

FINAL

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Fountain County Courthouse  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_ 045-137-31030

2. Location

street & number 301 4th Street N/A  not for publication  
city or town Covington N/A  vicinity  
state Indiana code IN county Fountain code 045 zip code 46932-1237

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official/Title

1/30/2008  
Date

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register  
 See continuation sheet.
- 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**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building
- district
- site
- structure
- object

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1            | 0               | buildings  |
| 1            | 0               | sites      |
| 0            | 0               | structures |
| 1            | 0               | objects    |
| 3            | 0               | Total      |

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN: Art Deco

foundation CONCRETE

walls STONE: Limestone

roof ASPHALT

other METAL

GLASS

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with checkboxes and descriptions.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- Criteria A-F with checkboxes and descriptions.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- ARCHITECTURE, ART, POLITICS/GOVERNMENT, SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1935-1957

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Johnson, Louis R. (architect), Scholer, Walter, Sr. (architect), Savage, Eugene (muralist)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Criteria for previous documentation on file (NPS).

Primary location of additional data:

- Criteria for primary location of additional data.

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.6 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 466170 4442800  
Zone Easting Northing

2

3 Zone Easting Northing

4

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Eliza Steelwater  
organization date 09-08-2007  
street & number 4541 Stidd Lane telephone 812/ 334-1107  
city or town Bloomington state IN zip code 47408

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Fountain County, c/o County Auditor  
street & number 301 4th St. telephone 765/ 793-2243  
city or town Covington state IN zip code 47932-1237

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 7 Page 1

Fountain County Courthouse, Fountain County, Indiana

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## 7. Narrative Description<sup>1</sup>

### SUMMARY

The Fountain County courthouse (built 1936-1937) is located in the county seat of Covington (pop. 2,465) in west-central Indiana. The county is sparsely populated, with a majority living in small towns and working in nearby counties. Covington's town square, though once filled with historical zero-lot-line business buildings, is much altered. The three-story courthouse is the county's third, and was a Public Works Administration project. It was designed by architects Louis R. Johnson and Walter Scholer, both practicing in west-central Indiana. Only one of three Art Deco courthouses in Indiana, the Fountain County building belongs to the "stripped Classic" variant of Deco style. The approximately 116-by-89 foot building is three stories in height. Construction appears to have followed the prevailing method of steel or reinforced-concrete framing with concrete floors. Walls are self-supporting brick or tile faced with limestone block and keyed into the framing. The flat roof contains a wired-glass skylight of 32 feet square. The exterior is organized into two pairs of elevations, with east-west and north-south nearly identical but differing from each other. Vertical organization follows a Neoclassical formula of rusticated base story topped by two upper stories bearing engaged columns. North and south facades have plain, squared pilasters. East and west facades feature a center group of half-octagonal, reeded pilasters having a simple base and a capital intensively decorated with bas-relief Deco motifs. All pilasters are divided by vertical window stacks composed of two replacement casement-and-awning windows separated by an original verdigris-tinted spandrel in synthetic stone. The east or principal entry features an entry court with balustrade. Corner plinths are each topped by two fine art objects, a bronze standing lantern and a carved fantasy animal in the form of a winged ram. The entry itself is a triple doorway with heavily decorated door-heads, rather out of sympathy with this otherwise excellent, if simple, Deco exterior.

The main entry leads to a first (not ground) floor interior two stories tall. The courthouse's overall design is such that the ground floor is somewhat cut off from the featured upper stories. Floors in public spaces on all stories are terrazzo with inlaid color motifs. The vestibule inside the first-floor main entry is hung with two 10 by 15 foot canvas painted shortly after construction by nationally-known painter Eugene Savage, a native of Covington. The main public or lobby area is equal in size to the skylight and is surrounded by a corridor or aisle. The working spaces of the courthouse are outside this aisle, and most have windows to the exterior. Spatial and visual organization in the public area is dominated by four elements: the skylight; a spectacular split stair with closed balustrade having a large scale, zig-zag profile; the ubiquitous application of a warm pink marble facing to stairs, balustrades, piers, and wainscot; and the presence of a 2,500 square foot mural surrounding the corridor above the wainscot on first and second floors. The courthouse was designed with placement of the mural in mind. Painted by local artists under Savage's direction, the mural depicts scenes from the county's history and links them to larger events of the region and nation. A notable interior space is the second-floor courtroom with original built-in oak furnishing, Deco ceiling fixtures, and original linoleum-square flooring. Two major spaces, the commissioners' meeting room and the assembly room, have suffered major alterations. The courthouse, though well maintained overall, has apparent structural problems, one a faulty roof drainage that has damaged the murals repeatedly over the years, the other two parallel cracks in the first floor terrazzo.

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of the Sec. 7 and Sec. 8 narratives are paraphrased or quoted without attribution in two other courthouse nominations, Vermillion and Warren counties, submitted at the same time by the present author. The Fountain County courthouse nomination document derives in great part from an earlier draft and ongoing help from Nancy J. Wagner, former staff member of the Purdue University Agricultural Extension Center.

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Fountain County Courthouse, Fountain County, Indiana

SETTING AND SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Fountain County, 396 square miles in extent, lies east of the Wabash River, which forms its west and north boundaries. Adjacent counties, moving clockwise from the north, are Warren, Tippecanoe, Montgomery, Parke, and Vermillion (Fig. 7-1). Elevations above sea level in the county range from about 720 to 490 feet, averaging approximately 650. The terrain rises eastward from the alluvial and outwash plain of the Wabash, Indiana's longest river. Most of the county's soil is loess over glacial till, cut by the Wabash's numerous tributaries.<sup>2</sup> Most rivers and streams have a wooded fringe, and collectively these riparian areas and break the county's farmable area into smaller expanses.

Fountain County, one of 92 in Indiana, had a population of 17,486 in 2006, and this number has had only small fluctuations since 1990. The county's residents make up only 0.03 percent of Indiana's population. Over half the county's population, or 54.7 percent, live in eight incorporated settlements. Interstate 74 runs through the county seat of Covington, from Danville, Illinois, 16 miles west, to Indianapolis, 76 miles east. Covington is also a short distance from SR63, a regional connector running north-south. One third of employed Fountain County residents work outside the county, going to urban areas in adjoining counties or eastern Illinois. In the historically agricultural county of Fountain, today a leading source of employment at 30 per cent of jobs is manufacturing. The number of farm proprietors in 2005 was 571, compared to 1,739 at the start of the Great Depression in 1930.<sup>3</sup>

The county seat, Covington (platted 1826), is not centrally located but was proximate to the Wabash River. In 1846 the Wabash and Erie Canal was run parallel to, and east of, the Wabash River immediately west of Covington. Covington sits at the south end of a river bend, and the town's original plat is oriented north-northwest to the former run of the canal where it cut off the bend. Covington is the county's second largest town at a population of 2,465, compared to Attica at 3,385. Covington's town square, centered within the original town plat, is a Shelbyville Square plan, with streets intersecting at corners. The square is bounded by Washington Street on the north, Fourth Street on the east, Liberty Street (formerly Union) on the South, and Third Street on the west. These compass directions are tilted slightly by the north-northwest plat orientation noted above.

Elevation of the Covington town square, location of the county courthouse, is about 550 feet. Historically, all sides of the square were filled with zero-lot-line business buildings. At present, the east and south sides retain some of these buildings with a degree of historical integrity, and still divided by the alleyways originally platted. Half of the north side of the square is a parking lot. The west side is occupied by a supermarket and its parking lot, which are some 4 to 8 feet lower than adjoining Third Street. The street is protected from this abrupt drop by a railing. The courthouse

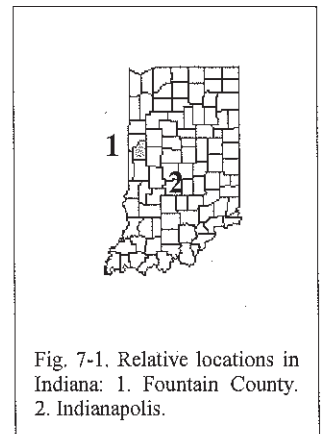


Fig. 7-1. Relative locations in Indiana: 1. Fountain County. 2. Indianapolis.

<sup>2</sup> Topographic detail provided by the Covington Quadrangle, Indiana, 7.5 minute series topographic map included with this document, and supplementary coverage online from U. S. Geological Survey, at <http://terraserver.microsoft.com>. For soils, Donald P. Franzmeier, "Cradle of Life: Soils," in Marion T. Jackson, *The Natural Heritage of Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 45ff, map p 48.

<sup>3</sup> All population, employment, and agricultural counts derived from U. S. Bureau of the Census 2005 reports and the 1930 Census of Agriculture.

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Fountain County Courthouse, Fountain County, Indiana

grounds or public square, which is included in the nomination, reaches to the street edges on all four sides. The boundary of the nominated area is extended at each corner for paved and grass-planted parking guides for diagonal parking (see site map included in this document). The square is approximately 270 feet on a side, or 1.6 acres in area. The main grounds are planted in lawn, with formally trimmed hedges outlining an inner walk surrounding the courthouse at about five feet from the foundation. A few of the square's numerous trees, notably specimen oaks (*Quercus* spp.) and tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), probably predate the present courthouse. Paved walks lead to the courthouse from the sidewalk along all four streets around the square. However, there is no public entry on the west or service side of the building. Besides the courthouse itself, the site contains a contributing object in the form of a 1926 war memorial erected at the time of the town's centennial and located on the southwest corner of the grounds. The granite memorial, on a concrete base, is an inscribed, tombstone-like plaque flanked by two drinking fountains on pedestals (photograph 8). There are also a recent war memorial and other outdoor furnishings including street lamps, a clock, planter boxes, benches, urns, and bollards that are included within the site.

The Fountain County courthouse is one of only three Indiana county courthouses built in the Art Deco style, all in the years 1936-1937. The Fountain County and Shelby County courthouses were built with Public Works Administration assistance. A third Deco courthouse, that of Howard County in Kokomo, was built with local funds at nearly twice the budget of the PWA buildings. Fountain County's courthouse cost \$246,734. Plan drawings state the Fountain courthouse measurements above ground as 115' 8" north-south, 88' 8" east-west, and 42' 4.5" feet in height. As shown on the included site map, the building is symmetrically placed within the town square and is oriented with its long axis north-south. Exterior and interior of the courthouse building are historically significant and contributing in Politics / Government, Social History, Architecture, and Art. The principal entrance is flanked by pairs of very fine bronze lamps and limestone carvings of a mythical animal based on the ram. The interior of the building displays an unusually effective combination of architectural elements and extensive wall painting as well as two large custom-painted canvases by Eugene Savage. These characteristics qualify the courthouse for significance at the state level.

## ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

### Style and Structural Elements

**Style.** Art Deco architecture as built in the United States is usually assigned the dates of circa 1920 to 1940. The buildings of this period comprise two main stylistic variants: Deco and Moderne (the latter not treated in this report).<sup>4</sup> American "Art Deco," in the narrow sense, has discernible roots in Beaux Arts Classicism, and will be discussed more fully in Section 8 below. Characteristics in common between Neoclassicism and Deco include symmetry, the use of grouped columns—in Deco, usually engaged squared-profile pilasters alternating with vertically stacked windows—and the grouping of ornament at doorways, windows, and roofline. But Art Deco departed from Classicism in important ways. One that is illustrated by the Fountain County courthouse is distinctive ornament and design details not derived from Classical motifs. Deco design makes use of geometric lines such as the zigzag and circle, stylized organic forms ranging from waterfalls to spiral seashells, and literal depictions of everyday objects such as telephones and farm animals that related to the purpose of a particular building.

<sup>4</sup> The following discussion draws principally on Eva Weber, *Art Deco in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster [Exeter Books], 1985).

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Fountain County Courthouse, Fountain County, Indiana

Where 1920s Deco was often playful and extravagant, many Deco buildings of the 1930s reflected the straitened life of the Depression in part by reverting to severely Neoclassical exteriors (Fig. 7-2). These buildings favored rectilinear forms over curvilinear, outline over modeling, and “an insistence on the moral-didactic purpose of art . . .” Interestingly, the interiors of such buildings frequently offered a contrasting richness of materials, decorative architectural flourishes, and artwork.<sup>5</sup> Publicly sponsored Deco building of the 1930s is sometimes referred to as

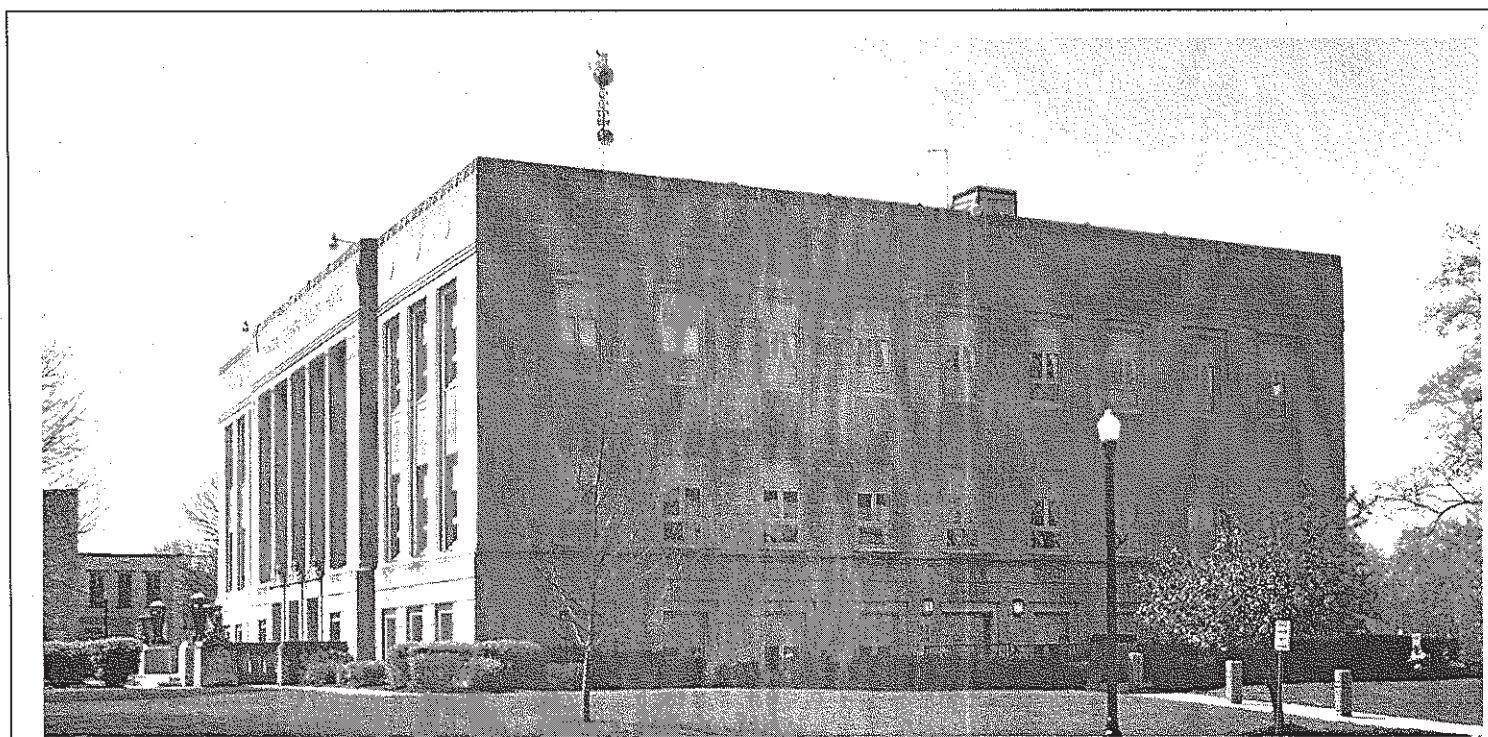


Fig. 7-2. Fountain County courthouse, photographed in April 2007, with principal elevation and entry court at left.

