

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE *Morgan-Monroe State Forest Office*



Original office of Morgan-Monroe State Forest constructed by the CCC during the 1930s.

The area that the newly remodeled Morgan-Monroe State Forest office sits upon has served a variety of roles in its history. Prior to Euro-American settlement, this region was populated by Native Americans for over 10,000 years. Native American interaction with the landscape produced the forest that would be encountered by the Euro-American settlers. Frequent burning during the latter half of the 18th century promoted the growth of fire dependent species such as oak.

The first Euro-American settler arrived in the area in the early 1800s, and in 1834 Absalom Fulford purchased the land the office sits upon from the United States government¹. By the mid- to late-1800s, Joseph K. Sharpe, Sr. had purchased this tract along with an additional 3,000 acres². The former owner, Abram Godsey, had a small tannery here which Sharpe expanded. The amount of chestnut oak and white oak trees, the bark of which was used for tanning hides, in the area helped to fuel the growth of the tannery, which also purchased bark from the surrounding neighbors. By 1880, Sharpe had also added a sawmill to his operation and reported producing 100,000 feet of lumber annually using steam and horse-powered equipment³.

A small company town developed around Sharpe's timber based industry and included a grist mill, boarding house, store, and post office, which was designated as Monroe Mills⁴. The town was centered near the current office building, but before the turn of the century the Sharpe landholdings were transferred over to the Bank of Indianapolis and the town faded away⁵.

Soon afterwards the land fell into the hands of B. F. Mason. Mason, who lived with his family in Sharpe's former boarding house, again altered the landscape as he developed a commercial orchard along the rugged upland ridges where he planted apple, peach, cherry, and plum trees as well as strawberries, grapes, and other fruits⁶.

By the 1920s, Mason had left the area and the land changed hands again. In January 1930, the State of Indiana purchased the land where the office sits from W. J. Holiday. By this time the cleared ridges had been subject to severe erosion and once profitable fields laid barren and desolate.

Within months of taking office, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's plan to pull the nation out of the depression had begun. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was developed to hire single young men in conservation efforts of the nation's natural resources. In May 1933, the first CCC camp in Indiana was stationed at Morgan-Monroe State Forest, just down the road from this office building. In addition to planting trees and installing erosion control features, the CCC developed the infrastructure of the property, including the original two-story office that once resided on this site.

The original office building was a modified timber frame structure made primarily of native hardwoods. Because of the forest's large size and central location, the Morgan-Monroe office was often the host site for many of the most important discussions and decisions concerning forest management in Indiana. Its proximity to Indianapolis, the Hoosier National Forest, several research universities, and much of the forest products industry made the building a natural site for hundreds of meetings during its lifetime. Those meetings introduced and often put in place programs as diverse as wildland fire management, continuous forest inventory, Youth Conservation Corps and Young Adult Conservation Corps programs as well as myriad long-term and short-term forest research projects, Best Management and Erosion control programs, wildlife management projects, and forest recreation projects.⁷

The property maintained this building as the office and service area until January 11, 1980, when an overnight fire destroyed the structure. The devastating loss of the building was compounded greatly with the loss of the property records, which tracked conservation projects, timber harvests, and numerous research projects. Within six months a new office was completed and staff moved back in to resume the work of the property.



Timber framework and the use of native material reflect the original CCC design of the former office building.

The wood-frame structure and native stone façade of the new office served the needs of the property for over thirty years. In the mid-2010s the determination was made to enlarge the space and combine the offices of Morgan-Morgan State Forest and Fire Headquarters into one building. This current, newly remodeled structure kept the exterior impression of the 1980 rebuild; however, the interior reflects historic notes of the original 1930s office building with an exposed timber frame and native hardwoods throughout.

The reconstruction project began in January of 2015 and was completed in the spring of 2019. There are 17 unique wood species used in the 6,600 square foot structure. Much of the wood was harvested from State Forest properties. The poplar trusses and siding are from trees grown at Morgan-Monroe State Forest. The white oak timbers originated from Jackson-Washington State Forest. The material for other parts of the building, such as the roof decking, was reclaimed

from structures slated to be demolished at Charlestown State Park. Work on the structure was completed in-house primarily through cooperation with the Department of Corrections. Over the four years the reconstruction took to complete, nearly 80 inmates worked on the building, some bringing specialized skills with them, while

others acquired new skill sets such as carpentry, plumbing or masonry as a result of the program.



Workman welding during office reconstruction in 2019.

Clad in native stone and yellow poplar siding, from the interior one meets with yellow poplar trusses set atop white oak beams in this modern park rustic structure, which houses numerous educational displays encompassing such topics as the history of the property, cultural and ecological features, wildlife, and forest management. The property will host a rededication of the office on May 10, 2019.



Yellow poplar siding on 2019 addition. The siding was made from wood harvested from Morgan-Monroe State Forest.

- 1 US Department of the Interior – Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records, *Absalom H. Fulford Land Patent*, 9, September 1834. <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/> [Accessed April 1, 2019].
- 2 *U.S Tenth Manufacturing Census, Marion Township, Monroe County, Indiana 1880*. Indiana State Archives, Reel 3770.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 S. L. Burpo, “Solitary pine tree in forestry the only landmark of a little town,” *The Morgan County Gazette*, 24, January 1984.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Rachel Peden, *The Land, The People* (New York: Knopf, 1966).
- 7 Ben Hubbard, personal communications, October 2018.