



=====  
**4. National Park Service Certification**  
=====

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

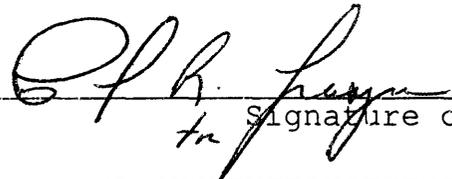
\_\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the  
National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the  
National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_



Signature of Keeper  
of Action

6/15/99  
Date

=====  
**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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing NA

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Montgomery Ward & Company  
Alameda County, California

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>COMMERCE/TRADE:</u>	Sub: <u>department store</u>
_____	<u>warehouse</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: <u>Vacant</u>	Sub: _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

=====

**7. Description**

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

roof tar and gravel

walls reinforced concrete, cast concrete ornament

other industrial sash windows

Narrative Description (See continuation sheets.)

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Montgomery Ward & Company  
Alameda County, California

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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)

Commerce  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance 1923-1948  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates NA  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person NA  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation NA  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder McCaully, W.H.  
\_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Statement of Significance (X See continuation sheets.)

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Montgomery Ward & Company  
Alameda County, California

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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Bibliography. (X See 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: Oakland City Planning Department

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**10. Geographical Data**

=====

Acreage of Property 8 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	567820	4181460	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (X See continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (X See continuation sheet.)

**USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**

Montgomery Ward & Company  
Alameda County, California

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

name/title Xandre Grube, Co-Chairperson (revised by OHP)  
organization League for Protection of Oakland's Architectural & Historic Resources  
date August 8, 1998  
street & number 1703 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue telephone (510) 532-3010  
city or town Oakland state CA zip code 94606  
=====

**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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Oakland  
street & number One City Hall Plaza telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Oakland state CA zip code 94612  
=====

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate proper ties 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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

OHP

Section number 7 Page 1

Montgomery Ward Building  
Alameda County, California

## PRESENT AND HISTORIC PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Montgomery Ward Building, Oakland's largest and tallest industrial building, is a complex comprised of four reinforced concrete buildings that abut one another other and are internally connected. Its eight stories stack 910,000 sq. ft of floor area into an architecturally impressive arcaded Art Deco industrial structure on the Oakland skyline, visible from downtown, the surrounding neighborhoods and cities, the Oakland hills' neighborhoods, State Route 880, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Fremont line and from across San Francisco Bay. It occupies an eight-acre parcel of the Flatlands, equivalent to three blocks of the adjacent pattern. Three of the buildings that comprise the Ward Building are contributing and were constructed in rapid succession in 1923, 1924 and 1926 in the same arcaded style in an L-plan by Architect, W.H. McCaully. In early years, a landscaped plaza featuring palm trees and other mature trees, including a sequoia and a pepper tree that remained from the Augustus B. Derby Estate Company, served as the entry to the retail store located on the first and second floors of the Building. A row of 24-inch elms lined 29th Avenue between E. 14th and E. 12th Streets. The fourth building was added in 1959 in a more modern non-contributing version clearly designed to blend in but not necessarily become one with the other three buildings. In 1964 a four-level garage structure was added on the west one-third of the site; the street entry plaza was filled in and storefronts covered over in an attempt at modernization to capture suburban clients. In 1996, the parking structure was demolished; huge piles of rubble remain on the portion of the site occupied by the garage. There is no longer any landscaping on the site although street trees soften the interface with the sidewalk. The complex' huge concrete mass, lightened by fenestration and distinctive arcaded industrial towers and bays, is familiar to all Bay Areans as they pass by it regularly on the freeway and BART.

### Exterior Setting and Appearance

The Montgomery Ward Building occupies a nearly rectangular lot with frontages of 792 feet along East 14th Street (recently renamed International Boulevard) and East 12th Street, on the northeast and southwest respectively. The southeasterly 29th Avenue frontage measures 400 feet. The first lot purchased, at the southeast end of the current property, was part of one of east Oakland's last

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Montgomery Ward Building  
Alameda County, California

country estates, occupied by a large single-family home with ring driveway. By 1911, it was listed as owned by the Derby Estate Company. The northwest portion of the Ward property was held by an Emma Wellman until 1920. By 1923, all of the property was owned by the Magnavox Company, who sold it to Montgomery Ward in numerous incremental parcels. The northwesterly property boundary abuts the St. Joseph Professional Center property, a rehabilitated compound of buildings of the Sisters of the Poor orphanage.

The immediate vicinity to the south and west of the Ward Building is heavy commercial and light industrial, mostly of a low-rise nature. The elevated Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) line passes by the site immediately to the southwest and the Fruitvale BART station is located four blocks to the southeast. Highway 880 parallels the BART tracks several hundred feet further south. To the southeast there is a narrow buffer of commercial and low density housing between the Ward Building and the BART station. To the north there are small neighborhood-serving stores and restaurants that front on East 14th Street and serve the immediately adjacent residential neighborhoods of the Fruitvale and San Antonio.

The Ward Building is Oakland's largest industrial building and a rare example of a mammoth industrial building that interfaces closely with an urban single-family residential neighborhood in the San Francisco Bay area. Its three corner towers, arcaded bays and large expansive steel sash are prominently visible on the skyline from points far and near in every direction.

The 910,000 sq. ft. Montgomery Ward Building includes three eight-story (119 foot-high) reinforced concrete buildings designed by architect W.H. McCaully, Ward's company engineer, and built by Wells Bros., in 1923, 1924 and 1926; and a fourth building added in 1959 mimicks the bays but does not include towers or the fine details of the architecture of the first three buildings. The three eight-story buildings adjoin each other in an L-plan with generous setbacks along E. 14th Street and 29th Avenue; they appear as a single huge building. The four-story fourth building, built in 1959, adjoins and fills in the L along East 12th Street.

The 1923 building is set back 60 feet from East 14th Street and 80 feet from 29th Avenue. The setback was intended to "permit the

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most advantageous landscaping of the grounds, on which are many beautiful trees that will be preserved" ("Bolts and Nuts", June 7, 1923). It was also set back to make available the "most favorable lighting conditions" ("Bolts and Nuts", ibid.). It measures 144 feet along East 14th Street by 184 feet deep and features seven window bays along East 14th Street. A corner tower at the northeast corner adds a ninth story.

The 1924 building adjoins the 1923 building at its full 144-foot width and extends its length an additional 184 feet along 29th Avenue. Together with the 1923 building there are 17 window bays along 29th Avenue. A corner tower at the southeast corner adds a ninth story and a lesser tower element marks the juncture of the two buildings.

The 1926 building adjoins the 1923 building and extends the East 14th Street frontage 200 feet westerly. It added 11 window bays along East 14th Street and three to fill the turn from the setback of the 1923 building. It is flush to the sidewalk, forming a minor L along the northeast facade, which was once an entry plaza. The building depth of 85 feet created the L around the then-vacant southwest corner.

The 1959 building, 200 feet by 300 feet, filled in the L formed by the other three buildings and adjoins all three. While the building features similar window bays that blend in with the original buildings from a distance, there is no arcade or art deco detailing on this building. It filled an area that then contained a railroad spur, small warehouses and loading docks, used as railroad receiving and warehouse access.

A four-level parking garage, on the west third of the site, built in 1964, was demolished in 1996 by the City of Oakland during a court challenge of the Negative Declaration issued on a proposed demolition of the Ward Building. Debris from the demolished garage is mounded on the west side of the site where the garage once stood.

The original three buildings are altered by a single addition, also constructed in 1964, on the northeast corner. This addition filled in the setback on the 1923 building along East 14th Street giving that frontage a suburban storefront look and eliminating the original store bulkheads and entry plaza.