“stripped classic,” or “Classical Moderne,” and the Fountain County courthouse is a well executed example of this style within the broader category of Art Deco.

**Construction.** The Fountain County courthouse was constructed 1936-1937 to a design by associated architects Louis R. Johnson, a native of Fountain County, and Walter Scholer of Lafayette, Indiana. The project was designated Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works Project number IND.1036-R. From its beginning, the courthouse was designed to include two floors of wall paintings surrounding a central atrium under a skylight. Nationally known painter Eugene Savage, a native of Covington, supervised the painting by local artists of over 2,500 square feet of specially prepared interior walls, dedicated in 1940. Savage also painted two large canvases for the building foyer.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For quotation and general characterization, Bevis Hillier, *Art Deco* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1968), 98-99. Comments on exterior-interior contrast in Weber, *Art Deco in America*, 63, col 2.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy J. Wagner, Nomination of the Fountain County Courthouse to the National Register of Historic Places, manuscript dated Aug. 8, 1988, Sec 8 p 7. Also see “Fountain County Dedicates Murals That Herron Art Museum Director Calls ‘Most Significant in Indiana,’” *Indianapolis Star*, June 8, 1940.



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Fountain County Courthouse, Fountain County, Indiana

“The most common forms of construction [in Midwest states],” read the report of the Public Works Administration in 1939, “are steel frame or concrete frame with reinforced-concrete floors and exterior walls of brick, stone, or terra cotta, backed up with brick or hollow tile.”<sup>7</sup> Not all construction details of the Fountain County courthouse can be known until the county’s large collection of blueprints from various buildings are catalogued for accessibility. However, it is likely that the Fountain County courthouse was built by the method described, resting on a reinforced concrete foundation of continuous footing with piers. The building’s framework appears to combine self-supporting, limestone-faced exterior walls tied into reinforced concrete floors, probably by a system of vertical and horizontal I-beams. The probable arrangement of the vertical beams is discussed below under “Interior.” There is a partially excavated sub-basement, above which the building is three stories in height. It has a tar-and-gravel roof that slopes toward a center drain. A square, wired-glass light well, 32 feet on a side, is shielded by a raised, pyramidal-roofed structure at the center of the main roof.

Exterior

**Surfaces and spatial organization.** The face material of the courthouse walls is mill-finish, Indiana limestone block, buff in color. Except for the base story and principal pilasters (described below under “Principal Elevation”), the block is laid in a running bond with alternating courses of lesser and greater width (photograph 2). The mortar used is a bright white, evidently original, which calls attention to the variable quality in finishing of mortar joints.

The courthouse exterior is divided vertically, in the Neoclassical manner, into three parts (Figures 7-2 above, 7-4 below). The base story, partially below ground, is of rusticated block beneath a simple molding course. The rustication is marked in the horizontal direction only, by squared depressions and square-edged blocks. Unadorned windows and entry doors in the base story, on all but the main or east elevation, are aligned with windows above at about four feet wide. The height of base-story windows is 5’ 4” above ground. Rising from the base story is the middle section, two upper floors made up of full-height attached pilasters divided by vertically stacked windows and topped by a narrow course of stone blocks. Above this course is the building’s only noticeable touch of the “Deco Moderne” or Streamlined style: a shallow, reeded belt course forming the “three little lines” often used in Moderne architecture to signify the speedy movement of modern life and times (photograph 2).

Marked off by this belt course, the entablature-like upper division of each elevation is blank except for a centered, incised inscription and blank, shallowly stepped hexagonal medallions centered over each window stack. The roofline coping, forming the top edge of a low parapet, is decorated in a repeating pattern (Fig. 7-3). Scribed, simplified scrolls alternate with short, vertically reeded lines, perhaps derived from the ribs of the clam shell, in groups of three. Principal pilasters as described below are accented by a coping detail using similar elements that rises slightly above the roof line. The east and west

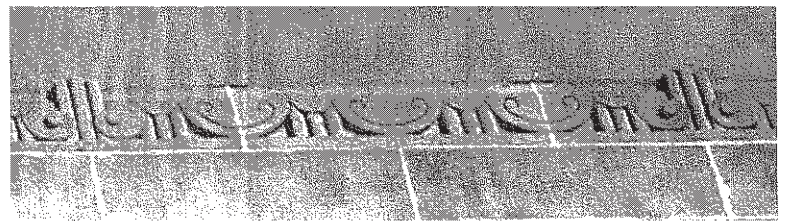


Fig. 7-3. Pattern of roof coping, repeating on 5-foot centers.

<sup>7</sup> C. W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown, *Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture ..* (Washington DC: U. S. Govt. Printing Office, 1939), xii.

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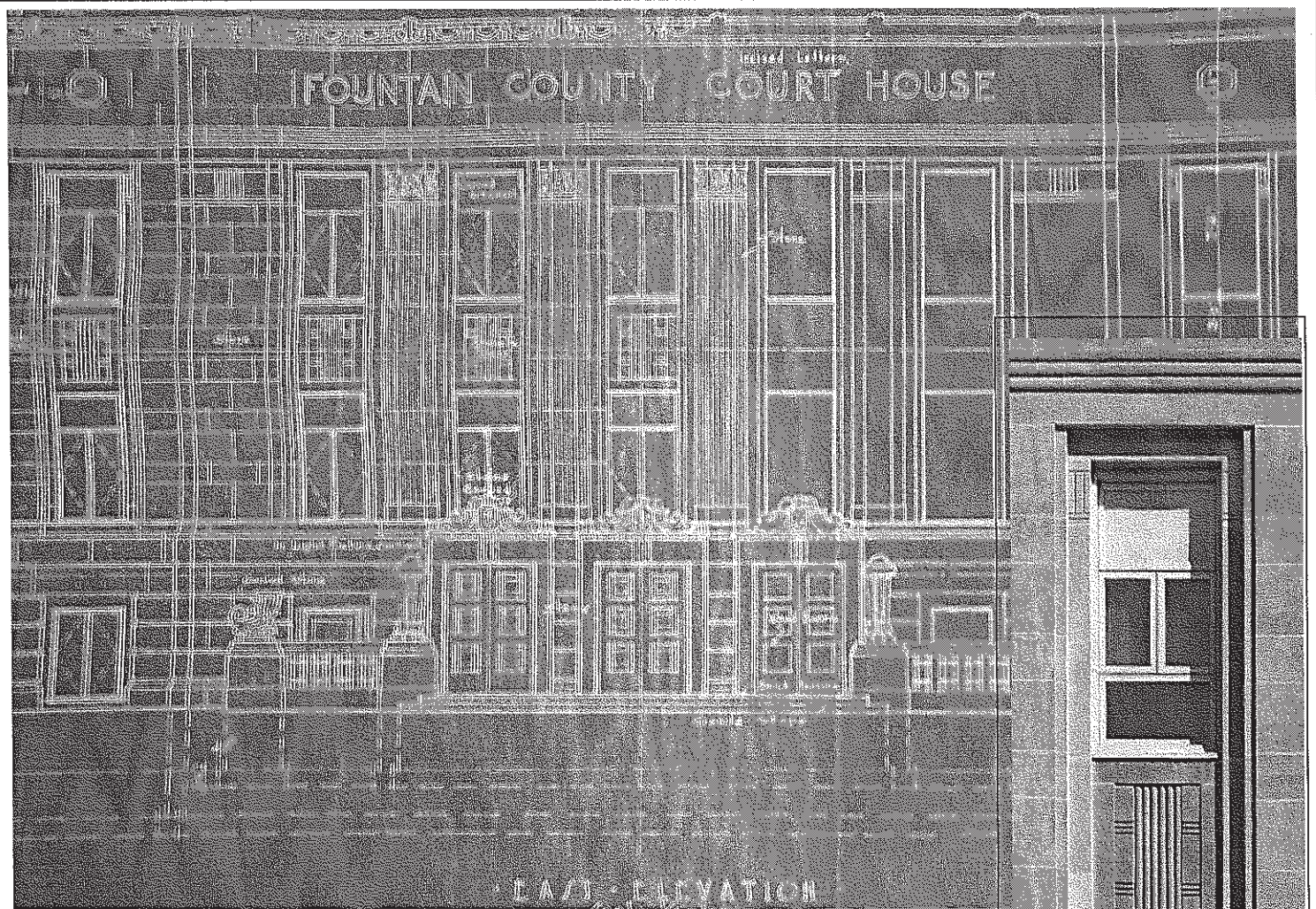


Fig. 7-4. Plan detail, principal elevation.

elevations are inscribed, in capital letters "Fountain County Courthouse." The north and south elevations contain inscribed mottoes in capital letters, respectively "The True Administration Of Justice Is The Firmest Pillar Of Good Government" (north) and "Law Heritage To Man Equal And Impartial Justice" (south; usage and lack of punctuation original).

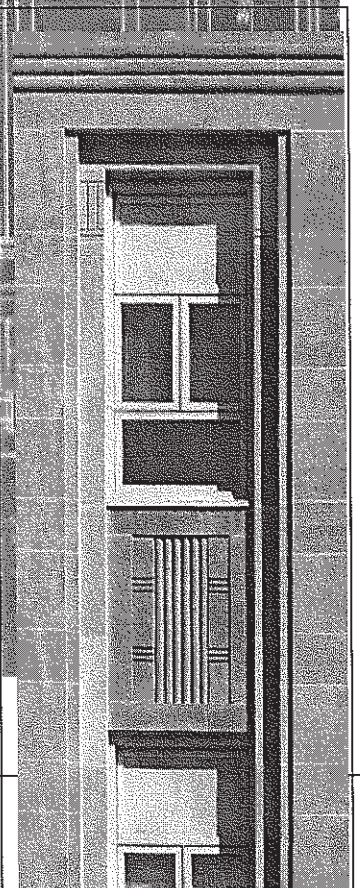


Fig. 7-5. Detail, window stack between pilasters.

The courthouse's exterior elevations are arranged as similar, but not identical, pairs (Fig. 7-2 above; photographs 1, 4-7). The east and west facades forming the building's long axis are composed of eleven bays each; the north and south facades of nine bays. At ground level, the east facade contains the main entry; the west facade is used for services and has no public entry. The north and south facades have a flat forward plane. They consist of a row of identical pilasters and two-high window stacks over the nearly square windows and doors (with flat headers) of the base story. A north-side door at ground-level, flanked by original wall lanterns, leads to the former "assembly room" through a door that

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is kept locked except on specified occasions. The south door, double-batten with wall lanterns, leads by stairs down and a corridor to the first-floor lobby.

The corner of each outer wall of the building is formed by butted expanses of stone approximately 1-1/2 times the breadth of the pilasters at their front plane. These pilasters, laid in running-bond blocks, are stepped back to a recessed window casing (Fig. 7-4). The casing, of vertically oriented blocks, has a deep reveal and a motif of scribed lines at each upper corner. Grouped vertical and horizontal lines, shallowly carved or molded, are repeated in the 5' 6" spandrels between the upper two floors. The spandrels, verdigris in color, are constructed in Rostone, a proprietary building material made of waste shale and limestone.<sup>8</sup> The 7' 6" tall window sash of the upper two floors was originally outward-opening steel casement below an opaque panel intended, in the architects' drawings, to contain "carved ornament" (Fig. 7-4). The sash has recently been replaced by a cream-painted metal ensemble including a plain opaque panel at top, with outward opening casements and an openable awning window below (Fig. 7-5 and photograph 2 showing open second-floor window).

**Principal elevation.** The west facade is similar to the east on its upper floors. However, the east elevation contains the main entry doors and forecourt to be described below, whereas the west elevation contains unadorned service hatches and windows, all proportioned similarly to other base-story windows. All three stories of the east and west facades are massed as a slightly projecting center plane of five bays, flanked by flat end sections of three bays each. Windows on each story are identical to those on the north and south sides. The pilasters at either end of the projecting section are wider, similar to the building corners. These pilasters, beveled back, abut the first of the four pilasters on each end section.

On the projecting center section, the pilasters are treated as engaged columns with base and capital. These pilasters are reeded and half-octagonal in section. The base is simply a narrower course of stone, but the columns are crowned with finely detailed capitals (Fig. 7-6). Each facet of the capital is a bas-relief composition of symmetrically arranged plant forms springing from a flower above a band of semicircles suggesting rainbows. The plant forms on the beveled sides are different from that of the front

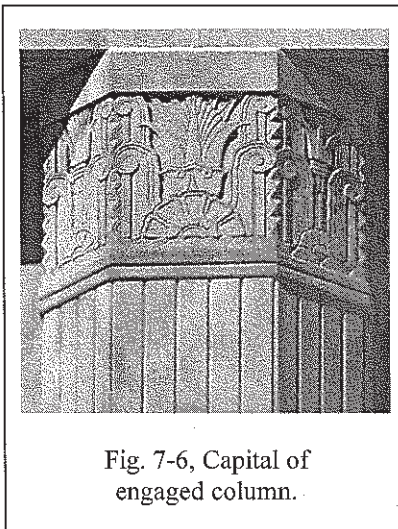


Fig. 7-6, Capital of engaged column.

