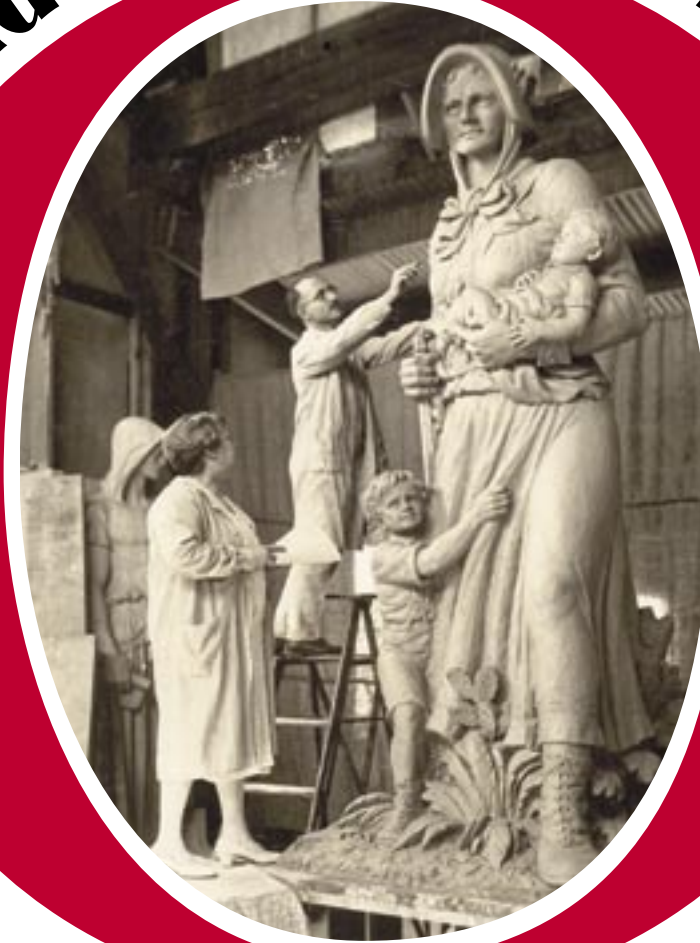


Madonna of the Trail



Signature of a Nation

In every second Sunday in May — this year on May 9 — Americans honor their mothers. Have you ever stopped to specifically consider our pioneer mothers? Have you ever wondered what drove them to endure weeks, perhaps years, of hardship on a quest to establish a new homestead?

by Cindy Thomson

When tracing your family tree, chances are you will end up looking in several localities. While some families staked claim to one area and stayed for generations, nearly every family has at least one branch that pulled up roots and headed elsewhere. Do you know the trails your ancestors used to reach their destinations?

America has many old pioneer trails, such as the Wilderness Trail, the Cumberland Road and the Oregon Trail. Tracing your family's travels can be more than just driving to a library or logging on to an Internet message board. If you actually retrace the footpaths of those who came before you, either in person or by doing research, you'll identify more fully with those ancestors and why they took to the road.

Surely such brave souls as pioneer mothers — and the dusty trails they traversed — have earned their moments of our remembrance. In 1909, a group of women in Missouri became concerned that the old pioneer paths were in danger of being forgotten. They sought to mark the Santa Fe Trail in their state. In 1912, U.S. Rep. William P. **Borland** from Missouri introduced a bill that gave all the historic routes the name National Old Trails Road. When U.S. 40, an ocean-to-ocean highway, was being planned, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) insisted that it be built along the historic trails. Thus began the partnership of the DAR and the National Old Trails Association.

The DAR proceeded by painting fence posts and telephone poles along the National Old Trails Road red, white and blue, and the group's slogan was "Follow the Flag of the DAR." But soon the idea was put aside because of World War I.

By 1924, the idea for roadside markers had grown into plans for 12 larger-than-life statues. Jackson County, Mo. administrative judge and future United States president Harry S. **Truman** was then president of the National Old Trails Road Association. He urged Congress to contribute \$1,000 per statue for the project. The monuments were the idea of Mrs. John **Trigg Moss**, chairwoman of the DAR Old Trails Road National Committee. In 1927, the design was named "Madonna of the Trail" to honor the pioneer mothers who traveled the trails, nurturing their families along the way. The sculptures were created by August **Leimbach**, a German native living in St. Louis.

