

## History of the United States Court House

Until 1860, there was no federal building in Indiana's capital city. The offices of the national government were scattered and transient as the rapid growth of the state and city required more and more space to house increased governmental services. The Post Office moved from private house in 1822 to tavern to storefront to office block. Since the establishment of the federal District of Indiana in 1817, the federal judges borrowed the courtroom of Indiana's Supreme Court in the State House for trials and hearings and kept their chambers in their private homes. Other federal agencies found offices in rented or purchased quarters throughout the city. Finally, in 1856, Indiana's congressional delegation was able to secure an appropriation for the construction of the first federal building. In 1860, the Government Building, a four-story stone structure at the southeast corner of Pennsylvania and Market Streets opened for business in downtown Indianapolis, housing, for the first time, all federal agencies in Indiana under one roof. Over the next four decades, as the federal workload in Indiana continued to grow, government offices expanded further into buildings to the east and south of the Government Building, more than doubling the original space. Toward the end of the century, the need for a new and larger federal building was recognized in Washington, D. C. and funds for construction were appropriated.

The entire block at the northeast corner of Meridian and Ohio Streets, one block north of Monument Circle, was purchased and ground was broken for the new United States Court House and Post Office in 1902. The cornerstone was laid on March 25, 1903 and the building opened for business in September 1905. The building is one of only 35 federal buildings that were constructed under the Tarsney Act of 1892 which opened the design of federal buildings to competitive bidding by private architectural firms. John Hall Rankin and Thomas Kellogg, noted Philadelphia architects, secured the design contract, and the Treasury Department accepted the New York-based John Peirce Company's low construction bid of \$1,300,000 (the final cost, however, reached nearly \$2,000,000). The new U-shaped federal building was massive, accommodating 925 federal employees and housing the main Post Office, executive offices, and the federal courts. Each federal function had its own space. The Post Office's sorting and customer service facilities occupied the first floor. The second story housed two monumental court rooms, judges' chambers, the office of the Clerk of the Court, the United States Marshal's office, the United States Attorney's office, and the Judges' Library. The upper stories accommodated various other federal offices, and the fourth floor included dormitories and club rooms for railroad postal workers required to lay over in the city. The basement contained additional postal space and storage and service rooms.

The Court House and Post Office is an excellent example of the Beaux-Arts style which was made popular in the United States by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The style was widely used during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for residential, commercial, and governmental structures alike. In the Court House and Post Office it also provides an allusion to Rome, the origin of our civil law, and many Roman symbols of government, justice, courts, transportation, communication, and commerce are incorporated in the mosaics, stained glass, casings, and decorative painting and plasterwork in the building. The building also inspired the use of the Beaux-Arts style for other public buildings in Indianapolis, including the old City Hall (1910) at Ohio and Alabama Streets, the Indianapolis – Marion

County Public Library's Central Branch (1917), at Meridian and St. Clair Streets, and the building set the style for the World War Memorial Plaza (dedicated in 1927), which stretches from the Court House and Post Office on the south to the Central Branch Library on the north.

After another four decades, more space was required for federal offices. Between 1936 and 1938, the Court House and Post Office was expanded by adding a northern addition, which finished the original U floorplan into a square, filling out the city block. The addition, which was designed by the local architectural firm of McGuire & Shook (now named Odle McGuire & Shook), continued the Beaux Arts style of the original building along the east and west elevations, but expressed a more Palladian style on the north face.

During the first half of the twentieth century, especially after the Great Depression, new federal programs increased the number of agencies and employees occupying the building, and increasing federal litigation required more and more space for the District Court, the United States Attorney, United States Marshal, and associated agencies. By the early 1970s, construction of the Minton-Capehart Federal Building, at Pennsylvania and Michigan Streets, and a new main Post Office, at South and Capitol Streets, relieved the crowded conditions in the original Court House and Post Office. The General Services Administration, the federal government's landholder and property manager, then remodeled vacated offices and began the continuing process of restoring the splendid architectural details of the original building. Today, the building known as the United States Court House is occupied primarily by offices and agencies relating to the judiciary: the United States District Court and the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Indiana, the United States Probation Office, and the United States Marshal.

