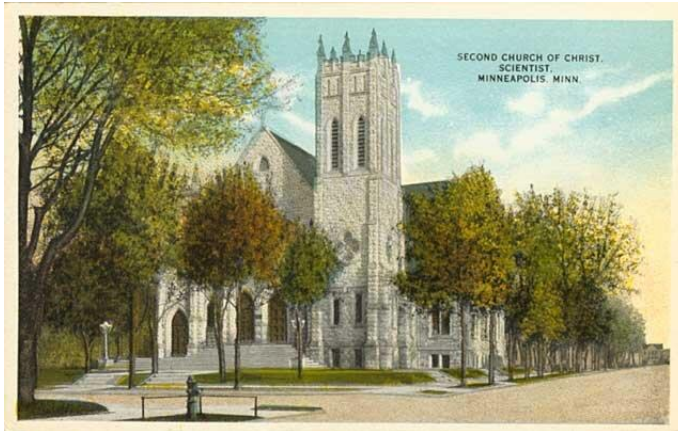


The Ivy Tower / Second Church of Christ Scientist

1930, 2007

The Ivy Tower, completed in 1930, on Second Avenue South between Eleventh and Twelfth Street is a unique nine-story building in Minneapolis built in the rarely seen Ziggurat architectural style. Originally built as administrative offices for the Second Church of Christ Scientist, it was intended



to be the first building of an eventual full-block development, culminating with a domed main church.

Thomas Rogers Kimball was the architect, and Naugle-Leck were the builders.

While the rest of the planned development did not come to fruition, the Ivy Tower has served as an office building and, more recently, as part of a luxury hotel, surviving multiple attempts at demolition.

The Second Church of Christ Scientist in Minneapolis was founded in 1897, as part of the rapidly spreading Christian Science branch of Christianity. Christian Science (not to be confused with Scientology) was founded in 1879 in Boston, Massachusetts by Mary Baker Eddy and quickly became the fastest growing religion in the country. Its core beliefs include the controversial view that disease should be treated primarily by prayer rather than medicine. Given the increasing effectiveness of modern medicine during the Twentieth Century, membership in the church peaked somewhere between 1930 and 1960, after which it began to decline.

In Minneapolis, the Second Church of Christ Scientist built its original church in 1901 at Second Avenue South and Eleventh Street. The church began looking at expansion in the 1920s and conceptualized a master plan for the block just south of the current church's location. This master plan called for four towers surrounding a main domed church building, and construction soon began on the first tower which is now known as the Ivy Tower.



Dwight Miller

The building was designed by Omaha, Nebraska based architect Thomas Kimball, in the Ziggurat form of Moderne architecture, a rarity in the city. The Ziggurat style draws on the design of temples from ancient Mesopotamia, characterized by terraced pyramids of successively receding stories. The exterior of the building included a textured-finish concrete for additional style, becoming one of the first in Minneapolis to do so. The total cost of construction was approximately \$186,000.

Due to the Great Depression, the remainder of the planned towers and the church were not built. However, the Second Church of the Christ Scientist still utilized the Ivy Tower as offices until 1965, when the building was sold to a local investment company for \$177,000. It was at this point that the building was renamed the Ivy Tower, having been known until that point as the Christian Science Tower. The investment company also completed renovations to the building to modernize it as an office building.

The Ivy Tower would continue to serve as offices for decades and was subsequently known for being seedy and inexpensive. It began to fall into a state of disrepair, and by the 1990s, because it was no longer economical to operate, the owners began to look at demolishing the building and creating a parking lot.



Staff Photo by Tom Sweeney

Some say costs to preserve it may be too high a price to pay to save the Minneapolis landmark.

Council vote may mean the end for Ivy Tower

*Minneapolis Star Tribune,
February 24, 1995*



Fortunately, multiple demolition applications were denied, including a Minneapolis City Council vote in 1995, where the outcome was far from certain. The Ivy Tower had been designated for protection in 1986 by the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Committee. Its historic designation status may have helped save the building. The owners eventually boarded up the building in the mid-1990s to cut their losses, and the building remained vacant for years.

By 2000, re-development proposals began to surface, financed by historic tax credits making the project financially feasible. Initial proposals by developers Jeffrey Laux and Gary Benson included a wide variety of uses, from hotels to offices to condominiums. Eventually, Laux and Benson landed on a luxury hotel and condominium development, which would rehabilitate the Ivy Tower as well as incorporate a new 25-story

condominium tower and 17-story hotel tower. These new buildings would surround the original Ivy Tower and would be known as the Hotel Ivy and Ivy Condos.

The original Ivy Tower was converted into hotel rooms. Construction on the project started in 2006 and was completed in 2008, at a total cost close to \$90 million. Unfortunately, construction began at the height of a condominium boom in Minneapolis, and by the time the tower was completed, the Great Recession had begun and the financial climate was unfavorable to condominiums. As a result, the building struggled to sell its condominiums and by 2009 had gone into receivership. The condominium units did not fully sell out until 2015.

Walking by the Ivy Tower today, you would not realize that until 2008, it was a run-down building close to demolition. It is now a luxury standard in downtown Minneapolis, with the penthouse hotel suite at the top of the Ziggurat structure costing several thousand dollars a night. There is also a restaurant and subterranean bar for the public to enjoy.