

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR Listed
7-1-2010

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

PK9523

1. Name of Property

historic name Main Street Commercial District
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number The 300 block of Main Street bounded by E. 3rd on the north and E. 4th on south. not for publication
city or town Little Rock vicinity
state AR code AR county Pulaski code 119 zip code 72201

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Cathie Matthews 5/12/10
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
6	3	buildings
	1	sites
		structures
		objects
6	4	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of Contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

Main Street Multiple Resource Area

4

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business, specialty store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business, specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

ROMANESQUE
STANDARD 20TH CENTURY COMMERCIAL
CLASSICAL REVIVAL
ITALIANATE
SULLIVANESQUE

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick, Cast concrete,
walls Brick, Cast concrete, Stucco, Terrazo
roof Built up tar
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Markable National Register Criteria
Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
removed from its original location.
birthplace or grave of a historical figure
a cemetery.
a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
a commemorative property
less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1900-1955

Significant Dates

1900, 1916

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal Agency
Local Government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Main Street Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Pulaski County, AR
County and State

1. Geographical Data

Area of Property Approx. 3.3 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>566696</u>	<u>3845138</u>	3	<u>15</u>	<u>566812</u>	<u>3845121</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>15</u>	<u>566791</u>	<u>3845021</u>	4	<u>15</u>	<u>566801</u>	<u>3845038</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the alley between Louisiana and Main streets on the south side of Third Street, proceed east approx. 378 feet along the north curbline of Third to the alley on the south side of Third between Main and Scott streets. Then proceed approx. 334 feet south along the rear property lines of 301-319 Main to Fourth Street. Then proceed approx. 378 feet west along the north curbline of Fourth Street to the alley between Louisiana and Main streets. Then proceed approx. 334 feet north along the rear property lines of 320-302 Main to point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

This boundary includes all of the property historically associated with the 300 block of Main between 1900-1955 that retains its integrity.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Holly Hope/ Special Projects Historian
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 05/11/10
street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street telephone 501 324-9880
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name N/A
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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SUMMARY

The Main Street Commercial Historic District consists of one block of South Main Street south of E. Third and north of E. Fourth streets in Little Rock. The district is composed of ten buildings and one non-contributing parking lot. Out of the eleven resources, four were listed on the National Register of Historic Places under the multiple property context, "Main Street Multiple Resource Area," in 1986. These were the Fulk Building, C.M. Taylor Building, Rose Building and the Gus Blass Department Store. Four buildings are considered non-contributing due to late twentieth-century alterations to the front facades. Architectural styles displayed in the district include Romanesque, Sullivanesque, Neoclassical, Italianate, International and Standard 20th Century. All of the buildings retain their original setbacks and continue to exhibit commercial character. The period of significance for the district spans the years 1900-1955.

ELABORATION

303 S. MAIN

The southeast corner of South Main Street is occupied by 301-303 S. Main. The building is considered noncontributing because of a false pediment veneered with plywood and furring strips above the recessed store entry on the northern bay. The pediment, which appears in a 1955 photograph of the southeast corner, extends several feet above the flat roof. At that time, and up until circa 1984, it displayed a smooth stucco surface.

A WWII-era photograph of 301-303 S. Main shows that the pediment of the building was contiguous and had a pent-roof overhang of Spanish tiles across the stuccoed front façade and over the northwest display window. By 1976 orange and maroon panels had been added to the surrounds of the display windows on the north and a cantilevered metal overhang shaded the sidewalk in front of the entire building. In 1955 the tall pediment rose only from 301 S. Main and the tiled overhang was gone. Today, the deeply recessed front entry of 301 features large aluminum single-light display windows, which flank a single-leaf aluminum and glass door centered between narrow stationary windows. Large cream terrazzo tiles cover the entrance floor. The southern bay or 303 S. Main, exhibits recessed display windows and a single-leaf aluminum and glass entry. The pediment above the cantilevered metal awning is veneered in a black and silver corrugated metal in a geometric pattern, giving it a Standard 20th Century Commercial character. The silver metal extends down to the surround of the display windows and is featured on the base panels. The entry floor has been covered in interior roll linoleum. It is unknown whether the metal panels on the pediment obscure the earlier façade but the current material was on the building by 1955, which was a popular treatment for commercial buildings at that time.¹

¹ Amberly Reynolds Rush, *Historic Photos of Little Rock*, (Nashville, TN: Turner Publishing Company, 2009), 138-139; Quapaw Quarter Association File, "301-302 S. Main Street," at Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock, AR.

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The north wall of 301-303 S. Main is covered in rough stucco and is divided into 10 bays by shallow pilasters. Three small windows have been enclosed by plywood panels. A single door opens toward the rear of this elevation while a door at the northeast corner has been stuccoed over. The rear, east elevation is also covered in stucco and features two single-leaf metal doors.

305 S. MAIN –KEMPNER BUILDING

The Standard 20th Century Commercial Kempner Building at 305 S. Main is noncontributing due to a late twentieth century stucco veneer over the front, western pediment. The one-story building featured a smooth, blank pediment in 1955 flanked by dark metal panels. The deeply recessed front entrance is flanked by beveled display windows surrounded by vertical boards and red brick base panels. The entrance floor is covered in terra cotta tiles, probably 1970s vintage. The entry consists of a single aluminum and glass door. The front, western façade of this building appears in a mid-1940s photograph with a row of transom windows below a high pediment. The transom windows were gone by 1984 and in 1991 a rough concrete veneer had replaced the smooth material. The original one-story building on the lot was destroyed when the adjacent structure at 307-311 S. Main collapsed on top of it during the fire of 1900.

The rear, eastern elevation is accessed by a single door. The outlines of three arched in-filled windows are visible in the brick wall.

307-311 S. MAIN – ROSE BUILDING

The Rose Building at 307-311 S. Main was listed on the National Register in 1986. The two-story Neoclassical building with terra cotta detail is an excellent example of early historic restoration efforts in downtown Little Rock.

After the 1879 structure on the lot was destroyed in 1900, owner Judge Uriah Rose rebuilt. This second building stood until 1916 when another fire inflicted heavy damage. Within the year the judge's son, George Rose, had constructed a third two-story building, featuring the façade presented today on S. Main Street.

The terra-cotta detail of the two-story Rose Building, shipped to Little Rock from Italy in numbered pieces, was damaged by the application of an International-style veneer of pebbled concrete panels in the 1960s. The renovation was the result of the urban renewal trend of the era but luckily a large part of the original 1916 façade remained beneath. In 1983, after a period of vacancy, new owner, Donald Gold took advantage of historic preservation tax incentives in the hopes that a restoration of the building would inspire subsequent redevelopment on Main Street. ²

² Donald Gold, *It Happened on Main Street: The Gold Restoration of the Rose Building*, (Little Rock, AR August House, Inc., 1985), 16, 41.

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The front, western façade of the Rose Building features three double-handled urns on piers atop the cornice. The original terra-cotta urns had been removed by 1963 and were faithfully reproduced in a zinc alloy coated with aluminum. The same treatment was used on the cornice, swag appliqués and egg and dart detail that had been irreparably damaged during the application of the 1960s veneer. A modillion cornice spans the top of the building above a line of dentil work. A frieze featuring festoons, grated attic vents and a centered recessed panel inscribed with ROSE tops the fenestration of the second story. The frieze is divided into three bays by scrolled cornice brackets elaborated with three-dimensional wreaths at the north and south ends of the façade and two brackets in the center embellished with a scrolled cartouche and egg and dart detail. The entire façade is articulated with a surround of egg and dart, bead and reel and bezant molding.

The Rose Building is organized in three bays divided by a pair of two-story fluted Ionic pilasters. Each bay at the second story is fenestrated with ribbons of three single-light casement windows beneath transoms. Engaged Ionic columns separate each opening. The window bays are articulated with molding in a foliated design and bead and reel strings. The window molding features a small course of dentil detail at the head.

The first and second stories are divided by horizontal panels embossed with diamond-shaped projections surrounding centered rosettes. Bead and reel and egg and dart molding embellish the panels. The center and north bays of the first floor are recessed and feature display windows and late-20th century wood and glass double-leaf doors. The south bay of the first floor is flush with the sidewalk and is accessed by centered double-leaf wood and glass doors flanked by stationary single-light windows.

The rear, eastern elevation of the Rose Building is fenestrated north to south on the first floor with two roll-up metal doors, a single-leaf metal door, a third roll-up door and two single-leaf doors. The second story is fenestrated by two single-light stationary windows. Evidence of a row of in-filled single-light arched windows at this story can still be seen.

313-315 S. MAIN – GUS BLASS WHOESALE COMPANY BUILDING

The Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building at 313-315 S. Main was built in 1900 on the site of a two-story structure adjacent to the Rose Building. The original two-story building on the lot had been destroyed in the S. Main Street fire. The new five-story building joined previous Blass concerns on the west side of S. Main at 310-312 and 316 and was the tallest building on the block at that time. A confection of detail, the building featured rusticated stone blocks around a two-story barrel-vaulted entry with foliated spandrel molding. Ribbons of double-hung windows were divided into three bays by corbelled pilasters and the building was topped at the fifth floor with a row of arched windows spanned by rusticated stone voussoirs, round attic vents, a boxed cornice and

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rooftop balustrade. The 1900 Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building appears intact in a WWII-era photograph of Main Street, but by 1955, it presented a severe International façade.

Probably circa early 1950s, a veneer of smooth stone panels was applied to the front, western façade of the building. The two-story recessed entry was enclosed with windows and flush aluminum and glass entrances on the first floor. A double-leaf door opened into the northern bay, a single-leaf door into the center bay and a single-light plate glass window fenestrated the southern bay. The centered entry door featured a surround of ribbed stone molding and each bay was topped at the first floor with corrugated frosted glass panels. The second, third and fourth floors were fenestrated with ribbons of seven, seven-light metal awning-type windows within contiguous stone surrounds. Original detail at the attic level was covered with blank stone panels. The north elevation of the building features no fenestration while the rear, eastern elevation retains rows of original arched double-hung, four-over-four windows in advanced stages of deterioration on the second, third, fourth and fifth floors. A fire stair winds from the floor down to the first floor. Cast-iron columns with fluting, roundels and amorphous detail remain around the rear loading doors at the rear, alley entry.

