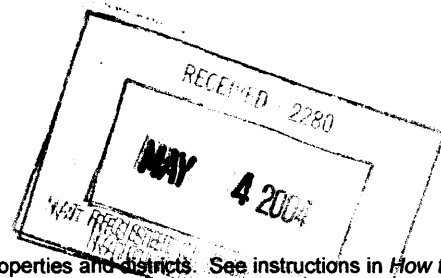


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name MEDFORD PLAZA APARTMENTS

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 235 South Oakdale Ave not for publication

city or town MEDFORD vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Jackson code 029 zip code 97501

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

James Hamrick
Signature of certifying official/Title / Deputy SHPO Date April 21, 2004

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain):

for
Edson H. Beall Signature of Keeper Date of Action 6/16/04

MEDFORD PLAZA APARTMENTS
Name of Property

Jackson County, Oregon
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

none

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Multiple Family, Apt Bldg

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: Multiple Family, Apt Bldg

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Period: International Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Concrete [Poured in Place]
Concrete [Corrugated panels]
roof Asphalt
other Metal: Steel windows
Brick: Brick Veneer

Narrative Description

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

Please see attached continuation sheets

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The Medford Plaza Apartments were completed in 1952 from plans drawn by Portland architect Don Byers, and were developed and built by Medford-area building contractors Marshall Bessonette and Wally Graff. Today, more than a half-century since its completion, the seven-story tall reinforced concrete building, prominently sited just SW of the Medford downtown commercial core, remains one of the tallest buildings in southern Oregon. Still in use as 49 apartment units, the building retains high integrity and effectively relates both its original design, workmanship and the associations that make it significant.

SETTING:

The Medford Plaza Apartments are located on several tax lots totaling 0.51 acres as shown on Jackson County Assessors Map 372W25DA. Combined these lots form a roughly rectangular parcel a 146 feet by 175 feet at the NE corner of the intersection of South Oakdale and West 10th streets¹. The site is flat, with tenant parking and service areas located to the north and east of the building.

Surrounding uses include the Medford City Hall, Lausmann Annex and related parking for the City of Medford municipal complex to the north and east. Across Oakdale are small 19th century residential volumes and, to the north, the (Jackson County) Justice Center and Jackson County Courthouse. Small residential and mixed-use buildings are located across West 10th Street while Sacred Heart Catholic Church, a brick building completed in 1928, is located diagonally opposite the apartments, at the SW corner of the Oakdale and 10th intersection. Uses further to the north and east are generally commercial and public, including the Jackson County Library, Federal Building and the National Register-listed Medford Downtown Historic District. To the south and west pre-WWII residential uses lead to the late-19th and early 20th century residential development of the National Register-listed South Oakdale Historic District.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The Medford Plaza Apartments is a seven story cast concrete structure in a cross or "plus sign" footprint. Above the first floor/lobby level, the walls are detailed in a minimalist fashion with strong horizontal bands cast into the stuccoed surface that reflect the interior

¹ The parcel includes Tax Lot 8300, the main structure along with associated parcels numbered 8400, 8401, 8500, 8501, 8601 and 8602, representing the expanded parking areas.

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floor and window levels.² One-inch wide “v-grooves” divide the building surface both horizontally and vertically and ornamental ribbed panels (identified as “corrugated concrete” on the plans) provide accent on alternating horizontal bands. The overall visual effect, characteristic of Byers’ “Tower” apartment designs, is that of a striped or layered volume set upon the double-height first floor lobby/service level.

As originally designed, the first floor entryway was partially finished in contrasting split-faced red brick veneer with integrated brick flower boxes flanking the entry doors. Here a projecting semi-circular concrete canopy, punctuated by eight 18” diameter round openings and highlighted by free-standing metal lettering graced the lobby entrance. All remaining exterior surfaces were smooth concrete or stucco finishes. At roof level, in addition to red brick chimney and various mechanical enclosures, an open pipe railing runs the entire perimeter, serving as modest crowning feature. Non-historic cellular telephone antenna were installed on the roof in February 2002 (City of Medford Building Permit #02-659).

As specified in the original plans, upper floor windows are steel sash with large vertical divisions, adding to the perception of height. Set in banks of three vertical panels or multiples thereof, two banks meet at the outside corners, again typical of Byers’ work. “[A] favorite design element was the uninterrupted corner window, which gave each apartment dweller an unobstructed view of the city” (Houser, 2003).³ All windows on the upper, apartment, floors remain as originally installed.

The rear (north and east) quadrants of the building provide service entries and mechanical spaces facing the asphalt surface parking lot. Three enclosed parking areas, with roll-up type doors, face east, to the rear. As constructed the building had only limited parking, a problem that was apparent shortly after the completion of the project. “They [the city] made a mistake, not making us have more parking originally. We ended buying some additional property to the rear and tearing that house down to provide some more...” (Graff, personal communication with the Author, 26-May-2003). Updated mechanical systems, including electrical conduits, HVAC units and similar features, are located to the

² Additional discussion regarding the architectural style of the Medford Plaza Apartments is found in Section 8, Statement of Significance, under the larger discussion of the work of Don Byers.

³ Michael Houser, Architectural Historian in the Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation was among the first to document the work of Don Byers. This nomination benefits substantially from his gracious sharing of sources and information related to Byers’ prolific career.

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rear. A non-historic wood-fenced patio area is tucked into the NE corner of the tower first floor, defined by a small wooden gate.

The first floor entry lobby faces the intersection of Oakdale and West 10th streets, entering into the building on its SW inside corner. As described above, this entry is beneath a projecting concrete canopy element, now augmented by a large, non-historic, barrel-shaped canvas awning, installed in 1985 (City of Medford Building Permit #1-43-85). The mill finish aluminum double-door and glazed panel system, with etched glazing proclaiming "Medford" and "Plaza" remain. Two projecting aluminum wall sconces, although not mentioned on the original plans, appear in available historic photographs of the building and also survive.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION: GROUND FLOOR

Immediately inside the main entry doors an "air-lock" or security alcove contains modern tenant mailboxes and an aluminum-framed glass window into the original office area, both as shown in the Byers plans.⁴ A central structural column, now covered with sections of mirror, dominates the space and divides the visual flow to the two original aluminum and glass lobby doors. The brick treatment of the walls, a continuation of the original exterior, is currently painted a cream/white.

The roughly octagonal-shaped lobby includes a central structural column as well, originally elongated to an oval so as to be fully centered in the room. This feature has been subsequently boxed out with wood paneling and mirrors, to form a rectangular footprint. Surface finishes include carpet, painted walls, and acoustic ceiling tiles. According to Byers' plans, the original flooring was rubber tile with wall and ceiling finished in a "...fine finish flat sand plaster" and paint.

Directly opposite the entry wall the aluminum-door elevator remains, providing access to the upper floors. Manufactured by Otis, this is apparently the original unit installed in 1952. Uses on the first floor level include three garages, facing east, a tenant laundry room, community room, office space, and two rental units (one 2-BR and one 1-BR), essentially all configured as originally designed. Wall, floor and ceiling surfaces all show modest alteration, similar to the treatments in the lobby area itself. Two u-shaped full-

⁴ Byers plans called for "50 Government Approved Mail Boxes" although the original elements have been replaced with the present, similarly designed, units.

