

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building
Other name/site number: Metro Tower
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 1220 Broadway
City or town: Lubbock State: Texas County: Lubbock
Not for publication: [ ] Vicinity: [ ]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 levels of significance:
[ ] national [ ] statewide [ ] local

Applicable National Register Criteria: [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D

Signature of certifying official: Mark Wolf
Title: State Historic Preservation Officer
Date: 2/10/21
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** COMMERCE / TRADE: Office Building

**Current Functions:** COMMERCE / TRADE: Office Building

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** MODERN MOVEMENT: International Style

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick, Granite, Glass

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-10)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria:** C

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** Architecture (*local*)

**Period of Significance:** 1955

**Significant Dates:** 1955

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): N/A

**Architect/Builder:** Castle, David S. (Architect); H. D. & T. J Crigger Company (Builder); BMFP Construction Company (Builder)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 11-20)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 21-23)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. (Part I approved—1/14/2020)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Texas Tech Library, Lubbock, Texas

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property:** Less than one acre (Approximately 0.293 acres)

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 33.584769°N Longitude: -101.848911°W

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The boundary includes the southern approximately 0.293 acres (ORIG TOWN LUBBOCK BLK 117, Lots 6-9) of the larger approximately 0.430 acre legal parcel identified as ORIG TOWN LUBBOCK BLK 117 Lots 1 & 2 & 6-9 in Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas (Property ID R107746); Lubbock Central Appraisal District accessed December 14, 2020 (Map 4).

**Boundary Justification:** The boundary includes the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building and excludes the parking lot to the north that is not historically associated with the property.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Rachel Nugent with assistance from Alyssa Gerszewski, National Register Historian  
Organization: Rosin Preservation, LLC  
Street & number: 1712 Holmes  
City or Town: Kansas City State: Missouri Zip Code: 64108  
Email: Sophie@rosinpreservation.com  
Telephone: 816-419-0763  
Date: May 4, 2020

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets 24-28)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 29-48)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 5-6, 49-65)

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**Photograph Log**

Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building

1220 Broadway

Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

Photographed by Brad Finch, f-stop Photography, April 2019; Amanda Loughlin, January 2021 (as noted)

*All photographs accurately depict property conditions. No changes nor significant deterioration has occurred since the photos were taken in April 2019 and January 2021.*

Photo 1

West and south elevations, camera facing northeast.

Photo 2

South and west elevations, camera facing northeast

Photo 3

West and north elevations, camera facing southeast

Photo 4

South and east elevations. Camera facing northwest

Photo 5

Contextual view of Broadway. Camera facing northwest

Photo 6

Contextual view on Broadway. Camera facing west

Photo 7

Main lobby on the ground floor. Camera facing north  
January 2021

Photo 8

Main lobby on the ground floor. Camera facing south  
January 2021

Photo 9

Elevator lobby on ground floor. Camera facing northwest

Photo 10

Elevator lobby on third floor. Camera facing northwest

Photo 11

View of the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. Camera facing northwest  
January 2021

Photo 12

View of removed historic restroom. Camera facing southwest  
January 2021

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Photo 13  
Open office on 14<sup>th</sup> floor. Camera facing southwest  
January 2021

Photo 14  
Corridor on 16<sup>th</sup> floor. Camera facing southwest

Photo 15  
Reinforcing steel added after 1970 tornado. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 16  
Open floorplan on 20<sup>th</sup> (top) floor with no interior finishes or partitions, camera facing northwest  
January 2021

Photo 17  
Facing brick on north façade repairs from 1970 tornado damage. Camera facing south.

**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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## Narrative Description

The Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building (GPLIC) is a twenty-story high-rise office tower with a rectangular plan and a flat roof located at 1220 Broadway in the central business district of Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas. The free-standing building is positioned at the northeast corner of Broadway and Avenue L. Completed in 1955, the building is an example of an International Style two-part vertical block with a wide rectangular base and a narrow rectangular tower that creates an asymmetrical “stepped” effect within the design. The steel-frame skyscraper has a three-story masonry base supporting a seventeen-story central tower clad in metal and glass curtain walls with brick spandrels. The brick-clad circulation core forms a solid “spine” at the north end of the building that rises one story above the curtain wall elevations. The contrast of materials and forms read as a curtain wall tower resting in a larger L-shaped masonry form. Typical of the International Style, the design lacks ornamentation and has both a vertical and horizontal composition. Banded windows with contrasting metal panels articulate the vertical steel structural arrangement on the exterior. Continuous brick spandrels and aluminum frame ribbon windows form strong horizontal bands. The narrow, primary elevation fronts Broadway and the larger, secondary elevation fronts Avenue L. Cut granite clads the exterior at the ground floor on the south and west elevations. An F5 tornado that struck downtown Lubbock in 1970 damaged the building and a major renovation from 1974 to 1977 repaired and reinforced the steel structure, repaired windows and the exterior masonry, and updated the interior.<sup>1</sup> Ongoing rehabilitation work approved by Texas Historical Commission and National Park Service staff is being carried out in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. While much of the interior historic fabric has been removed, the main configuration, original marble-clad columns and terrazzo flooring in the lobby, historic elevator lobbies, and historic corridors on the 5th, 8-13th, 15-19<sup>th</sup> floors are extant. Overall, the GPLIC Building retains sufficient historic integrity.

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## Setting

The Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building occupies a rectangular lot at the northeast corner of Avenue L and Broadway in the central business district in downtown Lubbock, three blocks west of the Lubbock County Courthouse (*Map 2*). The building shares a city block with a 1920s-era mid-rise hotel and a surface parking lot (*Map 3 and Photo 5*). A north-south vehicular alley bisects the block. Both buildings on the block have narrow setbacks fronting Broadway, which is a primary thoroughfare lined with office and retail buildings and surface parking lots. Both buildings have deep setbacks from the alley, as there were historically three one- and two-story buildings that occupied those now vacant lots. The current free-standing buildings are positioned to the perimeter of the street-facing sides of the block, which limits the impact of shadows on either building. Brick pavers cover Broadway (*Photo 6*). The roughly eighteen block commercial district is characterized by moderate density and a variety of building heights highlighting the verticality of the Great Plains Building in the otherwise relatively low, sprawling urban landscape (*Maps 3 and 5*). Buildings constructed from the 1920s through the mid-twentieth century vary in scale from the eleven-story hotel next door to a block of one- and two-story commercial buildings immediately to the west. Surface parking surrounds the building on the east and north sides.

## Exterior

The asymmetrical two-part vertical block has a wide rectangular three-story base and a narrower rectangular seventeen-story tower (*Photo 1*). The International Style tower aligns with the south and west elevations of the base but is setback from the east edge of the base. The circulation core occupies the north end of the building is clad entirely in the same red brick as the base and rises above the curtain wall tower. The circulation core, containing the stair and elevator shafts, forms a solid “spine” from which the bands of ribbon windows and spandrel panels extend horizontally. The distinction between these components of the building, through massing and materials emphasize

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<sup>1</sup> While the majority of the repair and renovation work occurred between 1974 and 1977, interior renovations of selected floors continued into the 1980s, per City of Lubbock Certificates of Occupancy dated 1987 and 1988.

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the asymmetrical form. The exterior has a strong horizontal emphasis with secondary vertical elements to balance the horizontal banding and express the internal structural steel grid. The grid is three bays wide on the narrow south side and six bays along the wide east and west sides of the building. For the tower, the east-to-west steel column grid has three bays measuring 18'-4", 17'-10", and 18'-4", respectively. North to south, the steel column grid has six bays. The north bay, corresponding to the circulation core measures 26'-2"; the remaining five bays each measure 19'-4". Steel beams connect all of the columns. There are also cross beams within the north-south bays to reduce the 19'-4" and 26'-2" spans (*Figure 13*). The column grid at the base has one additional row of 13' bays along the east side of the building. The building was designed with the north and east walls of the base and the north wall of the tower to have blank party walls and the office tower is positioned on the west side of the base. Both of these design elements would allow any future neighboring high-rise buildings.

The masonry-clad base of the first three floors has regular bays on each elevation. The base is clad in cut granite panels on the ground level on the primary south and secondary west elevations. Red brick clads the two floors above the granite and wraps around all elevations. Main entrances are on the south and west elevations (*Photo 2*). The red brick veneer on the north (rear) elevation has been replaced between the ground level and the tenth floor as part of the project to address the damage from the 1970 tornado.

The curtain wall tower is comprised of alternating bands of windows and brick spandrels at each story. On the east, south, and west elevations, six rectangular aluminum windows fill each structural bay while vertical metal panels separate each bay and delineate the columns in the tower, and buff brick spandrels mark each floor. The curtain wall is comprised of single-pane aluminum windows set between a steel "L" lintel above and masonry construction below (*Figure 14*). The curtain wall construction consists of one wythe of red face brick and one wythe of clay tile to provide the wind and fire resistance required by code. Thru-wall flashing covers the steel beam and the "Piece 'I' Beam Hanger" that support the one wythe of buff brick veneer that covers the portion of the spandrel between the top of the window and the floor above. The curtain wall is twelve inches thick below the window and four inches thick above the window. Red brick veneer over tile back-up clads the north elevation and wraps around one bay deep on the east and west elevations.

#### *South (Primary) and West (Secondary) Elevations*

A recessed entry centered on the tower pierces the first floor of the four-bay base of the south elevation. Two, single-hung metal frame doors with glazing flank fixed center panes with a transom. A non-historic, seamed metal canopy covers the entry. Six bays organize the long, west elevation fronting Avenue L. At the base, sets of fixed metal frame windows with non-historic metal-seamed canopies covering each set pierce the second, third, and fourth bays (*Photos 1-5*). The windows and canopies date to the 1977 renovation. A revolving door set between two sets of single-leaf metal-frame glass doors with fixed sidelights fills an entry in the sixth bay. Transoms and a non-historic metal-seamed canopy top the entry. The entrances are in their historic location and the doors have all been replaced except for the revolving door. The doors were replaced during the 1977 renovation. Cut granite cladding wraps around the northwest corner at ground level.

#### *North (Rear) Elevation*

Red brick veneer over clay tile back-up clads the north elevation and wraps around the northernmost bay on each of the east and west elevations (*Photos 3 and 17*). Four bays organize the first three stories. Rectangular metal louvered vents pierce the west bay on every story beginning on the second story and extending to the penthouse which rises thirty feet above the curtain wall-clad tower. Two metal louvered vents occupy the first floor of the west bay. Two metal louvered vents top double-leaf metal slab doors and a single metal louvered vent tops a single metal slab door in the east bay. There are no other openings in the brick.

#### *East Elevation*

The base of the east elevation is brick with a brick stringcourse at the first story and metal coping at the third story (*Photo 4*). The curtain wall tower steps back to the west and rises above the third story. A recessed entry pierces the



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north bay. Two sets of double-leaf metal doors with glazing each have transoms. A non-historic metal-seamed canopy tops the entry. Metal louvered vents pierce the wall at the second and third stories. Free-standing brick walls that abut the building enclose utility and mechanical equipment south of the entrance.

**Interior (Updated January 2021)**

As of January 2021, rehabilitation tax credit work approved by Texas Historical Commission and National Park Service staff is underway and being carried out in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The ongoing rehabilitation work is limited to the interior and does not impact the exterior. The lobby and upper floors (4-20) are currently undergoing work for conversion to residential apartments. The interior of the building has been renovated over the years to suit tenant needs, most notably in the years following the 1970 tornado. Building owners updated interior finishes and configurations to attract new tenants to overcome any lingering apprehension about the structural integrity of the building despite reassurance from inspectors. Much of the historic interior fabric was not retained, but some original features remain. The majority of extant historic fabric has been retained as part of the ongoing rehabilitation.

The lobby space was altered over years and mostly retains its original configuration consisting of a central double-loaded arcade that runs north-south and terminates at the elevator lobby against the north wall (Figures 2 and 5). Primary entrances are on the south and west elevations. A third entrance is on the east elevation. Office space lines the corridor behind non-historic glass partitions between historic marble-clad columns. Non-historic features, such as some partitions, have been removed from the lobby during the ongoing rehabilitation work (*Photos 7 and 8*). Historic terrazzo flooring in the lobby is extant beneath the temporary protective layer. Acoustical tiles cover a raised central ceiling vault with recessed light fixtures. The four elevators have metal doors with incised ornament at the ground floor lobby. Marble-clad walls are also extant at the ground floor elevator lobby (*Photo 9*). Elevator doors on all upper floors are simple original metal slabs. Historic one-inch tile clads walls in most elevator lobbies on upper floors (*Photo 10*). A historic stairwell is extant and rises through the building in the northeast corner. Men's and women's bathrooms were historically stacked in the northwest corner on every floor and were accessed from the elevator lobbies. The bathrooms have been removed during the current rehabilitation work (*Photo 12*).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is used for office space and is not included in the rehabilitation work. The finishes and configuration of 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, including the corridor, are not historic. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors contained the executive offices of the Great Plains Life Insurance Company. The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor it is characterized by non-historic finishes and configuration and is not part of the rehabilitation work. The 4<sup>th</sup> floor does not currently and did not historically provide access to the roof of the three-story base. On the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, the north half of the corridor is historic and intact. The south half of the corridor was removed during a prior renovation and the rest of the space had non-historic finishes. Currently, the non-historic finishes have been removed and the space is gutted beyond the corridor.

The other upper floors have historically been office space and were also modified over the years. The 5<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> floors are currently undergoing rehabilitation. The historic corridors are largely intact on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 8-13<sup>th</sup>, 15-19<sup>th</sup> floors and will be retained as part of the ongoing work (*Photo 14*). Historic corridors are not intact, and were not prior to this project on the 6-7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> floors. As of January 2021, the spaces beyond the corridor walls have concrete floors, plaster perimeter walls, and exposed ceiling structure, specifically the steel beams and metal decking (*Photos 11 and 13*).

The 20<sup>th</sup> floor historically had two separate spaces that housed a restaurant and a radio station. These spaces had been gutted prior to the current rehabilitation project and the whole floor is currently an open volume of space with no finishes. As of January 2021, a small rectangle has been cut in the concrete floor slab of the 20<sup>th</sup> floor to accommodate a new stairwell (*Photo 16*). The remaining floor slabs from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> floors will be cut as well. This new stairwell is located at the south end of the historic corridor and will connect the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> floors.

