

Erwin Richterkessing Farm  
(Henry Meyer Farm)  
4540 I-70 North Service Road  
St. Peters  
St. Charles County  
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1920

HABS  
MO-1920

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPY OF MEASURED DRAWING

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## ERWIN RICHTERKESSING FARM (HENRY MEYER FARM)

HABS No. MO-1920

Location: Township 47 North, Range 4 East, Survey 735.  
4540 I-70 North Service Road, St. Peters, St.  
Charles County, Missouri

UTM: 15/709000/4297040 (residence)

Present Owner: Missouri Highway and Transportation  
Commission

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: None

Statement of  
Significance:

The Erwin Richterkessing Farm, located in St. Charles County, consists of approximately one dozen buildings and is historically and architecturally significant as a farm complex representative of agrarian German-American culture in rural Missouri. The brick residence is a common example of Missouri-Germanic vernacular architecture while the various ancillary outbuildings demonstrate the agrarian nature of the Richterkessing property. It derives additional importance because of its association with the Ralph Richterkessing Farm to the west, a later example of German-Missouri architecture constructed by Richterkessing relatives. Each farm is important in its own right, but because they share the same architectural tradition, ethnic culture, and German surname, they form an impressive farm complex created and operated by members of a tightly-knit family.

Project Statement: This Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) recording project is part of a long term program to document historically significant buildings in the United States. The Missouri Highway and Transportation Department (MHTD) provided funding for the project as a requirement of MHTD's Section 106 mitigation of the impact of proposed highway construction to the property.

Design Division staff at Jefferson City MHTD Headquarters, Jim Corrigan, Photographer, and Steve Bushko, Photographic Lab Technician, Photo Lab, undertook the photography. Sue

Olson, Plans Drafting Technician, and Darrell Eilers, Intermediate Highway Design Technician created the site plan.

Historians: Stacy Sone and Toni Prawl, Missouri Highway and Transportation Department, May 1993.

## PART I. HISTORICAL DATA

Date of Erection: ca. 1875

Architect: unknown

### Historical Context

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, adventurous German families, uncertain of life in their homeland, immigrated to the United States seeking opportunity in America's growing towns and cities. Most were quickly assimilated into Anglo-American towns or rural areas and they soon lost their cultural identity. Other groups of German immigrants, however, congregated together in sparsely settled regions and established their own closely knit communities that attracted more German new-arrivals to the surrounding unoccupied farmland. Pennsylvania and Missouri were two of the most popular German settlement areas and, in time, the immigrants became the dominant cultural group in regions of these states.<sup>1</sup>

The first Germans to immigrate in large numbers to the United States settled far from the Missouri wilderness. They arrived around the turn of the nineteenth century and were generally affluent merchants who stayed in the larger cities along the east coast and in the booming industrial centers near the Ohio River and the Great Lakes.<sup>2</sup>

From about 1830 to the mid-1840s, the number of families emigrating from Germany grew and this time, the majority came from the working class. Artisans and farmers were generally more prosperous and arrived in the United States seeking greater economic opportunity. Craftsmen, such as carpenters, saddlers, masons, and blacksmiths, found little work in their homeland but proved to be in great demand in the United States. Likewise, farmers had become desperate as prices for their produce plummeted and land prices rose. Enticing descriptions of

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1. Charles van Ravenswaay, *The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1977), 4.

2. *Ibid.*, 6.

abundant land and an ever-increasing demand for their products led them to settle in the vast new country.<sup>3</sup>

Emigrants from southwestern Germany in places called Hesse-Darmstadt and Hesse-Cassel arrived around 1830 in the United States and generally congregated in larger eastern and midwestern cities, including St. Louis. Others from Franconia, Westphalia, Hanover, and Oldenburg followed. Although many of these Germans also remained in the east, many others ventured boldly into the sparsely-inhabited rural areas in Pennsylvania and as far west as Texas, Wisconsin, and Missouri.<sup>4</sup>

