

ARMSTRONG, Beulah. November 18, 1895–February 22, 1965.

BAKER UNIVERSITY (BA 1917), UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS (MA 1918), UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS (PhD 1921).

Beulah May Armstrong was born in Sterling, Kansas, the only daughter and the third of five children of Lillie J. (Detter), born in 1872, and John Allen Armstrong, born in 1867, both natives of Pennsylvania. Her parents married in about 1888. Her brothers were all born in Kansas: Guy W. in 1889, Russell B. in 1894, John A. in 1897, and William Keith in about 1905. In 1900 the family was living in Enterprise Township, Kansas, where her father was a farmer; in 1910 they were in Hutchinson, Kansas, and her father owned or managed a hardware store. The family remained in Hutchinson, and no occupation was listed for her father in later census reports.

Armstrong graduated from Hutchinson High School before entering Baker University, a coeducational school affiliated with the Methodist Church, in Baldwin City in eastern Kansas. While at Baker she became a member of the social sorority Zeta Tau Alpha. After her graduation from Baker University in 1917, Armstrong held a scholarship for a year at the nearby University of Kansas. She received her master's degree in 1918 and was awarded a fellowship at Kansas for the following year but resigned it, apparently to continue her graduate work at the University of Illinois with a scholarship in 1918–19 and a fellowship in 1919–21. She received her PhD in 1921 from Illinois with a dissertation in group theory.

Armstrong remained at Illinois as instructor 1921–31, associate 1931–45, assistant professor 1945–59, and associate professor from 1959 until her retirement in 1963 as associate professor emeritus. A former colleague, P. W. Ketchum, recalled that, “as a teacher she was tops.” She was heavily involved with advising students who were planning to become mathematics teachers and taught many of the courses they were to take. She also was an instructor in the University of Illinois correspondence course program.

Armstrong was active in a number of organizations on and off campus. She was a charter member of the University of Illinois chapter of Sigma Delta Epsilon, graduate fraternity for women in science; she remained active at the local level and was honored for her contributions at the time of her retirement. She also served as national treasurer in 1946 and 1947. She served as secretary and treasurer of the Illinois chapter of Sigma Xi and was a member of Kappa Delta Pi, an education honor society. While at the University of Illinois, she continued her interest in her college social sorority, Zeta Tau Alpha, and was honored by them in 1964 for her service to the Illinois chapter and the Champaign-Urbana alumnae association. She had held advisory and corporate board positions for the chapter and offices in the alumnae association. After her death a memorial study in the chapter house at Illinois was established in her name.

Armstrong was described by P. W. Ketchum as athletic, and he related that she and his wife, [Gertrude Stith Ketchum](#), played volleyball. In 1937 Beulah Armstrong indicated that she was especially interested in reading, philanthropy, and traveling. For her entry in *Who's Who of American Women* in the late 1950s, she identified as a Republican and a Methodist. She was a member of Wesley Methodist Church in Urbana, was active in the work of the Wesley Foundation, and in 1923 served as national president of Kappa Phi, a non-denominational group for Christian university women.

Shortly after her retirement, Armstrong indicated that she was expecting to move to a retirement community in Boulder, Colorado, in about a year and a half. However, she died suddenly of a coronary occlusion at age sixty-nine at her home in Urbana, Illinois, in 1965. She was survived by three brothers, Guy W. Armstrong, R. B. Armstrong, and W. Keith Armstrong. She was buried in Fairlawn Cemetery, Hutchinson, Kansas. Her estate included a bequest of \$1,000 to Baker University.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, Sigma Delta Epsilon, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, Pi Mu Epsilon.

Thesis and dissertation:

1918 Simple and complete K-points in a modular projective plane. MA thesis, University of Kansas.

1921 Mathematical induction in group theory. PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, directed by George Abram Miller.

References to: AmMSc 4–8, 9P–11P, WhoAmW 1.

“Dr. Beulah Armstrong Is Honored by Sigma Delta Epsilon Fraternity.” *Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette*, 23 May 1963.

“Prof. Armstrong Dies.” *Champaign-Urbana Courier*, 23 Feb 1965.

“Armstrong Rites Are Thursday.” *Champaign-Urbana Courier*, 24 Feb 1965.

“Beulah Armstrong.” (Obituary) *Hutchinson (KS) News*, n.d.

Other sources: Owens questionnaire 1937; P. W. Ketchum, conversation with author and Uta C. Merzbach, 23 Mar 1983, Urbana, IL; communication with Baker University Alumni Relations; US Census 1900, 1910, 1920 KS, 1930 IL; Illinois death certificate.

Last modified: October 24, 2008.