

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Nicholas County Courthouse

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 700 Main Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Summersville

N/A vicinity

state West Virginia code WV

county Nicholas

code 067

zip code 26651

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register -0-

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official [Signature]

Date 6/26/91

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

government/courthouse

government/courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Neo Classical

Art Deco

foundation Sandstone

walls Sandstone

roof Slate

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Nicholas County Courthouse is located in the center of the Town of Summersville, Nicholas County, West Virginia. The Courthouse and additions encompass an entire city block bounded by Main Street to the north, Whortleberry Avenue to the south, Court Street to the west and Church Street to the east. The Courthouse is set back from Main Street with a broad lawn in front. It occupies roughly the rear 2/3 of the property. The main entrance faces north. The 1940 WPA addition is to the rear, or south of the original building, and the jail is to the east.

The lawn contains two large maple trees and a number of lower bushes. The lawn is approximately 24 inches above the level of the sidewalk with a rusticated ashlar sandstone wall. The wall has a break in it at the center and concrete walk leads to the entrance. This is flanked with wood benches. On the lawn are a number of monuments and plaques. A carved stone obelisk with a zigarat shaped top is on the northeast corner. The sides are flanked with pilasters and it sits on a two step base. There is a draped urn at the peak. This is a memorial to Betsy and Peggy Morris massacred by Indians in Lockwood in the early 19th Century. It was erected in 1916. On the northwest corner is a stone memorial with a brass plaque attached. This is rusticated random coursed ashlar, with a hip stone cap on the top with a ball finial. It is a memorial to Nicholas County's war dead. There are also West Virginia Historic Highway markers on the lawn commemorating "Nancy Harts Capture" and "Summersville".

The original building is a good example of Neo Classical Revival style divided into three main blocks. The center block is square in plan, two stories tall with a raised basement. This has a hip roof with a cupola in the center. On the north and south ends there are projecting blocks two stories tall with flat roofs. These are the full width of the building but are not quite as tall as the center. The entrance is in a projecting pedimented bay on the center of the front elevation. The 1940 addition is to the south of the building and is a flat roofed structure, two stories tall, with the roof line the same as the end pavilions. It projects slightly at the east and west and the eastern projection forms a connector to the jail building. On the west side there is an additional entrance facing north.

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The jail is a two story square structure with a hip roof. It is three bays wide by five bays long.

The facade of all three buildings is rough coursed ashlar Gilbert Sandstone in a slightly pink coloration. The courthouse has a belt course of smooth faced stone at the second floor level and the belt course in the entrance pavilion is a carved ogee molding. On the side elevations of the main section, the second floor courtroom windows are tall round headed windows with the glazing divided into two large panels with narrow surrounds. There are four bays separated by pilasters with smooth carved capitals. The remainder of the flat headed windows in the building are two-over-two wooden sash types.

There is a wide plain frieze at the roof level and a large overhanging cornice with scroll brackets. The front entrance pavilion has a large tripartite round headed window in the second floor. This has an arched belt course above it. The entrance doors are framed with a smooth stone surround with a pedimented entablature. This is supported on square pilasters.

The 1940 addition is constructed of the same material. It is rough faced coursed ashlar sandstone. It has a flat roof. There is a belt course of smooth stone above the second floor windows. The windows are multipaned metal casement units. The entrances are detailed with smooth stone compound surrounds. These are more stylized versions of the main entrance in an Art Deco motif. Each of the three entrances to this addition is slightly different. On the west side, the entrance consists of a slightly pedimented lintel of smooth stone supported by flat pilasters with tall plinths, 24". At the top of the pilasters are carved stylized capitals. They are actually carved into the stone of the pilaster, not separate caps. They consist of a round cap with inverted chevrons beneath it. There is a lintel over the door that is carved with a chevron pattern. The doors are recessed slightly and the surround is compound.

On the rear the entrance is deeply recessed with a compound surround. Here the surround is also smooth stone but it is a chamfered arched rather than flat headed. Over the center of the arch is a diamond shaped smooth stone cartouche. The tympanum over the entrance doors, in the recess, is trapezoidal shaped with a carved motif containing chevrons and rectangular vertical elements.

