

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH Ethel Kensinger

CONDUCTED BY Cathie Frenzen

DATE March 4, 1985

TRANSCRIBER Hazel Storm

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

10-07  
2005.10.43

Ethel Aensinger was born September 26, 1890 in Cedar County. She has spent most of her life in the Cedar Rapids area where she and her husband, who was in the insurance business, raised their children.

This interview provides us with a look at the lifestyle of small town living in the Lisbon area around 1900 while Mrs. Aensinger was the young daughter of a rural physician. She delights in telling some of the early procedures used and stories of her father's house calls in a horse and buggy or sleigh. We also have a glimpse at the lifestyle during the Depression era.

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1 --When were you born? Where?
- 1-2,5,6,16 --How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids? --Lisbon and Greene, Ia., too.
  - What are your parents' names?
- 2 --Where did you go to school?
  - Are you married or single?
- 7,13,19,26 --Did you raise a family? How big?
- 4-5,7 --What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

- 1. Transportation
  - 14-15,25-27 --Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
  - 3,4,8,9-10,14 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
    - 15 --Horses and First Automobiles
  - 15-16 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
    - Hunter Airport and the first planes
    - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications

- Newspapers
- Radios
- Advertising
- 11--Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

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

2. Famous Characters

- Cherry Sisters
- Grant Wood
- Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
- Marvin Cone

3. Lifestyle--17, 19-20
  - Life before air conditioning
  - 9,16-17--Winter Activities
  - 20--Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
  - Clothing
  - 16-17,18--Toys
  - Saloons/Taverns
  - Farm Life
4. Family Life
  - Household Help
  - Women's Roles
  - 17,19--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
  - 22-23,24-25--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--23-24
  1. Education
    - Cedar Rapids Schools
    - Coe College
    - Mount Mercy College
    - 3,4--Cornell College
  2. Government
    - City Services
    - Streets/Roads
    - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
  3. Medical--11
    - 12--Hospitals
    - 10--Patient-Doctor Relationship
    - Broken Bones
    - 12-13--Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
    - 8,10-12--House Calls
    - 12--Home Delivery of Babies
    - 1,7--Medical School



4. Business and Economy

- 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
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

5. Attitudes/Values--27,28

- 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)
- 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

24-25 --Great Depression

Interview With: Ethel Kensinger  
Date of Interview: March 4, 1985  
Interviewer: Cathie Frenzen  
Transcriber: Hazel Storm

This is Cathie Frenzen with Ethel Kensinger. We are in her home on B Avenue N.E. in Cedar Rapids. The date is March 4, 1985. Ethel and I will discuss what life in the Cedar Rapids area has been like from 1890 to the present.

CF: Ethel, where were you born?

Kensinger: I was born on a farm in Cedar County. My mother was raised on that farm, and her parents lived there. When she was a young girl, her family entertained two young men from Canada who had come to visit with relatives in Cedar Rapids; and they happened to go down to this farm and the young people got acquainted. After my father--who was one of the young men and became my father--had gone back to Canada, his brother married my mother's sister. So my mother went to Canada to visit them, and during that time she and my father fell in love and they were married. After their marriage, my mother came back to Cedar County for my birth. That was September 26, 1890. My father and mother then moved to a farm in Manitoba, Canada, and they farmed there for a time. My father then got tired of farming, and he went into a sales business. They built a beautiful home in Morden, Manitoba. My father always had an ambition to become a doctor, so eventually he decided to come to Iowa City. His brother had come previously, and the family moved to Iowa City and my father entered medical school. In those days, medical school took only two years. But after he had finished two years and took his examinations in Des Moines,

they added two years to the curriculum at the University; and he decided he would go the full four years. He graduated, I think, in 1900. And it was then that we moved to Lisbon, and he set up his practice there in Lisbon. At first he had his office in the house. We bought a house, and it was quite a big building, so he had his office there. And eventually he built on an addition, and we had most of the house to ourselves then. He had his office just as a little part of it.

CF: How was your father paid for his services?

