

PH 0501077

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

JUL 14 1977

DATE ENTERED

JAN 9 1978

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Colonel Thomas Deye Owings House

AND/OR COMMON

Owings House/Owingsville Banking Company Building

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Main Street and Courthouse Square

-- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Owingsville

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

07

-- VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Bath

CODE

011

**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 (bank)  
 YES: UNRESTRICTED  
 NO (house)

## PRESENT USE

 AGRICULTURE  
 COMMERCIAL  
 EDUCATIONAL  
 GOVERNMENT  
 INDUSTRIAL  
 MILITARY  
 MUSEUM  
 PARK  
 PRIVATE RESIDENCE  
 RELIGIOUS  
 SCIENTIFIC  
 TRANSPORTATION  
 OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Mrs. Frank Stamper, house; Owingsville Banking Company, bank

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Main Street; Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Owingsville

-- VICINITY OF

STATE

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

Bath County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Owingsville

STATE

Kentucky

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky (Supplement)

DATE

house, 1972; bank, 1975

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY 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 Colonel Thomas Deye Owings House occupies a prominent position on the northeast corner of Main Street and South Court in the center of Owingsville. Constructed between 1811-14, the attribution for its design has traditionally gone to B. H. Latrobe. When erected, the mansion consisted of a single huge rectangular block with a high roof punctuated only by two giant chimneys on the roof-ridge which provide structural support (see photo 2).

The main facade facing Main Street had only five bays, spaced symmetrically against expanses of bare brick walls laid in Flemish bond. The central feature is a combination of a Palladian window over an entrance with double doors flanked by sidelights and surmounted by a great semicircular fanlight. The number of panes in the rectangular windows has been reduced, and only one of their wooden shutters remains.

The original east wall facing South Court and the Bath County Courthouse on the opposite side was also plain, but had, at least in the photograph taken at the turn of the century, more closely spaced openings. Two tall windows in each gable end lit the enormous space of the full third story, and at this time there was a second-story balcony linking the two windows at the northeast corner.

Alterations were made to the northeast corner of the mansion around 1905 to adapt it as a bank and differentiate the east third of the building from the remainder (which is still a private residence with a modernized apartment above, except for the lower right parlor which is in use as an office with a separate outside entrance--originally a window) (see photo 1). A huge cornice with over-scaled brackets and a raised segmental-arched panel in the center was superimposed on the roof facing Main Street. There is a paneled parapet and emphatic dentillation among other late Victorian features. Angular hood-molds were applied over the second-story windows, and a handsome Néogrec-detailed armature of cast iron was installed on the first floor; broad piers at the corners, slender ones between. In recent years, picture windows and a glass-filled vestibule have also been added on the east side. Similarly, an incompatible metal awning separates the main entrance from its fanlight and another covers the stoop of the office to the right.

(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 checked="" 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 1811-14; bank altered 1905

BUILDER/ARCHITECT attributed to B. H. Latrobe

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Owings House was one of the earliest and most ambitious mansions of the outer Bluegrass region of Kentucky. Attributed without known evidence to the architect B. H. Latrobe, the design is not only bold in scale but also handsome in the use of Federal features, which include a superb spiral staircase. The house was built under unique circumstances for one of the great entrepreneurs of Kentucky's early history, Colonel Thomas Deye Owings (1776-1853), who made (and lost) a fortune based on the production, manufacture, and the distribution of iron and salt--the former as owner and developer of the first charcoal-blast iron furnace west of the Alleghenies and the most successful of a number of early furnaces that made Kentucky the chief source of western iron for some 30 years thereafter. (See the National Register nomination form for the Bourbon Iron Works.) Since it was completed about 1814 the building has had an interesting history, combining continued residential use with a series of other functions, serving as statecoach stop and hotel, bank, and office space. Although the prominent corner portion was extensively remodelled for commercial purposes at the turn of the century, the careful observer can still discern within the whole block the impressive design that, according to tradition, won for Colonel Owings the naming of Owingsville after himself and his mansion.

