

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

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

1. Name of Property

historic name General Building
other names/site number Tennessee General Building, Bank of Knoxville Building, Third National Bank Building

2. Location

street & number 625 Market Street N/A not for publication
city, town Knoxville N/A vicinity
state Tennessee code 047 county Knox code TN093 zip code 37902

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private/public ownership and building/site/structure/object categories.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official: Herbert L. Byer, Deputy State Historical Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
Date: 1/29/88

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
[X] 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
Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/businessCOMMERCE/financial institution

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

RENAISSANCE

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETEwalls BRICK, Limestone

roof ASPHALTother CONCRETE, TERRA COTTA

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The General Building is a fifteen story office building located at the northwest corner of Market Street and Church Street in the heart of the downtown Knoxville business district. The concrete frame building was constructed in 1925 and 1926 and is an excellent example of Second Renaissance Revival architecture. The General Building is one of the oldest high-rises in Knoxville and, likewise, bears the distinction of being the only high-rise designed by the founders of the well-respected Knoxville architectural firm, Barber and McMurry.

The L-plan building typifies the Second Renaissance Revival style and early skyscraper designs, such as those of Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School, in its exterior divisions. The base of three stories, intermediate floors, and the top story with its cornice are organized into distinct sections by belt courses and use of materials.

The first three stories of the east and south facades are composed of rusticated limestone veneer. Symmetrically proportioned, the east facade contains three monumental circular arched openings flanked by rectangular windows. The two story arches are enriched by traceried fanlights, limestone rope molding, voussiors, and dentil trim. Arcaded limestone trim, scroll brackets, and cartouches are situated above the transoms. Modern revolving doors have replaced the original double leaf doors in two of the openings. The general lobby is reached through the northern arch, while the southern arch leads to the bank lobby. An original steel frame window is found in the central opening. Plaques with "Third National Bank" written on them cover stones that were incised with "Alex McMillan Company", "General Building," and "Day and Night Bank." Four wall-mounted iron and glass Renaissance Revival lanterns flank the arched openings. The domed lanterns are highlighted by trefoils and finials. Diamond pattern glass transoms cap the steel frame windows at the first story level. Two elaborately carved limestone cartouches are embellished with animal and floral motifs, volutes, and festoons. A molded limestone belt course and an enlarged limestone belt course that forms a dentiled cornice define the mezzanine or entresol level. Six bays of 2/2 double-hung sashes set in metal frames are seen here. These windows, like those on the fourth and tenth floors, are not original and their date is unknown.

The brick veneer intermediate section of the east facade of the building is characterized by six bays of windows on each story. Most of these are

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steel sashes with two operating lights set within twelve light frames. A terra cotta cornice rests below the fifteenth story, while the terra cotta crown cornice at the roofline mimics the arcaded design of the arched openings. Precast concrete quoins delineate all of the edges of the building. The south facade is similar, on all stories, to the east facade, except there are no lanterns or cartouches. All of the monumental arched openings contain windows in the bank area.

The rear of the building (the north and west elevations) consists of brick veneer with two belt courses of concrete replacing the elaborate crown cornice and two belt courses of concrete flanking the third floor, where visible. A small brick appendage at the rear of the office building makes the first two floors of the building square instead of an L-plan. This appendage was later expanded to a four story structure in 1958. A required fire-safety stairwell is currently being constructed for the entire fifteen story building in the interior portion of the ell on the west facing elevation. This structure will consist of Dryvit which matches the existing brick. Other current exterior work includes removal of all the precast concrete quoins. These deteriorating quoins are being replaced with synthetic plaster quoins that mimic the old ones. A penthouse screen, introduced in a 1972 renovation, will eventually be removed, exposing the original brick elevator penthouse. The existing screen is made of brown corrugated metal. Windows on both elevations are 2/2 double-hung sashes set in twelve-light frames.

The most impressive interior portion of the building is the vaulted bank lobby. Each vault in the ceiling consists of four triangular-shaped, intersecting plaster panels which radiate from the vaulting capitals or from the monumental windows. The two-story lobby is surrounded by a balustraded mezzanine on the east, north, and west sides. The mezzanine was closed in on the west end in 1972, and a panel was introduced behind the balustrade. Rope molded columns and arcaded openings on the balustrade give continuity to the Renaissance motif that was seen on the exterior. Walls in the lobby are made of concrete and plaster where the structural supports are located and of hollow tile and plaster on the remaining walls. Suspended lanterns illustrated in historical photos were replaced by brass chandelier fixtures in 1972, while marble stairs connecting the lobby to a lower level office area were removed in 1965 and replaced with another marble stairwell located where a bank office had been situated in the eastern end of the lobby.

