

Encyclopedia Entry: The Barringer
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The year was 1903, the beginning of winter, but even the cold could not temper the excitement that filled the minds of South Carolinians. Finally, after three years of anticipation, “The Skyscraper” was open for business.¹ The nickname denoted the building’s importance as the first of its kind in Columbia. At the end of January 1901, the Columbia newspaper, *The State*, announced the building of a skyscraper alongside the announcement of the Kendall building being scheduled to be demolished within the year.² The decision for “The Skyscraper” to replace parts of the demolished Kendall building on Main Street, which had been a commercial and residential space, was ironic because at one point it had also been considered Columbia’s mark of progress.³ The grand scale of the endeavor allowed for a variety of proposed plans, including one that called for a clocktower.⁴ Clocktower or not, “The Skyscraper” was firmly established as a landmark in the eyes of South Carolinians. The announcement for Columbia’s first skyscraper brought national attention from other southern states like North Carolina whose newspaper, *The Charlotte Observer*, commented, “Columbia is to be commended for following in Charlotte’s footsteps.”⁵ The prestige of a skyscraper put Columbia, and the state of South Carolina as a whole, on the national level as a place of industry and progress.

Brite and Bacon, architects from Chicago, were hired by the National Loan and Bank Exchange president, Edwin Robertson. Through their vision, “The Skyscraper” came to be a picture of Georgian revival straight from the streets of Chicago.⁶ The chosen style conveyed ideas of industry and progress associated with Chicago’s towering skyline. After the Civil War

¹ “In Its New Quarters Today. National Loan and Exchange Bank Has Moved”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), December 30, 1903: 8.

² “A ‘Skyscraper’ for Columbia”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), January 31, 1901: 4.

³ “The Kendall Building. An Ornament to the City Will Soon be Finished”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), July 26, 1895: 8.

⁴ “Would Certainly be Seen”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), January 30, 1903: 8.

⁵ “The State’s Survey”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), February 2, 1901: 4.

⁶ Thomas Wertenbaker, “American Georgian Architecture”, *Proceeding of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 87, no. 1 (1943): 65-69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/985001>.

ended in 1865, the economy of the South began to boom as railroads brought in money and new residents eager to take advantage of the growing southern cities. Columbia wanted to imitate one of the most industrialized and progressive cities in the United States, Chicago. Another factor in the style choice had to do with the strong nature of the materials: steel frame, brick curtain wall, and cast stone. These are materials that are strong and meant to last a long time, just like the bank and loan that owned the building would stand the test of time. The bank on the first two floors was often cited as “The Largest and Strongest Bank in South Carolina” by *The State*, even in its opening year.⁷ The look of the building, firm and dominating the landscape, created a sense of trust and pride in the Columbia community. The Panic of 1907 snowballed as a sharp decline in stocks left banks unprepared, and the country’s distrust in big banks caused a rush of withdrawals.⁸ Thankfully, by this time, the South had established itself financially, and the National Loan and Bank Exchange survived the country’s collective financial panic. The death of the bank’s president, Edwin Robertson, in 1928 marked the slow downfall of the bank over the next few years until the building went into receivership in 1933.⁹

The Great Depression brought around a new group of tenants, namely the WPA (Works Progress Administration), which occupied seven floors of the twelve-story building from 1936 to 1942.¹⁰ The WPA utilized the high rates of unemployment to create a national network of citizen relief workers from 1935 until 1943.¹¹ The WPA was one of the largest relief projects during the Great Depression, with up to three million unemployed workers around the country. Although

⁷ “National Loan and Exchange Advertisement,” *The State* (Columbia, South Carolina), July 10, 1903: 8.

⁸ Joseph Johnson, “The Crisis and Panic of 1907”, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1908): 454-467. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2141305>.

⁹ “Funeral Today Mr. Robertson”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), November 22, 1928: 2.

¹⁰ “Historic Columbia Buildings”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), April 10, 2006: B2.

¹¹ Chad Goldberg, “Contesting the Status of Relief Workers during the New Deal” The Workers Alliance of America and the Works Progress Administration, 1935-1941”, *Social Science History*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2005): 337-71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267880>.

the WPA occupied several floors, the Liberty Life Insurance Company had ownership of the property from 1938 until 1951.

The Barringer Corporation bought the property in 1953 from the Columbia Hotel Co. The Barringer Corporation spent several years during the 1960s renovating the building.¹² The corporation removed the cornice that wrapped around the top of the building due to the fear of lawsuits over falling debris. Other exterior renovations included the replacement of fixed windows on all floors with newer, sashed windows.¹³ The Barringer family, a well-known Columbia family, owned the Barringer Corporation and left their name attached to the building long after they sold it in 1974 to the 1338 Main Associates. The building, even to this day, is synonymous with the name “Barringer”. By 1982, the 1338 Main Associates gave up ownership of the building, and the building presumably went back into receivership until the early 2000s.

In 1979, the approval of a form submitted to the National Register of Historic Places officially cemented the Barringer’s place in Columbia’s history as a landmark. The approval accomplished Columbia’s intention of the Barringer being seen as a landmark of the city outside of its original banking function. The grand opening of the Barringer as a residential space happened in 2006 after Capitol Places converted the Barringer’s office spaces into residential housing.¹⁴ Over a century later, the Barringer continues to serve Columbia in its capacity as a skyscraper and a historic landmark of the city.

¹² Robert Stockton, “Carolina Landmark”, *The State* (Columbia, SC), November 13, 1977: 5E.

¹³ “National Register of Historic Places”, *United States Department of the Interior*, 1977.
<http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/richland/S10817740033/S10817740033.pdf>.

¹⁴ “1338 Main Street”, *Historic Columbia*, 2023,
<https://www.historiccolumbia.org/tour-locations/1338-main-street>.



Taken by Olesya Williams from Washington Street. Sep 7th, 2023.



Blanchard, Walter. *Lightning strikes over the 1400 block of Main Street during a storm at night.* Richland Library (Richland County, SC), photograph, Aug. 19, 1912.



Maxey, Russell. *National Loan and Exchange Bank*. Richland Library (Richland County, SC), photograph, 1905.



Shealy, Bud. *Armed Forces Day Parade on Main Street*. Richland County (Richland County, SC), photograph, May. 21, 1960.

When researching the Barringer, there is an impression that the Barringer fades into the landscape of the city rather quickly. This photograph in 1960 shows that the Barringer still stood out

prominently, even fifty-seven years after it was built.

