

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Block Realty Building

Other names/site number: Roy Beard Building, Site #PU4550

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 723 W. Markham Street

City or town: Little Rock State: Arkansas County: Pulaski

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

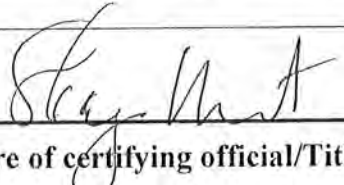
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local
Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B X C D

	<u>10-11-18</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____	_____
Signature of commenting official:	Date
_____	_____
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
- ___ determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ 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

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District

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Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Office Building

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Office Building

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: International Style, Miesian

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Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: GLASS, METAL, CONCRETE.

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Block Realty Building is a two-story Mid-Century Modern Style commercial office building located at the southeast corner of W. Markham and State streets. The present day .52-acres comprises 723 W. Markham, where the building is located, and two southern lots formerly known as 718 and 720 W. 2nd Streets. The first-floor exterior features full glazing windows and spandrel glass that covers privacy areas such as restrooms and storage areas. The second floor features exposed aggregate tilt-up concrete panels. The building was designed by Gene Levy of present-day Cromwell Architects Engineers¹ in 1964 in the Mid-Century Modern style with Miesian influences. A concrete-block building used for storage is located in the upper parking lot near the eastern property line. It is uncertain when it was built. This building is non-contributing. This property has maintained a high degree of integrity from its construction in 1965. There has been one addition on the first floor where the south façade has an area filled under the soffit. The Corten² steel I-beams were painted sometime between the late 1990s to the early 2000s.

Narrative Description

Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Block Realty Building is a two-story office building that is square in plan. The exterior of the building has four façades which are very similar with slight differences on each. Four Corten steel I-beams extend the height of the building on each façade supporting the structure. In his interview, Levy stressed the importance of this type of steel I-beam: "Corten steel was developed

¹ The firm was known as Ginocchio, Cromwell, Carter, & Neyland in 1964.

² In 1964, the steel may have been known as CorTen. Today, it is known as Corten according to www.corten.com. Therefore, the name *Corten* will be used in the nomination.

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for railroad car wheels. They'd paint them, they rusted but they didn't ever deteriorate because the rust creates a patina on the steel that preserves it forever almost."³

The I-beams are not placed at the corner of the building, they are inset from the corner of the building. The beams were painted teal in the late 1990s or early 2000s which upset Levy very much. The façade on the first floor of the original construction was continuous glass, either plate glass or spandrel glass with two doors, one on the north and one on the south side.

On the exterior of the second floor, between each pair of Corten I-beams, there are two cast-concrete white rock aggregate panels. On each corner of the building, there is one concrete panel. The corner of the building cantilevers from the I-beams. There is a metal trim piece at the top of the panels that is continuous all the way around the building. At the bottom of the concrete panels, there is a metal trim piece on the base of the panel. The concrete panels are attached to the Corten I-beams by four to five inches of steel. The original construction allowed vehicles to park partially under the soffit areas on the west, east and south sides.

Front/North façade (W. Markham)

The first floor features a centered, double aluminum storefront door. The remainder of the first-floor façade has the original plate-glass windows design. Spandrel glass conceals the bathroom and closet areas.

There is a small cast-concrete bulkhead with a stucco finish underneath the windows approximately twelve inches in height painted white.

The second floor features the arrangement of Corten steel I-beams with exposed aggregate concrete panels. There are no openings on the second floor of the north façade. Historically, the Block Realty Co. sign was centered on this façade mounted into the concrete panels. Today, the City of Little Rock Planning and Development sign is in the same location.

There are five recessed soffit lights on the north façade of the building for a total of thirteen soffit lights.

Side/East façade (Gaines Street)

It is almost identical to the west façade except for the enclosed addition on the south wall. There are two exterior glass doors: an original closet and an office created in the southeast corner of the building when the south wall soffit was enclosed.

There are four recessed soffit lights on the east façade of the building for a total of thirteen soffit lights.

³ Gene Levy, interview with Nancy Tell-Hall, March 7, 2018, 1300 E. 6th Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. Audio file, ©The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.

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Rear/South façade (W. 2nd Street)

The south façade has seen the most modifications since construction. The 1963 plans show a vault located on the first-floor's original south wall. This area, under the soffit on the south façade, was enclosed for additional office space and is faced with a dark gray/black brick veneer.

The addition resulted in the first floor being rectangular in plan. The east and west sides of the addition continue Levy's plate glass windows motif. After the addition, vehicles were no longer able to park partially under the building.

The south wall has four Corten steel I-beams and concrete white rock aggregate panels similar to the north facade. In the center of the second floor, a metal storefront door with a sidelight connects with the precast bridge that leads to the upper parking lot area.

There is a metal awning on the second floor of the south façade near the western edge for fresh air intake for the boiler that is not seen in the 1965 photos.

On the south side of the building, there are two scuppers, one on the east side of the south wall and one on the west side of the south wall. Both are centered at the meeting point of the two concrete panels.

West façade (State Street)

The West façade is almost identical to the north façade on the first and second floor but without the entry doors. The addition to the back of the building continued the plate glass window motif. The second-floor overhang allows partial parking of vehicles under the overhang.

There are no openings on the second floor of the west façade. Historically, the Block Realty Co. sign was at the north end of this façade mounted into the concrete panels. There is no signage on this side of the building currently.

There are four recessed soffit lights on the west façade of the building for a total of thirteen soffit lights.

SITE FEATURES

The west and south side of site has a retaining wall in an L-shape to create more parking adjacent to the first floor.

A precast concrete bridge connects the second floor to the upper parking area on the south side of the site.

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A small concrete-block storage building is located in the center of the site on the upper parking lot level at the junction of the retaining wall and the bridge.

In front of the building, there are two large planter beds that are raised on the street side. Each planter bed has cast-concrete coping and the walls of the planters have stucco exteriors. The original plans do show six planters on Markham Street and there are small planting beds with shrubbery between the parking spaces and the street. Upstairs, there are plantings in the parking lot. These are not seen on the original plans.

The sidewalks and the walkways around the building have a pattern of smooth finished concrete and washed aggregate concrete that is brown river rock small aggregate.

INTERIOR

The building's entrance lobby, accessed from a glass door on the north side of the building (W. Markham), features a men's and women's bathroom and a handicapped accessible bathroom. The elevator and the stairway door to the second floor are located here. A second glass door separates the entrance lobby from the reception area. There are four corridors surrounding the reception area. In 1965, there was a long corridor that led straight through to the backdoor. The 1988 renovations placed additional offices and rooms in the middle of the floorplan which turned the one long corridor into shorter north and south corridors. These middle rooms, now behind the reception area, are currently the copier room, storage and supplies rooms, and an archive room. In the north corridor, the electrical and cable system of the original elevator are located beneath a trapdoor on the floor. Above the trapdoor, there is a work area.

The interior on the west side of the building has five offices.

The interior on the south side of building features a graphics room in the southwest corner where a nine-foot vault was located in 1965. There is a backdoor a kitchenette, and a storage room.

On the east side of the building's interior, there are five offices. Director Jamie Collins' office, on the southeast corner of the building, has a conference room attached to it.

In 1963, on the east side of the second floor, twenty-five offices were designed for Block Realty real estate agents. Twenty of these offices had built-in, double desk with a file drawer between them.⁴ All of the agent offices, with the exception of one, was located on the east side of the building. Raymond, Samuel, and Lewis Block occupied the offices on the west side of the building.

The original floorplan shows the middle portion of the second floor as a lounge and a meeting place. Architect Gene Levy recalled that, as evidenced on Sheet D-2 of the 1963 original plans, there were Pella folding doors that allowed the area north of the Lounge to be turned into 4

⁴ Harris Interview, January 31, 2018.

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individual rooms or 2 large rooms. He remembered that Raymond Block, Sr. held office meetings there⁵ and Muskie Harris recalled Christmas parties being held there.⁶

Currently, the Zoning reception desk, file cabinets, a work area, and an office are located along the interior second floor north wall.

The east interior wall consists of one conference room, one office, a work area and a series of desk for the zoning agents.

The south wall has a conference room, a file room, the back door that permits access to the concrete bridge leading to the parking lot, a copy room, and the mechanical room.

The west interior wall has a large work area for additional zoning agents, and four offices.

The middle area of the second floor contains the Lounge, three bathrooms, two offices, and supplies are kept here. The largest part of this area contains the Zoning/Permit desk. This desk has heavy public contact on a daily basis.

The second floor has vinyl tiled floors; the first floor has vinyl tiled hallways and carpet in the offices. The bathrooms have mosaic ceramic tile floors.

