

John Jackson (J.J.) Mayes

Classroom Resource Packet

1. Student Biography of J.J. Mayes
2. Vocabulary List
 - a. Vocabulary words are pulled from the student biography, the actors' scripts, and the Character Information portion of our Guide Script. Words are organized alphabetically.
3. Supplemental Resources
 - a. "Horse racing once a big draw" by Bill Kemp
 - b. "Bloomington's west side first site for county fairgrounds" by Bill Kemp

John Jackson Mayes

1859-1918

John Jackson Mayes, Jr. was born on April 7, 1851 in St John's, New Brunswick, Canada. Mayes was the son of John Jackson Mayes, Sr. and Sybil (Robert) Mayes, both of whom were from England. There is little information available on Mayes' early life, but we do know that at the age of 17, John (referred to more commonly as J.J.) moved to Boston, Massachusetts. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Chicago, Illinois, and was reportedly living there in October 1871 during the **Great Chicago Fire**.

By the fall of 1877, Mayes had moved to Bloomington, Illinois, first renting a room a **boarding house**. Not long after his arrival in Bloomington, Mayes began his career as a photographer. Together with Arthur Bell, Mayes opened a Photograph Parlor in downtown Bloomington. Their studio offered services such as photo enlargement, baby photographs, group pictures, and frames and matting. They also copied old photographs and "enlarged any size, finished in Crayon, **India Ink**, or Oil." Advertisements for their studio stated they had "all the latest improvements for doing fine artistic work, and at reasonable prices."

However, the partnership between Mayes and Bell did not last very long. On September 11, 1878, *The Pantagraph* reported that Mayes and Bell had mutually **dissolved** their firm, with Mayes selling out all of his interest in the business to Bell. Later that same month, Mayes began to venture into his own business, making a trip to Chicago to "**procure** material for his new gallery." By 1879, Mayes had established his own gallery in Bloomington. Mayes heavily advertised portraiture at his new gallery, stating "if you want a first-class picture of yourself, go and see Mayes in the McClun block." Especially around the holidays, Mayes **touted** that a "card or cabinet picture of yourself" was a very appropriate and valuable Christmas gift to a "sister, **sweetheart**, or wife."

Mayes' work was highly regarded around Bloomington, with many **glowing** reviews appearing in the pages of local newspapers. An 1884 *Pantagraph* article applauded the "superior work" found at Mayes' Studio, including a recent **commission** to photograph all 150 members of the Stubblefield family at their annual reunion. The article stated that each face was easily recognized and that the picture was one that would be "highly prized for the future."

On Saturday, September 21, 1878, J.J. married Mabel de Conville in Fairbury, Illinois. In the presence of a few friends, Reverend C. D. Merritt performed the marriage ceremony. After spending a short time "receiving the congratulations" from their friends, the couple departed the town to return to Bloomington. Mabel and J.J. had four children, three of whom lived to adulthood.

J.J. Mayes also dealt with his fair share of legal **snafus**, the majority of which dealt with an incident involving his dog in 1883. In early May that year, Hester Fell visited Mayes' photography studio to get her photograph taken. Hester was the daughter of Henry C. Fell, a local insurance agent, and was around 12 years old at the time of the incident. While at the studio, Mayes' bulldog bit her on the leg so severely that she was **confined** to her home for an extended period of time. Some reporters wrote that the bulldog was "large and **savage**," while others said that this bulldog had been present at the studio for years and had never been an issue before. Most people agreed that the bulldog should no longer be kept in the studio. Mayes did **comply** to demands that the dog be removed from his downtown photography studio for the safety of the public and moved it to his barn on West Market Street.

Around the mid-1880s, Mayes became seriously involved in the world breeding, selling, and racing horses. According to the *Pantagraph*, his interest in horses began around the time he began suffering from a **recurring** series of health problems. In January 1885 Mayes sold his photograph gallery to focus on breeding and training horses. That spring Mayes also leased the old fairgrounds from Owen Lee Cheney. The fairgrounds were located between Market and Washington Streets and around half a mile west of the mainline of the Chicago & Alton railroad. Mayes used the grounds to train and breed horses for five years.

