

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Eloise Basler

Conducted by Sarah Start-Waldie  
September 8, 1984  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Transcribed by Sue Daugherty

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2005.10.10

Eloise Basler was born April 24, 1906, in Cedar Rapids. Her father was Charles Klersey and her mother Sophia Yark Klersey. After teaching two years, Mrs. Basler was married and raised two sons. From this interview, we learn about early communications and transportation in Cedar Rapids as well as the type of activities she participated in as a youngster and some of the amusements available.

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This is tape number 25. Welcome to the Junior League Cedar Rapids Oral History Project. We'll be going back in time and taking a look at Cedar Rapids of yesterday, taking the period of World War I through the Depression, through World War II. My person that I'm interviewing today, which is September 8, 1984, is Eloise Basler.

SS-W: Eloise, I would like you to tell me your full name and where you were born.

Basler: My maiden name was Klersey, so my name is Eloise Klersey Basler. I was born in Cedar Rapids April 24, 1906.

SS-W: What are your parents' names?

Basler: My father's name was Charles Klersey and my mother's name was Sophia. Sophia Yarko Klersey, then.

SS-W: Why don't you tell me where you went to grade school and also your high school days.

Basler: I went to Fillmore grade school. I lived within about six blocks of it and walked all the time. Then I went to Grant high school which was then called a vocational school and the only reason that I went to Grant was because it was considered a west side high school. My sisters went to Washington high school later. Actually, it was the last year that Grant was just a high school for west side, then you could choose where you wanted

to go. Then I went to Coe College.

SS-W: About when was that, timewise, when you were going to Coe?

Basler: Let's see, I went to Coe probably 1924. Then I took a teaching course--actually a music course--to teach. So it was in that span of time. Then went to my first teaching--I think in 1927. For two years I taught. First, in Preston, Iowa, and then in LaPorte City those first two years. And when I was married and moved to Cedar Rapids again--which has always been my home--I also had a teaching certificate for a job in Cedar Rapids and declined it because I had gotten married.

SS-W: Did you find, when you were going to Coe, back then, that there were quite a few women going to school? It seems to me back then that it probably wasn't all that usual for a woman to be going to college.

Basler: Well it really was at Coe, I don't know whether it was different than other schools. But actually it was because I affiliated in the glee club right away and of course, we had some fellows that would go along on the trips as business managers and such but I felt that it was really quite equally divided then, at Coe at least.

SS-W: When you were in school there did they have sororities and fraternities?

Basler: Yes. I didn't affiliate. They were just beginning, however, and probably were just societies at that point and after I was through at Coe then they became nationals and that kind of thing, but it was the very beginnings of things like that.

SS-W: What did people do for fun in college back then? Did they have



beer busts like they do now?

Basler: No, I wouldn't say they did, actually. If they did, I wasn't aware of it. Actually, they would probably have parties and we always had a "Flunk day" at Coe that was pretty well known and that kind of thing. Actually, probably because of interest, I would go to the athletic events as well as the music events.

SS-W: I see. Now, right at the moment are you married or single?

Basler: Yes. Married. My husband passed away 4½ years ago. I have two children; a son, Wayne and another son, David.

SS-W: As you were raising your family in Cedar Rapids, did you find that Cedar Rapids is a good place to raise a family?

Basler: Oh definitely. I think the Cedar Rapids schools have been top-notch. And actually, because of the size of the schools that they could attend, then there were many kinds of advantages over a small-town school when there wouldn't be certain courses needed if you were going to go on to college. So that actually, you were ready when you were ready to go to college, or they were ready to go to college. They had had many of the required courses due to the fact that Cedar Rapids educational system has really been top-notch.

SS-W: As you started out in teaching, I'm sure that you had certain ideals of how you wanted to teach and over the years probably changed some of those ideas. How do you think that in your career in teaching that education has changed in some ways, just very briefly.

Basler: Well, I think perhaps in more recent years, due to many national happenings that there's been much more emphasis on the scientific.

And, of course, you go through a time when there is an emphasis on scientific and then you revert back to the reading, writing, and arithmetic or the actual necessary things just to get along in life.

SS-W: You know, let's now take a step back in time and go through the window of history and talk about a little bit about transportation as you were growing up in Cedar Rapids. Some of the ways were automobiles, of course, but I'm sure automobiles were a lot different back then. Can you just tell me how you did traveling growing up as a child and then on into your teen years?

Basler: Well, because my father was a railroad man, we always did everything via the railroad. Because we didn't have a car for years and years, we always took all the trips to see family away or a distant trip. Like I remember going to Toronto, Canada or going to Cleveland, Ohio, and many times to Chicago because of relatives there. And always on the railroad. And because my father was a railroad man, I was very interested and I've always been interested in railroads everywhere. However, I remember one of the early cars, the Allen, that my uncle had, my mother's brother. And he would come on occasion and take us for a ride and I was really quite young at the time and I remember it was a very strange experience to me.

SS-W: How old were you back then?

Basler: I remember I was about five or six when we first. . . he would take us out in the country and of course, country roads then were not highways. They weren't. They were always gravel or muddy roads or that kind of thing. But I remember being rather fearful

of seeing a hill come, whether we were going to make it and that kind of thing. (Laughter)

SS-W: Did they have to crank the car back then?

Basler: Well, fortunately, he didn't have. Now, I remember my husband later telling me about when they were on the farm in Sac county in Iowa how they had their first car which was a Ford that had to be cranked. And then he very humorously tells about the time when his father first had his car he didn't know how to stop it so he just let it run until it ran into a building or something to stop it. (Laughter)

SS-W: Now, were you older than the experience of trolleys or did they have trolleys?

Basler: No, I remember there were trolley cars. In fact, I can still remember the streetcars that were trolleys for a while. And I remember lots of times riding a streetcar to my lesson, I was taking violin at the time, and I can remember I had to go across town on a trolley car to get to my violin lesson. Then, of course, I'm also remembering when all those tracks and the trolleys were removed from the streets, but I can still picture some of the streets that had them on.

SS-W: When you were riding in the auto, you said it was a really strange experience for you, what were you meaning by that? As from a child's point of view?

