

= One Meridian Plaza =

One Meridian Plaza was a 38 @-@ story high @-@ rise office building in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania , United States . The 492 feet (150 m) tower was designed by Vincent Kling & Associates and completed in 1972 . The building was demolished in 1999 as a result of damage of a fire that began on February 23 , 1991 . The fire began on the 22nd floor after linseed oil soaked rags ignited a blaze that raged out of control for hours . Philadelphia firefighters fought the blaze , but struggled due to a lack of power in the skyscraper and insufficient water pressure from the building 's standpipes . Three firefighters died in the twelve alarm fire after becoming disoriented by heavy smoke . Firefighting efforts inside One Meridian Plaza eventually were abandoned due to fears the structure would collapse . The fire was only brought under control once it reached the 30th floor which was one of the few floors that had automatic sprinklers installed . Ten sprinklers held back the fire until it started burning itself out and was finally brought under control almost a full day after it started . The blaze seriously damaged the building destroying eight floors and damaged neighboring buildings .

For eight years after the fire , One Meridian Plaza sat vacant and damaged right in the center of Philadelphia 's business district . The building was caught in litigation between the owners and the insurance company over how much the insurers would pay the owners and how repairs or demolition would proceed . Businesses near the empty high @-@ rise closed or moved and the city sued the owners to do something with the building . After lawsuits were settled , the building was declared a total loss and began to be dismantled in 1998 . At the time of its demolition in 1999 , One Meridian Plaza was the third @-@ tallest destroyed building in the world .

= = Building = =

One Meridian Plaza was a 38 @-@ story high @-@ rise office building designed by Vincent Kling & Associates . Construction on the 492 feet (150 m) tower began in 1968 , was completed in 1972 and approved for occupancy in 1973 . Built at the corner of 15th Street and South Penn Square in Center City , Philadelphia , Pennsylvania , the US \$ 40 million high @-@ rise was built adjacent to the Girard Trust Building , now the Ritz @-@ Carlton Philadelphia , and the front faced Philadelphia City Hall across the street . The rectangular One Meridian Plaza was 243 feet (74 m) long and 92 feet (28 m) wide and contained 756 @,@ 000 square feet (70 @,@ 000 m²) . Of the 38 floors , 36 were occupiable and 2 were mechanical floors . The structure also had 3 underground levels . The building 's structure was composed of steel and concrete and the facade was a granite curtain wall . There were two helipads on the roof . One Meridian Plaza 's eastern stairwell connected the building to the adjacent Girard Trust Building . At one point there were plans to build a structure on the south side of One Meridian Plaza that would share one of the elevator banks in the high @-@ rise , but nothing came of the plans mainly due to neither site having the same owner . On the northwest corner of the property is a bronze sculpture called " Triune . " Designed by Robert Engman the abstract sculpture was not damaged in the 1991 fire and is still there .

When One Meridian Plaza was built Philadelphia was enforcing a building code from 1949 that made no distinction between high @-@ rises and other buildings . In 1984 Philadelphia adopted new codes that required automatic sprinkler systems in all new buildings . At the time of construction , sprinklers were only built on the service levels below ground . In 1988 plans were put in place to have automatic sprinklers placed throughout the building by November 1993 . By 1991 four floors were completely protected by sprinklers and in part on three other floors . The sprinklers had been installed during floor renovations at the request of tenants and the building 's owners had plans to install more as other floors were renovated .

The high @-@ rise was originally known as the Fidelity Mutual Life Building , named for Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Co. who developed the building in a joint venture with Girard Bank . The high @-@ rise was the tallest building built in Philadelphia since the early 1930s . Girard Bank sold its share of the property , which was also known as Three Girard Plaza , to Fidelity Mutual Life in 1982 . Fidelity Mutual Life , which had moved its offices out of the building to Radnor Township ,

Pennsylvania earlier that year , subsequently sold the building to E / R Partners in 1983 . A joint venture of the Rubin Organization and Equitable Life Assurance Company of America , E / R Partners bought the property for US \$ 143 million . In 1989 a Dutch pension fund , Algemeen Burgerlijk Pensioenfonds , paid US \$ 120 million to enter E / R Partners with a sixty @-@ five percent stake in the building . In 1984 Three Girard Plaza became the Three Mellon Bank Center after Girard Bank was bought by Mellon Bank , and in 1990 was renamed again to One Meridian Plaza after Meridian Bank replaced Mellon Bank as the lead tenant . Another major tenant was Comcast , who made 81 @,@ 000 square feet (7 @,@ 500 m2) of One Meridian Plaza its corporate headquarters in 1989 .

