An Architectural History of Plymouth, Indiana, 1836-1960

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This discussion of the history and the architectural styles of the city of Plymouth, Indiana is meant to be a simple overview of how the economy and other factors influence what and how we build. It was my hope that this would be used as a tool for understanding the history of architecture in Plymouth by those who are not educated in the intricacies of the history of architecture and its styles, and as a guide through the vast diversity of styles and types of architecture in the American Small Town. It is divided into the following sections: Plymouth Before Railroads, Post Railroad to 1925, and The Great Depression to World War II. It briefly touches upon some architecture after the war.
INTRODUCTION

In the early beginnings of this country, we found great promise in what the land could give us. Through the years, we moved westward to claim larger and larger pieces of what is now the United States. As we conquered the great frontier, we methodically erected "monuments" to our progress in the form of buildings and cities. Some of these monuments never grew to be much larger than a ranch or two, or even a village; but others grew to astronomical proportions with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. Each had its own unique character created by the dedicated frontiersmen who worked hard to erect these beautiful pieces of art. Some, on the other hand, did not retain this character. Changes in resource availability, personal character, as well as a multitude of other factors forced some to be neglected or abandoned. Others still were destroyed beyond repair by floods, fires, and other natural disasters. While small towns and large metropolises were equally susceptible to neglect and catastrophic disasters, it was only through the determination of those who believed in a dream that pulled them through to what we see today.

Of course, as the size of the American town increased, the unique character blended into a haze that made the large metropolis monotonous and stale. Gone was the comfort of knowing everyone who came into one's store; of breathing fresh air as one walked down the street; of feeling at
home in the company of friends. These are the essence of the American small town--a sense of continuity and community that can be seen through the residents as well as the architecture. It is the architecture that expresses a feeling of permanence, a sense of belonging.

The individuals who erected these monuments varied greatly in skill and knowledge. Because many of the new citizens of this young country were from a variety of places in Europe, those who braved the wild terrain had a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Many of them had visions of what an ideal town should be and tried their bests to accomplish such goals. Merchants, bankers, farmers, salesmen, politicians, and many other trades were representative of the builders of today's historic small town. Yet, despite this vast range of occupations that helped to created the "monuments" of today, there existed a common link among them.

When Northern Indiana was settled in the early 1800's, people of all ethnicities flocked westward in the hopes of acquiring some good land upon which to establish a farm. Most commonly, groups of basically the same ethnic background would settle in a small community together, and if things went well a small town was established. One such town is Plymouth, Indiana, named after the famous Plymouth, Massachusetts. It was settled primarily by Germans, but a variety of ethnic backgrounds were represented at one time or another.
PLYMOUTH BEFORE THE RAILROADS

When people arrived in northern Indiana, they discovered a land heavily wooded and rich in nutrients. The land was excellent for farming, however, the numerous trees prevented it. There was a vast diversity of tree types in the area of both hard and soft woods. Trees like oak, walnut, and poplar were abundant, but there also grew ash, hickory, maple, beech, elm, and butternut. Of course, as people moved in from the east, the land would have to be cleared of trees to establish farms. At that time the easiest way to clear an area of trees was to cut and burn. With the exception of timber to build a cabin, all of the trees were cut down and the field then set ablaze (McDonald, 1908, p 74). This was felt to be the best way to prime the soil for farming, which was then the primary economic industry for the county. The major crops grown were corn and wheat, which was sold at markets in Ft. Wayne and Chicago; oats and rye, which were used for feed grains; and potatoes and beans, which were primarily used locally. For the longest time, farming was the only industry in the area. There were supporting trades and businesses--stores, saloons, hotels, mills, and some small scale service oriented businesses--that appeared with any new town, but farming was the only major economic base for the county (Thompson, 1890 p 80). Consequently, the architecture of the area was comprised of what was immediately available--heavy timber and
lumber. The honorable Daniel McDonald, a prominent judge and historian of Plymouth in the late 1890's and early 1900's describes a typical log cabin of the early settlers:

Cabins of the roughest kind of logs were erected and covered with clapboards, 'rived' with an implement called a 'fro,' out of red oak timber, which were held to their places by logs fastened on the laps. Chimneys were built of small poles, and the cracks in the cabin and chimney were 'daubed' with a very inferior quality of mud. If it were desirable to have a window, part of a log was taken out and a rough frame covered with white paper greased would be put in. The furniture...was of the most primitive workmanship (McDonald, 1908 p 65).