Basler: Oh, yes. It wasn't that he was a scary kind of driver or anything. It's just that it was a very new experience to me. Why I would have been skittish, because actually I'm not that kind of person. I would say I grew up to be a tomboy, so I wouldn't



think that that would have been the reason. It was just that early experience, I think.

SS-W: You said your dad was a railway man and that you did do some traveling. Where did you get the train--here in town--to go somewhere and . . .

Basler: Well, I remember the old Union station--which isn't really that old--and actually having some feeling about the fact that it really would have been good to preserve it and use it as a museum because really, it hasn't been all that long ago when I would go meet my mother--she was coming down from Waterloo, where I have a sister living--and we would go to the Union station and pick her up. My father was a conductor and so sometimes early on, on the freight, and then on passenger trains and so we would ride with him and of course, needless to say, probably the reason we didn't have need of a car is because we could travel as a family with passes on the railroad.

SS-W So did people do a lot of walking back then, would you say, more so than today?

Basler: Oh, yes, very much so. I can remember that I walked and walked when I was going to Coe and I would walk. I lived on G Avenue NW. And I would walk across the river and out to Coe and sometimes back for lunch and back again, so I did lots of walking, which I have always enjoyed because I have always liked physical exercise anyway.

SS-W: When you were traveling on the rail with your dad and family, can you describe for me a little bit what the cars were like? Were you able to get meals on there? What were the sleeping quarters

like?

Basler: I always loved that because I always thought the porters--that's what they were called then--and they would come along with fresh fruit and I thought, "Oh, that's heavenly!" Those fresh pieces of fruit. Well, of course, I didn't feel and my parents didn't feel that we were flush enough that we could buy all that fruit. But I remember those porters handling this kind of thing. Yes, I remember sleeping on the train. I've always enjoyed trains very much. All the accommodations, I really wish they were true yet again. So it was really an enjoyable experience. Oh, to watch the conductor as he was taking up the tickets and also the porter coming through with his wares and also sitting at the dining car because it was really fun to eat at a table at the dining car.

SS-W: The airport came in not long after the cars and everything. Transportation just seemed to take off so to speak--a little pun there--(Laughter). Do you recall Hunter airport?

Basler: Yes, I do. I can remember it very well. I didn't have my first airplane ride for quite a long while. I would love it. I knew I wouldn't be afraid of it. But I really didn't have it for a long while. We had a friend--a farmer--who had his own small little plane and he would take us. Now, this was several years ago--after I was married, of course. And my husband knew enough about it that he felt skittish about going like that. It didn't bother me at all, I didn't care one bit because I'm not scary like that.

SS-W: Let's talk a little bit about communication. I'm talking about

the newspapers, the radio, advertising, telephones. What was newspaper--say, in your teen years--that you had in Cedar Rapids?

Basler: Well, there was always the Gazette. But there was also the Cedar Rapids Republican, which was another newspaper of the town for quite awhile, not quite as big a circulation as the Gazette. I can remember--I can still picture the Gazette building--there on First Avenue and First Street West. I remember that as the Gazette building. Then I remember the radio stations, with Bert Puckett, which everybody knew very well in Cedar Rapids because he broadcast games and on-the-street broadcasts and that kind of thing. And I think the letters were KCRG.

SS-W: So when did your family have their first television, then? Do you recall at all?

Basler: Well, I think that would have been after I was married. Wayne and I bought the television and then my folks--of course, I was away from home and they got a television, too, because they liked things. My mother was a Lawrence Welk fan and that kind of thing.

SS-W: Well, for the radio, what were some of the programs you listened to? Because I imagine--didn't people used to sit around the radio like they did with TV?

Basler: Oh, yes. In fact, we had a radio that looked just like the ones they picture now in ads when you're talking about old time radios. Oh, yes, there was the Fred Allen Hour and Gracie Allen and that kind of thing. And then, of course, due to the fact that my husband was interested in athletics, I learned baseball by listening to radio and became a fan all the time, day after day in the summertime.

SS-W: Who were some of the big baseball stars back then?



Basler: Babe Ruth, for one. And Bobby Feller, because he was an Iowa player. I just can't remember all of them, well, that were members of other teams and everything at the time I was remembering.

SS-W: Now, as far as telephones back then--of course, nowadays we've got Teleconnect and MCI, all these modern communications--how did telephoning work?

Basler: Very well. That's another thing that sort of amused me as I was thinking back. Because we really had a telephone very early on, I think. And I can still remember my grandmother Yarkos' telephone number when we would call her and it's so funny, I don't know why I remember this but it was 5505J. And I kind of remember when they had letters after the names before they changed to other prefixes and that sort of thing. But why I remember her telephone number I don't know.

SS-W: Did you have to go through a switchboard operator or anything like that?

Basler: No, not here, it wasn't like farm houses, when they had to ring for the central and things like that, no. We just had the telephone as we know it now. Of course, with the vast improvements that are done here.

SS-W: When you were a little girl--say about ten--what did you do for fun on a Saturday in Cedar Rapids?

Basler: I loved roller skating. I always remember having a perennial scab on the knee because my grandmother lived on a First Avenue hill and I loved--being a sort of a tomboy--I loved to go down

that hill on my roller skates. Well, then, you'd come to a curb or something and down you'd go so you'd have that perennial scab on the knee. But also, I liked to climb, I liked climbing trees. I liked--if they were doing a building somewhere, like a house near me--I would like to climb over it. And as a family, we did lots of picnicking. Always on the holidays--like July Fourth, Memorial day, Labor day, always meant that was a picnic somewhere. So I love outdoor activity. I didn't ever ice skate but I remember using a sled a lot. Those are the kinds of things I liked.

SS-W: Tell me a little bit about your family life as you were growing up as a young girl. Now, I'm sure your dad worked in Cedar Rapids. What did he do?

