NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

FINAL.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Spencer County Courthouse

other names/site number N/A N/A

2. Location

street & number Bounded by 2nd, 3rd, Main and Walnut Sts. N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town Rockport N/A ☐ vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Spencer code 147 zip code 47635

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date: 2-1-99

Indiana Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
☐ entered in the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.		
☐ determined eligible for the National Register ☐ See continuation sheet.		
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register		
☐ removed from the National Register		
☐ other, (explain:) _____		

Spencer County Courthouse — Spencer IN
Name of Property — County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
- ☒ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

19th & 20th c. REVIVALS: Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: STONE: Limestone
walls: STONE: Limestone
roof: ASPHALT
other:

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

File

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1. Name of Property

historic name Spencer County Courthouse

other names/site number N/A N/A

2. Location

street & number Bounded by 2nd, 3rd, Main and Walnut Sts. N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town Rockport N/A ☐ vicinity

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Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other, (explain:) _____

Spencer County Courthouse
Name of Property

Spencer IN
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
- ☒ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT: Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

19th & 20th c. REVIVALS: Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: STONE: Limestone
walls: STONE: Limestone
roof: ASPHALT
other:

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Spencer County Courthouse
Name of Property

Spencer IN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.4

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	495930	4192560
2			
3			
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Glory-June Greiff

organization Historian-at-Large date 06-05-98

street & number 1753 South Talbott telephone (317)637-6163

city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46225

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Spencer County Commissioners

street & number Spencer County Courthouse telephone (812)649-6027

city or town Rockport state IN zip code 47635

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contriibution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1919-1948

Significant Dates

1921

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Dunlap, Elmer E.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:

Old Rockport, Inc.

main block of the building. Like the east and west sides, pilasters frame the three central bays but here the outer bays of the projection are blind. The very outer bays of this elevation have the segmental arch and rectangular openings already described, the arched ground floor opening on the west side being an entrance into the assembly room.

The interior is organized around a central rotunda that is topped by a shallow stained glass dome. The opening at each floor level that allows the dome to be seen from the ground floor is surrounded by a classically simple metal rail. A sixteen point star in the terazzo of the ground floor faces the dome above.The entrances and offices occupy the north, east, and west sides of the building on the first floor with offices for the County Auditor, Treasurer, and Clerk on the second floor.

The interior spaces and finishes have changed little over the past seventy eight years. Wall surfaces surrounding the rotunda are enriched by a marble wainscot and paired marble (?) pilasters supporting a dentilled entablature. Original wall sconces and acorn-shaped ceiling lights remain. Office entrances still have their dark walnut door and window frames. Original ceiling heights remain and those offices originally furnished with counters, metal grilles, and shelving retain them.

The south end of the building includes an assembly room on the basement and ground floor, offices on the second floor, and courtroom on the third floor. The grand curving stair from floor to floor is also located in the south end. The assembly room is very simply treated and includes a balcony area at the first floor level. The courtroom on the third floor is enriched by Doric pilasters that support an entablature that surrounds the room. Cross beams separate the ceiling into large recessed panels. The original chandeliers hang from the points where the beams intersect. The room also has retained its original judge's bench, jury seating, and rail.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Spencer County Courthouse is located in the center of a landscaped square in the heart of Rockport, the county seat. The community is sited on a bluff that overlooks the Ohio River and the courthouse, in the square bounded by Main, Second, Third, and Walnut Streets, has a commanding presence one block west of the bluff. The square slopes gently downward from south to north so that the south entrance to the building is roughly at street grade but the north, or main entrance, rests slightly higher than Main Street which it faces. The approach to the building from Main Street is framed by mature deciduous trees. Other, younger deciduous and evergreen trees are informally sited around the square while low and mid-height shrubs hug the building's foundation. A small memorial is located on the northwest corner of the square. A section of lawn has been removed from the east side of the square to provide handicap parking and ramp access to the building.

