

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCIS use only  
received APR 2 1980  
date entered SEP 24 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Commercial Structures of El Paso by Henry C. Trost *Thematic Resources*

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number Central Business District (See individual data sheets.) not for publication

city, town El Paso vicinity of congressional district 16

state Texas code 048 county El Paso code 141

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> thematic group	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Multiple Ownership - See individual data sheets.

street & number

city, town vicinity of state

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. El Paso County Courthouse

street & number City/County Building

city, town El Paso, Texas state Texas

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Historic Sites Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date June 1975, 1979  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Texas Historical Commission

city, town Austin state Texas

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Located in close proximity to one another within the central business district of downtown El Paso are seventeen structures dating from the early 20th century which comprise the Commercial Structures of El Paso by Henry C. Trost thematic nomination. Constructed between the years 1909 and 1930, the buildings contribute significantly to the commercial cityscape and represent not only the growth and prosperity of El Paso, but also the architectural skill and diversity of Trost.

Downtown El Paso occupies a portion of a greater area lying at the foothills of the Rockies historically known as "El Paso del Norte" or "the Pass of the North." As early as 1520 the Spanish claimed the pass, which prior to that time was well known to migratory Indians of the mountains, plains, and deserts. Following the Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1680 in New Mexico, Spanish colonists and Tigua Indians fled southward from Santa Fe and sought refuge in the area, though it was not until the early years of the 19th century that Anglos began to inhabit the vicinity.

The city of El Paso evolved from four earlier settlements, the oldest one made by Juan Maria Ponce de Leon in 1827, on which the commercial district exists. The Californio Gold Rush of 1849, soon followed by cattle drives brought overland travel through El Paso en route to the Pacific. Postal service was begun in 1852 and the Butterfield Overland Mail Route maintained a station at present Overland and El Paso Streets. The community was known as Franklin until 1859 when Anson Mills, state surveyor for the district, made an approved map showing each block in the town which he renamed "Town of El Paso."

El Paso grew and flourished during the remainder of the 19th century. With the arrival of four railroads in 1881 and 1882, the population of 700 exploded. Overnight new businesses opened and luxuries like indoor plumbing, electric lights, telegraph and telephones, city water supplies, and a mule driven street railway became available. Banking facilities were numerous as were saloons and gambling halls. El Paso became a western boom town and a haven for speculators, gamblers, and gunmen. This spirited lawlessness which flourished throughout the west during the expansion of the 1860's-80's continued through the 90's in El Paso. This can be attributed in part to the geographic isolation of the city and also to its proximity to Mexico where safety from the law was just across the Rio Grande. By the turn of the century however, El Paso, boasting a population of 15,000, began assuming an air of respectability. Pistols were required by law to be left at home and in 1905 open gambling was outlawed. In 1906 a bottle of champagne was broken to commemorate the paving of one block of Mesa Street in front of the Hotel Orndorff (now Hotel Cortez), the first to be paved in the city. The Mexican Revolution, which erupted in 1910 and lasted through the following decade attracted spirited and adventuresome individuals and checked the social and cultural development of the city. By 1920 however, El Paso, which covered 25 square miles and supported a population of 77,000 was well into what is commonly referred to as its small metropolis phase.

Early in the 20th century real estate developments were flourishing as El Paso expanded. With the presence of the railroads the city developed as a major shipping and marketing center and business boomed. Professional procedures, like the social and cultural practices, became polished and refined. With this flourishing commercial development came a need for commercial office and retail space. During the first three decades of the 20th century, numerous high rise buildings were erected in the central business district, many of which were designed by El Paso architect Henry C. Trost, who was well known throughout the southwest and enjoyed national recognition for many of his individual works.

