Frank Byers, Jr. was born in Cedar Rapids in 1919. His parents were Frank C. Byers, an attorney and Myra Lyon Byers. Mr. Byers recalls when his father was a state legislator and senator for Iowa and tells us about his own career in real estate which began in 1945. We also learn something of the communications and lifestyle of the late 1920's and 1930's.

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS
1 --When were you born? Where?
1 --How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
1 --What are your parents' names?
1 --Where did you go to school?
2 --Are you married or single?
2 --Did you raise a family? How big?
2,26-29 --What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community
1. Transportation
2-4 --Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
29 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
4,5 --Horses and First Automobiles
5,10 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
6 --Hunter Airport and the first planes
--Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)

2. Communications
7 --Newspapers
6-7 --Radios
8,27 --Advertising
7-8,26 --Telephones

B. People in the Community
1. Amusements/Recreation
8-9--Motion Pictures
--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 (<u>The Tattooed Countess</u>)
--Marvin Cone

3. Lifestyle
10-11,13--Life before air conditioning
11--Winter Activities
12--Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
--Clothing
--Toys
--Saloons/Taverns
--Farm Life
26--Shopping

4. Family Life
24-25--Household Help
--Women's Roles
12--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
--Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)

5. Ethnic/Minority Life
12-13,24--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

2. Government (State) 16-19,20,21
--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
   --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)
   26 --Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
   --Farmers Market
   --Mills on Cedar River
   4 --Buildings Erected
   --Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
   --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)
   --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
   14-15 --Great Depression

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Frank Byers, Jr.

Conducted by Laura Derr
October 19, 1984
Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Transcribed by Sue Daugherty

Junior League of Cedar Rapids
Oral History Project
Interview with: Frank Byers, Jr.
Conducted by: Laura Derr
Date: October 19, 1984
Place: Cedar Rapids, Iowa

LD: Mr. Byers, will you tell us your full name and the name of your mother and father.

Byers: Frank C. Byers, Jr. My father was Frank C. Byers and my mother was Myra Lyon Byers.

LD: And where were you born?

Byers: In Cedar Rapids.

LD: How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?

Byers: All of my life, until about four or five years ago.

LD: And you were born in 1919?

Byers: 1919.

LD: Where did you go to school?

Byers: I went to school at Johnson grade school, Franklin High School, half a semester to the old Washington High School, and then to the where they consolidated them in Franklin for senior high and junior high.

LD: Okay, would you explain why you went to Washington for half a year?

Byers: Well, for many years, they started, according to your age, you would either start school in the fall, or you started your school in January. So you might start in January and then you'd end up graduating in January.

LD: But you did not complete high school at Washington.

Byers: I did not complete high school at Washington, no.

LD: Where did you go?

Byers: In fact, I went the one semester because I was a mid-year student. The one semester at Washington, then they transferred to the Franklin for senior high and then I went the last two years to a military school.

LD: That was out of the state?

Byers: That was out of the state.

LD; After you graduated from high school, then, did you go to over to the University?

Byers: Then I went to the Univ.of Iowa until I went into the service.

LD; You served in World War II?

Byers: World War II.

LD: And came back to Cedar Rapids?

Byers: I came back to Cedar Rapids after the War, yes.

LD: Are you married or single?

Byers: Married.

LD: Would you give us your wife's name and your family, members of your family?

Byers: My wife is Jean Byers and I have three sons, Craig Byers, Scott Byers, and David Byers.

LD: What has been your occupation or career during your adult years?

Byers: I've been in the real estate, or was in the real estate business, from 1945 until just recently.

LD: I'm going to start you out just going back to the years when you were growing up in Cedar Rapids, which would have been in the twenties and thirties and ask you what you can recall about the importance of trains and the Union Station when you were growing up here.

Byers: Well, the Union Station, which is for Fourth Avenue, goes through now at Fifth Street, was, of course, the hub for transportation with trains coming and going all hours of the day and night. Then along towards the thirties, they came out with what they called the "streamlined" trains, that were supposed to be a very fast, and were a faster train, which, for a long time drew crowds down to watch the train go through. Because they were a different style.

LD: Were those diesels?

Byers: Yes, I believe that they did switch to diesel at that time.

LD: Did you travel on the train much?

Byers: Yes. I traveled on the train several times to . . .oh, probably two or three times to Florida and the same to California.

LD: So there was no difficulty, then, going from here to the west coast or from here to. . .

Byers: No, actually, the Union Pacific, which hooked up with the Milwaukee, the trains later were switched so that you had to pick them up in Marion instead of the Union Depot in Cedar Rapids.

LD: Did you ever spend the night in one of the sleepers?

Byers: Yes, I did. A number of times. Those were interesting and were kind of fun.

