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# Maeystown, Illinois

## THE HISTORY OF MAEYSTOWN

Nestled in a small valley between the bluffs that make up the Illinois side of the old American Bottom, a wide expanse where the Mississippi River once flowed, is the little old-world village of Maeystown, located in the southwest portion of Illinois, about five miles from the Mississippi River.

Before it came to be Maeystown, the land was known as McRoberts Meadow.





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The general area in which Maeystown rests has great historical significance. Captain James Moore, a Revolutionary War soldier serving under George Rogers Clark, founded the first permanent American settlement in the Illinois territory in this area. Moore fought with Clark at Kaskaskia when Clark captured the Illinois country for the Governor of Virginia. After seeing the advantages of this new territory, Moore returned to Illinois with his family and other pioneers in 1781 and eventually settled on the land to be called La Belle Fontaine on the Kaskaskia Trail. Founded in 1782, La Belle Fontaine (now in the town of Waterloo, Illinois) lies about nine miles north of the current site of Maeystown. Moore named the settlement after a nearby spring the French called La Belle Fontaine or beautiful spring. Soon, other adventurous pioneers journeyed to La Belle Fontaine to stake their own claims in this new territory. James McRoberts was one of these adventurous pioneers.

James McRoberts was a Revolutionary War soldier who was born in Scotland in 1763. His family immigrated to the United States in 1772 and settled in Washington, Pennsylvania. In 1779, when McRoberts was barely sixteen years old, he joined the militia to fight in the American Revolution. After the war, he settled in Kentucky and spent a great deal of time exploring many of the new territories around and west of the Mississippi River. It was during these explorations that he saw the advantages of living in the Illinois territory. During his first trip there in 1786, he bought and temporarily settled on one hundred acres of hilly land (Claim 316) where three streams descend the bluffs, in what was to become Monroe County. He attempted to clear the hundred acres that were to become Maeystown to entitle him to the grant he soon acquired. In 1797, five years after his marriage, he and his wife moved to Illinois from Tennessee and settled on Claim 315, which was a mile north of Claim 316, on a militia grant from the government.

Their permanent house was completed in 1798 and his family of ten children lived there for nearly fifty years, supported by working as farmers. As a farmer, McRoberts saw the value of the land in this part of Illinois, and avidly encouraged the settlement of others in the area. After years of holding prominent political positions in the county such as Justice of the Peace, County Judge and County Commissioner, McRoberts passed away in 1844. McRoberts wanted Claim 316, then known as McRoberts Meadow, to be sold by the executors of the will. The Meadow changed hands in rapid succession, and in 1848,



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it was sold it to Jacob Maeys, the eventual founder of Maeystown, for \$200.00 (\$5,400.00 in today's dollars).

Entering Maeystown, one gets a rare glimpse into the past and feels as if they are in another country. The landscape, houses, roads, stone bridge and stone church all come together beautifully and leave one with a sense of the town's history, of its uniqueness. A historic stone arched bridge leads one into the community of quiet streets lined with nineteenth century stone homes and structures, uninterrupted by modern buildings, such as fast-food restaurants, gas stations and convenience stores and modern traffic lights that would take away from the town's historic character. Some small towns telegraph their history as one approaches. Maeystown is that kind of community.

The village does not hold a claim to any part of American history; nothing particularly noteworthy has happened here, but is noticeably different from other Midwestern towns. Maeystown is unique in that all of its early settlers had something in common: they all came from German origins. As a result, walking the streets of Maeystown is the same as walking a street in Germany. That is how eerily similar the town is to the homeland of its founding citizens.

Southern Illinois is known for its rugged, natural beauty. With all of its fertile land surrounded by wooded, hilly terrain along with its flowing springs and streams, one can see why immigrants wanted to settle in this beautiful setting. A landscape with these criteria was exactly what German immigrants were looking for to lay down new roots. However, many may not realize that this type of landscape can be found throughout various areas of Germany. When German immigrants came to Illinois, they settled in areas such as Maeystown because this was a landscape that they knew, a place where they were comfortable living. In their new world, they wanted a landscape that would remind them of home. Also, readily available limestone was a desirable feature for a new settlement area because of its building purposes. Due to the surrounding limestone bluffs and the previously mentioned advantages of the area, Maeystown must have been a dream-come-true for the early settlers. Once immigrants settled here in Maeystown, they did not leave and move farther west for the most part they stayed and enjoyed their new home.



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Jacob Maeys was born in 1828 in Oggersheim, New Bavaria, which was an area in today's German state Rhineland-Palatinate located in western Germany. The Meess family, which at the time included Georg, Elizabeth, Jacob and his brother Heinrich (Meess was changed to Maeys after 1844 by Jacob), immigrated to the United States when Jacob was only four years old. The Maeys family moved around Pennsylvania for a number of years before the family of seven moved west to Illinois when Jacob was thirteen years old. After first moving to a location in the northern portion of Monroe County, the family settled on the Lawson Farm, located in the American Bottom and also in the northern portion of the county, where they rented land to farm. However, a dark time in their lives was about to begin: the Maeys lost their entire crop to the flood of 1844, which caused countless families untold hardships, and devastating sickness soon followed. Early the next year, the family moved to a farm about a mile northeast of the current village of Maeystown. Unfortunately, only six weeks after moving to this new farm, Jacob's father, George, passed away, which left Jacob, as the oldest child at sixteen, in charge. His family was now entirely dependent on Jacob for its support, rightly marking a new chapter in Jacob Maeys' life.

