

PH 0168951

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED JUL 17 1975
DATE ENTERED SEP 25 1975

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Chaumiere des Prairies
AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER *W of Nicholasville #4568*
Route 1 (Catnip Hill Road) — NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CITY, TOWN Nicholasville *vic.* VICINITY OF 05 CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
STATE Kentucky CODE 021 COUNTY Jessamine CODE 033

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Margaret Steele Fife
STREET & NUMBER Route 1
CITY, TOWN Nicholasville VICINITY OF Kentucky STATE Kentucky

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Jessamine County Court Clerk (Jessamine County Courthouse)
STREET & NUMBER Main Street
CITY, TOWN Nicholasville STATE Kentucky

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Survey of Historic Places in Kentucky
DATE 1971 — FEDERAL STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Kentucky Heritage Commission
CITY, TOWN Frankfort STATE Kentucky

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The original residence at Chaumiere, as known through an unusually detailed plan of 1800 and Meade's descriptions in his letters to Judge Prentis, seems to have been of an extraordinary design. Although comprised of a series of blocks erected at different times for different purposes in an agglomerative fashion, they were united by a rigid common axis. Even if the units were actually built as precisely as drawn in Meade's 1800 plan, the axis was only theoretical, not visual, since it was interrupted in the middle by several chimneys. Like the garden, this arrangement seems to have combined artifice with response to pioneer conditions and resources. Meade seems always to have known exactly what he was doing and his references to his "humble residence" sound artfully tongue-in-check. The art historical context may well have been, not only the English country estates such as Stowe and Chiswick that Meade might have known from his years at Harrow and after, but even such follies as Marie Antoinette's Petit Hameau at the Petit Trianon near Versailles--"Chaumiere des Prairies" is, after all, a French designation, referring to a thatched cottage not, perhaps, unlike the ill-fated queen's.

Construction at the site seems to have begun with a frame one-and-a-half-story house of the standard hall-and-parlor type, with a large chimney with multiple openings in the center between slightly asymmetrical rooms. There was also another room at the back, forming a "T" in the plan. (See Plan A.) By 1800 this first unit was apparently used as bedrooms, although one of them must also have served as a passage between the dining room and distant kitchen. By 1796, Meade had embarked upon construction of the much larger front complex, also in form of a "T". Originally this had only one-story--in spite of his neighbors' protests, evidently. This again suggests French prototypes, such as the "bagatelles" so much admired in Paris by Thomas Jefferson and imitated at least visually by Jefferson in his later version of Monticello. (See Appendix A, #2.)

The plan of this front part of Chaumiere, as described by Meade both verbally and in plans, was also somewhat unusual, with smaller chambers (lean-to sheds) at the ends of a long crosshall rather than behind the front rooms in the usual Georgian manner. Both larger and smaller chambers served as bedrooms, reached only from the compartmented ends of the crosshall, not directly from the wide central corridor, called the "vestibule, or south entry," which was lined by 1800 with marble slabs and benches. This corridor no doubt led the visitor past the private front wing directly to the large dining room, which must have served also as the parlor and general living room, as no other public spaces are referred to on the plan. The axial dining room mantelpiece must have provided the climax of the vista from the front entrance and closed off the service wings behind. Although it is possible to read too much into a mere plan, it would appear that Meade distinguished between public, private, and service uses by means of visual devices of size, axial direction, compartmentalization, and perhaps even ceiling height; this again evokes Jefferson's subtleties at Monticello. (See William H. Pierson's analysis in

(continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1796; 1820; 1840

BUILDER/ARCHITECT David Meade; Captain Carter

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Located nine miles southwest of Lexington in Jessamine County is a handsome Greek Revival house, one wing of which is the only surviving remnant above ground of La Chaumiere des Prairies. The house was appropriately named "Cottage in the Meadow" at the time of its erection before 1800, perhaps named after a popular novel of that time La Chaumiere indienne (The author, Jacques Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, was the first French writer to treat landscape as the background of life.) The builder of the house "Colonel" David Meade, was the ultimate country gentleman even in the midst of what was hardly more than a wilderness. Only venturing to hold public office once to serve briefly in the last, abortive Virginia House of Burgesses in 1769, Meade retired to devote his life to improving his estate and on the hospitality for which his name and that of his estates became bywords. Although only the octagonal ballroom remains of the original house, and perhaps the outline of the gardens, an unusual number of early accounts allows us to sense the natural and artificial beauties of this remarkable English country seat recreated in the West (see Appendix B). La Chaumiere des Prairies' wanton destruction by a subsequent owner was one of the tragedies in the history of landscape architecture, although it occurred under circumstances so melodramatic they might have appealed to Meade's sense of paradox.

