

Asa H. Moore (1820-1901)

Asa Harvey Moore was born on October 20, 1820, in Rutland, Massachusetts. He was the oldest child of Asa and Sabra (Lovell) Moore, who were from Royalston, Massachusetts.

Asa went to boarding school in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he learned about working in industry. But, he started out as a farmer until he was 19 years old. After that, he began working in the railroad business as a freight house employee for the Boston and Worcester Railroad Company in Grafton, Massachusetts. By 1845, he became a conductor for the Old Colony Railroad, which ran from Boston to Springfield, Massachusetts. He also helped start the first passenger train route from Boston to Plymouth. He worked for the Western Railroad for about 11 years.

In May 1848, Asa married Nancy B. Washburn in Plymouth, Massachusetts. She was born in 1829 and was the daughter of John Washburn. Nancy's family was related to Governor William Bradford, who came to America on the Mayflower. Asa and Nancy had three children: Thomas W., born in 1856, who tragically died in a hotel fire in 1888; Mary C. Moore Maxwell, born in 1858; and an unnamed child who probably died at birth in 1872.

In 1850, Asa and his family moved to LaPorte, Indiana, where he worked as an engineer on the Michigan Southern Railroad, which ran from Chicago, Illinois, to White Pigeon, Michigan. He also became the Assistant Superintendent of the railroad until 1854, when they moved to Bloomington, Illinois.

When they arrived in Bloomington, Asa became the train master and later the general superintendent of the Chicago-Alton Railroad. He also became a real estate investor, owning lumber yards in towns like Shirley, McLean, and Bloomington. He built railroad stations on the Alton line and eventually focused more on his businesses in Bloomington. One of his most famous properties was his Italian-style villa on North Main Street, where he and his family lived from 1870 until his death in 1901.

From 1859 to 1860, Asa helped start the Bank of Bloomington and became its first president. He sold his shares in the bank to Isaac Funk, who later renamed it the First National Bank.

Asa is most well-known for purchasing \$50,000 worth of shares in the Horse Railroads of Bloomington in 1869. He bought the shares from several well-known local people and took control of the railroad on January 1, 1870. He renamed it the Bloomington/Normal Horse Railway Company. Asa worked hard to improve the railway by adding new tracks and expanding it. He extended the line from 2 miles to nearly 9 miles, making many improvements to the system. One of his biggest changes was in 1872, when he removed the position of streetcar conductor and had the drivers collect fares directly from passengers using patented money boxes on the streetcars. This was a new idea that became popular in street railways across the country. Even though there were accidents and challenges with the railway, Asa's company was considered one of the best horse railways outside of Chicago. He also inspired a local resident, Frances Mueller Sr., to write a song called "Street Car Gallop" in 1887.

In addition to his railway business, Asa owned a lot of real estate and shares in other businesses, like the Blue Monday Gold Mine in Arizona. Despite his success, he never wanted to get involved in politics.

In 1887, after 17 years of owning the horse railway, Asa sold it to a group of people from Pennsylvania, including Judge John Graham and others. He sold the railway system for somewhere between \$125,000 and \$150,000, which would be worth about \$2.9 million in 2005.

In his later years, Asa and Nancy moved to Chicago to be near their daughter and her family. Asa passed away on August 14, 1901, at the age of 80. He died from a condition called softening of the brain. At the time of his death, his estate was worth \$300,000, which would be about \$6.9 million in 2005. Asa and his wife Nancy are buried at the Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois, where they have a large and impressive family monument.