

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



Old Republic Building

(Originally Bell Building)

307 North Michigan Avenue

Preliminary and Final Landmark Recommendation Adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, October 7, 2010



City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning
Patricia A. Scudiero, Commissioner

Cover (clockwise from left): The Old Republic Building at 307 N. Michigan Avenue; cartouche containing the initials of the building located above the rounded arch entry; detail of classical terra-cotta ornament.

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose ten members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual building, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning, 33 North LaSalle Street, Room 1600, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200) phone; (312-744-2958) TTY; (312-744-9140) fax, web site: www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks

This Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within City Council's final landmark designation ordinance should be regarded as final.

OLD REPUBLIC BUILDING

(Originally Bell Building)

307 North Michigan Avenue

Built: 1924

Architect: K. M. Vitzthum & Co.; J.J. Burns, Associate

The Old Republic Building is a 23-story commercial structure designed by K.M. Vitzthum & Company (J.J. Burns, Associate) in the Classical Revival style. The building is clad with light buff glazed terra cotta with Classical Revival terra-cotta ornamentation. It was commissioned by businessman Herbert Bell as the headquarters for the Bell and Zoller Coal Company and originally named the Bell Building. In 1956 it was sold to the Old Republic Life Insurance Company and has since been known as the Old Republic Building.

Located on the northeast corner of North Michigan Avenue and East South Water Street, the Old Republic Building was one of the first tall buildings, along with the London Guarantee Building, to be constructed south of the Chicago River on North Michigan Avenue after its widening in the early 1920s. The building exemplifies the city's efforts to encourage commercial development on the avenue as a result of major improvements brought about by Burnham and Bennett's 1909 *Plan of Chicago*. The construction of the Michigan Avenue Bridge, the widening of the avenue and the construction of the bi-level roadway at South Water Street and Wacker Drive in the 20th century changed the face of Michigan Avenue in particular, and the downtown in general.

The Old Republic Building is notable for its Classical Revival-style design and finely detailed terra-cotta ornamentation manufactured by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company, the largest of Chicago's terra-cotta manufacturers in the early 20th century. The building's prominent location and high level of design and craftsmanship helped establish a high-quality standard for commercial structures in the area.

K.M. Vitzthum & Company was a prolific architectural firm whose work represents a transition in both form and style from commercial structures expressed in traditional styles, such as the Classical Revival style of the Old Republic Building and the Gothic Revival style of the Steuben Club Building (188 West Randolph, 1929), to the sleek Art Deco-style verticality of the One LaSalle Street Building (1929). (Both the Steuben Club and One LaSalle Street Buildings are designated Chicago Landmarks.) Karl Vitzthum is especially noted for his bank architecture, having designed over fifty banks throughout the Midwest including the State Bank of Goshen, Indiana, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Home Bank and Trust Co. Building, Hyde Park-Kenwood National Bank Building, and the Marquette Park State Bank Building, all three designated as Chicago Landmarks.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH MICHIGAN AVENUE IN THE 1920S

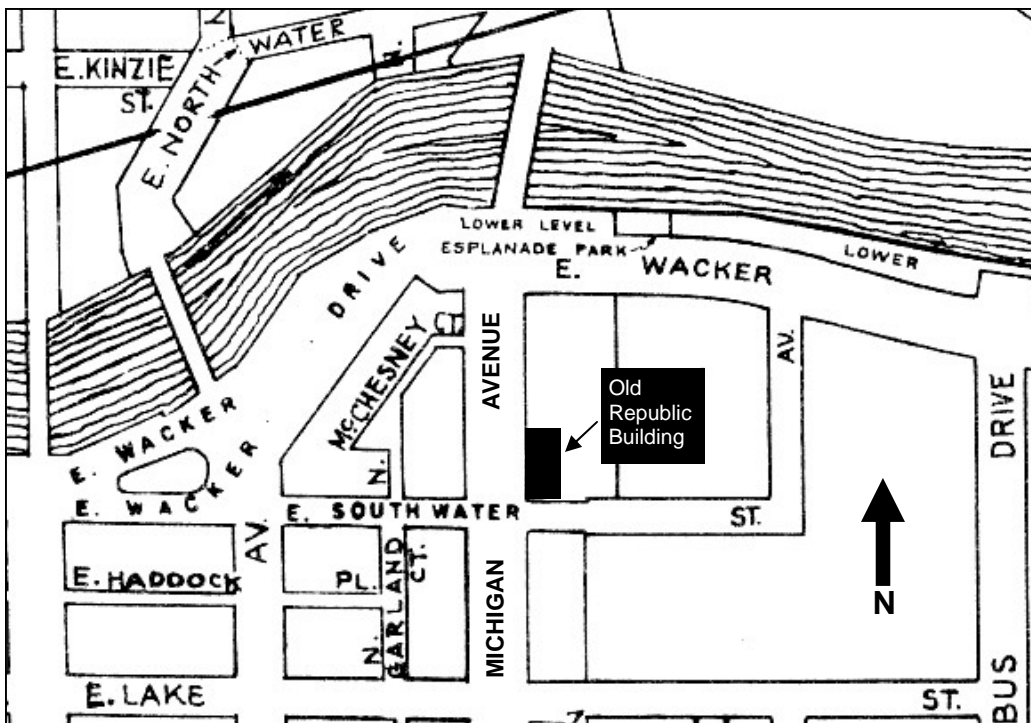
Long-standing ideas for the development of North Michigan Avenue north of Randolph Street were finally brought to fruition by the building boom of the 1920s. Until 1919, Michigan Avenue from Randolph to the Chicago River was narrow, congested and in poor condition. It was lined with wholesale stores, industrial buildings and warehouse structures used as storage for the shipping canals and railroad spurs east of Michigan Avenue. In 1852 the Illinois Central Railroad had purchased the area east of Michigan Avenue between Randolph Street, the river and the lake for use as rail yards. City traffic crossed the river on the Rush Street Bridge, which had become terribly congested, and from there continued north on Pine Street which was primarily residential. The area south of the river had developed as an industrial and warehouse district after the fire of 1871, with the South Water Market taking up much of the area.

From the turn of the twentieth century, there were attempts by the city to build a new bridge that would link Michigan Avenue directly with the Near North side. Chicago leaders through the previous decades had planned, invested, speculated and lobbied to improve Michigan Avenue from Randolph Street north to the Lake Michigan shoreline near Oak Street. Most of the early plans proved to be infeasible or failed to find political and financial support, though the idea of a connecting link persisted. As early as 1904, an article in the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Michigan Avenue and the Rush Street Bridge were inadequate to handle the volumes of traffic, and recommended the widening of Michigan Avenue and the construction of a new bridge, estimating a cost of \$2 million for the project. By January 1905, a joint committee of members of the City Council, realtors and businessmen approved plans for the connecting link at a cost of \$4.5 million, including costs of the purchase and demolition of buildings fronting on the avenue. However, political concerns kept the demolition orders from proceeding, and the project was abandoned.



The Old Republic Building, is located at 307 N. Michigan Avenue. It was one of the first tall buildings to be constructed south of the Chicago River on North Michigan Avenue following the widening of the avenue, the construction of the Michigan Avenue Bridge, and the development of the bi-level roadway at South Water Street and Wacker Drive. The building helped to encourage commercial development on the avenue as a result of these major improvements brought about by Burnham and Bennett's 1909 *Plan of Chicago*.

Top left: Building viewed from southwest. Bottom: Site map





The Old Republic Building is designed in the Classical Revival style and clad with white terra cotta manufactured by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company.

