

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**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.

1. Name of Property

historic name Griffin Auto Company Building

other names/site number UN0069

2. Location

street & number 117 E. Locust Street

not for publication

city or town El Dorado

vicinity

state Arkansas code AR county Union code 139 zip code 71730

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.)

Catherine Matthews
Signature of certifying official/Title

4/04/01
Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
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:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- 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:) _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check 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

Table with columns: Contributing, Noncontributing, buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total. Values: 1, 1, 1, 1.

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

Arkansas Highway and Transportation Era Architecture, 1910-1965

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store, TRANSPORTATION: road related

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store, TRANSPORTATION: road related

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE, walls BRICK, roof ASPHALT, other TERRA COTTA

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- Criteria A, B, C, and D with checkboxes and descriptions.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- Criteria A through G with checkboxes and descriptions.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
TRANSPORTATION

Period of Significance

1928-1951

Significant Dates

1928, c. 1948

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

N/A

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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 Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State Agency
 - Federal Agency
 - Local Government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Polk's El Dorado City Directory, vol 1928-9. R.L. Polk & Co. Dallas, Texas. 1928.

Griffin Auto Company Brochures, El Dorado, Arkansas. 1939, 1945, 1951.

Insurance Maps of El Dorado, Arkansas. New York: Sandborn Map Co., 1929.

Liebs, Chester H. *Main Street to Miracle Mile*. Little, Brown and Company, Boston. 1985.

Mary Jo Oliver, owner of the property. El Dorado, Interview by Amy Bennett, 12 January 2001.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately 3.75 acres.

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Commencing at the Southwest Corner of Block 20 of the Original City of El Dorado, Arkansas, and run South 60.0 feet to the South line of Locust Street for a point of point of beginning; thence East 200.0 feet; thence South 355.0 feet to a wire fence; thence northwesterly along said wire fence 123.0 feet; thence south along wire fence and fence extended 59.0 feet; thence West 78.0 feet; thence North 56.0 feet; thence North 74 degrees 32' 30" West 125.7 feet; thence North 310.0 feet; thence East 121.0 feet to the point of beginning, said tract being a part of Lots 15 and 16, Block 40, of the Original City of El Dorado, Union County, Arkansas, according to Jackson Plat.

Boundary Justification

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

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Griffin Auto Company.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Amy Bennett/Survey Historian
 organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 3/14/01
 street & number 1500 Tower Bldg., 323 Center Street telephone (501) 324-9874
 city or town Little Rock state Arkansas zip code 72201

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SUMMARY

The Griffin Auto Company Building is located at 117 E. Locust, only two blocks from El Dorado's Courthouse square and within three blocks of all major highways. Its boxy, symmetrical massing is divided into three sections: a filling station, showroom, and maintenance/storage area. The open-drive filling station is the most ornamental section and is given a Mediterranean influence by the use of the terra cotta, tapestry brick and a blind arcade of colonnettes. Several original interior features distinguish the showroom including the tile floor, terra cotta mantelpiece, and the wrought iron balustrade with brass hand rail that graces the stairs and mezzanine. A barrel vaulted roof covers the more austere rear portion of the building, containing the service department, the maintenance areas, and the storage areas of the basement. Despite some deterioration and its adaptive reuse, the building looks much like it did when it opened in October 1928.

ELABORATION

Located at 117 E. Locust, the 1928 Griffin Auto Company Building is a fine example of a car dealership building of no particular architectural genre, but with a discernible Mediterranean influence. The building's surface pattern ornamentation, and relatively lavish interior, applied to a rather boxy plan mark it as an architectural transition from the traditional "store front" showrooms to the streamlined "super service stations."

Despite its utilitarian usage, and reinforced concrete construction, the Griffin Auto Company Building makes use of a variety of surface ornamentation on its prominent elevations. The filling station portion contains the most decorative details including a glazed terra cotta blind arcade that wraps around two sides of the building, and buff/brown tapestry brick. Glazed white terra cotta blocks decorate the square columns that support the large openings for the car shelter. The area above the shelter is broken up into decorative horizontal bands that utilize tapestry brick, cornices of white terra cotta, and a blind arcade of Corinthian colonnettes.

The filling station and showroom are shielded from the elements by a flat roof covered by a built-up tar system behind a parapet. The walls above the open filling station are faced with tapestry brick and glazed terra cotta, whereas, the walls of the show room are plain red brick. This section rests on a continuous concrete foundation without a basement.

The barrel vault that covers the service department is hidden from view by a small raised parapet. A wood paneled garage door decorated by a pair of collonettes and three brick arches visually links this portion with the filling station. Inside a metal truss ceiling allows for an interior clear of supporting posts. Large multi-paned metal windows and skylights help light the enormous space.

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Underneath the service department is a full raised basement with massive reinforced concrete columns that give support to the upper story, and provide storage space.

Considering the variety of ownership, alterations to the building have been minimal. Exterior alterations consist of the replacement of some windows and the main door, the infilling of one showroom window, the removal of the original light fixtures on the car shelter ceiling, the elimination of the large glass and wood parts cabinet, and the removal of the gas pumps. Sometime between 1929 and the 1940s, a large wooden car parking garage with false brick front was constructed and then lost to fire.

Filling Station and Showroom

The north and east, or principle, elevations are visible from Locust and S. Jefferson Streets. Three large square columns and two pilasters frame the drive of the filling station. The area above the opening for the car shelter is broken up into ornamental horizontal bands. The decorative bands include a terra cotta cornice over the openings for the car shelter, a lattice pattern of tapestry brick, a string of terra cotta punctuated by corbels, a blind arcade of colonnettes with a variation of a basket weave pattern decorating the wall between them, and plain cornice of terra cotta topping the wall. Originally, metal exterior lamps were positioned on each exterior side of the massive square columns; however, today the only lamp that remains on the exterior of the building is over the garage door of the service area.

Underneath the car shelter, the walls are accented by tile wainscoting. The north wall is fenestrated by original metal eight-beside-eight casement windows, a large two-over-two window, and a pair of large stationary windows with transoms. Entry into the building is accomplished by two single-leaf brass doors and a modern aluminum and glass double-leaf door with a transom.

Interior of the Showroom

Early historic photographs of the showroom give a glimpse of an interior more akin to a hotel lobby. Decorative elements included tiled floors, marble baseboards, a beautiful wrought iron balustrade with brass hand rail, stenciled patterns along the ceilings, and even a set of wicker furniture positioned over an intricately patterned rug. In photographs from the late 1940s and early 1950s, the furniture is gone and replaced by additional cars and bouquets of flowers; however, the fixtures of the room remain intact.

The interior of the showroom offers high ceilings with a mezzanine on the east side. The tiled floors are peppered with motifs (oak leaf, fleur-de-lis, and flower just to name a few) that are very similar to the tile that graces the third floor of the Union County Courthouse. A wrought iron balustrade with brass rail makes an impressive outline for

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mezzanine and stairs. Originally, the mezzanine housed offices and a large safe. Paperwork was transferred from one part of the building to the other through a pneumatic tube system. Currently, the mezzanine is used for storage and the rear of the showroom space is sub-divided by office partitions that do not reach ceiling height. Hanging from the ceiling are six operable Emerson ceiling fans that have consecutive engine numbers.

