

Thomas Jefferson in Jefferson County, Kentucky

By Steve Wiser, AIA

The following is a walking/driving tour of significant sites in the Louisville region that have some connection to Thomas Jefferson. This text was originally titled 'More Than A Name', and prepared as part of Jefferson County's celebration of Jefferson's 250th birthday in 1993. It combines architecture and history into a tale of why Jefferson County, Kentucky is such a unique place to visit. Depending on time available and specific interests, this tour can be done in parts, or as a whole.

Twenty-six counties in the United States are named for our third president, Thomas Jefferson. Other than the name, most of these counties have little or no tangible connection to their famous namesake, except for one: Jefferson County, Kentucky. Perhaps no other county in America, no matter the name, can match all the references to Thomas Jefferson that are within this county's borders. This unique historical collection of symbols and relationships to Thomas Jefferson make this county more than just a name.



Thomas Jefferson was noted for his various endeavors, from politics and architecture, to inventing and gardening. His was a life full of challenges and achievement. His legacy can be found in the following locations: Charlottesville and Richmond, Virginia; Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Paris, France. To visit all of these sites in one afternoon would be impossible.



But, if you sought to catch a glimpse of Thomas Jefferson's lifetime of accomplishment, then take a tour through Jefferson County, Kentucky, and share the experience of one of our nation's most prolific scholars and leaders.



Where else to begin this tour then on **Jefferson Street**, between Fifth and Sixth Streets. Here, at the block's midpoint, sits a prominent statue of this county's namesake. A figure of Thomas Jefferson is holding the Declaration of Independence, which he authored, and he stands atop a bell flanked by statues representing Liberty, Equality, Justice, and the Brotherhood of Man, (Religious Freedom). This distinguished artwork was the design of Sir Moses Ezekiel and unveiled on November 9, 1901. A smaller replica of this original casting is displayed at the University of Virginia, founded by Thomas Jefferson.



Turn now and face the **Jefferson County Courthouse**, the seat of metro government. Jefferson County was one of three counties formed in the Kentucky territory while still part of Virginia. The

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year was 1780, and Thomas Jefferson was then Governor of Virginia (1779-1781) and signed the decree.

The courthouse design itself would have been admired by Thomas Jefferson. As an influential leader of style and taste in early America, Jefferson advocated architectural designs based on classical roots of democracy such as Greek and Roman. For obvious reasons, he disdained styles that had English traditions.



Gideon Shryock (1802-1880)

Architect Gideon Shryock designed the courthouse in 1837 in the Greek revival style. But the idealism reference to Jefferson does not end the relationship. Closer examination reveals an appearance that bears resemblance to Virginia's State Capital, designed by Thomas Jefferson. In fact, Shryock's original proposal was strikingly similar to Jefferson's structure with a six-column portico front and similar porticos on each end. By the time the courthouse was finally completed in 1860, budget cutbacks had downscaled the design, but the original intent is still

visible. Perhaps Shryock was looking to the Virginia Capital for another reason. It was hoped that this grand government building would ultimately become the Kentucky State Capital. And what other significant structure of that time period would be more fitting inspiration to establish credibility and importance? Coincidentally, Shryock had also designed the state capital in Frankfort, that was completed in 1830. A relationship that Jefferson County leaders felt would assist their state capitol hopes.



Walk around to the north side of the courthouse, and use the rear alley entry. Take the elevator up to the second floor and go left through the narrow passage into the beautiful courthouse atrium. It's one of Louisville's finest interior spaces, but note the framed copy of the **Declaration of Independence**. Thomas Jefferson wrote the original document and this copy is one of 200 engravings produced in 1824 to preserve the image of our nation's freedom statement. Only twenty-seven survive to date, and this one was graciously donated for display by the William P. Mulloy family in 1987.

After reading this important document and enjoying the marvelous courthouse interior, return outside and walk to the corner of Sixth and Jefferson Streets. Located here is a Carrara marble statue of

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King Louis XVI of France. The city of Louisville was named for King Louis XVI as a gesture of gratitude for French aid to the American Revolution. Hence the pronunciation 'Louieville', and not 'Lewisville'. Thomas Jefferson was Foreign Minister to France from 1785 to 1789, during the reign of King Louis XVI. This relationship between Jefferson, the King, and Jefferson County will be mentioned later in this tour.

Across the street is Louisville's **City Hall**, with the city flag flying prominently out front. On this flag are three fleur-de-lis symbols, which represents the French monarchy and the city's namesake, King Louis XVI. City Hall is an ornate building, designed by John Andrewartha in the Italianate style and opened in 1873. Of note are the decorative animal heads above the second floor windows and the stone relief of the locomotive in the pediment. Both of these aesthetic features reference Louisville's economy of the period. Architect Henry Whitestone added the French Second Empire clock tower in 1876. While City Hall has capably served for over 130 years, it is only one third of the original project. The west wing was never built.

