

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	DEC 16 1975
DATE ENTERED	MAY 6 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC *W*

Owen County Courthouse and Jail

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

100 North Thomas Street; 102 North Madison Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Owenton

VICINITY OF

Sixth

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Kentucky

021

Owen

187

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
- COMMERICAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Owen County Fiscal Court

STREET & NUMBER

100 North Thomas Street

CITY, TOWN

Owenton

VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Courthouse: Deed Recorded; Jail: Deed Book A

STREET & NUMBER

100 North Thomas Street

CITY, TOWN

Owenton

STATE

Kentucky

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky (Supplement)

DATE

1974

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 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		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Owen County Courthouse and Jail are located on the small courthouse square at the center of the small town of Owenton. The town, unlike many towns in the hilly knob area of north central Kentucky, is set at the top of several converging ridges rather than in the bottom-land of the valleys. The courthouse itself is located at the top of a gentle eminence on a small grass plot bordered by the major streets of the town on which are located modestly scaled commercial buildings. At one corner of the square, at the rear of the courthouse, is the tiny jail, forming part of the enclosure and barely detached from its neighboring shopfronts.

The courthouse is one of the finest of smaller Kentucky Greek Revival temple-form courthouses. The architect is unknown, and the style did form a kind of vernacular that might have allowed a builder to erect even so satisfying a design. The handsome cupola is rather more substantial than many, and the treatment of the panelled sides is simpler but perhaps more effective.

The courthouse is set back on its square, with a small open space in front. The tetrastyle portico is very shallow and high, almost like a stage set; but this allows a more compact relation than usual with the main block of the building, which is considerably deeper than it is wide. The columns are of brick, painted white like the rest of the building above the finely-laid ashlar stone foundation. The columns suggest an unfluted Tuscan Doric order. The entablature is plain but deep; the pediment seems relatively narrow and even undersized, but this allows the cupola above to dominate, as does its short setback behind the shallow portico. The cupola is on a fairly high octagonal pedestal and has a single stage with recessed openings on the four major sides flanked by engaged columns framed by the solid angle faces. There is another deep entablature under the rounded octagonal dome. (At some later date the surface appears to have been shingled.)

The long sides of the courthouse have two stories of windows of similar height framed in recessed panels between implied pilasters that merge with the plain entablature. Pilasters and entablature do, however, continue around the building which has convincingly classical proportions. All the openings have shallow segmental arches except the main central entrance under the portico, which has a full-round arch.

The main portion of the courthouse was built in 1857-58. In 1868, a small one-story wing was added on either side of the front in the first bay down the sides. These mitigate the narrowness of the portico while making it seem larger than it actually is through contrast of scale. The fronts of these wings, which contain the sheriff's and clerks' offices, also have recessed panels to match the side elevations.

One enters the courthouse through the narrow front door, flanked on the outside by pleasant benches for the perennial "courthouse gang," into a very tall shallow hall across the front of the main block that permits access to the wings on either side with steep stairs leading up from the ends to meet in a balcony in the center overhead. The great height of the ceiling,

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

SPECIFIC DATES **courthouse - 1857-58; 1868; jail - 1874-75** BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Owen County was formed in 1819 from parts of Scott, Gallatin and Franklin Counties. Owenton, the county seat, was incorporated in 1828 and is **centrally located**. Although much of the county is hilly, there is rich farmland to the north toward the Ohio River. Although Owenton is still a fairly small town, there are evidences of former prosperity in the fine Victorian mansions on the outskirts and the commercial structures that define the courthouse square.

With its shallow brick portico, strip-pilastered walls, and handsome cupola, the Owen County Courthouse is one of the finest and least disturbed of the smaller Greek Revival courthouses in Kentucky. It was among the last to be built in that style before the Civil War, during which it is said to have served as a barracks for Union soldiers. After the War two small wings were added beside the portico. A decade later the--surprisingly--charming jail was erected on a corner just behind the courthouse. Modest in scale and treatment, it gains some significance as the first known work of one of nearby Louisville's, and the South's, most prominent and prolific turn-of-the century architects, best known for the numerous courthouses his firm designed. Ironically, it was the success of H. P. McDonald's vigorous High Victorian courthouses that definitively displaced the restrained and noble antebellum Grecian temple as the model Kentucky courthouse.

On July 8, 1856, the county court decided to construct the present substantial brick courthouse. The central part of the building was started in 1857 and completed in 1858 by the contractor W. C. Cook. He was paid \$15,909.59 for his work. James A. Rice and a black man named Steve Wess helped him. The Civil War interrupted the construction. The wings were not completed until after the War was over, in 1868.

