



Chambers was once center for banking

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Sometimes, it's back to the original plan.

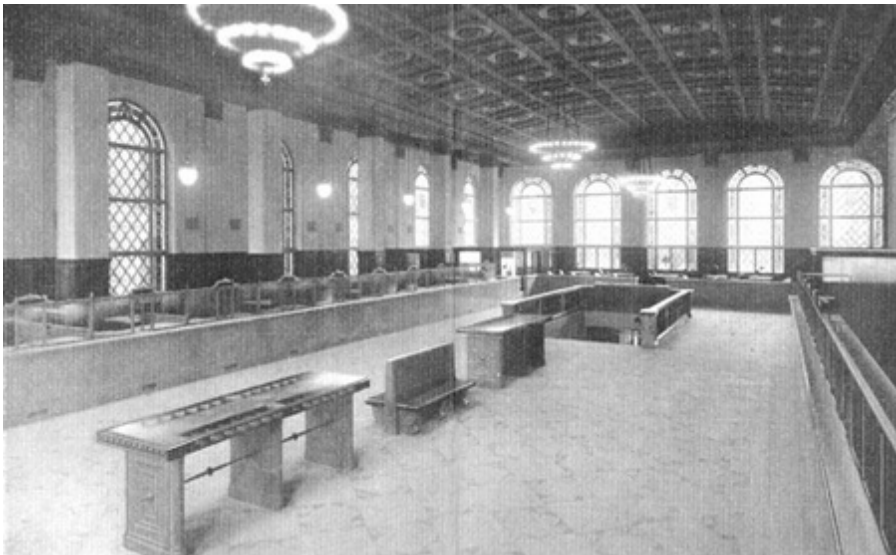
A proposal before the Jackson County Board of Commissioners could convert its meeting chambers into public offices for the treasurer, register of deeds and equalization departments.

The space could return to its initial purpose of customer service.

The second floor of the County Tower Building once served as the main bank room of the Union & Peoples National Bank.

In the late 1920s, the National Union and Peoples National banks merged, resulting in more business and severely crowded conditions. After a yearlong search, Albert Kahn of Detroit was hired as the architect of the bank's new headquarters at 120 W. Michigan Ave.

The building cost \$1.28 million and was completed in 1929.



Citizen Patriot file photoThe main banking

room of The Union & Peoples National Bank was up a set of stairs from the first-floor lobby, a design in vogue at the time

Kahn's design reflected what was in vogue at the time -- a spacious banking floor set a few steps above a grand main entrance

The entrance featured St. Genevieve rose marble. Off the lobby was the safety-deposit vault with 3,000 boxes.

Nearby, three elevators moved people up and down the 18 floors. There is no 13th floor -- it was skipped for superstitious reasons.

But it was the main banking room that captivated customers. They reached it by ascending through double-hinged, bronze gates. The room featured 7-foot walnut panels and column pilasters topped with Italian Travertine marble.

The 28-foot ceiling was exquisitely finished with plaster designs and medallions, painted red, blue and green, and gilded with gold.

Security guards would watch transactions from a crow's nest perched high in the northwest corner.

The windows' design came from the walls of the Davanzati Palace in Florence, Italy, and included a decorative shield motif. The imported, rose-colored glass diffused light and gave the room a warming glow.

The building's top 12 stories were leased by other tenants, including insurance companies, real estate and investment firms, the city attorney, and the Fuller Brush Co. The prestigious top floor was occupied by Fargo Engineering Co.

After the 1933 banking holiday, the National Bank of Jackson was organized as the successor to the Union & Peoples Bank. It operated from the location until 1958.

Consumers Power Co. leased part of the building during the 1960s before moving into the from Hotel Hayes.

In 1975, the building was sold to the county for \$100,000 and renamed the County Tower Building.

The former banking room was renovated as the commission chambers by removing an old drop ceiling to reveal the full windows, and by scraping gold paint off the wood panels.

Today, the ornate ceiling remains out of view, but could be restored.

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