

Chapter 7

Brick and Mortar of the State Health Department

"In addition to the advantages of centralization, there is the fact that the facilities in the new building are bigger and better. E. A. Erickson, chief of laboratory services, said that he expected his department to do a 'much better job' in the new building. His section is, among many other things, responsible for preparing all the tuberculin used in Minnesota and for doing all the dishwashing and sterilization for the department.

"Mrs. Yvonne Finke, chief of the serology section, added that she could now perform tests which were impossible with the old facilities.

"For example, in order to perform certain tests which required darkness, her staff members had to get under a black cloth like an old-time photographer. In the summer the temperature under there would sometimes rise above 100 degrees.

"The heat could affect both the sample being tested and the morale of the unfortunate staff member who had to perform the test.

"Now," said Mrs. Finke, "it's a pleasure to come to work."⁶³²

Excerpt from article on the new Health Department building
printed in *The Minneapolis Tribune*, July 9, 1969

Where is the Minnesota Department of Health? At present, the executive offices and several divisions are in rented spaces in St. Paul, and other divisions are in Minneapolis in the one building recognized as belonging solely to the Department of Health. Only one time during its history, from 1969 to 1987, were employees housed in one location.⁶³³ The department seems destined to a history of searching for a safer and bigger building to accommodate employees and coordinate effectively and efficiently protect the health and well being of the citizens of Minnesota.

Locations of First Health Departments

When the Board of Health was first formed in 1872, it operated from the upper floors of the Keystone Building in Red Wing, Minnesota.⁶³⁴ This was the office of the first

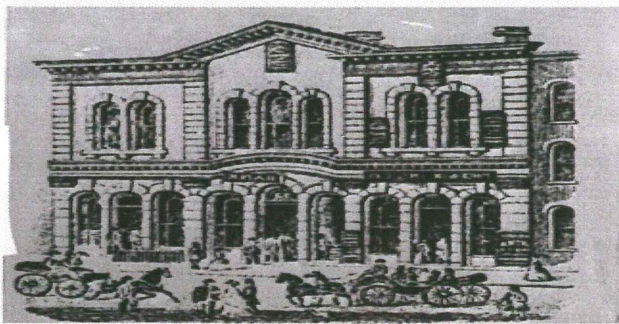
⁶³² *The Minneapolis Tribune*, "Health Department Pulls Itself Together," July 9, 1969, p. 15.

⁶³³ Does not include health department employees working in the field offices.

⁶³⁴ Minnesota Department of Health, "New Dimensions for Minnesota: State Board of Health Planning Guide for 1963-1973," June 1962, p. 3.

secretary and executive officer, Dr. Charles Hewitt. He used another building, since converted to a home, as his laboratory and vaccine station. When the supply of smallpox vaccine in Minnesota was inadequate and the purity questionable, in this laboratory Dr. Hewitt produced the pure smallpox vaccine, which he distributed to physicians throughout the state.⁶³⁵

In 1893, by the action of the University Board of Regents and at Dr. Hewitt's request, the Health Department laboratory was moved to the Mechanics Arts Building on the University of Minnesota campus.⁶³⁶ One year later, in 1894, the board's offices were moved from Red Wing to the Pioneer Building in St. Paul. Called the "old State Capitol," it is now demolished.



**First State Board of Health Location
Keystone Building in Red Wing**

In 1902 the Legislature appropriated funds for a health animal house on the University campus, with space for personnel nearby.⁶³⁷ Space was needed to house animals inoculated with specimens from sick people to determine the course of their disease. This was a very dangerous procedure for the laboratory personnel in such an unsuitable facility, and some

department workers became permanently infected.⁶³⁸



Dr. Hewitt's Laboratory in Red Wing

1970s photo

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In 1907 the Pathology Building, now known as the Psychology Building, was constructed on the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus in the Pathology Building, now known as the Psychology Building.⁶³⁹ Part of this building space was designated for the Health Department laboratories, and the keystone in the building reads, "Institute of Public Health and Pathology." By 1922, department employees had worked in four different locations on the University campus in Minneapolis: the Psychology Building, Westbrook Hall, Eddy Hall and the basement of Millard Hall.^{640 641}

⁶³⁵ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 12, No. 10, December 1958, p. 3.

