

DAVID WHITNEY BUILDING – INTERIOR – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The interior designation of the David Whitney Building was put in place while the building was still occupied with the primary intent to preserve the open atrium and upper floor balconies, the interior terra cotta materials, the decorative elevator doors on the first floor, and the skylight. This is highlighted in the designation report:

Entrances from Park Avenue, Washington Boulevard and Woodward Avenue lead to a central atrium lobby or rotunda which rises seventy-one feet, or four stories, above the entrance level to a glass skylight. The atrium lobby is surrounded by arcaded corridors leading to shops on the sides and elevators in the rear which line the perimeter of the building. The atrium lobby is faced with white glazed terra cotta. There is a balustrade at the second level of the arcade and pilasters rising from the second level through the third level. The pilasters are capped with an entablature which is surmounted by semi-circular arched openings at the fourth level. Ornate terra cotta medallions decorate the spandrel area; each arch contains a key console. The third level contains dark-colored terra cotta spandrel panels visually supported on decorative consoles. The south wall of the atrium contains the seven elevators, each with ornate brass doors and decorative terra cotta work surrounding the doors at each floor level. The interior of the lobby has not been altered, except for some alterations to individual storefronts.

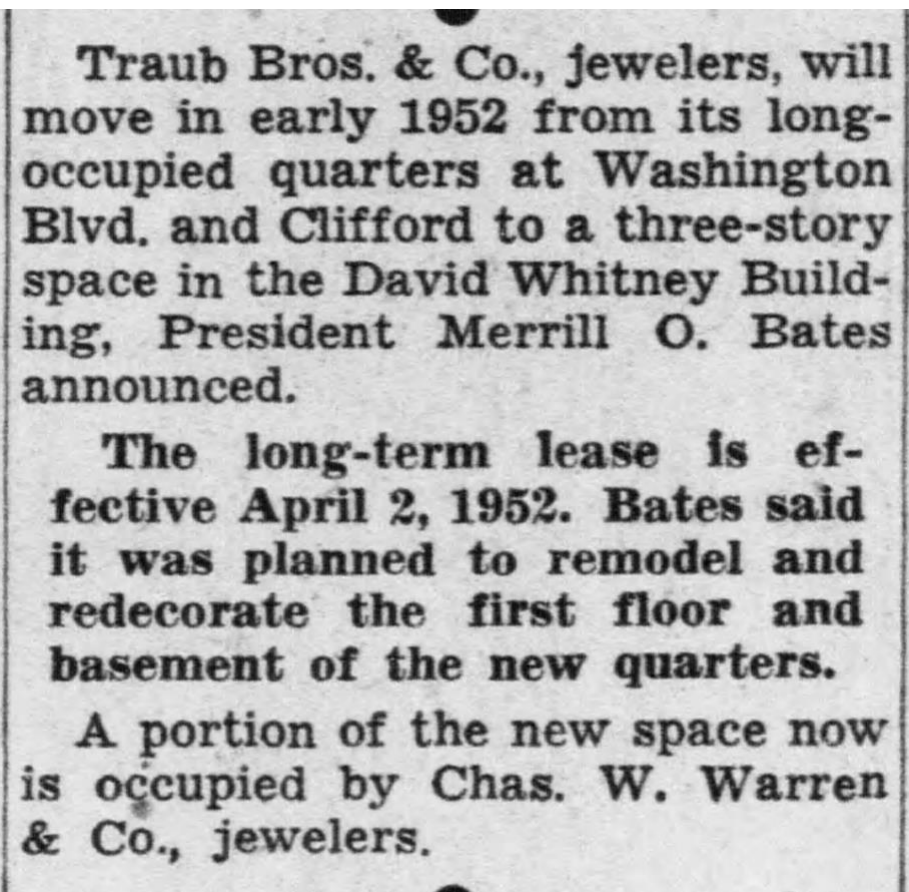
The upper fourteen stories contain offices surrounding the open light court above the atrium skylight. This center light court of over 3,000 square feet in area is open to the sky at the top, allowing the offices facing the court to be almost as well-lighted and ventilated as those facing the street. Italian marble was used to line the corridor floors and walls throughout; corridor doors and frames were mahogany. Within the individual suites were mahogany or oak woodwork and maple floors. The interior of the office area has not been altered except for changes in the offices themselves.

