

## The Moore House, Sparta

*Donna Moore*



In June 2007, I was contacted by a friend from the United Empire Loyalist's Association who told me that the Moore house in Sparta was under threat of a demolition order. She wondered if I could lend some family support to help preserve the home.

I had known of Moore house for many years, having seen it on my travels to Sparta and having read the article about it that appeared in *Century Home* magazine in 1985. But I had never been inside the home, and had not seen the outside for many years.

I contacted one of the Councillors for the Municipality of Central Elgin and learned of her grave concern that this building could be lost. She asked if I could get a letter writing campaign going. What has ensued has been an adventure. I have met and been inspired by

many people who have a deep commitment to heritage issues. I have learned more about my Moore family history. I have been frustrated and concerned about the state of historical preservation in Ontario.

A visit to the house ensured me that this house was worth preserving. I saw a well built home sitting high against the Sparta moraine looking out toward a very pretty pond and the village of Sparta beyond. I contacted Sam McLorn, who had owned the property when it was lovingly restored as a Centennial project in 1967. I was touched to learn that Faith Rogers McLorn, Sam's wife, now deceased, even researched the Moore family in her care to see that the home was restored appropriately. I have learned that Faith was the great-great-granddaughter of

Timothy Rogers who encouraged my ancestor Samuel Moore to come to Upper Canada from the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia. I wished I could have met her.

My Moore relations and friends were most generous in the support they lent. Over 75 letters were received by the Municipality of Central Elgin, and most of them came as a result of my plea. In September of 2007, I made a presentation to the Council to urge them to place a historical designation on this property.

I had learned much about the building. Among my papers was an undated article written about the house, probably in the late 1800s. It is clear from the sentiments expressed that this building was important to the Sparta community:

*John Moore Home Erected in 1824:  
Is an outstanding example of Pioneer  
Architecture in This District*

This pioneer home, adjoining the Friends Meeting Home property north of the village of Sparta, built in the early twenties, is not only the most outstanding examples of pioneer architecture and construction in East Elgin, but is considered one of the most valuable relics of early settlement days in Southwestern Ontario if not in the province. The Moore family were Quakers, and while playing a not unimportant part in the early history of Yarmouth, their work was accomplished in the quiet, but effective manner characteristic of this Society.



Elias Moore, a brother of John, was twice elected to represent the county of Middlesex, during the troubled times of 1835-36, which at that time included what is now the county of Elgin and some of the older people may remember a nephew, courtly, kindly Murray Moore, a prominent figure during the days of prosperity in Port Bruce.

The bricks used in the John Moore house were made on his farm, one of the five springs thereon supplying water to form a shallow pool, where oxen patiently trod the clay to proper consistency to use as mortar for the walls and foundations. It is claimed lime was secured by burning stopes found on the hillside and as Isaac Chase made lime for the building of his cobble stone house in 1872 by this process, it is more than probable that John Moore was the first to use Elgin lime for building purposes. The size, shape and pale strawberry tint, prove beyond doubt the century old hand-made brick, so easily distinguished from the later product of brickyards of larger size and deeper red as to color. The stones used in combination with bricks, were gathered from the farm and the solid face this old home presents to the world today, gives promise for many years to come, as a treasure house to be venerated among the few rare old homes left from pioneer days. The interior arrangement is unique, entrance being made at the base of the hill and the living rooms found nearer the top, with the upper bedrooms well up on the pasture field above.



Influenced by building styles in New England and Pennsylvania, Moore house is an early example of Georgian style with a symmetrical five bay south facing main façade. It is built into the hill, just like many Quaker homes in Pennsylvania. This allowed for a basement kitchen and protection from the elements with the possibility of access to a source of flowing water. Most new settlers built frame cottages as their first structures, so Moore house is of rather grand proportions for the period. The walls are 18 inches thick at the upper level and 28-30 inches thick at the lower level. The interior is a centre hall plan with a single straight stair running to the upper hall. There is a two-story extension of frame construction on a stone foundation which runs along the length of the north side.



Sam and Faith had put in a large pond and landscaped the property keeping to the native trees and a 19<sup>th</sup> century garden characteristics. It is a very pretty site.

