

HISTORY OF NASHVILLE

The town of Nashville is located in Washington Township and dates to the Indiana legislature's 1836 organization of Brown County, when it was named the county seat. Originally known as Jacksonburg, the town's name was later changed to Nashville.

Brown County's wooded and hilly terrain served to impede the growth of Nashville and the surrounding county. In the late 1800s widespread logging and subsequent soil erosion effectively ended farming as a livelihood. During that period half of the county's citizens emigrated. The terrain also inhibited other kinds of progress. A railroad did not arrive in the county until 1905, and then passed only through the northern part of the county, bypassing Nashville entirely. Thus change came very slowly to Brown County and Nashville.

But the physical aspects of Brown County and Nashville that slowed economic development helped to attract artists and, later, tourists. By the early years of the 20th century, several artists had discovered Brown County as a source of inspiration for their landscape paintings. Initially their numbers were limited because of the county's isolation. The artists typically boarded a train from Indianapolis to Helmsburg, then continued south to Nashville on foot or by wagon. Initially there were few places to board in town and few modern conveniences, but as an increasing number of artists discovered the picturesque and quaint landscapes, more hotels opened and more artists set up summer studios in Nashville. By the mid-1920s, the artists started organizing exhibitions. As word spread in cities such as Indianapolis and Chicago, tourists began arriving to visit the artists' studios and galleries.

Also during the 1920s, the State of Indiana began purchasing acreage that in 1929 would become Brown County State Park. The state park's opportunities, along with the tourists drawn by the artist colony, led to an increased reliance on tourism as a major source of revenue for the county at large and Nashville in particular. A few enterprising residents began to open shops to cater to the tourists, and shopping in Nashville soon became a draw in itself.

New development, sparked by tourism and several major fires, has dramatically altered Nashville's historic appearance. However, several significant buildings remain in the historic downtown. Among these are the Mary Bissell House, constructed of locally made bricks in about 1840 and once used as the parsonage for the Methodist church. The Bartley-Gibson-Hollenbarger House (c.1886) and the T.D. Calvin House (1875), both on Van Buren Street, are excellent examples of late 19th-century residential design and retain much of their decorative detailing. The 1875 Frank P. Taggart Drug Store, at the corner of Main and Van Buren streets, is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places and is considered one of the county's oldest remaining commercial buildings. A small historic district centered around the courthouse is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Brown County Courthouse (1875), the old log jail (1879), and the Brown County museum buildings (c.1840/1936) help to show the political and social history of Nashville and Brown County during their formative years.

The Town of Nashville established the Development Review Commission in May 2002 to protect the Town's unique character and ensure that future development is compatible with that character.