

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

DRAFT

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Commercial Exchange Building

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 416-436 West 8th Street

City or town: Los Angeles State: California County: Los Angeles

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Title :</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Beaux Arts

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Terra Cotta

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Commercial Exchange Building, constructed in 1924 is located in downtown Los Angeles at the southeast corner of West 8th Street and South Olive Street. This intersection is at the southern end of the principal business district. The Beaux Arts building is set amongst a variety of mid-rise buildings from the early twentieth century. The Commercial Exchange Building is thirteen stories—rectangular in plan with a classical, tripartite composition conveyed by a horizontal division of base, shaft, and cornice—the typical format for downtown Los Angeles architecture in the 1920s. In 2016-17, the building was rehabilitated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards to convert the building into a hotel with a lobby, lounge, and restaurant on the ground floor, and rooftop pool and deck, set back from the parapet to minimize visibility. The building retains all aspects of historic integrity.

Narrative Description

The Commercial Exchange Building occupies the prominent southeast corner location of the intersection of 8th Street and South Olive Street. The building is set on the lot line so the primary walls are immediately adjacent to the sidewalks. The placement of the building allows the blade sign on the northwest corner of the building to project over the sidewalks and is a dominant

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visual aspect of the intersection. It is visible for several blocks in either direction on Olive Street. The corner has a clearly urban context from the early twentieth century, although there is a more recent residential tower across Olive Street to the east. Additional buildings are under construction, so that the overall setting is transitioning into a blend of historic buildings and twenty-first century buildings of substantially greater scale.

EXTERIOR

The Commercial Exchange Building is characterized by two formal elevations. The 8th Street (north) façade is composed of eleven vertical bays and the Olive Street (west) façade is composed of three vertical bays, reflecting the narrow, rectangular plan.

The main entry is at the northeast corner. The terra cotta entry surround extends nearly the full height of the ground level. The entry door is recessed in this opening, framed by terra cotta. The walls of the building are constructed of red brick with contrasting terra cotta windowsills.

Windows on the street-facing façades are one-over-one, wood sash units. The first floor is capped with a metal cornice located above the storefronts that spans both primary façades. The original storefront form has been restored based on the 1924 Walker and Eisen design, with the exception of a circa 1936 storefront on 8th Street retained as the entrance to the hotel restaurant.

Further ornamentation at the base of the main façades includes inlaid terra cotta bands and a terra cotta stringcourse above the second story. The stringcourse extends across both primary façades and is composed of a classical entablature with a plain cornice and a frieze depicting swags of garland and fleur-de-lis.

The upper floors have one-over-one wood windows throughout, symmetrically placed on the façades. Portions of the original 1924 fire escape remain at the center of the west elevation with landings at each floor two through thirteen. The diagonal ladders were removed as part of the rehabilitation for safety reasons. The windows on the north and west walls of floors three through thirteen are original double-hung, wood sash, all repainted and restored. The second floor windows on the north and west elevations were replicated based on the upper floor style and materials, so the fenestration is consistent on all stories of the primary façades.

In 1935, a five-foot portion of the building was removed from the approximate center of the north elevation, and the west half of the building moved five feet to the east. The building was seamlessly reconnected at the cut line. This alteration, due to the widening of Olive Street, is reflected by the fifth bay having a single window, rather than paired. The anomaly on the façade is not readily apparent from casual observation.

The top two floors of the building retain the original glazed terra cotta facings. The terra cotta was repaired with glass fiber reinforced concrete and re-glazed in 2017 to match the adjacent terra cotta. The work was performed as part of the overall rehabilitation of the building. The terra cotta details on these two uppermost floors feature engaged pilasters, decorative floral treatment,

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Corinthian capitals, and a terra cotta cornice. The cornice features decorative modillions on the underside and acanthus leaves above. The cornice was modified by the removal of its original overhanging projecting soffit. The architrave band at the roofline still serves as an ornamental band that highlights the roofline. The cornice alteration occurred in 1966, likely due to deterioration of the anchoring of the soffit. Another prominent feature of the exterior is the neon blade sign located at the southwest corner. This sign, restored during the 2017 rehab, was originally installed prior to 1935.

The secondary elevations, the south and east walls, are not readily visible. Original steel sash multi-lite awning style windows are aligned horizontally and vertically on the south elevation. A few additional steel sash units are at the east elevation. Both the south and east elevations consist of brick infill between the exposed concrete structural framing, and have no formal ornamentation. "Commercial Exchange Building" painted signage, original to the building, is visible on the east and south elevations, and was repainted as part of the 2017 rehabilitation.

A roof deck and pool area were added as part of the certified rehabilitation. An outdoor bar at the east end was incorporated into the former elevator penthouse. The rooftop features are not visible from the ground level and therefore do not impact the historic appearance or overall integrity of the building. Railings installed on the south elevation are only minimally visible.

INTERIOR

The original entrance lobby is accessed through the main building entrance located on the northeast corner of the building. The interior of the lobby is sheathed with buff colored marble. Three arched openings for the elevators on the east wall are echoed by blind arches with inset black marble on the west wall, opposite the elevator doors on the west wall. The lobby features a barrel-vaulted, coffered ceiling over the entire space. The ceiling was uncovered, patched, and repainted as part of the 2017 rehabilitation.

A marble staircase at the southeast corner spans the basement to the thirteenth floor. One of the arches on the west wall of the lobby was opened during the rehabilitation to provide a passage from the lobby into the former retail space that became the hotel reception area.

The upper floors, two through thirteen, feature a T-shaped, stacked plan comprised of an elevator lobby at the east side of each floor with a central corridor spanning east-west in the middle of each floor. The corridors have marble baseboards and wood frame office doors, with sidelights and transoms. Elevator lobbies feature marble clad walls, marble base, and ceilings framed by a crown molding.