LD: And you would just wake up in the morning?

Byers: Well, they came in, you had seats facing each other in a little room, and they came in at night and made a lower and upper bunk. Then you stayed and they had a little tiny bathroom right there in the room.

LD: What are your memories of the CRANDIC Railroad?

Byers: Well, the CRANDIC ran from downtown Cedar Rapids to Iowa City, and I think ran every hour. Then, of course, towards the end, it was stretched out more and more. And of course, on football days, they ran big specials. The station for the CRANDIC at that time was on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Third Street, where the Killian's parking ramp is now. They'd run two or three sections down to the football games, which was a great way to go to the game.

LD: It's too bad we don't have that now.

Byers: It's **really** too bad we don't have it now, because it was fun and of course, my father was the attorney for the CRANDIC line and I remember a lot of times, he'd get calls in the middle of the night, because on the front of the CRANDIC lines they would have what they called a "cow catcher". And every now and then they'd hit a cow and CRANDIC would have to call him and tell him because that was always a problem for the railroad.

LD: He'd have to deal with that.

Byers: Then he'd have to deal with the problem.

LD: The owner and that sort of thing.

Why did the CRANDIC finally stop running?

Byers: Well, they evidently just couldn't do enough business. With everybody starting to have their own automobile and so forth, they ran back and forth in their own cars.

LD: So the effect of cars was really pretty dramatic on public transportation.

Byers: Pretty much, yes. And I think that's what, with our good, improved highways and so forth killed public transportation.

LD: Can you remember the changes in the roads that took place during that time?

Byers: Well, of course, the original roads kind of wandered around every corner and up and down every hill until they came along with their heavy equipment and started cutting through hills and making the roads straight.

LD: Do you remember the seedling mile? That was in the thirties, wasn't it?

Byers: Yes, I remember, I know where the seedling mile is, and I remember them talking about it, which I guess was one of the first paved highways in the state of Iowa and that was between here and Mount Vernon.

LD: It was amazing it didn't happen till the 1930's.

Byers: It is amazing.

LD: What kinds of cars did your family own when you were growing up?

Byers: I guess the first car that I remember we owned was a Hanes touring car. It was a car that you could put the top down on it and in the wintertime you put side curtains on. Usually along towards December, my father jacked the car up and put blocks under all the wheels and waited again till spring to take it out again. It was just too cold to ride in.

LD: So the car, then, was not a year-round form of transportation, what did you do in the wintertime?

Byers: Well, it really was kind of a year-round, but you'd have to be pretty well bundled. We had another car which was a Whippet. The Whippet was a smaller car and had the roll-up windows, glass windows and so forth. It was a warmer car.

LD: And you drove that in the winter?

Byers: And we drove that in the winter and put the other car up.

LD: Do you remember or have any memories of the Hunter Airport, the first airport?

Byers: Yes, I remember the Hunter Airport. In fact, we used to go out on Sundays and watch the planes sometime.

LD: Did you ever fly out of there?

Byers: No, I never flew out of there, but I remember when they brought the first tri-motor Ford plane in and it was quite a thing. A crowd of people went out there to see it, and they did give rides.

LD: How old were you then?

Byers: (Laughter) I'd have to. . .

LD: A teenager, perhaps?

Byers: No. No, I would say, probably, nine or ten. The late twenties. I may be off a few years on that.

LD: Another thing that was changing a lot during those years were communications. How important was the radio in your household?

Byers: We had one radio, which was an Atwater Kent. You could listen. . (ringing phone interupts)

LD; How important were radios in your home when you were growing up?

Byers: We had one radio, which was an Atwater Kent radio, and it was, at that time, the most popular radio. It was a little difficult to listen to if you had a storm outside because of static. It was terrible on the radio and you couldn't get a good clear, unless it was a clear day, you couldn't hear it very well. But it was really a major form of news and entertainment. We listened to it a great deal. But we just had one radio.

LD: What shows could you remember that you used to listen to regularly?

Byers: After the radio, not when we first got it, but after the radio had been going for a while, there was Fred Allen and there was Jack Benny was on. Those were the ones, of course, that I remember because they were the ones I would enjoy, the more entertaining shows. At that time, the Longinne on Tuesday afternoon and Texaco ran the opera. I think to this very day, they still run it. They've done that ever since.

LD: So, there were regular news programs even in the twenties.

Byers: There were news programs, but when you really had something special, and about this time because there weren't an awful lot of people with radios, the newspaper came out with what they called an "Extra". And you'd be sitting in the house and you'd hear the boy out on the street yelling "Extra! Extra Paper!" and you would go out and find out what happened.

LD: Was the Gazette the only paper during the years when you . . .

Byers: The Gazette was basically the only paper, yes. One time the Gazette was two papers but that's before I remember.

