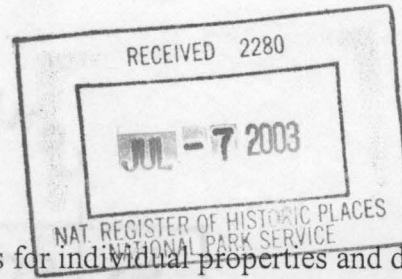


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Palmolive Building**

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number **919 North Michigan Avenue** _____ Not for publication

city or town **Chicago** _____ vicinity

state **Illinois** code **IL** county **Cook** code **031** zip code **60611**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide ☒ locally. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. Becker (S HRS)
Signature of certifying official

7-2-03
Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

American Indian Tribe

Palmolive Building

Name of Property

Cook, Illinois

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☒ entered in the National Register*Edson H. Beall**8/21/03*☐ See continuation sheet.☐ determined eligible for the

National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.☐ determined not eligible for the

National Register

☐ removed from the National Register☐ other (explain):**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 sites☐ 0☐ 0 structures☐ 0☐ 0 objects☐ 1☐ 0 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

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

N/A

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
COMMERCE

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Work in Progress

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation **Stone**

Roof **Asphalt**

Walls **Limestone**

other **Terra Cotta**

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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7. DESCRIPTION

Summary

The Palmolive Building, located at 919 North Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, stands at the southeast corner of North Michigan and Walton streets, near the northern end of North Michigan Avenue's "Magnificent Mile," about a mile north of the Loop's financial district. The Art Deco skyscraper rises thirty-seven stories, with a series of setbacks above a two-story base, which in turn rests on a basement and sub-basements on hardpan caissons on bedrock. The architects were Holabird and Root. The building plan is basically rectangular at street level, extending approximately 172 feet facing on North Michigan Avenue and 231 feet along Walton Street, to the property lines on all sides at the first floor level. The main entrance faces north onto Walton Street, with both north and west elevations treated as primary facades. The south, rear elevation adjoins a three-story building, and the east elevation wall is adjacent to the neighboring building. The structure is steel-framed with concrete floors. The first and second stories on the north and west facades are faced with storefronts framed with metal. Above that, on all elevations, the building is faced with limestone. The design of the undulating facade is strongly vertical in the modernist mode, with little embellishment other than decorative spandrels of dark terra cotta between projecting bays.

Exterior

The façade of the Palmolive Building is both the most symmetrical and the most complex of the Art Deco skyscrapers designed by Holabird and Root. Above the rectangle of the two-story base, the façade is similarly treated on all four elevations. The plan pulls in to form the shape of the capital letter I, with the short bars facing west and east. Rising through the center of the plan is the core thirty-seven story tower, flanked by symmetrical wings wrapping around on the east and west ends that telescope with setbacks at the 3rd, 11th, 18th, 22nd, 34th and 37th stories. At the core, the central five bays of the north and south elevations above the second story recess a depth of one bay and rise nearly unbroken to the thirty-seventh story. Because of the undulating surface of the facades, described as "prismatic volumes" by Carl Condit, the wings appear as buttresses to the core tower.¹ The core of the building is seven bays wide east to west, by three bays in width from north to south. The wings extend the facades to eleven bays by five bays at the third floor. In addition, the first two stories have extra, recessed bays on both the east and south that drop off except for the three central bays of the east elevation, which rise to the 17th story. Atop the

¹ Carl Condit, *Chicago 1910-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

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building rests the 37th floor penthouse, appearing like the top layer of a cake with smooth planar wall surfaces and chamfered corners, surmounted by the 150-foot polished steel and aluminum mast that rises to 620 feet above the ground. The mast once supported the Palmolive Beacon, which was the most powerful aviation light in the world when it was first built and lit. While the original beacon light is no longer there, the mast remains in good condition and will soon support a refurbished 1944 beacon that is currently on the roof waiting to be mounted at the top of the mast.

The smooth Indiana Bedford Limestone facing of the building is supported by 78 main building columns of steel, in turn supported on cylindrical concrete caissons that descend to bedrock at 132 feet. The large number of setbacks required special construction, with special wind bracing features at the corners in addition to the offsetting of exterior columns at every setback. The floors of the building are steel pan and concrete joists carried on structural steel girders.

Strong vertical emphasis is provided by the six symmetrical setbacks, by the alternating recessed and projecting bays of the façades, and by the continuous piers that divide the vertical strips of windows. The limestone façades are mostly devoid of ornament except for terra cotta spandrels on the recessed bays, which feature flat stylized decorations of papyrus. The windows of the upper stories, originally steel-framed double-hung sash, are mostly set in pairs divided by continuous mullions, with wider masonry bands framing the set. The windows were replaced in 1982 with metal-framed double-hung sash similar to the original. Each bay of the façade, all the way around the building, projects or recedes from the one next to it. The projecting tiers are framed by continuous piers of limestone, and divided by smooth limestone spandrels, while each of the receding bays is narrowly framed and has a dark ornamented terra cotta spandrel. The result of this design is that the receding tiers appear as dark channels cutting upward through the pale façade. The exception to this design is at the eighth floor, where the receding tiers on the east and west elevations and at the wrap-around portions of the north and south elevations feature carved limestone spandrels that project to the outer plane of the building. These panels, which feature incised scarab designs, are also located at the top of the receding bays at the tenth floor.

Each of the setbacks at floors 11, 18 and 22 wrap around the building core extending out from the core face of the building the depth of one bay at both the west and east ends of the building. Floors three through ten wrap around three bays on each end, floors eleven through seventeen wrap around three bays (with narrower end bays) and floors eighteen through twenty-two wrap around two and half bays on each end. At floors three through ten, each tier of windows has a set of two double-hung windows as described above. At the tenth floor, however, the windows are topped with a fixed transom. From the eleventh through the seventeenth floor, the façade sets

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back, but is otherwise the same except that the end tiers on both the east and west ends (of five bays) and the end sections of the north and south elevations (three bays each) have only one single window each instead of a pair. At the eighteenth floor, it sets back again, having only three bays on the east and west ends. On the north and south sides at each end, the façade projects only slightly from the outside plane of the building. The projecting portion here is one plane containing two tiers of single windows—the only place on the entire façade where this condition exists. The other unusual condition of these wings is that the pairs of windows in the central receding bay on the east and west ends are divided by a wider masonry mullion.

The twenty-third through the thirty-fourth floors rise relatively unbroken, with seven bays on the north and south elevations and three on the east and west. Each of these is as described above, with a set of two double-hung windows divided by continuous piers. At the 23rd floor, the central recessed bays become more deeply recessed. At the 35th story, the projecting bays are pulled in to a lesser depth, and the east and west are pulled in forming another setback. The thirty-seventh floor is a true penthouse, resting on the flat roof of the building and setting back from all sides. The plan is chamfered at all four corners, and a simple cornice extends around the top below a parapet. While the walls are smooth, some of the windows are set in bays, with sets of two flanked by narrower, angled windows. Above the 37th story is a limestone faced mechanical penthouse that also serves as a base for the beacon.

The Palmolive Beacon was supported on the extant mast, which is a steel framework sheathed with tapering units of brushed aluminum. Inside the framework, there was originally a small elevator to take one to the top, but it has been removed and only a ladder currently exists. Setting atop the mechanical penthouse is a refurbished 1944 beacon light, which will be reset atop the mast.

Building Base

The two lower stories of the building are faced with storefronts on the street elevations. The main building entrance faces north onto Walton Street, placed off-center in the third bay from the east. It was remodeled in 1967 and again in 1982 and consists of a glass and steel assembly covered with a steel-framed canopy that extends over the sidewalk. The storefronts are two-story units. The storefront bays – five on the west and 11 on the north-- are each separated by cast iron fluted attached columns with illuminated terminations that extend above the second story of each storefront. Originally, the storefront window surrounds were of cast iron with nickel trim, but these were removed along with the original glass in 1967, though preserving the columns and most of the fluted cast-iron spandrels at the top of the second floor. The storefronts and entrance were

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remodeled again in 1982, when they were re-designed in the spirit of the original, again preserving the original fluted attached columns extending above the 2nd story cornice line between each storefront, illuminating and framing the storefronts. The existing storefronts on the west elevation and wrap-around bays of the north elevation feature slanted, projecting "bay" windows within each bay rather than the squared-off slight projection of the originals. Those of the central five bays of the north elevation, however, retain the flatter configuration of the original. The existing storefronts are also constructed of metal rather than the original cast iron, and without the nickel decorative trim. On all bays, transoms divide the display windows between the first and second stories. There have been additional alterations in store entrances since then, but the openings have retained their original size. At the time of the 1960's remodeling, an original entrance from North Michigan Avenue into the arcade corridor, located in the central bay of the west façade, was replaced by a display window, and this altered feature has been retained.

Interior

The interior of the ground floor, along with the second floor, was also remodeled in the 1960s and again in 1982, with some later alterations. Due to the remodeling in the 1960s, there are only a few finishes of the original lobby remaining in addition to the carved walnut panels of the elevators. On the west wall of the lobby is an opening leading to the original nickel staircase extending from the basement to the second floor. While never a grand staircase, it retains beautifully ornamented newel posts and balustrade. Also, while the basic plan of the entrance vestibule and elevator lobby remains, in the 1960s the arcade that extended around to the south of the elevator lobby and then west to the street was removed. The retail shops were rearranged and remodeled so that the shops form an "L" shape on the south and west sides of the elevator lobby. The finishes and fixtures of the lobby were altered again in 1982, with rose granite walls and new terrazzo floor. The original lobby walls were of Circassian walnut, and the floors were of marble. Recently, the 1982 finishes were removed and temporary plasterboard walls and ceilings were installed during construction. These will be replaced by new finishes including marble walls and new elevator doors to match the original, while preserving the carved panels.

The elevators, claimed to be the fastest in the world when installed, are arranged for local and express service. Originally there were six express elevators to the right of the lobby, four of which ran express to the 16th floor, with a stop at each floor to the 34th. The other two continued up to the 36th floor. The six local elevators to the left of the lobby stopped at each floor through the 15th. Some time in the past, two of the local elevators and one of the express elevators were removed from service. The elevator doors, originally faced with Circassian walnut inset with nickel bands, are still accented with the original wood panels, carved by Enrique Alferez, of Native American

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women in the Art Deco style. The elevators, both doors and cab interiors, were remodeled in 1967 and again in 1982 along with the lobby. At that time, the original carved panels on both on the doors and in the cabs were preserved, though the Circassian walnut around them was recovered in another wood.

Originally there was an elegant restaurant and a lunch counter along the south side of the first floor, with other retail ranged around the west and north sides including a barber shop, valet, and cigar store. All of those spaces have been rearranged and now contain two retail stores, each entered from Michigan Avenue, and a coffee shop with its own entrance next to the entrance on Walton. The retail areas have had many alterations of both plan and finishes over the years, and the existing stores are currently undergoing remodeling.

