



Courthouse Preservation Advisory Commission
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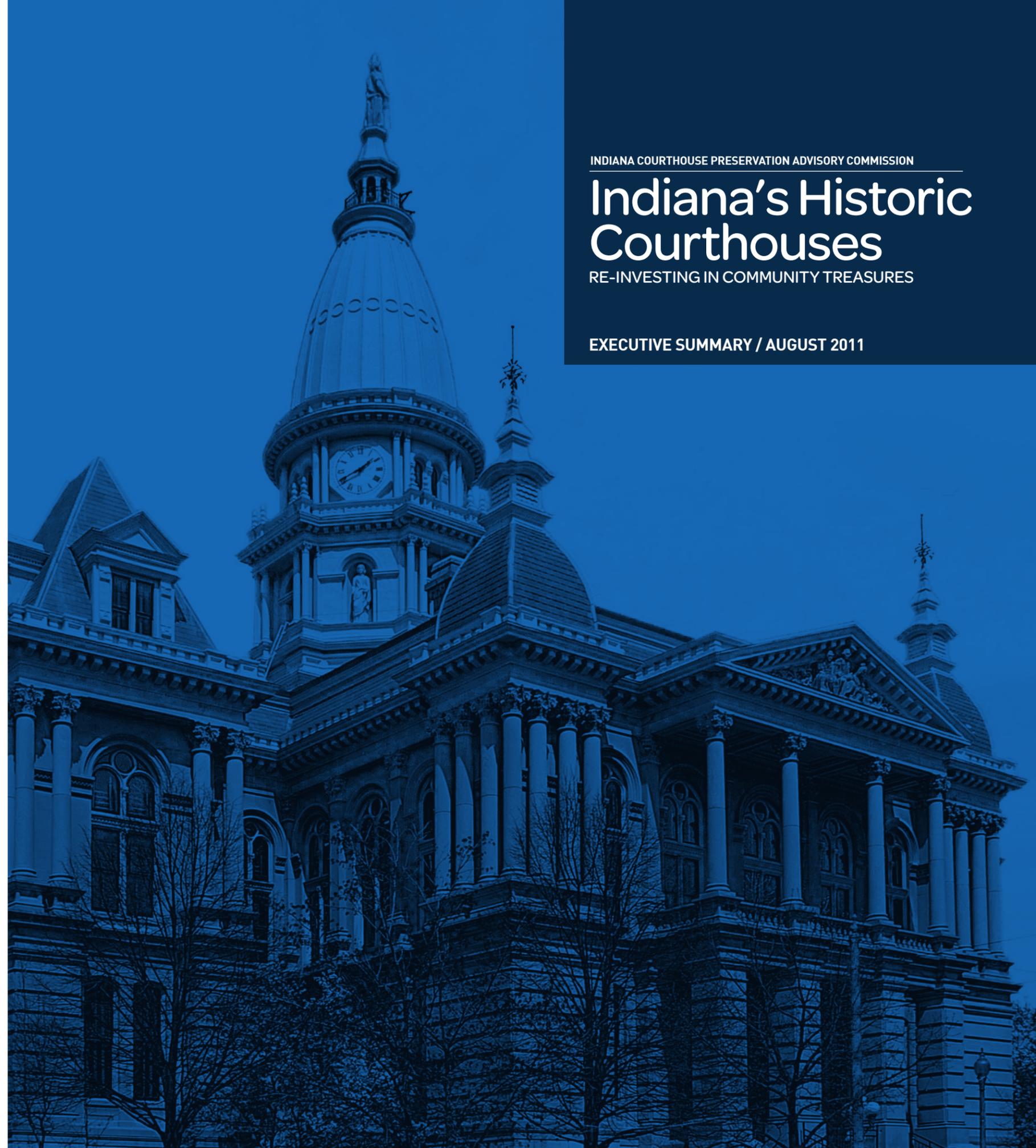
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INDIANA COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION

Indiana's Historic Courthouses

RE-INVESTING IN COMMUNITY TREASURES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY / AUGUST 2011





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This program received federal financial assistance for the identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Director, Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20240.

