



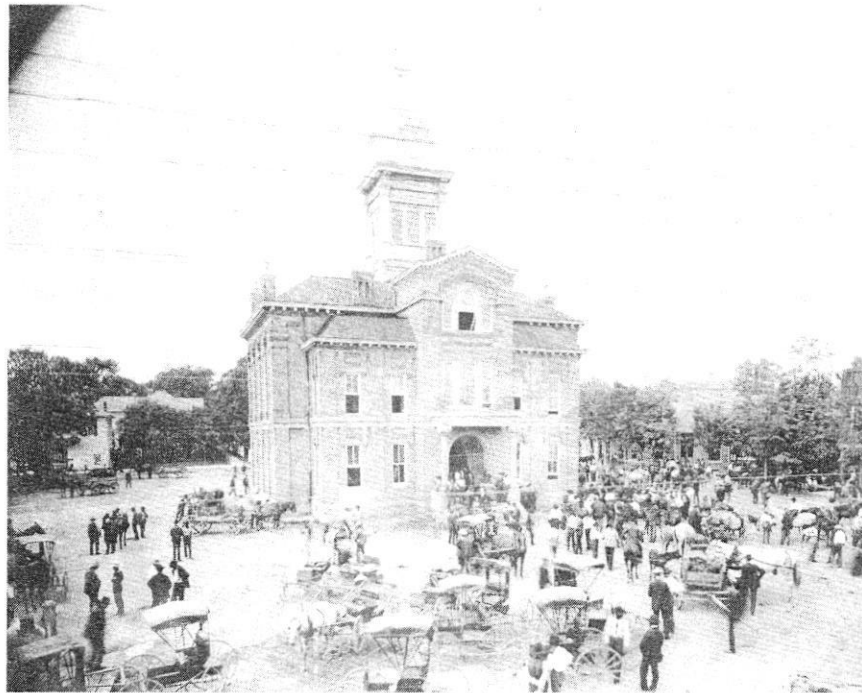
Adair County Courthouse

Built in 1884

Listed on the National Registry
of Historic Places in 1974

Remodeled and Rededicated in 1976





The 1884 Courthouse as it looked in early 1900.

William Henry Hudson, a carpenter, and Columbus Stone, a mason, were the contractors for this mid-Victorian style courthouse, built at a cost of \$17,486.50 in 1885 when the building was completed. The entrances, steps, and landings are of limestone quarried at Sparksville in Adair County.

The Louisville architectural firm of brothers Harry P., Kenneth, and Donald McDonald submitted the design for this, Columbia's second courthouse.

Columbia has had a courthouse since 1806. By the 1880's, a new courthouse was needed. County Judge Sallee and W. H. Hudson were appointed to sell the old one. C. J. Taylor and W. L. Taylor bought it for \$108 to be paid in four installments. Not included in the sale were the bell, stoves, chairs, tables, seats, the stone under the columns, or the pavement around the building. The building committee was John Eubank, James G. Conover, and W.W. Chelf.

The Victorian style is defined by building trends during the English reign of Queen Victoria. That style had no dominant feature but incorporated many embellishments resulting in a decorative building.

Consulting an architectural firm was a shift in the usual procedure, which was for the builders to lay out a plan. By the 1880's machine-sawed lumber and machine-made nails enabled more variations and possibili-

ties in construction for specific purposes to fit various situations. Architectural firms grew in number.

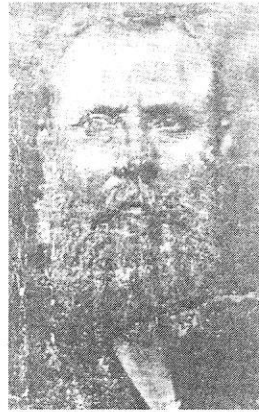
The McDonald Brothers developed a standard courthouse design, which could be altered to fit any budgeted cost between \$16,000 and \$40,000. They built 11 Kentucky courthouses on this same plan between 1882 and 1889. Eight of these courthouses remain in use in Kentucky, renovated or redesigned. These are in Simpson, Trimble, Carroll, Pikeville, Boone, Hickman, Graves, and here in Adair County. Their design was also used in other states.

