

ADG 9541



JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH: FRED FISHER

CONDUCTED BY: LINDA BURDT

PLACE: CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

DATE: JANUARY 22, 1985

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Fred C. Fisher, Jr., was born in Cedar Rapids on January 16, 1909, the son of Fred C. Fisher, Sr. and Lois Creelman Fisher. He attended the Cedar Rapids Public Schools before going to the Military Academy in Fari-bault, Minnesota (1924-1927). Following this, he studied at the University of Iowa, where he received his B.A. in English and History. After receiving his law degree from the University of Iowa School of Law in 1933, Mr. Fisher has practiced law in Cedar Rapids ever since, except for four years in the early 1940's. He married Elizabeth Curry in 1938 and has two children, James and Fritz.

Although Fisher's favorite memories stem from his early ham radio experiences with Art Collins, he also recalls many local and national historic events.

INTERVIEW TOPICS

CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

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

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

1. Transportation

- 2 --Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- Trolleys (the Interurban)
- 25-26 --Horses and First Automobiles
- 26-27 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
- Hunter Airport and the first planes
- Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- 2-3 --Newspapers
- 3-5 --Radios (Ham Radios)
- Advertising
- Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- 6 --Motion Pictures
- Cedar Rapids Parks
- Dances
- Carnival Week
- Chautauqua
- Community Theater
- Little Gallery
- Symphony Orchestra
- 6-8 --Circus
- 8 --Greene's Opera House
- Amusement Parks (Alamo)
- Camps
- 9-10 --Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)

2. Famous Characters

- 13 --Cherry Sisters
- 12 --Grant Wood
- 10-11 --Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
- 11 --Marvin Cone
- 14 -- Nat King Cole

3. Lifestyle

- Life before air conditioning
- Winter Activities
- Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
- Clothing
- Toys
- Saloons/Taverns
- Farm Life

4. Family Life

- Household Help
- Women's Roles
- 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

- Cedar Rapids Schools
- Coe College
- Mount Mercy College
- Cornell College
- <sup>16-17</sup> ~~17-18~~ --Military Academy
- <sup>16-17</sup> ~~17-18~~ --University of Iowa (undergraduate and law school)

2. Government

- City Services
- Streets/Roads
- Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)

3. Medical

- Hospitals
- Patient-Doctor Relationship
- Broken Bones
- Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
- House Calls
- Home Delivery of Babies

4. Business and Economy

- 15--Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
  - Local Brewing Companies
  - Retail Businesses /Department Stores
  - Professions
  - Banking and Finance
  - Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
  - Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
  - Farmers Market
  - Mills on Cedar River
  - Buildings Erected
- 14-15 --Manual Labor/Types of Jobs (Sweatshop messenger)
  - Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values

- Children/Discipline
- Sex/Petting
- Charity
- 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)
- 24 --Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
- 22 --Bank Closings (1933)
- 23 --Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
- 23-24 --Public Library Murder(1921)

2. National Historic Events

- Womens' Suffrage
- World War I
- Roaring 20's
- 21-22 --Prohibition
- 19-20 --Great Depression

Interview with Fred Fisher  
Date of Interview: January 22, 1985  
Interviewer: Linda Burdt  
Transcriber: Colleen Hansen  
Tape 36, Side 1

LB: Mr. Fisher, when were you born?

Fisher: January 16, 1909.

LB: And where were you born?

Fisher: Cedar Rapids.

LB: Have you lived in Cedar Rapids all your life?

Fisher: All my life.

LB: What are your parents names?

Fisher: Fred C. Fisher, my father, and my mother's name was Lois.

LB: Where did you go to school?

Fisher: Cedar Rapids public schools and then I went to the Sarabon in Paris for a year. I went to high school here, and I went to a military school.

LB: When was that, when did you go to military school?

Fisher: Oh boy, jeepers, I think it was about 1921 approximately.

LB: Are you married?

Fisher: Yes, same wife.

LB: How many children do you have?

Fisher: Two.

LB: How old are they?

Fisher: This is where I always run into trouble, because I can never remember my kids birthdays but--Jim is 38 and his brother Fritz is 40.

LB: What has been your occupation during your adult years?

Fisher: Lawyer

LB: The first topic area I'd like to touch on would be transportation. What experiences can you remember of railway travel?

Fisher: I remember very dimly taking the night train out of Cedar Rapids to Chicago. You checked in about nine or ten o'clock at night, went to bed and then you woke up in the morning, and you were in Chicago. Then, of course, later on we all rode the streamliners to Chicago. And that went on for quite awhile. Then all of a sudden there weren't any railroads.

