

# It started with one

Blistering chili, hard-working history and a famous tree define Moore's Country Store

By Amy Trent

**I**n 1926, H.C. Moore General Store and Riverside Service Station was a tiny, four-pump gas station alongside State Route 10 on the eastern edge of Lynchburg. Some 90 years later, that two-lane road is the sprawling four-lane highway known as U.S. 460 and Moore's Country Store is world famous, its blistering chili as beloved as the proud sycamore protruding through the roof of the building.



■ Riverside Service Station and H.C. Moore General Merchandise is pictured in 1955 just before the Virginia Department of Transportation expanded State Route 10, turning it into present-day U.S. 460. Although the highway department initially planned to demolish the store, plans were changed when a graveyard was discovered in the path of the planned expansion. The eventual highway expansion forced the store to move several feet back from the roadway.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

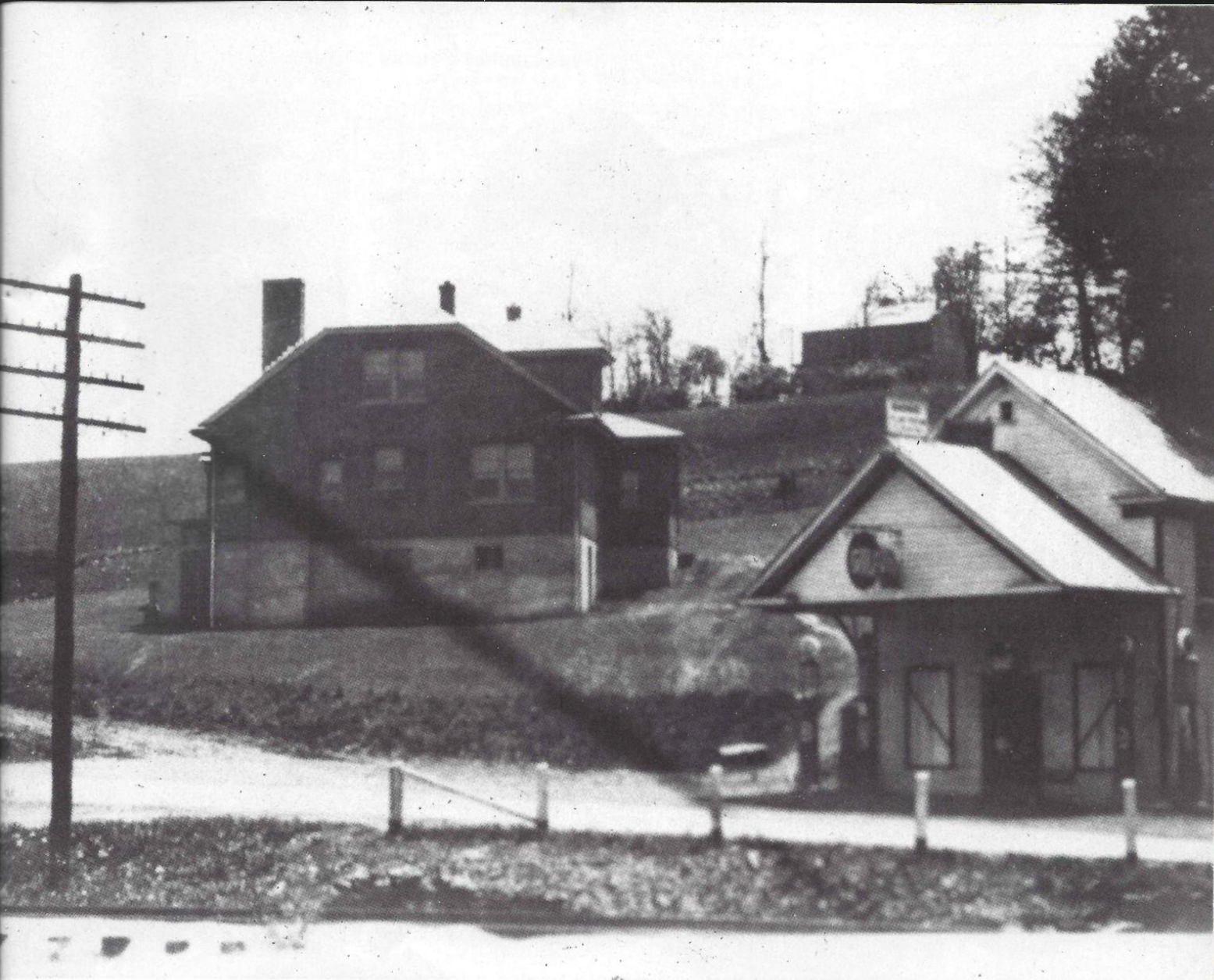
It was Herman Moore who made the decision to birth the store directly along the railroad tracks, opposite a railway section house used to shelter C&O railroad workers and a lock house where crews helped packet boats transition along the river.

