NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Located in western Kentucky on the edge of Lake Barkley (formerly the Cumberland River), old Eddyville is three miles south of the business section of new Eddyville in northcentral Lyon County. The combined population of the two communities totals 1,981 (1970 census figures) which includes the approximately 1,200 inmates at the Kentucky State Penitentiary. Old Eddyville lies at the northern end of Lake Barkley forty miles above the mouth of the Cumberland River at Smithland on the Ohio River.

The Old Eddyville Historic District consists of the nine remaining historic structures of the original town. Most of old Eddyville was destroyed in the 1960s by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Tennessee Valley Authority in order to facilitate the creation of Lake Barkley, one of the two large manmade lakes in western Kentucky that comprise the region's popular resort and recreational area. In order to create the lake, the Cumberland River was dammed about ten miles downriver from Eddyville near Grand Rivers. The resulting floodwaters enveloped most of the nineteenth-century town, leaving only the small peninsula containing the penitentiary and the few houses above the 367-foot flood level. The major portion of old Eddyville lay immediately south of the existing structures (see photos 1-5 and view 1).

Sitting on a promontory above Lake Barkley, the district is sparsely built with the remaining buildings scattered at the base of the penitentiary walls. All of the nominated acreage is now part of the Kentucky State Penitentiary grounds. The boundaries have been drawn to encompass all of the historic and architecturally significant structures that remain in old Eddyville, which by means of their design, location, and historical associations convey a distinct sense of cohesiveness. Eleven buildings, one of which is non-contributing, are included in the nomination. The 1910 filterhouse which serves the penitentiary is located just outside the southwest penitentiary wall and is non-contributing. The tiny one-room log building off the west corner of the wall was constructed between 1935-55 by one of the wardens as a playhouse for his daughter. In recent years, it has occasionally been used to house a prisoner. The other contributing structures are: the Gideon Dyer Cobb House and outbuilding, the Bowman House, the Huggans House, the Mason House, the Collier House, the Day-Smith House, and the Kentucky State Penitentiary. Those portions of the penitentiary complex being nominated are the Administration Building and Guard Tower (Stand # 1); Cell Houses Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5; and the 1894 Nash chapel.

Located on the southern edge of the district on Water Street and facing southwestward towards Lake Barkley, the Gideon Dyer Cobb House (see photo 6) is the earliest extant structure in the district. Erected ca. 1800, the Cobb House is a two-story, Federal brick building which probably served as a combination of residence and tavern. The two-bay section on the south terminating in a rear ell appears to be an early addition, while the sunporch on the main facade is an early twentieth century modification. The Cobb House sits on a rise above Water Street behind an elaborate wrought iron fence (see photo 7). Immediately south is a small brick structure with a frame addition on the west which functioned as a dependency to the main house (see photos 8 and 9).

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT McDonald Brothers, (penitentiary)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Eddyville Historic District is unique in that it comprises the vestiges of one of western Kentucky's earliest and most important settlements. Inundated by the damming of the Cumberland River in the mid 1950s, the old town of Eddyville retains but a minute portion of the buildings reflective of its nineteenth century prosperity which was so vital to this region of the state until the outbreak of the Civil War. During this period, Eddyville was a major transportation and commercial center for western Kentucky as well as the nucleus for the manufacturing of iron and steel in the state. As Kentucky and the rest of the nation became increasingly industrialized in the post-Civil War era, Eddyville's prominence faded, only to be rejuvenated in the latter part of the century with the completion of the new state penitentiary. The erection of this impressive structure on the shore of the Cumberland River represented a major triumph for those forces that had fought for decades to being reform to the state's penal system. Eddyville's remaining structures represent some of the region's few and finest nineteenth century buildings. As the only tangible evidence of the area's former prestige and importance, their value is increased.

