Form 10-300 (Rev. 6-72)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

North Carolina
county,
Caswell
FOR NPS USE ONLY

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The almost total domination of the Greek Revival style during Yancey-ville's antebellum boom era is reflected in the fabric of the historic district, which consists of the courthouse square and three blocks of West Main Street.

The county seat, known as "Caswell Courthouse," probably contained little more than the courthouse itself and several taverns and hotels for a number of years after its establishment in 1791. The appearance of the first courthouse, built about 1793, is unknown, but it seems from the following description in the Caswell County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. minutes of July, 1830, to have been located in the northeast corner of the present courthouse square. In response to an 1820 legislative act ordering that the public square be enlarged, the court extended the square

. . . . westerly to an oak tree in the lot of Azariah Graves and from thence to run south to a popular [sic] tree in the lower end of Paul A. Haralson's Garden and thence east in a paralel [sic] line with present line of the Public Square near to the Garden Pailings of Elijah Graves and then north to and with the line of the present Square, and the Court under the act as aforesaid received the lands of the owners as a donation and are not to be at any expense in removing any of the buildings within the lines herein specified. . . .

Only two known houses survive from Yanceyville's first period of development -- the Thornton House and the Paul Haralson House. House, named for Dr. Robert B. Thornton, who lived and maintained an office here in the second half of the nineteenth century, is located on the south side of West Main Street at the corner of Kerr Street, and appears to be the oldest structure in Yanceyville. The tiny frame Federal cottage, built early in the nineteenth century, is one story high with a finished attic, with boxed molded eaves and a steep gable roof. The most interesting exterior features are the compressed arrangement of the front door and flanking windows on the main (north) facade, with the molded architraves of the windows almost touching that of the door, and the gracefully molded The first floor is handsomely finished, with flat-paneled wainscots and deep molded chair rails. The front room contains a pierced dentil cornice and a tall, eccentric corner mantel distinguished by a short overmantel with flanking urn-shaped pilasters and the lavish use of pierced dentil moldings and incised ornament. The house is divided into two equal rooms with corner fireplaces, and an enclosed winding stair between the rooms ascend to the partitioned attic. The Paul Haralson House, located near the Haralson garden referred to in the county court minutes of 1830, is southeast of the present courthouse and overshadowed by it. house is an imposing two-story frame building of Federal form with a handsome classical entrance consisting of flanking Doric pilasters supporting an entablature with reeded ornament. Flat-paneled architraves with plain corner blocks frame the windows. The house was supposedly built in 1820, for a board bearing this date and Haralson's name was found during repair work. Haralson served as clerk of the county court from 1833 to 1841.

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The April, 1831, county court appointed a building commission for a new courthouse, and ordered them to advertise for an architect in the Raleigh Star, and North Carolina State Gazette, the Hillsboro Recorder, and the Milton Gazette, the most prominent North Carolina newspapers. The July, 1831, county court minutes record that John Berry, the well-known carpenter-builder from nearby Hillsboro, agreed to build the courthouse for the sum of \$5,000 which had been stipulated by the commissioners. Berry's specifications, which are recorded in the court minutes of the same session, are instructive, for this building was probably very close in appearance to the Orange County Courthouse which Berry later designed in Hillsborough (1844-1845), considered one of the finest Greek Revival institutional buildings in North Carolina. Berry was a talented local builder whose eclectic work reflected the best known architects of his period, but was most closely identified with the Greek Revival idiom. The Caswell County Courthouse must have provided an excellent model at the start of the village's building boom. Berry made ample use of Asher Benjamin's pattern books of Greek Revival motifs in the Hillsborough courthouse, and the domestic buildings of this era in Yanceyville show a dependence upon Benjamin also. The structure, according to the specifications, would be a two-story brick building, forty feet wide and fifty-five feet deep, with the courtroom on the first floor, jury rooms at the rear corners, and a gallery and offices on the second floor. The gallery would be built ". . . in the Doreck [sic] order, the columns to have base and capital and to be plated, the entablature to have a neat cornice. . . The gallery to be enclosed with Gothick pannel [sic] work rising 3 feet from the floor." The ceiling would be coved, and the courtroom would have ". . . a stucco cornice and center pice [sic] . . . the center piece to be enriched with ornamented stucco work. . . Exterior doors to be recessed on the outside 4 in. and have double elliptical arches sprung over them." The courthouse, erected on the south side of the newly enlarged public square, was apparently substantially complete by July, 1833, for the court minutes record the request that a workman be hired to finish the northeast room.

