

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received MAY 3 1983

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Central Y. M. C. A. Building

and/or common <sup>use this</sup> Leslie M. Stratton Y.M.C.A. (preferred)

2. Location

street & number 245 Madison Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Memphis

N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee

code 047

county Shelby

code 157

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Recreation

4. Owner of Property

name Young Men's Christian Association of Memphis and Shelby County

street & number 3548 Walker Avenue

city, town Memphis

N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee 38111

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of the Shelby County Registrar

street & number 160 N. Main Street

city, town Memphis

state Tennessee 38103

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date N/A N/A federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The 1909 Leslie M. Stratton Y. M. C. A. is a seven-story Beaux Arts building located at 245 Madison Avenue in downtown Memphis, Tennessee. The north facade facing Madison Avenue features an arcaded base and upper stories with elaborate Renaissance details in gray terra cotta. The other elevations of the building have plain veneers of dark red brick in contrast to the orange yellow brick of the north facade. Attached to the rear of the main seven-story building is a three-story section containing the gym, running track, and handball courts. Interesting architectural features on the interior such as plaster moldings, wainscoting, and ironwork are mostly confined to the lobby and stairwells. Despite recent partitions and dropped ceilings in the lobby and elsewhere, the building substantially retains its architectural integrity, particularly on the exterior. There is a 1953 seven-story brick-veneer addition to the west facade of the original building which is not included in the nomination.

The building covers a relatively flat lot measuring approximately 90 by 150 feet. The structure is located in the city's central business district three blocks east of Main Street adjacent to an area of early-twentieth-century warehouses and small businesses of one to two stories.

A variety of finishes and an exuberance of classical and Renaissance details on the facade make this building a good example of the Beaux Arts style of architecture. The structure is an early use of reinforced concrete in Memphis, and the exterior facade materials are granite, glazed architectural terra-cotta, and orange yellow brick veneer.

Vertically, the Y. M. C. A. building has seven bays defined by arcades at the base and upper divisions and flanking shallow entrance bays. The entrance bays, slightly recessed on the facade contain stairwells, originally serving to allow men and boys to enter the facilities separately. Horizontally, the structure is divided into three sections: a base, an intermediate section, and a termination.

The terra-cotta arcade defining the base of the building is surmounted by an elaborate cornice containing cyma recta, ovolo egg and dart moldings, triglyphs and metopes, and rosette ornamentation. The cornice is supported by huge console brackets enriched with acanthus leaves and hanging laurel wreaths. In this base section, the architectural terra-cotta is made to resemble rusticated masonry in alternating fluted and rosette patterns.

The five arched openings in the base section contain a central entrance and two casement type windows on either side. The window openings and doorway are topped by fanlights with radiating glazing bars. These are presently obscured, however, by a lowered ceiling. Voussoirs have alternating rosette ornamentation, and egg and dart moulding surrounds each window. Masks with hanging laurel wreaths form the keystones, and spandrels are foliated and have decorative shields. Sills are torus moulding with bayleaf decoration. Each arched window contains an ornamental cast iron railing. The arcade originally possessed a balustrade across the top of the cornice with finials centered above each pier of the arched openings. This balustrade, however, has since been removed.

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Cyma recta cornice mouldings surmount the side entrances supported by pilasters which combine volutes, acanthus leaves, fluted shafts, and torus mouldings of the Ionic, Corinthian and Tuscan classical orders. Terra-cotta blocks surround both side entrances and form transoms which are ornamented with festoons.

The orange yellow brick veneer on the building facade is coursed with architectural terra-cotta. In the intermediate section of the facade, terra-cotta courses join the lintels and sills of the fenestration. Terra-cotta panels containing shields are located between each story on the end bays of the facade. The fenestration in the intermediate section was originally one over one double hung sash type windows. In the 1960's, however, these were replaced with aluminum framed windows divided into narrow horizontal lights. At the fifth floor, beaded terra-cotta strips lead into an arcade and cornice which is the termination for the building. In this area, another set of masks projects above the fifth floor windows.