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The exterior integrity of the Ward Building is excellent. The exterior surface of the facades of the buildings is a series of bays, extending the full eight-story height of the Building. Each bay is filled with a wide expanse of industrial sash separated by spandrels between stories. The first, second, third and eighth floors are taller than the fourth through seventh floors. The window area at the top of each bay and the three corner towers is segmentally arched giving the building an arcaded appearance.

The parapet/cornice, concrete piers and spandrels are smooth surfaced reinforced concrete, with minimal stylized Art Deco "necktie emblems" and geometric ornament, providing what has been called Arts and Craft detail at the top of the building and the first floor string course. Each corner tower's parapet is curved like an overturned soup dish atop a segmental arch filled with vertical-bar tracery.

No remnant remains of the 1923 entry to the building, which included four doors with a single transom. It was located in the first bay on East 14th Street nearest to 29th Avenue. It featured a segmental arched lintel similar to those of the top floor windows. Above the first floor spandrel, was a similar arch filled with the same vertical-bar tracery.

A similar doorway exists at the northwest corner of the Ward building in the 1926 building. The door itself has been replaced but the original segmentally arched transom remains in slightly damaged condition.

The tar and gravel roof is flat with a slight curve for drainage. It is accessible from the towers and magnificent views abound.

Broken window glass, a paint scheme that painted the spandrels and windows a dark brown (distorting the strong grid formed by the concrete pilasters and spandrels), the insensitive 1964 modern storefront and the almost compatible 1959 addition are all that mar the exterior. The remaining defects are restorable items, which if undertaken, would return the full integrity of the exterior.

Interior Appearance

The interior of the Building has been cleared of all partitions, since the vacation of the Building by Montgomery Ward. Shelving

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Alameda County, California

and corridors between shelving have all been removed. All that remains of a six-foot-diameter package chute that once connected the floors, is the holes through each floor. The basic appearance of the interior is wide expanses of floor and supporting structural columns of reinforced concrete, placed on 20-foot centers. These are identical in all four buildings. They are three-foot-diameter mushroom columns cylindrical with wide-flaring capitals and no ornament. Only on the eighth floor do the columns change to 22-inch diameters. (Reduced Plan 3, Photos 15, 16, 18, 21-24)

The historic floor plans show no partitions. The first floor entry lobbies were located at the northeast corner (1923 building) and northwest corner (1926 building). The major portion of the first floor was originally used for receiving goods and mail order. Retail was located at the second floor. In 1957, the retail portion expanded to the first floor. Above the retail floors were the mail order operations, warehousing and some offices. Sanborn maps of the 1930's and 1951 identify "Retail Store 2nd, Warehouse Above, Offices 4th" in the 1923 and 1924 buildings. The 1926 building is identified similarly with "Employees Cafeteria 4th".

Elevator structures, each serving two large freight elevators, are located at the centers of the northwest sides of the 1923 and 1924 buildings. The single freight elevator for the 1926 structure is located at the center of its southwest elevation. A passenger elevator, with hollow clay tile enclosure, is located at the north corner of the 1926 building (PHOTO 19; Reduced Plan 3). Stair wells are located in the corner towers of the 1926 building.

The openings between the different buildings are marked by square columns rather than cylindrical ones, and these openings can be closed by fire doors. The fire doors on the 1923 building are pulley-operated sliding doors on a diagonal track, made of galvanized steel. On the 1924 building, the doors are steel roll-up doors (Photos 18,20,21). In addition, an extra girder reinforces the connection between the 1926 and 1923 buildings (Photo 21).

A basement is located under portions of the 1923 and 1926 buildings. For many years it was not accessible because of the need for asbestos abatement. All asbestos was removed in 1996-7.

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A staircase at the north corner of the 1926 building (East 14th Street side, on the entrants' left) was intended for general public use. Its treads and risers are tan terrazzo and the adjoining entry floor is 4" x 4" quarry tile. The stair stringers are dark grey, black and green terrazzo. The handrail is molded oak. The balusters are cast iron ellipses with foliate ornament in the center. Newel posts are square in section, with side panels and a nob on top (Photo 17, Reduced Plan 7).

All other staircases were for emergency and staff use only. Their walls are simple plaster over reinforced concrete or hollow clay tile. The hollow clay tile sustained minor damage in the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. The railings are simple unadorned metal tubes fastened to the walls. The staircases are enclosed with hollow-core corrugated and galvanized steel doors.

An incinerator chute is located at the south corner of the 1926 building and is constructed of brick and enclosed by three-foot-high hollow-core corrugated and galvanized steel doors on diagonal tracks (Photo 20).

Flooring is concrete slab throughout. Nine by nine-inch tiles covered some or all of the floors (Photos 15, 22). The north lobby features 4" x 4" quarry tile (Photos 16, 17).

No wall or ceiling finishes remain. Photos show that some drop ceilings had been in place on some floors (Photos 16, 18).

Windows bring a great deal of natural lighting into the building. The pivoting windows allow one-third of the surface of the windows to open. No interior window trim is noted. The 1964 storefront addition has been covered over with plywood to protect the window glass (Photos 1-3, 16).

The north lobby retains traces of its original beamed ceiling with egg-and-dart cornice, fluted pilaster and egg-and-dart-variant capital. Its oak and cast iron stair balustrade and scored plaster walls are in tact.

All hardware is utilitarian and not notable. The sliding fire door mechanical systems are, however, illustrative of mechanical history (Photo 20). The foundation is concrete and is not visible from the exterior or the interior.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Montgomery Ward & Company  
Alameda County, California

**Significance Summary**

The Montgomery Ward & Company building is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the area of commerce for its important role as a major west coast distribution center of the company's catalog business. Montgomery Ward & Company was founded in Chicago in 1872. Eventually it became the largest mail order company in the nation. In 1913, the company established its first warehouse on the West Coast in Portland, Oregon. The Oakland plant was created ten years later to save "from three to five days time filling orders." Oakland's excellent rail and road connections made deliveries of farm equipment and household goods to the rural and small town markets of the western states available on short notice. The Oakland distribution center operated in parallel with the Portland and Dallas plants to serve the western United States for over sixty years.

**Significance to Commerce (state level)**

Aaron Montgomery Ward, founder of Montgomery Ward & Company, was born in February 1843 in Chatham, New Jersey. As a child, he moved with his parents to Miles, Michigan, where his father established a cobbler's shop. Aaron attended public school and at the age of 14 became a cobbler's apprentice. He looked for other ways to make a living and after factory work and brick yard labor found a job as a shoe clerk. Retail appealed to him and in 1862 he moved to St. Joseph, Michigan, where he worked as a clerk in a general store. After three years he was promoted to manager. He moved on to Chicago to better his opportunities and worked as a clerk in Marshall Fields department store for two years. Then he worked as a traveling salesman for a dry good wholesaler.

Ward developed an idea for a mail order catalog while he was traveling about in the rural Midwest. Limited goods were available in limited quantity in each location. He concluded that the system for delivering goods was outdated and conceived of the idea of consumers selecting goods from a catalog and ordering from a centrally located store, which could deal in huge volumes and keep prices reasonable.

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After several setbacks starting a business, he started Montgomery Ward & Company with two partners in a small rented room in Chicago, in 1872. His one-page catalog listed 163 items and was advertised in farm periodicals.

Although the first year of business was slow, the 1874 catalog sold \$100,000 worth of merchandise. The catalog was bound and included 24 pages. Farmers were the primary customers for many years. However, good, quality merchandise made for satisfied customers and increased business to the extent that Ward became the largest mail order company in the nation during Aaron Ward's own lifetime.

Montgomery Ward & Company established its first warehouse on the West Coast in July 1913 in Portland, Oregon; it expanded in 1919. Prior to this, customers ordered merchandise from the Chicago store. The Portland warehouse served customers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Nevada, California, Alaska and Hawaii. It featured only catalog sales and no retail.

