

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH SISTER MARY ELEANOR CASHMAN
CONDUCTED BY SARAH START-WALDIE

September 9, 1984
Mt. Mercy College
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

10-07
2005.10.15

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

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

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

1. Transportation

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

2. Communications

- Newspapers
- 18-19--Radios
 - Advertising
 - Telephones

B. People in the Community

1. Amusements/Recreation

- 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 (The Tattooed Countess)
- Marvin Cone

3. Lifestyle

- Life before air conditioning
- Winter Activities
- 19-20 --Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving,
- 22-23 Christmas)
- Clothing
- Toys
- Saloons/Taverns
- Farm Life

4. Family Life

- Household Help
- Women's Roles
- Childrens' Activities/Behavior
- Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)

5. Ethnic/Minority Life

- Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
- Indians
- Segregation of Blacks
- Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

1. Education

- 3 --Cedar Rapids Schools
- Coe College
- 25-26 --Mount Mercy College
- Cornell College
- 4-7,10-14,21-22 --Sacred Heart Convent

2. Government

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

3. Medical

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

4. Business and Economy

- 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

- 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

8-10 --Great Depression

Sister Mary Eleanor Cashman was born in 1907 on a farm near Coggon, Iowa. Her parents were Elizabeth and Thomas Cashman, and she was sixth in a family of eight children. When she was three years old, her family moved to Cedar Rapids for two years, then back to the country in 1912. She did not return to Cedar Rapids until 1920, when she entered Sacred Heart Academy. In 1925, she became a nun and has served as a teacher at both the elementary and college level in the years since. She remembers the conception of Mt. Mercy College in 1928 and its growth over the years. She served as Mother Superior of Sacred Heart Convent from 1965-1971.

Interview with Sister Mary Eleanor Cashman

Date of Interview: 9 September 1984; Mt. Mercy College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Interviewer: Sarah Start - Waldie

Transcriber: Colleen S. Hansen

SSW: Sister, I would like you to give me your full name, when you were born, and where.

Sister: I am Sister Mary Eleanor Cashman; a Sister of Mercy from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I was born on March 7, 1907, on a farm near Coggon, Iowa. My parents are Elizabeth and Thomas Cashman, and I am the sixth in a family of eight children.

SSW: Did you live all your growing up years in Coggon?

Sister: No, when I was three years old, we moved to Cedar Rapids. That was in 1910, and we lived here for two years. Actually, we lived at 526 A Avenue West; the place where the Convent for the Sisters who teach at St. Patrick's is now.

My father worked as a motorman on the streetcars, and he also had a team of horses and drove a dray part of the time.

But they found that it was too difficult to feed six hungry children and themselves and so they moved back to the country in 1912. I lived in the country from then until I came to school at Sacred Heart Academy in 1920.

SSW: Tell me what it was like growing up in a family that was that large. Today, people just don't seem to have that many children, and you said that it was sometimes difficult to feed that many mouths. Did you help each other out?

Sister: It was a joy. Actually, I came at a nice place in the family. I was the fourth girl, and there were two boys so that my work was very limited. My older sisters took care of the housekeeping duties, and all I had to do was grow up.

SSW: Were there times when you felt you wanted more attention or anything like that or did the older kids in the family act as parents at times?

Sister: I never felt at all neglected. As I think back now, I think my mother really was very generous to me. It seemed like I always had very nice dresses. I had a little girl friend, and it seemed like I had more than she did. As far as having the older ones help me, when we had to do our school work at night it was wonderful to have an older sister who could teach you your multiplication tables and how to divide. They were very helpful. I attended rural school, and one of the joys would be after we walked that mile and a quarter home, to come home and find that they had had chocolate pie for dessert. And there was our dessert for us, waiting, and we were very pleased.

SSW: You grew up most of your childhood years in the country then. How does that differ from city life growing up wise?

Sister: I knew nothing except living in the country, and we had neighbors, and we had lots of activity. Just families going back and forth. The children enjoyed one another. I think we had a very good life.

SSW: From the time of your girlhood years, I understand you moved back to Cedar Rapids. Can you tell me why you decided to come back here?

Sister: My older sister, Eleanor, graduated from high school at Sacred Heart Academy and so then it was time for me to go to high school. It would have been necessary to either go to the public school in Coggon or to the parochial school in Ryan. We lived between the two towns. And in either case, transportation would be a problem because we didn't have buses at that time. So my girlfriend and I thought we would like to come to Sacred Heart Academy, and our parents consented and made it possible to do so.

SSW: About when was that?

Sister: That was in September, 1920.

SSW: You were saying about transportation, that they didn't have buses. What kind of transportation was there?

