

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Pet Plaza

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

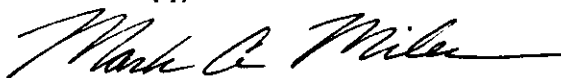
street & number 400 S. 4<sup>th</sup> St. [ n/a ] not for publication

city or town St. Louis [ n/a ] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county St. Louis (independent city) code 510 zip code 63102

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [ x ] 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 [ x ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [x] statewide [ ] locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ]. )



09/16/04

Signature of certifying official/Title

Mark A. Miles / Deputy SHPO

Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ]. )

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

[ ] entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet [ ].

[ ] determined eligible for the National Register

See continuation sheet [ ].

[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.

[ ] removed from the National Register

[ ] other, explain see continuation sheet [ ].

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

USD/NPS NRHP Registration Form  
Pet Plaza  
St. Louis (Independent City), MO

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	0 building
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	0	0 sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0 structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	0	0 objects
		1	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing.

(n/a)

Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register. 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

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Current Functions

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT

Brutalism

see continuation sheet [ ]

Materials

foundation concrete

walls concrete

roof asphalt

other

see continuation sheet [ ]

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet [x]

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☒ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

Architecture

**Periods of Significance**

1969

**Significant Dates**

n/a

**Significant Person(s)**

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

n/a

**Architect/Builder**

Aydelott, Alfred L./architect

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

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

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

# \_\_\_\_\_

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

# \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☐ Other:

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.248 acres

UTM References

A. Zone 15 Easting 744 680 Northing 4278 530

B. Zone Easting Northing

C. Zone Easting Northing

D. Zone Easting Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Stacy Sone (Research Associate) with Carolyn Toft (Executive Director)

organization Landmarks Association of St. Louis date March 18, 2004

street & number 917 Locust Street, 7th floor telephone 314-421-6474

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63101

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name 2840 Lincoln LLC, c/o Todd A. Massa

street & number 16141 Swingley Ridge Rd. Suite 300 telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Chesterfield state MO zip code 63017

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Pet Plaza  
St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri

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**Summary**

Pet Plaza, completed in 1969, is a thirteen-story concrete tower on a broad two-story base. Located at 400 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown St. Louis, the building is situated overlooking the southern end of the Gateway Arch grounds near the intersection of a network of interstate highways 44, 55, 64 and 70. The corporate office tower sits at the western end of a broad base leaving an outdoor plaza level designed for riverfront viewing over a depressed section of highway 70 near onramps at the southern edge of the site. The New Brutalist-style building's most distinguishing characteristics are its overhanging crown with tapered corners and a monumental elevator shaft on its west side. Closer inspection reveals fine details. Two textures of concrete appear throughout. The rougher concrete was poured in place and retains the imprint of its wooden form; the smoother, pre-formed concrete panels offering a slightly contrasting color are used as wall surfaces and for intricate sunscreens on the east and west facades. The exterior indicates the hierarchy of spaces within. At the entrance level, a covered exterior court with a high ceiling greets visitors as they approach the spacious lobby and exhibition area in the base of the building. The locations of the general offices are obvious from the exterior where rows of windows provide views of the city from every angle. Near the top of the tower, a balcony marks an especially important floor of boardrooms and Pet's test kitchens. Executive offices occupy the crown. The exterior of the building retains nearly perfect integrity. The interior suffers from a disappointing removal of artwork and furniture that the architect incorporated into the original design. Otherwise, the interior has undergone only few alterations to some spaces.

**Description**

The exterior of the Pet building is distinguished by its textured concrete, strong lines, stark western tower and a distinctive crown (photos 1-4). The elevator tower and much of the exterior surfaces are poured-in-place concrete. The wood forms used in the construction left a textured surface that shows the imprint of the wood grain (photo 5). The architect, Alfred Aydelott, featured other details in the concrete. The steel reinforcing rods used in strengthening the walls were cut off on the exterior and capped with stainless steel disks (photo 5). Other surfaces of pre-stressed concrete panels with exposed aggregate are smoother and a slightly lighter color. The building has three main sections: a large two-

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St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri

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story base, twelve general office floors, and a third, crown section of boardrooms and executive office space (figures 1,2). Because the exterior is indicative of the function within, it is appropriate to discuss the interior and exterior of each of the three sections together.

