

## OBITUARIES

**BETTY J. RITTER, 81**

# Des Plaines library's guiding force

**By Patricia Trebe**  
Special to the Tribune

When Betty J. Ritter moved to Des Plaines 32 years ago, she bought her home because it was near the public library. Eventually, she became one of the guiding forces behind the construction of a new 80,000-square-foot facility.

"When I walk through that building I sense her presence there and see her stamp all over it," said John Burke, a friend and former library board member.

When Miss Ritter first joined the board in 1993, she was chair of the building and grounds committee. The library was located on Graceland Avenue at the time.

"She recognized that the building was small and old, and she really got to know every nook and cranny of the building and how all the systems worked," Burke said. "Then when we came to design the new library her expertise was critical."

An architect by profession, Miss Ritter, who served on the board until 2001, was the main contact with the architects and board members and worked toward the library's completion in 2000.

"She really helped the library board to just cut through to the chase," Burke said. "She had great insight and was a very intelligent woman."

Miss Ritter, 81, of Des Plaines,



**Betty J. Ritter**

died Monday, Nov. 22, in her home, of cancer.

Born in Niles Center and raised in Evanston, she graduated from Evanston Township High School, then worked as an operator for Bell Telephone Co.

During World War II, she wished to join the Women Air Service Patrol and took flying lessons at Palwaukee Airport to receive her pilot's license, said her brother John.

"The day she arrived at the base in Sweetwater, Texas, was the day the government decided that they didn't need them anymore so she came home," her brother said.

After the war, she was briefly engaged to a Marine who wanted to return to his farm in central Illinois.

"But Betty could never be confined to a small farming commu-

nity," her brother said. "Her interests were too worldwide and she broke it off."

She returned to the phone company and her position took her to Seattle with Pacific Telephone from 1946 to 1948. Upon her return to Chicago she became night chief operator but she grew unhappy, her brother said.

"I remember very specifically that she thought there had to be a better occupation," he said. "She then took aptitude tests and they came out that she should be an architect." Miss Ritter went on to graduate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with an architecture degree and worked for the firms of Skidmore Owings and Merrill, then Perkins and Will.

Miss Ritter also was senior editor of Building Design and Construction magazine and editor of Inland Architect.

She gravitated to the arts and became an accomplished photographer, painter and writer. "She was a very free-spirited individual who was a sponge for knowledge," her brother said.

Shortly before she joined the library board, she was a member of the Des Plaines Cable Commission.

Other survivors include two brothers, Charles and Robert; and many nieces and nephews.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday in G.L. Hills Funeral Home, 745 Graceland Ave., Des Plaines.