⁶³⁶ MDH, "New Dimensions for Minnesota: State Board of Health Planning Guide for 1963-1973," June 1962, p.1.

⁶³⁷ MDH, Notes on building history written by Executive Office in October 1979.

⁶³⁸ Report from Henry Bauer, Ph.D., former director of MDH public health laboratories, June 2000.

⁶³⁹ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1969, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁰ MDH, Notes on building history distributed at open house for new building at 717 Delaware Street in 1969.

⁶⁴¹ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1969, p. 6.



Psychology Building on University of Minnesota Campus, 1923

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Beginning in 1894 and through 1969, department employees were housed in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The building used most frequently in St. Paul was the State Office Building, where department employees worked from 1932 until 1969 when staff from vital statistics; mortuary science; hotels, resorts and restaurants; and plumbing moved to the new building in Minneapolis.⁶⁴²

In 1938 a new five-story building, supplemented with a WPA grant, was constructed on the University of Minnesota's Minneapolis campus at a cost of \$324,900.⁶⁴³ Unfortunately, this building was not designed to protect the safety of the laboratory workers who had to handle infectious materials daily. In addition to safety issues in the laboratory, insufficient space was a problem from the beginning. The new building was not large enough to accommodate all department employees, and 66 employees continued working in St. Paul.⁶⁴⁴

Less than 10 years after the building was constructed, in 1947, the Board of Health unsuccessfully presented the Legislature with a \$1,000,000 proposal for a new building.^{645 646}

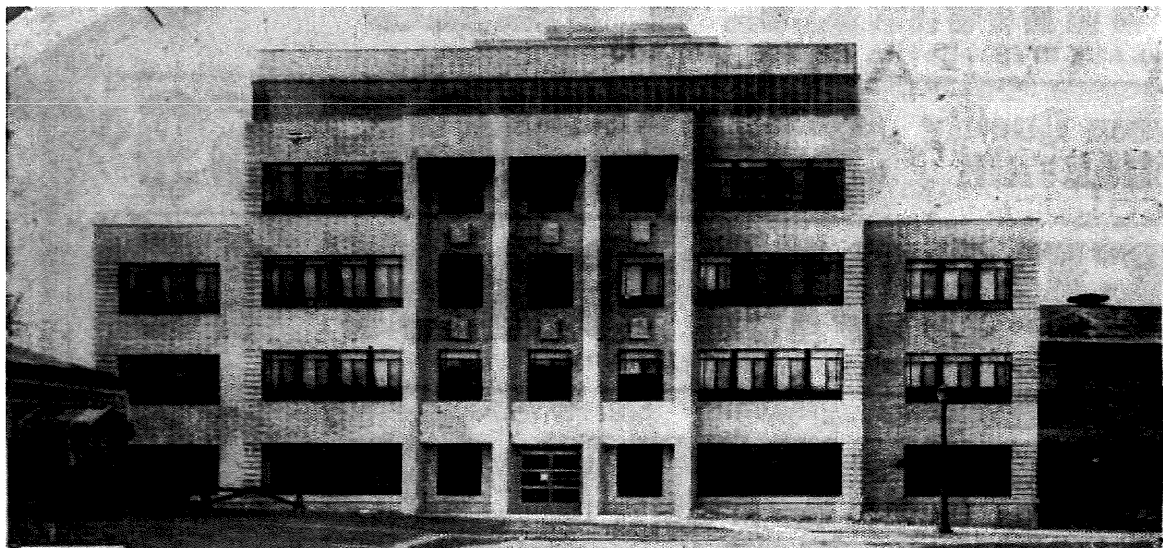
⁶⁴² MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1969, p. 6.

⁶⁴³ MDH, Notes on building history distributed at open house for new building at 717 Delaware Street in 1969.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ MDH, "New Dimensions for Minnesota: State Board of Health Planning Guide for 1963-1973," June 1962, p. 1.

