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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

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 an 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 Gibson Company Building

other names/site number _____ 098-296-01514

2. Location

street & number 433-447 North Capitol Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Indianapolis N/A vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Marion code 097 zip code 46204

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 A. Hester
Signature of certifying official/Title

4/24/2009
Date

Indiana Department of Natural Resources
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 certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- See continuation sheet

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

6-17-09
Date of Action

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Gibson Company Building
Name of Property

Marion County, IN
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- 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
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	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: Specialty Store
Industry: Manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: Business

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements: Chicago
Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals: Italian Renaissance

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls BRICK
TERRA COTTA
roof OTHER: SYNTHETIC W/ GRAVEL
other CONCRETE

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

See continuation sheet.

Gibson Company Building
Name of Property

Marion County, IN
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the 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, 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.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the 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 grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significant within the past 50 years.

Areas of significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY /
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1917-1958

Significant Dates

1917

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bass, Herbert L. & Co.

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more 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.)

- Previous documentation on file (NPS):**
- preliminary determination if 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: _____

Gibson Company Building
Name of Property

Marion County, IN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	6	5	7	1	8	6	0	4	4	0	3	0	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Zone Easting Northing

3

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Zone Easting Northing

2

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

4

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia M. Smith and Ben L. Ross

organization RATIO Architects, Inc. date _____

street & number 107 S. Pennsylvania telephone 317-633-4040

city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46204-3684

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name American United Life Insurance Company

street & number One American Square, P.O. Box 368 telephone 317-285-1974

city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46206-0368

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance to the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding the burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

Section 7 – Architectural Description

The Gibson Company Building, located at 433-447 North Capitol Avenue in downtown Indianapolis, is one of the largest remaining automobile industry-related buildings in Indianapolis and contains one of the most ornate automobile showrooms in the city. The building was designed by the Indianapolis architectural firm of Herbert L. Bass and Company and constructed in 1916-1917. Architect, Frank Hunter, completed later renovations to the building. It is a five-story structure with a full basement with six bays facing North Capitol Avenue (west) and nine bays facing West Michigan Street (north). Sanborn Insurance maps describe the building as fireproof construction, consisting of a reinforced concrete frame, floors and roof with brick and terra cotta curtain walls. Originally, new car sales and service were on the first floor with used car sales and service on the second floor. Offices were located on the western end of the third floor while the remainder of the third and the entire fourth floor was used for auto accessories and parts and the entire fifth floor was used as a workshop. The basement housed the boiler room and coal room as well as tire and miscellaneous storage. Vertical circulation through the building included three auto-sized elevators, a passenger elevator, a dumb-waiter, and two stairways. The second floor was also accessed via a ramp off the Michigan Street elevation.

The design of the building's primary elevations facing Capitol Avenue (west) and Michigan Street (north) are identical (image 20). The facades feature large windows consistent with the Chicago School movement and are articulated with Italian Renaissance detail. The first floor is clad in white terra cotta with columns separating the fenestration bays (image 01). The storefront lintels are articulated as flat arches, formed by gauged terra cotta units. An architrave or continuous sill of moulded terra cotta blocks runs atop the storefront lintels. The bays, which originally featured Kawneer storefronts (a popular brand of metal-frame storefront system of the day) and bi-fold garage doors were replaced in the past with wood panel infills, aluminum storefronts or modern overhead garage doors. They have recently been updated with storefront systems that are historically sensitive and approximate the original fenestration pattern at

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

street level (image 08). The second, third and fourth floors are clad in red brick with terra cotta sills at the window openings. Vertical brick piers between the windows have brick seams that imply projecting pilasters running through these floors. While the second and third floors have no lintel treatment, fourth floor windows have brick flat arches with staggered header-stretcher courses. The original windows consisted of triple sets of triple-hung, three-light steel sash windows. Historic photographs indicate that the second-floor windows on the west façade differed from the other windows in their lack of vertical muntins, being single-light, triple-hung windows. In past renovations, the majority of the windows had been removed and were replaced with fixed glazing in anodized aluminum frames, with some of the openings being down-sized. The most recent renovation installed a modern window system, but the original triple-hung design was replicated (image 15). The fifth floor is clad with white terra cotta with red brick inset panels continuing the vertical fenestration lines. The fifth floor base is a heavy terra cotta architrave belt that serves as a continuous window sill. In the past, all of the vertical muntins on the fifth floor windows had been removed creating single-light sash appearance. The original fenestration pattern was restored in the most recent renovation. A flat roof, trimmed with bracketed terra cotta ornament (image 09), caps the building. The elaborate entablature is composed of a deep architrave/window lintel, topped by a plain frieze, then a dentil course, egg and dart moulding, and then a small cornice with console-brackets. The fascia of this cornice is fluted and alternating circular fleurons and palmette disks align with each console. Corners have raised palmette antefixes.

While the design and materials of the primary elevations wrap one bay deep onto the east (image 06) and south elevations (image 02), the remainder of the east elevation, fronting Muskinghum Street, a city alley, and the south elevation, expose the building's structural system of reinforced concrete frame with brick and terra cotta curtain walls. The east elevation was at one time covered by an exterior insulation material altering this appearance, but has since been restored (image 03). The southern five bays of the first floor on the east elevation once had several loading dock platforms and automobile-sized doors. The platforms have been removed and the openings have been filled in. A service entrance is located in the

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

third bay from the north. Windows on this elevation, with the exception of the northernmost bay, were multi-light industrial steel sash with operable vents, all of which were at one time replaced by fixed glazing in anodized aluminum frames. They have since been restored to a multi-light industrial model comparable to the original design (image 07). On the south elevation (image 04), with the exception of the westernmost bay, the majority of the bays were originally filled with brick and terra cotta panels with smaller areas of industrial steel glazing. These windows were later infilled. In the most recent renovation, they were reopened and triple-hung windows were installed. A one-bay-deep light well centered (image 05) on this elevation originally contained the same multi-light industrial steel sash with operable vents as on the east elevation. The appearance of these original windows has also been replicated with new window systems.

With the exception of the new car sales room on the first floor and the offices on the third floor, the building's structural system and materials were exposed throughout the interior. Floors were exposed concrete, walls were painted brick or terra cotta block, and ceilings were exposed concrete. The round concrete columns featured "mushroom cap" capitals. The first floor sales room and sundries spaces featured tiled floors, plastered walls and coved plaster ceilings spanning between round and square columns with decorative capitals. The third floor office space had a mastic floor covering, painted plaster or wood office partition walls and painted plaster ceiling.

Over the years, the interior of the building has been reconfigured and subdivided to accommodate the various businesses and tenants. The basement is currently used for tenant storage and mechanical systems. The mushroom capital columns remain on this level (image 10). The basement floors are concrete slab. The main entrance to the building is through the light well on the southern façade (image 11). This gives access to the elevators (image 14). The round and square columns with decorative capitals and groin vaulted plaster ceilings remain on the first floor (image 12), as do remnants of the tile floor surfaces. The ramp off Michigan Street has been removed in its entirety and over the years, all

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 4

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

vestiges of the third floor offices have been removed. The second and third floors are currently used as office space for OneAmerica. Minimal walls have been added for offices and a conference room (image 16). The majority of the space is filled with portable cubicle systems. The rounded and square columns remain throughout on the second (image 13) through fifth floors (image 18). A raised access floor system (image 17 and image 19) has been installed on the second through fifth floors for interstitial building system space to enable the ceilings to remain visible and unencumbered. This system raises the floor level one-and-a-half feet. This difference in height is visible in the stairwells. Currently, the first, fourth and fifth floors are unfinished depending on future tenant requirements.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 5

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

Section 8 - Statement of Significance

The Gibson Company Building is significant under Criterion A, being associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (the rise of the automobile industry in Indianapolis) and under Criterion C, embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction (early automobile industry buildings and the work of Herbert L. Bass).

