ORIGINAL
Rec: 9-27-9

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

APPLICATION FORM
HISTORIC LANDMARK

APPLICATION TO:
[X] designate
[ ] amend
summary of amendments _____

[ ] rescind

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Name of Property: Woodward & Lothrop Service Warehouse

Address: 131 M Street, N.E.

Square and Lot Numbers: Square 712, that part of current Lot 110 formerly known as Lot 106 which is defined by the approx. 65,000 sq. ft. footprint of the Woodward & Lothrop Service Warehouse.

Present Owner: Union Station Associates Limited Partnership

Address: 1250 Connecticut Avenue, NW #500 Wash DC 20036

Original Use: Warehouse

Present Use: Warehouse

Date of Construction: 1937-38

Date of Major Alterations, if any: N/A

Architect: Abbott, Merkt & Company

Architectural style/period: Art Moderne

Name of Applicant: D.C. Preservation League
(If applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.)

Address of Applicant: 918 F Street. N.W. #310 Wash, DC 20009

Telephone: (202) 737-1519

Stephen L. Callcott
Signature of Applicant or authorized rep.

Sept. 19, 1991
Date

Stephen L. Callcott, Acting Director
Title of authorized representative

310.21 A statement of the prehistoric, historic, architectural and/or cultural significance of thr property proposed for designation.

The Woodward and Lothrop Service Warehouse, located at 131 M Street, N.E., is locally significant for its strong historical associations with warehouse development, spurred by the construction of Union Station, and for its representation of the Woodward and Lothrop Department Store, an institution in Washington retailing for more than one hundred years. The building also possesses architectural significance as a uniquely designed example of the warehouse building type and as a notable work of the architecture and engineering firm of Abbott, Merkt and Company. The building meets National Register of Historic Places criteria A and C, possessing significance for its architectural uniqueness, and as a strong example of the work of Abbott, Merkt and Company.

A major study of D.C. Warehouse buildings was conducted by the D.C. Preservation League and Traceries in 1990-91, funded as a matching grant-in-aid from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, through the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, Historic Preservation Division. The D.C. Warehouse Survey was a basic-level survey which identified over 100 warehouse buildings built prior to 1946 located within an approximately 100 city-square area north and east of Union Station. The project provides an inventory of the warehouses within that area, allowing for evaluation of those resources for historic significance. While the survey is being followed up by more indepth research on the warehouse building type, it is clear from this study that the Woodward & Lothrop Warehouse building at 131 M Street, N.E. meets several of the criteria for designation to the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Register of Historic Places.

The Woodward & Lothrop Service Warehouse qualifies for landmark status in the District of Columbia because it meets the following Criteria as established by the final rules of the D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board appearing in the D.C. Register, April 12, 1985:

Criteria a (3): It embodies the distinquishing characteristics of architectural styles, building types, types or methods of construction, landscape architecture, urban design or other architectural, aesthetic or engineering expressions significant to the appearance and development of the National Capital of the Nation; and

Criteria a (4): It has been identified as a notable work of craftsmen, artists, sculptors, architects, landscape architects, urban planners, engineers, builders or developers whose works have influenced the evolution of their fields of endeavor or the development of the National Capital or the Nation.

The Woodward & Lothrop Service Warehouse should be listed on the National Register of Historic Places with architecture as the area of signficance because it meets the following National Register criteria:

Criteria A: It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history; and

Criteria C: It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinquishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

310.22 If property is proposed for designation principally for its architectural significance, a detailed architectural description of the property, including where possible its original and present appearance.

The Woodward and Lothrop Service Warehouse is located at 131 M Street, N.E., in Lot 110 of Square 712. The warehouse occupies the northwest corner of the block, which is bounded by a spur of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to the east, and the old Palais Royal warehouse, now part of the Woodward & Lothrop warehouse complex, to the south. The Woodward & Lothrop warehouse sits amidst a group of other industrial buildings, primarily warehouses, including that of the M.J. Uline Ice Company, the Columbia Warehouse Development Company, and the Smithsonian Service Center. The Woodies warehouse, at six stories and 90 feet, rises above the other smaller warehouses and light industrial buildings in the area.

