

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**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

Dr. Ephraim McDowell House

AND/OR COMMON

McDowell House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

125-129 South Second Street

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Danville

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

__ VICINITY OF

sixth

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Boyle

CODE

021

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE

BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

(contact curator at McDowell House)

NAME

Kentucky State Medical Association

STREET & NUMBER

3532 Ephraim McDowell Dr.

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

40205

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Boyle County Court House

CITY, TOWN

Danville

STATE

Kentucky

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

none

DATE

__ FEDERAL __ STATE __ COUNTY __ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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 Dr. Ephraim McDowell House stands on a small lot on the western side of South Second Street (numbers 125-129) just south of its intersection with Main Street in Danville, Kentucky. The house and attached apothecary shop (north) and office (south) take up almost the entire frontage of the lot. To the rear, bounded by brick walls, are two small areas of lawn and a formal garden created in the 1930's.

Dr. McDowell, with Dr. Adam Rankin, rented the northern shop, then a free-standing building, in 1795 and purchased it two years later. The one-story, gable-roofed brick building contains two rooms; that in the front (east) served as an apothecary shop, that in the rear the doctors' office. The 3-bay front elevation is broken by a center door and flanking 9/6 sash windows with louvered blinds. The full cellar with cob fire-place is reached by a trap-door in the front room. The attic space was never used. McDowell sold the shop when he constructed his second office (see below).

The present ell of the McDowell House, brick with slanting roof, was built c. 1786. The main block--frame, 2-story, with gabled roof--was constructed c. 1800. Both sections have center halls with two rooms on each floor. The front entrance, at the center of the 5-bay main block, consists of paneled double doors with an elliptical fan and sidelights. Windows in the main block are 12/12 sash with louvered blinds; those in the ell are primarily 6/6 with blinds. When McDowell purchased the house in 1802, he enlarged a servant's room in the ell (adjacent to his own bedroom in the main block) to serve as an operating and recovery room, constructed a one-story brick addition, containing a waiting room and office, at the southwest corner of the house, and probably added the one-story rear porch, connecting the new office and the ell stairway which gave access to the operating room.

During the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the McDowell House had a number of owners and eventually became a rooming house. During the same period, the apothecary shop was successively a pool room, beer hall, barber shop, and restaurant. When the Kentucky Medical Association acquired the house in the 1930's, it was essentially intact but in very poor condition. Following a study by Donald Corley, the house was restored to its original appearance under the supervision of Julian Oberwarth. The Women's Auxiliary of the Kentucky Medical Association furnished the house with period pieces and was able to return to it many of McDowell's papers and personal items including instruments and medicine chests. No work was done on the apothecary shop until 1955 when it was acquired by the Kentucky Pharmaceutical Association. It was then in such a poor state of repair that it was dismantled and rebuilt; original materials were reused wherever possible. The shop is now furnished with an outstanding collection of 18th and early 19th century apothecary equipment and products. Both the house and the shop are now in excellent condition.

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 type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input 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 1795-1830, 1809 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Original unknown;
 Restoration - Julian Oberwarth

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This 2-story frame house with brick ell and attached brick apothecary shop and office is a landmark in the progress of American medicine. Here in 1809, well before the advent of practical methods of anesthesia, Dr. Ephraim McDowell performed the first successful ovariectomy. The complete recovery of his patient, Mrs. Jane Todd Crawford, did much to dispell the misconception among both physicians and laymen that exposing the inner wall of the abdomen invariably produced fatal infection, and eventually led to the development of a new area of surgical practice.

The shop in which McDowell began his practice in 1795, at the northern end of the house, was originally a free-standing building. The older section of the house, the rear ell, was constructed c. 1786, the main block c. 1800. McDowell purchased the house about the time of his marriage in 1802, remodeled it somewhat, and added a second brick office at the southern end. The famous operation was performed in the bedroom on the second floor of the ell.

The Kentucky Medical Association purchased and restored the McDowell House and southern office during the 1930's. The northern shop was essentially reconstructed by the Kentucky Pharmaceutical Association beginning in 1955 and donated to the Medical Association in 1959. The Women's Auxiliary of the Medical Association has furnished the house with period pieces and returned to it many of McDowell's paper and personal items, including instruments and medicine cabinets. The shop has been furnished with an outstanding collection of 18th and early 19th century apothecary equipment and products. The entire complex is open to the public on weekdays from 10 to 12 a.m. and 1 to 4 p.m. and on Sundays from 2 to 4 p.m.

