

## 801-807-815 ALTON ROAD, MIAMI BEACH

### I. Background

The subjects are three two-story apartment buildings built in the 1940s at the northeast corner of Alton Road and 8th Street in Miami Beach. They occupy Lots 6 and 7 in Block 122 of the Lenox Manor Subdivision, which comprises six city blocks between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets from Alton Road to Michigan Avenue. This subdivision was platted in 1921 by Carl Fisher's Miami Ocean View Company.

Most of the Lenox Manor Subdivision lies within the Flamingo Park Historic District of Miami Beach, but this district did not originally include the buildings lining the east side of Alton Road. It was not until 2007, with the Westward Expansion of the Flamingo Park district, that the boundaries were extended to Alton Road. These three buildings are designated as Contributing structures in the Westward Expansion district.

All three were designed by the same architect, A. Herbert Mathes (see Biography following), for the same owner, the Beach Bay Company. All are in Postwar Modern style, and they were built in response to the tremendous housing shortage immediately after World War II, due to the suspension of new construction during the war and the sudden population increase as servicemen returned home.

### II. The Buildings

First to be built was 815 Alton Road, on the northwestern portion of Lot 7, referred to in building records as "Tract A." The permit was issued on November 16, 1945, for this \$16,000 apartment house of four units, two per floor. One sheet of original plans was found on Microfilm # 21342 in the Miami Beach Building Department, with only the first and second floor plans and foundation plan.

All three of these buildings have a rectangular footprint and lie on an east-west axis, but this is the only one that faces south. The front entrance, leading to a stairwell, is at

the center of the south elevation. Each floor had two two-bedroom apartments. The door itself is plain, but an eyebrow above it is a remnant of the Art Deco style. The name of this building is shown in the 1952 City Atlas as "Solomon's."

The most distinctive feature of this building are the open, recessed porches, one for each apartment, at the southeast and southwest corners of the building, with low walls of open brickwork---assumed to be original. Brick is not a local material and it is rarely seen in Miami Beach before the Postwar period. Because of the porches, the building's west facade facing Alton Road is asymmetrical.

Windows that wrap around corners are another holdover from the Art Deco style. Here they are awning type, which may or may not be original (they are not shown in the plans), but are typical of the Postwar style. This building has a low, hipped roof of flat cement tile, with an overhang on all sides.

In 1966, a plain, one-story "utility building" measuring 13 x 20' was built behind this building and contained a clothes washer and dryer. Plans were found on Microfilm #75786. It was demolished at an unknown date.

The two other buildings, 801 and 807 Alton Road, were built as a pair two years later, in 1947. They face west onto Alton Road, and both had eight one-bedroom units, four per floor, on double-loaded corridors.

801 Alton occupies the southwest portion of Lot 6, called "Tract C." It originally cost \$43,000. Four sheets of original plans were found on Microfilm #25295, showing front, side and rear elevations; a section of the entrance; first and second floor plans and plot plan. This building is labeled "Jeanette" in the 1952 City Atlas, although a plaque above the door now says "Mark Leo." A Site Plan for 801 Alton for the installation of a six-foot fence in January 1986 was found on Microfilm #27957.

807 Alton occupies the northwest part of Lot 6 and the southwest part of Lot 7, on what is called "Tract B." It has slightly smaller dimensions than 801 Alton and originally cost \$40,000. Four sheets of original plans, showing front, side and rear elevations,



entrance section, first and second floor plans and plot plan, were found on Microfilm #25438. The 1952 Atlas labels this building as "Andrew," but a plaque above the entrance now calls it "Kimberley."

These two buildings are nearly identical: both have a flat roof with overhang, windows wrapping around the corners (shown in the plans as casements, but awning-type is present now), decorative horizontal lines incised in the stucco on the front facade, and a short eyebrow over the central doorway. But the most distinctive feature of these two buildings is the vertical fluting that flanks the front door and second-story window. Oddly, this feature does not appear on the original plans. And the fluting is different on each building: 801 Alton has five concave hollows on each panel, while 807 Alton has twelve convex, rounded flutes in each panel.

The eastern 50 feet of Lots 6 and 7 were set aside as "Tract D." Apparently it remained vacant until 1961 when the apartment house at 1135 Eighth Street, designed by Gerard Pitt, was constructed. It is not included in the present project.

### III. Parking

One characteristic of the Lenox Manor Subdivision is its lack of alleyways, or "Courts," that bisect most blocks in the rest of South Beach. These alleys, however, were intended for deliveries, trash removal, etc., and as fire lanes, not for parking.

On October 27, 1993, a permit (#BS930393) was issued to 801 Alton Road for 2600 square feet of parking, paved with asphalt, for seven cars. Five of these spaces are aligned along the western edge of the property, and the other two are behind (east of) 815 Alton, accessed by a driveway that runs between the 815 and 807 buildings. Curb cuts are present on both Alton Road and Eighth Street.

A stately ficus tree still survives at the far corner of the rear parking lot.