Basler: Yes, it was very interesting because--and I don't think this happens anymore--but I remember that my father would be called--and they would say, "That's the call boy" when they were ringing--and he would be called that the train was going to go out--say at 3:30 in the morning--actually, I think it's because the railroad companies would make up a train and there was no regular run. He might be called at 3:30 or "I'm going to be going out at 6 this morning" and that kind of thing. And it was always a call boy that would call and would say, "This is the call for this train". And I think there are still people living in Cedar Rapids--in fact, I ran across one just within the last year, that was a call boy that remembered calling my father. That's the kind of job it was. Then, you couldn't plan--for instance--a picnic, because you didn't know for sure whether your dad was going to be called and be gone and he wouldn't be able to

participate in the picnic with you.

SS-W: As far as advertising back then--I suppose this would be 1917 - 1918--nowadays we've got television advertising. How did businesses advertise? Was it mainly newspaper? What kinds of things did they take?

Basler: I think it mainly had to be the newspaper because I don't think that very much advertising took place on the then radios either. They were more for program or athletic events. And I don't recall, maybe it was because I wasn't paying attention, but I don't believe they used it for advertising like the newspapers or the billboard, that kind of thing.

SS-W: Oh, so they did have billboards.

Basler: Yes that kind of thing.

SS-W: Can you remember any of the billboards at all at that time?

Basler: Oh, probably it was like cigarettes and that kind of thing. Perhaps just some items for sale as well, like household items and that kind of thing. But there again I was not so interested in that kind of thing that it doesn't spark anything in my memory. as for sure what they all were.

SS-W: It seems to me, I don't know, that I always have some kind of jingle--TV jingle--or some kind of ad that I'm real familiar with. Were there some products that you remember that had jingles or anything like that?

Basler: Well, I remember they had jingles and I remember things like the Lucky Strike Hour. You could always tell when that was coming on due to the little tune they played for Lucky Strike. Or any of these--they really had their sort of their own little tune that



you'd carry on with you where you were and then you knew that that was it.

SS-W: Do you remember the Lucky Strike one?

Basler: No. I don't remember for sure. None of those I remember for sure. I mean, they would spark an area of recognition if I would hear them now, but not right now--offhand I can't think of one.

SS-W: Was there anything that you've saved from your growing up years that's in sort of memorabilia that, you know, people say, "Oh, wow, you've got one of those" that you saved? Types of things like--I know that I had a Shirley Temple doll (Laughter) and just something you've had that's become valuable over the years.

Basler: Yes. Valuable probably only to you, you know, yourself. But I remember one thing that I could call my possession then. We had a little doll that was dressed like a railroad man. And I loved that little doll because he reminded me of my father with the same kind of railroad garb that he wore especially early on when he was in the freight service.

SS-W: What did your mom do all day long? I know that women's roles have changed quite a bit now there are a lot of working women. I think that probably back then meal preparation was a lot different--there wasn't a microwave. What did your mom do as a houseperson?

Basler: Well, my mother was always a very good cook. We always had good meals as well as that she did sewing. I had two sisters so it meant that she made the clothes, especially the summer clothes. However, I think she also made like winter coats and that so she

did--now that I think of it--she must have spent lots of time sewing for three daughters. And I can remember so well that before school was to start in September, that we would take a vacation to relatives, like at Shell Rock, Iowa and mother always got our wardrobe ready for fall. But she always got it ready for us so that we took those on vacation with us when we were doing our August vacation prior to school starting.

SS-W: What about meals? Did she bake a lot?

Basler: Yes. She was always a very, very good cook. She did lots of baking. There were certain things she liked very well, especially at our holiday times. There were things that were very special to her that always had to be at the holiday. And of course, lots of it has carried on with me, too, due to the fact--like for instance, being of German descent, these are called a cookie--for Christmas--called "Pfefferneuses" actually means "pepper nuts". I make them every year and they are things that my family--my own two sons and their families--it really isn't Christmas if you don't have the Pfefferneuses made. So that's just one little item that my mother did all the time that carries on and on and on as a family. . . Well, another one is a yeast mix called "cinnamon sticks", which she made early on and then I have made them on and on and. I have grandchildren now that when I go visit, I have to make the cinnamon sticks while I'm there.

SS-W: Tell me a little bit about what your Christmases were like growing up here in Cedar Rapids.

Basler: They were great because probably due to the fact that, of course, that would be true with me and my children, but mother also knew

that Santa brought the Christmas tree, so that you didn't see the Christmas tree until Christmas morning. You couldn't peek around or anything because Christmas eve you had gone to bed early and very surprised and elated at Christmas morning to see that tree that Santa had brought. I carried that on for most of my married life too, that my children--I only had two--but my children didn't see the tree until Christmas morning. They didn't participate in the putting the ornaments on or any of that kind of thing--which I suppose is another thought which now has gone on to my children's children. They participate in it because they have not waited until Christmas eve to put that tree up so that Christmas morning was the first time that anyone ever saw it.

SS-W: What were some of the preparations you did around the house prior to Christmas to get ready for it?

Basler: My mother was great on decorating. Actually, she would put lots of roping up and hanging things, the kind of things we don't do now. However, there's items I like that have to be out at Christmas and of course, I've always loved lots of Christmas lights and so we have always lighted all the evergreens around and all that kind of thing. Another thing that appealed to me, and this dates for me from my days at Coe when the old chapel--the chapel that burned before that when there was at Christmas-time--there were many, many votive lights that were--in many colors--that were put--and this is Mrs. Burger (Reverend Burger was the chaplain at Coe) and Mrs. Burger started this. She would put--like for instance for Coe vespers at Christmas--then these lights would all be around. Well, that sparked something for me.



So then I started buying many, many colored vigil lights also and I would buy a few more every year. Till now I have about eighty of them and at Christmas-time then I put them around in all the window sills. Takes a long while to light them all but there are many colors and you buy the 12-hour candle to go in the votive light and that's one of the things that I've always loved. So, lots of lighting and decorating of that kind. Little different than what my mother did which was hanging crepe paper and that kind of thing.

SS-W: Let's go on to people in the community. Talk a little bit about what was going on in Cedar Rapids back then. Can you tell me a little bit about some of the motion pictures that you went to and about when was that?

