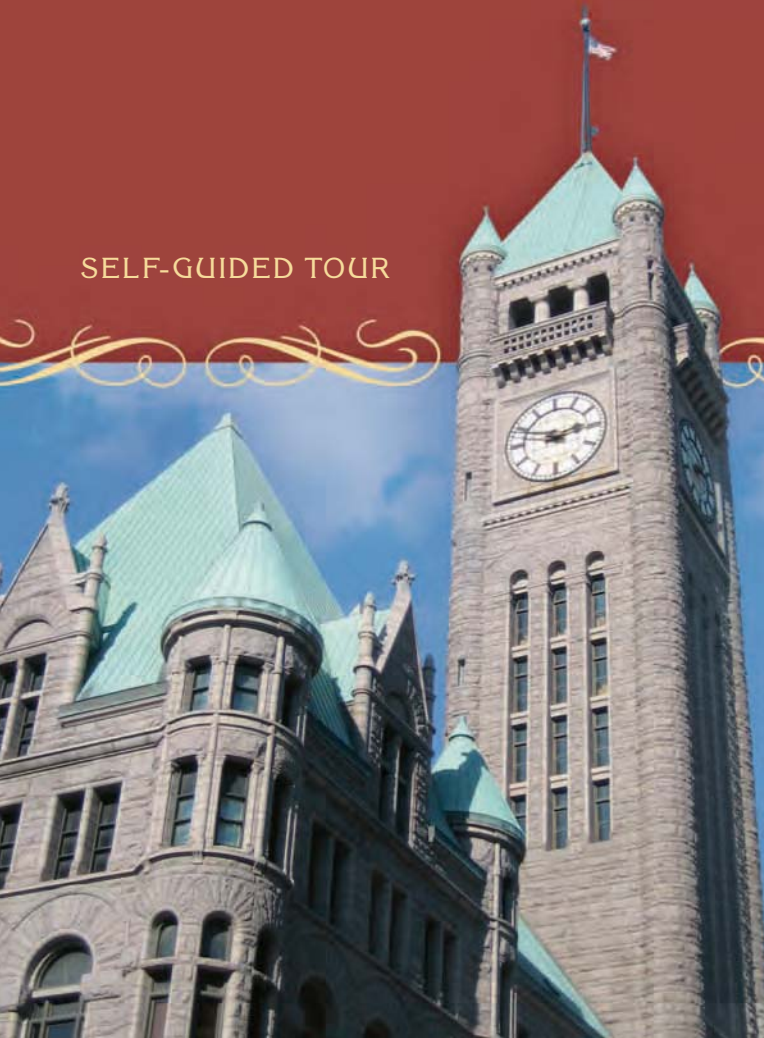


# HISTORIC MINNEAPOLIS CITY HALL & HENNEPIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE

SELF-GUIDED TOUR



## THE HISTORIC BUILDING

MINNEAPOLIS AND HENNEPIN COUNTY OFFICIALS  
HAD A GRAND VISION WHEN CONSTRUCTION OF THE  
CITY HALL AND COURTHOUSE (OFFICIALLY KNOWN  
AS THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING) BEGAN IN THE 1880s.



Just a decade prior to this, it became apparent that the existing—and geographically separate—city hall and county courthouse buildings had inadequate space for serving the needs of the rapidly growing frontier town. Finally, after much deliberation, a decision was made to join the two entities under one roof. The project was to be under the guidance of a committee comprised of three city council members, three county commissioners and three prominent citizens.

As a result, the Court House and City Hall Act of March 2, 1887—or Chapter 395, Special Laws of 1887, as it was legally designated—was created. In addition to designating Block 77 for the site, authorizing a \$1,500,000 bond issue, and authorizing the purchase, condemnation and transfer of properties as required, the act also designated “The Municipal Building” as the

abbreviation for “The Hennepin County Court House and Minneapolis City Hall.”



## LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES,

the City Hall and Courthouse was built between 1887 and 1906. Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis each owned and initially occupied half of the building. The County ceremoniously moved in on November 11, 1895 and the City followed on December 15, 1902. Minnesota Statue 383B.75, which took effect in 1904, created the Municipal Building Commission (MBC), which was to be comprised of the chair of the Board of County Commissioners (president), the mayor of Minneapolis (vice-president), a person appointed by the Board of County Commissioners (changed to a member of the Board of County Commissioners in 1977), and a person appointed by the Minneapolis City Council (now a member of the Minneapolis City Council).

