

PH 0662577

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 10 1978
DATE ENTERED JUL 24 1978

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
 AND/OR COMMON
COLUMBIAN MUTUAL TOWER
LINCOLN AMERICAN TOWER

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
60 N. MAIN ST. (MID-AMERICA MALL) ___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CITY, TOWN
MEMPHIS VICINITY OF CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
STATE
TENNESSEE CODE 47 COUNTY SHELBY CODE 157 ✓

3 CLASSIFICATION

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

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
LINCOLN AMERICAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
STREET & NUMBER
LINCOLN AMERICAN TOWER
CITY, TOWN
MEMPHIS VICINITY OF STATE
TENNESSEE 38103

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
SHELBY COUNTY REGISTER
STREET & NUMBER
SHELBY COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING, 160 N. MAIN ST.
CITY, TOWN
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38103

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
TENNESSEE HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY
DATE
JANUARY 1978 ___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
TENNESSEE HISTORICAL COMMISSION
CITY, TOWN
NASHVILLE STATE
TENNESSEE

7 DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Columbian Mutual Tower, more recently known as the Lincoln American Tower, stands on the Mid-America Mall (formerly Main Street) at the northwest corner of Court Square in downtown Memphis. Built in 1924, the twenty-two story skyscraper was the tallest building in West Tennessee and remains one of the most prominent landmarks on the Memphis skyline. Its architectural significance is derived from its prominent site, elegant ornamented facades, fine materials, and distinctive massing. Commissioned to house the headquarters of the Columbian Mutual Life Assurance Society, the building was conceived by the company's president, Lloyd T. Binford, who was nationally known as the controversial chief of Memphis' censor board.

Although no longer the tallest building on the Memphis skyline, the Columbian Mutual Tower stands out among its higher, newer neighbors by virtue of its distinctive set-back massing and human scale. From its strategic site, anchoring the corner of Court Square, it commands the approach from both the north and the south along the Mall. Rising high above the adjacent buildings on both its north and east sides, it firmly terminates the rows of facades lining both the Mall and Court Avenue. Its substantial mass, bold vertical emphasis, and shining white terra cotta facade effectively contrast with its lower, darker neighbors. The building thus emphasizes its role as the gateway to Court Square, the city's principal urban open space.

With its eclectic touches of Renaissance ornamentation, the building is the finest local example of the Commercial Gothic style. Its design may well have been influenced by the Woolworth Building of 1913, which it resembles. The overall massing of the Columbian Mutual Tower is divided into three parts, decreasing in floor area with increasing height in accordance with the zoning ordinances of the day. The lowermost fourteen stories comprise a massive base, measuring approximately 75 feet x 77 feet, which is capped by a tile covered mansard roof, punctuated by arched dormer windows and torch-shaped finials. Rising out of this base is an eight story tower, measuring approximately 35 feet square. The tower steps back slightly at the twentieth floor. At its summit the tower is terminated by a steeply pitched gothic roof, sheathed in copper, with dormer windows and torch finials. The roof is crowned by a delicate, wrought iron railed cupola which supports a high-flying flag which has long been a local landmark. From the Mall to the roof of the cupola is a height of 288 feet 9 inches.

The entire building is sheathed in cream satin white enameled terra cotta, except for the lower portions of the north and east facades, which are faced with white enameled brick. A five foot high base course of gray Indiana oolitic limestone wraps around the west and south facades.

On the west, or Mall, facade is located the main entrance. The entrance is flanked by two large, ornate, bronze gothic lanterns. The original pedimented doorway, with its cast iron columns and bronze revolving door, has been replaced by a green granite entrance facade and glass swinging doors. On either side of the main entrance the original Renaissance style doorways affording access to the ground floor commercial space have also been replaced with conventional aluminum store-front doors and

Continued

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Baggett, Hugh, Interview by James F. Williamson, Jr., December 16, 1977.

Boyer and Baum, Architects and Engineers, Saint Louis, Mo., "Columbian-Mutual Life Tower", architectural working drawings, revised June 1, 1923.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .13 acre (*Barham 5.12.78*)

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 5	7, 6, 8, 5, 7, 9	3, 8, 9, 3, 1, 0, 4	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the intersection of the eastern side or line of Main Street with the North side or line of North Court Avenue (the Avenue running on the North boundary of Court Square); running thence eastwardly with North Court Avenue 74 feet to an alley; thence northwardly parallel with Main Street, 76½ feet; thence westwardly in a direct line 74 feet to the eastern line of Main Street; thence with the eastern line of Main Street southwardly to the beginning.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James F. Williamson, Jr., Architect

December 21, 1977

ORGANIZATION

James F. Williamson, Jr., Architect

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

2004 Lincoln American Tower

TELEPHONE

(901) 526-2800

CITY OR TOWN

Memphis, Tennessee 38103

STATE

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Herbert L. Hays

TITLE

Executive Director

DATE

2/7/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Charles Sturges
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 ATTEST: *William Cole*
 LEADER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE *7.24.78*
 REGISTERED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER
 DATE *6.29.78*

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windows. Above the main entrance, however, the original plate glass fenestration, framed in terra cotta, remains intact, expressing the two-story entrance lobby within. At the second story level the fenestration is interrupted by a horizontal terra cotta spandrel featuring a large clock, flanked by a bas-relief. Around the clock face, which is inscribed "Columbian Mutual Life, 1903-1923", are arranged the figures of two women and two children, clad in classical drapery. The models for these figures were three of the children of company president Lloyd T. Binford and the son of secretary George W. Clayton. On either side of these figures are two wreaths with plaques bearing the bywords "Security" and "Protection". The entire entrance is contained within a segmented arched terra cotta frame, crowned by a terra cotta balustrade at the fourth floor line, below which is an ornamental cartouche, emblazoned with the initials "CML".

