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The Landmarks of Federal Hill: "The Hospital Trust Tower. A Tower of Italian Travertine Marble"

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"The Hospital Trust Tower. A Tower of Italian Travertine Marble"

The planning for the Hospital Trust Tower went back several months before the groundbreaking took place on September 8, 1970. The face of the building is not of Carrara Marble as many have believed it to be, although, Carrara had been visited and was considered to be used, as it is a beautiful stone and one which Michaelangelo liked to work with.

The stone selected, was extremely high quality Travertine marble, which was mined in an old river bed, approximately 35 miles from Rome. Tivoli was also visited several times and several suppliers were used in selecting the finest stones available. In this search, the late Raymond Imperatore, accompanied Mr. Clarence H. Gifford, Jr., Chairman of the Board. His good friend, the late Victor Beretta of The Duras tone Co., was also very helpful.

Several members of the local Beretta family, were also instrumental in facing the Travertine on cement for the erecting. The general contractors for the construction of the tower were, Conforti & Eisle, Inc., of New York City.

At the very beginning of this article, we must state, that the existence of this tower is truly a tribute to Mr. Clarence H. Gifford, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Rhode Island Hospital Trust National Bank. It was his forethought and vision of the expansion of the bank, requiring more space for its facilities, that caused him to initiate the planning and the building of this structure to meet the needs of the bank. It was his hope and desire that a building be erected that would not only be functional to the needs of the bank, Island Hospital National Bank. Public interest in the Hospital Trust Tower first started in 1969, when the bank announced plans for the construction of a high rise office building on company owned land at 35 & 49 Westminster St., and 17 Kennedy Plaza.

Following the groundbreaking ceremonies for the tower which formally took place in September of 1969, and from its inception, the tower was massively designed. The framework consisted of 30 levels of steel work and rose from a basement area of 15 feet below street grade, to a roof level height of over 400 ft. above the Providence street grade.

In all, ten million lbs., or 4,500 tons of steel were used to create the skeleton of the building. About 1,200 tons of Travertine were used in the construction of the Tower. It is interesting to note that the system used to transport this massive amount of stone: The initial cargo traveling from Bagni, de Trivoli, Italy, arrived at the Port of Providence in 1971. The first cargo came in a new export-import shipping system called the "Lash" (lighter aboard ship) system. It was the first such shipment destined for a Rhode Island firm. The Travertine arrived directly from Italy on one of the 60 barges carried on the ship's maiden voyage to the United States. The Travertine consisted of 30 levels of steel work and rose from a basement area of 15 feet below street grade, to a roof level height of over 400 ft. above the Providence street grade.

The entire 30-story tower is itself. This is accomplished with a large auto truck lift which can carry vehicles to the lower level parking and unloading areas. Cash is received from the armored cars through a double-door, security lock system. These doors are electrically controlled and monitored on television screens, from the security console and the money delivery area.

The vault area, is one of the most interesting facilities of this building. This vault was designed in an "L" shape and divided into two separate areas. One area for the surveillance and control of cash and gold, the other for the processing and automatic storing and handling of securities. A "Retriever File" is able to obtain and store, almost instantaneously, specific bins of stocks and bonds.

The vault, itself, is constructed of 24 inch concrete with reinforced steel rods. Its door is composed of laminated steel and immovable wedge-locks, and is a completely safe and pleasant working area for employees during working hours and is a 24-hour, fort like barrier.

The Tower is equipped with one of the most modern security systems in the United States. The major system is manned by the bank's own security force and provides protection, as well as all innovations, fire alarms and evacuation control available. It is interesting to note, that this system is a version of the one protecting the United States Mint in Denver and some of the Atomic Energy Commission centers across the United States. The system incorporates both visual and audio communications, with many Tower Areas.
but would be a credit to the entire banking community area; this, he certainly achieved.

This majestic tower, rising from a commanding location, in the heart of the Providence business district, is located at Westminster St., Exchange St. and Kennedy Plaza. The thirty-story, corporate bank headquarters, has provided more office space, in Rhode Island than any other building.

The tower is clad in rich, deep Travertine and contains more than 425,000 gross square feet of floor space. It is in a setting of what has for three centuries been, the traditional center of commerce for the State of Rhode Island.

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The tower affords a striking panoramic view of the city, including the historical east side; a dramatic view of the marble-domed State Capitol to the North, and the bay area to the South. Approaching the city skyline, one can see a symbol of the progress taking place in Providence.

The challenge in building, One Hospital Trust Plaza was to preserve the charm and character of the past, within a forward moving environment.

"This tower is a firm expression of their confidence in the bright future of downtown Providence as the center of commerce for Rhode Island." Those are a few of the words, expressed by Clarence H. Gifford, Jr., Chairman of the Board and Henry S. Woodbridge, Jr., President of Rhode Island and the only building in Rhode Island, and only the second in New England to utilize this stone to such an extent. The beige-colored stone, actually is not marble, but to the eye, there is practically no difference between travertine and lightly tinted marble. Travertine is far more suitable than marble for exterior construction work, because of its greater durability under all weather conditions.

