

Merkel Farmstead
8570 Louella Lane
South Side of U.S. 64
Vicinity of Shiloh
Shiloh Valley Township
St. Clair County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1191

HABS
ILL
82-SHILV,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERKEL FARMSTEAD

HABS NO. IL-1191

Location: The Merkel Site is located one-eighth mile south of U.S. 64 and 400 feet northwest of an unnamed tributary of Silver Creek (in the NW1/4, NE1/4, Section 3, Shiloh Valley Township). The farmstead is situated approximately one and a half miles east of Shiloh, four miles southwest of Lebanon, and five miles northwest of Mascoutah in Section 3 of Shiloh Valley Township, St. Clair County, Illinois. Originally situated within a large tract of timber, the farmstead is completely surrounded by tilled land and centrally located within the original land holding (not oriented with the present township road system).

USGS Lebanon, Illinois Quadrangle (1954)
UTM: 250,500m E / 4,272,425m N (Zone 15)

Present Owner: Public Building Commission
County of St. Clair
Belleville, Illinois

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of Significance:

The Merkel Farmstead represents the large rural home and working farmstead of an early (1830s), relatively wealthy, German immigrant family. The Merkel family was one of the first German immigrants to locate in the Shiloh vicinity which was shortly afterward to be known as the Lateiner Settlement. Although the farmstead was previously improved by an American family, the collection of buildings at this site is indicative of a German farm family. The earliest buildings exhibit characteristics typically associated with German immigrant families. By the early twentieth century, the newer structures are typical of those being constructed by the assimilated German families.

Although no documentary evidence has been found to support our contention, the Merkel family appears to have delved into wine

production upon initially coming into the region. The farmstead exhibits evidence of early commercial activity associated with wine production -- a specialized form of agriculture that flourished for a short duration in this region during the early to middle nineteenth century and was strongly influenced by the German background of the immigrants.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of Erection:

As with many vernacular buildings, the actual date of construction for the buildings at the Merkel Farmstead is unknown. It is probable that the Merkel Farmstead was initially occupied and improved by the American Silas Crane circa 1813¹. No above-ground features remain from the early nineteenth century Crane occupation. It is suspected that the house, corn crib and wine press building at the Merkel Farmstead were constructed by or for the Nicholas Merkel family during the early to middle nineteenth century. The barn, which was constructed during the early twentieth century, probably was constructed by or for the Knoebel family.

2. Architect:

As with most vernacular buildings, the construction of the buildings at the Merkel Farmstead was probably carried out either by an unidentified local carpenter/builder or the family members who occupied and/or used the buildings. Such construction generally was conducted without the aid of formal plans and followed traditional house forms passed from generation to generation through non-written methods². It is doubtful that an architect was involved with the construction of any of the buildings at the Merkel Farmstead. The form of the house (its double-pile character) suggests that it was constructed for a German family. The framing technology associated with the early wine press building suggests that it was constructed by a non-German (or American) craftsman. The framing technology associated with the corn crib suggest the presence of a German-trained craftsman.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

The following list identifies the land owners of the acreage associated with the Merkel Farmstead³:

Silas Crane (1814 to January 1821)
Henry Isbell (January 1821 to November 1832)
Nicholas Merkel (November 1832 to January 1875)
Henry Knoebel (January 1875 to December 1894)
Albert Knoebel (December 1894 to 1915)
Alvina Knoebel (1915 to c.1930)
Alvina Knoebel Heirs (c.1930 to unknown date)
Mildred and Morris Hecht (unknown date to July 1959)
Lerus E. Weil (July 1959 to 1994)
Public Building Commission, County of St. Clair (1994 to Present)

4. Builders, Contractors, and Suppliers:

See discussion in Part I.A.1 - Date of Erection, and I.A.2 - Architect.

5. Original Plans:

No original plans exist for any of the buildings at the Merkel Farmstead (See discussion in Part I.A.2 - Architect).

6. Alterations and Additions:

The Merkel Farmstead represents over 150 years of structural evolution associated with changing agricultural practices and family preferences. No above-ground structural remains associated with the initial American occupation are extant. It is suspected that the American period occupation is well represented by subsurface archaeological remains. The house, corn crib, and wine press building all were associated with the Nicholas Merkel occupation. The large brick house represents two major episodes of construction. The earliest is represented only by the rear kitchen wing. The latest episode of construction is represented by the large two-story front block, which appears to have been constructed after the demolition of a portion of the original structure once associated with the existing kitchen wing. The latter episode of construction may have been initiated due to a catastrophic event such as a fire.