The lobby of the office building has marble floors and one marble wall where the elevators are located. The remaining walls are faced with terra cotta blocks and plaster. The elevators have bronze-plated doors, and are

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surrounded by fluted pilasters and broken pediments. Painted plaster relief ornamentation comprised of festoons and fruit is found on ceiling beams, while a dentiled cornice is located at the ceiling edges in the lobby. The entrances to both the bank and tower lobbies have revolving doors, another product of the 1972 renovation.

The eighth floor of the building is the only floor (besides the first floor) which retains, for the most part, its original character in the corridor area. All other areas have been or are in the process of being remodeled. The eighth floor corridor has terrazzo floors, marble bases, painted wood chair rails, plaster walls, and painted wood frame doors and transoms. Suspended acoustical ceilings have been installed approximately 12 inches below the plaster ceiling.

Floors two through four and nine through fifteen were previously renovated for full floor tenants or tenants that leased a majority of the floor. Renovations took place, for the most part, in the 1970s and resulted in the original floor plans changing from approximately thirteen 10' X 12' offices per floor to floors with eight to ten offices, a conference room and reception areas. Materials used on these floors include a combination of bronze-anodized framed glass partitions and fabric-covered stud walls; floors were carpeted. The tenth floor contained the Bank of Knoxville's executive offices and was equipped with two fireplaces and a kitchen during the renovations. Floors five through seven are currently being renovated (i.e., partitions are being removed) for future tenants. All floors are being equipped with an additional restroom in order to provide both men's and women's facilities on each floor. Each floor is approximately 3,075 square feet.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
COMMERCE
MEDICINE

Period of Significance

1926-1931

Significant Dates

1926

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Acuff, Herbert

Architect/Builder

Barber and McMurry
Worsham Brothers

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

The General Building is an architecturally and historically significant building of the early twentieth century. The building is being nominated under criterion C because of its architectural significance as a distinctive high-rise building in the Renaissance Revival style. It is a unique example of the work of the well-respected architectural firm of Barber and McMurry. Under criterion B, the building is significant for its association with Dr. Herbert Acuff, a prominent Knoxville citizen who was a notable physician and businessman.

The development company's history of financing and construction of the General Building was recorded in the Corporate Record of The General Building, Inc. The General Building Inc. was incorporated as a Delaware corporation on November 14, 1924. The firms incorporators and founding subscribers were: A. R. McMurry, L. P. McAuliffe, A. P. Brown, B. F. McMurry, and John A. Ayres. On November 15, 1924, Herbert Acuff and F. A. Weiss were added to the list and made President and Vice-President/Treasurer, respectively. According to a proposal made by A. P. Brown in the Corporate Record January 10, 1925, "...sometime prior to October 1, 1924, the need for a modern office building in Knoxville was brought to my attention by a group of business men who were interested in the growth of Knoxville. These gentlemen who were not in anyway interested in the development of the building, urged me to investigate the need for such a building and, if possible, obtain a suitable location." After Brown discovered that there was, indeed, an acute shortage of office facilities, he searched for suitable building locations and discovered five sites in the downtown area that would be desirable. These sites were: Fouche Block, McTownlee Corner, Plaza Block, Briscoe Block, and the "Old Rambo Corner." The site considered most desirable was McTownlee Corner which could not be acquired for less than \$350,000.00. With the exception of Rambo Corner, which was owned by the McMillan Co., the other sites could not be purchased for any "reasonable" amount. The Alex McMillan Co. agreed to sell Rambo Corner for \$193,000.00 under the condition that they be given a lease for 25 years for a portion of the first floor. Construction of the building was determined to cost \$400,00.00 (preliminary figure). G. L. Miller and

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .10 acre

UTM References

A

1	7
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2	3	6	7	9	0
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3	9	8	3	6	1	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Knoxville 147 NW

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated parcel is a rectangular parcel fronting market Street (64.98') on the east and bounded by Church Street (72.45') on the south. It includes all of parcel 13, as outlined on the accompanying tax map.

