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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 American Apartment Building

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

2. Location

street & number 2093 NW Johnson Street N/A not for publication

city or town Portland N/A vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97210

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 Hamrick April 15, 1993  
 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:

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

Signature of the Keeper entered in the National Register Date of Action 5/27/93  
Delores Byers

American Apartment Building  
Name of Property

Multnomah, 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)

Domestic: multiple dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: multiple dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century

American Movements: Commercial Style

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation cement

walls brick

roof apshalt: built-up

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

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### SETTING

The American Apartment Building sits at the northeast corner of 21st and Johnson Street, N.W. It was designed by William Bell and constructed in 1911 for the American Realty Company. By 1911, with the appearance of the streetcar, Nob Hill was a neighborhood in transition. Apartment buildings were still a relatively new idea, dating only to the time of the Lewis and Clark Exposition. At the same time, the American was not the first such building in the neighborhood, nor even on 21st Avenue. The area also was becoming increasingly commercial, with many neighborhood shops along 21st. But east and west of the avenue was a neighborhood of large comfortable houses, and along 19th Street, of mansions on large sites. A half block to the west on Johnson Street, across 21st, was the large stable of the Nichols Riding Academy. East on Johnson, at the corner of 20th, was the A. L. Mills mansion, which every summer had the Nob Hill District's largest cordwood pile, extending for more than 100 feet along the parking strip with 30-40 cords of pole oak and first growth fir, waiting for the wood saw to come along in the fall.

Today, 21st is a vital neighborhood commercial street, with a blending of neighborhood-based necessities, restaurants and mid-to-high end boutique-type stores. Catercorner from the American is the City Market, a high-quality neighborhood food cooperative. Across the street to the west is a dry cleaner and to the south is a restaurant. One block to the south is the 1910 Barker Apartments designed by A. F. Peterson. The buildings in the area range between one and five stories and generally maintain their historic appearance.

By contrast, Johnson Street is predominately residential with apartment buildings and older homes which have been adapted for apartments. Most of the apartment buildings date from the 1910-30's and range in height from one to five stories. Most of the houses which have been adapted date to the turn of the century. Directly across the street from the American is a 1926 3-story Apartment House. Just to the south at 2058 and 2068 are a couple 1890/1902 residences. In the block north at 2151 is another 3-story apartment house.

By location, size and design, the American Apartment Building is the dominate building in the area.

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### DESCRIPTION

The American Apartment Building was built in 1911 by the American Realty Company. The architect was William B. Bell. It is a 5-story and basement brick apartment house. It is "H" shaped in plan, consisting of two identical wings running north and south. The two wings are separated by a wide, deep courtyard which leads to the main entrance. At the rear of the site is a shallower court of the same width.

The building sits on a cement plastered, rusticated base, surmounted by a water table. Under the table are the basement windows and service doors. Above the table, the first story is faced with rusticated brick which stops at the second floor level in a painted, moulded belt course. Above this course, the brick facing rises uninterrupted, except by windows, to another belt course at the fifth floor level, similar in design to that on the second. Above the fifth story, the building originally had a broad overhanging cornice of wood and sheetmetal; this cornice has been removed and the area it occupied has been plastered and painted. Above the cornice is a brick-faced parapet wall with a simple metal coping.

The face brick on the 21st Avenue and Johnson Street elevations, and in the front courtyard, is a red select common brick of uniform color, laid in common bond with mortar joints colored black with lamp black. At the north and east sides of the building, and in the rear court, the brick is red common brick with the usual range of color.

At the 21st and Johnson Street elevations, and also on the east elevation, there are paired polygonal bay windows with a balcony between at floors two, three and four. There is also a larger balcony at the fifth floor over the bays. At the Johnson Street balconies, there is a metal fire escape at each wing.

All the windows are original. At the bays, the center double hung sash are six over one, and the side double hung sash are four over one. Other windows are eight over one in square headed openings with steel angle lintels. At the east and north sides, and in the rear court, window openings have segmental brick arches.

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Except for the missing cornice, the exterior of the building is in its original state and in a very good state of repair.

The building is entered by a broad stair from the court on Johnson Street. The entrance door opens to a spacious lobby paved with a patterned mosaic tile. All the original fir trim, cased columns and beams, wainscot and panelling remain in excellent condition. Opposite the entrance door is the electric elevator, which still have its original open iron grille cab enclosure. The stairway, which wraps around the elevator shaft, is "U"-shaped in plan. It is lighted by windows from the rear court. The corridors on each floor still have their original base, chair rail, doors and trim. Apartment unit doors are single panelled fir doors, which like the trim, have their original dark stained finish. Light fixtures in the corridors have been replaced, and the fire doors have been installed cutting off the elevator and stair lobby from the apartment unit corridors.