The courthouse's mass is basically rectangular with the central five bays of the north elevation projection forward about a half bay and the central portion of the south elevation projecting approximately a bay and a half. The building is three stories tall with a parapet that conceals its roof. In the center of each elevation the parapet frames a round clock face. The ground floor, separated from the upper two floors by a thin cornice, is distinguished by its rustication and segmentally arched openings. The entrances on the north, east, and west elevations are recessed in the central bay which is distinguished by a molded enframement with bracket-shaped keystone. Lanterns flank this entrance bay. The upper two floors are unified by the use of engaged columns (north elevation) and pilasters (west, south, east elevations) that support a continuous entablature and the parapet already described.

The main facade of the courthouse faces north toward Main Street. The central five bays of the seven bay facade project forward and are defined by colossal engaged Roman Doric columns set on simple block pedestals. A low balustrade connects the pedestals in each bay. The column capitals are carved with an egg and dart motif. The use of engaged columns creates a high relief between the outer surface of the facade and the wall plane of the central bays. This is underscored by the setback of the outer two bays. The window openings on both the second and third floors of this elevation (and the other three) are rectangular and contain the original paired double hung wood sash and transoms.

The east and west facades are similar but only five bays wide. The central three bays are framed by pilasters and contain balustrades in a manner similar to the north side of the building. The central five bays of the south elevation project a bay and a half from the

interpretations of the Classical Revival style. Two of his courthouses, those in Franklin County and Jackson County, involved substantial remodeling of existing Second Empire buildings. The Pike County Courthouse, which Dunlap designed at approximately the same time as Spencer County's, is rendered in tan brick and is quite austere by contrast. Dunlap's Carroll County Courthouse completed in 1917, however, was more or less the model for the one in Spencer County. They are very similar but not identical.

If contemporary newspaper accounts can be believed, the construction of the new courthouse shortly after World War I was the most important event to take place in Spencer County in a lifetime. It was the fifth courthouse to serve the county, but apparently the first to be celebrated with not one, but two lengthy ceremonies. First was the laying of the cornerstone July 18, 1919, then the dedication of the completed building nearly two years to the day later on July 14, 1921.

Spencer County was created in March 1818. A log structure was quickly erected as a temporary courthouse until the construction of a more substantial brick building could be arranged the following year. This second courthouse was completed in 1822 but burned twelve years later. A two story replacement, also of brick, was finally completed in 1838. That building is remembered for the fact that Lincoln spoke there in 1844. The mid-nineteenth century was generally a prosperous time for Rockport and the county, and a larger courthouse became necessary. Another two story brick building, more than double the size of the previous courthouse, was erected in 18963-64. It served for fifty years before the county determined the still-modern-day needs. It was simply too small and lacked secure storage facilities for county records. In 1915 the county commissioners hired an architect and approved his designs but World War I interrupted building plans. As soon as wartime restrictions on construction were lifted in early 1919, work got underway.

First the square had to be cleared of the existing Civil War era courthouse and the adjacent jail, along with a handful of outbuildings and a few residences. All the county offices had to be temporarily located elsewhere throughout the town in available space in the upper floors and corners of commercial buildings. Wrecking of the old courthouse began in April under the direction of English Brothers of Champaign, Illinois. They also served as contractors for the new building. County commissioners then asked high-level members of the Free and Accepted Masons to "lay the cornerstone in accordance with their ancient ceremonies and usages," as befitted what they were touting as "the finest courthouse in southern Indiana," a "monument to the intelligence and patriotism of the people of this

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Spencer County Courthouse is an outstanding example early 20th century American Classical Revival architecture. It is surely the most imposing building in Rockport, the county seat of Spencer County, and is among the finest works of Indianapolis architect, Elmer E. Dunlap. As such, the courthouse is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C. It stands as the visual representation of the county government, and the fifth in a series of courthouses that have served Spencer County. It is thus, also eligible for the Register under Criterion A for significance in politics and government.

