

**APPLICATION**  
**LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION**

1. Name of Property Nissen Building and Addition
2. Owner's Name Downtown Winston-Salem Foundation  
& Address 101 N. Main Street, Room 158  
Winston-Salem, NC 27101  
Attn: Jack Steelman
3. Property Location 310-314 West Fourth Street  
Winston-Salem, NC 27101
4. Acreage 0.76 acres
5. Interior To Be  x  Yes   No  
Designated
6. Tax Block(s): 0078 Tax Lot (s): 001N, 000B, 000C

*Please complete the following information on continuation sheets*

7. When was the structure erected? For Whom? (If you don't know the exact date, please give a general time frame.) Have there been additions or modifications? If so, describe and give dates.
8. Do you know the names of any of the craftsmen who worked on the structure? (i.e., architects, carpenters, contractors, landscape designers, etc.) Do any architect's plans or building accounts exist? Where?
9. Do you have any old photographs of the structure? If so, do you know the dates of the photographs?
10. How has the building been passed down through the years, from whom to whom? (i.e., a quick chain of title)
11. What was the structure's original use, if different from today? Has the building ever been moved? List the sources of your information.
12. What is the significance of this property? (Please be specific and to the point.) Include a list of sources for your information.
13. Describe the architecture and present condition of the structure, also including any outbuildings or other appurtenant features to be included in the designation. If the property has been restored, what were the dates of restoration? Was the restoration done under the supervision of any historic preservation organization? If the property has not been restored, is any restoration planned for the property?
14. Is the property listed in any existing architectural or historical survey (i.e., the National Register of Historic Places)? If so, please give the title and date of the listing.

*In addition to the written application, the following materials must be submitted simultaneously:*

- a black and white 8" x 10" overall photograph clearly depicting the property being designated
- color slides showing all sides of the main structure and any outbuildings (may include architectural details, interior and exterior, which add to the property's significance)
- a tax map showing the location of the property, including any outbuildings and appurtenant features

*(Please label the above materials with the name of the property owner)*

**APPLICATION FEE \$50.00 (Check payable to Forsyth County)**

The following information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Date 1/27/03

DOWNTOWN WINSTON-SALEM FOUNDATION

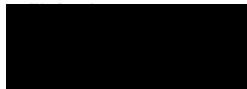
Stewart B. Long Security  
Signature of Property Owner

Mailing Address:

Downtown Winston-Salem Foundation

101 N. Main Street, Room 158

Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101



7. When was the structure erected? For Whom? (If you don't know the exact date, please give a general time frame.) Have there been additions or modifications? If so, describe and give dates.

The Nissen Building was built in 1926 for William Madison Nissen, owner of Nissen Wagon Works. The ground floor facade and in particular the Fourth Street entrance were remodeled following acquisition of the property by Charles P. Ryan (Charan Corporation) in 1964. The multi-tenant office space on the interior of the building was also refurbished at this time. Most of the marble wainscoting and translucent glass in the public corridors, as well as the original mahogany doors to the tenant spaces, were removed. When the principal ground floor lease space was rented to First Union Bank in 1968, additional facade changes were implemented, including the existing pebble aggregate flat arch bays wrapping around the 1st floor of the Fourth and Cherry Street facades. A one-story addition to the west of the tower was built in 1969, connected to the tower through an interior public corridor, which remains in place today.

In 1982, following acquisition of the property by Boone & Company and BRIC, Inc. (a wholly owned subsidiary of Boone & Company) the building and the addition were remodeled to accommodate the new owner and to facilitate leasing. According to local sources and the State Historic Preservation Office, this scope of work, done subsequently to the Nissen Building's inclusion on the National Register, was a Tax Act project.

8. Do you know the names of any of the craftsmen who worked on the structure? (i.e. architects, carpenters, contractors, landscape designers, etc.) Do any architect's plans or building accounts exist? Where?

William L. Stoddart was the Architect of the Nissen Building. Stoddart also designed the O'Henry Hotel in Greensboro, the Hotel Charlotte, The Virginia Dare Hotel in Elizabeth City and the Hotel Goldsboro. The Hunkin-Conkey Construction Company of Cleveland, Ohio, was awarded the construction contract for the building in January of 1926. T. C. Nash was the resident superintendent. Excavation for site preparation was done by the Powell Paving Company of Winston-Salem.

The Inspections Division of the City of Winston-Salem has a copy of the original plans for the building in its archives file.

9. Do you have any old photographs of the structure? If so, do you know the dates of the photographs?

The current owner has access to a number of historic photos - some dating to during and just after construction of the historic tower. Copies of sample photos are attached for review.

10. How has the building been passed down through the years, from whom to whom? (i.e., a quick chain of title)

William M. Nissen, the original owner, died in 1934; his wife, Ida, retained control of the property until her death in 1954. In 1964, the Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, the executor of the will of Ida Wray Nissen, sold the property to Charles Ryan/Charan Corporation following an extended legal battle with the Nissen heirs over the terms and conditions of the sale. In June of 1982, Boone & Company, an actuarial and employee benefit consulting firm, purchased the building from the Charan Corporation. Boone & Company and its assets were later acquired by the AON Insurance Company. AON sold the property to Wake Forest University on August 13, 1999 who in turn sold the property to B. B. & T. on the same day, as part of a land swap arrangement that also involved acquisition of property from B. B. & T. by the 1st Presbyterian Church, which now owns the remainder of Block 78. In December of 2002, B. B. & T. donated the Nissen Building and Addition to The Downtown Winston-Salem Foundation, the current owner of the property.

11. What was the structure's original use, if different from today? Has the building ever been moved? List the sources of your information.

The Nissen Building was originally built, in its existing location, as a multi-tenant office building with ground floor and basement commercial space, and a penthouse apartment residence for the building's owner. See the attached National Register nomination for additional information.

