

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: **Fort Thomas Women's Club**
 Other names/site number: **Village Players of Fort Thomas/CP-374**
 Name of related multiple property listing: **N/A**
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: **8 North Fort Thomas Avenue**
 City or town: **Fort Thomas** State: **KY** County: **Campbell**
 Not For Publication: **N/A** Vicinity: **N/A**

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

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:	_____ Date
_____ 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	

Fort Thomas Women's Club
Name of Property

Campbell County, KY
County and State

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

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Fort Thomas Women's Club
Name of Property

Campbell County, KY
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL: clubhouse

RECREATION & CULTURE: theater

SOCIAL: Civic

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION & CULTURE: theater

SOCIAL: civic

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Commercial Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation:

1908 Original Building: Stone

1925 Addition: Concrete

1995 Addition: Concrete Masonry Units (To be demolished)

Walls:

1908 Original Building: Brick Masonry

1925 Addition: Brick Masonry

1995 Addition: Vinyl Siding (To be demolished)

Roof:

1908 Original Building: Composition Roofing (Per Original Drawings)
(Single Ply Roofing currently)

1925 Addition: Composition Roofing (Per Original Drawings)
(Single Ply Roofing currently)

1995 Addition: Fiberglass Shingles (To be demolished)

Cornice:

1908 Original Building: Galvanized Iron, Painted

1925 Addition: Stone Coping

1995 Addition: None (To be demolished)

Miscellaneous:

1908 Original Building: Stone Keystone Trim above Windows and at sides of Arches

1925 Addition: Stone Coping at top of Exterior Wall

1995 Addition: Nothing (To be demolished)

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Women's Club of Fort Thomas Building (CP-374) is located on Fort Thomas Avenue, the main commercial street of older Fort Thomas Kentucky. The three-story building consists of the original 1908, designed by Harry Hake, a 1925 addition also by Harry Hake, and a non-descript 1995 addition. The building's architectural style can be classified as Late 19th and Early 20th Century Commercial Style. The original 1908 building is constructed with a stone foundation, Brick Masonry Exterior with a Painted Galvanized Iron Cornice. The original building also features selective use of Stone trim at the windows. The 1925 addition takes its design cues from the original 1908 building but without the arched windows and Metal Cornice. The 1995 addition is a non-descript wood-frame structure that holds a scene shop and costume storage facilities. The Architecture of the building exteriors remains in as originally designed and built. Several windows have been covered. The original 1908 building's interior was altered significantly. There are currently two significant stairs; a stair to the basement from the current 1st-floor gallery and a second stair from the 1st Floor to the 2nd in the main entry lobby. The Toilet rooms from the 1925 addition remain intact. The basic interior layout of the building today maintains the rooms and features from the buildings period of Significance from 1941 to 1972.

Narrative Description

ORIGINAL 1908 & 1925 BUILDING

The original Exchange building that is now home to the Village Players of Fort Thomas originally housed a telephone switching station, which remained in operation there until 1941.

Built of yellow iron-spot brick with arched windows, the two-story building at the corner of North Fort Thomas and Highland avenues was designed by noted Cincinnati architect Harry Hake (1871-1955) in 1908. An addition to the building was made in 1925 by Hake's firm as well. Hake's successful career included numerous other fine buildings for the Cincinnati and Suburban Bell Telephone Company (predecessor of the Cincinnati Bell Telephone Company). These included two headquarters buildings, one being a handsome Art Deco structure with well-designed and crafted symbolic sculptural decorations in metal and masonry and from 1906 on a series of suburban telephone exchanges in a variety of sophisticated period styles, such as the Fort Thomas exchange.

The building stands two stories tall and three bays wide, with a symmetrical front facing the street. It rests on a foundation of rock-faced limestone. The walls are laid in yellow iron-spot brick, in running bond. Alternating quoins anchor the corners of the façade. The front façade culminates in a projecting cornice with a dentil band and ornamental blocks. The roof itself is not visible from street level.

The symmetrical front, which faces west, is three bays wide, with a centered entrance. The second story, also three bays wide, features a modified Juliet balcony with a simple iron railing and a somewhat longer window for easier access. At the first story, many of the west and south windows are arched, held in place by splayed keystones. At the west façade, the second-story sash have 12/1 lights, anchored by keystones. The rear elevation and the rear portions of the north and south walls feature unusual 6/2 lights. Most of the windows appear to be in fair to good condition.

Twin chimneys stand in the middle of the south elevation, with unadorned sandstone water tables, lintels, and sills. At the north façade, a flight of plain concrete steps leads down to a basement entrance. There, a modern metal door provides access to the basement and, from there, to the rest of the building.

Inside, much of the building has been modified over time, but several original spaces and features remain. In the basement, the boiler room still existing in its original form. Radiators throughout the building may date to this period. The boiler room also has the sole remaining window and lightwell in the basement. All other windows on this level have been bricked in. The stair between the basement and first floor, as well as the door leading to it, are also original.

On the first floor, the restroom, kitchen, and back office largely remain in their original form. Wall bases, door casings, restroom fixtures, and the porcelain kitchen sink are all believed to be original. The second floor does not appear to have retained any interior elements from this time.

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE 1941-1972

In the early 1940s, the phone company vacated the property. The Women's Club of Fort Thomas took advantage of the situation by relocating to the vacant exchange. From 1954 to 1967, the Club's Drama Department became the Music and Drama Department, which in turn became the Village Players in 1967.

A few exterior alterations may have taken place during this period. The first-story arched windows, and some of the first-story side windows, were infilled with paneling. The original front door was replaced with a non-historic door featuring three square, glazed panels. At the South wall, a utilitarian metal fire stair, and a plain fire door somewhat too short for the opening, were added to provide an emergency exit from the second story

Inside, the basement level of the building has been adapted for its current use as a theater. Some backstage uses, like the dressing room, likely date to this period.

The first-floor lobby layout was reconfigured into its current form with a simple staircase with slender, square balusters to the second floor in the Northwest corner of the building. Terrazzo

flooring was added. In the kitchen and offices, hanging “schoolhouse” lights with stenciled milk-glass globes were also likely installed around this time. Cabinets were added along the East wall of the kitchen and under the sink (which was likely exposed originally).

The stairs from the lobby feature a more elaborate balustrade at the second floor. The rest of this floor was configured into its present use as an auditorium / multi-purpose space. There is a small, carpeted lobby at the top of the stairs that leads into the main space. The auditorium has an arched acoustical tile ceiling and furred out walls. At the rear of the space is a stage and proscenium flanked by two short flights of wooden stairs with iron railings.

