Elizabeth Brown Brooks, 1901-1994	
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The pages that follow constitute the transcript of an interview conducted as part of the Wilmette Public Library District's Oral History program, started in 1975 by a - committee of the Friends of the Wilmette Public Library which has been chaired since its inception by Rhea Adler, a resident of the Village of Wilmette since 1932.

A copy of the tape on which this transcript is based is available for circulation, and may be obtained by checking with a Reference Librarian concerning circulation procedures. This program would not have been possible without the cooperation of the many long-time residents of the Village interested in helping to preserve particulars of a fascinating past, and the patience, energy and effort of a small but dedicated group of interviewers, transcribers and typists who share the belief that the past is too important to be forgotten.

Richard E. Thompson Director

ABSTRACT

Interviewee: Elizabeth Brown Brooks

Interviewer: Rhea Adler

Date of interview: Spring, 1979

- Grandparents— Crocker, 1892/ Brown, 1868
- Early childhood- schools- churches
- Dedication of Sanitary District Canal and creation of (Washington) Gillson Park from dredgings
- New Trier faculty- 1914-1918; activities
- Village businesses: Smith's Grocery; Mueller's Meat Market; Van Dusen's Grocery; Cramer's Dry Goods; Green's; Martin Jacobson, plumber; Snyder's Drug; "The Hall"; Wilson's Bakery
- Brown Building built 1909; Masonic Hall on third floor
- Grandfather Brown blinded 1870- carpenter
- Melville Brown's business life in Chicago
- Allen Family- Rodney
- World War I— Wilmette activities— Red Cross entertainment of Ft.
 Sheridan and Great Lakes men; via North Shore Railroad
- Woman's Club first President Mrs. Leonard; Reading club; Miss Ida and Anna Law and Wilmette Library beginning
- Edwin and Horace Drury
- Louis K. Gillson family, Grace and Marjorie Stewart

Elizabeth Brown Brooks

TRACK 1

RA: State your name and where you live.

EBB: My name is Elizabeth Brown Brooks and at present I live at 1136 Greenleaf Avenue in Wilmette. Formerly I lived at, for many years, at 738 Eleventh Street in Wilmette, but I was born at about 1105 or 1107 Central Avenue where there is at present a store named "Jack and June". But I was born in a house that stood on that land. The house in which I was born now stands at the south—east corner of Greenleaf Avenue and Eleventh Street. My parents were John Melville Brown and Lillian Crocker Brown. It might be of interest to know that my father came to Wilmette in 1868. At that time he was five years old. His parents had brought him from Nova Scotia, first to Evanston, where they lived for two years, then to Wilmette. And my mother's parents moved to Wilmette in 1892 when she was a young woman in her twenties.

RA: And where had they come from?

EBB: They came to Wilmette from the south side of Chicago, but had previously come from Union City, Michigan, to Chicago in 1881.

RA: Crocker is an early Eastern name, so I assume —

EBB: Yes, my grandfather had been born on Cape Cod at Ostervilie (Round Barn Farm, W. Barnstable). But he had come out to Michigan as a young man after the Civil War and had stopped in Union City, Michigan, and worked there arid at that time he had become acquainted with my mother's mother who was

then a young woman and they were married in Michigan. Now I could be tempted to go along and reminisce about her and about the missionary relatives to the Hawaiian Islands and things of that sort but I'd better stick with Wilmette.

RA: Well, that I'm sure would be most interesting to add. Maybe we'll do that at another time. Because I do think it is a very interesting part of your history and would be of value. But I was wondering if your Grandfather Crocker, having come from the East to Michigan might have come on a military grant. Had he been in the war? Do you know?

EBB: He had been in the war and he was a younger son in the family so that he was not eligible to become the head of the farm. I never heard anything about his having come on a grant, or not. I think he just simply came west, I think, to seek his fortune. And he happened when he came to this little town in Michigan to like the people there and he started working for the man who later became his father-in-law, who was working in the mill, I think, the flour mill there. Arid later he became an inspector of flour mills all around the middle-west part of the

RA: Crocker Flour used to be very famous.

EBB: Well, I can't claim any fame that way. (giggling) And I can claim no connections with the Crockers of California.

RA: It would be lucrative, let's say, to claim their relationship.

EBB: He came west as a poor boy and he died as a poor man, a relatively poor man. However, you might. be slightly interested in the way that he happened to come out to Wilmette, because I have just discovered a reminiscence of my mother's and in this she says that in 1890 –

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Oh, one other point, she graduated from Oakland High School in 1890 and Mr. Mulford also went to that same high school. He graduated one year later than she did.

RA: That was Mr. Herbert Mulford...

EBB: Mr. Herbert Mulford. They both graduated from Oakland High School. And in 1890 all of the Chicago High Schools combined to hold their graduation exercises in the city's beautiful new auditorium — all of the high schools being four.

RA: Do you know what those four were?

EBB: Chicago North, Chicago West, Chicago South and the Oakland High School. The several hundred graduates sat on the big stage and sang several choral numbers, but enough of that. In 1892 the Crocker family moved to Wilmette to a home standing where our present post office is. And when the Crockers were moving into the house, the Browns were moving out of the same house. That was the first meeting of Lillian Crocker and Melville Brown. She goes on to say, "We had almost decided to live in Oak Park when Edwin Drury of Wilmette, a friend of my father's, through their membership in the George H. Thomas Post, persuaded us to look at

Wilmette. The sylvan beauty, the woods, the wildflowers, the lake, won us to Wilmette in spite of the fact that there were no sewers or water system, no gas or electricity, all of which seemed pretty primitive to city folks used to such conveniences. But Wilmette was growing and all of those improvements would soon come." She also told me personally one time that Mr. Drury met them at the station with a horse and buggy and Ralph Childs, who later became a dentist in Winnetka and who was the son of the doctor of that day, or of one of two doctors of that day - I'm not sure whether he preceded or followed Dr. Stolp - but Dr. Childs was a homeopathic doctor of those days.

RA: And this was the senior Dr. Stolp you're talking about?