The southern elevation adjoined the Jacob Kempner Building at 317-319 S. Main until after 1984. In 2009 that address is a parking lot for the Rose Law Firm on E. Fourth Street. The elevation is fenestrated at the third and fourth floors with seven arched window openings. The fifth floor contains seven double-hung openings. By 2008 all windows in the building except the rear elevation had been boarded over but it is likely that the mid-twentieth century openings remain beneath. The first floor front entry was boarded over as well and corrugated metal placed over two of the transom windows. In 1980, Tom Coyne, the owner of the Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building, had plans to remove the modern veneer and expose the original brick. It is not known how much detail remains under the stone panels but those remodeling efforts did not come to fruition. In 2010 a federal tax credit project for rehabilitation of the building was started and the building is projected to be utilized for residential purposes.³

317-319 S. MAIN – NONCONTRIBUTING PARKING LOT

The Jacob Kempner Building at 317-319 S. Main was destroyed after 1984 and the lot is considered a noncontributing site within the district.

³ "Council Endorses Renovation of Building," *The Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, (February, 13, 1980).

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The southwest corner of the Main Street Historic District is anchored by the Gus Blass Department Store at 320-324 S. Main. The seven-story commercial building was constructed in 1912 for David D. Terry, whose family had owned the property since 1868. George Mann, first architect of the Arkansas State Capitol Building, was hired to design the reinforced concrete building. The Gus Blass Department Store was placed on the National Register in 1986 as a significant example of an early two-way flat slab concrete building. At the time it was built it was considered "extremely daring" from an engineering standpoint. The building was constructed in two phases and the first, north installation was occupied while construction was proceeding on the south section. The standard building technique in the early twentieth century was to compose walls of brick spanned by timber beams. The first two-way flat slab architecture in the United States was built on the East Coast soon after the turn of the twentieth century, so the Gus Blass Department Store was among the earliest structures in America to use such a method.

The Blass concern was established in Little Rock by 1871. Jacob Blass had a storefront at 305 S. Main by 1883, but the growing mercantile needed more room as each year passed. By 1912 it required every inch of the one hundred-eighty-thousand square feet of floor space utilized in its newest building.⁴

The Gus Blass Department Store largely conveys its historic Sullivanesque appearance despite renovations undertaken in the 1970s. The eastern façade is divided into five bays from the first to the sixth floor. The base of the building features a white terra cotta surround with egg and dart, bead and reel and floriated molding on the first and second floors. The first-floor display windows are divided into ribbons of three single-light stationary openings. A double-leaf metal and glass door flanked by stationary windows opens into the northeastern bay. Each bay division on the first floor is topped with a band of dentil work and terra cotta eagles in high relief gripping a wreath and flowing ribbon. Second story fenestration features five bays of windows in ribbons of three.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth floors, which form the shaft of the building, are fenestrated by five bays of flush windows in ribbons of three. The shaft is veneered in buff brick. A terra cotta belt course at the sixth floor features four large cartouches surrounded by spandrels of fruit and flowers at each bay division. The sixth floor, or capital of the structure, is fenestrated by fifteen single windows beneath a wide cornice supported by massive brackets. The cornice is topped by a line of bouquet finials. All original windows, most of which were one-over-one double-hung, were replaced in the 1970s with stationary single-light openings.

⁴ "Unsuspected Engineering Significance Discovered at Blass Building," *The Arkansas Gazette*, from information in Quapaw Quarter Association file, "320-324 S. Main," at Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock, AR; "Blass Firm Is Celebrating Its Fiftieth Anniversary," *Arkansas Gazette*, (May 8, 1921).

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The southern elevation of the Gus Blass Department Store is divided into seven bays. This elevation mirrors the eastern façade with the exception of a double-leaf entry in the third bay of the first floor. The western elevation is devoid of ornament and fenestration and is stuccoed, as is the northern wall of the building.

310-312 S. MAIN – GUS BLASS DRY GOODS COMPANY BUILDING

The existing Gus Blass Dry Goods Company Building at 310-312 S. Main was utilized by the Blass family for commercial space by 1890. A circa 1895 photograph of the building shows a three-story structure on the lot with ribbons of windows, a boxed cornice supported by large brackets and corbelling topped with finials. By 1913 the Gus Blass Dry Goods Company Building appears in S. Main Street photographs with the current configuration.

The front, eastern façade of 310-312 S. Main is divided into three bays. In 1976 the entry-level was altered with the replacement of nineteenth-century display windows with three ribbons of three stationary openings on the north and south bays. The south bay provides access through a double-leaf metal door adjacent to two single-light windows. All fenestration on the first floor is topped with a projecting blind arch of dry-vit.

A belt course divides the first floor from the upper floors of buff brick. The second and third floors are fenestrated with three ribbons of three windows. All windows are covered with louvered shutters and it is unknown if the original one-over-one double-hung openings are beneath. The building is topped with a metal cornice. The large north and south brackets of the cornice are embellished with vegetal detail and each bay of the building is topped at the cornice line with an arrangement of smaller brackets flanking three small panels. A band of striated dentil work spans the soffit of the cornice. The cornice is topped with a metal band featuring four groups of rosettes.

The rear, western elevation of the building features a large covered loading dock probably dating from the late 20th century.

306-308 S. MAIN, DUNDEE BUILDING

The building at 306-308 S. Main was originally a three-story brick building and was home to the Cohn's Department Store until 1940. In 1950 the structure was destroyed for a one-story International style storefront with a veneer of black terrazzo panels. The panels were covered in stucco by 2009. It is unknown whether the panels remain beneath the modern covering. Dundee continuously occupied 308 Main until circa 2008 but it is now vacant. A tattoo parlor occupies 306 S. Main.

The first floor of the building is divided into two storefronts, the larger being at 308. The entry for 306 features a single-leaf aluminum and glass door recessed between display windows over base panels of the original black terrazzo. The double-leaf front doors of 308 are centered between expansive recessed display windows. A

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square glass display case is centered in the terrazzo-floored entrance with DUNDEE inlaid at the entrance to the exterior display "lobby."

The rear, western elevation of 306-308 S. Main is veneered in red brick and features three double-leaf metal loading doors on the first floor. The attic level is fenestrated with four multi-pane, metal awning windows.

304 S. MAIN, THE C.M. TAYLOR BUILDING

The C.M. Taylor Building, listed on the National Register in 1986, is a three-story brick building with Romanesque influences at 304 S. Main. An earlier structure on the lot was replaced with the current building by at least 1910. The first floor of the C.M. Taylor Building on the eastern façade has been altered significantly with circa 1940s recessed display windows, modern metal and glass double-leaf doors and a projected stucco panel over the original transom area.

The second floor is fenestrated with three tall ten-beside-ten casement windows topped with transoms beneath capstones of concrete. The second floor is fenestrated with three casement windows with fan-shaped transoms. The windows on this floor are embellished with brick Romanesque arches. The arches terminate in limestone impostes carved with a vegetal pattern. Two slender full-height pilasters of brick with concrete capitals flank the center windows. A projecting metal cornice featuring modillions is topped with a pediment fenestrated with three round attic vents inset in shallow recesses. The south side of the building is uninterrupted brick. The rear, west elevation is fenestrated at the first floor with metal double-leaf loading doors flanked by two windows covered in metal shutters. The second and third floors feature three single windows, also shuttered.

300-302 S. MAIN, THE FULK BUILDING

The Fulk Building occupies the southwest corner of 3rd and Main streets. The three-story brick Romanesque building was listed on the National Register in 1986. The Joseph Quinn Dry Goods Company occupied this lot in the 19th century but was destroyed in the fire of 1900. The building was owned by Frances M. Fulk, a Little Rock attorney, who then rebuilt.

Today the front façade presents two bays. The recessed first-floor display windows lead to double-leaf metal and glass doors. Base panels on the windows of the northern entry consist of Roman brick. The entry for 302 S. Main features a terrazzo floor inscribed with BAUMAN'S, a men's clothing store that occupied the building from 1937 to 1973. A blue metal veneer covers original transom windows above the entry level. The second and third floors are fenestrated by two ribbons of three windows. Fenestration consisted of ten-light casement windows topped with square transoms on the second floor and an arcade of rusticated brick gauged arches with concrete stones topping those on the third floor. All of the windows except one on the north elevation and the rear

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openings have been replaced with stationary panels of clear plexiglass. The two bays are separated by a two-story vertical contrasting pattern of rusticated brick, which is also featured at the south and north corners as a quoin treatment. The cornice consists of a band of dentil work beneath a band of rectangular attic vents topped with projecting arcades of brick. A metal name plate reading FULK is centered in the row of vents. Two thin bands of corbelling are topped by a plain brick pediment capped with a band of concrete.

First floor fenestration of the northern elevation consists of large stationary display windows at the northeast corner. A plaque affixed to the wall at the first floor reads "1831-1931, ON THIS SITE WAS HELD THE FIRST CITY COUNCIL OF LITTLE ROCK. DR. MATTHEW CUNNINGHAM PRESIDING AS MAYOR. MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL PRESENT, CHARLES CALDWELL, DAVID HOLT, BENJAMIN CLEMENS, JOHN MCCLAIN." From east to west, openings consist of three large arched single-light stationary windows with in-filled fanlights. A thin band of bead and reel detail spans the tops of the windows below the fanlights. Two single-leaf doors with in-filled arches above a band of egg and dart detail have been boarded over. The gauged brick voussoirs of the doors feature keystones but the voussoirs of the two arched windows do not. The northwest corner of the first floor features a row of single-light stationary windows in metal frames and one single-leaf metal door. This appears to be a circa 1970s alteration.

