



JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ESTHER YOUEL ARMSTRONG

CONDUCTED BY

LAURA DERR

July 9, 1985

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

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ESTHER YOUEL ARMSTRONG

Esther Youel Armstrong was born on June 21, 1903, the daughter of Nellie Dibble Youel and Charles Doke Youel, in Flanders, South Dakota. She came to Cedar Rapids in 1921 to attend Coe College, where she was graduated in 1925. Following a year of teaching, she married Robert Armstrong in 1926. They have lived in Cedar Rapids ever since and raised four daughters: Mary Helen Armstrong Dusheck, Esther (Goldie) Armstrong Cooper, Anna Youel Armstrong Johnston, and Amelia Margaret (Mimi) Armstrong Meffert. Over the years Mrs. Armstrong has served in many volunteer roles in Cedar Rapids. She was one of the first woman to serve on Boards, and has served on the Cornell College Board, the Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief, and the Board of Pensions for Methodism. In 1960 she was chosen Iowa Mother of the Year. Her memories include Coe College in the twenties, the Garden Club, Grant Wood (who helped the Armstrongs design and build their present home), Marvin Cone, St. Paul's Methodist Church, and volunteering in the Depression years.

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

I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1 --When were you born? Where?
- 2 --How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- 1 --What are your parents' names?
- 2 --Where did you go to school?
- 2 --Are you married or single?
- 3 --Did you raise a family? How big?
- 3-4 --What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?
- 90 --Family Background

II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

A. Technology in the Community

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- Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
- 86-87 --Trolleys (the Interurban)
- Horses and First Automobiles
- 87 --Mud roads and the seedling mile
- Hunter Airport and the first planes
- Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)
- 88 --Pioneer Trail

2. Communications

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- Radios
- Advertising
- 14 --Telephones

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1. Amusements/Recreation

- Motion Pictures
- Cedar Rapids Parks
- Dances
- Carnival Week
- Chautauqua
- 45-46 --Community Theater
- Little Gallery
- Symphony Orchestra
- Circus
- Greene's Opera House
- Amusement Parks (Alamo)
- Camps
- 9-10, 67 --Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)

2. Famous Characters

- Cherry Sisters
- 32-50 --Grant Wood
- Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
- 14, 20, 7-8, 50-51 --Marvin Cone
- 34, 71 --Robert Armstrong
- 33 --Colonel Robbins
- 39 --John Stuart Curry
- 39 --Thomas Benton
- 61-62 -- Jackson Burns

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- Life before air conditioning
- Winter Activities

76-77 --Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas) 76-77

- Clothing
- Toys
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- Farm Life

28-30 --Brucemore

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57,72-73 --Women's Roles 57, 72-73

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58-59 --Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)

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--Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)

43,44 --Indians 43,44

--Segregation of Blacks

--Jobs Available

C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community

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2,4-19,26 --Coe College

--Mount Mercy College

62 --Cornell College (Board service)

2. Government

--City Services

--Streets/Roads

--Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)

3. Medical

52,54-55 --Hospitals (St. Lukes) 52-54 --Pneumonia

--Patient-Doctor Relationship

--Broken Bones

--Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases

--House Calls

--Home Delivery of Babies

4. Clubs

21-32 --Garden Club

61-66 --Junior League

4. Business and Economy

- Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
- Local Brewing Companies
- 70,85 --Retail Businesses /Department Stores (Armstrongs)
- 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
- 60 --Charity
- Divorce
- Work
- Working women, Voting Rights for Women
- Patriotism (World War I)
- 66-70 --Soup Kitchen

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- 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
- 11 --Roaring 20's
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- 39-- Tape One: End of Side One, Beginning of Side Two
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Interview With Esther Youel Armstrong
Date of Interview: July 9, 1985,
Interviewer: Laura Derr
Transcriber: Leslie Onthank

LD: This is Laura Derr on July 9, 1985, and I'm going to be interviewing Esther Youel Armstrong in her home.

Mrs. Armstrong, will you tell me what your mother's and father's full names were?

Armstrong: My father's name is Charles Doke Youel and he was born right out of Shellsburg on a farm. And my mother's name is Nellie Dibble Youel.

LD: Dibble?

Armstrong: Dibble. D-I-B-B-L-E.

LD: When were you born and where?

Armstrong: I was born in Flanders, South Dakota, June 21, 1903.

LD: And that's where you grew up?

Armstrong: That's where I grew up. I went to high school--grade school and high school there.

LD: When did you come to Cedar Rapids?

Armstrong: I came September, 1921. My father had gone to Coe College and I didn't know there was any other college besides Coe. And so we came down and I entered Coe College.

LD: And since that point in time, what years have you been in Cedar Rapids?

Armstrong: Well, all except one year after I graduated. I taught school in Coleman, South Dakota.

LD: That would have been between 1925 and '26?

Armstrong: Um-huh, '25 and '26.

LD: And when were you married?

Armstrong: June 15, 1926.

LD: To whom?

Armstrong: To Robert Cooper Armstrong.

LD: And then, of course, moved back to Cedar Rapids.

Armstrong: Yes, yes--moved back to Cedar Rapids.

LD: Tell us about your family that you raised here.

Armstrong: We have four daughters: Mary Helen Armstrong Dusheck, who is married to Dr. Ralph Dusheck; Ester Armstrong, we always called her Goldie because she was named after me, and she's married to Lee Cooper and the live now in Philadelphia; and then Anna Yovel Armstrong Johnston, married to Thomas Johnston, he's a Presbyterian minister; and Amelia Margaret Armstrong Meffert, we always call her Mimi, and she's married to Dr. William Meffert.

LD: Susie I had in second grade a few years ago.

Armstrong: Did you?

LD: Boy, they grow up fast.

Armstrong: Don't they.

LD: Over the years, have you held any positions outside your position as homemaker? Have you been paid in any occupation?

Armstrong: No.

LD: Okay, so you've been a volunteer, homemaker, career person.

Armstrong: I've been a volunteer. And in many respects, the first woman on lots of boards, which was really a very interesting experience.

LD: Which you probably should have been paid for some of those experiences.

Armstrong: Some of them, yes. Well, I had my way paid to the meetings. I can say that.

LD: Your expenses. Well, I want to talk to you about those, too; but I'd like to go back in time initially and ask you about your memories of coming here as a young woman to Coe College. Why--well, you've already explained why you came to Coe all the way from South Dakota. But when you came here, where did you live?

Armstrong: Well, I lived at Voorhees Hall.

LD: You were right on campus.

Armstrong: All four years.

LD: Were you a sorority member?

Armstrong: Yes. I belonged to Tri Delta.

LD: Okay. And they still have Tri Delta. Only it's in the dormitories, isn't it?

Armstrong: Well, I don't know. I guess it is now. I think they have it in certain floors.

LD: Right. I believe it is. What was your major?

Armstrong: Major was English. I started out to major in English and then I didn't get a very good grade when I was a freshman. And I was taking chemistry under Ben Peterson and he was such a good teacher. I just loved the chemistry, so I decided to be a science major. But when I got to be a senior, I found out I had so many really scientific things to take--Gray's anatomy and bacteriology and so forth--and I decided, well, I really wanted to be an English major; and I was still going to be.

LD: So back you went to literature. Did you have a career goal when you were in college?

Armstrong: Well, I was going to be an English teacher.

LD: That was your goal. Sure, because you went back and taught for a year.

Armstrong: Yes, I taught English for a year.

LD: You mentioned Ben Peterson. Are there other teachers at Coe that you have really fond memories of that made an impression on you as a student?

Armstrong: Oh, Mae Wolf was a wonderful teacher. And Marvin Cone. And, oh, I had a great experience working in the dormitory with Ms. Wycoff, who was head of the--she taught home economics. They taught that in those days. And for the last two years I worked with Ms. Wycoff on the dining room in Voorhees Hall. It was a great experience for me.

LD: Now, what would you have done? Would you help set tables?

Armstrong: Yes. The first year I did that. And the second year I was in charge of the dining room. And we had three or four hundred people every meal, so it was quite an experience for me.

LD: Did you get to plan meals and things. . .

Armstrong: No, I didn't plan the meals but I planned the dining room.

LD: To make sure that everything was set up and. . .

Armstrong: That everybody was served properly and took care of the fees.

LD: Boy, that would be quite a business experience.

Armstrong: It was. It was great experience for me.

LD: Did that pay for room and board, or was that a non-paying position?

Armstrong: No, it paid for room and board.

LD: You mentioned Marvin Cone. Were you actually his student?

Armstrong: Yes, I was. I wasn't as good a student as I should have been, but I was very fond of him.

LD: He taught French, didn't he?

Armstrong: French, taught French.

LD: Any particular memories of him as a French teacher?

Armstrong: Well, he always had a big blue ring on his hand and I just loved that blue ring. Of course, all his comments about life in

France and comments about artists and his sense of color I loved.

LD: Did you have an opportunity to see his art work during that time?

Armstrong: Yes, oh yes, we did.

LD: I guess he had not made the trip to France at that time.

Armstrong: Yes he had.

LD: Had he at that point?

Armstrong: I think so.

LD: The one he made with Grant Wood?

Armstrong: I think he was, I'm not quite sure whether he was married. Oh, yes, he must have been married because he was always talking about Little Doris.

LD: At that time, Coe was very definitely connected with the Presbyterian denomination.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: What are your memories about the campus and the religious emphasis on the campus at that time?

Armstrong: Dr. Gage was the president and he was such a fine speaker, a wonderful president. And the YMCA and the YWCA were very active. There were a lot of Coe people that went into mission work. The YWCA, of which I was president my senior year, was a very strong force on the campus.

LD: So you were involved in the YWCA?

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Were there other--did you go out into the community as a result of that?

Armstrong: Well, we did have one thing we always did every year was to bring in industrial girls for a sort of a conference to try to get the feel of what it was like to be working.

LD: You mean people who were out in the factories here in Cedar Rapids?

Armstrong: Yes. Yes. I remember a whole group that came in that--girls that made gloves. I don't know whatever happened to the glove factory, but I can remember it was such an interesting evening with these girls that were working on making gloves.

LD: And they just really came to share what they were doing with you. . .

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: . . . rather than you trying to provide some sort of vocational experience.

Armstrong: No, we didn't do very much of that. Well, we worked often with the downtown 'YW. We would do things with them.

LD: I remember speaking with William Murray in his interview. He said that they actually went out and did a little preaching too as part of the 'YM.

Armstrong: 'YM did. They had what they called the "gospel team".

LD: He said that was about the only time in his life when he did that and that it was a very strong. . .

Armstrong: No, we didn't do that.

LD: Well, that was--even though you were in a Presbyterian college--that was what is typically known as the "Roaring '20's". Do you have memories of--that there were conflicts as the result of that period?

Armstrong: No, we oftentimes wondered why they called it that because it seemed very normal to us. Except that we didn't button our golashes; we just let them flap, you know.

LD: Oh, that's pretty scary (laughter).

Armstrong: But really, it was pretty tame.

LD: So you really didn't notice if there was a lot of drinking on the campus or anything of that sort?

Armstrong: Oh, no, we didn't.

LD: Well, it may have roared more in the east.

Armstrong: Maybe so, maybe so. We didn't know very much about that.

LD: What were the rules that women students were expected to follow?

Armstrong: Oh, we had to be in on time, you know. And I remember one time we'd gone up canoeing on the Cedar River and one of the boats sprang a leak and we were very much afraid. We didn't want to leave the other boat that was leaking, so by the time we got back to the boat house, it was late. And I had a very bad time getting in because it was late. So I got campused. And I had to stay in--I had to be in my room every night right after dinner. And nothing--no going out for three weeks.

LD: For three weeks?

Armstrong: For three weeks.

LD: That is pretty bad. So there really was a parental. . .

Armstrong: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They took good care of us.

LD: Of course, that was still true when I was going to school in the '60's.

Armstrong: I think it's all right.

LD: And it's changed very radically. . .

Armstrong: I think so. And, of course, it was just a girls dormitory.

LD: Right. There was none of this co-educational. . .

Armstrong: No. No co-ed.

LD: Do you have specific memories of the Dean of Women? I heard she was a very colorful individual.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. The first two years I was there, it was Dean Mariha Leonard. And she was a lovely woman. A very caring, able woman. And at the end of my two years, she went to be Dean of Women at Illinois University. So then we had Ms. Nicholson, a Ms. Nicholson, Florence Nicholson, for Dean. And she was quite strict.

LD: Yes, I've heard some of her remarks from various other people I've interviewed.

Armstrong: Yes, yes. She felt it was not right for my husband to whistle as he came up because I would hear his whistle and I'd know it was time to get ready to come down. And she didn't think that was proper for. . .

LD: That was inappropriate. How did you know? Were there telephones that went up to the dorms and so. . .

Armstrong: Oh, yes. They'd--well, no, not telephones but bells. And they would just ring your bell--335 or something like that.

LD: I see. Well, that brings me to the next question, which was when did you meet Robert? He was already a graduate, was he not?

Armstrong: Yes. Yes. He graduated from Coe in 1918 and had gone into the military service and then he was a graduate of Harvard Business School and had just come back. Well, I had met his sister. She and I sat next to each other in the Coe Chapel. We went, you see, every morning we went to chapel. And I was 'Y' and she was 'A' at the beginning of the next class. So we sat near each other. And so she invited me to--well, we had a double date on a Saturday night. Robert, of course, Saturday night was the night that the stores were open so he came home at 9:00. And I can remember, I was down under the piano bench. I was supposed to be barking like a dog under the piano bench the first time I met Robert.

LD: This must have been some game you were playing.

Armstrong: It was some game and that was something I had to do (laughter).

LD: The whole business of going out, where would you have gone on dates? What did you do for fun in those years?

Armstrong: Oh, we went out for dinner. We went, oh, canoeing was the great thing. We did a lot of canoeing. And we'd go for picnics. We'd go out to VanVechten Park, and we'd go to games and concerts. A lot of games. One time we went down to Grinnell to a football game, and Mr. Paddy went with us. And on the way down, he said, "We ought to make up a song for Coe College." And on the way, we all worked on the words; and he worked on the tune; and we got the Coe Loyalty Song.

LD: And it's still being used?

Armstrong: It's still being used. It's official.

LD: I'll be darn. Was he a music professor?

Armstrong: Yes, he was the head of the Music Department.

LD: Oh, that would help to make it official.

Armstrong: Yes. Well, it was a good song.

LD: That's great. Does that mean that it was common for professors and students to do a lot of things together outside of the classrooms?

Armstrong: Well, sometimes. Now, Paddy was a good friend of Robert's, so often we went with him, and sometimes Miss Leonard--Miss Leonard used to go with Paddy. So we would just get up a group together for something that we thought was interesting to do.

LD: I had heard from some other folks that we've talked with that Coe had a much more social environment for the interaction of split students, which is really where you learn a lot more generally.

Armstrong: Yes. And then the great friends we had were the Weld's. Dr. Leroy Weld was head of the Physics Department. And I was, in those days, a science major; and I signed up for astronomy. He called me in, and he said, "Esther, do you want to learn about the stars or do you want to study astronomy?" And I said, "I want to learn about the stars." He says, "I thought that was it." He said, "Astronomy is just higher math." He says, "I don't think that's yours." (Laughter)

LD: So you never would have gotten to look at a telescope or anything?

Armstrong: No, no. So I took something else. I've forgotten what it was.

LD: Beyond the period when you were a student and you were staying in the community and being a pretty distinguished alumni—I noticed that in 1962 you received the Alumni Award.

Armstrong: Alumni Award. Wasn't that nice?

LD: Well, it certainly was! What have you been involved in in relationship to the college then in the years since you graduated?

Armstrong: Well, I think one of the things that started at Coe was that there were quite a lot of foreign students. And I got very much interested in other cultures and a great friend of, for instance, Chinese people. Especially in those days. We had a lot of them. And so through the years we have had a lot of connections with foreign students and sponsored different foreign people. We had an AFS student, a little girl from Hamburg, Germany, that lived with us for a year. By the way, we're going to see her next month over in Homburg, where she's married and has some little twins. That was one of the things, and then, of course, I was always interested in the Christian work.

LD: And I know that particular award is for community service, not just for Coe College.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Were there foreign students at Coe when you were going to school?

Armstrong: Oh, yes.

LD: Can you remember—I believe you mentioned. . .

Armstrong: One was a great friend of mine, Mi Di Lee from Fouchow, China. And we kept in contact with her until she died. She went back to China and then got out after the Japanese invasion and the Communist invasion. And then there was another one that was not at Coe when I was. Her name was Sue Ging Fawn. But she graduated just before I came in. But everybody just doted on her, and she often would come back. She felt it was kind of home, Voorhees Hall. And so we got to know her. And so, many years later when things were very tied at the Communist invasion, why she asked us if we would sponsor her coming. And she did. We sponsored her and her family to come. She became a medical doctor. After she left Coe, she went to Philadelphia to the Women's Medical School and graduated and went back to China. And then, when she came

to this country, she worked in an institution in Massachusetts and is now living out in Palo Alto. And it was her--and now just two years ago we sponsored her niece coming, who is now a junior at Coe.

LD: So now you're in the second generation.

Armstrong: Second generation. And it's been a very interesting experience.

LD: I'll bet it has. Has Coe in the past, when you were a student there, you mentioned that there were a lot of careers that were mission careers and things of that sort that came out of that experience. Did you have classmates that very definitely went into religious missionary careers?

Armstrong: Yes. Yes. One of my very good friends was Elizabeth Patton Moss. She married Mervin Moss. And we traveled together on our honeymoons.

LD: Oh, that's pretty good!

Armstrong: Yeah, it really was. And we met them in Egypt and in Palestine, and then they went to what was then called Persia, Iran, and were there for many years until they had to leave. And then I had another friend, Gladys Ward. She was a niece

of Professor Ward who taught English. And she was born in China and spent all her life in China. Twice we visited her.

LD: You mentioned your honeymoon. That must have been quite a trip.

Armstrong: That was a trip! And that I'm eternally grateful for. And we owed this all to Robert's mother because she said, "Now, you're sort of footloose and free for a little while. And I want you to have this--take some time and do some traveling because you're going to be tied down." And so we had about a three months trip. We went all over Europe and Asia-Minor. It was a great trip.

LD: And she was right too, wasn't she.

Armstrong: Yes she was right because it was just very soon after that that Robert's father died, and then he was thrust into a lot of responsibility.

LD: When you were traveling then, I suppose you would have been traveling primarily by ship, wouldn't you?

Armstrong: Yes, oh, yes, it was all by ship.

LD: So it was much, much slower in those days.

Armstrong: And we did it all ourselves, you know, we just. . . I remember when we were in Egypt and it was 137 degrees. I don't know how we ever did it, but we did.

LD: Did you have a tour that you traveled on or. . .

Armstrong: No, we just went by ourselves.

LD: From day to day?

Armstrong: Well, we had it planned. We knew what we were going to be doing and where we planned to be. But sometimes we never got there.

LD: Well, that's the way to travel--not to have to be somewhere.

Armstrong: But it was great and since that we've loved traveling. We've done a lot of traveling.

LD: I'm going to move on to the Garden Club and your experience in that organization because I know that came soon after you were married and settled here in Cedar Rapids. When did you join the Garden Club?

Armstrong: Well, about 1930, I think. Somewhere around there, '29 or '30.

LD: Was it a very new organization?

Armstrong: Yes, it was fairly new. I wasn't a charter member but I was about the second one, I guess. Mrs. Douglas had opened Bruce-
more for garden shows; and it was such a success; and we were all very much interested in it. My mother was a good gardener, but I had never done very much of it until I got in Iowa in a house, you know. And then I got very much interested in it. Mrs. Dunchee was really the mother of all of us at that time because she knew so much. And I can remember we just had a new highway from Iowa City to Cedar Rapids and she said, "We ought to plant that and have nice plantings along the side." So she went out and gathered seeds of the Iowa wild rose, and the very first thing I ever did in the Garden Club was to transplant Iowa wild roses along the highway.

LD: As you had mentioned earlier, you were very pregnant at that time.

Armstrong: Very pregnant and I was down on my knees transplanting those things (laughter).

LD: Now that's commitment. How many members are in the Garden Club?

Armstrong: Thirty-nine.

LD: It is a fairly controlled. . .

Armstrong: It has to be 39.

LD: Is there a reason for that?

Armstrong: Well, we now belong to the Garden Club of America and when we joined we were 39 and so that's the number.

LD: You keep just at that level?

Armstrong: Uh-huh.

LD: And so then how do you choose members? Is it a matter of interest or. . .

Armstrong: Yes, it's interest. They have to be. . . well, people that are interested in growing plants, and people suggest their names.

LD: I see. So it would often time be within families, from one family to another.

Armstrong: Not very much, although. . .

LD: Daughters aren't always interested. . .

Armstrong: . . . our daughter, one daughter is interested and she is--well now, the Wilhelm's daughter. But many of them aren't, you know.

LD: So it really is a matter of being interested.

Armstrong: Yes, you have to be interested or it's just boring.

LD: And over the years I know you've been involved in a number of community projects, which you talk about when you just initially mentioned the planting the wild roses. What were some of things that you were doing in the community?

Armstrong: Well, one of the first things we did is when they built the water works. We thought that would be a nice place to plant. And so from Mrs. Dunchee, we got many of her beautiful French lilacs; and we planted those out at the water works. Well, when they had to expand the water works, some of these lilac plantings had to go. But there are still some of them out there, for which I always love to go out and see them.

LD: How would you plant those? Do you transplant. . .

Armstrong: Well, no, they stool out from themselves and there's a lot of little plants, you know, that come.

LD: I see.

Armstrong: So we took them out and then watered them and cared for them. Then another thing we did was to—I was on the committee to plant Mays Island between the Memorial Coliseum and the Court House. And we had a very nice plan with a fountain in the middle. And then they decided that they were going to dig out under the island and make a garage under it. Well, that meant all the planting was gone cause those trees have to have roots.