The corn crib has been modified with the addition of grain bins. The wine press building has lost its original side wings and has been surrounded by early twentieth century additions. Similarly, the function of the wine press building has changed from its suspected original function to a garage and machine storage building. Although abandoned and deteriorated, the barn, workshop, laundry room, and privy have been changed little over the years.

B. Historical Context:

The earliest historic settlement in this portion of Illinois occurred during the final years of the seventeenth century, when French missionaries arrived at what was to become Cahokia, St. Clair County. By the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the French had established communities at Kaskaskia (1703), Fort De Chartres (1719), Prairie du Rocher (1721) and St. Philippe (1723), all located along the bottoms of the Mississippi River. During this French Colonial period, this region became known as the Illinois Country and remained in the control of the French until the end of the French and Indian War in 1763.

Although the region was briefly under British Control, American pioneers began to pour into the region during the 1790s and early 1800s. St. Clair County was organized by the territorial Governor Arthur St. Clair in 1790, while Illinois was still part of the Northwest Territory. Although colonial French settlers had concentrated along the Mississippi River valley bottoms, the original American settlers were selecting better drained and wooded upland terrain. One of the earliest concentrations of American settlers was located in an area known as Turkey Hill --located in present day Shiloh Township east of Belleville. By 1800, approximately 20 individuals had settled in this region, and shortly thereafter the timbered lands along the Kaskaskia River and its tributaries (including Silver Creek) became well settled. These early American settlers were predominately from Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee⁴.

Following the July 1830 revolution in Europe, social and political unrest led many tradesmen, peasants, and members of the middle class in Germany to immigrate to North America. This immigration was spurred, in part, by the political climate that existed in Germany at the time. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, the governments of Germany (as well as the rest of Europe) had become reactionary, rejecting the liberalism of the revolutionary France and determined to maintain the status quo. This conservatism was exemplified by Prussia, which was the largest of the then thirty-nine German states and was a dominant military force in the region. An undercurrent of French liberalism remained, however, in the western German states that had been included within Napoleon's "Grand Empire", and many intellectuals and professionals there rejected the conservative trend in their nation. These feelings were stirred in the summer of 1830, when revolution broke out in France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Spain and portions of Germany. The swiftness and ruthlessness with which most of these revolutions were crushed convinced many liberals in Germany that significant reforms would never be undertaken in their homeland and was the impetus for many German families to emigrate.

In 1831, many German immigrants arrived in the vicinity of Turkey Hill.

The influx of the new breed of settlers in the area was so profound that an area within Shiloh Valley and Mascoutah Townships became known as the "Lateiner Settlement" in reference to "Latin Scholars," identifying the German immigrants as educated by American standards⁵. By 1837, 160 of the 400 inhabitants of Shiloh Valley were first generation German immigrants. According to Dr. Engelmann, a German immigrant and physician who moved to St. Louis from the Lateiner settlement in 1835, "the log cabin that had sheltered the former occupant [American settlers], would not answer now [for the Germans]. Houses had to be built, or to be improved or adorned..."⁶. Particularly after the mass influx of German immigrants during the 1850s and 1860s, the Shiloh Valley region became a distinctive rural German community. The Lateiner Settlement remained a tightly knit community until the advent of anti-German sentiment during World War I and the subsequent construction of Scott Air Force Base.

With the dawn of air transportation and World War I, Scott Air Force Base (then referred to simply as Scott Field) was established in September 1917 to train combat pilots for the American Expeditionary Force in Europe. The original airfield is one of the oldest continuous Air Force installations in the nation and originally consisted of a one square mile leased parcel of land. In 1919, immediately following the War, the airfield was purchased by the U.S. government and used as a "Lighter-than-air" (LTA) station for air service and balloon school during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1937, the Army Air Corps phased out lighter-than-air aircraft, replacing them with fixed wing aircraft. In October and November 1938, the base expanded to an airplane and communication school. In 1948, the base was renamed Scott Air Force Base⁷.