Base and Elevator Tower

Aydelott took advantage of a sloping site to create a broad base that is nearly two-stories high on its east facade and measures approximately 215' by 250'. The ground-floor level is nearly invisible from the exterior except for a truck delivery entrance discreetly tucked below a retaining wall on the south facade. This level holds, as one might expect, important utilitarian spaces that require little or no natural light. The loading dock, mailroom, supply and storage rooms and a print shop were all located in this level. The original corridors and rooms appear to be intact.

The next level of the base is prominently visible on three sides (north, east and south) where the concrete surface is punctured by pairs or groups of narrow windows, each surrounded by thin concrete frames that are a lighter color than the wall surface (photos 2, 4). On the interior this level contains substantial exhibition space for Pet to display its products as well as a cafeteria and kitchen (figure 3). The office tower is positioned on the western end of this base leaving a broad outdoor plaza designed as a place for visitors and employees to view the riverfront (photo 4) (figure 4). Also on this level is the lobby accessed from a covered court that opens from 4<sup>th</sup> Street (photo 6). From the entrance court, a visitor originally could either enter the building or walk through the court and ascend a spiral stair to the outdoor plaza. Although the entrance court has been glassed-in on its east side preventing access to the spiral stair, the sense of openness remains intact.

The lobby once had a reception desk behind which stood an abstract, brightly colored mural by Ivan Chermayeff. Short flights of stairs to a public exhibition area originally flanked the mural but the mural and stairs have been removed and replaced with a paneled wall. Original travertine marble lines the remaining lobby walls (photo 7).

Upon entering the lobby one is immediately faced with a replacement reception desk; directly to the right is the elevator tower. From the exterior, this tower is one of the

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building's most distinguishing features—a strong vertical mass placed off-center that breaks horizontal lines near the top (photos 1, 2, 3). The tower is poured-in-place concrete that bears the wood-form imprint. A pair of small windows is recessed behind concrete awnings on the west side of levels three through fifteen. The narrow, single windows on these levels of the north and south facades are positioned in a continuous trough that extends the full height of the elevator tower. This vertical line divides the elevator tower into two parts visible at the top where the two sections meet forming a wide obtuse angle. A grill with narrow slits caps the top of the west side.

Office Levels Three-Twelve

The general office levels of the long, narrow office tower are articulated with groups of windows. On the west facade, the window bays (two on the north side of the elevator tower and one to the south) project beyond the wall (photos 1, 2, 3). Narrow pre-formed concrete panels divide each window vertically and a wider band divides the bays between the levels. Concrete panels form the sides of each bay. Incorporated near the top of the windows is a two-layer concrete sunshield. This detail is absent at the 12<sup>th</sup> floor where the balcony over the top protects the window from the sun. A pre-formed concrete pilaster divides the projecting window bays from a pair of aluminum-framed windows on each level. Pairs of aluminum-framed windows are situated between poured-in-place concrete pilasters near the outer edges of the west facade.

Beyond these paired windows are projecting bays of aluminum-framed windows that form the corners of the tower (photos 1-4). Both the north and south facades are made up of these two window bays; one holds a group of five windows, the other has four (photo 3). The bays flank a concrete crevice with small windows that light the stairwell.

The east facade is a symmetrical arrangement of windows (photo 4). Its outermost corners are the projecting corner window bays that intersect the east facade with the north and south facades. A concrete pilaster divides the projecting bays of the north and south facades from a pair of aluminum-framed windows on each level. Most of the east facade is comprised of a nine-bay bank of windows that projects beyond the flanking corner sections. Narrow vertical panels of pre-formed concrete separate the bays that alternate between a pair of windows and a group of five. Concrete sunshields identical to those on

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the west facade trim the top of each window. Their continuous line across each level adds intricate detail to this facade.

