

PH011300

DATA SHEET

Form 10-300
(Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

| |
|----------------------------------|
| STATE: Kentucky |
| COUNTY: Garrard |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY |
| ENTRY DATE APR 14 1975 |

1. NAME

COMMON: **House of Congressman, Letcher House**

AND/OR HISTORIC: **Boyle-Robertson-Letcher House**

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
106 West Maple Street

CITY OR TOWN: **Lancaster** CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: **5**

STATE: **Kentucky** CODE: **021** COUNTY: **Garrard** CODE: **079**

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____ |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: **Mr. Charles Hamilton**

STREET AND NUMBER: **107 West Maple Avenue**

CITY OR TOWN: **Lancaster** STATE: **Kentucky** CODE: **021**

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: **Garrard County Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: **Lancaster** STATE: **Kentucky** CODE: **021**

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: **Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky**

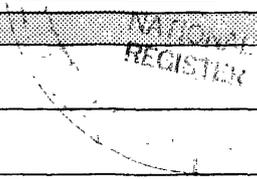
DATE OF SURVEY: **1971** Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: **Kentucky Heritage Commission**

STREET AND NUMBER: **401 Wapping Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Frankfort** STATE: **Kentucky** CODE: **021**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



APR 14 1975

STATE:

COUNTY:

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

(Check One)
 Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Ruins Unexposed

(Check One)
 Altered Unaltered

(Check One)
 Moved Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Built c. 1798 on Water Street, now Maple Avenue, a block from the Lancaster County Courthouse Square, the Letcher House was originally a double cabin of buckeye logs with chimneys on either end. The interior woodwork and large stone fireplaces attest to its early age.

In time more rooms were added and the exterior clapboarded. The two-story house now consists of nine rooms and a rear ell.

The white frame facade displays a portico supported by six unadorned posts, a central door, off-center due to the c. 1810 addition to the house. There are four small windows on the upper story, elongated ones on the lower level.

The roof of c. 1810 addition to the right (east) of the portico is slightly higher than that of the original portion contained between the chimneys (which may also have been revised at an early date). The roof and the gutter cornice are just a few inches higher over this "new" wing,

Although the sash is now single-paned and there have been other alterations through the years, the structure retains its early low proportions and rambling arrangement. Much of the external and internal woodwork is original. The property is well maintained.



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1798 and later**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The buckeye cabin, an unpretentious structure located in a small town in the Bluegrass area of Kentucky, has had, despite its humble appearance, a rather amazing history. It has been the home of four Congressmen. One was to become Governor, two later advanced to the office of the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals to become central figures in an issue which was to have a profound effect on the history of Kentucky.

The original portion of the cabin was constructed for John Boyle in 1798. Boyle was a Virginian by birth, of humble parentage. He studied law under Congressman Thomas Davis whom he succeeded as representative from Mercer County. In 1797 Boyle married and the following year "upon an out-lot of the town, which he had purchased, he built a small log house, with only two rooms..." (Collins, 1847, p. 207).

In 1802 when Boyle was elected to Congress, he acted with the Jeffersonian party, then dominant. He was twice re-elected without competition, and refused a fourth canvass because he wished to come back to Kentucky to practice law. After his return home he was offered a seat upon the bench of the Court of Appeals, which he accepted. One year later, in 1810, Judge Boyle was promoted to the Chief Justiceship, which he held until 1826.

The most famous decision to come from the Boyle court--certainly one of the most important of those decisions of any Kentucky court since that date--was that involving the "relief" issue. The court ruled as unconstitutional certain legislation passed by the State Legislature designed for the relief of debtors. Involved was a two-year replevin statute retroactive in its operation on contracts made prior to its enactment. The court ruled the law repugnant to that clause of the Federal Constitution which declares that no state shall pass any act "impairing the obligation of contracts."

(Continued)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Biographical Encyclopaedia of Kentucky. Cincinnati: J. M. Armstrong & Co., 1878, pp. 701, 702, 649, 650, 537.
 Calico, Forest. History of Garrard County, Kentucky and its Churches. New York: The Hobson Book Press, 1947.
 Collins, Lewis. History of Kentucky. Cincinnati: By the author, 1847, pp. 92, 183, 104, 105, 207, 208, 322, 324, 400.
 Gillian, W. D. "Robert P. Letcher's Appointment as Minister to Mexico." The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Vol. 47 (April, 1949), pp. 116-124. (Continued)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

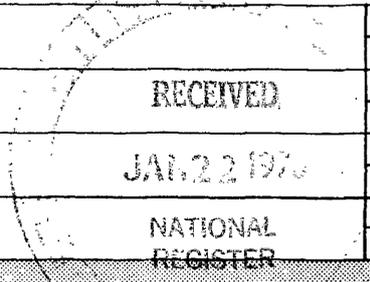
| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | OR | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|----|---|-------------------------|--|
| CORNER | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | | LATITUDE | LONGITUDE | |
| | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | | Degrees Minutes Seconds | Degrees Minutes Seconds | |
| NW | ° ' " | ° ' " | | 37° 37' 16" | 84° 34' 49" | |
| NE | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |
| SE | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |
| SW | ° ' " | ° ' " | | | | |

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APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **Less than one acre.**

