

ROST JEWELRY COMPANY BUILDING  
25 North Illinois Street  
Indianapolis  
Marion  
Indiana

HABS No. IN-216

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49-IND,  
41-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Mid-Atlantic Region, National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

THE ROST JEWELRY COMPANY  
(Commercial Building)

HABS No. IN-216

Location: 25 North Illinois Street; the south half of Lot 3,  
City Square 55; Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana.

Present Owner: City of Indianapolis,  
Department of Metropolitan Development,  
148 East Market Street; Indianapolis, Indiana

Present Occupant  
and Use: Vacant

Significance: The Rost Jewelry Company had conducted business at this location since 1910 in an 1887 commercial building. In 1947-48 the jewelry company extensively remodeled and enlarged the building into one of the best preserved vignettes of Art Deco retail design remaining in Indianapolis. The architect of the remodeling, Philip A. Weisenburgh, was a gifted Art Deco designer who previously has worked for the Rubush and Hunter architectural firm. It is believed that Weisenburgh is also responsible for the 1937 design of the H. P. Wasson and Co. Department Store a block away ("Washington Street Retail Mall Project: Inventory of Properties Declared Eligible or Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places," Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, April 29, 1980, p.5, typewritten, unpublished).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The Rost Jewelry Company Building (to be referred to below as the Rost Building) was remodeled in 1947-48, from an 1887 commercial building.
2. Architect: Indianapolis architect Philip A. Weisenburgh designed the remodeling and enlargement in 1946-47. (Rubush & Hunter Collection, Architectural Archives, Indiana Historical Society.) The creation of the Rost Building is documented in the architectural drawings of architect Philip A. Weisenburgh from 1946 with revisions the following year. Weisenburgh (1887-1972) was commissioned to transform the 1887 commercial building into a distinctively modern retail space. He had for many years worked for the local architectural firm of Rubush & Hunter. By 1925 he became chief draftsman for Rubush & Hunter and was responsible for the office and design supervision of the firm's commissions for hotels, commercial buildings and houses in Florida. Weisenburgh was described as the master of ornamentation and "extemporaneous" in design. Weisenburgh's obituary credits his contribution in the design of the Art Deco Circle Tower (1929-30) and the Spanish Baroque Indiana Theater (1926-27) ("Services Set Wednesday for Philip A. Weisenburgh," Indianapolis Star, November 14, 1972). Weisenburgh and the firm's superintendent of construction, Ernest Werner, apparently took over the firm in 1939 after the retirement of the founders, retaining the name possibly until 1941. Weisenburgh and Werner were partners from 1941 to 1946 (Patricia J. Casler, "The Architecture of Rubush & Hunter" Master's thesis, Columbia University, 1985, pp. 78, 112 & 113).

Immediately before the Rost project in 1945-1946 Weisenburgh had successfully redesigned the 1913-14 Occidental Building, one block away at West Washington and Illinois Streets. Here he also combined recessed entry ways and display windows with the green marble facing and Moderne detailing. The Rost facade is most closely related to the H. P. Wasson Company Department Store at West Washington and North Meridian Streets, utilizing smooth limestone, glass block band windows, metal canopies, Art Deco keystones and dark, polished stone framing the entry. The Wasson Building was built in 1936-37 designed by Rubush & Hunter with Weisenburgh as its chief draftsman.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Rost Building occupies the south half of a lot which in turn has been separated into north and south portions by two different ownerships until 1989. Since the 1947-48 remodeling and enlargement, the north half of the building was owned by Thomas L. Sullivan and his heirs until 1986 when purchased by SI Roose, Inc. and later by the City of Indianapolis, Department of Metropolitan Development in 1989. The south half of the building was owned by heirs of Kate Rand Winters until its purchase by the City of Indianapolis, Department of Metropolitan Development in 1987.
4. Builder, contractor: The Indianapolis general contracting firm of Brandt Brothers & Company was responsible for the extensive 1947-48 remodeling and enlargement resulting in the present Art Deco Rost Building ("Architectural Beauty Is Attained," Indianapolis Star, April 29, 1948, p. 26).
5. Original plans and construction: The 1887 Sanborn insurance map depicts the three-story, commercial building with a first-floor, brick wall separating the two commercial areas. The map describes the building as "Being Built". In 1887 the building did not extend to the alley, but rather to a point approximately thirty-five feet west of the alley. The 1898 Sanborn map depicts a one-story, rear addition extending to the alley (Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Indianapolis, Indiana, New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1887, II:41; and Sanborn-Perris Insurance Map, 1898, I:6).
6. Alterations and additions: The plans for the Art Deco Rost Building by Philip A. Weisenburgh are labeled as "Alterations and Addition to Rost Jewelry Co." and are part of the Rubush & Hunter Collection in the Architectural Archives of the Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. The 1887 building was remodeled and rebuilt as drawn by Weisenburgh. The existing Art Deco facade and interior were created in the extensive remodeling and enlargement campaign of 1947-48. During this remodeling the original interior, front and rear facades of an 1887 brick commercial block were removed and the present ones were constructed (Bass Photos #247203-F, dated September 4, 1940 and #238226, dated July 12, 1937, Bass Photo Collection, Indiana Historical Society). A new roof was installed, leaving only the basement and portions of the third floor interior with any of its previous character.