David Meade was born in 1744, the son of David Meade and Susannah Everard Meade. Meade's father owned a handsome estate and a large number of slaves at the mouth of the Nansemond River in Virginia. At the age of seven the younger David Meade was sent to England where he attended Harrow School for ten years.

In 1761 Meade returned to Virginia. Seven years later he married Sarah Waters of Williamsburg, Virginia. Although Meade was in his prime during the period of the Revolution he made only a brief entry into public life; he was elected First Burgess from Nansemond County to the Virginia Assembly in 1769. Meade related in his diary, "That he went to Williamsburg, afflicted with a tertian fever and ague, but the thought of speaking before that distinguished body bore more heavily upon him than his bodily sickness." Lord Botetourt, the Governor of Virginia, was an ardent Tory, and was so incensed at the freedom with which the Burgesses discussed the differences between England and the colonies that he abruptly dissolved the assembly. Meade returned home, never again to take part in public life. Although he spent the war years managing his large estate, he is said to have been a devoted patriot for the cause of independence.

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American Buildings and Their Architects (1770). Interestingly, the John Speed house, Farmington, near Louisville, in Jefferson County, Kentucky, whose basic layout is attributed to Jefferson, also has the public area--two octagonal drawing rooms--approached through an entry hall between bedrooms.) This whole front portion of Chaumiere was of log construction.

It would appear from Anna Maria Von Phul's 1815 watercolor, thought to represent Chaumiere, that at least the main portion of the front block and the original log section had been raised to two full stories by that time, and perhaps encased in brick. The orientation of her view and its overall accuracy are not, however, certain. (See photo 1.)

The kitchen wing, reached by means of a covered passageway from the rear of the original log house, was also "T"-shaped, and designed specifically to be fireproof, of stone construction. Colonel Meade's own description suggests why detached kitchens were advisable in those days (see Appendix A, #7). The kitchen must have been dominated by its enormous fireplace, with the oven in the adjacent "large closet."

The service buildings were also arrayed in an elaborately symmetrical fashion around the "hen yard" (behind and to the north of) the kitchen. The dairy and smokehouse flanked the kitchen forming subsidiary smaller, courtyards. Larger quarters for servants (not designated for slaves) marked the rear corners of the yard, which was apparently walled, with a detached double privy in the center of the west side and the whiskey house flanked by henhouses opposite to the east.

Thus the entire complex seems to have been elaborately symmetrical, yet highly articulated into separate partitions in what seems to be a proto-Federal manner. Whether this cluster of structures of varied materials and scales was actually executed as precisely and geometrically as Meade indicated on his plan, is not known, since none of it has survived above ground.

The justification for such an extensive description here of a nonexistent structure--aside from its intrinsic interest as a historical record--is that there seems little question that archeological investigation will provide physical evidence and perhaps corroboration of Meade's account in the near future. Excavation by Dr. Livingston of Asbury College

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in Wilmore, Kentucky, of only a small area, about 12 by 30 feet in extent, behind the present house, has already yielded clear patterns of foundation walls, as well as over 10,000 fragments of late 18th-century artifacts of the highest quality. It is suspected but not yet proven that the substructures of the two or more small rooms so far uncovered (to a depth of three or four feet) correspond to the eastern portion of the original frame structure north of the dining room on Meade's plan. Future investigation may well clarify this relationship, as well as perhaps reveal something of the layout of at least the gardens closer to the house.

The location of the surviving octagon in relation to the earlier house has also not yet been determined. William Leavy's description suggests, however, that it was placed to the right (east) of the dining room (see Plan B). The addition of a drawing room at that point seems reasonable for, as mentioned above, there was, in 1800, no room for entertainment except the dining room.