= = Fire = =

On February 23 , 1991 , at about 8 : 23 PM , a fire began on the 22nd floor of the building . It was a Saturday night and there were only three people in the building at the time , an engineer and two security guards . Workers had been refinishing woodwork in a vacant office earlier in the day and workers left a pile of rags soaked in linseed oil on the floor . The linseed oil oxidized and generated enough heat to ignite the rags which then set fire to other solvents nearby . Smoke detectors did not cover the entire floor and by the time the fire alarm went off the fire was already well established . After the fire alarm sounded in the building the engineer went up to the 22nd floor to investigate . When the elevator reached the 22nd floor the engineer found heavy smoke and heat which prevented him from reaching the elevator controls he needed to return to the lobby . The engineer escaped after radioing to a security guard in the lobby to recall the elevator using fire safety controls there . The second security guard was on the 30th floor when the alarm went off and used the stairwell to get to the ground floor .

The lobby guard returned a call to the alarm monitoring service which had called when the alarm initially went off to confirm that there was a fire , but never called the Philadelphia Fire Department . The first call came from someone on the street who saw smoke coming from the building . During the first 911 call , at about 8 : 27 PM , the alarm company alerted the fire department to the fire . Engine 43 was the first firefighting unit to arrive at the scene and reported seeing heavy smoke and flames in one of the windows . As firefighters started fighting the fire it had grown with flames breaking through windows and lapping up the side of the building .

= = = Problems = = =

Firefighters began experiencing problems before they even reached the fire . By the time firefighters reached the 11th floor the building had lost power after the heat from the blaze damaged electrical cables . The emergency generator never began producing electricity , and despite efforts to restore power the building was without electricity for the entirety of the event . This forced firefighters to work in darkness and without the aid of elevators . In addition , the transformers that provided power to the neighboring Girard Trust Building were in the basement of One Meridian Plaza . The transformers were eventually shut down due to water accumulation in the basement and firefighters directing water streams from that building had to do so without the aid of elevators .

Firefighters were again hampered when it was discovered the pressure relief valves on the standpipes were improperly adjusted when installed in the building . The Philadelphia Fire Department nozzles allowed 100 psi nozzle pressure while One Meridian Plaza 's pressure relief valves were giving less than 60 psi discharge pressure , which was not sufficient to fight the fire . It was several hours into the fire before a technician who could adjust the valves arrived at the scene .

The area around the building was cleared of pedestrians and firefighting personnel because of falling glass and debris . The falling debris was dangerous for firefighters because they often had to cross the perimeter around the building to enter and leave the high @-@ rise . Hose lines stretched into the building were damaged by falling debris and one firefighter was struck by debris and seriously injured while tending to the lines .

= = = Lost firefighters = = =

During the second hour of the fire it spread onto the 23rd and 24th floors . Heavy smoke was building up in the stairwells and a captain and two firefighters from Engine 11 were assigned to go to the top level to ventilate the stairwell . The three firefighters went up a center staircase from the 22nd floor and soon radioed that they were disoriented by heavy smoke on the 30th floor . There were attempts to direct the firefighters through the radio , and soon after the captain requested permission to break a window for ventilation , which was followed by a message that the captain was down . Permission to break the window was given and a search and rescue effort was initiated .

Search teams were sent from the lower floors and searched the 30th floor , but did not find the missing firefighters . The teams then moved onto the upper levels where one team got lost on the 38th floor and ran out of air in their self @-@ contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) . That team was rescued by a search team that had been placed on the roof by a helicopter . Rescue attempts continued until helicopter operations were suspended due to heavy smoke and thermal drafts caused by the blaze .

Using a searchlight the helicopter crew searched the exterior of the building and at 1 : 17 AM February 24 , the helicopter spotted a broken window on the 28th floor located in an area that could not be seen from the street . At about 2 : 15 AM a rescue team was sent to the spot and found the three missing firefighters unconscious and out of air in their SCBAs . The firefighters were brought to a medical triage set up on the 20th floor . There were attempts at resuscitation , but they were unsuccessful and the firefighters were pronounced dead .