Basler: I can remember probably from the time I was maybe eleven or twelve and it would be Saturday afternoon is that I would go to a movie. Probably with another friend or my own sisters or something like that. I can remember some of the names. There was an Isis and a Palace and the Strand. Those are the main ones that I remember. And I can even see where they are. The Isis was on First Avenue and the Strand, of course, was still on Third Avenue when it was changed to the State--I think it was something like that--so those are early on the ones that I remember. Then of course, I was very enamored about seeing movie stars and getting tabloids and seeing this one on because I just liked it very much so I expect there was that little urge that you'd like to be an actress yourself someday.

SS-W: That'd be back in about 1917 or so?

Basler: That's right.

SS-W: What about Chatauqua, is that something that rings a bell?

Basler: Not too much. I remember people talking about it, but I don't believe at that point that in my area of Cedar Rapids that it was occurring. Now I may be wrong, it may be that my family didn't pay that much attention to things of that nature. So I don't really have a real recollection of Chatauqua.

SS-W: What about the Symphony Orchestra? What was that like back then?

Basler: Oh, I remember the beginnings cause I remember I was taking violin lessons from Joe Kitchen and Joe Kitchen was one of the early, early directors of the symphony. Those early, early beginnings which of course were early much smaller actually they were all volunteer players--different than is true now--when some of the parts are professionals. That sort of things. Those are the early beginnings as in probably symphonies anywhere else.

SS-W: What did people do with the Community Theatre? Was that a big thing back then? I know it is now, it's really grown quite a bit.

Basler: That's true. I think that early on the Community Theatre was just another group doing something. It really didn't take on the proportions. Like for instance, look how the Museum of Art has taken off in the last few years. Early on those things were very humble beginnings, very slow beginnings. At least, my recollection of it wasn't so strong that it must have been very outstanding.

SS-W: Did you know of Greene's Opera House?

Basler: I remember Greene's Opera House because--I don't remember what age it would have been, it would be when I was quite young--that

Madame Schumanheinke the contralto from opera--from the Metropolitan--came to Greene's Opera House and I attended it. Then I remember other things. This was probably through a school activity that various affairs were held at Greene's Opera House. One of which that we as school people--students--participated in were the "Living Pictures". And they were really--in fact, it always has sparked my interest--to see that kind of thing because I'm interested in art as well. So that it was really a pleasurable thing to see a "Living Picture" which was meant to be just old masters depicted by actual people dressed in the costumes of the time and in a frame.

SS-W: So they'd be up on stage?

Basler: Yes, that's right, for an audience to observe. So it was known as the "Living Pictures".

SS-W: They'd have music with this or . . .?

Basler: I don't recall that there was music but there probably was. I don't recall that there was.

SS-W: "Masters" as far as painters you mean?

Basler: Yes. Oh, Raphael and all of those well-known at that time paintings that people would recognize and then in a frame were living people dressed for the part and assuming the positions of that picture.

SS-W: This was at the opera house?

Basler: At Greene's, yes.

SS-W: So they used it for more than just the opera.

Basler: Oh, yes. Traveling shows. I didn't always get to go to those but that's where they were.



SS-W: Tell me about that.

Basler: Well, like a New York company might come and give--Oh, I remember "Peg O' My Heart" was given there and I remember I was, I suppose, very impressionable and I loved "Peg O' My Heart". The song and everything. I didn't get to go to it, but that would have been one of my desires, to go see "Peg O' My Heart". That kind of thing and it was brought to the Greene's Opera House because actually that was the only place of a stage that anything like that could be brought and performed.

SS-W: So that was vaudeville, right?

Basler: No. Vaudeville was the Majestic Theatre. That was a different thing. The Majestic Theatre. But Greene's Opera House was more for legitimate stage or something like that, not acts like the Majestic Theatre would be for vaudeville.

SS-W: Did you ever see vaudeville?

Basler: Oh, yes, often. Oh, yes. I can remember the big curtain that was always down in place by the time you got there before the show started and then they'd roll that curtain up. And it was all advertising, just many, many placards of this and that with people's logo on it all over that. And of course, you got to be very familiar with that when you'd go to the theatre because as you'd sit there waiting for the show to begin, you just saw all of that. . . (Laughter) . . . curtain with all that advertising on it.

SS-W: Were these local companies that had the advertising?

Basler: Yes, local companies.

SS-W: Can you remember any companies that had their logo up there?

Basler: No, not for sure because it would be just peppered with them all over and I don't remember for sure.

SS-W: Now, what year was that as far as how old were you? What time period?

Basler: Probably when I . . . probably 1918 to probably 1924 something like that.

SS-W: What did they have in the vaudeville show? What all was in it?

Basler: Oh, just regular acts. The varying kinds, like once in a while you see now, kind of like circus acts. I mean, they'd have the tumbling--which I liked--they would have the people juggling, they would have the black-faced men with their banter back and forth, they would singing, they would have some song and dance--not too much because that was more reserved for places like if you'd go to New York and see the chorus and all that kind of thing. But there would be some dancing of that nature and singing, of course, the popular numbers of the day.

SS-W: Were there certain parts of town that were sort of risqué or did they have anything like x-rated movies back then? That you just knew as a child you weren't supposed to go around that?

Basler: No, I think the x-rated--the daring exploits of that kind of thing came in much later than my early recollections of things like that. I don't believe, in fact it's really rather recent vintage that there's been any x-rated theatres. And the only one then was the one on First Avenue and then there was one down on Sixth Street that you could go in and view tapes of x-rated things--maybe that still is going--and then the Marion Theatre--which more recently has been taken over for family-type things.

But early on I can't remember x-rated things of that kind and if there was an area that was a "no-no" area to be, I probably wasn't aware of it due to the fact that my parents were probably pretty vigilant about things like that.

SS-W: That makes sense. Do you recall the YMCA or the YWCA, was that around when you were growing up?

Basler: Oh, yes. Yes cause I could remember--not very clearly, because later I participated in YW activities for quite a while, being on the boards and having committees and such. But I would hear them tell about times when, yes they served meals at the YWCA, but that was at a time when I would not have been cognizant of it because I wouldn't have had need to go there for a meal. But I remember that being true and then I remember the YMCA being the same location that it is right now. Of course, it's been added to greatly and oh, I would go to things like a basketball game there or something like that.

