

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government: courthouse

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Government: courthouse

7. DescriptionArchitectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls BRICK

roof TILE

other WOOD & METAL cupola

STONE MOULDINGS &
ornamentation

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Cannon County Courthouse is centrally located in the business district of Woodbury, Tennessee (pop. 2200) on a square bounded by Main, Cannon, Water and Tatum Streets. The building was designed by Nashville architect George D. Waller and built in 1935-1936 by Bell Brothers of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Built in Colonial Revival style, the courthouse is a two-story rectangular-shaped (86'6" X 39'6") brick building laid in common bond with seventeen rows of stretchers between each row of headers. It rests on a rough-cut stone foundation which contains a basement. The building is composed of a five-bay central block flanked by one-bay wings on the east and west at a slightly lower elevation. The building has a three-part gable-end tile roof, octagonal wooden cupola with metal dome and a flagpole finial and one plain brick chimney on the northeast corner of the central block and east wing. The courthouse dominates the skyline; as the tallest building in Woodbury, its cupola is visible from both main approaches to town. Apart from the installation of modern metal and glass double-leaf security doors at the four entrances and an acoustic tile ceiling in the courtroom, the courthouse remains virtually unaltered since the date of its construction, both inside and out.

The main facade faces south onto Woodbury's Main Street. The central block is set off from the wings by stone quoins which rise from the stone water table to the cornice belt course. The five bays in the central block are composed of two metal 6'8" tall 3:6:3 windows on either side of the central doorway on the first floor and five metal 8' tall 3:6:3 windows on the second floor. The bays are separated by four square stone fluted pilasters with Composite capitals featuring broad, stylized volutes and plain bases; they extend the same height as the corner quoins. Each window has a plain stone sill. Between the first and second story windows is a smooth-faced square stone panel surrounded by radiating joint bricks in a flat arch pattern. The bays are further emphasized by one row of stretcher bricks vertically framing each window from the water table to the stone belt course at the height of the cornice of the wings. The central doorway is recessed four feet from the front wall of the building and is set in a tiled vestibule. The door has a stone surround, pediment entablature, and engaged balustrade separating it from the stone-framed window above. Above the belt course of the three central bays of the central block is a plain entablature with the words "CANNON COUNTY COURTHOUSE" engraved within. A plain stone cornice extends the width of the central block and separates

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the entablature from a stepped parapet that is embellished with volutes. The one-bay wings on either side of the central block contain metal 6'8" tall 3:6:3 windows on both the first and second story. These windows have plain stone sills and rowlock course brick hood mouldings accented by central stone keystones and square stone cornerblocks.

The east and west elevations are identical: each is three bays wide with a central doorway framed in stone with a flat hood supported by stylized volutes. The side windows on both stories are metal, 6'8" tall in the 3:6:3 configuration, and topped with a rowlock course brick hood moulding accented with a central stone keystone and square stone cornerblocks. The central window on the second story is of the same configuration but surrounded with stone facing which extends to the sill of a metal 6:3 gable-end attic window. The gable window has a five-light round-arch fanlight in a two-layer brick arch with radiating voussoirs; small stone squares separate the fanlight from the window on each side. The east elevation contains a handicapped access ramp leading to the east door.

The north (rear) elevation is nearly identical to the south facade in configuration, but much less ornate. The bay in each of the wings contains a small 1:1 window with no ornamental moulding. There is no pediment over the rear door and the four pilasters separating the central block bays are plain with plain capitals. There is no entablature between the belt course and the roofline and no parapet on the central block. There is a glass and metal coal chute to the left of the rear doorway. Like the front door, the rear door is recessed four feet from the outer wall and set in a tile vestibule.

The wooden cupola is on a square base rising from the apex of the gable of the central block. The first section of the drum of the cupola contains a clock facing each direction topped with a decorative gable pediment that is ornamented with returns and brackets. An octagonal rounded-arched bell tower above contains a bell donated to the courthouse by the Woodbury Methodist Church in 1935. The cupola is topped with a metal dome and flagpole finial.

The interior of the courthouse is very simple. The first floor contains county offices along an eight foot wide hall running from east to west. A nine foot wide hall running north-south intersects the east-west hall at an octagonal center lobby with a crushed stone mosaic map of Cannon County embedded in the floor. Each of the offices has an original wooden door with a plain surround and three-light transom above. The floors are covered with the original sheet linoleum. The walls have the original

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light-gold ceramic tile wainscoting (4'3" high) and white plaster above. The ceilings are 9'9" high. The first floor is lit with seven 1930s style glass light fixtures. Two metal staircases, original to the courthouse, lead from the wings to the second story. The east and west entrances contain wooden double-leaf nine-light doors with no transoms inside the modern storm-security doors at the vestibules.

