

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH Inez Lyon

CONDUCTED BY Theresa Riley

DATE February 25 & 26, 1985

TRANSCRIBER Imelda K. Collins

10-07

2005.10.52

# 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?
- 2 --What are your parents' names?
- 2,3,5 --Where did you go to school?
- 9 --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
  - 9-10 --Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
  - 10 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
  - 10,11,15-16 --Horses and First Automobiles
  - 3 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
  - 11,12,13 --Hunter Airport and the first planes
  - 13 --Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)
- 2. Communications
  - 13,14 --Newspapers
  - 14 --Radios
  - Advertising
  - Telephones

#### B. People in the Community

- 1. Amusements/Recreation
  - 34 --Motion Pictures
  - Cedar Rapids Parks
  - 6,10 --Dances
  - Carnival Week
  - 26,27 --Chautauqua
  - Community Theater
  - Little Gallery
  - Symphony Orchestra
  - 15,16 --Circus
  - Greene's Opera House
  - Amusement Parks (Alamo)
  - 16,17 --Camps
  - Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
- 2. Famous Characters 23-30
  - 27,28 --Cherry Sisters
  - 24 --Grant Wood
  - Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
  - Marvin Cone
  - 23-24 --James W. Good
  - 24 --Verne Marshall
  - 25 --Paul Engle
  - 25 --Dr. Arthur Erskine
  - 25 --William Shirer
  - 25 --W.F. Severa
  - 26 --Keith Vauter

3. Lifestyle
  - 4 --Life before air conditioning
  - 4 --Winter Activities
  - 32,33 --Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
  - 6,7,20,21,22 --Clothing
  - Toys
  - Saloons/Taverns
  - Farm Life
4. Family Life
  - 18,19,20 --Household Help
  - 18 --Women's Roles
  - 3,4,5,6,16 --Childrens' Activities/Behavior
  - 17,18 --Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)
5. Ethnic/Minority Life
  - 25 --Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
  - Indians
  - Segregation of Blacks
  - Jobs Available
- C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community
  1. Education
    - 2,3,5,6,24 --Cedar Rapids Schools
    - 6,7,8 --Coe College
    - Mount Mercy College
    - Cornell College
    - 6,7,8 --Ames
  2. Government
    - City Services
    - 3 --Streets/Roads
    - Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)
  3. Medical 31-32
    - Hospitals
    - Patient-Doctor Relationship
    - Broken Bones
    - Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
    - House Calls
    - Home Delivery of Babies

Inez Deacon Lyons was born in 1912 in Cedar Rapids, the daughter of William Deacon and Clara Taylor Deacon. She grew up on Knollwood Drive SE in Vernon Heights, and attended Miss Penny's Preschool and public school in Vernon Heights. Later she went to McKinley Junior High School and old Washington High School. In 1930 she attended Iowa State College in Ames for two years, then returned to Coe College and was graduated from there. She married Wallace D. Lyon in 1936. They had one daughter, Melissa. Subsequently they were divorced and he died.

Mrs. Lyons has been active for many years in Cedar Rapids as a volunteer. Her memories include early transportation, social life, famous Cedar Rapidians, clothing, family life and local schools.

INTERVIEW WITH INEZ LYON

Conducted by Theresa Riley

February 25 & 26, 1985

TR: This afternoon I'm interviewing Inez Lyon of 2407 Buckingham Drive NW, Cedar Rapids. Thank you for inviting me, Inez. Could you tell us something about when you were born and how long you've lived in Cedar Rapids? Something about your parents, your background?

Lyon: I was born in 1912 here in Cedar Rapids down on 10th Street and Fifth Avenue. I'm the fourth generation of the family to have lived here. The third generation to be born here. What else did you ask me?

TR: Well, what? You said you were the fourth generation, then that would have been your great-grandparents?

Lyon: The great-grandparents were the first ones--Dr. Mansfield. He was the first doctor to settle in Cedar Rapids, after he came back from the California Gold Rush. Then his daughter was my grandmother and she married--before she became my grandmother--she married C. J. Deacon, who was an attorney here in town. Their son was William Deacon, who was my father. I have a sister who lives in Tryon, North Carolina. But we've always lived here.

TR: Having lived in Cedar Rapids for this long, where did you live in Cedar Rapids? Where was the family home?



Lyon: The family started out, one set of grandparents lived on First Avenue where Allen's garage is now. The other set of grandparents lived down on Fourth Avenue and Eighth Street. Those are the grandparents. And then my parents established their home out in Vernon Heights on Knollwood Drive and when I was married we established our home on Linden Drive up near Bever Park.

TR: What were your parents' names? What was your mother's maiden name?

Lyon: She was Clara Taylor. Her father was A. A. Taylor, who had a jewelry store here in town. And my father was William Deacon. His father was the attorney.

TR: Where did you go to school?

Lyon: Went to the public schools here in town. It started out in a private preschool. Miss Penney had a preschool down on Third Avenue below Immaculate Conception Church and some of us children went to that preschool and then to public school. The first public school I went to was out in Vernon Heights. And when the family moved to Vernon Heights it was a new addition, and Henry Ely and Lou Anderson were developing it and there weren't too many houses at the time we moved out there, so there were lots. It was a heavily wooded area. There were lots of empty lots and lots of wildflowers and birds. It was a new addition, there weren't too many houses so there was no need for regular schools. And they moved in from the country a two room school, so that's where we started in the kindergarten. This must have been about 1917, 1918 and it even had outdoor plumbing. And it's hard to believe in this day and age.

