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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instructions in #10 PLACES. Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A) for each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 Atlas Life Building
other names/site number NA

2. Location

street & number 415 South Boston Avenue [N/A] not for publication
city or town Tulsa [N/A] vicinity
state Oklahoma code OK county Tulsa code 143 zip code 74103

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Signature of certifying official/Title: Bob Leachman, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 4-13-09
Oklahoma Historical Society
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 certifying official/Title
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
determined eligible for the National Register
determined not eligible for the National Register
removed from the National Register
other, explain

Signature of the Keeper: [Signature]
Date of Action: 5/19/2009

Atlas Life Building  
Name of Property

Tulsa County, Oklahoma  
County/State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)  
(listed resources.)

**Category of Property**

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Check only one box) (Do not count previously listed resources.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.**

N/A

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Commerce/Trade: Business: Office Building

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Commerce/Trade: Business  
Work in Progress: Hotel

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Classical Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
foundation GRANITE  
walls BRICK  
walls LIMESTONE  
roof OTHER: Built-up Membrane  
other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

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

Property is:

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

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

**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce  
Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Periods of Significance**

1922-1958 (Category A)  
1922 (Category C)

**Significant Dates**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person(s)**  
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Rush Endacott Rush, Architects

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(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:  
Oklahoma Historical Society/SHPO  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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Atlas Life Building

Tulsa County, Oklahoma

## DESCRIPTION

### SUMMARY

The Atlas Life Building is located in Tulsa's downtown core. It faces west-southwest on the city grid, whose alignment at this location is oriented to the Santa Fe-Burlington Northern railroad tracks which border the community on the north. The building, between Fourth and Fifth Streets, is located in the original town plan in the middle of the block on Boston Avenue. To the north is the Cosden Building (now Mid-Continent Building); and to the south is the Philtower, both of which are listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRIS #: 79002029 and 79002032). The Atlas Life Building is situated among a concentration of the downtown's remaining commercial buildings which face Boston Avenue.<sup>1</sup> (See Figure 1) The rear of the building faces an alley. The intersection of Boston Avenue and Fourth Street is at the highest point in the downtown area, which adds today an air of significance to the skyscrapers at this location.

### DESCRIPTION

The Atlas Life Building is a twelve-story, flat-roofed structure of Classical Revival design. The building is steel frame and the floor/slab construction is reinforced concrete with clay tile infill. The building is seven bays wide at the base, narrowing to three bays at the third floor. The building was designed by Rush Endacott Rush, Architects, a firm well-known for designs of other important Tulsa buildings.<sup>2</sup> The building construction was completed in 1922, and the ground floor occupies the entire property boundary, which is 100' x 140'. A basement is approximately one-half of the overall building's ground floor foot print. The second story is configured as an upside down "T", with full frontage on Boston Avenue. Floors three through twelve are rectangular, 50' x 140', therefore stepped in but centered on the foot print of the building base. The reduced floor space on the upper ten floors allows for exterior windows on the north and south façades for light and air space between the Philtower and Mid-Continent buildings.<sup>3</sup> A utility/elevator penthouse is on the roof.

#### West (Front) Façade

The west elevation of the structure faces Boston Avenue and the façade is divided visually into three parts: a two-story base, eight-story tower, and two-story tower cap. The horizontal building base has a foundation of dark granite, with walls of buff Bedford limestone veneer. The tower above the building base is red/brown tapestry brick with light brown mortar, and the tower is finished with a terra cotta cap.<sup>4</sup> The ground floor is composed of seven bays in a 2-1-1-1-2 pattern of shop fronts and a centered building entrance. The two large shops have centered entry doors. The small shops on either side of the main entry have side entry doors oriented toward the main building entrance. The shop doors are recessed with terrazzo entry areas, the entry doors have transoms above, and the display windows wrap into the recessed entry areas. The kick-plate area has decorative metal grills, and the windows are framed with metal, including the window framing and metal cornice which separates the divided light transom area over the shop windows. The metal work around each shop creates a window/transom ensemble.

<sup>1</sup> Orientation descriptions from here will be based on the cardinal points.

<sup>2</sup> Other significant Tulsa buildings associated with the firm include the Wright Building, Tulsa Municipal Building (Old City Hall), First National Bank Building (Reunion Center), Tulsa Club Building, Page Warehouse, Guaranty Laundry, and Boston Avenue Methodist Church.

<sup>3</sup> See historic photos and floor plans on continuation sheets.

<sup>4</sup> Tapestry brick has discontinuous transverse grooves.

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The ground floor main entry has two pairs of bronzed entry doors. Above the doors is a decorative metal floral frieze which separates the doors from a large decorative grill above. The grill pattern matches the shop kick-plate grill. Above the metal grill is a limestone entablature with a floral frieze, dentil course and cornice.

The second floor of the horizontal base is composed of three or four metal casement windows in seven bays, with the center bay having a divided-light arched window. The window is trimmed above with a floral band, limestone ovolo molding, and there is a stylized keystone at the top of the arch. The frieze beneath the arched window connects with the metal grill entablature above the main entry doors. Where the bays are not separated by the façade pilasters, simple friezes separate the second floor windows vertically, as simple friezes separate the ground floor from the second story between pilasters.

These first two floors compose the building base. The seven bays of the two-story base are divided by six pilasters into the 2-1-1-1-2 pattern. All pilasters are the same, with a granite base, and simple limestone square capital with a decorative pendent. The pilasters support the façade entablature which has a name plate frieze with "Atlas Life Building," above the three center bays and the name is accented on each side by limestone medallion. The cornice is composed of a narrow beaded molding and frieze finished with a cyma molding. The cornice supports a short terra cotta parapet wall, partially integrated into the third floor façade, from which the tower begins as the upper floors narrow to 50'. The parapet wall is composed of elongated and stylized triglyphs and narrow metopes, which are separated at the seven bay divisions by short terra cotta bases. In the third floor façade these bases support four brick columns whose caps are finished with terra cotta trim and a decorative square. The three bays of paired metal frame, one-over-one double-hung windows are surrounded by terra cotta trim and rest on the parapet wall terra cotta motif integrated into the third floor façade. The third floor provides a dividing line between the horizontal building base and upper floors with the use of elaborate terra cotta trim. At the corner junction of the second and third floor façade there are curved brackets which tie the third floor to the second floor parapet wall. The top of the third floor is finished with a terra cotta belt course, which has plain medallions above the brick columns and a fluted pattern above the paired windows. From the third to the twelfth floor, the building's three bays continue with the same type and pattern of windows.

The tower effect is emphasized by vertical terra cotta roll moldings, composed of overlapping acanthus leaves, at the tower façade corners which extend from floor three to ten. Floors three through ten are red/brown brick with light brown mortar. The one-over-one double-hung windows in each bay have terra cotta sills.

Floors eleven and twelve create a wide frieze which is the building cap and incorporates the three sets of paired windows on both floors. The eleventh floor begins at a belt course of layered terra cotta trim, upon which the eleventh floor windows rest. The two-story frieze is created almost entirely with terra cotta trim. The divisions or stylized columns that create the bays and separate the windows are stepped in terracotta trim with brick bases outlined in terra cotta. The columns are finished at the top by plain terra cotta medallions, although the top of the columns project from the twelfth floor through the cornice roofline. Because the decorative front façade wraps to the side façades, these column projections join on the roof and become elaborate decorative terra cotta posts which connect short recessed parapet walls that wrap from front to side façades. The two roof posts at the front façade once held flag poles that are no longer extant.

The building cap columns have decorative vertical terra cotta ornaments which begin in the brick area of floor eleven and drop in pendant form between the grouped windows of floor ten. The friezes that separate the eleventh and twelfth floor windows are simple with terra cotta surrounds. The friezes above the twelfth floor windows are florid and are also surrounded by terra cotta trim. The building cap is surmounted by a large

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roofline terra cotta cornice, which begins with a roll molding, an ovolo molding, a dentil course, and then three narrow terra cotta courses which are a small dentil pattern, a floral pattern, and another small dentil course. The cornice is highly decorated with "x's" from which modillions drop. The cornice coping is again terra cotta from which springs one additional decorative element, a smaller terra cotta cornice centered over the middle bay of floors three through twelve. This cornice has smaller versions of the curved brackets that occur on floor three, which tie this smaller cornice to the one below and to the recessed short parapet walls which wrap to the side façades. The smaller terra cotta cornice has short columns with recessed stylized decorative elements, and a stepped out platform which supports Atlas on one knee. He rises above the cornice with the world on his shoulders. The platform has recessed friezes on both sides, outlined in rolled molding and egg and dart trim. The smaller cornice is finished with layered cavetto molding, acanthus leaves, and cyma molding. The small cornice has a terra cotta roof crest with upright torches, which symbolically represent life, connected with scroll patterns and fleur-de-lis.

