FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Jack Hutchins Moore**

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Interviewer: Jane Goodsill and Jesse Matthews

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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22 Pages

Jack Hutchins Moore

Transcript

GOODSILL: I'd like to start by asking how your people got to Fort Bend County.

MOORE: A number of them came very, very, very early. My first ancestor who came to this part of Texas came in 1818, even before Stephen F. Austin formed his colony of the Old 300. He was on my mother's side, and his name was James Britton Bailey and they called him Brit Bailey. He settled in the area that is now called Bailey's Prairie. It lies between West Columbia and Angleton, right on the Brazos River. It's low and I'm sure it flooded badly during the recent floods, but it is an absolutely beautiful area.

GOODSILL: Tell me where James Britton Bailey came from.

MOORE: Somewhere in the South, and something makes me think it was possibly Tennessee, Kentucky or North Carolina.

GOODSILL: What did he do when he got here?

MOORE: I imagine he ranched. An amazing part of the story is that on his way here, coming through the Nacogdoches area, he got into some trouble with some Indians. His oldest daughter was kidnapped by the Indians and taken down to San Antonio. It turned out that was the child who was my great great great grandmother. Her name was Betsy Bailey and she married a man named David Milburn who actually was an Old 300 Colonist. I don't remember the story about how she was recovered from the Indians but she was recovered near San Antonio, completely unharmed. I don't know what effect it might have had on her later on, but she was fine when she was recovered.

GOODSILL: She and David had a child and that was your great-great grandmother?

MOORE: Yes. So Brit would have been my four times great grandfather, and Betsy was my 3 times great grandmother.

I have only one other relative who came to this area that I know of that is that far back. A person coming here during the colonial times would be what we would call a middle-aged person but in those days they would have been considered an old person. The other one who was like that was William Stafford. He was on my father's side of the family. He's my 4 times great grandfather on my father's side. I think he came in the early 1820s.

GOODSILL: Do you know where he came from?

MOORE: I'm not sure. He settled in the area that is now Stafford. It was named after him. He had two homes. One was the creek bottom area and the other was on the prairie. In the summer he would stay on the prairie and in the winter he'd be in the creek bottom area. His creek bottom home has a historical marker; it is very near Riverbend Country Club, on Oyster Creek. There is some canal or waterworks facility there. That historical marker is on the grounds of the canal company. I went to the dedication of it in the 1980s. That was his winter home. I'm not sure where on the prairie his summer home was located but it was near Stafford. Those are my two oldest ancestors who came to Texas and they came within a couple of years of each other.

Brit Bailey was here before the colonists were but not part of the Old 300. In fact Stephen F. Austin tried to tell him that he was on land that Austin had received a grant from the Mexican government to colonize and that Brit needed to get off the land. Brit told him he wasn't going anywhere. He told him he was here before Austin was and that he got his land from the Indians. Austin could try to make him move, but he wasn't moving. And he didn't move! He was a total character. Brit Bailey was on my mother's side and his son-in-law was David Milburn.

Let me tell you about the other ancestors I have who were Austin's Old 300 Colonists as there were four on my dad's side. My great grandmother was Lottie Dyer Moore; all four of her paternal grandparents were Austin colonists. Her grandfather was C. C. Dyer, an Old 300 colonist who married William Stafford's daughter, Sarah Stafford.

Lottie Dyer's mother was Sarah Barnett Dyer, who was the daughter of Thomas Barnett (an Old 300 Austin colonist who was one of the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence) and Nancy Spencer Barnett who was an Old 300 Colonist with her own land grant because she was a widow at the time the grants were issued. Part of this land grant is still owned by our family. She moved here with her first husband, James Spencer. He left on an expedition to Mexico and never returned. So she got the land grant that he was supposed to get. That's four different Old 300 colonists right in that same part of my family line. Pretty amazing!

GOODSILL: They all come to Texas, met each other and then the marrying started.

MOORE: That's right. There weren't that many people to choose from.

GOODSILL: So the question is, why did these people come to Texas?

MOORE: They had to be looking for a better life, mainly in terms of land - more land or better land - for farming and ranching.

GOODSILL: Where did your forebears who came to America come from?

MOORE: I've always had so much fun thinking about the ones who came to Texas I haven't spent as much time as a lot of other people have tracing further back. It's right here, where I live, and I've read so much about them and heard stories about them that I almost feel like I know these people.

GOODSILL: Are there any stories you can tell us about the people you have named?

MOORE: Brit Bailey is famous for a ghost story. In Bailey's Prairie there is a light that appears, called Bailey's Light. Apparently it is him roaming around in the river bottom with his lantern, looking for his lost jug of whiskey because his wife would not bury him with his jug of whiskey!