LD: Right.

Armstrong: And so we had a second planting of this. So this was one thing that we worked on for maybe eight or ten years.

LD: Would that have been in the '30's or later?

Armstrong: Oh, I think probably it was early. . . I can't remember the dates on that.

LD: But it was one of your earlier projects?

Armstrong: Yes. And then we did the planting at the airport when it was first extended, when it was made a nice airport. It used to be a little shack, you know, and then when they made a nice airport we planted that. And now that's been expanded. Now, not long ago we had a Garden Club meeting from, it was about 20 cities represented, and they all came in and said, "Oh, this is the prettiest airport in the country!" And I thought it was nice to hear them say that.

LD: Well, the plantings are wonderful. The flower beds. . .

Armstrong: Well, that was what we started. We started all of that.

LD: And typically, do you make a plan and start the garden and then turn it over to the city or the airport?

Armstrong: Yes, we do. We did that especially with Coe--that planting at Coe. We got the Jaycees to pay for the plan, and then we started filling it in. And then, let's see. . . then, well, I was chairman of the committee that planted the Five Seasons garage, you know the Parkade. So that was my latest.

LD: So you have the responsibility then of choosing the plans and deciding what will succeed best. . .

Armstrong: And what you can pay for.

LD: And what you can pay for. Generally, now does the Garden Club finance these?

Armstrong: Yes. And then we work with the City Parks and they help us a great deal, of course. They have some things that they can donate and then they donate the labor. And they are to take care of the maintenance afterwards. And then I've done a lot at Seminole Valley farm house, that's old--a long time ago. And then a lot at Usher's Ferry and a lot at Meth-Wick Manor, just different parts, different things.

LD: So all over the community there are places that the Garden Club. . .

Armstrong: Yes, I look at them and I think, "Well, that came from here."

LD: Are you involved in the Shakespeare Club?

Armstrong: No, I'm not.

LD: Because they planted that iris garden.

Armstrong: Yes, I know, the Shakespeare Garden. No.

LD: Talk about, if you will, the connection between Brucemore then and the Garden Club in those years. Were there more garden shows that you did or contests and things of that sort?

Armstrong: Yes, we did every other year or so, maybe sometimes every year. We would have garden tours and we would have garden shows and sometimes Christmas shows. We did a good deal of that.

LD: Was that primarily to raise funds then?

Armstrong: Yes, yes, to pay for these civic projects.

LD: I think we've touched on your interaction with the City Parks system. Did that start way back in the early years or was that something that came later?

Armstrong: Yes. No, we've been working on one of the things that we all hope is going to happen is that we're going to have a beautiful park around Cedar Lake. We always, when we were at Coe, we always called it the slough. But now we call it Cedar Lake, you know. But it really is a nice thing to have in the center of a town. And we want to make it a beautiful spot instead of just an industrial area.

- LD: Someone said, someone else that I talked with, that that was potentially one of the most--could be one of the most beautiful areas.
- Armstrong: Yes, it could be. But there's a lot of hurdles yet. I hope I live long enough to see it. I would just love to see that a beautiful spot.
- LD: Is that area owned by the city right around there?
- Armstrong: No, they're almost always individual homes around there, so that's one of the problems. And then, of course, the Iowa Electric Light and Power Company have it.
- LD: So you have to have a lot of cooperation.
- Armstrong: There's a lot of work to do on it.
- LD: I'll vote for that too.
- Armstrong: And the Audubon Society is very good about that too because we have a lot of winter birds that winter there, Canadian ducks and things like that.
- LD: So they would love to encourage a sort of planting.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Well, I hope it works out. Any other remembrances that you'd like to share about the Garden Club?

Armstrong: Oh, I think that's one of my great interests. I just love it!

LD: It's been quite a force over the years and I think it's a very quiet organization and many people are not aware that you've been behind so many of the projects.

Armstrong: We've had lots of garden tours.

LD: Are you involved at all now with Brucemore?

Armstrong: Only indirectly. I gave them a lot of plants and I'm just very interested in it.

LD: They certainly seem to be keeping it very nicely.

Armstrong: Yes, and the Garden Club has a plan to work especially around the pool there to make that a more of a beauty spot.

LD: And with all those potted plants. . .

Armstrong: Well, no, more of a wildflower thing for early May.

LD: I'll have to check that.

Armstrong: Well, it's still in the works.

LD: I see. Were you involved at all in Indian Creek with any of their plantings out there? Of course, they're really into prairie plantings and things of that nature.

Armstrong: Well, only just as a general supporter. I didn't really do anything very special except give them a lot of plants.

LD: Well, that's a very special thing because many of these plants are not available, I'm sure, in any commercial way.

Armstrong: Yes, they have a lot of our bluebells.

LD: Do you save a lot of your own seed?

Armstrong: Yes. I like to do that.

LD: Well, you're sure (can't understand tape here)

Armstrong: And the quantity.

LD: Right.

- Armstrong: And they're almost always. . . but they're interesting too because when you save your own seed, they go back to their genetic ancestors and so you have to sort them out.
- LD: That's interesting. So you might get some varieties that are not exactly what you expected.
- Armstrong: No, you get some pink bluebells, and I've been saving zinnias for years and years to get what I call the melon colors. But at least half of them are poor.
- LD: Because of the background?
- Armstrong: Um-huh.
- LD: I'm going to shift then and move into your memories of your home here in Pleasant Hill and the involvement that Grant Wood had in building this home. Initially, where did you live after you were married?
- Armstrong: We lived at 2233 Meadowbrook for six years and then our family was expanding and we. . . well, I was taking a course in botany at Coe and the assignment was to get 20 deciduous leaves. So I walked out and found this place. It was--pigs were being pastured in here--and I came in here and in no time I

found my 20 leaves. But I was thrilled to see a hilltop that was a broad hilltop because usually hilltops are peaked. And I came home and told Robert I had found such a beautiful spot. And so we bought this lot, or this area. We bought 22 acres from Colonel Robbins and Julie Allen. . .

LD: Julie Allen's father.

Armstrong: Ya, Julie Allen, actually it was her's because it had been willed to her through her mother who was a Larabee. So we had this land. Well, then I had pneumonia and was kind of incapacitated for a long time. They didn't have anything to take care of pneumonia in those days. So I kept thinking of what kind of a house would be nice out here. So I planned the layout. I planned the traffic of the house and the rooms. But I couldn't decide what we wanted, what kind of architecture we wanted. I didn't like what was currently being used. And about that time Grant Wood had been working at the store as a consultant for the decorators. They decided, for example, that instead of having mirrors in the windows, Grant thought monks cloth would be much better. And then the back of the dress wouldn't show.* Sometimes they had to fit it on a small mannequin, you know, and they tuck it in and fix it. And so he did a lot of very interesting things at the store. So we knew him quite well. And so we. . . it was at this time, 19-- well, about '31 or early '32, that he sold "American Gothic" to the Art

Institute in Chicago for \$300. And we all thought, well, here was a local boy who made the big time and he really ought to celebrate. So we got dressed up and went to the party and he unveiled the "American Gothic". And he, at that time, made a little speech about how he had been to France and he had decided that you really ought to do your heart in things that you knew very well. That all around you were interesting things if you could see the beauty in them.

LD: Instead of having to go to France for your subjects, right?

Armstrong: Yes. So after we got through that evening I said to him, "We're interested in building a house. Do you think--", "Oh," he said, "Art should be indigenous. You should really use the things that are at hand." And I said, "Do you think there's an Iowa architecture?" "Oh, definitely yes," he said, "I'll show it to you." And so he and I got in our car and we went around looking at all of these old houses up near Viola and Manchester.

LD: You really did tour then.

Armstrong: Oh, yes, we got all these pictures--took pictures of them and then Robert got interested, too, because they were, we thought, just basic kind of things that we liked and made out of local stone. So all of the features of this house, for in-

stance, the fireplace and the stairway were taken from an inn on a road near Manchester and this batten work that was typical in all of the early houses.

LD: Now, when you say taken you mean you just took the design and the idea.

Armstrong: Took the design. No, we didn't take the wood because they were different. But we took the designs from the outside of the house. The design for the porch, I remember he kept saying, "There's a house here that has a porch that I wish you could see." And we had a hard time finding it. We kept turning corners and he'd think, well, that isn't the right corner. Finally we found it and it was with these arches. He says, "I always thought it was so pretty." And then six weeks later the house burned. So it was a good thing we had the picture of it because he worked on it later. Well, anyway, all these details and Bruce McKay was then a builder with his brother. Bruce was not a graduate architect but he was a very great, very talented person, very artistic. And he went with us, and we would go to these places which were then a chicken house or a place where they were hanging up the corn for seed.

LD: So they really were old.

Armstrong: Old houses. And we'd pick up a piece of the woodwork which was falling off, and we found the old doorknobs. So we started hunting and found down in, I believe it was St. Louis, we found an old hardware store that had these things. Now they're duplicated, but those days they weren't. This was, you see, 19-- . . . we started to build this house Halloween 1932 and we moved in on August 10, 1933. Grant was so interested in it all. He was out here practically every other day. It was during the Depression and Robert always had the feeling that we should do things when nobody else was. And when nobody else was building was the time to build, and we had wonderful workmen.

LD: I'll bet because they weren't in any hurry, were they.

Armstrong: No. And we just. . . and then later we had all the workmen come back after we moved in and had a party for them and their spouses. It was just fun to see them walking through and telling their--talking about this detail and about that. It was a lot of fun.

LD: A good way to do a house warming.

Armstrong: Yes, it was a nice house warming. I, for instance, we wanted walnut on the banister for the stairway and we had the hardest time of finding walnut for it. Finally they found it

from a place that made gun butts, so that was it. This was the exact copy of a stairway up at Manchester.

LD: So Grant took an interest in both the inside and the exterior of the house?

Armstrong: Yes, many details, oh, just many details.

LD: Did he actually. . . did he serve as something like a contractor for you then?

Armstrong: Well, we paid him by the hour as I remember. That was the way we did at the store, so much by the hour. He was a teacher then at McKinley School, you know.

LD: Oh, so he was working full time, sure.

Armstrong: But he would be coming out and doing it and. . .

LD: Well, you had said earlier that he actually was involved in drawing the designs on the wood.

Armstrong: Yes, yes he did. And he made, for instance, when the plasterer was making these designs in the plaster, the plasterers just couldn't seem to understand what Grant was talking about. And Grant said, "Well, I'll fix something for you." So he

made, well, something like they use in geometry, you know, they put a pin in the middle and then they go around. And he made these little dents out of tin or something. And then he got up on the table and made the one out in the hall himself. And the plasterer said, "Oh, I think I could do that."

LD: Once he showed him.

Armstrong: Um-huh, once. . .

LD: Now, did those concentric circles in the ceiling, and I'll have to describe them for the people who are listening probably, there's a series of one, two, three rings around the light fixture, was that from something that you had seen somewhere?

Armstrong: Yes, we'd seen this type of thing. Some of them were fancier, but the ones that we liked were the simpler ones. And then all of those that we saw were on chains, would come down with a kerosene lamp, you know. Well, of course, we wanted electric lights so Grant figured out that thing in the middle and it was made out of copper; and then, when we painted it, it kind of turned a funny pink. So he had to work that out to do something about that.

LD: So he just adapted it.

Armstrong: Um-huh. He was so interesting. For instance, in the library we wanted. . . I said, "Well, where are the children going to hang their Christmas stockings on this fireplace?" And he said, "Well, I have some hooks." He had done some work in iron and he said, "I have some little hooks and I'll bring them." And then he put them in while the brick mason was laying them up, why, he set them in so the children would have a place to hang their stockings.

LD: So he was really connected

END OF SIDE ONE -- TAPE ONE

LD: This is side two of an interview with Esther Yovel Armstrong on July 9, 1985. Okay, you were mentioning some friends that he brought out.

Armstrong: Grant was very much interested in this as an architectural project; and he had some regional friends, John Stuart Curry and Thomas Benton; and he brought each of them out a couple of times to see the progress of the house in its building and afterwards.

LD: So this home was approved by all kinds of ascetic gentlemen, wasn't it.

Armstrong: Yes, they were interested in it as a typical Iowa house.

LD: Would you talk about the stone exterior of your home?

Armstrong: It was made from Stone City where Grant and some of his friends had this art colony. And the old stone masons were just artists. They knew how to do this. The masons that put up the stone in the house were 90 years old.

LD: And they actually came here with the stones and set them in place.

Armstrong: Yes. We had two car loads of stone that came down from Stone City, train loads, train car loads.

LD: Freight cars, you mean.

Armstrong: Freight cars full of stone. And they would chip them away and put them in.

LD: So they'd sit properly.

Armstrong: Beautiful big stone, you know.

LD: Are these stones mortared then?

LD: I see. So you knew him in that sense very well before you actually began building.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: It was probably a very friendly relationship, more than an employer and employee.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. And I was so fond of his mother. She was a lovely little lady, you know, and they lived upstairs in Turner's garage. And she gave me plants. She gave me all the plants that were in his mother, you know, his mother's picture. And the only one I still have, the others all died at times of stress of some kind, but I still have the mother-in-law tongue, you know.

LD: Well, now, that probably is worth--if anybody knew of the significance. . .

Armstrong: Well, one time it had multiplied, you know, through the years and we sold them at \$10.00 a piece in order to raise money to plant around the Five Seasons Parkade.

LD: I'll bet you had lots of takers.

Armstrong: We did. We sold them.

LD: I'll be darn. Did his interest extend at all into landscaping of the grounds, things of that sort?

Armstrong: No, no he didn't. That was Mary Spence that helped me with that.

LD: Did you lay out, then, all the plan?

Armstrong: Yes, this was all laid out on blueprints before we even got into the ground here.

LD: That's something we kind of passed over, what you mentioned that it was a pig farm, but beyond that, what was the area around here like when you moved in?

Armstrong: Well, it was woods. These people, the Hennessey family, which they have big machinery going up and down the streets nowadays, but they were the people that were having--raising the pigs. And they would get garbage from the hotels and feed these pigs. And so sometimes we would find hotel dishes around and we sometimes found some Indian arrowheads, you know, 'cause the Indians were living right near across the street over here at the Verbas. And there was a big mound of old clam shells that the Indians had gotten out of Indian Creek.

LD: I'll be darn. So there were still Indians in the community up into the '20's?

Armstrong: Well, no, I don't think so. I think that. . .

LD: You think that was the remnants of an early time.

Armstrong: Yes, but the Verbas had a wonderful collection. They had a whole great big cigar box full of Indian arrowheads and hammers that they had made out of stone, you know, just chipped out, the Indians did.

LD: Well, I knew that there were Indians nearby in Tama but I didn't realize. . .

Armstrong: Yes, they were here 'cause there was this great pile of rotted clam shells.

LD: Hence, Indian Creek.

Armstrong: Yes, it was Indian Creek.

LD: We were, I think I got off track there for a bit, but back to your connections with Grant Wood over the years--after this period, he, I guess, became much better known. Did he stay as

close to his old friends in Cedar Rapids when he became so well known?

Armstrong: Well, he did, but he was so famous and he was going here and yon; and then he went to the University of Iowa; and he had really a rough time down there. He had married and. . .

LD: And that was rather late in his life, wasn't it?

Armstrong: Yes, he was in his 40's or so, and then he got the cancer and it was a sad thing. He wasn't. . .

LD: Well, he died in his forties so he really did not live to enjoy the fruits of all his efforts.

Armstrong: Yes, he died very young.

LD: What kind of a man was he? If you could describe him, of course, we have pictures, but. . .

Armstrong: He was shy in many respects, but he loved the theater. He was very fond of Mary Lackerstein and Hazel Brown. I can remember different plays that these old original Community Theater people put on. I can remember "Journey's End" and some of those old plays that he and Marvin did the scenery for.

LD: Oh, really.

Armstrong: And Bruce McKay was the star, and really those were very interesting times and lots of fun.

LD: Those were true community theaters, weren't they!

Armstrong: Oh, yes, they were.

LD: Where was the theater at that time?

Armstrong: Well, I believe it was that one down, well, where it used to be on Third Street.

LD: There was a period when it was in the 'Y, I've been told, and I didn't know whether. . .

Armstrong: Yes, it was in the YMCA but I can't just remember. It seems to me it was down on Third Street.

LD: And they were very much involved.

Armstrong: Oh, yes, very much involved.

LD: So he had a, whether he acted or not, he had a great appreciation for. . .

Armstrong: Yes, he did. And he was always a very casual sort of person. And I remember how much fun he got out of the fact that he got an honorary degree, and he made this lithograph, you know, of himself. And he said, "You know, they only gave it to me because of the American Gothic." So he says, "I'm going to make everything gothic in it. Even these two guys that are giving me the hood," he says, "I'm going to make them look like they're gothic and I'll have the gothic window."

LD: Ya, it is. It's a wonderful piece. He must have had a great sense of humor.

Armstrong: Oh, he did. He had a great sense of humor.

LD: That shows in some of things that they have in the museum.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. And then his paintings. They all had a common touch. They give you. . . they speak to you. You see the picture of appraisal of, well, just. . . I can remember him doing the picture of, let's see, what was it called, "Murder on the Ridge Road"—it was a collision of three cars you were going to see. And you knew there was going to be an accident. And he said, "I'm going to draw this like it's an editorial."

LD: There's a great temptation nowadays to turn away from. . .

Armstrong: Yes, they say, "Let them take care of themselves."

LD: Right. Although I think that's one of the strengths of the Methodist church that they've never turned away.

Armstrong: I hope not.

LD: I hope you feel that way after all of your service.

Armstrong: I certainly do. I think it's very important. The Lord made all these people.

LD: Ya, and we, you know, even in our community one of the things that we'd mentioned the other day is that to me a measure of a community's tolerance is how many different ethnic groups live together. And Cedar Rapids is still a place that is very much populated by refugees and immigrants.

Armstrong: There's a lot, as you said. I was so interested in your little story.

LD: Oh, yes, about the youngsters, well, and yours too, you know, it does seem to me that there is an ability to accept in this community.

Armstrong: Well, we should.

LD: I'm going to shift a bit, although still talking about the Depression years because we were talking about St. Paul's and the local community involvement, and you mentioned the soup kitchen. Were you a charter member of the Junior League during that period?

Armstrong: Ya, I guess I was.

LD: 'Cause I think it was in the '30's, wasn't it, that it began?

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Talk about what the League's role was then at that time.

Armstrong: Well, we called ourselves Cedar Rapids Junior Service League, and then we were accepted into the national. And we worked at a soup kitchen. One of my Coe classmates was Elizabeth Bender, you've heard of the Bender Pool?

LD: Yes.

Armstrong: It was named for her. Well, there was Dr. Rummel. He had a big house; and he wanted to move out of it; and they moved it

up into Oak Hill; and it was then called the Jane Boyd Community House. And it was a three story house and was it a busy place. Because Oak Hill had a lot of poor people in it that were really affected with the Depression. And in those days the schools didn't have lunches at all.

LD: There was no hot lunch.

Armstrong: No hot lunch program or practically no athletic programs at all, you know. We had it at the church. We had a gym. It was the first gym in town, I believe. Well, I guess they did have one at the YMCA later but they had one at St. Paul's when it was built in 1913 which was really something. It's now the family fellowship room, you know.

LD: But it was really needed in those days.

Armstrong: Yes. And it was busy. It was dated every day. Well, anyway it was in Dr. Rummel's house, the old original Jane Boyd House down on Oak Hill, that we used to have this soup kitchen. And we'd go down there and make soup. We'd ask people to donate vegetables; and we'd buy things if we'd have to; and we got hamburger for the meat so everybody would have a little. That was a great experience. The Junior League did that.

LD: Did you only--were you primarily serving children or were you serving anybody?

Armstrong: It was children from Tyler School.

LD: The children from Tyler.

Armstrong: Um-huh, that came in.

LD: And you just came in and served your turn and made soup and served it.

Armstrong: Um-huh. You made soup. You'd go early and get it on, you know. And then we would have bread with them and usually some kind of dessert for them 'cause they loved it. And then another thing, after that kind of was taken care of, I worked for a long time at the Well Baby Clinics down on the Island. We would go up to, I think it was about the fourth floor of the City Hall, and I worked there with Dr. Hecker on taking and weighing the babies, you know.

LD: Now is this where you would actually show mothers how to bathe babies and things like that?

Armstrong: Um-huh. And weigh them and how to feed them, and then he would give the babies the right formula and see if they were

gaining right. And at the same time, some of the mothers just had one baby every year, you know, some of the doctors would give them some birth control. This was always very. . .

LD: Which was very new at that time.

Armstrong: It was very new at that time. But the mothers would want it, you know.

LD: Oh, I'm sure. Well, who would come to you in that time? Were they people that were referred by the social welfare system?

Armstrong: Yes, some way or other. I don't know. I never had anything to do with getting the mothers.

LD: Right.

Armstrong: I just took care of them after they got there. And I would just help the doctor and weigh the babies and show them, of course, I'd had babies of my own. . .

LD: You could talk to them on that. How many people would you have come in on a typical morning or how ever long you were open?

Armstrong: It was an afternoon always. Oh, I suppose 10 or 12, 15.

LD: It was steady. Were they people primarily from the Czech community or. . .

Armstrong: No, not any special community, just low income people.

LD: People in need. But at that time there were still a lot of different new ethnic backgrounds.

Armstrong: No, I can't remember. They all spoke English, as I remember.

LD: So that was certainly very local, what you were doing at that point.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Who was hardest hit in Cedar Rapids? Were the factories, as you remember? Did they cut back in their production? I would think not.

Armstrong: They all tried to do as best they could. I know at the store we never had to let anybody go but everybody took discounts.