Mayes' horses were bred from well-known and well-performing racehorses. Close attention was paid to the **bloodlines** of his horses. He even offered extended **pedigrees** to anyone interested in purchasing or sponsoring a horse. In one article from 1885, *The Pantagraph* specified a few of the racehorses Mayes owned. This included Mayes' Sprague, a five-year-old brother of another accomplished horse, Rounds Sprague. Mayes' Sprague was described as "a seal brown," being 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ hands high, and weighed around 1,100 pounds. Mayes also owned many other young horses and **mares**, including Monte Cristo, a "successful **sire** ... worthy of a more extended notice." These horses were very valuable. In 1887, Mayes sold his three-year old bay Altair to Mr. McGregory of Lafayette, IN for \$1,500. This is the equivalent of around \$48,000 in 2023.

Alongside his success in the horse business, which he is thought to have continued until around 1916, Mayes went back to professional photography. He opened a new studio in Clinton, Illinois by December 19 that year. According to the *Clinton Daily Public*, the studio was a "splendid set of rooms" with a lighting system Mayes had set up that was "a feature worth seeing." Ads for his studio in Clinton touted a new "electrical nitrogen sky light" which allowed Mayes to do evening photography sessions as well. Additionally, he boasted that he offered "up to date" photographs **utilizing** "**porcelain** pictures, large portraits in oil, **sepia**, and water colors" too. However, by July 4, 1917, he had sold the space in Clinton and decided to re-open a gallery in Bloomington, located at 320 North Main Street.

Mayes also taught photography at Illinois Wesleyan University's College of Fine Arts during the 1899-1900 and 1900-1901 school years. He was made the Principal of the School of Photography because "he has had thirty successful years in the profession" and that "his work shows the mind and hand of a master in his art." At any point in the calendar year, students could enroll in a three-month course to be instructed in three departments: Lighting, Posing, and Operating; **Retouching**; Printing and Finishing. Students could also specialize in any one of the three departments if they were particularly interested in a topic. This program was open to "any young man or woman desiring to enter the business world on a paying basis," and upon graduation, students would be fully qualified to open and operate their own photography studio.

On June 27, 1918, J.J. Mayes passed away at his residence at 410 North Oak Street after an illness that lasted six months. According to *The Pantagraph*, Mayes had become **progressively** weaker over the course of those six months, eventually **succumbing** to his unnamed illness. He was survived by their three daughters, all of whom would go on to succeed in their musical **endeavors**. His funeral was held at First Christian Church on Saturday, June 30. Mayes was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery next to his wife Mabel.

Vocabulary

Abundance (noun): an ample quantity; affluence.

Acquaintance (noun): the state of being familiar with each other.

Albumen (noun): the white of an egg.

Allure (noun): a power of attraction or fascination.

Beckoned (verb): to summon or attract.

Bloodlines (noun): a sequence of direct ancestors.

Boarding House (noun): a lodging house at which meals are provided.

Commission (verb): to assign the task of creating an order or product.

Comply (verb): to conform, submit, or adapt as required or requested.

Confined (adjective): kept within or limited to a particular location.

Court Summons (noun): an order or citation to appear in court.

Dispute (noun): a disagreement or quarrel.

Dissolved (verb): to cause to disperse or separate into many parts.

Donkey Dust (noun): a saying that refers to one's opinion as untrue or irrelevant (e.g. You're full of donkey dust!)

Endeavors (noun): a serious determined effort.

Exactness (noun): having the quality of being marked by particular and complete accordance with fact or a standard.

Exposure Time (noun): the amount of time it takes for a camera to take a picture; during this time the photography subjects must stay still or the photograph comes out blurry.

Glowing (adjective): highly enthusiastic and favorable

Great Chicago Fire (event): The Great Chicago Fire happened in 1871 when a massive fire broke out on the South side of the city. It spread to the North and West sides by midnight and destroyed around 18,000 buildings over the course of two days.

Homicide (noun): the killing of a human being by another.

Immune (adjective): not susceptible or responsive to something.

Impulses (noun): a sudden or spontaneous inclination to do something, typically without preparation.

Incensed (adjective): To be angered or irritated by something.

India Ink (noun): ink that comes from carbon black pigment. Historically, this ink has been made from ash and water or other liquids.

Infamy (noun): publicity or legacy based upon a widely-known act, typically a negative one.

Interplay (noun): interaction between two events or objects.

Kodak (noun): one of the early photography companies in the United States. Their Kodak No. 1 camera was released in 1888, which allowed more people to take photographs on their own.

Litigiously (adverb): in a contentious or disputed manner.

Mares (noun): a female horse, especially when fully mature.