The Oakland Montgomery Ward plant was created to save "from three to five days time in filling orders, and will also greatly reduce transportation charges" (Oakland Tribune, June 12, 1923). Ward promised Oakland jobs for several hundred people, an increase in postal revenues, a retail store for convenience of the people of Oakland and vicinity," and business for local manufacturers, following its policy of buying as much of its mail order goods as possible from local manufacturers. Ward announced that "They are interested in locating manufacturers in Oakland, who make similar items to those which they catalogue, but who have the equipment and the surplus capacity to make items which they could buy", including "practically all lines of household, farm necessities and wearing apparel." The Montgomery Ward catalog sales and distribution center in Oakland operated in parallel with the Portland and Dallas plants to serve the people of the western US for over sixty years. No other company handled such diverse merchandise and made it available to people so quickly. The location in Oakland where roads and rail and water transport formed a western transportation hub was indeed intentional. The rail and road connections to the site made deliveries of farm equipment and household goods to the rural and small town market in the western states available on short notice. Shortly, MW came to mean "Made in the West".

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Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 9Montgomery Ward Building  
Alameda County, CaliforniaSignificance to Commerce (local level)

Montgomery Ward was the first catalogue sales and distribution center and retail store of its kind and size to locate in Oakland. The store opened in 1923 to great fanfare; the 1924 and 1926 buildings expanded both the warehouse and the retail store. Many items were stored on site and could be delivered in minutes by employees on roller skates and series of corkscrew chutes to the order desk below.

In 1930, Sears Roebuck, a catalog sales competitor at the national level, opened a fashionable Oakland store. It did not include distribution and warehousing.

The 1964 parking structure was added to the Oakland Ward store as part of a "multi-million dollar expansion" (Tribune, January 12, 1964), aimed at customers who were being lured to suburban shopping centers. While the Montgomery Ward catalog and distribution center served the people of the West for sixty years, the retail department store served the people of Oakland and the Bay Area for almost as long. Hundreds of people also were employed by Wards for many years and still live nearby.

The Ward retail store closed in 1980 and the mail order distribution facility closed in 1985. The Ward Building has been vacant ever since and the garage was demolished in 1996. The City of Oakland and Montgomery Ward entered into an agreement to demolish the building and jointly build a shopping center. The Negative Declaration on the proposed demolition was appealed by Oakland Heritage Alliance, a Citywide non-profit organization of over 1,000 members. When the appeal was overruled by the Planning Commission, the League for Protection of Oakland's Architectural and Historic Resources filed a Writ of Mandamus and eventually prevailed in the State Court of Appeals. The Court ordered the City to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

The City, however, recently entered into an exclusive negotiating agreement with the Oakland School District to take steps to seek funding to demolish the building and build a middle school on the site. The League has just filed a second lawsuit against the City to ensure that alternatives to demolition are investigated under an EIR prior to making any decision to demolish the building. The League has identified an interested developer who would like to

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Montgomery Ward & Company  
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restore the building and reuse it for mixed commercial, residential and live/work uses.

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Montgomery Ward Building  
Alameda County, CA

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### Context: Mail Order Merchandising and its Cultural Impact

After the Civil War, a number of factors combined to open the way for the growth of catalog sales as a major force in American retailing. The country was experiencing a population explosion, both through high birth rates and immigration. The farm belt saw its population grow dramatically. Technology exploded as well – both in agriculture and in other areas of American life. (Most of the new farm machinery and many of the other new inventions were first sold by mail order.) The proliferation of railroad routes during this time, with the rise of Chicago as the hub of rural railroad lines, had a major effect as did the introduction of rural free mail delivery. In addition, the cost of manufacturing paper declined, making it possible to print catalogs much more cheaply than ever before. Literacy rates were on the rise.

Into this environment stepped Aaron Montgomery Ward, who began his mail-order business in 1872. Ward was certainly not the first mail order merchant, but his plans for a new business set him apart from his predecessors. Ward planned to market almost exclusively to farmers, to eliminate the middleman by buying directly from manufacturers or manufacturing items himself, and selling directly to customers. He would sell for cash, operate out of Chicago exclusively, offer a huge variety of goods, and use railway express to ship products to the station nearest the customer.

Ward saw the farmer as a second class citizen when it came to commerce. He believed the farmer should have every opportunity to purchase everything the city dweller could and be assured of quality as well. An admiring biographer explained Ward's vision: "Aaron Ward saw himself and the firm of Montgomery Ward not as a salesman or selling organization but as servants of farmers. The job was not to sell so much as to find out what was needed....The idea was to educate the farmer to the latest improvements..." (Hoge, *First One Hundred Years*, p. 15).

Gaining the farmer's trust was all-important, since sending money to a merchant one could not see required an act of faith. Many were already skeptical of

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Montgomery Ward Building  
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peddlers and merchants who promised one thing but delivered quite another. Ward was fortunate in making an alliance with the National Grange organization of farmers whose membership totaled almost a million in the 1870s. As one of their precepts the Grangers called for the elimination of the middleman wherever possible. Ward saw the organization as a natural ally and was able to receive their endorsement. He spoke often at Grange meetings and explained the concept of his catalog sales. He became the purchasing agent for the Illinois Grange and the company thereafter referred to itself as "The Original Grange Supply House."

While the first "catalog" produced in 1872 had only one page, Ward's first bound catalog came out in 1874. It was only 3" by 5" and had only 32 pages. By fall of 1875 the catalog had 152 pages and advertised almost 4,000 items. Ward recalled that the new venture was regarded very skeptically. "Our business was looked upon with suspicion by those whom we wished as customers. It was ridiculed by retail merchants, doubted by manufacturers and predicated a short life by all." (Quoted in Mahoney and Sloan, *The Great Merchants*, p. 12) But the skeptics were proven wrong. By 1878 the company was doing \$400,000 worth of business. (Its most popular selling item was the sewing machine.) The catalog grew and improved. By the 1880s almost every item was accompanied by a wood-cut illustration. (The first illustration had been of the "Granger hat.") The catalog of 1884 had 240 pages and nearly ten thousand items for sale.

Even after the company was clearly a success, Ward and his partner George Thorne took pains to maintain a personal relationship with their farmer customers. Many of them would write to the firm, asking advice or assistance, for the name of a good lawyer or to propose to one of the models illustrated in the "Big Book." Their letters would be answered, often in a way that would help promote further sales. One farmer asked to be sent "a good wife. She must be a good housekeeper and able to do all household duty." (Quoted in Boorstin, *The Americans*, p. 124) The farmer was advised not to select a wife through mail-order, but "after you get the wife and you find that she needs some wearing apparel or household goods, we feel sure we could serve both you and her to good advantage." Another man wrote that he hadn't ordered anything for a while because he had been kicked by a cow, his wife had been sick, and the couple had just had a new baby boy. The letter was answered: Condolences on the

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Montgomery Ward Building  
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broken arm, congratulations on the baby, and had the farmer noticed the anti-cow-kicking device advertised in the catalog?

Ward's business was already a big success when another entrepreneur, Richard Warren Sears, entered the business. While Ward had built a reputation on quality and a good price, Sears pitched his appeal to the less affluent farmers and offered them merchandise at rock-bottom prices. Moving from Minnesota to Chicago in 1887 he became partners with a young watchmaker named Alvah Curtis Roebuck. Originally selling only watches through the mail, by the early 1890s they were offering a huge variety of merchandise. More aggressive and less conservative than Wards, the new business quickly grew to rival the older company. By 1907 it had annual sales of more than fifty three million dollars. Yet even as it grew, Sears also took pains to maintain a personal relationship with its customers, answering their many letters with hand-written responses.