Fenestration on the second and third floors of the northeast corner are treated in the manner of the front façade. A pair of windows are topped at the third floor with arcades and a portion of the cornice features the arches and attic vents of the front as well. The rusticated brick pattern of the center front articulates this formal section from the rest of the elevation. Fenestration east to west from that point on the second floor consists of seven single windows with concrete sills and drip molds. Third floor fenestration mirrors the second floor. Up to the early 21st century the original ten-light casement windows graced the Fulk Building but deterioration resulted in the plexiglass replacements. Only one casement window remains on the second floor of the north elevation, which also featured some double-hung two-over-two windows at the northwest corner of the second and third floors.

The rear, western elevation is fenestrated on the first floor by a centered roll-up loading door flanked by two arched windows, which are covered by heavy metal shutters. The second floor features five shuttered windows and the third floor, six. Original casement windows appear to be under the shutters.

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SUMMARY

The 300 block of South Main Street is the most intact remnant of the early 20th century commercial area of downtown Little Rock. In 1986 the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program submitted a nomination for the Little Rock Main Street Multiple Resource Area. Under this MRA eleven properties in the boundaries were listed on the National Register, including four on the 300 block of S. Main. With the recent loss of an entire S. Main Street city block of viable and diverse architecture and the late 20th century remodeling of several others in the 600 block, the preservation community determined that what remains of that fabric should be recognized. The Main Street Commercial Historic District contains examples of early 20th century architecture with early 21st century noncontributing alterations. The period of significance spans 1900-1955. The period of significance of the MRA extended to 1935 because it was written in 1985. However, the examples of mid-20th century architecture found in the boundaries of the Main Street Commercial Historic District retain enough integrity to convey the story of Main Street's growth and ongoing history.

The block of S. Main Street included in this historic district begins on the north side at E. Third and S. Main streets and continues south to the intersection of E. Fourth and S. Main streets. The east and west boundaries are the alleys that run behind the structures. It consists of eleven resources, four of which are individually listed under the Little Rock Main Street Multiple Resource Area. Four buildings are noncontributing due to modern alterations and one site is a noncontributing parking lot. The resources exhibit typical commercial configurations with a presentation of contiguous storefront entries and recessed display windows fronting on a sidewalk.

The Main Street Commercial Historic District is only one example of several stages of commercial development in Little Rock's historic core. Whatever the structural status of the buildings, together they continue to evoke the story of Little Rock's merchant families, the social and cultural needs of their customers and trends in architecture and city planning. The district is being nominated under Criteria A and C as an example of the development of commerce in downtown Little Rock from 1900 to 1955, and for its collection of Romanesque, Sullivanesque, Neoclassical, Italianate, International and Standard 20th Century Commercial architecture.

ELABORATION

Streets in Little Rock were formed on a grid pattern in 1822 and early commercial development formed around the riverfront on Markham Street, north of S. Main Street. Most commerce was centered close to the "Little Rock" on the Arkansas River until the mid-1820s so that steamboats could drop off supplies. An early mention of a business furnishing general goods in Little Rock was recorded by Reverend Cephas Washburn in 1820. He stated

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that there was a "shanty" at the Rock (Little Rock) that offered medicinal supplies and whiskey known as "bald face." In 1830 the population of Little Rock reached 700. This necessitated some commercial growth resulting in the increase of general stores in town to five.⁵

The description of the early commercial building at the Rock as a shanty was adequate for many such ventures in the early 19th century. By circa 1840 commercial buildings were being constructed of more permanent materials than bark covered logs. One example on S. Main Street was the Badgett Block, a two-story structure of brick built between 1836 and 1841, to house seven first-floor stores with office space and apartments upstairs. Beginning in 1844 business development slowed and it was not until the late 1850s that any improvement could be seen. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported in 1857 that property owners had been asking exorbitant prices for unimproved commercial real estate. The editors of the *Gazette* considered this the primary impediment to growth. Just before the Civil War several events contributed to a minor period of progress. A railroad connection between Little Rock and Memphis was in the works, St. John's College opened in town, modern gas lights for homes and businesses were provided by a new gas works and Little Rock gained access to telegraph services. These amenities brought more customers, and subsequently business, to town making it a more desirable location for commercial operations for a short period before the war.⁶

South Main Street saw construction of approximately four commercial buildings between 1858 and 1860. A description of S. Main Street as a "dusty thoroughfare flanked by one and two-story, frame buildings" by a resident in 1860 contrasted with the picture of Markham Street to the north as the dense heart of the city's commercial and financial center. It was noted that commercial development on S. Main did not go past E. Third Street.

The first direct evidence of the effect of the Civil War on commerce consisted of a cessation of supplies for businesses in Little Rock in the first year, which resulted in the closure of several concerns. Once the troops reached Little Rock in 1863 it actually allowed the influx of supplies for the military and provided for a revival of business. Little Rock was on the cusp of large-scale growth, which would become a reality at the war's end.⁷

⁵ Hampton Roy, Sr., Charles Witsell, Jr., Cheryl Griffith Nichols, *How We Lived: Little Rock As An American City*, (Little Rock, AR: August House, Inc., 1984), 21; Julie Wiedower, "Little Rock Main Street Multiple Resource Area," on file at Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, AR, Section 7, 1; Dallas T. Herndon, *Centennial History of Arkansas*, vol. 1, (Little Rock, AR: The S.J. Ke Publishing Company, 1921), 460.

⁶ "How We Lived," 55, 79.

⁷ "How We Lived," 96-97, Wiedower, "Little Rock Main Street," Section 8, 1.

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Between 1865 and 1870 the population grew by 8,380 persons and within that period construction of commercial buildings as well as new homes, churches and schools in Little Rock exploded. The Little Rock City Directory of 1872 noted that most business houses were constructed of brick and that S. Main Street was considered the "grand outlet" for farmers. Author Charles Squier felt that S. Main Street was destined to become an important thoroughfare. Improvements in the streets of Little Rock appeared about that time when nine blocks of Markham Street were paved with tar coated wooden blocks. Sidewalks of planks, brick, stone or wooden blocks were also provided during the 1870s to property owners who could pay for it.

The 19th century commercial construction peak for Little Rock was considered to have occurred between 1872 and 1873. During this period twenty business blocks were formed. Commercial architecture at this time had begun to reflect the influences of larger cities and the arrival of skilled architects in town. Little Rock's first four-story building was erected at the corner of E. Second and S. Main streets in 1888 when two additional stories were added on the two-story Fones Building. Subsequent historic photographs of S. Main Street exhibit several three- and four-story brick structures with elaborate corbelling, heavy window hoods, prominent brackets and exuberant cornice moldings. By the late 1880s paving districts were established and improved roads opened the outlying areas of S. Main Street to further commercial development, as did the advent of streetcars. The growth of the railroad also lessened the dependency of merchants on the river for customers and inventory. Business construction began to extend south away from Markham on the waterfront following the same grid pattern of the 1820s and eventually reaching E. Tenth Street.⁸

Some areas of downtown remained in a formative stage throughout the new growth. In the late 1870s substantial structures were erected but were not yet the norm and buildings and tenants were continually changing. The east side of the 300 block of S. Main Street was typical of this when Judge Uriah Rose purchased two lots there. Five buildings on that side of the road were destroyed for new construction and by 1880, tax records indicate that the original two-story Rose Building at 307-311 S. Main was completed. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of the late 1880s demonstrate that neighboring buildings on the east and west sides of the street had evolved into significant multi-story structures that were taking their place in the commercial history of Little Rock. Tenants included Gus Blass Dry Goods, Cole and Dow Dry Goods and Carpet Company, a saloon, offices, a bakery and drugstores. Changes to the buildings on this block involved the partition of buildings to accommodate up to three merchants. Remodeling occurred often to existing storefronts, most likely in the form of architectural updates rather than spatial expansion as most of the changes were stylistic. Larger display windows and advances in structural systems using iron and steel also contributed to changes as did the constant threat and impact of fire.⁹

⁸ [redacted], 137, 148; Weidower, Section 7, 1.

⁹ [redacted] Gold, 9-10; Mike Jackson, "Storefronts on Main Street: An Architectural History," *Illinois Preservation Series*, (1998), 3.

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In February 1900, a fire on the second floor of Arkansas Book and Paper Company in the Rose Building on S. Main Street completely transformed the streetscape. The book store was adjacent to the Dickinson Arms Company at 311 S. Main and uncontrollable flames broke through partitions, spreading into the munition company's store of dry powder. A series of explosions demolished all of the buildings on the east side of S. Main and every plate glass window on S. Main down to the 700 block was broken. When the remaining walls of the Rose Building fell that morning it leveled Samuel Blum's one-story saloon at 305 S. Main. Blum's saloon had actually not suffered much fire damage but its ultimate destruction stemmed from the collapse of the Rose Building.¹⁰

The fire on S. Main Street brought a new face to downtown Little Rock. Turn-of-the-century photographs of the 300 block show the new Rose Building, the new five-story Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building, (313-315 S. Main), the Kempner Building (317-319 S. Main) and Samuel Blum's new saloon (305 S. Main). Buildings on the west side of S. Main also received new faces after the fire but it is not known whether the transformation was the result of total destruction or an opportunity to update due to insurance money received for window breakage. The Gus Blass Dry Goods Company Store (310-312 S. Main) went through several facelifts before 1918 when it appeared as it does today. The Fulk Building (300-302 S. Main) was rebuilt after 1900 and is shown in its current form by 1910. The C.M. Taylor Building at 304 S. Main Street is adjacent to the Fulk Building and its construction date is fixed at circa 1900, coinciding with the year of the fire as well. It appears in the same 1910 photo next to the Fulk Building, exhibiting its current Romanesque façade.