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height stairwells, with original metal pipe railings, provide access from the upper floors. The stairwell to the north includes open balconies on the upper floors and was designated as the "smoke tower."

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION: UPPER FLOORS

Designated as floors 1-6 in the original plans, the upper stories of the Medford Plaza Apartments are all virtually identical and each contain eight apartment units (two 2-BR, 5 1-BR and a studio) along with a janitor's closet. The central lobby, with a perimeter "hall" surrounding the elevator shaft, creates unusual angled vestibule entry ways to the units, which radiate off the core to form Byers' typical "plus-sign" footprint.

The interior finishes of the individual apartment units was generally modest, with rubber tile flooring throughout and simple painted plaster walls and ceilings. Byers' plans specify both "Pullman Kitchens" with integrated metal sinks and cabinets installed as a unit, and "Dining Alcoves" in all but the 2-bedroom units, an indication of the tight, spatially efficient, floorplans. Doors were painted fir and other built-ins (linen cabinets, bathroom cabinets, etc.) were of painted plywood. The character or design of the original light fixtures in the apartment units is not clear.

One interesting element of the upper floors is the annunciator/car call panel for the elevator. In addition to the typical up-down call buttons themselves, the annunciator is mounted between them, at waist level rather than above the car as is more typical. A round liquid-filled dial with the floor numbers houses a small arrow which rotates, marking the progress of the car up or down the elevator shaft. All are assumed to be original construction.

KNOWN ALTERATIONS:

As originally designed and built the Medford Plaza Apartments contained 50 individual apartment units along with associated public and service areas described above. Today the building contains 49 units, with the alterations to the 4th floor resulting in a total of three 2-Bedroom units, four 1 bedroom units, and one studio. Interiors of the apartments, as might be expected, have been serially upgraded and modernized in terms of finishes and floor coverings. As built the units were heated with an early in-floor radiant heat system, detailed in Byers original plans. "The tubes always leaked and we finally just disconnected

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the system and put heat exchangers in the closets” (Graff, personal communication with the Author, 26-May-2003).

The basic configuration of the ground floor remains intact, with the modifications to the cladding of the support columns, floor and ceiling surfaces previously described. The office space, still used as an office, remains essentially intact with the glass window opening onto the Foyer and early-appearing entry door off the interior vestibule.

The major alteration to the original exterior character of the Medford Plaza Apartment Building is the painting of portions of the red brick ground floor façade surrounding the main entry way and the cladding of portions of that material with the present green-painted T-111 sheetgoods. This treatment, c1980s, is built atop a system of 2x4 supports and the original materials remains underneath. Original steel sash windows, now painted green, remain, within deep-set framed openings in the T-111. Other changes, in addition to the previously described canopy, include a replaced wood and glass door at the service entrance, just north of the office space and the wood fencing that defines a small outside patio area.

Overall, the essential character of the Medford Plaza Apartment Building is virtually intact or easily returned to the original design. The owner intends to embark upon a full exterior and interior renovation program that will return the building to its 1950s-era design to the greatest extent possible.

SUMMARY:

The Medford Plaza Apartment Building was completed in 1952 from plans drawn by Portland architect Don Byers and was constructed and developed by Medford-area building contractors Marshall Bessonette and Wally Graff. Remaining in its original use as 49 studio, one and two-bedroom apartment units with associated public spaces, the Medford Plaza Apartment building retains high integrity and relates its Byers’s original design in the International Style and effectively conveying both its historic appearance and the associations which make it significant.

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Community Planning & Development
Architecture: 20th Century

Period of Significance

1952

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Byers, Don [Architect]
Bessonette and Graff [Builders]

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Jackson County Courthouse

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Medford Plaza Apartments, Medford, Jackson Cty, OR

The Medford Plaza Apartments, completed in 1952, is a seven-story reinforced concrete "tower" building that was designed by Portland architect Don Byers as one of Medford's first examples of the International Style. Built and long owned by local investors headed by Medford contractor Marshall O. Bessonette, the apartments were erected as an important element of Medford's massive post-WWII development period and even today, more than a half-century later, remain one of the tallest and most recognizable structures in the city's downtown core area. The Medford Plaza Apartments, retaining substantial integrity to the original Byers design, are significant under National Register criterion "A" for their role in the post-war development of Medford and under criterion "C" as a locally significant example of the International Style and the work of Don Byers. The Medford Plaza Apartments accurately reflects its original character and the associations for which it is significant.

CONTEXT:

The City of Medford, Oregon was founded in 1883 in anticipation of the arrival of the Oregon and California Railroad line which would tie Oregon and its populous neighbor to the south by 1887. Platted on the flat Bear Creek Valley floor east of the then-county seat at Jacksonville, Medford grew rapidly as the primary shipping point in southern Oregon, particularly after 1900 with the onset of what is locally referred to as the "Orchard Boom." Pears and Apples grown in the valley, many of which were shipped by rail from the Medford Depot, inspired a booming economy and a near-quadrupling of the Medford population between 1900 and 1990.

Slowed by over-development of its surrounding agricultural land and a drought, Medford contracted in population in the years leading up to and following WWI but began to grow again by the mid-1920s. The city boomed following the Great Depression, particularly with planning and construction of U.S. Army Cantonment Camp White, located to the east, immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the beginning of U.S. involvement in World War Two. Marshall Bessonette, the contractor who would later build the Medford Plaza Apartments, "...was the first local built hired by the army to start building Camp White.." (Hutchison, 1990).

Like much of the western United States, Medford's population boomed in the immediate post-WWII years. The influx of new residents and the shortage of building materials combined to create a critical housing shortage in the city. Medford's population, which

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grew by less than 300 persons in the decade before 1940, grew by over 6,000 in the next ten years, adding more than sixty-five percent to its pre-war size (State of Oregon, 1951:329).

Much of Medford's growth was accommodated by new suburban style housing developments, particularly to the east of the city core, while salvaged officers quarters and mess halls from Camp White were sold and relocated throughout the valley or disassembled for materials in the post-war market. Apartments, while always a part of the local housing mix, were not initially an element of Medford's post-war residential construction, a deficit which was noted by the local editor.

Medford has long needed such housing as the proposed Plaza Apartments will provide. While a great many homes have been constructed in recent years, and some very fine smaller apartments, demand for the large, self-contained, multiple storied (sic) type of apartment has not been met (*Medford Mail Tribune*, 25-October-1950, 8:2-3).

Medford's first apartment building, converted from what had been originally built as a tuberculosis sanitarium, was the Cargill Court Apartments, which opened in downtown at the SE corner of Sixth and Ivy streets in 1920.¹ Medford's second apartment building, and its first built specifically for multiple residential occupancy, was the Schuler Apartment Building, at the SE corner of Sixth and Oakdale, which opened in 1926.²

Other, substantially smaller, apartment buildings were constructed in Medford during the mid-to-late 1920s, most with less than ten units in a courtyard form, typically nested into an otherwise typical single-family residential area.³ Bungalow courtyards, with attached

¹ Cargill Court was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 in anticipation of a major renovation program for the long-vacant and abandoned building. That project failed to materialize and the brick and wood structure was razed in 1993 (NRIS #90000836). See "Medford Landmark Coming Down," *Medford Mail Tribune*, February 26, 1993, 1:1-4).