The neoclassical movement to which the courthouse belongs was heavily influenced by the classicism of the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. That "White City" of gleaming classical buildings established the image in many American minds of what the 20th century city should look like and reinforced a belief that classicism, and only the timeless dignity of classicism, could express the import of local, county, state, or federal government. It is therefore not surprising that many commissions for county courthouses in Indiana and elsewhere from the turn of the century thru the 1920s turned from the solid massive dignity of the Richardsonian Romanesque to classicism. Unlike other late 19th century - early 20th century revivals that employed the classical vocabulary, the Classical Revival or Neoclassical was characterized by simple, stately massing and an accurate and restrained use of the classical vocabulary. Drawing on the original spirit of classicism, the vocabulary was employed to define, articulate, and clarify different parts of an elevation or plan rather than to effusively adorn with detail.

The Spencer County courthouse design reflects all of these basic aspects of the 20th century Classical Revival. Its simple, compact massing yield a stately presence in the center of the square. The building's parapetted roofline reinforces in elevation its simple plan. Engaged columns and pilasters in a restrained Roman Doric Order frame and articulate bays rather than only provide surface enrichment. The rotunda centered plan recalls the monumentality of Roman precedents in an understated way. The court room is enriched by pilasters that provide a visible support for the expressed structure of the ceiling. In summary, both outside and in, the building demonstrates a simple, dignified, and sophistocated understandingof the classical architectural tradition.

Columbus, Indiana native Elmer E. Dunlap earned his degree in architecture and architectural engineering at the University of Illinois in 1897. He set up a practice in Indianapolis in 1903 which was active until the late 1920s. Dunlap designed several schools around Indiana (most notably School 26 in Indianapolis in 1921) and was responsible for several other courthouses in the state. All of his courthouses are

county."[1] On the big day, the parades, musical performances, speeches, rituals and other assorted pomp and circumstance lasted about five yours. The courthouse was due to be completed late the following summer (August 1920), but it was nearly another year before the scattered and cramped county employees were able to occupy their spacious new quarters. Evidentlly the county was so thrilled to have its sparkling new courthouse completed at last that dedication ceremonies began in the morning and continued all day long and into the night. The final cost was just short of $276,000. As an interesting, and perhaps telling aside, the Rockport Journal noted the day after the dedication that no Spencer County lawyers had charged for legal advice during the preliminary work involved in erecting this public building. "In other words," the paper asserted, "there has not been one cent of graft in any part of the work."[2]

The Rockport Journal had also exulted, even before the cornerstone was laid, that the new courthouse, would "be a thing of beauty and a joy, if not forever, at least for a hundred years."[3] Certainly the building is well on its way, having served the county for seventy eight years, longer than any of its predicessors. Perhaps the general downturn in Spencer county's fortunes was a good thing for the building in a way; there were never sufficient funds to make drastic changes. Today the courthouse stands in all its Classical Revival splendor, representing the past glories of the county as well as serving then present needs of its government.

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[1]"Great Event Coming," Rockport Journal , 9 May 1919.

[2]"The Building Committee" (editorial), Rockport Journal, 15 July 1921.

[3]"All in Readiness," Rockport Journal, 11 July 1919.

Major Bibliographical References

"Courthouse Files," Old Rockport, Inc., Rockport, Indiana.

History of Warrick, Spencer, and Perry Counties, Indiana. Chicago: Goodspeed Brothers & Company, 1885.

Rockport Journal .1919-1921.

Rockport-Spencer County Sesquicentennial, 1818-1968. Rockport 1968.

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description
Bounded on the north by Main Street, on the east by Second Street, on the south by Walnut Street, and on the west by Third Street.

