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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1186

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: St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station

other names/site number: Hellman's Service Station, Hellman's Golden Eagle, Hellman's Chevron
Lombard Flowers

2. Location

street & number: 8302 North Lombard Street ☐ not for publication

city or town: Portland ☐ vicinity

state: Oregon code: OR county: Multnomah code: 051

zip code: 97203

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 M. Hamrick 9/25/03

Signature of certifying official / Deputy SHPO Date September 25, 2003

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

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

for Edson H. Beall 11/21/03

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
- ☐ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/business = service station

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

WORK IN PROGRESS
VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne/Art Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: concrete slab
walls: steel frame
sheet metal siding
roof: galvanized metal
other:

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

See attached continuation sheets.

Narrative Description

Building Context and Site

The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station is located on a fifty foot by sixty-two foot lot on a two-hundred by two-hundred foot city block at the west corner of North Lombard Street[1] and North Charleston Avenue in the St. John's neighborhood of Portland, Oregon. It is a steel and glass structure built by Ray F. Becker Company as a filling station for the Signal Oil Company in 1939. It is a steel frame building in-filled with steel panels and glass. The building is made up of three spaces: a twenty-two foot by twenty-five foot garage or lubrication area, a one-hundred square foot octagon shaped office space with a tower above it and a twenty feet long by twelve feet wide drive-through canopy extending from the front of the office to the pump island. The northeast elevation of the lubrication space parallels North Lombard Street; the office area and pump island are oriented to face the corner of the lot so that they relate to both North Lombard and North Charleston Avenue. There are two small quarter-circular shaped beds of landscaping at the northwest and southeast corners of the property.[2] With the exception of a twelve foot by twenty-two foot strip of concrete paving at the back of the building, the site is paved in asphalt. The topography of the lot is level; it is located approximately two hundred feet above sea level.

The site is near the southeast edge of the retail and commercial core of St. John's, which is bordered by North Ivanhoe to the southwest, North Central to the northeast, and extends from approximately North St. Louis Avenue at its northwest border to North Oswego Avenue at its southeast border. The St. John's Bridge, a suspension bridge and a Portland City Landmark, built in 1931, is located approximately one mile from the gas station, and can be reached by traveling northwest on either North Lombard or North Ivanhoe. The topography of the retail core of St. John's is basically level, but within the adjacent five blocks to the west of town the elevation drops over 200 feet to the Willamette River. Below the bridge along the river are Cathedral Park and the Port of Portland's Terminal 4 facility. The St. John's Bridge, known as North Philadelphia Avenue as well as State Highway 30, crosses the Willamette River to the west side of Portland and connects with Northwest St Helens Road and the industrial area of Northwest Portland.

To the northeast of the filling station, across North Lombard Street and facing North Charleston Avenue, is James John Elementary School. Directly across Lombard Street from the station on the block bordered by Charleston and John Avenues is a fenced asphalt-paved playground for the school. The filling station is set back five-and-one-half feet from its northwest property line. The adjacent neighbors on the northwest side are Peninsula Station, a mail and copy center, and the Tulip Pastry Shop[3]. To the southeast down Lombard is a recently vacated Medical Clinic. The patient parking lot is directly behind the clinic to the southwest, and borders North Charleston Avenue. Beyond the clinic to the southeast east are a gun shop and a telephone service building for AT&T. Lombard curves to head east, and continues as a retail and commercial street for four miles, where it

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[1] At the time the building was constructed, the address was 8302 North Jersey Street.
[2] These were added in 1984 as part of the granting of a variance with the City of Portland.
[3] A bakery has been in that location since 1949.

connects with the Interstate 5 freeway. Three feet from the southwest property line of the station, facing North Charleston Avenue, are two 960 square foot lots and a single-family dwelling. The dwelling faces North Ivanhoe Street and is part of a complex of two homes and a church owned by the Assembly of God. Across North Ivanhoe is a shopping area with a large parking lot adjacent to the street. North Charleston Avenue does not continue through the two blocks containing this shopping center. The Safeway grocery store, currently located one-half mile away on North Burlington Avenue, has plans to relocate to this shopping mall within the next year; Rite Aid has just vacated the premises. The mall contains a Blockbuster Video Store, a self-service laundry and a hair salon.

Building Exterior

The building form of the St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station is defined by the relationship between three volumes: the tower with office below, the lubrication area, and the canopy with pump island.

As the building is approached from the northeast, its most striking feature is the octagonal tower, rising thirteen feet above the office. The three sides of the tower visible from the street featured individual metal open pan channel letters with the word "SIGNAL" spelled out vertically.[4] The letters were decorated with a single line of neon. The outlines for the letters are still visible, as are the holes and the porcelain insulators for the neon.[5] The five facets of the tower without the sign are decorated with two horizontal bands of sheet metal at the top and capped with a twenty-inch tall ziggurat-like form made up of a series of five stepped concentric rings.[6]

Visually, the tower is tied to the office space below it. The office is also an octagon whose sides measure five feet in length. Six facets of the octagon are visible from the exterior; they are almost entirely transparent. These sides have sheet metal on the lower thirty inches; the remaining seven feet is filled with plate glass. The vertical structural steel angle supporting the window glass extends through the metal band below. The other two sides of the octagon intersect with the rectangular volume of lubrication area. One is partially visible from the outside near the garage door; the other is only visible from the inside of the building.

Around the top of the office volume, flush with the upper edge of the windows, is an eighteen-inch high decorative band of sheet metal. There are three horizontal lines of ornamentation formed into the sheet metal of this band, two at the base and one at the top. Just above the office windows are two one-inch high indentations one-and-one-half-inches apart; the indentations come a point at a depth of one-half inch into the sheet metal. The upper part of the band has a single one-and-one-half-inch high line of decoration in relief two inches from the top, extending two inches out from the

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[4] The prior tenant had three "florist" signs on the tower. When the florist signs were removed, an edge made up of old paint, dirt and dust showed outline of the letters spelling "SIGNAL." From the shadow of the letter, David Blenko of Rocket City Neon, a consultant for the National Sign Museum, believes they were open pan channel letters. (Interview with David Blenko, October 25, 2002) In addition, a photograph from 1950 of a similar station in Lakeview, Oregon shows this type of letter.

[5] There are holes inside the letters indicating they were outlined with the single line of neon, and the porcelain insulators in the holes date the neon to 1939 (Ibid.)

[6] The top piece of the tower has been removed for restoration.

face of the building with an inch fillet on either side of the projection as it returns to meet the wall surface. In contrast to the metal at the base, this band is not interrupted by the vertical structure of the windows. From the southeast and northwest corners of the octagon the band breaks free from the building and continues outward twelve feet to create the canopy. Against the form of the office the band functions as both architrave and frieze; it becomes structural as it leaves the building and forms the cover for the drive-through and pump island. Originally neon decorated the this band on the office and canopy; one strip two inches below the first projected decoration at the top, the other just below the two inscribed lines of decoration at the base.[7]

The original doors to the office space were two wood full-light doors facing the pump island; the original permit drawings show two horizontal metal bars across each of the doors at hand level. The current pair of full-light doors is not original.[8] Above the entry doors is an original white porcelain sign with red lettering that reads "No Smoking, City Ordinance, Stop Your Engine." The office doors, canopy, and pump island face the corner of the lot and the intersection of both adjoining streets.

Above the top of the decorative metal band the form of the octagon continues up additional three feet. Two inches from the top of the octagon is a single line of decorative relief in the sheet metal, one-and-one-half inches high, extending two inches from the face of the building with an inch fillet as it returns to meet the wall face on either side. A single line of neon was located two inches below this relief. Above this form is another octagonal volume, also three feet thick, but stepped-in three feet in from the edges of the first.[9] The same line of decorative relief circumscribes the top of this octagon. Another strip of neon was originally installed around the top of this shape as well. The tower ascends thirteen from the center of the stepped octagon forms.

The lubrication part of the filling station is nearly fourteen feet tall, three feet lower than the roof of the office portion. The northeast or Lombard Street elevation of the lubrication building is almost entirely glass. There are four seven-foot tall plate glass windows five feet wide separated by one-inch steel angle vertical mullions. Below the windows is a thirty-inch high band of sheet metal, but unlike the analogous band below the office windows this band is continuous and unbroken by the vertical supports for the window. At the top of the windows is a decorative band of metal six inches tall; this band is consistent around the entire building. The embellishment on this band exactly duplicates and aligns with the ornament on the lower six inches of the office architrave/frieze; two one-inch high, half-inch deep indentations one-and-one-half inches apart. Above this band the building wall continues up another three feet and finished with a two-inch thick band of decorative relief in the sheet metal extending two inches from the face of the façade, with an inch fillet on either side. This band is located two inches below the top of the building and is consistent around all four sides of the lubrication building. On the two street facing sides (the northeast and southeast elevations) this band was decorated with two lines of neon, one two inches below the projection, another one inch above the windows.

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[7] Porcelain insulators were found in the metal along the edge where the neon had been installed.
[8] The doors have thermal pane glass.
[9] This form is not a complete volume, though it appears so from the ground. It is described on the original permit drawings as a "false parapet" and is actually constructed as an octagonal ring around the base of the tower.

The northwest side of the lubrication building is also primarily glass, and features a pair of large metal-frame windows seven feet tall and six feet wide. Each window is divided into three rows of two lights each. The uppermost light on the southwest side of each window is an operable hopper window. Three feet from the southwest corner of this elevation is a solid wood entry door to what was originally the women's restroom. The original air and water access for the filling station customers is adjacent to this edge of the lot near the neighboring building.

The southwest side of the building is the back of the building. This elevation is primarily sheet metal siding, with three small twenty-four inch square windows and a solid wood door. All three windows on this side contain obscure textured glass. Three feet in from the west corner of the building is a hopper window lighting the women's restroom; at the east end of the elevation is a door providing access to the storage area for the filling station. Centered between these two openings are two more windows: a fixed window that illuminates the storage area, and a hopper window for the men's restroom. There is a twelve-foot by twenty-two foot concrete pad behind the building that was used as a car washing area for the service station.

The garage door to the lubrication area is the only opening on the southeast elevation of the building. The garage door is a wood panel door, with five rows of four rectangular-shaped panels. The upper three rows are glass;[10] though the top two rows have been obscured with paint.[11] The garage door is twelve feet wide and ten feet tall, and is located within one foot of where the office octagon intersects the lubrication volume.

