

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

10.07 Final

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 Vermillion County Courthouse

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_ 165-459-11021

2. Location

street & number 255 South Main Street N/A  not for publication  
city or town Newport N/A  vicinity  
state Indiana code IN county Vermillion code 165 zip code 57990

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

10/28/07  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Vermillion County Courthouse  
Name of Property

Vermillion IN  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

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

- building
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	1	structures
0	6	objects
1	7	Total

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

N/A

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

0

**6. Function or Use**

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

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

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

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

**7. Description**

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

19th & 20th c. REVIVALS: Classical Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls STONE: Limestone

roof CONCRETE

other METAL

**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 through G with checkboxes and descriptions.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1925-1957

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bayard, John B. (architect)

Fillinger, Halbert L. (engineer)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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:



Vermillion County Courthouse  
Name of Property

Vermillion IN  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

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

1	16	465000	4414820
	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 07-16-2007  
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 Vermillion County, c/o Auditor  
street & number 255 South Main Street telephone 765/ 492-3570  
city or town Newport state IN zip code 57990

**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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**National Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

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

**SUMMARY**

The Vermillion County courthouse (built 1923-1925) is located in the county seat of Newport (pop. 557) in west-central Indiana. The formerly agricultural and coal-mining county is sparsely populated, with a majority living in small towns and working in nearby counties. Newport's much-altered town square, where the courthouse is located, never completely filled in with businesses. Streets intersect at the square's corners, and two of these streets are now regional connector roads. The courthouse square has walkways and is planted in lawn with young trees and other recent landscaping as well as several non-contributing objects. The three-story courthouse is the county's fourth, and was designed by Halbert L. Fillinger and John B. Bayard, both practicing in southwest Indiana, in late Classical Revival style. The building's dimensions are approximately 92 by 120 feet. The building is constructed on a reinforced concrete foundation, with concrete floors and roof and walls of structural brick faced with limestone. The whole is supported and braced with a complex system of I-beams. The flat roof contains an art-glass skylight. The exterior is strikingly symmetrical. All four elevations are nearly identical except in length. The upper two stories carry a centered group of engaged, two-story Greek Corinthian columns. The columns, separated by windows, are placed in a shallow recess flanked by flat-surfaced planes to create a three-part facade. The flat planes have three windows each, casements with a fixed transom. The upper two stories rise above a rusticated ground-floor story, which contains the building's four identical doorways. Sparing ornament from the Classical and Renaissance vocabulary is centered on and above these entries. The most striking detail is a clock in operating condition atop each parapet wall. Windows have heavy replacement aluminum framing in a dark finish that creates a greater visual emphasis than the original while reproducing its proportions.

Three entries from the exterior open only onto the ground floor. The fourth, or west, entry leads to a split-flight marble staircase rising to the top floor. The courthouse interior is organized around a square light well defined by four structural piers. A second set of four lighter piers, supporting segmental arches, create a colonnade between the light well and the offices on the north side of the building. This scheme continues on all three floors, with the upper floors having a closed balustrade around the light well and the ground floor an open lobby space. The south side, on ground floor and top floor, is dominated by two large spaces containing an auditorium and a courtroom respectively. The remaining space on all floors is subdivided into offices, meeting rooms, rest rooms, and miscellaneous chambers, most having an exterior view. The capitals of piers and pilasters increase in decorative intricacy from ground floor through first and second floors. Cornices throughout the interior consist of bands of Classical motifs probably formed from pre-made panels. Interior surfaces achieve continuity through a marble-trimmed terrazzo floor and a marble wainscot, above which the walls, piers, and pilasters are plastered and painted gray. Plaster ceilings are painted white. The courtroom is paneled and trimmed in brown-finished oak with original judge's bench and ornamented plaster ceilings.

The courthouse is in good condition inside and out, with minor deterioration. The most noticeable loss of integrity occurs in the ground-floor auditorium, which has lost its theater seating and received a dropped ceiling (probably reversible; photograph 12). The stage including proscenium is original. Otherwise, alterations are relatively few and detract little from the historic ambience of the interior.

<sup>1</sup> Portions of the Sec. 7 and Sec. 8 narratives are paraphrased or quoted without attribution in two other courthouse nominations, Fountain and Warren counties, submitted at the same time by the present author.

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Section 7 Page 2

Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

SETTING AND SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Vermillion County, 257 square miles in extent, is bounded on the west by the Indiana-Illinois border, on the north by Warren County, on the east by the Wabash River (across from Fountain and Parke counties), and on the south by Vigo County (Fig. 7-1). The county's name is spelled with two L's to distinguish it from adjacent Vermilion County, Illinois. The county is unusually narrow, with one vertical row of five townships. Elevations above sea level in the county range from about 660 to 480 feet. Terrain in the Newport vicinity includes the broad, relatively level valley created by the Wabash, Vermilion, and Little Vermilion rivers. The valley runs north to south on the county's east side, diminishing in width south of the Little Vermilion. West and south of this level terrain is a serrated topography of stream-created ridges and clefts. At the center of the county is a formerly prairie, or treeless, area, of thick loess soil. Most of the county's soil is loess over glacial till, with a band of alluvial and glacial outwash soils along the Wabash River.<sup>2</sup> The Wabash, draining some two-thirds of Indiana's lands from northeast to southwest, determined part of the route of the Wabash and Erie Canal, of importance to commerce in the early 19th century.

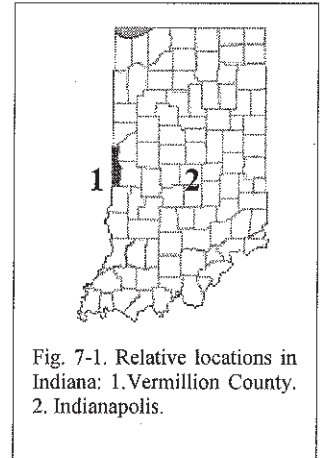


Fig. 7-1. Relative locations in Indiana: 1. Vermillion County. 2. Indianapolis.

Vermillion County, one of 92 in Indiana, has a population of 16,645. This number represents only 0.03 percent of Indiana's population and is expected to continue slowly decreasing. Over half the county's population, or 58.4 percent, live in small incorporated settlements. Vermillion County lacks a direct freeway connection leading to the Indiana capital of Indianapolis, and travelers or trucked freight must cover 10 to over 20 miles to connect to I-74 on the north or I-70 on the south. Over half of employed Vermillion County residents work outside the county, with most going to the nearby metropolitan areas of Terre Haute, Indiana, and Danville, Illinois. In the historically agricultural county of Vermillion, today a leading source of employment at 13.2 per cent of jobs is manufacturing, including those from an Eli Lilly Pharmaceuticals facility. The number of farm proprietors in 2005 was 254, compared to 972 at the start of the Great Depression in 1930.<sup>3</sup>

The county seat, Newport (platted 1824), is centrally sited north to south within the county. Newport lies near the eastern edge of the county, filling a narrow valley neck between the Little Vermilion on the north and a range of hills on the south that rise about 100 feet in one-half mile. The town abuts, and is oriented to, the Little Vermilion. This river joins the Wabash a few miles east of town. Newport is one of the county's smaller towns, with a population of 557 compared to the largest settlement, Clinton, at 4,906. Newport's town square, centered within the original town plat, is a Shelbyville Square plan, with streets intersecting at corners. The square is bounded by Vermillion Street on the west, Extension Street on the north, Main Street on the east, and Market Street on the south. (See site map included with this document.) Main connects north and south to a local road, N350E, that bridges the Little Vermillion River. Presently, the town's regional connector is SR 63, from which a spur road enters the town going eastward along Market Street. Newport is located via SR 63 some 30 miles north of Terre Haute, Indiana. At about an equal distance is Danville, Illinois, to the north-northwest, reached by SR 63 and I-64. Indianapolis, the state capital,

<sup>2</sup> Topographic detail is provided by the Newport Quadrangle, Indiana, 7.5 minute series topographic map included with this document. For soils, see 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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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

is 95 road miles away to the east.

Elevation of the Newport town square, location of the county courthouse, is about 500 feet. Facing the courthouse on three sides, zero-lot-line facades are a mixture of historic buildings circa late 1800s, altered in varying degrees, and modern intrusions. These blocks include one parking lot and one open green space. The south or Market Street block is occupied by a modern building with setback and parking lot. The town square itself is somewhat cluttered. Non-contributing modern objects include a small wooden building or decorative shed, a statue, a war memorial including several flagpoles, and four replacement street lamps (photographs 1 and 5). Within the square, paved concrete walks lead from the courthouse doors on all four sides to the outer or streetside sidewalk. The walks are level, except for a south-side ramp for handicapped access. Steps connecting the walk to the sidewalk level vary in number because the sidewalk elevation drops from south to north.

The courthouse measures approximately 92 by 120 feet in plan and 50 feet in elevation from ground level to top of parapet. The building is symmetrically placed within the town square and is oriented with its long axis north-south (photographs 1-5 and site map). The courthouse grounds, which are included in the nomination, extend to the street edges on all four sides. The grounds contain one non-contributing structure and 7 non-contributing objects. The exterior and interior of the courthouse building, unique in the county, are historically and architecturally significant and contributing.

## ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

### Style and Structural Elements

Variations within the Beaux Arts tradition, drawing on both Greco-Roman and Renaissance features, were popular in Indiana from the 1880s to about 1940.<sup>1</sup> "Beaux Arts" also describes a style that was used for Indiana courthouses and other public buildings simultaneously with its near relations, Classical Revival or Neoclassical and Italian Revival (also known as Renaissance Revival). Examples of these styles share such elements as domes, pediments, multi-storied columns in a Classical order, round-topped arches, and rusticated stone finishes. The difference among the styles might better be described in terms of overall effect rather than design elements—Beaux Arts exuberance, its multiplicity of features and ornament on any one building; Italian Revival emphasis on Renaissance elements (quoining, recessed columns, small upper-story windows); Classical Revival restraint, wherein a limited number of features from the tradition's vocabulary are developed in any one building.

The Vermillion County courthouse was constructed 1923-1925. Engineer Halbert F. Fillinger and architect John F. Bayard, both local to the region, collaborated in designing the building. It is a simply styled but structurally complex late example of the Classical Revival as seen in several Indiana courthouses of the 1920s. The courthouse rests on a reinforced concrete foundation of continuous footing with piers. Its framework combines self-supporting brick exterior walls with a system of vertical and horizontal I-beams (Fig. 7-2).

<sup>1</sup>Stylistic discussion from John C. Poppeliers et al, *What Style Is It?*, 66-71.