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## Integrity

The Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building retains excellent historic and architectural integrity. The building retains integrity of location and the historic setting is largely intact. It remains a free-standing building positioned at the northeast corner of Broadway and Avenue L surrounded by downtown Lubbock. It retains integrity of the materials and design that demonstrate its significance as a 1950s International Style skyscraper and a late example of the work of David Castle. The asymmetrical massing of the seventeen-story tower resting on a three-story masonry base as well as the brick-clad circulation core which forms a “spine” at the north elevation are clearly visible. The brick and granite cladding is intact as are the metal and glass curtain walls, and brick spandrels and aluminum frame ribbon windows which form strong horizontal bands. The contrast of materials and forms still read as a curtain wall tower resting in a larger L-shaped masonry form. All of these intact elements along with the flat roof and the lack of ornament communicate the influence of the International Style, which was consistent with architectural trends throughout Texas in the mid-twentieth century. Repairs made to the building following the 1970 tornado (completed between 1974 and 1977) included repairs to the roof, replaced missing window glazing, repaired exterior masonry, and added structural steel bracing on each floor. Non-historic canopies that date to the 1977 renovation cover windows and doors at the ground floor, but do not detract from the design of the exaggerated base and refined ground-level cut stone cladding. Some windows and doors were replaced at the ground level as well. Historic signage used for advertising was removed at an unknown date (*Figure 10*).

Interior alterations reflect the intended function as a speculative office building adaptable to meet tenant needs. One notable interior alteration was the addition of cross bracing one bay in from the south wall on all floors except the first and twentieth. Gypsum walls cover the bracing and are permeant interior partitions in the east and west bays. This alteration was part of the 1974 – 1977 rehabilitation to stabilize the building following the tornado damage. As of January 2021, the ongoing rehabilitation work is occurring in the lobby and on floors 4-20 that removed mostly non-historic and some historic fabric. On the 6-7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> floors spaces beyond the corridor walls have concrete floors, plaster perimeter walls, and exposed ceiling structure, specifically the steel beams and metal decking (*Photos 11 and 13*). While much of the historic fabric has been removed in these spaces the main configuration, original marble-clad columns and terrazzo flooring in the lobby, historic elevator lobbies, and historic corridors on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 8-13<sup>th</sup>, 15-19<sup>th</sup> floors are extant all of which reinforce integrity of design, materials, and workmanship (*Photos 7-10, and 14*). Historic bathrooms have been removed on all floors (*Photo 12*). Despite these changes, the building conveys the feeling a 1950s International Style high-rise building in downtown Lubbock, but it is no longer associated with the Great Plains Life Insurance Company.

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### Statement of Significance

The 1955 Great Plains Life Insurance Company (GPLIC) Building is a high-rise office building in downtown Lubbock, Texas. Noted West Texas architect David S. Castle designed the building for company's new headquarters as a postwar adaptation of the 1932 Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Building by George Howe and William Lescaze. The PSFS Building represented the "first skyscraper in which principles of the International Style were consistently manifested" in the United States and the design had a far reaching influence.<sup>2</sup> More than two decades later, Lubbock's GPLIC Building was part of the second wave of International Style skyscraper design. Like the PSFS Building, the GPLIC Building features a similar base-and-tower composition, with an asymmetrical steel-frame tower. The brick-clad circulation core forms a spine on the north elevation with office slabs extending to the south, finished with metal and glass curtain walls that create strong horizontal banding.

David Castle and other Texas architects shaped the modern skylines of growing West Texas cities where skyscrapers brought sophistication to central business districts. The GPLIC Building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level because it signifies Castle's adaptation of the International Style to West Texas. Coming at the end of Castle's career, the building was the most resolutely modernist skyscraper in his body of work. Additionally, the GPLIC Building is the second tallest building in the country to survive an F5 tornado, which struck Lubbock in 1970. The subsequent studies of the damage to this building informed the 1972 National Building Code and led to the development of the Fujita Scale used to measure the size and impact of tornados. The period of significance is 1955, the year of its completion.

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### Development of Lubbock

Lubbock began as a settlement in 1890 when Texas farmers and ranchers were expanding westward on the High Plains. Within a few years of its establishment as the Lubbock County seat, it became the marketing center of the South Plains, a region describing parts of north Texas and eastern New Mexico. The town's siting in the middle of a large expanse of rural prairie made it the singular market spot for a large geographical area primarily engaged in agriculture, mainly cotton, and ranching. In 1909, the railroad connected Lubbock to Plainview forty miles to the north and the city incorporated that same year. Lubbock's population was 1,938 in 1910.<sup>3</sup> The population steadily increased in the early decades of the twentieth century and the city prospered from the surrounding agricultural production. Cotton became the main crop around Lubbock in the 1920s. The discovery of the enormous Ogallala Aquifer, which stretches from North Texas to South Dakota, introduced large-scale irrigated farming, with state policy favoring unlimited water use by landowners.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1920s, the twenty-five counties surrounding Lubbock planted over 1.6 million acres of cotton.<sup>5</sup>

In 1923, the Texas legislature authorized the Texas Technological College, which became Texas Tech University in 1969. In 1930, the town occupied over five square miles and had two railroads to serve distribution activities for a trade area fifty miles in all directions and one-hundred miles to the west.<sup>6</sup> The city's population expanded during the years of the Great Depression from 20,520 in 1930 to 31,853 residents in 1940.<sup>7</sup> The city's economy included processing and distributing agricultural products, as well as manufacturing. Notably, local cottonseed oil and cotton compress operations developed to take advantage of the expansive cotton growing area surrounding the city.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992) 251.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence L. Graves, "Lubbock, Texas," Handbook of Texas Online, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hd104>

<sup>4</sup> Paul L. Carlson and Bruce A. Glasrud, *West Texas: A History of the Giant Side of the State*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014) 189.

<sup>5</sup> Carlson, *West Texas*, 189.

<sup>6</sup> "Lubbock City Directory," Hudspeth Directory Company, 1938.

<sup>7</sup> "Lubbock City Directory," 1940.

<sup>8</sup> "Lubbock City Directory," 1945.

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Between 1940 and 1950, the population nearly doubled when Lubbock experienced rapid growth. During World War II, the Lubbock Army Airfield (Lubbock AAF), eight miles west of the city, trained fixed wing pilots while South Plains Army Airfield (South Plains AAF), roughly six miles north, trained glider pilots. Oil discoveries in West Texas, specifically the Levelland Field in 1945, brought a new industry into the region.<sup>9</sup> In 1950, Lubbock issued 2,680 building permits representing \$25.7 million in construction projects and by 1952, Lubbock was a sizable city of over 70,000 residents.<sup>10</sup> Its economic prosperity remained tied to its status as a far-flung urban and retail trade center serving eight-hundred thousand people in twenty-six surrounding counties.<sup>11</sup> The “Hub of the South Plains” was the geographical trading, financial, industrial, commercial, medical, and cultural center of the area. It was the largest metropolitan area between Dallas and Albuquerque, San Antonio and Denver, Oklahoma City and El Paso, and Wichita Falls and El Paso; all points that are more than five hundred miles apart.<sup>12</sup>

The number of irrigated farms in Lubbock’s surrounding cotton field expanded during the mid-twentieth century. Aided by government subsidies, crop insurance, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides, cotton agriculture remained dominant in the local economy.<sup>13</sup> The 1950s marked a high point in development for Lubbock’s downtown that coincided with a doubling in population to over 128,000 by 1960. While the city never saw that dramatic increase again, a steady increase in population throughout the twentieth century represents an overall trend for the relatively few metropolitan areas in the West Texas region. Far-flung metropolitan areas draw population from the surrounding rural and agricultural areas. Along with education, medicine, and some oil production and associated industries, the cotton industry around Lubbock expanded throughout the twentieth century to its peak in 1981, when more than 4.5 million acres produced half of the cotton from Texas.<sup>14</sup>

### **Mid- and High-Rise Development in Lubbock**

The commercial building stock in downtown Lubbock was generally low-rise through the first half of the twentieth century. Most buildings were loadbearing masonry construction that did not exceed four stories in height. There were one or two buildings that reached six stories. The eleven-story Lubbock Hotel, which shares the block with the nominated building, was tallest building in Lubbock from its construction in 1926 until the completion of the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building in 1955. These early-twentieth century buildings were typically brick with applied stone or terra cotta ornament that conveyed various historical revival styles, predominantly Classical Revival. Private companies and government agencies constructed mid-rise office buildings in the mid- to late-twentieth century, but most of these are between seven and ten stories and exhibit a variety of modern styles. There are no other buildings that came close to the height of the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building. The twelve-story Art Deco Lubbock County Office Building was constructed in 1940 but was re-clad with a Mid-Century Modern façade in 1960. The fifteen-story Wells Fargo Building, designed by Dallas architect Thomas E. Stanley in 1968 reflects International and New Formalist influences and the nine-story Lubbock National Bank Building, designed by Ralph Spencer & Associates in 1971, exhibits a Modern aesthetic. Although it has remained the tallest building in Lubbock, the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building represents as an early post-war example of high-rise modernism in Lubbock.

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<sup>9</sup> “History of Oil Discoveries in Texas,” *Texas Almanac*, accessed online February 6, 2019, <https://texasalmanac.com/topics/business/history-oil-discoveries-texas>.

<sup>10</sup> Carlson, *West Texas*, 189; “Lubbock City Directory,” 1952.

<sup>11</sup> “Lubbock City Directory,” 1952.

<sup>12</sup> “Lubbock City Directory,” 1960.

<sup>13</sup> Carlson, *West Texas*, 189.

<sup>14</sup> Carlson, *West Texas*, 189.

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### Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building

The Great Plains Life Insurance Company was organized and chartered in Dallas in 1933.<sup>15</sup> The company merged with the Nebraska National Life Insurance Company of Lincoln, Nebraska and moved its headquarters from Dallas to Lubbock in 1951.<sup>16</sup> The company occupied temporary office space while they planned a new office building that would house their own operations and offer leasable office space in downtown Lubbock. The Great Plains Life Insurance Company, serving as the developer, commissioned Abilene-based architect David S. Castle to design their new high-rise headquarters and speculative office building in 1951.<sup>17</sup> The scale of the new building represented the tallest building in Lubbock, a status it maintains to this day (*Figure 8*).

The site for the new high-rise Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building was a surface parking lot immediately west of the 1926 Lubbock Hotel (Map 3).<sup>18</sup> David S. Castle's design called for a twenty-story, 271-foot tall building that towered over the surrounding buildings by eight stories or more.<sup>19</sup> In response to code requirements demanding that a building of that height have an enclosed fire stair, Castle pulled the circulation core to the north end of the building, similar to the PSFS Building, to keep the office space to the south open and flexible to meet tenant requirements. Workers broke ground in July of 1952 and by September of 1953, steel erectors H. D. & T. J. Crigger Company completed the frame and general contractors BMFP Construction Company began laying the concrete floors.<sup>20</sup> The building opened in 1955.

The completed building offered 155,453 square feet of floor space and was completely air conditioned.<sup>21</sup> The lobby featured retail space and a marble-clad elevator lobby on the north end near the main entry on Avenue L (*Figure 2*). Four automatic Westinghouse Elevators traveled at a speed of seven-hundred feet per minute to access the upper floors. The upper floors shared a basic repeated configuration with elevator lobbies on the north wall and restrooms in the northwest corner on each floor (*Figure 3*). A central stairwell accessed each elevator lobby. The speculative office building contained open office space that was adaptable to tenant needs. Leasing advertisements offered office space in the most modern building in the southwest.<sup>22</sup> Touted as Lubbock's only skyscraper, the marketing material emphasized the twenty-mile radius view from the top floor and the prestige of officing in a local icon.<sup>23</sup>

When construction was completed in 1955, the Great Plains Life Insurance Company occupied general and corporate offices on the third floor.<sup>24</sup> By 1956, the Great Plains Life Insurance Company also occupied the fourth floor.<sup>25</sup> Early tenants included professional offices such as an accounting firm, lawyers offices, oil well drilling companies, insurance, and medical offices. The sixth and seventh and the seventeenth and eighteenth floors were vacant in its first year of operation. A radio station and the Top of the Plains Restaurant occupied separate spaces on the top floor.<sup>26</sup> By 1965, the building was largely occupied, but the Great Plains Life Insurance Company was no longer a tenant. The First National Bank occupied the third floor (*Figure 9*).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Great Plains Life Building 20 Stories," Vertical File Lubbock, TX: Great Plains Life Building, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech, Lubbock.

<sup>16</sup> "Flooring To Be Poured Next In 'New Skyscraper' Here," *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, September 2, 1953, p. 11, 17.

<sup>17</sup> "Lubbock Gets Skyscraper," *The Abilene Reporter-News*, October 25, 1951, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> "Lubbock Gets Skyscraper," *The Abilene Reporter-News*, October 25, 1951, B-1.

<sup>19</sup> Greg Jaklewicz, "When Castle was king and ruled West Texas architecture," *Abilene Reporter News*, November 30, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> "Flooring To Be Poured Next In 'New Skyscraper' Here," *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, September 2, 1953, p. 11, 17.

<sup>21</sup> "Great Plains Life Building 20 Stories," Vertical File Lubbock, TX: Great Plains Life Building, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech, Lubbock.

<sup>22</sup> "The View is Better," *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, September 13, 1955, p. 26

<sup>23</sup> There has been no documentary evidence to suggest that the design or height of the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building prompted any changes to the building regulations in Lubbock.

<sup>24</sup> "Great Plains Life Building 20 Stories," Vertical File Lubbock, TX: Great Plains Life Building, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech, Lubbock.

<sup>25</sup> "Lubbock City Directory," Hudspeth Directory Company, El Paso, 1956.

<sup>26</sup> "Lubbock City Directory," 1956.

<sup>27</sup> "Lubbock City Directory," Hudspeth Directory Company, El Paso, 1965.

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*Lubbock Tornado of 1970*

The GPLIC Building is the second tallest building to survive an F5 tornado.<sup>28</sup> The Great Plains Life Insurance Company had recently moved out, but the building was still occupied by tenants when a tornado struck the evening of May 11, 1970. The tornado caused significant physical damage (1,100 homes destroyed and 8,000 damaged) and loss of life (26 deaths) in the Lubbock area.<sup>29</sup> The tornado's direct path was six blocks away and 250 mile-per-hour winds hit the building causing significant damage to the steel frame, the exterior brick veneer, the windows, the roof, and the interior partitions. The most significant permanent damage caused by the tornado was the twisting of the steel frame of the tower by 6 degrees.<sup>30</sup> Direct wind and flying debris damaged 60 percent of the glass in the windows and knocked off or loosened much of the red brick veneer on the north elevation (*Figures 10 and 11*).

Following the storm, University of Chicago researcher and meteorologist Tetsuya Theodore "Ted" Fujita traveled to Lubbock to study the pattern of destruction, a continuation of his studies focused on the composition and development of individual thunderstorms and tornados. Fujita's in-depth analysis of Lubbock led to the development of the Fujita Scale used by the National Weather Service, which indirectly measures the intensity of the windspeed based on the physical damage created by the storm.<sup>31</sup>

Texas Tech University professor Kishor C. Mehia, headed a two-year-long study that analyzed the damage to the GPLIC Building, along with storm damage to buildings in Corpus Christi following Hurricane Celia in 1970.<sup>32</sup> Recommendations from that study were incorporated into the revisions to the Uniform Building Code, adopted nationwide in 1972. The new requirements included larger structural members and stronger connections to withstand stronger winds and minimize storm damage.<sup>33</sup>

The analysis of the GPLIC Building determined that the placement of the "stiff" core, where the majority of structural strength resided, was at the north end near the elevator bank. This placement at one end rather than the center resulted in the weaker, south side suffering the more substantial and permanent structural damage when the steel frame twisted six degrees out of alignment. The visible exterior damage to the northeast corner was primarily to the brick veneer.

*Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building Since 1970*

Immediately following the tornado, Lubbock municipal officials feared the GPLIC Building would collapse and many tenants removed contents by crane through window openings to avoid entering the building.<sup>34</sup> The building remained unrepaired and vacant for four years. In 1974, Amarillo real estate investors Kenneth and Rufus Gaut purchased it and began rehabilitation.<sup>35</sup> The Gauts repaired the roof, replaced missing window glazing, repaired exterior masonry, and added structural steel bracing on each floor. The rehabilitation plan added structural steel cross-bracing in the two outer bays on floors two through nineteen (*Figure 12*). This location provided the necessary structural stability to prevent further twisting while keeping the central corridor bay free of obstruction to

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<sup>28</sup> Lavellee, "Lubbock Tornado still bringing questions." In 1970 there was not yet a system in place for rating tornados. The tallest building to survive a direct hit from an F5 tornado is the ALICO Building in Waco, Texas. This twenty-two-story masonry building was constructed in 1911 and struck by a tornado in 1953.

<sup>29</sup> "The 1970 Lubbock Tornado," Historical Marker Narrative, provided by the Lubbock County Historical Commission, page 3, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Lavellee, "Lubbock Tornado still bringing questions," Texas Tech University Department of Journalism, November 16, 2010. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150518100825/http://texastechtoday.com/news/?p=6942> (accessed February 13, 2020). The twist in the tower remains visible from the ground.

<sup>31</sup> "Fujita Scale (Lubbock County)," Historical Marker Narrative, provided by the Lubbock County Historical Commission, page 1, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> "Tech Two-Year Study Shows Tougher Code Cuts Building Damage," *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, September 8, 1972.

<sup>33</sup> "Tech Two-Year Study Shows Tougher Code Cuts Building Damage."

<sup>34</sup> "Fear of Collapse Surrounded Landmark," *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, February 3, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> "Fear of Collapse Surrounded Landmark," *Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, February 3, 2012.

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maintain as rentable space.<sup>36</sup> The bracing members were designed to carry the equivalent of one and one-half bays of wind load and were enclosed within metal stud and gypsum board walls (*Photo 13*).<sup>37</sup>

The Gauts promoted the building through advertising campaigns, but despite reassurances that the building was structurally sound, tenants were reluctant to sign new leases.<sup>38</sup> As the exterior renovation project neared completion in 1975 and a prime tenant had yet to sign a lease, the Gauts renamed it “Metro Tower Building.”<sup>39</sup> The Gauts continued to renovate office spaces as they signed new tenants beyond the official opening date of 1975. An engineer’s report, submitted in 1977, called the building “a mute testimony to the skill and insight of the original designers” and stated that the Great Plains Building “was able to withstand a totally unexpected load.”<sup>40</sup> The City of Lubbock issued the first certificate of occupancy in August 1977, worded to cover additional floors as they were completed and approved.<sup>41</sup> The Gauts were reluctant to provide finishes for spaces that did not have a specific tenant lined up, so the floor-by-floor renovation took longer than expected, with certificates of occupancy issued in 1987 (suites 1701 and 1702) and 1988 (twentieth floor).<sup>42</sup> The building has been continuous (if only partially) occupied since the post-tornado reopening.

### Criterion C: Architecture

The Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building is primarily significant as a late adaptation of the most iconic first-wave International Style skyscraper in the United States, Philadelphia’s PSFS Building of 1932, in postwar West Texas. Its construction in the windswept South Plains is but one example of the very long reach of the influence of the PSFS Building, and its stark presence in Lubbock is the result of a profoundly urban and eastern model of design and development applied within a seemingly unlikely context. The building also marks a late shift in the long career of architect David Castle, probably shaped by client desires for modern and up-to-date buildings that would become instant landmarks through their relatively immense scale and sleek design. Through the 1950s, Castle’s increasingly grand and modern commercial buildings reflected the region’s economic prosperity. The Great Plains Life Insurance Company noted upon the building’s completion that the “investment we are putting into West Texas and the entire state proves our confidence in the future of Texas.”<sup>43</sup>

### The International Style

The International Style originated in Europe in the 1920s, and was disseminated through the works of Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, J.J.P Oud, Marcel Breuer, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, among others. Gropius and Mies both served as directors of the Bauhaus school in Germany which was a training ground for many prominent modern architects until its closure in 1933. Architects Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson coauthored *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* in 1932, a catalogue to accompany the Museum of Modern Art’s *International Exhibition of Modern Architecture*, formally introducing the style to the U.S. The exhibit and

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<sup>36</sup> Arnold Macker, Maeker and Stephens Architect and Engineer, to Cecil Turquette, City Building Inspector, City of Lubbock, June 18, 1974 and August 23, 1977. Lubbock County Historical Commission Archives.

<sup>37</sup> James R. McDonald, P.E. Correspondence to James C. Whitten regarding the structural condition of the Metro Tower Building. Document on file at the NTS Building. September 27, 1977.

<sup>38</sup> “Tornado-Scarred Building Soon to Get New Look,” *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, October 22, 1974.

<sup>39</sup> “‘Metro Tower’ Name Given to Building,” *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, June 26, 1975.

<sup>40</sup> James R. McDonald, P.E. Correspondence to James C. Whitten regarding the structural condition of the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building. Document on file at the NTS Building. September 27, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> City of Lubbock, Texas, Department of Building Inspections, Certificate of Occupancy, for 1220 Broadway, August 23, 1977. The associated building permits and approved spaces were provided in attachments to the Certificate of Occupancy. Lubbock County Historical Commission Archives.

<sup>42</sup> City of Lubbock, Texas, Department of Building Inspections, Certificate of Occupancy for Building Permit No. 63054, for 1220 Broadway, #1701 and 1702, September 16, 1987; Certificate of Occupancy for Building Permit No. 69703, for 1220 Broadway, 20<sup>th</sup> Floor, September 9, 1988. Lubbock County Historical Commission Archives.

<sup>43</sup> “Lubbock Gets Skyscraper,” *The Abilene Reporter-News*, October 25, 1951, B-1.

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catalogue showcased the works of European and American modern architects, including Le Corbusier, Oud, Gropius, Mies, as well as Richard Neutra, Frank Lloyd Wright, Raymond Hood, and Howe & Lescaze.<sup>44</sup> Hitchcock, Johnson, and museum director Alfred Barr assigned the term “International Style” to describe the movement, and the catalogue strove “to illustrate and define the shared visual motifs and modes of expression irrespective of differences in function, meaning, and belief.”<sup>45</sup> Hitchcock and Johnson conveyed three main principles that defined the style:

There is, first, a new conception of architecture as volume rather than as mass. Secondly, regularity rather than as axial symmetry serves as the chief means of ordering design. These two principles, with a third proscribing arbitrary applied decoration mark the productions of the international style.<sup>46</sup>

The catalogue and exhibit allowed for wide dissemination of these ideas, giving way to continued evolution and experimentation in the 1930s and after World War II. In 1966, Hitchcock and Johnson released an update to their catalogue called *The International Style*.

Modern architecture, and the International Style in particular, represented a departure from historical styles of the past, and grew from large social and technological transformations and increasing urbanization.<sup>47</sup> Architects considered “how to reconcile old and new, mechanical and natural, utilitarian and ideal” while contemplating the continually evolving industrial city.<sup>48</sup> The defining elements of the International Style reflected the modern industrial age—the absence of ornament, emphasis on volume, cantilevered horizontal planes, flat roofs, smooth wall surfaces, windows flush with the exterior—all intended for broad application and elasticity. To increase efficiency, architects incorporated the use of industrial materials such as steel, aluminum, glass, and reinforced concrete to create abstract masses that emphasized the balance of forms rather than symmetry.<sup>49</sup>

Raymond Hood’s McGraw-Hill Building in New York (1931) displayed the partial manifestation of the style as applied to a skyscraper and was a precursor to the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Building, the first U.S. skyscraper to fully embrace the principles of the style.<sup>50</sup> The PSFS Building’s series of stacked floors reflected one side of the ongoing debate on whether skyscrapers should have a strong vertical emphasis, a debate which continued unresolved into the postwar years. An emphasis on horizontality and the use of a free-standing block design approach was implemented in both the PSFS Building and the GPLIC Building.<sup>51</sup>

While the PSFS Building served as a landmark pre-war skyscraper design, the design of International Style skyscrapers became more common after World War II. In the 1950s, the International Style was expressed in designs that were functionally as well as economically efficient, primarily achieved through the use of the all-glass or glass and metal curtain wall. The Lever House (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill) and the United Nations Secretariat Building (Oscar Niemeyer and Le Corbusier), both completed in 1952 in New York City, had

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<sup>44</sup> Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780*, 251; Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, (New York: Norton, 1966) 15; *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, New York, February 10 to March 23, 1932, Museum of Modern Art*, (New York City: Museum of Modern Art, 1932), 12, accessed March 6, 2020, [https://www.moma.org/documents/moma\\_catalogue\\_2044\\_300061855.pdf](https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2044_300061855.pdf); Henry-Russell Hitchcock, “The International Style Twenty Years After,” *Architectural Record*, August, 1951, 89.

<sup>45</sup> William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 1996), 239.

<sup>46</sup> Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture*, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock, “The International Style Twenty Years After,” 91; Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780*, 247-252; Curtis, *Modern Architecture*, 257.

<sup>50</sup> Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780*, 251.

<sup>51</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture*, 227.



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continuous glass curtain walls and open floor plans to maximize flexibility in program and thus functional efficiency.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building**

Howe and Lescaze's Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building (PSFS Building) of 1932 marked the introduction of the International Style to the United States.<sup>53</sup> The thirty-two-story building was the earliest skyscraper to fully embrace this new aesthetic and the philosophies behind it (*Figures 15 and 16*).

George Howe, born in 1886 in Massachusetts, graduated from Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1912 with a firm understanding of Beaux-Arts principles, particularly the expression of structure and its integration with the form of the building. This was reflected in the PSFS Building.<sup>54</sup> William Lescaze was born in Switzerland in 1896. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Zurich and was a "convinced modernist" that provided Howe with a direct connection to the theories associated with the European International Style.<sup>55</sup> In the late 1920s, Howe established a working relationship with the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society, designing four banks.<sup>56</sup> The Society engaged Howe to develop several design schemes for a new headquarters in downtown Philadelphia. Howe fully embraced newly imported modern design theories and after multiple schemes and some back-and-forth communication with client, Howe & Lescaze designed an unabashedly tall building with massing that was "complex, but utterly logical."<sup>57</sup> The focus on massing and expression through materials exemplified the "ultra-Practical communicating the concept of the ultra-modern."<sup>58</sup> To Howe, "ultra-Practical" meant "precise, direct, and unornamented."<sup>59</sup>

The form of the PSFS Building was particularly remarkable. The first five floors occupied the base and the upper 27 floors occupied the asymmetrical tower which was positioned on the east side of the base.<sup>60</sup> With the circulation tower enclosed in a narrow "spine," the office tower slabs extended outward in a T-shaped configuration. The initial design featured a solid, curving base with floor after floor of horizontal banding. Expensive materials made a distinct and sleek visual impact.<sup>61</sup> The "International Style-skin," contributed by Lescaze had a horizontal composition, was a "rebellion against the vertical emphasis customary to many tall buildings."<sup>62</sup>

The PSFS Building was a radical design at the time, with far-reaching influence in the decades that followed. The PSFS Building is considered an iconic work in the United States because it confidently displays an American affinity for technological advances and mass-production and was truly a hybrid between European and American expressions of the International Style. Architectural historian William Jordy noted that PSFS "of all buildings in the International Style, most compellingly mediates between the first and second, the European and the American,

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<sup>52</sup> Delaney Harris-Finch, Anna Mod, Hannah Curry-Shearouse, "Medical Towers" National Register of Historic Places nomination, NR 16000918, listed December 27, 2016, 10.

<sup>53</sup> William H. Jordy, "PSFS: Its Development and Its Significance in Modern Architecture." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May 1962), 47. The PSFS Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places and designated as a National Historic Landmark on December 8, 1976.

<sup>54</sup> Robert A. M. Stern, "PSFS: Beaux-Arts Theory and Rational Expressionism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May 1962), 84-85.

<sup>55</sup> Jordy, "PSFS," 62-63.

<sup>56</sup> "A New Shelter for Savings," *Architectural Forum*, December 1932, 135.

<sup>57</sup> Jordy, "PSFS," 52.

<sup>58</sup> Jordy, "PSFS," 50.

<sup>59</sup> Robert A. M. Stern, *George Howe: Toward a Modern American Architecture*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 114.

<sup>60</sup> Jordy, "PSFS," 52.

<sup>61</sup> Jordy, "PSFS," 53-54. The Great Depression reduced the cost of materials allowing the architects to apply expensive materials more liberally within the design at the request of their clients. For more on the design of the PSFS Building see Frederick Gutheim, "Saving Fund Society Building: A Re-Appraisal," *Architectural Record*, Vol. 106, No. 4, (October 1949).

<sup>62</sup> Stern, "PSFS," 94.

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phases of the style. As an American skyscraper it stands as the most important structure between Sullivan's work of the nineties and the Seagram Building at the end of the fifties."<sup>63</sup>

### **Inspiration for the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building**

No records can confirm that David S. Castle found inspiration in the PSFS Building for his design of the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, but the visual and compositional similarities are striking, and there is little question that would have known of the PSFS Building when he began developing his design. The PSFS Building won both national and international acclaim in the 1930s, and was published in *Architectural Forum* and *Architectural Record*. He would have also been aware of Hitchcock and Johnson's *The International Style: Architecture since 1922* and MoMA's *Modern Architecture: International Exhibit*, as well as more contemporary examples of the style.

In 1949, *Architectural Record* published Frederick Gutheim's evaluation of the current state of the PSFS Building and how the design held up in the seventeen years since it was constructed. Gutheim enthused:

Have the last twenty years produced anything in the way of a tall building—except for the United Nations secretariat, now a promise in steel—that provides the same functional satisfaction or as much food for the eye? If you had to pick the one skyscraper, this would have to be it.<sup>64</sup>

Castle may also have been enlightened by Henry-Russell Hitchcock's 1951 article in *Architectural Record*, "The International Style Twenty Years Later."<sup>65</sup> The International Style and the PSFS Building were well publicized through these channels which were easily accessible to Castle.