= = = Fire Companies on Scene = = =

1st / Box Alarm Assignment - Box 495 - 15th & Chestnut Streets

Squirt 43 , Engine 1 , Engine 20 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) Engine 11 (3 Firefighter Line of Duty Deaths from this Company)

Ladder 9 , Snorkel 5

Medic 7

Battalion Chief 5 , Battalion Chief 4

2nd Alarm Assignment :

Squirt 8 , Engine 10 , Engine 24 , Engine 44 , Engine 13 (Lobby Control)

Ladder 23 , Ladder 1

Medic 13

Battalion Chief 3 (Lobby Officer) , Battalion Chief 11

Division (Deputy) Chief 1

Air Unit 2

3rd Alarm Assignment :

Engine 49 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) , Engine 40 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) , Engine 60

Battalion Chief 1

Chemical Unit 1 , Chemical Unit 2

4th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 5 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) , Engine 29 , Engine 16 , Engine 3 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) , Engine 34 (Water Supply @-@ LDH)

Snorkel 2

Medic 21B , Medic 25B

Battalion Chief 8

Air Unit 1

5th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 33 , Engine 27 , Engine 53 , Engine 25

Ladder 11

Car 1 (Chief of Department)

Light Wagon 1

6th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 12 , Engine 22 , Engine 50 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) , Engine 59

Medic 3

ES @-@ 10 (Decontamination Trailer)

7th Alarm Assignment :

Squirt 57 , Engine 63 , Engine 14 , Engine 28 (Water Supply @-@ LDH)

8th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 61 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) , Squirt 9 , Engine 56 , Engine 41

Ladder 13

Medic 16 , Medic 1

Battalion Chief 2 , Battalion Chief 10

Car 6

9th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 38 , Engine 66 , Engine 45 , Engine 68

Ladder 18 , Tower Ladder 6

Battalion Chief 1102 (Call @-@ Back for Battalion Chief 2)

10th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 72 , Engine 18 , Engine 7 , Engine 2

Ladder 25

11th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 71 , Engine 35 , Engine 103 (Reserve) , Engine 119 (Reserve)

12th Alarm Assignment :

Engine 125 (Reserve) , Engine 181 (Reserve) , Engine 36 , Engine 52 (Water Supply @-@ LDH) , Engine 180 (ARFF @-@ Reserve @-@ LDH) , Engine 19 (Water Supply @-@ LDH)

Ladder 14

Rescue 1 (Reactivated Company for Incident)

Medic 15 , Medic 14

Battalion Chief 13 , Battalion Chief 9

Division (Deputy) Chief 1A

== Fire 's end ==

As the fire was going into its sixth hour it had spread up to the 26th floor . With inadequate water pressure coming from the standpipes , firefighters stretched hoses up the building 's stairwells to help fight the fire . While hoses were being taken up to the fire a sprinkler technician arrived to fix the water pressure . This improved the hose streams , but the fire had engulfed several floors and could not be contained with just hoses . By 7 : 00 AM , almost eleven hours into the fire , firefighters were able to get control of the fire on the 22nd through 24th floors , but the fire was still out of control on the 25th and 26th floors and was spreading upwards . Structural damage observed inside the building by firefighters and consultations with a structural engineer led to fears that the damaged floors might collapse . At 7 : 00 AM an order to evacuate the building was issued by Fire Commissioner Roger Ulshafer and the building was completely evacuated by 7 : 30 AM . After the evacuation , the only fire suppression efforts left were water streams being directed to the building from the neighboring Girard Trust Building and One Centre Square .

The fire 's spread only stopped when it reached the 30th floor which was the first fire affected floor to have automatic sprinklers . Ten sprinklers extinguished the fire on the 30th floor and prevented continued spread . Contained by the automatic sprinklers and running out of fuel , the fire was declared under control at 3 : 01 PM . The fire lasted over nineteen hours , destroyed eight floors , and killed three firefighters and injured twenty @-@ four . Twelve alarms were called which brought fifty @-@ one engine companies , fifteen ladder companies , eleven specialized units , and over three hundred firefighters . The fire caused an estimated US \$ 100 million in direct property loss .

= = After the fire = =

By February 26 city officials had determined One Meridian Plaza was not in danger of collapse . There was structural damage to horizontal steel beams and floor sections on most of the fire damaged floors . Under extreme fire exposure the beams and girders sagged and twisted and cracks appeared in the concrete floors . However , the overall structure was stable and able to support the weight of the building . Thermal expansion of the steel frame caused some of the granite panels to be dislodged from the building 's facade . The streets and buildings around One Meridian Plaza were closed and cordoned off . The 20 @-@ story Morris Building and several three @-@ story shops behind One Meridian Plaza on Chestnut Street were damaged by falling debris and sat unused for years until they were demolished in 2000 . The neighboring Girard Trust Building , then called Two Mellon Plaza , experienced extensive water damage forcing the closure of the building . A bank in the building reopened a month later but the rest of the tower remained vacant for years . The roads around the building were closed for months after the fire , including a portion of two of Philadelphia 's major streets , Broad and Market .

