

Metropolitan Building
25-107 John R Street
Detroit
Wayne County
Michigan

HABS No. MI-261

HABS
MICH,
82-DETRO,
23-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

METROPOLITAN BUILDING

HABS No. MI-261

Location: 25-107 John R Street
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan 48226
USGS Detroit Michigan, Quadrangle
UTM Coordinates: 17.330285.4688940

Date of
Construction: 1924-1925

Present Owner: Community and Economic Development
Department, City of Detroit
150 Michigan Avenue
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Present Use: None

Significance: This is a significant example of the kind of speculative commercial construction commonplace in Detroit during the city's period of rapid growth brought about by the success of the automobile industry in the late 1910s and early 1920s. It was built to provide office space in the rapidly-expanding Grand Circus Park area at the northern edge of Detroit's Central Business District. It is also a good example of late Gothic Revival design, applied to a modest skyscraper, with appropriate elaborate ornamentation.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1924-1925. The City of Detroit issued a building permit for the Metropolitan Building on July 14, 1924. The permit was for a twelve story reinforced concrete office building 180 feet in height, measuring 94 feet by 165 feet. (City of Detroit, Building Permits Microfilm and Index, Permit No. 42892, issued 14 July 1924).
2. Architect: The designers of the Metropolitan Building, Weston and Ellington, were one of dozens of architectural firms which flourished in Detroit during the boom years of the 1910s and 1920s.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Wayne County Register of Deeds office, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan

1924 Deed, April 23, recorded April 24, in Liber 1781, Washington Realty Company to Central Detroit Realty Company.

1946 Deed, June 19, recorded June 17, in Liber 8088, Central Detroit Realty Company to Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company.

1957 Deed, July 19, recorded July 26, in Liber 19592, Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company to Jerome M. Keywell, Kopel E. Kahn, and J. Phillip Levant.

1977 Deed, May 20, recorded September 14, in Liber 19868, Jerome M. Keywell, Kopel E. Kahn, and J. Phillip Levant to Nor-Am Comm., Inc.

1978 Judgement, November 20, recorded January 15, 1979, in Liber 20401, City of Detroit against Nor-Am. Comm., Inc.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

- a. Contractor: The Waldbridge-Aldinger Company was the general contractor. (From photograph taken by the Manning Brothers, Commercial Photographers, 20 January 1925, Negative No. 64745).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

5. Original Plans and Construction. No original architectural drawings have survived. Construction apparently proceeded quickly, because by January, 1925, the framing and exterior walls were virtually complete, except for the two story penthouse. A photograph taken in May, 1925, showed the building completed, but clearly unoccupied, while a similar photograph a year later revealed blinds or curtains in the windows, suggesting close to full occupancy.
6. Alterations and additions: The Metropolitan Building has not undergone many major changes either inside or out since first built. The Central Detroit Realty Company received a building permit in August, 1927, to install a mezzanine balcony, at a cost of \$5,000 and they added a fire escape from the twelfth floor to the penthouse roof in 1930. Most of the subsequent changes involved minor remodeling of interiors for new tenants. (City of Detroit, Building Permits Microfilm and Index, Permit Number 11599-A (1 July 1927) and 35294-A (19 December 1930).