Because of the DAR's commitment to preserving American history, it's no surprise that it conceived the idea of the Madonna of the Trail monuments. The monuments were, and still are, magnificent statues. All



12 are identical and made of a poured stone mixture containing Missouri granite, which gives each a pinkish hue. The statues are 10 feet tall, sit on a six-foot-tall base, and weigh about 17 tons each. Two sides on every statue's base carry identical inscriptions: "Madonna of the Trail, N.S.D.A.R. Memorial to the Pioneer Mothers of the Covered Wagon Days" and "The National Old Trails Road." The other two sides hold different sayings that vary according to the historical significance of each monument's location.

By the second decade of the 20th century, the tradition of honoring mothers was taking hold in America, just at the time marking old roads was becoming popular — even political. The DAR's dedications of the monuments helped bring attention to places such as Springerville, Ariz., and Richmond, Ind. But before site selections were made, any town vying for the privilege had to provide proof of its historical significance to the pioneer trails.

Two key people had to be lobbied for the honor: **Truman** and **Moss**. They toured the country to hear the pleas of various cities. In letters to his wife Bess, Harry **Truman** noted the competition. Regarding the decision in Kansas, he wrote on Oct. 2, 1927: "Dear Bess: The Kansas situation is settled. Council Grove won. It was a hard thing to settle but abiding by the rules and weighing in all the historical data obtainable, Council Grove won."

While in Arizona, **Truman** commented that even though he had received an excellent presentation from the people of Williams, "they never had done anything for the National Old Trails." And concerning the competition in New Mexico, he wrote, "... the Albuquerque delegation backed me into a corner and tried to force me to promise to vote for this town for the monument. Then

Each of the 12 Madonna of the Trail monuments bears a unique inscription. Below are the inscriptions on every monument, arranged from east to west, plus an interesting fact about that particular monument.

Bethesda, Md.

- Located on Rockville Pike (Maryland Route 355)
- Dedicated the week of April 19, 1929

This, the first military road in America beginning at Rock Creek and Potomac River, Georgetown, Maryland leading our pioneers across this continent to the Pacific. "To the honor and glory of the great motherhood of the past, I stand ... a sacred shrine. May all who pass within the shadow of my form, pause awhile, and understand the faith the ideals, and the real inner beauty of soul of those mothers of old, as they passed down the great homing trail of the nation."

— **Arline Nichols Moss**

Over this highway marched the army of Major General Edward **Braddock**, April 14, 1755, on its way to Fort Duquesne.

The monument's dedication was scheduled to coincide with the Daughters of the American Revolution's annual conference in Washington, D.C. DAR Regents from all 12 Madonna of the Trail sites attended.

Beallsville, Pa.

- Located on U.S. 40 across from the **Nemacolin** Country Club
- Dedicated Dec. 8, 1928

On this historic spot the hunting ground of the friendly Indian **Nemacolin**. This monument is erected and dedicated to the memory of our pioneer mothers.

Erected in nineteen hundred twenty eight in Washington County, Pennsylvania, the oldest county west of the Allegheny Mountains named for the father of our country.

The **Nemacolin** Country Club donated the land on which the Beallsville Monument sits. This monument has been rededicated twice.

Wheeling, W. Va.

- Located on U.S. 40 on the east side of the city
- Dedicated July 7, 1928

To the pioneer mothers of our mountain state whose courage, optimism, love and sacrifice made possible the national highway that united the East and West.

By the authority of the United States government and chiefly through the statesmanship of Henry **Clay**, this road was made possible in 1806.



a Santa Fe outfit did me the same way, and then Albuquerque started all over.”

It was a busy time for **Truman**. As he told his wife on Oct. 3: “I’ve got to get up at six-thirty [sic], meet Mrs. **Moss** at seven-thirty [sic], and at 9:00 A.M. [sic] hold another court to hear this town [Albuquerque], then drive to Santa Fe ... hear Santa Fe, come to a decision, and then start at Trinidad, Colorado, and hear Las Animas and Larimer and decide Colorado and then I’m coming home.”

