

The Rocky Mountain Section of the Society of Women Engineers

ANNUALLY AWARDS

The Pioneer Scholarship

The Pioneer Scholarship was established in memory of three pioneering women engineering graduates of the University of Colorado - Boulder: Hilda Counts Edgecomb (1919), Elsie Eaves (1920), and Lou Alta Melton Merrill (1920). During their college years, these women had a goal of forming an organization of women engineers and architects. The American Society of Women Engineers and Architects, a forerunner of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) was established, although it did not survive. Thirty years after their efforts to establish a women's engineering organization, Elsie Eaves and Hilda Counts Edgecomb became charter members of SWE.

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY
OF
Women Engineers
AND
Architects

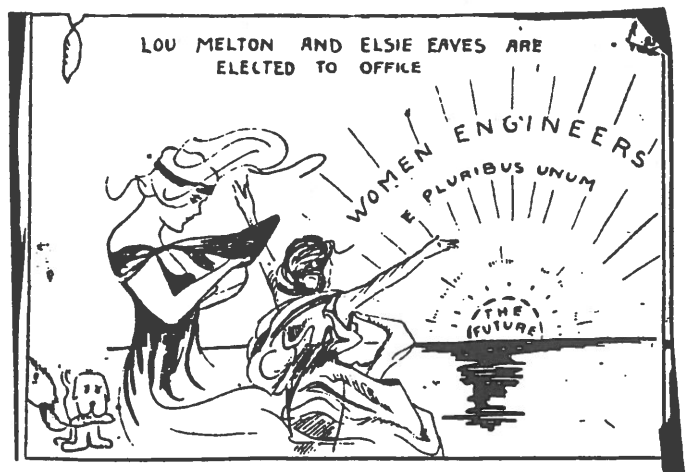
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Hilda Counts Edgecomb

Hilda Counts Edgecomb (1893-1989) received an A.B. degree from the University of Colorado in 1915 and taught high school mathematics and physics for two years before returning to study electrical engineering. Upon receiving her electrical engineering degree (the first awarded a woman by the University of Colorado), Hilda spent two years with Westinghouse Electric Corporation where she was accepted in the student training course. After this training, she returned to the University for graduate work. She then went to work for Public Service Company of Colorado, but became inactive in engineering following her marriage to Arthur Edgecomb.



Hilda Counts Edgecomb

Following his death, she accepted employment with Boeing Aircraft and later worked with the U.S. Corps of Engineers at Lowry Field. In 1943, she joined the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), where she worked until her retirement in 1963. However, she was immediately re-employed and continued to work for the REA until 1976. She became a Registered Professional Engineer in Missouri. Hilda was a National Director and Treasurer of the Society of Women Engineers 1950-1951. There is an entry from the minutes of the SWE Board of Directors meeting from June 1951 that reads "Mrs. Edgecomb presented a piece of pine wood from the original White House to the Society to have a gavel made from it." She was a member of the Washington, D.C. Society of Professional Engineers where she served as a Board member and chaired the Construction and Bylaws committees.

Hilda is remembered as a person with endless time and patience for others, and for other women engineers in particular. In 1952, she visited the Denver area and with the assistance of several others, began the Denver Section (later renamed the Rocky Mountain Section) of SWE which received its charter in 1954. She was always passing great opportunities on to other women engineers. In 1975, she received a Special Award from the Greater Washington Engineering Council.

Elsie Eaves

Elsie Eaves (1898-1983) was elected a Fellow member of SWE, the first year SWE elected Fellows. At that time it was said that Elsie "always encouraged women by her active example and participation." A life member of SWE, she served on the SWE Board of Trustees and had numerous firsts to her credit.

Because her father wanted her to go to a coeducational school, she turned down a scholarship to the Colorado School of Mines and entered the University of Colorado where in 1920 she received her B.S. in civil engineering (with honors). In her first jobs, she was a draftsman for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, and the Colorado State Highway Department; an instructor of engineering mathematics at her alma mater; and an office engineer for Col. Herbert S. Crocker, consulting engineer, and for Crocker & Fischer, contractors in Denver.