Sister: Well, there was the Illinois Central train that went from Cedar Rapids on through Coggon and Ryan and up to Manchester and on. We did have a Model T car. Other than that, in the winter time we had a sled.

SSW: That's something. Did you get gasoline from a gas station like we have now for the car?

Sister: Yes, there were gasoline stations at that time.

SSW: That's good. You didn't have to haul your gas. So you went to Sacred Heart. After Sacred Heart for high school, then what did you do?

Sister: Well, I graduated from high school in 1924. And on our robes we had MMP, because the Sisters had promised us that the new building which is now Warde Hall would be completed in time for us to graduate there. Actually, the windows hadn't been put in yet and so the place was not very habitable. But we did have our graduation in the new building. The MMP stands for Mount Mercy of the Pines which was the name that they originally planned for this new building. However, we were the only class to have that distinction because by the time the graduates of 1925 finished, they called it Mount Mercy Academy. Regarding my graduation, there are a couple of things I'd like to mention. Our class play was Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," and we put it on at the Majestic Theater on Easter Monday night.

SSW: Where was the Majestic Theater?

Sister: The Majestic Theater was right downtown. I am not sure which street and which avenue, but it was "the" theater in town at that particular time. We had it on Easter Monday night and then we were permitted to go home for our Easter vacation, because we had had to practice all during Holy Week.

Another recollection I have, is with regard to my graduation dress. At that time, Armstrong's had just added their women's department, and my parents came to town, and we went to Armstrong's and I got my graduation dress there. And, also, a dress for the Junior and Senior Banquet.

SSW: That's interesting. After your graduation then, what did you decide to do and, also, what did the women of that day do after high school graduation? What careers did they take on or what did they do with their lives?

Sister: Many of the girls that I graduated with went on to formal school or summer school and prepared themselves to teach. Others worked as secretaries. They had taken business courses in high school, and they worked as secretaries. As far as I was concerned, when I was a junior in high school, I began to think seriously about becoming a Sister of Mercy. I felt "called" to do that. I felt that I had a vocation to be a Sister and so I sought admission into the community. I visited with the Mother Superior and we settled on a date on September 24, 1924. So my father and brother and sister brought me in the Model T and we arrived at Sacred Heart Academy or Sacred Heart Convent. The first year I was what you call a postulant or candidate and then on July 16, 1925, I was received into the community. Another Sister and I--we were the first to be received in the Chapel at what is now Warde Hall. Prior to that, all the receptions had occurred at the chapel at Sacred Heart Convent.

SSW: I want to ask you at this point, before we go any further, I knew what I was doing at seventeen years old and I think a lot of teenage women are worrying about if they have pimples, who they might date. There are a lot of things you are awakening to at that age, and why in the world would you decide at such a tender age that you had a "calling" of a vocation in the Sisterhood? I'm just curious as to what strong urge brought that decision?

Sister: Actually, as I think about seventeen year olds today, I wonder about that too. But I really felt very strong about my decision. I had enjoyed dancing and parties and all that kind of thing, but it wasn't what I really moved in. And my parents consented. My mother quite reluctantly but, nevertheless, consented. I had one brother who particularly tried to convince me that I was making a mistake. But I made the decision. I was accepted by the community, and I never regretted it, thank God.

SSW: After you were postulant, you were then received as a novice, is that correct?

Sister: That's right. On July 16, 1925, the reception consisted of receiving the habit of the Sisters of Mercy; a black plait of

habit and wearing a white veil which indicated that you were a novice. And for two years, I was considered a novice. Two years later, on July 16, 1927, I was eligible to take temporary vows. That is to take vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and the care of the poor or sick and uneducated for three years. Now, it's done that way so at the end of that time, ^{if} you chose not to go further, you can leave without any obligation at all. Upon completion of the three years though on July 16, I was very happy to make permanent vows which means that I committed myself to live the religious life to the end.

SSW: Going back a little bit, tell me what were some of the considerations that you were dealing with as a postulant, as a novice and then as you took your temporary and then permanent vows.

Sister: As a postulant, I served as sort of a teacher's aide. We had small children in school at the time. I worked with the children from kindergarten to fourth grade. There were seventeen of them. I worked under the direction of a professed Sister. Then, after reception, I went to St. John's in Waterloo with four other Sisters. And I had an opportunity to teach fourth and fifth grades there under the direction of a very strict principal. But she was a very kindly soul too. Then, I returned to Sacred Heart Convent and that next year is what is called the cononical year. It's a year in which one spends time learning more and more about the religious life; taking courses in theology and that sort of thing. But all of the time from the very beginning, there was an opportunity to learn more about the religious life. We had a Sister who was in charge of the young Sisters and we met her daily for direction and for class work and that sort of thing.