EBB: Both of these would be seniors that I'm talking about. Ralph would have been of the same generation as the junior Dr. Stolp, and Ralph became a dentist at a later time, but at that time he was a young man and he was driving a horse and buggy for Mr. Drury while Mr. Drury took them around to see the possible - Incidentally, do you know about Florence's story? Have you talked with her — I guess she's about the only Drury left. That's an aside,

TRACK 3

but I also have a little more reminiscence of my mother's that I might give you at a later time and there is also a reminiscence which my father wrote to be read at a meeting of

The Old Town Folks in 1947 which I think could be of interest.

RA: It certainly could and I do think we should have it on tape.

EBB: But I'll save that for another time. Now you may wonder what my earliest recollections are as a little girl. I don't know exactly where to start.

RA: Where were you living when you first remember?

EBB: Until I was about five years old, no, I must have been less than five years old, we lived in this house on Central Avenue and then we moved - my father built the house on Eleventh Street, 738 Eleventh Street — and we moved into 738 Eleventh Street at about 1904. Oh, yes, I know that's right. I was only three. I was only three years old when we moved there. Or three-and-a-half. Because I had my first birthday party in that house and I recall that as the little girls were sitting around the dining room table my older cousin asked me how old I was and I said that I was three and a half years old and she giggled and said, "Oh no you're riot. You're four years old." And she asked that same question the second time and the second time I still said, "Three and a half years old." And again she giggled and laughed and said, "No, you're four years old." And from that time on I knew I was four years old. But that is really one of my first vivid recollections in the house at 738 Eleventh Street.

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The Congregational Church had just completed its newer

Brick structure which it now occupies on the west side of Eleventh Street but its earlier frame structure — into which they had moved in 1883 - was still standing at the south side of my father's house there on Eleventh Street, so as a little girl I remember standing at the dining room window sill with my chin just barely over the window sill watching the wrecking process that took place as that church was torn down, all except the rear portion. And the rear portion of that structure was moved back to the back of the house on 738 Eleventh Street. My father's thought at the time was that it would make a place for his father to have his carpenter tools and visit with his old cronies. It later became a garage, also, but it was re—converted and used, but that garage which now stands there back of the house at 738 Eleventh Street is the rear portion of that old 1883 Congregational Church.

RA: What other churches were there in town at the time?

EBB: The Methodists had built a structure, a frame structure over at the corner of Eleventh and Wilmette Avenue where the present church stands, very similar in its architecture. I have pictures of both buildings and each of them have a steeple and each of them - I had the other one here just a minute ago. I can't find it right now, but I do have both pictures. And there is a great similarity between the two structures.

RA: That is the one that was in The Wilmette Life in, uh –

EBB: This one here.

RA: celebrating —

EBB: But the Methodist Church which existed at the same time was very similar in its style of architecture. There must have been a Catholic Church up at the Ridge at that time.

RA: But that was not Wilmette at that time, was it?

EBB: Ahhhh, I had always considered that anything near the Ridge was Gross Point. But who was the gal we were talking about? — Esther Hoffman says that it was Wilmette all the way to the Ridge. Her knowledge and mine about that differ. But we always associated that church with the Gross Point community.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: But whether it was geographically within Wilmette or not at that time, I do not know.

RA: I believe most of the people [from Mr. Schneider's tape] who grew up there - both sides of Ridge Avenue were considered Gross Point area. Now how far east that went, I have no idea.

EBB: That is the impression that I had from my parents in my childhood. But Esther was furious when The Wilmette Life published and said that Teddy Roosevelt had come to visit Father Vattman [Vattmann] at Gross Point because she said that he visited Father Vattman [Vattmann] in Wilmette.

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RA: Well, that is very interesting and I think we could find

out through the state plats and maybe the village plats would show it, really.

EBB: What other churches? I don't know the age of St. John's Church. I'm sure the Evangelical Lutheran Church came later. I'm not even sure about the age of St. Augustine's Church. I know that the Baptist and Presbyterian Churches came later.

RA: We will have to get those from some of the people in the congregations.

EBB: Now, uh, I suppose my next recollection would be something about my school experience, but before I was able to enter school myself, the schools, they were in the process of building a new building - a new yellow brick building at the corner of Central and Tenth Street.

RA: Where was the first school?

EBB: The first school building was also on Central Avenue near Tenth Street, but, oh, some two hundred feet over from the corner. Now the —

RA: Which way?

EBB: To the east.

RA: To the east.

EBB: Now the very earliest school, frame school building, did stand at the corner of Central and Tenth Street, but that was later moved down to Sixth Street and it is the core of a house down at about Sixth, and I may be wrong about Sixth, but either Sixth or Fifth Street and Central Avenue. The only way one would recognize it as being the

old school house would be to look at the windows of that house. You would see the similarity between the windows of that house and the old school house. So I wouldn't remember just when that old frame building was moved, but I do know that during that, the year when I was ready for kindergarten, there was not enough space in the, oh, kind of stone building with the curved arch, for all of the classes, so they farmed out the kindergarten, they placed over in the northern part of what is now, Lyman—Sargent's, the food concession part of Lyman-Sargent's, that was a new building at that time. And the second graders met in the study of the Congregational Church. And I remember that even — I remember one day when I was sick and I had built a snowman and I was (phone ringing, and someone saying, "Cut it off.")

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I think I was saying that the second graders were at the Congregational Church and I remember one time when I was at home sick watching the second-grade children come and knock down my snowman. I felt very, very abused and thought they were cruel. I, myself, was a kindergartener at the time and went down Wilmette Avenue to the location which is now one of the stores, part of the Lyman store and our kindergarten was held there. My most vivid recollection there is that we had some little tiny Japanese dolls hanging in the window. These dolls had been sent to us by Miss Clara Eika (sp?) who also had been a teacher

in the Wilmette schools and had gone to Honolulu and she sent these little dolls back to us. I remember that, and also little Japanese parasols, I remember. When I was ready for first grade the what we then called "the new building" was completed so I attended first grade in the corner, first floor of the new building which later was used by kindergarten. I remember being in that same room where Laura Flentye later had her kindergarten.

RA: And what was that school called?

EBB: It was just called "the new building" of the Central School. Now I think there was already a Logan School over On Fifteenth Street, probably a frame building. Because, even then, people didn't quite like having their children crossing the tracks. So, and, of course, there were no buses, so I believe there was a second school over at Logan. We called that "The new building" all during my eight years in the elementary school. The Howard School — Wait a minute. No, I don't mean the Howard School — the Stolp School, which faced on Tenth Street and which lay to the north of the corner was not built until some time after 1914.