Fortunately, Maeys succeeded in his new role as his family's leader. He continued to farm the land that was rented by his father and split rails and earned money doing whatever he could. In 1846, Maeys rented the McRoberts farm, one mile north of today's Maeystown, and moved his family there. By 1848, Maeys had accumulated enough money to buy McRoberts Meadow (Survey 704, Claim 316), though he did not move there until 1852. He bought the tract due to the large spring located on the property and intended to create a saw mill for lumber. Maeys moved to his new property in 1852, when he built a one-room log cabin and the sawmill. At that time, there were no other settlers and not the thriving village found there during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the following year, Maeys wed Barbara Fisher, who was also a German immigrant from Osthof in Hesse-Darmstadt, which is in the western central part of modern Germany.

Due to the sluggishness of the stream that it was built over, the mill did not have enough of a water flow to operate. Maeys converted to steam power within a year, which made the mill successful for the next three years until Maeys sold his share to his partner of three years and became a farmer again. In 1858, Maeys decided to partner with Abraham Poston, who owned the general store in Maeysville (the original name of the





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town). By this time, Maeysville, obviously a name dedicated to Jacob Maey, had grown to include about two dozen houses. Due to its growth, Maeysville gained a post office in 1860, of which Maey was postmaster. The new post office was located in the store, making it convenient for Maey who worked there. In 1867, Maey bought out Poston's interest in the general store and took over the entire business himself, which he carried out along with continuing his farming.

Sometime during the Civil War, Maey constructed a new brick house for his wife and five children. Barbara passed away in 1880; a year-and-a-half later, Jacob married Christine Driemeyer, who was a native of Wersen, Prussia. Maey fathered six more children during his marriage to Christine, though four of them died soon after they were born.

Jacob Maey was a self-motivated man and very well-respected in the area. He was a resident of Monroe County from 1841 until his death in 1913 caused by a fall down his cellar steps when he was eighty-four. He was considered one of the best citizens in the county. His story is truly a memorable one with his trying early years, having to lead his family at an early age and his success against all odds to become a prominent member of the county. He led himself through adversity to become successful in life. He went from renting farmland with crops destroyed by a flood to owning about a thousand acres, mostly farmland, in the American Bottom, by 1875. With his death, Maeytown lost its successful founder and the community lost one of its — best and energetic citizens.

Officially, Maeysville became a town in 1852 and the name changed to Maeytown in 1860 when the community gained a post office, due to there being another town in Illinois with the name Maeysville. In late 1856, Maey decided to have his property laid out in 66-by-120 foot lots to become the village of Maeysville. Maey platted his land to sell to the numerous German immigrants that arrived in the area. German immigrants coming to St. Louis via New Orleans learned of the hilly Maeytown and bought land there. While most of the immigrants were from portions of Bavaria and Hessen, there were also quite a few with ancestral homes in other parts of Germany, such as: Westphalia and Wersen in Prussia, Schaumburg-Lippe (in northwestern Germany), Duchy of Nassau (in western Germany) and Dukedom of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (in northeastern Germany). Within six years, more than two dozen lots had been sold.



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Most of the Germans who settled in Maeystown were part of the — Forty-Eight movement who left Germany for economic and political reasons. In deciding where to settle, German immigrants mostly chose distinctly German communities so they would be with people of their own nationality. As previously mentioned, they also chose land which reminded them of home. They wanted surroundings which made them feel as comfortable as possible in a new world. With its steep hills, wooded surroundings and abundant streams, Maeystown seemed to be an ideal location for a new German community. Many Germans decided to settle there and the village began to grow.

Many of the original citizens of the village came directly to Maeystown or first settled in other areas of Monroe County and later moved to Maeystown. Many of the German immigrants who came to settle in Maeystown were not farmers, but tradesmen and professionals who had something to offer the community. The variety of trades and professionals as well as farmers made the community almost self-sufficient. Besides Maeys, the first citizens of Maeystown included: Ludwig (Louis) Ahlheim, cooper; Peter Bickelhaupt, blacksmith; John Coleman, carpenter; Jacob Empt, vintner; Martin Fornbauer, stone mason; Jacob Hoffmann, tavern owner and brickyard operator; Sebastian Holzmeier, carpenter; Ludwig (Louis) Krone, shoemaker; Jacob Pilliard, sawmill operator; Abram (Abraham) Poston, mercantile owner; Peter Ray, horse trader and tavern owner; Adam Ruch, butcher and peddler; John Schaefer, hotelier; Carl Siebenmann, wagonmaker; Heinrich Quernheim, furniture maker and undertaker; Charles Wilhelmj, doctor; Heinrich Wippermann, tailor; and Anton Zeitingner, miller. Most men had their businesses in their homes, except for the mill and general store, which had a hall above.