All of the upper residential floors are identical and clearly reflect the historic character of the building due to the restoration and replication of the baseboards and the millwork. The one change that occurred in the rehabilitation is that the door openings were symmetrically arranged along the corridor. When the building was in use as an office, the entrances to the various office spaces were more random due to the size of the individual offices. The corridors were all slightly

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different due to the placement of doors for the offices. The rehabilitated corridors are more uniform, and the use of millwork and door details allow all the floors to retain an authentic and consistent appearance. All of the millwork components from the various floors that could be reused were installed on the fourth floor. The upper floors have replacement material that is identical in design and coloration.

ALTERATIONS

The appearance of the Commercial Exchange Building is indicative of the full rehabilitation of the building in 2016-17, planned and executed to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The Historic Preservation Certification Application Part 3 was signed in December 2018.

The exterior was cleaned and repointed, and original windows repaired and painted. The original entrance surround and foyer was restored after removal of the 1950s granite sheathing, and the terra cotta was extensively repaired. Extensive sheathing was removed from the storefront and transom level, enabling remnants of the transom to be retained and blended with replacement components to recreate the 1924 Walker and Eisen storefront. The design form of the storefront on the north and west elevations is authentic and retains integrity of design and materials.

The Commercial Exchange Building retains a high degree of integrity, due to the restoration of the Beaux Arts exterior features, terra cotta detailing and full-height corner blade sign. The building stands out amidst the surrounding historic and modern buildings in the commercial core. Internally, the original ground floor elevator lobby has been restored. The lobby features original marble walls, flooring, a barrel-vaulted ceiling, and the marble staircase at the southeast corner that is a dominant feature of the space. The original elevator lobbies on floors two through thirteen were restored and the upper corridors rehabilitated to reflect their historic appearance with doors and transoms at each room.

The interior of the building is intact with the public spaces and elevator lobbies on all floors restored. The corridors on the upper floors were all removed due to their hollow clay tile construction that was not seismically stable. Corridors were rebuilt to the same dimensions. The doors and millwork were salvaged where possible, and reassembled for use on the fourth floor, a pragmatic decision based on the amount of material that was in salvageable condition. Millwork and doors on the other floors was replicated to convey an authentic appearance with some variation among the floors. Some floors have single doors with transoms; others have doors with sidelights and transoms. The placement of the doors is the primary concession to the change in use from vacant office to hotel, and the original corridor footprint remains a prominent aspect of the building.

The other significant change to the interior is the design of the former retail space. It had been heavily modified prior to the rehabilitation; the high volume of the first story was the only prevailing characteristic of the space. The former retail space became a hotel lobby, bar, and restaurant, finished with wood cladding on the walls and ceramic tile flooring, all markedly

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different from the originally modest décor, retaining the high ceiling and volume. A mezzanine was added at the west end. During the rehabilitation, a large portion of the original tile/mosaic floor of the retail space was revealed and retained, including an owl motif from the original Owl Drug Store that occupied the western portion of the first floor.

INTEGRITY

The Commercial Exchange Building has a high degree of integrity. The rehabilitation restored the appearance of key elements of the original design.

Location: The property remains in its original location, with the exception of the west portion of the building moved to the east by five feet in 1935.

Design: The building conveys its original design. The primary north and west façades, including the ground level retail storefront, were restored to their original 1924 appearance, with the exception of one storefront circa 1936 that was retained and restored as evidence of modifications that had been made to the retail level over time.

Setting: The urban context and setting of the historic downtown core is still intact. The Commercial Exchange Building is still a dominant part of the historic streetscapes of both 8th Street and Olive Street, although new construction has introduced buildings of larger scale at the intersection.

Materials: The 2017 rehabilitation cleaned and repointed the original brick surfaces of the two primary elevations as well as the terra cotta ornamentation of the exterior. The interior spaces, particularly the elevator lobbies on all floors, retained as much of the original marble flooring and plaster molding as possible.

Workmanship: The exterior elevations were restored, respecting the original workmanship from the 1924 construction.

Feeling: The historic lobbies are public spaces that strongly reflect the feeling of the former office use, with minimal impact from the change in use.

Association: The association with the downtown Los Angeles neighborhood and setting remains strong due in part to the authenticity of the rehabilitation effort.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

ENGINEERING

Period of Significance

1924-1966

Significant Dates

1935

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Walker and Eisen

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Commercial Exchange Building is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of Commerce, for its association with the economic history of Los Angeles in relation to the expansion of the city's metropolitan core in the early 1920s. The building is also eligible in the area of Engineering for an unprecedented move of half the building in 1935. Under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, the building is eligible as the work of master architects Albert R. Walker and Percy Eisen, and their prominent Los Angeles firm, Walker and Eisen. The period of significance begins in 1924, with completion of construction, and ends in 1966 when the building was extensively damaged by a fire and never returned to full occupancy.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

COMMERCE: Association of the Commercial Exchange Building with Expansion of the Metropolitan Core

The Commercial Exchange Building is significant for its association with the economic boom of downtown Los Angeles in the 1920s. Constructed during a period of major skyscraper development in the city's central business district, the building complied with the maximum allowable height limit of 150 feet that controlled the height and scale of Los Angeles for several decades. The Commercial Exchange Building is located in an area of downtown originally intended to accommodate growing business interests.

The Commercial Exchange Building is located in the oldest section of Los Angeles, on lands that were part of the original Spanish pueblo. The area was depicted on Ord's 1857 Map of the City of Los Angeles (**Figure 1**) that illustrated nearly the entirety of the city as it existed at the time. On Ord's Map, most buildings surrounded the Plaza and were sited along Main Street (Calle Principal). The lot was subdivided in 1872 as part of the Huber Tract.¹

As more Americans settled in Los Angeles, the city began to take on the appearance of an American town with wood and brick clad buildings. By 1890, the business district had moved south away from the Pueblo and the Plaza. Fort Street, later Broadway, was originally a residential boulevard, home to many of the city's prominent citizens. The character of the street transformed into a commercial thoroughfare in the later part of the nineteenth century, beginning with the construction of City Hall in 1888, at 226-238 South Broadway.

Congestion of the expanding business core caused commercial office buildings and retailers to locate a few blocks to the south. This trend continued throughout the first half of the twentieth

¹ Map of the Huber Tract: Survey Blocks Made by G. Hansen and L. Seebold, Oct 17, 1872—Los Angeles County Land Records MR002-280.