There are three stairwells that ascend through the building, in addition to the nickel stairs from the lobby to the second floor. These are all enclosed, steel-pan constructed stairs with concrete filled treads. There is one at the northeast corner of the building, one on the south behind the elevators, and one toward the west end of the building to the south of the corridor. From the 22nd to the 37th floor there are only two stairs, as the staircase at the northeast drops off with the setbacks.

Upper floors

The steel-pan and concrete joist floors are laid on steel girders. The floor plan of the upper floors remains much the same throughout the building height despite the setbacks, though the floor space ranges from 15,885 square feet at the first floor to only 2,914 square feet on the thirty-seventh. The elevators are located at the eastern third of the building, so that the double-loaded corridor extends from the elevators to the west, with varying lengths depending on the size of the floor and the type of tenant. The original elevator foyers had marble wainscots that extended to the tops of the doors, with Belgian black marble bases. Many of the extant elevator doors are the original double-panel, hollow metal doors with a decorative over grill. The floors of the corridors were originally terrazzo, some of which still exists beneath carpeting. Original door frames in the corridors were of walnut, but few remain.

When the building was first completed, there was but one small bathroom on each floor, tucked away at the southeast corner of the building behind the elevators. This is still much the case today, so that men's and women's bathrooms alternate on each floor, although there are some additional bathrooms that have been installed to the west of the elevators. Most of the bathrooms have been remodeled over the years.

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The office space floors are of smooth concrete, mostly covered with carpeting. The office spaces were intended from the opening of the building to be custom designed depending on the tenant's needs and wishes, so that no two floor plans were the same. This has continued over the years, with additional alterations in the spaces and finishes. Typically, the ceilings have suspended acoustic tile and the walls are painted.

The most extant interior spaces in the building are the original executive offices at the 37th floor. Reached by an open staircase ascending along the south wall from the 36th floor, the suite of offices is not, as imagined, modernist or Art Deco, but is traditional in design and finishes in the spirit of Georgian Revival. The painted stairs leads to a lofty reception hall with maple herringbone-patterned floors and openings leading into an office to the north, another office plus utility areas to the east, and a more formal hallway leading to the additional rooms on the west. The floors of the offices and hallway are of strip maple. The opening into the north office is formal, flanked by fluted pilasters with ionic columns and topped with a semicircular arch. The transom over the doorway, however, has been filled in with a vent and surrounding material. The reception hall also features bracketed cornice molding and a wainscot. The north room has painted walls with picture molding. The room to the east of this is faced with wood paneling and features a large bay window on the north. The hallway leading west is trimmed with painted wood baseboards and wall moldings. Two offices on the north side of the hall have wood paneling. At the end of the hall is a grand room extending all across the west end of the penthouse. From historic photographs, this room appears as original. It is faced with oak paneling below a decorative plaster ceiling. A fireplace with limestone mantel is located at the south end of the room, and sets of French doors at the chamfered northwest and southwest corners of the room lead out to the terrace on the west.

Summary of Integrity

The Palmolive Building retains excellent integrity. All four facades of the building appear as original, with all original exterior masonry and Terra Cotta features of the 3rd through the 37th stories remaining in good condition. In addition, the original steel and aluminum beacon mast has been preserved. Key features of the storefronts such as the openings and the double-height design, the attached columns with illuminated terminations, and upper level spandrels have all been preserved. In the interior, the artistry of sculptor Enrique Alferez and the ornamental nickel stairs have remained at the first floor, in addition to the elegant executive offices of the 37th floor. The most serious remodeling of the building occurred in the 1960s when the first and second floors, both exterior and interior, were redone. The third through the fifteenth floors were also remodeled at that time with new finishes and ceiling-hung HVAC units above suspended ceilings. There was

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also the application of a large sign on the building and a digital clock on the corner of Michigan and Walton, both of which have since been removed. In 1982, the original but deteriorated steel-framed, double-hung, one-over-one windows were replaced with new metal, double-hung, one-over-one sash like the original. Additional alterations have occurred over the years to the retail spaces, and the offices of all floors have been redone over time. On many floors, however, the original central corridor configuration remains.

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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.)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance **1929**

Significant Dates **1929**

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder **Holabird, John Auger Jr. and Root, John Wellborn Jr.**

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

Summary of Significance

The Palmolive Building, located at 919 North Michigan Avenue, meets Criterion C as one of the most significant examples of the Art Deco skyscraper in the city of Chicago. The period of significance is 1929, when the building was completed during the last phase of a period of tremendous growth in Chicago. The subsequent rise in demand for office space, coupled with zoning laws enacted in 1920 and 1923, had led to a proliferation of taller and larger skyscrapers within the city. Designed by Holabird & Root for the Palmolive-Peet Company, the Palmolive Building's series of six regular setbacks that continue up the structure on all sides create a more unified exterior that distinguish it from other Art Deco skyscrapers in Chicago, leading Carol Willis to describe the building as "the city's only true New York-style setback" skyscraper.²

While the building's massing distinguishes it from other contemporary skyscrapers in Chicago, the Palmolive Building exhibits many typical characteristics of the Art Deco skyscraper style that are rendered with exceptional finesse. These significant features include the strong emphasis on verticality, the use of smooth, flat materials with low-relief, stylized ornamentation on the exterior, the use of rich materials and finely crafted decoration on the interior, and the application of dramatic exterior nighttime lighting. An important lighting feature was the Palmolive Beacon, which lit the top of the extant 150-foot aluminum-clad, moderne mast atop the building and quickly helped to establish the Palmolive Building as a landmark in the Chicago skyline.³ As the first tall office building to be completed at the northern end of Michigan Avenue, it stood out as a symbol of the commercial development on the north side.

As the product of the second generation of two famous Chicago architectural firms, the Palmolive Building was designed by the firm of Holabird and Root. It is one of the most mature skyscraper designs John Auger Holabird, Jr. and John Wellborn Root Jr., who were noted for their sophisticated Art Deco skyscrapers of the era.

Architecture

² Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago* (New York, 1995), 127.

³ John Wesley Stamper, *Chicago's North Michigan Avenue: Planning and Development, 1900-1930* (Chicago, 1991), 162.

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Although many of Chicago's 1920s skyscrapers were modeled on those in Manhattan, even the more proportional and integrated Chicago buildings were still variations on the base-with-tower model. The Palmolive Building is an example of the culmination of the evolution of the skyscraper in Chicago in the early twentieth century as a product of changes in zoning regulation, urban environment, advances in building technology, and the increased demand for office space. The 1871 fire spurred the development of the steel skeleton frame in Chicago, and dozens of steel-framed buildings ranging from 16 to 20 stories were built in the 1880s and early 1890s. The Masonic Temple (NE corner of State and Randolph Streets, 1891-2, Burnham & Root, demolished) was the culmination of this first skyscraper boom. Completed in 1892, the building rose 302 feet and was briefly the tallest building in the world.⁴ This laissez-faire period in Chicago skyscraper construction ended abruptly with building height restrictions instituted in 1893. The real estate boom of the late 1880s had created a glut of office space that became more problematic with the financial panic of 1893. Rising vacancy rates within the city eventually led officials to limit the height of buildings to 130 feet. This number would fluctuate between 130 and 260 feet in the years before the 1923 Chicago zoning law.⁵

This height restriction, coupled with the large lots available in the central Loop, resulted in commercial buildings that were essentially cube-like boxes with central light courts. Some examples of this building form include the Rookery (209 South LaSalle St., 1885-88, Burnham & Root) and the Railway Exchange Building (80 East Jackson Blvd., 1903-4, D.H. Burnham & Company). At the southern end of the Loop, where lots tended to be longer and narrower, solid rectangular buildings like the Old Colony Building (407 S. Dearborn St., 1893-4, Holabird & Roche), and the Fisher Building (343 South Dearborn St., 1895-6, D.H. Burnham & Company) were popular. This type of construction was in marked contrast to building trends in New York City, where the absence of height restrictions and smaller lots led to a proliferation of towers rising as tall as 60 stories. New York's zoning law of 1916 did little to derail the construction of increasingly tall office buildings in the city; although the law required that buildings occupy a decreasing percentage of the lot size as the heights increased, it still allowed unlimited height on 1/4 of the building lot. This zoning regulation encouraged construction of 'setback' or 'wedding cake' skyscrapers.⁶

In 1920, the building height limitation in Chicago was revised to allow for occupied floors to the lot line up to 260 feet, with an unoccupied or ornamental tower rising up to 400 feet. Three years

⁴ Willis, 51.

⁵ Ibid, 50.

⁶ Susan Baldwin, "One LaSalle Street Building," National Register nomination, 11.

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later, the zoning code was again changed to allow buildings to rise 264 feet with occupied towers that could not take up more than 25% of the lot, or 1/6 of the cubic volume of the building. Though modeled on New York's 1916 regulations, Chicago's new zoning law was still too restrictive to produce the kinds of skyscrapers that were being constructed in Manhattan: architectural historian Carol Willis notes that "Although the 264-foot vertical rise was the highest in any American city with regulations, the limit on volume above that height meant that Chicago towers usually looked stunted, especially compared to those in New York."⁷

Chicago's zoning regulations resulted in the evolution of two typical building forms in the 1920s. The first was a base-with-tower form, consisting of a main building topped with a slender tower. As stated earlier, volume restrictions usually caused the tower to appear undersized in comparison with the larger, bulkier base. Construction of base-with-tower buildings continued to some extent through the 1920s, tending to be clad with the popular classical or gothic ornament.

Even before the enactment of the 1923 zoning law, designs for several skyscrapers with tall towers were constructed, including the Chicago Temple (77 West Washington St., 1923, Holabird & Roche) which required a zoning variance from the city for its gothic spire; the Wrigley Building, which followed the 1920 ordinance that allowed unoccupied towers; and the Tribune Tower. The Straus Building (310 South Michigan Ave., 1923-24, Graham, Anderson, Probst & White) was the first building to take advantage of the revised zoning regulations. The 21-story base is topped with a 9-story tower with a stepped pyramid roof.⁸ The Pittsfield Building (55 East Washington St., 1927, Graham, Anderson, Probst & White) was among the later base-with-tower designs to be built in Chicago. Inspired by the Woolworth Building in New York City, the building consists of a 21-story base and 17-story tower with rich gothic ornamentation on the exterior and within the elaborate lobby.⁹

As the decade continued, the tall, narrow tower atop a squat main block began to give way to a more integrated form. One of the first skyscrapers to exhibit this more integrated, proportional tower style was the Mather Tower (75 East Wacker Dr., 1928, Herbert Hugh Riddle). To accommodate the relatively small and narrow lot, the design for the Mather Tower incorporated a series of rear setbacks to bring the front façade higher. The octagonal tower also sets back at regular intervals, beginning at just over 41 feet in diameter and ending at a mere nine feet-six inches. The tall, narrow base and tower gives the building a sense of proportion lacking in earlier

⁷ Willis, 111.

