

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name James C. Curtis & Co. Building

other names/site number Oxford Clothes, Inc. Building

Name of Multiple Property Listing _____

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

street & number 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street not for publication

city or town Chicago vicinity

state Illinois county Cook zip code 60607

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: ___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date _____

Illinois Department of Natural Resources - SHPO
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
- ___ determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ removed from the National Register
- ___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action _____

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Cook, Illinois
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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE / TRADE – business,
warehouse
INDUSTRY – manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS / Chicago Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Limestone
walls: Brick, limestone, granite
roof: Asphalt
other: _____

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity).

Summary Paragraph

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building is located at 1220 W. Van Buren Street in Chicago's Near West Side community area, once the city's prominent industrial district just west of the downtown Loop, and faces Interstate 290 to the south directly across Van Buren Street. Designed by architects Patterson & Davidson and completed in 1910, the building is a 7-story fireproof industrial loft with a rectangular footprint and flat roof, clad in red and white face brick and stone along its south primary façade and common brick along its secondary facades. The building is regularly fenestrated with original window openings. Inside the building retains its original marble-clad Van Buren Street entrance lobby and components of its original 2nd floor showroom and office spaces. The majority of the building's interior is open plan and highly industrial in character.

Narrative Description

Site

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building is located mid-block along the north side of W. Van Buren Street between S. Racine Avenue to the east and S. Throop Street to the west, in Chicago's Near West Side neighborhood, approximately one mile west of the downtown Loop business district. The building is highly visible to commuters along the Eisenhower Expressway (Interstate 290) and at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Blue Line station just south across Van Buren Street.

Once located in a dense industrial enclave of similar light manufacturing facilities, in recent decades the neighborhood around the James C. Curtis & Co. Building has evolved into a much less dense commercial and residential community and has experienced heavy demolition and infrastructure interventions in recent years.

The James C. Curtis & Co. occupies a rectangular lot and faces south onto Van Buren Street. To the east is an empty lot that was historically unaffiliated with the building; an 8-story residential building is situated to the west, and a public alley to the north.

Exterior

The seven-story James C. Curtis & Co. Building has a heavy cubic massing with a flat roof. It has a rectangular footprint except for a recessed light well at the building's center west end (not visible from street view or from the public alley).

Along its Van Buren Street (south) elevation, the building is overall symmetrical in design, six window bays in width and clad in brown brick at its lower two floors (raised basement / 1st floor and 2nd floor) and red brick from its 3rd floor to 7th floor. The primary façade is visually divided into three separate sections: a two-story base, a four-story mid-section, and one-story top with a brick parapet.

The two-story brown brick base is regularly fenestrated with large window groupings spanning its brick structural piers. The original wood windows remain at the raised basement / 1st story. The far east windows are a grouping of two wood double hung windows while the center four window openings display original wood Chicago Style windows (wide fixed picture windows flanked by two narrower one-over-one operable hung windows). The raised 2nd story windows retain their original wood frames, although the wood sashes (including the four center Chicago Style windows) were replaced with aluminum hung windows by previous owners. Located at the far west end of the

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south façade, the building's main entrance retains its original wood and glass doors and side lights and is framed by a wide granite surround. An original canopy was removed by a previous owner c. 2018 according to Google Street View.

A stone cornice separates the two-story base from the four-story mid-section, which is framed by two outer bays that house paired windows with white brick headers. The center four bays are regularly fenestrated with large window openings separated by brick piers with Prairie-inspired decorative stone capitals, expressive of the building's structural steel frame within and typical of Chicago School Style commercial architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The original wood windows have been replaced with non-historic aluminum windows set within the original openings.

A simple brick cornice above the sixth story separated the mid-section from the top-section, which houses groupings of double and single windows with decorative brick surrounds. The south façade terminates above with a flat, simply articulated red brick cornice and parapet. From historic images, it appears that south façade was once topped by a decorative cornice which is now missing.

The building's secondary east and north elevations are unadorned and utilitarian, clad in common brick and regularly fenestrated with original three-over-three double-hung steel windows. A loading dock and large loading doors are located off the northwest. The building retains an original metal fire escape system at the east end of its north alley facade.

The flat roof houses three brick-clad penthouses above its stairwells and elevators, most of which are not visible from ground level except from the interstate to the south.

Interior

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building's interior is overall highly utilitarian in keeping with the building's historic manufacturing use.

The raised basement (1st floor) and primary 2nd floor are rectangular in plan. Above the 2nd floor, the building transitions to a C-shaped plan, with floor arranged around a large light well located at the center of the west wall, facing the alley.

The main entrance to the building, at the west end of the south elevation, opens into small wood and glass airlock within the highly intact ground floor entrance lobby. This entrance lobby retains original mosaic tile floors, gray marble wainscoting, and plaster upper walls and ceilings, all dating to the building's construction in 1910. A marble-cased opening along the entrance lobby's north wall provides access to a southwest corner stairwell, which wraps the building's only passenger elevator core and extends to the 7th floor.

The southwest stairwell's first landing arrives at the south end of the 2nd floor (raised primary floor) which appears to have originally housed a finished space with terrazzo floors, plaster walls with wood trimmed windows, and plaster columns and ceilings. A 1917 insurance map indicates that this space was originally used as a show room by the first occupant (a casket manufacturer). It appears that the space may have been subdivided for offices at some point, but no office partitions remain. The plaster columns in this space retain fragments of original decorative plaster panels that once acted as column capitals. In the 2nd floor's southwest corner, in a raised area above the ground floor lobby ceiling is a former office space historically accessed by a stairwell landing door. Although the east-facing wall has been removed, this office retains its terrazzo floors, plaster walls with wood trim, and plaster ceiling with highly decorative plaster trim.

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The 2nd floor also retains its original loading area at the building's northeast corner. As suggested by a 1917 insurance map, the south end of the loading area at the base of the west light well appears to have always been enclosed beneath a steel roof.

The building's remaining manufacturing interiors up to the 7th floor display open plans and are highly utilitarian in character, with reinforced concrete floors, perimeter brick walls, and steel structural columns and ceilings encased in fireproof clay tile.

In addition to the southwest stairwell and passenger elevator the building retains a center core with a freight elevator and stairwell. A third enclosed stairwell is located at the building's northwest corner.

Integrity

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building retains good exterior historic integrity and is still recognizable from a January 1911 newspaper image and a c.1911 postcard view (see enclosed Historic Images). The building retains its historic massing and flat roofline and its primary facade retains its original brick and stone cladding. Most of the south facade's original wood windows have been replaced though the ground level basement's wood windows remain. The secondary facades and internal light well facades all retain their original steel windows.

On the interior, the building retains its intact marble-clad entrance lobby, its southwest stairwell and passenger elevator core, and its 2nd floor open show room and adjacent office space. The remainder of the building's original manufacturing spaces remain with their open plans, perimeter brick walls, steel columns and clay tile column and ceiling cladding. The building's original center and northwest stairwells and freight elevator also remain intact.

Changes to the building since its completion in 1910 include: south facade window replacement; south entrance canopy removal; removal of the primary south facade's original decorative cornice; removal of rooftop water tank and signage visible in an early postcard view; partial demolition of southwest stairwell enclosures at upper floors; potential removal of partitions and damage to some column capitals at the 2nd floor show room / office space; and removal of east wall at 2nd floor mezzanine office. All changes to the building appear to have been made in the course of the building's continued use as a manufacturing and storage building over its 114-year history.

The majority of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building's significant exterior and interior features remain intact and continue to express their historic location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association that make the building a good example of an early 20th century fireproof industrial loft on Chicago's Near West Side.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1910

Significant Dates

1910 (year of completion)

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

Architect/Builder

Patterson & Davidson

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building at 1220 W. Van Buren Street in Chicago, Illinois is a well-preserved and early example of a fireproof industrial loft building in Chicago's Near West Side neighborhood. It is locally significant under National Register Criterion C for Architecture as a rare extant example of a fireproof industrial loft constructed using steel framing, a transitional structural system only briefly used in the first two decades of the 20th century as American industrial facilities evolved from those constructed with wood to reinforced concrete.

Completed in 1910 and designed by prominent Chicago industrial architecture and engineering firm Patterson & Davidson, the 7-story James C. Curtis & Co. Building retains the hallmark traits that exemplify early-20th century fireproof industrial loft architecture, typified by multi-story facilities constructed using fireproof and vibration-proof materials including masonry facades and internal skeletons of steel or concrete (or a combination of the two), with open plans for maximized flexibility for a variety of factory and warehouse uses, and with expansive operable windows for increased ventilation and light.

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building is among the earliest and most intact of a diminishing group of 1900s and 1910s fireproof industrial loft buildings extant in the Near West Side community. Once home to the city's largest industrial sector, the Near West Side has seen significant redevelopment since the 1960s and many of early 20th century industrial buildings in the community have been demolished or significantly altered for adaptive reuse. From its 1910 completion to 1946, 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street housed casket manufacturer James C. Curtis & Co., and from 1946 to 2016 the building housed Oxxford Clothes Inc. Though currently vacant, the James C. Curtis & Co. Building housed manufacturing tenants for over a century and is an excellent demonstration of the longevity of and flexibility afforded by early 20th century industrial lofts.

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building's proposed period of significance under Criterion C is 1910, the year of its completion. The proposed National Register listing boundary will encompass the building's entire footprint.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Building History

The seven-story industrial loft at 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street in Chicago was completed in 1910 for casket manufacturer James C. Curtis & Co., operated by James C. Curtis and his brother John C. Curtis.

The Curtis brothers' plans to build a new manufacturing facility may have begun as early as 1906 when James C. Curtis purchased a south-facing 100 x 178-foot lot along W. Van Buren Street just west of Center Avenue (today Racine Avenue).¹ Four years later in April 1910, a real estate notice in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* announced Curtis' planning of a new factory structure in the Near West Side:

"Bids are being taken for the seven-story factory building which James C. Curtis & Co. will construct at 1214-1222 West Van Buren street. It will be 100x157 feet in ground dimensions, will cost \$250,000, and is intended to be one of the best equipped factory buildings in the city. It will be divided into three sections by fire walls. Patterson & Davidson, engineers and architects, designed the building."²

Later that month, the *American Contractor* announced a permit for James C. Curtis & Co.'s new factory building.³ Curtis' plant was reported in late 1910 as nearing completion and by December 1910 it appears the building was completed.⁴

¹ "Sales on West Side," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 6, 1906.

² "Wells, Fargo & Co. to build offices," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 23, 1910.

³ "Chicago Building Permits," *The American Contractor*, April 30, 1910, 42.

⁴ "Says realty men prevent reform," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), November 30, 1910.

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Two early images of the building gave a glimpse of the new manufacturing plant recently completed along Van Buren Street on Chicago's Near West Side. A January 1, 1911, Patterson & Davidson advertisement in Chicago's *Inter-Ocean* newspaper offered a rendered view of the new "Fireproof Factory Building," showing the building's Chicago Style south façade and highly visible secondary east facade as seen from the corner of Van Buren Street and Center (now Racine) Avenue. A chimney and large water tank (both now missing) are visible atop the roof. A c. 1911 postcard offered a more photographic color rendering, possibly from the roof of a building almost directly across Van Buren Street. The Chicago Style brick and stone façade is highlighted along with the building's southwest main entrance and canopy (now missing). The rooftop chimney and water tank are visible along with a large "Curtis Caskets" sign atop the tank (all now missing). An automobile outside the front door appears to be delivering customers to the front door and two delivery trucks are visible in the east service alley, one poised at the east façade's southernmost 1st floor window waiting for deliveries. Both early images proudly show a new 115,000 square foot fireproof industrial loft ready for use and reflect the building's good historic integrity into the early 21st century.⁵

Early documents disagree on the plant's means of construction: a December 1910 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article notes that the building is constructed with brick and reinforced concrete while a 1917 insurance map notes its fireproof construction of brick and steel. A 2017 structural survey notes that both were correct as the building is constructed both with steel columns and beams and reinforced concrete floor slabs and joists.⁶

There are no known surviving descriptions of the completed building's interior, though the building's original marble-clad entrance lobby and portions of the 2nd floor show room and office survive. A 1917 fire insurance map outlined the activities on most floors undertaken by James C. Curtis & Co., "mfrs. of caskets" (current floor level numbers used): wood working and machinery in the basement (today called the 1st floor) 1st floor, a south show room and north shipping area on the raised primary floor (today's 2nd floor), stock and finishing on the 3rd floor with additional stock on the 4th floor, a south sewing room and north cabinet shop on the 5th floor, trimming and 6th floor and a south assembling space and north metal working space on the 7th floor. The facility's northeast corner basement (1st floor) and raised primary floor also housed dry kilns.⁷

In December 1946, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted James C. Curtis & Co.'s purchase of 2340-2350 S. Ogden Avenue (extant but heavily remodeled) to James C. Curtis & Co.⁸ Two weeks later the newspaper announced that 1220 W. Van Buren Street had been purchased for \$390,000 by the 1220 Van Buren Corporation composed of three separate companies who planned to house their operations in the building: the printer Barkley Brothers, the lithographer Chicago Planograph Company, and the Weinberg Corporation, maker of Oxxford Clothes which would occupy the building for the next seven decades.⁹

Oxxford Clothes Inc. would eventually occupy the entire building and was reported to have spent \$50,000 to "modernize" it on their arrival. Oxxford is known to have replaced windows on the Van Buren Street (south) façade and potentially installed the wood and glass airlock vestibule in the main entrance lobby. Oxxford did not appear to make any major changes to the building's exterior or main entrance lobby. Any other interior changes made by Oxxford are unknown.

