

Excerpt from an oral history interview with Leslie & Minnie Kimball, part of the Lawrence/Douglas County [KS] African American Oral History Interviews collection; accessible at <http://oralhistory.lplks.org//4kimballs.html>.

The original interview was collected by Curtis Nether on June 1, 1977.

### Introduction to the online interview transcript:

#### *Leslie and Minnie Kimball*

The Kimballs were married in 1922. Both were born in Douglas County. Mr. Kimball's father came here from Mississippi. Both of their families farmed. His father also worked as a well-digger and was killed when a well caved in. His family moved to Lawrence after the 1903 flood. Mr. Kimball went to a mixed-race school in Eudora and then attended Pinckney School, which had grades 1-4 for "colored" students. Mrs. Kimball attended an all-black school. They discuss segregated theaters and restaurants. A Kimball daughter worked at the Sunflower Ammunition plant in World War II. A daughter also helped start Ballard Center in Lawrence.

... MR. NETHER: OK. What about World War I, which was about 50 years later after Reconstruction? Can you remember what it was like? My own accounts of it, many people in the United States were rushing off to go to war. During the war everybody was tickled to death to go fight, and here in Kansas the farmers were the only ones that could be deferred from the draft because they needed to grow food and so forth. You were here during this time.

Mrs. Kimball, could you tell me anything about World War I that you can recall?

MRS. KIMBALL: All I can remember, we were on the farm and we had to produce as much food as we could, try to conserve it, and a few boys from our area went to the service. I noticed in that book that all three of them came back.

MR. NETHER: How did they feel about going generally?

MRS. KIMBALL: I think they felt it was their duty and they were going. No objections to their going. And we would come in and cheer them off as they went on the train.

MR. NETHER: You were kind of proud?

MRS. KIMBALL: Yes, very proud.

MR. NETHER: That's something. World War I is the most interesting war of all time because they had segregated units.

MRS. KIMBALL: That was just Bloomington. There were far more from Lawrence here.

MR. NETHER: They did serve in their own little segregated units, all black units?

MRS. KIMBALL: Yes, they did.

MR. NETHER: OK. Mr. Kimball, can you remember anything about World War I?

MR. KIMBALL: Yes, I remember I was put in Class 4A. And I didn't have to go. The reason I was put in Class 4A, on account of my mother being blind and I took care of her. And then I was placed in 4A, but they didn't call it during the war. Didn't call 4A. I was pretty close to going there, but the war was over before they called 4A.

MR. NETHER: Did you want to go?

MR. KIMBALL: No, I didn't want to go. No, sir. I would rather stay here. But I would have went if I had to, but I didn't care about going.

MR. NETHER: Did you think about things like here you couldn't go and sit anywhere you wanted to in a movie house and you couldn't eat at all the restaurants and here now they were telling you to go fight for democracy?

MR. KIMBALL: Un-huh.

MR. NETHER: How did you feel about that?

MR. KIMBALL: I don't know. I didn't feel bad about it all there. Tell you the truth about during those times, it didn't bother me so much because I didn't care about eating in those places anyway. I just wouldn't go to the theater. I just didn't go back to those different places and didn't worry me any. Only thing I didn't like at the time, I didn't want my children to face those kind of problems all the time, but it didn't bother me as they grew up.

MR. NETHER: The war was over and many people come back. Everybody is happy. Then you had a period of time when they said the country was prosperous. Everybody but the farmers were prosperous, and laborers weren't prosperous. Big businessmen were prosperous. This is the Roaring 20s period. What do you recall about the 20s? How did you socialize? Did you go out? This is when you were young.

MRS. KIMBALL: We didn't have too much money to go out and we just stayed at home mostly. Our main enjoyment was riding out in the car, taking a car ride. We always had a car.

MR. NETHER: What kind of car can you remember that you had?

MRS. KIMBALL: We had an old Buick, wasn't it? We first had that old Maxwell.

MR. KIMBALL: Yes, we had a Maxwell first.

MRS. KIMBALL: Then he started working for Buick in '26 and he kept Buicks most of the time. He worked at the Buick garage.

MR. NETHER: What year were you two married?

MRS. KIMBALL: 1922....