Three years after opening, the Great Depression hit.

Situated in a prime location and willing to work several jobs on the side, Moore was able to keep the store open, even as the country struggled.

Turns out, the second and third generation of the Moore family have that same fortitude and foresight and have turned that one store into a chain of restaurant-style convenience stores whose devotees visit for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

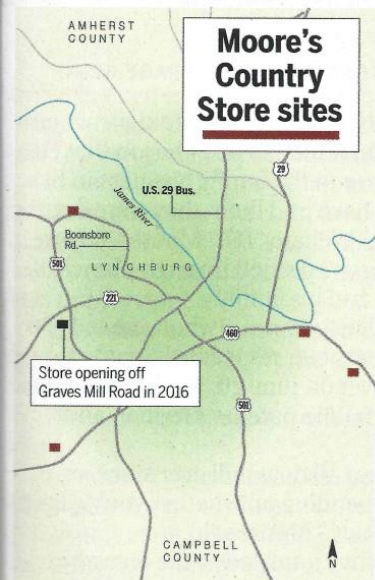
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■ The home of Della and Herman Moore, which was built in 1930 when William "Bill" Moore was just 1 year old, overlooks Riverside Service Station and H.C. Moore General Merchandise. This photo was taken on a Sunday in 1964 when the store was closed. The photo also captures the family's 1924 Studebaker.

### Important dates in history of Moore's Country Stores

- **1926:** Herman and Della Moore open Riverside Service Station and H.C. Moore General Merchandise.
- **1955:** Store is moved about 10 feet away from State Route 10 to make room for the new U.S. 460.
- **1959:** Store began selling hot dogs.
- **1960:** Anne and William "Bill" Moore buy H.C. Moore General Merchandise, renaming it W.R. Moore.
- **1978:** Original MCS building destroyed in fire and is rebuilt by hand by then-16-year-old David and his father, Bill.
- **1983:** The Moores begin operating Thomas Terrace Market as a convenience store.
- **1986:** MCS opens in newly renovated Lynchburg Community Market building in downtown Lynchburg, eventually leaving the space in 2005.
- **1999:** David and Jennifer Moore buy MCS from Bill and Anne Moore.
- **1999:** MCS begins operating Thomas Terrace Exxon.
- **2010:** MCS opens store on Waterlick Road in Campbell County.
- **2015:** MCS opens store on Boonsboro Road.
- **2016:** MCS will open off Graves Mill Road at 1001 Creekside Lane.



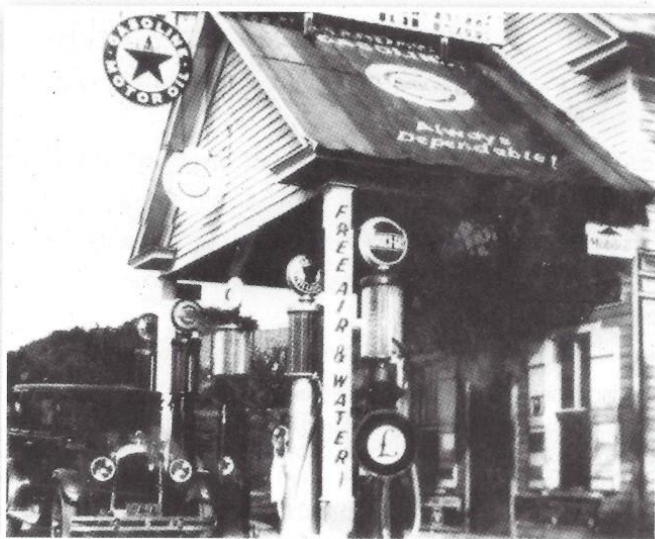
MAP BY JON NESS/THE NEWS & ADVANCE



■ Billie Jean (above, left) and manager Mark Emerson prepare lunch at Moore's Country Store on Waterlick Road.

■ Riverside Service Station and H.C. Moore General Merchandise (right) as it appeared in 1929 when it sold four different brands of gas — Standard, Gulf, Texaco and Amoco. The Moores lived on the second floor of the store until 1930 when they moved into the home they built on the nearby hill.

