



There be dragons here

COUNTY BUILDING ADORNED WITH MYTHICAL BEASTS

Since I've started illustrating and writing about the architectural gems in our area I've developed the habit of looking up as I walk around town. It was on one of my walks that I discovered some wonderful and whimsical relief sculptures of fire-breathing dragons lighting torches and sea serpents spewing water



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Artistic Impression

into elaborate urns. They are located on the Gateway Center, which is home to the District Attorney's office, the Visitor's Bureau and the Penn State Extension office, at 135 Jefferson Ave. The creatures appear on three concrete balconies in

the front of the building, and the motif is repeated in metal panels on the sides. In addition to the mythical creatures, there are also flower sculptures under the balconies and other floral decorative elements on the supports and borders.

I went inside to see if the staff could tell me anything about the history of the building, especially the sculptures. Unfortunately, not only didn't they have any information about the building, but the nice young man I talked to had never even noticed the fearsome beasts looming over the front door of his place of employment. Too many people spend too much time looking down at the little screens in their hands and they miss out on the beauty around them.

Construction on the building, which was the new headquarters for the Scranton Gas and

Water Company, was finished in March of 1922. My guess is that the dragons represent the flammable gas and the serpents the water. It cost more than \$300,000 to build and was dedicated by Worthington Scranton to his father, the late W.W. Scranton, who was the organizer and longtime president of the company.

Designed by architect Edward H. Davis, the steel-frame building has reinforced concrete walls faced with limestone and a granite base all around. The interior was adorned with top-notch materials throughout. The main entrance features bronze doors built by Tiffany's studios in New York that cost \$10,000. The famed studio also created all the bronze fixtures inside. Gray Vermont marble makes up the lower walls and cream-colored Caen limestone the upper portions. The Vermont marble was also used

Artistic Impression

Art is all around us. This is another installment in our occasional series that looks at the wonderful artistic elements in our community.

for the floors of the lobby and halls. When first opened, the building had a combination of gas and electric lights. The basement had a bowling alley and recreation room, and the mezzanine had locker and shower rooms for the workers. White tile and enamel was used in the large, well-lit lavatories. There was a vacuum cleaning system, and liquid soap was supplied to all the bathrooms via a central tank on the third floor. The executive offices were furnished in walnut and mahogany. A steel-enclosed fire escape is in the rear of the building.

The Scranton Gas and Water Company was involved with other regional water suppliers in several acquisitions, mergers and name changes until it became Pennsylvania Gas and Water Company in October of 1960. The Pennsylvania American Water Company purchased PG&W's water assets in 1996 and the remaining gas company was named PG Energy. Lackawanna County bought the building from PG Energy for \$525,000 in 1998.

I'm always amazed at the creativity that went into the buildings of yesteryear. It wasn't enough to just have a functional space to do business. The buildings also showed a sense of pride and made a statement about the organization's mission.

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