

A Veteran's Veteran: Caring for his Comrades

Area Teacher-turned-Soldier Goes On to Greatness

By Dave Jackson

World War I was said to be the war that would end all wars. For an area teacher and soldier, it was a life-changing path of patriotism and greatness that left Iowa forever a better place for the men who returned home.

The complete World War I uniform and memoirs of "Preston" Moore were recently brought home from Colorado to Iowa and loaned to the English Valleys History Center for display. The memoirs give great insight to the significance of one of our area's historical figures. After serving his country during World War I, Preston Moore returned home to teach, was a training officer of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the construction of Lake McBride, and organized the World War I Veterans Association for the State of Iowa.

Thomas Preston Moore was born April 1, 1896, by White's bridge at the northwest corner of Lime Creek township in Washington county, on the county line of Iowa and Washington counties. The Moore farm was two miles east of Foote and eight miles directly east of North English, bordering Greene township, Iowa County.

His father owned 80 acres of good flat bottomland on the English River. They raised corn, potatoes, turnips, navy beans, sorghum cane and vegetables. They took corn to the Greene Valley Mill to be ground and traded for flour. In addition to growing crops, they raised horses, cows, pigs and chickens. Preston's grandfather owned the farm on which the Champion Hill Church of Greene township was built and had donated the land for the church.

Preston grew up attending school at Eagleville, Greene Valley, Fairview and Kinross. An early story from his memoirs tells of the time he and his brother Vern won a raffle at the Greene Valley store just before Christmas. It was 17 lbs. of candy in a wooden pail, with each contestant chipping 10 cents toward the raffle. The boys having won the bucket of candy, excitedly headed off to home, finding a branch in the nearby timber, which they slipped through the handle of the wooden bucket, and with one boy on each end, they walked the two miles to the farm. They figured they'd have candy until Easter, and hid the bucket in a crib of shuck fodder in the barn. Within two weeks all the candy was gone.

The memoirs of Preston Moore relate many stories of his growing-up years in the area of Greene Valley. Times were tough financially, and his father bought and sold land and attended farm sales to buy the equipment needed to farm. They had timber lots for wood for building and heating. The boys helped work the farm and hired out during harvest time for thrashing and helped on their own farm.

Over the years, Preston's father had to give up some of the farms, and left the family. Preston's mother and the children rented farms, living for a time on the George Wine farm, Grimm farm, Crossett farm and other places. His mother worked the fields, plowing and harrowing and the boys hired out to earn cash for helping with the family needs. During the lean years, neighbors collected up money to buy them a cow. The wife of Bill McCartor donated two pairs of shoes for Preston and Vern. The boys grew up with a strong work ethic and grew physically sturdy through hard work and farming.

A CAREER IN TEACHING

Preston's grandmother was a teacher at several of the area schools. By the time he was 17, Preston was also showing a ten-

dency toward teaching. During 1913 he lived in New York State for eight months and attended the Horse Heads High School, where much of his preparation for teaching was completed.

In July 1913 he returned to Iowa and earned his teaching certificate, which arrived on his 18th birthday. In April 1914 he began teaching at Lincoln School No. 9, Lincoln township, Iowa County, the following fall and winter at Green Center, and spring 1915 at Evergreen School. The fall of 1915 he taught at German township No. 6, Keokuk County and winter at Evergreen. The following spring he taught at Tucker School in Greene township, near the Champion Hill Church. For the school years of 1916 - 17 he taught again at German township No. 6 and for the 1917 and 18 school year he taught at Nira, Lime Creek township in Keokuk County.

According to his memoirs, during this time he planned some of the most successful programs and entertainment that were ever presented in these country schools. In May 1916, he held a nine-district picnic at Greene Center and about 175 attendees enjoyed the event. In 1917, he engaged the parents and neighbors to paint and make improvements to the Nira school that led to Nira being designated as an Iowa Standard School, and a brass plaque was mounted over the door.

FOLLOWING THE CALL OF DUTY

By 1914, the drums of war were beating in Europe. The United States declared war on Germany on June 6, 1917. Preston was drafted in May of 1918 and reported for duty in Marengo, Iowa on July 25, 1918. Just prior to leaving, Preston did two things. First, on the day he was drafted in May, he petitioned to join the local Masonic lodge, Farmers Lodge No. 168 of Kinross, Iowa. He was initiated on July 18, and by the 24th, just six days later, he had passed the Three Degrees of Masonry. It was the day before he left for war.