Portions of the wood floors survive on the first through third floors. The marble portion of the 1947-48 facade was first installed in 1936 in an attempt to update the 1887 facade. The marble was reused in 1947-48. Changes to the Rost Building since its 1948 completion include the installation of carpeting, the removal of interior display cases and the removal of a large, applied-letter sign from the main facade. The removals occurred after the building closed in 1982.

B. Historical Context

1. Text: The Rost Jewelry Company was founded in 1900 at 15 North Illinois Street as "Carl L. Rost, Diamond Merchants." Its founder, Carl Louis Rost (1864-1946), a trained watchmaker, moved his store to its present address in 1910, occupying the building at 25 North Illinois. Rost sold his business in 1920; the new owners changed the firm's name to "Rost Jewelry Company". ("Carl L. Rost, Retired Jeweler, Dies in His Home at Age 82," Indianapolis News, May 10, 1946). The new owners remodeled the front facade of the 1887 commercial block with a two-story facade of polished Verde Antique marble and new display windows in 1936. This storefront included applied letters and a clock all in Art Moderne styling. This storefront was installed by the Wege Marble & Tile Company of Indianapolis, ("Rost Puts on a New Look," Indianapolis Star, May 21, 1948).

In 1939, Rost Jewelry Company owners Louis and Herman Strashun began planning for the complete remodeling and enlargement of the store building but were delayed because of commercial construction restrictions during the Second World War and the immediate post-war years ("Decade of Planning Results of Greater Rost Store," Indianapolis News, April 28, 1948, p.16). The Strashuns hired local architect Philip A. Weisenburgh to re-design the nineteenth century building to express the "efficiency and beauty of modern functional design" (Ibid.). Weisenburgh collaborated with the architecture and design department of the Freeman Store Equipment Company of Indianapolis, which was responsible for the design, layout and fabrication of the interior (Ibid.). The Freeman design included the built-in cabinets, recessed ceiling lighting and the use of mirrored wall panels and cabinets. Brandt Brothers, a local general contracting firm was responsible for the construction work which included the new, front facade, stairways, rear addition, elevator and roof.

Before the Rost remodeling and enlargement, the eastern third (facing the alley, Bird Street) of the 1887 building was only one story in height, in contrast to the three-story height of the street front (Sanborn, 1898, I:6). The remodeling and enlargement more than doubled the floor space of the Rost Jewelry Company. The remodeling plan called for the company to expand into the north half of the building, as it had occupied only the south half since 1910. In 1947 the entire brick facade of 25-27 North Illinois, with segmented arched openings and corbeled architrave, was demolished and rebricked with a smooth face to accept the limestone and marble veneer specified by architect Weisenburgh. The Art Deco marble facade of 1936, with clock and applied lettered sign which covered the second story of 25 North Illinois above the store windows and entry, was dismantled in 1947 ("Rost Jewelry Store to Get More Space, Modern Front," Indianapolis Star, July 27, 1947). It was reused and centered at the Art Deco facade directly above the recessed entrance and display windows (Bass Photo #247203-F). The street level display and the large, open, glazed recessed entryway permitted the entire store to be displayed to pedestrians with the "wall cases seem to run out to the side walk" adding to the effect of the modern approach (Indianapolis News April 28, 1948, p.16).