SSW: Tell me a little bit about what "learning more about the religious life" entailed.

Sister: Well, we needed to learn about the first Sister of Mercy, Mother Kathryn McAuley, who established the Sisters in Dublin, Ireland in 1831. We needed to learn the traditions of the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids. We needed to be educated spiritually and had an opportunity to pray and to learn how to pray better and to meditate and all that.

SSW: What, exactly, were the traditions of the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids?

Sister: That would take along time to do. Do you really want to do that?

SSW: Just an overview would be fine.

Sister: Well, the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids had come here in 1875. Three Sisters had come from Independence, and they were invited by the pastor of what is now Immaculate Conception and there was a Convent under construction when they arrived at what is now the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company.

SSW: Where is that at?

Sister: Down on Third Avenue and, I think, about Sixth Street. The Sisters had a school, and they visited the sick. There was, at the same time, a hospital. I mean shortly after 1875, a hospital was built. In the earlies days, the hospital was just across from where the Gazette office is today and then later on, they moved to where the hospital was developed later on. But the Sisters always taught and took care of the sick. They visited the sick and did what social type of work that people do today.

SSW: So visiting the sick--is that someone in their home or in the hospital?

Sister: Either or both. And the poor came to the Sisters often to get help. And they did their best to help them.

SSW: So if someone came here to you, it might be to...would this be an economical kind of help or are you talking about emotional help? What kind of help were people asking for?

Sister: Just like today, people have all kinds of needs. And so the Sisters tried to fill the needs as they could.

SSW: You mentioned that at one point you took your permanant vows. When was that now?

Sister: 1930 .

SSW: And then tell me about what happened after you decided to take your permanent vows, as far as what then.... became your duties as a Sister.

Sister: All of the time from 1927 on, I was teaching in schools. I taught in the elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Dubuque for fourteen years. I was the principal and a teacher at St. Matthew's School in Cedar Rapids for five years. I taught high school at St. Wenceslaus for two years. And that brings us up to about 1940. In the meantime, in the evenings and on Saturdays we had college classes and then in the summertime I went to summer school. And all the time, I was working toward a degree. In 1928 when Mt. Mercy Junior College was opened, there was an opportunity for the Sisters to really get their associate degrees.

SSW: Prior to that time, you're saying that you could teach without a degree.

Sister: Without a degree, yes. You needed a certificate, but you could get a certificate with one year of college in the early days. In fact, you could get a teachers' certificate back in the twenties with just having had summer school.

SSW: That's interesting. I would like to know how you felt about the national things that were going on in Cedar Rapids and how they effected this big commitment that you had made with your life. Back when you were just starting into your Sisterhood, that was the time of the Depression. Before that, of course, was World War I. How was your life affected in any way by World War I?

Sister: I was attending rural school at that time, and I was living at home. And I recall how sad my sisters were when their boy friends went into the service, and it was a sad time. My older sister was really broken hearted and it was a sad time. I remember very well when we heard the whistles coming from Coggon on November 11, 1918, and we found out that the Armistice was signed. And jubilation was great, because everybody thought that the war was over and life was for democracy and all that.

SSW: Wasn't there, back then, a big flu epidemic around that time.

Sister: Yes, in 1918. It happened in our area that it seemed like one person in each family died as a result of the flu. My sister, Eleanor, who had graduated from Sacred Heart Academy in 1918 and

was engaged in her first teaching position in the elementary schools, it was a rural school, was discouraged from coming home by my parents because they were afraid she would get the flu that we had. However, she felt she had to come and help take care of us, and she did contract the flu. And afterward, she had pneumonia, then she had an acute attack of appendicitis, and the whole result of it all was that she died on December 20, 1918.

SSW: Did medical help come to the house, at that time?

Sister: She had a ruptured appendix and the local doctor didn't recognize it at first. And so they called a surgeon from Waterloo, he came on the Illinois Central to Manchester, and he was met there, and he came to our home, and he did surgery on the dining room table.

SSW: Times really have changed since then.

Sister: Yes, the surgery was on the 13 of December, and she lived for a week. She died on the 20th.

SSW: It does seem like during that time period, just even from what I read, that everyone was affected so much.

Sister: Everyone suffered.

SSW: Moving on just a little bit. As I was saying, as you were entering into the Sisterhood that the Depression was upon us.