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Boundary Justification

The boundary is the area in which the building is situated. The boundary is also the legally recorded boundary lines for the subject property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cynthia B. Whitaker, Project Coordinator

organization Commercial and Investment Properties Co. date 9/12/87

street & number 1016 East Weisgarber Road, Suite 350 telephone (615) 584-3967

city or town Knoxville state Tennessee zip code 37909

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Co., Inc. agreed to purchase the bond issue at \$490,000.00 under the condition that Dr. Herbert Acuff act as president and F. A. Weiss act as Treasurer of the borrowing corporation. Both Acuff and Weiss agreed to serve as officers and to devote as much time as needed, without salary. A contract for the construction of the building was signed for \$383,353.71. According to the last recorded figure, building extras amounted to \$30,000.00, making a total building cost of at least \$413,353.71.

Barber and McMurry, the architectural firm who designed the building, was established in 1915. Though a majority of their work consisted of designing houses and churches, they were responsible for the design of several important local buildings, such as the YMCA, YWCA, and Church Street Methodist Church. Mr. Barber, the architect of the firm (Mr. McMurry ran the business aspect of the firm), was "a militant champion of the City and regional planning." Mr. Barber had long been an advocate of governmental reform and progress in Knoxville, both physically and culturally. Because both Barber and McMurry were listed as investors in the General Building, Inc. and were involved throughout the development process, the General Building is recognized as an example of well-planned cultural and economic growth for the City.

The Italian influence so characteristic of the Barber and McMurry's early work, which included several major commissions in the late 1920s that are now considered Knoxville landmarks, is expressed in this building with consistency and refinement. It is the only high-rise building by the firms founding principals and is the only building of comparable size surviving from this period in the downtown area. Other Barber and McMurry buildings which exemplify this style include the YMCA Building and the Candoro Marble Co. office building (1921). The 1929 YMCA Building (NR 11/17/83) is located three blocks from the subject building and displays stone-veneered, monumental arched openings, stone quoins, and brick-veneered walls. Both buildings are excellent examples of Barber's impressive detailing and eclectic classical style. The detailing of these buildings is obviously influenced by Paul Cret, Barber's mentor at the University of Pennsylvania, who was known for his "stripped classical" style. Barber and McMurry had offices in the General Building from 1926 until 1934 when they moved to 517 1/2 Church Street. Additionally, a note of interest is a project currently under construction directly across Market Street from the General Building. The design of these two five-story office buildings, named Centre Square One and Two, has been influenced, somewhat, by the General Building in that the bases of the new buildings consist of monumental arched openings and also display detailed ornamental appointments.

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Worsham Brothers completed the construction on the General Building. Earl S. Worsham, who was president of the company at the time of construction and was listed as a stockholder in the General Building Inc., completed several buildings in the Knoxville area. The most notable include the Andrew Johnson Hotel (NR 7/9/86), the First Baptist Church, the Medical Arts Building (NR 5/24/84), and Church Street Methodist Church. Worsham also completed government facilities in Roanoke, Virginia; Anacostia near Washington D. C.; Huntington, West Virginia; Shreveport, Louisiana; Ft. McClellan; Barksdale Field; and Bristol, Tennessee.

Dr. Herbert Acuff had offices in the General Building from 1926 to 1931. He attended Carson and Newman College, the University of Louisville (MD., 1911), and the Kentucky School of Pharmacy (1910, Ph.G.). He began his medical practice in Knoxville in 1911. From 1911 until 1913, he was the house surgeon for Knoxville General Hospital. He then attended clinics in Europe for six months and again returned to practice medicine in Knoxville. He was on the staff at Riverside - Fort Sanders Hospital, was chief of staff at St. Mary's Memorial Hospital, and was chief surgeon at Beverly Hills Sanitarium. Dr. Acuff was active in local and national medical societies. He enlisted in the Army in 1917 and rose to the rank of major while operating as a surgeon to the 30th Division and British and Australian divisions. Eventually, he became director of Field Hospitals for the 30th Division. After the war, he returned to his medical practice in Knoxville. He was elected president of the International College of Surgeons in 1950. In addition, Dr. Acuff was active in the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce and he served on the executive committee for the Great Smokey Mountains National Park from 1926 until his death.

Though Dr. Acuff was better known for his civic contributions and medical practice, he was also a noted businessman. According to Tennessee - A History, Dr. Acuff organized and presided over The General Building and Finance Company in 1920, which built and operated three apartment houses and a storage garage. Later he helped to organize the General Building Incorporated and built the General Building, then the tallest high-rise in Knoxville. He was vice-president and director of the Pruden Coal and Coke Company, was a president of Investment Property, Inc., and served on the boards of several banks. In 1947, Dr. Acuff also built the Acuff Building to house a medical clinic. The three story building was razed in 1968 after having stood vacant for over three years. The General Building is the finest remaining example of Dr. Acuff's pursuits in the field of finance and commerce and is the only remaining location where he had private offices.

