

Morrisse Building
55 Ward Street; 312 Main Street
Paterson
Passaic County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-945

HABS
NJ,
16-PAT,
25-

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 BUILDINGS SURVEY

MORRISSE BUILDING

HABS No. NJ-945

Location: 55 Ward Street; 312 Main Street (northwest corner of Ward and Main Streets), Paterson, Passaic County, New Jersey

USGS Paterson, New Jersey Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.569570.4529380

Last Owner: Paterson Redevelopment Agency
Paterson, New Jersey

Last Use: Vacant. The building was demolished on October 28, 1987.

Significance: The Morrissette Building is a fine example of the Renaissance Revival style. It was built c. 1890-1892 from a design of local architect Charles Edwards for James A. Morrissette (1844-1903), a prominent Paterson insurance and real estate entrepreneur. The building served as his business headquarters.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Based on deeds, commercial directories, and a datestone, the building dates from between 1890 and 1892.
2. Architect: C. Edwards (Haines, p. 72). This is likely to have been Charles Edwards (c. 1856-1921), a local architect who maintained a practice in Paterson during the last thirty years of his life. Born in New York City, Edwards spent his childhood in Ridgewood, New Jersey and is said to have acquired his architectural education in the offices of several well-known architects in New York City. Their identity is not known. Before coming to Paterson, Edwards maintained a practice in Princeton, New Jersey for a short time. In Paterson he is known to have designed the Paterson Savings Institution building, the United States Trust Company building, the Second National Bank building, and many residences ("Charles Edwards").
3. Original and subsequent owners:

References to the Chain of Title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Passaic County Courthouse, Paterson, New Jersey.

- 1890 Deed, February 19, 1890, recorded in Volume W9, page 221. Thomas M. Moore, one of the Special Masters in Chancery, to James A. Morrisse.
- 1913 Deed, July 30, 1913, recorded in Volume K24, page 129. Katherine E. Morrisse to William B. Gourley and Edward R. Weiss, executors and trustees of James A. Morrisse.
- 1917 Deed, March 1, 1917, recorded in Volume I26, page 110. William B. Gourley and Edward R. Weiss, executors and trustees of James A. Morrisse, to James A. Gavin.
- 1921 Deed, February 15, 1921, recorded in Volume C29, page 514. James A. Gavin and Nellie J. Gavin to Robert H. Edmond.

- 1921 Deed, February 15, 1921, recorded in Volume C29, page 515. Robert H. Edmond and Carrie M. Edmond to James A. Gavin and Nellie J. Gavin.
- 1949 Deed, January 27, 1949, recorded in Volume I51, page 460. Nellie J. Gavin to James A. Gavin & Sons, Inc.
- 1970 Deed, November 24, 1970, recorded in Volume V89, page 515. James A. Gavin & Sons, Inc. to Paterson Redevelopment Agency.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The identity of the builder, contractor, and suppliers is unknown.
 5. Original plans and construction: The existence and location of original architectural documents is unknown.
 6. Alterations and additions: Alterations to the Morrisse Building appear to have been minor. Based on a comparison of historic views (Photographs 8 and 9) and physical evidence the corner entrance originally was framed by over-sized terra-cotta consoles. It is unknown when or by whom this facade ornamentation was removed. Based on physical evidence the interior was altered by the introduction of a sprinkler system and on the fourth story by the base of a boxing ring with cast iron turn buckle supports rising at each corner. It is unknown when or by whom these additions were introduced.

B. Historical Context

The Morrisse Building was built for James A. Morrisse, a prominent Paterson insurance and real estate entrepreneur and steamship agent. The building served as his business headquarters. Morrisse was born in Ireland on August 26, 1844. Having initially spent some time in the West, he settled in Paterson in 1866 and, two years later, established his real estate business. By 1892 it had become the largest of its kind in Paterson and one of the largest in New Jersey. Morrisse sold many millions of dollars worth of property in Paterson, as well as Passaic, New Jersey. In Paterson he laid out and sold the Christie tract on Park Avenue for the Mutual Life Insurance Company and the Hopper and Clapp tracts at Park Avenue and 18th Street for the Receiver of the Knickerbocker Life Insurance Company. Subsequently, he organized the Cedar Cliff Land Company in Haledon, and the East Side Land, Building and Improvement Company and the