When completed, the City Hall and Courthouse had more than enough room for government functions at the time. At various times, a blacksmith shop, a horse stable, a wool brokerage, and a chicken hatchery rented the building's excess space. However, after 1940, things started getting crowded and, despite major modifications, the only solution was a new building. Hennepin



County moved most of its operations across the street into the new Government Center in 1975.

The Sheriff's office and the Adult Detention Center are the only county tenants currently in the building and they occupy 40 percent of the building's space.

As you exit to Fourth Street, turn to face the building and look up at the far right corner of the entrance. The cornerstone is 30 feet above the ground and has 1891 carved on the surface.

Periodicals, municipal reports and an invitation to the stone-laying are behind it in a metal box. A time capsule, created in 1991 at the 100-year anniversary celebration of the building, also rests behind the cornerstone.

The building is a Richardsonian Romanesque design by Long and Kees, modeled after the Allegheny County Courthouse in Pennsylvania. This style was popular in 1882, characterized by massive surfaces, heavily worked stone, stained glass and windows with arches. The red stone walls are granite and the huge blocks came from Ortonville, Minnesota, approximately 160 miles away.

The base of the building is formed of massive blocks of limestone, weighing up to 26 tons each. At the time it was constructed, the City Hall and Courthouse appeared to be a granite monstrosity, overpowering the simple wooden houses surrounding it and the Board of Trade claimed that the expense was an irresponsible use of the public's money. However, supporters such as the *Minneapolis Journal* pointed out that, at an expected cost of \$3.6 million, it was a bargain that would have cost twice that if built in another part of the country.



## THE MOST PROMINENT FEATURE OF THE CITY HALL AND COURTHOUSE IS THE CLOCK TOWER.

It is atypical of Richardsonian towers, which are usually short and squat. Rising to a height of 345 feet (400 at the tip of the flagstaff), it made the City Hall and Courthouse the tallest structure in Minneapolis until the Foshay Tower was built in the 1920s.

The clock was said to be the largest in the world when it was installed. Its faces measure 23 feet, 6 inches in diameter.

That's six inches larger than those of Britain's Great Clock of Westminster (a.k.a. Big Ben). Each minute hand is over fourteen

feet long and it was once calculated that the tip of the minute hand travels 110 miles each year. When the original backlit glass faces began to crack in 1949, a new set of metal clock faces with neon lighting was installed.

## THE MASSIVE SPIRE ALSO PLAYS HOST TO A CHIME OF FIFTEEN BELLS.

Every hour, quarter, and half-hour you will hear the bells play the

Westminster Chime. The bells, manufactured in New York, weigh from 300 to 7,300 pounds each—over 14 tons total! Electronic now, the bells were originally played by pressing large

wooden levers. The chime is the only American-made set that can play the “Star Spangled Banner” in the original key. The bells have such carrying power that, many years ago, people from distant communities petitioned the Municipal Building Commission to stop the bells. In response, a measure was passed against ringing the bells between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.

Starting in 1912, Joseph Henry “Hank” Auld would climb 447 steps to the unheated bell tower to play the bells by candlelight



on holidays and special occasions. Even when his salary was eliminated during the Depression,

he continued in his role as official bell player until he retired in 1969 at age 84. Starting at the age of 12, Mr. Auld’s son Edward accompanied his father into the tower for the bell concerts. Edward continued his father’s legacy by playing the bells for celebrated holidays until his retirement in 2001 at age 88. Since 1972, the bells have been played from a keyboard located in the Rotunda instead of the large wooden levers up in the tower. The bells are now played by members of the Tower Bell Foundation. The concert schedule can be found on their website at [www.towerbellfoundation.org](http://www.towerbellfoundation.org).

The Fourth Street vestibule was initially used to house the wagons and horses for the Minneapolis Fire Department. This practice was discontinued in 1904 and by 1906, the vestibule was heated and the marble around the doorways was replaced, along with the original mosaic tile floor. The vaulted ceilings are all that remain of the original appearance. The vestibules were reduced to one-story spaces with offices on the upper level in

1955, but it was restored in the mid-1990s to its 1911 grandeur. It is said that some of the black marble in the vestibule can no longer be quarried anywhere in the world.

## ROTUNDA

1 The “Father of Waters” rests comfortably at the center of the rotunda. This statue is patterned after the famous “Father Nile” which was carved by an unknown Greek sculptor in Egypt more than 2,000 years ago as a tribute to the mighty African river and is now displayed in Rome’s Vatican City.

