U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY, BUILDING 674
(Hotel Thayer)
West Point
Orange County
New York

HABS No. NY-5708-60

HABS
NY,
36-WEPO,
1/60-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

HABS
NY
36-WEP
1/60-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY, BUILDING 674

(HOTEL THAYER) HABS No. NY-5708-60

LOCATION: United States Military Academy
West Point, Orange County, New York

USGS West Point Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.586830.4580925

PRESENT OWNER AND OCCUPANT: United States Military Academy

PRESENT USE: Hotel

SIGNIFICANCE: The Hotel Thayer was built on the campus of the U.S. Military Academy in 1925-26 by a private firm to house visiting families of cadets, dignitaries and tourists. The hotel was purchased by the federal government in 1943, and became the only hotel owned and operated by the federal government. The present hotel is the successor to the West Point Hotel, which stood at Trophy Point from 1820 to 1932.

Historically, the Hotel Thayer is associated with important persons, including many Presidents and other military and diplomatic leaders who stayed there. In recent history, the Thayer received the 52 Americans who had been held hostage in Iran from November 1979 to January 1981.

The Hotel Thayer was designed by Caughey and Evans with consulting architects George B. Post & Sons, well-known for their design of hotels. The prominent firm of York and Sawyer designed an addition in 1946. The hotel's Tudor Gothic style interpreted in granite and brick is compatible with the predominant character of the USMA, yet distinct. The Thayer is a typical example of a 1920s hotel, in its construction during a national boom in hotel development, and in design elements such as the two-story lobby with gallery, a plan allowing maximum light and air to each guest room, and its use of a historical decorative style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1925-6, additions 1946, 1955, 1967

2. Architects: Caughey and Evans, 29 West 34th Street, New York, NY, with Consulting Architects George B. Post & Sons, 101 Park Avenue, New York, NY. Addition by York and Sawyer, 101 Park Avenue, New York, NY.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

   1926-1943: Thayer-West Point Hotel Corporation

   1943-present: U.S. Military Academy

4. Builder: Lowrey Construction Company, New York, NY.

5. Original plans and construction: The original plans were drawn by Caughey and Evans, dated 1925 with George P. Post & Sons, Consulting Architects. All drawings are located in the Department of Engineering, USMA, West Point, New York. Ground was broken on April 20, 1925, the cornerstone was laid on September 28, 1925, and the hotel officially opened on June 3, 1926.

6. Additions and alterations: The largest single addition to the hotel was the four-story 1946 southwest wing designed by York and Sawyer. Changes were also made to the east terrace, enclosing the terrace in 1955 and adding meeting and dining rooms in 1967. The windows of the 1925 hotel, originally steel casement sash, were removed and replaced with anodized aluminum double-hung sash. The front entrance porch was enclosed with aluminum windows and doors in the 1970's. Many other minor changes were made or proposed over the years, largely to the mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems and kitchen facilities. The appended Record File Index Sheet lists all drawings.

B. Historical context:

The Hotel Thayer was erected on the campus of the U.S. Military Academy in 1925-26 by the Thayer-West Point Hotel Corporation, under a lease authorized by an Act of Congress approved March 30, 1920. When the hotel opened in June 1926, it "added excellent, modern and much-needed hotel accommodations to the Post," according to the Annual Report

of that year. Built to accommodate growing numbers of guests during the prosperous twenties, it replaced an earlier hotel which stood at Trophy Point from 1829 to 1932. The hotel took its name from Colonel Sylvanus Thayer, superintendent from 1817 to 1833, known as the fatber of the academy.

The USMA originally intended to build the hotel, and carried a budget item of $450,000 for its construction from 1914 to 1920. However, rather than appropriate the funds, Congress authorized the Secretary of War to allow a private party to erect and operate the hotel, with the proviso that after fifty years, it would become the property of the United States. The government approached several investors, but it was not until 1923 that a Mr. Miner and Mr. Herbert Williams of Newburgh were given a lease, which they assigned to the Thayer-West Point Hotel Corporation. In 1943, the USMA purchased the hotel, which is the only one owned and operated by the federal government.

Architects Caughey and Evans, about whom little is known, enlisted the assistance of consulting architects George B. Post and Sons. George B. Post, who established his office in 1867, was known for his commercial buildings in lower Manhattan, including early skyscrapers such as the 15-story World Building (1892), the 25-story St. Paul Building and the first Times Building.

George's partnersbip with his sons William S. and J. Otis Post dates from 1904, and during his later years, the firm designed the New York Stock Exchange, the Wisconsin State Capitol and tbe main office and brancbes of the Cleveland Trust Co. (1907-8). Post also designed several city hotels during that period, and is credited with the development of modern hotel planning, as exemplified by the Pontiac in Detroit (1911-12), and the Statler in Cleveland, of the same era.

As George B. Post had died in 1913, his sons worked on the Hotel Thayer, and continued to be active in hotel design. William S. Post was most responsible for the firm's continued success in this area, designing Statler Hotels in St. Louis, Buffalo, and Boston, the Roosevelt in New York, and the Olympia in Seattle. William had joined his father's firm after graduating from Columbia University in 1890, and was named a Fellow of the AIA in 1907. After a successful career, he retired in 1930, leaving his brother in charge. The Thayer reflects the approach to hotel design described in articles written by W. Sydney Wagner and Walter Hopkins (both with the firm of George B. Post and Sons) and published in Architectural Forum in 1926, including the arrangement of

public rooms, size of the guest rooms, and the provision for future expansion.

