



Road to Moore house, present day

Up from the Ruins

STANDING AT THE EDGE of the shortgrass and sage, half-hidden by trees that heaved at the porch, the old Moore house slowly weathered down. The wind worked its worried way through the termite chaff of the north wall. On the south side, glass panes fell out of an upstairs window when the glazing turned to dust, giving the barn owls free access. Generations of skunks and other critters had made the narrow space below the floor joists their home.

The mournful quiet of the place gave way to the sounds of salvage. Removal of the sheetrock tacked up by Bill Turner in the '30's revealed multiple layers of wallpaper, that when cut away, showed the whitewashed beadboard installed by A. B. Moore when he built the house about 1899. Any beadboard pried from inside the exterior walls unleashed torrents of dirt clods and dust. Outside, peeling back the brittle roll siding with its fake brick pattern exposed tongue and groove siding, the yellow paint in surprisingly good condition. Board by board salvage of the siding revealed the source of all the dirt and dust; to increase the insulation the walls had been filled with cut sod, carefully stacked between the studs, with the root side up.

As the layers came off, more and more story fragments were brought to light. Above the first interior door jamb to be pried out lay a letter and some brittle photos. The 1933

letter from a Charlie Hill asked about the health of his brother Sam Hill. Post-salvage inquiry shed some light on the long-hidden letter. Gilbert Hill lived in the Moore house for a short time during the 1940's. His father Sam—called “Uncle Sam” by everyone around Lipscomb, Texas—who was injured in a car wreck in 1933, never really recovered, and died in 1934. A few of the photos turned out to be of Gilbert during his Lipscomb school days. One of the photos showed May Moore Wright and her sister Lura standing on a corral gate, a barn in the background. A sign on that barn, when magnified, read “W.P. Hill, 1914.”

Back in the kitchen a stick of beadboard still bore a pencil notation, possibly by Hattie Moore, about meat and lard purchased by neighbor Mrs. Berry. Old buttons and a canceled check were found in the dust layer under the attic flooring. Falling sod revealed a bit of lace and a photo negative. A tarnished and rusty kitchen knife served as a wedge to secure a double hung window.

Every room downstairs had a different pattern of linoleum, some in better shape than others. Exposed flooring around the linoleum sheets had been painted or stained, and now carried a polished patina from years of foot wear. Worn, faded areas on the kitchen linoleum showed where the table and chairs had been located. Some of the 2x4 studs and 2x6 joists show evidence that they were salvaged from another structure before A.B. Moore put them to use.

With the exception of the sugar pine used for the doors, the Moore house was made entirely of old growth longleaf pine from the 60 million-acre forest that once stretched from southeast Texas to Virginia and down to Florida. Starting in the 1880's, railcar loads of the milled longleaf lumber were shipped

*“It was so windy out
here they had to build
square squatty houses
, ‘cause the winds would
blow them away.”*

W.P. HILL (1858-1919) AFTER HIS FIRST VISIT
TO LIPSCOMB COUNTY, TEXAS



Moore house porch



South side of Moore house prior to salvage

to the High Plains to satisfy the settlers' demands for building materials. By the 1930's the longleaf forests were gone, logged nearly to extinction.

The silence in and around the old homestead on Wolf Creek seems a little less lonesome these days. The stories and fragments of past lives and times have been given light and a voice.

“There has to be [an] interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity; it is religiously and artistically essential. That is what I mean when I refer to the necessity of ruins: ruins provide the incentive for restoration and for a return to origins. There has to be an interim of death, of rejection before there can be a born-again landscape.”



Cow skull in brush