The Gibson Company Building is significant for its role as an automobile dealership and automobile parts distributor located on what was known as "Automobile Row" in Indianapolis. The building is architecturally significant, being the work of noted Indianapolis architect Herbert L. Bass, who was responsible for many other automobile industry garage and sales buildings.¹

On February 28, 2006, the National Park Service determined that the building "appears to meet the National Register Criteria for Evaluation and will likely be listed in the National Register of Historic Places if nominated by the State Historic Preservation Officer according to the procedures set forth in 36 CFR Part 60."

¹ Herbert L. Bass and Company, Construction Documents for the "Service & Sales Bldg. For the Gibson Co.," (Indianapolis, Indiana: December 7, 1916).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 6

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

History of the Automotive Industry in Indianapolis:

The 1984 Indianapolis Auto Industry Thematic Resources National Register nomination established the significance of Indianapolis as a “national center of automobile manufacturing and sales; automobile parts manufacturing and sales; automobile testing, research and development; and automotive industry leadership for the turn of the century until the Great Depression.”² The manufacture of automobiles, automobile parts and the sale of automobiles was an important part of the city’s industrial development in the first half of the twentieth century.

Until the late nineteenth century, Indianapolis’ industrial importance was primarily agricultural in nature—slaughtering and meatpacking being the number one industry in 1890. Growth in Indianapolis during this period was greatly influenced by the industrial advantages that a large railroad center provided.³ Indianapolis experienced benefits from the Gas Boom of the 1880s and 1890s, following the discovery of the nation’s largest natural gas field (five thousand square miles) centered around Muncie, roughly fifty miles to the northeast. This boom period ushered in what has been retrospectively called Indiana’s “golden age,” lasting through the first World War.⁴ It was a period of rapid industrialization and spectacular technological progress. Indiana cities were served by rapid electric transit systems, a high-speed interurban light-rail network covered the state more comprehensively than any other in the nation, and Hoosier capitalism boomed.⁵ It was also during this period that Indiana writers like James Whitcomb Riley, Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, George Barr McCutcheon, and Gene Stratton Porter topped the national best-seller charts while T. C. Steele and other painters of the “Hoosier Group” of impressionists achieved notoriety. “It was an era of good feeling, good living,” an age of unbridled

² Indianapolis Auto Industry Thematic Resources National Register Nomination, 1984-1986. Note: Nomination on file at Indiana DNR-DHPA; not accepted by National Register/NPS.

³ Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 1 prepared by Ratio Architects, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana. January 9, 2006.

⁴ John Barlow Martin, *Indiana: An Interpretation*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1947) 90.

⁵ Martin 90.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 7

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

optimism in which the Indianapolis automobile industry emerged.⁶ In 1928, a report from the Bureau of the Census covering the years 1899 to 1923 noted that “no considerable line of manufacture has shown so phenomenal an increase as the manufacture of automobiles.”⁷

At the end of the nineteenth century, the manufacture of carriages and wagons was the city’s seventh leading industry and was ranked a close second in the national market, producing 13.5% of the nation’s total. The manufacture of agricultural implements and equipment also accounted for a substantial part of the city’s industrial production.⁸ Bicycle manufacturing flourished in Indianapolis during the “Bicycle Craze” of the 1890s, becoming a million-dollar industry by 1900. As the bicycle craze faded in the late-1890s, some local bicycle manufacturers switched over to producing automobiles—the next big national fad. During the period from 1899-1904 bicycle production fell nationally by nearly 80% while automobile manufacture grew by more than 350%. Between 1899-1923 bicycle manufacture declined by 56% and automobile production grew by an astounding 77,048%.⁹ Indianapolis manufacturers produced 2,100 automobiles in 1905; 11,000 in 1911; 12,275 in 1912; and 16,400 in 1913—a 680% increase in eight years.¹⁰ The automobile industry was widely credited with reviving the city’s economy during the decade of 1900-1910, becoming the third industry in the city in number of employees and value of product by 1910.¹¹ In 1911, Indianapolis manufacturers produced approximately 5% of the automobiles built in North America.¹² In 1913 there were twelve auto manufacturers in Indianapolis, twenty-three

⁶ Martin 90.

⁷ Edmund E. Day and Woodlief Thomas, *The Growth of Manufactures 1899 to 1923* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928) 75.

⁸ Indianapolis Auto Industry Thematic Resources National Register Nomination, 1984-1986, 11.

⁹ Edmund E. Day and Woodlief Thomas, *The Growth of Manufactures 1899 to 1923* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1928) 189.

¹⁰ “Growth of Automobile Industry Here Places Indianapolis in Front Rank,” *Indianapolis Star* (October 23, 1913), 4.

¹¹ Robert Graham Barrows, *A Demographic Analysis of Indianapolis 1870-1920*, PhD. dissertation (Indiana University, 1977) 286.

¹² Indianapolis Auto Industry Thematic Resources National Register Nomination, 1984-1986, 13.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 8

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

automobile-related manufacturers, and eighty auto dealerships.¹³ During the 1910s and early-1920s, automobile manufacturing in Indianapolis remained second only to meat packing in annual value of product.¹⁴ Up through the first World War, Indianapolis' auto industry was equal to that of Cleveland and Detroit.¹⁵

From the 1890s up until about 1908, the automobile served primarily a toy for the wealthy and "motoring" was viewed as a sport. Early, pre-assembly-line automobiles were very expensive and plagued by mechanical problems, making them ill-suited as a means of regular transportation. Despite these issues, the American public was fascinated by the automobile.¹⁶ Bicycle dealer and promoter Carl G. Fisher realized the significance of this new trend and by 1900 had converted his Indianapolis bicycle shop into one of the first automobile dealerships in the state. In 1903, Fisher built a building at 330 N. Illinois Street for his auto dealership—the first purpose-built automobile sales building in the city. In 1905, C. G. Fisher & Company became the Fisher Automobile Company. Soon after, Fisher purchased expensive and exclusive residential property at the northwest corner of Capitol Avenue and Vermont Street, one block from the Illinois Street location, to expand his auto dealership in what would soon become Indianapolis' "Automobile Row"—several blocks of auto dealerships.¹⁷ Fisher's wife Jane recalled that her husband's vision for "Automobile Row" was initially regarded as "typical Fisher craziness."¹⁸ Stores along the street carried not only automobiles and automobile parts, but also

¹³ "Growth of Automobile Industry Here Places Indianapolis in Front Rank," *Indianapolis Star* (October 23, 1913), 4; Indianapolis Board of Trade, *Annual Report* (Indianapolis, 1920) 45, 47.

¹⁴ Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, Bureau of Industry, "Approved Progress Chart #4," *Annual Report* (Indianapolis: 1925) 56, 57.

¹⁵ Indianapolis Auto Industry Thematic Resources National Register Nomination, 1984-1986, 13.

¹⁶ Charles Panati, *Panati's Parade of Fads, Follies, and Manias: The Origins of Our Most Cherished Obsessions* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991) 62-65.

¹⁷ Jerry M. Fisher, *The Pacesetter: The Untold Story of Carl G. Fisher* (Ft. Bragg, Cal.: Lost Coast Press, 1998) 18.

¹⁸ Jane Fisher, *Fabulous Hoosier: A Story of American Achievement* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1947) 27.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 9

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

accessories such as motoring veils for ladies.¹⁹ Carl Fisher, a genius in the art of promotion, had been known to push cars off the roofs of buildings to prove their durability (a stunt he started with bicycles in the 1890s) and, in 1908, flew over Indianapolis in a white Stoddard-Dayton automobile attached to a red hot air balloon. At that time, Fisher was a popular hero to local school children and regarded by many citizens of Indianapolis as “the automobile tycoon who was helping to put Indiana on the map.”²⁰ The idea of transforming a quiet residential street near the state capitol into a center of automobile sales seemed far-fetched to many at the time, as it was located outside the core of the city’s commercial district.

Automobile-related businesses on Capitol Avenue and nearby streets flourished as the Indianapolis auto industry grew. Over 100 different automobile brands were manufactured in Indiana in the early-twentieth-century. The most successful included Apperson, Auburn, Duesenberg, Empire, Haynes, Marmon, Studebaker, Stutz, and Waverly Electric.²¹ By 1905 there were seven automobile manufacturers in Indianapolis accounting for 36% of the City’s total value of products produced.²² During the first decade of the twentieth century, Indianapolis raced to become the nation’s automobile manufacturing center, in fierce rivalry with Detroit, Michigan. In 1909, Carl G. Fisher, James A. Allison (Allison Engineering), Frank H. Wheeler (Wheeler-Schebler Carburetor Co.), and Arthur C. Newby (National Motor Vehicle Company) built the Indianapolis Motor Speedway to lure auto manufacturers to the city. All three were former bicycle enthusiasts who had been members of the Zig-Zag Cycling Club in the 1890s.²³ The speedway was intended as a testing facility as well as a means of generating publicity through competitive racing. Duesenberg, Marmon, Cole, and a few other manufacturers used the track to

¹⁹ Jane Fisher, *Fabulous Hoosier: A Story of American Achievement* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1947) 5.

²⁰ Jane Fisher, *Fabulous Hoosier: A Story of American Achievement* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1947) 3.

²¹ Jerry M. Fisher, *The Pacesetter: The Untold Story of Carl G. Fisher* (Ft. Bragg, Cal.: Lost Coast Press, 1998) 42.

²² Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part I prepared by Ratio Architects

²³ Jerry M. Fisher, *The Pacesetter: The Untold Story of Carl G. Fisher* (Ft. Bragg, Cal.: Lost Coast Press, 1998) 9-11. Jane Fisher, *Fabulous Hoosier: A Story of American Achievement* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1947) 24.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 10

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

road-test their products.²⁴ In 1910, Fisher arranged the nation's first aviation meet at the Speedway, featuring the Wright brothers.²⁵ After some initial difficulties, Fisher inaugurated the first 500-mile race in 1911 as a means of generating more income and publicity from the Speedway. The rise of the Indianapolis 500 focused even greater attention on Indianapolis and helped popularize the automobile nationally.²⁶

The large houses along Capitol Avenue were rapidly demolished and replaced by service garages and glass-fronted automobile showrooms. By 1915 there were more than twenty garages and other automobile-related businesses in the three blocks of Capitol Avenue between New York and North Streets comprising "Automobile Row."²⁷ This very development was captured by Indianapolis novelist Booth Tarkington in his trilogy *Growth*, consisting of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918, Pulitzer Prize 1919), *The Turmoil* (1915), and *The Midlander* (1923, later retitled *National Avenue*). Over the course of the three novels, the quiet, friendly "midland city" (Indianapolis) is transformed into a polluted, anonymous industrial metropolis. Tarkington particularly laments the demolition of the late-nineteenth-century upper-middle-class neighborhoods with tree-lined streets—home to the old, established families—for brazen glass-fronted commercial show-rooms and apartment-houses.²⁸ Though not specifically named, Capitol Avenue's "Automobile Row" is a clear inspiration for and symbol of much of the urban transformation Tarkington describes.

Detroit overtook Indianapolis and all other competitors as the nation's automobile manufacturing center in 1920. The gigantic automobile manufacturers of Detroit—most notably Ford—had concentrated on

²⁴ Indianapolis Auto Industry Thematic Resources National Register Nomination, 1984-1986, 15.

²⁵ Jane Fisher, *Fabulous Hoosier: A Story of American Achievement* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1947) 24.

²⁶ Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 1 prepared by Ratio Architects.

²⁷ Sanborn Map Co., *Indianapolis, Indiana* (insurance maps) 1898-1915; see also John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004) 117-118.

²⁸ Booth Tarkington, *The Turmoil* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1915); *The Magnificent Ambersons* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1918); *The Midlander* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 11

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

cheap vehicles for the mass market while Indianapolis companies had continued to focus on high-end vehicles. In 1920 the post-war recession set in, causing a rapid decline in the demand for high-end automobiles. Expensive luxury automobile brands such as Duesenberg, Lafayette, Marmon, and Stutz continued to be produced in Indianapolis for several years but all had closed by the late-1930s. After the decline in automobile manufacturing, automobile-related industries remained a strong force in the city. Capitol Avenue remained a center of automobile sales and service for Indianapolis through the mid-twentieth-century. During the last half of the twentieth century, most of the buildings comprising "Automobile Row" were demolished. As of 2008, only four buildings directly associated with the automobile industry remain along this stretch of Capitol Avenue, the Gibson Company Building being both the largest and most intact.

History and Chronology of the Property:

The Gibson Company of Indianapolis was established by Cecil E. Gibson in 1898 as a bicycle shop. Gibson, like Fisher, Allison, Newby, Duesenberg, and many other pioneers of Indianapolis auto industry, had started out in bicycles. With the rise of the automobile industry, the Gibson Company became chiefly concerned with the distribution of automotive accessories. The Gibson Auto Company, a separate venture, was established in 1900 by Cecil E. Gibson, E. M. Gibson, and C. Bauer.²⁹

In 1911, Gibson merged his business with that of Carl G. Fisher, to form the Fisher-Gibson Company, located at 424 N. Capitol Avenue, next door to the Fisher Automobile Company. The company was organized with \$50,000 in stock and planned to manufacture automobiles and accessories.³⁰ In 1912,

²⁹ E. E. Schwartzkopf, *International Motor Cyclopedica* (New York: Automobile Topics, 1908) 211.

³⁰ Beverly Rae Kimes, et. al. *Standard Catalog of American Cars, 1805-1942* (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 1996) 1451.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 12

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

after 18 months in business, Fisher withdrew from the Fisher-Gibson Company to devote himself to Prest-O-Lite (an acetylene auto headlight system) and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, being president of both companies. *Automobile* magazine called this “probably the most important change that has taken place among motor car dealers in many years.”³¹ The Fisher-Gibson Company had not manufactured anything but had served as distributors for Overland, Stearns, Alco, Stutz, Stoddard-Dayton, Empire, and Flanders Electric automobiles.³² In 1912, the firm name reverted to the Gibson Company and management passed to Joseph M. Bloch, Charles B. Sommers, and Aaron Waldheim.³³ Bloch came from Selma, Alabama to serve as secretary and manager of the Gibson Company, remaining until his retirement in 1968. He also formed the Atlas Manufacturing Company, an automobile parts export business that handled overseas requests sent to Carl Fisher.³⁴

Cecil E. Gibson served as president of the Empire Motor Car Company, an Indianapolis-based auto manufacturer founded by Carl G. Fisher, James A. Allison, Arthur C. Newby and Robert Hassler and in operation from 1909-1919. Harry C. Stutz worked as the designer and factory manager for Empire before leaving to establish the Ideal Motor Car Company in 1911—reorganized as the Stutz Motor Company in 1913.³⁵ Empire also operated a plant at Connersville, Indiana from 1912-1915. As of 1912, when the company was reorganized as the Empire Automobile Company with Gibson as president, it had stopped manufacturing automobiles to make Prest-O-Lite starters—a product associated with acetylene automobile headlight equipment made under a patent owned by Fisher and Allison’s Prest-O-Lite

³¹ *The Automobile: A Journal of Automobile Progress and Construction*, Vol. 26, June, 1912 (New York: The Class Journal Company) 831.

³² James L. Adams, “A White Elephant is Saved,” *Indianapolis Star* (May 15, 1977), Sec. 2, 19; *The Automobile: A Journal of Automobile Progress and Construction*, Vol. 26, 1912 (New York: The Class Journal Company), p.831

³³ Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 1 prepared by Ratio Architects; Indiana Historical Society, “Gibson Company: Historical Sketch” *Gibson Company (Indianapolis, Ind.) Records, 1895-1999*, available from http://www.indianahistory.org/Library/manuscripts/collection_guides/M0573.html; Internet; accessed 1 May 2008.

³⁴ “Country’s Oldest Auto Agency Located Here,” *Indianapolis Star* (February 12, 1954) 28, c. 2.

³⁵ David L. Baker, *Indianapolis-Marion County Automobile Industry, 1890-1940*, Historic context study and property type analysis (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, 1990) 11.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 13

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

Company (est. 1904).³⁶ In 1913 Union Carbide purchased Prest-O-Lite for \$9,000,000, one year before new electrical technology made gas headlamps and starters obsolete.³⁷ Gibson was also the president of the Madison Motors Corporation of Anderson, Indiana, active 1915-1919. Madison Motors later merged with the Bull Tractor Company of Indianapolis.³⁸

Drawings for a new five-story automobile factory for the Gibson Company, to be located at the southeast corner of Capitol Avenue and Michigan Street, were prepared by Indianapolis architect Herbert L. Bass in the summer of 1916. The new Gibson Company Building was designed to serve as an automobile assembly plant for Willys-Overland autos. The Overland Company had been established in 1903 at Terre Haute, Indiana, and relocated to Indianapolis in 1905, becoming a division of the Standard Wheel Company. Overland was purchased from Standard Wheel by John N. Willys in 1908 and became Willys-Overland in 1912. From 1912-1918, the Willys-Overland Motor Company was the second largest auto manufacturer in the United States, with only the Ford Motor Company being larger.

In 1915, the future site of the Gibson Company Building at 433-437 N. Capitol Avenue contained two single-family houses and a large mansard-roofed double house along Capitol Avenue, two alley-tenement doubles on Muskingum Street, and a row of five attached brick houses along Michigan Street. Around this time, the houses on the site were demolished and excavations dug, by hand, by crews from J. C. Douglas & Company. Dirt was hauled away in horse-drawn wagons, which also seem to have delivered most supplies. Photographs of the building under construction in 1916-1917 do not show any motor trucks, only horse-drawn wagons. The Bedford Stone Construction Company was the general contractor for the Gibson Company Building's construction. By January 1917, the reinforced concrete structure was up to the level of the second floor slab. The structure was complete and the exterior cladding finished up

³⁶ "Empire to be Reorganized," *Automobile* magazine, (Vol. 26, February 15, 1912) 489.

³⁷ Jerry M. Fisher, *The Pacesetter: The Untold Story of Carl G. Fisher* (Ft. Bragg, Cal.: Lost Coast Press, 1998) 32-33.

³⁸ *Motor West* (Los Angeles: Motor West Co., 1921).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 14

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

to the base of the fifth floor by May 1917. Photographs indicate that work on the plaster decoration of the sales room was underway at this time. By early June the exterior of the building was complete except for the installation of the storefront windows and reconstruction of the sidewalks. New concrete sidewalks were poured by the beginning of July and the storefront frames were in place, ready to receive the large plate glass windows. The building seems to have been completed in the late summer of 1917.

The Gibson Company Building was never used for auto manufacturing, as originally intended, but the Gibson Company continued to sell and distribute automobiles, automotive accessories, and later replacement parts.³⁹ In 1931 the Gibson Company's Capitol Motors dealership became a distributor of Plymouth and Hupmobile vehicles, in addition to Willys-Overland, Willys-Knight, Hupmobile and Dodge cars and trucks. Capitol Motors was later succeeded by Capitol Dodge.⁴⁰ From 1931-1955 the Gibson Company also distributed home appliances. The Gibson Company started Atlas Securities in the 1930s to serve as a finance company for auto dealers. The affiliated Atlas Manufacturing Company later evolved into an export subsidiary, which sold a line of automotive replacement parts worldwide. "Atlas" was used as the name on the parts that were distributed by the Gibson Company until after World War II.⁴¹

By 1940, the Gibson Company had increased dramatically in sales volume. An advertisement in the 1940 *Indianapolis City Directory* the company proclaimed: "GIBSON SERVES THE WORLD," and listed branches in South Bend, Fort Wayne, Terre Haute and Evansville, Indiana; Lima, Ohio; and Kalamazoo, Michigan.⁴² J. M. Bloch's son-in-law, J. William Julian, entered the business in 1949 and became company president in 1960. In 1958, the Gibson Company maintained 400 employees and four operating divisions conducting business in four surrounding states and many foreign countries through Atlas

³⁹ Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 1 prepared by Ratio Architects

⁴⁰ James L. Adams, "A White Elephant is Saved," *Indianapolis Star* (May 15, 1977).

⁴¹ Indiana Historical Society, "*Gibson Company: Historical Sketch.*"

⁴² R. L. Polk & Co., *Indianapolis City Directory 1940*, 13.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 15

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

Manufacturing. In that year, it served 4,000 customers ranging from independent automotive jobbers to car dealers, service stations, and fleet operations. It also stocked 40,000 different auto parts ranging from cotter keys to hydraulic lifts. Among the other types of goods that were distributed by the Gibson Company were Norge refrigerators (1931-c.1953), Hamilton dryers, and Arvin televisions (in production 1949-1955).⁴³

According to an article in the *Indianapolis Star* of January 1, 1950, "Among companies 50 years or older in Indianapolis there is probably no other company now in business that can be considered more of a pioneer in its field than the Gibson Company."⁴⁴ As of 1954, the Gibson Company was considered the oldest automobile agency in the United States.⁴⁵ Over the years, in addition to the automobile dealerships and automotive parts distribution ventures, portions of the Gibson Company Building were leased to other businesses, including the Rauch Cigar Company, various printing companies, General Service Administration's Inter-Agency Motor Pool, as well as some offices of the Indiana Bell Telephone Company for a short period in 1930 when their building at 240 North Meridian Street was being moved.⁴⁶

The Capitol Motors Division of the Gibson Company sold automobiles at the Indianapolis location until 1963, when it was sold to Palmer Dodge of Indianapolis and was moved out of the building.⁴⁷ At its peak, the Gibson Company had expanded to a total of twenty-five branch stores throughout Indiana, Ohio and Michigan.⁴⁸ The Gibson Company facility was sold to the Mermont Corporation in 1967 and the former Gibson operation dealt primarily with the distribution of exhaust systems. Mermont was divested around 1970 because of vertical integration and W. William Julian obtained the original company and its Indiana outlets in 1971. Julian changed the name of the company to ADP Auto Parts. The company

⁴³ Indiana Historical Society, "Gibson Company: Historical Sketch."

⁴⁴ "Gibson Firm Auto Pioneer." *Indianapolis Star* (January 1, 1950) 9.

⁴⁵ "Country's Oldest Auto Agency Located Here," *Indianapolis Star* (February 12, 1954) 28, c. 2.

⁴⁶ Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 1 prepared by Ratio Architects.

⁴⁷ Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 1 prepared by Ratio Architects

⁴⁸ Historic Preservation Certification Application – Part 1 prepared by Ratio Architects.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 16

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

ceased operations in 1984.⁴⁹ In 1985, the building was purchased by the American United Life Insurance Company (AUL). In 2006, renovations began and were ready for the doors to open by September of 2007.⁵⁰

Design of the Gibson Company Building:

Architect Herbert L. Bass (1877-1926) was an Indianapolis native and a graduate of Manual High School. In 1903, at age 26, he established the firm of Herbert L. Bass & Company. Consulting engineer Lynn O. Knowlton joined the firm in 1921 and the name was changed to Bass, Knowlton & Company. Bass designed numerous residences including the mansions of James A. Allison, Charles B. Sommers, Stoughton A. Fletcher II, and James I. Holcomb. He was noted for the design of several high schools across the state, including those at Lebanon (1908), Logansport (1912), and Greencastle (1914). Bass also designed the white-terra-cotta-clad Ben-Hur Life Building (1911) at Crawfordsville, Indiana. He designed several automobile-related buildings in Indianapolis, including the Fisher Automobile Company Building (1912) at 400-418 N. Capitol, the Fisher-Gibson Company Building (c.1911) at 416-424 N. Capitol, the Frank Hatfield Ford Company Building at 627 N. Capitol, and the Cole Motor Car Company Building (1911-1914) on E. Washington Street.⁵¹ One of Bass' most architecturally significant buildings is the nine-story Test Building on Monument Circle, completed in 1925. Within the design of a conventional urban building, it combined ground floor commercial spaces and upper floor offices with a six-level parking garage and a rooftop putting green.⁵² Bass' experience with parking garage design led

⁴⁹ Indiana Historical Society, "*Gibson Company: Historical Sketch*

⁵⁰ The Companies of OneAmerica Financial Partners, Inc., "*OneAmerica® Unveils its Newly Renovated Gibson Building*," One America, [corporate site] available from <http://www.oneamerica.com>; Internet; accessed 17 April 2008.

⁵¹ Indianapolis Auto Industry Thematic Resources National Register Nomination, 1984-1986, 21.

⁵² David J. Bodenhamer, Robert G. Barrows, and David Gordon Vanderstel. *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 310.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 17

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

to commissions for U.S. Postal Service substations and garage buildings in Indianapolis, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Dayton, Atlantic City, and Boston.

Bass' design for the Gibson Company Building included large, open, functional spaces for auto manufacturing in addition to a ground floor showroom. The ceilings were unusually tall so that car bodies could be painted and then hung from the ceiling to dry, while another set of car bodies was being painted below. Most of the interior was designed for manufacturing or service and was finished with plain concrete floors, exposed concrete structure (with "mushroom cap" column capitals), and painted brick or block walls. Interior partitions were designed for easy reconfiguration, allowing for changes within the factory. The exterior of the building was designed in keeping with the high-style office buildings of the period in Indianapolis, with consideration to the site's location three blocks from the state capitol.

Drawings dated August 10-11, 1916, show that Bass originally designed the exterior of the Gibson Company Building in an elaborate Neo-Gothic style with full terra cotta cladding. The storefronts were topped by low Tudor arches and drip moulds. At the second floor level, projecting pilasters expressed the structural bay, growing more elaborate in tiers at each floor before terminating in pinnacled and crocketed caps at the roofline. Fenestra-brand steel sash windows were set in groups of three, separated by narrow terra cotta mullions. Spandrel panels contained ornamental motifs at the third floor level but were plain at the fourth. The fifth floor spandrels contained Gothic ornament flowing out of the arches atop the fourth floor windows. Above the fifth floor another set of arches led up into a paneled parapet with shields and crests. The entire composition was to be topped with an open terra cotta balustrade accented with terra cotta pinnacles. This design would have been fairly unique for Indianapolis in 1916 as most of the city's Neo-Gothic buildings were not built until the 1920s. The Block Building (1911) and the Kahn Building (1915), both by Vonnegut, Bohn & Mueller, as well as the Meridian Life Building (c.1910) and the Hume-Mansur Building (1911, demolished 1980), both by Rubush & Hunter, are examples of

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 18

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

Indianapolis office buildings clad entirely in white terra cotta which predate Bass' initial design for the Gibson Company Building. The Roosevelt Building (1922-1923, Vonnegut, Bohn & Mueller, architects, demolished 1990) and the Knights of Pythias Building (1925, McGuire & Shook, architects) were among the few Neo-Gothic terra cotta-clad buildings in Indianapolis. Most of the city's other Neo-Gothic buildings were clad in limestone, including the Chamber of Commerce Building (1926, Robert Frost Daggett, architect) and the Scottish Rite Cathedral (1927-1929, George F. Schreiber, architect).

During the autumn of 1916, the Gibson Company seems to have determined that the original Neo-Gothic design would be too expensive and Bass redesigned the facades in a more restrained Neoclassical Renaissance style. A set of drawings dated November 27-December 6, 1916, shows the facades of the building as it was built. These facades were divided into the classical column divisions of base-shaft-capital. The many local precedents for this type of division include the Indiana Pythian Building (1906-1907, J. F. Alexander & Son, architects, demolished 1960s), the Board of Trade Building (1907, demolished 1982), the Odd Fellows Building (1907-1908, Rubush & Hunter, architects), the Merchants Bank Building (1909, D. H. Burnham & Company, architects), the Hotel Severin (1913, Vonnegut, Bohn & Mueller, architects), and the Fletcher Trust Building (1915, Holabird & Roche and Arthur Bohn, architects).

The ground floor was clad in terra cotta in imitation of dressed stone and featured Kawneer storefronts with large plate-glass display windows topped by transoms. The second through fourth floors were clad in dark red tapestry brick and featured large triple sets of Fenestra triple-hung steel sash windows. The fifth floor was clad in white terra cotta with red tapestry brick panels on the pilasters between the windows. A cornice with shallow modillions and topped by small shell accents completed the façade. The cornice modillions that were installed during construction differ in proportion and design from those indicated in the elevations dated December 7, 1916, being square rather than rectangular in proportion and featuring a slightly different scroll motif.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 19

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

The west half of the first floor contained a large automobile sales room and a somewhat smaller room for automotive sundries. Both spaces featured the same Neoclassical interior finish. The round concrete columns were plastered and their mushroom caps were concealed by Corinthian capitals. Low arched and paneled plaster soffits spanned between the columns, forming a grid of low groin-vaulted ceiling panels. Each vault contained a massive Neoclassical bowl-shaped light fixture at center, surrounded by eight fire-suppression sprinkler heads. The floor was covered in six-by-six-inch tiles and featured a concealed ventilation outlet for connecting automobile exhaust pipes, allowing autos to be run in the showroom. Square pilasters along the walls featured single or double electric "candle" sconces. Historic photographs (taken c.1917) show that automobiles were arranged diagonally in an informal manner within the sales room. Ferns on wicker stands were deployed among the automobiles while an Oriental carpet and mahogany library furniture defined a space for customer consultation at the center of the room. The automotive sundries room contained transparent oak-framed display cases on marble bases with glass on all sides. These display cases ran around three sides of the room and formed an island down its center. The side walls were lined with oak cabinets containing open display shelves and card-file drawers. The interior was painted in light colors and reflects the "hygienic" aesthetic of the period. There was also a "lounging room" adjacent to the sales room, located below the automobile ramp to the second floor and down a short flight of marble steps. An office, two passages, and two "contractor's rooms" were located between the sales room and the service room to the east. All of these interior spaces seem to have been designed at the time of the original Neo-Gothic facades, the drawings indicating the original Tudor-arched storefronts.

The southwest corner of the second floor contained a small sales room for used automobiles. This space had a plastered ceiling and colored concrete floor. The walls and columns were divided into two parts by a band of stenciled decoration, with a lighter color above and a slightly darker color below. Ceiling light fixtures of an inverted dome pattern were hung from funnel-like medallions. The two-tone color scheme

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 20

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

was used throughout the second floor and first floor service areas, but without the stenciled band. The western three bays of the third floor contained the offices of the Gibson Company. The offices were finished in the same manner as the used automobile sales room with identical light fixtures and the same two-tone color scheme with a stenciled band. Ceiling-height glass partitions divided twelve private offices from the general office and all spaces were floored in mastic. The remainder of the building contained open service spaces and storage areas for parts and sundries.

Overall, the Gibson Company Building serves as a significant link with the history of the automotive industry in Indianapolis—both in the manufacturing and sale of automobiles—and with the lives of the individuals who were instrumental in the rise of that industry, including Carl G. Fisher. The building also reflects the skills of Herbert L. Bass both in planning flexible, open spaces for automotive manufacturing and service and in the design of an industrial building with refined facades compatible with the central business district of Indianapolis.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 21

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 22

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 23

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 25

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

Section 10 - Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

Parcel #1-01-28491 Obediah Mifflin's Subdivision lot 11 and lot 12 block 14.

Boundary Justification

The property lines were chosen for the boundaries for this nomination. This site is located southeast of the intersection of North Capitol Avenue and West Michigan Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. The boundaries selected are the historic boundaries of the property.

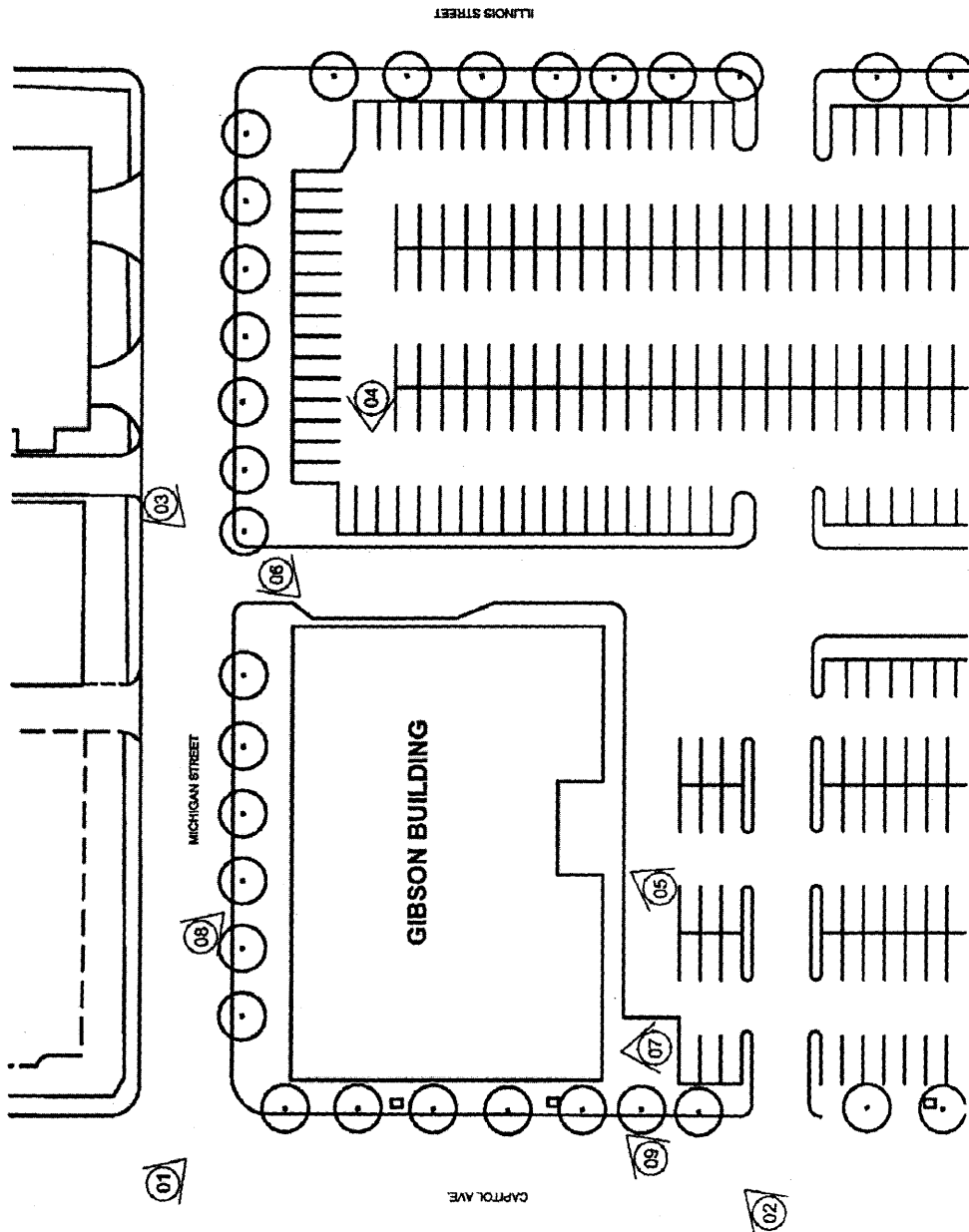
**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 26

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

Sketch Map and Photo Log

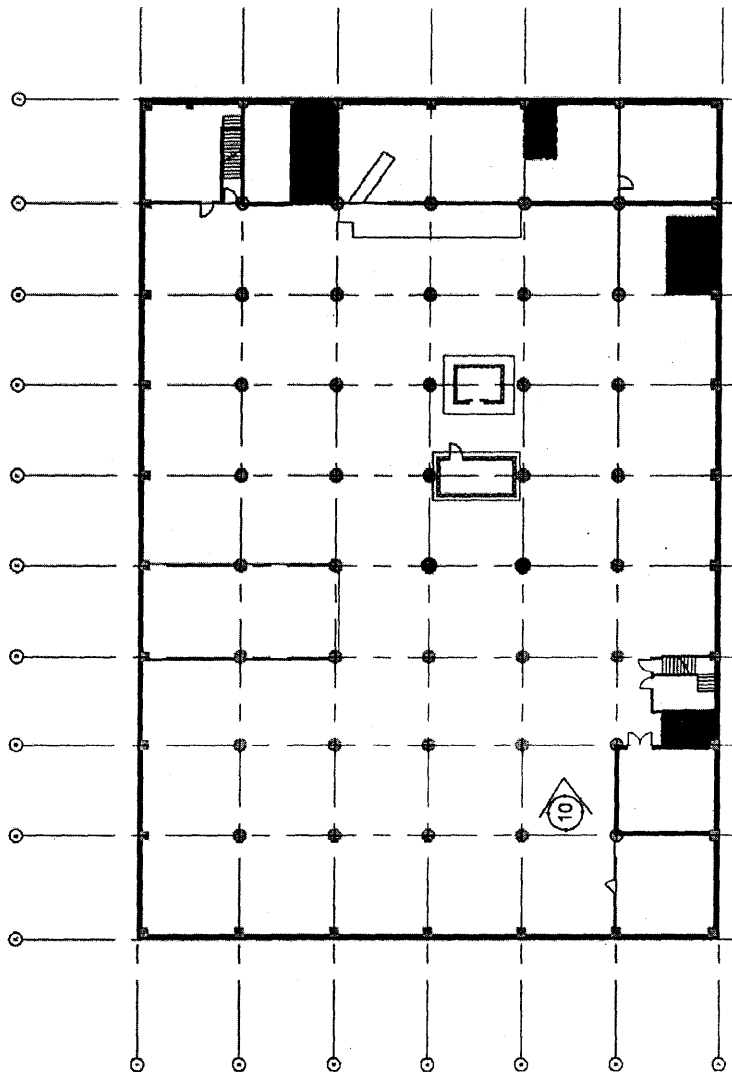


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 27

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN



BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN

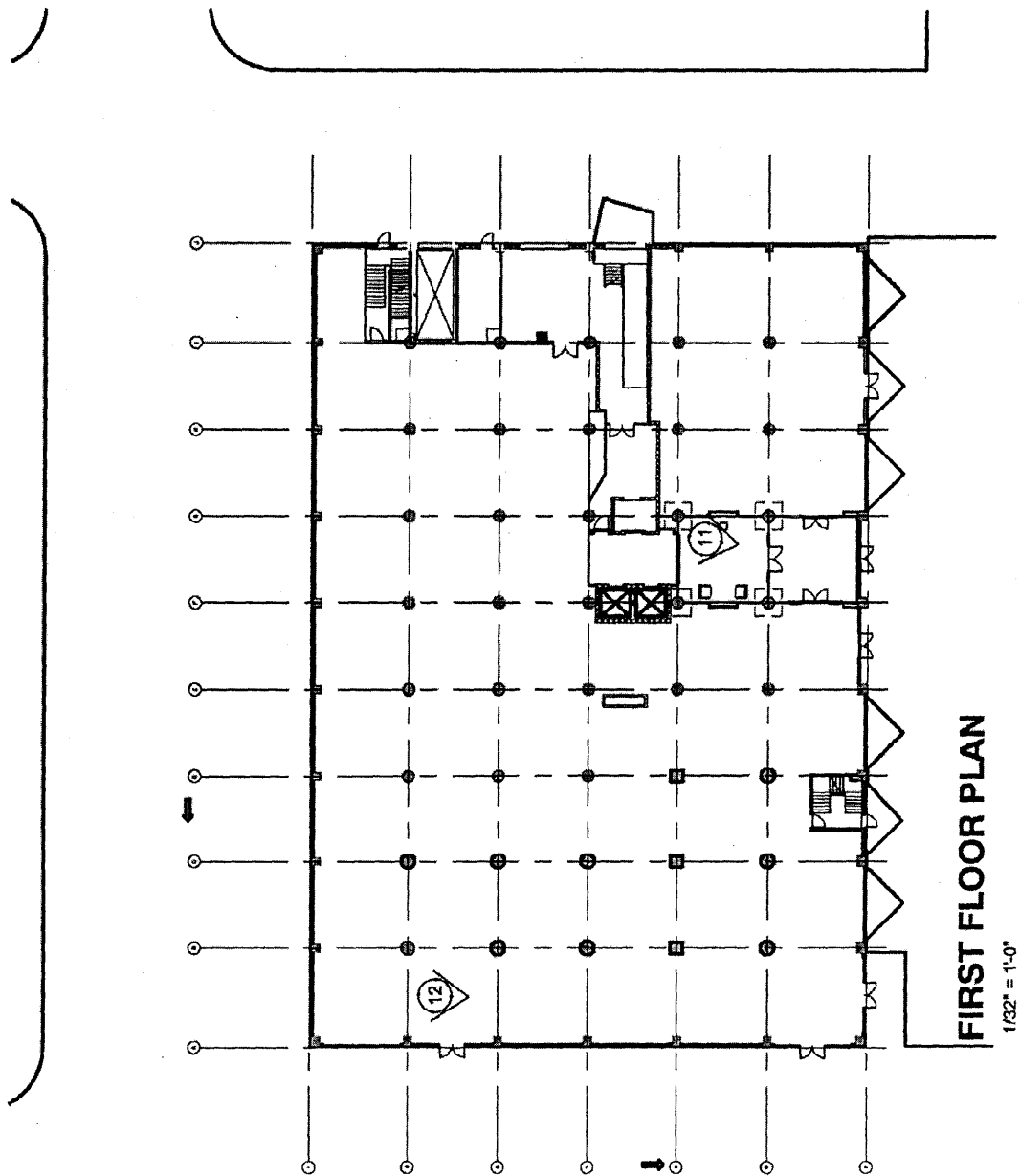
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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 28

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

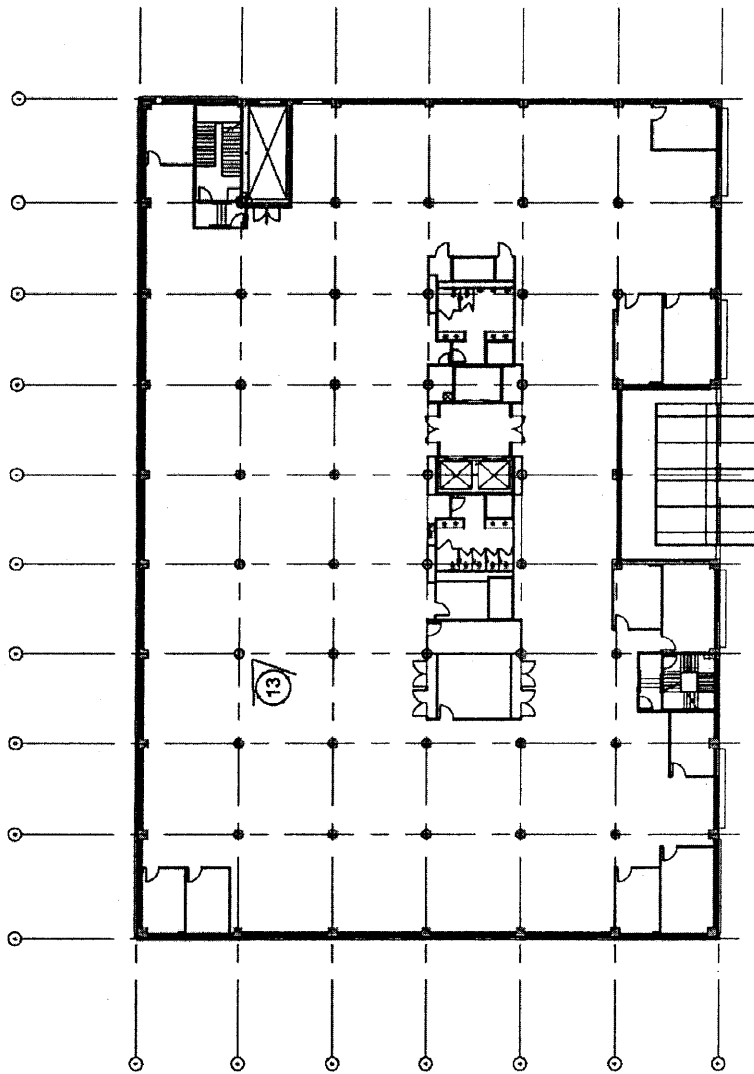


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 29

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

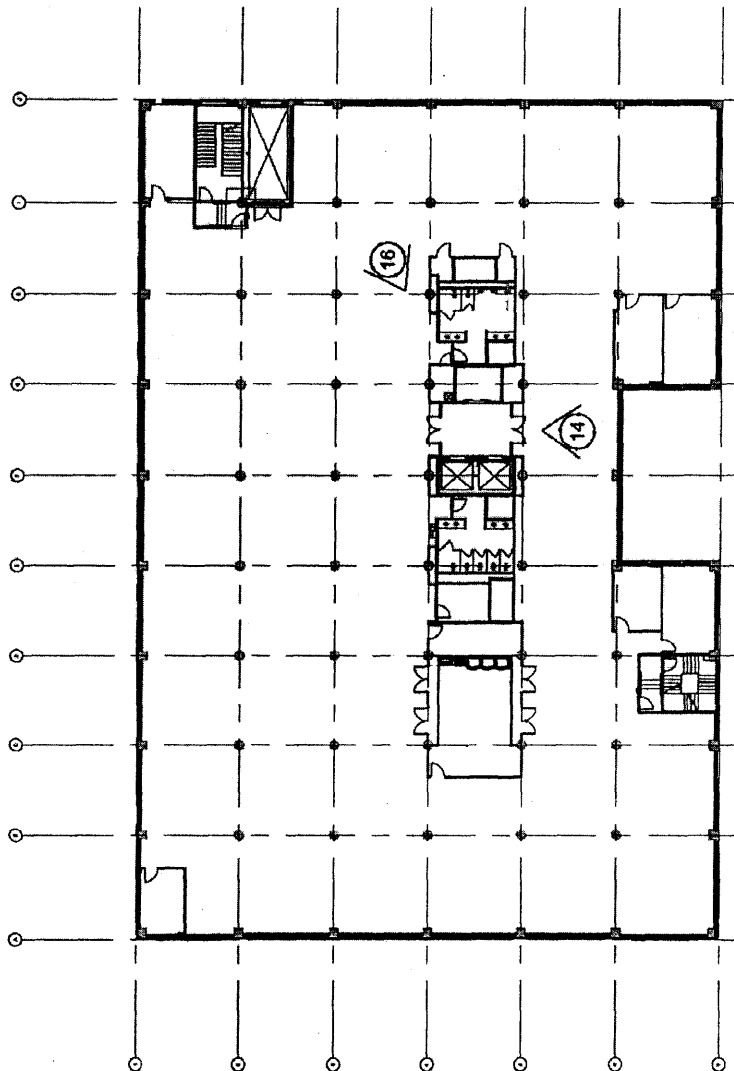
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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 30

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN



THIRD FLOOR PLAN

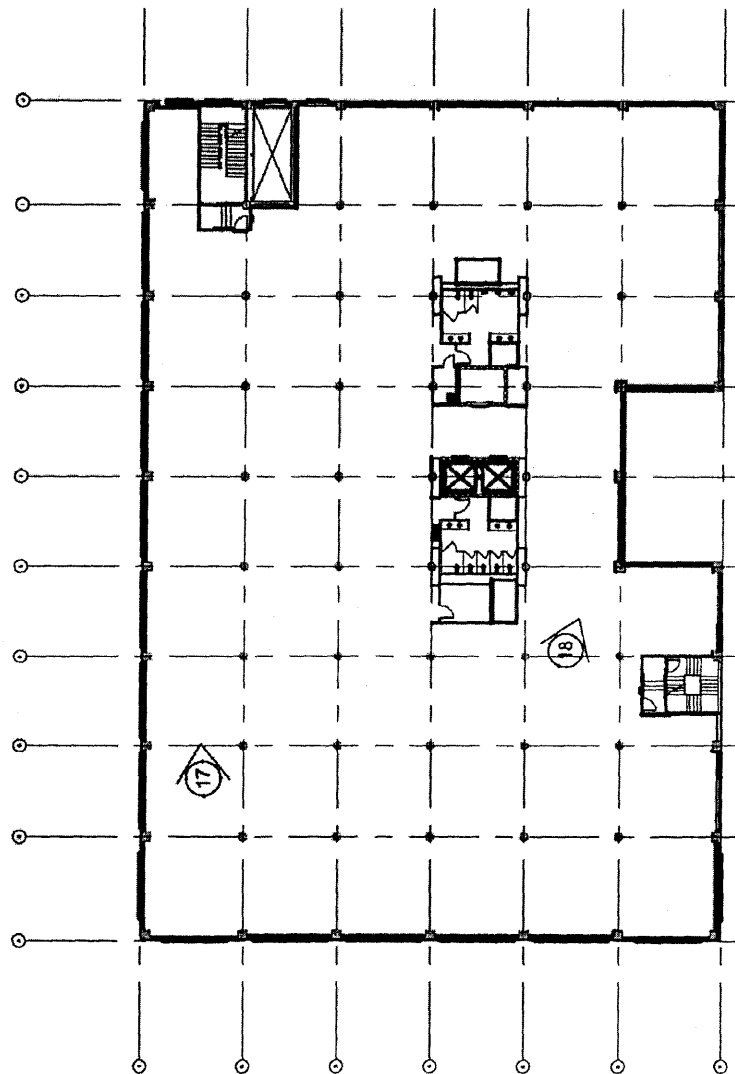
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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 31

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN



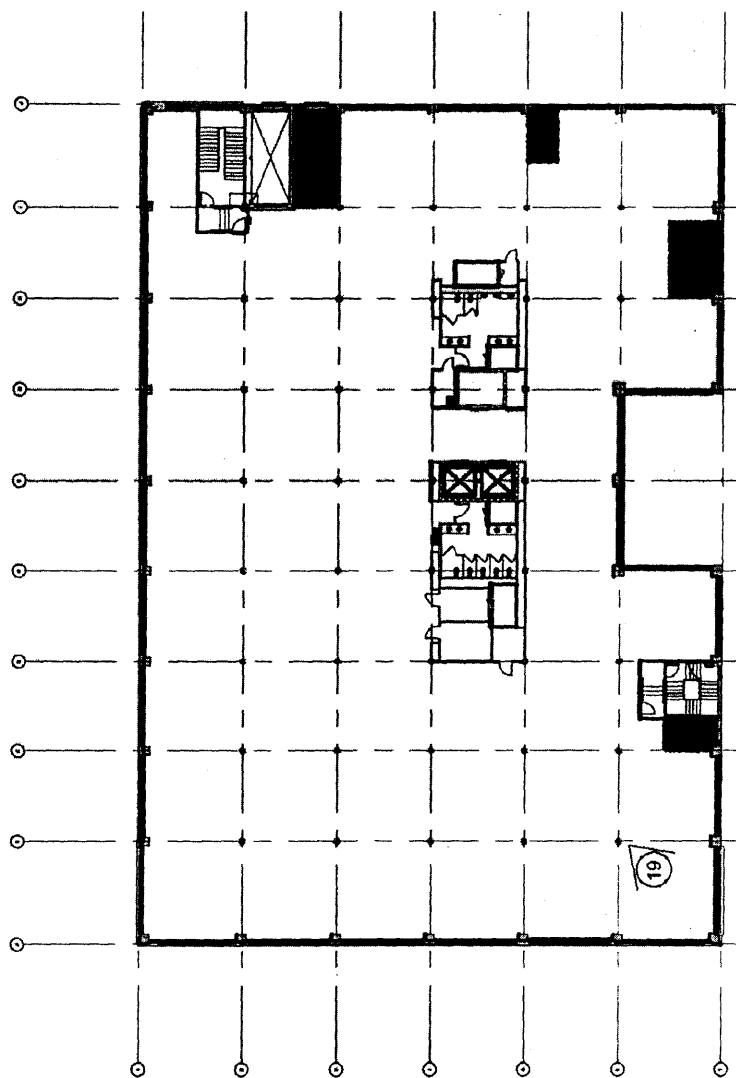
FOURTH FLOOR PLAN
1/32" = 1'-0"

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 32

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN



FIFTH FLOOR PLAN

1/32" = 1'-0"

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 33

Gibson Company Building, Indianapolis, IN

sPhotographs

Gibson Company Building, 433-447 N. Capitol Avenue, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana.

Number	Property	Photographer	Date	Description
0001	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing southeast.
0002	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing northwest
0003	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing southeast
0004	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing west
0005	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing north;
0006	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing west
0007	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing north
0008	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing southeast
0009	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Exterior, facing northeast
0010	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Basement, facing west
0011	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	First Floor, facing south
0012	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	First Floor, facing south
0013	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Second Floor, facing southeast
0014	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Third Floor, facing north
0015	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Third Floor, facing northeast
0016	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Fourth Floor, facing west
0017	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Fourth Floor, facing east
0018	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Fourth Floor, facing southeast
0019	Gibson Company Building	David Kroll	April 17, 2008	Fifth Floor, facing northeast
0020	Gibson Company Building	W. H. Bass Photo Co.	1917	Camera facing southeast