American sculptor Larkin G. Mead carved the “Father of Waters” from what was, at the time, the largest single block of marble ever taken from the celebrated Carrara quarries in Italy. The quarries have been used since the time of Emperor Augustus and supplied marble to Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. The original block for the “Father of Waters” weighed 44 tons.

Originally commissioned for the city of New Orleans and named “Mississippi,” the “Father of Waters” statue features symbols of the countryside the river flows through on its journey from the headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The figure reclines on a Native American blanket and leans against the

paddle wheel of a riverboat. He holds a cornstalk, while surrounded by a fish net, alligator, and aquatic turtle, and his head is adorned with a pine cone and leaf wreath. When New Orleans was unable to afford the statue, twelve leading Minneapolis citizens and the Minneapolis Journal presented the “Father of Waters” to the City of Lakes in 1904. Though never disclosed, the cost was estimated at \$40,000.



## IF OLD MAN RIVER WAS TO STAND,

he would be more than 15 feet tall and. With the base, he weighs over 14,000 pounds. There is a column underneath the base that continues all the way to the building foundation to support his substantial weight. Building lore says that rubbing his big toe brings good luck—notice that the toe is smoother and shinier than the rest of the statue.



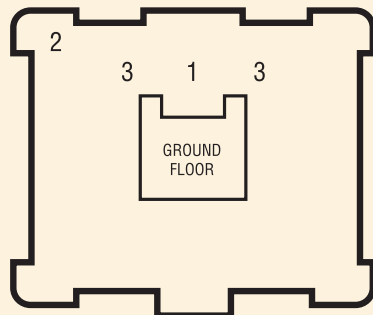
The Rotunda was given a thorough cleaning that was completed in December 2003. The marble was cleaned to remove decades of cigarette smoke but yellow stains still remain. A “snake oil salesman” had sold the MBC a product that was supposed to clean the marble, but instead it permanently damaged the finish. The stained glass windows were also cleaned and repaired. The lead framing (comes) in the windows were starting to bow out, so each window was completely removed. Bovard Studios took 72,000 pieces of glass to Iowa where they were cleaned, repaired, and replaced if necessary. They also created new comes for the windows. The project cost almost one million dollars for the marble cleaning and repair, stained glass window cleaning and repair, and lighting enhancements.

The Rotunda is now available evenings and weekends for special events such as wedding ceremonies and receptions, business events, formal dinners, etc.

([www.municipalbuildingcommission.org/events.html](http://www.municipalbuildingcommission.org/events.html))

## GROUND FLOOR

4th Street facing the Mississippi River



**2** Located in Room 1C, Regulatory Services issues licenses and permits from the antique-looking counters. This restored area features original ceiling heights, cashier windows, and modified columns exemplary of the early 1900s. Visitors are welcome to weigh themselves on the antique scale at the door.

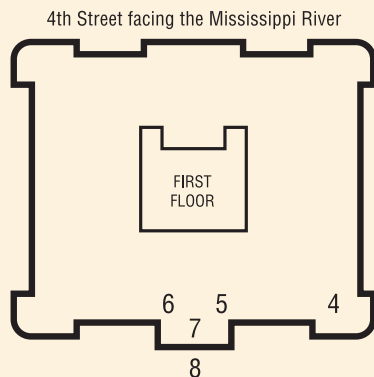
The historic décor in Regulatory Services is just one example of the plan to retain the historic feel of the building. A committee formed in 1981, whose members included elected officials, the MBC, and citizens, worked with an architectural firm to create a general plan called "A Civic Place." Their goal is for revitalization of the structure to recapture its original aesthetics. The MBC conscientiously refers to these plans when evaluating modifications to the appearance of the building.

**3** AROUND THE GROUND FLOOR ELEVATORS, 41 MISCHIEVOUS FACES PEER OUT FROM THE TWINING IVY. THE FOUR-INCH HIGH FACES, SAID TO REPRESENT THE CITIZENS WHO VISIT THE CITY HALL AND COURTHOUSE, OFFER THE VIEWER A VARIETY OF EXPRESSIONS RANGING FROM SNEERS TO SMILES. SEE IF YOU CAN FIND THE ONE STICKING HIS TONGUE OUT!



## FIRST FLOOR

The marble grand staircase leading to the first floor has played host to events ranging from choir concerts to wedding ceremonies. As you go up the stairs, note the places on the steps worn down by a century of visitors' footsteps.