PHOTO (ABOVE) BY JILL NANCE/  
THE NEWS & ADVANCE,  
SUBMITTED PHOTO (RIGHT)



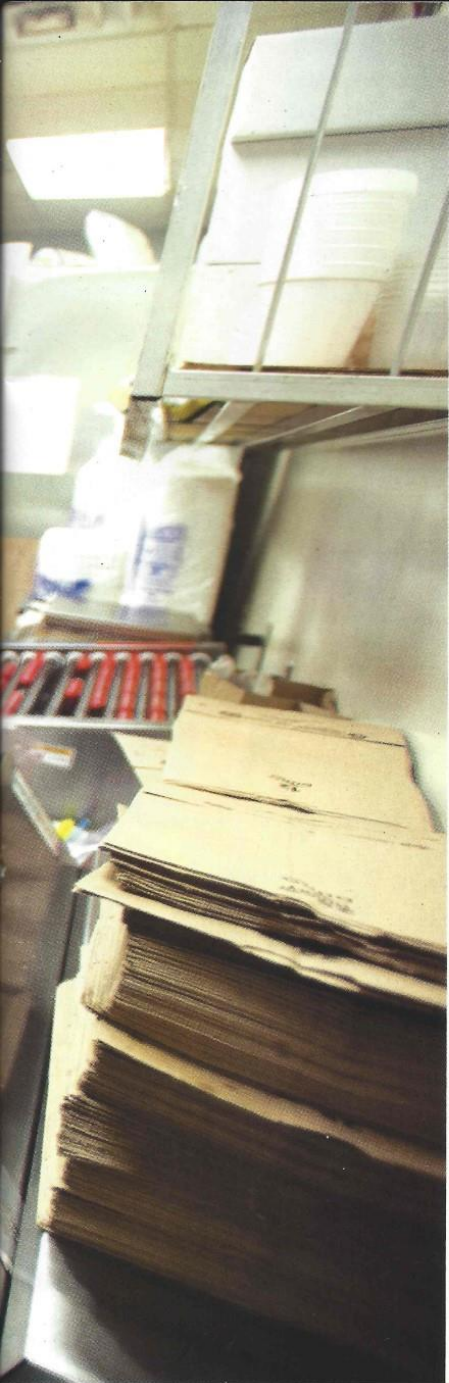
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"If anybody would have told me when I left Virginia Tech to take the job that I'd be back to run the family business in five years, I'd have told them they were crazier than hell," William "Bill" Moore said one afternoon as he sifted through photos of the store and his family.

He and wife Anne — who were only 30 and 23 years old, respectively, at the time — took over on June 20, 1960, buying the store from Bill's parents, Herman and Della.

"It's been all downhill ever since, or uphill depending on whether you're a pessimist or not," Moore said.

When they returned to the area after



## Moore's famous chili

Every week, Moore's Country Stores sell about 300 pounds of chili — hot and the new less-hot versions combined — accompanied by about 300 pounds of chopped onions and 600 pounds of slaw. While not a single member of the Moore family will reveal what gives the chili its trademark heat — which is somewhere between cayenne- and habanero-pepper hot — they did reveal one secret.

It's not beef, it's ground turkey.

Over the last 15 years David and Jennifer have stealthily worked to lessen the impact their country-style food makes on customers' hearts and waistlines. One example is with their fried chicken. Although they wouldn't dream of swapping their fried chicken for baked, David spent at least a year working with a vendor to find a way to get most of the MSG out of the breading. While the third-generation Moores have swapped ground beef for ground turkey, little else has changed with the chili recipe. Malissie Pulley, the only employee to work for all three generations of Moores, brought her grandmother's chili recipe to the store. She and Anne Moore, who died in June of 2013, standardized it, and David refined it, finally adding a less masochistic chili to the menu in 2010.

"I really resisted that," David Moore said one morning as the breakfast crowd at Moore's Waterlick turned into the lunch crowd.

"I was like, 'No. We don't do anything but hot,'" David remembers telling Jennifer when the issue came up.

But, always eager to see their customers are happy, Moore gave in.

"But it is not exactly mild for those that want mild," he said. "... It's just got enough kick to where it'll get their attention."

And it can only be found at Moore's Country Store.

"We make it for our own stores and that's it," David said. ♦

five years in the Rockies, both the Lynchburg Foundry Company and B&W were looking to move in off Mt. Athos Road.

"I was amazed after the first week how much business we did compared to the old days," Moore said. "I had thought I'd have to consult to make ends meet, but that didn't happen.

