

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

SENT TO D.C.
4-9-2002

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 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. 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 Elgin Tower Building

other names/site number Home Banks Building

2. Location

street & number 100 E. Chicago Street not for publication
city or town Elgin vicinity _____
state Illinois code IL county Kane code 089
zip code 60120

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 forth 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.)

William A. [Signature]
Signature of certifying official

01-5-02
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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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4. National Park Service Certification
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I, hereby certify that this 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 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
- ___ site
- ___ structure
- ___ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	Total

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8. Statement of Significance
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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- X 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.
X 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 a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce
Architecture

Period of Significance 1929-1952

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
Elgin Tower Building
Kane County, Illinois

Significant Dates N/A

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder Knoebel, W.G., Architect
St. Louis Bank Building and Equipment Company, Builder

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

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(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: Elgin Historical Society; Elgin Public Library; Kane County
Recorders Office; Elgin Historical Preservation Office

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>16</u>	<u>393698</u>	<u>4654729</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	<u> </u>	<u>See continuation sheet.</u>				<u> </u>

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

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

=====
11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Adrienne A. Sage, graduate student, Public History program

organization Loyola University Chicago date January 15, 2002

street & number 1542 Fairway Drive, Apt 202 telephone (630) 416-1228
city or town Naperville state IL zip code 60563

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Additional Documentation
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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)

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
Elgin Tower Building
Kane County, Illinois

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

name See attached continuation sheet

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 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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimate to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 for to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Bc 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 1ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Narrative DescriptionIntroduction

The Elgin Tower Building is an Art Deco office building in Elgin, Illinois, a city 38 miles west of Chicago on the banks of the Fox River in a region known as Fox Valley. The building is located in Fountain Square, the center of Elgin's downtown commercial, business, and financial district. Surrounded by low-rise retail stores and small business buildings, the 15-story, 186-foot tall Elgin Tower Building dominates the skyline of downtown Elgin as the tallest structure and one of only two Art Deco buildings in the city. Its architecture blends elements characteristic of the Modern movement with classical elements. The Elgin Tower Building has housed numerous businesses since its opening in May 1929, and consequently has undergone some alterations over the years. Despite these changes, the Elgin Tower Building retains its architectural integrity, and a recent restoration of the commercial façade returned the building to its original appearance.

Setting

The Elgin Tower Building is located in Fountain Square, which is the intersection of Grove Avenue, Douglas Avenue, and Chicago Street in downtown Elgin, on the east bank of the Fox River. Fountain Square has historically been considered the center of Elgin, and was the point from which the city boundaries were measured when Elgin was incorporated as a city in 1854. At that time, Fountain Square flourished as Elgin's commercial center due to its location at the foot of the city's only bridge, now Chicago Street, crossing the Fox River.¹ Property near the bridge was in great demand and small local businesses thrived in the downtown area. To meet the financial needs of the city, the Home National Bank opened in 1872 in a 3-story building located where the Elgin Tower Building now stands. As downtown Elgin expanded, the Home National Bank outgrew its building and constructed the Elgin Tower Building to house the bank and numerous other businesses. Today, Fountain Square and the surrounding downtown area remains a commercial and financial center, with numerous retail stores and businesses still in operation. Although downtown businesses have changed over the years, the surroundings of the Elgin Tower Building remain true to its original setting.

¹ Jerry Turnquist, "Tower Building has a history dating back more than 60 years," *Daily Herald* (Elgin), 30 August 1998, sec. 5, p. 1.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Narrative Description (continued)

Exterior Description

Designed by architect W.G. Knoebel and built from 1928-1929 by the St. Louis Building and Equipment Company and numerous subcontractors, the 7-sided Elgin Tower Building was constructed during the height of the Modern architectural movement. The building's exterior features reveal typical Art Deco style, with vertical emphasis, geometric forms, stylized stone relief, and ornamental detailing. Some Classical Revival and Gothic details are also incorporated into the Art Deco features. The first two floors form the building's base, which is surmounted by a tower of 13 stories, the top four of which are set back on the southeast and northwest facades. Additional set backs are found on the southwest façade at the third and thirteenth stories. The two-story base extends 31 feet beyond the length of the 13-story tower on the west side, and extends 25 feet beyond the tower on the east side. Small, low-rise retail stores adjoin the Elgin Tower Building on its east and west sides, along Douglas and Grove Avenues. The foundation of the building rests on gravel with 240 2-ton concrete and steel piles for support. The facade is made of Bedford limestone, with smooth gray granite along the building's base on the three street fronts.

The Elgin Tower Building's main entrance faces southwest toward the Fox River. This entrance consists of two sets of three glass doors and three rectangular windows bordered by brass ornamentation in low-relief zigzag and herringbone patterns. A decorative window spandrel separates the first floor entrance from a second-floor arched window. This spandrel is decorated with raised square, circular, and octagonal patterns. There are two rectangular entrances on the west side of the building. Above one entrance is an arched window, and above the other are three rectangular windows. There are two more rectangular entrances set back in the façade on the east side of the building.

The Elgin Tower Building has six arched windows along the first two floors of its west façade, two more on its south façade, and five along the east façade. Like the main entrance, these windows are horizontally bisected by painted spandrels with spiral patterns and the same octagonal and circular design of the spandrel above the main entrance. There are also two small rectangular windows on either side of the main entrance. The windows on the remaining thirteen floors are rectangular in shape, except for six-sided windows on the eleventh floor. There are three windows on each floor on the north, west, east, south, northeast, and southeast facades, and five windows on each floor on the southeast façade. The windows are separated vertically by limestone, and horizontally by spandrels decorated with a diamond and leaf pattern. On the southwest façade, three windows on the thirteenth floor curve to form an arch that complements the arched shape of the main entrance below. All the windows are steel framed.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Narrative Description (continued)

There is a great amount of carved stonework in keeping with the Art Deco style on the exterior of the Elgin Tower Building. Some classical elements are integrated into the façade on the building's two-story base. For instance, two high-relief, decorative Corinthian columns nearly as high as the second floor stand on either side of the main entrance, atop which are perched two stylized eagle statues. A floriated pattern on the column's capital matches a similar pattern on two circular relief designs next to the columns. The shafts of the columns are smooth. More floriated stonework is located next to the eagle statues along the top of the second floor. There are seven stylized eagles in relief at the top of the second floor on the southwest, west, and east facades of the building. Six of these eagles clutch a shield in their talons, and the seventh eagle, over an entrance on the east façade, is encircled in its wings. Another classical element decorating the building's two-story base is several Roman fasces. Thirteen high-relief fasces are located between the arched windows along the west, southwest, and south facades.

Below two of the arched windows in the limestone on the west façade are two metal grills with an inverse fleur-de-lis pattern. Above the building's main entrance, along the upper edge of the second story, is a zigzag parapet trim from which a flagpole protrudes. This zigzag parapet trim also decorates the upper edge of the eleventh floor, the thirteenth floor on the southwest façade, and the corners of the fifteenth floor. Additional stonework on the upper floors of the Elgin Tower Building includes stylized blossoms and floriated patterns between the tenth and eleventh floors and along the top of the fifteenth floor.