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The conditions existing in the city are similar to those of Chicago in the 1880's which facilitated the development of the Chicago and Sullivaneseque commercial styles. The advanced degree of economic development, the availability of good technical education, and the absence of restricting traditions present in eastern cities allowed Trost a rare and creative freedom. Designed to reflect the burgeoning prosperity of the growing city, Trost's commercial structures are innovative compositions of local and national architectural forms and stylistic elements skillfully executed with high quality materials. Reflecting such diverse stylistic formats as the Sullivaneseque corner commercial structure and the Art Deco setback skyscraper, the buildings, richly detailed with a variety of stylistic references, attest the architectural talents of Trost.

Built around 1917 in an ell-shaped plan is the Popular Department Store which exemplifies Trost's knowledge and understanding of the Chicago School Commercial style. Executed in white sandstone, the design features the typical tripartite division of base, shaft, and cornice highlighted with varying degrees of surface enrichment. The street facades feature three-part windows and simple spandrels between four story vertical piers, topped with a prominent dentilled cornice.

Located four blocks away, the Palace Theater represents Trost's capabilities with decorative surface enrichment as well as his knowledge of diverse stylistic idioms. Built in 1914 as a playhouse/theater, the Palace, then known as the Alhambra, is a simple three-story rectangular building with decorative details concentrated on the street facade. This sophisticated composition of Spanish Colonial elements with a strong Moorish influence exhibits a knowledgeable acquaintance with the style and precludes the popularity it acquired during the 1920's and 30's.

Working within the Second Renaissance Revival style, Trost designed the State National Bank which was constructed in 1921-22. The central arched entrance is accented with an exaggerated scroll keystone and stepped parapet with a foliated crest. Flanking the entrance are pedimented windows while the long facades of the rectangular building feature two story arched windows and round and rectangular insets. A prominent dentilled cornice and parapet broken with balustraded sections encircles the building.

Accurately portraying yet another building type and architectural style is the O.T. Bassett Tower which was built in 1930. The structure rises fifteen stories with a strong vertical thrust, tapering in the stepped skyscraper manner at the upper levels. The handsome brick structure features surface enrichment in brick and Art Deco detailing in sandstone and concrete. The entrance to the building which faces Texas Avenue is noteworthy; symmetrically composed, the entrance is a complex arrangement of doors and windows surrounded by stylized floral and animal forms, geometric delineations, and human faces, one of which is reported to be Trost's.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** \_\_\_\_\_ **Builder/Architect** Henry C. Trost

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

As examples of El Paso's finest downtown buildings, the seventeen structures included in the Commercial Structures of El Paso by Henry C. Trost thematic nomination are significant as the work of the city's most outstanding architectural firm, Trost and Trost. These buildings provide excellent representations of several major architectural developments in the United States during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The firm's designs reveal facility with a broad range of architectural styles including the Chicago School, Sullivanesque, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Art Deco modes. This ease with such a variety of styles follows the tradition of architects from the 19th century Ecole des Beaux Arts. In their diversity, these structures portray the schisms in U.S. architecture of their time, from the progressive direction of the Chicago School to the historic Neo-Classicism resulting from the Chicago Fair. Significant elements in El Paso's downtown streetscapes, these buildings provide an important link with El Paso's history and architectural development.

Born in Toledo, Ohio in 1860, Henry Charles Trost was the son of German immigrant parents. After finishing art school at age seventeen, Trost worked for three years as a draftsman for Toledo architects. He was subsequently located in a number of cities, including Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Denver, and New Orleans where he was associated with the World's Industrial and Cotton Exposition, 1884. Later Trost worked in Topeka, Kansas with the firm Haskell and Wood in connection with the design of the Senate Chamber of the State Capitol.

From approximately 1886 to 1896 Trost lived in Chicago, involved with two ornamental metal companies. He was a member of the Chicago Architectural Club, which also included Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright in its membership. For the six years, from 1898 to 1904, Henry Trost conducted a successful architectural practice in Tucson, Arizona.