Both interior bathrooms were fitted with tile lined showers. The "Lady's Lounge" was the most lavish. The sitting area was decorated with a cozy gas log fireplace with a glazed terra cotta mantel. At some point in the past, the sitting area was converted into an office, and the mantel received a coat of white paint to cover the chips and stains to its original finish.

Interior of the Service Area

The large floor space of the service department is unbroken by structural supports, because of metal trusses and a barrel vaulted roof. The space is lighted by electric lights, several large metal frame windows on the south, east and west elevations and three skylights.

The basement area matches the dimensions of the service department. The majority of the space is open storage; however, part of the area is divided into three large vaults. According to oral tradition, one vault was designated for each of the three Griffin brothers.

East elevation

The east wall runs the entire length of the building. The wall is stuccoed except for the portion that rises above the roofline to form a parapet. On the parapet a ghost sign indicates the words "Griffin Auto Co." The fenestration on this elevation is composed of six-beside-six and eight-beside-eight casement windows with obscured wire glass panes. A small projection near the northeast corner accommodated an exterior restroom that now lacks both a door and a roof. Entry into the interior is gained by a flight of stairs leading to a double-leaf metal door. Heavy equipment and vehicles can be loaded into the service area by way of three large garage doors located along the south portion of this elevation.

Rear Elevation

The rear façade parallels the railroad tracks. The wall constructed of red brick, and a coating of stucco denotes the raised basement. The elevation is fenestrated on the first floor by four eighty-four-light metal windows with panes in the center that crank outward to allow for ventilation. One window has been infilled, but the rest are in relatively good condition. Below, the fenestration of the raised basement is composed of seven twenty-four-light metal windows. A large opening near the southeast corner of the basement provided easy access for railroad shipments of

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automobiles and other supplies. A photograph dating to the late 1940s or early 1950s shows a railroad tank car sitting on the tracks to the southeast of the building.

Ancillary Structures

East of the main building is an 8,000 square foot lot that once held a horse stable and riding. The 1929 Sandborn map shows a large gable roof horse stable sitting in the middle of the lot with a circular riding pen directly to the east. An aerial photograph from circa 1945 also shows the roof horse stable and circular riding pen. By the time another aerial photograph was taken circa 1950, the ancillary structure has been removed and the space is filled by used vehicles and a small shed-roofed building. Since 1985 a large gable metal roofed open -sided structure has been used to store recreational vehicles and other equipment. This structure is non-contributing to this nomination.

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SUMMARY

The Griffin Auto Company Building derives its transitional architectural appearance from the application of traditional ornamentation onto a plan and construction type that solved the problems of selling and servicing automobiles. As the best example of a building designed as a full-service car dealership in the city of El Dorado, the Griffin Auto Company Building is being nominated under Criterion C with local significance. The building also qualifies under Criterion A for the role it played in automobile culture in Arkansas. The nomination is being submitted under the multiple property listing "Arkansas Highway and Transportation Era Architecture, 1910-1965" in conjunction with the historic context "Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965."

ELABORATION

The three brothers (William, Tom and Carl) who eventually founded the Griffin Auto Company came from North Carolina in 1899 and settled in Union County. They started a livery stable business. As Chester Liebs points out in Main Street to Miracle Mile, "These first dealerships. . . were eagerly snapped up by Main Street businessmen, especially those already engaged in selling and servicing horse-age transportation. Horse-less carriages went up for sale at livery stables, blacksmith shops, and carriage and bicycle shops across the county." In 1915, as the popularity of the automobile increased, the Griffin Brothers decided to branch out into the automobile business and became a franchise of the Ford Motor Company.

In 1926 (two years after the beginning of the oil boom), they gave up the franchise and developed an amusement park one mile east of El Dorado named Willow Lake. This venture did not last long though, and in the fall of 1927, the Griffin brothers began constructing the Griffin Auto Company Building on Locust Street at the south end of Washington Street. As stated in a brochure dated 1939, "This building was completed and the Griffin Auto Company reopened in October, 1928, with a filling station and automobile shop." Instead of re-securing the Ford franchise, the brothers chose to contract with Buick Motor Company. In 1931, they kept the contract Buick and added Chevrolet. They also secured many other lines of automobile products, and increased their business hours until they could boast:

"The Griffin Auto Company now stands ready at all times to serve the needs of the motoring public through any of its number departments with courteous attendants, factory trained mechanics, and the will to serve as its creed."

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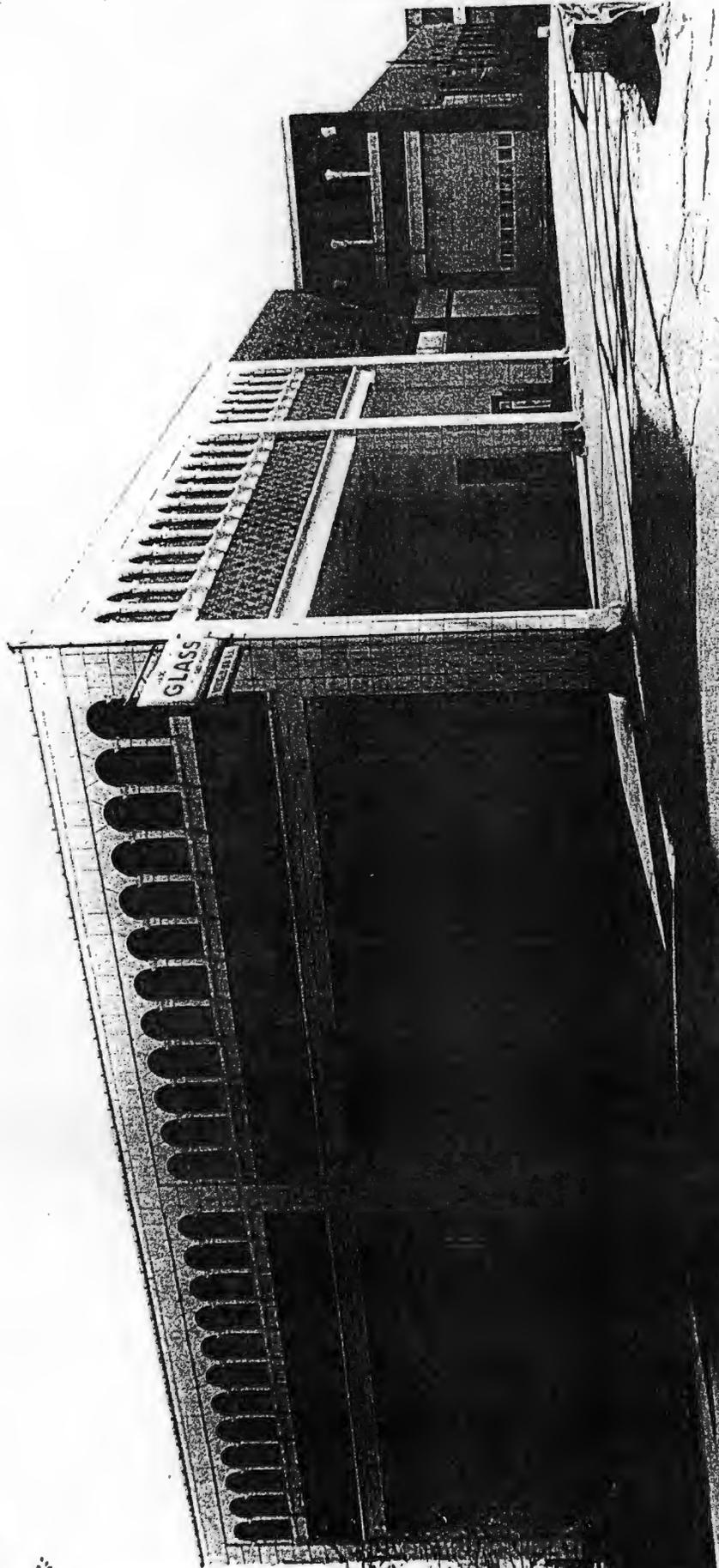
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The business also included an 8,000 square feet lot to the east of the main building. The space not only included a used car lot, but also a horse stable and riding pen. The stable and pen were used to sell, trade and buy horses. As indicated by promotional aerial photographs, the stable was removed in the late 1940s.