⁸ Pauline A. Saliga, *The Sky's the Limit: A Century of Chicago Skyscrapers* (New York, 1990), 117.

⁹ Baldwin, 12.

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base-with-tower skyscrapers, although, unlike the Palmolive Building, the façade of the base of the building remains a solid block that is distinct from the tower.¹⁰

Eliel Saarinen's second-place design for the Chicago Tribune Tower Competition in 1922, as well as Hugh Ferriss's zoning envelope studies in 1922, inspired architects in Chicago and elsewhere to move toward more modern, simplified forms.¹¹ 333 North Michigan Avenue, completed by Holabird and Root in 1928, was "Chicago's first true Art Deco skyscraper."¹² The 37-story building inspired by Saarinen's Tribune Tower design features a north-facing tower that is connected to the main block of the structure by a series of small setbacks and vertical channels. At the building's fifth floor, a low-relief frieze designed by Fred M. Torrey depicts scenes of pioneer life.

333 North Michigan set the standard for later skyscrapers in Chicago, including the Palmolive Building, completed one year later. Rising 468 feet above North Michigan Avenue, the Palmolive Building incorporates a series of setbacks at the third, eleventh, eighteenth, twenty-second, thirty-fifth, and thirty-seventh floors. The first three setbacks were not required by the city's 1923 zoning law. Instead of designing a sheer vertical rise to the 264 feet allowed by zoning, Holabird & Root chose to step in the building to create a more integrated massing and to allow for shallow, well-lit office space.¹³ The building exhibits a series of simple diminutions of its perimeter, and surfaces broken by the verticals of the fenestration and the sparse use of flat sharply incised ornament at various focal points. The vertical channels along the building's exterior become increasingly recessed as they travel up the building; these channels alternate with projecting bays to lend a rhythm to the elevations and emphasize the building's height.

Verticality in the new skyscrapers was emphasized through the use of projecting piers and recessed spandrels, along with deeper channels rising through sections of the buildings. The Palmolive Building is an excellent example of these techniques. It exhibits the only Chicago example of a skyscraper from this era with alternating recessed and projecting bays that create an undulating series of vertical channels that lead the eye upward. The effect is further heightened by the projecting piers between ribbons of windows, and the dark Terra Cotta spandrels that are recessed within the channels. The receding setbacks create an elongated effect that is heightened by continuous channels of windows and vertical piers, which minimize the effect of the horizontal

¹⁰ Saliga, 147.

¹¹ Ibid., 129.

¹² Baldwin, 12

¹³ Willis, 125.

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breaks created by the setbacks. The vertical thrust of the building is further heightened by the piers that run straight up through the center of each section of tower. Likewise, the symmetrical setbacks on the central tower both emphasize its height and give it slender and elegant proportions.

The emphasis on verticality resulted in a decrease in elaborate ornamentation. Like many commercial buildings from the early twentieth century, the Mather Tower was heavily decorated with gothic ornament. However, by the mid-to-late 1920s, many architects had begun to move away from historicism and toward a more simplified, abstracted design meant to reflect the modern age in which they were living. One manifestation of this move toward modernism was the Art Deco style. The term Art Deco derives from the *Exposition Des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, held in 1925 in Paris. The Exposition marked the coming together of several progressive design schools from Europe and the United States, including Art Nouveau, the Glasgow School, the Viennese Secession, and the Prairie School. Art Deco designs in Europe were generally high-quality showcases of hand craftsmanship and luxury materials, usually employing abstracted geometric and nature-inspired forms.¹⁴

When applied to skyscraper architecture in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, Art Deco was given another dimension. These new forms combined with Art Deco design tenets to produce the Art Deco skyscraper. In addition to the emphasis on verticality, there was a minimal use of exterior ornament. Materials used on the exterior tended to be smooth and flat, with decoration that was stylized, low relief and non-historical. On the Palmolive Building, the smooth Bedford limestone cladding is virtually uninterrupted by ornamentation, giving the building a streamlined, modern appearance. The exceptions are also meant to draw the eye upward. The only decorations on the limestone are the flat, incised panels at the eighth and tenth floors that feature winged scarabs and stylized papyrus, both Egyptian-inspired designs typical of the era. The dark Terra Cotta spandrels of the recessed channels repeat the flat, stylized papyrus designs.

The flat, minimally ornamented stonework was meant to heighten the effect of artificial illumination. The Palmolive Building along with other 1920s skyscrapers like the Wrigley Building, Medinah Athletic Club, and the Board of Trade, was equipped with floodlights to illuminate the building at night. In an article detailing the exterior and interior features of the newly built Palmolive Building in *Architectural Forum*, Henry J. B. Hoskins described the exterior lighting system:

¹⁴ Baldwin, 13.

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An elaborate system of floodlighting has been provided covering practically the entire exterior of the building and utilizing a total of 372 projectors which have a current consumption of approximately 175 kW. These projectors are distributed in general on all roof decks on all sides of the building. . . ¹⁵

As noted, the lighting was used to enhance the setbacks of the building. Much of that original exterior lighting system is extant, though in poor condition. The building will soon be re-lit with new components based on the original lighting plan and components, lighting the setbacks and top of the building. Another significant lighting feature on the Palmolive Building was the Palmolive Beacon. The idea of placing beacons atop Art Deco skyscrapers developed along with commercial aviation, and the lights became symbolic of modernist design. Not only useful for guiding airplanes, they attracted public attention to the buildings. The Palmolive Beacon became the most famous outside New York, though another well known beacon in Chicago is the "beehive" beacon atop the Straus Building at 310 South Michigan. The Palmolive mast itself remains as a significant Art Deco feature, with its sheathing of aluminum strips that catch daylight.

The relative simplicity of the exterior of the Art Deco skyscraper often belied the extravagance of its interior, especially in public spaces. Lobbies and entrances tended to be lavishly and dramatically decorated, using the most luxurious materials.¹⁶ While it contained some interior spaces of elaborate ornamentation, the Palmolive building boasted more simple but elegant interiors with sumptuous materials. The original lobby walls of Circassian walnut wainscoting with nickel-metal trim, and the floors of gray and pink Tennessee marble are gone, but the most impressive features of the lobby remain.¹⁷ The elevator doors in the lobbies, as well as the elevator cabs themselves, feature stylized bas-relief panels of Native American women carved in Circassian walnut and surrounded by strips of nickel.¹⁸ Also of nickel is the Art Deco style interior stairwell leading from the basement up to the second floor. The richness of the building's interiors can also still be found in the executive suites on the 37th floor, which boast original wood paneling, trim, and flooring.

¹⁵ Hoskins, Henry J. B., "Structure and Equipment of the Palmolive Building, Holabird and Root, Architects," *Architectural Forum* 52 (May 1930), 736.

¹⁶ Ibid; Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 10.

¹⁷ Robert Brueggemann, *Holabird and Roche, Holabird and Root: An Illustrated Catalogue of Works, 1880-1940*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1991), xiii; "A Modern Pyramid—Is Chicago's Palmolive Building," *Through the Ages* (October 1931), 41.

¹⁸ Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 7.

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The carved wood elevator panels, done by artist Enrique Alf  rez, are the most significant examples of interior craftsmanship in the building. Alf  rez was born May 4, 1901, in San Miguel de Mezquital, in Zacatecas, Mexico. His father, Longinos Alf  rez, was an established sculptor of carved wood and plaster religious statues for churches. The youngest of six children, Enrique first learned basic carving and sculpting techniques in his father's workshop. After a turbulent childhood, in which he served in the northern revolutionary army of Pancho Villa, Alf  rez went to El Paso at the age of 22.¹⁹ After hearing a lecture by Chicago sculptor Lorado Taft, Alf  rez moved to Chicago to study sculpture at the School of the Art Institute.

While at the school, Alf  rez also lived and worked independently at Lorado Taft's Midway Studios. During his first years in Chicago, Alf  rez was steeped in the Beaux-Arts style of sculpture that was the hallmark of Taft's work. Although Taft acted as a mentor to Alf  rez during his student years in Chicago, the Beaux-Arts style in which he worked was being supplanted by a new international style (also called Art Deco or Moderne) that was "to decorate the streamlined skyscrapers that were being built in the 1920s. . . . While retaining the idealized, often allegorical figures, if not the lofty tone of the Beaux-Arts style, Art Deco sculpture was simplified and streamlined, with rounded contours, geometric patterns, and linear clarity."²⁰

Not surprisingly, Enrique Alf  rez's first important public works, both in Chicago and later in New Orleans, were a personal interpretation of this new Art Deco style. Alf  rez's first architectural sculptures were the low relief limestone panels on the fifth floor frieze of 333 North Michigan Avenue. Alf  rez worked on this project under Fred Torrey, who was also associated with Midway Studios, designing and modeling reliefs in clay that were the basis for the frieze. The scenes of pioneer life, meant to recall the building's placement on the site of Fort Dearborn, are simply rendered in low relief. The geometric quality of the work compliments the building's linear massing and otherwise simple treatment of the limestone cladding. According to a letter written by Alf  rez, Torrey refused to give him credit for his work on 333 North Michigan and the Chautaugua Auditorium in New York. News of the tensions between Alf  rez and Torrey soon reached Lorado Taft, who was a good friend of Torrey. Taft asked Alf  rez to leave Midway Studios.²¹

¹⁹ John E. Bullard, *The Art and Times of Enrique Alf  rez* (New Orleans, 1988), 1.

²⁰ Ibid, 2.

²¹ Enrique Alf  rez to Robert Sideman, New Orleans, 30 November 1996.

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Shortly after finishing work on 333 North Michigan, Alférez was commissioned to create the series of carved walnut reliefs for the interior of the Palmolive Building. He received the commission from Holabird & Root through painter John Norton, who had worked for the firm painting the mural for the Chicago Motor Club Building. Alférez recalled working on the project:

I made drawings of what I wanted to do and, after these were approved, I never had any interference or criticism from anyone as the work progressed. The material was chosen by the architectural office. It was a very beautiful hard wood, Circassian walnut, rare and expensive, and I remember the first chisel marks as somewhat intimidating.²²

The walnut carvings depict four women surrounded by a lush background of foliage. The panels represent a more elaborate interpretation of the Art Deco style, with slightly rounded, organic forms. The richness of the carving matches that of the material, and is a reminder of the luxury of the Palmolive Building's lobby. These panels are considered Alférez's "finest work in Chicago," displaying "a sensitivity for the material and a total understanding of the Art Deco style."²³

These two projects were the only architectural works that Alférez completed in Chicago. In 1930, after visiting New Orleans on his way to Mexico, Alférez was asked to assist in making plaster casts of sections of a Mayan ruin for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago.²⁴ After returning from the assignment, Alférez settled in New Orleans, working on several public commissions and directing a number of sculpture projects for the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s. One of his best known architectural works in New Orleans is *Louisianans at Work and Play*, a twenty-foot tall pierced window screen placed above the entrance to the Charity Hospital Complex. Completed in 1939, the work was one of Alférez's last Art Deco pieces. The screen depicts contemporary men and women in various scenes of employment and recreation. The simple, almost abstracted forms are representative of the height of Art Deco in America, with its emphasis on modernity and progress.

