

Kennett City Hall and Masonic Lodge - National Register of Historic Places - Built 1903

122 College Street

The Kennett City Hall and Masonic Lodge, now known as the Dunklin County Museum, was constructed in 1903. It was named to the National Register of Historic Places on September 17, 1981.



It was originally designed to jointly house the Kennett municipal government offices and the Kennett Masonic Lodge. In 1976, Instead of razing the structure and replacing it at the present site with a new municipal building, the mayor and council purchased land to the north of the building to construct the new municipal building, leasing the 1903 building to the Dunklin County Museum for the preservation of artifacts and memorabilia of Dunklin County.

History

Construction began in June 1902 as a joint project by the City of Kennett and the Helm Royal Arch Chapter and the Masonic Lodge AF & AM #68, organized in 1888. The building was constructed at a total cost of \$6,000. The building was constructed on plans by Cape Girardeau architect Blackwood with labor provided by day workers.

The building represents the first permanent municipal offices for the city of Kennett and the municipal government operated for nearly three-quarters of a century from the ground floor offices. The second floor served as the second permanent home of the Masonic order, reputedly the city's leading fraternal organization founded in 1888. With the dedication of the building in 1903, the town observed Masonic week, demonstrating the respect with which the city held the Masonic order.

In 1976 the city vacated the premises, approximately twenty years after the Masonic Order ceased utilizing the upstairs lodge. The building was leased to the Board of Directors of the Dunklin County Museum as a historical museum for the county by the City of Kennett for a sum of \$1.00 per year.

Notable Features

Historically, the site is in the immediate vicinity of the purported campsite of the Indian Chief, Chilletcaux, for whom Kennett was originally named in the early 1800s. The name was changed to Kennett in the 1850s to honor Luther Kennett, Mayor of St. Louis and a railroad promoter.

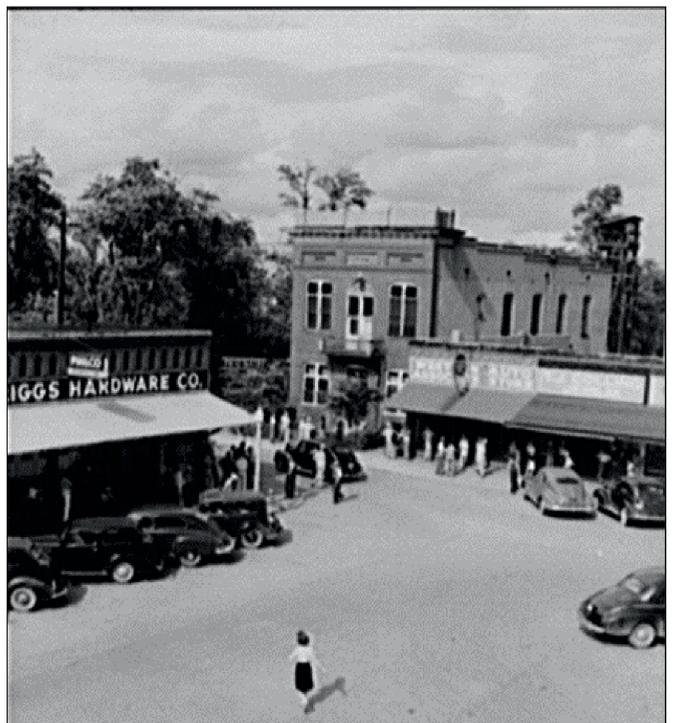
The brick building stands on a solid concrete and hard brick foundation, originally featuring a stretcher bond, red-pressed brick facade with a balcony over the front door. The building's front was altered in the 1920s, following a fire, and the balcony with balustrade was removed and the exterior plastered over and painted white.

Notable design features of the building include its ceilings of pressed metal, its 14 1/2' ceilings and its 24 double-hung windows, twelve of which were imitation cathedral translucent glass. The first floor was divided into a council room, three offices, and two "holding" cells which remain today. Brick for the building, supposedly was manufactured locally, from brick clay found on Crowley's Ridge and along the St. Francis River in Dunklin County.

Major alterations to the building include the removal of the balcony and balustrade and partially bricking in a window at the front (circa 1920); the partitioning of the downstairs city offices (1970); the replacement of the front door with a thermopane glass door with sidelights (1970); installation of wood paneling three feet up in the front hall and main downstairs room (circa 1970).

The museum is currently closed for repairs. It is expected to reopen in 2024.

Source: National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, December 1979.



City Hall 1942



Interior view of oak stairway. Photo by James M. Denny, July 30, 1980.