INTEGRITY

The Block Realty Building has maintained its exterior integrity from the time of its construction despite being renovated in 1988. The exterior reflects the initial design of Gene Levy with the exception of the south wall. The interior underwent a major renovation in 1988 yet still has the original elevator and three offices occupied by the Block brothers from 1965. With respect to the interior, the first floor of the building changed greatly during the renovation of the building for city offices. When constructed, the first floor had a central hallway that led from the front door to the back door, and this circulation space no longer exists. The central area of the building on the first floor now contains the reception area and waiting room along with a couple of offices and a large conference room. The circulation of the first floor of the building currently works in a square with offices around the perimeter of the square and the conference room and other spaces in the center of the square. Some of the offices around the exterior of the square are original to the construction of the building, including the Block brothers' offices. The building originally had two large office spaces, one on the east side and one on the west side of the building, and both of these spaces no longer exist, having been remodeled to accommodate smaller offices and the new hallways.

The second floor of the building also underwent changes during the renovations, but the changes weren't as great as on the first floor. As constructed, the second floor had hallways that circled

⁵ Gene Levy, interview with Nancy Tell-Hall, April 18, 2018, at his home. Audio file, ©The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.

⁶ Harris Interview, January 31, 2018.

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almost the entire perimeter of the second floor. Offices lined these halls with smaller offices on the west side of the buildings and larger offices on the east side. These offices were for the company's realtors. The central part of the building had a lounge and other larger rooms and the restrooms. Today, the circulation pattern remains the same, but the size of the offices has been altered to accommodate the needs of city employees. The central spaces of the second floor, with the exception of the restrooms, have changed, however, to accommodate additional offices.

As a result, the most important spaces of the first floor, the Block offices, still exist even though the rest of the first floor has changed dramatically. On the second floor, the rhythm of offices that were used by the individual realtors has remained, although the size and number of the offices has changed. The second floor also retains more of its circulation pattern than the first floor does.

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.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. 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.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery

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- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1965

Significant Dates

1965

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Gene (Eugene) Levy, Architect

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Block Realty Building, located at 723 W. Markham Street in downtown Little Rock, Arkansas, constructed in 1965, is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** with **local significance** for its importance as an excellent example of the Mid-Century Modern Style by noted Arkansas architect Gene Levy. Built in 1965, and designed by Gene Levy, the Block Realty Building is one of only a few buildings in the state of Arkansas to feature a completely windowless second story surrounding by tilt-up, concrete panels set atop a smaller glass box designed first floor. In addition, the design of the Block Realty Building illustrates some of the shifts in commercial and office design that occurred after World War II. Prior to World War II, commercial architecture used elements and motifs from the decorative pre-war revival styles. However, after the War, these were being pushed to the side by more functional and livable designs. This post-World-War-II architecture moved away from an “over-decorative eclecticism to a less self-conscious expression.” Expression, rather, was manifest through window placement and design, placement of a building on the site, and also through interior space arrangement.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance).

HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

Settlement in present day Pulaski County, Arkansas, began less than ten years after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. A community developed on the north bank of the Arkansas River across from the landmark known as “point of rock” and “the Little Rock.” Fifteen years later, Pulaski County was created. Between 1860 and 1870, Little Rock experienced an increase of 232%,⁷ prompting the growth of ever-increasing needs for housing.

By November 1889, the site of the Block Realty Building had the address of 721 W. Markham. The dwelling at the location could have been the Gordon Peay House. Mr. Peay opened Peay’s Hotel at Markham and Scott streets in the 1880s and appeared to have lived at the house with his family.

In 1929, physician James H. Scroggin owned the property and opened a sanitorium there. Scroggin’s Sanitorium, later Scroggin’s Hospital, remained on the property until around 1943. The Sanborn Fire Maps of 1939-1950 then showed the structure as a rooming house.

⁷ *Booming Cities Decade-to-Decade, 1830-2010*, <https://www.census.gov/dataviz/visualizations/017/508.php>, accessed March 30, 2018.

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The building's location at the corner of W. Markham and State streets was crucial to its longevity. By 1917, in addition to being in such close proximity to the Arkansas State House, a trolley system ran down W. Markham to the Union Depot and there were two bridges connecting North Little Rock to Little Rock.

In 1885, Benjamin J. Bartlett may have started his architectural firm of the same name because of the increased demand for housing that the growth in Little Rock brought about, and Mr. Bartlett designed a number of buildings including the Arkansas Deaf Mute Institute and the Arkansas Insane Asylum. In 1886, Benjamin J. Bartlett hired seventeen-year-old Charles L. Thompson as a draftsman and by 1888, the firm was known as Bartlett and Thompson. In 1890, Bartlett turned the practice over to Thompson and relocated to Rosedale, Mississippi, to design a new courthouse there. Thompson's firm went on to design sixteen courthouses, including the Washington County Courthouse in Fayetteville (Arkansas) and Little Rock City Hall at 500 West Markham street.⁸

Thompson had a series of partners including Fred Rickon, who was with him from 1891 to 1897. In 1916, Thomas Harding, Sr., became a partner in the firm and it was known as Thompson and Harding from 1916 to 1925. Under this partnership, the Federal Reserve Bank in downtown Little Rock and the Markham Street Central Fire Station at 520 West Markham street were designed. In 1919, the firm of Thompson and Harding merged with Ginocchio and Sanders and formed Thompson, Sanders, and Ginocchio until Thompson's retirement in 1938. From 1890 to 1938, Charles L. Thompson headed one of the most influential architectural firms in Arkansas. Part of his success was rooted in his firm's ability, under various partners, to design buildings in popular styles even as the styles changed.⁹

Before Thompson and Sanders' retirements, Thompson's daughter Henrietta "Retta" Thompson married a young architect by the name of Edwin Cromwell. By the time both of the firm's partners retired, Cromwell had practiced his skills with George Wittenberg and Lawson Delony. In 1941, Frank Ginocchio, senior partner at Thompson, Sanders, and Ginocchio, offered Cromwell a full partnership position at his father-in-law's firm. The firm, known as Ginocchio and Cromwell, went on to design many housing encampments, airports, and munitions facilities after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. After the war, the firm went on to design many buildings in Arkansas including the Arkansas Arts Center in 1959 and the Little Rock Regional Airport in 1967.¹⁰

Edwin Cromwell had three daughters. One of them, Trudie, married local architect Gene (Eugene) Levy. Mr. Levy began his career at Ginocchio, Cromwell, Carter & Neyland, Inc., in 1962 as an apprentice architect. In 1963, Ray Block, Sr., asked him to design a building to be located at 723 W. Markham Street. It would be Levy's first of many buildings in Pulaski County, Arkansas. He went on to become a partner in 1974 and the firm's name became Cromwell,

⁸ Charles Witsell, Gordon Wittenberg, and Marylyn Jackson Parins. *Architects of Little Rock: 1833-1950*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014, 37-39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 51-55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 111-114.

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Neyland, Truemper, Levy & Gatchell, Inc.¹¹ Currently, Cromwell Architects Engineers, as it is known today, is the oldest existing architectural firm west of the Mississippi River. After fifty-six years, Gene Levy retired on March 21, 2018, as Chairman Emeritus.¹² Although Gene Levy is still alive, he has retired and is no longer actively practicing architecture. He has officially retired, and no longer goes into the office, and furthermore, he is not listed on the staff of Cromwell Architects Engineers.

BLOCK REALTY

In 1923, Block Realty, Inc., was founded by brothers Raymond Block, Sr., Samuel and Lewis. The brothers were the descendants of two of the first Jewish settlers in Arkansas, Solomon and Mary (Levinson) Block. The Blocks (original name Bloch) were one of several prominent Jewish families that arrived in Camden (Ouachita County), Arkansas, in the 1840s. By the twentieth century, Solomon and Mary's descendants had moved to St. Louis, Dallas, and Little Rock.¹³

Family lore asserts that in the early 1920s, Ray Block, Sr., unsuccessfully tried to sell his house through a large realty company. After placing an advertisement in the newspaper, his house sold within one week.¹⁴ In 1929, Block Realty was located at 306 W. 3rd Street and by 1939, they relocated to 212 S. Spring Street. By 1956, the Block brothers built more one hundred homes per year and generated between \$10,000,000 to \$12,000,000 per year in sales volume. They built many subdivisions in Pulaski County including, but not limited to, the following:

<i>Little Rock</i>	<i>North Little Rock</i>	<i>Jacksonville</i>
Brickton Place	Better Homes Division	Oak View Subdivision
Cloverdale	Lasker's Second Addition	West Jacksonville Subdivision 1
East Palisades		
Grandview Addition		
Highland Park		
Pine Wood Hills		
Pinnacle Point		
Ridgecrest Manner		
Sherrill Heights		

At that time, they owned: Block Realty, Inc.; Block Rentals; Little Rock Builders, Inc.; Block Insurance; Block Mortgage Company; Block Builders, Inc., and The Junior Development Company.¹⁵

¹¹ Levy Interview, March 7, 2018.