B. Historical Context

Detroit was in the midst of an explosive population growth and physical expansion of the city, all the result of the success of the automobile industry, when the Metropolitan Building was erected in 1924-1925. The city's population jumped from 466,000 in 1910 to 994,000 in 1920 and then climbed to nearly 1.6 million by 1930. Between 1915 and 1927, Detroit grew, through annexation, from 46 square miles in area to 139 square miles. The Central Business District underwent tremendous growth in the 1920s, despite Detroit's diffuse housing patterns and the absence of a substantial financial district. The site of the Metropolitan Building, one block east of Woodward Avenue and a block south of the Grand Circus Park, was an attractive location for a speculative office building such as this.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: the Metropolitan Building makes a distinct stylistic statement through the extensive use of neo-Gothic decorative motifs and accented vertical lines which give the building a typical Gothic feeling of "lift" or "climbing." It serves as an excellent example of how readily the Late Gothic Revival style could be applied to skyscrapers, given the pronounced verticality of both.
2. Condition of fabric: the building is in good condition overall, except for a badly-deteriorated roof.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: this fourteen story structure has the configuration of an isosceles triangle, measuring 94 feet along the base and 165 feet along the sides. There are three bays across the front elevation.
2. Foundations: four foot granite foundations on concrete footings.
3. Walls: Decorative features which give the building its Gothic character include the use of quatrefoils, ogee curves, shield medallions, window tracery, and pointed-arch windows, especially on the upper floors. Some of these elements, such as the shield and quatrefoil motifs, appear on the stories below, but not to the same extent as on this upper section.
4. Structural systems, framing: The building has reinforced concrete beams, columns, and floor joists, and rests on a foundation consisting of concrete footings. Exterior walls are not load bearing.
7. Openings:
 - b. Windows: four over two and three over two double hung sash windows.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: See the attached floor plans.