**North Façade**

The north façade ground floor continues the full lot footprint of 100' x 140'. The second floor at the front façade is 100' wide but extends approximately 50' to the rear and has a slightly sloped flat roof. This originally left the ground floor open for skylights to interior shop spaces. There is only one open original skylight on the north side ground floor. A collector and downspout drain the second floor roof to the first floor roof. The north façade is divided into nine bays each having paired, metal-frame, two-over-two double-hung windows with terra cotta sills. The second floor configuration interrupts the pattern of windows on this level in the first three bays, however, the bays on all upper floors show the same window pattern. The façade is distinguished at the Boston Avenue intersection with the front facade by the terra cotta trim that wraps the first bay of the North façade. The third floor terra cotta window trim is the same for this first bay on the north façade, as is the building cap, the wide frieze and cornice of the front façade. This building cap that wraps to the north façade visually keeps the building façade from a flat or a one-dimensional appearance when viewed from the street. It also gives more of a tower appearance, as if the building is treated the same on all façades. This façade has two terra cotta belt courses which continue from the wrapped terra cotta cap at the bottom of the eleventh and top of the twelfth floors. The roof coping is terra cotta.

**South Façade**

The ground floor/second floor configuration and windows are the same as the North facade, as is the trim treatment and wrapping of the third floor and building cap to the first bay of this façade. The second floor configuration interrupts the bay pattern for the first three bays as on the North façade. The penthouse wall, with a pair and two single two-over-two double-hung window, is visible from this façade, and the roof and penthouse coping is terra cotta. A chimney stack at the junction of the South and Rear facades is finished with terra cotta coping as well. No skylights remain open in ground floor South façade rental space. The south façade bays vary slightly from those on the north because of the interior elevators. From the front to the rear, four bays are the same as on the north façade with the pattern of paired double-hung, two-over-two windows; then a blank brick wall for elevator area, a bay with a smaller single window for interior restrooms, a bay with a single window to light the interior stairwell, and then the bay pattern resumes for two more bays with the paired window configuration. The last bay has one window which is next to the chimney stack at the junction of the South and Rear façades.

**Rear (East) Façade**

The ground floor has a brick wall with two recessed service entries with paired metal doors. The lower portion of the ground floor brick wall is covered with a boiler-plate shield to protect from alley damage. There are two small windows from the interior arcade, which are covered with decorative grills, and have terra cotta sills. This floor's parapet wall is finished with terra cotta coping. The second floor has four double-hung, two-over-

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two windows that face the alley and overlook the first floor roofs, one window angles toward the north and façades. Collectors and downspouts drain water from the first floor roof. The rear façade above the first floor has three bays, two with paired double-hung, two-over-two windows, and one bay with a single window of the same configuration. A ladder descends from the penthouse to the building roof and another descends to the fire escape on the tower bay and continues down the building to the top of the first floor. The belt courses of terra cotta on the north and south façades continue on the rear at the bottom of the eleventh and at the top of the twelfth floors. The building roof coping is terra cotta, and this coping continues across the base of the chimney at the roofline.

**Interior**

The first floor public central corridor runs the full depth of the structure, and large shop display windows and doors face the corridor. The rear wall of the arcade has a large bronze panel clock held up by Atlas, and there is a small window on each side of the clock. The original finishes in the main entrance vestibule and arcade are significantly intact and include an elaborate coffered plaster ceiling, plaster crown molding, white Italian marble walls with a honed finish, York black marble baseboards, and Carthage marble floors. An original set of wide marble stairs ascend to the second level from the central corridor. The interior of the building on all floors, but seven, has seen multiple changes over the years due to changing tastes, tear-outs and reconfigurations for tenants. Floor seven still has original marble on the public space walls near and surrounding the elevators. There are several original office doors on this floor, some with original Atlas figure lock plates. The south façade stairs and stairwells have original railing and marble walls from floor two to twelve.

**ALTERATIONS**

The exterior of the building remains in near original condition. Some exterior store fronts have had original entry doors replaced, although display windows and the main entry doors are original. The arcade has had one interior store space removed to provide a corridor to the Philtower. The upper ten office floors have been significantly modified over the years for various office tenant needs. In 1992 there was a fire on the third floor, and the building was used for Tulsa Historical Society's 1992 Office Design Showcase. Members of the American Society of Interior Designers and American Institute of Architects redesigned and refurbished eleven office suites on several floors.<sup>5</sup> Retail spaces accessed from the arcade have had modifications based on tenant needs.

**CONDITION**

The building is in good condition.

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<sup>5</sup> *Tulsa World*, January 18, 1992, "Atlas Life Blaze," and September 24, 1992, "Office Designer Showcase."



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## SIGNIFICANCE

### SUMMARY

Category A, Commerce: The Atlas Life Building is locally significant because it reflected and contributed to the commercial development of downtown Tulsa during the critical period in which the city's urban core took shape. The Atlas Life Insurance Company, formed in 1918 as a direct and explicit offshoot of the booming oil industry, finished its headquarters building four years later. During the period of significance, 1922-1958, the business life of the building reveals the fundamental commercial contours of the city especially as the economy diversified and modernized beyond the petroleum sector that defined its origins.

Category C, Architecture: The Atlas Life Building is locally significant as a prominent structure in downtown Tulsa, and an outstanding example of a Classical Revival skyscraper with a base/tower configuration. The neon sign, which is now a visual Tulsa landmark, and the roof line Atlas sculpture with the world overlooking the street below, have become icons that merged building architecture with building purpose. Based upon original construction documents and field verification, the building retains a high degree of integrity with minimal modifications since original construction to the exterior and first floor public space.

### Category A, Commerce, Historical Context: The Rise of an Oil Town and its Buildings 1830-1930

### BACKGROUND<sup>6</sup>

The small village in the Creek Nation known as Tallasi emerged on the hills overlooking the Arkansas river in the years following the removal of the Creeks from Alabama to Indian Territory in the 1830s, and it remained a village in the following decades, serving the scattered farming families in the area. In the 1870s and 1880s, however, with the influx of white people into the area, often illegally, the settlement grew slightly and a railroad came through, but the rural character remained much the same. The name of the village evolved from Tallasi to Tulsey Town to Tulsa. The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw several ranch communities emerge in this area, and Tulsa was every bit ranching oriented as Native Americans both developed their own ranches and leased lands to white ranchers. At the end of the century, however, the federal government distributed tribal land to individual tribe members so that it was no longer the vast commons that it had once been. This meant that the land was being developed in parcels, but even more importantly, it meant that white people were flooding into the area and claiming land as their own, including land for town lots. In the process, the Creek Nation lost the land that had been assured it, and a new order began to emerge in the final years of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

The early social structure of Tulsa initially revolved around ranching, with its rural patterns of economy and culture, and Tulsa would likely have remained a small ranching community, smaller even than other communities in the area, had it not been for another development at the turn of the century. Several oil discoveries in the surrounding area launched Tulsa on a distinct course of development, beginning with the 1901 Red Fork gusher across the Arkansas River from Tulsa. This was followed by discoveries near the community of Cleveland in 1904, and especially by the discovery of the fabulously productive Glenn Pool, immediately south of Tulsa, in 1905 which, according to Angie Debo, became famous as the "richest small field in the world." "It was due largely to the output of this one field," she concluded, "that when Oklahoma attained statehood [in 1907], it headed the list of oil producing states."<sup>8</sup> The Glenn Pool, according to oil industry historian Carl Coke Rister,

<sup>6</sup> This section is authored by Michael Cassity.

<sup>7</sup> Debo, Angie. *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 88.

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“capped all early-day Oklahoma fields.”<sup>9</sup> This discovery set off a frenzy of exploration and moved Oklahoma to a position where it produced over half of the region’s oil and production continued to increase and then increased even more.