After the locations were chosen, it didn’t take long to place the monuments. They were dedicated between July 4, 1928, and April 19, 1929. U.S. Vice President Charles **Curtis** spoke in Maryland at the last dedication. **Truman**, the future president, spoke at nearly all of the dedications, but in a minor role. The *Springfield* (Ohio)

Daily News carried a story about the events of the first dedication in Springfield. On July 5, 1928, the paper reprinted most of the address given by the keynote speaker, Judge D.D. **Woodmansee** of Cincinnati. The paper also recounted a large part of **Moss’** speech. But **Truman** is briefly quoted, calling the statue “... the Mother of the Mississippi Valley.” He added that “too much honor or glory cannot be heaped on the shoulders of the pioneer mothers.” **Truman** also declared the unveiling to be fitting of the nation’s 152nd birthday.

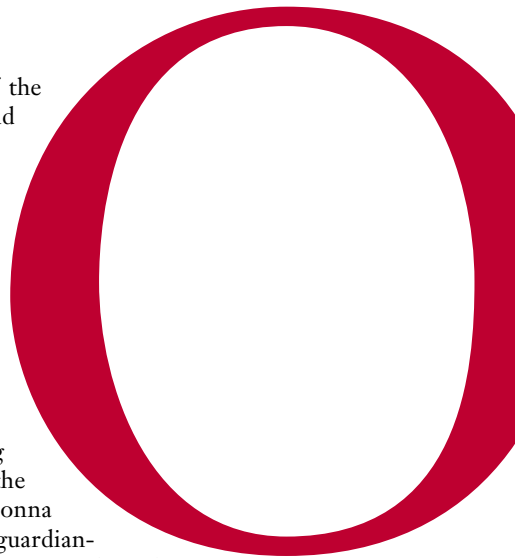
But it was **Moss** who made the most profound statements that day. Her speech in Springfield most likely was repeated in the 11 dedications that followed. According to the Springfield newspaper, she said, “The

statue is the autograph of the progress of the nation and symbolizes the dauntless strength and courage of the pioneer who traversed the territory in a covered wagon.” That autograph was effectively spread across the country and remains today for us to admire.

Moss was instrumental in planning and carrying out the dedications of the monuments. Each Madonna was then placed into the guardianship of local DAR chapters. Today, the chapters maintain the monuments and take pride in what the giant Madonnas represent.

The monuments have been restored and rededicated — some of them more than once. On Sept. 27, 2003, the Lamar, Colo., monument was rededicated, and many of the people who attended the original dedication returned for the ceremony. The DAR helps fund the upkeep of the monuments in part by selling pins depicting the Madonna of the Trail to DAR members. Various local organizations and government agencies also have contributed to the restorations.

So much is portrayed in these monuments. The pioneer mother, with a baby cradled in one arm and a child clutching her skirts, carries a rifle. She wears a sunbonnet; on her face is a determined expression. The historical significance of each Madonna’s portion of the trail is recorded for all time — the desire of the women



The Wheeling Park Commission added a road to make access to the monument easier for motorists.

Springfield, Ohio

- Located on U.S. 40 on the south end of **Snyder’s** Park Golf Course
- Dedicated July 4, 1928

Three miles southwest of here General George Rogers **Clark** commanding Kentucky frontiersmen vanquished the Shawnee Confederacy August 8, 1780 resulting in opening the Northwest Territory.

The National Road completed by the federal government to this point in 1839. From this point westward, built by the states through which it passes.

The first Madonna monument was unveiled in Springfield on the grounds of the masonic home. When an interchange through the site was constructed, the monument was moved a quarter-mile away.

Richmond, Ind.

- Located on U.S. 40 on the southwest corner of Glen **Miller** Park
- Dedicated Oct. 28, 1928.

The first toll gate in Indiana stood near this site on the National Road .

A nation’s highway! Once a wilderness trail over which hardy pioneers made their perilous way seeking new homes in the dense forests of the great northwest.

Following extensive restoration work, the monument was rededicated in 1988.

Vandalia, Ill.

- Located on the southeast corner of the old statehouse in downtown Vandalia
- Dedicated Oct. 26, 1928

The Cumberland Road built by the federal government was authorized by Congress and approved by Thomas **Jefferson** in 1806. Vandalia marks the western terminus.

At Vandalia, Abraham **Lincoln**, member of the Illinois Legislature first formulated those basic high principles of freedom and justice which gave the slaves a liberator, the Union a saviour.

The monument originally was placed at the western end of the Cumberland Road. It was moved a short distance in 1940.

Lexington, Mo.

