

Individuals and Institutions of Power in Mineral Point

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## Summary Statement/Introduction

The focus of our team's research and field work in Mineral Point was upper-class housing and institutions of social and political power. We investigated the Parley Eaton House, the Montgomery Cothren House, and St. Paul's Mission Church. We used both primary and secondary sources as the foundations of our historical research and created measured field drawings and finished pencil drawings of all three sites.

In addition to our research and field work we attempted to understand these buildings as representations and icons of institutional power in the town of Mineral Point. Sara Witty worked on the Parley Eaton House, built in 1846-7. Parley Eaton was a lawyer and a judge who chose to establish his home and office directly across from the courthouse in the center of town, thus connecting himself to the social, political, and legal fabric of the community. Sarah Fayen Scarlett also worked on the home of a prominent lawyer and judge: Montgomery Cothren. The Montgomery Cothren house was built in 1854-55, and unlike the Parley Eaton House, was located on the edge of town. Cothren's house, in contrast to Eaton's, was a symbol of power and wealth rather than one of connectedness. Alexandra Schultz worked on St. Paul's Mission Church, a small catholic church built in 1842 for Mineral Point's Irish catholic community. Although it was replaced as a place of worship by a larger church in 1860, St. Paul's remained and remains a symbol of Catholic heritage and pride.

This binder contains copies of our primary and secondary research materials, modern photographs of the sites, historical illustrations and maps, tax records, Wisconsin and U.S. census data, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, and our finished pencil drawings. Each site is represented by a section, which contains these materials in addition to a description and history

of the site. Because each site is different, each section contains unique information. The Parley Eaton House section contains copies of a pamphlet published in 1985, titled “A Narrative on the Parley Eaton House,” an important secondary source for information on the house and the site. The Parley Eaton House and the St. Paul’s Mission Church sections each contain interviews with individuals closely involved with the property. The St. Paul’s Mission Church section contains additional information on cemetery records. The Montgomery Cothren section contains both deed trace and tax records.

In addition, this binder also contains information on our methodology both in and outside the field. It also offers up some preliminary conclusions concerning each of these sites and their connections in the broader social landscape of Mineral Point, and also how they diverge and represent very different aspects of the community. All of these items work together to present a clearer view of buildings and spaces that still pose many questions about the daily life of Mineral Point Citizens.

## **Methodology**

For this project, our team employed several methods for reconstructing the physical and social history of our three buildings: St. Paul's Mission Church built in 1842, the Parley Eaton House built 1846, and the Cothren House built in 1854-55. One of the fundamental steps before performing fieldwork was to gain a general knowledge of the town and history of Mineral Point. This was done as a class by gathering primary and secondary sources about the town, such as maps, historic photographs, census records and histories.

The second avenue of research that we conducted was performing fieldwork in the town of Mineral Point. During this time, we took measurements of our three buildings and drew them to scale. For the Parley Eaton house, which was the first building we examined, we measured and drew plans of the exterior and all three floors. For St. Paul's Mission Church, we drew a plan, the front (north) elevation and one side (east) elevation. In some cases, measurements were approximated because we were unable to access certain features, such as the chimney and the window lintels of the Mission Church. For the Cothren house, we measured and drew the second floor and basement level, while Sarah Fayen Scarlett also transferred the field notes of the University of Delaware student's fieldwork for the first floor into a finished pencil drawing. We did not draw any elevations for either the Cothren house or the Parley Eaton house. We also took many photographs, especially of notable details such as windows and building seams. We used these photographs later to help reconstruct detailed drawings and a building chronology.

While in Mineral Point we also conducted several interviews with local residents, including the current and previous owners of the Parley Eaton house. They provided us with invaluable information on the history of the house, especially modern additions and renovations. This helped us to understand how the buildings had changed over time and how modern Mineral

Point residents valued historic preservation. In the case of St. Paul's Mission Church, we were able to speak with two residents, Bob Reagan and Lucille May, who were members of the Catholic church and actively involved in recent preservation work. All three of our group members conducted an interview with Bob Reagan, who had a general knowledge of the history of the church and its congregation. Sara Witty conducted a phone interview with Lucille May, a resident who was involved in the preservation of the church in 2001, after our return to Madison. Lucille identified modern additions and restorations to the church and provided some information on its use when she was a child.