⁶⁴⁶ BOH, *Minutes*, attachment: "Building Needs of State Board of Health," August 13, 1958, MHC, p. 203.



Health Department, 1938 to 1969, Building on University of Minnesota Campus

Efforts to Finance New Building Space

At the August 1950 board meeting the possibility of using Hill-Burton funds for up to 45 percent of the costs of the laboratory for a new department was discussed. There was agreement that this was a good idea and the time was right. Dr. Albert Chesley, executive officer and secretary to the board, said: "If war doesn't bust all this stuff up, now is the time to do it. Get it now while the getting is possible. As soon as the depression comes along where will you get it then?"⁶⁴⁷

Despite strong agreement of the need for a new building, the required legislative support was not present. Requests for funding were turned down in 1955 (\$1,900,000), 1957 (\$2,655,000), and 1959 (\$3,333,800).⁶⁴⁸

A 1959 study determined it was not possible to expand and remodel the existing building on the University of Minnesota campus.⁶⁴⁹ Dr. Gaylord Anderson, director of the University School of Public Health, suggested the possibility of a joint School of Public Health-Health Department building.⁶⁵⁰ The board agreed this would be desirable. A location was designated, but the idea did not develop further. Reflecting on this several decades later, Dr. Henry Bauer reports it didn't occur, as the department would be occupying University of Minnesota property and would not have as strong an identity. In addition, the growing student body and staff of the University created practical concerns, such as where department employees would park and whether or not there would be sufficient office space.

⁶⁴⁷ BOH, *Minutes*, August 1, 1950, MHC, pp. 394-395.

⁶⁴⁸ BOH, *Minutes*, attachment: "Building Needs of State Board of Health," August 13, 1958, MHC, p. 208.

⁶⁴⁹ MDH, "New Dimensions for Minnesota," Minnesota State Board of Health Planning Guide for 1963-1973, June 1962, p. 2.

⁶⁵⁰ BOH, *Minutes*, January 12, 1960, MHC, pp. 20-21.



By 1961, 268 department employees were working in a space on the University of Minnesota campus that had been designed for 168 people.⁶⁵¹ The average working space per employee was 86 square feet.⁶⁵² The building was crowded, with desks often facing each other. The desks were so close that in order for some employees to get to their chairs, other employees had to stand up. Without a lunchroom, employees ate at their desks. While they ate, fly ash from the public health laboratories would sometimes drift onto desks from the ceiling vents above.

The building was especially uncomfortable in the summer when the temperatures soared. Without air conditioning, employees sat with wet towels around their necks, with some even passing out from the heat. Employees who worked there remember it as a "filthy" place. Located 600 feet from a coal-burning generator station, a thin dusting of coal seeped in. In addition to constant dusting, the old wooden desks had to be periodically sprayed for cockroaches. A dress code was in place. Women had to wear skirts, and men had to wear ties, but because of the conditions those clothes became dirty very quickly.⁶⁵³ One employee who worked in the State Office Building in St. Paul in the 1960s said that, while his working conditions were not good, he could not complain because they were so much better than that of his co-workers housed in Minneapolis.⁶⁵⁴

A 1961 proposal to fund a new building was authorized by the Legislature, but the Supreme Court ruled that it could no longer sanction expenditures beyond the state's

⁶⁵¹ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 15, No. 1, January 1961, p. 1.

⁶⁵² MDH (executive office), five-page history of building, October 1979.

⁶⁵³ Interview with Donna Nolting and Ethelyn Yliniemi, Minneapolis, March 5, 1999.

⁶⁵⁴ Phone conversation with Fred King, Minneapolis, March 1999.

constitutional debt limit established in 1858. Voters removed this obstacle at the November 6, 1962, election⁶⁵⁵ by supporting Amendment No. 2 which permitted debt beyond the limit, if a building program passed by 60 percent or better vote in both houses.⁶⁵⁶ Still, the department didn't get the green light for building, and the lack of space became an increasingly greater problem.