When the new Rost store opened on April 29, 1948, the jewelry and silver departments were located on the first floor. The mezzanine and second floor displayed cameras, glass, and china wares, records, radios, luggage, and the gift and repair departments. The third floor was used as a storeroom ("Architectural Beauty is Attained," Indianapolis Star, April 29, 1948, p.26; "Rost Jewelry Store to Get More Space, Modern Front," Indianapolis Star, July 27, 1947).

The remodeled building has remained unaltered since its completion except for the installation of carpeting and the removal of display cabinets and gradual deterioration during its vacancy in 1982.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: The Rost Building is a three-story, Art Deco, commercial building. The Rost

Building was created in 1947-48 by completely remodeling and enlarging an 1887 brick commercial building. The 1947-48 remodeling was complete with only remnants of the 19th century character visible only in the interior of the third floor and in the stone and brick walls of the basement. Elements of the front facade include polished marble panels, smooth ashlar limestone, a recessed entryway and aluminum canopy. The design of the front facade does not reflect the building's three stories or retail and storage space.

2. Condition of fabric: The Rost Building is in generally good condition despite its vacancy in 1982 and subsequent deterioration.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Rost Building is a three-story structure 35'-1" wide and 119'-9" long. It occupies one full lot between Illinois Street and Bird Street, the alley to the east. The basement extends under the sidewalk along Illinois Street. The Rost Building abuts the six-story, 1910 Rink Building on the north and abuts a three-story brick commercial building to the south.
2. Walls:
  - a. West elevation: The principal facade, (west elevation), is on Illinois Street. It is clad with marble, limestone, and glass. At each side of the storefront are display cases clad with curved marble and glass that meet the recessed entrance, which is inset approximately twenty feet. The floor of the entry is a patterned, green terrazzo with brass dividers and the brass inlaid letters spelling "ROST." The entrance is protected by an aluminum-clad canopy which bears clocks and the store's name on the north and south elevations and "Jewelers-Silversmiths" in raised letters on the western elevation of the canopy. Hanging below the canopy, perpendicular to the facade, is a sign with neon letters bearing the store's name. At the second-floor level the marble panel covers the center of the facade limestone. Near the center of the marble panel is an octagonal clock with applied numerals, frame and hands. Centered in the limestone, flanking the centered marble panel, are two, long, narrow, glass-block vertical window bands which extend about four feet above and below the second-floor marble panels. The limestone covers the full width of the third floor of the facade up to the parapet. Behind

the parapet is a copper, standing-seam roof which slopes at 45 degrees toward the east (rear) (Centre Venture, "Building Descriptions for Circle Centre Mall," Indianapolis, Indiana, February 8, 1988, typewritten, unpublished).

- b. North and South elevations: These two walls are concealed from view. The brick north wall abuts the south wall of the neighboring, six-story Rink Building and the south wall is a party wall with neighboring three-story, brick building.
  - c. East elevation: The entire east wall of the building is constructed of brick including the elevator penthouse. The parapet is topped with tile coping. Two service doors are located in the north half of the first floor. Three, three and-a-half feet by four feet windows are located on the south half of the third floor (Ibid.).
3. Foundations: Rubble limestone and brick foundation walls support the exterior walls.
  4. Structural system: The 1887 commercial building was originally of wood timber construction. The 1947-48 remodeling significantly changed the structure. The primary supports for the second floor were changed and three bays of space were added from the present east wall to a line approximately 37 feet westward. In the basement, brick, load-bearing walls supporting the first floor run west to east from the west wall to this line. The first floor in this area is of wood framing and flooring. Within the brick walls are steel columns supporting the second floor. From a point west, approximately 37 feet from the east wall (1947-48 addition), is a concrete bearing wall located in line with the brick wall. The first floor in the three eastern bays is a concrete slab on grade on the south half and a structural slab in the north half. In the remaining portion of the first floor is steel framing supporting the original wood floor construction. From the third floor to the roof the structural system is wood timber construction with wood flooring. The 1947-48 addition of the three eastern-bays on the third floor to the east wall has a steel frame with steel bar joists. The first through third floors in this area are concrete. The brick perimeter walls provide bearing for beams and joists. The foundation walls are primarily stone with some brick and concrete near the addition (Centre Venture).

