

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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MAY 18 1976
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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

* HISTORIC
Colcord Building
AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Robinson and Sheridan
CITY, TOWN
Oklahoma City
STATE
Oklahoma
VICINITY OF
CODE
40
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
No. 5
COUNTY
Oklahoma
CODE
109

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Cadajeh Helmerich, Caroline Bates, Marguerite Callahan, Harriett White
(The four daughters of Charles F. Colcord)
STREET & NUMBER
15 N. Robinson
CITY, TOWN
Oklahoma City
STATE
Oklahoma
VICINITY OF

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Office of the County Clerk
STREET & NUMBER
Oklahoma County Courthouse
CITY, TOWN
Oklahoma City
STATE
Oklahoma

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Special Colcord Building Survey
DATE
1975
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Oklahoma Historical Society
CITY, TOWN
Oklahoma City
STATE
Oklahoma
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Louis Henry Sullivan coined the "form follows function" approach that underlies much contemporary architecture. He felt: "That masonry construction, in so far as tall buildings were concerned, was a thing of the past. That the old ideas of superimposition must give way before the sense of vertical continuity." One of his best known students was Frank Lloyd Wright.

A lesser known student was William A. Wells, architect for the Colcord Building, begun in 1909 and completed in 1910. (A persistent legend that Sullivan personally approved every part of the design cannot be confirmed.) But Sullivan went out of favor a few years later, before the Beaux Arts design popularized by the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. As a result, few buildings remain that reached the perfection of Wells' Colcord Building. And this magnificent 12-story structure, ironically enough, is one of the very few structures still standing, after Urban Renewal demolitions, in downtown Oklahoma City. An impressive monument to its builder (see No. 8), it is thus a no less impressive memorial to Wells and Sullivan, generally recognized as the creator of the modern skyscraper.

Many an early photograph of Oklahoma City shows a foreground of horses, wagons, and piled-masonry buildings while, in the background, there is the strong upward thrust of the gleaming white Colcord tower that "holds its head in the air, as a tower should," as Sullivan described his own Chicago Auditorium Tower of 1889. Also striking is the organic ornamentation on the Colcord Building, which has been described as an exact duplication of Sullivan's own detailing. Etched upon the lower parts of the building -- done with fantastic precision at the entrances where it can best be seen and appreciated -- this ornamentation is organic both in its own form and in relation of over-all building design.

"The ornament, as a matter of fact, is applied in the sense of being cut in or cut on, or otherwise done," Sullivan decreed. "Yet it should appear, when completed, as though by the outworking of some beneficent agency it had come forth from the very substance of material and was there by the same right that a flower appears amid the leaves of its parent plant." Certainly his dictum was carried out successfully by Wells in the Colcord.

The etched lower facade is repeated at the top. There the terra cotta ornamentation extends around three sides of the upper story and underneath the projecting cornices (intended to draw the structure back to the horizontal). Sullivan's influence, through Wells, can also be seen in the pilasters that separate the pairs of windows and extend uninterrupted through most of the building's height. Whether or not Sullivan actively participated with Wells in his effort (see No. 8), the Colcord has been called "quite pure Sullivan" by Oklahoma City architect John Bozalis. An AIA plaque hails its significance, as does one placed by the city's Historic Preservation Commission. Architectural classes from various universities have visited it regularly over the years.

Like its namesake, The Colcord is "a stayer" ... as strong today as when it was built. (Then it was the first building in this part of the country to be erected

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

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Colcord Building

with the poured-concrete technique - a procedure considered so risky at the time that bonding companies refused to underwrite its construction!) More significantly, perhaps, the Colcord remains strikingly handsome. And it should become even more so as Oklahoma City's urban renewal master plan for the area around it continues to unfold. The lower floor, changed somewhat about 30 years ago, will be restored to conform more nearly to the original design. The courtyard in the "L" on the west (now a parking area) will be renewed, the building's off-street sides improved generally to tie into the four-block retail Galleria adjoining it on the north and west.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Colcord, Charles F., The Autobiography of Charles F. Colcord, 1859-1934, Oklahoma Historical Society, 1970
- Goddard, Mary, "Colcord History Is Hailed," The Daily Oklahoman, April 18, 1971
- Morris, Philip, "Old Landmark ..." Oklahoma City Times, Oct. 15, 1964
- Nelson, Mary Jo, "Colcord Due Landmark Recognition," Oklahoma City Times, July 19, 1972