As for the reason why so many Germans settled in Maeystown during this short span of years, today it can only be speculation. No one knows the true reason why this became an all-German community, what drew the immigrants to this little town in the bluffs of southern Illinois. Some speculation exists that Jacob Maeys spent time at the boat landings south of Maeystown and the not-too-distant St. Louis, Missouri, and spread the word of his building a traditional German community in the Illinois countryside. Perhaps, as the German immigrants traveled up the Mississippi River and the boats made their stops along the way to St. Louis, they heard word of Maeystown and wanted to settle there. Perhaps it was Maeys' sawmill that sparked settlement in Maeystown. Inevitably,



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sawmills were magnets for settlement due to readily available cut lumber. No one knows the true reason since there was no defined plan of settlement.

The settlers of Maeystown and their descendants preserved their cultural heritage well throughout the years. The Germans carried on their culture, traditions and way of life, while still adapting to life in America. German was the only language spoken in the town for decades and this tradition was retained even longer in the homes. German celebrations were also retained in the community and are still celebrated today.



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### MAEYSTOWN ARCHITECTURE

Little has been altered or added, so Maeystown is rare and distinctive from other German settlements in Illinois. Maeystown is unique in that most of the original town is preserved in its entirety, providing a rare glimpse into the life of German immigrants during the mid-nineteenth century. Due to its location, no railroad or highway was placed through the town, thus exterminating the need for great change. Today, there are no gas stations, convenience stores or fast food restaurants that diminish the character of the community. In fact, it has been noted that Maeystown stayed the same while the world changed. Despite its uniqueness, Maeystown has anonymity. Not many people, even in surrounding counties, know much about the small community. But this is perhaps a factor in its preservation and why it retained its purity.

Two reasons for the village's uniqueness include the fact that the buildings are integrated into the landscape and that the town noticeably bears the imprint of its ancestry. The landscape was not altered to work with new construction, but the citizens decided to work with the landscape they were given and tried not to disturb their beautiful surroundings. Each settler adapted his architecture to fit the landscape. Around sixty significant limestone, brick and wood structures, ranging from Maey's original log cabin, to the stone church, mill, houses and outbuildings, still exist in the community.

One of the reasons that German immigrants decided to settle here was the fact that limestone was richly abundant in the bluffs that surrounded the town. Limestone was a desirable feature in new settlements for building purposes. These German immigrants brought with them their centuries-old knowledge of stone masonry, brick masonry and solid building construction. The limestone bluffs provided the settlers with the perfect building material to construct their new homes, outbuildings and businesses. Limestone became the lifeblood of the community.

Besides the use of stone in the town's houses, structures and outbuildings, the stonemasons of the town helped build the limestone retaining walls, which can be found throughout the village. The walls, found on nearly every lot in the community, were built along the hillsides to level the lots for homesteads—creating a kind of terrace system throughout the community. Large limestone pieces were fitted together to serve as



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roadside flagstone gutters along each of the main streets through the town. Portions of the roads in town may also have been constructed out of limestone. Hints of limestone streets can be seen under the cracking asphalt of many of the alleys throughout the town.

Though many of the buildings in the town are made of the astounding amount of local limestone, some homes were built out of locally-made bricks. The land on which Maeystown rests has a rich clay soil. Jacob Hoffmann, one of the early settlers, used the clay soil to operate a brickyard in the village behind his business at the corner of Mill and Main streets. Hoffmann built the two-story brick building which housed his business (hotel and saloon) of bricks from his own brickyard. Many, if not all, of the brick houses and outbuildings of the town are constructed of brick from this local brickyard. When Jacob Maeys built a brick house on his property during the Civil War, he used these locally-made bricks. Bricks from Hoffmann's brickyard were also used throughout the county. In addition, Hoffmann's bricks built the Waterloo Republican Building (now demolished), which stood on Main Street, and the Southern Hotel Building, which still stands at the corner of West Third and Main streets, in Waterloo.

Frame houses or structures on limestone foundations are also commonly found throughout the village. Stylistically, frame houses or structures are more difficult to read as German. However, many of these homes may have been built more quickly, used less labor and cost less money than the construction of a stone or brick house. These frame structures fit in with many of the homes built in nearby towns. Obviously, the builder adapted the use of the building materials to fit in with the economy and customs of the area.

Maeystown is platted out in long, narrow lots, like those found in Germany. One thing that is clearly noticeable about the architecture of Maeystown is that it strongly references this European tradition. As previously mentioned, this style is distinctively German in that the German house sits up against the sidewalk or curb in the front and the front stoop is, most often, on the sidewalk itself. Due to the sloping landscape of the community, many homes built the front door or entrance a few feet off the ground. Many of the buildings require the use of stone or concrete stairs to enter. The houses also stand very close together, which is a typical characteristic of German architecture.