LD: Did your family, then, depend primarily on the newspaper for most of the news?

Byers: I think basically, I can't remember that we sat and listened to the news on the radio too much. We got most of our news out of the newspaper.

LD: How important was the telephone in your household? Who used it?

Byers: Well, the telephone, at that time, of course, you had an operator and you had probably two or three numbers when you called somebody. You'd pick up the phone and wait for the operator to answer and

give her the number and she'd connect you.

LD: Were you allowed to use it for your social calls?

Byers: Well, I was allowed to use it, yes. It also was static-y. Sometimes it would be hard to hear on it. Particularly long distance calls. That's why I think some older people today when they call long distance shout because they used to have to shout to get it through.

LD: But there was just one exchange by the time that you were growing up and you didn't have more than one telephone company to deal with.

Byers: No, just the one, just Bell Telephone. Then eventually the dial system came along.

LD: Do you remember advertising being important in the radio and in your life when you were growing up. That seems to be the period when there was a lot of advertising coming in.

Byers: Yes, I can remember some of the radio programs I listened to, I remember Fred Allen was sponsored by Ipana toothpaste and there was, each one had a certain program, basically that they sponsored.

LD: I still remember that, too.

In your lifetime you have seen that radio and television and all the media coming into the household what can you remember about changes in the amusements, in the movies, for instance, when you were growing up? Do you remember silent films? Did you ever go to see silent movies here?

Byers: Yes, I did go to silent movies. I can't remember an awful lot about the silent movie too much. I remember going to them and with the titles underneath telling you what they were saying and

so forth. Then I also kind of vaguely remember the beginning of the Al Jolson and some of his early movies, which I went to all of those, when the sound started because I think that's when movies realy became a lot more popular.

LD: Were movies a regular entertainment? Did you go a certain number of times? Did you go every week, do you remember?

Byers: I used to go quite often. That was sort of a Saturday afternoon entertainment, to go to the movie and, of course, they had a lot of the Charlie Chaplain and good kid's movies at that time.

LD: Do you remember the movie houses you went to?

Byers: Yes. Basically, I remember when they opened the Paramount Theatre down here and that was quite extravagant, fancy . . . .used to go to what's now called the Capital, it was the State Theatre, on Third Avenue. Then there was the . . .it was right in the same spot on Second Avenue, there was a movie theatre, and the same spot on First Avenue. One was the Palace and the other was the Isis, over on First Avenue, I think.

LD: So there were quite a number of. . .

Byers: There were quite a few, yes. Then, of course, the Iowa Theatre was built, and then a few years later, the Paramount Theatre. Of course, those were large theatres.

LD: The Paramount would have been probably in the twenties, then.

Byers: No, I think probably, maybe it was the late twenties, probably it was.

LD: Do you remember the Alamo Amusement Park? Is that a place that was still. . .

Byers: The Alamo Amusement? No.

LD: I know it was in the teens. And the early part of the. . .

Byers: No. I don't know that.

LD: What other kinds of things do you remember doing as a youngster growing up in Cedar Rapids, for fun? In other words, did you participate--nowadays we participate in so many organized sports and things.

Byers: Well, I think, and it's kind of silly but, when I was in grade school, the ice man had a cart pulled by a horse and I used to hear him coming down the street and I got to be a good friend, so I'd go and climb up on the wagon seat and ride around while he delivered his ice. I'd go three or four blocks away from home and then get off and go back home. I enjoyed that. I can remember when we lived on 19th Street SE, I can remember when that was not a paved street. In fact, when they paved that street, they put black top in there and to the best of my knowledge, that black top has never been replaced and they've only had minor repairs on it. I don't understand how they did such a good job.

LD: So that was not a brick street.

Byers: No, that was never a brick street, it was a gravel street and then it was put blacktop on there.

LD: In relationship to the iceman, that makes me think of a concern that a lot of people have brought up in relationship to that period, there was no air conditioning in those days. Do you remember doing certain things to stay cool in the summer and places you would go or things that you would do to try to keep cool?

Byers: We had--and I think a lot of houses had--what they call a "sleeping porch" on the house, which has since been closed in which is just

screened in where people would go out, move their beds out there in the summertime and sleep to catch the movement of air and so forth and electric fans and that was about it. Because I remember it was awful hot. Particularly, I think it was the years 1934 and 1935, when you had the dust bowl and everything, that it was so hot. I can remember waking up in the morning and the entire room was just gray where the wind had blown all night and blown dust in and had just left a coating over everything in the room.

LD: So the dust bowl even was felt as far as. . .

Byers: Yes. It blew dust into town. Nowadays, they hold the soil better, but it was actually like a cloud, just blew the dust everywhere.