Castle's Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building was not a replica of the PSFS Building, but there are some important features of the nominated building that bear a striking resemblance to its predecessor. The GPLIC Building serves as a more restrained interpretation of the International Style than the PSFS Building. The positioning of the GPLIC Building's circulation core and asymmetrical office tower, along with the differentiation of cladding materials for these functional components evoke the T-shaped plan and visual distinction of functions seen in the PSFS Building. The proportion of base to tower, limited ornament, and use of curtain walls is similar in both buildings. The GPLIC Building does not incorporate prominent vertical elements to counter the strong horizontal spandrels, but it does have some vertical emphasis in the form of metal panels between the groupings of aluminum frame ribbon windows to convey the presence of the structural grid behind the curtain wall. The brick base of the GPLIC Building is not as sleek or elegant as the PSFS Building, but it provides a solid podium from which the office tower rises. Likewise, the brick circulation core at the north end of the GPLIC Building provides the solid "spine" from which the "ribs" of the spandrels appear to cantilever out.

### **Architect David S. Castle**

Architect David S. Castle, dubbed the "Skyline Maker" for his designs that reached new heights and provided cities with monumental buildings to define their skylines, had a long and prolific career in West Texas.<sup>66</sup> He arrived in Abilene in 1914, started his firm in 1915, and worked steadily in the region until his death in 1956. His work included residential, commercial, and institutional buildings and, increasingly toward the end of his career, large

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<sup>63</sup> Jordy, "PSFS," 83.

<sup>64</sup> Frederick Gutheim, "Saving Fund Society Building: A Re-Appraisal," *Architectural Record*, Vol. 106, No. 4, (October 1949), 88.

<sup>65</sup> There is no documentary evidence that Castle read any of these publications, but they were put forth by institutions and media outlets with a broad reach in the mid-twentieth century. It is likely that Castle would have been aware of this contemporary evaluation of architectural trends.

<sup>66</sup> Greg Jaklewicz, "When Castle was king and ruled West Texas architecture," *Abilene Reporter News*, November 30, 2018.

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monumental buildings intended to bring an urban feel to West Texas cities.<sup>67</sup> Architectural historian Stephen Fox characterizes Castle's work as "conservative with an emphasis on economy, solidity, and respectability."<sup>68</sup>

David Castle was born in Michigan and studied drafting, then mechanical, structural, and electrical engineering at the Armour Institute, now the Illinois Institute of Technology.<sup>69</sup> After he left college without a degree, he drew plans and wrote specifications for telephone buildings for the Chicago Telephone and Telegraph Company. He worked on a large construction project in Kansas City, Missouri for the Missouri & Kansas Telephone Company before joining Southwestern Bell Telephone Company in 1910 where he designed company structures in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston. In 1913, Castle joined the Fort Worth firm of M. L. Waller and moved to Abilene the next year to open a West Texas office of the Waller firm.<sup>70</sup> Castle soon opened his own company in Abilene, which served as his headquarters throughout his career. Castle correctly assessed the growth potential in the region when he opened shop in a town of ten thousand. By 1950, Abilene had grown to 45,000. Castle's architectural and engineering company had twenty-four employees including architects, engineers, draftsmen, construction observers, and clerical staff to assist in the design of numerous commissions in the region.<sup>71</sup>

Castle developed lasting business relationships with West Texas school districts, hospitals, universities, commercial developers, and local government officials. These relationships, and the quality of his work, earned steady commissions for numerous building types. During his forty-one-year career in Abilene, Castle designed at least six hundred building projects in West Texas, including eight county courthouses, and all of the school buildings constructed in Abilene between 1920 and 1935.<sup>72</sup> The breadth of his career demonstrated his mastery of changing architectural styles from revival styles of the 1920s, to regionally-specific Moderne institutional buildings in the 1930s, and finally embracing emerging new building technology to build skyscrapers that express a Modern aesthetic.

David S. Castle solidified his reputation as the "Skyline Maker" with the design of early skyscrapers and monumental works, such as the Wooten Hotel in Abilene and the Settles Hotel in Big Spring.<sup>73</sup> Both of these Art Deco hotel buildings, constructed in 1930, exhibit a symmetrical stepped massing with a wide base and narrow central tower. The ornament on these buildings reflects the aesthetic popular at the time of construction. Castle's educational and civic projects exhibit the variety of eclectic historical revival styles popular throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, designed twenty years after the Wooten and Settles hotels, exhibits a discernable Modern aesthetic compared with these earlier works, particularly in the curtain wall construction that expresses the internal structure and the use of different cladding materials and massing to communicate the distinct functions of the building. This shows a direct evolution within Castle's body of work, from the earlier skyscrapers to the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building. The prominent use of brick and granite paired with the horizontality of the aluminum frame ribbon windows and curtain wall of the asymmetrical tower illustrate Castle's experimentation with the International Style and the striking similarity with the PSFS Building.

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<sup>67</sup> Jaklewicz, "When Castle was king and ruled West Texas architecture," *Abilene Reporter News*, November 30, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Jaklewicz, "When Castle was king and ruled West Texas architecture," *Abilene Reporter News*, November 30, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Gary Lindsey, Ph.D, "Castle Builder of West Texas, David S. Castle," transcript from presentation at Grace Museum, Abilene, Texas, March 28, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Lindsey, "Castle Builder of West Texas, David S. Castle."

<sup>71</sup> Lindsey, "Castle Builder of West Texas, David S. Castle."

<sup>72</sup> Lindsey, "Castle Builder of West Texas, David S. Castle."

<sup>73</sup> Both of these buildings are listed in the National Register. The Wooten Hotel is a contributing resource to the Abilene Commercial Historic District (NR listed 1991) while the Settles Hotel is listed individually (NR listed 2013). David Moore, *National Register of Historic Places* form "Abilene Commercial Historic District," Abilene, Taylor County, Texas, 1991. Peggy Riddle, Kate Singleton, and Norman Alston, *National Register of Historic Places* form, "Settles Hotel," Big Spring, Howard County, Texas, 2013.

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*Comparable Designs: V & J Tower and the Wilco Building*

Castle designed two buildings in Midland, Texas for Jack B. Wilkinson, the V & J Tower (completed in 1951) and the Wilco Building (completed in 1958).<sup>74</sup> The V & J Tower (1951) was an L-shaped fourteen-story building that shared some similar features with the Great Plains Life Insurance Company building (*Figure 17*). The primary (south) elevation of the V & J Tower had a vertical band of dark granite panels on the west side while alternating horizontal bands of buff brick spandrels and ribbon windows delineated the office floors. The elevator penthouse rose above the roof and aligned with the dark vertical band, indicating the location of the circulation core. The horizontal banding wrapped around the north side of the building and around the south side of the L. The building did not have a base differentiated from the tower, as the ribbon windows and brick spandrels began at the first story (*Figure 18*). This building was demolished in 2007.

The GPLIC Building shares similarities with the 22-story Wilco Building (1958), including the contrasting forms on the primary façade of the monolithic red brick vertical element and the alternating horizontal bands of buff brick and grouped windows (*Figure 20*). The Wilco Building also lacks ornament and has an asymmetrical tower, although the tower is L-shaped and does not appear to have a circulation core positioned at one end of the building (*Figure 19*). The monolithic red brick slab on the front elevation is veneer only and it does not correspond to the interior location of the circulation core. The one-story base of the Wilco Building is less prominent than the GPLIC Building and clad in stone veneer panels that are roughly the same color as the buff brick spandrels. Wide stone buff colored panels between each group of four windows align with the structural bays. The vertical elements are more prominent in the Wilco Building than the Great Plains Building. The Wilco Building has an integrated parking garage, while the GPLIC Building does not.

*Curtain Wall*

The curtain wall system at the GPLIC Building is comprised of single-pane aluminum windows set between a steel “L” lintel above and masonry construction below (*Figure 14*). The curtain wall construction consists of one wythe of red face brick and one wythe of clay tile to provide the wind and fire resistance required by code. Thru-wall flashing covers the steel beam and the “Piece ‘I’ Beam Hanger” that support the one wythe of buff brick veneer that covers the portion of the spandrel between the top of the window and the floor above. The curtain wall is twelve inches thick below the window and four inches thick above the window. The lath and plaster are attached to the tile back-up on the interior of the wall.

**Conclusion**

The Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building was designed by architect David Castle and completed in 1955 as the new company headquarters. The GPLIC Building is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level because it reflects the adaptation of the most iconic first-wave International Style skyscraper in the United States, the PSFS Building, to West Texas. Coming at the end of Castle’s career, the building serves as the most resolutely modernist skyscraper in his body of work and as an intact example of 1950s Modernism. The skyscraper symbolized new sophistication for the central business district and the coming of high-rise modernism in skyscraper form to Lubbock. Additionally, the GPLIC Building is the second tallest building in the country to survive an F5 tornado, which struck Lubbock in 1970, and the subsequent studies of the damage to this building informed the 1972 National Building Code and led to the development of the Fujita Scale used to measure the size and impact of tornados. The period of significance is 1955.

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<sup>74</sup> “Lubbock Gets Skyscraper,” *The Abilene Reporter-News*, October 25, 1951, B-1. “Midland Building Fast for 100,000 Population,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 17, 1958. This article discusses both the V & J Tower and the Wilco Building with an accompanying photograph of the Midland skyline.

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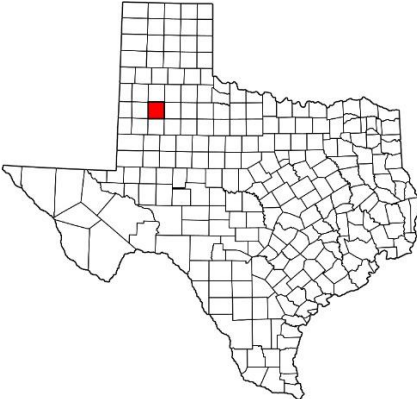
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Map 1. Lubbock County, Texas.



Map 2. Google Earth Map, accessed March 2, 2020





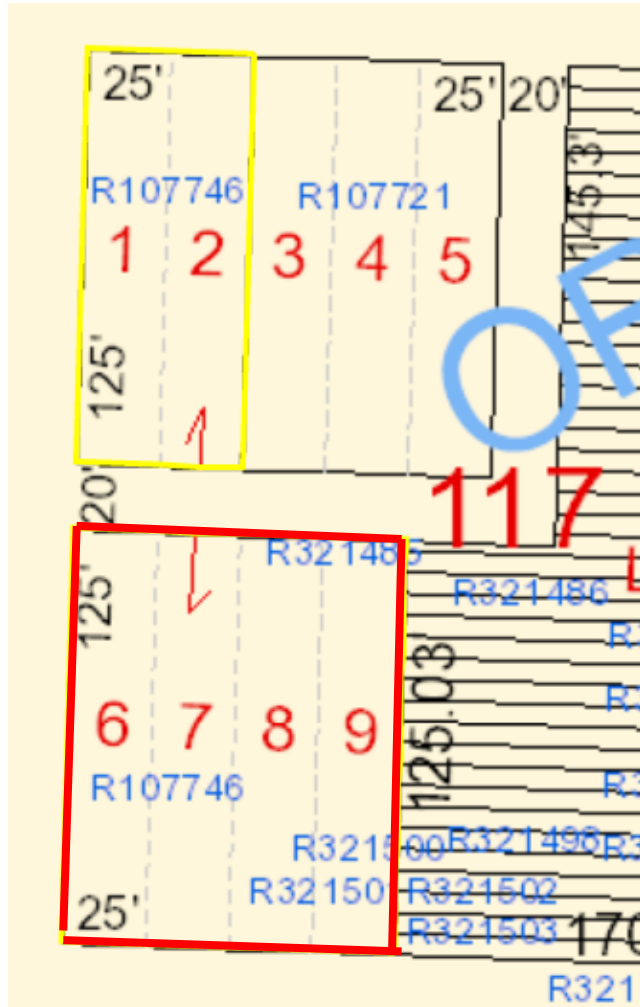
Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

Map 3. Nominated property boundary. Google Map, accessed March 9, 2020. Boundary map drawn from data gathered from Lubbock Central Appraisal District.



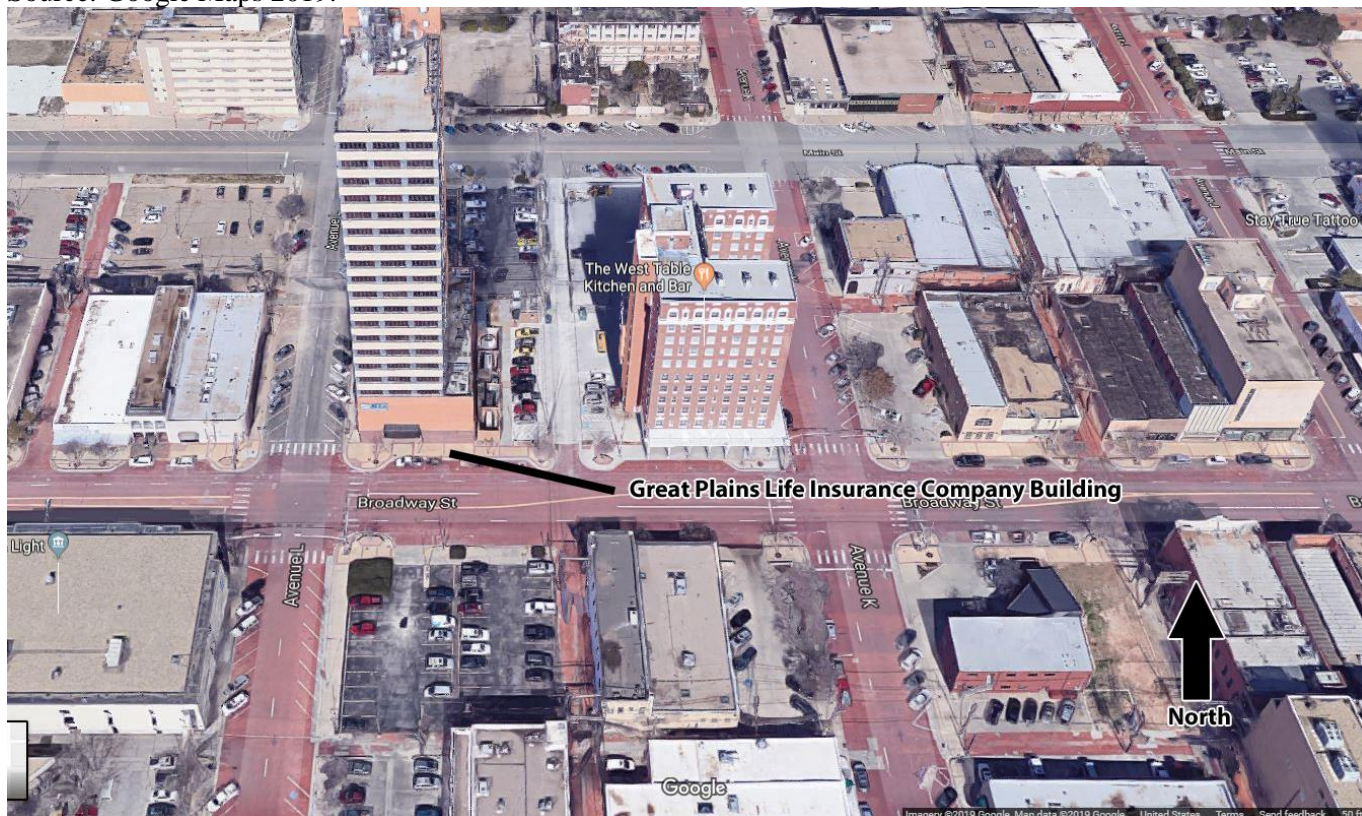
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Map 4. The nominated boundary (shown in red) includes the southern approximately 0.293 acres (ORIG TOWN LUBBOCK BLK 117, Lots 6-9) of the larger approximately 0.430 acre legal parcel identified as ORIG TOWN LUBBOCK BLK 117 Lots 1 & 2 & 6-9 in Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas (Property ID R107746); Lubbock Central Appraisal District accessed December 14, 2020. The boundary excludes the parking lot to the north that is not historically associated with the property.