Kensinger: The house is still there, and it has an iron fence around it. I think it is now the only iron fence left in Lisbon. The \_\_\_\_\_ used to have an iron fence around their place, but I think theirs has been torn down. The house that we lived in at Lisbon is still there. It is occupied by Dr. Gardner's granddaughter. But the town itself is pretty much like it was when he was there. And, of course, I went through school in Lisbon; graduated in 1908. At that time our school was not accredited. Up until that time, when they changed and added two more years to the curriculum, the first that graduated after that change was very small. There were only eight, I believe--seven girls and one boy. It was quite interesting. In June, 1908, when we were to graduate, of course, all the girls had their pretty gowns, and we counted on having a gala occasion. And that afternoon, before the graduation ceremony, we had a tornado in Lisbon. I was sitting out on the front porch of

our home when we saw shingles and all sorts of things flying through the air. It only lasted a few minutes. My father got on the pony and went to see what had happened. And he came back and said that the power house that furnished the electricity for the town had been blown away. At that time there was a farmer that had some hives of bees just across the road from the power house, and the wind upset the bees. So when anybody went to see the destruction of the tornado, the bees stung them. (Laughter) Well, that was kind of an exciting experience. But that evening then at the church, we had no electricity. And so everybody loaned their kerosene lamps, and the girls had no opportunity to show off their beautiful baccalaureate gowns. (Laughter) That was rather sad. After graduation, five of us decided to attend Cornell College. And at that time there was a boardwalk between Lisbon and Mount Vernon. There were two planks laid lengthwise, and that was the width of the walk. Of course, it never got shoveled of snow in the wintertime, but it made it easier walking anyway. And the five of us used to attend an eight o'clock class. On winter mornings we would get there feeling very fresh and invigorated by the winter winds. And the people in the dormitories next door would come sleepy eyed, rubbing their eyes and having trouble waking up for that first class at eight o'clock in the morning.

CF: How long did it take you to walk?

Kensinger: I don't remember, but I think around half an hour.

CF: Well, that's not too bad.

Kensinger: It wasn't too bad. And on stormy days, one of my brothers or my father would usually hitch up the team and give us a ride over. But there were no streetcar or anything to take us in those days.

CF: What do you remember about the campus? What was the campus like?

Kensinger: About what?

CF: The campus?

Kensinger: Cornell Campus looked... Main Street looked very much like it does today. But, of course, now they have many new buildings, and some of the old buildings... I remember we had a fire that destroyed one of the buildings and that has been rebuilt, and it is very nice now. And one of the older buildings on the Cornell Campus has been restored, and I remember having classes in that building. The Altoona Hotel--I think it was called the Altoona--was used at that time once in awhile for visiting notables who came to give lectures or music... I can't think of the soloist who came. She was a famous soprano singer, and she had a very beautiful dress. And they didn't have anybody to press it. I was teaching there at the time, and they asked me if I would press her dress. And I went over to that hotel and they furnished me with an ironing board and iron and I pressed this very fancy dress, and she wore it at the concert.

(Laughter)

CF: You said you were teaching? You taught in Mount Vernon?



Kensinger: Yes, after I had attended Cornell for two years, I went to Iowa State at Ames; and when I graduated there, I came back and taught two years in Mount Vernon. The first year I taught home economics in the high school, and the second year I taught just in the college. I taught sewing in the college. That was an interesting experience.

CF: What did you do after that?

Kensinger: Well, after two years of teaching... I'll have to go back and tell you that I met my husband in Mount Vernon. He was superintendent of schools at that time, and he had graduated from Grinnell College, and this was his third teaching experience. Well, after we had been teaching there two years, the war broke out, and we had decided to get married. My father had bought a ranch out in Montana. We had a thousand-acre ranch, and my younger brother and my husband and I went out to Stanford, Montana, and started farming on this ranch. And my father furnished the cattle. In those days it took about a hundred acres of Montana land to feed one head of stock, while in Iowa it would take about ten. But anyway, we enjoyed our life in Montana, but we found out that there was sufficient rainfall only about every three years. And after the war, we went into a period when the prices of grain dropped drastically and drought made it impossible to raise much of a crop. So we decided that we would give up the ranch and come back to Iowa.

CF: So, when you moved back to Iowa, what did your husband do?

Kensinger: Well, when we came to Iowa, my husband got a position as manager of the grain elevator at Greene, Iowa. And we lived there, I think, three or four years. At that time, the grain elevator was owned by the bank, and Mr. Sothesby was president of the bank and he went bankrupt. As the bank failed, we lost our savings and he lost his grain elevator as well as his bank interest. So we had to find something else to do, and we moved to Cedar Rapids from Greene, Iowa. Our life in Greene was very pleasant, and I have such pleasant memories of the time we lived there. We always stopped at Greene if we had to make a change.

