JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH John Ely, Jr.

CONDUCTED BY Anne Hampton-Larson

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TRANSCRIBER Hazel Storm

John Ely, Jr., was born at his old family home in 1919. His parents are John Montague Ely, Sr., and Jessie Laurel Sullivan Ely. He has lived all of his life in Cedar Rapids except for his college years and during WWII. He and his wife Polly have raised three children. His interest in railway travel is apparent throughout this interview in which much can be learned about trains, trolleys, life during the Great Depression, as well as background on various early business developments in Cedar Rapids.

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AHL: John, where were you born, and when?

Ely: Well, I was born here in Cedar Rapids, in the old family home at 2218 First Avenue.

AHL: In what year?

Ely: In 1919.

AHL: So have you lived in Cedar Rapids your whole life?

Ely: Yes. Oh, of course, there was a time during college days and World War II, but with those exceptions, I have spent my entire life here.

AHL: And what are your parents' names?

Ely: My father is John Montague Ely. Of course, I'm John Ely, Jr. And my mother's name was Jessie Laurel Sullivan.

AHL: And where did you attend school?

Ely: I went through the Cedar Rapids Public Schools right here in the neighborhood. The first school I graduated from was Arthur Elementary, then Franklin Junior High, then a short period at old Washington High School, and then back for graduation at Franklin, which became then a senior high school, and then finally on to Princeton University for four years.

AHL: And what year did you graduate from high school?

Ely: In 1937.

AHL: And you're married to Polly?

Ely: Yes.

AHL: And what is Polly's maiden name?

Ely: Her technical name is Shirley Matthews Ward Ely.

AHL: And where did she grow up?

Ely: She grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts. She was a blind date in the East during college days. (Laughter)

AHL: And tell me about your children. How many children do you have?

Ely: We have three--John M. Ely III; then a daughter, Martha Ely; and then another son, Nathaniel Ely.

AHL: And do they live in the Cedar Rapids area?

Ely: Oh, they're scattered. Our oldest boy, John III, lives in Anamosa.

AHL: Uh huh. What has been your career or careers during your adult life?

Ely: I haven't had very many (Laughter) of them. During World War II I was a purser with United Fruit Company working in the Merchant Marine. And then immediately after the war I came back to Cedar Rapids and applied for a job at the Quaker Oats Company's local plant, where I spent 37 years, having retired about 18 months ago.

AHL: Getting back to the old Washington High School that you talked about, tell me some of your favorite memories of Washington High School.

Ely: Oh, it was great! We were only there for a year and a half, and it was really the city's only high school in those days. There was a technical school called Grant, which is the place where the current Board of Education's--the Educational Service Center is, it's called--it's located. But, by and large, Washington Senior High School was it. That's where all

the students went, and it was located down--adjacent to Greene Square--on Fourth Avenue between the tracks and Fifth Street. In fact, just where the bowling alley is--the American Legion Bowling Alleys are now. Well, it was a rattle-trap old building and it wouldn't hold all the students, so there was an annex down the street, old Adams School. And you had eight minutes between classes because it was so far to go. And, of course, it was just marvelous to borrow the family's automobile and invite all your friends to go in between classes. And then you'd take the old Model A Ford, and everybody would stand on the running board and rock the car; and that's the way you went between classes. Can you imagine! Then school assemblies were held in the Paramount Theater, which in those days was, of course, a movie house. It's now a theater--Arts Theater. But then for gym we all went down to the Sokol Gymnasium, which is on Third Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues. So that's the way school was, and of course it was really a lot of fun. Old Adams School had one of those circular fire escapes that you slid down, and we never had any fire drills but we certainly loved to play in that. And you'd take your girlfriend down the fire escape, round and round in the dark, and come shooting out the other end. They don't have those--I think they've been gone a long time. Well, we had a marvelous school spirit, and a huge student body; and of course they fielded some great football teams--athletic teams.

AHL: Name some of the activities you were involved with when you were at Washington.

Ely: Well, I remember the old Hi-Y and the Hi-Y-ettes. They were the high school organizations sponsored by the YMCA and the YWCA, and this is how you put on dances. And I remember the school dances; they were... you could rent the Crystal Room at the Montrose Hotel, which was the best ballroom in the town, for $20, and an orchestra cost $20. And to break even then, you had, at 50 cents a person and then of course a dollar a couple, you had to have about 80 human beings there just to pay the bare costs. Nobody ever decorated in those days, you just paid the orchestra and paid for the hall and that was it. But we had some marvelous school dances there.

AHL: What were some clubs that the schools provided?

Ely: Well, there was the French Circle; I think every high school in the United States had a French Circle. I don't really remember. There wasn't too much emphasis on extracurricular activities at all.

AHL: Name some of your classmates that are still in town, that you remember.

Ely: Oh, there was one very close one, Don Barry, Jr., with whom I used to go on canoe trips. We've paddled canoes together for a thousand miles on different trips. I remember--you see, old Washington High School drew from two junior high schools, and one was McKinley and the other was Franklin; and we were always the Franklin crowd, so we lost track of the McKinley crowd because we were all divided up and sent back to the classes. We had an unusually small little group when we graduated. It was, oh I think there were only about 30 of us. I remember we all had a caucus and decided that our guest of honor was going

to be the attractive librarian, who wasn't much older than we were. That was Betty Fisher. And she is still very much around and very prominent in Cedar Rapids affairs, but she was just a school librarian back then before she was married. And, let's see. I remember it fell to me to get the graduation speaker, and I selected W. R. Boyd. And, really, I had very good taste, because he is probably one of the most prominent persons ever in the history of Cedar Rapids. W. R. Boyd was the man that single-handedly was responsible for the University of Iowa's College of Medicine. They didn't have a medical school, and he was the one that persuaded the Rockefeller Foundation to put up the money. Half from the Rockefellers and half from the State of Iowa to found this great medical school that we have. And that was W. R. Boyd, and we got him to be the high school commencement speaker.

AHL: Where did you attend college?

Ely: At Princeton University.

AHL: For four years?

Ely: Four years, yes.

AHL: And what was your major?

Ely: The School of Public and International Affairs, which was nothing more than a means of majoring in a number of fields--economics and sociology and--as well as politics.

AHL: And what year did you graduate?

Ely: Nineteen forty-one.

AHL: And how many students went to Princeton during that time?

Ely: I think our class was about 650, but there was a big attrition rate, so the whole university had about 2,000 students.

AHL: And when did you return to Cedar Rapids?

Ely: Late in 1945.

AHL: So during that four-year span, from 1941 to 1945, what did you do?

Ely: I--well, first, I worked as an engineer, or a draftsman, I guess, on an air base down in Trinidad. It was part of the destroyer deal in World War II when, to get bases, the United States traded 40 over-age destroyers for land that the British Empire held. And then after that, after a year, then war broke out while I was down there. And then I came home and joined the Maritime Service, and then ended up working on one of the United Fruit Company's banana boats which was pressed into action to carry refrigerated goods over to the Mediterranean; and then we were the first refrigerated ship with the invasion in France.

AHL: Why did you decide to return to Cedar Rapids?

Ely: Oh, oddly enough, there were only two reasons. There were probably others, subconsciously, but the two major reasons: One, I loved the Cedar Rapids Country Club. Good, we were going to be a member of the Country Club; and second, I enjoyed the Cedar River for paddling a canoe. So, for those two reasons, I came back.

AHL: And what exactly was your title at Quaker Oats?

Ely: Well, it started out as a purchasing agent, but later the company just called it a buyer.

AHL: And what was the most demanding part of your job?

Ely: Oh, just keeping the world's largest cereal mill supplied at

the right time with not too much but, by the same token, not permitting it to run out of supplies.

AHL: How many hours a week did you work?

Ely: Well, when you're salaried like that, it's a nominal 40; but our department always was more--maybe 45 or 50.

AHL: Tell me about the history of Quaker Oats.

Ely: Well, that's kind of interesting. The Quaker Oats Company had - the name is really an amalgam of a number of separate milling companies. It was the American Cereal Company from Fort Dodge, Iowa; I think they had some sort of a plant. And then there was the Douglas--the Douglas and Stuart Mill here in Cedar Rapids. And a number of others. And they all came together but retained their various milling sites and were known then as the Quaker Oats Company. It was a deliberately constructed name. They wanted--all these milling companies, when they went together in a trust, that's what it was called, back, I think in Nineteen--in the early 1900's, they cast about and they picked the symbol of the Quaker man, because he was pure and he was honest, and they wanted to stress the purity of their cereal products--their breakfast products. And so the local plant has always been the largest of the plants in the Quaker Oats chain, and if anything--and still is generally acknowledged to be the largest cereal plant in the world, located right here in Cedar Rapids. It was the Stuart family that had the milling brains, and the Douglases, they were the ones that had the capital; so it was Douglas and Stuart.

AHL: Now, which Stuart family? Souvenir Lead--Stuart family?

Ely: No, this Stuart was S-t-u-a-r-t. Old Mr. Robert Stuart had the little mill here, and he started the--what I call the reign of the Stuarts. And members of his family have been the chief executive officers and chairman of the board, etc., of the Quaker Oats Company right up until a couple of years ago. R. Douglas Stuart, Jr., just retired as the chairman of the board. So it has been--the company has closely controlled it--the whole company, although it has been publicly held for many years.

AHL: Tell me about the history of your family in the milling centers.

Ely: Well, we kind of lay claim to having something to do with being the first millers in the town. And it all goes back to George Greene, who is, unquestionably, the founder of Cedar Rapids. He came here, decided it was a wonderful location; but, to make it a viable community, he needed to have a miller because otherwise all your flour had to be hauled in by oxcart, and you couldn't have much of a town if that's the way the food was. So he wanted to get a miller, and he found one in Allegan, Michigan. The miller wasn't quite sure he wanted to come, but he sent his young wife, who was in her early twenties, to come and look at the town site. And she came, and she liked it right away. He never liked it at all. In fact, she persuaded him to come. He built a little brush dam across the river to furnish the water power, set up his mill; but he cursed the climate and said as soon as he got out of debt, he was going to leave. But he was dead within two years of some pestilence from long ago that was probably unable to be diagnosed but did

him in, and leaving--now, he was offered one-twelfth of the townsite as an inducement for him to come. And some of that property is still in the hands of the family. And it was a very far-sighted thing to have--and very fortunate for the succeeding generations that there is this property that furnishes a pretty good income over all those years. And that was the miller. Well, that was the end of the milling part of the whole thing. The miller's brother came to settle his brother's estate; you never trusted the wife in those days. And being a pioneer community with only maybe four or five hundred people living in it at the time, she really had no other recourse but to marry the person who had been her brother-in-law. And that's the way--and his name was John. And their children managed to live, and so the family sank its roots from that time until now.

AHL: Where was the mill located?

Ely: I don't know. It was probably just maybe where A or B Avenue would be; it was upstream a little from First Avenue and that's... I don't really know where it was. Let's just guess it was about where the Five-in-One structure is now.

AHL: You mentioned Judge Greene and Mound Farm. Tell me more about some of the things that you know about Judge Greene.

Ely: I really don't know much about him. He was an entrepreneur; he was an attorney and later became a district judge. But, more to the point, he was a businessman and into just about everything--mainly land. He chose as his homesite a beautiful high mound of earth, which he called Mound Farm. And the family, subsequently, lost it because they became land poor. They had so much land that they couldn't afford the taxes on the land,

and they lost a lot of it. And as far as I know, there aren't any descendants of the Greenes in evidence in the community; in fact, I'm not sure just where the Greenes are. They are scattered over the country. But he had this beautiful home up on the top of Mound Farm, and it was the finest home in the city.

AHL: Where is it located compared to the buildings at Mercy-- Mt. Mercy College?

Ely: Well, they took the home down, I think, when they built Regis Hall; so it was right there on the crest of the hill.

AHL: Tell me how the Sisters of Mercy happened to come upon Mound Farm.

Ely: Oh, the Sisters of Mercy were originally located down on Third Avenue, on perhaps Sixth or Seventh Street; and when they found that the land was available and they could buy it, then they made arrangements and actually bought the land outright.

AHL: Did they grow corn there?

Ely: Not that I know of. I remember the bottom lands, well about just where your house is here, were all marshes. And there were lots of skunk cabbages to be seen in the early spring.

AHL: That's how Chicago got its name, isn't that right?

Ely: Well, I'm not sure about that. I do know this that, of course, the marshes have all given way to the famous Kenwood Ditch.

AHL: Earlier you mentioned that you would like to talk about the circuses that came to town. Where were the circuses held?

Ely: Oh, at the circus grounds. And, interestingly, the circus grounds were just about where the old Linkbelt-Speeder Machinery plant is. What's the name of it now? The one that's over...

circus. Well, the circus said, "Well, we just won't set up there." Then they looked around the rest of Cedar Rapids, and where do you think they located? One year Ringling Brothers-Barnum & Bailey, the largest show on earth actually had a performance out on 27th Street, N.E., and the circus parade and all the equipment had to be hauled for two and one-half miles from downtown, out First Avenue, and at 27th Street, N.E., turned out and over to Mound Farm. So that very close to where we are located were, temporarily that year, the circus grounds. And I never could quite figure out how they did it, because the property where all the houses are located now, it's not level. But to make circus grounds usable, of course, you use thousands of bales of hay, which were put around to soak up any moisture and make it just right for the huge crowds that did show up for the circus. Interestingly enough, the heavy circus wagons broke up a lot of the pavement on 27th Street, which has caused it to be overlaid with subsequent coverings of asphalt several times. The city tried to collect from the circus, but the circus, knowing that they'd never come back to that spot, never divvied up to pay the damage to the pavement.

AHL: Now, when you talk of 27th Street, would that be 27th Street and Eastern Avenue?

Ely: Yeah. That's about where it was, too, right there.

AHL: How much did it cost to go to the circus?

Ely: I don't really remember. We were always guests of our parents or my grandparents. But I remember we got to sit in the special seats. And, of course, it was before the days of air conditioning; but even with air conditioning, you couldn't air

condition the circus tent. So they had huge rotating fans mounted on the circus poles. How they ever rigged up all the cables to get all the electricity in, I don't know.

AHL: What type of animals did you see?

Ely: Oh, the menagerie--there was a huge menagerie tent; and, of course, they always used the animals three times: one, in the circus parade, which was to get people interested to come to the circus performances; and then all the animals were in their cages, and you paid a special admission charge to go and see them in the cages; and then finally they performed in the actual performance. Well, there were the usual lions and the tigers, and there was always a hippopotamus--the first one you ever saw--and a rhinoceros, and a giraffe, and zebras, and I don't know what all.

AHL: I'll bet that was so exciting as a child.

Ely: Well, it was. And the elephants--their elephants are pretty sharp. What they did, they sold little tiny bags of peanuts in the shell for I think, oh, 15 cents, which was outrageously high priced, but the person selling them would say, "Oh, it's the circus." What you did with these peanuts, then, you went over near the elephants; and the elephants would hold out their trunks and you would drop a peanut right down the elephant's trunk, and the elephant then would keep holding his trunk out because he wanted more peanuts for one pass to his mouth. Then he would move the end of his trunk over to his mouth and, of course, snort the air through his trunk and that would blow the peanuts into his mouth. This huge pachyderm and these tiny little peanuts from children--but the elephants did enjoy it,

and they like peanuts. And then, the elephants would not eat the full peanuts, they always spit out the shells. So you'd see the elephant, after he had extracted the peanuts, who would take the shells out with his trunk and then come back for more peanuts. That was known as feeding the elephants. Kids don't have that opportunity, I don't think, very frequently any more.

AHL: How old were you when you went to the circus?

Ely: Oh, I think all the way from 6 up to 14.

AHL: And would it be a major event every other year?

Ely: It certainly was; and in retrospect, of course, it was a golden opportunity, because no longer can the people in North America see the huge old tent shows. Just the labor alone would rule it out--the labor costs the way they were. But the old--the circus roustabouts did it really for their free meals and the joy of just being able to work with the circus. I think the most spectacular thing about the circuses was the way they would pound in... a gang of men would pound in a tent peg. Each of them had a sledgehammer, and they would all be in a circle, maybe 15 or 20 of them, and by long training, and much practice, they would swing those sledgehammers, each man just ahead of the man next to him. So you'd see this circle of sledgehammers rhythmically rotating, and you'd watch the tent pole post just go right down into the ground with this unison--well, not unison, but just off, but in beautiful timing. It was a fascinating sight. I hope somebody recorded that on film because it is one of those bits of American lore that should be preserved in memory.

AHL: Did you ever see them try to get the stakes out of the ground?

Ely: No, I didn't. They had a special machine, a tent-peg puller, that would pull them out. But, they always--of course, if you went to the evening performance, when you came out, gee, the place was almost bare. The only tent left was the bigtop. The rest of the tents had all been struck and the cook tent had been down--they'd served their last meal--and that part was already loaded and on railroad cars and was going to the next town.

AHL: Would you see midgets?

Ely: Oh, sure. There were lots of midgets.

AHL: And were you frightened as a child when you saw a midget or did it fascinate you?

Ely: No, they just fascinated--you just never saw little people that small.

AHL: How would you get to the circus?

Ely: Well, in an automobile. There was plenty of room to park.

AHL: Did some people take the trolley?

Ely: Well, I'm sure they did, because the trolleys, of course, stand out from downtown Cedar Rapids all over town.

AHL: And did you see poor people as well as rich people at the circus?

Ely: Well, the circus always had a lot of passes, especially for farmers that allowed the posters to be put up on their barns along the highways and stuff, so that you never knew--there were general admission seats and then there were the reserved seats.

AHL: And you had the special seats, you said.

Ely: We got to have the special seats. Loads of clowns and all this spectacular entertainment. And the highwire acts were great. We have seen the famous "Flying Wallendas." The high flyers are the ones that work on the circus trapezes and do all the triple somersaults and then grab the hands of somebody that is swinging on another trapeze. That's preserved now. When the circus comes to the Five Seasons, you'll see those same acts; so there's not much new, but the old flyers were even more talented than the ones they have today.

AHL: And did they serve food?

Ely: Oh, sure. All the cotton candy and all the... Well, the streetcar system was extensive all around Cedar Rapids, and it was the means of transportation. Remember, this was before the days of buses; and I might just briefly tell you about the system. There were two streetcar companies. There was the Crandic, which was owned by the Iowa Railway and Light Company, which was the name of Iowa Electric earlier. They were more prominent in the railroading business and the transportation business than they were in the provision of electricity. And that was called the Crandic. And their streetcars were all blue and white. And I remember one of their branch lines went to south Third Street down to 14th Avenue, S.E.; and another one of their branches went up--it was called the Linwood Line, and it went as far as the Linwood Cemetery and Wilson Avenue, up the hill on Sixth Street. But--and I didn't--we lived in another part of the town, so we didn't know much about their streetcars.

AHL: And where did you live?

