

Noted Author Wins BPW National Writing Award

A woman writer who set aside her career for 20 years to become a working mother was acclaimed this week as best exemplifying the ideals of four great English women writers.

Tillie Olsen of San Francisco and Santa Cruz was cited by the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs and the British Post Office, which issued a set of stamps July 9 commemorating the famous authors: Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell.

The award was presented to Mrs. Olsen at the BPW national convention by Julia K. Arri, federation president.

Mrs. Olsen, a novelist, essayist and short story writer, is a unique literary figure because she wrote and published very early in life, then was silent until she reached her mid-40s when she resumed writing and won critical acclaim.

Born in Nebraska in 1913, she dropped out of high school during the Depression. Public libraries were her college.

She was selected from a group of finalists that represented the best in American literature.

Since entering the literary field she has become an award-winning author and a distinguished college professor and lecturer.

"I have accepted awards before," she said at the presentation this week in Omaha, Nebraska, "but this one is very special to me."

In presenting the award, Mrs. Arri said that the spirit exemplified by Mrs. Olsen and the four Victorian authors finds its counterpart in the activities of the 165,000 business and professional women who are members of BPW's 3,700 clubs nationwide.

The British post office was represented by Geoffrey Oakden, vice president of StanGib Ltd., North American stamp distributor for the British post office.

Tillie Olsen's best known work, TELL ME A RIDDLE, a collection of short fiction published in 1962, has become an American source classic. The title novella won the O. Henry Award as the best story of 1961 and the four pieces in the collection have appeared in 47 anthologies.

Her so-called "lost" novel, YON-NONDIO: FROM THE THIRTIES, was published in 1974, 40 years after its opening chapter appeared in an early edition of "Partisan Review." SILENCES, published in 1978, is a collection of essays with testimony from a number of writers, dealing with the power of circumstances over creative ability.

Tillie Olsen has been a professor, guest lecturer and writer-in-residence at universities including Amherst College, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Yale and Stanford.

She is presently planning to make her home in Santa Cruz County and has been spending time here prior to going east to receive the award.