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On the east elevation, the entrance is in the section that forms a hyphen with the jail. It has a shed roof canopy supported by timbers over the entrance.

The interior of the first floor consists of a center main corridor with flanking offices. The front has an open stair well with the stairs flanking the entrance up to a landing. The second floor consists of a main stair landing/vestibule with small flanking offices. Behind a central pair of doors is the courtroom. This takes up all of the main block of the structure. Behind the courtroom are offices and restrooms. The addition portion, 1940, contains offices on both floors.

There is little remaining significant fabric on the interior. The floors are mostly vinyl asbestos tile. Walls in most of the building are covered in pressed wood paneling, ca 1970. Others are covered in prefinished wallboard. Most ceilings are dropped lay in panel systems. The finishes of the 1940 section are painted plaster ceilings and walls. Some of the floors are carpeted. The Assessor's offices contain oak floors that have been refinished. The record storage room has original decorative ceramic tile floors. Doors throughout the building are mostly original. They are cross and bible raised panel doors. Most have been stripped of paint and finished in a stain and clear finish. Some are painted. It appears as though they were originally grain painted.

The predominant extant significant fabric of the building is located in the courtroom. This is the balustrade rail separating the visitors from the bar section. It has a square newel posts with flat panels and a cap. The rails are wide with a pent roof section. The balusters are large diameter turned in the north wall of the room. These are simple Classical Revival elements in light grey marble. They have scroll brackets supporting the shelf and square pilasters with simple caps. In the fireplace openings are the remains of coal grates.

The doors into the courtroom are paired 9 panel sections. They contain small square panels in the upper portion with longer rectangular panels in the center and short rectangular panels in the lower portion.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☒ B ☐ C ☒ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

politics/government

1896-1940

April 13, 1898

architecture

1940

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

FE and HR Davis - Architect

Levi J. Dean - Addition 1940 -

Architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Under Criterion A, the Nicholas County Courthouse is significant for: its contribution to the political history and development of Nicholas County, West Virginia; as the site of law cases, trials, etc. for the county; and as the focus of county politics and life. Under Criterion C it is significant for: its association with West Virginia Architect, Levi J. Dean; as a good example of the Neo Classical Revival style of architecture; and as an example of Federal WPA projects in Central West Virginia.

Nicholas County was formed in 1818 at the home of John Hamilton. A meeting was held in the Kesslers Cross Lanes farmhouse on April 17 to organize the new county. At that meeting, the actual location of the courthouse was one of the first controversial issues of the new county. One half of the residents and justices present wanted the courthouse erected on Archibald Hutchinson's farm, while the other half wanted the construction to take place at the Hamilton farm. A compromise was reached and the first courthouse to be erected was at the site of John Groves' farm.

A five member commission from Greenbrier, Kanawha and Randolph counties was established to locate the new county seat. The site recommended was a 5000 acre tract of land known as Arbuckle Tract adjacent to the John Groves farm. Thirty acres were donated by John Hamilton for the public square. On this square the first county edifices were constructed, including a log jail 1819-1824, a stone jail 1826-1906 and the first courthouse which was a 30x40 two story frame structure in 1820.

In 1882 a committee was appointed to review the condition of the existing courthouse. Although it was determined that the building was unfit for use, no action was taken other than bracing of the exterior walls.

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In 1892 the Normal School conducted a meeting at which the courthouse was considered, the result of which was a resolution condemning it. A commission was subsequently appointed to procure plans for a new structure. Two alternatives were to be reviewed, one for a brick structure and one for a stone building. Advertisements for architects were published in Nicholas County, Charleston and Wheeling.

On December 20, 1885, the commission reviewed plans by Frank E. Davis and William F. Gresey. No decision was made until the next day when plan "B" of F.E. and Henry R. Davis of Baltimore, Maryland was accepted. They were contracted to prepare plans and specifications for a building to cost \$22,000. Their fee was 5% of the building cost. The deadline for the completion of the project was set for March 10, 1896.

Three contractors bid on the project: The Withrow Lumber Company, Charleston, West Virginia; Thomas D. Johns, Baltimore, Maryland; and Fouse and Reich, Parkersburg, West Virginia, with the latter being successful bidder at \$21,978.00. Construction began in May 1896 and the building was first used as a courthouse on April 13, 1898, though it wasn't complete at the time. During the construction period, court was held in the Normal School in East Summersville and in a building on Main Street, Summersville, owned by Henry McQueen.