LB: What exactly did you go to Chicago for?

Fisher: Oh, on business. Then I had a couple of sisters who lived there in the Hinsdale area of Chicago. So I went to see them. And for awhile my mother was there with them so I went to see her too.

LB: At this time, what kind of business were you going on? Was this after law school?

Fisher: Yes, it was law school. I mean it was practicing law. I practiced law all the time except that I was four and a half years in World War II.

LB: You mentioned to me earlier that you were a newspaper boy for the Gazette.

Fisher: That's right, six dollars a month.

LB: How old were you?

Fisher: I suppose I was twelve or something.

LB: Did you deliver papers just in a residential area?

Fisher: Yes

LB: Your own neighborhood?

Fisher: No, no I had to go way to hell and gone out on First Avenue beyond Bever Park. The houses were a mile apart.

LB: How many papers did you deliver on your route?

Fisher: Sixty five. I remember that much.

LB: At the time, weren't they selling like extras if some kind of national event took place?

Fisher: Oh sure.

LB: Did you also do that? Was that part of your job?

Fisher: Well they would get them usually in the early noon or so and then if you were real excited about it, you'd go over and buy a copy of the paper.

LB: Who was it that sold these extras though? Was it the newspaper boys?

Fisher: There was a family named Kiebel in town here. And they did all the newspapers. We had two newspapers then. We had the Cedar Rapids Gazette, and we also had the Republican.

LB: Did you yourself sell extras?

Fisher: No, I never did. This was straight delivery to the house. Somebody wanted to pay one time and I didn't know how to do it.

LB: You made six dollars a month, is that correct?

Fisher: Yes.

LB: Did you deliver papers every day of the week?

Fisher: Yep.

LB: Another thing that I thought was really interesting was that you said you operated a ham radio.

Fisher: I still have one.

LB: What got you interested in that?

Fisher: Oh, I don't know. That was as a child. I had a ham license in 1920, and I've still got one.

LB: What did you pick up or listen to on your ham radio?

Fisher: You could pick up almost anything with that. It was a Collins transmitter and receiver.

LB: You had mentioned that you knew Art Collins himself, right?

Fisher: Very well, we grew up together.

LB: Did he go to the same school or live in the same neighborhood?

Fisher: Same school. Lived in the same neighborhood.

LB: What was he like? Did you keep in contact with him?

Fisher: Oh, I still do. He's down in Dallas most of the time now but when he comes to town we usually have lunch with him.

LB: What exactly did you use your ham radio for? Just for entertainment?

Fisher: For fun.

LB: For fun, can you remember of any particular times when you might have picked up something that was especially interesting?

Fisher: Well, we went out to Arthur's house. He was a childhood genius then, and I don't know how old he might have been. We were on bicycles so I suppose it was thirteen or fourteen. And he was just finishing copying the daily report from the Byrd Arctic expedition or Antarctic, I can't remember which. And he had it all typed out. His father taught him to type. And then we all went down to the Western Union office and he sent in the collect telegram to the National Geographic or who ever it was--it was interesting.

Then later on, we thought we could get our kids interested in amateur radio. They worked on it about one day. Ya know in little kits, and they worked on it about one day and that was the end of that. Our sons are very good friends still.

LB: What was that daily report that you had mentioned?

Fisher: He was the only person at that time who could communicate with the Arctic or the Antarctic and I can't remember which was Art Collins. And he had a desk about this size, and he had all of his equipment spreadout--what they call bread boarding. Just laid flat and so he would have a schedule, and he would talk and get the report from the expedition.

LB: How old was he then?

Fisher: Twelve I suppose.

LB: So did he get special recognition for this?

Fisher: Oh sure. There was a lot in the paper about him at that time.

LB: And is that how he got started; wasn't it him who has the business now?

Fisher: He did have. He got fired you know?

LB: No!(surprise)

Fisher: I'm sure everybody knows that.

LB: Do you have anymore comments about your ham radio experiences?

Fisher: No, except my transmitter doesn't work now.

LB: It doesn't work anymore? (Laughter)

Fisher: (Laughter) No, and I'm not getting it fixed. I just haven't done it.

LB: The next topic area I'd like to address would be amusements and recreation of the early 1900's. You had mentioned that you went to the motion pictures. Is that correct?

Fisher: Ya.

LB: Do you have any memories of any particular movies?

Fisher: Oh vaguely, "The Wizard of Oz." They didn't have any dirty movies then. I remember the prices of admission were very cheap. I think they were 10, 15, 20 cents or something like that. And you went to the matinees.

