

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property

historic name London Downtown Historic District

other names/site number Various Site numbers (see Description inventory)

## 2. Location

street & number Main Street between West 8<sup>th</sup> Street and West 5<sup>th</sup> Street N/A not for publication

city or town London NA vicinity

state Kentucky code KY county Laurel code 125 zip code 40742

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

Signature of certifying official/Title Mark Dennen/SHPO Date \_\_\_\_\_

Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register  determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register  removed from the National Register

other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
17		buildings
		district
	3	site
		structure
		object
17	3	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

1

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce/Trade: business

Commerce/Trade: professional

Commerce/Trade: specialty store

Religion: religious facility

Commerce/Trade: business

Commerce/Trade: professional

Commerce/Trade: specialty store

Religion: religious facility

Health Care: medical business/office

Commerce/Trade: restaurant

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commercial Style

foundation: brick

walls: brick

roof: Rolled composite, tar

other:

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

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## **Narrative Description**

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### **Summary**

London Downtown Historic District is a compact area containing 21 properties between West 8<sup>th</sup> Street and West 5<sup>th</sup> Street on the Main Street of London, seat of Laurel County, Kentucky. The buildings are 1-to-3 stories high, and constructed primarily of brick. There are 17 commercial buildings, 1 church, and 3 vacant lots. The dates of construction range between 1890 and 1939. The area proposed for listing is 3.89 acres, and includes 18 contributing buildings and 3 non-contributing sites. One of the 18 buildings, the Poynter Building, is currently listed on the National Register.

### **Environment and Development of Downtown London**

The town of London is located in southeastern Kentucky, a part of the state known for its rugged terrain. London serves as a regional gateway into the eastern Kentucky hills. While the town has a long history associated with the growth and development of Laurel County, the existing commercial Main Street developed in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, primarily in response to the opening up of the state's southeastern coal mines. Additionally, London became home to the United States Courthouse in 1912, which continues to serve a multi-county area of the state. Today the town is a banking and legal hub for the southeast region of Kentucky.

The London downtown commercial area developed slowly during the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; most of this era of the historic downtown exists only in scattered remnants. From its beginnings however, the development of the central business district was concentrated along the Main Street with the courthouse as the nucleus of the town. The secondary streets formed a grid that extended for several blocks in all directions.

In 1895, the town's population was about 1,100 people and many businesses were in place along the edges of the city. J. T Brown's Carding Machine and Corn Mill was one quarter of a mile north of the courthouse, while the London Manufacturing Company was an equal distance from the courthouse to the west. A modest Louisville & Nashville Railroad (L&N) spur served those facilities engaged in making brick and processing lumber. The site featured many buildings such as brick kilns, lumber storage facilities and loading docks for the rails. To be sure, the town relied on the economic vitality of local industries to support the growing businesses on Main Street, while at the same time, those industries created a catalyst for new economic growth within the city. Thus, the relationship between manufacturing, rails, and commercial growth of Main Street were correlated factors in the overall development of London's downtown commercial district. While this part of town had developed some, by 1895, Main Street was still characterized by dirt roads sparsely lined with commercial, residential, and religious buildings. The concentration of commercial activity was centered on the courthouse square.

The town got a boost in 1897, when Sue Bennett, a local social advocate who wanted to provide education for low income citizens, successfully started a school near downtown. The school was named in her honor and was associated with the Methodist church at large. By the 1920s, the school became a junior college and ultimately it served the area as a four-year regionally-influential institution. The emerging emphasis on education also brought with it the town's first public library that was formed by the ladies group at the First Christian Church (LL-L-10, Resource 19) located on Main Street.

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, the commercial Main Street had emerged as a vital hub of political, social, religious, and economic activity. The 1901 Sanborn maps show the expanded development of Main Street extending north from the courthouse to 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Also, the courthouse square was lined with offices, stables, and businesses. Likewise, the area south of the courthouse had developed to include hotels, drug stores, and mixed commercial/residential buildings. The buildings on Main Street were a composite of both brick structures and wood framed buildings that fronted the street.

The most elaborate building was the Catching Hotel across from the courthouse on Main Street. That building spanned nearly all of the block between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets in 1901 and by 1908 it had been expanded to include the entire block. At the street level, the store fronts were characterized by decorative cut stone finishes and glass-front open bays. The second story facades were constructed of brick and Italianate in their style. Although it was regarded as a single structure, the height of the building varied between two and three stories to give it some relief along the roof line. The cornices featured corbelled brick with decorative pressed metal details and Italianate brackets to finish them off. To be sure, the Catching block was a mark of progress and a sign of things to come as London embraced the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

At the turn of the century, the Main Street had become a collection of specialty shops, eateries, hotels, banks, and residences. The most prominent feature of the town was the courthouse. Built in the 1880s, the structure was architecturally eclectic and a very stylish building. It was two-stories with an elaborate hip roof and clock tower that was nearly thirty feet in height. The tower was situated in the center of the building and it enclosed a bell and housed four clocks that faced east, south, north, and west. The brick building had an elaborate cornice and highly stylized Italianate windows. The elevated entrance faced Main Street and it was accented by a Greek Portico with Dentils along the cornice. The courthouse was the epicenter of civic life and featured a bandstand on the lawn where the local fireman's band would hold concerts on the weekends. The lawn was enclosed by a stone retaining wall. The courthouse was destroyed by fire in 1959, and a new courthouse was built thereafter.

The edges of the downtown continued to develop as well. Not just the Sue Bennett School, the L&N Railroad redeveloped its line, installing a modern passenger depot and freight station on the north end of the town along Main Street. The line went through the west edge of town and the various streets expanded out to tie the rail road activities to the Main Street. The London Manufacturing Company expanded its operations along the line and the London Electric Light and Power Company was built nearby as well. North of Main Street was the newly built Murphy and Company Lumber Yard and the Turner-Day & Woolworth axe handle factory. With new development came a host of new commercial enterprises along Main Street from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> and the secondary streets of Broadway and Hill. The Main Street was a destination for outsiders and locals, and the rails brought in merchandise from all over. A furniture store, dress making shop, and roller skating rink were among the expanded businesses in the town north of the courthouse. North Main Street was also home to the Pennington Infirmary and the London Graded School, the city's first substantial public school building on North Main Street. While the area south of the Laurel County courthouse remained mostly residential, the area north of the courthouse flourished with continued commercial development.

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

Between 1900 and 1915, the concentration of commercial development on Main Street was between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets and north between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets. The sections out to 9<sup>th</sup> were evolving with new buildings; chief among them was the new First Christian Church built in the popular Romanesque Style. The area south of the courthouse to 1<sup>st</sup> Street lagged behind somewhat. The Sue Bennett School had expanded its campus facilities with the construction of teacher's quarters, a girl's dorm, and a substantial classroom building. The town's population was about 2,500 in 1912, and areas all around Main Street had become the focus of residential development that included stately Victorian-era homes as well as modest working class residences. Also in 1912, the United States Courthouse was built at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Main Streets. The building also housed the Post Office and was the most substantial building south of the Laurel County courthouse located in the center of town. Main Street between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> was dominated by residences and nearly void of commerce all together. The US Courthouse was in striking contrast to most everything around it.

The town got a boost in the 1920s and 1930s, when U.S. 25 was completed, linking the town via automobile and bus travel to the interior Bluegrass cities of Richmond and Lexington. The city's streets were now paved and they were lined with modern utility poles and traffic lights at the major intersections. Many photographs from this period show Main Street teeming with cars, filled parking spaces, and pedestrians crowding newly-poured concrete sidewalks. Modern lit signage hung from many of the commercial stores while aluminum and fabric awnings were suspended over the entryways. The downtown thrived as the social nucleus of Laurel County and became a destination for many traveling along the Dixie Highway throughout the first half of the century.

By the 1940s, London had matured into a substantial Kentucky town due to the region's ongoing coal and timber industry booms. This activity also fueled growth in the nearby towns of Corbin and Manchester. London became home to all the modern conveniences, such as movie theaters, department stores, hotels, and many other commercial enterprises that came to reflect the values of a consumer-oriented life in small town America. Also by 1940, the core area of the downtown business district had reached its limits of development along the Main Street. Those buildings that had been constructed in the previous decades continued to be used and re-used as the local Main Street economy evolved.

The post-WWII-era ushered in a time of change to some of the downtown's key historic buildings. In the early 1950s, the Catching Hotel caught on fire and was rebuilt using remnants of the original structure combined with new design features that lowered the entire building to two-stories. Also, in 1951, the Southland Theater caught fire and was destroyed, while in 1959, the Laurel County courthouse also caught on fire and was completely destroyed. Folks in the community responded to these events by building a new courthouse and replacing the theater with another commercial building that came to house other retail vendors. Also during this time, many of the buildings on Main Street modernized their facades to achieve a streamlined appearance, thus projecting a more modern image. Most changes were modest and included installing aluminum awnings and new signage. Some were more extensive, such as the upper façades of the McGee's building and the Hobbs building that were covered with punched aluminum panels. There were others that attempted to alter the facades and give them a flush profile that was void of windows. In all of these cases the goal was the same, namely to modernize the appearance of the building with the least amount of expense and alteration to the original structure. The lower facades underwent similar changes to doors and

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

windows, however, the majority of the buildings retained their original design, materials, and workmanship.