¹² Gene Levy, interview with Nancy Tell-Hall, April 18, 2018, at his home. Audio file, ©The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.

¹³ Carolyn LeMaster Arkansas Jewish History Collection. BC.MSS.08.07.

¹⁴ *Block Realty-Baker House National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*, Section 8, Page 7, September 24, 2008.

¹⁵ "Block Organization Has Been Helping A Growing Little Rock for 34 Years," *Arkansas Gazette*, May 20, 1956.

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Block Realty contributed to the history of African Americans in Little Rock. Glenn Block, son of Ray Block, Jr., recalls his grandfather as being a staunch anti-segregationist who hated the idea of segregated restrooms. Glenn does not remember any segregated bathrooms in the new building. He does, however, remember them at the Spring Street building and recalls that his “grandfather would not have stomached that. It made him angry that (prior to 1964) Arkansas state laws required segregated bathrooms and drinking fountains.”¹⁶

The Block brothers’ commitment to civil liberties was not just verbal; Glenn and Kenneth “Muskie” Harris state the Blocks assisted Andrew Jeffries in becoming the first independent African-American realtor in Little Rock, perhaps in the state in Arkansas.¹⁷ This is remarkable as a March 2, 1965, *Arkansas Gazette* real estate advertisement demonstrated the segregation lists practices of that era: there is a section titled “Colored Property, Sale.” The advertisement lists Jeffries Realty and Block Realty as just a few realtors who offered homes for sale to African-American buyers due “to racial covenants guided originally by the terms of the Federal Housing Administration loans.”¹⁸

Charles Jordan became the second African-American realtor employed by the company and he went on to own Charles Jordan Construction Company in Little Rock for 33 years.¹⁹ Muskie Harris became the third when he was hired by J.C. Whisnant in the late 1970s. He specifically recalled Abe Rosen, President of Block Mortgage Company, helping African Americans become homeowners. He knew Block Realty bought homes with the intention of selling them to those who could not obtain home loans because of “redlining.”²⁰ This standard practice by local banks denied loans to African-American families. Harris remembers Block Realty was very popular with African Americans.²¹

HISTORY OF THE BLOCK REALTY BUILDING

Like the rest of the country, architecture took a different direction in Arkansas and in Little Rock after World War II. The applied ornamentation that was prevalent prior to the War was replaced with a simplicity in ornament in architecture. Styles such as Mid-Century Modern and the International style began to appear in Little Rock, both in residential and commercial buildings. The International style was best manifested in Little Rock in the Tower Building (NR-listed September 23, 2011) and the National Old Line Building.

¹⁶ Glenn Block, text message to Nancy Tell-Hall, April 9, 2018.

¹⁷ Andrew Jeffries Obituary, <https://www.zoominfo.com/p/Andrew-Jeffries/465525511>, accessed March 25, 2018.

¹⁸ How the Federal Government Built White Suburbia,” *City Lab*, Kriston Capps, September 2, 2015, Accessed at https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/09/how-the-federal-government-built-white-suburbia/403321/?utm_source=nl_link6_041318&silverid=Mzc0MjUxNzQ5MzU4S0 on April 14, 2018.

¹⁹ Charles Jordan Obituary and advertisement, <http://m.arkansasonline.com/obituaries/2017/jun/07/charles-jordan-2017-06-07/> and http://woodlandsedge.com/home-builders-little-rock_5091_ct.aspx, both accessed March 25, 2018.

²⁰ *Urban Renewal*, <https://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/the-roots-of-little-rock-s-segregated-neighborhoods/Content?oid=3383298>, accessed March 28, 2018.

²¹ Kenneth “Muskie” Harris, interview with Nancy Tell-Hall, January 31, 2018, 723. W. Markham, Little Rock, Arkansas. Audio file, ©Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

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Some of the Mid-Century Modern buildings that were built in Little Rock during the 1950s and 1960s were designed in such a way that their structure was exposed on the outside of the building. The first architect to employ this practice in Little Rock was Warren Segraves. Although most of his work was constructed in Northwest Arkansas, since his practice was in Fayetteville, Segraves also designed two buildings in Little Rock. Segraves' first building built in Little Rock, the Cazort-Johnson Clinic on the UAMS campus at the corner of Capitol Avenue and Cedar Street, was built in 1958. Although the clinic was a relatively small building, it employed a steel frame – a signature feature of much of Segraves' work – much of which was visible on the outside of the building. Segraves also employed this method of construction for the second building that he designed in Little Rock, which was the Hundley Clinic at 1200 West Capitol Avenue built in 1963. Although it has been altered with the construction of a gable-on-hip roof, the building also has the exposed steel frame that Segraves was noted for.²²

However, it wasn't just Segraves that employed an exposed steel frame in his Mid-Century Modern work in Little Rock. Gene Levy of Cromwell Architects employed it as well, most notably with the Block Realty Building, built just a couple of years after the Hundley Clinic. His use of the exposed structure came from two sources in his education and training. First, Levy interned at the architecture firm of Erhart, Eichenbaum, Rauch, and Blass, and the architect Price Roark at the firm used an exposed steel structure in several of his designs, notably for the buildings for the Employment Security Division that were built across the state. Second, Levy's mentor, Dietrich Neyland, also employed the characteristic of an exposed structure in several of his buildings, most notably the KTHV Building at 720 South Izard in Little Rock and the Museum of Automobiles Building near Winrock on Petit Jean Mountain.

The 1963 original plans for the building are entitled "An Office Building For Pulaski Federal Savings & Loan Association." The facts surrounding the purchasing of the lot and the erection of the Block Realty building are complex as evidenced below.

January 19, 1959, Chairman of the Board W. P. Gulley Letter to Directors²³:

"In connection with our new building, you will be interested in a call from Raymond Block a few days ago to the effect that since they had an opportunity to buy some other property now they "might" be interested in selling us their present location for about \$200,000.00."

March 20, 1959, Chairman of the Board W. P. Gulley Letter to Directors:

"The final plans for our new building at Third and Spring should be completed and ready to release to the contractors for bids before April 1st. Prints of these plans will be at our meeting Tuesday for your perusal and comment."

²² Architectural surveys of the Cazort-Johnson Clinic (PU8843) and the Hundley Clinic (PU8844) in the files of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 2015.

²³ Savers Federal Savings and Loan Association Collection, 1906 – 1983, LR.MS.0106, Box 5, Item 10, Minutes: Monthly Reports of the Pulaski Federal Directors, 1958–1965.

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April 10, 1959, Chairman of the Board W. P. Gulley Letter to Directors:

“Plans and specifications for our new building...are in the hands of the contractors.”

October 8, 1963 Minutes:

Raymond Block, Sr. requested \$225,000.00 for the 90' x 140' plot located north of Pulaski Federal Savings and Loan Association's (PFS) headquarters located at 400 W. 3rd Street. Even though \$225,000.00 was set aside for the property, PFS countered his request by offering property at Cantrell Road between Grant and Pierce Streets in trade for the plot.

February 18, 1964 Minutes:

PFS was still in negotiation with Mr. Block.

March 17, 1964 Minutes:

Block Realty “found a desirable [location] at the southeast corner of Markham and State Streets.” At Raymond Block, Sr.'s request, PFS made an offer to the owner, Mr. H. Tyndall Dickinson, to buy three lots for \$58,750.00, which he accepted on March 9, 1964. “[A] building would be erected” on the property and “then traded for the Block property which adjoins the Association's home office building to the north.”

April 21, 1964 Minutes:

“...a fourth lot adjoining the site...was now being purchased...at the request of the officials of the realty company.” The fourth lot, located at 718 W. 2nd Street, was situated to the south of the new Block Realty building. The property, purchased from Mr. Arnold Duffey, for the amount of \$25,825.00 through Block-Meeks Mortgage Company.²⁴

May 15, 1964 Minutes:

The agreement was signed and completed.²⁵

According to Levy, Raymond Block, Sr., had three clear-cut concepts in mind for the building:

1. The offices for the real estate sales force had to be big enough for two realtors. He did not want realtors to become too comfortable; he wanted them to have a tabletop desk, a chair, and drawers for paperwork. Muskie Harris, the third African-American realtor at Block Realty, remembers the offices being as small as Mr. Levy remembers them in his 2018 interview.²⁶

²⁴ Block-Meeks Realty Company, located at 623 S. Broadway Street, Little Rock, was founded in 1955 by Mark J. Block (Raymond Sr.'s son) and William R. Meeks, Jr.

