

The Following are excerpts from a letter written by Palmer Forness who was instrumental in the restoration of Fargo's First House in 1979 following its move to Bonanzaville, USA in 1974. Further restoration work was completed in 2021 involving replacing several of the wall logs.

A short distance from the river, on the banks of a slough that is now Island Park, the two adventurers would begin construction of their home, a building that would one day lay claim to being the first permanent house built in Fargo. Considering the land was still Indian Territory, never had been surveyed and legally could not be pre-empted, purchased or homesteaded by anyone, they established "squatters rights" on it until several years later when they could legally file a claim.

There was immediate concern for the 40-50 logs that would be needed for the cabin walls. An account by Dr. Max Moore, grandson of Harry Moore, tells of hearing from his father how the logs were cut at various groves up river from the building site, lashed together as a raft, and floated down river among the last ice chunks of the past winter. The 18 long pole rafters of birch or similar type wood were obtained on the Minnesota side of the river and ferried across. It does appear the two men were not overly concerned about the choice of logs as skilled Scandinavian cabin builders would have been, some of the logs still having the bark intact when the cabin was completed. No doubt their primary concern was in getting a much needed shelter erected in a short time rather than in being overly concerned about the grandeur of it when completed. It is easy to picture the two builders swinging their axes, chopping, hewing and shaping the logs to ensure a snugger fit when they were placed into position. The ends of the logs were notched, rather crudely in this instance, to joint the corners, thus stabilizing the four walls against each other. Openings were left where the door and windows would exist. Day after day by aching muscle and honest sweat the four walls rose log upon log to the exciting fulfillment of the laborers.

When the four walls finally reached the desired height of eleven feet the pole rafters were erected to support the roof of the 22' x 26' log house (20' x 24' inside dimensions). The roof was of rough milled boards that were installed vertically instead of horizontal as in most such cases, each board extending the entire distance from eaves to peak. A loft area was reached by means of a wooden ladder.

From the completion of the building, that first came to be known as the Moore Mann house, it served a variety of purposes. It became a popular meeting place for parties and community events. It even became Fargo's first hotel, complete with a register for a paying guest who would not be provided with a private room, only a bed, access to a wash stand and water pitcher plus use of the nearby outhouse. During this time the Moore family resided in the house although little mention is found of them.

During the winter of 1871-1872 a renter at the home was an official of the land office of the federal government, U.S. commissioner George I. Foster. Foster continued living in Fargo long after those early years, serving as Clerk of U.S. Court and becoming involved in the insurance business.

When Fargo, Dakota Territory, held its first election on April 5, 1875, Capt. George Egbert was elected the first mayor of the struggling community of 600 souls. Considering the community had been experiencing considerable lawlessness, drunkenness and public disorder during those often turbulent years, creating the need for some official local law and order, the election also included the election for its first Marshal, Harry Moore ran for this office and was defeated by John Haggart by a vote of 60-30. Two months after the election, Mayor Egbert and the new city aldermen presented Marshal Haggart with an official jail. The city purchased a number of blankets for prospective prisoners at that time and signed a contract with Moore and Mann for renting from them, for \$15.00 a month, their log home-hotel. The contract existed for a little over a year, being canceled August 10, 1876, when the inmates were moved to a new jail the city had constructed at a cost of \$197.

The Moore Mann House/Hotel/Jail was sold to Frank Tanner (F.C. Tanner, W.F. Tanner). Prior to this the house had been moved from its original site near Island Park to a location several blocks north in order to establish homestead rights, also thus avoiding continued spring flooding of the Red River. The address that eventually listed it as 119 4th Street South. During these years the house was called the Frank Tanner house. Another account refers to it as the Elm Tree House and a sign to that effect hung in a huge Elm that shaded its humble existence. The old Elm is gone now as is any proof of the factuality of that account. Still the historical house survived in a very physical presence even though it's day to day happenings remain somewhat sketchy at times.

The year 1892 would begin a new chapter in the history of Fargo's First House. Now owners took possession of it and for the following half century would pridefully and jealously guard its existence. Henry Hector and his wife Mary were the contended new owners. The house then came to be known as the Hector house. Extensive appearance changing, remodeling, including an addition, took place after the Hectors became owners of the house. When completed, the structure that now hid the original logs beneath its new siding, laths and plaster was said to be the most comfortable in the city.

For 48 years Mary, Henry and their family would dwell there in contented comfort. Following Henry's death in 1940, at age 79, Mary would continue in residence for another six years. What interesting accounts of Fargo's history the Hector family and their house had been witness to, including the disastrous Fargo Fire of June 7, 1893 that began in Herzmans store a short distance from their home and developed into a conflagration that destroyed thirty-one blocks of the city that had then grown to 12,000 inhabitation.

The Hectors remodeled their home again in 1933. The Fargo Forum ran a photo picturing the logs from the original house that were exposed on one side during the construction project and some history about the first house built in Fargo.

On May 23, 1939, the Fargo Chapter of Pioneer Daughters of North Dakota gave formal recognition to Fargo's First House at a dedication service honoring its historical significance. Mrs. W.D. Hartman, chapter president, and Mrs. C.E. Webster, chairman of the history committee introduced Harry Moore, great grandson and namesake of the builder of the house. Mr. Moore then unveiled the historic boulder in front of the house at 119 Fourth Street South into which a bronze plaque had been embedded that stated:

**FARGO'S FIRST HOUSE MADE OF LOGS CUT ALONG RED RIVER  
BUILT BY A. HARRY MOORE IN 1869 REBUILT BY HENRY HECTOR 1892  
ERECTED BY FARGO CHAPTER OF PIONEER DAUGHTERS OF NORTH DAKOTA MAY 1939**

Following one more move and many years of neglect, the Fargo Moorhead Board of Realtors and Multiple Listing Service came riding to the rescue of Fargo's First House like some knight on a white horse. On April 30, 1974, led by far sighted realtors Jerry Dwyer, Jim Fay, Jack Hillaboe and other concerned members the Board purchased the neglected piece of property and presented the house to the Cass County Historical Society for preservation. The City of Fargo stepped forward, setting aside \$2500 toward moving and restoration expenses. Additional financial assistance came from Dr. Max Moore of Valley City, grandson of the original builder and from Mrs. Claude Hector, daughter-in-law of Henry Hector. Mrs. Hector was living in California.

On July 8, 1974 a building moving permit was hung on the house and it had been prepared for moving. The permit read: Nick Schmidt, moving permit #29199, to move house out of city limits from 205 23rd Street South.

Today Fargo's First House stands proudly at Bonanzaville as it has for the past 48 years. It is a very special part of area history. It is a tribute to the pioneers of Fargo, the city once billed as The Gateway to the West.