Although David Walker of Logan County formally established the western Kentucky town of Eddyville,¹ Colonel Matthew Lyon is the individual responsible for its settlement and growth. In 1798, Walker laid out 120 half-acre lots on the north side of the Cumberland River approximately forty miles below its mouth, and the following year he petitioned the Livingston County Court to establish Eddyville as the county seat. Walker donated two acres for the site and offered to supply labor and materials to erect the public buildings. Meanwhile, in the fall of 1799, Matthew Lyon of Fair Haven, Vermont, led a party of settlers to Eddyville and began purchasing large portions of land from Walker. In November of 1800, Gideon Dyer Cobb,² a member of Lyon's party, was appointed one of the five original trustees of the town of Eddyville. In the summer of 1801, Matthew Lyon returned with the rest of his family and another part of settlers and established his residence.³

Lyon (1750-1822) was already politically famous before embarking on this western venture. Born in Ireland, Lyon emigrated to Litchfield, Connecticut at the age of sixteen. In 1774, Lyon and Col. Thomas Chittenden moved their families from Litchfield northward into the region of the Green Mountains. Lyon aided in the capture of Fort Ticonderoga by Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys and actively supported the colonial cause throughout the Revolution.

The years from 1783 to 1801 constituted an extremely active period in Matthew Lyon's life. In 1783 he purchased land near the headwaters of Lake Champlain and founded the town of Fair Haven, laying out the town and building a grist mill, brick kiln, tannery and leather factory, paper mill,⁴ print shop, and an iron foundry. Col. Lyon published a newspaper and a periodical, both of which espoused his zealous political views. Lyon also represented Fair Haven in the Vermont General Assembly from 1784 to 1796 during which time he procured the statute chartering the University of Vermont at Burlington.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet.

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Old Eddyville Historic District Lyon County, Kentucky

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Gideon Dyer Cobb (1773-1834) was with Matthew Lyon's first party of settlers from Vermont arriving in Eddyville in 1799. His wife, Modena Clark Cobb, was the granddaughter of Colonel Thomas Chittenden, the first governor of Vermont, and a niece of Beulah Galusha Lyon. Gideon Dyer and Modena Cobb were the greatgrandparents of Kentucky humorist and writer Irvin S. Cobb (see National Register form for the Hotel Irvin Cobb listed 24 August 1978). In 1800, Cobb obtained a license to operate a tavern and was appointed one of the five trustees of Eddyville. The following year, he acquired additional town lots to be used for warehouses, and in 1802 he began operating a ferry across the Cumberland River at his house. The house was later owned by Judge Frederick Skinner, a grandson of Matthew Lyon.

Northwest of the Cobb House is the Bowman House, a l_2^1 -story brick structure dating from the latter third of the nineteenth century (see photos 10 and 11). The Bowman House is distinguished by the recessed entrance and gable roof accented by paired brackets. The frame central gable on the main facade is a later addition. The structure originally belonged to William Milton Bowman (b. 1831) who settled in Eddyville in 1855 and became a successful businessman.

At the northern edge of the district is the Dr. George Huggans House (see photo 12). Built ca. 1840, the Huggans House is a one-story, five-bay brick structure reflective of the Greek Revival style. A central portico supported by Doric columns shelters the entrance. Simple scrolled brackets adorn the cornice; bargeboard has been removed (see photo 13). Local tradition states that it was Dr. Huggans who defended William Kelly against accusations of insanity from his wife and father-in-law, J. M. Gracey. Kelly's experiments in the development of the pneumatic process for producing steel were ridiculed by many residents and local iron workers, thus leading to the charges of insanity.

Directly across the street from the penitentiary and backing up to the lake are three ca. 1905 residences, the Mason House (see photo 14), the Collier House (see photo 15), and the Day-Smith House (see photo 16). These lots lie on the outskirts of the original town plat; apparently few substantial residences were ever built on the river (west) side of Water Street until the turn of the century. For the most part, these buildings have always been occupied by employees of the Kentucky State Penitentiary.

