

Eagles Building  
1106 12th Avenue  
Intown Neighborhood  
Altoona  
Blair County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5510

HABS  
PA,  
7-ALTO,  
102-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

EAGLES BUILDING  
HABS No. PA-5510

HABS  
PA.  
7-ALTO,  
102-

Location: 1106 12th Ave., Altoona, Blair County, Pa.

Present Owner: Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie No. 286.

Present Use: The barroom behind the lobby on the first floor is well maintained and used by lodge members. The mezzanine, second, and third floors are no longer used except for a small room on the west side of the second floor which now serves as the organization's meeting hall.

Significance: The Eagles Building stands as a powerful tribute to the thousands of working people who financed its construction. Unlike the Masons or Elks, who also built substantial buildings in the commercial center, the Eagles were a predominantly working-class organization. Their lodge, an early design by architect D. George Puderbaugh of Altoona, has an unusual brownstone facade embellished with pairs of giant, carved eagles. Though handsome, the exterior is deceptive in its stark simplicity; the interior of the lodge, by contrast, consists of three open halls with impressive plasterwork and vibrant, painted decoration. Moreover, the interior is in virtually unaltered condition.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1912-13. The building was dedicated during three days of concerts and other festivities, May 29-31, 1913.
2. Architect: D. George Puderbaugh of Altoona designed the Eagles Building.

David George Puderbaugh (1885-1965) was one of the city's most versatile and prolific architects. A native of Altoona, Puderbaugh graduated from Drexel School of Architecture in Philadelphia in 1909. He opened offices in Altoona in 1912, and while he continued to practice architecture well into the 1950s, his most prestigious commissions date to the 1910s and 1920s. Puderbaugh served as Blair County Supervising Engineer for the Works Project Administration from 1935-38, and as a member of Altoona's housing authority in the late 1950s. He was also active in local politics, becoming chairman of the Blair County Democratic Committee in 1940, and losing closely contested races for mayor in 1943 and 1951.

Puderbaugh's work had a tremendous impact on the architectural development of Altoona and its environs. A list of his projects mentions over 300 residences, schools, churches, stores, and fraternal lodges. In addition to the Eagles Building, his outstanding productions include the Italian Renaissance-style Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church (1912), which may have brought him back to Altoona; the parallelogram-shaped Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen's Hall (1914) on 8th Avenue, which is still standing, but does not have its original cornice; and the Knights of Columbus Lodge on 11th Avenue (1925-26). By contrast, he also designed the "palatial" homes of some of Altoona's wealthiest capitalists, usually in a restrained, Colonial-Revival style. Those of note include the Boyer, Wolf, and Rothert residences in Sylvan Hills, just south of Altoona on the

Logan Valley Railway.<sup>1</sup>

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Eagles have owned this site since 1905.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: P. W. Finn was the contractor.
5. Original plans and construction: The lodge was designed to house the Eagles' club activities on all four floors. The first floor, which was equipped with a 50' bar, served as an informal social hall and buffet room; the mezzanine featured orchestra and billiard balconies on opposite ends of the building; the second floor consisted of the grand ballroom; and the third was devoted to lodge activities. These four divisions are marked on the exterior by molded brownstone stringcourses and varied window treatments. The building was designed with a flat roof, which supported a rooftop garden and a bandstand. A 1913 photograph of the facade also shows a marquee over the front entrance, which has since been removed. The cost of construction was estimated at \$100,000.

Judging by the original set of architectural drawings, some major modifications were made before the building was erected. Instead of the present brownstone-faced facade, the plans called for a brick wall above the first-story level. On these three upper floors of the facade, only the decorative elements--quoins, sills, columns, stringcourses, and keystones--were intended to be of brownstone. The original drawings also show a pair of copper lamps in the shape of eagles mounted on the rooftop balustrade; these were apparently never installed. Instead, a pair of giant, carved eagles was placed on the balustrade above the main entranceway, and a second pair was placed on the fourth-floor balustrade, flanking the central bay.