But the real story is just how brave and tough they were to move here and forge a life in a wilderness. It actually had a lot of opportunities but you had to make it work. It had a lot of dangers, too. And a lot of obstacles.

GOODSILL: What could you see as the dangers?

MOORE: No roads, so transportation was mainly by water, up these rivers and creeks that weren't that easy to traverse. The threat of Indian attacks and later on, the Texas revolution where the Mexican army was doing everything they could to chase these settlers out of Texas. Disease, mosquitoes, heat were all problems. You wouldn't think of cold so much, not in terms of freezing to death, but winters were wet and the cold was uncomfortable, leading to illness, particularly for the children.

GOODSILL: Yes, and you have to make everything, grow everything, churn everything.

MOORE: Not much variety in your diet either. Looking at the family cemetery tells the story of disease and childhood death. So many children under the age of 10 just never made it. There were lots of challenges. They were determined and brave, for sure.

GOODSILL: What generation would you guess it was that switched from farming to having a 'city' career?

MOORE: In my family, on my dad's side, my great grandfather, John Moore, Senior, made the switch.

GOODSILL: What is your father's name?

MOORE: Hilmar Moore. My mother was Hallie Kelley Peareson Moore.

GOODSILL: And Hilmar's father?

MOORE: He was John Moore, Junior. And his father was John Moore, Senior. He and his wife, Lottie Dyer Moore, were the builders of the Moore home in Richmond. She was the daughter of Sarah Barnett Dyer and James Foster Dyer.

GOODSILL: Of the Foster community?

MOORE: That's an interesting question. I don't know, but I don't think so.

GOODSILL: Do you remember your grandfather, John Moore, Junior?

MOORE: Very well. John Moore, Senior, died in 1940, before I was born.

GOODSILL: Why don't you tell us something about John Moore, Senior's life?

MOORE: Interesting story. He had four older sisters and was the only son and the youngest of the children. His parents were Doctor Matthew Moore and Henrietta Huddleston Moore. They came from Alabama to Wharton. There was a road into Texas called the Alabama Road. Eventually they moved from Wharton to Richmond. They lived right near where Pecan Grove is today. John Moore Sr.'s father went off to the Civil War, as a doctor. While he was there, he contracted a really bad case of dysentery, and he didn't live long at all after he got home in 1865. So his wife and five children were without their provider. They had several hundred acres of land but they lost all but the homestead, which was protected. That was 200 acres.

GOODSILL: Explain how the homestead protected them.

MOORE: That's Texas law, and we still have one of the more generous homestead laws in the United States. It's to say that if you have debts and creditors, they cannot take your home. It can expand up to 200 acres, as long as it is contiguous. If you put debt on the homestead, you can lose it or if you don't pay the taxes, you can lose it. But the homestead is protected from other types of debt. They lost everything except the 200 acres. John Moore, Senior, is three years old when his father dies. I think he's really impressed by the hardship that his family endured and he also felt an obligation to try to take care of the family. So he had a burning ambition to do well in business. He worked hard and studied hard. He went to Texas A & M.

In fact, he was in one of the first classes at A & M, which is ironic because all the later generations of my family, including me, went to the University of Texas. He and my other grandfather went to A & M, because there was no University of Texas at the time. A & M is about seven years older than the University of Texas.

GOODSILL: What did he study when he went there?

MOORE: I'm not sure. He didn't stay to get a degree. He came home and started working for a store in Richmond. Turns out it was a store owned by his wife-to-Be's family, the Dyers. He ended up managing the store. It was a general mercantile and had produce. So he made a good salary. He's probably about 20 at this time. He courted my great grandmother, and in 1883, when he was 21 and she was 18, they got married. Within the year they built the house known as the Moore home.

GOODSILL: Lottie's father must have helped.

MOORE: He and his wife had died the year before, so with Lottie's inheritance, they built that house.

GOODSILL: Now, that is QUITE a house! It was beautifully built, large rooms, spacious, tall ceilings, built in the period of the time.

MOORE: Yes. It had a completely different facade to begin with. It was originally a Victorian house and remodeled in 1905 by John and Lottie to look the way it does now, Greek Revival style.

GOODSILL: What was their motivation?

MOORE: I don't know. They thought it needed a more impressive front. By that time he was in politics.

So they got married and built that house with some of her inheritance. Also with some of her inheritance, they started adding to the land that she inherited. She and her sister inherited a really nice estate from their parents, who were James Foster Dyer and Sarah Barnett Dyer, out west of Rosenberg, between Rosenberg and Orchard. We still own a good bit of that land today. Part of my career has been helping to manage that land over the years. Included in that land is Nancy Spencer's original grant so we still own some land that was granted to my great-great-great grandmother by the Mexican government.

