

Jean Ten Broeck (1896-1996)

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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: Jean Ten Broeck

Interviewer: Rhea Adler

Date of interview: Spring, 1977

Name and present home, previous, place of residence prior to coming to Wilmette after World War .1

Interviewed by Lloyd Hollister for a job with Hollister Press - began work April 4, 1923

Description of early years and employees

Mike Weber came to Hollister Press from Chicago City News Bureau prior to 1923 and remained until his death in September 1957. He was succeeded by Fred Favor

New building erected in 1928

%Society Editor+- covered breadth of Wilmette and Kenilworth social life and activities: churches, womensqclubs, schools, any group or activity was covered

Contribution of %Wilmette Life+to Jean Ten Broeck

%Wilmette Life+contribution to life of Wilmette

Jean Ten Broeck

RA: Would you like to state your name?

JTB: Jean Ten Broeck. Now a resident of Mather Home in Evanston, after having lived many years in Wilmette, the locale of my newspaper career.

BA: Where did you live before that?

JTB: In Milwaukee. I have been asked why I came to Wilmette, why I chose my career. As I have just said, my family had lived in Milwaukee and was moving from there and coming back again to the North Shore where, prior to World War One, we lived in Highland Park for a number of years. My mother and her sister, Mrs. Joseph B. Marshall, who with her family moved to this village from Chicago in the early 1900s. And each lost a son in the war and wished to be near each other. So we came to Wilmette.

RA: How many were there in your own family? All together....

JTB: Well, there was father and mother and I, at this time. My brother had died in the war.

RA: I see. There were just the three?

JTB: My own mother had lost a daughter before. There were two children in the family until the war. In Milwaukee in World War I, I had done Red Cross volunteer work. I taught school, substituting for older teachers who were going abroad for the Red Cross. I was restless here without anything to do. A neighbor friend, Miss Irene Herriott employed by Lloyd Hollister, Incorporated,

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told me the classified ad manager, Lee Rossberg, a Wilmette man, was giving up that particular work at The Wilmette Life for another position, and she asked me why I didn't inquire about the work. I did, with long-lasting results. Because of the difference in office procedure now, and as it was in the spring of 1923, I reminisce.

The Hollister publisher interviewed applicants himself. After giving them information regarding possible qualifications, he asked me if I could type. The answer was ~~%No.~~ He then inquired if my handwriting was good. My answer required a momentous decision. Should I be truthful or lie? If I lied and he engaged me, he would soon find out and I would be without work. After breathing deeply, I told him that my penmanship was very bad. He hesitated and then with a twinkle in his blue eyes, I still see in memory, he asked, ~~%Can you make it legible?~~ I said, ~~%Yes.~~ And the job was mine April 4, 1923. We had no switchboard, just three phones which I answered. I learned a little about electricity from them. Talking on one phone, a second one rang. I picked it up and a tingling shock was mine. Contrasts between then and now is memory filling. The newspaper plant was the first floor of an old house on Central Avenue where the First Federal Savings and Loan Bank parking lot

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is now. Our quarters were very cramped. The main office had desks for Charles C. Hotz, manager, Miss Carrie, who later became Mrs. George B. Martin of Wilmette and me. Mr. Hollister's office was a cubbyhole adjoining the small office where the editor, Mike Webber, and the society editor, Miss Ruth Risley, had their desks. We were the only full time staff. Afternoons the Northwestern University journalism students came in as reporters. Philimon B. Kohlsaatt, Winnetkan, who had been Mr. Hollister's teacher at Lewis Institute wrote the editorials. Saturday mornings everyone stopped his or her work and went to an office counter to hand fold the printed Sunday morning program for a Wilmette church. After a time, I don't remember just how long, Miss Risley was leaving to be married. I was offered her position because I know, because of my knowledge of the North Shore and its life. There was one catch, however. I must learn to type in ten days. I borrowed a typewriter, a book on the touch system, and plugged away nights, meeting my deadline with the strange combination of the book system and my own. Speed rather than perfection resulted. Under the tutelage of Mike Webber, my editorial department career began. Mike had come to Chicago after his college years in Ohio to find newspaper work. He was running out of funds. While looking on entering an

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office building, he found fifteen cents on the floor. With it he bought coffee and a doughnut, his first food for that day. He found a job with the City News Bureau which was always considered a very fine source of news training and experience. His first assignment was to cover the tragic Chicago River disaster, the capsizing of the Eastland with tremendous loss of life. He later joined the Wilmette Hollister staff. Work with him was a happy, rewarding experience. He was not bossy. He gave one her job responsibility and direction. Then let her do it in her own way.