Historical Background

Ephraim McDowell, of Scotch-Irish ancestry, was born in Augusta County, Virginia, November 11, 1771. His father, Samuel McDowell, one of the judges of the first Kentucky court in 1783 and president of the convention that framed the first constitution of Kentucky, took his family to Danville when Ephraim was 12 years old. Ephraim studied anatomy and surgery with Dr. Alex Humphreys of Staunton, Virginia, and in 1793-94 attended the University of Edinburgh, where he was for a time the private pupil of Dr. John Bell. He left the university without his degree, and returned to Danville (1795), where he began the practice of medicine in partnership with Dr. Adam Rankin. In an area where few doctors could boast of having attended the best schools in this country, to say nothing of studying abroad, McDowell's training and skill placed him in the front

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Flexner, James T. Doctors on Horseback, Pioneers of American Medicine (New York, 1937).
 Hutton, Daniel M. Ephraim McDowell (Harrodsburg, Kentucky; 1939; second edition 1960; reprinted 1975).
 Jirka, Frank J. American Doctors of Destiny (Chicago, 1940).
 Works Progress Administration, American Guide Series. Kentucky: A Guide to the Bluegrass State (New York, 1939).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	16	696160	4169600	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the national historic landmark designation for the Dr. Ephraim McDowell House, Danville, Kentucky, are those of the property as owned by the Kentucky Medical Association. Specific lines are shown in red on the accompanying property survey filed in the Boyle County Registry with the McDowell Deeds (book 63, page 232; book 67, page 315).

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Polly M. Rettig, Historian, Landmark Review Project; original form prepared by Horace J. Sheely, Jr., Historian, 4/24/64

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

3/20/76

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 L Street NW

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington,

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

n/a National Historic Landmark

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

9/8/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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rank of his profession. His reputation spread rapidly and he was soon acknowledged to be the best surgeon west of Philadelphia.

In December, 1809, McDowell was called to treat Mrs. Jane Todd Crawford of Greensberg, Kentucky. Though two local doctors indicated that Mrs. Crawford was pregnant, McDowell quickly realized that she was suffering from an ovarian tumor. While the possibility of excising tumors had been suggested, no surgeon had been willing to attempt the operation, since it was universally held that exposing the inner wall of the abdomen invariably produced fatal infection. McDowell discussed these facts with his patient but also made it clear that her only hope of survival lay in removal of the tumor. He agreed that if she were prepared to face the risk of death, he would perform the required operation. Mrs. Crawford set out immediately for Danville, covering the 60-mile distance in several days on horseback.

McDowell operated on Christmas Day, 1809, with the assistance of his nephew, Dr. James McDowell. The patient was placed on a long wooden table covered with a blanket. She was fully dressed and perfectly conscious of every movement of the surgeon and his assistants. To restrain her involuntary muscles, and permit the surgeon to work, men held down her arms and legs with force. During the operation Mrs. Crawford repeated the Psalms. Later Doctor McDowell reported, "In five days I visited her, and much to my astonishment found her engaged in making her bed. I gave her particular caution for the future and she returned home as she came, in good health, which she continues to enjoy." Mrs. Crawford was 47 at the time of the operation and died at the age of 78.

McDowell's operation was one of the most important in the history of surgery. His cure for the usually fatal ovarian tumor was only one part of his discovery. Even more significant was his demonstration that the abdominal cavity could be opened safely. However, recognition of his achievement was slow in coming and McDowell himself did little to publicize his work. After seven years, he was persuaded to publish in the Eclectic Repertory and Analytical Review, Volume VII, an account of this operation and of several others of similar nature that he had performed since. The announcement met with indifference, incredulity, and even ridicule. A subsequent article in the same journal, written after two additional operations, hardly improved the situation. Finally, a report addressed to his former teacher, John Bell, was published by John Lizars in the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal of October, 1824, seven years after it was first written. In 1827, three years before his death, the University of Maryland conferred on McDowell the honorary degree of doctor of medicine. Today McDowell is considered to be "the father of abdominal surgery."