3. Flooring: white marble floor in lobby, terrazzo floors in public corridors and rest rooms on upper floors, and exposed concrete in tenant areas.
4. Walls and ceilings: ceilings are primarily suspended plaster on metal lath.
8. Mechanical equipment: Mechanical equipment does not include furnaces or boilers, because the building was heated by steam drawn from the central steam system provided by Detroit Edison to the Central Business District. There is a large water tank for fire suppression in space above the upper penthouse. The four passenger elevators, manufactured by the A.B. See Elevator Company, were modernized by the Westinghouse Corporation in the early 1940s.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings

The original architectural drawings have not survived. However, in 1980, a draftsman working for the firm of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, prepared a set of plans (to scale) of the floors of this building for an adaptive re-use study the firm was conducting at the time. Those plans were reduced and reproduced for use in this report.

B. Historic Views

Three photographs of the Metropolitan Building, in the private collections of the Manning Brothers, Commercial Photographers, Madison Heights, Michigan, dated 20 January 1925 (Negative No. 64745), 13 May 1925 (Negative No. 67264), and May 1926 (Negative No. 74474).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

D. Bibliography

1. Primary sources

City of Detroit. Building Permits Microfilm and Index, Department of Building and Safety Engineering, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

Wayne County, Register of Deeds. Land Tract Indexes, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan.

2. Secondary sources

Burton, Clarence M. The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922. Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922.

Ferry, W. Hawkins. The Buildings of Detroit: A History. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968.

Polk, Ralph L. and Company. Detroit City Directory. Detroit: Polk & Company, 1884-1974.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

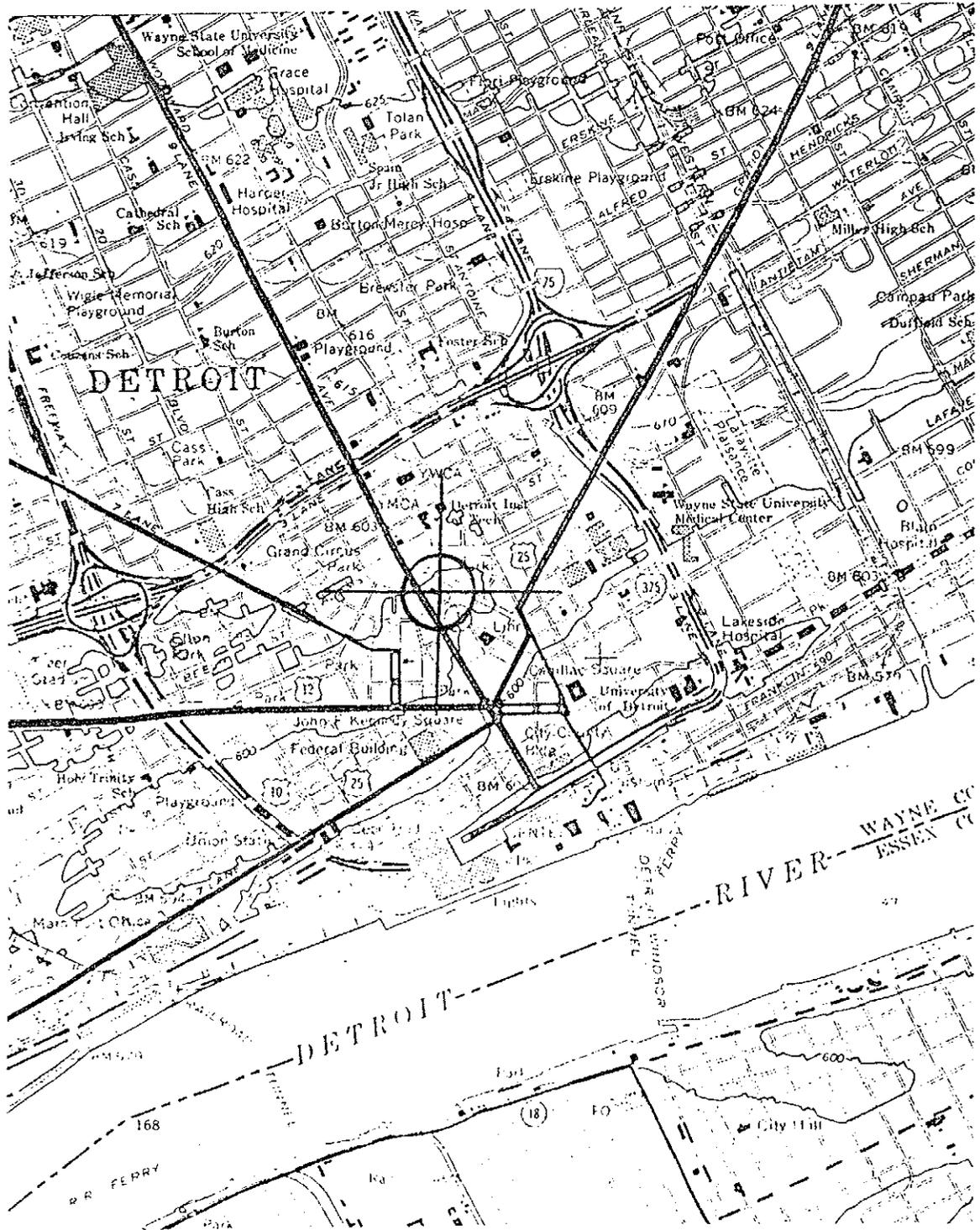
This documentation was undertaken in June, 1987, in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement among the City of Detroit, the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative measure prior to the demolition of the building.

