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AH449: Samuel Meadows House Report
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The Samuel Meadows House: An Example of Mineral Point's Middle Class Architecture and Ways of Life

The Meadows House is situated at the corner of Jail Alley and Vine Street, at the top of a hill. The structure sits closely to Jail Alley, causing a long, large outdoor area to extend northward, downhill to Doty Street. The structure consists of two sections: the original two-story stone house, which likely dates to 1849 and a one-story frame addition to the east side, likely built between 1867 and 1868. The stone portion sits at the top of the hill, while the addition sits farther down on the incline.

The structure maintains a long rectangular footprint, as the frame addition sits right next to the main house. Both sections have the same, side-gabled roof. Each end of the house's gables contains a brick chimney. All windows are six-over-six double-hung, save the small square basement window on the west elevation and the bay window in the addition, added sometime after 1971 (4.6).¹

From the Jail Alley elevation, the house seems small. Stone steps lead to a door flanked by a window on each side. It contains six panels with trim accentuating their edges. The top panels are small and square, while the middle ones are long, and rectangular. The bottom panels are rectangular, but shorter than those in the middle. The door is original (4.7).

However, when viewed from the northeast elevation, the house expands in size dramatically. Because it is situated on a hill, this elevation contains three visible stories: the sub-

¹ Photograph of southwest elevation, c. 1971. Photograph obtained by Nancy Pfothenauer.

level basement, the ground floor, consisting also of the frame addition, and the top floor. Only the top story is visible the southwest elevation that faces Jail Alley. The ground level door sits between two windows, and above each are windows of the same size. It, too, is original and contains small panes of glass that surround a larger pane. The bottom half of the door contains two rectangular panels trimmed with wooden molding (4.8).

The floor plan of both stories contains a large room with two smaller rooms to the side. The stairs are found in the larger area. When entering from the northern elevation, one enters into a hallway and proceeds into the large, formal room. This space contains a fireplace with a decorative mantle. A built-in cabinet sits across from the stairs. The window surrounds do not escape elaboration, as they are more coved and molded than other surrounds in the house. These elements seem to indicate the formal nature of the space and hint at the formal and/or professional activities that may have taken place here (4.9).

The clapboard-covered addition contains two distinct areas, currently demarcated by slate shingles covering one, while the other maintains its wooden siding. Both originally had clapboard siding, according to historic photographs taken as recently as 1971. Both sections have a window and door on the south elevation. They differ on the north elevation, as the slate section has both a window and door, while the clapboard section contains only a window. Underneath this section is a sub-basement, which contains a window and door that sits directly on the ground. A large stone buttress lay opposite them.

The Meadows house was built in 1849-1850 and commissioned by Abner Nichols, a local tavern keeper and owner of Lot 58, where the house resides. It was then sold to Samuel Meadows shortly after this, although the name that appears on the census records as head of household is James Meadows, Samuel's brother. According to the 1850 census record, James

served as a butcher. The household consisted of eight people: the Meadows family and two possible boarders, listed as carpenters. By the 1860 census, James Meadows works as a cooper. The household also shrank to five people: the Meadows family, minus Mrs. Meadows, and a boarder who worked as a dressmaker.

According to tax assessments, by 1868 Nicholas Kessler, a tailor, bought the property. The 1870 census reveals that the household consisted of seven family members. Between 1866 and 1868, there was an addition built onto the stone house, as the value jumps from \$250 to \$400. The tax assessment of 1868 lists the property as “Lot 58 and buildings,” which allows us to speculate that the addition may have been a separate structure. This 1872 bird’s eye drawing lends credibility to this claim (4.10).² Interestingly, the 1872 tax assessment declares a “Lot 58 and house,” which may date the connection of the addition to the house. Over the course of the decade, the household grew to a total of nine people by the 1880 census. As the children moved out over the years, the Kesslers obtained two boarders, as found in the 1905 Wisconsin census. Title work reveals that Nicholas, then his son Peter, owned the house from 1867 or 1868 to 1910. Extended family members then owned the house until 1960, when bought by Robert Neal. After his death in the 1980s, ownership changed hands frequently. Bruce and Sharon Rowe bought the Meadows House in 1999, and currently reside here. Until recently, they used the addition as an antiques shop. They have since moved the store to a separate building in town. The addition, and much of the house, now function as storage.

² Bird’s-eye illustration of Mineral Point, 1872. Image obtained by Nancy Pfothenauer.

Interpretation

As seen in the above paragraph, the Meadows House has a history tied to Mineral Point's economy. Abner Nichols sold the house shortly after having it built, which may indicate that it was a speculative venture, or that he quickly outgrew the house in terms of his social ambition and standing. The house sits one block away from both of the town's main thoroughfares, High Street and Commerce Street, which would have made it a convenient residence for shopkeepers or tradesmen working nearby.