Ely: In the northeast part, on First Avenue. But we knew the old Cedar Rapids and Marion Street Railroad Company. And, incidentally, my grandfather was the president of the street railway system for many years. That was before I was born. Well, on First Avenue there were two tracks, one for the streetcars going one direction and one for the other. And then there were branch lines coming off First Avenue. One line was North 13th Street, which went out as far as J Avenue on 13th Street, turning the corner around by Coe College and on out to J Avenue and back. And then there was another line that was the Central Park Line that went on 16th Street over as far as the Milwaukee tracks, which is roughly where National Oats is located now. And then there was the main Kenwood Line. That was the one that had frequent streetcars and went up to what was called Kenwood Park. Now, most people didn't realize it, but there was a little town called Kenwood Park. Of course, it was annexed by Cedar Rapids, I think around 1926; but originally that was a separate little locality. And then there was an extension--that was double track up to 29th Street, and then it came together to go over a special little bridge of the Kenwood Viaduct and into Kenwood itself, which was at 32nd Street and First Avenue. That, by the way, is why the parking is so wide between First Avenue and the stores there at 32nd Street and First Avenue on the south side of the street. And starting at that point was the line to Marion. There was a single-track line, and they had signal lights so they wouldn't have a collision between the streetcars; and the motormen would--that's what you call a streetcar conductor, a motorman--the motorman

would activate these special signal lights simply by stopping and pulling a switch out the window to activate the lights. Well, then the line went along the south side of Marion Boulevard, which is now First Avenue, and into Marion right up opposite the Milwaukee Railroad Station. Well, there was a Grande Avenue Line and a Bever Avenue Line. And, of course, when you came to the end of the line it was easy with a streetcar to turn it around; you lowered the trolley on one end and raised it on the other, and then you took the handles and moved them--the air brake handle and the big rheostat handle--and, of course, without the handles you couldn't work it. It was fun when you rode the streetcars because you used to ride in the back. Well, of course, each end of the streetcar was identical, depending on which end it was operating. But to warn people, there was a little pedal on the floor, and the motorman would step on the pedal and it would hit a gong; and that was to tell people to get out of the way. And, of course, if you were going to school on the streetcar, you would--and especially if the streetcar was crowded--you could get in the back of the car and make the gong work and the motorman couldn't do anything about it unless he stopped and came back and raised cain with you. Well, then in case of real emergencies, they had an air whistle. The motormen very rarely used the air whistle, but whenever they blew the air whistle that meant they were just about to run into something, so look out!

AHL: Did you ever see any accidents with the trolleys?

Ely: No, I've heard about them, and sometimes the trolleys got knocked off the tracks. One of the things that most people

have heard about but it's rather unclear to them is called "trolley jerking"--how you jerk the trolley wheel off the overhead line, and this was a favorite stunt. What you would do, you would grab the guywire of the poles supporting the trolley wire; and since the poles were pretty rotten anyway and kind of loose, if you pulled on the guywire, it would cause the pole to go back and forth and that would flip the overhead wire up and down. And if you did it right and the trolley car came by, the little trolley would jump the wire. And it was spring mounted anyway, and it would go straight up in the air. And, of course, the streetcar then would lose all power and come to a grinding stop. And the motorman then would have to get out and thread the trolley back on the wire.

AHL: How long would that take?

Ely: Well, it just takes a moment. And everytime you turned the trolley around, you had to do it anyway. But this way you had to do it if the boys were there jerking on the trolley. And they didn't have a very rapidly responding police force in those days. In order to get the police, you'd have to go to the nearest telephone and tell them to come out to stop the gang of boys that were jerking the trolley. Oh, and then sometimes if the trolley were stopped for a passenger and you went around in the back and you just gave a yank on the cable that the trolley was attached to, you could just pull the whole thing right off and up she'd go and the trolley car lost juice.

AHL: How many people would a trolley hold?

Ely: They'd hold more than the city buses would, and they used to be very full too in rush hour.

AHL: Were they the size of a freight car, or would they be...?

Ely: I think they were about 40 feet long, and that was the standard boxcar, is 40 feet. But, of course, it is a different type of car, it is a passenger car.

AHL: And it was enclosed?

Ely: Yes. Although they used to have some of them that were open-air cars that they used in the summer. Supposing you wanted to get the people out to the ballpark, and there was one out--oh there was a streetcar that went out to Roosevelt Junior High School. That's where the Cedar Rapids Bunnies used to play. That was the name of the ball team.

AHL: The Barneys?

Ely: The Bunnies.

AHL: The Bunnies.

Ely: The Bunnies. And so people would go out to the ballpark on the streetcars, and in the summer it was fun to ride in an open-air car. The seats were, well, I don't know (Laughter), it just was open and you could get on from any side. And, oh there was a line that went out to Ellis Park, just over near the Ellis Park Pavilion which is the old bath house, which is still there. That was the only place you went swimming in Cedar Rapids, was in the river; and you changed your clothes in the Ellis Park Bath House, which the playground commission, I guess, still uses. The building is still there.

AHL: Where is it located in Ellis Park?

Ely: Oh, right along the river between Ellis Boulevard and the river, and it was built as a boathouse. The last time I went by, interestingly enough, the door was open, and they keep a

truck in there and supplies. But that was the old bath house. And if you went swimming, you see, you took the trolley car downtown and transferred to the Ellis Park Car, and went out there and then went swimming and came home by the reverse route.

One thing the streetcar line had was what they called the baggage car. And that was a special car that carried baggage; and it was green. If you made a train trip and you wanted to have your trunk shipped home, they would deliver it with the baggage car provided you lived along the streetcar line. The baggage car always had two people on it, and one of them was the motorman up in the front of the thing and the other was the conductor. And the only conductor I can ever remember was somebody named Marty Geiss.

AHL: How do you spell Geiss?

Ely: G-e-i-s-s, I believe; it was a German name. Well, Marty had worked for the Street Railway Company for a long time. As a matter of fact, he had worked for the company when my grandfather was the president. And my grandfather was kind of a lordly type. His great big mansion home was where Blair House is now. And one night there was a great ball in Cedar Rapids with formal attire; and it was "raining cats and dogs," and his car wouldn't work. So, since he lived on First Avenue and being a very ingenious man, he said, "Well, we'll just go by the streetcar, only we'll have our own streetcar." And he called up Marty Geiss and said, "Get a motorman, go down and bring the car out to my home on First Avenue at 2222 First Avenue." Well, Marty Geiss... in those days, of course, you

didn't have overtime and there were no unions and, well, you just did what the president of the company said... so Marty got out the baggage car and then brought a great big umbrella and went right up to my grandfather's porte-cochere and they went out and went down to the--I suppose it was the Charity Ball down at the Montrose Hotel. Of course, the streetcar went right by the Montrose, so Marty covered them with the umbrella and that's how they got to the dance that night, via the streetcar. (Laughter) They summoned a special car for the occasion. That's what you do if you are the president of the Street Railway.

AHL: How much did it cost?

Ely: Oh, when I was young the fare was three for a quarter. And you had tokens. And it occurs to me, Anne, that if somebody had some of those old streetcar tokens, they would be collectors' items. I haven't seen one for many, many years; and whoever finds them should save them for a museum. Three for a quarter. And they looked--oh they were made out of some cheap metal, and I remember they looked like an "S" in the middle of them, engraved. That's about all I remember about the tokens. But if you rode the baggage car, Marty Geiss would let you on for a nickel. So, to go home at noon--and we all got long noon hours--there wasn't the custom of eating your lunch at school. Most people went home for lunch, and if the weather was good, you went home on your bicycle. We lived two miles from Washington and that was eight miles of bicycling a day, but nobody ever thought much about that. But if the weather was bad, you raced from Washington over to First Avenue, and if you

got there in time for the baggage car's regular run, which went ahead of the regular streetcar, then you could ride for a nickel. But if you had to wait for the streetcar, then you had to pay a token. But they got you home about the same time, and then you ate your lunch and then you took the streetcar back. And you got back downtown in time for the afternoon classes.

AHL: So you used the First Avenue Trolley the most?

Ely: Yes. Of course, we lived right on First Avenue.

AHL: When you went on a date, would you take your date on the trolley?

Ely: Well, let's see. We owned--our family owned--the first car we ever owned I can distinctly remember was the seventh Model A Ford car ever sold in Cedar Rapids. And I was born in 1919, and the first Model A's came out in late 1927 or 1928; so if you had a date, you always took the family car. By the way, there was no such thing as a driver's license required, and there weren't any state laws about how old you had to be. So, you could borrow the family car just about as soon as you were able to prove to your parents that you could drive the thing and they were willing to let you use it. Gasoline was about 13 or 14 cents a gallon, so that wasn't much of an expense.

AHL: I remember my father was born in 1921 and when he was seven he was driving the truck. I don't imagine very well, but he was driving it anyway.

Ely: Oh, it was awful! As I look back at it, they never should have allowed us... I can remember driving the family car to junior high school. Junior high school! Can you imagine! An eighth grader... you had to be in eighth grade.

AHL: Oh, that was funny. I can just imagine you sitting in the car in the eighth grade. Oh! I hope it doesn't go back to that.

Ely: No!

AHL: Tell me about the old police department. Where was it located?

Ely: Oh, it was along the river bank, of all places, on the west side. I guess the police stations have always been on the west side, and I think it was between Second Avenue and Third Avenue, and it backed up right on the river. They didn't have nice riverside parks like we've got now--they're all graded. But that's where it was. And it wasn't much of a police department. As I remember, most of the officers that were fortunate had motorcycles, and the rest of them patrolled by foot. And they had one motorized vehicle, and that was a great big old touring car just like you see in the movies with the old F.B.I. I suppose they bought it--well, it was just an easy car. You could then poke your guns out the side with nothing in the way to apprehend somebody.

AHL: What time period would this be?

Ely: Oh, I can date it this way. The first bicycle I had, I was 13; and it got stolen and it was recovered by the police. And I remember in those days they didn't have the high professional standards that they have now. So when you went down to reclaim your bicycle, one of the things that was strongly expected of you was to buy a ticket to the Policemen's Ball. That's what I remember my father very ostentatiously buying two tickets to the Policemen's Ball, kind of to thank them for recovering his son's bicycle that had been stolen. The bicycle, by the way, cost $13; I can remember that.

AHL: What color was it?

Ely: Well, I don't remember. I painted it with aluminum paint and called it the "Silver Streak." It was just aluminum paint all over except for the rubber tires. And the old tires were interesting because I can date this. A tire always cost $2, and I remember tires started costing $2.04. And that's because the state had inaugurated a sales tax for the first time--that's when I was a boy and that was my first brush with the Iowa Sales Tax, back in the early 30's.

AHL: You talked about the trolley before. Tell me about the passenger trains that came to town and where the depot was located.

Ely: Well, to start with the depot, the depot was located in a stretch between Third Avenue and Fifth Avenue. Fourth Avenue did not go all the way through as it does now.

End of Tape 1, Side A - Beginning of Side B

Ely: . . . with those. There were the famous "city" trains. There were four of them: the City of Denver, the City of Los Angeles, the City of San Francisco, and the City of Portland. And they ran in pairs. There would be one right after another in a pair, and later two more. The running time between Cedar Rapids and Chicago for the City of Denver was a very convenient three hours and nineteen minutes. And the airlines can't beat that today, going from downtown Cedar Rapids to downtown Chicago. Think of it! Three hours and nineteen minutes. Why, you can hardly get in from O'Hare with a speed like that.

And, of course, the dining cars--that's where you spent the time. It was the most perfect dining service there is. There is no restaurant in Cedar Rapids that has the perfection of waiters that they had on those trains. And the solid silver that you had at your place setting. Even the finger bowls; you don't see finger bowls. After a meal, a waiter would bring a bowl of water for you to dip your soiled fingers in and you wiped them on the full linen napkin. This was the mark of real distinction. So these were the great trains. Fares hovered just around a basic two cents a mile, that's what it cost to travel. The competition, of course, came by the buses. And when I went to college, I always rode Greyhound. I rode over 10,000 miles going to and from college by Greyhound, simply to save the train expense because it was that high. The locomotives were the most exciting thing about the trains. The Northwestern had--their finest locomotives were what they called their "H" class. They purchased 35 of them in the heart of the depression for $110,000 apiece. And they had magnificent foghorn whistles that you could hear through the night; these very deep train whistles that these "H" type locomotives [had]. Technically, they were known as the "Northern." Most steam locomotives were known by the wheel plan. They had four pilot wheels, eight driving wheels, and four trailers. And the pilot wheels--all passenger locomotives had to have four pilots in order to keep the whole thing on the track. And the drivers were the ones that furnished the power. These H-type locomotives had 76-inch diameter drivers.

Well, these trains would come wheeling into Cedar Rapids. And, of course, they used enormous amounts of coal; and the coal was fed into the boilers mechanically by an auger system. And then at the end of the auger at the firebox was a jet of steam that would separate the coal and distribute it over the entire bed of the coal-burning portion of the locomotive. And it burned almost instantaneously. It was using enormous amounts of coal. I think it was eleven tons of coal between Cedar Rapids and Clinton, just to give you an idea of what it took for it to pull 20 passenger cars at high speeds. Well, the locomotive engineers, for the brief stop that they would be in Cedar Rapids, would let us kids climb up into the locomotive and take a look at this--just fresh off the road and pausing momentarily before it took off west. And it was a thrill as you watched the train start; the conductor would give his characteristic "all a-bo-o-oard," and then the locomotive would start. The first... they always had to back up to put some slack between the cars so that as they started, you'd first start one car and get it moving a little, and then the next car, and the next, and the next. And most people always blamed the engineer for causing the jerkiness. Well, they had to. You can't start a whole train just from the... a tight train from a standing stop. Then this thing would pick up speed. And sometimes when they were a little over-enthusiastic the drivers would slip, and then all of a sudden they would spin around and then you'd have to stop and start the whole thing again. And sand was automatically sprayed onto the track to help the friction and to get this great thing going. Oh, it was a dramatic sight. There is nothing in

transportation today--not even the largest of the 747's are anything to compare with those passenger trains of yore. It was just when air-conditioning was coming in, so that the old passenger cars were re-equipped and the air-conditioning was added on the tops of cars.

AHL: What years would this be?

Ely: Oh, right in the heart of the depression, about 1934 or 1935, right in there.

AHL: Did you ever take a train ride from Cedar Rapids?

Ely: Well, many times! How else do you travel? I mean in style? You went by train.

AHL: And where did you go?

Ely: Well, I remember a close friend that we palled around with in school, his father was a ticket agent down at the old depot. So we had an "in," and we would take special trips. And one time we all bought tickets down to Ely, Iowa, and got off the train and went up into the hills and spent the day playing around in some woods, and then caught a weigh freight home to town. And on another occasion we took the train out to Linn Junction. Well, Linn Junction isn't even located as far out as 42nd Street, but in those days it was way, way out in the country.

AHL: You talked about the weigh freight. Tell me about that.

Ely: Oh, weigh freight was a local. That is, it was a train made up of just a few cars and it would go to the first town...

AHL: Passenger?

Ely: No, no. It had a weigh car, which was a fairly large caboose that was a combination. It carried any passengers that wanted

to go, but they kind of had to take their time while the train would switch cars at little towns along the way.

AHL: Now, when you took your trips with the family, did you have a separate compartment where you slept at night?

Ely: Oh yeah, you took the sleepers. But, well, there were compartments, but they were pretty expensive. What you took was an upper and a lower. And they were berths in the old Pullman cars. And an upper was always cheaper than a lower. And the Pullman car conductor would always give you a little ladder so that you could climb up to get into the upper berth, which were nothing but kind of shelves that were unlocked and folded down and held in place with chains. And they had a mattress in them, and a nice bed, and you climbed up the thing and then he'd take the ladder away. If you wanted to get down, then you had to ring a little... push a little doorbell, and it was right there by your berth. Well, on our honeymoon, I remember, to save money, we got a single upper for the two of us. That was something! The two of us climbing that ladder up into our berth! And then, because it was our honeymoon and we knew it was going to be a long way and we wanted to really enjoy it, we just lay abed late in the morning. And the next thing we knew, when we finally got up, the whole car had been made up for day travel and ours was the only upper that hadn't been put back together again. And, of course, I made the mistake--I was always so used to calling my wife by her maiden name, Miss Ward, and I said, "Well, hey, we'd better get up Miss Ward." And then all the people in the car turned to see whose was this male

voice talking to a "Miss" Ward who had spent the night with him in the upper berth. (Laughter)

I've always loved trains, though, and I still walk the right-of-ways and dream of how it was. Everything's diesel now, and there are very few passenger trains coming across the state of Iowa. I am an active member, however, of the American Association of Railroad Passengers. We have worked to bring back the passenger trains; and surely if the price of oil fuels rises to, say, $5 a gallon, it is far more efficient to transport passengers per unit of energy by railroad passenger trains than it is by air. So they may come back with a flood.

AHL: It's a shame that it's kind of the end of an era.

Ely: Yes.

AHL: We talked about the depression. When you hear the words "The Great Depression," what do you think of?

Ely: Well, you only realize about The Great Depression in retrospect. After--because when you're right in the middle of history, you don't realize what's going on. And only as I sort out boyhood experiences by this period can I see the significance for vast numbers of people. I indicated my hobby was railroading, and I used to go out to the interlocking towers at Beverly and Otis. And the old Otis Tower is no more; and the Beverly Tower, while it still stands, is deserted. But these were switching towers. They switched the passenger trains off the main line on the Northwestern and into Cedar Rapids and back on their main line. The main line ran along Hawkeye Downs; their freight trains never came into Cedar Rapids, but the passenger trains all did. Well, the interlocking towers were elevated so you could see the

tops of the trains, and huge numbers of men were riding on the tops of cars to go to and from places in the United States seeking employment. I remember I used to count the numbers of people on top of the trains, and they would average about 75, which is a lot of human beings to be riding on top of boxcars. You never see that any more. As a matter of fact, most freight cars, you can't even climb to the top of them any more. There is no footboard on top like the old cars. So it was a unique time in American history. And what was the reason? It was simply husbands seeking employment to support their wives back home. And there weren't that many automobiles, so travel around the country... you traveled on top of freight trains, you didn't travel in automobiles and you didn't hitchhike very much.

One indication, I remember reading the Reader's Digest and it explained that all the hoboes and tramps kind of have a language of their own. And they were always begging for food. And one of the ways that they signaled to one another was you go to the back door of a house and you ring the doorbell back there--our house had a front doorbell and a back doorbell--or you knocked on the door, and if the people gave you a meal then you with your little stubby piece of pencil you would draw a pair of eyes looking up. But if the people were stingy and didn't give you a meal, then you would draw the little eyes pointing down. Well, after I read that in the Readers' Digest, I went to the back door to see if anybody had drawn a pair of eyes. Sure enough! There were eyes drawn right on the frame of our back door with the eyes pointing up. My mother always fed people when they came and begged for a meal. Now, we lived

right on First Avenue, and, of course, a lot of people were walking from downtown Cedar Rapids from where they got off the freight trains up to Marion where the main line of the Milwaukee came through. So if you wanted to travel on the Milwaukee or move between the two railroads, you walked between Cedar Rapids and Marion; and when you were hungry, you looked around for the houses and begged for a meal. The going rate was, if you furnished somebody a meal, then that person was expected to do an hour's worth of work around the yard. And I liked that. We had a big yard and it was always nice to have somebody else that would kind of help pull weeds, because I was a little kid of only 90 pounds. I was kind of small for that big yard. It took me four and one-half hours to push the hand lawnmower to mow the grass.

AHL: And would you mow it once a week?

