

Mary Ellen Atkins

Secretary, Representative Karl Le Compte of Iowa (1943–1947)

**Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript**

August 24, 2016

Office of the Historian
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

“The Congressman kind of interviewed us. He just talked to me. He didn’t [ask me to] do any dictation or ask about my abilities in typing. He just accepted that I was going to be alright. He asked me if I’d like to come to Washington that fall of 1943. I said, “Yes, I’d love to.” So, that was it, because he was home in the summer on summer recess. Then I went back to my town. And, of course, all the mothers in my hometown would say to my mother, “How could you let her go all the way to Washington alone?”

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Abstract

In the fall of 1943, Mary Ellen Atkins started working for Congressman Karl Le Compte of Iowa as a secretary. In her oral history, Atkins remembers interacting with constituents, seeing prominent speakers on the House Floor, and spending her summers working in Le Compte's Iowa district office. Her description of secretarial tasks— typing and answering phones—reveals the role of young women working on Capitol Hill in the 1940s. Atkins' memories of her time in Washington, D.C., provide a glimpse of life during the tumultuous World War II era, including her experience living on war rations, attending dances with young military men, and witnessing President Franklin D. Roosevelt's funeral procession in March 1945.

Biography

From September 1943 to June 1947, Mary Ellen (Winter) Atkins worked as a secretary for Representative Karl Le Compte of Iowa. As Atkins greeted constituents, answered the phones, and worked in Le Compte's Iowa district office during her summers, she developed a deep understanding of the district's interests and concerns.

Born in 1923, Atkins grew up in Centerville, Iowa, with her two younger sisters. Her father, Abijah Winter, was an accountant, and her mother, Hazel (Kirkland), was his secretary. While attending Centerville High School, the local newspaper covered Atkins' success in short hand and typing competitions, in which teams won by making as few mistakes as possible in the allotted time.

After graduating in 1941, she worked as a secretary at a local soybean mill and attended Centerville Junior College. The county's Republican chairman read about her secretarial skills and recommended her to Congressman Le Compte. After a brief interview, Le Compte hired Atkins as a secretary in his Washington office.

Atkins moved to the District of Columbia in September 1943, and resided at Scott's Hotel, a local boardinghouse for young women. While she worked, she attended speech and writing classes at Georgetown University. Atkins met her husband, Don Atkins, Jr., at weekly dances and banquets for boarders and local military officers hosted by Scott's Hotel. They were married on June 29, 1947, and later moved to California. Atkins continues to reside in California and enjoys living close to her two sons, Don III, and David.

Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov> and the “People Search” section of the History, Art & Archives website, <http://history.house.gov>.

For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:

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Interviewer Biography

V. Grace Ethier is a researcher, writer, and oral historian for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned her B.A. in history from Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. She has been with the office since 2014 and leads the web production for the oral history team.

— MARY ELLEN ATKINS —
A CENTURY OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

[On August 24, 2016, Grace Ethier interviewed Mary Ellen Atkins, former House staff of Congressman Karl Le Compte from 1943 to 1947. The interview is part of *A Century of Women in Congress* oral history project to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first woman in Congress, Jeannette Rankin of Montana. The interview took place by telephone at the House Recording Studio in the Rayburn House Office Building. Mrs. Atkins was at her home in California.]

ETHIER: We wanted to thank you for agreeing to do the interview today, and we're really excited to hear what you have to say. If, at any point, you need to put the phone down for a break, we can do that. Or, if you answer a question and you think you may have missed something, we can go back. It's no problem. Mostly, we're just excited to hear from you.

ATKINS: Okay. Wonderful.

ETHIER: The first question I have for you is where did you grow up?

ATKINS: I grew up in Centerville, Iowa, a small town with a population of 8,000 to 9,000. Actually, it was about 90 miles south-southeast of Des Moines and about 30 or 40 miles north of Missouri.

ETHIER: And when you were young, did you have any female role models?

ATKINS: Not particularly. I just enjoyed my friends and my schoolwork, and I played the violin. I enjoyed that and being in the school orchestra at high school.

We had some cold weather there. {laughter} Hot in the summer, humid. In the winter time, very cold. That was before we wore slacks. We had to go

with just stockings on our legs to school. I walked about a mile to my junior high school and then to my high school. I had many cold days. On terribly cold days, I would put on ski pants underneath my skirt. I had to store them in the locker when I got to the school. So, we had some really cold weather.