LD: I was thinking of Oklahoma.

Byers: Yes. No, it blew around here.

LD: In the winter, then, conversely, you didn't have the same kinds of heating arrangements. How did you heat your home?

Byers: Well, we had a hot water heating system in the house. It was coal fired. I remember that my father went down in the morning and he had to shake the grates of the ashes through and then shovel them out. He kept a big metal bucket there and he'd haul them out, put them in the alley and the man would come by once a week and pick those ashes up. Then he'd have to throw coal into the furnace twice a day, in the morning when he went to work and usually when he came home at night.

LD: So it was a constant daily routine.

Byers: It was a constant thing, you had to keep going.

LD: In your family, what are the holidays that you remember as being the most significant?

Byers: Well, I think probably, of course, naturally, Christmas. That's for everybody. Then I think the other two holidays that were most enjoyable were probably Easter and the Fourth of July. Because we used to always. . . I think, then, many, many families would get together and go out into the country and have a large picnic on the Fourth of July and play baseball and they had a balloon that was out of paper that you put a candle or something in and it was like your hot air balloons that you have today with only in a miniature size, and would send those up and all kinds of firecrackers.

LD: Fireworks were not regulated then.

Byers: Fireworks were a big thing. It was exciting as a child, as exciting as Christmas, really.

LD: As you were growing older, could you describe a typical date when you were a teenager or when you were dating?

Byers: Well, I suppose a typical date--probably, we usually went to the movie and then afterwards, we'd go to the Butterfly and have a soda or something, which is still down there. Or out to the Yacht Club, it was out on Ellis Boulevard, near where they rent the canoes and so forth, or used to rent canoes, I don't even know.

LD: Was there dancing there?

Byers: Yes, there was dancing there, by nickelodeon.

LD: Do you remember eating out often when you were growing up?

Byers: We didn't eat out much. No, I don't. In fact, our family just didn't eat out much.

LD: We're told that there were, in the twenties, that there were as many as thirty Greek restaurants here in Cedar Rapids.

Byers: Yes, there were quite a few. There was the Second and Third Avenue Virginia which were Greek restaurants. I can't remember now, but our family didn't eat out much. I do remember though, that we always had fish on Friday night because--not that we were Catholic--but because the refrigeration wasn't good and that was the only day of the week that you'd get good, fresh fish.

LD: Makes sense.

Your family were members of the Cedar Rapids Country Club, that started in about--was it the twenties?

Byers: The Cedar Rapids Country Club, I think, maybe started before that.

LD: Can you remember what the Country Club was like during those days?

Byers: Yes, I remember the Country Club. It was a large, wooden building with a big, screened-in porch on it. They put that pool in out there in 1921, so I think that the club probably dates back to the mid-teens.

LD: The brick building then was built, , ,

Byers: The brick building was built in 1928. It's when they started it. They tore the old clubhouse down and built the brick building.

LD: Were there a lot of activities for youngsters in those days?

Byers: No, there really weren't. Today there are a number of activities. But in those days, you just went out and either took a tennis racket and played tennis or you went swimming, played golf. Nothing was crowded. Because there weren't that many people around.

LD: That period of the twenties, you were awfully young then, but do you have memories about prohibition and its effects on your family or on people around you? Did you hear people talking

about it?

Byers: Oh, I'm afraid I don't remember too much about that because I know that I heard them talking about it some but I really don't think I was quite aware that much about what it was. No, I really wasn't. I was aware,very much so, at the time when they repealed it. Because I was about an age when I would understand it. But during the period when they were probably getting alcohol from bootleggers and so forth, I just wasn't aware of it.

LD: well, then, that brings us up to that period of the end of the twenties and the early thirties. You would have been ten, eleven, twelve. . .

Byers: Yes.

LD: . . .just really becoming aware. How did the onset of the Depression and that period right in the early thirties affect you and your family? What can you remember about that?

Byers: It probably didn't affect us as much as it might have a lot of people. I do remember, though, that it seemed to me, practically--well, it would go in spurts--but it seemed to me, at least once or twice a night around dinnertime, somebody would come and ring the doorbell and ask if they could have a dime for some food or coffee or something to eat. They didn't care whether you gave them the money, if you gave them something to eat. So we often would send them around to the kitchen door and after we'd had dinner, we'd--whatever--if there was ever anything left and so forth, why we'd give it to them. But there were lots of people coming around ringing the doorbells and asking for help.

LD: Were they primarily men?

Byers: Primarily men.

LD: Then you noticed, then, that there were a lot of people just moving around.

Byers: Yes, these were people, I think, that with no jobs and no attachment. But a lot of them were willing . . . would come and ask for work, too. They'd come to the door and say, "Have you got anything to do around the yard?" or "Clean up your basement?" We would occasionally have them work in the yard and so forth if we had anything around that they could do.

