

THE ROYAL THEATRE

Constructed in 1931 by local contractor John Ephland at a cost of \$25,000, the Royal Theatre quickly became a centerpiece of downtown entertainment. Opening September 28, 1931, under owner Joseph T. Ghosen, the 500-seat theatre was among the first in the region equipped with sound-film technology, bringing early “talkies” and popular films such as *Jesse James* and *Gone With the Wind* to local audiences. Businesses including a barber shop and café originally shared the building’s storefront, reflecting the Royal’s role at the heart of the community.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the theatre introduced Technicolor films and underwent major improvements, including new seating, a redesigned foyer, expanded stage space, neon lighting, and updated equipment. Like many small-town theatres, the Royal experienced several periods of closure during the mid-20th century as entertainment trends shifted, reopening at various times for weekend movies and special events.

The theatre found new life in the early 1980s when community volunteers revived the space for live productions, beginning with Apple Festival performances. This effort led to the formation of a nonprofit governing organization—now known as the Royal Arts Council—which received 501(c)(3) status in 1984. After extensive volunteer-led renovations, the Royal reopened in 1985 as a community playhouse dedicated to live theatre and the arts.

Ongoing community support has funded continued upgrades to seating, lighting, sound, and facility improvements over the years.

Today, the Royal Theatre remains a vibrant historic landmark and community arts center, hosting live performances, films, and cultural events while continuing its legacy as a gathering place for the region.



Morgan County Historical Society and Museum

120 North Monroe

Versailles, Missouri 65084

(573) 378-5530 • historical@morganmomuseum.org • www.morganmomuseum.org

Hosted by the Morgan County Historical Society & Museum

This material is hosted and preserved by the Morgan County Historical Society & Museum.