Our founder, Ida S. Broo

Who was Ida S. Broo? She was the founder of the American Society of Women Accountants in 1938 in Indianapolis, Indiana. The first year of ASWA, Indianapolis Chapter #1 and National were one and the same; Mrs. Broo served as President of both. What kind of person was she? Why was she so interested in ASWA? Those who have had the honor and pleasure of knowing her say she was full of life and laughter, qualified, professional, persuasive, strong-willed and determined.

AFWA will be holding the 75th Anniversary Annual Conference in Indianapolis October 20-23rd at the Hyatt Regency. One of the highlights will be the 75th Anniversary Gala at the Indiana State Museum on Sunday evening, October 20. We would like to invite current and former members to attend. The cost is $85.00 and you can register at AFWA.org, or call Elizabeth Johnson at 703-506-3265. Parking is available the night of the event for $3.00. In honor of the 75th anniversary of our chapter and the national organization, we are devoting a special edition of Footnotes to Ida S. Broo.

IDA S. BROO

Ida S. Broo was born in 1885. She grew up in a large family on a farm in Seymour, Indiana. After her graduation from Seymour High School, she came to Indianapolis to study piano. After a brief career in teaching, she went to night school and took courses in accounting. In order to gain the two years of experience necessary to sit for the CPA exam, she worked for a CPA without pay. In 1925, she passed the CPA exam. She then moved to Florida, where she was an accountant for the New York Title and Mortgage Company. She also met and married her husband, Gus Broo.

They returned to Indianapolis and moved to Speedway. She held various accounting jobs before opening her own office where she handled tax and audits. She was the only woman in Indiana to practice under her own name.

Ms. Broo served two terms as the national president of the American Women’s Society of CPAs and founded the American Society of Women Accountants here in Indianapolis in 1938.

In 1941 she made an address before the Indiana CPA Society, the first woman to appear before the group. She died on September 12, 1966.
Tribute To Ida S. Broo

The following article appeared in the June 1988, issue of “The Women Accountant” and was titled “Remembering Our Beginnings”

REMEMBERING OUR BEGINNINGS

“As we begin the 50th Anniversary celebration of the Indianapolis chapter of the American Society of Women Accountants and, in fact the 50th Anniversary of the Society itself, we think back to those women who have helped make our organization what it is today. The following article about Ida S. Broo, ASWA founder, appeared in the bulletin several years ago and was related to us again at the Public Relations Meeting. For those of you who missed it, here are the memories of O.L. Hayes, CPA of a meeting of the Indiana Association of Certified Public Accountants held many years ago in the auditorium of the School of Business on the campus of Indiana University.

Ida S. Broo, the first woman in Indiana to receive a certificate to practice as a certified public accountant had hitherto been refused membership in the Indiana Association of Certified Public Accountants for the sole reason that she was a women.

At this particular meeting, it had been determined that her application for membership would be considered. When the time came for the discussion, one of the members made a statement in which he stated as an opening line that women did not have public acceptance in the field of public accounting. He then proceeded to outline the reasons why women should not aspire to enter the field because of the rigors of the work involved.

He outlined in some detail the hardships involved which included second-rate hotels, third-rate eating places and difficult problems of transportation. It should be remembered that this was before the days of Holiday Inns, jet planes and air-conditioned automobiles. It should be remembered also that the fees in those days were at the rate of $25.00 per day. He pointed out also that that many times the public accountant was unwelcome in the office of the assignment.

The speech of this man dealt with the frailties of the feminine of the species, and the desire of the rugged and all important male to protect them against the vicissitudes of the weather, the long hours of work and difficult travel. Many assignments require more than one accountant, and it would of course, be unthinkable to think of sending a woman on an assignment accompanied by a man, especially if they were to be away overnight.

It was an impassioned speech and his points of argument seemed indisputable. He retired from the podium apparently well pleased with his effort to defy the woman and keep her out of his pasture. The chairman thanked him for his remarks and inquired of Mrs. Broo whether she had anything to say.
Mrs. Broo thanked the chairman for the privilege and the former speaker for his consideration of women in general. She admitted being deeply touched by his sentiments, but said that somehow her mind had taken flight back to the days of girlhood on a farm in the vicinity of Seymour, where she lived with her brother, sisters and parents.

She then began a narrative of life on a farm in those days, and it went something like this:

The rising hour was usually around 4:00 A.M. The men dressed and went to the barn to feed the animals and get them ready for the day’s work in the fields. The women prepared breakfast so that it would be ready when the men returned from the chores at the barn. After breakfast the men sat down for a smoke while the women washed the dishes and cleared up the kitchen. After this activity, the women accompanied the men to the fields where they assisted as best they could in the work that definitely has time limit on the farm.

At noontime they all returned to the house and while the men fed the animals, the women began preparations of the noon meal. The men came back from the barn, washed up and they all sat down to eat. After lunch, the men sat on the porch to wait for the women to clear up the table and wash the dishes. When this activity was complete they all went back to the field for another half day of field work.

At sundown they all came back to the house and while the men cared for the animals, the women prepared the evening meal. The men came back from the barn, washed up, and they all sat down for supper. After supper, the men went out on the porch to smoke while the women washed the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen. After supper the men smoked some more and dozed in their chairs while the women got out the mending which must of necessity be done at times when they were not required to assist the men in the field.

