

WELCOME TO HISTORIC FORESTVILLE

Experience a historic Minnesota valley and town site with a rich history that features a well-preserved general store, homestead, and farm buildings from the 19th century. Explore the choices and factors that changed the course of a once-thriving community's history.



WHEN SITE IS OPEN: BEGIN YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THE VISITOR CENTER

- **Self-guided experiences** that provide a glimpse into Forestville's past.
- **Visit the museum store** for unique toys, books, and gifts for all ages.
- **Enjoy historical games** such as horseshoes, croquet, and more.
- **Contact 507-765-2785 or forestville@mnhs.org** for hours and information.

WHEN SITE IS CLOSED:

- **Explore the site, trails, and surrounding state park** with this interactive visitor guide.



VISITOR GUIDE

Learn more about Historic Forestville and browse our calendar of events at mnhs.org.



HISTORIC FORESTVILLE

Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park

EXPLORE THE STORIES AND HISTORY OF ONE MINNESOTAN VALLEY AND ITS ONCE-THRIVING TOWN

HISTORIC BEGINNINGS

Located in present-day southeastern Minnesota, the Forestville region has been home to people for thousands of years. Archaeological sites in the area date back to prehistoric eras and Native Americans lived in the region until the early 1800s, when treaties opened up the area for European American settlement.

Among the first European American settler-colonists to arrive in the area were the Foster and Meighen families, who established their first general store in 1853. By the time Minnesota became a state in 1858, Forestville was a growing community with a blacksmith shop, a cabinet shop, saw mills, farms, stores, grist mills, and multiple hotels in addition to the Meighen General Store.

DECLINE OF FORESTVILLE

When the Southern Minnesota Railroad bypassed Forestville in 1868, the town's fortunes turned as the area's residents moved to more prosperous railroad communities and beyond. In 1860, Forestville's population numbered 100 residents, but by 1870, this number had declined to 68. By 1880, Forestville's population had shrunk further to just 55 residents. During Forestville's period of population decline, the Meighen family, led by Thomas Meighen, began to buy up much of the surrounding land left by the departing residents of Forestville.

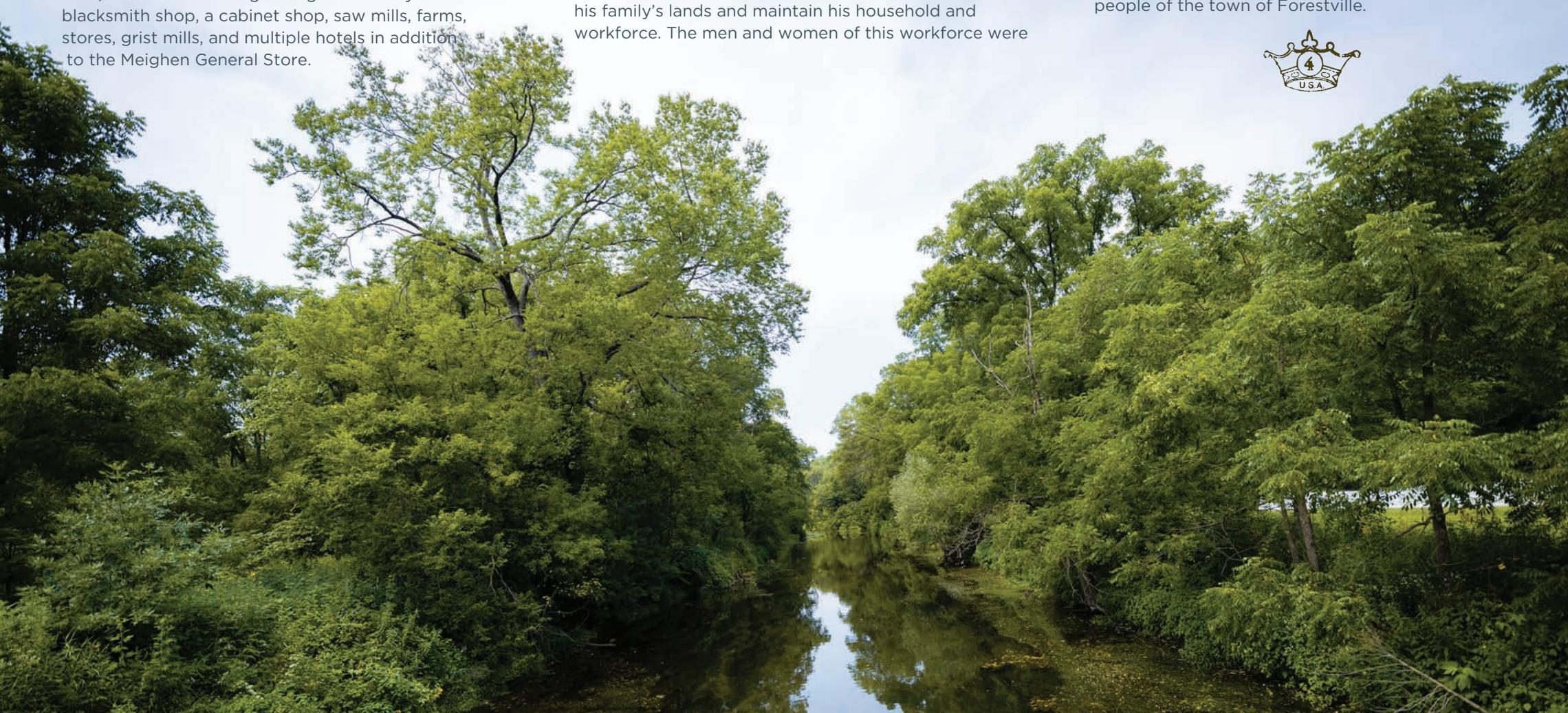
By 1890, Thomas Meighen, along with his father Felix, owned over 1,000 acres in the town of Forestville and the surrounding township. The Meighen family diversified their farming operations during the 1890s, concentrating on dairy cattle, corn, small grains, and vegetables. Thomas Meighen hired workers to farm his family's lands and maintain his household and workforce. The men and women of this workforce were