### IV. Architect Biography:

A. Herbert Mathes (1912-1977) graduated from New York University in 1937 and came to Miami Beach in 1944. Previously he had designed stores for the National Shoe Company, shoe exhibits at the 1939 New York

World's Fair, packing plants in Kansas, film labs for 20th Century Fox, and Forest Park Gardens in Rye, New York. During World War II he designed ships for the U.S. Navy.<sup>1</sup> In Miami Beach he designed a number of commercial, residential and municipal buildings, including:

Golden Gate Apartments	2395 Flamingo Drive
Parisian Hotel	1510 Collins Avenue
Geneva Hotel	1520 Collins Avenue
Continental Hotel	4000 Collins Avenue
Allison Hotel	6261 Collins Avenue
Miami Beach Public Library	2100 Collins Avenue (demolished)

Mathes is probably best known for designing the North Addition to the Fontainebleau Hotel in 1959, which includes the "cheese hole" façade and the "Spite Wall."

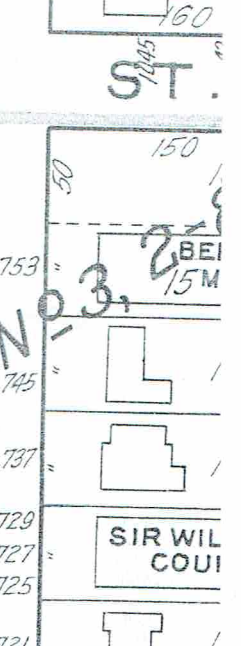
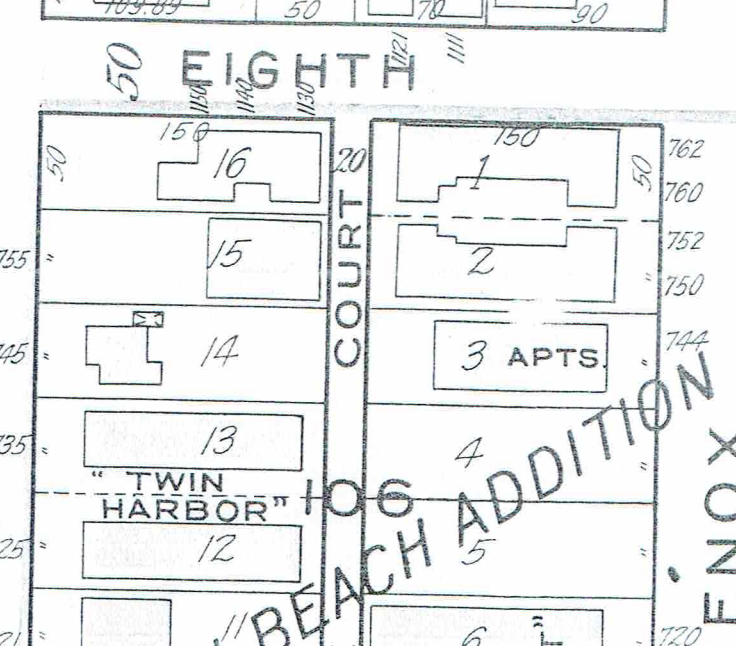
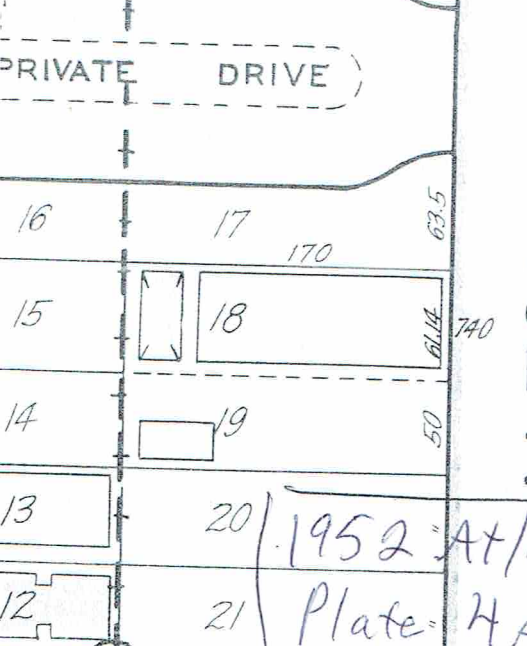
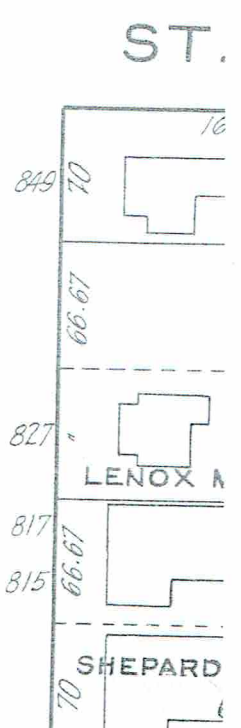
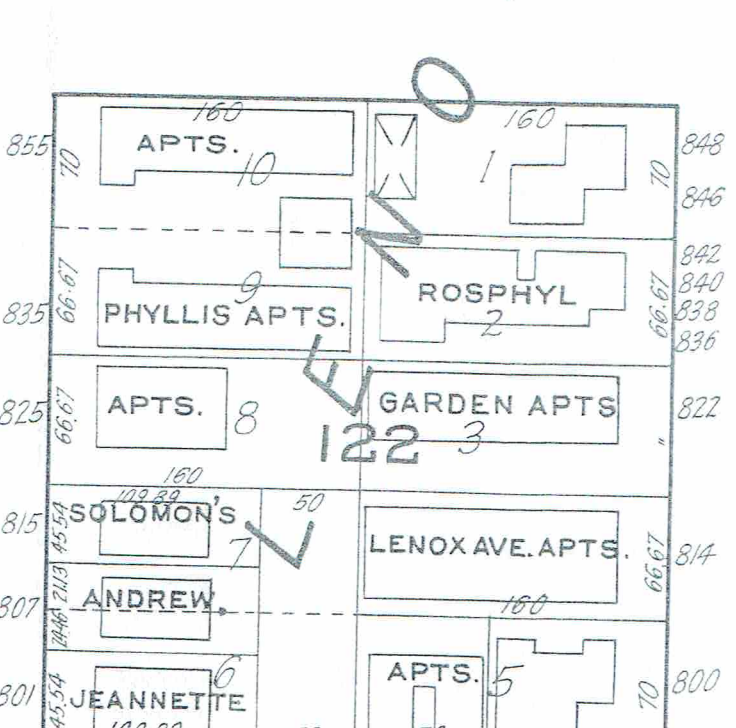
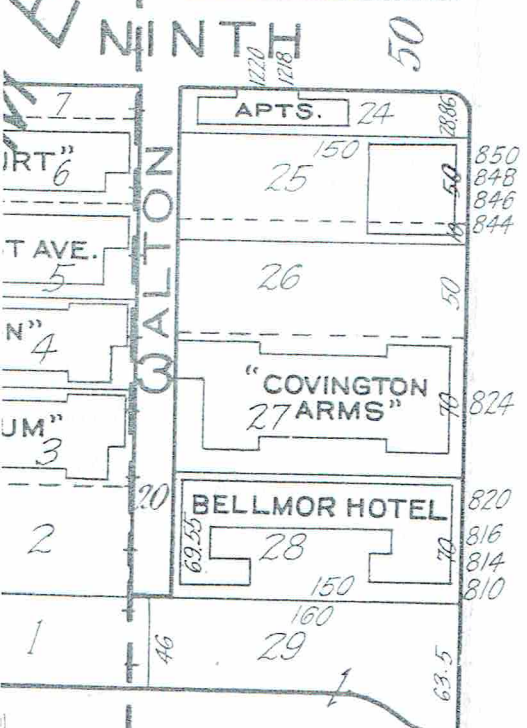
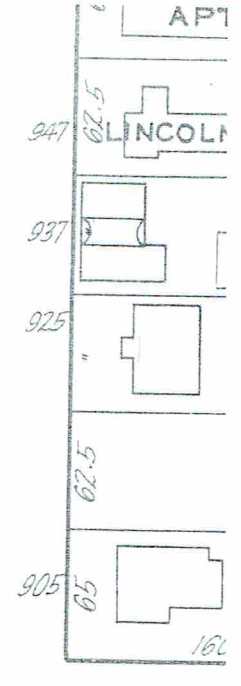
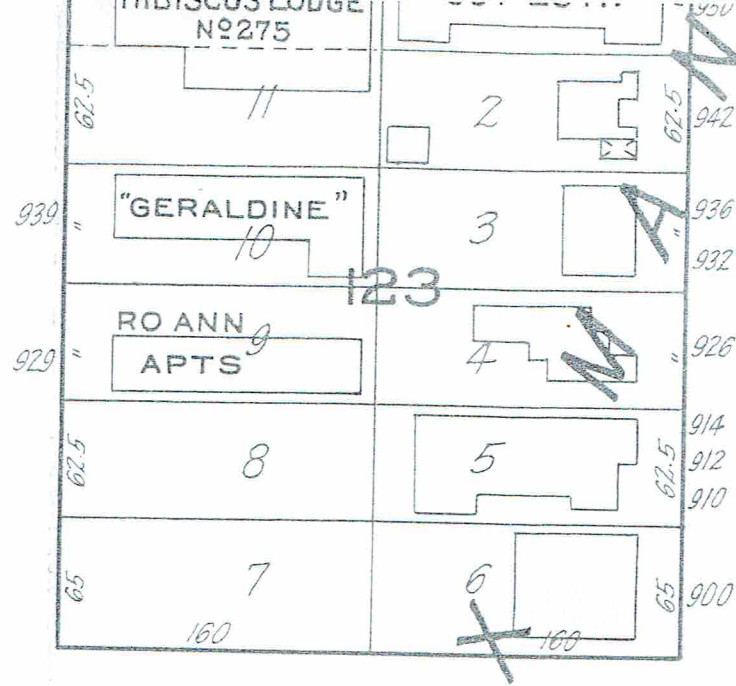
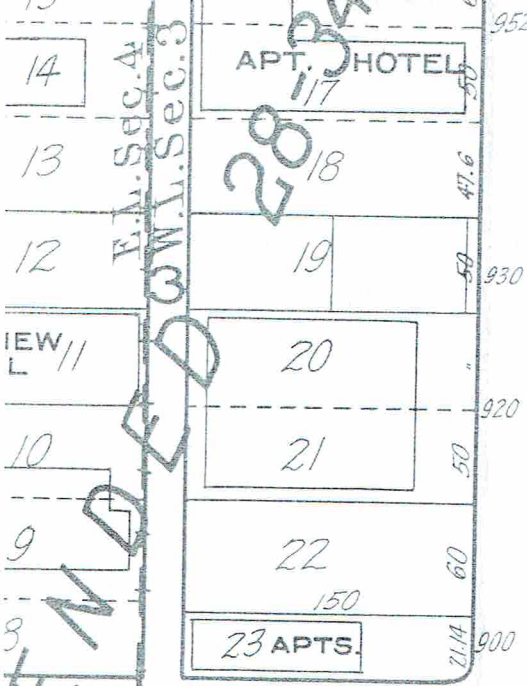
----- Carolyn Klepser, researcher

