

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Cary House

Other names/site number: Easton House, BLM 101

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 208 Arthur Heights

City or town: Middlesboro State: Kentucky County: Bell

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X 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 X local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Craig Potts/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

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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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

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

1

1

buildings
sites
structures
objects
Total

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Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Current Functions

Domestic/Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Queen Anne Stick/Eastlake detailing

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property: Stone, Cedar/Cypress Clapboard, Cedar Shingle, and Asphalt roof.

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Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Cary House (BLM 101) is proposed for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It is a wood-frame house, covered in clapboards and cedar shakes in the Queen Anne-style. It was constructed between 1889 and 1890, featuring distinct Stick/Eastlake detailing. The house stands in Middlesboro, Kentucky. The proposed area for listing is 0.46 acres and includes the Cary House (a contributing building) and a garage constructed between 2024 and 2025 (non-contributing building).

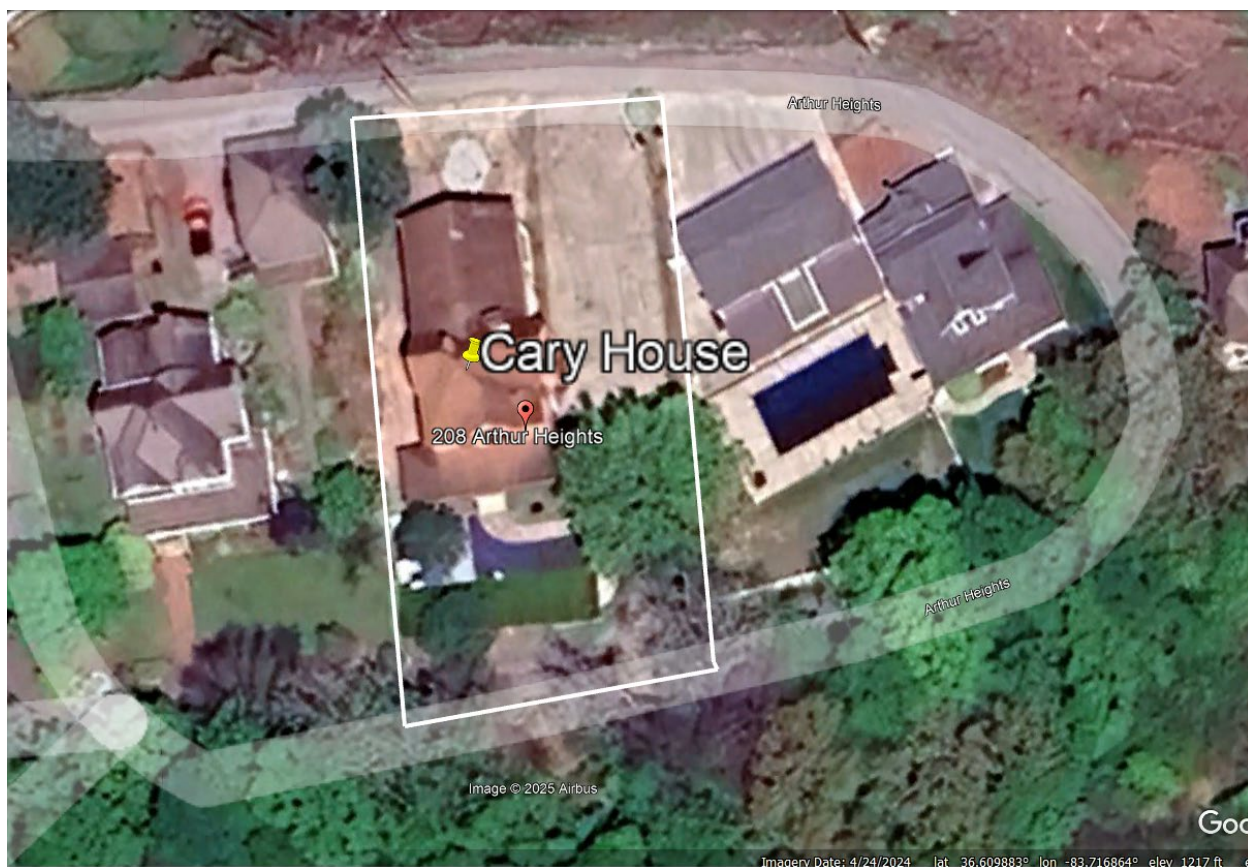


Photo 1. Cary House, Bell County, Kentucky Latitude: 36.609883° Longitude: -83.716864°

Physical Character of Site

The 5,536-square-foot primary living space is situated on a 0.46-acre parcel of level ground, facing south. Photos 1 and 2 show the Cary House with its neighboring houses in 2024. The southwest corner of the home is approximately 50 feet from the southern edge of the Arthur Heights loop, while the northeast corner is about 45 feet from the northern edge. A concrete driveway connects both the north and south sides of the loop, providing access across the property.

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A sidewalk extends from the front porch, descending a set of steps that make a 90-degree turn before meeting the driveway. The main floor of the house is elevated about 3-1/2 feet above grade. Surrounding the house are primarily lawn and flower beds, with the front yard featuring artificial turf and enclosed by a black fence. Additionally, a detached garage, built in 2024 and completed in 2025, is situated on the property; however, it is considered a non-contributing structure. Photo 3 shows the most recent survey of the Cary House in 1980.



Photo 2. The Cary House with its neighboring houses.

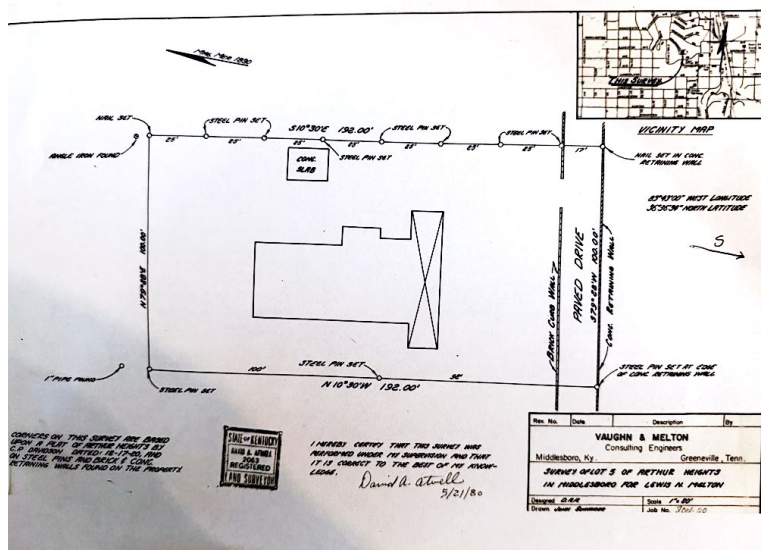


Photo 3. The Cary House, 1980 Survey Lot 5.

