

Jean Abbey Rowe

This week we are happy to name Jean Abbey Rowe as the 127th inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Jean Rowe was nominated by her children, Ann Rowe Backman, Robert, Ben and Tim Rowe

Jean Abbey Rowe was born Aug. 14, 1927 in Fenton, Michigan to Wilhemina "Minnie" and John Chester Abbey. She was the youngest of six children, three boys and three girls. Her father died when she was a young girl as did the sibling closest in age to her. This left Jean, her sister, and mother on their own. When Jean was a teen, and the only child still at home, her mother remarried. Her stepfather was of questionable character but even then, Jean knew her mind and stood up to him. She graduated from high school in 1945 as the valedictorian of her class.



Jean was the only one of her brothers and sisters to go to college. She graduated with a B.S. degree in Nursing in 1948 as part of the Cadet Nurse Corps.

Jean met her future husband, Dr. Richard Rowe, while working on the Dermatology Ward just before graduating. They were married in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Oct. 1, 1949 and moved to Marshfield in June of 1950, where they moved into Hartl Manor. Dr. Rowe began his practice at the Marshfield Clinic and Jean became very active in the community.

Their first child, Ann, was born while they were living at Hartl Manor. Their second, Robert, was born while they were living at their first house on Wood Street. They moved to their "forever" home on Oak Street where brothers Benjamin and Timothy joined the family.

Jean was elected to the Board of Education in 1964. She took her youngest child, Tim, along with her when she canvassed neighborhoods. His three year old voice proclaiming "Bote por Mommy!" Jean knew the value of a good education and wanted to champion one for every child in the Marshfield Public School System. She served for 24 years, 12 as the first female board president. As school board president, she was able to hand each of her children their high school diplomas. Jean spoke at District and State School Board Conventions and served on an Interim Education Committee of the Wisconsin State Legislature.

Marshfield continued to grow and the need for a new high school became evident. Jean chaired the efforts to get it built. Her daughter was in the first class to attend and graduate

from the new school. To open the new school, a basketball game was arranged between the best team in the state, Milwaukee Lincoln, and Marshfield High School. Leading up to the game, four students from each school were exchanged for a week. Jean's daughter was one of them. The Tigers lost the game.

Her love and respect for education was passed down to her children and grandchildren, all of whom graduated from college, some with advanced degrees.

Both her daughter's Camp Fire Girls' group and her sons' Boy Scout troops had Jean volunteering as a leader. She also volunteered with the Red Cross Bloodmobile, the American Association of University Women, the Philanthropic Educational Organization International Sisterhood, and was a lifetime member in the North Wood County Historical Society. The St. Joseph's Hospital Auxiliary and the Wood County Medical Auxiliary had her as a charter member.

The Rows were members of The First Presbyterian Church. Jean was on the search committee to find a minister to replace the departing one. She also chaired the efforts to build the new Presbyterian Church.

Jean worked hard, but she liked to have fun too. She and Richard were members of the dance club that met at Hotel Charles. She was an avid Bridge player and hosted Bridge Club often. There were also Marshfield Clinic parties held at their house.

In her "spare time," she loved to read and could devour a book in short order. The family had a cottage on the Big Eau Plain Flowage and enjoyed spending weekends there. Once Richard retired, he and Jean liked to travel, often with friends.

Richard died in 1996, just five months shy of their 47th Wedding Anniversary, and Jean continued to live in their house with support from their good friends Donna and Alvin Berres, their family, and other of Jean's friends from the community. A fall necessitated her move to the Marshfield Care Center where she died Oct. 11 2010. Her service was held at the new Presbyterian Church.