Another feature of the Tower Building is a three-faced clock on the east corner of the two-story base, a tradition carried over from the original building of the Home National Bank, whose slogan was "The Bank with the Clock." Each face of the electronic, 400-pound clock is three square feet. The clock sits within a copper case with copper and bronze ornamentation.

Interior Description

The Elgin Tower Building has 190 rooms and 52,000 square feet of space, 35,000 square feet of which is available to businesses for rent.² Upon entering the first set of doors of the building's main southwest entrance, an ornate metalwork grill can be seen on the right wall. The inverse fleur-de-lis pattern of this grill matches that of the exterior grills on the west façade. Going through the second set of doors brings one into a lobby with the original Winona Travertine marble walls, Tennessee slab marble floor, and ornamentation at the

² John Goers, "Tower Building has new owners with tall ideas," *Daily Courier-News* (Elgin), 10 October 1975, 1.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Narrative Description (continued)

top of the walls. The west wall of the lobby once had four glass doors bordered with brass that opened up into the main banking room of the Home National Bank, but three of the doors have been filled in with marble. The east side of the lobby that has a staircase leading down to the basement was originally gated, but the ornamental metal gate has since been removed. A chandelier has replaced the original bronze hanging lantern.

The lobby contains the two original, hand-operated elevators that remain in use today with the aid of operators. The brass doors of the elevators are decorated with floriated brass moldings that match the spiral pattern on the spandrels of the exterior Palladian windows. The interiors of the elevators contain floral pewter metalwork, brass moldings, and solid brass controls. Outside the elevators is the original brass mailbox.

Home National Bank and its affiliate organization, the Home Trust and Savings, occupied the basement, first floor, and mezzanine of the west side of the building. Two stores, including a restaurant called the Chicago Street Café, originally occupied the east side of the first floor. The elaborately decorated main banking room, measuring 51 feet by 80 feet, had Corinthian columns, black walnut trim along the elaborate 2-story, vaulted plaster ceiling, countertops of Botticino marble, bronze hanging lanterns, and fringed velour drapes. The main colors of this room were red, tan, gold, and cream. The mezzanine floor extended above the first floor on the west side of the bank room. The basement contained the bank's 2500 safety deposit boxes, and was also decorated with marble and elaborate metalwork.³

Home National Bank and Home Trust and Savings closed in 1932 due to the depression, and most of the interior furnishings were removed and sold to pay creditors.⁴ In March 1937, a Walgreens drug store opened, occupying the entire first floor. Renovations were made to meet the needs of Walgreens, advertised as an entirely modern business with air conditioning and a 60-foot metal soda fountain.⁵ The granite exterior along the east façade and part way down the west façade was cut and display windows installed. A second floor was added, replacing the mezzanine in the former main banking room and covering the original vaulted plaster ceiling.⁶ Businesses soon moved into the basement causing some modifications, like the removal of the safety deposit boxes, but the original marble floors, doors, wood trim, and light fixtures remain. Walgreens remained in the Elgin Tower Building until 1957. Shortly thereafter, a restaurant called the Tower Grill and Fountain moved into the first floor, resulting in more remodeling of the interior and the exterior at street level.

³ "Bank Structure Completed at Cost of \$800,000," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 3.

⁴ Jan Cox, "Still standing tall," *Daily Herald* (Elgin, 29 August 1998), sec. 5, p. 1.

⁵ "Walgreens to Open Saturday," *Elgin Daily Courier-News*, 26 March 1937, 7.

⁶ Cox, sec. 5, p. 4.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Narrative Description (continued)

Over the years the number of businesses renting office space in the building fluctuated, with some renovations made to the office space of the upper floors depending on business needs. Despite these changes, the building maintains its interior integrity, with all the floors that underwent remodeling still retaining many original details. The most significant alteration was made to the first and second floors, which, except for the original lobby, have been entirely remodeled. The fourth floor is under construction, with some walls and marble floors and wainscoting in the hallway having been removed, but some original doors, wood trim, and marble remain. On the tenth floor, the hallway and the office space immediately surrounding it have been reconfigured with walls torn down, but the remaining office spaces are in the original configuration and maintain original marble and wood trim. The seventh floor is currently closed due to construction. The eleventh floor is also undergoing renovation, but the original configuration of the office space, some wood trim, and light fixtures remain. Some of the office spaces of the thirteenth floor have been reconfigured, although original doors and light fixtures remain.

The remaining floors also retain most of their original interior details. For instance, the basement, third, fifth, sixth, eighth, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth floors all have the original marble floors and wainscoting in the hallways. Original wooden doors and trim and light fixtures also remain on these floors. The original wood trim remains in the office spaces of many floors, including the third, fifth, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh floors. The only alteration to the wood trim on the sixth and twelfth floor hallways is that it has been painted. The office configuration has not changed on most of the upper floors. In addition, all of the floors from the third floor up have the original steel-framed windows.

Restoration

As with all office buildings, businesses continually moved in and out of the Elgin Tower Building over the years, resulting in alterations to the interior office spaces and the exterior of the building's two-story base. During the 1960s, as Elgin's commercial activity declined, the Elgin Tower Building fell into disrepair. In the 1970s, the building's owners started making small improvements. For instance, Jim and Ruth Williams, who purchased the building in October 1975, painted the windows and restored the exterior decorative spandrels beneath them.⁷ It was not until William R. Stickling became the owner that the building underwent a full restoration.

⁷ Goers, 1.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Narrative Description (continued)

William Stickling and his brother John purchased the Elgin Tower Building in August 1978. Also the owner of another historical office building in Elgin, the Professional Building, William Stickling had a great interest in the historical integrity of his properties. In 1996, Stickling started interior renovations on most of the floors and planned to restore the exterior of the first two floors by stripping away concrete that blocked the original windows.⁸ Stickling received money from Elgin's Façade Improvement Program, which reimburses downtown business owners for 35 percent of the cost of restoring their buildings' facades. This funding enabled Stickling to improve the Elgin Tower Building's entire facade.

A nearly \$500,000 restoration of the Elgin Tower Building began in August 1996. Architect Bruce Dahlquist of Dahlquist & Lutzow Architects, Ltd., supervised the project using historical photographs and the building's original architectural plans. The restorative work included tuck pointing and frame painting of all windows, adding new steel-framed windows to the first and second floors, restoring granite and limestone to the exterior of the two-story base, replacing street level doors to allow handicap access, and restoring the three-faced clock and two elevators.⁹ Some of the key supports on the bottom of the building had been changed during past remodeling and were rebuilt as well.¹⁰ As a result of the Elgin Tower Building's restoration, Stickling received a Community Improvement Plaque by the Women's Council of the Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce, and a Merit in Architecture Award by the American Institute of Architects, Northeast Illinois Chapter.¹¹ In addition, the Elgin Tower Building was recognized as Elgin's seventh local historic landmark under the city's preservation ordinance in September 1998.