Take a moment to follow the east hallway around to the Fifth Street side of the building, which faces the Hennepin County Government Center. **4** You will pass by the administrative offices of the Minneapolis Police Department in room 130, which include the office for the Chief of Police. Several Minneapolis Police Department divisions have offices in the building and more than 800 police officers are stationed throughout the city.

Step into the Fifth Street entrance and notice the elaborate detail in the red marble. **5** You may see a million-year-old fossil in the stone installed over a century ago. **6** Around you in the entryway is decorative plasterwork and painting on the walls and ceilings. This is one of the restoration projects completed in 2001 by the MBC.

At the center of the entrance is a semicircular banister. **7** Step over to the banister to see people below passing through the Hennepin County Government Center tunnel. Currently, the Government Center houses most county functions, including administrative offices and courtrooms. **8** Outside, the statue of Hubert H. Humphrey stands in front of the City Hall and Courthouse. Humphrey served as the mayor of Minneapolis from 1945–1949, U.S. Senator from 1949–1964, and Vice President of the United States from 1965–1969.

Above you, the Fifth Street tower has been home to a pair of peregrine falcons since the spring of 2000. The first chicks were hatched in May 2005 and there has been at least one chick each spring since then. The peregrine falcon population was decimated by DDT in the 1950s but they were taken off the endangered species list in 1999 due to the efforts of groups like the Midwest Peregrine Society.



## SECOND FLOOR

9 As you step off the elevator, to your right is the Civil Rights Office. This department helps ensure that people are treated fairly regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, physical abilities or religious affiliation. 10 Notice the elaborate door pulls and mail slot at the Civil Rights Office.



11 Follow the hallway past the Civil Rights office and as you return to the rotunda, there is a good view of the stained-glass windows. In the center window, the three figures represent Peace (holding a dove), Justice (holding a sword and law book) and Community (holding a bee hive). The windows on the main wall are only partially open to natural light. In the late 1940s, an

addition was constructed inside the central courtyard and that building keeps the sun from shining through some of the windows. A sensor matches the light behind the six windows in the lower left corner to the intensity of the sunlight on the remaining windows.

On the stairwells in the rotunda, oak banisters curve down white French marble stairs and ornate black cast ironwork made by the Winslow Brothers in Chicago.



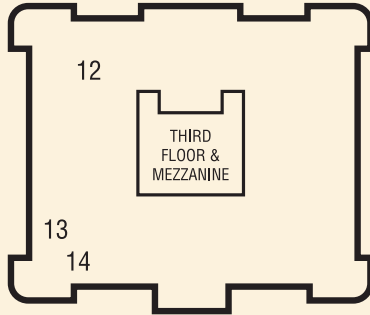
## THIRD FLOOR

On the west side of the building, it appears that the floor has been chopped in half. You're right, it has! As the building became more crowded, the high-ceilinged third floor was turned into two levels: the third floor and the mezzanine. The mezzanine floor houses offices for the City Coordinator, including the finance and budget departments.



Throughout the building, there is an occasional wooden bench in the hall. These are remnants of the original elaborate county courtrooms. Three small state arbitration and conciliation courtrooms are the only courtrooms that remain in the building. Since court cases are handled by the county and state, most courtrooms are in the Government Center. From the third floor, the carved serpents and gargoyles that aren't noticeable from the ground floor can now be seen around the perimeter. Additionally, the details of the skylight are visible—note the “H” and “M” in the points of the diamond signifying Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis. The skylight was initially naturally lit, but leaks caused it to be enclosed so it is now artificially lit. Far below, the decorative stone floors of the rotunda were introduced at about the same time as the “Father of Waters.” The original imported tiles had not been as durable as the architects had expected and, by the time the rotunda was heated in 1906, the entire floor was in need of replacement.

4th Street facing the Mississippi River



**12** The names of the current thirteen city council representatives are listed on the glass window of the city council offices, Room 307. In the reception area is a black and white picture of the first City Hall as well as a picture of the City Hall and Courthouse from 1906. Notice the red tile roof in the picture. When the original slate began to fall from the tower roof in 1950, the tile roof was replaced with what was then the largest copper roof in the world. The metal has since oxidized to its current breathtaking green color.



THE THIRD FLOOR ONCE ACCOMMODATED AN ELABORATE CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER WITH VAULTED, THREE STORY CEILINGS, ELEVATED GALLERIES AT BOTH ENDS, FALLING PLASTER AND TERRIBLE ACOUSTICS. IN 1923, THE CEILING WAS LOWERED TO IMPROVE THE ACOUSTICS, WHICH ELIMINATED THE GALLERIES AT EACH END.