Prepared By: Dr. Charles K. Hyde
Associate Professor of History
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan 48202
June 1987

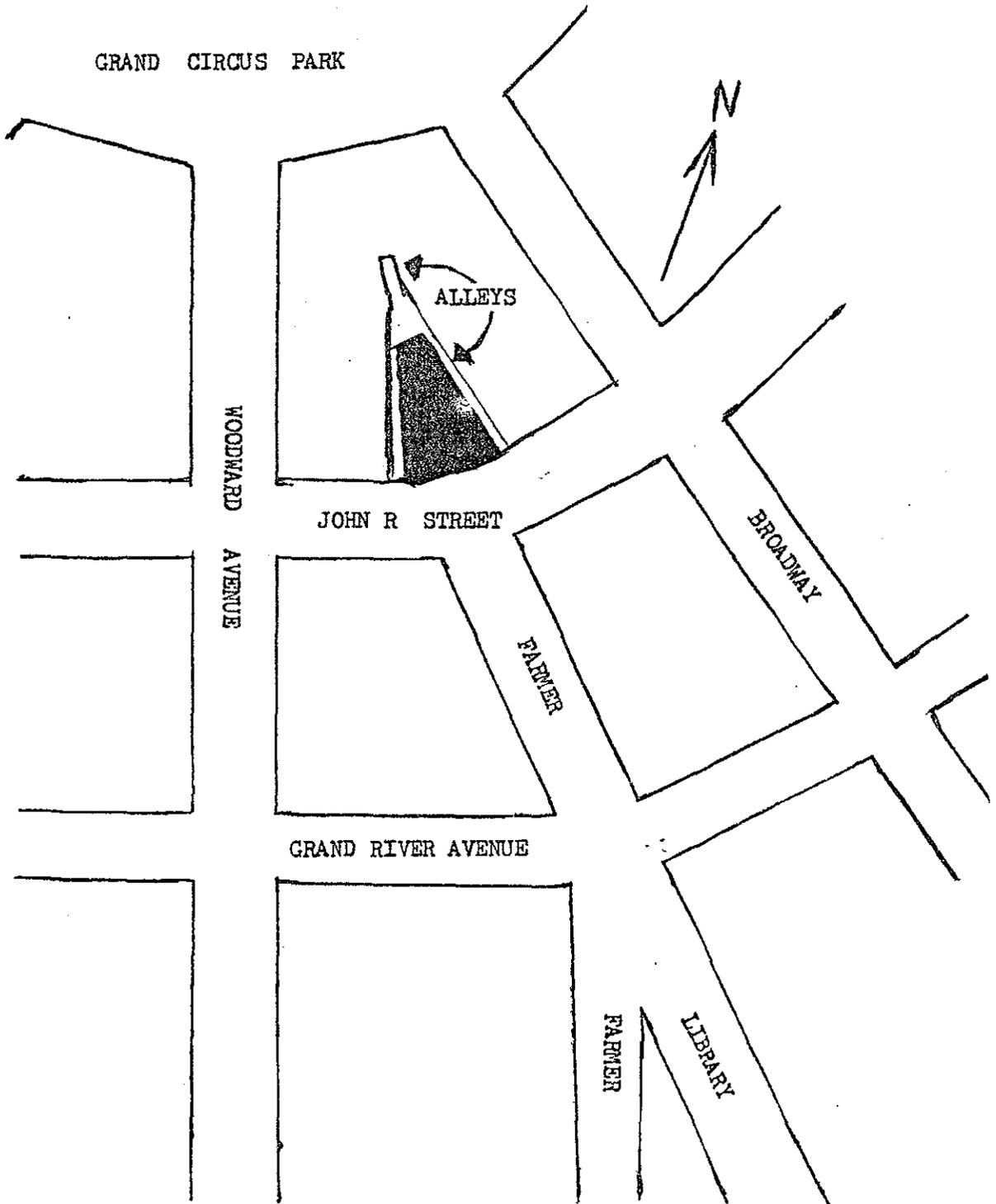


METROPOLITAN BUILDING
HABS No. MI-261 (Page 7)

