

## Lumber Exchange Building

1887, 1890

The Lumber Exchange Building was built in 1887 to house the offices of lumber distributors. The lumber industry was expanding in the late 1880s in the Upper Midwest, and a building was needed to house those engaged in this booming business.



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The Lumber Exchange Building was completed as a ten-story building, which in 1885, while being designed, was considered an excessive height and “fit only to be rented to the angels.” The architectural firm of Long & Kees (Franklin B. Long and Frederick Kees) designed the building. The style is Richardsonian Romanesque and features bold massing of pink Kasota stone contrasted with lines of windows. Long & Kees worked extensively in this style and are known not only for the Lumber Exchange Building but also Minneapolis City Hall (1889), the Flour Exchange Building at 310 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue South (1893-1897), and the Masonic Temple (1888) – now the Hennepin Center for the Arts, located at Hennepin and North 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

The original building-face along South 5<sup>th</sup> Street is identical to what we see today but the original building extended only 38 feet around the corner on Hennepin Avenue to include three bays of windows. The building corner included a turret at the top, with small towers along the 5<sup>th</sup> Street side.

With additional space needed, Long & Kees was hired to expand the building. The Hennepin Avenue side of the building was extended to include 13 additional bays of windows and an arched opening, matching the building entrance on South 5<sup>th</sup> Street. In addition, two floors were added. With 12 stories, the height was considered substantial enough to be considered the start of an era of ‘skyscrapers’ in Minneapolis. While today we consider a skyscraper to be much taller than a 12-story building, in the 1880s, the term was used to refer to buildings between 10 and 20 stories. At 12 stories, the Lumber Exchange Building was clearly a ‘skyscraper’.

Construction costs for the two phases of the building totaled \$1,200,000. Considered one the most expensive buildings at the time to be built in Minneapolis, the building had a 60-foot-long swimming pool in the basement private club area, built for the lumber executives who officed in the building.

The ten-story section of the building was designed with a “slow burn” construction method: columns and beams were large enough to retain strength even if a portion of their bulk was charred or burned.



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The upper two floors – five years newer – used a more modern fireproof method of protection. When completed, the Lumber Exchange Building was considered one of the first fireproof skyscrapers in the country.

This claim was put to the test when in 1891 a fire broke out in the adjacent building on South 5<sup>th</sup> Street, a paint / hardware store. The fire burned for a full 24 hours, and while the lower ten floors were partially ruined, the upper two floors were unscathed. After the fire, a skin

of terra cotta sheathing was placed over the wood and iron skeleton of the building, a design and structural technique that attracted national attention.



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As the lumber industry declined in Minnesota, the building functioned as offices for wholesale garment distributors in the Upper Midwest.

Other uses over the years include a barber shop, a bank, several bars, an event center, a shirt and zipper repair shop on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, and a Turkish bath in the basement, where the marble floors originated in a bathhouse in Turkey.



*The Minneapolis Times,  
February 26, 1891*

The building's main entrance on Hennepin Avenue includes a brass revolving door that once connected Grand Central Station in New York to the adjacent Commodore Hotel.

The Lumber Exchange Building was designated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

The building today is the oldest 12 story-plus building outside New York City.



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