⁸ Eric Krol, "Seeking a Fresh Face," *Daily Herald* (Elgin), 7 May 1996, sec. 1, p. 1.

⁹ "Restoration crews start working way to top of Tower Building," *Daily Herald* (Elgin), 17 August 1996, sec. 1, p. 1; "CIP Award goes to Elgin Tower," *Elgin Courier-News*, 2 February 1997, sec. F, p. 3.

¹⁰ Tim Crosby, "City to help pay increase in Tower Building repairs," *Elgin Courier-News*, 8 November 1996, sec. A, p. 3.

¹¹ "CIP Award goes to Elgin Tower," sec. F, p. 3; Turnquist, sec. 5, p. 3.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance

The Elgin Tower Building meets criteria A and C. Located at the center of downtown Elgin's business district, the Elgin Tower Building has played a prominent role in the development of commerce and business in downtown Elgin from its opening on May 3, 1929 into the 1950s. Built from 1928-1929 and originally known as the Home Banks Building, the Elgin Tower Building exemplifies Art Deco architecture in its decorative style, method of construction, and ornamentation. The Elgin Tower Building, therefore, meets Criterion A for its role in the commercial development of Elgin, and Criterion C as a prime example of an Art Deco office building. The period of significance is 1929, the year of the building's completed construction, to 1952, the fifty-year cutoff date for National Register significance.

History and Growth of Elgin

Within a few years of Elgin's founding in 1835 by James T. Gifford, numerous stores, including a flouring mill, saw mills, woolen mill, plow factory, blacksmiths, and tailors, started appearing on the east side of the Fox River. Elgin farmers produced large quantities of wheat, and Chicago quickly became a reliable cash market for the surplus. Wheat was shipped to Chicago by wagon and, starting in 1850, by the railroad, which quickly stimulated business in Elgin along the Fox River. The center of Elgin's commerce was Market Square, where farmers sold their crops to townspeople and wholesalers and purchased equipment at the mills. Elgin was incorporated as a city in 1854, and by 1860, most dwellings in Elgin were located within a half mile of Market Square. When the City of Elgin installed a fountain in the square in 1873, Market Square became known as Fountain Square, where the Elgin Tower Building stands today.¹²

In the 1850s, wheat started to decline as the main source of profit for farmers and was replaced by dairy products. Elgin shipped fresh milk to Chicago and soon became known as a premiere dairy center. Numerous creameries in Elgin produced cheese and butter, and Gail Borden's Elgin Milk Condensing Company started production in 1865. Elgin's dairy industry peaked in the 1890s after which the center of the industry shifted to Wisconsin. Nevertheless, the dairy industry further stimulated the city's growth and the development of businesses in the Market Square area. Between 1870 and 1890, Elgin's population more than tripled to 17,723.¹³

¹² A.C. Alft, *Elgin: An American History, 1835-1985* (Elgin: Crossroads Communications, 1984); available from <http://www.elginhistory.com/aaeh/>; Internet; accessed 15 April 2001.

¹³ *Ibid.*

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance (continued)

Beginning in 1865 with the opening of a factory in Elgin for the National Watch Company of Chicago, the watch industry became Elgin's major source of income and further stimulated business and industry in the city. Watchmaking transformed Elgin into a factory town as housing was built for the company's employees, which numbered 2700 by the late 1880s. Numerous immigrants, particularly Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians, moved into the city for employment, further boosting the population. In 1874 the name of the company was changed to Elgin National Watch Company, known worldwide as a producer of fine watches. The watch factory payroll became the mainstay of the local economy, employing thousands of workers during its 100-year run.¹⁴

As downtown Elgin grew into a commercial center, banks were established to manage the city's financial needs. First National Bank opened in 1865, and Home National Bank was founded in 1872 in Fountain Square as an important financial institution for the downtown area. At the intersection of Grove Avenue, Douglas Avenue, and Chicago Street in Fountain Square, the Home National Bank had a prime location. In 1878, the first horse car line was installed in the city, with tracks on Grove Street running between Fountain Square and the watch factory. In 1890, the first electric streetcar carried passengers between Fountain Square and Lord's Park, and an interurban trolley system allowed people easy access to towns surrounding Elgin. A new intercity rail line, the Aurora, Elgin, and Chicago Railroad Company, linked the three cities and built its Elgin terminal on the east bank of the Fox River, just south of Chicago Street. These new modes of transportation that carried passengers into Fountain Square, combined with the growing number of stores in the area, caused business to boom in the downtown area and for the Home National Bank.¹⁵

Business and industry prospered in Elgin throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, downtown was a bustling center of retail trade and services. Downtown businesses and entertainment included two department stores, a Woolworth's, five grocery stores, eleven clothing stores, two hotels on Douglas Avenue, two movie houses, bowling allies, and several professional offices. To keep pace with the rapidly expanding downtown business, Home National Bank remodeled and built additions onto its 3-story structure in the 1880s, 1907, and again in 1917. During the 1920s, however, the bank outgrew its building, and in 1927 bank officials decided to raze the structure and erect a new building.¹⁶ Construction of the Elgin Tower Building, then known as the Home Banks Building, commenced in March 1928 by the St. Louis Building and Equipment Company, and was completed in May 1929 at a cost of \$800,000. The new building

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Turnquist, sec. 5, p. 1.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance (continued)

not only housed the Home National Bank and its sister organization, Home National Savings and Trust, but numerous other businesses including law firms, insurance and real estate agencies, and several doctors offices. The Home Banks Building, with its great amount of office space, attracted new businesses to downtown Elgin.

The Home Banks Building

The early 1920s marked a boom period in downtown business and construction. The Home Banks Building sat at the heart of downtown's busiest section, Fountain Square, and marked the pinnacle of a period of construction in the downtown area. Its opening on May 3, 1929 symbolized Elgin's prosperity and future progress. On opening day, a special 16-page section in the *Elgin Courier-News* celebrated the building, its symbolism, and the Home National Bank. One article stated, "In the erection of this classic and costly tower may be found an exemplification of the faith and the optimism of its builders in the future of the Elgin financial and business world."¹⁷ Another article acknowledged that the gradual and steady growth and expansion of the city "has reached one stage of exemplification today, in the erection of the new Home Banks building, rearing aloft in prideful grandeur in Fountain Square. A dignified and majestic monument to the thrift and enterprise and business initiative."¹⁸ Elgin's mayor, Earle R. Kelley, also praised the Home Banks Building, saying "It is a beautiful asset to the city...It has increased the prestige of the city, it has increased real estate values in the Fountain Square District. It has added to the beauty and dignity of our commercial life...It stimulates our confidence in Elgin's progress."¹⁹ Citizens of Elgin took pride in the new Home Banks Building with its modern appearance, dominating height, central location, and variety of businesses that occupied more than 70 percent of the building's office space on opening day.²⁰

The people of Elgin believed that the strong, solid appearance of the Home Banks Building reflected the strength and security of the two financial institutions it housed, Home National Bank and Home National Savings and Trust.²¹ In 1929, these two institutions enjoyed great success. Home National Bank was responsible for the payroll of the Elgin National Watch Company and the accounts of many of the watch company's employees. In the early months of 1929, the combined resources of the two institutions totaled over

¹⁷ "Bank Structure Complete at Cost of \$800,000," 3.