When Interstate 75 opened in the 1960s, it bypassed London, and the town fell into a gradual decline that had a transforming effect on the downtown area. By the 1970s, many historic buildings were replaced with modern structures and the Main Street commercial center has had to compete with sprawling development that continues until today. The historic Catching Hotel that occupied the entire block between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets was torn down to make way for a bank. Other buildings between 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> streets were also demolished, leaving voids along the Main Street or making way for parking lots. Despite alterations and infill development that has occurred since the 1970s, the section between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> streets remains as a vivid reminder of the once thriving and important commercial nucleus of the county. It is that section of the downtown that was the heart of commercial development between 1895 and 1940, and it is that section that falls within the proposed district boundaries of this nomination.

### **Description of the District with Inventory of Contributing and Non-contributing Features**

The area between West 8<sup>th</sup> and West 5<sup>th</sup> Streets is only a small part of the total historic Main Street commercial environment. This section was selected for nomination because of its collective character; it has the highest concentration of extant historic resources that are associated with London's golden age of growth and development from 1895 to 1940. Those resources provide for us today a meaningful assortment of commercial buildings that are distinguished through their individual and collective contributions to the growth and development of London as a commercial community. That distinction is further emphasized by the high degree of continuity of architecture that allows the district to be seen and understood as a distinguishable entity within the downtown setting of London, Kentucky. Furthermore, the district is distinguished on the basis that it continues to show an unbroken stream of commercial, social, economic, civic, and religious activity on Main Street dating back to the late-19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **1. 107 West 5<sup>th</sup> Street (C) Commercial Building LL-L-78**

The county courthouse complex represents the center of town. Offices were built adjacent to the courthouse and served as both legal and commercial facilities within the heart of downtown. This building is a 2-story 2-bay two-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early-mid 20th century) stylistic influences built in the period 1930-1939. The foundation is continuous brick. Exterior walls are replacement brick veneer. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are replacement vinyl single-light fixed. At ground level there is a single large fixed-pane glass window, flanked by two doorways. Each doorway has a transom window. The doorways appear to be framed in wood. The cornice is unadorned and rises to a parapet wall capped with metal coping. The upper-level windows are nearly square in proportion and have brick sills. There is a projecting aluminum awning with a corrugated underside affixed by metal rods. The awning spans the West 5<sup>th</sup> Street facade.

#### **2. 111-113 West 5<sup>th</sup> Street (C) Commercial Building LL-L-76**

Like the previous building (107 West 5<sup>th</sup>), this building served as an office and commercial space across from the courthouse. It is a 2-story 4-bay two-part vertical block masonry building with Minimal

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

Commercial (early-mid 20th century) stylistic influences built in the period 1930-1939. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are replacement brick veneer. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are replacement vinyl single-light fixed. There are three primary entryways at ground level, each with a transom window. Flanking the entryways are large, modern single-pane glass storefront windows. The window and door enframing appears to be aluminum. The upper-level windows are nearly square in proportion with formed concrete sills. Above each window in the cornice area is a rectangular vent opening. The parapet wall is capped by metal coping. There are two flat projecting awnings that cover the doorways. The awnings are affixed by metal rods. The easternmost awning is aluminum with a corrugated metal underside, while the other is canvas.

### **3. 117-123 West 5<sup>th</sup> Street (C) Sentinel Echo LL-L-77**

Along West 5<sup>th</sup> Street there is the Sentinel Echo, a local newspaper building that also houses a photography studio. It is a 2-story 4-bay two-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early-mid 20th century) stylistic influences built in the period 1930-1939. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are original wood 1/1 double-hung sashes. The four bays are divided into two main masses, separated by a brick pilaster. The upper-level windows have formed concrete sills. The cornice is unadorned and rises to a parapet wall capped by stone. The ground floor bays have been altered by means of projecting frame additions clad in wood siding and capped with hip roofs. The roofs are clad in modern asphalt shingles. The facade modifications are constructed in such a way that their removal appears to be possible, returning the building's ground level to a good approximation of its original appearance.

### **4. 105 North Main Street (C) Poynter Building LL-L-9 Listed on NR 1985**

Today the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets continues to be defined by the Poynter Building. The Poynter Building served as an office and commercial retail facility near the heart of downtown for many years. It was home to the Western Union Telegram service and a drug store as well. The Basement Barber Shop was also in the building and was a popular spot for local townspeople to meet and discuss the events of the day. The Poynter Building was among the most substantial buildings on all of Main Street, occupying a privileged status across from the courthouse and town square. Today that building has undergone rehabilitation using the Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program and The building was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places on 08/08/1985.

It is a 2-story 6-bay two-part commercial block masonry building built in the period 1910-1919 (1910)\*. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are replacement aluminum 1/1 double-hung sashes. The Poynter Building is a masonry building laid in common bond. A five-course corbelled cornice with limestone cap surmounts both primary facades. The Main Street facade is divided into two bays, each containing three windows at the second level. The West 5th Street facade is organized into four, two-story bays separated by brick pilasters. There is a seven foot entrance bay set at a 45 degree angle on the Main/West 5th corner. At the first level an arched limestone doorway made of local limestone is the focal point. The wooden door is not original. To either side of the entrance are display windows with transoms and canvas awnings above. A ca. 1980s rehabilitation project removed a metal covering that had covered the transom area since the 1950s. New stained glass transoms were reinstalled in the space which closely approximates the original. The store windows were also replaced during the rehabilitation project with double-glazed, sound-proofed

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

windows which are divided into nine lights by wooden muntins. Below the windows are wooden panels of modern vintage. On the Main Street facade the original storefronts at the basement level were accessed from concrete steps which descended from the sidewalk into a four-foot wide recessed area. These storefronts have been removed. Other important exterior features include the stone window lintels and sills used in all of the second floor windows. On the interior, the pressed tin ceiling remains in the first floor commercial space. All other details and room arrangements are products of the rehabilitation project which converted all three floors of the building to modern office use. A sculpted stone plaque in the corner bay reads Poynter 1910.

**5. 107 North Main Street (C) London Hardware Company LL-L-75**

This building served as the London Hardware and Furniture Company for many years. Today it is a law office. The building is a 2-story 5-bay two-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early-mid 20th century) stylistic influences built in the period 1910-1919. The foundation is continuous brick. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are replacement 2-light casements. This building is laid in a common-bond brick pattern. The cornice features original wooden mouldings including dentils and moulded end brackets with a 'spade' motif. The center bay has one tripled window, flanked by pairs of double windows, with a single window at each of the outer bays. All of the windows were originally double-hungs but have since been replaced. The lower level features cast-iron pilasters separating the bays. The storefront transom windows are replacements that approximate the original fenestration pattern. The original bulkheads have been replaced by modern brick veneer.

**6. 112 North Main Street (C) Hackney's Building LL-L-80**

On the east side of Main Street, beginning at the corner of West 5<sup>th</sup> Street and moving north, is the Hackney's Building, originally a local dry goods company that started operating in London in 1879, although this building was constructed around 1895, and it is the oldest building in the district. It is a 2-story 4-bay two-part commercial block masonry building (original function: Commerce/Trade/Specialty Store) with Minimal Commercial (late nineteenth-century/early-twentieth-century) stylistic influences. The foundation is stone. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are replacement wood 2/2 double-hung sashes. The ground floor has been altered by the addition of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century plate glass windows and what appears to be Carrara glass bulkheads and panels. While the transoms are covered, the arrangement of storefront windows and the recessed entry remains. A canvas awning spans the facade. The upper level is characterized by seven windows with rusticated stone sills and segmental arch tops. Originally the building had only six of these windows. The northernmost bay of this building is not part of the original and the height of the building parapet was raised during the addition of the new bay. The cornice is flat and unadorned, with leaded metal coping.

**7. 113 North Main Street (C) Pennington Brothers' Grocery LL-L-79**

This building served as the Pennington Brothers Grocery store and today it is used as part of a retail outlet called "Bob's". It is a 2-story 2-bay two-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early- to mid-20th century) stylistic influences built in the period 1910-1919. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are replacement wood paneling (lower) and original brick (upper). Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are replacement vinyl 15-light casements. The ground level storefront has been altered to incorporate part of an awning that spans this building and the next at 121 North Main. At this level the brick has

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

been covered although the bulkhead, window, and doorway placement retain their original locations. The multi-light transom that spanned the facade is covered. The upper level has a pair of modern casement windows that occupy the original window locations. These are topped by a soldier course of bricks forming a lintel. The cornice is flat and unadorned with only a belt course of two rows of projecting brick. The parapet is capped by stone with metal coping.