The fenestration of the first floor, on the west and south facades, consists of two-story high plate glass windows, interrupted by steel spandrels. (Originally painted green to match the tile of the roofs, all exterior window frames were painted white as part of a major remodeling in 1965.) Above these windows is the first of several decorated terra cotta cornices. This first cornice, featuring rinceau ornamentation, originally matched the cornice heights of the adjacent buildings to the north and east. Similar cornices occur at the fourth and twelfth floor lines. At the fourteenth and twentieth floor levels are more elaborate cornices, ornamented with delicate carved crests, cartouches, and swags. Resting on these cornices are large terra cotta torch finials.

Beginning at the fifth story and extending the full height of the fourteen story base is a multi-story light well, opening on the east facade. Designed to afford natural light to the inner offices at these levels, the U-shaped floor plan also made possible cross-ventilation by opening the austral windows and transoms above office doors, allowing fresh air to flow through the building interior.

The building structure consists of steel beams and columns, encased in concrete for fire protection. Below the concrete foundations are extensive concrete pilings. The mechanical system consists of steam radiators throughout the building, powered by the two original boilers. Central air-conditioning is provided for the offices in the lower fourteen stories, with a large central cooling tower located on the roof of the fourteenth floor. It was from this location, prior to World War II, that the well-known Columbian Mutual carillon chimed the quarter hours and rendered occasional bell concerts. The upper floors are served by three automatic electric elevators which have replaced the original manually operated gearless traction models. In addition, a hydraulic sidewalk elevator provides service to the basement from the Court Square sidewalk.

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From the main entrance on the Mall, access is afforded to the lobby with its 25 foot ceiling and second story balcony, reached by the winding monumental stair. The wrought iron railing of the stair features a design which includes the CML initials. The lobby floor, walls, and stair are of Tennessee marble. The original coffered plaster ceiling has been partially remodeled with a bright red fabric covering. The original chandelier, however, remains intact. The overall scale of the lobby retains a unique intimacy and sense of human scale which characterizes the entire building and sets the Columbian Mutual Tower apart from the often scaleless quality of many modern high rise commercial office buildings.

The first and second floors consist of leasable office space which has been remodeled with acoustic suspended ceilings and lay-in fluorescent light fixtures, as have many of the offices on the upper floors. The entire third and fourth floors are occupied by the International Order of Odd Fellows. The organization's club rooms consist of a library, lounges, kitchen, billiards room, and a two story Lodge Hall, measuring approximately 39 feet x 53 feet, located in the northeast corner of the building. The Hall is illuminated by full height windows along the east wall. From the fourth floor, a second meeting room and the billiards room overlook the main Hall from balconies fitted with folding shutters. The remaining floors of the building's base are, for the most part, occupied by the Lincoln American Life Insurance Company. The building was the first in the city to feature an innovative office floor plan which grouped a series of small private offices around a central secretarial pool and reception area.

Above the fourteenth story, floors fifteen through twenty consist of a central elevator and stair lobby with groups of offices on the north and south sides. The twenty-first floor, now used as the Lincoln American board room, was originally the private office of Lloyd T. Binford. The office was paneled in wood, with a moulded plaster ceiling and marble floor. It included a private restroom equipped with a shower. The board room features a spectacular view in all directions of Memphis and the Mississippi River. Contained in the attic space above the twenty-first floor are the elevator machinery and the main water supply tank. A spiral stair leads to a trap door which opens onto the cupola at the summit of the tower.

With the exception of the alterations referred to above, the original interior finishes remain largely intact. These include pink marble corridor floors and toilet room partitions, birch and oak door trim, and brass finish hardware. The building has been meticulously maintained over the years and is generally in excellent condition considering its age.

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Boyer and Baum, Architects and Engineers, Saint Louis, Mo., "Specifications of the Materials to Be Furnished and the Labor to Be Performed in the Erection and Completion of the Columbian Mutual Life Tower".

Boyer, Baum and Company, Architects and Engineers, Saint Louis, Mo., "Report on a Proposed Building Development on the I.O.O.F. Site for The Columbian Mutual Life Assurance Society".

Columbian Mutual Tower, Rent Record Book

"Law Firm in Columbian Tower was First In, Now Highest Up", The Press-Scimitar, November 16, 1940.

Lease between Odd Fellows Hall and Library Association and F. B. Hunter and B. J. Campbell, January 28, 1914.

Lincoln American Tower, Plaque attached to south facade of building.

"Lloyd Binford Dies: Famed as Censor", The Press-Scimitar, August 27, 1956.

"Lloyd T. Binford Dies at 89; Famed Censor's Rites Today", The Commercial Appeal, August 28, 1956.

"New Name, Lights on Skyline", The Press-Scimitar, August 18, 1965.

"News of Bygone Days, 50 Years Ago: August 19, 1922", The Commercial Appeal, August 19, 1972.

"Secretarial Offices Finding Wide Favor", The Commercial Appeal, September 26, 1932.

"22-Story Skyscraper on N. Court and Main Will Cost \$1,000,000", The Commercial Appeal, August 27, 1922.