The octagon is reached through a small vestibule between equally small dressing rooms whose five-sided shape is determined by their residual location in the corners of the rectangle in which the octagon is inserted. These side chambers have recently been somewhat altered, but retain some original features, such as a "wig closet" of wood in the north room. Three walls of the octagon jut out beyond the square form that houses both it and the anterooms. Three windows in this bay, and a fourth one facing the fireplace in the north wall, admit light to the room. The fireplace is of stone and has a handsome mantel. All the window casings and doors are of black walnut (and are now painted). The south window is deeply recessed between "air-conditioning vents," which supplied cool air from the basement. Plaques located high in each side of the octagon, correspond to those visible on the outside. The octagon is spacious and is elegantly proportioned and is situated so as to have well-placed views of the countryside. The very choice of an octagonal shape and its high single story with panels over the openings is the most Franco-Jeffersonian feature of all.

The two-story brick residence on stone foundations built about 1840 by Captain Carter to the west of the octagon, after the destruction of the remainder of Colonel Meade's constructions, is ingeniously adapted to the use of the latter as its parlor, although the exterior with its four two-story bays to one side of the understated entrance does not effectively balance the story-and-a-half octagon wing opposite.

The recessed entrance (with Grecian triple window above) is a fine example of the adaptation of Minard Lafever's patterns, probably from his Beauties of Modern Architecture (New York, 1833). The overall form of the entrance, with Ionic columns based on the

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Temple on the Ilissus in Athens, set up against plain square piers with egg-and-dart bands as capitals under a full scale entablature, corresponds to plate 80. The arrangement of double doors, sidelights, and transom behind the columns also seems to conform to this plate. The entablature is enriched, moreover, with ornamental anthemion or honeysuckle motifs and continuous guttae that may have been inspired by Lafever's Plate 63 (actually designed and drawn for Lafever by James H. Dakin).

It is the plan of the Greek Revival wing attached to the octagon that is most ingenious and interesting, resulting in a rear (north) facade symmetrical in itself without the octagon. The entrance opens into a well-proportioned hall with a fine staircase rising along the west wall to a cross-landing. To the right is the impressive entrance to the octagon. To the left between the front entrance and the staircase is a door to another, rectangular living room with plain Grecian trim, mantel, and a cupboard beside the fireplace on the east wall. A similar room (now converted into a kitchen with some exposed brick walls) was probably the dining room. Behind it in the northwest corner of the block is a complex tower containing small service rooms and stairs, both to the kitchen in the basement below and to the upper floor and attic. These stairs and residual spaces are ingeniously fitted into the available space, which corresponds to the rear portion of the main stairhall at the opposite end of the block. These two projecting units symmetrically flank a two-story gallery open to the north, with square piers and plain trim. Thus, convenience and separation of circulation patterns in the interior is combined with abstract visual satisfaction on the exterior, at least toward the rear. The upstairs of the 1840 wing is similar to the first story, except that a small original chamber at the head of the main stairs has been converted into a lavish bathroom.

There are several outbuildings behind the present house, presumably located on or near the remains of Meade's Chaumiere. These consist of a frame smokehouse and a smaller frame structure.

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Just before the Revolutionary War began he sold his ancestral home to his brother Andrew and bought an estate on the James River (across from Westover, home of Colonel William Byrd) which he called Maycox. Here for twenty-two years he practiced the fine art of landscape architecture and hospitality, and often entertained the leaders of Virginia.

There is no clue as to why Meade left his beautiful estate on the James River at the age of fifty-two to come to the wilderness of Kentucky. In 1796 Meade and his family, with a large retinue of servants, floated down the Ohio River on flatboats and landed in Kentucky at Maysville (Limestone). From there they traveled overland to Lexington. In 1795, Meade had purchased three hundred acres in Jessamine County, nine miles southwest of Lexington, from Andrew McCalla who had settled upon it. After the sale, McCalla immediately moved to Lexington and established an apothecary shop.

At this location Meade devoted the rest of his life to making a splendid home out of the wilderness. Meade built a one-story house, of various materials--stone, brick, wood, and even one of mud--all arranged for elegance and convenience. About fifty letters that Meade wrote to Judge Prentis, his wife's cousin in Williamsburg, Virginia dating from Meade's arrival in Kentucky in 1796 to 1828, have survived. The letters provide a vivid account of life in Kentucky during the period when the Bluegrass was being transformed from a frontier into a highly civilized social and cultural center. Meade's estate and hospitality seem, themselves, to have symbolized to him and his visitors this very transformation, with its paradoxical juxtaposition of pioneer construction techniques and layout of individual units with considerable overall size and splendor of fittings in an artificially created English picturesque garden carved out of what had shortly before been the wilderness.