The termination section of the building contains five two-story arches and an overhanging cornice in terra-cotta as does the base. Within these openings are the windows for the sixth and seventh floors. Many of the decorative motifs used in the base are repeated in the termination with some variations. Decorative elements include beaded piers supporting large arched openings, foliated spandrels, festoons, and laurel wreaths. The Y. M. C. A. letters appear in the center of wreaths in the arch spandrels, and there is a balustrade across the sills. Supporting an overhanging cornice are single and paired modillions and dentils. A series of masks lines the cornice which is surmounted by a parapet.

The building is one of the earliest examples in Memphis of the structural use of concrete. A dark red brick veneer covers the east, south, and west elevations which have no decorative detail. The only prominent feature on the east facade is a vertical row of metal fire escapes. The upper three floors of the south (rear) facade contain eight segmentally arched windows per story. Below these three stories extends the three-story section of the building containing the gym, running track, and handball courts. Segmentally arched windows are located only on the first two floors, the former windows above having been bricked in. The west facade is now almost completely covered by the seven-story 1953 addition except for a vertical row of four windows at the southwest corner of the building.

On the interior, the lobby of the first floor was originally one large open space, but the western half has now been partitioned off. The area of the lobby which remains open has a fireplace at the eastern end of the room and wainscoting. The lobby's two skylights from the building's central lightwell have been covered. The stairwells between the floors of the building have ornate metal newel-posts and railings. The upper floors are arranged around the open central lightwell and contain simple rooms without any distinctive architectural details. The basement of the building has the original, tile swimming pool, which is still used.

# 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 checked="" 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** 1909 **Builder/Architect** John Gaisford (1875-1918)

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Leslie Stratton Y. M. C. A. building, completed in 1909, is being nominated under National Register criteria A and C for its importance in social/humanitarian activities in Memphis during the early twentieth century and for its architectural significance as a locally outstanding Beaux Arts building designed by a prominent Memphis architect, John Gaisford.

Historically, the building's significance relates to the development of a local movement supporting the establishment of parks, playgrounds, and recreational opportunities especially for children and youth in the city. The history of the growth in community leadership support for the Y. M. C. A. program and for the construction of this building was a local expression of the drive nationally for improved urban recreation. The national movement began its influence in Memphis after a local campaign was conducted by a field representative of the National Playground Association. Another manifestation of the movement was the first public children's playground at Overton Park established in 1908 with funds raised through the newly formed Memphis Playground Association. Two other playgrounds were also developed in 1909 at Brinkley and Gaston Parks.

By 1907 the progressive ideas of the parks and playgrounds reform movement and concern about youth living conditions and delinquency led to a greatly increased interest in the Memphis Y. M. C. A. by local community leaders. As playgrounds were principally aimed at small children, the recreational and Christian programs offered by the Y. M. C. A. were viewed as a way to address the growing problems of unsupervised older youth and delinquency. The community had become alarmed by behavior observed in youth gatherings such as smoking cigarettes and gambling, and delinquency had become a major social problem.

Membership and activities increased so much by 1907, that the Y. M. C. A. was able to purchase property on the south side of Madison near Fourth Street and commission construction of the Central Y. M. C. A. Building. The new building was completed two years later at a cost of \$200,000. It was dedicated in October of that year by President William Howard Taft with twenty-seven (27) state governors attending the public dedication ceremony. The event was much heralded in the city and a great crowd of Memphians came to watch. As part of the ceremony, President Taft officially opened the new facilities with a golden key.