GOODSILL: It kind of gives you chills, doesn't it?!

MOORE: Yes. It's a good feeling. And it's a feeling of responsibility to take good care of that.

GOODSILL: Is it farmland now?

MOORE: Yes, farm and ranch land.

MATTHEWS: Where are they buried?

MOORE: They are buried in the cemetery out there where all those young children are buried, too. It's on the original Nancy Spencer property.

It's kind of hard to get to, but we can still go there and you can still read the gravestones. Her parents, the Barnetts, are also buried there. The Dyers are buried in Richmond, not too far from the courthouse in a little cemetery that very few people know about. It's kind of in-between the old courthouse and the new court complex. It's right across the street from the Hendee house on Front Street that was built by Robert Calder and his wife. Mrs. Calder was Mirabeau B. Lamar's daughter. It's a small cemetery.

But back to John Moore. He wants to do well because he has faced a lot of loss with his father dying and his mother losing most of their land. He started trying to add to his wife's land and cattle and he did a remarkable job of it. From 1883 when they got married until about 1915, he probably increased what they started with by five or six times, in terms of acreage, in different parts of the county. He added to the original ranch and bought land to have more ranches. He was in the cattle business, but when you talk about having an 'in-town' business job, unlike some of my other ancestors, he left the actual working of the cattle and the farming to others. He was involved in the business side of it.

GOODSILL: At what age did he get involved in politics?

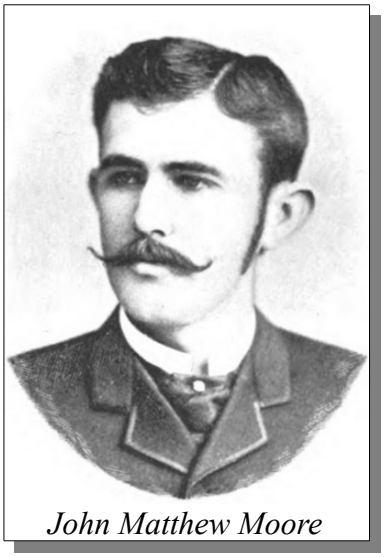
MOORE: I don't know much about that and I've only found out in the last 10-15 years that it was earlier than I had thought. In the mid-to-late 1880s he was appointed Secretary of State for the state of Texas, and did that for a while.

GOODSILL: I wonder what that job involved?

MOORE: Now it involves granting charters to corporations or different licenses or charters to various organizations.

GOODSILL: Did he have a legal background?

MOORE: He had that one year at A & M and that was it. No degree. He learned on the job. I want to research more about his being Secretary of State. In the mid-to-late 1890s, he was asked to run for the state legislature and he did. He served a few terms. He didn't want to be in politics; he was much more interested in business. But he knew that politics would help his business and he felt like he was performing a service.


John Matthew Moore

At some point he was asked to be a compromise candidate. I have to research this a bit more. I don't know if he accepted an appointment for a vacancy the first time or if he actually ran for the United States Congress from this district. He served four two-year terms in Washington, as a congressman. He was the first congressman from Fort Bend County.

GOODSILL: I heard a story from Virginia Scarborough, that her mother and her friend went to Taft's inaugural ball. She and her friend stayed with your great-grandparents in Washington.

MOORE: That's right. Because her friend was my great-aunt. She was the youngest child of John and Lottie.

GOODSILL: Did they have other children?

MOORE: They had one child who died at birth, and then five children who lived. There were three boys and two girls, and John Jr., my grandfather, was the youngest boy. In birth order there was a boy, a girl, a boy, a boy, and a girl. I didn't know the youngest one very well, Etta Mae. She was the one who was friends with Mrs. Scarborough's mother. I don't remember seeing her. And I didn't know the oldest one because he died really young. The oldest one was Raymond Moore. He died at age 40, in 1926. I knew the middle three really well, they were my great-aunt, my great-uncle and my grandfather. The great-aunt was Ivy Moore Morrison; the great-uncle was JFD Moore, named after his grandfather, James Foster Dyer; and my grandfather was John M. Moore, Junior.

GOODSILL: Let's hear something about his life.

MOORE: He grew up in the Moore home as did all those children, in Richmond. But he spent a lot of his high school years in Washington because his dad was in Congress. He went to the University of Texas and got a law degree but never practiced law. He was County Judge and then later Mayor. He was a cattle rancher.

GOODSILL: On the property you told us about?

MOORE: Yes, but also on one of the other outlying ranches that he inherited, south of Needville, that we still own. It's a wonderful place.

GOODSILL: What was he like?

MOORE: He was so interesting; he was fun-loving. He really liked children a lot and he took a big interest in children. He was a fabulous grandfather.