In 2016, Oxxford Clothes sold their company's Van Buren Street facility to a private developer and vacated the building.¹⁰ The building has remained vacant since 2016 with minimal interior demolition performed for abatement and exploratory purposes.

"Deal in Grand Boulevard," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 3, 1910.

"Leases and Loans," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 4, 1910.

⁵ "Building bought by clothier, 2 in printing line," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 29, 1946.

"James C. Curtis," *Forgotten Chicago*, <http://forgottenchicago.com/columns/postcards/james-c-curtis/>, accessed January 12, 2024.

⁶ "Deal in Grand Boulevard," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 3, 1910.

Insurance maps of Chicago, Illinois. 1917.

GEI Consultants, Inc., Structural Testing Reports for 1220 W. Van Buren, Chicago, Illinois, July 24, 2017, 2.

⁷ Insurance maps of Chicago, Illinois. 1917.

⁸ "Casket Firm Buys West Side Property for \$230,000," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 15, 1946.

⁹ "Building bought by clothier, 2 in printing line."

¹⁰ Chuck Sudo, "Suitmaker Sells West Loop HQ," *Bisnow*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.bisnow.com/chicago/news/office/missner-group-buys->

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The Fireproof Industrial Loft Building Type

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building, designed by architects Patterson & Davidson and completed in 1910, is an important local example of a fireproof industrial loft building, an American urban building type for factories and warehouses first used in the late 19th century but which did not come into widespread use until the first decades of the 20th century. Defined as a multi-story urban industrial facility constructed with a frame of either steel or reinforced concrete (or, as at the James C. Curtis & Co. Building, a combination of the two) and with masonry and glass facades and open floor plans expressive of these structurally adaptable structural systems, the early 20th century fireproof industrial loft responded to the expanding American manufacturing sector's need for large, programmatically-flexible, and safe structures for a variety of manufacturing and storage uses.¹¹ Built in 1910 with a hybrid frame of steel I-beam columns and beams with reinforced concrete floor slabs and joists, all clad in a Chicago Style masonry façade with large window openings, the James C. Curtis & Co. is important as an excellent Chicago representation of the burgeoning early 20th century fireproof industrial loft type.¹²

The fireproof industrial loft as an American urban building type evolved along with late 19th century American industry. "Lofts" were originally associated with "store and loft" buildings in mid-19th century America's dense commercial districts – tall, narrow 4- and 5-story brick structures with ground floor shops or taverns with open upper floor spaces leased for workshops or storage. Later purpose-built "industrial lofts" in late 19th and early 20th century American cities like Chicago were usually more expansive in footprint and provided multiple floors of loft spaces, sometimes housing multiple tenants.¹³

Before 1910, most industrial lofts in manufacturing neighborhoods like the Near West Side were constructed with load-bearing brick or stone exterior walls with internal frames of "mill construction" (with columns / posts, girders, joists, and floors of wood or heavy timber) which allowed for more adaptable open plans, made even more open as builders increasingly grouped stairwells, elevators, conveyors, hoists, chutes, and other vertical services in close efficient groupings. Industrial lofts of mill construction could be constructed quickly and cheaply and were at first considered safe due to their "slow-burning" qualities, improved with the introduction of fire containment programs like exterior fire escapes, automatic sprinkler systems, and compartmentalization of interior spaces using fireproof walls and doors. By 1910, however, the use of wood frame industrial construction waned due to the growing rarity and cost of old growth wood of sufficient dimensions, concerns over fire safety (for this reason many cities would eventually ban mill construction), and the proliferation of cheaper, stronger, and safer alternative building materials.¹⁴

Beginning in the first decade of the 20th century, builders of industrial lofts in American commercial districts turned from mill construction to "fireproof construction," retaining masonry exterior walls but using more modern internal frames of either structural steel or reinforced concrete, and often a combination of the two.¹⁵ Iron framing found popularity among late 19th century builders but proved vulnerable to softening and warping when exposed to fire. However, improvements in steel construction, among them the standardization of quality, strength, and dimensions of steel members, became well-known to Chicagoans who watched the rise of downtown skyscrapers with structural steel skeletons. In the first decade of the 20th century, industrialists in Chicago and other large American cities adopted steel for their own architectural uses in new urban industrial lofts. Though an expensive alternative to mill construction and later reinforced concrete, steel-framed industrial lofts like the James C. Curtis & Co. Building displayed higher structural strength and longer structural spans than possible previously and could easily endure the repetitive stresses put on it by machines. Structural steel framing also

oxford-clothes-building-65451, accessed January 10, 2024.

¹¹ Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30-35, 122, 144-146.

Mead & Hunt, *Milwaukee Industrial Properties Intensive Survey* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2016), 36-37.

¹² GEI Consultants, Inc., 2.

¹³ Bradley, 29-30.

C.W. Westfall, "Buildings Serving Commerce," in *Chicago Architecture 1872-1922: Birth of a Metropolis*, ed. John Zukowsky (New York: Prestel, 2000), 81.

¹⁴ Bradley, 30-35, 112-121, 133-138.

¹⁵ Westfall, 80-82.

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relieved masonry facades of their load-bearing requirements, allowing for larger window openings and brighter working spaces.¹⁶

Industrialists also turned to a new generation of architects and engineers like Patterson & Davidson who emerged into the American market c. 1910 specializing in these new construction methods but with new expertise in worker productivity and workspace planning, and the design and coordination of the multiple mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection, and production systems and machinery that made new industrial lofts so logistically efficient and economically successful.¹⁷

Industrial lofts of the 1900s and 1910s built with interior steel members did require additional fireproofing, often with poured or sprayed concrete or, as seen at the James C. Curtis & Co. Building, encasement of steel columns in fireproof clay tile in addition to poured concrete. Along with steel, American industrial architects developed a less expensive though more time-consuming structural alternative: constructing entire industrial lofts in reinforced concrete, or poured concrete strengthened by setting it with metal bars while still in its liquid form. A combination of water, gravel, sand and cement first widely used by ancient Romans and rediscovered by 18th century European builders, concrete was widely used in building construction in America by the late-19th century, though reinforced concrete did not come into widespread use as a structural material until the 1890s when techniques for improving its tensile strength through metal reinforcement bars, or “rebars,” were designed and marketed for mass production.¹⁸

Both steel and reinforced concrete gained widespread popularity in industrial loft construction in the 1900s and 1910s, particularly in heavily urban industrial districts like Chicago’s Near West Side. Insurance maps of the Near West Side show a swift transformation in the 1890s and 1900s from a community of small homes to an industrial hub of commercial streets lined with multi-story manufacturing and storage facilities, most built of “mill construction” even into the 20th century but quickly overtaken by fireproof structures of steel and reinforced concrete. A study of surviving examples in the Near West Side (discussed below) shows fireproof industrial lofts dating to as early as 1905 – 901 W. Van Buren Street, one portion of which is of fireproof concrete construction, the other of mill construction – and as late as 1928, just before the Great Depression ended most construction in this part of the city – 350 N. Ogden Avenue and the James T. Igoe Building (328 S. Jefferson Street / 600 W. Van Buren Street)’s 1928 addition, both of which display concrete construction. Many early Near West Side fireproof industrial lofts, like the James C. Curtis & Co. Building, were constructed using both steel and reinforced concrete, though this hybrid practice would not last. Just as resilient to loads and vibration as steel but cheaper to construct, reinforced concrete emerged as American industry’s dominant industrial building material by 1920.¹⁹

Early 20th century fireproof industrial lofts like the James C. Curtis & Co. Building were like their mill construction forebearers in their generally rectangular footprint, flat roofs, and brick facades, usually lacking in any distinct architectural ornament. Inside, large open floor plans were made possible by gridded steel and / or reinforced concrete structural systems. These lighter structural frames also translated to their buildings’ exteriors, with repetitive bays of large operable windows (critical before the widespread use of artificial interior lighting) and often more utilitarian façade aesthetics expressive of the regular structural systems behind them. Industrial lofts, especially those like the James C. Curtis & Co. Building constructed in denser urban settings, were several stories tall (four or taller) and housed manufacturing operations, storage for raw materials and finished products, machine shops, offices, and restrooms. Some industrial lofts like the Curtis Building were built to house single companies while some facilities served multiple manufacturing occupants. The result was a modern industrial building type suited to a wide variety of industrial uses.

¹⁶ Bradley, 138-145.

¹⁷ Lindy Biggs, *The Rational Factory: Architecture, Technology, and Work in America’s Age of Mass Production* (USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 48-54.

¹⁸ Bradley, 145, 156-159.

Amy E. Slaton, *Reinforced Concrete and the Modernizing of American Building* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 15-19.

¹⁹ Insurance maps of Chicago, Illinois. Westfall, 80.

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James C. Curtis & Co. (Builder and Building Occupant 1910-1946)

The seven-story industrial loft at 1220 W. Van Buren was completed in 1910 for James C. Curtis & Co., a casket manufacturing concern founded and led by James C. Curtis (1858-1936) and his brother John C. Curtis (1871-1946).²⁰ Born in Hornell, New York, James C. Curtis came to Chicago in 1888 and by the early 1900s the company that bore his name was a noted manufacturer and “undertakers’ supplies” including caskets, occupying several downtown Chicago locations through the first decade of the twentieth century.²¹

In 1910 the Curtis brothers directed the construction of the industrial loft at 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street which served as their company’s headquarters and primary production facility for the next 36 years.²² In addition to operating a successful casket production business, James C. Curtis busied himself with the buying and selling of commercial and residential real estate in the Near West Side and West Garfield Park neighborhoods.²³ When he died in June 1936, James C. Curtis’ estate was estimated at \$1 million.²⁴

After James C. Curtis’ death in 1931, the company was led by John C. Curtis, who is recorded as having retired from the company before it left its Van Buren Street headquarters in 1946, the same year as John’s death, for a new location at 2340-2350 S. Ogden Avenue (extant but heavily altered).²⁵

The company remained in operation as the James C. Curtis Casket Co. and then simply Curtis Casket until the company was dissolved in 2001.²⁶

Oxford Clothes Inc. (Building Occupant 1946-2016)

Founded in 1916 by Chicago brothers Louis A. (1887-1986) and Jacob H. Weinberg (1889-1955) as part of their family’s Weinberg Corporation, Oxford Clothes Inc. previously operated out of the Montauk Building at 509 S. Franklin Street (demolished) and 847 W. Jackson Boulevard (extant) before the company made the former James C. Curtis & Co. Building its home in 1946.²⁷

²⁰ “James C. Curtis,” Find a Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/68220392/james-c-curtis>, accessed January 7, 2024.

“James C. Curtis, Casket Manufacturer, is Dead,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), June 19, 1936.

“John C. Curtis,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), June 21, 1946.

²¹ *Illinois, U.S., Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

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²² “Wells, Fargo & Co. to build offices.”

²³ “Buys Rosenberg store building in Evanston,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 26, 1917.

“Several large deals this week in apartments,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 22, 1918.

²⁴ “James C. Curtis, Casket Manufacturer, is Dead.”

“Emory Fahrney estate valued at \$1,700,000,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), June 12, 1936.

²⁵ “John C. Curtis.”

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²⁶ “Help Wanted – Men,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), October 1, 1950.

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“Legal Notice,” *News Journal* (Chicago, IL), May 1, 1975.

“Business Entity Search – Curtis Casket Company,” Illinois Office of Secretary of State, www.ilsos.gov, accessed January 16, 2024.

²⁷ Oxford Clothes, “About,” <https://www.oxfordclothes.com/about>, accessed January 10, 2024.

“Jacob H. Weinberg,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 7, 1955.

“Louis A. Weinberg,” *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), February 22, 1986.

“Louis A. Weinberg,” Find a Grave, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/123766156/louis_a-weinberg, accessed January 10, 2024.

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“Clothing Concern Leases Three Floors on Franklin,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), August 1, 1937.

James C. Curtis & Co. Building

Name of Property

Cook, Illinois

County and State

For 70 years, 1214-1222 W. Van Buren housed Oxxford Clothes' headquarters and main production facility, where men's suits were custom made by hand for sale across the country through large retailers including Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Marshall Field & Co., Bergdorf Goodman, and Louis, Boston. At a high point in the 1980s, Oxxford employed 400 workers at its Van Buren Street facility and its other Chicago plant at 1220 W. Taylor Street (demolished) and produced up to 35,000 suits per year.²⁸ Among Oxxford's better known customers while operating out of the Van Buren Street building were U.S. presidents Lyndon B. Johnson, Gerald Ford, and George H.W. Bush, and actor Cary Grant.²⁹

Oxxford Clothes Inc. went through a series of private ownership changes after 1963.³⁰ In 2016, Oxxford Clothes Inc. sold the building at 1214-1222 W. Van Buren to a private developer. The company remains in operation at another location in Chicago as a popular custom suit producer.³¹

Chicago's Near West Side Neighborhood

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building is located approximately one mile west of Chicago's Loop business district and at the approximate center of Chicago's large Near West Side community area. The boundaries of the vast Near West Side community were originally defined by the University of Chicago's Social Science Research Committee in the 1920s. After World War II, two major infrastructure and urban renewal efforts – the construction of the Eisenhower Expressway (Interstate 290) and the development of an expansive new campus for the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) – effectively bisected the community area into two distinct neighborhoods. The neighborhood north of the Eisenhower Expressway (where the James C. Curtis & Co. Building is located) is relatively intact with its original city grid and many of its pre-1950s buildings intact, though many historic buildings were demolished to the north and west of the subject building as part of the Central West Project slum clearance program in the early 1970s and replaced with new developments – the Whitney M. Young Magnet High School (completed 1976), the Chicago Police Training Academy (completed 1976), multi-family housing complexes, and public parks – or left as vacant lots that remain today.³² The neighborhood south of the Expressway has also been significantly altered, with nearly all the buildings east of Morgan Street constructed after 1950.