Today, Scott Air Force Base is the home of the 375th Military Airlift Wing (MAW), which operates and maintains the base. One of the main responsibilities of the 375th MAW is the management of the continental U. S. portion of a worldwide aeromedical evacuation system, command and supervision of operational support airlift personnel and their fleet of C-12 and C-21 aircraft; command and supervision of all USAF C-29 aircraft; and initial qualification and instructor training on C-9 Nightingale, C-12F, and C-21A aircraft. In support of its mission, the 375th MAW also operates the USAF Medical Center Scott, one of six major military medical centers in the United States. By the late 1980s, the base employed nearly 12,000 individuals with approximately 3,400 dependents of military personnel living on the base⁸.

The Merkel/Weil Site is located in the NW1/4, NE1/4 Section 3. This land was purchased from the United States Government in 1814 by Silas Crane. An 1813 Preemption Report lists Crane as having improved and lived on the NE1/4 Section 3 prior to the time of his purchase. Although the exact location of this early farmstead site is unknown, it very well may correspond to the same location as the farmstead described

in this report⁹.

In January 1821, Crane sold the North Part, NE1/4 [current Lot 12] and the North Part, NW1/4 [current Lot 11] Section 3 to Henry Isbell for \$900. Isbell was a resident of St. Clair County at the time he purchased the above tracts, but it cannot be determined whether or not he established residence on either of them¹⁰.

Henry Isbell maintained ownership of the North Part NE1/4 and North Part NW1/4 Section 3 until November 1832, when he sold the two tracts to Nicholas and Maria Merkel for \$1250¹¹. The Merckels were natives of Hesse, Germany, and they appear to have been recent arrivals in Shiloh Valley at the time of their purchase¹². The Scheel map from 1835/6 depicts the Merkel residence as being located in the NE1/4, NW1/4 Section 3, a short distance east of a tributary of Silver Creek; on the map, Nicholas Merkel is designated as owning roughly 160 acres, which were located in the N1/2, NE1/4 and N1/2, NW1/4 of Section 3. In 1840, the Merkel residence included Nicholas and Maria as well as two males (aged 20-30) and three females (ages: under 5, 5-10, and 15-20), who were probably the Merkel children¹³.

Nicholas Merkel appears to have been a successful farmer, and he eventually acquired a considerable amount of land. By 1850, he owned 180 improved and 271 unimproved acres valued at \$4000. Products from the Merkel farm that year included 150 bushels of wheat, 4000 bushels of corn, 100 bushels of oats, fifteen bushels of Irish potatoes, and 160 pounds of butter. Merkel's livestock at that time was valued at \$480 and included six horses, four mules, seven milch cows, two oxen, and ten swine¹⁴.

The 1860 agricultural census reported Nicholas Merkel as owning 130 improved and 270 unimproved acres of land. While his land holdings had dropped somewhat from what they were in 1850, the value of his land had nonetheless increased to \$12,000. The value of his farm implements and machinery had also seen a dramatic increase, having gone from \$60 in 1850 to \$6000 in 1860. The census also points to the Merkel farm having undergone greater diversification over the decade. Primarily focussed on corn production in 1850, the farm in 1860 produced 400 bushels of wheat, 600 bushels of corn, 250 bushels of Irish potatoes, 200 bushels of barley, 200 pounds of butter, 100 pounds of cheese, and ten tons of hay. The livestock on the Merkel farm at that time included four horses, three mules, seven milch cows, eleven cattle, and fifteen swine. The Merkel family had slaughtered \$200 worth of livestock over the year¹⁵.

In 1870, Nicholas Merkel's real estate was given an assessed value of \$20,300, and his personal estate was valued at \$3000¹⁶. Due to his advancing age, Nicholas eventually turned over the operation of his farm to Henry Knoebel, who had married his daughter Regina in 1843¹⁷. In

1870, Regina and Henry Knoebel, as well their ten children, were living in the same household as Nicholas and Maria Merkel, who had reached the respective ages of 72 and 70. The Knoebels did not own any real estate in 1870, but they did have a personal estate valued at \$4000¹⁸.