In Missouri, this concentrated German settlement occurred largely as a result of one German citizen's published account in 1829 called *Report of a Journey to the Western States of North America*. The far-sighted author, Gottfried Duden, was a respected lawyer and civil servant from the Ruhr Valley who was convinced that the problems he had encountered in his homeland were triggered by overpopulation, oppression, and poverty. He traveled with an open mind to Missouri on a self-appointed mission. His goal was to find a suitable settlement location for a massive emigration that he believed was the only solution to Germany's problems. Duden spent two years living in eastern Missouri and in his report, outlined the advantages of settlement there. This widely read book convinced many Germans to seek fresh opportunities and promoted their emigration to Missouri. Major German immigration began about 1830 and was centered in St. Charles, Marthasville, Washington, and Hermann, Missouri, locations that Duden had eloquently described in his report. St. Louis became another center for German settlement and provided a point from which many traveled to other sections of the state, mainly along the Missouri River valley.<sup>5</sup>

St. Charles County, which eventually became a German hub, already had a long history well before the first Germans arrived. Strategically located at the confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois rivers, the region became an early center of a river transportation network across the country. In 1764, Creole voyageurs and fur trappers from the St. Louis settlement established an outpost in what later became St. Charles. A few years later, Louis Blanchette, a Frenchman, established the first

3. Ibid., 5.

4. Ibid., 5.

5. Ibid., 6,8; Walter A. Schroeder, "Rural Settlement Patterns of the German-Missourian Cultural Landscape," in *The German American Experience in Missouri. Essays in Commemoration of the Tricentennial of German Immigration to America, 1683-1983*. Howard Wight Marshall and James W. Goodrich, eds. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1986), 1, 27.

European settlement in the county at St. Charles after the Governor of the Upper Louisiana territory commissioned him to establish a post there under Spanish rule.<sup>6</sup>

The Boone family from Kentucky was likely to have been the first of the American settlers in St. Charles County. In 1795 Colonel Daniel Boone located at Darst's Bottom in the Femme Osage district of St. Charles County. His settlement there proved to be a milestone in the county's development. The Spanish Government, still anxious to be established in eastern Missouri, offered land to Boone if he agreed to persuade one hundred families from Virginia and Kentucky to settle in Upper Louisiana. He succeeded in his mission and witnessed ambitious new residents working diligently to establish their farms.<sup>7</sup> When the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory, westward movement increased dramatically. By the 1830s, American and French settlers had claimed most of the land in the fertile upland prairies and in the Missouri River bottom but bypassed the surrounding area's more rugged terrain. During the nineteenth-century's early years, the St. Charles County settlement grew steadily but a majority of the county remained a wilderness.<sup>8</sup>

The German immigrants were the next to arrive in St. Charles County and they eagerly claimed the wilderness areas that previous settlers had bypassed. Although many stayed in the town of St. Charles, the large wave of German immigration that began in the 1830s had the greatest influence in the rural part of the county. Kentucky and Virginia settlers had already established plantations on the fertile bottom lands along the Missouri River. The Germans willingly settled around them and eventually tamed the rugged land away from the river into prosperous farmland.<sup>9</sup> They learned to apply familiar old-world farming practices to the diverse and demanding conditions encountered in Missouri. German farmers were industrious individuals and, although they were willing to accept the region's demands, it still required a number of years to clear and develop their land.

During this adjustment process, German farmers learned that many of the skills and tools designed to meet gentler European

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6. Malcom C. Drummond. *Historic Sites in St. Charles County (St. Charles, Missouri: Harland Bartholomew and Associates, 1976)*, 5; *History of St. Charles, Montgomery, and Warren Counties, Missouri (St. Louis: Paul V. Cochrane, 1969)*, 94.

7. Drummond, 6; *History of St. Charles, Montgomery, and Warren Counties, Missouri*, 95.

8. van Ravenswaay, 8, 73; Drummond, 6.

9. Drummond, 6; van Ravenswaay, 8.

conditions were inadequate for their newly established farms. For example an essential chore such as plowing, which was easy in a field that had been groomed for a century in Germany, proved to be a tremendous challenge in a newly cleared upland Missouri field.<sup>10</sup> With the help of their experienced American neighbors, German farmers learned how to cultivate corn and other field and garden crops that were best suited to the soil and to Missouri's climate. German farmers, in turn, introduced old-world ingenuity to the Americans. With this cooperative exchange of techniques and ideas, both cultural groups found they could farm more efficiently.<sup>11</sup>