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While the house stands at the forefront of the lot, a garden and various secondary buildings border the lot boundaries behind each house, repeating the German tradition, where each lot was set up as a miniature farmstead. With the small limestone or brick house built next to the street, the rest of the lot acted as a farm, with outbuildings such as barns and smokehouses, animal pens, gardens, orchards and even vineyards. Nearly every lot in Maeystown is set up in this fashion.

This mini-farm layout was German custom for those living in town. In German towns, a central or side gate adjacent to the house led to the courtyard behind the home. This courtyard was surrounded by various outbuildings. The style of the houses and lots in Maeystown are merely a simplified version of this arrangement. Though there are few gates leading to the rear portions of the lots, walkways along the side or between houses are common to the layout of the lots in Maeystown. Nearly every lot in Maeystown has at least one outbuilding that is still standing.

The lot at the corner of Mill and Main Streets containing the Corner George Inn still has five of the outbuildings. The Corner George Inn was built in 1883-1884 by George Jacob Hoffmann using bricks from his own brickyard. Unfortunately, Hoffmann passed away in 1883 before the inn was completed; his wife saw the building to fruition and ran it as a saloon and hotel up until the turn of the century. Surprisingly, the painted words "Hotel & Saloon" can still be read on the brick wall bordering Mill Street. Over time, the space that the saloon occupied became a feed store for a good number of years before it became Maeystown's General Store. Being one of the larger buildings in town, it was only natural for the second floor to hold a hall used for meetings, dances and concerts.

The lot that Hoffmann's building stands on also has quite a few outbuildings, though it appears as if some may come from a later time period. The property was a busy and productive center for the community, since Hoffmann had the town's brickyard. Today, there are five outbuildings filling the lot behind the hotel. The two outbuildings closer to the main building appear to be the older structures. The brick structure on the eastern portion of the lot was once the summer kitchen for the property. The summer kitchen is small, rectangular in shape and was constructed of the same locally-made bricks on a stone foundation. Besides being a summer kitchen, over the years, the structure served as a smokehouse and wash house. A wood outhouse or small shed stands directly behind the summer kitchen. A large wooden shed on a stone foundation stands behind



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the hotel along the west border of the lot, close to Mill Street. Two structures line the back of the lot, though they are connected. A small gambrel-roofed barn/workshop stands in the northeast corner of the lot, while a large open shed fills the rest of the area along the back border of the lot. Hoffmann's property displays the typical locations of outbuildings on a lot, a summer kitchen and smokehouse is immediately behind house/building, usually immediately behind to the left or right, and the barn or shed in the back corner of the lot. Hoffmann's village lot resembles a farmstead's Vierseithof, with its building at the front of the lot, outbuildings along the east and west borders and the barn and shed along the back border of the lot.

Due to the fact that Maeystown is a very small town, there are few variations in the limited number of historic buildings in the community. Many of the houses display characteristics of German vernacular style, but, in most cases, the houses in the community were not built in typical or distinct architectural styles, such as an Ernhaus or Fachwerk house. However, one typical German style did translate to the hills of Maeystown: the house-barn plan.

Jacob Maeys' original homestead, which includes the oldest structures in the town, appears to be a variation of the house-barn style found in various areas throughout Germany, including Bavaria, where his family originated. This particular style of building began in Germany during the thirteenth century. The style was used by farmers and that may be the reason Maeys decided to construct a variation of the style for his homestead. Unlike the massive combined house-barns found in Germany, Maeys decided to modify his home to fit the needs of a new landscape. In Germany, the housebarns have the house and barn combined, yet with walls separating the two spaces, in most cases. In the rare occurrences of the house-barn in America and in this case in Maeystown, Maeys also decided to separate the two spaces, but he joined them in a different way under one roof.

Maeys first lived in a log cabin on his property in McRoberts Meadow, near the mouth of the spring which fed one of the three streams that ran through the Meadow. His home is not a typical house-barn design, since Maeys had to work with the very hilly landscape found in southern Illinois. As a result, in 1852, he constructed a smaller, simpler version of the typical house-barn style, which is rarely found in the Midwest. Amazingly, Maeys grouped everything needed for his farm into one mass unit, with all of the buildings



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needed for his farm interconnected. He housed his log cabin, kitchen, outhouse and stone barn under one roof, while his smokehouse and workplace/wood barn had separate roofs but were still connected to the rest of the structures. Surprisingly, nearly all of the original materials of the cabin and the adjacent connected structures still remain, as well as other farming structures located on the property.

Maeys' log cabin, outhouse, summer kitchen and smokehouse stand on the highest ground of the lot, while the two portions of the barn rest lower on the hillside to the east of the other structures. Maeys' simple one-room log cabin is separated from the summer kitchen by a narrow, covered, but outdoor hallway to the south of the cabin in the double-pen style. The cabin can be accessed through a wood plank door located in the center of the south wall of the open passage. The hand-hewn logs that make up the cabin sit atop a hillside on a limestone foundation.