Ely: Yes, darn it. My dad gave me fifteen cents an hour, I believe, for working, and that was the source of my income. My allowance was a dime, but five cents of that was for the Sunday school collection. I got to keep a nickel. So anything I earned was gravy.

That was one indication of the depression. There were a lot of other ones. Still here in Cedar Rapids there are some abandoned quarry areas down on the Otis Road, which was a hobo jungle. A hobo jungle was a place where people who had been riding the rods or riding on top of freight trains got off the trains and were able to sleep and eat. And they shared food between them at this old abandoned quarry just below Wilson & Company and Cargill's Corn Starch and Syrup plant. Most people

don't realize when they drive along Otis Road that that's where it was.

In the quarry there are the ruins of an old lime kiln. And this is where quick lime was made for the city for mortar purposes. This was before the invention of Portland cement, and many structures were put together with limestone--blocks of limestone. And the mortar was none too good; it was made out of quicklime, and it came from this quarry site, which later, when it was abandoned, served as kind of a campground for this hobo jungle.

There was another active hobo jungle at Beverly. Now, Beverly is the switching point on the Northwestern, just where General Mills' new cereal plant is located. And all the freight trains stopped there to take on coal and water. And, of course, this was a marvelous place to get on an off the trains because they had to do their coaling and watering there. So there was a big hobo jungle over there.

AHL: How did life change for you or for others around you during the depression?

Ely: Well, there was just a very critical shortage of money. I'll never forget the day the banks all closed, in 1933.

AHL: Tell me about that.

Ely: Well, suddenly... not many people had much in the banks anyway, and when they closed, there was just no... you couldn't get any money out of the banks. The banks were closed. It was like every day was Sunday. During the depression of course, everyone was saving money just as much as they could. Prices were cheap, and prices kept dropping lower and lower. We lived right

on First Avenue--well, the house that I was born in is next door to Blair House. Directly across First Avenue was a family that was making it by raising chickens and selling eggs. So to get eggs, I would go across the street with a brown paper bag and with twelve cents to get a dozen eggs. And that was a... eggs were always a penny apiece. And they were fresh--they'd been laid that very morning that I went across the street. Think of it! The eggs actually were laid across First Avenue right by Thompson Drive. These little indications--I remember once I tripped a boy when he was carrying a bottle of milk, and I had to repay the family. The bottle and the contents, I think, were thirteen cents. That was a Grade A bottle of milk. And bread, of course, was three or four cents a loaf, and then given away if it was a day old. So prices were just next to nothing. Nobody had much money and you wore cast-off clothing. Everybody did, or you wore the same clothing a long time. And, of course, you outgrew shoes if you were a kid, but you made them go until they were worn right through. Most of us had holes in our shoes. It was the thing you did.

AHL: Where did you get your milk?

Ely: Oh, we... in the old days, nobody knew anything about pasteurizing, so we drank raw milk. And I remember--it was Evergreen Dairies, and the dairy truck would come to your house every day and you would put out a little notice of how many quarts you wanted, how many quarts of cream, how many quarts... half and half came later. There was all the way from--I think the choice was full cream, which came in little half pints, and that was for your coffee and for cereal--for the oatmeal--and then

the regular milk. Nobody ever thought of skim milk. I mean--Horrors! Just full cream, good old Guernsey cream. It is an interesting thing--milk used to be sold by the type of cow from which it came. So you bought Holstein milk, you bought Guernsey milk--and Guernsey milk was more expensive because it's richer.

AHL: The day the banks closed, do you remember where you were and what you were doing?

Ely: No, I don't. I just remember that suddenly nobody could go to the banks any more. And they used to encourage savings with kids, so that every Tuesday you brought your pennies to school and then they were banked for you. The school maintained bank accounts for all the kids, and it was to encourage thrift among school children. Well, they stopped doing that when the banks closed because you couldn't get into the banks to deposit anything, and, so, everything came to a stop.

My father was a stockholder in the... oh, and was on the Board of Directors of the old Cedar Rapids National, which was the largest bank in Cedar Rapids at the time.

AHL: Where was it located?

Ely: It was located where the Merchants National Bank's parking ramp is now. In that whole building. Well, the Merchants has... down on the main floor, they have a lobby there, too. Well, in those days, if you were a director, you were liable for the deposits, not only did you lose all that you had invested in the thing, but you had to divvy up to make up for the other deposits. There was no such thing as a Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in those days. If the bank went under, well, tough luck! I remember that day he came home early from work and simply got

out his hoe and went out and cultivated the evergreens, just to do something physical because he had lost practically everything he had saved up during his lifetime. A horrible day when that bank went under!

AHL: Do you remember your grandfather during that time?

Ely: Oh, very clearly! My grandfather lived to be 96 years old, and he was a man-about-town. He retired at the advanced age of 34. Can you imagine! He had retired from active business at 34 and lived to be 96.

AHL: What was his occupation?

Ely: Well, really, just managing his mother's properties. And she had... remember, his father and his uncle--his uncle was that first miller who had been given a twelfth of the townsite. He had seen the Greenes go bankrupt because they lived too high on the hogs. So he lived cautiously and saved all this land and sold it off and had a darn good life from doing so. He had a huge home, and I remember people always asked me how many rooms it had in it. Well, as closely as I can figure, there were about 22 rooms in the place. And, let's see. He had a houseman, and a chauffeur, and a gardener, and a cook and a second girl. The second girl was--well, I don't know, she was the one that did the cleaning, and made the beds, and stuff like that, and waited on the tables; and the cook just cooked. Well, that was a staff of five to maintain that estate.

AHL: How would you compare his home to Brucemore? Was it as big?

Ely: It was about the same size as Brucemore, but architecturally it was far more attractive. I think Brucemore is not notable for its aesthetic details. My grandfather's house was a very long,

narrow home that kind of blended in and had prairie boulders in the wall in front. Well, the wall is still there and you see it as you go by Brucemore. But matching the wall or the first story with that same type of prairie stone.

AHL: Was it a sad day in your life when it was torn down?

Ely: Well, it wasn't torn down, it was burned down. It was the largest controlled fire in Iowa, and I remember that day so well when they burned it down. And there were a lot of accidents on First Avenue because people slowed down to see this great fire and somebody else was looking at the fire and would go crashing into them. There were five collisions while that fire was going on.

AHL: What year was this?

Ely: It was after World War II--I think it was in the early 1950's. It had been sold to United Fire and Casualty, and for a time they had thought of making it their home office. And then they hired a management consultant whose one recommendation was to get rid of the old Ely property, which they did. And then subsequently it was developed into Blair House.

AHL: During the depression, explain the government services that were provided.

Ely: Well, there weren't very many, I'll tell you! It was a whole other era. With the huge unemployment in Cedar Rapids, a group of businessmen all got together and contributed money to put people to work. And it was a nongovernmental aid project, just--the major project took place, of all places, on Cottage Grove Avenue. Right opposite where Washington High School is was a big hill on Cottage Grove Avenue, and they all thought... right

at the point where Linn Boulevard comes into Cottage Grove Avenue. So, the thinking was, we'll put all these men to work with shovels, and they'll lower that whole hill. And they'll move all the dirt by wheelbarrows and then they can earn some money. And they did. This huge number of unemployed people set to work and--probably--I have no idea what they were paid, probably ten or fifteen cents an hour. But at least it was some money. And that big hill was reduced. If you go out and look at the grounds at Washington Senior High School, you'll see there is quite a hill with some trees on it. Well, this hill along the road, Cottage Grove Avenue, was as high as that hill was before it was reduced. And this was in the days before bulldozers were extensive earth-moving equipment. It was all done by hand labor--shovels.

Well, later things got worse and worse; and finally a new administration came into office in Washington and you had this so-called "New Deal," with all kinds of controversial measures. Our family was rock-ribbed Republican and took an extremely dim view of all these work projects--the Work Project Administration, the famous W.P.A., and where everyone was accused of standing around, leaning on shovels and stuff. Well, what this did was to put people to work, give them some income and get public projects done. This is how a lot of art was painted. Now, we never seem to have preserved any of the famous painters' projects--murals--here in Cedar Rapids. In other cities they were preserved, but not here. I can even remember them being painted. They were in lobbies of public buildings--lobbies of the post office and places like this.

I do distinctly remember the C.C.C., which was the Civilian Conservation Corps. This was to put young people to work. And guess who ran it! The United States Army! Can you imagine Army officers coming out to the Palisades and taking all these young kids in their teens and putting them to work? This is how the Palisades Dam was built, all with hand labor.

AHL: How would people pay their debts during the depression?

Ely: They didn't. You just owed it. You just said, "Sorry, I can't pay. What can I do?" There was a lot of bartering going on. My parents owned the property on First Avenue between 21st Street and 22nd Street. It was a big lot. And there was a person who used to like to sell watermelons. He had an old, beat-up truck, and he came from Muscatine, which is the cantaloupe and watermelon growing section of the Midwest, so he... the way he paid for using the ground... my father... was just to keep us supplied with all the cantaloupes and watermelons that we wanted. And they were good! It was a trade-off. You did an awful lot of bartering in those days. For instance, I owned a canoe. And I wanted to store it at Sheftick's Boat House. Nobody thought to carry canoes--leave them at home and carry them on the tops of cars. So I struck up a deal with old Ed Sheftick; in lieu--in place of the rent, I got all the half empty paint cans down in our basement at home, and there must have been 50 or 60 of them, and all the stiff paint brushes. And he simply, sight unseen, took all that old paint and said "Yes, I'll store your canoe for the summer in return for that." And I remember old Wesley Klinger, the man who started the

Klinger Paint Company, was so impressed that his old dried-up paint could be used as rental for storing a canoe.

AHL: Getting back to the railroads, I forgot to ask you this question. Were there any famous people who rode through town on the trains that you remember?

Ely: Oh, I'm sure there were. The one that comes to my mind most, of course, was Harry S. Truman, and this was in 1948--the famous election of 1948, when Truman went whistle-stopping through the United States, and he came to Cedar Rapids. He came into town on the Rock Island from the north, coming down from the Twin Cities. And I remember the Rock Island put a special locomotive, all freshly painted, and Truman spoke from the rear of the train with one of those open platforms. And the thing came sweeping in, and I remember people ran down the tracks because the car stopped, oh, toward the middle of Greene Square and not toward the Third Avenue side. A lot of people fell down, and it was kind of tough. Other people had some eggs that they threw at Harry S. Truman right down there at the depot. But the Secret Service people were out and nabbed them fast.

AHL: Tell me about the mud roads and the seedling mile.

Ely: Well, let me start with the seedling mile first. When Portland cement was invented, naturally the purveyors of Portland cement wanted to show how great it was, and so they worked out a deal with the people around here. They said the main road is the Lincoln Highway, which was later called United States Highway No. 30, and the big stretch that everybody knew about was between Cedar Rapids and Mt. Vernon. So they said, "Look, we would like to offer to pay the cost of paving a mile right halfway

between Cedar Rapids and Mt. Vernon so that you can see how great it is and then you'll like it so well that you'll get the whole thing paved." So they did. And that was called "the seedling mile." The first part "seed" I suppose was to plant a seed for the idea of more miles of paved roads. But, oh, Anne, there were dirt roads all over the place. And we were always getting stuck. And if you borrowed the family car and you went out with your friends or something and you got stuck, then you went to the nearest farm house and the farmer would get out a team of horses. They didn't have tractors. Tractors came in pretty much later. And they'd hook on the team, and then you'd try to steer your car while this team of horses would pull your car out of the mud. And then there was always the question, "Well, how much will we pay him?" So you'd all look in your pockets and if each of you had a quarter, then you'd give this to the farmer who had risked breaking all his best harnesses trying to pull you out just as a good gesture for nutty kids that didn't have any sense enough to go and get stuck in the dirt and in the mud.

AHL: Tell me about the Hunter Airport.

Ely: Well, let's see. The Hunter Airport was on what is now called Kirkwood Boulevard, and it was roughly where--there's a foundry company that's located out there. That's where it was. And it was named after Dan Hunter, who was kind of a local entrepreneur who had a biplane. And I remember my father was a Rotarian, and the Rotary Club all went out on a picnic to the Hunter Airport. And I got to go along. Along about after supper, there was Dan Hunter with his biplane with the propeller spinning lazily,

looking around for people to please take up for a ride. And I said, "Well, Dad, will you take me up in the airplane?" I can distinctly remember this was 1927. And my father gulped and he said, "Well, all right." I remember it was $5 for a ride over Cedar Rapids. And a biplane had two cockpits. The pilot was toward the back and his passengers were in the forward cockpit. And there was room for one man and his little son. Let's see, 1927, I was eight years old. So we climbed in there, and I remember hanging on for dear life because it is an open cockpit. And I can remember this plane taking off and going up in the air, and how small Wilson Junior High School looked from the air. I suppose we weren't up too high. I have no idea. But we circled around downtown and then came back out to the airport.

There used to be airport shows, also. And the airport show was nothing but a bunch of people with a bunch of airplanes, and they'd all climb in together and then line up all the airplanes, and you could go and see them. And this is how you got to see the famous Ford Trimotor airplane and stuff like that. Oh, and the amphibious aircraft; they looked very odd. They were equipped to go on water and land.

AHL: That must have been exciting for you as an eight-year-old.

Ely: It was. Well, I didn't... that was the first time up and I don't think I took another plane ride for 30 years after that.

AHL: You mentioned earlier that you knew some of the history on the first dams in Cedar Rapids.

Ely: Well, I know a little bit about it because when the Five-in-One structure was built, they had to remove one of the very early

dams. So they built cofferdams. And I went over there with a saw and actually cut pieces of the old lumber that was used; and I was interested to see that it was black walnut. And I still have pieces that I took out of that. They had simply removed it to clear the riverbed. But it was the remnants of an old, old early dam.

AHL: Do you know what year it was built?

Ely: I have no idea. Of course, it was obviously in the 1800's sometime. It was prior to 1900.

AHL: And describe where the first dam was compared to where the dam is now.

Ely: Oh, I think it was just upstream maybe a hundred yards. No more than that. Then there was an old concrete one, and that was the main dam for the... which made the still waters that run up as high as... as far up as High Rock. That was a fairly serviceable dam, and it had a fishway along one side to permit fish to go up and down. In fact, it had the makings of a lock that you could actually put boats through, but I don't think it was ever used. You are aware, aren't you, that at the very outset of Cedar Rapids that a great deal of the freight that was brought here was brought up the Cedar River from the Mississippi in the high water in the spring? This is a fascinating chapter, and it is well documented by the State Historical Society. And my favorite story from what I have read relates to the building of a bridge for new Highway 30 when it crossed the Cedar River. They were digging some pilings, and they struck what they thought was a rock. And they needed to sink the piling where the rock was, so they sent a diver down; and lo and behold, it wasn't a rock at

all. It was the flywheel from a steamboat. And then they fished this great big flywheel up and went back in the records, and there had been a steamboat accident at that point--that very point where the highway came across the river. There was a boiler explosion and the boat blew up and sank on the spot, and that was the end of that. This was the reason why they found the flywheel where they did. Can you imagine the huge size of the river, and the accident happened to be, coincidentally, just where they were sinking pilings for the bridge across the river? That's above the Palisades.

AHL: Two things come to mind: one is your interest in the Cedar Rapids Country Club, and the other is of dams. Tell me about the dam at Indian Creek on the Cedar Rapids Country Club property. Do you know anything about that?

Ely: Oh, they were... I know that little dam. It was made especially to back up water to pump, to water, the greens and the fairways. That's all the reason for it. Earlier the Country Club had used city water and the water bill was pretty expensive, and then they thought, well, why--since Indian Creek comes right through our property, why don't we have a little dam and we'll pump the water out of Indian Creek and water the greens and the fairways that way and save a lot of money. Which they did.

AHL: And that's what the pump on the Cedar Rapids Country Club property is used for?

Ely: Yes. Now I don't think you can get permits to do that. You can't take water out of the streams with abandon the way you could before. It never occurred to anybody that you couldn't take all the water you could pump out of Indian Creek.

AHL: Do you know the history of the Cedar Rapids Country Club?

Ely: Yes. My grandfather was very active in the formation of the whole thing. The very first golf course was built roughly where 19th Street and First Avenue are. And it was, I think, probably a nine-hole golf course and it was right through the Brucemore area. Well, that didn't work out too well, and furthermore, there was this other place that was much better. And, so the lower land on part of the golf course used to serve as a target practice range for troops in World War I. They used to do target practice down there. Now, I'm not sure whether that was before or after the Country Club had started it for a golf course. I can remember the old clubhouse, and I think that was taken down in 1926 and a new one built then. It was a very attractive old-style wooden frame structure with a great veranda porch on it. I am sure there are a lot of old-timers in Cedar Rapids that can still remember that. There are beautiful grounds for the Country Club.

The reason we came back to Cedar Rapids was these marvelous dances that used to be at the Country Club. When you became 30, you couldn't have a junior membership, you had to have a full membership. And they were pretty expensive, so that's when we dropped out. So, the only use I make of the Country Club grounds is at night; I love to walk on the fairways in the full evening and under the stars, or look through the Country Club woods for wildflowers. But when I do so, I'm an interloper and not a member.

AHL: I understand that the swimming pool there is very unique.

Ely: Yes. That's where I learned to swim.

AHL: Can you remember what year that was built?

Ely: No. It was built I think before I was born.

AHL: Tell me about some of the local factories in town and how they started and who started them.

Ely: Well, mostly they were entrepreneurs--somebody had an idea and the factory just grew, and all of a sudden there it was. Let's start with Iowa Steel and Iron. It was a foundry. It was a man from Onslow, Iowa, who fell in love with the daughter of a family that had quite a little capital. And that was Margaret Douglas who married Howard Hall. And then, of course, using his wife's resources, he started this little foundry. It succeeded; and then he wanted to do structural equipment, so he started another company and that was Iowa Steel & Iron and it was building road-building equipment. Of course, that was very successful, too.

AHL: Is that the same as Iowa Man.?

Ely: Yes, this was Iowa Manufacturing. Both those, you see, he started. There was old J. G. Cherry who built cream separators and dairy equipment, and then he went into tanks. And his plant was downtown; and then later he got a partner named Burrell, and that's the Cherry-Burrell. But it used to be the J.G. Cherry Company. And then he had a little paper mill, and that was down at Tama, Iowa, and it has been built up. I think it is the largest paper mill in the state of Iowa. Part of the Cherry family, and it was a very prominent Cedar Rapids family. But, see, oh, there was an organization called the Hall Manufacturing. I'm not sure, but they made steel bushel baskets and stuff like that. But they eventually went out of business to be replaced on

the same site by a much larger organization--oh, I can't think of the name, but it is the one up at Kenwood just between 29th Street. They build bank equipment.

AHL: Lefebure?

Ely: Lefebure Company, that's the one. Lefebure was... I don't believe was a local person.

AHL: You mentioned earlier when I spoke with you about the Douglas Starch explosion. Would you share that with me?

Ely: Well, what little I know, and I hear most of it about... I've read the accounts and heard the stories, but I know exactly when it occurred. It occurred in 1919 two months after I was born. I was a tiny little infant and my mother was bathing me. Our house was about two and one-half miles away from where the explosion occurred, but the blast was so strong that it slammed the cupboard door--the cabinet door just above where I was being bathed--that's the way I heard about it. There was a large loss of life. It was primarily a dust explosion. And the Douglas Starch Works later became Penick & Ford and on the same...

