

PH0354074

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

| | |
|------------------|-------------|
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| RECEIVED | JUN 21 1976 |
| DATE ENTERED | JUL 19 1976 |

**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 **** Morgan County Courthouse**

AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Main Street

CITY, TOWN
West Liberty

STATE
Kentucky

VICINITY OF
—

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
7

CODE
021

COUNTY
Morgan

CODE
175

3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | PRESENT USE | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S) | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> PARK |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE | PUBLIC ACQUISITION | ACCESSIBLE | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: |

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Morgan County Fiscal Court

STREET & NUMBER
Main Street

CITY, TOWN
West Liberty

VICINITY OF
—

STATE
Kentucky

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Morgan County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
Main Street

CITY, TOWN
West Liberty

STATE
Kentucky

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky

DATE
1971

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
Kentucky Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN
Frankfort

STATE
Kentucky

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

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 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

West Liberty is situated in a roughly triangular bottomland formed by the mouth of the Long Branch as it empties into the Licking River, one of the main arteries that drains the eastern portion of central Kentucky and descends northward toward the Ohio River where it debouches between Newport and Covington, Kentucky, opposite Cincinnati, Ohio. The still fairly small town is located on the east bank of the Licking River, north of the present southwestward course of the Long Branch, between modest hills to the north and south. Across the river to the west, the town is enclosed by an almost straight bluff running north-south. The main commercial streets lie approximately along this north-south line of the Licking River. West Liberty forms a junction of roads that lead to other county seats: U.S. Route 460 west to Frenchburg in Menifee County; Route 7 north to Sandy Hook in Elliott County and southeast to Salyersville in Magoffin County; and Route 172 east and south to Paintsville in Johnson County.

The Morgan County Courthouse lies on a low knoll on the south side of U.S. 460 (Main Street). By means of bulk and height, as well as location, it has been since its erection in 1907 to this day the most prominent and imposing structure in West Liberty (see photos 1 and 2). The building, one of the first in the area constructed of reinforced concrete blocks, two blocks thick, is basically square with octagonal pavilions projecting at each corner (see photos 5 and 6), and a taller gabled entrance feature on the west facing toward the "downtown" area and the river (see photo 4). Along the east side of the courthouse is the one-story block of the jail facing Jail Street (see photo 7). The courthouse has the usual central hall running east-west flanked by a pair of stairs leading to a large one-and-a-half-story courtroom that occupies most of the second floor.

The two-and-a-half-story central block has a hipped, standing-seam metal (originally slate) roof that rises to a massive square tower. The tower's one cubic stage is defined by paired pilasters at the corners and emphatic cornices at top and bottom. There are double mullioned shuttered windows on each face. Above this stage is a squared-off hemispherical dome that has a circular clockface on each of its four sides. All the clockfaces have side-volutes for decoration. The tower ends its rise with a small ball at the peak of the dome (see photos 6 and 7).

The octagonal corner pavilions are slightly lower than the main block, being only two stories high. They are linked on the north and south sides by wings of the same height. These have slightly less prominent cornices than the main block which has projecting cornices with multiple moldings that are apparent only on the front. The side wings also have a plain parapet above the cornice (see photos 6 and 8).

Thin belt courses run continuously around the building at the levels of the first- and second-story window sills. In contrast to these emphatic horizontals, the main entrance feature

(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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY | <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input checked="" 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 1907

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Morgan County Courthouse, built in 1907, is located in the small mountain community of West Liberty, in eastern Kentucky. Although the town was established in 1823, few early structures remain. The oldest building in the downtown area is a brick residence dating to the 1870s. Main Street, little more than one block in length, has no building of more prominence or architectural significance than the courthouse (compare the 1908 and 1976 overviews of the town photos 1 and 2). It has also, of course, been the focal point of local government for the entire county.

Morgan County lies on the western slope of the Appalachian plateau and is a blend of the eastern Kentucky coalfields and the outer Bluegrass region. The county was formed in 1822 from parts of Floyd and Bath counties and was first settled during the period from roughly 1790 to 1805 by emigrants from Virginia (Stacy and Nickell, p. 102).

Although the location of the Morgan County county seat was at first a matter of considerable controversy among the local citizenry, the issue was resolved by the fall of 1825 when the county court appointed commissioners to let the building of the first courthouse at West Liberty (Stacy and Nickell, p. 2). The first Morgan County Courthouse is thought to have been of log or possibly frame construction, with the second courthouse being a more substantial two-story brick structure (Garr, p. 121). The brick building was destroyed by fire in 1862 when, one source indicates, Union troops supposedly brought straw into the courthouse to be used for beds and the building was accidentally or intentionally burned (Johnson, p. 95). Twenty-eight additional structures in the downtown area also burned. Although no major battles were fought in Morgan County, the skirmishes that did take place resulted, therefore, in considerable damage (Stacy and Nickell, p. 3).

After the destruction of the second courthouse, a third brick building was constructed, which apparently served the county until the present courthouse was erected in 1907. This last courthouse, built of huge precast concrete blocks, was modelled after the colonial capital in Williamsburg, Virginia, according to local tradition (Garr, p. 121).

(continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Collins, Richard and Lewis Collins. History of Kentucky, Vol II. Louisville: John P. Morton and Company, 1874.
- Garr, Elisabeth Headley. History of Kentucky Courthouses. National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1972, p. 121.
- Johnson, Arthur C. Early Morgan Courts. Ashland, Kentucky: Economy Printers, 1974.

(continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY one-half

UTM REFERENCES

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-------------|---------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | 1 7 | 3 0 1 6 8 0 | 4 1 9 9 2 2 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 |

| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|-------|------|--------|------|
| STATE | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

W. Lynn Nickell

WEL/GM

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Chairman-Citizens for the Preservation of the Morgan Co. Courthouse

March 20, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

440 Riverside

(606) 743-3649

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

West Liberty

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. Mutton

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

6/16/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Acting

Wm J. Smith

DATE

7/19/76

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

Robert B. Cetting

DATE

7/22/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Acting

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Morgan County Courthouse

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(photo 4) breaks the cornice of the main block with a gable that is partially stepped on each side and contains a small circular datestone. The low entrance is recessed and flanked by square piers. Above the entrance and below the gable are the tall paired central windows of the courtroom. The windows are fairly regularly spaced on the four main facades and on the faces of the corner pavilions.

Aside from the flat stone sills, mullions, and lintels, and a broad keystone over the main entrance, there is virtually no trim below the elaborately articulated tower. Rather, the architect has relied on the interesting and functionally expressive massing for his considerable affect. The first-story courses of concrete blocks are alternately narrow and thick while those above are all of approximately equal thickness, except for a very thin course at the tops of the second-story windows of the main front (see photo 4). These subtle variations of texture and pattern, however, were lost when the exterior surfaces were stuccoed in 1936 as part of a WPA project. A more obvious contrast between the dark, pebbled surface of the walls and the smooth white-painted trim also resulted (see photos 3 and 4).

Although presently unoccupied and somewhat neglected while a decision as to its ultimate fate is being made, the building is relatively intact inside.

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The analogy seems far-fetched, however, as the proportions of the two buildings are totally different and the (four) octagonal corner pavilions seem hardly equivalent to the (two) rounded ends of the two chambers of the Williamsburg Capitol. Moreover, the latter, although perhaps it was known from old engravings, was not reconstructed until 1934, twenty-seven years after the Morgan County Courthouse was built.

Rather, the design seems to belong to a series of imposing county courthouses constructed in Kentucky and elsewhere in the first decade of the twentieth century. The architect is unknown. It bears some resemblance, however, to several of the Kentucky works of Frank Pierce Milburn (1868-1926), whose earliest known works, dating from the late 1880s and executed under his father, T.Y. Milburn, were two eastern Kentucky courthouses: the Clay County Courthouse in Manchester (no longer exists), and the Powell County Courthouse in Stanton (1891). Milburn later settled in Columbia, South Carolina, and his firm became one of the most prolific, if now little-known, of early 20th-century architects of public buildings (see the article by Wodehouse on Milburn).

The ingenious use of octagonal corner pavilions or towers also occurs on the few more elaborate and fanciful, if probably somewhat smaller, Queen Anne-style Fulton County Courthouse (1905) in Hickman, located on a dramatic site overlooking the Mississippi River in the farthest southwestern tip of Kentucky (see the National Register for Fulton County Courthouse, listed April 22, 1976). The more stolid tower in West Liberty resembles that of Milburn's Lincoln County Courthouse (1909) in Stanford, Kentucky (listed on the National Register April 22, 1976), although that building has a plain cubic mass adorned with impressive porticoes rather than corner towers. The treatment of the main tower, however, is not unique to Milburn's work, as similar ones appear in the later works of the Louisville-based firm of H.P. McDonald and his associates (his brother Kenneth McDonald and/or W.J. Dodd; see the National Register form for the Hickman County Courthouse in Clinton, listed September 11, 1975).

It is primarily the apparently simple but actually quite subtle massing -- rising from the low two-story, octagonal corner pavilions connected by side-wings of equal height, through the cubic, hipped-roofed main courtroom block broken on the main west front by the slightly projecting gabled entrance feature, to the bold tower with its clockfaced dome, all emphasized by slight variations in cornice treatment and (before the walls were stuccoed during a 1936 Works Progress Administration project) originally by variations in the coursing of the unique reinforced concrete block walls -- that gives the Morgan County Courthouse its architectural distinction.

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Morgan County Courthouse
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PAGE 2

"Morgan County," Guide to Kentucky, Bicentennial '74-'76. Shelbyville: Landmark
Community Newspapers, Inc., 1974.

Stacy, Helen Price, and William Lynn Nickell. Selections from Morgan County History,
Vol. I. West Liberty, Kentucky, 1972.

Wodehouse, Lawrence. "Frank Pierce Milburn (1868-1926), A Major Southern
Architect," The North Carolina Historical Review, L, 3 (July 1973),
pp. 289-303.