In a November 12, 1800, letter to Judge Prentis, Meade enclosed a detailed floor plan and description of Chaumiere (see plan 1). This plan is one of the earliest (if not the earliest) known contemporary plan of a building erected in Kentucky. Meade's plan provides remarkable evidence of his intentions and presumably of the original layout of Chaumiere as it developed from the earliest ad hoc building in 1796 to the elaborate and strikingly symmetrical yet picturesquely composed conglomerate of 1800. In many of his letters, Meade gives detailed descriptions including room dimensions, of the progress being made in building Chaumiere (see Appendix A, #2, 3, 4, 6, 7). In addition to building a comfortable house, Meade constructed several log buildings for use as a school. Meade hired a tutor to teach his four sons and allowed his neighbors' children to attend (see Appendix A, #5).

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Marie Von Phul, a young Lexington painter and a friend of the Meades, painted a water color of what is supposed to be the front of Chaumiere des Prairies in 1815 (see photo 1). The painting apparently shows the house at a later stage when some of the one-story portions had been raised to two, and perhaps converted to brick construction.

There are many personal accounts by those who visited the Meades at Chaumiere, describing in length the Meades' way of life and the beautiful gardens. Among these accounts is one by Dr. Horace Holley, President of Transylvania University from 1818 to 1827, a frequent visitor (see Appendix B, #4).

The Meades entertained many distinguished guests at Chaumiere: James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, General Charles Scott, and Zachary Taylor were guests at various times. Henry Clay was also a frequent visitor (see Appendix B, #6). Perhaps the most notorious were Aaron Burr, a school friend of Meade's son David, and Harman Blennerhassett. Meade mentions in a letter that his son David, having been appointed Deputy Marshall, arrested Blennerhassett and was responsible for escorting him to Richmond, Virginia to appear at the conspiracy trial of Aaron Burr. Meade states that the escort and Blennerhassett were to stop at Chaumiere on the way to Richmond (see Appendix A, #8).

According to tradition the surviving octagonal ballroom was built in 1823 in anticipation of a visit by Lafayette. However, there is no record of Lafayette's stopping at Chaumiere during his travels through Kentucky in May 1825.

"Colonel" Meade and his wife had seven children; four sons and three daughters. The eldest son, David, died before his thirtieth birthday, unmarried, preceding his father's death. Another son, Richard, served repeatedly in the State legislature and lived in Oldham County, Kentucky. Meade had three daughters who all married well. At Meade's death in 1832 (Meade and his wife are buried on a rise overlooking Chaumiere), the estate was left to his children. In living in an extravagant manner and abstaining from gainful employment of any kind at Maycox and Chaumiere, Meade had consumed three considerable fortunes. Therefore at his death there were not sufficient left to maintain Chaumiere. Three years after Meade's death his heirs were forced to sell the estate at public auction. William Robards, a "plain practical farmer," bought the property. This surprised and distressed the citizens of Jessamine County, who had taken pride

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in the place. They were incensed and a little while after the new owner had been announced, there was a placard in large letters over the grounds the words "Paradise Lost." In less than a week the beautiful gardens were filled with horses, cattle and hogs. The forests were felled, lodges torn down, parks destroyed, and lakes drained. Main portions of the house were also demolished.

The third owner of Chaumiere was a Captain Carter, who erected a handsome brick residence, about 1840 and resided there for some years. This structure, attached at one end to the original octagon, is itself of considerable architectural interest, with an unusual and ingenious asymmetrical plan and a recessed entrance patterned after Minard Lafever designs. George W. Headley of a prominent Kentucky family, was also at one time the owner of Chaumiere, around 1874. In 1884 it was purchased by John Steele, a large landholder, who bequeathed it to his daughter, Mrs. Allen Zaring. (The house remains in the possession of the Steele family today.)

