

Pence Automobile Company Building

1909, 1929, 1935

The Pence Automobile Company Building, built in 1909, was designed in the Classical Revival style by Minneapolis architects, Long and Long. Located at Hennepin Avenue and Eighth Street, the building was used for sales showrooms, automobile assembly, and automobile-related services. It was included on the National Register of Historic Places based on its place in the extraordinary growth of the automobile industry in the early 1900s.



Minneapolis Journal, January 3, 1910

In 1899, there were hundreds of automobile manufacturers but only 8,000 vehicles. Harry Pence opened his first dealership in Minneapolis in 1903 and sold eighty-three cars that year. He chose Cadillac as his brand of choice. Cadillac, however, had a one-cylinder engine, and Pence decided that two-cylinder engines would have more speed and power. Buick manufactured two-cylinder engines.

After producing fewer than forty cars in 1904, Buick produced seven hundred vehicles in 1905. By the end of 1908, Buick had made 8,820 vehicles, establishing itself as the number one automaker in the world. Buick established dealerships for distribution of its product.

In 1905, Harry E. Pence was Buick's distributor for the upper Midwest. He was given control of thirty to fifty dealerships in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Montana. By 1906, Pence's dealership was the largest in the West. Subsequently, Pence's territory included Wisconsin and Wyoming. In 1912, Pence's dealership took shipment of 547 Buicks. His obituary in the *Star Tribune* of March 30, 1933, reported that by World War I, he managed, through his various dealerships, 15,000 automobiles in a single year.

In 1906, Pence moved his dealership to a four-story building on Hennepin Avenue. In 1908, with increased business, Pence purchased the lot at Hennepin and Eighth. The south end of Hennepin Avenue was then known as Automobile Row. By 1912, sixty dealerships were located in Minneapolis with twenty of them having



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Hennepin Avenue addresses and sixteen more within blocks of Hennepin Avenue. Most of those buildings were two stories.



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distributorship of Harry E. Pence.

On Hennepin Avenue, the entrance is recessed four feet with display bays on each side. New models were visible through the plate glass windows. On the Eighth Street side of the building, there are six storefront bays. A freight elevator on the Eighth Street side could raise automobiles to the upper floors. The south and west facades are utilitarian in appearance.

When the Pence Building was completed, the *Minneapolis Journal* on February 20, 1920, described it as the “finest structure of its kind in the world and as a building is accepted as one of the most likeable in appearance in the city.”



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The original plans for the Pence Automobile Company Building were for six stories, but with the industry growing, two floors were added prior to construction. The reinforced concrete building had a base of ornamental terra cotta, a shaft of glazed tan brick, and a cornice of terra-cotta and galvanized steel. The cost of the building was \$200,000. The eight-story building's primary facades are on the north and east and are rhythmic and symmetrical with rectangular openings at regular intervals. The building clad building was to house the Buick



Hennepin County Library

Upon the building's completion, Pence also sold Oldsmobile, Oakland, and Welch vehicles, while Buick continued to be his primary brand.

Pence planned obsolescence for his building assuming subsequent modification as a hotel, office building, or departments store. By 1912, the building had tripled in value, and Pence planned to remodel it into commercial space.

By 1915, Pence had the largest automobile sales business in the world, selling 3,000 to 4,000 automobiles, twenty-nine percent of all Buicks manufactured.

Pence later moved his business to Tenth and Hennepin and built a warehouse at 801 Washington Avenue. In 1930, Pence sold the dealership back to General Motors and retired. General Motors sold the dealership to Winfield Stephen. When Pence sold Pence Automobile, the company was capitalized at \$5,000,000 and employed four hundred workers.



Hennepin County Library



Minneapolis Journal, December 29, 1929

In 1929, the interior was modified to house the offices of the Minneapolis Gas Light Company. Minneapolis Gas Light Company had been given exclusive right in the 1880s to light Minneapolis' streets.

Gas Company Will Move Headquarters

Headquarters of the Minneapolis Gas Light Co. will be moved from the present location at 800 Hennepin avenue to the Baker Arcade, Eighth street and Marquette avenue, about Dec. 31, Harry K. Wrench, vice president and general manager, announced today.

Sales offices, showrooms, cashiers' cages and other facilities for serving the public will be located on the ground floor, while business and administrative offices will occupy the entire fourth floor of the Baker Arcade.

Minneapolis Star February 2, 1929

Minneapolis Gas Light moved its headquarters out of the Pence Building at the end of 1939 and into Baker Arcade.

In 1935, the Minneapolis Builders Exchange moved into the Pence building. Minneapolis Gas Light continued to occupy the first and second floors, and the Builder's Exchange occupied the fourth through the seventh floors. After the move, the building came to be known as Builders. A new entrance was installed on the Eighth Street side (with the address of 15 North Eighth Street) and two new passenger elevators were installed. In the 1940s, the building was home to the headquarters of Shell Oil Company.