Criticism and corrections when made were kindly and brief. Mr. Hollister was the same, and when confrontations occurred, I always was impressed by the men's fair judgment and their hearing the employees' side before making their decision. Mike Webber, who preceded me in the department by several years, stayed in his position until his death in September, 1957. Fred Favor of Wilmette succeeded him. Mike was a real newspaperman, liking to be out on the street in newspaper parlance, hobnobbing with and knowing people, picking up news items and different ideas and being aware of village trends. When my predecessor, who had married, returned for a time, there was no room for me in Wilmette and I was sent to open the Winnetka office, a desk in a real

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estate firm. Winnetka and Glencoe social news became my field for the Winnetka Talk and Glencoe News, our other newspapers at that time. Lloyd Hollister, Inc., was growing rapidly. I was again in Wilmette when the move was made to the second floor. The proofreader was installed in an adjacent room. Because he couldn't go downstairs as often as required, a hole was cut in the floor, a zinc bucket was devised, attached to pulleys and proofreading material was transported up and down. That situation changed greatly. A ground floor pressroom was another addition. Then in 1928 the new building was erected with what we thought had more than enough space. It hadn't. And numerous changes and enlargements have taken place. While in the old headquarters, the name of the paper circulated in Wilmette. The Lake Shore News was changed to Wilmette Life to tabloid form and then in 1925 to its present news magazine format with column changes later. News for Wilmette Life increased. When I started, the value of publicity, especially for groups, was not evident, but when the two inch item was obtained from a club it seemed a long story. That rapidly changed. There was so much news and long articles and stories became a space problem. %Society editor+was my title, but it didn't entail just social news as such. From

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the beginning I was aware how organized Kenilworth and Wilmette women, as well as those on the North Shore, were and still are. Much of the social life revolved around many groups - women's clubs, garden, church, civic, philanthropic, PTA and others. These just social had their place, too, from early days - private parties, luncheons, dinners, dances, bridge groups, debuts, weddings, events in club and athletic groups. All of this activity resulted in increasing news, demanding increase in staff. When I started I was the only full time member of the woman's department with the regular Kenilworth correspondent, for we always included news from that village. Later I had a full time assistant in the Wilmette office as well as a staff member who called and called and called for personal items, a very important feature then in the Wilmette Life.

BA: Do you remember when they started training publicity chairmen annually?

JTB: Yes. Give them the value, tell them how to, what was news and so forth.

BA: And what you wanted.

JTB And what we wanted. The Women's Club of Wilmette, the Women's Catholic Club, the Neighbors of Kenilworth, (a women's club), the Wilmette Garden Club, the North

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Shore Catholic Women's League, women's groups in the churches, women's golf groups, college and sorority alumnae groups flash into memory as active as when my career began. The North Ridge Club came a little later. The organizations increased in number and variety with the years and became too many to count. The Wilmette office was the hub of the entire editorial staff for all of our papers. Staff and offices increased for each publication, but it is only the Wilmette Life newsweek, the paper, one very, very large part of the society editor's coverage. A nose for news, to quote, is a professional requirement for reporting. Our noses and the noses of our staff sniffed untiringly to ferret out items and stories of interest to our readers, not only in Wilmette, but in faraway places. Although not in our department, I was often amazed by stories emanating from servicemen in World War II, having or finding the local paper, reading about a buddy, locating him or seeing him. My career in community papers had done much for me. There were few unpleasant moments for most Wilmette villagers and others were considerate and cooperative. These moments were greatly overbalanced by very interesting contacts, stimulating experiences and friends we

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have made.

PA: What part has the Wilmette Life played in the community?

JTB: The answer I give, based on my long association with the paper, under Hollister Publications, an association ending with my retirement January 1, 1967, lies in Wilmette Life's objective as expressed repeatedly to his staff by Mr. Hollister himself. The paper is to be keyed entirely to local news. News not to be found in Chicago papers, personal items, stories of individuals, Village (both Kenilworth and Wilmette) events, activities, projects, news to be verified, to be reported impartially with neither gossip or scandal, the paper for the family. One that can be read without embarrassment to anyone with the published, editor and staff dedicating themselves to achieving that community goal. I believe the Life has mirrored both Kenilworth and Wilmette.

(End of tape)