The removal of the uninhabitable One Meridian Plaza from the real estate market and the sudden relocation of the building 's tenants to other offices in Philadelphia took 1 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 square feet (140 @, @ 000 m2) of real estate off the market . The city 's office vacancy rate was 14 @. @ 3 percent at the end of 1990 ; in the two months after the fire , the vacancy rate lowered to 10 @. @ 7 percent . On December 18 Mayor Wilson Goode signed a law requiring every nonresidential building 75 feet (23 m) tall or taller have sprinklers installed by 1997 . An estimated three hundred buildings in the city were affected by the law .

= = = Vacant eyesore = = =

In the years after the fire One Meridian Plaza stood in the middle of Philadelphia vacant . The fate of the building was up in the air as the building 's owners and the insurance company prepared for litigation on how to proceed with repairs , who would control those repairs , and at what cost . E / R Partners were proposing deconstructing the building down to the 19th floor and rebuilding from there . Aetna Corporation , the fire insurer , claimed that girders above the 19th level could be repaired and used cutting US \$ 115 million in repair costs from the owner 's US \$ 250 million estimate . Aetna also proposed taking over the reconstruction . E / R Partners spent US \$ 50 million securing one Meridian Plaza and spent up to US \$ 500 @, @ 000 a month on security guards , utilities and inspections by engineers as the building stood empty .

Lawsuits on behalf of sixteen people and businesses claiming losses as a result of the blaze were filed shortly after the fire in 1991 . In February 1995 a US \$ 15 million agreement was reached to reimburse workers and businesses affected by the fire . While not admitting any liability , the US \$ 15 million minus legal fees was paid by E / R Partners and was meant for uninsured losses for businesses and workers in One Meridian and the surrounding damaged buildings .

Declared " eyesore of the year " by The Philadelphia Inquirer in 1994 , the burned , empty tower was an embarrassment to the city according to an editorial in The Inquirer . The editorial said the feeling only became worse after One Meridian Plaza could be seen in the background in the film Philadelphia . The One Meridian Plaza fire left the area around it a commercial void . Nearly every major store in the area closed and property values fell . Neighboring property owners , such as the owner of the damaged buildings behind One Meridian Plaza , were waiting for a decision on the future of the building before going through with their own development plans . In 1996 the city of Philadelphia sued E / R Partners saying One Meridian Plaza was an environmental hazard and should be demolished or repaired . The city and Mayor Ed Rendell were afraid that when E / R Partners settled with Aetna they would take the money and leave the building unfixed .

= = = Deconstruction = = =

In March 1997 E / R Partners settled with Aetna receiving around US \$ 300 million . After the legal issues were settled E / R Partners announced the building would be dismantled . With the announcement of the demolition the city dropped its lawsuit against the owners . Unable to implode the building because of the building density of the area , E / R Partners began an eighteen @-@ month , US \$ 23 million process to dismantle the building . Early in the process , which began in 1998 , the owners hoped someone would buy the property as is or with the damaged portion of the structure removed , but that hope was soon abandoned . The process was finished in 1999 . At the time of the demolition it was the third tallest habitable building destroyed and is currently the seventh , ranking after the World Trade Center 's twin towers , the Singer Building , and the original Seven World Trade Center in New York , the Morrison Hotel in Chicago , and 130 Liberty Street in New York .

= = Replacement = =

The site of One Meridian Plaza was bought by the Arden Group in 2000 . The site was converted into a parking lot as construction on a new building was held up in a zoning feud with the neighboring site , 1441 Chestnut Street . 1441 Chestnut Street was the site of the Morris Building and other smaller buildings that sat behind One Meridian Plaza . The feud between Arden Group 's chief executive Craig Spencer and 1441 Chestnut Street developer Tim Mahoney began in 2003 . Spencer and Mahoney settled their dispute in March 2006 and construction on One Meridian 's 48 @-@ story replacement , the Residences at the Ritz @-@ Carlton began in May . The Residences at The Ritz @-@ Carlton opened in January 2009 . A memorial was unveiled on October 21 , 2009 at the skyscraper honoring the three firefighters who died in the fire . The memorial features plaques with the firefighter 's names .