



A LITERARY SURROGATE

CONTEMPLATE THE LIFE AND

Lyrical Journalism, Investigative Poetry

BY REBECCA DUNCAN

In the days when Americans relied almost wholly on the local newspaper for world news, area happenings, and the price of eggs, a typical masthead might include a lone woman, listed as “society” or “women’s” editor. This staff member would spin elaborate accounts of weddings, civic events, and even the birthday parties of the town’s privileged children. Through her efforts, the community could discover who among their acquaintances had spent a Sunday afternoon receiving out-of-town guests and who had ventured to the next town to visit a special cousin.

This particular brand of social media nurtured readership and created bonds in the community, even as the content may have been buried among lost and found notices and grocery store ads. In North Carolina, Zoe Kincaid Brockman leveraged her position as society editor of the *Gastonia Gazette* to discover a writing voice that chronicled

twentieth-century life through insightful columns and nationally recognized poetry. Her reporting, commentary, and verse – developed concurrently – blend the linguistic and cultural conventions of journalism and imaginative literature. As she helped to develop the *Gazette*, Brockman pioneered many of the standards and practices of today’s professional journalists. In her poetry she revived classic forms and rhythms to explore and express her inner life and topical themes. These two strands of her writing life are woven together throughout her career.

Brockman lived from 1889 until 1975; public records, memories of friends and family, and information shared in her “Unguarded Moments” column help to anchor a few key details of her life.¹ She was the youngest in a family of unknown size; her father referred to her simply as “the Child.” Among her “distinguished forebears” were a state

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¹ Several of these columns are collected in Brockman’s *Unguarded Moments* (Heritage House, 1959); quotations from these columns cited parenthetically within this essay.

SCHOLAR AND A GRANDDAUGHTER

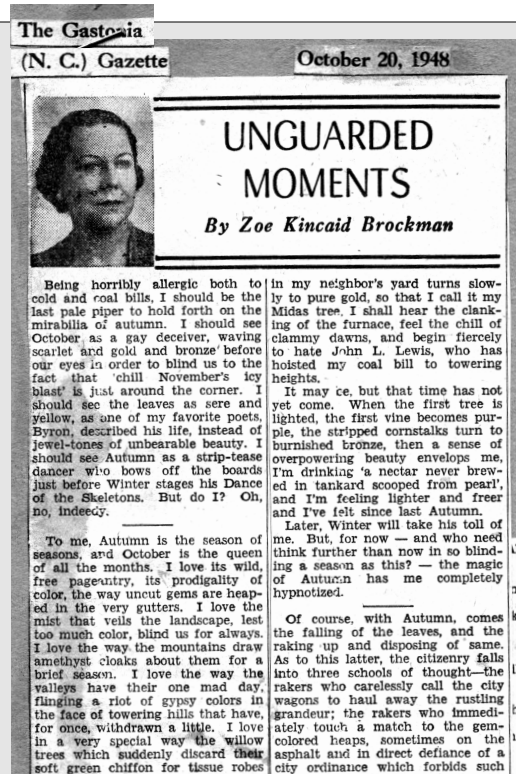
WORK OF ZOE KINCAID BROCKMAN

“Zoe Kincaid Brockman leveraged her position as society editor of the *Gastonia Gazette* to discover a writing voice that chronicled twentieth-century life through insightful columns and nationally recognized poetry.”

senator and a ruling elder in a Presbyterian church and “leader in the whiskey fight when Gaston was over-run with distilleries.”²

Brockman valued her Scottish heritage and wrote nostalgically about the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games and summers at her Kincaid grandparents’ expansive farm. In 1909, at the age of twenty, she married Thomas M. Brockman of Spartanburg, South Carolina. She bore two children: Sarah Frances in 1910 and Thomas (Tommy) in 1912. Sarah Frances married in 1928 and died five years later after a lengthy but undisclosed illness. Tommy served in the United States Navy during World War II; he and his wife, Kitty, often shared Brockman’s home. Family records and public documents gathered by Lyn Triplett indicate that Zoe and Thomas divorced in 1939.

Brockman’s formal education most likely ended with a high school diploma, although there



² Quoted from Mina B. Huffman, “Mrs. Brockman Nominated for North Carolina Poet Laureate,” *Gastonia Gazette* 3 Dec. 1934. Other biographical information was found in this source.

ABOVE Header of Brockman’s “Unguarded Moments” column in *The Gastonia Gazette*, 20 Oct. 1948

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs and clippings are courtesy of the Gaston County Public Library.