Locally that activity contributed to a surge in population, and Tulsa grew from 7,298 citizens in 1907 to 18,182 in 1910. More than size, though, this growth reflected a different kind of economy coming to dominance, activity symbolized by the arrival of the *Oil Investors’ Journal*, from Beaumont, Texas, in 1908. This was at first a branch office of the trade journal that reported activity in the nation’s oil fields, but by 1910 the journal’s main office had moved to Tulsa and changed its name to the *Oil and Gas Journal*.<sup>10</sup> And this was just one of many relocations as Tulsa pulled on the oil industry in the nation like a magnet. In 1912 the giant Cushing oil field west of Tulsa went into production and the magnet’s force intensified. Oilmen flocked to the area, bringing with them companies that were already established in Pennsylvania and also creating new companies. The suppliers, pipelines, and producers came in droves following the scent of oil production. Of critical importance, oil refineries began to crop up in West Tulsa and at Sand Springs, both across the Arkansas River from Tulsa. The population soared again. By 1920 Tulsa had 72,075 people—an increase of nearly three hundred percent in the decade. In that year the city telephone book listed 431 oil and gas companies, a number, as historian Danney Goble points out, that was three times the number of grocers and twice the combined sum of doctors and lawyers in the city. This number did not count oil refineries, petroleum distribution companies, or gasoline companies.<sup>11</sup>

And the growth continued. In 1920 the giant Osage field emerged; while much of the oil from the Burbank field went to Ponca City, as historian Angie Debo explains, “Tulsa was the oil capital, and the management and wealth of the industry still centered there.”<sup>12</sup> By 1930 the population doubled yet again, reaching a level of 141,258—the second largest city in Oklahoma. Professor Danney Goble cogently summarizes what had happened in those years:

By 1927, Tulsa provided the headquarters for fifteen hundred oil-related companies, and the city was at once the nerve center, the heart, and the guts of the mid-continent fields, which produced two-thirds of the nation’s oil. Its refineries furnished more gasoline than any other city in America. Its pipelines ran to each coast. Its producers were directly responsible for 90 percent of the crude oil flowing from Oklahoma fields, which, in turn, accounted for a third of all the oil originating in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Where previously ranchers had dominated the economy and culture of the town, now a group of oilmen (and it was a male-dominated industry) set the pace. Tulsa was an oil town—for better and worse—and that character shaped the course of the development of the community. One part of that development was the downtown skyline which took shape in the 1920s, and characteristic of that skyline was the activity in the block between Fourth and Fifth on Boston Avenue. The southeast corner at the intersection of Fourth and Boston had been a schoolhouse, but the school yielded to commercial development. The pattern of change was clear, and one description noted that although the high school was located in this block, “subsequently, on account of the growth of the city of Tulsa, many large business structures were erected adjacent to this block, rendering it of great value, but unsuitable for school purposes.”<sup>14</sup> The school had to go. And it went.

<sup>9</sup> Rister, Carl Coke. *Oil! Titan of the Southwest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 89.

<sup>10</sup> Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 97.

<sup>11</sup> Goble, Danney. *Tulsa! Biography of the American City* (Tulsa, OK: Council Oaks Books, 1997). 108.

<sup>12</sup> Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 102.

<sup>13</sup> Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 95-96.

<sup>14</sup> “Atlas Life Insurance Company vs. Board of Education of City of Tulsa,” *Pacific Reporter*, 200, (August 2, 1921), 171.

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Atlas Life Building

Once the school was razed, a new building, the Cosden Building, took its place in 1918.<sup>15</sup> This was the headquarters of the first oil refinery in Tulsa, one started by Joshua S. Cosden. Constructed in 1918 with sixteen stories, it was Tulsa's first skyscraper. Cosden lost control of his company in 1925 at which point this became the Mid-Continent Petroleum Building. Immediately south of the Cosden Building came the Atlas Life Insurance Building, constructed in 1921-1922. Immediately south of the Atlas Life Building came the spectacular Philtower, built by oil magnate Waite Phillips in 1928. In fact, Phillips also acquired the land to the south of the Philtower, across Fifth, and then started construction in 1929 of another building, the Philcade, which was completed in 1931 (NRIS# 86002196). Skyscrapers were on the march down Boston Avenue. In 1927 more than a million dollars a month was being spent on downtown construction, and Angie Debo commented on the oilmen behind all this development: "Tulsans at this time erected skyscrapers not so much because ground space was at a premium, but because they liked to see them rise."<sup>16</sup> She also noted, just as much to the point that, by the end of the 1920s, "For the first time in its history the city achieved an appearance of completion."

## The Atlas Life Building and Commercial Transformation 1922-1958

It was in this context that the Atlas Life Insurance Company building was created. Founded in Tulsa in 1918, Atlas Life was the first life insurance company based in the city and only the third such firm in Oklahoma. An explicit and direct product of the oil boom, it was, as Danney Goble observed, "an oilman's company. Its directors included nearly every major producer and refiner in the city."<sup>17</sup> The company grew fast, so fast that within three years it had started construction of its own building to add to the Tulsa skyline, and on November 23, 1922, the new building celebrated its grand opening with an elaborate dedication ceremony and crowds flocked to the building to inspect it.<sup>18</sup> Five thousand flowers had been purchased to distribute to women visitors, but those flowers had all been handed out within the first hour of the open house.<sup>19</sup> But it was more than a building that was being celebrated. It was a kind of business structure, a pattern of commerce that was also being extolled. The system of business and commerce being heralded was one in which independent operators ran their own firms, and they did so in a completely decentralized fashion, sometimes chaotic, sometimes swashbuckling, and sometimes vested with great civic purpose, but invariably independent.

This one building provided office space for more than forty of these oil companies and even more companies providing oil-related services like drilling, geological analysis, leasing, engineering, and others so that the Atlas Life Building represented a veritable hub and core of the petroleum industry. Indeed, Waite Phillips had his offices in the Atlas Life Building until his own building was completed next door five years later. But there were others too. There were also physicians and dentists, attorneys, accountants, and insurance companies. Atlas Life Insurance Company was the primary occupant of the building, but smaller insurance companies and agents

<sup>15</sup> The school yielded this city block, but not quietly. Some lots were sold by the Tulsa Board of Education and some, including the lots on which the Atlas Life Building was located, were leased for 99 years. This arrangement was challenged in a case that worked its way to the Oklahoma Supreme Court and the final decision, supporting the lease, is recorded in *Atlas Life Insurance Company vs. Board of Education of City of Tulsa*, *Pacific Reporter*, 200, pp. 171-174 (August 2, 1921). This arrangement also explains how the Tulsa Board of Education became owner of the building in the 1990s after a property management company leasing the building defaulted on its payments. The board subsequently sold the building and the land to another party.

<sup>16</sup> Debo, Angie. *Tulsa: A Guide to the Oil Capital* (Tulsa, OK: The Mid-West Printing Co., 1938); American Guide Series, Compiled by Workers of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Oklahoma; 44; Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 105.

<sup>17</sup> Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 99; "Atlas Officers Widely Known," *Tulsa World*, November 19, 1922.

<sup>18</sup> "Atlas Building Opens Tonight," *Tulsa World*, November 23, 1922; "Tulsans, Big and Small, Rich or Poor, Invited to Opening of Atlas Building on Nov. 23," *Tulsa World*, November 19, 1922.

<sup>19</sup> "Crowd Throngs Atlas Opening," *Tulsa World*, November 24, 1922.

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had their offices in the same building, leasing space from Atlas. Plus, about a dozen retail merchants in the first floor arcade also occupied the building.<sup>20</sup> In its early years, the Atlas Life Building revealed the oil dominance in the economy, but it also showed that other businesses were emerging also. In a subtle way, the dedication of the Atlas Life Building revealed that Tulsa's economy was becoming increasingly—if incrementally—diversified.

This commercial diversification contained two related dimensions: (1) the decline of the oil industry and (2) the maturing of the local economy beyond its initial extractive focus. The combination of these two factors transformed the economic and social infrastructure of the community and it all started in the Depression of the 1930s. The Depression dealt a serious blow to the petroleum business just like it did to other sectors of the economy, and this was combined with an already powerful trend toward overproduction that saw the price of oil drop, drop some more, and then collapse; oil had been selling for around \$3.50 per barrel but it dropped to below twenty cents after the opening of the East Texas Field, and even, in a few instances, down to a penny. By 1935 the price had stabilized at just under a dollar a barrel and ten years later it was still only twenty-five cents higher.<sup>21</sup> One by one, many of the oil companies that had flourished went under, were absorbed by others, or moved away into other parts of the country. Some just vanished into the legal files at the local courthouse never to emerge again. Oil was losing its prominence in the Tulsa commercial base—and on the skyline.