CHANGES AFTER PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE 1973-TODAY

Behind the building’s main block, a plain, two-story, shed-roofed, frame addition was built with blind walls and vinyl siding. The building was also expanded at the basement by roofing over an area between the exterior wall and the neighboring property’s retaining wall to create a backstage hallway.

In the basement, two restrooms and a utility sink were added at the foot of the interior stairs. Storage walls with bi-folding doors, an AV booth, vinyl tile flooring, and carpeting all post-date the period of significance. HVAC is provided by the old boiler and outdoor equipment from the North side of the theater.

On the first floor, carpeting and vinyl flooring were added in the front office and kitchen. Along the North side of the building, a long gallery appears to be the most recently updated space in the building. Features include pine flooring and a dropped ceilings between four original concrete beams. Vintage radiators—once concealed by unknown materials, now exposed—supply heat to the space. On the south wall of the gallery, two doors with full-length, glazed panels, since painted over, open to the kitchen. In the same space, French doors with ten-pane glazing open and bring light into the back office.

On the second floor, wood paneling and vinyl flooring likely postdate the period of significance.

The Village Players’ productions remain popular with Fort Thomas residents, and the Woman’s Club is planning to update the building by adding an elevator and retrofitting the building to accommodate persons with disabilities. The building is in good overall condition.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- 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

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.) NONE APPLY

- 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

(Enter categories from instructions.)

PERFORMING ARTS

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1941-1972

Significant Dates

1941

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Hake, Harry (1908 building & 1925 Addition)

Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph

The former Fort Thomas Woman's Club Building (CP-374) meets National Register Criterion A. It has played an important role in the social and cultural life of Fort Thomas, Campbell County, Kentucky. The building's significance is interpreted within the historic context "Women's Clubs in Kentucky, 1894-1961." Built in 1908 by the Citizen's Telephone Company and American Telephone & Telegraph Company, the original "Hiland Exchange" building housed seventeen hundred telephones. Founded in 1915, the Fort Thomas Woman's Club met at members' homes, the city building, the Methodist Church, and at available space at the Fort Thomas military post for its first twenty-six years. The nationally significant ratification of the 19th Amendment, providing women the right to vote beginning in 1920, came about as women became more active in their communities. The Fort Thomas Woman's Club members created a building fund to acquire a clubhouse. In 1941 group purchased the Hiland Exchange building for that purpose. As their meeting place, the building allowed the women to expand their social, cultural, and charitable activities, grow membership, and continue to influence their community. The Clubhouse became the County's key social and cultural resource associated with this local historic context from 1941 through the end of the historic period.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

History of Fort Thomas

Before the city of Fort Thomas existed, there was the Fort Thomas Military Reservation. Before either existed, the District of Highlands consisted mainly of peach orchards, farms, and ruins of The Cincinnati Defense Perimeter, Civil War fortifications built to defend the Ohio/Miami River Valley cities from attack by Confederate forces.

In the 1880s, after repeated flooding of the Newport Barracks, the War Department sent General Phillip Sheridan to find a new building site on higher ground. In 1887 after Major Samuel Bigstaff wined and dined the general, they assessed on horseback 112 acres that the Major owned on a bluff in Highlands. As General Sheridan overlooked the Ohio River and surrounding hills, he proclaimed that the site would one day become “The West Point of the West.” Sheridan also named the new fort to be built after the famous Union General George H. Thomas, “The Rock of Chickamauga,” who had died in 1870.

Completed in 1894, the Fort Thomas Military Reservation served in wartime as a mobilization point and during peacetime as a soldiers’ hospital. Several regiments of the U.S. Infantry were garrisoned there for the Spanish American War and WWI. The stately and well-built officers’ quarters added prestige to “The West Point of the West.” The little fort thus achieved a stature beyond its size and served as headquarters of the 5th Army Corps. The 10th Infantry Regiment, the last to be stationed at the Fort, provided flood relief in 1933 and 1937 to citizens of Covington, Newport, Bellevue and Dayton.

The town originally known as “Highlands” grew up around the military reservation, which stimulated development of the town and Campbell County. The Fort had concrete sidewalks with curbs and paved roads long before Highlands with its dirt roads and boardwalks. In 1914 the former District of Highlands became incorporated as a city and named “Fort Thomas.”

During WWI, WWII, and the Korean War, the Fort was an important center for recruitment and induction. The new brick barracks were taken over by the Veterans’ Administration Hospital in 1946. Active-duty military left in 1964. The City of Fort Thomas took over most of the land and former officer’s quarters in 1972. Today the U.S. Army Reserves and the U.S. Corps of Engineers still maintain facilities on the post. The former officer quarters were privatized, modernized, and sold to individuals in 1992, creating an upscale “Military Commons”. The homes’ exteriors have kept their 1890s look. The brick mess hall is now a community center.

In 1972 President Nixon’s Legacy of Parks program returned under-utilized federal lands to local municipalities to preserve for community and recreational purposes. Most of the Fort’s property was purchased by the city of Fort Thomas and converted to a park. Tower Park with its landmark

90-foot limestone water tower is at the center of town with tennis courts, soccer and baseball fields, museum, amphitheater, hiking trails, beautiful historic homes, at the heart of the suburban city of Fort Thomas, "The City of Beautiful Homes."

Historic Context: Women's Clubs in Kentucky, 1894-1961

Through all cultures and times, women have had to organize their efforts to acquire equal treatment, such as property inheritance and voting rights, to name just two. Any discussion of women's life involves a tension between two spheres of activity: the domestic (family and housekeeping duties) and the social (social interactions, cultural uplift, welfare efforts, personal improvement, and various political campaigns, etc.).