Given the substantial changes to the larger Near West Side community area since it was defined in the 1920s, for the purposes of this nomination the author considers most important the neighborhood context of the *north end* of the Near West Side neighborhood bounded by the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad (Kinzie Street) to the north; the Pennsylvania Railroad (Rockwell Street) to the west; the south branch of the Chicago River to the east; and Congress Boulevard (now the Eisenhower Expressway) to the south.

Long before the changes made to the neighborhood in the mid- to late-20th century, the Near West Side saw significant change in settlement, population, and activity even shortly after the city's founding. The Near West Side was for much of the 19th century the home to Chicago's elite, many of whom built large homes around Union Park at Lake Street and Ashland Avenue, and to some of Chicago's newest residents, families of African American, Irish, German, Czech, Bohemian, and French descent and later of Jewish, Italian, and Greek descent who settled in cramped conditions south of Harrison Street. The late 19th century saw the growth of wholesale trade businesses and manufacturers along the Near West Side's railroads and main commercial corridors which ultimately drove the exit of wealthier residents and the influx of poor and working settlers. These newcomers were served most notably by the Hull House settlement house organization, begun in 1889 at by

²⁸ Janet Key, "Levi Strauss sells Oxxford Clothes," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), December 2, 1986.

James L. Swanson, "Impeccable Fit: Custom Tailored or Made to Measure: The Ultimate Suit Makes a Comeback," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), September 12, 1999.

²⁹ "Levi Strauss sells Oxxford Clothes."

"Impeccable Fit: Custom Tailored or Made to Measure: The Ultimate Suit Makes a Comeback."

³⁰ "Byer-Rolnick Hat Buys Weinberg Clothes Firm," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), October 4, 1963.

"Levi Strauss sells Oxxford Clothes."

³¹ "Suitmaker Sells West Loop HQ."

³² John Davies, "DUR Approves Development Plans for Central West," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), May 25, 1969.

Clarence Page, "Quick Aid Action for Displaced Persons Promised," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), November 14, 1971.

"Will Dedicate Young School," *Daily Calumet* (Chicago, IL), May 5, 1976.

Philip Watley, "Police academy earns star," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), October 1, 1976.

James C. Curtis & Co. Building

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reformers Jane Addams (1860-1935) and Ellen Gates Starr (1859-1940) at Halsted and Polk Streets, one-half mile southeast of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building.³³

By the early twentieth century when the James C. Curtis & Co. Building was built along Van Buren Street between Racine Avenue (originally Centre Street) and Throop Street, Chicago's Near West Side was the city's largest inner city manufacturing district. Whereas mid-19th century industrial activity in Chicago was focused at riverfront, lakefront, and railroad-facing sites, industry's need for space pushed manufacturers and developers into neighborhoods previously used exclusively for homes. The Near West Side industrial sector was among the first and largest footholds of this late 19th century wave of industrial development, attractive for its proximity to downtown, numerous railroad lines, and the Chicago River's South Branch.³⁴ By 1950, when the community was studied by the University of Chicago Department of Geography, the Near West Side (or "West Central Area") contained over 8% of the city's manufacturing establishments and accounted for over 10% of the city's total employment. "No area of the city," the University's report claimed, "has a larger concentration of industrial workers per net industrial acreage" and the Near West Side supported "the largest concentration of industrial structures" in the city, substantially more than Chicago's famous Stockyards, "nearly all of the multi-story establishment type" producing "a large variety of products."³⁵ Among Near West Side companies were notably "printing, food, electrical machinery, and clothing industries, respectively, in order of importance. No other diversified industrial district of the city had the same industries."³⁶

The mid- to late-20th century brought significant infrastructure and redevelopment changes to the Near West Side. Post-World War II industrial slowdown and the departure of many of the Near West Side's resident companies brought its dominance of Chicago industry to an end. The once-thriving industrial sector gained a reputation for decline and blight, making it a target for redevelopments and city, state, and federal improvements. Beginning in the 1930s through the mid-20th century, many overcrowded communities south and west of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building were razed for large new infrastructure and urban renewal projects and for private subsidized housing projects. Much of Chicago's Italian neighborhood, including most of the historic Hull House complex, was demolished for the construction of UIC. Large areas of the community west of Ashland Avenue were demolished for housing projects. Most significantly, starting in the late 1950s the "Chicago Circle" interstate projects which, despite their continued proximity, divided the Near West Side into highly separated quadrants.³⁷

As of the 2020s, most light industrial companies have left the Near West Side, with the exception of some production activity on sites alongside the railroads that continue to frame the neighborhood's boundaries. Today's Near West Side and particularly the community around the James C. Curtis & Co. Building closer to the downtown Loop are home to increased commercial and residential development, including the rehabilitation of older buildings and the construction of new high-rise towers.³⁸

Architects and Engineers Patterson & Davidson and Frank E. Davidson

The firm of Patterson & Davidson, designers of the James C. Curtis & Company Building, was a brief partnership between two leaders in Chicago industrial architecture and engineering: William R. Patterson (1854-1916) and Frank E. Davidson (1867-1931). Davidson would, however, outlive Patterson and become the better known of the two as "a leading industrial architect in Chicago," a prominent designer of factories and warehouses in Chicago and the broader American Midwest.³⁹ Together they helped pioneer the field of "industrial engineering" in Chicago, a highly specified field of design that emerged c. 1910 to assist American industry create more efficient and cost-effective production, distribution, and storage facilities.⁴⁰

³³ "Near West Side," Encyclopedia of Chicago, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/878.html>, accessed January 23, 2024.

³⁴ Robert Lewis. *Chicago Made: Factory Networks in the Industrial Metropolis*. USA: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

³⁵ *Manufactural Occupance in the West Central Area of Chicago (University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper No. 11)*, 1950, 16-17, 24.

³⁶ *Manufactural Occupance in the West Central Area of Chicago*, 25.

³⁷ "Near West Side," Encyclopedia of Chicago, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/878.html>, accessed January 23, 2024.

³⁸ "Near West Side," Encyclopedia of Chicago, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/878.html>, accessed January 23, 2024.

³⁹ "Frank Eugene Davidson," Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950, <http://www.dictionarofarchitectsincanada.org/node/2698>, accessed January 11, 2024.

⁴⁰ Biggs, 48.

James C. Curtis & Co. Building

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Born in Effingham, New Hampshire, William R. Patterson studied at Dartmouth College before joining Chicago's Western Electric Company in 1877, first as paymaster and later as the heads of various Western Electric departments, rising to the level of the company's general superintendent.⁴¹ Patterson was a well-known electrical engineer who patented nearly 100 designs for lead-covered drycore underground and aerial cables used by telephone systems.⁴² As head plant engineer he supervised the construction of Western Electric facilities around the world, including in San Francisco, London, Antwerp, and Tokyo.⁴³ His largest commission at Western Electric was design of the company's expansive Hawthorne Works in Cicero, Illinois (mostly demolished except for the Hawthorne Works Tower at the southeast corner of Cermak Road and Cicero Avenue), called at the time "the electrical capital of the world."⁴⁴

In his later years at Western Electric, Patterson would have worked closely with Frank E. Davidson who joined the company in 1905 as an architect and construction engineer. Thirteen years Patterson's junior, Davidson was born in Hillsborough, Iowa, and came to Chicago in the 1890s after studying at Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa. Before joining Western Electric, Davidson worked a draftsman and superintendent of construction for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, served as a member of Chicago's board of local improvements and the City's superintendent of sewers from 1898-1899 and, then worked as a structural engineer for Illinois Steel Co. (1899-1904).⁴⁵

In January 1909, just after Patterson's retirement from Western Electric (though he would remain on the company's board until his death), Patterson and Davidson announced their own private architecture and engineering partnership.⁴⁶ Commissions came to the new firm quickly for additions to existing Chicago factories and warehouses and for new facilities, among them mill and factory buildings for a 1-story addition to the Hawthorne Works cable plant for Patterson's and Davidson's former employer Western Electric.⁴⁷

In its brief existence between 1909 and 1916, Patterson & Davidson became well-known in the Chicago area for their industrial engineering and architecture commissions which included the following:

- 3-story mill building on the Near West Side for Frank W. Williams Co. (1909, status unknown);⁴⁸
- 3-story steel-framed building for Chicago Telephone Co. (1909, status unknown);⁴⁹
- 5-story factory at the northwest corner of Fullerton and Sheffield Avenues for Eugene Dietzgen Co. (1909, extant);⁵⁰
- James C. Curtis & Co. Building at 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street (1910, extant);
- 5-story publishing house on Ohio Street near Fairbanks Court (1910, status unknown);⁵¹
- 5-story factory for Olson Rug Co. at Laflin and Monroe Streets (1910, extant with alterations);⁵²
- 5-story automobile show room and manufacturing facility for James Cunningham, Son & Co. at 2341-2345 S. Michigan Avenue (1910, demolished);⁵³

⁴¹ "Obituary: Mr. William R. Patterson," *Electrical Review and Western Electrician* (Vol. 69, No. 5), July 29, 1916, 218.

⁴² "In Memoriam," *Journal of the Western Society of Engineers* (Vol. 21, No. 1), January 1916, 710.

⁴³ "Obituary: Mr. William R. Patterson."

"In Memoriam."

⁴⁴ "In Memoriam."

"Personals," *Engineering News* (Vol. 61, No. 1), January 7, 1909, 28.

Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Vol. LXXXI (New York: American Society of Civil Engineers, 1917), 1757-1758.

⁴⁵ "In Memoriam."

⁴⁶ *Official Reference Book: Press Club of Chicago* (Chicago: Press Club of Chicago, 1922), 240.

⁴⁷ "To Better the City Sewerage," *The Chicago Chronicle Sun* (Chicago, IL), August 8, 1897.

⁴⁸ "Alumni Notes: Class of 1876," *The Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* (Vol. 1, No. 6), March 1909, 200.

⁴⁹ "Industrial Notes," *Engineering News (Supplement)* (Vol. 61, No. 2), January 14, 1909, 15.

⁵⁰ "Miscellaneous," *The Economist* (Chicago, IL) (Vol. 42, No. 10), September 4, 1909, 349.

⁵¹ "Manufacturing Plants," *Engineering News (Supplement)* (Vol. 61, No. 7), February 18, 1909, 56.

⁵² "Manufacturing Plants," *Engineering News (Supplement)* (Vol. 61, No. 16), April 22, 1909, 132.

⁵³ "Contracts Awarded," *The American Contractor*, September 17, 1910, 39-40.

⁵⁴ "Contracts Awarded," *The American Contractor*, August 20, 1910, 40.

⁵⁵ "Contracts Awarded," *The American Contractor*, September 10, 1910, 30.

⁵⁶ Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

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- Addition of a new 5th floor at the Addressograph Co. Building at the northwest corner of Van Buren and Peoria Streets (1911, extant);⁵⁴
- 6-story depot for the Illinois Central and Pennsylvania Railroads at 1203-1211 E. 76th Street in the Grand Crossing neighborhood (assumed built in 1911, demolished);⁵⁵
- 7-story Kaestner & Hecht Building at 500-532 S. Throop Street (1911, demolished);⁵⁶
- Unbuilt 16-story Shoe & Leather Exchange planned for the southwest corner of Madison and Franklin, planned for construction in 1913;⁵⁷
- The Argmore, a 3-story commercial and residential building at the northwest corner of Argyle Street and Kenmore Avenue in the Uptown community area (1913, extant and located in the West Argyle Street Historic District, National Register listed in 2010);⁵⁸
- Unbuilt 16-story Chemists Exchange Building planned for the northwest corner of State and South Water (Wacker) Streets, planned for construction in 1914;⁵⁹
- 2-story laundry and power plant for Modern Laundry Co., recorded both by Patterson & Davidson and its successor firm Davidson & Weiss (1916, status unknown).⁶⁰

Notable among young architects and engineers who began their careers in the office of Patterson & Davidson were Charles Moores and Samuel Dunford, later of Moores & Dunford who gained nationwide renown for their urban fireproof warehouse designs. Moores worked for Patterson & Davidson as a construction engineer, specifically on Western Electric commissions, and was a vice-president of the company before he formed his own industrial architecture firm with Dunford in 1913.⁶¹

Professionally ambitious, during the early 1910s Frank E. Davidson also completed Chicago commissions under his own name, including the Covent Theater and Hotel at 2653-2665 N. Clark Street (1915, extant though the theater was demolished in 1962, individually listed in the National Register in 2015).⁶² Davidson also appears to have worked in the early 1910s within a separate partnership, Davidson & Lockwood, with architect Frederick E. Lockwood; among their designs is the Fischer Furniture Plant at 400-418 N. May Street (1915, extant).⁶³

In 1911, Frank E. Davidson purchased his partner William R. Patterson's interest in their shared firm but continued to operate the company as Patterson & Davidson until Patterson's death in 1916.⁶⁴ Davidson then partnered with architect

⁵⁴ "New Buildings in the South Side Factory District," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), June 12, 1910.