The contours of the commercial restructuring could be seen in the roster of businesses in the Atlas Life Building. In 1935, the number of oil producers in the Atlas Life Building had dropped along with the price of oil. In that year fewer oil producers claimed the Atlas Life Building as their home office, although those that were left tended to be larger, and in these lean times more offices than ever were listed as vacant in the city directory. Some of those vacant offices were soon occupied by small businesses—even small retail merchants like jewelers and milliners.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, these other businesses seemed to be growing, and the life insurance industry, including Atlas Life Insurance, survived and even prospered—despite the hard times. The insurance industry did not have a high cost of production since it actually produced no tangible product; plus, the popularity of life insurance policies increased in an urbanizing society where more and more people entered the market for—and needed—life insurance, and insurance companies like Atlas Life were replacing the mutual insurance societies (fraternal orders and similar organizations) that had offered affordable insurance previously. Between 1900 and 1940, subscribed life insurance increased by eighteen fold while the general population did not quite double.<sup>23</sup> Life insurance increasingly represented complex financial instruments that were more than simple death benefits. One account maintains that the industry of which Atlas Life was a part, in fact, pumped more money into the economy than the federal government spent during the New Deal years (1933-1938).<sup>24</sup> Whether that assessment of insurance's contribution is an exaggeration or not, the point is clear: while the oil industry was declining in the 1930s, Atlas Life Insurance was growing.

There were external signs of this commercial shift in Tulsa's downtown. By the early 1940s Tulsa's Chamber of Commerce, which had at one time been dominated by the captains of the oil industry, included only six representatives from the oil industry on its board of forty directors. Atlas Life itself was no longer the pliant child of the oil industry but had assumed a life of its own.

<sup>20</sup> *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1926* (Kansas City, MO: R. L. Polk & Co., 1926).

<sup>21</sup> Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital*, 111; Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 328.

<sup>22</sup> *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1935* (Kansas City, MO: R. L. Polk, & Co., 1935).

<sup>23</sup> Mildred F. Stone, *A Short History of Life Insurance* (Indianapolis, IN: Insurance Research and Review Service, 1942), 92-93.

<sup>24</sup> Stone, *A Short History of Life Insurance*, 93.

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World War II brought the nation out of the Depression, but even global war could not restore the place of oil in the city's commercial order. The price of oil had dropped dramatically during the Depression but even the huge demand of the war machine did not bring prices back to their previous levels. The inchoate shift that had been dimly evident at the dedication of the Atlas Life Building was nearly complete; a different economy prevailed—an economy that was no longer exclusively based on the extraction of petroleum from the depths of the earth. The refining of oil was robust as a result of expansion of refineries during the war, but manufacturing was also growing, likewise as a result of the war, and the aviation industry in particular rivaled oil in the Tulsa economy and many now saw aviation as the sign of the future and the oil industry as a sign of the past.

In the years following World War II, Tulsa's economy grew at a pace faster than other parts of the state and nation and the new commercial structure solidified its standing as a base for manufacturing, service, and aviation industries. The Atlas Life Building was at the hub of, and reflecting, a thriving, busy, commercial downtown district. In 1947 the Atlas Life Insurance Company had expanded its own space in the building and there were the other usual occupants—dentists, physicians, lawyers, accountants, and now also realtors.<sup>25</sup> But this was changing and the trend was clear. By 1953, just five years later, the number of occupants in the Atlas Life Building had declined even more, but the building was fully occupied. The key to this puzzle was that some of those businesses with their offices at 415 South Boston were large—very large—and took up correspondingly large parts of the building. Only a handful of oil businesses operated there, but one, Deep Rock Oil and Gas, occupied the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth floors of the building. The oil industry was experiencing a wave of consolidation that left it unrecognizable from what it had been when the Atlas Life Building was first opened and occupied.<sup>26</sup> By 1958, the end of the period of significance, Deep Rock itself had been replaced by Crescent Oil and Gas in the building and the trend toward integration in the oil industry, and in the economy in general, continued.

There was another pattern, however, that could be discerned in the corridors of the Atlas Life Building and that was one also evident on the streets of Tulsa. Between 1945 and 1950, forty shopping centers had emerged in Tulsa, "a phenomenon unmatched in the United States by any other city of comparable size;" between 1940 and 1960 the Tulsa population more than doubled, reaching 261,685.<sup>27</sup> By the end of the period of significance, the Atlas Life Building remained at the heart of the city, at the core of downtown, although the pull of the suburbs and the neighborhood centers was increasing. By 1958 fewer physicians and dentists were practicing in the Atlas Life Building as others had begun the exodus to their own clinics scattered around the city. Likewise, the attorneys were opting out of rented space in one of the city's prime office buildings in favor of offices in small buildings where they were the sole occupants and which they owned as an integral commercial asset. The executive offices of the Atlas Life Insurance Company, now on the tenth floor of the building the company owned in Tulsa, was hardly alone in the building, but it presided over a different array of businesses on the other floors; whatever else might be said, it is clear that the commercial contours of Tulsa had changed and those changes were evident in the history of this building.

## Tulsa Commerce and the Atlas Life Building Since 1958

In the past half century, downtown Tulsa has experienced one challenge after another—suburbanization and the inclusion of exurbs in the city's commercial orbit; the development of an alternative strip of retail stores and the relocation of downtown merchants to that strip on 71<sup>st</sup> Street; wave after wave of consolidation in the economy in which local businesses have been swallowed by larger operations; construction of expressways with their

<sup>25</sup> *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1947* (Dallas, TX: R. L. Polk & Co., 1947).

<sup>26</sup> *Polk's Tulsa City Directory 1953* (Dallas, TX: R. L. Polk & Co., 1953).

<sup>27</sup> Vaughn-Roberson, Courtney Ann and Glenn. *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984), 150.

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physical and commercial impacts on the areas traversed; the demise of historic buildings and businesses in the downtown area; and the emergence of parking lots where thriving businesses and office buildings once provided the center of gravity for a wide region.<sup>28</sup> Not surprisingly, the Atlas Life Building has felt and faced some of these challenges. In 1991 Atlas Life Insurance Company was purchased by State Mutual and the company's operations were moved to Georgia. The next year the building was eleven-percent occupied.<sup>29</sup> New tenants moved in, and the building has remained at the core of the continuing financial section of the city, and the building a landmark in Tulsa's commercial core.

## Category C, Architectural Significance

The building is one of Tulsa's most outstanding Boston Avenue buildings, whose Classical Revival architecture was well chosen to represent the primary business that would occupy it. The public space on the ground floor is richly ornamented. Constructed when the Classical Revival style was popular between c. 1885 and 1940, the Atlas Life Building is among Tulsa's finest remaining examples of this architecture, with near intact original features on the exterior and the primary public space on the first floor. It also represents a low horizontal base with tower construction pattern not found in other Tulsa buildings. The four-story neon sign, which is now a visual Tulsa landmark, and the roof line Atlas sculpture with the world on his shoulders, have become icons that merged building architecture with building purpose.

## BACKGROUND

The period of downtown Tulsa's skyscraper development is quite extraordinary and it happened rather quickly once Tulsa became the "oil capital of the world." Between the 1910s and 1920s, the city was transformed both by population and money. There was probably no more important event in Tulsa's history than the discovery of oil in 1901. In 1905, the Glenn Pool strike added to Tulsa's value as *the* centralized business location where one could arrange leases, obtain bank loans, hire drillers and find equipment for the oil fields. As noted above in the commerce section, the significance of the oil economy in Tulsa began to have a direct effect on building within the city core.

Success within a community draws new residents, and Tulsa's success attracted people from all over the United States; those who believed they could improve their lives working in the oil fields and in the oil business.<sup>30</sup> When a million dollars per month was being spent on building construction downtown in 1927, it was easy to make such assumptions, and Tulsa's watched as a new skyline began to emerge in tall buildings.<sup>31</sup>

One of the most important areas for new construction in the late nineteen-teens and twenties was along Boston Avenue. While Main Street between First and Third Streets was originally the focal point of the nascent city, Boston Avenue south of Third Street still had plots of vacant land available.<sup>32</sup> The city had grown up on Main Street, with an abundance of three- to five-story buildings south of the Frisco Railroad. If one wished to build a skyscraper, vacant downtown core Main Street property was generally not available for new construction. In 1915, Boston Avenue south of Fifth Street was almost all residential and moving south into this area was inevitable as wealthy oilmen sought this avenue as the location to build visual testaments to their

<sup>28</sup> In this regard, see especially Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 249-291, and Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma*, 161-177.

<sup>29</sup> "Atlas Building Bought for \$400, 000," *Tulsa World*, July 2, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Goble, *Tulsa! Biography of the American City*, 91.