<sup>8</sup> Rostone was featured in the 1933 World's Fair "Century of Progress" exhibit as a construction material for the Wieboldt-Rostone House. The building's architect was Walter Scholer, associate architect for the Fountain County Courthouse. The house was moved to the Beverly Shores subdivision east of Lake Michigan and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993. See Anna Milkovich McKee, "Stonewalling America: Simulated Stone Products," *CRM: Preserving the Recent Past* (issue 1995 18-08). Rostone continued as a corporate entity under various ownerships, manufacturing polyesters and plastics, until 2005. Also see <http://www.rostone.com> and <http://www.rostone.com/wieboldt-rostone.htm>, accessed August 2007.

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plane. Each composition is separated by the vertically oriented zigzag motif. A plain band course tops the decorated section of the capital.

**Entry court.** Leading to the main doors is a notable entry court, a platform about 28 feet wide by 14 feet deep, raised by two steps. The walking surface is brick with a granite coping and step. The corners of the platform are enclosed by a low balustrade with rather clumsy balusters, octagonal in section. The front face of the balustrade both conceals steps down to the men's and women's restrooms (now accessible only from the interior) and contributes to the entry's strong sense of arrival (Fig. 7-4; site map; photographs 1-3). The balustrade's rail and limestone end plinths have a cavetto-edged top surface.

The cuboid plinths are about 3 feet tall. Figure 7-7 illustrates the pair of objects, exceptionally fine in design and workmanship, that are supported by the plinths. These two objects are treasures as valuable aesthetically and historically as anything else pertaining to the courthouse. Standing in an exposed outdoor location, they present a challenge to adequately maintain and safeguard. As shown in Figure 7-7, one of the lanterns is missing two of its decorative medallions, which consist of a stylized flower within a raised-edge square.

The handsome, 4-foot bronze lanterns are wired for electricity. Each lantern is fashioned as four reeded, pilaster-like straps clasping a lighted glass bowl. The straps are joined by a reeded and medallioned band at the top, bound together toward the bottom by a cyma reversa band, and end as abstractly rendered "paws" with toes curled under. The base is a two-layer cruciform shape with braid molding. For all the piling on of detail, even to pie-crust trim, the lanterns have

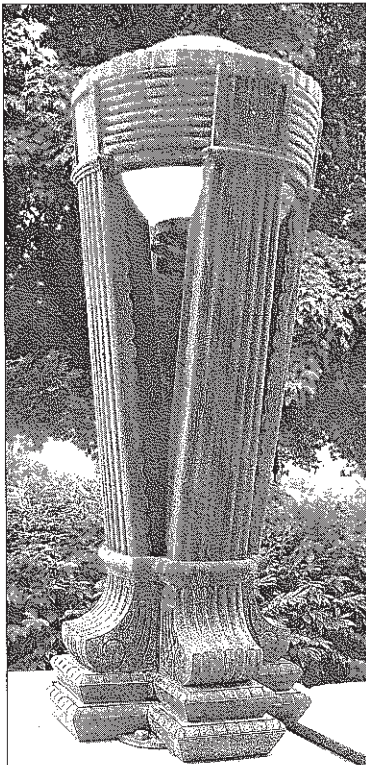


Fig. 7-7. Furnishings of entry court: (L) lamp; (R) sculpture.

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a classic calm. This effect stems from symmetry, the rhythm of reeded surfaces, and the self-contained gesture of the "feet" and base. A photograph of the entry court, apparently taken soon after construction, does not show the lanterns in place. However, they are included on the plan drawing in Figure 7-4.

The roughly 3-foot-tall curvilinear limestone sculpture, in its dynamism, contrasts with the lanterns. The sculpture represents a mythical beast, perhaps invented for the occasion, resting on a wave-like or plant-like base. Wings sprout from the head and forelegs of a ram, with curled horns, whose torso ends in an upward-curving vase shape. Though the whole is fanciful, anatomical credibility is furnished by the neck wrinkles of the ram as he pulls his head into fully arched position. It is likely that the sculpture was carved by one of southern Indiana's highly skilled limestone workers, but the design in its proportionality and awareness of Deco conventions may have been the creation of a sculptor hired under the Federal Arts project.<sup>1</sup>

**Entry doors.** Three centered doors on the east or principal elevation lead from the entry platform to the building's interior (photograph 1; detail Fig. 7-8). The doors, aligned with windows above, are separated by a distance equal to the front-face width of the engaged columns of the upper floors. The bronze double-batten doors in each doorway are three-paneled. Each panel is patterned with vertical and horizontal reeding with a centered square medallion having a bas-relief, five-pointed star. Door surrounds are single slabs of limestone with an incised line near the outer edge. The flat, tall lintel is decorated with three incised vertical lines and a bead-and-reel molding. Above each lintel is a door head highly decorated with carving. Each door head has an individual center inset. From left to right are an unlabeled tablet numbered I-X behind a fasces; scales pierced through with a sword behind a banner labeled "Justice;" and a crossed feather over a gavel labeled "Court-Order." Beyond the general relationship of the symbols to the legal functions of a courthouse, further research would be needed to determine more precisely the meanings that were intended. Surrounding the insets, each door-head has the same decoration. Its detail is Deco in content, a symmetrical pair of cornucopias spilling stylized, curling plant forms. However, the door-head configuration itself is incongruously reminiscent of a Spanish Baroque parapet in its heavy, sinuous outline and enclosed motif. The cathedral-like ensemble of three such doors injects an anachronistic element into an otherwise satisfying Deco entry court.

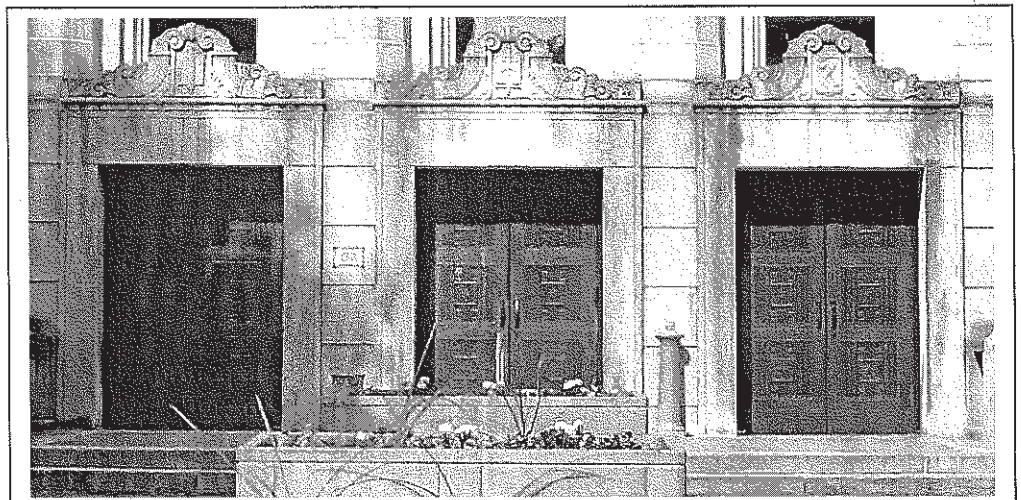


Fig. 7-8. Entry doors at ground level on principal elevation (east.)

<sup>1</sup> The photograph referred to is in C. W. Short and R. Stanley-Brown, *Public Buildings: A Survey of Architecture* .. (Washington DC: U. S. Govt. Printing Office, 1939), 41. Hiring practices for sculptors under federal programs of the Depression are described in William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), esp pp 430-433.

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**Present condition.** The exterior surfaces of the courthouse are in generally good condition. The limestone facing is in need of cleaning, especially at the main entry and around the roofline. The missing medallions decorating the bronze lanterns should be located and replaced; or a replica should be considered. These items may be eligible for individual insurance policies.

**Interior**

**Spatial organization and surfaces.** Contrary to the static dignity of a Neoclassical interior, the main floor of the Fountain County courthouse presents a dynamic, even theatrical, first impression. Crossing a small, unevenly lighted vestibule, the observer mounts a half-flight of stairs to the main floor (site map, interior plan marked "Ground Floor"). The inner portion of the square central lobby, two stories high, is given intimacy by its enclosing pillars and its intense focus on a staircase of sweeping design, rendered in a streaked marble of warm pink (photograph 9; Fig. 7-9). The staircase ascends to a landing, then divides left and right up to the second floor. The building's rectangular, two-story pillars or piers are faced with the same marble. The white terrazzo floor is inset with a wide terrazzo band of pink trimmed with green that forms a square within a square, about 15 feet across, further demarcating the inner area of the lobby (photograph 10). The visual "center" point of the lobby



Fig. 7-9. West end of courthouse interior's central space. Image courtesy of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana.

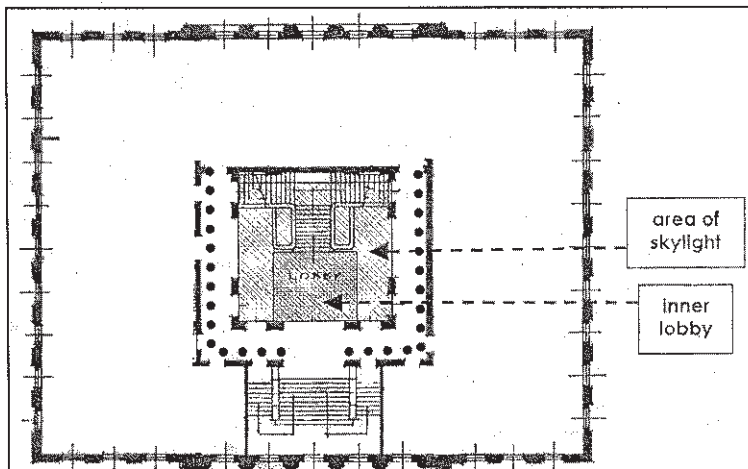


Fig. 7-10. Spatial arrangement of first floor. Dotted line indicates extent of wall painting. Two additional panels, visible from lobby, are placed on wall of stairwell to basement.

is actually closer to the entry or east side because of the space occupied by the main stair (Fig. 7-10).

The lighting of this two-floor main space, both overall and in detail (Fig. 7-11) makes dramatic use of contrasting brightness and shadow. The area is flooded with natural light by a square skylight, approximately 32 feet on a side. This measurement corresponds to the distance between piers defining the corners of the lobby. Outside the piers is an aisle or corridor, about 8 feet wide, formed by the pillars on one side and solid walls on the other (photographs 11, 12). These walls, on both the first and second floors, are wainscoted in pink-white marble with darker trim bands matching the pillars and stairs. Above the wainscot, the walls on these two floors

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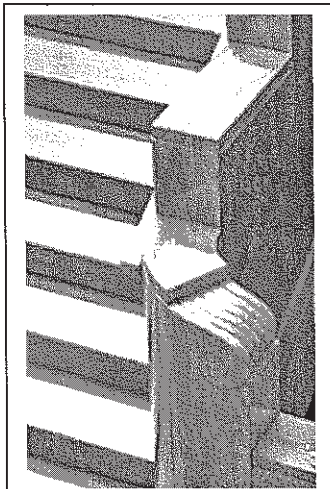


Fig. 7-11. Detail, turnout of balustrade at bottom of staircase, first floor.

are completely covered in a continuous full-color mural depicting the history of the county. The effect of this mural, partly concealed by pillars and alive with figures in motion, is both to deepen the shallow space of the corridor and to people it. The eye is led outward by the mural and upward by the staircase. A narrow, painted yellow border edges the murals at top and bottom and emphasizes their continuity. The murals are generally successful in integrating necessary interruptions, such as doors and finely detailed original brass ventilating panels (photograph 13).

Most ceilings are painted white, as are the glazing bars of the skylight. Ceiling lights are predominantly original, supplemented in work spaces by fluorescent bars. Original fixtures include both the simple bud shape of balcony and aisle lighting (as in photograph 13 at upper right) and the more elaborate Deco fixtures of the vestibule and courtroom, discussed below. The flooring in public areas (including restrooms) on all three levels is white terrazzo decoratively inlaid with pink and green. The forms are 1) edge bands like those enclosing the inner lobby, and 2) a centered decorative motif recurring along the corridors of first and second floors. This abstract design of overlapping diamonds, a version of a Deco icon, can be seen at the upper end of photograph 10. Also visible in this

photograph is the eight-sided star at the center of the lobby. The design could be called a compass rose were not the building aligned slightly off the cardinal points. Regarding flooring in the work spaces, most may originally have been marbled linoleum squares in red and cream or red and black, as shown below in photograph 19 of the courtroom.

In an unusual turn in the spatial organization of courthouses, this stage-like, two-story public space is given minimal visual connection to the building's surrounding work space. Office doors are of inconspicuous design, with no molding or trim and simple, full-wood-paneled battens (photograph 13 at lower right). As shown on the site map's interior plans, some spaces on both the first and second floors are further secluded by short corridors leading from the lobby. Use of individual spaces, which has evolved and continues to evolve, is not marked on the plans included with this document. Generally, the *second floor* is dedicated to the courtroom and its ancillary offices; *first floor*, to some of the county officers such as the auditor, treasurer, assessor, and recorder; *ground floor*, "assembly room" or community space (now including the Purdue Extension Service), other county officials (currently including the prosecutor), mechanicals and maintenance areas, rest rooms, and historical exhibits. First and ground floors have miscellaneous offices that change with space needs, and one first-floor suite is currently rented to a private user. Historical integrity of the building's interior is concentrated in the public rather than work spaces. All offices have industrial-grade carpeting and fluorescent lighting, and most have acoustic-tile ceilings. The Commissioner's Court on the first floor (at photograph 14 on site plan) illustrates one non-historical treatment, with carpeted walls, lowered ceiling, and a duct carrier. Note that, as in most or all offices, the original light fixture and door trim are retained. This formerly large space has been partitioned, as has the community room at the north end of the ground floor.

The ground floor (photograph 15) is visually excluded from the tightly knit design of the two upper floors. It is not open to the light well above. It can be reached from the exterior by stairs descending a few steps at the north or south ends of the building from exterior ground level. The north stair opens directly into the assembly room; the south stair leads to the lobby by way of a corridor. From the interior, the ground floor is accessed by inconspicuous stairs—a dogleg stair down from the main entry vestibule, or a split stair hidden by the balustrade that extends from the main stair (photograph 9, dark areas at left and right of staircase). The ground floor has a band-embellished terrazzo floor

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and piers corresponding to those on the floors above, except that the shaft above the marble wainscot is simply plastered. The piers support visible crossbeams forming a square, with some added surface electrical wiring. Ceiling fixtures in the aisle around the ground-floor lobby are original. Photograph 15 (at rear) shows the steps and railing down to the now-altered community room, which is entered from the ground-floor lobby through a double-batten glassed door with fixed transom. An elevator on the southeast side of the lobby, incorporated into the original building design, opens onto all floors.

