

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Knickerbocker Hotel
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 1028 E. Juneau Avenue N/A not for publication
city, town Milwaukee N/A vicinity
state Wisconsin code WI county Milwaukee code 079 zip code 53202

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

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

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
	Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

4/19/88

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Entered in the National Register 6/2/88
Alana Boyer

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling
DOMESTIC/hotel
COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling
DOMESTIC/hotel
COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store
COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite
walls Brick
Terra Cotta
roof Asphalt
other Terra Cotta

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Knickerbocker Hotel is a residential apartment hotel built in 1929 in a large, but modest, version of the Neo-Classical Revival style of architecture. The large, generally U-shaped building sits in a dense residential neighborhood of medium- and high-rise apartment buildings, hotels, and large nineteenth century homes on Milwaukee's lower east side, along Lake Michigan. Originally part of the prestigious Yankee Hill neighborhood of the lower east side, the area surrounding the Knickerbocker has been redeveloped numerous times, and at present, historic homes co-exist with the twentieth century apartment houses and hotels of the neighborhood. The eight-story building is constructed of reddish-brown brick, except for the rear facade of the building, which is constructed of plain, tan brick. The general plan of the building is a U, consisting of a rectangular base with two large projecting wings on the east and west ends forming the U. On both the east and west wings, indentations in the center of the facade mirror the main U shape of the building. The interior plan consists of common and lobby areas and retail spaces on the first floor, and about 30 units of various sizes on each of the upper seven floors.

The Neo-Classical Revival decoration of the building consists entirely of applied terra cotta trim. The first two stories of the front and east facades are covered in coursed terra cotta panels, although granite stone panels have been applied at the foundation level, simulating a granite stone foundation. The terra cotta wraps around slightly on the west facade of the building as well. The main entrance is at the center of the building and is slightly recessed in from the projecting wings of the front facade. The terra cotta portico is done in the classical style. It features paired columns in the Tuscan order supporting an entablature with an embossed frieze that also includes gold letters spelling out "The Knickerbocker." Topping the cornice of the modern portico is a classical balustrade. Under the portico, the main entrance consists of a set of modern metal and glass entry doors (probably not original) topped with a large fanlight and flanked by large sets of windows (also probably not original).

Most of the windows of this building are simple, individually placed or grouped sashes that have six-over-six lights. But the openings on the first floor front facade are more elaborate. They are mostly grouped in a tripartite arrangement and are arched with terra cotta decoration simulating segmental stone arches. The windows are also decorated with canopies. Two other entrances appear in the projecting wings of the front facade of the building. Both have metal canopies that were enclosed at a later date, one with glass and the other with wood materials. These enclosures are probably not original to the building.

See continuation sheet

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The terra cotta cladding of the front and east facades extends through the second floor and ends in a cornice between the second and third stories. Several groups of modillions support a shallow projecting bay that extends from the third through the eighth floors in the center of each projecting front facade wing, and in the center of the building between the two wings. These bays are decorated with three terra cotta spandrels that are placed under each of the three central windows of the third through seventh stories. Narrow brick pilasters separate these windows on the bays as well. This same detail is repeated in the center part of the wings of the east facade of the building, except that the detail appears on the flat wall surface since there are no bays on the east facade.

The most elaborate decoration on the building exists on the eighth floor of the front and east facades. A cornice divides this floor from the rest of the building and creates the appearance of a parapet. Windows of this floor have arched window hoods of terra cotta, featuring wreaths and foliage within the arch. Terra cotta pilasters separate these windows. Also, above these windows are more terra cotta panels, located at the roofline of the building. In the projecting bays of the eighth floor front facade and center section, the applied terra cotta almost surrounds the windows completely, and they also have the same window hood decoration. There are also terra cotta pilasters that support an entablature that is decorated with swags and medallions.