²⁵ No record of how much the building actually cost in the Savers Collection.

²⁶ Kenneth “Muskie” Harris, telephone call with Nancy Tell-Hall, April 6, 2018, Little Rock, Arkansas.

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2. The space in the real estate office would have no windows because he did not want realtors looking at scenery, congregating, or socializing in any area of the office. Mr. Block, according to his grandson, Glenn,²⁷ believed the sales staff should be out in the field, selling real estate as much as possible. When asked if he would like windows in his office, Mr. Block refused, holding that his space should mirror those of the realtors.
3. The only special request Block had was he wanted his own light switch in his office, which Mr. Levy included.

The question of which floor would be which was settled by Levy when he suggested to Block that the mortgage company would have many visitors; therefore, easy entry, a lobby, and parking had to be taken into consideration. According to Levy, the lobby and the elevator on the north side for these reasons.

The pit elevator in the building was chosen because it was an underslung elevator, or an elevator where the machine room is located in the basement. The cables go down a hoistway, making a penthouse (for a machine house atop the building) unnecessary.

According to Mr. Levy, the second floor had to be larger than the first floor because of the space requirements for the realty company. This was Block's largest department. He decided to place this department on the second floor and cantilevered it about 10 feet to give enough room on the site to park cars under the soffits around the building.

When asked about the shape of the building, Levy himself states he asked himself, "how do you [place] a building on top [of another building?]"²⁸ He was a fan of Philip Johnson's glass box concept, or the idea of placing one glass box atop another, and he decided he would do it in that style. The fully glazed, recessed first floor and the larger second floor on top achieved Levy's vision.

The exterior of the second floor, heavy aggregate concrete panels in place of windows, are clear examples of a unique combination of mid-century modern architectural styles. Levy combined Mies van der Rohe's use of exposed structural steel and Le Corbusier's use of reinforced concrete to create the Structuralism and Brutalism styles the Block Realty Building is known for.

By October 1, 1964, the original plan sketches were complete and construction began. The first time the completed building officially appeared on a Sanborn Fire map was in the 1965 revised version of the 1889 map. Although the address was listed as 721 W. Markham, it is currently 723 W. Markham.

²⁷ Glenn Block, interview with Nancy Tell-Hall, February 20, 2018, 723. W. Markham, Little Rock, Arkansas. Audio file, ©Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.

²⁸ All quotes from Mr. Levy are from: Gene (Eugene) Pfeifer Levy, interview with Nancy Tell-Hall, March 7, 2018, 1300 E. 6th Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. Audio file, ©The Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.

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Block Realty, Inc. went on to become one of biggest realty companies in the state of Arkansas. However, by the mid-1980s, two federal pieces of legislation drastically changed the real estate market in Arkansas: the “Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act of 1980” and Public Law 97-320, entitled the “Garn-St Germain Depository Institutions Act of 1982.” The 1980 Act “completely eliminated state usury ceilings with regard to first mortgage residential real estate financing and provided federal ceilings for the interest chargeable on business and agricultural loans and loans made by insured banks, savings and loan associations, credit unions, and small business investment companies.”²⁹ Simply put, this act changed the way Block Mortgage and local banks extended money to perspective homebuyers. Section 1A under Title VIII of the 1982 Act, sometimes called the “Alternative Mortgage Transaction Parity Act of 1982,” established what is now as the *adjustable rate mortgage*. In essence, the federal government removed the “traditional fixed-rate, fixed-term transactions”³⁰ Block Mortgage had practiced since its inception in 1923. Some argue that these Acts preceded the savings and loan crisis of the late 1980s.

According to Muskie Harris, it did affect Block Realty.³¹ In July 1984, Independence Corporation of Batesville, Arkansas, which owned Independence Federal Savings and Loan Association (IFS),³² bought Block Realty. The next year, Block Realty merged eighty-five Little Rock sales associates, employees, and staff members into its new building at 3900 N. Rodney Parham Road.³³

In June 1986, Block Realty became an affiliate of Realty World. The name became Realty World-Block Realty and remained a subsidiary of IFS.³⁴ On February 17, 1989, IFS, along with its subsidiaries, was placed into government conservatorship and absorbed into the Worthen Bank and Trust family. After many acquisitions and name changes, it is now part of Bank of America in Arkansas.³⁵

In early 1987, City Manager Tom Dalton stated to the Little Rock Board of Directors that the purchase of the Block Building “would allow Little Rock city government to geographically consolidate its operations and expand parking.”³⁶ In accordance with his suggestion, the City of Little Rock purchased the land and building at 723 W. Markham. After extensive interior

²⁹ Lynn M. Ewing Jr. and Kendall R. Vickers, *Federal Pre-Emption of State Usury Laws Affecting Real Estate Financing*, Missouri Law Review, Vol. 47, Issue 2, Spring 1982, 172.
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³⁰ *Garn-St Germain Depository Institutions Act of 1982*,
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³¹ Harris Interview, January 31, 2018.

³² “McNaughton secures Realty World franchise,” Business Briefs, *Northwest Arkansas Times* (Fayetteville, AR), Sunday, November 9, 1986, <https://newspaperarchive.com/fayetteville-northwest-arkansas-times-nov-09-1986-p-25/>, accessed April 24, 2018.

³³ *Arkansas Gazette*, “Changing Business Column,” Sunday, December 1, 1985.

³⁴ *Arkansas Gazette*, “Block Realty Affiliated with Franchise Firm,” Sunday, June 29, 1986.

³⁵ <https://www.usbanklocations.com/independence-federal-savings-and-loan-association-31614.shtml>, accessed January 16, 2018.

³⁶ *Arkansas Gazette*, “Building Purchase is Recommended by LR City Manager,” March 12, 1987.

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renovation, the building opened in 1988 and City Planning and Development located there the same year, where it remains today.

The building was renamed in 1993. Resolution No. 8,997, adopted on September 7, 1993, by the Board of Directors of the City of Little Rock, renamed 723 W. Markham the Roy G. Beard, Jr. Building. Beard was a thirty-year city employee until his death on November 22, 1992. He served as the as the Chief Building Official for the city for twenty-six years and received the Award of Merit, the highest award for a non-architect from the American Institute of Architects in 1987. His father, City Collector Roy G. Beard, Sr., worked for the city of Little Rock from 1917 until his retirement on February 28, 1964.³⁷ When combined, the Beards years of service to the city totaled seventy-five years.

While there is a marker located at the front of the building indicating the name change, the locals still refer to the building as the Block Realty Building. Today, Levy considers the building innovative, especially in its use of the concrete tilt up panels. He stated in his interview that “the windowless precast, tilt up concrete panels have insulation on the inside of them and sheet rock inside of that...and the overhang over the glass areas make the building extremely energy efficient even when we weren’t even thinking about energy.”

Looking back, Gene Levy admits they “didn’t know it at the time that we were building such an energy efficient building but we did. We weren’t even thinking about energy efficiency. But as you look back on it, this building is about as energy efficient [an] envelope as you could put on a building and it doesn’t even have insulated glass on the first floor. But it didn’t need it because the glass is all sheltered by the overhangs and it doesn’t get direct sun which is your greatest problem, heating and cooling, cooling mainly, in Arkansas.”³⁸

When placed into the body of architect Gene Levy’s work, the Block Realty Building holds a special significance: it is the first office building designed by Mr. Levy who went on to design many of Little Rock’s buildings, including the spectacular Jackson T. Stephens Spine and Neurosciences Institute, featuring two six-story spines at its entrance,³⁹ located on the campus of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY

The design of the Block Realty Building illustrates some of the shifts that occurred in commercial and office design that occurred after World War II. Prior to World War II, commercial architecture used elements and motifs from the decorative pre-war revival styles. However, after the War, these were being pushed to the side by more functional and livable designs. This post-World-War-II architecture moved away from an “over-decorative eclecticism to a less self-conscious expression.” Expression, rather, was manifest through window placement and design, placement of a building on the site, and also through interior space arrangement.

³⁷ *Arkansas Gazette*, “Roy Beard, Sr. Retires After 46 Years of Public Service,” Wednesday, February 12, 1964.

³⁸ Levy interview, March 7, 2018.

³⁹ Levy Interview, April 18, 2018.

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The Block Realty Building clearly reflects the design trends that were impacting commercial architecture after World War II. The building lacks the applied ornamentation that was so often used prior to World War II, and uses window placement and a variety of materials to give visual interest and ornamentation. The use of the windows on the first floor indicated that it was the more public part of the building, and gave the employees and clients a more pleasant environment. The lack of windows on the second floor indicated that it was a space for employees, and also made it a space that encouraged the employees to be out of the office doing work in the field.