GOODSILL: Did he hunt, or ride?

MOORE: Oh yes, and was good at everything. He was a particularly good rifle shot. Even when he was pretty old, he was still a good shot.

GOODSILL: So he liked being outdoors.

MOORE: He LOVED it.

GOODSILL: What skills do you think he brought to the governance positions that he held?

MOORE: Good common sense and he could get along with people from all walks of life.

GOODSILL: Was he a good problem solver?

MOORE: Yes, he was. And he listened to people and could find a way to get them to compromise. He was very principled but could easily find a way to compromise. He could figure ways where both sides got some of what they wanted but not everything. He was County Judge during the Depression, so things were tough in the area. I'm sure the tax revenues went down so there weren't as many dollars for the government to spend, and you had to be really careful with it.

GOODSILL: What do you know about the Depression in this part of the country?

MOORE: A little bit. It was not as bad here as it was in most other parts of the country. I think that was probably because of oil production; in this county it started in 1920. I think the first field was at Big Creek on George Foundation land. Another large one was on our property up at Orchard, in 1926.

GOODSILL: Who was the company responsible for developing that field?

MOORE: It was Gulf Oil Company who took the lease and developed it. Another really large field was the Thompson's Field, down below Thompsons, that the George Foundation benefits from, but also the Booth and Myers families.

GOODSILL: With the benefit of hindsight, after taking the oil out of the ground, how good of a job did they do with reclamation or keeping the land in reasonable condition?

MOORE: The standards weren't as high and the equipment wasn't as good. By nature, it can be a very invasive process. In several places where they drilled for oil and gas, they also did sulphur mining and that's a REALLY invasive process.

GOODSILL: Can you tell me about that?

MOORE: Yes, it's called the Frasch method. They have to build a plant to heat water really hot and they pump the water down into a very large well bore, to where the sulphur is. The sulphur is in a solid state down there. The hot water liquefies the sulphur and that lets it rise to the surface where they pump the slurry into a pipeline to a reservoir where they let it cool. Once it cools it forms back into a solid and they can then transport it by train. sulphur is so acidic that it corrodes everything that it touches, including the land. Our land is still suffering from that, out at Orchard where they had that sulphur mine. It makes the land barren and it can affect the water. Strangely enough, cattle can graze on the land. They like being there because the sulphur tends to protect them from insects. When flies and mosquitoes are really bad, the cattle go to that part of the property to avoid them.

GOODSILL: How deeply underground is sulphur found?

MOORE: It can vary, but it was pretty deep there at Orchard, maybe 1,500-2,000 feet.

GOODSILL: So they had to dig large and deep wells. And it was just a smelly mess!

MOORE: It was! Oil and gas wells are not as much of a mess but the requirements and standards were not what they are now, so yes, there is damage.

GOODSILL: At that time the oil companies didn't see reclamation of the land as part of their job?

MOORE: No, they didn't. But the income and employment they produced continued during the Depression which tended to insulate Texas, the Gulf Coast, and Fort Bend County from the complete effects of the Depression.

That area not being urban might have helped. Then again, agriculture was hurt pretty badly by the Depression. There weren't as many agricultural exports in the 1930s as there had been previously, and there was too much crop production compared to demand in the United States. It makes you wonder what might be coming up these days! There weren't as many agricultural exports in the 1930's as there had been, mainly it was overproduction compared to the demand in the United States.

GOODSILL: A lot of produce just rotted in the fields?

MOORE: Certainly. That's where you got the dust bowl phenomenon and people moving to California. But Texas got along better than most places did. Even so, it was harder here in the 1930s than it was in the 1920s or earlier. My grandfather was County Judge at that time so it was probably a little bit harder job then than it would have been earlier.

He was such an interesting, nice, friendly, happy man. I really liked him a lot. His brother and sister that I mentioned, neither of them had any children, and they were quieter than he was, but very, very nice too.

GOODSILL: What do you remember about your grandmother?

MOORE: Her name is Dorethea Guenther. She was from San Antonio, and her family was in the flour milling business there, a business that still continues there, C. H. Guenther and Son. They make Pioneer flour and La Paloma flour and other flour products.

GOODSILL: How do you suppose your grandparents met?

MOORE: They met on a blind date. I think my grandfather was at the University of Texas and she came up from San Antonio for a dance.

GOODSILL: Do you remember her?

MOORE: Really well. She died a few years before he did. She was a very well organized person and very, very nice. She was sweet and loved being a grandmother. She was more serious than he was. I think she kept him headed in the right direction.

GOODSILL: Do you think she was good at being the wife of a county judge and mayor?

MOORE: Yes, I do. One interesting thing about her was that her German family had all been agnostics. She went to the Episcopal Church in San Antonio when she was a teenager and joined instantly. Then she got untold numbers of people from her family to join.