Fire was a common occurrence in Little Rock and was often responsible for thousands of dollars in damage and destruction. The Rose Building was a victim of fire for a second time in 1916 when a flame in the bookstore bay damaged the structure, resulting in a total design change. It was at this time that the fashionable Neoclassical terra-cotta façade, purchased in Italy was applied and the Rose Building went through the third of its five incarnations.¹¹

Even without the impact of fire damage the remodeling of storefronts was a common occurrence due to ownership changes, new product display needs and changing architectural styles. It is rare to find a commercial building in Arkansas that has not been altered in some manner and this is often the result of stylistic trends. *American Builder* magazine stated in 1919 that the new movement of remodeling storefronts was a profitable situation for builders and merchants. The magazine reported that the tendency to alter just the storefront entry was

¹⁰ Gold, 16-19; "Losses of Fire Reach \$125,000," *The Arkansas Gazette*, (February 3, 1900).

¹¹ Hanley and Steven Hanley, *Main Street Arkansas: The Hearts of Arkansas Cities and Towns - As Portrayed in Postcards and Photographs*, (Little Rock, AR: August House, 2009), 12, 16; Rush, 72, 138-139; Gold, 30.

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in keeping with the "modern idea of conservation." If the owner was not able to find good tenants who were willing to pay the current rent then altering the storefront would enable them to retain a profitable structure. The occupants could also receive a modern display area and operate lucrative businesses by attracting customers with updated entrances.

It was a win-win situation for owners and shopkeepers because the store would normally not shut down as these alterations were applied. It had been determined through analysis of customer traffic that windows were "the store's best salesman," so that is where the modifications were concentrated. Contractors at the turn of the century were informed that they could sell their services more easily if they pushed window displays that provided well-lit space and allowed the attractive arrangement of goods that resulted in "stop, look and buy." Entry doors also became less elaborate and the metal door appeared more often in its place as the windows were made the focal point, becoming larger and taking on extensive recessed forms.¹²

In 1912 S. Main Street in Little Rock had evolved into a thriving commercial center and was the destination for shoppers from across the state. Business houses continued to be constructed to meet the city's needs and the forms of buildings advanced and grew from primarily one- and two-story brick structures up to ten-story monoliths of stone, brick and terra-cotta. Taller buildings multiplied and such architecture was touted as contributing to Little Rock's new "metropolitan" appearance. The Blass family was part of this vital atmosphere and three structures used for their various concerns remain in the 300 block of S. Main. The Blass Company was founded on that block in 1871 and the earliest remaining address used by Blass was the Gus Blass Dry Goods Company Building at 310-312 S. Main, which was remodeled to its current appearance by 1913, the year the innovative Gus Blass Department Store was completed at 318 S. Main. The beautiful Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building at 313-315 S. Main had been completed after the 1900 fire. At five stories, it was the tallest building on the block; however, space needs for the busy Gus Blass concern had become such an issue after the turn of the century that the building at 313 S. Main did not offer enough room for their goods and customers. This resulted in the construction of the seven-story Gus Blass Department Store, Little Rock's fifth skyscraper.

Construction began on the Gus Blass Department Store in 1912 when owner David T. Terry commissioned it for lease to Blass. The building was designed in the Sullivanesque style by George R. Mann, the first architect of the Arkansas State Capitol Building. Mann and his engineers, Brussell and Viterbo of St. Louis, constructed the department store in two phases, the first being completed and put into service by Blass while the second half, which

¹²Profit in Remodeling Store Fronts," *American Builder*, (April 1919), 40-43; "Get a Good Job Remodeling That Old Store Front," *American Builder*, (May 1919), 49; Jackson, 4.

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was completed in 1913, was being built. The building was at the forefront of innovative structural techniques as it was the first two-way concrete slab building constructed in Arkansas and was among the first of that type to be built in the United States. Prior to the late 19th century builders utilized brick walls and timber beams but after World War I reinforced concrete came into use for nonmilitary construction. The Gus Blass Department Store did away with traditional beams supporting slabs. Steel grids in concrete slabs shifted stress that would have been borne by the slabs to bearing walls and columns. Such innovations have enabled the Gus Blass Department Store to retain its impressive appearance into the 21st century.

Besides being significant for its engineering, the department store also served as the epitome of customer service. A newspaper article chronicling the fifty-year anniversary of Gus Blass Department Store in 1921 described the scope of the amenities available. Telephone orders could be taken for delivery via modern trucks. Baked goods and candy produced on-site were available for sale or as supplies for the tea room where the kids could await dad while he was getting a trim at the barber shop or mom getting a perm at the beauty parlor. A full-size model cottage displayed the latest in furnishings and appliances. The rest room provided checking service, desks, writing paper and a free telephone. Pneumatic tubes were utilized to carry orders and change for customers. The system was touted as the first of its kind in the state and the built-in ventilation system kept customers comfortable and happy as they browsed the one-hundred-eighty-four thousand square feet of floor space. The description of the department store and its role as a small village for shoppers, offering everything one could think of, emphasizes how a trip to downtown could be quite an adventure for the whole family. The building retains its original terra-cotta elements and massive copper cornice despite a 1975 remodeling that altered the front entrance and resulted in the removal of original display windows and flat-roofed entrance awnings suspended by chains.¹³

During the Depression and World War II, population growth and new construction slowed but downtown Little Rock remained the commercial focal point. After the war the higher numbers of automobiles, streets and highway systems began to provide new areas for commerce as people moved away from the historic core. The prosperity of customers improved by the mid-twentieth century and merchants realized that if they expected consumers to buy their new products and not abandon downtown for the suburbs, they should offer modern surroundings to stir their impulses.

¹³ [redacted], 185; "Unsuspected Engineering Significance Discovered at Blass Building," Quapaw Quarter Association File, "320-324 S. Main, Little Rock, AR; "Blass Firm Is Celebrating Its Fiftieth Anniversary," *The Arkansas Gazette*, (May 8, 1921).

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Few buildings in the 300 block of S. Main were totally rebuilt but materials like structural glass and porcelain enamel panels could be quickly applied over the window bays and three-dimensional elements of 19th and early-20th century buildings. Such materials could be found in Little Rock as a new age was introduced.¹⁴

The Fulk Building and the C.M. Taylor Building are examples of the evolution of storefront design on historic buildings. The upper two stories of the early-20th century structures are intact but the first-floor entries present mid-20th century alterations in the form of recessed mullionless display windows using clips rather than framing to provide more display space. Windows were cantilevered above recessed bulkheads to give the illusion of "floating" in space. Areas above the first floor traditionally used for transoms, were in-filled for use as signage space.

The C.M. Taylor Building at 304 S. Main appears on the earliest available Sanborn map in 1886 as part of a two-story, two-bay building labeled "Kellogg Printing." Several different book companies are found at that address in the city directory until 1893 when retail establishments begin to be listed there. In 1892 the Sanborn map showed a three-story building on the lot with one bay. A photograph from 1895 featured a different façade than that of a photograph from 1914, which exhibits the architecture it displays today. Various retail concerns were the occupants of the C.M. Taylor Building. In 1910 the addresses change and 304-308 was the home to the M.M. Cohn store. In 1942 the Little Rock City Directory listed 304 S. Main as a single address again and Green's Furs was the tenant.¹⁵

A building at 300-302 S. Main (site of the circa 1900 Fulk Building) appeared in the Little Rock City Directory in 1873. A structure on that lot can be seen in a circa late 1870s photograph of the west side of S. Main. The building in the photograph featured heavily hooded tall arched windows on the second floor, first floor display windows flanking a central recessed staircase and an elaborate corbelled cornice with blind Gothic arches, trefoils, modillions and finials. The 1886 Sanborn map showed that the southern section of the two-story, two-bay building did not extend to the alley but the northern bay did. In 1889 the Sanborn map recorded a three-story structure with no partition but by 1913 the building again had a center partition wall. The twenty-first century façade of the Fulk Building can be seen in a 1914 photograph. The Fulk Building held medical and law offices along with a host of dry goods and hardware stores from 1872 to 1900 when the Bank of Little Rock was a tenant. It was a clothing and shoe concern for many years and houses a military clothing and camping store today. The upper floors are vacant.¹⁶

¹⁴ Mike Jackson, "'Storefronts of Tomorrow': American Storefront Design from 1940 to 1970," *Preserving the Recent Past* 2, (2000), 2-57-2-60.

¹⁵ Quapaw Quarter Association File, "304 S. Main," at Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock, AR; Hanley, Steven and Ray, "Wish You Were Here." *Arkansas Postcard Past, 1900-1925*, (Fayetteville, AR, University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 359.

Quapaw Quarter Association File, "300-302 S. Main," at Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock, AR.; Hanley, "Wish You Were Here," 359.

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Dundee Building (306-308 S. Main), 301-303 S. Main, the Kempner Building (305 S. Main) and the Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building (313-315 S. Main) are illustrative of total restorations that likely date from the 1940s-1950s and display modern storefront trends.

The building on the southeast corner of E. Third and S. Main is considered noncontributing to the district because of late-20th century alterations to the pediment. The first known record of the original structure on the lot is an entry in the 1872-73 Little Rock City Directory, which refers to a building and a tenant named R.M. Mellon on the southeast corner of 3rd and Main. This building originally encompassed 301 and 303 S. Main in one storefront and eventually became three bays, but by the 1980s it had been reduced to two bays with two separate facades. Entries for the years from 1872 to 1883-84, list hardware or dry goods establishments in the building. In 1883 the City Hotel at 303 S. Main was listed in conjunction with the retail businesses. In 1887 the address of the hotel was 303 ½. By 1890 the Southern Hotel was listed at that address but the last mention of a hotel at 303 ½ in the city directories was in 1893. After the 1900 fire on Main, the rebuilt structure appears on a 1913 Sanborn map as two stories and a 1895 photograph of the southeast corner shows two-stories as well, but by 1939 it had become a one-story structure. In the 1895 photograph the building displays a typical 19th century storefront with flush street entry and heavy corbelling above a row of windows. Sanborn maps of 1886 exhibit a beveled corner entrance.

