

Social work leader honored

By NEIL SCOTT
of The Leader-Post

A woman who was a pioneer in the development of child welfare programs and the social work profession in Saskatchewan was honored Wednesday at a ceremony at the University of Regina.

Mildred Battel, the first professionally trained social worker in Saskatchewan, was awarded a distinguished service award from the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers.

Battel's resume includes a nine-year stint as a school teacher in rural Saskatchewan, a 20-year career as a social worker in this province and a subsequent stint as a professor of social work at the University of Manitoba.

But friends and colleagues say Battel's resume does not tell the full story of her dedicated service, which included extensive involvement in unpaid volunteer work after she retired in 1973 and returned to Regina.

"She's just a very exceptional person," said Mona Acker, an associate professor of social work at the University of Regina.

Harvey Stalwick, a professor of social work at the U of R, cited work in getting appropriate programs in place for unwed mothers as being among Battel's many ac-

complishments.

There was considerable stigma in the 1940s and 1950s associated with being an unwed mother, Stalwick said, and there was little support available for mothers who chose to keep their babies.

But Battel fought to have both unwed mothers and their children treated with dignity, he said.

Battel "truly was a pioneer in the social work field," Stalwick said, adding he cannot think of anybody else more deserving of the distinguished service award.

The daughter of a farmer who homesteaded in the Caron district west of Moose Jaw, Mildred Battel was born in 1908.

She taught school in Yellow Grass, near Weyburn, during the Depression years and her fellow teachers chipped in portions of their own salaries so Battel could continue her education on a part-time basis.

Battel worked for the Saskatchewan Tax Commission from 1937 to 1942 and for the federal government's labor and statistics branch in 1942-43.

She received a scholarship in 1943 to study at the McGill University School of Social Work.

Battel returned to Saskatchewan after completing her studies in 1945 and thus became the first professionally trained social



Mildred Battel

worker in the province's history.

The 1940s were a period when neglected children in the province were receiving new and unparalleled attention.

Battel was heavily involved in those pioneering developments, doing child welfare work in Moose Jaw and stepping up in 1950 to become the province's assistant director of child welfare.

She was the province's director of child welfare from 1952 until 1965 and taught at the University of Manitoba from 1965 until her retirement and return to Regina in 1973.

Battel received an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Regina in 1975.