The main entrance leads to a hallway lobby, off which are other hallways leading to retail businesses which take up much of the first floor space. The lobby leads to the hotel desk and office located at the rear of the first floor. Figure 1 shows the general floorplan of the first floor. The lobby area is decorated in an elegant classical style. It features red and gold carpeting, arched entries, large windows with fanlights, and french doors with fanlights. The most decorative features are the pilasters with corinthian capitals accented with deep red paint. A deep red and white decorated frieze highlights the cornice molding. Complementing the elegant decor are numerous multi-tiered crystal chandeliers. Even the smaller lighting fixtures on walls and ceilings in the lobby and common areas are crystal and elegant. The hallways leading to the retail areas have been individually decorated in an eclectic fashion that differs from the lobby area.

The upper floors have basically the same plan and are a mixture of public hotel space and private condominium units. Figure 2 shows a floorplan that represents the upper floors of the Knickerbocker. There are about 30 units per floor. The units vary in size, although there are a number of units that are identical. The hallways of the upper floors are narrow with arches and entrances spaced along the hallways. Each unit has a living/sleeping space, a kitchenette, and a bathroom. Because the building was originally designed as a residential apartment hotel, the kitchenettes were an important component of the units, and they are of basically two types. The larger kitchenettes had cabinets, icebox, stove, and sink in a small walk-in space or alcove. The smaller kitchenettes were hidden behind large closet doors and feature a single small wall unit of cabinets, stove, icebox, and sink. While some of the original cabinets and sinks still exist in some units, most of the kitchenettes have been remodeled with new cabinets, stove, and refrigerator or any combination of new appliances with old cabinets. The living/sleeping areas of the units are also variously decorated.

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The units that are used as hotel rooms feature double beds and a number of dressers, tables, and chairs. The units that have been converted into condominiums are furnished and decorated according to the individual taste of the owner-occupants. Many of these units, though, feature paneled walls that cover the original plaster and the simple wooden door and window moldings.

In general, the condition of the building is good. Its exterior is well-maintained and the lobby and common areas are in good condition and somewhat elegant. The hotel rooms are well-kept, but not luxurious, and the condominium units range from only fair condition to excellent, depending upon the owner. The condominiums are individually owned and the common space operated by a management company. The public areas of the hotel are being considered for considerable refurbishing and redecorating by the owner in order to retain the hotel's competitiveness with other facilities of its type in the city.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Period of Significance
1929¹

Significant Dates
1929²

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Rosman and Wierdsma³

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Knickerbocker Hotel is being nominated to the National Register under criterion C, because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction in Milwaukee--the large residential hotel. It is also being nominated as a good example of a design that used the still popular Neo-Classical Revival style in a modernistic way, borrowing from the modern Art Deco style, to give the building the modern appearance that architecture was moving toward in large buildings in that era. The Knickerbocker Hotel was one of a number of residential hotels built on Milwaukee's prestigious lower east side. Of this type of building, the Knickerbocker is one of the two largest and best remaining examples, the other being the Astor Hotel, already listed in the National Register. The Knickerbocker represents an important building type in large cities across the country; that is, the residential hotel that offered both permanent and transient residents a prestigious address with all the services they desired without the cost and trouble involved in the upkeep of a large house or even an apartment. This building type made more efficient use of valuable property near central cities, allowing people to live conveniently closer to downtown in a style befitting their middle or upper class status.

Historical Background

During the nineteenth century, the area around the Knickerbocker Hotel developed into a prestigious neighborhood known as Yankee Hill. Given its name because of the large concentration of Milwaukee's pioneer Yankee political and economic leaders who lived in the neighborhood, the area was part of the "Gold Coast" of the lower east side of Milwaukee during the late nineteenth century. Situated along Lake Michigan, the area had fine views and was conveniently close to Milwaukee's downtown. By the turn of the century, the area was no longer a center of Yankee prestige, but the area remained prominent as German and Irish leaders replaced the departing Yankees. After 1900, though, the area became transitional as many homes were divided up into rooming houses or demolished for new construction. The new construction in the neighborhood was largely a mix of apartment houses and residential hotels that served the growing middle class and upper class that could not or would not maintain a large house with servants, but still desired a prestigious address close to downtown. As the century progressed, more apartment buildings replaced single-family homes, and today, the neighborhood has retained the mix of large homes, apartment houses, and high-rise hotels and apartment buildings.⁴

