

John Jackson Mayes (1851-1918)

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. Gregory 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.