RA: That late?

EBB: Yes, and that was built to be a junior high in that day. There was no idea of sending all the junior highs to one building, but that was a junior high for the children east of the tracks. No comment.

RA: Nineteen fourteen was early for a junior high school.

EBB: The reason I'm aware of that is because my brother attended school in that building and he was ten years younger than I. I had graduated from grade school and had entered New Trier in 1914, so I don't remember the precise year, but it was between 1914 and 1924. One incident in school as I remember is that we were told that everyone — we were all to march down to the lakefront for the dedication of the gates which were being opened up to between the lake and the canal. It was built then. And in building the canal, they had dredged up a lot of earth and just dumped it in clumps out beyond the old shore, as it was, into what is now Gillson Park. But I remember standing on the bare clumps of earth and having my feet nearly frozen while we stood and listened to some kind of speeches which were supposed to be inspirational - (giggling). All that I remember is that my feet were cold! (more giggling).

RA: That is probably true for most dedications.

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EBB: At about almost that same - this is beside the point as far as Wilmette is concerned — it was almost at that time, maybe a little later, that I was taken down to Chicago and that I remember standing on raw clumps of earth, also, in what would now be Grant Park, to watch some kind of air show. Very early open planes, you know, that were doing loop-de-loops and things of that sort. But I also remember being cold and standing on those clumps of earth.

RA: Tell me who was head of the school at the time you speak of.

EBB: When I was first in school, Mr. Logee was the principal and I thought he was an awful ogre because one time when I wanted to go back to school the Friday at the end of my whooping cough incarceration, but I didn't have a doctor's certificate, he sent me home. He wouldn't let me stay and I thought he was just terrible. But about my second or third, second grade or third grade, I can't remember which, Mr. Harper came.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: And he was much beloved by everyone.

RA: Do you remember that he was called "Baldy" Harper? Did you ever hear that expression? Someone in doing a tape referred to him as "Baldy" Harper and said he also was station agent at the same time that he was in the school system.

EBB: I have no recollection of that. His brother, of course, taught at New Trier and I thought he taught at New Trier for a little bit before he came here.

RA: He did, I understand, I believe, for a year or so before he came —

EBB: This person, I wonder, might have confused him with Mr. Orner because Mr. Orner was the station agent for as long as I can remember.

RA: Well, this is interesting.

EBB: Mr. Orner and Mr. Harper could have looked a little bit alike.

RA: Mr. Orner was a smaller man, though, was he not?

EBB: Yes, he was shorter. That's completely new to me. But Mr. Harper was much beloved.

RA: And he had a long tenure in the school system.

EBB: A very long tenure.

RA: And then you went from the Wilmette schools -

EBB: To New Trier High School where I was there for four years.

RA: How large was it when you were there?

EBB: There was one main central building and there was an auditorium much smaller than the present auditorium, and a dining hail and two gymnasiums, one for boys and one for girls. But I think the total student body was possibly as many as two thousand and I think our graduating class in 1918 had maybe possibly four or five hundred.

RA: Oh, really? That many? (tone of amazement)

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EBB: My recollection for numbers is not very good. At New Trier, jumping ahead a little bit, I remember when I was a freshman and the faculty put on a play just before Christmas and they simulated a Christmas party in a country school, a one—room school. And, uh, each of the teachers took off on his pet peeve. Miss Packer, then Dean of the girls, chewed about a whole package

of chewing gum, and Miss Burchard wore a huge half— moon beauty spot on her cheek, and of the two skits I remember they had us in gales of laughter because they were doing all of the things that they didn't like in us. (giggling)

RA: How large was the faculty? Do you have any idea?

EBB: I can't tell you in numbers, but it must be - Mr. Windows was the physic department, someone else was the chemistry department., Miss Ulrich and Miss Raymond were the history department. Oh, there were probably four or five in the English department. I can't be quite sure about that. Dr. Small and Miss Fulton in the Latin department. Miss Grover and Katherine Murphy in the art department. Uh, Hildebrandt in Natural Sciences. And I can't remember the others but that gives you an idea as I named the department of the number of persons in a department where now they might have six or eight in the same department.

RA: Then you were there when Dr. Small was there.

EBB: I had my freshman Latin with him. I had my senior Latin with Miss Packard and I always remember the time when I was writing a test and was very, very puzzled about some figures of speech and I looked worried and Miss Packard came by and in a loud voice that everyone could have heard, said, "cassus, cassandra, canebat", and then I knew it was an alliteration! But she hadn't

given me any hint that wasn't available to anyone who was around. I remember that so well, and I remember Mr. Window's trying to play a trick on, Oh, the French department. I had a part in a French play. I never got up my nerve to act in an English play because I was too self—conscious, but some way of other, when I was talking French I could feel a little less self-conscious about it. But I remember Mr. Window had his wooden razor, part of the property for this French play, hidden from him. The man who wasn't there from the French department, and I was just thinking that was pretty mean of him.

RA: Mr. Windows, as I remember, was quite a prankster.

EBB: Well, that was it.

RA: Had a very good sense of humor.

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EBB: He was a prankster. Oh, and then towards the end of the physics course, he had given us one assignment in electricity which was optional - had to do with creating an arc light. And that was optional, but Grace Freeman and I determined that we were going to do this and the instructions were that we were to set up the apparatus for the experiment according to the instructions on the board and call him before we actually put any current on, and he came over and he looked at it and in a calm low voice he said, "Did Albert help you with it?" (laughter) And Grace and I were just furious. He knew

perfectly well that we had done it all by ourselves, but — "Did Albert help you with it?" (more laughter) Miss Grover was great fun. Miss Grover also helped on the dramatics production and Polly King from up in Winnetka was in the library. She helped us. I said I didn't take part in any English plays. I did. They finally put me into one play during my senior year because they felt so sorry for me — because it seems I had tried out for all the other plays and failed to make it. But I don't remember the play so well as I remember the cast party afterwards and the games that we played afterwards. I was so surprised that people like Miss Grover and Miss King whom I later knew as Polly King, could be so informal and so relaxed at a cast party.

RA: Teachers weren't supposed to be relaxed in those days. They were much more formal than they are today. It's interesting that they could be themselves at a cast party. That was a great surprise to me. Well, so much for school

RA: What businesses were in town that you think of in those days? Where did you do your shopping?

