**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

1. **NAME**
   - **COMMON**: Caswell County Courthouse
   - **AND/OR HISTORIC**:

2. **LOCATION**
   - **STREET AND NUMBER**: South side of Courthouse Square
   - **CITY OR TOWN**: Yanceyville
   - **STATE**: North Carolina
   - **Congressional District**: Second
   - **The Hon. L. H. Fountain**
   - **STATE**: North Carolina
   - **COUNTY**: Caswell

3. **CLASSIFICATION**
   - **CATEGORY (Check One)**
     - [ ] District
     - [ ] Building
     - [ ] Site
     - [ ] Structure
     - [ ] Object
   - **OWNERSHIP**
     - [ ] Public
     - [ ] Private
     - [ ] Both
   - **STATUS**
     - [ ] Occupied
     - [ ] Unoccupied
     - [ ] In Process
     - [ ] Being Considered
     - [ ] Preservation work in progress
   - **ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC**
     - [ ] Yes
     - [ ] No
     - [ ] Restricted
     - [ ] Unrestricted

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

5. **LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**
   - **COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.**
     - **STREET AND NUMBER**: Caswell County Courthouse
     - **CITY OR TOWN**: Yanceyville
     - **STATE**: North Carolina

6. **REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**
   - **TITLE OF SURVEY**: Historic American Buildings Survey
   - **DATE OF SURVEY**: 1956
   - **DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS**: Library of Congress
   - **STREET AND NUMBER**: East Capitol and Independence Avenue
   - **CITY OR TOWN**: Washington
   - **STATE**: D.C.
contains the courtroom with jury rooms and robing room at the rear. The in-
terior 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 base-
ment.

At the second-floor stair landing on each side, a round-headed double 
doors, 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.
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...
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 Margrett 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 1818 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 $29,000. 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, tells 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 massive walls are unfortunately disguised by its present coat of white paint, and the ornate cast iron fence which originally surrounded it was dismantled for repairs in 1941 and sold.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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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.


Research and architectural description by Ruth Little Stokes, survey specialist.


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).


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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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

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STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY:

NAME AND TITLE: Survey and Planning Unit

ORGANIZATION: Office of Archives and History

STREET AND NUMBER: 109 East Jones Street

CITY OR TOWN: Raleigh

STATE: North Carolina

DATE: 3 April 1973

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

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: H. G. Jones

Title: State Historian/Administrator

DATE: 3 April 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

Director, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

DATE: ___________________________

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

DATE: ___________________________