Some historians place the beginning of the Women's Movement in America in 1848, with a meeting in Seneca Falls, New York (<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/womenstimeline1.html>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_rights). The Sorosis Club was begun in 1868 by Jane Cunningham Croly to enable women aspiring to professional activity to support each other, as at that time, women were excluded from professional organizations (<http://womenshistory.about.com/od/womansclubmovement/p/sorosis.htm>). The Sorosis Club invited representatives of all women's clubs to their convention in New York in 1889, to organize an umbrella organization. The new General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) was formed to lobby for causes on a national level and to create an efficient communication network. Not long after the Sorosis Club 1889 convention, Kentucky women created a parallel organization on the state level. As reported in Tradition of Service, the Kentucky Federation of Women's Club (KFWC) centennial history, "One hundred years ago, in 1894, Kentucky women banded together to form an organization that offered them empowerment through learning and leadership opportunities, an organization that spearheaded movements to improve education and clean up communities, an organization that continually pressured government to improve its citizens' quality of life and expand individual rights". These clubs offered their members empowerment through literary pursuits as well as by promoting voluntarism and leadership opportunities. The Fort Thomas Woman's Club empowered women to efforts of self-improvement, social and civic engagement, creative and artistic pursuits, and educational and career advancement by increasing their effectiveness and influence through collective activity.

In 1922 the Kentucky State Federation of Women's Clubs had 154 clubs with about 10,000 members. During the late-19th-and early-20th centuries, there was an explosion of new women's organizations in the country. The following is a sampling of Kentucky organizations:

- Murray Woman's Club was founded in 1905,
 - Fort Thomas Woman's Club (1915-2018) was founded in 1915,
 - Hodgenville Women's club was founded in 1919,
 - Covington Woman's Club (1925-1975) was founded in 1925,
 - Sororities were being chartered at Kentucky Universities,
-
- Murray Magazine Club was organized in 1901 (in Western KY, Paducah and Mayfield also had Magazine Clubs organized during the early 1900s). The members joined to enhance their intellectual standards through the study of literature, history, society, and the arts. As there were few private libraries and even fewer public libraries at that time, magazines were affordable and provided the major source of information,

- The Junior League was founded in 1901 in New York, NY to promote child health, nutrition, and literacy among the immigrants living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Junior Leagues were chartered in Louisville in 1921 and Lexington in 1924. Fort Thomas Woman's Club in 1927 established a Junior Department, which established a kindergarten and ran it for two years at the Methodist Church before turning it over to the local board of education.
- St. Luke's Women's Auxiliary with one thousand members supported fundraising for St. Luke's Hospital, Fort Thomas, KY

In the early years of KFWC, the most important projects were those about education and establishing libraries in Kentucky. KFWC began sponsoring the "Traveling Library" in eastern Kentucky in 1901 and named Miss Fannie Castleman Rawson as Director. In one season she traveled by mule back 96 miles delivering books up creek bottoms and over mountain ranges. By 1910 there were 100 Traveling Libraries and a collection of 5,000 books. KFWC had a far-reaching effect on reading as the federation and the Kentucky Library Association were instrumental in getting the General Assembly to establish the Kentucky Library Commission (The Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives' predecessor). The Commission extended service to the entire state and, by 1913, there were 182 traveling library stations from 81 counties. Within a decade, KFWC celebrated the opening of free libraries throughout the Commonwealth. The new organization also recognized the need for a full review of the education system and soon moved on to create model schools, supplementary education, and programs with links to the Commonwealth's universities. In 1905, members campaigned for women's rights, since they were unable to vote in school elections. During these years, the women's movement gained confidence as they began to make small changes. They first looked at improving their local schools and were ready to march on Frankfort for the passage of the 1907 School Bill while also demanding equality for University of Kentucky women.

After 1920 when the 19th Amendment granted women voting rights, and in the 1930s and 1940s, the KFWC leadership focused more on legislative issues and city ordinances. Education and schools were still important, but the leadership felt these issues were better addressed at the school board and government levels. One of the major reforms was the push to provide every child with at least 8 years of primary education. Members stepped up their efforts to provide scholarships and grants to girls attending college in the Commonwealth. Because many families faced hard times during the Great Depression, KFWC recognized these needs and helped with a variety of local projects and ongoing support for education. In 1944, KFWC celebrated its fiftieth birthday and during that time grew from an organization of 16 clubs to 204 clubs with over 12,000 members.

The GFWC was also changing by the early 1940s. It expanded its vision to embrace a national political agenda. It hired lobbyists and became a powerful organization, often seen on Capitol Hill speaking for American women. The incoming GFWC President, Mrs. Blair Buck, echoed a very popular sentiment of "Democracy in Action" in her installation address on June 27, 1947. As Mrs. Buck stated the task of the organization was "to strengthen the forces of religion and of democracy at home and abroad, and to dedicate the power of our great organization toward building a world society based on the concept of the importance of the individual in the sight of God." In decades following World War II, the literature distributed to state federations began to suggest departments for foreign policy. Many clubs saw their work as

"an extension of the clubwomen's goal to teach children lessons of good global citizenship".

The 1950s ushered in a new era of self-examination and self-education within the organization. Clubs encouraged their members to evaluate their own private and spiritual lives, and the same within their families. As the first wave of the Modern Women's Movement began to question the traditional place of women, some clubwomen saw the family as embattled. Members were encouraged to take on research, publish books, and be a public speaker.

The Kentucky Woman's Clubs continued to support their founding goals, though shifted in ways that followed other social changes. As Americans began to see a higher standard of living, which gave women more control over household discretionary funds, the clubs began to move away from direct volunteer activities and toward more project management and support through project funding. So, instead of volunteering time, clubwomen often volunteered money. The Kentucky federation also enjoyed the increased prestige of the GFWC. The Governor of Kentucky commonly called on the KFWC president for advice on education, social welfare projects, and conservation. Many KFWC officers went on to serve on state boards and other appointed positions. KFWC proudly claimed to have "improved more Kentucky towns, provided better education for more Kentucky children and allowed more Kentucky women to grow politically, socially and professionally than any other organization."

The 1950s saw a peak in the prestige of the women's clubs. The GFWC became very powerful nationally. Civic officials, from school boards to governors to United States presidents, consulted women's clubs or their federations on any issue they deemed "a woman's issue." GFWC officers were regularly called on to accompany government officials on overseas trips designed to build bridges between nations. The officers would oversee evaluating needed social services and coordinating public awareness campaigns, and charity drives back home.

By the 1960s, interest and membership in women's clubs had started to decline, and by 2010, the number of clubs nationally had significantly declined.