End of Tape 1, Side B - Beginning of Tape 2, Side A

AHL: John, how many lives do you think were lost during the explosion at the Douglas Starch Works?

Ely: I'm not certain, but of course the press accounts are available. I think it was... the figure 143 sticks in my mind.

AHL: Can you tell me about some of the local brewery companies that were here in Cedar Rapids?

charges you simply brewed your product for a small distribution area.

AHL: Do you ever remember tasting the beer?

Ely: No. That was long before... it had stopped... it had ceased operation long before my time. There were, let's see, there is only one brewery left in the state and that's in Dubuque, and there had been one out of Sioux City. That gave up the ghost.

AHL: You mentioned earlier about the company strikes. What time would this have been?

Ely: Well, back in the thirties there was a great deal of labor unrest. And Franklin D. Roosevelt had come in and the whole tenor of the administration was to help organize labor. They had the Wagner Labor Relations Act, and this legally permitted associations of employees to get together and form a union. Well, that fact was not very well accepted by many of the employers in Cedar Rapids, so they were anti-union. And the people were trying to organize unions. So there was strife and there were strikes. There were some really rough strikes at the old Sinclair Packing plant, which later became Wilson & Company. Really knock-down, drag-out affairs--long ones. And this... the picketers all had clubs. I remember once trying to sneak into the grounds, going the back way down an alley and being met by a contingent of strikers with two-by-fours all ready to lambaste us with them. Well, you know, they didn't want anybody crossing those picket lines. They held--picket lines usually were pretty secure. It was very hard to operate while the strike was going on. And in the plant where I worked, early on in the late 1940's there were some rather severe strikes. One incident I

remember that sticks in my mind--I didn't own an automobile until about the first five years after we had come back after World War II, and so I'd wait for a bus to go to work, and the plant manager lived farther out First Avenue and he used to stop and give me a ride. Now, his eyesight was not too good, and one time--there was a strike in progress, and as we turned the corner at the Roosevelt Hotel from First Avenue north on Second Street, I spotted something that I recognized immediately what it was. Well, Mr. Arthur Poe, the plant manager, said, "What's that?" And I just couldn't bring myself to tell him that, "Mr. Poe, what I see is yourself hanging in effigy from your office window." And it was. Somehow the strikers had gotten into the main office and had taken this figure, tied it to... inside the office, and then put it out the window. And it hung there over the street. And he himself was hanging in effigy, and I was kind of at a loss to tell him what was happening. Well, it isn't often that you see somebody hanging in effigy anymore.

AHL: Do you think he ever saw?

Ely: Oh, he... by the time we got closer to the plant, he knew darn well what was what.

AHL: You mentioned earlier about the Witwer Grocery. Tell me a little bit about that.

Ely: Well, Weaver Witwer was another remarkable entrepreneur. Several of the Witwers were in the wholesale grocery business.

AHL: Was he related to you?

Ely: Yes, he was my father's second cousin, and I... there is a faint connection there and I'm not just sure how it was, but I have heard tell that Weaver Witwer used to wear my father's cast-off

clothing. The Witwers were of rather modest means early on. Well, he got into the wholesale grocery business, and just by dint of sheer determination and awfully hard work. He was one of the most fascinating men ever to have known, and he's been written up nationally in many business magazines. He didn't believe in sitting down, so he had an elevated desk. He just took a regular desk and added legs to it, and he had it slightly slanted. And he always kept three telephones, and he could carry on conversations on three telephones at once. And if you went to him to buy something, he very quickly took the order. He always took his own orders, and that just fascinated me. Whenever I'd buy anything for the Quaker Oats Company from him, I used to kind of have to practice getting my words to come fast because if you phoned him, you had to very quickly tell him what you wanted because, "click," he'd hang up. He didn't waste any time. He was a fabulous man, and he built a large empire. And then, not only did he distribute foods, but then he decided he would pack his own brands. And so he started Griddle Mix Pancake Flour, and then... and all his trucks said Griddle Mix on them. And then he went into the business of coffee--I forget what his coffee brand was called--but he became a large supplier of the Midwest.

AHL: Now, he had a warehouse down by the river, didn't he?

Ely: Well, the Witwer Grocer Company is still there. It is a huge building about--let's see, Ninth Avenue between Second and Third Streets. Right next to the McKesson & Robbins old warehouse.

AHL: Did he own farms?

Ely: Yes. That was his hobby. He'd take all his money and buy another farm.

AHL: And then he would grow the vegetables on the farms?

Ely: Oh, he... well, for instance, he went into the turkey business, and Witwer turkeys were sold--I remember advertisements in the New Yorker magazine for Witwer turkeys. And they were all grown on the Witwer farms. He did a lot of poultry--well, then he went into the retail grocery business. He started the MeToo stores, I believe. And the Witwer Farm--well, they started out as the Witwer Farm Markets, and then he began selling them to his store managers. That's how the MeToo Chain started.

Oh, and he went into partnership down in Blairstown, Iowa, and there was a whole... let's see, there were the MeToo Stores... what are the other ones on the west side? Anyway he had a hand in most of these retailing outfits along with his original company, which was the Witwer Grocer which was wholesaling.

AHL: John, tell me about the Douglas fortune.

Ely: Well, I can tell you more about the Douglas family. The first Douglas to come through was the contractor for the Northwestern Railroad when they were building it across Iowa. He liked Cedar Rapids. This is when he met Stuart and went into partnership with him. He had made his money as a railroad contractor, and then he went into different enterprises. And, of course, the Douglas Starch Works was one of them. Well, then he left the scene; and he had some sons, and they were partners.

There was George Bruce Douglas. And by the way, that's where Brucemore gets its name--from the middle name of George Bruce--Brucemore, his middle name was Bruce.

There was Walter Douglas, for instance. And I'm not sure of the connection, but the two brothers, I think, managed the Douglas Starch Works and owned it.

Then there was somewhat of a scandal along the way. Cedar Rapids' best novel was called The Tattooed Countess. The Tattooed Countess herself... and it's all... The Tattooed Countess is all about Cedar Rapids people; and if you knew the history of Cedar Rapids, you knew who all the people were that were portrayed in The Tattooed Countess.

AHL: Is that available at the library?

Ely: Yes, it is. There are several copies, and they are very popular. And it is a topnotch novel, and it was made into a movie in Hollywood, starring Pola Negri, and it was a very popular movie in its day. It came back during the festival in honor of Carl Van Vechten, the author. But that's a whole other story, about the Van Vechtens. But Walter Douglas, I believe, married The Tattooed Countess. And things were pretty hot, and he kind of left town and moved to Minneapolis where he used his money from his father for other enterprises that I don't know about. But, in the meantime, George Douglas had a home down on Second Avenue about Eighth Street, which is now the Turner Mortuary. And when Mrs. T. M. Sinclair became a widow, when her husband, who started the Sinclair Packing Company--now Wilson & Co., or later Wilson & Co.--when her husband died, she didn't want to stay at what is now Brucemore. So they traded houses. And she took the Douglas's home down on Second Avenue, and the Douglases then all went out to the old Sinclair home, which they renamed Brucemore.

They had... Mr. and Mrs. Douglas had three daughters, and the oldest daughter was Margaret and she married Howard Hall. They were all remarkable people. The middle one was Ellen, who took her... the money she inherited and pyramided it up into a very successful fortune. She wrote books on how to make money on Wall Street, and she was a prime example of what she told about in the book. And, finally, the youngest one, who was Barbara, who was named Barbara because she was born in Santa Barbara in California when the Douglases... when her parents were vacationing there.

They had... I knew the premises very well because one of my best friends was the son of the groundskeeper. So I was always going over there to play. And I can remember when the big barn was filled with hay for the horses. We used to play in the hay above where the family automobiles were kept. And Mrs. Douglas had a beautiful Lincoln limousine, and each of her three daughters had really zippy sports cars, all with honeycomb radiators, and they were really spectacular automobiles, especially for that day. There they were--all four automobiles lined up there in this beautiful... well, the architecture is that of England, and the cars were kept down below, and then above was all the hay.

And then they had a lovely skating pond. In the winter their friends would be invited to skate there. But in the summer they had swans. And it was what they called the garden house, next door to it. And that's where the oldest daughter and her husband lived. That's where Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hall

lived until Mrs. Douglas passed away, and then they inherited the big house. I don't really think they liked the big house as much as everybody thinks they liked it. They had a hideaway house down at the Palisades--a beautiful fieldstone home, and that's where Howard Hall entertained many of his business associates. Mr. Hall used to sell the products of the company himself, and he would sell to governments all over the world--this road processing machinery. But I remember once going swimming across the river and then going to visit the Halls' cottage over there, kind of unannounced and uninvited; and in the little guest house, in back, they piled up all the empty bottles of scotch. They always had Johnny Walker Red Label, and I counted over 400 empty bottles of Johnny Walker Red Label. So I'm sure they entertained the business accounts very amply.

That's about all I know. Howard Hall probably was a much more successful business man than any of the Douglases, including George B. or Walter or the rest of them, because, you see, he was able to pyramid his earnings and buy into the Amana Society and the Amana Refrigeration which Raytheon later took over. And, really, he did so well that a portion of his money was used to establish a foundation, which is one of the great saviors and benefactors of Cedar Rapids. Certainly, we all look up to the Hall Foundation for the magnificence with which they have endowed this city with some very important public works and extremely important public programs. The Hall Foundation is at work, and evidently their resources are extraordinarily extensive, because their spendings are all not from capital but from

earnings. And I suspect those earnings are coming from the holdings in Raytheon--Raytheon Corporation--which was in exchange for stock with Howard Hall's local enterprises and with Amana Refrigeration.

AHL: Who were some of the prominent people in our community when you were young? when you were growing up?

Ely: Oh, I remember some of the business leaders - minds pop up every once in a while. One of them was Morris Sanford, the one for whom the Morris Sanford Company was named. Morris Sanford ran a darn nice store. He had specialized in stationery and in photography supplies. And you could buy fireworks at Morris Sanford's! The family always bought our fireworks there on the Fourth of July. And toys. They had the best toy display in Cedar Rapids.

And then there was Herb Killian of the Killian Company. And then there was another wonderful store owner named Buck Newberger, who had what was Denecke's and later became Newman's. That's in the building where I think Kresge's is now and United Fire and Casualty have the upper floors. Oh, these are all people... let's see. Well, I never knew them too well. Oh yes, I remember there was Jim Hamilton, the president of Merchants National Bank, and really a great banker. He was the one that built up Merchants from a small bank to the second largest bank in the state. He primarily... it's a monument to Jim Hamilton... James Hamilton, a very austere but successful banker.

AHL: Where did he live?

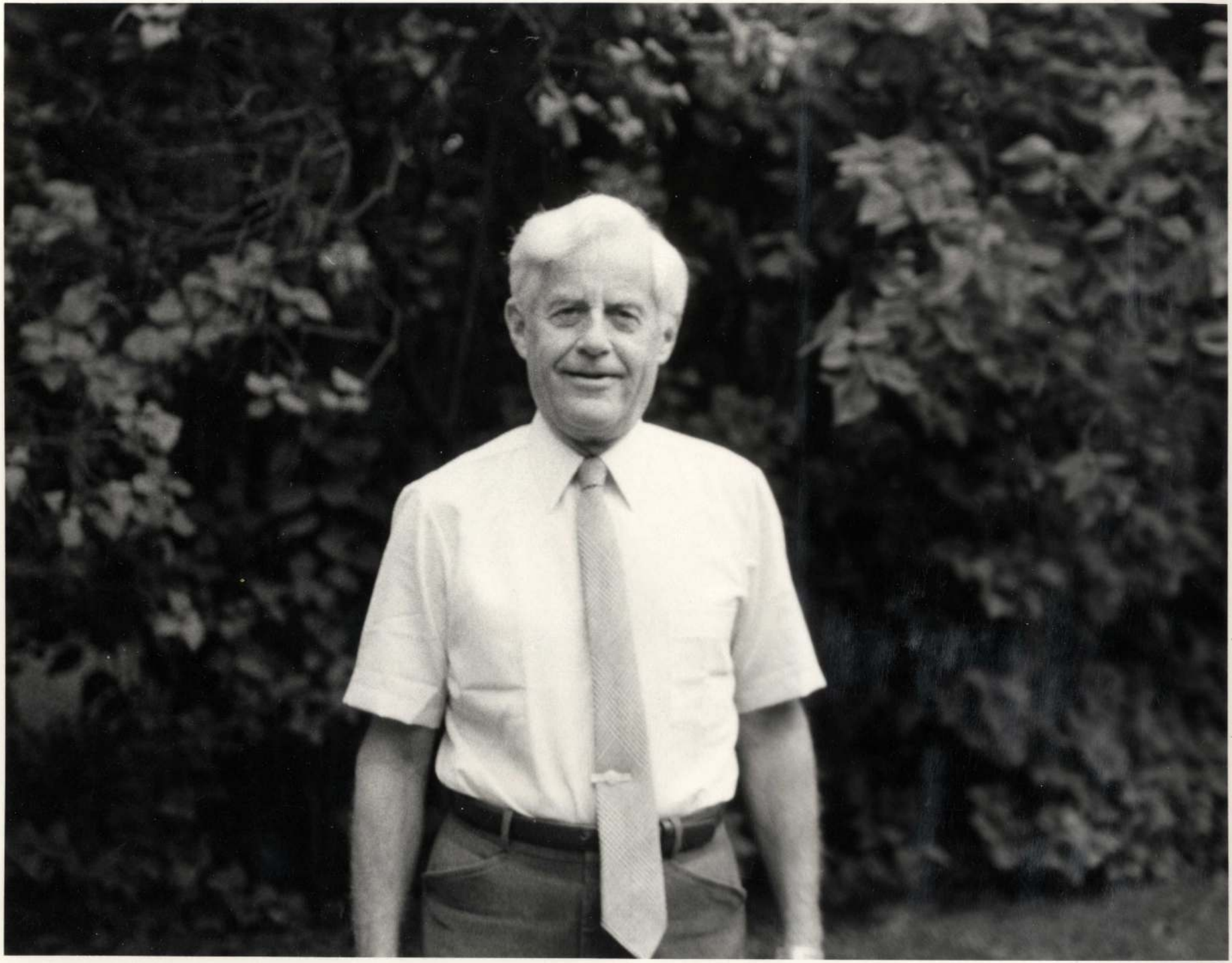
Ely: Oh, where did he live? It's over not too far from Linden Drive, I believe. He lived very modestly and never showed himself too much, but he was the very important town banker, certainly.

AHL: Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that I have forgotten to ask you?

Ely: Well, you forgot one little bit, and that's about an interurban line that ran between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. The tracks are still there, but it is no longer an interurban and no longer any passenger service. And the reason it's interesting--this is the Crandic's line. And whole generations of students at the University of Iowa, who lived in Cedar Rapids, traveled to and from classes on the Crandic. Well, the Crandic had electric cars--interurban cars--but, later, in an attempt to upgrade the system, they bought some interurban cars from a Cleveland interurban company. And the Cleveland company had bought cars... had owned cars that said "Comet" on the sides. These were high-speed electric cars. Well, they put these on in service, and, you guessed it, the students immediately renamed the railroad "The Vomit Comet." But they would get down there to Iowa City about as fast as you could drive even evading the speed limit. Those things got down to Iowa City in something like 35 or 40 minutes. They just sped right along. They went down through... where did they go? I know the railroad went through Oakdale, where the sanitarium was. In the old days, you know, a lot of people were afflicted with tuberculosis, and the state maintained its tuberculosis sanitarium at Oakdale, Iowa, a station on The Vomit Comet. Now it is part of the University of Iowa's campus--the Oakdale campus.

AHL: Well, I'd like to thank John Ely for this marvelous interview. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW



Jan 15- 1961

Gazette Photo.

REP. AND MRS. JOHN ELY, JR.

... A Matter of Personal Conviction ...

only "Dutch Treat" dinners

Mrs. Ely was president of Linn Co Democratic Womans club 1955

Sun., Jan. 20, 1963

Gov. and Mrs. Harold Hughes have a few words with Democratic Rep. and Mrs. John Ely, center, and Republican Rep. and Mrs. Tom Riley, all of Cedar Rapids, in the receiving line at the inaugural ball Thursday in Des Moines. The Cedar Rapidians were among the estimated 8,000 persons attending the event.

Linn Co. Democratic Women are proud of there First Lady and Governor Hughes

Global Cedar Rapids to honor contributions

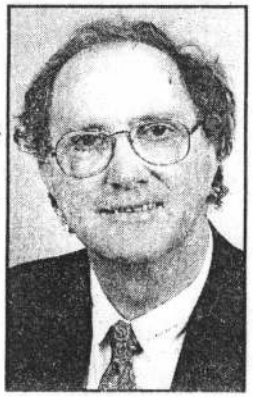
The second annual Global Cedar Rapids awareness week and conference begin Nov. 12.

The event is part of a model project that encourages all residents to make a difference in world affairs, said coordinator Gary Goldstein of Cedar Rapids.

"This is not intended for an elite, special-interest group," said Goldstein, an instructor at Washington High School. "It's a non-political, broad-based program for the entire community."

Activities will begin with a luncheon Nov. 12, in connection with the regular Rotary Club meeting at Five Seasons Hotel. Colin Ransom, chief executive officer of Ransom Financial Group, Winnipeg, Canada, will speak on building bridges of international understanding.

On Nov. 15, at 7:30 p.m., Dr. Michael Daly of Cedar Rapids will speak on world health concerns at St. Paul's United Methodist Church. His talk is cosponsored by the United Nations Association of Iowa.



Jack Healey
Amnesty International

An awards program will be at 7 p.m. Nov. 16 in Ballantyne Auditorium in Iowa Hall, Kirkwood Community College. The following individuals will be cited for their contributions to global understanding on international, national, state and local levels:

John and Polly Ely

Iowa native Norman Borlaug, professor at Texas A&M University and recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize; Jack Healey, executive director of Amnesty International, USA; George Peterson, assistant vice president of the National Geographic Society; John Chrystal of Coon Rapids, agricultural adviser to the Soviet Union; and John and Polly Ely of Cedar Rapids, longtime civic activists.

A daylong session is planned for Nov. 17, in Ballantyne Auditorium at Kirkwood.

Healey will open the conference with a 9 a.m. address on human rights, and small-group discussions are scheduled for the remainder of the morning.

Dimitry Dyomin, a former Radio Moscow journalist, will speak on Soviet reforms at a luncheon. Group discussions will continue until 4 p.m.

For more information, contact Goldstein, 366-3446.

