

Wyman Building

1896, 1934

The seven-story Wyman, Partridge & Company Building, at First Avenue North and North Fourth Street, was completed in 1896. The building is designed in the Renaissance Revival style. Doric columns frame the sides of the street-level windows on the Fourth Street façade of the building. Large arched windows are featured on the sixth floor. Today the building is known as the Wyman Building and it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a structure contributing to the Minneapolis Warehouse Historic District.



*The Minneapolis Tribune
June 14, 1896*

The property at the southwest corner of North First Avenue and Fourth Street was owned by Thomas Barlow Walker, a local businessman in the lumber business. Walker is best known as founder of the Walker Art Center. He was also responsible for building the Minneapolis Public Library system and served as president of the library board for 43 years, until his death in 1928.

In May 1896, Walker sold the property to Wyman, Partridge & Company for \$56,500. Long and Kees drew the plans and the building – the second in Minneapolis to be of steel construction – was to be “one of the finest in the Northwest.” Plans for the building included dividing the building into two parts: a salesroom and a warehouse, with a fire wall running between the two. C.F. Haglin was awarded the contract to excavate the property, lay the foundation, furnish the iron, and construct the building. The building was to be fireproof throughout, “as to head off all possible incipient conflagrations”. It was boasted that the building was the most convenient wholesale mercantile building in the Northwest.

Wyman, Partridge & Company started business in 1874. Known as the largest dry goods jobber north of Chicago, Wyman Partridge operated as a wholesaler to retailers. The announcement of their new building signaled that First Avenue North would finally be considered the geographic center of the Minneapolis jobbing center. The company’s manufacturing facility for garments was located on North Fifth Street, while the new building at 400 First Avenue North would be used as administrative headquarters, warehouse space, and a retail store.

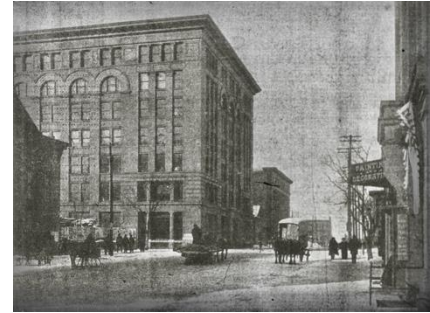
In the fall of 1896, a laborer employed at the construction site fell four stories when a wooden plank broke. Joseph Lovely broke both legs and was transported after the accident to his

Manufacturers, Wholesalers and Jobbers of Minneapolis	
COAL AND COKE. PIONEER FUEL CO. Shippers of COAL Wharves—St. Louis, Mo., Duluth, Minn., Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. C. Paul, St. Robert St., Duluth, St. W. Superior.	GROCERS. GEO. R. NEWELL & CO., WHOLESALE GROCERS. Corner First Av. N. and Third St.
PHILADELPHIA AND READING COAL AND IRON CO. Coal and Wood. 107 LUMBER EXCHANGE.	FRUITS AND PRODUCE. E. P. STACY & SONS WHOLESALE Commission Merchants. Jobbers in California Fruits and Hemp Products. 200-202 NORTH SIXTH STREET.
BAGS AND BAGGING. BEMIS BRO. BAG CO —MANUFACTURERS— BAGS 612 Fourth Street South. HARDWARE.	DRY GOODS. WYMAN, PARTRIDGE & CO., WHOLESALE DRY GOODS. CORNER FIRST AVE N AND FOURTH STREET.

*The Minneapolis Times
May 9, 1901*

home in northeast Minneapolis. It is not known if he survived his injuries.

H.E. Partridge, President and general manager of Wyman Partridge & Company, left the business in early 1901 due to health concerns. That same year, the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported that not a single woman was employed in the seven-story Wyman Partridge Building. The new warehouse manager, Mr. Scott, reported that there was little opportunity for them, “the stenographer’s desk being the only place that they might be expected to fill”.



The Minneapolis Daily Times
January 1, 1901

The Minneapolis Sunday Tribune
September 1, 1918

By the late 1920s, the jobber business was changing.

Consolidations and mergers resulted in fewer large dry goods houses. In June 1930, Wyman, Partridge & Company merged with three similar companies to form the largest wholesale and manufacturing concern in the country. Ely & Walker Dry Goods of St. Louis, the Walton N Moore Dry Goods Company of San Francisco, and the Watts-Ritter Company of West Virginia merged with Wyman Partridge to form the new dry goods house known as United Dry Goods Company. The Wyman Partridge Building remained locally owned, with a long-term lease to the new company owners. In addition to local ownership of the building, the consolidation called for the existing workforce to remain in place.

The new business model proved to be short lived. In 1934, four years after the merger, the Wyman Partridge Building was reconceived as the Wyman merchandise mart, a facility specifically planned for the local textile industry. United Dry Goods vacated the building at First Avenue North and Fourth Street, and rented the space for light manufacturing, jobbing, manufacturers’ agencies and small merchandising operations. While the building underwent substantial renovation on the interior, the outside of the building was unchanged. The new merchandise mart continued to be known as the Wyman Building, named in honor of Oliver Cromwell Wyman, founder of Wyman Partridge.



Hennepin County Library

In 1946, a convict recently released from Stillwater prison was accused of stealing four large cartons of nylon hose from the loading dock at the new merchandise mart. Following a long series of thefts in the area, the accused was apprehended. The theft did not deter Heyman Distributing Company from opening a branch office for their hosiery firm in the Wyman Merchandise Mart ten years later.

By the 1950s, Minneapolis had become known as the underwear capital of the world, and Minnesota was the second largest market for the manufacturing of infant's and children's clothing. Activity in the Wyman Building was at an all-time high. Thousands of people worked in the Wyman Building, making coats and dresses.



*The Minneapolis Star
November 5, 1955*

Within twenty years, tenants of the Wyman Building would change again. Clothing manufacturers began dealing directly with the small-town stores, and wholesalers such as those in the Wyman Building began to fail. A 1978, *Minneapolis Star* article listed the tenants of the Wyman Building as Ozone Dance Company, W.A.R.M. Gallery for female artists, and Vermillion Editions, a printing and lithography studio. The sixth floor of the building had been converted into a dance studio.

Clothing manufacturing had left the Minneapolis area. The Wyman Building was divided into smaller, leasable spaces, with many leased as artist studios. In 1980, a few hundred artists had active studio spaces in the north loop and warehouse areas, and dozens of art galleries occupied space in the Wyman Building, as well as other buildings on First Avenue. The Wyman Building was considered the unofficial center of the warehouse art scene.



*Minneapolis Tribune
September 15, 1973*



*Star Tribune
October 3, 1992*

By the early 2000s, the warehouse gallery scene at the Wyman Building was dwindling. The April 2004 gallery showings of Thomas Barry, the Flanders Contemporary Art exhibit, and the Kellie Rae Theiss gallery exhibit were some of the final public exhibits in the Wyman Building, where rent had



*Star Tribune
December 3, 1997*



Minnesota Historical Society

surpassed the budgets of artists and gallery owners.

Swervo purchased the building in 2005 and completed a significant modernization while respecting the historic elements that make this a unique and creative standout for office users. The original plaster walls, barrel-vaulted ceilings and hardwood floors remain to this day. This renovation sparked a trend that led to the revitalization of the Warehouse District as the go-to office destination for creative users,

tech companies and other businesses. Local advertising agency, Colle+McVoy, moved into the renovated space in mid-2006. Ten years later, Perforce Software moved to the Wyman Building.