The building was commissioned by Herbert Bell of the Bell and Zoller Coal Company and was originally known as the Bell Building. After its sale to the Old Republic Life Insurance Company in 1956, it was renamed the Old Republic Building.

Top left: West-facing façade. Top right: South and west elevations as viewed from Michigan Avenue. Bottom left: Detail of arched entry.

The continuing necessity of building a north-south link and developing the area was then affirmed in Burnham and Bennett's *Plan of Chicago* in 1909, originally commissioned by the Merchant's Club before it merged with the Commercial Club. The Michigan Avenue expansion drew increasing political support from the lobbying of commercial interests. The plan incorporated ideas from the City Beautiful Movement that had been strengthened by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago's Jackson Park, and its aesthetic of a planned, organized and beautiful urban environment. The Michigan Avenue project became a keystone of the plan, as Burnham and Bennett applied the principles of the movement to the final planning and details of the 1909 Plan. Burnham stated in the report, "So desirable has this thoroughfare become that extensions of it to the north or the south must enhance the value of the abutting real estate, because of the increased opportunities such extensions will create for continuing the building of structures of the highest class." These aspects of the plan—the widening of Michigan Avenue, the construction of a new Michigan Avenue bridge, and the re-design of Michigan Avenue and East South Water Street as bi-level roadways—eventually shaped the city today.

It took about nine more years, however, for a workable Michigan Avenue expansion plan to be finalized. Initial resistance to the expansion plan centered on the elevation of the avenue and to high assessments that would be required to proceed. An extensive campaign to gain political and public support for the *Plan of Chicago* in general and the improvement of North Michigan Avenue in particular, was launched by the Commercial Club and headed by Charles Wacker, leading to the creation of a City Plan Commission with Wacker as chairman. An educational campaign ensued, promoting the improved avenue as "the most significant thoroughfare in the world."

After two years, the City Council passed an ordinance in 1913 for the widening of Michigan Avenue and the construction of a new bridge. A bond issue was passed and the city contemplated the acquisition of the property that needed to be demolished on the east side of Michigan between Randolph and the Chicago River and on the west side of the avenue north of the river to Chicago Avenue. City land acquisition, immediately hampered by lawsuits, began in 1916. Finally, by 1918 the city had acquired the necessary properties and demolition and widening of the avenue began in April.

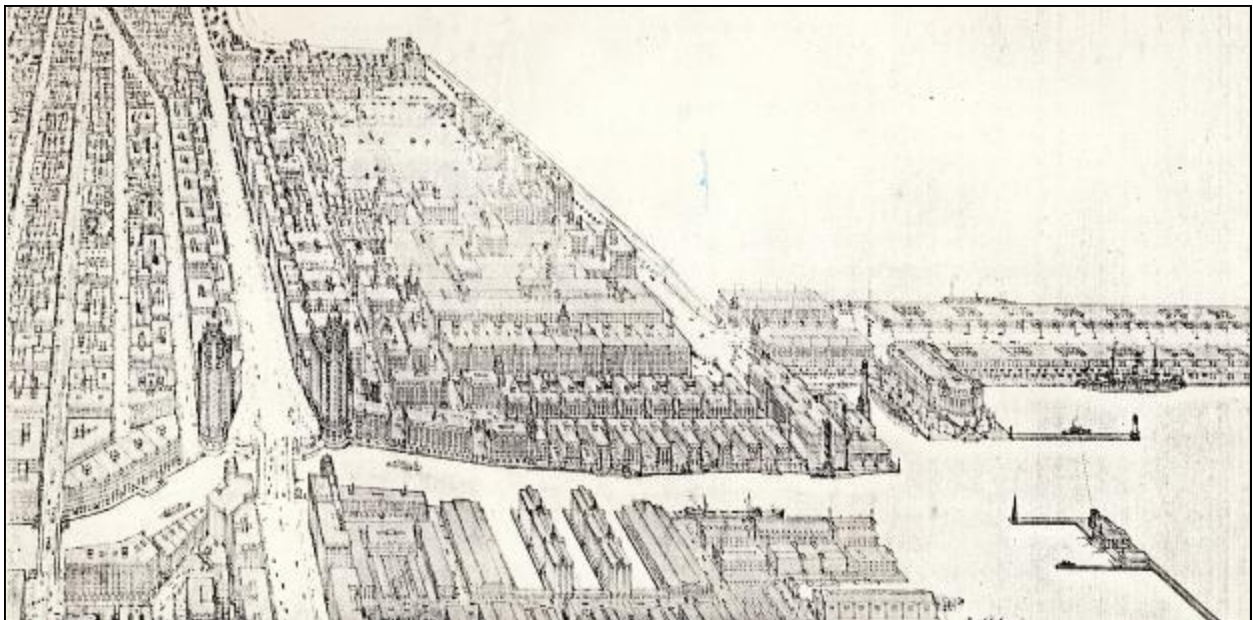
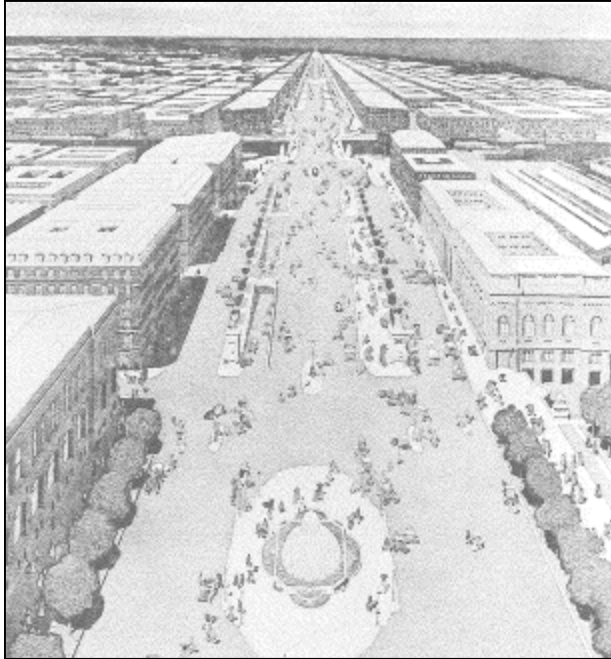
As the project became a reality, the area around the newly improved Michigan Avenue became a hotbed of real estate speculation for developers promoting space on the edge of the Loop—lower prices, more light, wide streets, and less congestion. Developers bought up the old warehouses and other commercial buildings, along with surviving residences, as building sites for new larger-scale construction. Banks and financiers also believed in this northward expansion and provided easy financing.

After two years of construction, the opening of the Michigan Avenue Bridge in May 1920 was celebrated as the most important realization of the 1909 *Plan of Chicago* achieved in the years since the *Plan's* publication. The final cost of the improvement was estimated at \$14,900,000. The area around the new bridge became known as the "New Gateway of the Greater Chicago," and commercial development of North Michigan Avenue followed throughout the 1920s.



Before the widening of North Michigan Avenue in the late 1910s and the development of Wacker Drive in the 1920s, the area on the south bank of the Chicago River (including the future site of the Old Republic Building) was a mix of 19th-century residences, small-scale commercial and industrial buildings, and the South Water Wholesale Market. Top: South Water Street.

Prior to the opening of the North Michigan Avenue Bridge in 1920, city traffic crossed the river on the Rush Street Bridge which had become terribly congested. Bottom: Rush Street Bridge.



