

U.S. Courthouse
620 SW Main St.
Portland
Multnomah County
Oregon

HABS No. OR-134

HABS
ORE,
26-PORT,
7-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Historic American Buildings Survey
United States Courthouse

pg. I

HABS
OR
26-PORT
7-

HABS No. OR-134

Location: 620 S.W. Main Street (S.W. Main and Broadway)
Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon

UTM References: Zone 10
Easting 525 020
Northing 50 40 150

Present Owner and Occupant: United States Government

Present Use: United States Courthouse

Significance:

While Portland has changed dramatically over the last 50 years, the Federal Courthouse remains an impressive example of early 1930 architecture. The Federal Courthouse is also an important Portland landmark as an architectural work of Morris H. Whitehouse, a native of Portland.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History:

The property is identified as Block 183 of the city of Portland; bordered by S.W. 8 Broadway on the west, Madison Street on the south, 6th Avenue on the east, and Main Street on the north. The site is 200 feet by 200 feet, or 40,000 square feet. The structure is square with light well plan containing 111,055 occupiable square feet of space.

1. Date of erection: May 1, 1933
2. Architect: Morris H. Whitehouse
3. Original and subsequent owners: United States Government
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:
Murch Construction Company (St. Louis)
Walker Cut Stone Company of Tacoma supplied the grey Wilkerson sandstone
(Note: 92% of the contract money available for labor and material went to local area firms.)
5. Major alterations and additions
1956 - New courtroom was added to 7th floor
1962 - Entire building exterior and light well cleaned and repointed
1968 - Air conditioning installed/mechanical penthouse added

B. Historical Context:

On March 5, 1928, Congress allocated \$500,000 for site acquisition and commencement of a new U.S. Courthouse for Portland, Oregon. The total estimated cost was \$1,500,000 with the proviso the existing Federal Courthouse at Morrison and Fifth would be sold at not less than \$1,750,000. (The Government placed the old courthouse on the surplus property list making it available for private acquisition. A 35-year long battle over the fate of the Pioneer Courthouse began. In 1973, the General Services Administration finally restored and rededicated the building.) On December 20, 1928, the cost estimate for the new courthouse was increased to \$1,950,000.

Block 183 of the city of Portland was the selected site. It was occupied by two large one-story garages, a three-story frame rooming house, five frame residences, and some trees.

The Government proceeded to acquire the property. In January 1929, Maurice W. and Ina Seitz sold lots three and four of Block 183 to the U.S. Government for \$150,000. The Ladd Estate Company sold lots one and two for \$160,000. Fred and Sophia Elwert were paid \$160,000 after condemnation of lots five and six in September 1929. Julius H. Meier, Grace Meier and Elizabeth Yeon, co-administrators and executor of the estate of John Yeon, were paid \$192,500 after the condemnation of lots seven and eight.

The site survey was completed in March 1930.

In June 1930, Morris H. Whitehouse was selected as architect for the new building. Murch Construction Company of St. Louis was selected in December 1931 as the low bidder for the project. The Walker Cut Stone Company of Tacoma, Washington was selected to supply grey Wilkerson sandstone. Ninety-two percent of the contract money available for labor and material went to local area firms.

Excavation began in January 1932, with the projected construction completion date of May 1, 1933.

On August 24, 1932, the Oregonian reported dramatically about the halls of the new building:

"The marble halls of the new two million dollar Federal Building will be inlaid with gold. The gold, according to P. A. Spice, construction engineer for the U.S. Treasury Department, is contained in the Mt. Nebo marble which has been adopted for the lower portions of the hallway walls and for the window stools. Traces of what Mr. Spice declares is the yellow metal may be seen in the specimens of the marble sent (to Washington, DC) from Salt Lake City, Utah, sixty miles northeast of Mt. Nebo. About \$60,000 worth of this marble has been ordered for the building, but the rich material is so tightly held by the hard stone that it cannot be extracted. . . Other marble for floors and trim will come from Tennessee and Arkansas. . ." The

Oregonian reporter waxed rapturous about the "fantastic figures," "rainbow colors," "crystals," and "rings" on the Mt. Nebo marble.

The cornerstone was laid by Morris Whitehouse and U.S. Attorney George Neuner on August 23, 1932.

The new Federal Courtrooms were officially opened on September 25, 1933.

Federal Judges John H. McNary and James Alger Fee presided. U.S. Marshal John L. Day was also present.

Part II. Architectural Information

A. Architect:

Morris H. Whitehouse was a 52-year-old native of Portland. He was educated in Portland, then at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1906, he received one of the early traveling scholarships for a year of study at the American Academy in Rome. He began working in Portland in 1908 and became one of the city's most respected architects, with many notable architectural works to his credit. Morris H. Whitehouse was also a past-president of the Oregon Chapter of the AIA.

1. Architectural Character: The General building massing and horizontal organization manifests the influence of the Renaissance Revival. Neo-Classical Revival influences may be seen in the plain, light colored surfaces, unadorned linteled windows, and the ranks of Doric pilasters of each facade. The ornamentation of the entablature is a combination of Neo-Classical elements and Art Deco. The influence of Art Deco is felt strongly in the building interior.
2. Condition of Fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior:

The Courthouse is of steel and concrete construction. The building has a basement and eight stories including an attic. It is faced in Wilkerson sandstone (a very hard, light colored material) laid in what the drawings call "American" bond. This is comparable in appearance to chimney bond.

1. Dimensions:

Square: 161 ft. 8 in. x 161 ft. 8 in.

65' x 78' light court occupies the core of the building above the first story.

2. Foundation: Concrete

3. Walls:

Wilkerson Stone

Entire light well is faced in smooth white brick.

Base is faced in smooth masonry.

4. Steel Structure, fireproofed by concrete.

5. Bulkheads:

A low, stepping-down masonry wall with a double steel pipe railing separates the site from the sidewalks on all four sides. Planting strips 18' wide are inside the wall on the east and west

sides. Two semi-circular recesses formed by taller sections of the wall open toward the sidewalk on the north side, and extend into the 28' wide landscaped area on either side of the building's main entrance. In the center of each recess is a flagpole capped by a bronze eagle with outstretched wings. At the center of the north facade 24 granite steps lead straight up from the sidewalk to a landing 42' wide.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Within the doorways a cast bronze semi-abstract floral pattern strip frames each 16' x 6' opening. The 7-1/2' double doors are of hollow bronze with brass trim. The glazed panel above each pair is covered by an iron grille with cast bronze floral and geometric ornamentation.
- b. Windows: The first story windows are 14' x 7' vertical rectangles. The unadorned casement windows of the second story are 7' x 6' rectangles divided into twelve lights. The third through fifth story windows are similar but 8' tall. Similar windows 19' tall extend from the sixth story through the seventh.

7. Roof: Gravel surface, built-up flat roof with a steel sided penthouse for air conditioning and mechanical equipment.

C. Description of Interior:

A ground level entrance on the northeast corner of the building's east facade leads directly into the basement and to a stairway and elevator lobby. A similar stairway and elevator rise from the northwest corner of the west facade. A third stairway and elevator lead up from the entrance on the south facade.

The basement originally contained a large swing room and restrooms for the male employees. Both rooms were visible from the enclosed lookout gallery. Storage for the post office, separate rooms and toilets for male and female custodial employees, an engineer's room, storage for court exhibits, boiler room and unassigned space filled the remainder of the basement.

The three pairs of bronze doors in the main facade lead from the landing into a foyer. The foyer is 18' 5" high, 42' wide and 20' deep. The floor is of Brown Nebo Golden Travis marble with borders of Red Nebo Golden Travis. The base and wainscot are of Pink Kasota Fleuri marble with handsome bas-relief figures on the end walls memorializing Oregonians who fell in military service in World War I.

The cornice and ceiling are of plaster. Opposite the entrance doors are three more pairs of doorways of bronze and glass which lead into the lobby.

The lobby is about 125' wide and 25' deep with three 14' x 11' bays on the south wall. The south wall and the bays contain lockboxes and Postal Service windows. At the west end of the lobby is the small foyer of the ground level Broadway entrance. At the east end is a vestibule of the stairs leading down to the 6th Avenue entrance. The floor of the lobby is paved with 1-1/2' x 1-1/2' and 3-1/2' x 1-1/2' squares of Brown Nebo Golden Travis marble. Lobby walls are of Pink Kasota Fleuri marble inset with panels of ornamented cast bronze and glass in the lock box and service window areas. Four elaborate cast bronze writing desks are placed along the horizontal axis of the lobby. The original turquoise colored ceramic ash receptacles stand on the floor behind the desks. Signage is of cast metal letters on black glass. Rolling metal curtains shutter service windows in off hours. Wall clocks in the lobby are of bronze. Most of the ornament is stylized, symmetrical repeated floral designs. The ceiling of the lobby is 18' 9" high. Square coffers, 3-1/2' x 3-1/2', with floral patterned borders and stylized birds, eagles, and a floral lattice pattern are all of cast plaster. The lobby has a warm rosy hue. It has not been significantly altered since it was constructed.