⁵⁴ Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

⁵⁵ "New Factory Building Annex on West Side," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), November 13, 1910.

⁵⁵ "Mills and Factories," *The American Contractor*, July 30, 1910, 25.

⁵⁵ "New Enterprises," *American Warehouseman's Association Bulletin No. 141*, November 1911, 345.

⁵⁶ Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

Note: the 2021 National Register nomination for the Pyle-National Company Plant designed by Davidson & Weiss incorrectly located the Kaestner & Hecht Company factory at 440 S. Jefferson Street in Chicago (also demolished). Insurance map research shows that although 440 S. Jefferson Street was operated by Kaestner & Hecht, the Jefferson Street property pre-dated the partnership of Patterson & Davidson.

⁵⁷ "Buildings," *Engineering News* (Vol. 69, No. 26), June 26, 1913, 46.

⁵⁷ "Sixteen Story Building for Shoe and Leather Trade," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), June 15, 1913.

⁵⁸ "Real estate news; deals of the day," *The Inter-Ocean* (Chicago, IL), February 18, 1913.

Emily Ramsey, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: West Argyle Street Historic District* (Chicago, Cook County, Illinois: Illinois State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service, 2010). Section 7, page 5.

⁵⁹ "Makes big lease for skyscraper," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), August 29, 1912.

⁵⁹ "Chemists' Exchange Building," *The Inter-Ocean* (Chicago, IL), September 8, 1912.

⁶⁰ "Industrial Works," *Engineering News* (Vol. 76, No. 17), October 26, 1916, 214.

⁶¹ Moores & Dunford Advertisement, *Distribution & Warehousing* (Vol. 20, No. 6), June 1921, 52.

⁶² "New Corporations," *Chicago Examiner* (Chicago, IL), August 19, 1913.

⁶² "Close deal for new playhouse," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), July 10, 1914.

⁶² "Real estate transactions," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), July 12, 1914.

Emily Ramsey, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Covent Hotel*, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (Chicago: Illinois State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service, 2017), Section 8, pages 8, 9.

⁶³ "Spotlight on Ravenswood's Deagan Building," Julia Bachrach Consulting, <https://www.jbachrach.com/blog/2022/3/1/ravenswoods-deagan-building-has-a-storied-past>, accessed January 11, 2024.

⁶⁴ *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, Vol. 96 (New York: American Society of Civil Engineers, 1932), 1451-1453. Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

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Name of Property

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John W. Weiss (1868-1938) and formed the firm Davidson & Weiss which also became equally known for the design large scale industrial facilities in Chicago and across the American Midwest including the following:⁶⁵

- Plants for the W.A. Jones Foundry and Machinery Company at 4401 W. Roosevelt Road in Chicago (1916, extant);⁶⁶
- Pyle-National Company Plant at 1334 N. Kostner Avenue in Chicago (1916, extant, individually National Register listed in 2021);⁶⁷
- 4-story building for Standard Cap and Seal Company at 2400-2412 N. Racine Street in Chicago (1917, extant);⁶⁸
- Large automobile parts assembly plant for Campbell Transmission Co. in Buchanan, Michigan (1917, status unknown);⁶⁹
- Continental Can Company plant in Clearing, Illinois (1918, demolished);⁷⁰
- Three plants for Auto Specialties Co. in Ford City, Ontario, Canada (1919, demolished);⁷¹
- Progress Company Building (later the J.C. Deagan Company Building) at 1770 W. Berteau Avenue in Chicago (1919, extant);⁷²
- 4-story plant for the Channel Chemical Company (O-Cedar Corporation) at 4501-4513 S. Western Avenue (1920, extant);⁷³
- Major addition to a factory and assembly plant for the Auto Specialties Manufacturing Co. in St. Joseph, Michigan (date and status unknown);⁷⁴
- Olson Rug Co. plant at 4000 W. Diversey Parkway in Chicago (1929, extant).⁷⁵

After beginning his career as a Chicago public official, Frank E. Davidson remained civic- and politically-inclined throughout his life. He unsuccessfully ran for office as a Democratic nominee for Chicago's Thirty-Fourth Ward alderman in 1898 and served as a member of the Park and Building Advisers of Illinois in 1917.⁷⁶ Davidson was a longtime member of the American Institute of Architects, the National Fire Protection Association, the American Specification Institute, the American Society of Civil Engineers, and of the Illinois Society of Architects of which he served as longtime president.⁷⁷ Davidson was considered a leader in Chicago's architectural field and penned several articles on the architecture, engineering and construction industries for periodicals like *Western Architect & Engineer*, *The American Contractor*, and *American Architect & Architecture*.⁷⁸ Frank E. Davidson died in 1931.⁷⁹

⁶⁵ "Spotlight on Ravenswood's Deagan Building."

⁶⁶ Rachel Barnhart, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Pyle-National Company Plant*, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (Chicago: Illinois State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service, 2020), Section 8, page 20.
Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Vol. 96, 1451-1453.

⁶⁷ *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, Vol. 96, 1451-1453.

National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Pyle-National Company Plant, Section 8, page 20.

⁶⁸ Paul Sprague, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Sheffield Historic District*, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois (Chicago: Illinois State Historic Preservation Office and National Park Service, 1972). Item Number 8, Page 10.

⁶⁹ Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

⁷⁰ *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, Vol. 96, 1451-1453.

National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Pyle-National Company Plant, Section 8, page 20.

⁷¹ Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

"Auto Specialties Co – Tecumseh Road," International Metropolis, <https://internationalmetropolis.com/2020/12/06/auto-specialties-co-tecumseh-road/>, March 5, 2024.

⁷² Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

"Spotlight on Ravenswood's Deagan Building."

⁷³ *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Pyle-National Company Plant*, Section 8, page 20.

⁷⁴ Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

⁷⁵ Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800-1950.

⁷⁶ *Official Reference Book: Press Club of Chicago*, 240.

⁷⁷ *Official Reference Book: Press Club of Chicago*, 240.

Emery Stanford Hall, ed. *Handbook for Architects and Builders* (Chicago: The Franklin Company for the Illinois Society of Architects, 1916), 5.

⁷⁸ *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Covent Hotel*, Section 8, page 9.

⁷⁹ "F.E. Davidson, architect, dies on Loop street." *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 15, 1931.

"Architects to pay tribute to F.E. Davidson," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), April 16, 1931.

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Comparable Historic Properties

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building is a significant local example of a large fireproof industrial loft and specifically an early example constructed with steel framing. Analysis of comparable buildings below shows that the building's innovative construction type made it a forerunner in Chicago's Near West Side industrial district.

Though Chicago's Near West Side was historically a significant and thriving commercial and manufacturing hub dominated by industrial lofts like the James C. Curtis & Co. Building, most have been demolished due to urban renewal and redevelopment.

Only eight former industrial facilities within the expansive Near West Side community area are currently National Register listed. Of these eight National Register listed properties, six are of fireproof (non-timber) construction and only two of these are fireproof industrial lofts with steel framing like that seen at the James C. Curtis & Co. Building:

- **International Tailoring Company Building – 847 W. Jackson Boulevard**
Completed 1916 with a 1922 addition; Mundie & Jensen, architects.⁸⁰
- **Otis Elevator Company Factory Building – 1435 W. Fifteenth Street / 1501 S. Laflin Street**
Completed 1900 with 1906-11 and 1916 additions; Samuel A. Treat and Abraham K. Adler (1900, 1906-11) and J. Norman Jensen (1916)
It appears that only the small 1916 addition is of steel construction.⁸¹

Focusing on properties in the north end of the Near West Side (north of Eisenhower Expressway and UIC and east of Ashland Avenue), the portion of the neighborhood that best reflects the community's historic industrial character, research shows that only two other extant industrial lofts of comparable age and size display the same transitional interior steel framing that seen James C. Curtis & Co. Building:

The following two non-listed neighborhood industrial properties meet the qualities of compability with the James C. Curtis & Co. Building:

- **133 N. Jefferson Street / 565 W. Randolph Street**
Completed 1906; architect unknown.⁸²
- **111 N. Canal Street – Butler Brothers**
Completed 1913; D.H. Burnham & Co., architects.⁸³

Analysis of comparable properties within the North Near West Side shows that the James C. Curtis & Co. Building is among the earliest and most intact of a quickly shrinking group of 1900s and 1910s fireproof industrial loft buildings utilizing steel framing still extant in the community.

⁸⁰ *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: International Tailoring Company Building.*

⁸¹ *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Otis Elevator Company Factory Building.*

⁸² Insurance maps of Chicago, Illinois. 1950.

Chicago Historic Resources Survey.

⁸³ Insurance maps of Chicago, Illinois. 1950.

Frank A. Randall, *History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 77.

Chicago Historic Resources Survey.

James C. Curtis & Co. Building

Name of Property

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County and State

Conclusion

The James C. Curtis & Co. Building remains a highly intact early example of fireproof industrial loft architecture on Chicago's Near West Side, once the city's most important industrial districts, and is an early and rare surviving example of a fireproof industrial loft constructed with structural steel. Among the first designs of architecture and engineering firm Patterson & Davidson, this 1910 building's Chicago School Style facades and intact historic interiors, including its ground level lobby, 2nd floor show room space and office, and open plan upper floor manufacturing spaces, continue to express the building's history as an early 20th century industrial loft.

James C. Curtis & Co. Building

Name of Property

Cook, Illinois

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James C. Curtis & Co. Building

Name of Property

Cook, Illinois

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Cook, Illinois

County and State

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James C. Curtis & Co. Building

Name of Property

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James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Name of Property

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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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Name of Property

Cook, Illinois
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	<u>41.876734</u>	<u>-87.657803</u>	3	_____	_____
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude
2	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The National Register listing boundary encompasses the James Co. Curtis & Co. Building's historic footprint, bound by the Van Buren Street sidewalk to the south, a vacant lot to the east, an adjacent building to the west, and a public alley to the north.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The National Register listing boundary encompasses the James Co. Curtis & Co. Building's historic footprint.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Cramer date 3/5/2024
organization Ramsey Historic Consultants, Inc. telephone 337.781.1180
street & number 1105 W. Chicago Avenue, Suite 201 email john@ramseyhcinc.com
city or town Chicago state IL zip code 60647

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **GIS Location Map (Google Earth or BING)**
- **Local Location Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Include for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Name of Property

Cook, Illinois
County and State

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
City or Vicinity: Chicago
County: Cook **State:** Illinois
Photographer: John Cramer, Ramsey Historic Consultants, Inc.
Date Photographed: January 9, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 14: James C. Curtis & Co. Building, looking northwest from corner of Van Buren Street and Racine Avenue.

Photo 2 of 14: James C. Curtis & Co. Building, looking northeast.

Photo 3 of 14: James C. Curtis & Co. Building, looking northwest.

Photo 4 of 14: Van Buren Street (south) facade, looking north at main entrance.

Photo 5 of 14: East facade, looking west from Racine Avenue.

Photo 6 of 14: North alley facade, looking south.

Photo 7 of 14: Ground floor entrance lobby, looking south at Van Buren Street entrance.

Photo 8 of 14: Ground floor entrance lobby, looking north at southwest stairwell (left) and passenger elevator (right).

Photo 9 of 14: 2nd floor south showroom, looking west.

Photo 10 of 14: 2nd floor raised office, looking west.

Photo 11 of 14: 2nd floor north section, looking north.

Photo 12 of 14: Typical upper floor south section, looking west.

Photo 13 of 14: Typical upper floor north section, looking north.

