

**Breitmeyer-Tobin Building**

1308 Broadway Street

Detroit

This building is significant primarily for its historical role as the center of black professional activity in Detroit since the 1930s. The Breitmeyer-Tobin Building is an unusual example of a Beaux Arts style building at the turn of the century. The widespread availability of inexpensive, glazed, terra-cotta architectural elements, which were much less expensive than carved marble or limestone trim, contributed to the popularity of this style, which accommodated the late Victorian taste for ornament while also drawing on sober classical and colonial-inspired designs.

In 1936 the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, an occupant of the building, allowed African Americans to enter the building to make payments on their insurance policies. This led to an influx of African American patrons. Thereafter black tenants rented office space in the building. As a result, by the late 1940s many of Detroit's prominent black professionals had taken offices in the Tobin Building. Among these were Dr. William H. Lawson and his son, Lloyd, both famed optometrists; five judges, including Damon Keith and Hobart Taylor, Jr., who became associate general counsel to President Johnson and later was appointed to the Board of Directors of the World Bank; and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the largest black union in the United States. Today black professionals are dispersed throughout the city, and the Tobin Building retains its role in fostering the growth and acceptance of black professionalism in Detroit. [CA 3/10/80, 80001918]