

# Fact Sheet: Reynolds Building Heritage

**Architects** Shreve and Lamb, New York City

**Opened** April 1929

**Cost** Estimated to be \$2.7 million in 1929 dollars

**Height** 380 feet from street to top of flag pole  
(at Fourth & Main Streets corner)

**Floors** 22 stories plus basement and sub-basement

**Exterior** Indiana limestone veneer with  
brick and clay tile backup

About 1,000 windows (40% of exterior)

**Interior** Marble  
Gray-brown from Missouri  
Buff and green from France  
Black from Belgium  
Rose from Italy



1928 construction



**Upgrades** 1956 Air conditioning added  
1963 Elevator controls automated  
1982 Lobby area renovated  
1987 Window replacement begins  
1997 Window replacement finished; exterior cleaned

**Awards** 1929 National Assoc. of Architects Building of the Year  
1983 Art Deco Society: best Art Deco building restoration  
1984 American Institute of Architects Honor Award



The Reynolds Building lobby features a 26-foot "Tapestry of Tobacco" mural created by Dennis Abbe of New York.

## History

In the early days of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, offices were located in corners or upper floors of a factory. Richard Joshua Reynolds' first office was in "The Little Red Factory."

When Mr. Reynolds died in 1918, his brother William became president. Under his leadership, in early 1927 the New York architectural firm of Shreve and Lamb was selected to design a new office building. The final plans were approved by year end, and excavation began in early 1928. By May 1928, the first steel was put in place, and stone work began in late June. The structural work was completed by early December. The Reynolds Building was occupied on April 27, 1929.

It was not until the early 1900s that the development of structural steel made it possible to build very tall buildings. This technology provided the vehicle Shreve and Lamb needed to use for the shell of the South's first skyscraper: The Reynolds Building.

When the building opened in 1929, Reynolds Tobacco only used about 50 percent of the building's space. The lobby was originally occupied by a drugstore, bank, telegraph office, railway ticket office and stockbroker. Space were also leased to tenants such as a dentist, newsstand, barbershop, restaurant and law firms.

Soon after finishing the Reynolds Building, Shreve and Lamb designed the similar Empire State Building in New York. (A birthday card from the Empire State Building is on display in the Reynolds Building lobby.)

## Art Deco Style

Art Deco is the design style of the building. Art Deco was popular in the time period between World War I and II. The Art Deco style had an elegant, cool sophistication, characterized by slender forms and vertical lines. Its simplicity was often combined with geometric shapes and vibrant colors.

Extensive ornate metal grille work welcomes guests as they enter the revolving doors into the lobby. Inside, this same metal presentation is used to accent walls and elevators. The metal used in the lobby is known as Benedict metal -- a combination of copper, tin, lead, zinc and nickel. It is no longer made. In fact, in later renovations, custom orders had to be quarried from West German mines. The metal was hand-tooled in New Jersey to try to replicate the original metal.)



The ceiling is a plaster base covered with gold leaf. It features dozens of circular designs reminiscent of smoke rings. Tobacco leaves frame the edges of the lobby ceiling. The carved marble detailing near the ceiling is typical of Art Deco, as are the designs in the lighting fixtures and elevator-door motifs.

## Lobby Exhibition Area

A 26' x 8' mural by Dennis Abbe of New York covers most of one wall. This "Tapestry of Tobacco" traces the history of tobacco, beginning with Europeans discovering tobacco from Native Americans in the 1600s, and ending with the year the Reynolds Building opened.

Carved glass was very popular during the 1920s and 30s. The lobby features glass panel etchings designed by Dennis Abbe and produced by three Russian artisans, the Sheffts brothers of New York.

Display cases contain smoking accessories popular when the building opened, including pieces by Cartier.

Two advertising paintings used in early Camel advertising reflect the era when the building opened: *A Social Success*, by Frederick Mizen (1929) and *Camel Has a World of Friends*, by Edward Chase (1927)