While the two firms competed aggressively, the early years of the twentieth century provided enough opportunities in mail order merchandising to allow them both to thrive. The two companies dominated the field, and their catalogs became a staple in American culture. Daniel Boorstin has noted:

It was not merely facetious to say that many farmers came to live more intimately with the good Big Book of Ward's or Sears, Roebuck than with the Good Book...For many...families the catalogue probably expressed their most vivid hopes for salvation....Just as, three centuries before, New England schoolchildren had learned the path to salvation along with their ABC's and had learned how to read at the same time that they learned the tenets of their community, so farm children now learned from the new Bible of their consumption community. In rural schoolhouses, children were drilled in reading and spelling from the catalogue. They practiced arithmetic by filling out orders and adding up items. They tried their hand at drawing by copying the catalogue models, and acquired geography by studying the postal-zone maps. In schoolrooms that had no other encyclopedia, a Ward" or Sears"catalogue handily served the purpose; it was illustrated, it told you what something was made of and what it was good for, how long it would last, and even what it cost. Many a mother in a household with few children" books pacified her child with the pictures in the catalogue. When the new book arrived, the pictures in the old catalogue were indelibly fixed in the memory of girls who cut them up for paper dolls. Just as Puritan children were supposed to think of their Bible as an exhaustive catalogue of the "types" which provided the pattern for all the actual happenings of the world, so the children of rural America thought of the big books from Sears and Wards as exhaustive catalogues of the material world. (The Americans, p. 129).

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Montgomery Ward Building  
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Essential to the explosion of the mail-order business in the early twentieth century was the dramatic improvement of mail delivery to rural patrons. Since 1863, people living in urban areas could receive their mail directly at their home address. But few towns were large enough to qualify for the service. In 1887 the population of a town must have reached 10,000 people in order to have free home delivery. At that time seventy five percent of the American population had to retrieve their mail at the post office. Interestingly, the local postmaster often combined that occupation with that of merchant, so that there was often a divided loyalty in terms of promotion of free home delivery. Farmers going to town to pick up their mail would buy supplies at the same time. Understandably these rural postmasters were not inclined to support free home delivery and the fight for extending the service was a long one. The National Grange officially endorsed the concept in 1891 and rural reformers such as Tom Watson of Georgia made it a rallying cry. In 1898 the Post Office provided for a program that would allow groups of farmers to petition their congressman for the service, and by 1906 an infrastructure of routes and agents was in place.

According to Daniel Boorstin, "This was the least heralded and in some ways the most important communications revolution in American history. Now for the first time it was normal for every person in the United States to be accessible by cheap public communication. For the rural American (more than half the nation's population by the census of 1910), the change was crucial. Now he was lifted out of the narrow community of those he saw and knew, and put in continual touch with a larger world of persons and events and things read about but unheard and unseen. RFD (rural free delivery) made these everywhere communities possible." (p. 132-133)

Another innovation that spurred the growth of catalog sales was the introduction of parcel post. Before 1913, the maximum weight for a package shipped through the U.S. mail was four pounds. If a package weighed more than that it had to be shipped through the more expensive express companies such as Wells, Fargo and American Express, or it had to be divided up into smaller packages. The introduction of U.S. parcel post in that year allowed large packages to be sent cheaply and resulted in an explosion of packages going through the mail, with three hundred million sent during the first year after enactment. While ostensibly

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the argument for parcel post was to enable the farmer to better send his crops to the city, the real impact was in reverse, with the farmers receiving more and more goods from the city. Montgomery Wards and Sears Roebuck were the beneficiaries of these developments. In the initial year of parcel post, Sears' sales increased 500% and Wards experienced a boost almost as great. Over the next decade, mail order sales increased steadily with a high point reached in 1926. In that year Wards had 8,500,000 catalog customers.

It was within this context that Montgomery Wards began to expand its facilities. In 1913 it opened its first West Coast warehouse in Portland, Oregon. Previously customers could only receive goods from Chicago. With trade continuing to increase, though, additional distribution facilities were needed. It was at this point, close to the national pinnacle of mail order sales, that the Oakland Montgomery Wards was built. It represented a need for major regional warehousing and distribution facilities, located at Oakland, one of the state's most important railroad and shipping hubs.

Interestingly, the building also reveals some changes on the horizon in the field of retailing. While catalog sales continued to be an important part of the company's business for many years, at least one of Wards' executives recognized that American life was changing and that the automobile was likely to transform the way Americans shopped. Wards helped to hasten the change by selling all manner of automobile parts, including its own brand of tires. General Robert E. Wood, who would later leave Wards to become head of Sears, had a vision of a new type of store for the company in the 1920s. He felt that retail stores would gradually become much more important in the company's business and would at some point take over prominence in it. The store that Wood projected would be larger than the usual department store and would make its appeal to men rather than women. Hardware, auto and radio supplies and home improvement products would be the mainstays of the new stores. They would be built on the outskirts of cities, not in more expensive downtowns, and they would be geared to working class customers. While Montgomery Ward had for many years resisted the idea of any retail outlets, in the mid-1920s it made its earliest foray into the field. The Oakland retail store was one of the company's first.

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Montgomery Ward Building  
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The Oakland Wards Building is important because of what it reflects about the economic and cultural history of the United States. Through its major role in the distribution of catalog advertised merchandise throughout the western United States it is associated with the transformation of America's consumption patterns and the creation of a national base for consumer identification. It was associated with the Montgomery Ward Company at a time when that firm had a large role in that transformation. Aaron Ward had made Montgomery Ward the most widely recognized national brand of the time. The company advertised more widely and effectively and distributed products more efficiently than any one had ever done before.

The building also reflects the changes that the automobile would make in the history of commerce. The store operation, located outside the downtown, was one of the first opened by the company. It was emblematic of the growing prominence of the newly mobile consumer, much more likely to visit a retail store, even one located outside the downtown area, than to order from a catalog.

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National Park Service

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Montgomery Ward Building

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Alameda County, California

### VERBAL BOUNDARIES

Boundaries of the site are shown on the USGS map enclosed and on the attached vicinity maps and drawing of the site, prepared by Robert Pilc, Architect.

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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
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Montgomery Ward Building

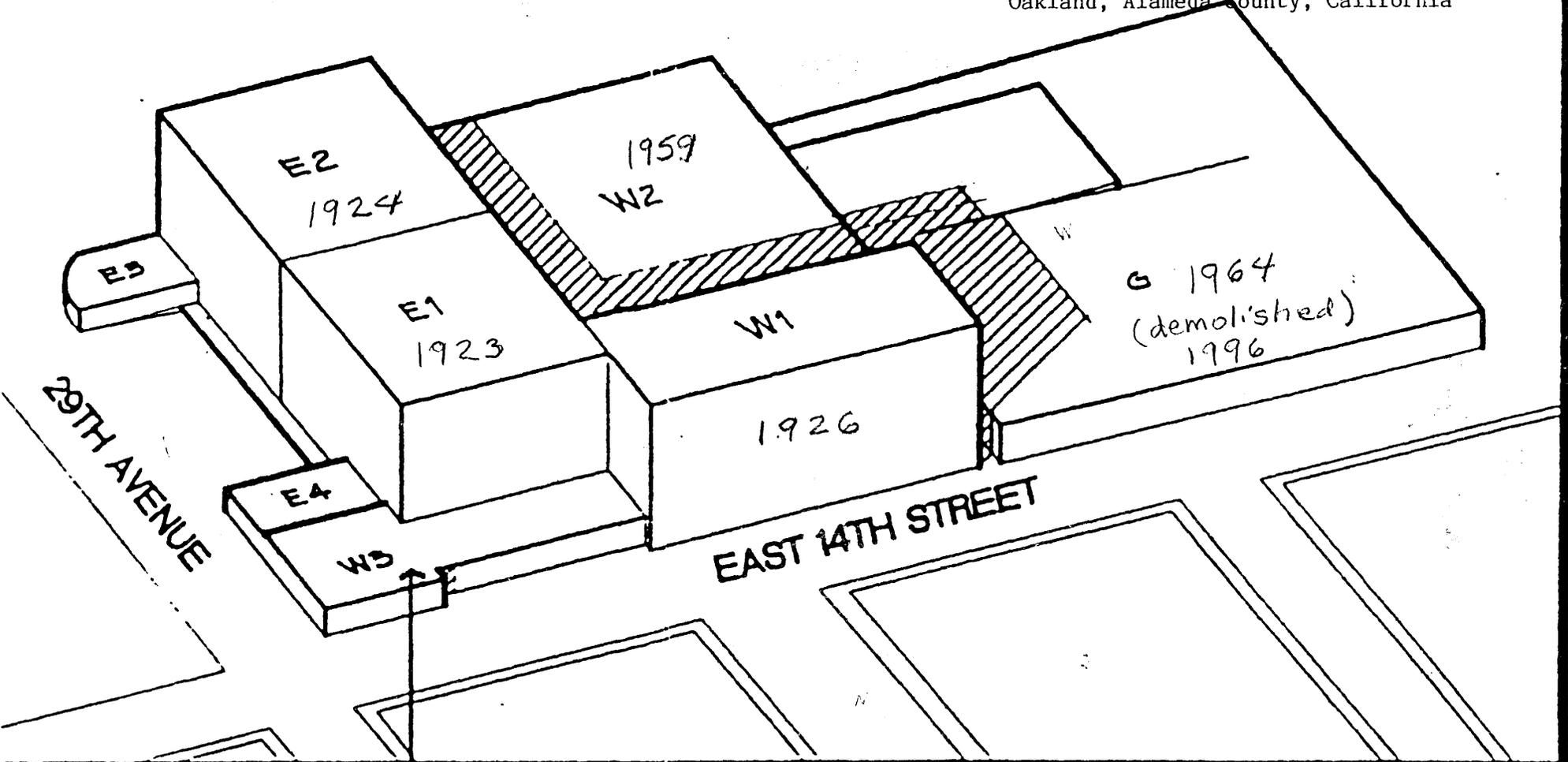
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Alameda County, California

