

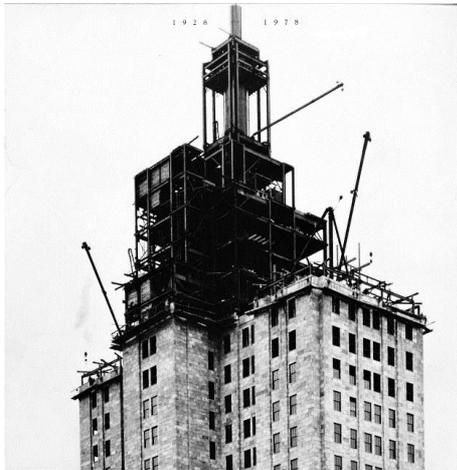


# PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

## Happy 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Industrial Trust Building!

By Jane Kim

In the heart of downtown Providence stands a soaring Art-Deco monument that opened 90 years ago this month. The Industrial Trust Tower—affectionately nicknamed the Superman Building after the Daily Planet building in the Superman comic series—is arguably the most iconic building in the state apart from the State House (1895). At 428-feet in height, it was the tallest building in New England when it opened, and remains the tallest building in Rhode Island today.



(Photo courtesy of Industrial National Bank, 1978)

Residents watched the 26-story building go up for months in awe and anticipation, and the skyscraper did not disappoint when it was finally complete. The Industrial Trust Tower opened to the public on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928, with much pomp and ceremony. *Providence Magazine* dedicated its October 1928 issue almost entirely to the Industrial Tower. “On Monday, October first, promptly at 9 o’clock, occurred one of the epochal events in the life of this community.” So begins the four-page article, a glowing ode to the building that has since defined the Providence skyline.

The thrill and pride surrounding opening of the Industrial Trust Tower courses throughout the article: “The magnificent 420-foot structure . . . is a striking demonstration of the company’s confidence in the growth and enduring soundness of the City, the State and Country.” After praising the “awe-inspiring reach” of the building and the “imposing tower that lifts its proud head over the . . . city,” the author launches into a detailed documentation of every architectural feature over several pages.

The building is, indeed, an admirable sight to behold. Designed by New York firm Walker & Gillette, the Industrial Trust Tower was publicized as a “business building for building businesses.” An art-deco style edifice built with Deer Island granite on the base and sheathed in hundreds of tons of Indiana limestone, it was hailed as the prime example of the “American Perpendicular” in 1928. It was also praised for “undertaking a great engineering feat,” set 50 feet under the sidewalk, and designed to carry double its weight.



(Cover of Providence Magazine October issue, 1928)

Celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution and the building in 1978, the Industrial National Bank described Providence as a city “unique in its heritage, aware of its special character, alive to the needs and desires of its people, open to the future,” and praised the projects that “depend on Old Providence to create the New.” It is with the same pride and awareness of its heritage that the city should look to its next era of conservation and construction.



*(Photo courtesy of the Providence Public Library)*

As we commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Superman Building, we recognize its irreplaceable value. It isn't the kind of building that gets built any longer.

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