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 |



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: **Patricia Ballard**

ORGANIZATION: **Garrard County Heritage Commission** DATE: **7-26, 1974**

STREET AND NUMBER: **Garrard County Public Library**

CITY OR TOWN: **Lancaster** STATE: **Kentucky 40444** CODE: **021**

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name Edna W. Melton

Title State Liaison Officer

Date 1-13-75

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

Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 4/14/75

ATTEST:

Keeper of the National Register

Date **APR 8 1975**

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

| | | |
|------------------|-------------|------|
| STATE | Kentucky | |
| COUNTY | Garrard | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | 4075 | DATE |
| | APR 14 1975 | |

(Number all entries)

Boyle-Robertson-Letcher House

8. Significance (Continued)

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The decision created a furor among high state officials but the legislature was unable to amass the two-thirds majority required by the State Constitution to remove them. The opposition then changed their tactics and repealed the act by which the Court of Appeals had been organized. The "old court" was abolished and a "new court" instituted. The old court denied the constitutionality of this action and continued to sit as a court of appeals.

The issue was brought before the people at the polls in the 1825 election. The result was a victory for the old court party by a large majority in the house. The senate, however, remained attached to the new court.

Because of the difference in opinion in the two houses, the reorganization law remained unrepealed. "For months the Commonwealth was trembling on the crater of a heaving volcano," wrote Lewis Collins. In an attempt to solve the problem a manifesto was prepared by George Robertson, Speaker of the House, signed by a majority of the house members and presented to the senate. The result was to aid in the decision made by a majority of the senate and the house members to repeal the act reorganizing the Court of Appeals, thereby reinstating the "old court."

The storm safely over, Judge Boyle resigned his post as Chief Justice but was persuaded to accept the office of district judge, which he held until his death in 1835.

The cabin in which the Boyles and his wife first lived and vacated in 1802 when they moved to Washington was next occupied by Samuel McKee and his young bride. McKee was a member of the State Legislature in 1806, 1808, and 1820, and was a representative in Congress from 1809 to 1817. His career also included service as a circuit judge and as an original trustee of Centre College.

The next occupant of the house on West Maple was McKee's brother-in-law, the aforementioned George Robertson, who, with his bride, set up housekeeping in the buckeye cabin in September 1810. Robertson had previously attended Transylvania law school as well as studying law under McKee and noted teacher and scholar Joshua Fry. In 1809 he was given his license to practice law by Judge Boyle and, like the McKees, commenced married life at the cabin in modest circumstances.

In two years, however, Robertson had secured a good law practice and in 1816 was elected to Congress. He was twice re-elected without

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Boyle-Robertson-Letcher House

8. Significance (Continued)

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opposition. He was elected to the State Legislature from Garrard County in 1822 and re-elected for another term during which he served as Speaker of the House. As Speaker, Robertson quickly became embroiled in the relief issue. In 1824 he was the author of a protest signed by the anti-relief party in the legislature which was to prevent the disbandment of the anti-relief forces. It "electrified the people, and furnished the text themes on which they were rallied to the rescue of the constitution" (Collins, p. 322). As was stated above, he also wrote the manifesto signed by the house majority in 1825-26. In 1828 Robertson was appointed Judge on the Court of Appeals and, one year later, appointed Chief Justice, in which office he remained until 1843.

Robert P. Letcher, a young lawyer, moved into the house in Lancaster in 1821. A native of Virginia from a modest background, Letcher came to Kentucky as a youth with his father, a bricklayer. Letcher taught himself to read and write and eventually studied law under the Honorable Humphrey Marshall and, as did George Robertson, with Joshua Fry. In 1813 he was elected to the State Legislature from Garrard County where he was to serve five terms. From 1823-33 he served as a representative to Congress. He then returned home to Kentucky but shortly afterward was elected a member of the legislature. In 1838 Letcher assumed the office formerly filled by Robertson, Speaker of the House. Letcher was the Whig candidate for governor in 1840 and received the largest majority ever obtained at that time by a candidate for that office. After his term as governor, Letcher returned to the practice of law in Frankfort, where he died January 24, 1861.

According to local tradition the clapboarded cabin on Morgan Street was also the home of Nancy Kennedy, after whom "Little Eva" in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin is modeled. It was here she raised her family of ten children. Nancy was the daughter of General Thomas Kennedy of Paint Lick, whose plantation was the reputed scene of Mrs. Stowe's famous anti-slavery novel.

Thus, this modest house, sometimes known as the "House of Congressmen," has been the home of four highly respected public servants, three of whom were deemed worthy to have a Kentucky county named for them. This house in which they all lived was certainly a common denominator, and their lives in so many other instances were strangely similar.

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Boyle-Robertson-Letcher House

8. Significance (Continued)

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All were of modest backgrounds, most came to the cabin newly married--bright, and ambitious with fame and success only a few years from their grasp. The house appeared filled with portentous good fortune for those four young men who began their careers residing at the buckeye cabin.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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(Continuation Sheet)

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Boyle-Robertson-Letcher House

9. Major Bibliographical References (Continued)

Page 2

Kinnaird, Dr. J. B. Historical Sketches of Lancaster and Garrard County. Lancaster, Kentucky: Central Record, 1924.

Clark, Thomas D. A History of Kentucky. Lexington: The John Bradford Press, 1960. Chapter IX "An Episode in Finance and Politics." See also Bibliography for additional references to the old court-new court controversy.

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REGISTER