Bath County, on the northeastern fringe of the Bluegrass area of central Kentucky, was formed in 1811 out of Montgomery County. The new county seat, as yet unnamed, was hardly a town, just a few modest houses (several of which survive within a block of the Owings mansion) on a dramatic plateau with views down into extensive (and mineral-rich) valleys. It is said that Colonel Owings and the father of Richard H. Menifee (a native son of the area known as the "Patrick Henry of the West"), who between them owned most of the land around, vied for the honor of having the town named after him. After much wrangling it was decided that whichever built the finer residence in the shorter time would receive the honor. Colonel Owings won, apparently on both scores. (Menifee died almost a pauper two years later.) Owings' decision to erect such an ambitious residence may also have been related to the death of his father in 1810 and perhaps the establishment of the town of Owingsville as county seat in 1811.

Thomas Deye Owings was born on March 6, 1776, at the ancestral home of his mother's family, the Colgates near Baltimore. His father, John Cockey Owings, came to Kentucky from Maryland and between December 11, 1782, and June 17, 1784, acquired a total of 45,800 acres in Fayette County, 10,000 of which were located

(continued)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Atlas of Bath and Fleming Counties, Kentucky. Philadelphia: D. J. Lake & Co., 1884.  
 Coleman, J. Winston, Jr. "Old Kentucky Iron Furnaces." The Filson Club History Quarterly, Volume XXXI (July 1957), pp. 354-358.  
 Hamlin, Talbot. Benjamin Henry Latrobe. New York: Oxford University Press, 1955.  
 Kilpatrick, Lewis H. "Historic Owingsville." Kentucky Magazine, 1.3(August 1917), pp. 316-23.  
 (continued)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1/2 acre  
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1 7	2 5 7 7 0 0	4 2 2 5 2 3 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
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Walter E. Langsam, Architectural Historian	DK
ORGANIZATION Kentucky Heritage Commission	DATE July 1977
STREET & NUMBER 104 Bridge Street	TELEPHONE (502) 564-3741
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.

SIGNATURE *Edred W. Melton*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer DATE 7-8-77

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE 1.9.78
ATTEST: <i>Charles H. ...</i>	KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER DATE 1.6.78
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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Colonel Thomas Deye Owings House

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

In spite of these exterior intrusions--some remediable, others perhaps with sufficient character of their own to justify the juxtaposition--the grandeur of the original mansion shows through.

The interior of the Owings House consisted of large rooms on the two main floors with a full basement and third-story attic. When used as a hotel in the 19th century, though, many substantial partitions were put up that split the main rooms and halls. An unusual feature for a Kentucky residence were the fireplaces which were back-to-back between each pair of rooms on both sides. Of the original mantels, four survive and are characterized by delicate Adamesque detail (see photo 4). In a similar fashion, the arches dividing the lower-level hall are daintily treated (see photos 5 and 6).

Connecting the three levels at the rear of the central halls is a superb spiral staircase of generous scale, but having details that are delicate and linear in effect (see photos 7, 8, and 9). Its steps are wide, deep and shallow, and the flights are slightly less than a full circle. A slender, cylindrical cherry handrail runs uninterrupted from the spiral newel to the third floor. The shaped spindles are extremely slender, and every 12th or 14th of these is of iron said to have been cast at the Bourbon Ironworks (listed on the National Register September 1, 1976) outside Owingsville, an enterprise that Colonel Owings managed. The whole staircase--no doubt cantilevered from the curved wall--is of minimal thickness, with exceptional continuity and harmony of line.

Through the remainder of the house woodwork of black locust is discreet but consistent in scale and detail. The baseboards are low and the third-floor door frames are plain standard Federal in character. An underground tunnel exits from the southwest to a garden and family cemetery behind the house. According to tradition, there was an early dumb waiter from the basement kitchen to the dining room above. No outbuildings have survived or are known to have existed. Such, however, would have seemed necessary despite the residence's being a virtually self-contained block.