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundaries for the project are the property lines of Montgomery Ward site, bounded on the north by E. 14th Street, on the east by 29th Avenue, on the south by E. 12th Street and on the west by a wall that separates the site from St. Joseph's Professional Center. The site includes the four attached buildings that comprise the Montgomery Ward Building and the attached (demolished) garage, now a vacant area mounded with rubble.

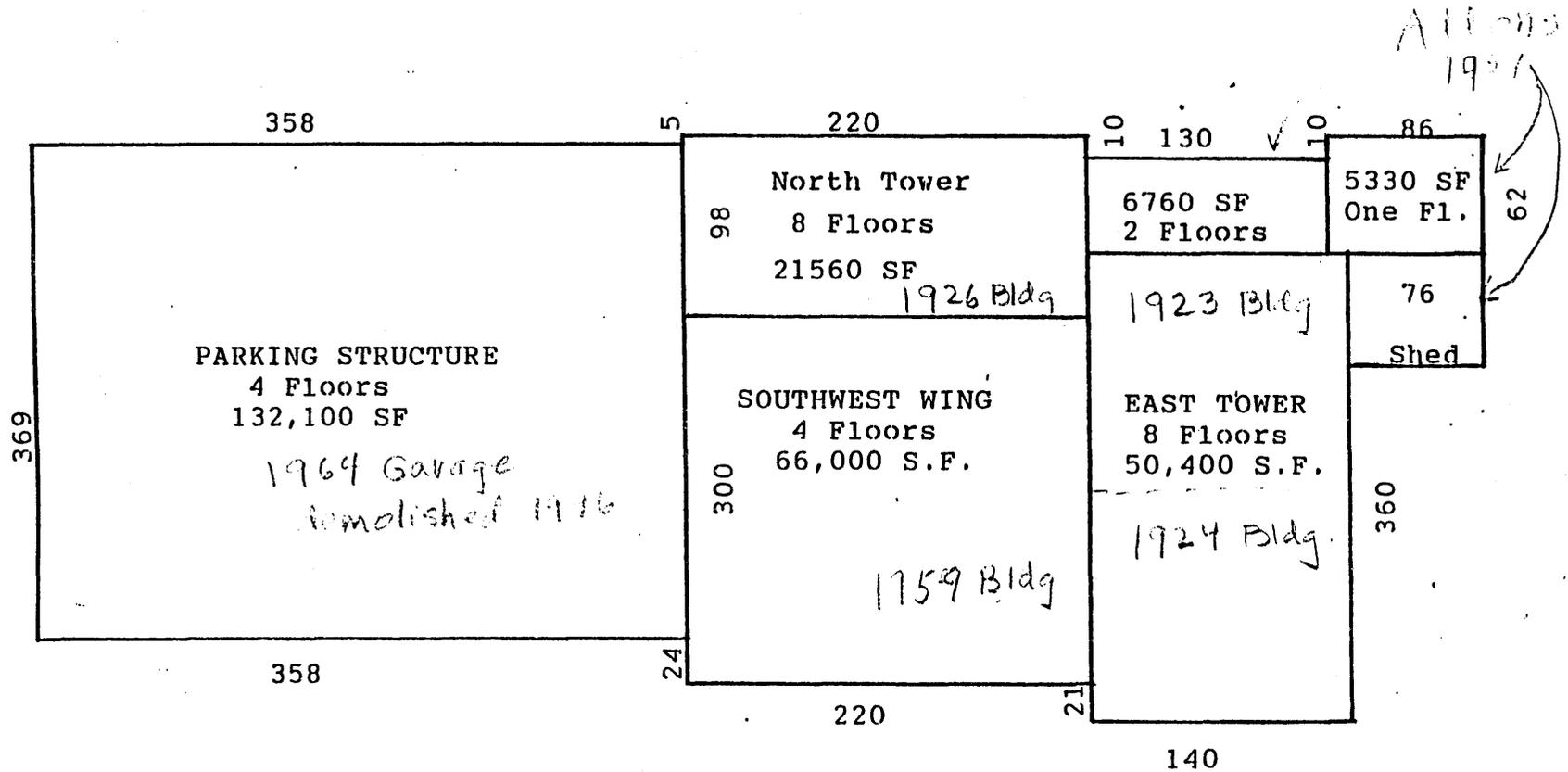
Montgomery Ward & Company  
2825 East 14th Street  
Oakland, Alameda County, California



BUILDINGS W3 AND E4  
TO BE DEMOLISHED.  
ADDED IN 1959.

E5 NO LONGER EXISTS. MAY HAVE BEEN 1959 ADDITION.

Montgomery Ward & Company  
 2825 East 14th Street  
 Oakland, Alameda County, California