Building Structure and Materials

The building foundation is a concrete slab. The wall structure is made up of steel angles and steel truss frames, which were pre-assembled in Becker's shop[12] and erected on the site. The concrete slab was poured to accommodate precisely positioned boltholes for the horizontal steel, which runs around the perimeter of the slab. There is a one-inch concrete reveal left between the steel and the outside edge of the concrete slab. Bolted to the horizontal steel are vertical steel angle studs positioned at approximately two-foot intervals. The steel extends nine-feet eight inches in height to the top of the window frames. Atop the studs is a three-foot tall steel girder truss constructed of one-and-one-half inch and two-inch angle steel. Two steel purlins and steel angle rafters support the roof. The roof is standing seam galvanized metal, weatherproofed with a coating of hot tar.

The canopy is constructed of girder trusses on the four outside edges, bridged with steel angle rafters. The canopy structure is reinforced with two crossing diagonal steel braces running from corner to corner on the underside, and it is supported at the outside edge by a single six inch diameter metal pole positioned in the center of the pump island. The underside of the canopy is not

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[10] Originally, the upper four rows of panels were glass filled.
[11] The wood in the lower row of the door is not original, though Mr. McArthur believes the door itself is the original garage door. (Interview with Lewis McArthur, October 26, 2002.)
[12] According to Marvin Becker, current owner of Becker Sheet Metal Company.

covered with sheet metal, so the structure is visible from underneath. The pump island is concrete, and still shows the outline of the two pumps that were positioned on either side of the support pole.[13] The two stepped tiers and the tower above the octagonal office area are constructed with vertical steel angle, reinforced in two places with horizontal angle.

The exterior is sheathed in sheet metal, with metal frame plate glass windows. The sheet metal panels are made with a flange that bolts to the steel angle frame with half-inch machine bolts.[14] The panels are tack welded periodically to the steel frame. The windows are metal-framed plate glass. Where the exterior metal panels intersect the glass they are fabricated with a flange that tucks between the metal window sash and the steel angle sill. This detail provides a smooth, taut exterior surface.

The double office doors are full-light wood frame; the other entry doors are solid wood.[15] The garage door is wood frame with wood and glass panels.[16] The roof drains into two cast iron pipes on the interior of the building, one at the south corner and the other at the north corner of the building near the office, the canopy has a gutter between the steel rafters running the twelve-foot length of the canopy near the pump island.

The building is currently painted off-white, with remnants of the paint scheme of the prior tenant of green and magenta. The original base color for the building was cream, with the exterior entry doors painted Signal green,[17] and the garage door cream. A ten-inch black stripe was painted all around the bottom edge of the building, including the canopy support post; three-inches above it was a three-inch orange stripe. Orange stripes bordered the sides of the tower with the "Signal" sign, and the five stepped circular top pieces were painted alternately orange and black.

Building Interior

The building structure is completely exposed on the interior. The floor of the lubrication area is concrete. The walls, ceiling and concrete floor have been painted; the paint is peeling severely. Originally there was a sixteen-foot by four-foot steel hoist shaped like an elongated "H" in the center of the lubrication area. The hoist has been removed.

On the southwest side of the building, a six-foot deep strip is partitioned off from the lubrication area; originally with a continuous wall. This zone contained three rooms: a storage area, the men's room and the ladies' room. The concrete floor in these rooms is four inches above the level of the floor in the lubrication bay. The partition and interior door to the storage area has been removed, the partition and door to the men's room are intact. The pair of hinges on the men's room door is

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[13] The deed transferring ownership of the building in August of 1940 specifically lists "2- Bennet (*sic*) Computer Pumps."
[14] Later Becker buildings used sheet metal screws instead of bolts.
[15] These doors are solid wood, and are hung with the original hinges. According to Lewis McArthur, the original doors were 8/4 solid wood.
[16] Mr. McArthur believes the garage door, though some glass has been removed and replaced with wood panels, is the original door.
[17] Signal green is a light spring green.

original.[18] The men's room contains a toilet and a washbasin. A new interior door opening has been cut in the partition to allow for access to the ladies' room from the interior of the building. Originally, entry to the ladies' room was possible only through the wood door on the exterior of the building.[19] The interior door to the ladies' room is not original, the exterior door is a solid wood door with the original hinges, but the door itself is not original. The fixtures in the ladies' room have been removed and replaced with a utility sink and a small hot water heater located on a shelf above the sink. The ceiling height in the two restrooms is lowered from thirteen feet to nine-feet eight inches.[20]

The garage entrance is on the southeast side of the lubrication space. The garage door system: track, pack hanger, channel and torsion springer extensions are original.[21]

The office octagon and the lubrication area intersect at the east corner of the space. The opening for entry to the office space is through a four-and-a-half foot wide opening in the side of the octagon located inside the building. The level of the concrete floor in the office space is four inches above the level of the floor in the lubrication bay.

Near the center of the northeast wall below the windows is a seven-inch by two-inch cast metal plaque. Becker installed these plates in their sheet metal buildings.[22] Embossed into the metal are the words:

BUILT BY
RAY F. BECKER CO.
PORTLAND, OR

There is a vent hole in the ceiling at the east corner of the lubrication building, and a one-inch supply pipe on the floor near the wall below it. This was to accommodate a small oil-burning stove that heated the service station in the winter. The electrical service panel is located in the north corner of the building. A lever-switched four-inch square "Wadsworth" electrical box is located on the northwest wall of the storage area; it operated the shut-off box for the air compressor.

The interior was lighted with simple incandescent lights; the junction boxes for the lights are still in the building, though the fixtures have been removed. Four light fixtures illuminated the lubrication area, and one each in the storage area, men's room and ladies' room. There is one fluorescent fixture in the office area. There are two junction boxes at the north end of the pump island; the original fixtures have been removed.

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[18] The solid core wood doors in the building were originally hung with half-butt surface mount hinges. (McArthur)
[19] Originally, access to the ladies' room was possible only through the door on the exterior of the building. According to Mr. McArthur, this was done because it was not considered desirable for the women to cross in front of the men's room to access the ladies' room.
[20] This was to make the smaller spaces feel more comfortable. (Interview with Lewis McArthur.)
[21] McArthur.
[22] Several consultants, including Lewis McArthur, indicated that these plaques were usually positioned above the office door on the lubrication area side. The plaque shows no indication of being moved, and it is likely that it was originally installed in its current location.

The interior of the building is painted off white; the paint is peeling badly. Originally, the lower portion of the interior walls was painted Signal green; above the top of the windows at the level of the girder truss the walls were cream in color. A deteriorated coat of paint is on the concrete floor; originally it would not have been painted.

Developmental History

The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station was in operation as a Signal gasoline service station from its grand opening on June 2, 1939[23] until 1954. It maintained the distinctive red-orange, yellow and black color scheme and signage appropriate for a Signal service Station. In 1954 the station became Hellman's Golden Eagle Gas Station, and was painted white. In 1965 the station became a Chevron outlet, and the color scheme and signage for the building was changed to reflect the change in ownership and product line.[24] At this time the gasoline pumps were replaced, and a large "Chevron" sign was installed on a new light pole at the east corner of the lot. The foundation for the pole that supported the circular "Signal" sign is still located adjacent to the light stanchion.

At some point in the history of the building the neon was removed, most likely at the time that Signal products were no longer sold at the location.[25] Holes in the sheet metal, many still containing the porcelain insulators, indicated where neon had been located. Neon was located on every other ring of the stepped circular tower top, illuminated the "Signal" letters on the tower and circumscribed the top of each of the octagonal tiers above the office. Two lines of neon followed the outline of the canopy, and two lines of neon decorated the northwest and southeast elevations of the building, as these were the elevations that were visible from the intersecting streets.

In 1984, a variance was granted by the City of Portland to legalize conversion of the structure into a flower shop. At this time the planting beds fronting Lombard Street were installed, six off-street parking spaces were required, and landscaping was planted on the southwest edge of the property. The gasoline tanks were decommissioned at this time; they were filled with concrete so that they would not pose a pollution hazard. From May of 1984 to September of 2002, a florist shop occupied the structure. Large back lighted plastic "florist" signs were hung on three sides of the tower. Baseboard electrical heating and portable air conditioners were added to the space during this period. All but the office and the northeast side of the building were completely covered with T-111 siding, which was secured to the metal siding with glue and sheet metal screws. An asphalt shingle roof was installed over the office portion of the building; it extended from the base of the tower, covered the first stepped octagon and terminated at the top edge of the office octagon. A counter was built over the top of the hoist and partition wall was built behind the counter to create a preparation area. Customers had access to the office space and the front part of the lubrication building; these areas were used for retail display.

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[23] *St John's Review*, June 2, 1939.
[24] The station was called "Hellman's Service Station." In the layers of paint on the building there are remnants of Chevron's blue, red and white color scheme. "Hellmans" was spelled out vertically on the tower.
[25] Photographs of the station, as Hellman's Golden Eagle "and" Hellman's Chevron" do not show the presence of neon.

In October of 2002, the wood siding, asphalt shingle roof and deteriorated sheet metal siding were removed from the building; the florist signs were taken down from the tower and the light pole. The sheet metal was analyzed in several places to determine the original paint scheme of the building.

The original driveway bell[26] for the pump island was located to one side above the office door on the lubrication area side; it has been removed for restoration. The original air compressor, a sixty-gallon horizontal tank Worthington, was removed from the northwest side of the storage area in the summer of 2002.[27] The hoist was removed in 2002, and the recess beneath it filled with concrete.

Current Plans

The current owner developed a detailed restoration plan for the building.[28] The restoration was completed in May of 2003, so that the St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station appears today as it did on opening day in June 1939. The sheet metal has been repaired and restored; the Signal paint scheme applied and restored Bennett computer pumps have been installed on the pump island. The original signage has been reproduced and placed in their original positions on the building and the site; the neon has been replaced on the building and the tower.

The owner plans to find a tenant to lease the building.

[26] The bell is a "Service Signal" Model E-60, manufactured by UP Knipp of Long Beach, California.
[27] The compressor will be restored and used at another location.
[28] The restoration plan is attached and labeled Appendix III.

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.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE
TRANSPORTATION: automobile
COMMERCE: service station

Period of Significance

Mid Twentieth Century: 1939-1954

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all 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 last 50 years.

