

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only
received **DEC 2** 1982
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Middlesboro Downtown Commercial District

and/or common

2. Location Roughly bounded by Cumberland Ave, 19th, 20th Sts., and

Edgewood Rd.

street & number

___ not for publication

city, town Middlesboro

___ vicinity of

state Kentucky

code 021

county Bell

code 007

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	___ public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
___ building(s)	___ private	___ unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	___ park
___ structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
___ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	___ entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
___ object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	___ scientific
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	___ military	___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple

street & number

city, town

___ vicinity of

state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bell County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Pineville

state Kentucky

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Survey of Historic Sites
title in Kentucky

has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date 1980-1981

___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Kentucky Department of the Arts, Heritage Division

city, town Frankfort

state Kentucky

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Situated in the extreme southeastern section of Bell County at the western entrance of the Cumberland Gap, Middlesboro (1982 population 12,000) is a regional center of trade for a three-state area. Bell County is bordered on the east by Harlan County, Kentucky, and Lee County, Virginia, on the south by Claiborne County, Tennessee, and on the west and north by the Kentucky counties of Whitley, Knox and Clay.

The Middlesboro Commercial District encompasses the original core of the downtown as laid out in the 1888 Plan. The district includes portions of Cumberland Avenue, 19th Street, 20th Street, Lothbury and Englewood streets. The district is composed of commercial, governmental and ecclesiastical buildings constructed during the last decade of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century.

The main commercial street of Middlesboro is Cumberland Avenue. The majority of the buildings fronting Cumberland are two and three-story load-bearing masonry structures. For the most part, the majority of the buildings are intact, except for the usual cosmetic changes that were made mainly at the street front level during the 20th century. One of the oldest surviving buildings on Cumberland Avenue is the Campbell Building constructed in 1890 (see photo 7). The Campbell Building is an excellent example of late 19th century commercial architecture and the only building with an original storefront.

One of the most interesting features of the Middlesboro Commercial District is the "town center" located at the intersection of Cumberland Avenue and 20th Street. The buildings fronting the intersection are set back from the principal building line to create a modified plaza or town square. Originally, there was a statue located at the center of the intersection which has long since disappeared. The buildings facing the intersection are the most imposing buildings in Middlesboro. These structures include the Old People's Bank Building (see photos 17 and 18), the terra cotta Ball Brothers Furniture Store (photo 16), the J.C. Penny Building (photo 3), and the Catos Building (photo 4). All of these buildings are L-shaped to help create the town center effect.

The western and partial northern boundary of the district is the old city canal. The canal was constructed ca. 1890 to bring fresh water into the town. Originally the canal was lined with wooden planks of which a few can still be found. The city is currently seeking funding assistance to restore the canal through the downtown area for use as a city park. Located on the canal at the western boundary on Cumberland Avenue is the American Association Building, listed on the National Register (see photo 10A).

A portion of the northern boundary of the district is the canal located behind the commercial structures on Cumberland Avenue up to 20th Street (see photos 11 and 11A). Twentieth Street forms the major north-south intersection in the district and contains such buildings as the old City Hall (see map 1); the Coal House (see photo 20), now the Chamber of Commerce, which is built entirely of coal; and the United States Post Office, constructed in 1915 in the classical revival style. Additional buildings of merit on 20th Street include the old Carnegie Library, which is a one-story classical masonry structure; and the First Presbyterian Church, constructed in 1889 and 1912.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1880-1930

Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Middlesboro Downtown Commercial District is significant in that it is one of the finest late 19th and early 20th century commercial districts in the entire eastern Kentucky coalfields region. On the whole, downtown Middlesboro retains a density, compactness and plan reflective of its late 19th century development and era of prosperity with very few intrusions. In fact, the Middlesboro Commercial District is more representative of commercial districts found in central Kentucky than those found in its eastern Kentucky counterparts. Most county seats and major towns in eastern Kentucky are typified by narrow streets and low-scale architecturally uninteresting commercial buildings devoid of any unique detailing. This general characteristic of eastern Kentucky towns is more than likely due to the poverty of the area, its inaccessibility, rugged terrain and the relative instability of the coal economy. Middlesboro, on the other hand, was a planned community and was built in a large valley and laid out with wide streets, open plazas and contains many architecturally unique and well-designed structures. In addition, Middlesboro is significant because it represents one man's dream to reshape and to tame the wilderness. The city that Alexander Arthur envisioned fully materialized. However, much of his dream still remains in the plan of the city and in many of the buildings that line Cumberland Avenue in the downtown commercial district.

Middlesboro is situated at the extreme southeast end of Kentucky, at the gateway to the historic Cumberland Gap, entry route through the Appalachians for thousands of settlers heading west in the latter half of the 18th century. Bell County, formed from portions of Knox and Harlan counties was established in 1867. Although Pineville, the county seat of the new county, had been settled quite some time before 1867, railroads did not enter this area until the last years of the decade following 1880; therefore, intensive industrialization did not occur until then.

The extraction of coal and lumber significantly increased after that time. By 1890, Bell County's economic potentials had stirred interest even in Great Britain. This was primarily due to the enterprise of an engineer from Canada named Alexander Arthur.

Alexander Arthur came to Bell County, Kentucky in 1886. Of Scottish descent, and a distant cousin of President Chester A. Arthur (1881-1885), he was hunting for minerals. In the hills beyond Cumberland Gap in Bell County he found what he believed to be substantial enough deposits of coal and iron to justify the development of a new industrial center which could rival Pittsburg and Birmingham.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"American Association Building in 1891." The Middlesboro Daily News (Friday, July 2, 1976), p. D-4.
 Fuson, Henry Harvey. "The Cumberland Ford Settlement." Frankfort, Kentucky: Kentucky Progress Magazine, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1930), pp. 45-50;

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 37

Quadrangle name Middlesboro South, Tenn.-Ky.-Va.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u>2</u> <u>5</u> <u>16</u> <u>9</u> <u>10</u> <u>10</u>	<u>4</u> <u>10</u> <u>5</u> <u>14</u> <u>4</u> <u>18</u> <u>10</u>	B	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u>2</u> <u>5</u> <u>17</u> <u>3</u> <u>16</u> <u>10</u>	<u>4</u> <u>10</u> <u>5</u> <u>14</u> <u>9</u> <u>16</u> <u>10</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u>2</u> <u>5</u> <u>7</u> <u>5</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u> <u>4</u> <u>6</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	D	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u>2</u> <u>5</u> <u>7</u> <u>3</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>0</u> <u>5</u> <u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

Starting at a point located at the northwest corner of 19th Street and the alley running east and west, south of 19th Street then west along the rear properties boundaries of the properties fronting Cumberland Avenue to a point on the west side of the Middlesboro

List all states and counties for propertles overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	David Morgan, Manager, Historic Sites Development Program		
organization	Kentucky Heritage Council	date	January 1982
street & number	9th Floor, Capital Plaza Tower	telephone	502/564-7005
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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Mary Curran Opper*

title *State Historic Preservation Officer* date *November 29, 1982*

For NCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Alvin B. ...
 Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register date *11/29/82*

Attest: _____ date _____
 Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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Middlesboro Downtown Commercial District

CONTINUATION SHEET Bell County, Ky. ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

The church was originally a half-timbered and stuccoed structure with Tudor arch openings built when Middlesboro was first founded. In 1912, the structure was "enclosed" within a yellow brick structure. The original building is clearly visible from various locations. Across the street from the church is the massive stone structure now occupied by the Middlesboro Board of Education. This is the only stone-faced building in the city and is reminiscent of an English castle with its stepped parapet and corner tower.