The 1870 agricultural census of Shiloh Valley indicates that the Merkel land holdings then included 180 improved acres suitable for cultivation and 227 acres of land covered by timber. Merkel had apparently divested himself of much of the agricultural implements and machinery he had owned in 1860, for the value of the equipment on the farm in 1870 was valued at only \$350. Crops produced on the Merkel farm for the year ending June 1, 1870, included 1000 bushels of wheat, ten bushels of rye, 800 bushels of corn, 300 bushels of oats, and 200 bushels of Irish potatoes. In addition, the farm produced 12 pounds of wool, 200 pounds of butter, thirty gallons of molasses, and \$140 worth of orchard products. The census also notes that Merkel owned ten horses, two mules, five milch cows, two cattle, eleven sheep, and sixteen swine, which altogether were valued at \$1117¹⁹.

Nicholas Merkel died in January 1875. His real estate holdings were subsequently acquired by his son-in-law, Henry Knoebel, who bought out the other heirs²⁰. Henry and Regina Knoebel were residing at the old Merkel homestead in 1880, and Maria Merkel, who had outlived her husband, was living with them²¹.

The agricultural census of 1880 indicates that Henry Knoebel owned 408 acres of improved land, fifteen acres of permanent meadow, pasture, or orchard, and 195 acres of forest. Nine of Knoebel's improved acres were covered by mown grass, while another eight had hay growing on them. Over the previous year, Knoebel had devoted sixty acres to wheat production and twenty-five acres to corn production, from which he had reaped 1500 and 1250 bushels respectively. He had also set aside a one acre plot for the planting of Irish potatoes, which had produced some 200 bushels. In addition, Knoebel had gathered 100 bushels of fruit from the forty trees in his orchard. Henry Knoebel's livestock in 1880 included five horses, two mules, five milch cows, two cattle, six sheep, thirty-six swine, and 150 chickens²².

In December 1894, ownership of the Merkel/Weil House passed to Albert Knoebel, who acquired the North Part NW1/4 and the NW1/4, NE1/4 of Section 3 following the death of his father²³. A 1901 county atlas shows Albert as owning the N1/2, NW1/4 and the NW1/4, NE1/4 of Section 3 (consisting of a total of 121.5 acres), including the old Merkel home²⁴. Albert Knoebel's occupation of the Merkel/Weil Site is established by both the 1900 and 1910 censuses²⁵.

Albert Knoebel died in 1915²⁶. Title to Albert's land holdings subsequently passed to his wife Alvina, who is believed to have lived into the late 1920s or early 1930s. Following her death, ownership of

the property was then passed her children, Martha, Odelia, Herman, and Hilda. The Knoebel children kept their parents' former land holdings undivided and in Alvina's name until post-1956²⁷.

In July 1959, Mildred and Morris Hecht (whose relationship to the Knoebel Family is unknown) sold 91.5 acres in the NW1/4, NE1/4 and the NE1/4, NW1/4 of Section 3 to Lerus and Verna Weil for \$5. The deed detailing this sale indicates that the Weils also agreed to pay the taxes due on the property for the years 1958 and 1959. Lerus Weil retained ownership of the Merkel Site until 1993, when the property was purchased by the County of St. Clair as part of the Scott Air Force Base expansion project²⁸.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character:

The Merkel Farmstead represents a well preserved example of an early nineteenth century farmstead (initially occupied by an American family and later improved by a well-to-do German immigrant family). The extant house, wine press building, and corn crib exhibit characteristics typically associated with the middle nineteenth century German immigrant family.

2. Condition of Fabric:

Although abandoned and relatively neglected over the past few years, the buildings at this farmstead are in a relatively good condition.

B. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

The Merkel Farmstead is situated immediately south of U.S. 64, centrally located within its landholdings (and not immediately adjacent to the township road system). A long combination gravel and dirt lane leads to the house from the northwest. The large, brick house faces west, oriented to the small drainage situated a few hundred feet to the west. The wine press building (and associated cellar) is located to the north of the house. The workshop and laundry house are both located a short distance to the east of the house; the barn and corn crib are located slightly farther east (See Figure 1).

2. Buildings:

The Merkel Farmstead includes the large, two-story, brick house (with single story kitchen wing) (HABS No. IL-1191-A), a small frame wine press building (with associated cellar) (HABS No. IL-1191-B), two frame corn cribs (one is HABS No. IL-1191-C), a frame barn (HABS No. IL-1191-D), a frame workshop building, a frame laundry or wash house building, two machine sheds and a frame privy (See photographic documentation HABS No. IL-1191-A through IL-1191-D).