A WWII-era photograph of the building shows a one-story stuccoed structure with a terra-cotta tiled pent roof over the western front and north sides of the display area. It is not known when this change took place but the Mediterranean influence could place the change in the 1920s. Sanborn maps from 1939-1950 show a flush storefront but that is not always the reality and the display area is not visible in the photograph so it is not known if the recessed entry was present then. In a 1955 photograph the recessed entry was a definite element, the pent roof was gone and the second bay of the building had become a separate storefront. Structural panels faced the window surrounds and bulkheads. Signage affixed to the tall pediment consisted of giant neon individual letters as well as a projecting sign. A retractable fabric awning is visible on the corrugated metal façade of 303 beneath a large projecting neon sign. This building featured a narrow recessed entry lined with a cantilevered display window and a flush cantilevered window.

The building was home to Foster Hardware until 1922, when city directories list a shoe store at that location. After a period of vacancy in the 1930s, a luggage store, men's clothing store and Moses Melody Shop moved in. Various clothing concerns have been located at this address for several decades.

In 1955, 305 S. Main, had a plain pediment with individual letters, projecting sign and angled marble or structural glass entry with picture-framed display window. The entry was altered at the first level by removal of the angled wall and picture-framed display window with flanking cantilevered display windows above bulkheads.

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Historically a one-story structure, the original building that had held Samuel Blum's saloon since circa 1890 was destroyed in the 1900 fire. Pre-1900 photos of this side of the street exist but the original façade is not visible. The 1886-1889 Sanborn maps of this building show that it was a small structure that did not extend to the alley like its neighbors. By 1913, after the fire an addition had been made to the rear. Maps from 1939 show a single bay that continued to the alley. The address first appears in the Little Rock City Directory in 1872 as a dry goods establishment. A saloon is listed at the site by 1882 and it remained a drinking establishment until 1919 when the building housed the more benign business of M.O. Wesson's confectionary. There were restaurants in the building through 1926 when Joseph Kempner moved his jewelry concern in. Joseph Schrader's photography business held on until circa 1945. From 1951 to 2010 several retail businesses have been located at 305 S. Main, today it is a wig shop.

The Dundee Building, across the street at 306-308 S. Main, replaced an early-20th century three-story structure at that address in 1950. Retailers were the main occupants of the site from 1873 through 1893 when M.M. Conn Department Store first appeared at 306 S. Main in the 1893 City Directory. The retailer occupied the original three-story building for 47 years until it moved to the 500 block of Main Street. Dundee clothing store appeared at that address in 1942 and shared the three-bay storefront with a jewelry store. After a new one-story building was constructed in 1950, Dundee and other retail establishments remained until circa 2008. Today only a tattoo parlor occupies the bay at 308 S. Main.

On the front façade of the Dundee Building, individual neon letters punctuated the unbroken expanse of the pediment. This building was the archetypal International commercial structure. The one-story building with two bays had a smooth, gleaming façade of black terrazzo panels. An expansive asymmetrically angled display area and freestanding shoe case in the "exterior lobby" was designed to lure customers in. A smaller bay in the southern section of the façade housed a second business, which was reached through a separate recessed entry flanked by cantilevered display windows. The Dundee Building was altered in the early 1990s with a coating of dry-vit making it noncontributing. Black terrazzo panels remain on the bulkheads of the southern bay to give an idea of the original elegant veneer.¹⁷

The Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building at 313-315 S. Main was shown on the Sanborn maps of 1886, 1889 and 1892 to be two separate buildings. By 1897 it had become one building with two bays. A photograph taken in circa 1895 shows a typical late 19th century two-story commercial structure of brick with heavily hooded

¹⁷Carol Dyson, "How To Work With Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century: A Mid-Twentieth Century Storefront Components Guide," Presentation to National Main Streets Conference, Philadelphia, PA, (April 2, 2008), 7; Rush, 139; Dyson, 4, 6-7.

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arched windows on the second floor above large first floor display windows. A large projecting cornice topped the building. Occupants from 1872 to 1900 were varied and included dry goods stores, dressmakers, jewelry and book sellers, drugstores, barbers, painters, upholsterers, doctors and lawyers. After the fire of 1900, retailer Gus Blass had a five-story structure built on the lot. The second and third floors were used for Blass' wholesale business. From 1901 to 1914 Gus Blass Dry Goods was the only business listed in the Little Rock City Directory at that address. In 1914 Beal McDonnell Dry Goods was listed and then Beal Burrow Dry Goods through 1922. Carp's Department Store enjoyed a run of two years in the building. Gus Blass was back with a furniture store from 1926 to 1934 when the Downtown Food Palace was listed. Blass is not seen in the directory again until 1956, but a photograph from circa 1953 shows that the retailer shared space in the building with radio station KTHS. It's not clear whether Blass had a business in the building continuously from 1900 to 1955.

The Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building was one of the structures on S. Main Street that received a terra cotta veneer between WWII and 1955. The complex façade with two-story barrel-vaulted entrance had been sheathed in smooth stone slabs featuring tall thin ribbons of seven-light metal hopper windows. The first-floor entrance was divided into three shallow bays emphasized with horizontal banding. In 1980 Tom Coyne, the owner at the time, had plans to pull the stone panels off. Coyne stated that the original brick was underneath, but just how much 20th century material remained is unknown. These renovations never occurred and the building has been empty for several years but recent plans by the owner are to utilize tax credits for stabilization. The rear of the building presents original double-hung windows and decorative cast-iron columns flank loading doors on the first floor, a small reminder of the stunning façade the Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building once presented.¹⁸

Gus Blass also had a two-story building in the area of 310-312 S. Main by 1871 but the current building at that address was not used by Blass until circa 1889, which is when the Gus Blass Dry Goods concern appears on the Sanborn map at 312-316 S. Main (address changes during this period were frequent). Prior to that, 310 S. Main was a boarding house in 1873 and in 1876 the address of 312 appears as the location of J. Kempner Dry Goods and Madame Zurcher's hair salon. That address is also recorded as the home of the Grand Opera House, which is shown in photographs of the late 1870s. A sketch of the west side of S. Main depicting the street in 1871 included the opera house. Addresses fluctuate back and forth for several years but beginning in 1919 and ending in 1945, the address of 310-312 is noted in the Little Rock City Directory as the home of Charles Stiff's jewelry store. Gus Blass is still present but at an adjacent address to the south on Main. In 1949 Gus Blass Men's Store is listed in the city directories at 310-324.

¹⁸ "Panel Endorses Renovation of Building," *The Arkansas Gazette*, (February 13, 1980); Quapaw Quarter Association File, "313-315 S. Main," at Arkansas Studies Institute, Little Rock, AR.

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The building is shown on Sanborn maps to be three stories in 1886. In 1889 it is shown as being four stories. A photograph of the building in 1890 shows that it has four stories but by 1892 it was back to three stories on the Sanborn map. It's unclear why the building changed so drastically in such a short amount of time. No evidence of a fire or remodeling project is noted in research files but an 1895 photograph revealed that the façade of the building as it can be seen today was in place. In circa 1955 a photograph of the building shows that the windows were still in place but some had been boarded over. It appears that the transom area above the first-floor entrance had been covered in either enameled panels or terrazzo panels. In 2010 the building is vacant.¹⁹

By the 1950s the interstate system was cranking up, more residents owned automobiles that could carry them away from downtown to ever increasing suburban neighborhoods like Broadmoor in southwest Little Rock. Far-flung subdivisions also took the shoppers with them. In 1956 the Town and Country Shopping Center, Little Rock's first strip shopping center, was built on Hayes Street (now University Avenue) to serve the residents of Broadmoor. Of course this had a detrimental effect on downtown as it was only the beginning of such growth.

Urban renewal came to Little Rock in the 1950s and 1960s. The city joined the Federal urban renewal program in 1955, which resulted in the clearance of run down residential areas – a consequence of widespread suburbs. The program was expanded in 1959 to a program of redevelopment in downtown commercial areas, which resulted in the formation of the Central Little Rock Urban Renewal Project in 1962. This project was to transform the historic downtown commercial core as well as flanking residential areas and involved a complete overhaul with expressways, parking and high-rise apartment and office buildings. Demolition of historic structures was a large part of this plan, which raised red flags for those who were interested in preservation of the town's historic character. The Technical Advisory Committee on Significant Structures formed in 1961, provided consultation for the members of the Little Rock Urban Renewal Project on the import of the remaining historic fabric in downtown. This was the introduction of historic preservation in Little Rock as the movement we know today.²⁰

By the 1970s customers were leaving downtown in droves for new shopping malls that were easily accessible by the freeway. The 300 block of S. Main Street was not overly-impacted by demolition strategies of urban renewal but the decline of downtown as a destination was certainly felt by merchants in that area. Renovations were primarily the strategy employed by S. Main Street building owners in that block. The Rose Building became part of that phase when tenant, Capital Business Machines, requested that the ornamental terracotta of the façade be covered in massive pebble and concrete panels in order to reflect the modern state-of-the-art

¹⁹ *The Arkansas Gazette*, (May 7, 1922); Hanley, "Wish You Were Here," 359.
²⁰ Roy, 214-215, 220-221.

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equipment they offered. The application of the panels caused a fair amount of damage and the removal of historic elements but enough remained beneath to eventually become part of a 1980s restoration.