LD: Now you were a student at Johnson. Did you notice that that period had an effect on your classmates? That there were a number of people who really seemed to be in poverty during that time?

Byers: No, I don't think people generally were quite as . . . They were aware that this was taking place but I don't think . . . You helped somebody that came around, but I don't think that people were as conscious about . . . Maybe older people were and I wasn't aware of it. I knew that some people were having struggles, but I never thought of the fact that they might be having trouble getting something to eat.

LD: Well, you were a youngster, too.

Byers: That's right.

LD: It didn't have the same obvious effect on you as it might have had on an adult. That kind of brings me up to a point where I wanted to talk with you about your father. Because of his incredibly rich career in the state legislature, and he began, I believe, in 1929, did he not?

Byers: Yes, he did.

LD: Which was that time when so many things were changing. What do you remember about that period, because you were ten years old at that time, so . . . Did he have to be away from home a great deal in order to be a member of the legislature?

Byers: Yes, at that time, the legislature met every other year, along towards about January 20, and usually would adjourn about the middle of April. He was elected as a Republican at that time and --in fact of the matter, was a Republican always--and went through all of the Democratic landslide years and was still elected. He had a very good rapport, I think, with everbody. He could talk to all of the various walks of life and got along very well with them. But he had to go and he would go away from home and take a hotel room in Des Moines. At that time, they were paid very little, it cost him out of pocket to be in the legislature, because by the time he paid for his hotel room and ate his meals out and got transportation back and forth to Des Moines. He'd come home for weekends, usually on a Friday afternoon--so he could take care of some of his law business--and go back on Sunday night. It was an out of pocket expense for him.

LD: So his career as a legislator was not the way that he made his living.

Byers: No. He was in the state legislature for, I think, one or two terms, which meant that you ran every two years. Then he ran for the state senate, which was a four-year term. Then he stayed in the senate for the rest of his career, until he finally retired from it. He was President pro tem of the senate a number of times. And was on the good committees in there.

LD: Were you aware, at that time, of what he was doing? Did he talk a great deal about the legislature? And about politics?

Byers: Yes, we discussed politics in our house quite a bit. I can remember Governor Clyde Herring, who at that time was a Democrat, coming to visit our house once in a big, long seven-passenger black Cadillac with State #1 plate on it, or something, coming in the drive. Of course, that impressed me a great deal as a young boy.

LD: Did he often bring legislative peers or friends home with him?

Byers: No, but they would stop by to see him. If they happened to be going through town, they may have wanted to stop about a certain particular problem that they were working on or that he might be a chairman of a certain committee. He'd get calls a great deal on the phone and would talk at length with them on the phone. He got calls from people in Cedar Rapids all the time that wanted help with this or didn't like that.

LD: That's my next question. Were you aware that his position with the state legislature, did that bring him close to the politics of Cedar Rapids? Did he have a lot of interaction with the local Mayor?

Byers: Well, no, not so much so, I don't think so. Just basically with the people. I suppose he did. Probably, I'm sure that the city offices had had certain axes to grind over a particular problem would come see him, but that was probably down in his office. He did have--and I think he may still have--he had the longest continuous service to the state, which was 32 years. I don't think anybody's had a continuous . . . There was an Arch MacFarland, out

of Waterloo who might have been in the legislature maybe 34 years, I think, but his wasn't continuous. He was in office and then out several times.

LD: In 1932, when he became state senator at a time when the Roosevelt Democrats practically did take all the offices. Do you remember anything about that election? Do you remember that victory? Did it seem to be a really important thing to you and your household?

Byers: I don't remember so much my father's part of that election, except that he won, as I do remember, of course, I remember the Presidential campaign and so forth. I guess I just finally got the point where I expected him to win the election. (Laughter)

LD: You were never disappointed. (Laughter)

Byers: In fact, I think a lot of times, he didn't even have opposition. I think people didn't run against him.

LD: So he developed that kind of relationship . . .

Byers: Yes, he had a very good going relationship with both the unions in Cedar Rapids as well as the businessmen in Cedar Rapids. So he got along with both sides.

LD: His district was larger than Cedar Rapids, though, wasn't it? It was, I presume, a portion of eastern Iowa.

Byers: No. I think it was Linn County and I don't think it went beyond Linn County. I think at that time, and I should know but I don't, it was a large area. It wasn't the way it is today.

LD: Did you ever go to Des Moines to see him?

Byers: Yes, I went down to Des Moines. Used to go down there a number of times, and we'd sit in on a session, particularly if there was something important coming up. He was used as a mediator a lot of

times when they'd get into a scrap and couldn't resolve the problem, they often asked him to step in and he seemed to be able to get the sides together.