The third and twelfth floors of the office tower vary slightly from the other floors. The third floor does not have the projecting bays; instead, the windows are recessed under projecting bays (photo 5). The concrete pilasters extending the height of the tower and the narrow concrete panels dividing the bays on the east facade all continue to the base of the facade. The third story windows recessed between varying widths of concrete create an appearance of a stilt-like base (photos 1, 3). The twelfth floor also varies slightly from the rest of the general office level. Four balconies on the east facade are centered in this facade (photo 4).

The interiors of the office levels were originally broad, uninterrupted spaces (photo 8) (figure 5). The architect's structural system of exterior pre-cast columns and concrete tees allowed for maximum flexibility in these spaces. When Pet occupied the building, offices were created on a 4' x 8' modular design allowing the floor plan to be easily altered. Although the modular offices are gone, these floors remain open except for the addition of walls forming corner offices on some levels.

Board Room/Executive Level

Balconies across each side of the facade mark a division between Pet's general office levels and the executive level (photos 1-4). The balcony on the east extends almost the full-width of the facade. The narrow concrete panels that rise from the tower below divide the upper stories of the east facade into an asymmetrical pattern of cubbyholes. Some are more visually pronounced by additional balconies at the fifteenth floor (photo 4).

The interior of the balcony level (floor 13) was divided into two sections flanking a reception area (figure 6). Board and conference rooms of varying sizes occupied the north section; test kitchens, benefiting from ample natural light, were located on the south section of the floor. A glass wall divided the reception area from the kitchens. Although the kitchens were replaced with office space under a later owner, the boardrooms are remarkably intact. Windows line the east side of the largest boardroom (photo 9). Its walls are rosewood paneling that open to expose audiovisual equipment. Acoustic panels suspended from the ceiling were incorporated in the original design and remain intact. A



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smaller boardroom in the northeast corner has an unusual patterned light fixture with mushroom-shaped pieces holding the light bulbs. The next two floors were executive offices connected with a central stair accented by a skylight.

The top executive floor, located in the building's crown, was designed with more permanent offices and a boardroom (figure 7). This level has been remodeled with drywall partitions. Narrow windows, concrete buttresses, and bold, tapered corners highlight the exterior of this crowning section of the building.

**Integrity**

The Pet Building remains substantially unaltered since its 1969 construction date. The exterior retains nearly perfect integrity and the interior is also quite intact. The architect-designed furniture and the original murals that decorated each floor in the elevator tower have been removed. The lobby has been altered by the addition of a wall behind the reception desk. Also, some office spaces have been changed to suit later occupants.

**Site**

Although Pet Plaza occupies a prestigious and highly visible site overlooking the southern edge of the Arch grounds (figure 8), only the entrance at the west elevation is readily accessible to pedestrians. No sidewalk exists along the eastern (3<sup>rd</sup> Street) elevation where vehicular traffic merges to and from various approaches to the Interstate system; a sidewalk along the north (Spruce Street) elevation does not extend the entire distance downhill from 4<sup>th</sup> Street. One hearty stand of pine trees is positioned along the narrow (otherwise barren) 3<sup>rd</sup> Street frontage; an assortment of deciduous trees (some original) dots the large grassy area to the south of the service entry beyond which lies yet another highway ramp. Designed in a more welcoming period of corporate history, the building was sited to maximize the wide, inviting view through the entry court to the interior court and viewing promenade.