The slabs of Travertine were one and one quarter inch thick, and were cast in cement, so that the entire block, with steel reinforcements is approximately ten inches thick, overall. As construction progressed, the steel was laced into a superstructure, forming a skeleton of the building; and the travertine facing gradually enclosed the Tower, presenting the Providence skyline with a distinct landmark.

Entering the interior of the bank, visitors are introduced to this building by its spacious 6,500 ft. Plaza which is graced by waters from a flowing fountain. Guests and customers may enter directly from the Plaza to the banking floor or may proceed in to the building lobby, where ten high speed elevators are available for use.

The lower level of the Tower holds some of the most important banking and security facilities located in this building. It is the first bank in Rhode Island and one of the few in New England able to receive armored cars directly within the bank. For emergency purposes, the security console can initiate an emergency evacuation sound system, which includes direct communication with each Tower floor and elevator car. A "Firemen's Service" can call all elevators directly to the lobby in case of fire, eliminating all possibility of the lifts being isolated.

The interior design of the Tower is embellished with vividly-designed furnishings, accented by an abundance of colorful paintings and sculptures. All of the wooden bank desks in the Tower, except those on the first floor, are made of teak or rose color. The art works range from traditional landscapes to modern sculpture and are the creations of local artists.

The 28th floor is known as the executive floor; on entering the reception area, a Travertine backdrop, accentuated by a bank logo, welcomes you.

The executives offices of the bank are located at the Tower's uppermost floor. This area is made up of eight individual executive offices, a Board of Director's Room, the Executive Committee Room, and guest dining rooms. The Director's Room, is a recreation of the former Board Room which was designed in 1918. The 56 year old Director's table was hoisted to its new home on the Tower's top floor, prior to the final installation of the exterior facing. It is twenty feet long, with five-inch thick inlaid top, constructed from Cuban mahogany root; the table is one of the
original furnishings of the former Board Room.

In addition to the outstanding panoramic views afforded from the twenty-eighth floor, and the handsomely comfortable meeting areas available, both the Executive Committee and the Directors’ Room have complete communication and audio-visual facilities. The system selected is flexible enough to permit the use of the most modern audio-visual techniques, including multi-image, front and rear projection screens, animation, and overhead projection.

One of the most unique aspects of this Tower is its private heliport, which overlooks Providence from its location at the top of the Tower. Providence is ideally situated between Boston and New York, two of the nation’s major commercial and financial centers.

While the building is much more than bricks and mortar, it is interesting to consider some of the material that went into building the size of this Tower. It rests on 512 steel concrete-filled piles, each designed to support one-hundred tons. There are 2,500 windows above the first floor; there are more than 10,000 individual pieces of travertine marble set in over 3,000 pre-cast panels which, along with the windows, make up the skin of the building. Within the structure there are 37 miles of electrical wire; over 280,000 cinder blocks, and more than 15,000 fluorescent light bulbs, plus hundreds of incandescent bulbs.

The building measures 408 feet above ground level, with a designed weight of 100 million pounds. It is bounded by Westminster St., Exchange Sts., and Kennedy Plaza. There is a 6,500 square-foot open Plaza on its Westminster Street front, which is graced by a beautiful water fountain.

The Hospital Trust Tower - A Tower of Italian Travertine marble, which was mined from an old river bed, approximately 30 miles from Rome. It contains about 1200 tons of Travertine.

Because the incorporators of the new bank wanted to do more than accept deposits, honor checks, and make loans, they asked for, and were granted, a charter containing trust powers so that the Company could serve as a trustee for people, families, and institutions. Its trust officers would be able to protect the estate and manage assets on behalf of trust clients continuously, from one generation to another.

With such a charter, Rhode Island Hospital Trust was a new kind of enterprise - the first trust company in New England. The new bank accepted its first deposits early in January, 1868 and the new hospital

admitted its first patients on October 1, 1868. Under the terms of its original charter, the trust company was to retain enough of its earnings to pay its owners, a six percent return on their invested capital.

One-third of the remaining earnings were to go to the hospital.

The trust company charter also provided that this profit-sharing plan was to remain "so long as no similar act of incorporation shall be granted by the legislature of this state to others." In 1870, the General Assembly did grant a "similar" charter to the State Deposit and Trust Company. This automatically cancelled the obligation of Hospital Trust to share its profits with the hospital. But the directors of the Bank, many of whom were also founders of the hospital, had no desire to withdraw their support from the new struggling medical institution.

They continued to share the profits of the Bank with the hospital until 1883. At that time, the trustees of the hospital and the directors of the Bank worked out a new financial relationship.

In place of the old profit-sharing arrangements, the owners of the Bank agreed to issue the hospital an eight percent gift of 100 shares of stock, each with a par value of $1,000. In 1968, the directors, looking ahead, decided that the old charter of 1868 was no longer adequate for the present-day functions. Therefore, in 1969, with the approval of the stockholders (including the hospital), it was decided to obtain a federal charter for the Bank and became, the Rhode Island Hospital Trust National Bank.