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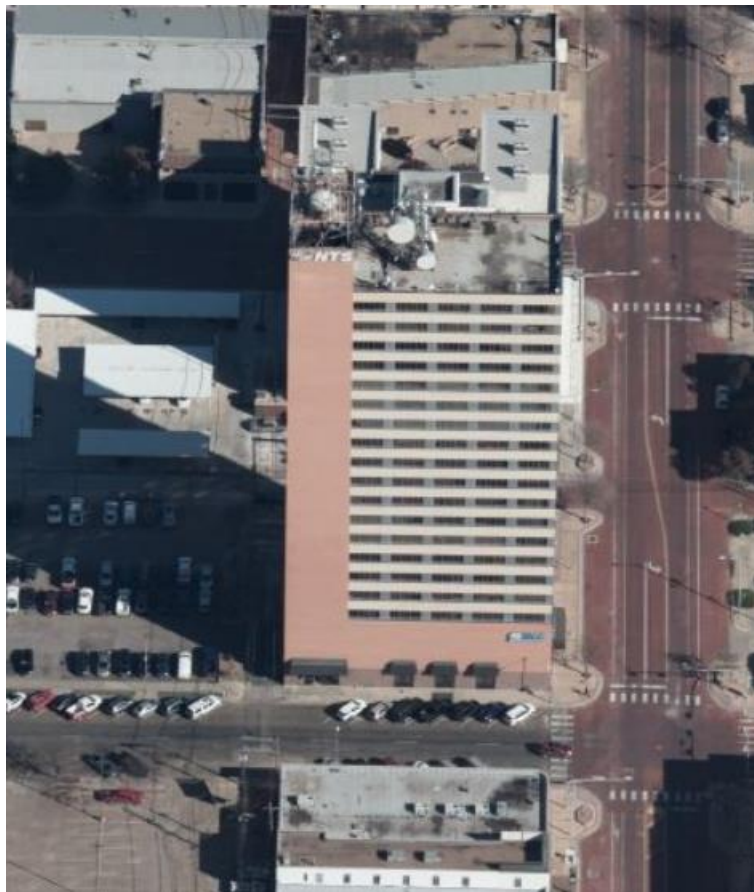
Map 5. Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, 1220 Broadway, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas.  
Source: Google Maps 2019.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

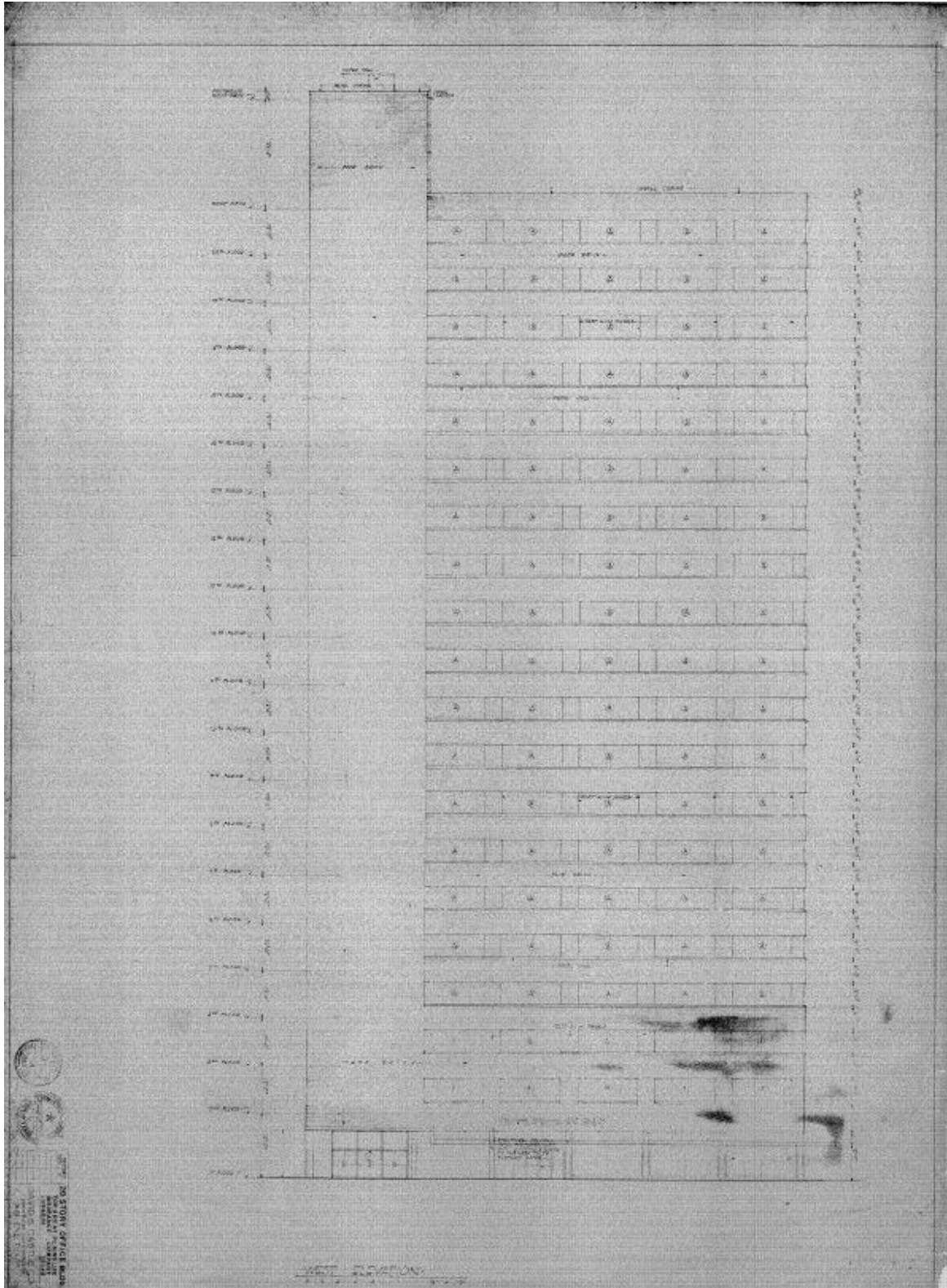
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Map 6. West Elevation of Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, 1220 Broadway, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas. Source: Bing Maps October 29, 2019.



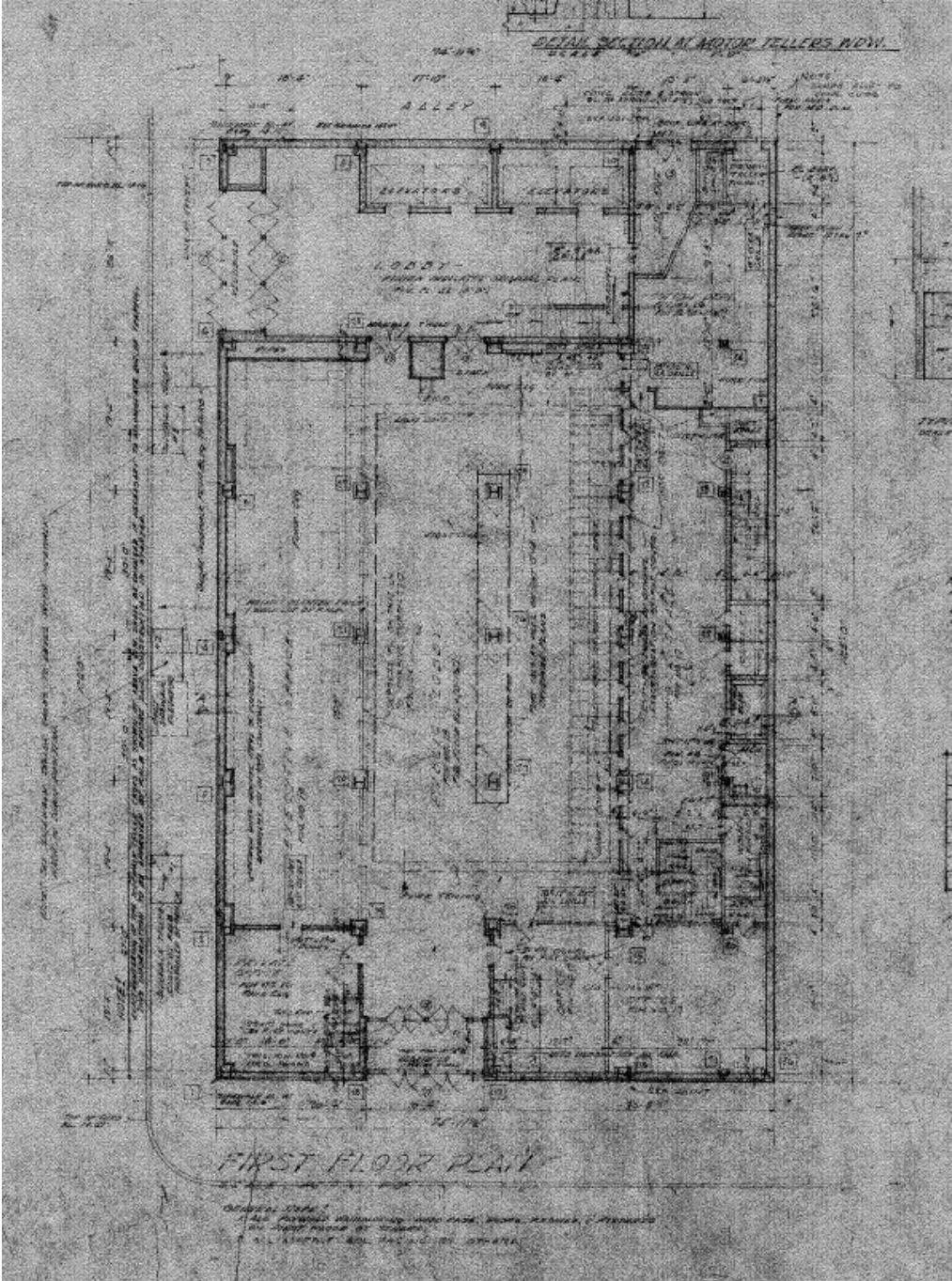
Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

Figure 1. West elevation, 1952 drawings by David S. Castle.



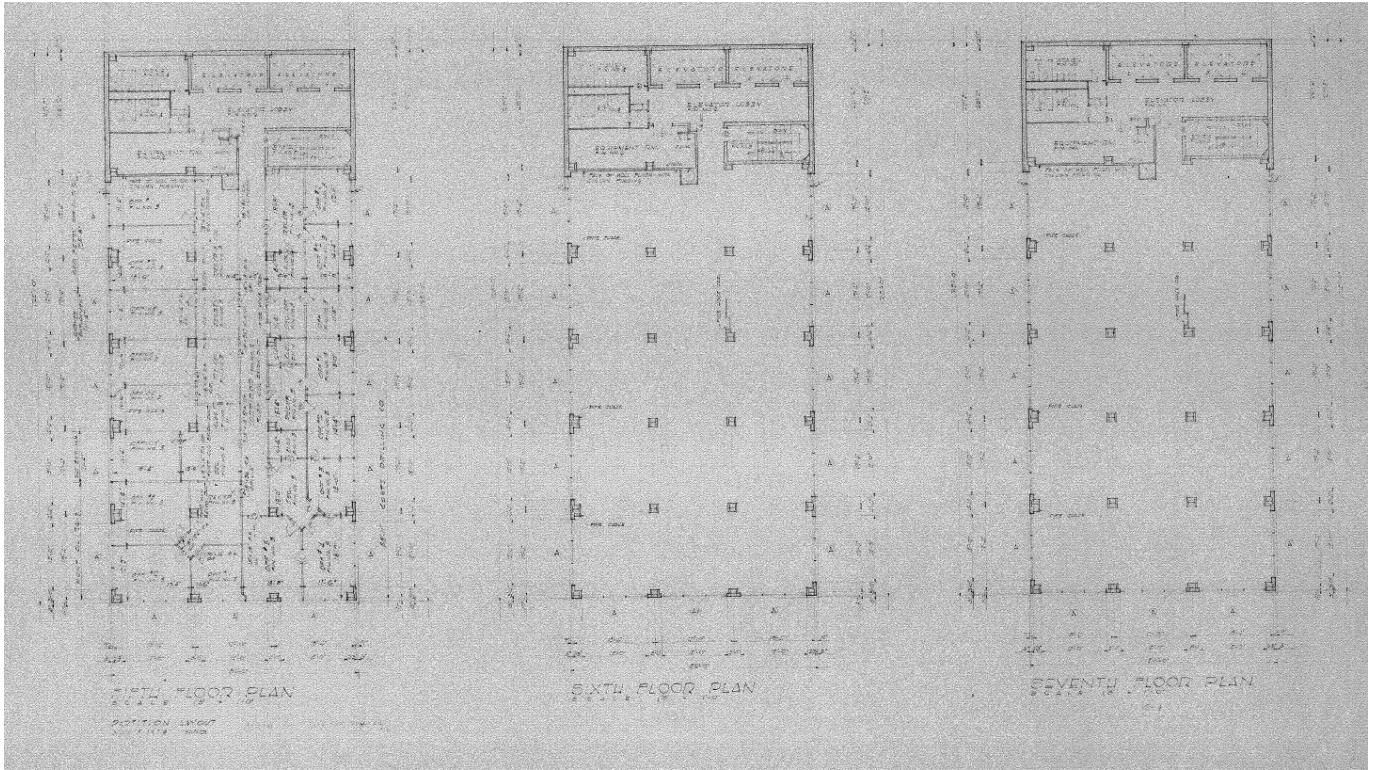
Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

Figure 2. First floor plan, 1952 drawings by David S. Castle.