In the meantime, the city was attempting to counter the loss of business through the construction of the Metrocentre Mall. In the late 1970s a Metrocentre Planning Area was formed covering forty blocks of the business district core, which encompassed S. Main Street down to E. Eighth Street. Following national trends favoring the construction of pedestrian malls, S. Main Street from E. Third to E. Seventh streets was closed to automobile traffic and paved with bricks. Customers were to be enticed to linger on S. Main Street through landscaping features like street furniture, kiosks, new street lighting, fountains and sculpture. At the time it was installed some business tenants and owners felt that there was not enough communication between property owners and developers of the mall. Parking became an issue when the street was closed down and elements like the fountain were out of scale and irrelevant to the purpose. Such efforts were ultimately not successful and the mall was re-opened to traffic in circa 1980, but it did help to foster interest in the rehabilitation of downtown's historic structures.²¹

In the early 1980s Donald Gold, the owner of the Rose Building, president of Little Rock Unlimited Progress and vice president of the Quapaw Quarter Association board of directors, joined with urban planner James A. Moses to explore methods of bringing business back downtown. Gold theorized that people had to have a reason to come downtown and he organized festivals and events that would draw customers to S. Main Street. New federal historic preservation tax incentives were also utilized by Gold and Moses to remove the false façade of the Rose Building and recreate missing elements, resulting in a faithful restoration of its 1916 appearance. Gold hoped that this would inspire other property owners to take advantage of tax credits and restore their historic buildings as well. The outcome of the restoration was inspiring but not enough to spur a sweep of development and rehabilitation projects. The mid-1980s also saw the construction of the Main Street Market Project, which unfortunately involved the demolition and alteration of a large block of commercial structures in the 600 block of Main. It was not long before the enclosed shopping mall closed and the hopes for the 300 block of S. Main stalled.²²

In the 1990s preservation attention was diverted to a dilapidated area of E. Markham (now partially known as President Clinton Avenue) when the River Market District was constructed. The successful entertainment and

²¹ Weidower, Section 7, 3; Hodges Firm, *Downtown Little Rock Development Plan, Vol. 2: Land Use Plan*, Adopted by the City of Little Rock Board of Directors, 1983, 17; "Joe Kaufman: 'It's How Hard You Work,'" From research files of Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Little Rock, AR, Main Street Buildings file.
²² Gold, 40, 4.

