

P110185731

# DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUL 17 1975
DATE ENTERED	AUG 12 1975

## 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

Seelbach Hotel

AND/OR COMMON

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

500 South Fourth Street

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

— VICINITY OF

Third

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Jefferson

CODE

III

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

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Gotham Hotels, Ltd.

STREET & NUMBER

405 Lexington Avenue, Chrysler Building, Room 805

CITY, TOWN

New York

— VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Jefferson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

527 West Jefferson Street

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

STATE

Kentucky

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky

DATE

1971

— FEDERAL  STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Kentucky Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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 Seelbach is a huge block with seemingly endless rows of regularly spaced windows, heavy cornices and round-arched base. It has large areas of wall-surface on which enrichments are dispensed with a lavish hand. The Seelbach belongs to the turn-of-the-century Beaux Arts Baroque with its heavily rusticated masonry base, its conglomerate cornice incorporating the whole top story and its emphatic stone lintels against the warm bricks of the stories housing the hotel rooms.

Though the design reflects Louis Sullivan's division of the wall into functional equivalents of public (base), private (shaft), and utilitarian (capital), the architectural vocabulary is not Sullivan's organic and innovative one, but the historical eclecticism of the Beaux-Arts architects of the period who rejected the Chicago School's inventions. The Seelbach illustrates the Beaux-Arts characteristic of not emphasizing complete originality for individuals, but instead the manipulation of individual forms within a common formal vocabulary, thus often causing a mixture of different styles--Louis XVI, Spanish Renaissance, English Renaissance.

The original hotel covered a lot fronting on 4th Street 136 feet by 105 feet on Walnut Street with a 45-foot court in the center, well-lighted and making every room accessible to light. As the original building did not meet demands an addition was built, bringing the total number of rooms to 350 (later changes expanded the total to 500). This addition occupied an additional 80 feet on 4th Street, running the same depth as the original.

The lower two stories were built of Bowling Green stone, and the remainder of Harvard brick and stone trimming. Marble, bronze, and hardwoods such as mahogany for doors were used in the construction of the Seelbach. Originally paintings decorated the walls of every bedroom. Equipment for each room included a writing desk and a telephone which connected with the Hotel Exchange.

Located at the rear of the building and entirely separated from the hotel proper a power building supplied such stores as Stewart Dry Goods Company, the Ohio Theater, and the Speed Building with heat by means of the most modern and up-to-date mechanical equipment to be found at that time. In the basement of the original Seelbach Hotel and its addition were located engines and dynamos, ice machines, pumps, kitchens, bakery, store-rooms, the help's dining room, incinerator, barber shop, public toilet rooms, and the famous Rathskeller with its Rookwood Pottery and vaulted ceiling.

The ground floor contained boilers and freezing tanks. Here was also found the main dining room, treated in Venetian Renaissance, on the north corner; the lobby in the center; the gentlemen's cafe on the south end with the bar behind it; and the Ladies' Reception Room on the north side.

(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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input 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 type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

1905

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Frank M. Andrews

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Seelbach Hotel opened at 4th and Walnut Streets in May, 1905, in a splendid new fireproof building that stands today. On its opening date, 25,000 people pushed in to see "the most elaborately equipped hostelry in all the South."

The real glory of the Seelbach is hidden in its basement. Now known only as the "Rathskeller," intact but used mainly for conventions, the Rookwood Room is one of the buried treasures of Louisville. The once famous Rookwood Pottery was established in 1881 in Cincinnati. Intended to emulate the achievements of foreign art potteries displayed at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, Rookwood attained an amazingly high standard of quality in hand-decorated pottery almost until its demise after World War II. The production of this pottery was managed on lines opposite the prevailing factory system, as the desire was to attain a higher art rather than a cheaper production. No printing patterns or strict duplicates were made. A spirit of freedom and liberality prevailed in order to cultivate individual artistic feeling among workers employed, most of whom were from the Art Academy of Cincinnati. Decorations were placed upon the moist clay before any firing, the colors being mixed with clay and becoming part of the ware itself. The pieces, after decoration, were fired into biscuit, and various glazes were applied in subsequent firings. These methods, while necessary to produce the beautiful underglaze effects of Rookwood, are rarely used elsewhere, as they increase greatly the risk and expense of manufacture. Rookwood Pottery was used to create whole ensembles of tile-decorated rooms--entries, conservatories, bathrooms, as well as mantelpieces and doorframes.