GOODSILL: She was persuasive and passionate about her own beliefs.

MOORE: She was. She was real active in the local church here. She was very determined. A really good lady.

GOODSILL: So these two got together and had Hilmar Moore.

MOORE: Right. But first they had his older brother, John Moore, III. He was funny and fun-loving like his dad was. He had a bit of a bad temper and I was a little bit intimidated by him when I was a boy. But once I was grown and moved back here, I got along great with him. He was really fun to talk to.

GOODSILL: What line of work was he in?

MOORE: He was in the cattle business, as was Dad. John came back and did that first and then Dad came later. Dad was going to be a lawyer and went to law school before World War II and then he went off to the Army Air Corps. When he came back, he had every intention of finishing law school but he never went back, instead going into the cattle business. So both of them were in land management and cattle business.

GOODSILL: In doing the Wessendorff series, I learned a lot about Joe Clyde and his love for cattle and trading and breeding. What was it about Hilmar and John that made them love that business?

MOORE: Part of it was they were taking care of a family business. Uncle John only did the family cattle business. Dad branched out and had his own cattle business in addition to the family business. They grew up in the business.

GOODSILL: What does that mean, he had his own cattle business?

MOORE: Uncle John managed the cattle that were owned by the family. Dad helped with that but had his own separate cattle operation. In some cases, he leased land from other people to pasture those cattle, including land from the George Foundation.

GOODSILL: Did he breed the cattle or buy calves?

MOORE: Some of both. He bought breeding age cattle and then maintained them and added to them.

GOODSILL: So they were both outdoors men.

MOORE: Very much so.

MATTHEWS: What breeds of cattle?

MOORE: If you go back to John Moore, Senior, the family always had purebred Herefords. They weren't registered but were pretty much purebred. Dad introduced other breeds, particularly Santa Gertrudis, which is a cross between shorthorn and Brahman. It added a lot of size and diversity to the family cattle. Since then we've had various breeds of bulls so other blood has been introduced, but that Santa Gertrudis bull/Hereford cow cross was probably the mainstay of the operation.

GOODSILL: Was the goal to sell the cattle?

MOORE: It was to sell the calves. Keep the cows, keep the bull, and sell the calves.

GOODSILL: Was this purely a breeding operation or did you raise cattle for meat as well?

MOORE: It was both. Those male calves are grown for meat. The female calves are sometimes raised for meat but a lot of times you keep the female calves to become part of your herd, for breeding.

GOODSILL: Did you inherit any of that interest?

MOORE: A little bit. I'm more interested in the land management side of it than the cattle business. I love going out in the country but I like doing the paperwork side of it a lot more than either my dad or my uncle did.

GOODSILL: Do you have brothers?

MOORE: I had two brothers. One of them, Philip, died pretty young in an automobile accident. My older brother, Hilmar, Junior, is six years older than I am and lives in Fort Worth. He's 71 and I'm 65. At the time of his death in 1977 at age 29, Philip was working with Dad in the cattle business. Hilmar, Junior, is not involved in the cattle business. I'm taking care of that, along with one of my cousins, Ray Moore IV, who is the great grandson of that first Ray Moore.

GOODSILL: So your father was in the cattle business as was John, and at some point your father got into politics.

MOORE: The mayor of Richmond at the time resigned, and the businessmen in town asked him to accept appointment to fill out that term, in 1949. And he never retired as Mayor. He was still the Mayor when he died, in 2012, so he served 63 years, which is a record.

The Guinness Book of World Records wouldn't put it in the book because they said they didn't have a category for that! But no one knows of anyone serving any longer than that. There was a man in Pennsylvania who started earlier than Dad but he died earlier.

GOODSILL: What do you think were some of his strengths as mayor? What in his personality made him adaptable to that job?

MOORE: Some of the same qualities that his father had, such as common sense and an ability to see both sides of a problem, get along with people and find good solutions. I also think candor played a large part. In a higher office, he probably would have been defeated for being as candid as he was, but it seemed to work well on the local level. He said what he thought; you knew exactly what his position was. He would listen but he did not try to sugarcoat his opinions to make it appeal to more people. He did what he thought was best.

GOODSILL: So the whole time he was mayor, he was also running his cattle business?

MOORE: Yes. There was almost no salary for him as mayor.

GOODSILL: It was a gift of love, wasn't it!

MOORE: Exactly.

GOODSILL: Tell us something about your mother.