The 1946 addition was designed by the firm York and Sawyer, which gained prominence in New York in the American Renaissance, particularly for their design of banks, colleges and hospitals. Both Edward Palmer York (1865-1927) and Philip Sawyer (1868-1949) began architectural practice in the firm of McKim Mead and White. In 1898, the two established a partnership.

The firm became known for their monumental classical designs, including the New-York Historical Society (1908), the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (1924), and the Central Savings Bank (1928) at Broadway and 73rd Street. While serving as consultants to the U.S. Treasury from 1909 to 1913, the firm won the competition for the Department of Commerce building, built in 1932. Also important was the firm's representation by Louis Ayres on the board that advised the Secretary of the Treasury on the planning and construction of the Federal Triangle. Following the death of his partner in 1928, Mr. Sawyer continued practice under the firm name.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The hotel is characterized by the Tudor Gothic Revival style, which is in keeping with the predominant style of the USMA campus. York and Sawyer's 1946 addition is very modest and stylistically atypical of their work. While there were attempts to blend the new wing with the original hotel through the use of a granite base and brick facing, the wing detracts from the character of the hotel. This result, further aggravated by replacement of the original windows, may have been due to post-War economic constraints.

2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The plan of the 1925 hotel is U-shaped, with two wings extending from the center at an angle. An addition was made in 1946, extending to the southwest, perpendicular to the southern wing. The center section of the original hotel is 109'-.5" long, while the wings are 144'-9" long across their western elevations. The 1946 addition is 174"-0" long and 42'-6" deep.

2. Foundations: The hotel is supported on concrete footings.

3. Walls: The walls of the 1925 hotel are composed of a two-story base of random ashlar rock-faced granite and a granite water table, with red brick walls above, laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers and stretchers. The hattered basement walls are punctuated by buttresses with pitched limestone caps. Windows are accented by limestone label-molded lintels. The walls of the annex also have a rock-faced granite base, but one story.

4. Structural system: The structural system consists of steel framing.

5. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: Few of the original exterior doors remain. The doors to the 1925 hotel have been replaced with douhle bronze anodized alumninum and glass doors. The 1946 annex has two major doorways; one at each end, both with label-molded limestone lintels, paneled oak doors, approached hy low bluestone steps. The southern doorway features a carved helmet and sword motif in the center. A doorway has been added in the center of the annex, for mechnical equipment, and features a limestone lintel, a louvered wood transom and double oak doors.

   b. Windows: Most of the windows on hoth the original hotel and 1946 wing are 6/6 bronze anodized aluminum sash, with the exception of leaded diamond-paned stationary sash at the second floor in the west elevations of the 1925 hotel. Windows at the first floor are also aluminum sash but with a diamond-patterned grid inside double sheets of glass. Originally, the 1925 hotel had steel casement sash, while the wing had multi-paned double-hung sash in single, douhle and triple groupings.

6. Roof: The roof is flat and covered with tar and gravel. The east elevation has a crenellated parapet, while the 1946 wing has a plain banded parapet.

7. Special features: Special features include a carved limestone cornerstone at the northwest corner of the 1925 hotel. The east and west facades each have a freize of decorative plaques and a sundial in the center. Gargoyles ornament the corner tower parapets.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: Tbe basement floor of the main hotel has dining and meeting rooms, and service, mechanical, and storage spaces. The basement of the 1946 wing is occupied by a entrance vestibule and lobby, office, storage and mecbanical space.

b. First floor: The center section of tbe 1925 hotel is occupied by the lobby, reservation desk and toilet rooms, while tbe nortb wing is occupied by a dining room and the south wing by a ballroom. The first floor of the 1946 wing is occupied by guest rooms flanking a central corridor.

c. Mezzanine: The center section of the 1925 hotel contains a mezzanine or gallery extending around three sides of the two-story lobby. Administrative offices occupy the space at the front and the north wing, while guest rooms occupy the south wing.

d. Second through sixth floors: The upper floors of the 1925 hotel and 1946 wing are occupied by guest rooms flanking central corridors. The majority of rooms in the 1946 wing are organized in pairs sharing a common bathroom.

2. Stairways: The 1925 botel has two stairways leading from the lobby to the mezzanine with travertine steps and wrought iron railings. In addition, two stairways of random ashlar granite formerly on the exterior, lead to the public rooms on the basement level. Exit stairways, located at corners of the center section have steel stringers and reinforced concrete treads. The 1946 wing and the other near the southern end.

3. Flooring: The floor in the lobby is black and white marble tile. All other floors throughout the hotel are covered with carpet, except for bathrooms, whicb have white tile floors, and utility rooms, which have linoleum tile floors.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The original walls and ceiling are finished with painted plaster. The walls of the main hotel lobby and mezzanine feature wood wainscoting and ornamental plaster reliefs in heraldic motifs including lions, griffins, crowns, shields and portcullises. The walls of the guest rooms are painted plaster with black

marble base. In the annex guest rooms, the plaster walls are covered with wallpaper, and finished with a vinyl base. The window sills are pink Tennessee marble. Ceilings in the hallways and guest rooms are coved plaster.

5. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: Significant doorways and doors are mainly located in the public rooms of the 1925 hotel, such as the double paneled doors leading to the ballroom. None of the guest room doors are original, except for louvered wood closet doors.

   b. Windows: Windows throughout have 6/6 double hung, bronze-anodized aluminum sash. Original diamond-paned leaded windows are still existing at the second floor in the 1925 hotel on the east elevations. Windows at the first floor have bronze anodized double-hung sash with a diamond-pane grid between double sheets of glass.

6. Decorative features and trim: Significant trim is largely limited to the public rooms and the Presidential Suite. The lobby features an elaborate carved wood mantel and heavy molded beams painted to imitate wood. Heraldic flags supported by wrought iron brackets decorate the walls in the lobby and ballroom. The ballroom walls are further decorated with elaborate wainscoting and superimposed orders in painted molded plaster imitating wood. The Presidential Suite features a molded chairrail with fretwork motif and molded plaster cornice. The living and dining rooms have identical fireplaces with black marble mantels and adjacent built-in cabinets with double glass doors. The women's powder room has a fireplace with a rose-colored marble mantel in the vestibule.

7. Hardware: Most of the hotel room doors have original brass plates and knobs embossed with a shield and "Hotel Thayer."

8. Mechanical equipment:

   a. Heating: Heating is by steam-heated hot air and delivered by fan-coil units.

   b. Air conditioning: The public rooms are served by individual chilled water air conditioning systems installed in the 1970s.

c. Ventilation: Ventilation is supplied throughout the building by operable window sash. The bathrooms are ventilated by pipes leading to an air handler on the roof.

d. Lighting: Elaborate wrought iron chandeliers hang in the lobby, dining room and ballroom. Other fixtures include wrought iron wall sconces. No other fixtures appear to be original.

e. Plumbing: Bathroom fixtures appear to be original, including sinks with triangular pedestals and shower stalls with gray marble partitions.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building is located on Thayer Road at the south end of the campus near Thayer Gate. The nortb-south orientation of the hotel on the Palisades makes good use of the site, overlooking Buffalo Soldiers Field to the west and the Hudson River to the east.

2. Historic landscape design: The hotel is situated on a hill above the road, and approached from the side by a steep driveway supported by a retaining wall of gray granite. A stairway leads from the road to a semicircular terrace opposite the main entrance.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: The original drawings, dated 1925, as well as alteration drawings dated 1946, and all other drawings are on file in the Facilities Engineer's Office in the Directorate of Engineering and Housing, US Military Academy.

B. Early Views: There are two views in the special collections of the USMA library. (See data forms attached.)

C. Interviews: Richard Scholl, Engineer, West Point, NY, June 26, 1989.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Records, U.S. Military Academy Archives.

2. Secondary and published sources:

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Schultze, Leonard. "The Architecture of the Modern Hotel," Architectural Forum. 39, No. 5 (Nov. 1923) 199-204.

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Warren, James S. "The Present Status of the Hotel Business," Architectural Forum. 51, No. 6 (Dec. 1929) 711-712.

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Withey. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects. Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Co., 1956, pp. 675, 536-37.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Additional information may be found at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and through interviews with individuals familiar with the hotel.