LB: Was this something that most children did for entertainment?

Fisher: Oh sure.

LB: Were there very many theaters?

Fisher: Five or six. The Isis and the Palace, and I can't remember the different names, but I can remember those two.

LB: You had mentioned that there weren't any dirty movies then. Were the movies mostly just geared for the children then? There weren't any higher ratings?

Fisher: Well, they didn't class them like they do now. But I think they were quite well censored. "The Sheik of Araby"; I can remember that one. Everybody was swooning over him--all the girls were.

LB: You had mentioned that you knew some circus people.

Fisher: My wife is from Baraboo, Wisconsin, and several members of the Ringling family were there. We were always over there at Baraboo on holidays, and weekends, and stuff like that. And so I met Henry Ringling. We became very good friends with Henry Ringling who died about--oh, after World War II. And my wife, of course, had been brought up with them so she knew all of them. They're fun people.

LB: Did you go to the circuses here in Cedar Rapids?

Fisher: Ya, we took them to the circus last time that the Ringling Brothers Circus was here and so we called--we found out--see Jean Ringling lives in Rome the year round but she has to come

back once a year to keep her citizenship. And then she has a daughter who is a widow--they had two children and so, anyway. I went down to the ticket office and I said, "I've got two tickets for my wife and me for the circus and they aren't very good," and I said, "I'm entertaining Jean Ringling and her daughter and son and so forth and could I trade these in for better tickets?"

And they said, "We could do better than that yet, you're free." They said, "Would they mind introducing--being introduced from the show?"

And I said, "No, I think Shirley would love it" which, of course, they did--they got all excited about it. Then they shined the lights on--you know we were right at just absolutely perfect seats and they shined the light on them and they came up and gave us programs, and then during the intermission we all went down to the dressing rooms, which was fun, and my wife met some of the people that she knew and Jean Ringling knew some of them. The woman who hangs by her hair you know. I don't know whether they still have that or not.

LB: I haven't been to the circus in a long time.

Fisher: Oh, that was fun.

LB: So when was that?

Fisher: The last time that Ringling Brothers was here. I can't remember; four years, five years ago, something like that.

LB: How about when you were a child here growing up here in Cedar Rapids. Did you go to the circus?

Fisher: Oh ya, but I don't remember anything about it. I remember them unloading--unloading the trains and things like that, but we also went to see that. But I don't have any recollection of the shows themselves.

LB: What sort of things were they unloading off the trains?

Fisher: Oh, the animals, and the tent poles, and all the equipment that the roust-a-bouts would gather together. So then they always had little boys and you could--if you got there and cried a little bit, why they'd let you in with a ticket and you could water the elephants and, of course, the elephants used an enormous amount of water you know. I never did do that though. Some of them did.

LB: You never got to do that?

Fisher: No.

LB: What can you remember of Greene's Opera House?

Fisher: Went to a graduation. I think one of my sisters or both my sisters was graduated from high school and so I went there. Then later on, they reopened the old Greene's Opera House and they had vaudeville there for quite awhile. And then the next thing I knew, why they'd made a car parking space out of it.

LB: What reason was that?

Fisher: Oh well, I mean people just didn't go to vaudeville anymore.

People change and so they, as I said, they made a garage out of it.

LB: Why do you think people quit going to vaudeville?

Fisher: Oh, I don't know. People have interests, they swing from one interest to another.

LB: And what high school was your sister graduating from?

Fisher: Washington High School which was down back up here some place.

LB: Were most high school graduations held there or was this a special one?

Fisher: I think they were, for awhile at least.

LB: You had mentioned that you were a member of the YMCA. How old were you when you were a member?

Fisher: I suppose ten or eleven.

LB: What did you do there? What was its purpose?

Fisher: Same old stuff. We hung on rings and things like that.

LB: Was it in the same location as it is today?

Fisher: Yes.

LB: They had like weight machines, and a swimming pool, and stuff like that?

Fisher: They didn't have any weight machines. They had some stuff you'd stand up on the wall and do this, you know. And then they had

wooden bars where you could go and pull this sort of stuff.

LB: Did you spend lots of time there?

Fisher: I don't remember spending a great deal of time there.

LB: Were most of the children your age members?

Fisher: Ya, our families would get a membership and hope we'd grow up to be big and strong types and, of course, we didn't.

LB: Was there membership fee then?