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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

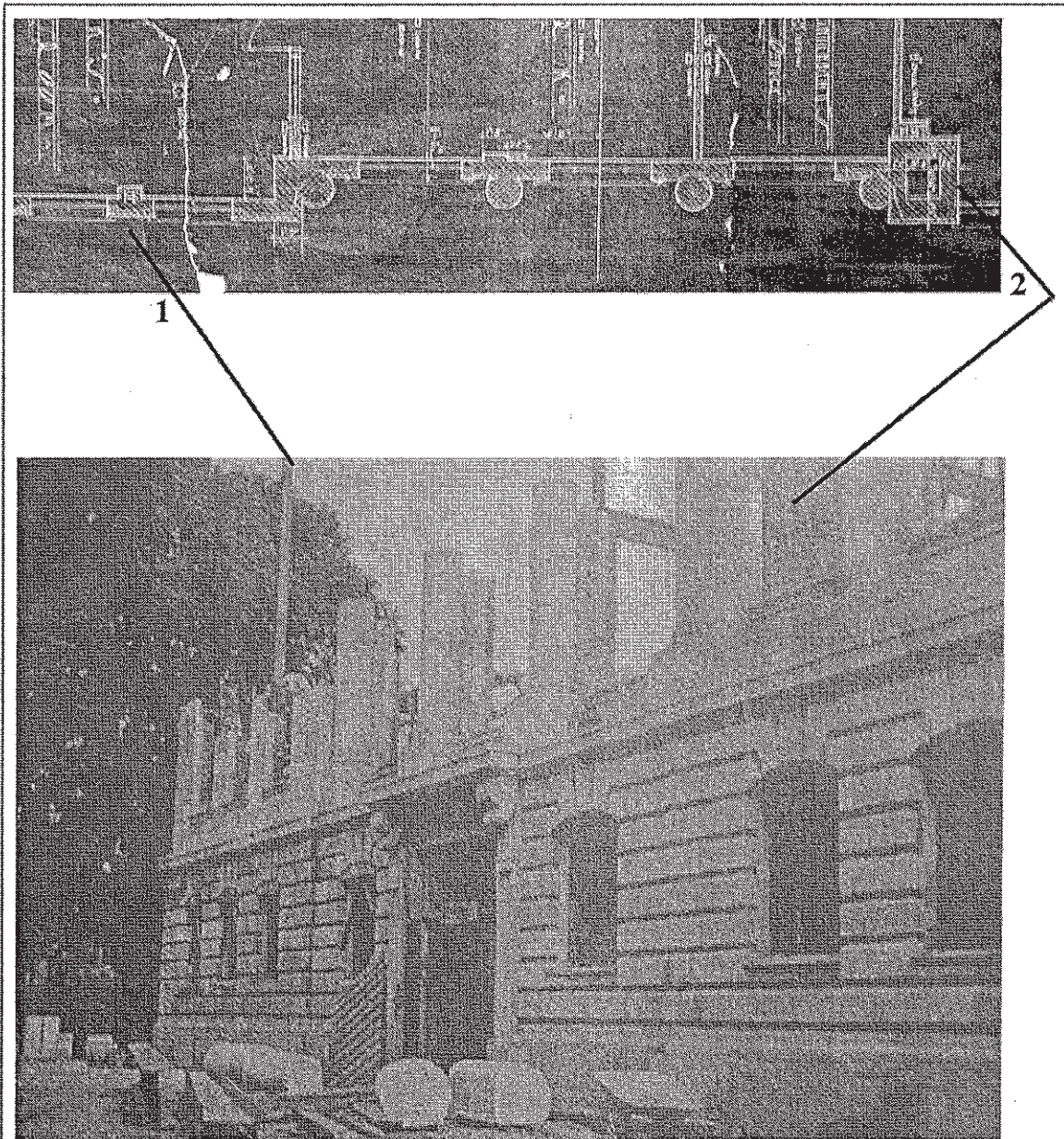


Fig. 7-2. Construction detail, north end: 1) vertical beam to be encased in brick; 2) structural brick duct. Pattern of diagonal lines indicates brick; diagonal hatching is limestone. *Source:* Drawings and Documents Archive, College of Architecture and Planning, Ball State University. Architect's drawing (1923) courtesy of Vermillion County Surveyor.



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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

The photograph in Figure 7-3 is a construction overview, seen from the roof, of the Sullivan County courthouse designed by Bayard in 1926. The proportions and arrangement of space of the Sullivan and Vermillion buildings are similar, consisting of blocks of office space partially surrounding a glass-roofed center light well. The Vermillion light well is a covered four-column (or Tuscan-style) atrium. The Sullivan light well is a rotunda whose circular formwork can be seen in the photograph, both just below the roof and at the level of the two floors below. In both buildings, the heaviest I-beams are placed horizontally, running north and south to support the floors and roof of reinforced concrete. There are two sets of I beams separated by a lighter set of beams across the center section where the light well is placed.

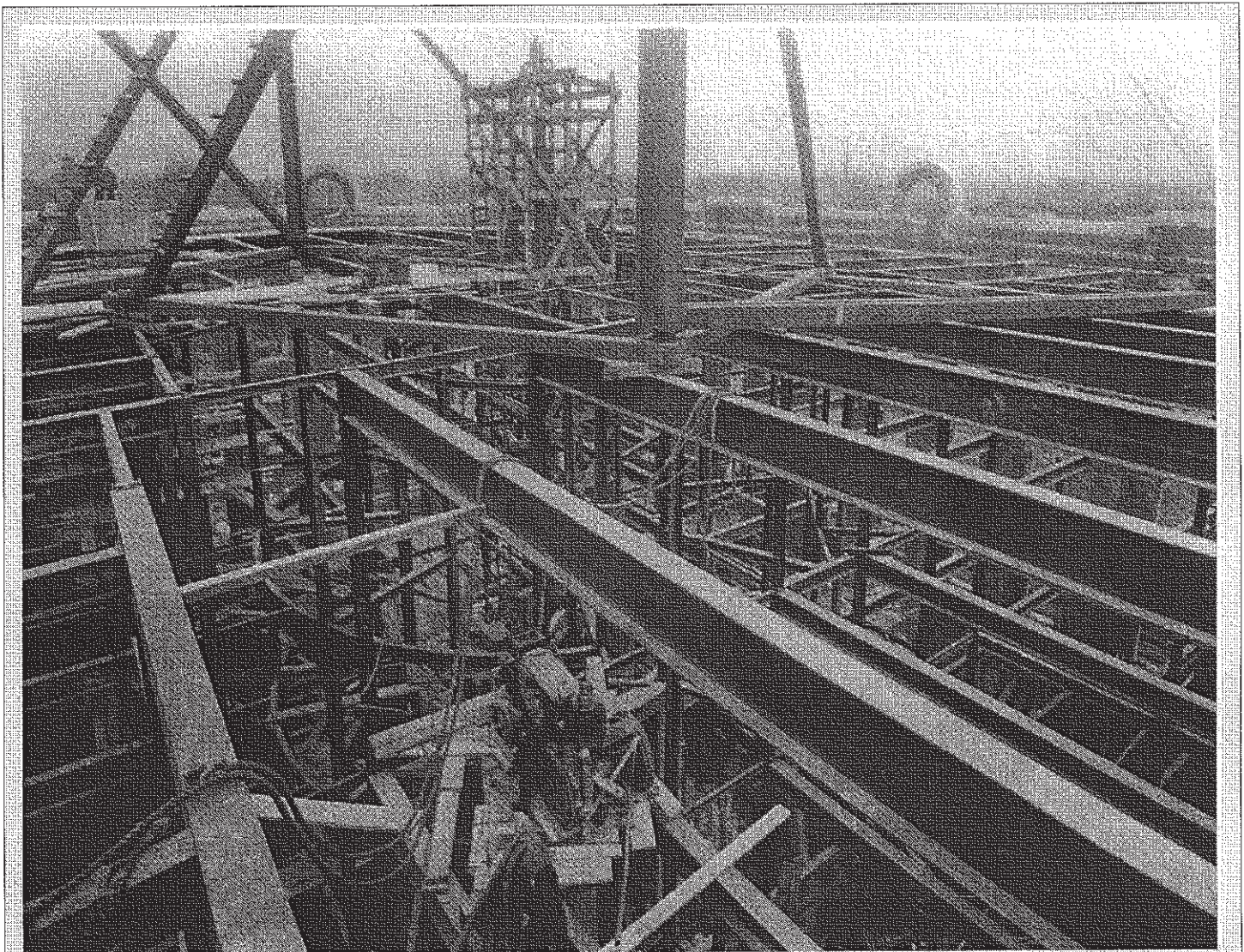


Fig. 7-3. Sullivan County Courthouse under construction, c. 1926; structural framework as viewed from roof.  
*Source:* Drawings and Documents Archive, College of Architecture and Planning, Ball State University.



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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

Exterior Details

Opposite facades of the courthouse are identical to the point that a main entrance is difficult to ascertain from outside (photos 4, 5). Each of the four doorways is the same, and even the words "Vermillion County Courthouse," incised in capital letters with serifs and Roman-style U's, appear on the frieze of both east and west facades. On the north and south sides, flat-faced, undecorated roundels, one above each column, project slightly from the frieze. All stone facing, ornament, and columns are of matching buff-colored Indiana limestone with a plain mill finish.

**Organization and upper floors.** The organization of each facade is a rusticated base story surmounted by two additional floors unified in design. The two upper stories form a flat plane flanking a centered set of bays, either three (north and south sides) or five (east and west sides). These slightly recessed bays are occupied by vertically aligned windows marking each of the two upper floors. The bays are separated by evenly spaced, two-story, engaged columns. Their capitals are executed with notable correctness in the Greek Corinthian style. The columns, whose shafts are not fluted, stand on 2-foot-tall plinths. Window openings on the flanking planes of the upper stories are rectangular, approximately 8 feet tall by 4 feet wide over a narrow stone molding serving as sill. Sash is composed of two vertically oriented, non-opening lights beneath a fixed transom. Windows in the bays between columns alternate between more and less elaboration (Fig 7-3). Only certain panels on the replacement windows are openable. Bays on