EBB: Well, there was, when I was a very, very little girl, - my mother used to take me across the tracks to the building that is now occupied by the Crossroads Restaurant, or Curt's, but that was a Frank Smith's grocery store and I think there was a meat market, Muellers, in an—

other location, a little further up the block. But then before too long Van Dusens came in –

RA: And they were where?

EBB: Well, at the northeast corner of Twelfth Street and Central Avenue where there is a discount drugstore now. You'd remember it as Winters.

RA: Across from the village hail.

EBB: Yes, and across from the bank. Did you ever talk. with the Schultzes? They could probably tell you more exactly the dates for that shop. Though I remember as quite a little girl being sent to Van Dusen's with grocery lists. Along in the middle of the block there about where Schultz is now, a little bit beyond Schneider's Store, but along in the middle of that block was Miss Cramer's Drygoods Store, which was also kind of a general notions store.

RA: There is a Cramer, a decorator, in that block now. Would it be the same building?

EBB: Never thought about whether there could possible he any connection.

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And there Green's. Probably the Wolf store.

RA: The hardware store?

EBB: Martin Jacobson had a plumbing shop but at the corner was Dr. Childs' house. Oh, there was another drugstore where The Touch of Elegance is now. That was Mr. Snyder's, and incidentally Dr. Seifert used to work there.

RA: Yes, and Dr. Siefert had promised to tell us about Mr. Snyder and Mr. Cazel.

EBB: Now I don't know if he'll tell this on himself, but Dr. Seifert would love to whistle. He would always whistle when he would come up to my mother's home for an evening. One time he laughed and said, "But do you know that as a young man I used to work with Mr. Snyder and he had his desk and office up kind of a little - up some stairs overlooking the store — and he called me up to talk to him one time and I thought he would scold me for my whistling, but instead he said, 'You're the only person I know of who can whistle a sextette in all six different parts."

RA: This is Martin Seifert?

EBB: This is Martin Seifert. Yes. (giggling) That drug store was there. And across the tracks on, urn, probably that's the drug store that went out quite recently — probably may have been there from very early days and then, you notice there's a long building that some kind of letters on it, and, urn, I remember that being called John's Hall and we used to have dancing classes there.

RA: Is that where there is a - A fraternal order has ahail upstairs in that building.

EBB: And, uh, back when I was reading the minutes of the Congregational Women's Guild, they talked about coming

events to raise money, they decided that they would do such and such if they could. get The Hall. And they never identified it by name. Just said The Hall.

RA: This was before your father built his building?

EBB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, this was way back in the 1880s, 1890.

RA: Then that would have been the only hail at that time.

EBB: Probably. Yes. And I think we may - I can't be sure about any of the meetings of Ye Olde Towne Folks over there. My father built his building in 1909, on Wilmette Avenue and it -was planned for stores on the first floor, and, uh, doctors' offices on the second floor, and the third floor was to be the — and was rented, he had a lease for seven years with the !4asons as a Masonic Hall. And then there were other — other times when it could be rented out to other groups. And, uh, I went over to the library because I was very much interested in finding out what had happened to the minutes of Ye Olde Towne Folks - and there still is a section of those minutes that I don't know about. about where they are. But, uh, I knew that Becky Fitch, Elizabeth Fitch, had been a very faithful secretary for many years and had a feeling that she had typed up something, and I find in the library a bound copy of the minutes going way back into the 1880's and coming up to about 1940. Somewhere in the forties.

RA: Is that on the shelves of the library?

EBB: No. It's downstairs. And I had a terrible time finding it. I had to go down and paw through some file cabinets and found a lot of papers and there are still pictures that should be in that library that I never have been able to find.

TRACK 11

RA: Well, we have discussed this, Mr. Thompson and I. I think he is waiting to see what kind of accomodations the historical society is eventually to have. However, things have been given to the library because the library is a permanent thing.

EBB: But, my mother — the reason that my mother and I sent over some things was because this was the only place that we know. This was before the Newberry was set up. So if anything is there that we gave, we would gladly let them go to Newberry But the library was the only place that we knew of to send them.

RA: Right. And perhaps needs to be discussed, re-thought, and I think they - and all the libraries I find, The Chicago Historical Society is giving Newberry Library things that they have that are better cared for at Newberry. Newberry Library is turning over its old photographs to Chicago Historical, and the same way with The Art Institute. Things are being better categorized than they have been previously and I think that is probably what will happen here.

EBB: But I still would like to know what happened to the original minutes that were hand-written. I have no idea where they are, but I did find...

RA: Do you know who did them?

EBB: Who did the minutes? The original minutes?

RA: The original ones.

EBB: Probably in an earlier year, Esther (Dunshee) Bower may have done them. Oh, what's her name...? Well, actually come to think...I did find the typed transcript of it and I've seen one that intereted me very much personally. Oh, Myra Bogsdon was secretary back ab one time. And, but, uh, Rebecca Fitch was the most recent secretary.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: And was secretary, I think, at the time Ye Olde Towne Folkes...

RA: And at that time she worked for the Hollister Press at Wilmette Life?

EBB: She did some. Yes, but her work with Ye Olde Towne Folkes was purely voluntary. Well, in 1916 they, us, they planned for a meeting and, uh, well, here again I probably better not take your time to read all this now, but there was a preliminary meeting of the board of directors and then the meeting itself actually took place in April of 1916.

RA: Where?

EBB: At City Hall up at my father's building. And there is a

photograph over there that's better than that, and, also the Wheelocks have one of the original photographs. That's just a Xerox, just a copy of the photograph.

RA: Yes.

EBB: And, uh...

RA: And that was 1916.

EBB: Nineteen sixteen. And my father had offered the use of The Brown Building, and I remember those meetings well, personally, that the younger daughters (the women cooked their own dinners at that time), except, maybe, probably Mrs. Hess who was the cateress of the village at that time, probably she came and actually cooked the meat for it. . .but the women set the tables and we girls did the serving. And then there was the business meeting afterwards and after the business meeting was over, they all took up the tables and the chairs and people moved back and people moved back and then...

RA: And this was sixty years ago. Right?

EBB: Nineteen sixteen.

RA: And in April.

