

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JAN 5 1977  
DATE ENTERED AUG 29 1977

**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

\*\* Casey County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

Casey County Courthouse

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Courthouse Square

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Liberty

VICINITY OF

5

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Casey

CODE

045

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

**OWNERSHIP**

**STATUS**

**PRESENT USE**

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

**ACCESSIBLE**

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Casey County

STREET & NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Liberty

VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Order Books of Casey County

STREET & NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Liberty

STATE

Kentucky

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

December 17, 1976

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

Frankfort, Kentucky

STATE

Kentucky

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Casey County is located in south central Kentucky, just beyond the edge of the Bluegrass region. The county seat, Liberty, is situated on bottomland at a bend of the Green River amid hilly terrain. The rather small courthouse square is located at the junction of two former main roads (one of which now by-passes the town). The square is at the southwest corner of the intersection, so that the courthouse is not approached frontally as is usually the case; this may account for the unusual asymmetrical composition, with the tall tower placed in the northeast corner nearest the intersection (see photo 1 and the United States Geological Survey Map). Most of the public and commercial buildings around the square are modest in scale, many of them having been subject to fires through the years. The square itself has a minimal amount of landscaping with several monuments and plaques within it.

The courthouse is a roughly rectangular two-story brick structure with irregular outline. (There is a low two-story recent addition on the west side.) The main mass of the courthouse rises to a high hipped roof covered with standing-seam metal. The four-story tower is set back from the northeast corner, with the main north entrance porch projecting beside it. The tower rises a full two stories above the main cornice: the first level above the roof probably once housed the town clock, but the large square openings are now filled in with flat panels and louvers. The topmost story is open, with wide segmental arches framed by recessed courses of brick and stone trim. There is a machicolated cornice below the tall pyramidal roof, which flares out slightly at the eaves. On each face of the tower roof is a triangular ventilation opening with scalloped louvers. At the peak is a metal pinnacle that once carried a weathervane.

The rough stone foundations and the double stone band separated by several courses of brick below the second-story windows continue across the tower, but the stone course at second-story impost level is continuous with that of the main north facade but lower than that of the higher mass of the courtroom block. The stone-and-brick course between the second and third stories of the tower is on a level with, but different from, the cornice of the courtroom block. Thus, the tower seems to gain independence upward.

The composition of the main north facade has three major units: the tower on the left, the entrance in the center, and a slightly recessed crow-step gabled pavilion on the right (see photos 1 and 3). The entrance almost seems squeezed between the flanking elements. At the first story is a shallow porch. A bold semicircular arch rests on squat piers with finely carved Romanesque capitals (see photo 4). There is a pierced stone parapet above with pyramidal posts at the corners. The porch continues the brick of the main walls, seeming pierced by the openings and encrusted with massive rough stone voussoirs and quoins of alternating length. The arch of the porch matches that of the entrance, which has more delicate articulation by means of wooden panels, incised lines, and corner bullseyes. Above the porch is a broad window under a segmental arch with defined edge, divided by slender colonnettes.

(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 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 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      1888-89      BUILDER/ARCHITECT      McDonald Brothers

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Casey County Courthouse, constructed in 1888-89, is one of the finest in design of its period in Kentucky, particularly in the use of varied materials. Unusual, too, is the degree of documentation available on every phase of its construction, including the initial planning, hiring of the architect and contractor, the outlay of costs, items purchased, and a review of the completed structure by the architectural firm--the prominent and prolific McDonald Brothers of Louisville.

Casey County is located in south central Kentucky, situated on the border of four of Kentucky's traditional territorial divisions--the Green River country, the Knobs region, the Mississippian plateau, and the Bluegrass. Watered and drained by the Green River and its tributaries, the land is hilly and broken, the soil thin (Guide to Kentucky).

Settlement of the county was similar to that of Lincoln County, of which it was a part until 1806. One of the early settlers was Colonel William Casey, a native of Virginia, who migrated to Kentucky during the Revolutionary War. In 1791 he, along with several other families, moved to Russell's Creek and "there, fifty miles from any other human habitation...built a block-house or station." Although few in numbers they were a "hardy band of pioneers, hopeful, courageous, and poor in the world's wealth" (Perrin, p.658). It was for Colonel Casey the county was named.

Liberty, the county seat, was named by Revolutionary soldiers who came into the area in the 1790s. The town was slow to expand until after the formation of the county and later did experience growth owing to exhaustion of lumbering activities farther up the Green River at Yosemite (Kentucky Advocate, p.7).