Oct. 27, 2016

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<sup>1</sup> "Portraits and Projects of Architects," *Florida Sun*, May 21, 1951.

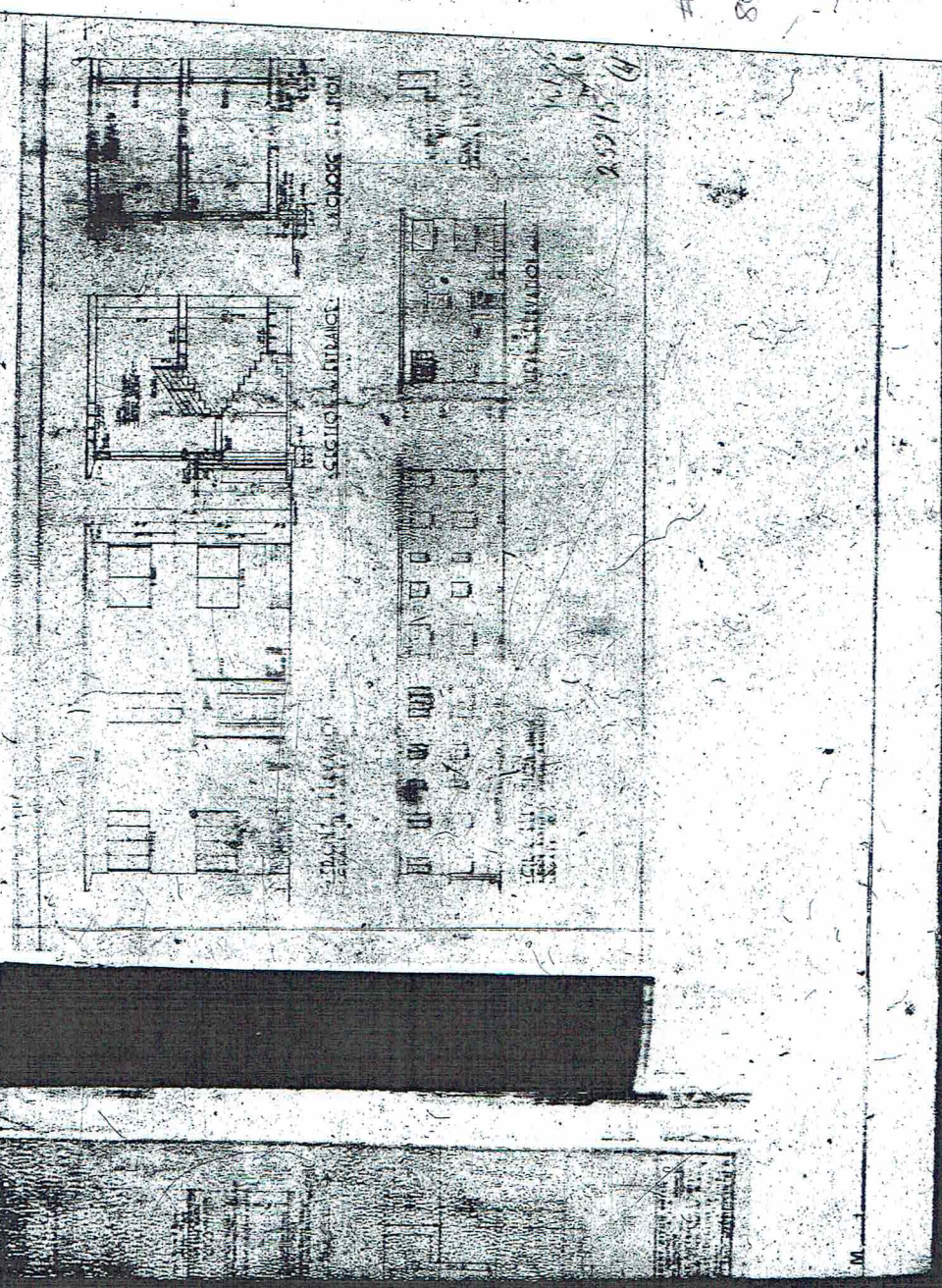




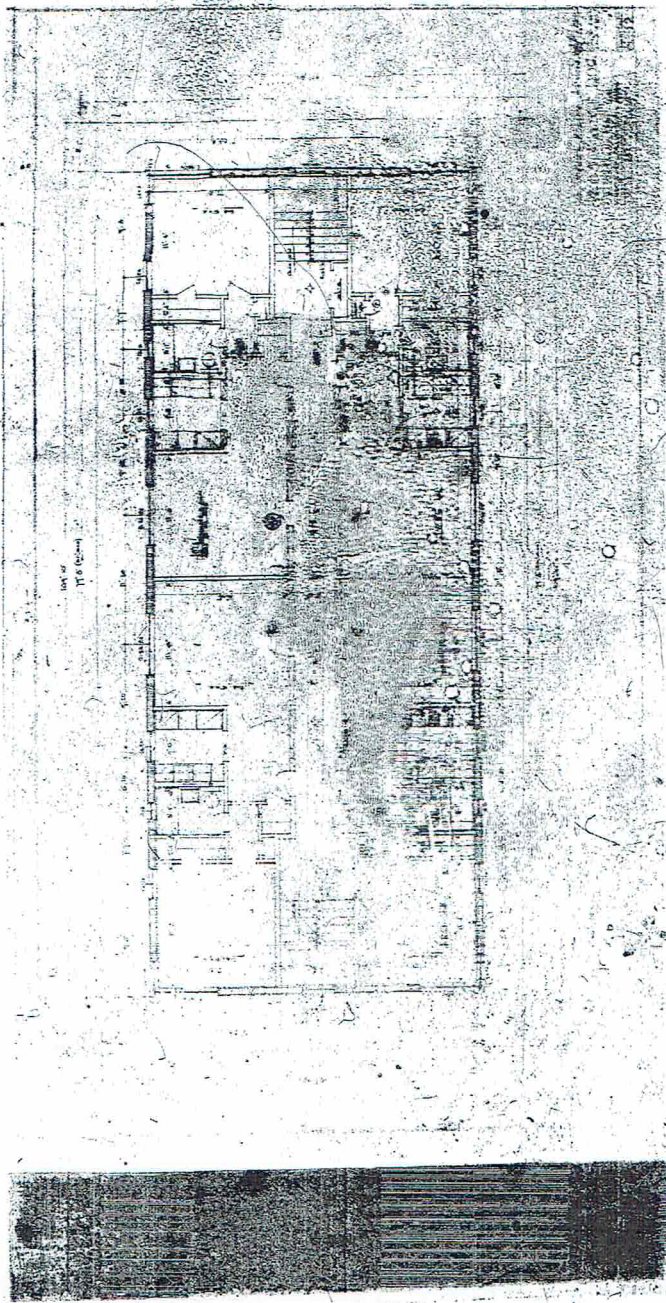
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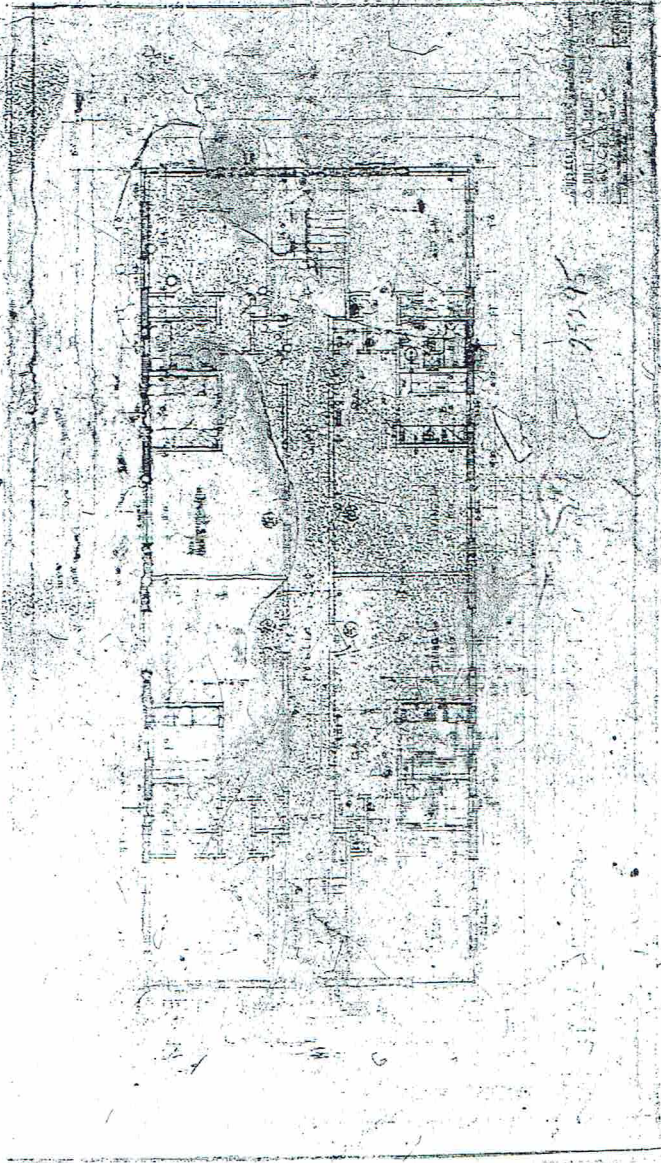