When plans to build the present courthouse were discussed, a petition was presented to change the courthouse site to Greensburg Street. The petition was accepted by the court, but there was much disagreement. The town trustees wanted the courthouse on the Square. They reviewed the original town records which "fixed the permanent seat of justice on the Public Square." A special called session of the county court changed the location back to the Square. The court had to pay for work already done preparing the Greensburg Street site by the Daisy Brothers Contractors and for moving the building materials back to the Public Square.

Unique features of this courthouse are the faces carved into the tops of two of the columns. Although there is no written record identifying them, the faces are likely to be Hudson and his wife, and done by his partner, Stone, who was reputed to be a talented sculptor. Aptly named, Stone was ahead of his time by honoring a woman as part of his art work. In 1884 women were given little public recognition.



Carved Faces on the Columns



**An Old Photo
of Hudson.**

Notice a likeness between the carved face and photo?

Hudson also built the present building on the left corner of Campbellsville Street (as one faces the street) and the Square. He was a well-

known livestock dealer and a director of the Adair County Agricultural Association which began the Adair County Fair in 1884 on an 11-acre tract Hudson and his wife owned. They deeded 19 acres for the fairgrounds to the Columbia Fair Association for \$3,000. In 1898 Mrs. Hudson managed the fairgrounds dining room where huge crowds were served during fairs and other events.

The courthouse was not a comfortable place to work — hot in summer, cold in winter. Restroom facilities were in a small room built on the outside.

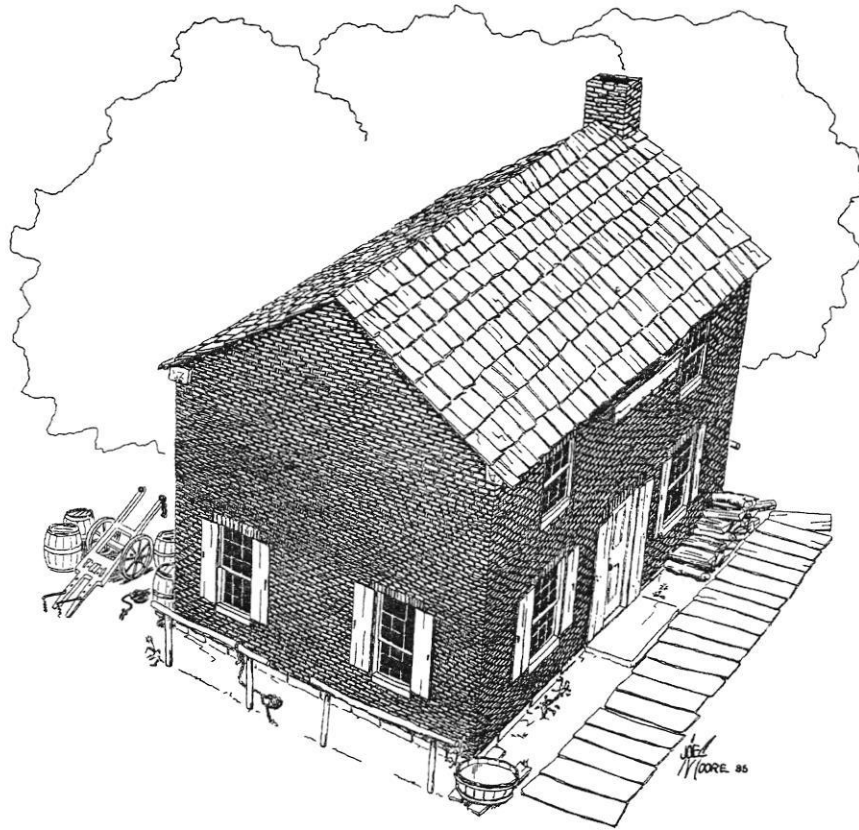
In 1974 the fiscal court voted to renovate and build additions on to the courthouse. Architects, Clotfelter and Johnson drew plans to enlarge the usable and storage space, install more wiring, and improve the facilities and access to the public. Joe England was county judge.