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**Summary**

Pet Plaza in St. Louis, Missouri is significant under National Register Criterion C in the area of **ARCHITECTURE**. It also meets Criteria Consideration G for properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years. Completed in 1969 as the world headquarters for Pet, Inc., the building was designed to reflect a fresh, assertive image for a company that had expanded far beyond its original product, evaporated milk. Theodore R. Gamble, president and later chairman of the highly diversified company, hired Memphis architect Alfred L. Aydelott for the demanding project. A Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, Aydelott tackled the challenging site overlooking a depressed freeway at the southern end of the Gateway Arch grounds by designing a sculpted concrete tower capped by a distinctive crowning executive and conference room level with a signature elevator tower prominently exposed on the west facade. Constructed during a period when many companies opted to relocate to the suburbs, Pet's corporate headquarters immediately earned benchmark status for its singularly forceful and successful solution to a demanding program. *Architectural Record* devoted an eight-page spread to Walter F. Wagner, Jr.'s coverage, "A Powerful Silhouette for a High-Speed Environment." Distinguished local critic George McCue called out the "forthright ruggedness of concrete with confident dignity and elegance . . . as painstakingly detailed as a hand-crafted object" in his tribute to a "patrician" new building. More recently, Dr. Osmund Overby (a former editor of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* who is currently completing the Society's volume on Missouri architecture) stated that no building in Missouri's limited examples of the style comes "close to matching the authority and nuance of the Pet Building." Pet Plaza is thus exceptionally significant at the state level as an unmatched exemplar of New Brutalism in Missouri. The building is highly intact and remains a distinguished St. Louis landmark featured in every publication on local architecture since its design. Its period of significance is 1969, the year it was completed.

**Background**

Helvetia Milk Condensing Company was founded in 1885 in Highland, Illinois where it prospered under the directorship of company founder, Swiss-born Louis Latzer. When the firm relocated to St. Louis in 1924, it changed its name to Pet Milk Company after its top-selling product—a condensed cream called "Our Pet." During the 1920s from St. Louis,

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the company began a new era as it expanded and joined the national market.<sup>1</sup> After successfully weathering the Depression and then increasing production during war years, Pet encountered problems as 1950 approached. With rising standards of living, more families were able to afford refrigerators allowing them to purchase fresh milk. The consumption of evaporated milk declined for the first time since the company's founding, prompting Pet to expand its product line. During the 1950s it introduced new products (instant milk, Pet-Ritz frozen pies and ice cream), opened new plant facilities and extended markets so that Pet and its subsidiaries distributed products in every state and also in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

A nearly complete turnover in management during the 1950s brought about more changes. Headed by Theodore R. Gamble, a dynamic young executive (and grandson of company founder Louis Latzer) who had quickly worked his way through the Pet ranks, the new directors embarked on an aggressive program to expand and diversify the company. Gamble, who was elected president of the company in 1959, hired a consultant to analyze every phase of the business. Just six months into his presidency, Gamble reported that the company had made considerable progress toward carrying out a reorganization program to "improve efficiency, promote expansion and facilitate diversification." Under his leadership Pet became one of the fastest-growing food processing, manufacturing and distribution companies in the industry. Sales went from \$60 million to a new record of \$230 million in just five years and profits doubled. The former canned milk company grew from two to eight divisions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Swiss Immigrant's Invention Led to Founding of Pet Milk Co.," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Feb. 16, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> "Swiss Immigrant's Invention Led to Founding of Pet Milk Co.," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Feb. 16, 1964.  
"Further Expansion, Diversification in '57 By Pet Milk Company," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Jan. 2, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Martin L. Bell, *A Portrait of Progress. A Business History of Pet Milk Company from 1885 to 1960* (St. Louis: Pet Milk Co., 1962), 162-166.

Gamble joined Pet Milk in 1949 as an accountant after serving in the U.S. Navy and earning his degree from Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. He occupied a variety of positions of increasing responsibility and had negotiated many of the deals that expanded the company, including the 1955 acquisition of Pet-Ritz Frozen Pies.

"Swiss Immigrant's Invention Led to Founding of Pet Milk Co.," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Feb. 16, 1964.

"Pet Milk Reports Progress With Reorganization Plan," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Aug. 19, 1959.

"Pet Milk Shapes Up Progress Blueprint After Lengthy Study," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Jan. 5, 1960.