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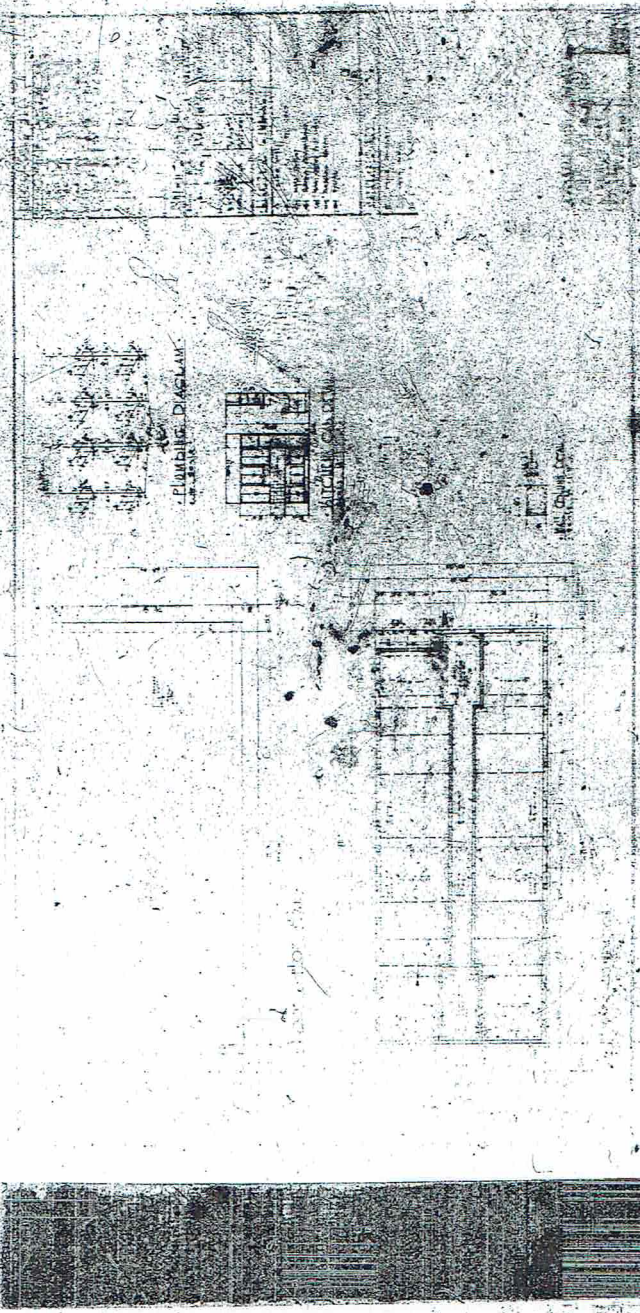