The Berry courthouse burned or was removed in 1857, but its influence on the architecture of the surrounding town survives, for the restrained yet robust dignity of form and detail of the Greek Revival buildings within the historic district probably reflects the character of that central structure. The village assumed its present form during this antebellum boom era. In the 1830s the Jeremiah Graves House, the Dr. Nathaniel Roan House, and the Presbyterian Church were constructed. In the early 1840s the Kerr House, the Thomas D. Johnston House, and the brick store were built, and a number of other houses still standing in Yanceyville date from this period. These buildings, consisting of one and two-story houses, one commercial building and a church, are predominantly of brick, with gable roofs. The finest residences of the period are the two-story brick houses along Main Street, while modest one-story frame houses with small outbursts of Greek Revival ornament line the narrow streets north of the public square and Main Street.

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The most pretentious house of this Greek Revival district is Dongola, the Jeremiah Graves House on the north side of West Main Street on the outskirts of town, forming the western cornerstone of the district. Graves, a tobacco planter and grandson of John Graves, patriarch of Yanceyville, built the house between 1835 and 1838 in an academic Classical Revival style which Thomas T. Waterman, author of The Early Architecture of North Carolina, saw as a bridge between the great brick country houses of Virginia and the smaller frame ones in North Carolina. According to local tradition Graves so admired a Virginia mansion which he saw while transporting his tobacco to the Richmond market that he built a replica of it, Dongola, named after a town on the Nile River. Waterman pointed out the marked similarity of the house to Horn Quarter, King William County, Virginia, which could have been Graves's model. The two-story L-shaped brick structure is sited so that both the south and west elevations serve as facades. The main (south) facade is distinguished by the monumental pedimented portico with coupled stuccoed brick columns and by the three-part windows in both stories. Elliptical fanlights with swag muntins surmount the main entrance and the first floor windows. An academic Doric entablature with the addition pinwheel motifs between the mutules above the trygliphs, continues around the south and west elevations. The sophisticated interior trim is lightened by curious flower motifs which occur in the capitals of the mantel pilasters and in the corner blocks of the door and window architraves. The Neoclassical design of the mantel in the main parlor was probably copied from an Asher Benjamin builder's guide.

Nearly as imposing a boom era residence as Dongola is the Johnston House, built by Thomas D. Johnston, prominent merchant, president of the Bank of Yanceyville, and one of the wealthiest men in town. The two-story brick house, built in 1842 according to the dated chimney, forms the grandest vista in Yanceyville, set at the end of a long axial driveway on the south side of Main Street near the public square. An especially interesting detail is the use of fretwork lintels with central cartouches over the double door entrances at both levels of the facade and over the facade windows. This lintel ornament is present on the east side but absent on the west and rear, suggesting the existence of a street running east of the house which has since disappeared. The most unusual feature of the house is the original one-story entrance porch, featuring Doric posts with an upper wooden balustrade with corner posts surmounted by turned wooden urns. The lintel ornament and porch (a rare survival) reflect the influence of Asher Benjamin's carpenters' guides. Josiah Rucks, a man of all trades, including tavern-keeper and coachmaker, who lived in Yanceyville during the boom era, was supposedly the architect/builder of this house.

According to local tradition, the Kerr House, located opposite the Johnston House on Main Street, was also constructed by Josiah Rucks. In 1832 the lot was purchased by Izban Rice, and an 1874 deed of transfer refers to the house as the old Rice tavern. Its most prominent inhabitant was Judge John Kerr, a legislator and a Whig candidate for governor.