#### **8. 114 North Main Street (C) Magee's Building LL-L-55**

The Magee's building was constructed in 1939, and remains as a good example of a glazed tile upper façade with its awning and open bay store front. It was among the town's most popular department stores for fifty years. It is a 2-story 4-bay two-part commercial block masonry building (original function: Commerce/Trade/Specialty Store) with Minimal Commercial (early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century) stylistic influences. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are original glazed tile. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are original steel 9-light casements. The facade is characterized by the regular fenestration pattern and by the glazed tile or block veneer. There are two distinctive transom windows that appear to be original glass block. There are Carrara glass panels at the storefront surrounds and on the bulkheads. The main doorway is recessed while the northernmost second-floor entry door remains. The facade was obscured by aluminum in 1996 but this has since been removed. The cornice is flat and unadorned, capped by metal coping. There is a rectangular panel inset in the center of the upper facade which reads MAGEE 1939.

#### **9. 120 North Main Street (C) Pica Building LL-L-54**

The Pica Building once housed the "Jones Store" that catered to women and children's clothing, as well as the Western Tool and Automotive Company. The Odd Fellows Hall, next to the Pica Building, was destroyed by fire in the 1970s. Today a vacant lot (#11) sits in its place, accommodating parking for local businesses such as the Pica Building. The Pica Building is a 2-story 4-bay two-part vertical block masonry building built in the period 1930-1939 (1939)\*. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are replacement brick veneer. Flat roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are replacement wood 1-light casements. The facade is a replacement and the original fenestration pattern has been obscured.

#### **10. 121 North Main Street (C) Golde's Clothing Store LL-L-81**

Golde's Clothing Store flourished into the mid-twentieth century after which the building became used as a retail outlet that is today called "Bob's". This is a 1-story 4-bay one-part commercial block masonry building built in the period 1930-1939. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are replacement wood paneling. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. The facade of this building has been covered while retaining the basic pattern of storefront bays and the recessed central-bay entryway, with bulkheads. Windows are mid-century plate glass with aluminum enframing elements. The building interior has been altered. According to Carl Keith Greene\* it is located in shops that were formerly occupied by Pennington Brothers, Golde's, Kroger's, Kidd Bros., and part of Carl Weaver's Pool Room. \*London (Images of America: Kentucky). Greene, Carl Keith. Arcadia Publishing, Nov 1, 1996.

#### **11. 130 North Main Street (NC Site) Demolished Odd Fellows Hall LL-L-53**

This was a 2-story, 4-bay, two-part commercial block building built in the period 1890-1899 (1899 per KHC form 1996)\*. The foundation was not revealed on the survey form. Exterior walls were

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

replacement brick. It had a flat with parapet roof clad in an undetermined material. Windows were replacement vinyl 6/6 double-hung sashes. A Kentucky Heritage Council survey form was created for this building in 1996. The associated report is entitled, "Phase I Cultural Resource Survey for the Proposed New Federal Courthouse in London, Kentucky." The building by that time had been extensively modified, both on the interior and the exterior. Its demolition year has not yet been learned.

**12. 131 North Main Street (C) Kroger Company Grocery LL-L-82**

The Kroger Company was founded in 1883 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and soon became one of the leading grocery store chains in the upland south. The building is a 1-story 1-bay one-part commercial block masonry building built in the period 1920-1929. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are replacement wood paneling. Flat roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. While the front facade has been altered the sides of the building and the rear are original brick. The massing steps downward toward the rear and the cornice is topped by leaded metal coping.

**13. 206 North Main Street (C) London Motor Car Company LL-L-56**

The London Motor Car showroom building - the town's first official Ford dealership - remains intact. It was constructed in 1917, and was a popular attraction to showcase the newest models of Ford cars on the market. This is a 2-story symmetrical 3-bay two-part commercial block masonry building (original function: Commerce/Trade/Business) with Minimal Commercial (early-mid 20th century) stylistic influences. The foundation is stone. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. At the ground level the original arrangement of a central entryway bay flanked by display windows has been retained, while the current facade is comprised of modern plate glass windows and doors with aluminum enframing. The upper level windows have been bricked in but the stone sills and lintels remain. The three main bays are separated by brick pilasters. The central bay cornice or parapet is higher than the flanking bays.

**14. 207 North Main Street (NC Site) LL-L-89**

This is a vacant lot. Used as a parking lot.

**15. 209 North Main Street (C) Parks Belk Department Store LL-L-83**

Additionally, on the same side of the street was the Parks-Belk Department Store, a chain of popular stores in the south. Today the building is used as a commercial office facility. It is a 2-story 3-bay two-part commercial block masonry building built in the period 1900-1909. The foundation is stone. Exterior walls are replacement stucco/parging. Flat roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. The building is laid in common bond masonry although the front facade is a modern replacement. The front two-story section is followed by single-story masses that step downward to the rear of the building, following the ground elevation. The cornice is capped with a leaded metal coping. There are no window openings on the side elevations. The northern side elevation has been parged.

**16. 211 North Main Street (NC Site) LL-L-88**

This is a vacant lot. Used as a parking lot.

**17. 218-234 North Main Street (C) Southland Theater Building LL-L-84**

The Southland Theater Building housed the Westinghouse Appliance store as well as the London

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

Wall Paper and Paint store. The building underwent a fire in the 1950s and was rebuilt into the commercial structure that it is today. It is a 2-story 8-bay two-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century) stylistic influences built in the period 1910-1919. The foundation is stone. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. The building is characterized by four primary bays separated by brick pilasters. A four-course corbelling pattern enframes the top of each bay. Windows are modern replacements but the fenestration pattern has been retained from the original. At the ground level the facades have been altered by the addition of modern aluminum and plate glass display windows, and Carrara glass panels. The entryways on the two southern bays retain their recessed doorways and side entries.

**18. 302-318 North Main Street (C) London Electric Building LL-L-85**

At the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Main is the London Electric building that also housed the Abe Nakdimen's Fair Store and Corner Café. This building was constructed in the 1920s and retains its original design, materials, and workmanship. It is a 2-story 4-bay two-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century) stylistic influences. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. The 7th and Main elevation is angled at 45 degrees with a doorway at ground level. There are brick quoins on the Main street ground floor and two flat aluminum awnings cover the two interior bays, suspended by fixed rods. Windows at ground level are mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century aluminum and plate glass while the upper level windows are a mix of wood and steel double-hungs and two multi-light fixed windows. The cornice is unadorned, rising flat to a modern metal coping.

**19. 303 North Main Street (C) First Christian Church LL-L-10**

The original First Christian Church building was located on Main Street during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was an anchoring institution within London. As Main Street development accelerated after the turn of the century, the congregation raised money to build the current church building in 1908, and it continues to serve the community through community outreach and education programs. It is a 3-story 3-bay irregular/asymmetrical-plan church with Romanesque Revival and Gothic/Neo-Gothic influences. The foundation is stone. Exterior walls are original brick. Multi-plane/complex roof clad in replacement asphalt shingles. There appear to be no chimneys. There is a two-story rear brick addition. Primarily characterized by the squared crenelated towers with brick pilaster/buttresses, arched stone window and door hoods, and the large central gable-front section with stained glass windows. There are numerous additions to the north and west, including an arcaded gallery that attaches the original building portion to newer buildings on the property. Contractors were recorded as Jones & Haggard.

**20. 320 North Main Street (C) Barber Shop LL-L-86**

This is a 1-story 3-bay one-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century) stylistic influences built in the period 1930-1939. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat roof clad in replacement corrugated tiles. Storefront windows and the doorway are plate glass with wood enframing. The window sills are stone. The facade is characterized by a wood fish-scale shingle cornice and three patterns of geometric brick, one above each window and the doorway.

**21. 322 North Main Street (C) Florist LL-L-87**

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

This is a 2-story 3-bay two-part commercial block masonry building with Minimal Commercial (early-to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century) stylistic influences built in the period 1920-1929. The foundation is undetermined. Exterior walls are original brick. Flat with parapet roof clad in replacement rubberized/asphalt composite. Windows are original steel multi-light fixed. At the ground level the facade has Carrara glass panel surrounds over modern wood paneling, plate glass windows, and a recessed entryway with wood paneled sidelights and what appears to be an original transom. There is a flat aluminum awning suspended by fixed rods that spans the facade. The upper level has three window openings and a flat cornice with a rectangular brick inset pattern. The parapet is topped with leaded metal coping.

Taken together these building represent the vitality of London's historic commercial Main Street and they demonstrate how those in London valued Main Street as a way to direct, attract, and control the interests of the populace toward a spatially focused environment for consumption.

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** N/A

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

Commerce  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1895-1961  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Jones and Haggard (builders, #16 and #19)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The span 1895-1961 was chosen because it represents the era through which London's downtown commercial district developed in context with the opening up of the southeast regional coal and timber industries, and in comparison with the growth and development of the downtown commercial districts in the nearby county seats of Williamsburg and Somerset.