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century, and ultimately, the center of the central business district migrated from 3rd Street and Broadway to 8th Street and Broadway. The Commercial Exchange Building location at 8th Street and Olive Street was two blocks east of Broadway, and was one of several buildings that extended the business activity toward the east. By 1920, the core business district covered fifty square blocks and the intersection of 8th and Olive Streets emerged as a prime location. This commercial core flourished in the 1920s as the most prominent location for commercial office buildings, such as the Commercial Exchange Building completed in 1924.

The concentration of 1920s buildings transformed downtown Los Angeles to resemble metropolitan cities of the eastern United States, replete with skyscrapers that housed a variety of commercial and office uses. The buildings all conformed to the 150-foot height limit, and these height-limit buildings in downtown were viewed by merchants and the public as the essential expression of a successful metropolis.²

Construction and Occupancy of the Commercial Exchange Building

The Commercial Exchange Building was constructed as an investment for Rudolph Rosenberg of the Eighth and Olive Company. Rosenberg was an industrialist and real estate developer who held a number of buildings in his portfolio. He understood the city center was shifting and envisioned an opportunity in the form of a new office building with leasable space. The Commercial Exchange Building was to be sited immediately adjacent to the RKO Hill Street Theatre, which opened in 1922 at the northeast corner of the block (demolished 1963).

While under construction, the Commercial Exchange Building was advertised in the *Los Angeles Times* as a “modern edifice of dignity and beauty” accessible to all districts including “banking, shopping, wholesale, and the post office” and was geared towards the “modern office tenant.”³ The building did attract a variety of tenants, including dentists. A March 9, 1924 *Los Angeles Times* advertisement announced that four floors of the building were fitted up for dental services. Through the later decades the building was occupied by the Owl Drug Company (circa 1925-1940s), the publishing house for writer Edgar Rice Burroughs,⁴ physicians, insurance companies, attorneys, and varied businesses and restaurants on the ground floor.

In order to construct a distinguished building, Rosenberg hired Walker & Eisen, one of the best architectural firms in Los Angeles. The goal was to ensure a high quality building that would attract tenants and help define the face of downtown Los Angeles as a metropolitan city on par with Chicago and New York. When the Commercial Exchange Building was completed, it was the only height limit building on the block and in the immediate vicinity.

² Teresa Grimes, Historic Architectural Survey and Evaluation Report and Finding of No Adverse Effect: Broadway From Second to Olympic Boulevard, City of Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles (Los Angeles: Historic Resources Group for the City of the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, 1998), 3-4; Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1959*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), 11.

³ “Commercial Exchange.” Ad. *Los Angeles Times*, 9 March 1924: V:9.

⁴ Jay Berman, “Remember when They Moved a Building?” *LA Downtown News*, <http://m.ladowntownnews.com> accessed 1 September 2014.

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Downtown Los Angeles flourished throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and was stable for several decades. Entertainment venues followed the offices and retailers to the area. By the late 1920s, the downtown district featured the largest concentration of theaters in the world. Located in the midst of the core, the Commercial Exchange Building held its own as a viable and active downtown building. Retail activity was listed on the first floor until 1960, and retail appeared on the first floor again in 1973.

The upper stories of the Commercial Exchange Building were occupied as well. City Directory research indicates that the *Oil Daily*, a petroleum industry publication, moved into the building in 1951 and remained until 1973. A 1957 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, promoting the proposed Downtown Civic Center, references the Commercial Exchange Building as one of the prominent buildings to remain in the area, indicated the building was still active.⁵

In 1966, a fire damaged floors twelve and thirteen, and those floors were vacated and were never again fully occupied. In the mid to late twentieth century, the economic activity of downtown Los Angeles began to shift to suburban enclaves.⁶ The occupancy of the upper floors appears to have declined by the 1970s, consistent with the general decline of the Los Angeles central core.

ENGINEERING: 1935 Bay Removal and Reconnection Campaign

In as early as 1923, one year before the Commercial Exchange Building was constructed, area landholders petitioned the City's Public Works Committee (PWC) to widen Olive Street between 7th Street and Pico Avenue. The PWC did not take immediate action and the proposal sat dormant until early 1925, just after the Commercial Exchange Building was completed. Between 1925 and 1928, the Olive Street sidewalk-widening project was processed at multiple City Council meetings and other public hearings until the City Council approved expansion of the Olive Street right of way in March of 1928.

The city soon awarded payments to owners of condemned properties, collected assessments, and completed the widening project except at the corner of 8th and Olive Streets in the vicinity of the Commercial Exchange Building. The project was not completed due to an error in the project's legal filing wherein long-term tenant Owl Drugs was not named in the condemnation suit and as a result would not release the property for the widening project. The project was further delayed by the bankruptcy of the building owner and the property's liquidation. When the dust settled in 1935, the decision was finally made to comply with the City's instructions to remove five feet of the building frontage along Olive Street.⁷

⁵ "Civic Auditorium Model Shown to Supervisors." *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1957, 1:2-3.

⁶ *City Center to Regional Mall*, 11.

⁷ "Widening Plea for Olive Street Filed," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1923, III, "Sidewalk Cost Plan Confirmed: Council Approves Olive Street Assessment for Widening Project," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1928, A3, "Court Upsets Last Barrier: Olive Street Widening Now Due to Proceed," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1928, A1, "City Hall Gossip," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 1932, A4 and "Building to Be Sold Thursday," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1935, A8.

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Rather than removing and rebuilding the entire Olive Street façade to make room for the street widening, the owners hired Kress House Moving Company to remove a five-to-ten foot section of building at the north elevation and through the center, equating to one half of one vertical bay, approximately fifty-five feet east from Olive Street. This plan was intended to save the ornate Olive Street façade and to reduce costs, as tearing down and rebuilding a portion of the entire building would have been much more expensive.