Detroit, Michigan Quadrangle
UTM: 17.330285.4688940

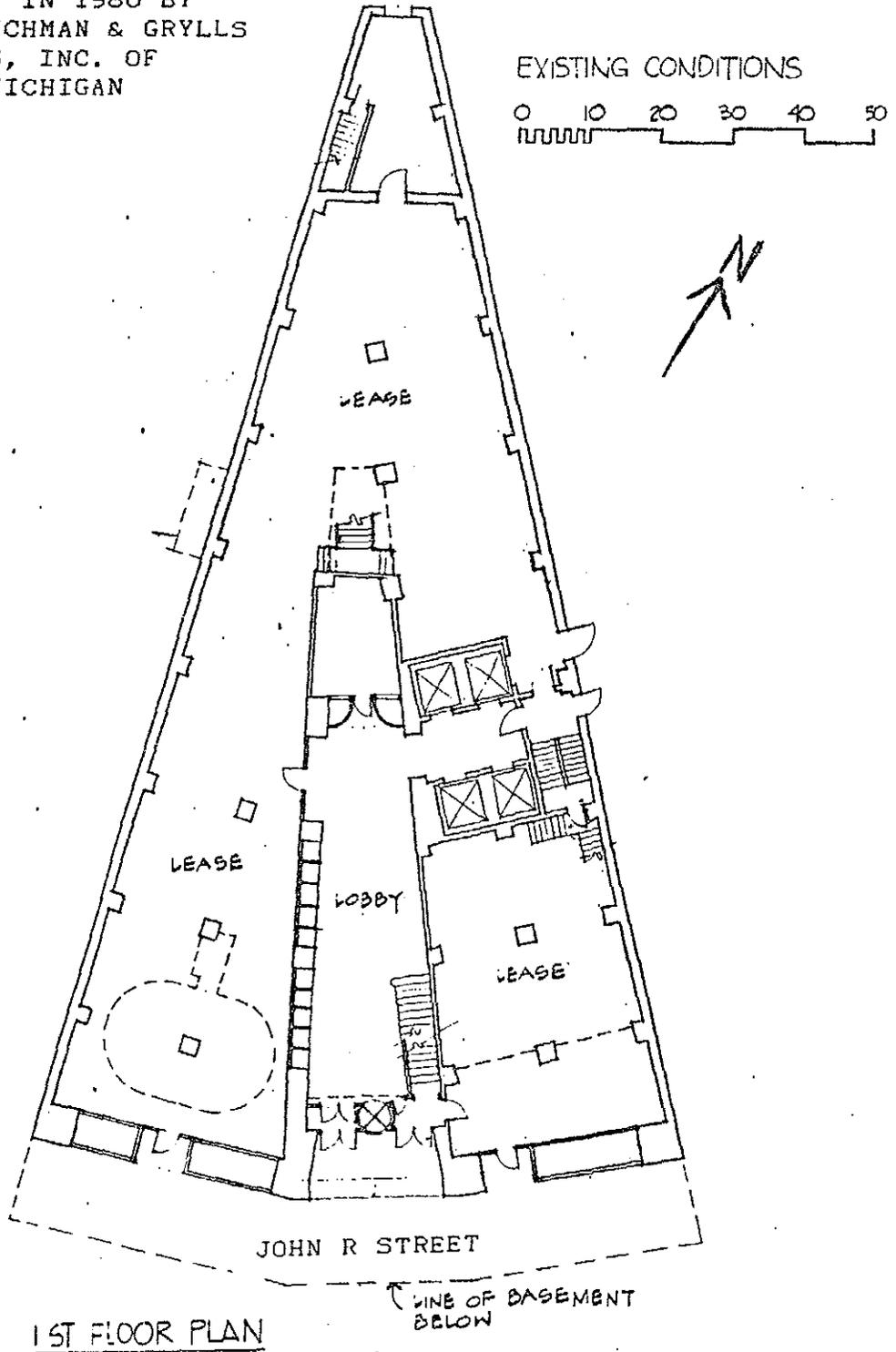


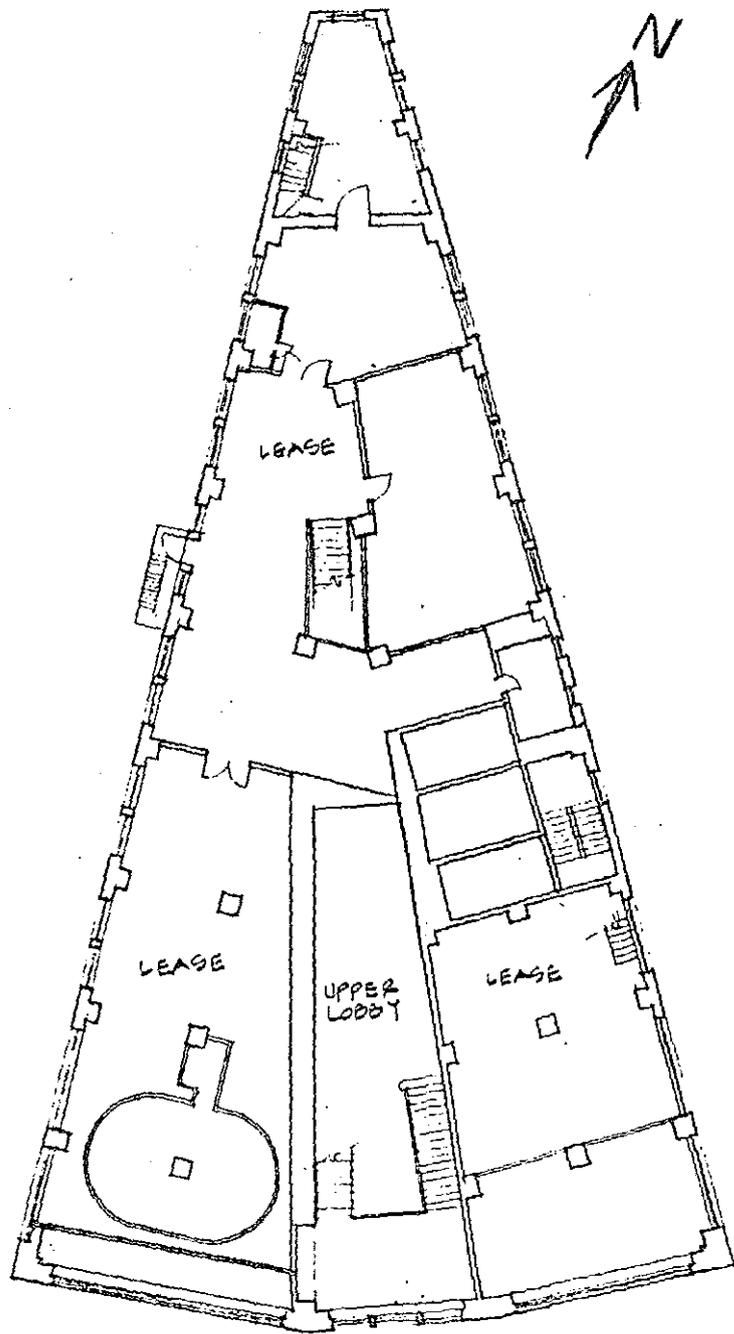
METROPOLITAN BUILDING
HABS No. MI-261 (Page 8)
OVERALL SITE PLAN