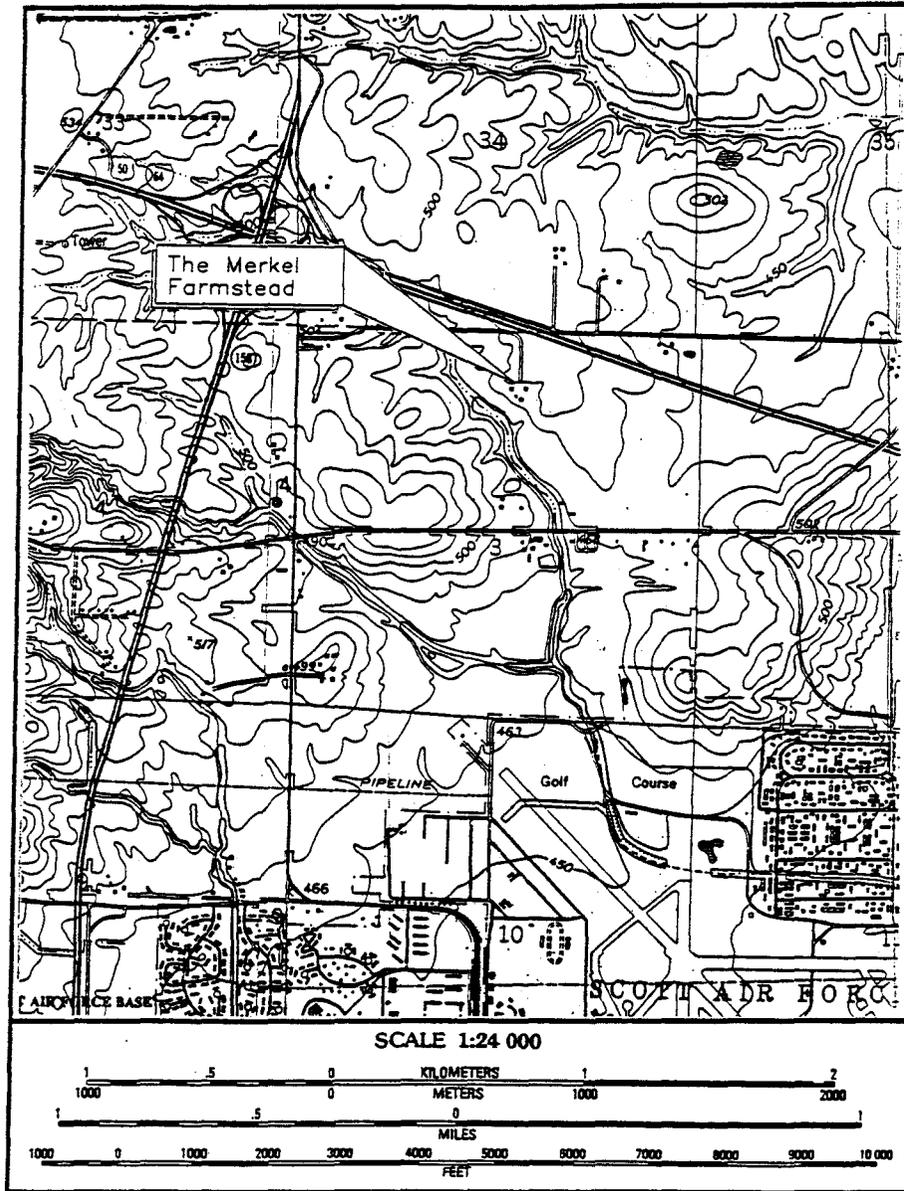


Figure 1. Location of the Merkel Farmstead (USGS: Lebanon, Illinois Quadrangle, 1954).