During the 1930s, Alférez was also experimenting with other styles in sculpture. His *Fountain of the Four Winds*, a sculpted stone fountain of three female nudes and one male nude, demonstrated "that Alférez could work in a more naturalistic personal style than indicated by his orthodox Art

²² Ibid.

²³ Bullard, 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

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Deco manner."²⁵ His work would continue in this new direction through the next several decades. Alf  rez continued to work through the 1980s, and, at the age of 87, was commissioned to create two monumental bronze sculptures for the front entrance of a commercial building in the city. He died in 1997.

Certain Art Deco characteristics of the Palmolive Building are evident in other Chicago skyscrapers of the late 1920s and early 1930s, both by Holabird and Root and by other architects. The Chicago Motor Club (68 East Wacker, 1927-28, Holabird & Root) provides an excellent example of an early modernist skyscraper done in a smaller scale. The building's stripped-down, symmetrical fa  ade reflects the aesthetic of the Ecole de Beaux Arts, of which both John Holabird and John Root, Jr. were students. The interior boasts the large mural of the United States by John Warner Norton mentioned above. In addition to the Palmolive Building, several other monumental Art Deco skyscrapers were completed in 1929, including the Civic Opera Building (20 North Wacker Dr., Graham, Anderson, Probst & White) and the Daily News Building (now Riverside Plaza; 400 West Madison, Holabird & Root). Like the Palmolive Building, these skyscrapers incorporated setbacks, elaborate lobbies and public spaces, abstracted ornament and exterior lighting, though the exterior forms were blockier.

While several Chicago skyscrapers built in the late 1920s still utilized more traditional massing solutions and ornamentation, many of these buildings also exhibited other characteristics attributed to Art Deco skyscraper style. The Carbide and Carbon Building (230 North Michigan Ave., 1928-29, D.H. Burnham & Company), although unremarkable in its base-with-tower massing, is distinguished in its bold color scheme of black with green and gold Terra Cotta. The Moorish and Assyrian ornament adorning the exterior of the Medinah Athletic Club was a bit lavish for a modernist skyscraper, however, the massing of the building is in keeping with other Art Deco skyscrapers of the period. As architectural historian Carl Condit notes in *Chicago, 1910-1929*, the limestone tower with its series of setbacks is "almost neutral in its simplicity."²⁶ The building also features low-relief sculptural panels on the exterior and a theatrically decorated lobby, both characteristics of Art Deco skyscrapers.

As the 1920s drew to a close, construction continued on those buildings begun before the stock market crash of October 1929. Among the most significant of these were buildings designed by Holabird and Root, which continued the Art Deco trend toward greater verticality and

²⁵ Ibid, 5.

²⁶ Condit, 172.

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simplification of exterior ornament. Among the more notable of these late skyscrapers in Chicago are the LaSalle-Wacker Building (221 North LaSalle Street, 1930, Holabird & Root), the One LaSalle Street Building (1930, K.M. Vitzhum & Company), and 100 North LaSalle (1930, Graham, Anderson, Probst & White). One of the final Art Deco skyscrapers to be completed in Chicago was Holabird and Root's Board of Trade Building. With its dramatic location at the terminus of LaSalle Street, deep setbacks and 30-foot statue of Ceres set atop the hipped roof of the tower, the Board of Trade is also considered one of the most significant examples of the Art Deco skyscraper in the city. The completion of the Field Building (now the LaSalle National Bank Building, 145 South LaSalle Street, Graham, Anderson, Probst & White), one of the largest and most stripped down of the Art Deco skyscrapers, in 1934, marked the end of the type in the city.

In the constellation of Chicago Art Deco skyscrapers, the Palmolive Building is neither the first, the last, or the tallest, but is distinguished by its design, location and setting. The building at 333 North Michigan, the LaSalle Wacker Building and One North LaSalle, for example, are more typical of the 1920s skyscraper form in Chicago. The Palmolive Building deviates from other examples of the type to present a more integrated design due in part to its unique setting at the top of Michigan Avenue. The site dimensions and location of the Palmolive Building enabled Holabird and Root to create a design in which all four facades are unusually integrated, in this case with undulating bays that create interest while emphasizing the vertical force. There is no other skyscraper in the city in which the setbacks required by zoning are more smoothly rendered. As such, it is considered a fully realized and mature example of the type.

Architects Holabird & Root

The Palmolive Building was one of several buildings along North Michigan Avenue designed by the Chicago-based architectural firm of Holabird & Root in the late 1920s. According to historian Robert Bruegmann, the Palmolive Building "can perhaps be considered the firm's most exemplary work of the late 1920's. Here, because there was an ample site and no tall neighbors to block the view, the architects created a nearly perfect expression of the high set-back skyscraper."²⁷ The firm was the successor to Holabird & Roche, whose nineteenth century commercial designs drew international attention. The successor firm was headed by John Holabird, William Holabird's son, and John W. Root, Jr., son of John Root, Sr. of Burnham and Root. The two young men met in Paris as students at the Ecole de Beaux Arts; Holabird had received a degree in engineering from West Point Academy in 1907, and Root had completed Cornell University's architecture program

²⁷ Robert Bruegmann, *Chicago History* (Fall, 1980)

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in 1909. Both Holabird and Root received their diplomas from the Ecole de Beaux Arts in 1913, and both returned to Chicago to work in the offices of Holabird & Roche.²⁸

After briefly serving in World War I, in 1919 John Holabird and John Root returned to Holabird & Roche. Upon their return, the two men began to take over control of the firm due to William Holabird's declining health and Martin Roche's disinterest in running the office. With the deaths of William Holabird in 1923 and Martin Roche in 1927, the younger Holabird and Root became the senior partners in the firm, and it was renamed Holabird & Root in 1928.²⁹

Records from the firm reveal the process through which Holabird & Root created some of its most well-known and influential designs in the late 1920s. John Holabird, following in his father's footsteps, generally made the initial contact with the client. From there, a series of detailed memos were sent to the heads of every department in the firm, describing the general parameters of the project. The design department was the first to work on a project; R.M. Cabeen, head of the department, would analyze the site, taking into account building regulations and other factors, and a rough plan and section of the building were laid out. These sketches were then sent to Gilbert Hall, one of Holabird & Root's chief designers. A visionary renderer, Hall essentially brought the building to life, determining much of its architectural structure and character. After being reviewed by the firm's mechanical and structural engineers, the design was sent to the drawing room to be made into working drawings. The firm's interior design department was also brought in at this stage to develop interior decoration for certain commissions.³⁰

During the mid-1920s—even before the firm became Holabird & Root—the work of the two young architects began to take on a more modern character and shaped the output of the firm until the Depression halted most construction in the 1930s. The zoning ordinance of 1923 encouraged new forms of skyscrapers; these new laws, combined with the setback skyscraper designs being built in New York City, influenced Holabird & Root's design approach. The firm drew particular inspiration from Eliel Saarinen's design for the Tribune Tower competition in 1922 and his proposal for the Chicago Lakefront in 1923.³¹ Both designs featured skyscrapers with streamlined forms, deep channels of windows, and series of setbacks—all of these elements were central to the new firm's designs, including that of the Palmolive Building.

²⁸ Werner Blaser, ed., *Chicago Architecture: Holabird and Root 1880-1992* (Basel; Boston, 1992), 68.

²⁹ John Zukowsky, ed., *Chicago Architecture and Design 1923-1993: Reconfiguration of an American Metropolis* (Munich, 1993), 464.

³⁰ Brueggemann, Vol. 1 (New York, 1991), xiii.

³¹ Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 13; Stamper, 146-7.

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The late 1920s and early 1930s were a period of great innovation for Holabird & Root, producing many of Chicago's best examples of Art Deco skyscraper style. One of the first designed by the firm was the Chicago Daily News Building, (Riverside Plaza, 400 West Madison Street, 1925-1929). The 23-story production and office building was built in air rights over Union Station's tracks.³² Although the building did not feature a tower, it did exhibit many of the elements that would be incorporated into later Holabird & Root designs. The firm followed with the design for 333 North Michigan Avenue, a 35-story commercial skyscraper completed in 1928. The building was directly influenced by Saarinen's design, and featured the characteristic setbacks, vertical emphasis, and abstracted ornamentation that was more fully explored in the Palmolive Building. Upon completion of 333 North Michigan, Holabird & Root moved the offices for the firm into the ninth and tenth floors. John Holabird and John Root occupied the two corner offices on the north side of the ninth floor.³³

In 1927, the same year they first began work on the Palmolive Building, Holabird & Roche also accepted the commission to design a new building to house the Chicago Board of Trade. The final design for the building featured a large rectangular base with an H-shaped plan in the center leading up to a narrow rectangle. Construction of the building was complete in 1930, and was greeted with much publicity. The streamlined, hard-edged form of the building, the dramatic setbacks and light well facing Jackson Street, the low-relief sculptural ornament, and the abstracted aluminum sculpture of Ceres set atop the roof made the Chicago Board of Trade building one of the most impressive in the city, as well as a fitting terminus for the financial corridor of LaSalle Street.³⁴ The design and construction of the Board of Trade and the Palmolive Building had occurred concurrently. During the time that they were designing the Board of Trade, Holabird and Root had shelved the 42-story version of the Palmolive Building and then taken it up again with a new design, which was completely built out before the Board of Trade was finally completed.

John Holabird and John Root continued to head the firm until Holabird's death in 1945. In 1948, Joseph Z. Burgee joined the firm, which was briefly known as Holabird, Root and Burgee. It was around this time that William Holabird II and John A. Holabird Jr. joined the firm.³⁵ The firm

³² Werner, 69.

³³ Brueggemann, Vol. 2, 405.

³⁴ Ibid, Vol. 3, 23-4, 37.

³⁵ Zukowsky, 464.

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continued to be known as Holabird and Root after the death of John Root in 1963, and has continued as one of the most successful architectural firms in the city of Chicago.

History and Development

The completion of the Palmolive Building in 1929 marked the culmination of a decade of rapid development along North Michigan Avenue, the city's new commercial boulevard. The area north of the Chicago River along the lake was first platted and subdivided in 1834, with Pine Street as its central street.³⁶ Many of Chicago's wealthy built large mansions along and near Pine Street, and soon the area had blossomed into a thriving residential center. The Chicago fire of 1871 leveled most of the area north of the river, with the exception of the Water Tower and Pumping Station, completed just three years before.³⁷ Construction began almost immediately after the fire across the city, and within five years, 100 new mansions stood along and around Pine Street again.