The warehouse is set back slightly from M Street with a larger setback from First Street to allow for trailer truck unloading. The area south of the building is paved for parking and trailer truck unloading. The entire area around the building, except that on the north, or primary entrance facade, is enclosed by a chain-link fence. The square-shaped building measures 260 feet wide by 250 feet deep. The main facade faces north towards M Street, distinguished by the neon sign centered on the parapet which reads "Woodward and Lothrop" in large letters; the words "Service" and "Warehouse" are located in smaller letters on either side of "Woodward and Lothrop." The fireproof reinforced concrete skeleton is covered by buff and tan brick laid in common bond, 5:1 ratio, with limestone detailing. The facade is divided by ten sets of three windows, creating a rhythmic pattern, emphasized by the use of the darker brick forming spandrel panels. The second window set in from each end is surrounded by limestone pavilions. These run from the first story to slightly above the roofline with three pilasters on each side and two separating the middle window. The first and second stories are separated by a three-tiered band, formed by six rows of buff brick and two recessed rows of tan brick. The limestone and brick surface detailing, along with the use of neon signage, and streamlined molding around its base give the building an Art Moderne appearance.

A non-functioning ground floor entrance door is located slightly off center towards the west. Above the entrance is a non-original, red-metal awning, coroler brickwork, and a chrome sign atop the door reading in neon, "Woodward and Lothrop." The twelve-light windows have four center awning panes surrounded by fixed panes, which repeats the colored-brick design between the windows. Some windows contain air-conditioning units. A parapet tops the flat roof, also containing a centrally located set of four raised skylights and a prominent, centrally-located, round water tower.

The east and west facades are similar to the main facade except for the deletion of one of the three-window sets to allow for the diminished measurement. The first story on both facades has been altered by the addition of trailer truck loading docks. The east facade docks are covered by red metal awnings similar to that over the main entrance. The south facade resembles the other facades except for the deletion of the limestone

detailing, parapet, and the third paired window set, here replaced in each bay with a single, unadorned window. The first window set at the southwest corner is now covered by a hyphen attachment to the old Palais Royal warehouse from the ground to the third story level. Remains of a railroad track spur indicate that this facade once served rail delivery services, corroborated by a vertical neon sign at the southeast corner reading "Woodward and Lothrop."

The footprint of the building covers approximately 65,000 square feet. The interior contains approximately 450,000 square feet of floor space. Two freight and two passenger elevators serve to transport cargo throughout the building. A basement level is present. The building was constructed for self-containment with both refrigeration and gasoline available.

The warehouse has undergone only minor repairs and alterations in its history. Its exterior is essentially intact as when it was first built. The only facade alterations are the addition of the first story loading docks, entrance surrounds, and the hyphen attachment to the Palais Royal warehouse.

310.23 If property is proposed for designation principally for its prehistoric, historic and/or cultural significance, a description of the existing physical condition of the property and its relation to the prehistoric and/or cultural significance of the property.

THE WOODWARD & LOTHROP DEPARTMENT STORE

The Woodward & Lothrop Department Store was founded in 1880 by Samuel Walter Woodward and Alvin Mason Lothrop, who moved to Washington together from Chelsea, Massachusetts to further their interests in the dry goods business. As young clerks, the partners had decided ideas of what a dry goods store could offer its customers. Chelsea proved too small for their ambitious schemes, and a search through Baltimore and Omaha, Nebraska, finally led them to Washington, which was experiencing a period of dramatic growth following the Civil War.

Woodward and Lothrop opened their first Washington store with partner Charles E. Cochrane on February 24, 1880. Known as the Boston House, the new store occupied 705 Market Place, located on Pennsylvania Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets. As Washington's first department store, the enterprise proved popular. Almost immediately, a second store was opened only two doors away. However, this situation proved unsatisfactory, prompting another move and consolidation at 921 Pennsylvania Avenue in January 1881.