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Description of Main House

Built on Arthur Heights overlooking downtown Middlesboro, Kentucky, the Cary House is one of two residences commissioned in 1889 by Alexander Arthur, the town's founder. The three-story house features exterior vertical wood trim, known as "sticks," set against cedar shingle siding, complemented by a gable field adorned with an arched sunburst ornament and decorative trim beneath the peak—key characteristics of Queen Anne styling. Additionally, elements of Eastlake design are evident in the turned spindles, jigsaw-cut brackets, and intricately carved millwork along the porch, eaves, and gables. These geometric details, devoid of flowing curves, are painted in contrasting colors to accentuate their craftsmanship. The house features an asymmetrical floor plan, a hipped roof, and a first-floor porch, along with a covered second-story balcony. The house was built at the same time as its neighbor, the Brooks House, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009 (NRIS: 09001137). Photo 4 shows both the Brooks House on the left and the Cary House on the right.



Photo 4. The Brooks (shown on the left) and the Cary House are shown as built in 1890.

Photo 5 is a view of both the Brooks House and the Cary House (labeled in the picture) as seen in about 1905. The image is taken from the central business district in Middlesboro, looking up toward Arthur Heights. Arthur Heights is an elevated hill overlooking the downtown district. The Arthur Heights view and location made this an ideal place for Alexander Arthur to build houses that showcased the importance of Middlesboro as a growing industrial area.

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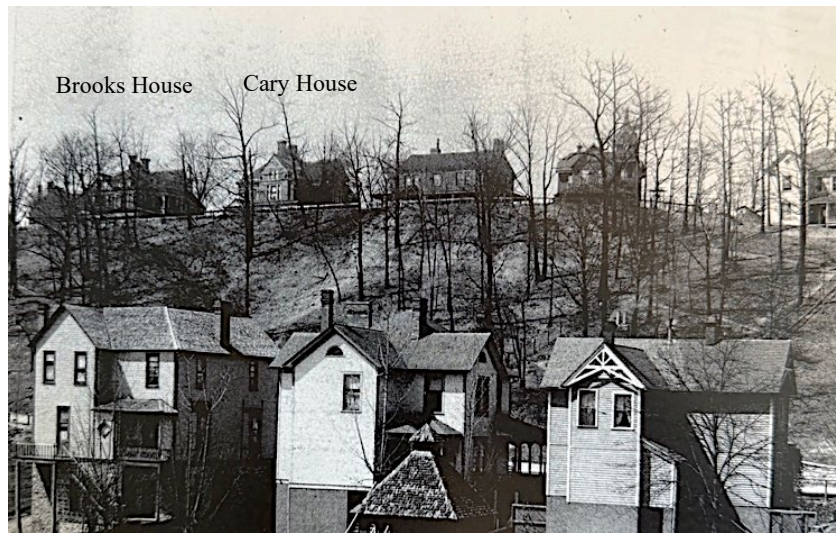


Photo 5. The Brooks House is shown on the top, far left, and the Cary House is the house to the immediate right. It is believed this photo was taken in 1905.

Today, the Cary House features modern upgrades and thoughtful additions, including a detached garage and an integrated porte-cochère that was added to the front porch, extending the original porch and roofline. The current owners have dedicated care and resources to preserving the house's architectural design and updates.

Exterior Physical Description:



Photos 6. North (Front) view in 2025.

North (Front) Side, Photos 6 and 7.

The structure features the asymmetrical massing and complex forms characteristic of the Queen Anne style. A dominant front-facing gable displays ornamental shingles and an arched window,

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creating vertical emphasis and stylistic richness. The shingle siding on the upper story and the horizontal clapboards below highlight another hallmark of the style: contrasting surface textures. Additionally, elements such as the arched central window and decorative trim bands reinforce the Queen Anne motifs. At the same time, the grid-patterned frieze beneath the second-story bay indicates a Stick Style influence.



Photo 7. Cary House in 1917. Note the brick update to the front porch and enclosure of the second-floor balcony.

Eastlake features are evident in the turned porch posts, spindle work, bracketed cornices, and fret-sawn decorative railings, as seen in early photographs from 1890 (Photo 4). These finely crafted details reflect Charles Eastlake's design philosophy and the availability of mass-produced ornamentation during the period. The house rests on a fieldstone foundation, typical of the time for its rustic texture and structural durability.

The front porch was modified using extensive brick construction, and the second-floor balcony was enclosed in the early 1900s, as shown in Photo 7. In 2025, the front porch was further extended to add a porte-cochere, as shown in Photo 8. The as-built 1890 Cary House is shown in Photo 4.

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Photos 8 and 9. East side of the house, 2025.



Photos 10. East side, 2025.

East (Right) Side, Photos 8, 9, and 10.

The east elevation reveals the irregular massing characteristic of the Queen Anne style, with a combination of projecting bays, gables, and later extensions. The two-to-three-and-a-half-story frame rests on a raised stone and brick foundation.

Toward the front (Photo 9), a projecting bay rises beneath a steeply pitched gable. The bay features paired one-over-one double-hung sash windows and is capped with decorative paneling, consistent with the patterned detailing found elsewhere on the house. The gable above contains decorative wood shingles and applied trim. Additional fenestration along this elevation consists of evenly spaced one-over-one sash windows with plain surrounds, painted in a contrasting darker tone.

Extending toward the rear, a two-story side wing continues the horizontal clapboard siding, complemented by decorative shingles in the gables. Photo 10 shows a modern two-car detached

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garage addition to the site, along with a second-floor walkway to a patio and pergola. The detached garage, constructed of compatible materials and proportions, includes overhead doors at the ground level and a flat roof.



Photos 11 and 12: South Side view in 2025.

South Side

The south (rear) side of the Cary House features the 2024-2025 modifications to the property, notably the addition of a detached garage and rooftop deck, as shown in Photos 11 and 12. The elevation presents a relatively flat wall plane, in contrast to the more irregular massing of the historic portions of the dwelling. The wall surface is clad in horizontal clapboard siding painted to match the rest of the house, above a brick foundation that is consistent with the brickwork visible across the property. Fenestration on this elevation is limited to two modern rectangular one-over-one sash windows with simple wood surrounds painted in a contrasting color.

The garage has a flat roof that has been converted into a deck, enclosed by a metal railing. A pergola structure is visible at the upper level, further emphasizing the modern adaptation of this section for outdoor use.

West Side

The west side of the Cary House continues the irregular massing and varied surface treatments characteristic of the Queen Anne style (Photos 13 and 14). The elevation is defined by a projecting gabled bay near the center, clad in decorative shingles and accented with applied trim and a Palladian-style window at the upper level. Below the gable, a set of vertically aligned one-over-one sash windows provides symmetry within the projecting bay.

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Photos 13 and 14. West (Left) Side view in 2025.

Fenestration across the elevation consists of single and one-over-one double-hung sash windows with plain wood surrounds, painted in a contrasting darker color. A distinctive arched window is located on the first floor, toward the front of the house, and is framed by decorative trim, set within clapboard siding, which adds variety to the window forms.