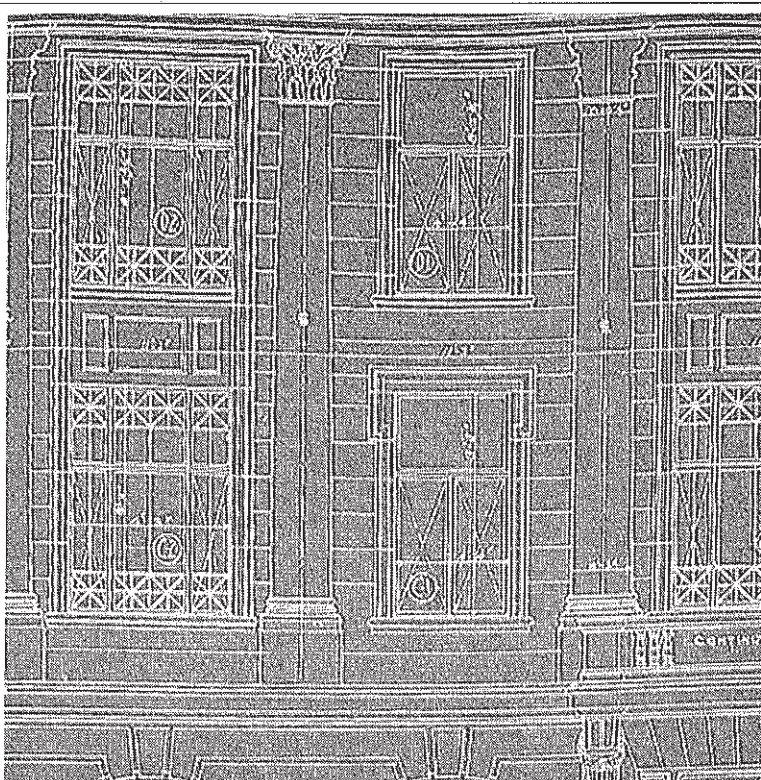


Fig. 7-3. Detail of upper windows and columns from architect's drawing (1923) for east and west elevations. Replacement sash has fewer openable lights. Fragility of the 3x4 ft. sheet prohibited flattening in order to photograph. Drawings courtesy of the Vermillion County Surveyor.

east and west facades have three larger windows per floor separated by columns and by two smaller windows. The smaller windows are similar to those on the facade's flanking plane, but are set within a stone frame of elongated blocks with outer edges raised in section. The window crown of the center or "first" floor is elaborated with a shouldered surround. On the narrower north and south facades, all three windows are of the elaborated type, also separated by attached columns.

These featured windows, identical on all four elevations, are of intricate design, with windows on the two floors linked by a paneled spandrel (Fig. 7-3). Main sash bars divided the original sash into a fixed panel above with three lights below in 1:2:1 vertical proportion. The lights were further divided by thinner muntins, creating a total of 20 lights at 4:5 vertical to horizontal proportion. The top and bottom four squares thus created were divided into eight sections each by starburst muntins. When the sash frames and main bars were replaced by heavier, fixed elements, this separate finer division was retained on the inside. The lower panel of the outer lights are openable as in the original design. Below a number of first-floor windows are metal panels, not on the architect's drawings, evidently



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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

added for circulation of air.<sup>5</sup>

**Entablature and parapet.** Above the upper story and resting on the attached columns, a plain entablature runs the entire circumference of the building. Uncut modillions support the corona, or overhanging element of the cornice (upper left corner of Fig. 7-4). The cornice is topped by a closed parapet, with metal-covered coping, some 4 feet high. The parapet is simply paneled with slight changes in projection and raised pier-like segments emphasizing the corners of the building and the inner corners of the flanking wall planes.

A principal locus of exterior decoration is the clock centered above each parapet (photograph 3). A circular stone frame, raised about two-thirds of its circumference above the parapet rail, is composed of rows of concave molding extending from the circle to form horizontal termini. These short arms are "supported," for decorative purposes, by pilaster-like paneled elements descending to the base level of the parapet. Within this outer molding is a roundel of reeded molding, wrapped in four crossed bands, suggestive of the bundled rods of the Roman fasces. This circle immediately encloses the clock face, designed with metal Roman numerals framed by rings. The numerals radiate in orientation from the center point of the clock face, which is white. The materials of the clock face are unknown, but evidently include iron that has streaked the parapet below with rust. Below the circular molding is a carved garland or festoon representing strung-together blossoms tied with ribbons, allowing the ends of the garland to hang down.

**Base story and entry doors.** The rusticated base story, where the four entry doors are located, is composed of eight raised panels of one course each, with narrow, recessed alternating courses. This design results in courses marked in the horizontal direction only by squared depressions and rounded shoulders. The base story meets ground level with a slightly protruding, taller base course. The base story is strongly demarcated from the two stories above not only by the change from rusticated to flat-faced stonework but also by a raised belt course, plain with a cap course above and moldings below. All windows in the base story are of identical size and design, segmentally arched. Three windows in the base story beneath each of the facade's flanking planes are centered within that plane and equidistant from each other (photographs 4 and 5). The window openings, approximately 3.5 by 5 feet tall, are segmentally arched. Three rusticated voussoirs do not span the whole arch, and are supplemented at each end by a specially cut block in one of the horizontal courses to simulate croisettes (lower left of Fig. 7-4). Metal-framed sash is inset to the depth of the blocks and consists of two vertically oriented, non-opening lights beneath a fixed transom. Originally, the lights were outswinging casements. Some ground floor "transoms" retain the decorated metal infill called for in the architect's drawings. The east and west facades on this story also have pairs of windows aligned with the bays above; the north and south facades have single windows. A sub-basement below ground has square one-light windows in light wells.

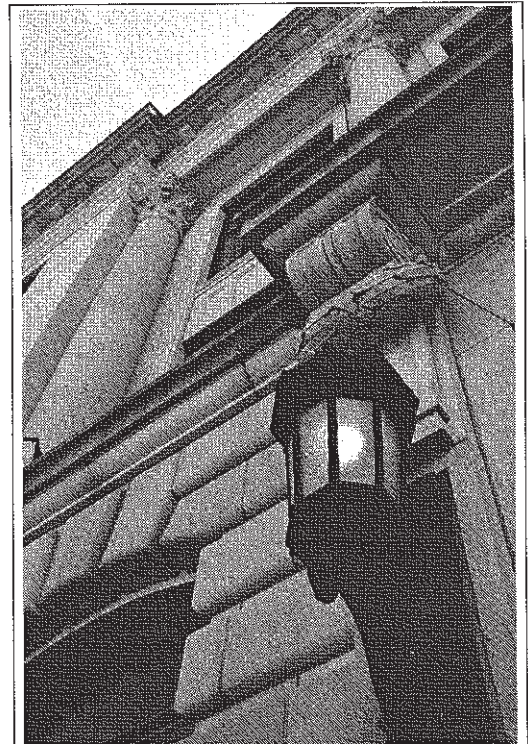


Fig. 7-4. Details of Classically organized facade, viewed upward from doorway on right.

<sup>5</sup> Figure 7-3 is from sheet no. 8 of the architect's drawings (1923), archived with all other remaining sheets in the office of the Vermillion County Surveyor, Newport, Indiana.



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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

The 8-foot-6-inch wide, double-batten entry doors are fully glazed within heavy bronze framing that divides the transom, double openable doors, and sidelights into proportions similar to those of the elaborated upper-floor windows described above (photograph 2). These door elements are recessed, with paneled sides, some 3 feet to the depth of the faced structural brick. The door, at nearly 15 feet tall, rests on a ground-level concrete apron that becomes the walkway, either a ramp or steps leading down to the public sidewalk depending on the rise of ground. On the east or west facade at least, as is known from an undated historical photograph, the top of the cheek walls were adorned with footed concrete planting urns.<sup>6</sup>

The limestone door surround consists of plain jambs beneath a flat arch with flared jacks. The lower end of the jambs are treated as part of the base course (photograph 2 at bottom center). Decorative, barely projecting pilasters flank the door jambs. The pilasters rise from the plane of the base course to support wall lamps and a balconet between two columns at floor level of the floor above (Fig. 7-5). The pilasters are detailed with raised edges. The balconet is fashioned as a balustrade, with turned balusters and a pedestal at each end. Circular stain marks suggest a missing element that is not, however, shown in the architect's drawings. The balconet is supported by vertically oriented scrolled brackets. The brackets, arising from the pilasters, are detailed as a scrolled-top triglyph. A swag of leaves (probably representing laurel, with a berry), bound at center with crossed bands, emerges from the upper corners of the brackets. The wall lamps, similar in decoration to interior ceiling fixtures, are probably original; outlets to 300 watts at entries are shown on the ground-floor plan drawing. These entry lamps with their rather domestic informality, French Eclectic in feeling, compete awkwardly with the austere classicism of surrounding details and the building's exterior as a whole.

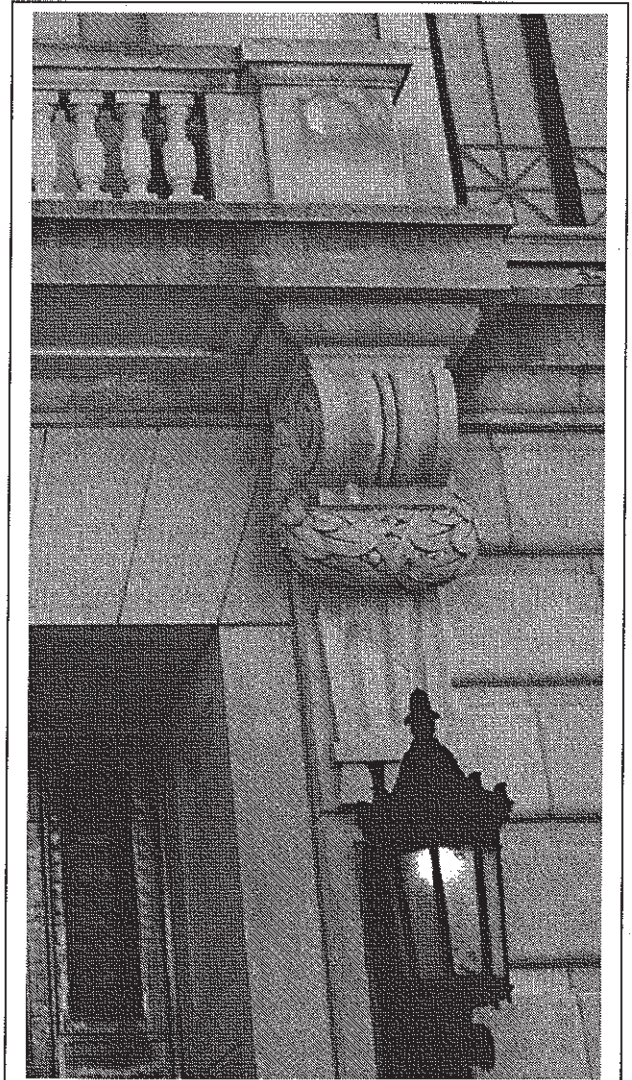


Fig. 7-5. detail of doorway bracket supporting balconet.

### Interior Details

**Surfaces.** The interior of the courthouse is unified by floor, wall, and ceiling treatments used throughout (photographs 6, 8, 10, 11; Fig. 7-6.). Floors are warm gray terrazzo enriched by bands of streaked pink marble outlining piers, pilasters, and wall bases and running plumb with the ceiling beams above. Interior stair steps in entry corridors and between floors are of streaked, light-gray marble. Bases of piers, pilasters, balustrades, and a great majority of walls are treated with a waist-high wainscot of gray-streaked white marble trimmed at the top by a slightly projecting plain

<sup>6</sup> Courtesy of Sherrie A. Koma, Vermillion County Auditor.