Original architects Walker & Eisen returned to help oversee the operation. Engineer Murray Erich provided expertise, and the Kress House Moving Company executed the monumental task of moving the western half of the building and reconnecting it to its eastern half. The move was specifically designed by the engineer to accomplish this project. There is no known precedent for any other move of this type, at least in Los Angeles. The Kress House Moving Company had turned the ten-thousand ton, 5-story Brunswig Drug Company Building ninety degrees on New High Street in Los Angeles in 1931⁸

After cutting the Commercial Exchange Building into two separate parts over the period of three months, and installing the complex systems of jacks and cribbing in the building basement, a crew of twenty men using steam cranes worked approximately nine hours to move the western half to connect it to its eastern counterpart.⁹ None of Kress' later projects was as complex as this move.

It has been said that not a single window was broken and the building tenants were not impacted. Most impressively, at the time it was claimed that the Commercial Exchange Building was the tallest building in the world to be moved.¹⁰ The work was supervised by Walker & Eisen. The repairs completed after the move, including new brick at the cut line, and Olive Street façade repairs, were consistent with the original 1924 building appearance.¹¹ Overall, the Commercial Exchange Building is consistent in look and feel with Walker & Eisen's most celebrated buildings, while maintaining its own distinctive appearance.

ARCHITECTURE: Work of Walker and Eisen, Architects

The Commercial Exchange Building was designed by prominent Los Angeles architects Albert R. Walker and Percy A. Eisen, and built by the William Simpson Construction Company. Upon completion of construction in 1924, the Beaux Arts style Commercial Exchange Building was touted by the *Los Angeles Times* as one of the most "substantial, utile, and handsome [buildings] that talent and money can produce."¹² The building was constructed in a period of major skyscraper development in the city's central business district, at the maximum allowable height limit. It was also located in an area of downtown intended to accommodate growing business

⁸ "Brunswig Building Moves." *Los Angeles Times*, 20 June 1931:II:1.

⁹ "Thirteen-Story Building Moved Five Feet, Joining Several Parts." *Los Angeles Times*, 18 October 1935:II:1.

¹⁰ Ibid; Jay Berman. "Remember When They Moved a Building?"

¹¹ Jay Berman. "Remember When They Moved a Building?"

¹² *Los Angeles Times*, 1 January 1925.

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interests by offering a two-hour parking zone rather than the typical forty-five minute limitations found on other streets in the commercial core.

Walker & Eisen Architects and Engineers (Walker & Eisen) was the preeminent architectural firm in Southern California during the 1920s to the 1940s. They were especially prolific in Los Angeles designing many commercial buildings, apartment houses, and hotels. The duo were peers of Allison and Allison, Parkinson and Parkinson, Albert C. Martin and Associates, Nordstrom and Anderson, and Morgan, Walls and Clements. These firms were collectively responsible for significantly shaping the urban form Los Angeles.

Albert R. Walker and Percy A. Eisen established the firm Walker & Eisen in 1919, on the eve of the 1920s population explosion that more than doubled the number of city residents, from roughly 575,000 in 1920 to over 1.2 million in 1929.¹³

The Commercial Exchange Building exemplifies Walker & Eisen's work during the 1920s when Los Angeles was booming and investors were looking for architects to stretch every inch of floor space, without concern for the architecture. The firm successfully managed its clients' needs without resorting to substandard design. Walker & Eisen produced excellent architecture while conforming to program and budget. The Beaux Arts style Commercial Exchange Building was designed in the archetypal aesthetic for the early twentieth century American skyscraper based on the Renaissance period palazzo and classical Beaux Arts ideology, and elongated the form to fit the programming requirements of a commercial office building in the central business district of Los Angeles.

Albert R. Walker (1881-1958)

Albert R. Walker was born in Sonoma, California. After the death of his father and younger sibling, Walker moved to San Diego with his mother to live with relatives. He attended a special study at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1902. Later that year he was back in San Diego working for the firm Hebbard and Gill. His association with Hebbard and Gill lasted only for one year. He continued his apprenticeship in Los Angeles, first with Parkinson and Bergstrum and then with A. E. Rosenheim, and Hunt and Grey. He ventured out on his own, establishing his independent practice in 1909 working mainly on residential and ecclesiastical projects. A year later he partnered with John Terrell Vawter, a graduate of the University of Illinois and a student of Gustave Umbdenstock's atelier associated with the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.¹⁴ Walker and Vawter worked together for seven years designing buildings around Los Angeles, their most ambitious being the Italian Renaissance Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1915) on Hope Street. From his work with Vawter, Albert Walker acquired an appreciation of the Beaux Arts paradigm. Walker and Vawter dissolved their partnership in October 1917 when

¹³ Donald J. Schippers, "Walker & Eisen: Twenty Years of Los Angeles Architecture, 1920-1940," *Southern California Quarterly* 46, No. 4 (December 1964), 374.

¹⁴ Clarence Alan McGrew, *City of San Diego and San Diego County: The Birthplace of California*, Volume 2 (San Diego: American Historical Society, 1922), 420.

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Vawter joined the military. Two years later Walker partnered with Percy A. Eisen to create one of the most important design firms in Los Angeles during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁵

Percy A. Eisen (1885-1946)

Percy A. Eisen was born in San Francisco, the son and grandson of prominent architects. In late 1885, Percy's father Theodore Eisen went to work for the San Francisco firm Curlett and Cuthbertson, moving the family to Los Angeles to work on projects like the Richardsonian Romanesque Los Angeles County Courthouse (1891). Theodore Eisen became a partner in 1886, forming Curlett, Eisen and Cuthbertson. Theodore Eisen stayed with the firm for a few years. By the 1890s, Eisen was working as the City Superintendent of Buildings, with an office at City Hall.¹⁶ By 1898, Eisen was in partnership with Sumner P. Hunt, working under the name Eisen and Hunt.¹⁷

Percy Eisen attended public schools and trained alongside his father to learn the practice of architecture. As early as 1908, Percy was in architectural practice with his father as Eisen and Son, Architects.¹⁸ In this capacity, Percy dealt with many of the city's business people and forged connections that served him well in his later endeavors. Percy left the firm in 1919 to partner with Albert Walker; his father Theodore continued to practice architecture until his death in 1924.¹⁹

Walker and Eisen

Together, Albert Walker and Percy Eisen were a powerful team. During their productive life, they were responsible for the design of more than 200 buildings. Their work focused on larger scale commercial office buildings, apartment houses, hotels, and movie theaters. The firm gained recognition from their work on larger buildings. There was a time that Walker and Eisen successfully obtained the bulk of the contracts in the city. Their success enabled them to recruit many highly skilled designers, several who trained in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts as well as draftsmen who came from the Beaux Arts Institute of New York. At the height of the boom, the firm employed fifty draftsmen. While both partners shared design responsibilities, Eisen tended to focus on business development using his well-established connections to secure contracts for the firm. Walker was the creative force who primarily focused on guiding their design effort.²⁰

¹⁵ Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 212 and McGrew, *City of San Diego*, 420.