LD: In their pay?

Armstrong: In their pay. But we did the very best we could and sometimes you'd wonder if you were ever going to meet the payroll.

LD: Ya. Well, in some ways I think Cedar Rapids probably was luckier than a lot of communities with its food production.

Armstrong: Yes. That's one thing that the oatmeal factories always do well. It's what we need more is more agricultural things.

LD: I remember Ellen Williamson saying the same thing and during that period oats were in great demand. How did that period affect your family life because here you were putting up a home in a time when people were very nervous about spending money on anything? Do you remember that it curbed the way you lived, the way you traveled?

Armstrong: We didn't travel.

LD: You just didn't.

Armstrong: We didn't. Except that Robert had to go to market. But no, we didn't do anything. We just stayed home and "tended to our knitting."

LD: So what would you do for a good time then in those days?

Armstrong: Well, we had lots of family picnics and potlucks and lots of picnics. The earliest one and the latest one, we'd try to have. We just loved picnics.

LD: The first and the last. That's great. Winter picnics, did you ever do that?

Armstrong: Well, I can't remember going on a winter picnic but we. . .

LD: Well, that leads me into something that I'm very interested in because I'm right now trying the mother, volunteer, and starting a business with my husband. How did you balance all of those things because you were getting more and more involved in so many areas of service in the community?

Armstrong: Well, it was local things that I did then during the Depression. Everything was local except for the clothing collection. Of course, that took a lot of time.

LD: I'm sure it did.

Armstrong: I did a lot. That was my big extra effort.

LD: When was your last child born?

Armstrong: 1938.

LD: '38. So you had very small children at that time.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Did you have someone who came in and helped out in the home?

Armstrong: Yes, we did. Actually, we had a live-in person.

LD: It would almost be a necessity.

Armstrong: Um-huh, we did. We had a live-in person; and she was taking a beauty course; and so she lived here and would help us and help babysit, you know. She was becoming a beautician.

LD: So now would that have been that Capri School? Did it exist in those days?

Armstrong: Well, it was called Paris then.

LD: Oh, but the same idea.

Armstrong: Yes. I think the Paris became the Capri or something.

LD: Where did your children go to school in those years?

Armstrong: They went to Johnson where yours do. They all went to Johnson, and then they all graduated from Franklin as the high school. Mimi's was the last class to graduate from Franklin.

LD: And in those years, were volunteers invited into the schools?

Armstrong: Oh, yes, very much. Miss Thompson was the principal down at Johnson School and she said, "Now, I'm not going to have any PTA's, but I want to have the parents come and visit." And so every month I would go visit. And I have loved it always to go visit school. And, you know, lots of times they don't really want you to come very badly.

LD: They always don't.

Armstrong: Some teachers don't want you to. But I always loved to visit school, and so I got the reputation that "you are the mother that visits school." (Laughter)

LD: And you were well known around there.

Armstrong: Yes, I was well known.

LD: That was a different community around the Johnson School in those days. From what I have heard, it was much more homogeneous.

Armstrong: Yes, I think probably. I think it probably has changed some.

LD: Well, Johnson now has a mixture of some of the, I would say, economically best well off and worst well off students in the community.

Armstrong: Is that so?

LD: So it's quite a mix but still very much a volunteer. That's one of the things I like best about it too. You can go and see what. . .

Armstrong: Who's the principal there now?

LD: Steve Chambliss; and he is just wonderful, I think.

Armstrong: Good.

LD: They have a very limited PTA, too, today; but the volunteer program brought in thousands of hours of work last year.

Armstrong: Isn't that great?

LD: Ya, which I'm not supposed to be talking about on tape. Back to that period when you were raising your family, what were the holidays that were most special in your family?

Armstrong: Oh, Christmas and birthdays.

LD: What did you do to celebrate birthdays? Every family has its special thing.

Armstrong: Well, of course, Robert's birthday is on the 4th of July so that's always the big day. And this year we just, I must say we had three grown up grandsons come from far away to celebrate. One from New York, one from Tampa, and one from Dallas. And this was a big celebration. And, well, we just always—we usually had picnics. The first date I ever had that Robert ever asked me for was Memorial Day. So since that we've always had a big picnic on Memorial Day to celebrate.

LD: Which sometimes takes grit. (Laughter)

Armstrong: So we've had them now for 62 years.

LD: Rain or shine.

Armstrong: Rain or shine.

LD: Cold or warm. Where do you go? Do you always have them here?

Armstrong: Right here. Well, at least since we've been in this house we've always had them. . . we had one picnic here before the roof was on. The roof was on but I mean it wasn't finished.

LD: What sorts of things did your daughters do outside of school in those days? Did you have the whole round of musical instruments and activities and. . .

Armstrong: Camp Fire and oh, yes, they all took piano lessons 'til they were ninth grade. And then Camp Fire. And I loved going to Camp Hitaga and selling donuts. And, of course, choir at the church and same things.

LD: Did you have any that were Dieman Bennett dancers?

Armstrong: No, no we didn't. They took some dancing lessons though at the Club, I remember that.

LD: How much were you involved, I'm sure you were members of the Cedar Rapids Country Club. Did that figure a lot in your social life?

Armstrong: No, we don't do too much. We go out. . . they did a lot of swimming and tennis. The girls did a lot of that. Especially Mimi did more tennis than any of them. And they liked that.

LD: I was just probing about that because for some people their growing up memories were, and of course your daughters are, so closely allied to that place and so many of their friends and activities and everything--it was almost like a small community in and of its own.

Armstrong: Yes. I did want to say that I've been working lately in the Food Bank. I didn't put that in. That's been a

END OF SIDE TWO -- TAPE ONE

LD: This is the first side of tape two of an interview with Esther Yovel Armstrong on July 9, 1985. I think that it's wonderful to see what happens with generations in families and a number of the people that we have interviewed that the generations have gone off somewhere else and they're the last of the people in the community. What has happened with your children? Have they all taken up, well I know one is still here, but that's the only one I know.

Armstrong: That's right. Well, our oldest daughter is Mary Dusheck. She's married to Ralph Dusheck who is a research psychologist and

Armstrong: Oh, yes. She goes into the White House once a week and sends out answers to the letters that come into the President.

LD: I'll be darn. As a volunteer.

Armstrong: Yes, as a volunteer activity. That's kind of interesting.

LD: That really is.

Armstrong: And, well, are you interested in the children? I don't know.

LD: Oh, yes!

Armstrong: They have two boys. The oldest boy was a graduate of Duke and then he went to Harvard Business School for two years and then decided he didn't want to be a business man. He still wanted to be a doctor.

LD: I'll be darn.

Armstrong: So he's on his fourth year of medicine down at Dallas, Texas. The second boy graduated from Ohio Wesleyan and got a masters in business from Vanderbilt and he is in real estate business in Tampa. Our second daughter's name is Esther. We always called her Goldie because she had golden hair and had the wrong name. She's married to Lee Cooper. Both Mary and

Goldie graduated from Cornell College. And Goldie, right after Cornell, went to India for four years where she did public relations for the Methodist church visiting the Methodist missions and writing about them. And she got very much interested in Indian art while she was there and had a big exhibit she got together of Indian Christian art. Then she came back here and married Lee Cooper and Lee went to--they were assigned to go to Africa in 1960 when everything kind of blew up and Dag Hammarskold was killed there. So they went to France for a year to brush up on their French and one of their children was born there. And then they went for a year to Cameron, which was a very rugged experience.

LD: Did I not hear her speak about that?

Armstrong: You might have.

LD: It must have been about a year ago in the church?

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Yes. That was a wonderful talk about surviving a very dangerous period.

Armstrong: A very dangerous period because her little boy, they went to the post office to mail some letters and there were a lot of

heads put up on poles around the post office and he says, "Do they eat people here?" For a child to see that. This was one of them that was here this weekend, and he's a graduate of Dartmouth in engineering and at the top of his class and went two years to M.I.T. and he's now with Texas Instrument in Dallas. The second one is Andy and he is a graduate of Duke and is with Morgan Stanley Investment Company in New York. The third one is going to Stanford, Charlie.

LD: So they have three sons?

Armstrong: They have three sons. And then Anna, her name is Anna Yovel Armstrong Johnston, and her husband is a Presbyterian minister, Dr. Thomas Johnston. He is in charge of development for the Presbyterian Church in Ohio, Michigan, and Kentucky. He is a flyer and he flies around to all of these meetings from upper Michigan clear down to Kentucky in a day.

LD: Oh my.

Armstrong: And they have. . .

LD: Makes him efficient, doesn't it?

Armstrong: Yes. She is a part-time worker at Presbyterian Westminister Terrace, a retirement home, and she's in charge of volunteers.

They have three children. The oldest is a girl. . . is this one right here. . . Katie and she's just graduated from Earlham Phi Beta Kappa and tennis champion, athletic honors. She's now hunting a job. I don't know exactly what she'll do. This boy is Timothy and he's a junior at Yale in physics. And then they have a daughter in high school, Sarah, who is really into dramatics and a violinist.

Then our fourth daughter is Amelia Margaret Armstrong Meffert and we've always called her Mimi. Her sisters called her Mimi from the time she was a baby. She's married. . . she went to Ohio Wesleyan and then took a masters at Yale, and Bill is a thoraxes surgeon and does open heart surgery. They have three children. Steven is just graduated from Duke this year and is going on to take a masters in animal behavior. Molly, this is Molly, just graduated from Washington High School this year and is going to Stanford. And little Susie is 11 and in grade school.

LD: And the only one I've had an opportunity to meet is Mimi. Do you, I believe Mimi is involved in the store now, is she not?

Armstrong: Yes, she is.

LD: Working from. . .

Armstrong: Yes, she works 20 hours a week at the store. She's, I think they call her Vice President in Charge of Long Range Planning.

LD: That's a good title. I wonder, do you see any hope that you'll get any of those grandchildren back here into the business or is that something. . .

Armstrong: They have to want to do it, Robert says.

LD: That's true.

Armstrong: They have, several of them--three or four of them--have come and worked in the summer or have done something like that. But they have. . . Robert says if the family does it they have to work twice as hard as anybody else and it's up to them to want to know whether they want to do it.

LD: And I think often have to sow their own wild oats first before they make that decision.

Armstrong: Yes, they have to decide.

LD: But that would be something if that should occur.

Armstrong: The store will be. . . is 95 years old now, so in five more years it will be 100.

LD: And it will have been under the same family name for that whole process. And that's really quite a legacy. I'm sure you hope that it can continue.

Armstrong: Well, I hope so. If it can do well.

LD: You stated once in one of the pieces of information I have, I'm not sure if it was a biography or a brief autobiographical thing you were writing for Coe or whatever, that your life passion and all your activities in your life have always been pointed in the direction of your Christian belief to help bring peace on earth and good will among men through your own actions and your own involvement. I think so much of what you've said about your community life and experience point in that very direction. And I guess I would hope, you know, that you feel at this point in your life that you can see some change that is for the better. It's awfully hard sometimes, isn't it. . .

Armstrong: We wonder, when we see the things that are happening in the Middle East, we wonder how there can be peace on earth. It's been very rugged for hundreds of years.

LD: One of the things about this community that is very special is that so many people like you have made it their life work, and I think you can maybe not see the results in a great way but you can see it them in your own environment.

Armstrong: Oh, yes. Yes, we can see a lot of difference in the last 20 years in the acceptance of the Blacks.

LD: Yes, and in that general, I think, just acceptance of all people of all backgrounds.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Which brings me to that awful question that your husband made me wait to get an answer on because he said he had to think about this one, but he gave me an answer on it. Having been in Cedar Rapids for more than 60 years, how do you think the community has changed since you came as a college student and bride and what was special about it then that may no longer be or vice versa that maybe has endured? Is there something that you can point to that has made it a worthwhile place for you in the years?

Armstrong: Well, we don't have streetcars anymore.

LD: That's true.

Armstrong: And I can remember, I thought it was a great deal--it was a big deal when I got on a streetcar to go from Coe College downtown. It was an adventure for me from coming from a little town. And then I remember Robert's father was so interested in this, oh, what did he call it, miracle mile? Not miracle. . .

LD: Seedling.

Armstrong: The Seedling Mile. The Seedling Mile out between Mount Vernon and Cedar Rapids. And we would go--he wasn't very well, and he would get a driver, and we would go driving out. He'd say, "Let's go out and ride on the Seedling Mile and we'll see what it will be like when Iowa has paved roads."

LD: He was a visionary, wasn't he?

Armstrong: Yes. And very much of a promoter of everything to have everything better. Now, none of our children can hardly think of it that we didn't have paved roads. I remember the first car I ever rode in. I got in the back. It was kind of like a "lover's tub" in the back and the chauffeur drove up alone up in front.

LD: What you're touching is the affect of transportation on our lives. It has opened up the whole world to so much that. . .

Armstrong: We're living in the automobile age, maybe almost the airplane age.

LD: We're beyond that, ya. Which brings us back full circle. One thing that I really wanted you to mention on tape was your discovery of the old territorial road that runs through your property.

Armstrong: Oh, yes.

LD: Not only do you remember the first car, but talk about the story about that.

Armstrong: Well, when we started building this house and taking care of the yard, we found this old road which was about six foot deep of yellow clay down at the bottom of it and found out that it was a real old road. Bob Waples, who opened up the addition beyond us, said, "I think if you'd write to the Library of Congress you could find out more about this." Which we did. And we found out that this road was first surveyed in 1841, and it was a road from Dubuque to Iowa City. When Iowa City was then the territorial capitol. So we're very sure that Robert's grandparents came to Cedar Rapids on this old

road and I'm quite sure that my grandmother came on it because it was the only road into town. And so we at first thought that we would bulldoze it over and make a nice level place and then we decided it was too interesting to do that so we walled up one side and made a spring garden on the side that faced the south and an autumn garden on the one that faced the north.

LD: And the ruts are still. . .

Armstrong: No, no we got grass to grow.

LD: But the path is still there?

Armstrong: Yes, oh yes, it's still there.

LD: You'd also mentioned your grandmother's story of crossing the Mississippi in an age before there were bridges.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: Would you share that with us?

Armstrong: Well, yes. My grandmother came to Pleasant Hill. By the way, Pleasant Hill was the name of the old Yovel farm and so that's the reason we call this place Pleasant Hill. And she

came as a little girl. She was age six when they left Indiana and came in January and February across Illinois and came to the Mississippi River. And she told us that the river was half frozen and they walked out on the ice and the men took the covered wagon, which the bottom of a covered wagon was in the shape of a boat; and they drove the horses across the river over to Iowa. Then they got a rowboat and came back for Grandma and her mother and the other children. And the cow had to come too. And the cow, the mother had to sit in the end of the boat while the men rowed the boat and hold the cow's head up. And the cow didn't like to get into that cold water and she mooed all the way across the river. And Grandma said, "I felt so sorry for the cow, I cried all the time." And she said, "We got over to Iowa and it was nothing but mud." And she said, "It was black mud," and she said, "We could only go six miles a day in the covered wagon." And they finally got to Cedar Rapids and parked the covered wagon out near the school house, which is Second Avenue and Fifth Street; and she said the children were in school and I watched them and I went around collecting flowers that were growing. And the men got on horses and went out to find a farm which we moved to and it was later called Pleasant Hill.

LD:

I'll be darn. Well, that's a full circle, isn't it from the Seedling Mile to the old territorial road.

Armstrong: Yes.

LD: But that's how much life is, I mean, the incredible changes there have been. I have, I think, covered all the areas that I had set out before the interview. Are there things that you would like to share with us, some memories. . .

Armstrong: I just want to say that I think you've done such a nice thing. I think it's wonderful that you're doing this.

LD: Well, thank you.

Armstrong: Because I think it will be historically important.

LD: It's pretty selfish, you know. I'm thinking of my children too. They don't know. . .

Armstrong: My children, when our grandsons were here, they said, "Oh, let us have the record of this." Cause they would love to have it.

LD: And you will receive a copy.

Armstrong: Well, this will be real nice.

LD: Thank you very, very much.

Armstrong: You're very welcome.



9-1-1957



Miss Armstrong To Be Bride of Connecticut Man

Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong of Pleasant Hill, Thirty-fourth street at Bever avenue SE, are announcing the approaching marriage of their daughter, Esther Alice, to Lee R. Cooper of Rowayton, Conn., son of Dr. and Mrs. Claude W. Cooper of Creston. The wedding will be an evening ceremony Dec. 27 in St. Paul's Methodist church. . . . Miss Armstrong was graduated from Cornell college, where she was elected to Mortar Board, Tau Kappa Alpha honorary forensic fraternity, president of the Associated Women Students and Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities. She recently completed four years of service in publicity and youth work for the Methodist church with headquarters in Delhi, India. She will continue graduate studies at Columbia university this fall in the New York school of social work. . . . Mr. Cooper was graduated from DePauw university at Greencastle, Ind., where he was a rector scholar; elected to Gold Key, senior men's honorary; three-year letterman on the swimming team; a member of the dramatics honorary, and Delta Tau Delta fraternity. Following a year's study at Union Theological seminary in New York, he spent three years in Korea in educational and refugee rehabilitation and relief work. He is a senior in the Yale Divinity school at New Haven, Conn.



—Gazette photo by Carl Franks.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong and their daughter, Mimi, are shown arriving at Municipal airport in Cedar Rapids Saturday following a four-months around-the-world tour.

Sun., Feb. 6, 1955

Will shows Armstrong estate goes to his wife, Esther

12/6/90 By Tom Fruehling

Gazette staff writer

Except for a \$5,000 bequest to the Greater Cedar Rapids Foundation, the estate of Robert Armstrong will be placed in a trust for his wife, Esther, according to a will on file in Linn District Court.

The will states that when Esther Armstrong dies, a charitable trust will be established for "religious, charitable, scientific, liter-

ary and educational" institutions.

The Armstrong will does not specify who benefits from the trust, saying those decisions are to be made by trustees.

However, listed as the type of institutions for which the funds are intended are St. Paul's United Methodist Church, the world mission program of the United Methodist Church, Coe and Cornell colleges, the YMCA, United

Way and the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art.

Money from the trust is to be used for "specific and special programs and projects," not for operating expenses.

The will directs that part of the trust be used for an endowed chair in forensics at Coe College.

"I have found that my involvement, while a student at Coe College, in forensics to have been a great value to me throughout

my life," Armstrong wrote in his will. "I accordingly ask that my trustees explore with Coe College the feasibility not only from a cost aspect but, more importantly, from a student interest aspect of establishing an endowed chair in forensics."

The will says that the Armstrongs' four daughters are not named in the will because each received benefits while Robert Armstrong was alive.

The Loran
Summer 1963



“—tribute to a by-gone age.”

The Armstrong House

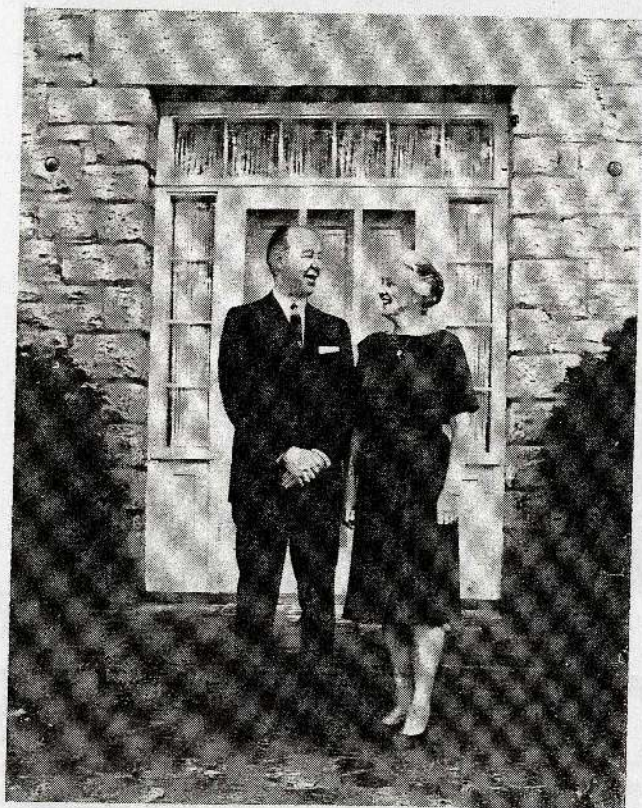
This home at Cedar Rapids reflects the strong influence of the old stone homes throughout Iowa's countryside.

By JOAN LIFFRING

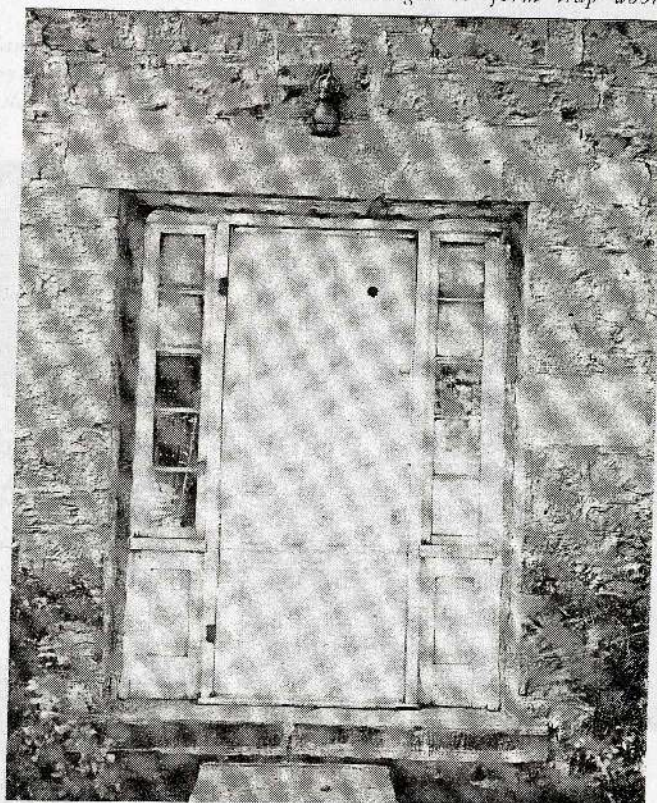
A COPY of early Iowa farm houses of native stone, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Armstrong of Cedar Rapids, is a tribute to a by-gone age. It has enduring charm. Built on one of the highest elevations in Cedar Rapids, the home is in the midst of a wooded area with native flowers. An old ridge road, now lined with rock walls, runs through the property. One side is walled for early spring flowers, the other side blooms in August and September. Pioneers once drove their wagons on this road from Prairie Du Chien to the village of Cedar Rapids.

