

# Lee and Beulah Moor Left Legacy of Love

By Anna Hoffer and Perla Talamantes

Fifty years ago, children from troubled homes had few opportunities to grow up in a nurturing atmosphere. Yes, there were institutions – usually cold, impersonal and often worse than the homes the children left. But 100 and more years ago, children from problem homes were at the mercy of relatives, or often, on their own. This is the story of two such children who grew up, became incredibly successful and decided that they would provide a place for children at risk. Lee and Beulah Moor chose to live and work in El Paso, and they left a beautiful legacy of care and love through a home which gives children of troubled families a chance at a bright future.

The Lee & Beulah Moor Children's Home was the result of a long time dream and a generous trust the Moors created. Who were these generous but private people? What caused them to want to design such a place?

Lee Moor was born on Nov. 21, 1870, in what is today Paris, TX. His parents were Sallie and Joseph Fitzgerald Moor, both apparently from Alabama. In the biography *Lee Moor: Shirt Pocket Tycoon*,



Lee Moor

Hawley Richeson wrote that research indicates that Joseph Moor was a doctor with the 19th Regiment of Dea's Alabama Brigade during the Civil War. Injuries acquired in battle, along with the Confederate loss, caused him to become withdrawn from his family and society in general, causing problems between the child's parents.

After Lee Moor's birth, Joseph took Sallie and his young son to live with her family in Jacksonville, TX. Richeson said that Joseph traveled west, and began ranching near Orogrande, NM. Sallie acquired a divorce from Joseph and remained bitter about it throughout the rest of her life, refusing support from her former husband and denying him any contact with Lee, facts the child would learn only as a young man.

Lee Moor was able to attend school regularly only through the third grade, leaving to help support his mother. He would return to school sporadically until he was 15. The little boy plowed fields with a team even though he could not reach the plow handles, and when he was eight years old, Lee landed a part-time job hauling lumber for a sawmill. He was paid with

lumber instead of money, amassing building materials which allowed his uncles to build his mother and him a house.

At 10, Lee went to work as a water boy for the Cottonbelt Railroad. He saw the men he met on the railroad as father figures and considered this period of his childhood his happiest. As Lee grew older, he advanced with the railroad to freight loading and eventually to management.

When Lee discovered the facts about his parents, he decided to meet his father, so at 17, he arranged a leave from the railroad. He set out on horseback, traveling over 700 miles west to El Paso. Once there he discovered that his father had a ranch between Orogrande and Cloudcroft, in the Sacramento Mountains in New Mexico. He stayed and worked with his father less than a year due to his mother's repeated demands for his return.

After returning to Jacksonville, he resumed his job with the Cottonbelt Railroad, earning regular promotions. He was eventually named station master at Hillsboro, TX, where he met Beulah Ethel Johnson. This was also where his 18-year railroad career ended, when he became infected with tuberculosis.

Beulah Johnson was born in Waco, TX, the daughter of a prosperous farmer. Her mother died when she was only four years old. She had two sisters and a brother along with nine half brothers and sisters from her parents' previous marriages. Her father died when she was a preteen, and after money her father had left for the children's support was gone, she was moved from one relative to another for years. She had finished her education and was teaching school in Hillsboro when she met Lee Moor in 1898. He conducted a determined courtship over the next two years, most of it by mail.

Richeson stated that doctors had told Lee that he must move to a dry climate, sleep outdoors and drink goat milk in order to survive tuberculosis. At first, he tried to live in Cloudcroft, NM, but found it too cold in the winter. He then moved down the mountain to High Rolls, where he found a goat rancher who agreed to let Moor sleep in his barn. In return, Moor worked for the rancher as he became stronger.

Beulah Johnson eventually traveled to El Paso and married Lee Moor on April 18, 1900. Their first home was an adobe house on his father's ranch in Wildy Well, six miles north of Orogrande. After his father and his partner, Oliver Lee, lost their ranch during a prolonged drought, and Joseph Moor returned to El Paso to open a livery stable, Lee and Beulah began ranching south of their Wildy Well home, raising both cattle and sheep, an act unpopular with cattle ranchers. Through a series of fortuitous situations, Moor made a tidy profit selling more than half of his large flock of sheep.