German farmers gradually made their poor acres more productive and many steadily expanded their holdings by purchasing the more fertile bottom land from Americans. In the process of acquiring larger tracts of land, Germans became the dominant cultural group, and eventually displaced the southern-plantation character that the earlier owners had established. By 1860, those of foreign birth represented about one-quarter of the total population. The majority came from many different German states with Hanover being the best represented.<sup>12</sup>

German immigrants chose overwhelmingly to establish isolated farms with their houses located approximately a quarter mile from their nearest neighbor. Because many of the Germans who settled in Missouri arrived from regions where this kind of scattered farm placement was the rule, they found the arrangement to be suitable. The rural Missouri-Germans generally established well-rounded farms that included animals and crops. An economy based even partly on livestock needed more land than one based upon crops only. German farmers operated larger-sized tracts of land than they had in a more crowded and intensively farmed Germany. Their larger farms in Missouri promoted a more dispersed settlement pattern than they had experienced in Germany.<sup>13</sup>

#### Richterkessing Family

Erwin and Ralph Richterkessing were first cousins, each being the grandson of Henry Richterkessing, Sr. Erwin and Ralph's fathers were brothers and second generation Missouri-Germans on their fathers' side. Erwin was the son of George Richterkessing; Ralph was the son of John Richterkessing. While

10. van Ravenswaay, 13, 11.

11. *History of St. Charles, Montgomery, & Warren Counties, Missouri*, 104; van Ravenswaay, 72.

12. van Ravenswaay, 72.

13. Schroeder, 35.

Ralph inherited his family farm from his father John Richterkesing, Erwin inherited the adjoining land through his maternal grandfather, Henry Meyer. The histories, names, and dwellings of both Richterkesing families are closely connected. Refer to HABS No. MO-1919 (Ralph Richterkesing Farm) for a discussion of the Ralph Richterkesing family.

Henry Meyer was born in Hanover in 1846 and immigrated to the United States at age 20 in 1866. According to the 1870 census for St. Charles, he was living with Henry and Anna Richterkesing, Sr., possibly at the residence on the 70 acre parcel identified by the 1875 plat map as Richterkesing's property. Richterkesing's 1875 holdings consisted of two disjoined tracts east of the property Erwin and Ralph inherited. Although Richterkesing was listed as head of household, he was two years younger than Henry Meyer. Perhaps the native-born Richterkesing had perfected his English and farming skills better than immigrant Meyer thus enabling him to offer a temporary home to his older friend, however their relationship has not been determined. Henry Richterkesing listed his occupation as farmer while Henry Meyer was classified as a farm laborer, owning no land.

By the 1880 census, relatives living with Anna and Henry Richterkesing included four children--even the future heir of the Meyer residence, infant George Richterkesing. Henry Meyer's residency with the Richterkesing family was brief and in 1873, he became a land owner. The county plat map for 1875 reveals Meyer owned two contiguous parcels, one containing eighty-four acres and the other comprised of fifty. Married in 1873 to Anna Ehlmann, eleven years his junior, the couple probably resided in the only building on their 134 acre tract depicted by the atlas. Its noted location in 1875 supports it is the same site of the present Erwin Richterkesing farmhouse. Furthermore, the character of the Erwin Richterkesing residence suggests it is associated with the period of Meyer's tenure (see HABS No. MO-1920-A for the discussion of the Erwin Richterkesing Farm, Residence).

Not only did Henry Meyer and Henry Richterkesing share the same Christian names and cultural backgrounds, but so did their wives. Twenty-six years later, the families had even more in common when their children, George Richterkesing and Anna Meyer, married in 1906. According to the 1910 census records, George and Anna Meyer Richterkesing were living with Anna's father, Henry Meyer. At age 64, Meyer claimed his position as head of household, a farmer employed in general farming, and one who owned his house free and clear of any mortgages. In contrast to patriarch Meyer, farm laborer George Richterkesing was 29, married four years, and did not own land. Anna and George were parents of one child, 3-year-old, Erwin. Information from the census records suggests the extended family lived with Meyer at his residence since Meyer was assigned family head and the

relationship of each member to Meyer was given, such as Erwin's listing as "grandson." Furthermore, because George did not own a house but Meyer did, the family must have resided in Meyer's dwelling.