The northern boundary of the district continues along Englewood Road and terminates at the concrete bridge over the canal at 19th Street (see photo 26). There are two such bridges in the district, both constructed ca. 1930. Located on Englewood Road is the old city high school ca. 1930 (see photo 25).

The remaining properties within the district are located on Lothbury and 19th Street. Lothbury, between 18th and 19th streets, contains an attractive row of early 20th century two and three-story commercial buildings. A majority of the buildings are identical, therefore, presenting a unified streetscape appearance. This commercial strip developed due to its proximity to the railroad. The original railroad station was located on Lothbury near 18th Street. It has since been demolished. The Majestic Hotel on 19th Street was constructed in 1929 and is the only remaining hotel in the district (see photo 31).

Downtown Middlesboro is fortunate in possessing an abundance of unusually well-designed and well-preserved commercial, religious, and governmental structures that reflect the growth and development of this important eastern Kentucky town. All in all, Middlesboro is one of the best preserved town centers in eastern Kentucky.

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Middlesboro Downtown Commercial District
CONTINUATION SHEET Bell County, Ky. ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

As the result of his grandiose plans, Arthur returned to England, formed the American Association, Limited, secured financial backing and returned to Kentucky where he purchased thousands of acres of land and laid out the new city which he intended to become the heart of a new empire. He called it Middlesborough after the great manufacturing city of the same name in England. As the result of his initiatives, a small army of construction workers built the town and the giant iron furnaces which would be needed, hundreds of miners began to extract coal, and railroad workers commenced the construction of lines toward Knoxville and spurs up the hollows to the new mines. As this took place, his new city did not grow, rather, it was created. By the end of the first year of activities there, it had a population of 15,000; by the end of the second year this had increased to 17,000.

The boom town which Arthur had created was known to the English investors as the "Magic City of the Mountains." Arthur laid out streets with names from England, e.g., Dorchester, Salisbury, and Doncaster. He built a business district and a plush residential area for his executives. He built a hotel whose magnificence was exceeded only by those in New York and established the second golf course in the United States. His new city was the first in Kentucky to have complete electrical service and possessed a reservoir that could supply water to a population of 150,000 persons.

Unfortunately, beginning in 1890, Arthur's luck changed for the worse. He first had a bad fire in the business district. He hurried to England to secure more financing and replaced the frame buildings with new ones of brick and stone. When the Baring Brothers Bank in England failed, it resulted in deep and desperate trouble for the American Association. At the same time that financial backing ended, so did the iron ore, which Arthur had seriously overestimated.

In a matter of weeks, Alexander Arthur's dream of a new industrial center at Middlesborough (now Middlesboro) came to a precipitate end. The railroad lines were soon covered by high grasses, the iron furnaces were shut down, and many mines were closed. Many stores ended their operations and the population fell to 4,200. Although Arthur never gave up the hope that his dream could be restored, it gradually died. His attempts to secure new investors in New York were also to no avail. In his will he asked that he should be buried at his dream city and in 1912 this was done. His body was placed on a hillside overlooking the city of his dreams and the tombstone is still plainly visible there.

Although Arthur's dreams for Middlesboro never fully materialized. He still left his mark on the city which is still much in evidence. Middlesboro is still a major market center for the surrounding area. The buildings located in the central business district reflect a much higher sense of design and craftsmanship than most neighboring cities. Perhaps this is because of the important role Alexander Arthus played in the development of the town.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Middlesboro Downtown Commercial District

Continuation sheet Bell County, Kentucky Item number 9

Page 2

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received

date entered

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History of Bell County, Kentucky. New York: Hobson Book Press, 1947.

Johnson Walt. "David Home in Harrogate Dates to '85, Was Built for American Assoc Doctor." The Middlesboro Daily News (Friday, July 2, 1976), p.H-4.

_____. "Middlesboro Tannery Dates Back to 1890." The Middlesboro Daily News (Friday, July 2, 1976), p. F-6.

Morgans, Brian H. "Cumberland---its History and Romance." No place of publication, no name of publisher, no date of publication, 3 pp.