Philip E. and D.R. Peareson 1902

MOORE: That's a good segue because I tended to go more in the direction of her side of the family, which was the law. Those pictures I showed you were three generations of lawyers here in Richmond. Her father's name was Philip E. Peareson. Her mother's name was Hallie Rust Kelley Peareson, just like my mother. Philip's father was DeRugeley Peareson. His mother was a Rugeley, so his name was "of Rugeley" - DeRugeley. There has been a book written about the original Rugeley who came to Texas. He had 21 children.

GOODSILL: Were they French?

MOORE: No, they were English. They may have originally been from France. But there is a Rugeley, England, where they came from. That Rugeley who came to Texas had 11 children by his first wife and 10 by his second wife.

GOODSILL: What was DeRugely Peareson's wife's name?

MOORE: Mollie Sargent. And her father or grandfather founded the area known as Sargent in Matagorda County. That's where she grew up. So a Richmond boy, DeRugely Peareson, met and married Mollie Sargent. And they had Philip.

One incredibly interesting thing about them is I have his birth date and my wife has Mollie's birth date. And Mollie is really a nickname for Mary Elizabeth and that coincidentally is also my wife's name.


COL P.E. Peareson 1841-1895

The three generations of lawyers on my mother's side are me, my grandfather and my great grandfather, DeRugeley. And his father was a lawyer also. He was also Philip Edward Peareson. born in Alabama but moved to Texas with his family as a young boy. He was an officer in the Civil War, first a Lieutenant and moving up to Major by the end of the war. He came back from the war and decided to become a lawyer. That makes four generations, counting me.

MATTHEWS: Do you happen to know his unit or regiment?

MOORE: They formed a Matagorda unit that his father was supposed to be the leader of, but his father got sick, so Philip became the leader of it. It might have been Matagorda Company D or something like that. And at some point they decided they were going to go out at night and they drowned trying to attack the Union ship out there for the Gulf of Mexico.

MATTHEWS: It was in January, and it was so cold the bay was frozen over.

MOORE: He wasn't there when that happened. He left and fought in Tennessee and was captured near Chattanooga and held as a prisoner for a while. Partly because he had skills to be a lawyer, we have some of his letters and he wrote the best letters.

I think he was exaggerating the hardship somewhat to try to woo his girlfriend, Miss Minnie Rugeley, who he ended up marrying. So there's a letter from him to her, before he was captured. It was wintertime and he talked about how tough it was. It's really good handwriting and some of the best writing you ever saw.

I'm really happy to have that documentation. He had a sister-in-law who never married and she saved all the letters that her sister Minnie and her husband Philip wrote to her. We have those letters! I haven't gone through all of them yet. We have letters from that family that go back to the 1810s, before they came to Texas. We don't have many but a whole bunch of them from when they came to Texas, from the 1840s through the 1880s.

GOODSILL: What do you do with those?

MOORE: A cousin of mine is going through them, transcribing them. It's hard for her to make the kind of progress she wants so it will take a long time, but she's working on it.

Judge D.R. Peareson 1869-1950

Back to the four lawyers, we have the original Philip Peareson who came from Matagorda to Richmond and he practiced law here from 1867 until he died in 1895. Then DeRugeley Peareson started practicing law here in Richmond, in 1892-1893, and I ended up joining that same firm when I moved back to Richmond. He practiced law until he died in 1950, about 58 years. Then my grandfather, Philip Peareson, practiced law here from 1920 until he died in 1970. There were nine years in there where there was nobody from our family practicing law in Richmond. I came back in 1979 and I've been practicing law since 1979 until now so that's 37 years.

Philip E. Peareson - 1894-1970

GOODSILL: You were saying that your father was in the cattle business but you took after your mother's side of the family. Did you mean just the legal part or did you mean her personality?

MOORE: Maybe some of both. She was really, really beautiful and really popular. I get emotional talking about her because she's been gone a long time. She died in 1982, really young, she was 61 and died of cancer. Everybody loved her. She just had a way about her of getting along with people. People wanted to be around her.

GOODSILL: Would you say she was primarily social or was there a part of her that was studious as well?

MOORE: She was studious to the extent that when she was in school she was very dedicated. I don't think she got her teacher's certificate but she got a degree from the University of Texas. She was a housewife, a mother and a homemaker. I guess she was primarily social. She did a lot to help my dad.

GOODSILL: But she also made an impact on you and the direction you wanted to go with your life and career?

MOORE: Yes, and taught me how to get along with and how to treat people. She had an aunt, my great-aunt, and she and her husband didn't have any children. I was named after her husband, Jack Hutchins. Her name was Louise Kelley Hutchins. She was the older sister of my grandmother, Hallie Rust Kelley Peareson. I was probably closer to my great-aunt Louise than I was to any of my grandparents. She was an amazing lady. I think my mother took after her quite a bit.