Fisher: Oh, I think it was probably \$2.50 a year, or \$5.00 a year, or something like that. Now it's \$380.00 in case you're interested. For the health club; I just paid it the other day.

LB: You had mentioned that you knew quite a few of these famous characters. In what capacity did you know Carl Van Vechten?

Fisher: I never knew Carl myself. I read most of his books which were very advanced. Those were dirty books as they would be regarded then--or now. But my sister and her husband knew him in New York. And they used to go to Harlem, to the night club in Harlem as his guest.

LB: How did she get to know him?

Fisher: Well, he was from Cedar Rapids, Carl was. And I think they were invited. Jean was living in New York then, and her husband, and I think they just ran into him.

LB: Who do you think the Tattooed Countess was?

Fisher: A woman named Bess Cock, I think.

LB: And who was she?

Fisher: A school teacher. A very lovely lady. She really got lampooned by that movie--or by that book.

LB: I don't know that much about that book. Could you tell me what it was like?

Fisher: You know, I can't remember much about the contents of the book. I can remember some of it, but not a great deal.

LB: But it was directed against her?

Fisher: Well, he just wrote about it. She was supposed to be an imaginary character but, I mean, he came awfully close to describing her.

LB: And was she a school teacher of his?

Fisher: I don't know whether she was or not.

LB: What do you know of Marvin Cone?

Fisher: Very well, I knew him very well.

LB: Even when you were younger, you knew him?

Fisher: Yes, he was a very nice, gentlemanly character. He was beautifully tempered. He enjoyed people, and so forth. My wife is president of Marvin Cone Art Club. He was very nice, personable, fun guy.

LB: What did he do here in Cedar Rapids?

Fisher: He and Grant Wood started out at school, painting. And they

continued through the years. They were contemporaries. Those are some Grant Wood's there (pointing to pictures on the wall). And then since then, of course, he died and so we spend a lot of time, we always have his wife, Winifred, at our parties and stuff.

LB: How did you know him when you were younger? Did you go to the same school?

Fisher: He was older than I was but I had him in school. He was teaching at McKinley so I always have fun saying I studied under Grant Wood. (Laughs)

LB: How well did you know Grant Wood? Just as a teacher-student relationship?

Fisher: No, later on I got a little better acquainted with him.

LB: Did you ever get to go to Turner's Alley?

Fisher: Oh ya.

LB: What was that like?

Fisher: Fun place. It was the second floor of the old stables. And our family home is right down in the ten hundred block of Second Avenue and so when we were kids we just ranged the whole block at that time on our tricycles. The Turner Mortuary was where the Sinclair family lived and they had previously bought it from the Douglas family.

LB: Did a lot of children in the neighborhood stop down at Turner's Alley?

Fisher: Ya, there were always two, or three, or four. I can't remember if there were three or four Sinclairs, maybe there were four of them. All different ages. So then they had all those great things--the wall around which at that time was twice as high, the brick wall, as it is now. And so it was kind of like a little play house, you know, that sort of thing. So it was interesting and fun.

LB: What do you know of the Cherry sisters?

Fisher: Well, we handled the last--they owned some land out in, do you know where Weaver Witwer's home is?

LB: No, I don't.

Fisher: Well, you know you go out Cottage Grove Avenue and then you go on up the hill. There's a great big, beautiful red brick house which is the one where Molly Busterowd lives now. And so, I lost my train of thought. Anyway, they came up to the office because Weaver Witwer wanted to buy this last forty acre piece. And they were all--they were just grotesque characters with the excessive makeup and all that sort of thing, and they had the funny old clothes on. So my father made out the sale papers, and that's the only time I ever saw them.

LB: How old were you when you saw them?

Fisher: I had been practicing law seven, eight, or nine years, something like that.

LB: Moving on to a new topic would be under life style. What do you remember about the taverns and saloons in Cedar Rapids?

Fisher: They never would let you in. I don't know anything about taverns and saloons. I remember when Nat King Cole used to play down in the bar down on First Street here in town before he got famous.

LB: On First Street?

Fisher: Ya, right across from where the Post Office is. (Federal Building)

LB: Did you get to see him?

Fisher: Oh yah and then we were--at that time the Junior League put on--no, it was the St. Michael's Church hired him and a whole band for a show from Chicago. It wasn't terribly long before he died.

LB: When was this that he played down on First Street? Can you recall?

Fisher: I suppose it was about 1926 maybe.

LB: Is he from here?

Fisher: No, but he lived here when he played in this bar down here.

LB: And where is he originally from? Do you know?