LD: The Democrats and Republicans, or. . .

Byers: I remember the oleo battle, they had such a time on that and he finally, I don't know, got involved in that some way and they seemed to get it worked out some way finally.

LD: Can you explain that--what the oleo butter fight was?

Byers: Well, they felt that that was going to take away--of course, at time you had more cows and so forth on the farms--and the farmers felt that that was going to hurt radically the sale of their butter, that people would all buy oleo and they wouldn't be able to sell their butter. They didn't want the oleo. If it was going to be on the shelf, they wanted it white, they didn't want it colored so it would look like butter. That was a big scrap, too.

LD: The oleo people won, though, didn't they.

Byers: Yes, the oleo people finally. . .because the public really wanted oleo.

LD: Did you get the impression, when you were growing up, that there was a real urban rural hostility or that there was a difference between the desires of those two parts of the legislature that came into conflict? I just wonder about that because of the . . .

Byers: No, I don't think. . . If it was so, I don't think I was too much aware of it. I did always that the urban people seemed to live better. The farmers didn't have any of the conveniences or anything. I didn't feel that the farmers lived as well. But I wasn't

aware of anything else.

LD: I just wondered if that would be a big power struggle or power play.

Byers: Not that I was aware of.

LD: What do you remember were your dad's--did he have a sense that there were certain things that he was most proud of, that he had achieved in his career? Did he ever talk about that? That there were some achievements that really meant a lot to him?

Byers: Well, of course I think--getting back to the oleo thing--I think he felt they should have oleo. There was another, I can't think of them right now, I know there were a number of issues that came up. I think he felt that the state should have state liquor stores, you know-- for each state to decide whether they were going to be wet or dry. I know that he fought the feeling that the state should be a wet state and there were a lot of people very strongly against that. I can't remember any of the other issues. I know another one, which was a silly issue, that got to be a big issue, were cap guns in the state of Iowa.

LD: Cap guns?

Byers: When you didn't have fireworks anymore, whether kids should be allowed cap guns. That was a big issue. They had to make a law where kids could have cap guns.

LD: Do you think he'd be in favor of the lottery today?

Byers: I suppose he would. I think it's probably a good way, it seems to be raising a lot of money in other states.

LD: It sure does.

Byers: I think it's ridiculous in a lot of ways, but I guess it raises

good money.

LD: It does seem to really bring it in.

Were there any particular things that you remember that he was disappointed about his career, things he didn't feel he could achieve or battles that he fought that he didn't think he won as a senator.

Byers: No. I guess I can't remember any. I really can't remember any particular disappointments.

LD: How did he feel about the New Deal?

Byers: Well, of course, he was very much agains the New Deal. It wasn't in his politics, so he wasn't in favor of that at all. He was a basically conservative individual and so I think that he felt that that was a lot of needless spending.

LD: He must, then, have felt that the state of Iowa could handle its problems.

Byers: Yes, and actually the state of Iowa had a balanced budget, and has had a balanced budget through most of its . . . not like a lot of states. And I think they were careful, and of course, he was particularly careful to . . .he felt that you can't spend more than you take in.

LD: Right. But from what I read, he did make a lot of legislation that related to taxes...

Byers: Yes, he did. It's a shame that I just can't recall all this, but he was involved in really most of the major things that came up through a number of years, there.

LD: Well, you know, you can always find that in the record books. Really, what's important is what you remember about it, what his

feelings were that you can remember about that period. Those are things we can't get anywhere else.

Do you remember the major local leaders when you were growing up here in Cedar Rapids? Did your dad interact a lot with the people--I suppose the term is "movers and shakers"?

Byers: Now, you see, he basically, he started out, he was a city attorney at one time in Cedar Rapids, for a short period of time. Then he served on the school board for a number of years. I remember, of course, as a young boy growing up, his serving on the school board. And just as today, you get into a lot of hassles and problems on that. He was quite active in the school board for a number of years.

LD: But then when he went for the legislature he didn't. . .

Byers: He dropped out of the school board because he just couldn't handle both. No. At that time, the school board had a place up on A Avenue, a big building, that was their headquarters.

LD: Do you remember any situations or any conflicts that were going on in the state legislature that really affected Cedar Rapids when you were growing up? Certainly every state law affects the local community, but I guess I'm curious as to whether or not that the city was tied very much to what was happening in Des Moines in those days.

Byers: I can't remember if there was any specific incident as such. But I'm sure that there were, I mean he was working for Cedar Rapids, as much as he possibly could. No, I don't remember any specific incident.

LD: Do you remember any rivalry between different regions of the state

during that time? In other words, was there a Des Moines Cedar Rapids rivalry or was there, oh we talked about the urban-rural situation.