Richeson stated that Moor was concerned about the future of ranching in such an arid location, and the Moors sold the ranch in 1903, the profit of which was to be the basis for their later fortune. He and Beulah moved to El Paso and purchased a home on Yandell Street in the Sunset Heights area. Since the home had more room than they needed, Beulah turned the rest of their residence into a rooming house. Moor started a contracting business, using some of the mules he had kept from the ranch. His first big contract was for leveling, grading and building roads for the Golden Hill Terrace area in El Paso.

His next project was a dam project in Chihuahua City, Mexico, where he met George Orr, another contractor from El Paso who helped Moor obtain a job building a railroad from Ojinaga to Chihuahua

City. Without complaint, Beulah moved to the railroad camp and began working, bringing water and food to the workers in a mule-drawn wagon. In 1910, the Lee Moor Contracting Company was established by Lee Moor, George Orr and W. A. Rawls. They secured a subcontract to lay track for the Santa Fe Railway Company which would go from Albuquerque to Los Angeles.

The Moors decided to stay in California when the job was finished. With complete control of the construction company, Moor took on the major task of carving out a highway through the mountains from Los Angeles to Bakersfield, uniting southern California with the north. Called the Ridge Route, the scenic road included 697 curves and is one of two California highways to be on the National Register.

Richeson related that while the Moors enjoyed their time in California, they felt that El Paso was home, returning in 1916. The couple built a house at 1100 River St. in 1923. A few months later they adopted an infant girl and named her Betty Lee Moor. She would marry a New York boy who graduated from the



Beulah Moor

University of Texas at Austin, John MacGuire, and the couple would give the Moors two granddaughters.

The Lee Moor Contracting Company prospered for 40 years. During World War II, Moor's firm was among those which built air bases in West Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, including Williams, Biggs, Holloman and Deming Air Force Bases. The company built thousands of miles of railroads, bridges and dams in California and the Southwest. This part of Moor's business was phased out in 1955 with its final significant contract being the construction of Paisano Drive in El Paso.

While his contracting business grew, Moor also was acquiring farmland. He eventually would own more than 4,600 acres, including 3,600 in El Paso County and another 1,040 near Tucson, mainly producing cotton. He provided houses for his workers as well as food service, with the result that his farms became "self-contained communities," as Richeson wrote. When employees became too old to work, Moor provided

continued on page 15



*Moor continued from page 16*

small pensions and an option to remain living on the farm. In all his businesses, Moor demanded much of his workers but gave much in return.

By 1940, Moor had also expanded his cattle ranching interests, owning and leasing hundreds of sections of land (a section consists of 640 acres) in Hudspeth County, TX, and northern Mexico between Juárez and Palomas, in addition to his farm in Clint. The land was able to support some 4,000 head of cattle in Texas and another 6,000 head in Mexico. Richeson said that Moor's two biggest markets were Peyton Packing Company in El Paso and Swift and Company in Fort Worth.

A reader might ask, how could Lee Moor have time to do anything else? However, in the mid to late 1920s, he would join a venture that would become "his leading source of wealth," according to Richeson. The business? Running natural gas transmission systems to cities and towns in the Southwest. And so Moor invested heavily and acquired a large number of shares in the business that would soon be known as Southern Union Gas Company. When Richeson wrote his book on Moor in 1974, the company had a plant worth more than \$330,000,000 and annual sales of \$130,000,00 to half a million customers in the Southwest. Today the company is worth billions and is one of the largest pipeline operators in the country.

The financial empire of the Moors was made possible by several factors, not the least of which was a willingness to work 12 to 16 hours a day, including Saturdays. Moor expected his employees to work as hard and long as he did – and they did. Employees tended to stay with Moor for a long time. He had only one secretary his entire career, Bess Waskey. Likewise, Moor did not race out to buy the newest model of equipment. He was known for repairing vehicles and machinery over and over as long as they were still functional. Nothing was ever wasted, but he was generous to his employees and friends.