In 1920, Henry Meyer, and George and Anna Richterkessing still resided together. The couple were approaching their fortieth birthdays and had four children at home: Kermit (age 1), Ester (4-years-old), Wilbert (9), and Erwin, the eldest at age 12. Because Anna's elderly father of 74 resided with the family, they presumably continued to occupy the Meyer residence together. After Henry Meyer's death in December 1922, the property was divided equally among his three children: Fred, Wilhelmine, and Anna. Fred and Wilhelmine deeded their interests to Anna and her husband by the following month. By 1951, Erwin and his wife Cornelia acquired the property from their co-owner relatives.

The Henry and Anna Ehlmann Meyer residence was inherited by their daughter and son-in-law, George and Anna Meyer Richterkessing, and then by their grandson, Erwin Richterkessing. While the Erwin Richterkessing farm can be traced back three generations to Henry Meyer, the younger Ralph Richterkessing farm was established by John Richterkessing about a quarter of a century later. Both neighboring farms remain closely linked to the Richterkessing family history and German-Missouri traditions. The following chart diagrams the genealogy of the Richterkessing families and how generations inherited the farms:

#### Erwin Richterkessing Family

1. Henry Meyer (born 1846; father-in-law to George Richterkessing)
2. George Richterkessing (born 1881; father of Erwin Richterkessing)
3. Erwin Richterkessing (born 1907 or 1908, son of George Richterkessing)

#### Ralph Richterkessing Family

1. Henry Richterkessing, Sr. (born 1848; father of John Richterkessing)
2. John Richterkessing (born 1874; father of Ralph Richterkessing)
3. Ralph Richterkessing (born 1901; son of John Richterkessing)

Chain of Title for the Erwin Richterkessing Farm

In April, 1951, Erwin and Cornelia Richterkessing acquired 115.19 acres from Erwin's brother, Kermit Richterkessing. The following title chain shows how the parcels of land contributed to the roughly 115 acres that made up the Erwin Richterkessing farm. The chain of title that follows is based on information compiled from abstract file 4185 at Emmons Title Company, St. Charles, Missouri:

1867, January

Benjamin and Mary Burckleo to  
Henry J. Holrah  
(1/3 of acreage)  
deed book 5, page 629

1872, January

Charles and Rebecca Smith to  
Henry J. Holrah  
(1/3 of acreage)  
deed book 13, page 217

1873, January

H.J. Holrah to  
Hermann Barklage and Bernard Luerding  
(foreclosed)  
deed book 11, page 266

1873, August

H.J. Holrah to  
Diederich Ehlmann  
deed book 16, page 129

1873, August

R.S. and Sarah Gilliland to  
Hermann Barklage and Bernard Luerding  
deed book 12, page 263

1873, August

Hermann and Caroline Barklage, Bernard and Mary Luerding to  
Diederich Ehlmann  
(final 1/3 of acreage)  
deed book 12, page 272

1873, December

Diederich and Mary Ehlmann to  
Henry G. Meyer  
deed book 12, page 349

1922, December

Henry Meyer died and left property to three children:  
Fred H., Wilhelmine Zumbahl, and Anna Richterkessing

- 1923, January  
Meyer heirs to  
George and Anna Meyer Richterkessing and to state for  
proposed highway.
- 1950, November  
George Richterkessing (widower) died and left property to  
five children: Erwin, Wilbert, Esther, William, and Kermit.  
Four heirs sold their shares to Kermit Richterkessing.
- 1951, April  
Kermit Richterkessing to  
Erwin and Cornelia Richterkessing  
deed book 244, page 562
- 1992, October  
Erwin and Cornelia Richterkessing to  
Missouri State Highway Commission

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### General Statement

Situated in the Missouri Rhineland Region, the architecture of the Erwin Richterkessing farmstead and the adjacent Ralph Richterkessing farm embodies characteristics of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Missouri-German building traditions (see MO-1920-A and MO-1919-A for specific information about the Richterkessing houses). Concentrations of German immigrants founded or adopted settlements in St. Louis and surrounding areas along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers that developed a distinctive German flavor indicative of their presence. Henry Meyer and John Richterkessing established their farms between St. Charles and St. Peters, two neighboring communities in St. Charles County with high concentrations of Missouri-Germanic architecture.<sup>14</sup>

### Site

Once agrarian, most of the land surrounding the Richterkessing farms has developed into a commercial area which supports numerous businesses. Even the address changes of the farms and neighboring structures reflect the dominance of

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14. Milton Rafferty, *Atlas of Missouri* (Springfield, Missouri: Aux-Arc Research Association, 1970), 9; and Erin McCawley Renn, "An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Missouri German Architecture," in *A Guide to the Tours*, Vernacular Architecture Forum, Tenth Annual Meeting, St. Louis, Missouri, comp. Osmund Overby (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1989), 63.