The lower portion of the elevation reveals the raised foundation of rusticated stone and brick, consistent with the rest of the house. Toward the right, a side porch projects outward, enclosed by a brick half-wall with square wood posts above supporting the extended roof. The porch features exposed rafters and a ceiling fan, reflecting its adaptation for continued use as an outdoor living space.

Overall, the west elevation exemplifies the eclectic variety of forms and details characteristic of the Queen Anne style, featuring projecting bays, contrasting wall materials, and a mix of window shapes, while also incorporating functional porch space that enhances the domestic character of the dwelling.

Interior Physical Description:

First Floor Layout: Visitors enter through the original front door into the main foyer, dominated on the left by the interior's most striking architectural features —a lavish Eastlake-style staircase featuring turned spindles, a carved newel post, fretwork panels, and a stained-glass arched window on the landing. All main floors, including the foyer, parlor, hallway, main bedroom, and dining room, feature original hardwood floors. The historic architectural features exhibit a luxury and craftsmanship that would be unusual in average housing. Photo 16 shows three images of the staircase visible upon entering the house's front door.

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Photo 15. Staircase and Stained-Glass Arch Window viewed in 2025.

Main Bedroom

Porte
Cochere

Photo 16. First Floor Layout.

Other Queen Anne influences present include:

- Stained-glass arch window. Bold colors and floral patterns, paired with asymmetrical panels, capture the romanticism and visual drama of the Queen Anne style.

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- Built-in window bench. This feature emphasizes Queen Anne's focus on cozy, picturesque interiors, blending comfort with opulence.
- Layered textures. Deeply paneled wainscoting, beaded casings, and dimensional ceiling treatments enrich the typical Queen Anne aesthetic.

Turning right into the central foyer and then left is a formal parlor with a bay window and fireplace. Straight ahead after entering the front door and past the staircase on the left, is the paneled wooden doors that lead to the formal library. The library was converted into a main bedroom in 2024. The original library's oak-built-in bookcases and fireplace have not been altered and still retain their original beaded casings, paneled wainscoting, and dimensional plaster ceilings. Entry to both the original library and the formal parlor is through wide, paneled wooden doors that slide into the wall (or a cavity beside it) rather than swinging open. This style was prevalent in late 19th- and early 20th-century homes, especially in Queen Anne and other Victorian-era houses, where they were often used to separate parlors, dining rooms, and other formal spaces. Past the library (converted to a main bedroom in 2024) is a walk-through closet that leads to a back porch. About half of the original back porch was converted to the main bathroom in 2024.

Toward the rear of the house is a formal dining room, which is entered through a small hallway leading from the central foyer. The dining room connects to a large kitchen that was partially renovated in 2024 to include new appliances and a central granite table. Part of the enclosed back porch area was further renovated in 2024–25 to include a first-floor laundry room.

Another interior feature of the Cary House is the decorative coffered 9-foot, 8-inch ceiling throughout the central foyer. The ceiling is divided into recessed wooden panels, each inset with highly detailed pressed tiles featuring classical floral and geometric motifs. These panels were popular in Queen Anne and Eastlake interiors of the late 19th century. It is believed that a prior owner refurbished the decorative coffered ceiling from its original construction.

The first floor also features a bathroom, a hallway closet, and access to the original cellar. The cellar is constructed of hand-carved stone and includes four rooms with 7-foot, 6-inch ceilings.

The second floor is accessed via the main staircase and includes a central hall that leads to the original main bedroom, four guest bedrooms, and three full-size bathrooms. These rooms feature original doors, trim, transoms, and hardwood flooring. An enclosed second-story balcony, altered in about 1905, is also accessible from this floor. Today, the rear of the central hall provides access to the detached garage's porch. The second floor has 9-foot ceilings throughout.

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Photo 17, Second Floor Layout

Third Floor Layout:

Photo 18, Third Floor Layout.

The third floor is entered via its original hardwood steps. Sometime during the mid-20th century, the third-floor attic was finished to include three bedrooms and a full bathroom for guests. The original roofline and windows were preserved, and the floors were fitted with laminate designed to replicate the original hardwood found throughout the lower levels. The unfinished attic includes access to the updated heating/cooling system for both the second and third floors.

Entry to the cellar is available via two entrances: an interior staircase from the first-floor dining room and an exterior entry door. The cellar includes a hand-carved stone and wood cellar with

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four rooms and 7½-foot ceilings, accessible from both the interior and exterior. While not finished to the same standard as the upper floors, historical evidence indicates the cellar served multiple purposes, including food and beverage storage, coal storage via exterior chutes, and housing the steam boiler that supplied heat to the upstairs radiators.

Photo 19. Cellar Layout

A licensed asbestos removal company removed the original coal steam boiler. It was replaced with a newer gas boiler in 2024. All original steam radiators have been refurbished and maintained in their original location. A modern heat pump system, using forced air, is also available to condition the interior climate of the house. Today, the home can be heated using either the steam boiler, the heat pump, or both.

Architectural Features and Finishes:

Throughout the home, interior elements include:

- Original five-panel doors with porcelain and brass hardware
- Eastlake-style window and door trim, incised and beaded
- Built-in window bench beneath a large arched window
- Tongue-and-groove beadboard ceilings and decorative plaster molding
- One working fireplace, sealed in the past and reopened in 2024, plus two electric inserts that retain the visual character while improving safety and efficiency

Noncontributing Feature: Garage and Porte-Cochere

A one-story garage with a roof patio is located on the northeast corner of the property. This 25 ft x 31 ft structure was added in 2024 and finished in early 2025. Also in 2024-2025, a porte-cochere was added to the first porch.

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Photo 20. Noncontributing Feature: Garage.

Changes to the House Since Construction:

The most significant early alteration occurred in about 1905, when the original wood spindle work on the front porch was replaced with brick columns, and the second-story balcony was enclosed. These changes are visible in Photos 4, 6, and 7.

In the late 1910s or early 1920s, a second modification was made. The small, open rear porch was enclosed to add additional storage space. The foundation for the addition was constructed using brick selected to harmonize with the original masonry, including the home's historic chimneys. The brick was laid in the English bond pattern.

Throughout these updates, exceptional care has been taken to match the original materials and detailing. Replacement clapboard siding was milled to match the original dimensions, and cedar shakes on the second story were trimmed to uniform widths consistent with the home's 1889–1890 construction.

Additional changes have been made in recent decades. During the 1980s, part of the third-floor attic was converted into a finished living space, including three bedrooms and a full guest bathroom. On the interior, three fireplaces—two on the first floor and one on the second—had previously been mortared over, likely to reduce drafts. In 2024, the mortar was removed, and two electric fireplace inserts were installed, allowing the first-floor fireplace to now operate as a gas fireplace, thereby restoring both functionality and aesthetic appeal. Additionally, the original coal boiler was replaced with a new gas-fired boiler. Today, all steam radiators throughout the house were restored to their prior working condition. A heat pump cooling/heating system installed in the 1990s was replaced in 2024 with a more efficient unit that provides heating, cooling, and humidity control throughout the home.

