

Ben & Celeste Brose

2019 Susan Hoskins

Ben and Celeste Brose were a unique business couple in Pipestone, Minnesota during the early 1900s. Ben was a traditional businessman, operating a music store on Pipestone's main street for years, as well as a successful travelling vaudeville entertainer. He regularly showed up in the newspaper due to his musical entertainment career. Celeste was a successful businesswoman in her own right, during an era when that was uncommon. She operated a millinery shop, while managing the household and the two businesses when Ben was on the road. She also raised four children, all while never dropping the ball.

Ben Brose was born in Quincy, Illinois in 1864 to German immigrants.¹ In 1870 his father's occupation was reported to be "proprietor of a stone quarry."² When Ben was fifteen years old, the family was farming in Lewis County, Missouri, not too far across the border from Quincy, Illinois.³

Celeste Neffeler was born in Wisconsin in 1862.⁴ Her parents were Swiss immigrants, farming south of Madison in Green County, Wisconsin.⁵ By the time Celeste was seventeen years old, she had hired out as a servant in a neighboring family's home.⁶

It is not known what drew Ben Brose to Pipestone, but he began to appear in various business ventures in the early 1890s. The first reference to Celeste Neffeler in Pipestone may be a newspaper article from 1886 which referenced that a Miss Neffeler had purchased a stock of millinery.⁷

In 1890, the management of Denhart & Neffeler reportedly took ownership of the Nicollet House in Pipestone, with Celeste's brother, Edward Neffeler, and brother-in-law, Joe Denhart, in

¹ Rites Held for Ben R. Brose; Resident of the City for Over 45 Years Dies at Home Here, *Pipestone (Minnesota) Leader* newspaper, 28 October 1937, Section II, p.1 c.3 p.1.

² 1870 U.S. census, Adams County, Illinois, population schedule, 4th Ward Quincy, p. 107 (printed), dwelling 727, family 889, Benjamin Brose in the John Brose household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

³ 1880 U.S. census, Lewis County, Missouri, population schedule, Highland Township, p. 35 (printed), dwelling 262, family 267, Benjamin Brose in the John Brose household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

⁴ Celeste Brose, death 21 Jan 1947, "Illinois Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947"; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 26 August 2019), records Celeste's date of birth as 30 Jan 1862.

⁵ 1870 U.S. census, Green County, Wisconsin, population schedule, Clarno Township, p.218 (printed), dwelling 168, family 166, Celesta Neifler in the Samuel Neifler household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

⁶ 1880 U.S. census, Green County, Wisconsin, population schedule, Clarno Township, p.11 (printed), dwelling 89, family 89, Celestia Neffeler in the Simon Bartlett household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

⁷ No title, *The Pipestone County Republican* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 10 September 1886, p.4 c.3 p.1.

partnership.⁸ It is unclear whether Celeste was a part owner of the hotel, as a newspaper article nine months later bemoaned the fact that “Ed and Miss Neffler” were leaving the business to new owners.⁹ But from later indications she had a good head for business and would have been a valuable contributor to the operation. Celeste had family in the area; brother Ed Neffler and their sister, Lydia Denhart (Mrs. Joe Denhart- who was also in Pipestone County by 1895) as was Celeste’s brother, Frank Neffeler, working as a butcher in the town of Trosky.¹⁰ No other members of the Brose family have been identified in Pipestone County.

It was in Pipestone, Minnesota that Miss Celeste Neffeler met Mr. Benjamin Brose and they were married on January 4, 1892.¹¹ At thirty years old, she was already a business woman at the time of her marriage, acknowledged as a “popular milliner” in the newspaper.¹² Newspaper accounts of the wedding event also hinted that Ben was from St. Paul, indicating perhaps his journey from Missouri to Pipestone went through the Capital.¹³ He was also named as “the popular musician of the 22 Indian Herb Medicine Company” his career in referencing his career in vaudeville and musical entertainment. In any case, the two were married at the home of Celeste’s sister, Lydia Denhart, on the occasion of the Denhart’s tenth wedding anniversary.¹⁴ Reports of the wedding indicated it was something of a surprise to many of the guests, many of whom has arrived expecting an anniversary party.