6. Alterations and additions: In 1940-41, the Eagles renovated their clubhouse, installing four new bowling alleys in their lodge room, and a mahogany bar on the second floor. The ballroom also received new furniture and curtains, improved lighting equipment (spotlights, etc.), and a fresh paint scheme of pale blue with bright blue trim. The windows on the front facade were replaced with glass block in the 1940s.

In the 1970s, a dropped ceiling was installed between the first and mezzanine floors, just below the balconies. Heat and electricity to the rest of the building were cut off at that time, as it was too expensive to maintain the vacant floors.

B. Historical Context:

Altoona Aerie No. 286, Fraternal Order of Eagles, was founded November 30, 1902, with 250 charter members. The lodge met on the fourth floor of the Mateer Building until 1905. On November 4, 1904, it purchased an earlier building on the current site for \$16,500. The Eagles spent an additional \$10,000 for improvements to this structure, but it was soon outgrown.<sup>2</sup>

The dedication of the new building made headlines for three consecutive days. Occurring May 29-31, 1913, the dedication was attended by a large national delegation of Eagles. On the first day, a parade of 2,000 marched down 11th and 12th avenues to the new lodge. The parade was followed by concerts and an

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<sup>1</sup>Altoona Mirror: "Puderbaugh Given WPA Directorship," (August 24, 1935); "Puderbaugh is New Chairman of Democrats," (May 1940); "D. G. Puderbaugh Candidate for Mayor," [Paid political advertisement] (October 27, 1943); "Architect, 79, Long Active in Area, Expires," (February 27, 1965). "A List of Drawings of the late D. George Puderbaugh, Architect," typescript, compiled by James S. Kasun, n. d.

<sup>2</sup>Fraternal Order of Eagles Golden Anniversary Program, 1902-1952 (Altoona: n.p., 1952).

opening banquet for Eagles and their spouses. The second day's events included the formal dedication of the building, with speeches on "the workmen of Altoona," fraternalism, and other subjects. This ceremony was followed by a vaudeville performance and dancing in the rooftop garden. On the final day, D. George Puderbaugh gave a talk on the architecture of the building. The Altoona Gazette commented that the building would "stand as a monument to his exceptional ability." Overall, the "splendor" of the dedication ceremonies was described as "unprecedented" in the city of Altoona; a schedule of upcoming events was printed in the newspaper each day.<sup>3</sup>

The Eagles made headlines again in the 1930s when their clubhouse was raided by federal officials--on three separate occasions--for the illegal manufacture and possession of alcoholic beverages. Yet despite the availability of beer, bowling, and billiards, Aerie No. 286 maintained that it was more than just a social club. Since the 1940s, the lodge has been actively involved in the Eagles' national campaigns for worker's compensation and old-age pensions, thus integrating fraternal activity with social responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

According to a lodge history, early membership was drawn from the "best" of Altoona's professional, business, and railroad employees. The Eagles provided economic security to their members with health insurance and widow's pensions at a time when neither the government nor employers provided such benefits. Aerie No. 286 boasted nearly 2,200 members in 1915, and just over 3,000 with the return of servicemen in the late 1940s. By the 1980s, however, the lodge's numbers had dwindled to about 200 members, only a handful are currently active in the club.<sup>5</sup>

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The stark, Neoclassical facade seems incongruous with the building's opulent interior which displays a lavish use of ornamental plasterwork and bright, painted decoration on the walls and ceiling.
2. Condition of fabric: Good-fair. Despite substantial water damage on all four floors, the original plan and decorative plasterwork remain intact.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The four-story, attached, rectangular building measures 50' x 119' x 76'-6" to the top of the parapet wall on the roof. There are three bays across the front.
2. Foundations: Not visible.
3. Walls: The facade is faced in smooth brownstone. The central bay, which projects slightly from the first-to-third stories, has a variety of surface ornamentation. At the first floor, a pair of engaged, Ionic columns flank the main entrance. There are balustrades supporting pairs of carved

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<sup>3</sup>Altoona Gazette: "Finest Clubhouse, F.O.E. House, Awaits Dedication Ceremony," (May 28, 1913); "Eagles Flock Altoonaward for Big Show," (May 29, 1913); "Most Auspicious Opening of Eaglesdom's Great Celebration," (May 30, 1913). Altoona Mirror: "Eagles Building Being Dedicated," (May 29, 1913); "Eagles Celebration Concludes," (May 31, 1913).