Broadway Land and Building Company, both involving properties on the east side of Paterson. On the south side of Paterson Morrisse organized The Citizen's Building and Land Company, The Hamilton Land Company, The Home Land and Building Company, and The Lake View Land and Building Company. Collectively, these south side companies owned over one thousand lots, extending from California Avenue to Crooks Avenue in Lake View on the east side of the Erie Railway. In addition, he organized the Laurel Grove Cemetery, the Iron and Silk Building and Loan Association, the Paterson Street Railway Company, and the Paterson Railway Company (Shriner, p. 112; Haines, p. 72). Morrisse died on April 5, 1903 ("James A. Morrisse"), and between 1913 and 1914 his firm relocated from the Morrisse Building to another location on Main Street (Paterson, 1913, p. 538; Paterson, 1914, p. 548). James A. Gavin, a local paint merchant, purchased the building in 1917. Commercial directories, historic photographs, and physical evidence suggest that the Morrisse Building housed a variety of commercial and institutional activities during the twentieth century.

By any measure, James A. Morrisse was a major figure in the developmental history of the Paterson area during the late nineteenth century. The Morrisse Building, anchoring a prominent downtown corner, served as physical expression of his many enterprises.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Morrisse Building is a fine example of the Renaissance Revival style. Of particular interest is the boldly articulated ornamentation of the main facades, accented by terracotta sculptural relief panels and cartouches in the spandrels, pilasters, and walls. These sculptures depict human faces, torches, swags, and garlands and are representative of popular decorative motifs of the Renaissance Revival.
2. Condition of fabric: Prior to demolition, the general condition of the structure was fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: the Morrisse Building is an irregular pentagon in shape. Overall it measures c. 48'-6" (line paralleling Ward Street) by c. 34'-0" (line paralleling Cianci Street). The Ward Street facade is articulated into four bays, and the Main Street facade into one bay. These two facades are joined by a single corner bay. Above its basement the building rises in four stories.
2. Foundations: Foundations are of granite.
3. Walls: Walls are of buff brick laid in common bond. The cornice, fascia, string courses, door and window moldings, and decorative panels and cartouches are of terra-cotta.
4. Structural systems, framing: The internal structural system is of wood frame construction. Exterior walls are load-bearing brick.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: A single leaf opening is situated in the lower left bay of the Ward Street facade and in the corner bay. The doors are missing.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Fixed pane display window openings are located on the first story, while one/one light double hung sash are located on the second, third, and fourth stories. Third story windows have round arched upper sash. An oculus is located in the stair hall between the third and fourth stories.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof is flat. Its material is unknown.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice is terra-cotta with Renaissance Revival detailing. The gutter system is probably concealed by the cyma recta.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See pages 10, 11, and 12.

2. Stairways: A single stairway is located in the hall adjoining the east wall.
3. Flooring: The flooring is wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are painted plaster/lathe. The wainscot and base are shaped wood. Between the first and second floors, the wainscot in the stair hall is marble. The stair hall has a patterned pressed tin ceiling. Other ceilings are painted plaster/lathe.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doors are single leaf paneled oak with a single pane fixed window in the upper third. Surrounds are wood with bull's-eye corner blocks and have a single light transom above the door.
 - b. Windows: Windows have shaped wood surrounds with bull's-eye corner blocks.
6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: The building has a circulating hot water or steam heating system with free-standing cast iron radiators.
 - b. Lighting: Original lighting may have been gas. Existing light fixtures are suspended from the ceiling and consist of exposed electric bulbs with metal shades. Switches are located adjacent to doorways.
 - c. Plumbing: A simple sink and toilet are located adjacent to a light well on the second, third, and fourth floor, respectively.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Morrisse building faces southeast toward the intersection of Main and Ward Streets. Adjoining the building on either side is a smaller scaled commercial block. The immediate vicinity is a densely built area of central Paterson.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: The existence and location of architectural drawings are unknown.
- B. Historic views: See Photographs 8 and 9.
- C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Passaic County. Deed Books, Passaic County Courthouse, Paterson, New Jersey.

Passaic County. City of Paterson Tax Map. County Assessor's Office, Paterson, New Jersey, n.d.

2. Secondary and published sources:

"Charles Edwards Dies in Paris," The Morning Call, July 11, 1921, p.1.

Edward B. Haines, compiler. Paterson, New Jersey, 1792 1892, Centennial Edition of the Paterson Evening News, Paterson Illustrated. Paterson, New Jersey: The News Printing Company, 1892.