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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

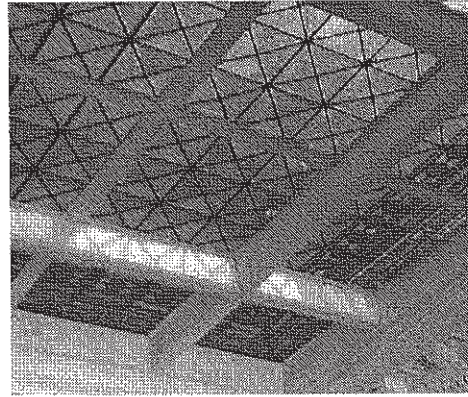
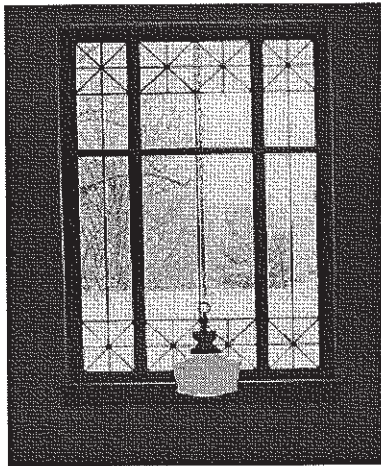


Fig. 7-6. Continuity of detail: window muntins (left) and those of skylight glass (right).

band trim of the same marble. The wainscot's 12-inch base trim is of white-streaked black marble. Above the wainscot, walls are gray-painted plaster over various structural materials described in the "Style and Structural Elements" section above. The wall-ceiling junctions have a molding of the same depth as beams that connect them to piers. The molding is prefabricated in an unknown material, with runs of repeating ornament, such as acanthus leaves, that do not match those of the light well. Ceilings, unaltered in height or material, are white-painted plaster. Interior paint colors are probably not those originally chosen. Period ceiling light fixtures, probably original, are

simple globes with minimal or no decorative metal. The fixtures, hanging from chains, are centered on each segment of the ceiling, emphasizing its pattern of cross-beams. Fixtures of the same design hang down over the stairs. Wood trim around office doors, paneling, and fixed furnishings within the third-floor courtroom, are brown-varnished oak. Windows to the exterior are plastered or drywalled with no trim. This treatment, in plaster, may be original given that the original casement sash was steel.

**Skylight, light well, and main piers.** Each of the three interior floors of the courthouse is centered on a square formed by four heavy compound piers, each 3 feet in diameter, containing beams set in gypsum block. The set of piers, 14.5 feet on center, surrounds the skylight embedded in the flat roof two stories above. Photograph 10 is a view across the light well on the first floor skylight trim. In the foreground is a pier of smaller diameter defining the colonnade at the south side of the light well (photograph 8). On the ground floor, the space between piers is open to foot traffic. On the two upper floors, the piers are connected by a waist-high closed balustrade.

The skylight can be viewed from all floors (photograph 9). It is divided visually into 16 sections, supported by four intersecting crossbeams plus two intersecting muntins that appear to be metal. All dividers are painted white. The glass is decorated with a border of polychromed bands, filled with repeating geometric shapes.

The shaft, base, and wainscot of light-well piers are detailed with stepped-back faces (Fig. 7-7). These and all piers, pilasters, and light-well moldings are decorated in an ascending order of enrichment at the ground floor, first floor, and second floor. The ground floor capitals are composed of a series of moldings suggestive of the Doric order adapted for a square capital. This composition of moldings is continued along the tops of walls and along the beams connecting spans between capitals, and between capitals and pilasters set into the walls. On the first floor, the capitals are decorated with an egg-and-dart molding between cavetto moldings. The design of the wall moldings and the ceiling molding of the light well on this floor are unrelated in appearance or origin to the capital. Rather, these moldings are a textbook example of Roman Doric entablature (Fig. 8-8a). The moldings were probably purchased pre-formed in fibrous plaster panels or a similar proprietary material and installed by tradesmen known as "decorative



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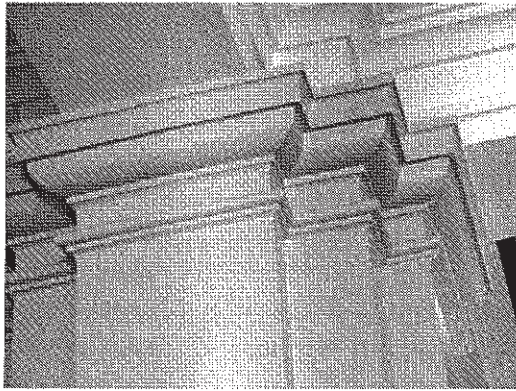
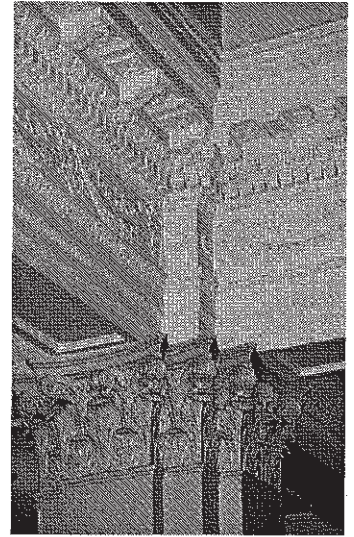


Fig. 7-7. Treatment of interior capitals and moldings by floor. Left to right: Ground floor, first floor, second floor.



plasterers," who installed pre-formed units as well as executing custom work.<sup>7</sup> As shown in Fig. 7-7b, the second-floor capitals are Greek Corinthian in inspiration. The cornice of the architraves above these capitals is based on the Roman Corinthian order, with modillions, egg-and-dart molding, and dentils. The frieze substitutes a swag for the elaborate figure work of Roman exemplars.

**Secondary structural piers; pilasters; connecting beams and arches.** A second set of 4 structural piers south of the light well visually demarcates a 7.5-foot-wide corridor between piers and the front wall of offices that occupy the north side of each interior floor. The corridor provides extra floor space and preserves the symmetry of three sides of the space outside the light well at just over 10 feet wide. As shown in photograph 8, these secondary piers on the corridor side are treated as a pier plus a pilaster, the whole approximately 2 feet wide by 1.5 feet deep in plan. All pilasters reach full height from floor to ceiling beam. Their capitals are treated similarly to those of freestanding piers. The arch, "furred and plastered" according to the architect's drawings, abuts a crossbeam above. The shallow arch is also used over corridor entries and stair portals

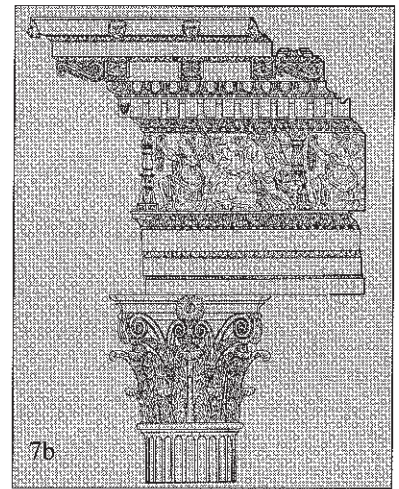
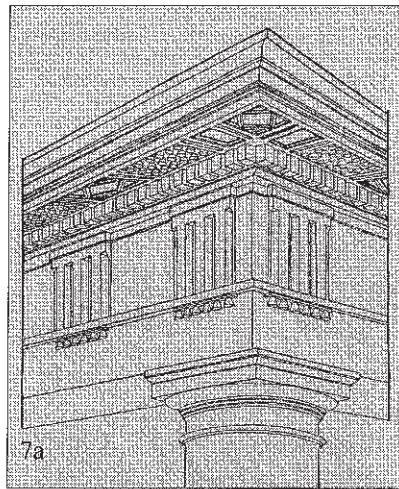


Fig. 7-8a. "Perspective of Roman Doric entablature;" Fig. 7-8b. "Roman Corinthian entablature," both in Cyril M. Harris, ed., *Illustrated Dictionary of Historic Architecture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 173, 139. Compare Fig. 7-6 above, first and second floor capitals and moldings.

<sup>7</sup> Robin Wyatt, "British Victorian," in Calloway and Cromley, *Elements of Style*, 249-250. Also see illustration in Wyatt, "Edwardian, 1901-1914," in Calloway and Cromley, 364-365.



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(photographs 11 and 6 respectively). Slight buckling can be seen in some secondary piers and pilasters that is not an effect of photography. These elements are covered with layers of trim, and not all are structural, therefore it is likely that trim was applied incorrectly or has lost alignment over time.

**Interior spaces.** The chambers and corridors as drawn on the plan retain their original footprints, though the spaces' use sometimes deviates from that specified on the architect's drawing. For example, at an unknown date, the auditors' office on the first or middle floor expanded into two additional spaces. The expansion involved closing in a former corridor with moved and replacement materials. A remaining corridor element, visible in photograph 11, is the segmental arch, resting on piers whose trim may have been removed. The courtroom (photograph 7) and its attendant chambers occupy the entire top floor. The judge's bench, walls, and ceiling retain historical integrity; other formerly fitted elements such as the jury box and spectator seats have been moved or replaced. The judge's bench is a raised area separated from the jury box by a low wall. Behind the judge's desk and chair is an oak-paneled backdrop, composed of plywood panels set into trim boards, that is approximately 8 feet in height and 13 feet wide. The top edge has a heavy molding with an arch at the center for a clock (recently replaced) surrounded by applied wooden ornament of leaves and blossoms. Doors lead from either side of the backdrop, one to the judge's chambers and the other to a corridor by which the jury can reach its approximately 13-by-30-foot deliberation room.

The courtroom, whose main entry is through opaque-half-glassed double doors midway down the room, measures approximately 50 feet long by 37 feet wide. Corners of the room are rounded on a radius of 2 feet 3 inches. The courtroom's south wall is lighted by the three elaborated windows (Fig. 7-5 above, left) that can be seen from the exterior, placed between columns. The room has recently carpeted floors, a 3-foot oak wainscot with white-painted plaster walls above, and a coved ceiling. The wide cove molding is ornamented with a band of bracket-like trim, in Italianate style, extending around the room. The ceiling itself has a centered original chandelier, now supplemented by fluorescent bars, and also several large, cone-shaped plaster medallions, partly painted gold and red and ornately detailed with concentric circles of trim (Fig. 7-9).