² The Schuler Apartments were designed by W. N. Jewett and built by contractor Larkin Reynolds for local businessman Ira N. Schuler, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991 (NRIS #91000800).

³ Excellent examples of this type include the Findlay Apartments at 505-515 South Holly (c1935) and Durell Court (329-333 North Holly, c1930), both of which are designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style.

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Medford Plaza Apartments, Medford, Jackson Cty, OR

single-story wood frame structures arrayed in a "U" form around a common walkway, were a popular residential form in Medford through World War II, particularly in the western portion of the city. With the onset of World War II and the sudden crush of military-related housing, the Evelyn Apartments, a two-story twenty-six unit courtyard complex at Sixth and North Ivy (opposite the Cargill Court Apartments) was erected for officer's wives in 1943.⁴

Despite these efforts, a 1949 Medford City Directory lists a mere ten apartment buildings in the city, which while presumed to be incomplete, nevertheless indicates that such structures were hardly a prevalent residential form (Latter-Day Saints, 1949:135). Apartment living, however, was becoming a popular form in other communities, especially among certain residential groups.

Although this is essentially a city of homes, each with its own yard, garden plot, and other advantages...Medford's growth has also brought many people here who desire accommodations more of the large city type. After all, there are certain advantages in apartment dwelling....(*Medford Mail Tribune*, 25-October-1950, 8:2-3).

Like many large postwar housing projects, the Medford Plaza Apartments was funded in part by loan guarantees through the Federal Housing Administration and was designated as FHA Project No. 126-42078. Ben Trowbridge, one of the project partners, stated in an early article describing the FHA involvement that "...the rent schedule will be set under federal housing authority (sic) terms and will included heat, lights, water and garbage service.." (*Medford Mail Tribune*, 12-Dec-1950, 6:1-2).

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY:

The initial announcement of a large multi-story apartment complex in downtown Medford occurred in late 1949. "First plans contemplated erection of the 48 or 50 unit apartment complex...(were reported) on October 30, 1949 when Ormand R. Bean, Jr., Portland, architect, revealed that he had been commissioned to draw up the plans" (*Medford Mail*

⁴ The Evelyn Apartments, still in excellent condition, were included as a contributing property in the Medford Downtown Historic District (Site No. 171.0), listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 (NRIS #98000949).

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Medford Plaza Apartments, Medford, Jackson Cty, OR

Tribune, October, 24, 1950, 1:6).⁵ At this point the Medford project was to have been developed by Coates Construction, also of Portland, a firm with experience in other similar projects, most notably the Lane Towers, in Eugene.⁶

As originally proposed the Bean/Coates Construction project at Oakdale and 10th ran into considerable delay because of setback variances required from the Medford City Council. Just under a year after it was first proposed, the project was assumed by Medford Plaza Apartments, Inc., a new venture formed by Medford and Portland business interests.

A United Press report from Salem said that the Medford Plaza Apartments Inc., had filed articles of incorporation with the state....Ben J. Trowbridge, partner in Trowbridge and Flynn Electric company, contractor M. O. Bessonette and Denton G. Burdick Jr., signed the incorporation papers...the group...have obtained the Coates' FHC [Federal Housing Commission] loan authorization for \$376,000 and will proceed with construction. Those interested include Trowbridge, Bessonette, Walter Graff and L. A. McCormick, all of Medford, and Al and Chet Gunderson, Portland...(Medford Mail Tribune, 24-October-1950, 1:6).⁷

Ben Trowbridge was an influential Medford businessman and invested in numerous downtown properties over a long career.⁸ Marshall O. Bessonette and his partner Walter (Wally) A. Graff were prolific Medford-area contractors during the post-war period, building the Big Y Shopping Center, the Acme Hardware Building, the original YMCA Building, the Fluhrer Pastry Building and many other buildings in Medford, most of which

⁵ Ormand R. Bean (1885-1975) was a long-influential Portland architect. Trained at the University of Oregon under Ellis Lawrence and later a partner in the firm Lawrence, Holford, Allyn and Bean, Bean served as a Public Utilities Commissioner and served many years on the Portland City Council. Bean was involved in various housing projects statewide (Ritz, 2003:25).

⁶ Berg/Carter, *City of Eugene Cultural Resource Inventory Form*, 1996.

⁷ See also the *Portland Daily Journal of Commerce*, 30-October-1950, 1:5.

⁸ Trowbridge's business partner, Diamond Flynn, was a longtime Medford mayor. The two ran Trowbridge and Flynn Electric, a prominent commercial contracting firm with a retail store on West Main Street.

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were of concrete construction. Bessonette first gained local renown contractor for the initial work on Camp White, a massive U.S. Army Cantonment built east of Medford that was begun in January 1942 (Kramer, 1992:14). Bessonette would go on to found Tru-Mix Construction, now LTM, which is still one of the largest concrete construction companies in southern Oregon. "Bessonette constructed a lot of buildings in the Medford area — and he built them fast...he would promise the owner 'day after tomorrow' completion and meet the deadline" (Hutchison, 1990). Graff, partner in Crater Lake Lumber Company and several other area lumber and timber businesses was involved with many of Bessonette's projects (W. A. Graff, personal communication with the Author, 26-May-2003).⁹

Under the new, local, ownership, the design of the Medford Plaza Apartment project was modified and the building was re-located slightly on the site to allow construction to proceed. "Plaza Builders, a subsidiary of the apartment company, will handle construction of the seven story building, with Bessonette in active participation" (*Medford Mail Tribune*, 24-October-1950, 1:6) Within three weeks of incorporation Plaza Builders obtained a permit for construction of the seven story apartment (*Medford Mail Tribune*, 10-November-1950, 1:4). Typical of Bessonette and Graff's inventiveness, the Medford Plaza Apartments was partially built with a WWII army surplus jeep, lifted to the roof and then moved floor-by-floor to help lift windows, mechanical equipment, and other materials as construction progressed. As the building neared completion the vehicle was removed from the roof by a crane. Using the surplus jeep, however, saved the cost of having an expensive crane on for the entire construction process. The Medford Plaza Apartments also was reportedly one of the first times a concrete pumper was used in southern Oregon, although this too was a modest affair, where concrete was pumped into wheelbarrows and dumped manually, as opposed to the large vertical pipe and hose sections used today. (Graff, personal communication with the Author, 26-Medford-2003).

The relationship between the Bean/Coates era project and its design and the building that was actually built, designed by architect Don Byers, is not clear.¹⁰ However the Medford Plaza Apartments as constructed and described in all available sources is clearly that depicted on blueprints dated October 1950. The plans document the project as Federal

⁹ See *Capitol's Who's Who for Oregon*, 1948:223.

¹⁰ This issue is additionally confused by two undated plan sheets in the original Byers set for Medford Plaza Apartments Inc., signed by Byers, but including a notation reading "Coates, Medford."

