BLAKE PONTCHARTRAIN™

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Hey Blake,

What can you tell me about the history of the 1010 Common building that is home to the new Fairmont Hotel?

Dear Reader,



The late Mayor Moon Landrieu and hundreds of others held a second line to celebrate the opening of the Bank of New Orleans building.
PHOTO BY JAMES GUILLOT / THE TIMES-PICAYUNE

THE SKYSCRAPER AT COMMON AND SOUTH RAMPART STREETS opened in 1971 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For its first decade, it was known as the Bank of New Orleans building, with the bank as its first major tenant.

The 31-story building came online during the downtown high-rise boom of the 1960s. According to The Times-Picayune, it was developed by Shepard M. Latter, Shirley Latter Schlesinger and Lane M. Meltzer.

The 438-foot-tall building was designed by the prominent Chicago architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, with local partner August Perez and Associates. After three years of construction, it opened as the second-tallest structure in the city at the time, behind the Plaza Tower.

1010 Common was a first in New Orleans, in that it was built using steel pilings as opposed to traditional round pilings driven 200 feet into the ground. Its listing in the National Register calls it "the first- high rise building in New Orleans to utilize high- capacity long- steel piles, a new steel foundation technology that had previously been limited to offshore oil rigs and other marine structures." Their use "allowed for a deeper embedment and a higher design stress than had ever been attempted for steel piles in the city, meaning it could support significantly taller and heavier buildings than had previously been built," according to the citation.

For several years, the energy company McDermott International was a major tenant, along with state government offices.

In 2014 developer Mohan Kailas bought the property for $16.6 million. He recently converted it into a mixed-use complex with office space and two hotels: a 216-room Element and the 250-room Fairmont on the upper floors. Its two restaurants, developed by chef Emeril Lagasse, include a café and a high-end Delmonico steakhouse.

BLAKEVIEW

FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, November in New Orleans meant the circus came to town, specifically, the Jerusalem Temple Shrine Circus. Billed as the "circus with a purpose," the show was one of many held in cities across the country to benefit the charitable efforts of the Shriners and their work providing medical care for children.

Although earlier versions of the Shrine Circus were held at different venues, the location most New Orleanians remember is the Municipal Auditorium, which hosted its first Shrine Circus 80 years ago.

"Highlighting the two-and-a-half-hour program is Clyde Beatty, the famous wild animal trainer, who will appear in person at every performance with the world's largest group of performing jungle-bred lions and tigers," reported the Nov. 25, 1946, New Orleans Item. That first circus — also featuring the traditional lineup of elephants, clowns, daredevils, acrobats, trapeze artists and more — was held Dec. 4-9, 1946. The circus moved to Thanksgiving weekend in its third year and kept its late November spot on the calendar for decades.

Admission to the first Shrine Circus was 60 cents for children and $1.20 for adults. By 1950, there were 15 performances during the circus' 11-day run at the Auditorium, attracting a total crowd of more than 100,000 people, according to the Picayune. The 1963 circus featured an appearance by the Three Stooges.

Produced by various traveling companies, the Shrine Circus was a fixture at the Municipal Auditorium until 1991, when it moved to Kenner's Pontchartrain Center.

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