The use of the Mid-Century Modern style in Little Rock grew after World War II, and the Block Realty Building was a product of the increased use of the style. The design of the building, with the exposed structure on the outside illustrated a characteristic that was employed on a few other buildings in Little Rock by the noted Arkansas architect Warren Segraves. The structuralism and design philosophy employed by Levy in the design of the Block Realty Building also influenced his design for the American Foundation Life Building at 1020 West 4th Street in Little Rock, which was built in 1966. Like the Block Realty Building, the American Foundation Life Building employs a recessed, glass-enclosed first floor with parking underneath the overhang between the building's columns. Although the upper floors of the building employ glass rather than concrete and aggregate panels, the structuralist grid is very apparent in the design. Since the Block Realty Building illustrates the use of Mid-Century Modern characteristics, it is being nominated to the National Register with **local significance** under **Criterion C**.

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Williams, C. Fred. *Historic Little Rock: An Illustrated History.* San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2008.

Block Realty Building

Pulaski County, Arkansas

Name of Property

Witsell, Charles Jr. "Cromwell Architects Engineers, Inc." in *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*. <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3261>, accessed February 16, 2018.

Witsell, Charles, Gordon Wittenberg, and Marylyn Jackson Parins. *Architects of Little Rock: 1833-1950*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): PU4550

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre.

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

2. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

Block Realty Building

Pulaski County, Arkansas

Name of Property

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15 Easting: 566049 Northing: 3845440

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting: Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Old Parcel #R0080998.

Lots 1, 2, 3, of Block 135 of the original city of Little Rock.

West 2/3rds of Lots 4, 5, 6 of Block 135 of the original city of Little Rock.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This boundary includes all of the land historically associated with the Block Realty Building.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Ralph Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator

organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

street & number: 1100 North Street

city or town: Little Rock state: AR zip code: 72201

e-mail ralph.wilcox@arkansas.gov

telephone: 501-324-9787

date: May 11, 2018

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Block Realty Building

City or Vicinity: Little Rock

County: Pulaski County

State: Arkansas

Photographer: Ralph S. Wilcox

Date Photographed: May 8, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 14. North and west façades of the building, looking southeast.

2 of 14. North façade of the building, looking south.

Block Realty Building _____

Pulaski County, Arkansas _____

Name of Property

- 3 of 14 . West façade of the building, looking southeast.
- 4 of 14 . South and west façades of the building, looking northeast.
- 5 of 14 . South and east façades of the building, looking northwest.
- 6 of 14 . Detail of the steel beams and aggregate panels, looking west.
- 7 of 14 . East façade of the building, looking west.
- 8 of 14 . North and east façades of the building, looking southwest.
- 9 of 14 . Detail view of the northeast corner of the building, looking southwest.
- 10 of 14 . Main lobby of the building, looking south.
- 11 of 14 . Office in the northeast corner of the first floor of the building, looking northeast.
- 12 of 14 . Former office of Raymond Block in the northwest corner of the second floor, looking northwest.
- 13 of 14 . Typical hallway on the second floor of the building, looking south.
- 14 of 14 . Storage building to the south of the building, looking northeast.

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas



Figure 1: Main lobby of the Block Realty Building, looking south, 1965.

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas



Figure 2: Office in the northeast corner of the first floor of the Block Realty Building, looking northeast, 1965.

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas



Figure 3: North and west façades of the Block Realty Building, looking southeast, 1965.

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas

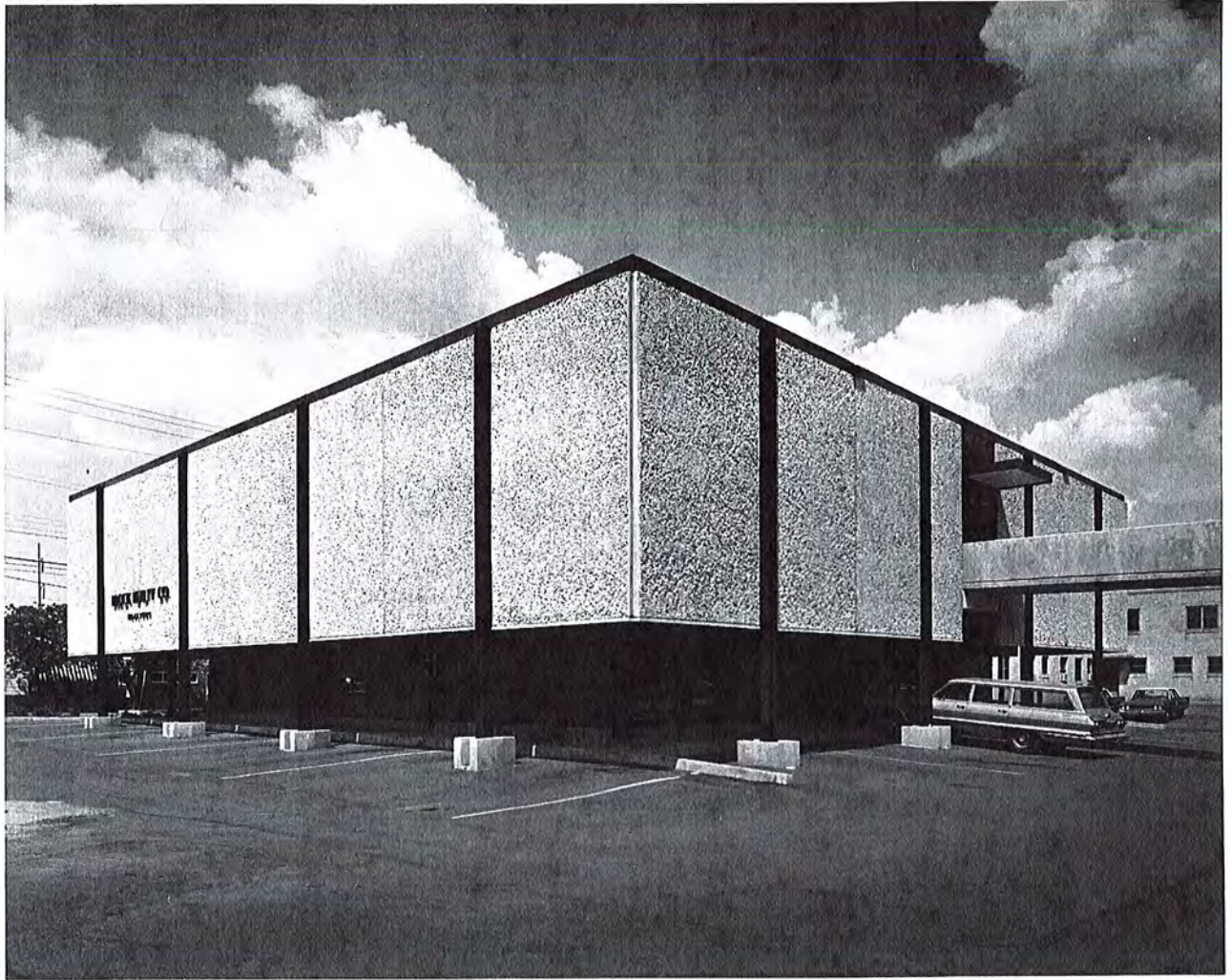
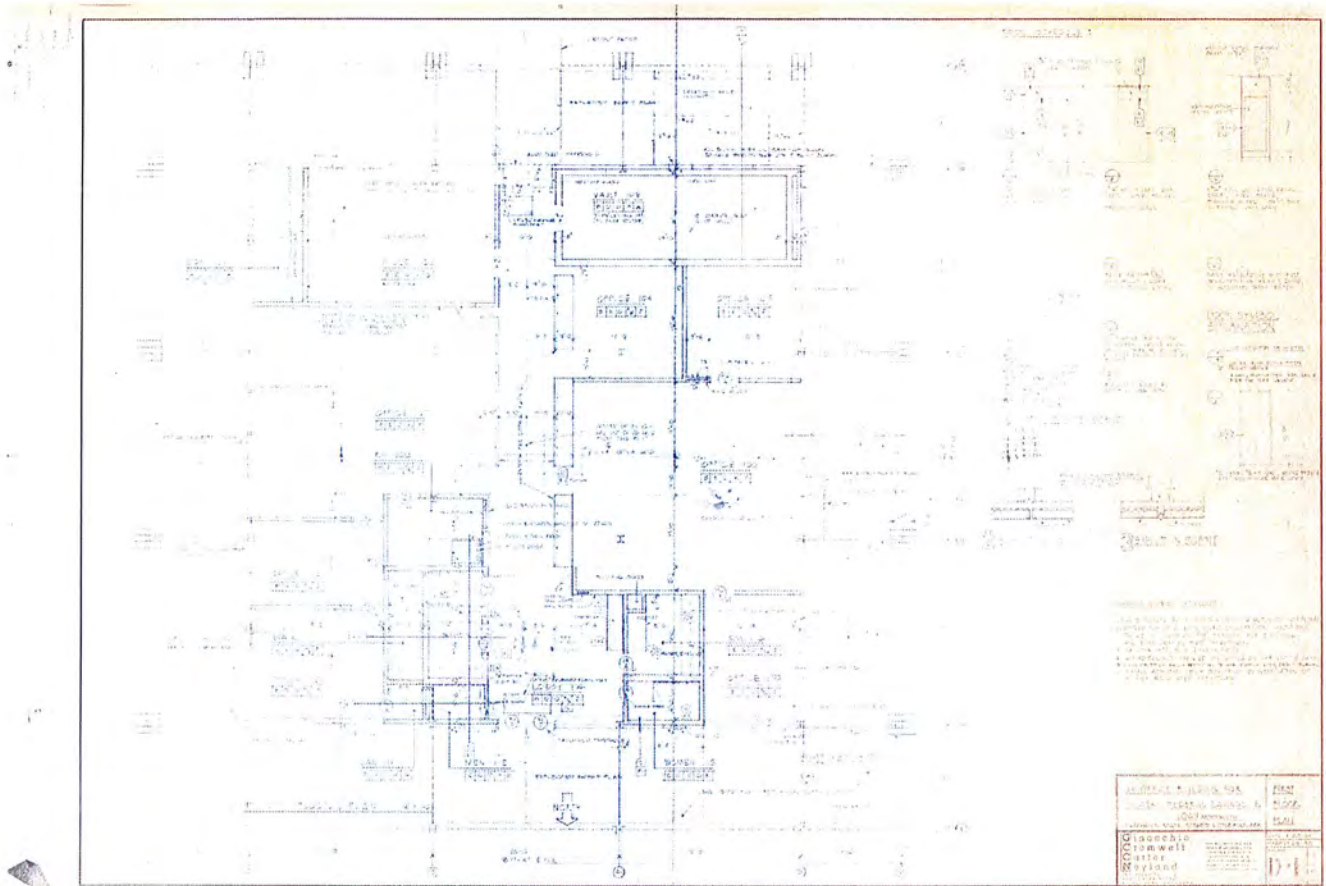