The new courthouse was dedicated on April 13, 1898. Members of the program committee were: W. G. Groves, J. S. Craigs, J. S. Grose, J. A. Mearns and J. M. Hutchinson. The dedication address was given by Attorney Ned Andrews of Clay, West Virginia.

The present jail was constructed in 1910 by the B. F. Smith Fireproof Construction Company, Washington, DC. It was started in April and completed in January 1911. During construction, prisoners were housed in Braxton County's new jail. B. F. Smith acted as architect for the job and David Dick from Charleston was the architect representing the county court during construction.

The Courthouse naturally served as the center of county and regional politics. Some of the more prominent persons involved with politics in the Nicholas County Courthouse include Joseph A. Alderson, who was Circuit Court Clerk in 1891 and County Court Clerk in 1903-1909, and Superintendent of Schools. The Alderson family was a prominent Nicholas County family - Joseph A. Alderson Sr. served in the Virginia Legislature prior to 1863 and John D. served 3 terms in Congress.

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Another was J. A. Hamilton, descendant of John Hamilton whose farm hosted the foundation of the county and the first court, who succeeded his father in 1873 in the clerk's position until his death in 1903.

Others included:

P. N. Wiseman - Clerk of County Court 1909-21, also a State Senator and Deputy Sheriff.

Jettes Mollohan - Sheriff 1913-1917 and the County Assessor in 1908 and the Democratic Chairman of Nicholas County. He served in the House of Delegates in 1919 and as Mayor of Summersville in 1933.

W. E. Morton - Sheriff 1917-21; 1929; 1933-37; President of the Nicholas County Bank from 1936-47; and served on the County Commission.

J. M. Wolverton - Prosecuting Attorney 1913-17, 1921-25. He moved to Richwood in 1904 and became Mayor in 1918-19. He was in the House of Delegates in 1925 and 1929 but ran unsuccessfully in 1930, 32, 36.

The most prominent political figure associated with the courthouse is Okey L. Patteson. Patteson was President of Fayette County Court from 1935-41. During this period he is also listed as interim Sheriff for Nicholas County, presumably during construction of the new jail. Nicholas County Court records list him as Sheriff and also indicate reimbursements to him for housing Nicholas County prisoners during this period. Subsequent to his association with Nicholas County he went on to become Governor of West Virginia.

Under Criterion C, an individual associated with the courthouse is the architect, Levi J. Dean, from Huntington, West Virginia. A partial list of commissions between 1918 and 1940 contains over 135 structures. Most were public buildings such as schools, courthouses, and municipal buildings. Some of his more prominent structures in West Virginia include stores for the O. J. Morrison Company in Huntington, Charleston, Fairmont and other cities. The M. E. Church in Richwood, West Virginia; the 4th Avenue Arcade in Huntington, West Virginia; the Jackson County Courthouse, Ripley, West Virginia; the Star Theater, Richwood, West Virginia; the Biltmore and Park Tower Hotels, Huntington, West Virginia; and the Pikesville Kentucky Courthouse. His commissions were located throughout West Virginia and his influence on architectural styles, particularly the Revival styles of 1910-30, is obvious when traveling in the state.

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During the Depression, Dean took to working at a number of Works Progress Administration projects in West Virginia. He completed the Municipal Building for Gassaway, and the addition to the Courthouse in Summersville. The Summersville project is a good example of this period of Dean's career. The details, styling and massing are all Art Deco derivatives that were popular for WPA construction. This style marks a departure from the Neo Classical and Colonial Revival styles of his previous buildings. It is significant in that he was able to do this and do it well. The Courthouse addition is a good example of the style and the details are all flawlessly executed. Particularly noteworthy of attention are the architraves around the various entrances. Those are where Dean concentrated his talents and expressions. The rear, south entrance has a segmented arch surround with a diamond shaped carved cartouche above it. The arch is compound. The west entrance is similarly compound but is framed by a shallow pedimented lintel supported by engaged pilasters. Above the pilasters are carved stylized ornaments representing corner blocks or capitals. These details embellish an otherwise simple structure. Though simple, the addition fits very well with the original building. This is one of the few Art Deco style buildings in Nicholas County.