Smooth bronze doors in alcoves at each end of the north wall of the lobby lead into what were postal savings and money order and stamp rooms. These had linoleum floors, wood base and trim, plaster walls and ceiling and marble window stools. These rooms were converted into a conference room and an office. The conference room was remodeled in 1968.

The large Postal Service workroom occupies most of the space behind the service screen. It has a wood block floor, 7'-1" high wainscoting and wood trim and window stools. A large skylight opening from the workroom into the light well above was roofed over in 1959. Air conditioning ducts and fluorescent lighting fixtures now occupy much of the room's ceiling space as well as some of the wall space.

Bronze-doored elevators are located at either end of the lobby. Marble stairways adjacent provide access to the second story. Restrooms are located across the corridor at the top of the stairs as is the stairway to the upper stories. The restrooms have wainscots and partitions of French Pink Tennessee Marble.

Offices about 20' deep surround the light well on the north, east, and west sides of the second story. A corridor circles these and provides access to an outer ring of larger offices. Offices typically had marble window stools, Philippine mahogany wood trim, picture mould, doors and base. The floors were covered with mahogany colored linoleum. The doors had chipped glass windows and glazed transoms. Many of these characteristics have remained, but most offices have had fluorescent lights installed, often in suspended, acoustical tile ceilings. Floor covering is either vinyl asbestos tile or carpeting.

The second floor has fluorescent lights installed in the east corridor. Carpeting has been installed in all corridors. The floors were originally of terrazzo with pink Italian marble chips in colored cement and Persian red chips in the borders. The base is still marble. Most of the plaster walls, cornice and ceiling remain as well as many of the incandescent lights.

The third through the fifth floors are similar to the second story. The public corridors of the third and fourth stories remain much as they were originally, but the fifth story corridors have lowered ceilings and fluorescent lighting. The lowered ceilings accommodate the 1968 air conditioning.

The sixth floor contains two courtrooms and judges chambers. Originally they had rubber tile floors. The base, trim, and clock face were of Brown Nebo Golden Travis marble. Main doors are leather covered. The walls, trim, cornice, window reveals, railing, and judge's desk, platform and steps were of oak. The ornamented coffered ceiling and acoustical wall panels were of plaster. Ornate heating grilles and clock trim are of bronze. Few changes, and none of any real impact, have been made. Some carpeting has been added and the jury boxes extended in both rooms. The door leading to the judge's chambers is framed by Corinthian pilasters and a segmented pediment. The judge's desk is flanked by Corinthian columns of oak paired with similar pilasters. These support an entablature with modillions. This theme continues throughout the

room. The ceiling coffers contain small plaster rosettes. The coffers are bordered by a plaster cable moulding. Glass and bronze lamps are suspended from the ceiling.

The judges' chambers originally had rubber tile floors; oak wainscoting, paneled walls, window reveals and cornice and a plaster ceiling. The library had rubber tile floors, oak and glass bookcases, oak wainscoting, ceiling mould, trim and window stools. The muntins of the bookcases, the ladder and track were of bronze. These rooms have retained much of their original appearance.

The corridors on this floor had rubber tile floors. The elevators and courtroom lobbies have marble floors, Brown Nebo Golden Travis marble base, 4' Pink Kasota Fleuri marble wainscot and plaster ceiling, walls and cornice. The corridors and lobbies have been carpeted.

The 24' 4" high sixth floor district courtrooms extend into the seventh story, occupying all but a 6' wide corridor around the light well on the east and west sides of the building. The court of appeals on the north side of the seventh story originally had rubber tile floors, marble base, cherry wood paneled walls, cornice, window reveals, railing, clerk's and judge's desks, platform and stairs. The 15' 6" ceiling was ornamented with cast plaster coffers. The entrance doors are leather covered. Double Roman Doric pilasters flank the door to the judge's chamber behind the judge's desk. A carved wood eagle is mounted at the top of the

broken pediment over the door. A moulded cornice with modillions finish the entablature just below the ceiling. Acoustical plaster wall panels and ornate bronze heating grilles and hanging lamps complete the scheme. The court of appeals courtroom remains much as it was originally. Fluorescent lighting panels have been set into some of the coffers. The floors have been carpeted.

D. Site:

The site is bordered by S.W. Broadway on the west, Madison Street on the south, 6th Avenue on the east, and Main Street on the north in the downtown Portland area.

Part III. Sources of Information:

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

GSA, Region 10 retains in Auburn, Washington

B. GSA historical records retained in Auburn, WA.

Prepared by: Name: James Cason

Title: Regional Historic Preservation Officer

Organization: Public Buildings and Real Property

Date: April 20, 1983

Part IV. Project Information

GSA Project: This project provides for alterations and major repairs which should be undertaken at this building for its continued use in providing adequate housing of Federal agencies. Major items of work in this project include improvement of heating, ventilating, air-conditioning (HVAC) and electrical system, installation of fire protection systems, modifications to promote energy conservation, improved facilities for the handicapped, elevator replacement, conversion of postal workroom to courtrooms, and historical restoration. The project will be divided into three phased construction: Phase I, providing a new snack bar and public lavatory facilities; Phase II, providing for two new courtrooms and their ancillary areas with historical preservation of the existing first floor lobby; Phase III, provides for rehabilitation of floors two through seven. The estimated construction contract award for the total project is \$5,547,244.

Individuals involved in the alteration project:

GSA Team Leader: Bill Sakaguchi

Project Architect: Don Miller

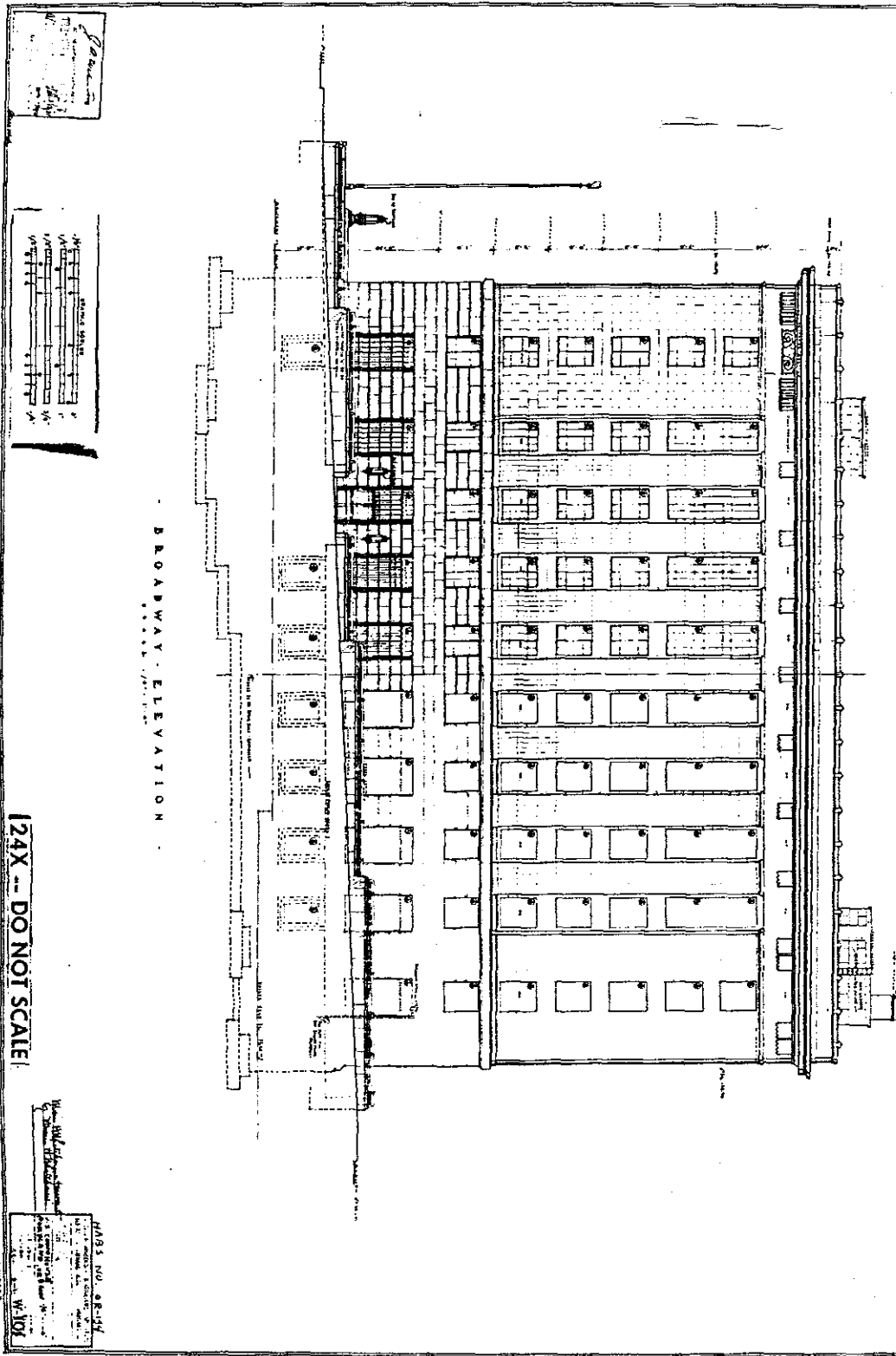
Contract Architect/Engineer: Zimmer . Gunzul . Frasca - Portland, OR