The Seelbach contains one of the two known surviving Rockwood ensembles on a large scale. Here a series of low vaulted compartments is divided by columns whose capitals turn out to be a ring of pelicans! The outer walls take the form of crenellated tile/battlements with medieval turrets and apple orchards. The ceiling is panelled with mellow but glowing tooled leather, the floor is of earthen-colored tile. The vestibule provides a more delicate touch, with a grandiose but exquisitely tinted and modelled clock--a Gothic gateway in itself. This large clock with its face of tile was presented to the Seelbach by its first president, C. C. Vogt, in 1907, at a cost of more than \$10,000. The whole ensemble is a rare one, and deserves to be restored and reinstated as one of the gems of the city.

The main-floor lobby of the Seelbach, though much altered, retains a grand staircase and a series of murals depicting notable events in Kentucky pioneer history, completed in 1904 by Arthur Thomas. The Courier-Journal called Thomas "the most famous Indian painter in the world" at the time, and his work in the Seelbach is considered to be his greatest effort. The

(Continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Grand Prix, Rookwood Pottery. Cincinnati, Ohio, 1900., and other sources on Rookwood.  
"Louisville Souvenir 1906." (Louisville, 1906), illus. p. 8, p. 96.  
Seelbach Hotel Company, The Seelbach, 1906.  
Thomas, Samuel, ed., Views of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, p. 219.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres  
UTM REFERENCES

UTM OK  
HL

A	1, 6	6, 0, 8	6, 8, 0	4, 2	3, 4	1, 8, 0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		
C						

B						
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		
D						

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

Walter E. Langsam, Coordinator, Designation Program, assisted by Kathy Mullory

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

May, 1972

STREET & NUMBER

401 Wapping Street

TELEPHONE

(502) 564-4476

CITY OR TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

# 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

*Eddred W. Melton*

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

7-14-75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*A.R. Montrose*

DATE

8/17/75

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

*Charles A. ...*

DATE

8.12.75

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

*Acting*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED JUL 17 1975	
DATE ENTERED	AUG 12 1975

Seelbach Hotel, Jefferson County  
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

Leading into the lobby were two doorways, each sheltered by bronze marquees. Two broad corridors of white statuary marble from Italy led to the lobby which is constructed of Lividia marble, inlaid with Skyros marble from Switzerland. The lobby was treated in classic Renaissance while broad pillars of gray marble rose to a paneled ceiling in the center of which was a frosted skylight with a tracery of green leaves. The floor and the clerk's desk were both constructed of marble. The key and letter boxes and the doors leading to the bar and dining room were of mahogany. A water fountain originally located in the lobby was one of the best examples of Rookwood Faience pottery, and the largest piece ever decorated and fired to come out absolutely perfect. Also adorning the walls of the lobby were mural decorations of pioneer days in Kentucky.

The Gentlemen's Cafe was entered from the south corridor or from the bar. Its style was Georgian, a replica of a room in Hampton Court, one of England's famous country seats. The bar, done in Spanish Renaissance, could be entered from the lobby or cafe.

The Ladies' Reception Room, entered from the north or main corridor, was executed in the style of Marie Antoinette.

The second floor of the original hotel contained the laundry, the ladies' parlors, the main banqueting halls, private dining rooms, reception halls, and bridal chambers. The ladies' parlors were Louis XVI in style, the woodwork done in stucco with gold ornamentation. The general color scheme was red, gold, and ivory. The mantelpiece and fireplace were constructed of marble and bronze; the mantel was adorned by a magnificent bronze clock and candelabra. These, together with huge bronze andirons, were antiques of the Louis XVI period. The main banquet hall of the hotel was done in French Renaissance with the walls bright red.

The Gentlemen's Private Dining Room occupied the south end and is almost a continuation of the hall. Italian leather covered the walls. English Renaissance was the dominating style of the Ladies' Private Dining Room. The floor was of polished hardwood and the walls hung in flowered tapestry. Tables were of polished mahogany, and the chairs also, with leather upholstery.

The Reception Hall connected the Ladies' Parlor, state suites, and private dining room. On the walls hung ten paintings by such artists as Metcalf, Breckinridge, Adams, Pothast, and others, and which were exhibited in the World's Fair at St. Louis.

(Continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JUL 17 1975
DATE ENTERED AUG 12 1975

Seelbach Hotel, Jefferson County

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

The walls of the Bridal Suite facing south on the 4th Avenue side were hung in French gray and lavender tapestry, with green carpetry. The furniture was of Circassian walnut and exquisite pattern. The Bridal Suite at the north end employed the Louis XVI style, furnished in mahogany furniture which won first prize at the St. Louis World's Fair.