"James A. Morrisse Died Yesterday Afternoon," The Morning Call, April 6, 1903, p. 1.

J. M. Lathrop. Atlas of the City of Paterson, New Jersey. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: A. H. Mueller, 1915.

Paterson Directory, 1913. Paterson, New Jersey: The Price & Lee Company, 1913.

Paterson Directory, 1914. Paterson, New Jersey: The Price & Lee Company, 1914.

E. Robinson. Atlas of the City of Paterson and Haledon. New York: E. Robinson Company, 1899.

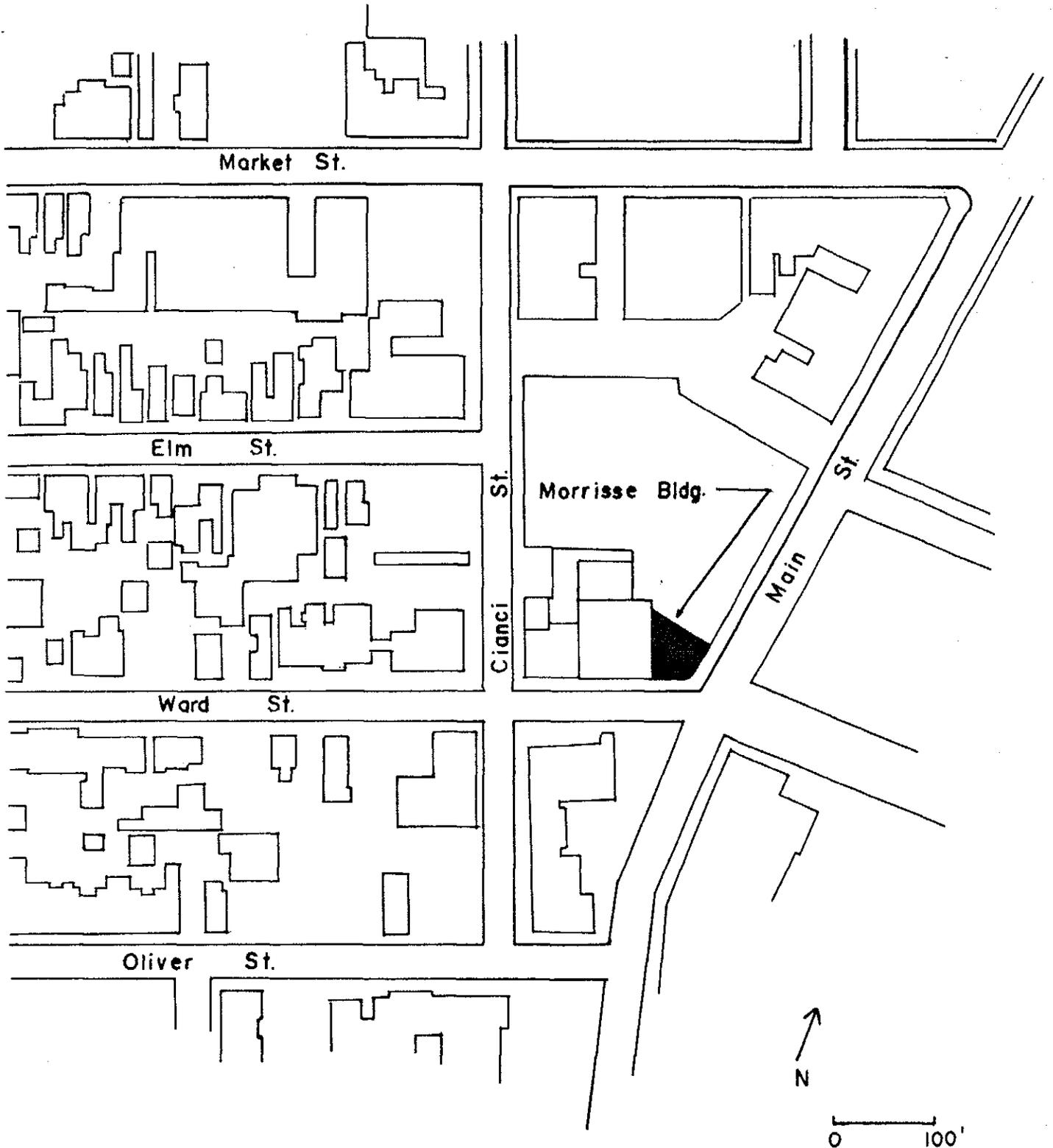
Sanborn Map Co. Insurance Map of Paterson, New Jersey. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1915.