History of the Fort Thomas Woman's Club

Ninety-seven women met on February 17, 1915, at the Altamont Hotel in Fort Thomas to form The Fort Thomas Woman's Club as a social and service club to advance the welfare of their city of 5,000. They were organized by Mrs. Murray R. Hubbard and others. Mrs. Frank Opp was chosen as Temporary Chairman, Mrs. Webster Helm as Temporary Secretary. Guest speaker Mrs. Chas Rockhill of Ohio spoke of the need for a Woman's Club in every community. Mrs. Hubbard was elected President. Mrs. R. E. Carter was elected 1st Vice President, Mrs. Samuel Harton 2nd Vice President, Miss Elizabeth Quinn 3rd Vice President, Mrs. Webster Helm Recording Secretary, Mrs. David Davies Treasurer, Mrs. E.A. Powell Corresponding Secretary, and Mrs. G.A. Skeer Auditor. A committee was formed to draft a Constitution and By-Laws. As the first president, Mrs. Hubbard in later years would affectionately be referred to by the club women as "Mother Hubbard."

The goals of Fort Thomas Woman's Club were to "further the welfare of the city both physically and morally." The Club's motto was: "To help others is to elevate ourselves, and to elevate ourselves is to help others."

The first regular meeting was on March 4, 1915, at the Avenel Hotel and the membership voted to join the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs (KFWC); the club was admitted the same month. The club originally was divided into four Departments: Music, Art, Civic, and Home Economics. There were four committees: Hospitality (the largest), Program, Printing, and Press. The Civic Department was also divided into standing committees: Health & Sanitation, Social Services, Illiteracy, Civic Beauty, and Social Purity.

On March 15, 1915, the club was officially affiliated with the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs (KFWC). Club dues were set at \$1.00 per year and the initiation fee at \$2.00. The Music Department purchased a grand piano for \$50, payable by installments.

The war years of 1916-1918 were busy as the Clubwomen volunteered to sew and knit sweaters and garments for Belgium war relief under the direction of Mrs. G.A. Aerts, wife of the Belgium consul. The Club women took over the local Surgical Dressing Unit Mrs. Aerts ran from her home and financed it and staffed it with volunteers at the Episcopal Meeting Hall, making, packing, and shipping 319,739 pieces of work from 1917-to 1918. Once the U.S. entered WWI, the Club took up additional relief work at Fort Thomas military post, making sewing kits for soldiers and serving them picnic suppers. So busy with war work, the Club postponed joining the General Federation of Women's Clubs until after the war.

In 1919 the Club was affiliated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) and continuously espoused the values and supported the policies and programs of both KFWC and GFWC throughout its one-hundred-and-three years of existence.

For twenty-six years, 1915-1941, the Club women met in members' homes, the city building, the Methodist Church, and at available spaces at the Fort Thomas military post. But as their membership grew, so did their need and desire for a larger meeting space. In hopes of someday building their clubhouse, the Club purchased a vacant lot and began a building fund.

However, after bank loans were approved in 1940-41, the members voted at a Special General Meeting on February 14, 1941, to purchase the vacated Hiland Exchange telephone building for \$11,000. The Club refurbished the attractive two-story yellow brick building at 8 North Fort Thomas Avenue on the northeast corner of Highland and Fort Thomas Avenues.

With its own clubhouse, TFWC entered its most energetic and active decades. The first regular FTWC meeting was held on October 2, 1941. With President Mrs. Grover Armstrong presiding. Mrs. Blackburn read the dedication for the new Clubhouse; Mrs. Brayton spoke about "Women of the Past." It was decided to hold an Open House on October 7 and that other groups could petition FTWC for shared use of Clubhouse space. Sigma Kappa, the Sub Deb Club, and the local USO would hold many dances in the second-floor auditorium. Dames of Democracy held business meetings at the Clubhouse, and the Fort Thomas Men's Club was charged \$15 to defray club expenses to hold a "Ladies Night" social on December 9, 1941, in the auditorium.

During WWII, the Clubhouse was the scene of many Homefront efforts. Members worked with the Red Cross rolling bandages for hospitals and making kits for soldiers overseas. The Clubhouse hosted USO dances, picnic suppers, and holiday teas for soldiers. The lower level of the Clubhouse was transformed into a Soldiers' Canteen, furnished with radio, victrola, piano, billiards, ping-pong, card tables, writing tables, and stationery. The recreational lounge was

available to servicemen and military cadets from Fort Thomas military post-Monday-Saturday 3 pm-10 pm, Sunday 3 pm-10 pm, and was hosted by husband-and-wife volunteers, many of whom provided cigarettes, cookies, and soft drinks. The field behind the Clubhouse was set up with horseshoe pits for soldiers' recreation. At Christmas, the Clubhouse was decorated for the season with a tree trimmed to make the servicemen feel even more at home. Miss Maude Peterson was the official hostess; Mrs. Grover Armstrong, a past president, oversaw the room's operation; Captain John Shevlin was the military post's representative. In July 1942, it was reported that since its opening two months earlier, more than 1200 servicemen had taken advantage of the lounge.

The Soldier's Canteen is just one example of how generous the Club was in responding to and sharing space for civic events. The canteen project further demonstrates how effective and dynamic FTWC was as a civic catalyst in administering, staffing, and operating the lounge. The club also coordinated the donations for furnishing and maintaining the lounge from community groups that included the local Lions, Optimist, and Rotary Clubs, and the First Baptist, First Presbyterian, and Methodist churches.

In 1943, the Fort Thomas Woman's Club sold war stamps and joined with KFWC/GFWC clubs in buying government bonds to help with the "purchase" of a bomber. The project was so successful; that the Treasury Department was able to purchase two bombers. Painted on their sides was the name "GFWC."

Constant fund-raising efforts were necessary to maintain the Clubhouse and Fort Thomas Woman's Club social, public service, and charitable projects. Each department held fund-raisers as well as the General Club. There was such a variety of fundraisers over the years, with the following list offering some examples: card parties, fashion shows, rummage sales, book sales, holiday bazaars, flower shows, garden tours, plant sales, home tours, and bake sales. A simple list of the myriad community and regional charitable organizations that have benefitted over the one-hundred-and-three years from the Fort Thomas Club women's generosity, volunteerism, and financial support would require pages.

Since 1941, the Clubhouse has been in constant use. Some examples of routine and special use occasions include:

- Board meetings
- 5th District KFWC Silver Jubilee Celebration Convention, more than 300 attending
- Regular FTWC general membership meetings (80-300 attending)
- Monthly FTWC Department meetings with luncheons, guest speakers, and musical programs.
- Regular FTWC committee meetings (There were as many as 35 committees)
- Plays presented by the Drama Department in 2nd-floor auditorium 1942-1966
- Plays produced by the Village Players in the lower-level black box theater 1967-present
- Charitable fundraising events, e.g., Benefit Bridge Bazar/Luncheons, with 350 attendees utilizing all three floors of Clubhouse
- Many USO dances in the second-floor auditorium
- Community Forum on Post-war Planning held February 29, 1944, with Malcolm Dill of the Regional Planning Commission, Charles Kuhn of Ft. Thomas Planning Committee, Dr. L.L. Ross, Mayor of Ft. Thomas, and many other public officials discussed citizens' ideas about what postwar projects to implement and how to expeditiously employ people in the constructive

upbuilding of the community.