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The physical context of the General Building has not been altered substantially and the building remains an important landmark with a remarkable continuity in its thematic styling. It is virtually unaltered on the exterior and retains its most significant interior spaces intact. Its presence continues to enhance Market Street, the historic and functional spine of downtown Knoxville.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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McNabb, W. R. The Architecture of Barber and McMurry, 1915-1940. From an exhibition at the Dulin Gallery of Art, 1976.

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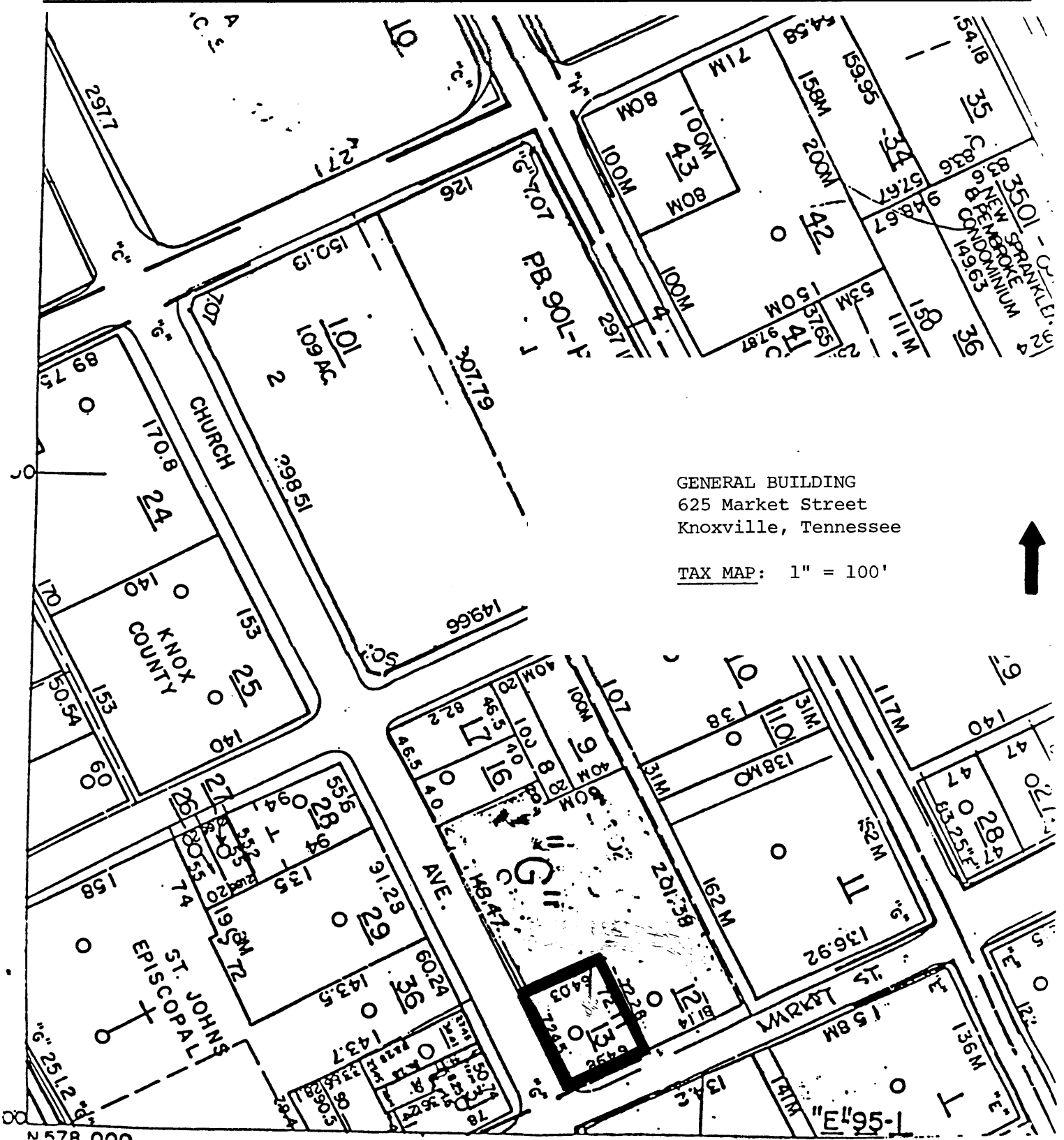
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General Building



GENERAL BUILDING
625 Market Street
Knoxville, Tennessee

TAX MAP: 1" = 100'