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Housing Administration project number 126-42078, and are signed by Don Byers, Architect with the assistance of H.B. Boland, designer and Pierson and Tidball, Engineers, all of Portland.¹¹

Progress on the building continued throughout 1951 and in a year-end round up of Medford's booming growth the local newspaper reported:

The Plaza Apartments at the corner of West 11th street (sic) and Oakdale avenue are nearing completion, with only interior work yet to be done... The multi-storied building is one of the tallest in Medford and Jackson County (*Medford Mail Tribune*, 2-December-1951, 12:1-5).¹²

No specific completion date for the Medford Plaza Apartments was located although the interiors were likely done by Spring 1952 and tenants presumably moved in shortly thereafter. The 50 apartments in the building were occupied according to the 1953 Polk City Directory for Medford.

OWNERSHIP

Medford Plaza Apartments, Incorporated, the original development partnership responsible for the construction of the building, acquired the site in two transactions recorded in Jackson County Deeds in 1950 (JCD 343:373 and JCD 344:10). This company, probably with various changes in partners, retained ownership until 1974 according to the Jackson County Clerks' records.¹³ Marshall and Joy Bessonette eventually assumed full control of the project which in 1978 shifted to Bessonette-Grove Investment Company and then, in 1984, the Medford Plaza Development Company.¹⁴ Later owners included the Medford Plaza Investment Group Company and Security Pacific Corporation, who sold the project to the present owner and applicant in 1991 (JC Journal Voucher 91-01817A).

¹¹ This full size plan set, identified as "Revised 21-October-1950" are in the possession of the applicant.

¹² The apartments were the tallest building in Medford at the time with only the nine-story Lithia Springs Hotel (later the Mark Antony and now the Ashland Springs Hotel) being taller in southern Oregon.

¹³ Wally Graff, one of the original partners, reports that he "got out of it early, but Marshall stayed in..." (Graff, personal communication with the Author, 26-May-2003).

¹⁴ See Jackson County Journal vouchers 74-05050, 78-12131 and 84-11482.

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Medford Plaza Apartments, Medford, Jackson Cty, OR

DON BYERS: ARCHITECT

Born in Alvadore, Oregon, near Eugene, in 1912, Donovan Clark Byers began his architectural career at the University of Oregon's School of Architecture and Allied Arts, studying under founding Dean Ellis Fuller Lawrence and Professor W. B. Wilcox. Economics and the Great Depression caused Byers to leave in 1934, shortly before completing his course work and graduating. Moving to Portland, Byers found work in the offices of architect Howard Gifford who in association with building designer Harry Boland operated the Universal Plan Service, publishers of a series popular plan books on residential architecture (Houser, 2002).

In 1946, after the death of Gifford, Byers became a registered architect and continued in association with Boland. By 1950, the Universal Plan Service had sold nearly half a million books. While maintaining his role with this company, Byers also set up an architectural practice, Don Byers Architect, and pursued other projects throughout the Northwest. Of particular note here was his prolific output of apartment complexes in the post-WWII period. "Donovan C. Byers was a Portland architect best known for the apartment houses designed by him in the late 1940s and early 1950s" (Ritz, 2003:62).

Byers' apartment concepts include two basic forms — *garden apartments*, generally located in suburban areas and of low-rise, highly landscaped design and *tower apartments*, urban, high-rise construction (Houser, 2002). Many of the tower projects included the word "plaza" in their names, as was the case with the Medford project.

Byers' tower apartment designs were typically reinforced concrete with the majority built in downtown Portland.¹⁵ However "...he did provide tower apartment designs for Medford, Corvallis, Eugene Salem and even Anchorage, Alaska" (Houser, 2002).¹⁶ The Medford Plaza Apartments, the only example of the tower form in Oregon outside the Willamette Valley, was one of four known Byers commissions in the Medford area. He is

¹⁵ Examples of Portland-area tower apartments designed by Byers include the King Tower (1949-51) at SW King and Yamhill, the Portland Towers (1950-51) on SW 21st Street, and Lone Plaza Apartments, at NW 25th and Lovejoy, built in 1950.

¹⁶ In addition to the subject Medford Plaza, Byers' other non-Portland tower apartments include the Capitol Plaza, Salem, built in 1951, Corvallis Plaza, at 15th and Jackson (1950-1951) and Lane Towers, 1601 Olive, Eugene (1951-1952). Byers' Anchorage project is uncertain but is likely the McKinley Tower, built in 1951 and similar in design to other known Byers tower apartments.

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also credited with the Barnes Apartments and Annex, built between 1948 and 1951 and the McCann House, built c1955.¹⁷

Byers remained in architectural practice into the early 1980s and over the course of his career obtained licenses in seven western states. His works ranged from private residences to shopping centers and included some of the tallest structures in Oregon for their time. Notable projects include the 24-story Panorama Apartments in Portland and St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. Byers work with the Housing Authority of Portland, included two sensitive additions to the WWII-era Columbia Villa Housing Project in NW Portland and the Northwest Tower Apartments, built in 1963 and harkening back to his post-WWII designs. Byers later designed shopping centers, restaurants and various other commercial and residential projects during his long and prolific career.

Between his private designs through the Don Byers Architect firm and the literally thousands of homes built through the Universal Plan Service, Byers was responsible for a vast body of work, concentrated in the northwest but found throughout the nation.

[U]like (several better known Oregon architects), Byers created an unusually high number of structures that directly impacted the day-to-day lives of the middle class, suburban and urban dweller. His presence can be found in the built environment in countless cities throughout the nation and maybe even throughout the globe...(Houser, 2002).

Byers remained in practiced until the early 1980s, finally closing his office after nearly five decades. "Byers died in Portland, March 13, 1989, at the age of 76, of injuries suffered when struck by a car 10 months earlier (Ritz, 2002:62).

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

The Medford Plaza Apartments fall within the general stylistic category of "Modern" with some aspects of the simplified International Style as it was employed in smaller communities in the post-war era. In some discussions of other Byers-designed tower

¹⁷ Byers two commissions for Bill and Lorraine Barnes were the Lorraine Apartments, at 600-614 Whitman Place and, most likely, one of the family's other apartments on either South Oakdale or King street. (Mike Barnes, personal communication with the Author, 30-May-2003). The John J. and Melba McCann House is believed to be the split-level structure located at 560 North Keeneway.

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apartments, specifically The Lane Towers in Eugene, the building style is described as "Half-Modern" or "Transitional," using terms taken from *Architecture Oregon Style*, the respected work by Rosalind Clark.¹⁸ Architectural historian Michael Houser, whose article on Byers remains one of the only analyses of his career, notes the various characteristics of the tower apartments as a type, without attributing any particular stylistic term to them.

[Byers'] tower apartments show a distinct geometric pattern with building footprints of an "X" or "+." While the banding of multiple groups of windows without mullions gave the structures a horizontal, almost International style flavor; they are broken by articulated end walls which had a strong vertical component... (Houser, 2002).