The widening and extension of North Michigan Avenue as a north-south link between the Loop and the Near North Side, and the subsequent development of the avenue as a street of high-quality commercial buildings, was a significant component of Burnham and Bennett's *Plan of Chicago* in 1909. Burnham and Bennett applied the principles of the City Beautiful Movement to the Plan's vision for the avenue. Top left: 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, looking north.

The North Central Business District Association was founded in 1912 and was chartered to work with City government to realize Burnham's vision for a grand boulevard connecting the Gold Coast residential community with the central city. Top right: Projected south view from Wacker and Michigan Ave published in the North Central Business District Association's *Recommendations for the Future Development of North Michigan Avenue*. Bottom: Aerial-view drawing of the Chicago River and of the development to the north that would result from a Michigan Avenue extension.



As parts of the *Plan of Chicago* were realized, the Michigan Avenue Bridge became known as the “New Gateway of the Greater Chicago,” and its construction led to the commercial development of North Michigan Avenue.

Top: 1924 aerial view of the newly-widened Michigan Avenue showing the Old Republic Building (left, arrow), the London Guarantee Building (center), and the Wrigley Building (right).



Bottom: 1925 photo looking north from Wacker and Michigan Avenue showing the Michigan Avenue Bridge flanked by the Wrigley Building (left) and the Tribune Tower, under construction (right).

Adding to the development was the opening in 1926 of Wacker Drive, a two-level road extending west from Michigan Avenue along the south side of the Chicago River. The removal of the old South Water Street Market, the city's central produce market, had begun in 1919 and by 1925 was almost complete. As the south bank of the river was redeveloped, it became a prized real-estate location and major buildings had been constructed, or were under construction, in the area.

One of the groups that had formed in 1913 to promote the construction of the Michigan Avenue Bridge and the widening of North Michigan Avenue was the North Central Business District Association. This group concerned itself with questions about the architectural character and aesthetics of the avenue and made proposals for the development of properties along the avenue. The concern was to maintain it as a high-quality commercial street. In 1918 they made recommendations which subsequently proved too ambitious to implement, but did propose to treat the plaza just north of the bridge as a gateway to the north side and to promote monumental buildings at this location. Some of their concerns, along with Burnham's vision, led to the concentration of high-quality buildings on the avenue.

BUILDING DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTION

In 1917, when speculation was high and before construction had begun on the Michigan Avenue Bridge, Herbert E. Bell, president of the Bell and Zoller Coal Company, purchased a lot roughly a block south of the Chicago River on the east side of Michigan Avenue. This was originally part of the homestead site of John Beaubien, Chicago's second permanent white settler. It was also next to the land used over a century before by the United States government for the location of Fort Dearborn. (The footprint of the fort was designated a Chicago Landmark in 1971.) Bell's lot extended about 130 feet along Michigan Avenue and 75 feet to the east on a narrow strip of land between Michigan Avenue and the Illinois Central Railroad property. In 1917 the lot contained a four-story brick building.

The following year, as part of the Michigan Avenue widening process, the city condemned and acquired most of the lot to widen the avenue, leaving Bell with an extremely shallow lot only twelve feet deep. He initially began plans to build on that remaining portion, but then was able to acquire an adjoining property to the east so that the present Old Republic Building could be constructed. The shape of the resulting building, with its wide façade and narrow depth, was a result of the lot's dimensions, but it also afforded good light to all elevations and created a prominent façade along the avenue. The location, with very few tall buildings in the vicinity in the early 1920s, lent the new building visibility from a great distance on all sides. Before the neighboring 333 North Michigan Building was constructed in 1927, the bend in North Michigan Avenue at the river placed the Old Republic Building on axis with the avenue when viewed from the north. During this time, the Wacker Drive improvement had begun, which allowed for lower-level access to the building.

Herbert E. Bell, founder and president of the Bell and Zoller Coal Company and the builder of the Old Republic Building, was born in Wisconsin in 1867. Upon moving to Chicago in 1887, he joined coal operators Pease and Company. After securing the building site on Michigan



After the widening of Michigan Avenue and the opening of the Michigan Avenue Bridge, the south bank of the Chicago River (just west of the Old Republic Building) was redeveloped with the removal of the old South Water Street Market (the city's central produce market) and the opening of a bi-level Wacker Drive in 1926. Before the construction of the Chicago Motor Club Building in 1927, the Old Republic Building (arrow) was a visual landmark at the eastern end of Wacker Drive.

Avenue, he chose K. M. Vitzthum & Company as the architectural firm and McLennan Construction Company as the general contractor for the new building. The construction of the building was announced in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in January 20, 1924, but the final design had not yet been completed. A building permit was issued on July 1, and the building was finished and ready for occupancy around the beginning of April 1925.

The Bell Building, as it was known at that time, was to provide offices for the Bell and Zoller Coal Company and rental space for commercial tenants as a real estate investment. While Bell particularly wished to appeal to other coal and mining concerns and related businesses, he also leased to insurance, advertising, and other commercial office tenants. Several floors were originally provided with additional facilities for physicians, dentists and affiliated professions. Notably, Vitzthum himself had an office on the sixteenth floor, and prominent apartment and hotel architect Robert DeGolyer had offices on the nineteenth floor.

In 1926, Herbert Bell founded the Bell and Zoller Mining Company, which also had offices in the building. Bell continued his businesses and ownership of the building until 1956, when it was purchased by the Old Republic Life Insurance Company.

Building Description

The Old Republic Building is a 23-story steel-frame and concrete structure on caissons. It is clad with glazed architectural terra cotta on the west, north and south elevations, while on the east side it is faced with light buff Kittanning pressed brick. The building is an elongated rectangle extending for 130 feet along the east side of North Michigan Avenue, while only 64 feet deep along an alley on the north and East South Water Street on the south. Terra-cotta ornamentation is concentrated at the lower and upper floors. Above the ground floor, the majority of the windows are double-hung and recessed between the vertical projecting piers. Above the full twenty-third floor, a penthouse floor is set-back with a flat roof topped by a mechanical penthouse.

When constructed in 1924, the Old Republic Building was by far the tallest structure in the eastern part of the downtown area and was visible for a great distance up and down Michigan Avenue. The building is 264 feet tall, built to the full height allowed at that time by the Chicago Zoning Ordinance for a building without a set-back tower. Due to the Wacker Drive Improvement Project construction of a bi-level roadway at Wacker, Michigan and South Water, there are two lower floors accessible from Lower Michigan Avenue. 333 North Michigan Avenue (Holabird and Root, 1928), one of four monumental buildings now framing the Michigan Avenue Bridge, is just to the north of the Old Republic Building. An eclectic group of buildings, including the dark green-and-gold glazed terra-cotta Carbide and Carbon Building (230 N. Michigan, Burnham Brothers, 1929), face the Old Republic Building across North Michigan Avenue.

The design of the front façade of the Old Republic Building, facing Michigan Avenue, continues onto both the north and south elevations as well. It is a traditional, classical tripartite division of base, shaft and capital, with the elaborate decoration of the lower floors repeated at the upper levels by the repetition of columns and cornices. The building's architectural style is



When constructed in 1924, the Old Republic Building was the tallest building on the east side of Michigan Avenue south of the river, and was visible for a great distance. At 264 feet tall, it was built to the full height allowed at that time by the Chicago Zoning Ordinance for a building without a set-back tower. Visibility was further enhanced by the bend in Michigan Avenue at the river, so that the Old Republic Building was centrally located on the avenue when viewed from the north.

Classical Revival with details mostly influenced by Italian Renaissance precedents. The three finished façades are rendered in light buff terra cotta above a four-foot base of Minnesota granite.