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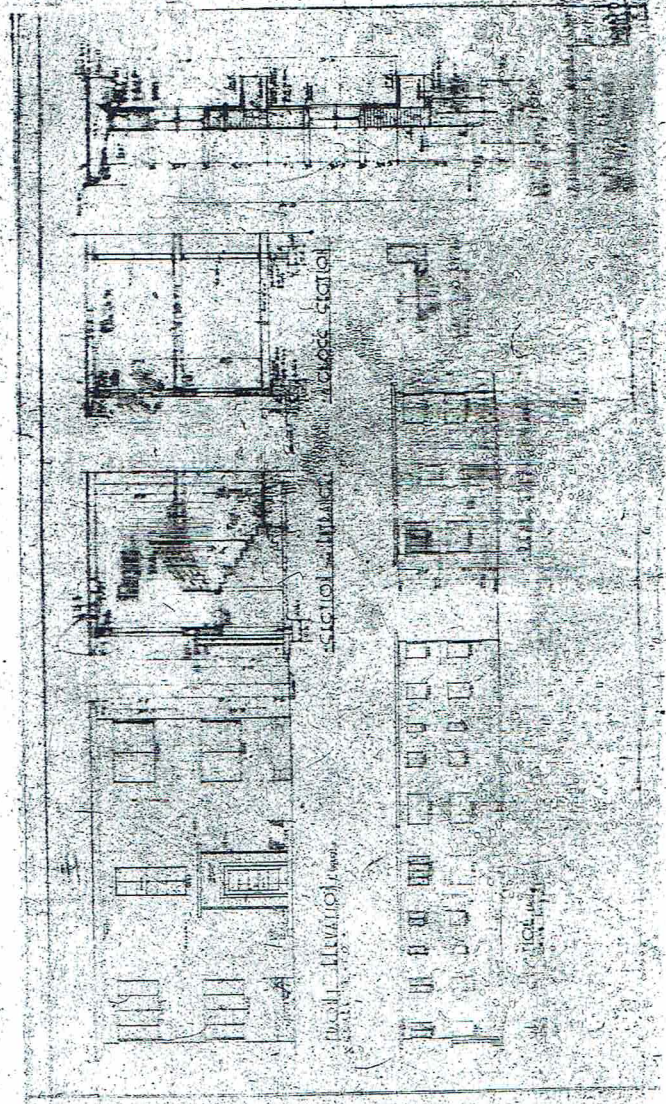
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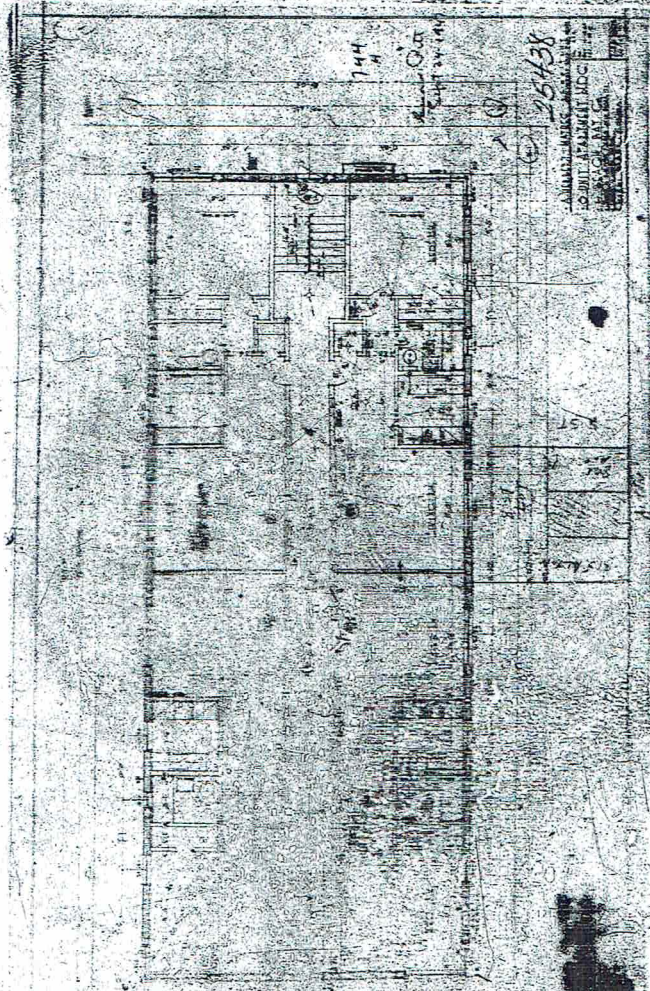