CF: Where exactly is Greene, Iowa?

Kensinger: It's north of here, I think about a hundred and fifty miles, something like that.

CF: So, after you moved back to Cedar Rapids, what did you do?

Kensinger: Then after we moved back to Cedar Rapids, my husband had to look for something to do, and for a short time he worked for a man's clothing business. I can't think just now what was the name of the firm, but he visited professional people and took orders for their suits, men's suits. And he was in that business maybe for a year, and then he decided he liked insurance business better. He worked for some life insurance company--Massachusetts Protective was the main firm he worked for for a number of years. And then he got a little tired of that and he went into a new line of work in Michigan--Lansing, Michigan. And at that time we thought maybe the family would move there, but it happened just



about 1929 when things began to go bad; and he didn't make a success of that work, so he came back to Cedar Rapids in about 1931, I think it was. And he took up with Massachusetts Protective again for a time. Then he went with Occidental Life, and finally he got into car insurance. And it was after that that the children had gone through school, he needed help in the office, so I took on the job of office girl, keeping his records and taking care of the office when he was out selling.

CF: Had you worked before that?

Kensinger: No, I hadn't worked before that. But I worked in the office for 27 years. After he retired, we took some trips. We took a trip to the Scandinavian countries, and we took several trips throughout the United States. And then my husband became senile with Alzheimer's disease, and he passed away in 1975.

CF: O.K., Ethel, I'd like to go back to your childhood and talk about some of the things that your father did? How was your father paid for his medical services?

Kensinger: Well, he sold a farm in Canada and so he had enough money to buy a home in Iowa City and to pay his tuition. And it happened that at the end of two years of medical study, he went to Des Moines and took the exams for license. And at that time they could practice after two years, so he went into practice with Dr. Schroeder; and he practiced medicine with Dr. Schroeder while he was attending the University for his last two years. And then, of course, he graduated after the

four years, and that was when we moved to Lisbon in 1900. There was another young man who graduated in the same class, and unfortunately, they both decided to go to the town of Lisbon. And there were two older physicians there at that time who were just about ready to retire. And so these two young doctors both started their practice about the same time. And they practiced together for a number of years and lived within less than a block of each other. That was quite interesting. His name was Dr. John Gardner, and it is his granddaughter that bought our home in Lisbon. My father was a very successful physician. He was a truly dedicated doctor, and he had to make trips in the country with a team of horses. Many times in the winter he would have to have two teams because he was all alone so much of the time, and March was the worst month. It seemed like everybody got sick in March. There was a lady--well, a family that lived a little bit south of Lisbon--who was apt to become a little hysterical when the weather got bad. And just as sure as my father would get sound asleep, this lady--her name was Miller--would get sick and call him out in the middle of the night. We always knew when the weather was bad that he'd have to get up and go answer calls. There was one time in March when we had an ice storm, and father was called out to take care of a woman who was ill several miles in the country. At that time he had a team of big, black horses. The roads were so bad that he had to take the buggy, a sleigh, but there was ice over everything. And one of the

horses didn't see very well, and somehow she slipped off into the ditch and fell and dragged the other horse with her. The buggy upset and my father fell out at the horses' heels. Fortunately, he had a heavy fur cap on and also a fur coat, and if it hadn't been for those he would probably have been killed, because the horses were struggling to get up and he was struggling to get out of the buggy and to get it up. But my father was a very resourceful man, and he knew how to handle horses. And he did get that team back up on the road, the buggy back up on the road, and he got to his patients and he got back home. But his face was terribly bruised from the struggle with the horses and all, and we felt it was very fortunate that he wasn't killed in that accident. And for a number of years he drove a team. In the wintertime he would usually take a sleigh, and of course it was cold. And we kept soapstones hot in the oven to keep his feet warm; so when he'd come in with one that had gotten cold, we'd have a nice hot one to replace it.

CF: What were soapstones?

Kensinger: Soapstones? Well, slabs of... well, soapstone. It was so square...

CF: What were they made of?

Kensinger: Well, that's what they always called them. I really don't know what... it was like a stone. But I suppose you'd call them soapstones, I don't know. Anyway, we had to keep some hot for him all that time. And at one time we had an Indian pony, and when the team he was driving got worn out, Dad

decided he'd see what he could do with this pony. And he hitched him up to his sleigh. But the pony was a runaway, and he got out in the country and he ran away. And he left my father's sleigh with all the robes and everything strewn on the road. And the pony got into a fence and cut himself so badly that he never was any good after that. But it taught my father a lesson not to experiment with a runaway pony.