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The front entrance is a double-leafed plate glass set of doors with aluminum frames. The rear, two, entries opening onto the alley Bird Street have plain, metal, flush doors.
- b. Windows: The windows of the west, front facade consist of plate glass display windows flanking the entrance and two, vertical narrow ribbons of glass block running continuously from the second to the third floor with a fixed single-paned window surmounting each glass block ribbon. The alley windows on the east facade are located at the third floor level and in the elevator tower at the fourth story. Three windows were bricked in at the first floor level.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The Rost Building's roof slopes both to the front (west) and to the rear (east). The rear (east) slope has a ballasted, built-up covering; the front (west) is clad with a standing-seam copper roof. The roof apex is located approximately twelve and one half feet from the west facade, resulting in high-pitched front and low-pitched rear slopes. The brick elevator penthouse rises seventeen feet above the roof line, of the east (alley) facade.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first floor is open except for a series of six-columns in the center and the double stairs leading to the mezzanine. Under the mezzanine is a vault and an elevator. Built-in display cases line the north and south walls. The mezzanine is served by the elevators has a restroom, and has stairs running to the second floor. Built-in cabinets and a counter are located on the mezzanine.
- b. Second floor: The Rost Building's second floor is open except for the series of columns, built-in cases along the walls. The floor is accessed by twin stairs flanking the centered stair from the mezzanine.
- c. Third floor: The third floor is also open except for the columns. A wooden, two-run, stairway in the southwest corner provides access to the garret.

- d. Garret: The garret is an open space tucked under the mansard roof.
  - e. Basement: The floor plan of the basement is divided by concrete walls around the stairs, toilets and lounge. A brick, load-bearing wall running east-west bisects the basement. The basement extension under the sidewalk forms two limestone vaults.
2. Stairways and elevators: There are five stairs in the building which provide vertical circulation. Identical twin, but opposite, monumental stairs connect the basement, first, and mezzanine levels. The stairs to the basement are steel with steel handrails. Those to the second floor are terrazzo-finished with ornamental handrail. Two stairs access an elevated portion of the second floor, which is above the mezzanine. These also have a terrazzo finish and ornamental handrails which continue as guardrails for the elevated floor. A wood service stair connects the second and third levels. It is enclosed within wood stud and plaster walls. An open wood stair connects the third floor with the attic in the southwest corner of the floor. A passenger elevator services the basement through third floors. A dumbwaiter elevator provides circulation from the second to third floors. Stairs and elevators date from 1947-48 except for the wooden stairs (Centre Venture).
  3. Floorings: Carpeting covers the floors of the first, second and mezzanine levels. Beneath the carpeting is the 1948 floor finish of linoleum tile. The basement floor is exposed, poured concrete, the third floor is exposed tongue and groove wooden flooring. The flooring of the garret is plywood sheets.
  4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Plastered ceilings and walls are found throughout the Rost Building from the basement to the third floor with some exposed portions of rubble stone and brick. The mezzanine has wood paneling covering some areas of wall. The third floor wall and ceiling finishes date from 1887, unaltered by the 1947-48 remodeling. The north and south walls are plastered, the ceiling is stamped sheet metal and the east and west walls are exposed brick from the 1947-48 remodeling. The rear (east) of the Rost Building is the 1947-48 addition and has no finish on the third-floor ceiling, leaving the structural steel frame exposed. The attic garret walls and ceilings surfaces are covered with sheets of unfinished drywall.

5. Openings:

Doorways and doors: Except for lounges and toilets there are no partitioned areas with doors. The above areas are located in the basement. The doors are plain flush doors dating from 1947-48.

6. a. Decorative features and trim: Built-in, glass-fronted cabinets line the walls of the first and second floors, although the glass counter display cases and islands have been removed from the open floor area.

7. Hardware:

a. Elevators: The 1947-48 elevator is metal paneled with metal doors, devoid of ornamentation.

b. Stair railings: Aluminum, Art Deco-styled railings follow the stairs up from the first floor to the mezzanine and to the second floor.