<sup>4</sup>Alvin J. Schmidt, Fraternal Organizations (Westport, Connecticut: The Greenwood Press, 1980), 94-6. FOE Aerie No. 286, Golden Anniversary Program.

<sup>5</sup>Chardos G. Nearhoof, Trustee, FOE No. 286, interview by Nancy Spiegel, Altoona, Pa., July 10, 1989.

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eagles at the second and fourth stories. On the third floor, the central bay has a pair of Ionic columns on either side of the window; a carved name panel reading "F.O.E." is located just below this window. The first and third bays are identical; a pier at each end of the facade rises a full three stories. An elaborate, molded stringcourse separates the third and fourth stories. The rear facade is a plain, red-brick wall laid in common bond.

4. Structural systems, framing: The building has a reinforced-concrete and steel frame and a steel-framed roof.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entranceway is located in the central bay of the building. The original double doors, which no longer survive, had three rectangular panels with swags and other Neoclassical ornamentation on the upper panels. They have been replaced by a pair of V-joint slab doors with small crosses set in rectangular panels of glass. The new doors were salvaged when the adjacent Grace Lutheran Church (built 1898) was demolished in the 1970s to make way for a podiatrist's office and parking lot.
  - b. Windows: The window openings were originally fitted with tripartite sash. These consisted of one-over-one-light, double-hung sash topped by three fixed, single-light transoms. In the central bay, the second- and third-floor windows are round-arched. The rest of the windows, on both the front and rear facades, have flat brick arches. Most of the windows are now filled with glass block.
6. Roof:
  - a. Shape: The flat roof, designed to support a rooftop garden, was originally floored in red block tile. It has recently been covered with layers of built-up roofing. The parapet wall rises 4'-6" from the top of the roof to the top of the tile block coping.
  - b. Cornice: The denticulated cornice is of brownstone.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
  - a. Basement: In addition to containing two boilers and coal bins, the basement was also used for food storage and preparation. A kitchen with two gas stoves, two walk-in coolers, and ample pantry areas is located on the 12th Avenue end. Other notable basement features include a restroom with the original urinals set on marble pedestals, and refrigeration units that date to 1913. Originally, the basement also had a wine cellar, rathskeller, and several bowling alleys, but these no longer remain. The basement has experienced severe water damage; some parts are under as much as a foot of water.
  - b. First: The main entrance leads to an inner vestibule and the elevator lobby. The lodge secretary's office and two private dining rooms open off the lobby. Behind these rooms is the social hall, which measures 47' x 64'. The floor-to-ceiling height is 24' in the two-story social hall and 12' in the lobby and dining rooms.
  - c. Second (Mezzanine): The mezzanine had orchestra and billiard balconies on either end of the building. A private dining room measuring 15'-6" x 10'-2" and a dining ball

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measuring 15' x 33'-10" were located opposite the stairway on the 12th Avenue end.