**Staircase, piers, entablature, and skylight.** Figure 7-12 is an overview of these features, also presented in photographs 9-12. It is evident, comparing figures 7-9 and 7-12, that the atrium design carefully coordinates load-bearing elements. The inner set of piers shown in Figure 7-12 lies directly beneath the main support members of the skylight. Note that the mural-decorated walls running east-west are aligned with the heaviest pilasters on the building's exterior, probably denoting another element of the building's framing.

The staircase's zigzag-topped closed balustrade is the major element that transforms the interior from Neoclassical to Deco. As noted, the roughly 8-foot-wide main staircase (with handrail surfaces about one foot wide) rises to a landing, then divides right and left up to the second or topmost floor. The total projection of the staircase is about 8 feet plus a square landing and split flights of the same size. A reeded triple molding in matching marble on the outside of the staircase underscores the stair's flow upward to the second-floor balcony (photograph 11). Elegant brass rails on the inner face of the balustrade, square in section with pyramidal finials, provide the needed practical handhold.

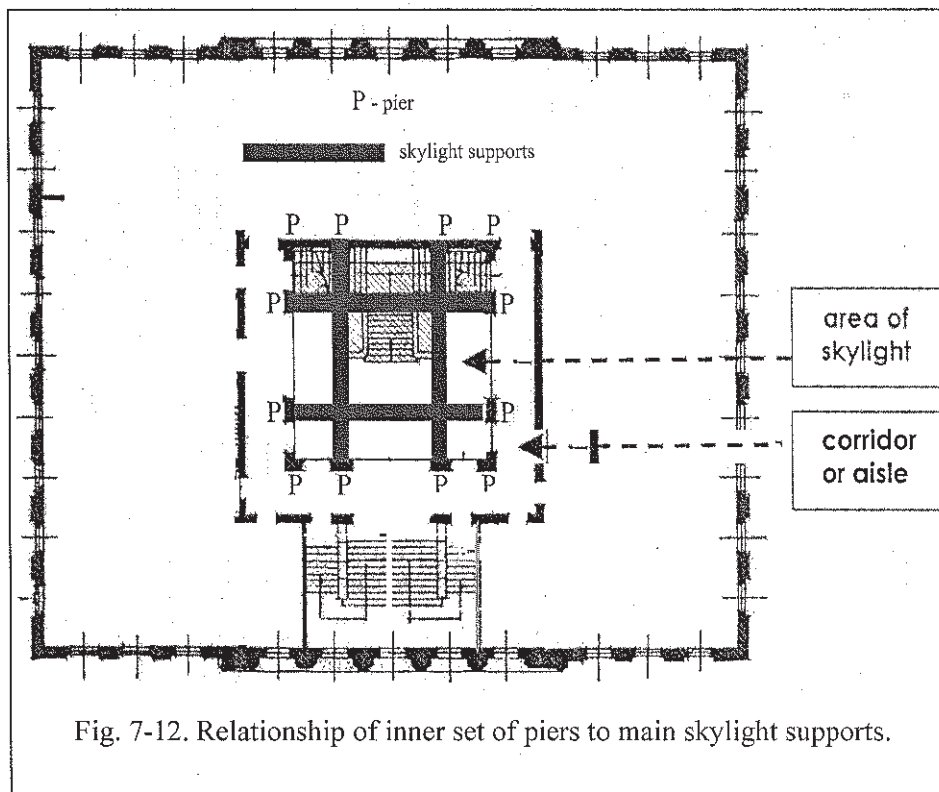


Fig. 7-12. Relationship of inner set of piers to main skylight supports.

Balustrades of the two upper staircase sections are composed of 5 square handrail segments, at 1 foot rise to 2 feet run, with a curved turnout at the landing. From the landing down to first floor there are 4 squared sections of balustrade, ending in another turnout. As shown in Figure 7-11 above, the two turnouts articulate the staircase's points of transition. A reeded upper surface and incised spiral on the side surface emphasize the turning. At the first floor, the balustrade turnout joins a low wall. This wall curves back beside the stairwell and staircase down to the ground floor (in shadow at right and left edges in photograph 9). The shallow stairs themselves end at the bottom with a projecting, curved tread that suggests smooth-flowing movement, in contrast to the series-of-waterfalls movement of the zig-zag balustrade.



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The balustrade of each wing of the stair ends at the top by abutting a rectangular column, one of 10 piers that rise from the first floor to a header or entablature beneath the ceiling (photograph 12). The piers measure approximately 16 by 53 inches in section, with L-shaped corner piers treated as two overlapping segments. This measurement applies to the base of each pier, which is slightly wider and deeper than the upper sections. The piers' overall visible height is roughly 25 feet. The piers are composed of three parts. The base matches the height and materials of the wainscot described above. The wider side of the shaft is treated with 7 half-rounds of trim creating a vertically reeded surface. The capital is defined by a 3-segment horizontally reeded molding topped by an incised, symmetrical, stylized decoration (Fig. 7-13). A centered half-round inside a ring, often used in the Deco vocabulary to refer to the sun and/or a rainbow, is surmounted and flanked by shoot-like plant forms with curled or spiraled tips. The capital is topped by a plain band of matching material.

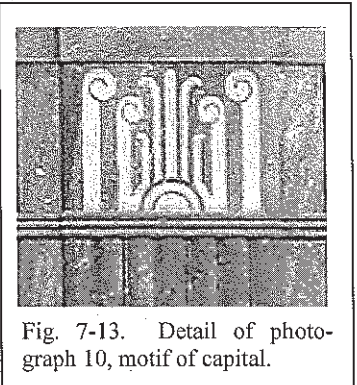


Fig. 7-13. Detail of photograph 10, motif of capital.

The entablature or wide decorated beam above the piers is some 3 feet tall on the lobby side. This beam supports a lower ceiling on the balcony side, treated with three layers of flat trim running along both the inside edge and the outside edge of the balcony ceiling (photograph 11). On the lobby side, the white-painted entablature is a continuous unit running around all four sides of the lobby. This structural element is decorated in a cursory way, half-Neoclassical and half-Deco. From bottom to top, the entablature has a reed band of 4 half-round moldings, a series of medallions, and a generic crown molding of vertical reeds or flattened scrolls interspersed with oval plaques. The frieze includes medallions in a series alternating blank rectangles with decorated octagons. The rectangles are edged with architrave molding and the octagons with similar molding that contains bas-relief depictions of the scales of justice. The motifs are outlined in mauve paint to relate them to the prevailing color of the marble facings.

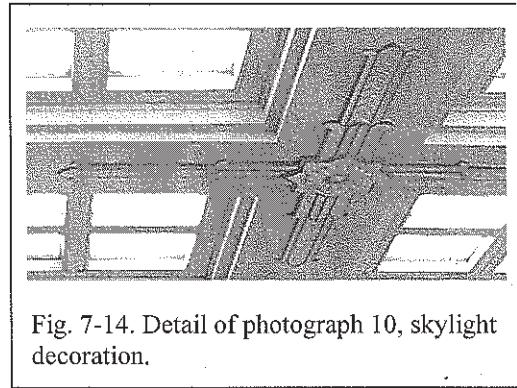


Fig. 7-14. Detail of photograph 10, skylight decoration.

The skylight, boldly sized to occupy the full lobby ceiling, is sectioned into major and minor divisions (Fig. 7-9 above). Heavy cross-pieces, probably painted steel, divide the glass into 9 sections, proportioned as shown in Figure 7-12. At the 4 points where the cross-pieces meet, another motif has been applied—a symmetrical cross of several applied layers, plant-shoot motifs and overlapping diamonds springing from a central flower-in-star (Fig. 7-14). This ornament stresses the structural nature of the skylight frame. It also intensifies the unity of the lobby space by reference to similar iconic Deco figures used elsewhere within sight of the skylight. Within the major divisions of the skylight, 4-light and 12-light sash is set high within a double reveal, giving a coffered effect.

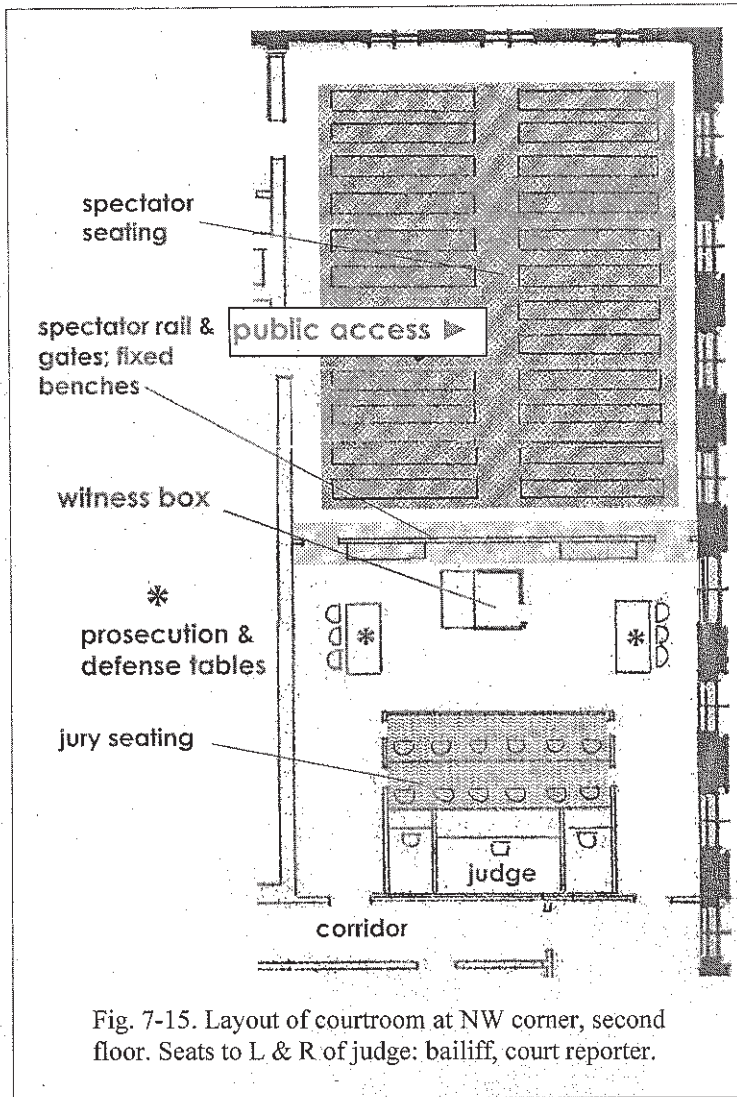
**Other featured interior spaces.** The courtroom of the Fountain Circuit Court occupies a space of about 30 by 55 feet at the north end of the second floor (photographs 16-19; Fig. 7-15). The courtroom can be entered from the balcony west aisle, through double doors leading to public or spectator seating. Another door leads from the clerk's office at the rear or west end. The courtroom can also be entered from a private corridor at the east end of the room, which opens onto the judge's office and other court-related chambers. The corridor provides two single doors into the courtroom, one on either side of the judge's bench.

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The courtroom's historical ceiling lighting, original wood wainscot, and built-in furnishings establish a strong period feeling in spite of some alterations. The room receives natural light from 3 west windows and 7 north windows, framed on the interior with reeded trim having square corner decorations. Artificial lighting is provided by two rows of original Deco/Mission ceiling lights, augmented by a fluorescent bar and replacement wall lamps behind the judge's bench. The built-in oak and oak plywood furnishings as shown on the plan appear to be intact and in their original configuration, giving the room structure, visual unity, and sense of purpose (Fig. 7-15). The furnishings are varnished in a light to medium warm tone rather than the more somber brown favored in courthouses of earlier decades. Virtually the only decorative motif is vertically oriented reed molding, capped by a plain band or a top rail. The plywood panel behind the judge's bench, about 20 feet wide and running floor to ceiling, is laid out in checkerboard squares of vertical and horizontal grain. Paired bands of 7 reeds each—the same width as the piers in the lobby—flank the bench. Entry door surrounds are reeded, and the design of spaced bands of reeding, with fewer rows, is carried to the entrance doors, the jurors' enclosure, the rail and gate in front of the spectator section, and even to the end of the pew-like spectators' benches. The spectators' section, occupying more than half the courtroom, retains original flooring of 9-inch marbled linoleum squares in red and tan, with a border of streaked black marble in 2 foot by 6 inch blocks.<sup>2</sup> The floor in the officials' section of the

courtroom has been covered or replaced with industrial-type carpeting. The ceiling, in spite of its acoustical tile, the fluorescent light, and replacement ceiling fans, has been remodeled with some sensitivity. Rows of coffering appear to have been added on the side walls to carry HVAC tubes, since the coffered moldings with vertical bead trim at east and west ends of the room are interrupted (Fig. 7-16).

<sup>2</sup> Linoleum is a proprietary wall and floor covering combining wood or cork dust in a linseed oil medium. Linoleum was patented in 1863 by Englishman Fredrick Walton, later the co-inventor of wall coverings Lincrusta and Anaglypta. Linoleum was a favored material of Modernist and Bauhaus designers, including Mies van der Rohe circa 1900-1930. See Gerhard Kaldewei, ed, *Linoleum: History, Design, Architecture* (Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001) for essays on the design, uses, and evolution of linoleum before vinyl largely replaced it in popularity around 1960.

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Fig. 7-16. Joining of remodeled to original ceiling molding at southwest corner of courtroom.

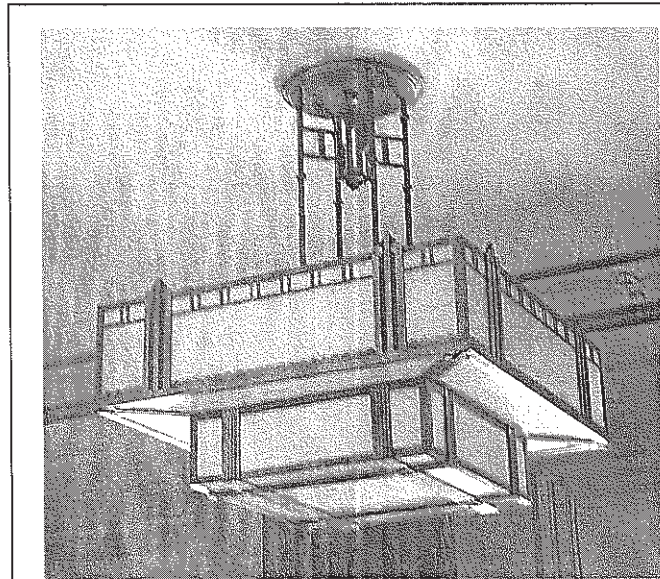


Fig. 7-17. Interior ceiling fixture centered over east entry to courthouse.