(Please note that the Addition was not referenced in the original Nomination Form. However, in reviewing the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, it states that "Parts of the buildings... cannot be considered...independent from the rest of the building. The whole building must be considered...". The 1986 National Register Bulletin states, "Count as one any building constructed as a single unit even if later added to or divided to form multiple units." The 1991 National Register Bulletin states, "Count a building or structure with attached ancillary structures, covered walkways, and additions as a single unit unless the attachment was originally constructed as a separate building or structure and later connected. Since the Addition was connected to the Nissen Building by a public corridor at the time of its construction, the Nissen Building and Addition should be treated as a single unit. Therefore, the current owner will submit an amendment to the Part I Application requesting that the Addition also be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.)

12. What is the significance of this property? (Please be specific and to the point.) Include a list of sources for your information.

The significance of the Nissen Building is as follows:

- A. The Nissen Building is associated with the boom period of the 1920s in Winston-Salem when the tremendous wealth generated by tobacco, textile and other industries enabled businessmen and others to finance and build elaborate skyscrapers and other commercial buildings.
- B. The Nissen Building is associated with the life of William M. Nissen. Nissen's great-grandfather was a wagon-maker in the Moravian settlement of Salem, N.C., and his father founded the famous Nissen Wagon Works in 1834. William M. Nissen owned and operated the Nissen Wagon Works until 1924.
- C. The Nissen Building is the work of New York architect William L. Stoddard whose other commissions in North Carolina included the O'Henry Hotel in Greensboro, the Hotel Charlotte, and the Hotel Goldsboro. The Nissen Building embodies the distinctive characteristics of the eclectic skyscrapers of the 1920s. The Nissen Building was the tallest edifice in North Carolina at the time of its construction.

See the attached National Register nomination for additional information.

13. Describe the architecture and present condition of the structure, also including any outbuildings or other appurtenant features to be included in the designation. If the property has been restored, what were the dates of restoration? Was the restoration done under the supervision of any historic preservation organization? If the property has not been restored, is any restoration planned for the property?

See attached National Register nomination for the architectural description. Presently the Nissen Building and Addition are in good physical condition. It is fairly weather tight, has utility services, and operating elevators. The ground floor facade has been altered in 1965 and again in 1968, as described in the attached National Register nomination, however the remainder of the exterior is largely unaltered. A tax act rehabilitation was done in the 1980's, and in the 1990's structural remediations were performed on corroded columns on the outside corners of the building. On the interior of the building, very little of the original build-out remains due to numerous retrofits for tenants over the years. The Downtown Winston-Salem Foundation is in the process of conducting due diligence investigations to facilitate the preservation and adaptive reuse of the building in accordance with the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Historic Rehabilitation.

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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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

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received _____
date entered _____

## 1. Name

historic Nissen Building

and/or common First Union Building

## 2. Location

street & number 310 West Fourth Street \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Winston-Salem \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state North Carolina code 037 county Forsyth code 067

## 3. Classification

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

## 4. Owner of Property

name Booke & Company and BRIC, Inc. (A wholly-owned subsidiary of Booke & Co.)

street & number 710 Coliseum Drive

city, town Winston-Salem \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state North Carolina

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Forsyth County Hall of Justice, Register of Deeds

street & number Main Street

city, town Winston-Salem \_\_\_\_\_ state North Carolina

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

From Frontier to Factory, An  
Architectural History of Forsyth County has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1981 \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state  county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records N. C. Division of Archives and History

## 7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Nissen Building stands on the corner of Fourth and Cherry Streets in the heart of Winston-Salem's retail and office district. It has been a prominent feature on Winston-Salem's skyline since its construction in 1926 by William M. Nissen on the site of the former Y.M.C.A. When constructed the Nissen Building was said to be the tallest building in North Carolina. It was designed by William L. Stoddart of New York City, who applied to the skyscraper form such Neo-classical design motifs as a modillioned cornice, balustrades, urns, and a grand office entrance featuring a full entablature with cable molding, rosettes, dentil molding and a cartouche.<sup>1</sup> The Nissen Building's first-story facade and much of the interior were altered in the 1960s, but the alterations did not reduce the building's significance to Winston-Salem's commercial district as a monumental reminder of the exuberant growth of the Twin Cities in the 1920s.

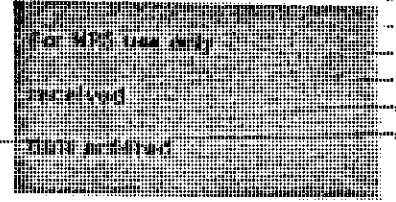
With the exception of the Reynolds Building, a magnificent Art Deco structure, Winston-Salem's early skyscrapers reflected the national trend to retain time-honored and traditional decorative motifs on areas such as facades and entrances.<sup>2</sup> This fusion of decorative devices was termed eclecticism. Architects relied on the ancient composition of the Classical column for the basic form--base, shaft, and capital--of the skyscraper.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Nissen Building's first three floors originally included a Neo-classical entranceway and an exterior finish of limestone, granite, and ornamental ironwork composing the "base" of the column. From this base, the building rose to the thirteenth floor with a finish of buff-faced brick punctuated by rows of windows to form the "shaft" of the column. Finally, the uppermost floors, or the "capital," were finished with limestone and details such as urns and modillions.<sup>3</sup> Although not identical, the Wachovia Building, the O'Hanlon Building, the Robert E. Lee Hotel and the Carolina Hotel all echoed this base, shaft, and capital idea. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that modern architects disdained eclecticism and began to practise the theory that "less is more," or the less decoration and relationship to classical motifs, the better.