John Moore's family of United Empire Loyalists fled New Jersey during the Revolution and arrived first in Nova Scotia before coming to Upper Canada in 1811 and settling in Norwich Township, Oxford County. Samuel Moore, my ancestor and John's father, purchased property for his three sons, John, Elias and Enoch, in Yarmouth Township, including the land on which the Moore house now stands, shortly after the war of 1812. By 1837, John's farm was valued at \$8,000. In addition to being a successful farmer, John became involved in local politics as a Reformer. Despite his Quaker roots, John attended and chaired several meetings in December of 1837 which led to the taking up of arms that month. John himself did not resort to violence but he, his son Joseph, and his brothers Elias, and Enoch were arrested and jailed. John Moore was found guilty of treason but was subsequently pardoned and released, as were his brothers. His son Joseph, however, died in prison. John continued to live as a prosperous farmer at Moore house until his death in 1854. The house passed from the Moore family late in the nineteenth century but remained the centre of a family farming operation until 1998 when it was sold to the current owners.

Members of the Sparta community, the committed individuals sitting on the Heritage Central Elgin advisory committee and myself waited with nervousness the night the decision was rendered by Municipal Council. In a 4 to 3 vote, the Council turned down the request to bestow a historical designation on the property allowing for the issuance of a demo-

lition permit. Some of the reasons cited by Council for this decision included:

"The home is not part of the streetscape of Sparta and therefore cannot be seen by the public." "The inside of the home was not restored to historical standards." "It isn't the responsibility of the Council to save memories for people." "The most appealing part of this house is its location." "Constituents made it clear that they did not want any taxpayer money spent on the Moore house preservation." The mayor also added that she could not find any mention of John Moore when she "googled" him, therefore, he could not be of historical significance. Only a few years previously, the Municipality had placed the Moore house on their registry of property of cultural heritage value or interest.

An appeal was made to then Minister of Culture, Caroline DiCocco, who issued a stop order on the demolition for 60 days to allow a further investigation of the issues. A provincially appointed facilitator was sent in and consulted with the Chair of Heritage Central Elgin (HCE), the Municipal Council members and the owners. HCE Chair Bob Burns requested that the Province designate this building of provincial historical significance; this recommendation was not taken. The resulting agreement with the owners allows them to make Moore house into a garage, to remove parts of the east wall to accommodate garage doors, and to build a walkway from the garage to the new home to built beside it. They will remove the frame addition at the back of the house as well as the garage that is attached to it. There is no known agreement to protect this building for the future.

In January 2008, I wrote the current Minister of Culture, Aileen Carroll, with my concerns about the decision. I referenced the Ontario Heritage Act which states that a property

may be designated as provincially significant if it meets one or more of eight criteria. Several consultants had indicated that Moore house met three of these criteria: design or physical value, historical value and contextual value. I also expressed concern that the Eight Guiding Principles in the Conservation of Built Heritage Properties at the Ministry's own website was not being applied. One of these principles states that alterations should be able to be returned to the original conditions. I do not understand how making the first floor of Moore house into a garage is reversible. What interior changes will be necessary to accommodate cars inside the structure? Does this mean the removal of the stairway? What effects will parking vehicles inside the building have on it? In March, I received a response from the Minister without any reference to the concerns I raised. She had stated that she was pleased with the outcome, and referenced the solution as one that met the needs of the owners. The Municipality had ignored evidence to support historical designation, and now the province was doing the same. Property owners' rights had won out. I understand why the owners want to build their new house on this location. But at the same time, I also feel that owners have an obligation to protect a building they clearly knew was of historical significance. I also feel that the Provincial Government should champion heritage preservation. They need to see beyond the wishes of individual property owners and developers to protect heritage properties where there are reasons that justify doing so.

In February, I wrote the Minister requesting a meeting with her. In May, the Minister wrote saying that she regretted being unable to meet with me. On June 16, I received a phone call from the Deputy Minister's office.

During my phone conversation with Margaret Rappolt, she indicated that she wanted to learn of my experiences and recommendations for the future of built heritage preservation. I have a meeting with her on July 23. In the meantime, I have requested release of the Ontario Heritage Trust's report on the Moore house under the "Freedom of Information Act." My request for access to this report was denied, and I have just recently sent in an appeal.

We are left with several questions: Will the report be released? Will the report show that provincial designation was recommended? Will the historical integrity of Moore house be sacrificed for the greater good?

We hope that the provincial government feels pressure on these matters, especially after the fire at Alma College. If you care about these issues, please write to the Minister of Culture, copy to Premier McGuinty, copy to your own MPP.

What has endured the test of time speaks to us in ways that more recent things cannot. Moore house conveys the values and ingenuity of our Quaker ancestors.