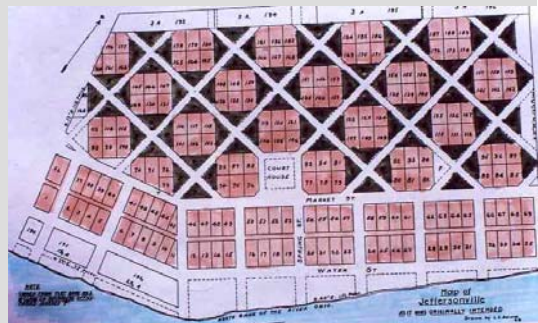


The remainder of this tour will require the use of motorized transportation. Our next stop will be in Jeffersonville, Indiana, which can be easily reached from Louisville by crossing the George Rogers Clark Memorial Bridge. Drive to Second Street, then turn north to Indiana. Follow the signs to downtown Jeffersonville. While we will briefly leave the borders of Jefferson County, the close proximity of Jeffersonville is too important not to be included in this tour.



Driving through downtown Jeffersonville makes you wonder what Jefferson had to do with this southern Indiana city other than being its namesake. Well, **Jeffersonville** was conceptually planned in 1802 by Thomas Jefferson. He offered a unique grid pattern that, he believed, would create a healthful, beautiful setting free from yellow fever epidemics that plagued river towns. His plan indeed was very thoughtful with diagonal streets, green space on the triangular corners, and the courthouse prominently positioned. Similar in concept to the rectangular grid and common park plan of Savannah, Georgia, it would have been a remarkable scheme that even today would

demand attention, as does Savannah. But, as with most plans, land developers could not see the long-term benefits and by 1817, the layout had been ignored. You can now only imagine what might have been. Jefferson also had a hand in the layout of Washington, D.C., and maybe the diagonal streets of Washington and the proposed Jeffersonville plan had the same origin.



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While in Jeffersonville, drive down Spring Street, between Court Avenue and Riverside Drive. Besides containing numerous historic facades, there are several infill structures that blend into the streetscape vernacular. The following buildings are recent projects: 201 Spring, 360 Spring, and the two buildings on both corners of Spring and Riverside Drive, (Jimmy's Bar & Grill and Maegan Point residential). For a refreshment, stop by 347 Spring Street. This is Schimpff's Confectionary, which has been family operated for over 100 years.

Recently restored, it has an authentic soda fountain. A Must See !

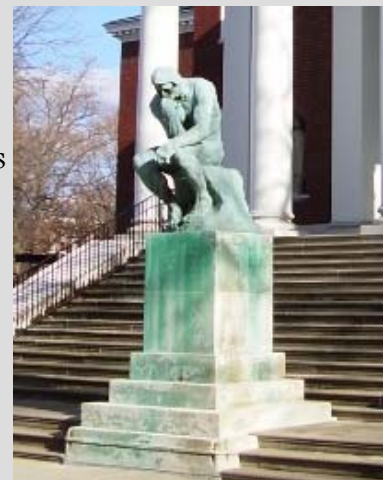


Journey back across the Ohio River on southbound I-65 and follow the signs to the University of Louisville campus. Exit at the Eastern Parkway off-ramp, then turn right onto Eastern Parkway. Go to the stoplight at Third Street, then turn right. Go to the next stoplight and turn right again to enter the campus from the main gate off Third Street. You will immediately notice the prominent edifice of the Administrative Building. Its pediment and six-column portico capped by a grand dome leaves no doubt that the inspiration for this building

was Thomas Jefferson's design for the Rotunda at the University of Virginia. Built in 1929, the **U of L Administrative Building** seeks to mirror the essence of Jefferson's theme for higher education. While the Rotunda was the pivot point, Jefferson's plan for the University of Virginia was to create an academic village of buildings, instead of one dominant structure. A broad expanse of open space in front of the Rotunda provided a central square, or commons, to foster interaction between students and professors. Jefferson's academic scheme continues to influence university planners today, as reflected in a direct way here at U of L. It is said that Jefferson developed his concept based upon the layout of King Louis XVI's chateaux at Marly. (Remember the earlier relationship between Jefferson, the King, and Jefferson County!)

The Administration Building, also known as Grawemeyer Hall, was designed by a consortium known as the 'Allied Architects', headed by Frederick Morgan. In front sits a copy of the famous Auguste Rodin statue, '**The Thinker**'. Unveiled in 1949 at this location, this statue was originally displayed at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. The statue was created in Paris, and supervised by Rodin himself. (Louisvillian Enid Yandell worked with Rodin. She sculpted the Hogan's Fountain and Daniel Boone statues in Cherokee Park.)