ETHIER: Wow. What did you think society expected of you as a woman, or to be, when you grew up, as a woman?

ATKINS: Oh, just to be a kind, caring, good person.

ETHIER: What about in terms of employment?

ATKINS: Well, I went to my junior college. While I was there in Centerville, after I graduated from high school in 1941, I worked part-time at our local soybean mill in the office as a clerk secretary. I did a lot of their work. They'd send out monthly newsletters to all their clients. I would have to run the mimeograph machine and had to type the information onto a stencil. That was way before today's technology. That was quite an exasperating time. If you made a mistake on that stencil, you were able to put a little liquid on it. You were supposed to fill in the letters. If you didn't do it, you had to type it all over again. It was a really frustrating time.

ETHIER: Did you have an early interest in politics?

ATKINS: I just enjoyed watching it. We grew up in a Republican family, and that actually was the reason I got my job in Washington—because when I was in high school, in addition to my college preparatory courses, I took typing and shorthand. And I was on the winning [typing and shorthand] teams. We went to Des Moines to competitions, and we were the winning team. It was written up in our local newspaper, *The Iowegian*.

Because of that, two years later, when my Congressman from Corydon, Iowa—a little town about 30 miles west of ours—needed a new secretary, he contacted our Republican chairman in our town. This happened because when he would lose a secretary in his office, he would then go to another county of his five-county district and ask for a secretary. He contacted the chairman of our town, and that chairman knew my parents. He had read the article in the newspaper about my being on the winning team. He phoned and asked me if I'd like to go to Washington, D.C., to work. And, of course, I said yes, because it would be a very good education and to learn about the government.

That chairman and I drove over to the Congressman's office. The Congressman kind of interviewed us. He just talked to me. He didn't [ask me to] do any dictation or ask about my abilities in typing. He just accepted that I was going to be alright. He asked me if I'd like to come to Washington that fall of 1943. I said, "Yes, I'd love to." So, that was it, because he was home in the summer on summer recess. Then I went back to my town. And, of course, all the mothers in my hometown would say to my mother, "How could you let her go all the way to Washington alone?" {laughter}

In September, I took the trains to Washington, and I was met by a Centerville girl we had contacted, who lived and worked there. She met me at the train station and said that she lived in an apartment with some other girls, and while there was no room for me there, she would take me to a nice boardinghouse. So, we went up to Massachusetts Avenue to an open boardinghouse near Dupont Circle. I lived there. It was the days of sugar rationing, back in the '40s. I had to turn in my coupon because we were served breakfast and dinner there. I lived there in a large bedroom with two other girls.

About two or three months later, we heard about the Scott's Hotel for girls, which was on a neighboring street, O Street. We went over there, we three, and applied and were accepted. About three months or so after I arrived in Washington, we moved over there. It was a nice hotel, about six stories high. It's kind of cross-shaped. In the center were the elevators and offices. I was on the fourth floor in a small room (kind of like dormitory living) because it was just a single room with a single bed, a desk, a bureau, and an easy chair. And then we had the wash basin and our clothes closet at the entrance. The bathroom facilities were down towards the end of center. It was quite a bit of fun. I really enjoyed that.

ETHIER: That is all so great. I'm staying quiet because I want to preserve something if we want to make a clip out of it. But that is all really great information.

I'm wondering what your mom thought of you moving to D.C., or your parents in general. I know the other moms were a little worried, but I'm wondering how your mom felt about it.

ATKINS: It was fine with them. They knew it'd be a good education and a good life for me there, and so that was fine. They just kind of laughed at the other mothers. They trusted me there, so that was no problem.

ETHIER: And how did you connect with that other girl who was also from Centerville?

ATKINS: I don't know whether we wrote her a letter or contacted her on the phone. But she was probably three or four years older than I, and we knew that she had gone there to work, so we contacted her. That was very nice of her to meet me at the train.

ETHIER: How long were you planning on staying in D.C.?

ATKINS:

Well, at that time, I didn't know how long it would be. Of course, it would turn out to be four years because I met my husband, Don, there and was there from fall 1943 until May 1947.

This girls' hotel had a wonderful banquet area on the first floor. And we would have three- or four-piece bands and have tea dances every Sunday afternoon. Then every other Friday night, we would have formal dances, and the girls all had to wear formal dresses. Only officers were invited to the dances. So, a friend brought him [Don] there. We would just dance with all the fellas there. In addition to the regular dances, we would have the round dances where we would change partners. We got acquainted with a lot of the fellas that way.