Moor was also modest in his appearance; clothes were strictly functional. He did not seek out publicity and had lifelong friends that the Moors made when they were young. As the title of Richeson's book implies, he kept records and made business plans in small notebooks he carried in his shirt pockets and crammed his wallet full of notes on his various projects. He kept an office of two small rooms in El Paso's Bassett Tower, giving up his desk for a small table when the space was needed for something else. But he was not afraid to take risks when others folded.

In the 1930s, the Moors became concerned about inheritance taxes, and they started putting their assets into trusts in order to avoid probate. The Moors

discussed creating a large trust for a children's home in El Paso. Richeson wrote that this was probably due to their own experiences during childhood. In December 1949, the trust for a children's home was established.

Involved in many charitable and philanthropic activities, the Moors were very generous to the community they loved. They made large donations to Providence Memorial Hospital which enabled it to function and to add many amenities, and they gave the University of Texas at El Paso a large tract of land, according to Richeson.

Beulah Moor died on September 23, 1951. Lee Moor died on December 15, 1958, at the age of 88. *The El Paso Herald-Post* reported in 1973 that the trust which the Moors established for the children's home consisted of property and cash worth \$9 million. Due to Moor's desire for privacy, the construction of the children's home, just a block away from the family home, was delayed until after his death.

campus is located on 13 acres at 1100 East Cliff Dr. The home offered foster care and adoption services, help for unmarried mothers and counseling for children with problems. The children were to eat, sleep and play at the home but go into the community for school, church and some recreational activities. Betty and John MacGuire would serve on the Board of Trustees.

Today, the Lee & Beulah Moor Children's Home provides residential services, foster care, adoption services, tutoring, recreation, life-skills development and individual, family and unplanned pregnancy counseling, according to their website. Residential services are provided when the parent is unable to provide a safe environment for the child, there has been violence at school or at home or parents have health problems. The anticipated length of stay is 15 months. The parents or their representatives are legally responsible for the children and must visit them regularly.

The campus consists of residential cottages, administrative offices, several nearby group homes, a gymnasium, a library and learning center, a support services building and landscaped areas including playgrounds and gardens. The children also use Camp Leavell, a recreational camp at Three Rivers, NM, donated by businessman Charles Leavell, an original member of the home's trustees.

In an interview with Anna Hoffer, Jim Thomas, Senior Administrator for Development and Activities, said that in the past 52 years, more than 20,000 children have been cared for at the home. They have been nurtured, loved and inspired. Today, because the economic downturn is putting a strain on family life, there are more children needing to come to the home than they have room for, according to Thomas. He said, "Families are hurting."

Lee and Beulah Moor's hard work, business acumen

and love of children have made their dream come true, a dream to give children a chance to live in a family atmosphere when their own home situation dissolves or becomes dysfunctional. The home meets the needs of the children and provides an essential service to the El Paso area. The Moors provided everything needed to make their dream come true – money, land, and most of all, Love with a capital L. It is fitting that on Lee Moor's gravestone these words are written: "Suffer the little children, to come unto me ..." (Mark 10:14). ♥

*(Photos on page 16 by Heather Coons of paintings of Lee and Beulah Moor which grace the entrance of the Children's Home)*



**A hummingbird and butterfly garden beautifies the grounds of Lee & Beulah Moor Children's Home. (Photo by Heather Coons)**

Richeson wrote that Lee Moor's personal philosophies served as the basis upon which the children's home established its organizational principles. According to the *Herald-Post*, the home was founded to care for youngsters whose home life did not take care of their basic needs. The Moors believed the home should be comfortable and attractive. Richeson said that the Moors believed that no child should be turned away on the basis of their race or religion. The number of children served by the home should be limited, so that each child could receive quality care. Furthermore, Moor felt that the children should receive help until the completion of high school, but if the trustees agreed, they could also receive support for college, which would later be repaid by the student.

The Lee & Beulah Moor Children's Home opened its doors in December 1959. The main residential