¹⁶ Los Angeles City Directory, 1894, 197.

¹⁷ Pacific Coast Architecture Database, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/partners/663/> accessed 1 September 2014.

¹⁸ Los Angeles City Directory, 1898, 358; "Architects Plan Many New Buildings," *Los Angeles Herald*, 5 July 1908, IV/5 and Schippers, Walker & Eisen, 372-373.

¹⁹ "Change in Firm," *Southwest Builder and Contractor* 54, No. 9 (August 29, 1919), 12; "Theo. A. Eisen, architect and reinforced concrete engineer (latterly Eisen & Son), still in business at 283 Wilcox Building"; Schippers, Walker & Eisen, 373.

²⁰ Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams*, 212; Schippers, Walker & Eisen, 377.

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While in practice together from 1919 to 1941, Walker and Eisen designed major buildings in the Southern California region in the cities of Los Angeles, San Diego, Long Beach, Beverly Hills and Palm Springs, and collaborated on numerous buildings designated as City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCM) or listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Walker & Eisen locally designated and National Register-listed properties include:

Silverwoods, six-story building built for a clothing retailer in 1920, Los Angeles, CA (Contributor to the Broadway Theater District NRHP No. 79000484)

The Hotel Normandie, a four-story Renaissance Revival style building erected in 1926, Los Angeles, CA (Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM) 1013)

Fine Arts Building, a 12-story Romanesque Revival building built in 1927, Los Angeles, CA (HCM 125)

James Oviatt Building, a 12-story building with a penthouse and mezzanine in the Art Deco style completed in 1927, Los Angeles, CA (HCM No. 195; NRHP No. 83004529)

United Artists Theater Building, a 13-story building in the Spanish Gothic style completed 1927, Los Angeles, CA (Contributor to the Broadway Theater District NRHP No. 79000484, HCM 523)

The Wurlitzer Building, a 13-story Gothic Revival building billed as “the world's largest music house” when it was completed in 1924, Los Angeles, CA (Contributor to the Broadway Theater District NRHP No. 79000484)

The Western Pacific Building, a 12-story Renaissance Revival style building, Los Angeles, CA (Contributor to the Broadway Theater District NRHP No. 79000484)

El Cortez Apartment Hotel, a 1927 14-story building in the Spanish Colonial Revival, San Diego, CA (NRHP No. 01001458)

The Beverly Wilshire Hotel, a nine-story building in the Renaissance Revival style 1928, Beverly Hills, CA (NRHP No. 87000908)

Walker and Eisen dissolved the firm in 1941, after twenty-two successful years in partnership, having designed 293 buildings throughout southern California. During the war years, Eisen served with the Air Corps Procurements Division. Following the war, Eisen partnered with Eugene C. Hart, focusing their efforts on designing residential architecture for returning veterans

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in the booming post-WWII communities of Inglewood and the San Fernando Valley. Percy A. Eisen died of a heart attack at his office on November 18, 1946.²¹

After dissolving the firm, Walker partnered with Gus W. Kalionzes and Charles A. Klingerman, both former draftsmen at Walker & Eisen.²² Both men were at least twenty years younger than the 50-year-old Walker. Walker, Kalionzes and Klingerman projects include the Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral (1948) (HCM 120), significant additions to Santa Monica Hospital (1954/1956), the Centinela Hospital Medical Center (1954) in Inglewood, buildings for the Teamsters Union in Los Angeles (1956), buildings for the University of Southern California (1957), and the California Medical Center (1958). Albert R. Walker died at home September 17, 1958.²³

²¹ "Eisen, Architect for Southland Buildings, Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1946, A3; "Famed L.A. Architect Albert R. Walker Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September 1958, B1.

²² "Famed L.A. Architect"; Application of Gus William Kalionzes for Membership in the American Institute of Architects.

²³ "Addition Completed," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 February 1954, F5; "New Teamsters Unit Planned," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 1955, F23; "Santa Monica to Get New Hospital Center," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 July 1956; "Initial Structure Slated in \$3,000,000 Program," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1958, G15.

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<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/partners/663/>. Accessed 1 September 2014.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

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___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
___ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
 Local government
___ University
___ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 34.044847 Longitude: -118.256566

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries are those of Los Angeles County tax parcel lot 514 40-18030 on which the building is located.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This boundary is coterminous with the building footprint.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Tara Hamacher and Roger Brevoort
organization: Historic Consultants
street & number: 256 S. Robertson Blvd, #2401
city or town: Beverly Hills state: CA zip code: 90211
e-mail tara@historicconsultants.com; roger@historicconsultants.com
telephone: (213) 379-1040 Tara
date: September 2018; Revised November 2018, February 2019

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Commercial Exchange Building
City or Vicinity: Los Angeles
County: Los Angeles
State: California
Photographer: Roger A. Brevoort
Date Photographed: August 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 10 North and West elevations. The west elevation fronts on Olive Street, the north faces 8th Street. The column of single windows locates the cut to allow the move of the west portion in 1935.
- 2 of 10 Upper portion of north elevation. Camera facing southwest. The restored blade sign projects from the northwest corner of the building.
- 3 of 10 Lower portion of north elevation showing the restored storefront and marble at base. Camera looking west.
- 4 of 10 East elevation, showing painted name sign at roofline. View also shows context of location, with historic buildings of similar age, height and scale, and contrast with twenty-first century buildings.