Hennepin County Library

Bertin Gamble and Philip Skogmo were boyhood friends in North Dakota. As young men, they separately came to Minnesota and worked in a variety of jobs. In 1920, they pooled their resources, borrowed some money, and purchased an automobile agency in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, which they sold in 1921. They discovered that the sale of auto parts and accessories was the most profitable part of their car dealerships. In March 1925, they opened the first Gamble Auto Supply store in St. Cloud, Minnesota. In 1928, they moved their headquarters to Minneapolis. By 1929, the chain consisted of fifty-five stores in five states.

In March of 1945, Gamble-Skogmo bought the Builders building and the adjoining Pence garage. Gamble-Skogmo occupied the building as its headquarters until 1967, when it built new offices in St. Louis Park. Gamble-Skogmo Inc. was a conglomerate of retail chains and other businesses.

The Pence Building was home to the Lincoln Branch of Northwestern National Bank from the 1950s to the 1980s.



Minneapolis Star, March 2, 1966

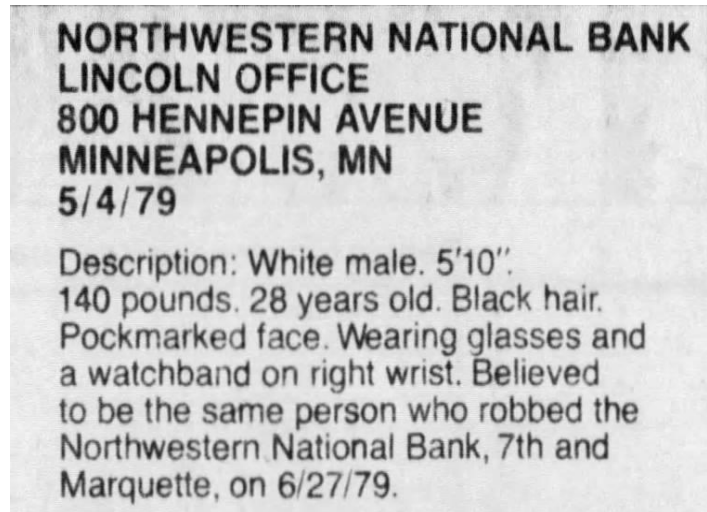
The Northwestern National Bank of Minneapolis opened its doors in 1872. Acquisition of smaller banks and a growing list of services made it one of the top banking companies in the region.

In 1929, Northwestern National Bank became a bank holding company organized as Northwestern Bancorporation (later

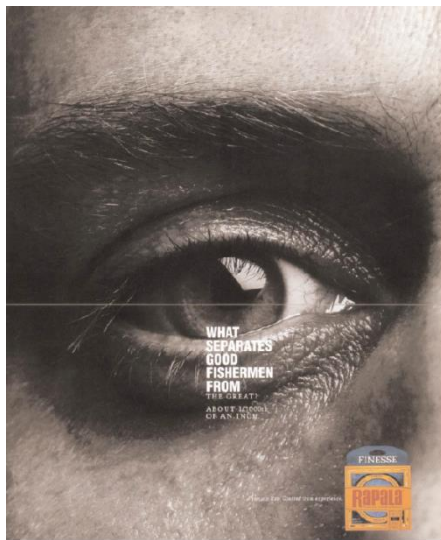
Norwest Corporation). Norwest merged with Wells Fargo in 1998.

Three walk-in bank vaults, including the original safety deposit boxes, remain in the basement level of the Pence Building to this day.

Carmichael Lynch was a Pence tenant in the 1980s and 1990s. Founded in 1962, Carmichael Lynch was purchased by Interpublic Group in 1998. Cofounders Leland T. Lynch and Jack Carmichael launched the Minneapolis-based shop which once ranked as one of the largest independently owned agencies in the United States prior to the sale.



In 1984, Carmichael Lynch earned two Effie awards from the American Marketing Association--a feat confined to New York agencies until then. As the ad agency business grew in Minneapolis in the 1980s, so did Carmichael Lynch. As the agency grew, so did the need for space.



Carmichael Lynch ad for Rapala

The agency moved downtown into the Pence. Carmichael Lynch transformed the Pence Building into a symbol of the agency's creative energy and helped begin a revitalization of the area. A lengthy article by Dan Wascoe, Jr., in the *Star Tribune* on April 17, 1988, noted that the company had created "forty-one conference rooms [that] are marked by bizarre decor reflecting parts of the agency's business. The cow room, with its udder-stated furnishings, represents agricultural clients. The urban-guerrilla room, with chain-link fence and tire tracks on the wall, honors longtime client Harley Davidson."

Carmichael Lynch was named agency of the year in 1991 by the American Association of Advertising Agencies and in 1993 for creative excellence. The agency received the Stephen E. Kelly Award from the Magazine Publishers of America in 1994 for its Schwinn bikes campaign. In 1998, Interpublic purchased Carmichael Lynch. The advertising firm vacated the building in the mid-2000s.

Current tenants include Sartell Group, Computer Forensic Services, CW Twin Cities, and Madel P.A.