The original portion of the courthouse is a very good example of the early Neo Classical style of architecture in Central West Virginia. Its progressive position in the history of West Virginia architecture is probably due to the fact that the original architect was from Baltimore, Maryland. This practice of employing architects from larger urban areas was not uncommon during this period. It was not uncommon for architects from Washington, Baltimore or New York to work on commissions in areas like West Virginia or western Maryland, etc.. There were architects in the state at the time, but it was still prestigious, as it is now, to bring in an "outside expert." Many of these architects specialized in public buildings such as courthouses. This phenomenon explains the architectural sophistication of the design of public buildings in such remote locations.

The style of the structure reflects the knowledge of an architect who is up to date on the latest developments in his practice. It is very progressive for the time period, though similar to buildings in some of the larger cities around the state. It can be described as the Neo Classical style with elements and details characteristic of the style such as pilasters on the facade planes; wide friezes; modillions in the cornices; pedimented projecting bay; and pedimented entrance with flanking pilasters and capitals.

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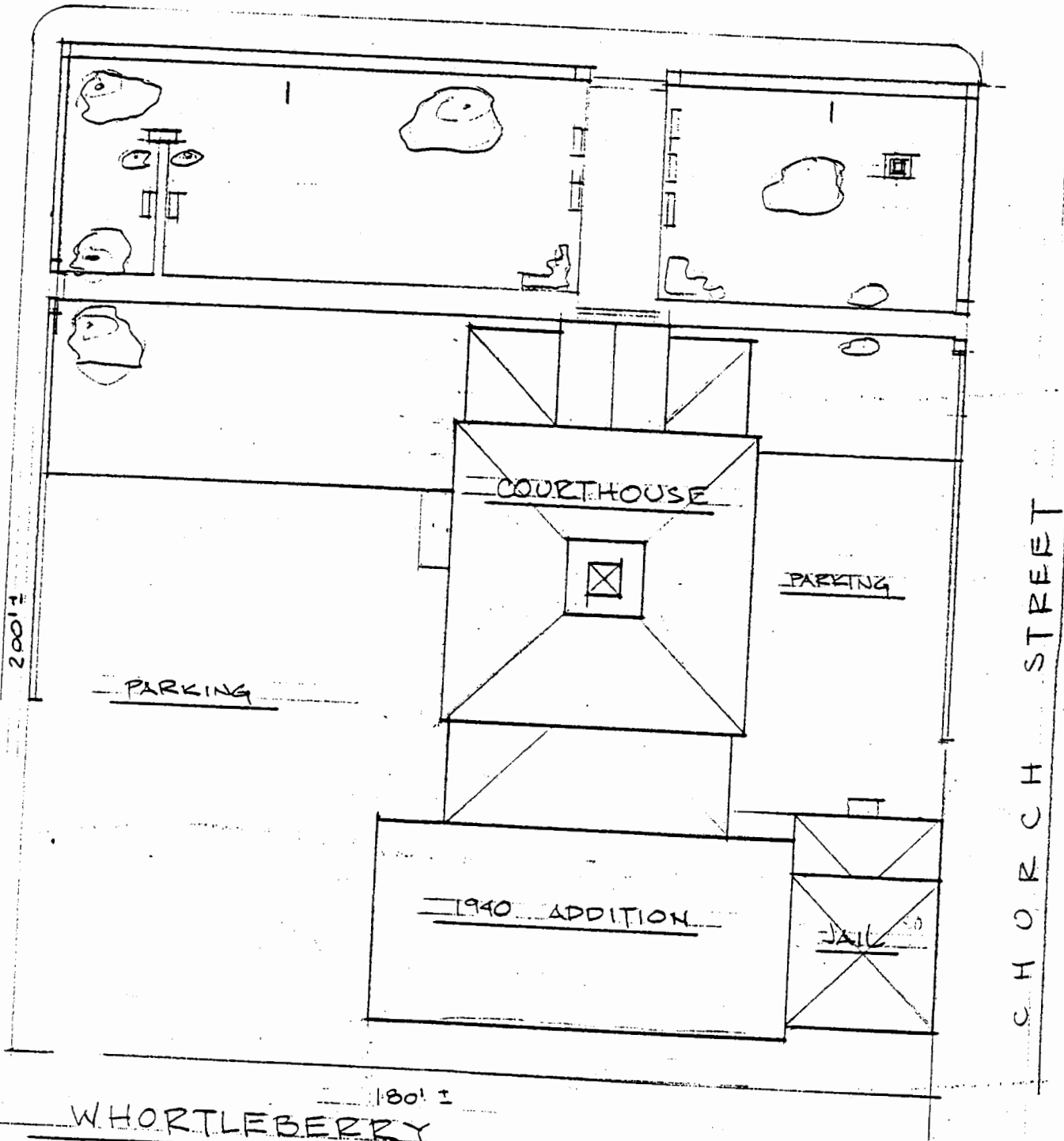
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All of these are typical of the period and the reinvestigation of the early architecture of the nation. It was a particularly appropriate style for public buildings such as courthouses because it represented the solidity and "history" of the government. It was a good symbol of the continuity of government. In later years this style gave way to the Beaux Art Classical Revival styles that replaced it in many public buildings of the early 20th Century. The scale of the building and the Neo Classical style is unusual in Nicholas County and the surrounding region. The building is constructed of lower Gilbert sandstone quarried near Summersville. The initial plans for the courthouse called for "hard burned salmon" face bricks with mortar to match. The stone was used probably because it was locally available and was a common material for many of the larger structures in Summersville. The jail is similarly constructed of sandstone quarried from the Groves' property. Other buildings in the vicinity include: the Nicholas County High School; the Farmers & Merchants Bank; and, the Breckenridge House. The 1921 WV Geologic Survey report for Nicholas County lists a number of quarries for building stone with most of them around Summersville. These provided the materials for many of the county's most prominent structures and its use in the courthouse is indicative of the prevalence of stone and quarries in Nicholas County.