Interstate 70 and its role in the suburban growth of the region. Both Richterkessing farms are situated off I-70 North Service Road, an east-west trending route parallel to I-70 and formerly named Old Mexico Road. This area, which is in the St. Peters city limits, continues to develop at a rapid rate largely due to the growth of St. Charles County and accompanying demographic factors. Heavy traffic, increased real estate values, and new business establishments along this corridor have affected the agrarian setting of the Richterkessing farms.

Standing buildings at the Erwin and Cornelia Richterkessing farmstead include the house (MO-1920-A) and two sheds (MO-1920-D, F), but photographs and field notes from 1991 document the presence of additional buildings including the main barn (MO-1920-B), a secondary barn (MO-1920-C), two sheds (MO-1920-I, H), a combination garage/shed (MO-1920-E), two garages (MO-1920-J, K), a chicken coop (MO-1920-G), and a privy (MO-1920-L) that are no longer extant. In spite of posted "No Trespassing" signs on the premises and frequent surveillance, vandals extensively damaged and removed these outbuildings sometime during January or February 1993. The age of the structures at their time of demolition is unknown; however, the variety of buildings, and their construction materials and techniques suggest they were erected over many years in response to changing demands of an evolving farm in continuous operation. The oldest outbuildings probably were constructed shortly after the residence was built, although their absence prevents examination. Several concrete foundations and debris of the auxiliary structures survive.

Utilitarian structures that assisted the Richterkessing family's farming operation are present on the premises including the cistern and root cellar. A decorated stone (see photos MO-1920-4 and MO-1920-D-1) near the gate and bordering the drive at the east of the house could have served various purposes. The hand-dressed stone may have been placed to mark the termination of the sidewalk, to separate the driveway from the yard, or to serve as the base of a hitching post. Its tooled surface and ornamental form further attest to Missouri-German's attention to craftsmanship.

A fence encloses the yard of the Erwin Richterkessing house, but affords little protection from the accelerated pace of urbanization all around it. Cultural geographers have noted the prevalence of fences in German-American settlements and recognize them for their value as territorial markers. The white picket fence directly south of the house distinguishes the front yard while intersecting woven wire fences at the east and west define the side yards. This fence, situated on an elevated concrete foundation, helps ensure a fixed boundary that separates the front yard of domestic realm from the bordering farm yard and adjoining acreage. A fence combining low-maintenance materials is a practical alternative to a typical wooden fence that deteriorates due to direct contact with the earth. The static

fence with its concrete foundation reinforces the idea that the Richterkessing family displayed a "keen sense of property possession" like fellow German-Missourians who earned a reputation for neat, orderly, and well-maintained farms.<sup>15</sup> Although the landscape and the Erwin Richterkessing residence itself have been modified, they provide a glimpse of Missouri-Germanic architectural heritage and link this place to another period and way of life.

### PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### Original Architectural Drawings:

No original plans or drawings are known to exist.

#### Early Views:

No known historical photographs are available.

#### Interview:

Ehlmann, Marilyn [Great Granddaughter of Henry Richterkessing and Great Granddaughter of Henry Meyer]. St. Charles County Historical Society, St. Charles, Missouri, Interview with Stacy Sone and Toni Prawl, May 10, 1993.

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15. Walter A. Schroeder, 21.

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#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Missouri Highway and Transportation Department (MHTD) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funded this study on the Richterkessing Historic Complexes in coordination with the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a requirement of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. Both the Erwin Richterkessing Farm and the Ralph Richterkessing Farm will be directly impacted by MHTD's construction of the Interstate 70/Route 115 (370) Extension interchange (Job No. J6I0879D) at the sites. Provisions for the resale and relocation of the Richterkessing houses also are part of the Memorandum of Agreement between the four agencies.