**Criteria Considerations** NA

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

## Statement of Significance

### Summary Paragraph

The London Downtown Historic District meets National Register Criterion A, and is significant for its association with the growth and development of Commerce and trade within Laurel County, Kentucky between 1895, and 1961. During these years, the downtown district was the most significant concentration of commercial properties in Laurel County, Kentucky. Its significance is understood within the Historic Context, "Commercial District Attributes in Towns in Southeastern Kentucky, 1890-1961." The public emphasis that was placed on the downtown was a critical factor in organizing the business district to be a backdrop for the principles of civic, social, and religious order. The downtown developed as an expression of pride in place and fostered devotion to consumer values that directed and controlled the interests of the populace towards a spatially focused environment for consumption and other functions. The downtown went beyond simply becoming a collection of buildings that had a commercial function; rather, those buildings worked together to satisfy the commercial and civic demands of an emerging modern culture. As a result, the buildings that remain in the district today inform us of a process of change over time that placed London's Main Street at the center of daily life for many of its citizens, and like many small towns in America, it emerged as the ideal image that in many ways came to define those who lived in Laurel County, Kentucky for many years.

### Historic Context: Commercial District Attributes in Southeastern Kentucky Towns, 1890-1961

The evaluation of significance for the town of London is being compared to Williamsburg, and Somerset, which are towns of similar size and population that all share a similar period of growth and expansion between 1890 and 1961. These towns share a regional heritage that generally influenced their development due to the emergence of the southeastern coal and timber industries in Kentucky. At the same time each town experienced a geographically concentrated impact of commercial growth associated with the distribution of railroads that were essential aspects of regional development in the southeastern coal and timber fields. Automobile transportation was also a major factor in the development of these towns in the 1920s. During that period, Kentucky made a sweeping effort to develop the state's modern highway infrastructure. The focus on development had regional implications, but the impact of that development can be vividly understood in the ways in which it impacted the towns of London, Williamsburg, and Somerset. Population increases, new manufacturing industries, and civic/commercial activities were concentrated in the town centers along Main Street. While distinct in their location and setting, a comparison between these places informs us how they shared common attributes that influenced their development up to the end and after the turn of the nineteenth century.

### Important Attributes in Three Southeastern Kentucky Regional Townships, 1890-1961

Several key factors are present within the towns of London (the focus of this nomination), Williamsburg in Whitley County, and Somerset in Pulaski County, that allow us to understand how certain key attributes contributed to their overall evolution. London and Somerset contribute to the economic unity of the "tri-cities" region of Southeastern Kentucky (Corbin being included), however, all three towns embarked on a similar pace of development, beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century that continues to the present time. Today, London, Somerset, and Williamsburg remain as some of the fastest growing towns in the state, and they have long been among the most important southeast regional cities to have absorbed the impact of growth in southeast Kentucky for

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

more than a century. This evaluation seeks to examine those critical features that each location embodies that made them conducive for regional development.

One factor considered is the broader **geographical characteristics of the region**. These towns straddle the line where the Eastern Mountain Coal Fields Region of the state transitions to the Pennyroyal Region. The area that defines this region is called the Daniel Boone National Forest. That area is a distinct topographic feature running north/south, which forms a plateau conducive for early settlement and transportation. The towns of London and Williamsburg are situated along the eastern edge of the route, while Somerset is on the western edge. The geographic locations positioned each town as “gateway” communities for a transition into the mountains to the east (London), Bowling Green to the west (Somerset), and Tennessee to the south (Williamsburg).

From their beginnings, London, Williamsburg, and Somerset were established as the **seat of government** within their respective counties. This placed each township in the position to be the destination for those seeking to do legal transactions within their respective counties and therefore placed an emphasis on the **courthouse as the town’s central feature** that was placed squarely in its middle. The evolution of the courthouse square was essential in the overall concentration of power and affluence within Kentucky’s rural townships. The location of the courthouse and its square also predetermined to a large degree the notion that other features of the town would develop in close proximity to the courthouse. Such things included the post office, city hall, and other spaces for community activities, including commerce.

Each of these towns demonstrate a desire folks had to concentrate their **commerce near the courthouse** square - usually on all sides - but in all cases along the **central avenue of main street**. The main street within each township is of critical importance for us to see how folks in the past desired to build their commercial enterprises in such a way that they shared a common location that spatially focused consumers, legal and civic services, and often industries of local and regional importance. One must see however, that the designation of each town as county seat, along with the development of the courthouse square, commerce, and the main street are extremely important common attributes that allowed each town to grow into regionally influential areas.

Each town was the product of **planned development** that established boundaries in such a way that future growth could be managed and encouraged. Such plans included narrow lots along the main street that allowed for (mostly) rectangular commercial structures to be built side-by-side with marginal width facing the street and suitable depth to accommodate interior spaces on multiple stories. The town plans designated town lots in such a way as to encourage the maximum amount of lots to be made available for development. As a result, the towns of London, Somerset, and Williamsburg were designed to accommodate a central government facility that was surrounded by commercial and residential structures that are essentially important evolutionary attributes associated with their growth and development.

Each town also became the focus of **railroad development**; as the place where the central passenger and shipping terminals would be built. The rails became the determining factor for the development of industries within each town, which fostered job growth, shipping and manufacturing of raw materials, and an overall boost in population growth. The rails are key in our understanding of each town’s overall development as was the advent of the state’s **modern highway system** in the 1920s. The new highways system further linked each town to the state’s broader economic and transportation infrastructure along the major routes of US 27 and US 25. These roads were forces in the continued development of each township well into the twentieth century and would remain so until

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

the construction of interstate 75. Clearly, modern transportation is a major attribute in the overall development of the tri-cities region, and those towns today thrive as a result of their proximity to I-75.

Each town continued to experience **population growth**, which informs us how local attractions/features of each town provided jobs, entertainment, social and civic services for its citizens. Those attributes also became attractions for surrounding areas within each county, underscoring the preference people had to utilize the downtown as the “common place” in daily life. Each town continued to improve and provide new services for its citizens as the years passed. In so doing, the towns remained among the most viable destinations for their county’s populations (as well as for new businesses and industries), resulting in overall population growth.

Each of the elements mentioned can be seen working together as essential and common attributes shared by each township. They provide us with a way to understand what was important for each town to grow, which enabled them to become among the most regionally affluent cities in Southeastern Kentucky between 1890 and 1961.

### **Williamsburg**

Founded in 1818, the town of Williamsburg was first known as Spring Ford, named after a nearby crossing on the Cumberland River. The city was officially formed when Samuel Cox donated land for the construction of a courthouse in 1818. The courthouse was built on a square that fronted the main street of the town and it retains that configuration today. Once the courthouse was built, the town was then known as Whitley Courthouse. It was very slow to develop until the early 1870’s, at which time local landowners began promoting the development of coal and timber lands in Whitley County. The promoters were the Honorable Charles B. Faris, Judge Granville Pearl and General Jarvis Jackson.

They advertised the county’s resources in newspapers in Louisville and as far north as Chicago. The plan was to attract outside money to the area. Typically, the land and mineral rights were purchased by local developers for minimal amounts. The developers would then sell the mineral rights to outside interests for large profits. This served to hand over the economy of the county to outside control, often to the detriment of the rural poor.

Large numbers of the county’s inhabitants sought employment in the emerging industries of coal and timber. While 5 logging towns sprang up throughout the county, the population in Williamsburg increased dramatically from 139 residents in 1870 to 1,376 in 1890. The population continued to grow into the early-twentieth century, to more than 2,000 by 1910. Along with the population increases, there was a build-up of commercial activities along the main street near the courthouse square. The town got a big boost around 1890, when the Mount Zion Association planned and built the Williamsburg Institute that later became Cumberland College. The local downtown attractions included the Hotel Belmont, the Dixie Theater, and many retail and service shops along the Main Street and courthouse square. A number of congregations built churches along the Main Street as well.

Although coal reserves in the Cumberland Plateau had been mined since the 1840s, a lack of transportation kept production low. The construction of railroads in southeastern Kentucky near the end of the nineteenth century, however, dramatically boosted the area’s potential for coal production. The Knoxville Extension of the L & N Railroad stretched from Winchester to Jellico, in Whitley County and provided a northern outlet for the coal being mined in the Jellico coal fields. The depot for freight

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

and passengers was located on Main Street slightly south of the courthouse. The momentum from mining placed Williamsburg on the fast track to expanded growth, which continued into the 1940s and beyond. The population grew from 2,331 in 1940 to 3,478 by 1960.

One major factor in the prolonged growth and expansion of Williamsburg was the development of US 25, which went straight through the downtown along Main Street. The route split east and west at Corbin. The east route went to Manchester, while the west route linked Williamsburg. The highway channeled travelers through the town and provided a direct link with the interior Blue Grass towns of Richmond and Lexington with many stops in-between. By the 1930s and 1940s, the Main Street was home to about sixty brick commercial buildings that housed general stores, bakeries, hardware, hotels, drugs, furniture, jewelry, theaters, and various other commercial ventures.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Interstate 75 was carved through the Pennyroyal plateau and the new interstate replaced the old US 25 to become one of the nation's primary interstate transportation arteries east of the Mississippi. As with many rural townships that thrived because of the early state highway system, Williamsburg's downtown began a period of decline beginning in the 1970s that was offset with new growth and development near the interstate junction.

