

## Written history of the Moore and McCarthy families in Merna

**Subject:** Oral and written family and personal stories; Personal stories

**Date:** 1840 - 1918

**Description:** A written history of the Michael Moore and McCarthy Families in Merna covers the years from their arrival during the Potato Famine in Ireland in 1840 and includes the flu epidemic of 1918. Family members and descendants mentioned in the history include Tom and Margaret McCarthy and their daughter, Ella, who later married Tom Moore. Ella Moore, who was for many years a teacher in the Merna and Fletcher Schools, wrote the history in longhand during her last years in a nursing home.

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### Moore and McCarthy Family History 1840 - 1918

#### Excerpts from a history written by Ella Moore

The Potato Famine of 1840 brought the Michael **Moore** family and the **McCarthy** family to America, and to the Merna area because they were farmers and stock raisers in Ireland and this was good farm land. The farm implements were horse drawn plows, harrows, seeders and sideboard wagons for husking com. There was no post office or church and Ella's father, Tom, rode horseback to Downs to collect the mail once a month. Her father attended school until he was 21 years of age. The teacher was William **Merna**, a son of James Merna. School was open five months from November 1st through March 31st. William, Tom's youngest brother, taught the Ballard School until he earned enough to enter Wesleyan. University to study law. Ella's mother, Margaret McCarthy, studied to be a teacher in Cleveland, Ohio, staying with a cousin.

She taught the Merna School, and met Tom Moore who lived near the school. Ella graduated from the Merna School in 1914 and attended St. Joseph's Academy in Bloomington. Every Saturday morning she attended a class on the corner of Market and Main at the Bloomington School of Dramatic Art. She learned a lot of "readings" and gave readings at various programs in the upstairs of the Carmody Grocery Store (the building is now the Merna Tap). There was such a crowd at one of the meetings that they were afraid the floor would collapse so the "Married Women's Club" took steps to build Community Hall. Some of the men were not pleased about that and they built the White Hall across the road. Father Lentz told the builders they would never have a bit of luck, which proved true.

Before the two halls were built, there was dancing on a platform in a space between the Gould store and the depot. Mrs. Gould kept bolts of different patterns of calico and muslin in the grocery store. Ella's mother made everyday dresses and aprons, but a dress maker on Fell Avenue in Normal made dress up dresses or they were bought ready made. They traveled to Marshall Field to buy a graduation dress. They took piano lessons from Catherine Cleary who taught on Saturday, coming out on the 7 o'clock train or from Teresa Coyne.

Ella attended classes three times a week, after school, at St. Joseph's Academy, Bloomington, and took a teacher's examination in the County Superintendent's office to become a teacher. She passed with a grade of 89. After she graduated, Bridget Somers of Bloomington, who had taught for several years at Merna School, resigned to marry a Mr. Glennon of Pontiac. No one in the Merna School area wanted to board the teacher and Mrs. Bergan and Mrs. Foran, where Bridget boarded while teaching, decided they were too old to continue, so they asked Ella to teach. The pupils in grades four to eight were ones that she had as classmates. She taught all eight grades and entertained the families "by a Christmas program and, at the end of the year, by a picnic." When finishing eighth grade, the pupils had to go to

Towanda and take a final examination to show they were ready for high school. If not, they had to spend another year in grade school. One of Ella's students won the McLean County Spelling Contest.

During the flu epidemic of 1918, Ella was teaching at Fletcher School. The blacksmith at Merna died with flu. Mary, Leo and Ella also were sick. Mr. Toughmey, the conductor, put a special coach on the 10 p.m train to take people with flu to St. Joseph's Hospital. Doctor Deneen met them. Among the Merna people who rode the train was Mrs. Jim Carmody, Father Carmody's mother. She died and is buried at Holy Cross Cemetery in Merna. Father Fitzpatrick had a funeral every day for a while. Ella's father paid St. Joseph's Hospital \$1000 but he was happy to do that because they survived. Ella went back and finished the year at Fletcher. Tom had the flu at home. The doctor told his mother to open the windows and give him whisky. When he went to Merna after the flu, they hardly knew him because he lost so much weight