LOOKING BACK
BY SHIRLEY SCHAPER

**Elmer E. Benson, pioneer State Center merchant
succumbs Sunday at age 95
Local business man 71 years
February 9, 1961 State Center Enterprise**

Elmer E. Benson, pioneer State Center merchant and oldest resident of this community, passed away Sunday, February 5, at the advanced age of 95. Death came at the home of Mrs. Fern Smith, where he and Mrs. Benson have lived the past year. His final illness was of only ten days duration but the venerable business man had been in failing health for several years.

Funeral services were held today at 2:00 p.m. from the Methodist Church here with Dr. William Baddeley in charge. Interment was in Hillside Cemetery with Terrestrial Lodge No. 276, A. F. and A. M. in charge of graveside rites. Pall bearers were Willis Baker, Ralph Watson, E.S. Pitman, William Watson, Arnold Westphal and Reuben Nichol. Flower bearers were Mrs. Gladys Smith, Mrs. Viola Westphal, Mrs. Amanda Hilleman and Mrs. Margaret Baie. Arrangements were in charge of Brimhall West Funeral Home.

Mr. Benson is the last in a long line of veteran State Center business men along main street who have either retired or passed away. He opened a small bakery when he first came to State Center, later selling the business to the Williams Brothers. He then took a clerking position with W. N. Gilbert in his dry good store. After working for Mr. Gilbert for 15 years, he and Amy Gilbert bought out the business. Five years later he became the sole owner of the store.

He retired in 1957 when he sold his drygoods (sic) business to Mrs. Gladys Smith. Mr. and Mrs. Benson, who were very active in the civic, social and religious affairs of the town for many years, celebrated their seventy-first wedding anniversary last December. Benson's Store was the town's most common meeting place for townspeople down through the years. Known as State Center's leading "senior citizen", Mr. Benson spent 71 years in active business in this community.

Mr. Benson was born in Ohio on January 21, 1866, the son of James and Mary Farquahar Benson. He came to Iowa with his parents at an early age, settling near Belle Plaine, where he received his early education. He came to State Center in 1885.

He was married to Hallie Tisdale on December 18, 1889 in the first wedding performed in the Methodist Church in State Center. He was a devoted member of the Methodist Church here and also held membership in the various Masonic bodies, the Odd Fellow Lodge, the old State Center Commercial Club and the present day Community Club.

Mr. Benson had served many years on the city council and board of education and had been a member of the State Center Fire Department for over fifty years. He had also served as a director of the Central State Bank for many years.

Always interested in athletics, he was a member of the famous "Iowa Hayseed" Baseball team here and was prominent in track circles as a runner.

He is survived by his widow, one son, Donald of New Rochelle, N.Y., and one sister, Mrs. Millicent Loper of Lincoln, Nebr. and Will Tisdale, a brother-in-law of West Union.

(Shirley's note: I will always remember Elmer Benson as a spry older gentleman who ran his business with a hands-on approach. I won't forget the time when I was in 5th grade and Mom had asked me to run up to Benson's during my school lunch break for a spool of thread. I paid for the thread and went back to school. Sometime later I realized that Mr. Benson had given me a nickel too much in change. I felt so guilty as we kids had been brought up to be honest. I asked my teacher, Shirley DeLay, if I could go back uptown to return the nickel to Mr. Benson. When I opened the door to his business (located at 108 West Main St.), Mr. Benson looked up from his work and seemed surprised to see a school girl at that time of day. I sheepishly told him he had given me a nickel too much in change and I had just now discovered it. When he asked me my name, I didn't know if I was in trouble for not noticing sooner, or if he would remember me in his will some day. Well, neither was true.)