

Langdon Building

1887, 1927, 1985, 2017

On January 22, 1887, *The Evening Journal's* headline read, "Sales Showing the Remarkable Activity in Local Dirt" with the article report that R. B. Langdon, at a cost of \$125,000, had purchased adjoining lots on Third Street and First Avenue North which would give him the most valuable corners in the city. On this land, Langdon would build the present-day Langdon building.



Minnesota Historical Society

By 1888, the Langdon building was completed and was occupied by grocery wholesaler George R. Newell & Company. In 1926, through a series of mergers, George R. Newell & Co became Super Valu. Super Valu was headquartered in Edina and until 1988, was the world's largest wholesaler. In 2018, Super Valu was sold to United Natural Foods Inc.

George R. Newell & Co., a wholesale grocer business, grew from humble beginnings. Newell came to Minneapolis in 1866, when he was only 21. Newell entered business in the grocery house of Stevens, Morse & Bull, jobbers in groceries. In 1870, at the age of 25, Newell became a member of the firm. This partnership dissolved in 1873, and for one year Newell continued the business alone. In 1874 he formed a partnership with H.G. Harrison. The business grew and in 1882, the firm's name changed and was incorporated as George R. Newell & Company.

For years George R. Newell & Co. occupied several buildings along Washington Avenue North. In 1881, another move took the grocer to the corner of Washington and First Avenue North, where the business, once again, outgrew its quarters. The next move would be to the Langdon building on Third Street and First Avenue North



*Minneapolis Star Tribune
February 8, 1889*

In the 1880s, Minneapolis embarked on a period of exploding growth that transformed the young Minnesota town into a major midwestern metropolis. During these final decades of the nineteenth century, the city's population quadrupled from 50,000 to 200,000. This economic boom permanently altered the city's commercial center and downtown Minneapolis streets that had initially been little more than a collection of modest frame structures. Downtown streets were soon lined with impressive multistory masonry buildings.

Wholesalers found a natural location to strategically concentrate warehouses just northwest of the central business district. In this location land values were low, and most importantly, there was a needed railroad hub.

This wholesaler/jobber area was fueled with growing commerce generated by the railroads. The access to goods, people, and new territories was created by and due to the railroad availability, and it was paramount to its growth. With the railroad network and the frontier population expanding, Newell's business grew rapidly across the Dakotas, Wyoming, Montana, Oregon, Washington, the Northwest, and into Canada. Newell soon had access to both the East and West coasts.

NEWELL'S EXTRA CALIF. FRUITS

Newell's Extra Sliced Peaches.....	.35	-	-	3.50
" " Lemon Cling Peaches...	.35	-	-	3.50
" " Pears.....	.35	-	-	3.50
" " Peeled Apricots.....	.35	-	-	3.50
" " White Cherries.....	.40	-	-	4.00
" " Tomatoes.....	.18	-	-	1.80

There is nothing finer put into cans than "Newell's Extra" regardless of price. Try them.

We have a bargain in canned peaches. A good solid pack Michigan peach in No. 3 size can for 15c. Come and see sample.

*Sauk Centre Herald
January 28, 1907*

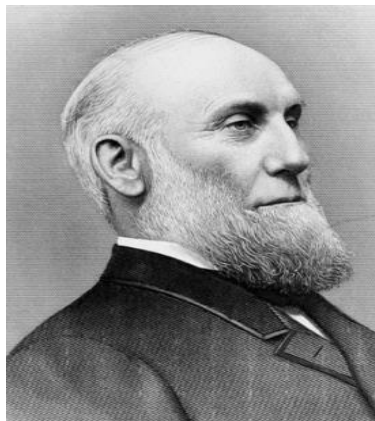
The Langdon building was specifically designed for the wholesale grocery trade. It was built of pressed brick, five stories high, with a high basement, and covered a quarter of a block. Access was needed at the building for horse-drawn vehicles. The frontier mercantile and grocer house merchants would arrive with their teams of horses to replenish their groceries, fruit, cigars, and essentials. It was not until the rise of the automobile in 1920s that city streets, sidewalks, curbs, and gutters arrived.

Robert Bruce Langdon was a partner in the wholesaler grocer firm, George R. Newell Co., when he built the building that carries his name. Langdon was a prominent businessman, financier, and construction contractor, as well as a state politician. Langdon served in the Minnesota Senate from 1873 to 1885.



*Minneapolis Star Tribune
January 28, 1907*

Langdon arrived from Vermont in 1858, the same year Minnesota became a state. He brought the first railroad track into the state.



Robert B Langdon, 1890

As a young man growing up in Vermont, Langdon witnessed the Burlington railroad being built across his father's farm. Langdon quickly developed an early interest in railroads.

In his lifetime, Langdon built over 7,000 miles of railroad, the waterpower canal in the Mississippi River for the Minneapolis Milling Company, the first Washburn Flour Mill (Washburn B Mill), and bridges over the Mississippi River.

The Langdon building was designed by architect W.H Dennis. Dennis grew up in New York, was trained in Paris, and a recognized

architect in the Richardsonian Romanesque Style. He had an extensive list of business blocks to his name. With its elaborate terra cotta ornamentation and finely detailed brickwork, the Langdon building was designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque Style. The building is an impressive five-story brick and stone warehouse with six bay facades in the street elevations. The first two stories are constructed with large two-story windows framed by brick arches, rusticated limestone piers, and a cast iron store front. Elaborate terra cotta ornamentation is showcased, including at the roofline. Terra cotta molds decorate the round brick arches, the lion head sculptures on the arches, and the foliated circle designs, with several of the designs having an “L” within. The most prominent terra cotta design is located on the corner (First Avenue and Third Street), with an ornate terra cotta shield at the second story level.