The extensive verbal documentation of the structure of Chaumiere is supplemented by Colonel Meade's plan and possibly Miss Von Phul's watercolor view, as well as the existence of the surviving octagon. These all help us visualize the extraordinary life-style that incarnated there during the first quarter of the 19th century. Furthermore, the potential for historic archaeology is probably unsurpassed, as the preliminary excavations at the site have already revealed. But it may well be that it is in the history of landscape architecture that La Chaumiere des Prairies will turn out to be most significant. For whatever specific reason or reasons Colonel Meade and his entourage left Virginia for Kentucky, the establishment of the most fashionable and artificially "natural" type of garden within what was still almost true wilderness must have been a great Romantic adventure. The romantic element of nostalgia seems to have played quite a part in the Meades' way of life: their retardataire costume and manners, the probable reminiscences of Meade's experiences in English country places during the period of his education. A sense of paradox has been suggested here, in the contrast of Meade's supposedly ardent Republican beliefs and his aristocratic demeanor, the Meades' social position and the purported "humbleness" of their actually extensive abode, in the artificial naturalness of the garden within a truly natural setting, and perhaps in the contrasts of the picturesque, the beautiful, and the sublime within the landscape itself. There appears to modern eyes to be an element of escapism in Meade's career--his lack of employment, his forsaking the relatively sophisticated life of Tidewater Virginia for the undeveloped Bluegrass of Kentucky. Yet at the same time, La Chaumiere seems to have been an extraordinary convivial place, the leading "attraction" of central Kentucky, one which lured all the most sophisticated visitors of the region to the Colonel's table. Thus, although so little of its substance has remained intact, La Chaumiere des Prairies recalls--perhaps all the more evocatively in its ruinous, rebuilt, literary, and as yet unearthed state-- a remarkable feat of the Romantic imagination.

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Archaeological excavations have been undertaken at this site, under the direction of Dr. Livingston of the Asbury Seminary at Wilmore, Kentucky. Please see attached report.

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Appendix A

Excerpts from Letters of David Meade to Judge Prentis in Williamsburg, Virginia concerning Chaumiere des Prairies.

#1 August 14, 1796 (p. 30) First reference to Chaumiere.

"The place intended for our future residence is about nine miles from here, nearly southwest towards the river the land is of the first quality. In quantity 320 acres we have a prospect of adding 225 acres more by purchase at about four pounds per acre which will altogether make about a very sufficient estate for my purpose meaning to occupy the whole of it myself.

We propose building in wood--on a very commanding ground the spring will be near two-hundred yards from the spot whence our log house will be placed or rather further from the intended mansion.

We are now preparing materials for three log houses. One of twenty feet each way the other two sixteen feet the two latter will be placed at ten feet distance from each other and one roof over the whole--to the end of each of the sixteen feet rooms I propose having a shed fourteen by ten feet--the twenty feet room will join the rest in form of a T but will be connected by the mediation of a covered way which will lead at the same time to the sheds, thus this if tolerably well executed will be a very comfortable temporary residence and will after make good kitchen-wash house."

#2 December 1796

"Our building went on very tardily for it was then at the time of our removal. The mason is now about the chimney of which there will be three with five fireplaces. Our dining room is 20' each way in the clear--this apartment is calculated for a future kitchen the other rooms are two of 17 by 16 feet and two of 16 by 10 feet--these four are for chambers the two longest are separated by a ten foot passage which leads to the dining room. It intersects a long narrow passage forty-four feet long leading to all the chambers to the right and left--all the rooms you perceive are upon one floor which is adverse to the prevailing stile of log houses in these parts. My fancy is approved but by few"...

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Appendix A

"Our present quarters is a log house 28 by 16 feet with a chimney in the middle having two fire places to each room--which are very small you may conclude our dining room is 16 by 12 feet and our chamber is two feet narrower--the two watched apartments above and the loft chamber above for the junior part of the family--the girls occupy the left or rather the most private room for that has a door put to it since we have been here--the other is David's chamber which serves for all the boys and two workmen to sleep in and sometimes there is in addition to them one, two or three at a time. Young men of our acquaintance--crowded as we are in a little miserable log house in the severest weather ever here known before so early in the season. We not withstanding have pretty good spirits and great appetites and are all of us in extreme good health. If my friends do not fail before we get well fixed and our farm sufficiently stocked

Our temporary house is built about 50 or 60 yards from the site intended for a future mansion the log house is at the corner of a wood upon the south side of which at the beginning of a descent is the spot marked out for our permanent habitation. The ground immediately adjacent I think lays very handsomely and finely wooded--the tract altogether lays very advantageously and upwards of three hundred acres of it is more land than a farmer would wish it. How happy it would make us all to have your opinion."