CF: How did patients pay your father for his services?

Kensinger: Well, my father was... he was very reasonable in his charges, and when he found a family that he said was hard pressed, he usually took payment in hay for the horses or maybe vegetables. I can remember one woman who would sell a bushel of nice tomatoes for 50 cents, and it was mostly produce, I think. And, of course, if they could pay in cash, they did.

CF: Do you remember how much it would have cost for a house call back then?

Kensinger: I just don't remember. But it wasn't very much compared to today. I think around three dollars, or something like that.

CF: That was for a house call? or an office call?

Kensinger: Yes, a house call.

CF: Was an office call cheaper than a house call?

Kensinger: Yes, usually. They got charged a minimum for their examination and all, and my father had a drug room and he prepared their drugs for them. They paid him for their drugs.

CF: They didn't use pharmacies at all back then? Your father did all the... ?

Kensinger: We did have a drugstore for a while in Lisbon, but my father didn't have confidence in the pharmacist, so he mixed his own medicines.

CF: How was your father notified that somebody needed his assistance if he had to make a house call? How did he know that he needed to go?

Kensinger: Well, we had telephones in those days, and mostly they'd come through the telephone. I remember one rather amusing incident. A lady came into the office. I guess we had just gotten up very early in the morning, and her mouth was wide open. And it seems like she had yawned and dislocated her jaw, and she couldn't close her mouth. And so her husband brought her to the office, and father had to manipulate that jaw. (Laughter)

CF: Do you remember the first phone your family had?

Kensinger: No, I don't think I remember that. Oh, I do remember a couple of things that happened to him after we moved there. There was a very nice man by the name of Andreas that lived in the country, and he had injured his eye in some way and it had gotten infected--so badly infected that my father had to remove it. And there in the kitchen of this home, he removed this man's eye. And very successfully he had a glass eye after that, but there was no infection or any trouble. Then another case, a woman who lived a block or so from us--she was a big, heavy woman--got appendicitis, I



think it was. Or maybe it was gallstones. Gallstones, I guess. And father undertook to operate on her in her kitchen. And as I recall, my mother gave the anesthetic, and my father removed the gallstones; and that lady recovered and said she got along just fine. (Laughter)

CF: Oh-hh. So that was instead of using a hospital?

Kensinger: Yes. Cedar Rapids was the closest hospital, and there was no way of getting people up there.

CF: Didn't you use the hospital services in Cedar Rapids at all?

Kensinger: Yes, occasionally there would be a case that he felt he couldn't handle at home, and he cooperated with the physicians here who had connections with the hospitals, and the two usually worked together.

CF: Where and how were babies delivered?

Kensinger: Well, they were in the home mostly. Babies were delivered in the home, and of course they usually came at night. My mother would go with my father and help take care of the babies after they were delivered. And we children very often stayed home alone while she went with Father.

CF: Did you ever go with your father on any of his medical calls?

Kensinger: Well, I used to go, but I never had anything to do. I just visited with him along the way.

CF: What were the most common diseases that you remember your father dealing with?

Kensinger: Well, of course we had all the children's diseases: measles and mumps and... scarlet fever was quite rampant in

those days. And diphtheria occasionally. And once in a while there would be a streptococcus infection that affected the heart. And of course there was quite often appendicitis, and those cases usually came up to the hospital. I had my appendix out, I think, when I was about eighteen, and I was at Mercy Hospital that time.

CF: Do you remember any epidemics of any diseases when you were growing up?

Kensinger: Yes. After we came back from Montana, we had this disease that goes around... Oh, dear, I can't think of the name right now, but so many people died of it during the war. Do you remember?

CF: What was the disease like? What were some of the symptoms?

Kensinger: Well, it was like a very bad cold, it started out, and it changed into pneumonia. Influenza! Influenza. And in... I think it was 1918 that we had an epidemic of influenza, and many pregnant women died of it. And many, many men in the service died, ever so many. When we moved to Greene, there were widows--many widows--whose husbands had died in the war. I think that was the worst epidemic that I can remember. And my father at that time... that was the year that my older daughter was born, and just at the height of that epidemic in Lisbon, and my father never came into my room without wearing a mask. At that time my husband had taken a load of stock in from the ranch to Chicago, and he got it. And when he came back to Lisbon, he was a very sick man for a while. That was the time when our older daughter was born.