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

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Ray F. Becker Company

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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

Statement of Significance

Introduction

The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station was constructed in 1939 as a service station for the Signal Oil and Gas Company. It was constructed as the Signal Corporation, a petroleum wholesaler entering the retail gasoline market, focusing on the West Coast of the United States. The building is steel framed, in-filled with sheet metal panels and glass, built in the Art Moderne style, and features a thirteen-foot tall tower and neon lighting to attract customers.

The building is locally significant under Criterion A because it provides a tangible representation of the importance of the automobile in mid-twentieth century American culture, reflected in its relationship to the St. John's neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. In addition, the building is significant under Criterion C because of its architecture; it is an excellent example of the Art Moderne style in a small commercial structure.

Site, Building and Surrounding Property Uses

The St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station site, at the west corner of the intersection of Lombard Street and Charleston Avenue, has had an automobile related function since the first structure was built on the lot in 1925. The earlier structure was wood, with a gable roof and two canopies, one facing South Jersey (now Lombard Street) and the other extending from the back of the building. The site was dirt paved. The building housed St. Johns Auto Electric Company at the address 317 South Jersey. They sold batteries, gas and oil and featured Willard brand batteries. In 1926 through 1928 H.E. Roche ran the business; in 1929 it was taken over by the father son team of Ellsworth R. and Robert Rakes, who lived with their families at 616 East Charleston Avenue. In 1931 their neighbors were Willis Dearing, a confectioner; William Forsythe, a grocer; Marian Crosson, a barber; Homer Clark's furniture store and the Millinery Mode dress shop. The Rakes ran the business together until 1935; Robert ran the business alone in 1936 and 1937. In 1938 the business was renamed Amel's Tire Service, providing gas and tire repair. In 1934 Signal Oil Company appears in Polk's Portland City Directory for the first time, their address is listed as 9930 NW Saint Helens Road, with George H. Gage as district manager.

In 1939 the property was vacant. Milmar Investment Company, a corporation of Signal Oil Corporation, purchased the property on February 18, 1939. The building permit drawings for the Signal Gas Station are dated April 4, 1939, on April 11, 1939 a building permit was granted and the concrete was poured on April 18th of that year. Signal employed the Ray F. Becker Company of Portland, Oregon to fabricate the building. Founded by Ray F. Becker in 1925, the sheet metal company has been in business continuously since that time. From their inception in 1925 through the 1950's the company specialized in industrial building, roofing, steel fabrication and custom metal projects. During World War II Becker built and installed the sheet metal and steel equipment on many of the ships which were constructed in Portland and Vancouver shipyards. The company fabricated and erected many of the metal gasoline service station buildings on the West Coast. Dave Becker, Ray's son, estimated that they had built over 10,000 service stations in a five state area. The

Becker Company worked closely with Signal to design and build many of the over sixty service stations they had in the Portland metropolitan area. Becker completed the drawings that were submitted to the City of Portland to obtain a building permit. These drawings showed the steel angle structure, elevations with window location, and the measurement and placement of the sheet metal panels. Placement of boltholes in the concrete slab foundation were very precise, and measured to an eighth of an inch. This was to accommodate the sheet metal panels, which were fabricated at the Becker shop on North Page and transported to the service station site where they were bolted together. A Signal engineer worked with closely with a Becker representative to oversee design and construction. Signal would contract separately for the painting, electrical and neon work on their stations.

The St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station opened for business on June 2, 1939, with a quarter page ad in the *St. John's Review* advertising "free balloons for the children" and "watch our success barometer at the station." A small article in the same issue stated: "The Signal Oil Co. opens one of the most beautiful service stations on the peninsula. It is located at the corner of Jersey and Charleston and is built on a tower style that attracts attention from all directions." Located along Highway 30, in the downtown area of the St. John's neighborhood, it was in a perfect position to attract the motorist who was in need of gasoline and automotive service. Elmer Cochrum was the "independent dealer" who operated the station.[1] The year before, he was listed in Polk City Directory as a machinist.

In the year of its opening, the station was neighbored by Willis Dearing, the confectioner, Homer Clark Furniture, and Pulley & Zurcher, plumbers. In 1941 Fred Bowen managed the station; in 1943 Arthur N. Thielen took over the position. In 1949, Kasper Insurance occupied the building to the northwest, and remaining a neighbor until 1984, Vickrey's Bakery was next door, becoming the Tulip Pastry Shop in 1959. The Tulip Pastry Shop is still in the same location today. Across Charleston Avenue to the southeast, Homer Clark Furniture and Pacific Telephone and Telegraph were the adjoining businesses. The furniture store remained in that location until 1977; the telephone company still occupies the same location today.

The St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station was a Signal Service Station until 1953; it was called "Walt's Signal Service" in 1949, and "Winter Signal Service" in 1952. In 1954, Charles M. and Nina M. Hellman leased the station from United Petroleum Corporation (later Westway Petroleum,) who had acquired the property from Standard Oil of California (dba Signal Oil Corporation.) The Hellmans operated the station as "Hellman's Service Station" until 1957, when it was renamed "Hellman's Golden Eagle." In August of 1962, Westway Petroleum sold the property to the Hellmans. They continued to operate Hellman's Golden Eagle until 1965, when the station became a Chevron outlet. The ad celebrating their grand opening on Thursday, May 20, 1965 stated "Nina and I invite you to stop in and say hello. . . 21 years in St. Johns at service station!" Free balloons, ice cream and gifts

[1] Oil companies had several different formats for station ownership; sometimes the corporation would own the land, buildings and improvements; some companies owned the land but leased the improvements. Some corporations built the stations, then sold them to investors and leased back the facilities. Salaried employees would run company controlled stations, lessee dealers leased the station and operated independently, able to hire their own employees, set hours and prices, extend credit and otherwise function independently.

were offered, and the station was done over in "red white and blue denoting the nationally famed Standard Oil products and Chevron gasoline."[2] The word "Hellmans" was spelled out vertically on the tower, just as it had been since 1954.

Chuck Hellman emigrated from Finland with his parents in the early 1900's. He was given a gold belt when he won the Pacific Coast Bantamweight Boxing Championship on May 11, 1926. He fought at Ebbits Field in New York in 1927, and "he was never knocked out."[3] Mr. Hellman was well respected, the *Oregonian* of December 16, 1954 stated "of the hundreds of boys who took up prize fighting as a profession in their younger days in Portland, none commanded more respect and admiration than Chuck Hellman, who now runs his own service station on Jersey Street in the St. Johns district. Chuck lived a clean life and never mingled with the outer fringe and hangers-on of the boxing game." The Hellmans retired to Pacific City in 1976; he died on August 8, 1986. He had two daughters.

The service station operated as Ross Chevron from 1971 through 1977. In 1978 and 1979 the property was vacant, a fireplace shop occupied the structure from 1980 to 1984, when Lombard Flowers leased the structure. In 1988 the Hellmans deeded the property to St. Johns Assembly of God, who sold the property to the current owner in July of 2002. The flower shop remained a tenant until September of 2002.

Historical Context

One cannot separate The St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station from its function and from the cultural context in which it was built. It is a gasoline service station, built in 1939. It has meaning as a cultural icon, tied to its sense of place and to its performance in the landscape and the marketplace.

> Gasoline Stations, as all other ephemera of the American roadside, hold cultural meaning. Indeed, in a nation committed to heightened mobility, both social and geographical, they stand profoundly symbolic.[4]

As American travelers embraced the automobile, their perception and experience of the landscape changed. The environment of built form created to serve the automobile traveler eventually became the paradigm by which the American environment of the road was reshaped; and the gasoline station was a very important part of the dynamic of changing the landscape.

Individuals become attached to building forms at a personal level. Gasoline stations provided powerful sources of attachment because they were intimately associated with the automobile and the mobility that the car represented. Those that had the means to own a car traveled and made those personal connections through experience; those that did not have a car dreamed of it. The tangible form of a gas station became a symbol for those experiences and dreams, and eventually became a symbol for the shared values themselves. These values, based on enchantment with mobility and the

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[2] *The St. John's Review*, May 13, 1965.
[3] Louis Ross and Wanda Harrison. "The Hell-Man from Oregon" and "The Pride of St. Johns" in *St. Johns Heritage*, Vol. 5, January 1997, pp. 78-79.
[4] John. A. Jackle & Keith A. Sculle. *Gas Station in America.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, pp. ix.

use of the automobile were then given public meaning. Raising these personal attachments to a public level provides a means of holding on to landscape, particularly the landscape of the roadside, which is so subject to change and re-working because of its relationship to the marketplace and to what is called "place product packaging."

Gas stations were one of the first architectural typologies to be representative of place product packaging. Place product packaging is the use of messages worked into the built environment; it involves building forms, signs, materials, colors and spatial arrangements. These built forms are meant to offer services and products to the customer, and to imply satisfaction, comfort, familiarity and convenience.

The gas station as a typology first appeared between 1907 and 1913[5]. As early as 1910 gas stations were using trademarks, brand names and chains of look-alike buildings to market their products. Logos were first displayed on the service station buildings, then on signs lifted up on columns or posts. Early gas stations were the "curbside" type – a pump located at the curb with an underground storage tank. These stations were built in front of hardware or grocery stores. By the 1920s these stations had been made obsolete in urban areas by fire regulations, and were replaced by "The Shed", a building with an industrial character similar to lumber yard or a coal yard. Pumps were located off the street and automobiles would drive in for fuel. A large shift in the way gasoline was marketed and the location of the marketplace to suburban and residential settings occurred in the 1920s with the development of "The House" typology. These were drive-in locations designed to blend into neighborhoods. They had hip or gable roof forms, and often borrowed architectural elements from styles such as classical revival or English cottage. An oil corporation would adopt a certain style as a means of identification.[6] This type was elaborated by the addition of a canopy, and by providing service bays for car repair, washing and lubrication. The 1920s and early1930s also saw the development of many unique designs for gasoline stations, such as windmills, teepees, pagodas, castles, and teapots.[7]

The Oblong Box typology was developed in the 1930s, when the depression motivated oil companies to develop auxiliary product lines and services to attract customers. Stations were designed to be distinctly different in order to draw the attention of the public. There was less decoration, more plate glass for display of products, and stations were painted to match the colors of the gas company signage and logos. Surfaces tended to be light reflective, portions were prefabricated, and the International style of architecture formed the vocabulary for the buildings, both for economic reasons and to develop a distinct and readily identifiable forms. Offices were larger and often integrated in

[5] The Standard Oil of California opened a gas station in Seattle in 1907 at Holgate Street and Alaskan Way, the building no longer exists but the site is a listed on the Washington Heritage Register.
[6] The Pure Oil Company is a good example of this with their English Cottage gas stations. Two Pure Oil stations are listed on the National Register in Georgia; one in New York.
[7] The Teapot Dome Service Station on Highway 12 near Zillah, Washington is on the National Register.

with the service bays. The Oblong Box was the most popular type of station built in the 1940s. Its permutations include the addition of canopies and colorful and animated pumps.[8]

Building typologies were disseminated to the industry through trade journals such as *National Petroleum News* and *Petroleum Week*. The development of gasoline service stations was tied to the marketplace; aesthetic concerns such as station design and presentation were a response to the need to attract and keep a customer base. The gasoline station became a recognizable building form, subject to change with the need to continue marketing. As geographic mobility of automobile users increased their cultural connectedness with other citizens, places came to be valued not for their uniqueness but for the characteristics which they shared universally with other places in the system. Values such as cleanliness, quality and good service reflected those connections; frequent encounters with gasoline stations made them valued as places for socialization, predictability and comfort. The gasoline station came to represent change and mobility, which was tied to certain universal values. As Michael Witzel said in his book *Route 66 Remembered:* "If the roadbed is considered to be the soul of Highway 66; it could be argued that the gasoline station is its very heart."[9] Gasoline stations mark in a very tangible way the movement of America from a production to a consumption value society.