She insisted that the women were happy to do these things because the men just had to have help in the field because they had a help problem even in those days.

When she finally finished, the roof fell in. My memory of this event is rather vivid and to the best of my knowledge and belief, this is a factual reporting of the event.”

O.L. Hayes, CPA
The following interview with Ida S. Broo appeared in the Indianapolis Star on July 8, 1945, as part of the “They Achieve” series. The interview was conducted by Lotys Benning Stewart.

The letters C.P.A. have a world of meaning, particularly when written after a woman’s name. For when a woman is able to claim the title, certified public accountant, it represents years of training and hard work and the courage to venture into a field where she is still looked on askance.

Ida S. Broo, C.P.A. one of the first women accountants in Indiana, has done much to open the doors of the profession to women. “There are only 236 women accountants in the United States, three in Indiana”, she said. “Right now, I am the only one practicing. It has been an uphill battle for women to enter the field, but I think the war has given many the opportunity to prove their ability.”

What does it take? “You have to have mathematical ability if you want to be an accountant”, Mrs. Broo said. “You have to enjoy working with figures. Sometimes I spend a whole day in my office with columns and columns of figures and my adding machine-don’t talk to a soul. Then you must have an analytical mind. It takes a lot of plain reasoning. Actually, accounting requires more of the qualities we generally consider masculine, so if a girl goes into it, it is because she is very gifted in mathematics and she usually is a success for that reason.”

“Accounting is a very fertile field. It is just in its infancy-the first C.P.A. in the United States was accredited in 1896”, she said”One of the things that has made it hard for women to qualify is that you have to have two years experience under a C.P.A. to take the examination, and this has not been easy to do.”

Mrs. Broo opened her office in the Indiana Trust Building in 1932, after a varied business experience which started when she was in grade school in Seymour. “My first job was watering graves in the cemetery”, she said, “for which I was paid from 3 to 25 cents every week-and when it rained I didn’t have to work.”

With eight brothers and a sister, her childhood in Seymour was full of adventure.”My father had the first automobile in Indiana”, she said. “It was a steam buggy which he built himself, putting a steam boiler on an old buggy bed. We rode in great style, but it frightened the horses so that an ordinance was passed which required you to have someone walk 50 feet ahead to warn people to hold their horses. This proved too much bother, so my father converted it into a boat.”

After her graduation from Seymour High School, she came to Indianapolis and studied piano at the old Indianapolis Conservatory and began teaching. “I soon decided that I would never be a great
musician and that I didn’t want to spend my life teaching, so I took a business course, “she said. She went with a pump and tank company “and when the plant was bought for an experimental machine shop, they bought me with the machinery”, she said.

“My employer told me to start keeping the books. I had no idea what books looked like, so I went to night school, took extension courses in accounting.”

In 1925, she took the C.P.A. exam, one of the few women to have taken it up to that time. She went to Florida during the height of the boom, where she did accounting for the New York Title and Mortgage Company, stayed there until the big hurricane. Meanwhile, she had married, and she came back here to establish her home in Speedway City. She held various jobs, worked for some time for Judge Earl Cox, in the city controller’s office, did free lance accounting before opening her own office where she now does chiefly auditing and tax work.

In 1941 and ’42, Mrs. Broo served as national president of the American Women’s Society of C.P.A.’s. She helped organize and has been national president of the Association of Women Accountants (sic), composed of women in banks, business concerns, in schools or in offices of independent accountants, who have not yet take the C.P.A. examinations. In 1941, she made an address before the Indiana C.P.A. Society, the first women to appear before this group.

As district governor of the Pilot Club, she is supervisor of the four clubs in Indiana. “It is a classified service club whose program is based on life and health”, she said. “We have many continuous welfare projects. The Indianapolis Club, for example, furnishes car and taxi fare for patients in the cancer clinic in the City Hospital, buys glasses for needy school children. When I was president in 1944 we assisted the Isolation Hospital, bought clothing and cosmetics for young women, gave a Christmas party for them.”

She has been active in the American Legion, the Eastern Star, the Ladies of the Oriental Shrine, and the Mutual Service Association. She was the Treasurer of the A.W.V.S in its first year.

Though her own entry into the field of accounting was more or less the result of circumstances, Mr. Broo would like to see qualified young women plan to become C.P.A.’s and direct their training toward that end.

“Today accounting is very essential and will continue to be under our present tax system”, she said. “Every little business has to keep books now, and it must be done by people who know how. Patient and unfailing adherence to detail are peculiarly feminine characteristics and are qualities a successful accountant must have. I hope every year to see more and more women write the coveted letters, C.P.A. after their names”.
The Indianapolis chapter began organizing the Ida S. Broo Scholarship Trust upon her death in 1966. The Trust, which assists college women majoring in accounting in the Indianapolis area, was created in 1970. The purpose of the Trust is to provide scholarships and merit awards to women students of accounting for the purpose of improving or developing their capabilities and for the instruction of the public on subjects useful to the individual and beneficial to the community. Each year the trust solicits donations from members to fund additional scholarships. Our chapter also funds the Mary Lindley Wells scholarship, which assists non-traditional students.

Please give generously when you receive the ASWA Trust solicitation letter this fall.

Donations should be made payable to the ASWA Scholarship Trust and mailed to:

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