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But by 1966, milk products accounted for only 45 percent of total sales—a precipitous drop from 93 percent in 1960. Given that sharp decline, it seemed appropriate to change the name to reflect the firm's broaden scope. Although "Pet" was a familiar and therefore a valuable name in the marketplace, "milk" was deemed symbolic of an outdated product line. The board formally voted to become Pet, Inc. during the summer of 1966.<sup>4</sup> Gamble was elected chairman and chief executive officer—a position from which he continued to direct the company with a drive and intensity that earned the company widespread attention.<sup>5</sup>

The Arcade Building in downtown St. Louis had served as company headquarters since 1924 when Pet Milk moved from Highland, Illinois. As the company grew, it occupied more and more space and eventually flowed into the adjacent Paul Brown Building. In 1960, when Pet acquired an additional floor in the Arcade Building and made extensive alterations to modernize its existing space, Sidney Maestre, chairman of Downtown St. Louis, Inc., praised the company for staying downtown: "Pet Milk Co. is one of the world's leading firms in the food industry and has contributed greatly to the importance of St. Louis as a major center in this industry." A year later Chairman Gamble forcefully restated his commitment to downtown: "10 years ago, I didn't see much of a future for St. Louis, but I changed my mind. In the last 5 years this city has begun to show tremendous promise... Our downtown area is really starting with the riverfront and the stadium a certainty."<sup>6</sup> Pet, Inc. would soon make an enormous contribution to this new riverfront development.

**Elaboration**

Well before Pet acquired more office space in the Arcade Building, Gamble had commissioned a New York firm, Becker & Becker, to evaluate space requirements. Gamble initiated the study because it had been "apparent for some time that our Company needed new, centralized offices in St. Louis to operate in an environment that would

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<sup>4</sup> "Pet to Drop Milk from Name," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Aug. 16, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> "Head of Company Cultivates Initiative in His Organization," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Nov. 1968.

"Gamble, Ellis Promoted to New Posts at Pet," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Aug. 16, 1966.

<sup>6</sup> "Pet Leases More Space in Arcade," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Feb. 14, 1960. "Wall Street Eyes St. Louis Executive and Pet Milk," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Dec. 16, 1961. "Pet Milk Frozen Foods in Paul Brown Building," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Jan. 23-24, 1965.

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stimulate maximum efficiency and productivity.”<sup>7</sup> The study confirmed that Pet, Inc. indeed required a new headquarters. Sequestered in the Arcade Building for decades, the company, despite its growth and economic contributions to the city, maintained an image of a canned milk company in the eyes of St. Louisans. Pet determined to construct a building that would reflect its new corporate image, forcing a higher profile and identity in St. Louis.<sup>8</sup>

Highly successful St. Louis companies had multiple options where to build during the 1960s. Following the lead of a number of other downtown companies, Pet could have relocated to a new office tower in Clayton, St. Louis County. Or, it could have followed another trend and built a campus-style complex even farther west. Believing that the health of the metropolitan area depended on an active downtown and now confident of the city's future, Gamble convinced the rest of Pet's management to remain in the city.<sup>9</sup> He then negotiated the purchase of a site overlooking the southern end of the riverfront development area.

Only a person with a great deal of vision and courage would see the potential in such a location. When Pet purchased the property, the most immediate landscape features were the depressed freeway to the east and spaghetti-style intersections of major freeways and ramps to the recently constructed Poplar Street Bridge. Excavation for the Arch was underway on an adjacent site scattered with work sheds and the remains of blighted buildings.<sup>10</sup> Though not yet under construction, plans were in place for a new sports stadium directly to the northwest. Stouffer's Riverfront hotel was scheduled for construction just to the north.<sup>11</sup> The area was truly in shambles but Gamble understood its tremendous potential.

Gamble was determined to make a major architectural contribution to the riverfront landscape. The architect he chose to carry out this vision was a friend, Memphis-based Alfred Lewis Aydelott. Raised in Arkansas, Aydelott studied architecture at the University of Illinois. He moved to Memphis in 1938 and worked with Lucian Minor Dent until called to service in WWII. After the war he returned to Memphis, established his own

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<sup>7</sup> “New Pet Headquarters,” *Pet Milk Co. Magazine*, Spring 1965.