The building has 38 apartment units. Although the doors and woodwork in some have been painted, many units retain their original dark stained finish, and most still have their original kitchens and bathrooms. The clawfoot bathtubs have, however, been enclosed with tile. Apartments have built-in side boards which have dish cupboards above with leaded glass doors. Apartments are both one and two bedroom units, and vary in size, with larger units at the corners. All units also have Murphy pull-down beds in the living rooms.

Heating is by cast-iron radiators. A new gas-fired boiler has replaced the original boiler. The dumbwaiters, which used to serve all of the apartments, have been closed off, as have the trash chutes which were located in the corridors.

The American Apartments is a fine building in a remarkably good state of repair and in nearly original condition. It is a popular address still, and all the apartments are full with a waiting list. One present tenant has lived in the apartment since 1941. It still provides comfortable, convenient living space after more than 80 years. It is one of the best designed and best preserved of the large apartment buildings in Nob Hill dating from the early 20th century.

**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)

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1911

**Significant Dates**

1911

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

William B. Bell

**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:

\_\_\_\_\_

American Apartment Building  
Name of Property

Multnomah, Oregon  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.35 acres

Portland, Oregon-Washington 1:24000

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	1	0
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5	2	3	9	6	0
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5	0	4	1	5	3	0
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Zone Easting Northing

2 

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3 

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Zone Easting Northing

4 

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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 John M. Tess, President

organization Heritage Investment Corporation date November 19, 1992

street & number 123 NW Second Avenue, Suite 200 telephone (503) 228-0272

city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97209

#### 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 Roy and Yvonne Brustad

street & number c/o Nathan Shlim, 2901 NW Quimby telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97210

**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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**SHPO SUMMARY**

The American Apartment Building occupies a 100 x 155-foot lot at the northeast corner of the intersection of Johnson Street and Twenty-first Avenue in northwest Portland. Built in 1911, it was designed for the American Realty Company in the tradition of Beaux Arts free classicism by William B. Bell, an erstwhile draftsman for Emil Schacht. No other examples of the independent work of this designer are known locally.

The property meets National Register Criterion C as a good, generally intact representative of a distinct architectural type characteristic of, if not peculiar to northwest Portland in the streetcar era. The notable exception to its overall state of preservation is loss of a classical cornice of wood and sheet metal.

The substantial, brick-faced building is H-shaped in plan and its footprint fully occupies the lot lines. It rises five stories on a high basement to house 38 apartments that, upon the building's opening, were equipped with all the modern conveniences of the day. The building presents its major frontage along Johnson Street. Stylistically, it is related to the numerous brick-faced apartment blocks with multi-storied oriels that sprang up in Nob Hill and neighborhoods throughout the northwest section of the city.

Exterior elevations are detailed in a restrained Renaissance idiom drawing chief effect from the rusticated ground course and polygonal window bays of stories two, three and four. The straight parapet wall, as has been mentioned, is no longer adorned with its cornice. Street facades are more or less symmetrically organized in the familiar base-shaft-capital hierarchy adopted for tall buildings by the Chicago School. The main entrance at the head of a recessed light court on Johnson Street is sheltered by the original marquee.

The vestibule and lobby are distinguished by extensive use of mosaic tile paving and fine paneled woodwork, including wainscot, cased columns and ceiling beams. The apartment suites are well appointed, furnished with built-in cabinetry in the Arts and Crafts tradition. Some dark-stained finish work remains in original condition.



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The proponents of the nomination attempted to conduct a comparative analysis, and the fact is that the American Apartment Building is comparable to many; the apartment buildings of Claussen and Claussen, for example, in such works as the Bretnor (1912) at Twentieth and Lovejoy. The quality among most of these is consistently high. In aggregate, such apartment buildings make a decided contribution to the quiet streets and busy thoroughfares of Portland. They are related as manifestations of a post-Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition boom in the multiple housing market, and as a class, they merit evaluation under Criterion A in a much looked-for context study.

Beyond this single speculative project of quality, the American Realty Company appears not to have been a major force in the trend. Formed in 1909, the firm did not venture further into apartment house development after completion of the nominated building. Bell's span of practice in Portland, traced through city directories, was about 1909 to 1916.