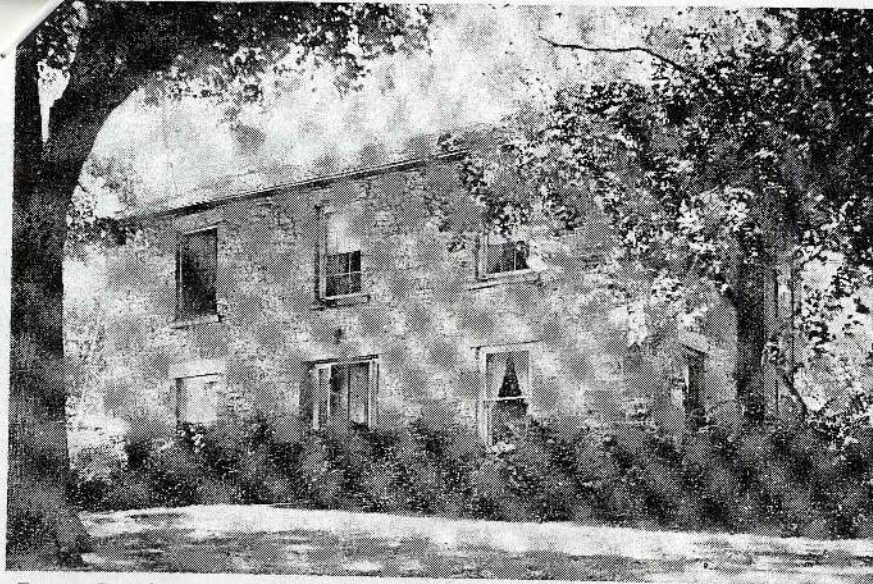
Famed Iowa Artist Grant Wood assisted Mrs. Armstrong and the late Architect Bruce McKay in designing the house. As a starting point, the three explored old Iowa settler's homes like the John Doe house in the village of Waubeek. They copied from many different crumbling stone houses, dating back to pre-civil war, using details of paneling design, and fireplaces of pioneer simplicity.

The Armstrong entrance, recessed into thick stone walls, repeats in detail the Doe front door. A derrick hoisted the half ton slab over the doorway.

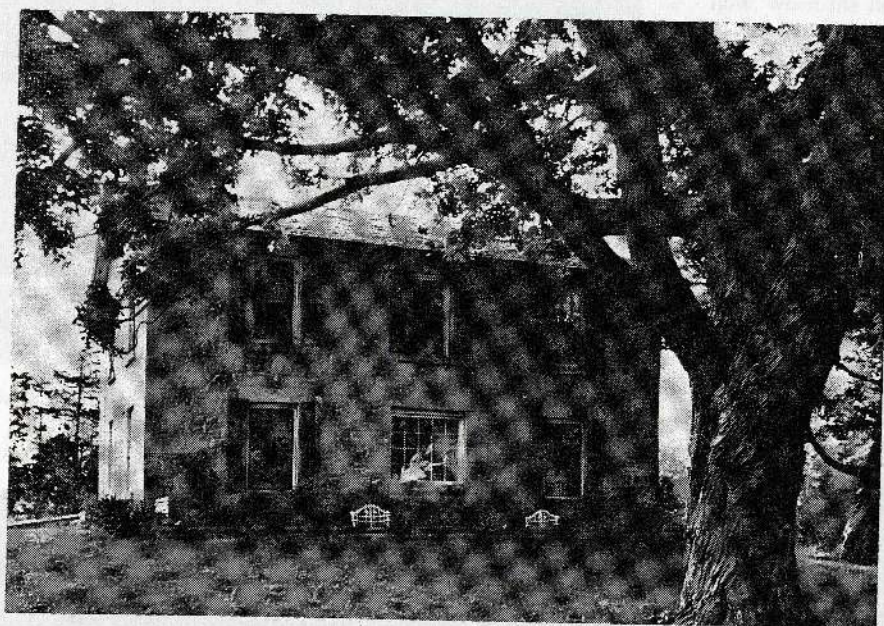


Mr. & Mrs. Armstrong at doorway. Round circles near the doorway are lights. Grant Wood refused to let any lamps hang from house. Stone masons chiseled holes for lamps. (Below) Doe entrance. Panels hinged to form trap door.





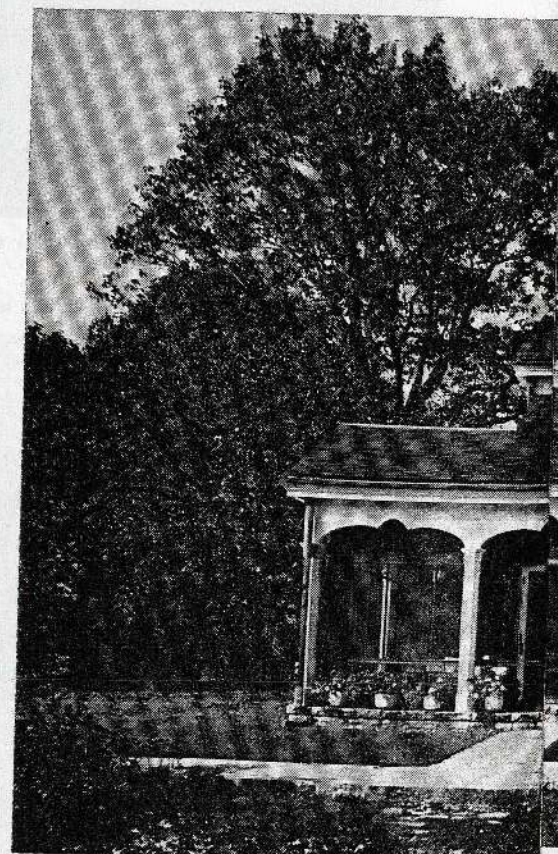
Eugene Doe house, built in 1860 at Waubeek. Original windows had divided panes.

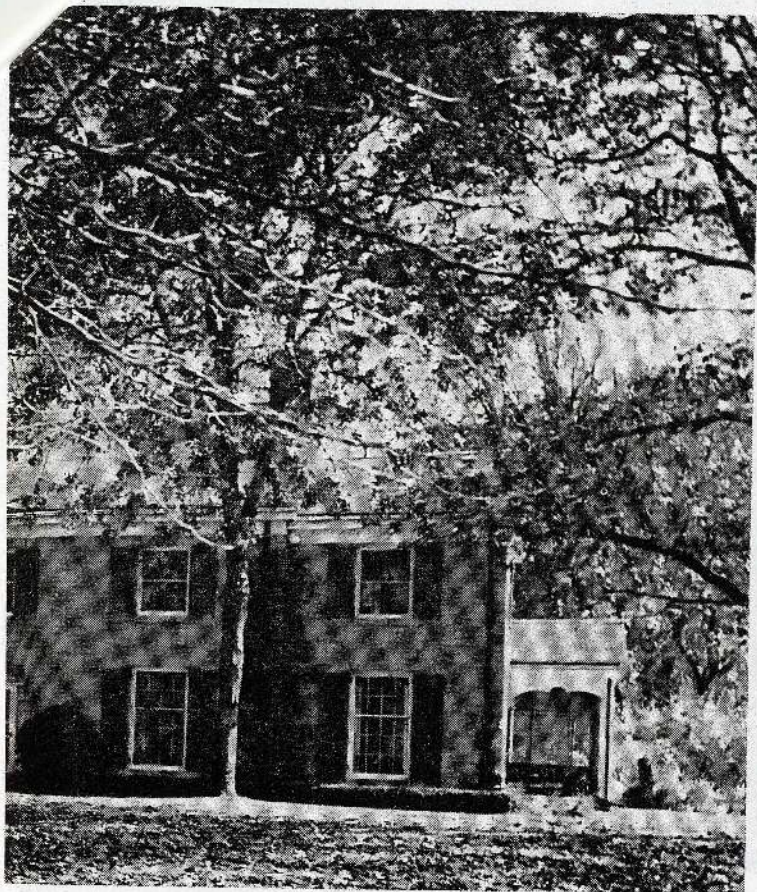


The old John Doe home, still occupied at Waubeek, provided many of the architectural details for the Armstrong home. This is the Doe home today. Gone is entrance copied by Armstrong. (Below) Old stone house shows carved slab over doorway.

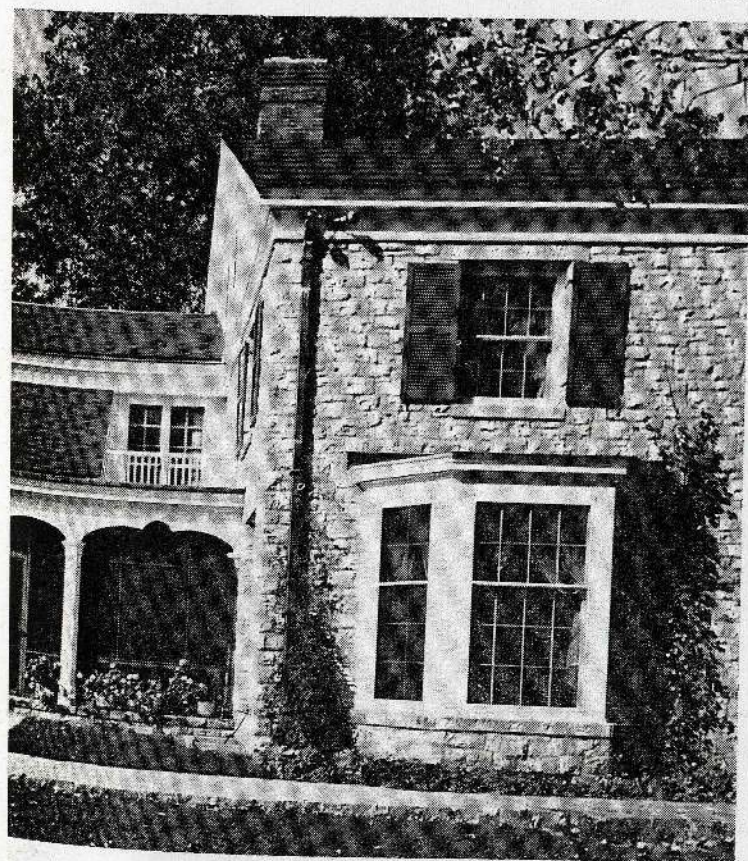


View of Armstrong home from the old territorial Doe house. Trim on the porch is copied from an old leaf picked each time for color when the shutters are changed.





roadway back of their home. The windows are the same as in the John old house. (Below) Paint for the shutters matches the green of an oak need painting. Design for porch arches was worked out by Grant Wood.

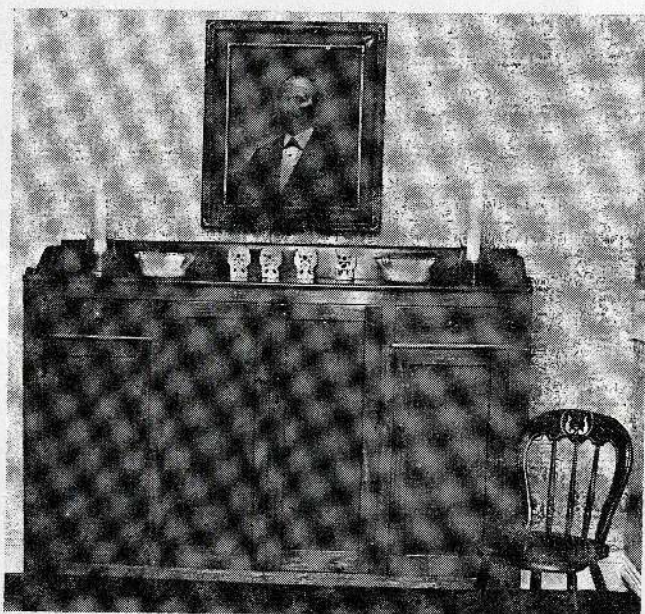


Iron hardware, with steeple-shaped hinge pins and china door knobs are exact copies from the old houses. The plaster center-light medallions refer back to the time of the pull-up-and-down hanging lamps with opalescent, ruby or amber overlay chimney shades. Grant Wood made the mold for the ceiling plaster work and cut the scallops on the porch cornice. The black walnut stair rail and bannister copy one in the old Perkins tavern near Waubeek.

Mrs. Armstrong furnished the house in early antiques, collected in the midwest—furniture that came from the East in covered wagons. Other treasures came from the Amana Colonies, brought west from Ebenezer, N. Y. in the 1840's.

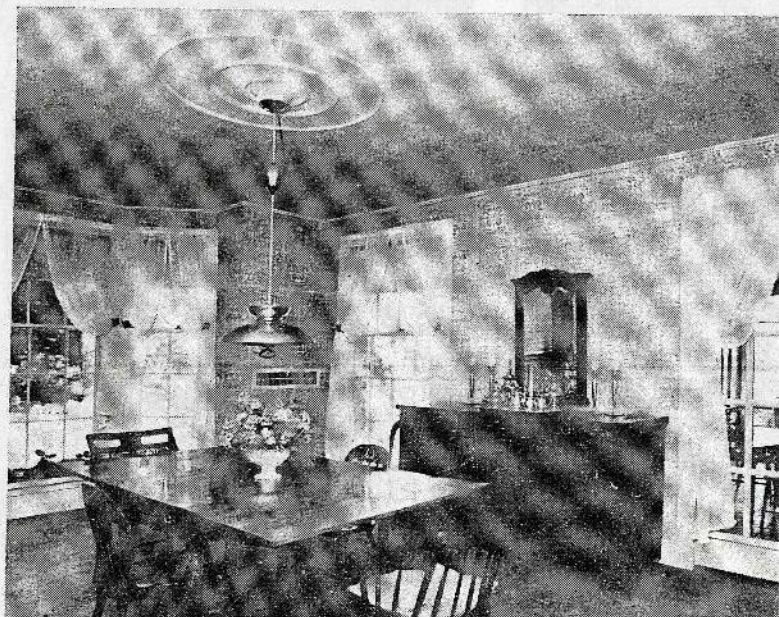
In this lovely setting, the Armstrongs reared four daughters. They are Mrs. Ralph Dusek of Natick, Mass.; Mrs. Lee Cooper, missionary to Cameroun, West Africa; Mrs. Thomas Johnston of Princeton, N. J.; and Mrs. William Meffert of New Haven, Conn.

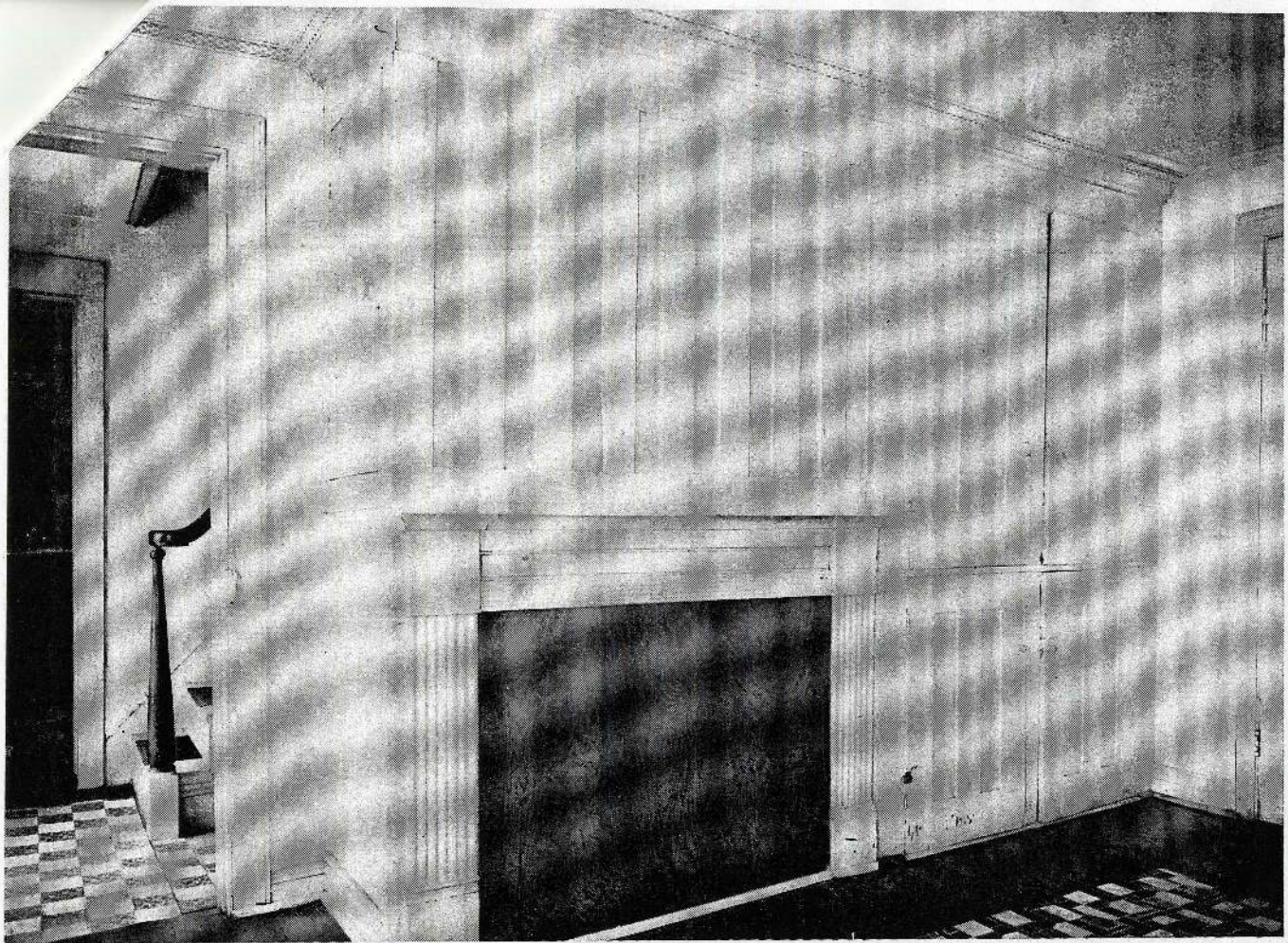
Bruce McKay once wrote, "As to the house, a century from now, when the last of Iowa's old stone houses have crumpled to ruins, posterity will still have one authentic copy of the early Iowa houses"—the Armstrong house in Cedar Rapids.



Portrait of William L. Cooper hangs over walnut sideboard.

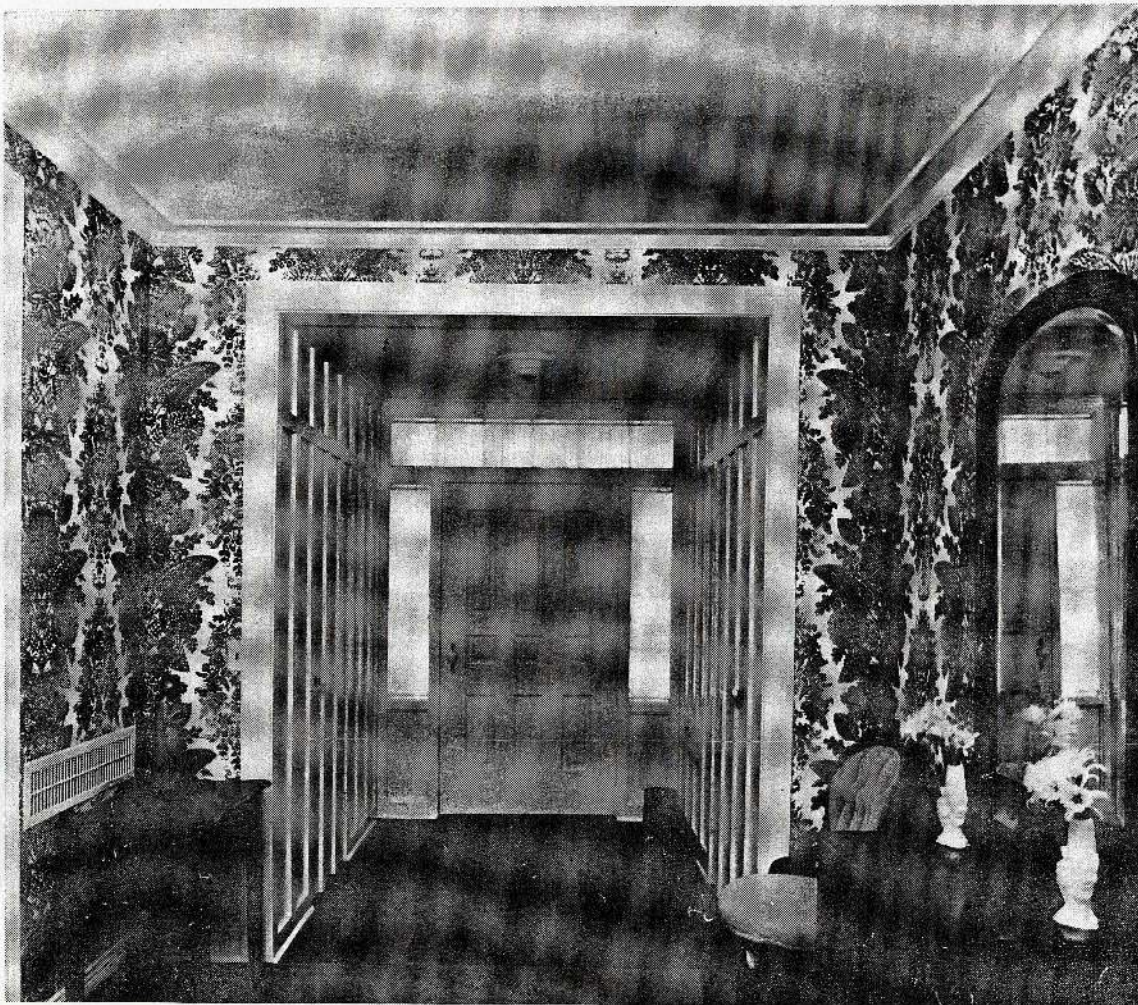
Ceiling decoration in the plaster shows detail of early homes.



