

DONOR STORIES

ROBERT L. AND ELEANOR L KEARNS “The Robert L. and Eleanor L Kearns Family Fund”



ROBERT L. AND ELEANOR L
KEARNS

Family History

It is amazing when you look back at history to see how specific moments and instances weave together to create our lives. For Robert L. and Eleanor L. Kearns the events of their lives were directly reflected in the choices of their parents who had chosen to make Waterloo their home.

Charles F. Kurth, Eleanor’s father, was born in Bellevue, Iowa and her mother, Drusilla Mae Clow, was welcomed into her family on a farm near Winthrop, Iowa.

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As young adults both of Eleanor’s parents came to Waterloo to pursue their professions. Eleanor’s father was a barber and came to Waterloo in 1900 to open his own Barber Shop in The Logan House- a location that was once where the Black’s Building now stands at the corner of East Fourth and Sycamore Streets. Eleanor’s mother came to Waterloo to become a seamstress in the early 1900’s.

It was in Waterloo that Eleanor’s parents met and began a courtship that would eventually develop into a marriage in 1904. The two continued to make their home here and eventually welcomed Eleanor into their family sixteen years later.

Robert’s parents however, did not come to Waterloo until 1924 from Vinton, Iowa. Robert’s father had a very simple outlook when it came to determining a life career. He always joked and told others that there were two choices of what to do with life; become a funeral director or a baker. After all, people are all going to die and they are all going to eat! So, Robert’s father became a funeral director and opened the Kearns Funeral Home in Waterloo. Robert’s father was also very community minded and helped to pass that sense of responsibility and stewardship onto his family. Robert’s mother also was active in the business and was the first licensed female mortician and funeral director in Black Hawk County, Iowa.

Robert and Eleanor’s Younger Years

Eleanor L. Kearns was born on January 4, 1920 at home in Cedar Heights. Her father’s half sister stayed with the family following her birth and was a great help to her mother. Growing up in this community, Eleanor attended West Junior and West High School both located in the same building on West 5th Street. After

graduation from high school in June of 1938, Eleanor attended Rockford College (an all girls school) for two years and then attended Iowa State Teacher's College (now UNI) for one year.

Robert L. Kearns was born on October 9, 1920 in Vinton, Iowa. While growing up in Waterloo, Robert attended Sloan Wallace and then graduated from West High School in January of 1939. After graduation from High School, Robert attended Gates Business College and then headed to Kansas City, Kansas to enroll in the Williams Institute of Mortuary Science. After graduation he attended Worsham School of Mortuary Science in Chicago for further study. In 1941 however, Robert was called, as were so many other young men, to serve his country. From 1941-1945 he served his military duty in Chicago, Ames, New Guinea and San Diego as a Pharmacist Mate First Class in the United States Navy.

Throughout high school Robert and Eleanor knew of one another yet it wasn't until 1947 that the two of them wed at the First Methodist Church and then made their home in Waterloo. The wedding was very special as the church was the same location in which Eleanor's parents had been married over 40 years prior. The newlyweds were very happy and excited about their new life but were saddened by the news that Robert had been diagnosed with Tuberculosis, which was service related, six months after their wedding.

After Robert's return from his tour of service, he went to work with his father and become a licensed funeral home director. In 1946 he finally achieved his goal, yet that was the same year his father died.

Eleanor kept herself busy working in a flower and gift shop and eventually came to own an antique shop on Jefferson Street in Waterloo. Robert's sister, Mildred, had cerebral palsy and lead Eleanor to become active in the United Cerebral Palsy Association- on the local, state and national level. She served as President on the local and state level of the organization and truly enjoyed volunteering in this capacity while making a difference in the lives of others. Due to her commitment and volunteer service, Eleanor was awarded the Mayor's Volunteer Performance Award for Outstanding Community Service in 1980 from Waterloo, Iowa Mayor Leo Rooff.

Bob and Eleanor also worked to develop the Kearns addition (located from Ansborough Avenue to the top of the hill on University Avenue back to Downing Avenue), approximately forty acres in Waterloo, as a residential area. They later donated land as well to the Community Services Building.

After a life filled with passion and commitment to the Waterloo community, Robert passed away on January 23, 1985.

The Kearns family was very committed and believed wholeheartedly in serving the community; a community that had helped to weave the lives of not only Robert and Eleanor but also of their parents, together. Eleanor has now chosen to weave yet another thread into the tapestry created by her family and decided to establish the Robert L. and Eleanor L. Kearns Family Fund at the Community Foundation. The legacy created by this fund will continue to make the community in which they lived and loved a place where so many will be happy to call home.