I dated several. I dated Don, and I dated a Frank from Pennsylvania. Don was from Los Angeles. We started dating. And then I would have to go home for summer recess, but he would continue going to the dances, and he would dance with a cute, little redhead who was good dancer. When I came back in the fall, it would take a while for us to get back together again. That was great.

ETHIER:

What else did you do for fun while you were living in D.C.?

ATKINS:

Well, we loved to go out to eat. We had some favorite French and Italian restaurants, and a nice seafood restaurant we loved out on the water. And I loved going to the National Symphony, because I had played the violin as a child from the time I was seven years old through high school when I was in our school orchestra. I loved music, and I would go to the symphony. I found some other girls from Scott's who would go, also. We went together on the streetcar over to the concert hall and enjoyed the music so much.

ETHIER: What do you remember of your first week of work, working in the office for the Congressman?

ATKINS: Well, of course, it was a little different from what I was accustomed to. The office was on the seventh floor of what we called Old House Office Building, which we found out later had become the Longworth [House Office] Building.¹ The names were changed.

We were in a large office. He had a number one secretary, Margaret Welsh, who was from Grinnell, Iowa, but she lived in Washington. She was his number one secretary and lived there with her husband. But the number two or the number three secretaries—I was number two—would be there until maybe we left to go on to college or go on to get married. That was when the Congressman would be in the habit of going into other counties in our district to look for his new secretary.

But I was in the first desk at the left as you entered in the office from the hallway, and I greeted most people. We had constituents come in from our Iowa district, and we'd take care of their needs whenever they had a problem or just to greet them. We had a lot of the sailors in the Navy and Army men come in and took care of them—see that they were able to go various places. In fact, I even dated a couple of those. The main secretary, Margaret, was farther in the room.

My two sons, Don III and David, and their wives, Kathryn and Sandra, respectively, and I went back to Washington in June of this year, 2016, just to visit some of my old haunts. We were able to find out where his office had been. I did not remember going up the elevator seven floors to his office. But when we went up there, we found it is now inhabited by a Congressman [Christopher] Gibson from New York. But a wall of panels to separate each

of the staff had been installed since I worked there. The staff were very nice and pleased to greet us. That was very interesting.

But anyway, beyond our office was the wardrobe room and the bathroom and then the Congressman's office beyond that—that all had pretty much stayed the same. That was very interesting to see that—but I enjoyed working there. We had a lot of people in.

And then I was able to go over to the Capitol because we were right across the street from [it], and we could go over there for important speakers who would come. We would be able to go up to the galleries and see them. I particularly remember General Dwight Eisenhower speaking to us, and we had the assembled Congressmen and Senators there to hear him. That was really inspiring. We were able to go over to hear other speakers, also. I just remembered Eisenhower for sure. That was wonderful to be able to do that.

ETHIER: Can you describe the physical space of the gallery that you were sitting in, and also, what the House Chamber looked like at that point?

ATKINS: We did not get to go in there when we were there last June. However, it was pretty much the same, I imagine, because I've seen it on TV when they've had Presidents speak there and various people. I imagine it's pretty much the same as it was then.

ETHIER: Okay. When you first started working on the Hill, did anyone offer you any advice or show you around?

ATKINS: Well, probably Margaret did give me advice and show me around there and gave me an idea of what was expected of me. That was pretty much that. I did belong to the Congressional Staff Club, and we would get together occasionally and take trips. And we particularly had one weekend where we

went to New York City and were able to see the sights there. And we really enjoyed the Rockettes at the Radio City Music Hall. That was terrific. We thoroughly enjoyed that.

Then one time Don and I drove up to West Point for a weekend there, and it was so nice to be able to see the Academy. We stayed at the hotel there. That was interesting. I was able to get around the area quite a bit and enjoyed all that while I was in Washington. One year, Don and I went up to Philadelphia to a Navy–Army game and enjoyed that. We had a great time.

ETHIER: So, Margaret was the number one secretary, yes?

ATKINS: Right.

ETHIER: How long had she been there? How long had she been working there?

ATKINS: I don't know. She was old enough that she had a daughter fairly close to my age. So, she was probably in her 40s or 50s. I don't know how long she had been there.

ETHIER: Did you feel any added attention or pressure because you were a woman staffer—a young woman staffer?

ATKINS: No, not a bit.