While any stylistic attribution in postwar American architecture is difficult, Byers work, including the Medford Plaza Apartments, does seem to belong with the basic International style vocabulary, if only for its largely unadorned form and inherent design that utilizes the nature of the materials; concrete and metal, as the primary exterior decoration.

The International Style is based on modern structural principals and materials. Concrete glass, and steel are the most commonly used materials...ribbon windows were a hallmark of the style, as were corner windows, in which the glass was mitered without any corner support... (Poppeliers et al, 1983:92).

In smaller communities such as Medford, the International Style generally appears later and, as might be expected, in less severe or rigid examples of the style than are found in larger, more urban, cities. Little such work existed in Medford prior to the Medford Plaza Apartments, where pre-war architectural designed tended to follow the Art Deco or Streamlined Moderne pattern, the latter of which remained in favor in the years immediately following the war.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Berg-Carter, Lane Towers, Oregon Cultural Resource Inventory, City of Eugene, 1996.

¹⁹ A prime example of post-war Streamlined Moderne is the J. C. Penney Building at 6th and North Central in downtown Medford. Designed by the Penney's company and built by Portland contractor Donald Drake, this is now the site of the Southern Oregon Historical Society.

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Some modest examples of the International Style were built in southern Oregon in the early 1950s, the most notable examples being two banks. These are the US National Bank of Oregon, built in 1956 in Ashland, and the First National Bank in downtown Medford, built in 1954. The latter was designed by the Portland firm of Church, Newberry and Roehr and while the architect of the Ashland bank is not documented it is likely a work from a Portland company as well. Several area school buildings, also built during southern Oregon's period of post-war growth, also exhibit the influence of the International Style. As with the banks, these buildings too, like the Medford Plaza Apartments, were generally designed by Portland-based firms, with the most notable example being George A. Briscoe Elementary School, in Ashland, designed by Allyn and Stokes and completed in 1949.²⁰ By the late 1950s and early 1960s other less exceptional works influenced by the International Style and its successors become more common in Medford. Several medical or other professional offices along East Main Street in Medford show the influence of the style, often inter-mingled with streamlined elements of an earlier era. The designer of the Franklin Building (built 1953, 330 South Central, Medford) is unknown but the structure exhibits the scored concrete surfaces, a glazed terra cotta treatment on the ground floor, aluminum storefronts, and other elements of the International Style.²¹ The largest, and certainly most visible, example of the International Style in southern Oregon is the Rogue Valley Manor, designed by Washington-based architect John W. Maloney.²² The "Manor," a large glass and metal construction volume with a "v-shaped" or wedge footprint and alternating bands of windows and blue metal panels, has dominated Medford's skyline since its completion in 1959.

Although far from a comprehensive listing, the Medford Plaza Apartments is clearly among the earliest examples of the International Style in southern Oregon and represents a locally significant work by a prominent and prolific Oregon architect. Designed, along with

²⁰ Briscoe Elementary, a contributing resource in the Ashland Skidmore-Academy Historic District (Site #196.0) was closed in June 2003, ending more than 125 years of educational use on the site.

²¹ Included in the Medford Downtown Historic District (Site #330.0), the Franklin Building was evaluated as Non-Contributing based upon its construction outside the period of significance but remains, nevertheless, one of the area's best commercial storefronts in the International Style.

²² Maloney apparently maintained offices in both Yakima and Seattle and was active beginning in the late 1920s. His Grandview High School, built 1925 in Yakima, and A. E. Larson Bldg (1925), both in the Art Deco Style, have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Among other projects, he also designed Wilmer-Davis Hall, and Smith Gym at the University of Washington. Maloney died on 26-January-1978.

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Medford Plaza Apartments, Medford, Jackson Cty, OR

virtually all the other major examples of the International Style in the Medford area, by an out-of-area urban-based architect, the Medford Plaza Apartment building because of its size and visible location, exemplifies the International Style in the local area. The building, additionally, was among the first uses of the style in southern Oregon.

SUMMARY:

The Medford Plaza Apartments, completed in 1952, is a seven-story reinforced concrete "tower" building that was designed by Portland architect Don Byers and built by a group of local investors headed by contractor Marshall O. Bessonette. Funded in part by the Federal Housing Administration, the apartments were developed as an important element of Medford's post-WWII growth and were seen as a major investment in that city's downtown core. Today, more than a half-century later, the Medford Plaza Apartments remain one of the tallest and most recognizable structures in the city.

The Medford Plaza Apartments represent one of the earliest examples of the International Style to be built in southern Oregon. Essentially unaltered, the Medford Plaza Apartments, retain substantial integrity to the original Byers plans in materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, location, and design and effectively relate the associations for which the building is significant.

The Medford Plaza Apartment Building, designed by Don Byers, built by Bessonette and Graff, and completed in 1952, accurately reflects its original design and character. The building is nominated under National Register criterion "A" for its role in the post-war development of Medford, Oregon and under criterion "C" as a locally significant example of the International Style designed by Donovan C. Byers.

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MEDFORD PLAZA APARTMENTS
Name of Property

Jackson County, Oregon
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 [110] [5 11 10 13 16 11] [4161815121917]
Zone Easting Northing
2 [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

3 [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []
Zone Easting Northing
4 [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title George Kramer, M.S.
organization Historic Preservation Consultant date 1-August-2003
street & number 386 North Laurel telephone (541)-482-9504
city or town Ashland state Oregon zip code 97520-1154

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Russell E Dale (D & D Properties)
street & number 585 Allison Street telephone (541) 482-8969
city or town Ashland state Oregon zip code 97520

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The nominated parcel, comprised of tax lots 8300, 8400, 8401, 8500, 8501, 8601 and 8602, totaling a combined .51 acres, is shown on Jackson County Assesors Map 372W25DA. The property is located at the NE corner of the intersection of South Oakdale and West 10th Street, at the periphery of the downtown core of Medford, Oregon. The property address, with the main entry on the diagonal facing the center of the above intersection, is 235 South Oakdale.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