As part of the 2024–2025 renovation, part of the enclosed rear porch was adapted to include a new first-floor main bathroom. This update allowed for the relocation of the main bedroom suite from the second to the first floor, while preserving the original main bedroom and bath as a guest suite.

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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

- ☐ 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

Architecture

Period of Significance

1889-1890

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Significant Dates

1889-1890

Significant Person

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Unknown but Possibly Barber

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Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph

The Cary House (BLM 101) meets National Register eligibility under Criterion C as a significant example of Victorian-era residential design in Bell County, Kentucky. Its significance is understood within the historic context “Victorian-era Residential Design in Bell County, Kentucky, 1875-1899.” Constructed in 1889–1890 for John B. Cary, a lawyer and an executive of the American Association, Ltd., the Cary House was commissioned by Alexander Arthur to project a sense of the nascent town’s stability, refinement, and modernity. Positioned on Arthur Heights overlooking downtown, the home embodied the founder’s intent to create a cosmopolitan community attractive to investors and executives. As with the Brooks House located next to the Cary House, the Cary House functioned as a “show house,” linking Middlesboro’s residential landscape with its broader civic and industrial aspirations. While not offered as a basis for eligibility, the house provides a glimpse into the transitional period of domestic lighting at the end of the 19th century. The home incorporated both gas and electric lighting, which testified to the promise of the modern age. Arthur’s installation of the dual lighting systems, including combination fixtures known as “electroliers,” was an advanced technology for its day and a feature of elite residences, as the landscape of electrification in Kentucky was being established. With abundant fuel to drive coal-fired generators, coal company towns could economically set up their own electric systems. The Cary House’s high style design, its prominent siting, its conspicuous architectural design, and innovative interior fixtures, all became tools for Arthur to promote Middlesboro as a worthy investment for industrial capitalists.

Victorian-era Residential Design in Bell County, Kentucky, 1875-1899

The Survey of Bell County properties presented here is a reuse of the historic context information on the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Brooks House (NRIS 09001137; SHPO inventory BLM-100). That property was listed in 2009, and its historic context is being reused for the Cary House’s Historic Context.

Category	Number of Properties	Notes/Examples
Demolished	7	Formerly included Italianate, T-plan, and Princess Anne examples (e.g., BLM 112, BLP 39).
Lost Integrity	8	Standing but heavily altered with non-period siding (vinyl/asbestos), porches removed (e.g., BLM 103, BLM 146).
Different Styles (not Queen Anne)	7	Retain integrity but represent other Victorian-era forms: Colonial Revival, Italianate, Dutch Colonial, log construction (e.g., BL 16, BLM 65).
Queen Anne Subtypes	4	• BLM 100 (Brooks House) – Queen Anne Free Classic • BLM 101 (Cary House) – Queen Anne Stick/Eastlake • BLM 111 – Queen Anne Free Classic • BLP 56 – Queen Anne Patterned Masonry

A 2009 search of the Kentucky Heritage Council Historic Structures Inventory (SHPO database) identified twenty-six houses in Bell County dating from 1875 to 1899. Of these:

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- Seven have been demolished.
- Eight survive but have lost integrity through non-period siding or significant alterations.
- Seven retain integrity but represent very different styles, making them poor comparison properties.
- Four exhibit Queen Anne subtypes.

Of the four Queen Anne houses, one is Patterned Masonry, two are Free Classic, and one is Stick/Eastlake. The Cary House (BLM 101) is the county's best surviving example of the Stick/Eastlake subtype, a rare form in southeastern Kentucky. Its neighbor, the Brooks House (BLM 100), represents Queen Anne Free Classic, together forming the most intact paired examples of Victorian high-style design in Bell County.

The survey demonstrates the Cary House's exceptional significance: it stands out not only for its architectural subtype but also for its integrity when compared to the heavily altered or lost majority of contemporaneous homes. Out of the twenty-six residences identified, only four remain as strong exemplars of Victorian stylistic design, and only the Cary House embodies the Stick/Eastlake style.

The Cary House is significant as a rare and intact example of Queen Anne Stick/Eastlake architecture in Bell County and as part of the executive enclave that symbolized Middlesboro's speculative industrial ambitions. In comparison to the SHPO survey population, it represents one of only four stylistically distinct Queen Anne houses built in the county between 1875 and 1899, and it is the sole Stick/Eastlake architecture example to survive with integrity. Its architectural qualities, modern features, and associations with Cary and Easton firmly establish its importance within both the local and regional historic context.

Middlesboro itself is a rare example of a late 19th-century planned industrial city. Though Arthur's grand industrial scheme collapsed during the Panic of 1893, the town retains a rich legacy of speculative urban planning, transatlantic investment, and architectural ambition. The Middlesboro Downtown Commercial District (NRIS 83002554), with over 60 contributing buildings, embodies Arthur's vision through its Richardsonian Romanesque, Classical Revival, and Late Victorian architecture. At the same time, religious and cultural institutions illustrate the community's social and ethnic diversity. The early 1890s design was important aesthetically, and served socially as a means of convincing investors that Middlesboro was a worthy risk for their capital.

The Cary House is also linked to its original owner, John B. Cary, who managed finances and contracts for the American Association, serving as Alexander Arthur's trusted officer when Arthur traveled abroad to secure British capital. In 1902, George W. Easton, a director of the Association and major British financier of Middlesboro's development, purchased the Cary House. The Easton family retained ownership for seventy years, tying the house to both local leadership and international investment.

Electricity in early Middlesboro:

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Another attribute of the Cary House is its role in expanding the use of residential electricity. While Thomas Edison's full-scale central power station, demonstrating electric light, was showcased in September 1882 at New York's Pearl Street Station, for the Appalachian Kentucky area, this vital achievement was only a glimpse of a far-distant future.

As noted by Henry Harvey Fuson in *History of Bell County, Kentucky*, Vol II.

The [Middlesbrough] Town Company was formed, and the embryo city was given the name of Middlesborough [its original spelling], after the great manufacturing city of the same name in England. The town was incorporated in 1890 and before the close of the year had a population of over 6,000, a well laid out town with a streetcar line, an electric light plant, water works, the finest hotel between Louisville and Knoxville, numerous office buildings and business houses that would credit any city of 50,000 population. [Page 371]

With Arthur's arrival and vision for a new industrial city, it is speculated that Alexandar Arthur placed importance on the electrical expansion in the region. The electricity system in 1890 brought about the transformative power of this technology, as well as the collaborative efforts that enabled it to reach other communities and rural areas across the state.

In 1890, in Middlesboro, electricity service demonstrated the tremendous possibilities of this new technology for powering streetcars (one of the first west of Washington D.C.), utilizing arc lighting in central public areas, as well as providing incandescent lighting for residential homes.

