

# Washburn Crosby Utility Building

1914, 2002

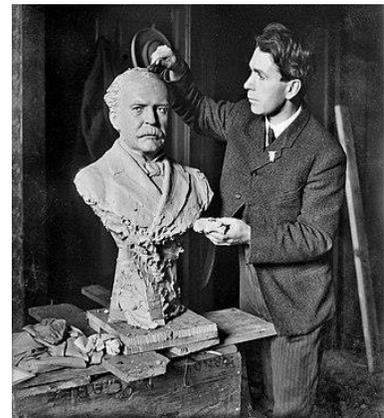
The Washburn Crosby Utility Building was part of the Washburn-Crosby Milling Company, the forerunner of General Mills. The Utility Building was built to house packaging operations for the growing flour mill. Belt and sheet metal shops were moved to the building to make room for more cleaning machinery in the "A" Mill. A power plant and cafeteria were also located in the Utility Building.



Construction of the Utility Building began on June 12, 1914. The Utility Building was designed by architects Hewitt and Brown. Edwin Hewitt (1874-1939) was born in Red Wing, Minnesota, in 1874. Hewitt worked in Cass Gilbert's office in Boston. In addition to the Utility Building, he designed St. Mark's Cathedral, the Minneapolis YMCA, and Hennepin Avenue Methodist Church.

The Utility Building, built by the Pike and Cook Company, at a cost of \$135,000, is an eleven-story pale-yellow brick and reinforced concrete structure.

The south facade has three pilasters with a terra-cotta milling figure atop each. The center figure represents a 1914 modern flour miller at a modern flour milling machine. The figure to the east is pounding grain in a mortar and the one to the west is squatting over a primitive hand- turned quern.



The figures were carved by John Karl Daniels and scaled to half-size, three to four feet tall and then doubled in size and reproduced in glazed terra-cotta. Mr. Daniels was paid \$200-\$300 for his one and a half month's work. Sculpting was done by watching workers at the mill; no models were used. Two large-sized windows placed in the center of the horizontal band of windows are balanced by two smaller windows on each end.

On April 22, 1918, two 25,000-gallon water tanks were added to the roof at a cost of \$6,000. In 1920, a brick and reinforced concrete band room was placed on the roof of the building.

In 1920, "Betty Crocker" was created. Betty Crocker got her start not in the kitchen, but in the advertising department of the Washburn Crosby Company of Minneapolis.

After an October 1921 contest in the *Saturday Evening Post*, Washburn Crosby received many household questions along with contest entries. Samuel Gale, head of advertising, wanted to answer the questions but felt that the advice should come from a woman. Gale solved this problem by inventing Betty Crocker. Her last name was chosen to honor former company director William G. Crocker. "Betty" was chosen because it sounded cheerful and friendly.



Minnesota Historical Society

In the fall of 1924, Washburn-Crosby Co started WCCO radio station. The company had been persuaded by executives of the Twin Cities Civic and Commerce Association to assume responsibility for the station and to pay for three years of the station's expenses.



Minnesota Historical Society

WCCO was created by taking over WLAG radio, changing the station's call letters to stand for Washburn Crosby Co., and changing the logo from "Call of The North" to "The Gold Medal Station." WCCO is still a Twin Cities and Upper Midwest icon.

Washburn-Crosby Company launched a radio show in 1924, later named "The Betty Crocker Cooking School of the Air." The broadcast became one of the longest running shows in radio history. The increasing consumer demand for cooking and baking information necessitated the hiring of twenty-one home economists, employed to carefully test and demonstrate the company's gold-medal winning flour. The result was the beginning of the Betty Crocker Kitchens.



*Public Ledger (Maysville, Ky) May 18, 1914*

In the 1930s, there was a large neon sign atop the Washburn-Crosby utility building that read “Eventually.” The odd word was a reference to the marketing slogan for Gold Medal Flour: “Eventually you’ll try Gold Medal Flour, why not now?” Very few advertising slogans last for decades, but Gold Medal Flour’s “Eventually... Why Not Now?” campaign was created in 1907 and appeared as late as the 1950’s.

The slogan permeated popular culture and appeared in cartoons, sermons, and even ads for unrelated products. Sadly, this sign is no longer in place.

Growth continued, and in 1935, a steel frame addition for flour storage bins was constructed between the Washburn "A" Mill and the Utility Building at a cost of \$20,000.

After General Mills closed the milling operations along the river in 1965, Riverside Industries assumed ownership, and the building was used as a warehouse.



*Minnesota Historical Society*

In the 1980s, the City of Minneapolis purchased much of the riverfront, including the Washburn Crosby Mill complex, of which the utility building was part, for redevelopment. The building was boarded up. Subsequently, the Minnesota Historical Society became increasingly interested in the riverfront. The complex’s historic importance was recognized with National Historic Landmark status in 1983.



*Finance and Commerce*

In February of 1991, fire destroyed many of the neighboring mill buildings. The Utility Building, however, was spared with little fire damage. The building sat vacant for several years, during which time vagrants passed through the building and added their own décor in the form of graffiti. When the building was converted into resident condominium use in 2002, the residents saved samples.

Today the Washburn Lofts works closely with the Minnesota Historical Society to keep both the architectural nature of the building and the essence of when flour was king in Minneapolis.