The tremendous growth of Chicago's commercial and business district south of the river in the last decades of the nineteenth century signaled that the area to the north could not remain residential. As early as the 1880s, many among the city's "commercial and industrial elite" were discussing the possibility of transforming Pine Street and Michigan Avenue into a great commercial thoroughfare.³⁸ As well as providing a new area of commercial expansion, the proposed boulevard would allow improved access to the burgeoning Gold Coast, a high-end residential area centered on the Potter Palmer mansion.

Interest in a Michigan Avenue thoroughfare continued through the first years of the twentieth century. By 1900, increasing traffic congestion along the river led to concerns over the existing traffic patterns created by the Rush Street Bridge. Built in 1884, the bridge handled over half of the north-south traffic in the city; bottlenecks and accidents were a daily occurrence.³⁹ In 1905, city officials again looked at the possibility of creating a bridge over the river at Michigan Avenue and widening the Avenue and Pine Street to the north. The proposal was temporarily abandoned, only to resurface within the 1909 Chicago Plan put forth by Daniel Burnham and Edward H. Bennett. Within four years, the City Council passed an ordinance for the widening of Michigan

³⁶ Ibid, xvi

³⁷ Ibid, xvii

³⁸ Ibid, 1

³⁹ Ibid, 4

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Avenue and Pine Street and the construction of a new bridge connecting the streets. The bridge and the widened avenue were finally completed by 1920.⁴⁰

Development along the new thoroughfare was almost immediate. Several impressive new skyscrapers—including the Wrigley Building (400 North Michigan Ave., 1919-24, Graham, Anderson, Probst & White), the London Guarantee and Accident Building (354 North Michigan, 1922-23, Alfred S. Alschuler) and the Chicago Tribune Tower (435 North Michigan Ave., 1923, Howells & Hood)—were constructed in the early 1920s around the Michigan Avenue Bridge, creating a gateway of sorts to the new commercial center.⁴¹ Commercial and business development along the avenue continued through the decade, pushing residents farther and farther northward. Although the majority of the new construction along the whole of the avenue consisted of commercial and office buildings, the northern end of North Michigan still saw relatively little of this development. Instead, large hotels like the Drake (140 East Walton Street, 1919, Marshall & Fox) and the Allerton (701 North Michigan, 1924, Murgatroyd & Ogden), as well as club buildings like the Medinah Athletic Club (505 North Michigan, 1927-29, Walter W. Ahlschlager) were built to take advantage of the area's proximity to both the Loop and North Side neighborhoods.⁴² Also, there was uniformity to the development, brought about by Burnham's vision of creating a great boulevard lined with buildings of a similar height and cornice line.

Into this setting, the Palmolive-Peet Company in 1927 commissioned the Palmolive Building as the first tall office building to be built at the northern end of North Michigan Avenue. Begun as the B.J. Johnson Soap Company in Milwaukee in 1864, the Palmolive Company was incorporated in 1916. In 1923, the company relocated its headquarters to Chicago, obtaining offices in the London Guarantee Building. The company held manufacturing plants in Milwaukee, Kansas City, Mexico City, and Toronto, as well as several in Europe, South America and Australia.⁴³ After a merger with the Peet Brothers Manufacturing Company early in 1927, the company began searching for new offices. The success of commercial and business developments along North Michigan Avenue prompted the company to purchase a half-block parcel at the southeast corner of Walton Place and Michigan Avenue as the site for their new headquarters building. The lot was part of a

⁴⁰ Ibid, 15; Commission on Chicago Landmarks, *Landmarks Designation Report: Palmolive Building, 919 North Michigan Avenue* (Commission on Chicago Landmarks and the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, 1999), 15

⁴¹ Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 2

⁴² Willis, 127; Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 17.

⁴³ Al Chase, "Plan Huge Palmolive Tower Across from Drake Hotel," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 July 1927, sec. 3:1.

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larger parcel owned by contractor Henry Paschen, architect Walter Ahlschlager, and others, who had planned to erect a Ritz Hotel on the site.⁴⁴

Original plans were for a 42-story building to be built in increments over a number of years, beginning with five floors. After a merger with the Colgate Corporation in 1928, the Palmolive-Peet Company decided to build a revised 37-story, 468-foot structure to ensure adequate space for the newly expanded company and potential tenants.⁴⁵ Foundation work began on the building in March 1928, and construction continued through the winter of 1928-29. Conditions on the site were far from ideal:

Located on the edge of Lake Michigan, the Palmolive Building presented a perfect target for the zero [degree] winds that came tearing down over the 360-mile open stretch of water to the north. Under these conditions, working upon the scaffolds was impossible, and men working upon open floors were often lashed to beams to prevent them from being blown overboard. It was impossible to hoist steel or stone, and then on calm days men had to employ blow torches to melt away snow and ice.⁴⁶

Despite these difficulties, work continued on schedule, and the Palmolive Building was substantially completed in April 1929 and occupied by June. Brochures published by the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company for the building's opening emphasized its excellent location, claiming that "Modern business men, jealous of the hours they now waste yearly in city transportation, will welcome this opportunity to work near their homes, live near their offices."⁴⁷ The distance between North Michigan Avenue and the Loop was also a major selling point for potential tenants who wanted to get away from the congestion and pollution of downtown. Henry J.B. Hoskins summed up the appeal of the Palmolive's North Michigan Avenue address in a 1929 *Architectural Forum* article:

With the advantage of rapid transportation to all parts of the city, the exhilaration of clear skies, and the close proximity to the delightful residential centers, it is not

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Willis, 125.

⁴⁶ Hoskins, 730.

⁴⁷ *The Palmolive Building: North Michigan Avenue at Walton Place, Chicago*, Promotional brochure, 1929 (located at the Chicago Historical Society), 4.

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remarkable that the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company should erect a towering landmark as a distinctive termination to the north side gateway of Chicago.⁴⁸

In keeping with the new boulevard's up-scale profile, the Palmolive Building offered small, high-rent office spaces on the lower floors and executive spaces on the upper floors. The more modest offices could be leased to smaller businesses, while large firms could rent entire floors. This new layout, as opposed to the large loft spaces offered by many of the older commercial buildings in the Loop, projected an image of the Palmolive Building as a modern, distinguished business space.

The Palmolive Building's prestigious location, along with its modern design, drew large numbers of upscale tenants. In addition to the eight floors occupied by Colgate-Palmolive-Peet, well established and high profile businesses like Kaiser Aluminum, the Celotex Corporation, Lord & Thomas advertising agency, and Esquire Magazine held offices within the building.⁴⁹ An examination of a list of tenants in a 1930 promotional brochure reveals that the majority of the tenants were advertising agencies, publishers, insurance agencies and real estate offices. One of Palmolive's largest tenants was Commonwealth Edison—the company signed a 50 year lease to use the building's sub-basement as an electrical substation. The Palmolive continued to maintain a high rate of occupancy; a 1943 Chicago Tribune article reported that the occupancy rate had averaged 90% since the building's completion.⁵⁰ Even in the midst of the Great Depression, a period when many commercial buildings in Chicago experienced high vacancy rates, the Palmolive Building enjoyed an 88% occupancy rate.⁵¹

The cache of the Palmolive Building increased in 1930, when the two-billion candlepower Palmolive Beacon was finally installed for use as a navigational guide for airplanes. Supported by the 150-foot steel and aluminum mast built to withstand winds of up to 100 miles per hour, the beacon helped to make the Palmolive Building a landmark in the city's skyline.

The idea of placing a beacon atop one of Chicago's skyscrapers had originated with Edward N. Hurley, who became chairman of the organizing committee for the 1933-34 Century of Progress Exposition. Hurley convinced the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company to install the beacon, which

⁴⁸ Hoskins, Henry J. B., "The Palmolive Building, Chicago: Holabird and Root, Architects," *Architectural Forum* 52 (May 1930), 655.

⁴⁹ Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 9.

⁵⁰ Al Chase, "Big Palmolive Sold to Chicagoans," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 September 1943 (newspaper clipping file on 919 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago Historical Society).

⁵¹ Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 9.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section: 8 Page: 24

Name of property: Palmolive Building
County and State: Cook County, IL

was a gift from Elmer Sperry of the Sperry Gyroscope Company in Brooklyn. The beacon was lighted for the first time in August 1930, by a switch thrown by the President of the United States in a highly publicized event. The beacon was originally named for aviator Charles Lindbergh. When Lindbergh failed to accept the honor, it was officially renamed the Palmolive Beacon, although it is still commonly called by its original name.⁵² The beacon consisted of a carbon-arc light that revolved through the skyline every 30 seconds, and a second, fixed beam that pointed toward the municipal airport to direct planes. The high-intensity carbon lamps were incredibly bright—according to one account, light from the beacon was visible from an aircraft flying 500 miles away at an altitude of 43,000 feet.⁵³ Because these carbon lamps burned out at an extremely fast rate, workers had to monitor the beacon around the clock to make sure that it didn't go out. According to a promotional brochure on the beacon published around 1960, the annual operating budget for the beacon included three full-time electricians. The machine shop at the base of the mast provided for emergency repairs and regular maintenance.⁵⁴ The beacon was extinguished during World War II for security reasons, and re-lighted in 1944 with a new light. As the area around the Palmolive Building developed, the beacon began to become a nuisance to residents of neighboring high-rises. In 1968, the beacon was partially shielded to prevent it from shining directly into the windows of nearby buildings. The beacon was finally removed from the Palmolive Building in 1988; the aluminum and steel tower that supported it remains on the building and will soon support a refurbished 1944 beacon.⁵⁵

⁵² Bruegmann (Vol. 2), 422

⁵³ Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 5.

⁵⁴ *A Close-Up of the Palmolive Beacon: Palmolive Building, Chicago*, Promotional brochure c. 1962 (Palmolive pamphlet file, Chicago Historical Society).

⁵⁵ Saliga, p141.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section: 8 Page: 25

Name of property: Palmolive Building
County and State: Cook County, IL

In 1934, the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company moved its general offices from the Palmolive Building to Jersey City, New Jersey. The company retained ownership of the building until 1943, when it was sold to the 919 Corporation.⁵⁶ The Palmolive Building changed hands twice more in the 1950s, and was leased by Hugh Hefner in 1965 to house the offices for Playboy Magazine.⁵⁷ As a result of this lease, a remodeling of the first and second levels, part of the basement, and floors three through fifteen was undertaken. Another renovation was undertaken in 1982 by the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; the remodeling included a new design for the two-level retail base that reintroduced elements from the original Holabird & Root design.⁵⁸ Despite these changes to the lower level, the Palmolive Building retains and represents an important design of Holabird and Root. This design best exemplifies characteristics of the Art Deco skyscraper that are not otherwise represented in Chicago.

⁵⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, 14 September 1943 (newspaper clipping file on 919 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago Historical Society).

⁵⁷ "Tell Palmolive Building Sale," *Herald American*, 5 March 1950; *Chicago Sun-Times*, 13 December 1958 (title unknown); Maggie Daly, "Hefner Taking Over Palmolive Building," *American*, 24 April 1965. All of these articles were taken from the newspaper clipping file on 919 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago Historical Society.