The fieldwork and the subsequent transformation into finished pencil drawings allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the physical aspects of our assigned buildings. We were able to recognize and record significant additions or changes which we would later research and date by searching through the deeds at the Dodgeville Courthouse, tax records and other sources.

After returning from the field, our next step was to research ownership of the two houses through deeds and also attempt to establish a building chronology for the additions to the Cothren house. Sarah Fayen Scarlett and Alex Schultz travelled to the Dodgeville County Courthouse and tracked the ownership of the Cothren house back to 1895 when Cothren's widow deeded it to Jane Hutchison. Then Sarah and Alex went to the University of Wisconsin-Platteville to the Southwest Wisconsin Room to consult the nineteenth-century tax rolls for both Parley Eaton and Montgomery Cothren, the first owners of the houses. There was quite a bit of information on Montgomery Cothren and the Cothren house, including a rise in the value of the house between 1866 and 1871 that suggests the addition took place at that time. The deed research for Parley Eaton was performed by Nate Millington and interpreted by Sara Witty. Sara Witty also examined a pamphlet written by Bert Bohlin, "A Narrative about the Parley Eaton

House,” which included tax records, land ownership records, architectural information, and illustrations of the property.

Research on St. Paul’s Mission Church followed a different path and required the consultation of a number of secondary sources, mostly located at the Mineral Point Room in the basement of the Mineral Point Free Public Library. A file on the church contained several photographs, newspaper clippings and pamphlets, mostly published in the twentieth century. The bulk of the articles and materials pertained to the recent sale of the 1911 church and the Mission Church to the Lutheran church in 2007. We were unable to locate any records created by the priests or other associated people concerning the congregation that used the Mission Church from 1842-1860, although there is some mention of “church records” in some of the secondary source material. Another resource that we used to research St. Paul’s Mission church was cemetery records produced by the WPA in 1942. This provided invaluable information on the makeup of the congregation during the early years of the church, such as nationality. Sometimes birthplace was also included on the gravestones, which proved the assertion that most of the early parishioners were Irish Catholic, although there were a significant number of French and German names recorded on gravestones from the later nineteenth century.

Additionally, all three group members used the Wisconsin and Federal Census records to learn more about the inhabitants of the buildings. For St. Paul’s, Alex was able to research some of the family names obtained from the cemetery records to learn more about the nationality and general makeup of Catholic households during the 1850s. With the names taken from the deed traces, Sarah and Sara were able to use Ancestry.com to search Federal and Wisconsin State Censuses. For the Cothren House, these records brought to light the women, children, servants,

and boarders who occupied the property with Judge Cothren and his descendents. Sara Witty found Census data on the Parley Eaton family as well as the original builder, Abner Nichols.

Through these diverse methods, our team was able to recreate a clearer vision of the function of these spaces in the nineteenth century. The fieldwork helped us to define our limits in terms of later research and refine our conclusions. Given more time, we would have consulted several other types of resources, such as St. Paul's church records and newspaper articles. At the Cothren House we would study land ownership records to piece together the parcels that the Judge bought and how those parcels descended through his family to create the unusual present day configuration. For all three properties, we would pursue more in depth investigations into the personal lives of the occupants of these spaces. For some occupants, such as Montgomery Cothren, Parley Eaton and some of the more well-known priests this information is widely available. However, we know less about the subsequent and modern occupants who use these built environments in very different ways. Newspaper articles and vital records on the later owners could help fill in a better picture of the many people who experienced and created the meaning of these buildings.