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Owings, Colonel Thomas Deye, House

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in the present Bath County. In May 1791 John C. Owings, with several others, purchased 75% of Jacob Myers' lands on Slate Creek on which two months earlier Myers had begun construction of the small furnace that was to become the epoch-making Bourbon Iron Works. When Myers withdrew from the company, known as John Cockey Owings and Co., in March 1792, Thomas D. Owings was requested by his father to come to Kentucky and assume management of the works. Young Owings gained controlling interest of the joint-stock company during a reorganization in 1795, and it was under his aegis that the early iron industry in Kentucky reached its greatest peak, particularly during the War of 1812, when Owings is believed to have provided cannonballs for General Andrew Jackson's New Orleans campaigns.

In 1798 the owners of the Bourbon Iron Works built Slate Forge on Slate Creek three miles above the furnace, to convert its pig iron into bar iron and blooms. Owings also acquired from Joe Harrison another forge which he renamed the "Maria Forge" in honor of Maria Nicholas, a daughter of the Honorable George Nicholas, whom he had married in 1803. Two additional rich banks of ore were opened up at Howard Hill Bank and Block House Bank, and the furnace enlarged to permit an output of three tons of iron a day, largely for the New Orleans trade. Owings' other enterprises included a gristmill, blacksmith shop, and general store near the furnace. He was also probably instrumental in the construction of the Iron Works Pike, which carried the products of the iron industry from Owingsville southwest through Fayette County to Frankfort and the Kentucky River, although the Licking River to the east also permitted convenient transportation. He was also one of the organizers and one of the largest stockholders in the first bank established in Bath County. Thus, it would appear that Owings was an all-round entrepreneur, controlling all phases of production, distribution, and financing.

Unfortunately, a decade after constructing his Owingsville mansion, Owings went into bankruptcy (perhaps as the result of the general over-extension of credit resulting from the boycott of British goods during the War of 1812, although it has also been suggested that by 1820 his production methods were technologically obsolete). The works were purchased by a consortium that included Henry Clay, one of Owings' many influential and distinguished friends, who included Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, General Spotswood of Virginia, and even Louis Philippe of France who is said to have visited the Owings House and Bourbon Furnace in 1814-1815. Owings himself was elected a State Representative from newly formed Bath County for four terms, and was its first State Senator. He also served as an Associate Circuit Judge, Justice of the Peace, and Sheriff of the county.

(continued)

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Colonel Owings' military title seems also to have been well deserved. According to Richards (from whom much of the information above is derived),

He organized and trained at his own expense the 28th Infantry for service in the War of 1812. These men, numbering 377, he erected cabins for, fed, clothed, housed and trained at the Olympian Springs [a spa near Owingsville and the Bourbon Iron Works], and thereafter they fought under the command of General William H. Harrison in the northwest and on the Great Lakes in 1813-1814.... Colonel Owings received his commission as a Colonel in 1813 and with these men joined General Harrison's army in September 1813. The troops landed at Malden on September 27th and took possession of Detroit on the 29th without any serious opposition. On October 6th these troops, under the command of General Harrison crossed the River Thames and pursued General Proctor, who after a few days retreated to the Moravian towns on the Thames River, 86 miles northwest of Detroit, where a severe battle took place in which the Indian chief Tecumseh was killed. Colonel Owings and 28 of his men are credited with assisting Commodore Perry in his victory in 1815, it being stated that Owings with these men as sharpshooters were placed in the rigging of one of the ships of the fleet under the command of Perry.

After his bankruptcy Owings eventually emigrated to Texas, where he continued his military endeavors, fighting in the war for Texas independence in 1836. He died at Brenham, Texas, in 1853, at the age of 77 years.