**Somerset (Downtown Commercial NR District, Listed 1977)**

Somerset was first settled in 1798 by Thomas Hansford and several members of the Jasper family and it received its name from Somerset County, New Jersey, the place where some of the settlers once lived. Somerset became the county seat of Pulaski County in 1802, and was incorporated as a city in 1887.

In 1877, the Cincinnati and Southern Railroad completed its main line through Pulaski County, eventually connecting Somerset to Cincinnati and Chattanooga. Towns along the right-of-way experienced rapid growth in the last quarter century, and Somerset became headquarters for a division of the railroad. The effect of the railroad was felt throughout the last quarter of the 19th century and into the early years of the twentieth century. Somerset outpaced both Williamsburg and London in growth, a point that can be seen in the population increases for each area listed in the table below.

	<u>1870</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1930</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1990</u>
London	165	1,147	1,950	4,035	5,757
Williamsburg	139	1,495	1,826	3,478	5,493
Somerset	587	3,384	5,506	7,112	10,733

A major factor in the rapid population increase was based on the notion that the Cincinnati and Southern Railroad located its repair shops in Somerset, which, along with railroad construction, brought a more diverse population to the county, including Irish immigrants. The Ferguson Repair Yard, another major employer, also located its facilities in Somerset and dominated the area's economy until the middle of the 20th century.

The town of Somerset flourished with new commercial venues of all kinds by the 1920s and 1930s. The town center featured an open public square across from the courthouse and the street was lined with the usual rectangular commercial brick buildings that housed hotels, banks, general stores, hardware, drugs, municipal services, theaters, churches, and civic institutions such as the Odd Fellows. Many other professional services were located downtown as well. The presence of these essential commercial, civic, municipal, and other venues, all existing in a central location along the Main Street and housed in homogenized brick buildings, shows how consumerism and the growth

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

of townships go hand-in-hand. The expectations of an emerging mass-culture placed value on a centrally located area for its social, political, religious, and other habits; this was true of Williamsburg as well as London - each developing at the same time to become regionally important towns within the southeastern portion of Kentucky.

Another factor in the continued growth of Somerset was the development of US 27, one of several major interstate routes to be built in the 1920s and 1930s. Like US 25 in London and Williamsburg, the route went through the center of town, channeling travelers into the commercial heart of the county. Many more businesses sprang up over the next couple of decades along Main Street, including service stations, auto garages and dealerships. Taken together, the Main Street embodied all of the conveniences to facilitate modern life.

Somerset was connected to London via KY 80. The route was (and is) a major east/west corridor that linked the two cities to a common economic theme, namely coal. Likewise, the route also linked Somerset to I-75 and made the town accessible to the voluminous amounts of commerce happening along the interstate. Additionally, the completion of Lake Cumberland in 1950, combined with the major road routes leading to the community further transformed Somerset into one of the largest recreation centers in Kentucky drawing more than 1.7 million visitors yearly, the bulk of which occurs between the Memorial and Labor Day holidays.

Today, Somerset's downtown continues to thrive as a destination, and its historic commercial center was listed in the National Register in 1977.

### **London**

The Main Street of London, like that of Williamsburg and Somerset, was coming more into focus in the late-1890s and early-1900s as a commercial artery, where commercial activity was beginning to extend beyond the courthouse square. In 1895, the town's population was about 1,100 people, and some industries were in place along the edges of the city. One such business was J.T. Brown's Carding Machine and Corn Mill, located one quarter of a mile north of the courthouse. The facility housed a corn mill on the first floor and a carding machine on the second floor. Retail outlets for dry goods, cloth, and dressmaking show up on Main Street at this time, which demonstrates an important relationship between manufacturing and retailing. One of the most enduring structures to remain in the district today from that period is the Hackney Building, located at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets. It served as a commercial outlet for the sale of dry goods and other farming implements.

The main line of the L&N that was constructed in the late 1880s, and ran along the town's western edge parallel to Main Street. It operated as an industrial line that serviced the London Manufacturing Company, a substantial brick and lumber processing facility. That industrial site featured many buildings such as brick kilns, lumber storage facilities and loading docks for the rails. To be sure, the town relied on the economic vitality of local industries to support the growing businesses on Main Street, while at the same time, those industries created a catalyst for new economic growth within the city. Thus, manufacturing, rails, and the commerce on Main Street, enjoyed a mutual inter-dependence in the development of London's commercial district.

An 1890s excerpt from the *Mountain Echo*, a local newspaper, captured the excitement of the towns emerging prosperity.

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

“Permanent improvements, steady growth and prosperity is the order of the day in London now. In fact, London has before her a brighter future than nearly any town in South eastern Kentucky. She occupies an elevated position and is one of the healthiest towns in the State beside many other natural advantages. Substantial and prominent improvements are rapidly being made and prices of real estate is steadily and permanently advancing, not spasmodically as is the case with some of our neighbors. One of the largest and most desirable industries to be developed here is a large planning [sic] mill, steam brick machine and axe handle factory located on the West side of the railroad about 500 feet South.”

The newspaper article is a snap shot of the past that lets us see how folks viewed and valued the progress being made within the town. The “brighter future” placed an emphasis on the expectation and hope that London would indeed continue on her path of new and welcomed development.

The town got a boost in 1897, when Sue Bennett, a local social advocate who wanted to provide education for low income citizens, successfully started a school near downtown. The school was named in her honor and was associated with the Methodist church at large. By the 1920s, the school became a junior college and ultimately it served the area as a four year regionally influential institution. The emerging emphasis on education also brought with it the town’s first public library that was formed by the ladies group at the First Christian Church located on Main Street. That church remains in operation today as one the most influential religious and social anchors of London’s past.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, the commercial Main Street had emerged as a vital hub of political, social, religious, and economic activity. The 1901 Sanborn maps show the expanded development of Main Street extending north from the courthouse to 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Also, the courthouse square was lined with offices, stables, and businesses. Likewise, the area south of the courthouse had developed to include hotels, drug stores, and mixed commercial/residential buildings. The buildings on Main Street were a composite of both brick structures and wood framed buildings that fronted the street.

Again, the *Mountain Echo* captured the spirit of day in its January 29<sup>th</sup> edition:

“London in all probability has outstripped any of her neighboring towns during the past year in the way of building improvements, yet but little has been said about it. Besides the new college building, there has been erected in London during the past year the M.E. Church, costing about \$4,500, and the following residences Mrs. Julia Parker's, Mrs. Sawyer, Mr. McCalla Fitzgerald, Mr. Andrew Jackson, Judge R. Boyd, Mrs. Hatcher, Mr. J.M. Chamberlain, J. B. Oakley, R.E. Ewell and the bank building now occupied by Mr. J.M. Young. A large majority of these buildings are commodious structures and handsome ornaments to the town. In addition to all these there have been various other smaller buildings erected and improvements to many others.”

The newspaper article placed an emphasis on the “commodious structures” that were said to enhance the town’s architectural appeal, thus expressing the value many placed on the commercial aesthetic of the town. Likewise, the momentum of new growth led the owners of existing buildings to undertake those improvements, while at the same time the downtown was beginning to see more new, although less ornate, buildings come into existence. The merger of church buildings, retail

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

stores, banks, and even residences along the main street show a growing emphasis on centralizing the downtown as the preferred location for nearly all aspects of life.

The notion that London “has outstripped any of her neighboring towns” reveals the attitude that London was indeed the place within Laurel County to do business. There were (and are) about forty other towns/communities within the county; however, none were more situated to become the target of substantial development as the twentieth century dawned than London. Its location, status as the county seat, target for railroad traffic, new industries, churches, educational facilities, and so on clearly and distinctly separated it from its neighbors by the end of the century.

To more clearly see the picture that was painted into the pages of the *Mountain Echo* in 1897, one can observe the setting in the Sanborn Maps for London. By 1901, the vacant lots north of the courthouse between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets, had been filled in, with new specialty shops of all kinds. Fruit stands, cobblers, grocery stores, dry goods, photography shop, and hardware stores lined the street and a substantial new brick Methodist Church was constructed at the corner of Main and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets. The steeple of the building soared five stories high and the presence of the church on Main Street reinforced the value folks placed on both religion and education for its citizens. It was the Methodist church that built the Sue Bennett School and campaigned for public education and temperance as well. Despite its religious purpose, the church served in the civic and educational well being of its citizens to foster responsible citizenship—a characteristic celebrated by Populists and Progressives of the day. The notion that the building occupied a prominent place on the Main Street reinforces our understandings of how people saw the church a significant centerpiece to their downtown environment.