CF: Did you get to visit Cedar Rapids very much when you were growing up?

Kensinger: Yes, we used to come to Cedar Rapids to shop, oh, maybe two or three times a year. And usually we came on the train. And I can remember as a little girl standing on the platform with that train coming in, and I always had a secret fear that the wind would draw me under the wheels. I don't know why I thought that. (Laughter) I remember holding fast to my father's hand when I was a little girl. And we would get on the train and come to Cedar Rapids and do what shopping we needed; and then once in a while in the summer time when the weather was nice, we would come with the horses. We had a team and a surrey, like the surrey with the fringe on top in "Oklahoma," and we had horses--a stable of horses, I guess you'd better say--in a suburban acreage place by Bever Park. Somebody that Father knew where he could leave the team, and then we would take the streetcar downtown. That was a great event for us kids, and we'd spend the day shopping and take the streetcar back out to Bever Park and get our horses and drive on home.

CF: When you were in, what did you eat when you came to Cedar Rapids? Were there restaurants? Were there places to eat?

Kensinger: Well, I can't just remember. I think we brought our lunch, probably, but I really can't remember. But after we moved to Cedar Rapids, there were several places to eat downtown, and my husband and I would quite often go. And, in fact, after I was teaching in Mount Vernon, I used to come up on

the interurban. By the way, the interurban was built while I was still teaching, and they stopped right across the street from our house. I would be wakened in the morning by the thump, thump, thump, thump of the motor as it was getting started ready to come to Cedar Rapids. And that's the way I got to my classes in Mount Vernon, was on the interurban. And quite often my friends and I would come up on the interurban to attend a play or some special event going on. I think the last car back was at eleven o'clock. We always aimed to get the eleven o'clock back home.

CF: What do you remember about your first car ride?

Kensinger: Well, the first car--I think it has been written up in the Gazette years ago--but a man by the name of Furnace decided he would design and have built an automobile. So he went into Chicago and submitted his design and had his car built. Well, of course, everybody in town was excited about it. According to the pictures nowadays it was a queer-looking vehicle. But Mr. Furnace was very generous about giving people rides, and I remember riding to Mount Vernon and back in his car. Every once in awhile he'd load up some youngsters and take them for a ride.

CF: What do you remember about your first plane ride?

Kensinger: I think we were having some kind of fair or show of some kind south of town. A man had come with a single-engine airplane--I guess it was single engine, it was just a little one anyway--and he was taking people up to ride for a dollar apiece. I decided I wanted to have that experience,

so I took one of the children--I don't remember which one--  
on my lap, and we had a trip around Cedar Rapids for a  
dollar. (Laughter)

CF: Do you remember what year this was?

Kensinger: No, I don't, but it must have been not too long after we  
came to Cedar Rapids.

CF: So it would be 1924?

Kensinger: Well, it would have been later than that. I think more  
likely in the thirties.

CF: What do you remember about your favorite toys as a child?

Kensinger: About what?

CF: Your favorite toys.

Kensinger: We didn't have very many toys. When I was growing up, I did  
have a beautiful doll that I got for one Christmas. And my  
mother gave me a trunk, and she made some clothes for the  
doll. I don't think I ever played with it very much, but I  
was very proud of it because it was a beautiful thing.

CF: More of a show piece?

Kensinger: Um hmm. And then I was always quite fond of coasting, and  
my father had a carpenter make us a sled and it had steel  
runners. And we were very proud of that, painted red. But  
the first time that I went out to use it, I somehow... I  
don't know how it happened, but I ran into a rock and cut my  
lip. And it just about ruined my Christmas celebration  
because I couldn't eat my Christmas dinner. (Laughter) But  
that sled lasted for years and years. I don't know what  
finally became of it. Then skates... I used to like to go

skating. And we had to walk about a mile, I guess, before we came to a pond--if we could get the boys to shovel the snow off.

CF: Was this just a natural pond?

Kensinger: It was a pond that they used to make ice for the ice houses. And there was a part of it that we could skate on.

CF: Tell me something about ice and refrigeration.