<sup>31</sup> Debo. *Tulsa: A Guide to the Oil Capital*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Tulsa, OK

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wealth. Forth and Boston, for example, was also one of the highest points topographically in the downtown, and thus added a degree of importance to the skyscrapers that would soon grace the location.

Meeting in the Palace Building (Forth and Main Streets) in 1918, the directors organized the company and rented space there.<sup>33</sup> The Articles of Incorporation filed September 24, 1918, list the first directors among whom were Frank Phillips (Phillips Petroleum), E. R. Perry (Superior Oil Corporation), and J. W. Gilliland (Gilliland Oil).<sup>34</sup> Outgrowing the Palace Building as business increased, plans were made for the Atlas building, and its construction began in 1921.

The architectural style was chosen to represent a *business*, as noted in the *Tulsa Daily World*. The *World* reporter had keenly observed that most buildings in Tulsa were named after individuals.

"It has been the aim from the start to keep the Atlas building in good simple business form. They have strived after the simpler and more dignified, rather than the ornate and costly. One has but to look at the Boston Avenue façade to reach this conclusion. It is clean and chaste and dignified and "right."<sup>35</sup>

Rush Endacott and Rush, Architects, designed the building and during the 1920s, it was the most significant architectural firm in Tulsa.<sup>36</sup>

Classical Revival was a fitting choice for a building that would represent the insurance business. When the Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893, the architecture of the White City was that of the Classical world. The fair's exhibition buildings were monumental in scale and inspired numerous public and commercial buildings across the United States, and had a profound effect on architecture, the arts, and American industrial optimism. The fair buildings came to represent what American cities *could* be – important, organized, beautiful, and significant in architectural design and planning. For a rising world power, the architectural language of Classicism translated into public structures on which the public could focus with pride. It was the architecture of power, self-assurance and of good and urbane taste.<sup>37</sup>

American Classical Revival had prospered within the United States during the early nineteenth century, so the style was not newly used after the fair. A variety of nineteenth-century advances were captured by the fair, however, and gave Classical Revival architectural forms new meaning. Advances in sanitation, aesthetics, rationalized urban functions, civic improvement and urban reform, building, artistic collaboration, architectural professionalism, and civic spirit were now associated with Classical Revival architecture.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Tulsa World*, March 12, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Articles of Incorporation of Atlas Life Insurance Company.

<sup>35</sup> "Tulsans, Big and Small, Rich or Poor, Invited to Opening of Atlas Building on Nov. 23." *Tulsa Daily World*, November 19, 1922.

<sup>36</sup> *Tulsa World*, March 12 1997. Lee Anne Ziegler, Executive Director of Tulsa Foundation for Architecture, concurred that the firm was probably the most significant architectural firm at the time.

<sup>37</sup> Gelernter, Mark. *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 202.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, William H. *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore, OH: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 60.

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American architects originally had found prototypes for Classical building forms in towered medieval town halls and guild halls, which when constructed, signified the rise of merchant classes in the late Middle Ages. Richard Morris Hunt blended the tower idea with a commercial structure in 1872, in his New York City Tribune Building. Hunt also divided the building into the traditional classical three part arrangement of a base, middle and cap, using these layers to define height in a beginning, middle and end.<sup>39</sup> While buildings like the Metropolitan Life Tower and the Woolworth Buildings in New York continued Hunt's idea of the tower growing out of a base, there were many other multi-story skyscrapers with towers perched above.<sup>40</sup> Many skyscrapers in the early twentieth century, however, also began to rise to full height without a break from street level.<sup>41</sup>

The Atlas Life Building is reminiscent of Hunt's early idea for a skyscraper--with a tower rising from a base, and is a reminder of many Italian tower/base or tower (campanile)/church configurations.<sup>42</sup> In the case of the Atlas Life Building, the base of the building is just two stories, which significantly emphasizes the tower appearance. The building's form exemplifies classical design in that the building received different treatment for different areas of interest. For example what matters most to the public is what is going on at the pedestrian level and at the skyline. Intermediate floors are of minor consequence by comparison, and in the Atlas Building these floors are a subdued brick and mortar. They become a background statement for the major architectural features at the street and roof line. Compared to a classical column with a decorated base, shaft and decorated capital, the building links its viewer to Classical Revival architecture which embodied and symbolized the Greek and Roman architectural ideals of republicanism, stability and social order.<sup>43</sup>

Ideal for an insurance business, the Classical Revival style of the Atlas Life Building helped convey the company's strength through an appearance of stability and durability; attributes that could visually assure the company's longevity to investors and patrons. The integration of the Greek Titan Atlas into the building's cornice, a common icon in western culture representing strength and endurance, further conveyed a strong message about the company's stability and permanence. Atlas overlooks and protects pedestrians below as an icon of strength. Atlas, integrated into the company's name, public space clock, door and key plates and in the building itself, helped unite the purpose of the insurance business with the building architecture.

The four-story vertical neon sign which was installed on the Boston Avenue exterior in 1946, was built by Claude Neon Federal. It has also become an important visual symbol of the building and its purpose. It integrated the building visually into the downtown streetscape, and kept the significance of the building keenly in the eye of Tulsans. A January 24 2001, *Tulsa World* article commented on the sign's significance:

<sup>39</sup> Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture*, 189. One of the most important architects who used the tripartite division of tall buildings was Louis Sullivan. Sullivan, however, divided building into parts based on use rather than just historical precedents.

<sup>40</sup> The Met Life Building's tower was added in 1909 after the building's first construction period of 1893. This building was not only towered and also a life insurance building, but the tower was modeled on the Campanile di San Marco in Venice. There is no indicated that Rush Endacott and Rush were inspired by this building, but it was the world's tallest building between 1909 and 1913.

<sup>41</sup> While form was an issue dependent on construction methods at the turn of the century as architects wrestled with solid masonry construction and experiments metal frame construction, for the Atlas Life Building, its steel frame construction was not an issue and the architecture chosen for affect.

<sup>42</sup> The Torre del Mangia above the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena is an example, although the tower is not centered above the base. Another example is the Torrazzo of Cremona, while part of a church configuration, it rises from a two-story base.

<sup>43</sup> Adam, Robert. "How to Build Skyscrapers," *City Journal*, Vol. 12, #2, Spring 2002. City Journal is quarterly magazine of urban affairs, published by the Manhattan Institute.



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But the Atlas Life sign, which was first hoisted in 1946, never stopped shining. It represented the city on postcards, phone book covers and travel brochures. So when a windstorm brought it down in 1998, people took notice.

David Averill, associate editor of the *Tulsa World*, perhaps expressed the significance of this sign best in an editorial January 28, 2001, after the sign relighting a few days earlier:

The Atlas Life Building, 415 S. Boston Ave., was built in 1922 and the sign, which was added a few years later, became a Tulsa landmark. It remained that even after the insurance company was absorbed by an out-of-state firm and the lights, literally, were turned out in 1991. The sign was renovated in 1996 but almost immediately was damaged in a windstorm to the point that it had to be taken down. The building's owners, Pearson Group Capital Management, are due a vote of thanks for having the sign painstakingly repaired, rehung and relit. They didn't have to do it. After all, the sign is cosmetic and isn't vitally important.

Except as a symbol of downtown and maybe the entire city.

..... the Atlas sign is more than a trigger for warm and fuzzy nostalgic memories. It symbolizes the spirit of a bygone era, a time when Tulsa's leaders dreamed big and had the wherewithal and moxie to put their dreams into action and into bricks and mortar.<sup>44</sup>

This prominent, iconic sign has been rehabilitated, and based upon a review of historic photographs of the structure appears to retain its' original appearance.<sup>45</sup> Its presence also represents other neon signs that once were plentiful along Boston Avenue, lighting up the street with buildings' purpose and identification. None, however, were as large as the Atlas Building sign, and today the Atlas Building neon sign represents those now gone from a once visually busy street scene.

There are other buildings in Tulsa's downtown which are Classical Revival and the following table helps to compare the Atlas Building's form, purpose and architecture to those buildings from the construction boom of the 1920s.

<b>Building<sup>46</sup></b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Stories</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Architecture</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Mid-co Building	1920	2	Oil Company Building	Classical Revival	Rectangular building, not comparable in size for base/tower architecture, or purpose. Windows are all replacements.
Petroleum Building	1921	10	Office	Pre-art deco, simple Classical details	Not comparable in base/tower architecture or purpose
Thompson Building	1921	15	Office	Classical Revival	Not comparable in architectural form – large rectangular office building with a small story and one-half Classical Revival penthouse and cupola.
Beacon Building (was an	1923	8	Office	Classical Revival	Comparable in purpose, built for insurance company, but original roof-

<sup>44</sup> "Atlas Plugged."