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shopping area has revitalized the riverfront, where commerce in Little Rock had its beginning. Since the value of the historic structures in the River Market has been proven it is the hope of preservationists and interested property owners on S. Main Street that such success could be implemented in other areas, such as the 300 block, which is a comfortable walking distance from attractions and hotels on Markham and President Clinton Avenue.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Main Street Commercial Historic District in Little Rock is being nominated to the National Register with local significance under Criterion A as an example of the development and evolution of commerce in downtown Little Rock from 1900 to 1955, and under Criterion C for its collection of Romanesque, Sullivanesque, Italianate, Neoclassical, International and Standard 20th Century Commercial architecture.

The west side of the 400 block of S. Main Street lost several historically significant structures when the block was swept clean by demolition in 2009. Three buildings, one dating to the 1820s, were destroyed at the same on the east side, leaving a gaping hole in the historic fabric of that side of the street.

The 300 block of S. Main Street is the most historically intact section remaining on the north end of S. Main to convey the story of late-19th and early-to mid-20th century commercial life in Little Rock. The Main Street Commercial Historic District contains a sweep of architectural styles and forms that are a timeline of cultural, stylistic and economic histories of downtown Little Rock. In contrast to the current desolation of the 400 block, the district retains its dense massing and open storefronts, evoking the atmosphere of the thronging streets seen in historic photographs. Many of the buildings between E. Third and E. Fourth streets on S. Main are empty and are up for sale, some having been so for several years, but they still offer opportunity to recapture an appreciation for what those buildings tell us about the merchant families and the vital environment that was fostered by their place in downtown. Many historic advertisements and articles on the downtown buildings emphasize the pride a company would take in having occupied a building for decades. Employees of the Gus Blass Department Store boasted of years of service covering 41, 33, or 23 years. City Directories list businesses at the same location from the early-to mid-20th century.

Such history and the feeling conveyed by these buildings was summed up by urban developer James Rouse, who stated, "The city cannot be whole without a dynamic and alive marketplace at its heart." This was proven when the downtown commercial area was moved to outlying areas in the 1960s and 1970s but the Main Street Commercial Historic District still can provide a beat for that heart.²³

²³"Downtown's New Building," *The Arkansas Gazette*, (July 20, 1978).

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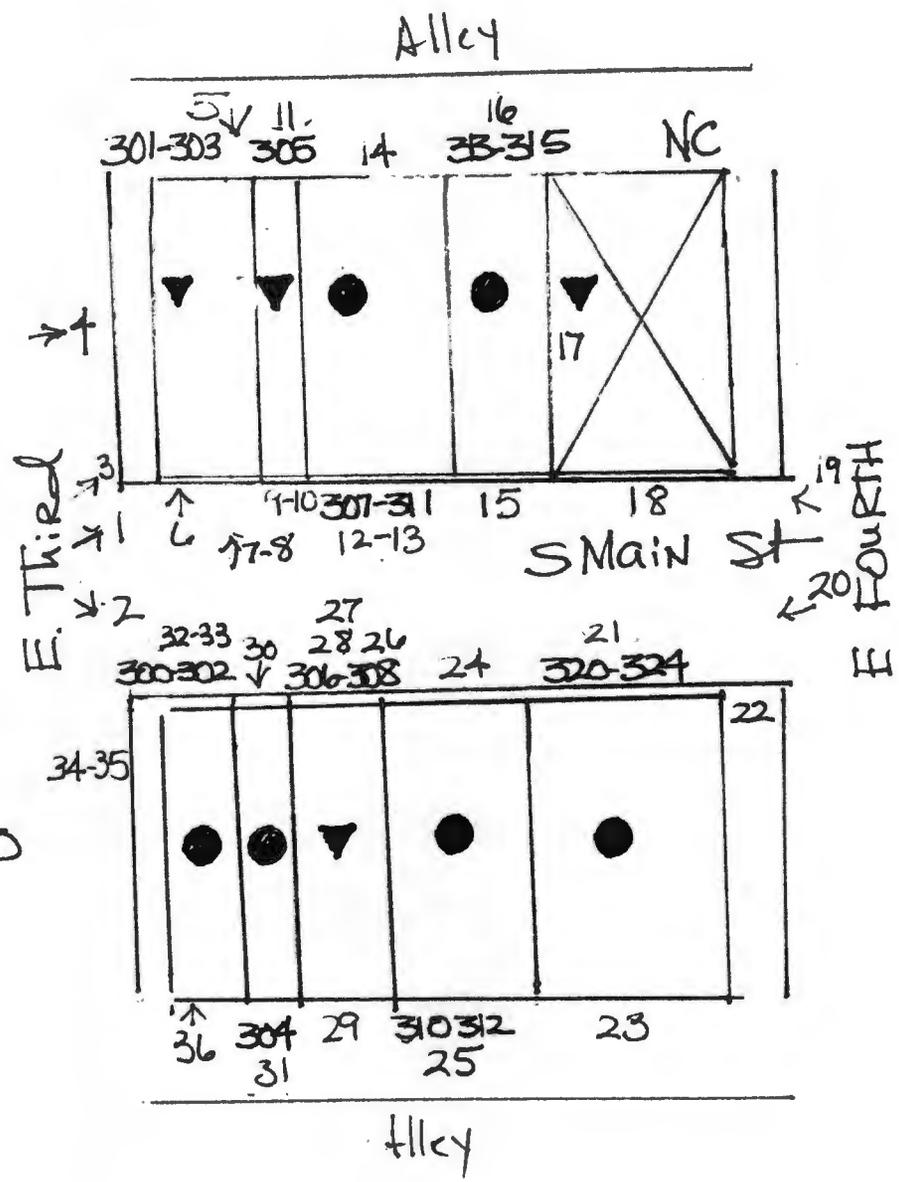
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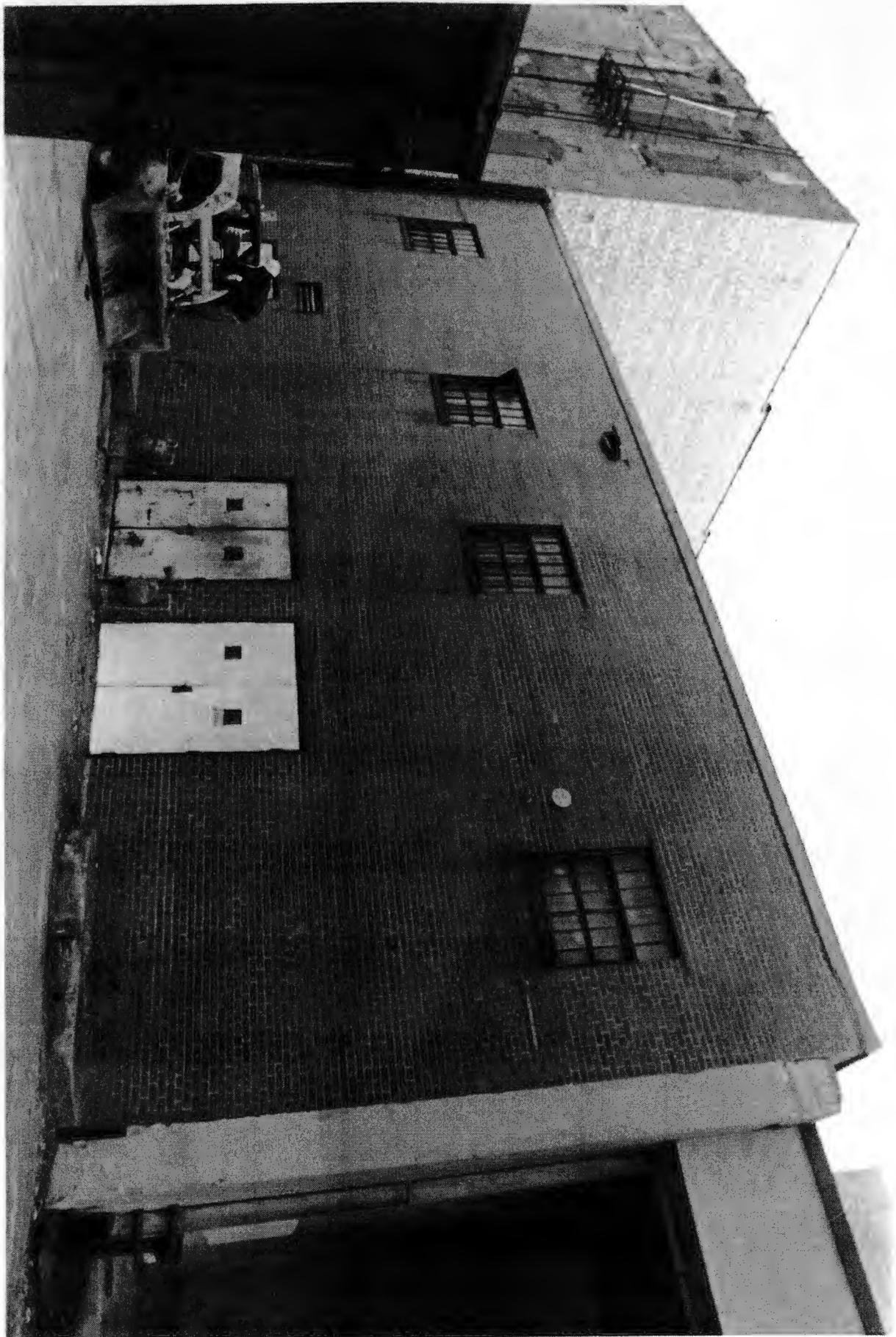
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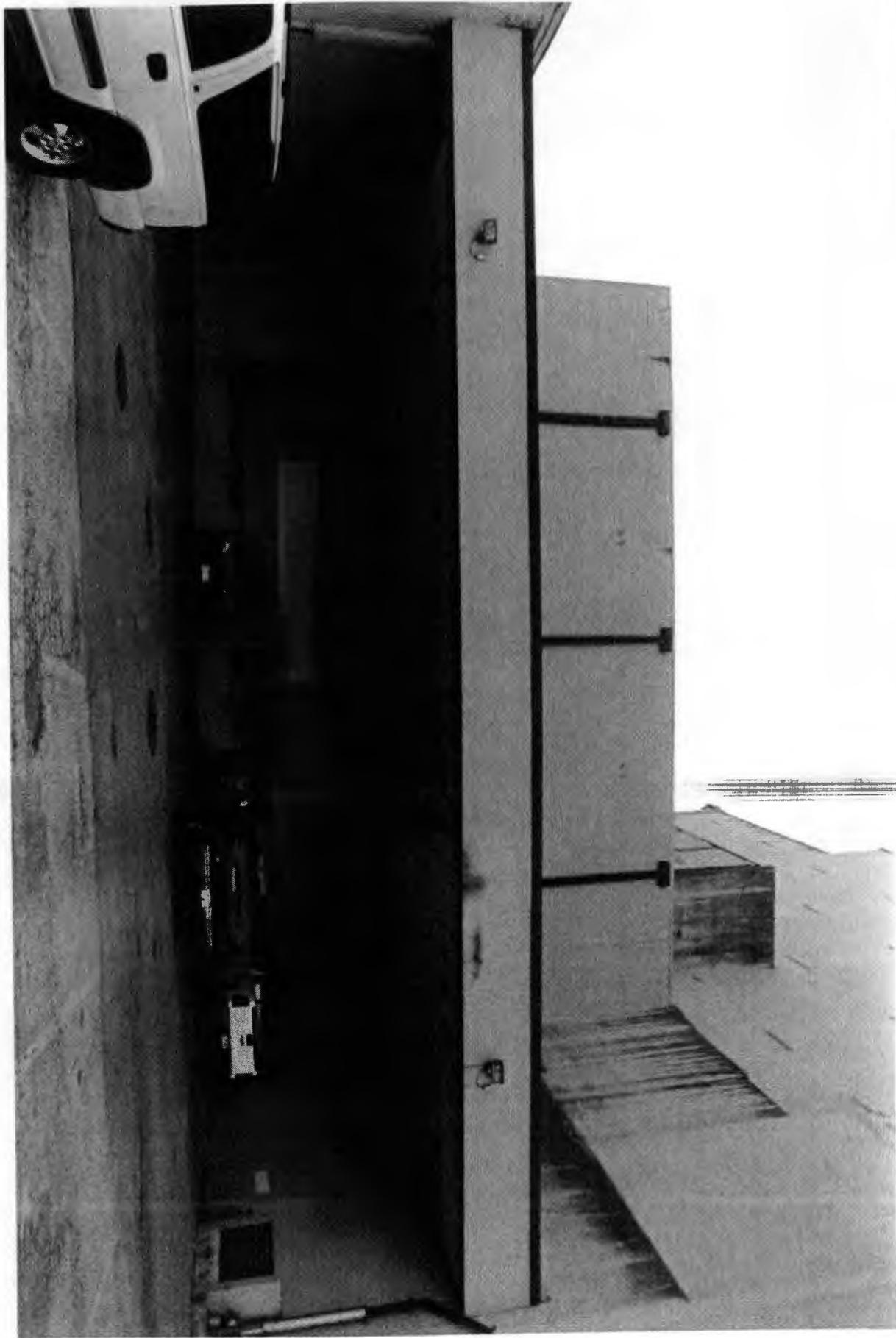
