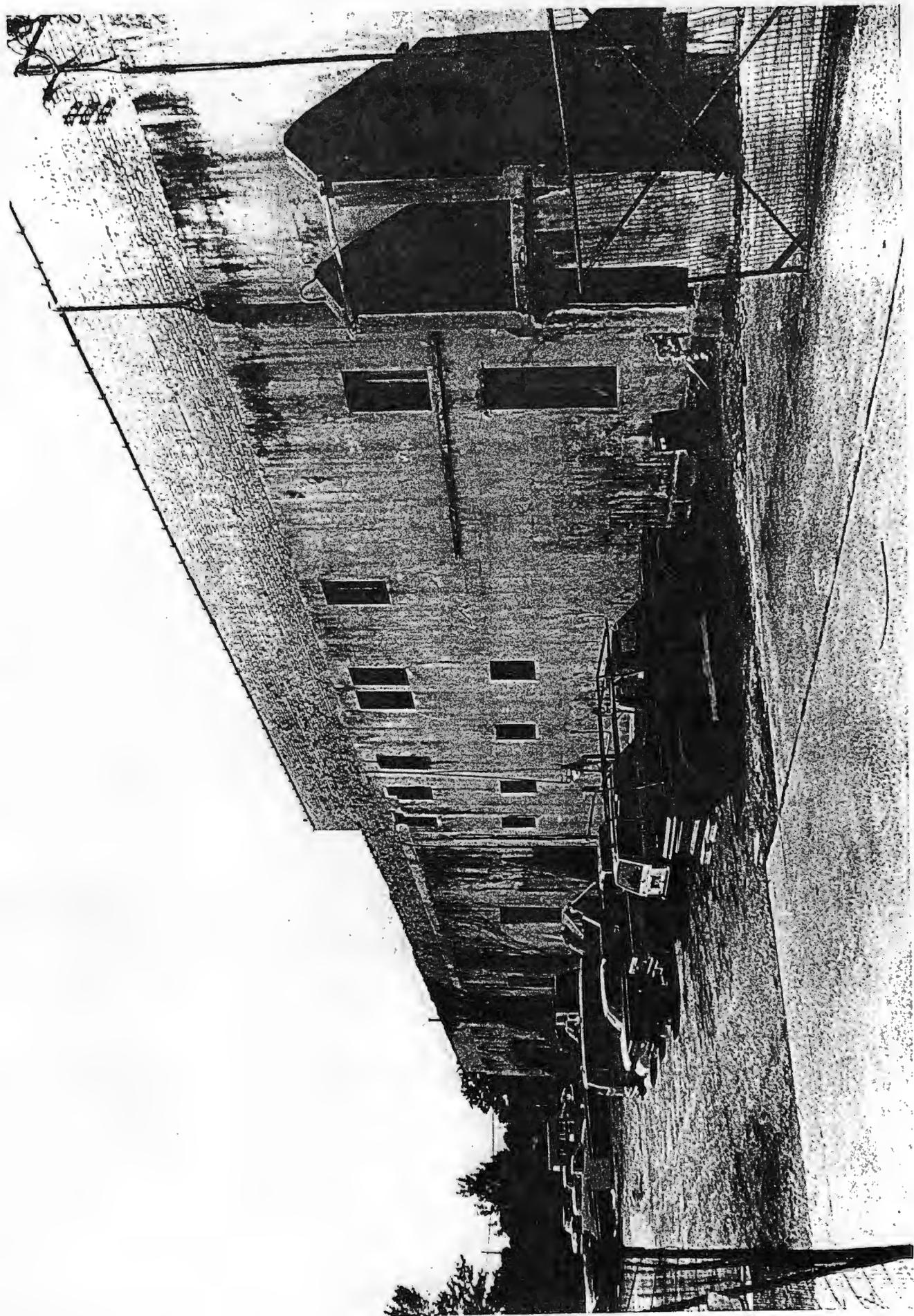
The Griffin Auto Company changed location circa 1960, moving to the corner of West Avenue and Hillsboro. The businesses that utilized the building since that time made good use of the large space. The first business to relocate in the building was Turpin Wickes Building Supply. The next business to move into the Griffin Auto Company Building was Glenn Marine, which used the space to sell boats. Since 1982 the building has been owned by Kenneth and Mary Jo Oliver who own the El Dorado Glass and Mirror Company.