A year and a half later, Ben and Celeste Brose were advertising the Grand Opening of the Brose Millinery & Music Store.¹⁵ An advertisement in the local newspaper reminded patrons of Mrs. Brose’s maiden name- Neffeler- as she was an established local milliner under that name. This may have been Mr. Brose’s first venture into a retail business of his passion, music. The advertisement promises the music store will carry banjos, guitars, mandolins, violins, etc., “the finest line...ever shown in Southwestern Minnesota.”

Their business was located, as it would be for years, at the corner of Olive Street [Main Street] and Lowry Street [Second Avenue NE.] They rented the Foskett Building, a frame structure with a corner entrance at that location and went on to purchase it in February 1894.

From 1893 to 1912, Celeste advertised her millinery shop, but Ben went into other ventures, such as a partner in the Star Feed Mill in 1894 and a furniture store partnership with his brother-in-law, Joe Denhart, in 1895.¹⁶ The Pipestone County Star reported on the Brose-Denhart

⁸ No title, *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 14 March 1890, p.1 c.3 p.(b).

⁹ No title, *Farmers’ Leader (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 3 December 1890, p.4 c.2 p.12.

¹⁰ 1895 Minnesota State Census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, Trosky, p.2 (written)

¹¹ No title, *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 8 January 1892, p.5 c.2 p.1.

¹² No title, *Farmers’ Leader (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 31 December 1891, p.1 c.3 p.22., family 8, F.L. Neffeler household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 26 August 2019).

¹³ No title, *Farmers’ Leader (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 31 December 1891, p.1 c.3 p.22.

¹⁴ No title, *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 8 January 1892, p.5 c.2 p.1.

¹⁵ (Advertisement), *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 15 September 1893, p.5 c.5 p.1.

¹⁶ Pipestone Business Advertising Index, 1879-1914, Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota (2019).

partnership which planned to deal in furniture and wallpaper.¹⁷ The Brose Building (formerly the Foskett Building at the corner of Olive and Lowry) was remodeled for this venture and the millinery moved to the second floor. The partnership was short lived, however, when Joe Denhart left the partnership in May 1896.¹⁸ Mr. & Mrs. Brose added furniture to their music and millinery business, and then dissolved that portion of their business in 1899.¹⁹

Outside of business, Ben and Celeste Brose were growing their family during this time. Their first child was born in June 1894, but only lived a few hours.²⁰ In 1896 son Robert Brose was born, followed by daughter Doris in 1898.²¹ The next year daughter Lucille was born.²²

At the turn of the century, Ben and Celeste were both involved in their separate but combined businesses, and in raising three small children; Robert 3, Doris 2 and Baby Lucille.²³ They weren't without extended family around either. Celeste's brother Frank Neffeler and his family had moved from Trosky to Pipestone, where Frank had become employed as a carpenter.²⁴ Sister Lydia Denhart was living in Pipestone with her husband Joe and their children. Joe was employed as a butcher.²⁵ Brother Edward Neffeler, who had been co-owner of the Nicollet House, had moved on to Aberdeen, South Dakota where he was a practicing physician.²⁶

Ben and Celeste purchased the lot directly east of their building in 1899 and set about to build a two-story stone block at that location. It was completed in the spring of 1900 and the Broses transferred their business to the new location in July. For a time, both the 201 and the 203 East Olive/Main locations were known as "the Brose Building," leading to some confusion in the records.

In 1901 Ben and Celeste's family was complete when youngest child, Horace was born.²⁷ Soon after, Ben began to travel as a musical entertainer on the vaudeville circuit. He was by 1902 touting himself as a "musical comedian."²⁸

¹⁷ No title, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 3 January 1896, p.3 c.1 p.1.

¹⁸ Notice of Dissolution, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 22 May 1896, p.2 c.4 p.3.

¹⁹ Pipestone Business Advertising Index, 1879-1914, Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota (2019).