Sister: In the thirties. I recall very well, I was at St. Matthew's and my father and one of my brothers stopped, and he was just elated because he had been able to get some kind of a negotiation at the bank so he was able to save our home. So many many people in the area were losing their farms. But he was just as happy as he could be and he was a great man.

SSW: Can you say anything that you recall that was happening to people around you in Cedar Rapids.

Sister: St. Matthew's is the kind of parish where the families had good jobs, and I think that we didn't see real poverty at all. There were a couple of families that had more need than others, and we would do our best to help them as far as books would be

concerned and so forth. But the demands on the school were not as great as they are today.

SSW: What were some of the things that the Sisters did, at that time, to reach out to the community here in Cedar Rapids to help out?

Sister: I think in the schools they were very well aware of families that needed particular help, and they would encourage, especially in the poor areas, they would encourage people to make contributions of food. And then, often times people would bring clothing to the Sisters, and they would be able to distribute it to the needy people. At St. Matthew's, I thought there was one family that might have need and so I questioned one of the boys just to find out how many children there were in the family so that somebody would send a Christmas basket to them. And he thought that I was concerned that some of the children in his family were not coming to our school and so he said, "Sister, any kid we ever get, it's going to come to St. Matthew's." (Laughter)

SSW: That's precious. Tell me a little bit about after the Depression, how you were affected by World War II.

Sister: At that time, I was at Mt. Mercy. I came to Mt. Mercy in 1941, after having earned my Master of Arts Degree at St. Louis University. And war was declared. I can remember exactly the announcement that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Sister Mary Josephine was listening to the radio, and she came into my office which was right next door and just with the greatest, greatest concern said that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. It did have an effect on the girls. We were just a girls' school; I shouldn't say "Just." We were a girls' school then. And some of the students thought that they should go home and help their parents so that their brothers could go to the service and there was a lot of unrest. We tried to convince them that the greatest service they could do would be to get themselves educated so that they could really be a help to their parents when the time came. But it was a sad time for all of us.

SSW: What did you find that was done in the community as a war effort?

SSW: What were some of the things that people did?

Sister: We sold War Bonds and that sort of thing. They were active in patriotic activities. I can't recall now exactly what they were-- I mean the War Bonds, the name of the bonds--but one of our students got some special recognition for having sold more than anyone else. I can even tell you her name. (Laughter)

SSW: Lets go back a little bit to when Mt. Mercy was first getting started. I'd like to have you tell me a little bit about the beginnings of the school. I know that right now as we're talking, we're in Warde Hall. Wasn't this one of the first places where the school got started?

Sister: Yes, I've mentioned before that the Sisters first came to Cedar Rapids in 1875 and then they moved from there (St. Joseph's Academy) to the hill that we are now on in 1906. The Academy wasn't large enough and so the Sisters went in search of a place that they could purchase to build and enlarge their school. They visited various places; they visited Brucemore; they visited Judge Greene's mansion here, and looked around different places. This was really out in the country then, but thanks to their foresight, they purchased the mansion and ten acres of land in 1906.

SSW: Where did they come up with the money for that at that time? Where did the funding come from?

Sister: I really don't know. They had been saving since 1875, and they had been doing their level best to--see the community had grown and the Sisters were teaching in schools such as Decorah and Elma and Oelwein. As the Sisters increased in numbers, they taught in the parochial schools, and they got a minimal salary. But everybody was contributing to the general fund, and I guess it was the providence of God, and probably the amount wasn't the greatest either. If you ever want to read all about the beginnings of our community, we have some books. Sister Mary Ildephonse wrote Length and Shadows which is a story of the community in 1947, and Sister Mary Augustine Roth wrote a story of the college in; she completed it in 1978, and the title of that is Courage and Change. But anyway, they made the

purchase in 1906. The house had been used to store grain, so you can imagine the condition it was in. And just last Sunday I visited with a lady who's at Crestview Acres; her name is Mae Casey; she's my brother-in-law's mother. She was a ninth grader when the Sisters moved from St. Joseph's Academy up here to the Greene Mansion. She told us how hard the Sisters worked to get the place in readiness for school in the fall. They had to use a lot of soap, and water, and good old elbow grease, I guess. But anyway, it was ready. But by 1909, the facilities weren't big enough to accommodate the students, and so they built what became known as Sacred Heart Hall-- which was attached to the mansion. That was Sacred Heart Academy then until 1924. In 1924, the present Ward Hall was finished and that then was Mt. Mercy Academy from 1924 until 1957.