Problems due to inadequate space for the department were highlighted in 1950 by the Governor's Commission on Efficiency in Government. This commission cited the location of department staff in both St. Paul and Minneapolis as a "serious management problem." The report identified inefficiencies and impairment of services as a result of the diffusion of operations. It noted increased costs for the department due to the time involved in intra-departmental communications and the need for increased telephone facilities.⁶⁵⁷ All of these issues continued to exist, through the 1950s and into the 1960s. The Jacob's report of 1950, the self-survey task force report of 1955-58, the legislative research committee report of 1956, and the self-survey task force report of 1959 all said the same thing: the Department of Health needs a new building.⁶⁵⁸

The lack of space was translating into reduced programs and services to the people of the state. Because of space shortages, the department was unable to take advantage of federal grants and additional personnel available at no cost through the U.S. Public Health Service.⁶⁵⁹ Nationwide, more and more research was being done in the field of public health, but the department couldn't join in with the movement because of space limitations. The University of Minnesota had no additional space to offer. They needed all the room they could find to accommodate a growing enrollment of baby boomers who had reached college age.

Proximity to University of Minnesota

Unlike other large state agencies, the Health Department has been unique in its location in Minneapolis, rather than part of the capitol complex in St. Paul. The Minneapolis campus location was chosen to support the close working relationship and ties between the University of Minnesota and the Board of Health. These ties dated back to the beginnings of the board. When the University Board of Regents created a "Department of Instruction of Public Health" in 1873, they asked Dr. Charles Hewitt, the first secretary of the Board of Health, to be in charge.⁶⁶⁰ Dr. Hewitt rapidly developed public health courses, delivering lectures in personal hygiene and sanitary science. He also took an active role in organizing the University's college of medicine, and he unsuccessfully advocated that the medical school be built around the department of public health, which he viewed as the foundation of medicine.

⁶⁵⁵ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 16, No. 4, April 1962, p.1.

⁶⁵⁶ MDH, program distributed at open house for new building at 717 Delaware.

⁶⁵⁷ J. L. Jacobs & Company, "Summary and Report for the Efficiency in Government Commission, State of Minnesota," October 1950, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁵⁸ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 15, No. 1, January 1961, p. 1.

⁶⁵⁹ MDH, "New Dimensions for Minnesota: State Board of Health Planning Guide for 1963-1973," June 1962, p. 14.

⁶⁶⁰ Philip Jordan, *The People's Health*, 1953, p. 61.

The relationship continued through the years, and in the 1950s the board worked closely with health professionals from the University for help with difficult public health problems, such as polio. The University of Minnesota and the Department of Health worked together on research projects, and exchanged public health expertise. This relationship was most profitable and beneficial for the public health of Minnesota.

Dr. Albert Chesley, executive director and secretary to the board, was one of the strongest promoters of locating the department close to the University of Minnesota:

"I don't think there is any question in anybody's mind now about the necessity of having the University and the State Board of Health on the same premises. It took a long time to bring these things about."⁶⁶¹

"I feel very strongly on that point. I think it would be a great mistake, tragic as a matter of fact, if the State Board of Health laboratories and everything were put over in St. Paul."⁶⁶²

Dr. Albert Chesley
Executive Director and Secretary to State Board of Health, 1950

A close physical relationship made it easier for the Board of Health and the University to exchange scientific and technical information, as well as the joint use of staff. Recruitment and retention were easier because of the teaching and research possibilities. The main disadvantage was the confusion legislators and others sometimes had in that the board and the University were not one and the same.⁶⁶³ Located on the University of Minnesota campus, apart from legislative activities in St. Paul, may have also put the board at a disadvantage. It wasn't visible to the legislators and other decision makers. Nestled in the campus, to many it appeared to be a part of the University of Minnesota, rather than a state agency. Even the department's address included one line, "University Campus," making such thinking easy to understand.

