

The Old State Treasury, Corydon, Indiana



Introduction

History of Corydon

The town of Corydon holds a prominent place in the history of the Hoosier state, having served as both the territorial capitol – beginning in 1813 – and then as the state capitol from 1816 to 1825. But beyond that significance, the community maintains a tremendous collection of historic structures dating from the territorial period forward, and has served as the center of commerce and community life for Harrison County and its surrounds for more than two hundred years.

In October 1808 Corydon was designated as the county seat of Harrison County, the fourth to be created in the Indiana Territory. Harrison County was named for future

President William Henry Harrison, then the territorial governor of the Indiana Territory, and Harrison is credited with giving Corydon its name. Harrison also purchased a number of lots in town, although he continued to reside in Vincennes.

By 1810, a few buildings had been erected, but growth was slow and the town remained fairly isolated, with its location inland from the Ohio River. Cedar Glade (the Kintner-McGrain House, c.1808) at 704 N. Capitol and the c. 1807 Westfall House at 210 W. High date from this period, as does the c.1810 Harrison log house at 419 N. Capitol. However, with the 1809 separation of the area that would later become Illinois from the Indiana Territory, Vincennes was situated on the far western border of the territory. On

May 1, 1813, the territorial capitol was relocated to Corydon, which was more centrally located.

As the new capital, Corydon developed quickly as the center of political and social life, with a number of taverns and other businesses springing up. The elegant, Federal-style Posey House at 225 N. Oak was built in 1814 for the son of the last territorial governor, Thomas Posey, although Posey himself chose to live in Jeffersonville. And in 1814, contractor Dennis Pennington began construction on the limestone Harrison County Courthouse, a sturdy, 40' x 40' structure with walls 2½ feet thick.

The population of the Indiana Territory grew rapidly, and by April 1816 the United States Congress had authorized the organization of a state government. Representatives from across the territory met in Corydon during June, drafting the state's Constitution under the shade of an elm tree, the remnants of which have been preserved on W. High Street. Indiana was formally admitted into the Union as the nineteenth state on December 11, 1816.

Although a number of other communities vied for the role, Corydon was chosen as state capital, in part because the newly-constructed courthouse could also be used to house the state government: the General Assembly met on the first floor, while the Senate and Supreme Court used the upper level. Several other buildings also survive from this period, many of which were private residences that also served governmental functions. The Federal-style brick home at 200 E. Walnut, built c. 1817 for Davis Floyd, served as headquarters for Gov. William Hendricks during his term in office from 1822 to 1825. The house at 417 N. Mulberry was rented by the state for use as an office building, the east room for the state Auditor and the west room for Treasurer, with the cellar below used as the vault.

As settlement in the state advanced northward, it became clear that the capital should also be moved. In October 1824, wagons loaded with the state records left Corydon, and Indianapolis formally assumed its role as capital in January 1825. With the departure, Corydon resumed its identity as a small marketplace town and county seat, with relatively slow growth and little industrialization.

Following the Civil War, Corydon took on greater prominence as a market town for the surrounding agricultural area. In 1865, the town's first serious fire destroyed all the buildings in the block bounded by Beaver, Elm, Chestnut and Capitol, which at that time contained a mix of commercial and residential structures, both log and brick. Following the fire, this area was rebuilt with two-story, brick commercial structures more urban in design, with party walls and continuous façade lines. The Applegate-Reader buildings at 111-113 Beaver Street and 110-112 E. Chestnut Street were constructed at this time and are the oldest solely commercial buildings remaining in Corydon.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of other fires reshaped the character of the town's center, with the subsequent new development giving greater definition to the square as the commercial core. The town also experienced its greatest period of growth, nearly doubling in population from 880 to 1,610 between the 1890 to 1900 censuses. This growth can be attributed to several factors, most notably the 1882 completion of a spur connecting the Southern Railroad to Corydon. The Bulleit and Keller families also arrived in town around this time, and both became important players in the local economy, with several extent buildings still bearing those family names, including the J.J. Bulleit Building at the corner of Elm and Chestnut streets, and the Colonial Revival-style Charles Keller House at 720 N. Capitol Avenue.

