

HISTORY MAKER

ADA OPHELIA REDD BROWNING

Born: March 4, 1894, Chambers County, Alabama
Died: June 27, 1968, Winston-Salem

Known as: A poet, champion of the arts, civic organizer, early leader for women in broadcast and local radio host for 31 years

Variety Magazine's coverage of the third annual American Women in Radio & Television Convention in 1957, spotlighted "femme d.j." Ada Redd Browning of Winston-Salem's WSJS-NBC.

With 20 years on air, they dubbed her a "vet of the conventional woman's show" that played music "to the tune of the jingle of the cash register and audience approval."

Never an employee of the station, she signed her own sponsors and wrote her own content.

A founding member and past president of the Association of Women Broadcasters, she advocated for women's place on the air. She represented North Carolina at a White House dinner for female broadcasters hosted by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Beyond the airwaves, she was president of the Thursday Morning Music Club of Winston-Salem and, later, of the N.C. Federation of Music Clubs, where she advocated for music's place in education.

Born near Birmingham, Ala., to shoemaker Harry Redd and his wife, Margaret, Ada had only a seventh-grade education, but, music and poetry were part of her everyday life, according to her hometown newspaper.

She and her husband moved their family to Winston-Salem in 1936, but she never cut ties with Alabama. Her poetry regularly appeared in the Birmingham News, covering many topics, including being a poet.

"If you had dipped your pen in blood, Like him who knew that God was good, The violent prose you dare to scream would rhyme into a poet's dream."

By 1937, she was broadcasting and active in several arts and civic organizations. She became a well-known personality across the region, promoting musical education and stronger community bonds.

"Together we compose the music of humanity," she told the Raleigh News & Observer. "Although we cannot all be soloists, each of us is important to the symphony as a whole. We must agree on the music we are to play – the music of the brotherhood of man."

Music wasn't the only artistic expression she promoted. She coordinated the publication of nine books of poetry written by local authors and often read these works as part of her broadcasts.

After three decades on WSJS, she wrapped up her final show just moments before her death, signing off with her usual, "Bye, y'all."

—KATE RAUHAUSER-SMITH

FAR RIGHT: Poet and radio host Ada Redd Browning.
RIGHT: The Redd sisters, with Browning on the right.



FAMILY PHOTOS