



Minneapolis Armory

Media contacts: Commissioner Peter McLaughlin: 612-348-7884
Carol Allis, Public Affairs: 612-348-8536

- Built in 1935, the Minneapolis Armory was the most important building constructed in the Twin Cities during the Depression.
- The Armory is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- It was the costliest single building in the state supported by a Public Works Administration (PWA) grant, a President Franklin Roosevelt initiative.
- The building is the greatest example of PWA Moderne style in Minnesota and one of the most important examples of PWA Moderne in the country – a design characterized by strong geometry, bold contouring and integrated sculpture ornamentation.
- Armory construction pumped nearly \$300,000 directly into local labor products and employed as many as 407 tradesmen at one time.
- All the materials for the building were produced locally, in keeping with the principles of PWA projects – steelwork by Minneapolis-Moline and Gillette-Herzog; brick from Twin City Brick; granite from St. Cloud; limestone from Mankato.
- The Armory houses two of the few remaining examples of Federal Arts Project murals – two 12-foot frescoed murals by local artists Lucia Wiley and Elsa Jemne.
- At its peak, more than 27 units of the Minnesota National Guard and Naval Militia used the Armory for training and recreational purposes. Forty-ton tanks were periodically run around the drill hall track and the balcony was built out from the south wall to resemble the bridge of a battleship.
- In 1980 the National Guard suspended operations at the Armory site.
- From the late 1930s through 1970s the building was used for civic events, including trade shows, political conventions, concerts and sporting events. After World War II and until 1959, it was the site for the Golden Gloves boxing tournament, professional wrestling and Lakers' professional basketball games.
- In April 1989, when the City of Minneapolis relinquished its right of first refusal for the property, Hennepin County purchased the Armory for \$4.7 million as the site for a new jail.
- In January 1993, the Minnesota Supreme Court overturned a district court decision and ruled that the Armory was protected under the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act and could not be razed because of its historical status.
- In November 1998, the Hennepin County Board agreed to sell the Armory to Armory Development II LLC for \$2.6 million. The developer, in turn, invested \$2.9 million to convert the building to a parking structure.
- Two of the county's conditions of sale were that the owner must restore and preserve the historic structure and allow the county to maintain the Veterans Memorial Garden.
- Veterans Memorial Garden
 - Dedication: May 24, 2001
 - The design of the garden was inspired by a 1928 postcard, found by a vacationing Hennepin County employee in a Vermont antique store, depicting the elegant formal gardens of the first National Guard Armory, once located on what is now the site of the Minneapolis Sculpture Gardens.
 - Plantings include red-white-and-blue shrub roses, planted in a wave pattern; 850 red-white-and-blue tulips; and other perennials, annuals and ornamental grasses.