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From 1887 to 1927 the house served as a hotel and was a center of social activity in Yanceyville in the late nineteenth century. It is a two-story brick building set close to the street, with exterior end chimneys, a gable roof, and a very simple Greek Revival entrance and simple molded trim. interior finish is equally plain.

The house occupied by Abisha Slade, Yanceyville's most famous citizen, while clerk of county court from 1841 to 1853, still stands on West Main Street between Turner Avenue and the Danville Road. The two-story brick house has interior end brick chimneys and a handsome pedimented Doric entrance porch. The interior, a center-hall plan with an enclosed stair leading to the second story, is finished with inventive Greek Revival mantels, marbleized baseboards, flat-paneled wainscots, and molded chair rails. The Slade family occupied the house until about 1940.

The Presbyterian Church, located at the southwest corner of Union and Harvey streets, is a starkly simple pedimented brick building one bay wide and two deep, with a small, well-maintained cemetery to the south. The church, the first in Yanceyville, was founded as the result of a division in the congregation of Bethany Presbyterian Church, located between Yanceyville and Milton. The gable-end facade of the present building, constructed in 1832, is filled by the huge double louvered door set within a wide plain crossetted architrave. The interior, which has been little changed from its original harmonious simplicity, contains afoyer with corner stairs leading to the galleries, and an auditorium. The galleries on three sides of the auditorium are the most distinctive feature. They are supported on Doric columns, and the flat-paneled solid balustrades bear prominent hand plane marks.

The only commercial building of the boom era which still stands in Yanceyville is the Brick Store located on West Main Street between the Kerr House and the public square. This two-story pedimented brick building, exhibiting robust Greek Revival commercial design, was probably built by James Gunn and William Bowe, who acquired the lot in 1838. In the early 1840s the partners began advertising a tanning business, and the Industrial Schedule of the 1850 census lists Gunn & Bowe Boot and Shoe Makers, employing an average of seventeen workers. This retail shop must have been constructed during this decade. The store has served numerous subsequent uses, including a post office, newspaper office, and lawyer's office. The structure has a Flemish bond facade with a center double door and six-over-six sash windows and a pedimented stuccoed gable. Each opening is surmounted by a wooden lintel with concave rondels in the center and at each corner. Despite the succession of functions, the interior is in a perfect state of preservation -- a rare survival of a mid-nine teenth century commercial interior. Each level contains a front and rear room, linked by a double door on the first floor, and a single batten door on the second. An enclosed stair with initial winders rises between the two first-floor rooms. Each rear room has a fireplace with a simple mantel composed of pilasters carrying a molded cornice and shelf.

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Each room is finished with plastered walls and molded architraves, and a chair rail is present in the rear first-floor room and both second-floor rooms. The full basement opens only to the street.

The present Caswell County Courthouse, the third built in the public square of Yanceyville, was erected between 1857 and 1861 following the destruction of the second courthouse. The building is located near the site of the previous building, on the south side of the square. Erected during the final years of the town's boom era prosperity, the building breaks the quiet Greek Revival atmosphere. It is a monumental embodiment of Victorian institutional architecture, combining Italian Romanesque and Classical features in a design unique in courthouse architecture in North Carolina. The eclectic design is that of John Williams Cosby, son of a prominent Raleigh architect.

Postwar Victorian architectural styles had little effect on Yanceyville, for almost nothing was built between 1865 and 1900. Two buildings constructed about 1900 are local landmarks. The Caswell County Jail, located immediately southwest of the courthouse, is a two-story brick Romanesque Revival style building, with segmental-arched windows and a brick corbel cornice. The southeast room of the first story and the entire second story serve as prisoner's quarters, and this section retains the original iron cells, gallows, and doors made by Stewart Jail Works Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. The remaining five rooms of the first story serve as jailer's living quarters, with a metal food slot between the jailer's kitchen and the first-floor prisoners' quarters. The Barzillai Graves House, located on the south side of West Main Street, was built by a young county sheriff Barzillai Shuford Graves for his bride. The structure is a picturesque two-story frame building with an Italianate bracketed cornice and porches with handsome coupled Corinthian columns.

