

HERITAGE  
OF  
KEYTESVILLE

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SPONSORED BY  
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MISSOURI VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

KEYTESVILLE, CHARITON COUNTY, MISSOURI

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## THE HISTORY OF CHARITON COUNTY, MO.

"Chariton, the best county, in the best state of the Union, embracing an area of 740 square miles and containing 466,891 acres of land . . . was organized November 16, 1820, becoming a part of the territory then embraced by the boundary of Howard county." It originally included area to the north: Linn, Sullivan, Putnam and parts of Adair and Schuyler counties. The original county seat was the settlement known as "Old Chariton" which was in the south part of the area near the mouths of the two rivers, the Missouri and the Chariton, where early French traders had had a fur agency. This community had been laid out in the spring of 1817 by General Duff Green, who acquired a national reputation as a politician.

As the counties to the north established their own farms and boundaries, Chariton County developed its boundaries along natural lines. The Grand River is the Western line and the Missouri River is the Southern line. The county with its approximately 740 square miles has three other major rivers or streams which drain the eastern half of its lands: Mussel Fork Creek, the Chariton River (from which the county takes its name), and the East for of the Chariton. Located centrally in the state, on the north side of the Missouri River, the county was characterized as "well watered with undulating upland prairies and fertile soil." With these features, agriculture predominated from its earliest history. As early as 1820, the topography drew many settlers when a tide of immigrants from the tobacco regions of Kentucky and Virginia came pouring into Chariton County. This encouraged other settlements and soon farms were opened and mills and manufactureirg establishments were erected. Later stock raising became important and the area boasted "that the famous blue grass regions of Kentuck will here find a rival for the honors." The coming of the railroad and creation of good shipping points only served to increase the county's prosperity.

Today the county continues to be basically agricultural. A major highway 24 runs East to West across its midsection and connects its major cities Salisbury, Keytesville and Brunswick, respectively. Three other major roadways extend North to South, highways 129, 5, and 11 connecting most of Chariton County's communities and replacing the early wagon roads used to transport goods to market. Another industry for the county is associated with the large Swan Lake Wildlife Refuge in its northeast sections. Currently the county has a population of 10,489 , located in 16 townships.

## THE HISTORY OF KEYTESVILLE, MO.

In 1830 James Keyte, an Englishman and Methodist preacher, purchased the land and established the town of Keytesville. Two years later he donated 50 acres to the county upon which to erect a courthouse and public buildings. From these humble beginnings grew a community in Mid-Missouri which would be continuously rich in heritage and personalities.

The first courthouse, a square brick story structure built in 1833-34, was destroyed by fire in 1861. The second structure built in 1866 and costing \$75,000 was also two story and was also destroyed by fire in 1973. With the transfer of the courthouse and all its amenities from Old Chariton to Keytesville, the first circuit court was held in Keytesville on July 16, 1833. The community developed rapidly and prospered greatly.

Despite the fact that the area was hit hard during the Civil War years when the town citizenry split into fierce opposition and a number of people were killed during skirmishes, Keytesville managed to keep looking forward. By the 1870's, its population of 1000 were served by "two hotels, a first class flouring mill, two wagon-plow-agricultural implement manufacturers, two tobacco factories, a bank, two churches, an excellent public school, a newspaper, a number of stores and shops and one of the finest courthouses and jails in the state." The railroad, located a mile and one-half south of town, supplemented its industry and offered the citizens both travel away and new things coming in. In 1883, the town was incorporated as a fourth class community.

A number of Keytesville notables should be mentioned:

Sterling Price (1809-67) operated a mercantile store in the community in the 1830's, served in the Missouri legislature and as a representative to Congress (1845-47), was elected Governor of Missouri in 1852 as a Unionist, and joined the Confederate camp in 1862. A museum is now dedicated to him and operated by the Friends of Keytesville.

W.W. Rucker (1855-1936), a prominent political figure, he served six years as twelfth District Judge and several terms in Congress.

John D. Taylor - served as a representative to the state legislature in 1908, 1910, 1916, '33, '34, '36, and '38.

Jane Rucker Hadley Barkley (1911-64) married the U.S. Vice President Albert W. Barkley under Truman.