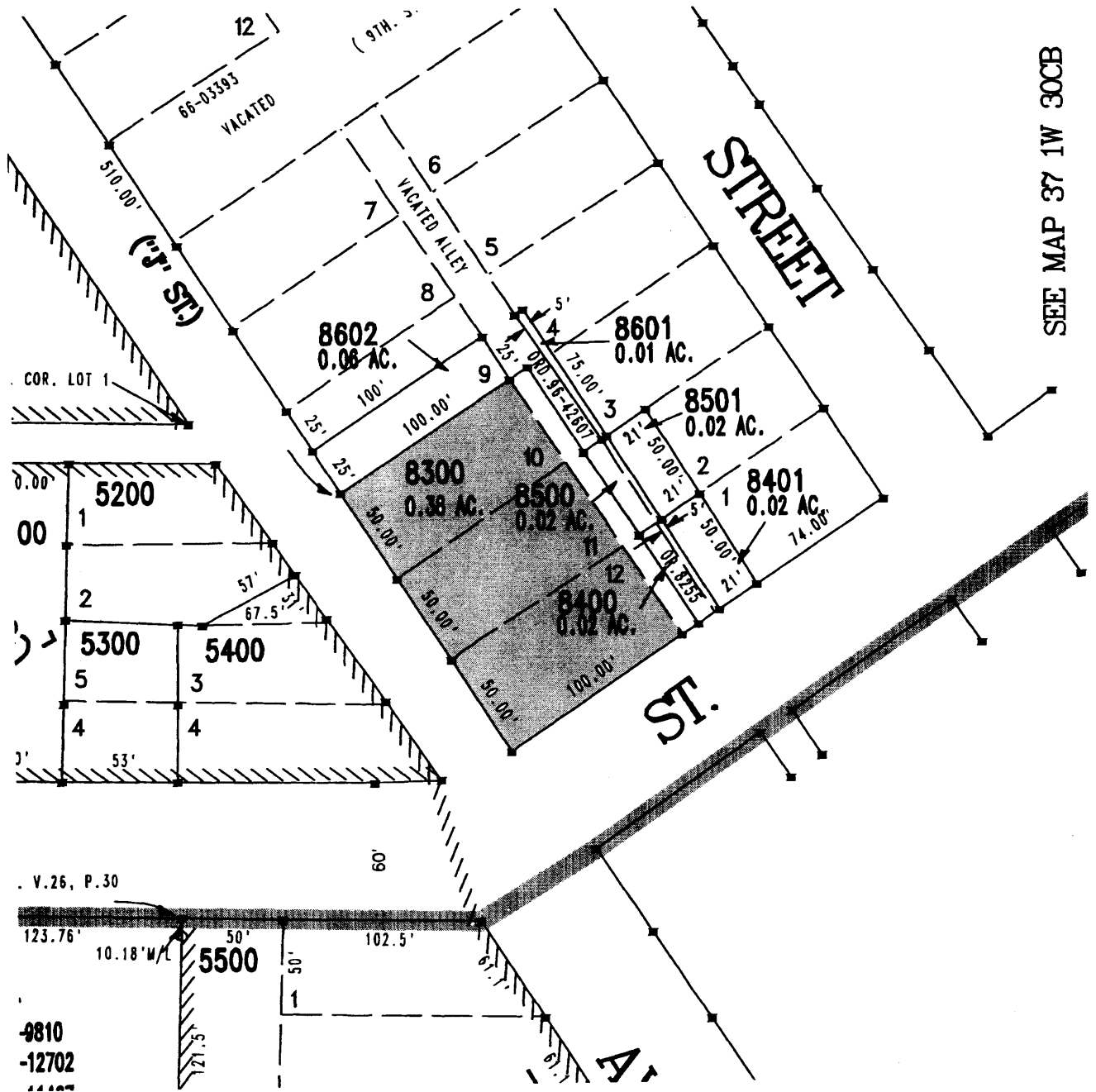
The nominated parcel includes all of Lots 10, 11 and 12 of Block 75 of the Original Medford Town Plat as conveyed to Marshall Bessonette in 1950 and recorded on Jackson County Deeds 343:373 and 344:10, as augmented by subsequent minor additions to the rear and north, to provide additional parking, and contains the entire Medford Plaza Apartment Building and all areas related to the use of the site as a 50-unit apartment tower.

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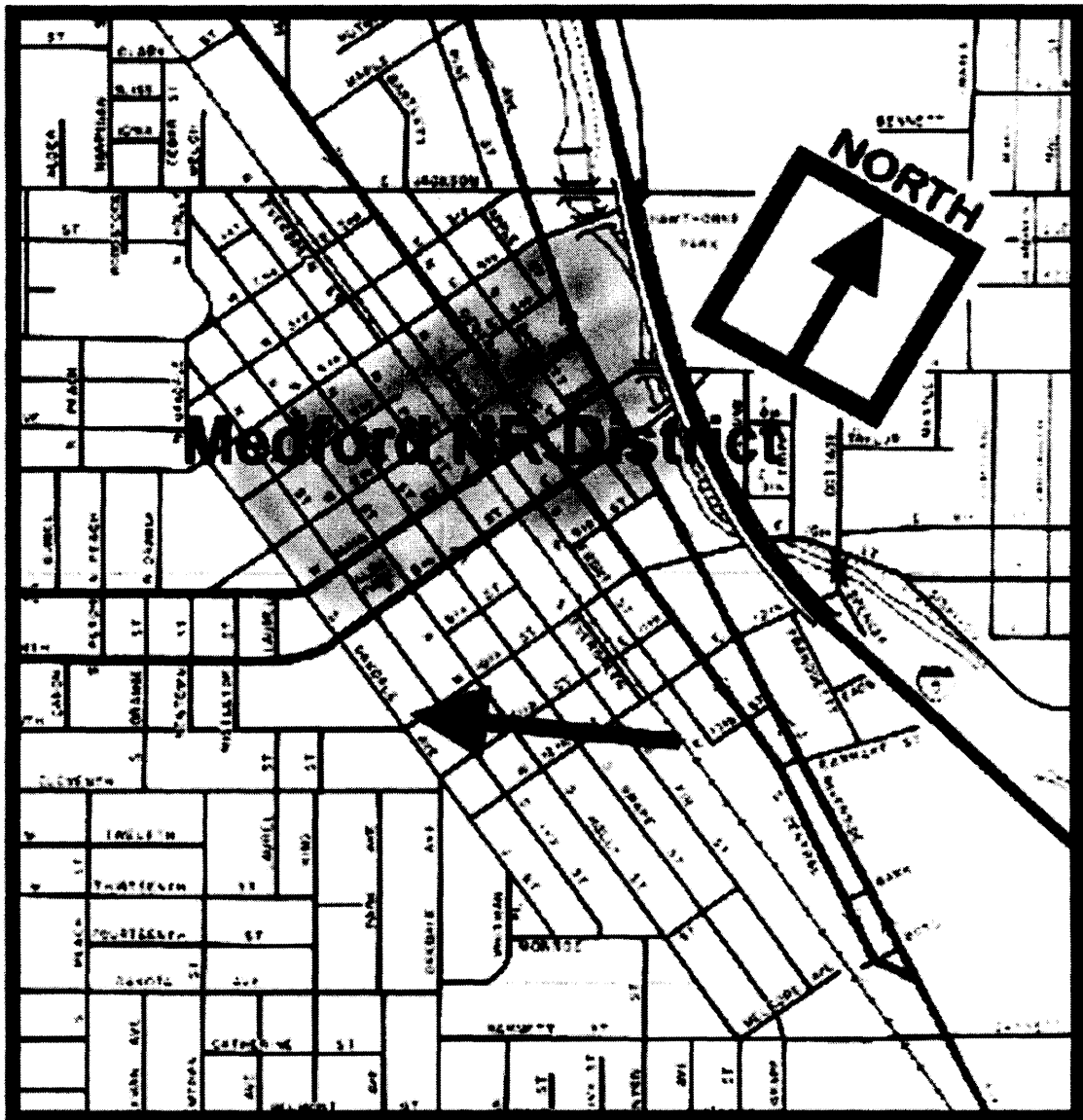
Section Number: PHOTOGRAPHS Page: 1 Medford Plaza Apartments, Medford, Jackson Cty, OR