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The Knickerbocker Hotel was part of this apartment house and residential hotel building boom in the early twentieth century. It was also part of a hotel building boom that occurred during the 1920s in Milwaukee. Completed in 1929 for a reported one and one-half million dollars, the Knickerbocker took its place in Yankee Hill right down the street from the Astor Hotel, another residential hotel built in 1916 and doubled in size in 1925. The Knickerbocker was built in the Neo-Classical Revival architectural style, a style similar to the Astor, and it is interesting that the builders felt the area could maintain two large residential hotels almost next door to each other. The general layout of the Knickerbocker has remained largely unchanged throughout its history. In a 1931 Milwaukee city directory, the Knickerbocker housed retail shops on the first floor, regular hotel space, and around 80 permanent residents. The permanent residents were largely upper and middle class couples and widows. Of the residents that had an occupation listed in the city directory, there were a number of middle and upper level business executives and managers, attorneys, and doctors. The physical plan of the Knickerbocker did not change until the condominium conversion boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this time, the permanent residents converted their units to condominiums. Today the building contains these condominiums, regular hotel space, and retail space on the first floor.

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE - ARCHITECTURE

The Knickerbocker Hotel is significant for architecture because it is one of the two largest and best extant examples of a type of early twentieth century construction--the residential hotel. The other is the Astor Hotel (924 E. Juneau Ave.), listed in the National Register in 1984. The Astor and the Knickerbocker are relatively equal in their importance to the building type in Milwaukee and are especially interesting because they sit almost side-by-side on Juneau Avenue. They are also relatively equal in their expression of the Neo-Classical Revival style, their overall integrity, and their prominence in the neighborhood in which they reside.

The Knickerbocker Hotel is also important because it represents the densification of the central city that occurred in large cities during the early twentieth century. As population grew, especially middle-class population, there was a great demand for high-quality housing close to downtown, at the time still the center of business activity in most communities. There was also a demand from upper and middle-class people for housing that provided services normally performed by servants in single-family homes of the wealthy. For those middle and upper class persons who either could not afford such single-family homes with servants, or no longer wished to maintain such a home, the luxury apartment house or, better yet, the residential hotel met their housing needs. These persons usually did not desire to live in the growing suburbs, since these suburbs were primarily composed of single-family homes and were more suited to families. So, builders met this demand by constructing large apartment houses and residential hotels in the central city. For the upper and middle class persons, a prestigious address was important, so much of this construction occurred in historically prominent neighborhoods.

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Because the residential hotel catered to permanent as well as transient residents, they were generally located slightly away from downtown, while remaining convenient to it. According to Milwaukee's central business district historic resources survey report, the "quiet residential hotels [of Milwaukee] were located away from the main traffic arteries and business areas of the downtown. Most . . . were located on the east side of the river in what was then the totally residential Yankee Hill area." The report indicates that of the numerous residential hotels in the area, several have been demolished, and of the remaining examples, the Astor and the Knickerbocker Hotels are the best and largest. Because they are equally important as the best examples of the residential hotel type of construction, they are both significant to Milwaukee's architectural heritage.⁶

The Knickerbocker is also significant for architecture because it represents the movement towards more simplified, "stripped-down" ornamentation influenced by the rising popularity of Art Deco and modern architecture. Its details, done in terra cotta, are concentrated at the roofline and foundation and have a lighter appearance and are more abstract than traditionally decorated Neo-Classical Revival buildings. Also, the spandrels and vertical piers are a design feature that emphasizes the verticality of the building and suggest the Art Deco style in this regard. It is the decorative terra cotta, especially, that helps distinguish the Knickerbocker from the Astor Hotel. The Astor uses stone to express its architectural details, giving the Astor a heavier and less attractive appearance than the Knickerbocker.