The Board of Health and the University had what Dr. Albert Chesley, executive director and secretary to the board, referred to as a "gentlemen's agreement" regarding the board's occupation of the Psychology Building.⁶⁶⁴ The money for the building had been appropriated to the University, not to the Board of Health. The building was owned by the University, and it paid for heat, electricity, and some maintenance costs such as painting.⁶⁶⁵ This arrangement wasn't entirely satisfactory to the board, as seen in the following conversation that took place as Deputy Executive Secretary Dr. Robert Barr prepared for a meeting with representatives from the University in 1954:

⁶⁶¹ BOH, *Minutes*, August 1, 1950, MHC, pp. 394-395.

⁶⁶² BOH, *Minutes*, January 10, 1955, MHC, p. 28.

⁶⁶³ BOH, *Minutes*, attachment: "Building Needs of State Board of Health," August 13, 1958, MHC, p. 209.

⁶⁶⁴ BOH, *Minutes*, June 1, 1954, MHC, p. 120.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

Barr: "I would like to see it set up so that the Board of Health would pay any bills for cost of operation of this building, and get away from this service on the part of the University. When we wanted things we were reticent about asking for them. When we asked to have this building painted. . ."

Boynton (Board member Dr. Ruth Boynton): "If we should get a building separate from any University department, I think such a thing could be done."⁶⁶⁶

Dr. Barr supported a separation in that he felt the department needed to be viewed as autonomous, not a part of the University.⁶⁶⁷

While the University of Minnesota generally supported having the department located nearby, it wasn't unanimous. In 1954 the board met with representatives of the University to discuss the possibility of two potential sites on the University campus for a Board of Health Building. Later, board member Thomas Netz, who was chair of the committee selected to work with the University on this issue, met with the vice president of the University. Professor Netz reported on his unsatisfactory meeting at the October 1954 board meeting:

He said, 'What building?' And I said 'Why, we have a State Board of Health building in the tentative stages of planning. We had some communications between the University officials and Dr. Chesley, representing the Board, and we went over the whole thing---sites A and B. The site we selected was the one opposite Powell Hall.' He said, 'I don't know anything about that. That site is going to be used for the Medical School, and anything else will be over my dead body.'⁶⁶⁸

Prof. Netz described what he felt were the University vice president's preference: "He wants it outside the periphery of the campus 50 years hence."⁶⁶⁹

Increasing Space Needs and Increasing Efforts

Given the cramped quarters and inability to expand, in May 1958 Dr. Barr was willing to suggest that the board forego the idea of a physical location close to the University of Minnesota. He said the need for space was so critical that a building should be found outside of the campus, if necessary, even though he knew the board wanted to remain close to the University of Minnesota. The department had received \$150,000 in research money, but if it had adequate space, Dr. Barr felt it could have tripled or quadrupled that amount.⁶⁷⁰ Minnesotans were losing out.

At an August 1958 legislative hearing, statements emphasized the overcrowding, the inefficiency created by being housed in both St. Paul and Minneapolis an anticipated increase in staff as public health shifted to research, and the overall handicap the

⁶⁶⁶ BOH, *Minutes*, October 8, 1954, MHC, p. 113.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁷⁰ BOH, *Minutes*, May 22, 1958, MHC, p.154.

present situation created for a strong public health system in Minnesota.⁶⁷¹ The arguments were not sufficient to get a new building.

The board sought the support of its friends – the Minnesota Medical Association, the University School of Public Health and the State Dental Association – to urge appropriations for a new building.⁶⁷² They realized this had to be a joint effort. At a 1959 board meeting, Dr. Harold Wenthe said:

I see, then, a dinner meeting called by the Head of the State Board of Health with all these people present, with the material documented and laid in front of them. I really think it will be another five years if we approach them by word of mouth. It should enjoy some concerted effort on our part. I would like to do something.⁶⁷³

The need for additional space became even more urgent in 1961 when the board learned that it might soon be expected to certify health facilities and investigate complaints in these facilities, as part of the federal Medicare program being proposed by Congress.⁶⁷⁴ New responsibilities in the areas of family planning, emergency services, genetics and environmental control all required more space. Still, the building remained unfunded.