ETHIER: And how would you describe the atmosphere of the House when you first started working?

ATKINS: Of the office?

ETHIER: Yes, of the office or the House in general, whatever you can remember.

ATKINS: Well, it was fine, friendly. Just enjoyed working with the constituents and taking care of their needs whatever they were. It was just a friendly atmosphere. Margaret was great towards me. And so, of course, was Mr. Le Compte. Occasionally, his wife [Dorothy] would come in. She was from Corydon, too. She was pretty active in the Congressional Wives [Club].

On the summer recesses, when I would go out to Corydon, I would drive over there and work there during the week and then drive home on the weekends. I would rent a room in a home. I got well-acquainted with Karl's sister, who was a local librarian. My summers were great there, also.

ETHIER: So, you sort of stayed connected to the congressional office, in a way, during your summers home?

ATKINS: Oh, yes. We just took care of mostly Iowa business while we were at home during the summer recess.

ETHIER: Did you have a favorite spot to be in the Capitol? Did you have a favorite room in the Capitol that you liked to be in?

ATKINS: Well, of course, I loved to go to the dining room. They had a Senators' dining room there, and they had that famous bean soup—I think it was—that they made there. I had my first oysters there. {laughter} I really enjoyed that. And, of course, I loved walking around, through the Capitol. I remember seeing some famous Senators up and down the halls or the stairs. I think I saw Jack [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy there one time. Although somebody told me, "Well, what was he doing there?" because he wasn't the President until '60. I don't know how long he was a Senator.

ETHIER: Were there any office or House traditions that you participated in?

ATKINS: Right offhand, I can't think of anything other than just our normal work there. I don't know.

ETHIER: That's fine. Speaking of your normal work, can you describe what a typical day for you looked like, and what some of your responsibilities were?

ATKINS: Well, of course, letters were dictated to me, and I would answer questions from the constituents. A lot of those calls came directly to me—whenever they called from Iowa. There were a lot of farmers in that area, and if they had a problem with agriculture, or something like that, we would help take care of them or tell them where to contact somebody, to help them out. And, of course, greet the people as they came in to see us. It was just a standard kind of clerk secretary work that I did there.

ETHIER: Did you have a favorite task? Something you liked to do?

ATKINS: Well, of course, I enjoyed talking to the constituents when they came in and anybody that came in. I enjoyed greeting people there.

ETHIER: Do you remember what sort of questions they would ask about agriculture or other things?

ATKINS: Well, if they wanted some law changed, or they felt that they were being harassed because of something the Agriculture Department did, or—I don't know, just take care of their problems. That was 70 years ago. I'm forgetting what happened then.

ETHIER: That's fine. You're doing great. Were there any unusual days that you can remember? Something that happened out of the ordinary?

ATKINS: Well, of course, I remember when [President] Franklin [Delano] Roosevelt died in Georgia in 1945, I think it was. I was at home at the Scott's Hotel.

That was before TVs. We all had the radios in our rooms. I remember hearing the broadcast on my radio that he had died. I remember running all up and down all the halls, "Turn on your radios! Turn on your radios! The President has died!" I notified all the people there.

Then I was able to view his cortege, with the flag draped and coffin on a horse-drawn carriage. I think he probably was on his way to the Capitol building for a viewing there. That was very impressive. We were all on the streets watching that. And then I remember [Harry S.] Truman being President after that, of course, and just saw various things, various famous people.

ETHIER: Going back to the funeral you just talked about, where were you standing on the street? What part of the city were you in?

ATKINS: Well, I was near the Capitol, somewhere in that area, because I would've come out from work I'm sure. It would've been during the day. So, it was somewhere there. I don't remember where on the streets, but because our office building was just right across the street from the Capitol, it would've been in that area.

ETHIER: And what do you remember about the feeling around D.C. during this time?

ATKINS: Well, it was all, of course, a lot of sorrow then that he had passed away, a lot of crying and a lot of sorrow.

ETHIER: Related to that, how did World War II sort of change the atmosphere of D.C.? Did you notice anything different in the city during that time?

ATKINS: Of course, we saw a lot of uniforms there, just a lot of officers. I even went to the USO [United Service Organizations] a couple times to dance with the

soldiers there. And, of course, the officers would come to our dances, so we had a lot of uniforms all over the area. It was really a great, interesting time to be in Washington during that time.