METROPOLITAN BUILDING
HABS No. MI-261 (Page 9)

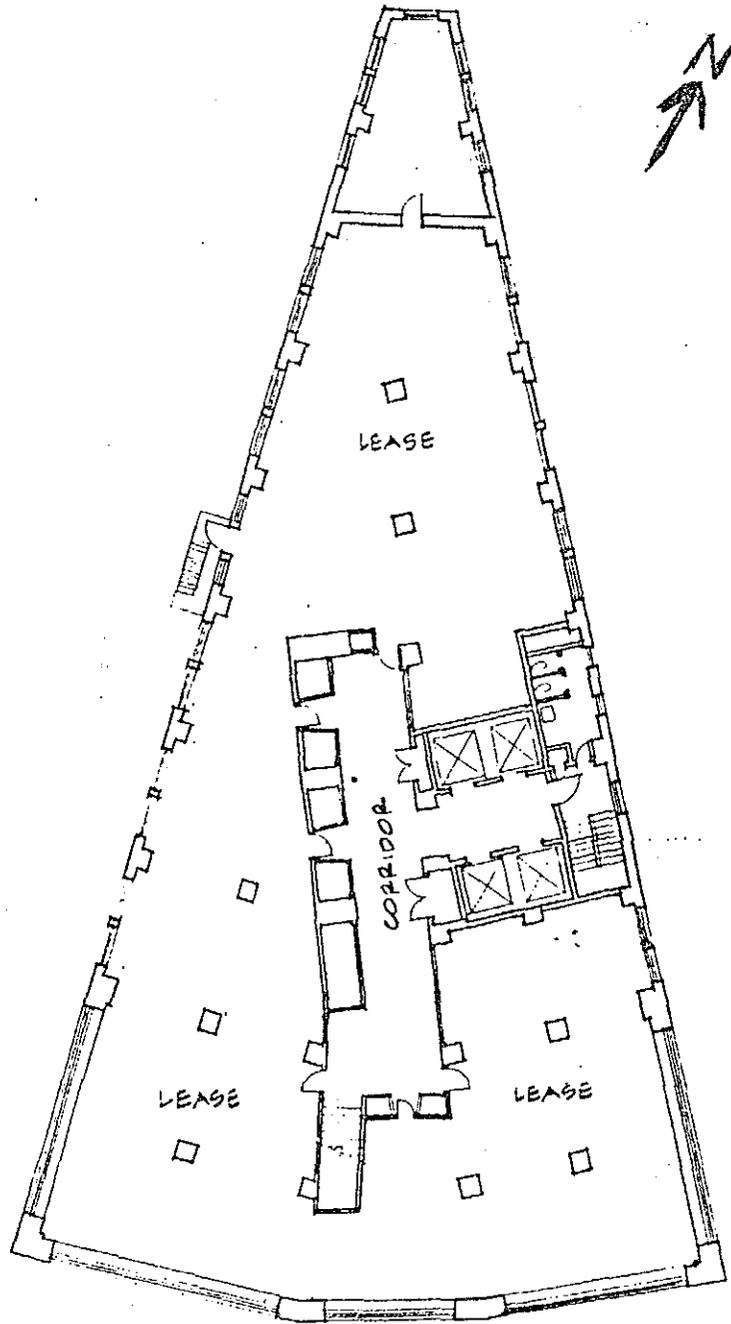
THE FOLLOWING FLOOR PLANS
WERE DRAWN IN 1980 BY
SMITH, HINCHMAN & GRYLLS
ASSOCIATES, INC. OF
DETROIT, MICHIGAN