- | | | | |
|----|---|-----|--|
| 1. | Historic View: Project Rendering
Looking: Northeast
Source: Ptd Daily Journal of Commerce
Date: 30-October-1950, 1:3-4
Negative: scanned from microfilm | 7. | Current View: East-facing, rear, elev.
Looking: Northwest
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer |
| 2. | Historic View: Construction
Looking: Northeast
Photographer: Unknown (Mail Tribune)
Date of Photograph: 2-Dec-1951
Negative: scanned from microfilm | 8. | Current Detail: Entryway
Looking: Northeast
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer |
| 3. | Historic View: Construction, with crane
Looking: South
Photographer: Unknown (Wally Graf?)
Date of Photograph: c1951
Negative: scanned from microfilm | 9. | Current Detail: Corner Windows, bands
Looking:
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer |
| 4. | Historic View: Entry, Corner elevation
Looking: Northeast
Photographer: Unknown
Date of Photograph: c1952
Negative: Courtesy of Michael Houser | 10. | Current Detail: North-facing elevation
Looking: Southwest
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer |
| 5. | Current View: Entry, Corner elevation
Looking: Northeast
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer | 11. | Current Detail: Entry sconce
Looking:
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer |
| 6. | Current View: North elevation
Looking: Southeast
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer | 12. | Current Interior: Lobby
Looking: West, toward mailbox foyer
Photographer: G. Kramer
Date of Photograph: June 2003
Negative: Collection of the Photographer |



MEDFORD PLAZA APARTMENTS
 235 South Oakdale, Medford
 Jackson County, OR

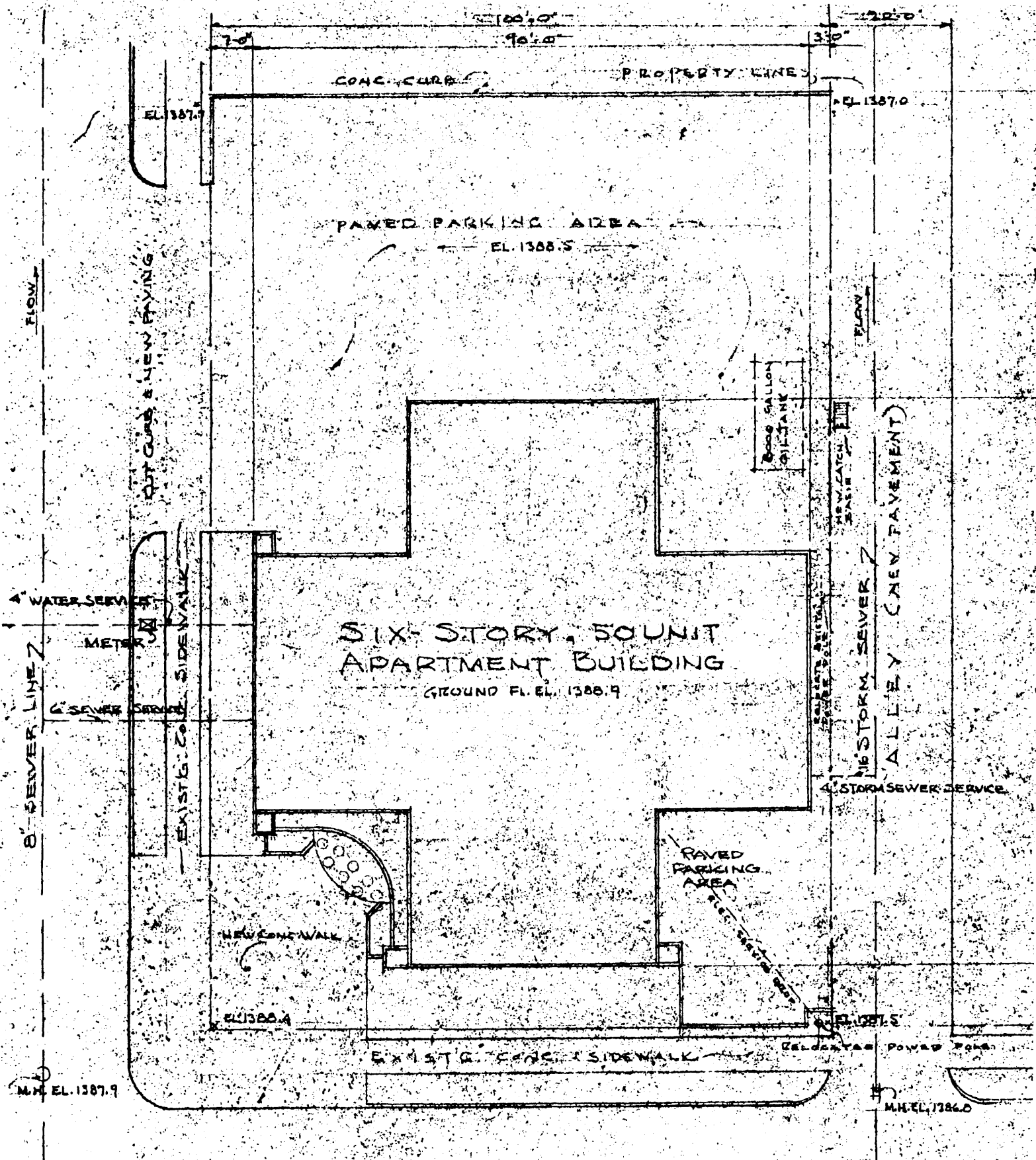
ASSESSOR'S PLAT
 372W25DA, Lots 8300-8602
 as shaded for clarity



