

## **Asa H. Moore (1820-1901)**

Asa Harvey Moore was born on October 20, 1820 in Rutland, Westchester County, Massachusetts. He was the oldest child of Asa and Sabra Lovell Moore, both of Royalston, Massachusetts.

Asa H. went to boarding school in Worcester, Massachusetts where he received training in industry. However, he was a farmer until he was 19 years old. He then began his career in the railroad business as a freight house employee for the Boston and Worcester Railroad Company at Grafton, Massachusetts. By 1845 he became the conductor of the Old Colony Railroad running from Boston to Springfield, Massachusetts, and also was the conductor to make the first Boston to Plymouth passenger train run. He worked for the Western Railroad for about 11 years.

In May of 1848 he married Nancy B. Washburn in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Nancy was born in January 1829 and was the daughter of John Washburn. Her family was direct descendants of Governor William Bradford, who came to America on the *Mayflower* and was governor of the colony at Plymouth, Massachusetts. They had three children: Thomas W., born in 1856 and died in a hotel fire on November 13, 1888; Mary C. Moore Maxwell, born in July 1858; and an unnamed child who probably died at birth in October 1872.

In 1850 he and his wife moved west to LaPorte, Indiana where he was made an engineer on the Michigan Southern Railroad for the route running from Chicago, Illinois to White Pigeon, Michigan. He also held the position of Assistant Superintendent of the Michigan Southern Railroad until 1854 when he and his family moved to Bloomington, Illinois.

When Asa and Nancy came to Bloomington in 1854 Asa became the train master and eventually the general superintendent of the Chicago-Alton Railroad route through Bloomington. Asa also became heavily invested in real estate owning lumber yards in the towns of Shirley, McLean, and Bloomington. He also owned considerable amounts of land in Shirley and McLean where he built stations on the Alton railroad line. After a time, he sold most of his property outside of Bloomington and began to focus more on various enterprises within Bloomington. One of his best pieces of property was his own home, an Italian-style villa, which was located on North Main Street. He and his family lived there from 1870 until his death in 1901.

From 1859 to 1860 Asa became one of the incorporators and first president of the Bank of Bloomington. He sold his interests in the bank to Isaac Funk who renamed the bank First National.

The event Asa is most well known for was in 1869, when he purchased approximately \$50,000 of shares of the Horse Railroads of Bloomington. He purchased these shares from some of Bloomington's well known citizens such as Judge David Davis, Jesse Fell, Norval Dixon, and Putnam Ferre.<sup>1</sup> The railway he purchased extended from Grove Street in Bloomington to the Illinois Central Railroad in Normal. On January 1, 1870 he took possession of the company officially and renamed it the Bloomington/Normal Horse Railway Company.

Asa did much for the horse railway and also spent much of his own money to upgrade and add to the existing horse railway tracks in Bloomington/Normal. From the time he

---

<sup>1</sup> "Asa Moore is Dead." *The Daily Pantagraph*, August 14, 1901

took possession of the Horse Railway in 1870 until he sold it to John Graham in 1887, he extended the line to: the Illinois Central Railroad Depot in Normal, built the Chestnut Street Branch, added the West Washington Street to the Chicago and Alton Railroad Depot line, built the East Front Street Branch crossing the Illinois Central Railroad at Towanda Ave., and had the franchise to build the Miller Street branch in place before he sold the entire line. Through all of these additions, he extended the Horse Railway from two miles to almost nine miles.<sup>2</sup>

His biggest change in street railways was instituted in 1872. Asa eliminated the street car conductors' position and made the street cars operated only by the driver. He accomplished this by placing patented money boxes on the front platform of each car next to the driver. Passengers were expected to place their fares in the box upon boarding. If they neglected to do this, the driver would either ring his bell to remind them to pay the fare or he would stop the mules and go back into the passenger compartment and personally collect the fare. This new innovation was being implemented on street railways throughout the country during this time. It was with the advent of the coin boxes and lack of a conductor which may have contributed to the accident involving the electric streetcar driver David Law on March 17, 1893 (six years after Asa Moore had already sold his horse railway company).

The horse railway was a daily topic in the *Daily Pantagraph*, which commented on track conditions, accidents, run away mules and horses, upgrades, community needs and concerns, and maintenance of the streetcars. Regardless of the hazards and accidents that did occur, Asa's horse railway company was considered one of the best railway systems of its kind outside of Chicago. His horse railway prompted another local resident, Frances Mueller Sr., to compose a song titled "Street Car Gallop" in 1887.

Asa was not only a horse railway owner but he also owned considerable amounts of real estate throughout the Bloomington and Normal area. In addition, he owned shares in other business ventures such as in the Blue Monday Gold Mine in Arizona. While he was a prominent business man, he never had any political aspirations.

After owning the horse railway for 17 years, from 1870-1887, Asa sold his entire street railway system in Bloomington/Normal to a Pennsylvania syndicate comprised of Judge John Graham, Judge W.F. Sadler, and J.B. Hursh on May 19, 1887. Asa sold 6 miles of track, 51 head of mules, 10 cars, a truck barn on Park Street, tools, feed on hand, and other miscellaneous items. It is estimated that Asa got somewhere between \$125,000 and \$150,000 for the railway system, which would be the equivalent of almost \$2.9 million in 2005 value.

In the last years of his life, Asa and his wife Nancy moved to Chicago and lived near his daughter and her family on Lake Avenue in the suburb of Hyde Park. Asa died on August 14, 1901 at his Hyde Park residence at the age of 80. The cause of his death was listed as softening of the brain. It was estimated that his estate was worth \$300,000 and in today's economy would have been the equivalent of almost \$6.9 million. In 1890 he had purchased a large family monument made of Barre Granite from Vermont. He placed this on the family plot in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois where he was buried. His wife Nancy, who died in November 1908, was also buried at the family plot.

---

<sup>2</sup> S.J. Clarke Publishing Company. *The Biographical Record of McLean County, IL*. (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1899) 104

By: Candace Summers, 2005