E. Supplemental Material

1. Site plan

2. Historic photographs, Special Collections, U.S. Military Academy

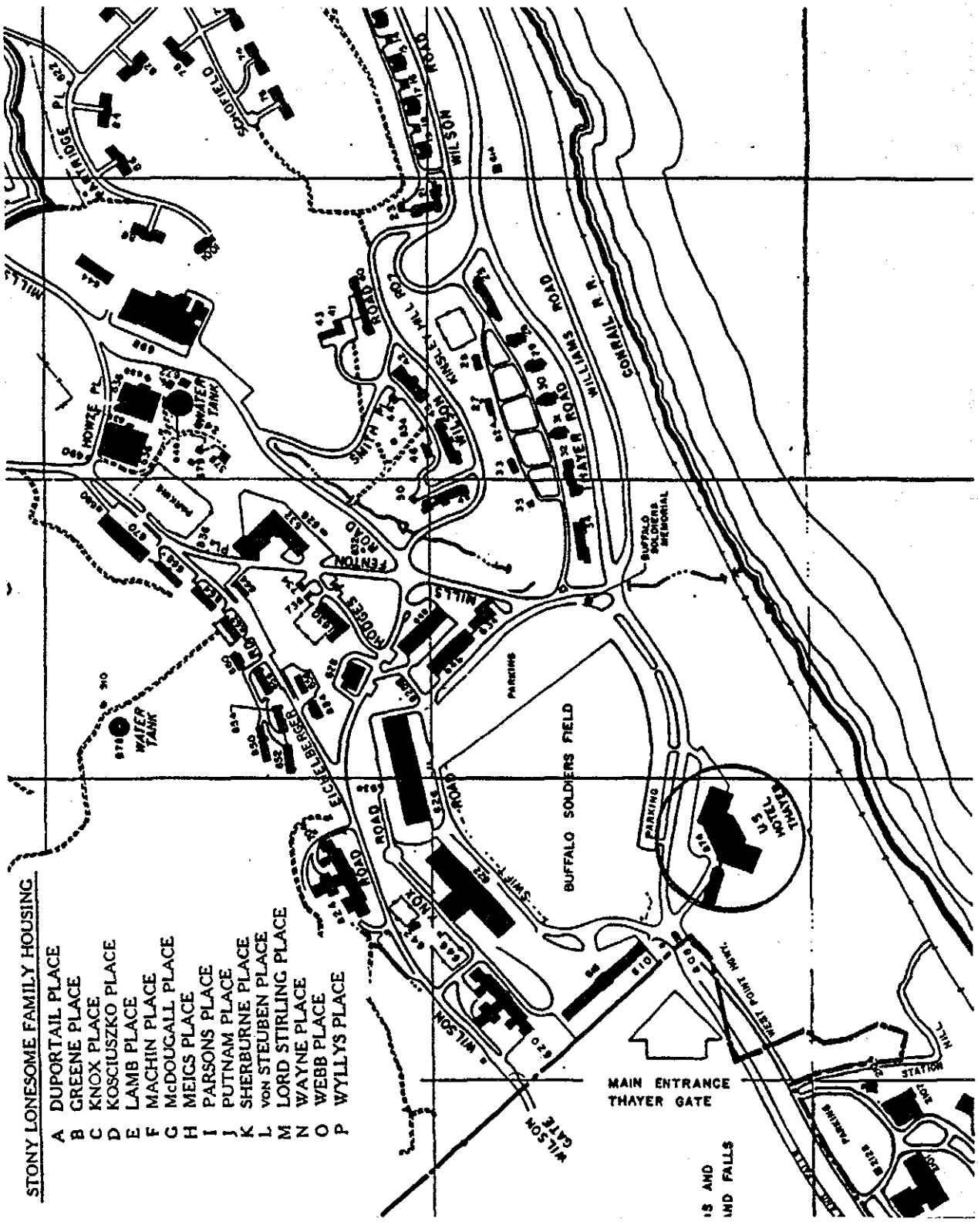
3. Floor plans, Hotel Thayer, Manager's Office

4. Record File Index Sheets, Hotel Thayer, Facilities Engineer's Office, Director of Engineering and Housing, U.S. Military Academy.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project presently being undertaken by the U.S. Military Academy, Directorate of Engineering and Housing, consists of the rehabilitation of the main hotel, demolition of the 1946 wing, and construction of a new wing in the same location.

Prepared by: Beth Sullebarger
Title: Principal
Affiliation: Sullebarger Associates
Date: October 1989