Figure 4: South and west façades of the Block Realty Building, looking northeast, 1965.

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas



Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas

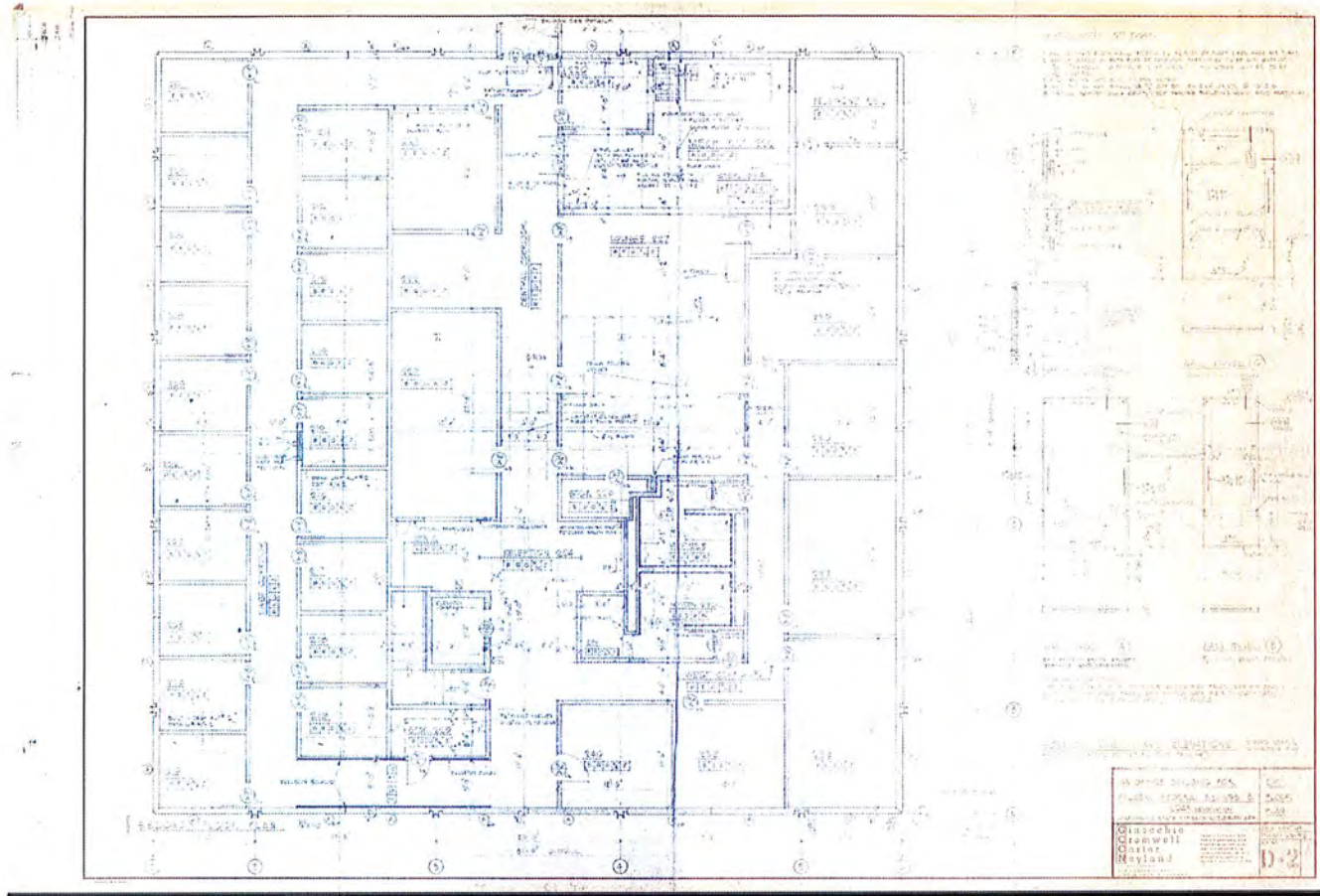


Figure 6: Second floor plan of the Block Realty Building, 1964.