Photo 14 of 14: Center stairwell, typical view looking south.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Name of Property
Cook County, Illinois
County and State
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 27

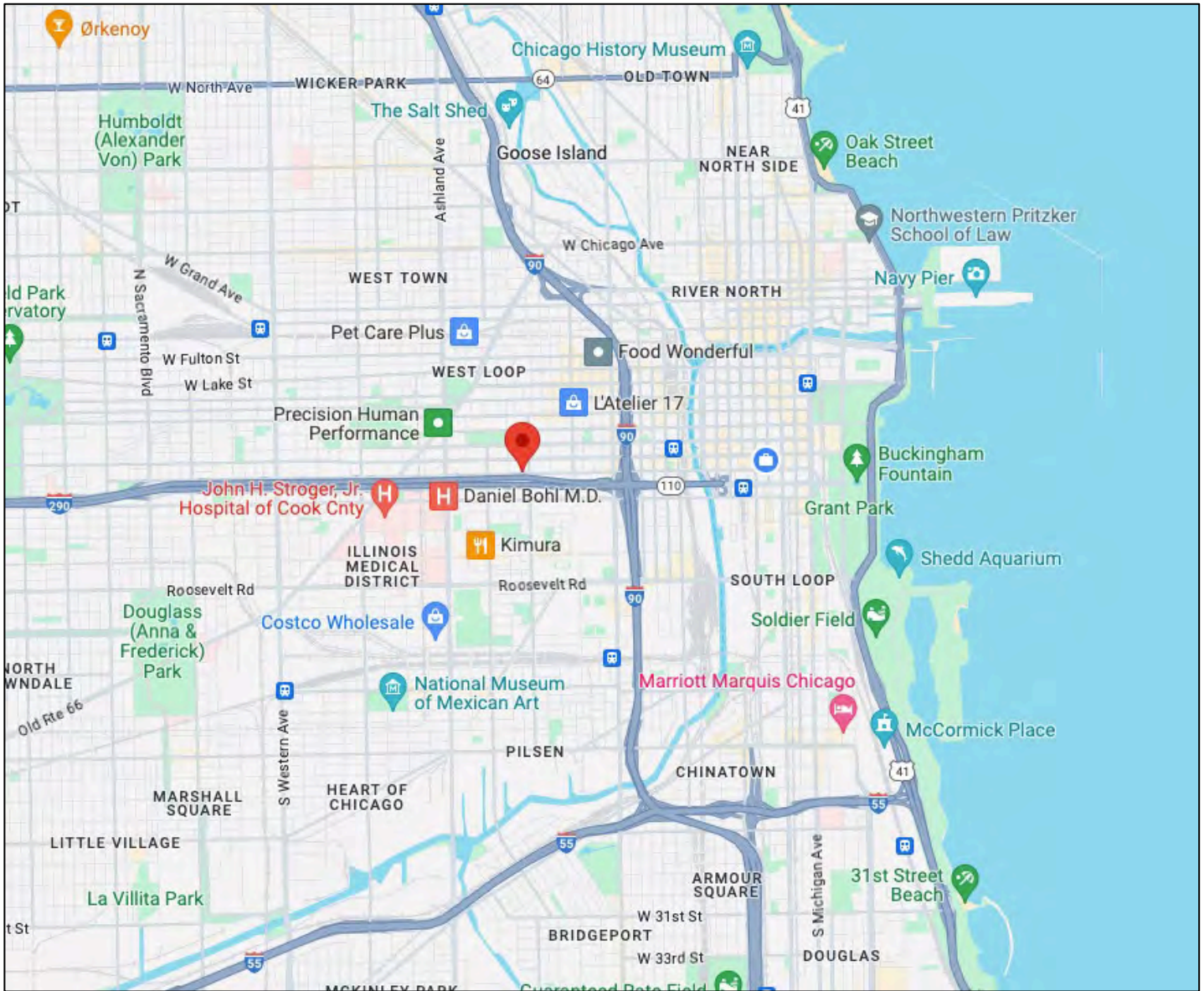
List of Figures

(Resize, compact, and paste images of maps and historic documents in this section. Place captions, with figure numbers above each image. Orient maps so that north is at the top of the page, all document should be inserted with the top toward the top of the page.)

- Figure 1.** James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Location map.
- Figure 2.** James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Site map with National Register boundary.
- Figure 3.** James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Google Earth GIS Map.
- Figure 4.** James C. Curtis & Co. Building – 1st floor plan. Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed.
- Figure 5.** James C. Curtis & Co. Building – 2nd floor plan. Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed.
- Figure 6.** James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Typical upper floor plan. Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed.
- Figure 7.** Patterson & Davidson advertisement in the January 1, 1911 *Chicago Daily Tribune* showing the new James C. Curtis Co. Building.
- Figure 8.** William R. Patterson (1854-1916), industrial architect and engineer; partner in Patterson & Davidson, designer of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building. Source: “In Memoriam,” *Journal of the Western Society of Engineers* (Vol. 21, No. 1), January 1916, 710.
- Figure 9.** Frank E. Davidson (1867-1931), industrial architect and engineer; partner in Patterson & Davidson, designer of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building. Source: *Official Reference Book: Press Club of Chicago* (Chicago: Press Club of Chicago, 1922), 240.
- Figure 10.** A c. 1911 postcard showing the James C. Curtis & Co. Building. Source: Forgotten Chicago website.
- Figure 11.** 1917 Sanborn map of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building.
- Figure 12.** December 29, 1946 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article on the sale of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building with a photo of the building.
- Figure 13.** 1950 Sanborn map of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building.

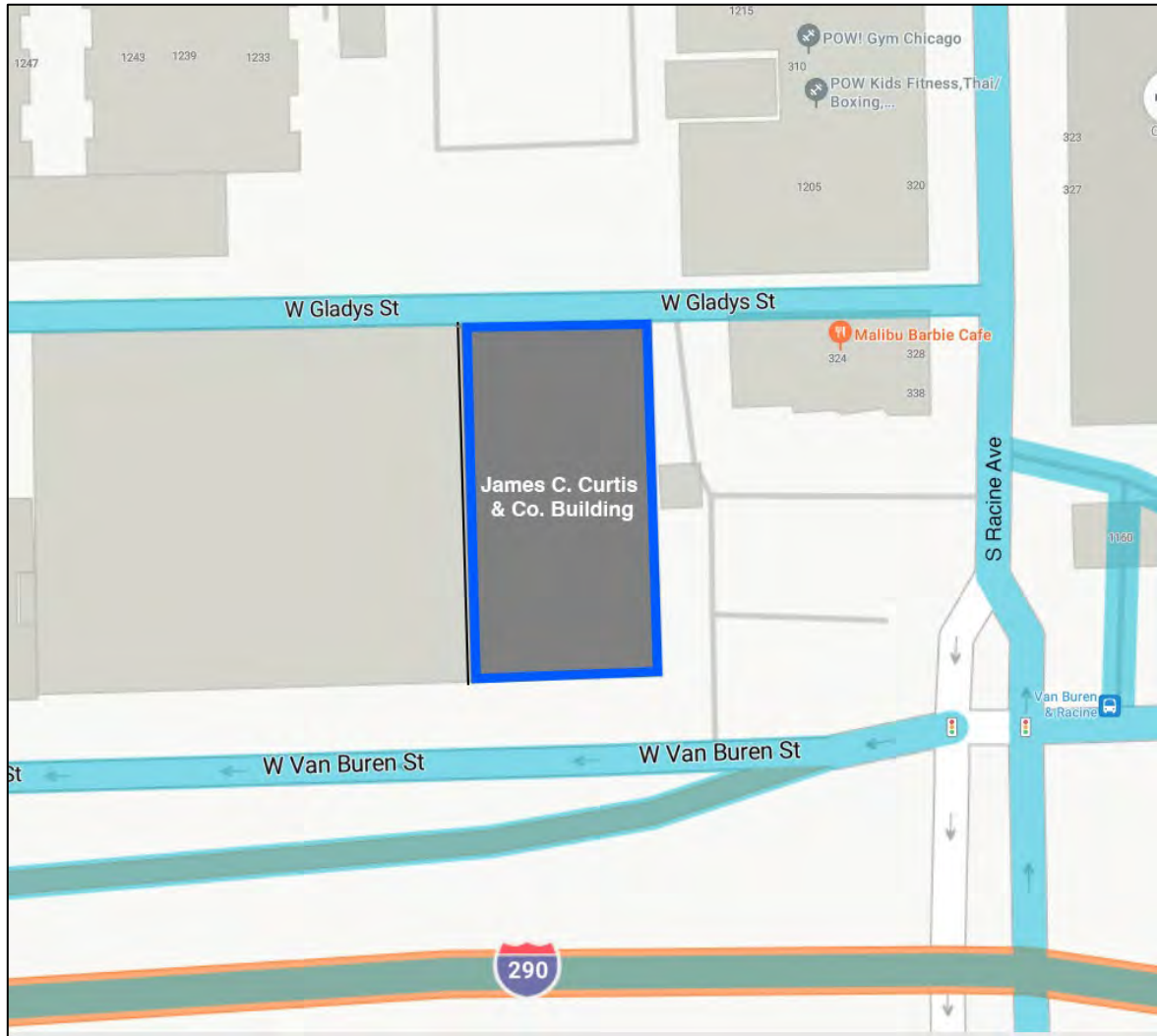
Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 1. James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Location map.



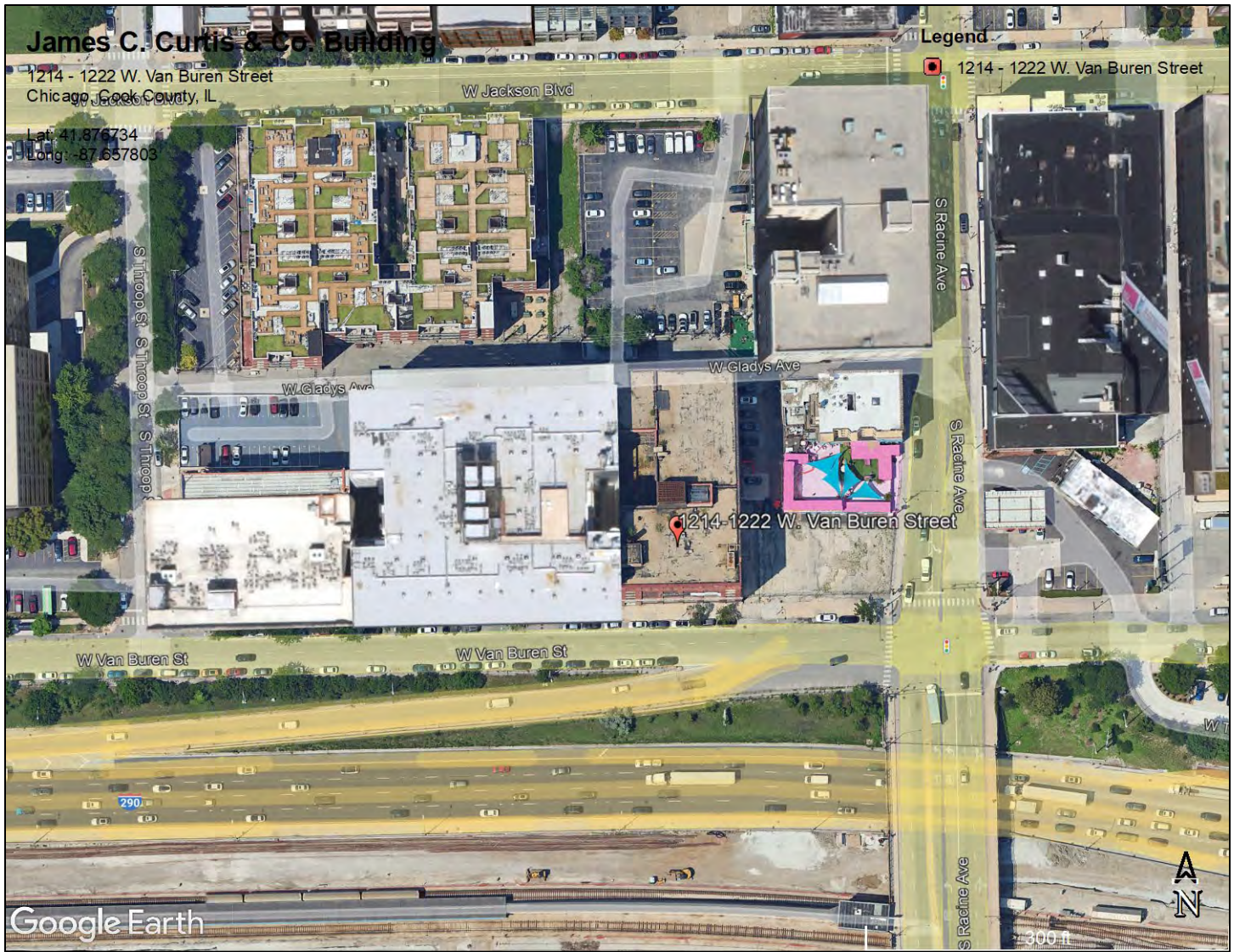
Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 2. James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Site map with National Register boundary.



Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 3. James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Google Earth GIS Map.



Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 4. James C. Curtis & Co. Building – 1st floor plan. Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed.