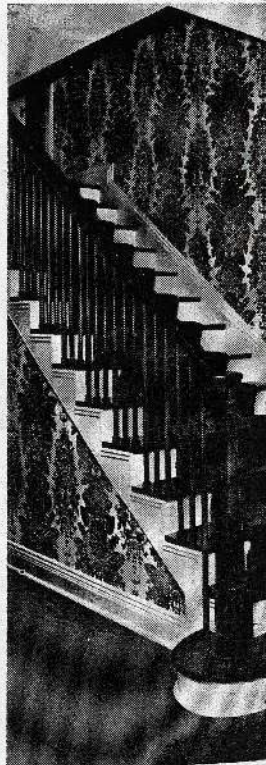


Fireplace (Perkins' Tavern 1855). Fireplace copied in Armstrong house, also design for trim, base, doors and hardware. Front entrance way, identical to old Iowa settlers' home. Woodwork and ceilings painted white and off white.

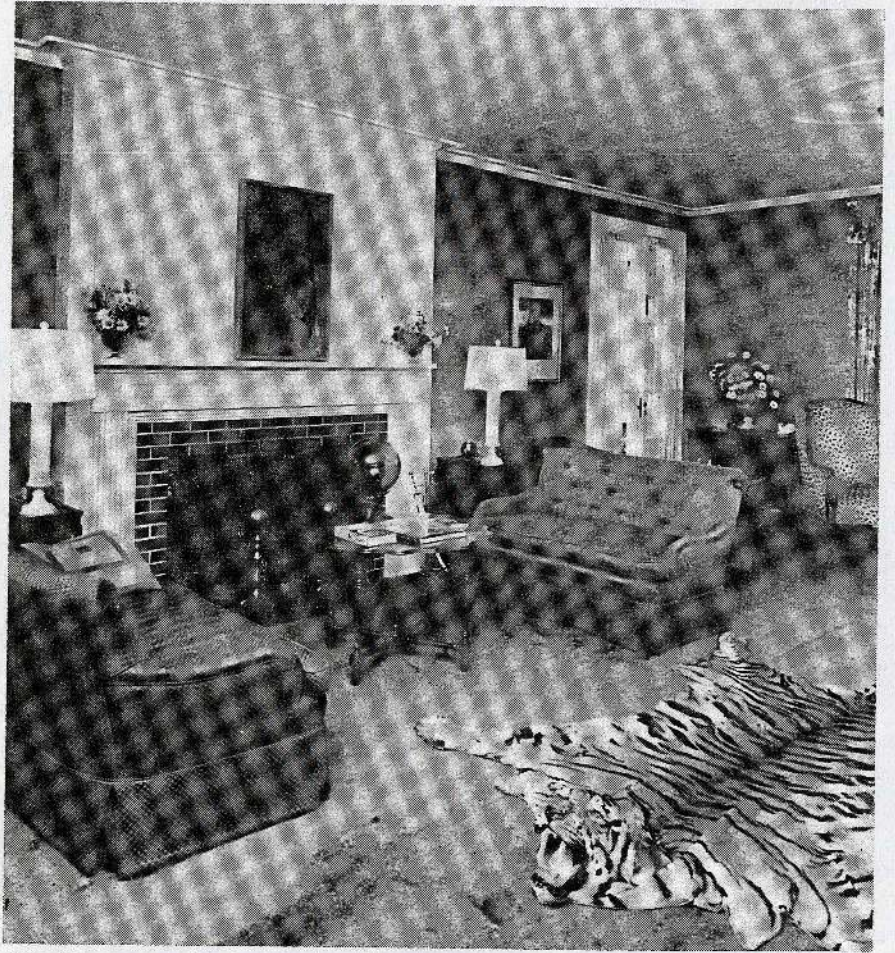
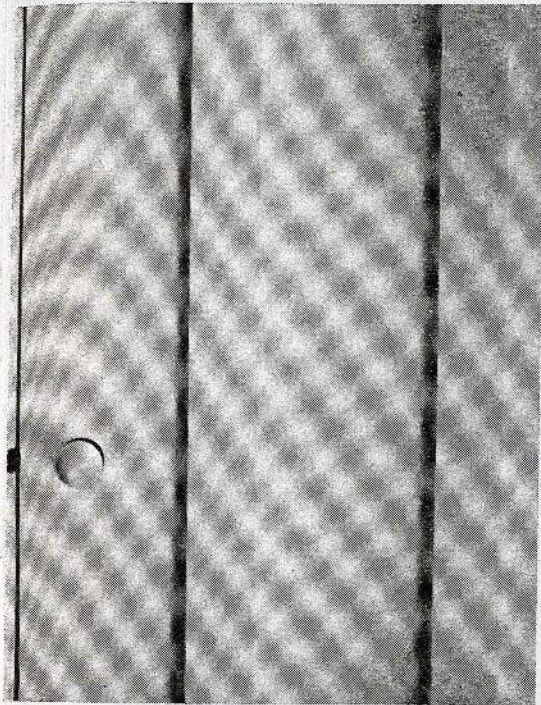
The search
Numerous
came when



Black walnut front sta



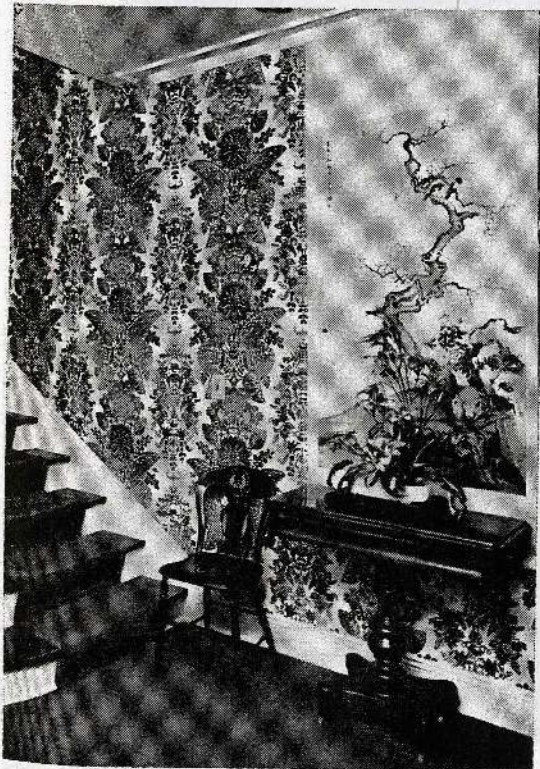
for authentic hardware presented the problems. hardware companies were contacted and success a wholesaler was found who had the old hardware.



The living room fireplace copies the one built in 1855 in the old Perkins' Tavern.

irway is a copy of the one in the Perkins' inn.

Authentic early Iowa pioneer cabinets and cupboards provide much storage space.





—Gazette photo by Art Hough

United Church Women Install Officers

United Church Women of Cedar Rapids and Marion met Wednesday in the First Presbyterian church to install new officers. Seated, from left, are Mrs. Arthur Welty, 714 First avenue NW, Noelridge Christian, president, and Mrs. Greer McCrory, 1927 First avenue SW, Salem EUB, recording secretary. Standing, from left, are Mrs. Robert Armstrong, Thirty-fourth street and Bever avenue SE, St. Paul's Methodist, president-elect, and Mrs. Ocie Trimble, 1530 Eleventh street NW, St. James' Methodist, corresponding secretary. Continuing officers fill the posts of first, second and third vice-president and treasurer.

1-24-63

ARMSTRONG FILE; COPY IN CHURCH FILE

*Armstrong Home from
India for Further Training*



—Photo by John Barry.

MISS ESTHER ARMSTRONG

... home from India ...

MISS ESTHER ARMSTRONG

... home from India ...

By Ellen Fiesenhiser.

Jan. 6, 1957

A SELF-HELP movement among youth in India is indicative of their concern about their country's underdeveloped facilities," said Miss Esther Armstrong, who returned home two weeks ago after four years as head of the Methodist information office in Delhi.

Miss Armstrong, daughter of the Robert C. Armstrongs, Thirty-fourth street at Bever avenue SE, participated in and assisted with the organization of work camps for youth, ages 12 through 20, as part of her public relations work directed by Bishop J. Waskom Pickett.

"Last summer in a work camp in northern India's Assam province, I worked on a student union building for an interdenominational college. Latticed bamboo and mud plaster was used in construction so that the whole structure would sway rather than collapse during earthquakes," said Miss Armstrong.

Carried Things on Head.

"I found that the easiest way to carry heavy things was on my head. This was great for posture, too!"

A matriarchal system of culture prevails among some of the Assam tribal groups, she said.

"Women are a great economic asset in this region. They weave, farm, make final business decisions and own property which is inherited through daughters."

Miss Armstrong's residence in Delhi, which she shared with an American principal of a girls' school and Bishop Pickett's secretary, was cool but like a mausoleum, she said.

Thick Walls.

"The walls were two feet thick and the ceilings, equipped with electric fans, 20 feet high. Since summer temperatures ranged from 115 to 120 degrees, our days began at 5:30 a.m. All activity ceased at noon and we worked again from 5 to 8 p.m."

After graduation from Cornell college in June, 1952, Miss Armstrong attended a six-week orientation course at the Hartford Seminary Foundation in Connecticut which included phonetics training in Hindustani.

"When I first arrived in India in January, 1953, people would sometimes reply 'Sorry, but I don't speak English'—even when I was using my best Hindustani! And I still have the habit of using my hands when talking."

Wheat flour and bananas are basic diet elements in northern India. But rice, a basic southern commodity, was served at farewell parties for Miss Armstrong.

Much Food.

"Sometimes large tents were set up in gardens for these parties which were often attended by gatherings of whole family groups. There were songs, dances, many speeches and always much food including curried rice, highly

See picture on back!

HOME & GARDEN

Wood's artistry creates Armstrong castle

By Shirley Ruedy
Gazette staff writer

The three of them would pile in the car and scour the Iowa countryside, scrutinizing farmhouses, studying a porch here, noting some windows there. Sometimes they would go inside an interesting public building, their sharp eyes taking in everything from baseboards to ceiling

■ Related story, 1D

moldings. Then they would joyously climb back in the car and head for Cedar Rapids, chattering happily about what they had just seen, and making plans for their "castle in the sky."

The year was 1932, the three were Esther Armstrong, wife of Cedar Rapids businessman Robert Armstrong; the couple's good friend, artist Grant Wood, and Bruce McKay, local architect-builder. The "castle in the sky" became "Pleasant Hill," the great Stone City stone house and Armstrong estate that last year was named to the National Register of Historic Places.

"Grant was such a good friend and so helpful, so creative," recalled Esther Armstrong recently of the man who also created the world-famous "American Gothic." "He knew all kinds of crafts: Plaster, brick, tile, metal. He even designed our front gate and garden seat. . . .

"And he was so understanding. That's a good word for Grant. He would understand you even before you asked the question. He knew the problem and was a jump ahead of you."

Esther, now 88 and widowed, laughed softly as she remembered another quality of Wood's: Perfectionism. On the day that the two huge stones marking their driveway were placed, she said, "He had the men move those rocks from one place to another for two hours. I kept telling him, 'Grant, you *can't* ask them to move those rocks one more time.'

"But he worked with them and they didn't seem to mind too much. Finally, he got the rocks just where he wanted them and he just *beamed*. Because, of course, at last they were right."

Robert had hired Wood (who was just on the verge of real artistic recognition) as a decorative consultant at Armstrong's new store for women. Both he and Esther were impressed with Wood's "sense of suitability,



Gazette photo by L.W.

Esther Armstrong is seen here with her vintage wichuriana rose bush, a favorite. It sits near the corner of a pioneer road that ran through the property and the township to Iowa City. "We think that our grandparents, who came to Linn County in the 1850s, probably came over this road from Pleasant Hill," wrote Esther in a history of the house. Wildflowers abound on the three-acre estate, and, she notes, "I like to garden, especially prairie flowers, anything that's indigenous."

ther in a 1976 piece she wrote on the house's history.

The couple had been thinking of building a house, and Esther asked Wood if there were an Iowa architecture. He enthusiastically answered yes, pointing out inside brick chimneys and board and batten walls as "distinctly Midwestern."

"The early pioneers who came here in the mid-1800s used the materials at hand. They used stone, handmade brick and native timber to build as they remembered back Eastern architecture," Esther quoted him as saying.

The young Mrs. Armstrong, mother of two little girls, had had pneumonia, and during her mandated bedrest, carefully drew up a floor plan for the dream house.

Building a home was a pretty ambitious undertaking for the economy of 1932, but, recalls Esther, "All the wonderful workmen weren't doing anything and Robert said, 'The time to do

The thick walls and front facade design came from the Eugene Doe house in Waubeek, as well as the front entrance, the shutters with wrought-iron fittings, and the window pane size. From the Old Perkins Tavern on the Ridge Road near Anamosa, came the ideas for the fireplace, paneling, baseboards, woodwork, doors, hardware and the black walnut stair bannister (the solid walnut was finally located at a gun butt factory.)

"Bruce took photographs, samples of moldings and cornices, measurements with calipers for authentic duplication," at all the old buildings they chose, Esther reminisced in her history.

The foundation was begun on Halloween day of 1932. Two stone masons — both over 80 years of age — hewed the stone at the Stone City quarry, then laid up the walls after the stone arrived at the site by freight. Lentils over the doors and windows weighed one to two tons each and were put in place by a

Hill cemetery were crushed for gravel, so he suggested the Armstrongs use other gravel and trade it for the cemetery for the stone. They did, and with those, he signed the garden seat and gate curbs.

The artist had a great rapport with the carpenters and masons and if they didn't understand how something was to work, why, he would just up his sleeves and show them. The spacious house took months to complete (Ultimate cost: A whopping \$30,000. Armstrongs moved in, in April of 1933.

"We are grateful to Grant Wood for his ability to use strength, honesty and beauty in the materials around us and translate it into the house we have been such a joy to use as home."

Thus wrote Esther Armstrong 15 years ago in concluding her history of her beloved Pleasant Hill. For almost 60 years, the family has known the

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Esther, now 88 and widowed, laughed softly as she remembered another quality of Wood's: Perfectionism. On the day that the two huge stones marking their driveway were placed, she said, "He had the men move those rocks from one place to another for two hours. I kept telling him, 'Grant, you *can't* ask them to move those rocks one more time.'

"But he worked with them and they didn't seem to mind too much. Finally, he got the rocks just where he wanted them and he just *beamed*. Because, of course, at last they were right."

Robert had hired Wood (who was just on the verge of real artistic recognition) as a decorative consultant at Armstrong's new store for women. Both he and Esther were impressed with Wood's "sense of suitability, judgment of quality and workmanship and imaginative approach to any problem," said Es-

Esther Armstrong is seen here with her vintage wichuriana rose bush, a favorite. It sits near the site of a pioneer road that ran through the property and the township to Iowa City. "We think that our grandparents, who came to Linn County in the 1850s, probably came over this road from Prairie du Chien," wrote Esther in a history of the house. Wildflowers abound on the three-acre estate, and, she notes, "I like to garden, especially prairie flowers, anything that's indigenous."

ther in a 1976 piece she wrote on the house's history.

The couple had been thinking of building a house, and Esther asked Wood if there were an Iowa architecture. He enthusiastically answered yes, pointing out inside brick chimneys and board and batten walls as "distinctly Midwestern.

"The early pioneers who came here in the mid-1800s used the materials at hand. They used stone, handmade brick and native timber to build as they remembered back Eastern architecture," Esther quoted him as saying.

The young Mrs. Armstrong, mother of two little girls, had had pneumonia, and during her mandated bedrest, carefully drew up a floor plan for the dream house.

Building a home was a pretty ambitious undertaking for the economy of 1932, but, recalls Esther, "All the wonderful workmen weren't doing anything and Robert said, 'The time to do something is when no one else wants it.'"

So — "Pleasant Hill" was on.

The thick walls and front facade design came from the Eugene Doe house in Waubeek, as well as the front entrance, the shutters with wrought-iron fittings, and the window pane size. From the Old Perkins Tavern on the Ridge Road near Anamosa, came the ideas for the fireplace, paneling, baseboards, woodwork, doors, hardware and the black walnut stair bannister (the solid walnut was finally located at a gun butt factory.)

"Bruce took photographs, samples of moldings and cornices, measurements with calipers for authentic duplication," at all the old buildings they chose, Esther reminisced in her history.

The foundation was begun on Halloween day of 1932. Two stone masons — both over 80 years of age — hewed the stone at the Stone City quarry, then laid up the walls after the stone arrived at the site by freight. Lentils over the doors and windows weighed one to two tons each and were put in place by a derrick.

Wood discovered that Stone City stones edging a pond at Oak

Hill cemetery were being crushed for gravel, so he quickly suggested the Armstrongs buy other gravel and trade it with the cemetery for the stones. They did, and with those, he designed the garden seat and front gate curbs.

The artist had a great rapport with the carpenters and craftsmen and if they didn't understand how something was going to work, why, he would just roll up his sleeves and show them.

The spacious house took 10 months to complete (Ultimate cost: A whopping \$30,000.) The Armstrongs moved in, in August of 1933.

"We are grateful to Grant Wood for his ability to see strength, honesty and beauty in the materials around us and to translate it into the house which has been such a joy to us as a home."

Thus wrote Esther Armstrong 15 years ago in concluding the history of her beloved Pleasant Hill. For almost 60 years, the family has known the mellow stone house as a treasure. Now the nation knows.

Gazette photo by L.W. Ward

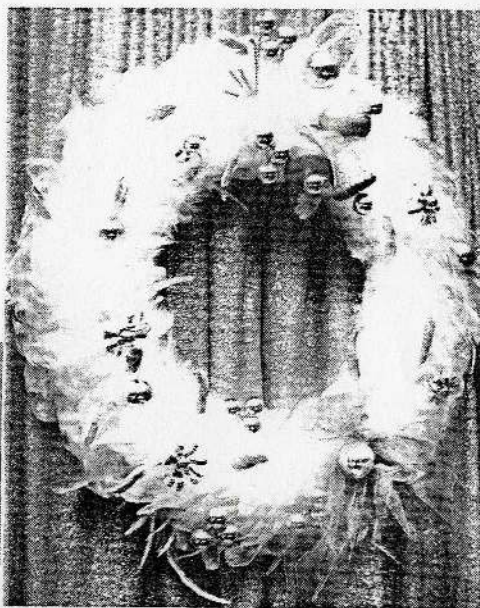
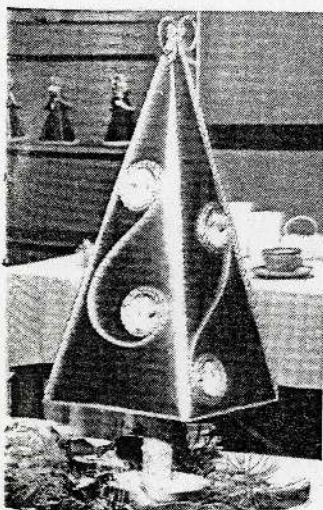
Members of the Women's Society of Christian Service of St. Paul's Methodist church presented their annual Fall Festival November 15 and 16. Chris Lange, pictured at left, is shown with some of the candy Christmas trees and metallic angels for table decorations. The Festival itself was a holiday wonderland of holiday decor and gifts. Pictured below at left is the yuletide table setting by Peg Yaw. The setting is flanked with gold metallic Christmas trees surrounded by evergreen sprigs. The Sustaining and Active members of the League who helped with the festival include Millie Albright, Edna Foster, Dee Voorhies, Fran Foster, Marian Hunting, Harriet Miller, Betsy Flodin, Harriet Van Nostrand, Esther Armstrong, Chris Lange, and Peg Yaw. Items on display included miniature tree lights, Christmas candies and baked goods, tree and table decorations, table settings, ceramics and pottery and various home decor.

—PHOTOS BY TOM MERRYMAN.



Christmas About the House

The annual pre-Christmas Fall Festival of St. Paul's Methodist church was presented last month by members of the Woman's Society of Christian Service. Above, Esther Armstrong is pictured with Bethlehem camels, hand-carved of olive wood from the Mount of Olives. The dolls are authentically dressed after the people of Bethlehem. Proceeds from the sale of the camels and donkey went to refugees in the Near East. Parchment star, for use as a light fixture, is a reproduction of an old Moravian star. The Armstrongs brought similar camels and figures back from the Holy Land two years ago. They were imported this year especially for the church festival. Society grossed over nine thousand dollars from the two-day event.



Unmistakably Christmas were the feather wreaths and trees, among the items on display at the St. Paul's Methodist Festival. The tree above was touched with pink glitter and hung with pink Christmas tree baubles. The wreath at center was of white feathers accented with gold glitter, baubles

and how. Pictured at left is one of the gold metallic trees made by members of the St. Paul's Women's Society of Christian Service. The tree-idea was brought back from New York by Chris Lange last summer and then reproduced here.