SS-W: Do you remember--speaking a little bit about vaudeville about famous entertainment people. Do you remember the Cherry sisters?

Basler: I definitely do, due to the fact that my grandparents--my Klersey grandparents--my father's folks. They lived on a small acreage that now is up by Ellis Park and it was part of, is part of now, the golf course. But at that time, their property was on Zika Avenue there and I can remember that the Cherry sisters--and this was when I was young and the family was talking about the Cherry sisters--they lived on the dead end of that, far out on Zika Avenue. So that I was really quite surprised when the Cherry sisters moved out and did anything even on Broadway, because to



me they were just common people that were neighbors, fairly far-removed from my grandparents. So that's what I remember. I never did see them. All I did hear about was the fact that when they performed they got fruit and vegetables thrown on them and that kind of thing. Other than that I don't know anything more about them, never having seen them.

SS-W: Now what would Grant Wood have been doing when you were growing up? Was he around here?

Basler: Yes. And of course, that was at a time when he was at McKinley high school then, which was where my husband was teaching and I could remember early on before my husband really was at McKinley that Grant Wood was there and how his presence well-known at McKinley high school. In fact, there were some of his paintings were part of McKinley and had been stored sometimes in the attic at McKinley. That kind of thing. So he was really a McKinley person actually, at that time.

SS-W: Now this is someone I don't know of, but maybe you do--somebody known as the "Tattooed Countess"?

Basler: No, I don't know that either. I wondered what that was, in fact, I just--once in while--have heard about that in seeing it in a book or something. So I really don't know about that.

SS-W: Was there anybody else that strikes a bell as far as being a well-known person, that just comes to mind, when you were growing up?

Basler: Well, not necessarily. I remember Brucemore, which now has become in the National Register. But I remember going and performing at Brucemore one time. And I also remember, because actually now when you go to Brucemore you see pictures of Herbert Hoover,

and I can remember at the time when he was being entertained here at Bruce more. So mainly I think that name rings more of a bell than anything at this point.

SS-W: When you were growing up in the teen years, when were you allowed to start dating and what was a dance like then? What did you do? What was dating like back then?

Basler: Well, I remember the one that I was enamored of at that time, when I was like about fourteen, his parents were the strait-laced nature that dancing was a no-no. So we actually didn't really because I was going places I guess we didn't ever call it dates. Going places with him--maybe to shows or a picnic or something like that--never was it any affair like going to a dance not ever really. Later, of course, after I'd met my husband, it was true because he was used to going to dances and that kind of thing, and then it was true. But not in the early dating time.

SS-W: So, did you ever go to dances later on then?

Basler: Yes, some. Not like--for instance, our regular Saturday night thing or anything that . . . No. We belong to a dance club which is still in existence, called Congenial 100, we did monthly dances there. Or if there was the Policeman's Ball, which is sometimes held, we would go to that, too, on occasions, too, when the Policeman's Ball or some money raising thing. But we would go, it would probably be an the Coliseum or someplace like that.

SS-W: What music was popular in your teens?

Basler: Gee, I don't know. I can't think what might be more than now. Certainly not rock. (Laughter) I'm sure it was not rock. It was just really jazz, that kind of thing, and dance music.

SS-W: Glenn Miller?

Basler: Yes, that kind of thing.

SS-W: Did you ever go to a dance where they had live music?

Basler: Always, you see, at the Policeman's Ball, they brought in a name dance band. And dancing--you'd say yes, but the place was so crowded that all you did was try to work your way down by the bandstand just to watch the players mainly and that was usually what that was like. Others, I know, would go to dance places, probably like pavilions around, that I did not due to the fact that probably the one that I would be seeing at the time did not do that kind of thing and just didn't. But I know there's contemporaries that probably did do that but it wasn't me.

SS-W: Do you remember--although you didn't frequent them--any of the saloons and taverns in the town?

Basler: No, not at all. Not at all.

SS-W: Where did people go out to eat or did people go out to eat a lot?

Basler: My family didn't much. But actually, I remember the Harmony cafeteria down town. I remember when Bishop's was downtown, that kind of thing. Then there would be the Chinese and Japanese restaurants. There wouldn't be the prevalence, as we know now, of pizza parlors and fast-food things cause those are of more recent vintage than early on, really.

SS-W: Let's talk a little bit about life style. What was it like on a July Fourth? What were some of the typical things that you did growing up then?

Basler: Well, of course, early on--my mother being a really very careful person and kind of scary about too big a fireworks but we

were always allowed to buy the smaller ones that we couldn't get hurt with and so we loved having fireworks. Of course, you see, in recent years there has been a ban on that but we always did have that. Then we always did have some . . . a little money spent on . . .

[END OF SIDE ONE - TAPE ONE]

SS-W: We're talking about the Fourth of July in Cedar Rapids.

Basler: Well, I remember of course, we were always going somewhere on a picnic but, early on, especially when we were really

little, we would always have our fireworks and even before my mother was ready for us to get out and do it, we were out shooting our little firecrackers that we were able to buy and we never could buy the big ones 'cause that was just for older people to have those but we just enjoyed



Basler: (Continued as side two of tape begins) . . . having the punk and lighting our own little firecrackers. And then at the evening hour, when it got darker, then we were allowed to get some nightworks to use ourselves and it would be either at the picnic we might do it or in our backyard.

SS-W: Where did you go for Thanksgiving? How did that all take place? Did you have Thanksgiving at your home? Did you go someplace else? What were some of the kinds of food you had at Thanksgiving?

Basler: Well, most of all--and I think that this, of course, is changing now, too--but we always went home for Thanksgiving, to my mother and dad's. And as we grew older and had our own homes, then we would help with the preparation. But early on, I remember, mother had it all prepared and she knew exactly what she wanted to have and nearly always it was either a capon or a turkey--always that kind of thing--and that was true as well for Christmas, because we always went home for Christmas. Even if we had--later on, our own Christmases in our own home--we would have a certain designated time that it was time to go home for Christmas and that's where the exchange gifts were done and that's where eventually the meal with all the family took place. And, like I said, early on, we probably helped with preparations of some of the things, but when I was really young my mother did it all.

