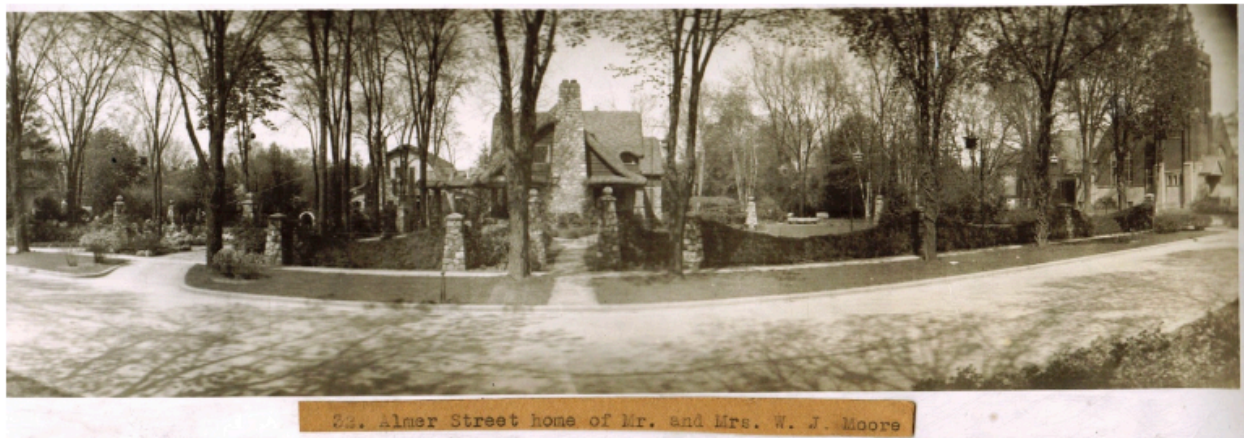


The Storybook House of Caro

and the man behind it all:
W.J. Moore





In 1914 W. J. Moore purchased the property @ 123 N. Almer Street in Caro. In 1917, Moore built a large swimming pool on the property and from 1923 to 1927 renovated the home, carriage house garage, and grounds.

In 1917, Moore transformed the property's grounds into elaborate luxurious surroundings by planting full-grown trees transplanted by a large mechanical wooden horse-drawn trailer which he invented. Also installed were flower gardens, an aquatic garden, fruit trees, and shrubs enhancing the intricate property, enjoyed from one of the inviting bench seats throughout.

In addition to a large swimming pool with a Japanese bridge, a stone lighthouse, a rock garden, and fountains added to the character of the property, there was a mechanical cable-rigged model airplane trapeze where one could swing from a house balcony and drop into the pool, and later be carried back to the balcony. In the 1930s, Moore designed an extensive sprinkler system that would utilize the swimming pool water to feed the sprinklers all around the property. The grounds were well lit by over a dozen tall steel poles with hidden electric light bulbs, all topped by large Martin birdhouses. The lighting was so extensive that even the grass tennis court was useable at night.

The remodeling from 1923 to 1927 transformed the home into a fine example of a custom Tudor Revival "storybook" Style, wrapped in cedar siding with stone column accents and chimneys. The unique hidden gutters were installed on the rolled edge roof to divert rainwater directly into the city sewers. The style of roof brings a magical element to the property. The carriage house garage echoes the design and materials of the main home, while also providing a second story which was used frequently for Caro community club events—dances, playhouse, and even high-school basketball games.

While the home has an extremely unique architectural style within the community setting, the real distinction is the interior—most specifically the control panel wall of its "futuristic smart-home" technology. W.J. Moore was an electronic inventor who designed and created the novel technological features used exclusively throughout the house. These features/functions were thought to be far ahead of their time. The master control panel in the foyer still stands today. Nearly 100 years later, some labels and instructions are still preserved, and amazingly, some of the control switches still perform their original function. Examples of the original technologies include a "secret" burglar alarm in the wall, accessed by a secret latch that locked all exterior doors instantly. Remote controls to open motorized-hinged home doors, and the incredible garage-door pulley system. The home was wired to have over 20 active telephones; allowing calls in every room of the house and garage. The amount of detail that went into the design and function of the home, garage, pool, and grounds is extremely meticulous, and at the time, was considered genius by many.