W. L. Stoddart, the architect for the Nissen Building, was from New York, but he was no stranger to North Carolina. Stoddart designed the O'Henry Hotel in Greensboro, the Hotel Charlotte, the Virginia Dare Hotel in Elizabeth City, and the Hotel Goldsboro.<sup>4</sup> He designed the Nissen Building with two parallel towers divided by a setback which begins above the second floor. He provided in the original plans for the possibility of a third tower to be built later, if necessary.<sup>5</sup> The construction contract for the building was awarded to the Humkin-Conkey Construction Company of Cleveland, Ohio, and T. C. Nash was the resident superintendent of the project. The contract was awarded in January, 1926, and the building was to be completed by December 1, 1926. A January 31, 1926 newspaper article stated that: "Ground has already been broken for the new building and the work of excavation is in charge of the Powell Paving Company of Winston-Salem. This work will be completed by the middle of February and the actual construction of the eighteen-story structure will begin immediately."<sup>7</sup>

The Nissen Building is the only skyscraper in Winston-Salem to have two parallel towers separated by a set-back. The first three floors are faced with limestone and backed with twelve inches of brick; the third through tenth floors are faced in brick backed with eight inches of terra cotta tile, and the thirteenth through eighteenth floors are faced with limestone and backed with eight inches of brick.<sup>8</sup> The original

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architectural drawings show that the street level was occupied by retail establishments which featured large display windows of polished plate glass with cast iron frames and ornament on a base of polished granite. On Fourth Street in the west tower stood the grand office entrance with three large bronze doors surrounded by a classical entablature of carved limestone. The words "NISSEN BUILDING" were inscribed in bronze above the door.

\* Most of the street level details were altered when Charles P. Ryan (Charan Corporation) of New York purchased the building in 1964.<sup>9</sup> By March, 1965:

Contractors, working mostly at night, have removed many of the ornate touches to the 38-year old structure in downtown Winston-Salem. Their aim has been to create a more modern, efficient office building to compete with others here for tenants. One of the most noticeable changes is in the Fourth Street entrance to the busy building.<sup>10</sup>

The ornate, Neo-classical entrance and decorative bronze grillwork were removed from the Fourth Street entrance, and chrome and glass replaced it. In 1968 Ryan leased the ground and first floors to First Union Bank, which again altered the street-level facade of the building. First Union added a series of thirteen flat-arched bays containing tinted plate glass windows around the Cherry and Fourth Street facades. With the exception of the street-level changes, however, the exterior of the Nissen Building remains as it was constructed in 1926.

The third floor of the Nissen Building is sheathed in limestone and is separated from the brick shaft of the building by a belt course of patera and rosettes. Spanning the space between the two towers at the third floor level is a balustrade with turned balusters. Fenestration is rhythmic, consisting of a pair of windows--a single window--a pair of windows, and is repeated in both towers up to the thirteenth story. At this level the building again becomes sheathed in limestone and the windows are spaced evenly across the Cherry and Fourth Street facades with pilasters separating each bay. Above these two stories hangs a modillioned cornice, and above this cornice the final floors of the building are set back and have chamfered corners. The building's southern facade is unornamented except for rows of windows.

When the building was constructed W. M. Nissen did not complete the interior of the top 10 floors, with the exception of the eighteenth, which housed an apartment in the eastern tower for him and his wife, Ida, and office space in the western tower.<sup>11</sup> The interior of the finished office space up to the eighth floor contained marble and glass corridors. As one newspaper article reported during the alterations of 1964:



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A total of 19,270 square feet of marble and about 12,000 square feet of glass is being removed from the corridors... As a replacement of the marble and glass is metal lathes and plastering...

Office doors of dark mahogany and translucent glass will be replaced by solid wooden flush doors of a light hue. Metal plates of a uniform size will be affixed to doors to identify tenants.<sup>12</sup>

Very little of the original office interior finish remains in the Nissen Building. Reminders of the grandeur of the original interior finish include the ornate bronze doors of the first floor elevators, a marble staircase which begins on the first floor, marble walls in some of the restrooms on the office floors, and black marble surrounding the elevator lobby on the eighteenth floor.

The unfinished floors of the Nissen Building were large spaces which could be arranged at will. Only the elevators and bathrooms were permanently placed. In 1942 the Nissen Building's space was needed by the Civil Service Administration for a regional office and the upper floors were completed for this purpose. Government offices continued to occupy the upper floors until the 1960s.

William and Ida Nissen maintained a luxurious apartment on the eighteenth floor which was housed in the eastern tower of the building and occupied the entire floor of this wing. W. M. Nissen died on August 14, 1934, but his widow continued to live in the apartment until her death on October 26, 1954.<sup>13</sup> According to visitors who remember the Nissen's apartment, there was a living room along the south (or back) of the tower, and a kitchen and large dining room occupied the west side of the apartment. A hall went from the back of the building to the front, along which were bedrooms and a den. At the end of the hall was a room which Mrs. Nissen is said to have called her "north parlor." From this room one could see the mountain ranges north of Winston-Salem as well as Pilot Mountain.<sup>14</sup> After Mrs. Nissen's death the top floor was renovated for office space and eventually was occupied by the National Labor Relations Board.<sup>15</sup>

Even though interior alterations have removed most of the 1920s interior finish in the Nissen Building, the building's significance and architectural character remain strong. The structure retains most of its exterior detailing which is a reminder of the exuberant and highly significant period of the 1920s in Winston-Salem; it remains one of the most prominent features of the Winston-Salem skyline; and it is associated with the Nissen family, one of the most important families in Winston-Salem's history.

✓ In June, 1982, Boone & Company, an actuarial and employee benefit consulting firm, purchased the building from Charan Corporation. The company plans to refurbish and occupy the building's top eight floors, and First Union Bank will continue to occupy its present space on the first and second floors.