Traditional chinking and diagonally-placed pieces of limestone remain to fill the gaps between the logs, with most of the lower gaps displaying only the limestone. The original roof still exists as well, though today the original timbers are covered with metal roofing. Hand-hewn boards braced by timbers with the bark still intact make up the roof of the cabin. Some of the original shake roof shingles can also still be seen above the boards. The gable facing north is comprised of wood slats, with a crude window opening in the center. The west facing wall also has a small rectangular opening near the roofline in the center of the elevation. Another rough wood plank door stands in the east wall of the cabin, near the southeast corner, which leads to the adjacent stone portion of the barn.

Across the short hallway south of the cabin, Maeys built a summer kitchen. Often, during this time period, the kitchen was built separately from the home to prevent disastrous fires. The summer kitchen appears to be slightly newer than the log cabin. The boards used for the walls and ceiling are not hand-hewn like those in the cabin and brick is used within the structure. While the walls of the summer kitchen are mostly comprised of vertically placed wood boards, the north and east wood walls are built on a high limestone foundation. The entrance to the summer kitchen is not in the hallway, but on the west elevation of the grouping of structures. A fixed six-pane window sits directly north of the wood door in the structure's west wall. The north wall of the adjacent limestone smokehouse acts as the south wall of the kitchen. The brick oven, possibly



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constructed with bricks from the local brickyard, is located in the southeast corner of the kitchen and is capped with a thick slab of chipped limestone. A large hole is cut into the middle of the stone and it is bordered by rusted metal. A brick chimney rises from the back of the brick oven along the east wall and extends about three feet from the roofline.

At the end of the short hallway connecting the cabin with the summer kitchen, Maeys integrated an indoor outhouse into the structure, which is unusual for the time period. Most of the other cabins and homes built in the succeeding years used outhouses located in rear portions of properties.

Directly south of the summer kitchen, the stone smokehouse stands adjacent to the kitchen and is the tallest structure in the group. The limestone smokehouse is square in shape with a pavilion roof covered, now, in modern asphalt shingles. Another alteration to the original building is found in the concrete mortar added between all of the limestone pieces. The recessed entrance to the smokehouse lies on its west elevation. Its wood door is identical to that of the summer kitchen. A wide but simple limestone lintel adorns the wall above the door. In the center of each elevation, small square air openings appear directly under the roofline. The rear or east elevation of the smokehouse has an additional smaller opening near the center of the elevation.

The limestone foundations of the structures on the upper portion of the hillside cut into the hillside to create stable foundations and act as barriers and walls for the barns below. The limestone barn is connected to the east elevation of the log cabin. The door in the east wall of the cabin opens into the stone barn and offers an elevated view into the space. This detail connects Maeys' house to the typical German house-barn. Steep stairs lead down to the dirt floor of the small limestone barn, which originally housed the animals used on the farm. A single rectangular opening stands in the center of both the north- and east-facing walls of the stone barn. The west wall of the barn displays the stone workmanship and shows how the Germans worked with the landscape to create needed structures. This is seen in the way the structures' foundation extends into the hillside with logs resting upon it. A split wood plank door leading to the wood portion of the barn or workplace occurs in the south wall of the stone barn. The south wall also had a rectangular hole cut high into the stone wall to allow air movement into the structure. One step down takes one from the stone barn into the slightly newer work



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area, which is enclosed by vertical wood boards to the east and south. The stone foundations of the smokehouse and summer kitchen, as well as the stone walls of the barn comprise the west and north walls of the area. It has been said that this simple area with its shed roof was once Maeys' sawmill and workplace, though that is speculation. The weathered wood plank door to this structure is in the south wall, directly across from the opening to the stone barn. Steep limestone stairs climb up the hillside outside along the western wall of the smokehouse to the level of the other structures.

Maeystown Creek borders the western edge of Maeys' property. About fifty feet west of Maeys' home is the original spring which fed Maeystown Creek. The spring is nearly enclosed by large blocks of the abundant limestone. The limestone blocks line the eastern side of the path of the spring to the creek. Over time the spring has moved farther north on Maeys' original property, perhaps a hundred feet or so from its location during Jacob Maeys' time. Looking south from the original spring, one can see Maeystown's stone bridge.

Walls of limestone are found throughout the property to even out the ground to provide for a better farmstead. A wall extends south from the base of the stairs to the south of the smokehouse and one also zigzags to the northwest from that corner of the cabin to the separate barn that was constructed later. Several other structures located on the property were constructed during Maeys' lifetime. This includes two partially enclosed stone sheds that are well over one hundred years old are built into the hillside north of his home. He used these sheds to house some animals and store farm equipment.

West of these sheds stands a large barn also on a high limestone foundation, which was built sometime soon after Maeys settled the property. All of the large timbers used for the construction of the barn are hand-hewn and wooden pegs are used throughout the structure instead of metal nails, dating the barn to the same time period as many of Maeys' other structures. Some of the timbers on the interior are even numbered with Roman numerals to indicate their correct location. The high limestone foundation is due to the fact that the immense barn is also built into a hillside and fully integrated with the landscape. The entire first level of the barn is enclosed by limestone walls. On the east elevation, the wood floors of the rest of the barn above the limestone jut out several feet





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over the doorway to the ground floor of the barn to protect the entrance. The wooden levels of the barn are massive; at least two stories in height.