The Hatfield Cabin, an original log cabin built in 1850, still stands and can be seen east of Plymouth on East 9 B Road (Figure 1).

As rivers were dammed and saw mills established, the timber would be milled into usable lumber to create wood frame housing and other buildings. This was the only major building material available at the time. The buildings would be constructed using felled trees until mills emerged to convert the logs into planks. No glass was available because it was difficult to come by and very expensive (McDonald, 1908 p 65).

One of the major drawbacks of building with wood is the susceptibility it has to fire. When Plymouth and the surrounding county were just beginning to develop, there were no fire fighting organizations established. As a result, Plymouth had its share of major fires. The most prominent one in the city's history occurred in 1857. It started on the east
side of Michigan Road between Garro and La Porte Streets. It quickly consumed much of the east side and spread to the west side as well. Nearly all of the businesses in Plymouth at that time were totally destroyed by the fire. The city hall was also located in this block, and as a result, most of the written public records were also lost (McDonald, 1908 p 383).

This fire prompted the organization of a fire department for Plymouth and the surrounding community. The first company was located in a two story wood frame structure on the bank of the Yellow River (McDonald, 1908 p 112,113). The Yellow River was an integral part in the decision to locate the firehouse here. It provided a constant source of water to use in fire suppression. Throughout the late nineteenth century, a number of fire companies had established themselves; and because of this effort, many potentially disastrous fires had been successfully contained.

As with many small towns, there is always a sense of pride felt by its citizens concerning the public buildings. The most prestigious of public buildings is the courthouse. Plymouth has had a total of three courthouses in its history. The first courthouse was a wood frame building constructed using local lumber at a cost of about $300.00. It was a one room structure located at the corner of Michigan Road and Adams Street. This building was built when the county was just beginning to be settled, near the time when Plymouth was named the county seat in 1836. At that time there
were not many legal proceedings, so the court building was used quite
often for school purposes and for town meetings (McDonald, 1908 p 336).

The second courthouse was built by Levi C. Barber in the 1840's,
also of local lumber. It was situated on the site of the present courthouse
and was built at a cost of $5000.00. This building was much better suited
for the growing needs of the community. It was a two story structure with
dimensions of 50' x 80' and topped off with a cupola. There were several
offices of approximately 14' x 16' on the first floor to be used by the
various county officers. The entire second floor was devoted to use as a
courtroom (Thompson, 1890 p 69).

A building type closely related to the courthouse is the county jail.
Plymouth has had its share of confinement structures also. In 1838, shortly
after the organization of the county, the first jail was built of hewn logs
taken from local woodlands at a cost of $399. The builders, Oliver Rose
and James Courier, were contracted locally. The building was to be
constructed so as to prevent escape by convicts. It was:

to be sixteen by twenty, of white or burr oak timber, to be
well hewed, and counter-hewn, twelve inches square; the
foundations to be three sills, twelve by twenty inches, let into
the ground twelve inches; the lower floor to be laid with
timbers hewn as above, twelve inches square, to be well laid
and perfectly level; the walls of the first story to be made of
timbers twelve inches square and hewed as above, to built
seven and a half feet high; then the second floor to be laid with
timbers hewn as above, twelve inches square, to be laid in a
complete, workmanlike manner; the above-said wall to be
raised with a half 'duff-tail,' so as to fit down close and tite! to be two windows, twelve inches square and eighteen inches long; the grates to be let in the centers of the timbers at equal distance; the said lower floor to be covered with inch boards, well seasoned and well matched, and spiked down with spikes two inches in length, and the spikes to be two feet apart one way and six inches the other; the said walls to be well lined with good white oak plank, well seasoned and matched together, two inches thick, spiked on with four inch spikes, twelve inches apart one way and four inches the other, the whole building to be weather boarded with good half-inch boards; the door of entrance to be five feet high and two and a half wide; said door frame not less than two inches thick, to be made of good timber, well seasoned, and hung with good strong hinges in the upper story of the north side, near the east end; one trap door, made of good oak timber, five inches thick, two and a half feet square, to be hung with good iron hinges, made for the purpose; the said door to be let down even with the floor, in a place cut through the floor for the purpose, to rest on two iron bars, three feet long, one inch square, with a good and sufficient hasp and staple, lock and key, to be placed three feet from the wall of the west end (McDonald, 1908 p 342-343).