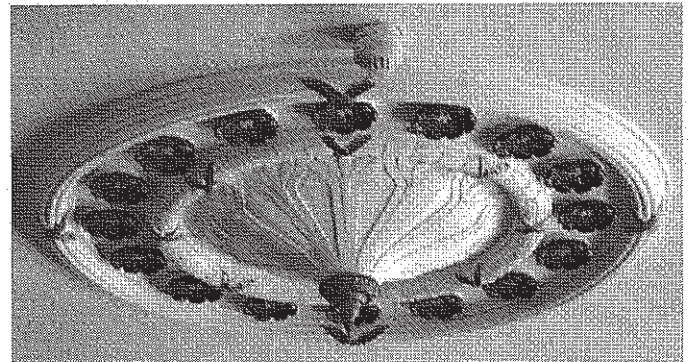


Fig. 7-9. Courtroom ceiling, decorative medallion.

**Entries and staircases.** The four entries to the courthouse are elaborated to varying degrees. The main or west entry, having the only stairs extending above ground level, is the largest at about 21.5 feet deep (from outer facade level) and equally wide. As shown on the site map floor plans, the space is divided into a vestibule and a split-flight staircase with landings at the turns of the stair. The vestibule measures about 7 feet running at exterior level from double entry doors to double inner doors that are oak framed and half-glazed. The vestibule walls have mitered corners on the exterior or entry side. The width of the vestibule corresponds to the space occupied by the three flights of the split staircase. As one enters from outside, and passes through the inner doors, the central flight of stairs mounts to ground-floor level. There are two side flights of stairs that can be descended to the basement, through a single-batten door, or ascended to the first and second floors. The marble center stair feels somewhat overscaled due to its lack of detail in comparison to other parts of the interior. The stair has broad, flat copings on a closed balustrade, and further flat

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expanses of veined marble on the underside of each flight. The 7-foot-deep landings, by comparison, are nicely scaled and detailed, filled with light from the elaborated windows (Fig. 7-10). Wall corners are rounded on a 3 foot 10 inch radius and detailed with setbacks similar to those of the piers in the light well.

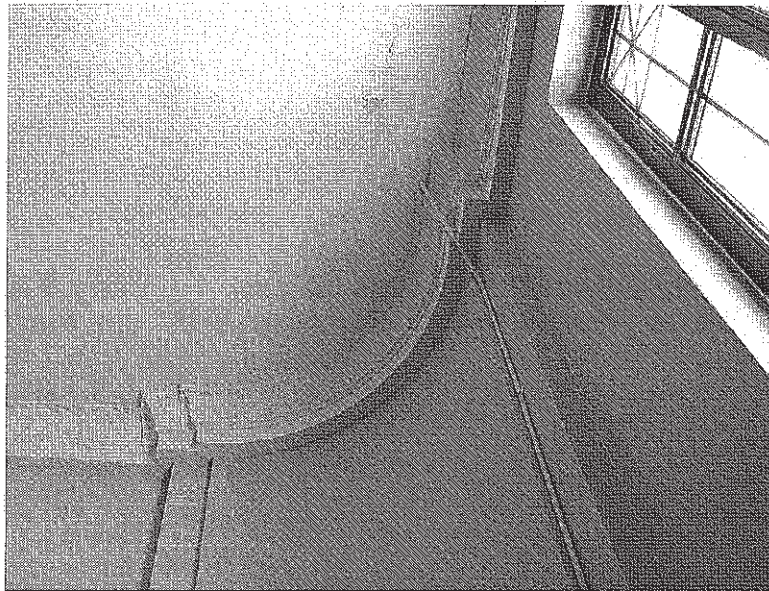


Fig. 7-10. Southwest corner of landing between first and second floors.



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## 8. Narrative Statement Of Significance

### SUMMARY

The Vermillion County courthouse is significant at a local level in the categories of Architecture and Politics / Government under Criteria A and C. The courthouse is unique within the county in history, architecture, and function. The building, in Newport, Indiana, was built 1923-1925. The years from World War I through the early 1920s were a period of prosperity for the county. The economy was based on rich resources of agricultural soil and on coal deposits. The county seat of Newport, platted in 1824, remained a small farm-service center and never achieved a population comparable to the coal-mining town of Clinton. Rivalry between the two towns for location of the county seat persisted until 1919, when a political compromise awarded the county hospital to Clinton. In 1923, after three previous courthouses had burned down, the present one was constructed and is still in use. John B. Bayard, the associate architect on the project, was a noted practitioner in his birthplace of Vincennes, Indiana, and was soon to design the Sullivan County Courthouse (1926).

During the first decades of a county's existence, in a "homesteading" state like Indiana, the courthouse served as a symbol of permanence as well as the most effective governmental unit for citizens on a day-to-day basis. From about 1880 through the first decade of the 1900s, prosperous counties apparently perceived an advantage in building "show courthouses" whose cost in 2005 dollars could run to \$154 million (Allen County). However, such gestures ended as World War I approached. Beaux Arts styling, in such forms as Classical Revival and Renaissance Revival, proved to be suited not only to grandeur but to simplification—the rather boxy public buildings of the 1920s and on, usually lacking complex footprints, visible domes, dominant pediments, or monumental columns. Advancing building technologies—such as reinforced concrete, steel structural members, and concrete or gypsum blocks—helped achieve designs in the Beaux Arts tradition. However, as in the Vermillion courthouse, technology could also help retain the appearance of Classicism. Pneumatic stone-carving tools and pre-formed cast plaster produced intricate details, and stone veneer lent the weighty dignity of worked stone construction without its prohibitive cost.

Surprisingly, 84 historic courthouses still stand today, most in use, in Indiana's 92 counties. Their greatest threat may be context that has been lost or will be lost as small-town downtowns fail. In such cases, the courthouse sits stranded, deprived of the architectural surroundings and social context that reinforced its intended visual and symbolic prominence.

### SELECTED HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, PREHISTORY TO 1923

The economy and politics of Vermillion County in the early 1900s were still shaped in large part by the county's geological prehistory.<sup>1</sup> The county's tax base came from coal mining and agriculture. Seams of coal were laid down

<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Howe, "Of Time, Rocks, and Ancient Life," 3-13; Wilton N. Melhorn, "Indiana on Ice," 16-21; and 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; "Distribution of Coal," CO-08 of an e-text, *Our Hoosier State Beneath Us*, produced by the University of Indiana Libraries. Online at <http://www.indiana.edu/~librcsd/etext/hoosier/CO-08.html>; accessed June 2007. For full reference, see <http://www.indiana.edu/~librcsd/etext/hoosier/index.html>; Indiana Coal Council, "Indiana Mining History," in *Coal in Indiana*, undated online document at <http://www.indianacoal.com/doc/Coal%20in%20Indiana.pdf>; accessed June 2007.

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during the Pennsylvanian Period circa 325 to 286 million years ago, in “coal swamps” from a former inland sea. This bituminous or soft coal was chiefly produced from decayed vegetation compressed by the weight of later sedimentary deposits. Coal deposits in most of Indiana have disappeared through erosion, but the seam running from northwest to southeast through western Indiana, including southern Vermillion County, remains viable. The area centering on Clinton, Vermillion County, produced coal through underground mining from the 1830s through the 1920s, by which time strip mining replaced underground mining. Millions of years later, fertile soils began to develop through the grinding action of pre-Wisconsinian and Wisconsinian glaciers some 700,000 years ago. Outwash or meltwater from a later glacial lobe, about 20,000 years ago, contributed to forming the Wabash River. 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 Vermillion County made the county’s more level areas centers of grain-growing, while areas of more sloping topography were used as pasture or orchards.

Vermillion County has small areas of prairie soil, also deep and fertile. These areas, and others along the Indiana-Illinois border extending almost the length of the state, represent a prairie-forest margin whose extent and location have shifted over millenia. The shift partly reflects climate change between 8,000 and 3,000, during which drier and warmer periods expanded the prairie temporarily. Both lightning strikes and burning by Indians (to preserve the habitat of hunted species such as buffalo, prairie chicken, other birds, reptiles, and small mammals) also kept the prairie from turning to forest. As Indians were driven out of Indiana, European-American market hunters took over. The earliest white homesteaders did not farm prairies, believing them to be agriculturally inferior because they did not support the growth of forests. This preconception was overcome in the years after 1840, when John Deere developed the breaking plow with a chilled steel moldboard.<sup>2</sup>

Vermillion County was created by the Indiana legislature in 1824. Formation of the county followed a pattern in which Euro-American settlers, in moving westward and northward, initially defined extremely large counties with vague boundaries on the frontier edge, then subdivided these counties. The Vermillion County enabling act first awarded the county commissioners authority as far north as the shores of Lake Michigan. Previous to its independence, Vermillion County was part of Vigo County to the south, then part of Parke County when the latter was carved from Vigo’s northern side. The appointed commissioners for Vermillion, before elected commissioners assumed their posts, chose the site of Newport as the county seat. Newport was not yet perceived as a central location in the county. Reasons for its choice may have been political, perhaps even the product of bribery from the site’s landowners.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, Newport scarcely developed.<sup>4</sup> Its population may never have exceeded 750, compared to 557 in 2005. The town attracted relatively few enterprises—by 1927, a clay-products manufactory, a grain elevator, a sawmill, a lumber company, and a small coal mine. (All of these were served by a railroad connection, the Chicago and Eastern Illinois,

<sup>2</sup> Marion T. Jackson, “Perspective: The Indiana That Was,” in Jackson, *The Natural Heritage of Indiana*, xxiii-xiv.

<sup>3</sup> Harold L. O’Donnell, *Newport and Vermillion Township 1824-1924* (reprinted 2006 by the Vermillion County Historical Commission), 20; James A. Schellenberg, *Conflict Between Communities : American County Seat Wars* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Data in the following discussion are taken from the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps for Newport in 1905, 1910, and 1927, and for Clinton in 1886, 1915, 1921, and 1921 as revised in 1939.

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beginning in the 1880s to 1890s.) Clearly, the town's main purpose was to serve as the seat of administration for county government, whose main functions are the keeping of property records, the collection of taxes, the administration of funds, and the upholding of civil and criminal law through the court system. Newport, as a service center for agriculturalists, developed an economic and political rival in the coal-mining town of Clinton at the south end of the county. Clinton was and is the county's largest town, with a peak population of 15,000 circa 1921, down to 4,906 in 1925. Clinton's leadership tried repeatedly to move the county seat to Clinton from Newport. In 1919, a bill in the state legislature endorsing this move came very near to being passed. The reaction of the county's northern residents included proposals that Warren or Fountain county take over the northern part of Vermillion. By 1921, however, Clinton received the new county hospital and agreed to cease efforts to acquire the county seat.<sup>5</sup>

On May 27, 1923, the existing courthouse burned after being struck by lightning at 1:30 a.m. This fire might be regarded as suspicious, had not Newport and Clinton settled their competition. Moreover, as late as 1927, Newport had no fire department and no water supply other than individual wells and springs. After the rudimentary first courthouse of 1824, fire destroyed all three courthouses (built 1832, 1845, and 1867 [with an addition in 1903]) prior to the present one. Shortly after the 1923 fire, the county commissioners hired a Vermillion County resident, licensed engineer Halbert F. Fillinger of Dana, to act as "supervising architect" for a replacement courthouse.

