

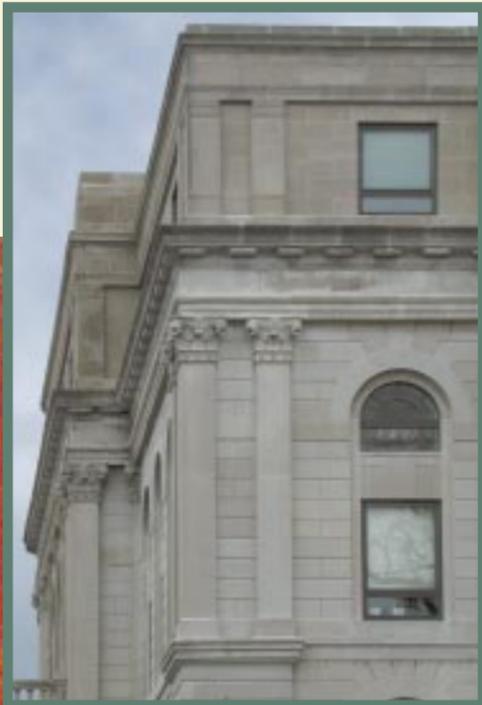
A CITY LANDSCAPE EMERGES. A CITY IMAGE UNFOLDS.

The poet Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, California, “There’s no there there when you get there.” In contrast, persons arriving in Courthouse Square recognize it as the distinctive heart and open-air living room of the City of Valparaiso. There, at the crest of the hill, the historic ensemble of buildings and open space give unique form to the civic and commercial spirit of generations.

In 1837, at the very beginning, the open space of the public square, eventually framed with wooden structures and shops, was included in the town plat. In the early 1850s, as the town square continued to grow and take shape, most of the structures were replaced by masonry buildings, many of which still stand today in some shape or form.

As a result of the additions and transformations through the years, what you’ll find today in Courthouse Square is a wonderful variety of building types: a county courthouse, county jail and sheriff’s residence, post office/city hall, opera house, banks, business blocks, specialty shops, and individual business buildings. These various types not only foster commerce, represent professional space, and even feature some residences above the streetside level, they represent more than 160 years of changing tastes in architectural beauty and poetic expression.

To experience a building as a poem is to attend with the eyes, mind, heart, and soul to a building’s silhouette, interior spaces, construction materials, as well as to attend to such details as entrances, windows, roof lines, and ornamentation. This guide offers information and direction for such appreciation of selected buildings that stand proudly today in Courthouse Square.



PORTER COUNTY COURTHOUSE

1885-1934, 1937, Second Empire Style
Indiana Limestone, Courthouse Square
J.C. Cochrane, architect, Chicago
John D. Wilson, contractor, Valparaiso

Valparaiso’s key civic landmark, the Porter County Courthouse, asserts its governmental authority in monumental nineteenth century classical Greek and Roman forms. It stands apart, centered, on the highest ground facing north, south, east, and west. Though the roof line was flattened by fire in 1934, the Courthouse, itself, is still palatially large and ceremonial looking.

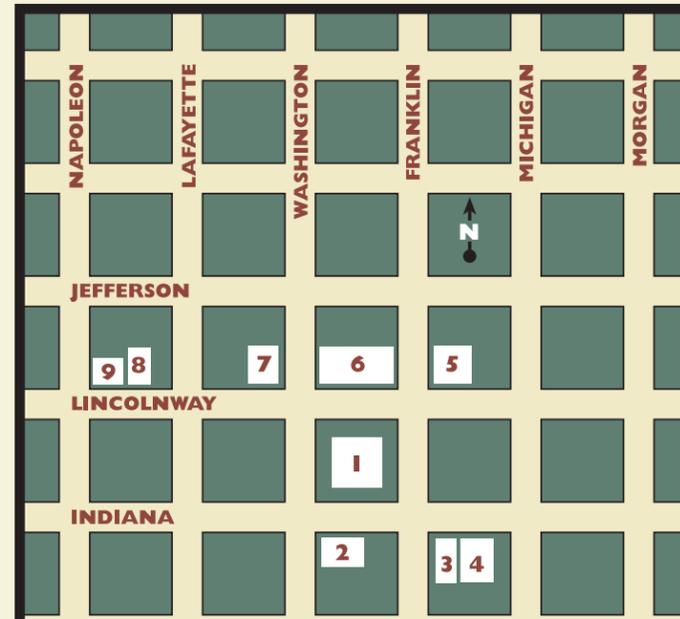
Originally, citizens entered it by walking up a broad exterior stairway to either the north or south projecting porch. Each porch roof is supported by six giant Roman Doric columns with egg-and-dart and rosette ornamented capitals and topped by a balustrade.



This main floor and the courtroom floor above are twice the usual height. Their massive, light gray exterior walls are enlivened by smoothly dressed stonework with deeply cutback joints called rustication and by rows of graceful, arched windows.