Part of the lure for new development was based on improved city services. During the previous decade, the city had embarked on a campaign of developing modern sewers and public water lines that greatly enhanced the lives of those living in the town. The London Manufacturing Company expanded its operations along the L&N line and the London Electric Light and Power Company was built near by as well. The power company opened the town up to electrical services that allowed for new machinery, lighting, and other aspects of modern life. It was located adjacent to the London Manufacturing Company on the western edge of the town near the Main Street. Likewise, the town installed telephone lines along Main Street, and the Western Union Company set up shop on the corner of Main and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets.

North of Main Street was the newly built Murphy and Company Lumber Yard and the Turner-Day & Woolworth axe handle factory. The logging boom in the eastern counties had implications for London’s ability to establish processing and finishing enterprises within the town. The Murphy lumber yard was one of two very substantial saw mills that processed the raw timbers being shipped via the rails. The mills served not only the local community, but provided lumber for the southern and central portions of Kentucky and parts of Tennessee as well. By 1908, there were several furniture factories on Main Street that also benefited from the abundant lumber that was available at the mills. Wagon repair shops flourished along the secondary streets and several hardware stores also opened up along Main Street.

With new development came a host of new commercial enterprises along Main Street from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> and along the secondary streets of Broadway and Hill. The Main Street was a destination for outsiders and locals and the rails brought in merchandise from all over. The town even featured a new roller skating rink—a recreational venue that was sweeping the country at the time. North Main Street was also home to the Pennington Infirmary and the London Graded School, the city’s first substantial public school building on North Main Street. The Catching Hotel had expanded to occupy the entire block along 4<sup>th</sup> Street and the Jackson Opera House opened its doors around 1905.

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

While the area south of the Laurel County courthouse remained mostly residential, the area north of the courthouse (the focus of the NR district) flourished with continued commercial development. In just a few years time, businesses came and went that marked a transforming, and then a re-transforming, of Main Street. For example, buildings that occupied lots along 5<sup>th</sup> Street in 1901 were no longer there in 1908. Small shops had been replaced by more substantial commercial buildings that were rectangular in shape, offering more organized retail space that fit the conventions of Main Street commercial architecture of the period. Likewise, more buildings were constructed of brick. The pattern that emerges from the Sanborn Maps shows that all the brick commercial buildings were two stories, while all the frame buildings were single story. The scale of the buildings changed along with their materials, to eventually give the commercial avenue of Main Street the more consistent appearance it has today. As a rule, the closer were the buildings to the courthouse (town center), the more elaborate they were. This is to say that they were multi-story, composite materials (stone, brick, iron), and much more characterized by stylistic ornamentation.

One such structure was the Poynter Building that served as an office and commercial retail facility near the heart of downtown for many years. It was constructed in 1910, and it was home to the Western Union Telegram service and a drug store as well. The "Basement Barber Shop" was also in the building - a popular spot for local townspeople to meet and discuss the events of the day. The Poynter Building was among the most substantial buildings on all of Main Street, occupying a privileged status across from the courthouse and town square. The Hackney building (map #6) also anchored the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Main Street, while the entire block was filled in with commercial buildings by 1910. The Masonic Hall occupied the opposite corner at 6<sup>th</sup> and Main and the First Christian Church raised money to replace its 19<sup>th</sup>-century building with a stylish Romanesque structure at the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Main. That church housed one of the area's most progressive Woman's Clubs, that worked for the causes of adequate public education for its citizens. They both worked together to bring the city's public school into existence and helped organize it.

In 1912, the United States Courthouse was built at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Main Streets. The building also housed the post office and was the most substantial building south of the Laurel County courthouse. Main Street between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> was dominated by residences and nearly void of commerce all together. The U. S. courthouse was in striking contrast to most everything around it. Nevertheless; the courthouse influenced the notion that London would become a town known for its many legal professionals who practiced law in the U. S. and other courts.

The transformation of Main Street continued. On both sides of Main, between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets, new construction introduced new businesses. The Main Street was alive with consumer activities that included both goods and services of all kinds. A jewelry store, insurance office, used furniture store, paint and wallpaper store and so on meant that downtown was certainly the primary consumer destination. The main county roads converged onto the Main Street near the city square and folks from all over could visit the London Motor Car showroom building - the town's first official Ford dealership that was constructed in 1917, It was a popular attraction to showcase the newest models of Ford cars on the market.

Between 1901 and 1920, the Main Street underwent a substantial period of growth and re-development of its commercial and religious buildings to reflect a very modern and progressive attitude of change. The population of the city had more than doubled, to 2,500 residents. The forces for change were a combination of social, political and economic concerns that could be seen at work all across the country. The Progressive appeal and Woman's Club movement helped those in London find ways to utilize the church as a tool for moral and civic reforms in education and community life in general. The downtown area was home to the Baptist Church, Methodist Episcopal Church,

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

Pentecostal Mission, Methodist Church and the First Christian Church (among some others). The notion that new schools, churches, and commercial buildings were occurring at the same place and at the same time demonstrates the deliberate balance that people were seeking in their new way of seeing life in America. Institutions drove the process through which citizens were raised to be civic minded, morally equipped, and conscientious consumers. London's first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century put it on pace with much of the rest of small-town America.

Images from the 1920s show the streets teeming with people and a parade ceremony featuring the Oleika Shrine Temple proudly showcasing their civic pride along the Main Street. In the backdrop of the images one can observe the transformed Main Street, a place that went from a scattered group of framed buildings along the road to a more organized and commercially oriented set of buildings that were architecturally diverse.

From the 1920s though all of the 1940s, London's Main Street matured into a regionally important place, with many new businesses and chain stores setting up shop. Merchants catered to local demands for goods and services and the town got its first motion picture facility during the 1930s called the Reda Theater. That building was located along Main between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets. Many buildings had custom lit signage that was suspended out towards the road to catch the eye of motorists coming to town. Sidewalks underwent improvements as well. The dusty road surfaces and sidewalks had been paved during the mid-1920s, which completely transformed the streetscape to accommodate automobile travel.

One factor of great importance to the town was the decision to route the new U.S. 25 Highway (known as the Dixie Highway) through downtown London around 1925. The route made the interior Bluegrass towns of Richmond and Lexington much more accessible to automobile transportation and greatly influenced the desire of locals to utilize the improved bus lines for travel throughout the state and elsewhere. The Lexington Cartage Company and later Greyhound Bus lines extended their services to London and Corbin. During that time, the state generated more than 8 million dollars annually in gasoline taxes, which provided much of the revenues needed to build its massive highway infrastructure. To be sure, the development of the highway system facilitated commerce in ways that were not possible before, but most Kentuckians agreed that "the greatest gain has been in the tourist travel – so richly beneficial and desirable to the state." The new highway linked London and Corbin along a common route and the two towns experienced similar surges in growth at that time. The Hotel London was built in response to the increased travel and it stood at the corner of 7<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets where it also housed the Greyhound Bus Station.

The Southland Theater Building along Main Street was celebrated as one of the premier movie theaters that would seat several hundred people, demonstrating the notion that London was indeed a destination for entertainment. The building underwent a fire in the 1950s and was rebuilt into a commercial structure that housed the Westinghouse Appliance store as well as the London Wall Paper and Paint store. Moreover, during the 1940s the town continued to install improved street lights, traffic signals, signage, curbs, sidewalks, gutters, and so on. With each passing decade, the town became more attractive as a place to live, visit, shop, and find recreation.

As the 1940s came to a close, the process of development that began at the turn of the century had reached its apex. All of the former mixed-use, framed buildings that were irregularly spaced along the street had been replaced by modern commercial two-story brick structures that addressed the Main Street. They had very predictable regularity in scale, form, and function and there were no more vacant lots along Main Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets. A whole new generation of post-World War II residents would inherit what their ancestors had built and they would use it as the

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

catalyst through which they would understand their community and rear their own children over the next couple of decades.

The 1950s included a time of expansion for the city as well. The population for the town continued to increase from 2,263 in 1940 to 3,426 in 1950. In 1956, when the London-Corbin Municipal Airport opened, it accommodated small aircraft; it became a regional aviation hub by the 1960s, when its runway was expanded to six thousand feet, long enough to handle large commercial aircraft. The airport provided yet another boost for the downtown's economic vitality, and it also gave the southeast region a boost for the incoming and outgoing waves of coal company executives, bankers, politicians and other affluent types. In 1962, former President Dwight D. Eisenhower visited London through the airport on a campaign booster for Thurston B. Morton's senate re-election bid.

Although the 1950s ushered in some façade changes to the appearance of the downtown, it continued to thrive into the 1960s as the preferred social and commercial hub of the county. While no new buildings were built in this period, Main Street housed the most influential local retailers such as the Dyche family, and regional/national chain stores that included Westinghouse and Kroger's Grocery store. The local church community continued to thrive along Main Street as well. The First Christian Church expanded its facilities to include a balcony and new educational facilities.

The downtown had long been used for showcasing civic pride through festivals and parades and in 1962 the Homecoming Parade sponsored its first celebration on Main Street. Images of the event show the architectural setting intact. From the earliest period of its commercial growth and into the 1960s, London was the pride of those who grew up and lived in Laurel County.