EBB: April. Yes.

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RA: Grandfather was blind. Had he been blind long?

EBB: The records that I have seem to indicate that he was blinded in 1870. And the story was that (he was a carpenter by trade) a nail had flown up into his eye and caused perforation on one eye and probably infection spreading to the other. There was no doctor in the town, the nearest physician was in Evanston. Whether his eye-

sight might have been saved with modern methods, I don't know, but his sight was completely gone from that time on.

RA: And from only the one eye or from both?

EBB: I think the injury was to one eye only. But both eyes were completely gone in a very short time.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: So that from that time on he was able to do very little as a breadwinner to the family. Even when I was a little girl he used to make some tables and some doll cradles and a few small items that he could do just by feeling with his hands. But the support of the family really was dependent on his wife. My father said that in his. . .when he was a small child.. .his mother had to work. I don't know how. I think maybe just taking in washing or doing things of that sort and as soon as my father was able to do anything he left school and started running errands, cleaning out the schoolhouse, chopping wood for the schoolhouse, fixing the oil in the lanterns and things of that sort in order to try to save his mother. And he did that until he was a youngish man, and probably some time in his teens got his first position in the city which was a matter of being a messenger boy for the Northwestern Railroad.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: And worked for them until some time in the 1980's, at which time he went to work for Norton Brothers Canning

Company. And that was when circumstances were much more favorable for him for a period of time, because Mr.

Norton of the Canning Company happened also to be a blind man. And my father was very good to him.... very energetic, and Mr. Norton came to rely on my father in many ways other than just business. He took my father with him on trips to be his agent to look after the tickets and things of that sort. He found that my father loved music although he had never had any opportunity for education in the music field and he gave tickets to my father for the symphony concerts back in the 1890's.

RA: And where were they held then?

EBB: I think right in Symphony Hall. At least as soon as Symphony Hall was built. It was. .Mr. Norton was one of the benefactors of the orchestra and he not only had a box for himself but he had a whole row of seats in the front of the balcony which he gave away to other persons.

RA: I noticed in some of your material it said the Auditorium... that your mother told of going to the Auditorium to concerts with your father. And it was before Orchestra Hall.

EBB: Probably he did. You see, I'm not accurate. I'm not clear myself about the dates.

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RA: So he had a great deal of opportunity with Mr. Norton to expand himself.

EBB: Yes, indeed, and Mr. Norton liked him very much and even surprised him at the time my father and mother were married. Mr. Norton had suggested Old Point Comfort as a good place

to go for their honeymoon and when they arrived at Old Point Comfort they were ushered to a rather elegant suite and my father felt that he couldn't afford to pay for this and he asked the clerk if they couldn't have something less expensive and the clerk pointed to a note on the dresser and in the note it said, "Compliments of Mr. Norton." So they were his guests for the honeymoon.

RA: What did...what business was Mr. Norton in?

EBB: It was a canning company. I think they were the producers of the cans themselves. To be used by the canning industry.

RA: I see.

EBB: And, uh, there was one time (I can't give you the year of this) when apparently there was a railroad strike of some kind on, and there was a load of either cans or tin for the cans, (I'm not even sure about that) waiting outside the city to come in, and my father volunteered to shovel the coal if somebody else would run the engine, and they went and brought this carload of material into the city, on their own, in order to help the canning company. But of course, it was contrary to what the union would have liked.

RA: It was strike—breaking?

EBB: It was strike-breaking.

RA: Did they have unions at that time?

EBB: That I don't know except I know that it was a rather risky thing that they did, but he was able to get someone else

who understood enough about engines that the other person was willing to drive the engine if my father would shovel the coal.

RA: This would have probably been in the late nineteenth century?

EBB: Yes, it definitely was before 1900.. But I don t know the exact year. Just a word more about my grandfather before I get into the later years. My grandfather brought his wife and the small children (my father being only three at the time) from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, first to Evanston and then north to Wilmette.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: And, uh

RA: Whereabouts in Wilmette?

EBB: Well, something that I've just read mentions their having settled in a cabin at the south—east corner of Central Avenue and Eleventh Street. I later was told that that cabin (in fact, I think we would find that in my father's reminiscences), that that cabin was later enlarged and became the home of

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the Bockius family. And also I think I remember that in my father's reminiscences he speaks of its having at an earlier time been an Indian site and quite recently, only about fifteen years or so ago) the Bockius home was destroyed in order to make room for the people who are there at present, and Rodney Allen (who was then retired) was watching and observed as they

were digging the foundation for the new structure and found Indian corn in the hollow underneath the house.

RA: Oh, for goodness sake.

EBB: I wish I knew when it happened to that Indian corn that Rodney Allen dug up at that time. Because it might be very interesting to know what is under the ground in that part of the world.

RA: Was that not rather close to the area where your father found a relic...an artifact?

EBB: Yes, because the artifact which he found was not on Eleventh Street, but just east of Eleventh Street. Which would have been almost directly north, you see, of this location where Rodney saw the Indian corn. Unfortunately, Rodney has died and I have no idea what may have happened to it and to his findings there.

RA: Both he and his brother are gone, are they not?

EBB: They're both gone, yes. He did have a sister living in Texas and I would have no idea whether she might or might not be living. I have no idea what her name is. And. . .because she did marry. So I don't know what her name is. And Rodney died at a time when I was out of town, so I don't know anything about that. If you wanted to look into any kind of records, at all, I think it was the year, I believe it was in 1966, but I was away when he did die. So whether there is anything about him in the old Wilmette Lifes, I don't know.

RA: I see. Did the Allens always live where Rodney died?

EBB: No. I remember one time when they lived in a brick house that was up at the corner of either Elmwood or Forest and Sneridan Road.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: They were on the north-west corner. I remember going to a Campfire Girl meeting or else a Sunday School class meeting up there with Rodney's sister who was a leader of a group I was in. I believe it was a Sunday School Class. But that would have been when Mr. Allen, Sr. was still living. Arid how long Rodney and his brother had lived at this other location. I don't know.

RA: So your grandfather lived with you at 738 Eleventh Street for many years then did he not?

EBB: He lived there from the time that we moved to 738 Eleventh Street which was 1904 until his death which was, I can't remember the exact year.. .about nineteen...

RA: Doesn't say...

