

A Chronology of Restoration and Preservation
The Ephraim McDowell House: Danville, Kentucky
(Based on the pamphlet written by Mrs. E. R. Denny. Editing and later information
added by the staff of McDowell House.)

- 1797 Dr. Ephraim McDowell & Dr. Adam Rankin purchase the building known today as the Apothecary Shop.
- 1802 Dr. McDowell marries Sarah Hart Shelby, daughter of Isaac Shelby, Kentucky's first governor. The couple settles in a fine Georgian home in the center of Danville, scarcely one block from the town's main street. The back section of the house is believed to have been built in the 1790s.
- 1803-1804 Dr. McDowell and his wife have a large wooden section added to the House.
- 1809 Dr. McDowell, at his home on Christmas Day, removes an ovarian cyst weighing twenty-two and one-half pounds from Jane Todd Crawford. This is the first successful removal of an ovarian tumor in the world and is believed to have been done in an upstairs bedroom.
- 1820 Dr. McDowell sells the apothecary shop and builds an office on the opposite side of the House. A formal garden is also added to the backyard.
- 1830 On June 30, Dr. McDowell dies. He is fifty-eight and it is now believed that his death resulted from acute appendicitis with rupture and generalized peritonitis. Thus, ironically, his life might have been saved by an appropriate operation of the type that he had successfully performed.
- Circa 1837 The McDowell Family sells the House.
- 1837-1935 The House serves as many different things. One of the presidents of Centre College lived there. It also served as a Methodist Parsonage. It eventually becomes a boarding house with 12 families on the property.
- 1911 Dr. August Schachner begins research on Dr. McDowell's life and work. He finds the McDowell House in Danville. He is appalled at its neglected condition.
- 1912 Dr. Schachner addresses the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, and urges the women to consider acquiring and restoring the McDowell House. They pass a resolution to do so.
- 1913 In response to Dr. Schachner's inquires, Mr. Weisiger, the owner of McDowell House, states that he will sell it for \$10,000; the assessed value of the house is \$1,500. Attempts to buy the house from Mr. Weisiger are unsuccessful.
- 1921 Dr. Schachner revisits the house and finds it almost beyond repair. He

continues to work towards his dream of making Dr. McDowell's former home into a memorial.

- 1935 Dr. Schachner is present at the dedication of a memorial to Jane Todd Crawford in Danville. Dr. Irvin Abell, chairman of the Jane Todd Crawford Memorial Committee, announces the formation of the Ephraim McDowell Memorial Committee by the citizens of Danville. Also, the Kentucky State Medical Association states its intent to buy the McDowell House and restore it as a memorial in honor of the preeminent pioneer surgeon. Mrs. Walker Owens is present at the ceremony and first sees the McDowell House.
- 1935 The Kentucky State Medical Association instructs the Ephraim McDowell Memorial Committee to buy the McDowell House from the Weisiger sisters for \$15,000. The Committee buys the house and the sisters donate \$5,000 to the memory of their father, Dr. Joseph Weisiger. The house is then deeded to the Kentucky Parks Commission in the name of the Division of Public Properties. This transfer of ownership allows federal funds to be obtained from the Works Progress Administration for restoration of the house.
- 1939 Restoration of the McDowell House is completed and it is dedicated under the auspices of the Kentucky State Medical Association. Dr. Irvin Abell, now president of AMA and chairman of the McDowell Memorial Committee, delivers the principal address. The approximate cost of restoration is \$35,000.
- 1946 The Kentucky Parks Commission announces that the McDowell House is reverting to the Kentucky State Medical Association. The reason for the state's decision to return the ownership of the house is that it is not sufficiently attractive to tourists.
- 1947 The McDowell House reverts to the Kentucky State Medical Association and Mrs. Walker Owens of Mt. Vernon, Kentucky, is president-elect of the Kentucky State Medical Association Auxiliary. Dr. Blackerby writes Mrs. Owens that he is depending on her to refurbish the McDowell House correctly and open it for visitors.
- 1948 Mrs. Owens inspects the condition of the McDowell House, which she last saw in 1935. The house has been closed for over three years.
- 1949 Faced with a shell of a house and no money, Mrs. Owens embarks on a seemingly hopeless project. She is now both president of the Kentucky State Medical Association Auxiliary and chairman of the McDowell House Committee. Turning to Dr. Clark Bailey of Harlan, Kentucky, a delegate to the AMA, she receives encouragement. He gives her a check for \$300 to start the furnishings with a pair of whale-oil lamps from the estate of Governor Isaac Shelby. She eventually travels over 11,000 miles to raise money and find furniture for the house.