The front (west) façade of the building is highlighted by a centrally-placed, monumental three-story entry. The rounded-arch entry is surmounted by a cartouche at the center of a series of swags. The surround of the arch features rope and floral designs. Above the entry doors the arch contains 3 x 4-foot panes of glass divided by metal mullions, similar to the original. Over the glass is mounted in bronze block letters the name “Old Republic Building” and the address “307.” On either side of the entry are three double-height bays of retail windows. The southwest corner bay was altered circa 1975 to create a recessed chamfered corner entry into the southernmost retail space. The large windows of the ground floor are separated from the second-floor Chicago-style windows by dark green glazed terra-cotta spandrels. The windows are separated by fluted Corinthian pilasters that continue up to the top of the third floor level where they terminate at an ornamental frieze. Between the pilasters at this third-story level are sets of double-hung windows. Above the frieze are single double-hung windows in the same configuration as those of the building shaft above, but dividing them from the shaft is a projecting cornice.

Within the uniform shaft of the building, the vertical lines are strengthened with continuous piers between the windows. Decorative spandrels between piers separate the windows. Each bay consists of a tier of single window openings, each with a single metal double-hung, one-over-one window. The exception to this pattern is at the strengthened corners of the building, a characteristic of the Classical Revival style. The tiers at each corner consist of a set of windows framed and set apart from the single windows by double piers.

The four full top floors of the building are, like the lower floors, monumental in scale. Engaged Corinthian columns between windows form a classical colonnade. The colonnade is further highlighted by string courses that underscore the rows of windows both below and above. Above the twenty-third floor, an ornate and deeply projecting cornice emphasizes the building’s classical appearance. Preventing the building from appearing top-heavy is the “cap” formed by the penthouse, which is set back from the face of the building on the north, west and south by about 15 feet and forms a smaller 24th floor for the building.

The three-story entrance opens into a double-height rectangular lobby, eleven feet wide and approximately half the depth of the building, which leads to a narrower elevator foyer with passenger elevators. The lobby was remodeled when a bank became a tenant in 1975 and again in the early 1990s. While the lobby retains its marble walls, the elevator foyer has been paneled in dark wood with a tile floor. The ceiling has the original dome shape, but with non-historic chandeliers. At the far end of the elevator foyer, a few marble steps ascend to a staircase which curves up to the second floor. On either side of the lobby and foyer are retail spaces, each with a storefront on Michigan Avenue.

The upper floors have been modified over the years. The typical multi-tenant floor plan has about 7,200 square feet of rental space, consisting of offices of varying sizes. The top floors of the building were reserved for executive use. On the twenty-third floor, the original executive

The Old Republic Building is designed in the Classical Revival style, which was often used to interpret the ideas and aesthetics of the City Beautiful Movement in the early 20th century. The design has a classical division of base, shaft and capital, with the design of the lower floors repeated at the upper levels by the repetition of columns and cornices. Much of the ornamental detail is influenced by Italian Renaissance precedents. The building is faced with light buff terra cotta.





The Old Republic Building has an imposing entrance for tenants and their guests. The entry doors are within a monumental three-story arch, with a surround featuring rope moldings and floral designs. At the top are swags and a cartouche with the initials of the building. Top: Photo of entry, ca. 1924, showing four-story base and three-story monumental arched opening. Bottom: Rendering of entry, ca. 1957, after the purchase of the building by the Old Republic Insurance Company.

The building's west, south, and north elevations are faced with cream-colored terra cotta profusely decorated with classical ornament, including fluted Corinthian pilasters, decorative swags, foliate ornament, and projecting cornices.

Top: Southwest corner detail at third level. Bottom left: Base of Corinthian pilaster. Bottom right: Decorative mullions and lintels on west elevation.



offices of Bell and Zoller now serve the same purpose for the Old Republic International Corporation. The twenty-second floor was originally designed as an apartment for Mr. Bell and so had a more domestic scale, though it has since been redesigned and serves as additional executive offices. On top of the building, within the penthouse floor and reached only by stairs from the twenty-third floor, is the Skyline Club, a private luncheon club frequented mostly by Old Republic company executives. Set back from the building walls on the west and north, it contains about 3,260 square feet. The list of charter members includes the architect Karl Vitzthum as well as important industrialists of the 1920s.

THE CLASSICAL REVIVAL STYLE

The Classical tradition in architecture and design is one of the oldest and most significant in Western civilization, influential from its origins in 6th Century, BC, Greece, through the present day. The architecture of ancient Greek temples and sacred buildings was widely admired by other Mediterranean cultures, including ancient Rome which incorporated Greek Classical architectural forms and details in its buildings throughout its empire, encompassing regions as far flung as England, North Africa, Spain, and Persia.

The Italian Renaissance sought to revive Classicism through a melding of the traditional Roman Classical forms with contemporary building types, a trend that continued through the 17th and 18th centuries and into the Classical Revival periods of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Classical design was seen as a significant aspect of Western civilization, and buildings intended to house important cultural, economic, or social institutions, whether public or private, often utilized Classical forms and ornament as part of their designs. By the early 1900s, the Classical style was increasingly adapted to a wide variety of building types, including banks, university buildings, railroad stations, and even large hotels.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, architects in both Europe and America increasingly learned their professions in architecture schools. The most prominent ones, including the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, taught students how to design complex modern buildings while cloaking them in historic architectural styles, especially Classicism. This academic training came at the same time as a popular revival of interest in Classicism that was fed by the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago's Jackson Park in 1893. This grandly-scaled "White City" of Classical Revival-style exposition buildings and monuments on the city's south lakefront was immensely influential in the popularization of the style both among Chicagoans and throughout the United States.

Classical Revival has always been the most ubiquitous style in America. The architectural critic C. Matlack Price said in a 1913 issue of *Art and Decoration*:

Even if we have in this country no style of architecture which we can call 'American,' it cannot be denied that there are certain types of building which are essentially American in their origin and which bear a distinct national stamp. Of these the 'skyscraper' office building and the apartment house seem to come most readily to mind.

The Old Republic Building is an example of a “classicized skyscraper,” combining the structure of a Chicago commercial building with a traditional, classical façade in the “White City” tradition. It has an ornate base at street level, a simpler “shaft” for economical construction, and an ornate top to draw attention from a distance.

Old Republic Building, ca. 1960, view from southwest.



According to this view American architecture needed the traditional styles to create a general awareness of true culture and to foster American involvement with it, not only with the architects, but on the part of those who lived in their buildings. A truly ingenious American style would be founded on tradition; only upon that basis should artists and architects attempt to initiate something new.

The Classical Revival architectural style was most often used to interpret the ideas and aesthetics of the City Beautiful Movement in the early 20th century. Its principles and details were incorporated into the details and design of the Michigan Avenue Bridge and Wacker Drive along with many of the monumental buildings that were constructed around the bridge.

The Old Republic Building is an example of a “classicized skyscraper,” combining the basic structure of a Chicago commercial building with a traditional, classical façade in the “White City” tradition. In the early 1920s, Classical Revival was the most accepted choice for a building façade, as it presented a proper and respected image. The advantage of the classic tripartite “column” structure for a tall commercial structure is that it offers an imposing entrance for tenants and their guests, a simpler and less expensive shaft that can repeat the building’s basic design to whatever heights are allowed, and an ornate top that advertises the building from a distance. These components all work to great advantage on the Old Republic Building. Columns and pilasters with classical capitals and projecting cornices created a framework for the display of other classical ornament. The strengthened corners of the building bring an element of visual restraint that derives from Italian Renaissance design.

