

Madonna of the Trail Lexington, Missouri

The statue is a tribute to the many hundreds of thousands of women who took part in the Western United States Migration.

Madonna of the Trail is a series of 12 identical monuments dedicated to the spirit of pioneer women in the United States. In the late 1920's, the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) commissioned the design, casting and placement of twelve memorials commemorating the spirit of pioneer women. These monuments were installed in each of 12 states along the National Old Trails Road, which extended from Cumberland, Maryland, to Upland, California. The Madonna of the Trail is depicted as a courageous pioneer woman, clasping her baby with her left arm while clutching her rifle in her right, wearing a long dress and bonnet. Her young son clings to her skirts.



On Monday, September 17, 1928, The Missouri Madonna of the Trail in Lexington, Missouri, was unveiled and dedicated. Harry S. Truman, a Missouri Justice of the Peace and the President of the National Old Trails Association, was the keynote speaker at the ceremony.

The ceremony was in many ways a “home-coming” for Lexington, and the streets were crowded with visitors while homes were filled with guests. Most of the visitors were former residents, relatives, and people with connections with Lexington. Many people dressed in period costume, including some eighty-plus year old “real pioneer women” who were dressed in costumes that were over 100 years old.

On August 25, 1928, prior to the dedication, a copper box time capsule, filled with pictures, books, pamphlets and other miscellaneous items, was deposited in the base of the pioneer mother statue. The pictures included Mrs. John Trigg Moss, Chairman

of the National Old Trails Committee, NSDAR; Mrs. Henry C. Chiles, Regent of the Lafayette-Lexington Chapter, NSDAR; a National Old Trails Association Road meeting in Kansas City; Lexington High School; and Lexington Boy Scout Camp. (See attachment for complete list of items included in the time capsule.)

The Lexington Madonna inscriptions read:

West Face: MADONNA OF THE TRAIL N.S.D.A.R. MEMORIAL TO THE PIONEER MOTHERS OF THE COVERED WAGON DAYS

South Face: LEXINGTON SETTLED 1820 BY VIRGINIA AND KENTUCKY PIONEERS, EARLY TERMINUS OF RIVER TRANSPORTATION, STARTING POINT ON THE WESTERN TRAIL OF THE PACK PONEY AND OX CART.

East Face: THE NATIONAL OLD TRAILS ROAD

North Face: JOHN, HAMES AND ROBERT AULL RUSSELL MAJORS & WADDEL DONIPHAN PIONEERS-TRADERS SOLDIERS-CITIZENS OF LEXINGTON WHO GAVE VALIANT SERVICE TO THE WINNING OF THE WEST.

For weeks after the celebration, the Lexington News contained numerous articles from various organizations, praising the success of the event.

Under the leadership of Missouri State Society Daughters of the American Revolution (MSSDAR) Regent, Joan Magee, MSSDAR plans to completely restore the Madonna of the Trail located in Lexington and update the landscaping that surrounds her. Completion of the work is scheduled to be finished in 2021 prior to the celebration of the Missouri 2021 Bicentennial.

The history of the plans and work for the twelve Madonna of the Trail statues spanned a period of some nineteen years. The idea for the Madonna of the Trail Monuments began in 1909 when some Missouri Daughters wanted to mark the Santa Fe Trail. In 1911, the President General of NSDAR appointed Elizabeth Gentry of Kansas City, Missouri, as Chairman of the National Old Trail's Committee. Miss Gentry had been previously the Chairman of the Missouri Old Trails Committee which was started by the Kansas City Chapter's Santa Fe Trail Committee. The Missouri Old Trails Committee evolved into a MSSDAR State Committee, and finally became a National Committee of NSDAR. During that same time period, the National Old Trails Road Association (N.O.T.R.) was organized to study trails and post roads as they recorded the steady march of civilization from the East to the West.

The work of both the NSDAR and the N.O.T.R. was halted during World War I. In 1922, after Arline Moss was appointed to be the National Old Trails Committee Chairman and Harry S. Truman became president of the National Old Trails Association, planning was resumed. Mrs. Moss had previously served as MSSDAR Regent, as well as Regent of the Cornelia Greene Chapter, NSDAR.

Mrs. Moss decided to erect a monument to honor the pioneer mother after seeing a small picture of a statue in Portland, Oregon, erected to Sacajawea, the Shoshone

Indian woman who guided Lewis and Clark. Arline Moss worked for five months with her son, John Jr., an artist and an architect, to develop designs for the Madonna of the Trail monument.

In 1927, at the recommendation of the stone manufacturing company who would produce the statues, she presented her ideas to architectural sculptor, August Leimbach, although he had not entered the competition for the design. Mr. Leimbach was a German sculptor who came to St. Louis in 1910. Within three days, he had created a model and showed it to Mrs. Moss, who was departing immediately for a DAR meeting in Washington. Within days, she wired back that he was awarded the contract.

All twelve monuments are made of algonite stone (a poured mass) of which Missouri granite is the main aggregate, giving the monuments a warm pink shade. The figure Madonna stands 10 feet high on her 8-foot base and weighs five tons. All monuments were poured in the same mold and after sculpturing, shipped to the twelve locations listed below where they were mounted.

1. Bethesda, Maryland
2. Beallsville, Pennsylvania
3. Wheeling, West Virginia
4. Springfield, Ohio
5. Richmond, Indiana
6. Vandalia, Illinois
7. Lexington, Missouri
8. Council Grove, Kansas
9. Lamar, Colorado
10. Albuquerque, New Mexico
11. Springerville, Arizona
12. Upland, California

Sculptor Leimbach described his work; "The idea I had when I modeled the design was this: The pioneer mother with her children was waiting for the father at her blockhouse in the wild West, for the father did not come home as he had promised. She, believing him in danger, put her little child in a blanket, grasped the gun and with the boy ran out in the field to look for the father".

The gun is sketched from the gun of Daniel Boone, with his carvings on the shaft". "On the ground is prairie grass and cactus brushes, also arrow heads, and on one side in the shadows is a rattlesnake partly covered by grass". "The bust is of an uncle of mine whose grandfather came over to this country from Germany and landed at a spot in Ohio where there were 6 to 8 houses. This place today is called Cleveland".

"When a school boy in the old country, the American history of the pioneer days made an impression on me. I often thought of those who had left the old home and all that was dear to them and had come to this country to find a field for their ambition. When I came to America I often saw these pioneer types, strong and brave and always prepared to protect themselves

against any danger. Asked to make a sketch model of a monument of a woman of pioneer days, I was inspired by my own impression of these people I had met, and the Madonna of the Trail is the result".

The NSDAR paid for the creation of the twelve statues, with each DAR member asked to contribute ten cents. The N.O.T.R. Association and local authorities picked up the tab for freight and placement of the five-ton statues. The MSSDAR maintains the Madonna of the Trail in Lexington, Mo. All twelve Madonna of the Trail statues are maintained by their local state DAR Chapter to this day.

Thanks to those conscientious women from Missouri and the DAR and National Old Trails Road Association, the location of these Western paths have not been forgotten.

Harry Truman, who would become the 33rd U.S. president in 1945, dedicated almost all of the statues personally. He praised pioneer women, for whom the Madonna represents, stating, "They were just as brave or braver than their men because, in many cases, they went with sad hearts and trembling bodies. They went, however, and endured every hardship that befalls a pioneer."

MSSDAR State Regent Joan Magee and approximately 5,000 Missouri Daughters invite you to include a visit to Madonna of the Trail in Lexington, MO as part of your Missouri 2021 Bicentennial Celebration.

Submitted By:
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