EBB: I will try to find that. . .it was sometime about 1912 or 1913, thereabouts. But I don't remember the exact year.

RA: Tell me about your father's enterprises and about Wilmette during World War I. I have had inklings of some interesting stories about some of the activities that went on in the community during that time. Were you too young to remember?

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EBB: Oh, not exactly. I was, let's see... our entrance to the war came when I was in high school. And he had already built the building at the corner of Eleventh and Central

Avenue, but it was not yet occupied. And so as soon as our women started working energetically for the Red Cross he qave the full use of two store areas to the women. One of those areas was used for a time for band— age making and the other one was used for knitting and packing of packages which were to go to the soldiers. have pictures of that which I don't have with me right now. I took them over to the man who is doing the history of Wilmette.

RA: Oh, yes, Mr. Bushnell.

EBB: I left those with him just before I went away. I have pictures of those — them. At the same time, very early in the time when young men were being recruited and trained up at Great Lakes, both Great Lakes and Fort Sheridan expanded quite rapidly at that time although, not nearly to the extent that they did in World War II. There was a committee set up called "War Camp Community Service" and my father volunteered the free use of the hail in the Brown Building...the Masonic Hall...for Saturday nights and Sundays. The boys would come down on Saturday and I think sometimes there was a supper served to them and then there was danding, at least piano music and dancing, and girls of the village were invited to come and there always were mothers to chaperone.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: And those were quite gay and pleasant events. Many of the boys would have to go back before midnight that night.

They could go back on the North Shore. Some of them had thirty-six hour leave and my father often had a few cots that he would set up at the close of the dances in the hail for the boys to stay overnight if they wanted to. Some of them were occasionally invited into the homes. Mrs. Wilson, who was...she and her husband had the bakery at that time. She lived right around the corner on Central Avenue and she had a heart of gold. And she almost always had at least one or two or three boys sleeping at her house on Saturday nights. And then on Sunday afternoons, I believe, we used to gather a little more informally just for singing around the piano. In those days it was still frowned on to dance on Sunday.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: We could dance on Saturday night, but not on Sunday night.

RA: You stopped at midnight?

EBB: Yes, we stopped at midnight on Saturday night. Sunday evenings probably stopped much earlier because even if the boys had thirty-six hour leaves, they did have to get back. At one time we had a heavy snow storm. This was probably in 1918. And, uh, Mrs. Wilson telephoned me at about four o'clock in the afternoon and said, 'Two of the boys have just come down and they're having supper at my house. Come over and have supper with them." The railroads were all so tied up that we did not expect any number of boys. There would be no party that night,

but these two boys had come and I was there having dinner with them and around about, say, the middle of the meal the door opened and a third boy came in. It was George Guyon and he had gone all the way to Thorndale for the skating rink and came back in and he was laughing at the rest of us for making such a fuss over the snow storm because he had come from northern Michigan. He was French—Canadian. That is, he was of French—Canadian ancestry and he thought that the word that had gone out to the men at Great Lakes at first was that there was no liberty. Then they had announced that there was a North Shore car going as far as Highwood, but they could go at their own risk, but they must be back by midnight. And there three boys had come all the way to Wilmette, and one of them all the way to Thorndale!

RA: And the mode of transportation, then, was the North Shore?

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EBB: Yes, but, maybe that same week—end, or maybe a different weekend. I'm not quite sure because I remember there - were two, maybe three successive week—ends, when we had rather severe snow storms. There had been a very severe snow storm and at ten o'clock in the morning my father came in and announced to the rest of the family, saying that the opera train which would normally have left Chicago right after the opera, around eleven thirty or twelve — in fact, I think they used to hold that train long enough. . . if the opera was long they held it there long

enough so that the patrons coming from Lake Forest and thereabouts could get on the train...the opera train had just reached Wilmette, because of the snow. The trains had no means of pushing the snow aside other than the old cowcatchers. And here were these women in their opera coats and their evening dresses, shivering, and Mrs. Wilson sent over coffee and sweet rolls to feed the ladies and gentlemen who were on their way probably up to Lake Forest, trying to get home to Lake Forest. But that was typical of Mrs. Wilson's heart of gold. ..to send the coffee and sweet rolls over.

RA: She must have been quite an unusual person.

EBB: She was a very unusual person.

RA: And their bakery was where at that time?

EBB: On the west side of Wilmette Avenue where Ann's Bakery is now...the same location where Ann's Bakery is.

RA: Very interesting.

EBB: It was a...Mr. and Mrs. Wilson...he did the bakery. Mrs. Wilson waited on people and her sister, Miss Taggert, waited on people, and a lot of the time her son Bob... in fact, Bob operated the business for a short time after his mother and father had gone. Mrs. Wilson used to say ...well, she got started in this interest in boys be— cause someone from out in Kansas somewhere wrote to her andsaid so and so was up at Great Lakes. She went up to

see this boy and invite him down for that Sunday and he brought a friend with him and then that friend would bring another friend and it became a series of friends and she said one time to me, she said, "They come and they put their pictures on the piano and their pajamas under the pillows and then they're my boys."

RA: How cute, how cute. That was some of the social life that the community.. .but we have many organizations of long standing. What about, for instance, the Women's Club in Wilmette? I know your mother had quite a part in that.

EBB: She was quite active in that, but I don't remember any particular connection between the Women's Club and the war service, uh....

RA: Did they do bandages at that time? Were they...

EBB: They may have.

RA: Because that bandage chapter of the Red Cross that I believe even operates today has been continuous over...

EBB: Well, you see, it happened that at that particular beginning of the war my father had the space available, and so whether they were working both places, I don't know. At a later time the store space would not have been available to them, and then I do know that they did a Trojan job at the Women's Club.

RA: And the Women's Club at that time was still small, was it not? Wasn't that before the present building?

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EBB: Yes. The larger hall is definitely a later structure

built probably, if I remember correctly, in the thirties, and the portion which they now call the dining room is about, well, about in the central core of the building as I remember it in the earlier years.

RA: And I believe someone gave that land originally, didn't they, for the Women's Club?

EBB: That I wouldn't know. And I don't know if my mother even mentioned that in this.

RA: It seemed to me that I read somewhere that some woman gave the land for the first Woman's Club. And who were some of the people in it?

EBB: Would you like to have me read this little reminiscence that my mother wrote?