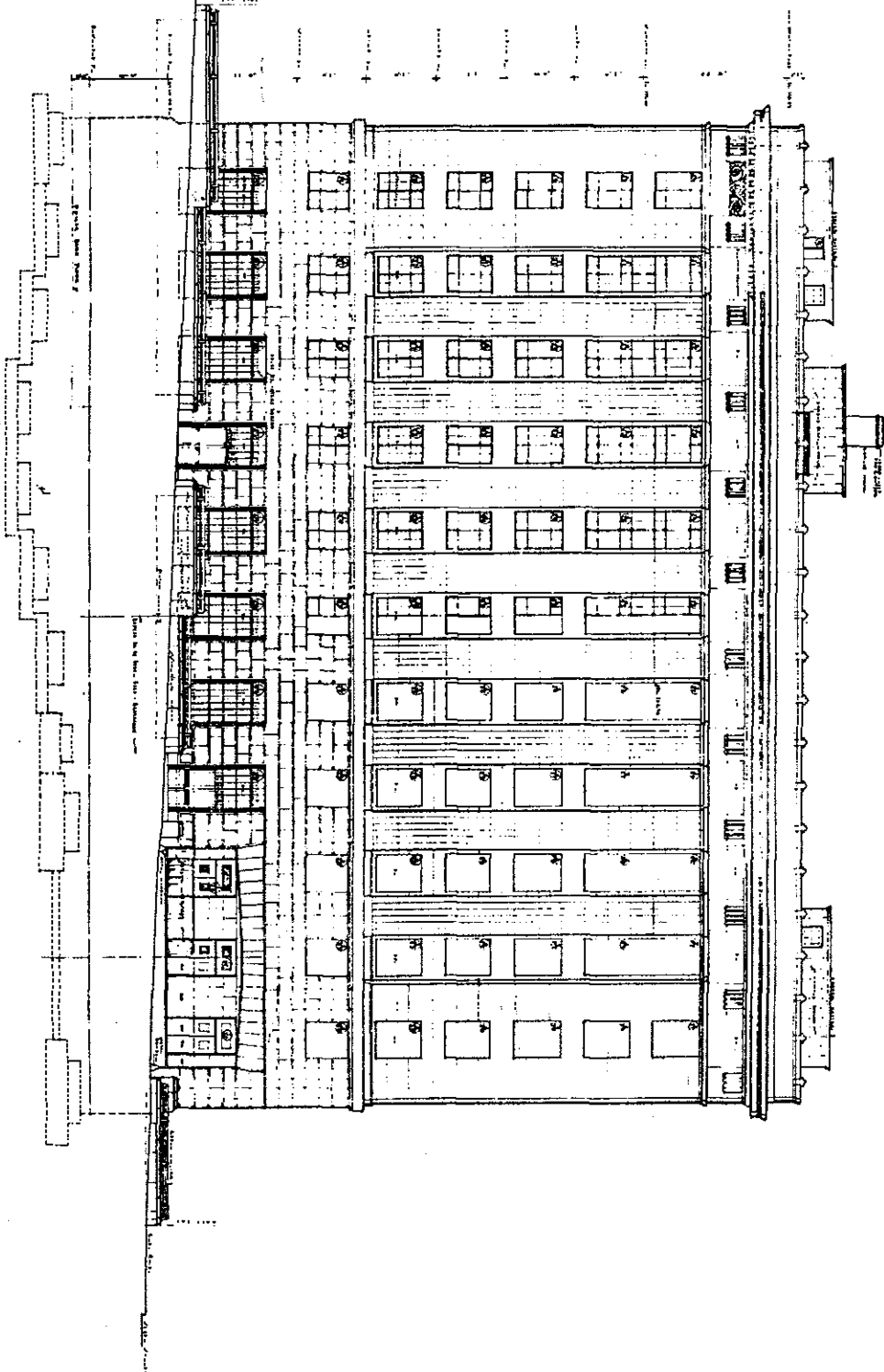
Photographer (Historical Documentation): Delano Photographics, Inc.

1536 SE 11th Avenue

Portland, OR 97214

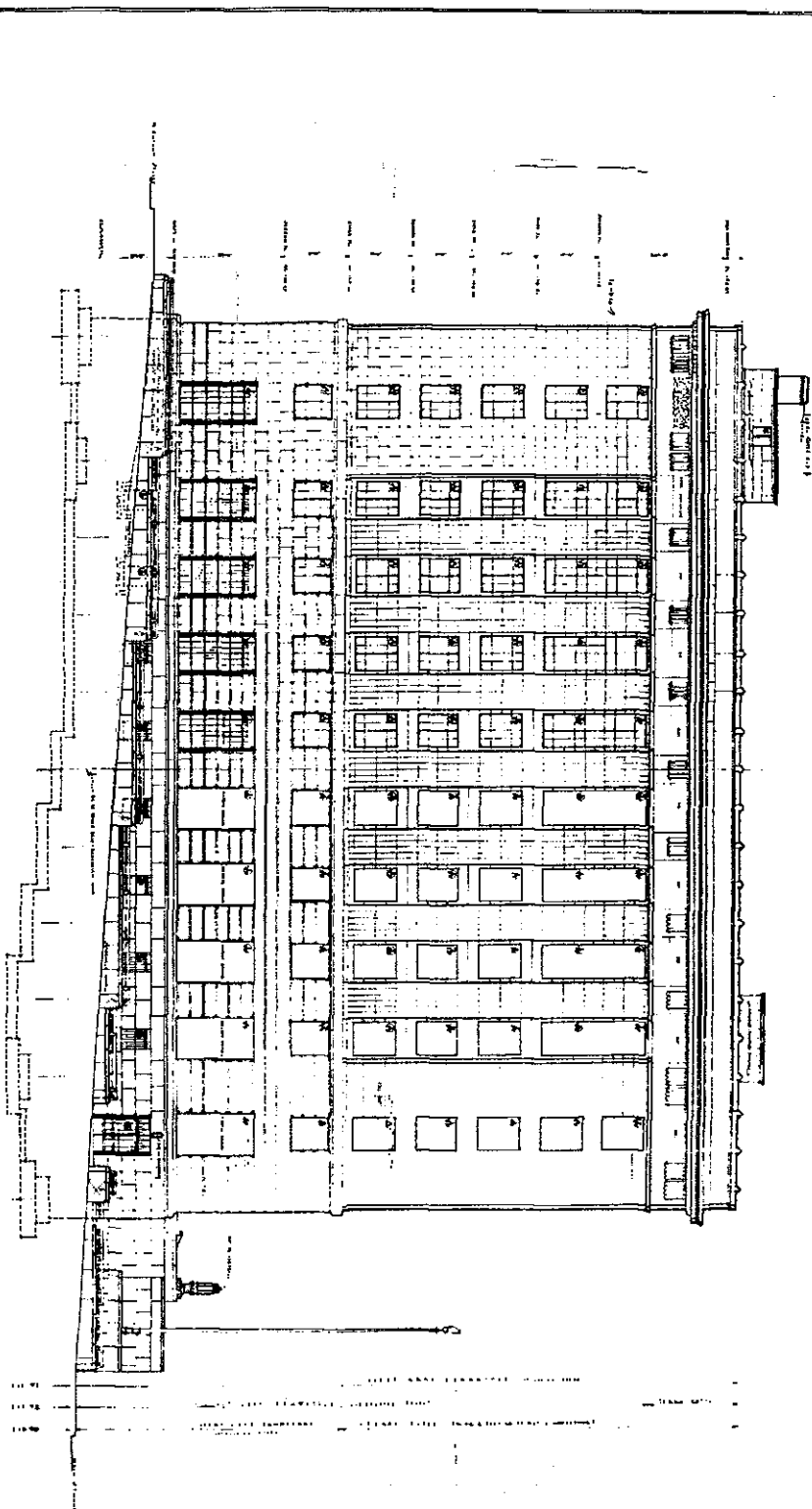
Note: ^{Full size copies of the} Originals for the following data pages can be found in Library of Congress ~~Field~~ Field Records (Oversize) for HABS OR-134. See Oregon FN-17.