8. Mechanical equipment: Heat is supplied by city steam and distributed through radiators and forced air. Air handlers are located in the basement northwest and third floor east, attached to the ceiling. Another is located on the third floor near the stairs. Air condensers are located on the roof at the east end. A pneumatic tube delivery system runs throughout the first and second floors of this building. The equipment is located in the basement northeast. The gas, steam, and water entrances are located on the west end of the building under the sidewalk. The electrical entrance appears to be on the northwest end (Ibid.).

- D. Site: The Rost Building occupies the south half of Lot 3 of City Square 55 in the first block of North Illinois Street. The Rost Building was created through the extensive 1947-48 remodeling of an 1887 brick commercial building. The building is flanked by the 1910 Rink's Women's Apparel Building on the north and the surviving portion of an 1870s Italianate commercial building to the south, whose surviving facade has since been covered with sheet metal panels, (circa 1965) with no historical character retained. At the time of the 1947-48 remodeling, the Rink Building had already been remodeled in the early 1940s into a G. C. Murphy department store. The other buildings on the block are the corner buildings of the ten-story Illinois Building of 1925 on the north and the

twelve-story, Roosevelt Building of 1922 to the south, both commercial office buildings. Directly across the Illinois Street is the eight-story, 1911 William H. Block and Company Department Store Building, remodeled in the 1930s on the first exterior two floors and interior in the Art Deco Style. Directly south of Block's stood the Claypool Hotel from 1902 to 1969, the city's finest hotel of the early twentieth century. Today the Claypool site is occupied by the eighteen-story, 1985 Embassy Suites Hotel. Since the Civil War the first block of North Illinois Street has historically been a dense and bustling commercial business area.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: The 1946-47 remodeling drawings are part of the Rubush & Hunter Collection of the Indiana Historical Society's Architectural Archives, 315 West Ohio Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. The collection includes a pencil drawing of the main facade, dated 1946. The series of construction drawings are the work of Philip A. Weisenburgh and are labeled "Alteration and Addition to Rost Jewelry Company." Most of the drawings date from 1946 with revisions dating from June and August of 1947. The drawings indicate the extensive remodeling; Sheet No. 1 notes "Present wall to be removed entire length of building." The drawing also document the reuse of the applied letter of the sign, marble tile and clock which were part of a 1936 remodeling of the 1887 storefront. Drawings by the Freeman Store Equipment company of Indianapolis document the built-in cabinets. The drawings indicates that the Rost Building was built as planned by Weisenburgh.
- B. Old views: The Bass Photo Collection of the Indiana Historical Society, contains only two historic views of the Rost Building as it appeared in before the remodeling of 1947-48. Images of the present facade and interior were featured numerous times in Indianapolis newspapers with articles, photographs and advertisements. The Indianapolis News featured a special "Rost Section" in its April 28, 1948 edition, on the eve of the grand opening.
- C. Bibliography
1. Primary and unpublished sources:  
  
Casler, Patricia J. "The Architecture of Rubush & Hunter." M.S. thesis, Columbia University, 1985.

Centre Venture, "Building Description for Circle Centre Mall," Indianapolis, Indiana, February 8, 1988. (typewritten, unpublished.)

Deed Books, Marion County Recorder's Office, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1833-1989.

Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, "Washington Street Retail Mall Project: Inventory of Properties Declared Eligible or Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places." Indianapolis, Indiana April 29, 1980. (typewritten, unpublished.)

2. Secondary and published sources:

"Carl L. Rost, Retired Jeweler, Dies in His Home at Age 82", Indianapolis News, May 10, 1946.

"Decade of Planning Results in Greater Rost Store", Indianapolis Star, April 28, 1948, p. 16.

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"Rost Jewelry Store to Get More Space. Modern Front", Indianapolis Star, July 27, 1947.

"Rost Puts on New Look", Indianapolis Star, May 2, 1948.