¹⁸ "The Span of Years," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 14.

¹⁹ "Greetings From Mayor," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 3.

²⁰ "Many Tenants in Bank Tower," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 6.

²¹ "Home Banks Move Into New Building Today," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 1.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance (continued)

\$5.5 million, and employed over thirty men and women.²² Newspaper articles highlighted the banks' modern facilities, such as five fireproof and burglarproof vaults, and reassured the city's residents of the security of their finances if entrusted with Home National Bank.²³ These reassurances, however, did not prevent the financial losses suffered by Home National Bank when the stock market crash of October 1929 sent America into a deep depression. Home National Bank and Home National Savings did not recover from its financial losses, and closed in 1932 due to bankruptcy. The businesses that occupied the upper floors of the Home Banks Building also suffered, with only 35 percent of the office space occupied at the bank's closing.²⁴ It was not until the post-World War II period that the Home Banks Building would fulfill its promise of leadership in Elgin's commercial prosperity.

The Elgin Tower Building

Following the closing of Home National Bank and Home National Savings and Trust, the Home Banks Building passed into receivership to the First National Bank of Chicago in August 1932. By July 1934, the building's occupancy had increased to 60 percent but the two floors at street level remained empty. That same month, the city officially changed the structure's name to Elgin Tower Building, reflecting the building's dominance of the downtown skyline and commerce.²⁵ Like cities across America, Elgin's businesses, industries, and citizens were hard-hit by the depression. There was a slight recovery from 1936 to 1937, the year that Walgreens opened in the first floor of the Elgin Tower Building. But not until World War II created industrial demand did Elgin's industries resume their pre-depression levels of production and begin to prosper again.

Immediately following World War II and through the 1950s, Elgin, like cities and towns across the country, experienced a postwar boom. During this period, downtown Elgin reached the height of its commercial and business prosperity, and the Elgin Tower Building played a central role in attracting businesses and customers to the downtown area. The city had put a restriction on downtown construction during the war, which helped the Elgin Tower Building draw occupants to its office space. By the end of the 1940s, the

²² "History Shows Success Home National Bank," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 3.

²³ "Vaults at New Banks Fire and Burglar Proof," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 4.

²⁴ "Home Banks Now the Elgin Tower," *Elgin Courier-News*, 13 July 1934, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance (continued)

building was near full capacity and remained so through the 1950s.²⁶ In addition to Walgreens and the Blue Bird Beauty Shop in the basement, businesses housed in the building included law firms, several doctor's offices, and real estate firms. Walgreens, a tremendously popular and rapidly expanding drugstore at that time, along with the other services provided in the building were tremendous drawing cards to customers from Elgin and its surrounding towns. An increase in population and residential housing in Elgin and its suburbs, coupled with the growing use of automobiles, also contributed to the commercial success of the Elgin Tower Building and downtown Elgin in general. Downtown business provided a substantial share of the municipal government's revenue. Downtown sidewalks were filled with people and the streets were filled with cars throughout the 1950s.²⁷ Elgin flourished as the commercial center of Fox Valley, and the Elgin Tower Building was the premiere location for businesses in the region.²⁸ Thus, the Elgin Tower Building, opened as a symbol of commerce at an ill-fated time in history, was able to reemerge as a commercial center in the booming post-World War II period when downtown Elgin was at the height of its retail success.

The post-World War II period was the heyday of downtown Elgin and the Elgin Tower Building. When the 1960s arrived, Elgin's commercial success started to slow. Between 1957 and 1962, downtown business vacancies increased by 40 percent. Walgreens moved out of the Elgin Tower Building in 1957, replaced by the Tower Grill and Fountain, a popular restaurant among downtown employees and shoppers. The Elgin National Watch Company had started to lay off employees toward the end of the 1950s due to competition from Swiss companies. The watch company's closing in 1965 officially marked the decline of Elgin's industrial prominence and contributed to the slowing of downtown business. Downtown commerce also declined when the opening of the U.S. Route 20 bypass re-routed automobile traffic away from the downtown area. In addition, shopping centers and malls built on the outskirts of the city, as well as the opening in 1971 of nearby Woodfield Mall, the largest enclosed shopping center, lured customers away from downtown Elgin. Although Elgin's retail sales increased by 120 percent between 1963 and 1971 due to its new shopping centers, downtown did not enjoy the same prosperity. By the early 1980s, the major department stores had moved out of downtown Elgin, and many vacant store fronts were seen in Fountain Square.²⁹ In 1980, the Elgin Tower Building stood 60 percent empty- its lowest occupancy since the pre-World War II period.³⁰

²⁶ Lou Marra, "Grand Old Lady Towers Above the Rest," *Daily Courier-News* (Elgin), 6 August 1999, 10.

²⁷ Aft.

²⁸ Goers, 2.

²⁹ Aft.

³⁰ Cox, sec. 5, p. 4.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance (continued)

Due to the Elgin Tower Building's symbolism of the city's future progress and its central role in downtown Elgin's commercial prosperity in the post-World War II era, the structure's owners and local businessmen viewed it as the focal point in the revitalization of downtown in the following decades. Ownership of the building changed hands several times throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Otto Pelikan, a Chicago investor, purchased the building in 1945 and owned it until his death in 1967. The Elgin Tower Building Corporation was created to manage the building until its purchase in 1975 by Walter Bartels.³¹ Later that same year, Jim and Ruth Williams bought the building and made improvements to the façade in order "to restore the Tower's image as an office building capable of attracting Chicago firms interested in moving their offices to the Fox River Valley." As president of Downtowners Inc., a group of businessmen interested in promoting downtown Elgin and improving the city's appearance, Jim Williams saw the Elgin Tower Building as the starting point in this endeavor due to the structure's dominance in downtown's landscape and commercial life.³²

William Stickling and his brother John purchased the Elgin Tower Building from the Williams' in August 1978 and continued to improve its physical condition in order to attract more businesses to the building and to downtown Elgin. As previously mentioned, William Stickling spent thousands of dollars on a massive restoration project in 1996-1997 to return the building to its historic appearance. Stickling worked as an elevator operator in the building as a teenager in the mid-1940s, experiencing firsthand the boom period of the Elgin Tower Building and downtown Elgin. As its owner, he sought once again to restore the building to its former grandeur and, by doing so, revitalize downtown commerce. In January 1999, the Elgin Image Advisory Commission proposed use of exterior lighting to illuminate the Elgin Tower Building in order "to show the city's downtown again is open for business." A commission member believed the building to be a symbol for downtown's redevelopment, and the lights would help Elgin reverse a negative image inside and outside the city.³³ Even in recent years, the community has viewed the Elgin Tower Building as the symbol of the city's commercial success and the focal point in efforts to revitalize Elgin's downtown area.