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Insurance (Life)	
Real Estate:	$110 per principal $ 21 per licensed personnel $ 5.50 per non-licensed personnel $200 minimum
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Schools	
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4 - 205.50	14 - 260.50	24 - 315.50	34 - 370.50	44 - 425.50
5 - 211	15 - 266	25 - 321	35 - 376	45 - 431
6 - 216.50	16 - 271.50	26 - 326.50	36 - 381.50	46 - 436.50
7 - 222	17 - 277	27 - 332	37 - 387	47 - 442
8 - 227.50	18 - 282.50	28 - 337.50	38 - 397.50	48 - 447.50
9 - 233	19 - 288	29 - 343	39 - 398	49 - 453
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7/90

To represent Linn County —

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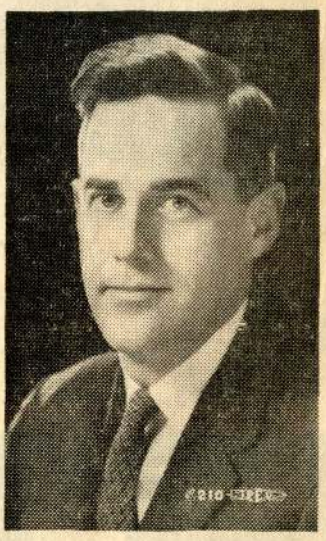

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Ely has served in the last two legislative sessions as State Representative. Now he asks your support for election as State Senator—and thanks you for it.

FOR A BETTER IOWA,

JOHN M. ELY, JR.

Democratic Candidate for
the four-year term

"Let's Keep John Ely in the Legislature"

11-2-1964

Ely lived by beliefs

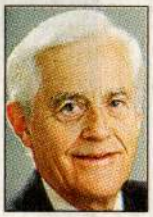
5-28-2007

By Steve Gravelle
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — They held a memorial Sunday afternoon for John Ely Jr., but his life's work is already remembered all over Iowa.

"He lived his life as he believed it," daughter Martha Ely Goralka told about 250 people who attended the formal memorial at Peoples Unitarian-Universalist Church.

Ely, 88, who died March 30 after complications from surgery, is probably best known across the state for working to repeal Iowa's death penalty in 1965. That came after Ely personally viewed what became Iowa's last execution in 1963.



John Ely Jr.
Worked to repeal death penalty

Putting personal experience and values into public action was how Ely lived, his daughter said.

"Everything in our family was either an educational experience, whether good or bad, or a religious experience," Ely Goralka said. While Ely and his wife, Polly, were longtime members of the Universalist church, "they could always quote the Bible better than many fundamentalists. Stopping to help someone with a flat tire was

"I learned there is no greater power than the power of compounding interest," son-in-law John Goralka said. "That was not just for investing, but it was for social good. John believed that a few steps now would mean huge improvements in the future."

To that end, Ely was a donor to and supporter of such groups as the United Nations Association, the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union. His work on the Oak Hill Cemetery board helped preserve and maintain the cemetery at a high level, said Linn County Supervisor Linda Langston.

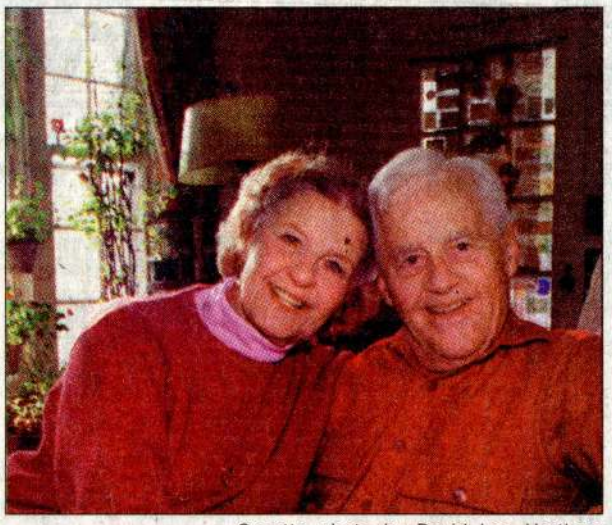
"What he provided people was the inspiration to leave a gift for the future," Langston said. "We can celebrate the legacy that's there, and we can celebrate the legacy in the future."

Mayor Kay Halloran said she learned "the value of public life" from Ely. "If it wasn't for John, I wouldn't have stuck my name on the ballot."

Ely drew on his eight-year tenure in the Iowa Legislature to encourage lawmakers facing criticism for unpopular decisions, Halloran said.

"John would come up very quietly at your elbow and say, 'Don't worry, it'll be all right,'" she said.

C.R. couple spread good fortune through activism



Gazette photo by David Lee Hartlage

John and Polly Ely of Cedar Rapids have long been active in a number of peace, environmental and social justice organizations.

By Tom Fruehling
Gazette staff writer

Neither fame nor fortune has ever been much of a concern to Polly and John Ely, even while they've tasted a measure of each.

John, 78, freely admits, for instance, "Look, we're in the chips, though you wouldn't know it by where we live."

That would be a converted stable at 203 23rd St. NE, now in the shadows behind Blair House, where once stood the Ely family's mansion on First Avenue NE. Horses used to sleep standing up in what is now the couple's bedroom.

John Ely comes from a long line of Cedar Rapids pioneers, among them the miller who founded Quaker Oats. And John himself worked there for 45 years after graduating from Princeton University, his service as a grain buyer punctuated by World War II.

The family at one time owned a good share of downtown Cedar Rapids real estate.

Still, money has never driven Ely or his East Coast bride of 55 years. They've used their good fortune for the good of others.

PEACE MAKERS

12-25-1997

The couple live frugally, they drive well-worn cars plastered with Democratic Party political stickers and watch educational television from surplus easy chairs bought at a fire station auction.

"I've had this system, and it's worked out very well," says John. "We use one-third of our income to live on, we invest one-third and we give one-third away. We've been lucky. Why not try to help others?"

Their generosity, in time and talents, is not intended for public approval. The mark of their lives is that both have worked tirelessly for social causes in which they believe.

Along with it has come some notoriety because if there's a committee that's doing good works on a local or national level, chances are that John or Polly Ely (or both) are active members.

Most of them, says Polly, 77, somehow involve issues of peace and justice. "Peace depends on justice," she says.

Probably the couple's longest-running interest has been the United Nations Association.

John first became involved in college, where he was a student in

■ Turn to 6A: **Peacemakers**

Peacemakers: Longtime activist

■ From page 1A

Princeton's School of Public and International Affairs and a regular observer of the political workings in Washington, D.C.

"I've always been interested in public affairs," he says. Indeed, his sense of involvement led him to serve in the Iowa Legislature from 1961 to 1969. Besides tackling other liberal causes, he was a staunch opponent of the death penalty.

As for Polly, she says she led a sheltered social-awareness life throughout her days as a student at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. "Then the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and I decided I had better pay some attention to how it happened and do what I could to keep it from happening again," she said.

Indeed, she vividly recalls spending her 50th birthday in May 1970 congregating with a mostly college-age crowd for an anti-war demonstration at the Linn County draft board office.

John once figured that one or both of them hold memberships in some 140 different organizations.

Both John and Polly feel the United Nations remains the best hope for worldwide peace.

And they're of the opinion that the United States is shirking its duties as the most powerful and richest member of the international organization.

"There has never been a period of prolonged peace in the world," says John. "Right now, I think we're feeling invulnerable. But it's a false sense of security. You have to be alert to the forces that might do you in."

The Elys, over the years, have lobbied and written endlessly to political leaders on such issues as land mines, atmospheric atomic testing, Third World hunger and poverty, nuclear weapons, civil rights, prison conditions, infant mortality and environmental concerns.

And, on the local level, they've worked in everything from Planned Parenthood to the Council on Aging.

John once figured that one or both of them hold memberships in 140 organizations locally or nationally.

Just reading the newsletters, he says, is almost a full-time job.

"Right now, I think we're feeling invulnerable. But it's a false sense of security. You have to be alert to the forces that might do you in."

John Ely

They hope they've help change things for the better.

"People in the United States have a genius for solving problems," John says. "All we have to do is focus on them."

And, Polly adds, "One person can make a difference."

d good fortune through activism

By Tom Fruehling
Gazette staff writer

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PEACE MAKERS

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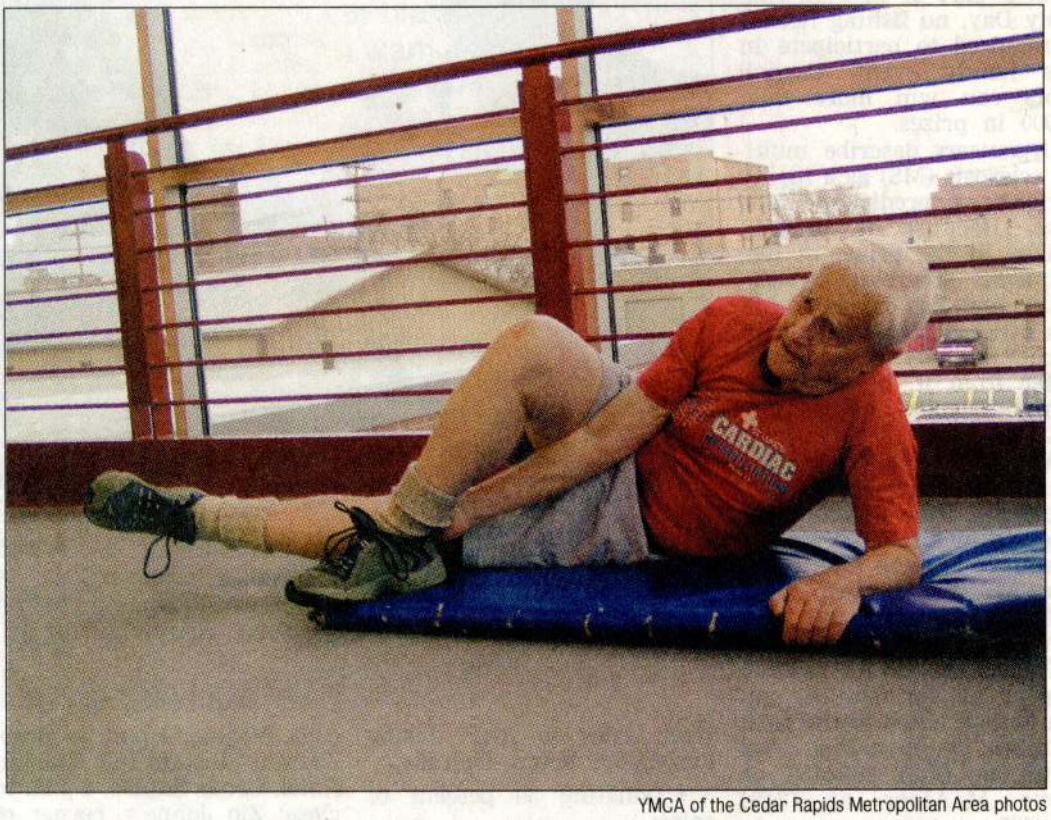
Along with it has come some notoriety

The Ely family observes tradition

John Ely of Cedar Rapids speaks Monday before placing the urn containing his brother's ashes in the Ely family mausoleum at Oak Hill Cemetery. Frederick DeForest Ely died Dec. 14, 1998, in Tucson, Ariz. It is an Ely family tradition to gather each Memorial Day to remember family members who have died. Frederick Ely's ashes are the first cremated remains to be placed in the mausoleum.

Photo by Chip Pearson, Gazette intern

6-1-1999



YMCA of the Cedar Rapids Metropolitan Area photos

John Ely, 86, of Cedar Rapids, stretches before one of his daily workouts at the Helen G. Nassif YMCA in downtown Cedar Rapids. Ely believes in keeping healthy in all facets of life – mind, body and spirit. Living long and well runs in his family, too. His father lived to 103 and his grandfather 97.

Staying sharp

C.R. octogenarians exercise mind, body to remain fit in many senses of the word

5-28-2005

Iowa News Service

CEDAR RAPIDS — On any given day, John and Polly Ely of Cedar Rapids may receive mail from any of the 80 organizations they belong to.

"We have to have a big mailbox," said John, 86, a former state representative and senator who worked at Quaker Oats for 39 years.

The Elys also subscribe to three newspapers — The Gazette, the Des Moines Register and the Wall Street Journal — as well as magazines such as National Geographic, Smithsonian and the New Yorker.

Polly, who turned 85 on Mother's Day, also likes to have a couple of books going at once — one a serious book, the other a frivolous one. "Once I read the yearly State of the World Report and had to read 'Death of a Salesman' to cheer up," she said jokingly.

The Elys believe in keeping their minds sharp. That's why they read and stay engaged in what's happening locally and globally. They believe in keeping fit. That's why, most days, they spend a couple of hours at the Helen G. Nassif YMCA in Cedar Rapids.

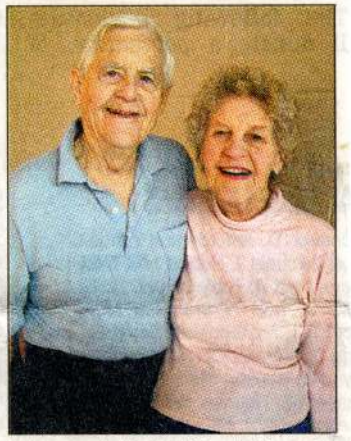
And they believe in their spiritual health. That's why they're active members of Peoples Church Unitarian Universalist.

"I don't want to die before I'm dead," Polly said.

Added John: "Each year of life is more and more precious than the ones earlier. You want to live just as long as you can."

John's had two heart attacks and two cancers. He's incontinent and isn't shy about saying so. "Can you imagine a man my age wearing diapers?" he asked. Because of his interest in the environment, John uses cloth diapers that he proudly washes himself. He sticks to his cardiologist's words of wisdom: 30 minutes of exercise each day and steer clear of salt, sugar and fat.

Polly exercises regularly "out of sheer vanity. I want to look as good as I can and I want to be alive in as many aspects as I can."



John and Polly Ely believe in keeping their minds sharp. That's why they read and stay engaged in what's happening locally and globally.

When she broke her arm in a car accident, Polly didn't do her usual exercises. But she still worked to keep her mind sharp — training herself to write with her left hand so she could continue to work crossword puzzles. Even though her arm is long since healed, she'll occasionally work the puzzles with

▶ ELYS, PAGE 4D

Song, kiss start each day

OM PAGE 1D

left hand, just to make it ore challenging.

John can look at his ancestors and know he has genetics on his side. His father lived to be 103. His grandfather was 97 when he died.

"I know it's going to come to an end," John said. "I look over my shoulder for the guy in black with a scythe. I want to keep ahead of him. When he taps me on the shoulder, that's it. I don't believe in the afterlife. If you're going to do anything, now's the time."

"I don't disbelieve in an afterlife." Polly said. "I'm going to wait and see."

The two say their relationship also deserves credit for their longevity. They met on a blind date while they were in college — John at Princeton, Polly at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Mass. — and each graduated in 1941.

"I look over my shoulder for the guy in black with a scythe. I want to keep ahead of him."

John Ely

Cedar Rapids resident, 86

"Can I tell them about our kiss?" Polly asked John.

Every morning, Polly said, John sings a little song, then they end it with a kiss.

"We're always finding stuff to laugh about," Polly said. "We don't hear each other so we argue about things we agree on because we don't hear each other."

LEGACY

Death penalty foe Ely dies

4-1-2007

Former state legislator's ancestor was among earliest settlers in C.R.

By James Q. Lynch and Adam Belz
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — Former state legislator and longtime death penalty opponent John M. Ely Jr., 88, died Friday at St. Luke's Hospital of complications after surgery.

John M. Ely Jr.
Died Friday

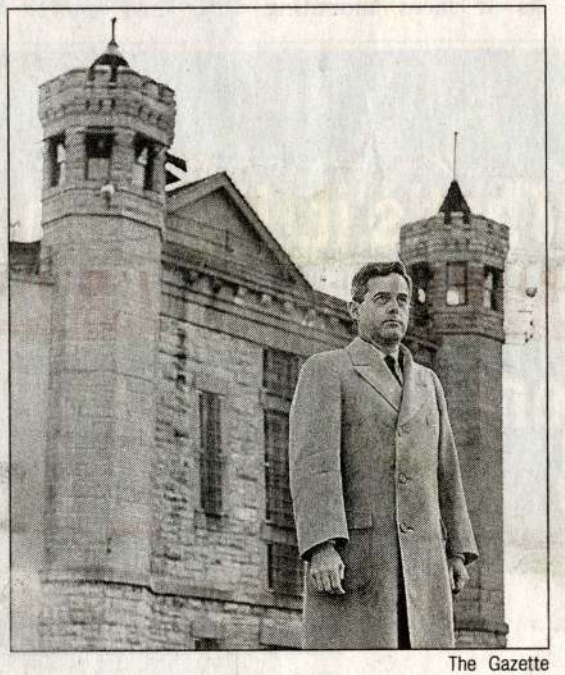
Ely, a descendant of one of Cedar Rapids' founding families, had interests that ran from international to the neighborhood. He was one of the foremost proponents of changing the Cedar Rapids' commission form of government, long before the idea gained traction. And in 1995, he pledged $100 toward stopping the Cedar Rapids Police Department from selling guns collected in a handgun swap when he thought it might allow the guns to be resold.

"It was an honor to represent John," Mayor Kay Halloran said last night. Ely lived in her district when she was a state legislator.

He was a passionate politician, Halloran said.

"Who else would go to Fort Madison to witness a hanging before he felt qualified to vote on the death penalty?" she said. "It was as if then he could say, 'I've seen it. I

► ELY, PAGE 15A



Then-state Rep. John M. Ely Jr. stands outside the Fort Madison penitentiary after witnessing a hanging in 1963 – the last execution carried out by the state. Ely, whose account of the execution helped bring about the repeal of Iowa's death penalty, died Friday in Cedar Rapids at 88.

The Gazette

Ely/Generosity, selflessness cited

▶ FROM PAGE 1A

know it. I can speak against it.' "

It was his work to repeal the death penalty in 1965 that people recalled about Ely, who served in the Iowa Legislature from 1961 to 1969.

"I always admired him, perhaps most importantly, because he is the primary reason we don't have the death penalty in Iowa," 2nd District Rep. Dave Loebsack said.

As a state legislator, Ely witnessed the last execution carried out by the state when it hanged Victor Harry Feguer in 1963. It took until 1965 to repeal Iowa's death penalty statute, thanks, in part, to Ely's first-person account.

Thirty years after helping repeal the death penalty, Ely helped keep it off the books in Iowa, former State Rep. Ed Fallon said.

"He became one of my mentors" in the mid-1990s when the Legislature again debated the penalty, Fallon, a Des Moines Democrat, recalled.

The death penalty wasn't the only volatile issue Ely tackled as a legislator. In 1969, four years before the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion, Ely introduced a bill to make abortion, with restrictions, legal in Iowa.

Halloran called him a financial angel to the Iowa Civil Liberties Union and the Democratic Party.

"Every time the civil liberties needed money, he gave them a few more shares of AT&T," she said. "He was a super example of the way things were supposed to be done."

Loebsack met Ely through mutual interests, including the United Nations Association and campaigns.

"He was a phenomenal individual. He worked tirelessly on campaigns for social justice and to improve our relations with the rest of the world," Loebsack said. "He was a political powerhouse and we're going to miss him as an institution."

Ely grew up in Cedar Rapids and went to local public

He spent a semester at Coe and some time at the University of Iowa but graduated from Princeton University in 1941. He and his wife, Polly, met in 1939, on a blind date. They were married in 1942 in Worcester, Mass. They have two sons and a daughter.