—Gazette photo by Tom Merryman

The United Clothing Appeal is one of the major interests of Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong. She is working on a garment to add to her basket of articles for the appeal.

Club Presidents

Church Women's Group Tackles Large Projects

By Jo Fuller

For some families the task of outfitting the family at Easter is quite a project, but for members of the United Church Women this is only a starter. One of their year-

(Last of a Series)

long projects is that of collecting and making clothing for refugee camps.

In the Cedar Rapids-Marion area there are 52 societies of Protestant and Orthodox churches which make up the United Church Women. Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong is president of the organization.

"The purpose of the group is not to take over individual works of the societies but to do projects which are too big for one group and need to be done with a united effort," Mrs. Armstrong said.

Council Projects

Some of the projects that the council sponsors are the World Day of Prayer which was held the first Friday of Lent; the Lenten Luncheons given with the YWCA every Wednesday during Lent; May Fellowship Day where it emphasizes its own problems and the World Community Day where it studies problems in relation to the whole world.

The organization was started in the 1900s and was called the Missionary Union. It later became affiliated with the National Council of Churches and became known as the United Church Women. Nationally the group has

13 million members with 31 Protestant and Orthodox communions affiliated.

Serving her year as president of the group, Mrs. Armstrong feels that "only when we make a united approach will we bring peace on earth and good will to men."

Special Interest

Mrs. Armstrong's special interest lies with the United Clothing Appeal.

"When we took a trip

around the world, we toured some of the refugee camps. Once you have seen these existing conditions, you can never forget them.

"In order to make clothes for people in other countries that they like, our Church World Service sends us patterns for the various countries," said Mrs. Armstrong who has knitted several sweaters and caps for the project.

Another interest of Mrs.

Armstrong is that of "beautifying Cedar Rapids in a civic way". She is enthused about making Cedar lake a beauty spot and conserving the flora and birds. She has participated with the Cedar Rapids Garden club in its landscaping at the airport and the YWCA.

Proud of Azaleas

At her home at Thirty-fourth street and Bever avenue SE, she has some type of flower blooming every month of the year except January.

"I'm particularly proud of my azaleas," said Mrs. Armstrong who refers to her house plants as her pets.

She was voted Iowa Mother of the Year in 1960.

The Armstrongs have four daughters: Mrs. Ralph Dusek, Needham, Mass.; Mrs. Lee R. Cooper, Kalwezi, Congo; Mrs. Thomas Johnston, Philadelphia, and Mrs.

William Meffert, Newhaven, Conn. They also have seven grandchildren. 3-18-64



Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, left, and Mrs. Isaac B. Smith, in the garden at the Armstrong home, Pleasant Hill, during the Cedar Rapids Garden club tour Wednesday.

azaleas, di "to grow here.

International interests affect Mrs. Armstrong's reading, too, and her last book review for one of her book clubs was on David Livingston.

She belongs to 2 book clubs which she describes as being "friendship clubs."

-Mrs. Armstrong-

(Continued from Page 15).

principally the "things we think are better home grown."

Prepares for Girls.

She freezes quantities of sweet corn and raspberries and also uses the freezer for "chain cooking."

"Whenever we make something we especially like we freeze half of it. This makes it simpler, especially when the girls are home. They like things that cook a long time."

She raises herbs and things like an especially long Chinese cucumber, okra and asparagus.

She loves to grow flowers too, and is proud of her

For all of her affinity to other lands, Mrs. Armstrong is a loyal booster for Iowa and Cedar Rapids.

"I never go away but that I come back and feel this is a real garden of Eden. I don't know why everybody doesn't feel the same way."

"It's a wonderful place to rear a family," said Iowa's Mother of the Year.

oOo

AVOID PLAIDS.

A short woman must avoid plaids in her wardrobe, and if she wears a checked fabric, the checks should be so small as to be almost invisible. She should also stay away from flamboyant floral prints.

rear thrilled with her when she came home. That is how I got started being interested in missions and that interest led to so many things."

Mrs. Armstrong nearly went into the mission field herself before her marriage. One of her daughters is entering the field.

She has served on the St Paul's Methodist church board of missions, as she has served in nearly every other capacity at the church.

She has been on the national Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief for 8 years. It is through this committee that she has worked with the interdenominational Church World Service.

Born in S. D.

Although Mrs. Armstrong has been an active member of the Methodist church since her marriage, she was a member of a Presbyterian family. She was born in Flandreau, S. D., daughter of a dentist who was from Eastern Iowa. She attended Coe college as had her father.

"The second major event in my life—probably the first thing I did that was really important — was marrying

"Grant Wood helped us design our home," Mrs. Armstrong said. "We liked the idea he was promoting that all art should be indigenous. With his help we tried to use local products. We used stone from Stone City and duplicated details of early Iowa houses."

There is a feature of his torical interest on the home site at Bever avenue and Thirty-fourth street SE (Mrs. Armstrong still refers to the latter as Dairydale road and hopes someday to persuade the city to give the street its original name.)

An old territorial road has been preserved to the rear of the wooded property. It was a road from Prairie du Chien that forded the Mississippi and brought many early set



—Gazette photo by Bob Kerns.

Officers for 1959 of Cedar Rapids Garden Club 11-16-1958

Officers elected for the coming year by the Cedar Rapids Garden club are, from left above, Mrs. Wayne J. Foster, 2304 Hillcrest drive SE, president; Mrs. William C. Culver, 360 Woodland drive SE, vice-president; Mrs. William C. Crawford, 510 Vernon drive SE, re-elected treasurer; Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, Thirty-fourth st. at Bever avenue SE, recording secretary, and Mrs. C. James Noell, 300 Twenty-fifth st. dr. SE. Mrs. Carl Baumhoefener is retiring president.

HARVESTERS, not gentleman farmers. A harvest moon by night and an Indian summer sun by day call Cedar Rapids acreage-owners into the fields to look over their crops of pumpkins, peaches, cattle and fodder. Harvesting a bumper Halloween crop this season are Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong (left), busy loading pumpkins at their country home, Pleasant Hill farm. (Thompson photo.)



SEPT. 26, 1937

Esther Armstrong gave much here and abroad

UNFORTUNATELY, several generations of Eastern Iowans are unaware of the impact Esther Armstrong made in the community and around the world. They also missed the pleasure of knowing a truly gracious and grand lady.

She died Sunday, at the age of 99, after several years of lingering ill health.

In many respects, Mrs. Armstrong lived in the large shadow of her husband, Robert, a looming business and civic leader. But as she once noted, when talking about his enthusiasm for flying and their many around-the-world trips, "Mr. Armstrong has been the pilot, and I've been the navigator."



**Esther
Armstrong**
A life of service

She was long a linchpin at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, teaching Sunday school and serving on every imaginable committee. And for years she was a main cog in the national Methodist church worldwide mission efforts.

She felt her tireless work for others was a moral obligation.

"When you have much, you certainly have the responsibility to share," she explained. "That applies to individuals and to the nation."

And it does. In her own quiet way, Esther Armstrong lived a life of service.

12-5-2002

Grand lady Armstrong dies at 99

C.R. department
store mogul's widow
from bygone era

By Tom Fruehling

The Gazette

12-3-2002

CEDAR RAPIDS — One of the last of the city's grand ladies is dead.

Esther Youel Armstrong, 99, widow of department store mogul Robert Armstrong, died Sunday at St. Luke's Hospital after a long illness. Her body will be cremated, and a memorial service is set for 1:30 p.m. Saturday at her beloved St. Paul's United Methodist Church.

"There has never been a finer Christian woman, mother and wife," said longtime friend Bob Yaw of Cedar Rapids. He took her a church bulletin every Sunday for several years while she was in failing health.

"She was very intelligent, but modest. The list of her accomplishments just goes on and on. Her family is filled with high achievers, and much of the credit comes back to Esther."

She was from a bygone era.

Strong and talented in her own right, she nevertheless acquiesced to her rock-willed husband.

"She always encouraged my sisters and me to excel," noted daughter Amelia "Mimi" Mefert of Portola Valley, Calif. "But she came from the tradition that called for her to say, 'Whatever Robert says.' That



**Esther
Armstrong**

Widow of
C.R. department
store mogul
Robert
Armstrong

Armstrong: Esther Armstrong known for her graciousness, gardening

■ From page 1B

wasn't something our generation wanted to hear from a woman."

Meffert, the youngest of four Armstrong girls, added, "My mother was very kind and generous. She considered herself blessed. But she was never, never ostentatious."

Friends agree. All of her good works were done without fanfare or hope for reward.

"She was genuinely interested in other people," said Louise Knapp of Cedar Rapids. "She was a wonderful woman, a gracious hostess, an intrepid traveler and so generous."

The daughter of a small-town South Dakota dentist, she came to Coe College in 1921 because her Iowa-born father had gone to school there. She met and

fell in love with Robert Armstrong, who lived near the campus and was the brother of one of her sorority sisters.

Because her father demanded that she work before marrying, she returned to South Dakota after graduation to teach high school English for a year before her marriage in 1926.

Her businessman husband, who was six years her senior and died in 1990, once said, "Marrying Esther was the best contract I ever made."

She was long active in Methodist church activities, serving on most committees at St. Paul's and on several national boards. She and her husband taught eighth grade Sunday school for more than 25 years.

Armstrong was particularly

interested in the church's foreign missions, partly as a result of the couple's many travels. For more than 15 years after World War II, she spearheaded a local clothing drive for refugees.

"Esther was so sensitive of others' feelings," said friend Roby Kesler of Cedar Rapids. "She continually thought of others, and not just her friends and family, but really people all over the world."

She had a passion for gardening. Plants always abounded at Pleasant Hill, the Bruce McKay-built stone home her artist friend Grant Wood helped design before he became famous.

"Mother had a sense of beauty in everything she did," said

Meffert.

A book compiled by the Cedar Rapids Garden Club with photographs of her mother's landscape artistry was added a couple of years ago to the Smithsonian Institution's collection on the history and design of American gardens.

Armstrong was named Iowa mother of the year in 1960 and national Methodist mother of the year 10 years earlier.

Survivors include one other daughter, Anna Johnston of Camp Hill, Pa.; 11 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. Two other daughters, Esther Alice Cooper and Mary Helen Dusek, preceded her in death.

■ Contact the writer: (319) 398-8316 or tom.fruehling@gazettecommunications.com

Pleasant Hill willed to Coe

Esther Armstrong
donated home
for president's use

By Elizabeth Kutter

The Gazette 12-14-2002

CEDAR RAPIDS — Pleasant Hill, the home of Robert and Esther Armstrong since 1933, will become the new home of the Coe College president.

Esther Armstrong, who died Dec. 1 at age 99, gave the family home and surrounding land at 370 34th St. SE to the Cedar Rapids college for use as a presidential manse, according to her will filed in Linn County District Court on Wednesday.

"Coe College is extremely grateful for this very generous gift from Robert and Esther Armstrong," said President James Phifer. "It is yet another affirmation of the link between

the college and the Armstrong family."

The Phifers have not set a date for moving into the house, according to Amy Johnson Boyle, director of marketing and public relations at Coe. "Some updating may need to be done," she said.

The college has in the past had a presidential manse but does not have one at this time. The Phifers live in their own home in southeast Cedar Rapids.

In her will, Armstrong requests that "evidence of Grant Wood's involvement in its planning and construction be maintained as an essential element of the property."

Coe plans to honor the family's wishes with respect to the historic stone home designed by Grant Wood and Esther

■ Turn to 2B: Coe



Gazette photo

The Armstrong estate is donating this house, Pleasant Hill, to Coe College. The home, at 370 34th St. SE, will serve as the college president's residence.

Coe: President gets new home

■ From page 1B

Armstrong and built by Bruce McKay, Phifer said.

The house has 4,862 square feet of living space, six bedrooms, three fireplaces and 4½ baths. Located on 2.93 acres of wooded land, Pleasant Hill has an assessed value of \$535,743.

Esther Armstrong also gave Coe her Marvin Cone painting of Stone City.

The rest of the estate will go into the Esther and Robert Armstrong Charitable Trust.

Robert Armstrong died in 1990. His will created a trust for Esther's benefit. The trust has three trustees. Robert's will also stated that on Esther's death it becomes a charitable trust for "religious, charitable, scientific, literature, and educational" institutions. The will is not specific as to which charities.

A 1990 story in The Gazette identified St. Paul's Methodist Church, the world mission of the United Methodist Church, Coe and Cornell colleges, the YMCA, United Way and the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art as the type of institutions for

"specific and special program and projects," Robert Armstrong's will stated, not for operating expenses. Robert Armstrong also asked the trustees to consider establishing an endowed chair in forensics at Coe College. Forensics in this case is a study of the art of argumentation or formal debate.

Robert Armstrong took such a course in college and though it sharpened a person's thinking and ability to present issues, said F. James Bradley estate executor.

Both Esther and Robert Armstrong were graduates of Coe College. Robert Armstrong served as president of its board of trustees for many years.

The couple's surviving daughters, Amelia Meffert of Portola Valley, Calif., and Anna Johnston of Camp Hill, Pa., will each receive \$120,000.

The five children of deceased daughters Mary Helen Dusek and Esther A. Cooper will each receive \$60,000. They are David and Jonathan Dusek, Andrew Charles and Samuel Cooper

CEDAR RAPIDS

Esther Youel Armstrong, 99, died peacefully on Sunday, Dec. 1, 2002. Services: 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7, 2002, at St. Paul's United Methodist Church. A reception celebrating Esther's life will be held in the St. Paul's social hall immediately following the service.

Esther was born on June 24, 1903, in Flandreau, S.D. She moved to Cedar Rapids in 1921 to attend Coe College, an easy choice since she literally thought it was the only college in the United States. After her college graduation and one year of teaching, Esther returned to Cedar Rapids and married Robert Armstrong in 1926.



Survivors include her children, Anna and son-in-law Thomas Johnston of Camp Hill, Pa., and Amelia "Mimi" and son-in-law William Meffert of Portola Valley, Calif.; 11 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

Esther was preceded in death by her husband, Robert; daughter, Mary Helen Dusek and son-in-law Ralph Dusek; daughter, Esther "Goldy" Cooper; and brothers, Donald Youel and Charles Youel.

Esther's priorities were "first, my responsibilities to our family because God gave them to us; second, to the Church; and third, to other interests that demonstrate Christian principles."

Esther's life revolved around her family, attending St. Paul's Church where she taught Sunday school for 25 years, Cornell College where she served on the Board of Directors and had two daughters attend, the Cedar Rapids Garden Club, traveling throughout the world, and the house she designed, with assistance from Grant Wood, and built in 1932 and known as "Pleasant Hill."

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be given to a charity of donor's choice.



Esther Armstrong

Nov. 1991

Esther Armstrong cited by Garden Club of America

Esther Armstrong, 370 34th St SE, has received a national citation from the Garden Club of America, it was announced at last week's meeting of the Cedar Rapids Garden Club.

Mrs. Armstrong was awarded the prestigious Medal of Merit. The local affiliate, in its letter of nomination to the national organization, said it was nominating Mrs. Armstrong "for enriching the life of her community by participation and example, freely giving of her time and talent in conservation, flower arranging and horticulture — a generous teacher and an inspiration to all."

"I was just amazed," said Mrs. Armstrong, 88, in a telephone interview. "I couldn't see why they gave it to me. There are a lot of people more knowledgeable than I." One of her special areas of interest is prairie flowers, which she grows at her home, "Pleasant Hill." It was the subject of a Gazette cover story in July.

Mrs. Armstrong is the longest term member of the Cedar Rapids Garden Club, having joined almost 60 years ago. The group is in its 35th year as an affiliate of the Garden Club of America which has 188 branches.

CLOSE-UP

Esther Armstrong

Editor's note: Today's Close-Up subject is Esther Youel Armstrong, 89, 370 34th St. SE, homemaker, gardener, retired volunteer, widow of Robert C. Armstrong, longtime Cedar Rapids businessman.

What do you like most, least, about your occupation?

I made the floor plan for our home — 'Pleasant Hill' — (which was) designed by Grant Wood. We moved in 59 years ago. Home is what I like most, and being without Robert is what I like least.

If you could visit with any five people from throughout history, who would they be?

Number one: Jesus, who made the world better than any person who has lived. Second: Marco Polo, who opened the cultures of the Orient. Number three — David Livingstone, who opened Africa. Four is Marie Curie, the determined little lady who opened a new field of science.

Number five: my great-grandparents. I'd want to talk to them about why and how they came to America. And could I add one other? I'd like to tell Grant Wood how the world enjoys 'American Gothic' and hear him laugh. He was a great laughter.

What's good and bad about living in Cedar Rapids?

Good: We've traveled to many countries and all over the United States, and we always felt that Cedar Rapids was the best place on earth — for the fertility of the land, the values of the people and the opportunities for education. Bad: irresponsible people — people who won't take any responsibility for making Cedar Rapids good.

What has been your goal in life?

To leave every place better than I found it.

What is the best book you ever read?

A favorite classic is 'The Secret Garden' by Frances Hodgson Burnett. It's a very old story of a little English girl who is in India when her parents died. She



July 1992

Profile

Education: Bachelor of arts in English from Coe College.

Hometown: Flandreau, S.D.

Family: Daughters Mary Helen Dusek, McLean, Va., booker for music recitals and a political activist; Esther Cooper, Philadelphia, social worker with drug-addicted women and children at Einstein Hospital; Anna Johnston, Camp Hill, Pa., a continuing education instructor in social work; Amelia "Mimi" Meffert, Cedar Rapids, with Armstrong-Race Realty; 11 grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

goes to live with an uncle in England who has a home for her, but no time for her. She finds rehabilitation in his garden. I especially like that part.

If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?

Africa or India. I've been to both twice, and I'd like to go back. But I won't. I'll just look at the pictures now.

What makes you laugh?

Funny jokes, puns, limericks, situations.

What is your favorite meal?

Sweet-and-sour pork, Iowa sweet corn, Iowa tomatoes with minced fresh herbs and honeydew melon with lime juice.

What are your leisure interests?

These interests are not leisurely, but they're very interesting. In my girlhood days in World War I, I was a Herbert Hoover girl, demonstrating at county fairs how to preserve food, how to cold-pack vegetables and meat. This was the forerunner of the 4-H movement. We did it (so) the government could send food to starving people in Europe.

During World War II we collected clothing for refugees and made soup in the old Jane Boyd House (this was before the schools served meals). I have enjoyed helping 'well baby' clinics, and in more recent years, the food bank. Also the missions and visiting them.

Another leisure interest is flower gardening, especially perennials and prairie flowers with deep roots.

The most important thing you've learned in life is. . .

To be honest and loving. That's all, and it's hard to do.

What's your idea of a great time?

To have the family together.

If you were given a million dollars, how would you spend it?

To help educate worthy young people.

Do you have a pet peeve?

Persons who won't take responsibility or won't make a commitment.

What did you want to be when you were in high school?

I had a favorite teacher and I wanted to be like her, a teacher of high school English. I did that for one year and loved it. Then I taught eighth-grade church school for 26 years and loved that, too.

The first thing you notice about a person is. . .

Their manner, whether it is open and responsive.

Exclusive of the present, what would be your favorite time in history to live?

The 19th century in early Iowa must have been a very exciting time. I'm always so interested in what the early pioneers found when they came to the prairie.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

I'll never forget it. As a little girl in South Dakota the elastic in my panties broke in front of a group of old Norwegian fishermen, who laughed at me. I felt terrible. What did I do? I picked them up and walked away.

— By Shirley Ruedy

AROUND THE TOWN

Esther Armstrong honored for her work in horticulture

A longtime member of the Cedar Rapids Garden Club has been honored by the Garden Club of America.

Esther Armstrong, 370 34th St. SE, received the Garden Club of America Zone XI Horticulture Award at the annual zone meeting in Colorado Springs, Colo., on Sept. 11. The zone consists of Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Colorado and New Mexico.

She and her husband, Robert, attended the meeting.

Esther was nominated by the Cedar Rapids Garden Club. A member for 53 years, she has served as president, vice president and recording secretary, and as chairman of many committees.

She was chairman of the landscape and planting committees for Veterans Memorial Island and the Cedar Rapids Airport, and has shared her expertise with area colleges.

In nominating Esther for the award, Mary F. Gray, award chairman for the Cedar Rapids Garden Club, wrote: "Esther has given generously of her talents, time and plant material. She does not serve in name only, but actively participates. Perhaps her most endearing and enduring characteristic is her commitment to her community and her willingness to give."

Armstrong estate makes National Register of Historic Places

By D.R. Miller

Gazette staff writer

The wooded estate called Pleasant Hill, a large stone home designed by Grant Wood at the corner of 34th Street and Bever Avenue SE, is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

The home was designed for Robert and Esther Armstrong after they met the famous Iowa artist while he was working for the Armstrongs in the late 1920s as a decorative consultant.

"I'VE ALWAYS thought it was one of Grant's best works of art,"

Esther Armstrong said in a telephone interview. "It's a wonderful thing."

In 1976, Esther wrote, "We were impressed with Grant's sense of suitability, judgment of quality and workmanship and his imaginative approach to any problem."

Like Iowa's early settlers, Wood encouraged the builders of the home to use native timber and stone.

The trio of Wood and Robert and Esther Armstrong traveled the surrounding Iowa country-

side harvesting architectural ideas to include in the home, which would stand on seven acres of woods. Later the Armstrongs would raise their four daughters in the home.

THE FIREPLACE IS copied from the Old Perkins Tavern on Ridge Road near Anamosa and the stones were quarried at Stone City. Other stones were rescued from a pond renovation at Oak Hill Cemetery and were made into seats and curbs for the gardens.