STONY LONESOME FAMILY HOUSING
A DUPORTAIL PLACE
B GREENE PLACE
C KNOX PLACE
D KOSCIUSZKO PLACE
E LAMB PLACE
F MACHIN PLACE
G McDOUGALL PLACE
H MEIGS PLACE
I PARSONS PLACE
J PUTNAM PLACE
K SHERBURNE PLACE
L VON STEUBEN PLACE
M LORD STIRLING PLACE
N WAYNE PLACE
O WEBB PLACE
P WYLLYS PLACE
WILSON ROAD
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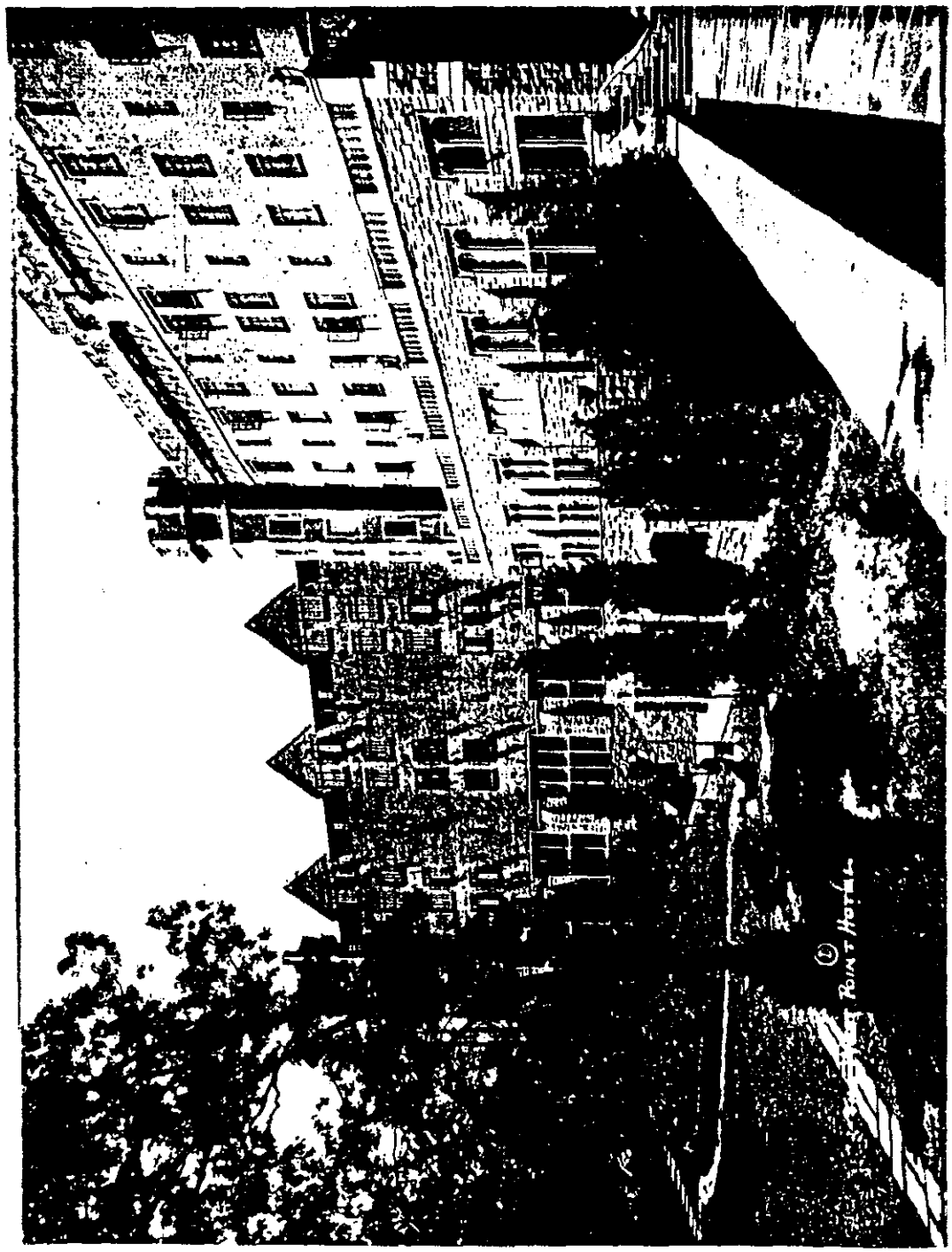