Photo 21 shows a picture taken in 1890 that highlights the new electrical infrastructure built in Middlesboro. The tall wooden poles along both sides of the road (Cumberland Avenue, the main commercial street of Middlesboro) are the electrical distribution poles that transmit electricity to the homes and businesses. The picture also shows the electric streetcar tracks, and in the middle, left center of the photograph, an arc streetlight hangs from an electrical cable. Photo 22 is a Sanborn Insurance Map showing the location of Middlesboro's original four dynamos used to produce electricity for the new electrical infrastructure.

While Middlesboro was demonstrating broad access to electricity relatively early, as late as 1937, only 3 percent of rural Kentucky homes had acquired electricity.

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Photo 21. A newly built electrical system in downtown Middlesboro in 1890.

The *Electrical World* magazine, published in January 1891 (Vol 17, Issue 5), reported that an incandescent dynamo and other additional machinery would be added to its *existing* electric plant at the Middlesboro Electric Light, Heat, and Power Company. This significant addition helped propel the introduction of incandescent lighting throughout the elite hotels and residences of Middlesboro.

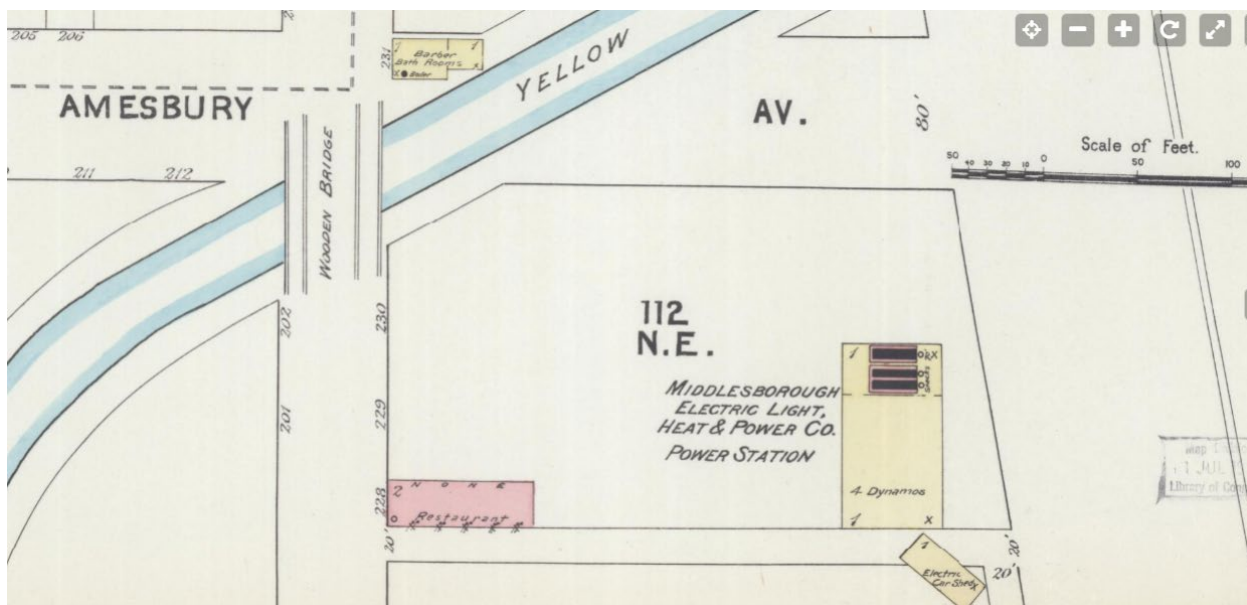


Photo 22. Sanborn Insurance Map, Middlesboro 1891 (map 8) showing an electric plant with four dynamos

The leadership demonstrated by Alexander Arthur, through his numerous companies in Middlesboro, is evidenced in the Cary House. While every town with electricity in Kentucky in 1890 obtained this new power through a self-contained electric system, few coal company town owners invested in this expense to improve their workers' home lives before 1900. Once the L&N Railroad penetrated eastern Kentucky's coalfield shortly before WWI, hundreds of coal camps dotted the landscape. Many of

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those houses are said to have a single electric light or two, courtesy of their employer. Within Kentucky's Appalachian region, Middlesboro's provision of electricity to the community is, at this point, one more sign that the town was a modern, incorporated city, rather than a mere company-owned establishment.

Cultural Significances:

The Cary House helps us realize the scope of ambition that Alexander Arthur had for Middlesboro. It was one of several cities founded within Kentucky's two coal fields that sought to provide their workforce with more than the minimal arrangement of spaces and services. Arthur founded the town by assembling civic and financial leaders to establish a community that could rival the industrial cities of the North. The prominent homes on Arthur Heights, including the Brooks and Cary Houses, gave townspeople a visible sign of the thoroughness of these industrial ambitions.

John B. Cary played a crucially important role as Secretary-Treasurer of the Middlesboro Town Company in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Cary managed the company's finances, executed contracts, and served as the trusted local officer when Arthur traveled abroad to secure British investment. His responsibilities extended beyond administration; Cary was effectively Arthur's second-in-command during the city's formative years.

John Brooks served as Middlesboro's mayor during the city's boom in 1890, overseeing the development of early municipal services and infrastructure. Under his leadership, the city acquired its first firefighting equipment and constructed a new firehouse. A Knoxville native, Brooks later became president of the Middlesboro Town Company and, after returning to Knoxville, was elected mayor of that city in 1908.

George W. Easton, a British financier, purchased the Cary House in 1902. As a director of the American Association Limited, Easton was instrumental in channeling millions of dollars in British capital into Middlesboro. His involvement linked the house to the international financial networks that underpinned the city's development. The Easton family retained ownership of the Cary House for seventy years, until 1972.

History of Middlesboro, Bell County

Middlesboro, Kentucky—originally spelled Middlesborough—was not the product of gradual frontier settlement but a bold industrial experiment. Founded in the mid-1880s, the town's early governance reflected a rare blend of speculative capitalism and municipal ambition. Company leadership dominated its creation, but by 1890—the year the Cary House was completed—the city transitioned into a formal civic government, creating a hybrid model that shaped its unique character.

Company-Led Governance (1886–1890)

In August 1886, engineer-entrepreneur Alexander Arthur and investors formed the Gap Associates, purchasing extensive land in Bell County in pursuit of iron and coal resources. By 1887, this venture had evolved into the American Association, Limited, which British financiers supported. Arthur

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acquired more than 100,000 acres, platted the town, and established the Middlesborough Town Company to oversee its development.

Under company control, the Town Company laid out streets—often named for English cities such as Dorchester, Salisbury, and Doncaster—and built modern amenities uncommon in Appalachia: electric lights, waterworks, hotels, and even one of the nation’s earliest golf courses. Middlesboro was deliberately “created” as a planned industrial city, with public works directed by corporate officers rather than elected officials.

Incorporation and Hybrid Governance (1890)

The town was officially incorporated on March 14, 1890, introducing a mayor–council system under Kentucky law. While Middlesboro now operated within the framework of municipal governance, the American Association and Town Company retained significant influence through land ownership, capital, and political leadership. The result was a hybrid structure: a legal municipal government layered upon infrastructure and institutions shaped by corporate authority.