The presence of the railroad spur also allowed property owners to take advantage of the availability of mail order building components. In relation to the size of the community, a very large number of Corydon's Victorian-era downtown commercial buildings incorporate cast iron storefronts and/or ornamental metal cornices, most manufactured by the George Mesker Company of Evansville.

Residential buildings surround the downtown commercial core, some built within the original 185-lot plat of the town and others incorporated through later additions and subdivisions. A number of fine residences representing various architectural styles remain, many found along North Capitol Avenue. Included among these are the Federal-style Kintner-McGrain House/Cedar Glade (built 1808), the Italianate/Colonial Revival Applegate House (c.1880/1910), the Queen Anne Mitchell-Atwood House (1902) and the American Foursquare Dowling-McGrain House (1915).

In addition to these larger homes, Corydon also has an abundance of smaller-scale historic residential structures, many constructed during the boom years around the turn of the 20th century. Local developer and builder William Mitchell was responsible for many of these homes, including the Victor Bulleit House – a finely detailed Queen Anne cottage at 415 N. Capitol – and the Joe Bender House at 510 E. Chestnut.

A preservation ethic was on display early in Corydon, with an 1890s history of the state capitol by D. F. Lemmon drawing public support for its preservation. Momentum for state acquisition of the building grew during the early years of the 20th century, with the General Assembly finally approving purchase of the building and grounds in 1917 as a state memorial.

A portion of the downtown – roughly bounded by Indian Creek, Beaver Street and Mulberry Street – containing many of the earliest buildings was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. A 1989 revision greatly expanded the boundaries of this historic district, particularly to the east. Inside the Corydon Historic District, both the 1873 Kintner House Hotel (201 S. Capitol Avenue) and the 1808 Kintner-McGrain House (740 N. Capitol) are both individually listed in the National Register. The Leora Brown School, built in 1891 on Summit Street to educate Corydon's African-American children, was listed in the Indiana State Register in 1992.

Parade on North Capitol Avenue. The Dream Theatre, seen in the background, originated in the Beanblossom Building on Chestnut Street before moving to this location. It burned in April 1966. Photo from Indiana Landmarks collection.



Adapted from the *Harrison County Interim Report – Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory* (Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, 1987), *Down in Old Corydon, Indiana* (Historical Society of Harrison County, 2016) and the National Register of Historic Places nomination, Corydon Historic District Boundary Increase (Mary Ellen Gadski, 1988).



Corydon's Carnegie Library was constructed in 1914 in the Neoclassical style. Indiana had 164 Carnegie libraries, the most of any state.

The Role of the Historic Preservation Commission

Created by city ordinance in 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission is charged with protecting the character of Corydon's historic districts by reviewing proposed exterior changes to buildings within the districts. The Preservation Commission does this by issuing a 'Certificate of Appropriateness' (COA) for work that it finds is consistent with these guidelines and will not adversely affect the historic or architectural character of the district.

The Historic Preservation Commission is made up of five to seven voting members, appointed by the Town Board President and ratified by the Town Council. These members, who serve without compensation, have a demonstrated interest or professional expertise in preservation or a related field, and must be Corydon residents. Advisory members may also be appointed and do not need to be residents of the town. Staff within the office of the Town Manager provides administrative support to the Preservation Commission.

The COA Application and Review Process

Section 7 of the Town of Corydon's Historic Preservation Ordinance sets forth the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) application procedure. In general, a COA must be issued prior to the start of any demolition, moving of structures, new construction, exterior alterations, or changes to walls or fences within a designated historic district. Routine maintenance and interior work does not need a COA. If you have any questions as to whether the work you are planning requires a COA, please contact the Corydon Town Manager's office at 812/738-3958.

If your project does require a Certificate of Appropriateness, an application form can be obtained at Town Hall at 219 North Capitol Avenue or downloaded at <https://townofcorydon.com/historic-preservation-commission/>. The application must be filled out in its entirety and returned to Town Hall. Supporting materials that further explain the proposed work should also be supplied with the application.