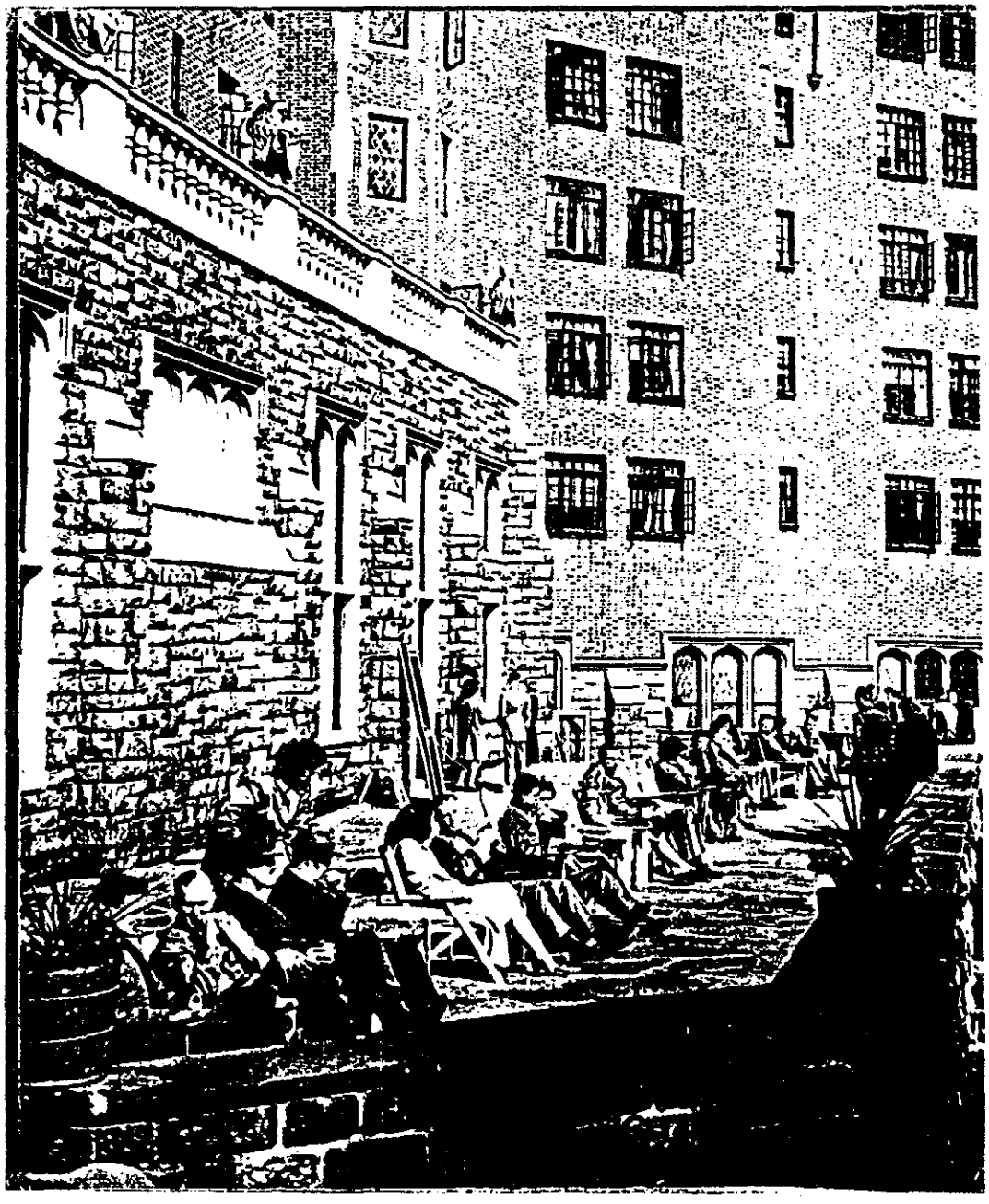
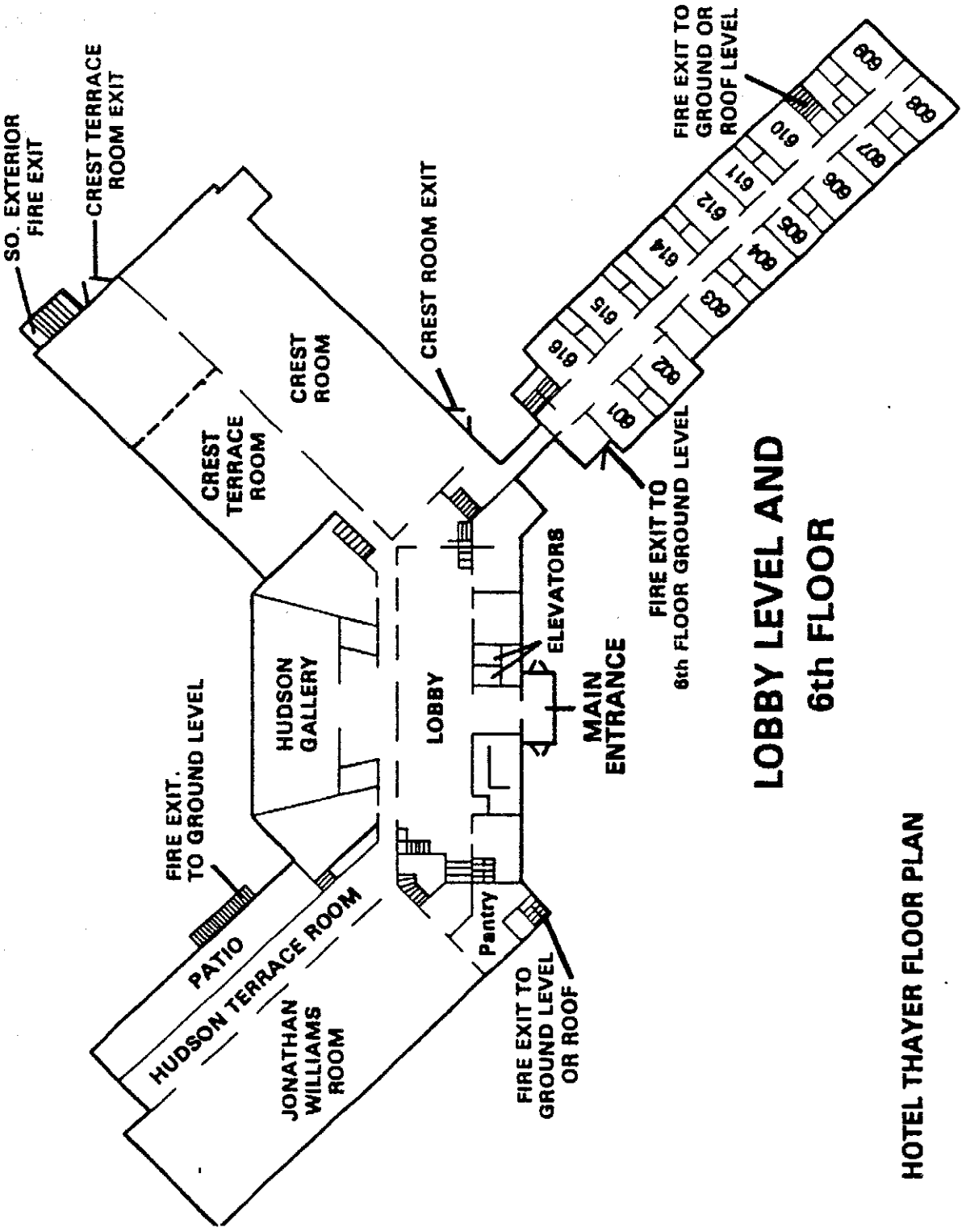
CONRAIL R.R.
THAYER ROAD
KINSLEY HILL RD
SMITH PL
HOWZE PL
WATER TANK
FENTON ROAD
HODGES
MILLS
EICHELBERGER
KNOX ROAD
SWIFT ROAD
BUFFALO SOLDIERS FIELD
BUFFALO SOLDIERS MEMORIAL
PARKING
U.S. HOTEL THAYER
WEST POINT HWY.
MAIN ENTRANCE
THAYER GATE
WILSON GATE
STATION
HILL