The David Whitney Building on Grand Circus Park was built with an interior court, permitting an outside exposure for all offices, which were primarily occupied by doctors and dentists. Billed as an "Exclusive Shopping Center," the first four floors were designed exclusively for high-class shops, while the stories above were rented for offices. The ground-floor shops had splendid street frontage as well as fronting on the inner corridors of the rotunda. The shops included Watkins Cigar Stores Company; G.M. Schettler Drugs; Rogers Shoe Company;

Huyler's confectionery; Martin Maier and Company, trunks; Capper & Capper, men's furnishings; F. Rolshoven & Co., jewelers; Berlitz School of Language; and milliners, hairdressers, ladies clothes shops, tailors, and corset shops. A promotional booklet entitled "When Royalty Shops" spoke to the quality of the shopping experience in the Whitney Building: "The shops of the David Whitney Building have attained reputations as enviable as New York's smart shops ... prices are really moderate."

Levels above the fourth floor were primarily rented as the offices of physicians and dentists. Having doctors as tenants reportedly had a downside; despondent tenants receiving bad prognoses occasionally hurled themselves down the central light well. In the 1950s, Detroit's population began the migration to the suburbs and eventually their doctors followed.

Note the last sentence of the second paragraph where it notes that there have been alterations to individual storefronts. These alterations occurred over the history of the building as tenants moved in and out of the building. For example in 1951 Traub Bros. & Co. jewelers moved into a three story space in the building and the planned to remodel and redecorate the first floor and the basement of the new quarters.



Detroit Free Press, April 22, 1951

When the Detroit Bank opened in the building in 1953 they created a 4,200 square foot space on the ground floor which likely included alterations to the ground floor interior storefronts.

Bank to Open Nearby Office

Establishment of a new branch office of The Detroit Bank in the David Whitney Building was announced by Joseph M. Dodge, president.

The office will occupy 4,200 square feet of ground floor and basement space at the corner of Washington Blvd. and Grand Circus Park.

The building is one of the foremost professional buildings in the nation, 10,000 persons using its elevators daily. Nineteen years have elapsed since banking service was offered there by the old Wayne County and Home Savings Bank.

Detroit Free Press, May 28, 1952

Announcing
the Opening of a New Banking Office in
THE DAVID WHITNEY BUILDING

Washington Boulevard at Grand Circus Park

The Detroit Bank, the oldest bank in Michigan, opens its 37th banking office for business on Monday morning, May 4, in the David Whitney Building . . . and extends a hearty welcome to both old and new customers in the Grand Circus Park section to utilize its attractive new quarters for their banking requirements. All of the general banking services now available at the Main Banking Office are provided, including a convenient after-hour depository.

Mr. George Hawkins, who has been with The Detroit Bank for over twenty years, is the Officer in Charge. The Detroit Bank is particularly pleased to have its newest banking office in the David Whitney Building because it means the association of two names that have long figured prominently in the dynamic growth and development of Detroit! Regular banking hours are from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and on Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Open this week for your inspection from 5 to 8 p.m., Monday and Tuesday.

MEMBER FEDERAL DEPOSIT  INSURANCE CORPORATION

THE DETROIT BANK
37 CONVENIENT BANKING OFFICES
OVER ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SERVICE

Detroit Free Press, May 3, 1953

All of the storefronts in the first floor were reconstructed during the 2012-13 restoration of the building. The photos below show that the west storefronts had panels that appear to be from the 1950s and a much larger mullion between the display windows and transom, this was to accommodate a mezzanine level that was added in the space during a later renovation.

Because the storefronts were in a variety of configurations and conditions a rule for the pattern of the storefronts was created and followed. The rule was based on what was thought to be the historic pattern of the storefronts.