From 1889 to 1890, the Cary House was built for John B. Cary, an attorney and executive within Arthur’s circle. Cary managed finances, executed contracts, and served as Arthur’s trusted officer when Arthur traveled abroad to secure investment. Next door, the Brooks House, owned by John Brooks, gained additional importance when Brooks became mayor during the city’s boom in 1890, overseeing the city’s early municipal services. In 1902, George W. Easton, a British financier and director of the American Association, purchased the Cary House. Easton’s investment continued to link the property to the international financial networks that underpinned Middlesboro’s creation. The Easton family retained ownership for seventy years, until 1972.

Collapse of the Corporate Vision

Arthur envisioned a metropolis of 250,000 residents with rail connections, electric streetcars, and modern utilities. By 1890, Middlesboro had grown to more than 6,000 residents with banks, hotels, churches, an opera house, and even a hospital. Yet the dream collapsed after the Panic of 1893 and the failure of the London banking house of Baring Brothers. The American Association went bankrupt, Arthur was dismissed, and properties—including the Four Seasons Hotel and sanitarium—were liquidated. Despite this failure, Middlesboro left behind a remarkable infrastructure, vibrant cultural life, and architectural landmarks, such as the American Association Building, listed on the National Register in 1978 (NRIS 78001299).

Cultural Legacy and Endurance

Middlesboro was more than an industrial scheme; it was also a cultural hub. Local pianist Ben Harney, a pioneer of ragtime, performed in its saloons, and the city petitioned to host the 1892 World’s Fair. As one of the first cities west of Washington, D.C. to adopt electric streetcars, it quickly earned a reputation as a modern town in the Appalachian region.

Though its speculative foundation faltered, Middlesboro endured. Today, it stands as a testament to ambition, resilience, and reinvention, uniquely situated within a meteorite crater and still home to the nation’s oldest continuously operated golf course, the Middlesboro Country Club (1889). Its

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governance story—shifting from corporate control to municipal legitimacy—captures an extraordinary moment in American urban history, when international finance, industrial optimism, and civic ambition briefly converged in the Cumberland Mountains.

Evaluation of the Significance of the Property within the Historic Context of Queen Anne Architecture in Middlesboro and Bell County, Kentucky

The Cary House is architecturally significant within its local architectural context. It is one of the two most architecturally significant residences within Bell County, with its significance coming from the extent to which it exhibits Queen Anne styling motifs. In a style group whose architectural significance is measured by exuberance and layered detail, there are no other houses with more architectural complexity than the Cary and Brooks Houses. It was significant to the townspeople of Middlesboro for its high style design, which became a symbol for the deep aspirations of the American Association, developers of the town.

The Cary House came about from the extraordinary speculative development of Middlesboro during the late 1880s and early 1890s. Conceived by Alexander Arthur, a Canadian-born entrepreneur, Middlesboro was envisioned as the “Pittsburgh of the South.” The city’s location near the Cumberland Gap provided access to coal and iron deposits, while railroads offered connections to regional and national markets.

Backed by substantial British investment, the Middlesboro Town Company platted the city, built infrastructure, and promoted it as a modern industrial hub. At its peak, the town boasted electric streetcars, hotels, theaters, and residential districts catering to both workers and leaders. The optimism of the Gilded Age is captured in Middlesboro’s bold urban vision, which ultimately faltered with the Panic of 1893.

Arthur Heights was developed as a residential district for the Town Company’s leadership, symbolizing the social hierarchy of Middlesboro’s industrial experiment. Houses here were built with stylistic ambition, demonstrating wealth and cultural refinement. The Cary House, erected in 1890, exemplifies this trend through its Queen Anne-influenced architecture and commanding siting, serving as both a private residence and a public statement of success.

The house is directly tied to John B. Cary, Secretary-Treasurer of the Middlesboro Town Company. Cary’s role placed him at the financial core of Middlesboro’s speculative economy, overseeing accounts, managing stockholder relations, and helping direct the city’s ambitious development. His residence represents the personal side of Middlesboro’s leadership and provides rare physical evidence of the individuals who guided the Town Company’s efforts.

The Cary House’s history also resonates with broader national patterns of the Gilded Age:

- **Industrial Speculation:** Like Pullman, Illinois, Middlesboro embodied late 19th-century confidence in planned industrial communities.
- **International Investment:** The town illustrates global capital flows into the Appalachian industry.

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- **Boom and Bust:** The 1893 collapse curtailed Middlesboro's ambitions, but the Cary House remains as a rare survivor of that formative era.

It is also thought that the Cary House exhibits strong stylistic similarities to the pattern-book designs of George F. Barber, a prominent architect from Knoxville known for his widely distributed Queen Anne and Eastlake plans in the late 19th century. Barber's influence is evident in the Cary House's detailed gable treatments. Although there is no direct attribution, the design suggests that the Cary House may have been inspired by one of Barber's patterns. This idea is further supported by Arthur's connection to Knoxville, where he served as Chair of the Chamber of Commerce in 1888 and resided, indicating he likely knew and possibly socialized with Barber. Arthur's position helped him solidify his social and professional standing in Knoxville, which he leveraged for his industrial ventures in Middlesboro.

Evaluation of the Integrity Between the Significance and the Property's Physical Condition

The National Register of Historic Places requires that a property not only meet significance criteria but also retain integrity, defined as "the ability of a property to convey its significance." To assess whether a property possesses integrity, the National Register recognizes seven aspects: Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association. Each element contributes to a holistic evaluation of whether the Cary House continues to represent its historical and architectural value. This section examines the Cary House through the lens of these seven aspects of integrity.

Location: The Cary House remains on its original site along Arthur Heights, a residential enclave developed for prominent leaders of the Middlesboro Town Company. The property has not been relocated. Its location historically was important to communicate to townspeople which residents occupied the most important roles in the company town. Those on Arthur Heights were established by the company to occupy the upper rungs of the social hierarchy. The house's location continues to transmit its early social identity through its siting.

Setting: The Cary House's relationship to adjacent historic homes, tree-lined streets, and the broader views of the Cumberland Gap region supports the integrity of the setting. This is reinforced by the fact that the house to the left of the Cary House (Brooks House) is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Design: The Cary House embodies late Victorian/Queen Anne stylistic elements, including asymmetrical massing, decorative woodwork, and a varied roofline. Alterations have occurred over time rendering the house no longer a pure example of 1890s design. Its original design significance has to do with balancing complex forms and shapes against one another. The changes that were made after the original construction did not violate the tenets of Queen Anne design which gave the house its original significance. As a result, the property continues to exhibit a Victorian-era exuberance, illustrating the complex ambitions of Middlesboro's industrial founders. The changes to the house have not eradicated the significant impact of the Queen Anne design—the house continues to stand out within its local architectural context as a landmark of Queen Anne design with but one rival: its next door neighbor.