## THE CHAMBER WAS REMODELED AGAIN IN 1956.

The 1956 room was only one-story high, had dark wood paneling covering the windows, and a plastic dome light in the middle of the ceiling. When the MBC began the process of updating the building's ventilation and emergency/safety systems, they removed the 1956 ceiling and discovered remnants of the 1923 plaster ceiling. This prompted the renovation of the chambers to their 1923 appearance. Now featuring 14-foot high windows, the original paint scheme, stenciling, light fixture reproductions, two wall murals, and state-of-the-art A/V and television equipment, the chambers were recreated from photographs and the original architect's blueprints. The renovation was completed in January 2002 and Council members meet in the chambers approximately every other Friday at 9:30 a.m. to make crucial decisions that affect the city. Meetings are open to the public, and those with concerns are encouraged to attend.

As you continue past the Council Chambers, you can see the Wall of Mayors that was installed in September 2000. This celebration of the city's leaders includes photographs of all the mayors of Minneapolis including Hubert H. Humphrey and the current mayor.



**AFTER YOU TURN THE CORNER, LOOK CLOSELY AT THE FLOOR ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE HALLWAY.** <sup>13</sup> There is a small tile on

the floor with the name “Miss Lillian Cross” engraved in it. Miss Cross was employed by the American Encaustic Tiling Company in the 1880s/1890s and the company supplied the tiles for the



City Hall and Courthouse. Another tile was found on the fourth floor with “Nannie Schunk, #4 Spangler

Street, Zanesville, Ohio” written on it. Ms. Schunk still lived in Zanesville and confirmed that she and Lillian Cross had worked at the tile company. Single female employees often scratched their name/address on the tiles hoping to encourage correspondence and/or romance with the men laying the tiles. There are five million tiles in the building, all installed by hand.

<sup>14</sup> Our top elected official, the mayor, occupies an office on the south side of the hall in room 331. Perhaps you will meet our city's executive officer during your visit.

## FOURTH & FIFTH FLOORS

(NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC)

The fourth and fifth floors house the Adult Detention Center, where people that have been arrested, but not convicted, are held. The inmate intake, where the officers bring the accused into the building, is on the ground floor. They use a locked, enclosed garage and an elevator closed to the public that goes directly to the fourth floor.

# GHOSTS!

On March 18, 1898, John Moshik, a member of the notorious Rice Street Gang, was executed for murder and robbery. He was the last person hanged in Hennepin County and the only one in the City Hall and Courthouse, at a temporary gallows on the fifth floor. Some say Moshik's ghost still haunts the building.

While the juvenile detention center was housed in the City Hall and Courthouse, a number of youngsters over a period of years reported that a man in a black hat, black pants, and black shirt had been coming around the cells, laughing at them in the evening.

Other unexplained events like pictures falling off the walls and flickering lights have been reported. One employee reported seeing people in late 19th century clothing sitting in the cafeteria. When she turned around—they were gone.

What do you think?

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

We hope you enjoyed your tour. If you have further questions about the building or if you wish to purchase the book, *Municipal Monument*, the Municipal Building Commission can help you. Stop by Room 105.

Municipal Building Commission

350 South Fifth Street, Room 105

Minneapolis, MN 55415

Tour Hotline 612-596-9535

Information 612-596-9512

[www.municipalbuildingcommission.org](http://www.municipalbuildingcommission.org)

For additional history on the City of Minneapolis or Hennepin County, consult your local public library.



## FOR TOURS OR TO VOLUNTEER

Tours are available free to the public on the third Wednesday of every month at noon or by advance reservation. Call the Tour Hotline at 612-596-9535 to schedule a tour or to receive more information on becoming a volunteer in the MBC tour guide program.



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# HISTORIC BUILDING TOURS

THE CITY HALL AND COURTHOUSE IS HOME TO AN ABUNDANCE OF LOCAL HISTORY AND URBAN LEGEND.

DISCOVER AMAZING FACTS AS YOU EXPLORE THE BUILDING USING THIS SELF-GUIDED TOUR BROCHURE.

🦋 FIVE-STORY ROTUNDA

🦋 14,000 LB. FATHER OF WATERS STATUE

🦋 RECENTLY RENOVATED CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

🦋 345 FOOT CLOCK TOWER

🦋 GHOSTS!

🦋 MILLION-YEAR-OLD FOSSILS