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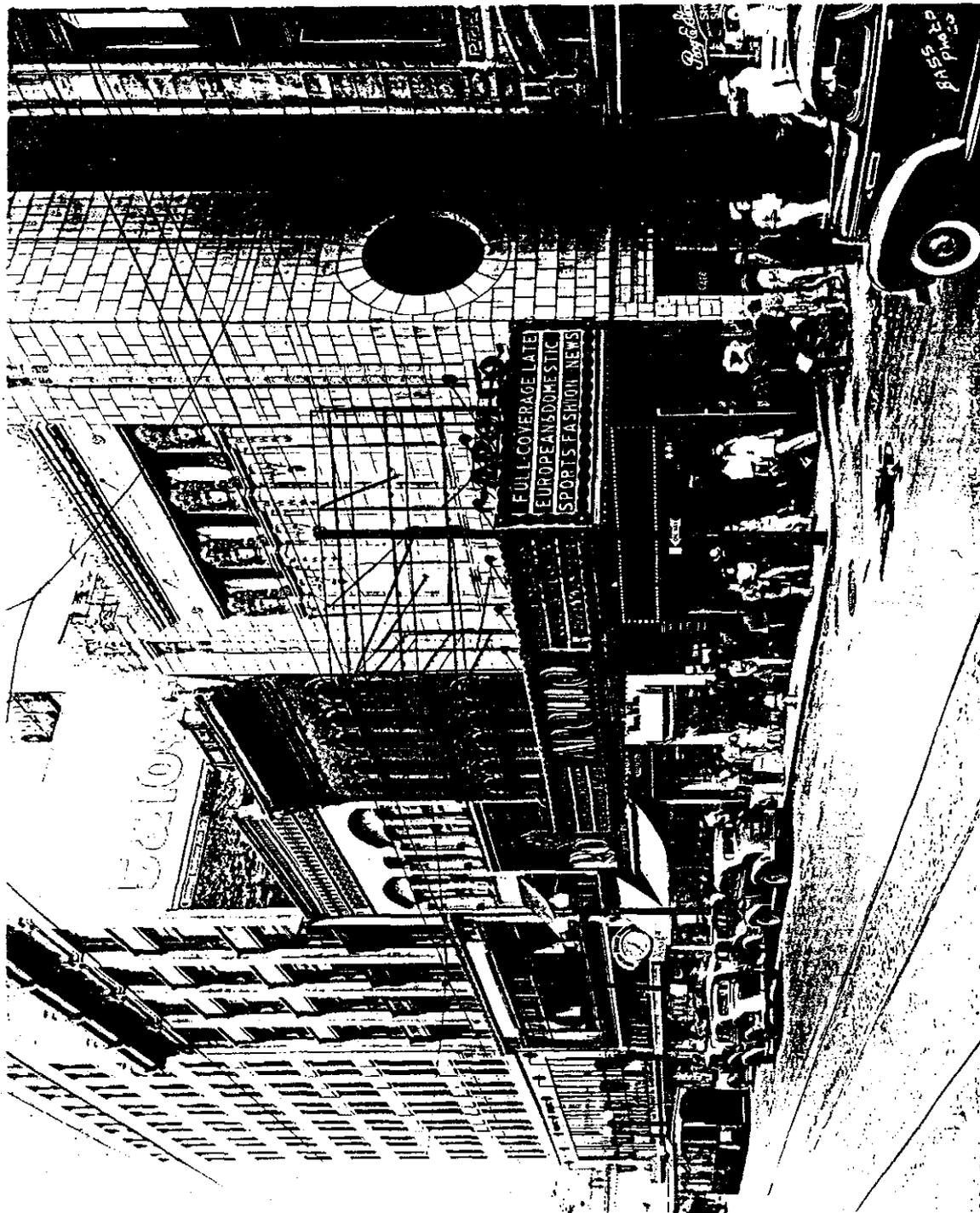
Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Indianapolis, Indiana. Vol. 1, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1914 and updated to 1954.

Sanborn-Perris Map Company. Insurance Maps of Indianapolis, Indiana Vol. 1, New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1898 and updated to 1913.

"Services Set Wednesday for Philip A. Weisenburgh," Indianapolis Star, November 14, 1972.