- d. Third: The hallroom, which measures 47' x 88', was described as "the most elaborately fitted and best appointed of any in this section of Pennsylvania." The hyperbolic, but nonetheless telling description continued: "Few surpass [the Eagles' ballroom] in any of the large larger club houses or hotels of the metropolitan cities of this country." (Altoona Gazette, [May 28, 1913]) The front of the orchestra balcony was embellished with an 18' mosaic, since removed. To the front of the building were the ladies' parlor, retiring, and refreshment rooms. The floor-to-ceiling height is 18'.
  - e. Fourth: The lodge room, which measures 47' x 90', had elevated platforms along the sides. "Splendidly appointed" ante-rooms were located at the 12th Avenue end, along with committee and lounging rooms. The floor-to-ceiling height is 14'.
2. Stairway: The stairway is located in the elevator lobby, to the right of the main entrance. It has carved newel posts and turned balusters on all floors.
  3. Flooring: The hasement has 4" thick concrete floors. With the exception of the elevator lobby, which has a multi-colored tile floor, the remainder of the building is floored in yellow pine. The Lodge Room originally had dark green Wilton carpets.
  4. Wall and ceiling finish:
    - a. Basement: All interior walls are of brick; they were originally plastered with cement mortar. The ceiling has exposed joists.
    - b. First: The elevator lobby is finished with Italian marble and a plaster cornice with egg-and-dart molding. Behind the entrance, the buffet room has a pressed-metal ceiling with decorative beams. Six pilasters with Ionic capitals decorate each of the side walls.
    - c. Ballroom: Originally, the decorative Ionic pilasters in the ballroom were painted gold, cream and pink. The ceiling, "which impresses one with its height and grandeur" was finished with elahorate plaster decoration, "the design of Louis XV"; these features remain intact, although the color scheme has changed several times.
    - d. Lodge Room: Originally, the walls had "deep pink frescoeing"; the plaster ceiling was painted buff.
  5. Openings: Most of the interior doors have five rectangular panels. All of the doorways have Colonial Revival-style surrounds except for the basement doorways, which have simple, molded surrounds.
  6. Original furnishings: The Eagles Building had a variety of "artistic and luxurious" furnishings. The Lodge Room was furnished with mahogany and leather benches. Oak chairs with green leather trim were located in the Ballroom, and the room's windows were draped in "old rose and cream curtains." Much of the original furniture has been removed to the basement, where it is in a very bad state of repair. In addition, the basement pantries are still stocked with the original blue and white transfer-printed tablewares and serving pieces; warming tables are still in place in the second- and third- floor anterooms.
  7. Mechanical systems:

- a. Heating: Steam heat.
  - b. Lighting: The Eagles Building was equipped with electric lighting. In the Ballroom, indirect lighting was provided by eighteen "beautiful and costly white art domes, each carrying high power tungsten incandescent." The lights in the Lodge Room were "toned with opalescent shades," and equipped with a dimmer. The fusebox on the first floor appears to be original.
  - c. Food service: The basement was equipped with two gas stoves, two walk-in coolers, and a dumb-waiter system for transporting food and tablewares to the banquet and ballrooms above. All of these features are still extant.
- D. Site: The building faces southeast on 12th Avenue.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: A set of nine original ink-on-linen drawings are in the possession of James S. Kasun, registered architect, 302 Coleridge Ave., Altoona, Pennsylvania. These include front and rear elevations, a complete set of floor plans, a longitudinal section, and a perspective section through the northeast corner of the roof. All drawings are signed by Puderbaugh and dated March 9, 1912.
- B. Early view: The Altoona Mirror library has a photograph of the building, ca. 1913, in its collection of historic cuts. The original marquee over the entrance and the original tripartite sash appear in this view.
- C. Interview: Chardos G. Nearhoof, Trustee, FOE No. 286, interview by Nancy Spiegel, Altoona Pa., July 10, 1989.
- D. Bibliography:

- 1. Primary sources:

- Altoona Mirror:

- "Eagles Building Being Dedicated," (May 29, 1913).

- "Eagles Celebration Concludes," (May 31, 1913).

- "Eagles Refurnish New Lodge Home," (February 13, 1941).

- "Eagles to Formally Occupy Renovated Home," (September 23, 1940).

- "Federal Officials Raid Eagles Lodge," (August 20, 1930).

- Altoona Mirror file on D. George Puderbaugh:

- "Altoona Area Affected by WMC [war manpower commission] Changes," (August 21, 1945).