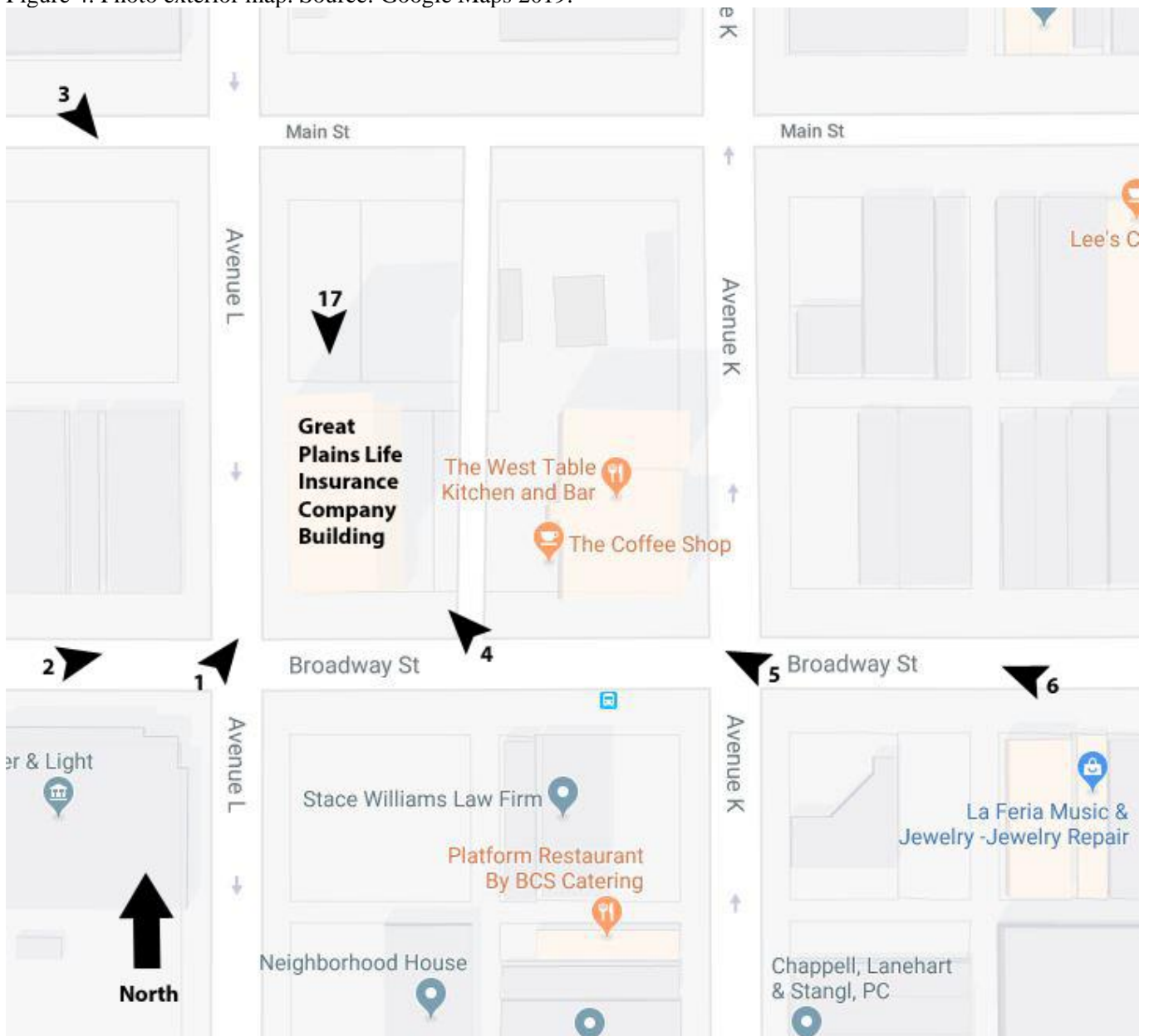
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Figure 3. Fifth, sixth, and seventh floor plans (typical), 1952 drawings by David S. Castle.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

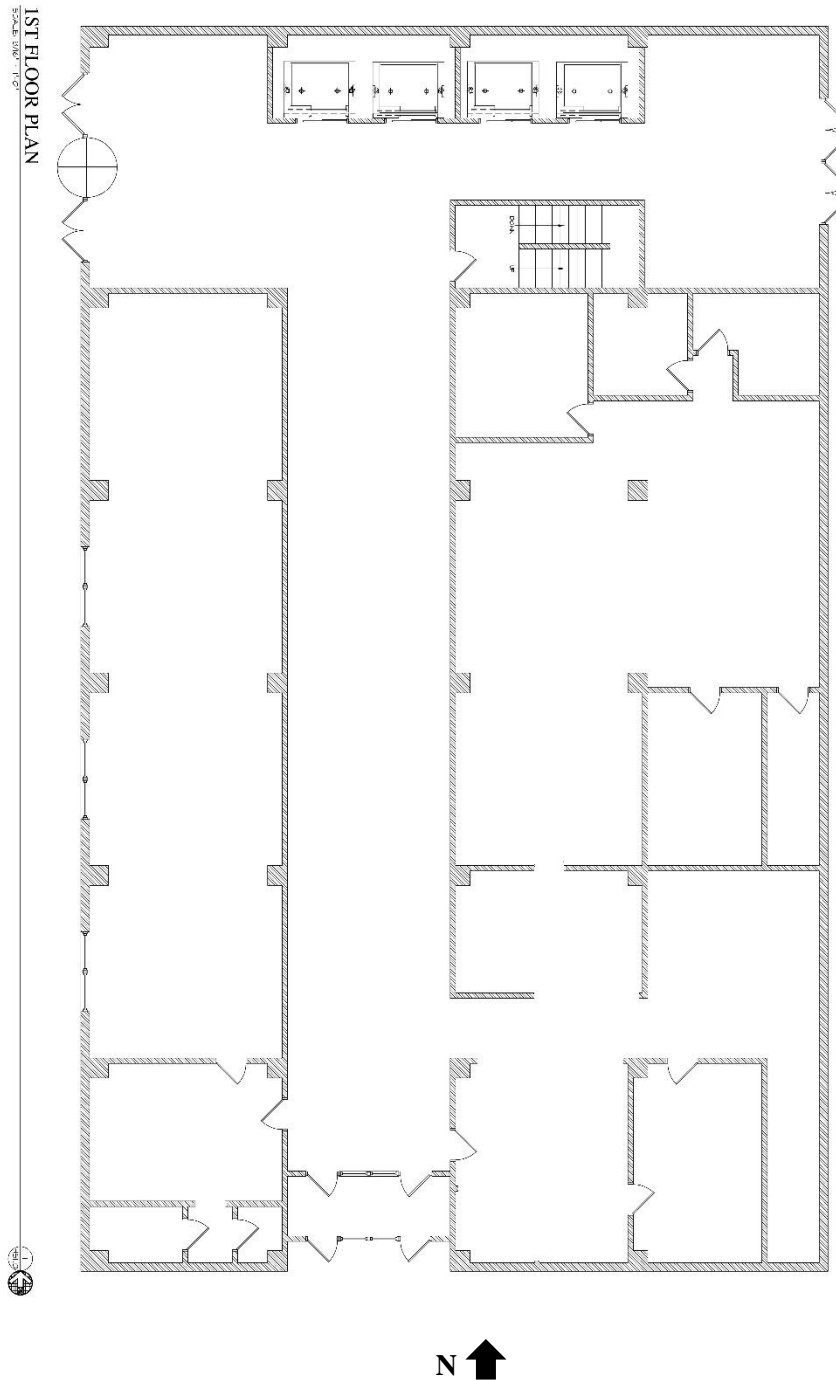
Figure 4. Photo exterior map. Source: Google Maps 2019.





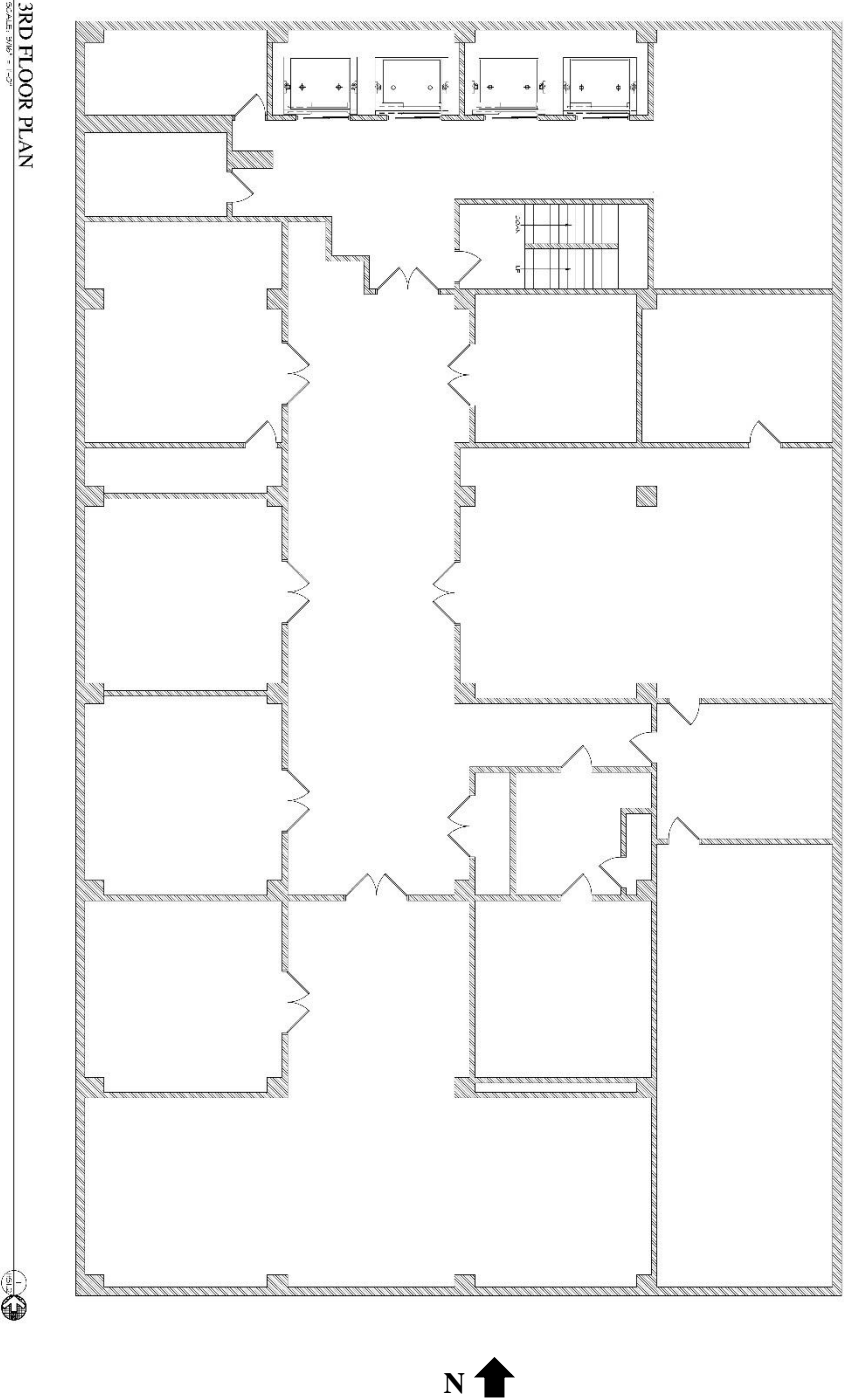
Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

Figure 5. First floor plan does not reflect removal of some non-historic partitions as part of ongoing rehabilitation.



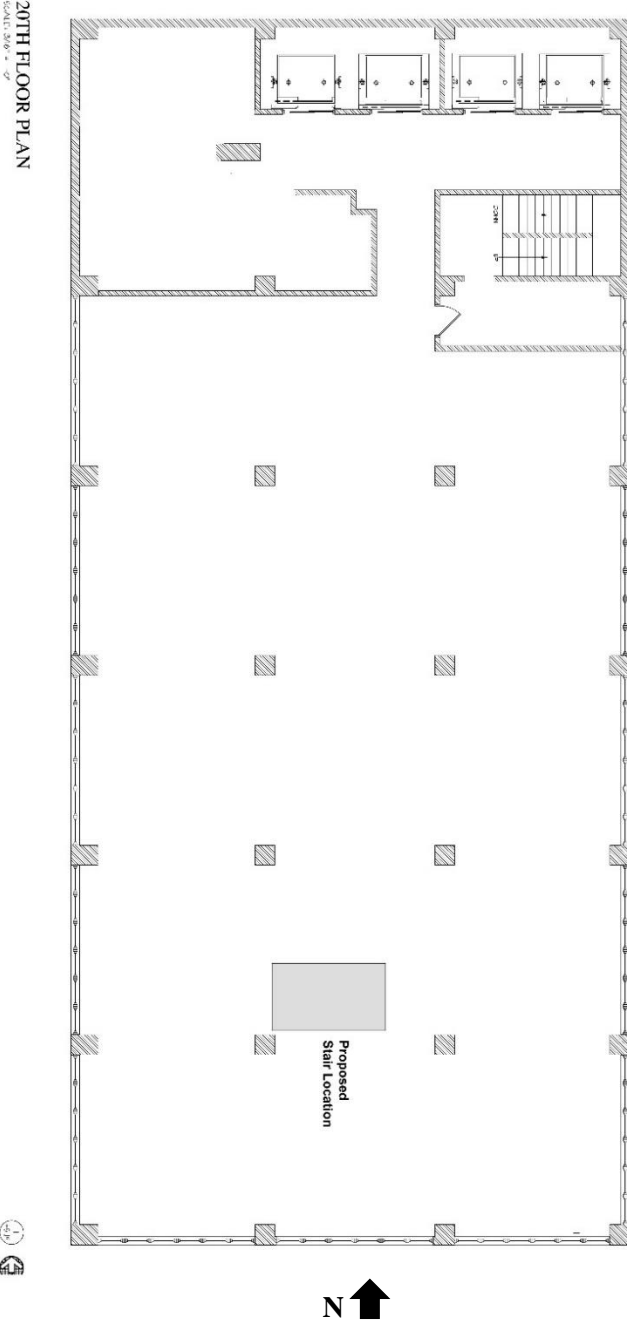
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Figure 6. Third floor plan showing non-historic configuration. Not part of current rehabilitation project.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

Figure 7. Twentieth floor plan. Part of ongoing rehabilitation work.