Block Realty Building
Name of Property

Pulaski County, Arkansas

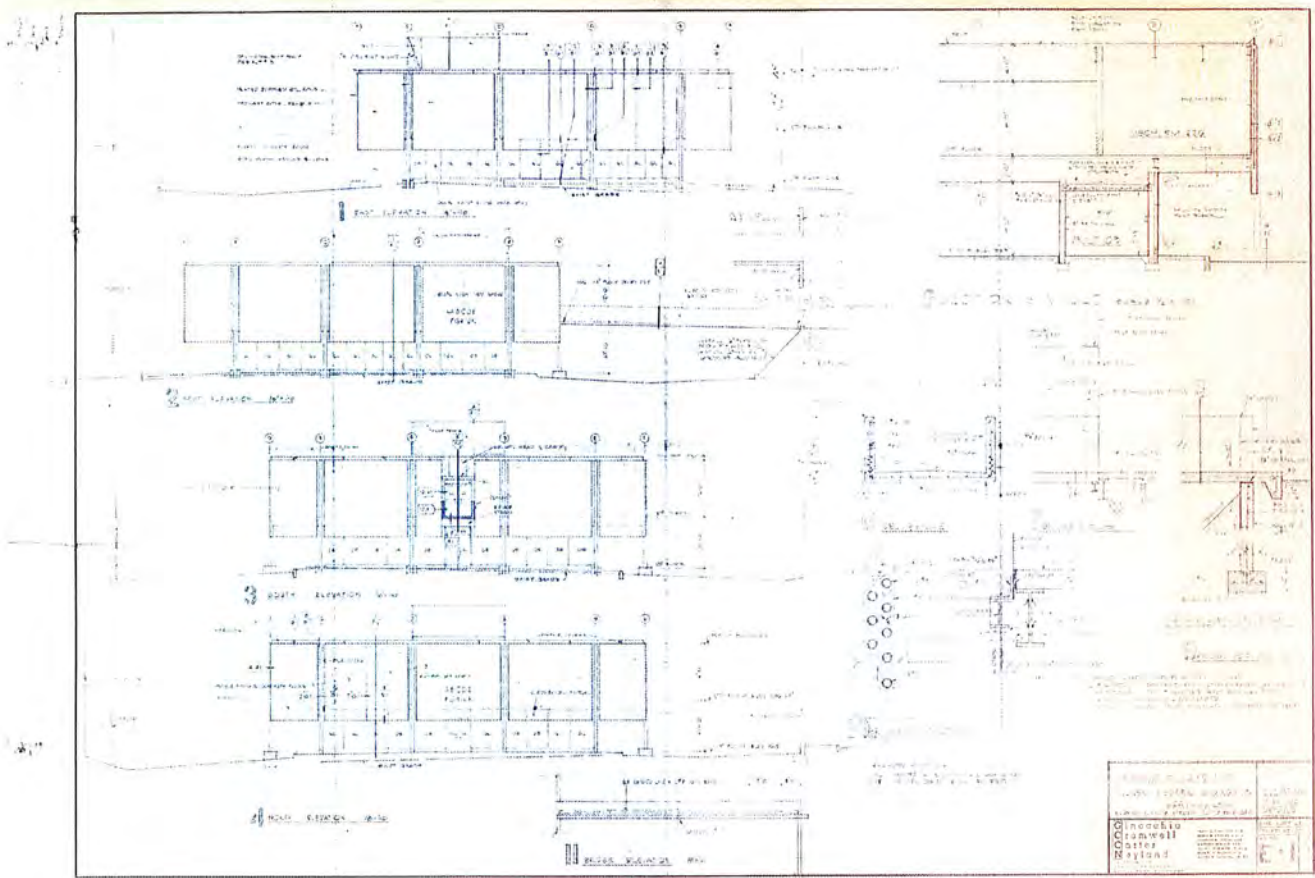


Figure 7: Elevation drawings of the Block Realty Building, 1964.

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 listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



|-----163 feet-----|

Block Realty Building
Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas

15 566049E 3845440N



North



|-----656 feet-----|

Block Realty Building
Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas

15 566049E 3845440N



North



ONE WAY
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CITY OF LINCOLN NEBRASKA
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT



CITY OF LITTLE ROCK
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

7303





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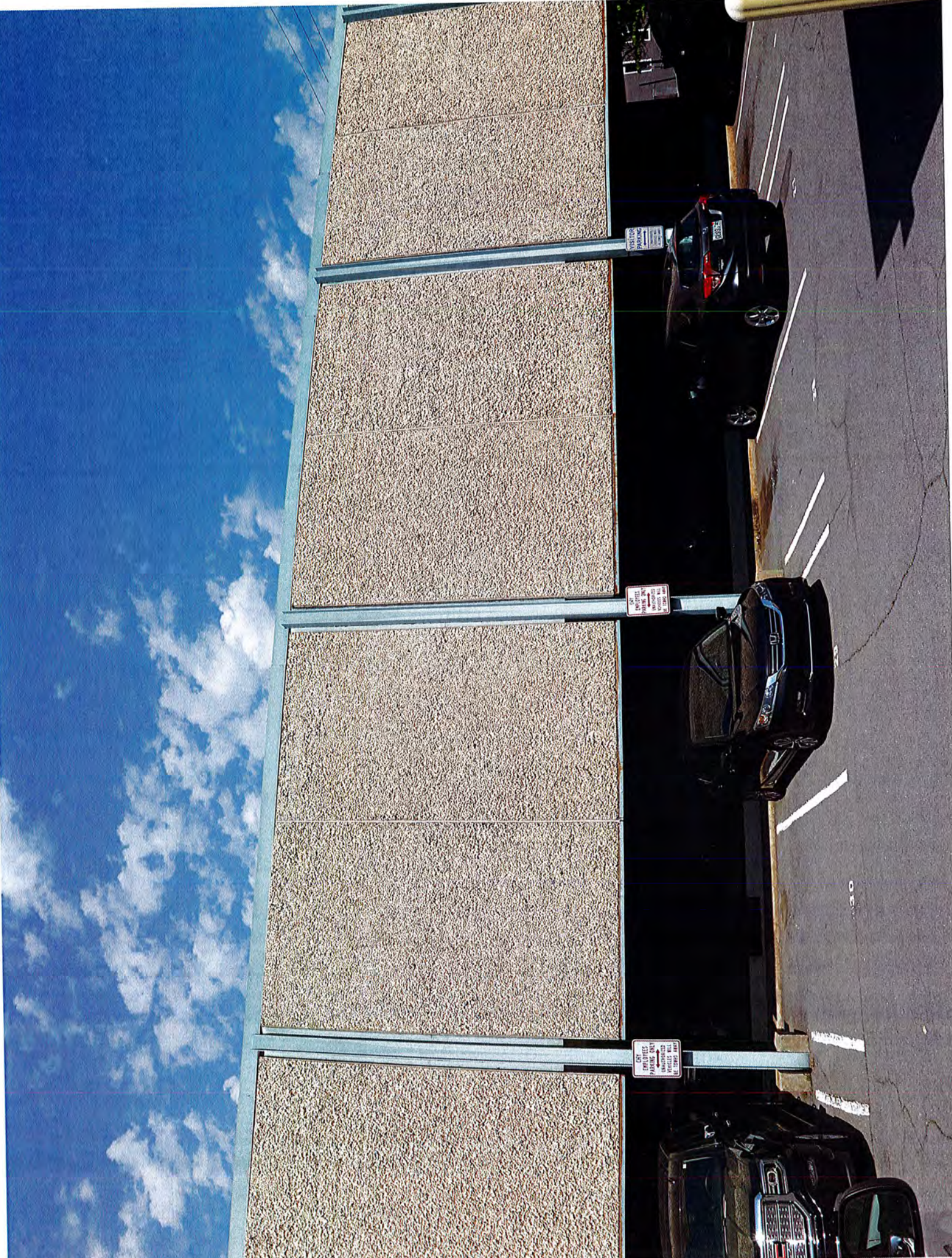
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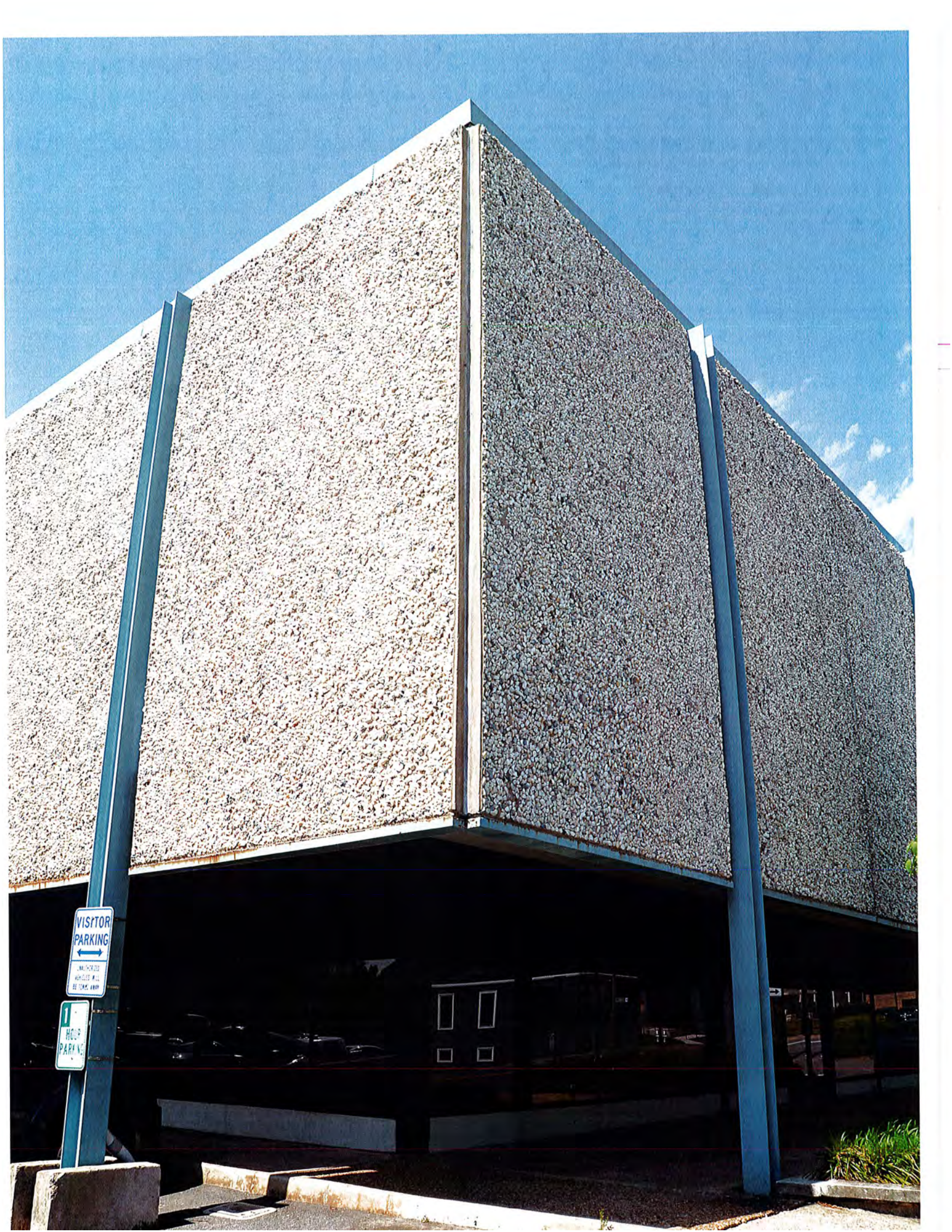


