

# Manor house has watched county grow since 1800s

Potomac News 6/18/90  
By JIM ROGERS  
of the Potomac News

**BRENTSVILLE** — Stately historic Moor Green Manor House has sat secluded atop a hill on Flint Rock Road since the early 1800s, its presence a reminder of a more genteel time.

While it remained fixed in time, surrounding farms vanished beneath developers' earth-moving equipment. In their place, modern houses arose. Only Moor Green remained.

The two-story brick house, built by the Hooe family in about 1802, is listed as a historical landmark on both the national and state registers. Because all nationally registered properties are protected against destruction by the federal Historic Act of 1966, the house has remained intact.

Ben Shoemaker's family bought Moor Green in 1907 for \$8,000 when it was part of a 384-acre estate. The 70-year-old Brentsville resident now lives in a modern home within walking distance of the manor house.

Shoemaker recalls growing up at Moor Green, watching farmers work the fields, and curling up before one of the house's seven huge fireplaces on chilly evenings. "They didn't keep the fires going all day," he said. "... I don't know why we didn't freeze in the winter."

Shoemaker's family lived in the manor house until 1939, about the time he turned 19 years old.

"My great-uncle bought it in 1907," he said. "My mom died when I was 3 years

## Places

old and my father, brother, three sisters moved into the big house to live.

"It was a real farm in those days, but we didn't have to do much real farm work," Shoemaker said. "My uncle, who was in his 70s when we moved in with him, was too old to work the place himself. So, he hired a man to do the farm work."

The hired man plowed the fields with horse-drawn equipment for many years, Shoemaker said. "He did everything the old fashioned way — from churning butter to cutting wood with an ax."

Shoemaker's father moved away from Moor Green in 1924 to become a Washington, D.C., police officer.

"He'd come home every weekend," Shoemaker said. "But we didn't see much of him during the week."

A brother-in-law replaced the hired hand in 1933. "Of course, by that time, my dad had replaced all the old equipment with modern stuff. We had a tractor and all the modern equipment of the time."

Historical records report how the property was used by Confederate and Union forces during the Civil War.

"Back when my great-uncle bought the place, he told a friend of his about the house," Shoemaker said. "Turns out that this friend had been a captain in the Civil War and remembered wintering



The Moor Green Manor House, near Brentsville, was built in the early 1800s.

By Ron Sirell-Potomac News

his troops at the old farm around 1863 or so."

Over the years, investment bankers have had an influence on Moor Green.

Records show that Moor Green was owned by First Commercial Bank Inc. in 1980 when the then 36-acre property was divided into five building lots of three- to six-acres apiece. The Arlington-based bank allowed 15 acres around the house to remain intact.

The house had been vacant for 15 years, following its purchase by the bank in the mid-1960s. In April 1984, the bank set out on an 18-month-long project to renovate Moor Green and restore it to its original beauty.

Bank officials in 1986 reported spending more than \$260,000 on the house, replacing ancient electrical, plumbing

and heating systems. Workers also replaced the roof and added an additional bedroom to the top floor.

The house, now estimated to be worth more than \$500,000, was sold at auction in the late 1980s and today is the private residence of Mrs. Kay Gaines. She could not be reached for comment.

"She let me go through it the other day," Shoemaker said. "That was the first time in many years I've been in there. I felt sort of funny walking into some of the old bedrooms ... remembering the places my brother and sisters used to play."

"It's really different now. A lot has changed. But the floors are the same. The old pine floors are still there and still bare," he said.

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