²⁰ No title, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 15 June 1894, p.5 c.2 p.3

²¹ No title, *Farmers' Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 3 December 1896, p.6 c.1 p.8. No title, *Farmers' Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 3 March 1898, p.7 c.2 p.14.

²² No title, *Farmers' Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 21 September 1899, p.1 c.4 p.3.

²³ 1900 U.S. census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, Pipestone City, p. 22B, dwelling 445, family 445, B.R. Brose household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

²⁴ 1900 U.S. census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, Pipestone City, p. 22B, dwelling 446, family 446, Frank Neffeler household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

²⁵ 1900 U.S. Census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, Pipestone City, p.209A, dwelling 246, family 246, J.S. Denhart household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 26 August 2019).

²⁶ 1900 U.S. Census, Brown County, South Dakota, population schedule, Aberdeen, page 158A (printed), dwelling 149, family 160, Edward Neffeler household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 26 August 2019).

²⁷ No title, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 22 March 1901, p.8 c.4.

In 1904 while touring the southern states in a circuit through Missouri, Kansas and Arkansas, Ben met up with former Pipestone businessman, L.H. Moore, who was acting as theater manager in Gentry, Arkansas.²⁹ He was by that time much involved in another interest of his: taxidermy. As he traveled south and then into Oklahoma, letters written to the Pipestone County Star newspaper detail his interest in the local birds and waterfowl and how his specimens were being shipped home.³⁰

While Ben was touring with his vaudeville show, Celeste was holding down the fort in Pipestone with two businesses and four children in check. Although she announced the sale of her business to her successors in 1903, it apparently fell through.³¹ In March, 1904 she had a bit of a coup in the act of a marvelous window display for her Millinery store to kick off her spring season opening. Keeping in mind her children ranged in ages from eight to three, the Pipestone County Star had this to report:³²

“...In among the beautiful array of millinery articles, Mrs. Brose’s four charming little children were posed in a manner that made a picture most delightful to look upon. Daintily attired and as composed as waxen models....hundreds of people stopped before the window and gazed upon the picture within.”

Celeste Brose continued to be a force in the local millinery business.

Between 1907 and 1908 Ben and Celeste moved their business back into the corner store. Ben Brose may have ended his traveling show by that time. In 1907 he was involved in more endeavors close to home. It was that summer he opened “The Brose Wonderland.”³³ This was a museum of sorts, featuring mounted animals and birds from Brose’s own taxidermy collection, as well as relics and curios. The museum was to be open twice daily: 2:00-4:00pm and again 7:00-9:00pm. Each exhibition period would close with half an hour of musical entertainment in the theater.

²⁸ Ben Brose Writes; Tells of Big Business as Season Nears its Close, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 23 May 1902, p.2 c.3 p.1.

²⁹ Brose in the South; Musical Comedian Writes the Star from MO and KS, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 4 Mar 1904, p.5 c.3 p.1.

³⁰ In Land of Indians; Brose and Clemens Make a Hit at Tahlequah, Indian Terr., *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 25 Mar 1904, p.8 c.2 p.1.

³¹ Pipestone Business Advertising Index, 1879-1914, Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota (2019).

³² Attractive Window; Mrs. Brose’s Millinery Store was Center of Attraction Yesterday, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 25 Mar 1904, p.1 c.3 p.1.

³³ Wonderland is Opened; Brose’s New Place of Amusement was Opened to the Public Last Night, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 27 June 1907, p.8 c.4 p.5(b).

Ben reopened his Wonderland in 1908, upgrading it to a motion picture theater.³⁴ The Museum was open in the afternoon and again in the evening before the motion picture shows. A flat fee of 10 cents covered everything.

In 1910, the children were between the ages of 13 and 9, and the family also housed two roomers.³⁵ Celeste probably continued with her business, as she was recognized as the proprietor of a millinery shop in 1914.³⁶ At that time Ben was recognized as a “theatrical manager” and the family was living at 201 East Olive/Main, where Celeste also ran her millinery business.