- Located on the northeast corner of Highland Street and Cliff Drive
- Dedicated Sept. 17, 1928

Lexington settled 1820 by Virginia and Kentucky pioneers. Early terminus of river transportation, starting point on the western trail of the pack pony and ox cart.

John, James and Robert **Aull**, Russell **Majors** and



who first sought to mark the trail of their pioneer ancestors. Because the monuments are so tall, we cannot pass by without feeling that those who went before us were giants in courage, ingenuity and sheer grit.

Perhaps the most significant thing about these monuments is that they are all essentially identical. It may have been more cost-effective to have them all cast alike. Or, their likeness could be more symbolic: All the women who passed by those rugged roads were alike in some ways; most were mothers with multiple children. They were nurturers, mentors, teachers and nursemaids to their clans — all without the conveniences we enjoy today. Perhaps that's what **Moss** meant when she called the statues "the autograph of the progress of the nation."

More information on America's historical trails

Before the Revolutionary War, most people in America of European descent lived on the Eastern seaboard. The most convenient travel was on water, either up the coast on clipper ships or on rivers into the interior. Eventually the Great Wagon Road connecting Philadelphia and the Carolinas became a heavily traveled route. Many of the people on the Great Wagon Road were of German and Scot-Irish descent. For more information on this trail, see <ourworld.cs.com/JourneysThruTime/id113.htm>, or read *The*


Can the DAR Help You?

The Daughters of the American Revolution was founded in 1890 as a service organization for women. Its purpose is to preserve American history and promote patriotism. Approximately 170,000 women are members, and there are 2,296 chapters in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., and in several foreign countries.

The DAR has grown into a premier resource for genealogical research. Its vast library is open to the public and is located at 1776 D St. NW, Washington, D.C., 20006-5303. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays; it is closed on Sundays. Members of the DAR and its related organizations, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Sons of the Revolution and the Children of the American Revolution, are not charged to use the facility. Nonmembers are required to pay a small user fee.

The DAR holds unique and rare collections not found elsewhere. Although the focus is on the Revolutionary War era, the colonial era and the 19th century also are covered. The DAR is a repository for approximately 15,000 volumes of Genealogical Records Committee Reports, which are valuable resources for family histories, cemetery record transcriptions and Bible records. The library holds more than 150,000 book volumes, and adds about 5,000 books annually to its collection. The holdings also include the Seimes Microfilm Center, which houses 53,000 items. The DAR Library does not lend any of its collection or make copies; it is strictly a research library. Research help is available. Its Web site is <www.dar.org>.

According to the DAR Web site: "Researchers wishing to become more familiar with the large holdings of the Library and the other offices should consult the DAR's 1997 publication *American Genealogical Research* at the DAR, Washington, D.C. by Eric G. Grundset and Steven B. Rhodes. This is the first comprehensive guide to DAR collections designed to answer questions by both DAR members and general researchers."

To join the DAR, applicants must be a woman more than 18 years old and able to prove lineage to a Revolutionary War veteran or a patriot. The DAR offers research help. 

Waddel **Doniphan** pioneers-traders soldiers-citizens of Lexington who gave valiant service to the winning of the west.

The monument, which sits overlooking the Missouri River, has been rededicated twice.

Council Grove, Kan.

- Located on Main Street (U.S. 56) on the east side of the Neosho River
- Dedicated Sept. 7, 1928

Here, 'East meets West' when the 'old Santa Fe Trail' was established August 10, 1825 at a council between the United States commissioners and Osage Indians.

1825-1866 — Trailsmen

1847 — First white settler **Seth Hays**

1847 — Council Grove trading post

When the Council Grove monument was unveiled, the

largest crowd to attend a Madonna of the Trail dedication gathered. It is estimated that between 10,000 and 15,000 people attended.

Lamar, Colo.

- Located at South Main Street (Lamar Highway) and Beech Street
- Dedicated Sept. 24, 1928

A place of historical lore noted for Indian lodges; shelter from storm and heat; bivouac for expeditions; scene of many councils.

In commemoration of "big timbers" extending eastward and westward along Arkansas River approximately twenty miles and of Bent's new Fort. Later Fort Wise, 1852-1866.

Harry S. **Truman**, who helped select the sites for the Madonnas, was listed on the Lamar dedication program, but he did not appear.

Albuquerque, N.M.

- Located at Fourth and Marble NW on the grounds of the courthouse
- Dedicated Sept. 27, 1928

To the pioneer mother of America through whose courage and sacrifice the desert

has blossomed. The camp became a home, the blazed trail the thoroughfare.