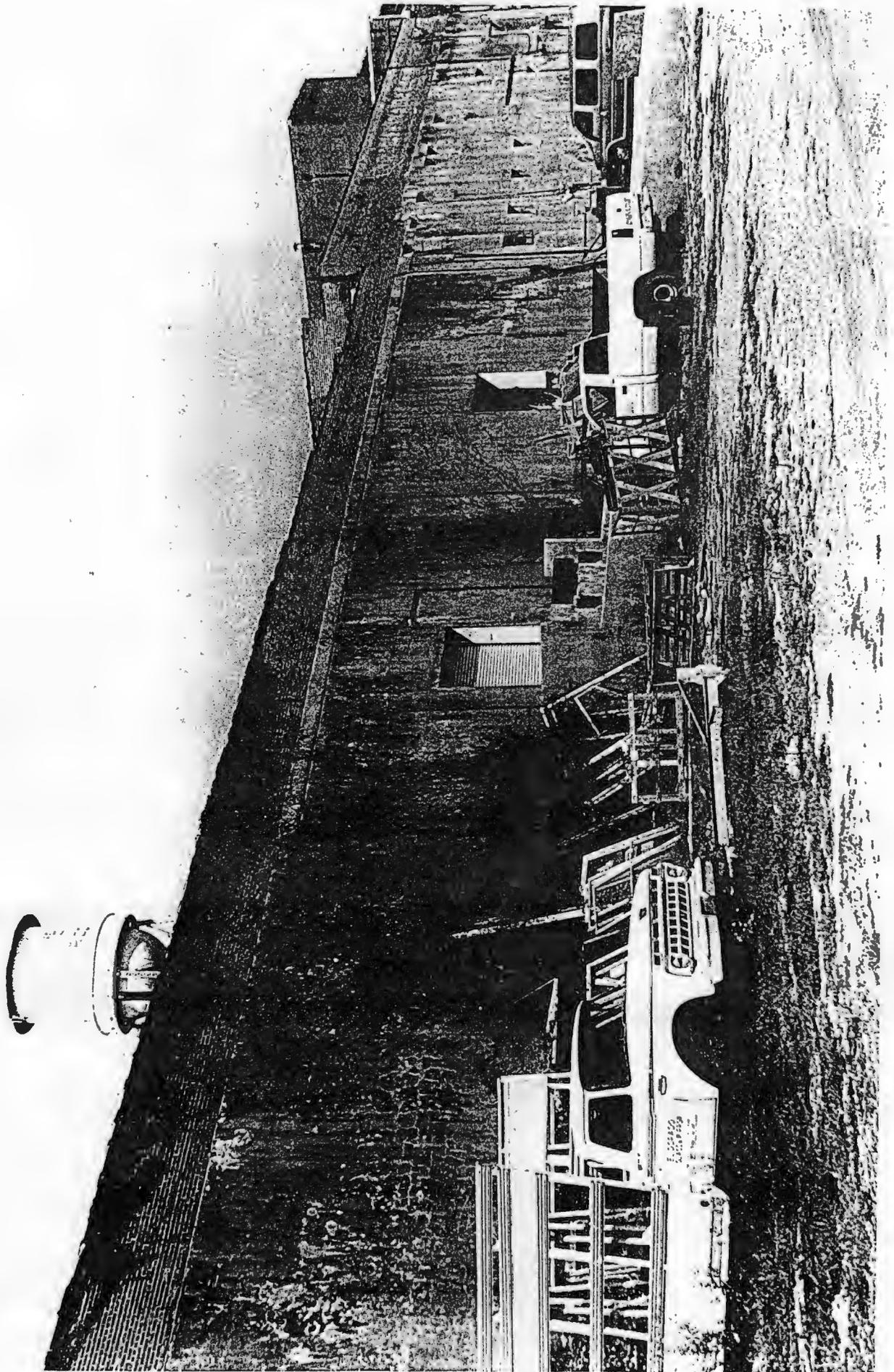
Significance

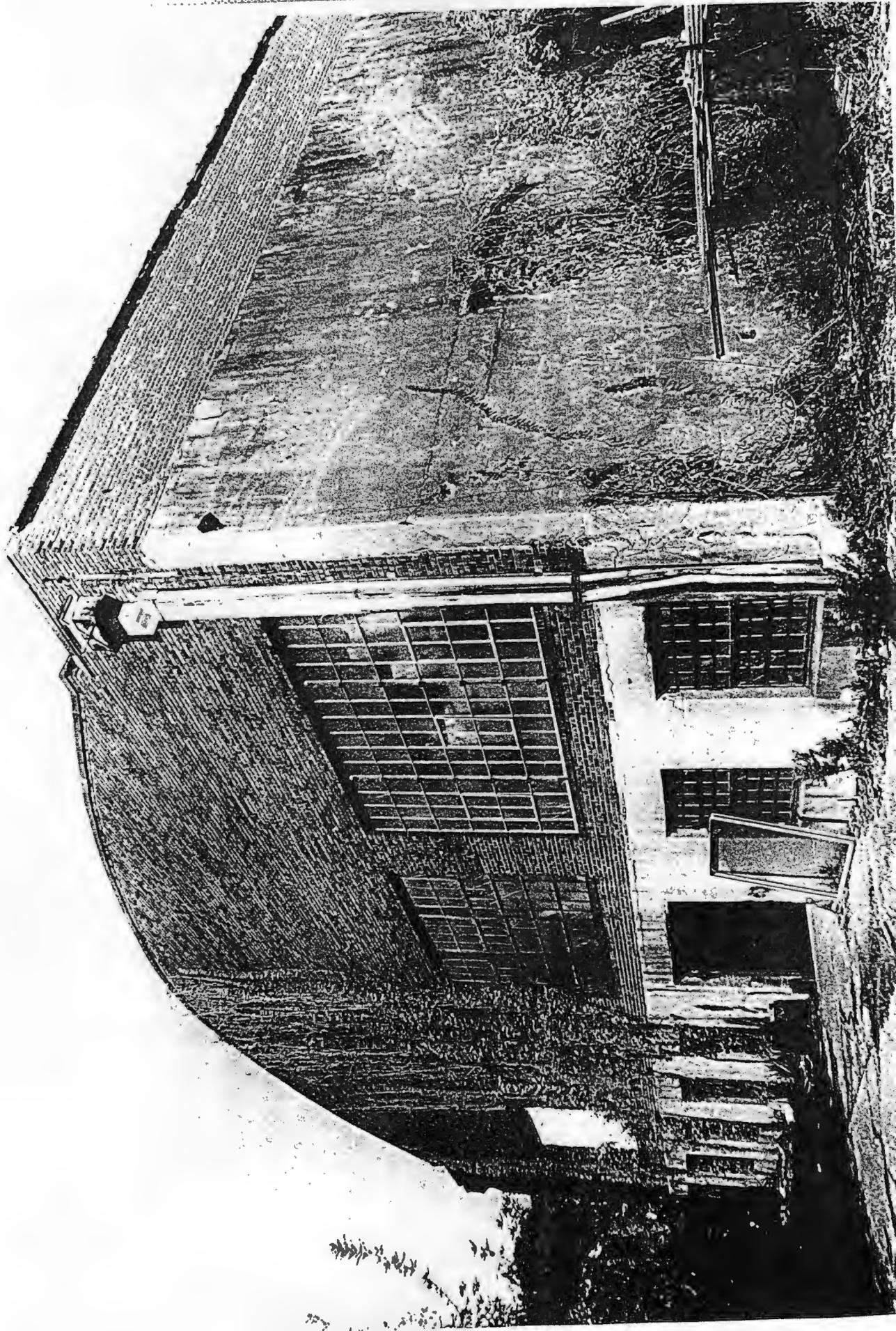
The Griffin Auto Company Building is the finest high-style car dealership building within the city of El Dorado. In spite of the alterations suffered, its tapestry brick, white terra cotta, and blind arcade combine with the other details to preserve its original architectural character and identity. For these reasons, the Griffin Auto Company Building is being nominated under Criterion C with local significance. The building also qualifies under Criterion A for the role it played in automobile culture in Arkansas. The nomination is being submitted under the multiple property listing "Arkansas Highway and Transportation Era Architecture, 1910-1965" in conjunction with the historic context "Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965."