SS-W: That's a lot to prepare.  
What about your clothing? I think I remember especially some of the things I wore as a teen. Where were the skirt lengths at?

What types of things did you wear as a teen?

Basler: I remember one time when they were rather long, but then they got to the just below the knee stage and then also above the knee stage. ((Laughter) But, of course, it really fluctuates a lot now by anybody who is able to wear that kind of thing. But I remember--especially do I remember at the time of my marriage, which would have been 1929--that everything was long-waisted. I hate to look at my going away because it was a long waist with a belt right around the hip line. But that was really the vogue then and always, always to go to church with a hat on. I have loads and loads of pictures of going to church and I had a hat on and I wouldn't dream--even though I was in choir all the time--I had to have that hat to go to church and put the hat on when I was away so that now, well, I think hats are coming into vogue more but still, people just don't wear hats like they did then.

SS-W: Did they wear gloves, too?

Basler: Yes. Even now, of course, I guess I just wouldn't want to go without gloves--not necessarily in summer, however, I did. I remember having white gloves in summer and you wore those to church because it was the thing to do. But, now I don't like to go from fall on without gloves at all. I just don't like it.

SS-W: What about for casual attire. I know they probably didn't wear jeans like they do now. What did they wear instead of jeans?

Basler: Well, people, if they were daring would have slacks. (Laughter) And of course, it is true, jeans came in much, much later, especially for adult wear. Gradually, it was the thing to do for young children because of the easy laundering and wearability of



jeans. But for the most part, you might have slacks but not to the great extent that jeans are worn now, so it would actually be just skirts and that kind of thing. Probably knee highs and that sort of thing and hose.

SS-W: I'd like to talk a little bit about medical facilities back then. Today house calls are unheard of. Do you recall a doctor ever coming to your house?

Basler: Oh, yes, quite frequently. Another thing that sticks in my mind so much, this is when I was real little. Like I said, I was a tomboy and probably playing with a lot of kids in the yard, and I can remember some boy having thrown quite a big rock that cut my forehead so that it required stitches and I remember that the doctor came to the house and just stitched that cut in my forehead right there in the living room. And I can remember so well that the neighborhood kids were standing at the screen door watching while I was having my cut sewed up. I can almost see that yet. And for a long while, there was a scar--that, of course, as the years have gone by has disappeared. But I did have that scar on my forehead from that rock.

SS-W: Did women go to the hospital to have their children? Midwifery is coming back now, is more in vogue. Or were babies delivered at home sometimes? And how about yourself?

Basler: Well, mine of course, was always hospital business, but my mother's, I know her deliveries were always at home, so that actually, during my formative years, I think perhaps then it got to the point where people went to the hospital for the babies. But as far as my medical, I had tonsils removed probably at the

age of ten or twelve. But other than that, I never had any surgery. When I was at Coe, I had corrective surgery from a terminate bone removed in my nose, due to the fact that it was creating a sinus problem. But as far as broken bones or needed anything like an appendix or anything like that, I just never had --and actually my family didn't either--we were really quite not prone to that kind of thing so we really didn't have to make the use of a hospital.

SS-W: Did they have an emergency rooms like they do now back then? Do you recall?

Basler: They probably did, although I had no way of knowing that they did. Because never had had an emergency that was in--within my area of interest--of anybody I knew.

SS-W: So you didn't hear as much about the ambulances, heart attacks, or anything like that at that time.

Basler: No, the only--as far as noises in the street--that the ambulance sirens or the police sirens were not as prevalent as they are now. Maybe because I didn't notice it or maybe because the frequency of the need of it was not as great. Now that we have become a larger population and more things happening all of the time. One of the things when we're talking about street noises. I can remember when there was a disaster or something happened during the war of note, the Extras that were out. And I can remember hearing the newsboys calling "Extras" as they left the newspaper office and into the resident areas to sell the Extras to people. I can just hear them calling, "Extra! Extra!" real loud as they walked along the street.

SS-W: So they actually came into the resident area.

Basler: Yes, because you see there was no radio or no--at that early, early age, if there was any--not everybody had them, to get the news out and so it had to come out on the printed page, called out by an Extra, so that you got it when you knew it was not time for a paper delivery.

SS-W: Let's talk about--sequentially--a little bit about national historic events. Now, first of all, tell me a little bit about where you were at, age-wise, for World War I. That'd be about 1917 to 1919.

Basler: I can remember that I was in grade school. I was aware of it, probably due to the fact that I had an aunt--my mother's brother's wife--that died in the flu epidemic. As we read about that and, yes, there was a big flu epidemic at that time, and I remember that this Aunt Alice died at that time. And I can remember what a trauma it was because I was so impressionable and I remember at the church service--and that's where the funeral was held--I was so moved because I was so affected by the sadness of my uncle, whose wife had died that way. In fact, because of her death--and they had two children, the youngest of which was about three and there was no one to raise that child--and so, for a long while she was raised by my mother and she was in our household because she was without a mother--at this untimely death of her mother during the flu epidemic. And I remember also regarding that area of time I remember the time of the armistice. I was going to school, it was in the morning, and I was walking to Fillmore school--and I can actually remember the block that I was



walking in--when I realized that the armistice had been signed; that the war was over. And I would have been like about thirteen or something like that at the time.

SS-W: The flu epidemic. Were people just dying right and left?

Basler: Oh, yes. For one thing, I don't think they had the antibiotics then that now they can control spread of that kind of thing and probably know much more now about the fact that if you're running a temperature or this kind of thing, you had to do that kind of preparation because it was going to be really bad. Now I realize that even now there is a flu vaccine because some people are so allergic to that kind of thing and it's dangerous, especially as they're getting in older years to that sort of thing. Now, I've never had serious illness like that at all and I am not one, even at my age now, that takes the flu shots like many, many people do. And like they advise the elderly to do.