The courtroom level, with its recessed walls and paired pilasters, is testimony to the importance of this area. These pilasters have deeply cut, elaborate Corinthian capitals. These and the other wall features can best be studied on the sunlit south side.

During the 1990s, renovations included cleaning of the exterior, expansion of the interior square footage in the ceiling space, which was formerly unused, and a complete upgrade to the electrical and mechanical systems.



1. Porter County Courthouse
2. First National Bank
3. Sheriff’s Residence (Porter County Historical Society and Museum)
4. G.A.R. Memorial Hall (Memorial Opera House)
5. Farmer’s State Bank (Bank One)
6. Lincolnway & Courthouse Square
7. Corner Business Block
8. Grand Opera House (Odd Fellows Building)
9. U.S. Post Office Building (City Hall and U.S. Post Office, Downtown Annex)

COURTHOUSE SQUARE

THE FOUNDATION OF OUR CITY. THE CORE OF OUR IMAGE.

On and off Courthouse Square, are, of course, other buildings in settings and sequences that present architectural grace and distinction. They, together with the aforementioned building, help express a heightened image of who we, as a 166-year-old community, are and are growing into.

Therefore, for personal and civic satisfaction, join the growing number of building watchers that explore and refine their discriminating tastes regarding the close-up and overall architectural beauties that are present. Citizens with a practiced eye can help build a consensus as to the direction of image growth. A case in point is the use of the old Post Office Building as City Hall. Another example of bringing new energy into Courthouse Square is the construction of Franklin Center, where Lowenstine’s Department Store once stood. Here, retail establishments on the ground floor and professional office space above give today’s businesses the opportunity to enjoy the advantages of this prime, central location.

This ongoing process of maintaining, pruning, and grafting by aware citizens can strengthen and further develop a living city image, bringing inspiration to all within its view. Courthouse Square is the crucial center of this process.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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George Neeley, Douglas Pierce, Bertha Stalbaum, Harriet Van Ness, John Van Ness, Richard J. Bauer, Debra Griswold, Wanda Rice, Vic Ritter, Brent Wagner

For more information, call (219) 462-1161.

VALPARAISO COURTHOUSE SQUARE

An Architectural Guide 2003



Revised by the
**Valparaiso Historic
Preservation Commission**

FIRST NATIONAL BANK

C. 1902, Neoclassicism
Indiana Limestone
14 Indiana Avenue

Banks, as well as governments, used classical architectural forms to imply wisdom and convey a sense of security. When constructed, this restrained monumental temple front gave a new face to an older structure. Its engaged Tuscan pillars on waist-high pedestals make two stories look like one, thereby echoing the stately scale of the Courthouse porches. Rather than protrude, however, this bank “porch” is recessed, protected by thick side walls and the plain, heavy entablature and parapet overhead.

The pillars divide the wall into three equal parts allowing for very large, almost square, single-light sash windows on the second floor and upward-flowing, arch-headed windows on the first. Interestingly, the entrance is off-center, providing an informal everyday accent to a handsome design of almost modern simplicity.

SHERIFF’S RESIDENCE

Before 1871, Italianate
OLD COUNTY JAIL
1871, Castellated Gothic revival
Joliet limestone, brick, metal
R. Rose, architect
National Register of Historic Places
(Porter County Historical Society and Museum)
153 S. Franklin Street

The use of picturesque variety and historical allusions was considered creative and meaningful by mid-century Victorians. This residence and jail is a very special example of a mixed-style building in such taste. It apparently began as a residence for a person of means and social standing. Set back on a lawn, its cubic shape, low-hip roof, and stressed central axis at the entrance have classical order, yet the generous, exuberant door and window stone enframements, corner quoins, metal cornice brackets, and red brick walls break it up into picturesque energy.

Notice how the center is stressed by the connections of the stone framing to the bullseye attic window. The elongated windows that reach to the floor are in typical Italianate style. Notice window differences from front to side.



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In 1871, the county commissioners purchased the residence and added the jail using stylistic features of a medieval dungeon, i.e., only quarry-faced stone, crenelations on the two towers and two turrets, and narrow windows with hood molding.

Study how the architect struggled to bring some sense of unity to the overall appearance of the building. Does using the same stone help? At the connecting points, towers are placed that extend up and out as in towers of the Italian Villa style and, so, create a focal point for the building as a whole.

Regardless of the degree of its aesthetic success, the building as a whole presents a vivid picture of people of high standing and of no standing living together.

G.A.R. MEMORIAL HALL

1893, Late Victorian
National Historic Landmark
(Memorial Opera House)
104 E. Indiana Avenue

The Opera House design is exaggerated, or melodramatic. Its gabled red-brick-bulk massively pushes to the sidewalk, changing like a stage set into a variety of interrupted sculptural forms. It’s fun to look at, but hard to label because its design seems independent of any consistent style.