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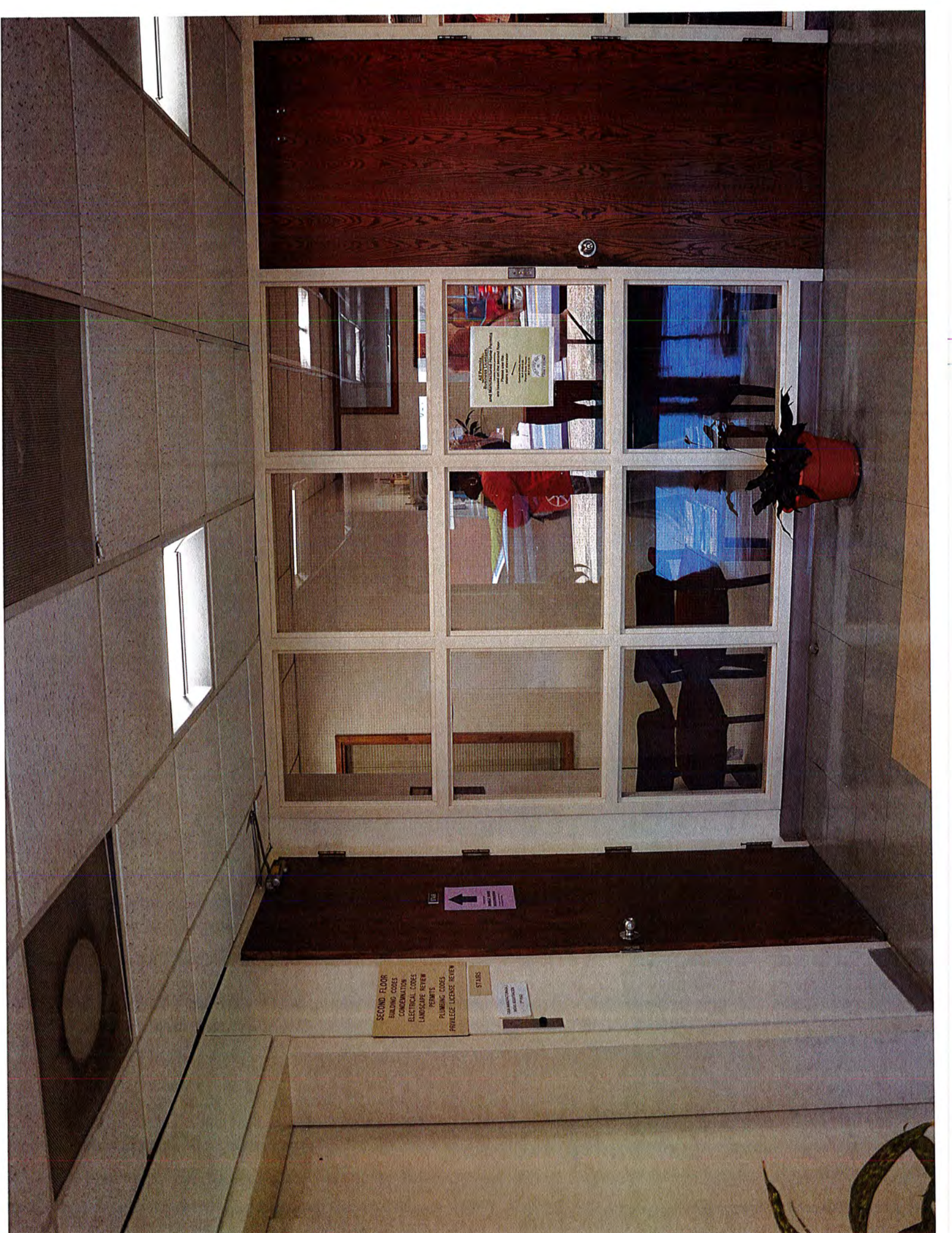




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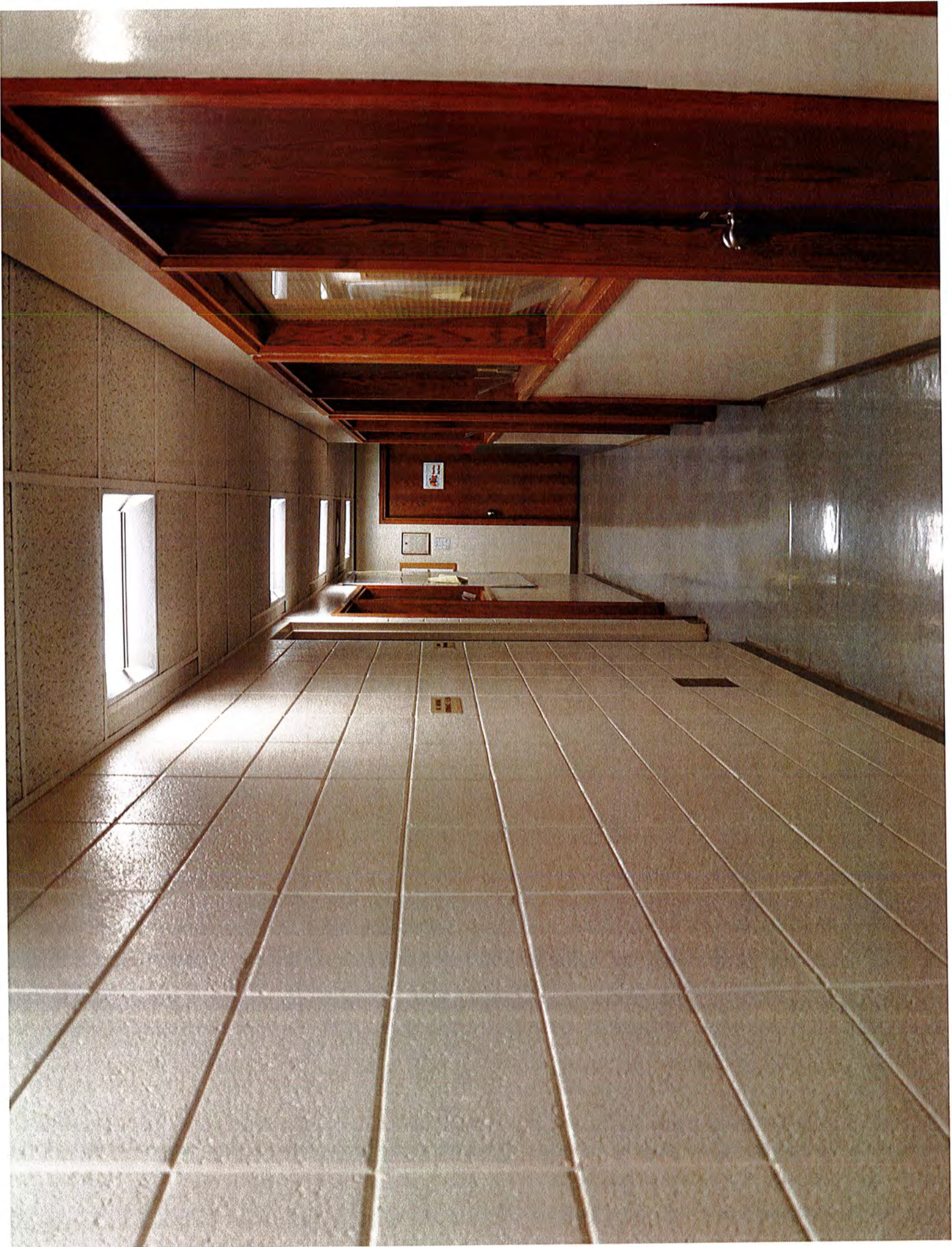
SECOND FLOOR
BUILDING CODES
CONSERVATION
ELECTRICAL CODES
LANDSCAPE REVIEW
PERMITS
PLUMBING CODES
PRIVILEGE LICENSE REVIEW

STATUS

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BY ORDER OF THE CITY MANAGER

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DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
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Commercial Plan Review • Unsafe Commercial Structures
House Moving • Demolitions
ZONING
• Sign Permits • Privilege Licenses
• Landscape Review • Code Enforcement
• Building Permit Review • Planning Commission
• Board of Adjustment • City Beautiful Commission
723 W. Markham Street
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