The Knickerbocker was designed by the Milwaukee architectural firm of Rosman and Wierdsma, of which little information is known. According to Milwaukee city directories, this firm practiced at least between 1923 and 1931. Besides the Knickerbocker, there are eight known designs by the firm in Milwaukee, most located just west of the city's downtown. They are all apartment buildings. None are particularly architecturally outstanding, and none greatly resemble the Knickerbocker. They are all medium to large apartment blocks of brick construction with simple architectural detailing. They range from the gothically detailed apartment house at 1341-45 Wisconsin Avenue, located next to Marquette University, to the Tudor Revival apartment house at 3421 W. Wells St., to the simple Prairie style apartment building at 2933-37 W. Wells St. An analysis of these apartment buildings indicates that while the firm did not make elaborate use of the popular period revival styles of the day, nor the less popular Prairie style, the stylistic touches on their buildings suggests that they were at least familiar with these styles. Of their known designs, then, the Knickerbocker is the largest building, and, along with the gothically-inspired apartment house near Marquette University, the most elaborately decorated. Their known designs do no place Rosman and Wierdsma in the forefront of Milwaukee architects of the 1920s, but they were skillful in executing the simply decorated apartment buildings of the era.⁷

The residential hotels of large cities, along with the luxury apartment houses of the early twentieth century, represent a new type of lifestyle of the era for middle and upper class persons, a lifestyle that was reflected in a type of construction. This type of construction, the residential hotel, provided residents the prestigious address

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they desired and the services they wanted without the need to maintain their own home or apartment. The construction of the Knickerbocker Hotel also coincides with the development of transient lodging away from railroad-oriented hotels to those that served an automobile-owning group of travelers. These new hotels could be located away from railroads and also did not have to be exactly located downtown since the automobile provided more flexible transportation. The residential hotel provided an alternative for transients brought about by the automobile. Because the Knickerbocker is one of the two best remaining examples of residential hotel construction in Milwaukee, and because this type of construction was important in the densification of the central city and represents a particular lifestyle of the middle and upper classes in the early twentieth century, it is a significant architectural landmark in Milwaukee.

Notes:

¹The period of significance is the date of construction since this building is being nominated for architecture only.

²Building Permit File, City of Milwaukee, Municipal Building, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

³Ibid.

⁴Landscape Research, Built in Milwaukee, Milwaukee: City of Milwaukee, no date, pp. 184, 186.

⁵Les Vollmert, Carlen Hatala, and Robin Wenger, Final Report Central Business District Historic Resources Survey, Milwaukee: City of Milwaukee Department of City Development, March, 1986, pp. 47-48; "Developer Sells the Knickerbocker," Milwaukee Journal, 1 January 1978, on file in the "Hotel" clipping file at the Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Milwaukee City Directory for 1931, Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

⁶Vollmert, et. al., pp. 47-48.

⁷Milwaukee City Directories, Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Architect's Files, Preservation Planner's Office, Department of City Development, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Building Permit File, City of Milwaukee, Municipal Building, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
"Developer Sells the Knickerbocker." Milwaukee Journal, 1 January 1978. On file in the "Hotel" clipping file at the Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
Landscape Research. Built in Milwaukee. Milwaukee: City of Milwaukee, no date.
Milwaukee City Directories. Milwaukee Public Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
Vollmert, Les, Carlen Hatala, and Robin Wenger. Final Report Central Business District Historic Resources Survey. Milwaukee: City of Milwaukee Department of City Development, March, 1986.

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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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one

UTM References

A 16 426780 4766090
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The west 25.50 feet of Lot 2 and all of Lots 3, 4, 5 and 6 in Eastman's Subdivision of the Quarter Blocks 21, 22, 23 and 24 in the East 1/2 of the SW 1/4 of Section 21, T 7 N, R 22 E in the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the intact portion of the property lot historically associated with the Knickerbocker Hotel. The verbal boundary description is the historic legal description of the building prior to a portion being divided into condominiums. Each condominium has an individual legal description, but for clarity, the historic description was used above.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carol Lohry Cartwright, Historian date March 1, 1988
 organization Consultant street & number R. 2, 5581A Hackett Rd. telephone (414) 473-6820
 city or town Whitewater state WI zip code 53190

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KNICKERBOCKER HOTEL, 1028 E. Juneau Ave.,
Milwaukee, Milwaukee Co., WI. Photos by
C. Cartwright, November, 1987. Negs. at
the State Historical Society of Wisconsin,
Madison, Wisconsin.

Photo #1 of 5: Site view, from the
southeast.