The first county court meeting was held on May 14, 1807, at the home of James Swiggert. A few months later, on January 1, 1808, the court again met and "proceeded to fix upon the spot of ground whereon to plan the seat of justice in and for the county of Casey" (Garr, pp. 45,46). According to Garr's history, they decided on the lands of William Bowman on Green River adjoining Richard Northcutt's land as it was the most central and convenient place to lay off two acres of land for public use. A log courthouse was constructed soon after, to be replaced in 1837 by a more substantial brick structure (Garr, pp. 45,46). Information on other, if any, courthouse that preceded the one now in use is not available.

In September 1887, a special court session was called, presided over by county Judge G. W. Raines. The discussion concerned the proposal for construction of a new courthouse, or repairing of the old one. It was decided that a new courthouse

(Continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Casey County." Guide to Kentucky Bicentennial 1974-76. Shelbyville, Ky.: Landmark Community Newspapers, Inc., 1974.  
 The Casey County News, Feb. 13, 1975, p.1; Feb. 6, 1975, pp.1&7; March 6, 1975, pp.1&7; Feb. 27, 1975, p.7.  
 Collins, Lewis and Richard. History of Kentucky, Vol. II. Louisville: John P. Morton & Co. (1874), pp. 123-124.

(Continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

No UTM available.

Latitude 37° 19' 05" <sup>05</sup>

Longitude 85° 56' 26" <sup>24</sup>

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

Fred J. Burkhard; Walter E. Langsam; Architectural Historian  
 ORGANIZATION DATE

Casey County Fiscal Court; Ky. Heritage Commission December 17, 1976  
 STREET & NUMBER TELEPHONE

P. O. Box 104

Liberty, Kentucky, 42539 Frankfort, Kentucky  
 CITY OR TOWN STATE

# 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Cedric W. Neeton*

TITLE

*State Historic Preservation Officer 12-28-76*

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

ATTEST

*Charles A. ...*  
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 KEPTER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*8/29/76*  
 DATE  
*8.23.77*  
 DATE

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Above the cornice is a hipped-roof dormer lower than the adjacent crow-step gable. The latter has three beehive-like stone features on the top step and others at the lowest. In the gable is a small triple window with diamond-pane one-over-one sash under an ogival arch. The arch of the second story in this bay is round, with alternating voussoirs, like those in the courtroom on the east side.

As with most county courthouses, there is a rear entrance in line with the front entrance, in this case marked by a separate gable. The center of the prominent east side has another distinctive treatment (see photo 2). The main block is three units wide with paired windows under slightly pedimented stone lintels flanking a round-arched central window on the first story. This window is set in a slightly projecting wall surface with an implied parapet above. Between the voussoired elliptical arches of the overscaled double windows of the courtroom on the second floor is a plaque inscribed with the date "1888." This is flanked by brick corbels that rise through the machicolated cornice into a gabled feature that frames a tiny lunette with yet another voussoired arch. Between the plaque and the lunette is a brick panel with basket-weave pattern.

The other openings and surface articulations provide still more decorative elements. The windows of the main chambers on the upper floor have transoms divided by horizontal mullions with dentil courses and slender colonnettes. Most of these windows are bordered by small glass panes. The majority of windows of the first-story offices, however, are plain two-over-two-pane sash, although the lintels vary. Other exterior ornamental features includes the handsome wrought-iron railing of the belfry and the pierced iron basement ventilator grills (see photos 1, 5).

The interior arrangements are less unusual than the exterior, in spite of the slightly asymmetrical plan; there is the usual central hall flanked by county offices and the story-and-a-half main courtroom across the second floor. As on the exterior, many of the original structural features remain, despite some modernization and the addition on the west side.

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be built and a committee was appointed to oversee the project. At a meeting on October 25, 1887, the building committee was empowered to employ McDonald (misspelled McDowell in the records) of Louisville as architect (Casey County News, Feb. 6, 1975, p. 1).

The contractor engaged was McCoy and Milbern (perhaps Milburn: conceivably related to Frank P. Milburn, architect of several other important courthouses in Kentucky. See the National Register form for the Fulton County Courthouse, listed April 22, 1976). In February 21, 1889, order book it is recorded that a representative of McDonald Brothers had examined the building and found that all was completed according to contract with a few exceptions: "The cornices on the outside are not exactly in line.... The brickwork on the outside is not uniform in color" along with other minor complaints. However they recommended the building "be received and paid for as a job, with the above exceptions, an unusually good one" (Casey County News, March 6, 1975, pp. 1&7).

Other information contained in the order books reveal that the stone for the foundation came from John William Dockery farm at Poplar Hill and that the stone work was done by Thomas David Dunhauser, a native of Germany. His chief assistant was his son Green Cox (who used his mother's maiden name) (Ibid., p.7).