The entry leading from outdoors to the first floor and its atrium measures approximately 25 feet wide by 18 feet deep (photographs 20-22). The space includes a 6-foot-deep entry landing or vestibule floored in terrazzo. A half-story flight of stairs leads upward to the first floor and doglegs at half-width down to the ground floor on either side. At the top of the stairs are two marble-faced pilasters aligned with the stair balustrade, with openings on either side allowing a glimpse of the corridor and lobby ahead. The “up” staircase, about 15 feet wide, has a closed balustrade of the same style and materials as that of the main stair described above. There are a brass center hand rail and two side rails, identical in design to those of the main stair. The entry ceiling is white-painted plaster, with a wide, plain two-layer trim as used in other interior spaces such as the aisle and balcony ceilings. In the entry, this trim is joined by a cavetto to a decorated band of trim. The trim motif is octagonal medallions, in several layers of low relief, connected by stylized flowers and scrolls. The cavetto and the reveal of the trim band are painted mauve. At the center of the ceiling is a fine Deco/Mission light fixture (Fig. 7-17). It is a drop fixture having two square tiers of brass-enclosed opalescent glass. The brass frame is principally ornamented with motifs of shoots and reeding. The east wall of the vestibule is filled by the triple doorway of three bronze doors trimmed in 3-row reed molding with rounded corners (photograph 20). Between the doors are white plastered wall spaces having flat marble trims topped by a horizontal 3-row reed molding. Above the door openings are three windows of the east facade, first floor. Minimally trimmed, they are painted white to match the plaster wall spaces separating them. Centered in each space is a reeded marble facing similar to those of the interior piers. The outer corners of the entry space are also faced in this way.

**Paintings on canvas.** On the side, or north and south, walls of the entry, the marble facing frames two horizontally oriented rectangular canvases, 10 by 15 feet, painted by Eugene Savage, a Covington native who became a successful artist based in New York. The canvases are allegorical in subject matter—“The Disbursement of Tax Dollars” (north

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wall; photograph 21) and "The Receiver of Taxes" (south wall; photograph 22)—and made up of juxtaposed vignettes rather than a single naturalistic scene. Good and bad uses of taxes are separated to left and right respectively by a semi-abstract crevasse in "Disbursement" and a by a fragment of papered house wall in "Receiver." In both canvases, the foreground figures are sharply modeled, with emphatically draped clothing, strong facial expressions, and delineated musculature. Three figures on the left in photograph 21 are realistic portraits of individuals important to the artist. The allegorical figure of a naked young woman, present in both panels, is given a non-naturalistic, elongated body and limbs, perhaps to indicate her symbolic role. Depth of field is established by increasingly flat, semi-abstract shapes such as a checkerboard of fields, the outlines of distant buildings, and rays suggesting sunlight or a spotlight's beam. Fortunately, the canvas panels escaped the damage suffered by the murals, whose paint was applied directly to the walls. The Savage canvases were professionally cleaned and re-varnished in 1999. Before restoration, the canvases were appraised at \$245,000.

**The murals.**<sup>3</sup> Savage oversaw the painting of the first and second floor walls, which was carried out by Fountain County artists or artists with county connections. Savage supervised the wall preparation, established a palette, and received cartoons from each artist before the painting began. The murals comprise a narrative through time, beginning on the east wall of the first floor and moving clockwise to south and north walls. Early scenes refer to the North American continent or to the Wabash Valley in general; later scenes are more focused on county happenings and landmarks. The main staircase occupies most of the west wall, but room was found in the stairwells down to the ground floor for two painted maps representing Fountain County at its beginning (1826; photograph 23) and its form at the time of painting (1939). The second floor continues the narrative, beginning on its east wall and moving clockwise over all four walls to end on the north.

The two outer pilasters and their crossbeam at the east end of the lobby are painted with symbols of the American Indians (not specified as to which groups, and not necessarily authenticated) and insignia of the French, British, and United States governments (partly visible in photograph 24). This set piece and the maps mentioned above are the only wall paintings that do not represent individual scenes, usually several in juxtaposition to represent a time period. The earliest scene is that of Indians witnessing the arrival of the Spanish (first floor, east wall; photograph 25). The pre-homestead period also includes French exploration and trade and the eventual meeting of Tecumseh and William Henry Harrison shortly before the battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. Other subjects, in succession, are the arrival of Euro-American homesteaders (photograph 26), their early settlement conditions (photograph 27), establishment of the county prior to the Wabash and Erie Canal boom (photograph 28); the Civil War (photograph 29), the turn of the century (photograph 30), and the period beginning with World War I in 1914 and ending in 1939, when the mural designs were completed. Homage is paid in this panel to the PWA, whose artists' fund supplied a \$5,000 grant for the mural project (photograph 31).

A title and the painter's name are to be found on each wall. Painting styles of the 10 artists, assuming they were faithfully reproduced in the 1983 restoration, do not vary widely and are further harmonized by the common palette. The intent of the artists was to portray daily life of their forebears as they understood it. They also wished to reference great events of the region and nation, local landmarks, and beloved icons such as the covered wagon and log cabin

<sup>3</sup> An appendix included with this document under Additional Documentation is the unauthored brochure "Courthouse Murals Painted by Eugene F. Savage and Local Arts," dated September 2004 and available at the courthouse. The brochure briefly describes the history of the project and the nature of both murals and canvases, and lists both the original artists and those who undertook a 1983 restoration.

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(photograph 26). Most of the depicted scenes suggest artists with varying levels of academic training, though at a generally less sophisticated level than that of Eugene Savage. An exception is the second floor's west wall panel done by Joan and Jeanette Savage, who achieve a meta-interpretation by representing PWA works including the courthouse on whose wall they have depicted the building itself (photograph 32). In general, human figures and their appurtenances are carefully observed, while the flora and fauna of nature are given a fond but rather generic treatment. As mentioned in the brochure "Courthouse Murals," as late as 1971, the murals were valued at over \$200,000.

**Present condition of the courthouse interior.** The main interior space is arresting and charming in design, but the building's work space may have been outgrown. One measure of the problem is the undue amount of impedimenta that have accumulated in what should be the most carefully presented space in the building. Under-scaled memento cases, plant stands, and notice boards are placed around the first-floor lobby. Signs are affixed to important architectural details. At the first floor entry, the door surround and the space below one of the Eugene Savage canvases are encrusted with paper notices (photographs 20, 21). Many courthouses are able to regulate the number of utilitarian and "decorative" furnishings by confining most of them to the ground floor. However, the Fountain County interior plan segregates the ground floor to the extent that it may be seen by relatively few who frequent the building.

The building's other problems, as seen from the interior, appear to be structural. Roof leaks necessitated an extensive restoration of the murals (1983; by local artists listed in the Appendix) and have made a second restoration desirable. Examples of flaking paint among the murals can be seen in photographs 23, 29, and 30.

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8. Narrative Statement Of Significance

SUMMARY

The Fountain County Courthouse is significant at the state level in the categories of Politics / Government, Social History, Architecture, and Art. The courthouse is unique in Indiana for its over 2,500 square feet of murals, including two 10-by 15-foot wall canvases by nationally known artist Eugene Savage, who directed the mural project as well. The building, in Covington, Indiana, was built 1936-1937 in the "stripped Classic" Art Deco style as a Public Works Project under the New Deal. Its murals, designed and completed between 1937 and 1940, were part of the project budget. Walter Scholer, Sr., the associate architect on the project, was a noted practitioner in Lafayette, Indiana, where he completed important projects both in the city and on the campus of Purdue University in West Lafayette. He also designed the Wiebold-Rostone house for the Century of Progress exhibition of 1933, and used Rostone as the spandrel material on the Fountain County courthouse exterior.

The courthouse is the finest example of a New Deal art and architecture project in Indiana. Nationally, Fountain County Courthouse appears to rival great projects like El Rincon Post Office or Coit Tower for its breadth, scale, and refinement. Additional research may well confirm the national significance of the Fountain County Courthouse.

The county, formerly a beneficiary of its location on the Wabash and Erie Canal, then as a nexus of railroading, reverted to an almost entirely agricultural economy by the early 1900s. Its former, circa 1860 courthouse was condemned as unsafe several years before federal funding became available in 1935 under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, better known as the Public Works Administration or PWA. Through a someone informal arrangement involving President Franklin Roosevelt, his social-political circle, and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the Fountain courthouse artworks were also funded under the PWA rather than the later and better-known, but less geographically comprehensive arts program of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which succeeded the PWA. Savage's canvases are highly competent and engaging allegories of wise and unwise management of tax revenues. The naturalistically painted murals of 11 local artists, displaying formal artistic training, are a strikingly lively, consecutive narrative of the region's and counties' history. Part of the murals' significance is their deep integration into the architecture of the courthouse interior. Conversely, the architectural significance is enhanced by the murals' effect of peopling and opening up the narrow corridor or aisle surrounding the central, two-story atrium. The other striking feature of this tightly focused space is its split staircase with a zig-zag closed balustrade in pink-streaked marble, truly a "flight" of stairs drawing the eye upward toward the 32-foot-square skylight. In spite the staircase and a sparing amount of Deco-themed ornament, the courthouse shows its Classical Revival underpinnings. The exterior is vertically organized with a rusticated base story surmounted by engaged columns and pilasters supporting an entablature-like space. It is decorated with a pair each of outstanding bronze lanterns and beautifully carved limestone animal figures. The interior, if not for its staircase, could be called Classical Revival for its organization around an atrium defined by structural piers. "Stripped Classic," whose iconic example is the 1920s Nebraska State Capitol, was a model for public buildings of the 1930s.

The courthouse suffers from a faulty roof drainage that has necessitated one major rehabilitation of the murals, which are again showing damage. Correcting the roof design, along with an examination of the building's foundation are paramount concerns, both for the building's historical significance and for the monetary value of the artworks around

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and inside the building.

**SELECTED HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, PREHISTORY TO 1936**

A deciding factor in the development of Fountain county was its location on the Wabash River, which drains two-thirds of Indiana.<sup>1</sup> Glaciers produced both the Wabash River and Fountain County's fertile soils. Some 700,000 years ago, soils began to develop through the grinding action of pre-Wisconsinian and Wisconsinian glaciers. Many millenia later, about 20,000 years ago, outwash or meltwater from a glacial lobe contributed to forming the Wabash River, and produced sand and gravel deposits of commercial importance. Meltwater drainways like the Wabash created valleys of glacial till. Near these valleys, winds deposited thick layers of loess, or windblown particles of silt and clay. Though highly susceptible to erosion, loess is agriculturally fertile. Its presence in Fountain County made the county's more level areas centers of grain-growing, while areas of more sloping topography were used as pasture or orchards. The river itself, and some of its tributaries, were undoubtedly food sources and transportation routes from the beginning of human habitation.

A warming period around 5,000 B.C. brought migratory peoples into what is now central Indiana; later centuries, though cooler, saw settlement along major river valleys like that of the Wabash. Such settlement persisted after the arrival of Europeans; however, the identity of tribal peoples in the area changed over the next two to three centuries. Indigenous eastern tribes were pushed westward by Euro-American settlement, and the grouping of peoples and their alliances shifted as Indians became involved with struggles for land sovereignty among the French, British, and Americans. A Potawatomi village, Chioppy or Chipaille, existed south of the Wabash on Big Shawnee Creek in Fountain County during the 1700s. This village had previously been occupied by the Miami as one of a group of settlements along the Wabash. A documented and now reconstructed French fort dated 1717 is Fort Ouiatenon, some 15 miles east-northeast of the Fountain County border near West Lafayette, Indiana. The fort was established among existing Indian villages, in particular a large settlement of Wea, a subgroup of the Miami.

Both French and Indian settlement remained after the fort's disbanding when the French lost their land claim; however, conditions declined until ultimately, in 1791, all Indian villages along the Wabash saw their houses and crops destroyed at the order of President George Washington. The Indians ceded their lands in the area through greater or lesser degrees of coercion, notably the Treaty of St. Mary's in 1818. After the battle of Tippecanoe, two Miami "reserves" were established partly in Fountain County—the Barnett and Longlois reserves—but around 1840 both Potawatomi and Miami were relocated far to the west under U. S. military escort. The preceding century of strife and its outcome are commemorated in the name of Fountain County, after a major from Kentucky who was killed fighting the Miami near Fort Wayne in 1790.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wilton N. Melhorn, "Indiana on Ice," 16-21; and Donald P. Franzmeier, "Cradle of Life: Soils," 45ff, map p 48, in Marion T. Jackson, *The Natural Heritage of Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> George R. Parker, "The Wave of Settlement," in Jackson, *Natural Heritage of Indiana*, 368ff; Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, "Fountain County History," in *Fountain County Interim Report* (1988), xiii; Tippecanoe County Historical Association, Fort Ouiatenon History, online at <http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/forthistory.htm>; Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University, Bloomington, The Geographic Location of Potawatomi Bands, online at <http://www.gbl.indiana.edu/Pot/PI98.html>; both accessed August 2007. Fort Ouiatenon site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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The state of Indiana was admitted to the Union in 1816, and by 1820 Euro-American homesteaders began squatting on future Fountain County lands. The Indiana legislature created the county in 1826. Of several early towns, all on the banks of the Wabash, Covington was chosen as the county seat after its founder Isaac Coleman donated every fourth lot in the plat to the county government. The first courthouse was a frame building erected in 1827 on city lot 120 rather than on the town square. Prosperity was nearly immediate and accelerated when the Wabash and Erie Canal arrived in Covington in 1846, completing its crossing of the county the following year. However, Fountain County experienced another side of the early industrial age when a cholera epidemic—the by-product of increased geographical movement of people, including the infected, via new transportation methods—occurred shortly after construction was completed. As the canal declined in importance with the coming of railroads during the 1870s-1880s, Covington enjoyed a renewal of railroad-based commerce. Both Covington and Attica, a larger town, maintained a degree of prosperity even though routing of the Chicago and Indianapolis Railroad eclipsed these towns in favor of Lafayette (Tippecanoe County), now the major city of northwestern Indiana. Between 1899 and 1910, Covington achieved its greatest historical population (approximately 3,000) and geographical extent. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1910 shows that the streets were partly brick paved and lighted by "arc electric lighting." There were two railroads and one railroad bridge, a canning factory (principally for tomatoes), quarries and sellers of cement products, a grain mill, and a wool warehouse. Before the present courthouse was built, three previous courthouses had occupied the town square. The then-existing building, designed by Isaac Hodgson in 1859 had been condemned as unsafe in 1929.<sup>3</sup>

Fountain County's economy, and hence the tax revenues handled by the county's government, became based almost completely on mixed farming. Even in 1930, at least five years after agriculturalists began to experience economic depression, the county's percentage of land in farms, 91.3, and the size of those farms at an average of 132.7 acres, exceeded the state average. Unfortunately, between 1920 and 1930 the value of farmland, buildings and equipment, and farm products—which had risen between 1910 and 1920—dropped drastically in Fountain County as it did nearly everywhere (Table 8-1). In 1935, when the Public Works Administration stepped up its program of financial assistance for public construction, the Fountain County commissioners must have begun planning their proposal for a new courthouse almost immediately.

