

Leah Moncure Undertold Marker BCHS Quarterly Meeting

The Bastrop County Historical Society hosted a presentation on Leah Moncure and her recently unveiled Texas Historical Commission Undertold Marker by Sandra Chipley, RLA, ASLA on Thursday, January 23, 2025 at its Museum & Visitor Center. Chipley, as a service project for the local DAR chapter, wrote the Undertold Marker Application, "Leah Moncure, P. E. # 2250, Texas's First Woman Engineer" that was approved in February 2021. The King's Highway Chapter National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) along with the Bastrop County Historical Commission (BCHC) held a marker dedication ceremony on January 13 at the Bastrop Public Library. The historical marker is located in front of the Moncure House, 1601 Main Street, in downtown Bastrop, the house where Leah grew up and to which she retired in 1964.

Moncure was born in 1904 just after her twin sister Grace. Leah was born with a congenital heart defect, once referred to as "blue baby". Doctors predicted that she would not be able to take an education or live into adulthood. Her father and grandfather were surveyors and Leah developed an early interest in surveying equipment and drawing tools...along with the mathematics required of the profession. Moncure obtained her BA with high honors from Baylor University in 1925 with a double major in Mathematics and Education. In 1937 she graduated from The University of Texas at Austin (UT) with a BS in Civil Engineering. While at UT she alternated semesters with working for the Texas Highway Department (now TxDOT) and bed rest for her heart condition.

In April 1938, Moncure became a registered Professional Engineer, the first woman in Texas to achieve that distinction. She was a woman of many firsts: the first female Engineer to work for the Texas Highway Department, the first Life Member of the National Society of Professional Engineer, and the first female member of the Texas Society of Professional Engineers.

Just after obtaining her license in 1938, THD did an article in Texas Parade Magazine on her:

“Her seven years of professional practice in the highway engineering field have made her as familiar with highway plans and blueprints as the average woman with a dress pattern or curtain making. Although she might be termed an invader into man’s precincts, Miss Moncure holds her position by merit and asks no quarter from any of her male co-workers.”

Due to complications with her heart, Leah retired in 1964 after 32 years with the Texas Highway Department. The Travis Chapter Auxiliary of the Texas Society of Professional Engineers established the Leah Moncure Memorial Scholarship in 1965 for Female Engineering Students at UT Austin, Cockrell School of Engineering. Moncure passed away in 1972 and was buried in Fairview Cemetery.

Engineers came from all over Texas to honor her accomplishments at the marker dedication this month. Distinguished speakers at the ceremony included: Kathy Crusco, Treasurer, Texas Society Daughters of the American Revolution (TSDAR); Robert B. Gilbert, PhD, PE, DGE, NAE, Chair, Maseeh Department of Civil, Architectural and Environmental Engineering, UT; Julia Harrod, PE, F NSPE, National Society Professional Engineers President Elect, Texas Society Professional Engineers Past President, and UT Austin CARE Academy of Distinguished Alumni President; Karen Friese, PE, Texas Board of Professional Engineers & Land Surveyors; Diana Schulze, PE, TxDOT Bastrop Area Engineer; Connie Schroeder, PE (Ret), Former Bastrop Mayor and past recipient of the Leah Moncure Scholarship; BCHC Chair and Former Bastrop Mayor Kenneth Kesselus; Regent Carol Brown, King’s Highway Chapter, NSDAR; and Alicia Costello, Texas Historical Commission. Other distinguished guests included the first woman member of the Texas Board of Professional Engineers, the President of the Texas Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, numerous members of both state and national engineering societies, other TSDAR State Officers, Bastrop City Council members, and the Bastrop County Historical Society (Officers, Board of Trustees, Members, and Staff).

Members of the Moncure family were in attendance from Bastrop, San Antonio, Boston and Pensacola, Florida. Among Moncure’s family spending were honored guests, Martha Leah Kunkel Oppenheim (Leah’s niece) and

her husband Russell, Kristen Mortonson and Lauren Oppenheim (Martha's daughters), and Nancy Glenn Fekerman. Kristen Mortonson, Lauren Oppenheim, and Nancy Fekerman shared personal memories of Moncure. Lisa and Peter Willits, current owners of the Moncure House, were represented by their daughter-in-law, Amy Williams, and their granddaughters, Emma and Lillie.

The story of this remarkable Bastropian woman is now available for all to read along the sidewalk in front of the historic Moncure House at 1601 Main Street near the intersection of Cedar and Main Streets, across the street from Tracy's Drive-In Grocery. There are two other Undertold Markers located in Bastrop County, one in Smithville recognizing the "Chitlin' Circuit" and the second a few blocks from Main Street commemorating the Mina Ward School.

Sandra Chipley, RLA, ASLA