The existence of the county courthouse in any town naturally contributes to the development of that town. Official county business is conducted which in turn brings people into town, with brings commerce into town to service the visitor and the cycle goes on. The very justification for forming the county in 1818 was that it would be more convenient for area residents to do business in Summersville than in Charleston. Prior to construction of the courthouse, the population of Summersville was approximately 100. In 10 years it jumped to 223 and in 1910 was 200. All of the banks in town were constructed after the courthouse; the Nicholas County Bank in 1922 and Farmers & Merchants Bank in 1917. Many of the general stores, hardware stores etc., were constructed in the period immediately following the courthouse construction, as well as the two hotels in town. Summersville continued to grow into the 20th Century achieving a population of 643 by 1940.

MAIN STREET

COURT STREET



WHORTLEBERRY



NOT TO SCALE

ETCH
1

NICHOLAS COUNTY COURTHOUSE
SUMMERSVILLE, WV

MICHAEL GIOULIS

DATE
NOV. 1990

9. Major Bibliographical References

Berger, David. West Virginia Geological Survey, Nicholas County, 1921
Brown, W.G. History of Nicholas County, 1954
Gioulis, Michael. Price House National Register Nomination, Jan. 1991
Myers J. Howard. West Virginia Blue Book 1950. Jarrett Printing,
Charleston, West Virginia
Nicholas County Court Records. Nicholas County Courthouse
Nicholas County Historical and Geneological Society. Nicholas County
History 1985
Unpublished Manuscript, Nicholas County Courthouse, Wilma Richardson

☐ See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings
Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State historic preservation office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☒ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .83 acre

UTM References

A

1	7	5	1	3	0	0	0	4	2	3	4	7	5	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D

Zone			Easting					Northing						

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The site is one square block in the center of Summersville bounded on the north by Main Street; on the south by Whortleberry Avenue; on the east by Church Street; and, on the west by Court Street.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This is the original "Public Square" donated to the county by John Hamilton. It contains all of the significant courthouse structures.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Wilma Richardson, Board of Directors
organization Nicholas Co. Historic Landmark Comm. date April 5, 1991
street & number 700 Main Street telephone (304)872-5726
city or town Summersville state WV zip code 26651