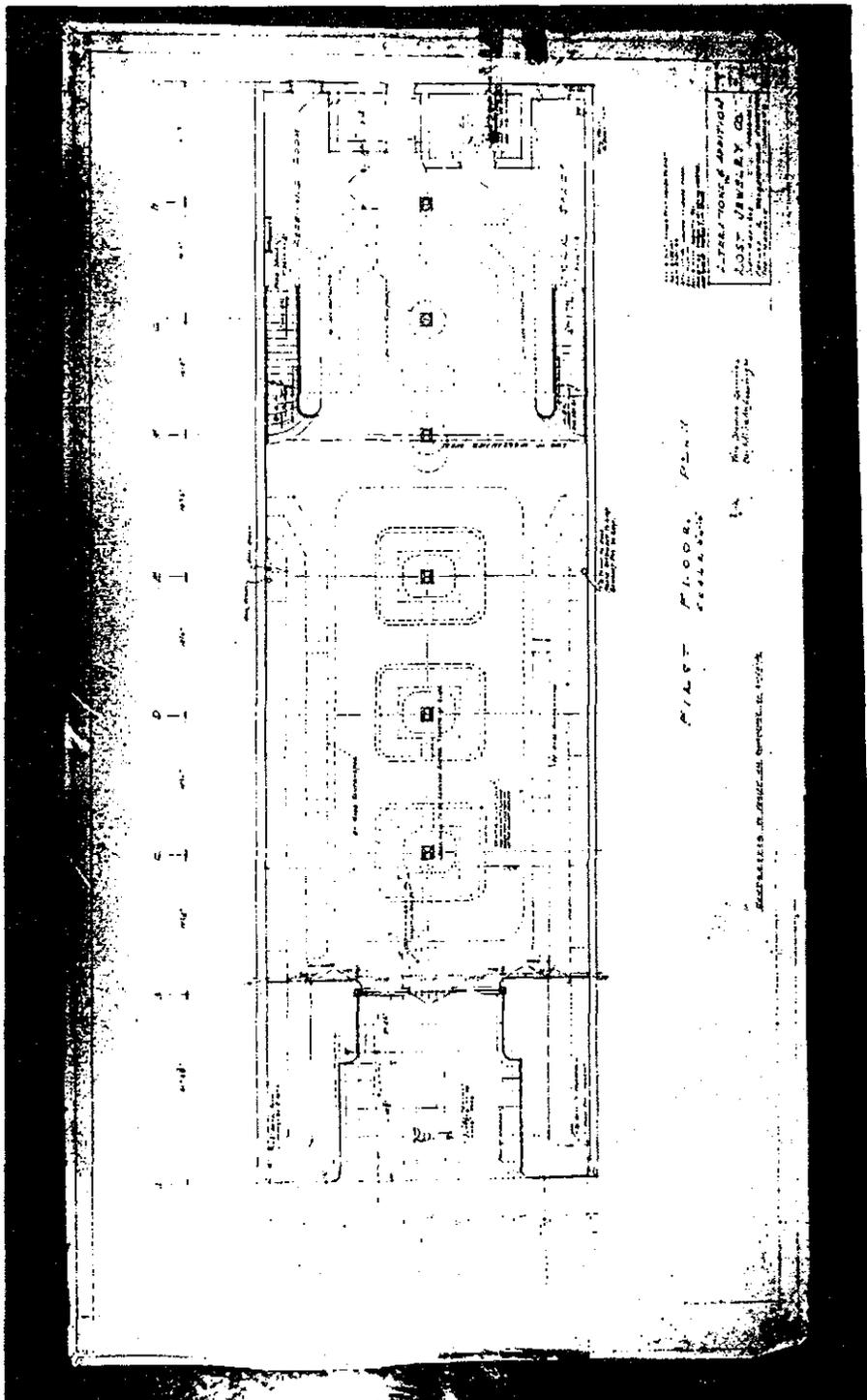
D. Supplemental Information

1. Bass Photo #247203-F, September 4, 1940.  
Rost Jewelry Co. Building is left of center, partially obscured by Apollo marquee. Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis.



Rost Jewelry Co. Building (Commercial Building)  
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2. First Floor Plan, Alterations & Additions to Rost Jewelry Co., Philip A. Weisenburgh, February 11, 1946, revised to August 7, 1947. Original in Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis, Neg #C4266.



PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission (IHPC) in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort before demolition.

Prepared by William L. Selm  
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Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission  
August 10, 1989