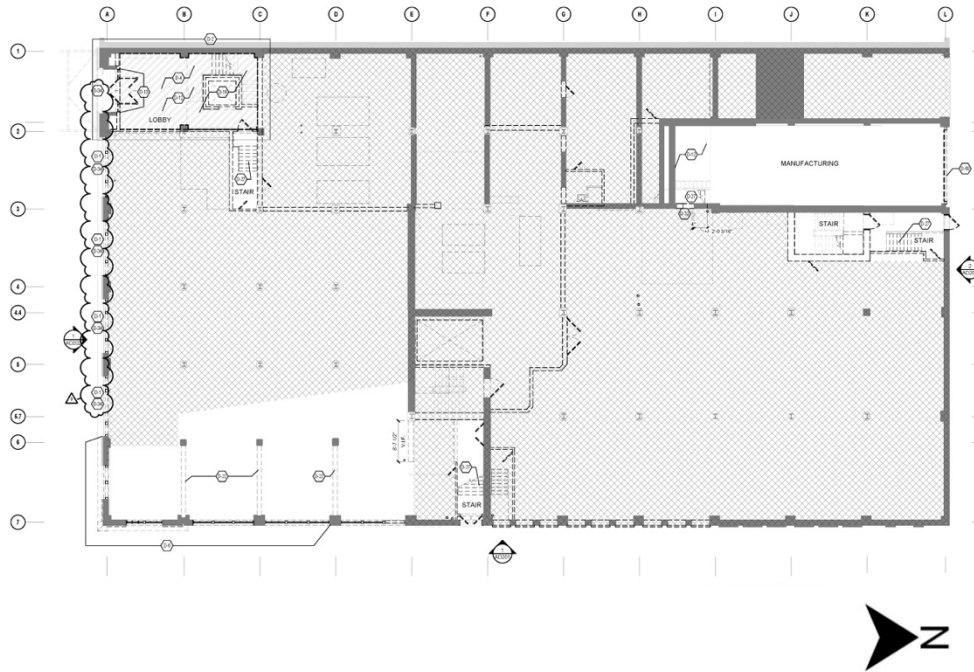
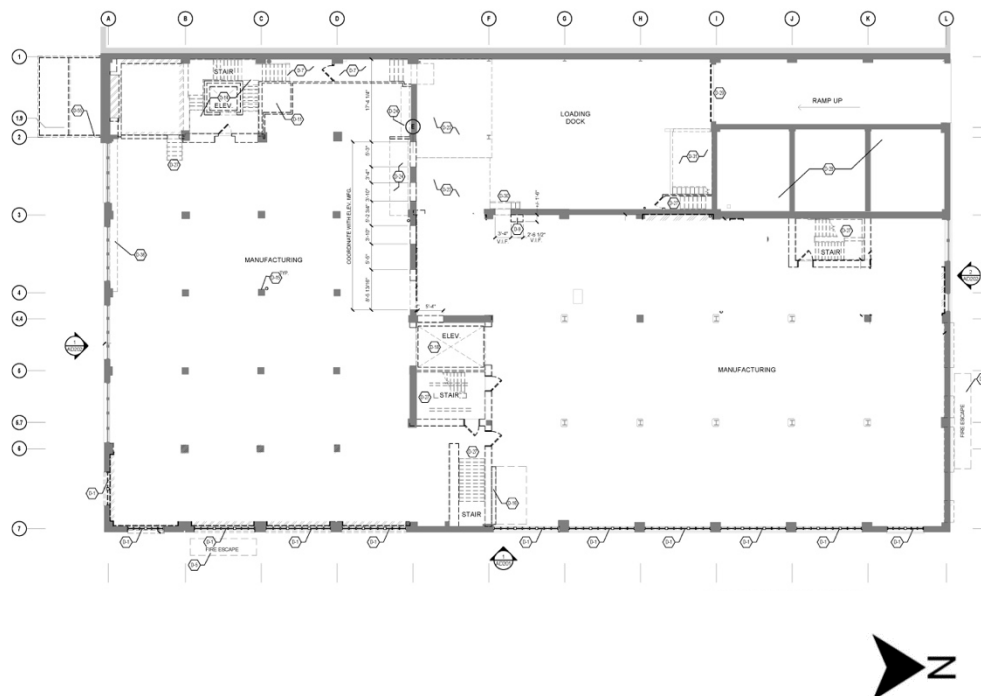
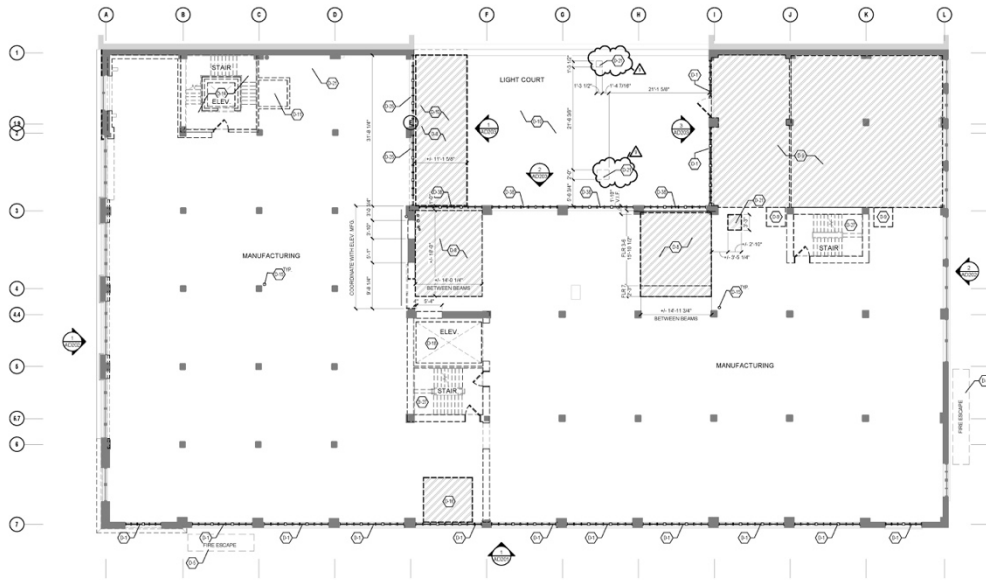


Figure 5. James C. Curtis & Co. Building – 2nd floor plan. Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed.



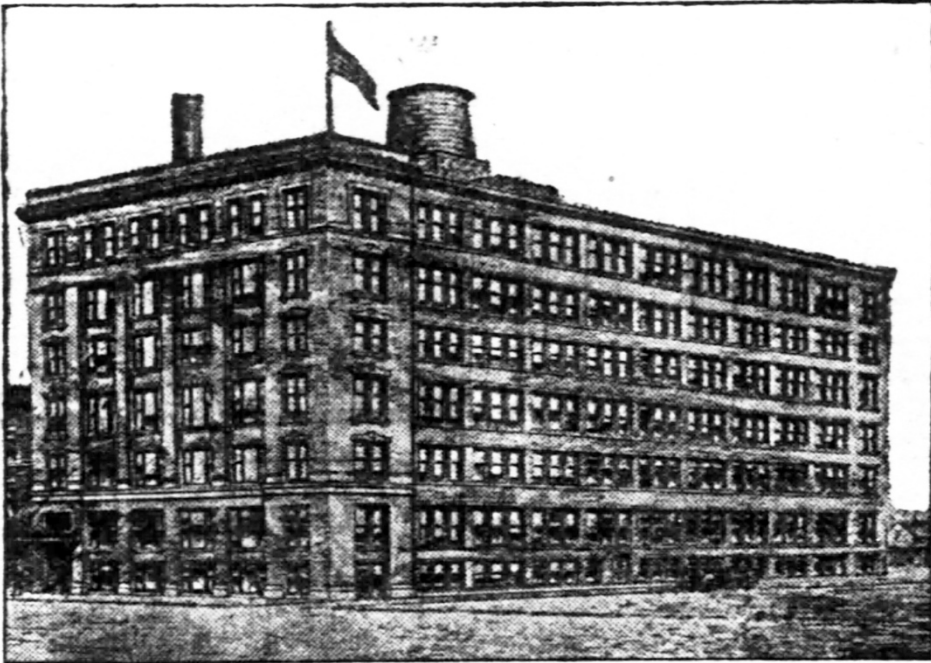
Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 6. James C. Curtis & Co. Building – Typical upper floor plan. Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed.



Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 7. Patterson & Davidson advertisement in the January 1, 1911 *Chicago Daily Tribune* showing the new James C. Curtis Co. Building.



Fireproof Factory Building at 1214 to 1222 West Van Buren Street, James C. Curtis & Co., Owners.

W. R. PATTERSON
Consulting Engineer

F. E. DAVIDSON
Architect

PATTERSON & DAVIDSON
Industrial Engineers

98 Jackson Boulevard **Chicago**

Manufacturing Plants and Industrial Buildings Our Specialty

Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 8. William R. Patterson (1854-1916), industrial architect and engineer; partner in Patterson & Davidson, designer of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building. Source: "In Memoriam," Journal of the Western Society of Engineers (Vol. 21, No. 1), January 1916, 710.

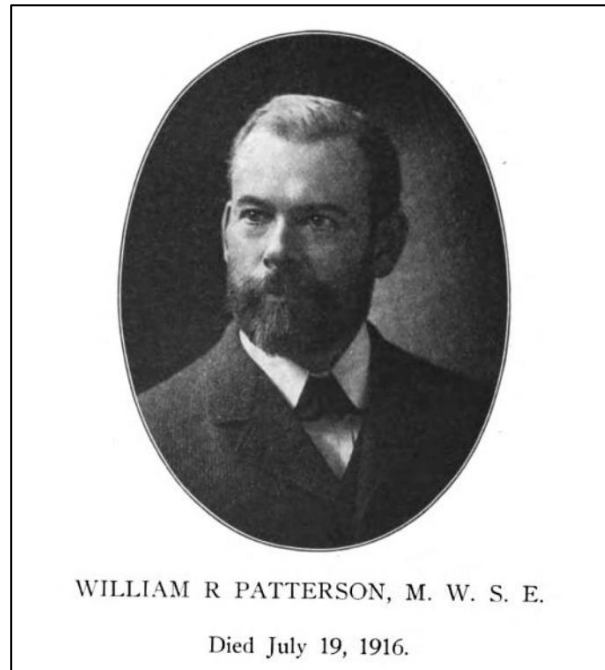



Figure 9. Frank E. Davidson (1867-1931), industrial architect and engineer; partner in Patterson & Davidson, designer of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building. Source: Official Reference Book: Press Club of Chicago (Chicago: Press Club of Chicago, 1922), 240.

FRANK E. DAVIDSON

FRANK E. DAVIDSON, architect and engineer, was born in Hillsborough, Ia., June 7, 1867; s. of Mary Louis (De Sollar) and Robert Davidson; ed. in Iowa State Coll., Ames, 1887-90. Married Emilie H. Hardie, Chicago, Sept. 20, 1896. Mem. of bd. of local improvements and supt. dept. of sewers, Chicago, 1898-9; structural eng., Ill. Steel Co., 1899-1904; architect and eng. of construction for Western Elect. Co., 1905-08; mem. firm of Davidson & Weiss, architects, and Patterson & Davidson, engineers, since 1909. Dem. nominee for alderman of thirty-fourth ward, 1897; mem. of bd. of Park and Bldg. Advisers of Ill., 1917. Mem. of Am. Inst. of Architects, Ill. Soc. of Architects, N. F. P. A., Am. Specif. Inst., Am. Soc. C. E., W. E. S. Mason (Shriner). Mr. Davidson is serving fifth year as president of Ill. Soc. of Architects and seventh year as editor of society's publications. Home: 7436 Kimbark av. Office: 1448 Monadnock Block.



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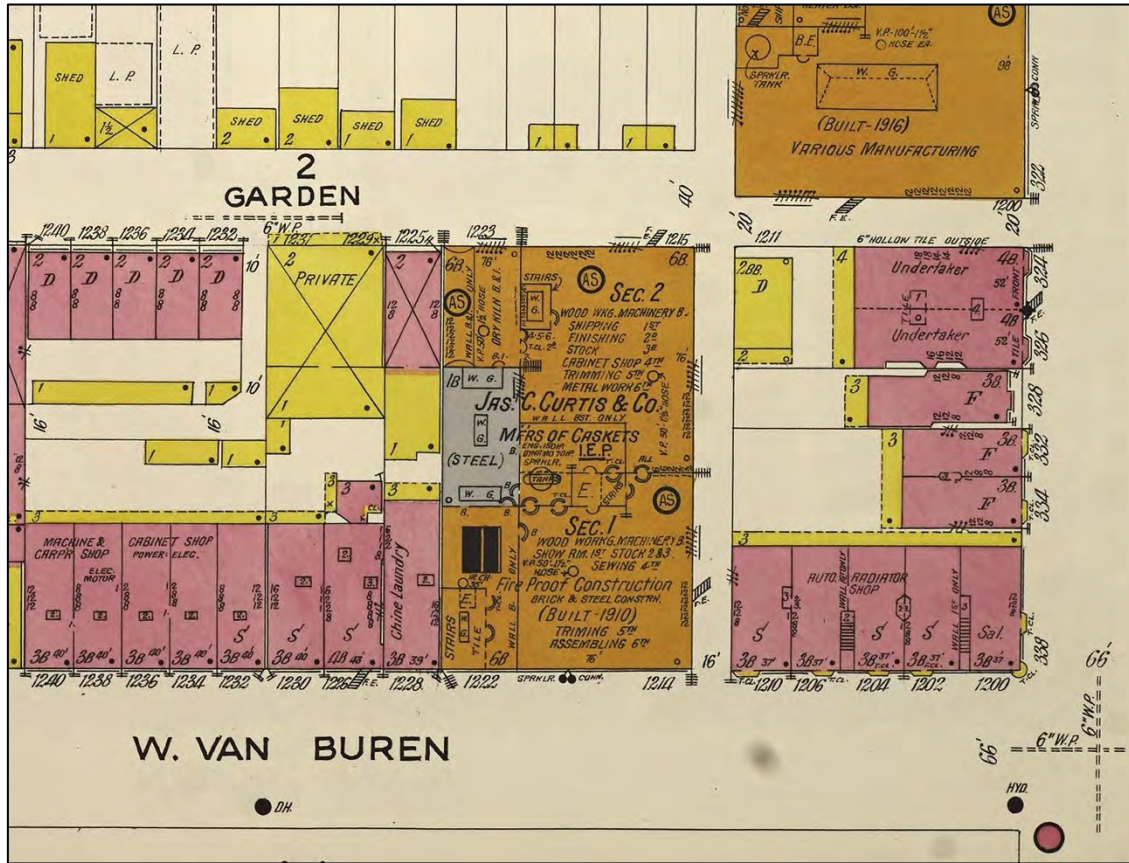
Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 10. A c. 1911 postcard showing the James C. Curtis & Co. Building. Source: Forgotten Chicago website.