Several people mentioned Ely's selfless principles, including his vote for a legislative redistricting plan that essentially left him without a district.

"He was a giant," said Cedar Rapids attorney Bob Rush, who worked with Ely on civil liberties issues. "The mark John left was dedicating a life to standing up for what he believed.

"You wish there were 100 more just like him," Rush said, "but he was unique."

"He was the best example of how to be a good citizen," said Connie Birmingham of Marion. Describing herself as Ely's "political godchild," she said he had a profound impact on her thinking about capital punishment.

"He made a difference," she said. "He and Polly made a difference together. One was a reflection of the other."

Libby Slappey, who met Ely after she moved to Cedar Rapids from Washington, where she worked for then-Sen. Dick Clark, remembered his zeal.

"I had no idea people of John's age could be as passionate about the issues as the young Turks," she said.

Ely's great-grandfather, Dr. John F. Ely, was an early settler in Cedar Rapids. He was a director of the first railroad to reach Cedar Rapids from Clinton in 1859, the Chicago Iowa and Nebraska.

He also helped organize the Burlington Cedar Rapids and Minnesota Railroad in 1868 to continue work on a north-south route.

Ely told The Gazette in 2004 that he remembered hearing his grandfather talk about how towns were named for railroad figures, including his own great-grandfather.

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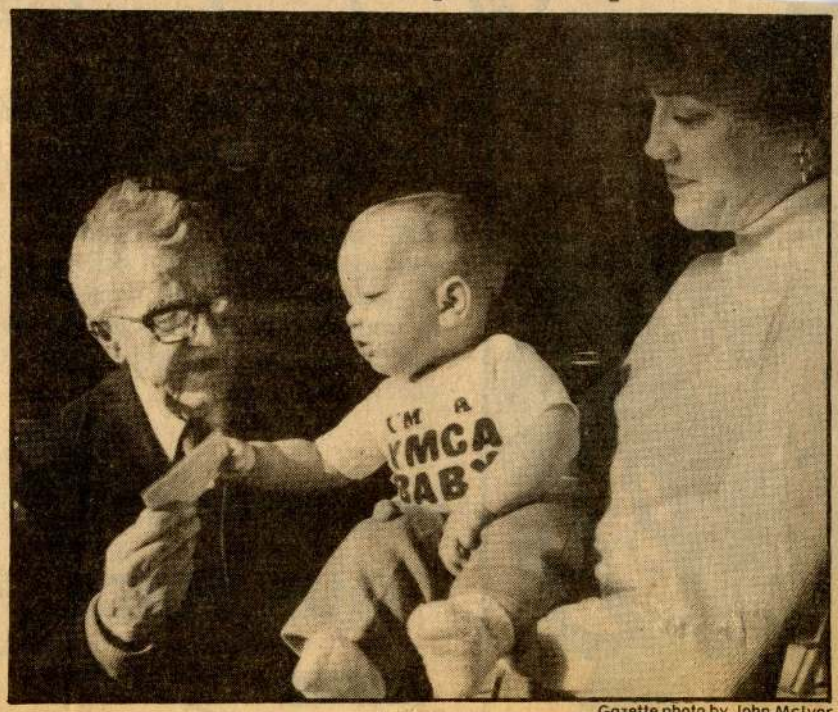
■ Contact the writer: (319) 398-8273 or adam.belz@gazettecommunications.com

ing of Lula's defense of an investment in Iran by the

John M. Ely of Cedar Rapids, who has belonged to the Central YMCA for 86 years, welcomes into the membership 7½-month-old Nathan Allick, held by his mother, Mrs. David Allick of Cedar Rapids. Nathan is presently the youngest member of the Y.

Feb-24-80



Gazette photo by John McIvor

JOHN ELY

"The University should take the position, we the university will look out for our students. We, thank you, will do the disciplining and not the civil authorities. After all, it was university property that was being affected, not the properties of the City of Iowa City. What should be the proper attitude to take.

"I suppose it's really great to say on one hand, we will stand up for freedom, we will allow every student to express himself, every human individual, as far as he likes, but at the same time we will maintain the basic rules of law and order. Of course you can't go wrong there, you satisfy the liberals by saying we're for free speech, and you satisfy those who believe in law and order, by saying that law and order will be maintained. It sounds eminately logical, except there's the feeling about the thoughts of those who have taken this extra step, of overtly breaking law and regulation in behalf of their own ideals. Here's where you do some calculated thinking.

"Put yourself in the place of the demonstrators. What are they after? Certainly not an excuse to get their names in the paper; the big point is idealism, to get across their idea to move men's minds so to change national policy. This is critically important. How do you do it? The questions must come up over and over again. How? How? How?

"As you look at the rules of the game, or the unwritten rules of the game, as they are popping up, certain ideas come to you. The way to get maximum impact is to break municiple ordinances and university regulations. You criticize the rules of the game, well it looks as though to the news media in Iowa, if you demonstrate and carry placards.

"You know, the first time I ever demonstrated was three years ago down in the slums of Des Moines, at the Federal Building. Gosh, I felt funny and I wondered why I had never done this when I was a student. It made me feel good, gee, all of a sudden this was a critical step. Now this type of demonstration almost means nothing. You see them and you say 'Hi!' and he's got a placard and it says something and that's it! There are no pictures taken, no comments made. You wonder whether it's all worth it.

"Five years ago had the act been done of the spilling of the blood on the steps of the Memorial Union, IT would have been news. But, did you notice how it really wasn't news this time? No pictures, brief press comments, well, how then do you get across? Well, you almost over get across, you see, if you do break laws. If you are one of the one hundred and eight who locked arms and sat dow front of a howling mob, there on the steps of th Union, you knew that your pictures were going flashed all over the place and there were going be major headlines. Really in terms of dollars cents it was rather a bargain, because it made headlines in every paper in Iowa, at a net cost something like $6,000. After all, $50 fine plus $ in costs multiplied by 108 was the actual monet cost of the thing. Well, you see pragmatically ho this point got across? And it isn't the students are setting the rules of the game, it's really th news media. Similarly when the case has come fore the court, or when the grand jury meets ar hands down indictments, and the word 'conspira pops out, and you notice the front page of the De Moines Register this morning, they decide what happened. Here again, now you're getting back to maximum impact.

"No student, I think, is educated, no citizen, til he has read Thoreau's essay on 'Civil Disob ience' and has thought about it. You know, you c

take this step lightly. This idea of the higher go higher law, higher moral order. Most every cit should think of 'Well, I'm down here, you see, a higher order is up on this level, which says tha will be law-abiding and I will not be a criminal so forth.' That's as far as you should have to g under civil society, but a few, and throughout h tory there have only been a handful, those few w fulfill the role of prophesy, say 'This I believe, but just believing is not enough, I must act on t information.' He believes and persuades others and indeed the course of history.

"When we think of the prophets we think of th Old Testament prophets. Bear in mind that thes people were minority representatives in their t few in their society believed as they did, and th were young! Most of them, practically all of th were stoned to death by the time they were thir Hopefully we deal with our prophets more kindl A prophet you know doesn't have to be right; he can make mistakes; there are false prophets, b think it is largely true that prophets are withou honor in their own countries.

"Never underestimate, you who have demons ated, the impact on other minds. It doesn't sho The last thing people want to talk about who ar public office today is Vietnam. Frankly, you ju don't bring it up. If it's brought up, the other fe brings it up, not the practicing politician. But, think that we have been influenced. It's not a po ular thing to say and I doubt if my 184 colleagu in the Iowa General Assembly would feel the sa However, I want to put in one plug for the legis lators; all those who have been involved in the House and in the Senate in education committe have kept their mouths shut and not commente versely on the situation that occurred here and the University of Northern Iowa. It is only thos who do not specialize in education that have sh off their mouths."

Neighbors photo by Ann Scholl Boyer

Making a difference

John, Polly direct their energy toward improvin

By Ann Scholl Boyer

The difference between John and Polly Ely and most people is that they believe their efforts can make the world a better place.

CEDAR RAPIDS

At their Cedar Rapids home, a converted carriage house, they recycle so much that the two of them have just one bag of garbage to set out at the curb each week.

They have opened their home to visiting journalists from Ukraine and Russia who have come to Iowa to learn about the free press.

At their church, Peoples Church, John serves on the church board and is chairman of the social concerns committee. Polly heads the wider affairs committee, and also visits patients in the hospital.

Their recycling efforts also spill over to the church. Church members bring their recyclables to the church. John and Polly sort them, selling those that have value. The money goes into the church's social concerns activities, such as Habitat For Humanity.

In Cedar Rapids, home to John's ancestors since the 1800s, the Elys are interested in world peace and justice issues. John says his "most significant" activity is his work as moderator of the Cedar Rapids Area Peace with Justice Network. The organization, which Polly belongs to as well, serves as a network of all the city's organizations that have a peace or justice outlook. John's been active in the group since its inception about a dozen years ago.

> ***"It's the Good Samaritan story: You don't go walking down the other side of the road. You stop and do something about a situation."***
>
> **John Ely**

"It's part of human civilization," John says of his interest in peace and justice. "I think it's so important it shouldn't be left undone. It's the Good Samaritan story: You don't go walking down the other side of the road. You stop and do something about a situation."

John's vice president of the Willis Dady Emergency Shelter. He's a liaison between the shelter and the United Way's allocation committee. John's on the board of the United Nations Association, and he's vice chairman of the Cedar Rapids Historical Committee.

Polly is also active in the United Nations Association and is a member of the Sierra Club. She just completed 12 years as a commissioner on the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission.

In the past, she has been president of Peoples Church. She was a founding member of the Cedar Rapids Medical Aid Fund to help needy women pay for abortions. She was on the Council on Human Relations, the group that existed before the civil rights commission. She was a Rape Crisis volunteer. And she's been active in the Democratic party, helping candidates as well as helping get out the vote.

On the state level, John served in the Iowa legislature for eight years. He was the chief sponsor and floor manager for the bill outlawing the death penalty in Iowa.

Because of the movement to bring back the death penalty, John was asked to speak recently on a panel at the University of Iowa. His message: "that human life is infinitely precious.

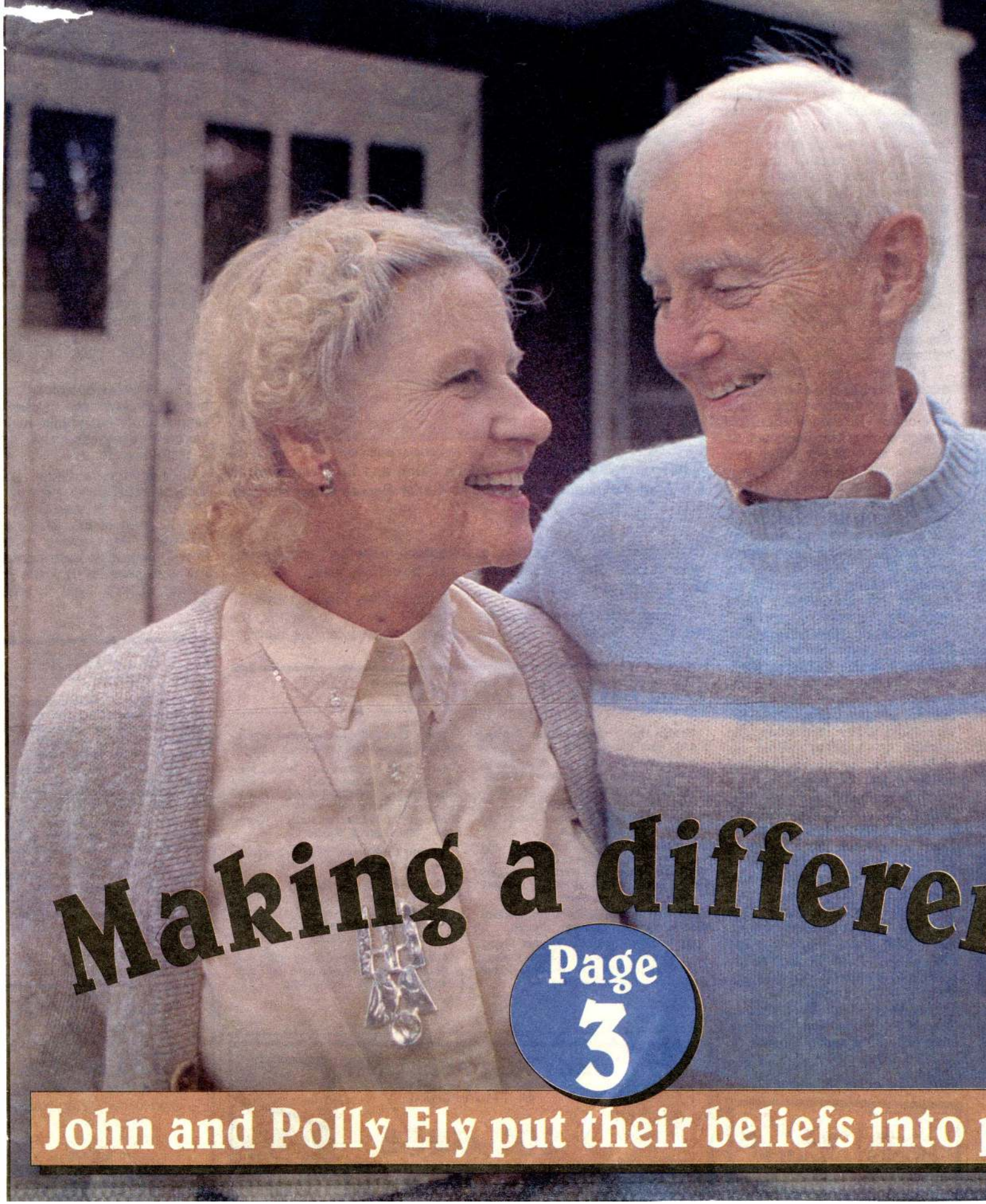
Profile/ John and Polly Ely

Ages: he's 75; she's 74.

Education: he has a bachelor's degree in public and international affairs, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., 1941; she has a bachelor's degree in physiology, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Mass., 1941.

Family: three children, John III, Anamosa; Martha Goralka, Antioch, Calif.; and Nathaniel, Madison, Wis.; four grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

Interests: both enjoy volunteer work, exercising and canoeing.



Making a differe

Page 3

John and Polly Ely put their beliefs into

Gazette photo by Tom Merryman

John M. Ely (left) raises his hands in acknowledgement of the 95th-birthday tribute given him by the Rotary Club Monday. His son, John Jr., is at right.

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The Ely family observes tradition

Photo by Chip Pearson, Gazette intern

John Ely of Cedar Rapids speaks Monday before placing the urn containing his brother's ashes in the Ely family mausoleum at Oak Hill Cemetery. Frederick DeForest Ely died Dec. 14, 1998, in Tucson, Ariz. It is an Ely family tradition to gather each Memorial Day to remember family members who have died. Frederick Ely's ashes are the first cremated remains to be placed in the mausoleum.

6-1-1999

CLOSE-UP
John Ely

Editor's Note: Today's Close-Up subject is John Ely, 71,203 23rd St. NE, retired buyer at The Quaker Oats Co., former state representative and legislator (1961-1969) and member of a pioneer Cedar Rapids family.

What do you like most, least, about your retirement?

Most: The opportunity to read in depth and at length. Least: The slow decline in my physical strength, even while my mental capactities are OK — or so I hope.

If you could visit with any five people from throughout history, whom would they be?

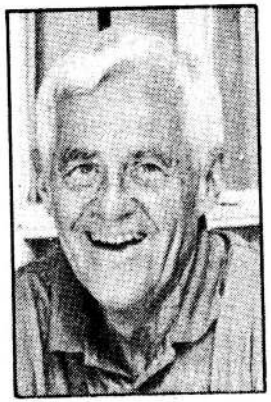
Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Sweitzer, Abraham Lincoln, Robert Ingersoll — the great 19th century agnostic — and Jonathan Swift.

What's good/bad about living in Cedar Rapids?

The good thing is the dependable, solid people that live here. Bad: The predictable urban sprawl and lack of cohesiveness as Cedar Rapids grows bigger and bigger.

What is your goal in life?

To work toward world peace, environmental protection and population control. And as you can guess, these I consider to be the world's three most important problems.



Profile:

Education: B.A. in political science from Princeton University.

Born: Cedar Rapids.

Family: Wife, Polly, 69. Children, John III, 45, Anamosa; Martha, 42, Concord, Calif.; Nathanial, 41, Madison, Wis. Four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

What is the best book you ever read?

The collected works of William Shakespeare, especially the plays of "King Lear," "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet" and "Othello." I became acquainted with them in World War II when I was on convoy duty — ships move pretty slowly and I had a lot of time going across the Atlantic.

If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?

To The Louvre near Paris, which has, I believe, more great art than anywhere else in the world.

What makes you laugh?

Oh! Political humor, every time. Cartoons, jokes. . . that's what's so good about American politics.

What is your favorite meal?

Cookies, and more cookies, all kinds. Nix on big meals. I always say cookies are my last link with youth.

What are your leisure interests?

Reading, travel, bike riding, jogging, and puttering around the house. . repairing, fixing, changing. I love to make little changes, installing those high efficiency light bulbs from Japan, store things in the rafters in the basement. . . . How does my wife like it? You'll have to ask her!

The most important thing you've learned in life is. . .

The sheer joy of living. It's great just to be alive.

What's your idea of a great time?

Stimulating conversation with well-informed people. That tops everything.

If you were given a million dollars, how would you spend it?

I'd set up a non-profit foundation, the income from which would be used for solving human problems that never quite get solved, but that the money would help.

Do you have a pet peeve?

Sure do. Overpopulation. World population has more than tripled in my lifetime. If it triples again, I wonder if the environment will be strong enough to sustain human life.

What did you want to be when you were in high school?

I wanted to be a minister. But I became interested in public affairs, eventually becoming a state senator for four years.

The first thing you notice about a person is. . .

The expression on his or her face. It tells a lot.

Exclusive of the present, what would be your favorite time in history to live?

It would be in the height of the Renaissance in Italy. Wouldn't that be an exciting time?

What was your most embarrassing moment?

That day in 1945 when my mother made me wear knee britches to school because she thought it was the style. I was the only boy in the whole of the old Washington school not dressed in long pants. I felt awful!

"There is a real sense of pride" in how people care for their yards.

Jim Judd, 45

"It was a good place to raise our kids."

Jerry Buttleman, 65

"Great neighborhood, lot of nice people."

Ron Gonder, 72

6-27-2007

HISTORY

Ely family's downtown home had equine connection

By Suzanne Barnes
The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — John and Polly Ely were famous for living simply, but few know a former inhabitant of their bedroom was a horse named Teddie.

Teddie was John's sister Martha's horse and was named after Teddy Roosevelt. The discrepancy in the presidential and pet name spelling is lost to history.

How the Elys and the equine came to share the same room is simple. Teddie was long gone when Polly and her late husband, who died March 30, moved into what had been the carriage house for the home in which John's late grandfather, John S. Ely, lived.

The Elys did have to have their bedroom floor redone because Teddie had pawed at it, Polly said.

According to Gazette files, John S. Ely's former home was purchased by United Fire and Casualty for use as a corporate office.

A consultant, however, suggested that was not feasible. The old Ely mansion was burned and the site is now occupied by Blair House, 2222 First Ave. NE.