Fisher: I think Chicago. Nice guy. They had him at the Country Club for dinner before hand. That was a pretty daring thing at that time. He was very poised and he said, "You know I would have tried twice as much if I'd known how much you were getting for these tickets." Because they were charging \$15.00 a person. Which was pretty big money then.

LB: Earlier when I talked to you, it sounded like you had held a lot of jobs while you were growing up. One of them that you mentioned was that you were a messenger in a sweatshop.

Fisher: Well, it was a kind of a sweatshop. There were two old ladies, both cripples, and one of them would do part of a dress and the other one would do part of a dress, or so forth like that, you know. And then they had to get them back and forth. So, I think I got \$2.00 a week or something for stopping at one place and trading the stuff back and forth. They lived right up the block from us.

LB: Who were these ladies?

Fisher: Can't even remember.

LB: It was just them two?

Fisher: They were cripples. They were housebound and they lived in the sixteen hundred block on Second Avenue.

LB: You also worked at Quaker Oats. What did you do there?

Fisher: I was an electrician's helper. Then the following year, I was on the shipping gang. That was almost the end of me. I'd never been so tired and sore in my life as I was for awhile on that. That is hard work.

LB: Doing what?

Fisher: Just pushing big packages of oatmeal around.

LB: What was Quaker Oats like then? Was it a big factory?

Fisher: Very much like it is today. Except there's a lot more automation than there was then.

LB: You said that you were in the Military Academy, probably in the 1920's.

Fisher: I think '24 to '27 was when I was in Military School.

LB: What made you decide to go to Military School?

Fisher: A little pressure on the part of my family.

LB: Did your father attend Military School?

Fisher: No, the only thing he did--I remember him drilling with a bunch of men out on Mound Farm. This was during World War I. I can remember going out there to see him, but he never served. That was the rural--what did they call that then? The reserve or something. ... the reserve or some such thing as that. I was the only soldier in our family.

LB: What was the Military Academy like?

Fisher: Very strict. Terrific instruction. We went under the--they had the English system of all kinds of philosophy, language. I took Latin and French for four years. We had classes of about six in size. It was a wonderful school. Just terrific.

LB: Where was that at?

Fisher: Here.

LB: Here?

Fisher: Faribault, Minnesota.

LB: What was a typical day like? Was it just school work?

Fisher: Ya, they'd get you up at 6:30 in the morning, go and run around the campus--jogging around the campus and then you'd go back and you went to school from--I think it was 7:30 to 11:30. There were three classes and two study halls and then you'd have lunch and then we had a recreation time. Everybody had to play some game, either football or something until 4:00. Then you came in and cleaned up and then you had an hour study hall. This was compulsory study hall. You couldn't read, you couldn't move around, you couldn't do anything. All you could do was study and then you'd have dinner. Then they had another study hall from 7:15 till 9:00 at night. So it pretty well took care of your day. And I know I was, it was so, I was so far ahead of my classes; my high school classes that when I went to the University of Iowa, I didn't do a damn thing for a year. I was way ahead.

LB: So following military academy, you went right to the University of Iowa for your under-graduate study?

Fisher: Ya, uh huh.

LB: And what did you study?

Fisher: Well, of course, I had finished my French. My four years of French and my four years of lab. Then I took--I was interested in writing at the time and so I did some of that.

LB: What was your major at the University of Iowa?

Fisher: English and History, I think.

LB: What did it take to be admitted to law school? Was it tough to get in?

Fisher: Not at that time it wasn't. All you had to do was--tuition for liberal arts was \$45.00 a year and law school was \$64.00. And all you had to do was be alive and go there. But after you got there, you had to really work.

LB: How many students were in your class?

Fisher: 160, I think. I could be way off on that, but I think that's what there were. There were a lot less when we got through, I can clue you on that.

LB: What made you interested in the legal profession?

Fisher: My father, my uncle, my brother-in-law.

LB: All of them were in the legal profession?

Fisher: Uh huh, my uncle was a Supreme Court judge, my brother-in-law was--he was older than I was; his family were all lawyers. So it was just almost inevitable.

LB: Your father was a lawyer?

Fisher: Uh huh, that's a picture of him right there and this is in (Fisher gets up and walks over to the picture so his voice fades) 1898 and he's clear in the back there. At that time, of course, you studied law--you didn't go to law school; you could go and study in somebody's office and then take the bar exam. That was true up until about twenty years ago or so. And this was the male stenographer (still pointing to the picture). This was a very modern office because they had a typewriter you see. And then over here was the telephone and that was in the reception

room. And this was the old boy who was the head of the office; named BurrJones. And this is 1898.It's kind of fun.