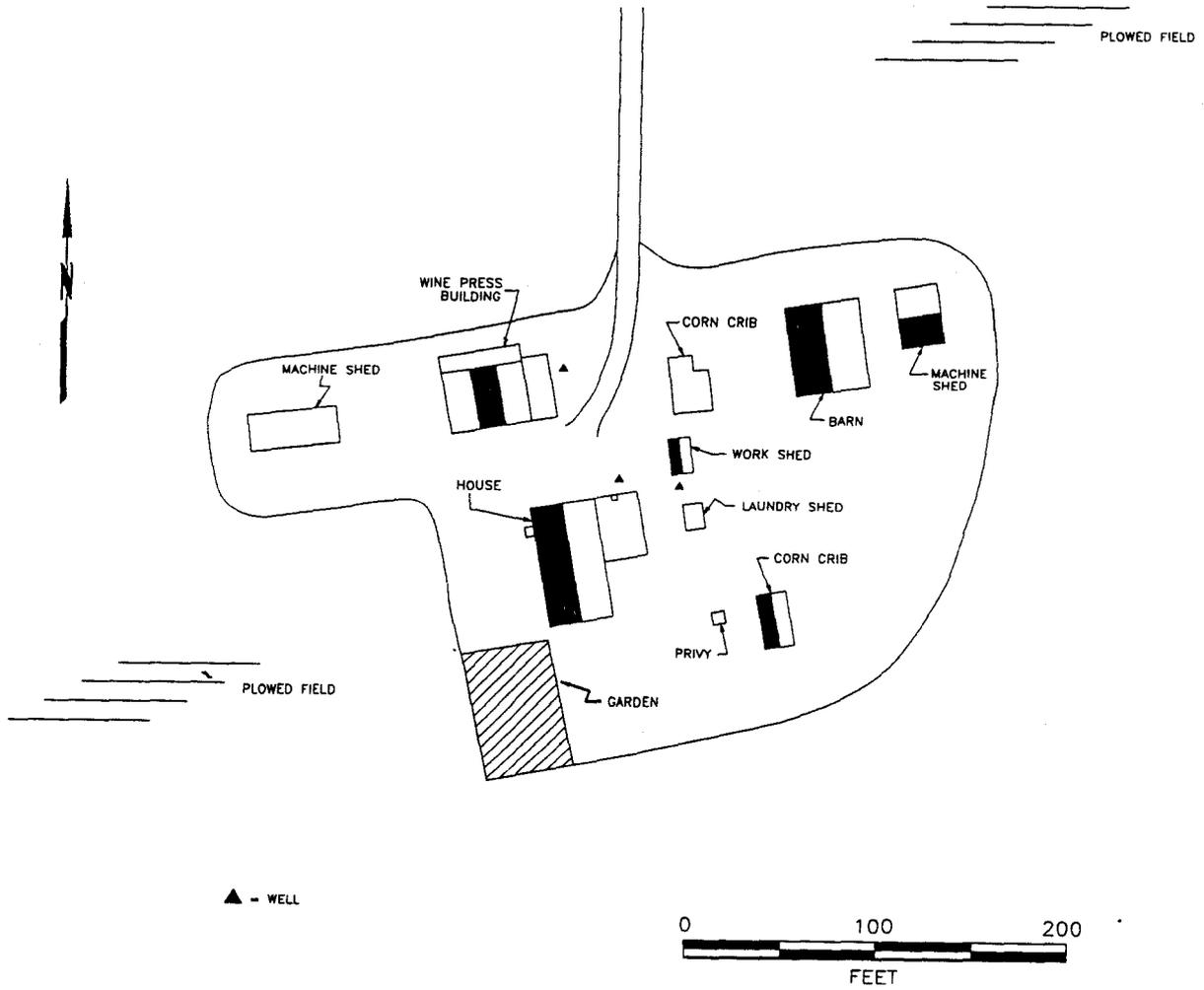


Figure 2. Sketch map of the Merkel Farmstead, ca. 1990.
Drawn by F. Mansberger.

PART III. ENDNOTES

1. Refer to discussion in Part I.B. for details regarding the land sale history of this property.
2. Henry Glassie, Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).
3. This list is based on chain-of-title research conducted by Fever River Research at the St. Clair County Courthouse. Refer to discussion in Part I.B. (page 6 and associated footnotes) for details regarding the land sale history of this property.
4. History of St. Clair County, Illinois, (Philadelphia: Brink, McDonough, and Company, 1881), 48, 56; and Newton Bateman and Paul Shelby, Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of St. Clair County, Illinois, (Chicago: Munsell Publishing, 1907), 676.
5. Brink, McDonough and Company, 1881, 64; and Bateman and Shelby, 1907, 681-82.
6. Brink, McDonough and Company, 1881, 65.
7. TAMS (Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton), 1988, Airport Master Plan for Joint Use Operations at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, Phase II Report --Environmental Assessment-- Forecasts, Facilities, Requirements, Alternatives. Prepared for Illinois Department of Transportation and St. Clair County.
8. Betty Kennedy, An Illustrated History of Scott Air Force Base, 1917-1987, (Scott Air Force Base: Military Airlift Command, History Office, 1987).