Table 8-1. Value of Fountain County Farms. *Source:* U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census (1930), Agriculture, Tables I and III.

| YEAR REPORTED | VALUE OF FARMLAND AND BUILDINGS | PERCENT DECREASE FROM PREVIOUS REPORT |
|---------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1920          | \$36,648,249                    | N/A                                   |
| 1925          | \$18,616,907                    | 49.2 %                                |
| 1930          | \$17,257,495                    | 7.3%                                  |

**THE FOUNTAIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE AND ITS ARTWORKS, 1936-1940**

Officially, the Fountain County courthouse was Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works Project IND.1036R. This information can be obtained not only from federal records but also from a panel of the courthouse

<sup>3</sup> Information from the 1988 draft National Register nomination by Nancy J. Wagner is relied on throughout this section without specific attribution. Also see Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, "Fountain County History," in *Fountain County Interim Report* (1988), xiii, 46-48; and Jon Dilts and Will Counts, *The Magnificent 92 Indiana Courthouses* (Bloomington IN, 1991), 52-53. The date of the previous courthouse is given in other sources than Dilts as "the 1860s." For the cholera epidemic, see Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).



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mural (photograph 30). The part of the mural scene nearest its painted worksite sign depicts construction workers, underscoring the fact that an important part of the federal program was employment. Architects Louis R. Johnson of Covington and Walter Scholer of Lafayette designed the courthouse, which was constructed by Jacobson Brothers of Chicago and completed in July 1937. The cost of the project was \$246,734, with construction costs at \$199,950.

Little is known of **Louis R. Johnson** beyond the fact that he was a member of the Indiana Society of Architects. In designing the Fountain County courthouse, Johnson had in mind an address made to the Society by Wilbur D. Peat, then- director of the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis. Peat's stress on the importance of including murals in public building design influenced Johnson to plan one of the largest public murals in Depression history.<sup>4</sup> **Walter Scholer, Sr.** (1890-1972), associate architect on the Fountain County project, was a prominent Lafayette architect. His only other courthouse commission was the extensive remodeling of the Lawrence County Courthouse in 1930.

Scholer is known best, perhaps, for his association with Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. He was the

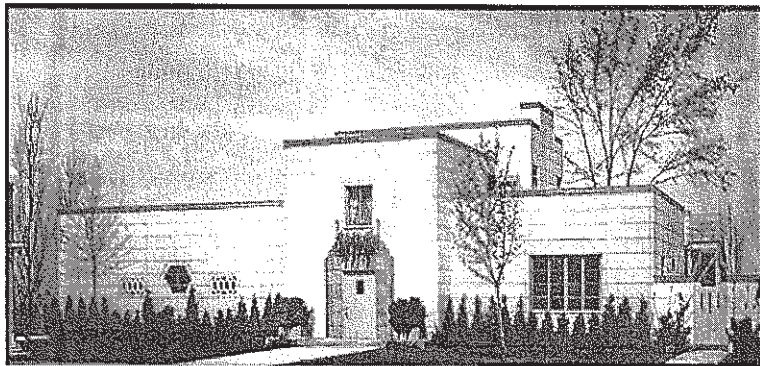


Fig. 8-1. Wiebolt-Rostone house in an undated historical picture after 1950, when most of the exterior had been re-sided with Perma-Stone. The door surround is the only remaining Rostone element.

consultant for Purdue's Construction Office and designed Cary Quad, Elliott Hall of Music, Mackey Arena, Mechanical Engineering, and Windsor Halls, among other campus buildings. Scholer's recollections of this association were printed some years after his death by the county historical association. Scholer also carried out commissions in Lafayette including the Mars Theater (1920), Albert A. Wells Library (1927), and Morton School (1929). Notably, Scholer built the Wiebolt-Rostone house (Fig. 8-1) as part of the 1933 World's Fair "Century of Progress" exhibit. The house, now altered with a covering of another artificial stone and other changes, was moved to the Beverly Shores subdivision east of Lake Michigan after the exhibition and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.<sup>5</sup>

The Fountain County Courthouse mural project was funded at \$5,000 as part of the construction cost by special request of the county commissioners in their application to the federal government. Dates of the mural project were 1937-1940. **Eugene Savage** (1883-1978) agreed to direct painting of the murals in return for artistic freedom in painting the vestibule panels on canvas, intended in part as a tribute to his parents. Savage was by then a nationally known artist who worked on canvases, murals, and mosaics over a long career. Savage studied at the Corcoran Gallery and the Art Institute of Chicago, and was later awarded a fellowship to study in Rome at the American Academy. His early success came from mural paintings executed in both European countries and the United States. Some sources ascribe Savage's style partly to the influence of contemporary of Mexican muralists D. A. Siqueiros, J. C. Orozco, and

<sup>4</sup> "Speech Was Instrumental That Brought Murals to Fountain County," no author, *The Commercial-News, Danville IL*, Feb. 21, 1982.

<sup>5</sup> *The Building Of A Red Brick Campus: The Growth Of Purdue As Recalled By Walter Scholer* (Lafayette: Tippecanoe County Historical Ass'n, 1983); David Parrish, *Historical Architecture of Lafayette, Indiana* (West Lafayette: Purdue Research Foundation, 1972). For Rostone, see Anna Milkovich McKee, "Stonewalling America: Simulated Stone Products," *CRM: Preserving the Recent Past* (issue 1995 18-08).

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Diego Rivera; however, differences of opinion on this subject will be discussed below under Contexts of Significance. Savage "played a vital role in the WPA Federal Art program" and went on to become a professor at Yale University. There he taught mural painting and probably had considerable influence on the form through students who became successful practitioners and teachers in their turn. Savage continued to receive commissions, notably one for a Hawaiian mural series for the Matson Shipping Line. His Hawaiian work, adapted for various objects including Matson's menu, is still avidly collected. Throughout his life, Savage studied the Seminole people of Florida and created numerous easel paintings, sometimes with surrealistic elements, on Seminole themes.<sup>6</sup>

### FOUNTAIN COUNTY'S COURTHOUSE IN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The importance to a town of becoming the county seat is reflected in the efforts over time, found in many county histories, of one town to take the county seat from another. Such petitions were decided by the state legislature. In Fountain County, these efforts were comparatively few and tame, ending with Veedersburg's unsuccessful bid in 1872. Early courthouses in homesteading states like Indiana both promised, and were symbolic of, a permanence that was by no means guaranteed. Settlements could fail economically, or a whole town could be lost to natural disaster or contagions, as was the town of Maysville in Fountain County when the 1840s cholera epidemic struck. Counties were the glue that held together otherwise disconnected hamlets and farmsteads on the frontier. Formation of counties, mandated by Indiana's first constitution (1816), conferred political and legal existence by recording land titles. County government had the power to settle disputes, keep a degree of public order, and collect revenues (however scanty) for public projects. The election of county-wide officials brought continuity where local settlements failed, at the same time underlining the dearly-held principle of self-governance. Indiana adopted a version of Pennsylvania's county system administered by county commissioners and divided into townships. Commissioners initially appointed a clerk, circuit court officers, sheriff, tax collector, recorder, and other officials, although most of these offices would soon be subject to election.<sup>7</sup>

Some 67 of Indiana's 92 courthouses now in use, or about 70 percent, were built between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I. The years between the wars saw construction of some of the most elaborate courthouses in the state. The fact that the styles of courthouse building went so far beyond the utilitarian indicates the symbolic as well as practical importance of county in the lives of its citizens and in the collective face they presented to the world. Fountain County is unusual in having continued to use its rather simply styled, Gothic Revival two-story courthouse, apparently without additions, until the building was actually declared unsafe. The history of this ongoing state of affairs is not known. But it can be argued that the county's modest level of commercial activity gave residents a lesser degree of incentive to vaunt their prosperity to prospective residents or investors. Veedersburg (founded 1871) was a known exception to this conjectural complacency, since their community leaders attempted to appropriate the role of county seat. Veedersburg was the last of Fountain County's commercial centers, however. It benefited from its siting at the convergence of several railroads, and from the opening of an important brickyard in 1890. But the decline of Veedersburg's railroads in favor of the Chicago and Indianapolis route outside the county meant the decline of the

<sup>6</sup> Biography and quotation at AskArt, <http://www.askart.com/AskART/artists/biography.aspx?searchtype=BIO&artist=25663BIOGRAPHY> for Eugene Savage, accessed August 2007. There is apparently no published biography for Savage, though his name and particulars are an entry in Peter H. Falk, *Who Was Who In American Art 1564-1975* (Madison, CT : Sound View Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> National Association Of Counties, "The History of County Government, Part I." Online at [http://www.naco.org/Content/NavigationMenu/About\\_Counties/History\\_of\\_County\\_Government/Default983.htm](http://www.naco.org/Content/NavigationMenu/About_Counties/History_of_County_Government/Default983.htm), accessed June 2007.

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town's importance except to itself. Moreover, Veedersburg's boosters were only a single voice in one of the most strongly agricultural counties in the region.

The average expenditure for courthouses in Indiana counties had been dropping since World War I. Relative cost of courthouses over time can be estimated by the roundabout method of converting the price of construction to 2005 dollars (the latest available date), then dividing that amount by the population of the county at the time the courthouse was constructed. This yields a per-capita cost for purposes of comparison only, since the method of financing all of the courthouses isn't known. When amounts are equalized as 2005 dollars, however, the median price per capita of the 16 courthouses constructed 1903-1916 was about one-third higher than that of the 6 courthouses constructed after World War I: \$1,090.33 versus \$703.79. Though not the most expensive, the last price over \$1,000 per capita was \$1,202 for Carroll County's courthouse in 1916 (Table 8-2).<sup>8</sup>

Stylistic changes facilitated this lowering of the price of courthouses. Courthouses in Indiana from the 1850s were designed primarily in Victorian Period styles, until variants of the Beaux-Arts style tradition were introduced with the building of the Classical Revival Grant County Courthouse in 1880.<sup>9</sup> Courthouses built between 1880 and 1914, such as that of Grant County and of Allen County (Ft. Wayne, 1897), tended toward magnificence, introducing a full range of the 19th century Beaux Arts vocabulary. Cupolas or domes, roof balustrades, heavy entablatures, pediments, balconies, two-story columns, and rustication might be included, usually with a panoply of Classical and/or Renaissance details. The style period was capable of complex and elaborate designs yet, surprisingly, Beaux Arts design easily led the way to simplification in both architectural effects and construction techniques. Underlying the decorative details was an effective formula for a dignified effect even when magnificence began to be foregone. A compactly massed, largely symmetrical three-story structure having a rusticated base story and two-story columns required only a smattering of detail to evoke the desired result. The Beaux Arts atrium interior could substitute a less-costly skylight for a dome, eliminating one of the more difficult architectural elements to fire-proof. Such an interior adapted easily to prevailing construction practice using steel or reinforced concrete beams to support concrete floors and tie them to a self-supporting wall of stone-faced brick or hollow tile. Simplified versions drawing on the Beaux Arts tradition can be seen in the 7 courthouses built in Indiana between 1916 and 1928. Excluding Scholer's remodeled Lawrence County Courthouse of 1930, these pared-down Neoclassical designs can be found in Carroll (1916), Pike (1920), Spencer (1921), Vermillion (1924), Sullivan (1927), Harrison (1927), and Daviess (1928) counties. Figure 8-2 shows several of these courthouses, in whose design the bones of 1930s "stripped Classic" Deco architecture are apparent.

Table 8-2. Estimated cost of selected Indiana courthouses, 1870-1924.  
*Source: See text note 7.*

| COUNTY                          | Bartholomew (1870) | Allen (1897) | Carroll (1916) | Vermillion (1924) |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|
| POP.                            | 21,133             | 74,096       | 17,970         | 25,870            |
| COST AT CONSTRUCTION            | \$225,000          | \$818,000    | \$250,000      | 358,000           |
| COST IN 2005 DOLLARS (millions) | \$48.5             | \$154.3      | \$21.6         | \$19.8            |
| PER CAPITA COST IN 2005 DOLLARS | \$2,295            | \$2,086      | \$1202         | \$765             |

<sup>8</sup> Computations based on Gross Domestic Product Per Capital from MeasuringWorth.com at <http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/index.php>, accessed at various times in June 2007. See the article on this site, "Six Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 - 2005," for an explanation of the measure used. Populations are U. S. census decennial counts at the nearest date to courthouse construction. In some cases populations were extrapolated to the exact year.

<sup>9</sup> John C. Poppeliers et al, *What Style Is It?*, 66-71, for a discussion of Beaux Arts styles.