Construction of the house occurred shortly after the beginning of Mineral Point's "Transitional Years," which note the years between the end of the initial lead mining boom and that the beginning of a large-scale zinc mining operation, 1848 and 1880. During this time, author George Fiedler notes that the town became a "service point" for the surrounding farmers, for miners picking up supplies before moving farther west, and for railroad shipping.³ The town's merchants, purveyors of dry goods, played a large role in maintaining a changing economy that catered to a transient population stopping through. The middle class maintained the town, forming its core, stable group of citizens, and the business owners and tradesmen provided the goods and services needed by them. James Meadows and Nicholas Kessler exemplify this middle class population, and the house manifests the nineteenth century merchant's life.

Nichols first sold the property to Samuel and James Meadows, James noted as a butcher, then cooper, in the 1850 and 1860 United States censuses.⁴ Modifications to the property during

³George Fiedler, *Mineral Point A History* (Mineral Point: Mineral Point Historical Society, 1962), 131.

⁴1850 United States Census (Free Schedule), Mineral Point Township, Iowa County, Wisconsin; p. 311, family 59, dwelling 59, lines 36-42; July 24, 1850; www.ancestry.com (accessed 1 July 2010). 1860 United States Census (Free Schedule), Mineral Point Township, Iowa County,

the Meadows' ownership are unknown at this stage of research, as an 1866 tax assessment describes only a "house."⁵ James Meadows may have owned, rented, or worked at a shop elsewhere in town and did not require a commercial space on the same property as his home.

Nicholas Kessler, a tailor, then bought the property, and within a year or so of obtaining ownership, he made an addition to the property, as seen in a \$150 tax jump in 1868.⁶ The assessment for this year also uses different wording, describing "buildings" instead of "house."⁷ This would seem to indicate that he built a separate structure on his property. The 1872 bird's-eye illustrates the house with a building attached directly to it, and another structure on the other side of a gap. That same year, Kessler's taxes dropped \$125, and the property is described only as a "house." He may have added middle, connecting structure, creating the large structure that we see today (4.11).

The need for such a space implies that Kessler worked from home, keeping his business on-site with his home. In doing this, his home also played an important role in his trade. In looking at the ground floor plans, the formal parlor space had a door that connected it directly to the addition. He could easily walk between the business and personal sections of this structure, incorporating both in order to present an image of himself as a respectable businessman and middle class citizen, a viable member in the community. The doors on the addition indicate that clients may have entered the workshop, seeing the professional life of the tailor, seeing the tailor's professional equipment and skills. Kessler may have then led them to his formal living space, to speak with them about their wants and expectations. He may also have done his

Wisconsin; p. 197, family 1260, dwelling 1268, lines 19-23; July 18, 1860; www.ancestry.com (accessed 1 July 2010).

⁵ Tax Assessment for 1866, Iowa County, WI. Southwestern Wisconsin Room, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, WI.

⁶ Tax Assessment for 1868.

⁷ 1872 bird's-eye; tax Assessment for 1872.

paperwork at a desk in this room. These same clients would also have been his peers in the business world, and to display his home to them would have been a way to show their personal and economic relationships while asserting to themselves their power as a class. Allowing clients into his home may have been a way for Kessler to use his hospitality to economic advantage as an effort to draw in and maintain his clientele.

The home's formal space has many elements that indicate notions of middle class living and social ambitions. A hallway separates the parlor from direct contact with the outside, and is entered through a door with wooden panels, carved molding, and glass panes. This is certainly the most elaborate door on the house, indicating that the northeast elevation was the formal facade. Once inside, the room's east wall contains a built-cabinet and a fireplace with carved mantel, and the wooden trim around the room differs from that found throughout the rest of the house. These architectural elements, along with the larger size, mark this room as the showplace of the house, useful for business and social interactions.

This house continues to bear witness to Mineral Point's merchant class and its reliance on a transient population, this time in terms of a tourist economy. Current homeowners Bruce and Sharon Rowe sell antiques in town, and until recently, they used the addition as their shop, moving eventually to a large space on Commerce Street. This house, as well as many of the other stone homes in town, play a role in this economy, as they give the town its visual identity and permit the town's architecture to become a vital commodity in and of itself. Over its 160-year lifetime, the home attests to the continuing service economy of Mineral Point while also showing the changes that have occurred to the town and to the economy. Contemporary shopkeepers no longer sell as many vital needs and services to the community, selling rather an ideal, escapist lifestyle whose needs include historic buildings and objects, specialty gifts. The

entire downtown area accommodates these needs, showing the resilience and staying power of Mineral Point's merchant middle class.