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### NOB HILL AND THE ADVENT OF THE APARTMENT HOUSES IN PORTLAND

The 1911 American Apartment Building is located in the Nob Hill neighborhood in Portland. This area was part of Capt. John H. Couch's land claim. Couch was a Massachusetts seaman who first came to Oregon in 1840. Portland was not much more than a simple clearing in the wilderness at that time. He returned to the area in 1845 and claimed an area of land bounded by the Willamette River and NW Twenty-first, Ankeny and Thurman-Donation land Claim #52. Couch chose this territory because he felt it had the greatest potential for the shipping and commercial industries. The total claim was perfected in 1849 to include 640 acres. In 1850, Couch sold one-half his interest in the claim to George Flanders.

The Couch family settled in the claimed area setting aside 13 acres for the Couch estate and orchard. The first residential houses were built north of A and B streets. The commercial district was near the water in the 1850's and was expanding northward. The first residential district was centered along 4th and 5th streets. Couch decided to move north as the city began to grow. Large, double blocks were given to the Couch children and the area between 16th and 26th began to develop into an area of elegant homes. People moving into the area were the successful merchants, doctors, and other professionals who had taken advantage of the opportunities that existed in the young city of Portland. The Nob Hill area was an isolated area of the city with the Couch family creating their own New England style niche in the neighborhood.

The early years of the 20th century were a time of rapid growth and development in Portland. The city's population more than doubled between the years 1900 and 1910 from 90,000 to 212,000. This growth surge was due in part to the 1905 Lewis and Clark World's Fair, which gave the city international exposure it had not previously known.

Much of the population growth in Portland was absorbed in Nob Hill, an area which had previously been distinguished by its stately mansions, owned by many of the city's leading families. Some of these mansions still remain, including the Ayer-Shea residence and the George Heusner residence, both on the National Register. However, many of the mansions were replaced in the first two decades of this century by apartment houses like the American. The area became, and remains to this day, an intensely urban concentration of

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residential, commercial, and institutional uses. It boasts a number of properties listed or eligible for the National Register. Besides the mansions listed above, these include the Regent Apartments, the Ormonde Apartments, the Campbell Hotel, Trinity Episcopal Church, and the Belle Court Apartments.

Newspaper articles from the period testify to the apartment house boom which occurred in Portland around the years 1910-1913, and which was focused in Nob Hill. These articles also speak of a growing sophistication on the part of the public, which expected a high degree of quality in apartments. Real estate prices began to climb and apartment buildings were the wave of the future. Apartment buildings were virtually non-existent before 1904.

W.L. Morgan, Portland architect and contractor, built what was reported to be the first apartment building in the city in 1904 at what was then the southeast corner of 16th and Jefferson. The apartment building had 13 rooms and was opened in June of 1904. Morgan built two other apartment buildings at northwest 15th and Everett and the apartments rented immediately. In 1905 there were only three or four frame apartment houses in Portland. In the Nob Hill area, apartment buildings sprang up around the streetcar lines on 19th and Twenty-first avenues. This area became the most densely populated district in the state. By 1910, an article in the Oregonian reported that Nob Hill was an area where "the building is most marked" and was "being built up with fine apartment structures."

During the 1920's and 1930's, long time residents of the area continued to move away as older homes were being replaced and more homes were converted into apartment dwellings. With the advent of the automobile, the need to live close to the downtown area diminished and people began moving away from the city center. In the 1940's and 1950's inner-city problems, such as theft, traffic, and vandalism were on the increase in the Nob Hill area. The 1960's and 1970's saw a re-birth of the neighborhood, families were moving back and older homes were being restored. The Northwest District Association was created in an effort to restore the neighborhood. The elegant days of the late 1800's are long gone, but historically and architecturally significant structures in the Nob Hill district still exist. This character is preserved through the residences and apartment houses that were built during this period.

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## THE COMMERCIAL STYLE

Commercial style buildings are of five to sixteen stories with straight fronts, or slight central projections at most, flat roofs, and level skylines. The character of their facade derives from the fenestration, to which any ornamentation--often there is none--is subordinated. The pattern is often entirely regular; such groupings of windows as there may be usually has to be looked for to be seen. The windows themselves are rectangular, very large, and variously divided. Bay windows are often employed. The total area of glass normally exceeds that of the brick or other skeletal appearance even when the building is not of frame construction. When it is of frame construction, the piers and spandrels may be in the same plane, or the spandrels may be recessed. In either case, a fairly even balance is maintained between the vertical and horizontal lines. A cornice of moderate projection is the commonest upper termination of the facade.