Mats (noun): thin, flat pieces of paper-based material that are put in frames as decoration and to protect the photo or art from the frame.

Nipped (verb): to pinch, squeeze, or bite quickly.

Obituary (noun): a notice of a person's death usually with a short biographical account.

Painstaking (adjective): involving diligent care and detail.

Porcelain (noun): a hard, fine-grained, sonorous, nonporous, and usually translucent and white ceramic ware.

Procure (verb): to get possession of or obtain something.

Progressively (adverb): something happening over time/ through a progress or process.

Pugilistic (adjective): having to do with boxing.

Queen Victoria (person): The Queen of the United Kingdom, Great Britain, and Ireland from 1837 to 1901. During this time period, there were many political and scientific changes in the United Kingdom, as well as an expansion of British colonialism.

Recurring (adjective): happening on many occasions over time.

Renowned (adjective): widely known and respected.

Retouching (verb): the act of editing photographs to improve their quality.

Savage (adjective): untamed or wild.

Sepia (adjective): having a brownish-gray color or tint.

Sire (verb): to bring into being; especially referring to the breeding of domestic animals.

Slandorous (adjective): something that is defamatory of or misrepresents somebody and makes them look bad.

Sleighting Carnival (noun): a community event in which large groups of people went out in their horse-drawn snow sleighs at the same time.

Snafus (noun): situations marked by errors or confusion.

Stabling (noun): accommodation for animals in a building.

Stoic (adjective): showing little or no strong emotion.

Succumbing (verb): yielding to a force, appeal, or desire; to be brought to an end by the effect of disruptive forces.

Sue (verb): to seek justice from a person through a legal process.

Sweetheart (noun): a romantic partner or interest.

Tout (verb): to promote or talk up.

Trotters (noun): horses bred or trained for racing.

Utilizing (verb): making use of something.

Horse racing once a big draw

Bill Kemp; June 25, 2013



The oil painting "Harness Race at the County Fair" by Bloomington-born artist Sidney Smith was painted around 1893 when Smith was 16 years old. There's a good chance this work is based, at least in part, on the old eastside fairgrounds. Smith later became the nationally celebrated comic strip creator of "The Gumps." He was killed in an automobile accident in 1935. (For The Pantagraph, Illinois State Museum)

Although horse racing is known as the "sport of kings," back in the 19th century it was wildly popular with the hardscrabble pioneer. And once civilization took hold in Central Illinois, farmer and city dweller alike enjoyed watching -and betting on - "the ponies."

John Reynolds, Illinois' fourth governor, recalled the great races at Horse Town Prairie (today the St. Clair County community of Fayetteville) as early as 1803, when his state was still a territory and its residents primarily folk from Kentucky, Virginia and other southern states.

"At these races almost every description of business was transacted," Reynolds said. "Horses were swopped (swapped) and contracts made. Debts paid and new ones contracted.

Amusements of various species were indulged in. Foot-racing, wrestling, and jumping were not neglected."

Several decades later, James Latta, an early Methodist circuit rider who traveled through Central Illinois, preached against the popular vices of the day, especially horse racing. "There is a class of people who cannot go to hell fast enough on foot, so they must get on their poor, mean pony and go to the horse-race," declared the good reverend.

According to a pioneer history of McLean County, the area's first racetrack dates to 1833. The purse was \$150, according to Esek E. Greenman, who rode Bald Hornet, owned by Henry Jacoby. Not long before the race (or so the story goes), someone set Jacoby's horse loose in a field of green corn.

"It was supposed that Bald Hornet's racing days were over, but care restored him," reads an account of the race. Greenman also claimed the owner of Gun Fannon hinted that he (Greenman) would be rewarded by "holding up his horse." Greenman spurned the offer to (in the parlance of boxing) "take a dive," though in the end an aggressive Tiger Whip tripped up Bald Hornet to win the race.

According to available records, Bloomington's first permanent track was located at the McLean County Agricultural Society's fairgrounds on the city's western limits, an area today bordered by Market, Stillwell, Washington and Caroline streets. Racing was held here from the mid-1850s until the mid-1880s.

A second racetrack (or "driving park") opened in 1870 on the city's near southeast side, an area partially bordered by Croxton Avenue and Lincoln and McGregor streets, land that now includes Holiday Park. The Illinois Trotting Association staged an annual meeting and races on the grounds, and at other times the track was leased to race promoters.