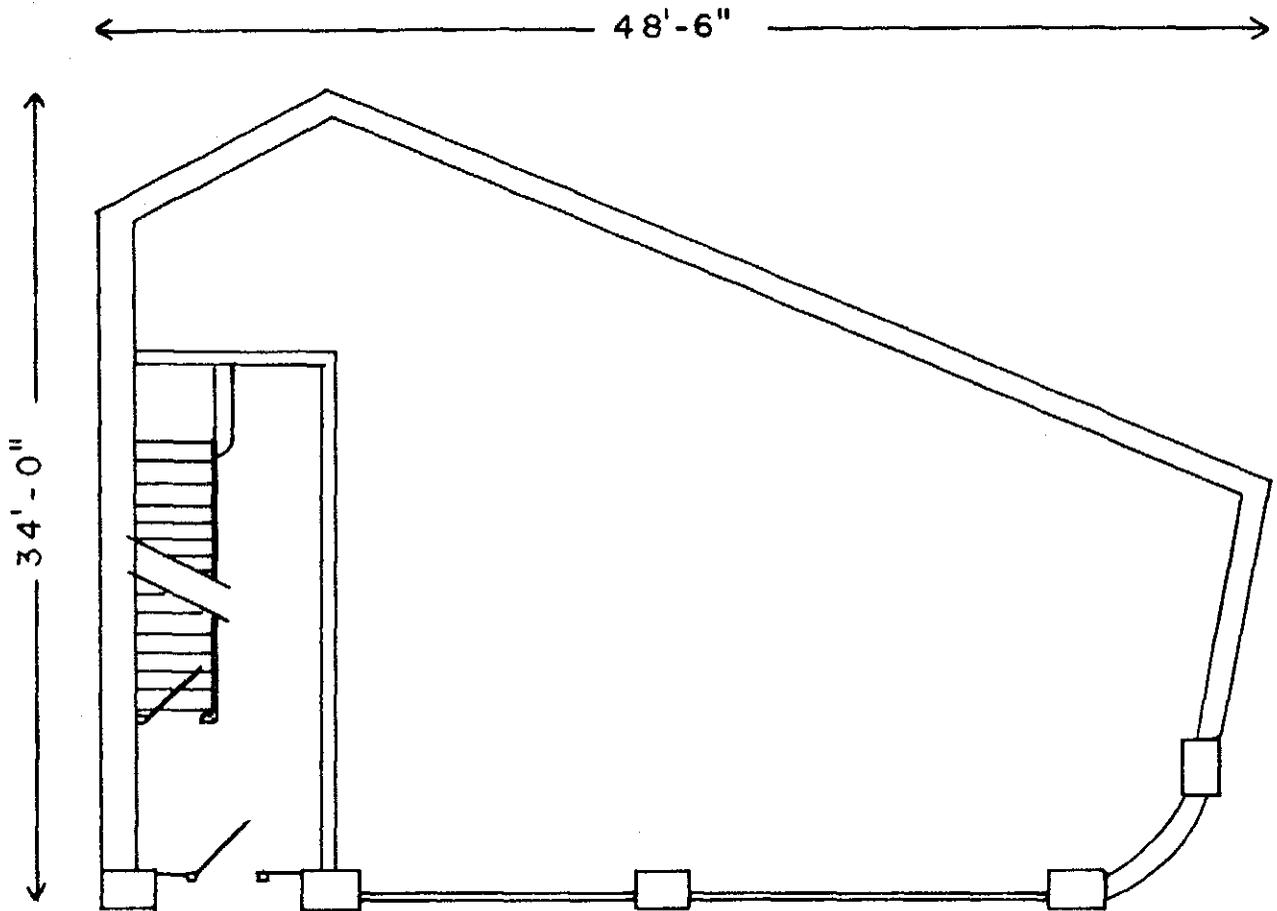
Charles A. Shriner. Paterson, New Jersey, Its
Advantages for Manufacturing and Residence: Its
Industries, Prominent Men, Banks, Schools, Churches, etc.
Paterson, New Jersey: The Press Printing and Publishing
Company, 1890.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