⁵⁸ William Marlin, "That Palmolive Look," *Inland Architect* 26 (May/June 1982), 8.

Palmolive Building

Name of Property

Cook, Illinois

County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

☐ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☒ Local government

☐ University

☒ Other

Name of repository

Commission on Chicago Landmarks; Chicago Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property **Less than 1 acre**

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

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
------	---------	----------	------	---------	----------

1	16	448250	4638630	3	_____
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2	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
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☐ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section: 9 Page: 26

Name of property: Palmolive Building
County and State: Cook County, IL

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section: 9 Page: 27

Name of property: Palmolive Building
County and State: Cook County, IL

A Close-Up of the Palmolive Beacon: Palmolive Building, Chicago. Promotional brochure c. 1962 (Palmolive pamphlet file, Chicago Historical Society).

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section: 9 Page: 28

Name of property: Palmolive Building
County and State: Cook County, IL

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section: **10** Page: **29**

Name of property: Palmolive Building
County and State: Cook County, IL

10. VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Palmolive Building is located at the southeast corner of North Michigan Avenue and East Walton Place, on Lots 23 through 31, excluding lot 25, of Block 13 of the Original Town of Chicago in Sections and 9 and 10, Township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian, all in Cook County, Illinois .

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The above described lot constitutes the property historically associated with the Palmolive Building. The building fills the lot to the lot lines on all sides.

Palmolive Building
Name of Property

Cook, Illinois
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title **Susan Baldwin and Lara Ramsey**

organization **Baldwin Historic Properties** date **2/01/2003**

street & number **233 East Wacker Drive, #410** telephone **312/228-0707**

city or town **Chicago** state **IL** zip code **60601**

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:
Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

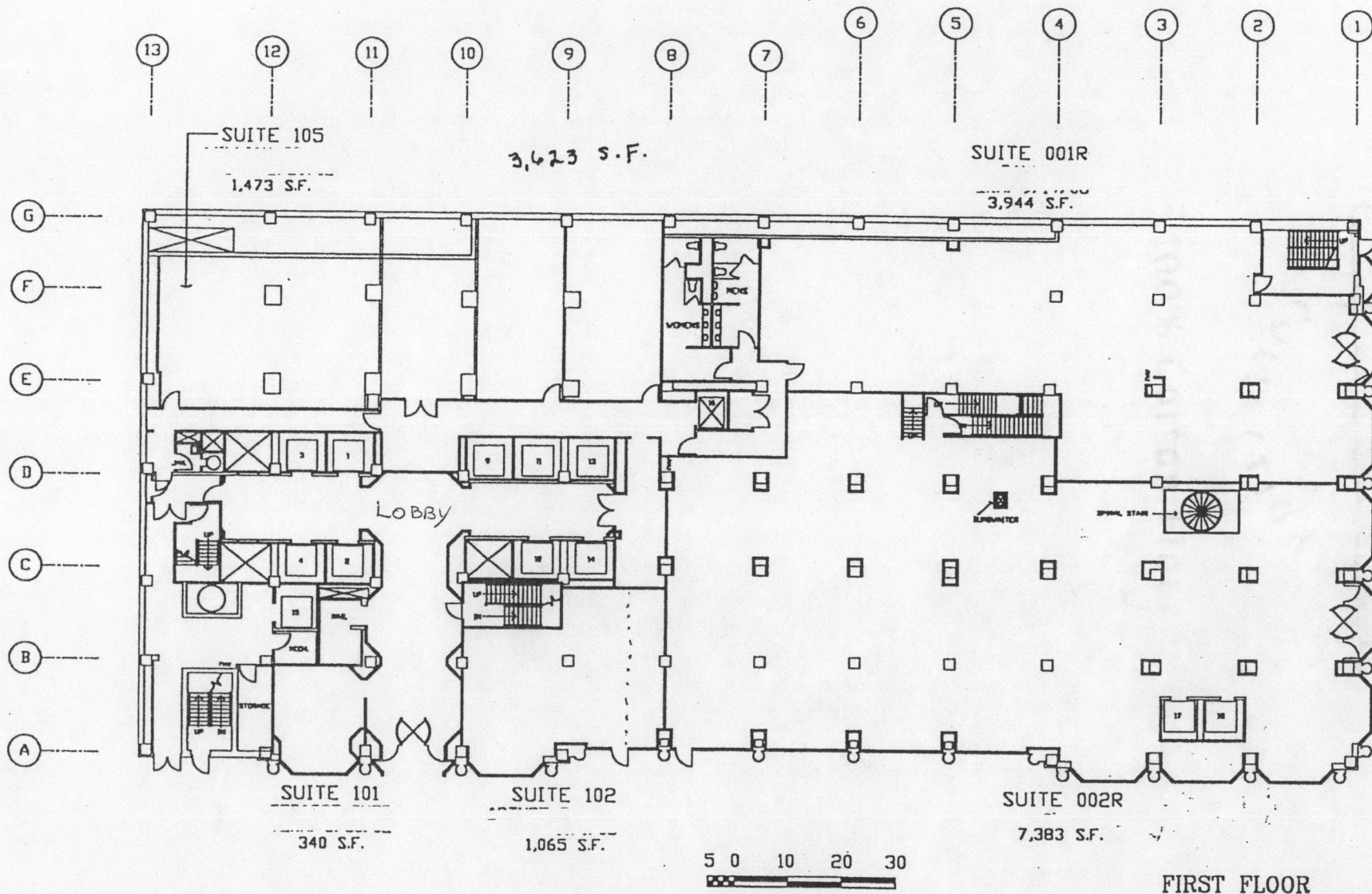
name **Draper and Kramer, Inc. L.L.C.**

street & number **33 West Monroe, Suite 1900** telephone **312/795-2377**

city or town **Chicago** state **IL** zip code **60603**

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

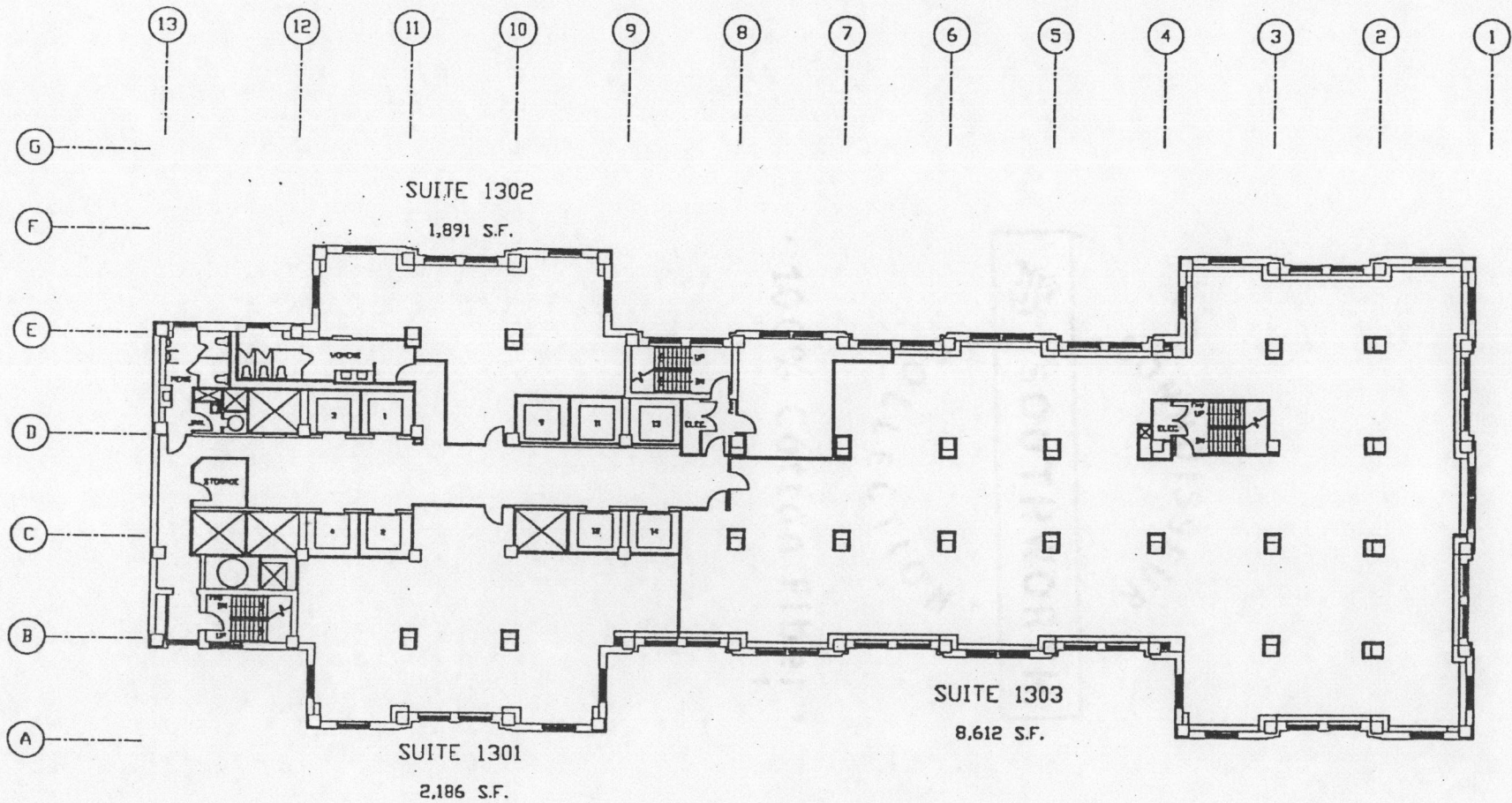


Original Floor Plans
© Purchase Date

PALMOLIVE BUILDING

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DRAPER AND KRAMER
INCORPORATED