#3 July 1797

"It consists of different log houses so intimately connected as to form one mansion of five rooms, an entry ten feet wide and twenty long to our dining room door-- and a long narrow cross passage--the apartments consist of a dining room--full twenty feet square--two smart uniform chambers about thirteen by fifteen in the clear--and two chambers which are lean-tos or sheds ten by sixteen--to these I am now framing as was before mentioned two more chambers which will be joined to the left of the building by a covered way in this design when finished will be several closets and two of them pretty large."

#4 September 7, 1798

"We have just finished two additional bedrooms which are of frame work-wainscotted chair board high and cornices with hearths of wrought stone from a quarry at our

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best spring which affords good stone and the best water in the neighborhood Sally Meade's eldest daughter now occupies one of the new rooms and I will be bold to say is as well lodged as any of our friends or acquaintance in Virginia when the little improvements I am making to the interior parts of a log building are finished. I think we shall have an elegant kind of Chaumiere for I will not dignify my collection of rooms with a name of higher class amongst buildings.

#5 1802

"My four sons are under the tuition of a highly qualified person--some of the materials for a school house having been prepared previously to my return my time has been chiefly engaged ever since in Kentucky directing the building of a good log house of two rooms is now nicely finished and one already occupied by master and boys--I may venture to add that no private school on the western country is in higher repute than ours at least we have reasons to believe so from the numerous applications which have been made to us for admittance.

#6 September 19, 1803

"and it is probable we shall have masons and carpenters about us many months to come having several buildings to execute intended for comfort as well as profit in which we have already made some progress.

#7 October 5, 1806

"We are at this time within three or four days of finishing the walls of a strong well built limestone kitchen 44 by 22 containing two rooms with a passage of six feet between a dairy and smoke house--each 13 feet square and connected to the kitchen by stone walls--there will scarcely be any combustible material about them except the roof and every part of that will be so accessible that nothing of timber can be well guarded sic from fire.

#8 July 20, 1807

On Sunday evening last we were surprized sic by the sudden and very unexpected apparition of David who has returned to Kentucky as the messenger or private agent

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of the illustrious prisoner Mr. Burr and has acted here and returned as it would seem in aid of the prosecution after procurring the appointment of Deputy Marshall he has served several subpoenas on persons whose evidence at the trial of Mr. Burr--will it is probable serve less to exculpate him than to examine General Wilkinson. He has caused Mr. Blennerhassett to be apprehended examined by the new Circuit Federal Judge and committed to prison--this unfortunate and I hope guiltless gentleman with whom his very handsome lady we have had some acquaintance is to be escorted by our hero David--of the Vicar of Brayl and a guard to Richmond by the Hanahwa route tomorrow the escort sets out from Lexington and will probably call at our Chaumiere on its route."

... "David went very early this morning from hence to Lexington to receive the State prisoner Mr. Blennerhassett who is well known to be a gentleman of very considerable fortune. He is moreover a well educated well bred man and will be of some advantage to Andrew Meade's third son on the journey who on his part will not be least pleasing companion of the party for him-- We expect the escort here before noon on its way to Richmond when Andrew joins it

#9 February 20, 1827

"The ardour which I pursued my favorite occupation which has resulted in the improvement of about forty acres about my residence Chaumiere des Prairies which has acquired an extensive celebrity the common which has been bestowed upon this part of industry and fancy by Americans is no doubt relative compared to the gardens of the rich in Europe it will sink to insignificance but to any thing of the kind in the United States might to eminence how or that may be I will venture my opinion that no man either in America or any other region--ever did more than I have done with as humble means as I have had."

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Personal Descriptions of Chaumiere des Prairies

- #1 Mrs. Susan C. Williams, David Meade's granddaughter, gives an intimate description of this paradise in the wilderness:

"The house might be called a villa, built in an irregular style of various materials, wood, stone and brick. The part composed of brick was a large octagon drawing room. The dining room was large and square, wainscotted with black walnut, with very deep windows, where we children used to hide ourselves behind the heavy curtains; there was a large square hall, and numerous lobbies, passage ways, and areas. The grounds were extensive and beautiful; at that time it was said there was not so highly and tastefully improved country seat in America; distinguished visitors to Lexington were always taken there.... And then the walks--the serpentine one mile around, the haw-haw, a wide straight walk with an echo--both with white benches at intervals, and in a secluded nook, a tasteful Chinese pavilion. The birdcage walk was cut through a dense plum thicket, excluding the sun, and led to a dell, where was a large spring of water, and the mouth of a cave. At this point was the terminus of the lake, and after a hard rain there was a waterfall, in which my grandfather greatly delighted.... I should not omit to say that both my grandfather and grandmother were all that their servants could desire, as master and mistress; all that were capable of taking care of themselves were manumitted at his death."