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- 5 of 10 South elevation, post-rehabilitation. Additions and railings on the roof located and painted to blend with the tertiary character of the south elevation.
- 6 of 10 Main entrance doorway, post-rehabilitation. The terra cotta surround was repaired and reglazed. This door leads in to the main hotel lobby that originally served as the office entrance. Camera looking southwest.
- 7 of 10 Interior of main lobby at entrance to elevator lobby for hotel guests, formerly the office portion of building. Marble walls, flooring and elevator doors are original fabric. Marble staircase is visible at rear of photo. Camera looking south.
- 8 of 10 Entrance lobby ceiling, as restored. Camera looking up from centerpoint of lobby.
- 9 of 10 Fourth floor corridor, illustrating typical door configuration with door, sidelights, and transom. All of the millwork on this floor was salvaged from various floors and reinstalled on this floor. Placement of the doors was revised to accommodate hotel needs. Camera looking northwest.
- 10 of 10 The floor of the retail space at the northwest corner of the building was retained, previously occupied by Owl Drugs. The mosaic of the owl is an original feature, utilized in the hotel's formal dining room. Camera looking east.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

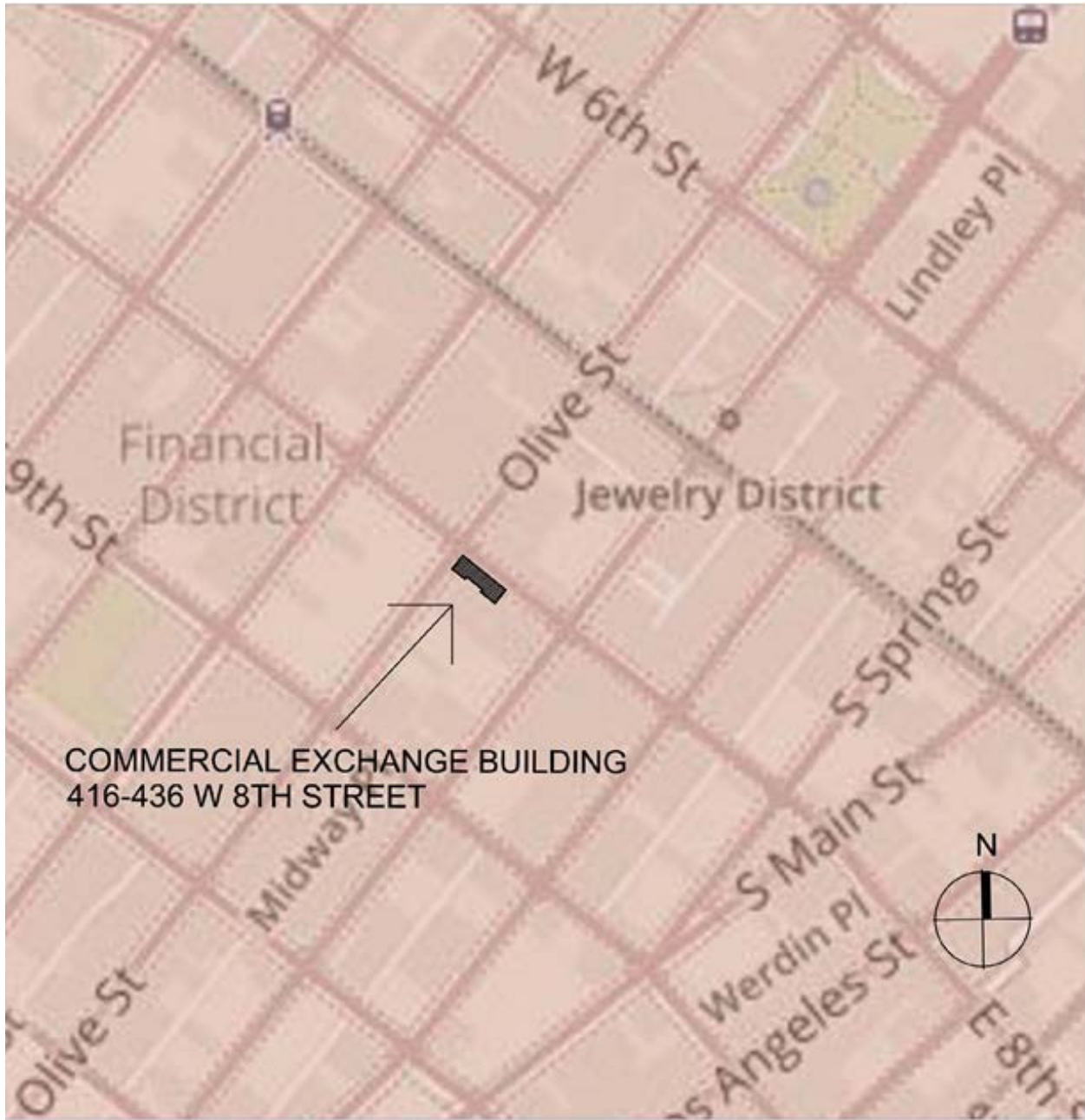
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Location Map