Sometime between 1910 and 1920, many of the Broses’ extended family left Pipestone. Celeste’s brother Frank Neffeler and sister Lydia Denhart both relocated to California during that time, where they were to remain.

Robert Brose graduated from Pipestone High School Class of 1917 along with sisters Doris and Lucille.³⁷ Horace Brose graduated from Pipestone High School Class of 1918.³⁸ All four children spent some time in Minneapolis after high school graduation, Robert and Horace attended the University of Minnesota for a time.

When the United States entered World War One, Robert Brose joined the army as part of Base Hospital #26 which was a joint project of the University of Minnesota and the Mayo Clinic. He was stationed at Fort McPhearson, Georgia for training before he was sent overseas in 1918.³⁹ Base Hospital #26 was established in Allerey, France in June and cared for nearly 6,000 men through 1919. Robert Brose was a medical aide with the group, hauling water and bearing stretchers and assisting with patient care.

By 1920, Ben Brose had started offering music lessons in both string and brass instruments, and Celeste remained in the millinery business.⁴⁰ Sons Robert and Horace appear at home in the 1920 census, but both were University of Minnesota students in Minneapolis by 1921.⁴¹ Daughter Doris worked as a stenographer and Lucille as a clerk in a railroad office. With all

³⁴ Wonderland to Re-Open, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) newspaper, 7 July 1908, p.1 c.5 p.(b).

³⁵ 1910 U.S. census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, Pipestone City, p. 1B, dwelling 18, family 18, Ben R. Brose household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

³⁶ “Pipestone City Directory,” First Edition, February 1914, (L.R. Peel, Star Publishing Company, Pipestone, Minnesota) Mrs. B.R. Brose, millinery store, p.41. (Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota).

³⁷ “Pipestone Area Schools; Central School, Hill School and Brown School,” (Pipestone County Historical Society, Pipestone, Minnesota, 2016), Class of 1917, p.90, (Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota).

³⁸ “Pipestone Area Schools; Central School, Hill School and Brown School,” (Pipestone County Historical Society, Pipestone, Minnesota, 2016), Class of 1918, p.91, (Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota).

³⁹ “In the World War; 1917-1918-1919, Pipestone County, Minnesota,” (Leader Publishing Company, Pipestone, Minnesota), Robert Weston Brose- pages not numbered, (Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.)

⁴⁰ 1920 U.S. census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, Pipestone City, p.12A, dwelling 247, family 262, Benjamin Brose household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 28 June 2019).

⁴¹ “Davison’s Minneapolis City Directory, 1921,” (Minneapolis Directory Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1921); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 20 August 2019).

four children living in Minneapolis in 1921, Ben and Celeste traveled there in May to see daughter Lucille marry Walter Diegre.⁴² Walter Diegre worked as a insurance agent through the 1930s and Lucille's family remained in Minneapolis after daughter Celeste was born in 1923 and son Richard in 1928.

Two years after Lucille's marriage, son Robert married Mildred Hurd in Minneapolis in 1923.⁴³ Robert had found work as a musician and also began to manage various theaters through the 1920s, including the Strand Theater in 1924 and the Lagoon Theater in 1928. His daughter Barbara Brose was born before they moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1929 where he managed the State Theater and the Wisconsin Theater before moving on to Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1931, after his son Robert Jr. was born.⁴⁴ They remained in Oshkosh for many years with Robert managing the Oshkosh Theater and the Strand Theaters through 1940.⁴⁵ At the time of the WWII draft, Robert was living in Wauwatosa, WI and employed at the Fox Wisconsin Amusement Corporation.⁴⁶

Ben took a surprise business turn in 1926 when he made space in his music store for his new fur business.⁴⁷ He was known to have practiced taxidermy for years, and in 1926 he installed up to date equipment for fur craft services, including the purchase of an electric fur sewing machine. Music remained his main income between the store and his work as a music teacher.⁴⁸ Celeste may have sold out her millinery store by then.

