

FINAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum
AND/OR COMMON Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 350 Court Street
CITY, TOWN Evansville VICINITY OF Eighth
STATE Indiana CODE 18 COUNTY Vanderburgh CODE 163

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Veteran org.

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Board of Commissioners of Vanderburgh County
STREET & NUMBER 305 City-County Administration Building
CITY, TOWN Evansville VICINITY OF Indiana

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Vanderburgh County Recorder's Office
STREET & NUMBER City-County Administration Building
CITY, TOWN Evansville STATE Indiana

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory
DATE August 1978 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Indiana Department of Natural Resources
CITY, TOWN Indianapolis STATE Indiana

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum answered two major needs. Before the building was planned in 1913, Evansville and surrounding southwestern Indiana lacked a civic structure able to accommodate conventions, entertainments, exhibits, and other public gatherings. Vanderburgh County also wished to have a memorial for its citizens who fought in the Civil and Spanish-American wars. The Coliseum, then, represented the integration of two civic programs.

Designed by local architect Clifford Shopbell (1871-1939), the 1916-1917 Coliseum was a two story brick-faced structure of modern lines onto which Greek architectural elements executed in stone were superimposed in key locations. (Photo #1) The four-thousand seat auditorium occupied a prominent site in downtown Evansville. Located three blocks northwest of the principal banking and commercial area of the city and adjacent to the courthouse square, the Coliseum was precisely on axis with Fourth Street, a main northwest-southeast artery. This placement afforded a view from a distance of the monumental Doric-style portico, the centerpiece of the front elevation. In close proximity to the Coliseum were the domed, Old Vanderburgh County Courthouse (1888-1890; National Register, 1971) and the castlelike Old Vanderburgh County Jail and Sheriff's Residence (1890; National Register, 1971). (Photo #2)

In plan, the Coliseum was a rectangular auditorium building, approximately 196' wide by 170' deep and two stories in height with basement. A front projection with rounded corners, about 166' wide by 35' deep, carried the massive portico and enclosed the foyer and four large meeting rooms. (Photo #3) The building was constructed of reinforced concrete and steel, and the walls--except for the rear wall of red brick--were faced with an "impervious" gray brick laid in stretcher bond. This brick was selected to match the color of the Indiana Oolitic limestone used for the portico and for the other stone detailing. The roof was formed by a structural concrete slab supported by steel trusses. Raised skylights originally admitted light to the auditorium, but were subsequently abandoned. At the rear of the building, a brick scenery loft was added in 1931, rising above the roof line.

The Greek detailing used by the architect of the Coliseum was not only in accord with the severe neo-classicism in vogue at the time, but also served to heighten the memorial aspect of the building. This ceremonial quality was especially dramatized by the principal architectural feature, a 105-foot-wide portico of "Greek Doric style," constructed of limestone quarried and cut to the architect's specifications at an Ellettsville, Indiana, quarry. The portico was composed of six fluted Doric columns in antis--27' high and of drum construction--an entablature, a cornice, and a pediment. Engaged demi-columns of the same order terminated the columnation. The frieze was formed of alternating triglyphs and disc-shaped metopes. The low pediment of ashlar construction, lacking raking and horizontal cornices, rose gradually to form a shallow tympanum in which the flag and eagle emblem of the Grand Army of the Republic were carved in bas-relief. Bronze sculptural groups on pedestals with life-sized figures flanked the broad stairs leading up to the portico.

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The entrance wall beyond the columns was faced with smooth limestone and contained seven entrances. Above each doorway was a window framed by a simple Doric architrave molding with crossettes. In contrast, the more prominent entrances were enriched with moldings and paterae and cornices supported by ornate consoles in an arrangement based upon an opening from the Ionic-ordered Erectheion. (Photo #4) Sets of double doors sheathed in metal (now painted) repeated the paterae motif in the panels.

Other architectural details--while meriting comment--were not as impressive as the colossal portico. A base course of limestone--4'6" high and following the contours of the building from front to rear--simulated a podium. Above, at the top of the walls and continuing the lines of the portico, an architrave and cornice of stone framed a frieze formed of ornamentally laid brick. Five sets of vertically aligned openings pierced each wall of the rounded projection and had steel frame casement windows with fixed transoms. First story windows had surrounds of stone with lintels ornamented with fretwork carved in bas-relief and a simulated balustrade in mezzo-relief at the base. (Photo #5) Windows of the second story had lintels similarly embellished with fretwork and stone sills supported by brackets. Other windows in the building, also of steel frame construction, were strictly utilitarian in use and appearance.