Total Ground Floor Area = 150,050 SF

EXISTING PLAN AREAS

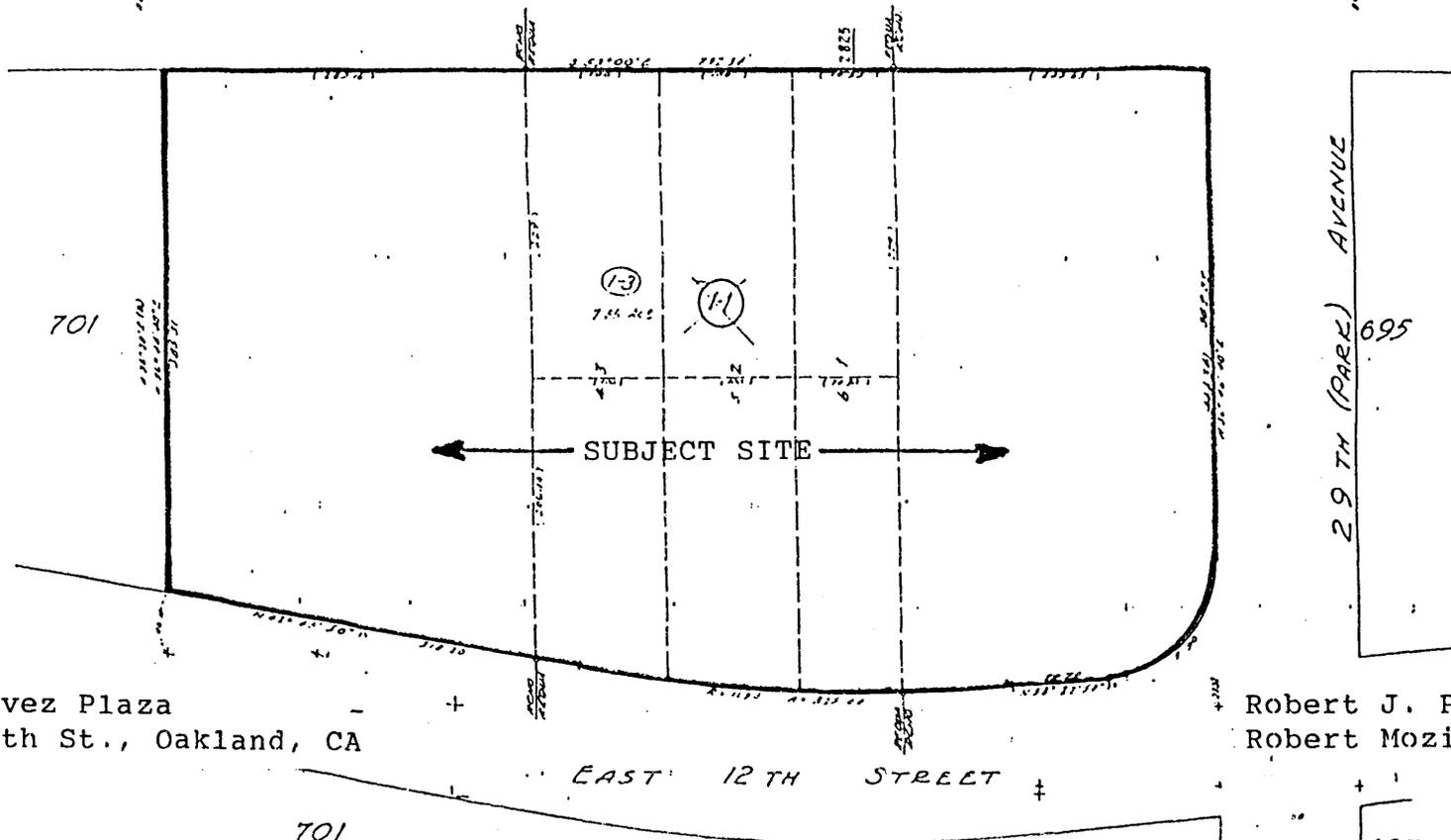
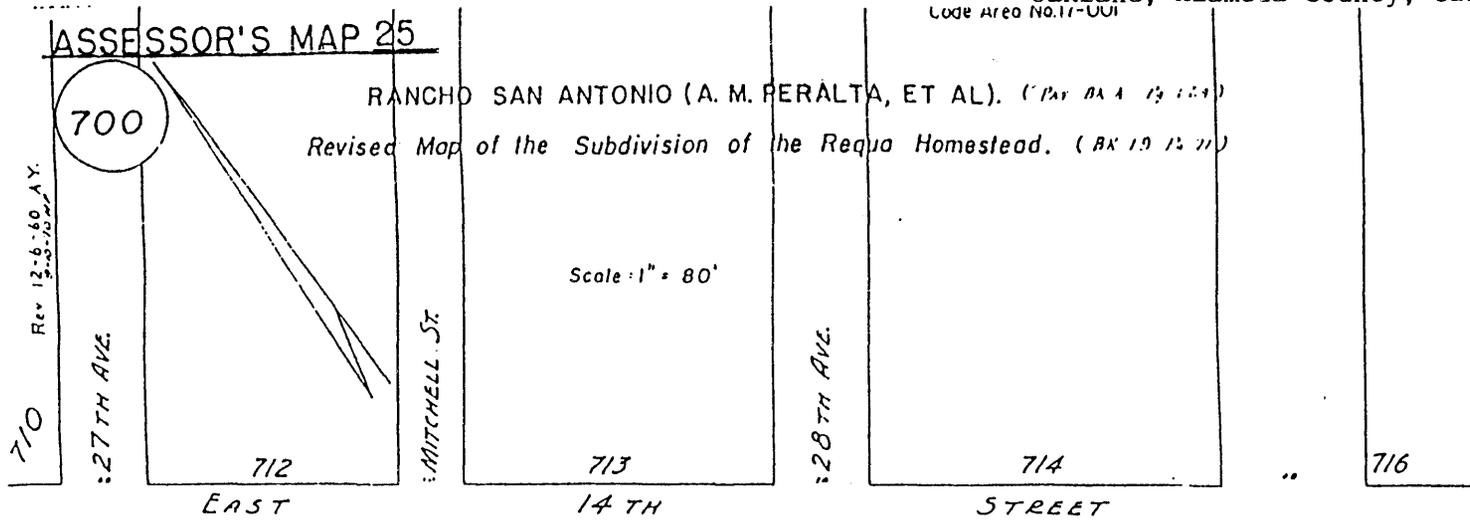
Scale 1" = 100'

Cesar Chavez Plaza  
 2825 E. 14th Street, Oakland, CA

Robert J. Pilc, Architect  
 Robert Mazingo, Architect

Montgomery Ward & Company  
 2825 East 14th Street  
 Oakland, Alameda County, California

Code Area No. 11-001



Cesar Chavez Plaza  
 2825 E.14th St., Oakland, CA

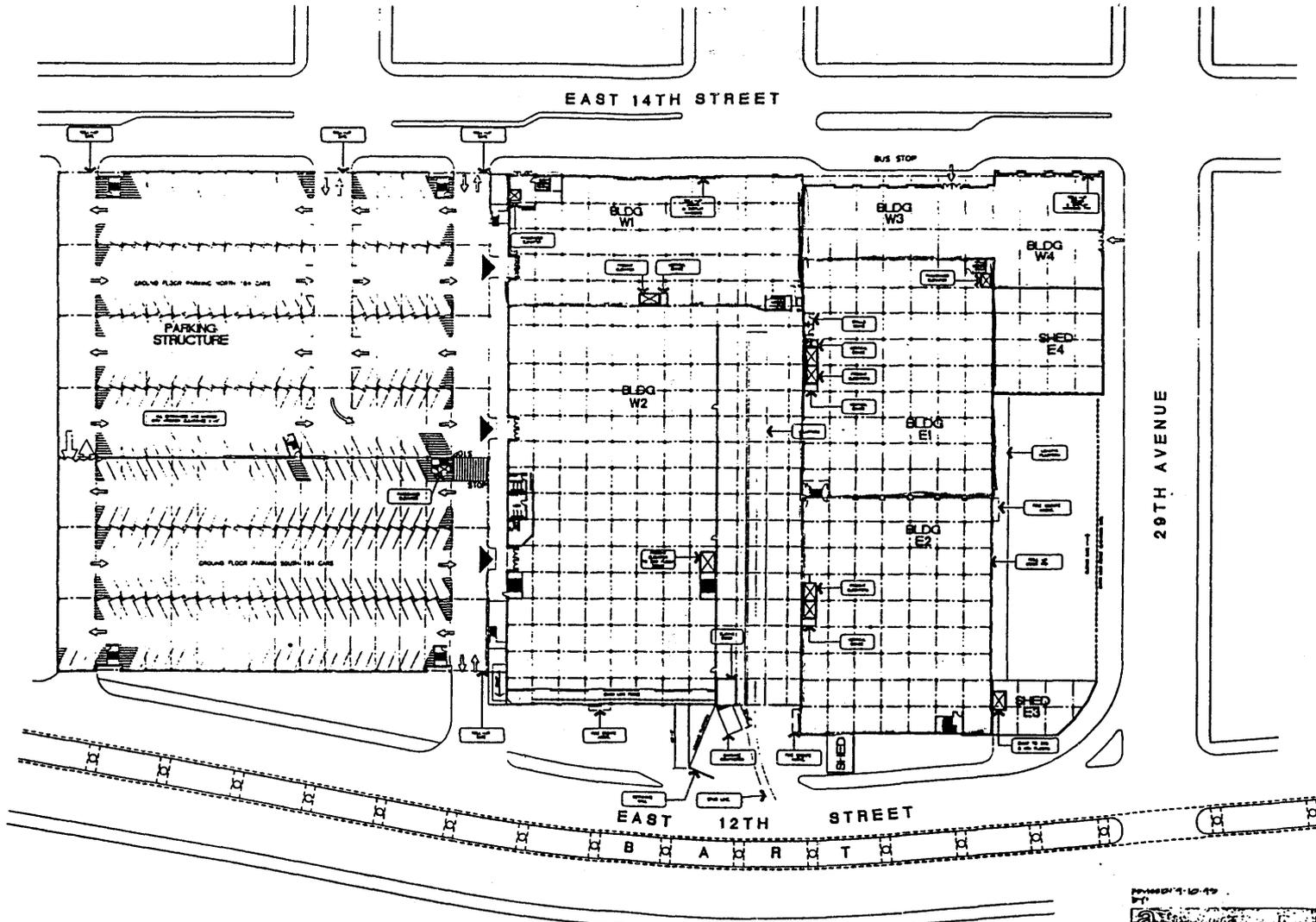
Robert J. Pilc, Architect  
 Robert Mozingo, Architect

