

MONROE COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
BUILT IN 1910

The present Monroe County Courthouse is the fourth such structure to occupy the public square. Although today's courthouse is the only building on the square, in earlier times the land also contained the first county jail, fire house, and a public well.

The courthouse was designed by the Fort Wayne architectural firm of Wing and Mahurin, who drew plans for at least three other Indiana courthouses. Contractors were George W. Caldwell and Lester Drake of Columbus, Indiana. They are most noted for two structures which were pioneering efforts for their period--the West Baden Hotel which had the largest dome built up to that time and the Palace of Agriculture which was erected for the St. Louis World's Fair and was the largest building ever constructed under one roof at the time of its execution.

Two artists who made substantial contributions to embellishment of the courthouse were Albert Molnar, Sr. and Gustave Brand. Molnar, who came from Hungary in 1903 to work on the art work at the St. Louis World's Fair, sculpted "The Light of the World" for the main entrance. Gustave Brand was a German emigrant who supervised the ornamentation on the German exposition in the Chicago Columbian Exposition. Brand is credited with ten murals, the stained glass dome, and the large stained glass window on the second level landing. The murals, depict figures in classical dress and incorporate themes of local importance. Brand's stained glass window features an American eagle and is an impressive focal point for the main entrance staircase.

Many statues and plaques are found throughout the courthouse grounds. The dominating structure on the lawn is the imposing Captain W. M. Alexander Memorial, "To the Soldiers of All Wars". George W. Bunting designed this obelisk topped by the figure of a Civil War soldier; it was erected by the Grand Army of the Republic in 1928. Around the base are friezes depicting battle scenes from the Mexican War, Civil War, Spanish-American War, and World War I. A second soldier statue, "The Spirit of the Fighting Yank", created by Ernest M. Viquesney, a ubiquitous sculptor of public memorials.

Harry Donato, carver of "Fighting Yank", also had a national reputation, his work can also be seen in the carvings on the Museum of Art in Chicago. Another monument is the "Freedom Flame" inscribed with Franklin Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. Yet another monument of note, currently found on the lawn west of the courthouse, is the 1910 center of United States Population Marker which was originally sited on the Showers Brothers Furniture Company property. The Monroe County Historical Society had the marker moved from the old factory site to the courthouse lawn for safe keeping several years ago.

The accumulation of these memorials over the years indicates the courthouse's continuing role as a center for honoring those individuals, values, and events which county residents consider of lasting merit. The most popular single feature of the Courthouse Square remains its oldest--the fish-shaped weathervane. The weathervane was forged by a pioneer local blacksmith named Austin Seward.

The Monroe County Courthouse in Bloomington, Indiana is a Beaux-Arts Classical structure built of native limestone. The three story building is constructed in four distinct protrusions which extend from beneath a central dome.

The ground level is rusticated with keystones above the windows and a central doorway in each of the four sections. Above the doorways are four ionic-capitaled pilasters with shafts rising two stories to support the entablature beneath the roof. Above the roofline are carved panels. The side walls of each section feature doric capitaled pilasters and a balustrade above the entablature.

The main (south) entrance is dominated by a sculpted group of three classical figures entitled "The Light of the World" which are located above the doorway. The group is flanked by two ionic columns, and behind it the recessed second and third level feature a large stained glass window. The name "Monroe County Court House" is carved in the frieze, flanked by festoons. Above the entablature is a carved panel featuring two caryatids. The walls supporting the dome contain a four-faced clock with each face framed by pilasters topped with a pediment. The dome is copper, has panels containing vents, and is topped by cresting. Above the dome is a three foot nine inch gold-leafed copper weathervane in the shape of a fish, which has been an ornament on all of the Monroe County courthouses since 1826.

The courthouse interior was originally highlighted by a rotunda, culminating in a set of eight classically inspired murals beneath the dome. Matched double stairways led to the second level from north and south entrances. The second and third levels consisted of a central circle of columns connected by an iron railing, with offices located along the exterior walls of the building.

In 1962 the interior was altered to provide more working space without building exterior additions, and east and west doorways were closed, northern staircases removed, and floors inserted on second and third levels beneath the dome to create a Superior Court room and expand office space.

Despite the remodeling, the main southern entrance and staircases remain intact. The central hallway is finished in limestone with columns in Egyptian Revival style. Two murals in the same classical theme as the dome murals are located beside the stairwell. Stairs, floors, and portions of the walls are of marble laid in a two color design. Stair railings are cast iron. On the third level, the Circuit Court room retains its original mahogany woodwork and brass lighting fixtures.

With its courthouse and lawn of monuments, Courthouse Square is the focal point for Bloomington and Monroe County. At the time of its construction, the courthouse was the grandest and costliest (\$250,000)

structure ever raised in the community. Its elegance and architectural detail represent the hopes and optimism of an earlier age, when small Midwest communities struggled to bring grandeur, beauty, and a sense of affluence to hamlets which had recently been hacked out of wilderness. The courthouse remains one of the few public buildings of substantial architectural detail in the county. It is the product of outstanding representatives of the fields of architecture, construction, and sculpture.

The source for this material was the National Register application for the Monroe County Courthouse.

# 13 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES 1910

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Wing & Guy M. Mahurin

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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# DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

*Sacramento  
January 23/1976*

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

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*(Continued  
on next page)*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

|                  |
|------------------|
| FOR NPS USE ONLY |
| RECEIVED         |
| DATE ENTERED     |

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

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