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Materials: The Cary House preserves a substantial portion of its original materials, including a hand-carved stone base, wood siding, decorative trim, window frames, and interior finishes. Retention of these historic materials allows the property to illustrate its construction period and methods, ensuring a strong material identity.

Workmanship: Evidence of late nineteenth-century craftsmanship is evident throughout the Cary House. Hand-carved woodwork, ornamental detailing, and joinery highlight the skills of regional builders and artisans. These surviving features provide tangible evidence of historic building practices, ensuring the integrity of workmanship.

Feeling: Through the preservation of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship, the Cary House conveys the aesthetic and cultural atmosphere of an elite residence in a speculative boomtown of the 1890s. The property continues to evoke Middlesboro's period of ambitious industrial development, supporting the integrity of feeling.

Association: The Cary House retains direct association with John Cary, an influential figure in Middlesboro's founding period, and by extension with the broader leadership of the Middlesboro Town Company. Because the property remains in its original location and retains the physical features necessary to illustrate its historical context, it maintains strong integrity of association.

The Cary House retains integrity under all seven aspects defined by the National Register. It continues to communicate both its architectural significance as a late Victorian residence and its historical significance through association with John Cary and the Middlesboro Town Company.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Major Bibliographic References:

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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:

 X State Historic Preservation Office
 X Other State agency
____ Federal agency
 X Local government
 X University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): BLM 101

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.49

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

See Page 26.

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.609883°	Longitude: -83.716864°
2. Latitude:	Longitude:
3. Latitude:	Longitude:
4. Latitude:	Longitude:

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Or

UTM References Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐

NAD 1927

or

☐

NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Boundary Description

The area proposed for National Register listing is mapped on Bell County Property Valuation Administrator map 069-43-00-088.00. It is the entire lot, and is described in Bell County Deed Book 403, page 717. That property is outlined in red on the following map:



Photo 23. Property Boundary.

The parcel extends north to a concrete driveway and asphalt named Arthur Heights, which provides access to the property and separates it from adjacent residences. To the east, the boundary runs along the neighboring residential lot and terminates at the curve of the access road. The southern edge of the parcel fronts a wooded area, with the tree line forming a natural boundary between the house lot and the undeveloped slope below. The western boundary adjoins a neighboring residential property,

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consistent with the spacing of houses along the same street. The property encompasses approximately 0.46 acres, including the Cary House, front yard, rear driveway, and paved parking area.

Boundary Justification

The boundary for the Cary House encompasses the full extent of the historic residential lot historically associated with the property, as initially laid out by the Middlesboro Town Company in about 1888-1889. That acreage has integrity of setting, design, material, and feeling, making it appropriate for the listing area of this nomination. The parcel includes the house, front yard, side yard, and rear yard, along with its driveway and parking area, which collectively were the historic setting and use locus of the property. The boundary follows the legally defined lot lines, which have remained consistent since about 1888. No additional land outside this parcel is directly associated with the historic significance of the Cary House.

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Michael and Karen Howard
street & number 208 Arthur Heights telephone _____
city or town Middlesboro KY
state zip code 40965

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Michael and Karen Howard
organization: Owner of Property
street & number: 208 Arthur Heights
city or town: Middlesboro state: KY zip code: 40965
e-mail howard.mike.w@gmail.com
telephone: 865-389-4489
date: August 27, 2025

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Photographs

Photo Log

Property Name: Cary House

Location: Middlesboro, Bell County, Kentucky

Photographers: Michael Howard, Karen Howard

Date of Photographs: 1890, 1891, 1905, 2025

Information specific to Photographs:

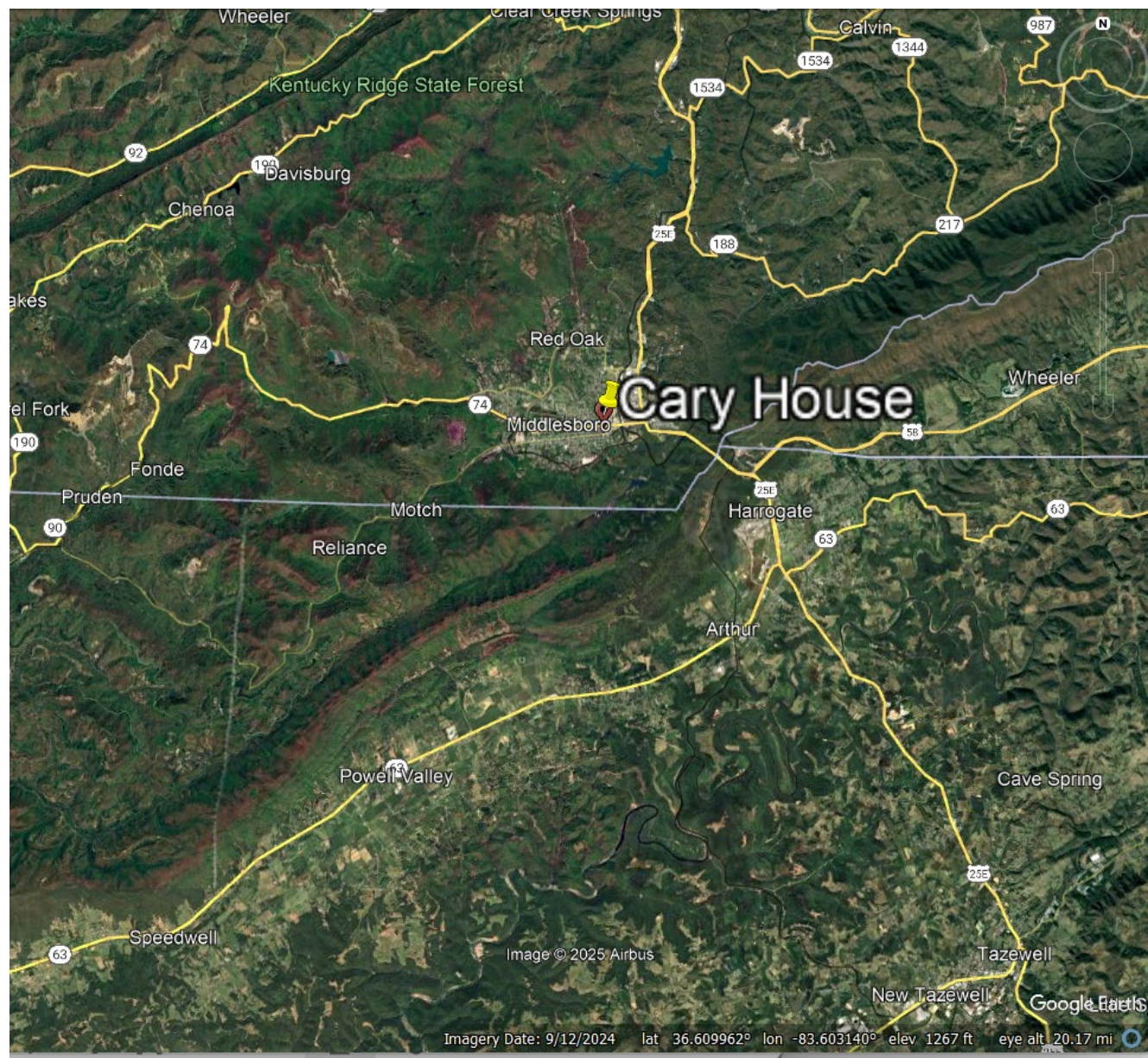
- Photo 1: Cary House, Bell County, Kentucky Latitude: 36.609883 Longitude: -83.716864
- Photo 2: The Cary House with its neighboring houses.
- Photo 3: The Cary House, 1980 Survey Lot 5.
- Photo 4: The Brooks (shown on the left) and the Cary House are shown as built in 1890.
- Photo 5: The Brooks House is shown on the top, far left, and the Cary House is the house to the immediate right. It is believed this photo was taken in 1905.
- Photo 6: North (Front) view in 2025.
- Photo 7: Cary House in 1917. Note the brick update to the front porch and enclosure of the second-floor balcony.
- Photo 8: East side of the house, 2025.
- Photo 9: East side of the house, 2025.
- Photo 10: East side, 2025.
- Photo 11: South Side view in 2025.
- Photo 12: South Side view in 2025.
- Photo 13: West (Left) Side view in 2025.
- Photo 14: West (Left) Side view in 2025.
- Photo 15: Staircase and Stained-Glass Arch Window viewed in 2025.
- Photo 16: First Floor Layout.
- Photo 17: Second Floor Layout
- Photo 18: Third Floor.
- Photo 19: Cellar Layout
- Photo 20: Noncontributing Feature: Garage.
- Photo 21: A newly built electrical system in downtown Middlesboro in 1890.
- Photo 22: Sanborn Insurance Map, Middlesboro 1891 (map 8) showing an electric plant with four dynamos
- Photo 23: Property Boundary

