

The Mayo House
Le Sueur, Minnesota
Le Sueur

HABS 29-44

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PHOTOGRAPHS
Written Historical and Descriptive Text
District No. 29

Historic American Buildings Survey
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702 Wesley Temple Bldg.
Minneapolis, Minn.

MAYO HOUSE
Le Sueur, Le Sueur County, Minnesota

The Mayo house is just a small, two-story, gabled cottage. Its "architects" were Dr. William Worrall Mayo and his brother James. They built it together, James doing most of the work apparently, in the summer of 1859. For the three years preceding, the Mayos had been living on a farm in Cronan's Precinct (now Lake Prairie Township), Nicollet County, just across the river from Le Sueur. They moved to the town when the house was ready.

It is likely that only part of the present house was built at first, other rooms being added later. The varying floor levels may be evidence of this, as the low ceilings of the rooms may bear witness to the unusually small stature of the men who built them.

When the Mayos moved to Le Sueur, their family consisted of two daughters. William James Mayo, the elder of the famous brothers, was born in the Le Sueur house on June 29, 1861.

Dr. W. W. Mayo's appointment as examining surgeon on the Civil War draft board took him to Rochester in May, 1863. He liked that town, and moved his family there to reside early in January 1864. Presumably he sold the Le Sueur house at that time or shortly thereafter.

In 1932 the house was owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Ray Christian. They permitted a local newspaperman to go through it, and he subsequently wrote a description and history of the house, urging that steps be taken to preserve it as a historic site. I quote from his article, which appeared in the Le Sueur Herald, September 7, 1932:

"On the first floor, many of the quaint old windows reach to the floor. Those on the second floor are V-shaped, with many panes. The rooms upstairs are not used by the Christians, but the quaint 'step ups' to the different chambers and the low ceilings give it a charm all its own.

"Many people have lived there. The present owners have not painted the exterior, because they wish to preserve its quaint appearance....

"Many years ago, a country doctor [Dr. W. W. Mayo] kept one of the quaint rooms, reached by steps, as his laboratory. Here he mixed and compounded the various formulas which he used upon his daily rounds, which often included a mere trail closed in on both sides by woods....

"The birthplace of this great surgeon [Dr. W. J. Mayo] became the home of C. N. Cosgrove, who purchased it from Felix Borer, a politician.... All of the children of Mr. and Mrs. Cosgrove were

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born in the house with the exception of one daughter.... Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Cosgrove occupied it during the first year of their marriage, and it was then that it was modernized, without detracting from its original appearance.... Just now its owners admit that they might sell it...." [C. N. Cosgrove and his son E. B. Cosgrove were Le Sueur celebrities. The father, who moved to Le Sueur from New York in 1872, was a state senator, president of the Minnesota State Fair for six years, founder of the canning industry in Le Sueur and the Minnesota Valley, etc.]

On November 23, 1932, the house was marked as a historic site through joint action by the Minnesota Historical Society and the Minnesota State Highway Department. The "unveiling" of the marker was made the occasion for a gala local celebration, which the members of the Mayo family went from Rochester to attend. Both the Mayo brothers gave brief addresses. (Rochester Times, November 25, 1932, and copies of the program, speeches, etc.)

In 1934 Drs. W. J. and C. H. Mayo bought the house from Mr. Christian and turned it over to the city of Le Sueur, along with a sum of money sufficient to finance the needed repairs. A committee of Le Sueur citizens was appointed to arrange for its use as a city library. (Minneapolis Journal, March 24, 1935; Minneapolis Tribune, March 25, 1935. Although the gift seems not to have been announced until March, 1935, the "transaction" was completed on November 21, 1934, according to a letter from Mrs. Nora H. Guthrey, secretary to Dr. W. J. Mayo.)

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