Because the additions on each corner were a different color than the original brick, the whole building was painted. Wood burning potbellied stoves were removed, spittoons were thrown away, and an elevator was installed. The cost was \$408,030 plus \$11,190 for bell tower renovation with a bell that could be turned on and off by electricity instead of being rung by hand. The local builders were McLean Construction. The benches outside still offer a place to sit and converse on topics of interest, and as has been the tradition of many years, whittle.

We might try to imagine the Public Square as it was in early 1800 — forested, with trails of animals and hunters crossing between the Green and Cumberland Rivers and Russell Creek. Numerous springs gushed good fresh water. Animals gathered at water sources; hunters followed. They built homes and began trades. A remnant of those times is an old stone spring house, still standing, not far from the courthouse.



Spring house on Deerlick Spring, near the dip in Jamestown Street. The public spring was across the street from here.



1806 Courthouse

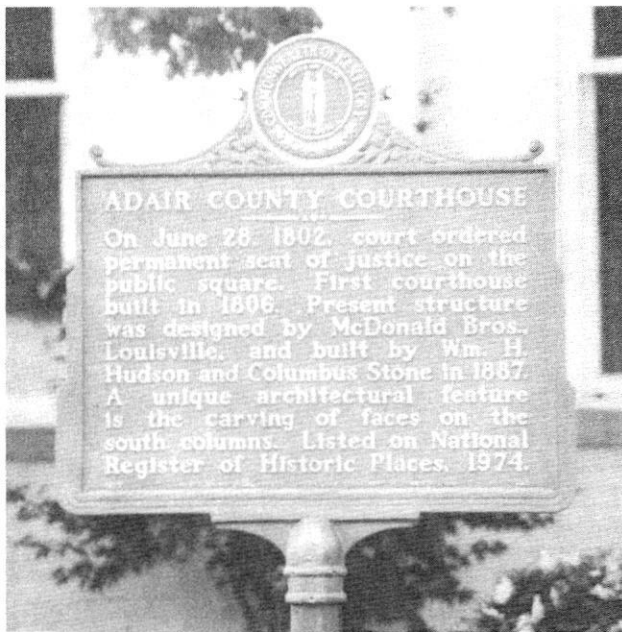
Columbia's founders, Daniel Trabue, Creed Haskins, and William Caldwell, chose this central spot for a Public Square from the 50 acres they had purchased from Blackmore and Nancy Hughes for £75 (English money). They donated a central portion for a Public Square plus the spring to the town, but they sold the surrounding acres, divided into lots.

The first order issued in the newly formed county was by Governor Garrard to organize a law body. Adair County Court began May 1802 with magistrates appointed by the governor. Plans were made to build a courthouse 37'x24', two and a half stories tall, with a goose weather vane on the shingle roof, six windows below and four above, two doors below and the lower floor paved with brick or stone. There was to be one chimney with one fireplace below and two above. The contractors were William Sutton and Robert Ball. Ball was foreman of the masonry work. He also had supervised the masonry work on the Greensburg Court House (still standing) and on the early school on High Street (still standing).

The first courthouse was to be completed in 1804. Some supplies came overland by wagons, lumber, hewn by hand, came from plentiful timber

locally, and bricks were fired on Jones Street. Clay for the bricks came from an area along Jamestown Street. The area still shows some depression from excavation — notice it the next time you dip down on the turn from Jamestown Street onto Hurt Street. Building materials were stacked on the Square. The winter of 1803-1804 was severe; materials disappeared. The courthouse was completed in 1806 at a cost of £700.