Early in his career Vitzthum worked in the offices of Daniel Burnham and Graham, Anderson, Probst and White (GAPW), and was undoubtedly influenced by the Classical Revival-style buildings produced by both offices. The Wrigley Building (400 North Michigan Avenue, 1922-23) was one of the most important buildings designed in the Classical Revival style by GAPW, and their use of white terra cotta on the building was highly significant, even though the ornamental detail is more Spanish Renaissance Revival with its imposing eleven-story tower inspired by the design of the Giralda Tower in Seville, Spain. Terra cotta allowed for the interpretation of many ornate eclectic styles, though Classical Revival was the most ubiquitous. Architect Pierce Anderson of GAPW was a graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, had worked with Burnham and designed a number of influential Classical Revival Buildings of the time, including the Federal Reserve Bank Building on LaSalle Street (1920), Union Station (1925), and the Straus Building on South Michigan Avenue (1923).

Other Classical Revival buildings of interest from the time are the Lake Shore Trust and Savings Bank Building (601 North Michigan) by Marshall and Fox from 1921. This five-story structure, which preceded the completion of the Wrigley Building, is designed as a Greek temple, with large Corinthian columns extending the full height to support a prominent entablature. At the same time, Marshall and Fox were designing the Drake Hotel at the north end of Michigan Avenue in a more restrained Renaissance Revival style which influenced the design of many other commercial, hotel and residential buildings in the area.

Architectural Terra Cotta in Chicago

While many 1920s tall buildings in Chicago were clad in limestone, others were clad with terra cotta, including the Old Republic Building. Due to the intricacy of historic ornament, terra cotta

The Old Republic Building, ca. 1924, view from northwest.



was most often used on skyscrapers designed in historic architectural styles such as Classical or Gothic Revival, where the use of color allowed terra cotta to imitate the appearance of many different building materials, including stone. Earlier terra cotta, used since 1870 in Chicago for both fireproofing and ornamentation, had originally been unglazed and used to create applied designs of all styles, often used in conjunction with brick facades. Following the Chicago fire of 1871, there was widespread use of terra cotta tiles as fireproofing in commercial structures. By the mid-to-late 1880's, light-colored terra cotta was being manufactured and used to imitate limestone decoration to contrast with brick facades. In 1894, however, Charles Atwood pushed terra-cotta technology. Instead of confining its use to ornamentation or fireproofing, he used white glazed terra cotta to entirely sheath the Reliance Building, which led to terra cotta's recognition as a material able to clad steel-frame buildings.

The adaptability of terra cotta to steel-frame construction, both as fireproofing for steel structural elements and as cladding, revolutionized the terra-cotta industry and caused it to expand rapidly. Many Classical Revival style buildings constructed in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s featured ornamentation rendered in architectural terra cotta. It offered many advantages as a building material—it was durable, inexpensive, and infinitely adaptable. Terra cotta could be modeled into a wide range of forms, from flat patterned blocks to large three-dimensional figures, and could be glazed in a multitude of colors and finishes.

By the 1920s, architectural terra cotta was a key component to the imagery and decoration of various eclectic architectural styles. It was used to face buildings such as the Spanish-inspired Wrigley Building (1923), as well as Gothic-style skyscrapers such as the Pittsfield Building (55 E. Washington, GAPW, 1927), and Mather Tower (75 E. Wacker, Herbert Riddle, 1928), as well as Vitzthum's own Steuben Club Building (1929).

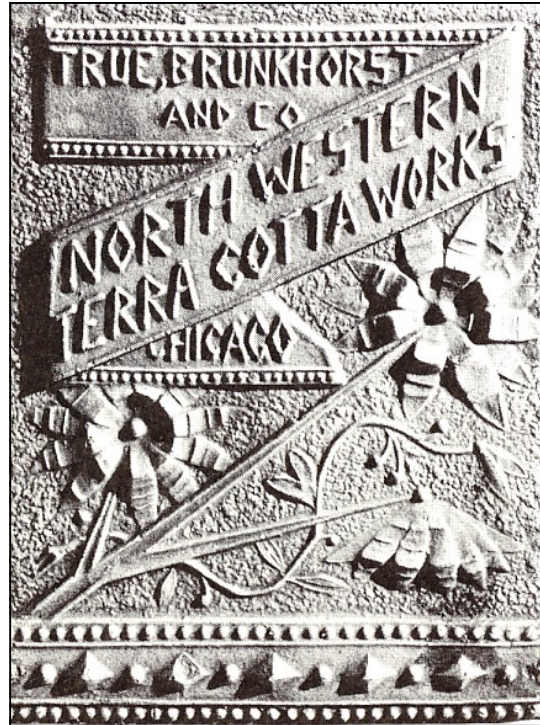
The terra cotta for the Old Republic Building was manufactured by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company of Chicago, which by 1900 had become the nation's largest terra-cotta producer and remained so for thirty years. Northwestern was founded by a group of Chicago investors in 1878, including G. Hottinger, John R. True and F. Wagner. By the early-twentieth century, the company had constructed a large plant on the northwest side of the city and employed over 1,000 workers. The company went on to establish plants in Denver, St. Louis and Chicago Heights. It was also one of the most innovative companies to manufacture terra cotta, developing both state-of-the-art production and installation techniques.

Northwestern's regular clients included prominent Chicago architects such as Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright, and the company manufactured terra cotta for many of the city's most important buildings, including the Auditorium Building, the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building, the Marquette Building, the Civic Opera House, the Gage Building, the Fisher Building, the Chicago Theater, and the Steuben Club, all designated Chicago Landmarks. The company's extensive experience with large-scale buildings such as these made it a natural fit for the elaborate ornamentation that Vitzthum designed for the Old Republic Building.

The use of architectural terra cotta peaked in the 1920s, before being eclipsed by modern curtain-wall construction of glass, exposed steel and concrete which became standard in the post-World

The ornamental terra cotta that decorates the Old Republic Building was manufactured by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company, one of the major producers of architectural terra cotta in the country. Northwestern produced terra cotta for buildings designed by many well-known Chicago architects including Daniel Burnham, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Right: Sample tile, ca. 1884. Bottom: Modeling room at Northwestern Terra Cotta, ca. 1925.





Architect Karl Vitzthum was influenced by the work of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. Top left: The Wrigley Building (400-410 North Michigan Avenue, 1921-24) was one of that firm's most important buildings of the 1920s, and their use of white terra cotta on the building was highly influential on later buildings such as Vitzthum's Old Republic Building.

The adaptability of terra cotta to steel-frame construction revolutionized the terra-cotta industry and caused its use to expand rapidly in Chicago in the early twentieth century. Architectural terra cotta was key to creating the imagery and ornament of various eclectic styles of the 1920s, and was used to face skyscrapers such as the Continental and Commercial Building (bottom left: 208 S. LaSalle, 1922) and the Pittsfield Building (bottom right: 55 E. Washington, 1927).



War II era. Business for Northwestern Terra Cotta declined during the Great Depression and never regained its earlier levels. The last plant was closed in 1965, and the company went out of business, but leaving a wealth of significant architecture throughout the country.

ARCHITECTS K. M. VITZTHUM AND J. J. BURNS

K.M. Vitzthum & Co., the architectural firm which designed the Old Republic Building, was a prominent designer in Chicago during the 1920s. During this time the firm designed a number of Classical Revival- and Beaux Arts-style buildings, including banks, office buildings, theaters, churches and apartment buildings.