The second story contains the courtroom, which encompasses the entire length of the central block and faces west. The courtroom is rectangular in shape (54'6" X 41') with a twelve-foot ceiling. The jury boxes are on either side of the bench and are closed in by a metal railing. The jury boxes are ten feet deep. The wooden bench sits on a raised platform covered with linoleum tile, as is the rest of the courtroom floor. The bar is a metal railing identical to that on the jury boxes. Seating in the courtroom is comprised of wooden fold-down chairs in theater style with aisles on the left and right. All of the furnishings in the courtroom are original to the building. The windows are recessed in the wall with tile sills. The walls are white plaster with the original light-gold ceramic tile wainscoting. The east door of the courtroom is a double-leaf wooden door with a plain wood surround and a rectangular six-light transom above. There is a small glass-covered peep hole in each of the doors, which are original to the building. There are two doors at the west wall of the courtroom, on either side of the bench. Each is plain with no transom and lead into the jury room (on the left) and stair hall (on the right). The ceiling has had acoustic tile added in recent years; otherwise the court room and the entire interior retains all its original integrity.

The Cannon County Court House is an excellent blend of a traditional style and 1930s modernism with its tile wainscoting and county map in the central lobby floor. It is the most imposing building in Woodbury and is a proud symbol of the local government. The courthouse stands on the square in Woodbury and is the second court house for the county (the first burned in 1934). The courthouse is surrounded by the principal business streets of the town and is the focus of downtown Woodbury.

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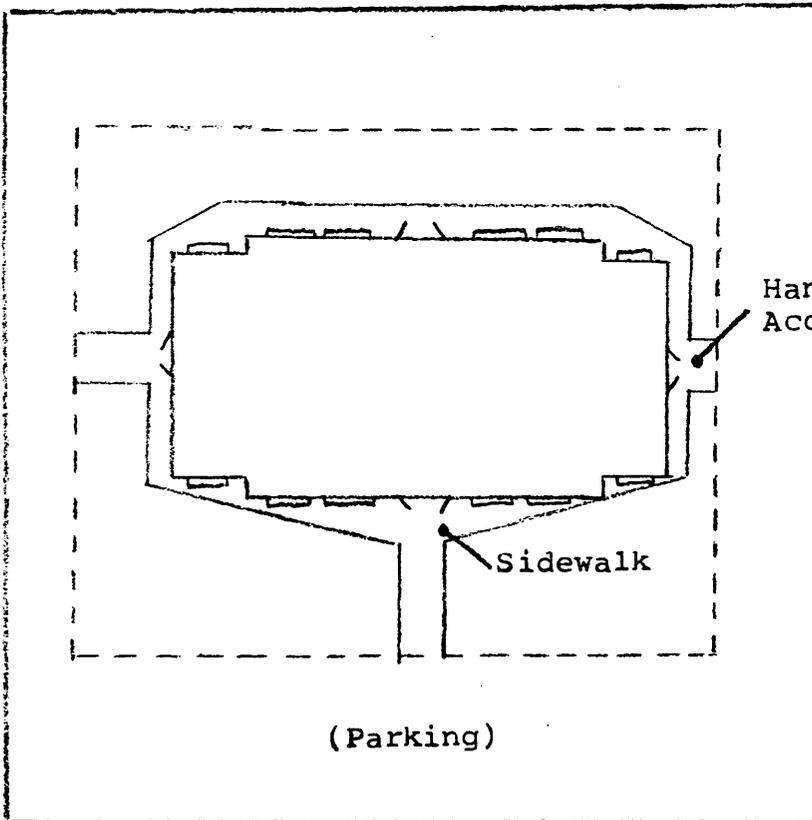
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SKETCH MAP
(NOT TO SCALE)

WATER STREET



Handicapped
Access Ramp

Sidewalk

(Parking)

TALLUM STREET

CANNON STREET

MAIN STREET

N

CANNON CO. C.H.
WOODBURY, TENN.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1935-1936

Significant Dates

1935-1936

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Waller, George D.
Builder: Bell Brothers

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Cannon County Courthouse is nominated to the National Register under criterion C for its importance in architecture. Built in the Colonial Revival style, it is the only historic public building in Woodbury designed by a formally trained architect. Most buildings in Woodbury, a small rural county seat, are vernacular adaptations of architectural styles or show influences from pattern book detailing. This characteristic is true whether the building is a dwelling, church, or governmental building. With its finely detailed cupola and striking two story classical pilasters, the courthouse is a truly locally significant architectural statement, reflecting some of the best features of the Colonial Revival style.

The Colonial Revival style reached the height of its popularity for public buildings in the 1930s. With its ordered symmetry, modest scale, and traditional nationalistic image, Colonial Revival represented architectural continuity with the Revolutionary Era to remind people caught in the midst of the Great Depression of their proud heritage of orderly government, modesty, and self-sufficiency. In addition, the economic realities of the 1930s dictated a more modest scale and style than the grandiose Beaux-Arts public buildings that had been popular prior to the Depression. However, popular interest in the Colonial Revival did not stem solely from a desire and need to tone down prior architectural excesses. The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg captivated the public imagination and had a significant impact on popularizing Colonial building types.

Characteristic of the Colonial Revival style in public buildings during the 1930s was a "red brick structure whose facade presented a balanced composition, accentuated usually by small-pane windows, central ornamented entrances, and the roof surmounted by a cupola and spire."¹ Fitting this description perfectly, and reminiscent of Independence Hall in its form, the Cannon County Courthouse is an excellent representation of the Colonial

¹David Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," Winterthur Portfolio 22 (Summer 1987: 142).