It would appear that the advantageous location led to the use of the corner third of the mansion for non-residential purposes quite early. As mentioned above, Colonel Owings himself participated in the founding of a Bank of Owingsville that may well have been operated from his house. The "Owings House" is said to have been used as a stagecoach stop from about 1826 throughout the nineteenth century. It was the local stopover for Olympian Springs (mud bath), the famous Bath County spa, where many prominent citizens assembled to "dry out" their consumption of alcohol as well as for medicinal purposes.

It is believed that T.J. Lee operated a bank in the corner rooms before it collapsed in 1892. Joseph Richards (1845-1904), a drygoods merchant from Maryland, opened there in May 1893 the bank his heirs still own.

A fire about 1890 affected the interior of the corner of the building. In 1905 the corner third was extensively remodelled in late Victorian fashion to provide a rather handsome

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ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

castiron front on the first story of the corner. At this time the eastern peak of the roof was removed and an elaborate metal cornice added to distinguish the bank from the remainder of the structure. Other changes to the Victorian front have been made recently, and the lower right (west) parlor has been converted into an office with a separate entrance on Main Street. A substantial amount of the center and upper western parts of the house remains in residential use, however, and the whole structure is still a source of tremendous pride to the community in which Colonel Owings played such a formative role.

The attribution of the Owings House to the famous Anglo-American architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820), a protégé of Thomas Jefferson, is as yet unsubstantiated, although based on long-standing local tradition. The Owings family's Maryland origins, and the better-documented tradition that Owings met Louis Philippe on a trip to Baltimore in 1814 (Kilpatrick, "Louis Philippe," p.377) make it plausible that Colonel Owings may have met Latrobe and acquired a plan and drawings for a house from him while there.

During his years in Washington, D.C., 1807-1813, Latrobe and his wife "had what was virtually a salon" (Hamlin, p.314). During these years Latrobe was also active in Baltimore, particularly in connection with the designs for the great Baltimore (Roman Catholic) Cathedral and the Baltimore Exchange (with Maximilien Godefroy; see the National Register form for the St. Thomas Church, near Bardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky).

Moreover, Latrobe did design several known structures for Kentucky, including Senator John Pope's House in Lexington (not to be confused with his later residences in Washington County; see Hamlin, pp.105-106, on the Lexington house) and in 1817 a United States arsenal for Lexington whose design, sent to Pope, may have been executed later in Frankfort (not the present Arsenal). He also designed the wings of Owings' friend Henry Clay's house Ashland (pp.381-82), as well as a row of tenement houses and shops in Lexington (p.418) and in 1812 a dormitory for Transylvania College at Clay's behest (p.350). Thus, there were plenty of possible contacts between Baltimore and Kentucky, Latrobe and Owings.

On the other hand, a number of houses in Kentucky, such as the Hunt-Morgan House in Lexington, have been attributed to Latrobe solely on the basis of their fine spiral staircases like that of the Owings House -- a type traditionally associated with his name. Few or no such staircases, however, appear in his known works, which are unusually well documented and published by Talbot Hamlin in his admirable

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biography of Latrobe. Full publication of Latrobe's papers is in progress, however, and investigation of them may cast further light on the architect's work in Kentucky (said also to include a house built for General James Taylor in Newport about 1812; see the National Register form on Taylor's later mansion).

#9 Continued

\_\_\_\_\_, "Louis Philippe in Owingsville." Kentucky Magazine, I, 4 (September 1917), pp.375-84.

Richards, John Adair. A History of Bath County, Kentucky. Yuma, Arizona: Southwest Printers, 1961.

Thomas, Elizabeth Patterson. Old Kentucky Homes and Gardens. Louisville: The Standard Printing Co., 1939, pp.172-73.

Additional information supplied by Mrs. Ella Lewis Richards and James Morrill Richards.