"About 300 people attended the races yesterday, generally an orderly, well disposed body, with none of the drunkenness, quarreling or profanity usually prominent at such places," reported the Aug. 17, 1870 Pantagraph. The previous day's program included a half-miler with a

\$50 purse won by Captain Reeder, "a wiry little thoroughbred stallion" owned by H.B. Slayton of Elkhart.

In the late 1880s, a group calling themselves the Bloomington Fair Association opened fairgrounds and a racecourse at what is now a residential neighborhood roughly bordered by Country Club Place, Mercer and Oakland avenues, and Vale Street. George Miller, a prominent local architect, designed the racetrack amphitheater.

By this time, the trifecta of horse racing, boxing and baseball dominated the world of organized sports. On Sept. 19, 1890, purses at Bloomington's east side grounds were as high as \$500 (or more than \$11,000 today, adjusted for inflation). The third race, a three-in-five "trot" with a \$300 purse, featured horses from Chicago, Peoria, Terre Haute, Ind. and Louisville, Kent.

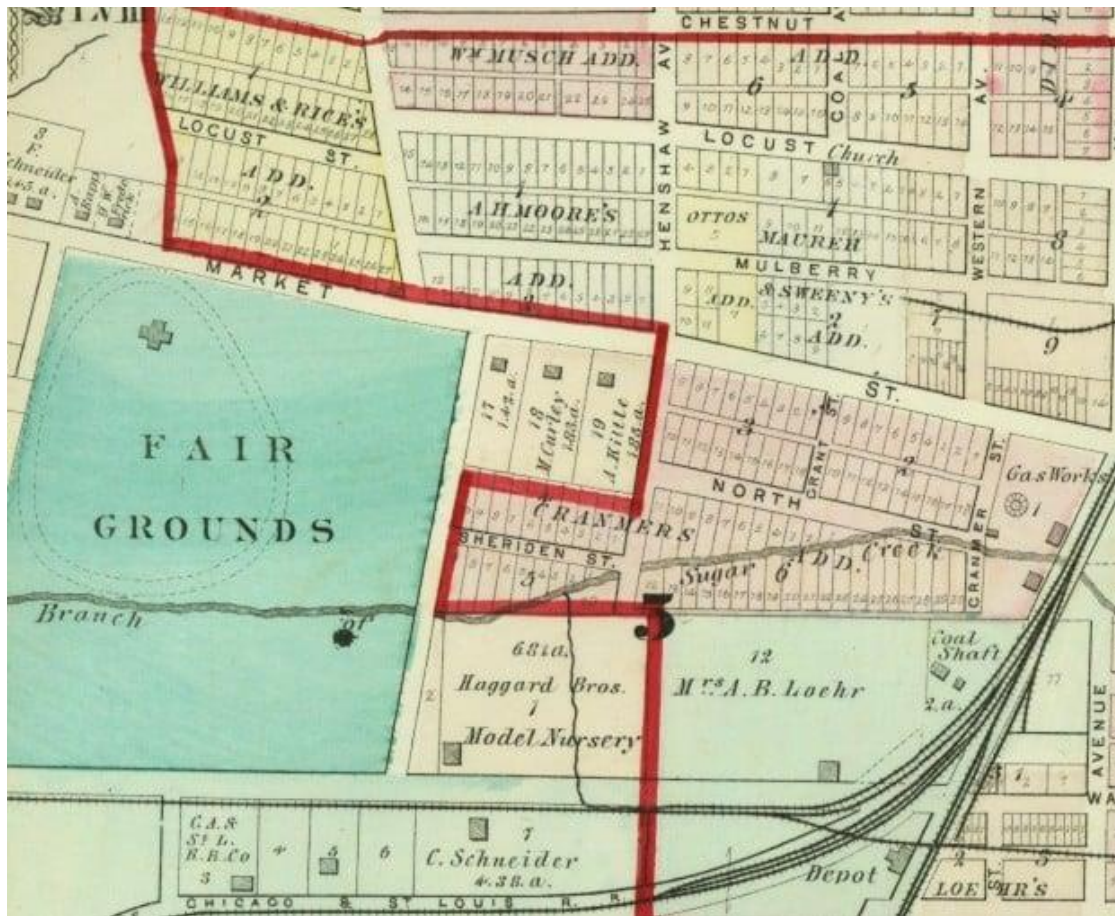
Although no visible traces of the amphitheater and other fair buildings remain, it's not unheard of for homeowners to occasionally find brickwork and the like buried in their backyards.