LB: What kind of attorney was he?

Fisher: Who?

LB: Your father.

Fisher: He spent most of his life--he was originally a banker. I dug up some stuff on him (starts to rummage through papers). Wonder if it's here? (Fisher seems to be going through drawers and makes some comment about computers.) Do we have an unanswered question?

LB: I asked about your father. What kind of attorney he was?

Fisher: Well ya, he studied and then he went to work for an insurance company in Des Moines for awhile, and they transferred him here. And I don't remember exactly what he did, but then the Depression came along and nobody had any money, and there was no other way to make a living so he went back into the practice. He'd been a lawyer then for a number of years and we were together until he died.

LB: Now that you mentioned the Great Depression, what exactly do you remember about it?

Fisher: A great deal. Ya, nobody had any money, there was no cash involved, there was no credit involved, the banks had been closed. For instance, Merchants Bank was, as I remember the story, they had an orchestra play in the lobby and they had every single

teller's window with stacks and stacks of currency. And Jim Hamilton was standing at the door and he said, "Now, if you take your money out of here, don't ever bring it back." And so he had what they called a "run on the bank." See a bank never has all the money. Bank never has enough money to pay everybody off on a certain day. And periodically they still have runs; they had one in Chicago at the Continental Illinois recently.

LB: What were you doing at the time of the Great Depression?

Fisher: I was reading to a blind man. We were required--I got \$60.00 a month which was big dough then. And I had to live with him, which wasn't a chore because he was an awfully nice guy. And then he had a car. I used to drive him around. He fixed pianos on the side so he and I--just real delicate it would go clunk, clunk, clunk--you know the way they do--so I learned how to fix pianos to do the repair work. So I was repairing on the one end of the thing and he was tuning on the other. And then, of course, I had to read his lessons to him.

LB: His lessons for what? He was a law student also?

Fisher: Ya, uh huh. Very interesting, fun guy.

LB: Do you remember his name?

Fisher: Bill Hahle. He was head of one of the blind organizations here in Iowa for many years.

LB: What did other students do to make it through the Depression?

Fisher: Well, I had a board job. I worked on the dishwashing machines

at the University of Iowa, the big old machine in the back for a couple years, and then I was a waiter in the nurse's dining room. And then for awhile in summer, I worked as a cook in the isolation ward. So then I had about three jobs going at the same time. Saturday night I used to go out and do dishes at the Memorial Union. We got twenty five cents an hour or something like that.

LB: You did all these jobs while you were still studying law?

Fisher: Ya, they won't let you do that anymore, of course. I worked eight hours a day besides going to school.

LB: That sounds pretty tough.

Fisher: Not particularly. There wasn't anything else to do. Either work or go to school. And as I say, I had \$60.00 a month. That was big money. You could buy a beer for I think thirty cents or twenty cents a bottle.

LB: Now that you mentioned beer, what do you remember about Prohibition?

Fisher: First of all, I can remember all the legal things that were going on. The courts were full of people, bootleggers, being prosecuted and that sort of stuff over in Federal Court. But, anyway, when Prohibition was finally repealed, I can remember a great deal. We went down and bought a gallon of White Swan Gin and took it home. And then, of course, it was horrible but we didn't know any better then. White Swan gin was probably the worst drink there ever was.

LB: How old were you then?

Fisher: I was in college.

at the University of Iowa, the big old machine in the back for a couple years, and then I was a waiter in the nurse's dining room. And then for awhile in summer, I worked as a cook in the isolation ward. So then I had about three jobs going at the same time. Saturday night I used to go out and do dishes at the Memorial Union. We got twenty five cents an hour or something like that.

LB: You did all these jobs while you were still studying law?

Fisher: Ya, they won't let you do that anymore, of course. I worked eight hours a day besides going to school.

LB: That sounds pretty tough.

Fisher: Not particularly. There wasn't anything else to do. Either work or go to school. And as I say, I had \$60.00 a month. That was big money. You could buy a beer for I think thirty cents or twenty cents a bottle.

LB: Now that you mentioned beer, what do you remember about Prohibition?

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LB: How old were you then?

Fisher: I was in college.

LB: During Prohibition, how did you or maybe others that you knew obtain alcohol?

Fisher: There were places. They called them blind pigs or something like that. There wasn't much--a lot of well-to-do people had access to either imported liquor or something. The average individual didn't have that kind of money and have that source. One man that I knew very well, he was in school with me, used to make three pints of liquor a week. He'd take it to three people; never made more than that and he put himself through college with that.