Then she headed east and came to McGraw-Hill. The late Col. Willard T. Chevalier hired Elsie (after an editor told her "a woman's place, if not in the home, is in the department store") and created her job as assistant on market surveys for *Engineering News-Record* in 1926. She became Director of Market Surveys for *Engineering News-Record* and *Construction Methods and Equipment* shortly thereafter. In 1932, Elsie moved to the position of Manager of Business News Department, where she directed the activities of 100 staffers throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Her career in the publishing field was a series of "firsts." In 1929, Elsie originated and compiled the first national inventory of municipal and industrial sewage disposal facilities - an analysis which she recompiled at regular intervals. A few years later, she compiled statistics on needed construction, which aided the passage of the Federal Loan-Grant legislation used to revitalize the construction industry during the 1931-1935 depression. In 1945, she organized and directed the *Engineering News-Record's* measurement of Post War Planning by the Construction Industry which was used by the Committee for Economic Development and the American Society of Civil Engineers as the official progress report of the industry. This index was unprecedented in the field of engineering analysis. Under Elsie's direction, the "Post War Planning" statistics were converted into a continuous inventory of planned construction. This has become the *Engineering News-Record's* "Backlog of Proposed Construction," an index to more than \$100 billion of construction activity. Another of her unique "firsts" was defining the limits and editing the pilot issues of the *Construction Daily*, a nationwide service.

A licensed professional engineer, Elsie was a member of the New York State Society of Professional Engineers and a life member in the Colorado Society of Engineers. Her awards from the University of Colorado - Boulder included the first woman to receive the Distinguished Engineering Alumna Award (1973), Norlin Award (1974), and Centennial Medalist (1994).

Elsie was a pioneer in the field of engineering and her firsts are many: First chapter honor member of University of Colorado chapter of Chi Epsilon (national civil engineering honor fraternity). First woman to graduate in civil engineering from the University of Colorado - Boulder, and only fourth woman to graduate in engineering (1920). First woman member of the American Society of Civil Engineers (1927). First woman to be a life member of the American Society of Civil Engineers (1962?). First woman elected to honorary membership of the American Society of Civil Engineers (1979). Also first woman to be elected Associate Member, Fellow of ASCE. First woman licensed as a professional engineer in New York State. First woman to hold a mar-



Elsie Eaves

ket survey position at McGraw Hill. First and for a long time, the only, woman member of the American Association of Cost Engineers (1957) as well as the first civil engineer. First woman to receive the Honorary Life Membership Award from the American Associate of Cost Engineers (1973). First woman to receive the International Executive Service Corporation "Service to the Country" award. First woman to receive the American Association of Civil Engineer's Award of Merit (1967). First woman to deliver Arthur Boase Lecture for the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Colorado - Boulder.

Lou Alta Melton Merrill



Lou Alta Melton Merrill

Lou Alta Melton Merrill (1885-1974) was a builder of bridges. Born in Texas, Lou Alta's family moved around much in her youth, but settled in Boulder where she studied civil engineering (and not law) at the University of Colorado. She was the President of the American Society of Women Engineers and Architects during that time. Upon graduation, Lou Alta was hired by the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads to design and build bridges for the newly expanding highway systems in Wyoming, Montana, and later California. In 1921, she was transferred to Missoula, Montana where she was assistant bridge engineer. The project with which she was most intimately associated was the bridge over the Blackfoot River on U.S. Highway 10 between Missoula and Bonner, Montana, a bridge that is still standing.

In the Spring of 1922, Lou Alta was sent to Oakland/San Francisco to work on a bridge there. In August of 1922, Archie Merrill, a mathematics professor she had met in Missoula, drove out to California and they were married at the home of her cousin.

After their marriage, Lou Alta never went back to bridges. She designed the home they built and lived in for almost forty years. Lou Alta was exceedingly active in community affairs. She learned to weave, designing and creating original patterns which she then wove and sewed into tableware, linen, and clothing. She was a gardener, particularly of roses, and was a prime mover in establishing the Memorial Rose Garden, a still thriving testament to her work. She was active in youth activities including Camp Fire Girls, Rainbow Girls, and the state vocational school for delinquent girls. During World War II, she replaced drafting staff and taught in the Montana State University's (now University of Montana) mathematics department. After Archie's retirement, the Merrills moved to Arizona where Lou Alta was active in the Tempe Garden Club and Desert Weavers.

The Society of Women Engineers

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