Heating and lights were the responsibility of the county clerk, William Caldwell, who made sure wood and candles were on hand. For 41 years this small courthouse was the seat of justice for Adair County. It held records of the Revolutionary War veterans who settled this area and of men who fought in the War of 1812. The men of the court took censuses, made tax lists and rules for orderly conduct, tried court cases, and kept up with state and U.S. legislation. Notices were posted on the courthouse doors. Evening meetings were set by saying, "We'll meet at candlelight." Minor improvements were made such as installation of a lightning rod, but not much changed.



Marker on the courthouse lawn.



1806 Courthouse was remodeled in 1847.

The 1806 courthouse took on a new look in 1847, when the Greek Revival style prevailed. The Greeks had also fought their war of independence and represented early democracy, thus inspiring this first wholly American style. It flourished with southern mansions and public buildings in Washington D.C. Thirty Kentucky courthouses were designed in the Greek Revival style between 1832 and 1861. Many were redone, as Adair County's was, from simpler beginnings.

Four columns supporting a hip roof were added on each of two sides (facing Jamestown Street and Greensburg Street) of the building. A hip roof has both sloping sides and ends. The area of the courthouse stayed the same, but the roof overhang allowed covered space under which people could stand. The courthouse was two stories high with ceilings raised high enough to accommodate stovepipe hats. It was painted white. A cupola for a bell was added with the provision that it should not cost more

than 40 dollars. The bell, rung at the beginning of court sessions, served as a time reminder. They still used candles for light. There was no inside plumbing.

While this 1847 seat of justice stood, lawmakers dealt with many problems of settling disputes, of protecting the water supply, of sending young men to fight in the Mexican War, and seeing the terrible conflicts caused by slavery and the Civil War.

In 1861 some thought was given to possibly building a new courthouse, but the county was not financially able to do so. Then the war began.

During the Civil War General John Hunt Morgan and his cavalry raiders camped in Columbia a few times. On July 3, 1863, as they came through from Cumberland County they met and overcame Union troops on Burkesville Road. Nearby homes became hospitals for the wounded. Morgan's 2,500 Confederates spent that night in Cane Valley, planning to cross Green River at Tebbs Bend on July 4, but that portion was defended by 200 Union troops under Colonel Orlando Moore. The C.S.A. troops could not overcome this well-fortified bridge. Under a flag of truce, they buried their dead and withdrew, forded Green River at another place and proceeded toward Lebanon.

Morgan's threat to burn the courthouse was thwarted by a Mrs. Smith, who ran a boarding house on the Square. She pleaded with him that a fire would blow onto her house and destroy her only means of livelihood. He



Marker on the courthouse lawn.

told her he would test the wind before deciding to set the fire. He tested the wind which, at that time, was blowing in the direction of the boarding house. The fact that John Hunt Morgan enjoyed eating at Mrs. Smith's probably helped save the courthouse. His threat was not carried out.

During the war, the records of Clinton County were stored in the Adair County Courthouse. Champ Ferguson, a violent Confederate rebel from Clinton County, attached himself to Morgan's raiders as a scout, but in reality was out to destroy and kill as many as he could. He made a bonfire on the Square and burned the Clinton County records. He planned to burn Adair County records, but decided instead to take money from a safe kept in a law office. He dragged the safe to the Square, smashed it with a sledge hammer taken from a blacksmith's shop, took \$300 which was in it and began throwing the other contents of the safe on the fire. Junius Caldwell, son of William, had succeeded his father as clerk of court. He persuaded Champ to put out the fire and leave. The blacksmith came to claim his hammer. He boasted that he had given Champ the worst cussing he ever had. When some doubt was raised, he allowed that he'd waited until Champ was well beyond the Cumberland when he did it.

Champ was not killed in the war, but was hanged shortly afterward. His handcuffs are on display at the Tennessee State Historical Museum at Nashville. He is buried near Sparta, Tennessee, by his request.