Table 8-1.  
CONSTRUCTION COSTS,  
VERMILLION COUNTY  
COURTHOUSE

Building . . . .	\$262,520
Wiring . . . . .	\$5,890
Equipment . . . .	\$60,000
Decoration . . . .	\$8,000
Heating and Plumbing . . . .	\$18,428
Landscaping . . .	\$3,000
<b>TOTAL . . . .</b>	<b>\$357,838</b>

Source: Lewis, "Indiana County Has Fine Official Home."

### BUILDING THE VERMILLION COUNTY COURTHOUSE, 1923-1925

Vermillion's county auditor of the mid-1920s, in a self-laudatory article for *American Public Official Magazine*, wrote that "Attorneys and citizens accompanied the commissioners and Mr. Fillinger on visits to several counties to inspect public buildings and consult officials."<sup>6</sup> Following this trip and discussion of the design, the commissioners hired architect John B. Bayard of Vincennes as the "associate architect" who would draw plans and write specifications. H. L. Fillinger participated in this process and acted as construction supervisor. Others employed included general contractor Jasper N. Good and Company of Columbus, Indiana; marble contractor F. E. Gates Marble and Tile Company of Indianapolis; and interior decorators William G. Andrews Decorative Company of Chicago. Two firms designed and installed wooden furniture and fittings, the Monroe Benbrock Company and the American Seating Company, both of Chicago. The grounds around the leveled site were landscaped with trees, shrubs, and grass of unknown species. The general contract was awarded December 29, 1923, and the building was dedicated June 11, 1925. The final cost of the building was \$357,838 (Table 8-1). Most of the amount was financed through a \$307,000 bond issue at 5 percent, maturing in 20 years. The county sold the bonds to an Indianapolis brokerage, Breed, Elliott, and Harrison for a premium of \$9,827.

Little is known of Halbert L. Fillinger, but **John B. Bayard** (1876?-1933) was a well known and successful architect.

<sup>5</sup> O'Donnell, *Newport and Vermillion Township 1824-1924*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> For this and following information, see Mortimer Lewis, "Indiana County Has Fine Official Home," *American Public Official Magazine*, undated ephemera c. 1925, 9-11. Archived in Jay C. Bixby collection, Drawings and Documents Archive, College of Architecture and Planning, Ball State University, Muncie IN. Also see O'Donnell, *Newport and Vermillion Township 1824-1924*, 29.



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He was a native and lifelong resident of Vincennes, Indiana, who served in the Spanish-American War and was buried with military honors. As an architect, Bayard specialized in commercial and public buildings. His more important contracts in Vincennes included the First National Bank (1913), Vincennes Public Library (1919), Sacred Heart Church (date unknown), Pantheon Theater (1924), Gibault High School (1926), and LaSalle School (1927). He also oversaw remodeling of the Knox County Courthouse (1926) and supervised construction of the George Rogers Clark Memorial, designed by Frederick Hiron. Outside the county, Bayard designed and supervised construction of the Sullivan County Courthouse (in Sullivan, Indiana, 1926) as well as drawing the plans for the Vermillion courthouse. Bayard's death was a suicide, attributed to worry over his health. He is buried in Mt. Calvary Cemetery.<sup>7</sup> Like the majority of architects of his time, Bayard was not formally trained. He attended Vincennes University and graduated from Purdue University as an electrical engineer. It is not known how he came to practice as an architect. As the son of a banker, Bayard may have been able to tour European cities and view Renaissance and Classical models, but high-quality text and photographic documentation of important European examples would also have been available in his time.

Bayard and Fillingier were praised for the technical quality of their design for the Vermillion Courthouse. When the examiner for the Indiana State Board of Accounts approved the plans, he wrote: "These are the most extensive set of plans ever brought to this office [in my ten years' experience]. It is the best arranged courthouse I ever saw and more complete in detail. It will make a model courthouse. The specific specifications on steel work I like. The plans and specifications safeguard the interest of the people and are drawn and written so that any contractor can understand them. You have twenty-three exhibits of blueprints here while ordinarily architects only bring in 7 or 8 pages."<sup>8</sup>

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

Early courthouses in homesteading states like Indiana were symbolic of a permanence that was by no means guaranteed. 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>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Brian Spangle, Columnist, "John B. Bayard Dies," Vincennes *Sun-Commercial*, April 23, 2005. Clipping courtesy of Brian Spangle, Knox County Public Library. Also see "John B. Bayard Shoots Self To Death At Home," Vincennes *Sun-Commercial*, April 27, 1933, no author named.

<sup>8</sup> "Model Set of Plans." Undated newspaper article, probably from the Newport *Hoosier State* or Vincennes *Sun-Commercial*. Clipping in Jay C. Bixby collection, Drawings and Documents Archive, College of Architecture and Planning, Ball State University, Muncie IN.

<sup>9</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 20, 2007; O'Donnell, *Newport and Vermillion Township 1824-1924*, 20-29. Also see "Vermillion County's New Courthouse," Newport *Hoosier State*, January 16, 1924.



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County government was often administered first from a settler's house. This was briefly the case in Vermillion County, until a one-story frame building of 24 by 36 feet was completed on the southeast corner of the public square. A brick building followed in 1831. It and its successors of 1844 and 1867 were all destroyed by fire. During intervals of new construction, administrators met in the Presbyterian church. The 1867 courthouse was of Italianate design, albeit with a mansard roof (Fig. 8-1). By 1903, the level of county business required an added wing, nicely done in matching style and placed in a recessed position on the courthouse's west side.

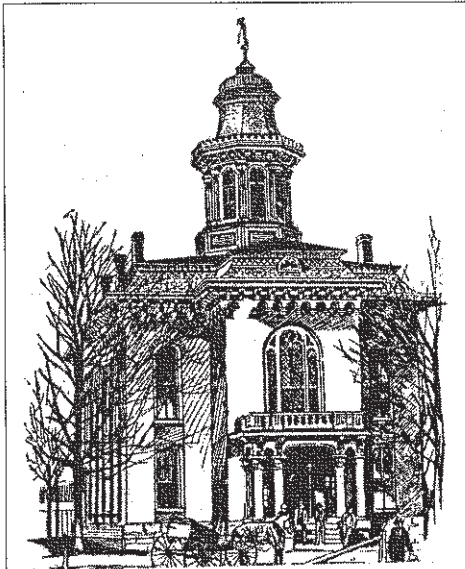


Fig. 8-1. Vermillion County courthouse of 1867. Source: O'Donnell, *Newport and Vermillion Township 1824-1924*, 27.

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. Only in Indiana's few urban centers of the early 20th century would city halls, headquarters of fraternal organizations, and very large churches be given a similarly imposing presence. By 1870, the counties' frontier period had passed, there was a pent-up demand for administrative space, and postwar prosperity had come, at least to some counties fortunate enough to be on a railroad line. Parts of rural Indiana were becoming oriented to regional markets, and it may have been felt that a lavish courthouse presented outside investors a reassuring picture of prosperity. From the point of view of the county's predominantly rural residents, county government was still the most important decision maker on a day to day basis. It represented legal and political authority, a

source of jobs both directly and indirectly, and management of the area's assets.

Indiana's first remaining courthouses, brick-built, were constructed in Greek Revival style during the 1840s: Ohio County, 1844, and Orange County, 1847. By the 1850s, Victorian Period styles appeared. Most were relatively modest two-story buildings, brick trimmed with stone, given a touch of grandeur by a tall tower. Taller and more elaborate examples include the small but impressive Blackford County courthouse (1893), stone-built in Romanesque Revival style; and the Bartholomew County courthouse in Columbus, a brick Second Empire building (Fig. 8-2).



Fig. 8-2. Bartholomew County Courthouse, 1870. Source: Cory Walker, "The 92 Indiana Courthouses," online at [http://www.angelfire.com/in4/indiana\\_courthouses](http://www.angelfire.com/in4/indiana_courthouses).

For Indiana courthouses, styles derived from the Beaux Arts movement in architecture were alternative choices to the Victorian as early as 1880, when the stone-built Grant County courthouse was constructed in Classical Revival style (Fig. 8-3). The Classical Revival or Neoclassical style

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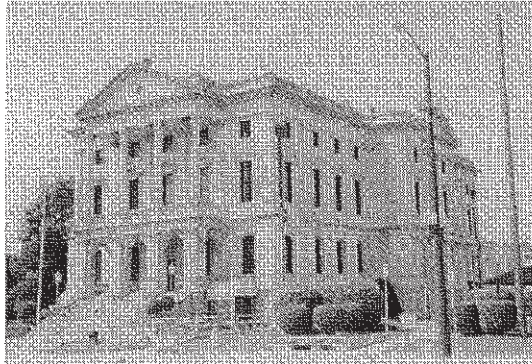
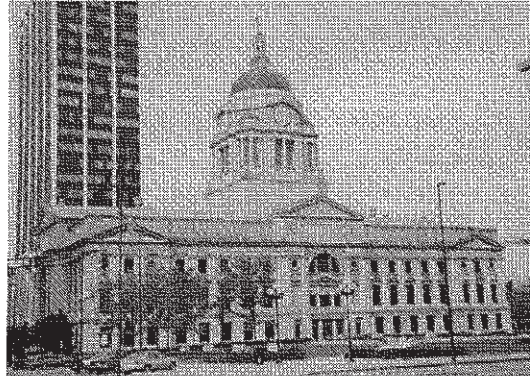
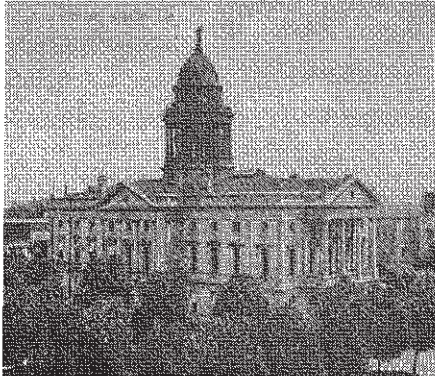


Fig. 8-3. (left) Grant County Courthouse, Marion IN, 1880; (below left) postcard view of building with tower, removed about 1941; (below) Allen County, Ft Wayne IN, 1897. Source: Walker, "The 92 Indiana Courthouses."



of this building is one variant of the Beaux Arts architectural tradition. In 1846 the first American architect trained at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, learning a vocabulary of forms, surfaces, and embellishments derived from the grander buildings of Greco-Roman antiquity and the Renaissance.<sup>10</sup> Indiana's surviving courthouses having Beaux Arts characteristics are executed in structural stone or stone veneer. Most contain an important element of

the Beaux-Arts repertoire: symmetry, replacing the asymmetry of late Victorian styles. In Beaux Arts styles, symmetry can extend to the building as a whole rather than just the main facade. The building may have two or even four featured entries marked by grouped columns or piers. A pediment may mark these entries or break the roofline. Multi-storied columns follow either Classical or Composite orders and are raised over a base story, usually rusticated. Heavy entablatures with modillions and/or dentiled cornice may be topped with a balustrade or a low, solid wall enclosing the roof. Belvederes or cupolas, ranging from light and vertical to low and massive, crown the roof in many examples. A Renaissance-derived feature sometimes included is the clock, prominently displayed on the dome or on or above the entablature.

