

# Minneapolis Grain Exchange

1903, 1909, 1928, 1955

Today the building is known as the Minneapolis Grain Exchange, but when built in 1903, it was the Chamber of Commerce building. The building's purpose was to provide a trading floor and offices devoted to promoting the fair trade of wheat, corn, and other grains produced by Upper Midwest farmers.

In 1881, a group of local influential businessmen, including bankers, millers, merchants, manufacturers, and railroad executives came together for the first official meeting of a new organization, the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. The group wanted to call themselves the Minneapolis Board of Trade, a more fitting title to the organization's intentions; but that name had been taken by another club of local businessmen who refused to relinquish the name.

The men who gathered in late 1881, knew their name was misleading: the name implied an organization encompassing all the city's business interests. The new Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, however, had only one mission: to operate as an open market, where like-minded businessmen could meet to buy and sell grain. The group realized that they needed a place where the sellers and buyers of grain could do their work. Their first building was four stories and was located at the corner of First Avenue South and Third Street South.

Today, the Minneapolis Grain Exchange is made of three Street South: the main building, the east building, and

The main building was the first to be built. It was completed in 1903, at a cost of \$600,000 and was one of the first steel structures in the city. Steel manufacturing meant buildings could be built taller, were largely fireproof, and included elevators.

The architects were Frederick Kees and Serenus Colburn. Their design for the main building was influenced by Louis Sullivan-designed large-scale commercial office buildings. Common characteristics of the Chicago

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Detailed Description of the Building and Its Equipment.

struction are taken up, when the arrangements for the business, convenience and health of the occupants are considered, all questions of external architectural merit fade into insignificance. Here it is that the conspicuous suitability of the building becomes most prominent. For as an office building the Chamber of Commerce has no superior, and for the needs of a trading organization no more perfect arrangements could be devised. In planning the structure the officers of the chamber and the architects, Messrs. Kees and Colburn, determined to have a building which would not only be suitable but in every way permanent; for it was a part of the thought of the Chamber of Commerce men that this was to be the home of a permanent organization which would probably be doing business right here when the sons and grandsons of the present members have succeeded to membership. The occasion seemed to be one which called for excellence of construction.

change in the architectural arrangement of that front. An exceptionally wide but severely plain cornice lends dignity to the building. Messrs. Kees & Colburn give this style of building no particular name. It is not an "adapted" or "modified" anything. It follows their own ideas and is as well entitled to carry their name as any other.

The internal arrangement of the building is with reference to the special requirements of a grain trading body. Entering from Fourth avenue one passes through a broad, low corridor to the elevators; there is a stairway, but it is inconspicuous and little used—only fast elevators are equal to the demands of the grain men. These elevators afford communication with every floor, one being operated for the special use of the fourth or trading room floor. The location of the trading room on the fourth floor has obvious advantages. It is almost equally accessible from all parts of the building.

*The Minneapolis Journal, March 30, 1903*



*Hennepin County Library*

Commercial buildings included steel frame construction; masonry overlay; decorative terra cotta, and decorative strips of windows.

The entrance at the center of the building on the Fourth Avenue South side opens directly to a large lobby, which includes “five high-pressure hydraulic elevators which provide communication with the upper floors.” Ornamental iron work around the elevator doors was fabricated by Winslow Brothers of Chicago. The hallways have wainscoting of Italian marble. The building was fully leased before construction was completed and, as such, the interior office spaces were completed to meet the needs and tastes of each individual tenant. The tenants agreed among themselves that mahogany furniture would be fitting for the building, so the furnishings were consistent throughout.



*Hennepin County Library*

The fourth floor of the main building contains the historic trading floor for the Hard Spring Wheat market and is a two-story space. For several decades, buyers, and sellers of this wheat product worked this trading floor. The room was designed with a state-of-the-art signal system. One hundred boxes are prominently positioned on one side of the room, each wired with a system of electric lights and signals. Using this system, any broker on the trading floor could be easily summoned. The brokers using the signal box system were expected to occasionally check the box, to determine if someone wanted their attention.



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The price haggling that took place on the trading floor was done for specific shipments of grain. Buyers and sellers would stand over tables that were piled with trays of sample grain.

The east building, added in 1909, was designed by Long, Lamoreaux & Long. It was built as expansion space, as the main building had reached its Trader's office capacity by early in the new century. The building is twelve stories, and in contrast to the brown main building, the east building is made of orange brick with a decorative terra cotta top.



The north building at Third Street and Fourth Avenue was completed in 1928, and designed by Bertrand, Chamberlain and Prondziniski. It was built in six months, thought to be a new construction record in the northwest at the time. The original building was seven stories tall and expanded to ten stories in 1955. While recognizable as three distinct buildings from the outside, the interior appears seamless, as corridors connect each of the three buildings with no evidence of a transition from one building to the next.

In February of 1957, Minneapolis Grain Exchange elevator operator Eugenia Frolund won a free trip to New York City. As part of the March of Dimes "Operation Cash Register" competition, Miss Frolund collected \$462.32 in donations from building tenants and visitors. Her New York City trip included an elevator ride to the top of the Empire State building.

During the same year, the first electronic computer to be used in the grain industry was installed at the Grain Exchange by Cargill. The *Minneapolis Star* proudly announced that the computer could process in eight hours what had previously taken ten days.



**GRAIN BRAIN**—The first electronic computer of its size to be used in the grain industry has been installed by Cargill, Inc., in its offices at the Minneapolis Grain Exchange building. Joan Rilling, above, touches starting button on processing machine to complete in eight hours a problem that previously required 10 working days. The magnetic tape Miss Rilling holds contains 4,400,000 items of information — the same amount contained in the foreground stack of card files.

All three buildings comprising the Minneapolis Grain Exchange were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

The final day of floor trading at the Minneapolis Grain Exchange was December 19, 2008. The move to electronic trading signaled the end of floor trading.

Twin-Cities based CoCo, a co-working and collaborative office space, opened in 2011 and was further expanded in 2017. Today the Grain Exchange Building contains the offices of tech companies, lawyers, traders and non-profits.

*Minneapolis Star, May 7, 1957*