The wood frames at the storefronts were deteriorated and missing and for the most part were re-created in the 2012-13 restoration of the building, including the two storefronts on the west side that are being proposed for alternations in the 2023 renovation. The wood as noted above and shown below was recreated in the pattern shown but proportions changed due to removal of an added mezzanine which resulted in new framing to be constructed. The center storefront on the west side did not feature an existing grille and it was recreated during the 2012- 13 work. The left most storefront grille that appears in the photo below will be salvaged and reinstalled at the east side storefront to finish the pattern at the door infill. The storefront on the east side where the door is proposed for removal was also reconstructed during the 2012-13 work.



PHOTOS FROM BEFORE THE 2012-13 WORK

As noted above the importance of the atrium is the openness of the space, including the open balconies on the upper floors, the terra cotta materials, the elevator doors, the skylight, and the general placement of storefronts as a whole around the atrium. The retention of the exact configuration of each storefront which was modified over the history of the building is not as important to the overall character of the atrium and building as the existence of storefronts that generally follow the pattern.

Furthermore the Elements of Design (see below) allow for the new use to play into the Commission's decisions when considering alterations to the atrium. The modifications proposed to the four interior storefronts are crucial to the operations of the hotel and restaurant. Therefore, we are requesting these slight variations to three existing storefronts that were reconstructed in 2013.

(e) In accordance with Sections [21-2-76](#) of this Code, the Historic District Commission is hereby authorized to consider interior features in certain portions of the David Whitney Building Historic District. A permit shall be required for such interior work in those portions of the David Whitney Building, as required in [Section 21-2-71](#) of this Code, as if such work were exterior work. The Historic District Commission's consideration of the interior features of the David Whitney Building, as provided for in [Section 21-2-76](#) of this Code, shall be as follows:

- (1) The interior spaces of the David Whitney Building which are hereby made subject to the Historic District Commission's consideration are those spaces normally accessible to the public from the main entrance doors on Washington Boulevard, Woodward Avenue, and Park Avenue, including the four-story high lobby, sometimes called an atrium and referred to at the time of construction as a "central light court," and its adjoining spaces including the one-story-high entrance areas or hallways which lead from the lobby to the main entrance doors and the balcony areas of the upper three floors of the lobby. Features within these areas subject to the Historic District Commission's consideration include, but are not limited to, wall surfaces, including the store fronts facing the lobby on all four floors, ceilings, including the glazed skylight covering the lobby, floor surfaces, and permanent fixtures including light fixtures. Areas which are not made subject to the Historic District Commission's consideration include the interior of stores and offices adjoining the lobby and all other areas within the David Whitney Building, including basements, the upper floors from the fifth floor to the roof, attic areas, and the interiors of closets and service areas.
- (2) When considering proposals for the alteration, demolition, partial demolition, removal, or addition to any or all of the architectural features and permanent furnishings within the designated areas of the interior of the David Whitney Building, the Historic District Commission shall use the following criteria:
 - a. Subsections (d)(1) through (22) of this section, as applicable;
 - b. The architectural or historic significance of the existing or proposed structure, feature, or permanent fixture, and its relationship to the architectural and historical value of the David Whitney Building Historic District;
 - c. The purpose of the designated spaces within the David Whitney Building Historic District and the needs of its owners, provided, that such considerations shall not bind the Historic District Commission to permit any work solely on the basis of such considerations;
 - d. The provisions of [Section 21-2-75](#) of this Code; and
 - e. Any other factor, including aesthetics, which the Historic District Commission finds relevant.
- (3) As a guide in considering proposals affecting the designated interior spaces of the David Whitney Building Historic District, the Historic District Commission shall make use of a set of slides, taken by the staff of the Historic Designation Advisory Board at or near the effective date of this section

which was June 7, 2000, and represent the state of those interior spaces as of the date of designation. A copy of this set of slides, together with a list describing each slide and a diagram showing the relationship of the slides to the designated interior spaces, shall be placed on file in the Offices of the City Clerk, the Historic Designation Advisory Board, the Historic District Commission, and the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library.

(Code 1984, § 25-2-133; Ord. No. 08-00, § 1(25-2-133), eff. 6-7-2000)