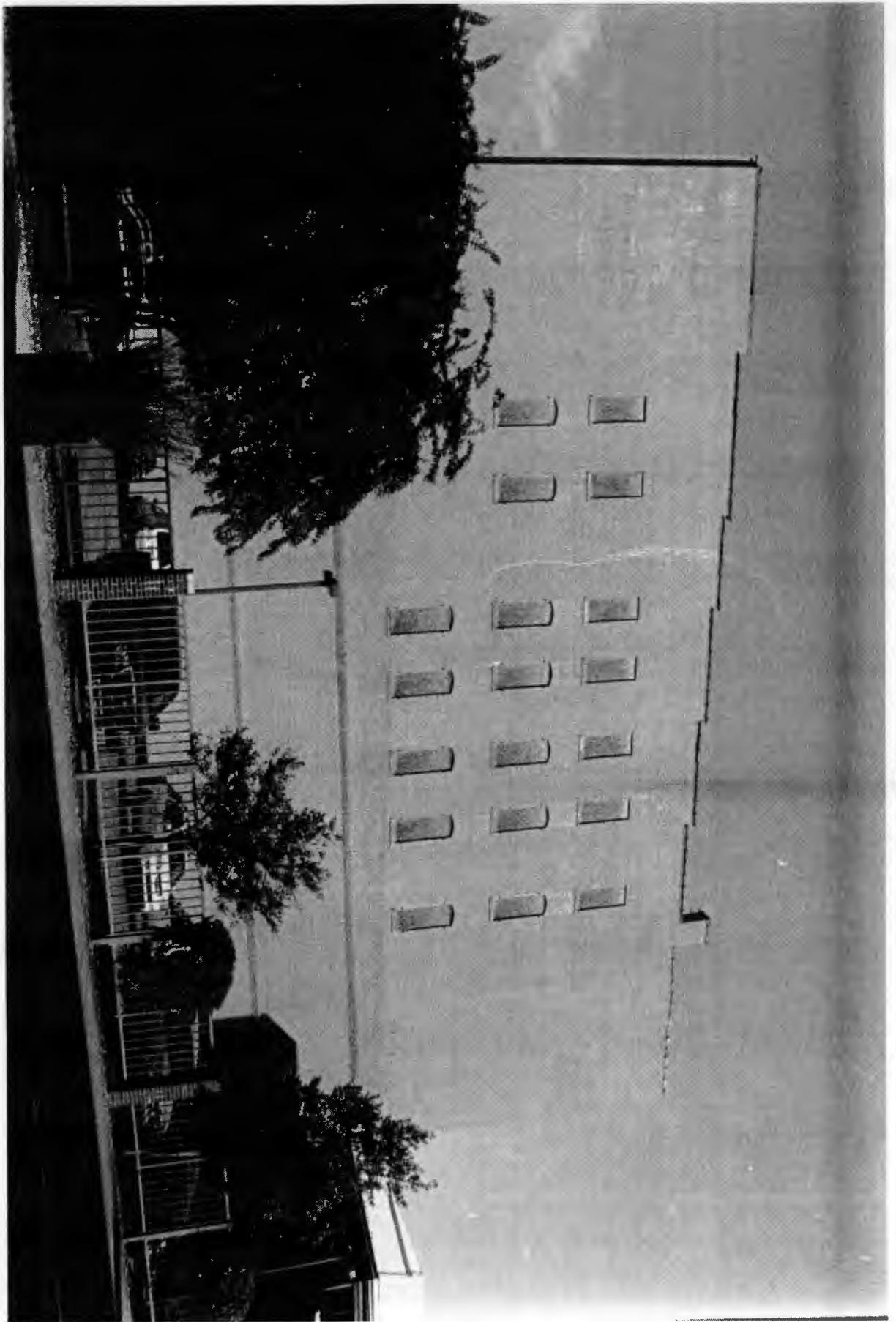






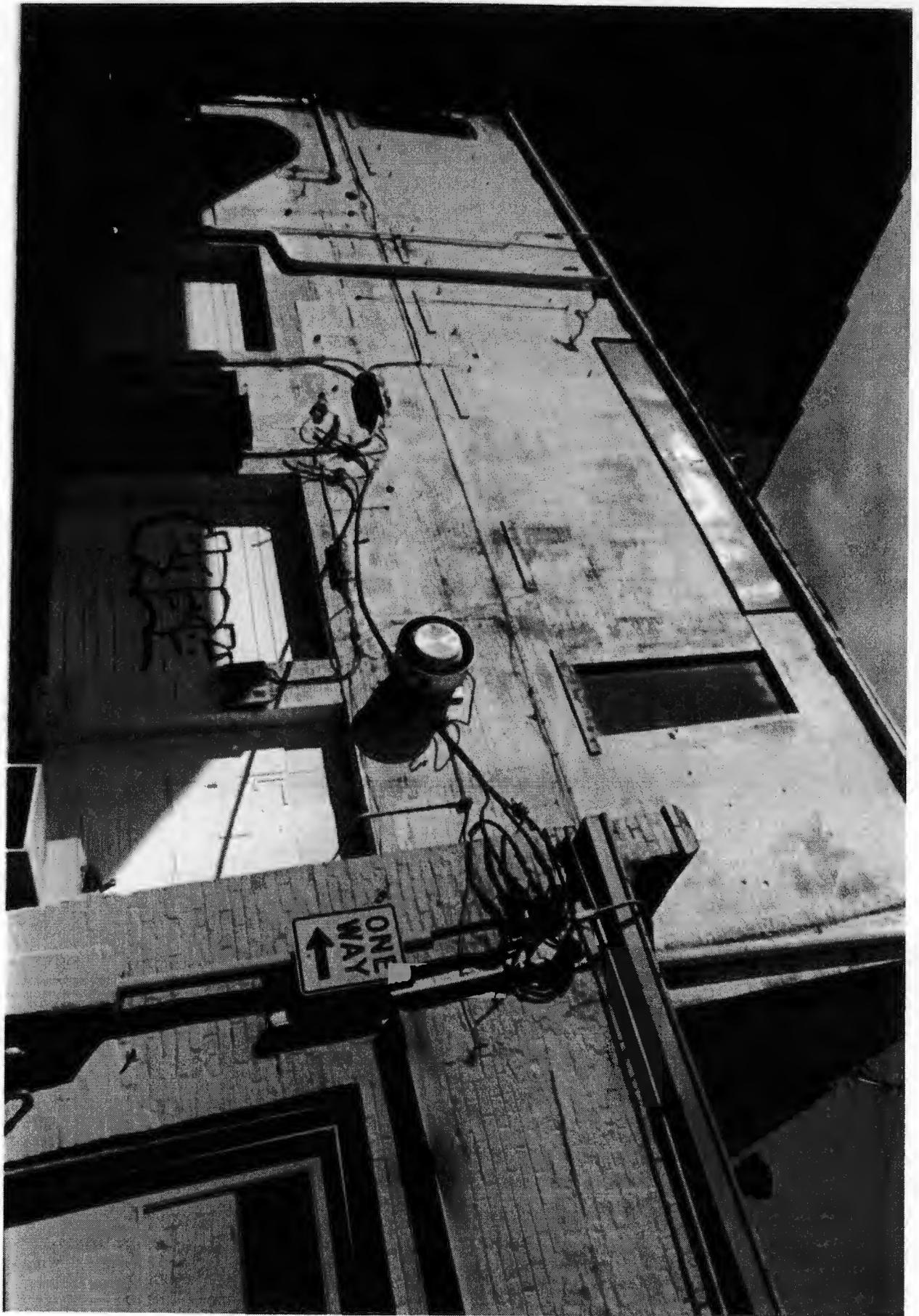


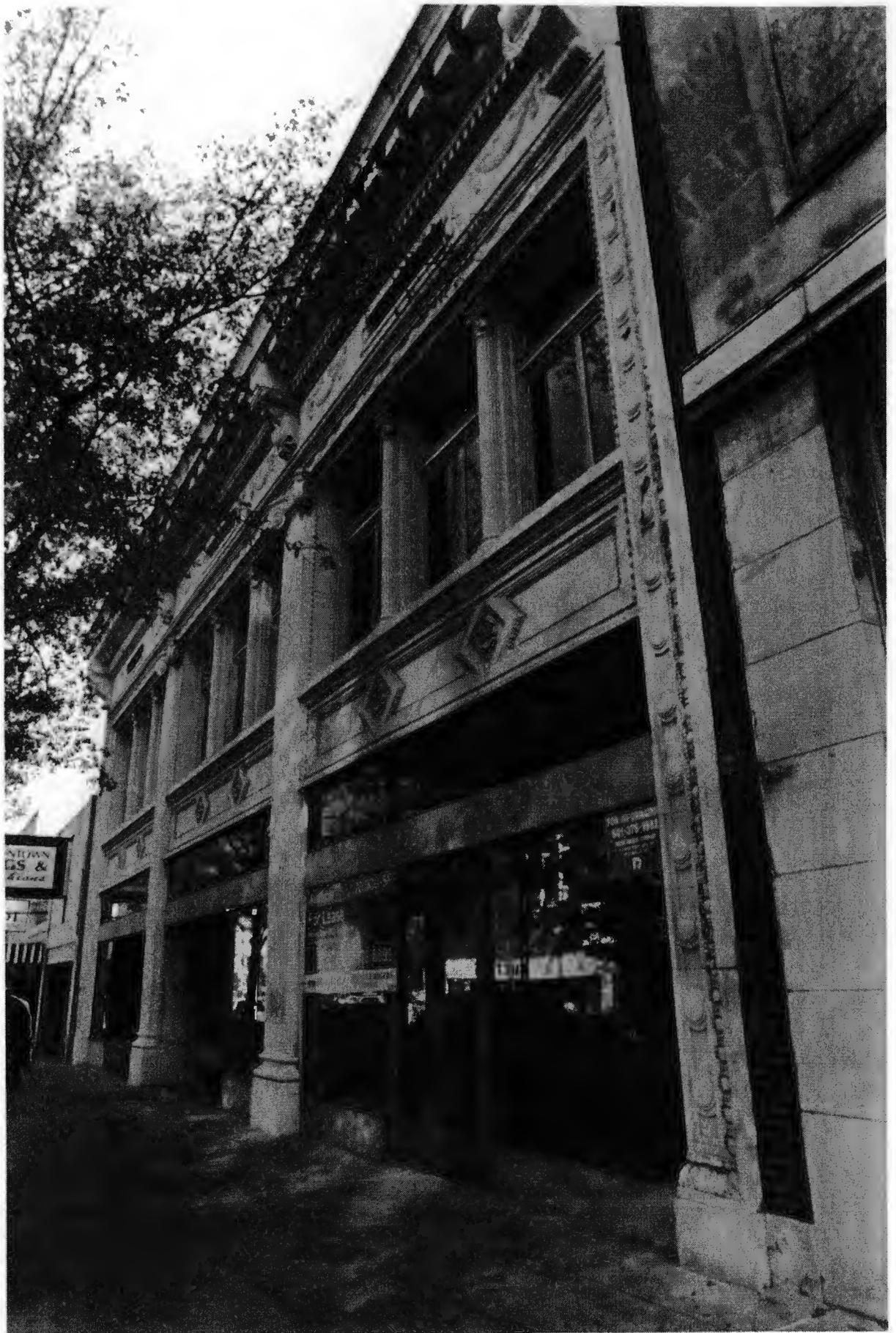
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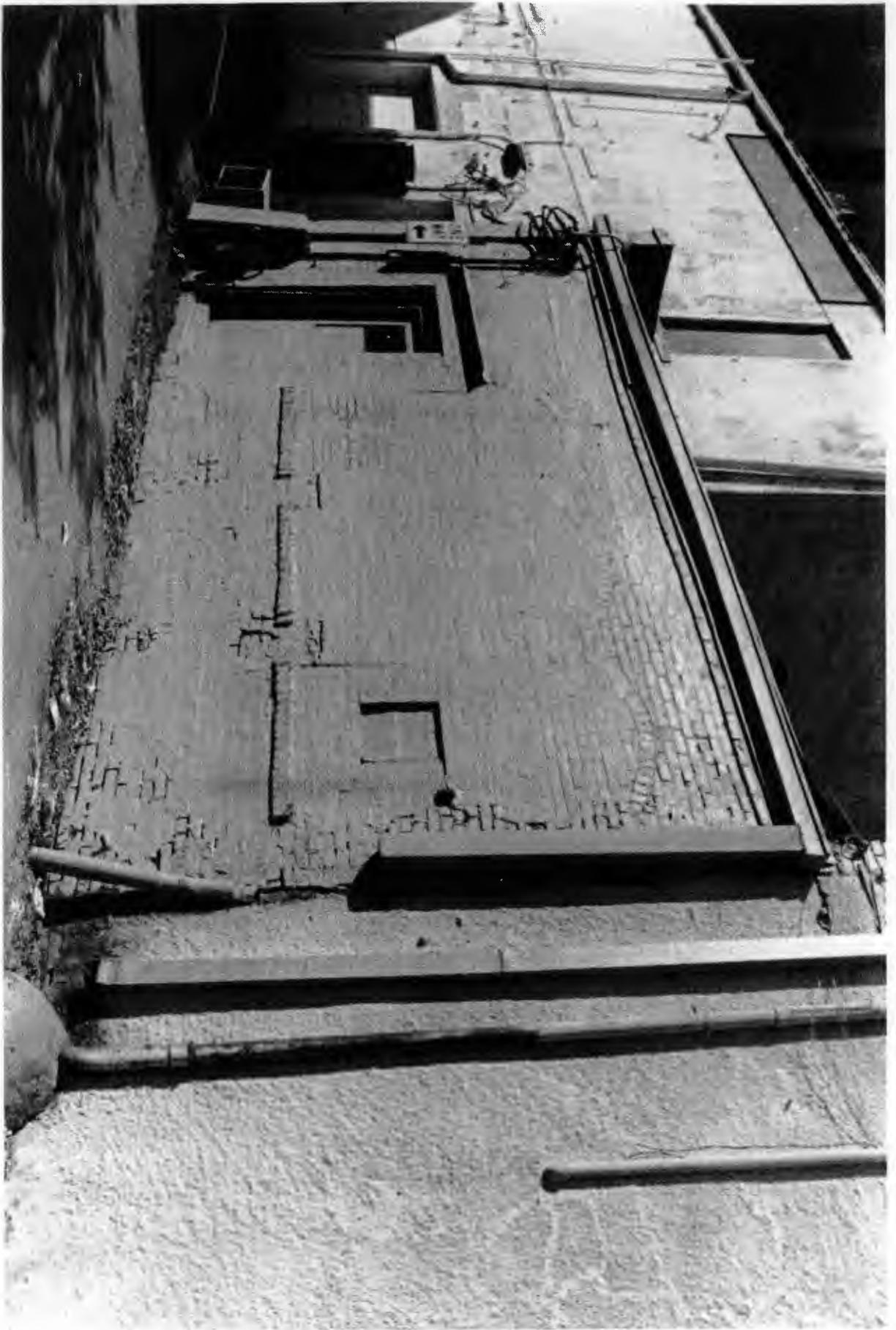












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