- Guest speakers, such as Ollie M. James, assistant managing editor of *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, addressed more than 300 members and guests at the November 1944 meeting, discussing current events including his meeting with many servicemen who had witnessed and testified that Nazi atrocity stories were not propaganda, but facts.
- Live Radio Broadcast of “World Town Meeting”, Feb. 5, 1948, over station WZIP, with Miss Betta Cleveland moderator. Presented by Mrs. Glenn Finch, Chair of The International Relations Department, Chair of the Women’s Action Committee for the 5th Congressional District of Kentucky and affiliated with UNESCO in Greater Cincinnati. In celebration of FTWC’s 33rd birthday anniversary. A luncheon of international foods was served; the Highlands High School student chorus sang a program of selected national anthems. Club members dressed in native costumes comprising a United Nations panel represented France, China, Russia, England, and Brazil. Representatives discussed what their countries could contribute to the Marshall Plan (to promote peace and revive a working world economy) and how they could expect to benefit. According to the *Cincinnati Post* Feb. 9, 1948, this program was “the first direct broadcast in this area of a program originating in the auditorium of a woman’s club.”

Although there were various departments over the years, including Civic and Garden, consistently the Club had departments focused on the arts: Music, Drama, Art (fine arts), and Literature. This focus on the arts was emphasized and manifested by the Club’s programming at all public events and meetings, including department and committee meetings, and general membership meetings.

At all Club meetings, besides a luncheon and business meeting, a guest lecture and musical interlude were always part of the program. A guest dramatist or novelist was always invited to speak and enlighten members on her areas of expertise; additionally, the musical part of the program might include a guest vocal soloist from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music accompanied by a Music Department member accompanying her on the piano. From its inception, FTWC demonstrated a strong interest in drama, music, and literary arts, regularly inviting successful (male and female) novelists, journalists, poets, dramatists, and critics as guest speakers to discuss popular novels, Broadway plays, their work, or the writing of others. Some speakers presented dramatic interpretations from current or popular plays; some discussed and critically reviewed current Broadway hits.

Particularly active was the Drama Department which was formed in 1940. At a meeting on December 4, 1941, guest speaker Professor Frank Fowler, nationally known director of the Guignol Theatre at the University of Kentucky, and “a foremost adherent of ‘The Little Theatre Movement’ discussed current plays and past Broadway hits, including ‘Life with Father,’ ‘The Corn Is Green,’ ‘Watch on the Rhine,’ and ‘The Blithe Spirit.’ Mr. Fowler pointed out that the Little Theatre Movement of the 1910s-1920s began as a backlash to the monopolistic “Syndicate” commercial theatre system. European touring companies after WWI catalyzed to inspire American audiences to demand relevant and dynamic theatrical offerings, not the stale, mass-appeal, mass-produced commercial fare presented by Hollywood and Broadway. Little theatres encouraged new plays and new playwrights, and greater artistic explorations. Playwrights such as Susan Glaspell, Eugene O’Neill, Elmer Rice, Robert Sherwood, and others emerged through the support of The Provincetown Players, part of the avant-garde and an early and influential “little theatre.”

Such small independent theatres were more daring and experimental, focused on creating fine art, not a commercial success, but rather on artistic merit and expression, historical, political, and/or socially relevant content. By 1925 almost 2,000 community or little theatres registered with the Drama League of America. By 1940 theatre education was offered at many universities in the United States. The Little Theatre Movement would go on to birth Off-Broadway in the 1950s, the Golden Age of International Art Film (1950-1960s), and the proliferation of non-commercial community theaters across the United States. In 1975 American Association of Community Theatre (AACT) estimated there were 15,000 community theatre groups.

For decades, the Drama Department's annual spring theatrical production benefitted "Camp Sunshine," a summer camp for underprivileged children of Campbell County. By 2003, over \$95,000 had been contributed to this charity. Each year the camp's most generous benefactor was the "The Camp Sunshine Committee," as the producing group of the Drama Department came to be known. The Camp Sunshine Committee, comprised of theatrically inclined club women and their husbands, also acted onstage and assisted backstage in plays presented by Theatre Productions, Inc., "Campbell County's Little Theatre" from 1947-to 1951.

Theatre Productions Board of Directors included Glenn Clark Miller as President, Lucille Raisbeck as Vice President, Elverta Mergenthal as Secretary, and Natalie Hamilton as Treasurer. The group presented four productions annually, mostly comedies such as "Philip Barry's "The Philadelphia Story" and "Kiss And Tell" by F. Hugh Herbert. Many FTWC members and their husbands were Theatre Productions members and residents of Fort Thomas, Newport, and surrounding towns. Under the masthead, their club stationery proclaimed "Northern Kentucky's Foremost Little Theatre." Plays were presented in the Highlands High School auditorium; Tickets to "Kiss And Tell" their debut production in March 1948 were 85 cents (including State and Federal Taxes); a season subscription for four plays was \$3.75.

Some members of Theatre Productions eventually joined with thespians from the Fort Thomas Woman's Club Drama Department and Camp Sunshine Committee in 1966 to form a community theatre known as "The Village Players of Fort Thomas." Village Players members, their families, and others repurposed the former Soldiers' Lounge in the Clubhouse lower level into a little black box theater with thrust stage. The original seats were obtained from a renovated bowling alley.

The Village Players first season opened with a production of "The Solid Gold Cadillac" in May 1967. In its second season (1967-1968), VP presented three productions – one each in November, February, and May. Since then, VP has continued to annually present 3-6 stage productions of drama, comedies, musicals, new works, and children's plays to the community at affordable prices.

The Village Players (VP) would continue The Woman's Club tradition of service to the community and charitable giving, choosing a new charity every year. In addition, VP has provided up to two scholarships per year to high school seniors majoring in the arts.

Currently, the lower-level black-box facility consists of the main stage with tiered seating for 102; a thrust stage; lighting and sound rooms; lobby; ticket booth; dressing room; checkroom; refreshment counter; restrooms; workshop; and costume/prop storage room.