5 0 10 20 30

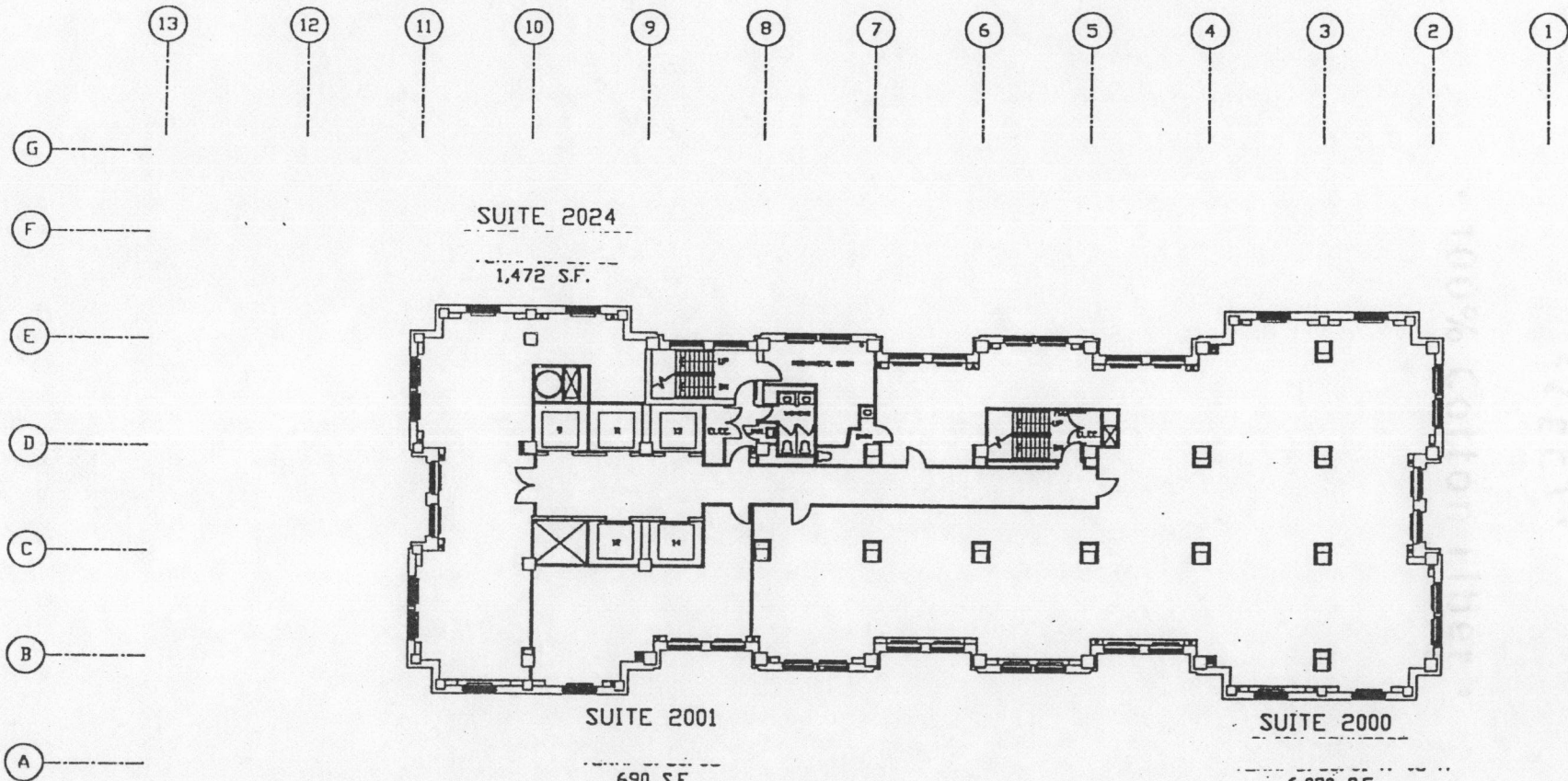


THIRTEENTH FLOOR

TYPICAL BASE
FLOORPLAN

2 - 17

PALMOLIVE BUILDING
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
DRAPER AND KRAMER
INCORPORATED



TWENTIETH FLOOR

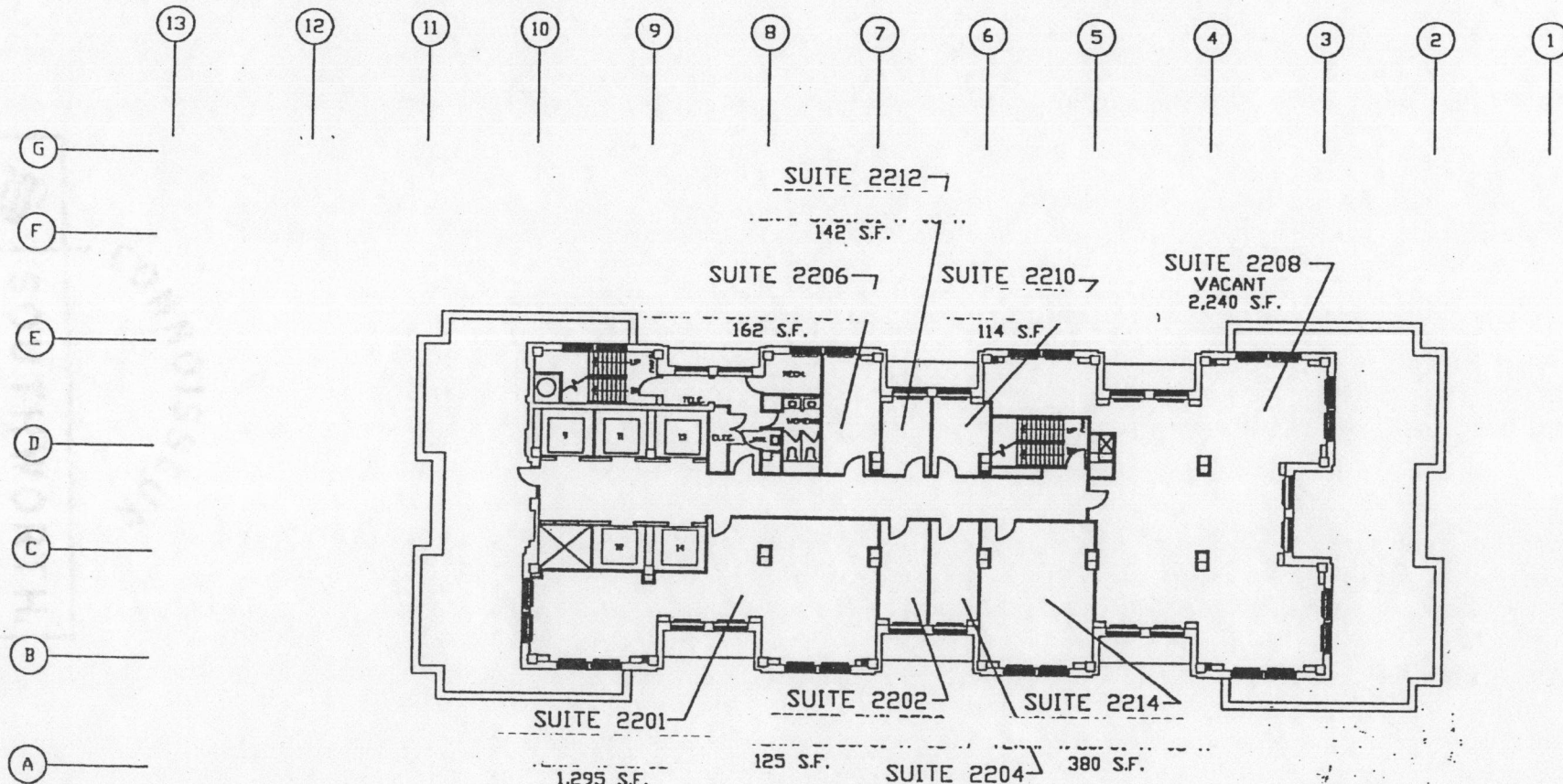
TYPICAL TOWER
FLOOR PLAN

18-21

PALMOLIVE BUILDING

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DRAPER AND KRAMER
INCORPORATED



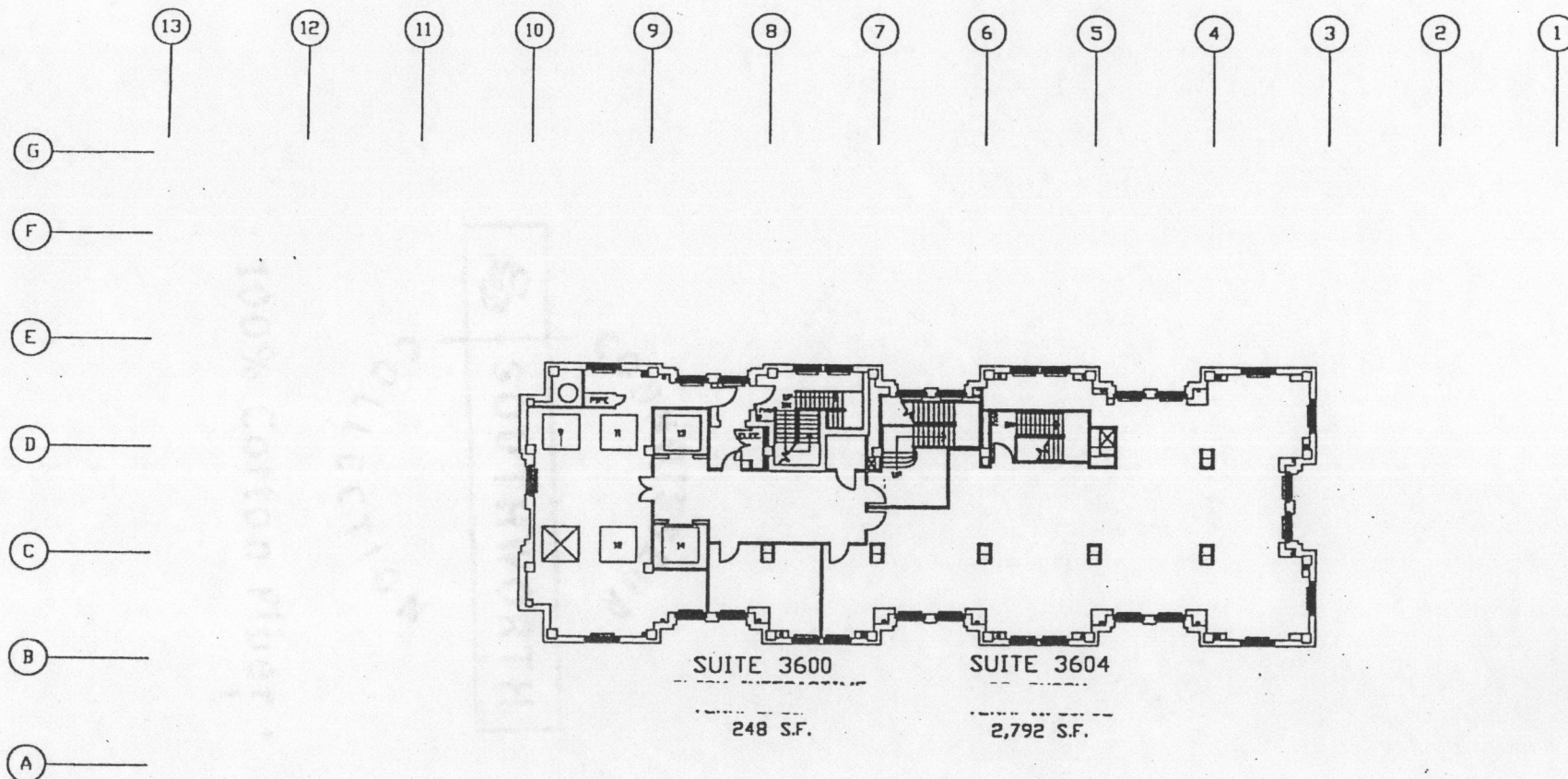
TWENTY-SECOND FLOOR

TYPICAL TOWER
FLOOR PLAN
22 - 34

PALMOLIVE BUILDING

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DRAPER AND KRAMER
INCORPORATED



THIRTY-SIXTH FLOOR

TOWER FLOORPLAN
35-36

PALMOLIVE BUILDING

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DRAPER AND KRAMER
INCORPORATED

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Palmolive Building

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ILLINOIS, Cook

DATE RECEIVED: 7/07/03 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/23/03
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/08/03 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/21/03
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 03000784

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 8/21/03 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.