Kensinger: In those days we had... ice was kept in ice houses with sawdust for refrigeration. After we came to Cedar Rapids-- came to this house--we had... in those days we called them iceboxes. And we had to put a card up in the window if we needed ice; we'd put up 50 pounds or 25 pounds, whatever we needed. And we had that icebox for a number of years before we changed to... I think the next thing was a gas refrigerator, which worked very well, and we used that until we had a new electric one.

CF: What were some of your favorite activities in the summer? What types of things did you do?

Kensinger: Well, when we lived in Lisbon, my folks got us a pony and the cutest buggy you ever did see. It was a fat little pony and it was called Ginger; and we just loved him. We kids were given the responsibility of taking care of him. We had to curry him and clean his stall and take care of it. But we kept that little pony going most of the time, and we took all of our friends. I can't describe just what kind of little buggy it was, but there was a place at the back where maybe two or three kids could stand and then there was a

seat where the driver could go. And we traveled all over the country with that pony, and that was where we had the most fun. That smart little pony--he was a Shetland--he had belonged to children before, and he knew how to manage children. He did not like to go to Mount Vernon. He hated that hill, so when we would get out away from town far enough so that he was pretty sure we were headed for Mount Vernon, he decided he wasn't going to go. So he would just let the buggy... (Laughter) it was quite safe... and he would just turn us around in the road and send us back to Lisbon. And if we really needed to go to Mount Vernon or wanted to, we'd have to get Father in the buggy with us because he wouldn't go for the kids. He would for my father. He was a funny little Shetland.

CF: Did you have any special toys that you played with outside during the summer?

Kensinger: Well, I can't remember any special toys. But I had a girlfriend who lived out in the country, oh, maybe five miles I think it was, and I used to get my girlfriends together and get one of my brothers to take us out there and we would spend the day out on that farm. In the fall there were hazelnuts out there, and that was a favorite place to go.

CF: How long have you lived in this house?

Kensinger: Sixty-one years.

CF: Can you tell me something about the history of the house?



Kensinger: Well, this house was built on the corner of Second Avenue and Sixth Street and was moved to here. I haven't been able to find out the date, but it belonged to Witwers. Not George Witwer but his cousin, I think it was. And we moved here... we bought the place and moved here in 1925; and since then we have made many changes. When we came, there was an open porch, and the house itself was very different. We had a big open hall as we came in, and on the other side by this hall was what we would call the parlor. And you have seen houses with these big pillars that went up...

END OF SIDE ONE - BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

Kensinger: The east side of the house was a big parlor, it had big white pillars that separated that from a wide hallway, and in the parlor we had the piano. And our children all took music lessons. Don and Marsha both took cello from Alan Richardson. Alan is a very talented musician and an excellent teacher, so those two children have a pretty good musical background. Beth wasn't much interested. She took lessons from Mrs. Patterson, but she and Mrs. Patterson didn't see things eye to eye so finally she just quit. And she's not so musical. But the other two, with Alan Richardson as their instructor, did quite well. They went to national contests and did very well in their solo work, too. Back to the house.

The west side of the house is separated with French doors, and we could heat that better. We have a fireplace,

and we used to use the fireplace quite a lot; but after we got the gas heat we kind of quit using the fireplace. My husband wasn't very fond of it anyway. But it was a nice, comfy place, and on Christmas Eve we would often have the family here with the fireplace going and singing Christmas songs. It was a cosy time. We'd have a Christmas tree, of course. We used to laugh at my daughter's husband. He didn't have a good ear for music, but he tried to sing anyway and he was pretty badly out of tune sometimes. But it was fun. We all were together. We had bookcases built in here back in about 1952, I think, and we had to get rid of the piano at that time. We had the west side made into an apartment--just a small efficiency apartment, but they do have a bedroom upstairs if they want it.

CF: So now there is like two apartments? The house is divided into two apartments?

Kensinger: Well, my side of the house that used to be the parlor, is now made into an apartment, an efficiency apartment. It is a big room, and there is plenty of room to make...

CF: O.K. What did you do as a family for entertainment? When your children were growing up, what did you do for entertainment as a family?

Kensinger: As a family? Well, we took several trips in a car. My husband wasn't much of a hand for entertainment, but he did like to go visit the relatives. And we often did that over weekends. We had relatives in Poweshiek County. It was quite a little trip over there, but we enjoyed it. I guess visiting relatives was cheap entertainment over weekends.



CF: How do you think that your children's youth differed from yours? How do you think that their growing up was different from how you grew up?

