

Dr. Bessie Moore

Pays rent for her space

Photo/Arkansas Democrat



Dr. Bessie Moore

By Betty Woods

Nine governors and three presidents have sought the help of Dr. Bessie Boehm Moore. In answering their calls and those of others, she has followed her father's advice to pay rent for living on this earth.

The nine governors have appointed her to the state Library Commission for a total of 39 years. The three presidents have named her as a member of the National Library Advisory Commission.

But, Dr. Moore is no politician herself, or so she claimed. She has never been chairman of the national group, a post reached by presidential appointment. But she has been vice chairman, a position elected by members of the commission. She has held that title since the permanent commission was formed in 1970.

"People give me too much credit," Dr. Moore said. "I can't do all these things by myself. If I do have a talent, it is the ability to create a sense of urgency in others to support the projects I see as necessary. Arkansans are good workers. They will work as a team to bring a program to fruition."

The biographical resume of Dr. Moore takes up three single-spaced typed pages.

It deals with her experience as an educator - a classroom teacher ... for 10 years state supervisor of economic education for the state Department of Education ... executive director of the Arkansas State Council on Economic Education ... national president of Economic Education.

Dr. Moore is the first living person to be honored with a building named for her at the University of Arkansas at

Fayetteville. The Bessie B. Moore Center for Economic Education was dedicated in 1979.

The biography lists her library work – organizer of the first county library in Arkansas at Pine Bluff in 1926 ... member of the Arkansas Library Commission since 1941 ... past national president of the American Library Trustees Association and winner of its award for outstanding service to libraries.

At 77, Dr. Moore is learning a typewriter keyboard in order to participate in the White House Conference on Library and Information Service. The Library Advisory Commission can enter and edit data on a typewriter-like keyboard, store the data in the built-in bubble memory and transmit the information via standard telephone lines to the host system for later access by other members around the country. The 28 members can save the expense of Washington meetings by voting through the computer system.

“I certainly was not going to be the only member who couldn’t use the system,” she declared. “I have input I wish to make.”

Dr. Moore has many writing credits to her name, as contributor to education and library periodicals as well as economic journals.

She has also served as a member of the board of directors of First National Bank of Little Rock.

Her civic and political activities are listed – member of the committee of Little Rock residents whose findings brought about the expansion of Little Rock Junior College into a four-year institution ... delegate to the Democratic National Convention ... chairman of the Mountain View Folk Cultural Center Commission ... member of the Governor’s Advisory Committee on the Status of Women and on the Aging ... Woman of the Year for Arkansas ... Freedoms Foundation Medal for distinguished service to education.

Dr. Moore takes vocal pride in some of her accomplishments, denying all the

time that she should be getting the sole credit:

– “I was in on the beginnings of early childhood education when I first started with the state Department of Education in the early 1930s. I was in charge of 13 nursery schools.

– “Arkansas’ economic education program is a model one, the top one in the country. Japanese have been here to be trained. Our program has been examined by people from Quebec, from Italy, from Australia.

“I became involved as a student at the University of Connecticut, when I was working on my master’s degree. I saw the need for economic education in Arkansas and switched from reading specialist to that field.”

Edgar Boehm was a great influence on the life of his daughter. He taught her to pay for living on this earth, and he taught her to finish what she started.

“This was ingrained in me. It’s almost physically impossible for me to leave a project unfinished.”

And her concern for libraries is a continuing project.

“Libraries are becoming increasingly important in the world today. They are an important source of information for everything and everybody – daily living, business. That is why I am deeply interested in the work of the White House Conference. It is an outgrowth of a series of state and territorial meetings, 57 of them, where problems of libraries and directions were discussed. This national group is exploring these findings and adding to them broader issues the state would not be aware of.”

Through the home computer, Dr. Moore and her colleagues report at least three times a week to the central data bank.

Dr. Moore has retired from her paying jobs, but Dr. Bessie Boehm Moore of Little Rock has not retired from living and leading.

Betty Woods is Style editor for the Arkansas Democrat.