TR: Did all the grades go to that school?

Lyon: All the grades went to that school. There weren't too many then.

TR: Do you remember who your teacher was?

Lyon: No, I don't remember who the teacher was. I feel sorry for her, and I hope I don't remember because she's the kind--when it was our turn to recite we'd come up to the front row and she had a switch and if we did not recite to her satisfaction, we were switched. So I hope I don't remember her name.

TR: Could you tell us something about what your life was like growing up in Vernon Heights?

Lyon: Well it was wonderful. Of course at first the streets were not paved, it was just blacktop and no curbings or anything like that. And we'd played in the streets and then after they paved it--which they did--there was much roller skating and bicycle riding on the streets. And there was no problem because there wasn't that much traffic. And we didn't worry. The parents didn't worry, and we had a wonderful time. It was a wonderful place to play. Even at that time, Mr. Mateer worked for the light company and he used to trim the lights--the street lights. Whatever he did, I don't know, but after he trimmed the street lights we would pick up these pieces. They looked like charcoal I don't know what they were, but that was kind of fun.

TR: Now what do you mean by trimming the street lights? What kind of lights were they?

Lyon: I don't know.

TR: They would have had a wick?

Lyon: Of some kind, yes. They didn't burn. It didn't burn with a flame or

anything like that. But whatever kind of lights they were, needed trimming.

TR: They would have a filament that would have to be trimmed.

Lyon: Right, right. And as kids of course the ice wagon. Ice was all delivered. There were no iceboxes, or automatics--electric iceboxes. The ice wagon was horse-drawn. That was lots of fun because we got to ride around the block in the back of the ice wagon and also the postman would take us around the block in his little truck. That was pretty exciting. We... Also there was a pond over on Memorial Drive, there weren't any houses over there and we'd go across the fields to this pond and that's where we did our ice skating when we were kids. And that was kind of fun. Looking back it's just hard to imagine that place, that area wasn't built up.

TR: The changes! Where would the pond be in relation to the cemetery then?

Lyon: The cemetery?

TR: I was thinking of Mount Vernon Road.

Lyon: Well, it was between Mount Vernon Road and Bever Avenue

TR: Down in. . .

Lyon: Down in the. . .

TR: Down in that sort of little gully?

Lyon: Yes. I was down in there. That was. . . .

TR: Was it a natural pond?

Lyon: Yes. It was a natural pond.

TR: And there probably were little creeks that ran in through there.

Lyon: Yes, I think that there probably was. And that was fun. Another part of our growing up in Vernon Heights which was fun. This was



older. We were older at this time, but it was still before TV and radio, so we made our own fun. This would have been--oh--around the early 20s, mid 20s. But we played baseball out in the front yard and kids would come from all over the southeast end of town. Little brothers and sisters. And the little brothers and sisters got to chase the ball. They did all the leg work. And when it got dark, we moved in the house and rolled up the rug and the little brothers and sisters pumped the piano--player piano and the older brothers and sisters danced. And we all learned to dance that way and it was much fun. And that is something that today the young people don't experience. It was just such a wonderful place and way to grow up. We were all very fortunate.

TR: About how many children would have been involved in the, like the baseball games and ... .

Lyon: Goodness knows.

TR: In the neighborhood, how do .... .

Lyon: Fifteen, twenty?

TR: Fifteen or more depending on the ... .

Lyon: Depending on the weather and who wandered, .. ..

TR: Who wandered in.

Lyon: But then it was lots of fun.

TR: Wonderful.

Lyon: It was lots of fun.

TR: Where did you go to high school then?

Lyon: I went to McKinley Jr. High and then to Washington and that was the old Washington, down by Greene Square.

TR: The old Washington High School then was approximately where the

American Legion is now?

Lyon: Yes.

TR: What are some of the things--some of the activities and some of the things you remember about your high school days?

Lyon: Well, school and I were never too compatible, but we had a lot of fun.

TR: What did you do?

Lyon: Well, that was in the days--near the end of the days--of sororities in high school. They had rushing and pledging and there were the junior and then the senior group--that was kind of fun. And of course, there were dances and gatherings. Oh, high school dances used to be down at Dreamland Ballroom and that was down on Fourth Avenue where that new parking ramp is on Third Street and Fourth Avenue--upstairs. That was where the school dances were held. YW, Girl Reserve, those were activities.

TR: Then after high school, then you went to Coe College.

Lyon: I went to Ames for two years, and then to Coe. Graduated from Coe.

TR: When you went to Iowa State College at Ames, what were some of your impressions of going away to college at that time. What year was it and what. . .

Lyon: It was 1930. And we took the train up to Ames. Elizabeth Chandler, who was a friend, and we were going together and we went on a train out to Ames, and we thought we were Mrs. God, and we were all dolled up in our new clothes, and away to school for the first time.

TR: Tell me about your clothes. What kind of clothes, or were clothes as important then or even more important than now?