MEDFORD PLAZA APARTMENTS
235 South Oakdale, Medford
Jackson County, OR

VICINITY MAP

Source: Highway & Street Guide
for Jackson County, Oregon



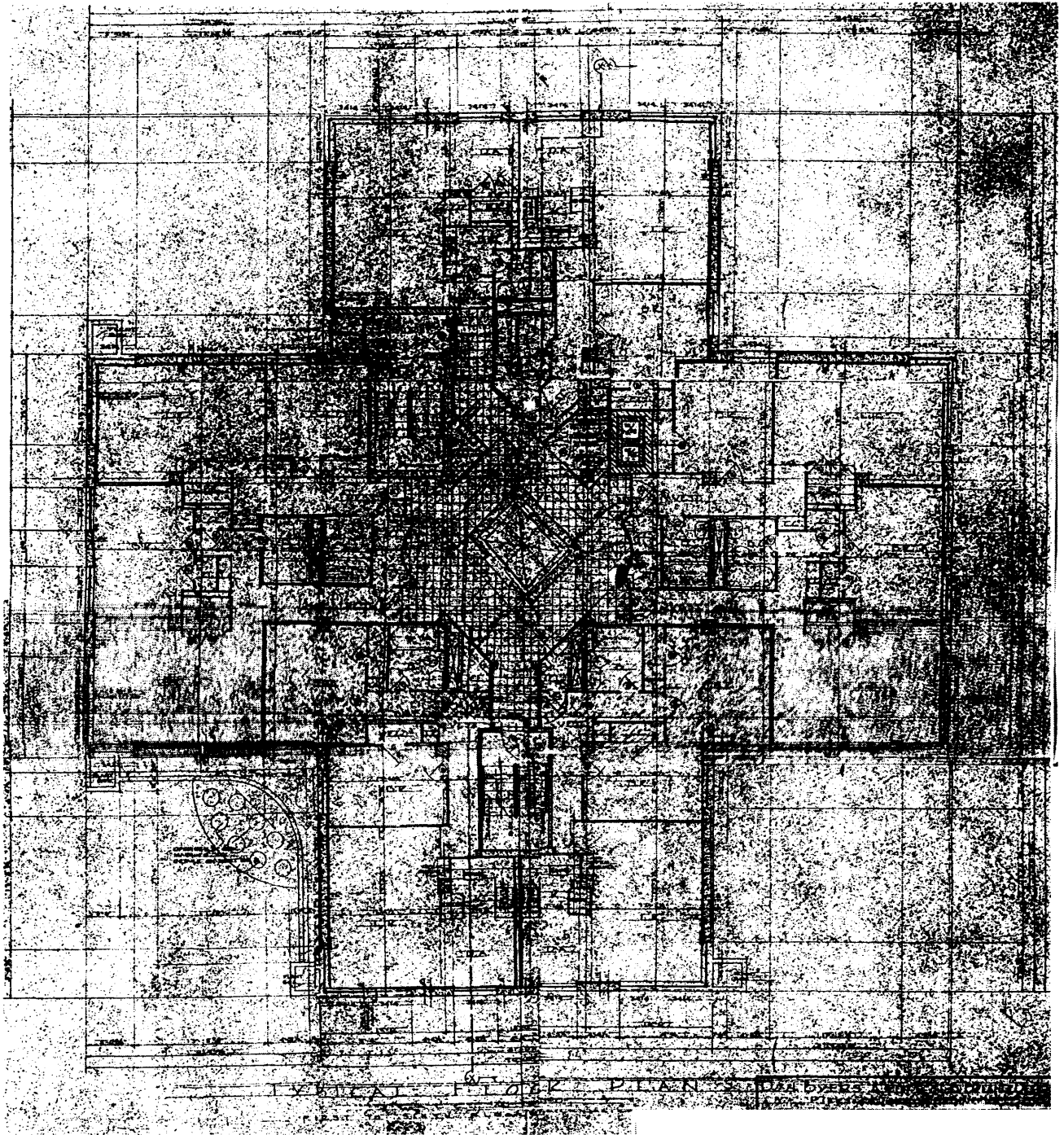
SIX-STORY, 50 UNIT
APARTMENT BUILDING

GROUND FL. EL. 1388.9

OCT. 1950 - ORIGINAL PLANS
345ST #2

MEDFORD PLAZA APTS
235 SOUTH CARDALE
JACKSON CTY, OR 5901

P L A N



MEDFORD PLAZA APARTMENTS
235 South Oakdale, Medford
Jackson County, OR

ORIGINAL FLOORPLAN
Sheet #3, Floor 1-6, Typical
Don Byers, Architect

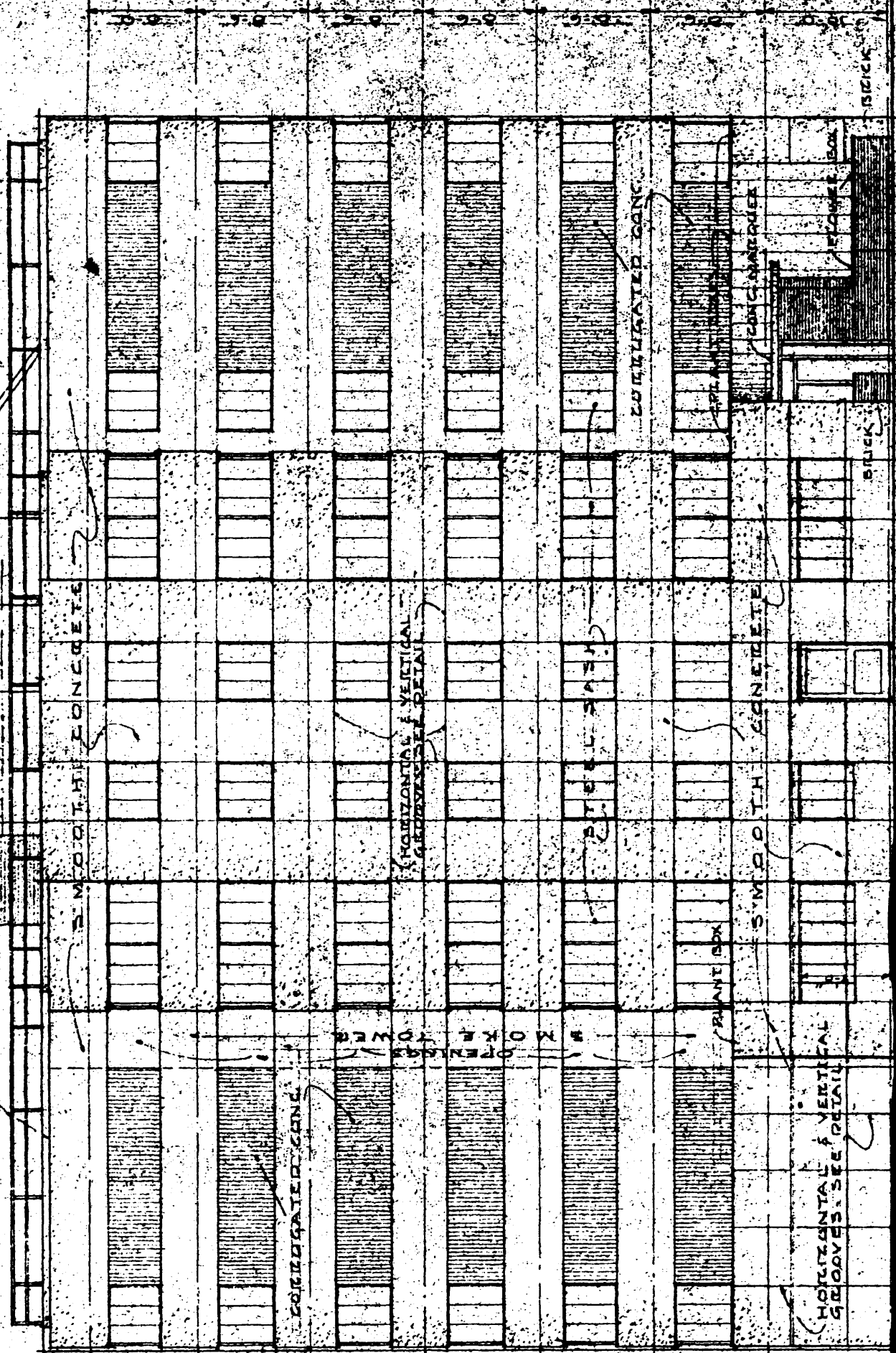
1
A
10

1/4" PIPE RAILING ON
CONCRETE CURB

BRICK CHIMNEY

ELEVATOR PENTHOUSE

STAIRWAY PENTHOUSE



1952 SOUTH OAKDALE ELEVATION
ORIGINAL PLANS