Signal Oil and Gas Company was a relative latecomer to retail gasoline marketing. The company was born in 1921 during the oil boom at Signal Hill, California. Sam Mosher, a lemon and avocado farmer in nearby Pico Rivera, visited the oil drilling areas with Bob Bering, a friend from college. Signal Hill at that time was described as "a madhouse."[10] Bering, an oil lease agent for a small oil company, showed Mosher how vast amounts of "wet gas", which lifted the crude petroleum to the surface, was being wasted by the major oil companies – it was burned as it escaped into the atmosphere. Wet gas contains a high percentage of natural gasoline, which at that time was worth twenty-three cents on the open market. Bob knew that by building a casinghead gasoline plant the natural gas could be extracted from the waste gas using an absorption process. Mosher and Bering borrowed money to get started, and established the Signal Oil and Gas Company. An absorption plant was built and was producing by 1922; more plants followed. Sam Mosher was a good businessman, he became known for taking risks that paid off for the company. More plants followed, and in 1925 Standard Oil of California contracted with Signal to buy all of their gasoline production until December 31, 1930.

It was the conclusion of this contract at the end of 1930 that prompted Signal to enter the retail side of the gasoline market. Signal needed to find outlets for the gasoline they produced. Most of the oil industry was not expanding due to the Depression; but Signal took risks and found opportunities in the economic decline. On February 14, 1931, they bought U.S. Refining, which owned a string of service stations in California that sold "Purr-Pull" gasoline. This fuel was reputed to "make a motor

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[8] One of the best examples of the Oblong Box type is the Texaco station of the 1940s. In 1937 Texaco hired Walter Dorwin Teague to design their station, a Streamline Moderne building which became instantly recognizable as a Texaco Station.

[9] pp. 80

[10] Walter. A. Tompkins. Little Giant of Signal Hill, An Adventure in American Enterprise. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964, pp. 18.

purr on the hard pull" and had a purple vegetable dye put into the solution, a visual gimmick for consumers developed in the era of pumps which had glass walled tanks.

Signal then needed to develop an approach to the marketplace: they needed a logo and a product niche. A logo was developed, a bulls-eye sign featuring a traffic stop-and-go light with the word "GO" in the extended semaphore board in a color scheme of red-orange, yellow and black. The product niche was provided by the development of an anti-knock gasoline. By adding a blending ingredient to regular gasoline[11], the gas was competitive with premium gas in performance and competitive with regular gasoline in price. Signal's marketing strategy during the difficult economic times of the Depression was summed up in their slogan "Go Farther with Signal." Signal had inherited Purr-Pull stations, some of which were distinctive Art Deco style buildings with a stepped tower form enhanced by pointed pilasters and one or two extending canopies. These stations were the progenitors of the Signal tower form gasoline station.

Still at the height of the depression, Signal moved into the Northwest in 1933. They purchased Polsky & Gage, the leading Oregon wholesaler of petroleum products, with their bulk plant at Linnton,[12] and moved into Seattle that same year by buying Cascade Petroleum. These two purchases allowed Signal to control the independent gasoline market in the Northwest, and meant that they would not have to ship Signal gasoline to those markets. They began aggressively building stations and marketing their gasoline up and down the West Coast.

The marketing of Signal in the decade of the 1930's is a case study in the use of place product packaging. Though they had inherited a number of dissimilar stations, they used color scheme, signs – particularly the six-foot diameter banjo-style "Signal" sign – to unite their stations and identify their product. They built many new stations in the late 1930's and 1940's; often built with a tower. In 1939 Signal was building enough stations to create a department to handle their design and layout. The St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station is an example of one of the types built during the Depression. Depending on the layout of the adjoining streets, the canopy and office octagon were sometimes positioned differently in relationship to the lubrication building, sometimes at a 90-degree angle rather than a 45-degree angle, sometimes with two canopies or two lubrication bays instead of one. The orientation of the station in relationship to the street was a very important element in the decision to site and built a service station. The ability of passing motorists to see the station and signage was important, as was their ability to enter and exit the station with ease. The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station was positioned at a 45-degree angle in relationship to the intersection of two streets to allow automobile traffic to enter and exit from both sides of the canopy and pump island. Large driveway cuts were positioned along North Jersey Street (now Lombard) and North Charleston Avenue to allow for this important flow of traffic. This allowed individuals to access the pumps from both streets, and to drive through to access the lubrication bay.

For Signal service stations built during the Depression, the tower was the constant architectural element, enhanced and supported by color, signage and illumination. According to *The Signal News*

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[11] This was an ingredient that Signal produced in abundance at their natural gas plants.
[12] From 1933 to 1940, *Polk's Portland City Directory* lists the offices of Signal Oil Company at 9930 NW St. Helens Road.

of March 1950 celebrating the 25th anniversary of Signal gasoline retailing, "the tower type Signal station . . . became a familiar design throughout the marketing territory."[13] The Signal logo, the "whimsical traffic light with a Go sign"[14] provided a strong visual tie to the automobile, and to the lore of the road and mobility that the automobile had brought to Americans.

Signal used their advertising budget to lease blank brick walls in the West Coast cities it served[15]. In the 1930's the walls were featured Western scenes by painter Burt Proctor, the Signal logo and the slogan "Go Farther With Signal." These signs were an economical way to reach a large number of people. Signal also sponsored radio programs, the "Signal Carnival" and the Tarzan radio program beginning in July of 1932. During the hard times of the Depression, when families did not have the money to buy toys for their children, Signal gave out coupons with the purchase of gasoline that could be redeemed for prizes. When the Tarzan movie premiered in 1933, a Signal sponsored Tarzan parade was held in the streets of downtown Portland. They also created the "Signal Tarzan Club" for children; it was so successful 415,000 children had signed up by 1934. In late 1943 they sponsored "The Whistler," a mystery radio show that was extremely popular on the West Coast.

Advertising gave the motoring public knowledge of the brand names, quality and service a gasoline company might provide. Architecture, lighting, signs, services, contests, give-aways and promotions were the tools that drew customers to the filling station. The success and power of these campaigns and techniques is born out in the attachments that people have to gasoline collectibles and "petroliana" today. These attachments are more than just nostalgic; they are symbolic of cultural connectedness and shared values.

Illumination was an important component of the filling station. The perception of a built form varies between night and day, and stations used artificial illumination to create distinctive nighttime places. This is an important component in the perception and structuring of the roadside – its cognitive dimension. Signal recognized the importance of lighting – the July 1950 issue of *Signal News*, a magazine for Signal dealers, in conjunction with a photograph of a station illuminated at night, stated: "The APPEARANCE of your station is your INVITATION to potential new customers. A well lighted and clean station like this one provides an invitation that is hard to pass up."[16] The St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station was representative of this advice, with neon lighting on the street facing elevations of the building, the canopy and the illuminated letters "SIGNAL" on the building tower. The four glass panels advertising the Signal brand name which were located at the top of the Bennett 541 gasoline pumps were also lighted from behind. Lighting was a very important part of the phenomenon of building as sign, and gasoline service stations were the progenitors of the type. The combination of lighting, distinctive color schemes, and display made the filling station ensemble read as a large three-dimensional billboard, recognizable across America.

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[13] R.A. Barrager, ed. "Goodwill Builder," *The Signal News*, No. 19 (March 1950): pp.3-10.
[14] Michael Karl Witzel. *The American Gas Station*. Osceola: Motorbooks International, 1992, pp. 129.
[15] Signal had a billboard on the north side of the brick building on NW Tenth between Everett and Flanders in Portland during the 1950s. Faint remnants of the billboard are visible there today.
[16] pp. 8. (emphasis from original.)

In the late 1920's, Portland residents spent as much on their automobiles as they did for food.[17] By 1930, there was one car for every for residents of the city. The 1920s were a decade of growth in road and bridge building. With the depression in the 1930s the city had ceased to grow; by 1940, the maritime and shipbuilding industry had declined. The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station was built in this sluggish economic climate. There industries were resuscitated by 1942 with the coming of World War II. By 1943, one out of three people in Portland were a new resident. Even given the shortage of fuel and the institution of gas rationing in late 1942, there was a good population base for the selling of gasoline and automobile services, particularly in North Portland where much of shipbuilding activity was concentrated. During the War years Signal tailored their marketing to respect the seriousness of the war; they sponsored "The Signal Round Table," a radio discussion show, and gave away "Victory Garden" booklets at their stations.

When the war ended in 1945, there was a pent-up demand for automobiles, and for automobile services. Industrial and residential growth in Portland was focused in North and Northwest Portland. The St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station was positioned to take advantage of these trends. Signal now stressed the quality of their fuel in their advertising, with the slogan "It Takes Extra Quality to Go Farther – and Signal is the Famous Go Farther Gasoline." By the end of the decade, Signal had over sixty service stations in the city of Portland.

On August 7, 1947, Standard Oil of California (Socal) bought "all real estate, bulk plants and service stations" of Signal. Standard retailed the Signal brand as a secondary brand for nearly twenty years while Signal Oil and Gas Corporation continued business as a refiner and producer of oil and gas.[18] In 1967, Standard Oil of New Jersey purchased the Signal stations on the West coast and rebranded them Enco.