Stickling's commitment to the Elgin Tower Building and the revival of Elgin's downtown continued following his death in March 1999. Stickling's estate stipulated the creation of the William R. Stickling Charitable Foundation, whose members include several employees of the building. When put into effect, the Foundation will maintain the Elgin Tower Building and raise money for the preservation of other historical buildings in Elgin. The Foundation members hope in the long run to once again make Elgin the financial center

³¹ Peter Powell, "Tower Building fix-up planned," *Daily Courier-News* (Elgin), 1 May 1975, sec. H, p. 2.

³² Goers, 2.

³³ Brad Hahn, "Elgin Tower may highlight downtown changes," *Daily Herald* (Elgin), 27 January 1999, sec. 1, p. 1.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

of Kane County and Fox Valley.³⁴ The west side of the building's first floor underwent renovations in 2001 and now houses the offices of the Downtown Neighborhood Association, a downtown redevelopment program, rent-free.³⁵ The interiors of the fourth, seventh, and eleventh floors are also being renovated in order to attract more businesses to the building. Thus, the Elgin Tower Building continues its vital role in the stimulation of commerce in downtown Elgin.

Art Deco Architecture

The Elgin Tower Building is a prime example of Art Deco architecture. The Art Deco style became popular in the U.S. from 1910 to 1939 as part of the Modern Movement that represented the new technology and industry of the 1920s. The Art Deco style reflected the use of new materials, method of construction, and ornamentation. The development of steel construction and reinforced concrete were integral components in constructing massive Art Deco skyscrapers. Decorative and stylistic characteristics include streamlining, stepped or setback facades, ornamental metalwork, modernized figure sculptures and reliefs, geometric shapes, a contrast of smoothness and texture, and modernized classical elements that simultaneously conveyed change and the traditional ideals of solidity and mass. Popular Art Deco motifs included spirals, zigzags, sunflowers, hexagons, and seashells. Interior features include stylized geometric motifs, innovative and sometimes opulent materials, and the same sculpted stone and ornamental metalwork details as on the exterior.³⁶

The Elgin Tower Building possesses many of the structural and ornamental characteristics of Art Deco architecture. The St. Louis Building and Equipment Company used a reinforced concrete and structural steel framework in constructing the building. The building's façade has a vertical streamlined effect with set backs at the third and eleventh floors. Exterior ornamentation includes zigzagging, geometric shapes and spirals on the window spandrels, low-relief metalwork surrounding the main doorway, stylized blossoms and eagle sculptures and reliefs, classical elements like Corinthian columns and fascias, and floriated designs that contrast with the

³⁴ Brad Hahn, "Rebuilding Elgin's past," *Daily Herald* (Elgin), 5 August 1999, sec. 1, p. 1.

³⁵ Information provided in a phone conversation by Ted Meyers, attorney in the Tower Building and trustee of William Stickling's estate, 11 April 2001.

³⁶ Patricia Boyer, *Art Deco Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 7, 12; Patricia Boyer, *Art Deco Interiors* (New York: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1990); John J.-G. Blumenson, *Identifying American Architecture*, 2d ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 77; David Gebhard, *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996), 4.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance (continued)

smooth granite and limestone façade. Remaining interior features include marble walls and floors and brass metalwork on the elevators that matches the designs on the exterior window spandrels of the first and second floors. The original vaulted ceiling of the banking room has been destroyed.

In Art Deco architecture, the buildings themselves were the stars rather than the architects.³⁷ Although noted architects designed Art Deco buildings during the 1920s and 1930s, unknown architects familiar with the latest architectural trends also designed many such structures.³⁸ The architect of the Elgin Tower Building, W.G. Knoebel of St. Louis, falls into the latter category of Art Deco designers. No information on Knoebel nor the St. Louis Building and Equipment Company that constructed the building could be uncovered.

Art Deco Skyscrapers

Art Deco architecture was a distinctively urban style and many public buildings in cities all over the U.S., including Chicago, were constructed in this style during the 1920s and 1930s. Office buildings in particular made use of Art Deco architecture due to its modern appearance that portrayed the buildings, especially skyscrapers, as symbols of progress and optimism, or as “cathedrals of commerce.”³⁹ Art Deco skyscrapers belonged to a subset of the style known as American Vertical that incorporated the upward-soaring quality of Gothic architecture, and had vertical shafts alternating with vertical bands that enclosed windows with spandrels.⁴⁰ Many American Vertical skyscrapers also emphasized verticality through the presence of slender columns on the facade that subtly represented a classical portico.⁴¹ The 15-story Elgin Tower Building, with its vertical bands and Classical Revival elements, exemplifies the American Vertical style of Art Deco architecture

When choosing a design for the new Home Banks Building in 1928, bank officials desired a style that would reflect the strength and stability of the bank, serve as a monument to the bank’s founders, and also symbolize the future prosperity and progress of the bank and of Elgin.⁴² They decided an Art Deco skyscraper

³⁷ Boyer, *Art Deco Architecture*, 12.

³⁸ Gebhard, 7.

³⁹ Boyer, *Art Deco Architecture*, 87.

⁴⁰ Gebhard, 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁴² “Home Banks Move Into New Building Today,” 1.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Statement of Significance (continued)

would best represent these goals and provide a modern, agreeable surrounding for the bank's customers.⁴³ They also wanted classical elements, such as the Corinthian columns and stylized eagles, incorporated into the modern architecture to reflect the conservatism of the city and further represent the stability of the bank. The Roman fasces along the west and east sides of the Elgin Tower Building particularly convey the strength of the building and the bank. Carried by guards walking ahead of officials in ancient Rome, fasces symbolize authority, a trait bank officials believed to be embodied in their institution and its new building.⁴⁴ The Elgin Tower Building definitely dominates downtown Elgin with its great height, modern Art Deco style, symbols of authority, and elaborate ornamentation. A newspaper article printed on the Elgin Tower Building's opening day noted that the building "stands proudly erect, massive yet graceful, a happy combination of beauty and utility, radiating quiet dignity and opulence, yet with a predominating note of great strength. The Home Banks tower is, indeed, an appropriate monument, a landmark, in Elgin's progressive forward march."⁴⁵

When selecting a design for the bank's new building, bank officials also sought a structure that was unique in style compared to other buildings in Elgin and nearby cities of similar size.⁴⁶ The Elgin Tower Building does indeed stand out among the other structures in Elgin not only because it is Elgin's tallest building, but also because it is one of only two Art Deco buildings in the city. The other Art Deco building is two stories high and was built in 1930 as the Elgin headquarters of the Salvation Army. It has housed Senior Services Associates, Inc. since 1971.⁴⁷ This building retains most of its exterior integrity, but its interior spaces have been completely altered. Some Art Deco wall sconces on the first floor, the marble staircase, the configuration of a second-floor hallway, and some office doors appear to be the only remaining original interior details. Thus, the Elgin Tower Building is a very unique building in Elgin due to its height, architecture, and historical integrity.

