MORGAN COUNTY

HISTORY & GENEALOGY

ASSOCIATION, INC.

HISTORY OF MOORESVILLE
COURTESY OF THE ACADEMY BUILDING MUSEUM, JULIE KYLE-LEE, MANAGER

The early settlers who came to Indiana have been described by historians as "the strong and the brave." Those who first came to Morgan County in the now Mooresville vicinity around 1818 were "a rugged people who knew they needed each other to combat the Indians and the savage terrain. They had a love for, and a determination to maintain freedom, and yet had a compassion for their fellow men."

Jacob Wetzel was the first white settler in the county, and he blazed the Wetzel Trace, the first east-west roadway in central Indiana, starting at Waverly. The fertile fields surrounding White Lick Creek, along with woods and abundant wild life, rolling hills, springs, and proximity to the Wetzel Trace provided ideal conditions for developing a community. The local Indians were described as not being the savage or warring type. The Delaware tribes had agreed to leave the Territory after the War of 1812, which provided more security to white pioneer settlers of Indiana, a new state in 1816.

The first settler in the Mooresville area was William Ballard in 1820. Samuel Moore was born in 1799. His Quaker family had come from England and settled in North Carolina. They disagreed with slavery and moved away from its practice when Samuel was 20 years old. They migrated to Washington County, Indiana. He soon struck out on his own and became interested in trading activities. Moving northward, he eventually came to Brown Township in Morgan County in 1822.

Samuel Moore established the first trading post in Brown township. It originally was in a log cabin at the site of the current Village Shopping Center and the Kroger store, near White Lick Creek. He traded with both whites and Indians. At that time, the currency used to purchase needed goods was primarily silver, but also included deer skins, coon

skins, ginseng, bees wax, and buck horn.

Samuel Moore's business flourished, and by 1823 he bought land and laid out the original plat of the town a year later. It consisted of four blocks of five acres each, with each block containing sixteen lots. The total land of 20 acres was purchased for $2 an acre.

The first cabin was built by Asa Bales ()who later became the first postmaster), and the first frame building was Samuel Moores's mercantile store, on the northeast corner of the main intersection of town. A large rock marker in what is now Hadley Mini-Park stands at the site on Main street.

Mr. Moore conducted business there for 44 years, and his goods were taken by wagon and boat to Madison, Louisville, and even as far as New Orleans and Boston. The records from his store were meticulously kept and were used to help land the historical village and store at Conner Prairie.

Soon after the town was platted, the State Capital was re-located and built just 20 miles away in Indianapolis, which w a big boost for Mooresville in terms of business, land values, population, and road and bridge development. Soon many more businesses appeared in the town.

As soon as possible after the first log homes were built, provision was made to educate the pioneer children. The first school society, for primary grades only, was organized in 1828 and held in Samuel Moores's store. The Quakers built the first high school in central Indiana in 1861. Their building, known as the Academy, is still standing. In 1956, the Mooresville, and Brown, Madison and Harrison Township schools consolidated to form the Mooresville Consolidated School Corporation.

In 1828, Samuel Moore married Eliza Worthington. They had several children, but only one who lived through adulthood. Margaret Moore later married David Fogelman, and they had a daughter.

Christianity came with the pioneers, and the Quakers and Methodists organized their first classes about the same time in 1821 and 1822. At present, there are over 30 active churches in the area.

The village prospered and grew. In 1831, the population was listed as 200, eight more blocks were added, and the town was officially incorporated. By 1850, the population had reached 500 people.

Mooresville was extremely fortunate that photographer J. P. Calvert arrived in 1867. His photographs of the town's early years are invaluable and can be seen at the library and at the museum.

In 1870, John D. Carter, one of the first citizens of Mooresville, started the "Old Settlers Picnic." In 1877, Samuel Moore donated five acres of land for the annual reunion. That location, now called the Old Town Park, served as the site of the picnic every year until 2000. The Old Settlers Festival is now a three-day event, and takes place in Pioneer Park, after a parade through the streets of town. The Lion's Club has managed the event since 1962.

The six-acre North Park was donated to the Town in the 1950s. In 1971, the town purchased the 104 acres on Indianapolis Road to form Pioneer Park. Rooker Park has also been recently developed. Hadley Mini-Park, downtown, was established to honor Paul Hadley, the Mooresville resident and well-know water color artist who designed the state flag. The town adopted "Mooresville, Home of the Indiana State Flag" as its slogan in 1966 and also named the Junior High School after him. The mini-park was also built to honor Samuel Moore and the site of the new trading post he established (built by J. D. Carter and his cousins), when he laid out the town.

The Hovey Workingman's Institute, organized in 1855, was the first effort at a library in Mooresville. Later a reading room was established, and then a new Carnegie library was dedicated in 1916. The current Mooresville Public Library, on West

Harrison Street, built in 1988.

The first newspaper was the *Mooresville Chronicle*, established in 1846. Later came the *Mooresville Enterprise*, *The Herald*, *The Monitor*, and *The Guide*. In 1895 the *Mooresville Guide* changed hands and was called the *Mooresville Times*. The weekly newspaper now covers a much larger area, has expanded to two issues per week, and is now known as the *Mooresville/Decatur Times*.

The first bank was the Savings Bank of Mooresville, established in 1872, and became known as the Farmers Bank in 1872. The First National Bank was organized in 1903, and around 1927, the two banks merged into a new organization known as the Mooresville State Bank. It closed in 1930, and the present Citizens Bank was organized in 1931. The Mooresville Federal Savings and Loan Association was established in 1934, and later became the current First Indiana Bank.

Town Founder Samuel Moore died in 1889, at the age of 90 years. The bell in the Academy Building was tolled 91 times to tell the town and mourn his death. He, along with his wife Eliza, and their children, were buried in the old town cemetery on West Washington Street.

The growing pioneer town of Mooresville benefitted from the new inventions of the 20th century. It gained telephone service in 1901, interurban train service in 1903, an electric service plant was established in 1904, and the first motion picture show (5 cents a ticket) opened in 1908.

A volunteer fire department was organized in 1904 and still functions on a paid volunteer basis as the Brown Township Fire Department. We also now have the Town of Mooresville's Fire Department, and the Mooresville Police Department, which is administered by the Police Commission.

By 1924, at the town's 100th anniversary, the population was 1800. After World War II, the count was an estimated 7,100. From the 2000 census, the current population is about 11,000 within the corporate limits, with approximately 30,000 additional people living within a five mile radius.

There have been over 40 annexations, and the town now has over 3,000 acres within its limits. The governing body is the elected Town Council, consisting of five members and a Clerk-Treasurer.

Mooresville held its Sesquicentennial Celebration in 1974. President Ronald Reagan visited in 1985. The Town of Mooresville celebrated its 175th anniversary and the 200th anniversary of the birth of Samuel Moore in 1999. In April of 2000, the historic 1861 Academy Building was re-dedicated.

"In grateful memory to the pioneers...who have laid firmly the foundation of our home town, Mooresville. Marvelous have been the changes since the first settlers came in...It was no easy matter in those days of toil and struggle against the discouraging elements of the wilderness, as well as against sickness, securing food and shelter. But they conquered these in admirable fashion. It has been a good way of life: to live in a community and to work with people in finding solutions to common problems."

Original sources: Ballard, Potts, Richardson and Ruona. (Please check with the Academy Building Museum, the Mooresville Public Library, or the Morgan County Public Library for more information).