Photo #2 of 5: Front facade view from
the southeast.

Photo #3 of 5: View from the southwest.

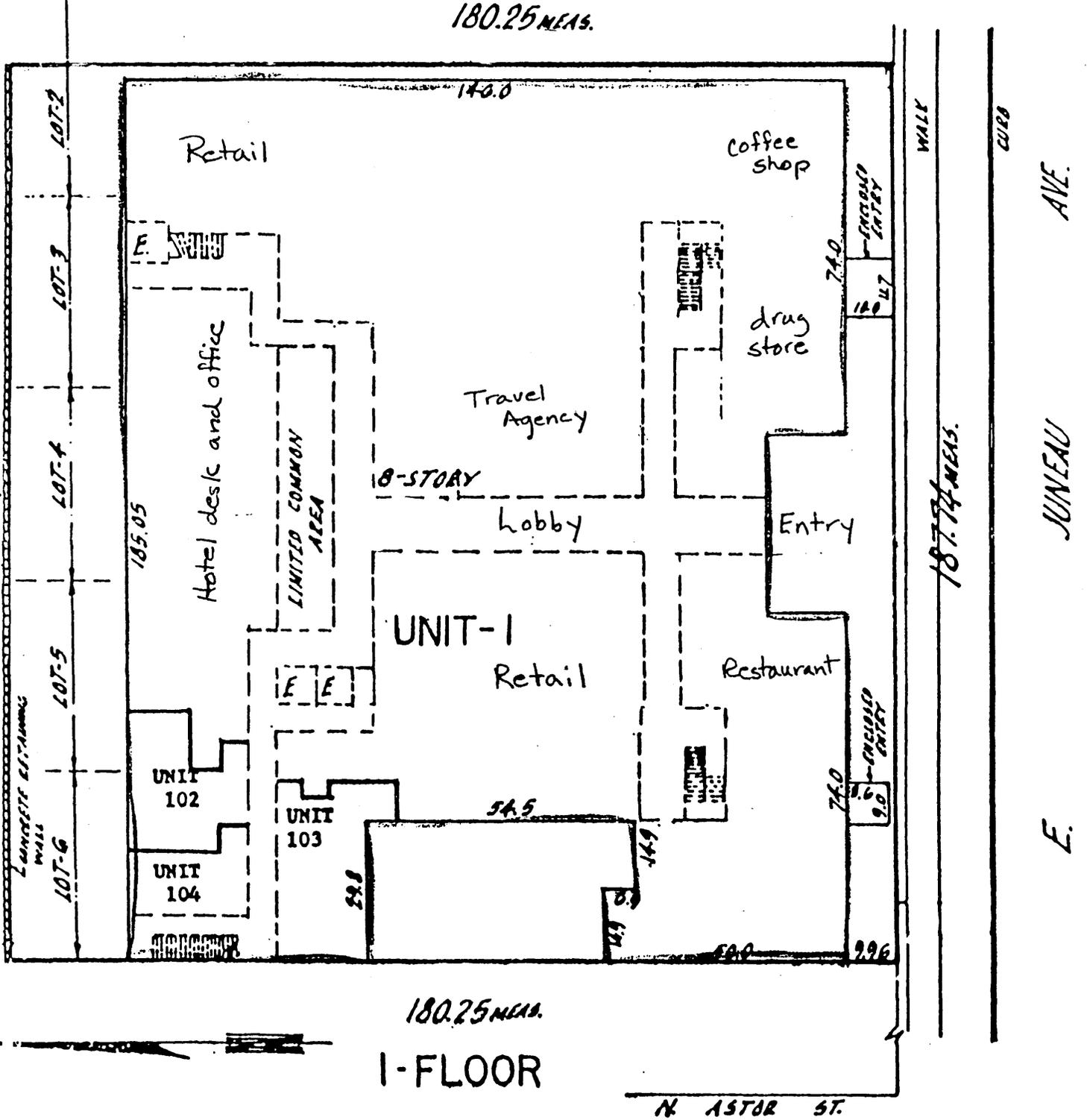
Photo #4 of 5: Front facade view from
the southwest.

Photo #5 of 5: Close-up of the main
entrance, view from the south.