The servants were indeed an important part of their sumptuous and spacious establishment. Seven men were kept at work on the grounds, mowing the grass, trimming and tending the trees, shrubberies, and gardens; not a leaf or twig was ever allowed to remain on the velvet turf.

All the rest of the servants were negroes. There were cooks, dining-room servants, coachmen, footmen, outriders, valets, and housemaids. All these were under the special charge of Dean, the negro butler, who copied the polish and grace of his master's manners, with the imitative talent of his race. The plate and jewelry, and the liveries of the servants were under his oversight. The butler and men of the establishment wore a livery of drab cloth with silver buttons and low-cut shoes. The care of the silver and cut glass was no little charge. The

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magnificent solid silver plate, which was brought from England, and the costly china and cut glass were on such a lavish scale, that one hundred guests could be easily served at one time.¹

#2 Mrs. Anna Meade Letcher, a great-granddaughter of Colonel Meade, writes of the house:

"Most of it was but one story, but it contained a great number of rooms which were richly furnished. In the octagon drawing room hung four handsome mirrors, which were draped, as were the windows and eight sides of the room, with hangings of brocaded stain. The large square hall was called the stone passage, where in summer afternoon tea was served. The pictures on the wall were mostly family portraits, some of them by celebrated artists. One of David Meade at eight years of age was by Hudson, the teacher of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and several were by Sir Joshua, himself. One was by the celebrated Sully. When Edward Everett visited Chaumiere, just after a stay abroad, he pronounced the art collection there, though small, the equal of any he had seen in private galleries in Europe."²

Item 3 William Leavy described Chaumiere in his memoirs:

The dwelling and grounds and the bulk of the farm lying on the Southeastern side of the road. A small porter's lodge of stone adjoining the gate with a stone inscription over the gateway "La Chaumiere du Prarie" [sic] a handsome wood lot on the opposite or western side of the road forming a part of the trail. The land in cultivation is high, and well located and of the first quality. In less than half a mile's ride through the open ground you come to the residence and farm buildings embosomed in a handsome grove of native forest trees mostly of the Sugar Maple. The buildings framing the residence of the venerable proprietor were wooden and unpretending rooms erected at different periods--they were but tolerably comfortable at his purchase, the best additions, including the large dining room,

¹ Ida Withers Harrison, "Chaumiere du Prairie," The Journal of American History, IV (1915).

² Ibid.

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made at different times by himself--an octagon parlour of brick on the east having entrance from the dining room was a handsome addition made in the latter period of his life. A picturesque view of a neighboring cottage is had from a _____ in the eastern side of the grounds--the boundary a rural fence of Stone Pillars and wooden rails; and on the Southern side a distant view of a farm house adds to the charm of the scenery. The western walks were varied, some walks consisting of copses of underwood, young cherry trees, plumbs, lilacs, etc. and in situations the tulip poplars and other handsome forest trees were plant'd by himself or under his direction.³

#4 Doctor Horace Holley, President of Transylvania University from 1818 to 1827, wrote this tribute:

"I went with a party of ladies and gentlemen, nine miles from Lexington, to the country seat of Colonel Meade, where we dined and passed the day. This gentleman, who is past seventy, is a Virginian of the old school. He was a good deal in England in his youth, and brought back with him English notions of a county seat--though he is Republican in politics. He and his wife dress in the costume of the olden time; he wears the square coat and great cuffs, the long court vest, knee breeches, and white silk stockings at all times; the buttons of his coat and vest are of silver with the Meade crest on them. Mrs. Meade had the long waist, the stays, the ruffles at the elbow and the cap of the past century. She is very mild and lady-like, and though between sixty and seventy, plays upon her piano forte, the first one brought to Kentucky, with the facility and cheerfulness of a young girl. Colonel Meade is entirely a man of leisure, never having followed any business, and only using his fortune in adorning his place, and entertaining his friends, and strangers. No word is ever sent him that company is coming--to do so offends him. Servants are always in waiting. Twenty of us went out one day without warning, and were entertained luxuriously on the viands of the country.... His house consists of a cluster of buildings, in front of which spreads a beautiful, sloping lawn, smooth as velvet. From this, walks diverge in various directions

³William Leavy, Memoir of Lexington and Its Vicinity (1873), p. 251.