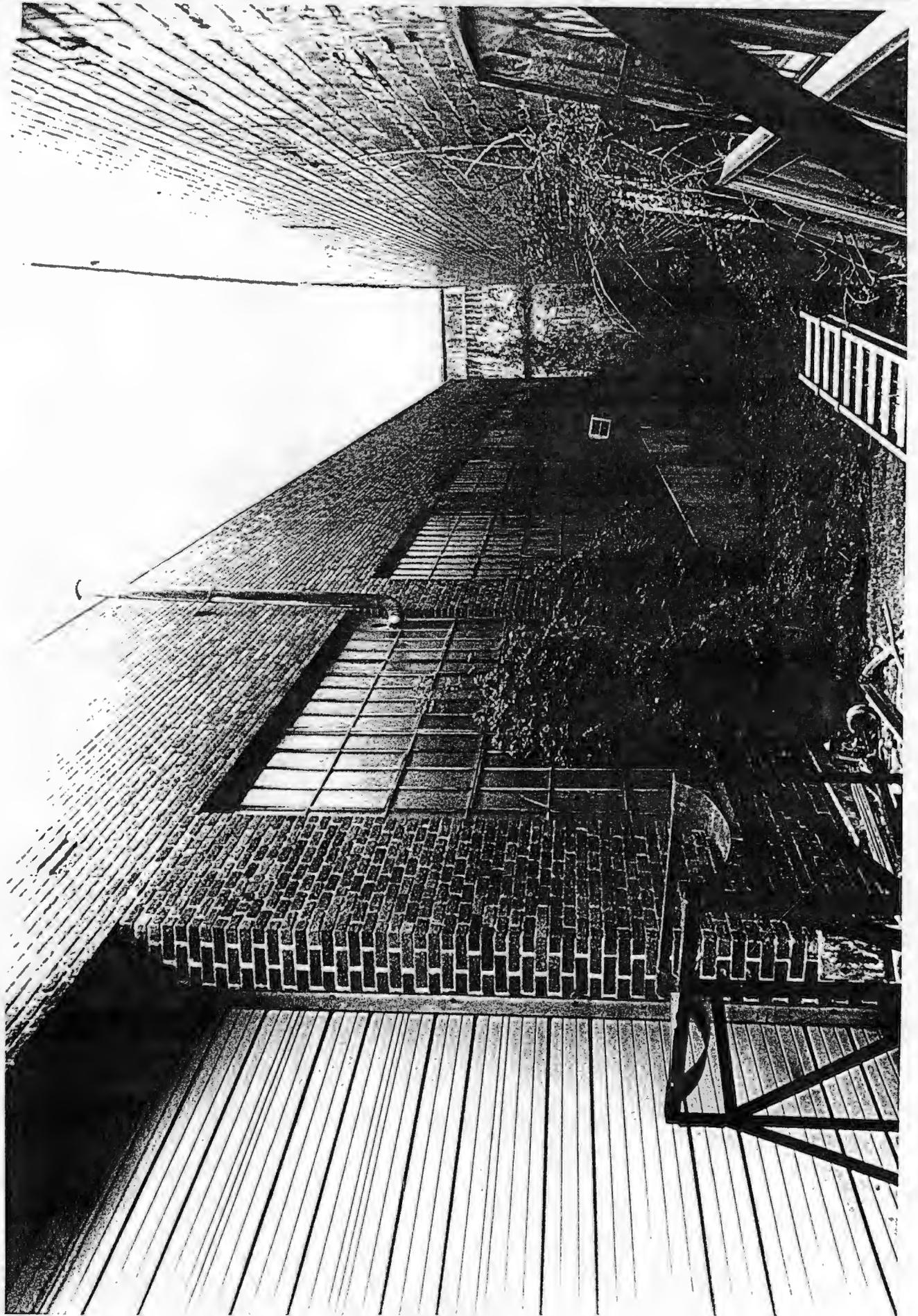


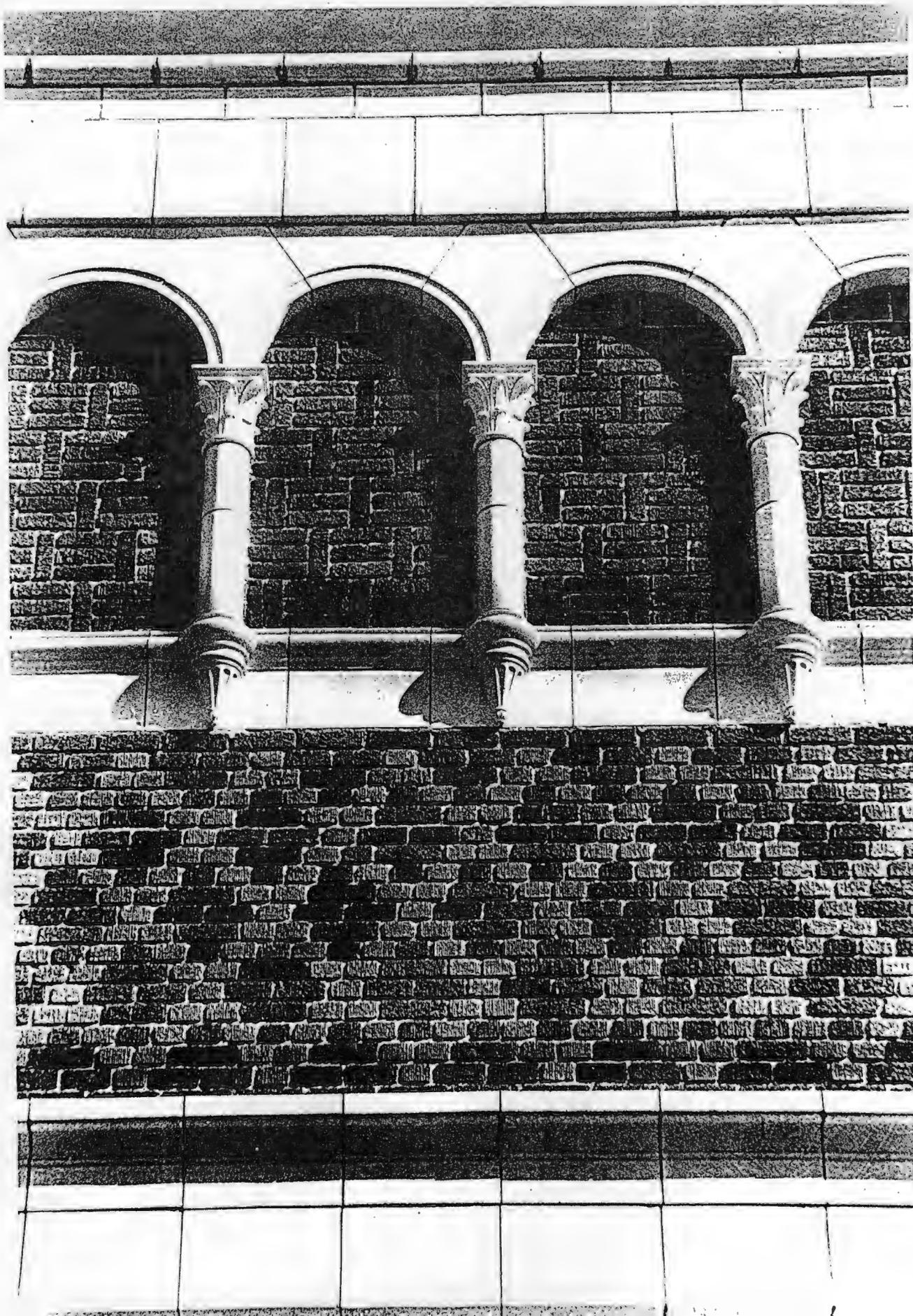