Finally, the Commission is grateful to Indiana Landmarks for financial support to produce this report.



- The General Assembly should establish a matching grant program to assist counties in paying for the cost of professional feasibility studies, historic structure reports, or preservation plans for the rehabilitation, restoration, and maintenance of historic courthouses.
- The General Assembly should define the rehabilitation, restoration, and maintenance of historic county courthouses as economic development projects, allowing counties to use revenues from the County Economic Development Income Tax (CEDIT) and County Adjusted Gross Income Tax (CAGIT) for such projects.
- The General Assembly should establish a low interest loan program under which counties may borrow up to 60 percent of the cost of projects involving the rehabilitation, restoration, and maintenance of historic county courthouses and repay the loans using revenues received from their CEDIT or CAGIT assessments.
- The Indiana Department of Natural Resources' Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, in cooperation with Indiana Landmarks, the Indiana Association of County Commissioners, and the Indiana Judicial Conference should sponsor seminars for county officials on making decisions about the rehabilitation, restoration, and maintenance of historic courthouses, providing additions or annexes, and caring for historic landscape design and objects on courthouse grounds.
- The Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, in cooperation with Indiana Landmarks, should continue to provide a program of technical assistance to county officials upon request regarding sources of deterioration in courthouses and appropriate responses.
- The Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, in cooperation with Indiana Landmarks, the Indiana Association of County Commissioners, and the Indiana Judicial Conference should sponsor seminars for county officials on how counties have successfully financed rehabilitation of historic courthouses.
- In cooperation with Indiana Landmarks, AIA Indiana, the Indiana Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Indiana Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the Indiana Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers, the Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology should offer continuing education courses or seminars for design professionals on the rehabilitation and restoration of historic structures, designing additions, and maintaining and rehabilitating landscape features and historic objects on courthouse grounds.
- The Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, in cooperation with Indiana Landmarks, should consider preparing a manual on the maintenance, rehabilitation, and restoration of historic courthouses.
- The Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, in cooperation with Indiana Landmarks, the Indiana Association of County Commissioners and the Indiana Judicial Conference, should maintain a listing of current funding sources that counties may use for courthouse preservation projects.
- The Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, in cooperation with Indiana Landmarks, should continue and add to the website established by the Courthouse Preservation Advisory Commission (<http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic>), providing information for county officials and the public on historic courthouses and their maintenance and rehabilitation and economic development strategies involving courthouse squares.

Based on its findings, the Commission would offer the following recommendations to the General Assembly

- The Indiana General Assembly should recognize historic courthouses as key elements of Indiana's identity and of the identities of the counties in which courthouses are located through a resolution designating Indiana's historic courthouses as official symbols of Indiana identity and heritage.
- The General Assembly should consider commissioning a traveling exhibit that tells the story of Indiana's courthouses and their importance to their counties and to the State as a whole.
- The Indiana Division of Tourism should consider acknowledging and promoting the obvious, natural attraction of historic courthouses and their squares for tourists and other visitors through a statewide tourism campaign.
- The Indiana Economic Development Corporation and the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs should consider using courthouse squares as part of the branding and marketing campaigns that they develop to lure businesses and manufacturers to rural Indiana.

Foreword

The Courthouse as a Centerpiece

Even amidst the hectic pace of change we experience in the twenty-first century, there stands a place that serves as the reliable centerpiece of community life – the county courthouse.

The courthouse and its surroundings represent “the place where we live,” and the monumental architecture featured in Indiana's historic courthouses reflects the aspirations of our ancestors and our own hope for the future. So it has been since the nineteenth century, when county seats featured three substantial structures. The churches reflected the faith which had brought pioneers across the mountains to new homes. The grain elevators demonstrated the push toward agricultural and commercial prosperity. The courthouses declared our collective commitment to the cause of justice and to effective civil administration.

