

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: North Carolina
COUNTY: Caswell
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Caswell County Courthouse

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
South side of Courthouse Square

CITY OR TOWN:  
Yanceyville

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
Second  
The Hon. L. H. Fountain

STATE: North Carolina      CODE: 37      COUNTY: Caswell      CODE: 033

**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"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
Caswell County Board of Commissioners

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Caswell County Courthouse

CITY OR TOWN:  
Yanceyville

STATE:  
North Carolina

CODE:  
37

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Caswell County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Yanceyville

STATE:  
North Carolina

CODE:  
37

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1956       Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:  
East Capitol and Independence Avenue

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

STATE:  
D. C.

CODE:

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contains the courtroom with jury rooms and robing room at the rear. The interior is plastered throughout, and the original interior architectural trim, becoming more elaborate with each successive floor, remains substantially intact.

The basement, used primarily for storage, is very simply finished, with round-arched door openings and vertical beaded sheathed doors.

The first floor contains heavy wooden trim consisting of high molded baseboards, wide molded architraves, flat-paneled door soffits and reveals, and flat panels beneath the window sills. Each room contains a stained pine mantel in a Victorian Gothic design. The two northernmost rooms are small and each has a small-scale mantel consisting of truncated Doric pilasters supporting a plain curved frieze and a curved shelf. The more ornate mantels in the center rooms are very similar in design. The pilasters, with applied pendant motifs, support a frieze elaborated with applied strips, a plain center tablet, curved end blocks and a curved shelf. The mantels in the two southernmost rooms are identical, each with paired pilasters on high bases supporting a frieze with an applied corbel cornice and a large pendant-shaped center tablet and a curved shelf. At the rear of the hall against the east wall, a single flight of wooden steps provides alternate access to the basement.

At the second-floor stair landing on each side, a round-headed double door, each leaf flat-paneled, opens to the courtroom. The ornate architectural trim and most of the furniture of the courtroom are original. The room features an unmolded baseboard, a vertical beaded sheathed dado and molded chair rail, wide molded architraves, and flat-paneled doors with flat-paneled soffits and reveals. The ceiling is a masterpiece of coffered plaster work, with deeply molded ribs radiating outward from a center intricate openwork plaster medallion. The ribs overlap the plaster cove cornice and terminate below the cornice in small Corinthian corbels. The cornice area between each rib is elaborated with a round flat panel flanked by rectangular ones. Portions of the plaster work were restored twice in the twentieth century following small attic fires. In the center of the south wall of the courtroom is a round-arched plaster niche, through which a round-arched flat-paneled door leads to the robing room. A wide molded plaster surround with engaged plaster Corinthian colonnettes frames the niche. The wooden judge's bench in front of the niche is elevated on a wooden platform with a molded baseboard and vertical sheathed sides and contains round-arched flat-paneled ornamentation. Surrounding the bench is a semicircular platform partitioned into sections for the various court participants by a cast-iron railing of rich curvilinear design. The wooden courtroom benches have curved cast-iron arms with rosette motifs. The three small rooms behind the courtroom (the robing room in the center and the jury rooms on either side) have identical architectural trim but lack wainscots. Private access to the courtroom is provided for the judge by an enclosed stair which ascends in a single flight from the first floor to the robing room.

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Caswell County Courthouse, a monumental embodiment of Victorian institutional architecture, is a rectangular stuccoed brick structure located on the south side of Courthouse Square in Yanceyville. There is a sweeping view of the hills surrounding Yanceyville to the rear.

The two-story building, five bays wide and seven deep, is elevated on a foundation of rusticated granite blocks and crowned by a cupola octagonal in section. Pilasters separate the bays of each elevation, and a belt course divides the first and second stories, breaking out around the pilasters. The second story, containing the courtroom, is treated as a piano nobile and is emphasized on the exterior by greater height and more elaborate architectural detail. The three center bays of each elevation project as a shallow pavilion, and the roof breaks out over each pavilion in a segmental arch. At the second story on the east and west elevations the pavilion pilasters have stuccoed Doric capitals. The second-story pilasters of the main (north) entrance pavilion are emphasized by colorfully painted metal Corinthian capitals composed of ears of corn and tobacco leaves. Each first-story window contains four-over-four sash in a rectangular opening with a simple wooden surround and a granite sill. Each second-story window has six-over-six sash in a round-headed opening, with wooden Lombard tracery articulating the upper sash and an identical architrave and sill. In the wall surface beneath each window at both levels is a rectangular flat panel.

Decorative trim is concentrated at the cornice and provides a heavy visual cap, with large wooden acanthus modillions supporting the deeply overhanging molded wooden eaves. Beneath the cornice is a wide frieze with an upper wooden dentil course and a lower brick corbel table. The low hip roof is covered with tin. Interior stuccoed paneled brick chimneys with molded caps project from the roof--three on the east side and three on the west side. The octagonal wooden cupola which rises from the apex of the roof is crowned by a dome covered with tin which supports an open lantern and a weathervane. Each flush-sheathed face of the cupola is enframed by wooden pilasters and a wooden corbel table like the bays of the main structure, with a dentil cornice beneath the molded cupola eaves. The north, south, east, and west faces contain round openings, some with clock faces still present.