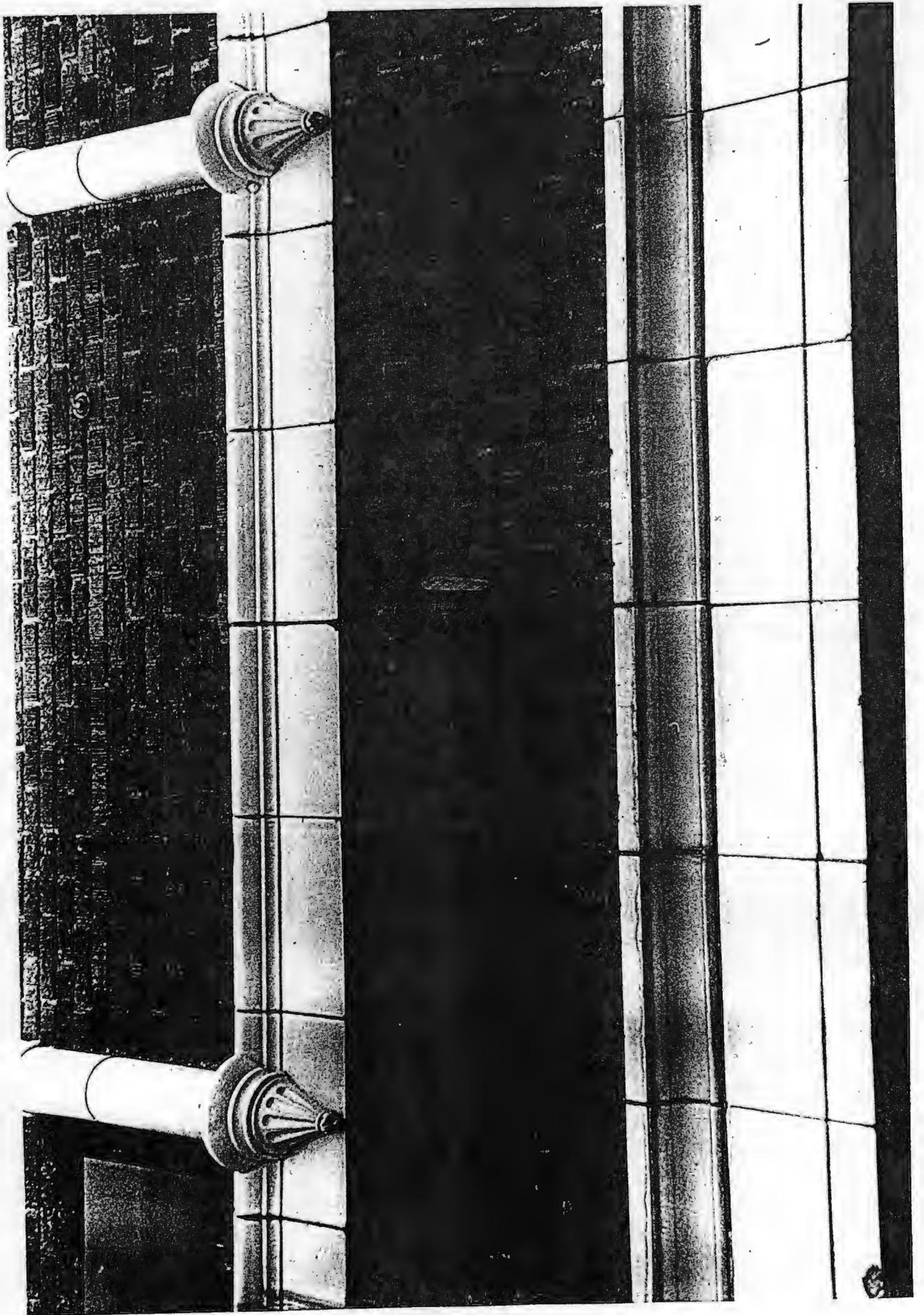


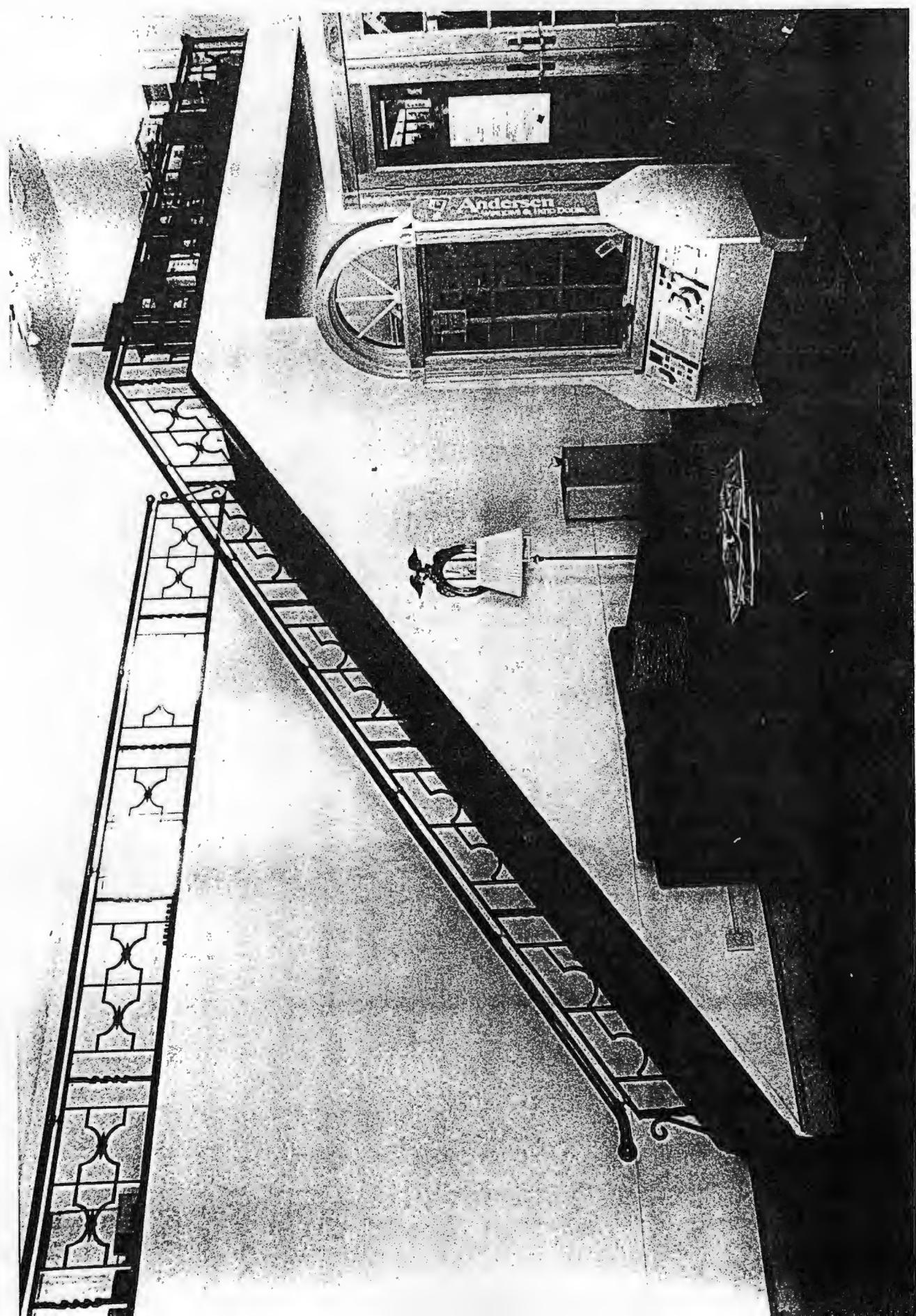


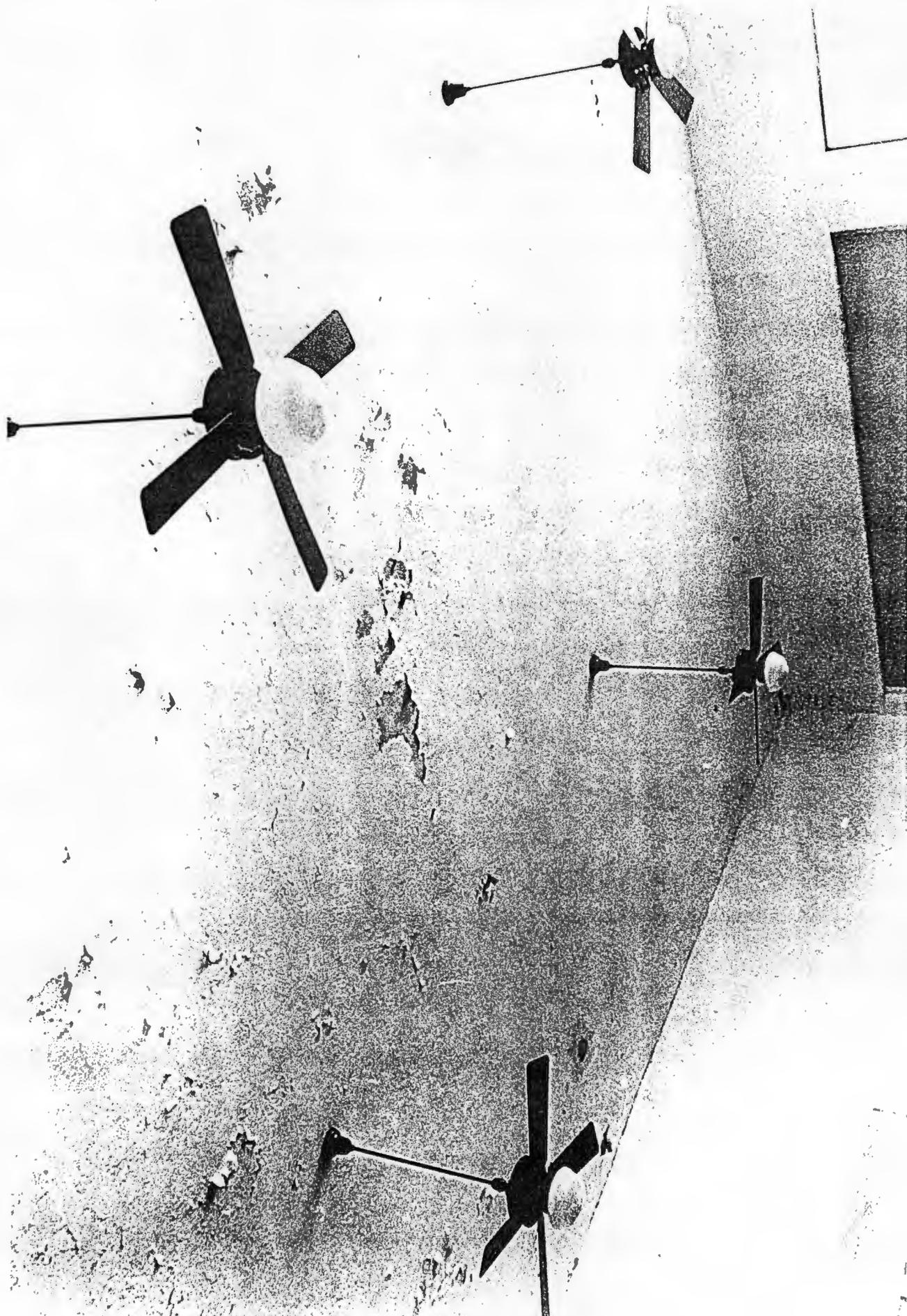


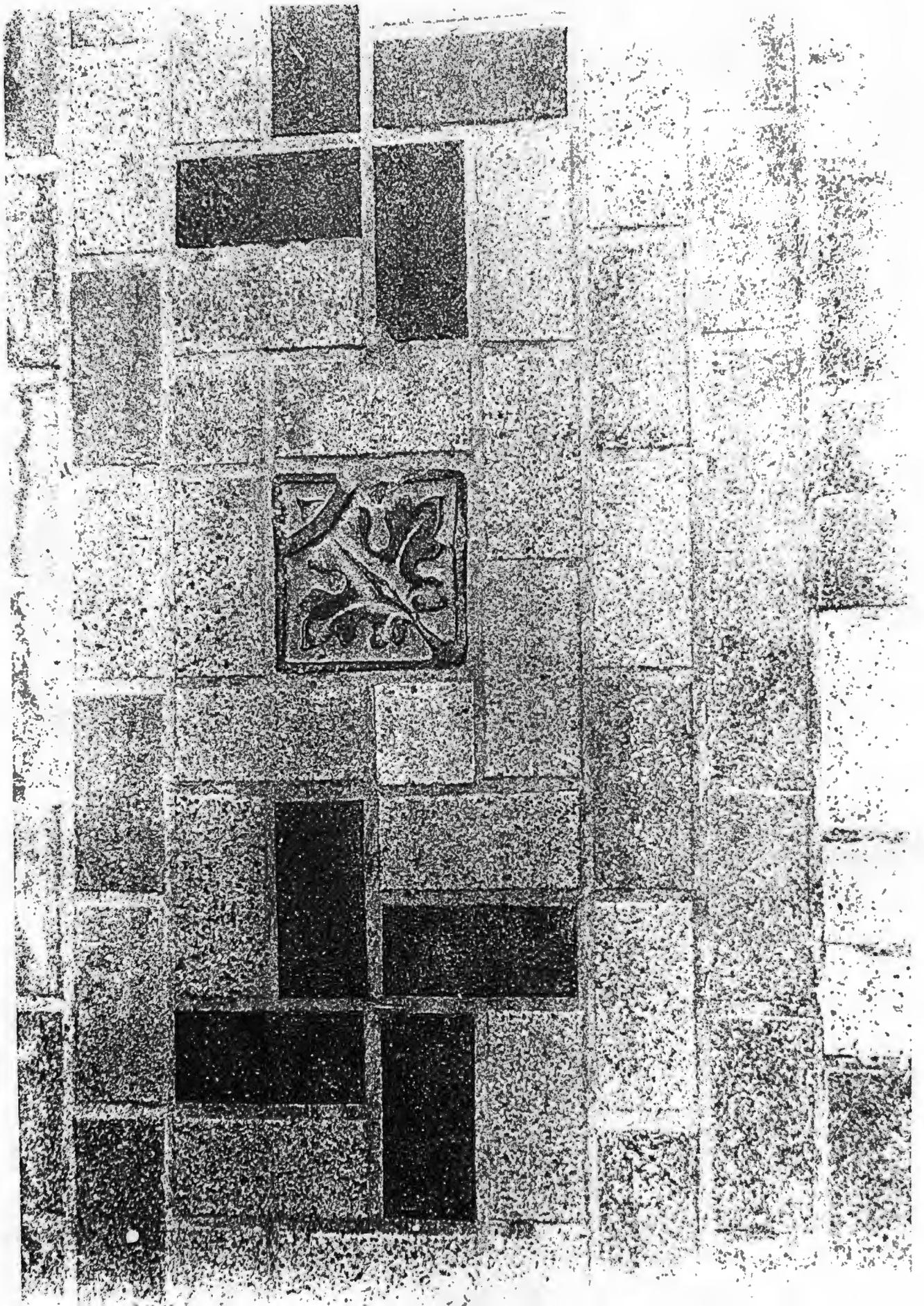


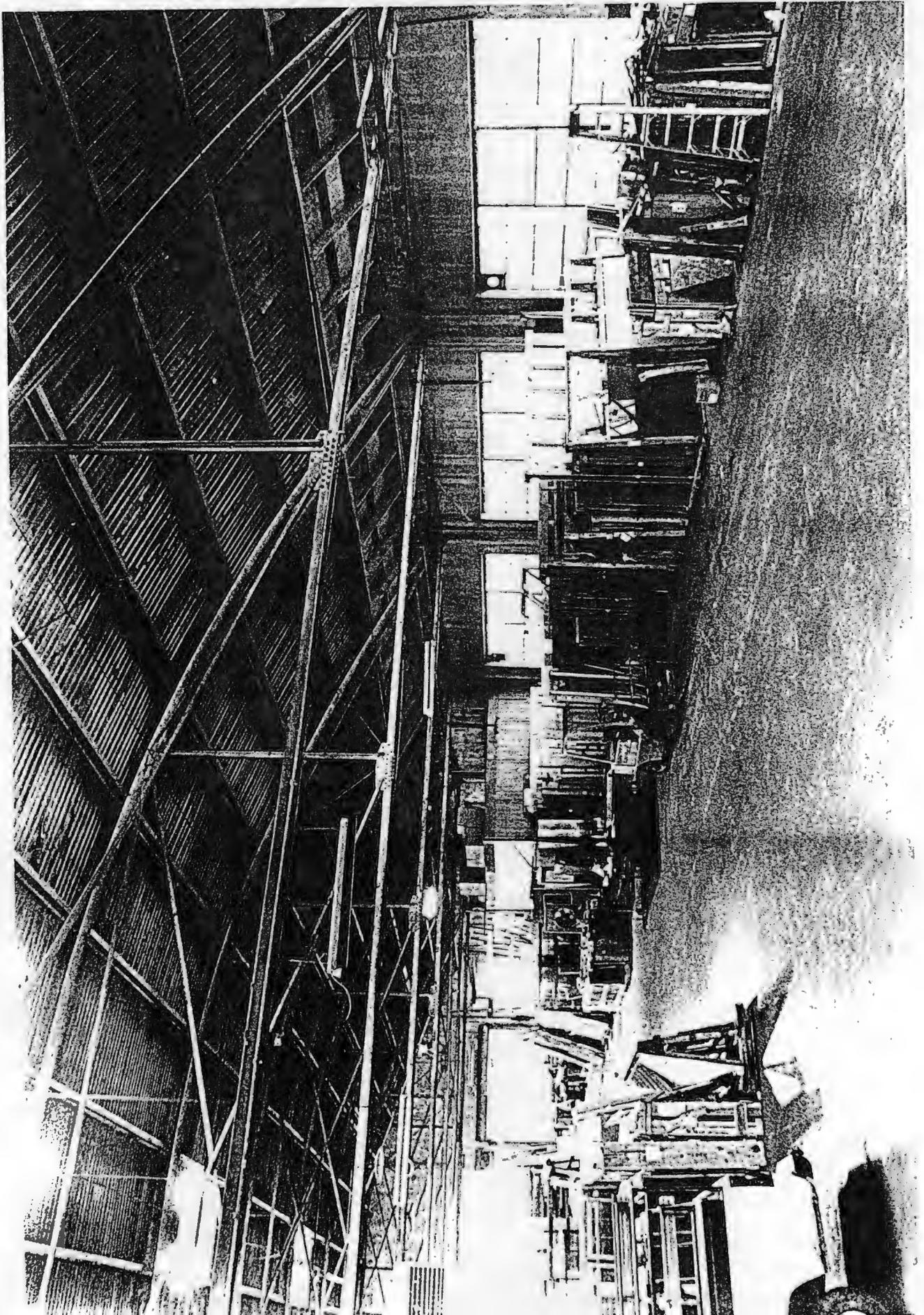