RA: That's fine.

EBB: For one of the later meetings of the Women's Club? I'm just reading from her words.

RA: First answer one question for me. I believe that's about Mrs. Leonard.

EBB: Yes.

A: Was not that the mother of Louise Leonard Wright?

EBB: Yes, It was. And her husband was the minister of the Methodist Church here in Wilmette. Yes, indeed. As I say, my mother wrote this up and read it from the platform of the club, well, at some time in the early 1950's. I can't remember the exact year. It reads as follows:

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"My very first memory of Mrs. Leonard is when she called

on us shortly after my family moved to Wilmette in the Spring of 1892. Wilmette was then a small and very friendly little village of a few hundred people when calling and home visiting were common and neighbors always called soon, to welcome a new family. When Mrs. Leonard left our home after that first call, my mother said, 'How very friendly she is and so interesting and easy to talk with.' And I said, 'How very young she seems and how good to look at.' We soon learned that she was the wife of the Methodist minister and also President of the Women's Club which had started only a year earlier and had at first been called the Reading Club. Mrs. Leonard had been one of the twenty charter members who founded the club as well as its first president. Miss Ida Law should also be mentioned as a leading spirit among those twenty founders." And, incidentally, I don't know if my mother mentions this, but Miss Ida Law was the librarian all during my early childhood.

RA: Who began the Wilmette Library, right?

EBB: I think probably so.

RA: And do you remember where this library was at that time?

EBB: The building that I recall was in the same location as the present library but there was an earlier frame building I think, over where the Lyman—Sargent store is now.

RA: I was told it was upstairs on the second floor of that building.

EBB: That is earlier than my own personal recollections. Well, getting back to the Women's Club.

"In those roles of leadership, in chu±ch and as wife of the minister and particularly in the Women's Club as its first president, Mrs. Leonard was blessed with just the right qualities such as a fine, well-trained mind and a friendly and very gracious personality. Before coming to Wilmette as a bride, she had earned a college degree and had been Dean of a woman's college. She and my mother found common interests so that she was often in our home. That may be the reason why I remember her as well as I do after all of these years. My mother joined the club soon after we came to Wilmette while the small group was meeting in the home of the Law sisters, Ida and Anna, and when Mrs. Leonard was still president." And the Law house was up either on Forest or Elmwood and at the corner of either Eleventh or Twelfth. I could probably take somebody there, but I can't.... 'cuz I would recognize the house. It's a large frame house up in there.

"However, in those early years, daughters were sometimes invited as guests. It was pleasant to be asked to help serve when occasionally they had refreshments. And a few of us were able to contribute in another way. The program in those early years were somewhat serious and furnished entirely by the members themselves. At first they took turns in reading from such books as Justin McCarthy's

History of Our Times, or in lighter vein George Eliot's Romola"....(I wouldn't think that Romola was too light... giggles) — "and, soon too, some of the women were writing papers on topics of interest, giving considerable time and thought to their preparation. At that time two or three of us daughters were studying at The Chicago Musical College which suggested the idea that it would be nice to have opening music for some of the programs, if we were willing to provide it." She doesn't mention, but Lillian Drury who later married Mr. Northam was another woman who... another girl of my mother's age... who played piano and they sometimes played duets.

RA: I see.

EBB:for the Women's Club.

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RA: Mr. Fred Northam did a very good tape for us.

EBB: Umhumm

RA: Both of his mother's contribution and his grandfather's contribution to the community.

EBB: I'm not sure whether she was the daughter of Mr. Horace or Mr. Edward Drury.

RA: Mr. Edwin, I understand, had no child of his own. They had a child who was an orphan. It was in the family, but someone else's child that they raised, but the Horace Drury's had, I think five daughters and a son? Something

EBB: Well, your knowledge on that is better than mine. I'm

ashamed to say that I don't know exactly what the relationship of Florence is to.

RA: Florence is the youngest sister of Lillian Drury. Lillian was the oldest of Horace Drury's children. And I've learned this all from Mr. Northam recently.

EBB: Well, Florence is also a very good friend of the Wheelock girls.

RA: Yes, and I talked to her and she was the one who referred me to Fred Northam, because he is very much interested in history of the family. (Since deceased 1981)

EBB: Yes, o.k. Now coming back again to the Women's Club.,. "So I did see something of Mrs. Leonard as a charming president in the very early years before I became a member myself. Some of you who are here today will remember Mrs. Leonard as she came back to us in 1941 when we were celebrating the golden anniversary of our club." So if '41 was the golden anniversary...

RA: It would have been 1891...

EBB: .. .that it was founded. "Do you remember how lovely she looked?" And, incidentally, the program at which my mother read this was also a Presidents' Day, honoring former presidents.

RA: When Mrs. Breed was president.

EBB: When Mrs. Breed was president, yes. "It seemed as though the fifty years had enriched her charms. If any of you have kept the special club

bulletin of that year, look at her picture when you go home. And at that time, she was as alert in mind and as much at ease as ever. The words with which she greeted and congratulated us were well chosen. We may at this moment feel rather sad because our club no longer has a living charter member. Mrs. Leonard was the last one to go, but we can feel glad that in the beginning we had such a woman as Mrs. Leonard to be one of the founders of our club and our first president. Her spirit and mind were vital and I feel that the influence of the ideals of such a person do, in some subtle way live on in our ideals of today. In closing this tribute to her, I would like to read some of her own words as she spoke to us on the fiftieth anniversary.

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Mrs. Leonard said, "Through these fifty years it has been thrilling and inspiring to observe the steady development of this club. The little seedling of a half—century ago has grown into a tall sturdy deep-fruited wide- branched tree. Not only has it grown in size, but as good trees should do, it has blossomed and born fruit and freely given of its kindly shade to all who drew near. It has been an ornament to the community as well as an instrument of service. Long after the last charter member has gone, may the club continue to flourish, a veritable sequoia, semper virens."

RA: Very good. Your mother is one of the first people I

remember when I came to this village. I went to a meeting of The League of Women Voters at her home on Eleventh Street.

EBB: Was that a full meeting of the League or was it one of those meetings which Grace Stewart was conducting on foreign policy?

RA: It was long before Grace Stewart came to Wilmette.

EBB: Oh, I see, yes.

RA: And there were many, many — Mrs. Singleton— many of the early members.