Aunt Louise's husband, Jack, was the manager of a big ranch west of Wharton, the Pierce Ranch. She helped him a lot in that. He died young, and had done well in business, so she inherited a nice estate. She was very philanthropic. She made lots of gifts to help people, some known and many unknown. I feel like I was influenced a lot by her. I admired her character and her values, and just the way she treated people.

GOODSILL: Tell us something about her philanthropy.

MOORE: She was very, very generous. She didn't have any children or grandchildren but she was very generous to us too. She gave fairly substantial gifts to Wharton County Junior College and to the Gulf Coast Medical Hospital in Wharton and numerous other charities. And a lot of private donations.

GOODSILL: Why Wharton?

MOORE: They lived near Wharton and later in El Campo, and she grew up in Wharton. She and Hallie grew up in Wharton. I think my grandmother, her younger sister, met my grandfather Peareson at the University of Texas.

GOODSILL: Do you have children?

MOORE: Yes, I do. I have two children, Lou - named after Louise Hutchins, and Jack, Junior. They don't live in Texas and probably will never live in Texas. They both live within 10 miles of each other in northern California. I think they are pioneering over there! We've been in Texas a long time and they struck out and went somewhere else.

GOODSILL: Are either of them interested in the law?

MOORE: Neither one of them.

GOODSILL: Either of them interested in politics?

MOORE: No. Nor cattle. My son is a little bit interested in land management but he'll probably never do it. My daughter is real interested in writing. She's trying to write a novel. Her husband is in the high-tech business. My son is in the energy forecasting business. That's challenging. He just loves crunching numbers. And he feels that it is an important thing to be doing. Each of them has two children; the oldest is six and the youngest is 1-1/2 months. So we go to California at least 4-5 times a year.

GOODSILL: What else do we want to cover?

MOORE: On Mom's side of the family I need to fill in some gaps. Let's talk about Hallie's parents. Her father was a lawyer in Wharton, named G. G. Kelley, George Gerard Kelley. He's Irish and his parents came to Texas from Ireland. He was the youngest of 10 children. He grew up along the Brazos, near Navasota, and came to Wharton to be a schoolteacher. He then decided to become a lawyer and became a lawyer there for a long period of time, probably 40-50 years. He was very interested in literature. He could recite poetry and read Shakespeare, and quote the Bible. I didn't know him because he died in 1938 but apparently he was a very interesting fellow. They called him Judge Kelley but I researched it and he never was a judge. That was an honorary title. He married a girl from Wharton, Margaret Lucy "Lou" Rust and her father was an interesting guy, who came from Virginia.

His name was Jack Rust, but his full name was Andrew Jackson Rust. He was born in 1828, which is when Andrew Jackson was elected president. He came to Wharton from Virginia. He wasn't in the cattle business but he did buy some land. He was a merchant in Wharton.

GOODSILL: Was Wharton a thriving place then?

MOORE: It was kind of a center, about like Richmond. His marriage to Lou Rust is how you get back to Brit Bailey and David Milburn. Her father was David Milburn and her mother was Betsy Bailey Milburn, who was the one who was kidnapped by the Indians.

If I didn't know my forebears, I've heard many stories about them, particularly from my grandfather Moore, my grandfather Peareson and my great-aunt Louise Hutchins, all of whom told really good stories about the people further back. They kept the history alive. I don't remember every detail about it but I remember the gist of it. I've always liked history a lot and it works really well with what I do because I did a lot of title law when I first started practicing law. And I've handled lots of estates. All that fits in perfectly with my liking history.

GOODSILL: Tell us about title law and estates.

MOORE: It's a history lesson! Some people think it's the most boring part of law. It's not, if you like history. You are looking at deeds and trying to trace ownership of land back through time to make sure that the person who claims they own that property now really does own it. You trace inheritances and you trace transfers.

The interesting thing is, for John Moore to acquire the land he did, I'm just now finding this out because I've been studying his papers. He did a whole lot of that research himself. When he needed an attorney he would get one but many times he just dug it out himself. You can tell from his correspondence. He wrote letters all over the country to find heirs, to make sure that if he was going to buy the property, he was getting clear title. This started in the mid-1880s, going through 1915-1920. He was hard working and dedicated. So my practice of law fits in really well with my love of history.

GOODSILL: Tell us about being an estate lawyer.

MOORE: It's helping people transfer property from one generation to another, both in the planning and then after people die, in the actual transfer. I've enjoyed doing that a lot.

GOODSILL: So you have to go back and do some deed work for that as well, to make sure everything is passed down in the proper way.

MOORE: You definitely do. I enjoy the law. It's business law basically; transaction law.

GOODSILL: Who in your line did that sort of work, other than John Moore?