In 1928 the Sisters received permission from the Archbishop to start a two year college, so the fall of that year with a small enrollment, the Sisters started Mt. Mercy Junior College. The first year I think they had about 29 students, and the next year they had probably about 60. After the two years, they had their first graduating class--a class of 22. A little different from our class this year; we had a graduating class of 203. So the junior college was started then in 1958. Then in 1957, the Sisters could foresee the need of having a senior college. So the junior year was added in 1957; the first graduates of the senior college was in 1959, and it was a small class too because many of the students were used to a two year school and didn't choose to go on for their third and fourth years right away. But the first baccalaureate degrees were granted at the graduation in 1959. In order to have approval, and be really able to grant degrees that would be acceptable, we needed more central accreditation. So, we did a self-study under the direction of the North Central Association and to the great joy and delight of everyone, we were granted full accreditation in April of 1960 which was a real triumph. In fact, everybody was so elated that they, for example, the Sisters and some of the lay people went to Chicago to meet with the committee for the North Central Association. And the word came through that we had passed

and so we called home to let them know about it. Two of us came home early from Chicago, but the other two Sisters didn't come until the next night and so by that time, the students and everybody were ready for their arrival. They had a group of students go to Marion--to the station--the Northwestern came in at Marion, and they met the train. (laughter) They had ballons, and sparklers, and all that kind of thing. They came back to McAuley Hall which was constructed at that time, and we had a real celebration, in fact, it was such a great celebration that our Mother Superior, Sister Mary Lawrence, recommended that Sister Mary Ildefonce, who was the president, write the story of the accreditation and so Sister did provide a brochure called The New Frontier which tells about the great event.

SSW: What year was that that they were accredited then?

Sister: 1960, then we carried on and in 1970, it was decided that we should become co-ed and men came to the college for the first time. Prior to that, a few had come for summer school but not during the regular school year. They came for evening classes too. But in 1970, men came. And since then our growth has been really, really good. Of course, we've added majors and I think that the fact that we study the community and try to provide the majors that people really want has been a reason for our continued growth. For example, we have majors in Public Relations, Piano Pedagogy, Criminal Justice, Social Work, Religious Studies, Speech Drama, Computer Science, Business Administration; we have about 23 majors. I think we are fulfilling community needs. We find that our student body is career oriented. They want an education, but they also want to make a living when they get finished with school. I think that's probably why some of those majors are so popular.

SSW: When the school started out, what did you offer as far as curriculum way back then?

Sister: In the junior college days, we had two terminal programs; Secretarial Science, and Teacher Education. In addition to that, we had the liberal arts for people who wanted to take two years at Mt. Mercy

and then transfer to a senior college or university and get their baccalaureate degree. Or, they may have wanted to go on into medical technology or something like that. They would get their background here.

The heads of the departments for Teacher Education and Secretarial Science really had their finger on the community and knew, for example--the Sister in charge of Secretarial Science, Sister Immaculata--knew the businessmen in the area. She'd have them come and talk to the students--tell the students what they expected of a person in their office. And then she would recommend the girl that she thought would fit the position to her very best ability. She had the best attitude; she was so positive, and she made them feel that they could really do wonderful things. It was good for them.

Similarly, the Sister in charge of Teacher Education, Sister Mary Elizabeth, was interested in school. She visited the schools, and she talked to administrators, and she was eager to find where there would be positions open. Then she would recommend that they apply at that particular place. She would give them recommendations. She was also aware of the places where the students would fit the best. It was really a 100 percent placement service at that time.

SSW: Yea, I'd say so. How many teachers would there have been back then when the school was first starting?

Sister: Probably there were 15 or so; it's hard to say without checking.

SSW: How many as opposed to now.

Sister: We have approximately 100.

SSW: (The interviewer gasps) My, that's really a lot of growth. Let's go back a bit to the early history of Mt. Mercy. Can you give me some idea of what you think were the highlights of the early history?

Sister: What did you have in mind as highlights?

SSW: Oh, as far as maybe accommodating the students. Where did they stay?

Sister: Oh, well before 1956--from 1924 until 1956, the students lived on fourth floor of this building. There were bedrooms that would accommodate four, some would accommodate three, and some would accommodate two students, but this was the dorm building from 1924 until 1956. At that time, in 1956--no, it was in 1957--the Academy was discontinued, and we just had the college from then on. After we got the senior college, the Academy was discontinued...principally because Regis High School, at that time, was finished, and many of our students were from the surrounding area. They were commuter students and so they could be accommodated at Regis High School. So from then on, we had the college.

In 1956, the McAuley Hall was constructed and that provided housing for 160 students and so then, the fourth floor here wasn't needed for residents. It was needed for faculty offices and so there was a transformation in that.