My husband was from Los Angeles. He was born in Denver, and his family moved him to Los Angeles when he was about two. He went to UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] and was in their Naval ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] program. He had a double major in chemistry and in naval science.

And then, of course, when he graduated in spring of '43, he was sent to Annapolis as a Second Lieutenant and was there for the summer. When he heard about the Naval Research Laboratory just outside of Washington, he applied there and was accepted. He was stationed there for the rest of the war, which is a good thing, because he would get very seasick and, being in the Navy, that didn't do. I was glad he was able to be working over there. He lived, I remember, on Danbury Street, I think more in the southeast part of Washington. I'm not quite sure now where the Naval Research Laboratory was. We did pass it one time when we visited there.

ETHIER: Great. What do you remember of Congressman Le Compte?

ATKINS: Oh, he was a very kind person, very interested in everybody's life, and just a good Congressman, in my opinion. Not a high-paid lawyer, but a newspaper man, editor, and owner of the local newspaper in his town in Iowa. He was just a very nice person. My parents would have him and Dorothy to our house for dinner a few times when he was home during the summer. I liked him very much and liked Dorothy very much.

ETHIER: Can you talk more about his wife, what you remember of her or if she was around in the office often?

ATKINS: No, she didn't come in there very often. We didn't see her there. I saw her more at home during the summer recess than I did, actually, in Washington. She was busy with her Congressional Wives [Club] and all her activities there.

ETHIER: You talked about seeing Eisenhower speak on the House Floor and Harry Truman. Do you have any other memories of people you saw speaking on the House Floor or any debates you saw?

ATKINS: No, I'm not remembering who the other speakers were. I know we were allowed to go over there when somebody or something fascinating was going on, but I just don't remember now who any of the speakers were.

ETHIER: That's fine. The girls that you lived with in the boarding house, where did they work? Did they also work on the Hill with you?

ATKINS: You know, I had a lot of friends there who worked for the FBI, and most of them were from the Eastern states. There were several from North and South Carolina, and I had one particular friend, Carolyn [Bason], who worked for the Senator from—I think it was North Carolina. She had this southern drawl. She was a lot of fun to talk to. She was not married, but she eventually married a Senator. I think it was Russ [Russell Billiu] Long. He's the son of that famous Huey [Pierce] Long activist in the South. But when his wife died, she eventually married him. She worked for another Senator from North Carolina.

ETHIER: So, you would go to dances with these girls, and they became your friends?

ATKINS: Yes. Yes.

ETHIER: What kind of positions did your friends hold at the FBI and in the Senator's office? Were they also secretaries?

ATKINS: In the Senator's office, yes, they were secretaries. I don't know what the friends did for the FBI. I just know that a lot of them worked there.

ETHIER: I just have a couple more questions left. Was there anything unexpected, or something that surprised you, about your time in the House?

ATKINS: No. I was just prepared for anything that happened. I didn't know what was going to happen. Nothing as I recall. No big surprises. I just had a wonderful life there.

ETHIER: How did you decide to leave the Hill? We talked a little bit about this before.

ATKINS: Well, Don and I became engaged, I think, in—oh, Christmas of 1946, I took him home to Iowa to meet my parents, and we became engaged. He left the Navy in 1946 and went back to Los Angeles and worked on his master's degree from UCLA. And I continued working that year until I retired in May of '47 to go home to prepare for the wedding there at my home in Centerville in June 29, 1947. And we had our wedding there at a local Presbyterian church. It was wonderful time there.

ETHIER: And did you remain interested or involved in politics after you left the House?

ATKINS: No, I was not involved. I was always interested because it had piqued my memory, all that time I was there, but I did not work in it. A couple times we had voting booths in our garage, when we lived later in California in Rossmoor just outside of Seal Beach in Los Alamitos. I was on the board—

reading the results afterwards. But that was just a few times, two or three times, I think.

ETHIER: Can you talk a little bit more about that, what the elections were for, and how that process worked?

ATKINS: Well, I don't remember. Probably federal and state elections in the '60s. I was on the committee to help out to volunteer for that.

ETHIER: Wow. Well, Mary Ellen, those are all of the prepared questions I have today. Do you have anything else that you want to share or add—anything that I didn't cover?

ATKINS: Well, I have prepared a history of very much all of my life. I'd like to send that to you.

ETHIER: Okay.

ATKINS: And then if I find that picture of Karl Le Compte and Margaret Welsh and myself, we posed—I think it's, maybe, the Capitol in the background. I've got to find that, and I'd like to send that to you, also.