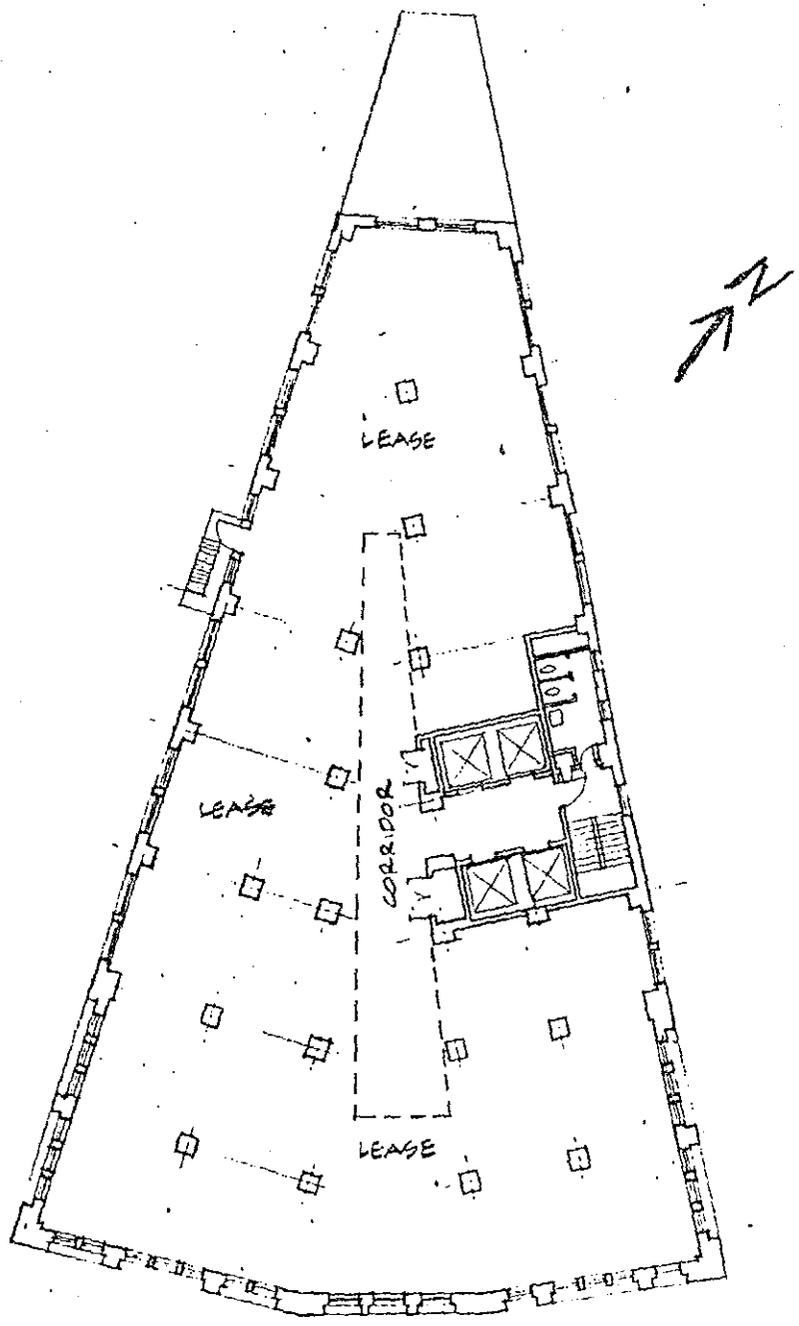
JOHN R STREET

MEZZANINE PLAN



JOHN R STREET

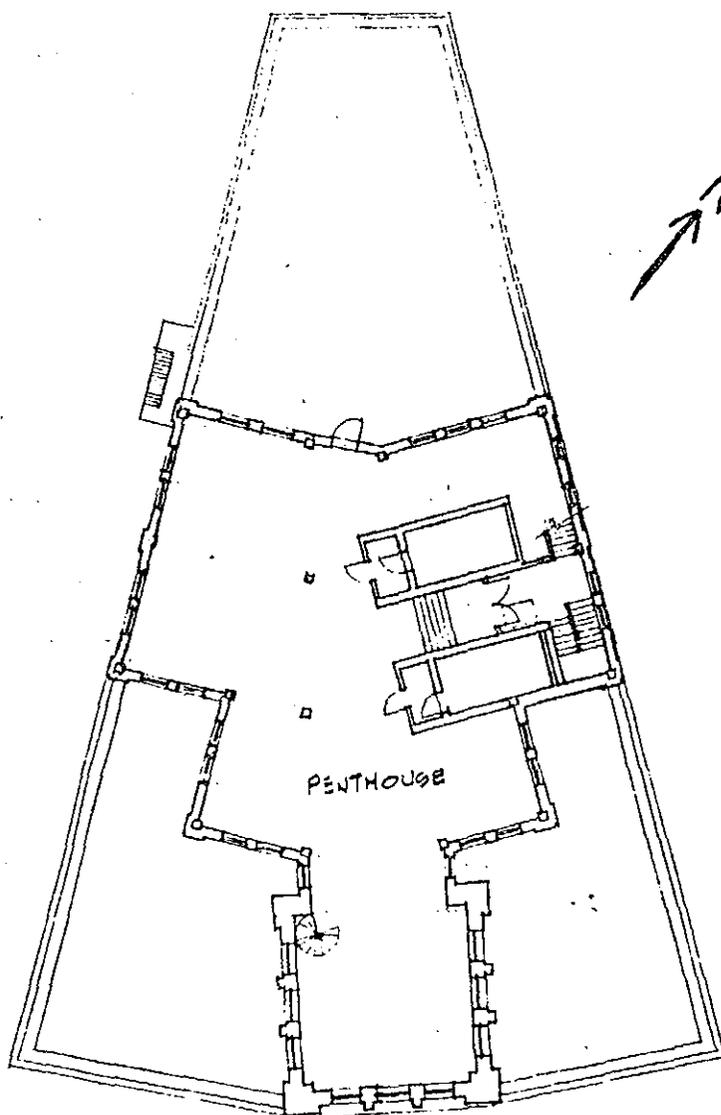
2ND FLOOR PLAN



JOHN R STREET