Montgomery Ward & Company  
 2825 East 14th Street  
 Oakland, Alameda County, California

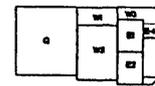
The  
 Ratcliff  
 Architects

Berline and  
 Associates  
 Architecture

EAST 14TH STREET



KEY PLAN



CONCEPT DRAWING  
 THIS DRAWING NOT TO BE  
 USED FOR CONSTRUCTION  
 OR BID PURPOSES

INFORMATION ON THIS  
 DRAWING PROVIDED BY  
 AND SPECIFIED BY ORBIT  
 PROPERTY CORPORATION.

10/22/75	DEC	
10/21/75	DEC	
10/17/75	DEC	
10/16/75	DEC	

MONTGOMERY  
 CENTER



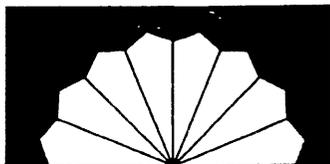
FOR  
 ORBIT PROPERTY CORPORATION.

EXISTING GROUND  
 FLOOR / SITE PLAN

DATE	BY	CHECKED
10/22/75	DEC	
10/21/75	DEC	
10/17/75	DEC	
10/16/75	DEC	

EXISTING GROUND FLOOR & SITE PLAN

Montgomery Ward's Portland Building. "MONTGOMERY WARD" 1996



Montgomery Ward & Company  
2825 East 14th Street  
Oakland, Alameda County, California



Montgomery Ward & Company  
2825 East 14th Street  
Oakland, Alameda County, California

# SUNDAY EDITION

# OAKLAND

# POST

**Cops**

Sunday, April 21, 1996, 32nd Year No 91

## Demolition Scheduled!

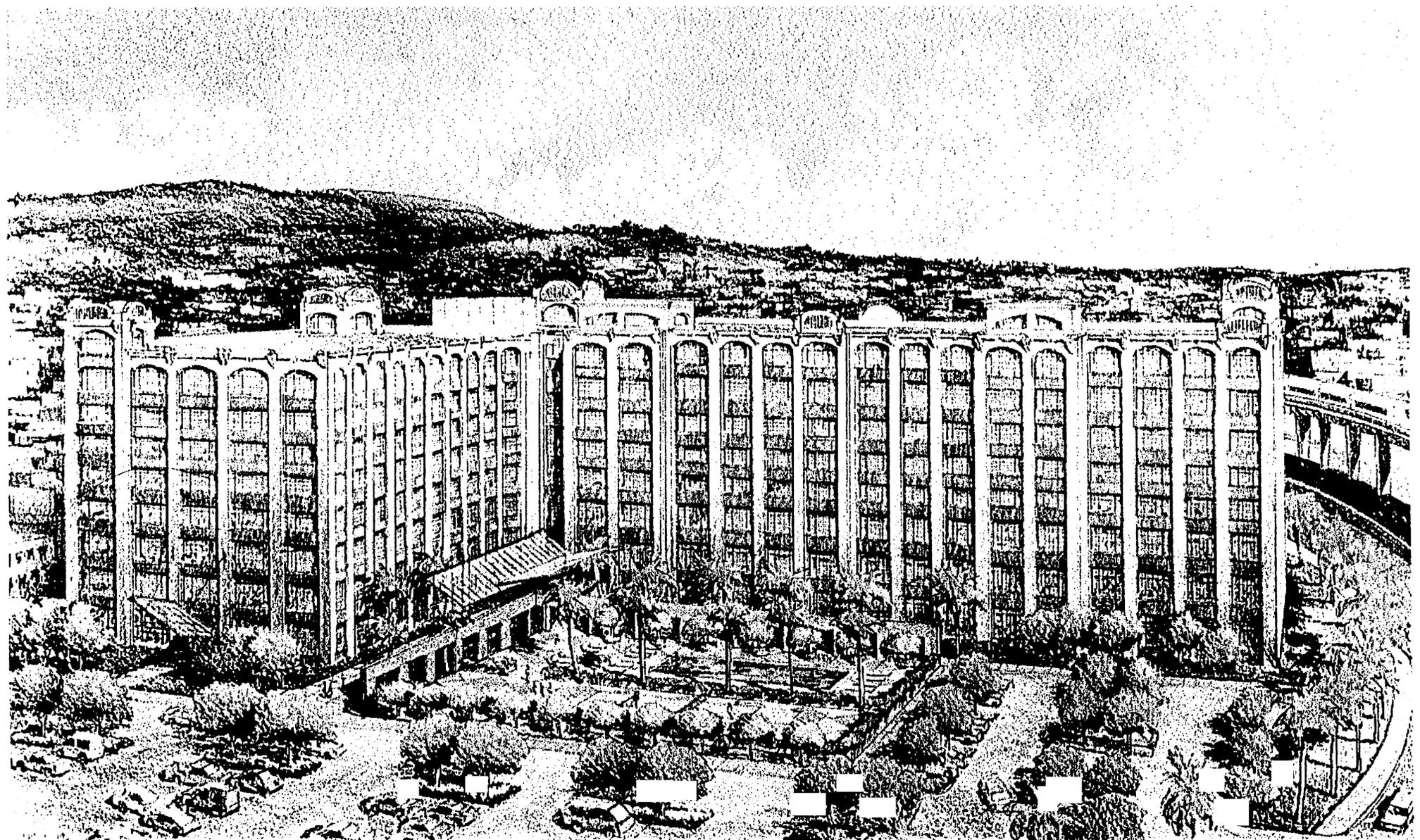


Photo by Tom Nash

Alameda County Superior Court Judge Sandra Margulies has given Oakland the green light to resume demolishing the Montgomery Ward parking garage. Demolition on the main building is scheduled for the end of May, but a group of preservationists still want to have the building declared a historic site. They will have a hearing on May 10.