The Village Players became an active member of the Association of Community Theatres of Greater Cincinnati (ACT) and the Ohio Community Theatre Association (OCTA), excerpting a scene from “Guest in the House.” Later the group also joined the Kentucky Theatre Association (KTA). VP has received numerous awards from ACT, OCTA, and KTA over the years, competing at the regional and state festivals of OCTA and KTA. Several Village Players members have been honored with the “Art Rouse, Mario Pitocco, and Roger Grooms Awards” given by ACT, and “Spirit of Community Theatre Awards” given by OCTA.

In 2015 FTWC held an Open House and buffet dinner to celebrate its 100th Birthday Anniversary with one-hundred members and guests attending. Officers present were President Ginger Paul, Vice President Flo Grey, Second Vice President Betsy Evans, Recording Secretary Toni Allen, Corresponding Secretary Kay Ort, Treasurer Rita Walters, and Auditor Connie Harding. It was a bittersweet celebration for Club members present since it was well known that the membership in women’s clubs throughout the country had been declining significantly since 2010. The FTWC Board recognized in 2015 that the times had indeed changed.

In the 21st Century, more women than ever before were working in professional careers, in government, business, education, the arts, and professions. The advent of the 21st Century and the digital age brought many changes to our society, culture, and institutions. In addition to societal changes, changing demographics and decreasing membership due to more women spending their dwindling leisure time with their families and more women being required to work outside the home. Nevertheless, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs continues to thrive, with nearly 80,000 members in affiliated clubs in every state and in more than a dozen countries. GFWC members continue to work in their communities supporting the arts, preserving natural resources, advancing education, promoting healthy lifestyles, encouraging civic involvement, and working toward world peace and understanding.

But by 2018 the Board of The Fort Thomas Woman’s Club had made the difficult decision to disband The Club. They recognized that their former Drama Club/Camp Sunshine Committee, now known as “The Village Players,” had developed over 57 years into a self-sustaining, vibrant award-winning community theater that had eclipsed its parent organization as the social and cultural heart of Fort Thomas. Fifty-seven years of 3-6 theatrical productions annually, along with annual contributions to FTWC for Clubhouse maintenance and utilities, in addition to donating yearly to charities and scholarships; all convinced the Board to gift the Fort Thomas Woman’s Club Clubhouse building to the Village Players. The Board was convinced that The Village Players would continue to thrive and in the long-established tradition of FTWC by donating to charities, providing outlets for creative self-expression to its members, producing top-notch theatrical productions to challenge, enlighten, and entertain visitors to the little 102-seat village theater downstairs under the yellow-and-white awning.

The Village Players is now a non-profit tax-exempt arts organization, committed to providing a multi-use cultural arts center for artistic expression and cultural experiences in the fine and performing arts that will enhance its community and enrich the lives of its members, Fort Thomas residents, and visitors.

Evaluation of the Historic Significance of The Fort Thomas Woman’s Club Clubhouse within the context of Women’s Clubs in Kentucky, 1894-1961

Since affiliating in 1915 and 1919, The Fort Thomas Woman’s Club, like its older sister club, the Murray Woman’s Club in Calloway County, Kentucky, has a long history of supporting the goals of the KFWC/GFWC organizations: working in the community to support the arts, preserve natural resources, advance education, promote healthy lifestyles, encourage civic engagement, and work toward world peace and understanding. The Clubhouse has been on the scene for hundreds of projects and thousands of volunteer hours. The lives of men, women, and children in our community have been enriched by the leadership and learning opportunities provided through the implementation of these projects.

The Fort Thomas Woman’s Club had the distinction of being the largest and most active Woman's Club in Northern Kentucky for over a hundred years. The Club had more than three hundred members in 1968. FTWC has shared the Clubhouse with other organizations making possible community improvements for women beyond the resources of the Fort Thomas Woman’s Club. Our community would not be what it is today without the vision of the early members who purchased and paid for their Clubhouse building, refurbished, updated, and maintained it for seventy-seven years before gifting it to The Village Players in 2018. The Village Players, Inc. a non-profit arts organization seeks to carry on the public service legacy of the Fort Thomas Woman’s Club as it develops 8 North Fort Thomas Avenue into a multi-use cultural arts center for artistic expression and cultural experiences to enrich the lives of Fort Thomas residents and visitors to our community.



Historic Photo – 1909 Exterior



Historic Photo – Switching Room



Historic Photo – 1967 Theater



Historic Photo – 1978 Exterior

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

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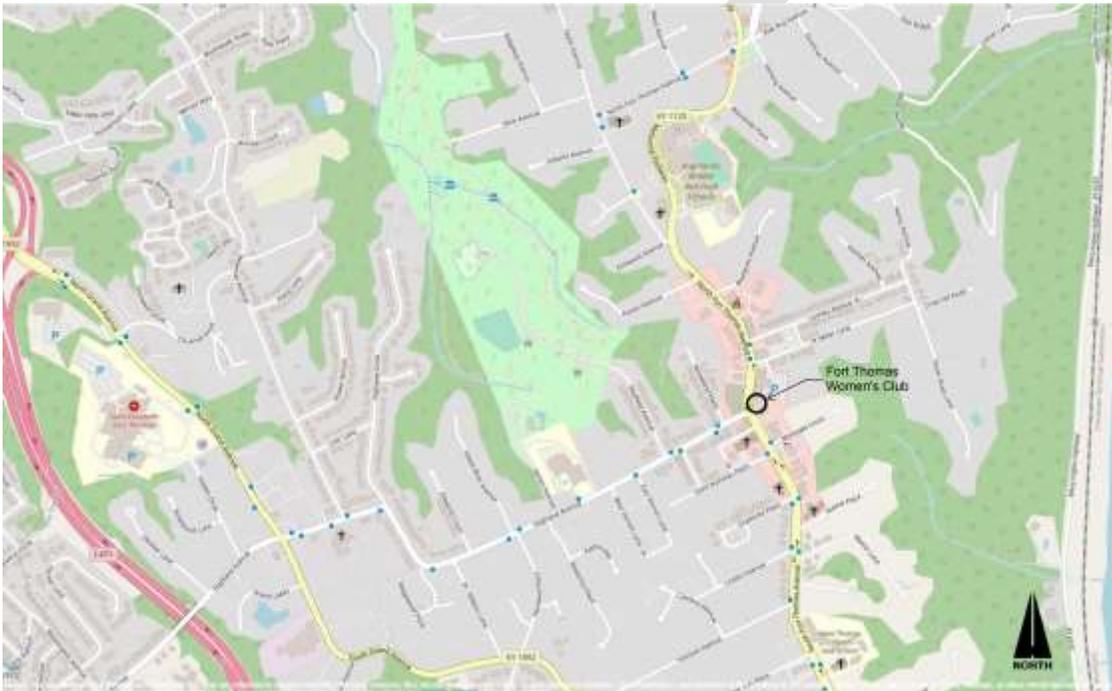
telephone: **513.325.3523**

date: **February 17, 2022**

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.



- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

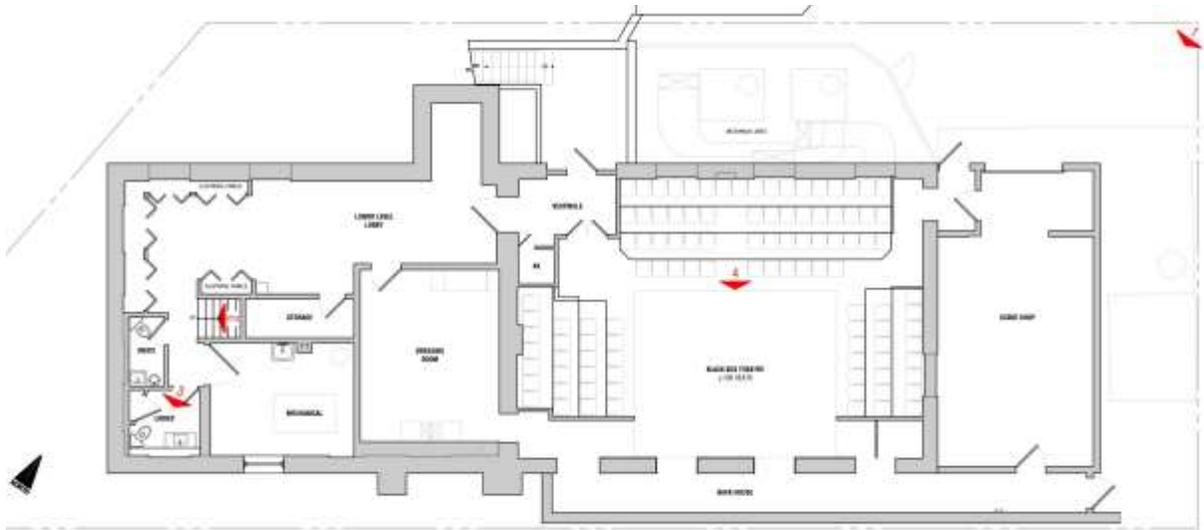


Photo Key Plan – Lower Level

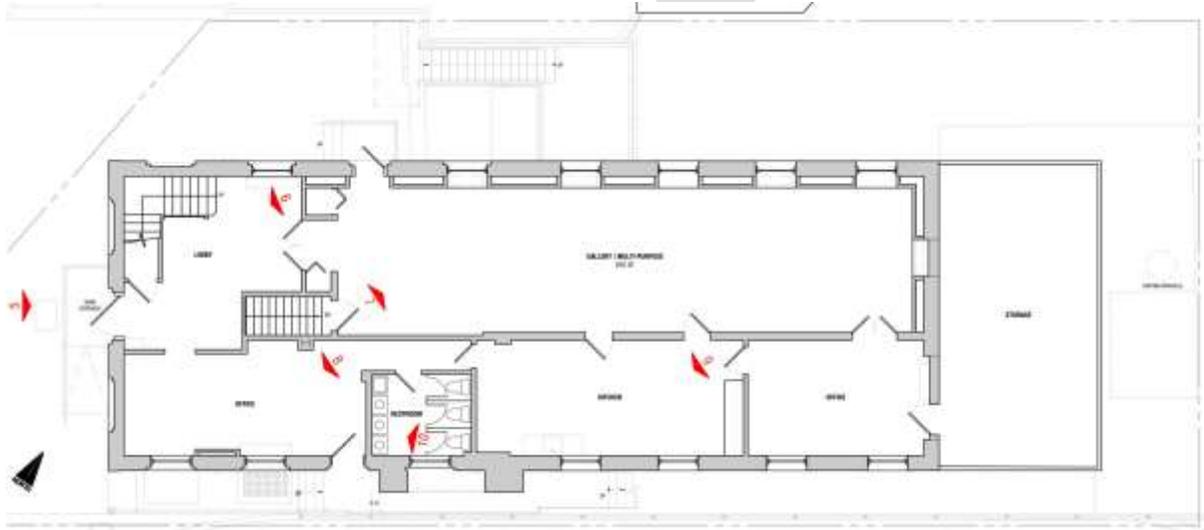


Photo Key Plan – First Floor



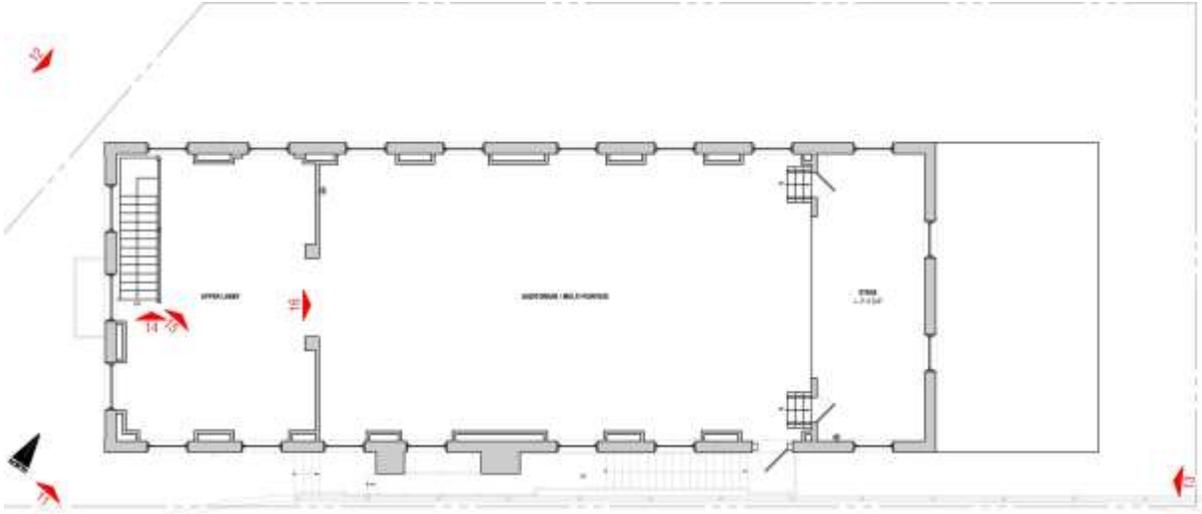
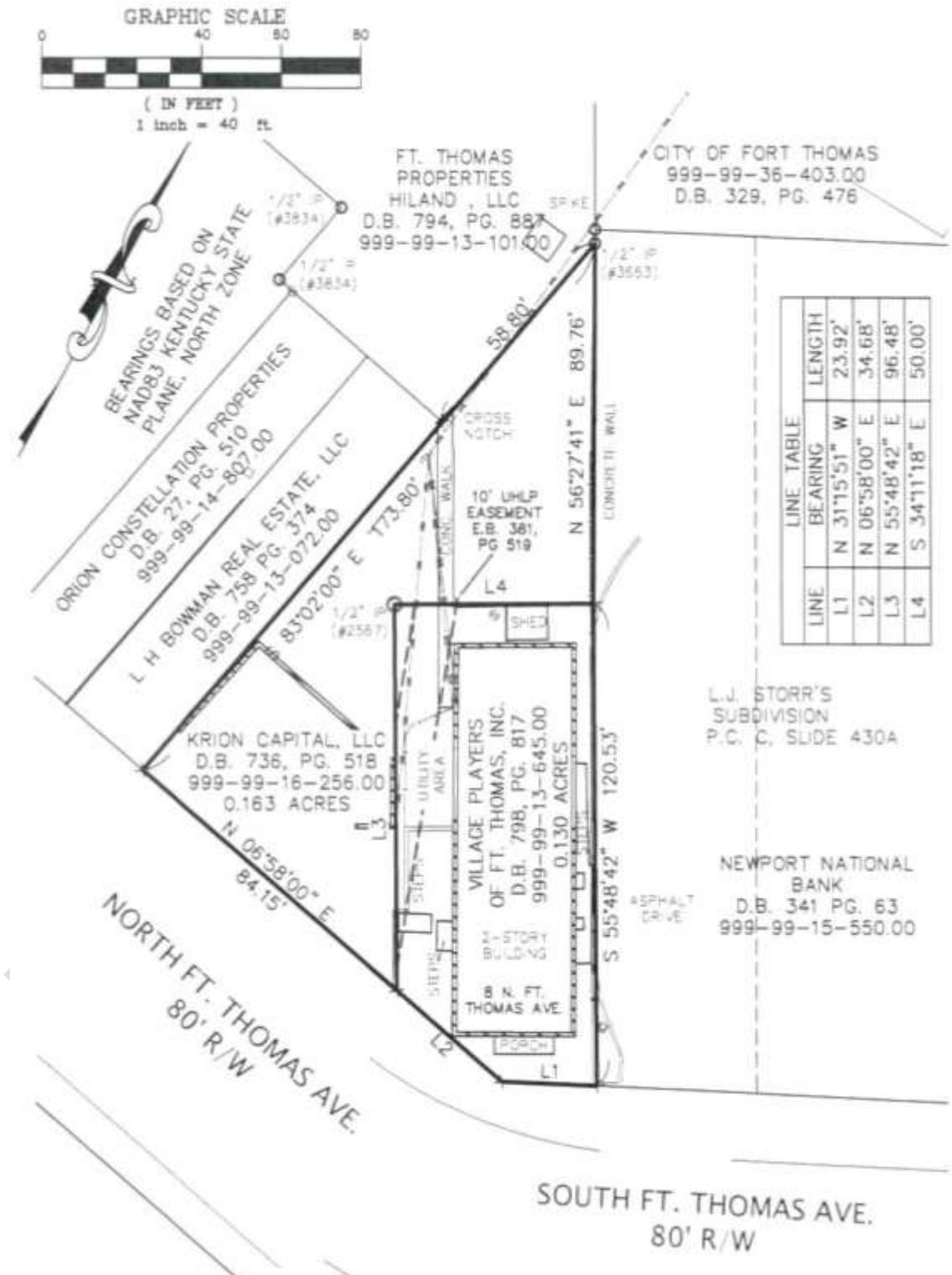


Photo Key Plan – Second Floor

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

DRAFT



LINE	BEARING	LENGTH
L1	N 31°15'51" W	23.92'
L2	N 06°58'00" E	34.68'
L3	N 55°48'42" E	96.48'
L4	S 34°11'18" E	50.00'

L.L. STORR'S
SUBDIVISION
P.C. C, SLIDE 430A

NEWPORT NATIONAL
BANK
D.B. 341 PG. 63
999-99-15-550.00

Property Plat Survey

**Photographs
Photo Log**

Name of Property: **Fort Thomas Women's Club**

City or Vicinity: **Fort Thomas**

County: **Campbell**

State: **Kentucky**

Photographer: **James Stapleton**

Date Photographed: **December 21, 2021**

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:



Photo #1 (KY_Campbell County) Exterior, Northeast Corner, camera facing southwest



Photo #2 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, 1st Floor looking at Stair to Basement, camera facing West



Photo #3 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, Lower Level Bathroom, camera facing Southwest



Photo #4 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, Lower Level Black Box Theater, camera facing South



Photo #5 (KY_Campbell County) Exterior, West Façade, camera facing East



Photo #6 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, 1st Floor Entry Staircase, camera facing Southwest



Photo #7 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, 1st Floor Gallery, camera facing Northeast



Photo #8 (KY_Campbell County) Interior 1st Floor Office, camera facing Southwest



Photo #9 (KY_Campbell County) Interior 1st Floor Catering, camera facing Southwest



Photo #10 (KY_Campbell County) Interior 1st Floor Historic Bathroom, camera facing West



Photo #11 (KY_Campbell County) Exterior, Southwest Corner, camera facing Northeast



Photo #12 (KY_Campbell County) Exterior, Northwest Corner, camera facing Southeast



Photo #13 (KY_Campbell County) Exterior, Southeast Corner, camera facing Northwest



Photo #14 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, 2nd Floor Stairway, camera looking North



Photo #15 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, 2nd Floor Upper Lobby, camera looking Northeast



Photo #16 (KY_Campbell County) Interior, 2nd Floor Auditorium, camera looking East