The Louisville architectural firm chosen by the Casey County court, McDonald Brothers (which consisted at that time of H(arry) P. McDonald (1848-1904) and Kenneth McDonald, Sr. (1852-1940)), was one of the most prolific firms, not only in Kentucky, but in the entire Southeast, their important commissions including structures as far from Louisville as Savannah, Georgia, and New Orleans, Louisiana. Although they designed and supervised the construction of an enormous range of buildings from private residences and churches to factories and tobacco warehouses, they were best-known for their public buildings, especially the county courthouses that were replaced at unprecedented scale and enormous quantities during the last quarter of the 19th century. After some experimentation in the late 1870s, such as the still vaguely Italianate Henry County Courthouse, Kentucky (see the National Register nomination form approved by the State Review Board on October 12, 1975), they developed a standard model employed with slight variations in innumerable examples throughout the 1880s. These include, in Kentucky alone, those in Adair County just southwest of Casey (listed on the National Register August 27, 1974), Hickman County in far western Kentucky (listed on the National Register September 11, 1975), and Carroll County in the northcentral part of the State on the Ohio River. These were angular, vertically massed and articulated structures with a minimum of stylistic reference: even the usual steep mansard-roofed tower over the central courtroom mass had little to do with the lavish Second Empire confections of the late 1860s and 1870s employed by many other architects. The McDonald Brothers model seems calculated expressly to produce an impression of size, height, and almost forbidding rectitude, at minimal cost. Decorative details and such demanding constructive features as curved brick arches and extraneous stone trim are held to the minimum.

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The Casey County Courthouse, coming toward the end of the 1880s, suggests one of at least two routes the firm of McDonald Brothers was taking at that time away from this standard "non-stylistic" (although vaguely Romanesque-inspired) courthouse design of the early 1880s. The structure in itself is definitely "Richardsonian Romanesque," that is, influenced by the Romanesque Revival architecture of H. H. Richardson (1838-1886), the great Boston architect whose works were publicized in an important monograph shortly after his untimely death. The irregular but basically pyramidal massing, the sturdy round and segmental arches, the contrasts in texture all relate to Richardson's influence. On the other hand, the tall tower with its machicolated cornice and steep pyramidal roof suggest other sources in Richardson, such as his early Hampden County Courthouse (1872) in Springfield, Massachusetts. These angular towers may have been associated with the town halls and other fortified watchtowers and campaniles of the early Renaissance, such as that of the famous Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.

It is interesting that Paul Goeldner, author of a doctoral dissertation entitled "Temples of Justice," indicates that, on the basis of his thorough survey of all 19th-century courthouses in Midwestern states (not including Kentucky) and Texas, notes that McDonald Brothers showed a distinct lack of interest in the Richardsonian Romanesque for their courthouses even though they were responsible for the design of a number of other important structures in their personal version of the style. Rather, they seem to have preferred as an alternative in their later courthouses the Baroque Revival manner incorporating Italian, French, English, and perhaps even American Colonial Revival elements in what is often called the Beaux-Arts classical style: significantly, at the very time McDonald Brothers was providing the county fathers at Liberty with the most Richardsonian of the firm's known courthouses in Kentucky, they supplied Boone County in northern Kentucky with another fairly small courthouse, but in a somewhat classicized version of their standard 1880s model. Thus, while the latter represented a new departure that was fully developed in the following decade or two, the Casey County Courthouse apparently was a unique solution for a particular site in a style that was to become a "road not taken."

The design of the Casey County Courthouse is unusual among the courthouses of the McDonald firm in several other respects. As mentioned elsewhere it is asymmetrically composed, with a tall tower at one corner to one side of the main entrance, rather than above or behind it. In other respects, too, the skyline is more active than was usual with McDonald Brothers: a crow-step gable "balances" the tower on the opposite side of the main entrance and a small but elaborate dormer breaks through the corbelled cornice on the east side. Equally unusual is the lavish use of stone trim--in belt-courses, quoins, sills and lintels, keystones, and elsewhere--as well as textured brick effects--pressed brick banding on the tower, several types of corbelling, and

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a basket-weave pattern under the east dormer. Most of the stonework is calculatedly rough-surfaced and contrasts with the smooth brickwork and the delicate trim of the window frames. Moreover, the carving of details, such as the capitals of the entrance piers, is unusually fine. Thus, the Casey County court and their building committee, not only sought, but gained one of the most distinctive and lavishly executed court-houses in Kentucky.



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- "How Casey County Grew." Kentucky Advocate Sunday Magazine, Feb. 8, 1970, p.7.
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