### **History of the District Court in Indiana**

For over two centuries, the courts of the United States in Indiana have been called upon to resolve the most significant legal, political, and social problems of the day. Before becoming a state, Indiana was part of the "Northwest Territory", consisting of the land belonging to the United States which lay northwest of the Ohio River, including the present states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The judicial power of the national government was first established in this territory by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 which provided for a Territorial Court consisting of three federal judges. In 1800, Congress separated most of the territory west of the present state of Ohio and called it the "Indiana Territory". While the judicial administration of this new territory initially continued on the same plan of three judges as under the Northwest Ordinance, increases in population and commerce quickly led to enhancement of the judiciary. In 1801, lower courts, below the three-judge territorial court, were created. In 1805, the territorial courts were given equity jurisdiction and, for the first time, appeals were allowed to the Supreme Court from the territorial court. In 1802, Ohio was admitted as a state and the present eastern border of Indiana was established. In 1805, the Michigan Territory was split off from the Indiana Territory, followed by the Illinois Territory in 1809. Finally, in 1816, Indiana was admitted as the nineteenth state and the federal District Court was established three months later.

The judicial District of Indiana was created on March 3, 1817 and Benjamin Parke was appointed as the first district judge three days later. The Court first met in Corydon on May 5, 1817. It moved to Indianapolis in January 1825 along with the move of the state government. One district judge served the entire state of Indiana until 1928 when Congress split the District of Indiana into the Southern District and Northern District. One judge continued to serve the judicial needs of the Southern District until 1954. Today, Congress has authorized five full-time district judges for the United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana to conduct the judicial business of the United States in the southern part of Indiana.

Until 1912, two federal courts sat in the District of Indiana: the District Court, described above, and the Circuit Court. Beginning with the passage of the first Judiciary Act in 1789, each justice of the United States Supreme Court was assigned to a Circuit consisting of a regional group of states and he was required to “ride the circuit” twice a year, holding a session of the Circuit Court in each district of his assigned Circuit. The Circuit Courts were the trial courts for most federal crimes, suits between citizens of different states, and civil suits brought by the United States. The circuit courts also heard appeals over most civil suits brought in the district courts. At that time, there were no courts of appeals between the districts and the Supreme Court. As the workload of the Supreme Court and the Circuit Courts increased over time, the Supreme Court justices found it increasingly difficult to meet their twice-yearly obligations as circuit justices, which often resulted in justices missing sessions of court and cases being held over to successive terms until the justice was able to reach the district. To provide some relief, Congress provided that the Circuit Court for each district would consist of both the visiting circuit justice and the resident district judge, but either alone could conduct the business of the Circuit Court. Thus, court could be held even if the circuit justice was absent. Later, Congress expanded the Circuit bench again to three judges, creating separate circuit judges who had no permanent seat, but continually rode an assigned Circuit. In 1891, Congress created the current Courts of Appeals for each circuit and transferred the appellate jurisdiction of the Circuit Courts, as well as the circuit judges, to the new courts, but continued the trial jurisdiction of the Circuit Courts. Until their eventual abolition in 1912, the Circuit Court regularly brought justices of the United States Supreme Court to Indiana as judges and as representatives of the national government, which had an important impact on the community, especially on the bench and bar.

From its earliest days, the District Court has made its mark on the nation’s judicial landscape. In 1818, Judge Benjamin Parke, a political ally of former territorial governor (and later President) William Henry Harrison, upheld the constitutionality of the federal statute permitting the return of fugitive slaves to the states from which they had fled. In 1862, Judge Caleb Blood Smith, who as President Abraham Lincoln’s Secretary of the Interior was the first cabinet secretary from Indiana, presided over the “Morgan County War” trials, sparked by a band of southern Indiana citizens firing on union cavalry troops who were attempting to arrest Union army deserters. District Judge David McDonald and Circuit Justice David Davis heard the Civil War-era case of *Ex parte Milligan* and sent it on to the Supreme Court where, in 1866, Justice Davis declared the decision of the Supreme Court that civilian citizens may not be tried by military courts when the civil courts are open and available. In the mid-1920s, the Court presided over a series of Prohibition-era prosecutions, including the “Jack Daniels Case”, which implicated a revenue collector from Missouri in a criminal scheme that siphoned 30,000 gallons of whiskey from nearly 900 barrels and replaced the spirits with water.

The District Court bench, whose members have included former Indiana Supreme Court justices, former members of Indiana's General Assembly, and a former member of the United States House of Representatives, was an all-male institution until President Ronald Reagan appointed the first female judge, Sarah Evans Barker, in 1984. The present Court has addressed such complex and important public issues as busing, obscenity, school prayer, police brutality, prison conditions, voting rights, government corruption, ownership of international art antiquities, and the right of a child with AIDS to attend public school, in addition to many highly significant private lawsuits with national and international implications.