

CAPROCK CHRONICLES

Daniel Boone's relative first female lawyer in Lubbock

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Caprock Chronicles is edited by Paul Carlson, professor emeritus of history at Texas Tech University. This week's essay about some of the first women lawyers in Lubbock is by Chuck Lanehart, attorney and Lubbock historian.



Pat Moore was the first women admitted to the bar in lubbock County, in 1918. [PROVIDED BY CHUCK LANEHART/SOUTHWEST COLLECTIONS OF TEXAS TECH]

In 1910, only three women were licensed Texas attorneys. By 1930, a whopping 75 female lawyers practiced in the state, along with about 6,500 male colleagues. Today, women make up about 35 per cent of Texas' 90,000 lawyers. One early female lawyer was the first of her gender to practice law in Lubbock.

Born in 1888, Emma K. Boone was a native of Hill County, Texas, and a descendant of Squire Boone, brother of the iconic Kentucky frontiersman, Daniel Boone. She attended Southwest Texas State Normal School (now Texas State University) and Baylor University.

In 1916, Emma enrolled at the University of Texas School of Law, joining only six female students there. She was the first woman president of the UT junior law class.

While in law school, she married William H. Bledsoe of Lubbock, in 1917. (Emma was Bledsoe's second wife. His first wife, Alice Matthews, died in 1915.) Bledsoe at the time served as state representative from the South Plains area, so they probably met in Austin.

After Emma received her law degree, Judge Whitfield Davidson administered an oath that made her the first woman admitted to the bar in Lubbock County. It was 1918, but another two years would pass before the U.S. Constitution was amended to allow Emma and all American women the right to vote, on Aug. 18, 1920.

W.H. Bledsoe was a legendary, self-educated pioneer Lubbock lawyer, beginning his practice in 1908. He successfully defended the first person tried for murder in Lubbock County, in 1912.

As state senator, he brought Texas Technological College to Lubbock by sponsoring the 1923 enabling legislation. Emma said in a 1969 interview, "Mr. Chitwood put the bill through the House. It was known as the Bledsoe-Chitwood bill, but I know who wrote it because the Judge (Bledsoe) and I went over every sentence."

Sen. Bledsoe was a founder of the law firm now known as Crenshaw, Dupree & Milam.

Emma K., as she preferred to be called, maintained a civil practice for a time. Her husband once asked her to speak for his client in a murder trial during the 1920s, well before Texas women were permitted to serve on juries in 1954. An experienced old judge advised her that the all-male jury would certainly be offended if she spoke, so Emma K. declined for the benefit of the client.

She was an educator for many years, first in high schools, and then at Texas Tech, where she taught Texas history. Her granddaughter, Bronwen Bledsoe of New York, remembers Emma as a well-dressed, well-traveled socialite who practiced very little law.

Sen. Bledsoe died in 1936, and Emma remained in their handsome brick home at 1812 Broadway until her death at age 95 in 1983. Lubbock attorney Pat Simek acquired the Bledsoe home and converted it to a law office in the mid-1980s. He continues to maintain his practice in the historic building, which was originally constructed in 1921.

Emma was survived by a son, seven grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, and 15 great-great-grandchildren.

Emma paved the way for the amazing success of the second woman who practiced law in Lubbock, Pat S. Moore, a native of Lorenzo.

Moore began her practice in Lubbock in 1949 after graduating from SMU Law School.

In 1953, she became the first woman president of the Lubbock County Bar Association, and four years later she became the first woman elected to Lubbock County public office, as judge of Lubbock County Court at Law, Number 2.



Emma Bledsoe, left, attended the University of Texas law school, and began practicing law in Lubbock in 1949. She was the first woman elected to Lubbock County public office, as judge of Lubbock County Court at Law 2. [COURTESY OF DALLAS

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In 1968, she was elected the first woman district judge, of the 72nd District Court. She presided over many notable cases, including the first Maxey vs. Citizens National Bank trial, the longest civil litigation in Lubbock’s history.

She was instrumental in establishing Texas Boys Ranch, where troubled juvenile males of Lubbock and surrounding counties could live rather than return from her courtroom to their unsafe, unsupervised, unlawful homes. Texas Boys Ranch is now a part of Children’s Home of Lubbock.

Judge Moore received statewide publicity when she refused to seek an excuse from jury duty, stepping down from her own bench to report for jury duty in the 99th District Court. She was not chosen, but was paid for two day’s service, then endorsed the check back to Lubbock County.

Judge Moore's accomplishments came despite a severe disability caused by a childhood bout with polio, and she died tragically of cancer at age 49.

She was survived by her husband James, also a Lubbock lawyer, and two children.

The Junior League of Lubbock created the Pat S. Moore award in 1974 in her honor.

The award recognizes women who despite adverse circumstances, have provided outstanding inspiration to others, service to the community, and who possess the preeminent qualities of integrity, morality, loyalty, humility, compassion and courage.