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Marker To Recognize Musician

Moore Day Declared

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A former Tappahannock resident who was a pioneer among blues musicians will be memorialized Dec. 3 during a special ceremony that will include the unveiling of a highway marker in his honor.

William "Bill" Moore, who resided in Tappahannock during the 1920s, will be recognized in a program sponsored jointly by the James River Blues Society and the Middle Peninsula African American Genealogical and Historical Society of Virginia.

The Essex County Board of Supervisors last week adopted a resolution declaring Dec. 3 as "William Moore Day" in Essex.

Moore's recording career coincided with his residency in Tappahannock, according to Gregg Kimball who has spent the better part of the last six years researching Moore's life.

"I play a lot of early blues and ragtime guitar and to aficionados of that kind of music he's very well-known," says Kimball who is affiliated with the James River Blues Society.

That organization has spent the past four years recognizing founders of Virginia blues music while at the same time providing a public record of the achievement by erecting historical markers along the state's highways and byways.

The first of those markers was erected in 2001 honoring Lynchburg blues pioneer Luke Jordan. Last year, a marker was dedicated



Blues pioneer William Moore (l) poses with his son William Edsel in this circa 1945 photograph. (Courtesy William Edsel Moore)

December 3 In Tappahannock

Essex Declares 'William Moore Day'

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to blues musician Carl Martin in Big Stone Gap. Last summer, the organization assisted Rappahannock County with the dedication of an historical marker for blues musician John Jackson.

According to Thomas Harris, a member of the local genealogical organization, Moore lived in a home that formerly stood next to First Baptist Church in Tappahannock. Moore, who is described as a master of finger-style guitar known as East Coast or Piedmont blues, made his living primarily as a barber working in Bob Clark's shop.

According to Kimball's research, Moore's ragtime-inspired playing was captured by a Paramount Records session held in Chicago circa January 1928, from which eight songs were commercially released of sixteen that received a copyright. The issued recordings bear the name "William Moore" or "Bill Moore," and are some of the earliest commercial recordings by an African American from Virginia, according to Kimball.

Moore was born to a farming family in Georgia on March 3, 1893. He apparently left Georgia during his teens and eventually made his way to New Jersey, where he



A graphic of William Moore from Robert Crumb's card set "Heroes of the Blues" released by Yazoo Records.

met his first wife, Gwendolyn Gordon, a native of Warsaw, in Atlantic City where she worked. They married there and had two children before relocating to Tappahannock in the 1920s.

According to Kimball's research, Moore was living in Tappahannock when he traveled to Chicago to record for Paramount, and his songs reflect the place and culture

of the time. Kimball describes Moore's "Old Country Rock" as a fine example of a country dance tune, with a caller imploring various family members and fellow dancers to "rock," before telling them to "step back and let me rock." The song's narration refers to the Rappahannock River and the Town of Tappahannock.

Kimball also says Virginia audiences would have also appreciated Moore's twelve-bar blues songs, such as "Midnight Blues," and the references to Ford motor cars and banking problems in "Ragtime Millionaire," a variation on Irving Jones's novelty composition.

Moore's son, William Edsel Moore, has been interviewed by Kimball and indicated that his father later in life became a church deacon and shied away from performing secular material, preferring sacred songs.

According to information supplied by Kimball, Moore moved to Fredericksburg around 1929 and worked at Chester Bailey's barbershop on Caroline Street in that city. He later moved to Warrenton and married a hairdresser named Bessie. They opened a shop together called "Bess and Bill's." After Bessie died, Moore married a woman

named Louise and worked in Madison's Barbershop. Eventually Moore opened his own shop next to the Fauquier Theatre in downtown Warrenton and several of his sons joined him in that business by the 1940s.

Moore suffered a heart attack and fell into bad health by the late 1940s. He died on Nov. 22, 1951, and is buried in the Warrenton Cemetery.

Kimball also noted that Moore appears as card number 1 on the Yazoo set "Heroes of the Blues," illustrated by underground artist Robert Crumb, and this honor reflects his popularity among 78-rpm record collectors and guitar revivalists from the 1960s until today.

Almost all of Moore's recordings can be found on the reissue of "Ragtime Blues Guitar" that was released by Document Records.

The community is invited to the marker dedication which will take place at 1 p.m. on Dec. 3. The marker will be erected along U.S. Route 17 across from the Essex County Public Library. The library will open an exhibit in its display case regarding Moore on Nov. 21.