⁴³ "Tower Style Chosen From Many Designs," *Elgin Courier-News*, 3 May 1929, 4.

⁴⁴ Mike Michaelson, "Digging for deco," *Daily Herald* (Elgin), 7 November 1997, sec. 6, p. 35.

⁴⁵ "The Span of Years," 14.

⁴⁶ "Tower Style Chosen From Many Designs," 4.

⁴⁷ Michaelson, sec. 6, p. 35,

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

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Integrity

Despite interior and exterior renovations that the Elgin Tower Building has undergone over the years as businesses have moved in and out, the building retains its historical integrity. Although renovations on the east and west façades of the first two floors removed some of the original granite, limestone, and windows, the original appearance and design of the building has been restored and those materials replaced. On the remaining floors, all the ornamentation and exterior materials, including all upper-floor windows, are original. The restoration of the building in 1996-1997 focused on the historically accurate appearance of the building by using original architectural plans and historical photographs as guidelines. As a result, the appearance of the building now exactly matches the original façade of 1929. The building retains much of its interior details, such as marble hallways, doors, light fixtures, and office space configuration. The Elgin Tower Building remains in its original location and commercial setting in Fountain Square. In addition to the building's architecture, the three-faced clock, originally a symbol of Home National Bank since 1872, and the elevators that are still hand-operated by conductors contribute to the historical feeling of the building. Businesses such as law firms and doctors offices continue to occupy the upper floors of the building as they did in the post-World War II period. Most importantly, the Elgin Tower Building retains its association with the commercial prosperity of downtown Elgin.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Verbal Boundary Description

Parcel One:

That part of Lots 3 and 4 in Block 19 of the Original Town of Elgin on the East side of the Fox River, described as follows: Beginning at the Southeast corner of said Lot 4; thence North along the East line of said lot, 60 feet; thence West at right angles to said East line, 66 feet to the West line of said lot; thence Southwesterly at right angles to the Easterly line of River Street to the Westerly line of said Lot 3; thence Southerly along said Westerly line and along the Westerly line of Lot 4 aforesaid to the South line of said Lot 4; thence East along the South line of said lot, 49.5 feet to the point of beginning, in the City of Elgin, Kane County, Illinois.

Verbal Boundary Description (continued)

Parcel Two:

That part of Lot 3 Block 19 of the Original Town of Elgin on the East side of Fox River, described as follows: Beginning at a point on the Westerly line of Lot 3 aforesaid, 44 feet Southerly from the Northwest corner thereof; thence Southerly along the Westerly line of said lot, 53 feet and 8 inches to the Northerly line of the lot conveyed to the Home National Bank of Elgin by deed dated June 3, 1890, and recorded June 17, 1890 as documented 30468, in book 266, page 115; thence Easterly at right angles to the Easterly line of River Street, 19 feet 9 inches to the East line of said Lot 3; thence North along said East line to the point therein from which a line drawn at right angles to the Easterly line of River Street would intersect the place of beginning; thence Westerly at right angles to River Street and along said line 60 feet and 2 inches to the point of beginning, in the City of Elgin, Kane County, Illinois.

Parcel 3:

The North 21 feet of the South 81 feet of Lot 4, (measured on the East line of said lot) in Block 19 of the Original Town of Elgin on the East side of Fox River, in Section 14, Township 41 North, Range 8 East of the Third Principal Meridian, in the City of Elgin, Kane County, Illinois.⁴⁸

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Elgin Tower Building.

⁴⁸ Kane County Recorder's Office, Title to Elgin Tower Building, Legal Description, 17 December 2000.

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ELGIN TOWER BUILDING

Owner Information

Estate of William R. Stickling
c/o Ted Meyers
100 E. Chicago Street, Suite 200
Elgin, IL 60120
(847) 760-4600

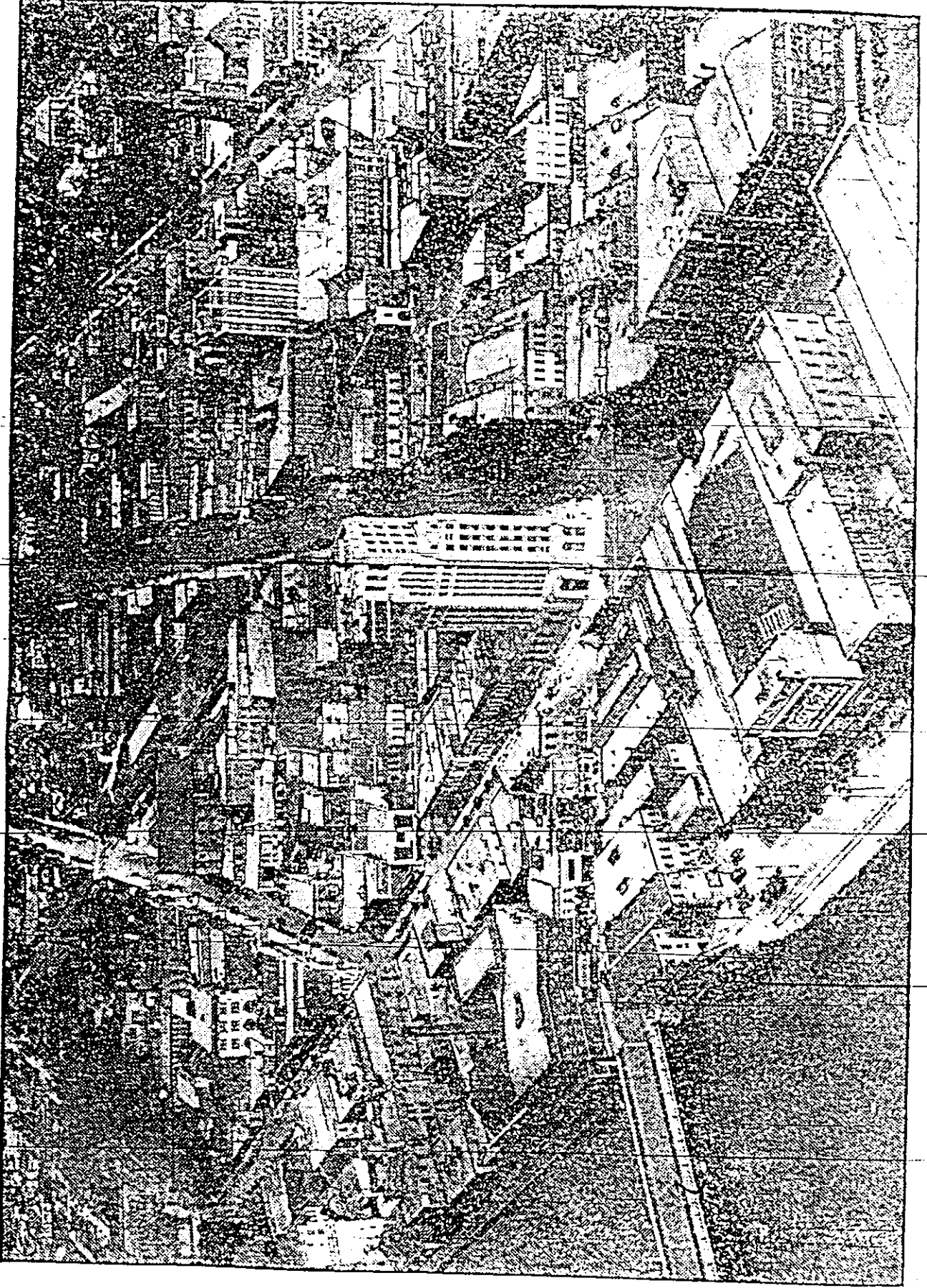
Chicago, Ill. Dec 18/42
 1915 Page 249, Div.
 567208, Richard Day, 1918
 June 6, 1908