Gambling both drove the popularity of horse racing and undermined its integrity. In July 1892, professional starter Harry Loper complained to The Pantagraph that unnamed officers with the local trotting association were buying "pools" (that is, betting) on races, an apparent conflict of interest.

In April 1904, The Pantagraph lamented the fact that it had been "a number of years" since the ponies last ran in Bloomington. Racing, it seemed, had fallen out of favor, at least locally.

Bloomington's west side first site for county fairgrounds

Bill Kemp; June 25, 2013



An 1800s map of the original county fairgrounds. Courtesy of the McLean County Museum of History

The McLean County 4-H Fair opens on Wednesday, marking the 16th year the annual event had been staged at the “new” west side grounds. We say “new” because the county’s first permanent fairground was also on Bloomington’s west side.

For three decades, from the mid-1850s to the mid-1880s, the county fair was held about a half mile west of the Chicago & Alton Railroad mainline (now Amtrak and Union Pacific), and between Market and Washington streets. Confused? Today, the Secretary of State’s DMV office is located on what was once the north end of the fairgrounds.

Organized in March 1852, the McLean County Agricultural Society held its first fair later that fall. According to a society report, the inaugural event attracted 118 entries of various livestock, with premiums amounting to a then not-insignificant sum of \$146.

The location of the first two or three fairs is not known. That changed in 1854 when an association, apart from, though working with the agricultural society, acquired the west side parcel for a permanent fairground.

“They have ten acres of land, well watered and shaded, which cost with the fencing and other improvements the sum of \$1,800,” reported the McLean County Agricultural Society (the fairground eventually would come to encompass 55 acres or more). Back then, a branch of Sugar Creek ran east-west through the property, which likely proved handy when watering stock during muggy fair days. Befitting a permanent fairground, there would eventually be substantial structures on the premises, one of the larger being a circular amphitheater located inside the half-mile dirt race track.

By 1855, the local county fair was well on its way to becoming a fall tradition. On the fair’s third day that late September, entries included “fruits, flowers and mechanical and agricultural implements, as well as a fine display of needlework,” reported *The Pantagraph*. “Amongst the contributions to the floral department, we noticed a beautiful collection of dahlias by our enterprising nurseryman, F.K. Phoenix, embracing over forty varieties, besides many other flowers.”

Apart from the fair, the fairgrounds also hosted a wide range of events over the years, none more common than horse racing. In late May 1875, Dr. Edmond Stevens’ “Tom Crowder” bested Robert McCart’s new mare, “Cotton-Picker” in two half-mile heats. “The attendance was quite large,” reported *The Pantagraph*, adding the crowd “contained representatives of nearly every occupation — the ministry perhaps excluded.”

The final fair at the old west side grounds was held Sept. 9-12, 1884, ending a run of at least 29 consecutive years at the same location. In the end, it appears the fair could not survive the persistent money problems of the fairground association and its stockholders.

For a while, the old site was still used, though not always for first-class entertainment. In May 1885, for example, a seedy wild west show paraded through town before performing at the now-forlorn fairgrounds. The crowd for Fargo's Wild West show "was a small one, yet much bigger than the performance deserved," noted The Bulletin, a long-defunct daily competitor to The Pantagraph. "The parade of the dirty, greasy individuals, and the skinny, lifeless shabbily caparisoned (dressed) alleged horses through the streets this morning was a very bad advertisement for the concern. The managers would do better to hide their 'attractions' until they got an audience through the gates of their show grounds."

The same day The Bulletin savaged Fargo's, it reported the sale of the west side grounds to Maria Paist for \$12,300 (or about \$300,000 today, adjusted for inflation). The sale cleared up the long-standing indebtedness of the fairgrounds, and Paist moved to develop the parcel into a residential development. The Fair Ground subdivision (as it was called) was platted in July 1887, with the aptly named Circle Drive looping through the heart of the new development (though this street did not correspond to the old fairground dirt track).

Bordered by Market (on the north), Stillwell (east), Washington (south) and Caroline streets (the latter originally called County Rd.), the development never fulfilled its promise. Most of the lots remained empty, and the street layout was eventually altered and much of the subdivision converted to commercial use. Today, one would never guess this stretch of Bloomington once served as the original McLean County Fairgrounds.