SS-W: The next thing, I think, in sequence; do you recall at all, the roaring twenties, prohibition? Was that a big impression for you?

Basler: Not really, because I didn't come from a family that drinking was major at all. In fact, almost not at all. My father didn't drink. Oh, an occasional beer maybe in summer if he was working. I remember him saying that that's the time that beer tastes good, if you're hot and tired. But otherwise, I don't even remember having beer at home in the icebox or anything.

SS-W: What kind of beer did they have back then? Do you recall.

Basler: Gee, I don't know because of the fact that it just wasn't part of our life.

SS-W: The next period of time would be the Depression, which was



1929 to the late thirties. Where were you age-wise and how did that affect your life then?

Basler: Well, I remember very well that. I was married in June of 1929. My husband was teaching. At that point, he was teaching in Montana. We were in Montana at the time. In fact, we were at a teacher's meeting in Bozeman, Montana--it was a fall teacher's meeting of the area people--when the crash came, Wall Street. From then on, of course, it was rather tough: to start your married life then, when teacher's salaries were low, when things were not obtainable because people didn't have the money for them, and that kind of thing. It really, truly was a Depression and rather tough time to start out married life. I mean, you couldn't dream of buying your own home then and that sort of thing because money was too tight, you just couldn't do it. It was an impressionable time, but likewise, I would think that rather than--in my case--of it being a bad time so that the marriage would go rocky, it really draws you closely together because you both are working at a thing to make it go.

SS-W: Did you have times when there wasn't enough food to eat or anything like that?

Basler: No. I don't ever remember that. For one thing, we had gardens and that kind of thing. Perhaps you didn't buy ice cream as much as you might have, or pop or something like that. But the staple food, no, there was never a time that there was a shortage of that--in my existence.

SS-W: Do you remember anyone you know not having a job, or losing a job, that kind of thing?

a nest egg or anything like that. Now, of course, in my acquaintance would be people that probably would have inherited things like that so that they had more money but that was not true with my family.

SS-W: Did people tend to keep more of their money at home rather than in banks?

Basler: Very much so. In fact, my father was the kind--why he would be this way, I don't know--but he had a special name for it. He called it his "velvet". He would hide it somewhere. Could be in a rafter in the basement or just . . .you never knew where he was hiding his "velvet". And then he would have that so that when he wanted to buy something for somebody like at Christmas or something, then he would go to his "velvet" and do his purchases.

SS-W: Do you recall women's suffrage? Were you pretty young?

Basler: Yes, I really was. I remember that such was true, but it not being my area of interest, I really didn't pay that much attention to it.

SS-W: I get the feeling from talking to you, Eloise, that it seems like your family was somewhat futuristic as far as women's rights. I don't get the feeling that you'd ever felt that you were without them. Was that influence from both your parents?

Basler: I think so. My mother, during these war times, was very active in the Red Cross. I can still see the uniform she wore with the headband and everything. In fact, she was really--at some kind of a meeting sometime--sort of honored because of all the time that she had spent at the Red Cross, rolling bandages and doing that kind of thing. My mother was a kind of a leader-type person

Basler: Oh, probably there were lots of them that did. But it didn't really make an impression on me because you're so busy adjusting your own life so that other people's problems weren't foremost in your mind.

SS-W: Do you remember food lines or anything like that here in Cedar Rapids? Were there people that assisted to help people that were

Basler: Well, I remember the Sunshine Mission that was held for years and years down north of First Avenue on Second Street. I remember they would house the indigent--usually man--that would come and need food and need housing overnight because he had no job--he would be like a bum or a tramp or something like that. Or somebody that really needed attention as far as lodging and food is concerned. And of course, being a mission like it was, they would also have the religious meetings at the same time, so that they would be saving souls--we say--at the same time that they were assisting in the necessary elements of life.

SS-W: What can you tell me about bank closings back then?

Basler: The only thing I remember that's relative to the Depression time otherwise I have no real recollection of that because it didn't concern me. I mean, I didn't have anything or my family didn't have anything that was lost because of the closing of the bank.

SS-W: Did you or your family have any savings accounts in banks?

Basler: Yes, but very meager, really. It would be really meager because at that time, salaries weren't all that great and my father, being what you'd say, a working man. You just worked with the salary that you made. So that, actually, you couldn't be putting away



and she was very active there and we were always very active in our churches, too, always. So that she's the leader-type person and could take charge. That's the ways she was with Red Cross as well as with her church activities.

SS-W: Speaking of women back then--a delicate subject back then, of course, was sex and petting--obviously, I think with your family that you were brought up quite strictly--what about other young girls back then as far as attitudes toward sex? Were there ever any women that, you know, did--like they say. What was the general attitude?

Basler: Well, of course, you would have, in your associations, let's say, you could point out and talk with each other about, "Oh, well, she's that kind, isn't she." But it would really be quite minimal, it would not be prevalent or as--what'll I say--relaxed as it is now. Which, no matter what you think it has grown to be more of a common thing and sort of expected and people really don't look down their noses at it like they did then. But it was not as frequent as perhaps one would imagine. At least, my knowledge of it was not as frequent as that.

SS-W: But the idea of petting or anything as you were dating, that just was not done.

Basler: That's right. Not even a kiss, you see.

SS-W: Oh, no kisses?

Basler: No kisses!

SS-W: No kisses! My gosh!

Basler: So it was really a no-no.

SS-W: Did you ever go on chaperoned dates or anything like that?



Basler: No. No, never was necessary because of that. Because, of course, the early on one, he was church-related too. His folks were church-related. So that kind of thing was not part of your normal existence.

SS-W: What about divorce? Did that ever happen back then?

Basler: It never ever happened in anything that was relative to me or my friends. Now I knew it probably existed, but due to the fact that it never was in my family or my close friends, my knowledge of it wasn't very great.

SS-W: Maybe generally people just did not divorce back then.

Basler: Oh, I don't think the frequency of divorce was as great then. Of course, now there could be argument there, because there's many more people now so naturally, there would be more percentage of people that do experience it. But I also feel that probably the overall percentage would be greater now than it would be then when you take the average of the population at that time and the average of the population now.