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Owings House was one of the earliest and most ambitious mansions of the outer Bluegrass region of Kentucky. Attributed without known evidence to the architect B. H. Latrobe, the design is not only bold in scale but also handsome in the use of Federal features, which include a superb spiral staircase. The house was built under unique circumstances for one of the great entrepreneurs of Kentucky's early history, Colonel Thomas Deye Owings (1776-1853), who made (and lost) a fortune based on the production, manufacture, and the distribution of iron and salt--the former as owner and developer of the first charcoal-blast iron furnace west of the Alleghenies and the most successful of a number of early furnaces that made Kentucky the chief source of western iron for some 30 years thereafter. (See the National Register nomination form for the Bourbon Iron Works.) Since it was completed about 1814 the building has had an interesting history, combining continued residential use with a series of other functions, serving as statecoach stop and hotel, bank, and office space. Although the prominent corner portion was extensively remodelled for commercial purposes at the turn of the century, the careful observer can still discern within the whole block the impressive design that, according to tradition, won for Colonel Owings the naming of Owingsville after himself and his mansion.

Bath County, on the northeastern fringe of the Bluegrass area of central Kentucky, was formed in 1811 out of Montgomery County. The new county seat, as yet unnamed, was hardly a town, just a few modest houses (several of which survive within a block of the Owings mansion) on a dramatic plateau with views down into extensive (and mineral-rich) valleys. It is said that Colonel Owings and the father of Richard H. Menifee (a native son of the area known as the "Patrick Henry of the West"), who between them owned most of the land around, vied for the honor of having the town named after him. After much wrangling it was decided that whichever built the finer residence in the shorter time would receive the honor. Colonel Owings won, apparently on both scores. (Menifee died almost a pauper two years later.) Owings' decision to erect such an ambitious residence may also have been related to the death of his father in 1810 and perhaps the establishment of the town of Owingsville as county seat in 1811.

Thomas Deye Owings was born on March 6, 1776, at the ancestral home of his mother's family, the Colgates near Baltimore. His father, John Cockey Owings, came to Kentucky from Maryland and between December 11, 1782, and June 17, 1784, acquired a total of 45,800 acres in Fayette County, 10,000 of which were located

(continued)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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 Coleman, J. Winston, Jr. "Old Kentucky Iron Furnaces." The Filson Club History Quarterly, Volume XXXI (July 1957), pp. 354-358.  
 Hamlin, Talbot. Benjamin Henry Latrobe. New York: Oxford University Press, 1955.  
 Kilpatrick, Lewis H. "Historic Owingsville." Kentucky Magazine, 1.3(August 1917), pp. 316-23.  
 (continued)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1/2 acre  
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1 7	2 5, 7 7, 0, 0	4, 2 2, 5 2, 3, 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
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Walter E. Langsam, Architectural Historian

DK

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

July 1977

STREET & NUMBER

104 Bridge Street

TELEPHONE

(502) 564-3741

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.

SIGNATURE

*Edred W. Melton*

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

7-8-77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

ATTEST:

*Charles H. ...*  
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

1.9.78

DATE

1.6.78

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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Colonel Thomas Deye Owings House

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In spite of these exterior intrusions--some remediable, others perhaps with sufficient character of their own to justify the juxtaposition--the grandeur of the original mansion shows through.

The interior of the Owings House consisted of large rooms on the two main floors with a full basement and third-story attic. When used as a hotel in the 19th century, though, many substantial partitions were put up that split the main rooms and halls. An unusual feature for a Kentucky residence were the fireplaces which were back-to-back between each pair of rooms on both sides. Of the original mantels, four survive and are characterized by delicate Adamesque detail (see photo 4). In a similar fashion, the arches dividing the lower-level hall are daintily treated (see photos 5 and 6).