There were a number of reasons given as to why the board was having such a difficult time getting funding for a building that seemed clearly needed. Dr. Barr felt the legislators had a lack of understanding as to the purpose and objectives of the department. He emphasized that everyone who was in contact with legislators needed to be a health educator.⁶⁷⁵ Others recognized that the department was competing with construction needed for state schools and colleges to accommodate the large population of baby boomers. The confusion between the department and the University of Minnesota was also cited.

In 1960 Dr. Barr made an additional plea for a new Health Department building. Unless adequate space was found, loss of funding for research would continue and service would decline.⁶⁷⁶ Realizing the importance of space, in 1960 Dr. Barr gave his new deputy executive director, Dr. Henry Bauer, a specific charge: "Get us a new building!"

Dr. Bauer was happy to take on this assignment. As head of the public health laboratory, he was well aware of the limitations and dangers of the existing building and had a strong motivation for getting larger and up-to-date facilities. The present laboratory was not safe. Two microbiologists working in the tuberculosis laboratory contracted the disease. Because of the design of the existing hood, three laboratory workers became infected with encephalitis. A microbiologist examining stool specimens contracted typhoid fever. Dr. Bauer and a co-worker who was working on a research project for the eradication of Brucella infection spent a month out of work, having

⁶⁷¹ BOH, *Minutes*, attachment: "Building Needs of State Board of Health," August 13, 1958, MHC, p. 203.

⁶⁷² BOH, *Minutes*, August 13, 1958, MHC, p. 203.

⁶⁷³ BOH, *Minutes*, February 24, 1959, MHC, p. 39.

⁶⁷⁴ BOH, *Minutes*, January 31, 1961, p. 23.

⁶⁷⁵ BOH, *Minutes*, October 18, 1960, MHC, p. 365.

⁶⁷⁶ BOH, *Minutes*, May 24, 1960, MHC, pp. 75-76.

contracted brucellosis in the lab.⁶⁷⁷ The building was hazardous for employees, it was costing the state money in lost grants, and it was inefficient. For more than 20 years it had been recognized as contributing to serious management problems.

At his first appearance at the Legislature, Dr. Bauer sensed what he needed to do. He prepared clear explanations, particularly with respect to the cost. Dr. Bauer developed his own guidelines for dealing with the Legislature: believe in what you're doing, use cost numbers and put the burden of proof on the opponent.⁶⁷⁸ Armed with facts and figures, charts and graphs, Dr. Bauer pointed out the dangers, safety issues, and lost services for the state. He clarified what was needed to make the department an effective, safe and pleasant place. Over and over again, he stressed the economic costs: "...health problems involve economic issues as well as preventing and curing illness. Sick people are not producing for the economy. Thus, those who care for the sick keep man-power hours out of economic production."⁶⁷⁹



**Aerial View Showing Sites of old and new Health Department Buildings
University of Minnesota Campus**

Dr. Bauer felt things were progressing well, so he was surprised by an article in the December 1962 *Star Journal*. It included a list of the buildings that the state building commission was considering, and the Health Department was not there. Dr. Bauer had kept an open line of communication with the commission and its secretary, Mr. Burdick. He immediately contacted Mr. Burdick who told him the purchase of land for the department building was included in the total request of \$29 million for the state building program. Dr. Bauer reminded Mr. Burdick that the land for the new department building must be off campus but in close vicinity of the University of Minnesota Hospital and Medical School.

⁶⁷⁷ Conversation with Dr. Henry Bauer, February 1999.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ *Minnesota Daily*, "Health Board Announces Plans for Campus Office," August 1965, pp. 1 and 3.