The first use of the term Commercial Style in print would seem to have been due to the anonymous editor of the four volumes of Industrial Chicago, published in 1891. "The Commercial Style is the title suggested by the great office and mercantile buildings now found here. The requirements of commerce and the business principles of real estate owners called this style into life. Light, space, air and strength were demanded by such requirements and principles as the first objects and exterior ornamentation as the second."

Certainly the American is not in the category of the great Chicago office structures that have come to typify the commercial style. Still, Portland's first apartment building was constructed in 1904. It comprised 13 rooms. The American built only seven years later was 38 apartments and five stories with elevator. A significant jump forward for the city.

At the same time, built in a elegant, upper middle class neighborhood, the American is an attempt at blending the desire for "high-rise" apartment living while maintaining a human scale. The design was commercial. The American manifests the primary elements of that style, with an emphasis on light and space, with the character of the building defined by its bay and other windows, and with a balance between vertical and horizontal lines.

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### AMERICAN REALTY COMPANY

The American Realty Company was a speculative venture created by several Portland capitalists to exploit the apartment building boom that followed the Lewis and Clark Exposition in 1905. The firm formed in 1909 to specialize in real estate investments. The American Apartments were their first and apparently only apartment building and apparently their only construction project. The building was designed to be a quality structure to attract the high-end occupants. Construction cost \$100,000, compared to \$80,000 for the Barker Apartment Building one block away and 16 units larger. It featured three, four and five room apartments which initially rented for \$35-\$40-\$45 per month, with upper floor corner apartments renting at a premium \$55-60. The owners expected a net return of 15%.

At the time of construction, according to the Oregonian, "demand for dwellings of this class seems too large to satisfy". In this period, over twenty apartment buildings were under construction in the Nob Hill neighborhood. The American was to be one of the more elegant addresses established with the most modern of conveniences. Construction plans included a marble vestibule, electric elevator, ladies' reception room and men's smoking room, private dumbwaiters, house phones, post office distributing station, steam heat, laundry with "patent" dryers. An Oregonian article states "particular care and attention have been given to light and ventilation."

The principals were Samuel Connell, President and David A. Pattullo as Secretary/Treasurer. Connell was at the time President of the American Bank and Trust and President of Northwest Door Company. After the American Apartments were built, in 1912, Connell severed relations with American Realty and began constructing manufactured, ready-cut houses, portable houses and garages. This was done through his firm, Sam Connell Lumber.

J. M. Leiter replaced Connell in 1913 and headed American until 1918. Leiter had served as part owner and manager of the Bridal Veil Lumber Company and had moved to Portland to invest in real estate.

Five years later, Arthur H. Devers replaced Connell. Devers was the long-time President

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of Closset & Devers, a wholesale coffee importer. He kept his affiliation with American Realty until American Realty closed in 1926.

The common denominator throughout the short history of American Realty was Pattullo. The Scottish born Pattullo started as a manager at the shipping/export firm of Balfour, Guthrie and Company. In 1912, he also took on management of Golden Rod Milling. In 1926, the year American Realty closed, he then became President of Crown Mills and the next year, President of Oregon Iron and Steel.

The firm employed a full-time sales manager in 1910 and in 1911. Two people each served for one year, Vernon Major in 1910 and Tyler Scoville in 1911. Subsequently, no actively managed the office, which was located in the Board of Trade Building.

### **WILLIAM B. BELL**

The American Realty Company hired William B. Bell to design the American Apartment Building. It is the only building which he is known to have designed.

Little is known of Bell. Until this application, he has been unknown to architectural history in the city. The City Directory provides the only known information about him. From 1909 to 1910, Bell was a draftsman for Emil Schacht. The German-born and trained Schacht had arrived in Portland in 1883 at the age of 29. He opened his office two years later and practiced in the city until his death in 1926. A leader in the city's earliest architectural association, the Portland Association of Architects, Schacht is remembered for his design of the exuberant Oriental Building at the Lewis and Clark Exposition of 1905. His most noted design was the Police Block (1912). A prolific architect, some of Schacht's more well known works includes the Bullier Building (1906), Swetland (Aus) Building (1907), Maegly-Tichner (1911) and the Ideal Theater (1912).