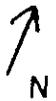
John Milner Associates, Inc., West Chester, Pennsylvania was retained by Hardesty and Hanover, Jersey City, New Jersey and the New Jersey Department of Transportation, Bureau of Environmental Analysis, Trenton, New Jersey to prepare HABS documentation on thirteen properties in Paterson, Passaic County, New Jersey. These properties are to be demolished as a result of the Route 20 Connector project. HABS documentation is provided pursuant to the instruction and intents set forth by Section 101 (b) (4) of the National Environmental Policy Act; Section 1 (3) and 2 (b) of Executive Order 11593; Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; Federal Aid Highway Program Manual, Volume 7, Section 2; the amended "Procedures for the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties" as set forth in 36 CFR Part 800; and the Memorandum of Agreement among the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Officer and the Federal Highway Administration, executed May 10, 1985.

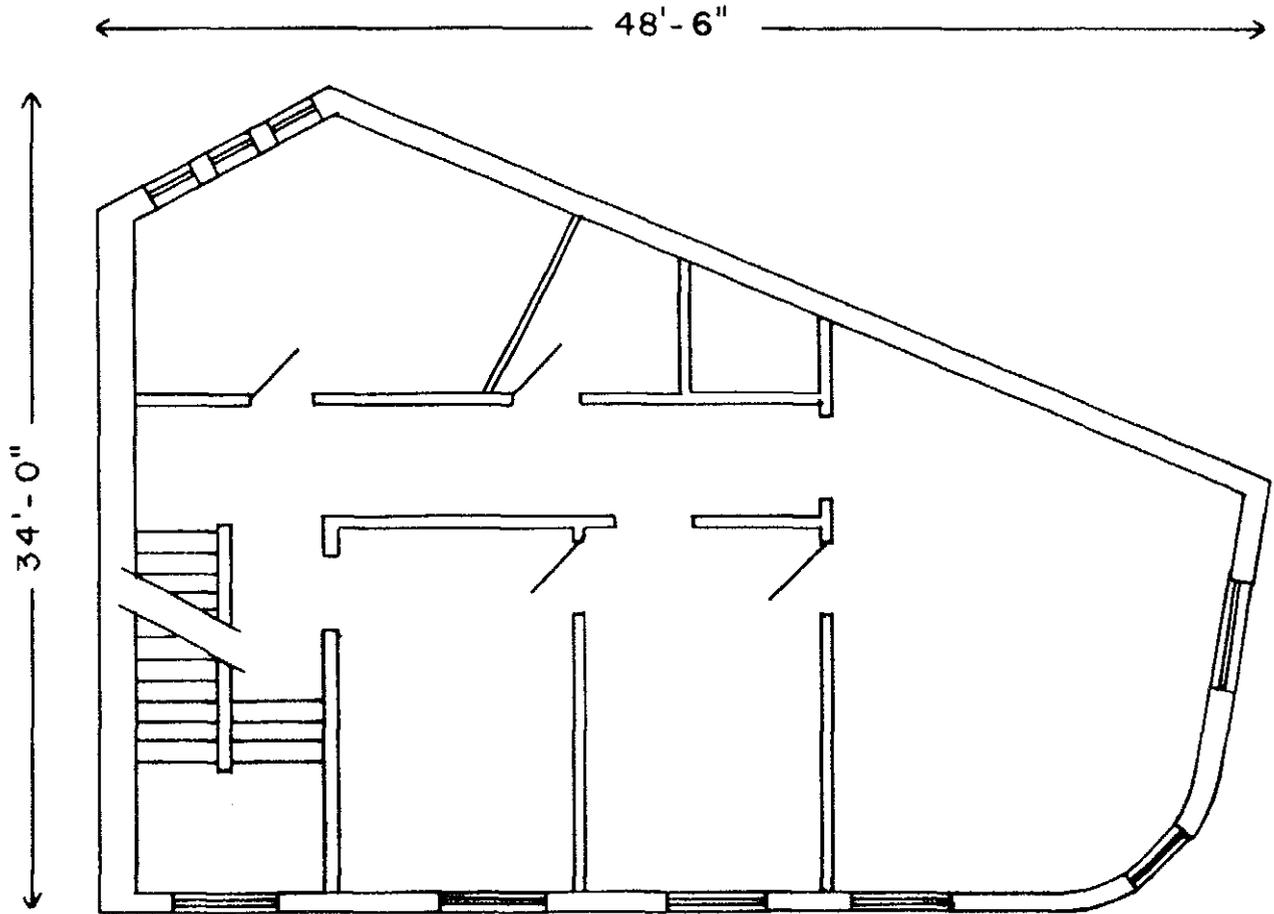
Prepared by: Richard Meyer
Title: Principal Architectural
Historian
Assisted by: William R. Henry, Jr.
Title: Project Architectural
Historian
Affiliation: John Milner Associates, Inc.
Date: November 1987