The building was completely remodeled in the mid-1990s to restore the exterior back to the way that the original designer envisioned it. The public is welcomed by a central projecting pavilion with a sweeping Romanesque arch entrance, echoed by a second floor arched window and topped by a clipped gable. The walls of the facade flare out to meet the ground and swell to become Queen Anne turrets at the corners. Notice how the horizontal courses of light-colored stone line up and connect or don’t connect.

The roof line is especially varied and playful. The turrets end with indented brickwork, flare out with a metal cornice stamped with delicate scrollwork and modillions, and are capped with curved mansard roofs. The false front rises from the turrets in fat curves. And, of course, inside there’s much more. The remodeling project in the mid-1990s restored the interior back to its original splendor. Visitors can now enjoy the ambiance of a bygone era, and the modernization of the restrooms, mechanical, and electrical systems offer the amenities and comfort of today.

FARMER’S STATE BANK

1927, Abstract Neoclassicism
Indiana Limestone,
sandstone, polished granite
(Bank One)
101 E. Lincolnway

The intersection of Lincolnway and Franklin is a “gateway” to Courthouse Square. There, on the northeast corner, Farmer’s State Bank created an image of itself as a Renaissance palace over the structure of a former department store.



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Though the three-dimensional qualities are extremely shallow – the image is almost that of a drawing – the illusion created on the Lincolnway side is that of a monumental central pavilion projecting forward from the wall and enclosing a triumphal arch entrance. The glazed arch rises two stories, is flanked by giant Ionic pilasters (decorative pillars with scroll capitals), and helps hold up a heavy entablature and parapet (horizontal beam and roof wall).

This victorious view of banking is further encouraged by the carvings of fruit-laden garlands along the roof line. Many further interesting features can be found on the Franklin Street side. The smooth, stepback panels relate to other 20th century modern styles, such as Art Deco.

BUSINESS BLOCK BUILDINGS

LINCOLNWAY & COURTHOUSE SQUARE

Mostly c. 1851-1899, mostly Italianate
One E. Lincolnway (Seasons on the Square) through
23 E. Lincolnway (Martin Binder Jeweler, Inc.) (L.D. Bondy Block)

The character of Courthouse Square is defined primarily by the buildings that surround it. The unbroken wall of business buildings on Lincolnway is especially effective in that regard. Built mostly in the 1850s and 1860s as “business blocks,” that is, as buildings for shops on the ground floor and offices and assembly rooms above, these structures usually consisted of cast-iron framing holding large plate glass walls on the sidewalk level and load-bearing brick walls above. The window openings above usually are tall and narrow rising to either flat or round heads accented with decorative molding. The roof line often has decorative brick work and sometimes sheet metal cornices. The varied shapes, patterns, and surfaces of the second and third floors combined with the current scene on the sidewalk level make a rich and striking mix of past and present.

Note the handsome quality of the window framing, wall brick, and exposed ironwork in the restorations of the buildings at 3-5 Lincolnway and at the Southeast corner of Lincolnway and Franklin (The Windle Block of 1885).

The liveliest building is the L.D. Bondy Block of 1899 at 23 E. Lincolnway. Built tall for a dance and meeting hall on the third floor, it provides a welcome accent to the beginning of the block. Do not miss going to its Franklin Street side to see its pattern of windows, bays, and especially its brick horizontal lines created by laying bricks at an angle. Notice also that the corner of the building is clipped, or beveled, allowing the store entrance to diagonally welcome the entire intersection.



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CORNER BUSINESS BLOCK

c. 1873, High Victorian
(Gil Drugs)
52 W. Lincolnway

This building is remarkable for its bold corbeled brickwork – bricks projecting forward – at the roof line, for its segmented-arch window heads that join abruptly with the window sides, and, of course, for the horizontal connecting lines created by laying courses of bricks at angles.

Note that, at the very top of the wall, is a row of bricks laid at an angle but in an upright, “soldier” position.

As with the Bondy Block, the building’s corner is clipped, allowing the store entrance to face diagonally to the entire intersection.

GRAND OPERA HOUSE

c. 1875, Italianate
(Odd Fellows Building)
162 W. Lincolnway

The extremely narrow, elongated windows of the second floor denote the presence of a high ceiling room: the vaudeville theater. The brickwork designs are admirable with panels recessing at the windows and in the cornice.



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U.S. POST OFFICE BUILDING

1917, Neoclassical
James A. Wetmore,
Acting Supervising Architect
(Valparaiso City Hall and
U.S. Post Office)
166 W. Lincolnway

The effect of governmental authority is here sought by placing the building back from the sidewalk, raising the main floor a flight of stairs off the ground, and making the entrance squarely in the middle between monumental two-story, freestanding, very plain Tuscan pillars. The wide wall of windows behind the pillars is very welcoming. The building’s renovation has transformed the original U.S. Post Office into today’s City Hall and a downtown U.S. Post Office location.



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