LB: How did he make it?

Fisher: He'd distill it out of a potato or a potato mash.

LB: What do you remember about the banks closing?

Fisher: Well, again, this deal with the Merchants National Bank. The president had issued an order requiring all banks to close for a period of time. I can't remember how long it was. And nobody had any money. That was all over the country. Well, then they got going a little later on. There were about eight or nine banks in Cedar Rapids. The Peoples Bank reopened; the Merchants, of course, reopened. I can't remember whether the Corn Belt Bank reopened or not. It was a big deal. I mean the transactions; all transactions just stopped.

LB: How did it affect the community; like the stores and anything else?

Fisher: Well, you could go into the stores but you couldn't buy anything.

My brother-in-law was in New York then and he was entertaining this friend of his, and this friend of his decided he had a thousand dollar bill. So he took that along and, of course, nobody could cash it. So my poor brother-in-law had to pick up the tab for the whole thing.

LB: Do you remember the Lyman Stark building collapse?

Fisher: Very well.

LB: How did people react to that?

Fisher: I was awful small then but--see I was born in 1909. What year--you've got the date down there someplace.

LB: I think it was like 1913 maybe.

Fisher: Ya, I'd have been about four or five years old. I can remember my mother and father taking me down there and the building had fallen in a direction across the street--you know it was what they call the Iowa Building now. And it fell in, the whole street. I can remember the great big reinforcing cages, like falling down. I don't remember, there wasn't a very great loss of life; there were some people killed. The story was at that time that this big contractor had chiselled on the amount of cement he had put in. I don't know whether that's true or not; never did find out. But it was pretty spectacular.

LB: What do you know of the Public Library murder?

Fisher: I know a great deal about it. I represented the members of the family. For quite a few years, I went out and got flowers for the individual at the request of his family. It started out

with this man who was a very talented engineer, and he was coming home with a shot gun in his hand and it was reported to the police. And so this policeman went over there and followed him. They got into the back entrance to the library which is where the children's area used to be. And he went up in this balcony or whatever it was, and the policeman kept on following him; talking to him and pretty soon he turned and shot him. He was obviously demented at the time, and I think he was given life in prison or something. I can remember when he died; he's buried out in the Mt. Vernon cemetery. And so, at the request of the family, we always put flowers on the grave. I'm not sure they even have his name on the gravestone. I knew the surviving members of the family. One of them was vice president of Northern Trust of Chicago and they own two beautiful, old brick houses right out away from town from the Turner place.

LB: That happened in 1921 so you probably weren't too old but do you remember what the community reaction was?

Fisher: No, I'm sure that there were those who said how sad it was, etc., etc., etc. But, as I say, I represented the family on some other matters; my father and I did both. Both of us did.

LB: What can you remember of the Douglas Starch Works explosion?

Fisher: Well that was what I was talking about you know, I was at this boy-girl party, out on Second Avenue and about Nineteenth Street. And I took one look at this great big explosion, and I thought that's something I want to see so I just took off.

LB: Did a lot of other children go with you?

Fisher: No, nobody went. Everybody stayed at the party but I went.

LB: You went by yourself. Weren't you scared?

Fisher: Not particularly.

LB: And what did you see once you were there?

Fisher: Well, of course, the whole thing was just flat; the whole Douglas Starch Works was just flat.

I was trying to get you--I just--I've got that book--I bought--  
I got two books; one of them is the history of the Merchants Bank  
which is real interesting, and the other was We Went First Class  
by Ellen Williamson. Now she was the middle Douglas girl. You  
know the big estate of Brucemore on First Avenue. And she wrote  
a lot of good books. I think eight or nine. See, I was raised  
with them. Mrs. Douglas had a pre-school and I like to say that  
they took the deprived children of the neighborhood in to be with  
Barbara, their daughter. It was a real interesting deal. So, any-  
way, she wrote six or seven books about Cedar Rapids and they are  
all just--good. And her name is Ellen Williamson; she died about  
a month ago.

LB: What do you remember of the first automobiles?

Fisher: We all had Model T Fords. You'd buy them for \$30.00 usually.  
And they were perfectly terrible in winter because they had a  
modified automatic transmission like we do now, but it was just  
like a solid mess and when it got good and told the thing would  
stand on a thing like this and wouldn't go downhill.

LB: Did you have to have a license to drive them?

Fisher: Ya.