Maey's property is located at the north end of town at 1320 Mill Street, above the stone bridge that marks an entry point into the heart of town. Maey's home is unique in that no other existing home in Maeystown was built in this particular way, a direct variation of German architecture. During the Civil War, Maey's built a newer brick house less than twenty feet west of his original cabin. Most likely, the brick used for the new house was from the local brickyard in Maeystown. Like most of the structures in the village, the house displays a wide limestone foundation descending down the hillside. The house is one-and-a-half stories with a full basement. Though it was remodeled in 1927 (most likely when the dormers and stucco over the brick facade were added), the house retains some of its historic character. The house displays a nice wide porch with a limestone foundation and two end chimneys on the south elevation. Maey's descendants still reside on his original tract and have preserved the original cabin and the other structures he constructed on the property.

Another variation of German vernacular architecture transported to Maeystown was the German bank house. One example is found at 1203 Mill Street. This house is a regional variation of the German bank house, which is commonly found in Pennsylvania. This smaller version denotes an architectural style that the Germans used to incorporate into a hilly landscape. Part of the ground floor is built into a hillside, with an entrance in the stone foundation standing at the base of the hillside. This house also has an entrance on the main floor from the front porch, much like the bank houses found in Pennsylvania. This is a simpler variation of this style, yet it still contains the unique details that hint at its style.

Some other variations of German architecture carried over to the small town of Maeystown. Simpler architecture was constructed, probably due to a less prosperous economy. Nearly all of the houses and buildings throughout the town display one or more of the same German architectural characteristics and all of the houses were constructed to work with the landscape and not alter it.

Another dominant architectural characteristic of the town is the extensive use of locally-available limestone. Many homes and buildings were constructed of limestone and all of



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the rest of the buildings used it for their foundations. The house at 1203 Mill Street is one of the total limestone structures, from foundation to its side gabled roof.

Most of the brick and limestone buildings have segmental arched lintels of the same material over each of the windows; however, in some cases, brick lintels were placed over the windows of limestone buildings. Some of the oldest buildings in town, such as the Mill (1113 Mill Street) and the house at 1203 Mill Street, have long wooden lintels, painted white. The house at 1203 Mill Street has both wood and limestone segmental arched lintels, though the lintels over the main story windows on the side elevations nearly form pediments. Most of the buildings in the town retain their original windows.

In Maeystown, as well as other small towns in the area, there is an assortment of houses that display two front doors. This peculiarity normally appears on one-and-a-half story houses; however, a two-story home in Maeystown also displays two front doors. The two-story building with the double entry stands at 1127 Hanover Street and was constructed in 1867 as the home of Louis Ahlheim. The other prominent house in Maeystown with two entries on the front facade is Wilhelm Maeys' home at 1128 Main Street, built in 1870. It is unknown why these homes had mirrored entries on the front façade that led to separate rooms, though it is speculated that this was done to avoid the central hall plan and make the rooms easier to heat and ventilate individually.

Wilhelm Maeys' home at 1128 Main Street also displays another common characteristic of typical German architecture found throughout the town. The house exhibits classical decorative brickwork across the cornice; in this case, between a row of bricks that slightly jut out and the roofline is a band of bricks with their corners facing outward. Even the simplest brick German vernacular homes in America display decorative brickwork along the cornice, though not always in a style exhibited here. In some cases, the decorative brickwork is displayed in the form of dentils, corbelling, banding or highly decorative designs.

Several buildings and structures stand as focal points in the community. Some of these include the beautiful limestone bridge that welcomes drivers into the community; the limestone church that overlooks the community and the limestone mill that stands in the heart of the historic portion of Maeystown.



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The arched stone bridge marks the entrance to historic Maeystown. The bridge was built at the north end of Maeystown to span Maeystown Creek, which flows through the village in a general north-south direction. Before the stone bridge was built, horses had to haul their carts across the stream while pedestrians used stepping stones to cross the wide creek. Later, a wood bridge with a rock foundation on either side of the stream was built. In 1881, Alphonse Smolkant and Thomas Fink, master stonemasons, constructed the beautiful bridge which still stands today — over one hundred thirty years later. Smolkant worked for J. B. Morandy and Company, winners of the bid to build the stone bridge. The bridge was built on solid rock and is constructed of mortarless native limestone. It is symmetrical in form and simple in its lines. The stone bridge stands as a landmark in the town, displaying wonderful stone craftsmanship and draws the notice of all visitors.

In 1892, Smolkant built a stone house on the corner of Franklin and Hanover streets, not too far from the church in the western portion of town. Smolkant's limestone house is unique, since it is the only home with a gambrel roof. He also built a large shed near the alley on his property, where he taught local men about stone masonry. Smolkant and his apprentices were the men who built many of the limestone retaining walls throughout the town.

Religion was an important part of the lives of the immigrants who settled in Maeystown. The immigrants tied themselves to their new land and began their traditions and customs anew, but one thing that never changed was their unwavering faith. Before there was a pastor in town, the residents gathered in various homes throughout the community to worship together. Until 1859, the town made due with a circuit rider who came around sporadically and preached in homes.