### **Evaluation of the Commercial Significance of London Downtown Historic District within its Historic Context**

To be sure, the town of London is the product of many factors working together to the same end. The town has a long history associated with the settlement of the state as well as the Civil War. It was incorporated as a town in 1836, and it slowly absorbed its role as a commercially viable township - first as a crossroads destination along the Wilderness Trail and then as a target for major railroad expansion into the southeastern coal fields after the Civil War.

Today one can observe through the town's geographic location its importance as a railroad destination. At the time the railroads were developing in the late 1880s, Laurel County was the extent to which the rails could penetrate rugged eastern mountainous terrain, therefore placing the town in the pathway of new industrial rail traffic. The rails by themselves, however, did not predestine London to become a regionally important town. The fact that London was the seat of government for Laurel County also elevated it as a priority destination for those seeking to do legal and other business in the county, therefore influencing the rail developers to locate their passenger and freight depot along the Main Street with numerous spurs feeding new industries in the town.

We can see today the importance of the rail facilities and their location within the town as vivid reminders of how people once valued the rails as a vital part of their economic lives. Only after the development of the rails, which ran parallel to Main Street, do we see a collective desire by locals to concentrate their economic, social, religious, and other concerns on the Main Street. London's association with those events indeed was a major attribute that contributed to the town's historic significance in the areas of its growth and development from 1890-1961.

The advent of the automobile and Kentucky's desire to improve the state's highway infrastructure had a direct and lasting impact on the city as well. The road system that was developed in the 1920s linked various county seats (as much as possible) along a common route. Not only did

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

this allow for easier access to London's courthouse from outside areas, it transformed the Main Street into a significant commercial artery with much of the regional automobile traffic being channeled directly into the commercial core of the city. Likewise, the road system was promoted by the state to spur on tourism and travel via commercial bus lines. US 25 gained a local/regional reputation as the "Dixie Highway" and became one of the most widely traveled roads in all of Kentucky and the south in general.

In conclusion, the impact of events to improve transportation, first through industrial rails, and then through the state's modern highway system are most readily understood through the concentration of the commercial buildings that remain in the district today. Likewise, social reformers who focused on religion and education as a way to moderate the tempo of change that was occurring in the town (and the nation) valued the Main Street as their preferred location to build their institutions (churches and civic lodges). When we observe the buildings today they remind us how the citizens of London engaged the emerging modern world of mass culture and mass consumerism from 1890-1961, specifically through a devotion to consumerism that was tempered by religious constraints and responsible citizenship.

To be sure, the buildings that remain are remnants of the prosperity that was shared by all who called London their home and they came to symbolize to another generation the values that were commonly shared by those of the past. With the development of I-75 came a new emphasis to decentralize the urban commercial core and direct consumers to the large shopping strip plazas that hugged the interstate exchange exits. Through the 1970s, London's downtown entered a period of decline interspersed with periods of renewal for some of its aging historic buildings. The present desire among city officials, local property owners, and concerned citizens is to preserve what remains of their historic downtown core. Their will demonstrates how the buildings are valued today as a critical part of the heritage that those who live in London are eager to celebrate and honor through their continued use and adaptation to current modern demands.

### **Evaluation of the Integrity of the Significance of London Downtown Historic District**

The historic context explains how the contributing buildings in the district are each associated with the development of the commercial Main Street through a gradual process of growth.

- The town's **location** is important to its development because (first) the contributing buildings are all in their original locations. A second factor to consider for "location" is the town's geographic position in the foothills of the southeastern coal and timber fields, which placed in the pathway of the railroads that were essential elements in the overall growth of the region.
- Factors in the town's development, such as the railroads, US 25, the courthouse square, and the commercial/religious buildings along the main street inform us of the many social functions that played out in the downtown. Those attributes combine to provide the historic **setting** of London that is readily observable today. The setting is best described as a "Commercial Main Street District" that developed between 1895-1961.
- The buildings in the district share a similar scale, setback, and overall architectural character that, when taken together, conveys general **feeling** of a past way of life. The historic setting conveys a distinct sense that the downtown was clearly the commercial, political, and social nucleus of the town during the period of significance.

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

- The buildings that remain in the district also share in similar **design, materials, and workmanship** features that distinguish them in form and function as commercial main street architecture. Likewise, their collective design provides an architectural continuity that contributes to the notions of *setting* and *feeling* because the buildings retain their massing, scale, setback and overall historic character that distinguishes the area as a downtown commercial district within the period of significance;
- Each contributing building was constructed during the period of significance and in **association** with the regionally important historical events that shaped not only London, but Williamsburg and Somerset as well, all within the period from 1895 to 1961.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

---

### Previous Research at the Kentucky Heritage Council

- Kentucky Historic Resource Inventory Forms for London, Laurel County

### National Register Nominations

- Hodgenville Commercial Historic District (Boundary Increase), LaRue County, Kentucky, Author,
- North Main Street Historic District, Pulaski County, Kentucky, Author Unknown, 1984
- Pennington Infirmary, Laurel County, Kentucky, Lisa Greer, 1987
- Poynter Building, Laurel County, Kentucky, Robert Polsgrove, 1985
- Sue Bennett Memorial School Building, Laurel County, Kentucky, James Earl Hays, 1979

### Secondary Sources

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- Kleber, John E. *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*. Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1992.
- Martin, Charles, 1988 *The Pennyryle Cultural Landscape*. Kentucky Heritage Council, Frankfort and the National Park Service, Washington, D.C.
- Thomas, William Roscoe. *Life Among the Hills and Mountains of Kentucky*. Kenova, W. Va: Big Sandy Valley Historical Society, 1983.
- Tibbals, Alma Owens. *A History of Pulaski County, Kentucky*. Bagdad, Ky: Moore, 1952.

### Sanborn Maps

- The 1895, 1901, 1908, and 1912 maps were all consulted. Each map was accessed online at Kentuckiana Digital Library, Laurel County, London.

### Web Sites

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Williamsburg,\\_Kentucky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Williamsburg,_Kentucky), June 15, 2011
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerset\\_kentucky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerset_kentucky), June 15, 2011

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

- <http://www.fcclondon.com/history.htm>, June 15, 2011 (First Christian Church)
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerset\\_kentucky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerset_kentucky), June 14, 2011 (Census)
- [http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kylarela/mtecho/mtecho\\_main.html](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kylarela/mtecho/mtecho_main.html), June 12, 2011. (Mountain Echo)

### Mountain Echo

- Quote is as it appeared in the February 28<sup>th</sup> Edition of the *Mountain Echo*, 1890.
- Quote as it appeared in the January 29<sup>th</sup> Edition of the *Mountain Echo*, 1890.

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

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 # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): Various. See Description inventory

### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** Approximately 3.3 acres

#### UTM References

##### London Quad

**Coordinates below expressed according to NAD 27 (Coordinates = NAD 83: 16/758999/4113213)**

**Coordinates calculated by GIS: KYGeonet**

1	<u>16</u>	<u>759 000</u>	<u>4113 000</u>	3	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	4	<u>16S</u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

### Verbal Boundary Description

The area selected for listing is depicted on the scaled district sketch map. Please refer to that map.

### Boundary Justification

The boundaries chosen for the London Downtown Commercial District contain the highest concentration of historic resources associated with the growth and development of London's commercial main street community during the period 1895-1961

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Fred J. Rogers & R. Glen Payne

London Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Laurel County, Kentucky  
County and State

organization Preservation Services and Technology Group, LLC date \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number 206 B Orchard Drive telephone 859-270-3413  
city or town Nicholasville state KY zip code 40356  
e-mail [fredj.rogers@gmail.com](mailto:fredj.rogers@gmail.com)

---

**Photographs:**

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**Name of Property: London Downtown Historic Commercial District**  
**City or Vicinity: London**  
**County: Laurel State: KY**  
**Photographer: Fred J. Rogers & R. Glen Payne**  
**Date Photographed: February, 2011**

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

- 1 of 10: View facing NW, corner of Main & 5<sup>th</sup> Streets, buildings on north side of Main Street
- 2 of 10: View facing S, corner of Main & 5<sup>th</sup> Streets, Poynter Building
- 3 of 10: View facing SW, corner of Main & 5<sup>th</sup> Streets, buildings on south side of Main Street
- 4 of 10: Detail view of store front, 107 Main Street, KHC resource #LL-L-78
- 5 of 10: View facing NW, buildings on north side of Main Street
- 6 of 10: View of courthouse
- 7 of 10: View facing NW, buildings on north side of Main Street
- 8 of 10: View facing SE, buildings on south side of Main Street
- 9 of 10: View facing W, First Christian Church, 303 Main Street, KHC Resource #LL-L-10
- 10 of 10: View facing N, buildings along 5<sup>th</sup> Street