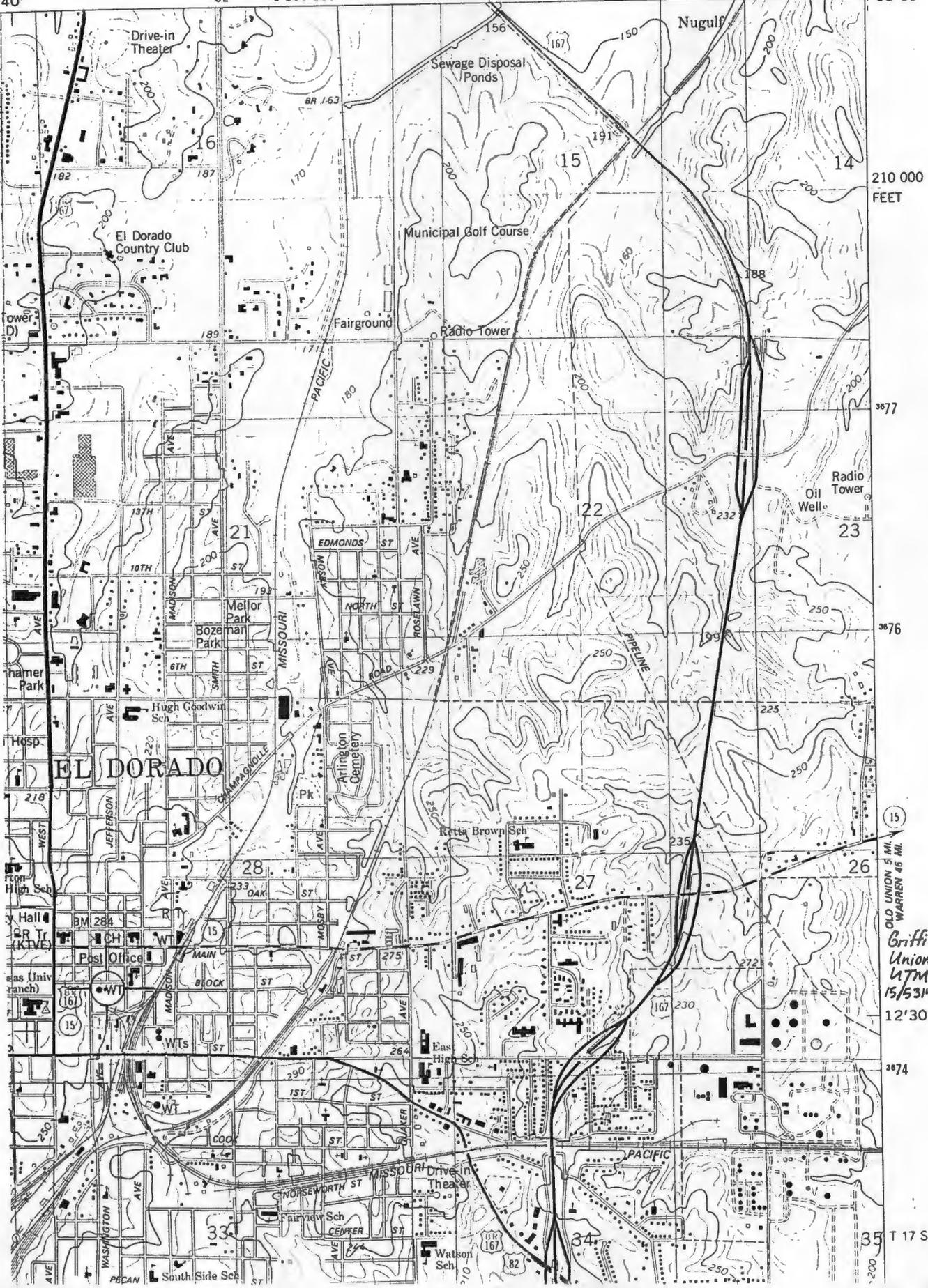


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