The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station operated as a Signal retailer until 1954, when the station was sold to United Petroleum Corporation. It operated as an independent gasoline retailer until 1965, when it became a Chevron station. It operated as a Chevron retailer until 1978.

Architectural Significance

The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station is a study in the execution of the modern style. It uses restrained ornamentation, subtle detailing and the sophisticated interplay between simple geometric forms to achieve a whole that has both artistic and functional value.

The building form is created by the relationship between three geometric forms: a rectangular garage or lubrication volume (the box), the faceted prism of the office with the tall octagonal tower (the tower), and the strong horizontal plane of the canopy (the canopy). The office and tower are positioned at a forty-five degree angle to the lubrication building. The garage has an orthogonal relationship to the street; the office, tower and canopy are positioned in relationship to the intersection

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[17] Carl Abbot. *Portland: Planning, Politics and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City.* University of Nebraska Press: 1983, pp. 93.

[18] Signal later re-entered the retail market with the purchase of Bankline Oil Company in 1950, buy buying their the Norwalk brand and stations.

of the streets. Because of this juxtaposition, the relationship between the building forms is dynamic instead of static; no one form dominates. The dialogue between the forms is enhanced by their juxtaposition. The building can be understood and evaluated by assessing how each piece is made and by analyzing the interaction between the forms.

The octagonal tower is the strongest element of the building. It is tall, and constructed to emphasize its verticality. The tower is ornamented with pair of horizontal bars at the apex of alternate sides of the octagon and five stepped circular pieces at the top. The prominence of the tower was also reinforced by the neon-lighted vertical letters spelling SIGNAL, which were placed on the sides of the tower octagon visible from the street. The original paint scheme of the tower also emphasized its height. A pair of two-inch vertical orange stripes bordered a black background behind the vertical "Signal" sign; the other sides were painted beige. The circular steps of the tiered top piece were painted alternately orange and black, with strips of neon circumscribing every other step.

The prominence of the tower is also reinforced by the way it relates to the office space below it. Visually, the office forms the base for the tower. The tower is strengthened and grounded by three octagonal forms: the prism of office glass on the street level, and the two octagonal sheet metal forms above the glass. The tower is the integration of these three portions. The first octagonal disc is located above the decorative metal band above the office windows. This disc is the same diameter as the office. Though the horizontal plane of the decorative band interrupts it, this volume has a strong connection to the office space. The relationship is also strengthened by the height of this disc; it is slightly taller than the height of the lubrication building. This allows it to be seen as a part of the tower, separate from the lubrication building, but not disconnected from it. The single band of decoration on the top of this disc also ties it to the lubrication volume - it is identical to the ornament at the top edge of the box. The verticality of the tower is also reinforced at the level of detail - the vertical structural steel angle supporting the office glass extends past the sill of the window and through the plane of the sheet metal surface below it. In the lubrication building this ground-level band of sheet metal is an uninterrupted plane.

The eighteen-inch decorative band of sheet metal positioned just above the top of the office windows interrupts the vertical rhythm of the stepped tower base. In comparison to the strength of the tower and the bulk of the lubrication building this horizontal element is fairly thin and delicate; but it is the piece that ties them all together and the link that binds the canopy to the whole. It is the most intensely ornamented of the three building parts, with three bands of decoration, one at the top and two at the base of the band. Its ornament forms the vocabulary for the language of decoration used around the building. The pattern in the lower six inches of the band is repeated around the entire building at the same level, and the upper line of decorative relief is repeated at the top of each of the octagons and at the top of the lubrication box. The repetition of and relationship between these decorative elements also ties all three forms together; tower, box and canopy.

From its intersection with the lubrication volume on the east side of the building, the band encircles the top of the office windows, then it breaks free from the office volume and continues out as a structural element to form the canopy. The transition from decorative to structural gives this piece its presence and makes this form powerful. It is both a connector and an element unto itself. The

canopy reads as a horizontal plane; its form balances the verticality of the tower. It is supported on the outer edge by a slender single column; making it seem as though it is floating in the air.

The lubrication volume, or the box, is the largest form of the three. Though the most functional of the three forms, it is subordinate to the tower and the canopy. It functions like a background or a foil for these more prominent portions of the station. This part of the station is fourteen feet tall - three feet lower than the office portion. It is a box with openings, and the openings are positioned to maximize function: windows in the front and side to allow for light and transparency to the public, a large paneled garage door to the lubrication area, and small windows and doors in the back for the three support spaces (restrooms and storage). The structural and decorative elements are repeated on all sides of the box, a tall band of sheet metal around the upper edge, decorated at the top and the bottom, and a smooth band of sheet metal at the base. In between are large expanses of windows, the garage door, and smaller window openings interspersed with sheet metal panels. The building faces and relates to the street, with the garage door opening on the Charleston Avenue side and the largest windows for the space fronting the Lombard Street side. The skin of the building is smooth, the openings are made in such a way that the plane of the wall is preserved; the sheet metal is tucked into the edges of the windows and doors to make a flat and finished edge. The Lombard side elevation reads as three horizontal planes. The vertical mullions of the windows nearly disappear, and the glass appears as a band of transparency across the front of the building. Unlike the analogous band on the office octagon, the lower sheet metal siding is unbroken by the vertical steel mullions of the windows. The horizontality of the upper band is emphasized by lines of decorative elements that exactly duplicate the pattern in the lower six inches of the canopy.

The garage door characterizes the Charleston Street side of the station. This door is mostly glass, and is pushed toward the southeast edge of the elevation at the intersection with the office tower, bringing most of the transparency to the front of the building as well as allowing for the storage and support services toward the back of the building. The northwest elevation has two large windows and an entry door, but the scale of each window is broken down into six individual panes of glass in three rows of two lights each. The rear elevation is the most solid, with four equally spaced openings punched through the sheet metal surface: three small square windows and a door. The amount and position of the openings in the building mirrors their use; areas of public access and view have larger openings, areas of private business use have smaller openings. There is also a vocabulary of scale in the use of the openings, from sheets of glass on the front of the building, broken down into lights and panels on the sides, and to individual small openings at the back.

The Art Moderne style of architecture developed as an adjunct to the Art Deco architectural movement. Art Moderne is distinguished by its simplicity, by the use of distinct, simple, geometric forms with restrained ornamentation. The Art Moderne style was more often employed in small commercial structures with an element of machine mass production, such as gasoline stations. Both art Deco and Art Moderne shared a fascination with the aesthetic of the machine, both as form and process. The decorative elements of Art Moderne are simpler than those of Art Deco; they do not employ the Egyptian and Persian influences that often distinguished the latter style.

The St. John's Signal Tower Gas Station is a study in the execution of the modern form, a small building that applies the technique of Art Moderne with precision and subtlety.

Building Comparisons

Former Signal Service Station, Third and Ankeny, Portland, Oregon
Located at Southwest Third and Ankeny in downtown Portland, Oregon, a former Signal Service Station now operates as offices for Atwood Investments. The permit drawings for this service station are dated April 27, 1939, just a few weeks after the date on the St. Johns station drawings. The office octagon, though positioned at the corner of the lubrication building, is much more consumed by the volume of the lubrication box; only three sides of the octagon are visible from the exterior as opposed to five sides on the St. John's Signal Tower Station. While the relationship between the three geometric forms in the St. John's station is dynamic, the Atwood configuration makes the station appear more static and straightforward. In the Atwood station the tower is much less prominent as an interactive element; the box form of the lubrication building and the canopy dominate. The station has been altered by the removal of the tower and smaller stepped octagon; the first stepped octagon remains.[19] This station shares the same detailing on the canopy and the building as the St. John's structure. The Atwood lubrication building is smaller than the one in St. John's. The original sheet metal siding remains only on the west side of the building, the other three sides have been covered with wood siding. The west side elevation has only one window with divided lights, where in St. John's there are two. The station is located at the junction of two streets, and the office and canopy relate to the intersection. It is a Ray F. Becker Company building.

Former Flying A Gasoline Station, Northeast 23rd Avenue and Sandy Boulevard, Portland, Oregon.
The former Flying A Gasoline Station at Northeast 23rd and Sandy Boulevard in Portland, Oregon is now used for parking cars in support of the Timberline Dodge dealership across the street. It was built in 1941; it is a Ray F. Becker Company sheet metal building. The building is made up of three forms: the box of the lubrication building, a tower and canopy. The relationship between these elements is different than that of the Signal station; the canopy form is much thicker and more substantial, and relates to and extends from the roof of the lubrication building rather than from the tower. The canopy is grounded by an additional vertical form placed against the face of the lubrication building - a thick rectangular projection that extends slightly above the height of the lubrication form. The tower is shorter and squatter in appearance. It is octagon shaped up to about one-and-one-half stories in height; and is topped by three stepped circular discs. The first disc is about three feet tall, with ribbed edges. There are two additional smooth-sided discs above it; both are decorated at the top with a band of metal relief. Originally, the tower was capped with a large letter "A" with wings extending from either side, which was the logo for Flying A gas stations, outlined with neon. The office space is contained in a bay-like projection from the lubrication bay and the adjacent octagonal area at the base of the tower. Behind the office, in the box form, were the restrooms and a storage area. The building canopy faces Northeast Sandy Boulevard.

Former Service Station, Fourth and Water Street, Silverton, Oregon.
In downtown Silverton, Oregon, a restored gasoline station of the small box with canopy typology is located in mid-block near the south end of downtown. It is a Ray F. Becker Company sheet metal building. The station is steel building; the box is approximately ten feet square and is pane glass on

[19] A photograph from *The Oregonian* on February 19, 1955 shows the tower intact and the station operating as a Chevron station.

three sides. The door is a full light, single entry door centered in the front façade. The flat roof extends out twelve feet as a canopy and is supported on two poles sitting on the pump island. The building and canopy are decorated with three recessed bands of decoration at the lower edge. Two restored pumps flank the canopy supports. The filling station is located in the middle of a block; the pump island, building and canopy face the street. There is a separate garage and office to the south of the filling station on the same lot, with a glass garage door facing the pump filling station and glass windows on the side facing the street. A small glass and steel office space is attached to the street side of the garage form. The buildings are vacant.