As you depart from the front of Grawemeyer Hall, look to the north, at the U of L School of Law Building. To the right of the



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entrance, you will note the large cornerstone with the date '1938'. Look very closely above this date and you will see a plaque. This plaque notes the final resting place of **Louis and Alice Brandeis** (Look on the ground immediately below this plaque). Louis (1856-1941) was on the U.S. Supreme Court from 1916 to 1939, and is acclaimed as one of the most brilliant, innovative Justices to have served.

Depart U of L by traveling eastbound on Eastern Parkway. In less than two miles, you will come to the intersection with Preston Street (Hwy 61). Here you will observe on the northeast corner a **National City branch bank**. But not just any branch bank. You will quickly note this bank's strong visual identity with Thomas Jefferson's home of Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia. Ralph Gifford, then a bank vice president, and an avid historian, was responsible for this inspired selection of thematic design. Gifford worked with Read Henry of the former Harstern, Louis, and Henry architectural firm to have it built in 1954. It seems only fitting for a bank, which handles thousands of nickels a day with the likeness of Jefferson and Monticello on them, to be of this design, in this county.

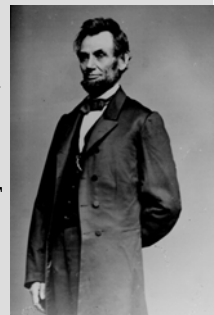


Continue on eastbound Eastern Parkway to Bardstown Road.



Turn right and drive to 3033 Bardstown Road, (a block north of the Watterson Expressway.) Somewhat off the beaten path and hard to see, but the county's piece d' resistance of this Jefferson legacy, sits **Farmington**. This charming, simple home was once the center of a major plantation owned by Judge John Speed, and it's design is attributed to Thomas Jefferson himself. The floor plan contains two identifiable Jeffersonian features: two central octagonal rooms and a hidden staircase. Judge Speed's wife Lucy is said to have enlisted Jefferson's help on the design through her Virginia family connections. She was related to Dr. Thomas Walker, who was guardian to a young Thomas Jefferson. Besides the connection to Thomas Jefferson, Farmington has another Presidential relation. Abraham Lincoln stayed here for several weeks in 1841. He was a friend of the Speed family. There's an admission fee to tour the house, but it's a must see.

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This tour's last stop will take us onto eastbound Watterson Expressway to the Brownsboro Road exit. Turn left onto Brownsboro Road. (One slight diversion at this point: at 4701 Brownsboro Road is the Zachary Taylor National Cemetery. **Zachary Taylor**, 1784 – 1850, who was 12th President of the United States, is buried here. This is a relatively small national cemetery and the Taylor mausoleum is easily located adjacent to the main drive. Phone: 893-3852).

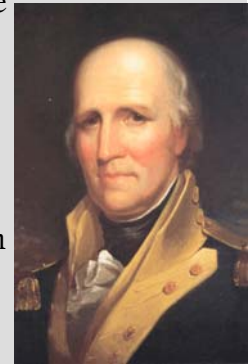


Continue on Brownsboro Road west to the intersection with Blakenbaker Lane (there is a stop light at this intersection), turn right, and follow the signs to Locust Grove. **Locust Grove** is also an historic home like Farmington, but it doesn't have as direct relationship to Thomas Jefferson. Locust Grove is the last home of General George Rogers Clark, who was a good friend of Jefferson. Jefferson encouraged Clark's exploration of Kentucky in

1778, which resulted in Louisville's founding that same year. Clark recommended his younger brother William to President Jefferson to co-lead an exploration of the Northwest Territory, or now known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1803 - 1806).



Jefferson was so persuaded, and contrary to St. Louis' claim otherwise, brother William and his partner Meriwether Lewis both departed and returned to George Roger Clark's Clarksville home in southern Indiana (which was previous to his moving here to Locust Grove.) The Lewis and Clark Expedition was one of Thomas Jefferson's most important presidential achievements.



George Rogers Clark's cabin has been replicated on the Clarksville waterfront in southern Indiana. Refer to the Historic Homes section of this book for more details and location directions.

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743, and died on July 4, 1826. He was President from 1801 – 1808, and Vice-President from 1796 to 1800. From starting the Library of Congress with his own personal book collection to acclaimed horticultural experiments, Jefferson's multi-purpose life offers many examples of leadership. While he never set foot in Jefferson County, it is fortunate to have so many local linkages to Thomas Jefferson's accomplishments. For Jefferson County is more than just a name.

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