

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project  
 Ida Bess LeFevre Interview Abstract  
 October 11, 2018

Interviewee	Ida Bess LeFevre
Year of birth	1920
Place of birth	Liberal, Seward County, Kansas
Interviewer	Susan Porter
Interview date	2018-10-11
Interview location	LeFevre home; Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri
Keywords	<p>LeFevre, Ida Bess          LeFevre, Larry          Camp, Warren Scheley Sr.          Porter, Susan          Beaver Lake          Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas          Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas          Monte Ne, Benton County, Arkansas          Camp-LeFevre Store; Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas          Fred's Hickory Inn; Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas          Kraft Foods; Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas          Rotary Club (Organization)          St. Theodore's Episcopal Church; Bella Vista, Benton County, Arkansas          Business          Carnivals and Fairs          Churches          Fashion          Religion          Stained glass windows</p>
Description	<p>Bess LeFevre and her husband Larry moved to Northwest Arkansas following World War II. In 1955, and for the next twenty-five years, they would be a part of a growing Bentonville Square business district, managing and owning the Camp-LeFevre retail store. She calls their business the "little store in the big building" with its three floors running through an entire block.</p> <p>Residents of Bentonville, other Northwest Arkansas communities, and area farm families shopped at Camp-LeFevre for ready-made clothing and domestics. With the area's growth, came changing expectations for clothes and conveniences. The LeFevre's went to market in Kansas City to keep up with trends. Those trends included the arrival of double-knits and the expectation of pants and jackets, not just dresses, for the ladies. Good service was key; LeFevre tells of quickly coming downstairs from her bookkeeping office to serve customers. Her husband made sure students of limited means had suits for graduation. The LeFevre's were active in the local retail merchant group.</p>

	<p>Her stories of the group’s activities include pushing the Kraft Company’s production of Swiss cheese by adding “Ozark Land is Dairyland” to their advertisements, the turkey race won by an enterprising merchant leading the turkey to the finish line, and dressing up for Trail Days and the Benton County Fair. LeFevre’s husband worked closely with civic groups including the Rotary to provide scholarships to deserving students.</p> <p>The LeFevre’s decided to close the store in 1980. They sold everything, including the old safe and the store’s mannequins. She said she could have sold the paint on the walls if she wanted.</p> <p>When not working at the store, LeFevre recalls Sunday drives to Siloam Springs and the area that would become Beaver Lake and lead to the end of Monte Ne.</p> <p>Much of the LeFevre family’s entertainments were related to church activities. Active in the Episcopal churches in Springdale and Rogers, the LeFevres joined with a group who decided to form St. Theodore’s Episcopal Church in Bella Vista. LeFevre remembers meeting at Fred’s Hickory Inn Restaurant and then a skating rink before building the current (and later expanded) church on Kingsland. She names the six priests from the first (Father Strickland), to Father Gavin who helped design the Church’s stained-glass windows, to the current rector (Father Lowry, 2018).</p> <p>The LeFevre children, a girl and boy, were born in 1950 and 1951. Her son, always interested in electricity, built radios in second grade. Today he is an electrical engineer. Her daughter, beginning as a candy striper, works at the KU Medical Center. In 2003, husband Larry passed away at age 90 following 55 years of marriage. She is thankful for a wonderful mate, children, and life.</p> <p>Today at age 99 (2018), LeFevre lives in Kansas City. But she is quick to share stories of living in Northwest Arkansas when local expectations changed as new people moved to the area, annexations between Bentonville and Fayetteville occurred, Bella Vista grew, Beaver Lake was completed, and modern conveniences arrived. And she shares each with a sense of humor that shoppers at Camp-LeFevre and worshipers at St. Theodore’s remember when the name Bess LeFevre is mentioned.</p>
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Comments	
Interview sidebar	The LeFevre's ran the Camp-LeFevre store until their lease ended in December 1980. Then they `sold out to the bare walls. [Customers] brought everything. They even bought the dummies in the window. I said, what you gonna do with it? Well, they were going to put it in the field for a scarecrow." [00:12:30]