Karl Martin Vitzthum was born in Bavaria on January 2, 1880. His father was an architectural engineer for the Bavarian Royal Railroad System, his paternal grandfather was a contractor and builder for several state buildings in Bavaria, and his maternal grandfather was a cabinet manufacturer and contractor at the Royal Court of Bavaria. Vitzthum's architectural training was rigorous. He attended the Royal Real School at Freising near Munich, then the Royal College of Architecture at Munich. His first employment was with Professor Theodore Fischer in the City Building Department of Munich. He first visited Chicago in 1902, and then returned to stay in 1914, taking a position with D.H. Burnham and Company. Before establishing his own firm in 1919, he also worked for Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, as well as White, Jarvis, and Hunt.

Vitzthum's first known commission in Chicago was the Beaux-Arts luxury apartment building at 2344 North Lincoln Park West, built in 1916. The permit lists Vitzthum and Teich Co. as architects, indicating that Vitzthum had teamed up with Frederick Teich for this one commission before beginning the firm would produce many major buildings over several decades.

Although the firm name was K.M. Vitzthum & Co., his partner from 1919 to 1956 was John J. Burns. Burns was born in New York City in 1886, graduated from Washington University in St. Louis, and then came to Chicago. Burns' entire career seems to have been in partnership with Vitzthum until Burns' death in 1956. Although the firm is sometimes referred to as Vitzthum and Burns, it is unclear if that was ever the official name. In fact, all of their buildings except the Bell Building list only K. M. Vitzthum as the architect on the permit, so it seems apparent that Vitzthum was the main design partner. In the specific case of the Old Republic Building, the original drawings list "K.M. Vitzthum – J.J. Burns –Architects," and the rendering identifies Burns as "Associate," indicating that perhaps Burns had a major role in the design of the building.

Vitzthum's firm remained in business for 45 years. In 1942, Vitzthum was one of several noted Chicago architects involved in the design of the Frances Cabrini Homes. In 1956 the firm became Vitzthum and Kill when Vitzthum took on partner Robert Kill after the death of Burns. Vitzthum remained active into old age, serving on the Chicago Zoning Board of Appeals from 1958 until his death in 1967 at age 87.

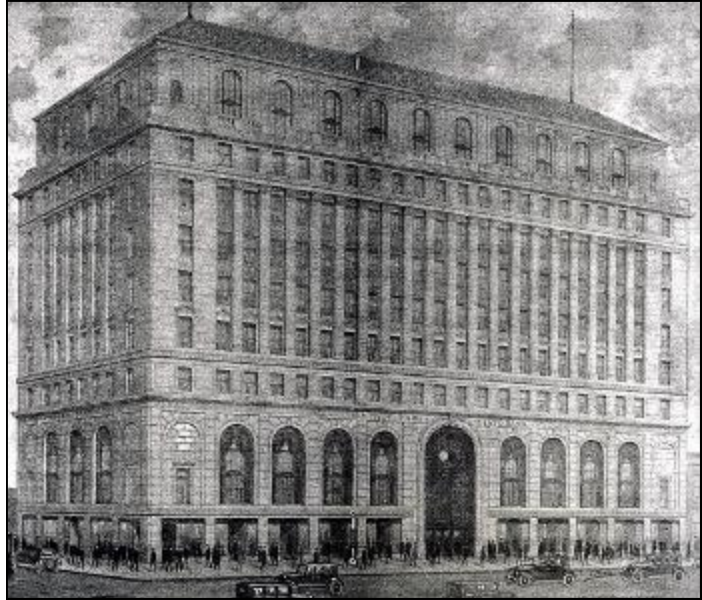


Bottom right: Architect Karl Vitzthum was a significant architect of commercial buildings in Chicago. He designed such major buildings as (top left) One North LaSalle Street Building (1930); (top right) the Home Bank and Trust Company Building (1925); and (bottom left) Steuben Club Building (1928), all designated Chicago Landmarks.



Vitzthum often used the Classical Revival style in his commercial buildings, especially his bank designs. His designs often used monumental entries set within round-arched openings similar to the Old Republic Building.

Examples of his bank designs include: Hyde Park-Kenwood National Bank Building at 1525 West 53rd Street, 1929 (top); the Home Bank and Trust Company Building at 1200-08 N. Ashland Avenue, 1925 (middle); and the Marquette Park State Bank Building at 6314 S. Western Avenue, 1924 (bottom), all designated Chicago Landmarks.



In *The Sky's the Limit: A Century of Chicago Skyscrapers*, historian John Zukowsky writes "...the firm of Vitzthum and Burns...designed several of the city's most visible tall office buildings...which reveal their progression between 1925 and 1930 into mainstream design, from the terra cotta classicism of the Bell Building through the limestone Modernism of the Steuben Club and the elegant setbacks of One North LaSalle." The Old Republic Building is important as the firm's first major Classical Revival design. As a prototype for many of their later buildings throughout the 1920s, the Old Republic Building is a beautifully proportioned example of a tripartite classical façade on a modern office building.

Vitzthum used components of this design principle consistently in all his larger buildings, where typically the multi-storied base of the building is topped by a single "transitional" story that is differentiated from both the lower and upper stories, and repeated at the top of the building in the form of a setback pavilion. This configuration was used on his Midland (Hotel) Club Building (276 West Adams, 1927), the DePaul Building (64 East Lake, 1928), and even on the 1929 Art Deco-style One LaSalle Street Building (a designated Chicago Landmark). Another consistency was the use of monumental rounded arched entrances, usually suggesting Renaissance Revival style, on the firm's major buildings until One LaSalle Street, where it was inconsistent with the more-angular Art Deco design

In addition to Loop commercial high-rises, Karl Vitzthum is well known for the design of neighborhood bank buildings. These include the Hyde Park-Kenwood Bank Building (1525 W. 523rd St, 1929), the Home Bank and Trust Building (1600 N. Ashland Ave., 1925-26), and the Marquette State Bank Building (6314 S. Western Ave., 1925), all Chicago Landmarks. Vitzthum also designed prominent buildings throughout the Midwest such as the Sheboygan County Courthouse in Wisconsin (1934), the Elco Performing Arts Center in Elkhart, Indiana (1924), and the State Bank of Goshen, Indiana (1924), all of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

LATER HISTORY

The Old Republic Life Insurance Company, which purchased the building from Herbert Bell in 1956, was formed in the 1920s and has grown over the years to become one of the fifty largest publicly-held insurance companies in the United States. By 1969 ownership of the Old Republic Building was transferred to the parent company Old Republic International Corporation, which is the current owner. The company remains headquartered in the building and still uses the executive offices, while leasing space to other tenants. The Old Republic International Corporation, primarily an underwriter for industrial and financial service companies, has a substantial interest in major segments of the insurance industry, especially in the areas of mortgage guarantees and title insurance.

The Old Republic Building is identified as "orange" in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey. It is also a contributing building within the Michigan-Wacker Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.



An aerial view of the Old Republic Building in November 1958 shows the building one year after the Old Republic Life Insurance Company bought it from Herbert Bell. Today, the Old Republic International Corporation remains the owner.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sec. 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Old Republic Building be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City's History

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois or the United States.

