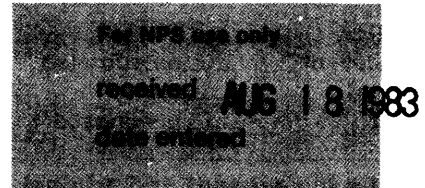


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



1. Name

historic Downtown LaPorte Historic District

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Roughly bounded by State, Jackson
Maple and Chicago Streets N/A not for publication

city, town LaPorte N/A vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state Indiana code 018 county LaPorte code 091

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial ✓	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence ✓
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government ✓	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industrial ✓	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple ownership

street & number

city, town N/A vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. LaPorte County Courthouse
Centre Township Assessor

street & number Courthouse Square

city, town LaPorte state Indiana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory
has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes no

date 1980 ___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Indiana Department
of Natural Resources

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The downtown area of LaPorte occupies the historic location of the meeting of two trails in pre-Colonial times. There are a number of lakes and lowlands immediately north of the downtown area which forced settlement on the firmer ground. The railroads, which arrived in the 1850's, reinforced land development south of the lake area and provided a focal point for industrial growth. This industrial growth, which included a wide range of heavy and light manufactured goods, sustained the town and served as its main source and location of jobs until after World War I. The decades since have seen growth at the edges of the city and diminishing manufacturing activity downtown. What remains of the buildings constructed during these decades represents part of a rich legacy of commercial and civic history; the blocks and buildings left from this early growth are well integrated into the modern core of LaPorte's central business district.

The proposed district occupies approximately 20 blocks, laid out in a grid pattern. To the immediate north are lakes and the railroads; in all other directions are residential areas, also laid out in grids (although not with the same axes as those of the downtown grid). Some of these residential neighborhoods contain excellent examples of Shingle, Stick, Queen Anne, Neo-Classical and Prairie School styles of domestic architecture. These homes attest to the fortunes amassed in the LaPorte area. Many of these fortunes were made in buildings extant downtown.

These downtown structures, like their domestic counterparts, exhibit a pride and concern for craftsmanship among those who built them. There was also a willingness to adjust tastes with the prevailing styles throughout the decades. Examples include Italianate, Romanesque, Neo-Classical, Chicago Commercial, Prairie School, and others. Unlike the residential neighborhoods, where the structures are free-standing, these stylistic changes occur among buildings standing next to each other. The proposed district is laid out with distinct sight lines and with high density, mixed-use in mind. Many of the structures have three stories: ground floor commercial with upper floors a combination of professional and residential use.

The earliest buildings still standing were constructed between the Civil War and the Panic of 1873. Taking their cue from more famous examples in nearby Chicago, land speculators purchased property near the railroads and on the Courthouse Square in hopes of reaping rewards from resale. The Zahrt blocks (607-609 Michigan Avenue, photo #1), constructed in 1868 and 1874, respectively, were such examples. The tin brackets at the cornice and tin window hoods suggest a showiness that belies the buildings' otherwise severe and simple lines. The interiors are simple and lack any extravagance, indicating that the worth of the land was perceived to be rapidly escalating. In fact, other buildings like these were demolished and replaced with taller buildings as early as 1890. Another example of this type of development is the former Ridgway Hotel (Ludwig's Foods, 401 Michigan, photos #2, #3), which was constructed in 1863. Its boxy mass is relieved with the use of window hoods, an elaborate cornice, and oriel windows. Though a food warehouse today, the structure contains the original hotel layout upstairs. The structures along the 800 block of Lincolnway (810-20 Lincolnway, photo #4) and those of the 700 block of Lincolnway (photos #5, #6) follow this same design—consistent cornice lines, sparse Italianate detailing with window hoods, and boxy massing. This was the norm throughout the 1870's.

8. 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 type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 19th–20th centuries **Builder/Architect** Various

Statement of Significance (~~in one paragraph~~)

The downtown district developed because of three major factors: government, industry and commerce. The county courthouse (there have been three since the city's inception in 1832) has always been an inspiration for architectural expression. As industrial and commercial activity grew together in the downtown district, the buildings housing these activities grew in prominence to reflect the owners' pride. Unfortunately, many of the original factory buildings downtown were razed in the 1960's, but their commercial counterparts are extant. For example, the Niles Block (Niles and Scott Manufacturing), located in buildings still standing one-half mile from downtown), the Hotel Rumely (M. Rumely Co.), the Lonn Block (Great Western Manufacturing) and the Ridgway Buildings (Ridgway Hotel and various real estate holdings) all attest to historic family names in LaPorte. The proposed district incorporates all of these commercial structures and others, as well.