The third and fourth floors of the hotel were originally used as dormitories for female help; they were large, airy rooms with bathrooms and large sitting rooms.

Located in the front of the mezzanine were writing rooms, stenographers, public telephones, and a billiard hall. In the rear were the officers' dining room, linen rooms, and the auditor's rooms. A broad stairway of solid bronze and Italian marble led the way to the mezzanine from the lobby. The chairs and woodwork here were also of mahogany.

The remaining seven floors consisted of bedrooms, single and en suite, each with a private bath. The French, or Presidential, Suite highlighted the ninth floor, while the grand ballroom was on the tenth floor.

The crown of the building was the Roof Garden. Here the roof was employed as an open-air dining room, adorned by vine-covered trellises. The roof garden on the addition was treated differently from that of the old in that it was covered and enclosed, making it a winter garden as well, arranged in such a way as to be used for an auditorium or assembly hall, having a seating capacity of 600. On the west side was a stage, and located near it were reception, check, and retiring rooms.

The Seelbach Hotel has undergone several changes, some exterior, but mostly interior, since its opening. In 1925, the new owner of the Seelbach spent \$500,000 to modernize the hotel by lowering the main floor of the building to street level and turning the entire ground floor into storerooms. A travel agency, a candy store, and a card store now occupy part of the ground floor. The main dining room was removed from the corner room to be later occupied by Walgreen's Drug Store, a coffee shop, Royal Bank and Trust Company, and presently by Bank of Louisville. The offices of the hotel were moved to the mezzanine. Also located on the mezzanine are business offices. Elevators were installed, and running ice water was piped to every room. The Sheraton Corporation, who bought the hotel in 1956, installed air conditioning and television in all 500 rooms, added new elevators, and renovated the tenth-floor ballroom. In 1948, a granite facing was placed on the first floor of the outside of the building. As part of an air-conditioning project, the ceiling of the hotel's lobby was lowered so that it ran parallel to the floor of the mezzanine. Many of the accessories such as paintings which hung in the bedrooms and on the second floor and

(Continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
JUL 17 1975	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	AUG 12 1975

Seelbach Hotel, Jefferson County

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 4

the mahogany and brass beds have since been removed.

The Power Building, presently in operation, is soon to quit supplying heat to other businesses.

The basement of the Seelbach has been remodeled, the Rathskeller and a barber shop being the only public facilities in use there now. The portion of the basement below the corner room has been blocked off. At the base of the stairs leading from the lobby is a fountain consisting of a small cherubic figure surrounded by greenery.

The murals on the walls of the lobby, though covered in 1960 by metal laths by the Sheraton Corporation, to be covered with white plaster and painted light gray, were uncovered in 1969 and may still be seen. Also in the lobby, the water fountain of Rookwood Pottery has disappeared.

The Gentlemen's Cafe and the Ladies' Reception Room are no longer in use; now on the south side of the lobby is located the Derby Room with its bar.

Many of the private dining rooms, banqueting halls, and parlors still exist but are used for different purposes and have undergone name changes--for example, the Colonial Room, the Oriental Room, the Junior Ball Room, and the Oak Room. The French, or Presidential, Suite still accommodates prominent figures as it did when President Kennedy traveled to Louisville in the early 1960s.

The Roof Garden was closed in 1971 because of the interruption of meals by rain and because of the misfortune of someone tossing a bottle to the street below.

Nevertheless, the structure and much of its spectacular decor survives intact. Its location on the recently completed River City Mall (4th Street from Liberty South to Broadway has been closed to vehicular traffic) gives it great potential for yet another revival.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUL 17 1975
DATE ENTERED	AUG 12 1975