During the 1909 and 1910 years, like many of Portland's architects, Schacht was busy designing apartment buildings in the Nob Hill. These were the years that Schacht employed Bell as a draftsman. In 1911, Bell established his office at the Board of Trade Building. This was the same building in which American Realty maintained an office. The following year, he moved his office to the Worcester Building and in 1915 again relocated to the

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Sherlock Building. In 1916, he worked out of his home at 494 Marguerite Avenue, which he shared with his wife Claudia. The following year, Bell disappeared from the City Directory.

Given the competence of the American Apartment Building and the total disappearance of Bell and his wife from the Portland area, we can only surmise that he moved from the city in 1917.

Regardless, the American Apartment Building remains the only known example of his work.

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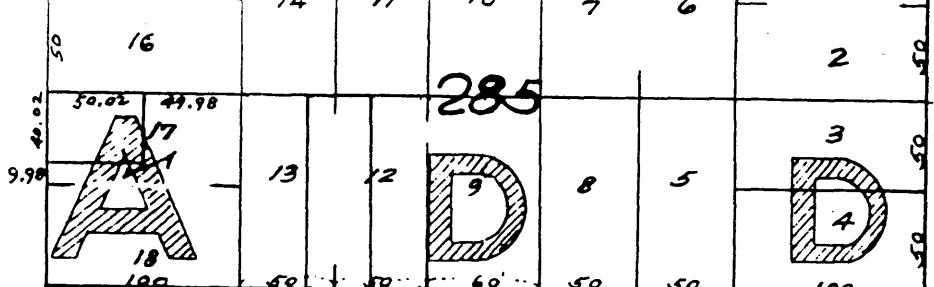
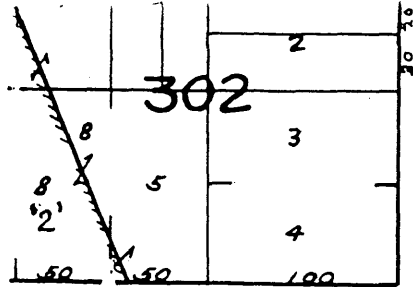
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### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The American Apartment Building is located on the west five feet of lot 12 and all of lots 13, 17 and 18 of block 284, Couch's Addition in Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon.

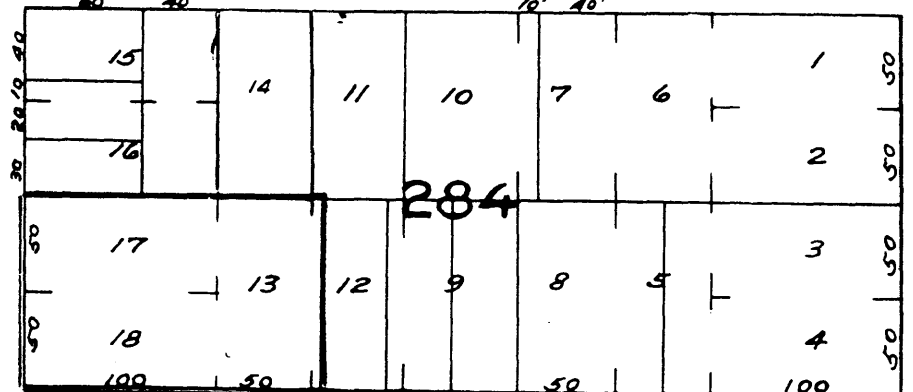
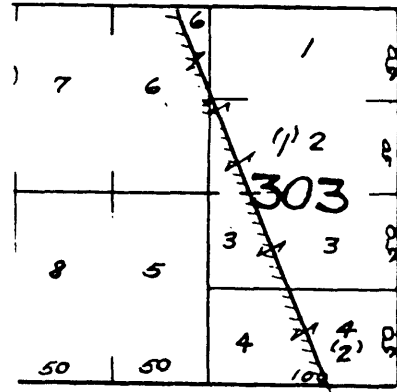
### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary is the legally recorded boundary lines for the building for which National Register status is being requested.