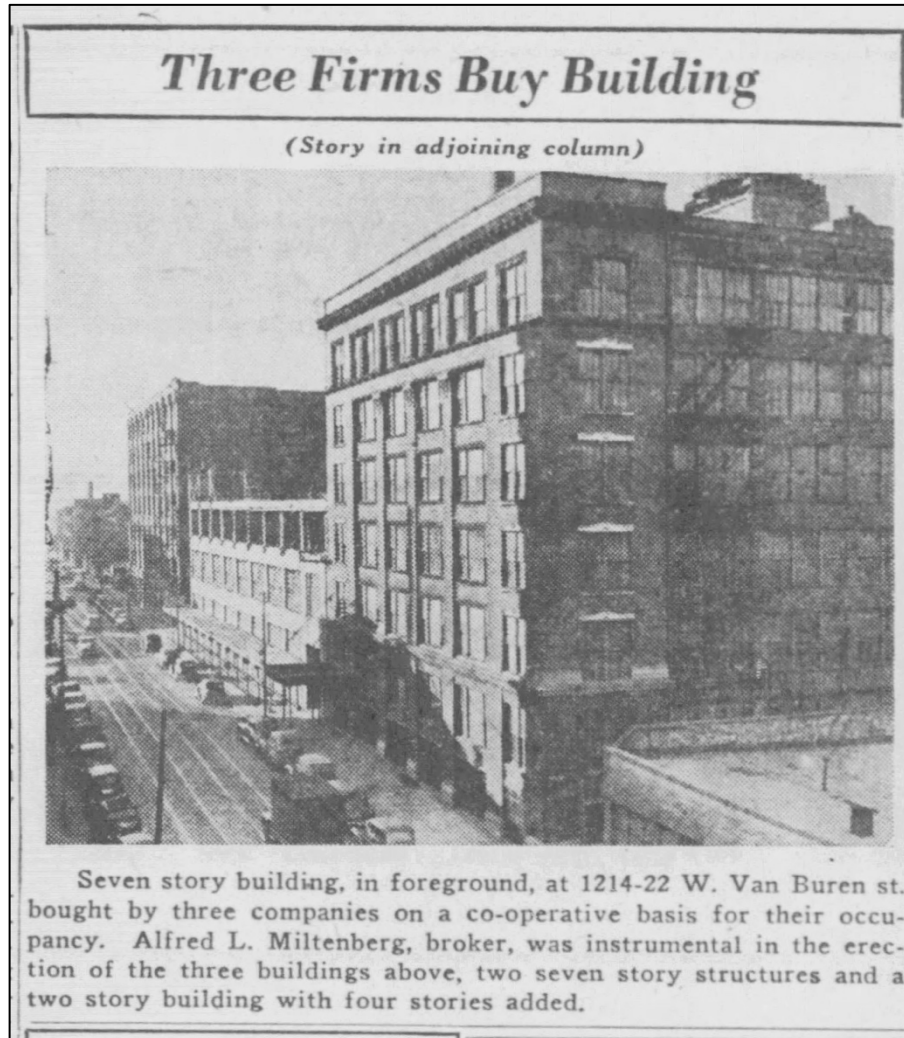
Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 11. 1917 Sanborn map of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building.



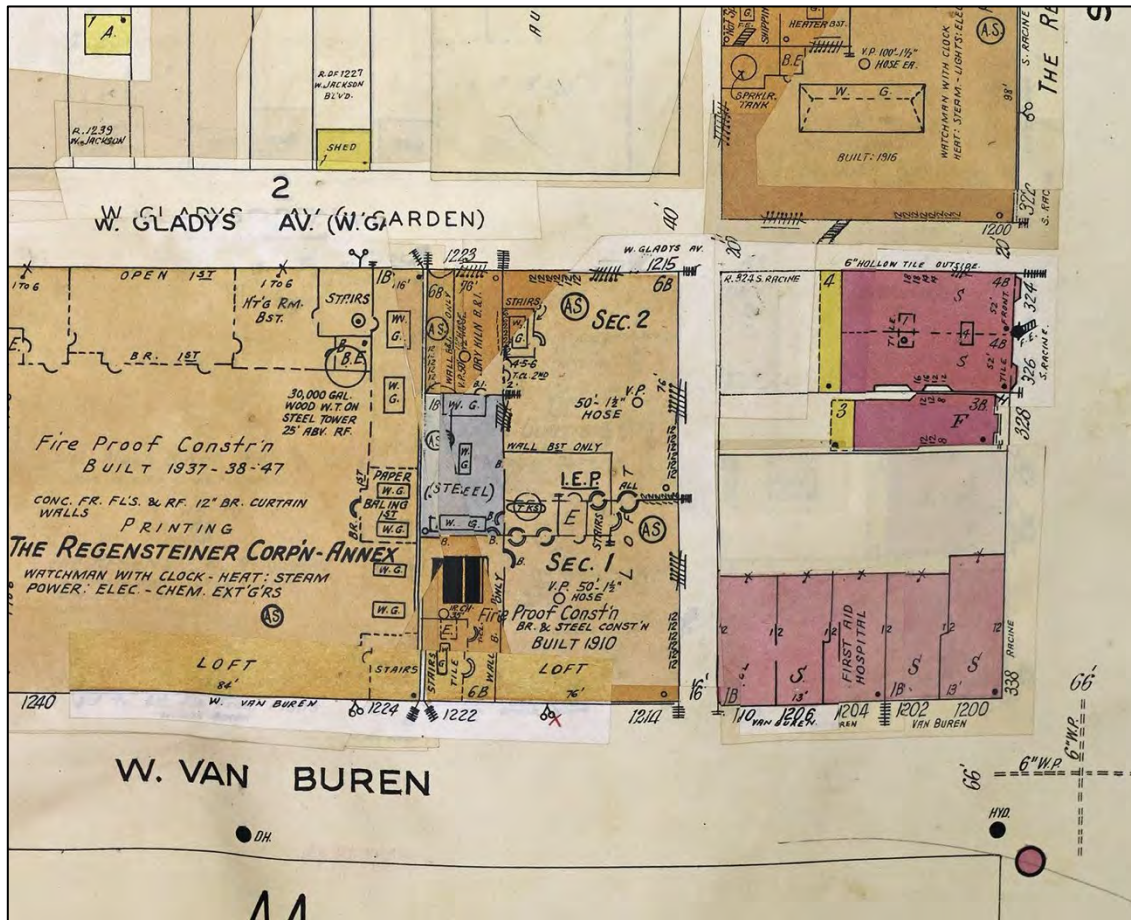
Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

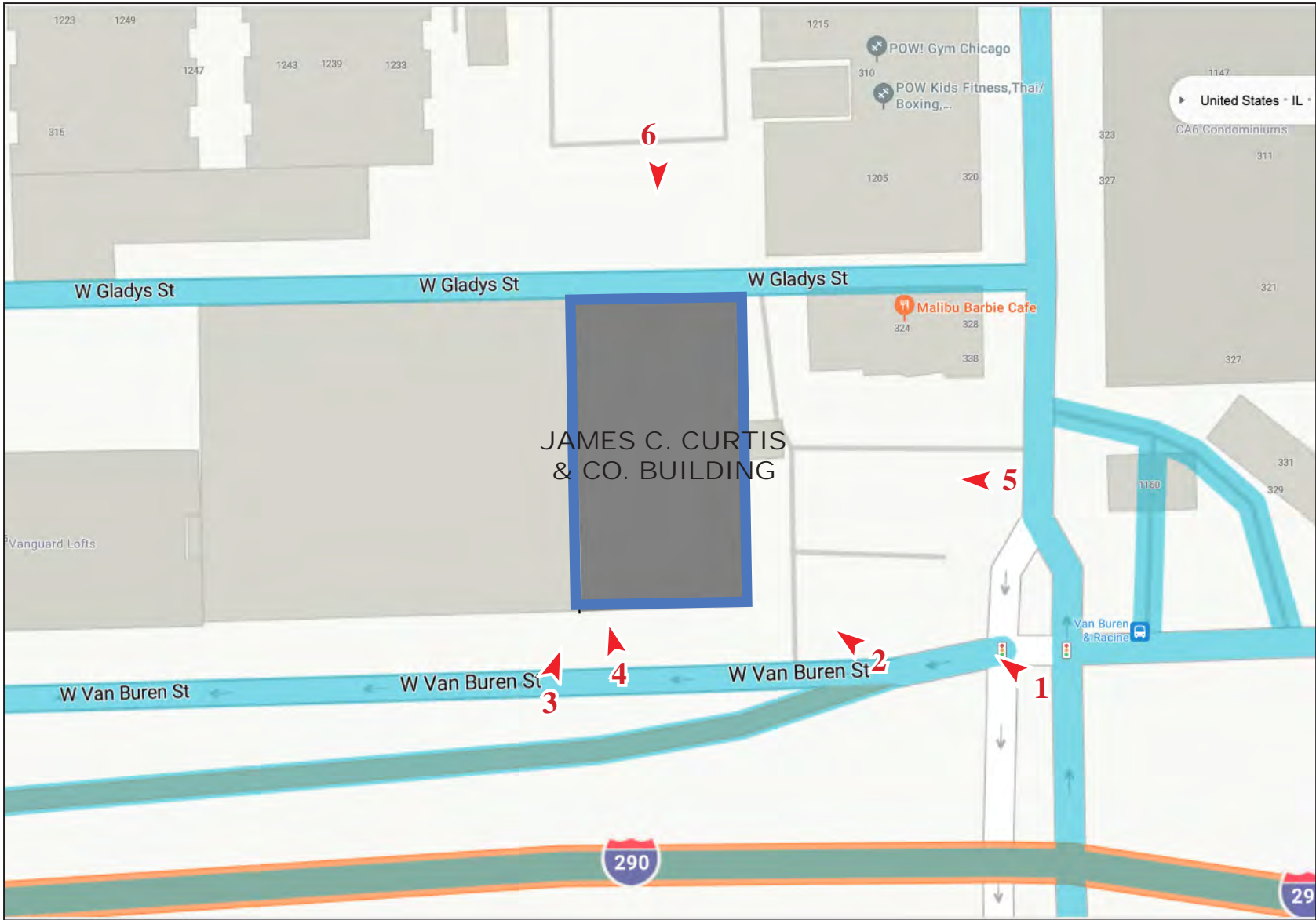
Figure 12. December 29, 1946 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article on the sale of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building with a photo of the building.



Property name: James C. Curtis & Co. Building
Illinois, County: Cook

Figure 13. 1950 Sanborn map of the James C. Curtis & Co. Building.





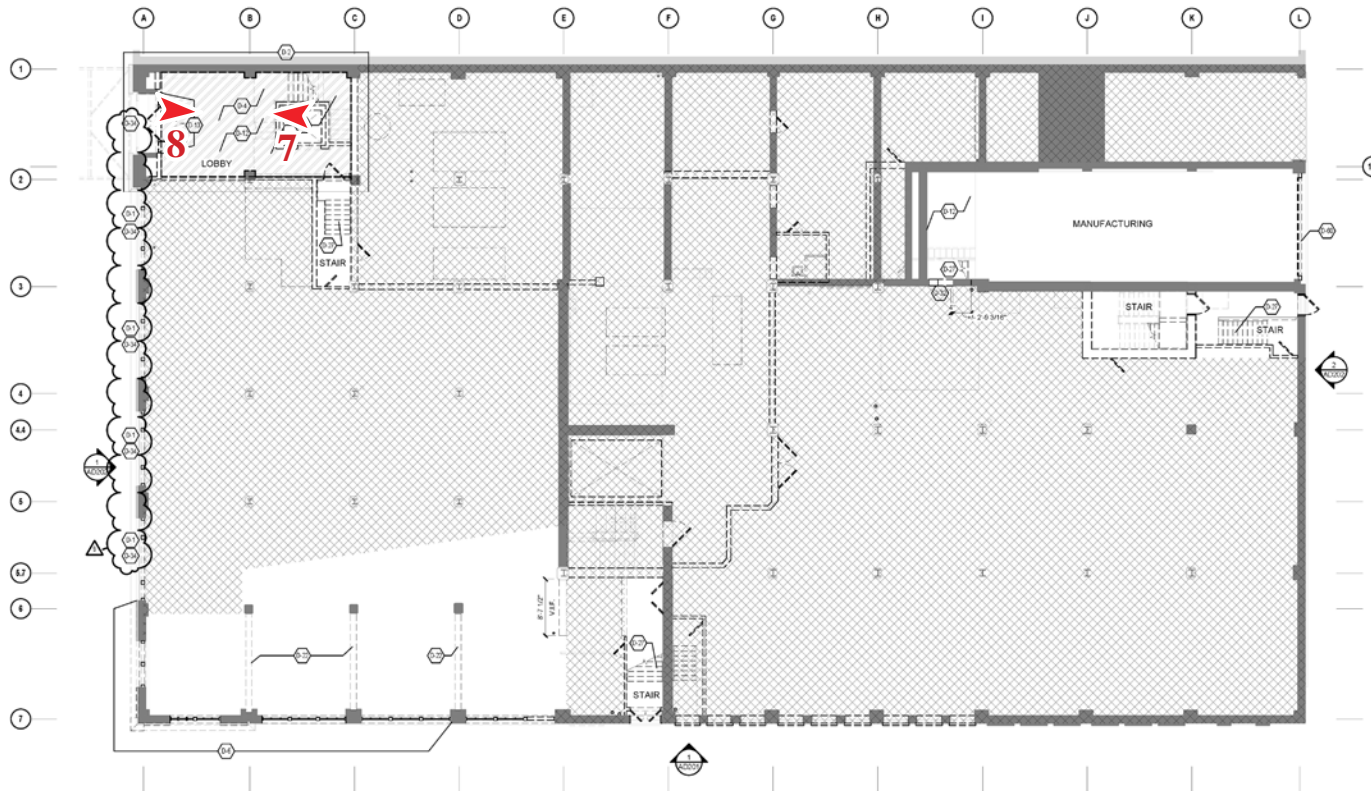
 National Register boundary

Site Plan

James C. Curtis & Co. Building
 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
 Chicago, Illinois 60607

