

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH 0143308 DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED JUN 9 1975

DATE ENTERED JUN 18 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

Hancock County Courthouse

AND/OR COMMON

Same

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courthouse Square

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Hawesville

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

STATE

Kentucky

— VICINITY OF

CODE  
021

COUNTY

Hancock

CODE

091

**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

Hancock County Fiscal Court

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Hawesville

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Hancock County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Hawesville

STATE

Kentucky

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky (Supplement)

DATE

1974

— FEDERAL  STATE — COUNTY — LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Kentucky Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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

Hawesville, county seat of Hancock County, lies near a southward bend of the Ohio River, opposite Cannelton in Southern Indiana. At this point the bluffs prevalent along the Kentucky side of the river break apart, allowing access to the shore from the highlands. Here, where there is now a modern bridge--formerly a ferry--lies the town, at the mouth of a small valley. Exhilarating views along the river in both directions contrast to the feeling of enclosure provided by the hills rising above the town itself. At the widest bit of bottomland, adjacent to the stream that formed the valley, is the courthouse square, the center of the small community's life.

Because of the lack of available open space, the courthouse seems to have developed vertically, with its cupola a fine vantage point competing only with the surrounding hills.

The design is attributed to a Robert Boyd of Boston, Massachusetts (there seem to have been many trade connections between New England and the Ohio River towns in western Kentucky in the mid-19th century: the great mills across the river from Hawesville in Cannelton, Indiana, were partially undertaken with financial support from Rhode Island and the magnificent buildings there were designed by Thomas Tefft of Providence, Rhode Island). \*

The courthouse is a rectangular two-and-a-half-story structure five bays long and three wide. There are three gables; two at the ends and one over the slightly projecting central three bays of the north side. All three meet at the square base of the delicate octagonal open cupola. Colossal two-story flat pilasters articulate the brick surfaces vertically. They appear to rest on a stone foundation with a plain string-course, and to support a deep entablature broken only by the attic windows. The gables are outlined by the continuing cornice at their base and have circular openings in their centers. A double belt-course projects from the surface between the main stories, but is discreetly kept shallower than the pilasters.

The first-floor windows are plain rectangles with projecting stone sills and flat lintels; in contrast, the three entrances are arched and recessed. The windows of the second-story courtroom are round-arched like the entrances below, with stone keystones and impost blocks. The profiles of the moldings throughout are refined and "correct," and except for the verticality suggested by the rise of the second-story openings to meet the under side of the entablature, the proportions are classical.

On the north and south sides of the building the entrances lead to a central hall, off which were originally offices (much of the first floor is now occupied by public toilets). The courtroom is reached separately through a steep flight of steps rising straight ahead within the west entrance. It leads directly into the courtroom, which occupies the three eastern bays of the second and third stories. On either side of the staircase on the second floor are smaller rooms, originally retiring chambers for the judge and jury, although one of the two rooms on the third-floor mezzanine has two doors with peepholes--for the use of either the jury or the Masons who at one time rented the topmost story.

(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 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    1859-65

BUILDER/ARCHITECT    Robert (Thomas?) Boyd

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The

Hancock County Courthouse is a structure of singularly tranquil and substantial architectural presence, although created in the midst of the turmoil of the Civil War. It plays a transitional role as well in the architectural history of Kentucky courthouses, between the Greek Revival vogue of the decades before the War, and the bracketted and scrolled Italianate or the flamboyant French Second Empire Mansard of the post-Civil War era often known as the Gilded Age. This handsome structure, built of stone quarried from a nearby hillside and brick kilned on the site, still evokes the Grecian temple, with its fine proportions, chiselled pilasters, and broad gables crowned by a domed cupola. Yet the lack of a horizontal emphasis, as well as of a free-standing portico, the vertical articulation of the surfaces, and the round-arched entrances and upper-story windows, all suggest Italianate influence combined with the Greek.

Hancock County was formed in 1829. Hawesville, the county seat, was incorporated in 1836. It is believed that the first Hancock County Court sessions were held in the Dupuy house in Utility in 1829, although records from the early 1830s refer to "The Hancock County Courthouse in Hawesville." In 1847 Lewis Collins referred to Hawesville as "the seat of justice, . . . situated on the Ohio River, about one hundred and fifty miles from Frankfort. It contains the usual public buildings, a Baptist and a Methodist church, a public and a private school, five lawyers, five physicians, ten stores, one tavern, thirty mechanics' shops, and thirty coal diggers."

The significance of the courthouse to the community is well-conveyed in a recent article by a journalism intern at The Hancock Clarion who sought to overcome the general lack of research materials in the area by resorting to the memories of older citizens. After noting that the few surviving documents on the early history of the courthouse include policies insuring the structure for \$5,000.00 in 1897 and 1900, Marian Turley asks:

What is a building worth today which holds a significant part of Hawesville's and Hancock County's past within its walls? It was in this building that many of the county residents' grandparents and great-grandparents received their high school diplomas at graduation. It was in this building that lovely ladies and dashing young gentlemen danced at gala balls and receptions generations ago. In the courtroom on the second floor men of state, governors and Congressmen, spoke. These events were not so very long ago, Miss Ruth Vance remembers. Miss Vance remembers the balls and receptions; she remembers the excitement and thrills often associated with the courthouse. She remembers when every teacher in the county was required

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# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Lewis Collins, History of Kentucky. Maysville, Ky.: Lewis Collins, 1847.  
 Charles A. Clinton, "A History of Hancock County, Kentucky." Hawesville, n.d.  
 Paul Kenneth Goeldner, "Temples of Justice: Nineteenth Century Courthouses in the Midwest and Texas." Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Fine Arts, Columbia University, New York, 1970. P. 455 (on Thomas Boyd).

