

Moore runs good ole' barbershop

By Bonnie Helwig
Battalion Reporter

Every small town has its storyteller.

Howard Moore, 81, has been telling stories in the same barber shop, behind the same barber chair for 52 years in the West Texas community of Miles, located near San Angelo.

A step into his barber shop is a step into the 1920s. The clock on the wall has been there since 1921 and still keeps perfect time.

"These barber chairs have been here ever since I have, along with nearly all the other furnishings," he said. "The shower and bath for the cowboys are still in the back, too."

A ceiling fan hangs from the center of the room, although the doors of the shop are open wide during warm weather.

His shop is usually filled with the "old timers" of Miles, and the stories can go on forever, he says.

"One day, a stranger came in here for a haircut while me and one of the boys was having an argument over some story," Moore said. "After I had finished giving the fellow a haircut and shave, he said he wasn't leaving until he knew who was going to win the argument."

"I told the stranger that if he would come back in five years, he would probably find us still arguing over the same old stories."

Known to everyone as 'Efe (pronounced eef), a nickname given to him by an older brother, he quickly drifts back to the 1920s when business was best.

Moore pointed to the wall lined with empty chairs.

"Fellows used to line up in here every Saturday for a shave and a bath for two bits," he said. "Many a time I've worked from 6 a.m. until midnight on a Saturday. That's 18 hours, but I was younger and the haircuts took less time back then, too."

Moore said the barber shop was not only a place to get a haircut, but also a courtroom and wedding chapel when needed.

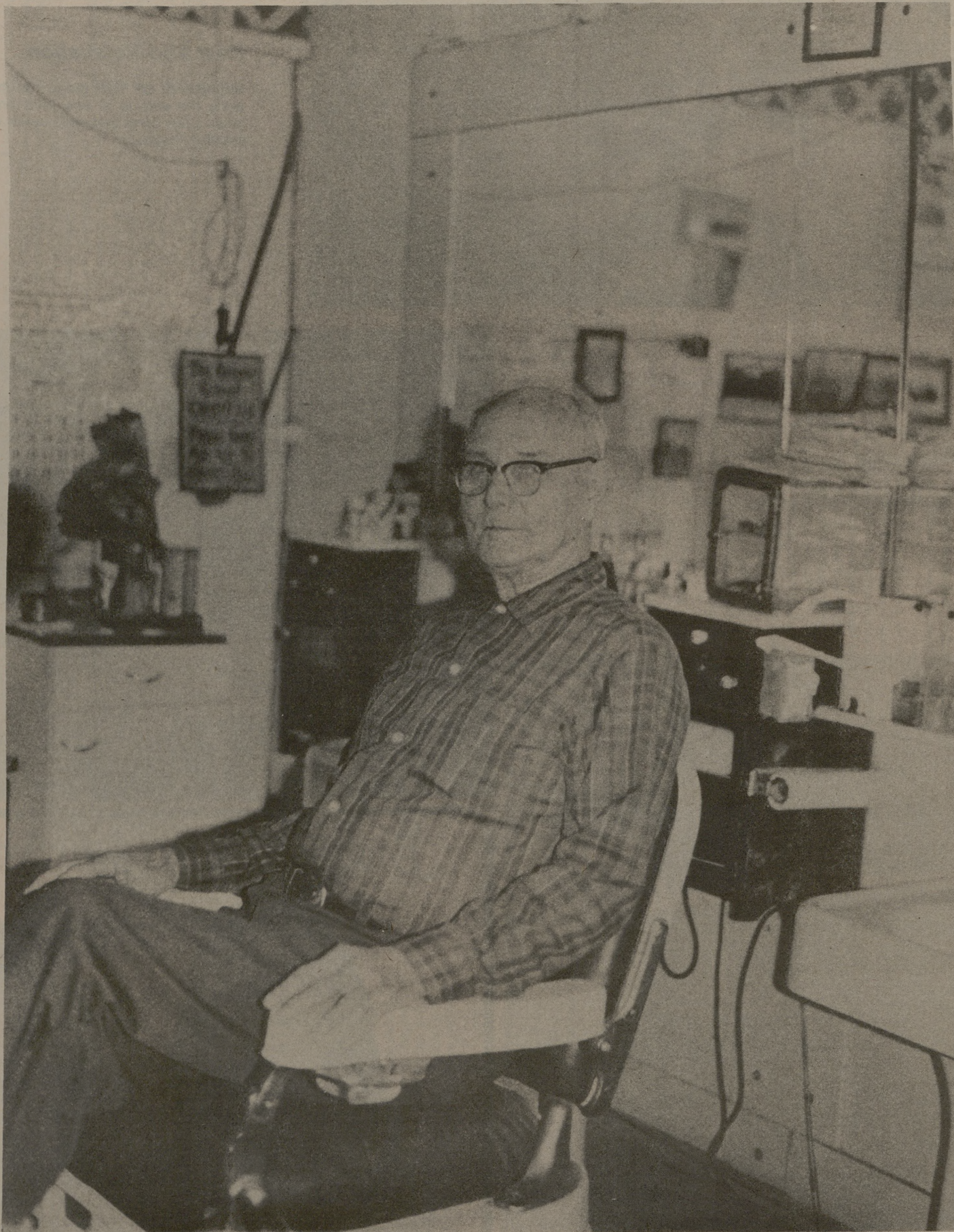
"The justice of the peace in Miles was also a barber and worked right at this next chair for 30 years," Moore said. "Why, we used to hold court right behind the cash register whenever the highway patrol brought somebody in. He would leave customers sitting in the chair half-shaven while we'd all stop working to hold court."

"I know we've had six or eight weddings in here. People would come in and want to get married, so we'd stand them over in the corner, marry 'em and send them on their way."

Moore had a smirk on his face when he recalled the prohibition days when bootleggers used the barber shop as their place of business.

"The most shameful thing that ever happened here was on Christmas Eve," he said. "All the customers were sitting around getting drunk and they'd offer us a drink before they got on the chair for a haircut. Of course, we'd take one, and by the middle of the afternoon, all four of us barbers were drunk."

"One of the barbers was so drunk that he couldn't stand up,



HOWARD MOORE, who is 81 years old, sits in the barber chair he has used to cut hair for the last 52 years. He says he

doesn't like the long hair or hair styling these days, and will give a simple haircut for \$2.

so he and some of the customers moved the chair back to he could sit on the lavatory and keep cutting hair. I had a hard time getting home that night, and I've never been drunk since," he said.

Through the years, Moore has cut women's hair as well as men's, but prefers his male customers.

"Women are just too particular," he said. "I gave this one lady

a mirror to check her hair after I had finished cutting it and she complained that it didn't look right in the back.

"I thought it looked fine, so I decided to pull a little trick on her," he said with a sheepish grin. "First, I turned her away from the mirror so she couldn't see what I was doing. Then, I held the scissors about four inches away from her head and went 'snip,

snip, snip' so she would think I was cutting it some more. She said it looked so much better after I had finished, and I hadn't changed a thing."

Although Moore is not as busy as he used to be, he has no plans to retire.

"The last antique dealer that was through here wanted to buy that clock, the lavatories, the chairs and cash register," Moore

said. "I told him I needed all that stuff. I'm not ready to quit yet."

Moore said he doesn't give the popular layered haircuts and has no use for a blowdryer.

"This business of (hair) styling is beyond me," he said. "I just don't see how these women can stand that long hair on men these days. I give old-fashioned, old-timey haircuts to anyone who wants one for two dollars."