The period of significance of the Vermillion County Courthouse begins in 1925, when the courthouse was completed. The building retains substantial architectural integrity as well as all of its original functions under county government, therefore the significance of the courthouse continues until the present 50-year end date, 1975.

## THEMES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN INDIANA COURTHOUSES OF THE 1920S

### The Architecture of Prudence in Rural County Government, 1923-1928

The Vermillion County Courthouse was begun in 1923, midway through the last phase of Indiana's Classical Revival

<sup>10</sup> John C. Poppeliers et al, *What Style Is It?*, 66-71. Richard Morris Hunt was the first American student of the École.



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courthouse designs, 1916-1928. Six of the seven courthouses of this late period are remarkably similar in appearance and construction, standing in contrast to the variety of courthouse design during the earlier decades of the Beaux Arts tradition circa 1880-1912. The last Indiana courthouse built with a visible dome is in Clay County, 1912. This courthouse and another from 1912, the Hendricks County courthouse, are also the last to make use of dominant pediments that break the roof line.<sup>11</sup> The Carroll County courthouse, built in 1916 just before the U. S. entered World War I (1914-1918), is unusual in that the stonework is rusticated on all three stories (Fig. 8-4). Otherwise, this building by architect Elmer E. Dunlap of Indianapolis presents the repertoire of stylistic features most common in late Classical Revival courthouses. Emphasis is placed on multiple entries at ground floor, with grouped columns on the two stories above. The height is three stories, topped with a closed balustrade. Seven courthouses built during these years are still in use and retain substantial historical integrity. Besides Carroll, the courthouses are in Pike (1920), Spencer (1921), Vermillion (1924), Sullivan (1927), Harrison (1927), and Daviess (1928) counties (Fig. 8-5).

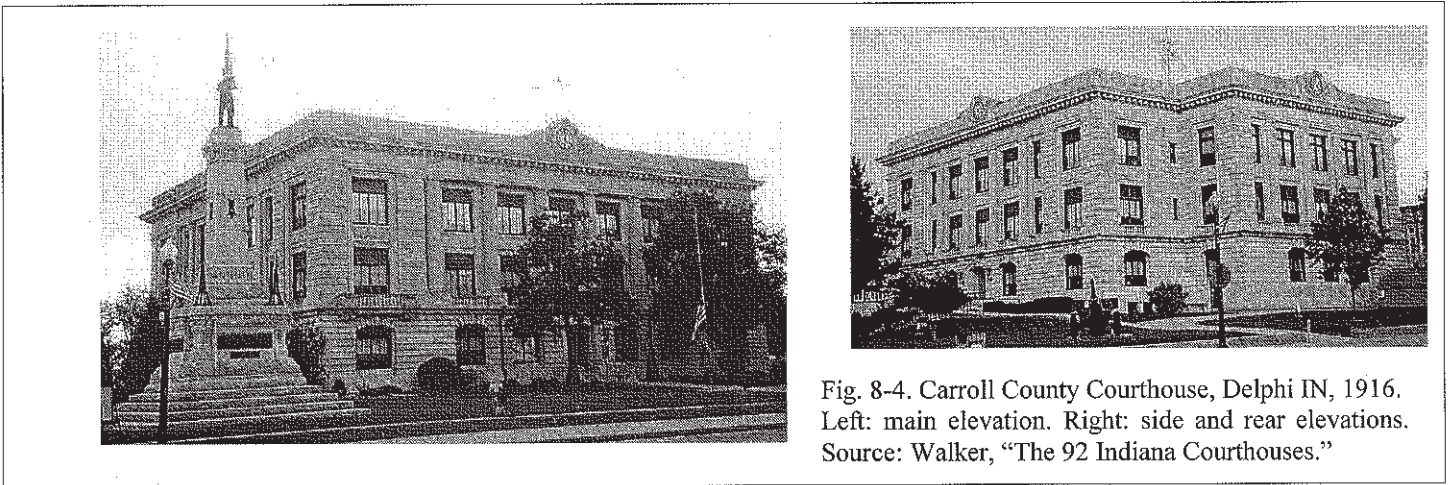


Fig. 8-4. Carroll County Courthouse, Delphi IN, 1916. Left: main elevation. Right: side and rear elevations. Source: Walker, "The 92 Indiana Courthouses."

Architect Elmer E. Dunlap of Indianapolis designed three of them—Carroll, Pike, and Spencer. John B. Bayard designed two—the Vermillion and Sullivan buildings. The Daviess County courthouse was designed by another Vincennes architectural firm, Sutton and Routt. Only the Harrison County courthouse, in Corydon, built 1927-1928 to the design of architects Fowler and Karges of Evansville, differs significantly from the other six. As befits such an old county (1808), the courthouse design has a Greek Revival cast. It is brick-built with a mill-finished, stone-faced ground floor, and its rectangular footprint is broken only by the projecting plane of an entry with massive Doric columns on the two stories above ground level. However, the lack of pediment or dome and the closed parapet relate the building to its time of construction, as does the steel framing described on the Sanborn map of 1927.

<sup>11</sup> A 1930 remodeling of the Lawrence County courthouse includes a broken pediment on the upper story, apparently suggested by the Gothic Revival gable end previously in place on the main facade.



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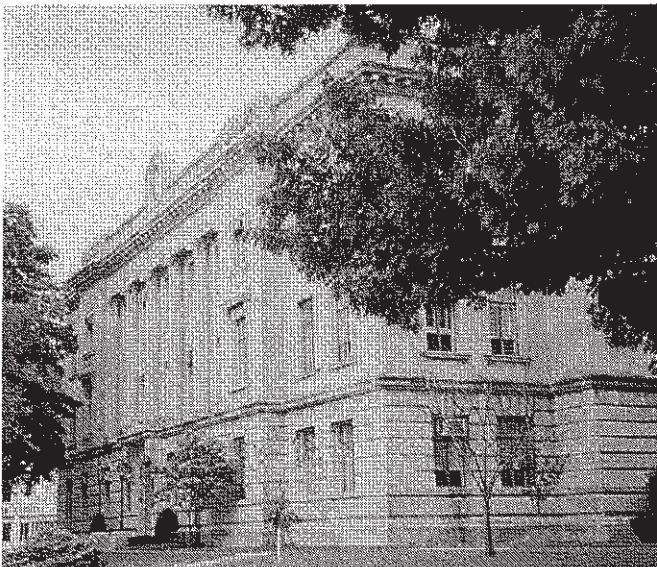
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Vermillion County Courthouse, Vermillion County, Indiana

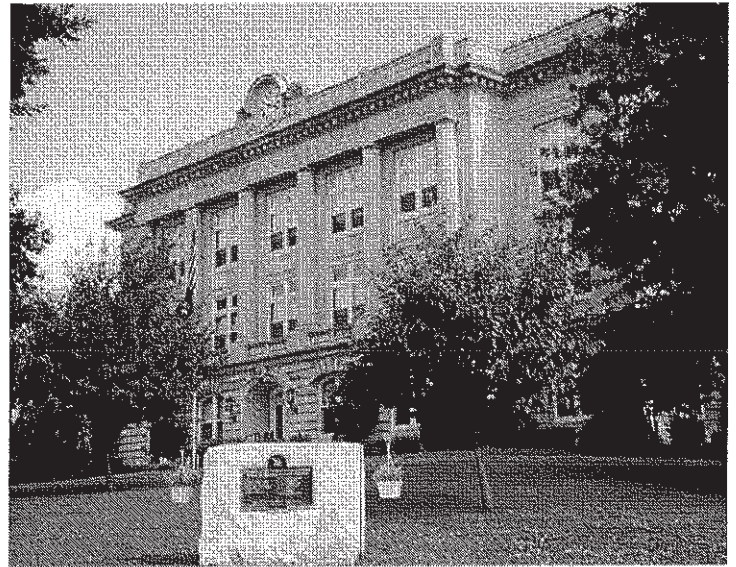
The similarity of the above courthouses transcends the choice of architect and date of construction. Figure 8-5 is a comparison of the two Bayard designs with the Dunlap design for the Spencer County courthouse (1921). It could be argued that the projecting entry planes on the principal entries of the Sullivan and Spencer courthouses, by two



Vermillion, 1923 (Bayard)



Sullivan, 1926 (Bayard)



Spencer, 1921 (Dunlap)

Fig. 8-5. Three county courthouses of similar design. *Source:* Walker, "The 92 Indiana Courthouses."



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different architects, create a more similar effect than the Vermillion and Sullivan courthouses, both by John Bayard. Bayard's two buildings, both three stories high, are very different in size, with Vermillion at about 92 by 120 feet and Sullivan some 160 by 160 feet without the projecting planes. However, Bayard's Vermillion and Sullivan elevations are similarly divided into three sections, with six columns grouped at the center above a rusticated ground floor (only four columns on the Vermillion's side elevations). In both buildings, the columns are attached and set within a recess, but the Sullivan columns with Composite capitals are placed within a slightly projecting plane. On either side of the recess, the plane continues to the width of one more bay. In this way, one of the three windows flanking each recess on the upper floors is emphasized, as well as decorated with swags or an ornamented header. This emphasis continues with swagging on the closed balustrade at roofline, and the projection can be seen in Figure 7-3 above. The Vermillion ground-floor windows are segmentally arched; those of the Sullivan ground floor are square-headed. The Vermillion ground-floor entries are topped by a balconet with supporting decorative brackets; Sullivan's entries project slightly and are topped with a pediment. On the interior, the Sullivan courthouse is arranged around a central rotunda below a low, glassed dome not visible over the parapet. This arrangement contrasts with the square light well of the Vermillion interior. Instead of square columns above the ground-floor interior, the Sullivan interior has round marble columns set on square bases. The terrazzo floor within the rotunda is decorated by a compass rose in two shades of marble. Both courthouses continue the interior motifs of white marble wainscot and segmental arches, but the light-well railings and split stairs in the Sullivan courthouse are railed with wood supported by iron balusters rather than with marble and a closed baluster, as in the Vermillion courthouse. The Sullivan and Vermillion circuit courtrooms are quite similar in appearance though different in the details of ornamental elements. The Sullivan courthouse has a second courtroom, that of the superior court, which has suffered a dropped acoustical ceiling and other alterations.