As one can see, this building was built with detention and confinement in mind. In fact, this jail was so well built that it was used on up through 1879, despite an attempt for a replacement in 1851.

The second jail building was drawn up by William M. Dunham and was built in 1851 by Albert Bass for a total cost of $2,380.00. The building proved to be very ineffective in detaining criminals. Throughout its existence, holes developed in several of the walls, and numerous thieves and villains easily escaped (McDonald, 1908 p 343). After several years this building was abandoned, and the original jail building was used until a third one was built in 1879.
As mentioned above, before there was a way to get more "modern" materials to the newly settled areas of Indiana, much of the architecture was constructed using the local lumber and timber industry. Soon after the 1850's, the styles, durability, and safety drastically changed. It was in the 1850's that the first railroads were introduced into the county (McDonald, 1908 p 330). With this new access to stone, iron, and glass, buildings could easily become more durable and still stay relatively inexpensive. The first railroad to traverse Marshall County land was the La Porte & Plymouth Rail line in 1856, and in that same year, the Ft. Wayne to Chicago route was completed. It wasn't until the 1880's that additional railroads entered the county, but these first two were more than enough to set a vital turning point in the architecture of Plymouth (McDonald, 1908 p 331).
POST RAILROAD TO 1925

The railroads were a vital turning point in the development of the local economy as well. With each train that stopped came a new opportunity for investment in this newly developed frontier. Money came from various regions of the Eastern U.S. A place was needed to keep it, and consequently the banking industry of Plymouth grew dramatically. With new money in the area, many merchants, as well as the county itself, set out to build better buildings in which to conduct business. In fact, the lumber business, critical in the development of new structures, was most prosperous in the two decades immediately following the first railroad (McDonald, 1908 p 330).

The railroads provided a new avenue on which the architectural styles of the East could travel. Architects from the larger cities brought new ideas and new opportunities to small, new communities via the railroads. Information from bigger cities could more easily and quickly reach many of the people settling the new frontier. News of archeological discoveries of the ancient civilization in Greece prompted much interest around the world in the ways of their culture and heritage. The Greek Revival style was used in many applications throughout the 1860's and 1870's due to the intense interest and wonder of the ancient world. Possibly the oldest church of the county was designed in the Greek Revival
Style. Built in 1860 and located on North King Road, Jacoby Church (Figure 2) is named after the family cemetery located on the grounds. Also built in this year is a house located on East 14th Road, which was designed in the Greek/Gothic Revival Style (Figure 3). Other examples of the Greek Revival style include the Jordan-Snyder House on South Michigan Road, near Argos; and a house at 118 West Harrison Street.

Another popular style that was used as a result of the railroads is the Italianate Style. The third and present courthouse was designed by Gurdon P. Randall of Chicago in the Italianate style in 1870 (Davis, 1990 p 41). Randall designed an immense clock tower over an ashlar stone and brick building (Figure 4). The plan is roughly square, with porticoes on each of the four sides built in the Corinthian style (Dilts, 1991 p 106). When it was completed in 1872, Randall exclaimed that the brick and masonry work was "the best public work of the kind he had ever seen." The building had a look and feel of solidity and durability. "The heavy, rough ashlar of the foundation giving (the walls) the appearance of being built on a solid ledge of rocks." The furnishings for the entire building were both designed and constructed by local carpenters out of native walnut and ash (Thompson, 1890 p 70). This building marked the beginning of constructing with materials other than wood.

The total cost of the building was $105,000, which included the
building, the furniture, grading of the square, the heating apparatus, and superintendence. At the time of completion, the county was only in debt for the building for a fraction of that amount, $50,000. Within two years, this debt had been paid off (McDonald, 1908 p 342). To accommodate the growing need for space, a modern addition to the historic building was made in 1990 on the north facade.