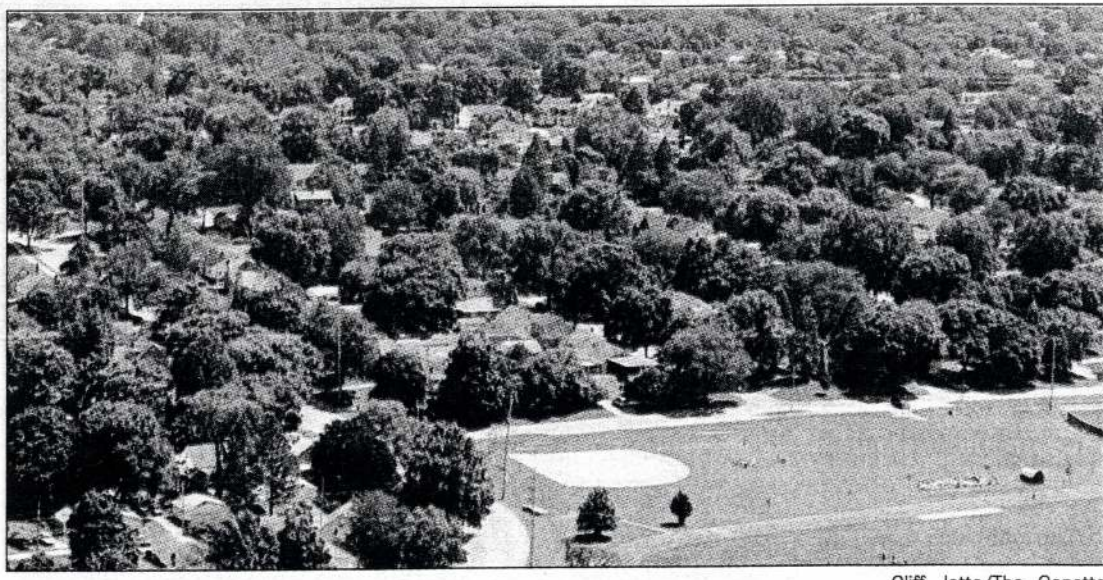
The building on the downtown side of Blair House was the home in which John M. Ely and his three siblings were raised.

According to Polly, family members called the area a bee hive because so many Elys lived there.

The Ely grounds extended from 21st to 23rd streets, according to Gazette files.

Polly Ely

In an undated photo, a very young John Ely and his younger brother, Fred, haul wood on the Ely property, which once extended from 22nd Street to around 23rd Street along First Avenue NE. Fred Ely died when he was a child; John Ely died at age 88 on March 30.



Cliff Jette/The Gazette

This bird's-eye view shows the northeast Cedar Rapids neighborhood around St. Matthew Catholic Church, as seen looking southeast from Tomahawk Park last week.

■ Contact the writer: (319) 398-8434 o
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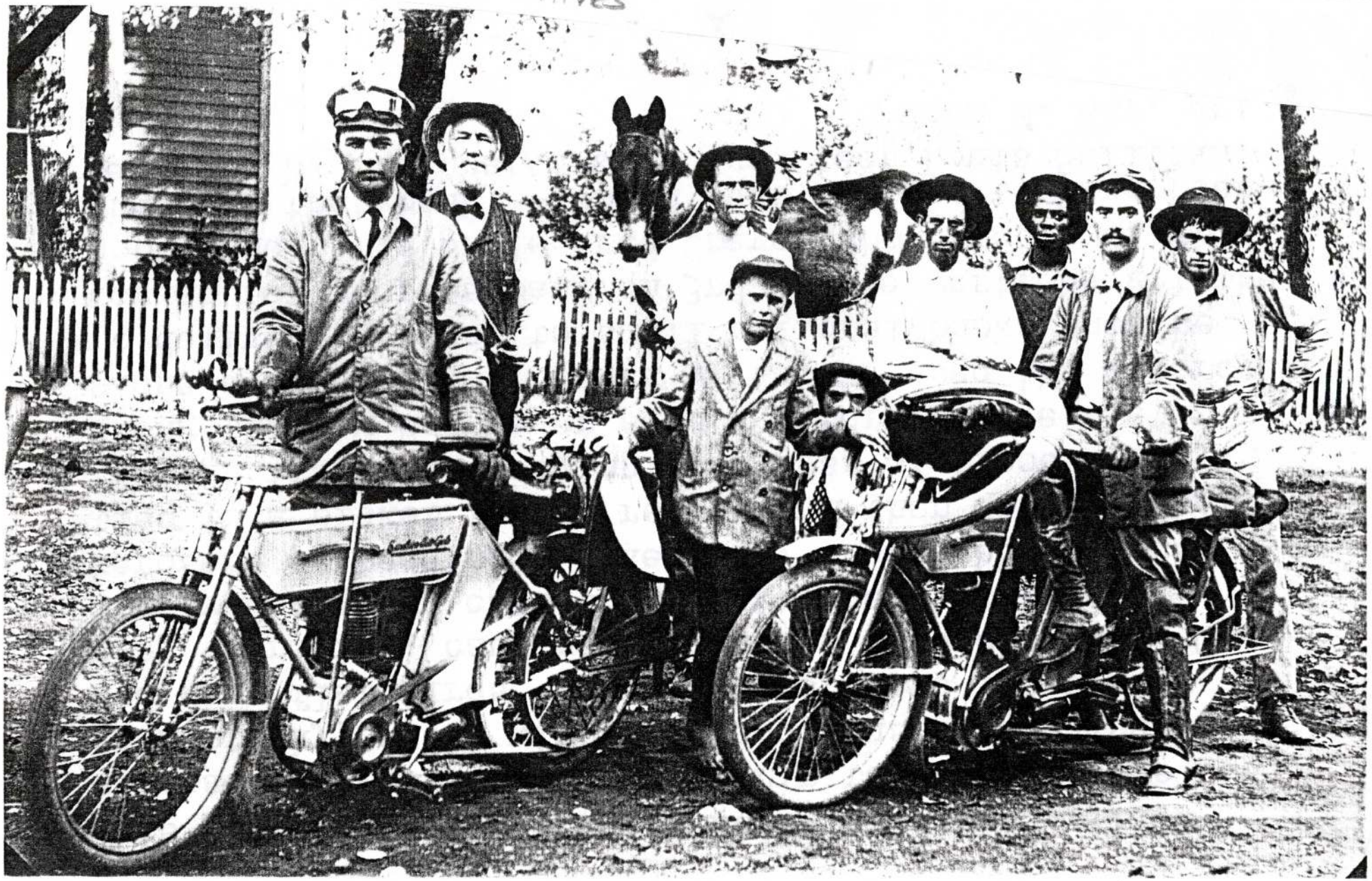
In ARCHIVES



John Ely, Jr.

This picture is the only reminder of John M. Ely's spectacular ~~monte~~ motorcycle trip to Mammoth Cave Sept. 1909 in Kentucky, along with a friend, Gus Long. They had many flat tires -- but, worse, were the horses they terrified, causing all manner of accidents. One involved a gypsy cart that overturned, spilling kerosene on bedding. A Kentucky thoroughbred horse tied to a picket fence, reared and then ran a picket through its throat, dying from loss of blood. Many along the way had never seen a motor vehicle, let alone a motorcycle. Later my father used the motorcycle to deliver currency to small regional banks when he worked for Peoples Bank on 3rd Avenue West; he got the job through his Uncle Fred Shaver who owned a sizable chunk in that bank -- which just happens to have been desinged by ~~cele~~brated ~~exar~~ architect Louis Sullivan.

John M. Ely, Jr.

Making a difference

John, Polly direct their energy toward improving the world

By Ann Scholl Boyer

The difference between John and Polly Ely and most people is that they believe their efforts can make the world a better place.

CEDAR RAPIDS

At their Cedar Rapids home, a converted carriage house, they recycle so much that the two of them have just one bag of garbage to set out at the curb each week.

They have opened their home to visiting journalists from Ukraine and Russia who have come to Iowa to learn about the free press.

At their church, Peoples Church, John serves on the church board and is chairman of the social concerns committee. Polly heads the wider affairs committee, and also visits patients in the hospital.

Their recycling efforts also spill over to the church. Church members bring their recyclables to the church. John and Polly sort them, selling those that have value. The money goes into the church's social concerns activities, such as Habitat For Humanity.

In Cedar Rapids, home to John's ancestors since the 1800s, the Elys are interested in world peace and justice issues. John says his "most significant" activity is his work as moderator of the Cedar Rapids Area Peace with Justice Network. The organization, which Polly belongs to as well, serves as a network of all the city's organizations that have a peace or justice outlook. John's been active in the group since its inception about a dozen years ago.

> ***"It's the Good Samaritan story: You don't go walking down the other side of the road. You stop and do something about a situation."***
>
> **John Ely**

"It's part of human civilization," John says of his interest in peace and justice. "I think it's so important it shouldn't be left undone. It's the Good Samaritan story: You don't go walking down the other side of the road. You stop and do something about a situation."

John's vice president of the Willis Dady Emergency Shelter. He's a liaison between the shelter and the United Way's allocation committee. John's on the board of the United Nations Association, and he's vice chairman of the Cedar Rapids Historical Committee.

Polly is also active in the United Nations Association and is a member of the Sierra Club. She just completed 12 years as a commissioner on the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission.

In the past, she has been president of Peoples Church. She was a founding member of the Cedar Rapids Medical Aid Fund to help needy women pay for abortions. She was on the Council on Human Relations, the group that existed before the civil rights commission. She was a Rape Crisis volunteer. And she's been active in the Democratic party, helping candidates as well as helping get out the vote.

On the state level, John served in the Iowa legislature for eight years. He was the chief sponsor and floor manager for the bill outlawing the death penalty in Iowa.

Because of the movement to bring back the death penalty, John was asked to speak recently on a panel at the University of Iowa. His message: "that human life is infinitely precious. The state of Iowa shouldn't stoop to the level of murdering its own citizens in retaliation for murder."

Mainly because of his work in government, John says he's learned "you're likely to get slapped down and beaten down and lose, but you have to be hopeful you might make it. Sometimes, the things that happen are uplifting."

John was on the committee to establish charters for Iowa's community colleges.

"Look at Kirkwood" he says. "If it hadn't been for that committee meeting morning after morning, hammering out the details, we wouldn't have Kirkwood Community College.

"You just never know. You just never know. You just keep working at it. You keep losing and losing and eventually you win one. You see progress being made."

Says Polly: "Whenever I get discouraged — and it's kind of often — I look at my memory of the Grand Canyon. I remind myself that was made by drop after drop after drop of water over a long, long time. If I can be that drop of water, OK."

Profile/ John and Polly Ely

Ages: he's 75; she's 74.

Education: he has a bachelor's degree in public and international affairs, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., 1941; she has a bachelor's degree in physiology, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Mass., 1941.

Family: three children, John III, Anamosa; Martha Goralka, Antioch, Calif.; and Nathaniel, Madison, Wis.; four grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

Interests: both enjoy volunteer work, exercising and canoeing.

Cedar Rapids Gazette Nov 3 1957

Why's Why in Cedar Rapids

John M. Ely, jr., ingredients buyer, Quaker Oats Company. Residence: 203 Twenty-third street NE. Two sons, one daughter. Born in Cedar Rapids Feb. 17, 1919.

Have you lived here all your life?

Yes, except for three years when I was in the merchant marine.

Have you ever considered living elsewhere?

Yes. I thought of living in New York City, but at about the time of the original atom bomb I decided I had better head for the hinterlands and came back to Cedar Rapids.

How did you become a purchasing agent?

After deciding to return to Cedar Rapids, the next question was where to get a job. I always had tremendous respect for Quaker, so I applied for a job while still a purser on a ship. I wrote to the office manager that I could go to work a week after the ship docked, and I did, as a helper in the purchasing department.

What's the toughest thing about purchasing for a factory?

Buying the necessary ingredients at the lowest cost—the same problem any housewife has in a grocery store. Quality specifications, however, also are extremely important.

Is it grain you purchase?

No, everything but grain — meat scraps, tankage, phosphates, vitamin mixtures, even ground limestone, for cattle and poultry feed. Today we purchased 80 carloads of soybean meal.

Do you buy mostly in Iowa?

We try to concentrate our buying in the area where we do business. This also means there is less freight to be paid.

Outside of business, what is your favorite activity?

It shifts. At one time I spent practically all of my spare time as a Scoutmaster. That lasted about five years. Following that I became interested in the local Democratic party, serving as party treasurer and as a candidate in the last two elections. Now I'm tied up as committee chairman selecting a

JOHN M. ELY, JR.

pastor for Peoples church.

Does this mean you won't be a candidate again?

It's hard to say. I hope not.

What decided you to run for office?

Everyone has a priority scale in his own life. I thought the thing to do was to run for office where the need was greatest.

If you run again, what office will you seek?

The same one (state representative). The need still exists. At the moment I don't honestly know whether I will run in the next campaign, but that's the office I have my eye on. The state is the area of government about which people know the least, so it suffers from inattention.

What is your favorite recreation?

Taking canoe trips with Mrs. Ely. I got the idea from my father, but enlarged on it. She and I have paddled over 2,000 miles together.

What was your most extensive trip?

A couple of hundred miles down the St. Croix river into the Mississippi and then down to McGregor. The first trip we took was from the Wisconsin Dells down to McGregor, along the route followed by Marquette and Joliet.

What do you like besides canoeing?

We do a lot with our children, go to family nights at the YMCA and go to auctions together. I get a lot out of reading, too.

What reading do you like best?

I'm having a lot of fun with Edwin O'Connor's "The Last Hurrah".

Do you do much work around the house and yard?

I should, but I don't do nearly enough. I live in an old barn —my grandfather's old carriage house. Last year I helped remodel the hayloft into bedrooms for the children.

What has been your most unforgettable experience?

The time I was in a convoy running the English channel. It was about 3 in the morning and the Germans were pouring buzz bombs on London. The antiaircraft batteries were knocking down about one out of three. It wasn't the Fourth of July, but it seemed like it.

Outside your family, what one person has had the greatest influence on your life?

A professor of politics at Princeton. Now that I look back on it, he greatly influenced both my political and religious thinking. You could call it a by-product of college.

Have you a pet peeve?

The lack of interest of people in their government. They're always interested in the politicians, but too little in what the politicians do.

What is your philosophy of living?

To plan in such a way that I can do first things first. I don't like to do things that don't seem to me the most important.

What is your favorite food?

Eating is not one of the things I specialize in. We use it as a means of family economy.

Have you a favorite season of the year?

Yes, the fall with its colors and aromas. The trouble is that it doesn't last long enough.

—Interview by Bruce Fishwild.

Helen Weare Ely Brill, 88, died April 14, 2003, of a brain injury after a fall in her home in Bloomfield, Conn. Born Sept. 24, 1914, in Cedar Rapids, her middle names reflected descent from two closely linked families, each of whom settled in Cedar Rapids in 1844. Daughter of Laurel S. Sullivan and John M. Ely Sr., she was preceded in death by an older sister, Elisabeth Ely Murray, a younger brother, Frederick D. Ely, and her parents, leaving a surviving brother, John M. Ely Jr., Cedar Rapids.

Mrs. Brill grew up in the family home, 2218 First Ave. NE, attending Arthur, Franklin and old Washington public schools, later graduating with honors from Scripps College in California where she also earned an M.A. She taught high school in Los Angeles, then when World War II broke out and American citizens of Japanese lineage were interned and sent to "relocation centers," Helen chose to teach American government and American history to youngsters at Manzanar in the California desert within the barbed wire enclosed camp.

It was at Manzanar that she met Robert Brill, a conscientious objector from New York City. They married, had two daughters in NYC, lived in Buffalo, N.Y., West Chester, Pa., and then Bloomfield since 1963.

Helen was active in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) since being drawn to its tenets of simplicity and service in her 20s. She and her husband, Bob, held leadership positions at the local, regional and national levels and was a core member of the Hartford Meeting. Additionally she and Bob founded the Connecticut chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). They also hosted many visitors from around the world — from refugees to State Department dignitaries — making a real difference in the lives of many. Bob died in 1993.

Survivors in her immediate family include Louise Langston Brill and her partner, Mary Donnelly, of Barnet, Vt., and Laurel Brill Swan and her husband, Michael Swan, of Bloomfield, Conn.; and grandchildren, Robert and Laurel M. Swan.

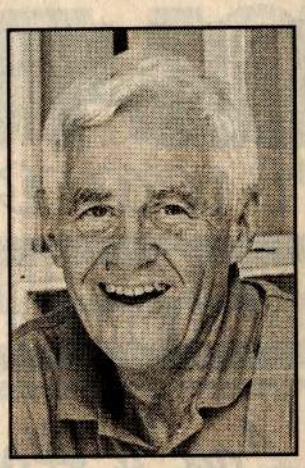
Services will be May 17, 2 p.m., at Hartford Friends Meeting, Hartford, Conn.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be made to the Brill Memorial Scholarship, PFLAG Hartford, c/o David Owens, 75 School House Crossing, Wethersfield, CT 06109.

Grim anniversary

THE IOWA HOUSE Judiciary Committee has turned down reinstatement of the death penalty — even Gov. Terry Branstad's limited proposal covering rapists, kidnappers and perpetrators of other heinous crimes.

That means the issue probably is finished for the year, though it could resurface. It also means Iowa will not hurriedly bring back the form of punishment legislators were glad to abolish nearly three decades ago.



John M. Ely Jr.
Opposes death penalty

Lengthy deliberation seems especially appropriate today — the 30th anniversary of Iowa's last execution. The prisoner hanged at the State Penitentiary at Fort Madison March 15, 1963, was Victor Feguer, the first person executed in Iowa under the federal Lindbergh kidnapping law.

Among the witnesses was then-State Rep. John M. Ely Jr. of Cedar Rapids. He told The Gazette that day that an "awful shudder" came over him when that trapdoor was sprung. "I felt very strongly that the Legislature should seek other methods of execution, if indeed we have to continue with capital punishment in Iowa. Hanging by the neck until dead smacks too much of the Middle Ages."

Two years later, Ely, then a senator, was chief sponsor and successful floor manager of the bill to abolish the death penalty.

"I sensed at the time that this was to be my supreme accomplishment in life. . . . " Ely wrote recently in an article for Peace Talk, newsletter for the Cedar Rapids Area Peace with Justice Network. "Some 28 years later that perception still holds; it was the very top of my life!"

Ely goes to the State Capitol Building today to speak at the rally marking the 30th anniversary of Iowa's last execution.

Today the lethal injection is supplanting the gallows, electric chair, gas chamber and firing squad as the means of execution in the United States. Whatever method is used, the people must realize the intentional taking of life is no small matter.

C.R. GAZETTE MAR. 15 1993

4-26-2006

Local activists honored at Iowa U.N. assembly

CEDAR RAPIDS — Cedar Rapids residents and lifelong activists **John Ely** and **Mary Alice Ericson** were honored at the Iowa United Nations Association's Annual Assembly on April 8 at the Islamic Center.

Both received the United Nations Association's Scroll of Honor, the organization's highest honorary award for outstanding service in Iowa to the goals of the United Nations and the United Nations Association.