With the rise of manufacturing and a working class came the proliferation of social clubs and fraternal organizations. The Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, the Phi Delta Kappa, Moose, Elks, and others were all in the downtown area, with each organization maintaining its own assembly hall or commercial building. There are no less than six assembly halls in the district, some with rather elaborate decor. (The former Odd Fellows ballroom features Second Empire details; the stained glass work in the Masonic Lodge is exquisite.)

With the rise of a commercial base came retailing empires: King's Emporium, Levine's Boston Store and other local merchants were followed by J. C. Penney's, Woolworth's, Sears Roebuck, and Montgomery Ward. All of these firms, whether home-owned or controlled through a national chain, contributed to the overall activity downtown and added to the existing building stock—most of which stands in the proposed district today.

Preservation activities began in the downtown area in 1976 and have resulted in some significant progress in retaining the district's architectural qualities. The Courthouse was substantially remodeled and expanded with a modern addition. But the original structure was left unaltered on its exterior. The former Odd Fellows Building was remodeled into a women's clothing store with some alterations to the exterior, but the original lines and details remain. In 1979 the former Carlbeck Hotel was adapted to a restaurant with substantial alterations to the interior. The facade and details were left and refurbished. In 1981 and 1982, at the behest of the LaPorte Development Corporation, buildings on two sides of the Courthouse Square were repainted, utilizing historic color schemes suggested by LeRoy Troyer and Associates, Architects.

The above-mentioned preservation activities are sparking an interest that has long been dormant in LaPorte. Citizens felt a sense of outrage and helplessness when landmarks were razed in recent years. A number of intrusions have also marred the continuity of the district: an unsightly overpass has descended upon the Courthouse Square, forever disturbing its balance and tranquility; each of the three commercial banks has either covered a historic facade in a sense of misguided modernity, or constructed, anew, with antiquated designs; some downtown properties have been lost to parking lots or face imminent demolition due to neglect and abandonment.

9. Major Bibliographical References

LaPorte County Historical Society: "A Centennial History of LaPorte"
 LaPorte Sesquicentennial Commission: "LaPorte, Now and Then"
 LaPorte "Herald-Argus" archives

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Approximately 35

Quadrangle name LaPorte East

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	6	5	2	3	3	8	0	4	6	0	6	7	2	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B

1	6	5	2	3	5	1	0	4	6	0	6	5	0	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

1	6	5	2	3	4	0	0	4	6	0	6	0	6	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

D

1	6	5	2	2	9	0	0	4	6	0	6	1	6	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

E

1	6	5	2	3	0	2	0	4	6	0	6	7	0	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

F

Zone	Easting				Northing									

G

Zone	Easting				Northing									

H

Zone	Easting				Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

Please see continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John C. Rumely/Annette Slager

organization LaPorte Development Corp.

date August 1, 1982

street & number 609 Michigan Avenue
P.O. Box 486

telephone 219/362-3178

city or town LaPorte

state Indiana 46350

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

J. M. Redem

title Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer

date 8-4-83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

9/15/83

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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When real estate values began to mature the builder was more interested in spending money on details. Two of the best of the early "personality" blocks were constructed in 1886-8: the Higday and Collins blocks (712-14 Michigan Avenue, photo #7). The two facades were constructed of polished sandstone, intricately pieced together with keystones above each window. Rather than real estate speculators, these two builders operated businesses from these addresses and their names are proudly emblazoned on each facade. Other blocks soon to follow bear prominent manufacturing names: Lonn, Niles, Ridgway, and Rumely. Whether as offices for the family firm or as speculative ventures, the buildings constructed between the 1890's and the First World War would no longer be lean and unadorned, as earlier designs had been. LaPorte entered its era of opulence.