In the same way he approached disease, Dr. Bauer was always alert and mindful of what was going on in order to ensure the department building would be considered.⁶⁸⁰ Knowing the importance of keeping everyone informed, he used the skills of Marie Ford, director of public health education, to prepare and distribute regular reports on the progress being made towards a new Health Department building. Working with Dr. Bauer and Dr. Barr, Marie Ford sent regular reports to the board members, the department's accounting office, the state comptroller's office and the state purchasing department.⁶⁸¹



Work on New Health Department Building Begins in 1967

New Building at 717 Delaware Street

Dr. Bauer's efforts eventually paid off. In 1965, five years after Dr. Bauer was given the assignment of getting funding for a new building, the Legislature approved construction and equipment of a new building, and Gov. Elmer Anderson signed the bill authorizing funding. Of the total funding designated for the building, \$3,826,000 came from state funds and \$1,054,000 from Hill-Burton funds. The plan, designed by Ellerbe Architects in 1960, provided for 165,000 square feet, which compared very favorably to the 65,000 square feet the department was currently using.⁶⁸² The plan was designed so two additional floors could be added, if they were needed in the future.

⁶⁸⁰ BOH, *Minutes*, January 22, 1963, MHC, p. 15.

⁶⁸¹ Communication with Dr. Henry Bauer, June 29, 2000.

⁶⁸² BOH, *Minutes*, September 13, 1960, MHC, p. 325.

The department was fortunate in having John Magney of Ellerbe Architects as the lead architect in designing and constructing the new building. Each division director submitted space requirements for his/her division to Mr. Magney. He reviewed these and worked closely with persons from the department to make sure the needs of divisions were met. Of special concern were the public health laboratories, where highly infectious organisms were routinely examined and the chance for becoming infected was high. The new design separated the handling of the air from the fifth floor laboratory from the rest of the building. New safety methods were implemented, including the incineration of used laboratory air before it was released to the outside.⁶⁸³

In 1967 Bor-Son Construction, Inc. began work on the new building at 717 Delaware Street S.E. near the University of Minnesota Hospital. The site covered an area of one-half block between Walnut and Oak, close to Washington Avenue. Completed in 1969, the Health Department building was built under budget. In fact, \$7,000 was returned to the state.

By the time construction on the new building began, the department was spread in three different locations, in addition to the seven field offices. Administrative services, vital statistics, mortuary science, plumbing and the hotels, resorts and restaurants section were housed in the State Office Building in St. Paul. The local health administration division, health mobilization coordinator, local health services, special services, maternal and child health, nutrition, human genetics, family education, and dental health were located in the Student Health Service Building on the University of Minnesota campus in St. Paul.⁶⁸⁴ Remaining divisions and sections were located in Minneapolis on the University of Minnesota campus.

Unified Health Department – 1969

With the completion of the new building in 1969, for the first time in its 97-year history, all department employees, with the exception of those in the seven field offices, were in one place. A total of 340 Health Department and 70 Minnesota Pollution Control Agency employees moved into the six-story building.

In 1969 the floors were used for the following purposes:

Basement

Garage for 95 cars and radioactive counting room

First Floor

Boardroom (later named Chesley Room), shipping and receiving, and storage areas for supplies

Second Floor

Administrative Services, Environmental Health Division, Hospital Services Division, Executive Offices, Central data processing, conference rooms, and vault for vital statistic records.

⁶⁸³ Report from Dr. Henry Bauer, June 29, 2000.

⁶⁸⁴ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 20, No. 6, June-July 1966, p. 4.

Third Floor

Special Services Division, Medicare Services, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, lunchroom and library.

Fourth Floor

Environmental Health Analytical Laboratory Services Section, Local Health Administration Division, Disease Prevention and Control Division, Nursing services and medical laboratory records.

Fifth Floor

Virology, serology, microbiology, cytogenetics and rickettsia disease medical laboratories.

Sixth Floor

Quarters for experimental animals.



State Department of Health Building, 1969

Built with Minnesota granite, the new building was an attractive environment with several interesting features. One unique addition was an electronic "trouble shooter" which provided 24-hour surveillance of heating, refrigeration, and sensitive electrical laboratory equipment. Linked electronically with sensing devices, equipment was monitored around the clock and potential breakdowns detected before they occurred.⁶⁸⁵ The laboratory housed an independent ventilating system to ensure the safety of workers. On the sixth floor air locks were installed to prevent airflow in and out of the animals' quarters. Structures under the roof housed mechanical and air sampling equipment.

