

**Mary Ellen (Winter) Atkins**  
Secretary, Representative Karl Le Compte of Iowa

## **Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress**

### **From the Winning Typing Team to Congress**

Mary Ellen Atkins recalls her unique path to Washington, D.C.  
*Interview recorded August 24, 2016*

We grew up in a Republican family and that actually, was why 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 team. We went to Des Moines to competitions, and we were the winning team. It got 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—he needed a new secretary. Why, he contacted our Republican chairman in our town, because—when he would lose a secretary in his office, he would then go to another county of his five-county district there in Iowa and ask for a secretary there. He contacted that chairman of our town, and that chairman knew my parents. He had read the article in the paper about my being on the winning team. He called 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. He and I drove over to the Congressman's office. He kind of interviewed us. He just talked to me. He didn't do any dictation or see about my abilities about typing. He just accepted that I was going to be all right. 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 little mothers in my hometown would say to my mother, "How could you let her go all the way to Washington alone?"