Connecting the three levels at the rear of the central halls is a superb spiral staircase of generous scale, but having details that are delicate and linear in effect (see photos 7, 8, and 9). Its steps are wide, deep and shallow, and the flights are slightly less than a full circle. A slender, cylindrical cherry handrail runs uninterrupted from the spiral newel to the third floor. The shaped spindles are extremely slender, and every 12th or 14th of these is of iron said to have been cast at the Bourbon Ironworks (listed on the National Register September 1, 1976) outside Owingsville, an enterprise that Colonel Owings managed. The whole staircase--no doubt cantilevered from the curved wall--is of minimal thickness, with exceptional continuity and harmony of line.

Through the remainder of the house woodwork of black locust is discreet but consistent in scale and detail. The baseboards are low and the third-floor door frames are plain standard Federal in character. An underground tunnel exits from the southwest to a garden and family cemetery behind the house. According to tradition, there was an early dumb waiter from the basement kitchen to the dining room above. No outbuildings have survived or are known to have existed. Such, however, would have seemed necessary despite the residence's being a virtually self-contained block.

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in the present Bath County. In May 1791 John C. Owings, with several others, purchased 75% of Jacob Myers' lands on Slate Creek on which two months earlier Myers had begun construction of the small furnace that was to become the epoch-making Bourbon Iron Works. When Myers withdrew from the company, known as John Cockey Owings and Co., in March 1792, Thomas D. Owings was requested by his father to come to Kentucky and assume management of the works. Young Owings gained controlling interest of the joint-stock company during a reorganization in 1795, and it was under his aegis that the early iron industry in Kentucky reached its greatest peak, particularly during the War of 1812, when Owings is believed to have provided cannonballs for General Andrew Jackson's New Orleans campaigns.

In 1798 the owners of the Bourbon Iron Works built Slate Forge on Slate Creek three miles above the furnace, to convert its pig iron into bar iron and blooms. Owings also acquired from Joe Harrison another forge which he renamed the "Maria Forge" in honor of Maria Nicholas, a daughter of the Honorable George Nicholas, whom he had married in 1803. Two additional rich banks of ore were opened up at Howard Hill Bank and Block House Bank, and the furnace enlarged to permit an output of three tons of iron a day, largely for the New Orleans trade. Owings' other enterprises included a gristmill, blacksmith shop, and general store near the furnace. He was also probably instrumental in the construction of the Iron Works Pike, which carried the products of the iron industry from Owingsville southwest through Fayette County to Frankfort and the Kentucky River, although the Licking River to the east also permitted convenient transportation. He was also one of the organizers and one of the largest stockholders in the first bank established in Bath County. Thus, it would appear that Owings was an all-round entrepreneur, controlling all phases of production, distribution, and financing.

Unfortunately, a decade after constructing his Owingsville mansion, Owings went into bankruptcy (perhaps as the result of the general over-extension of credit resulting from the boycott of British goods during the War of 1812, although it has also been suggested that by 1820 his production methods were technologically obsolete). The works were purchased by a consortium that included Henry Clay, one of Owings' many influential and distinguished friends, who included Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, General Spotswood of Virginia, and even Louis Philippe of France who is said to have visited the Owings House and Bourbon Furnace in 1814-1815. Owings himself was elected a State Representative from newly formed Bath County for four terms, and was its first State Senator. He also served as an Associate Circuit Judge, Justice of the Peace, and Sheriff of the county.

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Colonel Owings' military title seems also to have been well deserved. According to Richards (from whom much of the information above is derived),

He organized and trained at his own expense the 28th Infantry for service in the War of 1812. These men, numbering 377, he erected cabins for, fed, clothed, housed and trained at the Olympian Springs [a spa near Owingsville and the Bourbon Iron Works], and thereafter they fought under the command of General William H. Harrison in the northwest and on the Great Lakes in 1813-1814.... Colonel Owings received his commission as a Colonel in 1813 and with these men joined General Harrison's army in September 1813. The troops landed at Malden on September 27th and took possession of Detroit on the 29th without any serious opposition. On October 6th these troops, under the command of General Harrison crossed the River Thames and pursued General Proctor, who after a few days retreated to the Moravian towns on the Thames River, 86 miles northwest of Detroit, where a severe battle took place in which the Indian chief Tecumseh was killed. Colonel Owings and 28 of his men are credited with assisting Commodore Perry in his victory in 1815, it being stated that Owings with these men as sharpshooters were placed in the rigging of one of the ships of the fleet under the command of Perry.