The most stunning structure of this new era is, of course, the Courthouse (Courthouse Square, photo #8). Its styling is a freewheeling example of Richardsonian Romanesque. It was designed by Chicago architect B. S. Tolan and constructed during the years 1890-94. It features a large rotunda, large arches which frame intricate stained glass half-rounds, and figurines carved into the details. Another building employing masonry, large arches and an attention to detail is the former Odd Fellows Building (717 Michigan, 1895, photo #9). A third such structure, very similar in style to the Odd Fellows Hall is the Dick Building (1002 Lincolnway, 1912, photo #10), built of pressed brick and cast arches.

The Queen Anne style is represented in the district by two prominent commercial blocks: Lonn's Block (915-21 Lincolnway, 1889, photo #11) and the Ridgway Block (705-09 Lincolnway, not pictured). Both feature oriel windows, eccentric bays and, in the case of Lonn's Block, highly decorated panels. Two smaller examples of the Queen Anne style of ornamentation are the former A. P. Andrew Bank (810 Lincolnway, photo #12) and 617 Michigan Avenue (1893, photo #13). Both feature intricate tin bays on the upper floor.

With the maturing of land values at the turn of the century, owners of existing structures improved them with new facades. LaPorte architect George Allen designed a number of homes for wealthy clients and was facile in a number of different styles. His major commissions included the Methodist Church (neo-Gothic), LaPorte High School (eclectic) and several large homes along Indiana and Michigan Avenues (Classic Revival and Prairie School). In the commercial district, Allen redesigned the facade of a former typical storefront and created the People's Bank (912 Lincolnway, 1912, photos #14, #14a). The People's is a typical "Greek temple bank" of limestone. What makes it special is that Allen imposed the facade on an otherwise flat surface. The combination of a projecting pediment and a receding arch make the entrance imposing and seemingly larger than its neighbors. Despite the addition of nonconforming display cases in the front, this facade is one of the best of its kind anywhere in the area.

Even when the speculative builders were at work during these years (1890-1914) their product was slightly better than that of previous decades. Examples include typical storefronts along Indiana Avenue (photo #15) built in 1905. Cast columns, leaded glass, cast stonework, and real cornice work of brick or stone rather than stamped tin, were the result. A small example worthy of mention is around the corner from these buildings (807 Jefferson, 1904, photo #16). The original facade (now covered over with plaster) is of shaved stone, fashioned with very simple cast detail work.

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Two spectacular structures incorporating large, overhanging roofs and excellently balanced details, are the U.S. Post Office (James Knox Taylor, architect, 1912, photo #17) and the former New York Central Depot (1909, architect unknown, photos #18, #19). The Post Office, now the City Hall, incorporates a harmonious combination of large arches, cast ornaments and small dentil work. The depot has no ornamentation, but the symmetry of its brackets and building masses (separated by an equal length of canopy) make the overall composition a beautifully ordered complex. As a development site (near to downtown and directly within view of the overpass) it is one of the best adaptive reuse opportunities among depots anywhere in the Midwest.

By 1910, LaPorte was experiencing significant job growth, thanks to new industries moving to the city and to the rapid expansion of the farm implement business. (At that time, LaPorte's Rumely Company was one of the world's largest manufacturers of traction engines and implements.) With nationwide commerce came more progressive architectural influences. The lines were cleaner; the horizontal massing typical of the Prairie School and Chicago Commercial style were seen here in buildings constructed prior to World War I. The "superblocks" of the Masonic Temple (1910, 805 Indiana Avenue, photos #20, #21) and the Hotel Rumely (1912, photo #22) indicated a willingness to use a new style when confronted with a larger scale project. Both buildings are broken into segments (base, body and capital) with the breaks accomplished either with the introduction of a new material (cast stone to brick, or change of brick) or with the use of ornamentation. Another structure using the same horizontal banding is the former Rumely Company showroom (Moose Building, 519 Michigan, photo #23).

The rest of the proposed district is comprised of a mixture of commercial buildings built after World War I or substantially remodeled at that time. The materials tend to be less substantial (glazed brick, few ornaments besides accent pieces at cornices or lintels, pressed tin, etc.) than among the earlier buildings. The sight lines remain consistent (the 500 block of Lincolnway, photo #24) and the facades taken as a group, represent a harmonious composition. Individual buildings, despite the meanness of materials (such as 510 Lincolnway, photo #25, 1916, architect unknown, of pressed tin, substantially altered), were, nevertheless, inventive in arrangement and are worthy of preservation.