Byers: Well, I think there was probably. . . Of course, whenever a state legislator goes down there he's trying to get everything he can for his area as much as possible. So there is a certain amount of rivalry, but I don't remember anything specific.

LD: Anything else, any stories or anecdotes that you remember about that you'd like to share about your dad?

Byers: No. I really can't think of anything specific, which is too bad, I should dig back, but I do remember that he was very active in most of the problem-type things that came along and once he and this--the Arch MacFarland that I mentioned over in Waterloo--were honored by a joint session. They called them together once and had a big honor for them. Both when they were in their latter, probably their last few years that they were there.

LD: Did he ever want you to go into law or politics?

Byers: I think he would have been very pleased if my brother or I had gone into law and politics. He never said too much, but you know he would kind of indicate that it would be nice if I got into it. But I never did.

LD: And your brother is not.

Byers: No. My brother didn't even stay in Cedar Rapids.

LD: It's very hard to follow in those footsteps.

Byers: That's right.

LD: I'm going to switch gears here a little bit and ask you to try to think back to, again, the period when you were growing up. Do you

remember interacting a lot with the Czech community and with people who lived in the Czech--what we consider now Czech town or Czech village? Were there many Czechs that came to Johnson? Do you just have any memories of the ethnic background in Cedar Rapids?

Byers: No. I guess I really didn't think of somebody as being Czech or anything else when I was a young boy. I know that certain friends of mine, that I went to school with, were Czechs. But I just didn't think too much of it at the time. They were just a student in school.

LD: Just kids.

Byers: Just kids in school with me and I didn't. . .oh, I think once in a while you kidded them about it. I used to hear maybe the family kidding about the Czechs or something. But I didn't really think too much of it.

LD: Were there a number of people that you remember who worked as household help? This would not be Czech, this would be more Amana girls, or . . .

Byers: Well, I do remember, yes. Growing up, with the old wringer washer, many people had a lady who would come in and do the washing each day and then they would iron and go home. And I think a number of people had it. And they was basically, were usually people from the Czech section of town, down from the southwest side of town. I remember we had a lady who came out and she would come on Mondays and do the laundry in the morning and wash and then she would iron in the afternoon and go on home. I think probably a lot of people who had maids had somebody that was working in the

house--domestic help--they were usually, I think, Czechs.

LD: Rather than live-in, they'd just come in.

Byers: They'd come in and go, yes. And, of course, a lot of people did have live-ins because, I think, a lot of the bigger, older houses had a third floor and extra rooms in them.

LD: Where did you grow up? Which home?

Byers: On Nineteenth Street. Basically Nineteenth Streeet and Third Avenue. So we had a fairly sizeable house. It was down in the middle of the block between Third Avenue and Blake Boulevard. We had four bedrooms and two baths on the second floor and two bedrooms and a bath on the third floor.

LD: But you did not generally have someone that lived in with you.

Byers: Yes, we did have some that lived in. We had some that lived in until World War II. At one time we had two people that lived in. And you see, there's another case where, those were young girls that came from the farm. That's why, maybe that's why I think of the farm as not quite as well able to support, so those young girls would come in and, of course, got the board and room and so much a week. At one time, when we were small, we had two live ins.

LD: Did those young women generally end up going back to the farm? Do you have a sense of whether they would stay in the city?

Byers: No. The ones that I can very definitely remember, of course, they would have two days a week off. Someone would come and pick pick them up and they had dates and they just got married and most of them ended up living in town. Married and had families and we used to call and visit them and I remember definitely that almost all of them got married and lived in town.

LD: So they became kind of like members of the family, too.

Byers: Yes, we had one of them that was with us for 12 years.

LD: So that's almost like a sister.

Byers: Yes. That's right. She came as a young girl, probably 17 or 18, and she probably didn't get married until she was probably close to 30. Of course, a lot of people waited later to get married then, because they couldn't afford it.

LD: Of course, that was in the Depression.

Byers: Yes. It was the Depression, they just didn't have the money, they couldn't support each other.

LD: In the household that you were growing up in--let me just pursue this a little bit, because I think we have changed so radically in the way we live in domestic life that we--did your mother, in your memories, do a lot of shopping? Did she go shopping for her groceries? Did she generally have it brought to the house? Do you remember how she handled those chores?

Byers: She did not go to the grocery store. She did all of her shopping on the telephone. She'd call on the phone. She'd order her meat. She ordered all of her groceries. Of course, the milkman came--until quite recently, really--delivered milk to the house. They came really daily, I think she could call the grocery store.

LD: Do you remember where she shopped?