The penitentiary, located on a rise on the east side of Water Street overlooking the lake, visually dominates the site (see photos 17 and 18). Designed by the noted Louisville architectural firm of the McDonald Brothers, the massive, stone structure was erected between 1884 and 1890 in the Romanesque style. The foreboding, fortress-like edifice displays a central tower and gradually recessed



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flanking wings to the north and south. Tall, narrow rounded-arch windows puncture the heavy three-story walls and the only ornament consists of the stone buttresses and the crenellated cornices. The Administration Building and Cell Houses Nos. 1, 2, and 3 were erected in 1884 (see photo 19). Cell House No. 4 which abuts the Administration Building on the south was built between 1900-1904 in the second building phase and is identical to Cell House No. 1 immediately north of the Administration Building. Cell House No. 5 was not begun until 1937 and was completed in 1941 (see photo 10). Constructed of concrete, this unit simulates the qualities of the 1880s stone sections and encloses the south side of the complex, thus completing a unified, symmetrical composition. The guard tower immediately west of the Administration Building was also constructed in 1937. At the southwestern edge of the penitentiary grounds is the 1910 filterhouse. The Nash chapel (see photo 20), constructed in 1894, is located off the northeast corner of Cell House No. 3 and is a gable-end brick structure with pointed arch openings. Other buildings that make up the penitentiary are located in the quadrangle to the east and as standard institutional structures postdating 1940 are not included in the nomination.

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Lyon, an ardent Jeffersonian-Republican, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1797 and immediately made known his anti-Federalist views both in speeches and his Fair Haven newspaper. His outspoken criticism of the Federalist Congress and President John Adams resulted in his conviction and imprisonment for violation of the Alien and Sedition Acts.⁵ Nevertheless, Lyon remained popular among his constituents and was reelected to a second term while still in jail. He is credited with casting the crucial vote in the House that elected Thomas Jefferson over Aaron Burr in the 1800 presidential election.

Col. Lyon's unfortunate political experiences likely influenced his decision to leave Vermont. His political colleagues and friends, Andrew Jackson and Senator Stevens Thompson Mason of Virginia, encouraged Lyon to consider the region of western Kentucky around the Cumberland River where large deposits of iron ore were known to exist.

From the initial settlement in 1799, Eddyville grew rapidly, being one of only five western Kentucky towns to be listed in the 1800 census. Eddyville was incorporated in 1810. The two key factors in the town's development were its location on the Cumberland River, which guaranteed its success as a major transportation center for western Kentucky and Tenneesee, and the large deposits of iron ore in the vicinity. Col. Lyon was quick to capitalize on both of these conditions. By 1808, Eddyville had become the second largest town on the Cumberland River next to Nashville, and merchants from as far away as Hopkinsville were dependent on Eddyville for shipping produce to New Orleans. In 1809, Lyon erected a shipyard at Eddyville and began building some of the first steamboats used on the western waters.⁶ When war with England appeared evident, Lyon began building gunboats for the U. S. Navy. Unfortunately, he had no formal contract with the federal government and the boats were destroyed in a storm on the Mississippi River causing Lyon to lose his entire investment.⁷

Linked to the river traffic was the prolific iron industry that flourished in Eddyville until the Civil War. By 1815, Matthew Lyon and Gideon Cobb had an iron furnace in operation and by 1830 there were furnaces both sides of the Cumberland River.

Numerous other furnaces were established in the vicinity of Eddyville during this period, and the iron industry became the principal element in the economy of the region in the pre-Civil War period. The best known iron works was the Tennessee Rolling Mill founded by Daniel Hillman in 1845 and considered to have been the largest iron mill south of the Ohio River in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Knowledge of this iron industry brought William Kelly (1811-1888) of Pittsburgh to Eddyville in 1846. In partnership with his brother John P. Kelly, he began experimenting to develop a superior quality metal, one that would be more malleable while retaining the strength of iron then being produced. During the 1850s, Kelly perfected what became known as the pneumatic process.⁸ He acquired a patent for the process in 1857, and although he eventually lost most of his fortune and was forced to sell the patent and his interests, he is now recognized as a leader in the development of the iron and steel industry in western Kentucky (see National Register form for Kelly's Suwanee Furnace Office, Lyon County).9