Nursing is a very, very popular major here. I should have mentioned that earlier. When that program was just getting started, we didn't have a building for it and so fifth floor which--when the students lived here--was the attic, was renovated into a nursing area. They had offices up there, but they also had the lab. Eventually, we were able to have Donnelly Hall constructed, which is really the nursing building, but we do have other classes there, too.

SSW: Before you went into the administrative part of your job with the college now...o.k., 1930, you've gone into your permanent vows,

what were some of the different things that you were doing up to the present time?

Sister: I was teaching in the elementary schools in this area. I was principal of St. Matthew's and that sort of thing. I was teaching. In the summer time, I was going to summer school.

SSW: Did you ever take on the position of the Mother Superior?

Sister: Yes. I was elected to that position in 1965. So, from 1965 until 1971, I lived at Sacred Heart Convent and was responsible for the Sisters of the community.

SSW: What does that entail being the Mother Superior?

Sister: Well, it's like being the president of an organization. In those days, the Sisters were assigned to their positions. That's one of the joys of religious life. You take a vow of obedience and you're asked, but you're invited also, to take a certain position. Consequently, when I taught in the different schools, I was assigned to those schools. When I was sent to study at St. Louis University, I was encouraged and I suppose if I objected, I wouldn't have been sent--but I was asked and I consented and went away to school for a year. Then I came back and I was assigned to Mt. Mercy. I stayed here until I was elected to the position of Major Superior, which lasted six years. Then I came back to Mt. Mercy. I asked to come back.

SSW: Now, back when you were doing your teaching, what did you find as far as attitudes of the students, say back in 1925, as opposed to some of the students today?

Have students changed a lot or attitudes?

Sister: I was working with a different level of student at that time.

I was working in the grade schools. Today, my association is with college students. Actually, I think that education is always pretty much the same. There is a need and you try to fulfill the need. You help people as much as you can.

SSW: So, you don't think that students in general have changed all that much?

Sister: Not that much, really. No. I think that sometimes students aren't as disciplined today. It depends on the major that they're in, however. If you're in certain majors, you're disciplined plenty, because you have to fulfill these obligations in order to accomplish what is necessary. I'm thinking of the nursing program.

END OF SIDE ONE - BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SSW: Back in 1925, when you were teaching at the elementary level, were there basics like arithmetic, reading, and phonics?

Sister: I'm sure there were. I was teaching fourth and fifth grades at that time and we were beyond the phonics stage, but we certainly did have history, geography, arithmetic, spelling, reading--all those good things. Today, I'm not familiar with the grade schools, but I'm sure the needs are the same as they were then.

SSW: I'd like to know, digressing from the history of Mt. Mercy, some of your personal impressions of that time period. First of all, let's talk a little bit about transportation. We discussed it a little bit earlier, but I'm talking about in Cedar Rapids. What

was the mode of travel in that day as far as--do you recall trolleys? Were the streets all paved? What went on back in the 1930's as far as transportation?

Sister: Well, the best way from the hill back home--you could take a street-car. The terminal for the streetcar was in Central Park, which was on E Avenue and 16th Street. You could ride all the way downtown for a nickel. To get to Iowa City for Saturday classes, you could take the Crandic Line to Iowa City. Those were our modes of transportation that way. If you wanted to go to Waterloo, there was also the Crandic.

SSW: Is that a train?

Sister: It's an interurban. It went from Cedar Rapids to Iowa City several times a day; also Cedar Rapids to Waterloo several times a day. Then, if you wanted to go to Chicago or some place like that, you had the trains. You had the Northwestern and the Rock Island, and you could go to Chicago in about four hours, and it was a joy. You could go to Chicago in the morning; leaving Marion about 6:30 a.m. and get to Chicago around 10:00 a.m. Then you could get a train back that evening. It was wonderful.

SSW: Where was the train station in downtown Cedar Rapids?

Sister: In Cedar Rapids, it was the Union Station and that was just across from the Montrose Hotel, which has been taken down just lately, I think...but it was right in that area. It was a beautiful old building. The architecture was something special. I think it's regrettable that it wasn't preserved. There was an Illinois Central Station, too, about a block away from that. The Illinois Central

was on First Avenue. We had two stations downtown and there was a station in Marion for the Northwestern.

SSW: Did people have horses back then?

Sister: Not in the '30's; in the '20's, probably, but not in the '30's. In fact, in the teens more, because by the '20's, everybody had a car--a Model T.

SSW: Was that a nice car?

Sister: It was a little old Ford, and it got you places.

SSW: Do you remember the airplanes coming into being?

Sister: Well, of course, we all know about the Wright brothers. Is that what you have in mind?

SSW: I mean locally.