KNICKERBOCKER HOTEL
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Figure 1

180.25 MEAS.



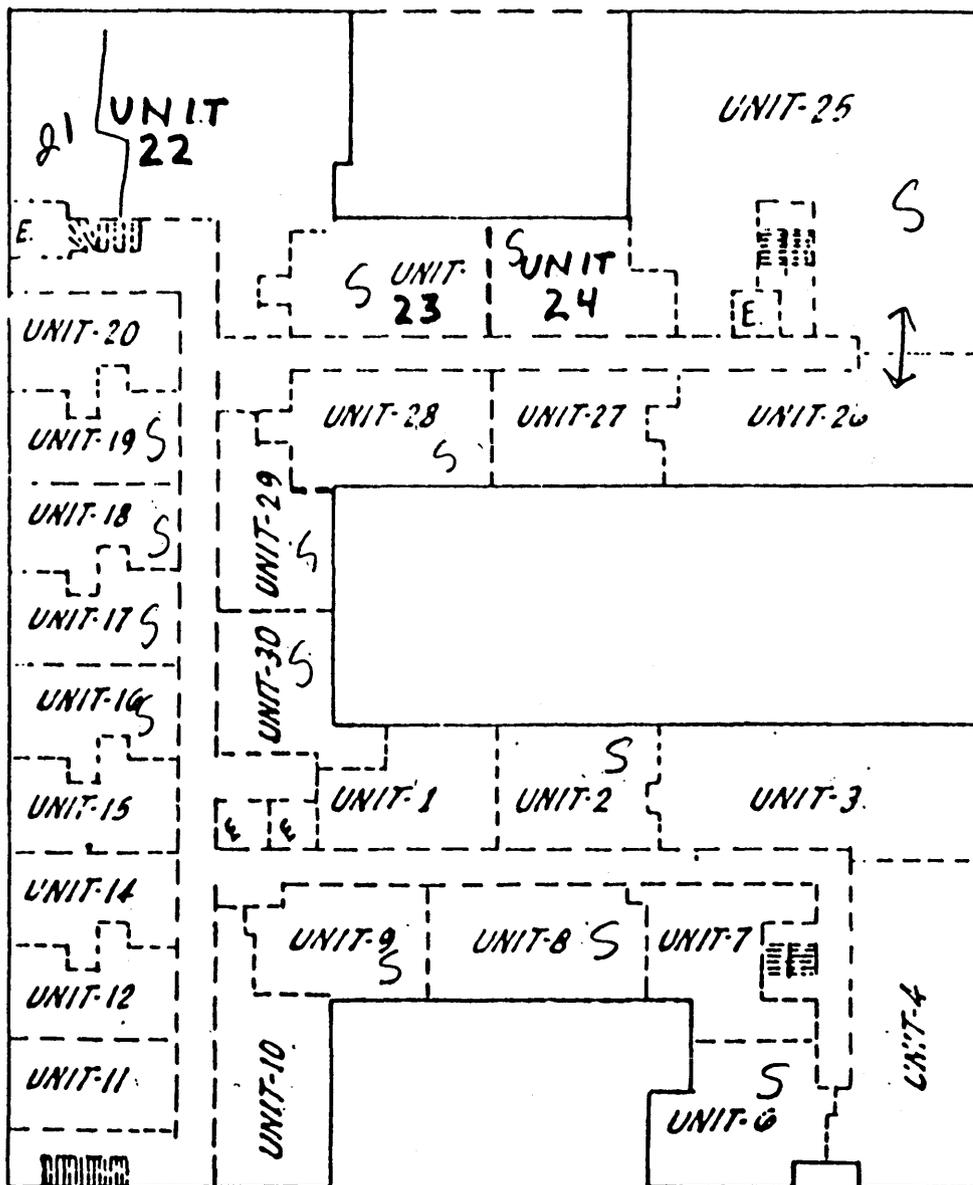
180.25 MEAS.
1-FLOOR

N. ASTOR ST.

E. JUNEAU AVE.

KNICKERBOCKER HOTEL
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Figure 2



4th. FLOOR

NOT TO SCALE