

HILLTOWN HISTORY

Fresh Mountain Air

By Deborah Daniels

And be closer to God at Moore Mountain House. How many mountain inns were started with an eviction notice? Moore Mountain House in Montgomery, MA. was started that way sometime in the 1870s. Westfield got the State to mandate that the area around Moose Meadow Brook should become the watershed to a reservoir that was going to be created to supply Westfield with drinking water. So, the businesses along the brook had to go. Montgomery was a town with a population of 318 in 1873, most likely not in a position to oppose the takeover. So it was that a sawmill, grist mill and a whip factory owned by Oliver Moore Jr. ceased to exist. Westfield did buy the land for which two reservoirs were created. Oliver Moore Jr. was a canny man, never relying on just one means of support. He had a farm that supported his 11 children with the necessities and the whip factory provided a bit more, but what now that the factory was gone? All the nearby mountains were building inns to attract tourists, Sugarloaf Hotel, 1864, Mount Tom's Notch House built before 1856, and Mount Holyoke Hotel in 1851. Thus, it was that Moore Mountain House came to be. It was located at the top of the hill, 1200 ft above sea level in the Hampden County town of "greater altitude than magnitude." It became a summer resort that attracted tourists from Springfield, Hartford, CT., and from New York. It offered pure air, the best water, grand scenery and wholesome fresh food. For entertainment there were hayrides, fishing and boating on Moose Meadow Pond, square dancing in the barn, croquet, card games and hiking along the brook with picnics and berry picking. There was always an empty hammock or two, beckoning on the front lawn. City kids could learn about farm chores such as gathering the eggs and milking the Jersey cows. Guests came. They arrived by train or trolley. Their first thrill was probably being carried up the hill by horse and buggy and seeing the hilltop view.

The Mountain House was owned by Uncle At, Oliver Atwater Moore, and Aunt Mary, his wife, Mary Pettis Moore. Oliver Moore Jr (Uncle At's

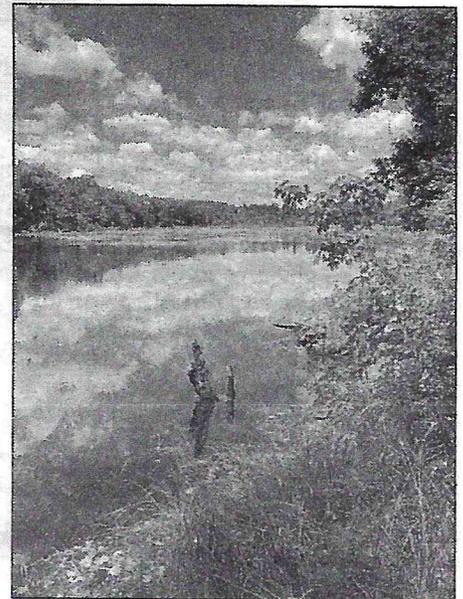


The cellar hole wall, part of the remains of the Moore Mountain House, with a ball jar and thunder mug found during a hike.

Submitted photos by Deborah Daniels

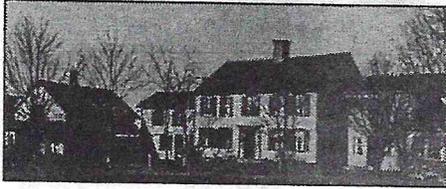
father) was killed at the age of 70 in a Huntington bridge accident while bringing his prize cow to a show. There was room for 40 guests, in what was described as suites, presumably for families with single and double beds. There were separate bathrooms for the ladies and the gentlemen with a shower attachment. Local girls were hired to serve the food. A typical meal being chicken fricassee with Jersey cream, hot biscuits, string beans, and a large slice of blackberry pie for dessert. The Inn rates were \$2 per day; \$8, 10 and \$12 per week. There was a hired manager to run the business of a guest house. That left Uncle At free to attend to his farm and maintain the Inn in a manner suitable to genteel guests. Ochterlony Moore, At's brother, kept a large barn with trusty steeds at the ready, across from the Mountain House. Those eight original Moore siblings, two died as toddlers, came in handy in running the Inn. Many Moores lived nearby.

Uncle At lived into his 90s. However, the tourist trade declined with the advent of the automobile and competing attractions. Westfield wanted more watershed land. Moore Mountain House was in the way of progress. The



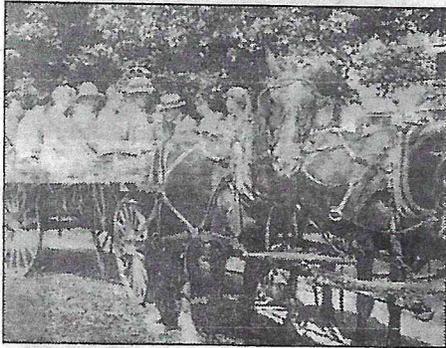
Moose Meadow Pond with a beaver dam in the distance.

Mountain House was torn down in 1916 and the contents of the house were auctioned off. The stately Maple trees still stand at attention in front of the cellar holes of Moore Mountain House. The remains of several of the buildings are discernible — stone foundations, fireplace stones, a very deep stone lined well and the barn and silo foundations across the road. Mountain House Road itself is a well-preserved dirt road inviting closer inspection of its rich history. There is a side road that leads to the original stone dam and then the remains of the saw and grist mills. The reservoir views will fill you with awe. The earthen dam was restored as a WPA project in 1935. The five square miles of property along Moose Meadow Brook allow the reservoir to hold back 184 million gallons of water! That water now is used as an emergency water supply. It was deemed too foul to be used as drinking water in 1974. It has, however, come in handy putting out forest fires in nearby Tekoa Mountain. It is a sanctuary for wildlife and history. Well done Montgomery for preserving the area. Thank you to Liz Massa and the Hilltown Hikers for showcasing this hike and making it explorably by the public. I would be remiss if I did not point out that there is treasure to be found in unexpected places. We found

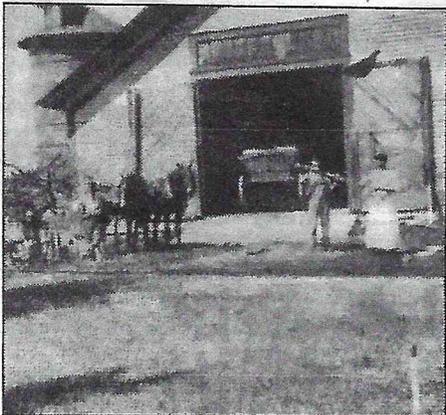


The Moore Mountain House, an 1880s Montgomery Inn. A special thank you to Montgomery Librarian Paula Long for helping with getting archive photos.

Photos courtesy of the Montgomery Library



Guests at Moore Mountain House take a hayride.



Ochterlony's Barn was located across the street from the Moore Mountain House.

Ball jars, farm implements, stone crockery and the ever-present enamelware pans, including the thunder mug pictured. Go be amazed!

Do eat at The Grille, 46 Main Rd. in Montgomery, they serve a mean tuna melt.

Do you have a memory or historical curiosity from the Hilltowns that you'd like to share with your neighbors? Send your story and photos to countryjournal@turley.com.