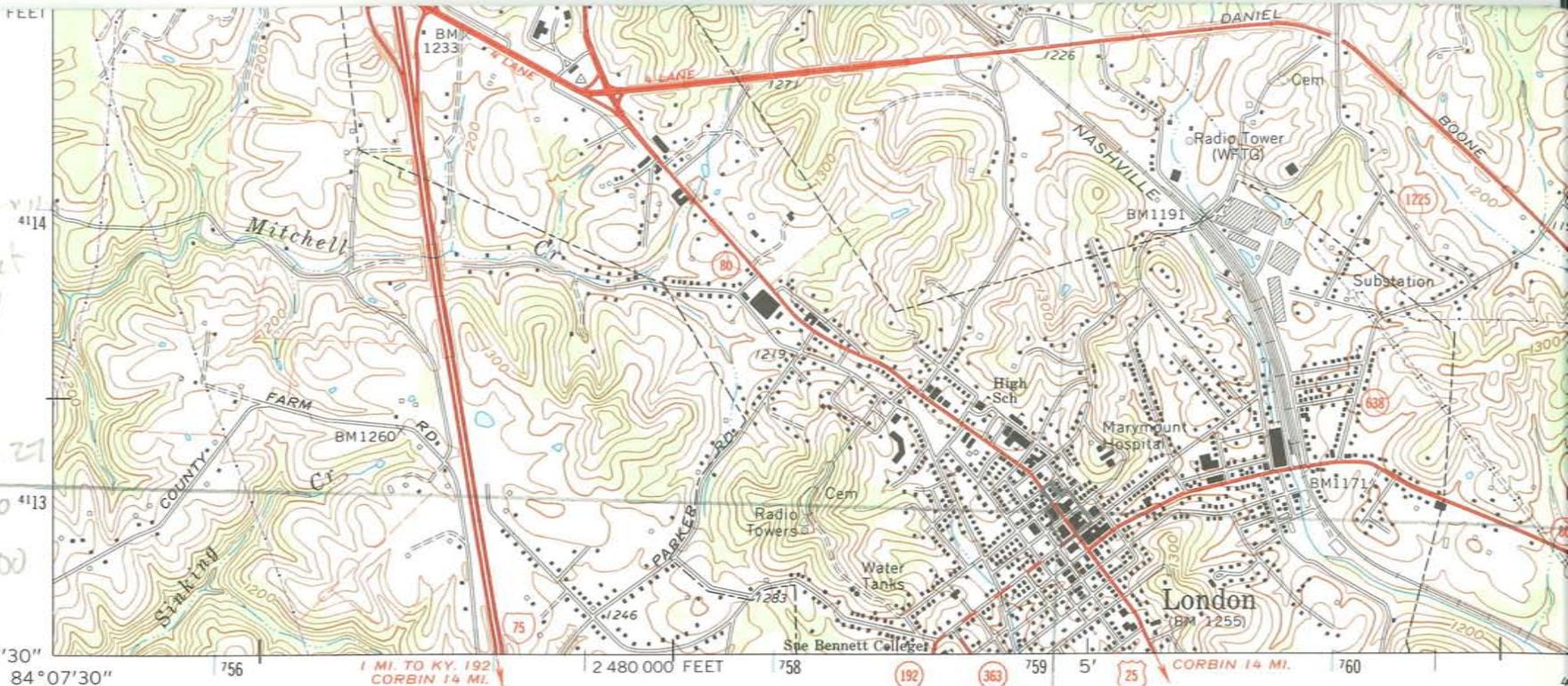
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**Property Owner:**

---

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state KY zip code \_\_\_\_\_

London  
 Historic District  
 Laurel Co. KY  
 Zone 16  
 Coordinates = NAD 27  
 Easting 759 000  
 Northing 4113 000



37°07'30"  
 84°07'30"

1 MI. TO KY. 192  
 CORBIN 14 MI.

2 480 000 FEET

192

363

759

5'

25

CORBIN 14 MI.

760

(LONDON SW)  
 4158 11 SW

Coordinates =  
 NAD 83  
 Easting 758 999  
 Northing 4113 213

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey

Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Tennessee Valley Authority

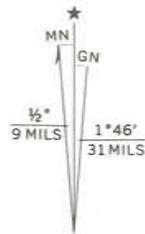
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1951. Field checked 1952. Revised from aerial photographs taken 1969. Field checked 1969

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
 10,000-foot grid based on Kentucky coordinate system, south zone

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 16, shown in blue

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked

National forest boundaries represent proclamation lines and do not necessarily imply Federal jurisdiction



UTM GRID AND 1969 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



CONTOUR INTERVAL  
 NATIONAL GEODETIC DATUM

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACT  
 FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
 KENTUCKY GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
 AND KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS

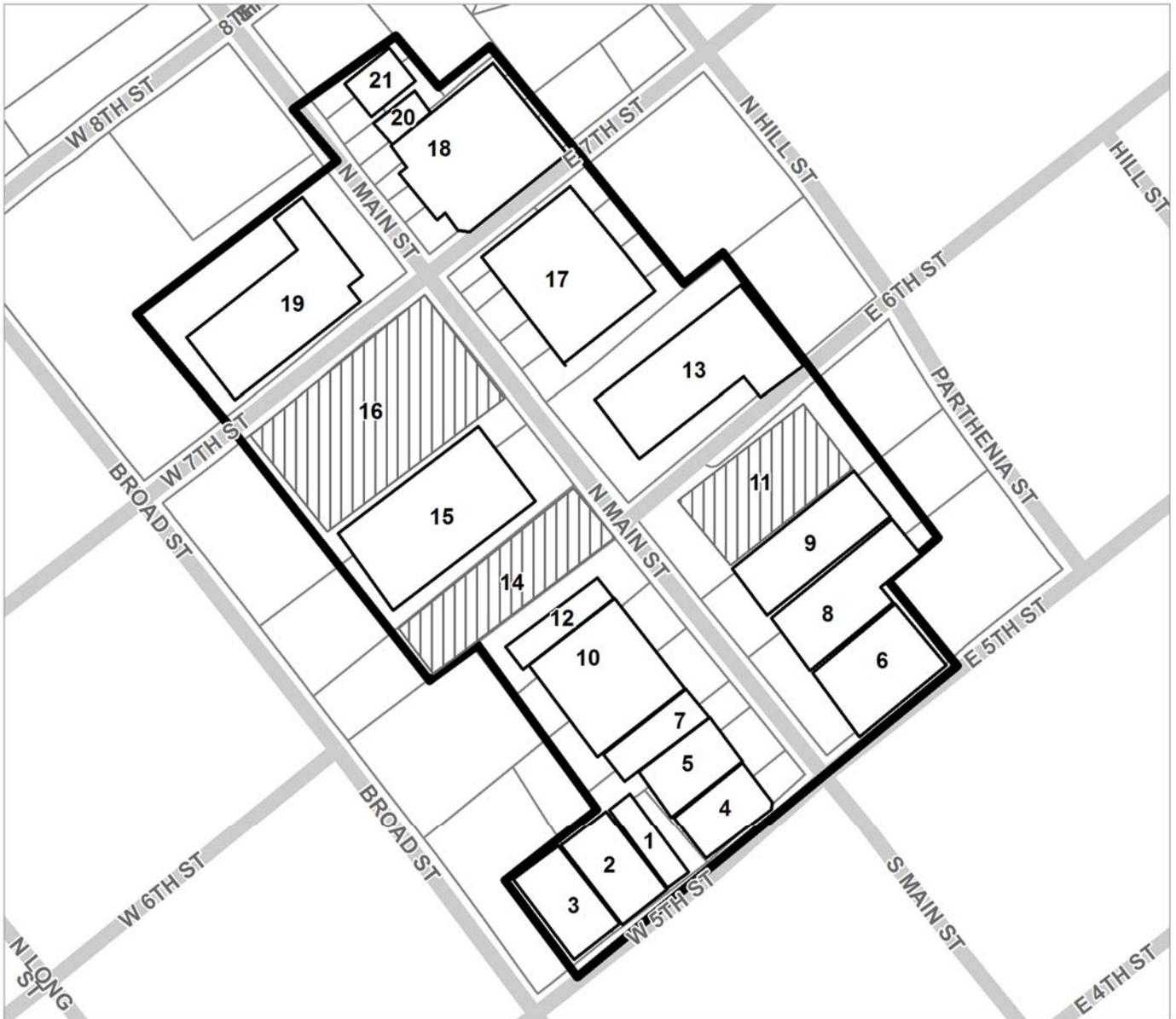
# My Map

Downtown London HD



Copyright 2010 Esri. All rights reserved. Mon May 2 2011 11:02:36 AM.

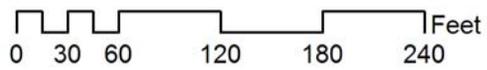
Area shown in green above:  
3.897828 acres



**London, Laurel County, KY**

Downtown London Historic District

-  Potential District Boundary
-  Contributing
-  Non-Contributing



QUAD: 1:24000 London, KY 1976 (1969)

MAP SOURCE DATA COURTESY OF:

Laurel County PVA  
 Courthouse Room 101  
 101 S. Main Street  
 London, KY 40741



LEFT TURN  
YIELD  
ON GREEN

E 5TH ST





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