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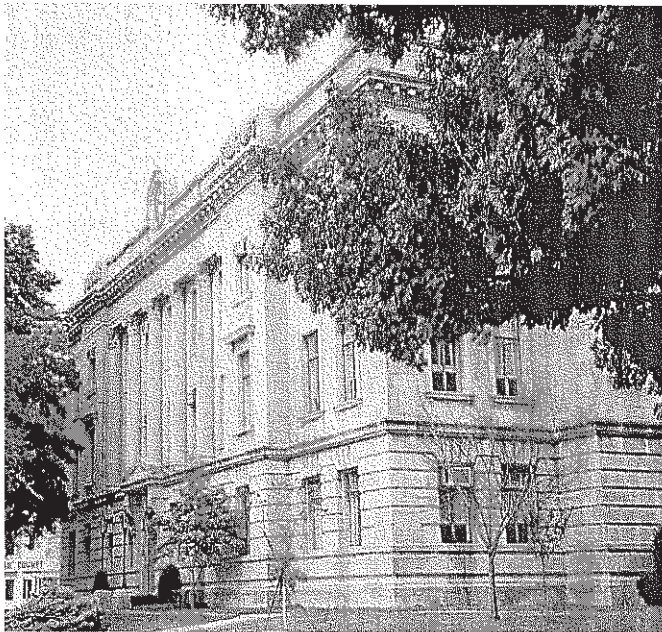
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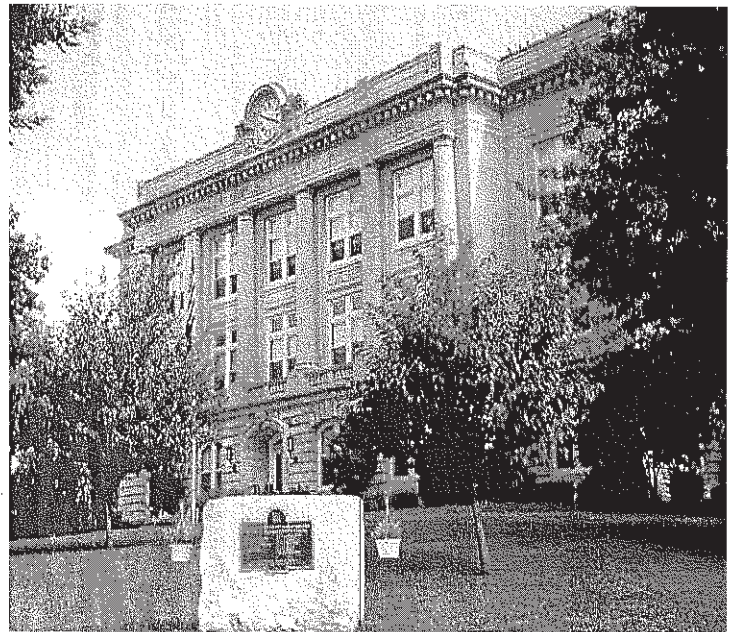
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Vermillion, 1923 (Bayard)



Sullivan, 1926 (Bayard)



Spencer, 1921 (Dunlap)

Fig. 8-2. Three county courthouses of similar design; architect's name in parenthesis. *Source:* Cory Walker, *The 92 Indiana Courthouses*. Online at <http://www.angelfire.com/in4/indianacourthouses>.

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The history of the Fountain County Courthouse begins with its application for federal aid, probably in 1935, followed by the building's design in 1936 and completion in 1937. The building retains substantial interior and exterior architectural integrity as well as most of its original functions under county and state government, therefore the significance of the courthouse runs from 1937 until the present 50-year end date, 1958.

**THEMES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN INDIANA COURTHOUSES OF THE 1930S**

**PWA and WPA: Construction Funding for Local Governments in the Depression, 1935-1943**

The Daviess County Courthouse of 1928 was the last built from scratch in Indiana before the Great Depression. By the time the condition of Fountain County's 1859 courthouse was acknowledged, the county's government along with most in Indiana was undoubtedly unable to finance the needed reconstruction or replacement. A new courthouse apparently became possible for Fountain County only after the Public Works Administration's final set of appropriations for public construction in 1935.<sup>10</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Public Works Administration (PWA) became the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which continued in existence until 1943. A principal difference between the two was that the WPA created a systematic and extensive program of employment for workers outside the construction trades, chiefly to white-collar workers such as clerks, teachers, librarians, technicians, social workers, and artists. However, the beginnings of arts employment were earlier, as will be discussed below under the context of the Fountain County murals.

The creation of jobs in times of economic depression was not new, dating back at least to mid-19th century.<sup>11</sup> Such relief efforts were usually sponsored either by large municipalities or by charitable organizations. But joining the goal of stable employment to the goal of planning public works developed only slowly. Experiments in European countries at the turn of the century suggested that public works programs to create employment required long-range planning. In the United States, a few states proposed or legislated programs, but these efforts proved ineffective. Meanwhile, members of Congress had been proposing combined employment-public-works since 1919, after the end of World War I. During the presidency of Herbert Hoover 1929-1933, Congress enacted the first of such proposals, the Federal Employment Stabilization Board of 1931. Hoover was slow to recognize that federally financed building was unlikely to have an adverse impact on private-sector building, of which for a time there was almost none. The Stabilization Board's scope proved inadequate as the Depression deepened, and the Board's functions were gradually transferred to various divisions of the Public Works Administration. In 1932, Congress appropriated \$300 million for federal public works and authorized federal loans up to \$1.5 billion to states, counties, cities, and a few private corporations. This was the first instance of the United States government's using its own credit to borrow on behalf of non-federal

<sup>10</sup> U. S. Dept. of the Interior, *Back of the Buffalo Seal (1936)*, 98-99.

<sup>11</sup> William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 14-16, for a summary of Hoover's programs; Arthur D. Gayer, *Public Works in Prosperity and Depression* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1935), 5-18, for a brief history of Depression relief programs. Self-laudatory accounts of the PWA are *Back of the Buffalo Seal* (note 11 above) and Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, *Building for Recovery: The Story of the PWA* (circa 1939). Amounts of individual and cumulative appropriations vary from one source to another. Lewis Meriam, *Relief and Social Security* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1946), provides an exhaustive analysis and statistical summary of New Deal relief programs, and may give the most accurate dollar figures.

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projects.<sup>12</sup> Soon after his election, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (in office 1933-1945) successfully engineered the first of a series of Congressional appropriations. The Federal Emergency Relief Act passed in 1933 became the first relief operation under Roosevelt's New Deal. Congress funded the Federal Emergency Relief Administration at \$3.3 billion. FERA is better known as the Public Works Administration or PWA. A supplementary program of 1933-1934, the Civil Works Administration [CWA], was discontinued as too costly, but FERA again received supplementary appropriations in 1934 and 1935.

The New Deal drew (and still draws) many criticisms as "big government" for its cumbersome bureaucracy and the encroachment of federal government into previously local areas of authority. However, a positive contribution of the New Deal was to provide a model and procedures that increased stability and continuity in the running of municipal, county, and state governments.<sup>13</sup> Part of the model was to establish a chain of grants distribution from federal to state to county or municipal government. The concerns of early 19th-century pioneer settlements about their survival as political units still had some validity in the 1920s, owing to the national boom and bust cycles of "big capital." Two of Indiana's three courthouses built during the Depression, those of Fountain and Shelby counties, were made possible by the PWA. In both cases, the financial mechanism was grants (up to 45 percent of the project cost) and, probably, either federal loans or federal purchase of a county bond issue covering most of the remaining cost. Howard County's courthouse was built 1936-1937 *without* federal assistance. A burst of prosperity enabled construction when three manufacturers moved operations to Kokomo. Prior to that unpredictable stroke of good fortune, Howard County had gone 10 years without a courthouse, razing its previous one as a fire hazard in 1927. At that time, the city of Kokomo had already suffered the bankruptcy of the Haynes automobile company, and the county's farmers had fallen victim to the drastic drop in commodity prices that preceded other aspects of the Great Depression. Very fortunately, Fountain and Shelby counties did not have to wait for manufacturing jobs to arrive in order to secure employment for some of their residents and an adequate building for their government.<sup>14</sup> A further source of economic recovery was the farm price supports initiated under the New Deal.

**"The Cult of the Mural": The Fountain Courthouse Murals and Federal Politics in the Modern American Mural Movement, 1935-1940**<sup>15</sup>

The painting of murals for the Fountain County Courthouse required two years of research and planning, beginning with completion of the new building in 1937, and were executed in time for dedication in June, 1940. Eugene Savage, because of his established stature, was one of 11 artists in the nation not required to compete for supervision of the project. Further research might reveal that the Fountain County murals are among the most extensive in the nation, since one authority cites a mural of 2,400 feet as the upper end of American achievement in this art form.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For one private-sector project under the New Deal, see Eliza Steelwater, *Nomination of the Marcy Village Apartments (Indianapolis)*. A small-business owner completed the apartments in 1939, and they have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>13</sup> An incisive discussion of the formation of inter-governmental ties is in McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts*, esp 31-35.

<sup>14</sup> Dilts and Counts, *Magnificent 92 Indiana Courthouses*, 74-75.

<sup>15</sup> The phrase "cult of the mural" is McDonald's, *Federal Relief Administration*, 427.

<sup>16</sup> McDonald, *Federal Administration and the Arts*, 428. The mural in question was "Major Influences in Civilization," prepared for the Samuel Tilden High School, Brooklyn, New York. McDonald lists other examples nationwide in a footnote on page 430. Information about Savage's status is in Wagner, National Register Nomination manuscript of 1988.

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A rather obvious source of the proliferation of murals was the number of new building surfaces created by PWA and WPA funding. However, American public interest in mural art had already been stimulated by the Mexican mural movement that grew out of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros and other painters completed numerous commissions including murals in the United States during the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> The aesthetic credentials of these internationally acclaimed artists were never in question in spite of the left-wing views that often fueled their subject matter. However, anti-communism was prevalent in the United States to the extent that the Rockefeller family ordered the destruction of the Rivera mural they had commissioned for the Rockefeller Center. The issue, widely publicized in the press, was not Rivera's depiction of May Day (or International Workers' Day) but simply the inclusion of a portrait of Lenin. As to Eugene Savage's work, he cannot have been unaware of Mexican muralism, and the allegorical quality of his canvases for the Fountain County Courthouse relates to Mexican styles. However, Savage studied at the American Academy in Rome, which the Fine Arts Commission of the U. S. Treasury Department identified with "the established tradition built up by its pioneers [presumably meaning earlier American artists]" and "fostered" by the Academy.

The occasion for this comment from the Fine Arts Commission was a 1933 proposal by George Biddle, a classmate of Roosevelt's at Groton. Biddle's prospectus suggested that a group of "socially conscious" muralists should pattern themselves on the Mexican mural movement and paint for laborers' wages, but with nearly complete artistic freedom, on the walls of government buildings. The Commission declined the proposal, and Roosevelt distanced himself from it in responding to Biddle. However, when the Treasury Department was reorganized later in the same year, it was given a Procurement Division. One of the Division's responsibilities was receiving construction proposals, and by November 1933 the Civil Works Administration was created. Headed by Edward Bruce, a Treasury Department employee and established amateur artist, the CWA quickly initiated the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). Bruce moved in Biddle's and Roosevelt's social circles; unlike Biddle, he was conservative in outlook and pragmatic in practice. Although PWAP had already been launched in principle, Bruce went to Eleanor Roosevelt to solicit the inclusion of artists in the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935. In his letter, Bruce pointed to the commercial gain that France and Italy had received from its art. He tied in the European tradition of patronage while proposing that, under present circumstances, only the United States government could serve effectively as a patron. Such an approach was finely tuned to the perspective of its audience, hereditarily wealthy individuals who happened to be in political office or influential on those who were.

No doubt Bruce's successful request made it possible for the Fountain County commissioners to hire Eugene Savage, a local son, and to incorporate his canvases and the murals he supervised into the building of their new courthouse. Though bureaucratic in structure, the PWAP was highly successful in reaching the local level in every state of the Union, and public response was extremely enthusiastic. The record of PWAP, which was not limited to murals but included all forms of graphic and sculptural art, stands in contrast to the limitations of the later Federal Art Project under the WPA.<sup>18</sup> In the event, the Fountain County murals were a popular and artistic success that expressed the makers' faith in the adequacy of received wisdom about their own past. The closest to critical scrutiny were Savage's canvases, and these expressed admonition rather than any approach to radical thought. Savage, a successful working artist, was closer in outlook to Edward Bruce, a successful working bureaucrat, than to the ideologically motivated

<sup>17</sup> For an overview, see Laurance P. Hurlburt, *The Mexican Muralists in the United States* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), and Bruce Campbell, *Mexican Murals in Times of Crisis* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> McDonald, *Federal Administration and the Arts*, 363-368.

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George Biddle.

Art Deco Architecture and the Re-Emergence of Classicism, 1935-1940

The "stripped Classic" variant of Art Deco, as seen in the Fountain County courthouse, represents the confluence of several streams. The name "Art Deco" is specifically a shortening of the title of the 1925 Parisian *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (Fig. 8-3). Exhibits of several nations were included, but the exposition was not intended to be a World's Fair. Its thrust was to assert France's leadership in matters of taste. More of the work on display was interior design, fashion, fine art, and applied art rather than architecture. The emphasis was on richly decorated surfaces whose motifs drew on contemporaneous art movements such as Cubism, and self-consciously differed from both Art Nouveau and Classicism. Buildings were small and varied in design. The French ones did not put forward a unified new style, but suggested a tendency to emphasize surface over massing.

The conspicuous exceptions at the Paris exhibition were the Russians and, even more, Le Corbusier, whose exhibit was only grudgingly accepted. The Bauhaus design school opened in 1919, but Germans as World War I enemies of France were not invited to the Paris exposition. The Soviet pavilion and Corbusier's houses in International Style served as the only representatives of Bauhaus-inspired work. Also on exhibit in Corbusier's pavilion was a model of his proposed residential development. It was a massed phalanx of 18 cross-shaped towers enormous in height and scale, dwarfing all architecture around them in a space that Corbusier would have had cleared near the Seine. This

type of residential high-rise eventually did come to be built in Paris and many other cities around the world. In the end, International Style at all scales dominated the future of European architecture through the 1930s on, but did not gain wide acceptance in the United States until after World War II. Art Deco as architecture was much more important to Americans during the 1920s and 1930s.

It can be argued that the strength of American Deco architecture owed as much to American as to European high-style roots, so many of both that any summary such as this one must leave out most of the connections.<sup>19</sup> An important one, however, is the aesthetic of surface decoration and bold effects in color and massing advocated by the Englishman John Ruskin, whose writings influenced Frank Furness (1839-1912), of Philadelphia, and other American architects. Furness, in turn, was the teacher of Louis Sullivan (1856-1924). Sullivan is

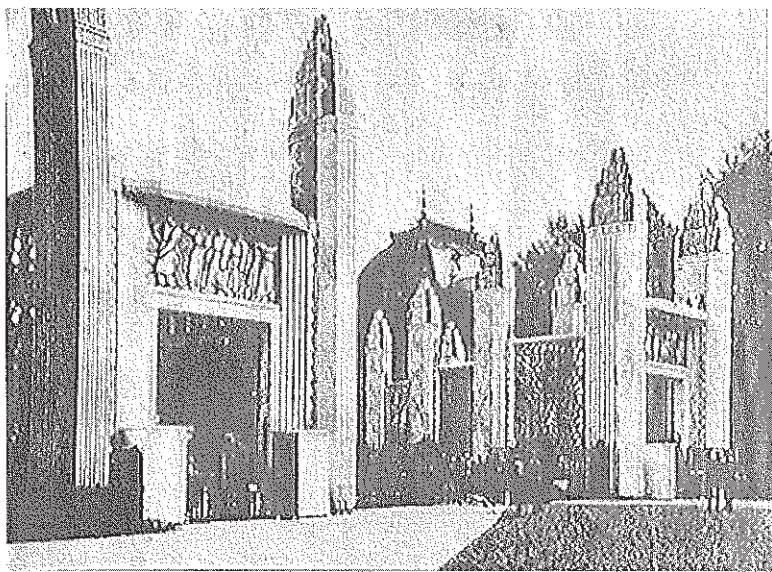


Fig. 8-3. *La Porte d'Honneur*, Paris Exposition of 1925. Courtesy of Arthur Chandler, online at <http://www.retropolis.net/exposition/aftermath.html>

identified by some with Art Nouveau and perhaps most widely known for his offering apprenticeship to Frank Lloyd

<sup>19</sup> Discussion in the following paragraph derives from Eva Weber, *Art Deco in America*, 47-50.