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1 4	6 3 4 5 8 8	3 9 2 5 6 0 9	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Kent Ruth, Deputy

ORGANIZATION

Oklahoma Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

Historical Building

CITY OR TOWN

Oklahoma City

DATE

December 1975

TELEPHONE

405/884-5456

STATE

Oklahoma

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

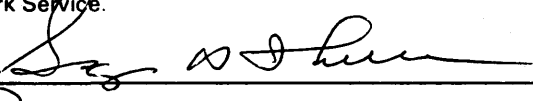
NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE



TITLE

SHPO

DATE

MAY 14 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

11/5/76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

11/2/76

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1910 to the present

BUILDER/ARCHITECT William A. Wells

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Few of the true "builders" of Oklahoma City were more important than Charles F. Colcord. Fewer still have such a magnificent physical monument with which to underscore that importance. The 12-story Colcord Building -- of unconventional design and still strikingly handsome after 65 years of use -- is a fitting memorial to both builder and designer ... and to the free spirit of individual enterprise that made, not only Oklahoma City, but this nation as well.

* * *

Colcord was born in Kentucky in 1859. He became a true "frontiersman" at 13 when he was sent for health reasons to a Texas ranch. By the time he was 20, he had lived on the range, hunted buffalo, dealt with marauding Mexicans, restless Indians, and rattlesnakes, learned to trail horses and cattle through raging streams and mindless stampedes. He took part, successfully, in two of Oklahoma's famed land "runs" - Old Oklahoma in 1889 (occupying lot 1, block 1 in Oklahoma City) and the Cherokee Outlet in 1893 (the best lot in downtown Perry). Along the way he served as Oklahoma City's first policeman, then as sheriff and as marshal.

In 1903 Colcord returned to Oklahoma City for good. From then until he died in 1934 he was involved in virtually every aspect of development of the capital city ... and, through oil, banking, real estate, and politics, much of the state as well. If there was a secret to his success, it can perhaps best be illustrated by the planning and actual construction of the building that bears his name.

"About 1904 or 1905 Bob Galbreath and I purchased from Henry Overholser six lots with eight frame buildings on them, at the corner of Grand and Robinson," he wrote in his autobiography (published 37 years after his death as an important historical document). "At that time," he noted, "the attitude of businessmen in Oklahoma City was not very hopeful." By 1907, however, he was ready to build. And as Galbreath wanted to erect a hotel on the site while he preferred an office building, he bought out his partner, then set out to determine the course he should follow. "This was to be the first big building in Oklahoma City and I was anxious not to make any mistakes."

He visited many cities -- Atlanta, Kansas City, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Chicago -- and examined many buildings to make sure he'd have the most modern and practical plans. In San Francisco he found some of his answers. "When the big fire occurred . . . I went out there immediately afterward to see how their buildings had stood the fire and earthquake. F. B. Ziegler, a business associate, was with me and we found that there were only eleven buildings that had escaped the holocaust. These buildings, which