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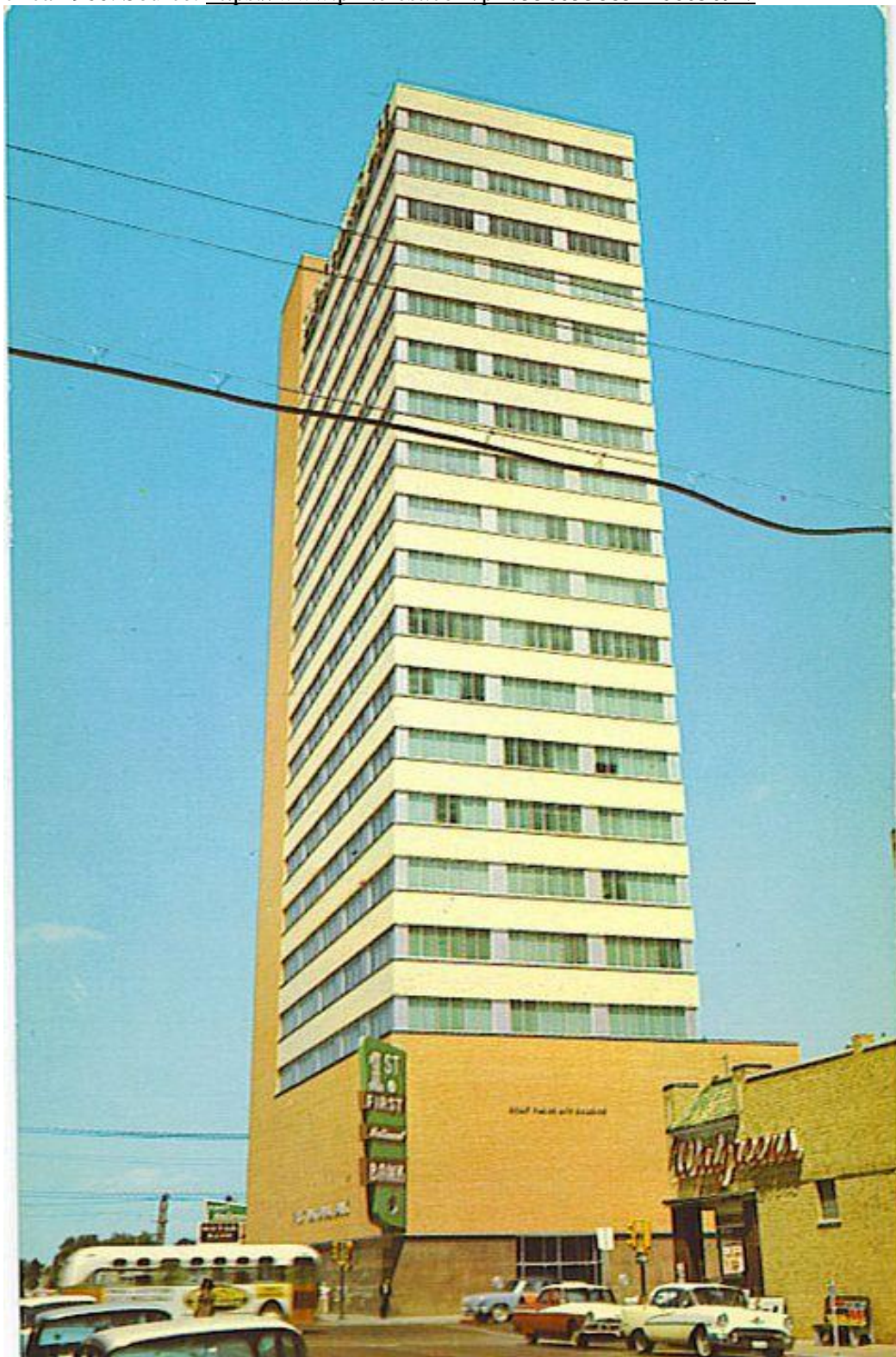
Figure 8. Aerial photo showing the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building towering above the downtown. Photo take between 1955 and 1970. Source: Framed photo on the wall in Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building.



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Figure 9. Historic postcard showing the south and west elevations of Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building circa 1960. Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/556053885216605091/>



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Figure 10. Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building following tornado damage in 1970. Source: <https://www.lubbockonline.com/1970-lubbock-tornado/20-years-later/2012-02-03/fear-collapse-surrounded-landmark>



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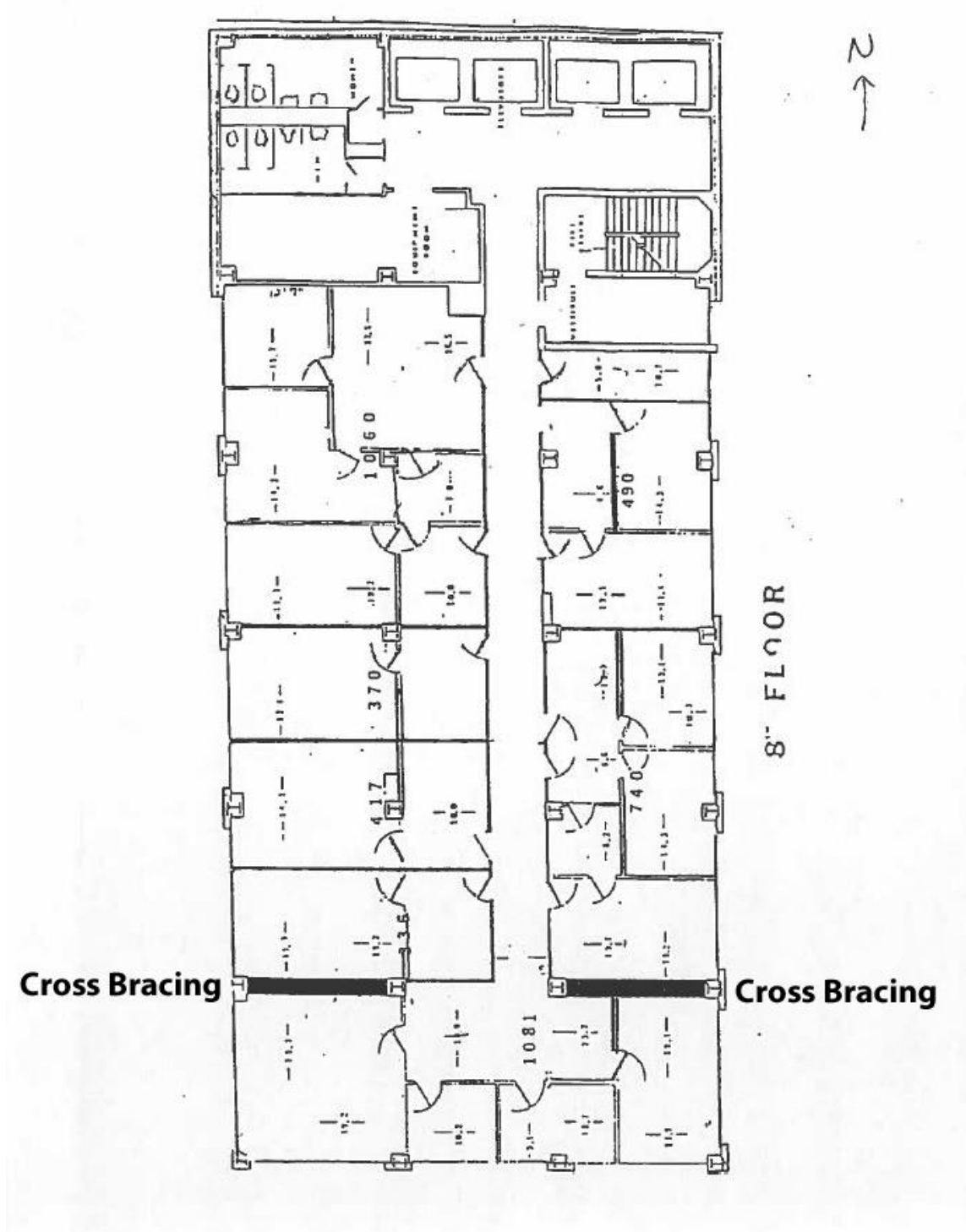
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Figure 11. Historic Photograph of damage to northeast corner from 1970 tornado. Source: Lubbock Tornado vertical file, Lubbock Public Library.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

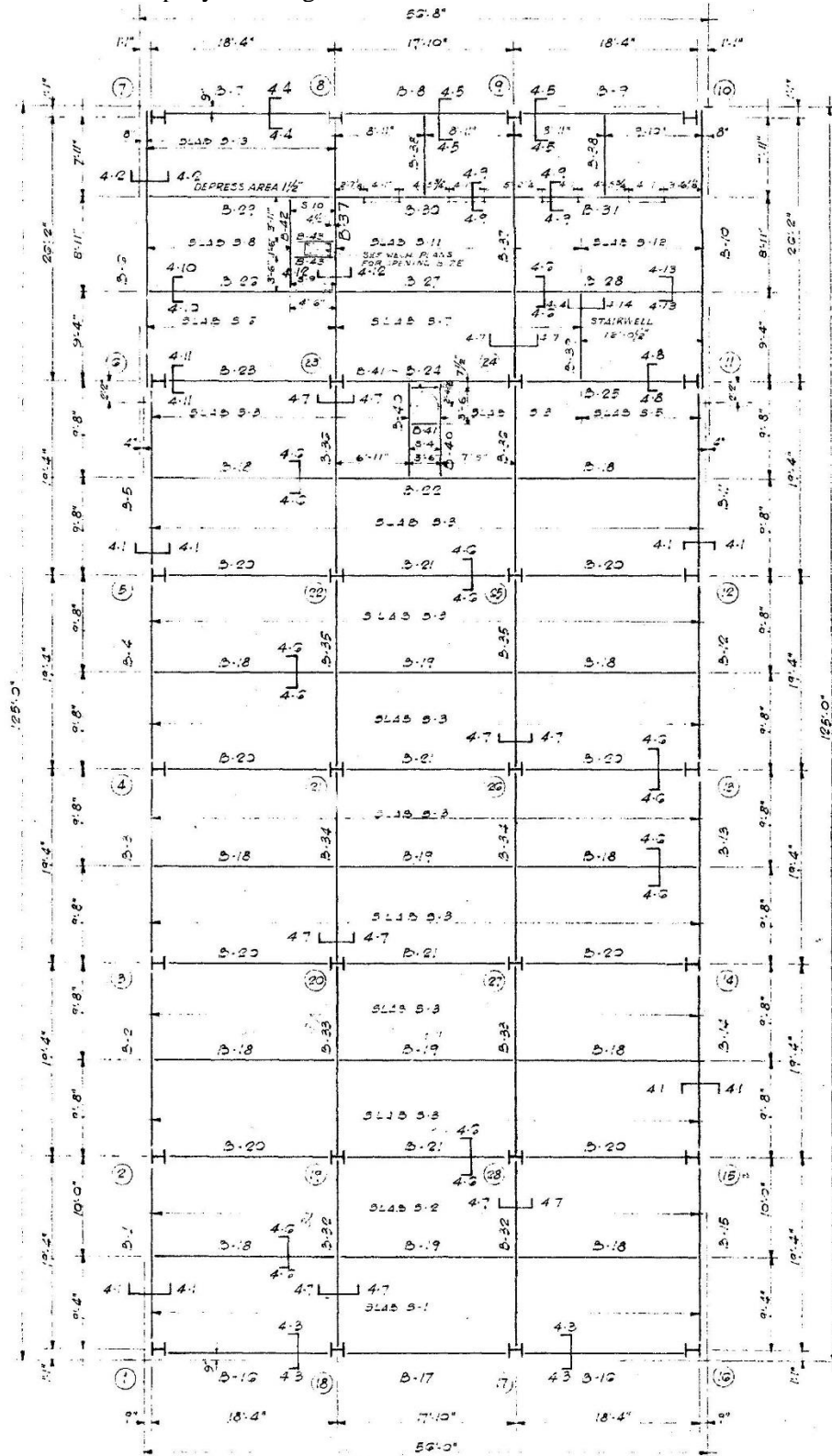
Figure 12. Typical floorplan showing elevator bank, stairwell, and restrooms at north end, central corridor and added interior walls one bay north of the south wall concealing cross bracing. Source: on file at Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building.





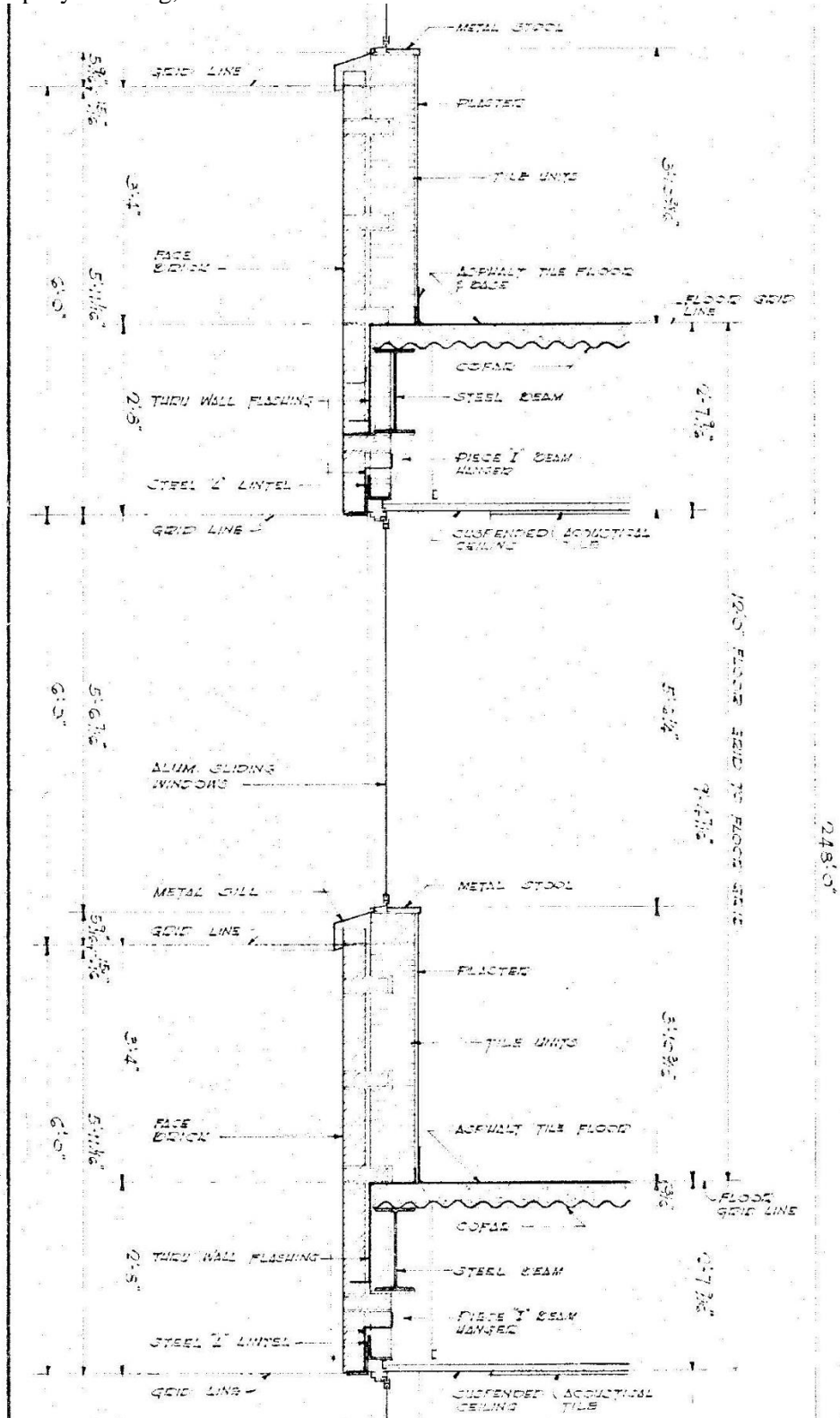
Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

Figure 13. Typical Floor framing plan. Source: David S. Castle, architectural plans for the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Sheet S-5.