After his bankruptcy Owings eventually emigrated to Texas, where he continued his military endeavors, fighting in the war for Texas independence in 1836. He died at Brenham, Texas, in 1853, at the age of 77 years.

It would appear that the advantageous location led to the use of the corner third of the mansion for non-residential purposes quite early. As mentioned above, Colonel Owings himself participated in the founding of a Bank of Owingsville that may well have been operated from his house. The "Owings House" is said to have been used as a stagecoach stop from about 1826 throughout the nineteenth century. It was the local stopover for Olympian Springs (mud bath), the famous Bath County spa, where many prominent citizens assembled to "dry out" their consumption of alcohol as well as for medicinal purposes.

It is believed that T.J. Lee operated a bank in the corner rooms before it collapsed in 1892. Joseph Richards (1845-1904), a drygoods merchant from Maryland, opened there in May 1893 the bank his heirs still own.

A fire about 1890 affected the interior of the corner of the building. In 1905 the corner third was extensively remodelled in late Victorian fashion to provide a rather handsome

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castiron front on the first story of the corner. At this time the eastern peak of the roof was removed and an elaborate metal cornice added to distinguish the bank from the remainder of the structure. Other changes to the Victorian front have been made recently, and the lower right (west) parlor has been converted into an office with a separate entrance on Main Street. A substantial amount of the center and upper western parts of the house remains in residential use, however, and the whole structure is still a source of tremendous pride to the community in which Colonel Owings played such a formative role.

The attribution of the Owings House to the famous Anglo-American architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820), a protégé of Thomas Jefferson, is as yet unsubstantiated, although based on long-standing local tradition. The Owings family's Maryland origins, and the better-documented tradition that Owings met Louis Philippe on a trip to Baltimore in 1814 (Kilpatrick, "Louis Philippe," p.377) make it plausible that Colonel Owings may have met Latrobe and acquired a plan and drawings for a house from him while there.

During his years in Washington, D.C., 1807-1813; Latrobe and his wife "had what was virtually a salon" (Hamlin, p.314). During these years Latrobe was also active in Baltimore, particularly in connection with the designs for the great Baltimore (Roman Catholic) Cathedral and the Baltimore Exchange (with Maximilien Godefroy; see the National Register form for the St. Thomas Church, near Bardstown, Nelson County, Kentucky).

Moreover, Latrobe did design several known structures for Kentucky, including Senator John Pope's House in Lexington (not to be confused with his later residences in Washington County; see Hamlin, pp.105-106, on the Lexington house) and in 1817 a United States arsenal for Lexington whose design, sent to Pope, may have been executed later in Frankfort (not the present Arsenal). He also designed the wings of Owings' friend Henry Clay's house Ashland (pp.381-82), as well as a row of tenement houses and shops in Lexington (p.418) and in 1812 a dormitory for Transylvania College at Clay's behest (p.350). Thus, there were plenty of possible contacts between Baltimore and Kentucky, Latrobe and Owings.

On the other hand, a number of houses in Kentucky, such as the Hunt-Morgan House in Lexington, have been attributed to Latrobe solely on the basis of their fine spiral staircases like that of the Owings House -- a type traditionally associated with his name. Few or no such staircases, however, appear in his known works, which are unusually well documented and published by Talbot Hamlin in his admirable

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biography of Latrobe. Full publication of Latrobe's papers is in progress, however, and investigation of them may cast further light on the architect's work in Kentucky (said also to include a house built for General James Taylor in Newport about 1812; see the National Register form on Taylor's later mansion).

#9 Continued

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