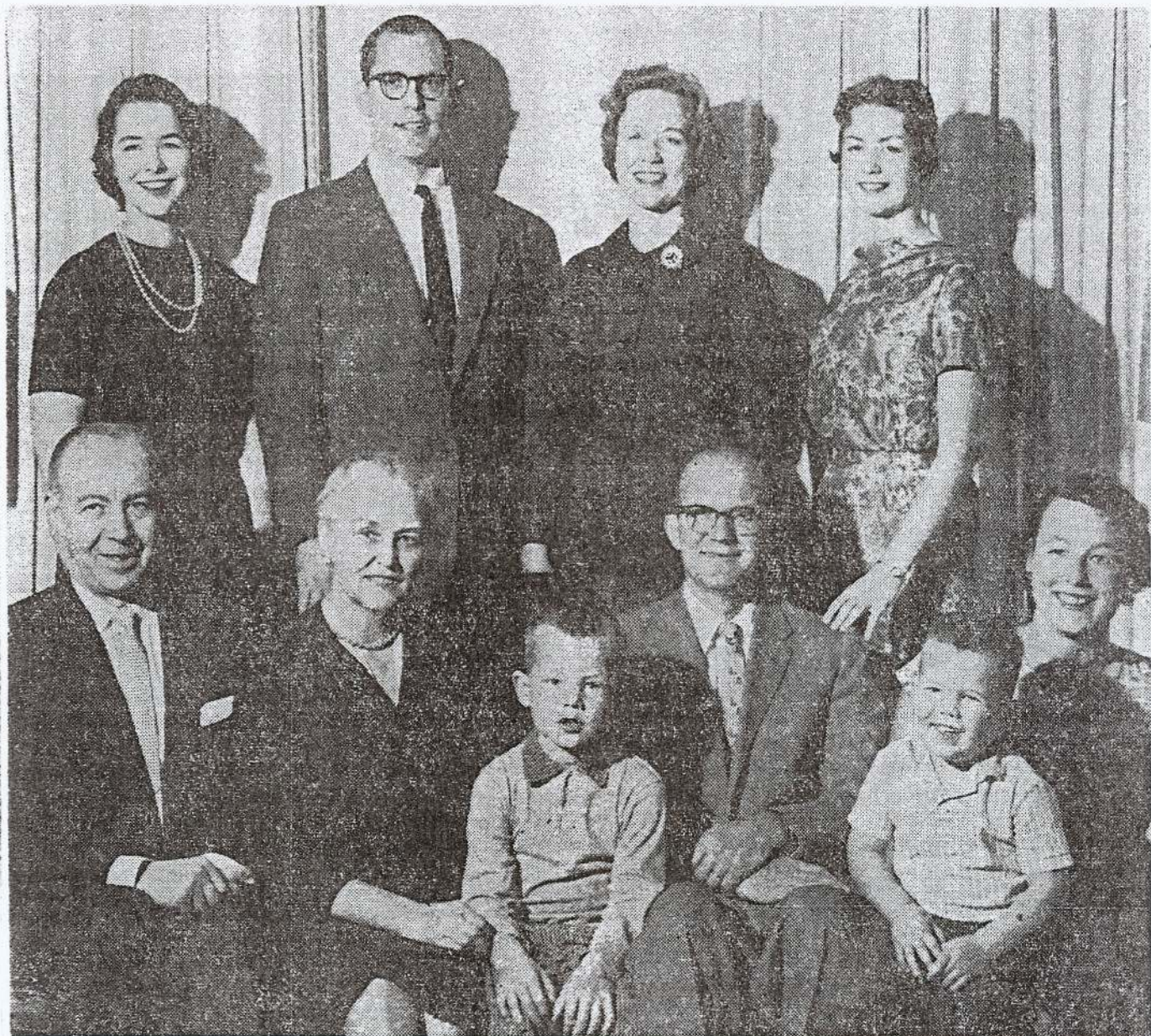
"On Halloween 1932, they began to dig the foundation," Esther recalled. "And we moved in on Aug. 10, 1933."

The estate was named Pleasant Hill after the community near Shellsburg where Esther's father was born and raised, she said.

The house will have to be kept in as original state as possible, she said. "We plan to change the wallpaper now and then, though," she remarked.

At present there are no plans to open the home to the public, Esther said.

Mrs. Armstrong, Iowa's Mother of the Year, Gets Things Done: 'Simplicity With a Flair'



FAMILY OF IOWA MOTHER OF THE YEAR—Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong is shown here with her children and 2 of her grandchildren. From left: Front, Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, and Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Dusek, with their 2 sons, David (left) and Jonathan. Back, Anna, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Lee R. Cooper, and Mimi. The Coopers' son, Samuel, was born after this photo was taken.

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By Laurie Van Dyke.

WHEN Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong came home from a trip around the world, she immediately set to work canning a bushel of beans from her garden.

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To New York.

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"I've looked, but I can't



FAMILY OF IOWA MOTHER OF THE YEAR—Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong is shown here with her children and 2 of her grandchildren. From left: Front, Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, and Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Dusek, with their 2 sons, David (left) and Jonathan. Back, Anna, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Lee R. Cooper, and Mimi. The Coopers' son, Samuel, was born after this photo was taken.

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The way Mrs. Armstrong accomplishes her tasks is described by one good friend as having "simplicity with a flair."

She shared with her husband the longtime dream of building one of the state's finest department stores.

And she has given equal energy to clothing people the world over.

When the Church World Service truck comes from St. Louis to pick up bales of clothing for refugees from Algeria or Tibet, it is Mrs. Armstrong who is there to meet it.

"Best Stop."

"Cedar Rapids is one of our best stops in the country," the truck driver once told Mrs. Armstrong.

She personally has headed the work that brought in 24,580 pounds of clothing last year.

It was during the Armstrongs' trip around the world in 1954 and 1955 that

To New York.

Mrs. Armstrong will be in New York May 2-6 as Iowa's candidate for "American Mother of the Year". Winner of that title will be announced May 3.

Before she leaves for New York, Mrs. Armstrong and her husband will be honored at a reception sponsored by the Cedar Rapids-Marion Council of United Church Women.

The reception, open to everyone interested and to be given by the Roosevelt hotel, will be from 3 to 5 p.m. Sunday, May 1.

Mrs. Armstrong became aware of the acuteness of the refugee problem.

It is typical of her life that she has been doing something about it ever since.

The 56-year-old Mrs. Armstrong fails to give the appearance of a woman who

has been "doing things" all her life.

Receiving a guest in her big stone house on "Pleasant Hill" in southeast Cedar Rapids, she might appear to be just a wife of a prosperous businessman.

The olive green shade prominent in the home is a rich setting for her bone-colored silk suit and her smoothly-drawn gray hair.

Contentment.

Her young face shows the contentment of life in a city she describes as "the garden of Eden."

But it is significant that the tea she serves from an olive green pot was given her by a Chinese refugee family.

The picture above the mantel — changed with the seasons — shows rice sowing in India.

And the telephone call she receives is from the wife of a Methodist bishop of Southern Rhodesia who was at the Cedar Rapids airport passing through town.

Mrs. Armstrong received the call calmly — as she had been receiving calls all day long.

From 10 days of quiet on

a secluded island off the coast of Florida, she had returned to Cedar Rapids to find herself in the midst of the flurry of being named Iowa Mother of the Year.

She was quiet in the flurry all around her, among the scores of friends who repeated one thought, that no one was more deserving of the honor.

"I've looked, but I can't see any flaws in her," said one longstanding friend.

Mrs. Armstrong was reluctant to agree to her nomination by the Cedar Rapids-Marion Council of United Church Women.

"We got her to agree, but she called me a week later to have me give her another sales talk," laughed Mrs. Dwight Krumboltz, president of the council.

* * *

Mrs. Armstrong talks more willingly of her husband and

(Continued: Page 15, Col. 1.)

--Mrs. Armstrong--

(Continued from Page 2.)

of her 4 daughters than of herself.

She hesitates to tell other people of her activities because "it will just make them weary."

4 Principal Events.

In her orderly fashion she singled out 4 events of her life that she believes have had the greatest effect on the way of life she has chosen.

"I think the first big thing happened when I was a little girl," she said. "We had a missionary from our church who went to Africa. I was real thrilled with her when she came home. That is how I got started being interested in missions and that interest led to so many things."

Mrs. Armstrong nearly went into the mission field herself before her marriage. One of her daughters is entering the field.

She has served on the St. Paul's Methodist church board of missions, as she has served in nearly every other capacity at the church.

She has been on the national Methodist Committee for Overseas Relief for 8 years. It is through this committee that she has worked with the interdenominational Church World Service.

Born in S. D.

Although Mrs. Armstrong has been an active member of the Methodist church since her marriage, she was a member of a Presbyterian family. She was born in Flandreau, S. D., daughter of a dentist who was from Eastern Iowa. She attended Coe college as had her father.

"The second major event in my life—probably the first thing I did that was really important—was marrying Robert," Mrs. Armstrong said in recounting events that led to her being named Mother of the Year. "After all, this was a cooperative enterprise."

She met her future husband while she was attending Coe. She was graduated there in 1925, a few years after Mr. Armstrong was graduated from the same school.

She remembers that her big job at Coe was being president of the YWCA. She is still on the advisory committee for Coe.

and a member of the city YWCA.

Her membership in the Cosmopolitan club at Coe foretold the interest that brought visitors from more than a dozen countries into her home during the last few years.

Her grades at Coe were "all right," she said, admitting to a high B average.

"A good liberal arts education is so important," Mrs. Armstrong said. "Certainly a mother needs to know everything that she can know in order to be understanding. I don't claim this at all for myself. It's my friends that have got this all up."

Married in 1926.

Esther Youel was married to Robert Armstrong in 1926. The couple lived at 2233 Meadowbrook dr. SE until building their present home in 1933.

"Grant Wood helped us design our home," Mrs. Armstrong said. "We liked the idea he was promoting that all art should be indigenous. With his help we tried to use local products. We used stone from Stone City and duplicated details of early Iowa houses."

There is a feature of historical interest on the home site at Bever avenue and Thirty-fourth street SE (Mrs. Armstrong still refers to the latter as Dairydale road and hopes someday to persuade the city to give the street its original name.)

An old territorial road has been preserved to the rear of the wooded property. It was a road from Prairie du Chien that forded the Mississippi and brought many early settlers to Iowa City.

"It is quite possible," Mrs. Armstrong said, "that Mr. Armstrong's grandparents, the William Coopers, came here on that road."

Mrs. Armstrong's ancestors also were early settlers, her grandmother coming to Cedar Rapids in the 1840s. The family lived in a community near Shellsburg called "Pleasant Hill", origin of the name given the Armstrongs' present home.

Samuel Armstrong Cooper

strongs' newest grandson, in honor of his great-grandfather, Samuel Cooper Armstrong, founder of Armstrong's store.

It was Mrs. Armstrong's namesake, Esther, who married a Cooper, creating the family name coincidence.

Oddly, Esther's mother-in-law, Mrs. Claude Cooper of Fort Madison, was one of the nominees in the Iowa Mother of the Year competition.

Daughters.

The Armstrongs' oldest daughter, Mary Helen, 32, is the wife of Dr. Ralph Dusek, a research psychologist at Natick, Mass. They have 2 boys, David and Jonathan.

"We specialized in girls," Mrs. Armstrong laughed, "and now we have all grandsons."

Mary Helen is a Cornell college graduate, a history major. She taught school for a year before her marriage. Since her marriage she has been active in international relations work for the American Assn. of University Women.

Esther, 29, also a Cornell graduate, is married to the Rev. Lee R. Cooper, a graduate of Yale Theological Seminary.

Esther, known as Goldy in Cedar Rapids, met Lee while both were planning to go on 3-year short term missionary service stints. Lee went to Korea and Esther went to India.

She stayed there 4 years and upon her return attended graduate school in New York and was married to Lee. The couple are taking orientation training to go to the Belgian Congo as full-time missionaries. They will be commissioned at St. Paul's church here July 3.

Anna, 25, is teaching in a Wilmette, Ill., junior high school this year. She received her master's degree in education from Columbia university after first majoring in history at Ohio Wesleyan university in Delaware.

Youngest of the daughters, Amelia, 21, called "Mimi", is a senior at Ohio Wesleyan this year. She will be graduated this spring, having finished 4 years of college in 3 years. She has been accepted to do graduate work in history at Yale next fall.

The interest in history

one handed down by their parents. Both Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong are readers of history and international events.

"We talked about those things at the dinner table and encouraged the girls to report on what they had read and done," Mrs. Armstrong said. "We always tried to make the family dinner a real occasion."

"We had happy family times sharing. Certainly the family should be doing a lot more than it is today. It should be putting an emphasis on good things."

"I think it is very important for a mother to spend a lot of time with her children. The girls have been very interested in my other activities. They have been interested in the fact that I was interested in these things and it broadened their interests."

"They've gone way beyond me," she laughed. "All of them have, or will."

On Discipline.

In exercising discipline with her children, Mrs. Armstrong followed the rule: "In the things that don't matter, be lax—in the things that do matter, be strict."

"I'm sure the girls thought we were very strict about when they should get in at night," she said. "But in little faddy things, like making jewelry out of safety pins, we let them do what they wanted. That wasn't important."

Mrs. Armstrong had a motto she often repeated to her daughters:

"Prepare for the worst, hope for the best, and take what comes."

There was always family worship in the Armstrong household and grace at the table.

All of the Armstrong girls were at one time or another students of their parents in Sunday school. For several years Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong have each taught a section of the 8th grade Sunday school class at St. Paul's.

This is one of the many interests the couple has shared through the years.

Flying, Too.

"Mr. Armstrong has been a pilot since the 30s," his wife said, "and I've been the navigator."

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Flying, Too.

"Mr. Armstrong has been a pilot since the 30s," his wife said, "and I've been the navigator."

The couple often take trips

of up to 700 or 800 miles in their 4-seater Stinson Voyager.

"We have flown to Ohio many times to see the girls and to South Dakota to see my parents," Mrs. Armstrong said. "We love to take a couple of hours and go over to see the Mississippi when it is in flood or when the colors are so pretty in the fall."

She recalled that hundreds of people in Cedar Rapids have made their very first flight in her husband's plane.

She has shared her husband's interest in development of downtown Cedar Rapids and in the store, although she has felt she should "remain behind the scenes."

"It was the hope of his life and mine to complete the new store," she said.

* * *

While she has been active in other phases of Methodist church life, enough to be named national Methodist "Woman of the Year" in 1950, her husband is president of St. Paul's board of trustees.

Paradoxically, it is her husband, always a staunch Methodist, who is a member of the board of trustees of Coe college, a Presbyterian institution. Mrs. Armstrong, formerly a Presbyterian, is on the board of Cornell college, a Methodist school.

Mr. Armstrong is president of the St. Luke's hospital board. His wife has been active in work of the hospital auxiliary.

Worked in Clinic.

It was in an allied area of work that Mrs. Armstrong had the experience that she considers another major influence in her life.

"I think one of the most interesting things I have done was to work in the public health clinic as a young woman," she said. "That really opened my eyes to many things."

The work she referred to was in nursing clinics sponsored by the Visiting Nurses Assn.

It was one of many civic enterprises. In other phases of her life she has worked on Parent Teacher Association committees and on League of Women Voters projects.

She is a member of the Cedar Rapids Art Assn., the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People and is a sustaining member of the Junior League.

Facets of Mrs. Armstrong's work in the Methodist church are too extensive to relate. At present, besides her national office, on a regional basis she is on the jurisdictional committee on program for the church and on the conference committee on missions and church extension.

She is also on the Iowa Council of Churches committee for Church World Service.

World Tour.

The fourth major event in her life Mrs. Armstrong counts as effecting a change in the outlook of both her and her husband.

"Our trip around the world was a big thing in our lives. We will never be the same after that . . . becoming aware of all the rest of the world. I think we had the idea that everything in America was best.

"We had very little understanding of the minority we really are here — and what a privileged minority."

"When you have much you certainly have the responsibility to share. That applies to individuals and to the nation."

The Armstrongs have sponsored many refugee families coming to this country. They have helped in other ways, too.

They had an American Field Service student from Germany in their home several years ago. This summer a friend of Mimi's from Ohio Wesleyan, a Hungarian girl, will be a guest in the Armstrong home.

"We usually have somebody on the string," Mrs. Armstrong said.

* * *

The Armstrongs have

made other trips abroad, the first on their honeymoon. And Mrs. Armstrong was a delegate to the World Methodist conference in 1951 in Oxford, England.

On their round-the-world trip, the Armstrongs visited their daughter, Goldy, in India and had opportunity to see many of the world's "homeless ones."

"We saw clothing from the churches of America being unpacked and distributed to the people who needed it," Mrs. Armstrong said.

Since then she has intensified her work in the clothes-collecting area. Her effort is at least partly responsible for the increase in amount of clothing collected in Cedar Rapids from 15,000 pounds in 1958 to 24,580 pounds in 1959.

"My work is really answering the telephone and meeting the truck that comes from St. Louis to pick up the clothes," she said.

After returning from their trip Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong made 175 talks on their travels and the refugee problem.

Family First.

Money collected at various churches where they gave their talks went to that church's mission program.

Although traveling and giving talks and attending meetings have taken up a lot of time in her life, Mrs. Armstrong believes she has always put her family first.

She loves to entertain and the house has been filled with her daughters' friends as well as with choirs from India and visitors from New Zealand or Peru.

Domestic and international interests have a tasty tie in the Armstrong household.

Mrs. Armstrong loves to cook and she loves to do experimental cooking. A good many foreign foods are no longer experiments with her.

She has taught her girls to cook too, and says, "They're better cooks than I am."

Mrs. Armstrong especially likes to cook with fresh, canned or frozen foods that she raised in her garden.

The Cedar Rapids Garden club is a major interest. She helped with plantings at the airport.

She does much of her own garden work just as she has done most of her own cooking. A yardman has helped with some of the gardening.

"Mr. Armstrong will walk out to look at it, but that's the end of it," she said.

Mrs. Armstrong raises

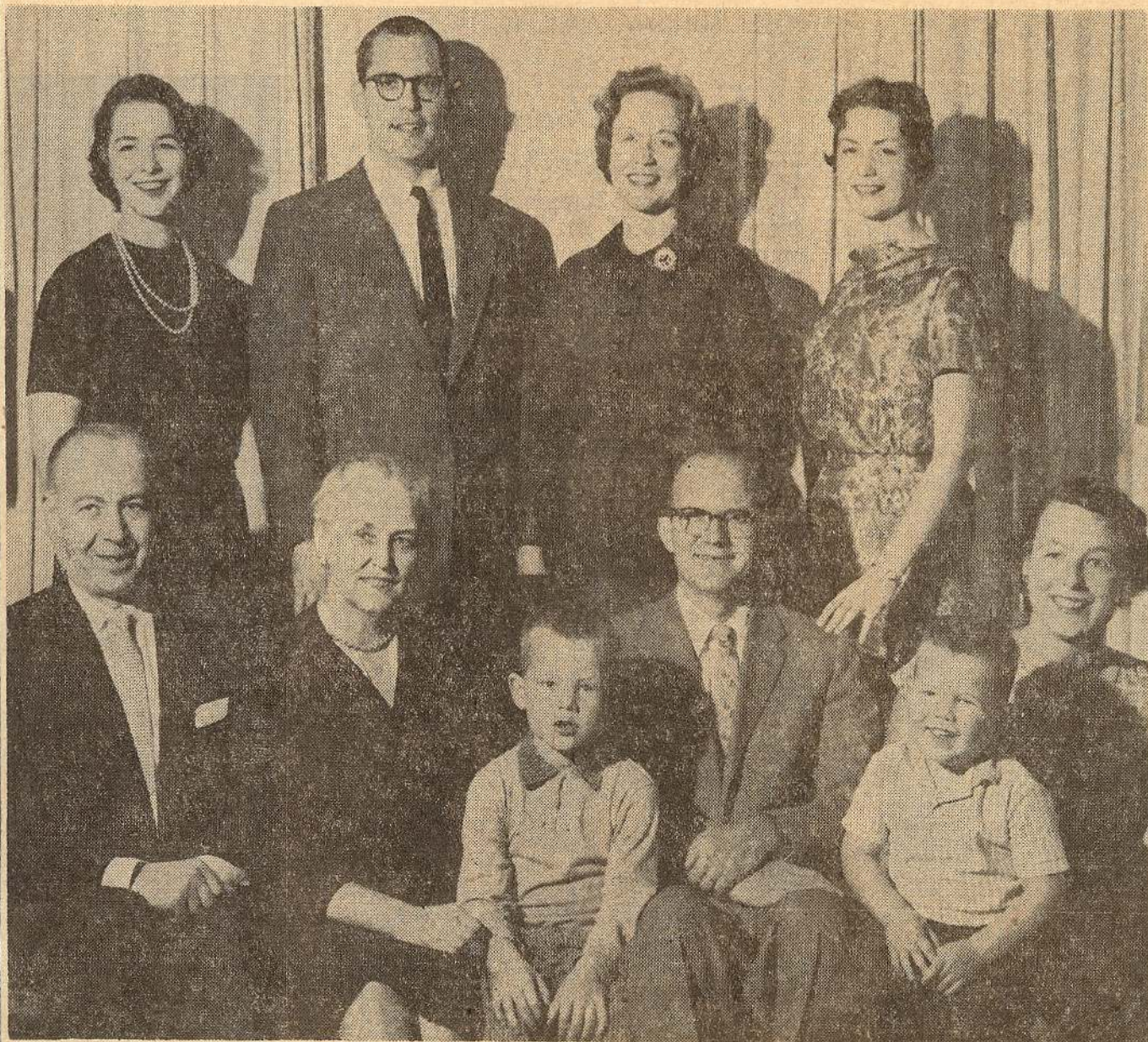
(Continued: Page 16, Col 7.)