Woodward and Lothrop's successful merchandising technique, unusual for the time, included the establishment of one set price for goods, which replaced the bartering method commonly used by their competitors. Their reputation and expanded patronage prompted them to look for new quarters in 1887. Their move to the existing Carlisle Building at Eleventh and F Streets, N.W., opening April 2, 1887, demonstrated the partners' desire to test unchartered waters. At the time, F Street was first making the transition from a residential to a commercial neighborhood. This move prompted other retail stores to open in the vicinity, forming the heart of Washington's commercial center for the next 75 years. The first store on F Street was located in a pre-existing building. By 1901, Woodward & Lothrop had grown to such an extent that the partners could commission the construction of a new, highly ornate building on G Street.

Family succesors continued the business's policy of expansion. The store expanded from the northeast corner of Eleventh and F Streets to encompass almost the entire block by 1925. Under the direction of Samuel's son Donald Woodward, the department store grew not only in size but in services offered. By the 1930s, Woodward & Lothrop offered a variety of services for its customers and staff, including a jewelry department and repair section, an engraving shop, an optical department, cold storage vaults for furs, the "Walnut Room" for upscale women's fashions, the "French Room" for women's hats, the "English Shop" for men's fashions, the "Evening Room" for men's evening clothes, victrola and radio galleries, furniture galleries, a tea room, ice cream parlour, a power generatoring plant, and its own food services and employees' cafeteria. This increasing specialization required more storage space and support facilities than the downtown site could

accommodate. Consequently, Woodward & Lothrop's fiftieth anniversary (1930) was marked by the purchase of an existing warehouse facility at First, M and Pierce Streets, N.E., to handle repairs and package deliveries. Donald guided the store through the Depression years, priming the business for another expansion in 1937 -- the construction of the six-story service warehouse at 131 M Street.

The expansion of the downtown Woodward & Lothrop store during the early 20th century was an attempt to create not only more retail floor space, but office and storage space required for the rapidly growing commercial enterprise. The purchase of a small, existing warehouse in 1930, and the construction of the custom-designed warehouse in 1937, allowed the more valuable space in the downtown store to be devoted to the sale of goods. While clearly constructed with economy in mind, the utilitarian service warehouse's strong proportions and use of Art Moderne detailing were clearly intended to express the corporate image of the Woodward & Lothrop enterprise.

## THE WOODWARD & LOTHROP SERVICE WAREHOUSE

The construction of the Woodward & Lothrop Service warehouse represented a new trend in the retail industry. In the early years of department store development, goods, services and storage were usually contained within the store or in a separate storage building located nearby. However, the increasing size and services offered by department stores, and increasing cost of land in downtown areas, created a need for off-site storage space. Greater storage potential also allowed merchandisers to buy greater quantities of goods at lower prices, and therefore offer them to consumers at the most competitive prices. This arrangement also freed up more retail space at the downtown store, which had previously been required for the storage of bulky items and other related activities which produced no income for the business. Consolidation of these non-income producing activities at a single location on lower-priced property nearer to transportation routes was cost effective. This idea was fully realized in 1937 with the construction of the Woodward & Lothrop warehouse.

Compared to the predesigned two-story warehouse purchased by Woodies in 1930, the 1937 custom-designed warehouse illustrates the full-blown ideal of the remote delivery station, simultaniously able to take advantage of both rail and road transportation. Not coincidentally, the construction of the Woodward & Lothrop warehouse corresponds directly with the construction of the Hecht Company's warehouse in 1938 on New York Avenue. Both remain excellent examples of the remote delivery station which was first developed in this period.

The construction of the service warehouse also positioned Woodward & Lothrop for its ambitious suburban expansion in the 1940s and 1950s. Located close to rail and trucking lines, the service warehouse served not only the downtown store, but the stores in Bethesda (1946), at the Pentagon (1946), at the first purpose-built suburban store in Chevy Chase (1950), and others which were constructed throughout the metropolitan region in the ensuing decades. The Service Warehouse served as the primary service and storage

center for the Woodward & Lothrop chain until the construction of their Shirlington warehouse in the early 1970s.

