

Excerpt from an oral history interview with **Laurenia Elynor Kiser**, part of the **Lawrence/Douglas County [KS] African American Oral History Interviews** collection; accessible at http://oralhistory.lplks.org//4laurenia_Kiser.html.

The original interview was collected by Curtis Nether on June 3, 1977.

Introduction to the online interview transcript:

Laurenia Elynor Kiser

Laurenia Elynor Kiser's father, who was born a slave, was named "Doctor." Her grandmother was part Native American. Her parents met in Lawrence and married in 1880. They lived southwest of Lawrence in Bloomington. Her grade school was integrated until third grade. She describes the chores and social activities of her younger years and talks about hearing stories of escaping slaves hiding in the Bloomington area of the Underground Railroad and about another lady hiding in a corn field during Quantrill's Raid. She attended Liberty High School from 1912-16. Her brother served in World War I. She discusses war rationing. Mrs. Kiser attended college in Emporia and got her teaching certificate. She taught only in all-black schools and experienced racial discrimination in hiring in the Depression. She discusses prejudiced service of the Red Cross in World War II. Mrs. Kiser asserts that some black teachers lost their jobs after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Topeka* decision. Mrs. Kiser discusses changes in housing options, theater attendance, and welfare. She was a member of the Ninth Street Baptist Church.

... MR. NETHER: It was just a time when here blacks became equal and now whites got upset and became the dominant forces.

What about World War I? Can you remember what it was like here in Douglas County then?

MS. KISER: Oh, yes, I remember. I am seventy-nine and I remember that. And I had a brother to go to war and we also had a cousin that lived with us and he went to war. But my brother was in Portland, Oregon. He registered in Douglas County. By the way, I was looking through an old book. We have a lot of old books there. And I found in there my brother Frank's registration card. He was forty when he registered in Clinton precinct, and I think he was just eighteen. I think they registered at eighteen, or was it twenty-one? I am not sure about that. But I believe he was twenty-one on 2-45.

MR. NETHER: It was eighteen to forty-five

MS. KISER: At that time.

MR. NETHER: It first started from, I think, twenty-one to thirty, then it went to eighteen to forty-five.

MS. KISER: Yes, I remember that since you mention it.

MR. NETHER: Was your brother enthusiastic about going to war, going to fight?

MS. KISER: The older brother, he registered here but he married and went to Portland, Oregon. My younger brother didn't say much about it, but he was mighty glad he didn't have to go. He was put in

class 4 because he was a farmer. When my father passed, he stopped high school to run the farm, and so he was put in Class 4A or B, whatever he was, and then he didn't have to go. He would be the last one. But he never did go.

MR. NETHER: The reason I asked is World War I was one of our most patriotic wars. It was when a lot of people were excited about it. They wanted to go and fight. They made posters where they have young ladies on it, the soldiers' shoulders and so on. I was wondering since blacks at this time were being lynched a lot and it was a bad time for blacks, were black people still enthusiastic about going to fight a foreign war?

MS. KISER: I think so. As I said, my brother didn't say much but he wasn't too particular about going, but I had?and I still have it?a service pin with one star, and I was so proud of that pin. I was so proud I wore it to school, wore it everywhere. Had one brother in service.

MR. NETHER: They gave you these service pins?

MS. KISER: The service pin, yes. If I can find it, I think I can, I will show it to you sometime. Just a little tiny pin.

MR. NETHER: That's interesting. It's the same thing now where they put a star in the window if you had a son??

MS. KISER: We had a star in the window. We put a star in the window.

MR. NETHER: Can you remember what was it like here in Douglas County at that time? Were people sacrificing a lot for the war or were they?did they stay up with the news on the war, and so on?

MS. KISER: Yes, they did a lot of sacrificing. You could have white flour?you could have flour, but you weren't supposed to use?and you had to have so much white flour and so much graham flour, mixed flour. No white bread. We were in the country. And we made our own bread, so we were just allowed so much flour, so much brown flour, and so much white flour.

MR. NETHER: How did you feel about sacrificing for the war cause?

MS. KISER: I don't know. It seemed like to me I was old enough to, but I didn't think too much about it. I just thought everybody had to do it and we just had to do some of those things.

MR. NETHER: Is there anything else about World War I that you would like to mention here?

MS. KISER: No, I don't think so.

MR. NETHER: After World War I many of the soldiers came back and you had a period of time where many say was a very prosperous time, but actually it was only prosperous for you if you were a big businessman. If you were a farmer or laborer, times weren't so good for you. These times were known as the Roaring 20s. Can you remember anything about the 1920s? What was it like? Also during the time of Prohibition here?

MS. KISER: Yes. Roaring '20s.

MR. NETHER: What did you do for fun during the '20s?....