Settling in El Paso, Texas in 1904, Henry Trost went into partnership with his brother Gustavus Adolphus Trost, and nephew George Ernest Trost to form the architectural firm Trost and Trost. Henry was the principal designer, and for the next twenty-nine years, until his death, the firm produced over two hundred buildings in the southwest, including some of El Paso's finest structures. Henry Trost handled a variety of architectural styles with equal facility and many of his works show delightful originality in their combinations of elements. The influence of his years spent in Chicago is readily apparent in much of Trost's work. His contact with buildings of the Chicago School architects Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and the impact of the World Columbian Exposition of 1893 provided inspiration for several of the structures included in this nomination. Trost was an early experimenter with steel-reinforced concrete, and his eclecticism extended to works of the Spanish Colonial Revival, Pueblo, and Art Deco formats.

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An interest in new structural possibilities is revealed in a series of buildings in reinforced concrete which Trost designed prior to common usage of the material. The first of these, the Richard Caples Building, dates from 1910. Its composition, with a light well separating two office towers which rise from a one story base, was used by Trost several times. While the Caples Building was faced with brick, the Roberts-Banner Building, completed in 1910, is amazingly bold and simple, with the concrete exposed on the exterior. Ornamentation has been simplified to flat, stylized geometric and leaf-like motifs which adorn the spandrels and cornice. Trost here seems to have made a conscious effort to suit the design of the decoration to the character of the material. The Abdou Building (1909-1910) exhibits a similar simplification of form and limits decoration to the street level arcade, top story spandrels, and cornice. Trost's use of the Chicago window along with this simplification relates these structures to the Chicago School.

The Anson Mills Building, Trost's largest reinforced concrete edifice, is not included in this nomination due to alterations, including painting and installation of reflective glass windows and spandrels, which have severely altered its original architectural character.

Three department stores provide examples of the Chicago School Commercial format; Newberry's, the Popular, and the White House. Their Chicago windows, rounded corners, and composition of base, shaft, and prominent cornice reveal a particular influence of the designs of Louis Sullivan (i.e. the Schlesinger Mayer Store, Chicago). Additional inspiration of Sullivan's compositional scheme is illustrated by the El Paso International Building and Hotel Paso del Norte. The hotel is listed individually in the National Register (1/18/79).

Even the Columbia Furniture Company, a modest commercial building of only three stories, reflects the influences of the Chicago Commercial style. Trost has once again differentiated the street-level facade from that of the stories above. The grouping of the windows expresses the steel frame which supports the structure, and visual strength is added to the design by the decorative cornice and detailing of the corner piers.

The time Henry Trost spent in Chicago included 1893, the year of the World Columbian Exposition, where the Classicism favored by the eastern architectural establishment was selected over the progressive Chicago School for the Fair's overall design. Trost did not shy away from designing structures in the classical mode. The Union Bank and Trust Building, with its pilasters, modillioned and dentilled cornices, and balustrade provides an example. Neo-classical touches used within a Chicago School framework are shown in the W. S. Hills commercial building at 215-219 East San Antonio.

Classicism of the Renaissance Revival was skillfully applied in the design of the State National Bank Building. A particularly elegant structure, the simple rectangular block has a strong clarity which is accented by deeply revealed double-story arched windows and sculptured medallions above the piers. The San Antonio Street (entry) facade, symmetrically composed of a large arched doorway flanked by pedimented windows, further carries out the austere Renaissance format, as does the crowning dentilled cornice and balustrade.

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An architectural style that held particular appeal for the Southwest was the Spanish Colonial Revival, because of the region's interest in its own 18th century Spanish Missions. Hotel Cortez (1925) is indicative, with its elaborate ornamentation concentrated around the entrance and selected windows. The Singer Building shows further Spanish influence in the arch, balconies, stuccoed walls, and terra cotta tile roof.