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No one denies the opportunities now idle in the district. From a textbook real estate sense, the district is prime for revitalization: its boundaries are distinct (sight lines at the edge of the commercial area evaporate into residential areas; the railroad tracks form a hard edge to the north); the ownership is predominantly local and is rapidly being turned over to younger generations; the public sector has taken a number of initiatives to renew the interest in downtown.

Most importantly, in terms of real estate dynamics, the proposed district will succeed for its scale and sense of continuity. It was almost entirely built or remodeled in the years 1870-1914. Most of the buildings are two or three stories, masonry construction, and originally designed for mixed commercial and residential use. Therefore, as one or another property is rehabilitated, an easily copied example will inspire other property owners.

As it has since the Civil War, the downtown district continues to serve as a focal point for the community. The district houses all of the financial institutions in the city; two of the best restaurants are located downtown; most of the legal profession is located near the Courthouse; and there still remain a number of the town's better retailers. Civic leaders still conduct business downtown, though their family names have given way to corporate identities or institutions. The activities are still the same, however. The names of historic leaders live on: A. J. Stahl and A. P. Andrews (two bankers and real estate developers) are now incorporated with the First National Bank; Meinrad Rumely (inventor and industrialist) has left a legacy with the Hotel Rumely, the former Wolff Tractor Company, and the nearby Allis Chalmers works; the early circuit riders, such as Judge Niles, have now given way to the Courthouse complex (the addition for which is a mixed blessing of public space amenities and poor, overall design).

As a courthouse square area, LaPorte's downtown district ranks with some of the best of such among Indiana county seats. In terms of scale, continuity and a sense of place, it is an area that continues to inspire visitors and residents, alike.

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Beginning at the northwest corner of Jefferson Avenue and Jackson Street; thence west along the north curblineline of Jefferson to Clay Street; thence south along the west curblineline of Clay one-half block to an alley; thence west along that alley 156 feet to the rear of the Missionary Baptist Church (located at 813 Monroe Street); thence south along the rear property line of the church and the former manse building to Maple Avenue; thence west along the north curblineline of Maple to Monroe Street; thence south along the west curblineline of Monroe 115 feet to the alley behind the LaPorte YMCA; thence west along the alley to Michigan Avenue, then crossing Michigan, and continuing west along the property lines midway between Maple and Harrison Streets to Indiana Avenue; thence south along the west curblineline of Indiana to Harrison Street; thence west along the north curblineline of Harrison Street 121 feet to 805 Harrison; thence north along the west property line of 805 Harrison, and continuing along the west property line of the LaPorte Public Library to Maple; thence east along the south curblineline of Maple Avenue 40 feet to an extension of the west boundary of the New Church (81 feet west of Indiana Avenue); thence north one-half block to an alley; thence west along that alley to Madison Street; thence north along the east curblineline of Madison to Jefferson; thence west along the north curblineline of Jefferson across Perry Street and 80 feet west of the corner, to the west property line of Bellevue Apartments, located at 710 Perry; thence north along that property line and its extension one-half block to an alley; thence west along the alley to Chicago Street; thence north along the east curblineline of Chicago to Lincolnway; thence east along the south curblineline of Lincolnway to Madison; thence north along the east curblineline of Madison to State Street; thence east along the south curblineline of State across the overpass to the southern extension of the west property line of Schafer's Laundry, located at 801 State Street, 61 feet west of Michigan Avenue; thence north on this property line to an alley along the north edge of this property; thence east along this alley to Michigan Avenue; thence north along the west curblineline of Michigan to an alleyway one-half block north of Washington Street; thence west along this alley to Indiana Avenue; thence north along the east curblineline of Indiana Avenue to the southern right-of-way line of the Penn-Central Railroad tracks; thence east along the railroad right-of-way, taking in the former depot, and continuing to the imaginary northern extension of the east curblineline of Monroe Street; thence south along this line to the alley which runs between and parallel to Washington and State Streets; thence east along this alley across Clay to Jackson Street; thence south along the west curblineline of Jackson to the place of beginning.