Former Shell Service Station, Fourth and Adams Street, McMinnville, Oregon.
In McMinnville Oregon, on Adams Street just north of Fourth, is a former Shell Service Station from the 1950s of the "S20B"[20] type. This is an early example of the modified oblong box type of gasoline station. The station is a metal frame structure clad with cream-colored porcelain enamel panels. The building box is bisected by a shard-like form that is taller than the box – clad in a contrasting color of red-orange porcelain enamel. This shard functioned as a sign, with the yellow sea shell shaped logo with the words "Shell" placed atop the form. To one side of the sign is a door to an office space; two sides of the office space are windows. To the other side of the sign are two garage doors, mostly glass paneled, serving two lubrication bays. This station is located in the middle of a block. The canopy and pump islands are separate from the station building. The structure currently functions as a tire store.

Conclusion

The Saint Johns Signal Tower Gas Station is a beautiful example of the Art Moderne architectural style executed in steel and glass. As a gasoline station, it also has meaning as a representation of the cultural importance of mobility and the automobile in American society. It is distinguished by its long and continuous history as a part of the gasoline and automotive service industry, its architectural coherence and its connection to American culture and values in the mid-twentieth century.

[20] S20B was the name Shell Oil Company assigned this prefabricated station.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.6267 acres (2730 sq. ft.)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	519400	5048218	3			
2				4			

Verbal Boundary Description
See attached continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification
See attached continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Georganne Sahaida			date	11/27/02; 08/11/03
organization	Design Studio			telephone	503 – 525 - 4960
street & number	PMB 353, 25 N.W. 23rd Place, Suite 6				
city or town	Portland	state	OR	zip code	97210-5580

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/title	Robert F. Phillips, Jr.				
organization				telephone	503 – 227-3892
street & number	2010 N.W. Aspen Avenue				
city or town	Portland	state	OR	zip code	97210

Boundary Description

Legal Description:
Partition Plat No. 2003-87; a re-plat of Lot 8, Block 2, Parcel 1, P.T. Smith Addition to St. Johns, in the City of Portland, County of Multnomah and State of Oregon.

Location:
NW ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section 12, Township 1 North, Range 1 West of the Willamette Meridian (WM), Multnomah County, Oregon.

Assessor's Information:
Multnomah County Tax Assessment Office Records: Tax Lot 7100 of Map 1N1W12AB.

Boundary Justification

The lot size has been decreased from the historic 5,000 square feet to 2,730 square feet to allow for the division of a parcel from the south side of the property. The building maintains the same relationship with its north, east and west property lines, and maintains its important historic relationship with and driveway access from the intersection of North Lombard Street and North Charleston Avenue. The south property line is located six feet from the back elevation of the lubrication bay.

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Notes from an interview with David Blenko, October 25, 2002. Notes in possession of the author.

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See attached continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification
See attached continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Georganne Sahaida			date	11/27/02; 08/11/03
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Appendix I: List of Photographs

Photographer: Rob Phillips
Date of Photographs: November 18, 2002
Name and mailing address of holder of negatives:
Rob Phillips, 2010 N.W. Aspen Avenue, Portland, OR 97210

Photograph 1 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Northeast (front) Elevation

Photograph 2 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Northeast Elevation
North Lombard Street and Charleston Avenue

Photograph 3 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Canopy Elevation
Looking Southeast

Photograph 4 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Office and Tower
Southeast Elevation

Photograph 5 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Office, Tower and Canopy
East Elevation

Photograph 6 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Exterior Detail: Tower

Photograph 7 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Exterior Detail: Air and Water Station

Photograph 8 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Northeast Elevation
Lubrication Bay
Elevation facing Lombard Street

Photograph 9 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Northwest Elevation

Photograph 10 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Southwest (rear) Elevation

Photograph 11 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Exterior Detail
Window and Sheet Metal Panel

Photograph 12 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Interior
Northeast Elevation

Photograph 13 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

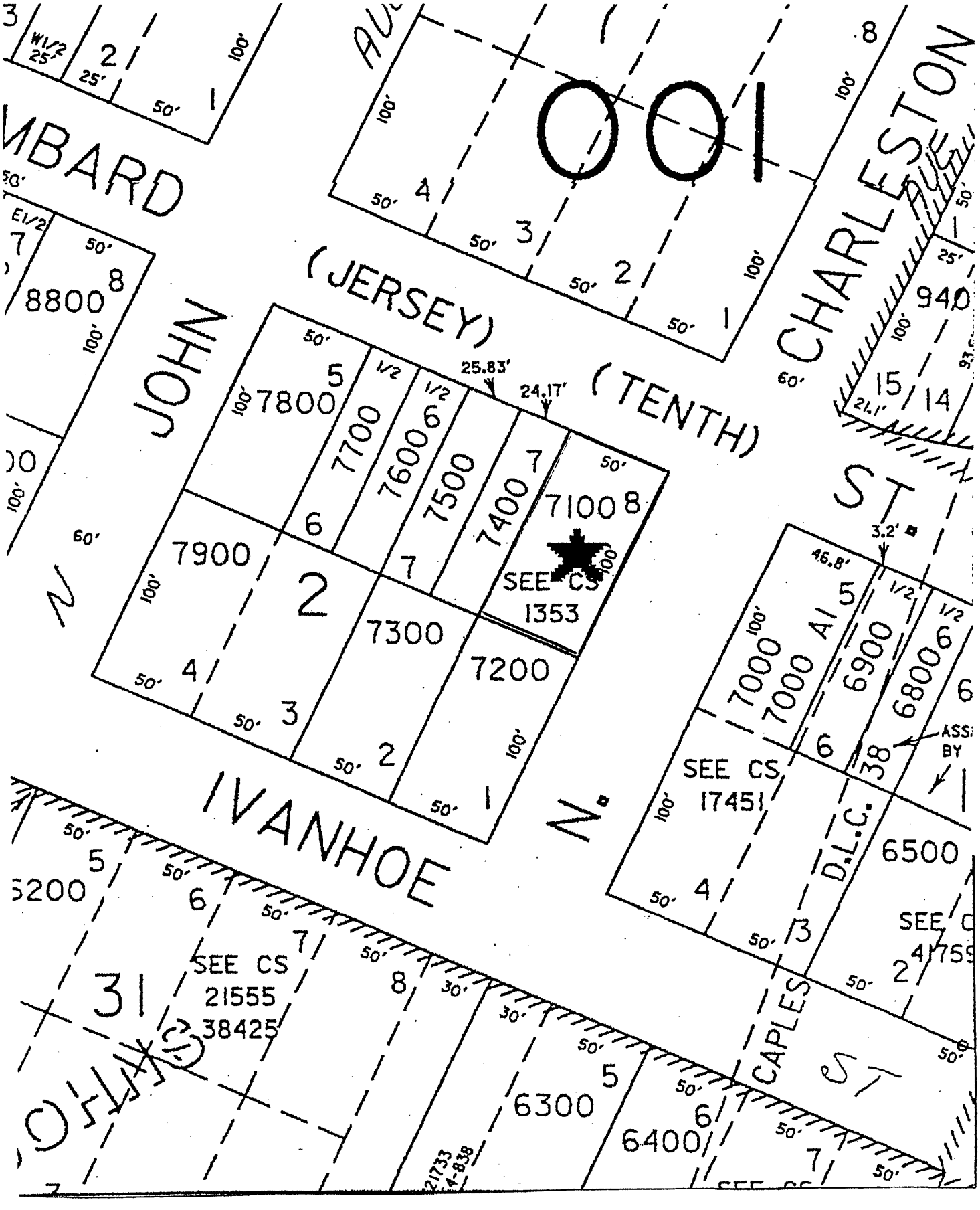
Interior
Northwest Elevation

Photograph 14 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

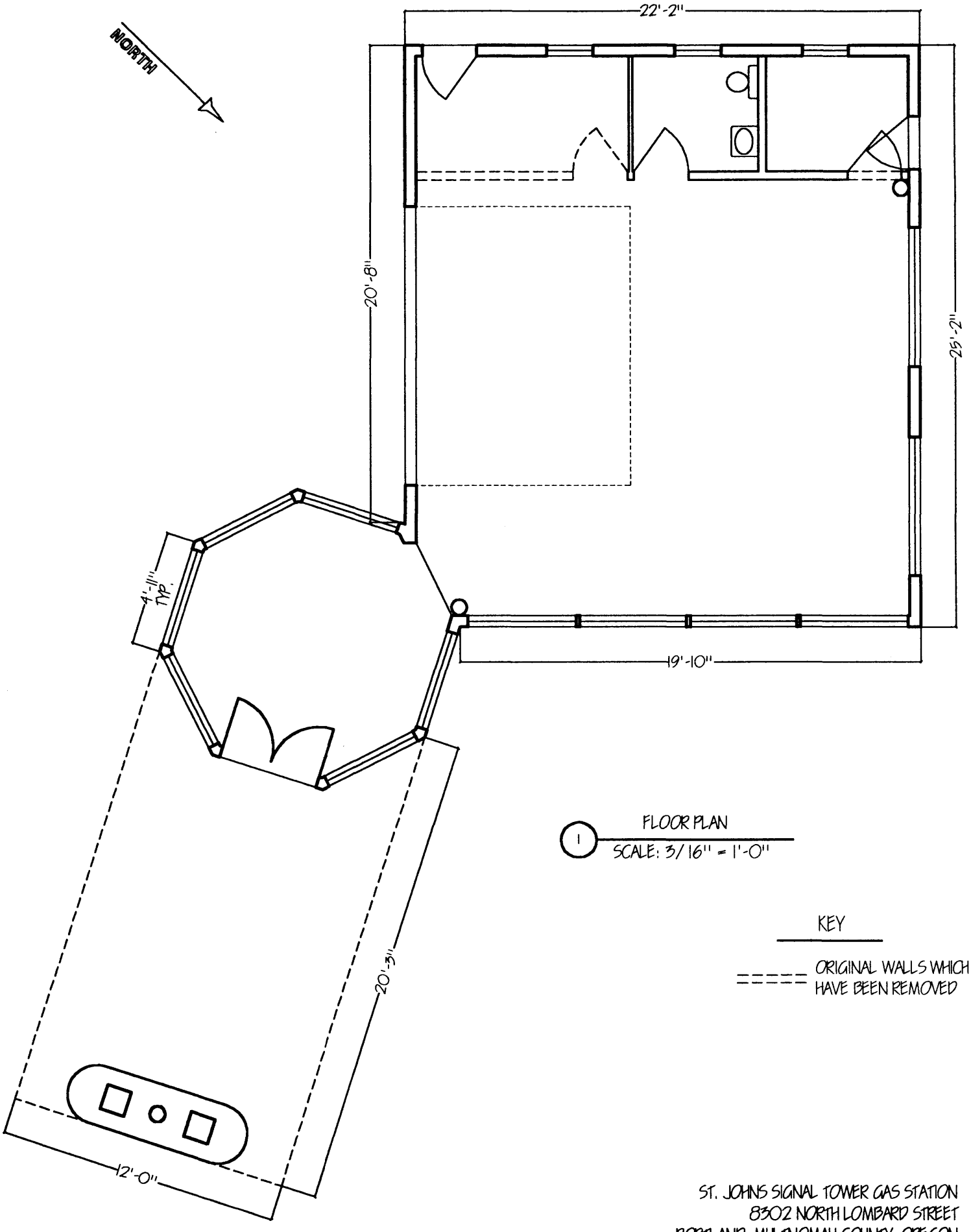
Interior Detail
Lubrication Bay Ceiling, Girder, Truss, Garage Door