- The Old Republic Building was one of the first tall buildings, along with the London Guarantee Building, to be constructed south of the Chicago River on North Michigan Avenue after its widening in the early 1920s, transforming the area and connecting Michigan Boulevard south of Randolph to what would become the "Magnificent Mile" north of the river. The building exemplifies this important stage in the 1920s in the development of Michigan Avenue, conceived as part of the 1909 *Plan of Chicago*.
- The Old Republic Building, with its early and prominent location and high level of design and craftsmanship in terra cotta, helped to create a high-quality aesthetic and architectural standard for commercial structures on Michigan Avenue.
- The building's use of terra cotta for cladding and detailed ornamentation exemplifies the importance of terra cotta to early Chicago skyscraper design and the significance of the terra cotta industry in Chicago during the early 20th century. The building's elaborate terra-cotta ornament was produced by Chicago's Northwestern Terra Cotta Company, one of the United States' major terra-cotta companies and the producers of terra-cotta cladding and ornament for such significant Chicago buildings as the Auditorium Building, the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building, the Marquette Building, the Chicago Theater, and the Civic Opera House, all designated Chicago Landmarks.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

- The Old Republic Building is an excellent example of the "classicized skyscraper" of the 1920s, designed in the Classical Revival style with primarily Italian Renaissance detailing. Classical Revival was an important style in the early 20th century as a manifestation of the "City Beautiful" movement, which combined the traditional cultural associations of classicism with contemporary commercial buildings. The tripartite "column" design easily lent itself to the logical overall form and layout of modern skyscrapers.



Architectural ornamentation on the primary western-facing elevation at the southwest corner (top) and above the main entry (bottom).

- The Old Republic Building is a significant and handsome early 20th-century terra-cotta-clad skyscraper, exemplifying the importance of the material to early 20th-century commercial architectural design in general and the design of tall skyscrapers in Chicago in particular.
- The Old Republic Building displays excellent design and craftsmanship in terra cotta. The building has a plethora of Classical Revival terra-cotta detailing including Corinthian columns and pilasters, rope moldings, brackets, shields, lion's heads, and both floral and geometric patterns.

Criterion 5: Important Architect

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

- K. M. Vitzthum and Company, the architect of the Old Republic Building, was an important and prolific early 20th-century architectural firm in Chicago. With partner John J. Burns, Karl Vitzthum designed many commercial, ecclesiastical, and residential buildings throughout Chicago and the Midwest.
- Karl Vitzthum's firm designed some of Chicago's most striking 1920's skyscrapers, ranging from the Classical Revival-style Old Republic Building and the Gothic Revival-style Steuben Club Building (1929) to the Art Deco-style One LaSalle Street Building (1930). The Steuben Club Building and the One LaSalle Street Building are both designated Chicago Landmarks.
- The Old Republic Building is among the earliest and finest examples of the work of Karl Vitzthum in the Classical Revival style and influenced his later designs for banks and other commercial buildings throughout the Midwest.
- Vitzthum designed many important neighborhood bank buildings in Chicago, including the Home Bank and Trust Company Building (1925-26), the Hyde Park-Kenwood National Bank Building (1928), and the Marquette Park State Bank Building (1924), all Chicago Landmarks.

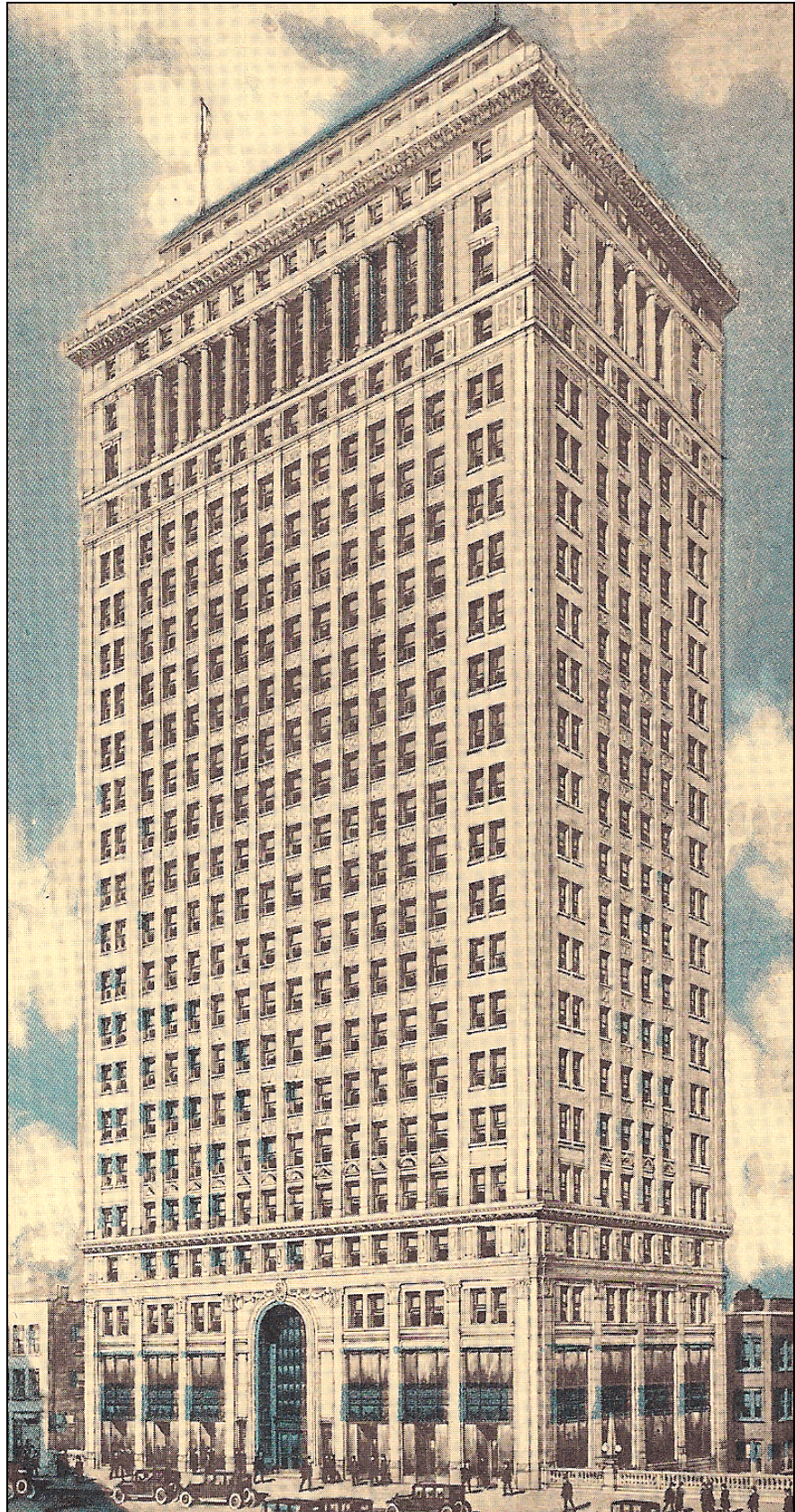
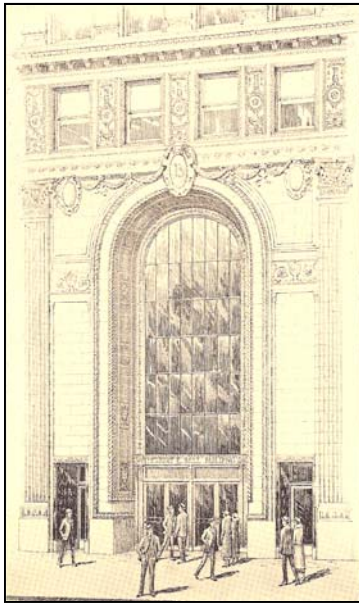
Integrity Criterion

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

Retaining its historic integrity of location and setting, the Old Republic Building is located on a rectangular building parcel fronting North Michigan Avenue, just south of the Chicago River. The building retains a high degree of architectural integrity on the exterior. The building's overall massing is intact, with no major additions. The primary elevations retain virtually all of the original terra-cotta, including the dark glazed spandrels between the first and second floors and all the pilaster and frieze ornamentation at the base of the building. In addition, the upper-level cornices, including the wide projecting cornice at the top of the building, are still intact.