The wide range of sources for Trost's designs is reflected by the Palace (Alhambra) Theater of 1914, exhibiting Spanish Moorish elements in the arched windows and intricate ornamentation. Historic photos show the first story composed of the entry framed by an intricate frieze, which related in character to the entrance of Sullivan's 1893 Transportation Building at the Chicago Fair.

Trost's last works reveal an interest in new means of expression for the high-rise building. The Plaza Hotel exhibits a tentative influence of Art Deco in the rectilinear emphasis and projecting tower. Vertical emphasis is achieved by the contrasting light bands running uninterrupted up through fifteen stories. Characteristic Deco ornament is used, with its flat, incised, geometrical and stylized natural forms.

Full employment of the Art Deco, stepped skyscraper form is seen in the O.T. Bassett Tower (1929). Here the tower soars; Trost used a variety of means to achieve this. The mass is composed of a grouping of tall, slender, rectangular blocks. Both windows and spandrels are deeply recessed to emphasize the full height of the structure. This verticality is further emphasized by the symmetrical A-B-A scheme used in the building's overall composition, and in each individual block.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Engelbrecht, Lloyd C.; Henry Trost: The Prairie School in the Southwest, The Prairie School Review, Volume VI, No. 4, Fourth Quarter, 1969.  
 Engelbrecht, Lloyd C.; Unpublished Manuscript, Chapter V, "Reinforced Concrete," Chapter VI, "Variety and Contrast," 1979.

## 10. Geographical Data

See individual data sheets.

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

Acreege of nominated property individually, less than one

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

Quadrangle name El Paso, Texas

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

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D 

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E 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See individual data sheets.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Linda C. Flory, Historian; Carol Kennedy, Research Associate

organization Texas Historical Commission date March 7, 1980

street & number P.O. Box 12276 telephone 512-476-5428

city or town Austin state Texas, 78711

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*[Handwritten Signature]*  
date 3-8-80

title Texas State Historic Preservation Officer

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*[Handwritten Signature]* date 4/18/80  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: *[Handwritten Signature]* date 3/23/80  
Chief of Registration