Kensinger: Well, for one thing, my earliest recollections were of a farm, visiting my grandparents on the farm. I really enjoyed farm life. My children had... remember, there is a playground out at Daniels Park, and in summers they usually went out there. And then of course we had neighborhood children. We had a back porch out here that we called the play porch, and I furnished it with orange crates and different things and play equipment. And the children played out there by the hour. Of course as they got older they had older friends and did things together. We had a nice neighborhood.

CF: What can you tell me about the history of the Central Park Presbyterian Church right next door?

Kensinger: We joined the church in 1925, I think it was, and we were active in the church. I was a Sunday School teacher for years and years, and I started out as superintendent of the primary department. I taught children of all ages and even adults. Finally, our Sunday School became smaller, and I got interested in other things. So I gave up teaching. But a lot of those children are grown up and have families of their own now. Oh, it has been interesting.

CF: What changes have you seen in the church in the 61 years you've lived next door to it?

Kensinger: Well, one thing, they have built two additions to the church, and there have been changes in the membership. At one time we had a big Sunday School, but gradually that's diminished in numbers. I think a lot of these houses along here are now apartments, and they don't have children to come to Sunday School. And that has been a change. And I think the woman's work has changed quite a bit. We used to have a missionary society and a ladies' aid and what we called the Daughters of Martha. The Daughters of Martha did a lot of work for poor people. They did sewing, made quilts, and sewed for children and things like that. But you see, social security has taken over. The government takes care of lots of the people now that the churches used to. That's changed. I don't think our young people are quite as active as they used to be. We had a very active college group and high school group and younger ones, but now I think there is just one young people's group.

CF: Was this church a shoot off the First Presbyterian Church?

Kensinger: Well, this is Presbyterian.

CF: Was it a break-off from the First Presbyterian Church in Cedar Rapids?

Kensinger: No, I don't think so. I think this originated in the northeast side of town, and it was moved to the corner here. First, it was a little frame church, and then... I don't remember the year that this church--the original church--was made, but when they made the first addition then that little church was torn down. But when they were building that

addition, then they tore down that little church. Sunday School classes used to be here on our porch. (Laughter) That's kind of interesting, I think, that these young people don't \_\_\_\_\_.

CF: Do you remember anything about the rivalry between the Presbyterians and the Methodists?

Kensinger: No, I don't. My husband's family were Methodists, and when we first moved to town we belonged to St. Paul's. And my husband had a class of young people over there for a time. After we moved over here, it was so much easier to send the children to the church next door. And so we changed our membership. But I still like the Methodist church; I have lots of friends over there.

CF: What can you tell me about the Masons? What were the Masons?

Kensinger: The Masons?

CF: The Masons. The Masonic...

Kensinger: Oh, yes, the Masonics. My husband joined the Masonic Lodge when he was in Mount Vernon. He taught at Mount Vernon for seven years, and he joined the Masonic Lodge there. He always enjoyed the work, and after he came here, he belonged to the Mizpah Lodge. He also was a part of the men's chorus that sang at all the Masonic affairs. They always had a concert on Palm Sunday, and he sang in the chorus at that time. I don't think he ever held an office, but he was a Shriner and he enjoyed the Masonic work. I never joined the Eastern Star. Somehow I never could find time for it.

CF: What did the Shriners do in the community? What was their place in the community?

Kensinger: Well, I don't know about the community, but they do support the children's hospitals, you know. That's their main philanthropy. They did give a Palm Sunday concert every year, and they usually had a Shriner's Parade and they entertained the children with clowns and different things. It was just kind of fun. That's what it was meant for was just entertainment.

CF: O.K. What are some special memories that you would like to share? Just about anything. Any kind of activity.

Kensinger: Well, my husband and I belonged to a little social group that used to get together for bridge parties and suppers. And my husband also belonged to a quartet, and they used to meet with their wives and we'd have meals together and all. It was always interesting. Oh, the church affairs took up quite a lot of our time because there was always something going on over at the church.

CF: What types of things?

Kensinger: Well, they used to have suppers. That was an interesting thing. During the Depression it was very hard to make ends meet at the church, so the ladies at the church put on suppers, paid suppers. And they'd have a series of maybe six weeks when they would put on a supper once a week. The ladies worked very hard, but they really put on excellent suppers. And they didn't charge very much for them. So we

had big crowds, almost more than we could handle. Eventually, the times got better and they quit doing it. We had one lady by the name of Mabel Rice who liked to make the biscuit for chicken pie. She did it for all the circles. We were divided into circles, and these different circles would put on these suppers. And Mrs. Rice always made the biscuit for the chicken pie. Poor girl! She has passed away since then. But we worked over... I can remember one time I was chairman of the circle, and I bought my chickens from a farmer in the country. And he came in and killed the chickens for me, but I took the feathers off and got them ready to cook. We spent the whole day getting that supper ready. It was really work!