MADISON STREET - ELEVATION .
 11446 1/2" x 11"

124X -- DO NOT SCALE

HAB 5 - No. OR-134
KODAK SAFETY FILM
U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE



SIXTH STREET ELEVATION

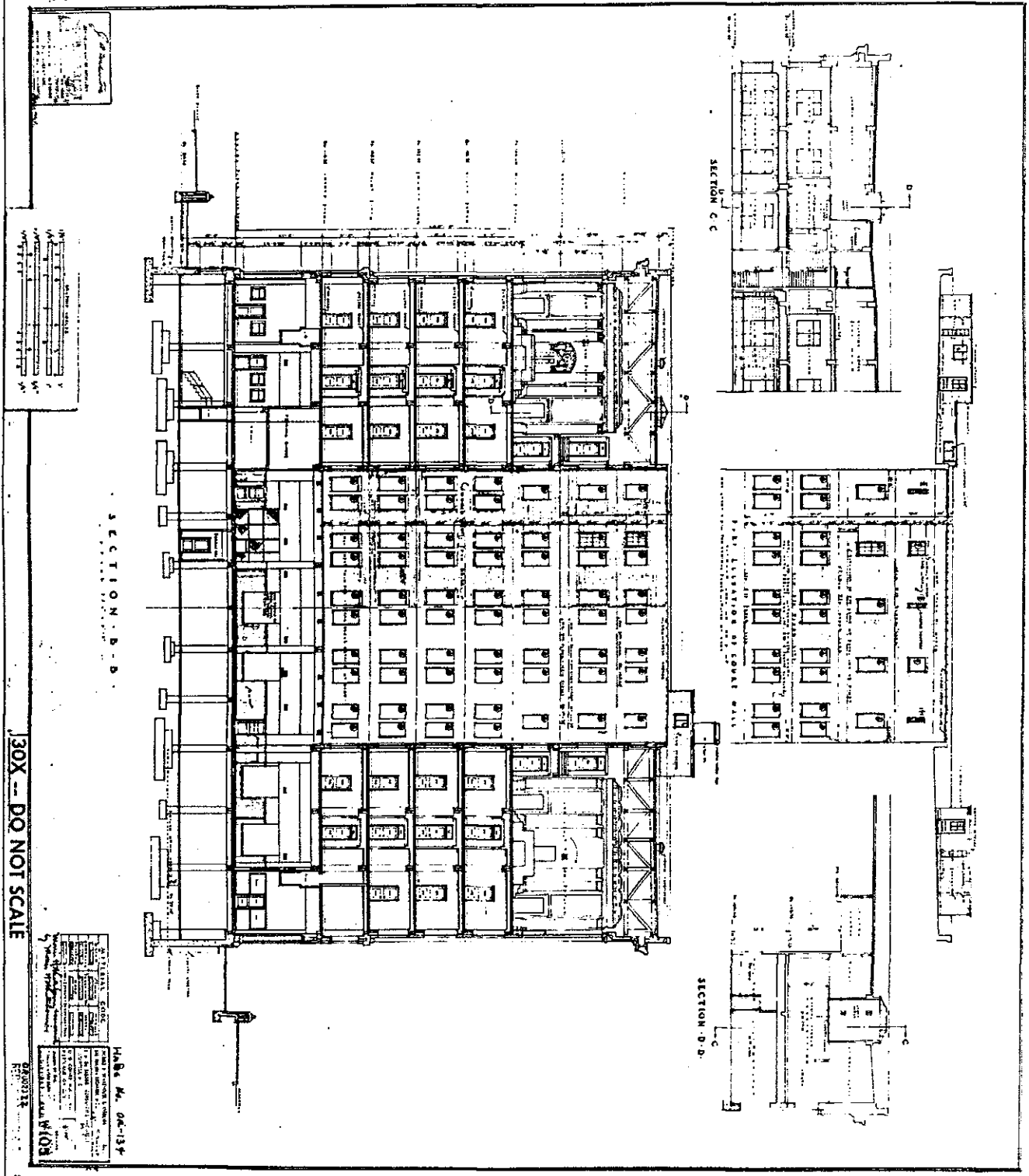
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Architect's Office
1000 10th Street
San Francisco, Cal.
1934

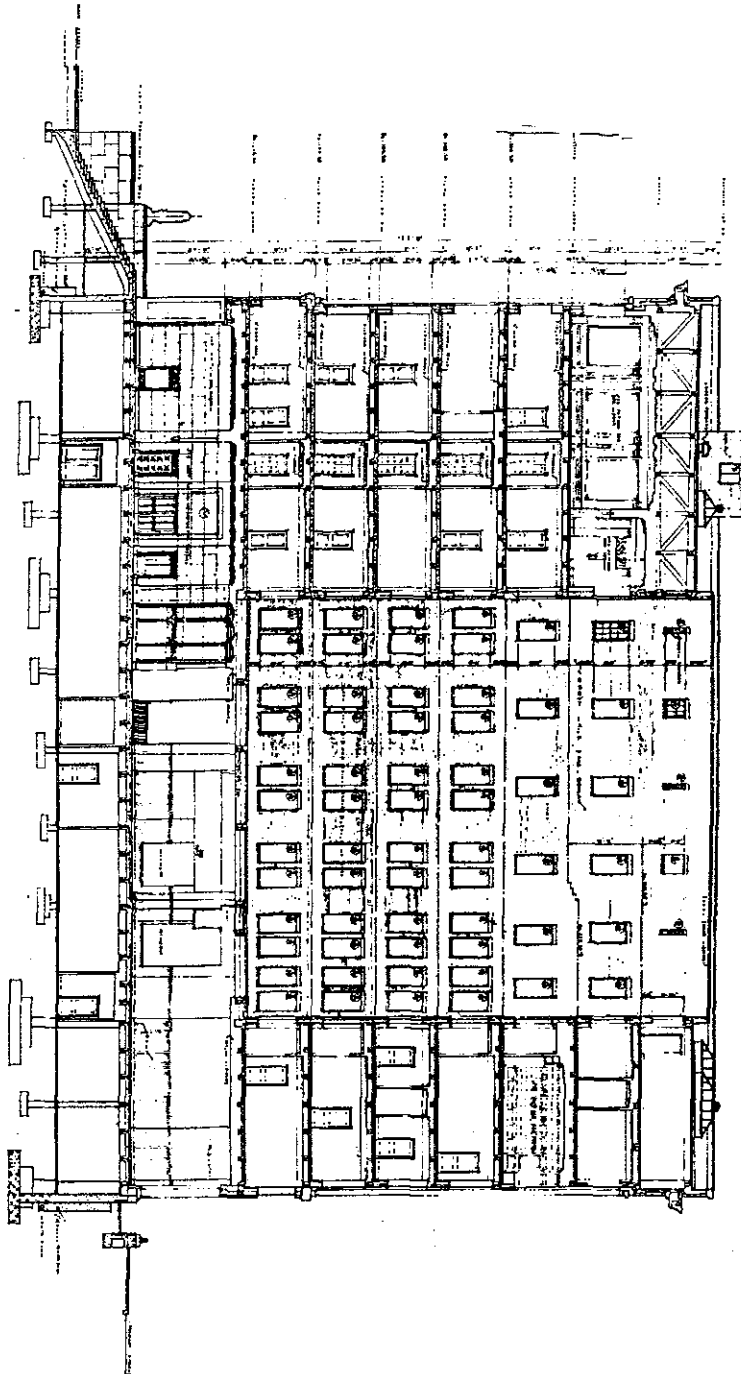
GENERAL NOTES
1. SEE PLAN FOR LOCATION OF BUILDING.
2. SEE PLAN FOR LOCATION OF BUILDING.
3. SEE PLAN FOR LOCATION OF BUILDING.