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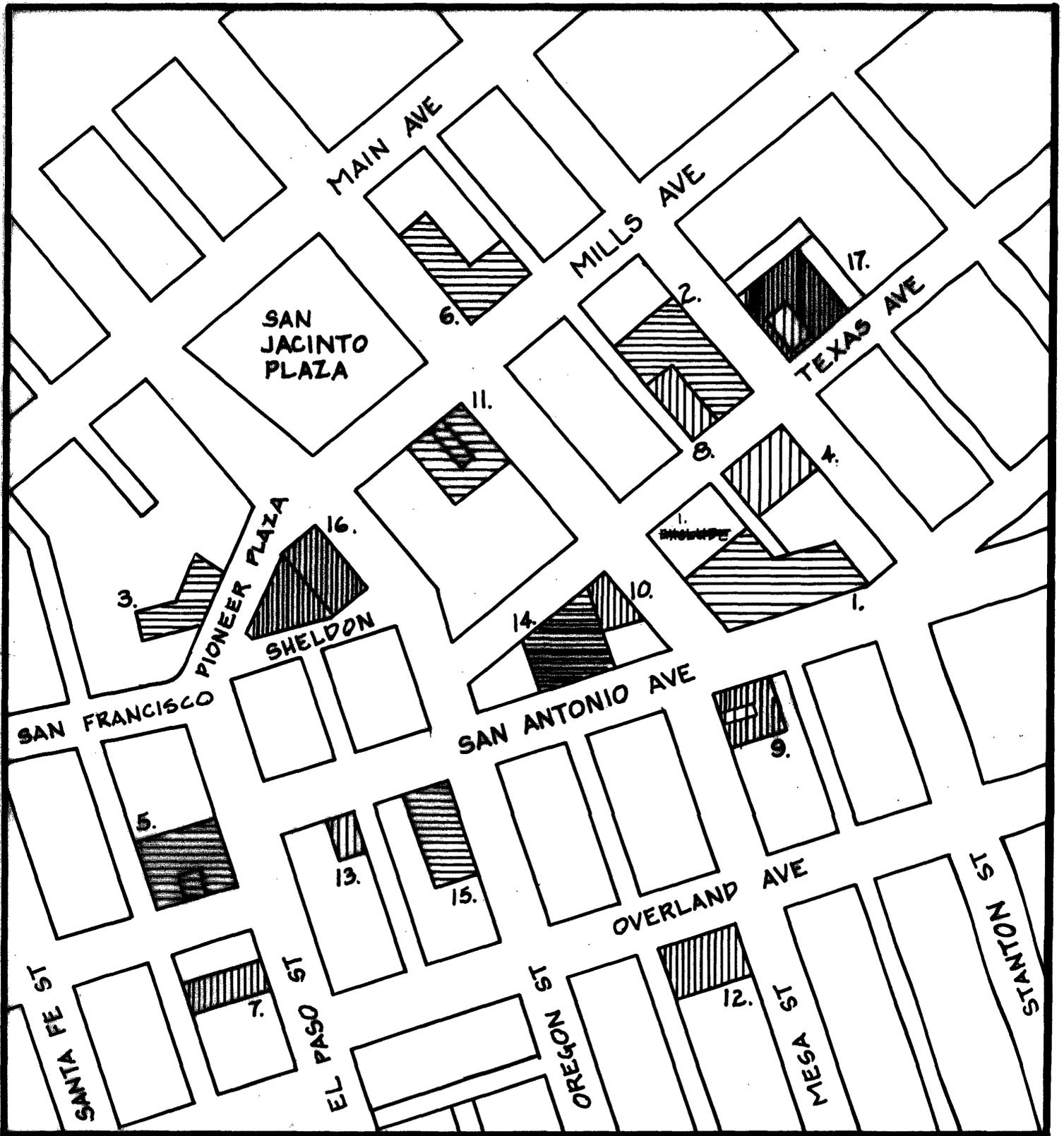
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Site Inventory Forms, City of El Paso, Completed 1971-1978.

Southwest Collection, El Paso Public Library; Newsclipping File, photographic collections,  
original drawings by Trost and Trost.

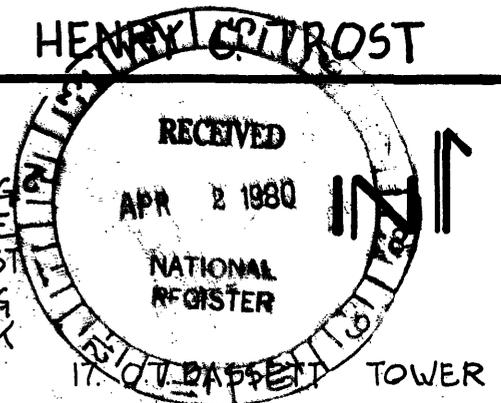
Webb, Walter Prescott, Handbook of Texas, Volume I, Texas State Historical Association,  
1952, Marvin D. Evans Co., Fort Worth, pp. 561-62.



COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES OF EL PASO BY HENRY C. TROST

- 1. POPULAR DEPARTMENT STORE
- 2. J.J. NEWBERRY COMPANY
- 3. WHITE HOUSE DEPARTMENT STORE
- 4. EL PASO INTERNATIONAL BLDG.
- 5. HOTEL PASO DEL NORTE
- 6. HOTEL CORTEZ
- 7. PALACE THEATER
- 8. SINGER SEWING COMPANY

- 9. CAPLES BUILDING
- 10. ABDOU BUILDING
- 11. ROBERTS-BANNER BLDG.
- 12. COLUMBIA FURNITURE
- 13. UNION BANK AND TRUST
- 14. COMMERCIAL BUILDING
- 15. STATE NATIONAL BANK
- 16. PLAZA HOTEL



17. T. D. BASSETT TOWER