

Aaron Mayers (1827-1888)

Aaron Mayers was born around 1827 in Manheim, Pennsylvania. We don't know exactly when he moved to Bloomington, but he eventually settled there with his mother, Mary (Jones) Mayers. His father's name is unknown.

Mayers married Jemina Enlow on June 1, 1851. Together, they had four children: Cora, Effie, Lucy, and Nellie. Sadly, Cora died at 29, six years before her father. Effie married Charles Bruce from Brooklyn, New York, and Lucy married Charles R. Hyde. Their youngest daughter, Nellie, never married and stayed at home.

At age 27, Mayers started working as a cabinet maker. In 1870, he went into business with Jay N. Ward, opening a furniture store called Ward and Mayers at 203 North Main Street. The partnership ended in 1876, but Ward continued to sell furniture at the same location. Mayers was also active in his community. He joined the Bloomington Fire Department in 1858 and was listed as a member of Prairie Bird Fire Company #1. He also worked as a City Collector in 1865, which meant he collected property taxes.

In 1878, Mayers started working in the funeral business, which was common for furniture makers in Illinois at the time. He partnered with William B. Myers and bought the funeral business from Montell B. Jeter, renaming it Mayers and Co. They provided everything for funerals, from making coffins to comforting grieving families. After Myers left the business in 1881, Mayers continued on his own until 1886, when he teamed up with Jemina's brother, Jesse Enlow. The business was then renamed Mayers and Enlow.

The funeral business had a bad reputation at the time, with some people believing undertakers would visit sick people to measure them for coffins before they had even died. One article in *The Pantagraph* defended Mayers, saying that his visits were meant to offer sympathy, not take advantage of people.

In 1884, *The Daily Bulletin* reported how the funeral business had changed. Before Mayers's time, funerals were simple, and coffins took about half a day to make. The coffins were plain and unadorned, and bodies were rarely embalmed. It wasn't until 1845 that horse-drawn hearses were used in Bloomington.

Mayers offered a wide range of coffins, from affordable oak and chestnut ones to more expensive options made of materials like rosewood and black walnut. One of the priciest coffins cost \$500, and it was covered in silver and lined with silk. Mayers also sold burial clothes, such as white cashmere dresses for women and standard black suits for men.

Mayers passed away on September 18, 1888, at the age of 61 after a long illness. His funeral was held on September 20 at his home. He was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington. After his death, Jemina and her brother continued the funeral business until around 1905, when they sold it to John W. Birney.