PLANS OR-134
U.S. COURTHOUSE
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.
1934

PROJ. 41

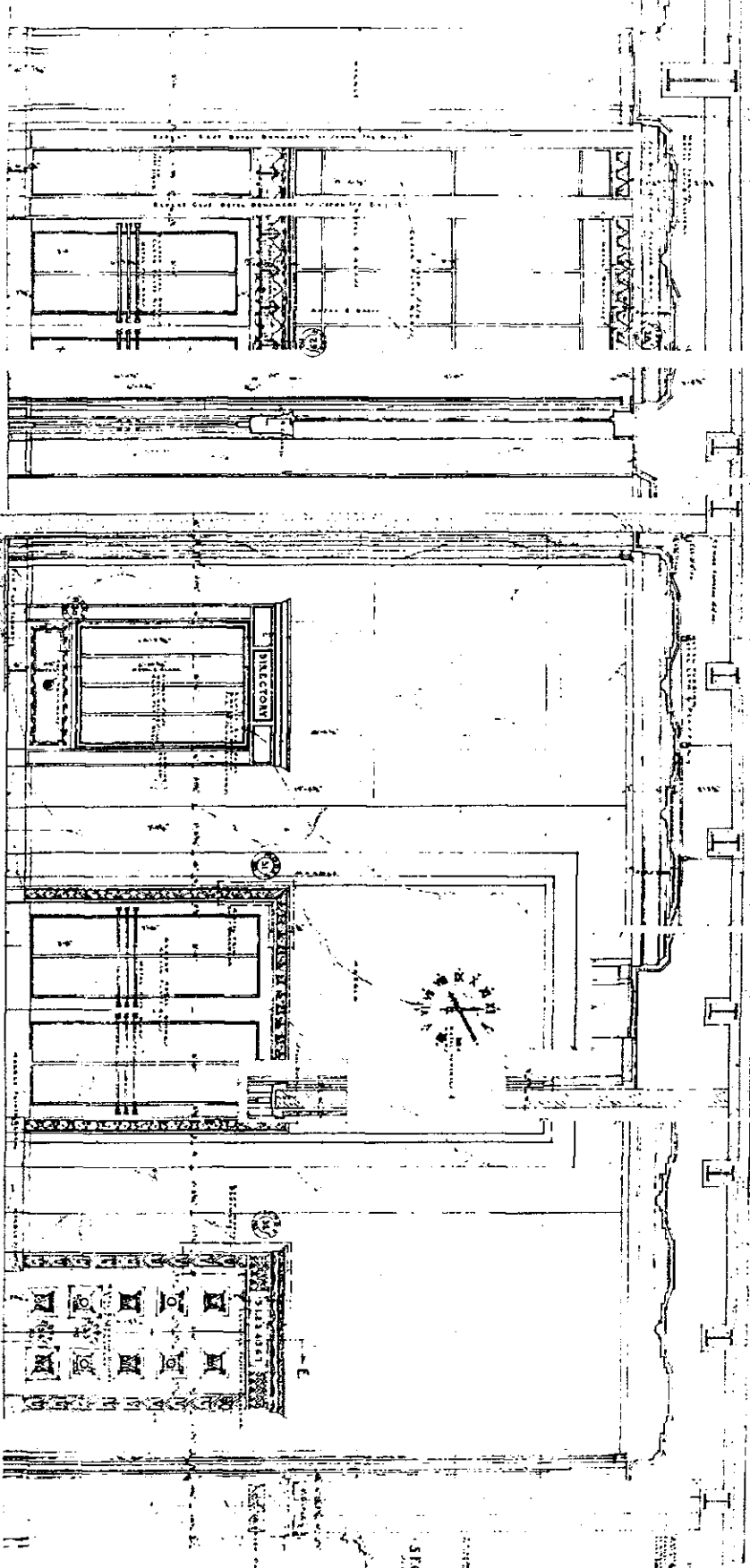


SECTION A-A



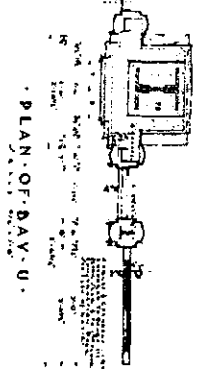
24X -- DO NOT SCALE

HABS No. OR-134	
PROJECT NO.	OR-134
DATE	10/1/54
BY	W. H. H. H.
CHECKED BY	W. H. H. H.
APPROVED BY	W. H. H. H.
SCALE	1/4" = 1'-0"