Seelbach Hotel, Jefferson County

CONTINUATION SHEET

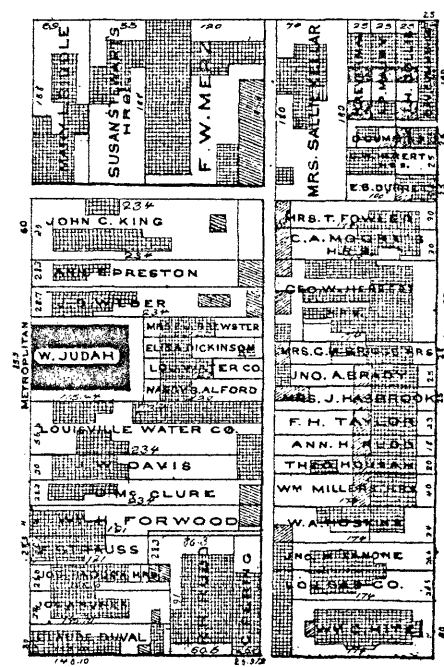
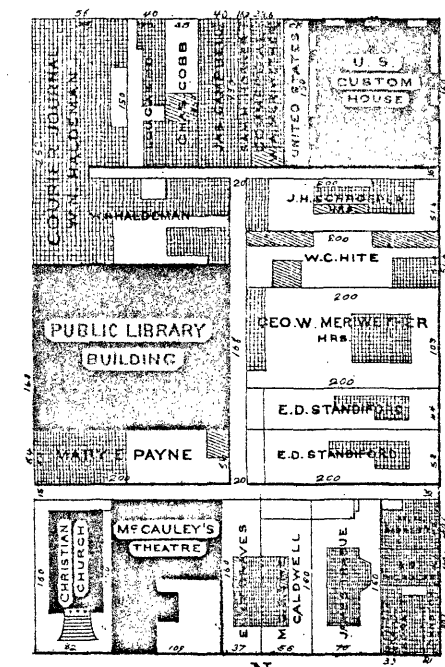
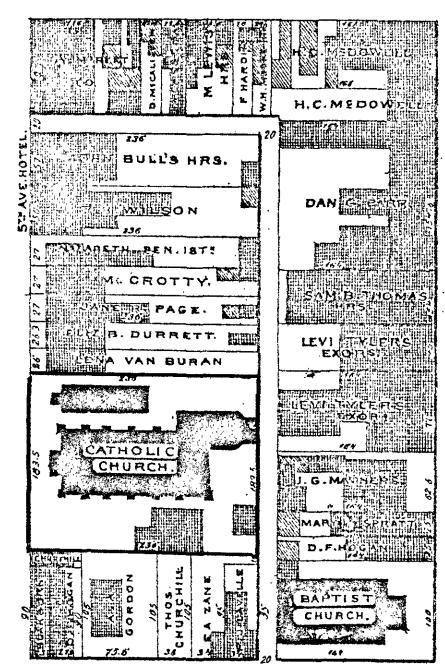
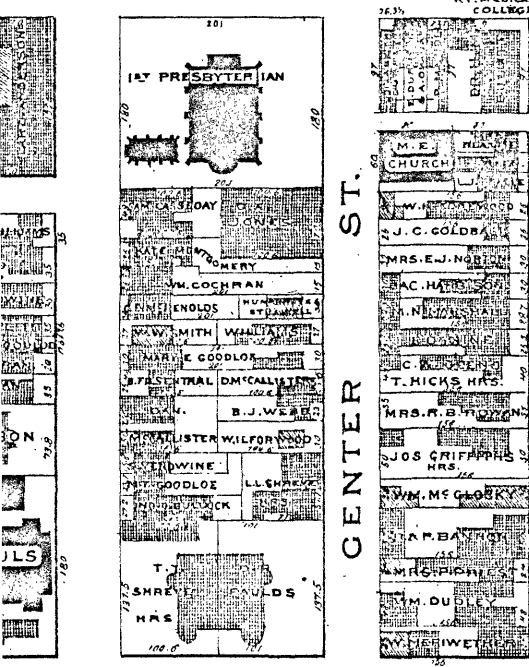
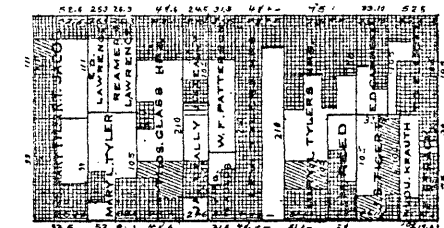
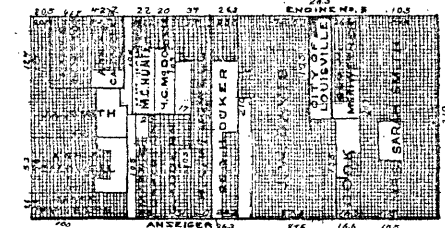
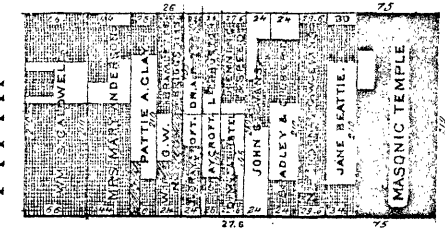
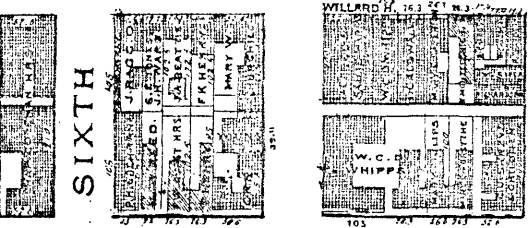
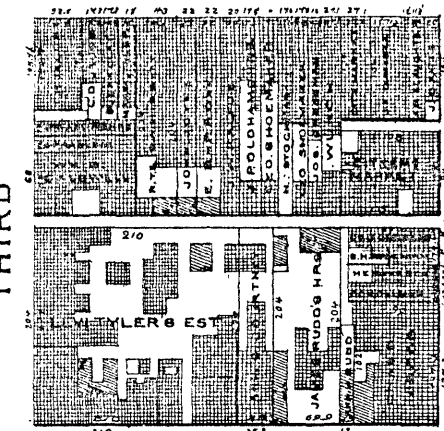
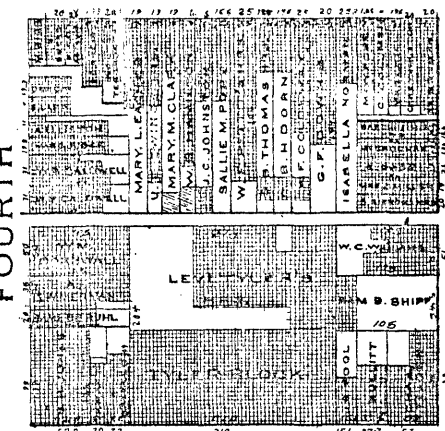
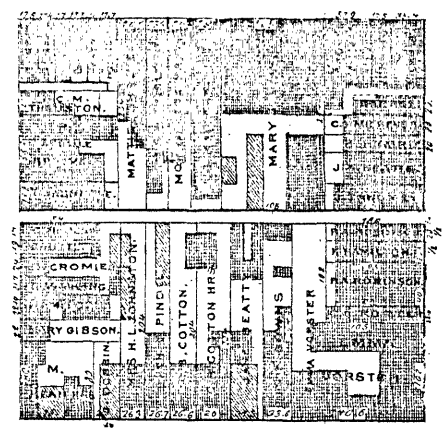
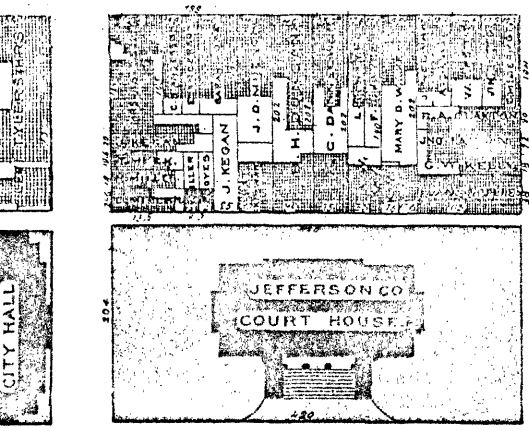
ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

---

murals were executed in life-like tints. The central picture over the clerk's desk is of Colonel Henderson calling the first Legislature of Kentucky to order inside a stockade. On its right is a mural portraying the capture of Daniel Boone by the Indians, next to which is a panel depicting a Negro in a field cultivating tobacco. Another shows General Clark and his men in an attack on Vincennes. On the left side of the desk in a work regarded as the masterpiece, Thomas has illustrated Daniel Boone telling stories by the campfire.

The architect of the Seelbach, Frank M. Andrews, also designed the state capitols of Kentucky and Montana, the Hotel McAlpin in New York, the Arlington Hotel in Washington, D. C., and the George Washington Hotel in Washington, D. C. In 1911 he received a medal for a paper on "American Architecture" which he read that year before a meeting of the Royal Society of Arts in London of which he was a member.





Scale 200 ft. to 1 in. Map No 1.

FOURTH

THIRD

SECOND

SIXTH

FIFTH

CENTER ST.

Cathedral of the Assumption  
Louisville  
Jefferson County  
Kentucky

Atlas of the City of Louisville  
Louisville Abstract and Loan  
Association, No Scale, 1876.

Map 2. Cathedral outlined in  
red.

**JUL 7 1977**

**SEP 21 1977**