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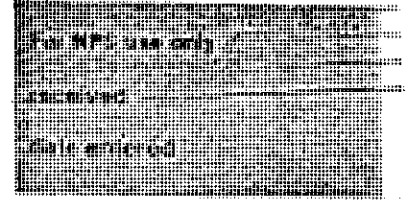
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## Architectural Footnotes

- 1  
William L. Stoddart, architectural drawings, Nissen Building, Winston-Salem, N.C., 1927, in possession of Newman, Calloway, Johnson, Winfree, Winston-Salem, N.C., hereinafter cited as Stoddart, drawings.
- 2  
Daniel M. Mendelowitz, A History of American Art (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., second edition), 1982, 339.
- 3  
Stoddart, drawings.
- 4  
Author's interview with Charlotte Brown, architectural historian, July 27, 1982 (notes on interview in possession of author), hereinafter cited as Brown interview.
- 5  
Winston-Salem Journal, "Contract is Awarded for the New Nissen Building," January 31, 1926, hereinafter cited as Journal, January 31, 1926.
- 6  
Journal, January 31, 1926.
- 7  
Journal, January 31, 1926.
- 8  
Stoddart, drawings.
- 9  
Charles P. Ryan to Charan Corp., June 30, 1964, Forsyth County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Forsyth County Hall of Justice, Winston-Salem, Book 884, 420. (NOTE: In 1964 Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, executor of the will of Ida Wray Nissen, sold the building to Charles Ryan after an extended legal battle with the Nissen heirs over the terms and conditions of the sale.)
- 10  
Sentinel (Winston-Salem), "Work on Building Nears Completion," March 27, 1965.
- 11  
Winston-Salem City Directory (Asheville: Commercial Service Co., 1929), 633, hereinafter cited as City Directory with appropriate year.

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Winston-Salem Journal, "Nissen Building Is Being Modernized," August 2, 1964, hereinafter cited as Journal, August 2, 1964.

13

Winston-Salem Journal, "Mrs. Nissen Dies Here; Rites Today," October 26, 1954; Will of William Madison Nissen, Forsyth County Wills, Film 1216, 994, Forsyth County Hall of Justice, Winston-Salem; Will of Ida Wray Nissen, Forsyth County Wills, Film 496, 728, Forsyth County Hall of Justice, Winston-Salem.

14

Hope Wray Howell interview with Wade Nissen Wray, nephew of Ida Wray Nissen, July 30, 1982 (notes on interview in possession of the author); Winston-Salem Journal, "Once Tallest," July 4, 1982, hereinafter cited as Journal, July 4, 1982.

15

Journal, July 4, 1982.

## 8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1926

Builder/Architect William L. Stoddart

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Nissen Building, an eighteen-story skyscraper in downtown Winston-Salem, was built by William Madison Nissen, former owner of the Nissen Wagon Works in Winston-Salem. Designed by New York architect William L. Stoddart, the Nissen Building stands as a reminder of the great boom period of the 1920s in Winston-Salem.<sup>2</sup> It remains a prominent feature in the Winston-Salem skyline and a monument to the Nissen family's important role in the development of present-day Winston-Salem.

### Criteria Assessment

- A. The Nissen Building is associated with the boom period of the 1920s in Winston-Salem when the tremendous wealth generated by tobacco, textile and other industries enabled businessmen and others to finance and build elaborate skyscrapers and other commercial buildings.
- B. The Nissen Building is associated with the life of William M. Nissen. Nissen's great-grandfather was a wagon-maker in the Moravian settlement of Salem, N.C., and his father founded the famous Nissen Wagon Works in 1834. William M. Nissen owned and operated the Nissen Wagon Works until 1924.
- C. The Nissen Building is the work of New York architect William L. Stoddart whose other commissions in North Carolina included the O'Henry Hotel in Greensboro, the Hotel Charlotte, and the Hotel Goldsboro. The Nissen Building embodies the distinctive characteristics of the eclectic skyscrapers of the 1920s. The Nissen Building was the tallest edifice in North Carolina at the time of its construction.

William M. Nissen's background is inextricably interwoven with the history of Salem, Winston, and the combined city of Winston-Salem. On September 10, 1770, Tycho Nissen, William's great-grandfather, arrived in Salem, N.C., and by February, 1771, Tycho Nissen was sent to the Moravian settlement of Bethania to learn the wagon-making trade from Brother Transou.<sup>3</sup> Wagon making, however, was not Tycho Nissen's only role in the Moravian settlements of North Carolina. He served as a lay minister at the Friedland Moravian settlement, keeper of God's Acre (Moravian graveyard) in Salem, carver of gravestones, nightwatchman, clerk in the Salem Community Store, maker of clay pipes, roadmaster, and member of the Aufseher Collegium (Salem's governing board). Tycho Nissen married Maria Salome Meurer in 1775, and they had four children. Nissen died in 1789.<sup>4</sup>

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On March 12, 1813, John Philip Nissen was born to John Christian, Tycho's son. When John Philip was twenty-one years old, he followed in his grandfather's footsteps and entered the wagon-making business. He built a small shop in Waughtown, a settlement immediately south of Salem, in 1834. By 1835 he hired Daniel Clodfelter of Davidson County as a blacksmith, and also in that year he married Mary Elizabeth Vawter.<sup>5</sup> John P. Nissen and Mary Elizabeth had twelve children, and several of the sons, notably George E., William M., Christian Francis (Frank), John Israel, and Samuel Jacob, were active in the wagon-making trade. John Philip's wagon business thrived in Waughtown, and he named it for his oldest son, George E. Nissen. After the Civil War, George E. and William M. Nissen took over their father's business. John Philip Nissen died in 1874.<sup>6</sup>

In 1898 William M. Nissen married Ida Wray of Reidsville. They had two children, George W. and Richard.<sup>7</sup> In 1910 William purchased the interest of his brother, George, in the wagon making business, and by 1911 he had also purchased the J.I. Nissen Wagon Works begun by his brother, John Israel. William then consolidated the entire operation under the name of George E. Nissen and Co. with his sole ownership.<sup>8</sup>