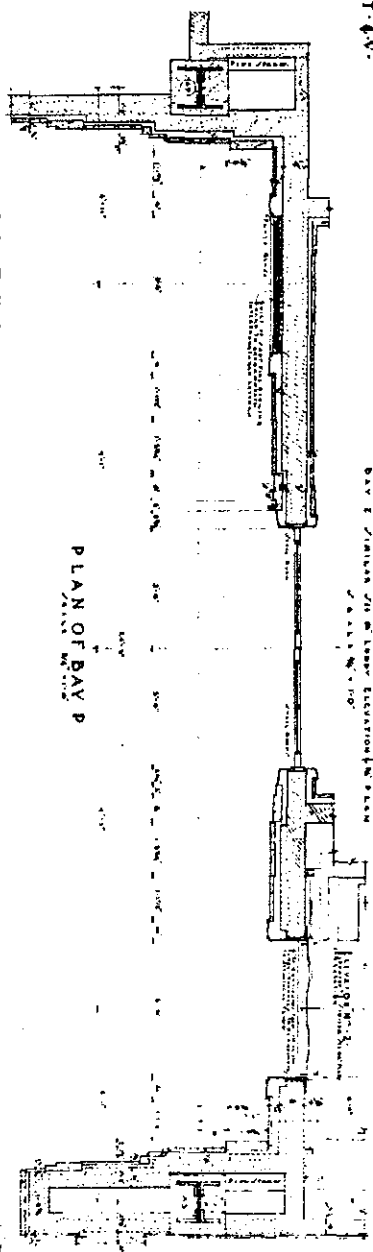


SECTION THRU BAYS U-T

ELEVATION OF BAY P



PLAN OF BAY U

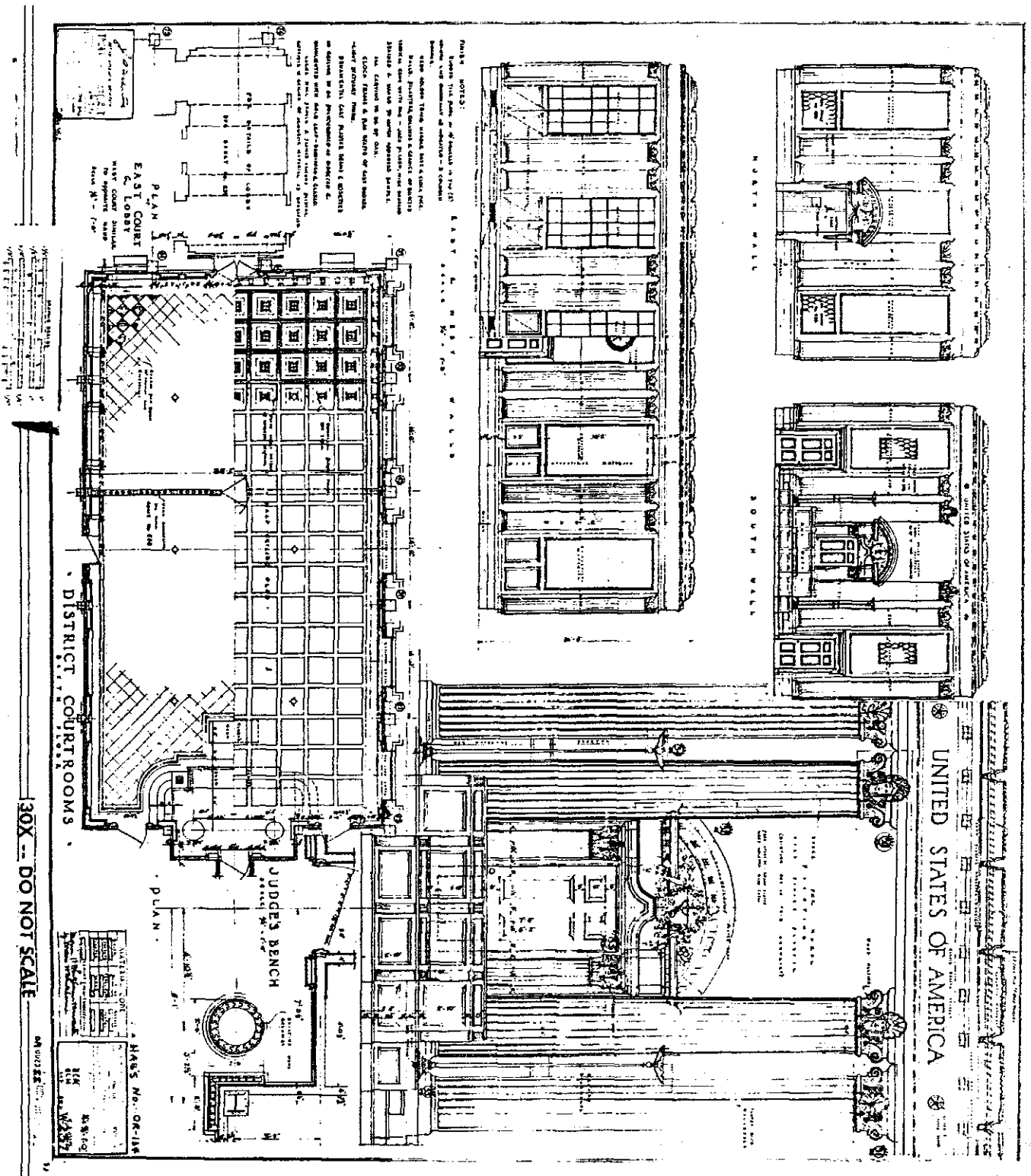


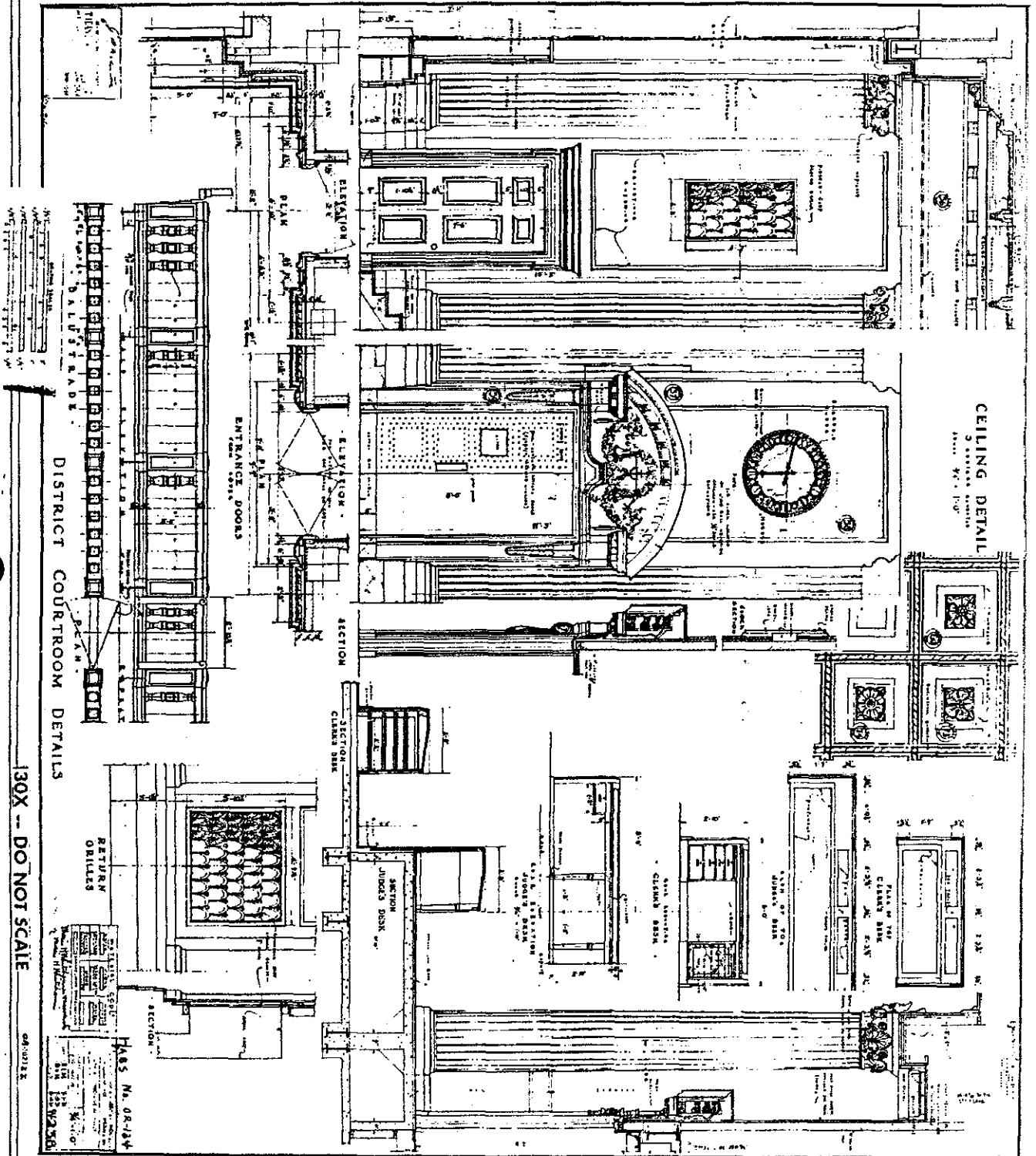
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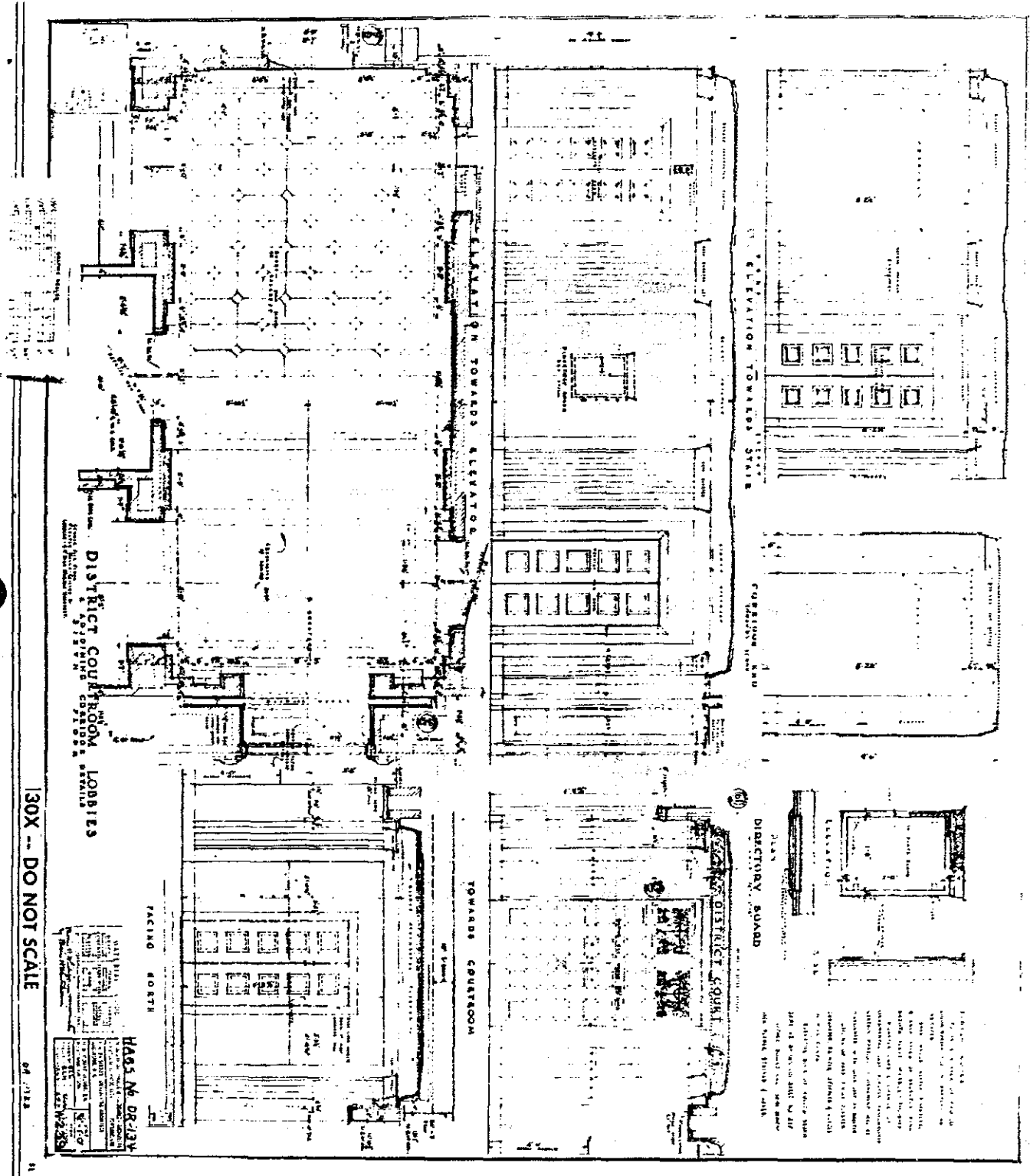
SCREEN DETAILS IN LOBBY
DOORS & END WALLS

ITEM	QUANTITY	UNIT	PRICE	TOTAL
1. MATERIAL	1	sq. ft.	1.00	1.00
2. LABOR	1	hr.	1.00	1.00
3. TRANSPORTATION	1	mi.	1.00	1.00
4. TOTAL				3.00