From 1909 to the present, the Stratton Y. M. C. A. has served the recreational needs of Memphis youth and adults. Indoor activities have included basketball, track, gymnastics, handball, and swimming (the building had the first indoor swimming pool in the city). Although there is no space for outdoor sports on the property, the Stratton Y. M. C. A. has sponsored baseball and camping on other sites. Beginning in the early twentieth century, the building housed the Y. M. C. A.'s adult education programs, which were the first in Memphis.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Northwest Memphis, TN-AR

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

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B 

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C 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary L. Baker, Preservation Planner

organization Memphis Landmarks Commission date December 9, 1982

street & number 22 North Front Street telephone (901) 528-2834

city or town Memphis state Tennessee 38103

# 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.

Deputy  
State Historic Preservation Officer signature Herbert L. Hyzer

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission date 5/9/83

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Delores Byer Entered in the date 6/30/83  
Keeper of the National Register National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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In addition to providing activities, the Stratton Y. M. C. A. supplied rooms for men from its early days until the mid-1970s. This was a very important function of the organization and provided travelers and local residents with clean, safe, and inexpensive lodging. The 1953 addition to the original building greatly increased the number of rooms available.

Until the 1950s, the Stratton Y. M. C. A. provided most of the organization's programs to the city. At that time the Y. M. C. A. began building branch facilities in various areas of Memphis, but the downtown building remained a significant facility in the organization's work. With the greatly increasing number of persons returning to the downtown area of Memphis to live, the Stratton Y. M. C. A. is now playing an increasingly important role in the city.

The Stratton Y. M. C. A. has the most elaborate Beaux Arts facade in Memphis as well as the city's most detailed examples of ornamental terra cotta. The ornateness of the building's exterior is only modestly approached by a few other Beaux Arts buildings, including the Court Street Masonic Temple (1911), the Tennessee Trust Building (1906), and the Central Bank and Trust Building (1909).

The architect of the Y. M. C. A., John Gaisford, produced several other important buildings within Memphis during the period when he resided here between 1905 and 1918. Known examples of his work still existing are the Baptist Memorial Hospital (1910), the Falls Building (1910), and Lenox School (1909). He also designed many buildings, particularly churches, throughout Tennessee and in many other states.

John Gaisford was born in England in 1875 and was educated there as an engineer and architect. His early experience included drafting and designing new church buildings, church restorations and repair, and mansions and commercial buildings in London and in rural western England. Through this experience he became very familiar with the history of architecture and architectural details.

Gaisford emigrated to the United States in 1901, initially settled in Pennsylvania, and worked primarily in the eastern United States. In 1905 he came to Memphis and remained here until his death in 1918. He became so particularly well known as a church architect that in 1910 he was commissioned by the Board of Church Extension of the Methodist Episcopal South to publish a guidebook of church plans in various styles to be used by church pastors and building committees.

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The Commercial Appeal. September 1, 1918 and October 26, 1982.

Gaisford, John. How to Build a Church. Memphis: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1911.

Miller, William D. Memphis During the Progressive Era 1900-1917. Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1957.

Whittington, Earle Ligon. "A History of the Young Men's Christian Association of Memphis and Shelby County." Reprinted from The West Tennessee Historical Society Papers, Vol. XII. Memphis: Memphis State University Press, ~~1966~~, 1958