In 1876, the fire company erected a two story brick structure to house the new fire department. In addition to this the City Hall was located on the upper floors of the building (McDonald, 1908 p 114). This building, built by Robert McCance and William P. Beaton, was also in the Italianate style (Davis, 1990 p 37). Throughout its history it has been used as a fire house, but recently it had been used for emergency medical vehicles only. Currently this building is in use as a storage facility and is in need of repair (Figure 5). There are plans to refurbish it and use it as a community center.

In 1879, the third jail was completed at a cost of $16,970.00. It was designed by J.C. Johnson of Fremont, Ohio and built by William H. Myers of Ft. Wayne (McDonald, 1908 p 343). This structure was built to replace the original jail, as an attempt as one previously had failed. This building has since been demolished.

Due to the introduction of the railroads, an immense amount of
prosperity and growth was experienced in the city between the dates of 1873 and 1925. The population of Plymouth almost doubled and new industries developed (Davis, 1990 p 40). The farm economy flourished due in part to the faster transportation of grain to market. A wide variety of industry popped up in the city and surrounding areas, including a brewery, mills of all sorts, mercantile stores, and a multitude of others. As a result many beautiful and exciting structures were built in the area. In 1876 the city constructed The Centennial Opera House at 109-111 West La Porte Street. It was an example of Italianate architecture, the predominant style of the time. It was recently demolished to make way for an urban park.

There still exist many residential examples of the Italianate style, one of which is located on E. 14th Road East of Plymouth. Built in 1880, it is a red brick, two story house with a one-story section on the east side of it (Figure 6). A cubic form with similar additions is typical of this style of architecture. A prominent businessman of the city and director of the State Bank of Plymouth, Henry Humrichouser, had a wonderfully detailed Italianate house built in 1890 at 620 North Michigan Street, in what is now the Northside Historic District (Figure 7). Other examples of Italianate architecture include a house at 700 West Garro Street, a house on South Olive Trail, the commercial building at 107 West La Porte Street, and the
commercial building located at 109 North Michigan Street.

An example of commercial Victorian Gothic architecture can be seen at 120 N. Michigan Street (Figure 8, middle). Currently it houses the Plymouth city Chamber of Commerce.

As time passed, other styles were introduced. The Romanesque Revival Style gained prominence toward the late 1890's and through the first part of the 1900's. It is a formidable style which "conveys an impression of defiance" (Davis, 1990 p xxvii) in the building. In 1895 the Marshall County Infirmary, now known as the Shady Rest Home (Figure 9), was completed at a cost of $53,366.00. The building was designed by the firm Wing and Mahurin in the Romanesque Revival Style and built by J.D. Wilson and Son. This building replaced a wood frame structure that had quickly outgrown its usefulness (McDonald, 1908 p 344). Also designed in this style is the Simons Building located at 118 N. Michigan Road (Figure 8, right). Built in 1895 for a prominent businessman of Plymouth, this structure exhibits the classic formidability and massiveness that is prevalent in buildings of this style. Today it houses the City News Agency, a locally owned newsstand.

Some of the most beautiful residential architecture was built in this time of economic growth, and many of them still stand today. The Queen Anne Style was very popular in the United States in the 1890's. It is
associated with the Victorian style of architecture, and often times the owners desired this type of architecture because of the prestige associated with it and the prominence it conveyed. Many outstanding businessmen of the day had homes built in this style to show off their successes. The prime example in Plymouth exists at 230 Webster Avenue (Figure 10). Built in 1890 with its turreted corner and wrap around porch, it is a beautiful example of the Queen Anne Style.

Another example of the Queen Anne Style is the Hoham-Klinghammer House. Located just outside of Plymouth on State Road 17, this formidable brick home, built in 1890, was the residence of the owner of the only brewery that ever existed in this county. Many other fine examples of the Queen Anne style exist in Plymouth. A few include a house located at 621 E. Garro Street, a house located at 724 Pennsylvania Avenue, the Perry Strohecker house located at 408 South Plum Street, and a house located at 302 West Jefferson Street.