Pearce, John Ed. "Bell County: A Kentucky test of endurance and a tale of two towns." The Courier-Journal Magazine (Sunday, May 14, 1978), pp. 8-14; 38-41.

"Souvenir of Middlesborough, October, 1890." Louisville, Kentucky: Courier-Journal Job Printing Company, 1890? 62 pp., illus., map.

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Middlesboro Downtown Commercial District

Continuation sheet Bell County, Kentucky

Item number Ten

Page Two

Canal, then following the west and northern boundary of the Canal to a point located on the eastern side of 20th Street. Then north 100 feet along the east side of 20 Street to a point, then west to the rear property lines of the structures fronting 20th Street. Then north to the southern side of Englewood Street, then east along the southern side of Englewood Street to the eastern side of the concrete bridge across the Canal, then south along the eastern side of the bridge to the southern side of the Middlesboro Canal; then along the eastern boundary of the Canal to the south side of Lothbury Avenue. Then east to the southeast corner of Lothbury and 19th Street, then north to the rear property lines of the structure facing Lothbury, then following the rear property lines to the western side of 18th Street. Then south to the northwest corner of Lothbury and 18th Street, then west approximately 125' to a point, thence south to the rear property lines of the structures facing Lothbury Avenue, then west 75' to a point. Then north 50' to a point then west 50', then south 25' to a point, then west to the west side of 19th Street, then south to the point of origin.

The boundaries have been drawn to include those parts of the Middlesboro Central Business District which retains sufficient integrity to qualify for the National Register.



Waste Ponds
Water Tank

Sewage Disposal
Water Tank

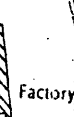
Memorial Gardens Cemetery

441

25E



Radio Tower (WMIK)



City Hall

Library

St. Julian Jr. High Sch

LOUISVILLE

Cem.

Creek

Yellow

Parker

FERN

HOME RUN ROAD

PARKER LANE

HEBREW

MAXWELTON HEIGHTS

Cem.

DONCASTER

ROCHESTER

EXETER

WINCHESTER

AVE

CHESTER

Library

20TH

LOTHBURY

Post Office

RD

ASHBURY

PROSPECT RD

GREENWOOD

IRONWOOD

LYNNWOOD

FLEETWOOD

DALEWOOD

KENWOOD

NUTWOOD

RD

Cemetery

Cem.

LOUISVILLE

HOLLYWOOD

ST

MC PHERSON

ST

AND

CRACK

CANTERBURY AVE

15TH AVE

BLOOMSBURY AVE

AMESBURY AVE

CUMBERLAND

AVE

ST

ST

ST

ST

ST

East End Grade Sch

17TH ST

16TH ST

15TH ST

14TH ST

13TH ST

12TH ST

11TH ST

10TH ST

Freight Depot

19TH ST

18TH ST

17TH ST

16TH ST

15TH ST

14TH ST

13TH ST

12TH ST

11TH ST

DANBURY

SALISBURY

17TH ST

16TH ST

15TH ST

14TH ST

13TH ST

12TH ST

11TH ST

10TH ST

PROSPECT RD

GREENWOOD

IRONWOOD

LYNNWOOD

FLEETWOOD

DALEWOOD

KENWOOD

NUTWOOD

RD

Cemetery

ASHBURY

PROSPECT RD

GREENWOOD

IRONWOOD

LYNNWOOD

FLEETWOOD

DALEWOOD

KENWOOD

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PROSPECT RD

GREENWOOD

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FLEETWOOD

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KENWOOD

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RD

Cemetery

ASHBURY

PROSPECT RD

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KENWOOD

NUTWOOD

RD

Middleboro Downtown Commercial
District
Middleboro, Kentucky
Middleboro City Map
KY Department of Transportation

Map 2 of 3