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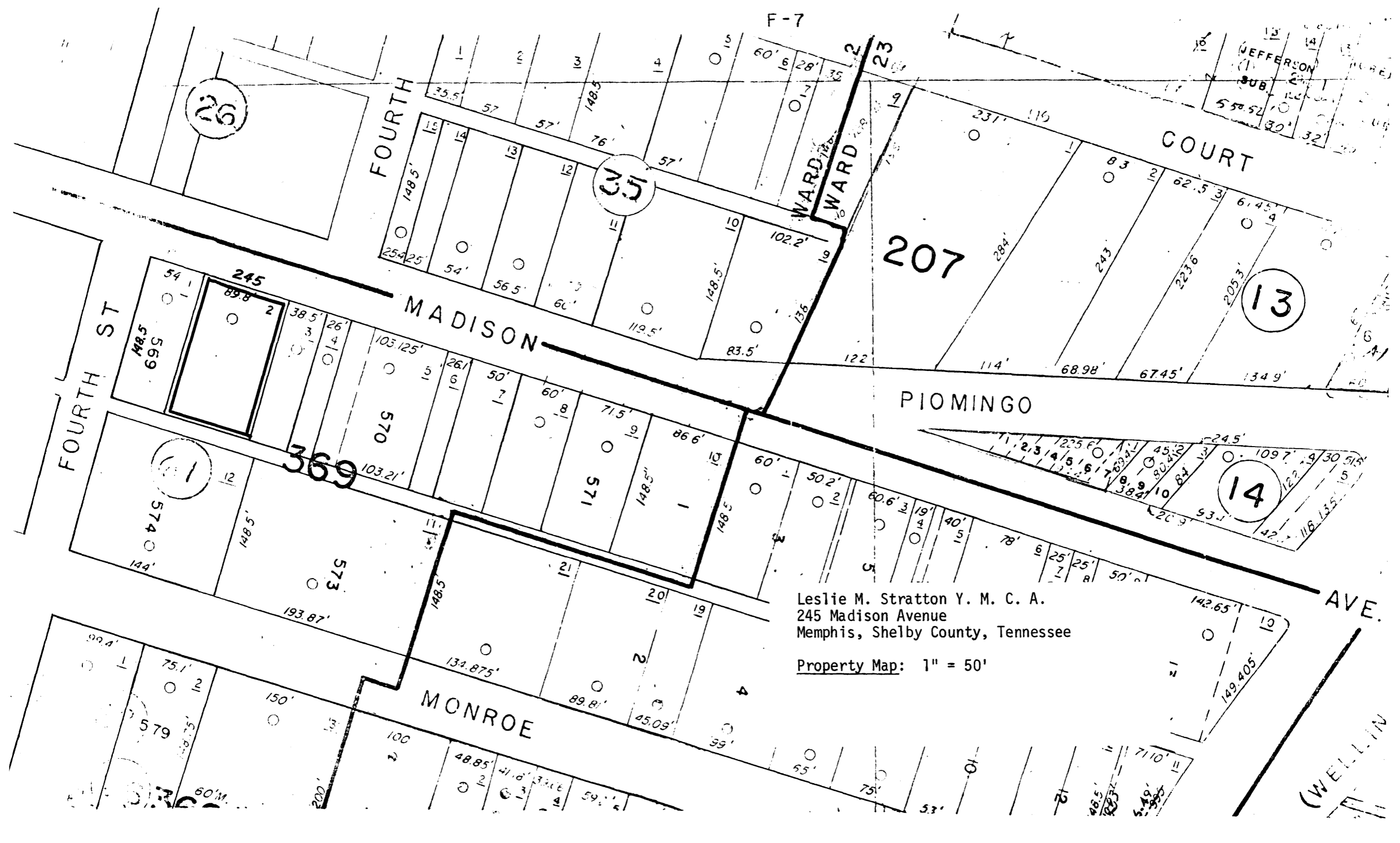
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A part of lot No. 569 in a division of the Overton property, being a part of lot four hundred and eighty one (481) on the original plan of Memphis, more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at a point in the south line of Madison Avenue fifty four (54) feet east of the east line of South Fourth Street (formerly DeSoto Street) thence east with the south line of Madison Avenue eighty nine (89) feet ten and one half ( $10\frac{1}{2}$ ) inches, thence south, parallel with South Fourth Street, one hundred, forty eight and one half ( $148\frac{1}{2}$ ) feet to an alley; thence west with said alley, eighty nine (89) feet, ten and one half ( $10\frac{1}{2}$ ) inches; thence North, parallel with South Fourth Street, one hundred, forty eight and one half ( $148'$ ) feet to the point of beginning, including all improvements now on, or hereafter erected thereon.





F-7

JEFFERSON  
SUB  
550.52  
30' 32'

26

27

207

13

28

369

14

Leslie M. Stratton Y. M. C. A.  
245 Madison Avenue  
Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

Property Map: 1" = 50'

MONROE

AVE.

(WELLIN