mainly paid in store credit at the Meighen General Store. In this way, Thomas Meighen transformed Forestville into a "company town" in which everything was owned by his family.

With the closing of the post office in 1902, the town of Forestville officially ceased to exist—and by 1905, even the Meighen family had decided to move to neighboring Preston.

FORESTVILLE NOW

While Forestville's general store officially closed in 1910, the surrounding farm lands continued operation for several decades. In 1963, the Minnesota State Legislature established Forestville State Park, which dedicated the area and former town site for public use. In 1978, the Minnesota Historical Society began operations at Historic Forestville, and today continues to interpret the history and stories of the people of the town of Forestville.



HISTORIC FORESTVILLE

ONE SMALL TOWN. MANY BIG STORIES.

HISTORIC FORESTVILLE STRUCTURES

- A THE MEIGHEN STORE:** Built in 1857, the general store was the center of the Forestville community until it closed in 1910. What do you see as the center of your community?
- B MEIGHEN FAMILY RESIDENCE:** Connected to the general store, this part of the brick building was home to several generations of the Meighen family. Would you want to live in the same building as a store?
- C GRANARY:** Built in 1859, this structure provided storage for the Meighen family's crops and grains.
- D WAGON/CARRIAGE BARN:** Constructed in 1897, this barn provided space to store wagons, tools, and farming implements. Which space at your home does the barn remind you of?
- E VISITOR CENTER:** Opened in 2002, this is your go-to stop for Forestville tours, questions, and information when the historic site is open.
- F FOSTER HOUSE:** This is the former location of a two-story brick house that was home to the Foster family and others from 1868 until the 1940s.
- G SCHOOLHOUSE:** Children in Forestville attended school at the site of this single-story brick building from 1857 to 1879. Forestville's students would have walked to class, but how do/did you get to school?
- H SCALE HOUSE:** Here, crops were weighed before they were sent to market.
- I LIVESTOCK & HORSE BARN:** One of the largest buildings in Fillmore County when constructed in 1894, this "balloon-frame" barn was used for the Meighen family's dairy operation and for stabling horses. Do you think it is still the largest barn in Fillmore County?
- J CARIMONA ROAD:** This road connects Forestville to Carimona (4 miles) and Preston (9 miles), two towns to the northeast. How do you think people from Forestville in the 1850s traveled this road?
- K GILLETTE-HERTZOG BRIDGE:** Constructed in 1899 using Carnegie steel, this is the third bridge to connect North and South Forestville.

- O MAIN STREET:** In 1855, Forest Henry and William Renslow platted 27 blocks as the town site of Forestville, with Main Street running along the center of the new town.
- P BLACKSMITH:** Another early Forestville business was the blacksmith shop that operated from the 1850s to the late 1880s.
- Q PUBLIC SQUARE:** Forest Henry and William Renslow also platted a public square in 1855, which they hoped would become the center of the town site of Forestville. What do you see on this site today?
- R DISTILLERY:** Opened in 1856 on the east side of the town site, the distillery produced rye whiskey until the early 1860s.

- L LEUDTKE AND MEIGHEN SAW AND ROLLER MILL:** In operation from 1892 until 1910, the saw processed lumber and the mill ground corn into feed for the surrounding farms.
- M HENRY AND RENSLOW GRIST MILL:** One of the early Forestville businesses, this "grist" (grain that is ground into flour) mill operated from the 1850s until the 1880s. Why is this mill located on the banks of the river? What do you think its power source is?
- N HOTELS:** Forestville was home to two hotels: the Marsh Hotel (1858) and the Fremont Hotel (1856), which operated until the 1870s. Why do you think these hotels were built close to Main Street?

KEY

- A** Existing Historic Structure
- A** Previously Existing Structure
- Hiking Trail
- Hiking and Horse Trail