The source of a near-formulaic design approach for these 1920s courthouses is difficult to determine fully without further research into the relationships of individual architects and county commissioners. However, the differences seem to have been largely a matter of cost. Massing of the building within the Beaux Arts tradition was essentially rectangular, occasionally square, and the design details were based on specific historical models. The cost-saving building and decorating technologies developed around 1900 or earlier lent themselves to easy production of this well-defined Classical aesthetic. At the same time, new technology divorced Classicism from the origins of its aesthetic, since the appearance of original Classical and Renaissance architecture sprang from the construction logic of structural masonry. This bit of inauthenticity could hardly have been a concern. For Indiana courthouses of the early 20th century, the dignity of Classicism could be evoked within a building mass containing fewer or more inflections of plane, and details in lesser or greater profusion, depending on the county's budget.

A comprehensive study of the financial history of county government in these years, and its decision-making processes, has yet to be made. But the style preferences and technological innovations discussed above provide clues to the lesser price of Indiana's pre-Depression courthouses. Relative costs for 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, 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. It appears that the most expensive per capita Indiana courthouse constructed until after World War II was

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Table 8-2. Estimated cost of selected Indiana courthouses, 1870-1924.  
*Source: See text note 12.*

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

Bartholomew County’s courthouse (Columbus), costing \$225,000 in 1870, or \$48.5 million in 2005 dollars. This building marked the beginning of the “show courthouse” era, as Carroll County’s courthouse in 1916, just before the United States entered World War I, marked the end (Table 8-2).<sup>12</sup>

Vermillion County’s courthouse wasn’t a particularly expensive one, and the county experienced a period of early 1920s prosperity based on agricultural production and coal mining. Yet Vermillion’s auditor Mortimer Lewis in his post-construction article for

*American Public Official Magazine* ended by remarking, “The people of all townships as well as of Newport have displayed a keen interest in every bit of the work and I am sure many have become better acquainted with their county business and have a more friendly feeling toward the officials.” This last phrase suggests that, if the previous courthouse hadn’t burned, county voters might not have supported even the \$50,000 in tax revenues that helped make up the \$357, 838 total building cost. Either of these figures was many times the \$18,874 spent for an addition to the former courthouse in 1903.<sup>13</sup>

**The Persistence of Historic Courthouses, 1929-1957**

The Daviess County courthouse of 1928 was the last built before the Depression, and perhaps one the last built with county funding alone. Lawrence County, in 1930, undertook a remodeling that added two wings. This measure yielded more space for less cost than an equally large courthouse built new. Howard County constructed its own courthouse, but the Fountain and Shelby county courthouses in the same years 1936-1937 were federal projects. No more courthouses were built from this year until 1959, when Floyd County demolished its circa-1900 Classical Revival courthouse to be replaced by a city-county building (Fig. 8-5).

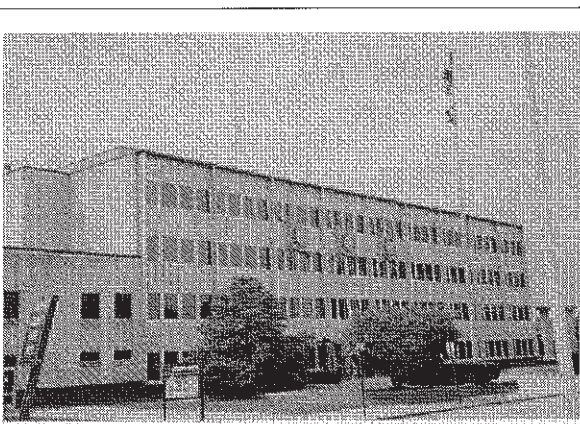


Fig. 8-5. Floyd County City-County Building (1959), New Albany IN. Source: *The 92 Indiana Courthouses*.

Seven other demolitions and replacements followed. The White County courthouse was destroyed by a tornado in 1974, and Perry County changed its county seat to Tell City in 1992.<sup>14</sup> The reason for demolition would have to be individually investigated in other cases: Marion (Indianapolis, 1960), Delaware (Muncie, 1966),

<sup>12</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>13</sup> O’Donnell, *Newport and Vermillion Township 1824-1924*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> The Renaissance Revival courthouse is now the county museum located in Perry’s former county seat, Cannelton.

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Vanderburgh (Evansville, 1967), Lake (Crown Point, 1971), and Madison (Anderson, 1972). The construction subsidies of urban renewal doubtless played a part, as did preservation activism or the lack of it.

More remarkable is the continued existence of 84 historic courthouses in Indiana. Certain counties, such as Orange (Paoli, 1844) and Monroe (Bloomington, 1907), have adopted the strategy of placing some functions of expanding government in separate, modern buildings near the courthouse. Other counties have small and often declining populations combined with an increased number of small incorporated entities that reduce the county tax base. Vermillion County fell into this category in 1957 and still does so today. Funds for drastic change may be lacking, but also the historic courthouse is basically adequate, having 20th century technology that has been relatively easy to update with air conditioning and supplemental wiring. The courthouse is also easy to maintain compared to courthouses with extensive painted exterior trim, and complicated footprints creating complicated foundations and roofs.

The most serious threat to Vermillion's and other quasi-rural courthouses may be loss of context. The town of Newport, selected as Vermillion's county seat in 1824, has a population of fewer than 600 today and a town square that never filled with the expected zero-lot-line buildings. The historic buildings that are present have been altered, detracting further from the courthouse's dignity as a perceivable center of community. This unfortunate circumstance is illustrated within the courthouse as well. The lack of historical integrity of the building's main public space, the auditorium, contrasts with the excellent integrity of the work spaces and lobbies originally provided. The auditorium's stage has become a storage area, and the lower or seating level is now used principally for gatherings of courthouse officials and employees rather than the local or county community.



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#### MAPS AND DRAWINGS

Plans for the Vermillion County Courthouse, Job. No. 432, Nov. 1923; associated architects John B. Bayard, Vincennes, Indiana, and H. L. Fillinger, Dana, Indiana. Set of up to 23 sheets archived in the office of the County Surveyor, County Courthouse, Newport, Indiana.

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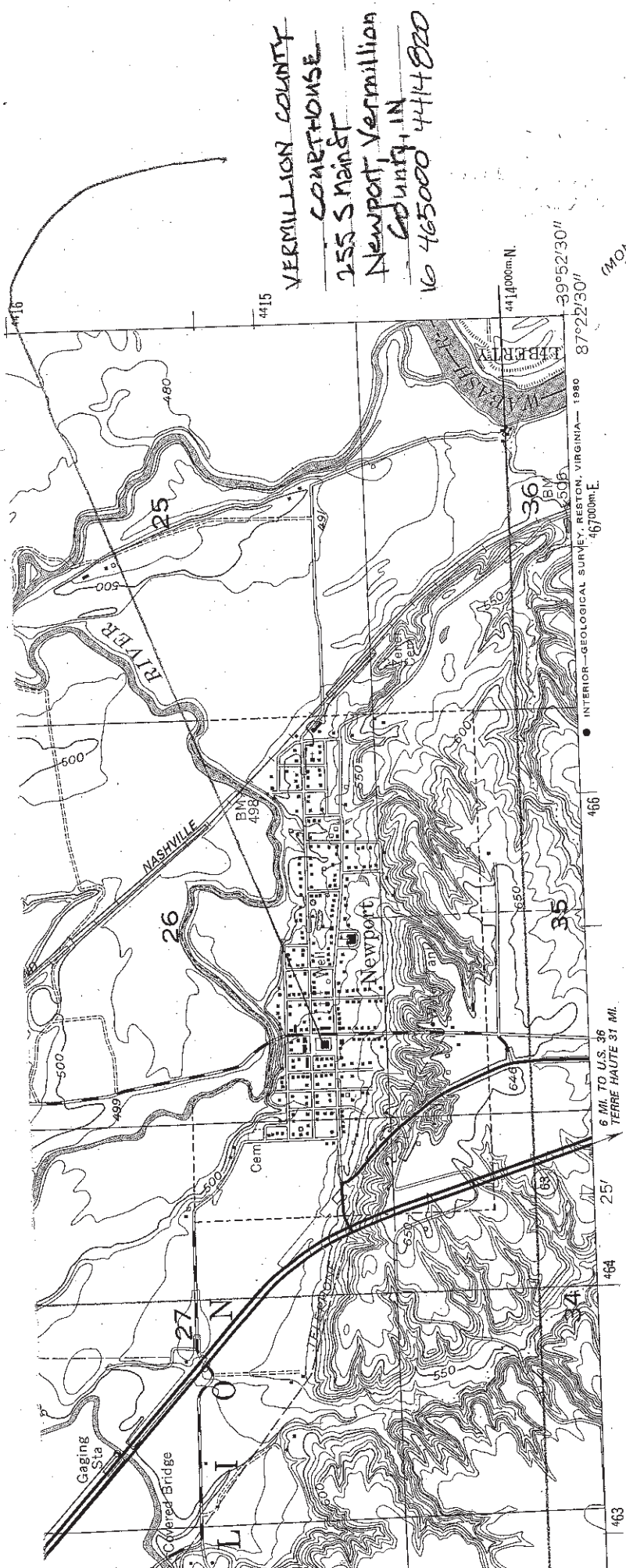
10. Geographical Data

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the Vermillion County Courthouse is defined as part of the W  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  Section 26, T17 R9. The area of the courthouse square was platted without a parcel number, but extends to the edge of the street on all sides, creating a parcel measuring approximately 176 feet along the south curb of Extension Street on the north, 234 feet along the west curb of Main Street on the east, 172 feet along the north curb of Market Street on the south, and 233 feet along the east curb of Vermillion Street on the west.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the courthouse building and its grounds, which have formed parts of an entity throughout the history of Newport as the Vermillion County seat.

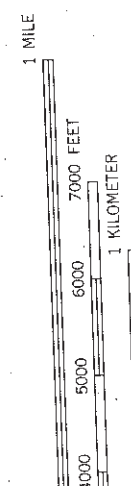


VERMILION COUNTY  
 COURTHOUSE  
 255 S Main St  
 Newport, Vermillion  
 County, IN  
 465000 4414800

(MONTEZUMA)  
 3563 IV SE

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Heavy-duty ..... Light-duty
- Medium-duty ..... Unimproved dirt
- State Route



10 FEET  
 DATUM OF 1929



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

NEWPORT, IND.  
 N3952.5 — W8722.5/7.5

1964  
 PHOTOREVISED 1980  
 DMA 3563 IV NW — SERIES V851

MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
 FLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
 JURGES, INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204  
 SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

