



The stately home of J.D. Edmundson at 3333 Grand Ave. was torn down a half century ago.

Elite once dismayed about landmark

By WALT SHOTWELL

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It was just 50 years ago when Des Moines west-siders got wind of some new apartments that threatened to become a snag in their silk-stockings district.

Among other atrocities, it would mean tearing down the stately old home of J.D. Edmundson, the pioneer businessman whose fortune created the Des Moines Art Center.

Worse, it was rumored that the government was building the apartments under one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's wild schemes aimed at slum clearance. *Slum clearance* along lovely Grand Avenue? Where neighbors included such eminent families as Hubbell, Hippee, Finkbine, Carpenter, Cownie, Kauffman, Chamberlain, Polk, Burt and . . . well!

But Windsor Terrace was built. It is considered to be Iowa's first apartment "complex," as distinguished from a "building," and the first project of its kind to be backed by the Depression-born FHA (Federal Housing Administration).

Today the 18 buildings with 137 apartments still nestle

between Grand and Ingersoll avenues at Thirty-fourth Street, a model of tranquility and a monument to the saying, "They don't make 'em like that anymore."

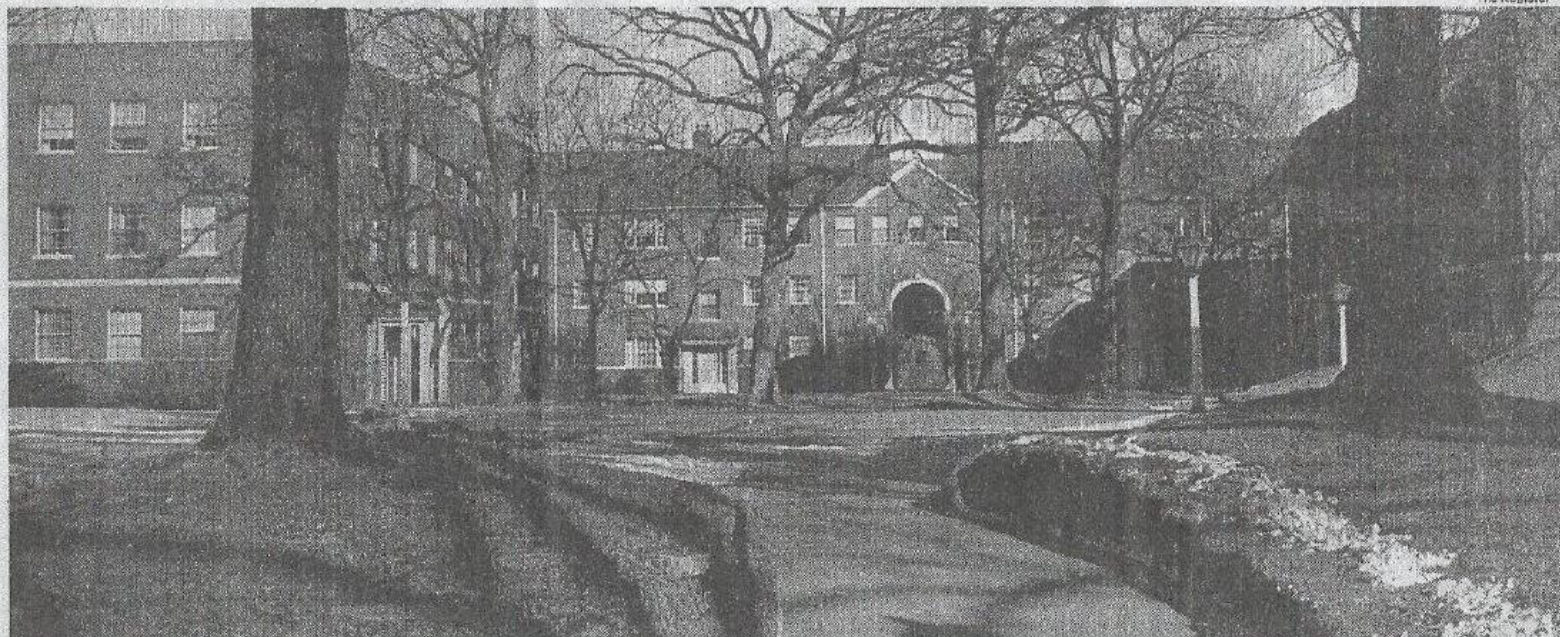
Many noteworthy Des Moines names have appeared on the Windsor Terrace register — Lee Keyser, whom many authorities credit with inventing night baseball; Ding Darling, the distinguished Des Moines Register cartoonist; a member of the Fitch shampoo family; three sisters of the Younkers department store family; Allan Hoschar, a Des Moines Register city editor, and (gossip has it) a mistress of an Iowa governor now deceased.

At the beginning it took the combined powers of the builder, Arthur Sanford of Sioux City, and a colorful former Iowa governor, U.S. Senator Clyde Herring, to smooth ruffled feathers of the Des Moines elite.

Much of their nervousness involved the FHA, one of many

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Windsor Terrace, home to many noteworthy Des Moines names, was constructed at the Edmundson site by the Depression-born Federal Housing Administration.

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"alphabet" agencies established during The Depression by the Roosevelt Administration — like the CCC, WPA, CWA, NRA and so on.

Iowans knew little of the FHA, so when it was learned that the FHA was backing the private loans that actually financed Windsor Terrace, it sounded like socialism to the conservative Des Moines establishment. Then when it was learned that FHA backing had supported slum clearance in larger cities, nervousness turned to indignation.

Many of the skeptics were Republicans, not exactly fans of FDR. But Herring, a Democrat, gave a statement to the press that eased the fears. It was not slum clearance, he promised, and the project was strictly "private enterprise." Those were the magic words, dear to the hearts of the upper crust.

When construction actually started in 1940, "complex" was not yet a word attached to apartments. So Windsor Terrace was called "garden apartments," and that's one reason why Jeanne Platt, a retired Roosevelt High School Spanish teacher, moved there in 1961 and still climbs three flights to her apartment.

"It is a grand place to live," she said. "All those gardens. This is not like an apartment house; you don't hear noise."

Alice Brown, now of Wesley Acres, said she and her late husband moved into Windsor Terrace "before the Ingersoll side was finished." They stayed 40 years.

"It has been kept up really well, we had good neighbors and everything was taken care of," she said.

She laughs about the original turmoil, especially tearing down the old Edmundson place.

"No one wanted that big old house torn down," she said, "but after Windsor Terrace was built, everyone wanted to live there."

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