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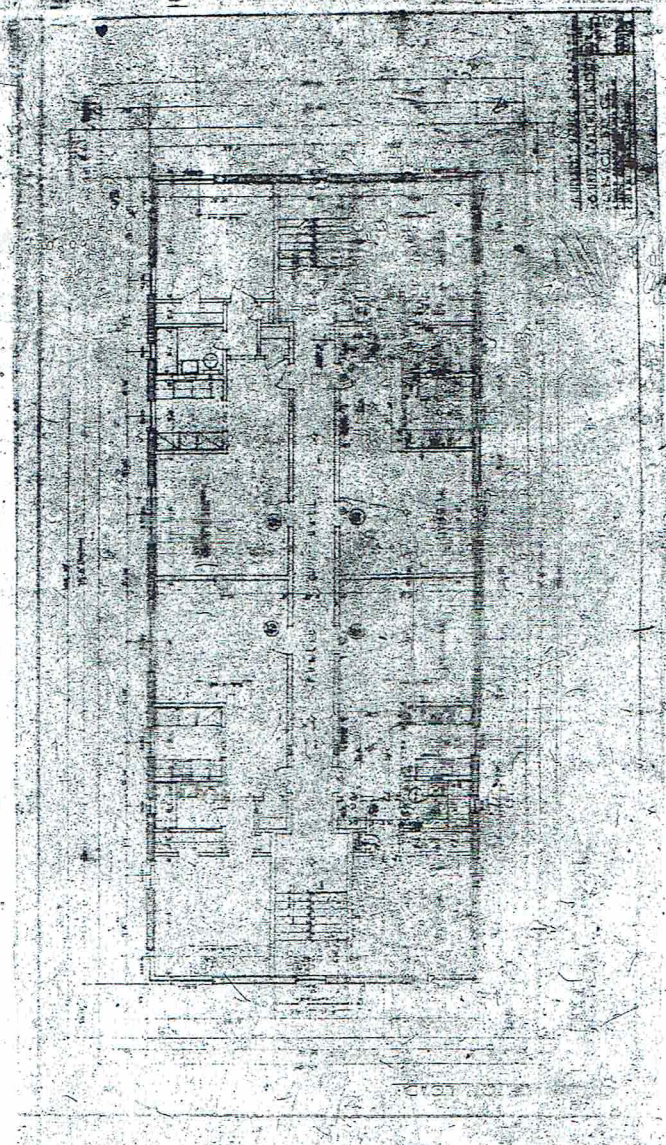
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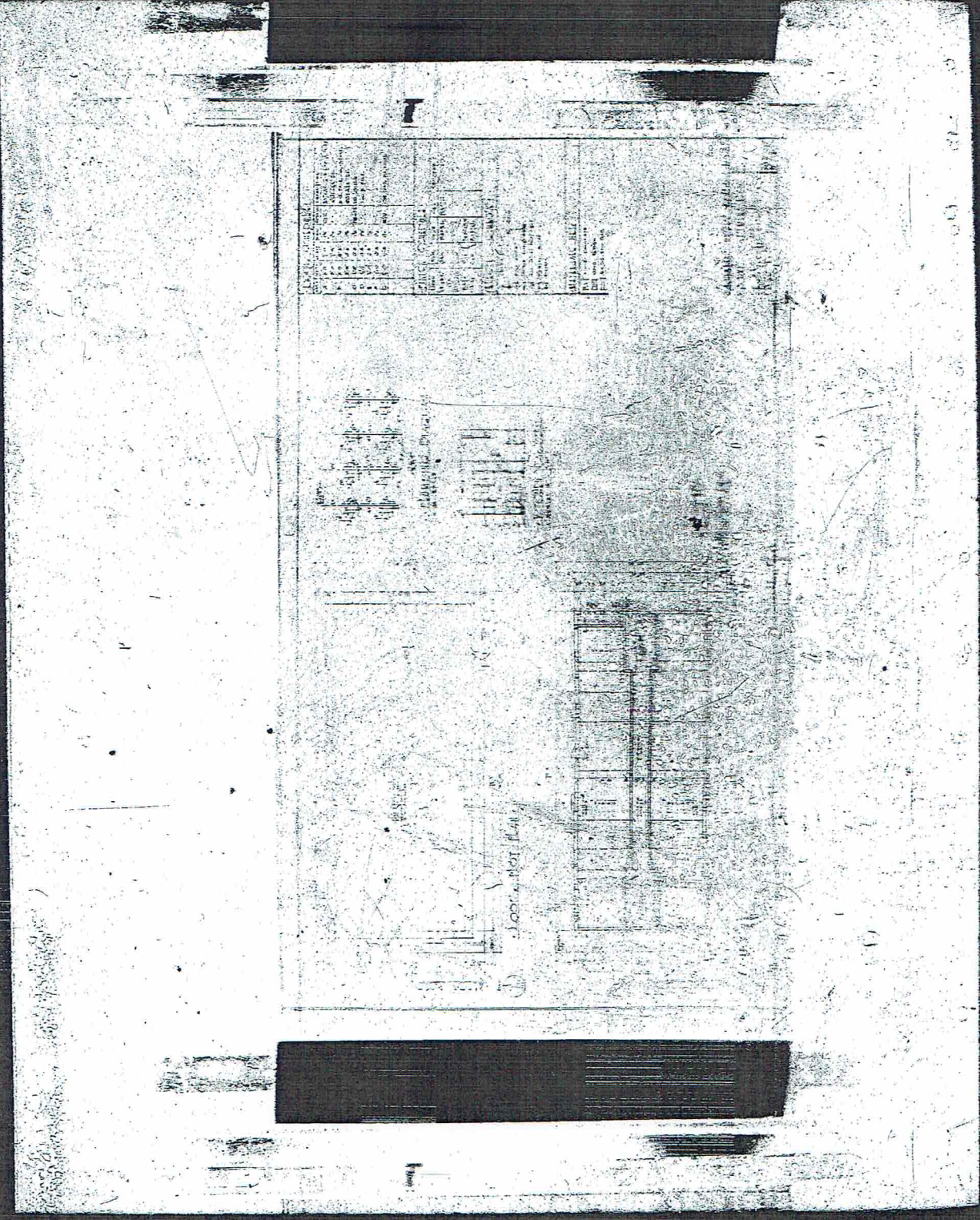




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