When construction was completed in the summer of 1939, the warehouse was hailed by the Woodward & Lothrop Company as "one of the most distinctive buildings to be devoted entirely to the service functions of any store." Rail siding ran in at the second floor level on the south and east elevations, thus permitting unloading of merchandise from trains into the warehouse, and ultimately onto trucks for delivery. The first floor of the building was devoted to the wrapping and delivery of customers' packages. In addition to the receiving and marketing operations of the store, the warehouse contained stock rooms; dry cleaning services; the manufacturing divisions, such as woodworking, upholstery, engraving, watch and jewelry repair; and rooms for the department store's clerical, typing and accounting staff. The warehouse complex was enlarged in 1946 when Woodward & Lothrop bought the holdings of the Palais Royal Department store for $5.7 million, which included the adjacent Palais Royal warehouse. The warehouses were connected at this time by a three story hyphen.

The Woodward & Lothrop warehouse was designed by the New York engineering firm of Abbott, Merkt and Company in 1937. According to a Woodward & Lothrop publication, Roger Garland oversaw the construction and served as the project's associate architect. The building was erected by several construction companies at a cost of $1 million. Work commenced on the site in February 1938 when excavation began for the basement and foundations. Footings were poured in two stages by the George A. Fuller Company of Washington, preparing the site for the walls by June. The Turner Construction Company took over construction of the superstructure. Several Washington businesses helped with the finishing details. The neon sign was provided by the Beacon Sign Company; the freon refrigerator from the Washington Refrigeration Company; and the elevator from the Westinghouse Electric Elevator Company.

Abbott, Merkt and Company was founded in 1921 and was headed by Hunley Abbott and Oswald L. Merkt, both of whom were engineers. The company's work and reputation were far reaching, and spanned several decades. The only other known Abbot and Merkt structures in Washington include the Palais Royal warehouse and the Hecht Company warehouse. Nationally, Abbott and Merkt's work includes the New York Port Authority Building, heralded as one of the largest in the country upon its completion; the United Parcel Delivery Station in Los Angeles; and the J.L. Hudson Company warehouse in Detroit, Michigan. Unfortunately, very little is known about the firm's design philosophy or working methods.

Washington, long associated with traditional, classical styles, was slower to accept the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles than other major cities, such as New York, where the style was used readily to express modernistic ideals. Art Moderne, typified by the use of streamlined forms, gained popularity in Washington during the New Deal, when it was often mixed with classical elements (the result has been labelled "Greco-Deco", "1930s classicism", and "stripped classicism"). Abbott, Merkt and Company's design for the Woodward & Lothrop warehouse is a fine example of the Art Moderne style applied to the warehouse building type. The use of limestone trim, brick detailing,

and neon signage all work to give the Woodward & Lothrop warehouse a streamlined appearance, while still maintaining stripped classical elements. By mixing both the classical and the Moderne, the design seems particularly appropriate for a Washington warehouse building.

## WAREHOUSE DEVELOPMENT IN WASHINGTON

Warehouses typify commercial trends throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. European precedents were set in London and Copenhagen where warehouse construction was focused along the waterfront docks. These ideas transplanted easily to America, developing in port cities, trade centers, and mill towns. Warehouses were primarily rectangular, two-story brick structures on raised stone foundasitons with flat roofs and small, regularly spaced windows. Ornamentation was limited to decorative cornice brickwork or stone quoining, lintels, and trim. As modes of transportation changed, warehouses shifted away from the water to railroad lines, and eventually to trucking routes.

While some warehouses were located along the waterfront in Georgetown and around the Navy Yards, the development of the warehouse storage facility in Washington is most closely related to the history of the rail industry. While serving as a port city in its first century, Washington never developed into a major shipping hub. However, early in the 19th century, Washington was linked to the rest of the country by rail. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was constructed from Baltimore to the Federal city to facilitate the delivery of goods often hindered by poor road conditions. The first passenger line entered the city in 1835, arriving at the "Old Original Depot" constructed on the northern edge of the Mall. Seven lines subsequently were laid to service the city, each with their own station.

