

# After the fire, a closer look at Wayne State's Maccabees Building and its history

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Damage from a rooftop HVAC fire can be seen to Wayne State University's Maccabees Building, 5057 Woodward Ave. in Detroit on Wednesday April 1 2026.MLive.com

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DETROIT, MI - Ten days after an [April 1 fire damaged upper floors of the Maccabees Building](#), the Midtown landmark is drawing renewed attention, not just for the repairs ahead, but for the nearly century of history inside its walls. The fire, sparked by an electrical issue in a cooling tower, was contained in less than 30 minutes.

No injuries were reported, though smoke and water damage impacted several upper floors used by Wayne State University departments.

While much of the building has since reopened, the incident prompted concern across Detroit and a renewed appreciation for one of Midtown's most recognizable structures.

"I had people blowing up my phone in a panic when they saw the smoke," said Dan Austin, founder of Historic Detroit. "That speaks to how much people care about the Maccabees Building. It's a Midtown landmark."

According to [HistoricDetroit.org](https://www.historicdetroit.org), the 14-story building was designed by renowned architect Albert Kahn and constructed in 1927 for the Knights of the Maccabees, a group that provided low-cost insurance to its members. The building takes its name from the biblical Maccabees, a group of Jewish rebels who fought to defend their religion.

41—MACCABEES BUILDING  
DETROIT, MICH.



HistoricDetroit.org

An undated

postcard shows the Maccabees Building in Detroit with "WXYZ" displayed atop the structure, when the radio station operated from studios inside and helped launch programs like the Lone Ranger. (Courtesy of [HistoricDetroit.org](http://HistoricDetroit.org))Historic Detroit

When construction began in 1926 at Woodward Avenue and Putnam Street, the organization had about 200,000 members across North America.

Tenants began moving in early the following year, but the formal opening drew about 5,000 members from across the U.S. and Canada to Detroit.

"The magnificent temple of the Maccabees is not only a monument to the solidarity and growth of the order, but a constant worldwide advertisement of Detroit as a city of marvelous growth," the Detroit Free Press wrote at the time.

Today, the building is known for its Art Deco design and ornate lobby mosaics.

"It's not the Fisher or the Guardian, but it's an underappreciated piece of the city skyline," Austin said. "From an architectural beauty standpoint, it belongs near the top of the list."

Austin said the building's most striking features are often overlooked.

"It's not until you walk inside and see the mosaics and chandeliers that you realize just how beautiful it is," he said. "That lobby is like stepping back into 1920s Detroit."

He described the interior as a "time capsule" that remains largely intact nearly a century later.

The building also played a role in shaping American pop culture.

According to [HistoricDetroit.org](http://HistoricDetroit.org), radio station WGHP, later renamed WXYZ, operated from the building, where The Lone Ranger debuted in 1933 and The Green Hornet followed in 1936.

Both characters were created and recorded inside the Maccabees Building before becoming nationally and internationally known.

“It’s one of those cool footnotes in Detroit history,” Austin said. “A lot of people don’t realize those household names started right here in that building.”

WXYZ later began television broadcasting from the building in 1948, becoming Michigan’s second TV station.

The Maccabees organization relocated to Southfield in 1960, and Detroit Public Schools later occupied the building for decades before moving out.

Wayne State purchased the building in 2002 and now uses it for administrative and academic offices.

Austin said the building’s preservation is part of what makes it so significant today.

“Buildings like that, that are still so well preserved, are even more important to protect,” he said. “We were really close to losing something special.”

For many Detroiters, the building remains a familiar point along Woodward Avenue.

“When I’m driving up Woodward, I don’t look at street signs, I look at how close I am to the Maccabees,” Austin said.

Nearly 100 years after it opened, the building continues to serve a new generation, its history still visible for those who know where to look.

“That lobby is probably the best-kept secret in the building,” he said. “You walk in and you’re just stunned, it’s like a time capsule.”

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