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, in its June 18, 1914, edition referenced George R. Newell as one of the founders of both the Minnesota and National State Grocers Association and a pioneer in the wholesale grocery trade. Newell attributed the passage of the U.S. Pure Food Act of 1906 to the activities of the National Wholesale Grocers Association.



Larry Syverson, Used with Permission

THE BEST OF THE BEST



Because of the many packers on the Islands, the one who packs NEWELL'S EXTRA is the oldest and largest—the pioneer of them all. He has earned an enviable reputation for his product and he must keep it at all costs.

So he exercises a little more care in selecting, processing and packing his fruit than does the average packer. As a result of his extraordinary system of inspection, you will find in a can of

NEWELL'S EXTRA PINEAPPLE only golden-ripe slices, absolutely flawless—not a speck of

tough fibre—not an edge chipped off or broken—the very heart of perfect fruit, packed the day it is picked.

NEWELL'S EXTRA PINEAPPLE comes in its own juice and cane sugar, not the ordinary syrup of sugar and water. The pineapple syrup preserves the flavor—the sugar and water syrup takes it away.

NEWELL'S EXTRA PINEAPPLE is packed in extra heavy tins, gold lacquered—an extra precaution against spoilage as a result of the action of the fruit juice on the metal of the container.

It's worth while to ask for NEWELL'S EXTRA.

GEO. R. NEWELL & CO.

Minneapolis Journal
November 9, 1915

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* on June 17, 1914, noted that Newell's brands had become known as the standard of excellence in the area's most-discriminating homes.

A June 17, 1919, *Star Tribune* article noted the important service that George R. Newell & Co. had contributed to conservation of food during World War I. “When the crisis of war placed unheard-of demands on the producers and distributors of food stuffs, George R. Newell & Co. placed a fitting climax on their 50 years of conscientious service to the needs of the Northwest and the nation by active support of the program of the Food Administration for conservation of food.”



Minnesota Historical Society

When founder and president George R. Newell died in 1921, his son, L.B. Newell became the president of George R. Newell & Company. In 1926, Newell merged with Winston, Harper & Fisher Company, creating the Winston & Newell Company. The merger

made possible reduced overhead expenses, better service, and a wider range of services under one management. (This company became Super Valu in 1958.)

The 1920s brought changes to the wholesaling and transportation industries in the Warehouse District. With the growing importance of chain stores, the increasing sales of mail-order houses, the tendency of large manufacturers to establish their own branches, the increasing cost of transportation and the arrival of the motor-truck industry, the decentralization of wholesaling began. Once the railroad began to lose importance as a mode of transportation, wholesalers found it more profitable to build one-story warehouses in suburban areas rather than multi-story structures dependent on close rail transportation.



Hennepin County Library

By 1927, other businesses began to occupy the Langdon Building. From 1927 to 1947, the Langdon occupant was the Northbilt Manufacturing Company. During World War II, this sportswear manufacturer had a United States government contract. The Northbilt team of brothers Raymond and Harry Levy produced 2,000 field jackets a week.

In the 1930s and 1940s, The American Railway Express and the Air Express occupied the Langdon building serving as Minneapolis' main express delivery office. Air express was a new transportation industry. Early pilots navigated by looking for familiar landmarks: towns, rivers, railroads, racetracks, large buildings, and lakes. This method of flying was how the term "flying by the seat of your pants" originated. Trans-Atlantic air express was added in 1941, and in 1946 high speed air express was added, which included Hawaii.

Express Employee Alertness Saves St. Paul Family from Probable Death by Bomb

JOSEPH JACKSON TRIES TO MAIL BOMB

Joseph C. Jackson, 170 Eton Ave., 45 years old, is being held by police after attempting to ship a fire-bomb by express to Thomas Thurston, 312 Kentucky St. Jackson was apprehended after employees of the American Railway Express Company, 300 First Ave. N., Minneapolis, became suspicious of a package he was carrying. The police were called. When they arrived, they found Jackson in a lavatory.

When police detonated the bomb in a sandpit at Stinson Boulevard and Broadway Ave., the explosion sent flames more than 100 feet in the air and shook buildings for three blocks around. Explosive experts said the bomb was composed of gasoline, thermite, dynamite caps, an old bed spring and a rat trap. Attempts to extinguish the bomb failed, police said, due to the

thermite, which is used in incendiary war bombs.

Tuesday, St. Paul police said they had arrested three women, acquaintances of Jackson, and that they are being questioned. Two are from St. Paul and one from Minneapolis.

When Jackson's room was searched, police found eight pounds of black powder, a revolver and \$43.34 in cash. They further added that the bombs made by Jackson average two pounds of powder and that he had enough powder on hand for four more bombs.

Two years ago the Riverview Cafe, 120 S. Robert St., was bombed and, according to police, Jackson has admitted sending the bomb which wrecked the cafe and injured the proprietor, Alex Kluka, and three other persons. Jackson admitted having a grudge against Thurston on account of a beer parlor altercation.

Subsequent businesses included Midland Mercantile Stores (1940s); Minnesota Wholesalers, Inc. (1953-1960); Johnson Printing Company (1956-1989); Café Brenda (1986 – 2009); Dahlgren, Shardlow & Uban, Landscape Architects (1985-2005); KKE Architects (1986-2007); GIS Systems and CADD Sales (1988); Lynch Jarvis Jones, Inc. (1991-1995); and IPR College of Creative Arts (2014-2022).



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The Langdon was renovated in 1985 by Prime Development Corporation. The architects were Korsunsky Krank Erickson.

In 2017, the building owner renovated the first floor lobby and atrium. The building features a five-story atrium with marble tile on the interior.



The Langdon Building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a structure contributing to the Minneapolis Warehouse Historic District.