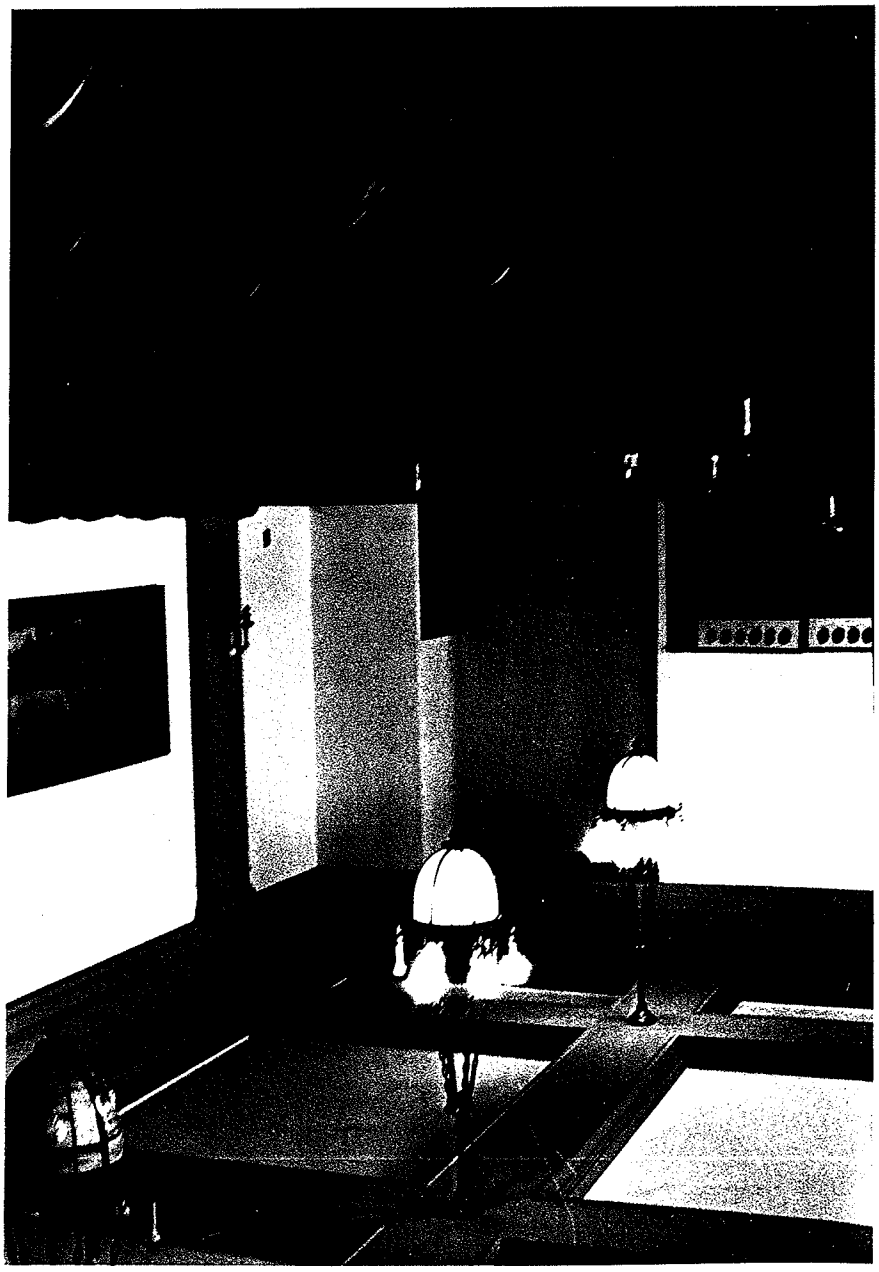
Boundary Justification
Encompasses the historic courthouse square.

Spencer Co Courthouse
[illegible]
G J Greiff
April 1997
NEG on file w/photographer
looking SE at N & W facades
[illegible]

Spencer Co Courthouse
Spencer Co (1)
G J Greiff
April 1997
NEG on file w/photographer
looking S at main W facade
photo [illegible]

Spencer County Courthouse
Spencer Co IN
GJ GREIFF
April 1998
neg on file w/ photographer
looking W at East facade
photo 3

Spencer Co Courthouse
Spencer Co IN
GJ GREIFF
April 1998
neg on file w/ photographer
interior, looking W on 2nd floor across rotunda
photo 5



Spencer County Courthouse
Spencer Co IN
B&J Gray
April 1998
Neg on file w/ photographer
interior, courtroom, looking W
photo 7