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Wright. Equally important is that Sullivan's ideas, writings, and buildings deeply affected the development of American architecture, including its skyscrapers. Central for Art Deco is Sullivan's belief that architecture should play a social and expressive role. This statement stands apart from the concepts of dignity, monumentality, and display of wealth that had filled the "social and expressive role" of architecture in earlier style periods, from Classical and Renaissance to Queen Anne and Neoclassical. In terms of skyscrapers, Sullivan's concept led to a concentration on appealing street-level design, including entry lobbies of fewer stories than the main building. Sullivan may have introduced, and certainly spread, the use of vertical window stacks separated by decorated spandrels. The complex massing and "soft ornament" of American Deco skyscrapers, built mostly during an urban building boom circa 1925-1931, was abetted by a 1916 New York zoning law requiring staggered heights for admitting more light at street level. Small towers and narrow pinnacles were often used to maintain emphasis on the vaunted tallness of these buildings, and these design elements lent themselves to both abstract and stylized organic decorative motifs, which were more easily assimilated visually at a distance than those of the Classical and Renaissance periods.

A counterbalancing influence on American Deco architecture, especially pertinent to the Fountain County Courthouse, is Beaux-Arts classicism. Frank Furness studied in the atelier of Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1925), who was the first American to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. As discussed above in describing the Fountain County courthouse, the links between 1930s Deco and the Beaux-Arts Neoclassical are readily apparent, and culminated in the style referred to in this report as "stripped Classic." A chief American progenitor was Bertram Goodhue (1869-1924). Goodhue's design for the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln, which evolved through design and construction over decades, can be given the dates 1920-1922 (Fig. 8-4). In the opinion of Deco scholar Eva Weber, the exterior of the Nebraska capitol "fundamentally established the prototype for governmental construction in the classical moderne [i.e., stripped Classic] style."<sup>20</sup> In this one building can be seen several features of the Fountain County Courthouse exterior, namely detail placed only at strategic points, spandrel window stacks, cruciform windows (in the wings), and an entry court that concentrates interest at the ground level.

Most closely comparable to the Fountain County courthouse is that of Shelby County, also built with PWA funding in 1936-1937 (Fig. 8-5). Its project cost was somewhat higher than that of Fountain County at \$253,584. The Shelby Courthouse has dimensions of 75 by 150 feet, with ground, first, and second floors plus a partial third floor to accommodate the two courtrooms (circuit and superior) that the building contains. The construction method of the two courthouses is similar, and both share exterior elevations organized as grouped pilasters separated by two floors of spandrel windows. The entry court is less successful than that of the Fountain courthouse, besides lacking comparable art pieces. The main entry to the Shelby courthouse, three doors wide, is placed within a recessed center section. Each door, however, is given a projecting surround within the recess.

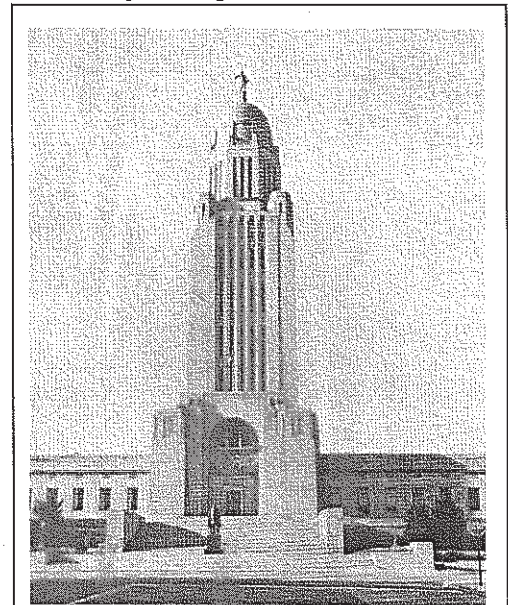


Fig. 8-4. Nebraska state capitol, north (principal) facade with entry court. Source: Weber, *Art Deco*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Weber, *Art Deco in America*, 59-64; 59 for quotation; 59-60 for detail on the Nebraska capitol.

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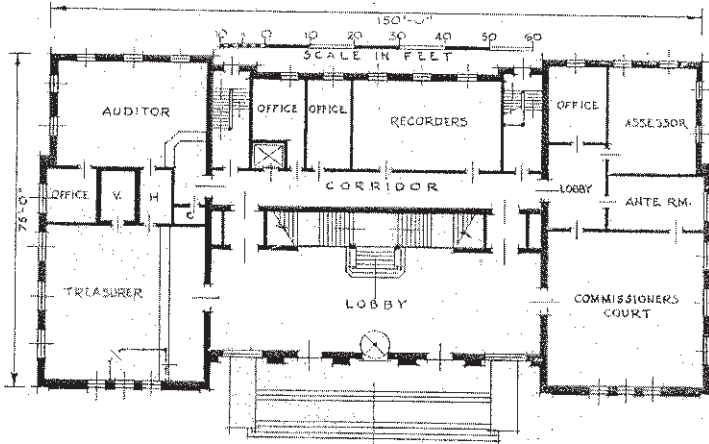
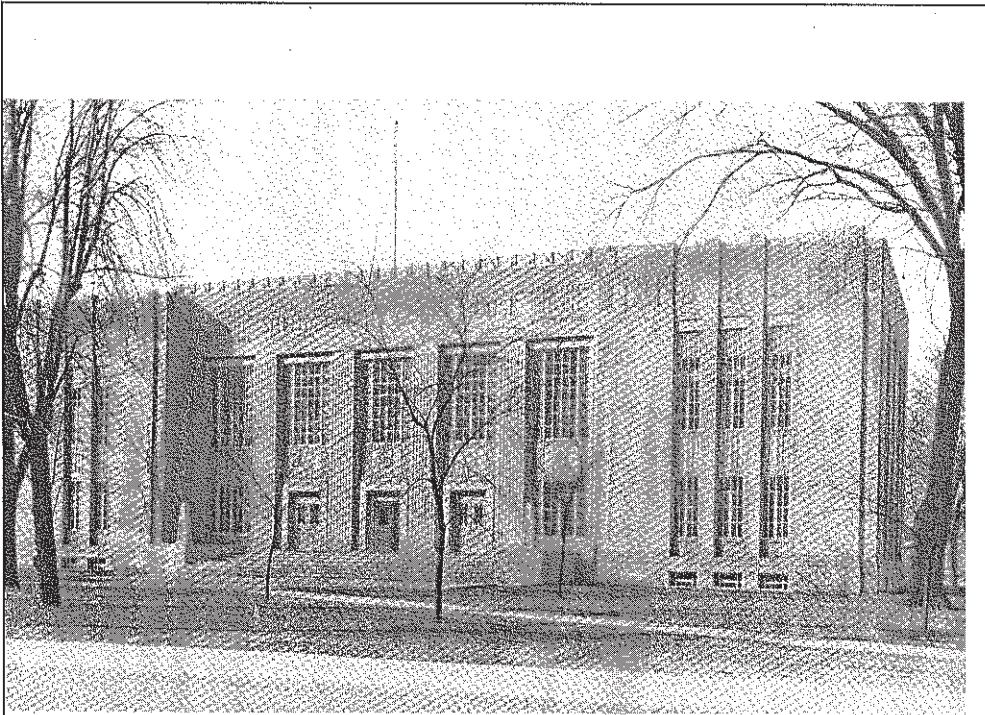


Fig. 8-5. Shelby County Courthouse, Shelbyville, Indiana. Architects: D. A. Bohlen and Son. *Source:* Short and Stanley-Brown, *Public Buildings*, 42.

The lobby of the Shelby building is high ceilinged but split into two stories, and does not have the intent or effect of focusing the public area as does the main stair of the Fountain courthouse. Corridors are sequestered behind the wall of the split stair with its decorative, open metal balustrade. The building has no light well. However, the triple exterior opening, coffered lobby ceiling with bright fixtures in each compartment, and end rooms with full-glass, transomed doubled doors create a light-filled space with many details to attract the eye. The lobby floor is marble block in a herringbone pattern, and extensive stone trim is green-streaked marble. Both interior and exterior have a more complete scheme of carved ornament than those of the Fountain courthouse. In contrast to the focused intimacy of the Fountain courthouse's main space, the Shelby courthouse creates an expansive main space, hiding numerous work spaces behind the main staircase. Notably, the rear elevation, though massed similarly to the front, is unadorned to the point of homeliness. The Fountain and Shelby courthouses could be said to have shared the circumstance of a tight budget while retaining the desire for an impressive effect. The two respective teams of architects chose contrasting treatments to make that effect. Shelby's

design may be the more serviceable, while Fountain's, with its deep integration of artwork and architecture, is surely the more original.

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**MAPS AND DRAWINGS**

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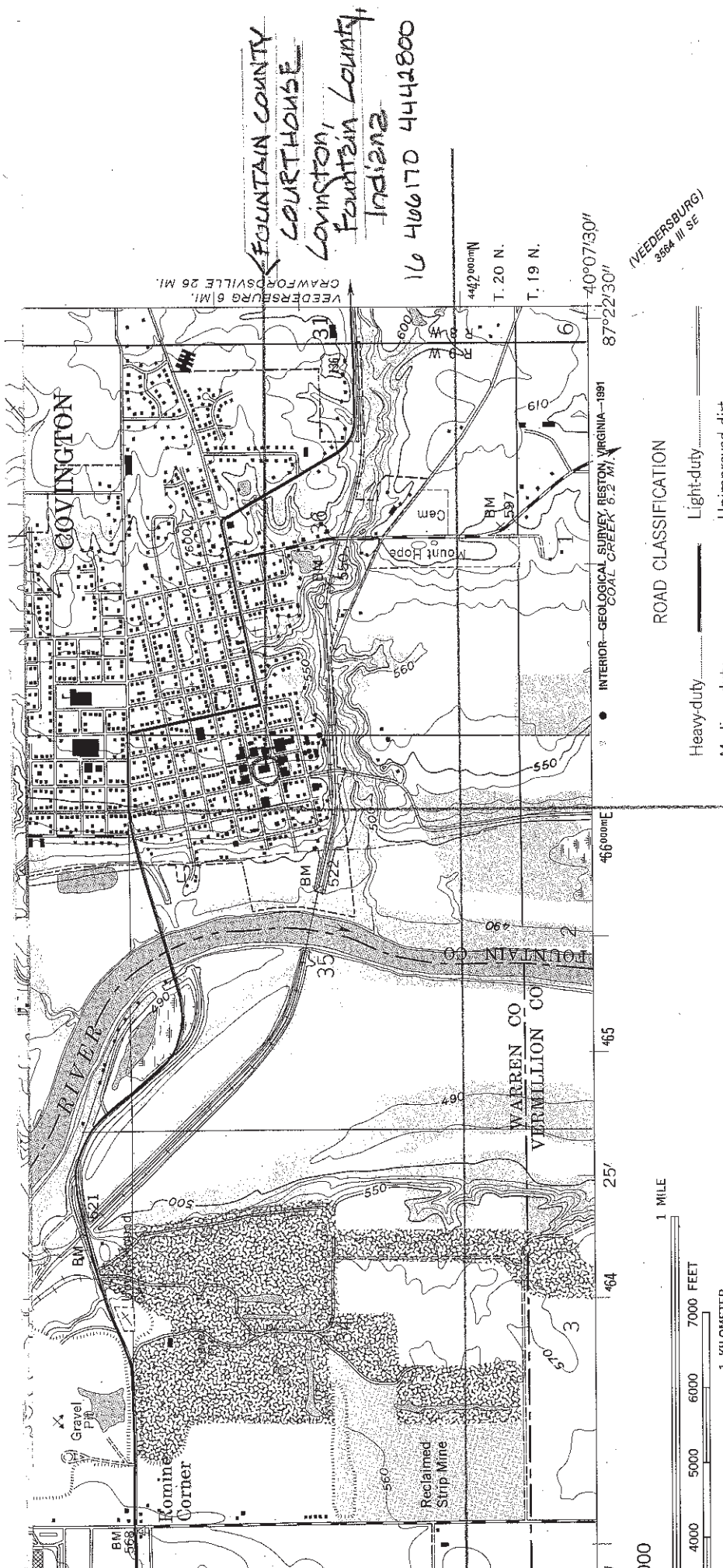
**10. Geographical Data**

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the Fountain County Courthouse is defined as part of the E 1/2 of the NE 1/4, Section 35, T20 R9. The area of the courthouse square was platted as one square block. It extends to the edge of the street on all sides, measuring approximately 176 feet on the north, 234 feet on the east, 172 feet on the south, and 233 feet on the west. Additional to these measurements are paved and sodded, polygonal parking guides protruding about 15 feet from each corner of the block. See site map at a scale of approximately 1" = 75 feet for alternative description.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the courthouse building and its grounds, which formed parts of an entity soon after the beginning of the history of Covington as the Fountain county seat.



FOUNTAIN COUNTY  
 COURTHOUSE  
 Covington,  
 Fountain County  
 Indiana  
 16 4166170 4442800

COVINGTON, IND.  
 40087-B4-TF-024  
 1958  
 REVISED 1991  
 DMA 3564 III NW-SERIES V851

ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
 Heavy-duty  
 Medium-duty  
 Light-duty  
 Unimproved dirt  
 U. S. Route  
 State Route

QUADRANGLE LOCATION  
 INDIANA  
 Revisions compiled in cooperation with State of Indiana agencies from aerial photographs taken 1987 and other sources. Contours not revised. This information not field checked  
 Map edited 1991  
 MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 20092,  
 ESOURCES, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204  
 AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST  
 SCALE 10 FEET  
 5-FOOT CONTOURS  
 DATUM OF 1929  
 1 MILE  
 7000 FEET  
 6000  
 5000  
 4000  
 1 KILOMETER