Sister: Locally? Not particularly. I don't remember when they had the airport constructed, do you?

SSW: It's called Hunter Airport. Is that correct?

Sister: (There is no response from Sister Mary.)

SSW: What do you recall of communications? What do you recall of the radios back then? Now, I know you didn't have television, so tell me a little bit about radio.

Sister: Radios were very interesting. The reception wasn't the best, but there would be programs--musical programs that everybody would listen to and try to blot out the static and just enjoy the music,

They were the radio programs that we enjoyed.

SSW: Do you remember any local stations here?

Sister: Well, WMT has been here for a long, long time. I think it's been here more than 60 years, and I don't know when KCRG started, but it's probably been a pretty long duration, too, because it's a Gazette station, and The Gazette's been here for a long time.

SSW: What were some of the programs that you listened to?

Sister: Oh, we didn't listen to the radio a whole lot. See we--well we were pretty busy. By the time we teach and then you correct papers and prepare for the next day, you're pretty well taken care of. Then, on weekends, we had the care of the house that we lived in. We had to take care of our clothes so our time was pretty well taken up. Then we had some time for recreation.

SSW: What was some of the recreation?

Sister: We met daily and visited. We could play cards or listen-- sometimes someone would play the piano or people would sing-- that kind of thing.

SSW: In the sisterhood, what was done for holidays, such as Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Sister: We always started the day with Mass in the morning, and then we'd have special things for meals. Breakfast would be a big occasion and similarly the dinners and so forth. Then we had more time of enjoyment of one another and, first of all, doing something that we wanted to do.

SSW: Did you, in any way--of course, I know in homes people decorate. Did you do any of that?

Sister: There's always a lot of that in convents.

SSW: What kinds of decorations did you have?

Sister: Just the kind that you would normally have for Christmas--a tree and the whole bit.

SSW: Can you tell me, as you became more mature in the Sisterhood, how you saw that--looking back now, as being affected by the changes around you and the community. What I'm talking about would be just your modernization types of things. Did that change the Sisterhood?

Sister: Yes, I think it did. Vatican II, which occurred in the sixties, had a tremendous affect upon religious life. It was at that time that it was recommended to us by the Holy Father that we change our habit--our attire, and make it more modern. So, in 1966, on August the fifteenth, we adopted a more modern dress. Now, that wasn't done without a lot of preliminary planning and preparation, ordering of habits, and all that kind of thing. For the first time, we wore shorter skirts and then we needed to wear nylons instead of cotton hose. We needed to wear different types of shoes and slippers. We needed to do something with our hair, which we had probably not done much with prior to that. And so, it was a complete change for us. It was a good change, I'm sure, because we did need to modernize...not only our clothing, but, as a result of Vatican II, every religious community has made an attempt to understand better the charism of our founders and to fulfill--

to a greater degree, the kind of charism that she would want us to fulfill today.

SSW: Back in the 1930's when you were just getting started, what would a typical week look like for you then. If you could, in detail, tell me a little bit about that. You know, as you rise in the morning, what did you do?

Sister: I think we arose real early--like about 6:00 a.m. or maybe earlier. We had a half hour to dress and then we went to the chapel and had a half hour meditation. This would be followed by the saying of the morning prayer, our Office, which would take probably about 15 minutes. Then we would have Mass, which would take about a half hour. Then breakfast.

SSW: Did you have any time for silence that you were to maintain silence?

Sister: Yes, do you want me to continue with the day, or do you want me to talk about that?

SSW: Tell a little bit about the silence and then continue with the day.

Sister: From nine o'clock at night until Mass the next morning, people kept silence...unless there was a real emergency, or unless there was some reason why they had to talk.

SSW: That was interesting. Did you find that a fulfilling time?

Sister: I think it was good. I often thought when I was responsible for the students in the dormitory; I'd like to have them keep silent.
(Laughter)

SSW: Continue talking about your typical day.

Sister: Well, after Mass, breakfast, and then to school. We were in school from then until 4:00 in the afternoon. The students, perhaps, left at about a quarter to four and then we would gather our belongings when I was teaching at St. Matthew's, and I would come back to Sacred Heart Convent and we had Office at 5:00. Then at 5:30, was our evening meal and then there was time to do what you wanted to do from about 6:00 until about 6:30 or so. Then we would have an hour's recreation or maybe it was a half hour recreation--we'd all assemble together and exchange pleasantries of the day. Then after that, we'd have a study hour. We'd have a chance to prepare our work for the next day and at 9:00, most of us would go to the dorm and get ready for bed. That was the end of the day.