(continued)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM OK  
HL

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	5,2,2,0,3,0	4,1,9,4,16, <sup>3</sup> 4,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ms. Tanya Gritz, Human Resources Planner

(WEL)

ORGANIZATION

Green River Area Development District

DATE

March, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 628

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Owensboro

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.

SIGNATURE

*Cedric W. Milton*

TITLE

*State Historic Preservation Officer*

DATE

*6/3/75*

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

*6/18/75*

ATTEST:

*[Signature]*

DATE

*JUN 17 1975*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Hancock County Courthouse

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The courtroom is one of the handsomest and least altered from the original condition of any in Kentucky. It, too, is handsomely proportioned, with high (two-story) ceiling and well-scaled windows. These have refined Greek Revival frames, "eared" above and "kneed" below, with horizontal molded cornice at the top. The main entrance from the stairhall has had a pediment as well. There is a wooden dado with round-arched dividers around the room. The special feature of the courtroom is the (no doubt original) castiron balustrade dividing the judicial actors from the spectators, and the castiron supports of the benches for the latter. These are gracefully shaped with classical details such as anthemias (honeysuckle motifs), with rivets and small holes for lightness functionally incorporated into the decorative design.

The cupola contains a fine bell labeled "J. Collingridge. Bell Foundry. Louisville, Kentucky, 1846." It is said to have been brought from the first Hancock County Courthouse which was located in a nearby town called Utility, although Ms. Turley's research indicates that court was being held in Hawesville a decade before that date.

\*It is possible that there is a confusion between this "Robert Boyd of Boston, Massachusetts" and Thomas Boyd of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Thomas designed a number of courthouses in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky. The date of his birth is apparently not known, but the earliest recorded courthouse designed by him--the gaudy Second Empire building in Georgetown, Scott County, Kentucky--dates from 1877. The change in styles over more than a decade would probably account for the differences between the Hancock and Scott County designs, for instance, but the name "Boyd" is common enough that the local accounts referring to "Robert" may well be accurate and simply refer to another, otherwise unknown architect.

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to attend a "workshop" held at the courthouse each summer to be eligible to teach the next year. Miss Ruth remembers when any event of consequence was to be held it was, as a matter of course, conducted within the confines of the courthouse.

In 1936, Cecilia Laswell, a Kentucky historian, wrote: "For Hawesville is a typical old fashioned southern county seat with life centering around its courthouse." Ms. Laswell also described the courthouse bell tower by saying ". . . on the East corner of the courthouse there is a quaint little house with a tiny steeple on top and a bell. . . ." It was her understanding that the bell was used as a fire alarm. When a fire was spotted, someone would run to the courthouse, climb to the top and frantically ring the bell until the townsmen all appeared to fight the fire.

Miss Vance could remember purposes of the bell tower even further back. She recalled talk of when the bell tower was used as a look-out for Civil War "guerillas." There is, in fact, a statement in a court record which reads: "The Hancock Circuit Court of February Term 1865 of the Hancock Circuit is hereby disferred with on account of the dangerous arising from the proximity of Guerrillas and other aminies of the Government. . . ." James Stuart, Circuit Judge.

"What is it Worth?" (The Hancock Clarion, January 30, 1975).

The Civil War, which marked the earliest years of the courthouse, was one of the great events in the history of Hawesville and Hancock County. The area was caught between the Kentuckian's Southern Sympathies abetted by Confederate guerillas inspired by General John Hunt Morgan and his "Raiders" from the south, and Union troops protecting the vital industries just across the Ohio River in Cannelton and other Indiana towns.

More than a century later--a century of relatively little activity on the Kentucky side of the Ohio--Hancock County has recently become a focal point of the rapidly increasing industrialization of the Ohio River Valley. The economic boost this has given to the community not only provides great pressure for "progress" already in some cases devastating to both the natural and the manmade environment, but paradoxically has also supplied some of the county's citizens and leaders with both newfound means and revived incentive to recognize and preserve the area's heritage. The proposed restoration and adaptation of the present Hancock County Courthouse is a crucial issue and symbol of this decade's conflicts and opportunities.

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- Elizabeth Headley Garr, The History of Kentucky Courthouses. Frankfort: The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1972.
- "Court House . . . Remodel with Annex or Tear it Down, Rebuild . . ." The Hancock Clarion (Hawesville, Thursday, December 19, 1974).
- "Fiscal Court Applies for Federal Funds for Court House Renovation," The Hancock Clarion (Thursday, January 16, 1975).
- Marian Turley, "How Old Is It: Sketchy is Best Word to Describe History of Court House," The Hancock Clarion (Thursday, January 23, 1975).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "What Is It Worth?" The Hancock Clarion (Thursday, January 30, 1975).