ETHIER: Yes. We'd love to have that. I was telling my coworkers about that picture earlier today. I'm very excited to see it.

ATKINS: I hope I find it. {laughter} It's one of those occasions where you know where it is, and you go to look for it, and it's not there.

ETHIER: Right. {laughter}

ATKINS: I'm going to look over in my other scrapbook. I was active in the woman's club in our area. I was president way back in 1965–66, and I was given a

huge scrapbook at the end of my term. Then I started adding some pictures to that, and so it may be in there. I've got to look through that today.

ETHIER: This is while you were living in California?

ATKINS: Yes. Oh, yes.

ETHIER: You were part of a woman's club? Can you describe that?

ATKINS: Yes. Actually, Don and I were one of the first inhabitants of this Rossmoor, which is an unincorporated area just near Los Alamitos, so we always used Los Alamitos as our mailbox. But there are about 3,600 homes in there. It's a large development. The woman's club was started back in 1958 or '59 because, at that time, a lot of the new people moving in there were mothers, and they weren't working, and so they started up a bridge club. And those women started saying, "Why don't we start a woman's club here?" I understand that they went knocking door to door to ask people if they'd like to join the woman's club. They did.

I joined in 1960. And, at that time, because most of the women were not working, we had up to 400 members. They still had that many when I was president in '65-66. We used to have dances. And we had some good work on local charities, and we became pretty much a charitable organization. We've continued all these years. I've been on the board several times. And now I'm in charge of the telephone committee. I've been very active in the club because we have a lot of different sections and many fundraisers. I've enjoyed that all these years.

ETHIER: What were your responsibilities when you were president?

ATKINS: Well, just to hold our general meetings and oversee the various sections. We had a lot of different sections: craft and bridge and drama and choral and golf, and just a lot of different sections—just to oversee those. We had a board of about 12 different officers. I think I was treasurer the year before I was president. Then I was on the board as past president. We've had a past-presidents' club since then. Our function was to determine five or six high school seniors who would receive the club's \$1,000 scholarships. I was president—it's funny to say, but I was president of the past presidents. {laughter} I have enjoyed that club all these years.

My sons live nearby. I'm just very fortunate. I'm in a senior living place now, and I'm very happy here. My first son, Don, and his wife, Kathryn, moved into our first home there in Rossmoor. We lived in three different homes there. We moved out of that one so they could move in and bring their children, their boys, over there to our nice schools. And then my other son, Dave, and his wife, Sandra, are just east of us about—each of them is just about five minutes away from me if there's any problem. I'm very fortunate to have that.

ETHIER: Yes. That sounds like a good position to be in.

ATKINS: Yes, it is.

ETHIER: Well, thank you so much, Mary Ellen, for talking to me today. This is all so wonderful, and I'm really excited that we have this now.

ATKINS: Well, as I said, my two sons, and their wives, and I went back in June. Unfortunately, my youngest grandson and his wife, Ted and Rachel, were unable to join us. We deliberately stayed near Dupont Circle so we could find the Scott's Hotel. And, actually, Don and I had driven by the Scott's Hotel, oh, probably 30 years ago or so. We went back and forth on trips.

Don was a history buff, and he loved the Civil War Era, and so we'd go visit all those places. We went to Washington quite often, and we drove by Scott's one time and found out that Scott's had become a senior living facility. We found people using our beloved banquet hall as a dining room!

When we went there in June, we stayed, actually, behind it. We could see it from our hotel room. It has become a rehab place now. It was wonderful. My sons were so thrilled to be able to go back and see that place and see the banquet hall where Don and I danced. That was our major impetus to go back to Washington, to find the office where I had worked and the hotel where I lived. And so, that was a wonderful trip. We were also able to visit my older grandson, Don IV, who lives and works in Washington, D.C. We also enjoyed seeing his girlfriend (now his fiancée), Alayna.

ETHIER: Yes. It's great for me to hear those stories, so I can't imagine what your sons must feel, seeing your old stomping grounds.

ATKINS: Yes. They really were, and the wives were, too, of course. That was great. That was a wonderful trip.

ETHIER: That sounds great.

ATKINS: I don't think there is anything else. I will send you this history and have my sons help me with the computer on sending that.

NOTES

¹After the Longworth House Office Building opened in 1933, Cannon, the first House office building, became known as the “Old House Office Building,” and Longworth was referred to as the “New House Office Building.”