LB: And how old did you have to be in order to drive one?

Fisher: I'm not sure we even had, now wait a minute, I'll back up on that.

I don't even remember buying a--oh, you had to buy a license for the car, but there were no drivers' licenses at that time at all.

When we were ham radioing it, there was no restriction on frequencies.

You could tune in on anybody. Fortunatdy, we didn't have much power. (in the 20's)

LB: Were women able to drive automobiles?

Fisher: My mother did. My mother was the first in town.

LB: And what kind of reaction did she get when she drove around?

Fisher: I don't know, I think she attracted quite of bit of the old attention. There were only open cars then. Sedans were very rare.

LB: What do you remember of the Seedling Mile and the mud roads?

Fisher: Ya, I remember the mud roads. Everything was mud. And then you'd be driving along and you'd hit the Seedling Mile which was out Mt. Vernon Road and then you'd have one mile of concrete. What they did, the old interurban to Mt. Vernon went through, so what they did, they shipped the material by the interurban; the freight cars on the interurban. That's how they built it on both sides of the road so there was just a mile. It was very effective

at getting people to--because the roads were just awful. I can remember one time going to Clear Lake up in Wisconsin, and it took three days to get there.

LB: Did you have any experiences of getting stuck and not being able to get out?

Fisher: Uh huh, what you did, you went down to the nearest farm house, and the farmer came out, and hitched a team; you gave him \$3.00; he'd hitch on to the front of the car with a hook, and hauled you out. Then if you broke a spring, you went to a blacksmith shop. Every town had a blacksmith shop, and they would make a spring for you right there.

LB: How long did that usually take?

Fisher: Half an hour, maybe, at the most. They were pretty important guys, these blacksmiths were, you know.

LB: What else did they do besides make the springs?

Fisher: Oh, some of them did some very artistic things. We have several very nice wrought iron bridge lamps that were made by the-- there was an interesting family that lived on Second Avenue and right across the street from us.

END OF SIDE ONE - BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

And a real fun story that was told me, I'm sure it was correct about the, there was an oldtime constable here who happened to be in New York or something and he looks down and here in the street on a rainy night is obviously this man who was one of the members of this family that lives across the street. And so he just rushed to him and started to lift him up out of the gutter and this guy said, "Beat it, I'm on stakeout." I swear up and down it was true. And, anyway, he was guarding the president, and also those guys at that time did some counterfeiting work too.

LB: What did they counterfeit?

Fisher: Oh, U.S. funds, of course, U.S. dollars and so forth.

LB: I just have one last question unless you can think of anything else about the early decades of the twentieth century that you would like to share before I ask my one final question.

Fisher: Well, as I say, the biggest thing as we look back on it was that there was no credit. And about the first person in town to give credit was a crazy duck named, oh, what was his name. And he was selling washing machines for a dollar down, and you could always dig up a dollar to make the payments. If you wanted a hot water heater, for example, you could get one from the Gas Company for a dollar down.

I remember when we were moving into our little house. Betty and I had a little house we had bought for \$2,500.00 and we had it fixed up. It was right on First Avenue. It was a nice house. We had a lot of fun with it there a long time.

But anyway, later on occasionally you'd find people who'd give credit. I remember one time--it was a time--I keep emphasizing this lack of credit because you're not familiar with this, but there was none. I bought this house, as I say, for \$2,500 and I paid \$50 down, the balance at \$35 a month, had a hell of a time making payments. You were always running out of money. I know we had an account with a grocery store across the street, and they're still friends of mine. They're still around. One of them is Frank Pfaff, who runs this deal on the westside...you know, just did this new building...the building that they rebuilt on First Avenue and Second Street. It's that building they fixed all up, red brick building and put a little cupola on the top of it. He was the grocer, and we had an account and we paid by the week.

LB: The last question I have, and it seems like you pretty much answered it, was how you would compare life then and now and is there anything that you miss from that time period?

Fisher: Well, I'd loved to have had about \$50,000 like one of my friends had, and he parlayed that into a couple of million by the time things went again. I mean, it was a great opportunity to make money. Rural mail carriers got rich. They had cash and you could do anything with cash.

LB: Who provided them? Was it the people?

Fisher: Well no, government salaries, you see, government pay.

LB: So the best kind of job might have been a government job?

Fisher: Well no, not necessarily a government job, but you had money to buy other things with.

LB: Do you have any other last comments before we close up here?

Fisher: No, this has been fun.

LB: Thank you very much.

Fisher: I hope it's usable.

LB: I'm sure it will be.