Second, he sat down and wrote an oath, on June 30, 1918, which he signed and memorialized into a booklet of his life history to that point. The oath follows:

"I, Preston Moore, am a citizen of America, and an heir to all her greatness and renown. The health and happiness of my own body depends upon each muscle and nerve and drop of blood doing its work in its place. So the health and happiness of my country depends upon each citizen doing his work in his place. I will not fill any post or pursue any business where I can live upon my fellow citizens without doing them useful service in return, for I plainly see that this must bring want and suffering to some of them. I will do nothing to desecrate the soil of America, to pollute her air, and degrade her children, my brothers and sisters."

"I will try to make her country and cities beautiful and her citizens healthy, happy and free, so that she may be a desired home for myself now, and for her children in the days to come." Given my signature this 30th day of June, 1918, at my home in Green Twp., Iowa County, Iowa. - Thomas Preston Moore.

Preston Moore was sent to Camp Pike, Arkansas, where he entered Officers Training School and became a 2nd Lieutenant. No one knew how long the war would last.

On September 15, 1918, Preston wrote the following notes in his diary: "We are passing through a national crisis that may shake democracy to the very foundation stone. This awful world war that is extinguishing hundreds of thousands of lives and destroying billions of

dollars of property, has plunged the whole world into conditions so chaotic that no one can foresee the outcome. We may be sure that the new world which will emerge from this awful struggle will be very different from anything in human experience. The next few years with us will determine whether government by the people is to endure or fail. Our country is not only woefully lacking in physical preparedness, but, what is more lamentable, it lacks a mental, moral and spiritual preparation that must lie back of, and support all physical preparation."

In his notes, Moore continued, "Patriotism is at a low ebb; it is dormant. We have forgotten the struggles endured by our ancestors in order to give us the great country we call our own. In grasping for dollars, we have lost some of the essentials of civilization. We are fast losing the sturdy manhood and womanhood that have been the salvation of this country in every crisis. Politics have taken the place of citizenship."

Besides the raging world war, another crisis soon settled in at the camp and across the country and the world. The Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918 was taking the lives of many soldiers, and Preston soon became violently ill, described in detail in his memoirs. "I could not eat or drink and I vomited until I thought I would surely die. My lungs filled up with fluids and I could hardly breathe. My nose bled from both nostrils. I was on the verge of choking to death."

He related that one morning the sunshine came through the window at the camp, and his lungs began to clear of fluids. It was the beginning of a brighter day. Many soldiers died in the camp that autumn, and many more across the world.

The Armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, and remains celebrated to the present day as Armistice Day, or Veterans Day. Preston was just a few weeks short of completing the Officer Training School. He later wrote, "The country, tired of the horrendous cost and devastation, wanted no involvement in European conflicts and the majority of the military was sent home. Because I had a few weeks remaining to complete the officers training, and the order was sent from Washington to "demobilize" the army, I was discharged as Private, and along with the entire Battalion, and all were sent home. I would have liked to complete my officers training and receive a commission, but that was not an option. On the long train ride home, I thought about my life."

When Preston returned home to Iowa, he began teaching again. He also lived on the family farm and took farm jobs between school terms. He taught at a country school near Hills in the early 20s. He married Kathryn Shetler of Joe Town, December 25, 1924. The new family lived in Kalona and Preston taught schools in the area. In 1927 Preston was working on a WPA park and after work, noticed a swarm of bees. He and a friend "hived" them and it began a hobby of beekeeping, which lasted more than 20 years. "I always had honey on the table," he said.

WPA INSTRUCTOR FOR CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

In 1933 the State of Iowa acquired 870 acres in Johnson County, near Solon, for a park area. Of this, a 250-acre lake was formed by a dam 600 feet long at Mill Creek where it entered the Iowa River. Lake McBride was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, Company 782, comprised of a group of 178



Thomas Preston Moore was drafted for service in WWI in May 1918. The uniform in this photo has been loaned to the English Valleys History Center by the family of Moore. Photograph courtesy of Treva Heiser.