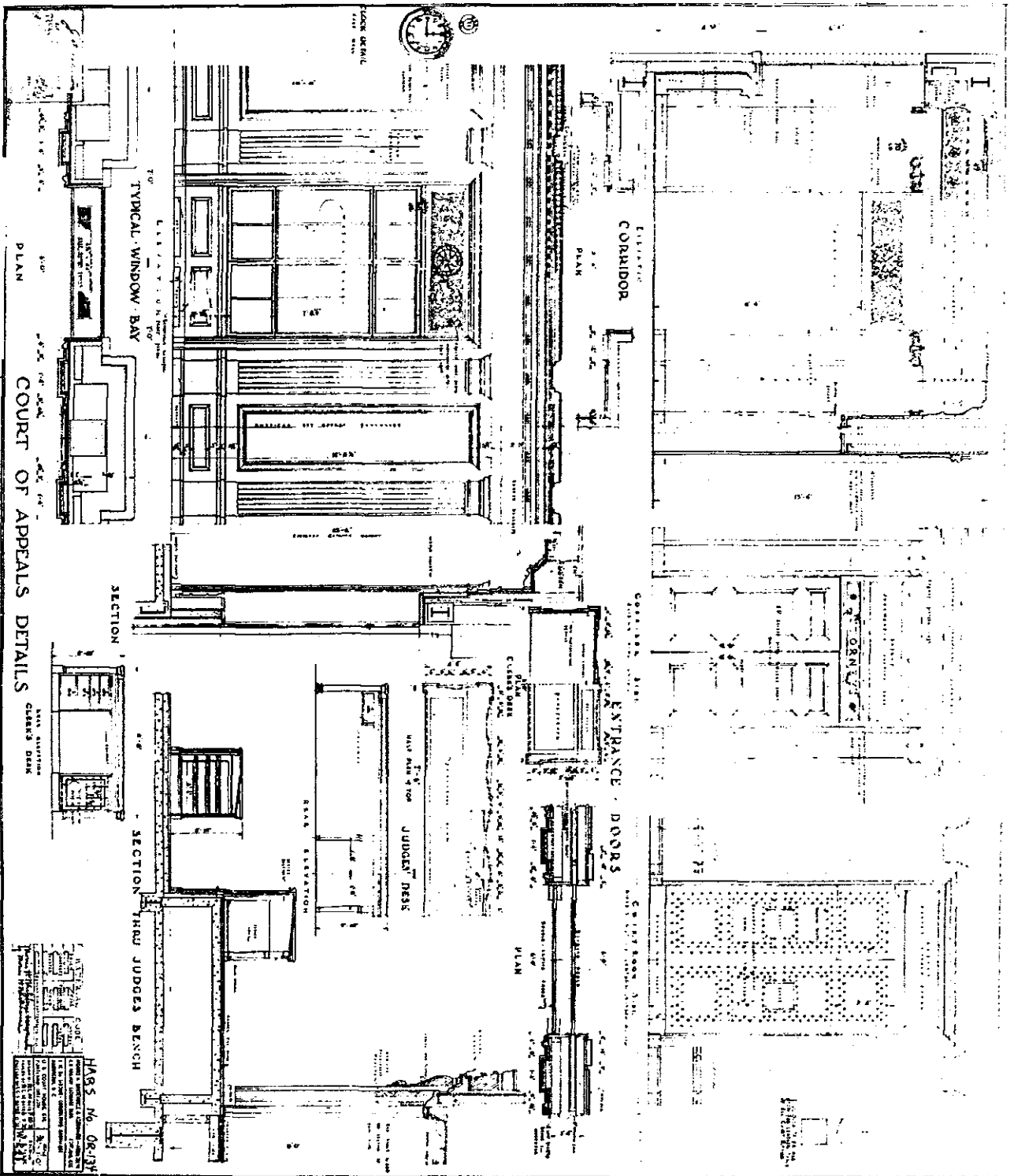
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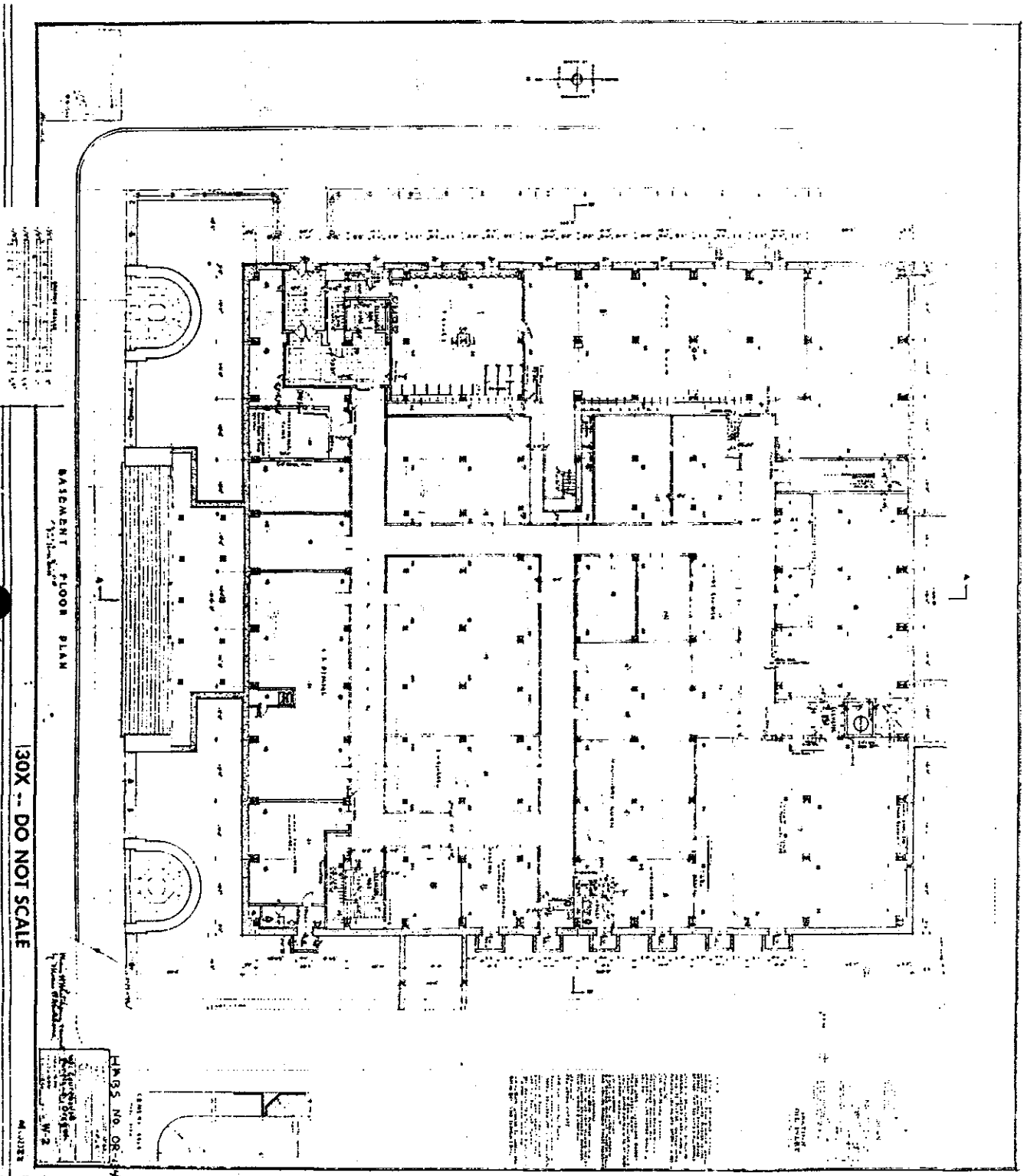