There were lavish lawn and swimming parties, which were symbolic of the early 20th century. From the 1920s through the 1950s, this home and its gardens was the site of many community events and gatherings. Over the years, there were several community events held at the Moore home, including a gathering of the Michigan Region of the Veteran Motor Car Club of America (VMCCA) members on June 11, 1950.

After more than 100 years, the W. J. Moore home still stands in Caro. In its heyday, it was considered the showplace of the “Thumb” area of Michigan. Despite the ensuing years and changing times, the Moore house has maintained all the eccentricity, imagination, uniqueness, and curiosity as it has in years past. Even today, it is considered a creation of lasting beauty.

In 2022, the Moore House was purchased by the great-great-grandson of W.J. Moore, Steven Shields, and his partner Becky Allen. Since the home is now back in the family, we are currently working on the historic designation and preservation of the entire property. W.J. would be very proud of all the efforts the family is making to restore his beautiful, unique property.



William James (W.J.) Moore
1870 – 1955

William James (W.J.) Moore, inventor and executive, was born in Burford, Ontario, Canada on August 21, 1870. He was the son of Samuel Kinsey Moore and Elizabeth Selina Fox. He moved with his family to Sandusky, Michigan in 1875. His father was a lumberman.

Mr. Moore received his Accountancy Diploma at the International Business College in Saginaw, Michigan on June 28, 1889. He then attended Oberlin College during 1889-1890. At an early age he became interested in telephone work through contact with his cousin, Elisha Gray, the inventor. Elisha was minutes behind Bell with his patent on the telephone. Elisha mentored W.J. and he soon established telephone patents and a telephone company of his own; The Moore Telephone System. In 1896 W.J. married Lovila Ellen Wooley and together they would have five children: Claude, Earl, Vera, Maurice and Andrew.

In that same year of 1896, business interests at Caro, Michigan offered Mr. Moore a bonus of several thousand dollars to move his companies there. Moore Telephone System (MTS) was one of 6,600 independent telephone companies that sprang up around the turn of the century after the basic Bell patents ran out. By 1905, Caro was a thriving and cohesive center of business, industry, and middle-class life.

Moore was the director and largest stockholder in the State Savings Bank of Caro and was a member of the Telephone Pioneers of America, Independent Telephone Association of America, and the Caro Exchange Club. He was a founding member of the Caro, Michigan Chamber of Commerce in 1922. In Caro, Moore was known as an astute businessman, philanthropist, lavish entertainer, and backer of community projects. His hobbies included landscape gardening, swimming, photography, and motoring. He spent much of his time in scientific research and in designing and building electrical contrivances.

W.J. Moore served as President of the Moore Telephone System (MTS) until 1947 when his son Andrew J. Moore succeeded him. He continued acting in a consulting capacity at MTS until he died in 1955.



In addition to the telephone and other technologies, Moore also had an interest in automobiles. He owned the first "horseless carriage" in the Thumb of Michigan. In 1899, he imported a DeDion Bouton automobile from France, before automobiles were built in Michigan. In the garage, there is an incredible garage-door pulley system and above the entrance there is a replica of and an inscription describing Mr. Moore's 1899 DeDion Bouton automobile.

In 1914, Moore ordered a specially built Cadillac Model 51 with a V8 engine and long wheelbase. Coach builder Kimball from Chicago was commissioned to create a unique body to Moore's specifications. It was a car ahead of its time and was loaded with extras and comforts, including a telephone which operated as a wireless. Moore was a member of the Veteran Motor Car Club of America and owned the Cadillac until his death in 1955. The Cadillac now resides in the Louwman Museum in the Hague, Netherlands, and represents the first generation of two great American automotive traditions: the V8 engine and the customized car.

