

The Kress Building
535 Central Avenue
HPC #96-01 - Designated September 1996



Built in 1927, the Kress Building is a classically styled commercial building most influenced by the Beaux-Arts style. It was continuously used as a five-and-dime store until closed by S. H. Kress & Company around 1981. The Kress Building was built by Samuel H. Kress, founder of the S. H. Kress chain of five and dime stores. Mr. Kress retained an architectural staff to design many of his buildings, although the architect of St. Petersburg's Kress Building is unknown. The five-and-dime store, a concept conceived by F.W. Woolworth in 1897, had an immediate impact on the downtown scene. The downtowns of the 1920s and 1930s, including St. Petersburg's, were vibrant places of great activity with the five-and-dime store at the center of this activity. These stores offered not only shopping, but also lunch counters and places to socialize. Their popularity was apparent by the number of competing five-and-dimes that could be found in a single downtown. F.W. Woolworth's would be joined by J.G. McCrory's, S.S. Kresge's and S.H. Kress and Co. Indeed, in St. Petersburg, the Kress Building was located next to J.G. McCrory's. Today uses in the building are a mixture of offices and services.

The Beaux-Arts style, as evidenced by the State Theater and the Mirror Lake Library, is a highly ornamental style of architecture that originated from the Ecole des beaux-arts. It emphasizes a strongly symmetrical facade and may feature classical detailing, such as the egg-and-dart molding and dentils found on the Kress Building. Although the Kress Building is not an elaborately decorative building, it does feature the figure sculpture (urns, brackets) along the parapet that is so common with the Beaux-Arts style, in addition to be clad with glazed terra cotta tile. That the building is less ornamental shows some influence from the Commercial style, a style popular for five to sixteen-story commercial buildings during the 1910's in large cities. The Commercial style emphasized large glass expanses and subordinate ornamentation.

The Kress Building is a four-story (plus basement and mezzanine) masonry building with a spread footing foundation. The ground floor facade of the building is extra long, accounting for the mezzanine level within the building. It features a largely glass expanse on both the southern (front) and western exposures. The front entrance consists of two plain commercial glass doors topped by a multi-light transom window and flanked by two concrete block piers. The upper three levels of the south elevation are clearly more classical in design than the ground/mezzanine level. Separating the ground floor and mezzanine from the upper portion of the building is a classical decorative string course featuring an acanthus leaf pattern. Decorative recessed panels run horizontally between the windows, separating each floor. A decorative cornice is located above the fourth floor and is detailed with egg-and-dart molding over dentils among other classical ornamentation. The cornice is topped by a classically detailed parapet featuring a central raised portion containing the name "Kress" flanked by two urns and two decorative brackets. The western facade of the Kress Building is similar in detail to the south (front) facade, excluding the main entrance. A small side entrance is located at the northern end of this western facade. The upper three floors are divided into eight bays with identical ornamentation as that on the front; the parapet level also features the central raised portion with the "Kress" name.