"This was a barn burner from day one. And we just grabbed it by the tail and hung on."

Things haven't slowed down in the least.

In the last 15 years, MCS has gone from 13 employees to 80. When a store under construction on Graves Mill Road opens, the company will have about 100 employ-

ees.

It takes only three Moore's stores to sell 70,000 pounds of hot dogs annually.

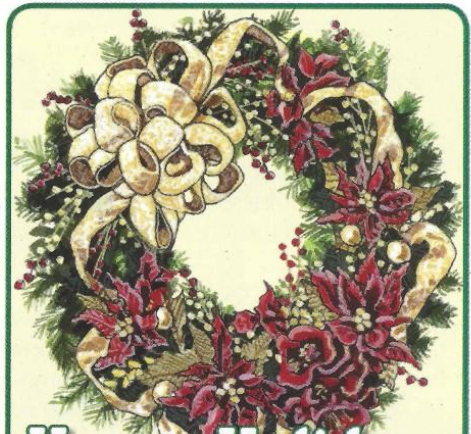
It would typically take 15 stores to sell that much product, said Dan Brewer, the food service director for Family Brands International LLC, the company that handcrafted a hot dog recipe for Moore's.

David Moore, who took over MCS with wife Jennifer in 1999, "makes his own chili and has got a well-known following for that product, and the hot dog lends itself well to that chili. It's almost a cult following that he has."

That demand, along with the desire to secure the future of MCS, has pushed the

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Moore's to begin building a fifth store.

MCS Graves Mill is slated to open in 2016 next to Home Depot, on what could become one of the city's busiest thoroughfares.

"It's kind of surreal for us that we've grown, and how important (Moore's) is to people," said Jennifer, who with her husband, David, works in the stores alongside MCS employees, making sure customers are greeted when they enter and sent away with a smile.

When the company announced it would open a fifth store, Jennifer said customers began coming in and purchasing even more products to make sure the store would be built.

"Moore's Country Store is a cultural institution in our area," Marjette Upshur, Lynchburg's director of economic development, said when describing the company's plans to expand in Lynchburg. "Moore's Country Store on Boonsboro Road was an instant success because of [the Moores'] reputation for great food and stellar customer service."

Customers may go in for the hot dogs, but they go back for a second one because of the way in which it was delivered, according to Moore's Country Store customer, turned employee, Deborah Porterfield.

"They'll have to run me out of here," Porterfield said one afternoon as her co-workers piled hot dogs high with coleslaw and

Moore's chili.

The secret recipe for Moore's isn't in the chili, the fried chicken, the macaroni and cheese or even the barbecue, Porterfield said.

It's the Moores themselves. "This is one of the best places I've worked," she said.

"It's a big family," said Jessica Holt, who started working at Moore's at 15 and now is the payroll administrator.

She fully intends to spend her career with the Moore's.

"I stay here because David and Jennifer are so good to me," 16-year MCS veteran Barbara Stinnett said one afternoon.

More than a decade after retiring from the store that his father started, Bill Moore now can clearly see how the company has come to this juncture.

It is very much like the sycamore out front.

It had just started to grow up from the creek that ran beneath the service station, when Bill Moore was a child.

Today its canopy presides over much of the building.

"You don't see sycamores knocked down. You go around the river and you see sycamores hanging out of the banks by one root. They just don't blow over, their roots go so deep." ♦

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■ Moore's Country Store is world famous, selling shirts and other goods at its locations across Central Virginia. MCS sells 2,100 to 2,500 hot dogs daily, with Store 460 and MCS Waterlick each selling 700 hot dogs daily. The top three food sellers at MCS are hot dogs, chicken and hamburgers.





PHOTOS BY JILL NANCE/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

■ Buddy Moore (above) eats lunch at Moore's Country Store on Waterlick Road. Moore goes to the restaurants about five times a week. "Moore's Country Store is a cultural institution in our area," Marjette Upshur, Lynchburg's director of economic development said, when describing the company's plans to expand in Lynchburg. "Moore's Country Store on Boonsboro Road was an instant success because of [the Moores'] reputation for great food and stellar customer service."



### What do the Moores eat at Moore's Country Store?

"Breakfast. Three fluffy scrambled eggs and a biscuit covered with turkey." – **Bill Moore**

"You can't beat the cheeseburger. [As a child] "I ate cheeseburgers [for] breakfast, lunch and dinner." – **David Moore**

"My absolute No. 1 go-to is the Moore's hamburger. It's just good. It just has a good flavor, it's the right size." – **Jennifer Moore**