Latitude: 34.044847

Longitude: -118.256566

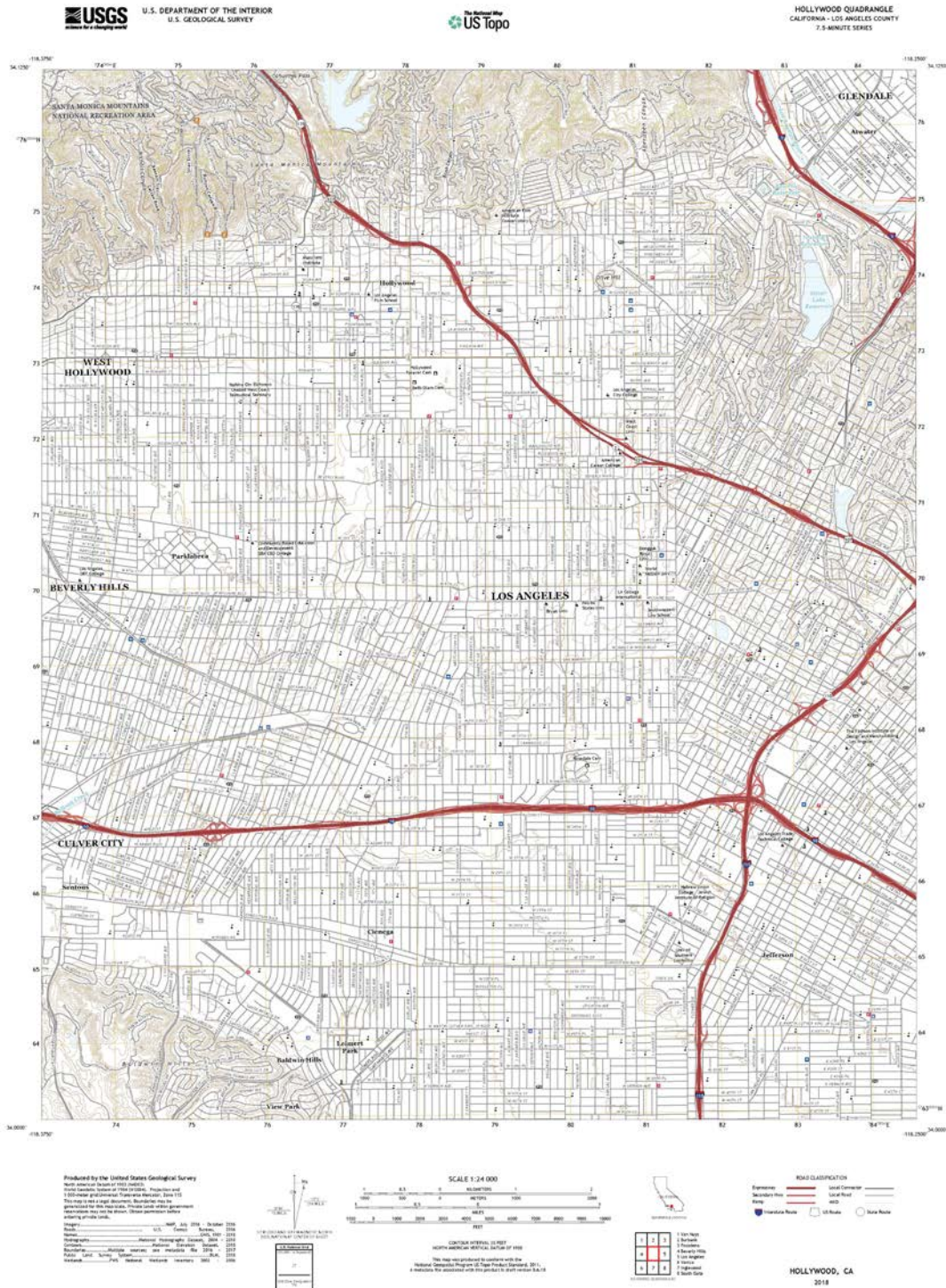


Southeast corner of Olive Street and West 8th Street, Los Angeles

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USGS Map— Los Angeles Quadrangle