ELGIN



Plat
 Division No. 10
 - Cont. Pt. Division St
 u. B.K. 237E
 53 Jan 4-196
 June 8, 1908
 Recorder, K. C. T.

State of Illinois I hereby certify that within to be a corner
 Lane County I plot of the Town of Elgin as surveyed by
 given under my hand and seal this third day of August
 1842 Peter J. Wagner (D) County Surveyor of Lane County
 The within Plat of Elgin laid out by me is laid on the two
 sections of Sec 14 and the west fractions and rights of Sec 13
 Range 8 east of 3rd meridian all the lots are 66 feet wide by
 deep except fractional lots and all the streets are 66 feet wide
 center street between Blocks 6 and 11 where it is 99 feet wide
 Feb 11th 1845 James J. Gifford
 Clerk of Illinois This day personally appeared before the
 Lane County ss I signed a justice of the Peace of said County

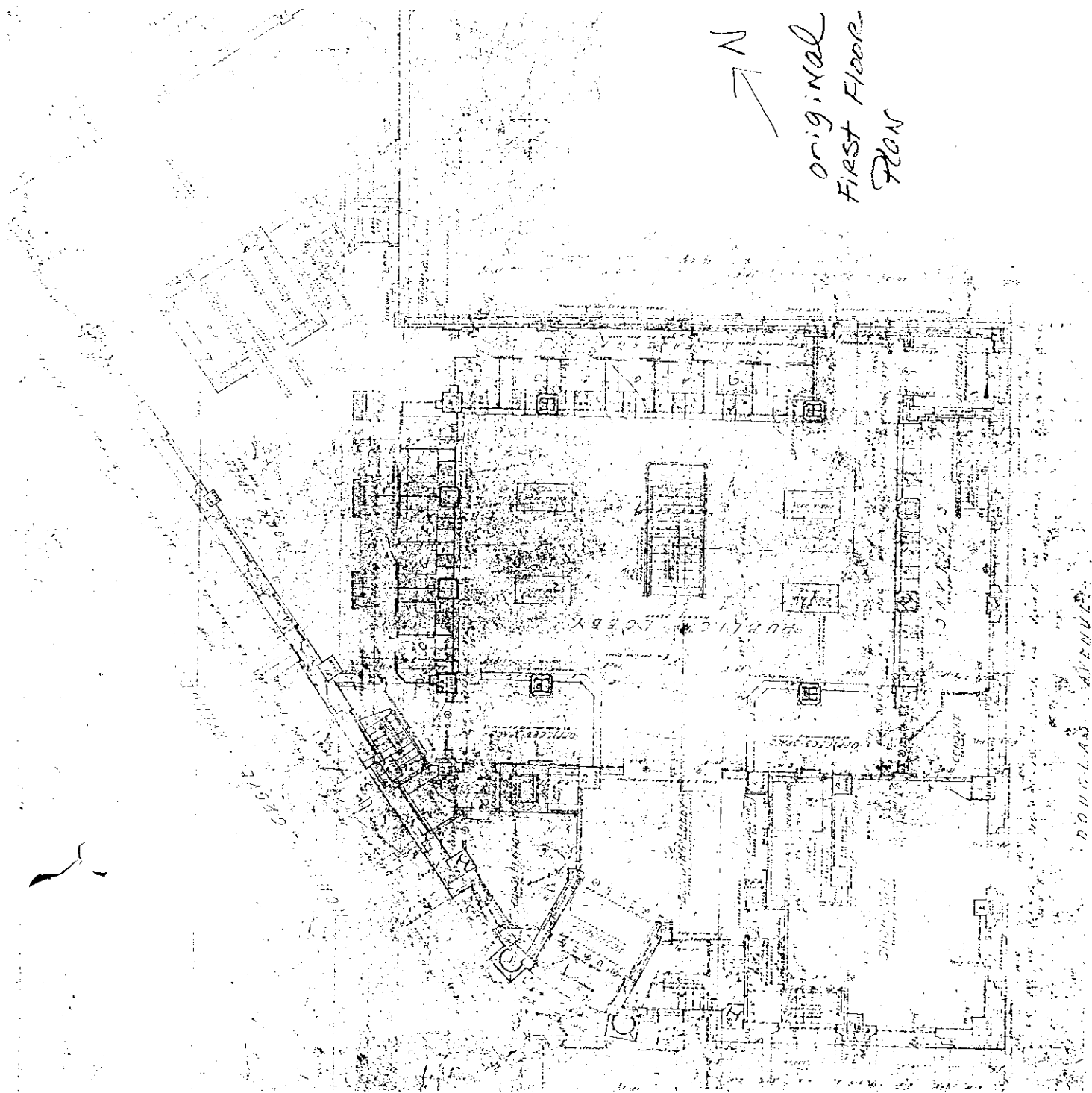


Aerial view of downtown Elgin with Tower Building centers, c. May 1929

Photo from Elgin Courier News, May 3, 1929.

