

Vigo County Courthouse
Courthouse Square

Owner: Vigo County Commissioners
Vigo County Courthouse
Terre Haute, Indiana 47807

Description:

Photo 13 and 52, Bldg. 195

The Vigo County Courthouse is an imposing stone building located in the center of the Courthouse Square in Terre Haute. The third building to serve the county government, the present courthouse was completed in 1888 according to plans drawn up by Cincinnati architect Samuel Hannaford. A French Second Empire-style structure, it continues to serve as the seat of government for Vigo County.

In plan, the Courthouse is shaped like a cross, but the roof plan suggests a rectangular structure with wings extending out to the north and south. The building stands three stories above an elevated basement. The foundation level of the building features rusticated rock-faced stone construction with rectangular window openings. On the rectangular (east-west) section, rounded-arch windows are used in pairs, separated by pilasters, on the second floor level, while the third floor features taller, wider, rounded-arch windows with pronounced keystones. Between these window openings are pilasters whose capitals feature a palm branch motif. A heavy cornice marks the beginning of the mansard roof with its segmental-arched or gabled dormers.

The north and south wings are similar but employ rectangular windows on each level.

An entry pavilion appears at the center of each facade and includes a flat-roofed portico at the main floor level, with paired columns and a surmounting balustrade. Above the portico each pavilion's center bay is framed by paired, fluted, Corinthian pilasters supporting a segmental arched pediment. Surmounting each of these is a convex dormer containing a pedimented opening. Originally, each pavilion featured exterior stone steps which provided access to the main floor entrances; these have been removed from all but the east facade.

Rising from the center of the building is a three-tiered, octagonal tower featuring a variety of decorative elements. The first level has engaged columns at each corner and features rectangular windows on alternating faces of the tower. Round arched windows appear on the second level, separated from the lower rectangular windows by a heavy cornice. On the third tier, alternating tower faces are pedimented and contain large clock faces flanked by engaged columns. The tower's large dome rises from this level and is surmounted by a small domed lantern.

Significance:

The Vigo County Courthouse is significant for its architecture and for its association with the county governmental system over the last century. The building is an imposing stone edifice of French Second Empire design, with a tower that continues to dominate the city's skyline. Since its completion in 1888, it has housed the offices and courtrooms of the Vigo County government.

Vigo County Courthouse

Building #195, Continued

Significance (Continued)

The present County Courthouse is the third structure to serve in this role since the county was formed in 1818. It was designed by Cincinnati architect Samuel Hannaford, who also designed Terre Haute's Union Station and the Hulman and Company Building. Limestone for the project was supplied by the Terre Haute Stoneworks from their Stinesville quarry. The building features a mansard roof, monumental entry porticos, and a tower with a dome rising to a height of 196 feet. The tower contains a bell purchased with funds provided in a bequest from Colonel Francis Vigo, one of the state's most prominent settlers. Long a city landmark, the building continues to serve as the headquarters of the County government.

Geographical Data

Acreage: Less than one acre

UTM Reference: 16/464340/4368360

Boundary: Map #1806-21, Block #452, Parcel 001