Maxwell D. Taylor - a graduate of West Point he received several high military positions including the Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army, served as a U.S. Ambassador and is the author of three books.

R. Cal Hubbard - a noted sports figure in football, he was the supervisor of umpires for baseball's American League, 1952-70.

Keytesville, despite a decrease in population to 689 in 1980, continues to be characterized by the features for which it was noted in 1896 (with a population of 1100) its citizens "are of high intelligence and thoroughly American in thought- in action. Especially favored by nature with an exceptionally fine location, enterprising man has supplemented her efforts by tasteful and harmonious improvements." Keytesville was "a community of beautiful homes surrounded by spacious well kept lawns ... a community that enjoys the best social, moral and educational advantages, ... nice well kept streets ... many flourishing commercial establishments ... and a number of fraternal, literary, and musical organizations which greatly contribute to the pleasure and entertainment of the community."

Today the courthouse continues to make it the center of the County, even though its business district has decreased greatly. The community has lost a number of its early fine residences, but newer homes continue to sit on spacious lots along tree-lined streets and the people perpetuate the traditions of friendliness and enjoyment of life.

Each year the community grows during its celebration of Price Days and once again the streets bustle with activity. This year as the town prepares to celebrate its 150 year anniversary, the citizens have gathered to share to excitement as well as the "remember when" stories, and Keytesville is reliving some of its early grandeur and prominence.

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## SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURAL CRITIQUE

A windshield survey was the first step in the inventory process. It was conducted by Linda Donovan Harper, architectural historian and several Keytesville citizens who were familiar with the communities history. Ms. Harper noted homes and structures of architectural interest and merit and the Keytesville citizens designated those sites where were "landmarks" to the town, "old homes", or buildings associated with old or prominent Keytesville families. A combination of these sites which included residences, churches, and commercial properties was then compiled with an attempt to include sites that were good examples of the variety of architectural styles found in the town. Following the designation of specific sites, Ms. Harper photographed the buildings and set out the appropriate maps. Individual owners were asked to prepare information about their buildings and/or to bring in their abstract for review. After reading the abstracts, personal history on the previous owners was investigated both by the Friends of Keytesville, as a part of their match, and by Ms. Harper. A number of sources (see Bibliography) were used to do this research. The new format of the historic inventory survey form was prepared by Linda Harper who completed all items except Item 8. This section was a combination of research done by Ms. Harper and the members of the Friends of Keytesville. Upon completion of the forms they were delivered to the Friends for review and any final, additional research. Following their work, the forms were then sent to the Missouri Valley Regional Planning Commission, who typed the forms and assembled the information into booklets (three copies - one to Friends of Keytesville, one to Missouri Valley Regional Planning Commission and one to Historic Preservation Program.)

In preparing this survey, a number of details about the architecture of Keytesville were highlighted. The community which was known for its spacious lots and attractive streetscapes continues to retain these affinities. A number of older homes have been lost to new construction but the integrity of the community is still intact. Early homes exhibit those details characteristic of outstate Missouri residences, generally symmetric, frame, and having Greek Revival details such as transom and sidelights and 6/6 windows (K-R3, R18). Several Gothic Revival and/or Carpenter Gothic residence accent the streetscapes (K-R1, R-1, R23). These have gable peaks highlighted by ornate bergeboards, segmentally arched windows, and so forth. Most homes in the community which date before 1890 fall into the vernacular format. There are several one and one and one-half story homes with central entrances and/or paired entrances. Most of these are nondescript and many have been altered or updated.

From 1890 to 1910, the majority of homes built in the community were in the Queen Anne style (K-R4, 9, 14) or were at least embellished by Queen Anne and Eastlake detailing (K-R6, 12). Turned posts, spindle frieze, brackets, and fishscale shingles are typical of these accents. After 1905, homes began to take on a more classical detailing (K-R10, 13) which include palladian

windows, blocky plans and so forth.

Most churches also exhibit this Queen Anne detail. The two black churches tend to be simpler and more vernacular in both style and plan.

Commercial structures are generally brick, are both one and two story and often are highlighted by cast or pressed metal details, for example columns or cornice. Most of these have been altered or remodeled; windows made smaller, canopies added and so forth. K-P4 is probably the best example of what the elegance of the Keytesville downtown once was.