<sup>45</sup> "Renovations Kept Original Features Intact," *Tulsa World*, March 5, 1997, reported that the sign had been once restored in 1992 during the time the Boston Management Company made interior renovations. A *Tulsa World* newspaper article written by Jasen Corns, *World* Staff Writer, January 24, 2001, however, notes that the wind damage came in 1998, not 1996.

<sup>46</sup> This list is taken from the Downtown Tulsa Self-Guided Historic Walking Tour, which lists 25 building of note, as well as twenty-five additional buildings of mixed use. Another source is the Tulsa Historical Society's Tulsa Downtown Walking Tour which lists both historic and more contemporary architecture.

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insurance building)					top iconic beacon removed in 1976. Flat-topped, rectangular office building
Vandever Department Store	1924	6	Department Store	Classical Revival	Not comparable for base/tower architecture, purpose, or height
Mayo Hotel	1925	18	Hotel	Classical Revival	Not comparable for base/tower architecture, purpose or size, Rectangular building
Reunion Center (1 <sup>st</sup> National Bank)	1919/ 1925	10	Bank	Classical Revival	A Rush Endacott Rush-designed building, flat-roofed rectangular in shape, not base/tower. This building has had major alterations to the interior public space.
Fawcett Building	1926	3	Oil Company Building	Modest Art-Deco	Not comparable in purpose or size. Not tower/base architecture.
Marion Corporation	1926	3	Office Building	Neo-Colonial Revival	Not comparable in architecture, purpose or size
Day Building (Nelsons)	1926	2	Small Commercial Building	Art Deco	Not comparable in architecture, purpose or size
Philtower	1927	23	Office Building	Neo-Gothic, Art Deco	Not comparable in architecture, purpose or size
Parker Building (Holarud Building)	1927	10	Office Building	Art Deco	Not comparable in architecture, or purpose. This building has had major exterior modifications
Tulsa Club Building	1927	6	Private Club	Art Deco	Not comparable in architecture, purpose or size
Oklahoma Nat. Gas	1928	10	Utility Company	Art-Deco	Not comparable in architecture, or purpose
Adams Building	1928	14	Hotel	Gothic, Italian Renaissance, Baroque	Not comparable in architecture, purpose
Public Service Building	1928	6	Company Building	Art-Deco, Zigzag	Not comparable in architecture, purpose
Exchange National Bank.	1917, 1929	22 (with additional 4-story tower)	Bank	Classical Revival	Originally began as a ten-story building; enlarged with significant addition and tower beginning at the 10 <sup>th</sup> floor. The architectural effect of a decorative base and building cap does not appear on this building.

This comparison reveals that no buildings constructed during the building boom of the 1920s compare in architecture, purpose, or size to the Atlas Life Building.

The building is one of Tulsa's most outstanding Boston Avenue buildings, whose architecture represents the significance of the primary business that occupied it. The public space on the ground floor is richly ornamented. Constructed when the Classical Revival style was popular between c. 1915 and 1940, the Atlas Life Building is among Tulsa's finest remaining examples of this architecture, with near intact original features on the exterior and the primary public space on the first floor. It represents a low horizontal base/tower construction pattern not found in other Tulsa buildings. The four-story neon sign, which is now a visual Tulsa landmark, and the roof

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line Atlas sculpture with the world on his shoulders overlooking the street below, have become icons that merged building architecture with building purpose. Based upon original construction documents and field verification, the building retains a high degree of integrity.

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- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma. New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1915.

### Interviews

- Ziegler, Lee Anne. Executive Director of Tulsa Foundation for Architecture, Tulsa, OK, January 22, 2009.

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Tulsa County,**Websites**Adam, Robert. "How to Build Skyscrapers," *City Journal*, Vol. 12, #2, Spring 2002.[http://www.city-journal.org/html/12\\_2\\_urbanities-how\\_to\\_build.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/12_2_urbanities-how_to_build.html)Historic Postcard and Photos, Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library and  
Tulsa Historical Society.<http://www.tulsalibrary.org/>

Downtown Tulsa Self-Guided Historic Walking Tour

<http://nfp.cba.utulsa.edu/bajaja/SIGSANDSymposium6/LocalArrangements/TulsaArtDecoWalking.pdf>

Tulsa Historical Society's Tulsa Downtown Walking Tour.

[http://www.tulsaohistory.org/events/deco\\_tours.htm](http://www.tulsaohistory.org/events/deco_tours.htm)

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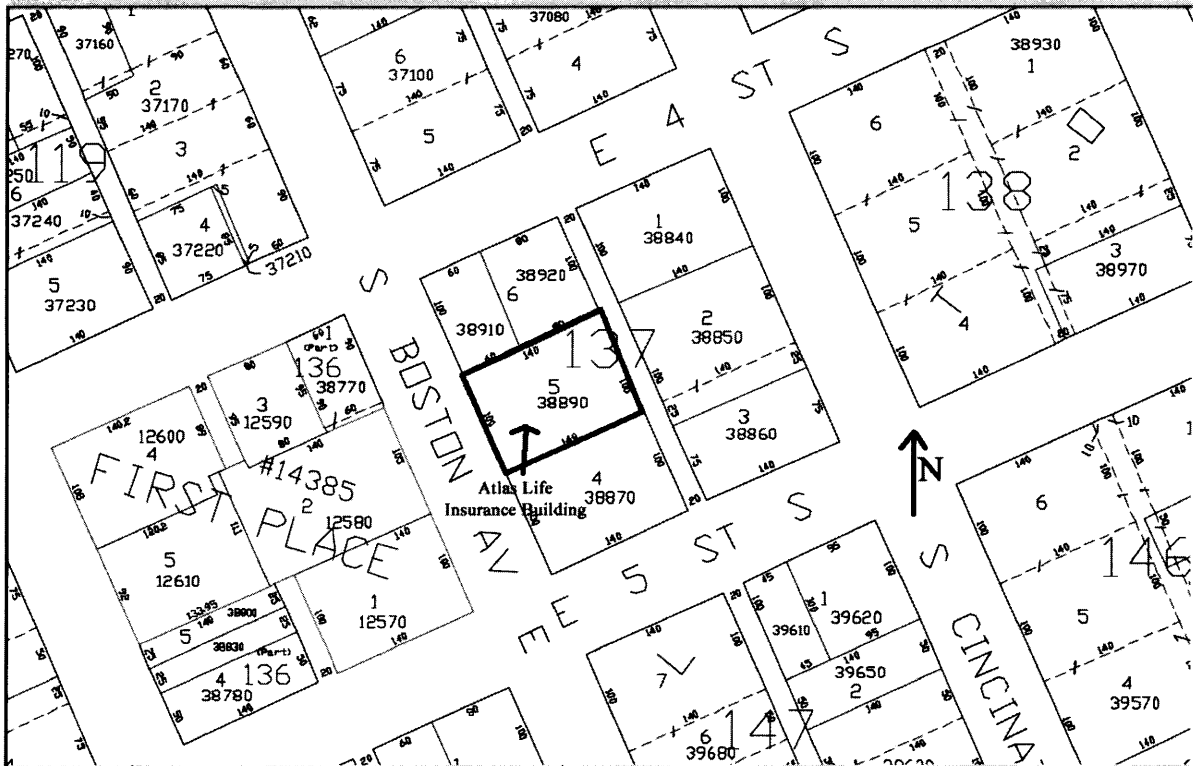
Atlas Life Building

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## GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Parcel Number: 38890 (Tulsa County Tax Assessor)  
Lot 5, Block 137



Location of Atlas Life Building

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary includes the area historically associated with the Atlas Life Building

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## PHOTOGRAPH LOG

Atlas Life Building, Tulsa County, Oklahoma

Photographer: Cathy Ambler

No.	Subject	Dir.	Date
0001	Front Façade	NE	2/1/2009
0002	North Façade	W	1/26/2009
0003	Rear Façade from Parking Garage Deck	W	2/1/2009
0004	South Façade	W	2/1/2009
0005	Building Base	NE	1/26/2009
0006	Building Cap	NE	2/1/2009
0007	Central Corridor, Ground Floor	E	2/6/2009
0008	Elevators, Mail Drop, Directory, Ground Floor	S	2/6/2009
0009	Atlas Clock, Ground Floor	E	2/6/2009
0010	Main Stairs to Second Floor	SE	2/6/2009
0011	Seventh Floor Elevators, Original Materials	SW	2/6/2009
0012	Seventh Floor Stairwell, Original Materials	SE	2/6/2009