At the peak of production, the Nissen Wagon Works produced 10,000 wagons a year.<sup>9</sup> A history of the Nissen family states somewhat proudly that: "Before Winston-Salem came into national prominence as the tobacco metropolis of the world, it was widely heralded as the home of the Nissen wagon."<sup>10</sup> Nissen wagons superficially resembled the famous Conestoga wagon, yet there were several differences. The Nissen wagons were intended for general light duty in the transportation of people as well as goods, whereas the Conestoga was a considerably heavier vehicle intended to carry only goods and farm produce. At the front end of the Nissen wagon was a box on which a driver and a passenger could sit.<sup>11</sup> A brochure from the George E. Nissen company in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century advertised wagons such as "Mountain, Low Wheel. Running Gear; Farm Wagon with Straight Frame Bed; and Wide Track One-Horse Farm Wagon with Brake."<sup>12</sup> Due to the Piedmont terrain in which they were primarily used, most of the Nissen wagons were built with forty-two and fifty-two inch wheels.<sup>13</sup>

In 1919 a fire destroyed the main building of the George E. Nissen Wagon Works on Waughtown Street, but William M. Nissen rebuilt the plant.<sup>14</sup> According to Nissen's obituary, his health began to fail in 1924, and he sold the wagon works in 1925.<sup>15</sup> Local tradition maintains that he sold the business for close to one million dollars, some of which he used to construct the Nissen Building in 1926. The Nissen Wagon Works continued manufacturing wagons under its new management until 1948.<sup>16</sup>

William M. Nissen decided to construct a skyscraper for downtown Winston-Salem, and he purchased the site of the YMCA at Fourth and Cherry Streets in 1924 for that purpose. Although there does not appear to be any overriding reason for Nissen's desire to build a skyscraper, he probably did so out of a combination of civic pride and a desire to take advantage of the business boom of the first quarter of the 20th century in Winston-Salem. In 1911 Wachovia Bank had built Winston's first skyscraper, followed by E.W. O'Hanlon's building in 1915, and the Robert E. Lee Hotel in 1921. By 1926 Nissen apparently had decided to build for Winston-Salem one of the tallest and most elaborate office edifices in the State and to give it his family's name.

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Nissen retained William L. Stoddart, an architect from New York City, to design his new building. Stoddart was familiar to North Carolina since he had designed such buildings as the O'Henry Hotel in Greensboro, the Hotel Charlotte, the Virginia Dare Hotel in Elizabeth City, and the Hotel Goldsboro.<sup>17</sup> Stoddart's plan for the eighteen-story skyscraper called for polished plate glass display windows on the ground floor surrounded by iron frames with pilasters and a polished granite base. The doors on the Fourth Street elevation were bronze with ornate grilles above them, and the office entrance to the building was to have three massive bronze doors within a Neo-classical limestone frame bearing the words "NISSEN BUILDING" in bronze.<sup>18</sup>

It was to be a grand building on a scale befitting the optimism and success that the 1920s brought to Winston-Salem. The building's original cost was \$1.5 million, and that included finishing the interior of only the first eight floors and Nissen's apartment on the eighteenth floor.<sup>19</sup> An editorial written the day after W.M. Nissen died in 1934 said of the Nissen Building:

Out of his courage, his faith, his vision--out of the money which came from the turning of wagon wheels on the farms of Carolina, arose a structure of architectural beauty as a symbol of Winston-Salem's calm faith in her future and the security of her destiny--a building that remained for sometime as the tallest edifice in the State--'The Nissen Building.'<sup>20</sup>

Winston-Salem did feel "secure in her destiny" in the early 20th century, and the building record for those years proves it. The years between 1910 and 1930 reflected a marked change in the architectural character of downtown Winston-Salem. The architectural symbol of American society in the early twentieth century--the skyscraper--had arrived.<sup>21</sup> Art historian Daniel Mendelowitz has stated aptly that the early twentieth century was the era of "bigness": "Technological advances whetted the taste for bigness....With steel to carry the load, with the inflated cost of land, and with the invention of the elevator, the multi-storied building became inevitable."<sup>22</sup> So it was in Winston-Salem where the "race for the sky" started in 1911 with the city's first metal-frame skyscraper--the seven-story Wachovia Bank Building on the corner of Third and Main Streets. In 1915, E.W. O'Hanlon erected his eight-story building on the corner of Liberty and Fourth, and in reply the Wachovia Bank added another story to its 1911 building to create a "tie." The Hotel Robert E. Lee on the corner of Fifth and Marshall outdid them all, however, with its twelve-story edifice erected in 1921. W.M. Nissen continued the trend in 1926 with the eighteen-story Nissen Building, which was followed by the eleven-story Carolina Hotel in 1928. R. J. Reynolds climaxed the "competition" with the beautiful twenty-two-story Reynolds Building in 1929.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the skyscrapers of the 1920s, the County Courthouse and City Hall were erected in 1926, and large church edifices were built. First Baptist was erected in 1924, Augsburg Lutheran in 1926, St. Leo's Catholic in 1928, St. Paul's Episcopal

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in 1929, and Centenary Methodist from 1929-1931.<sup>24</sup> Large period houses such as those designed by Philadelphia architect Charles Barton Keen proliferated on the outskirts of Winston-Salem in the 1920s, as many families in Winston-Salem amassed wealth from the booming tobacco and textile industries, among others. In 1929, however, when the stock market crashed, the building boom faded, not to recur until after World War II.<sup>25</sup>

W. M. Nissen's skyscraper, built on the eve of the depression and in competition with other skyscrapers and office buildings, had difficulty filling its office space. According to J. T. Greene, a long-time barber in the Nissen Building and a friend of George Nissen, William's son: "Old man W. M. (Nissen) never did rent it all...And he died thinking he was going to lose the building."<sup>26</sup> In an interview in the 1960s George Nissen recalled that as many as a quarter of the building's finished offices in the first eight floors were vacant in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup>