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9. Public Domain Sales Tract Record Listing. Illinois State Archives. Springfield, Illinois.

St. Clair County Deed Record 1075, 190.

Hammes, 1977, 353.

10. St. Clair County Deed Record. Recorder of Deeds Office.
Belleville, Illinois. E:33.
11. Ibid; G:73.
12. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1870.

Brink, McDonough and Company, 1881, 64.
13. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1840, 330.
14. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Agricultural Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1850, 641.
15. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Agricultural Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1860, Township 2 North, Range
7 West.
16. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1870, 1.
17. Buecher, 1980, 1.
18. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1870, 1.
19. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Agricultural Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1870, 7.
20. St. Clair County Probate Record, Box 432.

St. Clair County Deed Record, Z5:291, 134:469.
21. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1880, 5.
22. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Agricultural Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1870, 7.
23. St. Clair County Deed Record, 244:134;

St. Clair County Probate Record, Box 531.
24. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St.
Clair County, Illinois." 1900, 2.

Ogle, 1901, 31.

25. U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St. Clair County, Illinois." 1900, 2A.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St. Clair County, Illinois." 1910, 5B.
26. St. Clair County Probate Record, Box 941.
27. Hixson, 1938.

St. Clair County Title Company 1956.
28. Rockford Map Publishers 1965, 41.

Rockford Map Publishers 1975, 35.
29. TAMS (Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton), 1988a:2.2.
30. TAMS (Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton), 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1989.
31. Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Letter to IDOT dated October 20, 1992.

PART IV. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

None available.

B. Early Views:

None available.

C. Interviews:

None conducted.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

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U.S. Bureau of the Census. "Population Schedule: St. Clair County, Illinois." 1900.

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2. Secondary and Published Sources:

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PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION

In order to increase the capacity of commercial airport operations in the United States, the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation both approved programs for evaluating joint military-civilian use of existing military facilities in 1983. At that same time, Congress directed the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to report on the feasibility of joint use at

Scott AFB and two other military airfields in the United States. In March 1988, the FAA determined that joint use of Scott AFB was technically feasible²⁹.

Beginning in 1985, the Illinois Department of Transportation initiated a study of the feasibility of joint use at Scott AFB. Shortly thereafter, IDOT obtained a grant from the FAA to prepare a master plan and assess the environmental impacts of joint use at Scott AFB. These plans and assessments were prepared for the proponents of the proposed action (IDOT and St. Clair County) by Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton (TAMS) in association with other consultants³⁰.

During 1988 and 1989, a Phase I archaeological reconnaissance survey of the proposed SAFB expansion was conducted by the Contract Archaeology Program at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIU-E). Results of those field investigations are presented in Holley, Gums and Brown (1990). In April 1991, SIU-E contracted with Fever River Research (Springfield, Illinois) to conduct a literature search and architectural assessment of the extant structures that were to be affected by the proposed Scott AFB expansion. The results of that work were detailed in Mansberger and Halpin (1991). In October 1992, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency determined the house at the Merkel Farmstead eligible for the National Register of Historic Places³¹.

This HABS recordation was completed as a result of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Federal Aviation Administration and the Illinois State Historic Preservation Officer, which was concurred in by the Illinois Department of Transportation, and was accepted by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on December 9, 1993.

IDOT received response from HABS outlining the level of documentation for this farmstead on November 19, 1992. The property was not acquired by St. Clair County until late 1994. At that time Floyd Mansberger, Fever River Research (Springfield, Illinois), conducted the architectural investigations at the Merkel Farmstead, and Christopher Stratton conducted additional documentary research. This work, although prepared for the Illinois Department of Transportation, was conducted under subcontract with Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville.

Photography was provided by Roger McCredie, IDOT, Springfield, Illinois.

Jerry Jacobson, Historic Resources Coordinator, Illinois Department of Transportation, Springfield, Illinois, provided information on the project history as well as editorial assistance

of the draft document.

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July 15, 1995
Revised - August 30, 1994