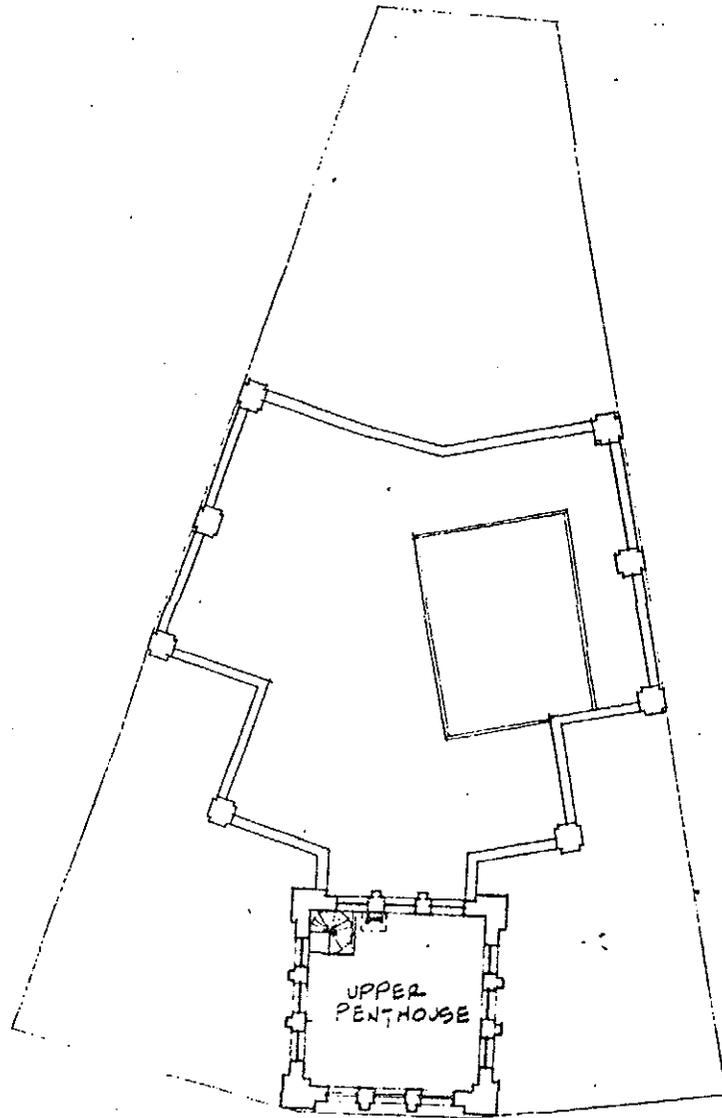
3RD THRU 12TH FLOORS

METROPOLITAN BUILDING
HABS No. MI-261 (Page 13)



JOHN R STREET

13TH FLOOR



JOHN R STREET

14TH FLOOR

EXISTING CONDITIONS