Right: Architectural rendering of the Old Republic Building by K. M. Vitzthum & Co; J. J. Burns, Associate.

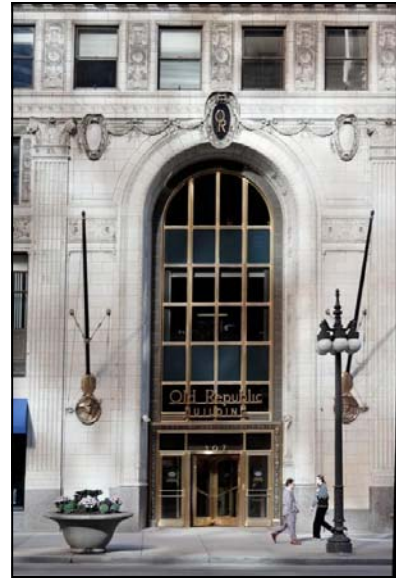
Below: Main entry as planned in 1924.





Left: The Old Republic Building viewed from the southwest in September 2010.

Below: Main entry at 307 North Michigan Avenue.



Decorative details throughout the building, including columns, pilasters, brackets and fanciful ornament, also remain, as do original metal, double-hung windows.

The entry to the building was modified when the Old Republic Life Insurance Company purchased the building in 1956. The monumental arch retains multi-paned windows above the entry doors, although those window panes are now larger. The cartouche at the top of the arch, which originally featured a “B” for Bell, was changed to “OR” after the purchase of the building by Old Republic in 1956. The current bronze signage was added at that time and the original Herbert E. Bell sign over the door was removed. The original sets of bronze doors were replaced at some point by revolving doors. In 1975, a bank tenant created a recessed chamfered corner first-floor entry at the southwest corner of the building. This entry is no longer used, but still exists.

On the interior, the original entrance lobby and elevator foyer were altered in 1975 with replacement of the original floors, the addition of bronze chandeliers to the ceiling, and the installation of dark wood crown, casing and base in the elevator foyer. Also at that time, a bronze gate that was salvaged from another building was attached to the east wall next to the stairs.

The Old Republic Building has been well maintained over the years. Current repairs to the classical cornice are being implemented with new terra cotta molded to match the original in color and design. The building retains virtually all of the characteristics that exemplify its historic and architectural significance.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

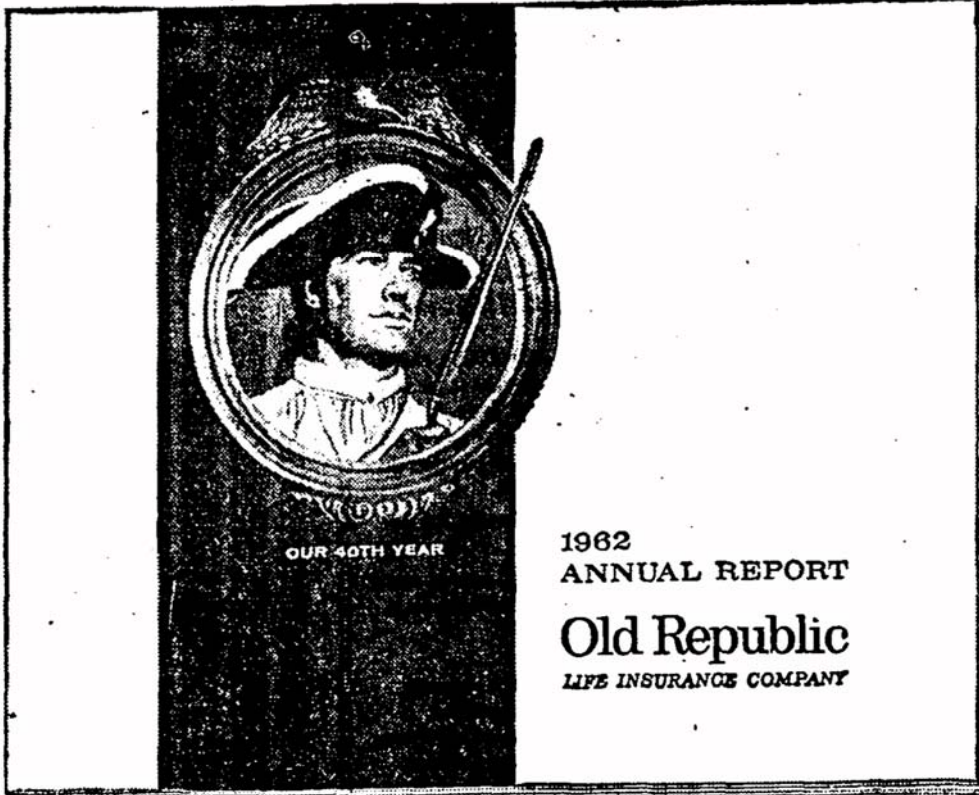
Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the “significant historical and architectural features” of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its preliminary evaluation of the Old Republic Building, the Commission staff recommends that the significant historical and architectural features of the Building be identified as:

- All exterior building elevations, including rooflines, of the building.

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Over \$3 Billion of Insurance Written in 1962



	1962	1961
Assets	\$35,342,115	\$30,432,684
Surplus to Protect Policyholders*	7,029,850	6,604,734
Direct Premiums Written	57,178,902	49,352,244
Premiums Retained	24,372,787	23,334,496
Gross Operating Gain	1,725,259	1,598,661
Federal Income Tax	561,268	705,166
Net Gain from Operations	1,163,991	893,495
Net Gain Per Share	1.26	.99
Dividends Per Share:		
Cash	.60	.80
Stock	2%	-

*The reserve for unauthorized reinsurance is based on the requirements of the State of Illinois. State of New York requirements are such that the reserve is increased by \$4,045,407 in 1962 and \$3,511,862 in 1961 and surplus in each year reduced accordingly.



Old Republic Life Insurance Company

307 NORTH MICHIGAN AVENUE, CHICAGO 1, ILLINOIS

1963 display advertisement in the *Chicago Tribune* for the Old Republic Life Insurance Company.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Illustrations

From MacRostie Historic Advisors, pp. cover (all), 3-4 (all), 14, 16 (all), 30 (all), 33 (all)

From Felix Mendelsohn, Paul Gilbert and Charles Lee Bryson, *Chicago Yesterday and Today*:
pp. 6 (all)

From A. N. Rebori, *North Michigan Avenue Development*: pp. 7 (top right)

From Vernon Howe Bailey, *North Michigan Avenue Development*: pp. 7 (bottom)

From *Plan of Chicago*: pp. 7 (top left)

From Chicago History Museum, Street Files for Michigan Avenue, pp.8 (top), 12

From *Chicago Daily News, Inc*, 1925: pp. 8 (bottom)

From Felix Mendelsohn, *Chicago and Its Makers*: pp. 10, 25 (top left and bottom right)

From Old Republic Insurance Companies, pp. 15 (top and bottom), 18, 20, 28, 32 (all)

From Sharon Darling, *Chicago Ceramics & Glass*: pp. 22 (all)

From <http://bbs.keyhole.com>: pp. 23 (top left)

From <http://chicagoarchitecture.info>: pp. 23 (bottom right)

From Chicago Landmarks Commission: pp. 23 (bottom left), pp. 25 (top right), 26 (all)

From achicagosojourn.blogspot.com: pp.25 (bottom left)

From *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 1963: pp. 36

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Printed October 2010.