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Figure 14. Curtain wall section detail. Source: David S. Castle, architectural plans for the Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Sheet G-13.



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Figure 15. Historic Photograph, c. 1935. Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.  
Source: Philadelphia Free Library, <https://libwww.freelibrary.org/digital/item/44276>.



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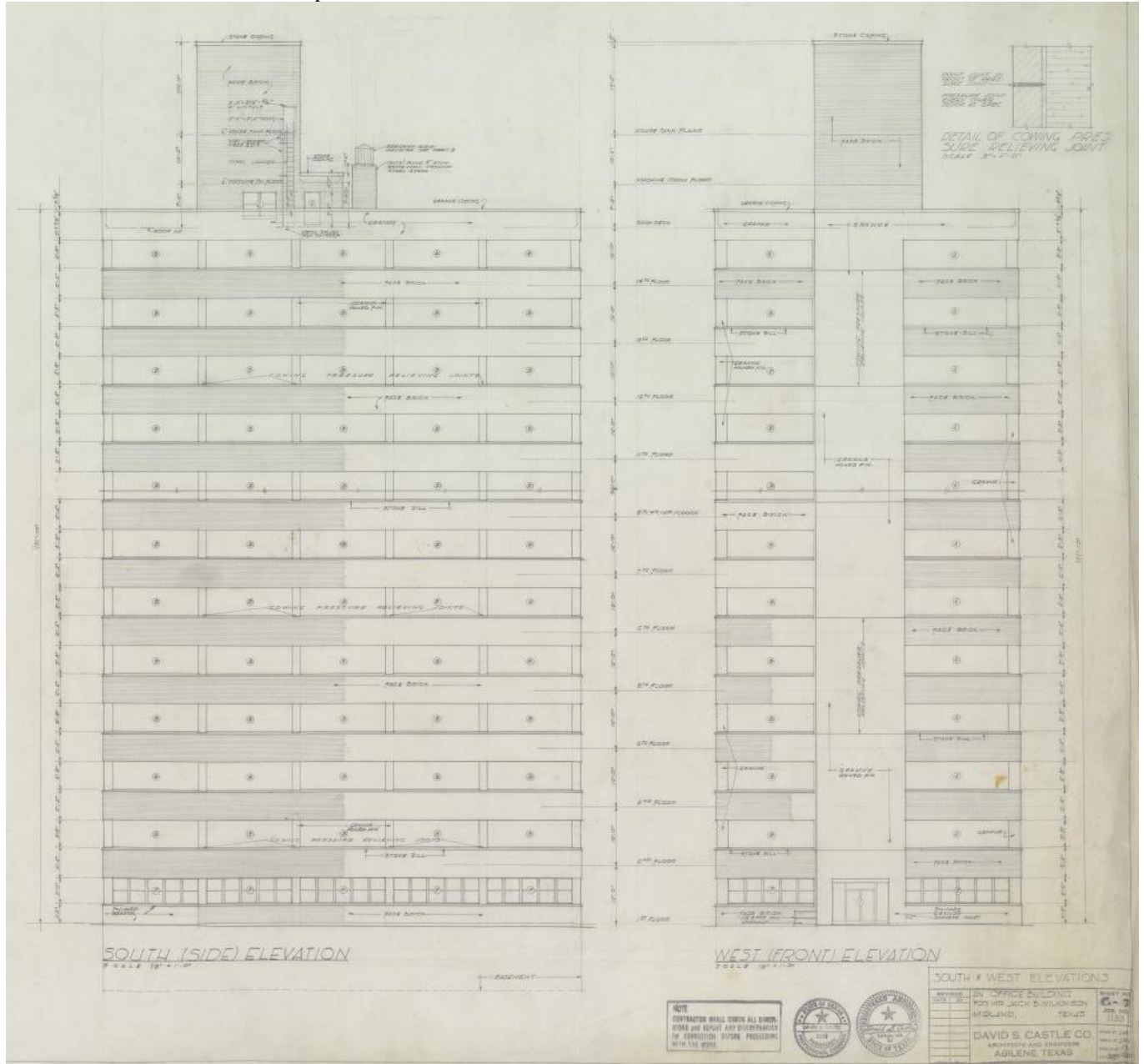
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Figure 16. PSFS Building, undated photograph. Source: do.co.mo.mo., <https://www.docomomo-us.org/register/loews-philadelphia-hotel>.



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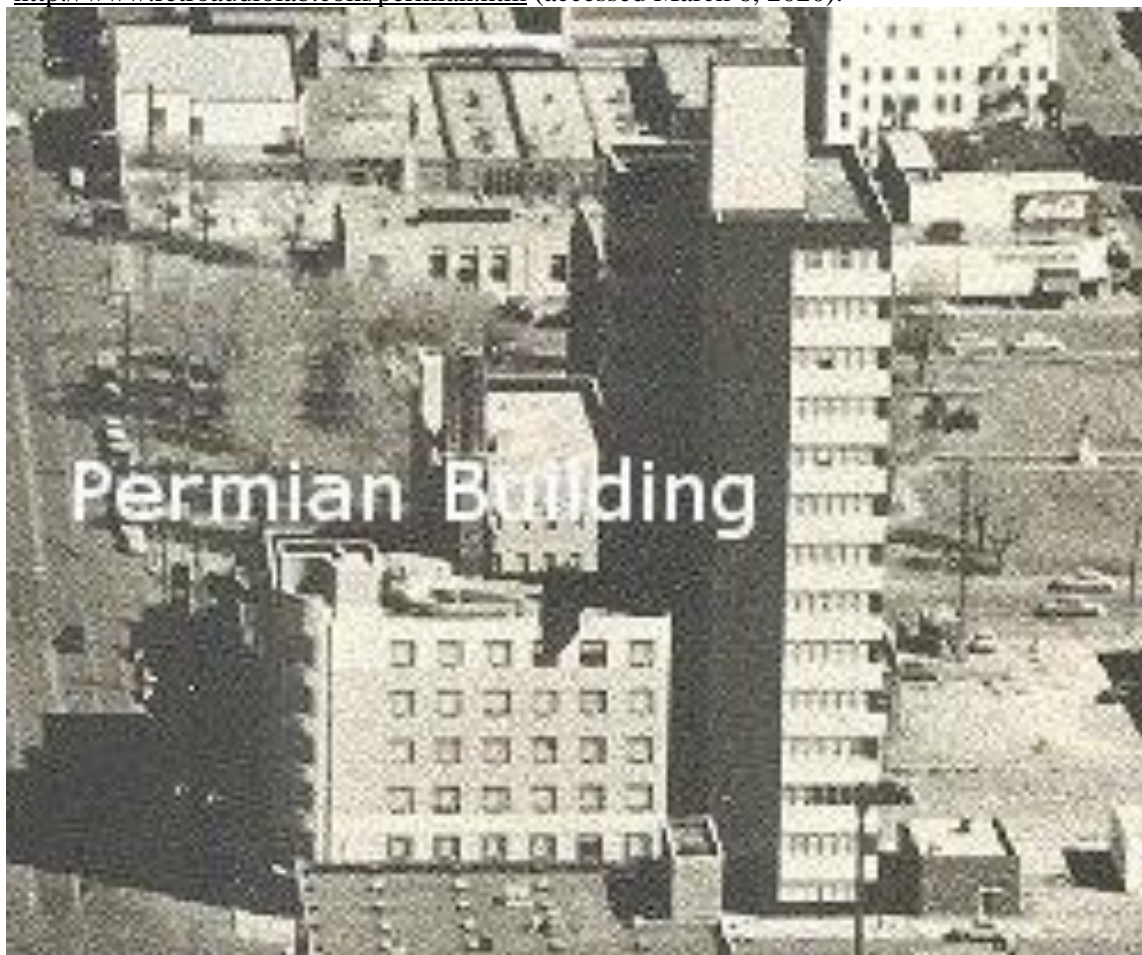
Figure 17. 1. V and J Tower, South and West elevations, Architectural plans, David S. Castle Co., 1950. Source: University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Tittle-Luther/Parkhill, Smith and Cooper, Inc..



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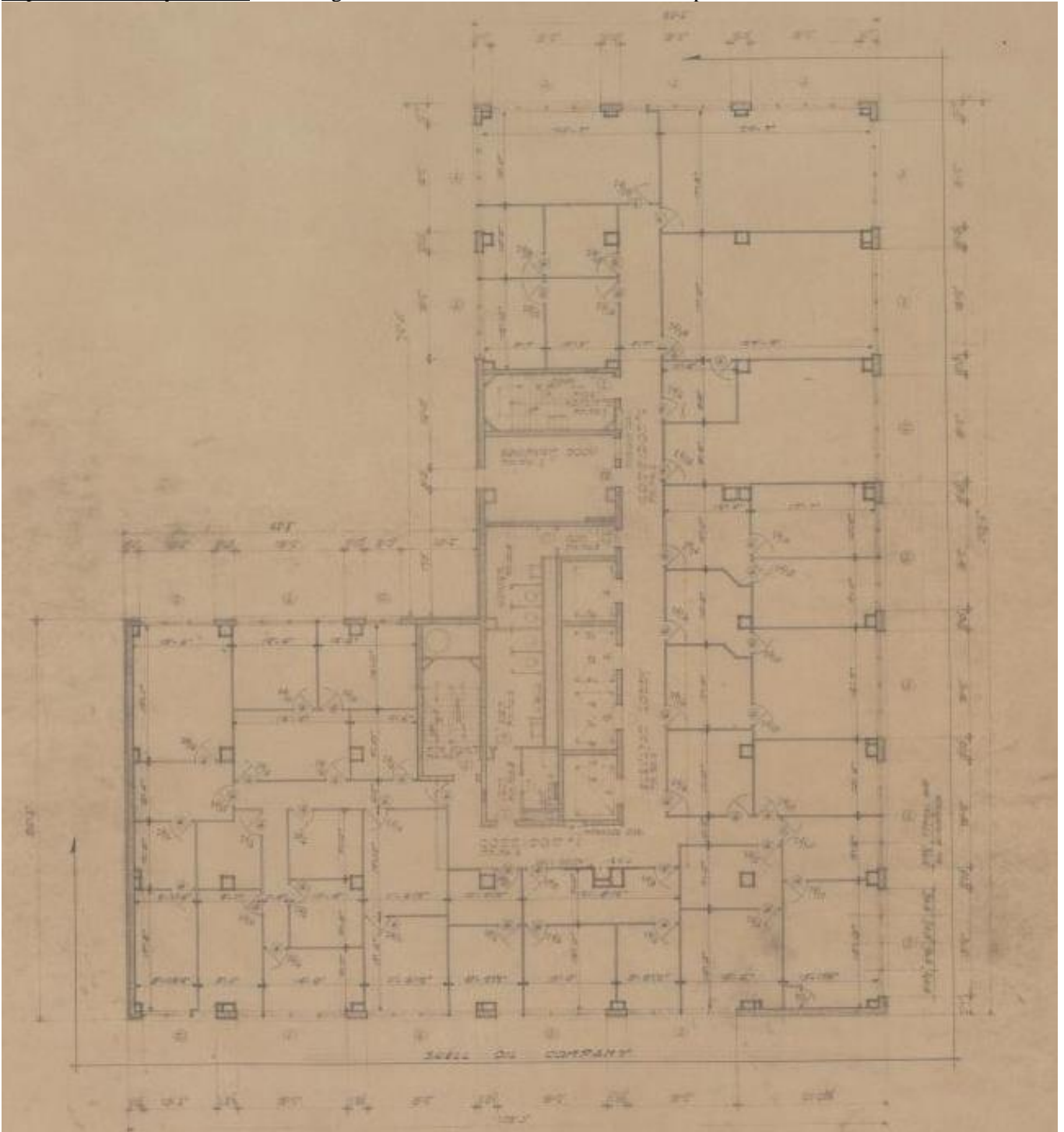
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Figure 18. Historic aerial photograph of Midland, 1957. The V & J Tower is to the right of the Permian Building, both of which were demolished in 2007. This photograph was already labeled with the building name for the website. Source: Chad Hauris, *Retro Electronics and Radio Lab*, Midland, Texas, January 7, 2007. <http://www.retroaudiolab.com/permian.htm> (accessed March 6, 2020).



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Figure 19. Wilco Building, 21<sup>st</sup> Floor, Plan. The brick veneer that forms the solid vertical band on the primary elevation is visible at the lower right corner of the building. However, that solid vertical band does not correspond to the location of the circulation core. Source: David S. Castle Co. Wilkinson Office Building and Parking Garage, Midland, Texas: 20th & 21st Floor Plans, item, 1955; <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1000325/>, accessed March 8, 2020), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/>; crediting Tittle-Luther/Parkhill, Smith and Cooper, Inc..



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Figure 20. The Wilco Building at 415 West Wall Street in Midland, Texas. Architect: David S. Castle, completed in 1958. Source: Google Maps 2019.





Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 1. West and south elevations, camera facing northeast.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 2. South and west elevations, camera facing northeast.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 3. West and north elevations, camera facing southeast.



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Photo 4. South and east elevations. Camera facing northwest.



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Photo 5. Contextual view of Broadway. Camera facing northwest.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 6. Contextual view on Broadway. Camera facing west.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 7. Main lobby on the ground floor. Camera facing north



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 8. Main lobby on the ground floor. Camera facing south





Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 9. Elevator lobby on ground floor. Camera facing northwest



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 10. Elevator lobby on third floor. Camera facing northwest



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 11. View of 6<sup>th</sup> floor. Camera facing northwest



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 12. View of removed historic restroom. Camera facing west



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 13. Open office on 14<sup>th</sup> floor. Camera facing southwest.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 14. Corridor on 16<sup>th</sup> floor. Camera facing southwest



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 15. Reinforcing steel added after 1970 tornado. Camera facing southeast.



Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 16. Open floorplan on 20<sup>th</sup> (top) floor with no interior finishes or partitions, camera facing northwest





Great Plains Life Insurance Company Building, Lubbock, Lubbock County, Texas

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Photo 17. Facing brick on north façade repairs from 1970 tornado damage. Camera facing south

