

# DONOR STORIES

## CARLTON AND THELMA WINTER “Carlton and Thelma Winter Fund & Carlton L. Winter Memorial Scholarship Fund”

Thelma Beatrice Ness Winter was born in Minnesota on October 20. The year is her secret. Her parents were George and Ada Belle Cheney Ness, who were farmers. Thelma attended Iowa State University and the University of Northern Iowa, majoring in home economics and music. She later attended the University of Iowa for advanced courses in homemaking. After graduation she taught home economics for 12 years in Rowley, Van Horne, Grandview, and Wilton, Iowa.



CARLTON AND THELMA  
WINTER

Carlton Louis Winter was born in Wilton, Iowa, on October 22, 1912, the son of Dr. Louis Carl and Anna Maria (nickname Mayme) Winter. He graduated from high school in Wilton and then attended Business College in Muscatine. After graduation he purchased a department store from the estate of Henry and Amelia Lamp (his aunt and uncle), where he had worked from the time he was eight years old.

Carlton and Thelma met at a dance in Davenport at the Coliseum Ballroom where he asked her for a date. Thelma made it a point to shop at his store whenever possible for supplies for the Home Economics course she was teaching. After dating for a year, they became engaged at a dance at the Coliseum where they had met and were married on June 18, 1939.

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After their marriage Carlton and Thelma bought two more grocery stores - one in Atalissa and one in West Liberty. In 1958 after deciding they would like to get out of the grocery store business and move to Colorado or Florida, they sold the stores in Atalissa and Wilton, keeping a manager for the West Liberty store. But they saw an ad in the Des Moines Register announcing the opening of the first shopping center in Waterloo, Iowa, on LaPorte Road. The Waterloo

area was growing, with many homes being built in the area.

Carlton and Thelma opened their first Ben Franklin store February 20, 1959, in this shopping center. Before they opened the store there was a terrible snow storm and they, along with six sales women who were preparing the store for the opening, were trapped in the store for two days. Since they had no winter clothes, they had to cover up with rugs to keep warm. For food they went next door to Smitty's Super Valu for potato chips, lunch meat and crackers. But the weather eventually got warmer and they opened a garden center in the spring, contributing to the success of the store.

About a year after the opening of their Ben Franklin store, Thelma and Carlton sold their grocery store in West Liberty. In December 1961 Thelma and Carlton opened their 2nd Ben Franklin store at Logan Plaza Shopping Center, owned by the Herb Kanofsky family. Once again, it was a cold beginning and Thelma checked-in all the merchandise wearing a fur coat, since construction was still underway.

With two stores now, Carlton managed the store on LaPorte Road and Thelma took care of the one on Logan Avenue. Both businesses did very well. John Deere and Rath were flourishing at the time which helped to make that Christmas a great success.

In 1963, the workmen at the nursery on the south end of 4th Street in Waterloo asked the Winters if they were going to put a store in the new Kimball Plaza Shopping Center. A drug store located on the north and an A & P on the south were the beginning of Kimball Plaza. Carlton and Thelma opened their 3rd Ben Franklin next to the A & P grocery store on April 30, 1963. It was difficult at first with only the hospital traffic, but business started to go well after the first year, as the area began to grow. Subsequently, the strip center was filled with a hardware store, beauty and barber shop, a small cafe and a large cafeteria.

In 1965 they opened their 4th Ben Franklin in the mall on Highway 18 between Mason City and Clear Lake, driving every day to prepare for the October opening. Thelma lived in Mason City for two months to get the store started. Even after hiring and training managers, Thelma traveled back and forth two or three times a week.

By clearing huge trees, the developer who had built the Mason City store built their 5th Ben Franklin near a hotel on Main street in downtown New Hampton in 1969. It was a store twice the size of the one at Logan Plaza. At this time, the Logan Plaza Ben Franklin store became a Coast-to-Coast store and the Ben Franklin store was reopened in a new 24,000 square foot store and garden center.

In 1971, Carlton and Thelma decided to try downtown Waterloo. They opened their 6th Ben Franklin in the former Kreske building next to Black's Department Store. When the Crossroads Mall opened they wanted to have a Ben Franklin located there, but since Woolworth was given the variety lease they opened the Barberio Cheese Shop instead. The Winters really loved their work and their customers, working night and day, seven days a week.

In 1981, 23 years after they opened their first Ben Franklin store, they decided to sell their four Waterloo stores to two of their former managers. But for four years they stayed and worked with the managers, with Thelma helping with the bookwork and Carlton working the night schedule at the LaPorte store. In their words, "We just wanted to ensure the businesses were successful."

As owners of Ben Franklin stores, Thelma and Carlton attended two five-day conventions every year in cities across the country with wonderful entertainment, big bands and formal dinners. For recreation Thelma and Carlton enjoyed going dancing with friends to the big band sounds at ballrooms in Electric Park, Mason City, Dubuque and Des Moines.

While they were in business, Thelma and Carlton contributed to many nonprofit agencies including the Girl Scouts, YMCA, YWCA, the American Cancer Society, the Red Cross and the United Way. The Winters became involved in charitable contributions because supporting the community was something they wanted to do. "Waterloo had been so good to us we just want to do everything we can for Waterloo", Thelma stated.

In June of 2008 Thelma Beatrice Ness Winter passed away. She was preceded in death by her husband Carlton Louis Winter who passed away in January of 2000.

In addition to the Winter's endowment fund, the Community Foundation also supports the Carlton L. Winter Memorial Scholarship Fund.