CF: So, did you keep chickens here?

Kensinger: Oh, no. We never had chickens in town. We had these friends in the country, and we could get them there. But that was one of the projects that kept the church going during that depression. And it was largely due to the women's efforts. They really worked. It was kind of hard to raise enough money to pay the preacher each time. But we somehow managed.

CF: Are there any other special things you'd like to share from your memories? It can be from your childhood or anything.

Kensinger: I suppose if I can think of them, I would probably think of things. Right now... I do remember the old depot, and I really liked that old depot. I used to, of course, take the train to Ames when I was in school there. And that was a



happy time when after vacation we would all... in this area, we would meet at that old depot and take the train for Ames. That was really...

CF: What were the trains like then? What was it like going up on a train?

Kensinger: Pretty much like they are now. I do remember one thing about them, the last train ride I took with the children. Marsha was about five years old and she'd been taking lessons from our preacher's daughter here, and Kathy said she wanted her to take part in a recital that they had down at Coe. Well, Marsha was pretty small to get up on that platform and play on that big piano. So Harry wasn't home that day, but I told the children if Marsha would do that I would take them to Lisbon on the train. And that was just enough incentive that she did get up and play. She had a little special talent. And we went down to the depot-- myself and the three children--and we got on the train and went to Lisbon. That was the dirtiest ride! (Laughter) Oh, I guess they didn't think much of the passengers in those days, and we all were so sooty when we got to Lisbon. But it was quite a thrill for the children to have a train ride. That was kind of fun.

CF: You said that you really liked the depot. What did you like most about the depot?

Kensinger: Well, I guess because maybe it was a friendly place and I met people that I knew and could visit with. As I grew older I liked the architecture of it. I really felt bad

when they tore it down. It had pleasant memories for me, and I thought it was a building worth saving. But, as my husband said, it took too much money, and nobody came forward with the money to preserve it. So down it went!

CF: What would you say are the most notable differences between the early nineteen hundreds and today?

Kensinger: Well, I think that there is quite a lot of difference in entertainment. I am pleased now that they are doing more with music in the schools. I think we have gone a little too far with jazz and some of the modern music. I'd like to see more of the classical come back.

CF: How do you think entertainment has changed, other than musically?

Kensinger: Well, the T.V., of course, has made a very big difference, and some of the T.V. programs are worthwhile; but so many of them today are simply trash. I seldom turn on... My favorite programs are "Washington Week in Review" and Rukeyser's program. I think they're worthwhile, and once in awhile something will come on that I'll be interested in. But I think the lot of it is just a waste of time. I do like some of the news programs.

CF: How does that compare with radio? Was radio better than television, do you think?

Kensinger: In some ways, yes. Now, I turn on the radio in the afternoon to an F.M. station at the University--at U.N.I. I like those programs. Classical music appeals to me. I really spend more time, I think, reading than I do listening to either radio or T.V.



CF: Before television did you listen to the radio a lot?

Kensinger: I think I enjoyed the afternoon programs on radio a little more. I like humorous programs once in awhile, too. I used to enjoy Jack Benny, but I can't seem to find any that quite equal Jack Benny.

CF: Weren't there any other changes that you've seen over the years? Anything that would stand out in your mind?

Kensinger: We used to go to the picture shows quite often, but the last one I saw that appealed to me at all was the one on Ghandi. That appealed to me. But most of them I just don't care for that way. I used to attend the movies once in awhile, but I just don't care enough to go now.

CF: You said earlier that visiting relatives and friends was the main form of entertainment. Do you see that still happening today?

Kensinger: No, I don't believe so. I really do... I think young people now maybe go to the movies more, and I think they attend dances more. It's kind of a frivolous generation. It probably does appeal to the young people today, but I'm too old to enjoy it.

CF: I want to thank you very much for everything you've told us about.

Kensinger: I'm afraid it hasn't been very much.

CF: No, it's been great.

Kensinger: Good.

END OF TRANSCRIPT