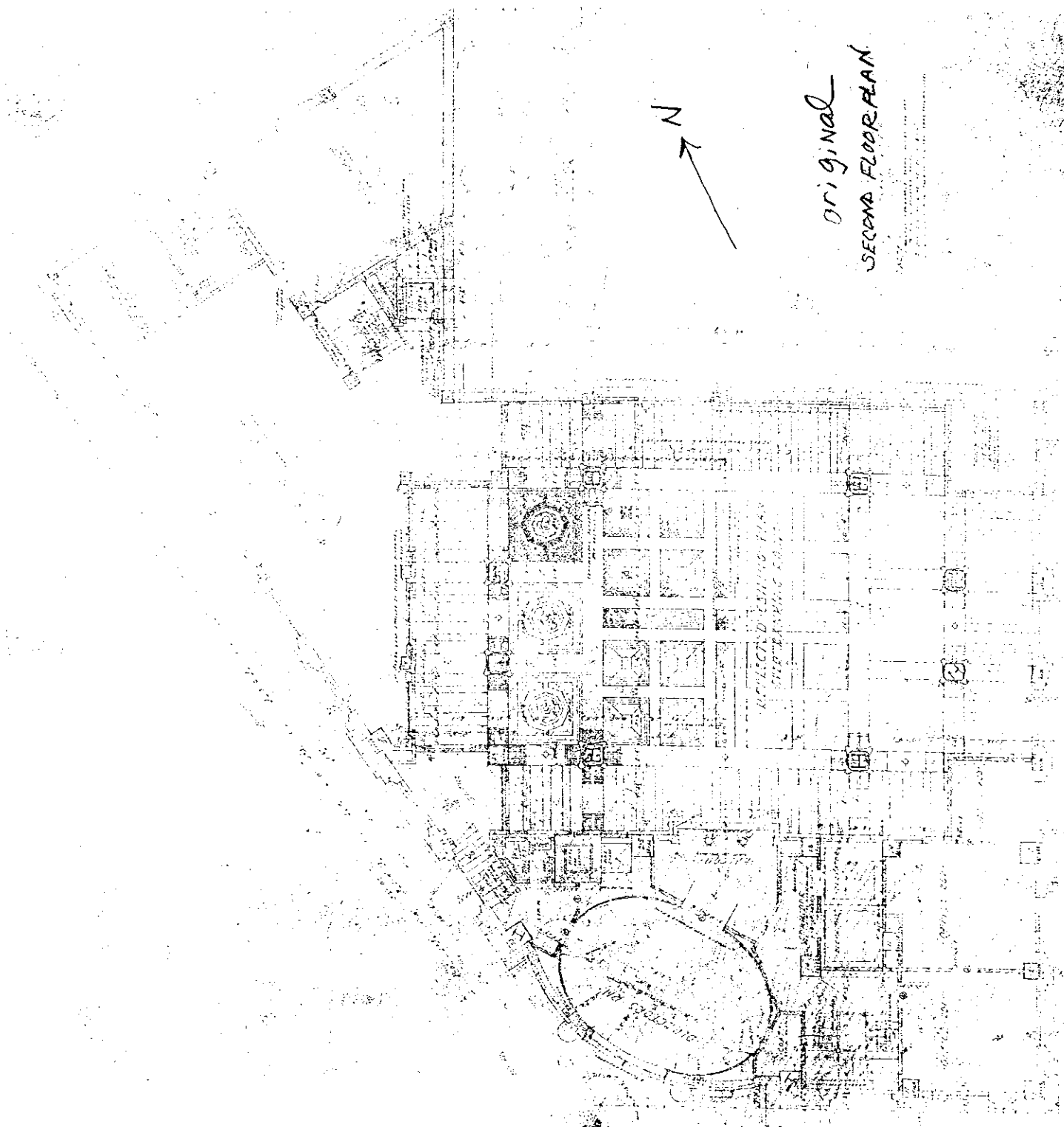
Elgin Tower Building

original
FIRST FLOOR
PLAN



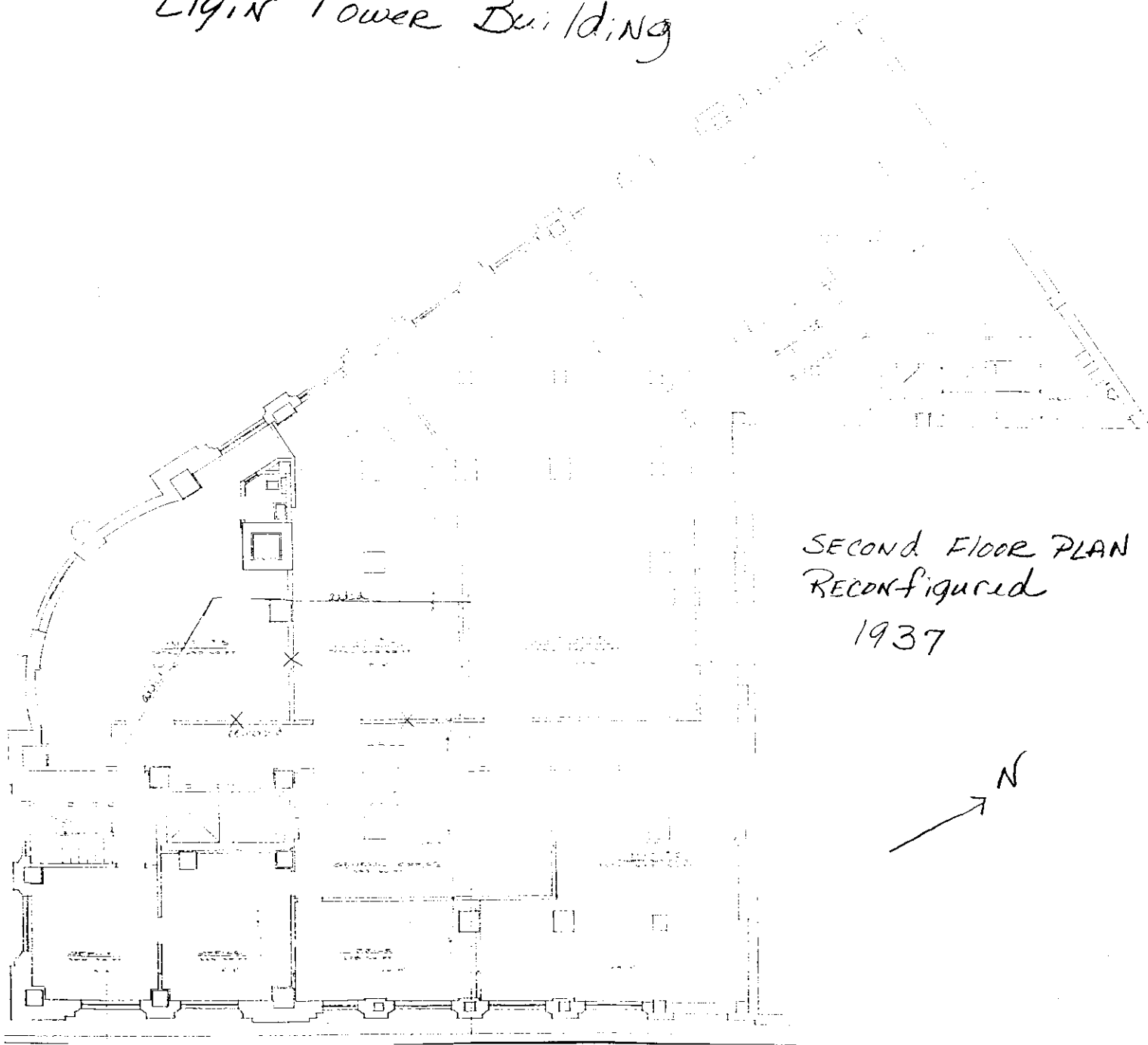


original
SECOND FLOOR PLAN



Elgin Tower Building

Elgin Tower Building



SECOND FLOOR PLAN
RECONFIGURED
1937

Elgin Tower Building
Kane County, IL

Typical Upper
Floor Plan