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After the Civil War, Eddyville's prosperity began to deteriorate. The Elizabethtown & Paducah Railroad was completed to nearby Kuttawa in 1871, bypassing Eddyville by one mile. This signalled the decline in the dependence on the river as a major means of transportation. In addition, the iron industry was ailing as better quality ore became available elsewhere and the timber within hauling distance of the furnaces was depleted. Most of the furnaces had ceased operating by the turn of the century. The effect of the war, the slowdown in the iron industry and the decline in river traffic are evidenced in the census figures for Eddyville during this period. The population dropped from 599 in 1860 to 386 in 1870.

The only major new development in Eddyville in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the building of the Kentucky State Penitentiary. Built to confine maximum-security male prisoners and sometimes called "The Castle of the Cumberlands," the penitentiary has served the Commonwealth since 1890. Much of the construction work was completed through convict labor.¹⁰

The history of Kentucky's penal system is both a sordid story of man's inhumanity to man and a desperate attempt of the state government to ensure that its penal institutions would be self-supporting if not profit-making. Indeed, this philosophy prevailed as late as 1930 when Governor Flem D. Sampson expressed displeasure that the penal system was not self-supporting.¹¹

Kentucky's first penitentiary was erected in Frankfort in 1798.¹² It was also the first state penitentiary west of the Appalachian Mountains.¹³ From 1798 to 1825 the Frankfort prison was operated by "keepers" appointed by the governors.¹⁴ From 1825 to 1880, the infamous "lessee system" prevailed.¹⁵ "Lessees" such as the first keeper, Joel Scott, wielded tremendous political and economic power. Scott made a profit that exceeded \$40,000 during this tenure from 1825 to 1834. His successor, Thomas S. Theobald, made an all-time record profit of \$200,000 between 1834 and 1844.¹⁶ During this period the state was unable to add its \$100,000 share to its general fund because it had to spend nearly the entire amount to enlarge the penitentiary.¹⁷

Most attempts by various governors and legislators to reform the prison system in Kentucky during 1858-1880 were unsuccessful.¹⁸ The notorious practices of politically powerful Jeremiah South's administration of the penitentiary in Frankfort after 1875 finally led to the conversion of the system from a keeper to a warden, the ending of the "lessee system," and the decision to erect a second or "branch" prison in Eddyville.¹⁹

From 1876 to 1880 a terrible struggle occurred in the Kentucky General Assembly regarding what changes should be made in the prison.²⁰ Newspapers of the time made frequent references to the problems of the penitentiary, and Henry Watterson, editor of the Louisville <u>Courier-Journal</u>, was particularly vocal about it in his editorials. Governor James Bennett McCreary (1875-1879) was unable throughout his entire administration to get the legislature to come to real grips with the prison problem.²¹

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During the early part of the 1880 session of the General Assembly, opposition to a new penitentiary was provided by Jeremiah South and his partisans. South's death on the floor of the State Senate while defending himself in the debates over the matter finally made legal reform possible.²² An act was subsequently passed providing for the relief of overcrowding at the prison in Frankfort. Governor Blackburn appointed a committee of three to study existing prison systems in the East and to select a site for a proposed branch penitentiary.²³ The committee recommended the eighty-acre farm of former U. S. Senator Willis B. Machen near Eddyville.²⁴ Their plans, prepared by the well-known Louisville architectural firm of the McDonald Brothers, were presented to the General Assembly in 1881-82 but received little attention. Finally, in 1884, the legislature appropriated funds to build the Eddyville facility. Construction was initiated in 1884 and was completed in 1890.

By this time, Eddyville had declined into a sleepy agricultural community. The only industry in the early twentieth century consisted of small local enterprises that died out by the late thirties and forties.