The interior layout of the Coliseum adhered to conventional auditorium plans. (Photo #6 and #7) The foyer was directly in line with the stage located in the northwest end of the building. In front of the proscenium was the sunken orchestra pit. Since the auditorium was meant to accommodate different types of events, the floor was flat and the only fixed seats were those in the concrete balcony extending around three sides of the large hall. Below the balcony on both sides were enclosed meeting rooms, now used for office and storage space and for a kitchen. Murals framed by pilasters flanked the proscenium. Painted after 1931 by Nelson Wilson of Evansville, the murals represented Evansville as a pioneer settlement and as a modern city of the 1930s.

Changes to the building through the years have been minimal, largely restricted to interior improvements. A major renovation effort in 1931 included construction of a brick scenery loft, raising and enlarging the stage, installation of a hardwood floor, and conversion of basement space to dressing rooms. Also, the acoustical coffered ceiling and the construction of curved walls with large organ grills on either side of the stage improved the acoustical properties of the auditorium. (Photo #8)

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Two other features have assumed a large measure of significance and therefore merit description. The statuary of life-sized figures which flanked the front steps were the first bronze civic sculptures installed in the city. (Photos #9 and #10) They were the design of a local artist, George H. Honig (1881-1962), and were cast in Chicago at the American Bronze Foundry by J. Berchem. Honig, responsible for numerous commissions in the Midwest, was a pupil of the noted American sculptor, Hermon Atkins MacNeil (1866-1947). The two groups symbolize Vanderburgh County at war and at peace. Inside the Coliseum was a great organ. Built by M. P. Moeller, Inc., of Hagerstown, Maryland, the instrument was composed of five separate organs and some seventy-four hundred metal and wood pipes. It was built in 1919 for the Methodist Centenary at Columbus, Ohio. In the same year, it became available for purchase for \$35,000, a great deal less than its original cost. With money derived from fund raisers, private donations and city allocations, the organ was purchased for the Coliseum and dedicated to professor Milton Z. Tinker, director of music for the Evansville public school system from 1868 to 1914.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
.PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
.1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
.1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
.1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
.1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
.1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
.1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1916-1917

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Clifford Shopbell and Company

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

When completed in April of 1917, the Vanderburgh County Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum was considered one of the largest auditoriums in the Midwest, a point of pride for the people of Evansville, and a cynosure for public events. Its architect, Clifford Shopbell and Company, produced a powerful monument to the City Beautiful, satisfying a complex civic and ceremonial program with skill and efficiency.

From the time of its erection into the mid-1960s, the Coliseum was the principal center for the city's and county's cultural life. Along with the adjacent nineteenth century courthouse and jail, it completed a trinity of official architectural forms. The size of the hall permitted militia drills, circuses, athletic contests, dances, fairs and exhibitions of large machinery. Chairs could be set up, and musicals, concerts, plays, or speeches were given. Since 1971 the Coliseum has been leased from the county by a benevolent veteran's organization which maintains the building and uses it for meetings and promotional events. Although used regularly, the high demand and respect which characterized the Coliseum's earlier use is now enjoyed by other, more modern facilities.

The architectural significance of the Coliseum was found primarily in the adroit manner in which functionalism and aesthetic appeal were united. The excellent craftsmanship, the thoughtful and archeologically faithful rendering of the Doric portico, and the careful use of supportive classical detailing gave the building a dignity in keeping with its memorial aspect and public nature. The stark simplicity of the Coliseum was in counterpoint to Henry Wolter's adjacent picturesque County Courthouse, an ensemble of public architecture rarely found elsewhere.

The architect of the Coliseum was particularly well-suited for the job in two major respects. Clifford Shopbell (1871-1939) ran an office which was, even by today's standards, notable for its high degree of organization, its size, and its ability to get the job done. The office's popularity with politicians and other sponsors of large projects made it the firm-of-choice in 1910s and 1920s. With nearly a dozen members, the firm could advertise the following on the day of the Coliseum's dedication, 8 April 1917:

The Efficiency of Our Organization Is Based on the Number and Ability of Our Employees, Whereby We Are Able to Obtain Specialists in Each Particular Line of Work.

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The Municipal Market (1913), Y.M.C.A. Building (1913), two Carnegie library branches (1911), and dozens of city school projects built before 1930 represented Shopbell and Company's hold on the public building market. Shopbell's talented Prairie School designer, Edward J. Thole, even produced a striking residence on Southeast First Street (1912; Riverside National Register District) for the city's Progressive mayor, Benjamin Bosse (1874-1922). (Bosse, indeed, was a prime mover in the Coliseum undertaking.)