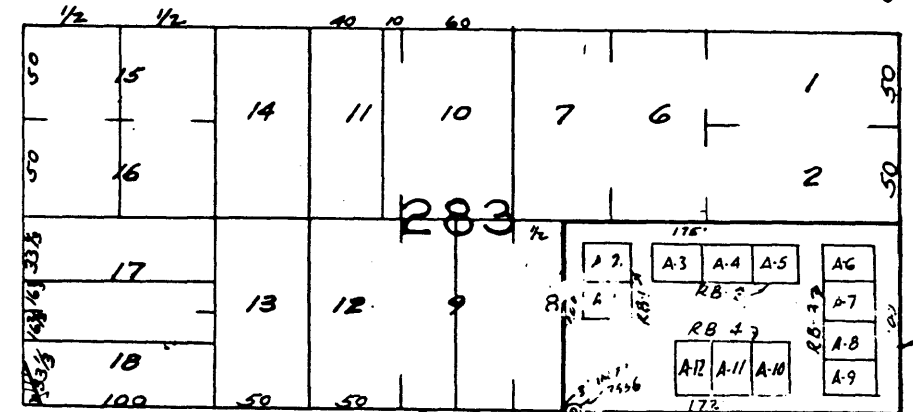
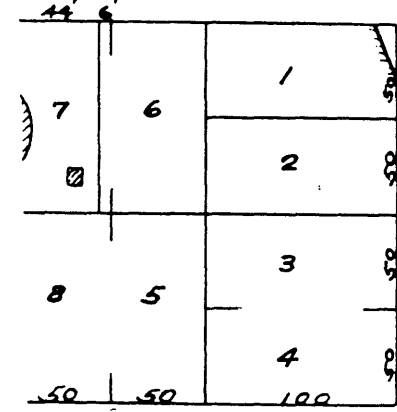
59.9

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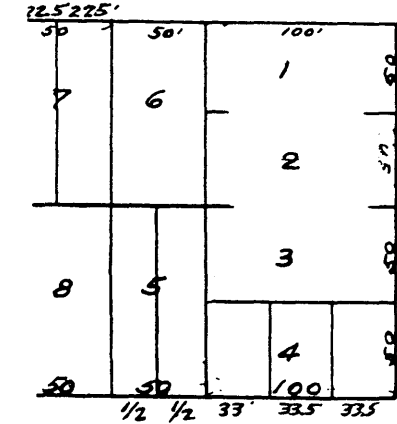


JOHNSON

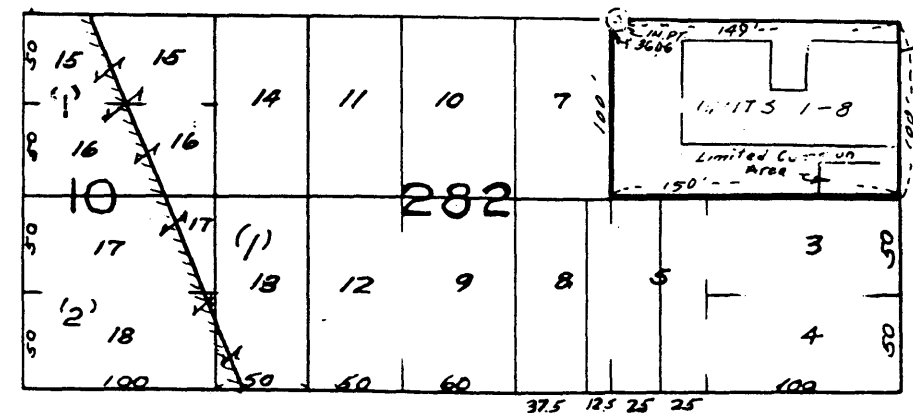
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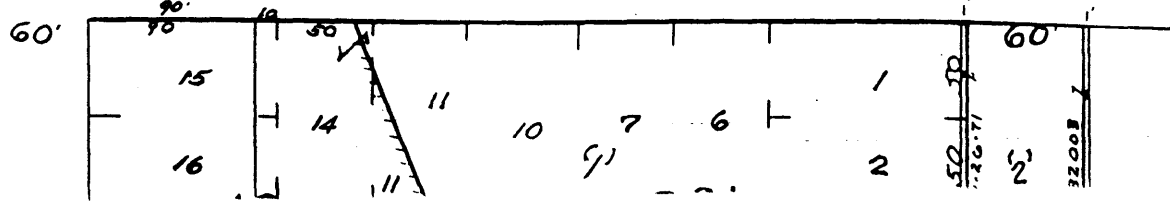
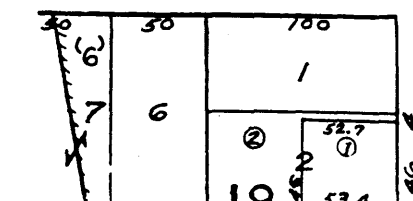


N.W. 21ST



N.W. 20TH

ST.



BOOK 1