

MISSOURI COURTHOUSES

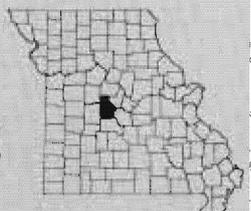
MORGAN COUNTY

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Fig. 1. Morgan County Courthouse, 1844-1887. (From: *Versailles, Missouri—Its First 125 Years*)

County Morgan
Organized Jan. 5, 1833
Named After . . . General Daniel
Morgan, Revolution-
ary War hero
County Seat . . . Versailles



In 1906 John Salmon, a Morgan County citizen, recalled that the court purchased a log house off the square for the county's first courthouse in 1836. They moved the building to the center of the square, where it continued in use as a courthouse until 1843.

The second courthouse was a rectangular, two-story building built in 1844, also on the square (Fig. 1). Two men from Jefferson City, William Burch and



Fig. 2. Morgan County Courthouse, 1889-.
 Architect: William F. Schrage
 (From: *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, Sept. 20, 1925)

Colonel Young, made the brick.

On March 12, 1887, before construction began on the new courthouse that Morgan County citizens had voted to build, fire destroyed their modest brick courthouse of 1844. Fireplaces and pot-bellied stoves created fire hazards that constantly threatened 19th century buildings; arson frequently was suspected if the courthouse held damaging evidence to be used in a forthcoming trial. After the fire, Versailles businessmen quickly constructed buildings and rented space to the County Court at rates which some considered exorbitant.

In June 1887 voters defeated a proposition for a bond issue. Two area newspapers blamed a third newspaper for the defeat, claiming the *Morgan County Leader* had failed to educate the people. The following year the county held another election. In spite of a majority vote, the election results were challenged. Those disputing the results asked whether the two-thirds majority, which the law required, applied to the total number of voters or only those who voted on the courthouse issue. The challenge was finally resolved in February of 1889 when the judge ordered the County Court to issue bonds for the new courthouse.

The third and present courthouse was designed by William F. Schrage, an architect from Kansas City, in 1889 (Fig. 2). Henry H. Hohenschild, an architect practicing in Rolla, also visited Morgan County's court and presented plans for their consideration. But the court chose Schrage's plan, which called for four corner pavilions, a center tower and porches supported by brick columns.

This courthouse is similar to those built according to Schrage's design in Howard County, 1887, Laclede County, 1894, and Ripley County, 1898. Pettis County's more costly version, designed by J. G. Cairns and J. S. McKean in 1884, was built with light-colored stone, creating an entirely different effect. The cost of Morgan County's courthouse was about \$20,000; Harmon Griffith, Sedalia, was the contractor.

A great portion of the tower has been removed, but the courthouse is still used and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

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