Into the primitive West face upswung toward the sun bravely she came, her children beside her here she made a home, beautiful pioneer mother!



Great Wagon Road: From Philadelphia to the South by Parke **Rouse**, Dietz Press, 2001, 300 pp., \$15.95.

After Daniel **Boone** blazed the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap and into Kentucky, tens of thousands of people of English, Scot-Irish, Scottish, Welsh, German and French heritage followed that trail. For more, see <www.danielboonetrail.com/>, or read *Historic Highways of America: Boone's Wilderness Road* by Archer **Hulbert**, AMS Press, 1971 reprint edition, \$63.25, or *Blazing the Wilderness Road with Daniel Boone in American History* by Carl R. **Green**, Enslow Publishers, 2000, 112 pp., \$20.95.

Another trail, the National Road, also called the Cumberland Road, originated in Cumberland, Md., in 1811 and ended at Vandalia, Ill., by the year 1850. At that point, the railroad became the favored mode of transportation. The road was continued later as the National Old Trails Road and included other historic routes such as the Santa Fe and the Oregon trails. For more information on these trails, see <www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/bibearly.htm>, or refer to Archer **Hulbert's** Historic Highways 16-volume series noted above.

For a taste of life from the perspective of pioneer woman going to Oregon and California, read *Pioneer Women: The Lives of Women on the Frontier* by Linda **Peavy** and Ursula **Smith**, University of Oklahoma Press, 2003, 144 pp., \$15.98, and *Covered Wagon Women* by Kenneth L. **Holmes**, editor, University of Nebraska Press, 2003, 288 pp., \$14.95.

What is the National Road?

The National Old Trails Road, or Old National Road, which is now mostly U.S. 40, encompasses many historical trails including **Braddock's** Road, Cumberland Road, Boon's Lick Trail (a misspell-

ing of Daniel **Boone's** name), and the old Santa Fe Trail. In the late 1800s, with the advent of the railroad, the National Road lost importance. It wasn't until the 1920s, when the automobile became the preferred mode of transportation for the common man, that the issue of a national road was reborn.

More information on the National Road

- <college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_063600_nationalroad.htm>
- <www.route40.net/history/national-road.shtml>
- <www.connerprairie.org/historyonline/tamroads.html>
- *The National Road (The Road and American Culture)* by Karl B. **Raitz**, 424 pp.; \$40, Johns **Hopkins** University Press, 1996.
- *The Cumberland Road: A History of the National Road* by Reed B. **Day**, 43 pp.; \$8.95; available from Closson Press, 1996.
- *Old Pike: A History of the National Road, With Incidents, Accidents, and Antidotes Thereon* by Thomas **Searight**, 598 pp.; out of print. Heritage Books, 1991) [link](#)



Cindy Thomson, a frequent contributor to *Family History Magazine*, enjoys both historical and genealogical research. A former kindergarten teacher, she now spends her time taking care of her family, writing, and occasionally giving presentations to various groups on how to begin family research. She writes full time at home despite having three "sometimes noisy" teenage sons. She and her husband are raising their family in the Columbus, Ohio area.

The Albuquerque monument was moved from its original location to make room for a new federal courthouse. It now stands a few yards from the original site, but still overlooks El Camino Real, or the King's Highway.

Springerville, Ariz.

- Located on Main Street (U.S. 60) across from the post office
- Dedicated Sept. 29, 1928

A tribute to the pioneers of Arizona and the Southwest who trod this ground and braved the dangers of the Apache and other warrior tribes.

Coronado passed here in 1540 — he came to seek gold — but found fame

The monument has been moved from its original location, the intersection of the National Road and the Coronado Trail. It now sits in the town's center.

Upland, Calif.

- Located on old U.S. 66 at Foothill Boulevard and Euclid Avenue
- Dedicated Feb. 1, 1929

This trail, trod by the padres in Spanish days, became under Mexican rule, the road connecting Los Angeles, later the American Post Road.

Over this trail, November 1826 Jedediah **Smith**, seeking a river flowing westward, led a band of sixteen trappers, the first Americans to enter California overland.

The monument once suffered earthquake damage. A \$37,000 restoration was necessary and was carried out by **Wharton** and Associates. It was seismically stabilized in 1990. [link](#)