A very prominent residential style of the 1890's, the Stick Style was also used by prominent businessmen to display wealth and prestige. Joseph Swindell, mayor of Plymouth for two terms in the late 1890's and early 1900's, built a magnificent house at 220 Webster Avenue in 1892 (Figure 11). Situated next to the above mentioned Queen Anne Style, the presence of these two houses makes the Webster Avenue neighborhood one of the
most prestigious and well kept of Plymouth.

Also of the Stick Style, but not as widely known, are some commercial buildings. Shortly after the Nickel Plate Railroad was laid in the county in 1882, a passenger depot was built in Plymouth on W. Garro Street (Figure 12). What makes the Stick Style so prominent is the protruding roof overhangs on all sides of the building, as well as the application of wood slats to the face of the building to mimic a structural system.

As the turn of the century neared and Plymouth basked in the continuing growth of the community both industrially and economically, a multitude of movements in architectural styles began to appear throughout the city. Within a twenty year span, several styles surfaced in the architecture of the area. Experimentation in a variety of social and economic areas prompted this rich diversity of architectural styles, ideas, and ideals. In 1901 a building on the corner of Michigan Street and Garro Street was constructed to house the Masonic Temple and a bank (Figure 13). It was designed in the Neoclassical style, a style prevalent in commercial and bank architecture. What once was a clock on the angled entry facade is now gone, and today the building serves as photography and camera shop, with office space above. This style gave the appearance of monumentality and safety and was very popular in commercial and non-
residential architecture in the early 1900's for this reason. It was an image that made a person feel safe about keeping his money in a building of such formidability. Across Michigan Street, on the southeast corner of this intersection, is another Neoclassical example, also a bank. This building was originally built in 1879 by W.S. Matthews for the First National Bank an office was established here in Plymouth, but in 1916 the Neoclassical facade was added (Figure 14). Today it functions as the Plymouth City Building. The Lauer Building on the southwest corner of Michigan Street and Garro Street was designed in the Neoclassical Style, also. The owner of this building was a very prosperous merchant of Plymouth and a very prominent citizen. Today this building is the home of the Marshall County Historical Society and Museum.

Soon after the World War I, residential styles began changing drastically from the commonly used styles of the late 1890's. This can be attributed to the fact that those returning from the war began looking at the picturesque styles they saw in Europe as models for their houses here. One such style is the Tudor Revival, an example of which can be found at 217 Webster Avenue (Figure 15). What makes this house unique is the use of vivid, green roofing tiles, which sets it off from its surroundings, while not detracting from it. Another example can be found at 608 North Michigan Street in the Northside Historic District. This house was built in 1911-
1912 by Samuel Schlosser, a prominent businessman, and is representative of the Tudor Style (Figure 16).

A non-residential use of Tudor Revival, often referred to as Collegiate Gothic, was very popular in the design of educational facilities. The Lincoln High School building, constructed in 1923, is the only example in Plymouth of this style (Figure 17). This building is located on North Liberty Street and functions as the Junior High School for the city. In 1986-1987 the building was totally remodeled and sandblasted to bring back the original look of the building.

Other styles which had their beginnings as architecture of Europe include the Dutch Colonial Revival (Figure 18), the Free Classic (Figure 19), and American Four-Square.

Characteristic of the Dutch Colonial Revival houses is the distinctive gambrel roof line, with flared eaves (Whiffen, 1981 p 22). In many ways this style gives the building a barnlike appearance. Examples of the Dutch Colonial Revival Style can be seen 1023 North Michigan Street, 304 Webster Avenue, and 107 East Jackson Street.