The Nissen Drug Co. was among the retail establishments in the building which remained a long-time tenant. The drug company was listed in a 1928 City Directory along with other tenants of the building including the Warner Hat Shop, real estate and insurance companies, dentists, physicians, attorneys, and the North-Eastern Construction Company.<sup>28</sup> By 1929 the retail establishments on the ground floor of the Nissen Building included the Nissen Oriental Shoppe, Gladys Lingerie Shoppe, Warner Hat Shop, Nissen Drug Company and the Nissen Building Barber Shop. Floors two through eight held the usual insurance companies, real estate companies and professionals.<sup>29</sup> In 1931 tenants included the Belcher-Forlaw Shoe Company, and the Bob-O-Link Golf Course which had moved into the basement.<sup>30</sup>

The building remained partially rented until 1942 and World War II. In 1942 the U.S. General Services Administration moved a regional office of the Civil Service Administration into the Nissen Building, as well as the Army Air Corps' newly-created Office of Flying Safety. The upper floors were completed, and during the war years the building was popularly dubbed "Fort Nissen."<sup>31</sup> Even after the war the U.S. Government continued to be the building's largest tenant, and the regional Veterans' Administration office moved in and stayed until 1966.<sup>32</sup> The eighteenth floor, however, continued to contain the Nissen's apartment in the east tower of the building. William M. Nissen died in 1934, but his wife, Ida, lived in the apartment until her death in 1954.<sup>33</sup>

Even though the Nissen Building was not an early success financially, it has been a sentimental favorite among Winston-Salem residents since its construction. William M. Nissen's vision of Winston-Salem as a progressive city and his willingness to finance and promote that view won him a special place in the hearts of Twin City residents. Not only did he build a magnificent skyscraper for the city, but he also aggressively supported the highly-important 1926 campaign to widen the streets of Winston-Salem. This was a top priority of city leaders at the time, and a front page headline of February 15, 1926 stated: "NISSEN TO SET BIG SKYSCRAPER BACK FIVE FEET."<sup>34</sup> The article went on to say that:

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"The move of Mr. Nissen is believed by many property owners to be one of the most important actions taken in the city for wider streets. It means the elimination of a sixty-foot building line so far as the largest office building in North Carolina is concerned..."<sup>35</sup> First Presbyterian Church sold Nissen a two-to-four foot strip of land south of the building site so that the skyscraper could be set back.<sup>36</sup>

The importance of W. M. Nissen and his building to Winston-Salem is evident in the editorial written in 1934 after Nissen's death:

But not in the making of wagons alone went the spirit and the genius of W.M. Nissen. He was a man of superb courage. He was unexcelled in his faith in Winston-Salem. His vision beheld here on the Piedmont hills a great city-- the home of industry, religion and culture.<sup>37</sup>

The editorial also stated that the Nissen Building "...was to stand as his monument. It was to be his contribution toward the building of a nobler city, even as the Nissen wagon had been the contribution of the Nissens to the upbuilding of North Carolina."<sup>38</sup>

While the editorial in 1934 expressed great affection for the man and his vision, the fact that another editorial memorializing the Nissen Building appeared in 1964-- thirty years later--makes an even stronger statement about the importance of this building to Winston-Salem. When Charles Ryan (Charan Corp.) purchased the building in 1964 there was great sentiment to keep the name "Nissen Building."<sup>39</sup> The editorial pleaded that the building had been part of the city's personal as well as economic life:

We have had our teeth filled there, our bunions treated and our hair cut. We have bought insurance, real estate, Easter bonnets and hearing aids there; received legal<sup>40</sup> advice, tax assistance and medical examination.

The new owner of the building was welcomed in the editorial, but he was also admonished that Twin Citians "...still can't help hoping that he will leave us the old Nissen name."<sup>41</sup> First Union Bank was a major tenant under Charles Ryan's ownership, however, and the building has been called the "First Union Building" since the late 1960s.

In 1982 Booke & Company, an actuarial and employee benefits consulting firm, purchased the Nissen Building with plans to renovate the tenth through eighteenth floors for its offices. First Union will remain in the building. The building will play a vital role in Winston-Salem's downtown revitalization under Booke & Company's ownership. William M. Nissen probably would be pleased that his faith in the future of downtown Winston-Salem finally has paid off.



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## Significance Statement

### Footnotes

1

Roxie Sides, "The Tycho Nissen Family," typewritten manuscript, undated, Archives of the Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, Winston-Salem, N.C., 2, hereinafter cited as Sides, "Nissen Family."

2

William L. Stoddart, architectural drawings, Nissen Building, Winston-Salem, N.C., 1927, in possession of Newman, Calloway, Johnson, Winfree, Winston-Salem, N.C., hereinafter cited as Stoddart, drawings.

3

Sides, "Nissen Family," 1.

4

Sides, "Nissen Family," 2.

5

Sides, "Nissen Family," 2.

6

Sides, "Nissen Family," 2.

7

History of North Carolina, North Carolina Biography (Chicago, Lewis Publishing Co., 1919), IV, 61, hereinafter cited as N.C. Biography.

8

Winston-Salem Journal, "Death Claims W.M. Nissen At Home Here," August 14, 1934, 1.

9

Sides, "Nissen Family," 2.

10

Roxie Sides, "The Nissen Family, Wagon History," typewritten manuscript, undated, Archives of the Moravian Church in America, Southern Province, Winston-Salem, N.C., hereinafter cited as Sides, "Wagon History."

11

George Shumway and Howard C. Frey, Conestoga Wagon, 1750-1850 (York, Pa.: George Shumway, Third Edition 1968), 243-256, hereinafter cited as Shumway and Frey, Conestoga Wagon.

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12.

George E. Nissen and Co., ca. 1910 advertisement, Bill East Collection, Winston-Salem, N.C.

13

Sides, "Wagon History."

14

Sides, "Nissen Family," 2.

15

Winston-Salem Journal, "Death Claims W.M. Nissen At Home Here," August 14, 1934.

16

Sides, "Nissen Family," 2.

17

Author's interview with Charlotte Brown, architectural historian, July 27, 1982 (notes on interview in possession of author), hereinafter cited as Brown interview.

18

Stoddart, Drawings.

