From seeds sown in an architectural competition, 20 West Ninth Street was built in 1888 from a design submitted by McKim, Mead and White. Rising ten stories above street level, the New York Life Building was an instant landmark in keeping with the firm’s other claims to fame - Madison Square Garden, Pennsylvania Station and a 1903 renovation of the White House’s East and West Wings.

The Kansas City of 1888 was protected by four policemen and three fire companies. With the Missouri River forming the city limits to the north, 20th Street on the south, Woodland Avenue to the east and the state line to the west, 20 West Ninth’s elegant Italianate design immediately boosted the city’s image.

From the top of its two-story observation tower to the street-level view down Baltimore Avenue, 20 West Ninth incorporates texture, color, and detail of note.

**Signature Two-Ton Bronze Eagle**
Perched above the main entrance is an original sculpture by Louis Saint-Gaudens of a massive eagle tending a nest of baby eaglets.

**Barrel-Vault Ceiling**
Constructed of cast-iron and copper plating, a barrel-vault ceiling canopies the main lobby.

**Mosaic Floors**
Much like the Italian artisans who laid them, the intricate tiles gracing the main lobby were imported from Italy and painstakingly installed at a rate of a few square feet a day.

**Brownstone - Terra Cotta - Brick**
A detailed terra cotta tile crowns the top of the building. The first three stories are constructed of brownstone blocks cut, sized and numbered in Vermont. The bricks were fired in a kiln that sat literally in the shadow of the building.

First Life - In addition to serving as the regional headquarters of the New York Life Insurance Company, 20 West Ninth’s first tenants included banks, attorneys, architects, and the Kansas City School of Law. Later occupants included TWA and the Historic Kansas City Foundation.

A media frenzy at the debut of the New York Life building inspired a famous quote that pleased city fathers. Reporting on the building, Harper’s magazine pronounced that, “Everything’s up to date in Kansas City.” In 1970, the building was entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

Second Life - As the business district expanded to the south and modern high-rise structures changed the skyline, commercial tenants departed 20 West Ninth Street. By the mid-1980s, the building was partially occupied and deteriorating.

In 1994, UtiliCorp United purchased the property and spent two years giving the building an energy-efficient renovation.

Third Life - Motivated by a need to address space issues and to exercise good stewardship of financial and human resources, the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph acquired the property in 2010. Kansas City’s historic landmark is now the home of the Chancery and Catholic Charities of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph.