

**United States Department of the Interior  
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 Sparta Building

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number 12 North Riverside N/A not for publication

city or town Medford N/A vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Jackson code 029 zip code 97501

**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 Hannah 8/31/92  
Signature of certifying official/Title Deputy SHPO Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office  
State of 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:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper <u>Robert Ryan</u>	<b>Entered in the National Register</b>	Date of Action <u>10/8/92</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____	_____

Sparta Building  
Name of Property

Jackson, Oregon  
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		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: office building  
Industry: communications facility  
(radio station)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: restaurant  
Vacant: not in use (2nd floor only)

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century  
American Movements: Commercial Style,  
Beaux Arts Classicism

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete  
walls brick and concrete  
roof asphalt  
other metal (cornice)  
glazed brick

**Narrative Description**

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

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The Sparta Building

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The Sparta Building, located in Medford, Jackson County, Oregon, is a two-story brick structure and was completed in 1911. Designed by influential Medford architect Frank Clark and built by local contractor Elmer Childers, the Sparta Building occupies one of the most prominent locations in the city. Although significant in its design, the Sparta Building merits special attention as the original location of the early radio station KMED, a pioneer in commercial radio broadcasting in Oregon. A local landmark since its completion, the Sparta Building remains one of Medford's most important commercial structures. The building retains sufficient integrity to its original design and appearance to successfully relate the period of significance and its important association with the advent of commercial radio broadcasting in the southern Oregon area.

**SITE:**

The Sparta Building is located at the NE corner of the intersection of Riverside and East Main Streets in downtown Medford. The flat commercially-zoned site is identified on Jackson County Assessors Plat 37-1W-30BB as tax lot 9200. An irregularly shaped trapezium, the property measures approximately 62' x 108', for a total area of 6750 square feet. To the east is Bear Creek, the north-south spine of development in the southern portion of the Rogue Valley, and the elevated "viaduct" of Interstate 5 which runs parallel to the Creek through the city. Downtown Medford, the traditional commercial and governmental center of southern Oregon, lines Main Street to the west of the nominated site. Other commercial properties, most dating from Riverside's use as a portion of the Pacific Highway [Highway 99], are found to the north and south.

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**STYLE:**

The exterior of the Sparta Buildings exhibits the detailing of a modest version of what has been called the American Renaissance Style. Here symmetrically arrayed detailing divides the facade into orderly horizontal and vertical elements, each in turn decorated in a comparatively elaborate manner. Typical of the style, the Sparta Building has a flat roof, surrounded by a parapet and heavy cornice detail. Regularly spaced windows draw the eye to the curved center entry, itself highlighted by Ionic pilasters.

Clark made frequent use of the various details associated with the American Renaissance idiom. Of the twenty commercial structures of Clark's which retain sufficient integrity to be assessed stylistically, eight are in the American Renaissance style, five, including the Sparta Building, being located in Medford.<sup>8</sup> Unique among these designs, the Sparta Building is clad in white-glazed brick, a material more in keeping with the general tenets of the American Renaissance Style.

**CONSTRUCTION: EXTERIOR**

The primary structural system of the Sparta Building is a mixture of bearing brick, three wythes thick and laid in common bond, and concrete. The minor elevations (north and east) are unpainted brick on the second floor with concrete below. The concrete lower portion of the north elevation has been stucco clad, apparently following demolition of the adjacent structure. The lower concrete portion of the east elevation remains in use as a party wall for the adjacent structure.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Atwood and Evans, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Separate party wall agreements were signed between the Medford Building Company and owners of both adjacent lots. See Jackson County Deed Books [JCD], 105:37 and 155:440.

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The foundation of the Sparta Building is of perimeter concrete augmented by internal wooden piers. For most of the basement the substructure rests above a shallow crawl space although a small basement area (in the SE corner) has a concrete floor. This serves as the location of the original heater, water heater and other equipment. The roof is modest dual pitch covered with a hot asphalt-type coating, and slopes toward the original downspouts and leader heads at the NW and SE building corners.

The five windows on the second floor of the north elevation are three-part metal sash with a single transom and appear original. All have a two-ring masonry arch. The east elevation (visible on the second floor only, above the adjacent structure) is broken by a 11' deep recess, approximately 45' in length and roofed with an inset single pitch of corrugated metal. The wall surfaces of this area are covered with a pressed sheetmetal imitation brick panels that has been painted red to mimic the surrounding masonry, probably original or an early alteration. Two original skylights, which once lighted the rear of the first floor, are present in this area although neither functions due to ceiling changes on the interior.

The primary elevations of the Sparta Building create twin frontages along East Main Street and North Riverside. Here the bearing masonry has been clad with a single wythe of glazed white brick, apparently the first use of this material in the Medford area.<sup>10</sup> While the first floor is not exposed, the second floor elevations are virtually as built. The brickwork here is divided into a series of horizontal bands by deep rustications. Slightly raised portions between the original 1/1 wood sash double-hung are capped with a 3-part stepped "capital" and set up a matching plinth, forming a pilaster-type appearance. Above the window level, another series of horizontal banding blends into a wide, plain, frieze which itself rises to the elaborate, over-sized, sheetmetal cornice. The cornice, approximately 24" in depth, is highlighted by exaggerated dentils and a multi-part crown. A parapet rises above, providing the final horizontal element of the facade.

<sup>10</sup> Please refer to the following Statement of Significance, page 15.

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On the Riverside frontage, the 104' straight portion is divided by seven windows, each lighting an interior office space. The white brick and cornice wrap the NW corner and likely provide an indication of the setback of the now demolished adjacent structure. [See 1927 Sanborn Map] The exterior plane of the rounded corner entry is recessed 12" from the two flanking facades. The south elevation, facing East Main Street, is shorter than the west, measuring only 63' in length and containing only four window bays. Here, irregular window sizes likely provide an indication of the variation of the original interior room arrangement.

The rounded corner portion of the second floor elevation contains three 1/1 wood sash double hung windows, all original. The large central sash is flanked by twin Ionic pilasters with fluted shafts, elaborate 3-dimensional capitals and built-up bases. [See Photo 8] The construction of this detail appears to be concrete, cast in three pieces and attached to the facade. Each of the three windows has a subtle curve reflecting the arc of the facade.

The elaborate detailing of the second floor of the Sparta Building rises from a remaining sheetmetal "stringcourse" that visually separates the first and second floor elevations. As originally designed, the primary elevations of the first floor were predominantly glazing, divided by concrete columns which supported the second floor. Solid portions, between the columns, were wooden panels and, at the building corners, glazed white brick. Although not definitely determined, the sills of the storefront windows appear to have been marble, an indication of the elaborate quality of the Sparta Building's design. A transom band, retractable canvas awnings, and other typical features of commercial storefront design were all present on the building until the 1960s remodeling described below under alterations. An entry door to the second floor office spaces was located at the extreme SE corner of the building [See Photo 6], set off visually by a inset frame in the facade which survives.

In the original design of the Sparta Building, the rounded corner entry was flanked by twin Ionic columns that matched the pilasters of the second story. These columns were made of concrete with a flecked surface texture to create a stone-like appearance. The entry itself was recessed approximately 12'

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feet from the facade, creating an entrant. An elaborate coffered fir ceiling, finished in a dark natural stain, added to the luxury of the entry. Centered on the stringcourse, 8" high individual letters spelled out the building's name and in the mid-1920s, probably in response to the growing tourist trade along the Pacific Highway, smaller black letters were added along each facade identifying the two major routes upon which the Sparta Building is located.<sup>11</sup> Two minor entries, one providing access to the second floor, the other to the storefront at the extreme NW corner, were also slightly recessed and protected by matching sheetmetal canopies of elaborate ribbed design.

**CONSTRUCTION: INTERIOR**

The second floor offices of the Sparta Building are arrayed off a 6' wide L-shaped hallway. Although at various times as many as 18 individual rental spaces have been located on this floor, individual tenant needs often necessitated the combination of adjoining rooms and interior partition walls have apparently been removed and then rebuilt dependent upon these shifting rental requirements. As existing now, most spaces are approximately 12 feet wide and 20 feet deep, apparently substantially similar to the historic room arrangement. Three rooms along the west (6, 7 & 8, see attached floorplan) remain essentially open, forming a single large space. It is here that the KMED studio was located and reportedly this space survives essentially intact from its arrangement during the radio station use.<sup>12</sup> A similar large space, now modified, also existed on the opposite side of the hallway (Rooms 13, 14 & 16) for use as a dance studio.

<sup>11</sup> See Photo #6. During this time a porcelain letter incandescent sign proclaiming "Medford-the Gateway to Crater Lake" spanned Riverside [the Pacific Highway] immediately south of the East Main Street intersection.

<sup>12</sup> David Rees, oral communication with the author during a site visit, 4-February-1992. Mr. Rees started working at KMED in the Sparta Building in May 1930 and remained with the station until after they moved to newer studios.

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Little original interior finish survives on the second floor. At present, many rooms are clad with c.1966 Philippine Mahogany panelling. This is installed over a textured masonry panel which appears as a plaster wall but was installed in sheets. This surface itself was in turn installed over the original lath and plaster interior wall surfaces. Wainscot is present along the entire hallway.<sup>13</sup> Door and window trim also dates from the 1950s reflecting remodeling in response to fire and variations in usage. In places, modern gypsum board construction and ceiling tiles reflects more recent remodeling efforts.

Original materials survive in the deep sills of the curved corner entry where three-part baseboard and traditional period detailing are visible below the inappropriate vertical board cladding. [See Photo 14, extreme left] These details and available historic interior photographs provide a basis for the restoration of the second floor spaces. Two original skylights survive and light the long central hallway.

As originally built, the first floor of the Sparta Building was predominantly a single large unfinished space. A single division along the north exterior appears in the 1911 Sanborn Map. For the remainder of the first floor, the open joists and cross-bracing of the ceiling were probably left exposed and the raw concrete of the exterior walls unclad. The original flooring was apparently wood. As early as 1923 [See Photo 4] lowered ceilings were added in this area and over the years other alterations and partitions of the first floor have been undertaken. At one time as many as five separate business were located on the first floor. As a result, after over 80 years of rental use, little original fabric survives. For example, as fashion as changed ceiling heights of the first floor have been reduced from the original 20' (at joist level) to approximately 17' (a lath and plaster ceiling which likely dates from the mid-1920s, and finally to the present suspended T-bar ceiling at a height of 12 feet. This last dates from the mid 1970s and early 1980s. However, as presently configured, remnants of each these ceiling levels survive at various locations throughout the first floor.

<sup>13</sup> Early or original vertical beadboard wainscot likely survives below this plywood covering although this has not been conclusively determined at this time.



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Some original detailing at the corner entry survives; the coffered fir ceiling, long hidden above the succession of ceiling height changes, was discovered during recent inspection and remains in amazingly intact condition. A subject of much local speculation, the fluted corner columns do in fact remain, hidden from view since 1966. Unfortunately the capitals were destroyed at that time. Wooden sashes and other elements of the transom panels, portions of the storefront windows themselves, and the marble sills are also likely present beneath the remodeling. The white brick portions of the first floor, covered by the stucco cladding, remains visible at the NW corner. The current owner intends to pursue a program of remodeling, revitalizing the long unused second floor and restoring those original details that do remain.

**ALTERATIONS:**

The corner entry, the focal point of the Sparta Building, was first altered from its original design as early as 1923. At this time the original recessed corner entry had been modified, the twin entry doors pushed toward the street to create more useable interior space and the coffered ceiling enclosed and a band of transom windows were added. [Compare Photos 2 and 5] Over the years, a series of fires, on both the first and second floors, have also resulted in the destruction of original materials. The first floor, used for a number of purposes, assumed its present configuration in the mid-1980s as the previous tavern usage was altered for the creation of "Club Med", a restaurant which encompassed virtually the entire first floor. A counter space and other internal appointments were added to the corner space as it was converted to restaurant use. Numerous building permits relating to internal alteration are on file with the Medford Building Department, detailing only those changes dating from the 1960s to present.

Informants and physical inspection indicate that the second floor of the Sparta Building was first substantially "modernized" in the late 1940s, after KMED vacated much of that space. Various minor partitions were moved, removed, or constructed and the use-specific trappings of the studio such

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as the enclosed control room and the sound-proofing on the walls were removed. A series of minor fires and changes resulting from tenant requirements in the late 1950s and early 1960s led to further alteration of the second floor.<sup>14</sup> Finally, major remodeling occurred in connection with the second floor's conversion to 6 apartment units, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing in phases to the early 1970s.<sup>15</sup> It is likely that it was at this time the two rooms along the north wall, originally where "Tony" the janitor kept his supplies,<sup>16</sup> were converted into bathrooms. Subsequent paneling and other modern finishes, now present throughout, probably date from this period as well.

In 1966 the major exterior alteration to the Sparta Building occurred with the remodeling of the first floor elevation. City of Medford permit #8-29-66, granted to D.L. Pickell, then owner of the building, provided for the installation of "stucco over the windows" and the "remodeling of the front of [the] office building." The corner entry was again altered, moved out still further toward the street, its twin wooden doors replaced with a single modern metal one. The most dramatic changes relate to the enclosure of the full-height storefront glazing and the built-up band the sealed off the transom windows. Other glazing, toward the outside corners of the structure were simply removed or covered. At this time the original stairwell to the second floor, lined with wainscot of Italian marble was also altered. The marble was removed and replaced with wood paneling. The hexagonal mosaic flooring at this entry, mixed green and white 1" tiles survives, providing an indication of the grandeur of this once elegant feature. Presently a simple plywood stairs provides access to the second floor, intended solely for function and probably built subsequent to the major fire described below.

<sup>14</sup> D.L. Pickell, personal communication with the author, 6-February-1992. Mr. Pickell purchased the Sparta Building in 1957.

<sup>15</sup> City of Medford Building Permits, #6-18-69 "Remodel Rooms 10 and 11 and #12-6-71 "Remodel Office to Apartments" are typical of this pattern.

<sup>16</sup> Rees, op cit.

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By 1978, the apartment use of the second floor was discontinued as the lack of a second exit for fire safety remained uncorrected. It is unclear to what use the second floor was put between this time and the early 1980s when a major fire swept through the rooms, damaging much of the building. Since then the entire second floor has remained vacant, used solely for storage by the various tenants of the ground floor restaurants uses.

**SUMMARY:**

Built on speculation over eighty years ago, the history of the Sparta Building from the start has been one of interior alteration to meet the changing needs of a variety tenants. Although little early trim and interior finish detailing survives, the exterior of the building remains sufficiently intact to reflect its original design. The second floor exterior, with its locally extravagant design and use of materials is virtually as built. On the ground level, original material remains, hidden beneath removable cladding, and will be again be revealed as part of the planned renovation of the building.

The Sparta Building retains its original footprint, respecting its orientation toward a prominent intersection in the downtown Medford area, and continues to be a major commercial structure within that city. The building's exterior successfully conveys the opulence of Frank Clark's trendsetting design and the quality materials and workmanship of Elmer Childers' construction. The Sparta Building retains sufficient integrity to foster the understanding of its development and successfully relates the historic associations which make it significant.

Sparta Building  
Name of Property

Jackson, Oregon  
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 National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**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 significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Communications

Commerce

**Period of Significance**

1926-1941

1913-1919

**Significant Dates**

1937, 1941

1913

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Clark, Frank Chamberlain, architect

Childers, Elmer N., contractor

**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 of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Sparta Building  
Name of Property

Jackson, Oregon  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.15 acres

Medford, Oregon 1:62500

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	110	51107510	468160100
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	Northing	
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 George Kramer, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date March 1, 1992

street & number 386 North Laurel telephone (503) 482-9504

city or town Ashland state Oregon zip code 97520

#### 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 Russell E. Dale

street & number 585 Allison Street telephone (503) 482-2663

city or town Ashland state Oregon zip code 97520

**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 existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form 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 this 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.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

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SHPO SUMMARY

The Sparta Building, a large, two-story concrete and brick masonry block faced with glazed white brick that is prominently located at the intersection of East Main Street and Riverside Avenue in Medford's central business district, was completed in 1911. The architect, Frank C. Clark, provided a Commercial Style design detailed in the tradition of Beaux Arts Classicism that characterized the American Renaissance.

The building extends to its lot lines with a footprint of 62 x 108 feet. Though its continuous ground story display windows and prism glass transoms and grand, bowed corner entrance portico with colossal Ionic columns in antis have been sacrificed to stuccoed infill of 1966, the Sparta Building maintains a dignified presence at the northeast corner of the intersection of principal thoroughfares. Above a sheet metal belt course, the upper facade presents seven bays along Main Street and four on Riverside. The bowed corner of three bays is slightly inset from the major facade planes. Frameless, straight-topped windows have one-over-one, double-hung window sash, and the bays are set off by pilaster strips. The upper facade is rusticated by continuous sunk fillets on the street facades. The entablature is composed of architrave fillets, frieze, sheet metal cornice with plain modillions and an unadorned attic, or parapet. The wide central bay at the corner is framed by Scamozzi order Ionic pilasters superposed over the structural columns of the portico below.

The main floor showroom was first occupied by the automotive dealership of C. E. "Pop" Gates, one of the outstanding mayors of Medford. The building is primarily significant in the area of communications, as well as commerce, as the home of KMED, one of the first licensed radio stations in southern Oregon, which occupied five second story office spaces from 1926 to 1941, during much of which time the roof supported two 85-foot transmitter antennas. A fire which damaged the upper story in the early 1980s ended a long and varied succession of tenants until the recent rehabilitation.

At the time of its opening, the Sparta Building represented a speculative real estate development of unusual scope even in the optimistic climate of the Rogue Valley orchard boom (1909-1912).

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The excitement of the first wireless signals, the thrill of the first voice broadcasts, and the world of the radio amateur, all came from a pioneer spirit and experimental technology. Radio was magic, and people welcomed it with open arms.<sup>13</sup>

One individual fascinated by the new technology was William Johnston Virgin, the son of a prominent pioneer family from the Central Point area. In 1921, with a group of other amateur radio enthusiasts, Virgin was present in a small Ashland garage to participate in what was likely the first transmission of radio voice messages in southern Oregon. The group gave "Bill" Virgin the small breadboard transmitter they had constructed "... due to the fact that his father owned a flour mill... which would provide an excellent place for stringing up the antenna."<sup>14</sup>

Soon, Virgin was toting his primitive transmitter around the Rogue Valley and giving exhibitions. He advertised for people to come and "listen to him play the radio" at Central Point churches and grange halls. By September 1922, he had established what was to eventually become known as "KFAY" with studios at the Jackson County Fairgrounds. The little five watt station broadcast music as well as news provided by the Medford Mail Tribune.<sup>15</sup> Soon KFAY obtained a license from the government and was selling advertising time to local businesses. Virgin's part-time radio station had begun the move from a hobby to a potentially successful commercial venture.

**KMED RADIO:**

The major step toward the founding of true commercial radio in southern Oregon occurred when Virgin struck a deal with Robert

<sup>13</sup> John Bittner, Broadcasting: An Introduction. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1980), p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> Chipman, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> See "Put Valley Radio in at Central Point," Medford Mail Tribune 21-July-1922, 3:4.

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Ruhl, publisher of the Medford Mail Tribune. Ruhl agreed to purchase a one-half interest in the station and, more importantly, offered the full support of the influential Mail Tribune and its Associated Press wire service to promote what was now to be known as "The Mail Tribune-Virgin Broadcasting Service---the official radio station of the Mail Tribune." Five second floor offices, virtually the entire North Riverside elevation [Rooms 5-11 on the attached floorplan] of the Sparta Building were leased for the new venture's studios and work commenced on upgrading the station's capabilities for its newly expanded role in the local media. The walls between Rooms 8 and 9 were torn down, creating a large studio space for the station's use.

The equipment for the station is now being put in place on the Sparta Building... It is the latest West Electric Companies equipment. The towers extend 130 feet above the street level and 85 feet above the roof.<sup>16</sup>

Massive alterations were undertaken at the Sparta Building to accommodate the radio station. Interior partition walls were removed to create the studio space in what are now Rooms 6, 7 and 8. A control room was built in the corner of studio, against the windows. The transmitter itself was located in Room 5, along with the various equipment associated with news. Eventually, KMED would occupy the entire Riverside frontage except for Room 4.<sup>17</sup>

Within a week of the first announcement, word arrived from Washington D.C. that the Department of Commerce acknowledged KFAY's move and granted the new station the call letters KMED,

<sup>16</sup> "Mail Tribune Radio Station to Open Soon," Medford Mail Tribune, 19-December-1926, 1:6. The towers, clearly visible in Photo 6, were actually just wooden windmill towers, purchased from the local farm supply store, and adapted to the new technology.

<sup>17</sup> Information on the layout of KMED was gathered from the interviews with David Rees.



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"... the last three letters designating this city."<sup>18</sup> The formal opening of KMED was to be a gala affair with a program produced by the Crater Club of Medford and "... consisting of vocal and instrumental selections, skits, speeches, and short exercises."<sup>19</sup> The first broadcast began with a short address by Ashland's noted orator Professor Irving Vining followed by a brief explanation from the Mail Tribune on the objectives of the new station.

The establishment of the broadcasting station is in accordance with the long established policy of the Mail Tribune to furnish its territory and its patrons with the quickest, the best, and the latest in modern service... All events of interest, state national, and county will be put on the air as they occur.<sup>20</sup>

The establishment of KMED in Medford was something of a local event. It was an unusual, pioneering, development in the southern Oregon region and apparently the announcement of the station's inception generated a great deal of interest and excitement. The Mail Tribune gloated that "The dedication of KMED... calls for another notch in Medford's gun of enterprise and progress... there isn't another place in the world the size of Medford which has its own broadcasting station."<sup>21</sup> Local enthusiasm aside, in 1926 commercial radio stations were still relatively rare and almost all concentrated in larger urban centers. As late as 1928 there were only sixteen licensed stations in Oregon and only five outside the Portland area. KMED, the only Oregon station south of Eugene, was also the only station north of Sacramento, California.<sup>22</sup> While the

<sup>18</sup> "Mail Tribune Station Starts Sunday," Medford Mail Tribune, 24-December-1926, 1:4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "Mail Tribune Radio Station to Open Soon," 19-December-1926.

<sup>21</sup> "Medford is On the Air," [Editorial], Medford Mail Tribune, 29-December-1926, 4:2-3.

<sup>22</sup> See Citizen's Radio Call Book, September 1928 (Vol. 9, #3).

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Mail Tribune's boast may be in part the product of some understandable self-promotion, KMED would, at least locally, remain a singular phenomenon; Medford would not have a second radio station for another twenty-four years.

In these early days of radio, stations could reach far larger areas than they can today. The airwaves were relatively uncrowded; there was no FM, CB band or television and, for the most part, atmospheric conditions allowed for reception unimaginable today. Small, relatively low powered, transmitters could reach virtually the entire west coast and beyond. Medford listeners were familiar with the stations of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and even Denver, Colorado in addition to those of the northwest. KMED's own signal, only 50 watts when the station first signed on the air at the Sparta Building, covered a huge territory. "Telegrams received stated the program had been heard in Oakland, Cal. and Timber, Montana."<sup>23</sup> "Letters [from listeners] were regularly received from great distances, even as far as Australia."<sup>24</sup>

Early programming was far less professional than it would become following the growth of radio networks and the expansion of the medium.<sup>25</sup> At its start, KMED relied almost entirely on local talent and events for its content. The studio space in the Sparta Building served as the setting for

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<sup>23</sup> "First Program Station KMED Well Received," Medford Mail Tribune, 29-December-1926, 1:2.

<sup>24</sup> Chipman, p. 5. The practice of writing distant stations and reporting on their signal strength, program content or other factors was a traditional part of early radio listening. Today, this tradition survives among ham and shortwave radio operators who write in return for what have become known as "QSL" cards.

<sup>25</sup> A form of a radio network had been started as early as 1920 by AT&T. Following various corporate machinations occasioned by the threat of anti-trust actions and public opinion, NBC, the National Broadcast Company, a division of RCA under the direction of David Sarnoff, signed on the air in September 1926, the beginning of the modern radio network.

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plays, musical numbers and skits employing the talents of local friends and neighbors. Actors, musicians and their equipment all crowded into the studio and clustered around the microphone in front of the control booth. "Rupert and George Maddox, with Joyce Maddox accompanying on the piano, sang a vocal duet [and] the Crater Club of Medford, under the direction of Paul McDonald... put on a couple of hours of fun and comic selections for radio listeners."<sup>26</sup> Later programs would run the gamut from the Pirates of Penance, produced by the Medford Opera Company and Gates Groceteria's "Friendship Circle," a children's program,<sup>27</sup> to a lecture on the care of pneumatic tires by C.L. Wolfe, "the tire man."<sup>28</sup>

With modern equipment and Ruhl's backing, Virgin and KMED explored new uses for radio in southern Oregon. Fledgling attempts at national broadcasts allowed Rogue Valley listeners to participate in important distant events. On September 23, 1927 the second Dempsey-Tunney fight was broadcast. "Enterprising businessmen set up radios in their place of business so people could listen to this fabulous accomplishment of bringing immediate information on the fight."<sup>29</sup> In October 1927 Medford heard the World Series live, and in November, a high school football game between Medford and Ashland was covered play by play, reportedly Oregon's first live coverage of such an event outside Portland.<sup>30</sup> As

<sup>26</sup> "First Program Station KMED Well Received," 29-December-1926, 1:2.

<sup>27</sup> This show, broadcast continuously from 1927 through 1961 was reportedly one fo the longest running singly sponsored programs on radio.

<sup>28</sup> Mr. Wolfe, who owned a service station in Medford, was apparently a multi-talented individual. He regularly conducted selections of popular pieces played by what was unabashedly called "The Tire Man's Orchestra."

<sup>29</sup> Chipman, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> In these days before actual remote transmission was available the action would be sent to the studios by phone and then "re-created" with sound effects and transmitted to listeners. For one early sports event

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early as 1922, Bill Virgin thought a daily weather report would be a useful feature for local orchardists and, after receiving special permission from the government, began broadcasting "frost reports," a feature that would continue on KMED for the next 50 years. Elections and politics also quickly took advantage of the new medium. Roosevelt's Fireside Chats, local, state and national elections as well as other news all were relayed to listeners in southern Oregon by KMED.

The local service was fast... Probably every radio set in this county, as well as in Josephine county, was in use with most listeners using their sets until the station closed down... At midnight when listener were asked if they wished to continue... the studio phone [rang] incessantly for over half an hour.<sup>31</sup>

Sometime after September 1929, Ruhl apparently tired of the radio business. Perhaps advertising revenue was not as profitable as he anticipated or, more likely, he realized that radio, despite its ability to rapidly report news, would not seriously threaten the Mail Tribune's role as the area's news leader. "Magnanimously [Ruhl] gave [Virgin] a quit claim to his half interest in the station."<sup>32</sup> Within in a few months though William "Bill" Virgin, at age 41, died.

He was a pioneer in the radio business of this section and established the first radio store in this city. He later established a radio broadcasting station...which grew into KMED.<sup>33</sup>

With Bill Virgin's death, KMED's ownership and operation was taken over by his widow. Blanche Virgin thus became one of

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KMED boasted "Descriptions will at no time come later than 10-30 seconds after the play" (3-November-1928).

<sup>31</sup> "Southern Oregon Enjoyed Returns from Radio KMED," Medford Mail Tribune, 7-November-1928, 3:1.

<sup>32</sup> Chipman, p. 7

<sup>33</sup> "Death Summons W.J. "Bill" Virgin, Radio Pioneer," Medford Mail Tribune, 28-January-1928, 3:2.

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the first women to own and operate a radio station in the United States of America.<sup>34</sup>

Under Mrs. Virgin's control, aided by the increasing popularity of the radio medium as well as the declining price of radios themselves, KMED prospered, becoming an increasingly vital element of southern Oregon life. In 1933, a larger more powerful transmitter was built west of Medford and the wooden windmills on the Sparta Building were removed.<sup>35</sup> KMED's offices, studios, and other facilities remained on the second floor of the Sparta Building. Flushed with success, Mrs. Virgin decorated the Sparta Building studios in an exotic Chinese motif.<sup>36</sup> "Many a wide-eyed young visitor to the station was visibly impressed with the grotesque-faced oriental dragons and brilliant colors."<sup>37</sup> In 1937 KMED joined the NBC radio network and in 1938 the name of the company was formally changed to Virgin's Broadcasting Station, a name that would become known nationwide via the network affiliation. In early 1941 KMED built a new "floating" studio, completely isolated from outside noise, on what is now Rossanly Road, near the earlier transmitter site. With the new building complete, KMED moved from its Sparta Building offices ending fourteen years on the second floor.

Throughout World War II, KMED remained the local source for military news and entertainment for the southern Oregon area. KMED's role as the Rogue Valley's only station ended in 1946 with the arrival of KWIN in Ashland, followed a year later by Medford's second station, KYJC. In 1950 a group of local businessmen purchased the KMED from Mrs. Virgin, now remarried and known as Blanche Virgin Randle, concluding twenty-two

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<sup>34</sup> Ray Johnson, personal communication with the author, 16-January-1992. Mr. Johnson relates two other early women station owners, each of whom also inherited their stations. Johnson started at KMED in 1947 and retains a connection with the station at this writing.

<sup>35</sup> David Rees, personal communication with the author, 4-February-1992.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Chipman, p. 16.

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years of management. In 1959 a division of Radio Medford, Inc., new owner of KMED, established KMED-TV, the second television station the Rogue Valley. Later still, KMED-FM (now KTMT), first in the area to broadcast in stereo, would go on the air, continuing the pioneering KMED tradition. Today, seventy years after Bill Virgin first invited southern Oregonians "listen to him play the radio," KMED radio still broadcasts on the AM band. It remains the oldest continuously operated radio licensee in the State of Oregon.<sup>38</sup>

In the past few decades, Southern Oregon had become recognized as a great place to live and work...and a great place to do business. KMED has materially contributed to making it so.<sup>39</sup>

**POST-KMED:**

With the departure of KMED, the occupancy of the second floor of the Sparta Building was again uncertain. Commercial Finance, a loan company had moved into the corner first floor space prior to 1942. The Cozy Nook restaurant remained on the East Main frontage and another restaurant, associated with a tavern, occupied the NW corner. The offices of the second floor continued to serve a variety of professionals, dance studios, a dress-maker and others. In late 1941 with the declaration of war, Medford was suddenly faced with a housing and rental space crunch beyond all anticipation. Early in that year the War Department had announced that an area east of Medford in the Agate Desert was being considered as the site of a cantonment, a U.S. Army facility used to train troops. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Congress approved the construction funds to build what would become Camp George A. White. The contractor for the huge \$27 million camp was a collective comprised of five of the largest construction firms

<sup>38</sup> Al Reiss, "KMED Talk", Medford Mail Tribune, 11-December-1981, Tempo Section, 3:2. Some controversy surrounds this claim as station KEX in Portland also competes for the distinction.

<sup>39</sup> Chipman, p. 33.

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on the west coast. This group, under the name Contractors Medford Cantonment [CMC] established its offices on the second floor of the Sparta Building. [See Photos 6 and 7] By June 1942, CMC employed over 10,000 men and women on Camp White's construction and its payroll of over \$1.6 million per month.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, the Sparta Building continued to provide office space for a variety of small businesses including beauty shops, music studios, various engineers and construction firms. Commercial Finance remained the primary first floor tenant for much of the 1950s and for a time a branch Post Office occupied 403 East Main. A number of bars, including the Hi-Way Club and Harold's, were infamous tenants. In 1959 Peter Kiewit and Company, contractor for Interstate 5 thorough Jackson County had its offices in the Sparta Building.<sup>41</sup> In the mid-1960s, along with the remodeling of the first floor and the enclosure of the columns, the second floor of the Sparta Building was converted to apartment use and remained so until the fire described in Section 7. Since then the second floor of the building has been used for storage. By the 1980s the first floor had been unified into a single tenant use and a few unsuccessful restaurants operated in the space. Subsequent to final closure [by Sheriffs sale] in 1988, the entire Sparta Building remained vacant until purchased by the present owner in Fall 1991.

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<sup>40</sup> Jane Smith, personal communication with the author, 11-October-1991. Mrs. Smith was the Administrative Asst. for CMC's Medford office and vividly recalls the horror of pay-day when all these checks had to be typed. See also Medford Mail Tribune, 17-June-1942, 1:7.

<sup>41</sup> D.L. Pickell, personal communication with the author, 6-February-1992. Interestingly enough, Kiewit was also a member of the CMC collective which located in the Sparta Building almost two decades earlier.

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**RELATED RESOURCES:**

**Stylistically:**

While a number of other structures were built with elements of the American Renaissance Style during Medford's 1909-1912 boom period, the most imposing designs are those by architect Frank Clark. These are the Hotel Medford [1911, 406 W. Main] and the Liberty Building [1910, 201 W. Main]. Both the Grand [Barnum] Hotel [1914-15, 204 N. Front] and the Medford Elks Building [1915, 202 N. Central] were also designed by Clark but date somewhat later. Of these four, the most comparable to the nominated structure is the Elks Building. The corner entry design, first used by Clark on the Sparta Building serves as a precursor for the full-height colonnaded design the architect used on the Elks Building four years later. Here, as did the Sparta, the corner entry established a trend at the intersection. Clark's design for Medford's second City Hall, located at 6th and Central across from the Elks and now demolished, also utilized a corner entry, albeit much simpler and without free-standing columns. The Elks Building, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, retains substantial integrity to its original design and should be considered the epitome of Clark's use of the curved entry forms he first explored in the design of the Sparta Building.

The significance of the Sparta Building within the body of Frank Clark's work is evidenced by the designation of the structure as "Primary," a higher ranking than that which was accorded the Barnum Hotel or the Gannett-Cory Building, especially notable since the last property had already been listed in the National Register at the time of the survey.<sup>42</sup> These two comparable Clark designs, along with the primary ranked Hotel Medford (now demolished, see below) are substantially less grand in conception, utilizing plain, rectilinear ornament and offer common flat facades to the street. The sheet metal cornice bands of these three structures, as well as the Sparta Building, are quite similar, each with heavy dentil courses. However, of all Clark's

<sup>42</sup> Atwood and Evans, Frank Chamberlain Clark Survey, 1982. The Sparta Building is designated as Site No. 59.



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American Renaissance designs, or for that matter American Renaissance architecture in the Medford area, the Sparta Building remains unique in its use of white glazed brick on the primary elevation. While other buildings, notably the original Hotel Medford (as well as the Phipps Building, built in 1909) use a light cream-colored brick for the primary elevations, virtually all other structures utilized simple red brick.<sup>43</sup> The glazed white brick of the Sparta Building remains a notable extravagance within the Medford downtown area.

**Communications:**

Only three surviving resources other than the Sparta Building that are associated with the early broadcast history of southern Oregon have been identified. The 1933 KMED transmitter building survives, moved off its original site and much altered for use as a dwelling just north of the 1941 studio building.<sup>44</sup> That studio itself also survives, albeit in a much altered fashion, as a portion of what are now the studios of KTVL Television on Rossanly Road.

The 1947 studio of KYJC, the second broadcast facility in Medford, still stands at 1201 Barnett Road. This modest building was unfortunately altered substantially for use as professional office space in the late 1980s. A metal roof severely compromises the integrity of the original streamlined moderne design. The KFAY studios at the Jackson County Fairgrounds are completely undocumented. Presumably simple in nature and consisting mostly of an equipment installation in the "Dance Pavilion,"<sup>45</sup> they likely do not survive; most of the fairgrounds was demolished upon the completion the Jackson County Exposition Park near Central Point in the late 1970s.

<sup>43</sup> The original Hotel Medford burned in 1988. Rebuilt in an imitative design, the present structure is not historic and no longer remains listed on the National Register.

<sup>44</sup> Ray Johnson, "Voices of the Air", (KSYS Public Broadcasting, Medford. 1-February-1992).

<sup>45</sup> See Medford Mail Tribune 23-September-1922, 3:1.

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**SUMMARY:**

The Sparta Building was an innovative and important design in the American Renaissance Style as utilized during Medford's boom building period of 1909-1912. Its use of a curved corner entry established a model for later and more impressive structures in that style. The elaborate use of glazed white brick on the Sparta Building remains a unique example of materials in Medford. It is however as the original home of radio pioneer KMED that the Sparta Building merits recognition as a significant resource in the history of southern Oregon. The oldest surviving structure associated with the establishment of commercial broadcasting in southern Oregon and the site of radio pioneer KMED's formative years, the Sparta Building represents a significant period in the development of communication technology; the so-called "Golden Age" of radio. Retaining substantial integrity to its historic appearance, the Sparta Building successfully relates its design, workmanship, and use of materials. The Sparta Building admirably conveys the associations for which it is significant.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property includes all of the irregularly shaped lot identified as Tax Lot 9200 on Jackson County Assessors plat 37-1W-30BB, located at the NE corner of the intersection of East Main Street and North Riverside Avenue and commonly referred to as 12 North Riverside in the City of Medford, Oregon.

NOTE:

With retail frontages on two major streets, the Sparta Building has historically included first floor uses assigned addresses ranging from 2-30 North Riverside as well as 401-407 East Main. The offices of the second floor have been designated as 407 1/2 East Main Street followed by the appropriate room number (i.e. 407 1/2 East Main, Room #4). Currently the Sparta Building as a whole is listed on the Jackson County Tax rolls with the single address of 12 North Riverside.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated parcel includes the entire city lot historically associated with the structure known as the Sparta Building.

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**THE SPARTA BUILDING**

**Medford, Jackson County, Oregon, 97501**

1. Historic View: Construction, Corner Elevation,  
looking NE  
Photographer: Unknown (Medford Mail Tribune)  
Date of Photograph: c. 1-Jan-1911  
Negative: George Kramer
2. Historic View: C.E. Gates Ford Company, Corner  
Elevation, looking NE  
Photographer: Unknown  
Date of Photograph: c. 1915  
Negative: Southern Oregon Historical Society (SOHS),  
#8652
3. Historic View: Busy Corner Motors, Corner Elevation,  
looking NE  
Photographer: Unknown  
Date of Photograph: c. 1920-21  
Negative: SOHS #6710
4. Historic Interior: Busy Corner Motors,  
Interior, First  
Floor, looking N from East Main  
Photographer: Unknown  
Date of Photograph: c. 1920-21  
Negative: SOHS #67??
5. Historic View: Western Auto, Corner Elevation  
looking NE  
Photographer: Unknown  
Date of Photograph: c. 1929-33  
Negative: SOHS #7940

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- 6. Historic View: L.B. DeWitt, CMC Supervisor, at  
Entry to 2nd Floor entry, South  
elevation, looking north  
Photographer: Evelyn Gustafson Price  
Date of Photograph: October 1942  
Negative: Collection of Mrs. Homer Price, SOHS  
Negative #13696
  
- 7. Historic View: A.J. Kretchell, CMC Comptroller, at  
Sparta Building Entry, looking NW  
Photographer: Evelyn Gustafson Price  
Date of Photograph: October 1991  
Negative: Collection of Mrs. Homer Price, SOHS  
Negative # 13695
  
- 8. Exterior: Corner Elevation, looking NE  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 9. Exterior: South Elevation, looking N  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 10. Exterior: East (Rear) Elevation, looking NW  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 11. Exterior: West Elevation, looking NE  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 12. Exterior: North Elevation, looking S  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer

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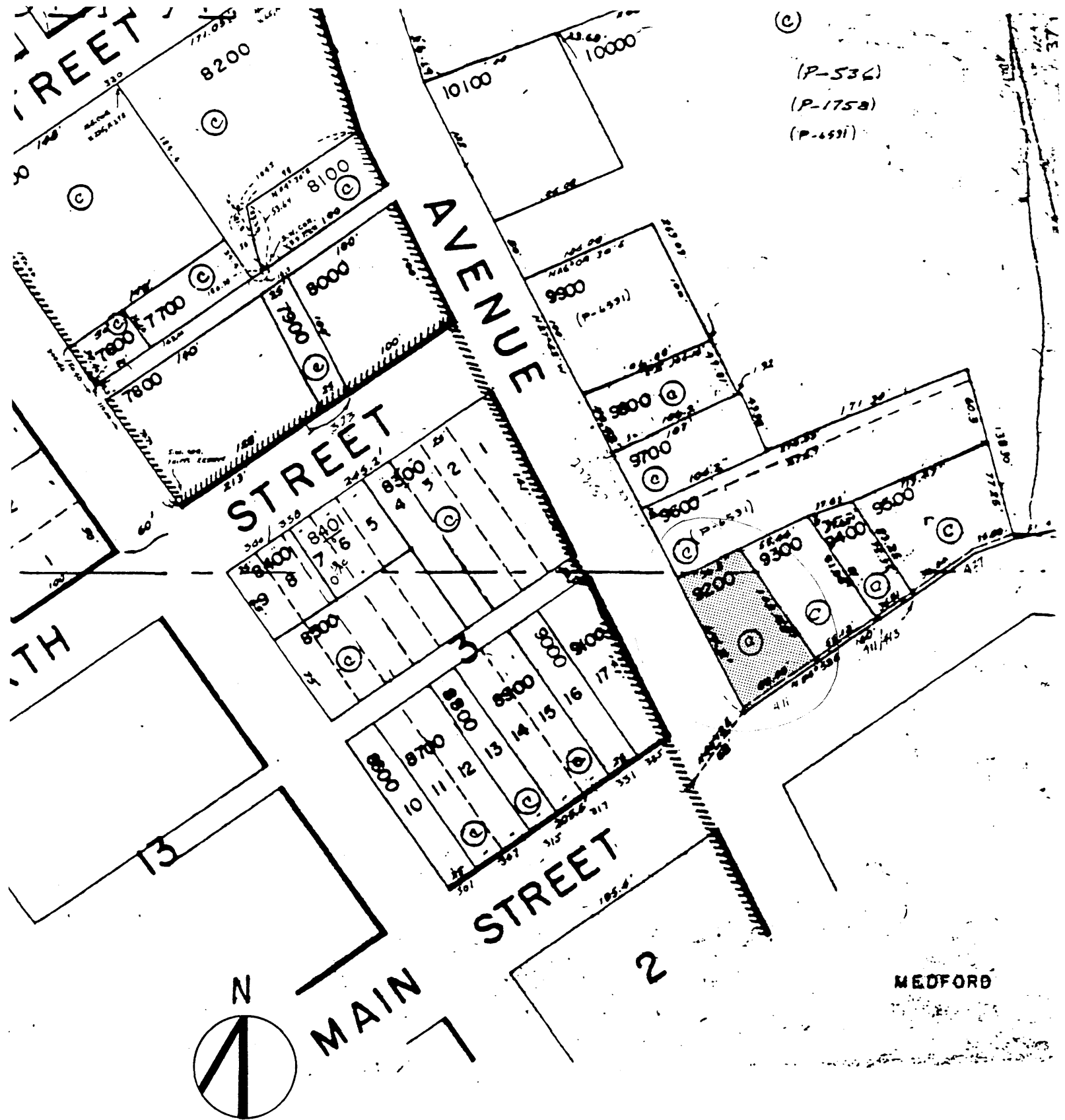
Section Number: PHOTOGRAPHS

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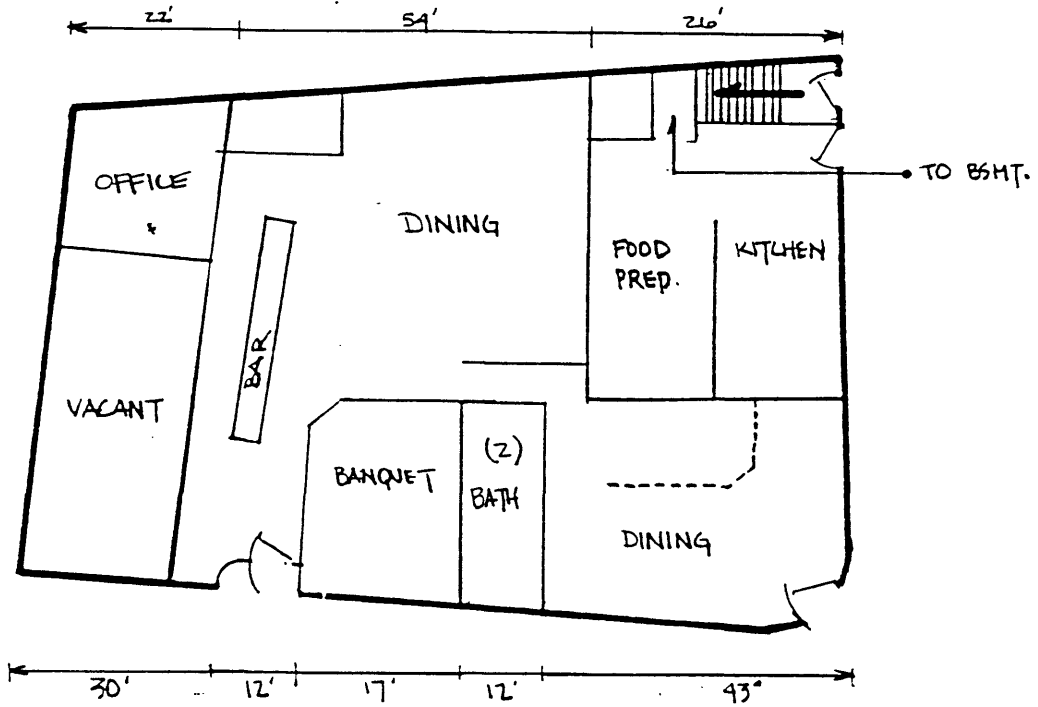
- 13. Exterior Detail: 2nd Floor, Corner Elevation,  
looking NE  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 14. Interior: 2nd Floor, Corner Room #4, looking SE  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 15. Interior: 2nd Floor Hallway, looking S  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 16. Interior: 2nd Floor, Rooms 7 and 6, looking SE from  
center of former studio space  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 17. Interior: 1st Floor, Corner space, looking N from  
Main Entry  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer
  
- 18. Interior: 1st Floor, Interior space and bar,  
looking E from North Riverside entry  
Photographer: G. Kramer  
Date of Photograph: February 1991  
Negative: Collection of the Photographer



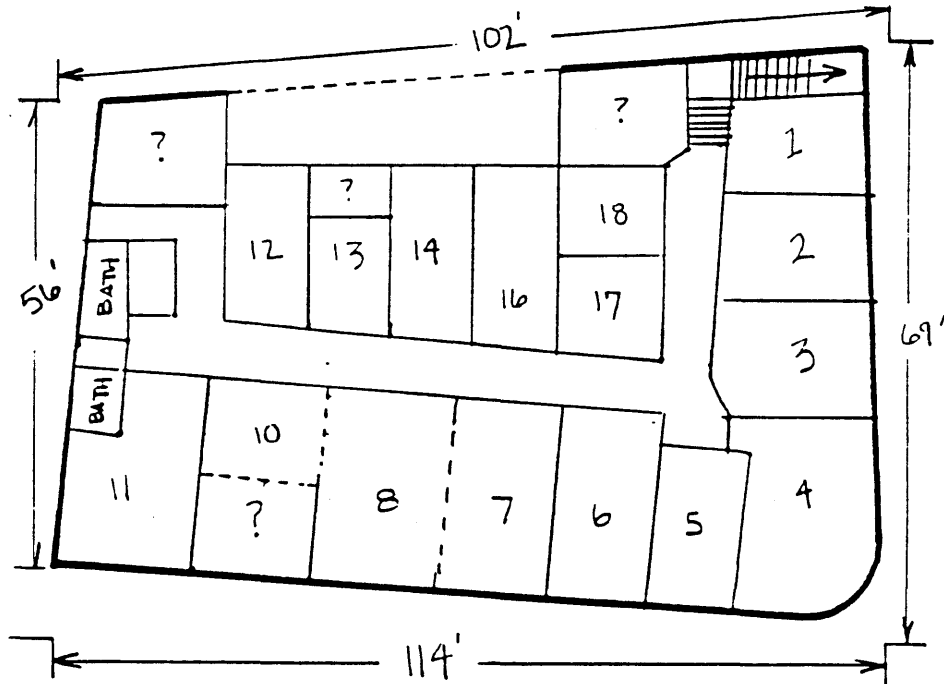
SPARTA BUILDING, MEDFORD  
 12 Riverside Avenue

Jackson County Assessors Map  
 37-1W-30BB, Tax Lot 9200



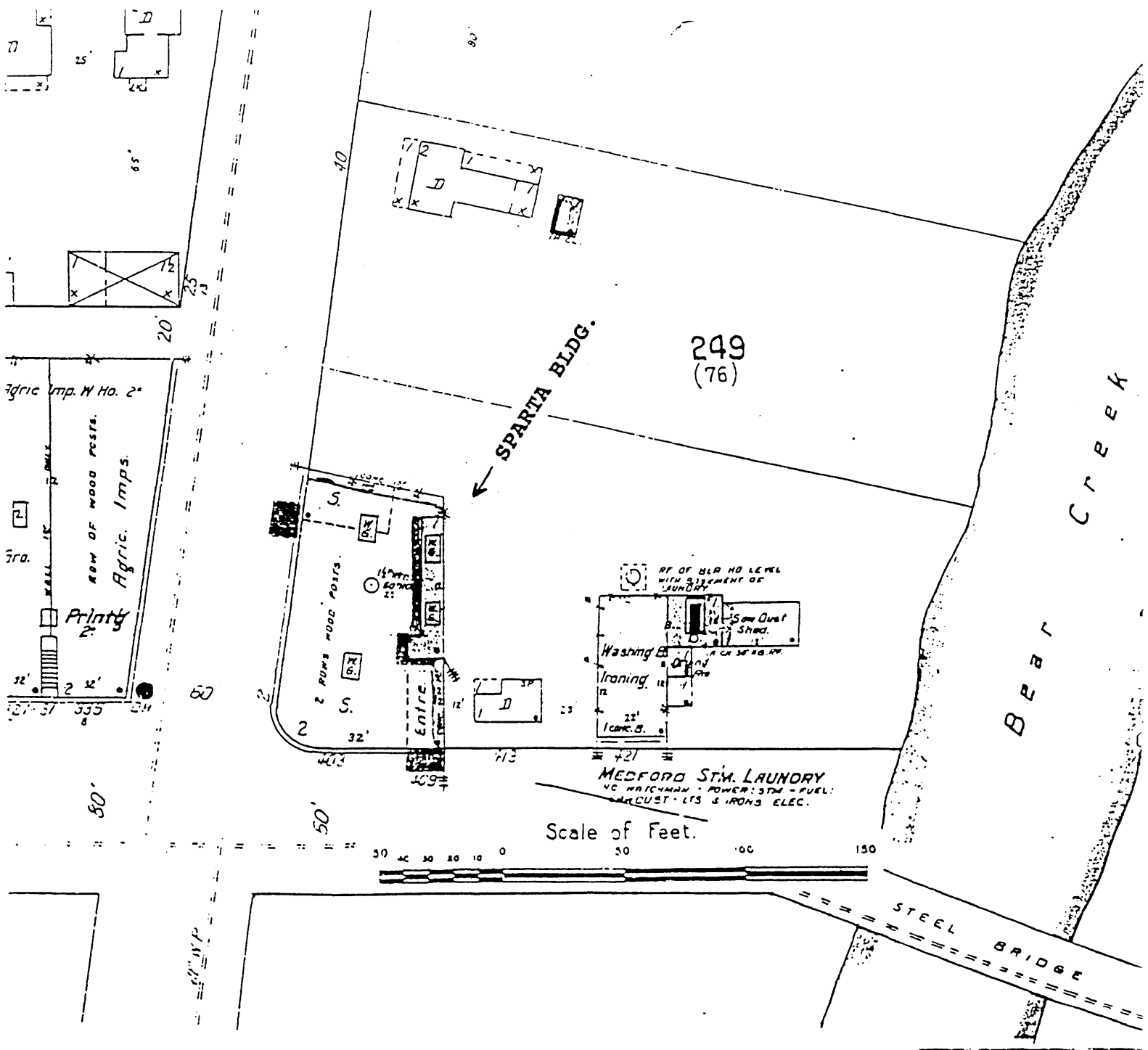


**Ground Floor**



**Second Floor**

**SPARTA BUILDING, MEDFORD**  
**12 Riverside Avenue**  
  
**Interior Floorplan, 1992**  
**NOT TO SCALE - APPROXIMATE ONLY**

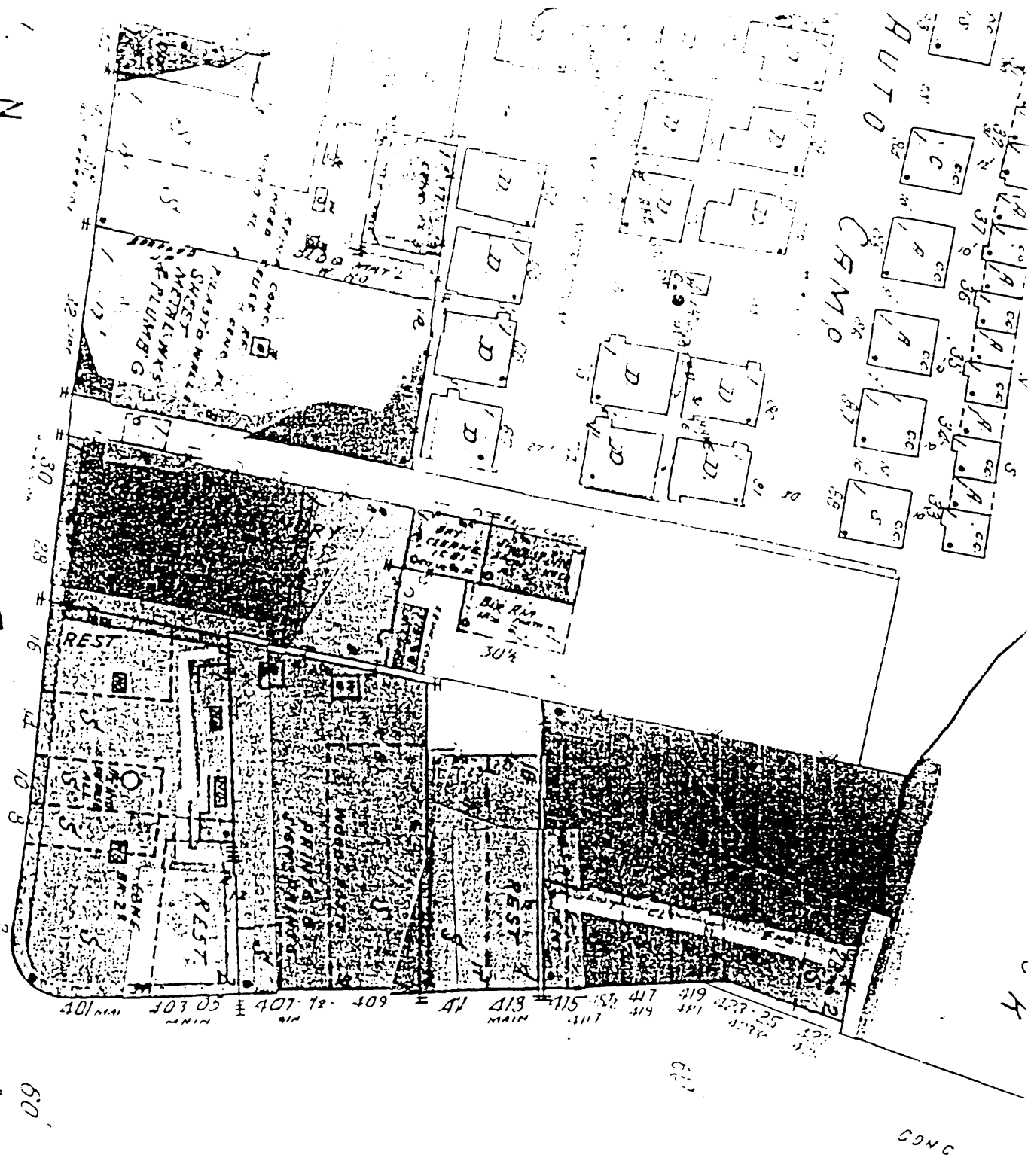


**SPARTA BUILDING, MEDFORD**  
**12 Riverside Avenue**  
 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Sheet 16  
 October 1911

S. GOVT OFFICES

SPARTA BLDG. →

N.



**SPARTA BUILDING, MEDFORD**  
12 Riverside Avenue

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map,  
Sheet 13  
1927, updated to 1954