In 1930 son Horace Brose was recorded in the census both at his parents' home in Pipestone as well as a boarder in Chicago, indicating a certain unsettledness regarding his whereabouts. In 1931 Horace Brose married Miss Marie Morrison in Chicago, although the union must have been short lived and further explanation of this marriage has not been found.⁴⁹

⁴² "Pipestone Girl Weds at Minneapolis," *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 17 May 1921, p.1 c.6 p.4. "Brose-Diegre," *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 31 May 1921, p.4 c.5 p.7.

⁴³ "Robert Brose Weds Minneapolis Girl," *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 4 May 1923, p.1 c.6 p.1.

⁴⁴ "Konrad's Oshkosh (Wisconsin) City Directory, 1931," (Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1931); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 20 August 2019).

⁴⁵ "Wright's Oshkock (Winnebago County, Wisconsin) City Directory, 1940," (Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1940); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 20 August 2019).

⁴⁶ U.S. World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942 for Robert Westone Brose; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 16 August 2019).

⁴⁷ Brose in Fur Business; Holding Sale of Pianos and Phonographs, *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 15 October 1926, p.1 c.4 p.(b).

⁴⁸ 1930 U.S. census, Pipestone County, Minnesota, population schedule, East Ward Pipestone City, p.11A (printed), dwelling 234, family 279, Benjamin Brose household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed on 28 June 2019).

⁴⁹ "Visited Son Who Was Recently Married," *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 18 September 1931, p.1 c.3 p.6.

Ben Brose died in October 1937 at home in Pipestone.⁵⁰ He was 73 years old and the proprietor of the Brose Music Shop at 105 2nd Avenue NE.⁵¹ He had come to Pipestone in 1891 and his career was extensive, for years operating a music store, well known as an instructor in band and string instruments and he traveled widely as a professional musician and entertainer. He had also been involved in taxidermic work and sign painting, and also held extensive property interests in Pipestone.

At the time of her father's death, Miss Doris Brose had been living in Manhattan and working as a home decorator. She continued to do so through the 1940s.

Celeste remained in Pipestone after her husband died and had moved to Chicago around 1940 to live with her son Horace. Horace married Lazetta Draayom in 1941 and Celeste made her home with them in Chicago until her death in 1942.⁵² Celeste had been engaged in the millinery business and a keen businesswoman in Pipestone for decades. At the time of her death she was the owner of two business places in Pipestone, as well as several residences.

Both Ben and Celeste were cremated and buried at Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Two highly creative people managed to find positive outlets for their creativity and live successful lives in Pipestone. It is also worth noting the success and legacy of their four children in the wider world. Robert and Horace both made their livings through the musical talent their father shared with them. Robert branched into management, a keen business skill of his mother's. Horace and his wife Lazetta took their creative business skills and founded the company "Heide Babe Products" which they named after their first child, Heide Brose.⁵³ The Heide Babe Products company manufactured and sold innovative baby care products. They retired to Florida in 1950, where Horace passed away in 1978. Doris and Lucille had both left home to be working girls holding office jobs in Minneapolis before Lucille was married in 1923. She went on to raise two children with her husband Walter. It appears Doris never married. She left Minnesota in the 1920s to arrive in New York City to develop a home decorating business which she practiced through the 1940s.

⁵⁰Rites Held for Ben R. Brose; Resident of the City for Over 45 Years Dies at Home Here, *Pipestone (Minnesota) Leader* newspaper, 28 October 1937, Section II, p.1 c.3 p.1.

⁵¹ "Wright's Pipestone City & County Directory for 1937," Brose Music Shop (pages not numbered), (Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota).

⁵² Mrs. B.R. Brose Dies in Chicago, *Pipestone County Star (Pipestone, Minnesota)* newspaper, 23 January 1942, p.4 c.4 p.2. Mrs. B.R. Brose, Pioneer Resident, Dies in Chicago, *Pipestone (Minnesota) Leader* newspaper, 23 January 1942, p.3 c.4 p.6.

⁵³ "Lazetta (Draayom) Brose, 91," *Headlight Herald (Tracy, Minnesota)* newspaper, 4 May 2005; digital image, *Headlight Herald Archive* (<http://headlightherald.com>) : accessed 16 August 2019.