Photograph 15 of 15
St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, OR

Interior Detail
Office Octagon Ceiling, Roof Drain



St. Johns Signal Tower Gas Station
8302 North Lombard Street
Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon

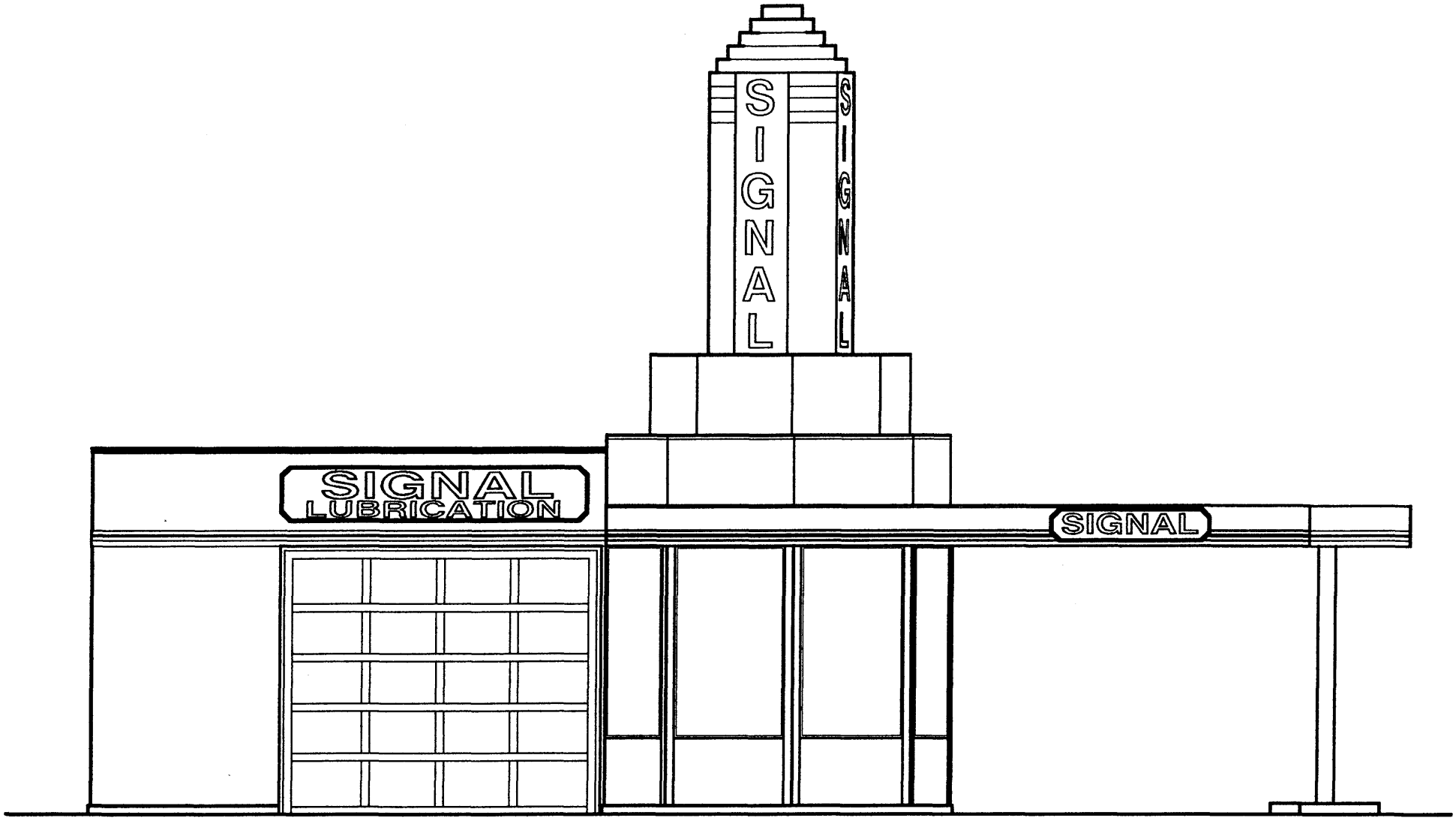


1 FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"

KEY

ORIGINAL WALLS WHICH HAVE BEEN REMOVED

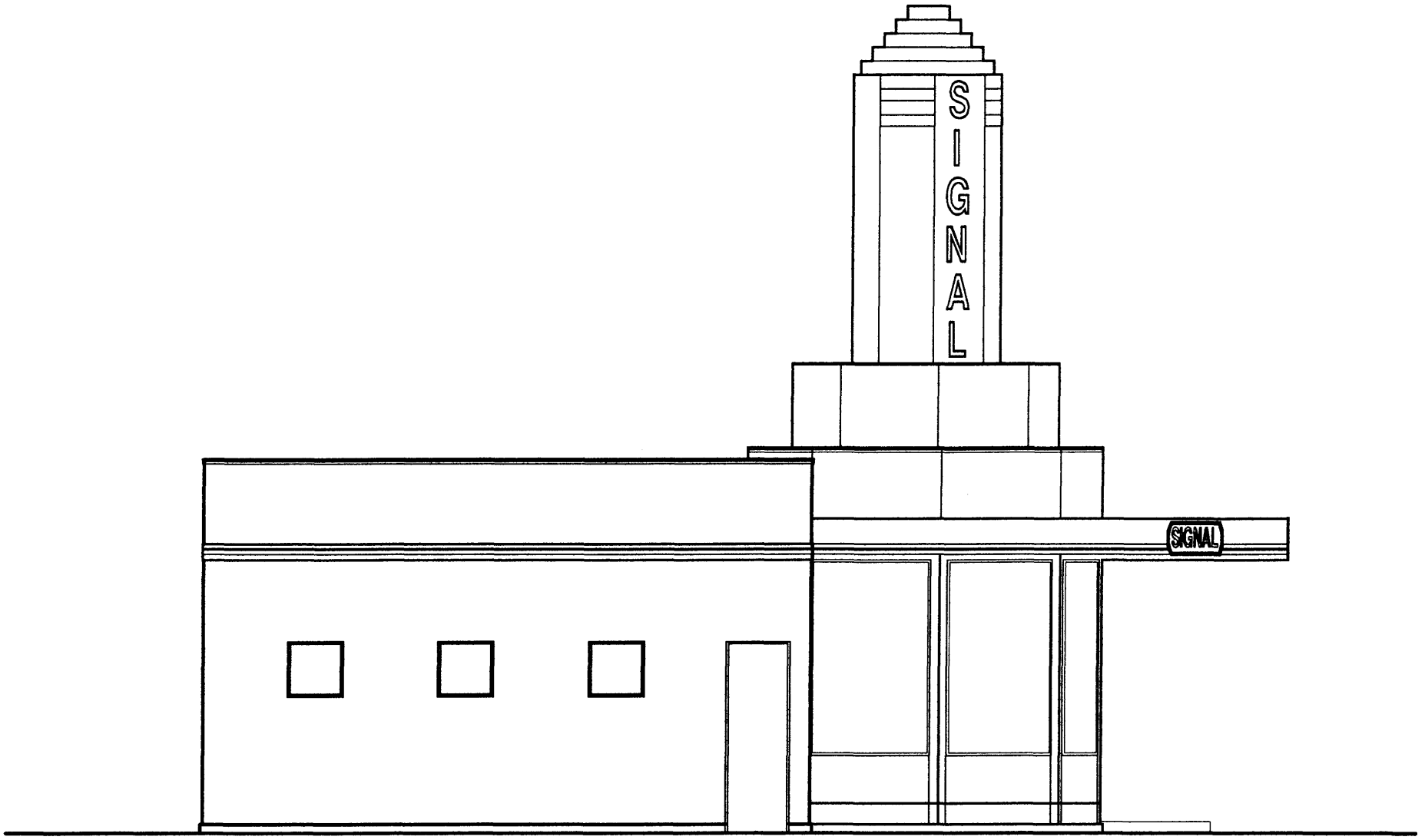
ST. JOHNS SIGNAL TOWER GAS STATION
8302 NORTH LOMBARD STREET
PORTLAND, MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON



2

EAST (LUBE SIDE) ELEVATION

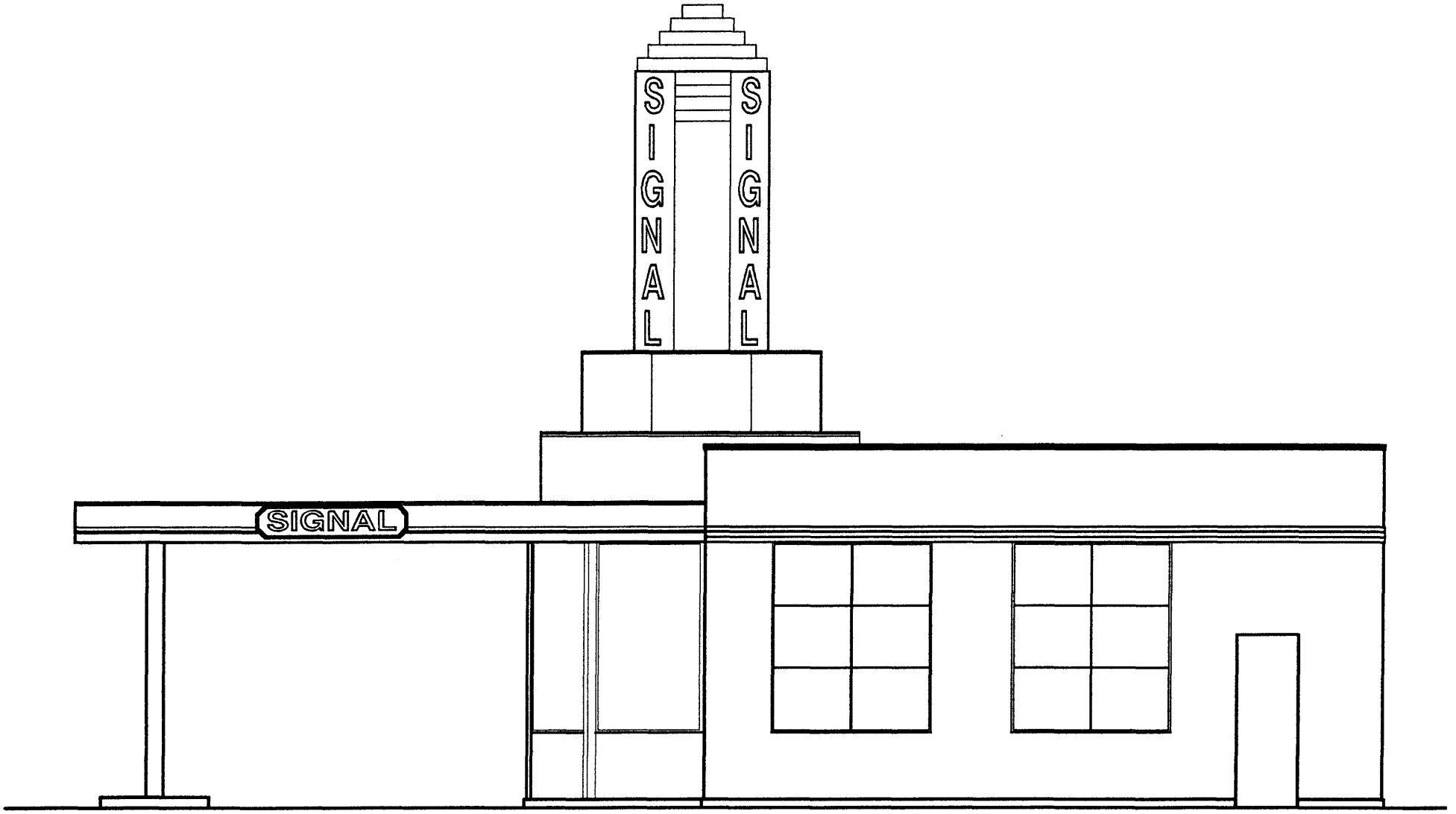
SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"



3

SOUTH (BACK) ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"



4

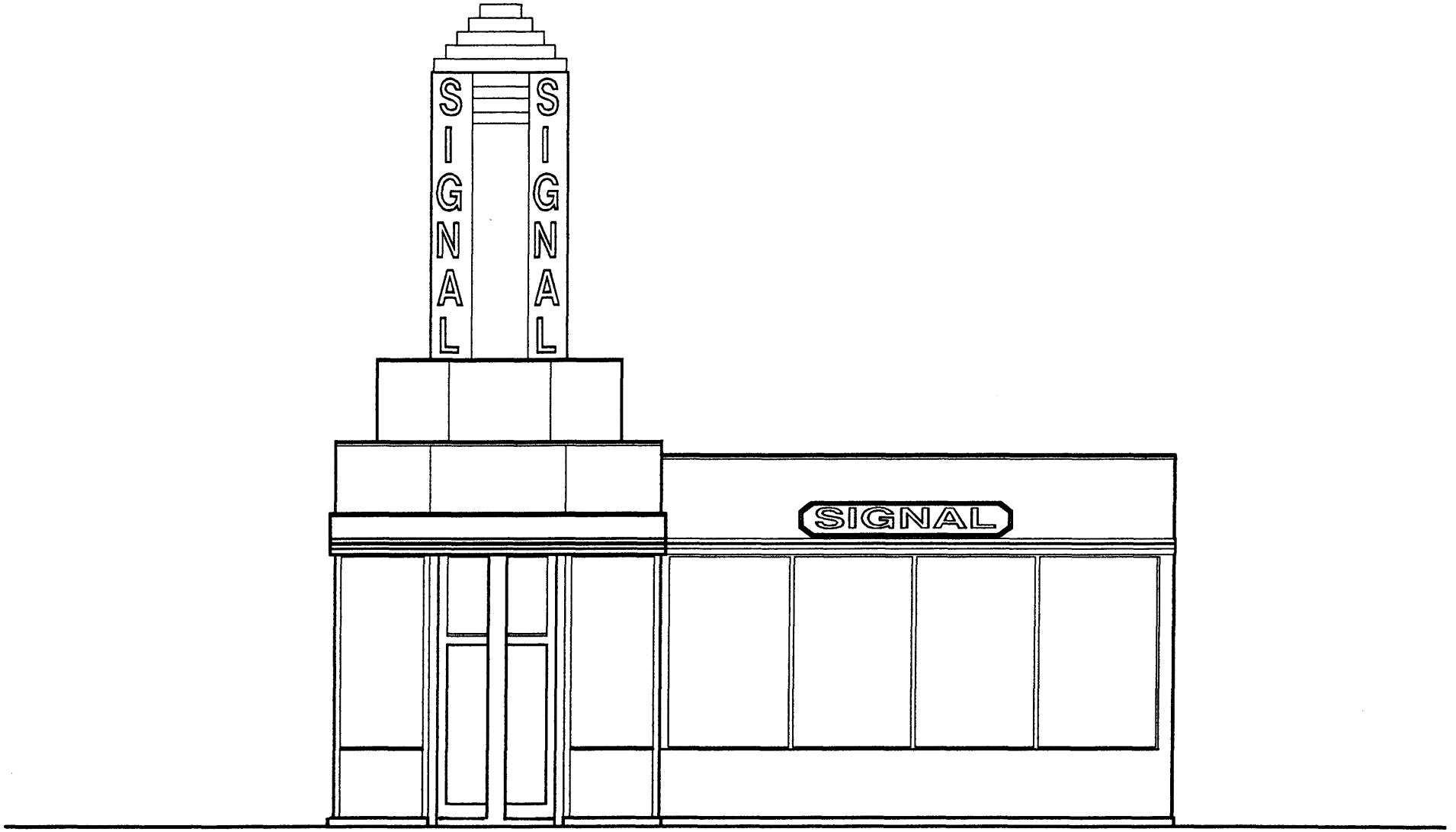
WEST ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"

5

NORTH ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"



6

NORTHEAST ELEVATION

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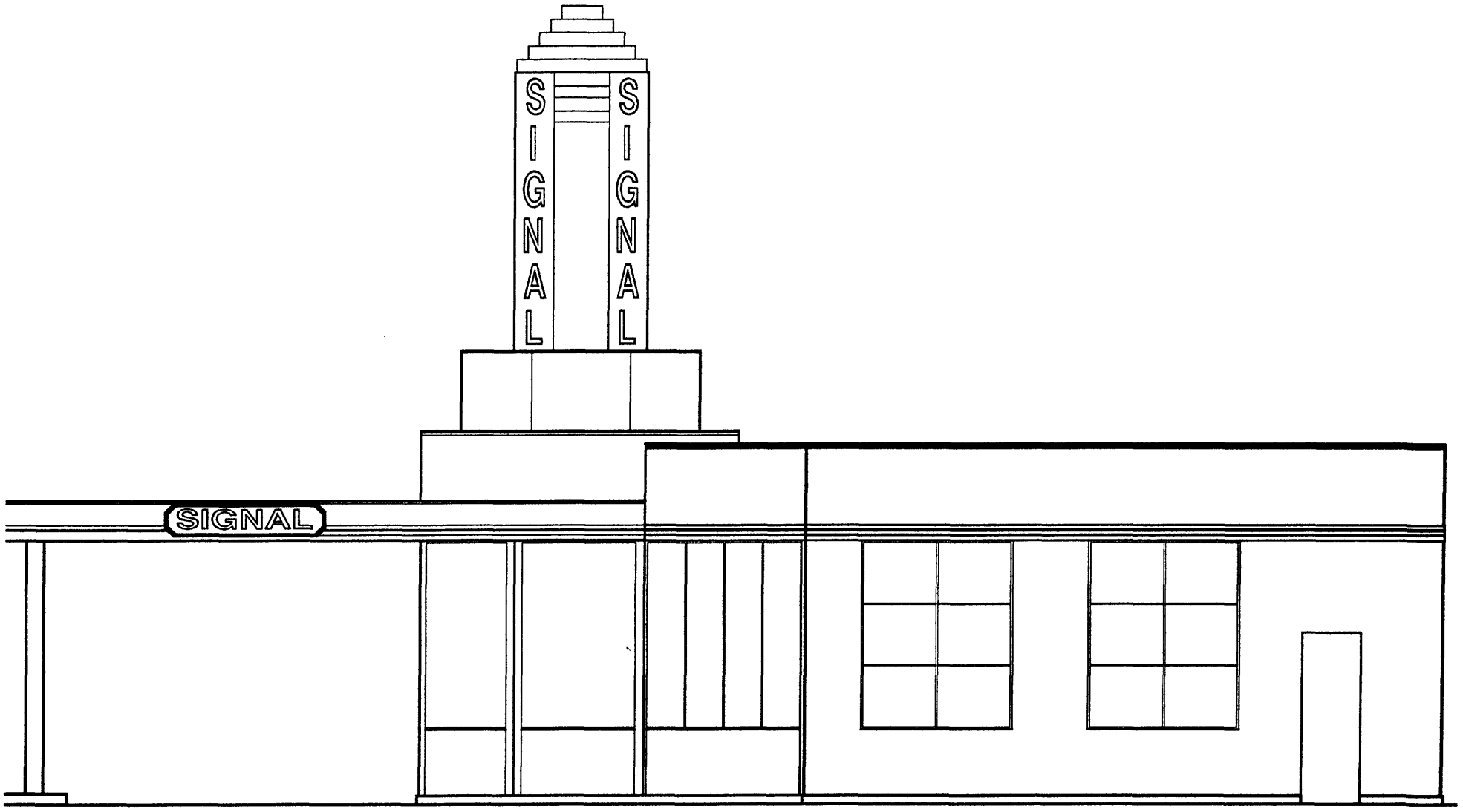

7

WEST (CANOPY SIDE) ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/16" = 1'-0"