Free Classic style exhibits references to the classical style, but with a much broader interpretation, hence the name. Other examples of the Free Classic Style include a house located at 805 Pearl Street, a house located at 719 North Center Street, and a duplex located at 310-312 North Plum
The American Four-Square Style is almost exclusively a residential building style. Characteristic of this style is a two story hipped roof structure, with a one story porch extending the width of the front facade, hipped attic dormers, and wide, enclosed eaves (Davis, 1990 p xx). Buildings in the American Four-Square Style can be seen at 824 North Michigan Street, the James Bergman House located at 115 Otto Avenue, and a house located at 100 North Liberty Street.
THE GREAT DEPRESSION TO WORLD WAR II

As with most communities in the United States during the Great Depression, very little new construction was done because of the poor economy. This period of severe economic depression provided a time for some to reevaluate their entire lives. The Great Depression caused a massive overhaul of the social and political arenas of this country that affected all aspects of the citizens' lives. Architecture and its styles were also affected. Because money was so tight during this period, building more economically was gaining popularity. Mass production was increasing in efficiency and economy, which lowered initial costs of many essentials. and buildings constructed in the late 1930's expressed this.

A style that emerged in the early part of the century was the Bungalow Style. In residential architecture in the middle to late 1930's it became the prevalent style because it was simple in that it reflected the common man. It can best be described as the residential style most like the "American Dream" house pictured with a white picket fence, two and a half children, a dog, and everything else that went along with "the ideal way of life". After the Great Depression, the emerging middle class saw this style as their own. These houses were generally ideal in scale for a family. They were inexpensive and very fashionable at the time. Most of the Bungalow Style houses of the county are located in Argos, but
Plymouth has a few. Many of these are located in the Southside Historic District of the city. Examples include houses at 714, 720 and 905 South Michigan Street, each showing some characteristics of the Bungalow Style (Figures 20, 21, 22, respectively).

Commercial buildings following the Depression followed closely with the modern architectural ideals. An early movement of the Modern era was the Art Deco, which boasted flamboyant decoration to express a modern, streamline of society. The only example of Art Deco in Plymouth is the Rees Theater, built in 1940 and designed by Alves O'Keefe. With its sometimes brilliant marquee and metallic accents, it is still used as a theater but has not the splendor it once had (Figure 23).

As part of the Art Deco Movement and modern movement, designers began looking more towards an architecture that was truer to its construction, virtually absent of decoration, and functionally articulate. In 1960 just such a building was constructed in Plymouth at 109 North Water Street (Figure 24). This structure, labeled the Telephone Building, is a prime example of the Twentieth Century Functionalism that saturated the Modern Movement. Other examples of this style include a commercial building located at 501 North Michigan Street, a commercial building located at 828 North Michigan Street, and the Beyler-Volpert Building located at 111 North Water Street.
CONCLUSION

With the twenty-first century approaching fast, a new type of frontiersman is emerging from the society in which we live. He is one who wants to learn from the past the ideals and motivations that drove the founding frontiersmen of this beautiful city. He wants to preserve the richness of the many architectural styles that are present all around him. Instead of creating new "monuments" to human progress, he is content and enthralled with admiring and studying those of the past generations. There is a constant fight to sustain the old, majestic styles of the past against the growing insurgence of modernity and its characterless structures. Structures like the strip mall at Oak Road and U.S. 30, the department store across the street, and even the County Building located at 112 W. Jefferson Street seem to be stamped out of a common mold that adds no visual delights or worthwhile experiences. They are massed produced facsimiles of the same building here and throughout the country. Of course, one has to wonder whether these beautiful styles of the past will endure the transition. Through education and a heightened appreciation for our history, we can show people the importance of the American small town and their unique character.

The historical significance of the architectural styles we have created
cannot be overstated. There is so much that can be learned from the existing examples. They can tell us what the economy of the past has been and how it has affected certain types of industry. They can provide a window into the creative energies of our forefathers and their forefathers. They provide a physical time line continually retelling the triumphs and heartaches of people long since gone. They provide a basis for improvement in the way we do things. There are a multitude of facts and secrets held within the architectural styles of the past that should not be overlooked. While our society is rushing to make more efficient machinery, our past is slipping away. Old structures are demolished to make room for another superstore that has no unique character or a skyscraper that is surrounded by ones just like it. Architecture is just the beginning. Soon we will all be faceless beings in a mob of efficiency and technology.
REFERENCES

Davis, Ann C. (Survey Coordinator and Architectural Historian), Marshall County Interim Report, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, November 1990, pp. 120.


The newly designed and built Marshall County Courts building is in the foreground, right, of the courthouse built in the 1870s.