Historic view, n.d., Special Collections, U.S.M.A.

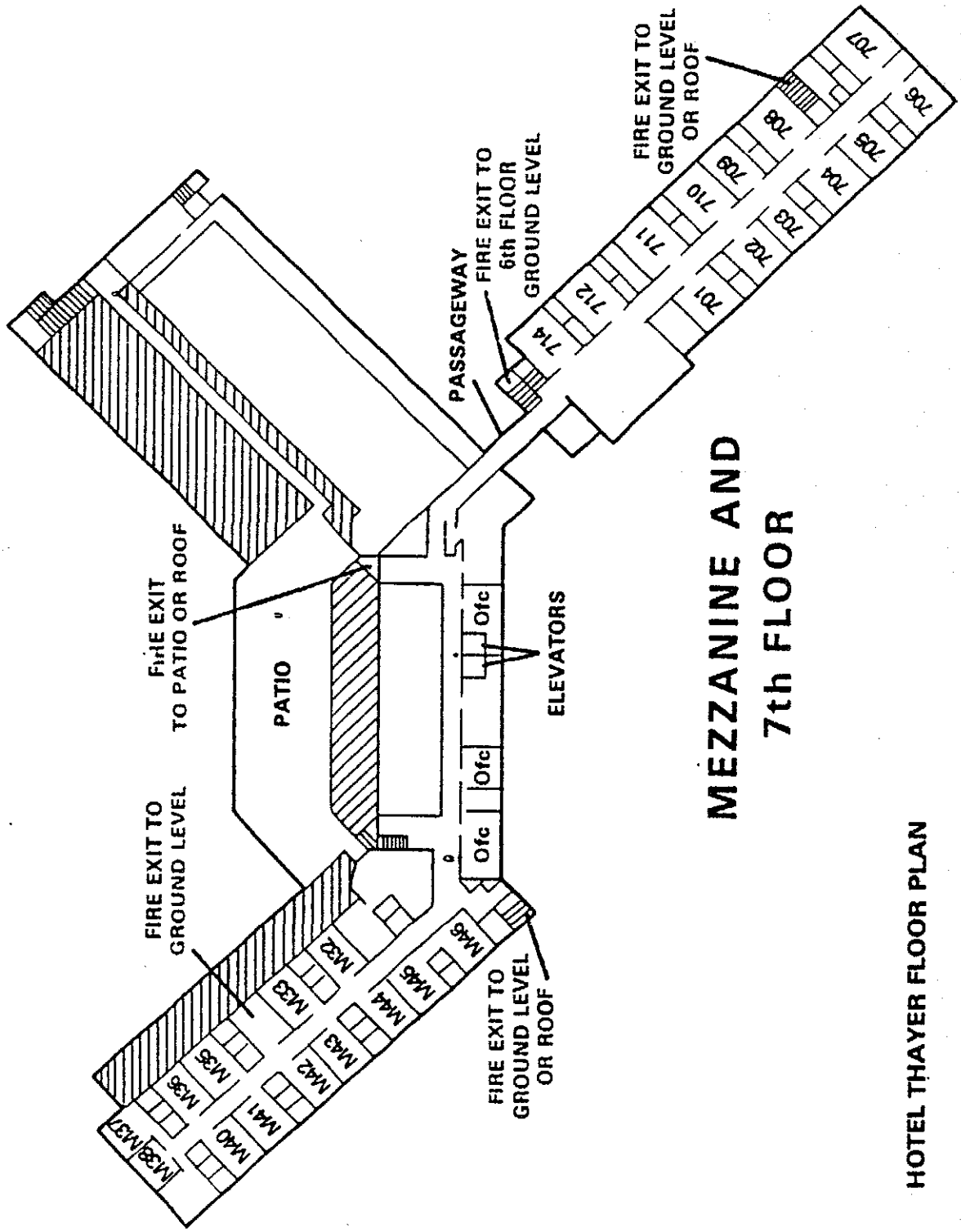


Historic view, East Terrace, n.d., Special Collections, U.S.M.A.