For new construction, these supporting materials should generally include:

- ◆ *a site plan showing existing and proposed structures;*
- ◆ *photographs showing a view of the street and adjacent buildings;*
- ◆ *elevations of the proposed new building;*
- ◆ *and any additional supporting documentation that may assist the HPC in its decision-making.*

Applicants planning a new construction project in the historic district are strongly encouraged to meet with the HPC and/or its staff early in the planning of the project, so

input can be provided prior to submittal of a COA application.

For the rehabilitation of an existing building, supporting materials should generally include:

- ◆ *photographs showing existing conditions;*
- ◆ *descriptions or samples of materials to be used;*
- ◆ *for a substantial rehabilitation, site plans and floor plans;*
- ◆ *and any additional supporting documentation that may assist the HPC in its decision-making.*

When the application is determined by the staff to be complete, it will be placed on the agenda for the Historic Preservation Commission. Meetings are held monthly – on the first Tuesday – if there is pending business.

Preservation Commission members will receive copies of all applications and supporting materials in advance of the meeting, and are encouraged to visit the properties where work is planned. Members always try to visit at reasonable times and will be happy to talk with you during the visit; however, they are not allowed to discuss details of your proposed work outside of a public meeting.

Applicants are very strongly encouraged to attend the Preservation Commission meeting at which their COA application will be reviewed, or to have a knowledgeable representative present. At the meeting, the applicant will typically present the project, outlining the work that is proposed, and the Preservation Commission members and staff will ask questions and evaluate the proposal relative to the design guidelines. Members of the public who may be present at the meeting will also be given the opportunity to comment upon the application.

After all comments have been heard, a motion may be made to approve or deny the application, or approve it with conditions. A simple majority of the Preservation Commission must vote in favor of a motion in order for it to be carried. If an application is denied, the applicant is welcome to revise and resubmit the project. Any person or party aggrieved by a decision of the Preservation Commission is entitled to judicial review.

How to Use the Design Guidelines

The design guidelines were developed by the Historic Preservation Commission, staff of the Town of Corydon and Corydon Main Street, and Indiana Landmarks. The guidelines are designed to be adaptable, and will be reviewed and revised periodically to reflect new technologies and evolving preservation priorities.

The guidelines have a twofold purpose. First, they will be used by the Historic Preservation Commission to evaluate proposed projects within the historic district. Second, they are also designed to provide guidance to the owners of historic properties – both within the designated historic district and elsewhere in the community – to provide best practices and recommended approaches as work is being planned.

Before You Begin Your Project

As you plan your project, consider the effect that it will have on your historic building and its surroundings. Following are a few things that you, your designer, or contractor should consider early in the planning process.

☞ When historic materials are removed, they are gone forever. Can the work be designed and built in a way to minimize such removal?

☞ Even interior projects such as plumbing, electrical and HVAC systems often have an impact on the exterior of a structure. Can the work be designed and built in a way to minimize the exterior effects?

☞ The Preservation Commission does not regulate interior changes; however, interior features can contribute significantly to the historic character of a building. If an interior project is planned, can the work be done in a way to avoid creating an 'historic shell' where the interior loses its integrity? Can the removal of historic fabric be minimized?

☞ Adaptive reuse projects, such as converting a former manufacturing facility to residences, pose special challenges. Can the work be done in a way that minimizes the destruction of valuable historic features? Will new construction, if necessary, combine skilled new design and craftsmanship with old, thereby enhancing both?

☞ In energy efficiency projects, it is important to note that the majority of heat loss occurs through infiltration, not through transpiration through side walls. Are all windows, doors and other openings properly caulked, weatherstripped and tight? Are vapor barriers properly installed in attics or ceilings? Are storm windows a better and more cost-effective alternative than new insulated glass units?

☞ Some building sites are better than others. Is your site contributing to deterioration of your historic building by channeling water toward a foundation, retaining wall, or other important feature?

☞ The cumulative effect of multiple projects can sometimes add up to the loss of historic character. What effect will all the projects you are planning have on your historic property?

☞ Poor maintenance practices can have a devastating effect on the longevity and value of an historic resource. Is your building being properly and routinely maintained?



The Harrison County Fair is the oldest continuous county fair in the state, and harness racing has long been a prime attraction. The 1927 grandstand seen in the background here was destroyed by fire in 1961. Photo from Floyd County Library collection.