But efficiency was neither the only nor the principal motive behind Shopbell's selection. The Coliseum was, admittedly, an exemplar of the Progressive Era. Well-planned, urbanistic, convenient--the building realized all the touchstones of the City Beautiful. Yet Shopbell possessed a penchant for dutiful attention to classical detail that ultimately spelled his involvement and success with the Coliseum. A native of Princeton, Indiana, Shopbell learned his trade as a draftsman for the Evansville and Terre Haute Railroad. After a period of apprenticeship in several Indianapolis offices--and three independent years in Evansville--Shopbell formed a partnership in 1897 with architect W. D. Harris. Until about 1910 and Harris's demise, Shopbell produced several picturesque essays--a Gothic synagogue (1903) may have been an extreme example of Harris and Shopbell's steadfast dependency on romantic forms. However, the buildings erected solely under Shopbell's aegis after 1910 eschewed reliance on any single style. Whether a Prairie School dwelling or a Beaux-Arts public auditorium, precise attention to detail, mass, material, texture, color, and plan was a thread common to all of Shopbell's designs.

The enthusiasm shown for the Coliseum project suggested both a passion for powerful architectural statement and a means of tapping an economic market. The combined characteristics of the enterprise--boosterism and memorialism--were assured of drawing support from every quarter. Business associations realized the efficiency of providing for large conventions. Yet the thousands of citizens who felt a personal loss because of the Civil War supplied a popular commitment which pushed the building forward. This alliance was nowhere more clearly expressed than in the 1913 referendum authorizing the county to spend the first \$100,000 on the project. (The cost--2/3 borne by the county--finally reached \$250,000.) The margin in favor of the Coliseum was seven to two. The election, conducted the day after a Decoration Day propaganda blitz, stressed "the patriotic nature of the enterprise...appealing to the minds of those who bear gratitude for the men who won victory for the nation on the field of battle." Organizing the referendum, however, and illuminating the complex rationale underlying the Coliseum were "a small army of retailers, wholesalers, professional men and Evansville boosters."

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Acoustics Expert Approves Designs for Coliseum Job." Evansville Courier,
5 April 1932.

"Coliseum is Best Memorial." Evansville Courier, 30 May 1913.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Evansville South

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:20,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 16 449650 4202890

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property nominated is bounded by Market Street on the southwest, by Court Street on the southeast, by Northwest Fourth Street on the northeast, and by an alley on the northwest.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Joan C. Marchand, Historic Preservation Specialist
Douglas L. Stern, Historic Preservation Officer

ORGANIZATION

Department of Metropolitan Development

DATE

5 October 1978

STREET & NUMBER

Room 304A, City-County Administration Building

TELEPHONE

(812) 426-5487

CITY OR TOWN

Evansville

STATE

Indiana

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

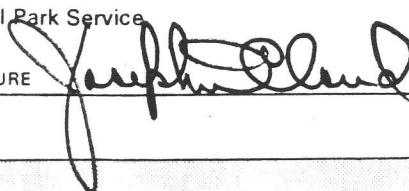
NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE



TITLE

DATE

3-15-79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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"Dedication Plans for New Coliseum Nearly Completed." Evansville Courier,
5 April 1932.

Dedication Program of the Remodeled Memorial Coliseum. Evansville, Indiana,
April 12-13, 1932. Evansville, n. p., 1932.

"Entire Coliseum Site Acquired." Evansville Courier, 11 September 1915.

"Evansville Firms Build Coliseum." Evansville Journal, 8 April 1917.

"List of the Coliseum Corporation Stockholders." Evansville Courier, 7 May 1916.

"Local Guild Offers Free Concerts." Evansville Courier, 4 June 1939.

McGlaufflin, Alice Coe, ed., Who's Who in American Art. Vol. 1: 1936-1937.
Washington, D.C.: The American Federation of Arts, 1935.

"New Coliseum Is Classic Style." Evansville Courier, 2 July 1916.

"Organ Description Given by Gillette." Evansville Courier, 9 November 1919.

"Patriotism the Dominant Note." Evansville Courier, 8 April 1917.

"Plan Remodeling of Coliseum at Cost of \$65,000." Evansville Courier, 14 May 1931.

"Plan to Remodel Coliseum Meets Board Approval." Evansville Courier, 15 May 1931.

"Sculptor at Work in Evansville on Groups of Statuary to Adorn the Front of
the Coliseum." Evansville Courier, 23 January 1916.

"What the New Coliseum Means to Evansville." Evansville Press, 8 April 1917.

"Vanderburgh County Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum to be Dedicated."
Evansville Courier, 8 April 1917.

Evansville, Indiana. Saletta & Greubel. Architectural Drawings Collection.
"Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum," 1916.

