

Barrett & McNagny

Founded: 1876

Location: 54½ (later 52½) Calhoun Street, Fort Wayne (1876– ); corner Main and Clinton Streets (mid-1890s); 36 (later 136) East Main Street (mid-1890s–1912); 714–717 Shoaff Building (1913– ); 1001–1004 First National Bank Building, 119–129 West Berry Street (–ca.1929); 344 Utility Building, 114–118 East Wayne Street (ca.1929– ); Lincoln Bank Tower, 116 East Berry Street; 215 East Berry Street (1993)

In March 1876 James Madison Barrett moved to Fort Wayne to practice law. The son of Protestant emigrants from northern Ireland, Barrett was born in LaSalle County, Illinois, in 1852. A county superintendent noticed Barrett's abilities as a young boy and secured his father's word that James would go to college when he came of age. Barrett attended Mendota College in Mendota, Illinois, for one year and then moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he attended Ann Arbor High School. He then enrolled in the University of Michigan, from which he graduated in 1875. After college, Barrett studied law in the Chicago office of McKaag, Culver & Butler and in the firm of Farwell & Warren in Princeton, Illinois, before moving to Fort Wayne. He was briefly in the law office of Robertson, Lowry, and O'Rourke but soon established an independent practice with Charles H. Aldrich, a high school and university classmate.

Barrett and Aldrich practiced law together for ten years. A native of Lagrange County, Aldrich later served as U.S. solicitor general in the administration of President Benjamin Harrison. Aldrich & Barrett was a successful firm. Barrett, who specialized in corporate law, represented Fort Wayne streetcar interests for over forty-five years, serving as president of the Fort Wayne and Northern Indiana Traction Company from 1913 to 1917. In November 1883 Aldrich and Barrett managed to attract Fort Wayne attorney John Morris as a member of the firm, which then became Morris, Aldrich, &

Barrett. Morris was one of the most prominent members of the bar in northeastern Indiana. Originally from Ohio, he had first practiced law in Auburn, where he was elected a judge of the court of common pleas, and then in Fort Wayne. He was renowned for mental acuity and the meticulous preparation of cases. Morris loved to solve complicated mathematical problems and to pore over case books searching for answers to difficult legal propositions. He memorized the volume and page numbers of leading cases and was said to prepare his adversary's case as carefully as his own. Immediately prior to joining Aldrich & Barrett, Morris served as one of five special commissioners to the state supreme court, functioning as an additional justice in order to reduce a large backlog of cases.

In 1886 the firm became Morris & Barrett after Aldrich moved to Chicago. In 1887 and 1889 Barrett served in the state senate as a Democrat and became an important legislative leader. He introduced antitrust legislation and backed educational initiatives; his most well known achievement was the Barrett law, which encouraged street improvements by allowing property owners to pay the costs of improvements over a ten-year span. In 1891 the firm of Morris & Barrett merged with that of Robert C. Bell and Samuel L. Morris, becoming Morris, Bell, Barrett, and Morris. Samuel Morris was John Morris's son. At the beginning of 1898 Bell retired from the firm, and later that same year the senior Morris withdrew to become bankruptcy referee for the Fort Wayne district. Barrett and Samuel Morris remained as the sole partners.

The firm had been located on East Main Street since at least the mid-1890s, but between 1912 and 1913 Barrett & Morris moved to new offices in the Shoaff Building on the southeast corner of Calhoun and Berry Streets. Between 1904 and 1909 Samuel

Morris's son, Samuel, Jr., studied law in the offices of Barrett & Morris; he then established an independent practice with offices in the Shoaff Building. Edward G. Hoffman joined the firm in 1914. Barrett's son James M. Barrett, Jr., joined the firm in 1919. James, Jr., received both a bachelor's and law degree from the University of Michigan but enlisted in the army in 1917 and served almost two years overseas during World War I. He saw combat and was wounded in action. He was admitted to the bar in 1919, and like his father practiced corporate and public utility law.

In the first years of the 1920s both Morris and Hoffman left the firm. The Barretts briefly practiced law as Barrett & Barrett, but over the course of the 1920s they brought in new partners, including, for short periods, George M. Eberhart and R. Earl Peters. In 1924 Phil M. McNagny joined the firm. McNagny was born in Columbia City, where his father, William F. McNagny, was a lawyer. In 1876 William McNagny had begun a law practice with future vice president Thomas Riley Marshall that lasted until 1909, the year Marshall was inaugurated governor. That same year Phil began reading the law with his father and was admitted to the bar the following year. They shared a practice until William McNagny's death in 1923. In 1926 or 1927, after the departure of Earl Peters, Barrett, Barrett, Peters, & McNagny became Barrett, Barrett, & McNagny, which it remained until 1986. James Barrett, Sr., died in 1929.

In 1928 or 1929 the firm moved into the Utility Building on East Wayne Street. Eventually, both James Barrett, Jr., and Phil McNagny were followed in the firm by their sons, James M. Barrett III and William F. McNagny, who joined the firm and were senior partners by the mid-1980s. In 1986 Barrett, Barrett, and McNagny merged with Bonahoom, Chapman, McNellis, & Michaels, another Fort Wayne law firm. The new

firm was known as Barrett & McNagny and maintained offices in Indianapolis, Huntington, and Angola as well as Fort Wayne. Barrett & McNagny, which continued to specialize in corporate and public service law, grew to nearly forty attorneys and a support staff of about the same size. Its client pool included banks, utilities, insurance companies, health care providers, and businesses of all sizes.