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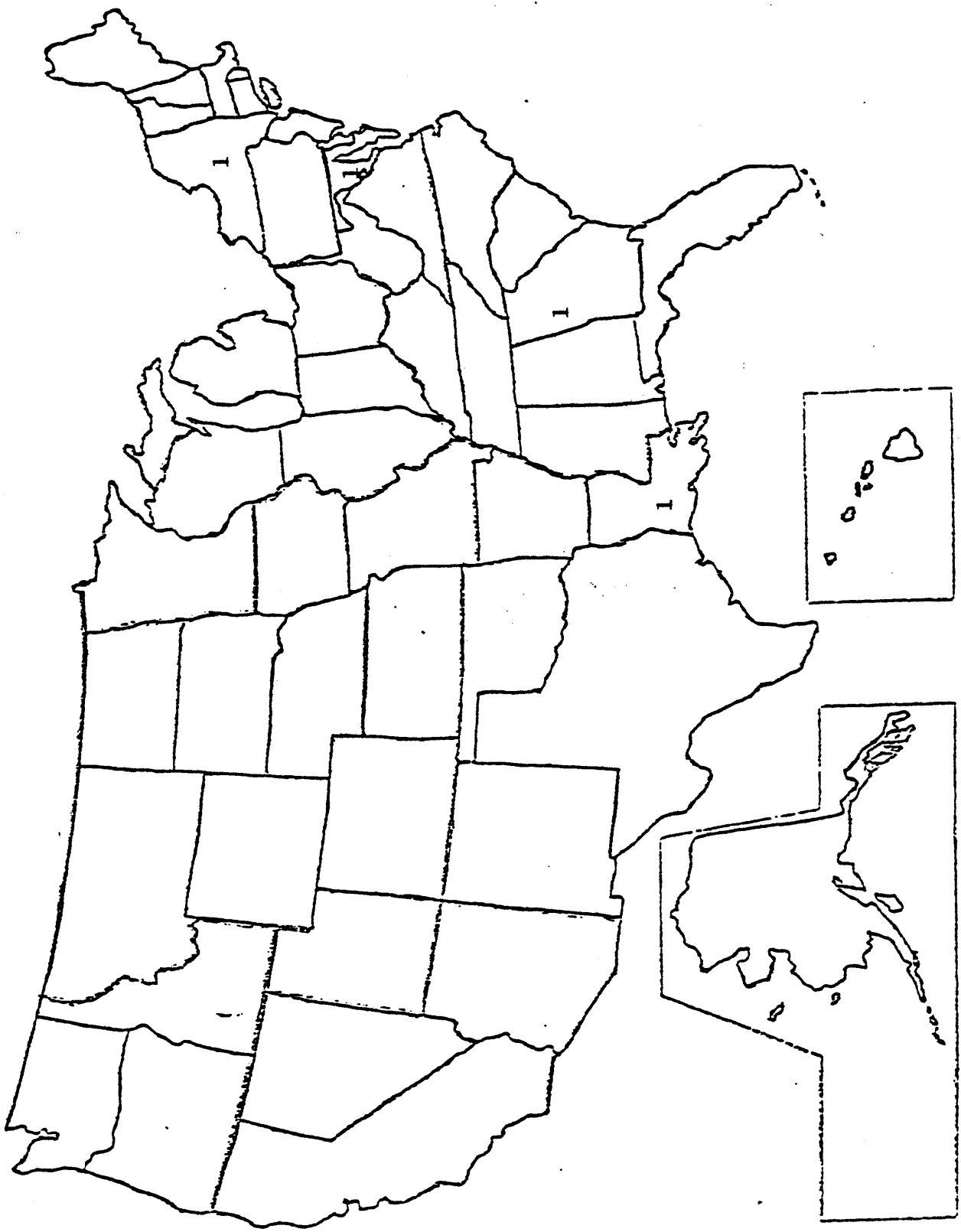
ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 1

Colcord Building

stood out like lone trees on a prairie, were all built of reinforced concrete. The steel buildings had all gone down, melted and crumpled in the tremendous heat. Up until that time I had been planning a steel building, but when I viewed these ruins I changed my mind and decided to build of reinforced concrete."

His Colcord Building was completed in 1910 -- curiously enough, the year Oklahoma City became capital of the state -- and did indeed seem to stir the infant city from the lethargy he'd felt a few years before. Years later, he wrote: ". . . this building of mine was the beginning of a series of big buildings that has made the Oklahoma City of today." His "today," of course, was pre-1934. But his pioneer "skyscraper" still stands proud and handsome amid newer structures a half-dozen times as tall - a substantial and significant tie with the past that still dominates a largely "renewed" urban area of today.



National Register Tax Reform Act Certified Local Districts: April 30, 1979