Confederate General Hylan B. Lyon and his troops stormed through Kentucky burning eight courthouses. They burned the one in Taylor County and proceeded through Columbia to Cumberland County to burn that county's courthouse. It is not known why Columbia was spared. Perhaps Mrs. Smith was on guard duty.

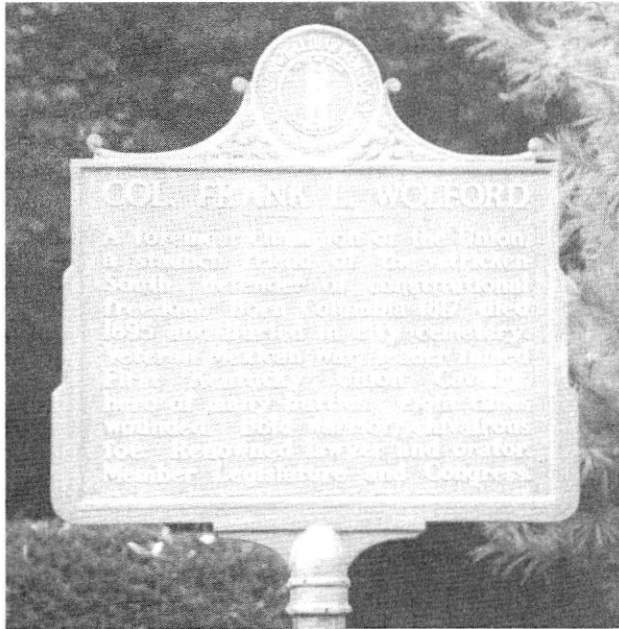
During that war 24 Kentucky courthouses were destroyed. If Union officers and/or troops used a courthouse as headquarters or barracks, it was likely Confederate troops would burn the building. Five of the courthouses were destroyed by Union troops by accidental fire or destructive behavior.



The D.A.R. placed this marker in 1942 indicating this area was settled by Revolutionary War veterans.

Union Colonel Frank Wolford, born in Adair County, was ever on the chase after Morgan during the Civil War. He'd been wounded eight times in battle. Reputed to be one of the best criminal lawyers in the Green River region, Wolford had a close link to the courthouse. His link now is the marker on the courthouse lawn. He was dishonorably discharged from the army and jailed for publicly criticizing Lincoln's presidency. Lincoln intervened and pardoned Wolford, who continued to serve his state and country in the Kentucky House and later the U.S. Congress. His house on Greensburg Street was recently dismantled and given to the Galilean Home, a children's home in Casey County where Wolford had practiced law.

In 1802 when Trabue, Haskins, and Caldwell laid out the town, they could not imagine the vehicles that would be invented. Their town had stores and homes within easy walking distance. Horses and wagons had ample places to hitch up. Traffic signs were not needed. They wanted the courthouse to be the center of a town they named Columbia, a synonym for the United States. They had been in the Revolutionary War and were strong supporters of freedom and justice. They were acquainted personally with leaders of the newly formed United States and Kentucky governments. They, themselves, were active as leaders of early Columbia. While they did not envision our mechanical conveyances, they did envision a town that was a good place to live, and hoped, probably, the courthouse in the center of a Public Square would inspire that message.



**Marker on the
courthouse
lawn.**



Since 1990, the lighting of an evergreen on the courthouse lawn has been a high point of "Christmas in Columbia," the first Saturday in December. It stays lit throughout the Christmas season. A marker indicates that it was given in memory of Bill Foster who had a Christmas tree farm in Glensfork. A Christmas tree for the courthouse was Bill Walker's idea. It was given as a five-foot tree by Foster's widow, Emmi, whose native country is Germany — from which our custom of the Christmas tree came.

This brochure was printed with funds supplied by the Adair Heritage Association. It was compiled in 1997 by Yvonne Kolbenschlag.

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Drawing of the 1806 courthouse is by Joe Moore. Recent photographs are by George Kolbenschlag. Old photographs are from library files.