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forming vistas, terminated by picturesque objects. Seats, verdant banks, alcoves, and a Chinese temple are interspersed at convenient distances. The lake, over which presides a Grecian temple, that you may imagine to be the home of the Water Nymphs, has in it a small island, which communicates with the shore by a white bridge of one arch. The whole park is surrounded by a low, rustic stone fence, almost hidden by roses and honey-suckle, now in full flower. You enter from the road through a gate with massive columns, and follow a drive, which winds through a noble park, to a minor gate, the capitals to whose pillars are formed of the roots of trees, carved by nature. There the rich scene of verdure and flower-capped hedges burst upon you. There is no establishment like this in our country."⁴

- #5 William and Ophia Smith in their biography of John James gives this account of his visit to Chaumiere in 1823:

"The party found their host, a lively old gentleman in his seventy-ninth year, actively supervising the care of his grounds. He was in his garden dress of brown linen, with a roundabout jacket and heavy woolen socks to guard against the dew.

"The spacious front lawn was interspersed with a few native forest trees, but not a twig was allowed to spoil its fine surface. Every other day the grass was cut and the lawn swept, while the more remote parts were mowed once a week. Ornamental walks led off to the most beautiful parts of the grounds. There was a small islet at the head of the lake, with a picturesque Chinese bridge leading to it. At the foot of the lake, in a deep dell, was a fine spring that disappeared into the ground a few feet away. In another part of the dell, the waters of the lake cascaded over a natural wall, at the same time passing through a rude arch which was a fine imitation of Gothic ruins. On the bank of the lake was a white Doric portico at the end of a walk arched over by the boughs of cherry and plum trees. Under handsome trees another avenue led to a white thatched roof, which bore out the name of the estate, 'La Chaumiere.' At a sudden turn, a third vista showed showed a large obelisk as the high point of interest; a fourth showed a beautiful Chinese pagoda. Another walk was bordered with lilacs, and yet another with rose bushes. Everywhere there were charming little coves, and, here and there, large white seats 'bearing a remote resemblance to sofas.'

⁴Harrison, "Chaumiere."

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"John James thought Colonel Mead lent dignity to the 'finest feelings of our nature by his refined taste for and admiration of rural scenery, by his hospitality and generous entertainment of strangers, and by his philosophical enjoyment of life.' Colonel Mead had once owned a farm on the James River which he had brought 'to a degree of improvement unequalled in any part of America.' After spending a fortune on it, he was forced to sell it, Carter Harrison becoming the purchaser. 'With the wreck of his fortune,' Mead moved to Kentucky and bought La Chaumiere, which with twenty-seven years of assiduous labor had become 'the most charming spot in the western country and more natural and beautifully simple than any in the eastern section of the Union.'

"This garden of thirty acres was enclosed with a fence of rails inserted in square columns of stone, all built by his own servants. Colonel Mead had masons, carpenters, and every kind of workman he might need, among his slaves.

"At dinner that day, Colonel Mead appeared 'in a dress that was so appropriate in all respects to his age and venerable appearance that all present marked its peculiar fitness.' The cut of his coat, vest, and white flannel breeches was exactly the same as that of his wedding suit."⁵

#6 Bernard Mayo in his biography of Henry Clay gives this description of Meade and his estate:

"Some of these Blue Grass plantations and stock-farms, it was said, resembled estates in Languedoc and Provence. Unique, however, was David Meade's Chaumiere du Prairie near Lexington, in Jessamine County, a mansion composed of rustic cottages grouped together, with a drawing-room draped in silk brocades, flower gardens after those at Versailles, serpentine walks, and a lake presided over by a Greek temple and statuary. Colonel Meade, eccentric and charming, was an old-school Virginian who dressed in small clothes and periwig, had the manners of a grandee, and delighted Clay and others with his hospitality."⁶

⁵William and Ophia Smith, A Buckeye Titan (Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, 1953), p. 111.

⁶Bernard Mayo, Henry Clay (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937), p. 193.