The McMillan Commission's plan of 1901 for the consolidation of the train stations into one "union" station, set the stage for the near northeast quadrant of the city to develop into an area of industrial uses. Prior to the 1907 construction of Union Station, this area was sparsely developed. Primarily residential, only a few industrial buildings existed along the Metropolitan Branch of the B & O Railroad which ran north from the Mall along Delaware Avenue to First Street, N.E. With the construction of Union Station, rail expansion occurred north of the station, dramatically increasing the number of industrial and warehouse buildings in this area. This growth demonstates the shifting patterns of transportation in Washington. While earlier, shipping related warehouses were located in Georgetown and along the waterfront around the Navy Yards, the construction of the new Union Station opened up the near northeast quadrant for development related to the rail industry. As the railroad established itself as the primary transporter of goods in the early 20th century, this trend continued. In the 1920s, when the city first enacted zoning legislation, this area was zoned for industrial uses, further encouraging the construction of warehouse buildings.

From the D.C. Preservation League's survey, it was found that warehouse construction is typified by three general methods: brick load bearing walls; reinforced concrete frame with walls of concrete, brick, stone, terra cotta, or cast stone; and steel frame construction with curtain walls of varying materials. The utilitarian and industrial requirements of space, fireproofing, ample light, and ventilation generally take precedence in warehouse design over decorative elements.

The Woodward & Lothrop Service Warehouse exemplifies the best of several warehouse design trends. While incorporating modest decorative materials of a quality appropriate for the Woodward and Lothrop corporation, the building honestly expresses its utilitarian purpose. Applied ornament, such as seen in the brick work, spandral panels, and limestone detailing, is used to mitigate the massiveness of the structure. Typical of good warehouse design, the resourceful application of inexpensive ornament complements the building's utilitarian storage and service functions.