In 1859, the townspeople built a log church for the village congregation to gather. The small rectangular log church was 20' by 28' with four six-over-six paned windows. An addition on the south side built between 1892 and 1897, created a new wooden platform entrance. (The original entrance to the log church was where the middle window on the west elevation is today. Currently, the logs of the log church are covered by weatherboard, and it is unknown when this was done; however, the stone foundation of the original church can still be seen.



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The first resident pastor of the church used the structure as a sanctuary and residence before the parsonage was built. The log church was used for worship services from 1859 to 1867, when a new church was completed, but it has continued to serve church purposes. After the worship services moved to the stone church, the log church became a parochial school, which did not close until 1922. Today the building serves the congregation as a meeting hall for councils, church organizations, choir practices, classes, and the like.

Directly west of the log church, the village decided to construct a stone church after the congregation outgrew the log church. Construction began in 1865 and it took two years to complete the larger 31' by 52' stone church. The new location was chosen due to its high vantage point over the community. The church is easily the most prominent building in the village with its lofty location on the highest hill of the community.

Martin Fornbauer was the master stonemason in charge of constructing the church. Every man in the village spent time working on the church, either by quarrying stone from the nearby limestone bluffs at the creek banks at the southern edge of town, furnishing teams and wagons, hauling the stone to the building and/or putting them in place. The men took turns working on the church so that they could still complete their own jobs or farm work. Obviously, the church played an important role in the lives of the immigrants in this small community. They built this church for themselves and as a legacy for their children and future descendants.

The church was built in a simple fashion, due to the fact that it was meant for a small country congregation. However, the steeple of the church was not constructed until 1888. Alphonse Smolkant and Thomas Fink were charge with constructing a steeple to point toward heaven.

In 1905, a major renovation took place, with the largest change being the extension of the back (south) wall of the church in order to accommodate a new pipe organ. The double doors that make up the main entrance to the church were slightly recessed in the entry and new art glass windows were installed in the southern portion of the church, which served as the altar and choir loft. A small side entrance door was also added in the extension on the east side. The pulpit of the church is distinctly European in style, since it is roughly circular in shape and sits a few feet off of the ground on a thin



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central pedestal. Nearly all of the old churches in Germany have pulpits similar to this one, or it is attached high up on a massive stone column, but it still maintains the same similar shape.

The stained glass window that serves as a fanlight above the double door entrance bears the text Evangelische St. Johannes Kirchell or St. John's Evangelical Church in traditional German writing was installed in 1905. The congregation was considered to be German Evangelical, otherwise known as Lutheran. Amazingly, the congregation still conducted services in German until 1943, during the Second World War when anti-German sentiment was very strong. St. John's is the only remaining church in the village.

The first parsonage stands northwest of the church, at the corner of Franklin and Hanover streets. The brick parsonage was completed in 1867 and it is believed that the bricks for the building came from Hoffmann's brickyard. Originally, the building had four end chimneys: one for each downstairs room; however, none of the original end chimneys exist today. Also, the property used to include a barn on the northwest corner, a chicken house and a smokehouse. Grapevines used to grow along the east side of the house and formed a great canopy. Only an old shed, outhouse and a modern garage exist on the property today.

The old Zeitingen Mill is located at 1113 Mill Street near the stone bridge. The mill is one of the more notable buildings in town. This steam flour mill was built in 1859 near the large creek that runs along the west side of the village. Jacob Pilliard bought the land for the mill from Jacob Maeys out of Block One of Maeys's platted community. Jacob Pilliard and John Coleman, an English immigrant, worked together to construct the mill. By 1862, the mill was owned by Anton Zeitingen. The original mill burned down on April 18, 1868, though, luckily, it was fully insured. After the fire, the land was purchased by prominent members of the community: Jacob Maeys, William Maeys, Jacob Hoffman, Jacob Jobb, George Hoffmann, William Hoefft and Dr. Charles Wilhelmj. The new owners rebuilt the mill in 1880, but it never was used for that purpose. In 1893, William Hoefft bought the building when he took over his brother's undertaking business. Hoefft set up his undertaking and furniture business in the mill and continued there until his death in 1914. Over the years, the building has been a flour mill, funeral parlor, barber shop, dance hall, auto garage, gas station and furniture restoration shop. Today, the





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stone mill is owned by the Maeystown Preservation Society and houses the town's museum and visitor center.

The mill is rectangular in shape and is constructed of fieldstone packed together with mortar. The large building contains three stories: the ground floor partially embedded in a hill and two stories above. It has a slightly pitched front-facing gable roof of modern standing seam metal. All of the windows, except the six-over-six basement windows, are nine-over-six windows, with a long wood lintel above.

In the late 1800s, styles of architecture from the outside world began to intrude in Maeystown. One can see this intrusion in the former bank building at the corner of Mill and Main Streets, built in 1919, and Gus Diehl's 1908 house with a two-story porch on the facade.