2. COOK CO., IL.

3. S. BALDWIN

4. 2/03

5. 233 E. WACKER, CHICAGO, IL.

6. NORTH ELEV. LOOKING SW

7. (2)



PALMOLIVE



BUILDING
LANDMARK
RESIDENCES

(312) 397-1590

(312) 397-1590 • CHICAGO'S FINEST LIVING LANDMARK •

1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO., IL.
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WACKER, CHICAGO, IL.
6. N. ELEV. LOWER FLOORS,
LOOKING SE
7. (3)



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO, IL.
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WALKER, CHICAGO, IL.
6. SPANDREL DETAIL
7. ⑥

PHOTOGRAPH <##> 018
225228* N N-1-5-022044)



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO., ~~IL~~
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WA
6. EAST ELEV., UPPER STORIES
7. (8)



1. PALM OLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO, IL.
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WACKER, CHICAGO, IL.
6. S. ELEV., UPPER STORIES
7. (12)



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO, IL.
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WALKER DR, CHICAGO, IL.
6. LOBBY, ELEVATOR DOOR PANELS
7. (14)



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.

2. COOK CO, IL.

3. S. BALDWIN

4. 2103

5. 233 E. WACKER, CHICAGO, IL.

6. LOBBY, STAIRS

7. (15)



1. PALM OLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO., IL.
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WACKER DR, CHICAGO, IL
6. ~~██████████~~ 5TH FL, ELEVATOR LOBBY
LOOKING NE
7. (16)



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO, IL.
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WACKER, CHICAGO, IL.
6. TYPICAL CORRIDOR, LOOKING W
7. (17)



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO, IL
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WACKER, CHICAGO, IL
6. 37TH FL., EXEC. SUITE
7. (19)



1. PALMOLIVE BLDG.
2. COOK CO, IL
3. S. BALDWIN
4. 2/03
5. 233 E. WACKER DR., CHICAGO, IL.
6. 37TH FL., EXEC. SUITE, W. RM.
7. (20)

Missing Core Documentation

Property Name
Palmolive Building

County, State
Cook, Illinois

Reference Number
03000784

The following Core Documentation is missing from this entry:

☐ Nomination Form

☒ Photographs (Photo #1, 4-5, 7, 9-11, 13, 18)

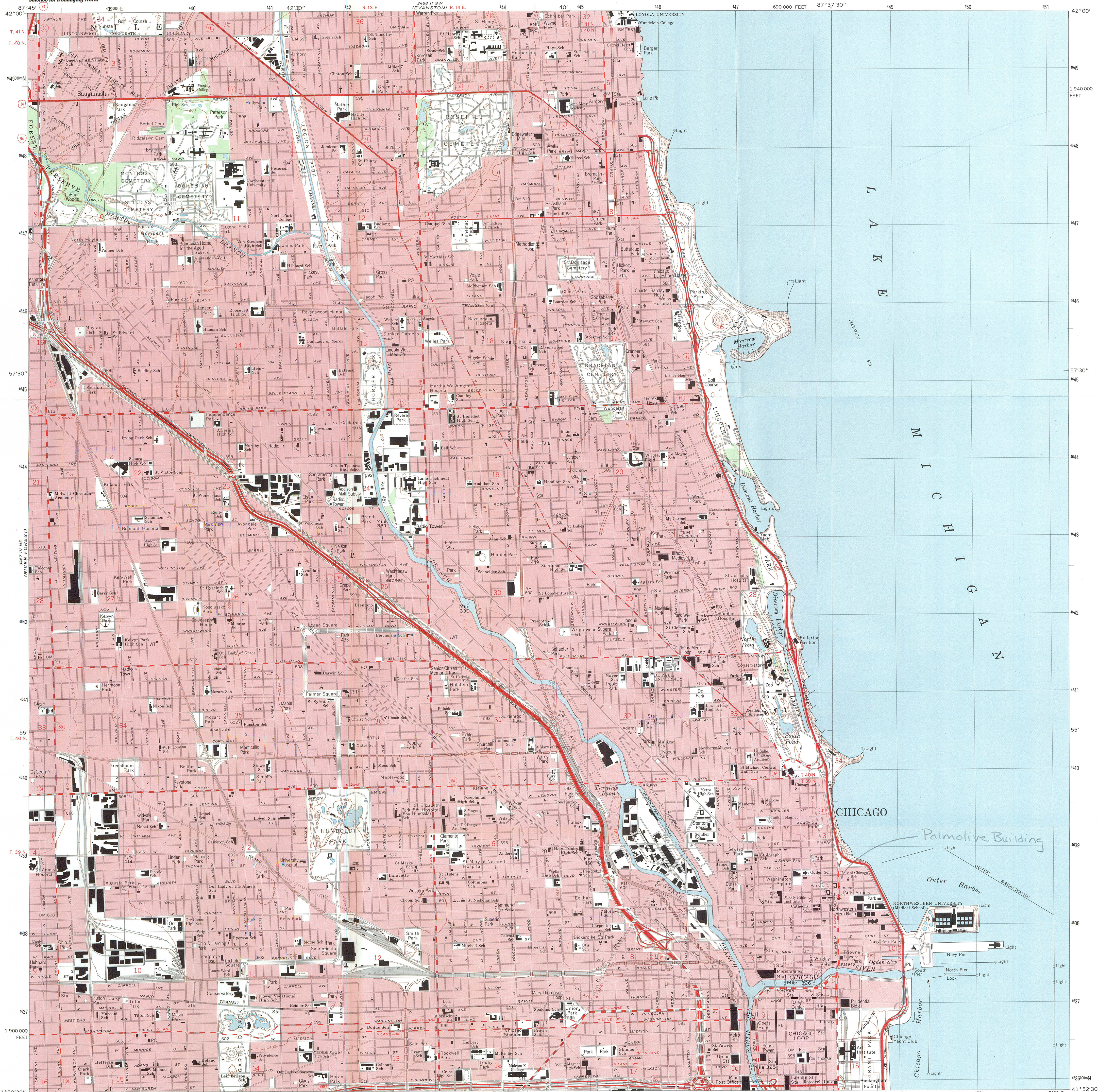
☐ USGS Map

3467 10 SE
(PARK RIDGE)



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

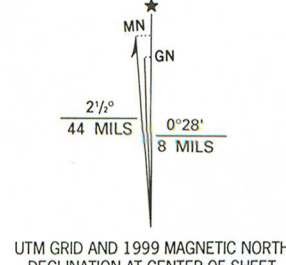
CHICAGO LOOP QUADRANGLE
ILLINOIS-COOK CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Derived from imagery taken 1988 and other sources. Photomaps using imagery taken 1997; no major culture or drainage changes observed. PLSS and survey control current as of 1992.
Boundaries, other than corporate, verified 1999.

North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 10 000-foot ticks: Illinois coordinate system, east zone (transverse Mercator).
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 16.

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software.



SCALE 1:24 000
CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
AND ILLINOIS GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS 61820
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, hard surface
Secondary highway, hard surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route
U. S. Route
State Route

CHICAGO LOOP, ILL.

1997

NIMA 3467 1 NW-SERIES V863

1919 North Michigan Ave
Palmolive Building
Cook County, IL
Zone 16
E 448250
N 4638630



138N 0-607-41716-4
9 780607 417161



City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning
and Development

Alicia Mazur Berg
Commissioner

Suite 1600
33 North LaSalle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60602
(312) 744-3200
(312) 744-9140 (FAX)
(312) 744-2578 (TTY)

<http://www.cityofchicago.org>

May 8, 2002

Tracey A. Sculle
Survey & National Register Coordinator
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
1 Old State Capitol
Springfield, IL 62702

Re: **Chicago nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for**

- **Armour Square, 3309 S. Shields Ave.**
- **Davis Square, 4430 S. Marshfield Ave.**
- **Calumet Park, 9801 S. Avenue G**
- **Palmolive Building, 919 N. Michigan Ave.**
- **William H. Reid House, 2013 S. Prairie Ave.**
- **"Land Subdivisions with Set Aside Parks, Chicago, Illinois"**
- **Multiple Property Documentation form**
- **Washington Square Historic District**

Dear Ms. Sculle:

This is in response to your letters of March 12 and 31, 2003, to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and Mayor Richard M. Daley asking for the City's comments on the nominations of the properties referenced above to the National Register of Historic Places. As a Certified Local Government (CLG), the City of Chicago is given the opportunity to comment on local nominations to the National Register prior to their being considered by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council.

At its regular meeting of May 1, 2003, the Commission voted unanimously to endorse the National Register listings for all seven nominations. The Commission found that:

- both **Armour Square** and **Davis Square** meet Criteria A and C for their national significance as part of the innovative plan of the South Park Commission in 1903 to create small neighborhood parks with recreation programs and social services in working-class Chicago neighborhoods;
- **Calumet Park** meets Criteria A and C for its local significance as a locally significant component of the South Park Commission's 1903 expansion program;
- the **Palmolive Building** meets Criterion C as one of Chicago's finest Art Deco-style skyscrapers designed by Holabird and Root, a noted Chicago architectural firm; and that
- the **William H. Reid House** meets Criterion C as a significant local example of Classical Revival-style architecture;
- the **"Land Subdivisions with Set Aside Parks, Chicago, Illinois"** Multiple Property Documentation Form meets Criteria A and C,





Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

1 Old State Capitol Plaza • Springfield, Illinois 62701-1507 • (217) 782-4836 • TTY (217) 524-7128

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Richard M. Daley, Mayor of the City of Chicago
Brian Goeken, Landmarks Division, Department of Planning and
Development

FROM: Amy Easton, Assistant Coordinator, National Register and Survey *AE*

DATE: March 10, 2003

SUBJECT: Preliminary Opinion on the Palmolive Building, Chicago, Illinois

The Palmolive Building is a good candidate for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The building qualifies for its local significance under Criterion C, for architecture. Its period of significance is 1929, the year it was built. The Palmolive building was designed for the Palmolive-Peet Company by Holabird & Root, a Chicago architectural firm known for sophisticated designs of Art Deco skyscrapers. The Palmolive Building is distinguished from other Art Deco skyscrapers in Chicago by a series of setbacks that continue up the building on all sides and create a more unified exterior. The building is a good local representative of the Art Deco style and maintains sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register.