Byers: There was a Pearley's Grocery Store on First Avenue and the 1500 block. She got a lot there. And down on the corner of Fifteenth Street and First, where Keller's Office Supply is, there was a Cedar Rapids. . . **(End of side one)**

At that time, in fact, I started out because I had originally

looked at real estate, and had gotten interested in it, in Miami Beach, I went to Miami Beach and got a license. But then, I didn't know a single soul, just not one person. And that's a difficult way to get into real estate. After six or eight months, I realized that that wasn't the way to do it, so I came back to Cedar Rapids. And got into the real estate business at that time. Of course, it was right after the war, and I couldn't even sit down to eat my dinner. When you'd put an ad in the paper, the phone rang. It just never quit ringing. I'd get at least 25-30 calls a night off an ad.

LD: In other words, there was a great need for housing.

Byers: Great need for housing and people didn't really have that much money. They wanted to rent and, of course, houses were cheap then. But there were many people calling for rentals and so forth, but then there were a lot of people looking to buy. The financing was so inexpensive, the interest rate was 4 percent if you borrowed on the house.

LD: What would you consider to be the greatest period of real estate here in Cedar Rapids?

Byers: I think probably during the 1950's. It was great, yes, because really and truly, everything, of course, was inching up in price, but there was lots of building going on and there were an abundance of customers--you had to work, they didn't come in and take it away from you, I mean you had to work at it. The real estate business at that time, all of the people had been in had gotten in in the early twenties. They were all older people. There weren't too many younger people. I was one of the few. John Bickel and

I were really the two young people in the business right after the War. Then, of course, more and more young people started coming in.

LD: You actually were involved in home building, for awhile weren't you?

Byers: Yes, I did. Then I built homes and both involved in selling, resale, and building homes.

LD: I guess that was a period when the population of Cedar Rapids was really growing.

Byers: Population was growing and Collins Radio was expanding. The reason I started building homes was because people would go out with me and they'd say, "Why don't you have such-and-such type of house in Cedar Rapids?" and "I don't know why nobody is building this type of house." So I thought, well, I guess that's true, so I guess I'll start building it. And it was good. It was great. In fact, I was building one for myself and a man kept arguing that he couldn't find that type of house and I showed him the plans on the seat and he bought the house I was building for myself.

LD: (Laughter) I guess those days are not the same anymore at all.

Byers: No, it's not that way anymore.

LD: Not from what I hear Craig say.

Byers: No, it's not going to be that way again, either in the very near future.

LD: It's too bad. That pretty much answers my last question. Although, I'm sure there's more to it than that, why did you come back to Cedar Rapids and why did you stay here over your whole period of life?

Byers: That was why. I knew that there'd be opportunities in Miami

Beach and I'm sure have since improved and they were. (Laughter) That's been a great expanding area. But you have to have friends along the way and to sit down and make all new friends when I had a lot of friends back here and knew a lot of people to work with, it just seemed sort of foolish. And the opportunities were great down there but they were also very good here. And I think I was fortunate to live in the period that I did, because that was a very expanding period in our economy.

LD: It was the right time to be where you were.

Byers: It was the right time to be the age I was, that's right. (Laughter)

LD: Well, I think I have just about exhausted my questions. Were there areas or topics, that I have just sluffed over that maybe you can think of?

Byers: No, because you probably have talked to people about the era when when we had the streetcars that were going up and down everywhere which were nice.

LD: I was going to ask you about the streetcars.

Byers: Of course, they were great. Of course, that was terrific, you'd just jump on the streetcar and ride downtown. They couldn't change their route very well.

LD: They went right up to, then. . .

Byers: They went up Grande Avenue and they went up Bever Avenue, I believe, they switched down there, they'd cross and switch in the 1200 block of Third Avenue. Then you had two systems. You had the Light Company had a system that went out to Sinclair Avenue out the middle of Blake Boulevard, that's why that parkway's there. Also, they had an Interurban, that went to Lisbon. That came out

Blake Boulevard and went on out east of town. And they had an Interurban to Waterloo and Cedar Falls. . .

LD: . . . And all of those, I guess, went by the wayside . . .

Byers: . . . they just went by the wayside because of the cars, yes.

LD: Were you involved in any of the Cedar Rapids colleges, Coe or Cornell?

Byers: No, I wasn't because, see, I went down to Iowa and I just didn't get involved.

LD: Well, I think unless. . . you were too young to know about these fires, explosions, etc.

Byers: Yes, unfortunately.

LD: Do you remember anybody talking about the Douglas Starch Works explosion?

Byers: Vaguely, but not too much.

LD: That would have been the year you were born. 1919.

Byers: Yes, I knew it was 1918 or 1919.

LD: I think that covers most of my concerns. I really appreciate the time that you have given me.

Byers: Well, I don't know whether I was much help to you or not.

LD: Oh, yes.

(END OF TAPE ONE)