Photo 0001. Front Façade



Photo 0002. North Façade

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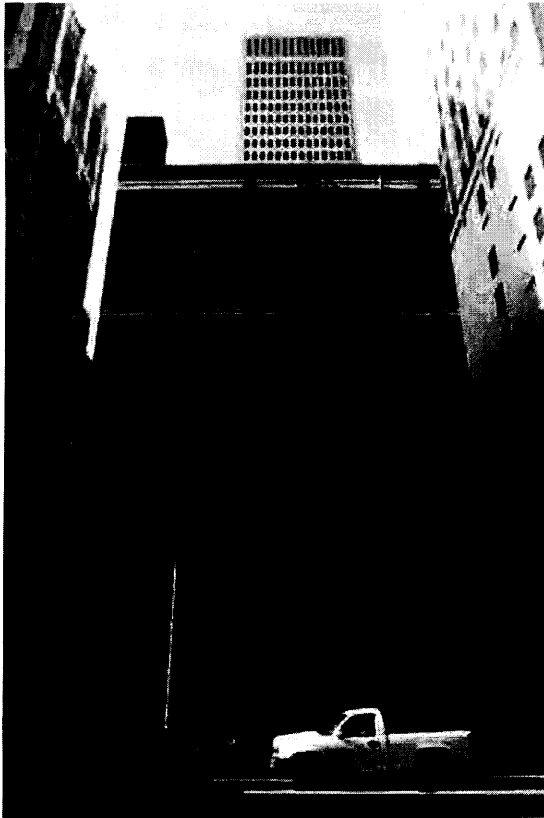


Photo 0003. Rear Façade from  
Parking Garage Deck



Photo 0004. South Facade

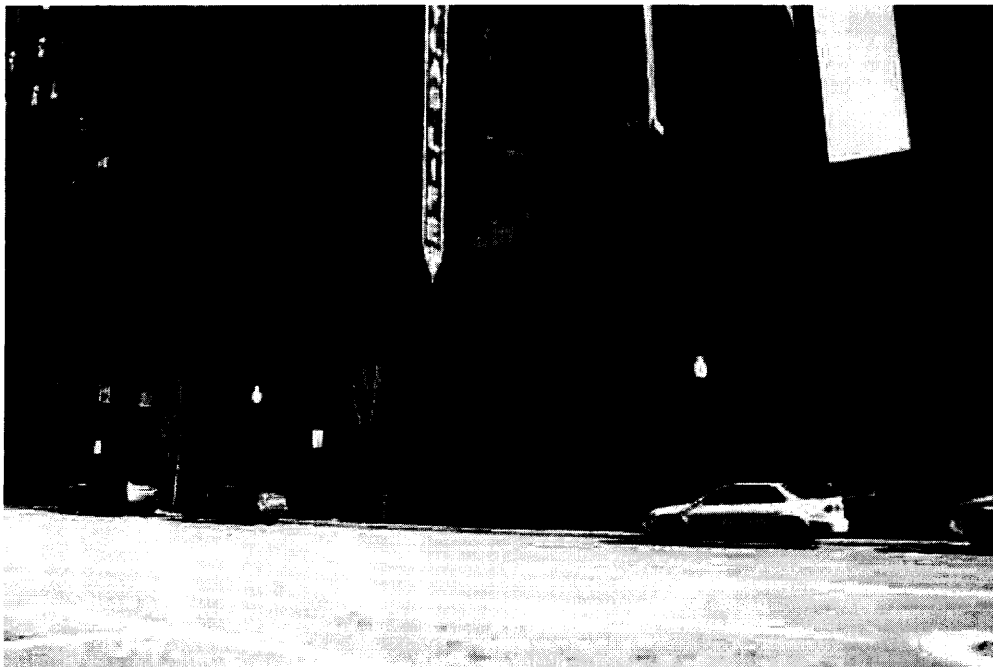


Photo 0005. Building Base



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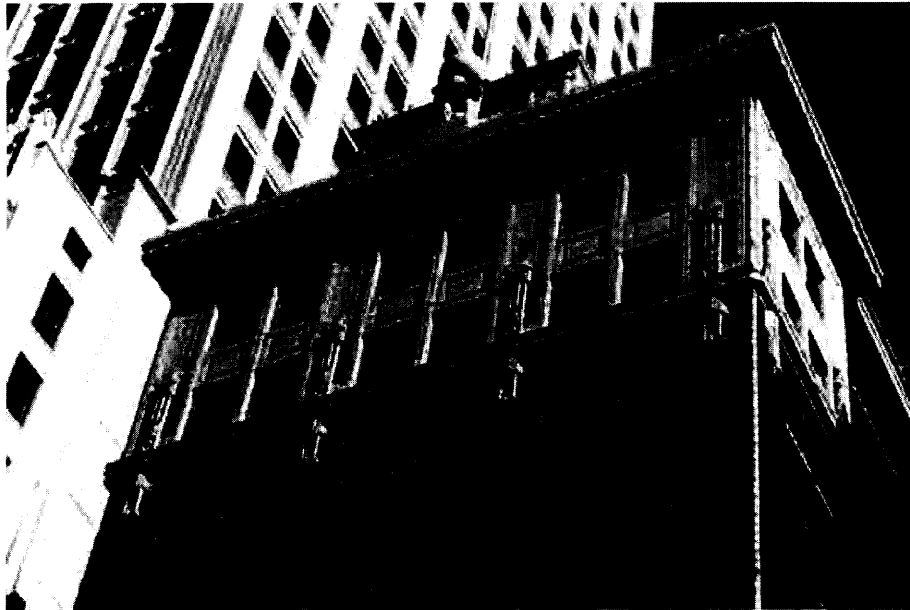


Photo 0006. Building Cap



Photo 0007. Central Corridor, Ground Floor

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Photo 0008. Elevators, Mail Drop, Directory, Ground Floor



Photo 0009. Atlas Clock, Ground Floor



Photo 0010. Main Stairs to Second Floor

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Photo 0011 Seventh Floor Elevator Original Materials

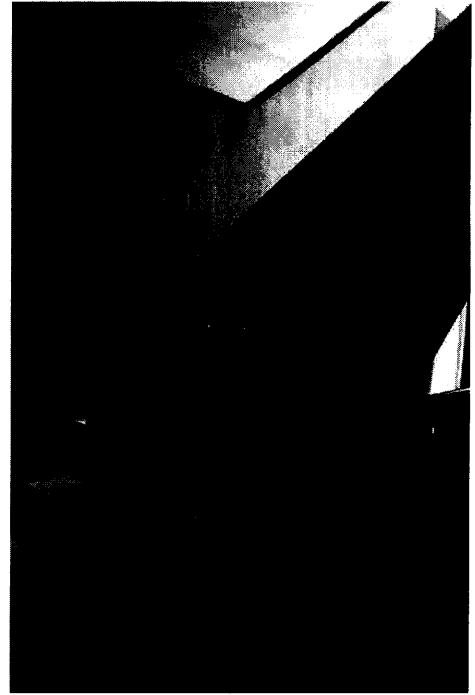


Photo 0012 Seventh Floor Stairwell

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Figure 1. Google Earth Aerial of Atlas Life Building Location  
To the north is the Mid-Continent Building, and to the south the Philtower

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Postcard of the Atlas Life Building  
Prior to Philtower (c.1925) construction, and  
Atlas Life Building Photo (c. 1940s)<sup>47</sup>