Levy

4-10-1960

Mrs. Armstrong, Iowa's Mother of the Year, Gets Things Done: 'Simplicity With a Flair'



FAMILY OF IOWA MOTHER OF THE YEAR—Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong is shown here with her children and 2 of her grandchildren. From left: Front, Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, and Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Dusek, with their 2 sons, David (left) and Jonathan. Back, Anna, the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Lee R. Cooper, and Mimi. The Coopers' son, Samuel, was born after this photo was taken.

Church Women Elect Officers



MRS. ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Mrs. Robert Armstrong has been elected president of the Cedar Rapids-Marion Council of United Church Women.

Election was conducted Wednesday at a meeting of the council's board of managers. Mrs. Armstrong succeeds Mrs. Arthur Welty.

Other officers are:

President-elect, Mrs. John Troxel; first vice-president, Mrs. Francis Camizzi; second vice-president, Miss Alice Bothell; third vice-president, Mrs. W. L. Rayburn; recording secretary, Mrs. Greer McCrory; corresponding secretary, Mrs. Ocie Trimble; treasurer, Mrs. L. V. Hoskin. 9-28-63



—Gazette photo by John McIvor

United Church Women Install Officers

Officers of the United Church Women were installed Wednesday at a luncheon meeting at the YWCA. From left seated are: Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, Thirty-fourth street and Bever avenue SE, president; Mrs. Francis Camizzi, 2515 Indiana street SW, first vice-president; standing from left are Mrs. William L. Rayborn, 2467 Teresa drive SW, third vice-president; and Mrs. Leslie Haskin, rural Marion, treasurer. 1-16-64

Esther Armstrong

Editor's note: Today's Close-Up subject is Esther Youel Armstrong 89, 370 34th St. SE, homemaker, gardener, retired volunteer, widow of Robert C. Armstrong, longtime Cedar Rapids businessman.

What do you like most, least, about your occupation?

I made the floor plan for our home — 'Pleasant Hill' — (which was) designed by Grant Wood. We moved in 59 years ago. Home is what I like most, and being without Robert is what I like least.

If you could visit with any five people from throughout history, who would they be?

Number one: Jesus, who made the world better than any person who has lived. Second: Marco Polo, who opened the cultures of the Orient. Number three — David Livingstone, who opened Africa. Four is Marie Curie, the determined little lady who opened a new field of science.

Number five: my great-grandparents. I'd want to talk to them about why and how they came to America. And could I add one other? I'd like to tell Grant Wood how the world enjoys 'American Gothic' and hear him laugh. He was a great laugh.

What's good and bad about living in Cedar Rapids?

Good: We've traveled to many countries and all over the United States, and we always felt that Cedar Rapids was the best place on earth — for the fertility of the land, the values of the people and the opportunities for education. Bad: irresponsible people — people who won't take any responsibility for making Cedar Rapids good.

What has been your goal in life?

To leave every place better than I found it.

What is the best book you ever read?

A favorite classic is 'The Secret Garden' by Frances Hodgson Burnett. It's a very old story of a little English girl born in India whose parents died. She goes to live with an uncle in England who has a home for her, but no time for her. She finds rehabilitation in his garden. I especially like that part.

If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?

Africa or India. I've been to both twice, and I'd like to go back. But I won't. I'll just look at the pictures now.

What makes you laugh?

Funny jokes, puns, limericks, situations.

What is your favorite meal?

Sweet-and-sour pork, Iowa sweet corn, Iowa tomatoes with minced fresh herbs and honeydew melon with lime juice.

What are your leisure interests?

These interests are not leisurely, but they're very interesting. In my girlhood days in World War I, I was a Herbert Hoover girl, demonstrating at county fairs how to preserve food, how to cold-pack vegetables and meat. This was the forerunner of the 4-H movement. We did it (so) the government could send food to starving people in Europe.

During World War II we collected clothing for refugees and made soup in the old Jane Boyd House (this was before the schools served meals). I have enjoyed helping 'well baby' clinics, and in more recent years, the food bank. Also the missions and visiting them.

Another leisure interest is flower gardening, especially perennials and prairie flowers with deep roots.

The most important thing you've learned in life is



Profile

Education: Bachelor of arts in English from Coe College.

Hometown: Flandreau, S.D.

Family: Daughters Mary Helen Dusek, McLean, Va., booker for music recitals and a political activist; Esther Cooper, Philadelphia, social worker with drug-addicted women and children at Einstein Hospital; Anna Johnston, Camp Hill, Pa., a continuing education instructor in social work; Amelia "Mimi" Melfert, Cedar Rapids, with Armstrong-Race Realty; 11 grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

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Another leisure interest is flower gardening, especially perennials and prairie flowers with deep roots.

The most important thing you've learned in life is. . .

To be honest and loving. That's all, and it's hard to do.

What's your idea of a great time?

To have the family together.

If you were given a million dollars, how would you spend it?

To help educate worthy young people.

Do you have a pet peeve?

Persons who won't take responsibility or won't make a commitment.

What did you want to be when you were in high school?

I had a favorite teacher and I wanted to be like her, a teacher of high school English. I did that for one year and loved it. Then I taught eighth-grade church school for 26 years and loved that, too.

The first thing you notice about a person is. . .

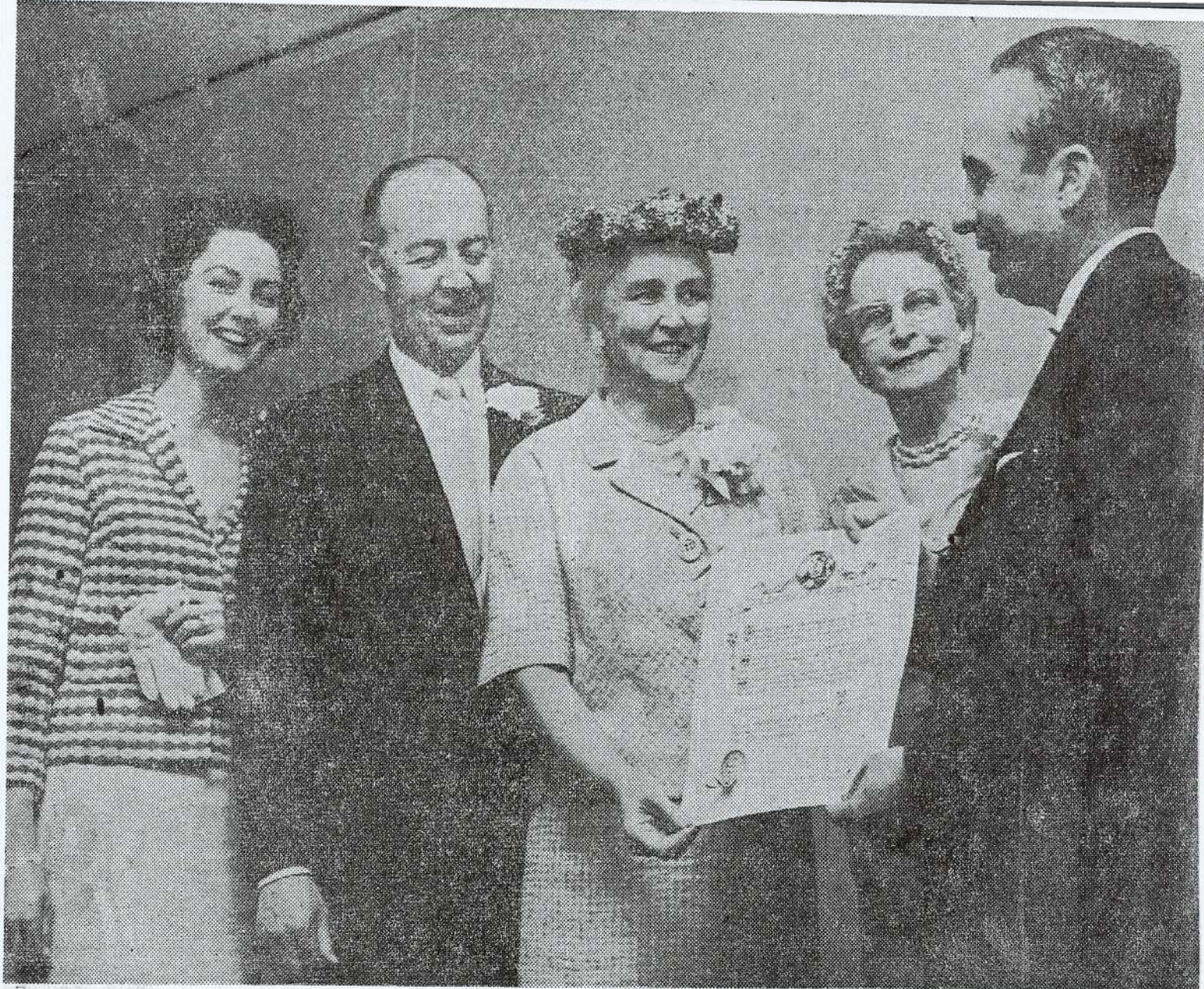
Their manner, whether it is open and responsive.

Exclusive of the present, what would be your favorite time in history to live?

The 19th century in early Iowa must have been a very exciting time. I'm always so interested in what the early pioneers found when they came to the prairie.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

I'll never forget it. As a little girl in South Dakota the elastic in my panties broke in front of a group of old Norwegian fishermen, who laughed at me. I felt terrible. What did I do? I picked them up and walked away.



—Gazette photo by John McIvor.

Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong Receives Citation at Reception May 2/60

Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, center, Iowa Mother of the Year, received a citation Sunday afternoon from Park Ward, Des Moines, representative of Governor Herschel Loveless. It was given as a token of the state of Iowa at a reception in Mrs. Armstrong's honor at the Roosevelt hotel. Looking on are, from left, Miss Amelia Armstrong, daughter of the Armstrongs and a student at Ohio Wesleyan at Delaware; Mr. Armstrong, Dairydale rd. and Bever ave. SE, and Mrs. Earl Roadman of Dike, 1957 Iowa Mother of the Year. Certificates were also presented to other nominees. Approximately 500 attended the reception, given by the Cedar Rapids-Marion United Church Women and the Roosevelt hotel.

Society for Women Feature



—Gazette photo by L. W. Warc

Religious Book Study Club Luncheon

From left, members of the Religious Book Study club, Mrs. Lawrence Baker, 1105 Fourteenth avenue SW, president; Mrs. George Morden, 615 Fifteenth street SE, vice-president; Mrs. Wallace Gall, 206 Twenty-seventh street drive SE, secretary, and Mrs. Viola Gibson, 1132 Thirteenth avenue SE, admire flowers in the garden of Mrs. Robert Armstrong, 370 Thirty-fourth street SE. Mrs. Armstrong was hostess in her home Monday for the club's 25th anniversary luncheon celebration. Mrs. Gibson organized the club in 1946.



—Gazette Photo by John McIvor

Tri-Delts Salute Members Nov-7-73

Helping Delta Delta Delta sorority mark its annual Founder's day Tuesday night are, from left: Mrs. Max Daehler, 2210 Grande avenue SE; Mrs. Robert Armstrong, 370 Thirty-fourth street SE; Mrs. Richard Asprooth, 1815 Grande avenue SE, president of alumni chapter, and Miss Chrys Grafrath of Kansas City, president of Delta Eta chapter and a senior student at Coe college. Mrs. Daehler and Mrs. Armstrong were honored as 50-year members at the Founder's day dinner given at Coe. Both have the distinction of having Coe buildings bearing their names.

CEDAR RAPIDS

Esther Armstrong Cooper, 67, formerly of Cedar Rapids, died Thursday, Dec. 4, 1997, of cancer in her home in Germantown, Pa.

Ms. Cooper, A.C.S.W., L.S.W., was a member of the Department of Social Work at Albert Einstein Medical Center for 25 years. She served most recently as a clinical manager with supervisory responsibilities for the delivery of social services for Women's and Children's Programs and Psychiatry. She was committed to facilitating access to quality medical care for multicultural and disadvantaged women and children.

Ms. Cooper established the Methodist Information Service in New Delhi, India, in the 1950s and organized a landmark exhibition of Indian art on Christian subjects for the



Methodist Indian Centenary celebration. In the 1960s, she developed social work programs for women and children in the newly independent republics of Cameroon and Zaire. Later, she worked in Guadeloupe, French West Indies.

She received her B.A. from Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, and her master's in social work from Columbia University, New York. She did additional studies in African affairs and French.

She enjoyed her family life and friendships forged through work and travel. Other pursuits included folk art, gardening, music and ethnic cooking. She was a member of First United Methodist Church of Germantown and served on the Professional Advisory Board of Wissahickon Hospice and the Support Organization for Trisomy — 18 and 13.

She is survived by her sons, Samuel A. Cooper of Plano, Texas, Andrew C. Cooper and his wife Emily P. McKhann of New York City and Charles F. Cooper of Mountain View, Calif. She was the daughter of Esther Y. Armstrong and the late Robert C. Armstrong of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the sister of Mary A. Dusek of McLean, Va., Anna A. Armstrong of Camp Hill, Pa., and Mimi A. Meffert of Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and the aunt of Jonathan T. Dusek of Cedar Rapids.

Relatives and friends are invited to attend her memorial service on Dec. 20, 1997, 2 p.m. at First United Methodist Church of Germantown, 6023 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia. In lieu of flowers, contributions to The Esther A. Cooper Memorial Fund for Mothers and Babies, Albert Einstein Medical Center, Development Department, Braemer Building, 5501 Old York Rd., Philadelphia, Pa. 19141, would be appreciated.

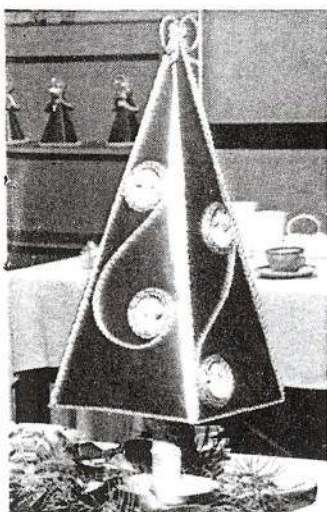
Members of the Women's Society of Christian Service of St. Paul's Methodist church presented their annual Fall Festival November 15 and 16. Chris Lange, pictured at left, is shown with some of the candy Christmas trees and metallic angels for table decorations. The Festival itself was a holiday wonderland of holiday decor and gifts. Pictured below at left is the yuletide table setting by Peg Yaw. The setting is flanked with gold metallic Christmas trees surrounded by evergreen sprigs. The Sustaining and Active members of the League who helped with the festival include Millie Albright, Edna Foster, Dee Voorhies, Fran Foster, Marian Hunting, Harriet Miller, Betsy Flodin, Harriet Van Nostrand, Esther Armstrong, Chris Lange, and Peg Yaw. Items on display included miniature tree lights, Christmas candies and baked goods, tree and table decorations, ceramic and pottery and various home decor.

—PHOTOS BY TOM MERRYMAN



Christmas About the House

The annual pre-Christmas Fall Festival of St. Paul's Methodist church was presented last month by members of the Woman's Society of Christian Service. Above, Esther Armstrong is pictured with Bethlehem camels, hand-carved of olive wood from the Mount of Olives. The dolls are authentically dressed after the people of Bethlehem. Proceeds from the sale of the camels and donkey went to refugees in the Near East. Parchment star, for use as a light fixture, is a reproduction of an old Moravian star. The Armstrongs brought similar camels and figures back from the Holy Land two years ago. They were imported this year especially for the church festival. Society grossed over nine thousand dollars from the two-day event.



Unmistakably Christmas were the feather wreaths and trees, among the items on display at the St. Paul's Methodist Festival. The tree above was touched with pink glitter and hung with pink Christmas tree baubles. The wreath at center was of white feathers accented with gold glitter, baubles and bow. Pictured at left is one of the gold metallic trees made by members of the St. Paul's Women's Society of Christian Service. The tree-idea was brought back from New York by Chris Lange last summer and then reproduced here.



—Gazette photo by Bob Kerns.

Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, Thirty-fourth st. at Bever ave. SE, is pictured at left with Mrs. Jackson Burns, 212 Twenty-fifth st. dr. SE, at the Lenten luncheon Wednesday noon at the YWCA. Mrs. Armstrong was speaker at the event, which was attended by 200 women. The Lenten luncheon series is sponsored by the YWCA and the Council of United Church Women.

3-13-58

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Mrs. Armstrong Is Speaker at Lenten Luncheon

"It's not beyond our power as Christians to see that all men have food and shelter," Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong told 200 women Wednesday noon at the Lenten luncheon, co-sponsored by the Council of United Church Women and the YWCA.

Mrs. Armstrong said that in this century of the homeless man, many of whom are homeless because of their flight from Communism, we must do more to help.

"We can do it if we work on an international scope," she said, "for working together we can do what alone we could never do."

"Jesus saw a deeper hunger which needed to be fed," she said. "This is the bread of life, and is received through sharing. And as Christians, it's not beyond our power to also share our bread of life."



6-5-62

Mrs. Armstrong Given Service Award

Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, Dairydale road and Bever avenue SE, right, was honored this weekend at Coe college commencement activities. She is shown here receiving an alumni distinguished service award from Mrs. Russell Knapp, 529 Knollwood drive SE. The award was made in recognition of Mrs. Armstrong's work in church and community, and was one of five given.

Society for Women Features



—Gazette photo by Carl Franks.

Mrs. Armstrong, Mother of the Year, Returns Home

This was the scene at the Municipal airport Wednesday evening when Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, 1960 Iowa Mother of the Year, second from left, arrived here with Mr. Armstrong from a Florida vacation. Members of the Cedar Rapids Council of United Church Women, which nominated Mrs. Armstrong for the honor, presented her a congratulatory bouquet. Pictured are, from left, Mr. Armstrong, Mrs. Armstrong; Mrs. Dwight Krumboltz, 2231 Fifth ave. SE, president of the UCW, and Mrs. Floyd Poppinger, 1216 Thirtieth st. NE, president-elect. Forty people were on hand to meet the couple.

Mrs. Armstrong Nominated 'Iowa Mother of Year'

Mrs. Robert Armstrong of Thirty-fourth street and Bever avenue SE Monday was named one of 15 finalists for consideration as 1960 "Iowa Mother of the Year".

Announcement of the finalists was made by Mrs. Earl Roadman of Dike, chairman of the selection committee. Final choice from among the 15 women is to be announced Tuesday.

Winner of the Iowa title will represent the state in the American "Mother of the Year" contest later this year.

Other finalists are:

Mrs. Everett Dyer, Ottumwa; Mrs. James Kelly, Des Moines; Mrs. John Barnett, Knoxville; Mrs. Louis John Moore, Ottumwa; Mrs. Claude W. Cooper, Fort Madison; Mrs. J. W. Napier, Fort Madison; Mrs. Stephen Eppler, Grinnell.

Mrs. Edgar Kemper, Muscatine; Mrs. Lael Moon, Ankeny; Mrs. William Alexander, Dumont; Mrs. Gaillard Heflin, Harlan; Mrs. Benjamin Hitzhusen, Rockwell; Mrs. William Friedman, Des Moines; and Mrs. Wilber Sackett, Spencer.

Selection of the award winner is based on achievements of the woman and of her children. She must also be active in civic projects, be a church member and have led a life which "exemplifies the precepts of the golden rule," Mrs. Roadman said.

Members of the selection committee were Mrs. Roscoe Jones, Atlantic; Mrs. J. L. Lush, Ames; Mrs. Clyde McFarlin, Montezuma; Mrs. Yale Goldberg, Des Moines; Mrs. Genevieve Craven, Grundy Center; Mrs. Sylvester Haughton, Waterloo; Mrs. Wade Clarke, Des Moines; Mrs. Carl Hoover, New Sharon; and Mrs. Frederick Clark, Mason City.

Mrs. Armstrong To Be Honored at Reception

A reception in honor of Mrs. Dwight Krumboltz, Mrs. Robert C. Armstrong, Iowa Mother of the Year, will be given today from 3 to 5 at the Roosevelt hotel by the Cedar Rapids-Marion United Church Women and the Roosevelt hotel. The public is invited.

Mrs. Earl Roadman, 1957 Iowa Mother from Dike, and chairman of the Iowa Mothers committee, will present a pin to Mrs. Armstrong.

She will also introduce the mothers present and award certificates of merit to the 1960 candidates. Mrs. F. C. Popinger, newly-elected president of the UCW, will present Mrs. Armstrong a scrapbook in behalf of the club's executive committee.

Park Rinard, representing Governor Herschel Loveless, will present citations at 3:15 to the nominated mothers as a token of the governor and the state of Iowa.

Hostesses for the event are

Mrs. Dwight Krumboltz, UCW retiring president, and members of the board of managers and past presidents. Floral arrangements will be provided by the Cedar Rapids Garden club. Pouring at the tea will be the Mmes. F. C. Popinger, William Cech, Russell Cole, Wayne Foster, Joseph McCabe and Edwin Zeller. Mrs. Berle Miller is in charge of the guest book.

Guests will include Mayor and Mrs. James Meaghan; 1947 American Mother, Mrs. Frederick Murray, and Dr. Murray; Miss Anna Youel Armstrong, Skokie, Ill.; Miss Amelia Margaret Armstrong, Ohio Wesleyan at Delaware; Mrs. Roscoe Jones, UCW state president from Atlantic, and Mr. Jones; the Roadmans; the Rinards, Des Moines; Dr. and Mrs. Cole, Mt. Vernon; Dr. and Mrs. E. T. Hubbard, Iowa City; Mrs. James J. Kelly, Des Moines, and Mrs. Luman Wing, Evanston, Ill.