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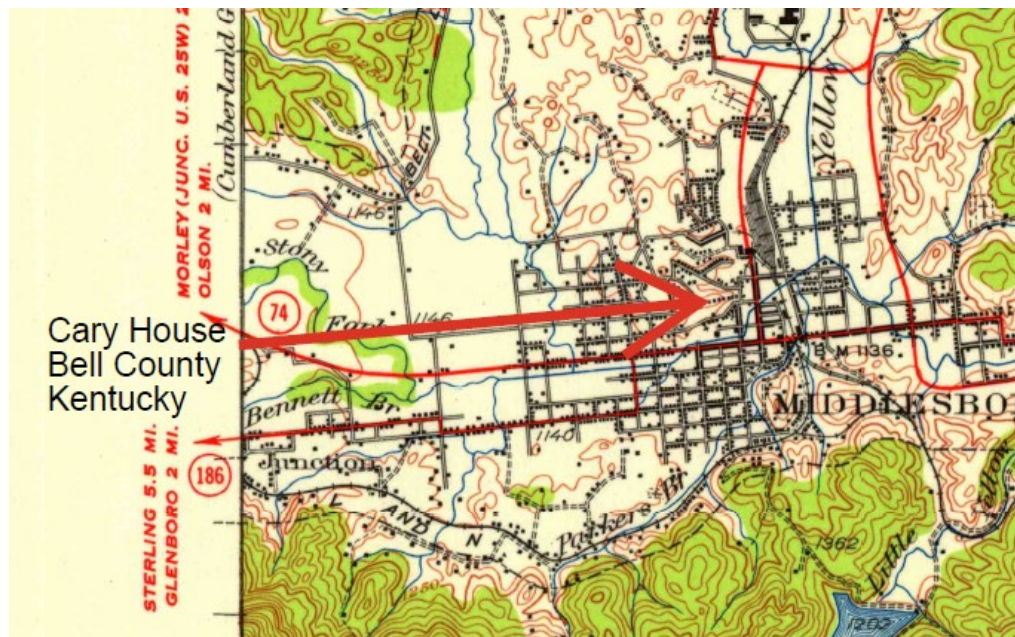
Wide area map showing location of Cary House within the Region. White lines indicate state boundaries.

Cary House

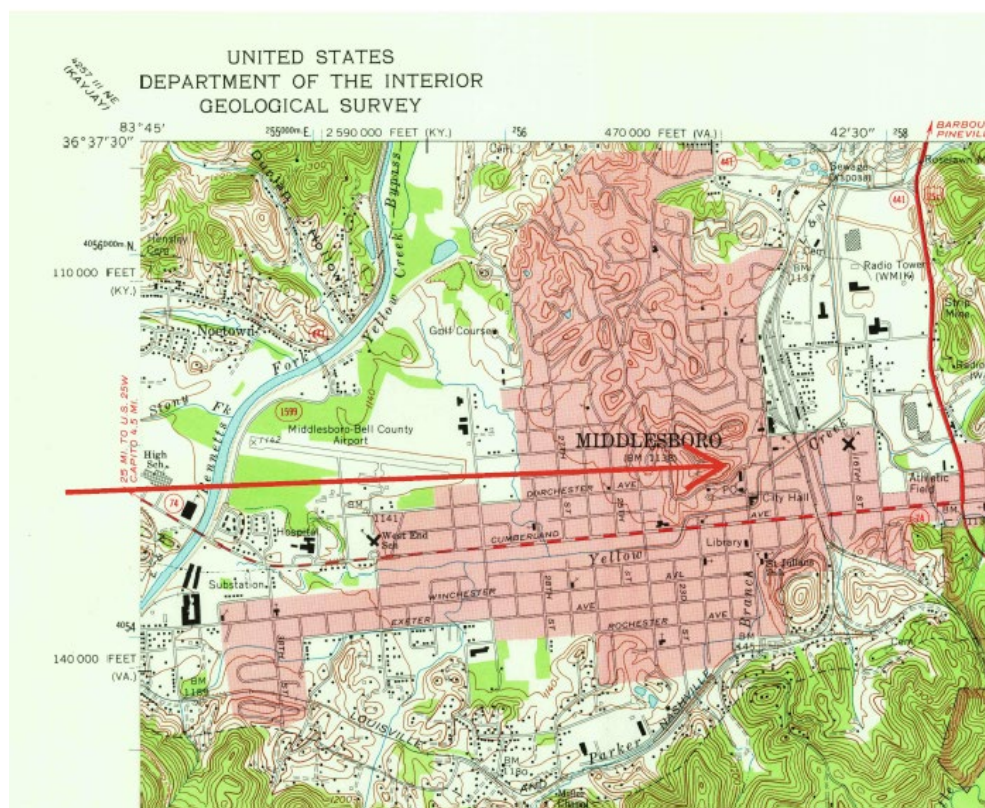
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Location of Cary House on Middlesboro KY USGS 1927 quad map (1:62500)



Location of the Cary House on Middlesboro South quad, 1974 (1:24000)

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