Building Details: Atlas and the Four-Story Exterior Neon Sign

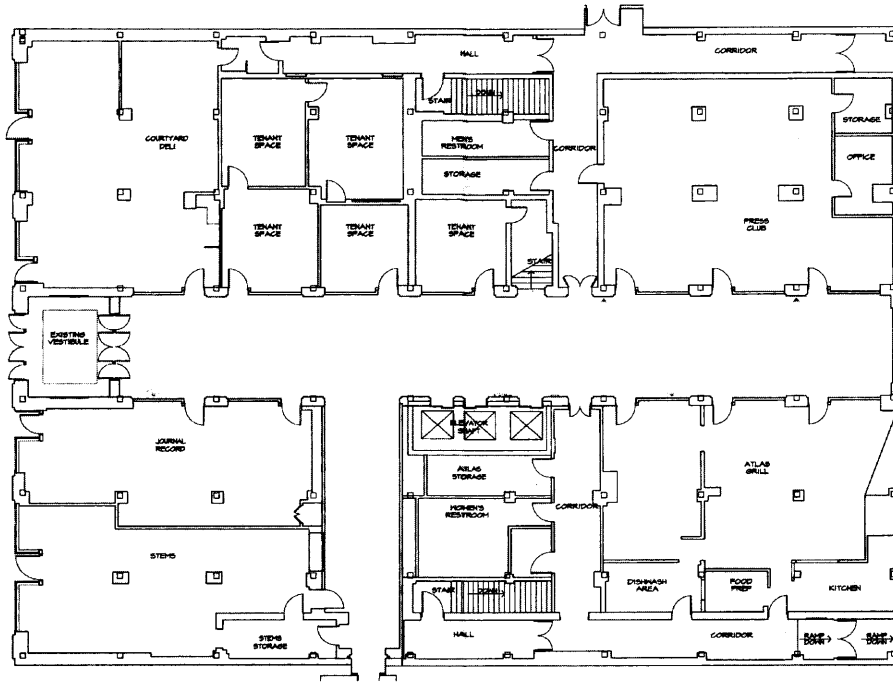
<sup>47</sup> Historic Postcard and Photo are from the Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa-city County Library and Tulsa Historical Society.

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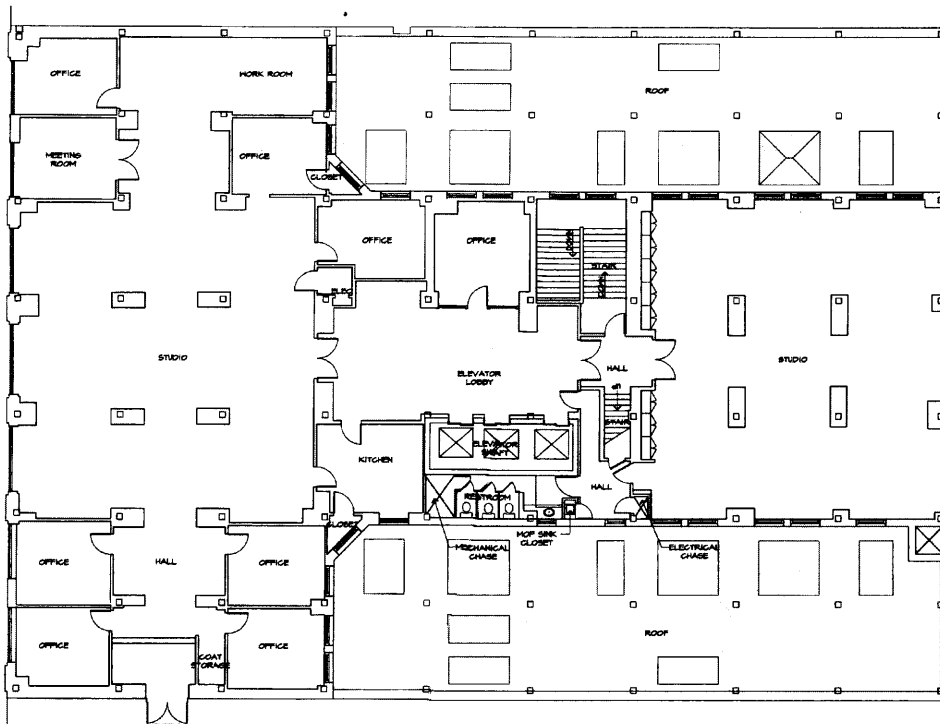
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1 EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Ground Floor, 2008, courtesy of GH2 Architects.



1 EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN

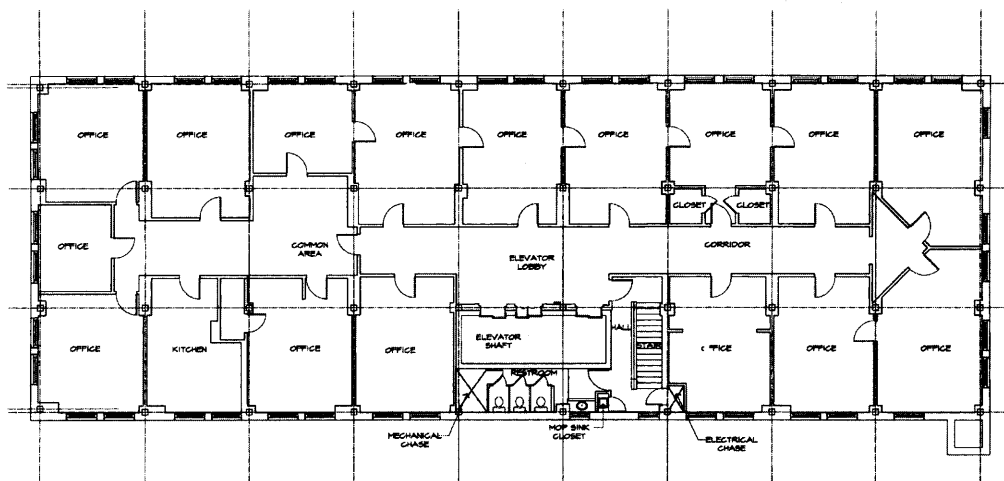
Second Floor, 2008, Courtesy of GH2 Architects.

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1 EXISTING SEVENTH FLOOR PLAN

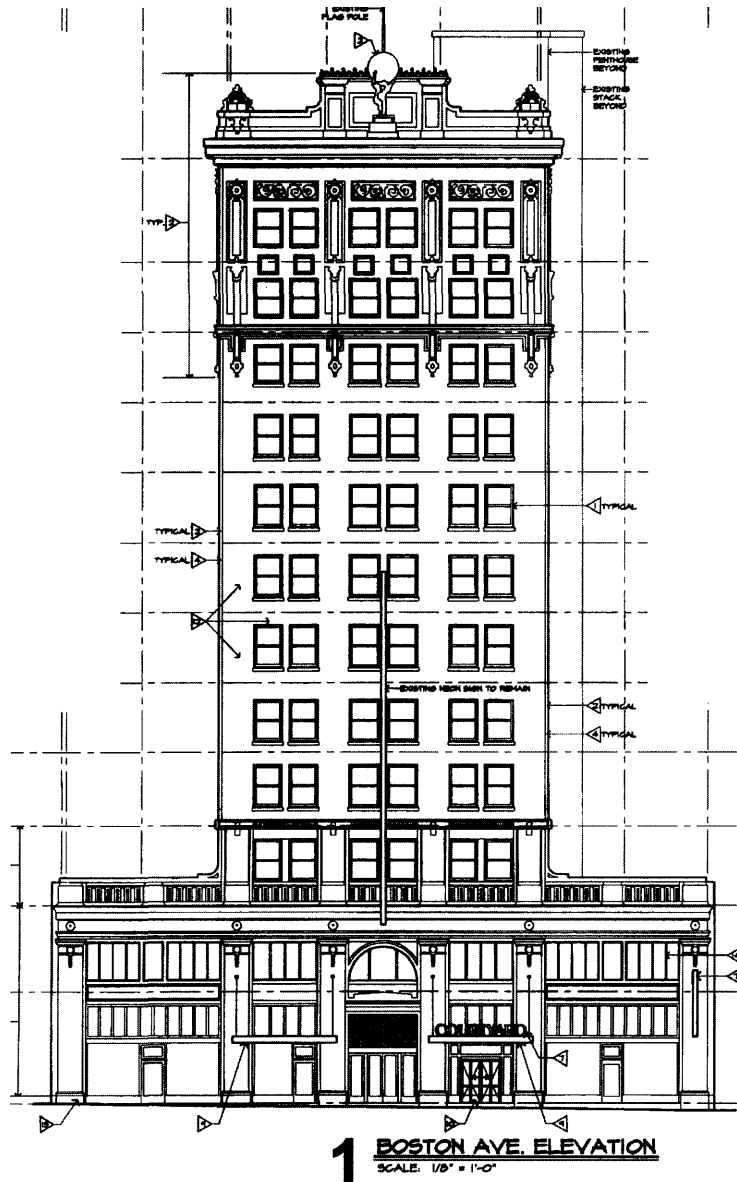
Seventh Floor, 2008, Courtesy of GH2 Architects.  
This floor is representative of plans for floors three through twelve  
and is the floor with some original materials.

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Boston Avenue Façade, Courtesy of GH2 Architects.  
This drawing has the proposed new entrance for the Marriott Hotel.