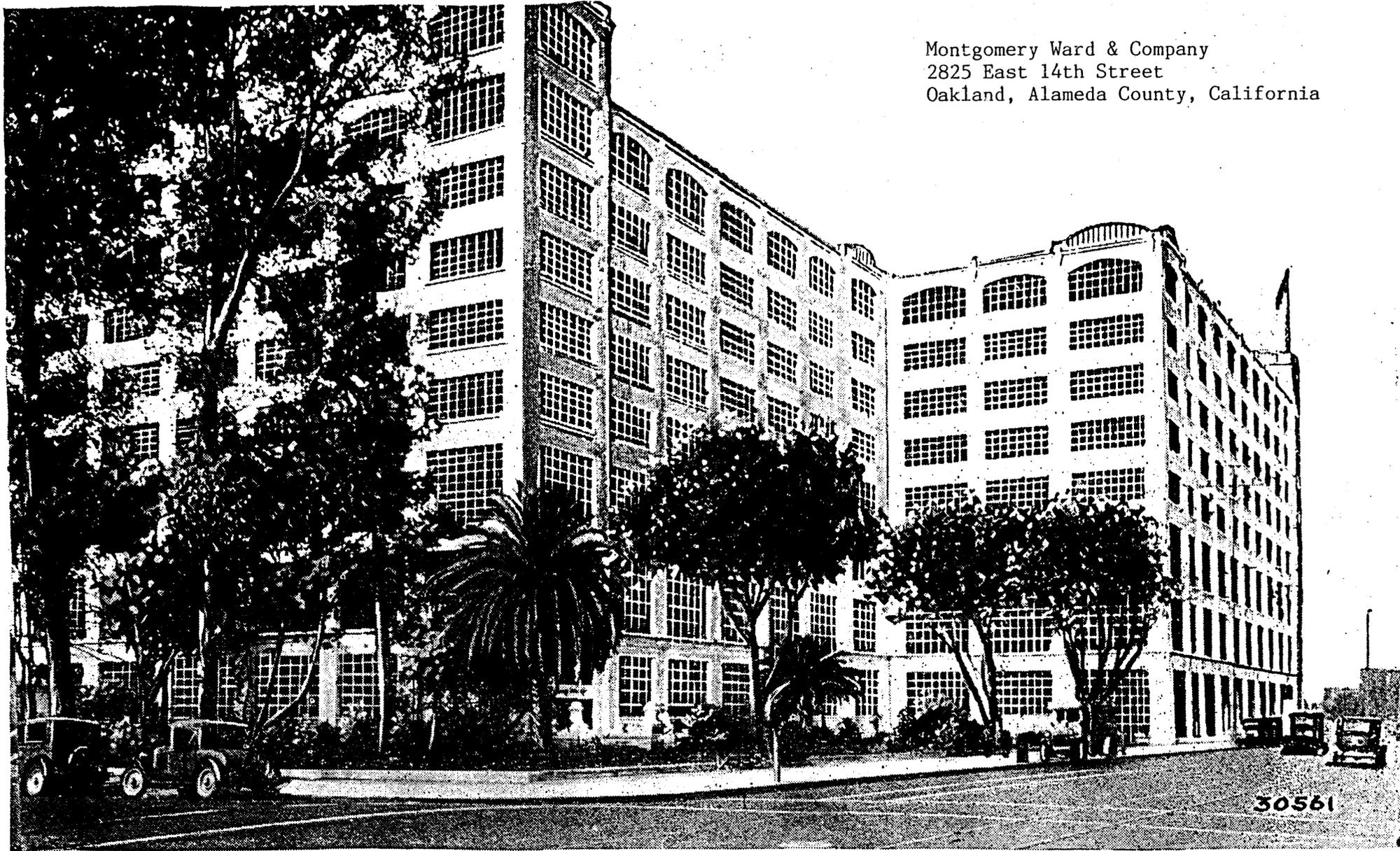
Artist rendering of a restored Montgomery Ward building

Montgomery Ward & Company  
2825 East 14th Street  
Oakland, Alameda County, California



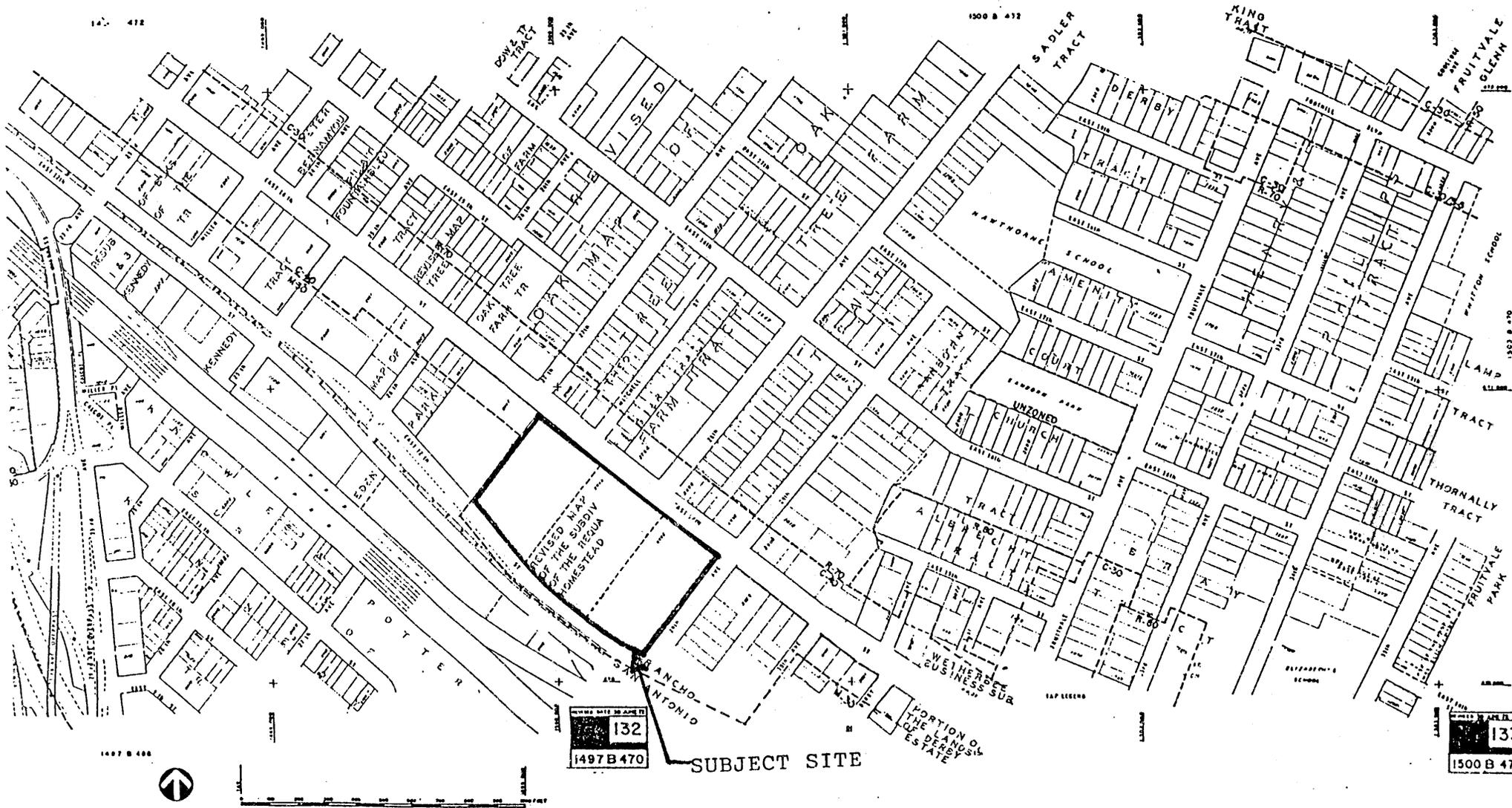
MONTGOMERY WARD & COMPANY'S BLDG., OAKLAND, CALIF.

Montgomery Ward & Company  
2825 East 14th Street  
Oakland, Alameda County, California



Pastcard 1926

Montgomery Ward & Company  
 2825 East 14th Street  
 Oakland, Alameda County, California



ZONING MAPS 132 + 133

Cesar Chavez Plaza  
 2825 E. 14th St., Oakland, CA

Robert J. Pilc, Architect  
 Robert Mazingo, Architect