MOORE: Both of my great grandfathers did. And even my grandfather Peareson did. He managed a title company that the family owned. But both those great grandfathers on my mother's side, Kelley and Peareson, did exactly this.

GOODSILL: Isn't that interesting! Before we began you mentioned Kathleen Lindsey. Did you have any interaction with her because she did a lot of title work?

MOORE: It was mainly later in her life, because her law office was in Rosenberg and she had been partners with her husband, Bob. One of their younger law partners, Greg Knauth, continued her practice after she retired, and then a few years ago, he retired. Mrs. Lindsey came to me to be her personal attorney. I represented her the last 8-10 years of her life, and it was a treat talking to her and representing her.

GOODSILL: She could really calculate data.

MOORE: And I hardly ever prepared anything for her that she didn't have a correction or change to make to it. And she wasn't being nit-picky. This was when she was in her 90s!

GOODSILL: And I might go so far as to say that she made the document better with her changes!

MOORE: Oh, for sure. No question about it! She was amazing. But the really interesting thing was, she remembered, that as a young attorney, having interactions with both my grandfather Peareson and my great-grandfather Peareson. Those was just priceless memories to hear about.

GOODSILL: She was instrumental in starting the Fort Bend County Library system. In her interview she had some very warm things to say about her father and how much she admired him. His name was Francis Xavier Joerger.

MOORE: She was the first female attorney in Fort Bend County. When she was in law school in the mid 1930's she was one of only five women in law school at UT Austin. There were probably 200-250 males and five females. You've got to be pretty dedicated to do that. And you talk about philanthropy; she did a lot of philanthropic things.

One thing that has been very rewarding in my later career, is getting to represent charitable foundations. Mainly the George Foundation and the Henderson-Wessendorff Foundation.

GOODSILL: People don't always know what it's like to do that type of work with a foundation, so could you tell us about it?

MOORE: It's really like representing a small business. I don't make decisions about grants they make but I make sure they follow the right procedures when doing that. It's really interesting but it also gives you a good feeling that you are helping to do something good. You aren't giving the money away but you are helping the people who ARE giving it away to do it right.

The only thing I have probably left out is on Dad's mother's side of the family. Let's go back and talk about the Guenthers a little bit. My great grandmother was named Marie Bachman and she's the only one of my great-grandparents that I actually knew. She lived to be 95. She was born in Switzerland and she came from Switzerland to Ohio when she was five years old. She lived with my grandparents, John and Dorethea Moore, in what is now The Moore House. As a little boy, I would go visit her quite often and I really liked her a lot.

Her husband was Hilmar Guenther and that's who my dad was named after. So a German married a Swiss. Hilmar Guenther's father was Carl Hilmar Guenther. He came from Germany in the 1840s and started the flour mill in Fredericksburg. The mill was flooded out and then he went to San Antonio and re-established the flour mill there, in 1851-1852.

GOODSILL: Is wheat grown in Texas?

MOORE: Some. I'm not sure how the amount grown now compares to back when the mill was established.

GOODSILL: I understand wheat was grown prolifically in the Panhandle prior to the Dust Bowl. This was part of the reason for the Dust Bowl, because they dug up the prairie grass, which had kept the soil anchored to the ground.

MOORE: Dorethea Pape was Carl's wife and she came from Germany, too.

GOODSILL: Anything else you want to talk about?

MOORE: I like history so much and I've had so much satisfaction knowing my family history especially because so much of it is right here in this area. It really makes me love this area. I love traveling but I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

GOODSILL: You know, we're looking at this family tree and it goes from top to bottom, past to present. Wouldn't it be interesting to do a family tree of the land? Let's talk about land use for a minute. Originally it was grazing and hunting land for the Indians. The next generation what would it have been?

MOORE: I guess grazing then farming. Next would be farming and ranching and that is how much of the land is still used. Then you gradually get urbanization.

GOODSILL: And there is oil production in there. And after oil comes houses?

MOORE: Yes. And businesses. For example, Meyerland shopping center was a cattle pasture as late as the 1940s. A good friend of my dad's family had cattle on that property. Then if you go out to Beltway 8 and the Grand Parkway, a lot of this area that is now being developed was all cattle pasture. Now it is being converted to housing and businesses.

An important thing in all this was the trains. You went from the rivers for transportation and they were very undependable, to the railroads, which were much better but limited and fixed. Of course you had horse and buggies and later automobiles, trucks and airplanes. That's a big part of it too.

In one of the letters we have from Philip Peareson, he talks about taking his family down to the Bay City area from Richmond in a horse-drawn wagon. In the middle of the trip, a norther blew in and got them all wet and cold. They intended to arrive by sundown but they didn't. And this is only 60 miles or so. It was a harrowing experience.

GOODSILL: Thank you for this interview, Jack!