## Conclusions

St. Paul's Mission Church, The Parley Eaton House, and The M. M. Cothren House all asserted and created power in the cultural landscape of early Mineral Point. Two served as the public face for prominent lawyers who became circuit court judges. The other was a gathering place and monument for the Catholic community, who had arrived early in the town but remained in the minority. Despite this overarching similarity, the ways that these individuals and institutions chose to position themselves and their buildings within the town differed significantly. Today, because these properties are associated with institutions and individuals that figured prominently in the founding and building up of Mineral Point, they have all been recognized as historic and made into monuments of the town's history. Together, they are part of a particular representation of history that recent Mineral Point residents have chosen to create.

St. Paul's Mission Church was a symbol as much as a sacred gathering place from its first construction in 1842. It helped a small community of Catholics stake their place in a largely Protestant town and connect themselves to the network of missionaries that was serving the western territories. It helped launch the congregation forward so that very quickly they could afford to build a larger church similar to the Methodist and Episcopalian versions nearby. From the beginning, the parish forcefully asserted their relationship to the larger Catholic community, especially a well-known and revered missionary priest, Father Mazzouchelli. Although he had little to do with the building of the parish and nothing to do with the building of the church, his fame and spiritual status created a legitimate religious identity that asserted their presence in the town. Interestingly, the building itself was only used as a place of worship for a very short time and now serves as a sort of museum open upon request by local residents. The use of the

Mission Church space remains largely unknown, but it is clear that it was an important monument to the Catholic community—a physical stake in their claims to their role in the creation of Mineral Point.

Although the residences in this study also serve as important representatives of secular judicial power, they provide an informative contrast between the ways two prominent lawyers asserted themselves differently within the landscape of Mineral Point. In some fundamental respects, Eaton and Cothren built similar houses. They both featured prominent formal parlors for entertaining business and social calls on the first floor. Both had kitchens in the basement, which placed service staff and the smells and heat of cooking away from guests and sleeping quarters. But in other important respects, these houses differ significantly and created power for their owners in different ways.

Parley Eaton chose to position himself directly next to the county courthouse, which used to stand on Commerce Street just feet from Eaton's front door. He built an office wing on his house to centralize his work and his social presence in one prominent location. The house itself followed conventions of the Federal Style and would have been recognized by businessmen from eastern cities as connected to commerce and law in the rest of the country. When the house was sold to Nicholas Treweek in 1874, Treweek set up his law office in the same space that Parley Eaton had used. Both men utilized the house as a home and as a site of business, tying themselves to the social, political, and the legal sphere of Mineral Point.

In contrast to Eaton's urban townhouse, M. M. Cothren built a home surrounded by land on the outskirts of town. Instead of aligning himself and his family directly with the courthouse by way of proximity, Cothren announced his standing in the community by creating a pastoral estate. While much work remains to fully understand the site of Cothren's house, its distance

from the town's commercial center, its position set back from the road with several outbuildings, and servant and rental housing, all suggest that Cothren modeled his home after the English country houses. Despite the seeming incongruence of its compact townhouse style with its expansive surroundings, Cothren's home separated its residents from the daily activity of the town and provided the backdrop for a more leisured lifestyle. Cothren's ability to pay and house servants and cooks further removed his family members from drudgery and the daily experience of most Mineral Point residents. This ostentation through separation contrasts with Eaton's more direct presentation of wealth and power, and seems a logical tactic for Cothren, who became judge more than ten years after Eaton, when the town center was already largely established.

In some ways, the survival and restoration of these three structures suggest that Mineral Point, like many American towns, rescued the buildings associated with the prominent white men and their families who pioneered unsettled land and created economies, industries, and lasting homesteads. But when considered more fully, Mineral Point tells a broader story than most. Since the 1940s, Mineral Point residents have been using the built environment to tell stories about miners as well as shopkeepers and farmers who occupied the town. Although it is clear that many questions still remain surrounding the public and private functions of these buildings and how these changed over time, they were important structures in the creation of the Mineral Point landscape. Furthermore, their occupants played active roles in the formation of organizations – governmental and religious- in Mineral Point society, molding the social landscape from the top down. Although this part of Mineral Point's history has been somewhat left behind in favor of the Cornish miner myth in recent years, this history is an important companion to the many untold stories which continue to fascinate local enthusiasts and historians.

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