In addition to his leadership with the United Nations Association, Ely has worked for social justice and equality. As an Iowa senator, he worked to abolish the death penalty and secure fair housing for low-income Iowans. Ely also has worked on behalf of the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, NAACP and Willis Dady Shelter for the Homeless.

Ericson has been a leader of the Iowa United Nations Association since 1960. Under her leadership, membership of the Linn County chapter has doubled. She has been active in other social causes, as well. In the 1980s, she was one of the founding members of the Cedar Rapids Peace with Justice network and has served as chairwoman of the Sociology Department at Coe College.

By Tom Fruehling
Gazette staff writer

He went away to college at Princeton University, like his father and grandfather before him, and sailed the seas during World War II as a merchant ship purser.

Otherwise, 68-year-old John M. Ely Jr. has stuck pretty close to home over his lifetime.

In fact, for the past 41 years, Ely and his wife, Polly, have lived a mere 200 yards from where he was born in his parents' home at 2218 First Ave. NE. Their residence, located in the shadow of Blair House at 203 23rd St. NE, is a converted barn that once housed carriages and animals on his grandfather's grand estate.

Hay was once kept upstairs, and horses used to sleep standing up in what is now the couple's bedroom.

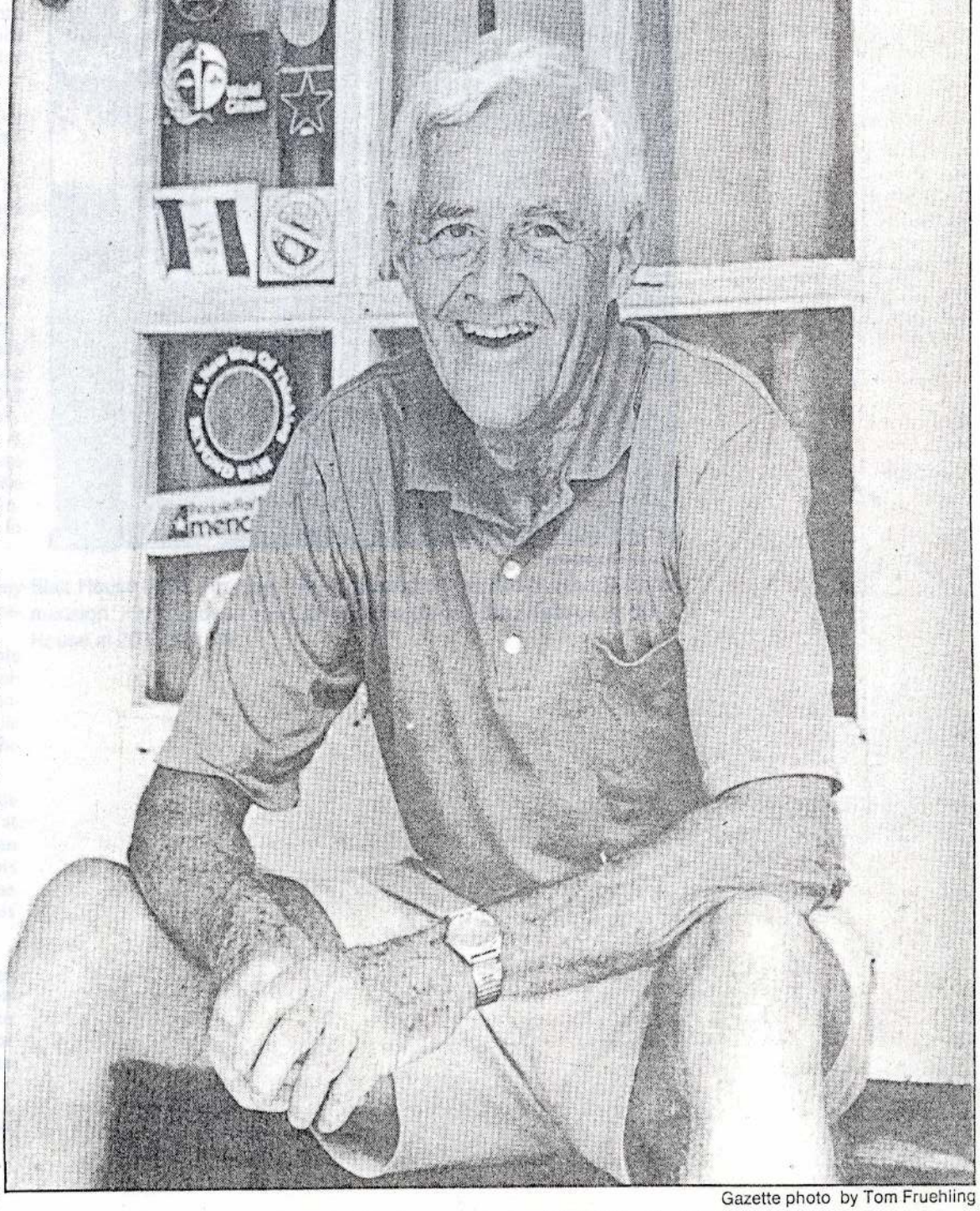
Besides his four-year foray to Princeton, where publishing mogul Malcolm Forbes was a classmate and Secretary of State George Shultz studied a year behind, Ely didn't ever venture far for his schooling.

There was the brief period when he had to attend the old Washington High School downtown near Greene Square Park. But Ely says he still made a 2-mile bike trek home for lunch every day. "Unless," he notes, "we went to either the Second Avenue Virginia lunch room or the Third Avenue one. Then you were really living it up."

For grade school, Ely walked all of two blocks to Arthur elementary and for junior high, he went a couple of blocks the other way to Franklin. He returned to the remodeled Franklin to finish high school.

When he graduated in 1937, Ely says he left with one distinction: "I was named the student who lived closest to school."

He's always voted in the same grade school where he first learned what voting meant.



Gazette photo by Tom Fruehling

Besides his college years and a stint on the seas during World War II, John Ely Jr. has stayed close to home.

John M. Ely Jr. has a long way to go, though, to claim senior status on the near northeast side of Cedar Rapids, however. His father, John M. Ely, after all, is 103 years old and, except for his own Princeton years, has never lived anywhere else.

The elder Ely was born and reared in an area then at the edge of the city but now in the heart of downtown. He returned home after college in 1906 and, when he wed, built a house adjacent to his parents' since-demolished mansion. He has called his house at 2218 First Ave. NE home since 1917.

"That's the way it was done in our family," explains the younger Ely. "Everybody tended to live together. When my father married, my grandfather (John S. Ely) told him he'd give him the land if he'd live next door.

"Along came my aunt, Mary Esther, who married lawyer Haven Simmons, and our back yards adjoined. Her poor husband, surrounded by all those in-laws, with the families that compacted. There were always a lot of kids and cousins around, though."

Ely, who is the eighth in the family line to bear the same first and last names, says tradition took a turn to the worse when it came to his bequest.

"When my generation grew up, they said to me, 'We'll let you have the barn and the chicken coop.'

"This was after I got back from the war, and building materials were hard to come by. We fixed the place up into a home and planned to stay maybe two years. Well, after raising three kids, here we are."

The Ely family has roots that go back to the pioneer days of Cedar Rapids. The first to come was grain miller Alexander Ely from Michigan who had been coaxed here in 1844 to set up a mill on the rapids of the Cedar River. As inducement, property baron and town booster Judge Greene gave the young man title to one-twelfth of the city's land.

Notes John M. Ely Jr., who retired three years ago after a 45-year career at Quaker Oats, "The rest of us have been coasting along ever since. The Elys have always played it very carefully and retained land in the family."

In fact, the very last of the family's considerable downtown holdings was just recently sold.

Within two years of starting the mill, Alexander Ely died and his brother, Dr. John F. Ely, came out from New York to settle the estate. He ended up marrying his brother's widow and staying put.

In the family tree, John F. begat John S., who begat John M., who begat John M. Jr. Says the latter, "Our son (John III) is the ninth generation John Ely . . . and the last."

It was John S. who perhaps made the most of the family's good fortune.

"My grandfather retired at the age of 35 and died at 97," relates John M. Jr. "Along the way, he made a very nice living managing the family business affairs. He collected rent and traveled around the world."

Back in the early part of this century, John S. built what was a showpiece home at 2222 First Avenue NE just down the road from his buddy at Brucemore, businessman George Bruce Douglas. The Ely spread was near the end of the paved street, between Cedar Rapids and the town of Kenwood Park, on the trolley car line.

"It was a spooky old house," remembers John M. Jr, "but huge with a lot of land around it. My grandfather had the driveway slanted so that it pointed downtown — and away from the county seat in Marion."

Left to right, Mrs. Sid Leibsohn, Jim Coquillette, Werner Heck, Gaylord Fanton and John Ely, jr.

CIRCA 1940

—Gazette photo by Tom Merryman

Sertoma Award To Ely

John M. Ely, jr., 203 Twenty-third street NE, Tuesday received the Cedar Rapids Sertoma club citizen of the year award. Ely, a buyer for Quaker Oats Co., has served many years on various church and human relations boards. A former state senator who pushed for re-districting legislation that abolished his own senate seat, he is chairman of the Linn county Moratorium committeee. The award was presented in a ceremony at the Montrose hotel. Byron Thorpe is behind Ely and Judge William Eads is at right.

Gazette photo by Lisa Powell

John Ely poses in Oak Hill Cemetery, the oldest in Cedar Rapids. Behind him is the burial stone of George Greene, one of the founders of Cedar Rapids. Greene died June 28, 1880.

A family tradition

Oak Hill Cemetery will keep changing with Cedar Rapids

By Tom Fruehling
Gazette staff writer

Even though he describes the property as "41 acres of prime real estate," John Ely Jr. never wanted to have a cemetery on his hands.

Blame it on his ancestors.

The Ely family helped settle Cedar Rapids and have had an interest in Oak Hill Cemetery, the town's oldest burial ground, since it was established back in 1854.

"In the early years," explains John, "it was a for-profit operation. Then one of my forebears did something unscrupulous, like make off with some money or something. To restore the family honor, a non-profit organization was set up. And an Ely has always been on the board."

Indeed, his father, John Sr., who died just shy of his 104th birthday in 1987, managed the Oak Hill Cemetery Association all of his very long adult life. He invested the perpetual-care funds and made sure the graves of Cedar Rapids' leaders and its poorer citizens were properly maintained.

As the last of the Ely clan in town, the task of heading up the cemetery board finally fell to John Jr. He says he was a reluctant manager. The endowment fund was put in the trust of Securities Corporation of Iowa. Then John struck a deal with Dave Linge, the late proprietor of Cedar Memorial Funeral Home and cemetery.

"Dave was a believer that all the cemeteries in town be kept up," he points out. "So he'd told my father that he'd take over management of Oak Hill in return for my father recording his memories of Cedar Rapids.

"Well, Dave got my Dad one tape recorder. That didn't work, so he got him another. But my father never did get around to doing it. Then Roby Kesler wrote a book about him and that was so successful, she did another one called 'John Ely Remembers More.'

"I had Dad autograph some copies, took 'em out to Dave and said, 'Well, here's our part of the bargain, here's your management fee.'"

That arrangement has been in place for several years. Cedar Memorial has provided an on-grounds superintendent and work crew, and interest from Oak Hill's $800,000 endowment has paid for upkeep.

John Jr., meanwhile, has pretty much followed in the footsteps of his father.

"When he managed it, he once went 18 years without [illegible]" recalls John. H[illegible] dent for two y[illegible] to call. "I do h[illegible] in serving," he said.

Recently, however, John learned that Cedar Memorial intends, in his words, to "cut the umbilical cord."

The caretaker at Cedar Memorial plans on retiring in a couple of years, so Oak Hill superintendent Greg Blood, 34, is being transferred to Cedar Memorial next June. By then, John said, he and a new board he's going to have to form will be on their own.

John, 74, a retired Quaker Oats buyer and one-time state legislator, isn't sure what direction the cemetery will take. But he says there's no question of the long-range viability of the Cedar Rapids landmark. It is, after all, the eternal resting place of such luminaries as city founder Judge George Greene, tycoon Arthur Collins, and a host of other dignitaries, including a long line of Ely family members. The cemetery is also burial place for indigents.

"The most prominent people in Cedar Rapids are buried here," said John. "To walk through the cemetery is like taking a three-dimensional history lesson. All the names, they're just thrown out at you."

Dows, Douglas, Sinclair, Daniels, Bever, Higley, Cherry, Cook and Coquillette. As late local historian Harold Ewoldt noted, "All names that have shaped and guided the destiny of Ced[illegible]

JOHN M. ELY, 1884-1987

C.R. pioneer 'just ran down'

12-18-1987 **By Tom Fruehling**
Gazette staff writer

Obituary on page 16A

John Ely's body finally wore out.

Four months and a week shy of his 104th birthday, Ely died Thursday after gradually weakening in recent years.

"He just ran down," said his son John Jr. "He'd gotten slower and slower. Then he stopped. But he wanted to die without pain, and he did. And he wanted to die at his home, and he did that, too."

John Ely

He'd long ago come to grips with dying. On the occasion of his 99th birthday in 1983, the man who automatically had the term "oldest" attached to any of his interests said he laughed at the specter of death.

"You know you're mortal. The only thing I need in life is more years. Knowing I can't have them, I'd be foolish to blind myself. I may not be here the day after tomorrow.

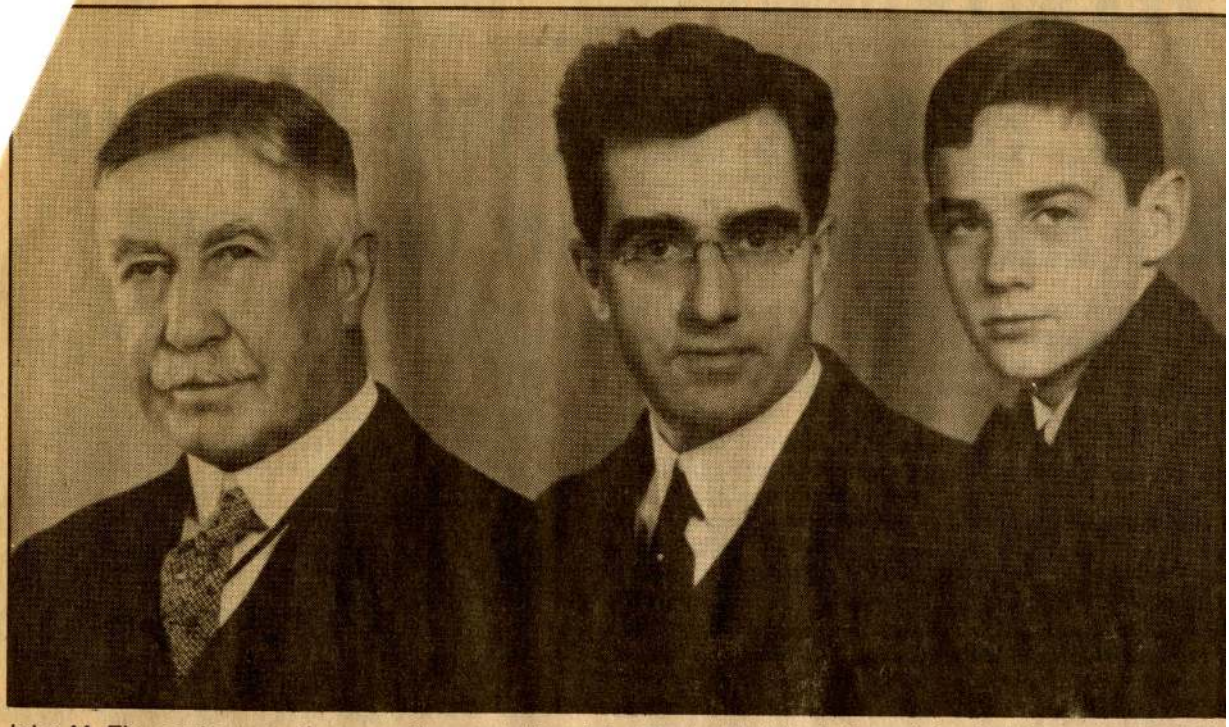
"I feel fulfilled at what I've accomplished. I've had fullness of days. I can die in peace."

John M. Ely was a Cedar Rapids pioneer, one of the city's biggest boosters and one of its most benevolent citizens. He was also the oldest Chicago Cubs fan around and the longest continuous regular subscriber to the Wall Street Journal.

He once said the earliest memory of his hometown was the time back in 1887 when a crew of men dug up his parents' cellar to put in the city's first sewer system. Ely also witnessed the paving of Cedar Rapids' dirt streets with wooden bricks.

Almost to the end, Ely recalled with remarkable clarity the minutiae of his many years. He was always a stickler for details, a trait that served him well over a lifetime as a succesful businessman and investor.

• *Please turn to 4A: Ely*



John M. Ely, center, was the seventh generation John Ely, behind his father, John S., left, and before his son, John M. Jr., right. This picture was taken in 1933. A member of a pioneer Cedar Rapids family and a longtime civic activist, Ely died at his home Thursday at the age of 103.

ELY: 'I can't tell you why I've lived so long'

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Born into a family of early Cedar Rapids settlers, Ely inherited considerable downtown property. One of his forefathers was given one-twelfth of the city's land back in the mid-1800s to set up a grain mill, and Ely spent his life managing the family trust.

Explaining why he was still reading the Wall Street Journal daily and buying and selling stocks as he neared his 100th birthday, Ely noted, "If I see an opportunity to make good investments, I'll do it . . .You can't help it if you've made a study of it all your life."

The last of the Ely holdings in the central business district was sold just recently.

After an idyllic childhood in Cedar Rapids, marked by "Johnny Boy's" youthful ventures into circus lemonade stands and door-to-door doorbell repairs, Ely went off to Princeton University. And although he studied politics there under Woodrow Wilson, he stayed a dyed-in-the-wool Republican.

After graduation in 1906, Ely came home and never left.

"I was never tempted to settle down anywhere else," he said.

Ely spent a few years in the banking business, but devoted the rest of his life to investments and property management. He had an office in the Guaranty Bank Building (Room 318) from 1916 until 1979.

A dedicated, lifelong walker until a broken hip slowed him down at the age of 95, Ely often trekked to work from his home at 2218 First Ave. NE. He and his wife Laurel, who died in 1958 after a 49-year marriage, built the house next to the home of his parents in 1917.

In his younger years, Ely proudly recalled, he made a habit of hiking to destinations as far away as Vinton. Given a YMCA card at the age of 10, he retained membership for the next 93 years.

In addition to an active regimen, he always maintained a vice-free lifestyle and claimed the secret to his longevity was a tendency to thoroughly chew his food.

Still, Ely readily admitted four years ago, "I can't tell you why I've lived so long."

Never senile, he contended that "age is largely a matter in your head. It's hard for me to think of myself as old."

He was an even 100 at the time.

Ely was long among the most benevolent of Cedar Rapids citizens and was active in many civic organizations.

He managed the Oak Hill Cemetery for many years until turning the task over to his son, John M. Jr., and carried on a family tradition of supporting the Public Health Nursing Association. Ely was one of the founders of Camp Good Health and an officer of the Red Cross.

"Give yourself away," he suggested as the value system by which he lived for over a century. "Give yourself to your family, to the community, to others. That is the way I have been happy."