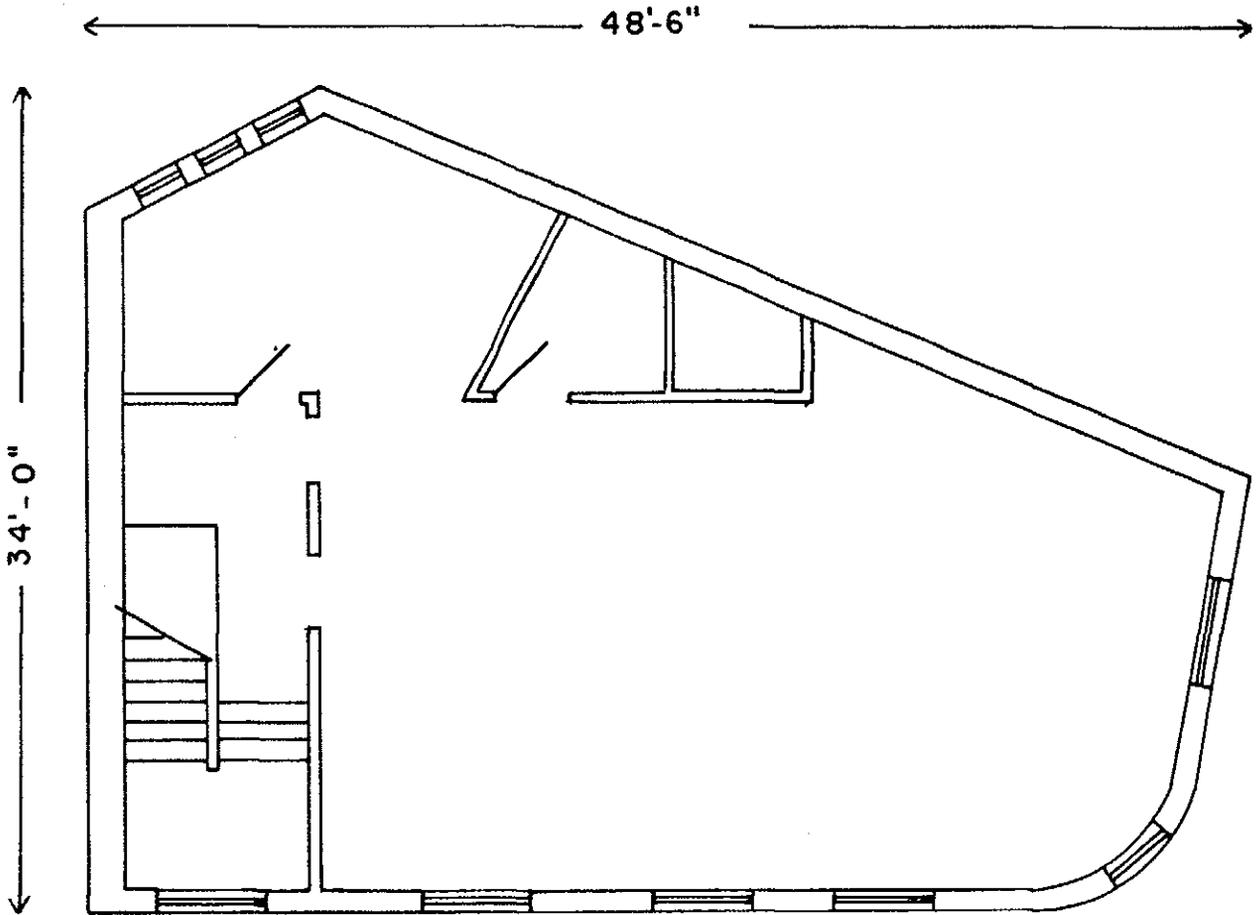
Morrisse Building 1st Floor
55 Ward Street 312 Main Street





Morrisse Building 2nd-3rd Floor
55 Ward Street 312 Main Street





Morrise Building 4th Floor
55 Ward Street 312 Main Street

