

Farmers and Mechanics Bank 1942, 1963, 2006

The Farmers and Mechanics Bank, home to the Westin Hotel for more than fifteen years, is in the heart of Downtown Minneapolis' business district at 88 South Sixth Street. Situated on a historic site at the northwest corner of Marquette Avenue and Sixth Street, the building was constructed in 1942, with an eleven-story addition added in 1963.

The history of the site began in 1884, when two local businessmen constructed a large roller rink (which doubled as an exposition hall seating up to 4,000 people). The rink, Crocker Roller Skating Rink, was named after local businessman, Frank L. Crocker. *The Sunday Tribune* on November 2, 1884, announced its opening and declared it "without the slightest extravagance, to be the finest ever erected for roller skating."

The rink was constructed during what was considered a roller-



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skating mania (sometimes referred to as "rinkomania") sweeping across the country following the introduction of mass-produced roller skates in the early 1880s. By 1885, there would be at least eleven roller skating rinks in Minneapolis. These roller-skating rinks were especially popular among the younger crowd, as they were considered a suitable place to mix and meet potential partners outside traditional life. Considered controversial at the time, roller skating was condemned by many clergy, among others, as immoral and harmful.

The roller skating craze was short lived, however, and in 1887, the building was purchased by New England Furniture and Carpet and became a furniture store. The old skating rink, for unknown reasons, was nicknamed the Casino Building, and referred to as such in the newspapers. By the early 1900s, New England Furniture became one of downtown's largest retailers and continued to operate



Sunday Tribune, November 2, 1884

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out of the building until 1921, when the store moved operations to 416 First Avenue N. Shortly thereafter, the building was razed, and the site became a parking lot.



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The site remained a parking lot until 1941, when the Farmers and



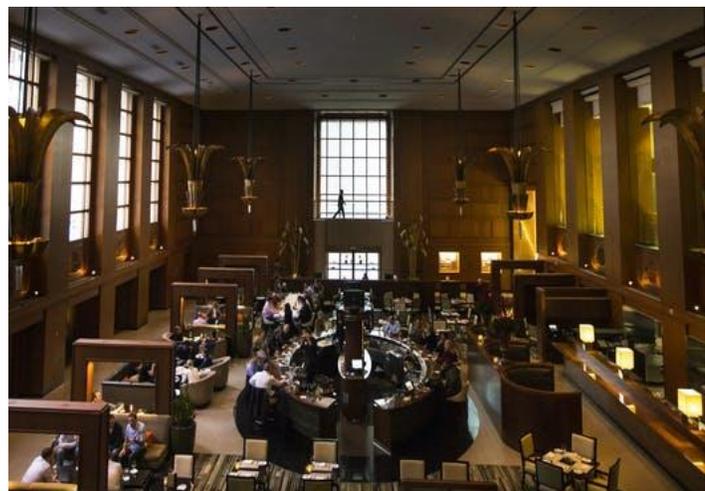
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Mechanics Bank bought the site to construct a new bank headquarters. Farmers had outgrown their previous headquarters at 115 Fourth Street South and was looking for a location closer to other large banks in the city.

Prominent local architects McEnary & Kraft were hired to design the building, which consisted of a main banking room at the corner of Sixth & Marquette (surviving today as BANK restaurant), as well as an adjoining five story building along Marquette Avenue.

Opened to the public on March 2, 1942, the structure was built of Kasota stone (also utilized for Target Field) and constructed in the Streamline Moderne Art Deco style. Included were two large reliefs on either side of the entrance (fittingly one of a mechanic and one of a farmer) and substantial ornamentation on the inside of the bank hall.

The bank quickly outgrew its new building, in large part due to the economic expansion seen after WWII, and by the early 1960s, construction had begun on an expansion. While the original banking room remained the same, the five-story adjoining building was expanded to eleven stories, and a new building of eleven stories was constructed along the Sixth Street side of the structure. This expansion more than doubled the size of the bank. While Farmers & Mechanics occupied much of the new building, some floors were leased to tenants.



Minneapolis Star Tribune

Farmers & Mechanics Bank fortunes changed during the next two decades. Due to a high-interest-rate economy, savings bank charters did not fare well. By the 1980s, Farmers & Mechanics was considered a failing bank. In 1982, the bank was acquired by Carl Pohlad (owner of Marquette National Bank) to save the bank. After 108 years as a separate entity, the state's only mutual savings bank ceased to exist on its own.

Marquette took over operations of the F&M building until 1992, when it was sold to First Bank System, which in turn merged with US Bank in 1997. US Bank continued to operate out of the building as its downtown retail office until 2002, when it vacated the lobby for more modern and traffic centric locations closer to the skyway.

Following US Bank vacating the property, the building was sold, and its most recent chapter as a hotel began. The entire building was converted into a Westin Hotel over a twelve month period, from 2006 to 2007, by Ryan Companies, at a total cost of around \$34 million. The conversion maintained and restored many of the original features of the bank. The main banking hall became the lobby and a restaurant called BANK. The bank vault is now a wine cellar, and the eleven story 1963 addition contains the 214 guest rooms. The hotel and restaurant continue to operate today, carrying on the long history of this historic Minneapolis building.