On June 1, 1862, Owen County was placed under martial law, with Union sympathizers holding county offices. On October 16, the first contingent of Union troops arrived to use the Owen County Courthouse as barracks.

A mass meeting, on September 15, 1873, in the courthouse passed a resolution condemning the Klu Klux movement.

Prominent men from Kentucky and the nation have spoken in the courtroom or from the front porch of the courthouse. Governor J. C.W. Beckham, candidate for senator, spoke January 27, 1914. On July 14, 1917, William Jennings Bryan spoke from the porch to a large crowd. Attorney T. A. Perry, Sr., lent a rug for Bryan to stand on. He asked the crowd to sing "Tenny's Going Dry." Governor Bert Combs brought his government-to-the people and Owenton

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the diagonally ascending stairs, and the large front windows make this quite a dramatic space, also convenient for the regulars in cold weather. Straight ahead lies a narrow central corridor which rises a few steps at either end and leads to the rear entrance. The offices flank this corridor; rest rooms and other services are in the basement reached conveniently under the stairs to the second story.

Aside from a pair of small offices at front and back, almost the entire second story is taken up with a large courtroom the full width of the main block, lined with windows almost down to floor level on both sides. From these is enjoyed a fine view over the commercial buildings that surround the square out to the rolling farmland beyond.

Most of the interior, like the exterior, appears to be unaltered. The plain woodwork is harmonious, although the original black walnut window sashes and panes had to be replaced after a cyclone in 1973. The lightning rod only recently replaced the original. However, the winch which lifted the timber used in the erection of the building is still in the cupola. The double front doors and all the other outside doors were replaced in 1974. The courtroom has an attractive tin ceiling that probably does not date from the original construction but does not spoil the character of the room which has not yet suffered a lowered ceiling, pine panelling, or any of the other gifts of revenue sharing.

The bell in the cupola continues to announce that it is time for court. Before Owenton purchased new fire equipment (a floridly carved stone labelled "Owenton Fire Department/1893" is sunk into the retaining wall surrounding the courthouse square), a fire was proclaimed by the ringing of the courthouse bell. The faster the clapper clanged the worse the fire.

Modern improvement, such as restrooms in the basement, oil heat, hardwood floors laid over the original ones in the 1930s, has not destroyed the original character of the interior.

The jail is an almost cubic brick building set on a considerable slope at the southwest corner of the square opposite the rear of the courthouse. It has three bays with a central entrance over which is set a large plaque proclaiming: "Owen County Jail Erected A.D. 1874." The lower windows are tall and narrow with straight cornices. The upper windows share with the entrance-- and also with the windows of the courthouse-- a gently curved arch. The cornice has well-spaced brackets and an almost flat hipped roof. The flavor of the

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design-- the first known by H.P. McDonald-- is definitely Italianate. The upper and the lower right windows are filled with a honeycomb grill that is both decorative and secure.

The jailer's quarters are on the first floor and at the rear of the jail. There is a small shed to one side, but the jail-- probably considered humane in its day compared to the diminutive but stone-walled jails of many Kentucky county seats-- remains very much today as it was built a century ago.

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became the State Capital April 11, 1963. He and his staff set up temporary headquarters in the Owen County Courthouse.

Thus the courthouse has remained for over a century the center of community life as well as one of the town's links with events and personages of national importance.

The jail is naturally subordinate to the courthouse, but has an unexpected charm of its own, forming a link between the public and private parts of town.

March 1, 1875, Owen County Court appointed Jesse Holbrook, Attila Cox, and H.P. Montgomery a committee to purchase a site for the jail, lot 85, at the price of \$1,000 and to procure the legal title to be made to Owen County Court. The lot was purchased from Duvall and Thomas.

Attila Cox resigned from the building committee on May 24, 1875. John J. Orr was appointed in his place. On July 15, 1875, Joseph L. Gaines and Attila Cox contracted with H.P. Montgomery, Jesse Holbrook, and John J. Orr, the building committee, to build the jail for \$8,992. H.P. McDonald from Louisville, Kentucky, was selected as the architect.

June 28, 1876, the jail was completed at a cost of \$8,992. James E. Lineback, jailer, was ordered to occupy the jail immediately. Since then it has served the county effectively yet attractively.

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Louisville, Chicago: F. A. Battey and Co., 1888, p. 634.

Newcomb, Rexford. Architecture in Old Kentucky. Urbana, Illinois: University of
Illinois Press, 1953, p. 123.

Owen County Clerk Records. Order Book J.