- "Architect, 79, Long Active in Area, Expires," (February 27, 1965).

"D. G. Puderbaugh Candidate for Mayor" [Paid political advertisement], (October 27, 1943).

"Puderbaugh Given WPA Directorship," (August 24, 1935).

"Puderbaugh is New Chairman of Democrats," (May 27, 1940).

Altoona Gazette:

"Finest Cluhhouse, F.O.E. House, Awaits Dedication Ceremony," (May 28, 1913).

"Eagles Flock Altoona-ward for Big Show," (May 29, 1913).

"Most Auspicious Opening of Eagledom's Great Celebration," (May 30, 1913).

Building Record, Blair County Tax Assessment Office, Hollidaysburg, Pa.

Puderbaugh, David George. "A List of Drawings of the late D. George Puderbaugh, Architect." Typescript, compiled by James S. Kasun, n.d., Altoona, Pennsylvania.

2. Secondary sources:

"Fraternal Order of Eagles" in Fraternal Organizations, by Alvin J. Schmidt. Westport, Connecticut: The Greenwood Press, 1980.

Fraternal Order of Eagles Golden Anniversary Program, 1902-1952. Altoona: n.p., 1952.

E. Additional Sources: The records of FOE's Building Committee are probably still extant, but have not yet been located.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. An overview of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and an overview of the downtown (HABS No. PA-5789) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Nancy Spiegel in the summer of 1989 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Spiegel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace and Sara Amy Leach.

Fig. 1.1 Drawing of 12th Avenue facade, March 9, 1912.

