

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICT ON
THE NONMETROPOLITAN CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The use of the historic district as a tool for economic development has been well documented in urban places and virtually unstudied in nonmetropolitan areas. Although rural communities have much to gain by the exploitation of the historic district, little evidence exists that this option has been fully explored by smaller local governments.

To date, nonmetropolitan Hancock County, Illinois, has certified historic districts in Carthage, Nauvoo, and Warsaw and one pending approval in La Harpe. Economic and social data were compared between the cities of Nauvoo, Warsaw, and La Harpe in order to determine possible consequences attributable to the long-term presence of an historic district. Carthage's historic district was approved in 1986 and so was not included in the study.

A survey posed to local government officials and civic leaders in Nauvoo and Warsaw in June, 1986, revealed that the historic districts in these cities had probably not been fully integrated into any type of long-range economic development plan. Nauvoo respondents revealed a high degree of complacency, preferring to leave this aspect of their economy to private groups. Those surveyed in Warsaw expressed open hostility about the historic district and questioned its value.

As indicated by the survey, little relationship was noted between the economic data analyzed and the establishment of the historic district. The only significant difference between the three communities was the vastly higher percentage of CBD property owners in La Harpe who lived out-of-state. However, La Harpe's economy appeared healthier than either Nauvoo's or Warsaw's.