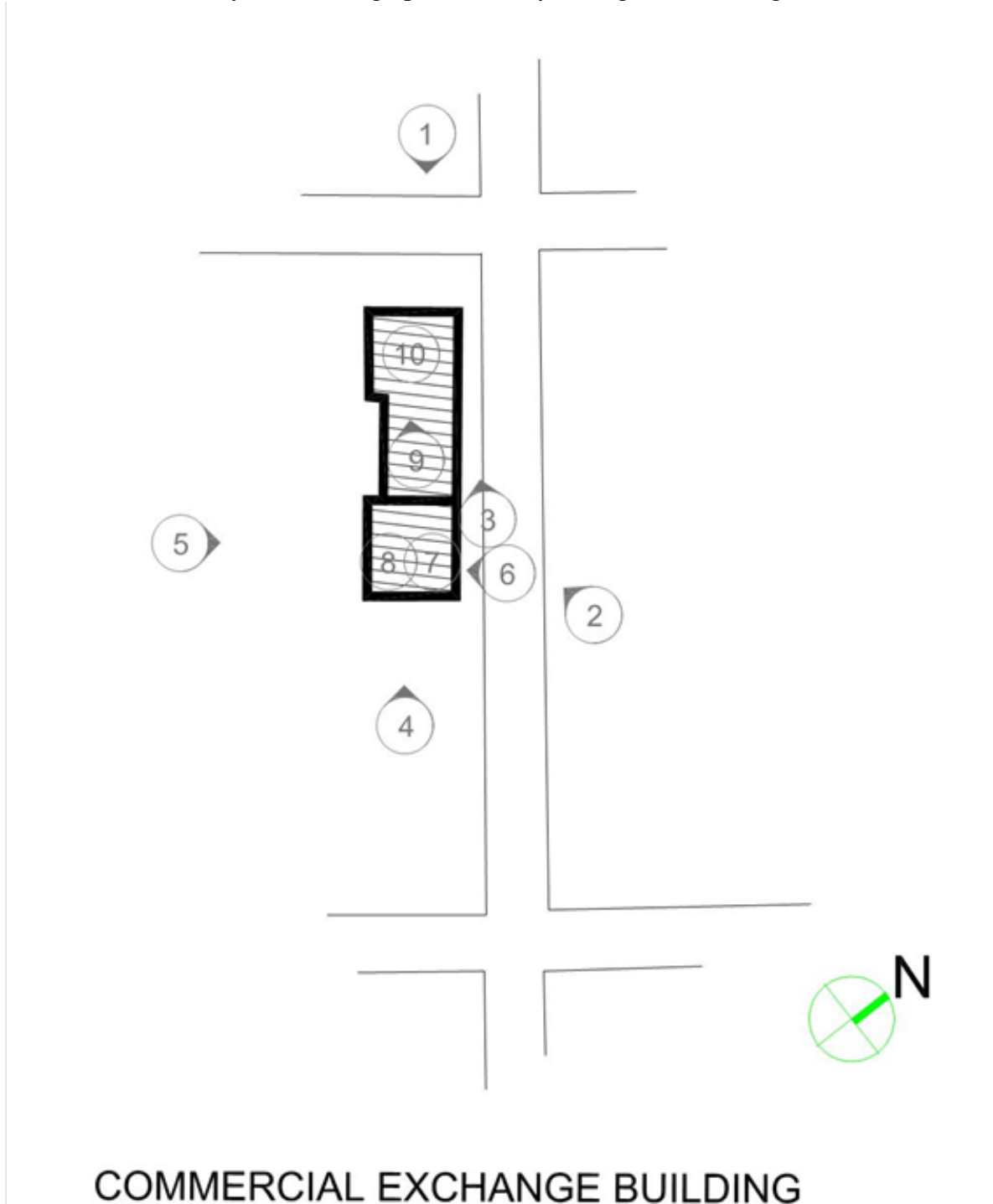


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Sketch Map/Photo Key

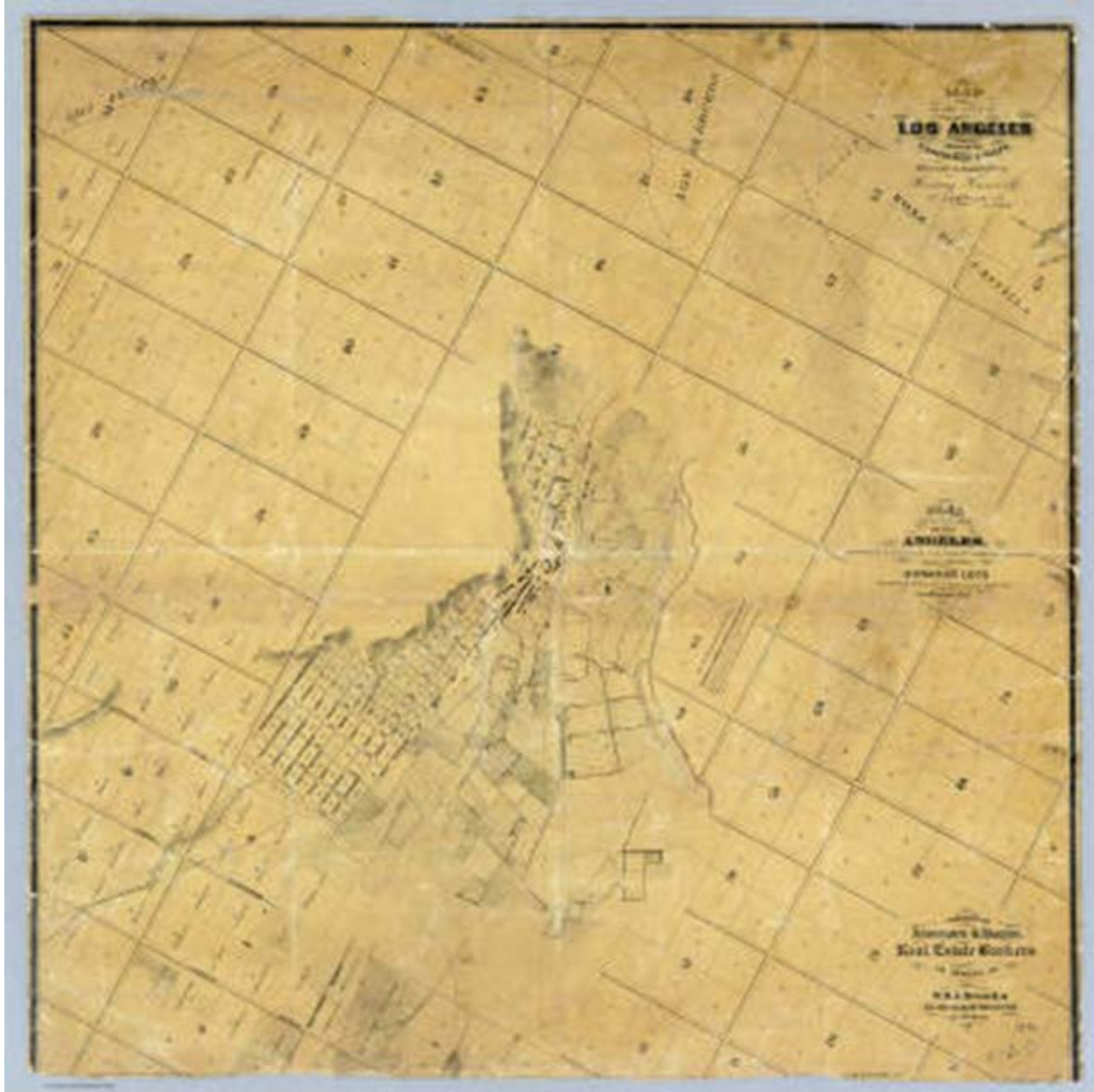
Olive Street is to the top, (west), 8th Street is to the right, (north). Interior Photo 7 is looking south across the lobby, 8 is looking up at the lobby ceiling, 10 is looking down at the floor.



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Figure 1. Ord's Map of Los Angeles 1857, Rumsey Collection #5183000. Downtown area is at approximate center of map.



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Figure 2. Base of building during construction, 1924, .showing location of transoms and size of glass panes, and horizontal and vertical mullions. This image was the basis for the restoration of the storefront. Source: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.



Figure 3. Building move, 1935, basement area as excavated to accomplish the move using steel rollers. Man is not identified in the archival record. Source: UCLA Online archives: <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz00254xd6>.



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Figure 4. Image illustrates the location and scale of the cut made through the building to accommodate the move of the west portion in 1935. *Los Angeles Examiner*, USC Special Collection (EXM-P-S-LOS-ANG-CIT-BUI-055)



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Photo 1



Photo 2



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Photo 3



Photo 4



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Photo 5



Photo 6



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Photo 7



Photo 8



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Photo 9



Photo 10