The archetypal sleepy Southern courthouse square, with the Civil War monument centered in the green and bordered on four sides by streets, is lined with a parade of early twentieth century commercial buildings. The north side contains the most striking row, consisting of a brick building with a mansard false front, a narrow brick late Victorian store with a bracket cornice, and the Northwestern Bank, a yellow brick Classical Revival building with an imposing full-height Doric portico superimposed on the facade. Gold letters in the panels of the entablature of this charming twentieth century false front announce that the bank was founded in 1906 and the building erected in 1922.

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Yanceyville citizens still live in their Greek Revival houses and transact business under the shadow of the imposing Victorian courthouse. The domestic, commercial, and institutional Greek Revival buildings reflect the range of interpretations obtainable within the Greek Revival style, ranging from the refined stateliness of Dongola to the refreshing simplicity of the Abisha Slade House to the vernacular robustness of the Brick Store. The Yanceyville Historic District, recalling the town's antebellum tobaccocentered boom era, contains one of the largest and most consistent groupings of Greek Revival buildings in North Carolina.

Caswell County, created out of Orange County in 1777 by the General Assembly of North Carolina, was divided in half in 1791 with the eastern half established as Person County and the western half remaining as Caswell County. Leasburg, the county seat, was abolished, and the sites of the new county seats were left up to the county justices. The Caswell County justices employed a Mr. Poston, a surveyor, to find the geographic center of the county, the new county seat site, and to lay off the "Public Lotts." As stipulated by the General Assembly, the first County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions after the establishment of the county in March, 1792, was held at Joseph Smith's tavern. The June and September court sessions of 1792 were also held there. The July, 1793 session met at ". : . the place appointed for the New Court House." John Graves, owner of this land, donated a portion of it for the courthouse. The court appointed Grayes the "standard bearer" for the county, and ordered him to keep the official county weights and measures at his house, which must have been nearby. county seat, called "Caswell Court House," developed very slowly. The several county court sessions were kept busy establishing committees to lay off roads connecting the already established settlements with the new government center. As late as 1810, Bartlett Yancey, one of the most famous statesman produced by the county, who was born and lived near Caswell Court House, wrote that ". . . the whole of the possessions there belong to Capt. John Graves and his Sons. . . . " By this time, according to Yancey's calculations, the village contained ". . . 2 taverns, a Store, a Hatter's Shop with about 15 houses. . . . " The Caswell Academy, which had been chartered by the state in 1802, was located within one fourth mile of town. Richmond and Petersburg served as markets for the village's produce.

This embryonic period lasted until the early 1830s, when the county seat, reflecting the awakening of the county itself, entered a boom era

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which lasted until the Civil War. The April, 1831, session of county court approved a plan for a new courthouse, and by 1833 the building was substantially finished. In 1833 the heretofore nameless county seat was designated Yanceyville, in honor of the Yancey family. Dr. Allen Gunn, Thomas D. Johnston, John C. Harvey, Paul A. Haralson, and Colonel Thomas Graves were appointed town commissioners. In 1832 the first church in town, the Presbyterian Church was erected. By 1840 a weekly newspaper, The Rubicon, a debating club, a milliner, a coach maker, a dry goods and grocery store, and even an industry-the Yanceyville Silk Growing and Manufacturing Company -- had appeared. tobacco plantation owners in the vicinity gradually acquired "town" land, and nearly every taxpayer in the 1850 tax lists in the Richmond District, in which Yanceyville was located, owned both a large rural tract and lots in Yanceyville. Certain citizens were becoming wealthy. Dr. Allen Gunn, in town by 1830 practicing medicine and engaging in various business ventures, listed 211 slaves in the 1838-1839 tax lists. Thomas D. Johnston, who had come to Yanceyville by 1828, became a prominent merchant, president of the Bank of Yanceyville, and civic leader. His property was valued at \$161,000 in the 1860 census, making him the richest man in town and second most wealthy in the county; the census listed 84 slaves at his plantation and 32 slaves elsewhere, presumably at his places of business. Captain James Poteat, a planter, listed 105 slaves valued at over \$43,000 in the 1863 tax lists. The 1850 census listed five coachmakers, two coachpainters, and three cabinetmakers in Yanceyville. Two hotels, the Village Hotel and Poteat's Hotel, rivaled one another for guests.