The region continued to languish throughout the twentieth century with the penitentiary being the area's only object of note until 1954 when Congress authorized the damming of the Cumberland River to create Lake Barkley. In 1958, the federal government began purchasing all property below the 367 foot mark and acquiring easement to the 378 foot mark. Plans were made for the re-routing of roads and rail lines, and in the early 1960s the new town of Eddyville, located approximately three miles to the north, was begun. Lee S. Jones, a Louisville attorney and former native of Lyon County, donated land for the new town, and 300 lots were laid off with the stipulation that those not built upon by 1964 would revert to Jones. Construction began immediately on streets and utilities for new Eddyville and in 1962 the new courthouse was completed. As the impoundment of the lake would virtually isolate the Kentucky State Penitentiary and old Eddyville, a road was built to the rear (east) of the penitentiary connecting the remains U.S. 93. The lake was flooded in 1965, dramatically of the nineteenth century town to transforming the physical character of Eddyville by consuming most of the original town. The penitentiary and remaining property and buildings along Water Street now belong to the state and are used to house Kentucky State Penitentiary employees.

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FOOTNOTES

1

Local tradition states that the town was named for the eddies in the Cumberland River.

2

Gideon Dyer Cobb was the great-grandfather of Kentucky humorist and writer Irvin S. Cobb (see National Register form for Hotel Irvin Cobb, listed 24 August 1978).

3

Lyon was subsequently elected and served four successive terms in Congress as representative of the western Kentucky district.

4

Lyon is credited with being one of the first to make paper from wood pulp for his printing shop.

5

Tom W. Campbell, <u>Two Fighters and Two Fines</u>, (Little Rock: Pioneer Publishing Company, 1941), p. 61.

6

Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8

M. H. Moseley, M.D., "The Timeless Talisman - Steel," Paper presented to the Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky, 3 April 1972.

9

Robert Gunn Crawford, "A History of the Kentucky Penitentiary System, 1865-1937" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1955), p. 147.

10 Ibid., p. 358.

11

Ky. Senate Journal, 1930, I, 69.

12

William C. Sneed, "A Report on the History and Mode of Management of the Kentucky Penitentiary," Frankfort, Kentucky, 1860.



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13 <u>Ibid</u> .			
14 Crawford, pp. 2-3.			
15 <u>Ibid</u> ., pp. 3-65.			
16 <u>Ibid</u> ., p. 3.			
17 <u>Ibid</u> ., pp. 3-4.			
18 <u>Ibid</u> ., pp. 19-28.			
19 <u>Ibid</u> ., pp. 28-65.			
20 <u>Ibid</u> ., pp. 32-65.			
21 Louisville <u>Courier-Journal</u> ,	September 3, 1879.		
22 Nancy Disher Baird, <u>Luke Pry</u> exington: (The University Press of	yor Blackburn; Physici f Kentucky, 1979), p.	an, Governor, Refo 88.	ormer.
23 Ky. <u>Senate Journal</u> , 1879-188 hese committee members were former ddyville, and Judge William M. Bec	r Congressman R. H. St		

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Baird, p. 106.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at Point A (see U.S.G.S. map) on the east wall of the Kentucky State Penitentiary at Gate 6, southeast along the wall approximately 250' to a point in line with the southeast corner of Cell House No. 5, thence southeast approximately 500' to the water's edge (Point B on U.S.G.S. map), thence following the northeastern shore of Lake Barkley in a northwestwardly direction approximately 1500' to Point D (see U.S.G.S. map), thence northeast and crossing Water Street approximately 300', thence southeast approximately 175' to the west corner of Cell House No. 2, thence northeast along the prison wall approximately 300' to Gate 2, thence southeast approximately 175', southwest approximately 200', southeast again approximately 300' along the rear of Cell Houses Nos. 1, 2, 4, and the Administration Building, thence northeast approximately 200', turning southeast approximately 175' to the point of origin.