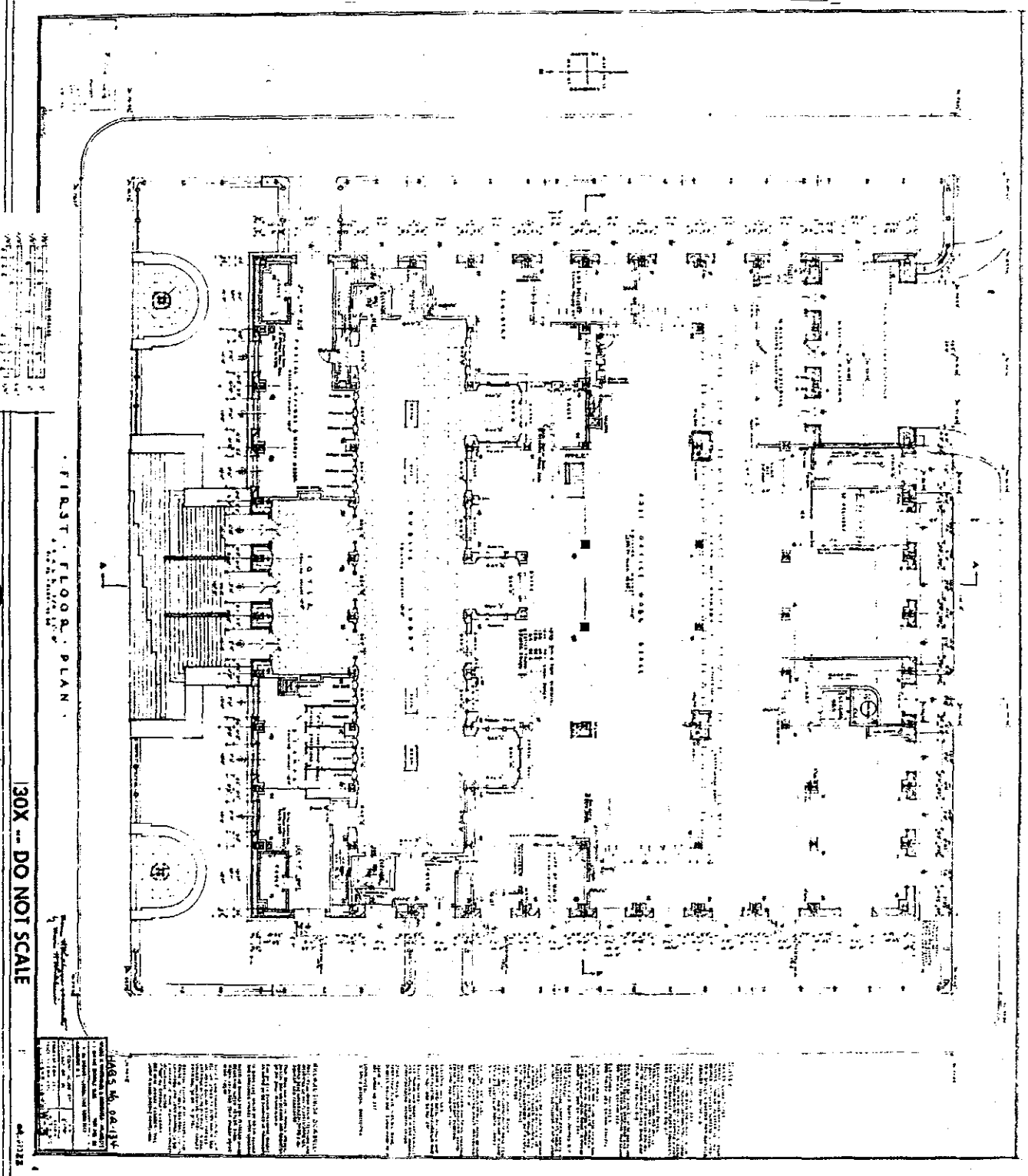




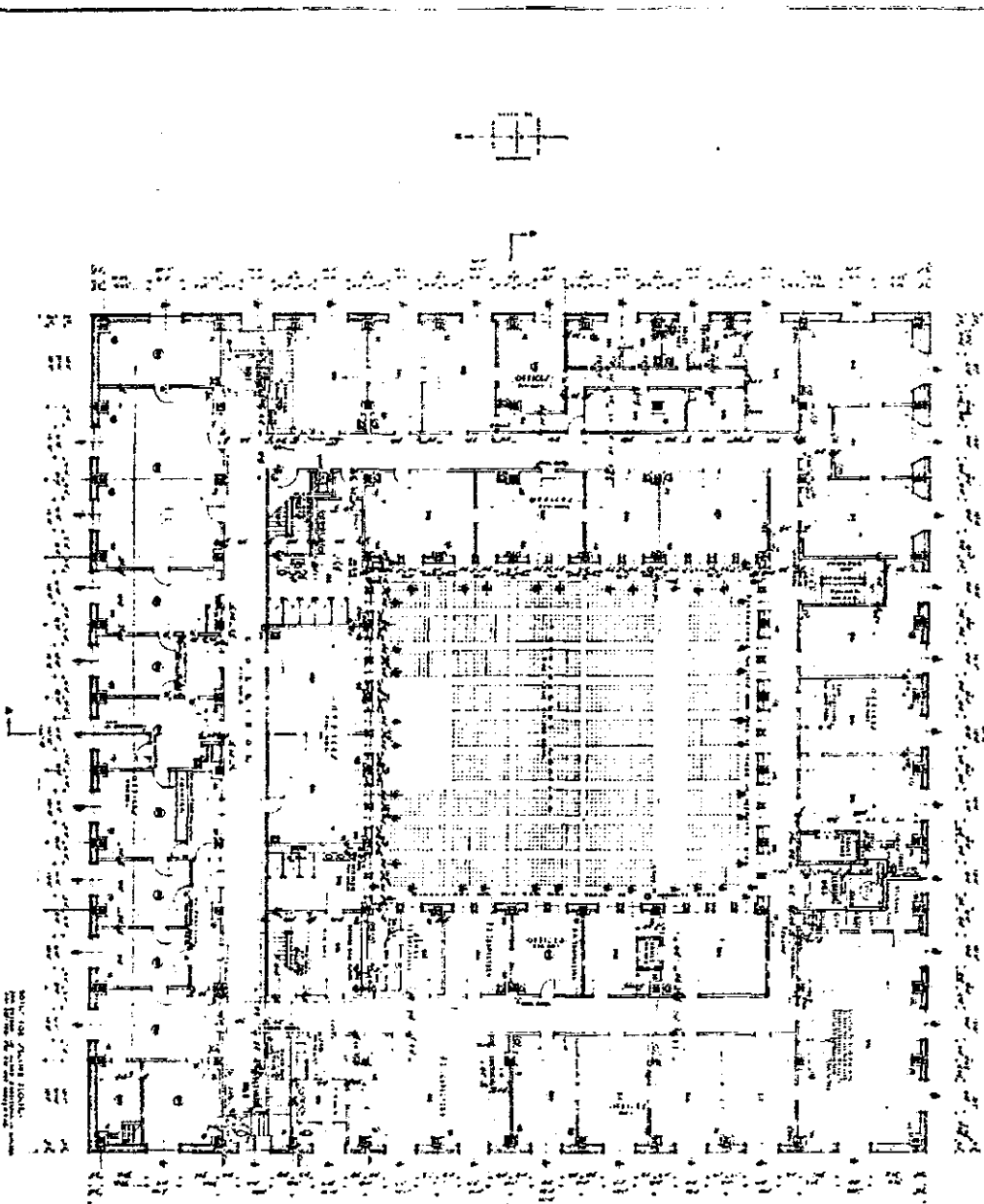
130X -- DO NOT SCALE

OR 1112





SECOND FLOOR PLAN



GENERAL NOTES:
1. ALL WORK SHALL BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LATEST EDITIONS OF THE BUILDING CODES AND SPECIFICATIONS.
2. ALL MATERIALS SHALL BE OF THE BEST QUALITY AND SHALL BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL TO THE ARCHITECT.
3. ALL WORK SHALL BE COMPLETED WITHIN THE SPECIFIED TIME FRAME.
4. ALL WORK SHALL BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LATEST EDITIONS OF THE BUILDING CODES AND SPECIFICATIONS.
5. ALL MATERIALS SHALL BE OF THE BEST QUALITY AND SHALL BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL TO THE ARCHITECT.
6. ALL WORK SHALL BE COMPLETED WITHIN THE SPECIFIED TIME FRAME.
7. ALL WORK SHALL BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LATEST EDITIONS OF THE BUILDING CODES AND SPECIFICATIONS.
8. ALL MATERIALS SHALL BE OF THE BEST QUALITY AND SHALL BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL TO THE ARCHITECT.
9. ALL WORK SHALL BE COMPLETED WITHIN THE SPECIFIED TIME FRAME.
10. ALL WORK SHALL BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LATEST EDITIONS OF THE BUILDING CODES AND SPECIFICATIONS.
11. ALL MATERIALS SHALL BE OF THE BEST QUALITY AND SHALL BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL TO THE ARCHITECT.
12. ALL WORK SHALL BE COMPLETED WITHIN THE SPECIFIED TIME FRAME.
13. ALL WORK SHALL BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LATEST EDITIONS OF THE BUILDING CODES AND SPECIFICATIONS.
14. ALL MATERIALS SHALL BE OF THE BEST QUALITY AND SHALL BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL TO THE ARCHITECT.
15. ALL WORK SHALL BE COMPLETED WITHIN THE SPECIFIED TIME FRAME.

HABS No. OR-134

30X -- DO NOT SCALE

04/20/88