SS-W: What about discipline as parenting back then. Do you think parents were stricter or was it different than it is now?

Basler: Well, I think they were--maybe strict wouldn't be the word so much as they set forth rules and they wanted those rules observed. That was even true in my own raising of a child. I can remember that my oldest son really--because we had a definite . . . you had to be at home by 12 o'clock--was really . . . I can remember definitely him saying one time, "Nobody but me has to be home that time." And he would really run in order to make it home by 12 o'clock as he was told to do. But, of course, he made me feel

like we were the only ones that demanding but that's the way we were at the time.

SS-W: I think children sometimes do that anyway. (Laughter)

We've talked about World War I, about the Depression. As a young woman, how did World War II affect you. That would be the late thirties.

Basler: Yes, well that would be true because my husband was just beyond-- I would say--a draft age, but because of that during that World War activity, he moonlighted at the Quaker Oats. He was teaching, so at 4 o'clock, because of, you see, with so many young people gone, then he would moonlight and go to Quaker Oats to work. He worked in the machine shop. And this was for years and years, during the existence of the War because that was his war effort too, because he was helping do something that somebody that had gone to service was not there to do. So he really moonlighted for a number of years. Going right from school at 4 o'clock right to the Quaker Oats plant.

SS-W: That's long hours.

Basler: That's right.

SS-W: Was there a general feeling of somberness about the war that just hung over or did people have their good times, too? Or was it a more solemn time because that was going on?

Basler: No, I don't think it affected the populace like as if the war was happening in your area--like in Europe. We were sort of oblivious to the awfulness of it. Probably the effects on the populace in America was the shortage of this or the shortage of that due to the war. It wasn't so much the . . . of course, you were aware

when there were casualties, expecially casualties of people in your area. But actually, the effect was more of the not being able to do this and that because of shortages and lack of money and that kind of thing.

SS-W: Can you tell me . . .we've gone through quite a bit of history here. . .if you can recall back as a young girl or a little bit older, what were some of your special memories growing up here in Cedar Rapids?

Basler: Well, I can remember that you were always very proud--you see, it was known as, maybe it still is known as, the Parlour City. So you were always very proud of the fact that the city was very clean, the city had very fine opportunities--cultural as well as educational--and that we participated in things. Like, for instance in elections and that sort of thing. We were aware of national activity so that we participated in that kind of thing. I mean, you always registered to vote, you were very cognizant of the fact that this is the kind of person you want there to take care of matters in legislature for you, so actually, the citizens of CedarRapids have already been very upstanding like that, trying to do their part in every way. Any kind of a move that was being done, there was always in Cedar Rapids that were able to take ahold of the thing and do their part. We were not removed from this kind of thing. We were always very much participants of any national thing that had to occur.

SS-W: Eloise, I want to thank you so much for sharing your life with us on tape, as part of this project. I think it was Abe Lincoln who said, "We cannot escape history and so we are all shaped by

our past." It's been my pleasure to interview Eloise and learn more about Cedar Rapids through the windows of time. Thank you.

END OF TAPE



INTERVIEW TOPICS  
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

## I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1--When were you born? Where?
- 2--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- 1--What are your parents' names?
- 1-2--Where did you go to school?
- 2,3,30--Are you married or single?
- 3--Did you raise a family? How big?
- 2--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

## II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

## A. Technology in the Community

## 1. Transportation

- 4,6-7,10--Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- 5--Trolleys (the Interurban)
- 4-5--Horses and First Automobiles
- 4--Mud roads and the seedling mile
  - Hunter Airport and the first planes
  - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

## 2. Communications

- 8,27-28--Newspapers
- 8,11--Radios
- 11-12,18--Advertising
- 8,9--Telephones

## B. People in the Community

## 1. Amusements/Recreation 8-9

- 15--Motion Pictures
  - 20--Cedar Rapids Parks
  - 22,23--Dances
    - Carnival Week
    - Chautauqua
  - 16--Community Theater
    - Little Gallery
  - 16--Symphony Orchestra
    - Circus
  - 17-18--Greene's Opera House
    - Amusement Parks (Alamo)
    - Camps
  - 20--Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
  - 18-19--Vaudeville
2. Famous Characters
- 20-21--Cherry Sisters
  - 21--Grant Wood
    - Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
    - Marvin Cone

- 3. Lifestyle 6
  - Life before air conditioning
  - Winter Activities
  - 10,13-15,23-24--Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving,
  - 12,25-26 Christmas)
  - Clothing
  - 12--Toys
  - Saloons/Taverns
  - Farm Life

- 4. Family Life
  - Household Help
  - 12-13--Women's Roles
  - 9-10--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
  - Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)

- 5. Ethnic/Minority Life
  - Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
  - Indians
  - Segregation of Blacks
  - Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

- 1. Education 3-4
  - Cedar Rapids Schools
  - 2-3,14--Coe College
  - Mount Mercy College
  - Cornell College
- 2. Government
  - City Services
  - Streets/Roads
  - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
- 3. Medical
  - Hospitals
  - Patient-Doctor Relationship
  - Broken Bones
  - Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
  - 26--House Calls
  - 26--Home Delivery of Babies

- 4. Red Cross 31

4. Business and Economy
  - Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
  - Local Brewing Companies
  - Retail Businesses /Department Stores
  - Professions
  - 32 --Banking and Finance
  - 23 --Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
    - Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
    - Farmers Market
    - Mills on Cedar River
  - 8--Buildings Erected
    - Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
    - Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)
5. Attitudes/Values-Cedar Rapids the Parlour City 35
  - 33--Children/Discipline
  - 32--Sex/Petting
    - Charity
  - 33--Divorce
    - Work
    - Working women, Voting Rights for Women
    - Patriotism (World War I)
- D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community
  1. Catastrophic Events
    - Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
    - Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
    - Bank Closings (1933)
    - Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
    - Public Library Murder(1921)
  2. National Historic Events
    - Womens' Suffrage
    - World War I
    - Roaring 20's
    - Prohibition
    - 30-31--Great Depression
    - 28,29--Flu Epidemic
    - 34-25--WWII