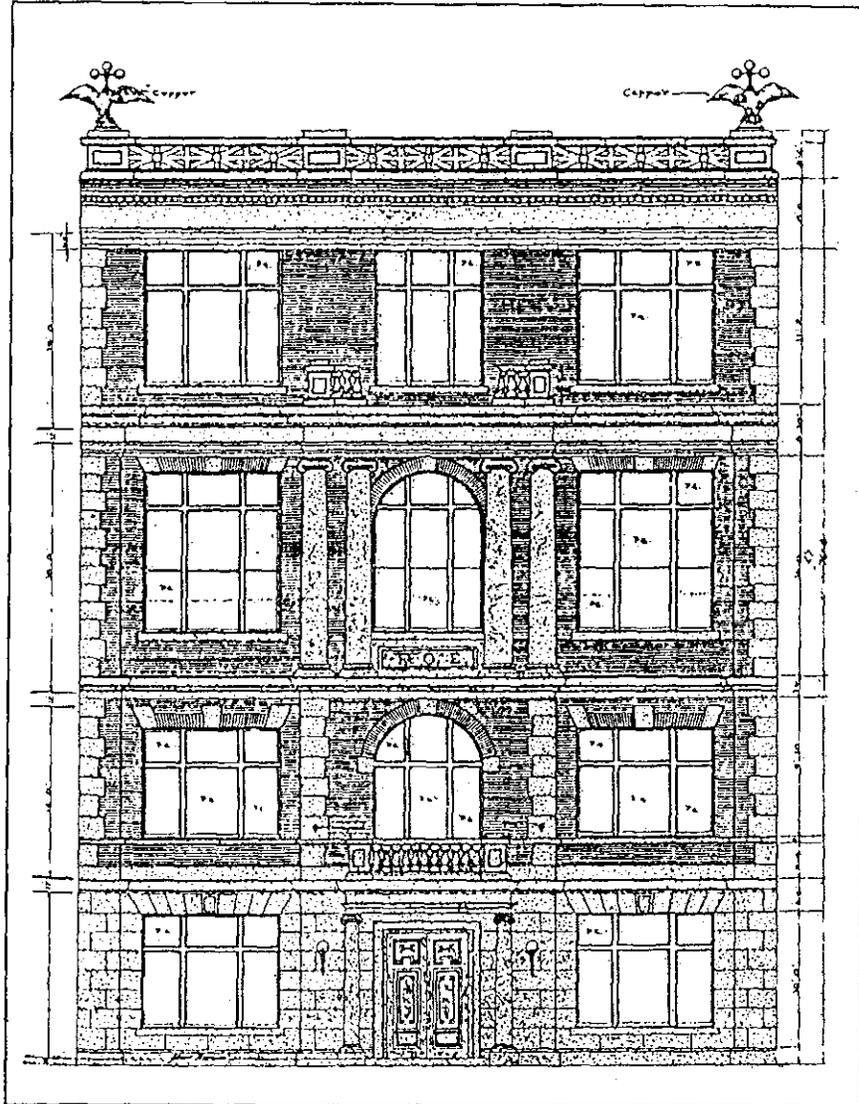


Fig 1.2 Drawing of "Proposed Alterations to F.O.E."