Kathy Bearce, Anamosa, IA, and Treva Heiser, Loveland, CO, display the original World War I uniform of their father, Thomas Preston Moore. The daughters recently brought the uniform, his memoirs and photographs for display by the English Valleys History Center in North English.

men who constructed the park and dam. Six barracks were constructed on the site to house the men. Over time the camp grew and offices, supply rooms, garages, a bath house, latrine, hospital and class rooms were added. The construction lasted from May 1935 through April 1939. Preston Moore was a Workers Progress Administration (WPA) instructor for the work force.

Moore taught at the Stone Academy, Highway 1, south of Solon, Iowa, for several years. Founded in 1842, the building is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Thomas and Kathryn Moore lived at Solon and raised a family of six children. They moved to Mt. Vernon, where they lived from 1941 to 1955, when they moved to Lisbon, Iowa. During this time he also continued farming, his lifelong passion.

From 1955 to 1958, Preston worked with the Linn County Conservation Service as a Conservation Aid. He wrote, "I became interested in the conservation of our rich soil when I was farming near Mt. Vernon in 1947 and practiced soil saving on my farm with strip farming, contour plowing and terraces. I have never let an opportunity pass without speaking about the values to the farmer and to the Nation in saving our rich soil from eroding and washing down the rivers, never to be returned to the farm."

ORGANIZES VETERANS OF WORLD WAR I

During the 1950s, Preston organized a state-wide network of World War I veterans into an effective association called Veterans of World War I. He traveled throughout the state encouraging men to unite and promote legislation that would enhance their very meager government benefits, especially for their widows. Association members were called "Buddies," a term carried over from the days of the war.

Preston Moore personally established 39 "barracks" across Iowa, and served as Commander of the Linn County Barracks in 1957 and 1960, and as Commander for the State of Iowa, 1958 - 59. He was Director of Public Relations beginning in 1961. Kathryn served as the Ladies Auxiliary President, and traveled with Preston often to promote the organization. George Wine, North English, was the Legislative Chairman for the Veterans of World War I. Working closely together, the two men and others across the state were able to influence much-needed legislation that assisted the



February 18, 1959: on the West porch of the U.S. House Office Building in Washington, D.C. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Preston Moore were in Washington to attend the Congressional Dinner and honor members of Congress who served during World War I. Approximately 150 delegates from 32 states and 200 members of Congress attended the dinner. Left to right: Hon. H.R. Gross, Congressman, Third Iowa District; Mrs. Kathryn "Kay" Moore, Department Auxiliary President, and Thomas Preston Moore, Department Commander, Veterans of World War I Association. Moore organized the Veterans of World War I and personally opened 39 Barracks around the State of Iowa.

World War I veterans and their widows. They traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with legislators, many of which were also veterans of "the War to End all Wars."

Thomas Preston Moore died suddenly on Nov. 3, 1967, following a short illness. The man who had pledged himself to his fellow citizens by his written oath in June 1918 had achieved his own high expectations.

His daughter, Treva Heiser, of Loveland, Colorado wrote, "As a father, a grandfather, a teacher, and friend, he will be long remembered as a kind and gentleman who attained a high and reputable position in his community, his state, and in the hearts of his family, his students and many friends."

Preston Moore was a 50-year member of the Farmers Lodge No. 168 and never forgot his roots in Greene Valley.

In 1965, two years before his death, Preston and Kathryn took a trip to the old farm in Greene township where his great-grandfather Moore settled in 1843. At the time, he was excited to see that the old house built a century and a quarter before still stood near the Champion Hill Church.

They had a picnic dinner under a big maple tree that was over a century old.

He wrote, "the robins were singing, having nested in a tree near the cemetery, where some of my relatives laid resting, the cares of this world having passed by so long ago. The church door was unlocked so I went in and looked around. I remembered the times as a young man when I had worshipped here. The piano sat with the songbook opened to a familiar hymn. I played it and was renewed with joy and happiness."

Through the generosity of the Moore children, the World War I uniform, memoirs and many photos of Thomas Preston Moore are on loan at the English Valleys History Center for public viewing. His original pledge and oath to his fellow citizens is a testament to the greatness of the man who never forgot his home in the English Valleys, nor his fellow World War I comrades.

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