

Morgan Custom Tailors

Founded: 1888

Location: 118 East Main Street, New Albany (1888–89); 54 East Market Street (1890–1900); 218 Pearl Street (1900–1906); 201 Pearl Street; Bank and Market Streets (1906–15); East Fourth and Spring Streets (1915–65), branch at Vincennes and Spring Streets (1930s); 319 Spring Street (1965–)

During the Civil War, James J. Morgan, an English immigrant and the son of a tailor, joined the Union army in Philadelphia. He was captured by Southern troops and spent his time in prison sewing uniforms for Confederate officers. After the war he remained in the South, living in Louisville, Kentucky, until 1888.

Morgan then moved across the Ohio River to New Albany and set up a tailoring shop. Eventually the little shop became a department store with “one price cash clothing” and a liberal exchange and return policy. It appears Morgan was not as good a department-store manager as he was a tailor, though. By February 1906 the large department store, opened with fanfare less than a decade earlier, had to declare bankruptcy.

James Morgan taught his son John the tailoring trade, and John used these skills in World War I. He served in the armed forces, stitching fabric to refurbish damaged Allied airplanes in France. While John was in France his father received a large contract to make United States Army officer uniforms. Before the war he had experimented in selling ready-to-wear clothing for men and boys, but he quickly withdrew from the field.

After the war John came back and joined his father in the business. By 1921 J. J. Morgan & Son opened a new branch office at Vincennes and Spring Streets. John and his

son, Frank Morgan, operated separate stores until the mid-1930s. After John's retirement the shop located at the corner of Vincennes and Spring Streets was closed.

Robert Morgan, the last generation of the family to become a tailor, learned the trade in the 1920s under the tutelage of his elder brother and his father. Sadly, no family members have stepped forward to take over the business once Robert retires.