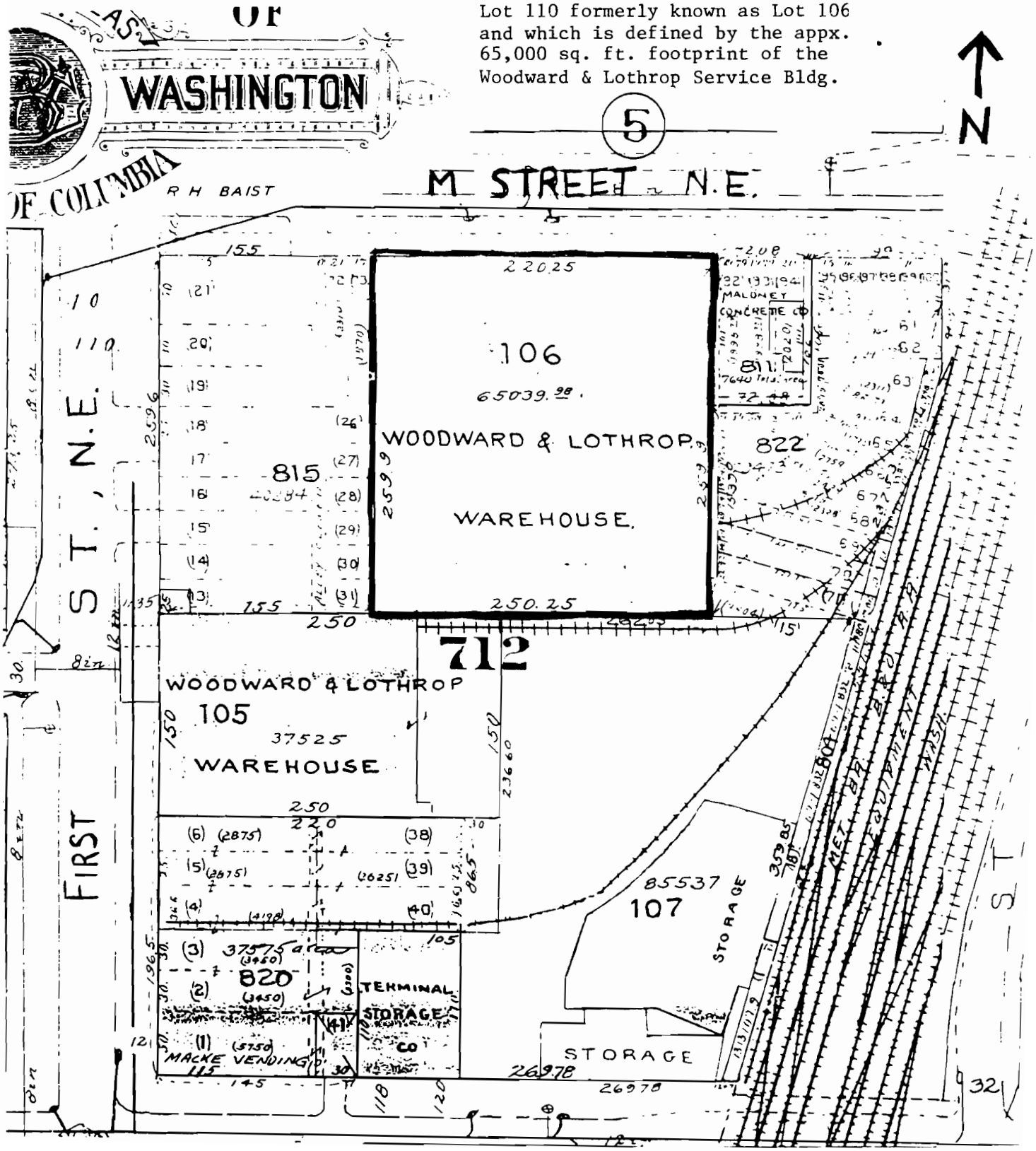
## CONCLUSION

The Woodward & Lothrop warehouse is an excellent example of warehouse design from the 1930s, which saw the rise in popularity of the Art Moderne style for industrial related buildings. This streamlined Moderne style attempted to connect the power and energy of the machine to the building that housed it. As is typical of this utilitarian building type, the Woodward & Lothrop warehouse was designed by a firm which specialized in engineering rather than architecture. The design elements found in the Woodward & Lothrop are limited to simple applied details and a judicious, skilled use of inexpensive materials. As such, the building continues to serve as a model for high-quality warehouse design.

The Woodward & Lothrop warehouse is a strong work of Art Moderne, warehouse architecture by the firm of Abbott, Merkt and Company. It is also an excellent example of the evolution of the warehouse building type, representing the trend towards the decentralization of the merchandising industry in the early 20th century.

310.24 A map showing the exact boundaries of the property proposed for designation; the square and lot number(s); square footage of property proposed for designation; north arrow; and contiguous streets, if any.

Square 712, that part of current Lot 110 formerly known as Lot 106 and which is defined by the appx. 65,000 sq. ft. footprint of the Woodward & Lothrop Service Bldg.



310.26 A list of bibliographic and other sources used to prepare the application; indicate where the reference material is archived.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"Woodward and Lothrop Bonuses Total $93,750." Washington Star. December 4, 1940, p. A2.

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District of Columbia Building Permits