The town grew over the years. The village was incorporated in 1904 and Jacob Jobb, the town saddler, became the first mayor. By 1904, the village had grown to about three hundred people. The years around the turn of the century were known as the village's golden years with its building growth and height of population in the community. Maeystown had a high school from 1920-1933, a three-year high school until 1943 and a bank from 1919-1933. The prosperity of the village ended during the Great Depression, along with that of countless other communities throughout the country. By 1980, the population of the village had decreased to one hundred and forty-three people. In 2002, there were one hundred and forty-eight residents. Though the community's population has remained relatively small, it has taken pride in its architecture and ancestry.

Of course, there have been modifications to the community: German language and customs are no longer all-pervasive, some older structures have been razed or replaced by newer ones, and the St. Louis metropolitan area may be beginning to encroach, but Maeystown is still, in essence, an 1870 rural Illinois community of German parentage. In 1978, the entire village of Maeystown was placed on the National Register of Historic Places through the efforts of a number of its inhabitants, in an attempt to preserve its natural beauty and historic value. The community values its history and strives to preserve this glimpse of Germany in southern Illinois.



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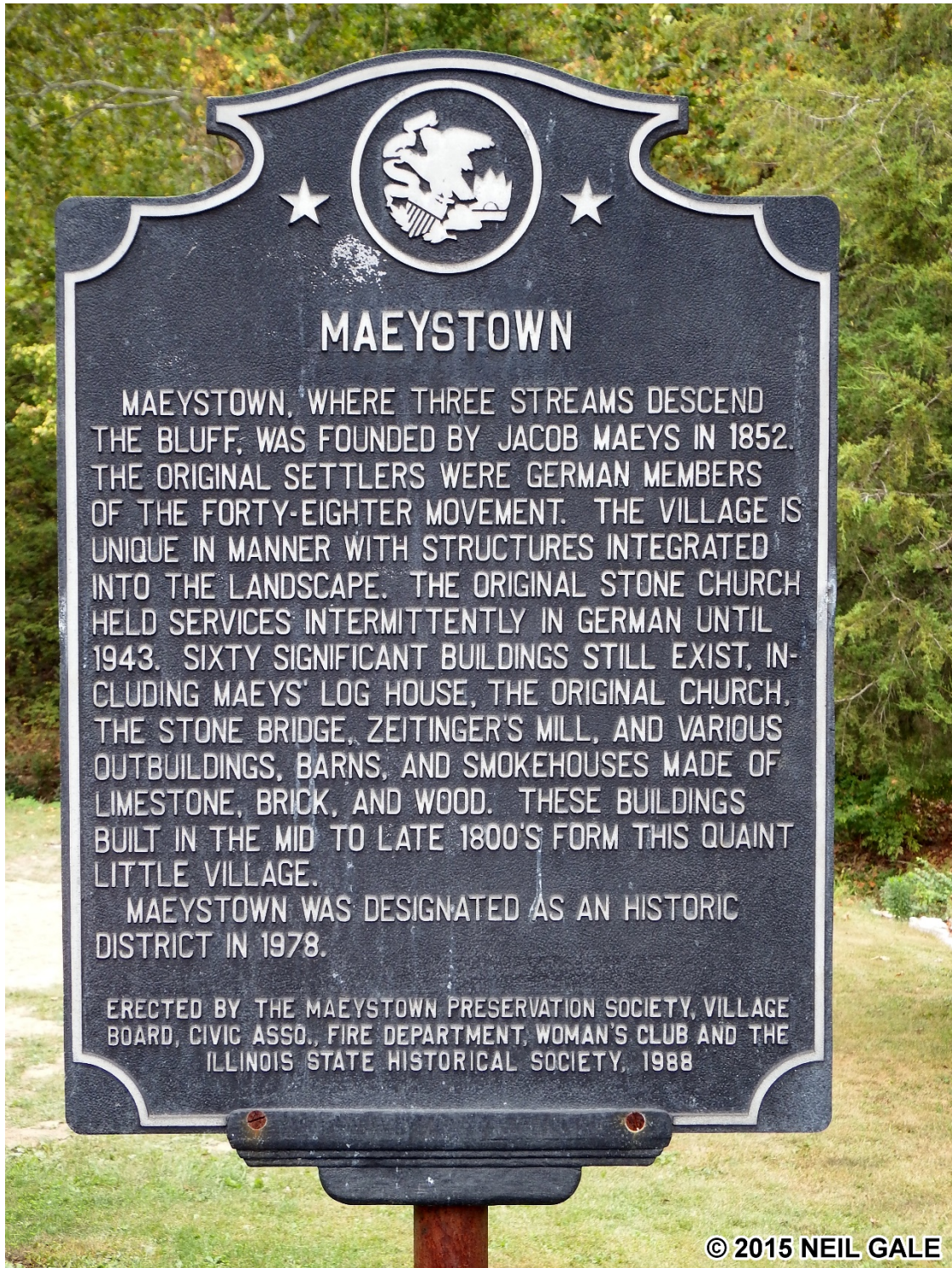
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