

# Rappahannock Times<sup>®</sup>

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"Established 1850"

Seven Sections



Greg Kimball (second from right) of the Library of Virginia poses with William Moore grandchildren (l-r) Thelma Moore, William Edsel Moore Jr. and Sylvia Moore under the highway marker following Saturday's dedication ceremony.

## Moore Resided Here

# Marker Cites Blues Legend

A crowd of about 100 in Tappahannock turned out Saturday, Dec. 3, to observe and celebrate the dedication of a Virginia Highway Marker to honor William Moore.

Moore was a Tappahannock resident in the 1920s. It was during his time in Essex County that he developed a blues style of guitar playing for which he is famous today, and for which he is still emulated by blues musicians world-wide.

Tappahannock Mayor Roy Gladding gave opening remarks at the dedication ceremony that captured the importance of Moore and the region in which he lived. "Today," Mayor Gladding said, "we are here to recognize someone who spent time here in Tappahannock, and then went on to accomplish other, and greater things."

A host of Moore descendants and family members were on hand to celebrate the unveiling of the marker as well. Some had traveled as far away as New Jersey for the event. These included Norman Andre Moore Jr., a grandson of William Moore, and granddaughters Lisa Moore and Thelma Moore.

Thelma Moore, who lives in Manassas, read a quote at the ceremony that she said inspired her grandfather: "To achieve all that is possible, we must attempt the impossible. To be as much as we can be, we must dream of being more."

Moore was born in Georgia in 1893. His son, William Edsel Moore, now 77, believes his father left home while in his late teens and made his way to New Jersey. There he met his first wife, Gwendolyn Gordon, a native of Warsaw. They married in New Jersey but moved the young family back to her home region of the

Please Turn To Page 2

## Blues Legend Recognized Here

# Moore Marker Dedication

Continued From Page 1

Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula.

Moore's guitar playing exemplified a syncopated East Coast style that was popular in Virginia and Georgia. His 1928 recording "Old Country Rock" is an outstanding example of a country dance tune, with a caller imploring the participants and fellow dancers to "rock." The song refers to the Rappahannock River and the Town of Tappahannock where Moore worked as a barber. Scholars believe that the song also mentions Ernest Gaines, who later became a prominent Tappahannock leader.

Moore's song, "Barbershop Rag," testifies to both his skilled guitar playing and the barber profession. He also recorded classic twelve-bar blues songs and popular tunes, including "Midnight Blues" and "Ragtime Millionaire," a variation on the popular tune by jazz composer Irving Jones.

Later in life, Moore shied away from the blues and performing such songs. He became a deacon in his church and preferred sacred songs. According to Greg Kimball of the Library of Virginia, the Moore family lived close to the First Baptist Church and residents of Tappahannock recalled him playing the guitar, violin, piano, and accordion.

Unfortunately, a shotgun accident in 1940 severed a little finger, which severely hampered his unique style of playing chords on the guitar. Moore died Nov. 22, 1951, appropriately enough on Saint Cecilia's Day. Saint Cecilia is the patron saint of music. He is buried in Warrenton.

Unlike many musicians today, Moore did not make a dime on his recordings, which are today considered classics. According to Kimball, Moore was one of the earliest — and even few — artists to record the folk music of Virginia and the Piedmont. His repertoire covered the whole of Virginia folk music and he influenced several generations of musicians to follow.

Read at the dedication ceremony was a telegram from Wendell Holmes, leader of the blues group "The Holmes Brothers," currently



A vintage phonograph plays a recording by blues legend William Moore during a post-marker dedication event at the Essex County Public Library. (Photo by Cynthia Carter)

on tour in Europe. Paying tribute to the James River Blues Society of Virginia, a principal sponsor of the highway marker, and the Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society of Virginia, Holmes noted, "Even though many of us did not know him personally, it is apparent that William Moore's musical influence has had far-reaching effects on blues artists of today. This historic marker will be a reminder to locals and passers-by that we have a deep and rich African-American heritage, and it is up to us to honor those to whom honor is due."

A reception for Moore family members, the public, the African-American Genealogical Society, and state officials — including Kimball and Camille Bowman of the Virginia Historical Society — followed after the dedication of the highway marker at the Essex County Public Library. Guests were treated to examples of William Moore's recorded legacy and live music as well.

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