Like the county itself, the economy of Yanceyville revolved around tobacco. Although the industrial schedule of the 1860 census listed five tobacco factor es in Yanceyville employing an average of 144 workers, the town was too close to Danville and Lynchburg to develop as an independent market for loose-leaf auction sales or a tobacco manufacturing center. Yanceyville was important during the nineteenth century for the contribution which its tobacco planters made to the scientific cultivation of tobacco and to the organization of tobacco growers in the Grange movement and other groups to achieve standardization of warehouse prices. Abisha Slade, whose slave Stephen in 1839 cured a barnful of tobacco to a bright golden color using charcoal as a fuel instead of wood, became by 1856 the model for tobacco growers in the Virginia-North Carolina area. Slade was an enthusiastic and articulate proponent of the new curing method, which resulted in the revitalization of the Piedmont counties of both North Carolina and Virginia, the future Bright Tobacco Belt, whose impoverished soil was discovered to be capable of growing tobacco which could be cured to a bright yellow. Abisha bought lots in Yanceyville, held an interest in the Village Hotel, served as clerk of the county court from 1841-1853, and then abandoned politics to devote himself full-time to tobacco cultivation. Other influential figures in Yanceyville were Dr. N. M. Roan, William Long, and Azariah Graves, who were among those who chartered the "Border Grange Bank" in Danville in 1879, an attempt through the Grange to improve prices for tobacco farmers. These three men were leaders in the Grange in the Bright Belt. All were well-known tobacco growers, who wrote in tobacco magazines and journals concerning their experimentation on fertilizer types to

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increase tobacco production and their work to develop reliable curing techniques.

The Civil War was disastrous for the tobacco-based economy of Yanceyville, for the manpower which enabled planters to produce so much tobacco was liberated. Capital disappeared. The town had no water or rail transportation. The political scene became explosive as a result of the resentment of outside intervention in local government and the political participation of blacks. The Ku Klux Klan chapter in Caswell County was one of the most active in North Carolina, and the hatred and bitterness of the Reconstruction Period throughout the state was embodied in the murder by members of the Klan of John W. Stephens, a resented politician, in the Caswell County Courthouse on May 20, 1870. Governor William W. Holden immediately imposed martial law on the entire county. Holden was later impeached, the only North Carolina governor ever forcibly removed from office. The economy of Yanceyville has remained tobacco-based throughout the twentieth century, but it has never regained its antebellum prosperity. Although the town contains several industries, it is primarily a market for the surrounding countryside.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES	9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES						
Research and architectural description by Ruth Little Stokes, survey							
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Caswell County Records, Caswell County Courthouse, Yanceyville, North							
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II. FORM PREPARED BY	1	<u> </u>	L				
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12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION		NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION	***************************************				
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As the designated State Liaison Officer for th	e Na-						
tional Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Pub.	lic Law	I hereby certify that this property is included in the					
89-665), I hereby nominate this property for in	National Register.						
in the National Register and certify that it ha		1					
evaluated according to the criteria and proced							
forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:		Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation					
National State A Local							
National Country of the Page 1200002							
Malace		Date	{				
Name UU UU UU	ATTEST:						
H. G. Jones	,		J				
Title Director, Division of Arch		.					
and History		Keeper of The National Register					
Date 15 August 1973		Date					

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

	North Carolina				
	COUNTY	···			
	Caswell				
	FOR NPS USE ONLY				
	ENTRY NUMBER	DATE			
1					

STATE

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

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January, March, June, 1792
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July, 1830

January, April, July, 1831

July, 1833 July, 1857 July, 1858

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