19

Winston-Salem Journal, "Nissen Building To Be Air Conditioned," September 4, 1960.

20

Winston-Salem Journal, "W.M. Nissen," August 15, 1934, 8.

21

Daniel M. Mendelowitz, A History of American Art (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., second edition, 1970), 343, as cited in Gwynne S. Taylor, From Frontier to Factory (Winston-Salem: City-County Planning Board, second edition, 1982), 58, hereinafter cited as Mendelowitz, American Art and Taylor, Frontier to Factory.

22

Mendelowitz, American Art, 259 in Taylor, Frontier to Factory, 58.

23

Larry E. Tise, Building and Architecture (Winston-Salem: Historic Winston, 1976), 43, as cited in Gwynne S. Taylor, From Frontier to Factory (Winston-Salem: City-County Planning Board, Second Edition, 1982), 58, hereinafter cited as Tise, Building and Architecture in Taylor, Frontier to Factory.

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24 Tise, Building and Architecture, 43 in Taylor, Frontier to Factory, 58.

25 Taylor, Frontier to Factory, 58.

26 Winston-Salem Journal, "Once Tallest," July 4, 1982.

27 Winston-Salem Journal, "Once Tallest," July 4, 1982.

28 Winston-Salem City Directory (Asheville: Commercial Service Co., 1928), XXV, 1112, hereinafter cited as City Directory with appropriate date.

29 City Directory, 1929, 1084:

30 City Directory, 1931, 1073-74.

31 Winston-Salem Journal, "Once Tallest," July 4, 1982; Winston-Salem Journal, "Tenants Quit Nissen, Reynolds Buildings—Reasons Differ," June 26, 1966.

32 Winston-Salem Journal, "Once Tallest," July 4, 1982.

33 Winston-Salem Journal, "Mrs. Nissen Dies Here, Rites Today," October 26, 1954.

34 Winston-Salem Journal, "Nissen To Set Big Skyscraper Back Five Feet," February 15, 1926, hereinafter cited as Journal, February 15, 1926.

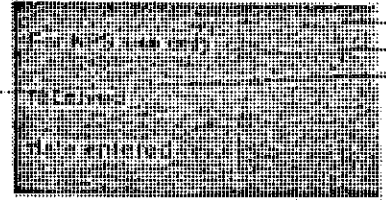
35 Journal, February 15, 1926.

36 Journal, February 15, 1926.

37 Winston-Salem Journal, "W. M. Nissen," August 15, 1934, hereinafter cited as Journal, August 15, 1934.

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Journal, August 15, 1934.

39

Charles P. Ryan to Charan Corp., June 30, 1964, Forsyth County Deeds, Office of the Register of Deeds, Forsyth County Hall of Justice, Winston-Salem, Book 884, 420. (NOTE: In 1964 Wachovia Bank and Trust Co., executor of the will of Ida Wray Nissen, sold the building to Charles Ryan after an extended legal battle with the Nissen heirs over the terms and conditions of the sale.)

40

Sentinel (Winston-Salem), "The Nissen Building--Then and Now," June 25, 1964, hereinafter cited as Sentinel, June 25, 1964.

41

Sentinel, June 25, 1964.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Continuation Sheets)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Winston-Salem East

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

1	7	5	6	7	1	7	6	3	9	9	4	2	0	8
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

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G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Tax Block 78, Lot 2N, Forsyth County Tax Maps

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

state N/A code county N/A code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gwynne S. Taylor

organization Preservation Consultant

date 9-7-82

street & number 827 Westover Avenue

telephone 919-725-9000

city or town Winston-Salem

state N.C. 27104

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*William S. King*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date February 7, 1983

For NPS use only

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

date

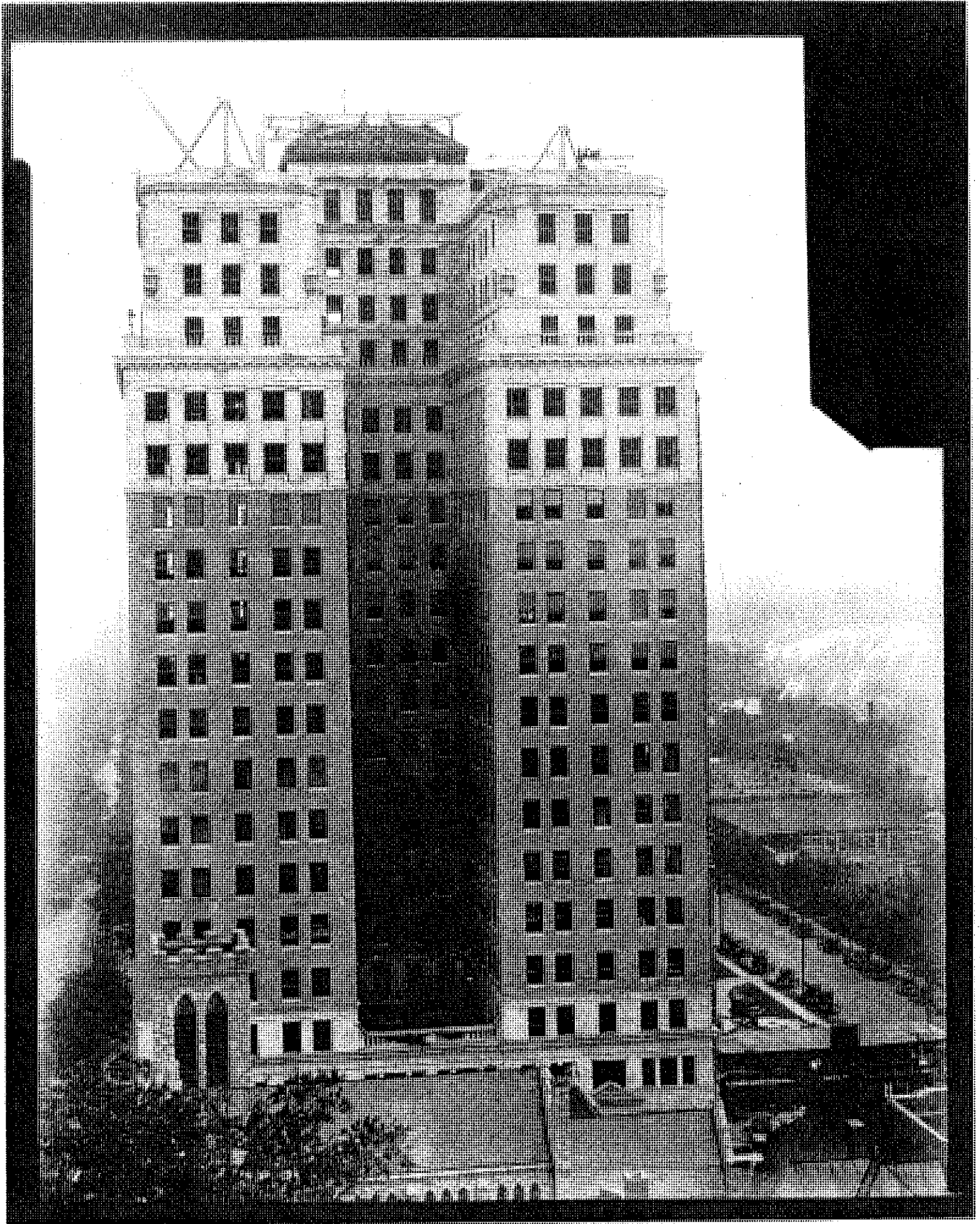
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date