1949-1954 Restoration efforts continue.

- 1955 The Apothecary Shop is purchased by the Kentucky Pharmaceutical Association.
- 1955-1959 Restoration of the Apothecary Shop takes place under the oversight of Mr. George Grider, a local pharmacist and President of the International Pharmaceutical Society.
- 1959 Dedication of the Apothecary Shop takes place on August 14, 1959. On that day it is deeded to the Kentucky Medical Association.
- 1961 At the close of the year, Mrs. Owens and the McDowell House Committee feel they have accomplished their goal of restoration. The house is furnished correctly and the estimated value of the contents is \$25,000.
- 1962 Rather than return the house to the Kentucky Parks Commission, the McDowell House Committee recommends that the McDowell House and Apothecary Shop remain within the jurisdiction of the Kentucky State Medical Association.
- 1965 The Ephraim McDowell House and Apothecary Shop is designated a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior. Mrs. Owens feels her work at the McDowell House has been completed and that a splendid memorial honors "The Father of Abdominal Surgery."
- 1979-1981 Grant is received from the Kentucky Heritage Council. The first major restoration work is done since the 1930s.
- 1984 McDowell House installs fire and theft security system.
- 1985 Tornado destroys large part of the brick wall surrounding the back of the McDowell House. A challenge grant is received from the James Graham Brown Foundation to build an endowment for maintenance of the House.
- 1988 Challenge Grant is completed with more raised than needed to meet the challenge. Wall is replaced that was destroyed by tornado in 1985.
- 1998 McDowell House receives a grant from the IMLS for a CAP Assessment. Dr. Thomas Taylor and Ms. Elisabeth Batchelor do a study of the House and make recommendations for improvements.
- 1998 McDowell House receives a grant from the IMLS for a MAP I Assessment. Mrs. Lee Langston-Harrison presents the House with recommendations for improvements in administration, etc.
- 2000 McDowell House receives a grant from the IMLS for a MAP II Assessment. Further study is done and recommendations made.
- 2000 A long-range plan is developed.

- 2000 The decision is made to begin a \$1.7 million capital campaign drive.
- 2001 A \$150,000.00 matching grant is received from the Save America's Treasures program.
- 2002 To date, \$471,743.65 has been pledged and/or paid towards the \$1.7 million.
- 2003 Matching grant of \$150,000.00 is received from the James Graham Brown Foundation.
Complete paint analysis of McDowell House finished by Frank Welsh and Associates.
- 2004 Governor and Mrs. Fletcher visit McDowell House to present a facsimile check \$328,000.00 as part of a TEA-21 grant. This money was used in 2005 and 2006 to do archeology work, grade work and develop an historic landscape plan.
- 2005-2006 Drainage work is complete
Exterior geo-thermal system is completely installed
Underground service entrance is installed
Removal of brick sidewalks, repair of brick sidewalks
Installation of wheelchair ramp
Installation of new attic service door
Electrical work connected to the geo-thermal system
Archeological dig conducted in formal garden area and Apothecary Shop garden
- 2006-2007 Exterior of House is scraped, primed and painted with donated Porter Paint
All shutters, window sills and casings are repaired or replaced
Interior of state-of-the-art geo-thermal unit is installed