⁶⁸⁵ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1969, pp. 1-2.

Another interesting feature was an elevator-file in the disease prevention and control division. These files provided fingertip access to all venereal disease records dating to 1918 when the venereal disease program first began. When the appropriate button was pressed, a revolving drum would stop at the desired alphabet letter.⁶⁸⁶

More than 800 people attended a dedication ceremony and open house at the new building on July 13, 1969. The lobby, boardroom and selected spots were filled with flowers from well-wishers. Gov. Harold Levander was present to accept an oversized symbolic gold key for the building. Employees served as hosts and hostesses and tour guides. A special attraction for the day was a ready-to-take-off helicopter on the roof, provided by the emergency medical services unit. Telegrams and letters were received. One was from Robert B. Howard, M.D., dean of the College of Medical Science at the University of Minnesota:

"You and your colleagues have lived and worked under unimaginable difficult circumstances for these many years, and I am sure this beautiful building is most welcome. I look forward to a continuation of the excellent relationships that have always existed between the State Board of Health and the College of Medical Sciences, especially the School of Public Health. I hope these relationships will grown even stronger now that we are physically closer to one another."⁶⁸⁷

Dr. Robert Howard, Dean of College of Medical Science at the University of Minnesota, 1969

Shortage of Space/Multiple Locations – Again

Metropolitan-area department employees remained together at 717 Delaware Street for almost 20 years. As programs grew and the number of employees increased, however, capacity was reached and divisions had to find alternative office space. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency left the building in November 1973. In 1987, the health resources division, which was responsible for certifying and licensing health care facilities, moved to rented space in the Central Medical Building in the Midway area of St. Paul. In 1989, the environmental health division moved to the Dinnaken Building, one block from 717 Delaware Street.

The department had grown to 881 employees in the metropolitan area in 1990. This was more than 2-1/2 times the number of employees who moved into the new building in 1969. Even with the loss of two large divisions, the capacity of 717 Delaware was exceeded. A series of moves began, and only the divisions of disease prevention and control and the public health laboratory were not affected by relocation. Perhaps the most significant move occurred in 1997 when the executive office relocated in the Metro Square Building in downtown St. Paul.

⁶⁸⁶ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1969, p. 5.

⁶⁸⁷ MDH, *Minnesota's Health*, Vol. 23, No. 6, June-July 1969, p. 3.

By 1999, the department's metropolitan employees – totaling more than 1,200 – were housed in several locations:

717 Delaware Street Southeast Minneapolis, MN	Disease Prevention and Control Public Health Laboratory Center for Health Statistics Library Services
Snelling Office Park 1645 Energy Park Drive Saint Paul, MN	Conference/ Meeting Rooms Copy Center Mail and Distribution
Golden Rule Building 85 East 7th Place Saint Paul, MN	Commissioner's Office Facility and Provider Compliance Family Health Environmental Health
Metro Square Building 121 East 7th Place Saint Paul, MN	Environmental Health Health Policy and Systems Compliance Community Health Services Finance and Administrative Services Policy and Communications

In the early 1990s the architectural firm of Lindberg Pierce conducted a study of the department's space needs. They recommended construction of a new Health Department building with 342,000 usable square feet.⁶⁸⁸ The Department of Administration supported this recommendation in its strategic plan for state agencies in 1992.⁶⁸⁹

Beginning in the 1980s, proposals for a new building have been submitted to the Legislature several times. At present there are no confirmed plans for a new space.

The department seems destined to a history of searching for a bigger building and employees working in temporary locations in different sites.

⁶⁸⁸ MDH, "Facilities Planning Criteria and Building Site Selection," 1991.

⁶⁸⁹ Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership, "The Strategic Plan for Locating State Agencies," 1993.

**Minneapolis/Saint Paul Metropolitan Area Locations of the
Minnesota Department of Health -- 1999**