SSW: What kind of clothing did the students wear back then? I know kids today wear jeans.

Sister: In parochial schools, they wore uniforms and that's what we did--we wore uniforms. But for the college--that was for the Academy, but when the college got started, at first they thought they would be wearing uniforms, but they never really did. They encouraged the students to wear navy blue dresses or a blouse and a navy blue skirt or something like that. There was never any particular success in having uniforms in college.

SSW: Back then, when the students were wearing uniforms, what were the lengths at as far as skirts?

Sister: Normal. Whatever the style was at the time.

SSW: Do you recall how long the skirts were?

Sister: It depends upon which skirt you are talking about. It changed, you know.

SSW: Like back in 1930.

Sister: In 1930, I think about the knee. I don't recall exactly.

SSW: Back then, what was the reaction--can you tell me a little bit about how the students felt at having Sisters as teachers?

Sister: I think they liked having--I know as a student, I enjoyed having Sisters as teachers. Some of the best teachers I ever had in my life were Sisters. One in particular--I had her for Latin and for English. She just did more to help me learn grammar and words and that kind of thing than anybody else in my life...a marvelous teacher.

SSW: Also tell me, if you can recall, some of the Sisters who influenced you on your path of faith...if there were any in particular in your formative years.

Sister: I'm sure there were. I think that the Sisters that you were assigned to live with always had an influence. As teachers in the high school days, they were an influence. I think practically everybody was taught a great deal just by example.

SSW: How were you influenced by them, do you think?

Sister: I admired them and appreciated the kind of life they were living and thought that I would like to go and do likewise.

SSW: Were there times that you questioned your faith when you were first starting out?

Sister: Thank God, I think no.

SSW: Were there times when you were starting out and as time went on that you had special moments of religious significance as far as special memories?

Sister: One of the opportunities that a Sister has in each year is to make an annual retreat, which can be five days or it can be eight days or whatever--of complete silence and total interest in the retreat itself. They always have a retreat master--somebody who comes and gives talks. Perhaps he'll give two or three talks a day. It gives you something to meditate on--to think about. We have a very good opportunity to learn more about our faith and to appreciate religious life.

SSW: How do you feel (the telephone rings in the background) because surely you feel that you have made a contribution to Cedar Rapids in your commitment?

Sister: And you want to know how I feel I have made a contribution?

SSW: Yes.

Sister: I probably could say that I have fulfilled a roll of service, particularly in a registrar's office, because everyone coming to a registrar's office needs help. Either they are planning a schedule, or they're deciding on a major, or they want to know where such and such an office is and so we do, in this office I think, give service. If we give service to the Mt. Mercy community

they, after all, are from the outside community and so it goes on and on and on.

SSW: Never ending. Did you have some special things that you want to say?

Sister: Well, I just would like to say that one of the highlights of our days at Mt. Mercy was the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Mt. Mercy College...and that happened in '78, '79. To mark the year, March 24, 1979, we had Mt. Mercy night at the Paramount at which Richard Williams and the Cedar Rapids Symphony Orchestra played. William and Pat Medley, who were faculty members, performed with the orchestra. Jim Rogers, who was a radio personality from WMT, was the Master of Ceremonies for part of the program. They had a slide projection of Mt. Mercy memorabilia highlighted by historical narratives by Robert Navjoks, who is a present faculty member, Marjorie d'Aquila, who is a trustee (she now lives in Minneapolis), and Kathleen Novy, who is an alumna. At the conclusion of the program, we had the introduction of the Mt. Mercy alma mater, which had been composed by Linda Williams and was accompanied by the orchestra. Then after that, there was a reception at Stouffer's, which was sponsored by Life Investors. So that was a big, big occasion!

Then, another thing I'd like to say is that we've had various important personalities visit campus through the years. I'm not going to mention all. I'll just mention a few. For example, John Kennedy visited this campus when he was campaigning for President. Roger Mudd was here and gave a talk once upon a time.

Darrel Walter gave a talk. A very colorful character that came at least that I can remember was Cardinal Beran from Czechoslovakia and he delighted everybody with his simplicity and his joy at seeing himself on television and that kind of thing. For graduation this year, we had Helen Hayes, the first lady of the American theatre as commencement speaker. This was accomplished through the help of one of our trustees of the college. So, I'd just like to say that we are proud of our college on the hill. We're grateful for the opportunity to serve the community, and we thank God for His goodness to us. We shall continue to go forward with courage and faith.

SSW: Sister Mary Cashman, I want to thank you so much for sharing your memories of Cedar Rapids, past, and your endearment to Mt. Mercy. Thank you.

Sister: You're welcome!



