Morris began as a location on the proposed Illinois and Michigan Canal which would link the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. During its construction from 1836 to 1848, this was one of several towns that grew up along its banks—supplying contractors, housing workers, and enticing newcomers. In 1841, after William Armstrong successfully petitioned the Illinois Legislature to create two new counties out of the vast county of La Salle, Grundy County needed a county seat. There were two possible locations, but the Canal Commissioners could not reach an agreement. When Isaac Morris, of Quincy, cast his vote for the location favored by the local residents, they gratefully named the town after him.

Leander Newport was appointed surveyor, and directed to lay out the town into lots, blocks, streets, and alleys, with a public square. The original town was bound to the north by Washington Street, to the east by Cedar Street, to the west by Wauponsee Street, and to the south by the canal.

Mail to the new town was carried by stage coach before the canal opened. In 1839, the residents built Shakey Bridge over Nettle Creek to induce the Frink and Walker Company to build a warehouse and a flour mill. In 1845, it finally did, after the United States Postal Department mandated daily delivery for the new county seat.

With the opening of the I & M Canal in 1848, the town prospered. Wooden structures went up quickly for grain elevators, workshops, hotels, and stores. Then, in 1867, there was a fire on Washington Street. A fire district was implemented, enforcing more substantial building materials like brick and stone. A building boom followed and the wooden buildings were replaced. After the arrival of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad in 1852, Morris grew to the north.

The history of Morris is based on the development of transportation—from stage coach to canal, from railroad to trucking. Its buildings stand as an architectural record of its growth from the past.
Start at railroad tracks on Liberty St.

1. Rock Island Railroad Depot
   Grundy County Chamber of Commerce
   909 Liberty St.
   This is the second depot, built in 1900. The restoration was completed in 2000 by the Morris Community Foundation.

2. Carson House
   Red Cent Pub & Grill
   823 Liberty St.
   Originally the Boston Saloon, built in 1858, it was renamed the Carson House in 1862. The two story addition was built in 1877. Here, traveling salesmen stayed while they called on their Morris customers before taking the Rock Island to the next town.

3. Chicago, Ottawa, & Peoria Interurban Station
   The Bigger Bite
   721 Liberty St.
   This was the depot and power house for the interurban street car line was completed in 1911 as part of the Illinois Traction System. The line ran between Joliet, Morris, Ottawa, and Princeton and closed in 1934.

4. Perry Armstrong House
   Delockey Apts.
   109 E. North St.
   This building was originally red brick with wrought iron trim. Armstrong's law office was upstairs. Lymon B. Ray (elected to the Illinois House in 1873) used the balcony built on the west window to deliver his political speeches to Liberty Street.

5. First Center School
   Dr. Halkyard's Office
   110 E. Jackson St.
   Public grade school classes opened in this building during the fall of 1853. In 1876, it was replaced by the stone "Old Center School" on Division Street. In 1930 Dr. Fred Graham purchased this building for his dentist office. Its west wing had already been torn down in 1924.

6. Collins Building
   Buy the Book & Associated Orthodontists
   420-424 Liberty St.
   J. R. Collins built this three story building in 1905 for his Farmers & Merchants National Bank and as a hardware store for a nephew, Price Matteson. Founded in 1906, the Morris Hospital occupied two flats on the northeast corner of the third floor.

7. Gebhard Block
   Hair Biz & Jensen's Vac & Sew
   314-318 Liberty St.
   Louis Gebhard built this commercial building in 1885. It housed Peterson's Grocery, Cronin Hardware, and the Sachse Saloon on the ground floor. The second floor was apartments, and the third floor was the Masonic Hall.

8. Morris Post Office
   Morris Coin Shop & Montage Spirits & Gifts
   302-304 Liberty St.
   In 1875 Louis Gebhard built this building to house the Post Office and the Eli Johnson Clothing Store. In 1907 Charles Sachse added a two story brick addition on the west end to house the Henry Kutz Saloon. The First Trust & Savings Bank began here in 1916.

9. Washington Hotel
   Harder Apartments
   114-124 W. Main St.
   In 1867, Phil Lehr built a wood frame hotel here. In ca. 1869, Conrad Wagner bought it and renamed it the "Washington House." The main building was completed in 1875.

10. Grundy Hotel Site
    Fabric Center
    301-305 Liberty St.
    At this location William Armstrong built the first hotel in Morris in 1841. It burned ten years later and was replaced by the Hopkins House, which burned in 1888. The current structure was built in 1891.

11. Streeter Block
    New Beginnings Bridal & Cakes
    221-223 Liberty St.
    This imposing structure, the first brick building on Liberty Street, was commissioned by B. F. Streeter in 1890. Henry Baum moved his clothing store here in 1888. Baum's Hall upstairs was one of the first motion picture theaters in Morris. The store closed in 2007 after 132 years.

12. Robinson & Allen Building
    Just Kidding Around & Me Tú Boutique
    216-218 Liberty St.
    Nobel Robinson built this impressive building of Aux Sable limestone, and opened a saloon here in 1877. The store to the north was rented as the "Holtzman News Stand."

13. Pike Block
    The Sweet Tooth & Tumble Weedz
    202-212 Liberty St.
    A portion of this building was built by Henry C. Goold in 1867 on land owned by John Porter. Marshall Pike later consolidated the four buildings at this site. They were bricked over in 1873.

14. Grundy County National Bank
    201-205 Liberty St.
    Property owners Abigail Atwater and N. C. Petty built this brick building in 1867 to house the Grundy County Bank. The "Here's Hallmark" section was built by Samuel Hull, a canal boat captain, who built a grocery store downstairs with his living quarters above.

15. Claypool Building
    Eagle's Hall
    101 W. Washington St.
    Lawrence Claypool built this building of Aux Sable stone in 1877. In 1899, Sam Underwood bought it for a grocery, which grew into the Revolution department store. The Fraternal Order of Eagles #1024 purchased the building in 1947.

16. Lymon B. Ray Store
    Fred Robinson & Associates
    105 W. Washington St.
    Built in 1864, this was Ray's Dry Goods Store. The owner was elected to the Illinois House in 1873, then to the Senate, and eventually became Lieutenant Governor. He helped organize the Grundy County Republican Party.