Downtown W-S Foundation  
Nissen Bldg. and Addition



Downtown W-S Foundation  
Nissen Bldg. and Addition



**Downtown W-S Foundation  
Nissen Bldg. and Addition**



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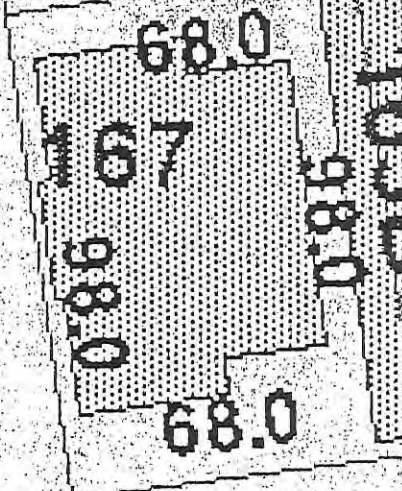
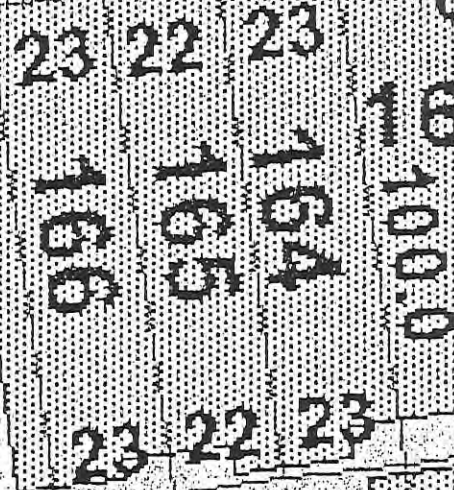
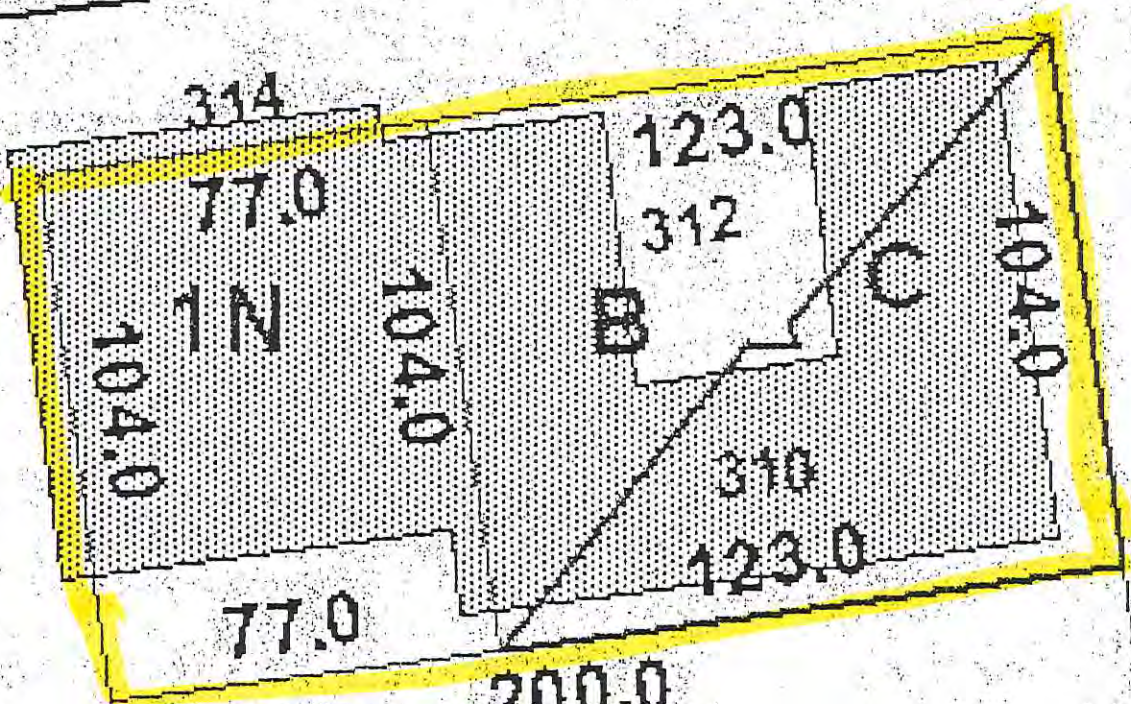
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