

Ruah MacNeil, 85, (

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POMPANO BEACH, Fla. — Ruah Vivian Dewitt MacNeil, a longtime community leader in Marion and one of the founders of the Marion Art Center, died Wednesday at her home in Pompano Beach. She was 85.

Mrs. MacNeil, the widow of John L. MacNeil, a former vice president of the First National Stores, was considered a pioneer in community services in several cities and towns and had marched in the Suffragette parade of 1916. She also took part in the first Girl Scout leadership training class in the United States and later organized the first Girl Scout troops in Cambridge and Newton.

Mrs. MacNeil also graduated from the Tufts University School of Dentistry in 1923 and practiced dentistry for a short time before becoming involved in community affairs. She also graduated from the Sargent School in Boston.

In Marion, Mrs. MacNeil was a former president of the Sippican Women's Club and had been named perennial chairman of the Marion Art Center Show. She was a painter of large scale abstract paintings. She had also been in charge of the restoration of the Front Street clubhouse, built in 1812.

Mrs. MacNeil, with the help of private contribution, established a hot lunch program in the Newton Public School system during the Depression of the 1930s. She also established a well-baby clinic in Newton and founded the Newton Junior Women's Club. She was the first woman appointed to the Community Council in Newton and drafted a minimum standard housing proposal which later became state law.

Mrs. MacNeil was born in Elmira,

N.Y., the daughter of Dr. Newton Allen and Minnie (Simpson) DeWitt. She had lived in Marion for more than 20 years.

She is survived by a son, John Wallace, of Newton; five daughters, Jean Ruah Perry of Pompano Beach, Fla., Margery Gustafson of Worcester, Janice May Mendes of Marion, Barbara Jane Fuller, of Houston, and Marcia Janette, of New York City; one brother, Walter A. Dewitt of Ossipee, N.H.; two sisters, Madelaine Manning of East Sandwich, and Evelyn Perrins, of Burlington; 23 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at St. Rita's Church in Marion at 11 a.m. tomorrow.