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A
 preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:
 State historic preservation office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 16 1583940 3965100
Zone Easting Northing
C _____

B _____
Zone Easting Northing
D _____

See continuation sheet

Woodbury 319 SE

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is the Court Square, Woodbury, Tennessee, bounded by Main, Cannon, Water and Tatum Streets.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the courthouse and the yard within the square.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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Revival style in public buildings of the period. Moreover, it is significant that the civic leaders of Cannon County chose the Colonial Revival style for their new courthouse, reflecting the penetration of the style into one of Tennessee's most isolated counties.

Fourteen courthouses were built or remodeled during the 1930s in Tennessee. At least five were designed by the prominent Nashville architectural firm of Marr and Holman and five were funded with money from the WPA. Many of these have classically inspired designs or reflect the simplified Art Deco designs popular for public buildings in the 1930s. Like the Cannon County Courthouse, the Claiborne County Courthouse is brick with a central pediment on its symmetrically proportioned facade and small pane windows, however, it has no cupola. The much simpler style courthouse in Pickett County is the only other extant 1930s courthouse that has a cupola. Both the Hancock and Macon County courthouses have similar design features with the Cannon County Courthouse in their use of brick, symmetry, and central entries. The Cannon County Courthouse is the only one that has all of the features of a Colonial Revival building as defined by Gebhard.

Cannon County was organized on January 31, 1836 from land taken from Rutherford, Smith and Warren counties. By 1836, the population in the wooded hills of Cannon County had grown so as to make the establishment of a county seat necessary for the convenience of this population. Cannon County was named in honor of Newton Cannon, governor of Tennessee in 1836. The act establishing the county also provided for the establishment of a county seat within five miles of the existing hamlet of Danville. The site of Danville was chosen for the county seat and the name changed to Woodbury to honor Levi Woodbury, Secretary of the Treasury under President Andrew Jackson. As county seat, Woodbury has remained the only commercial town of any significance in this rural county.

The first court house in Woodbury was built by William Bates in 1838. It was located on the square and financed by the sale of town lots. Woodbury's square conforms to the pattern established in Shelbyville, Tennessee of a planned central courthouse square with the four principal streets in the town intersecting at the corners of the square. (The Shelbyville Square pattern was a frequently employed configuration in courthouse towns, especially in Texas and the lower Midwest.) Bates' 1838 courthouse served as the seat of county government until it burned under mysterious circumstances on November 13, 1934. The present courthouse was constructed on the same site by the Bell Brothers of Murfreesboro, Tennessee under the direction of George D. Waller. Waller (1883-1969) was a Nashville architect known for his church and school designs throughout

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Middle Tennessee. This courthouse was financed by the sale of county bonds and cost \$45,000.00 to complete. Work began on the present courthouse on November 4, 1935. The cornerstone was laid in March, 1936 and the building completed several months later.

The courthouse dominates the business district of Woodbury. Its Colonial Revival style is a traditional statement of the power of the county government: in employing a historic style, the building emphasizes its links with the American past and the virtues of liberty and justice by evoking the architecture of the Revolutionary period. Further, the size and style of the courthouse mark it as the only significant public building in this predominantly rural county and the most architecturally and historically important building in Woodbury. The courthouse is also the social center of Woodbury: older men still congregate on the benches surrounding the court house, young people park their cars and pickups in the surrounding parking lot to mingle.

Moreover, the courthouse represents the continuity of local government in Cannon County over the last 150 years. It is only the second courthouse in Cannon County and has served with no major alterations as the seat of county government since 1936. The strength and independence of local government is symbolized by the solidity and traditional image of the building. The Cannon County Courthouse embodies a patriotic expression linking the glories and virtues of the Revolutionary period and the strength of the institution of local government.

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Cannon Courier. Woodbury, Tennessee. 1 November 1935; 16 March 1936.

Crane, Sophie and Crane, Paul. Tennessee Taproots. Old Hickory, Tennessee: Earle-Shields Publishers, 1976.

Gebhard, David. "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s." Winterthur Portfolio 22 (Summer 1987): 109-148.

Mason, Robert L. Canon County. Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1982.

Price, Edward T. "The Central Courthouse Square in the American County Seat." In Common Places, pp. 124-145. Edited by Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1986.

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Cannon County Courthouse
Courthouse Square
Woodbury, Cannon County, Tennessee
Photos by: Steve Sadowsky
Date: March 1990
Negatives: Tennessee Historical Commission
Nashville, Tennessee

South facade, facing northeast
#1 of 9

Detail of south facade, facing northeast
#2 of 9

Detail of south facade, facing northeast
#3 of 9

West elevation, facing northeast
#4 of 9

West elevation, facing east
#5 of 9

North elevation, facing southeast
#6 of 9

East elevation, facing northwest
#7 of 9

Second floor courtroom, facing west
#8 of 9

Second floor courtroom seats, facing south
#9 of 9