#5155 5-17-17
#6537 3-5-28
#4914 12-13-27
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#206681 9-18-37
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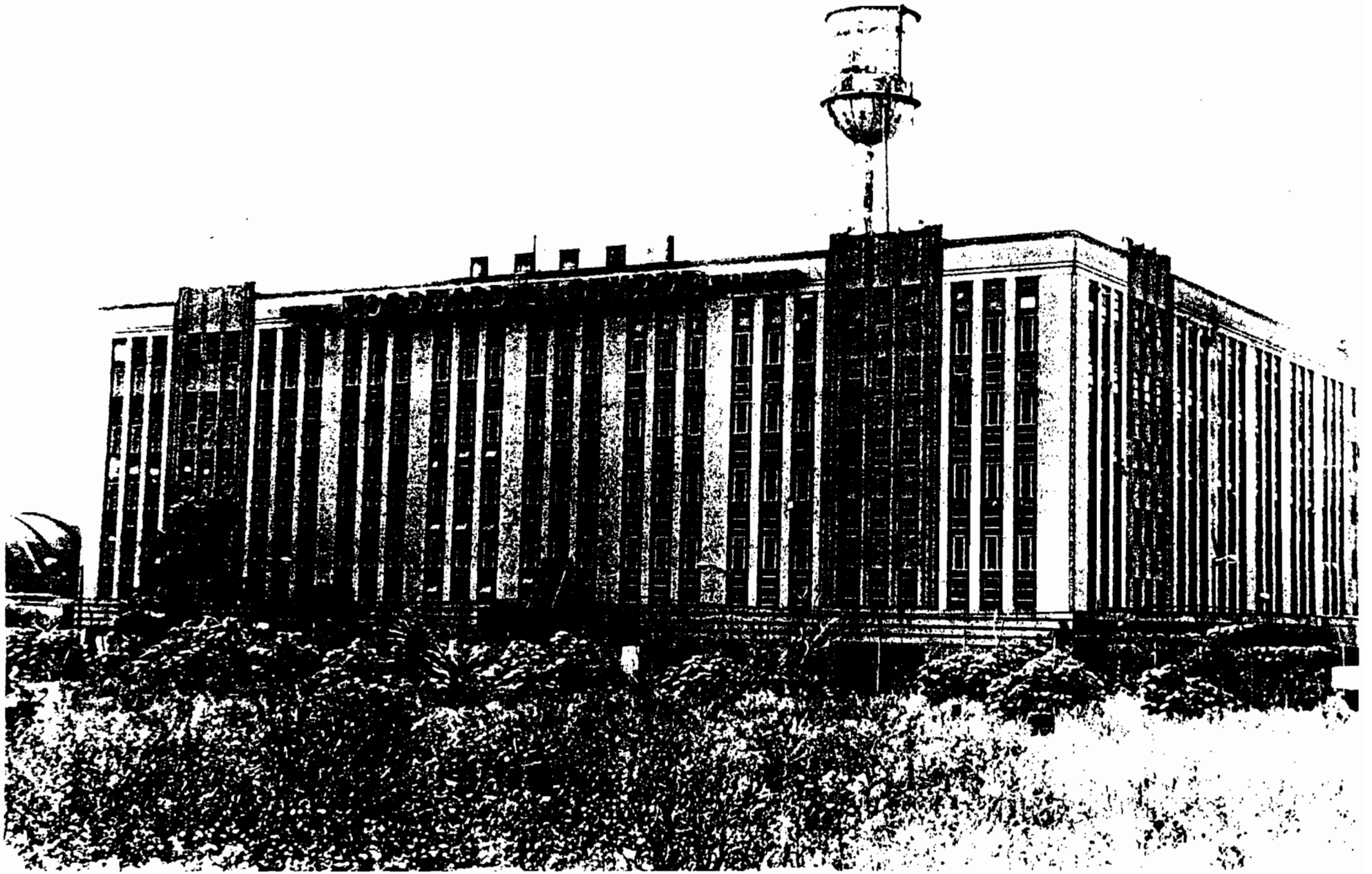

WOODWARD & LOTHROP SERVICE WAREHOUSE, 1991
ENTRANCE (NORTH) ELEVATION
M STREET, N.E.

WOODWARD & LOTHROP SERVICE WAREHOUSE, 1991
PERSPECTIVE VIEW FROM
M & FIRST STREETS, N.E.

WOODWARD & LOTHROP SERVICE WAREHOUSE, 1991
REAR ELEVATION, WITH PALAIS ROYAL WAREHOUSE AT LEFT

WOODWARD & LOTHROP SERVICE WAREHOUSE, 1991
WINDOW DETAIL