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Persons instrumental in the preparation of this form:

Mr. Donald Morris, Manager, Memorial Coliseum.
Mr. Garland Mullen, Organist, Memorial Coliseum.
Mr. Jack Wesley, Saletta & Greubel, Architects.

3460 11
KASSON
11 57
11 57

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

STATE OF INDIANA
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

38° 00'

87° 37' 30"

4460000 E

NEW HARMONY 27 MI.
BLAIRSVILLE 15 MI.

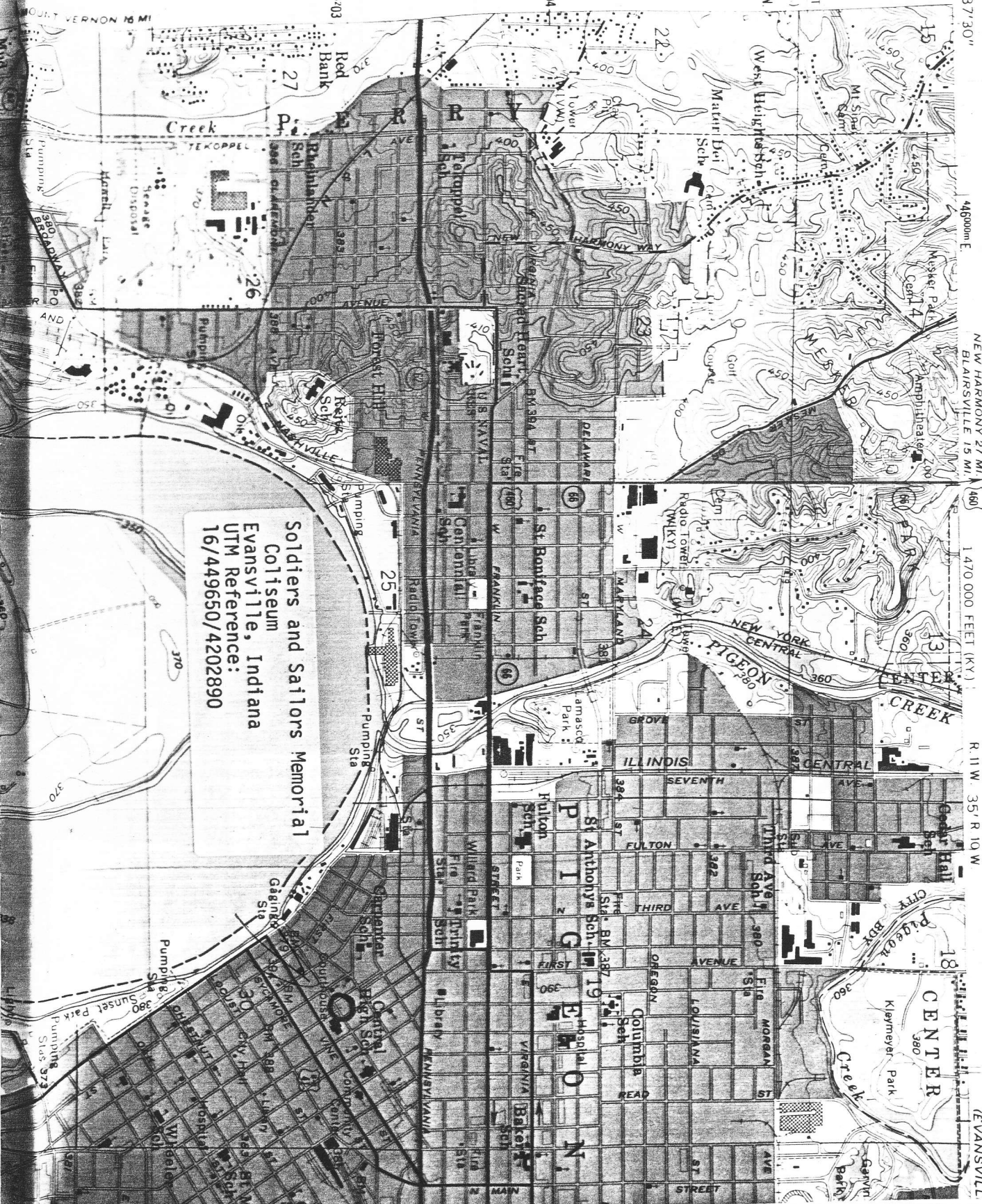
1470 000 FEET (KY)

R. 11 W. 35° R. 10 W.

EVANSVILLE 3460 11

610 000 FEET
(KY)

4705000 N



Soldiers and Sailors Memorial
Coliseum
Evansville, Indiana
UTM Reference:
16/449650/4202890