The main (north) facade, which faces the square, is dramatized by the void of the recessed porches at both levels of the pavilion. A balustrade with heavy turned balusters and a molded handrail protects the upper porch. The main entrance, in the rear wall of the lower porch, is a tall double door, each leaf raised-paneled with heavy boss and rosette ornament, set within a flat-paneled opening. In each side wall of the lower porch is a double flat-paneled door set within an identical opening leading into a plastered stair hall containing a wooden spiral stair to the second floor. Tall turned balusters and a heavy molded handrail wind upwards from the paneled polygonal newel at the base of each stair. The east stair continues to the attic with a simpler railing. Beneath the west stair stone steps descend to the basement.

Both the basement and the first floor follow a center-hall plan, with three rooms of varying sizes opening off each side. The second floor

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Colonial       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATES (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input 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 checked="" 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 present Caswell County Courthouse, an eclectic Victorian structure designed by John William Cosby and built between 1858 and 1861, is architecturally one of the most distinctive courthouses in North Carolina. The unusually striking main facade is dramatized by the recessed entrance porch on two levels, the brightly painted capitals of corn and tobacco, and the fine arched corbel course of the cornice.

The Caswell County Courthouse is the fourth built in the county since its creation in 1777. The third courthouse, which was designed and built by the Hillsborough carpenter-builder John Berry between 1831 and 1833, burned. The April county court of 1857 considered repairing this building, but by July, the court ordered a new one to be built and appointed a group of building commissioners. Evidently the commissioners held an architectural competition, for the January 8, 1858, issue of the Milton Chronicle, Vol. 17, No. 45, announced that

The New Court House was not let on the day appointed by the commissioners. Further time was allowed Architects to draw up plans. The commissioners met on Tuesday last, however, agreeable to adjournment and adopted the plan drawn up by John W. Cosby, Esq., late of Raleigh and now of Halifax, Va. Mr. Cosby has no superior as an architect, as the assylum [sic] for the Mutes in Raleigh and other grand monuments to his genius fully attest.

John William Cosby was the son of Dabney Cosby, who operated a brickyard on Hargett Street in Raleigh and is said to have been an architect himself. The Asylum for the Mutes to which the above account refers was built by Dabney and J. W. Cosby in 1848 in crenellated Norman Revival style. Unfortunately the identity of the "other grand monuments" designed by Cosby remains a mystery.

The Caswell County Courthouse was completed in 1861 at a cost of slightly more than \$28,000. The stone used in its construction was quarried about one-half mile from the site, and the brick was made near the quarry. County legend, probably stimulated by the magnificence of the completed structure, holds that the builder went broke before the yard was filled in and the retaining wall constructed, and later committed suicide. Although the building is in good structural condition, its massiveness is unfortunately disguised by its present coat of white paint, and the ornate cast iron fence which originally surrounded it was dismantled for repair in 1941 and sold

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for scrap iron during the Second World War.

The building's primary historical significance is the result of a famous murder which occurred during Reconstruction. John W. Stephens, a Republican state senator, was ambushed and assassinated in the courthouse on May 20, 1870, by members of the Ku Klux Klan, whereupon the county was placed under martial law by Governor William W. Holden. Holden was later impeached for his "dictatorial" actions, the only governor in North Carolina ever forcibly removed from office.

The architectural finish and furnishings of the courtroom are particularly noteworthy. The coffered plaster ceiling, a spectacular display of the plasterer's craft, spawned the local tradition that an itinerant French architect, finding the courtroom unfinished following the completion of the structure itself, asked to execute the ceiling and was granted permission. The courtroom is nearly unchanged in appearance and contains most of the original furniture. The original fabric of the entire courthouse, both exterior and interior, is remarkably intact.

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Hobbs, Robert C., to Ruth Little Stokes, January, 1973, copy in Survey files, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Olsen, Otto H. Carpetbagger's Crusade: The Life of Albion Winegar Tourgee, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1965.

Reconstruction Papers 1868-1871. Affidavit of John G. Lea explaining the events surrounding the murder of J. W. Stevens, July 2, 1919 (released 1935). Private Collections, Division of Archives and Manuscripts.

Smith, Mrs. Arthur. "Famous Structure may be viewed by public today," Greensboro Daily News, Dec. 7, 1952.

The Milton Chronicle, Vol. 17, No. 45, January 8, 1858. (On microfilm at the State Archives).

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Research and architectural description by Ruth Little Stokes, survey specialist.  
 Brown, Miss Mary Wilson. "If Courthouses Could Only Talk--," Popular Government, March, 1935.  
 Caswell County Records, Caswell County Courthouse, Yanceyville, North Carolina, Office of the Register of Deeds (Subgroups: Court Minutes).  
 Caswell County Records, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina, (Subgroups: Court Minutes).  
 Henderson, Tom. "Homespun Yarns," Greensboro Daily News, May 19, 1940.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	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	° ' "	° ' "		36° 24' 14"	79° 20' 09"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: less than 1 acre

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY:**

NAME AND TITLE: Survey and Planning Unit

ORGANIZATION: Office of Archives and History DATE: 3 April 1973

STREET AND NUMBER: 109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN: Raleigh STATE: North Carolina CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION	NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION
<p>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:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name <u>H. G. Jones</u></p> <p>Title <u>State Historian/Administrator</u></p> <p>Date <u>3 April 1973</u></p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p>_____  <i>Director, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation</i></p> <p>Date _____</p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p>_____  <i>Keeper of The National Register</i></p> <p>Date _____</p>

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