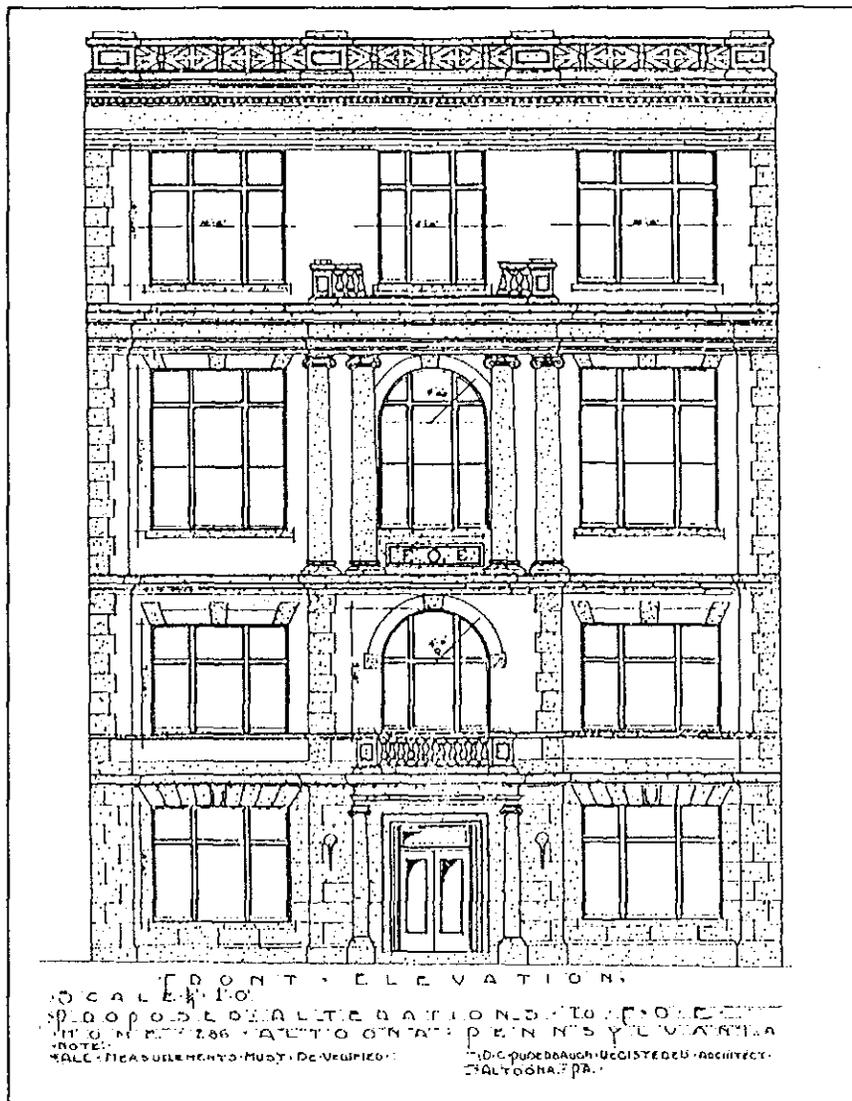
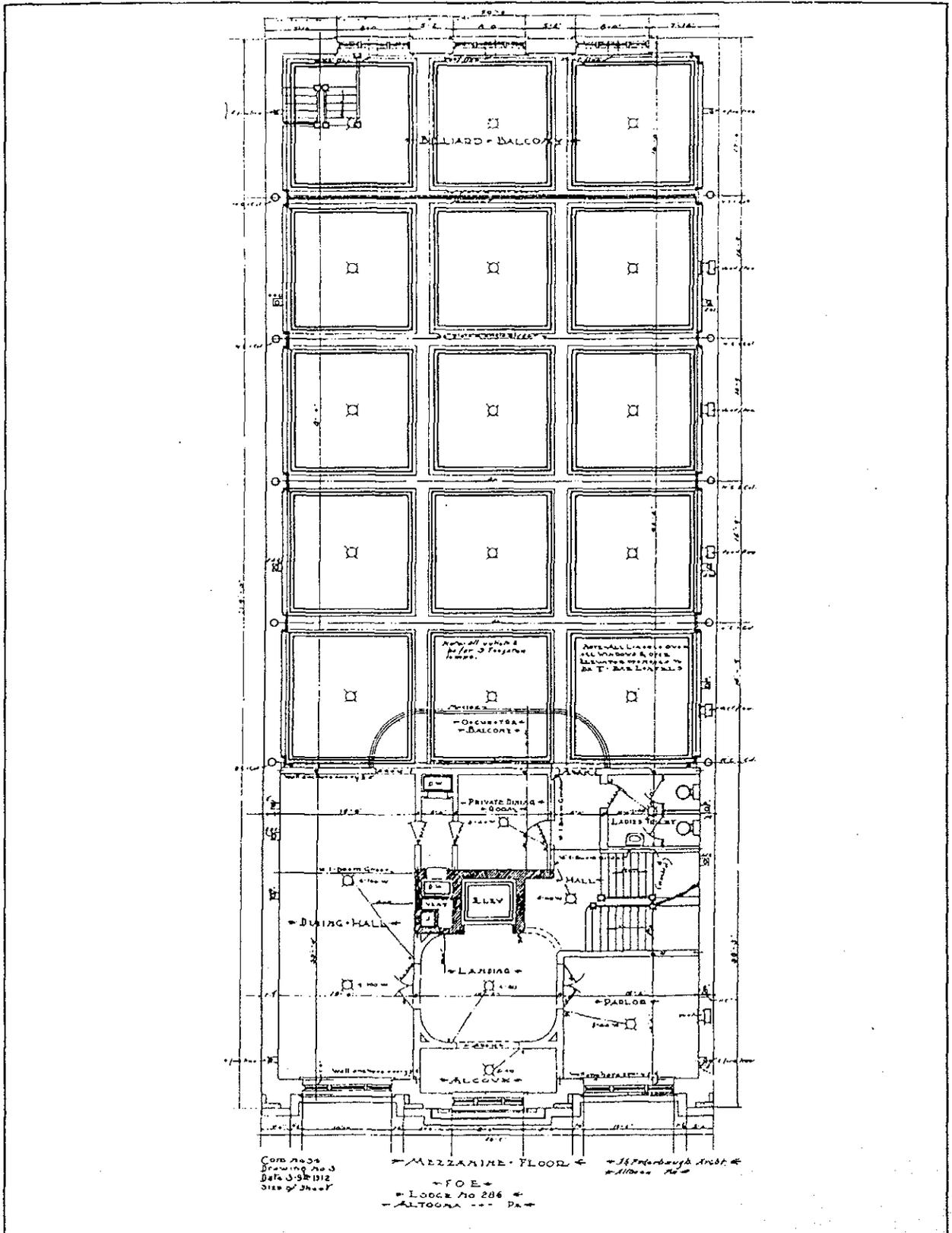


Fig. 1.3 Mezzanine-floor plan, March 9, 1912.



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Fig. 1.4 Second-floor plan, March 9, 1912.