National Register Nomination
 Site Plan
 Photo Key



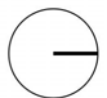


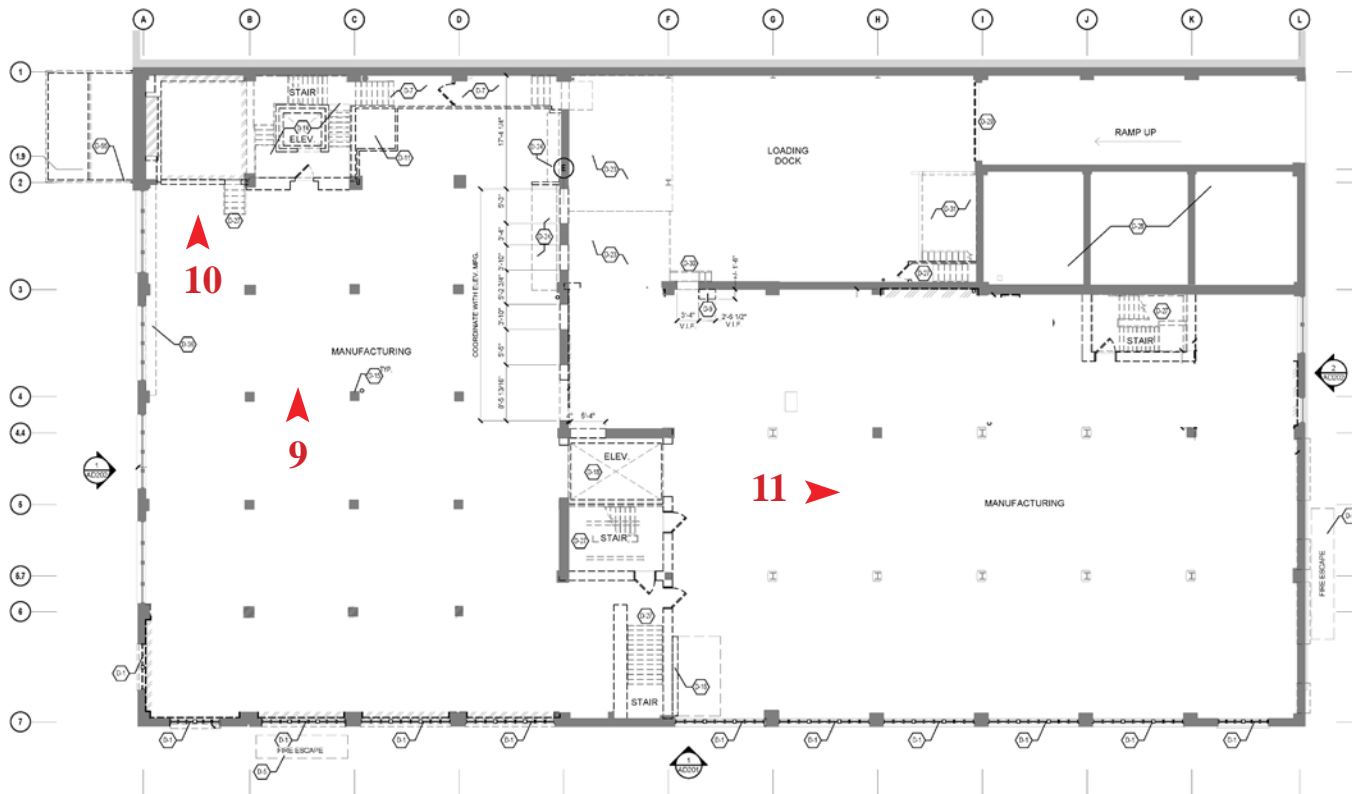
Ground Level Lobby / 1st Floor (Basement)

Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed

James C. Curtis & Co. Building
 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
 Chicago, Illinois 60607

National Register Nomination
 Photo Key



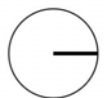


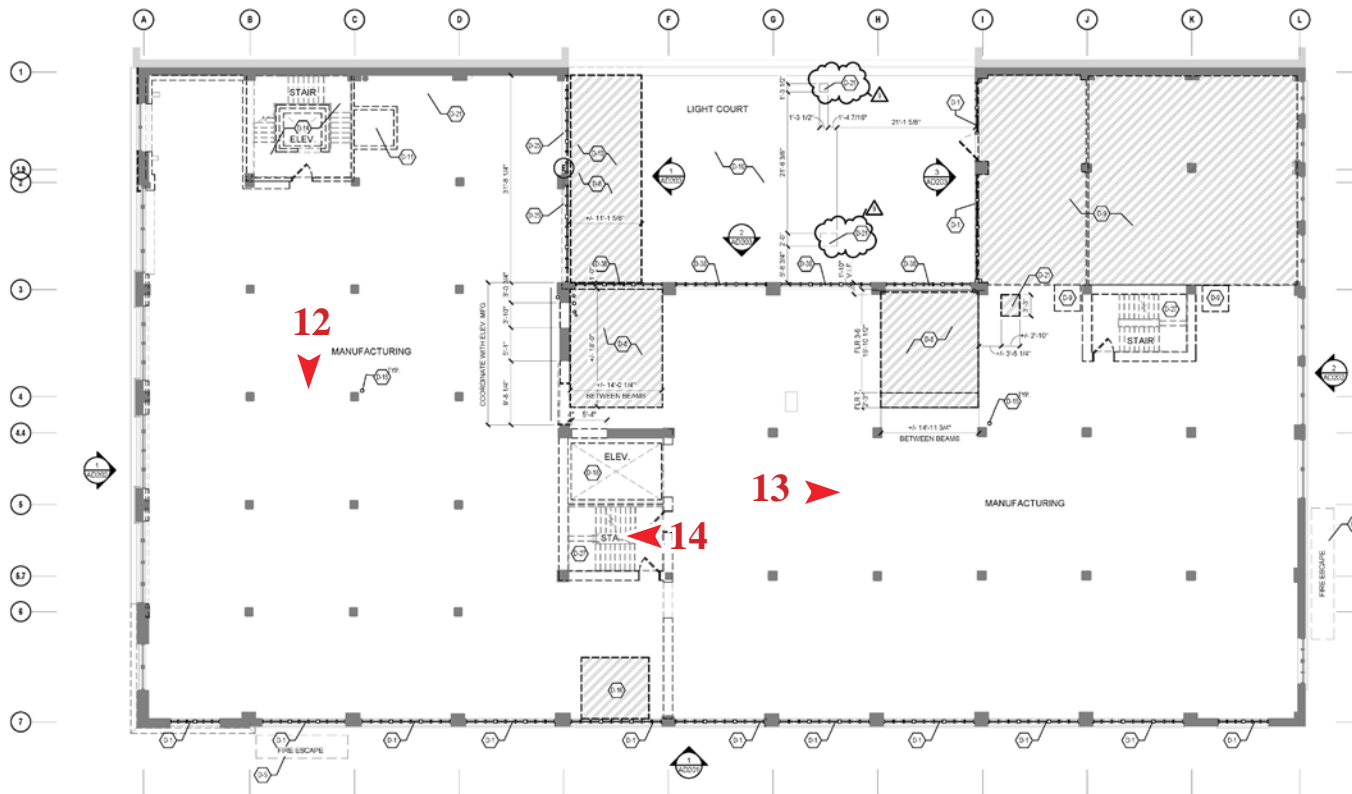
Primary Floor / 2nd Floor Plan

Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed

James C. Curtis & Co. Building
 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
 Chicago, Illinois 60607

National Register Nomination
 Photo Key



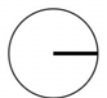


Typical Upper Floor Plan

Note: plans date to 2018 and show demolition scope that was not executed

James C. Curtis & Co. Building
 1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
 Chicago, Illinois 60607

National Register Nomination
 Photo Key



National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607



Photo 1. James C. Curtis & Co. Building, looking northwest from corner of Van Buren Street and Racine Avenue.



Photo 2. James C. Curtis & Co. Building, looking northeast.

National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607



Photo 3. James C. Curtis & Co. Building, looking northwest.



Photo 4. Van Buren Street (south) facade, looking north at main entrance.

National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607



Photo 5. East facade, looking west from Racine Avenue.



Photo 6. North alley facade, looking south.

National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607



Photo 7. Ground floor entrance lobby, looking south at Van Buren Street entrance.



Photo 8. Ground floor entrance lobby, looking north at southwest stairwell (left) and passenger elevator (right).

National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607



Photo 9. 2nd floor south showroom, looking west.



Photo 10. 2nd floor raised office, looking west.

National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607



Photo 11. 2nd floor north section, looking north.



Photo 12. Typical upper floor south section, looking west.

National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607

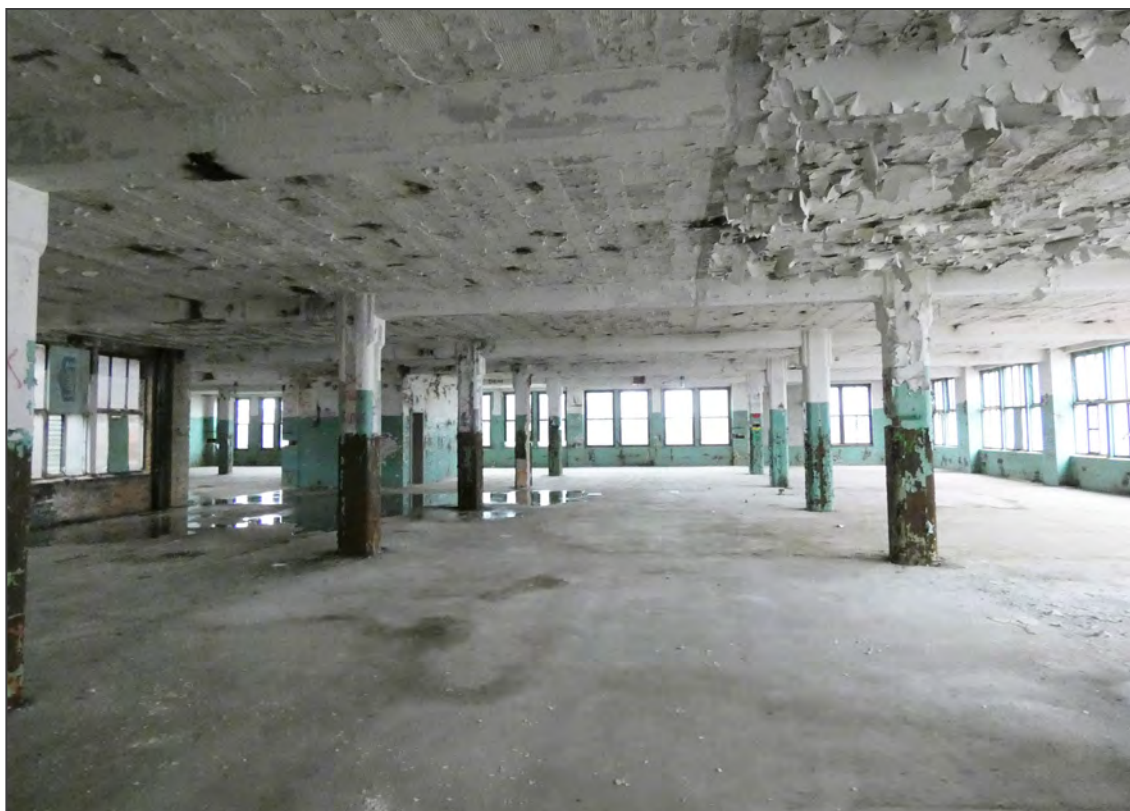


Photo 13. Typical upper floor north section, looking north.

National Register Nomination
Current Photos
1214-1222 W. Van Buren Street
Chicago, IL 60607

CURRENT PHOTOS



Photo 14. Center stairwell, typical view looking south.