EBB: Mrs. Evans...

RA: Mrs. Evans, and the lady who lived on Central Street where the parking 1t at the National Tea now is, Mrs. Ayres. And, uh, Mrs. Gilison, (the second Mrs. Gilison) was another one, Margery, Miss Stewart's sister. That whole story about the Gilison family is a story in itself.

RA: That's right and I would so like to get hold of one of them to really tell it to me. The adopted daughter, I believe it is.

EBB: The adopted daughter is still 1iving. Or at least I talked to her about a year ago.

RA: In Mundelein.

EBB: So I think that she would be glad to talk. She does not remember anything about the house prior to the time when they came there. She was a very small child when

they moved from Evanston to that house on Forest Avenue. And yet the house on Forest Avenue was obviously a much older house.

RA: Now you have clarified something for me. Yesterday in the Evanston Library I was looking at Andreas' Cook County, Illinois, and it gave Louis K. Gilison living in Evanston, a lawyer in Chicago. And it puzzled me because it had to be the same man. Now you say he lived in Evanston before he came to Wilmette.

EBB: While Grace Stewart was still living, Joanne Andrews asked me what I know about that house and I went over to ask Grace and she was very clear in the recollection of everything that she knew. But anything she knew started with what she had known from Margery and then from Florence back in the early 1900's. Florence Gilison was an adopted child. I believe they had lost a child and there was something... she did know there was something. Some kind of an exchange of houses that took place that brought the Gilisons from Evanston to Wilmette.

RA: I see.

EBB: But she knew nothing about the earlier ownership of the Wilmette house.

RA: I see.

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EBB: There were two boys in the family, also, but I believe they have both died, and Mrs. and Mrs. Gilison travelled

with my mother and me in 1922. We had a short trip through Germany where we went up the Rhine and went to Oberammergau together. Mr. Gilison and I really had great fun being the business managers of this party of four at that time. He was probably a member of the school board even at that time. I'm not sure about that.

RA: Mrs. Gilison, herself, I believes was a charter member of the National Organization of Parents and Teachers, along with Mrs. Langworthy of Winnetka. There were five women who founded the National Organization of Parents and Teachers. So they were very educationally minded. I knew Mrs. Langworthy's daughter, Fran Murray of Winnetka.

RA: She still lives in Winnetka.

EBB: Well, this Margery Stewart came to be a teacher at New Trier some time in the 1920's. I don't remember exactly when she had arrived, but I do know that in 1927 when I did a very temporary one semester job at New Trier she was there at that time. She and I used to walk together to school.

RA: Did she live at the Gilison home at the time?

EBB: Yes, he was on the school board at that time. And some way of other the connections made — she took a room at their house, but became very much a part of the family. She called both Mr. and Mrs. Gillson "Mother" and "Father" and was like a daughter in the family, until after the first Mrs. Gillson died. At that time she was

— had plans anyway — to go East and take a course at Columbia University in School of Administration, which she did, and a year or so later we learned that Mr. Gillson was bringing this Margery Stewart back as his bride.

RA: Oh, yes.

EBB: There was probably at least thirty years difference between them in age, but they had a very fine companion-' ship.

RA: Well, I never knew the first Mrs. Stewart...

EBB: Mrs. Gilison, you mean...

RA: Mrs. Gilison, but Margery of course I knew all through my early years in the League and then when Grace came to live with her after Mr. Gilison died and they took the small house over on Lawndale and then moved to Washington due to Margery's illness and all. Both Miss Stewart and Margery Gillson made a great contribution to the community in their lifetimes.

EBB: But there was also a very fine companionship between Margery and Mr. Gillson, also.

RA: I felt that in having known him very briefly before he passed away. And he had done a great deal for the community. He and Mr. Horace Drury, I believe, according to Mr. Northam were really responsible for the development of Gillson Park and what used to be Washington Park and the entire lakefront.

EBB: I'm so glad that that was re-named Gilison Park while Margery was still living.

RA: Yes, yes, indeed.

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EBB: While we have just come away from the Women's Club activities, you might be interested to know also about a reading circle to which my mother belonged. This was a much smaller group of women and they had their first meeting in June of 1905.

RA: Was this the group that Mrs. Wheelock belonged to?

EBB: I don't believe the Wheelocks were ever in this group. Mrs. Coburn was a member and Mrs. Hyde...oh, I can remember some of the names but they wouldn't mean anything to you because they left town long since.. But in 1955 they celebrated their fiftieth year and at that time my mother and Mrs. Coburn were, the only two charter members of that group.

RA: For goodness sake.

EBB: They started as a group of, well, maybe fifteen... I don't think they ever had more than twenty ladies in the group because they always were meeting in homes. So the group had to be small enough to gather in a circle around the house and their plan was to — for one member — to either read aloud from or review a book while the others brought their sewing, their fancywork or their mending, whatever they wanted to do. They had their — the organization was very informal. They had a leader, and the choice of leader rotated alphabetically.

They rotated the meetings alphabetically. And whoever had entertained at one time became the leader for the following time. I attended one of their meetings back in the forties and their leader made a brief report at that time, saying that their treasury was almost running dry. Would the ladies please each put in a dollar. The only use that they had for their treasury was occasionally to send flowers to some member who was sick, (giggling)

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and it was just replenished when necessary. Oh, that must have been about their fortieth or their thirtieth meeting anniversary because at that time Mrs. Singleton who was a very good record keeper reviewed the books that they had read over the years... I mean, reviewed the names of the book. They had one period of time when they were reading George Bernard Shaw. One period of time they went in a good deal for travel books. Another time when it might be Dickens and unfortunately I don't know where those minutes of Mrs. Singleton are, but she had a very interesting report of the different kinds of reading matter that they had covered over the years.

RA: It would be very interesting if those records were available to The Historical Society.

EBB: I don't know what may have happened to those. Mrs... oh, they lived down on Ninth Street.. .was the one who had this fiftieth anniversary and might have had any records but she left town so quickly after her husband

died. I just don't know what happened. But that group continued to meet until well into the sixties.

RA: Did they take in new members?

EBB: Their plan had been, in their earlier, more vital years, to take in new members as someone might be transferred to California or some other place they would, take in a new member in order to keep the membership about constant. However, in the long .

(end of tape)