Even as activities like retailing and manufacturing have gravitated toward the edge of town in most places, the substantial investment in the center of cities, in the courthouses and their surrounds, remain the focal point of law, administration, and civic discourse.

Notwithstanding their continued importance to our daily lives, finding the money, the expertise, and the will to maintain our state's historic courthouses has been a growing challenge. Hoping to find new ways of doing that, the Indiana General Assembly created the Courthouse Preservation Advisory Commission, with the charge of assessing the state of county courthouses and identifying strategies to improve our stewardship and use of them. It called to service on the Commission representatives of county and state government and the courts, and of the non-profit world, as well as experts in architecture and history and historic preservation.



Randall T. Shepard Courtroom, Old Vanderburgh County Courthouse [4]

This report reflects our examination of the state of courthouses, based largely on evaluations from county officers, and our evaluation of approaches that might protect and refresh these special buildings for effective use in the generations ahead. Unsurprisingly, the state of maintenance ranges along a continuum from thoughtfully well-kept to neglected nearly to the point of demolition by neglect. The number of immediate crises may be small, but the long-term picture is not what it needs to be.

Aside from the continuing issue of finance, we conclude that Indiana's counties confront a special problem in procuring the right professional expertise when the moment for repair or rehabilitation is at hand. Put more bluntly, it is all too easy to spend money on renovations that actually make the courthouse less secure and useful. Both state government and the private sector need to do more to help county officials sort out the best approaches. Courthouse preservation is a matter of expertise and civic will and respect for the high ideals of our forebears.

These beautiful structures reflect our better selves, and they should be saved, renewed, and honored. We hope this report will serve as a roadmap for all who are committed to the preservation and effective use of these great treasures of Indiana life.

For the Commission,

Randall T. Shepard, Chair
Chief Justice of Indiana



Executive Summary

In 2008, the Indiana General Assembly adopted Public Law 85-2008, creating the Courthouse Preservation Advisory Commission. The Commission was charged over its four-year life with providing information, advice, and recommendations to county officials on the rehabilitation and preservation of the State's 81 historic courthouses in county use and with making a report to the General Assembly in 2011 with findings and recommendations on the following topics:

1. **Make an assessment concerning the importance of preserving historic courthouses to the history and identity of county seats and counties.**
2. **Make an assessment of the importance of preserving historic courthouses to the economic revitalization of county seats and counties.**
3. **Study the condition of historic courthouses.**
4. **Investigate the need for rehabilitation, restoration, and maintenance of historic courthouses.**
5. **Study the needs of county officials in planning for the successful restoration, rehabilitation, and maintenance of historic courthouses.**
6. **Provide county officials with information concerning funding sources for courthouse preservation projects.**

The Commission has found in its two years of gathering information and communicating with county officials that historic courthouses are widely seen as important community landmarks and symbols of county history and identity. Through its surveys, the Commission was struck by the rich variety of

architectural and artistic expression that each historic courthouse provides its community. The Commission has also found that courthouses hold and attract jobs and help stimulate economic investment in the downtowns of county seat communities. The Commission learned that overall most historic courthouses are structurally sound, but many face the need for significant investment by their counties. Although some counties have engaged in studies to establish priorities for rehabilitation and restoration before undertaking renovation projects, many lack information on how to go about planning and carrying out appropriate maintenance, rehabilitation, restoration, and preservation measures for their courthouses.

The Commission distributed surveys about the condition, special features, and needs for rehabilitation to county commissioners, county building superintendents, and county judges. In addition, the staff of Indiana Landmarks made site visits to 80 of the historic courthouses and completed survey forms on historic features and conditions of each building. Based on the results of the four surveys, the Commission has concluded that the historic courthouses of the State contribute significantly to the identity of county seat communities and have the potential to enhance economic revitalization efforts in those cities and towns. The Commission also found that although some counties have been able to maintain and rehabilitate their historic courthouses following high standards of preservation, many face the consequences of years of deferred maintenance and limited funding. Based on its findings, the Commission would offer the following recommendations to the General Assembly on the following pages.