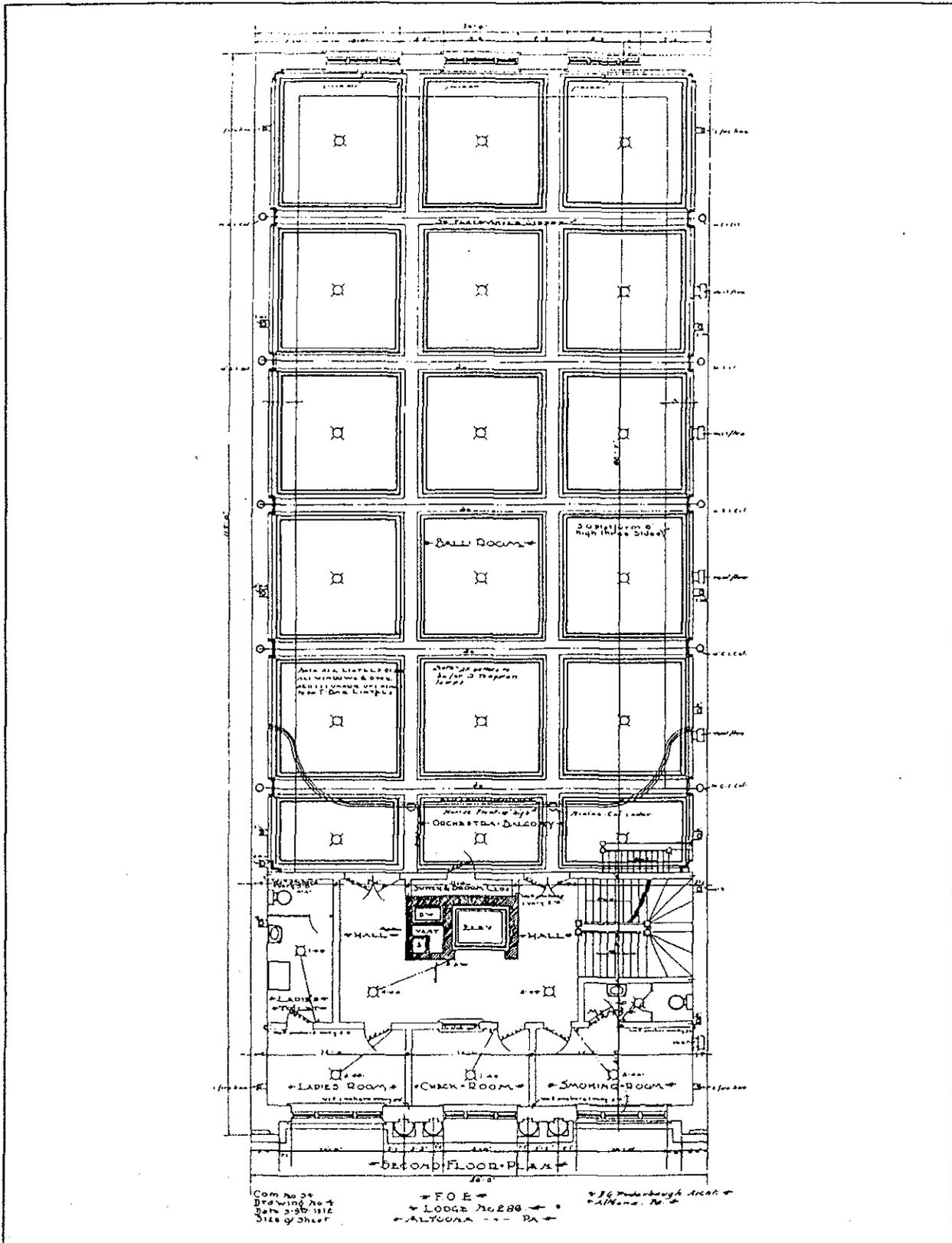




Fig 1.6 Perspective section through roof at northeast corner showing construction."