LOBBY LEVEL AND 6th FLOOR

HOTEL THAYER FLOOR PLAN



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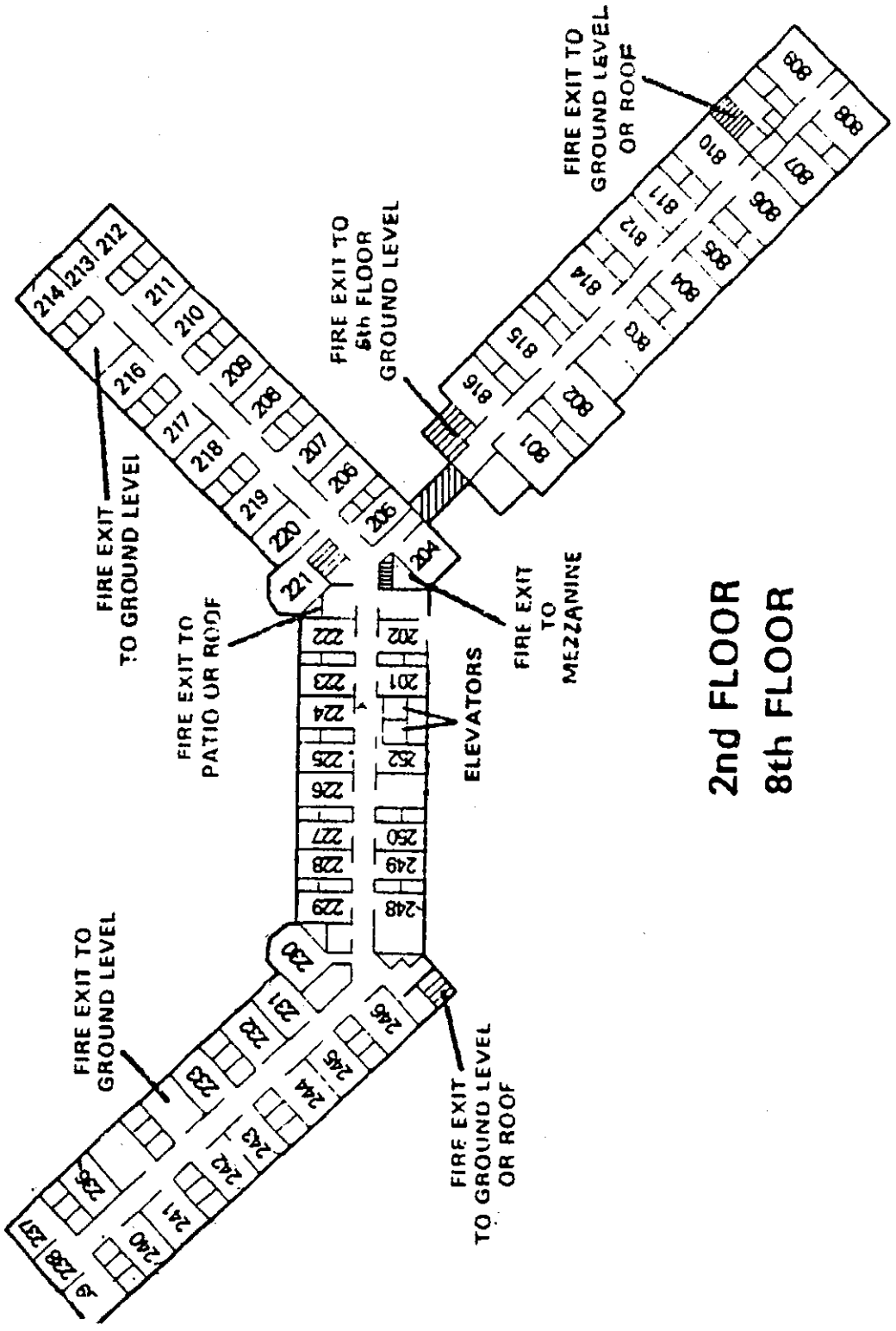
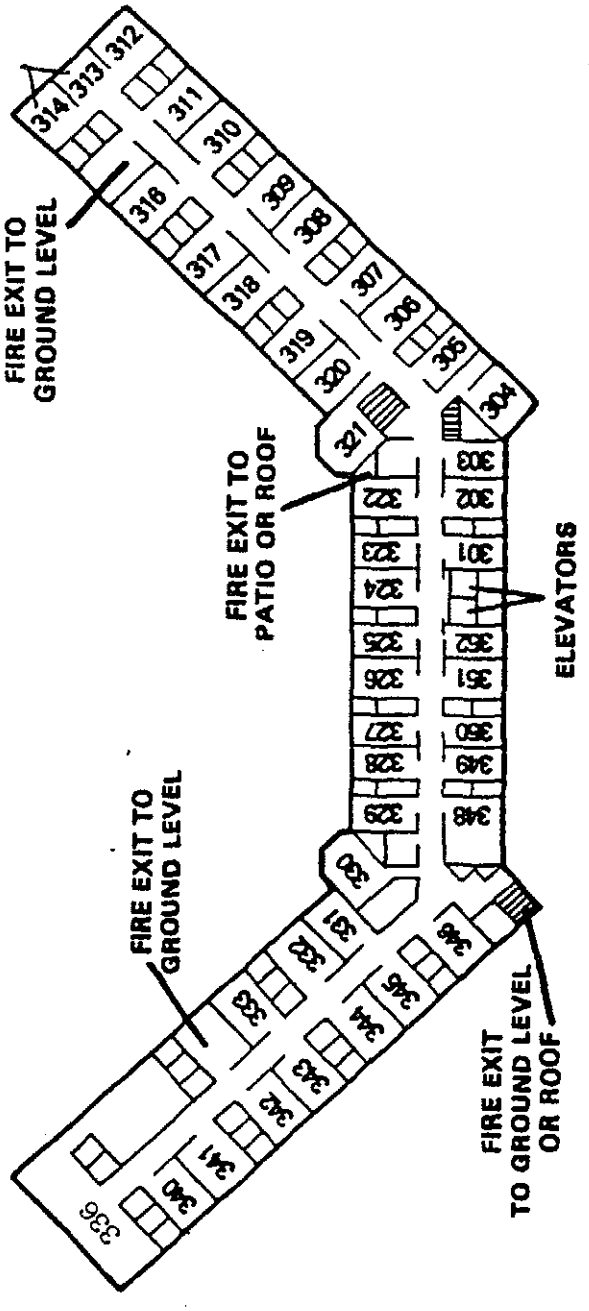


HOTEL THAYER FLOOR PLAN



3rd FLOOR
(TYPICAL)

HOTEL THAYER FLOOR PLAN

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