<sup>8</sup> Ted Gamble, Jr., telephone interview with Stacy Sone, Nov. 13, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Gamble, Nov. 13, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> George McCue. “Corporate Image on the Riverfront,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Feb. 23, 1969.

<sup>11</sup> “New Pet Headquarters,” Spring 1965 p. 10.

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practice and earned a substantial reputation across the eastern United States and in Peru. He was appointed architect-engineer for the design and construction of the U.S. Embassy in Manila, Philippine Islands. Aydelott served as Architect-in-Residence at Yale University (teaching with Louis Kahn) and the Carnegie Institute of Technology. In addition to serving the Memphis American Institute of Architects (AIA) chapter as president, he was also active on a number of national AIA committees and juries. *Progressive Architecture* bestowed design awards to Aydelott in 1949, 1950, 1951, 1954 and 1957; *Architectural Record* selected one of his projects for its "Record Houses of 1956." Aydelott advanced to Fellow in the AIA in 1964 for Distinguished Design. Until the commission from Pet, Aydelott had designed only one building in St. Louis—a house in Ladue, an upscale suburb, for Theodore Gamble with whom he was already well-acquainted.<sup>12</sup>

During the planning phases for the new Pet building, Aydelott offered considerable input and in fact encouraged the company to hire Becker & Becker to study the company's space requirements. So confident in Aydelott, Gamble and the Pet board of directors gave him free reign in the building's design.<sup>13</sup> The architect acknowledged that the building posed significant architectural challenges: "It required a design to fulfill the needs of a dynamic growing company. At the same time, because of proximity to the Gateway Arch and surrounding national park, it had to be both distinctive and yet a harmonious part of the new riverfront."<sup>14</sup> The Pet building, Aydelott determined, would represent "a dot at the end of a sentence—an important endpoint in a line of significant buildings centered on the Gateway Arch."<sup>15</sup> Aydelott's vision for a linear progression of important works of contemporary architecture did not materialize. Only the jewel-box-like American Zinc, Lead and Smelting Company Building (NR 5/4/98) several blocks north at 20 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street is a worthy counterpoint to its contemporary, Pet Plaza.

Upon completion of the architect's plans and model in June 1965, Gamble formally unveiled Pet's new corporate headquarters at a civic reception:

The building will be much more than just a modern work center for our people. Architecturally it will symbolize the future of Pet Milk Company—

<sup>12</sup> McCue, Feb. 23, 1969; correspondence from A.L. Aydelott, Oct. 10, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> McCue, Feb. 23, 1969.

<sup>14</sup> "New Pet Headquarters," 1965.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Aydelott telephone interview with Stacy Sone, 11-15-03; "Pet's Gamble Proves Profitable," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Feb. 18, 1969.

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Pet Plaza  
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a widely diversified corporation dedicated to growth and to the highest standards of product quality and service.<sup>16</sup>

Gamble also reinforced his commitment to downtown St. Louis: "We are part of what is certain to be one of the outstanding park and civic center areas in the nation, with extremely fast and convenient accesses from every direction." Mayor A. J. Cervantes praised Pet's plans as evidence of "the new vitality and spirit of progress in St. Louis."<sup>17</sup>

The model Aydelott prepared before the announcement illustrated a building quite unlike anything seen before or after in St. Louis. In preparation for a Landmarks Association of St. Louis annual meeting at the property in 1997, Michael Hogan (an architect with the Sverdrup firm then occupying the building) prepared a short history of the project including Aydelott's design philosophy:

Aydelott believed that there should be a break from popular design trends of the times which were mostly rectilinear steel and glass skyscrapers with limited expression of form. He did not adhere to the concept of 'less is more.' As Aydelott once said, 'I like to see a man take a plain, unadorned steel supporting beam and make it beautiful.' The result was a concrete structure with unique shapes and distinct lines that defined the image of a growing company.<sup>18</sup>

To a large extent form indeed followed function. Vital operations that required little natural light (such as storage rooms, food lockers and computer equipment rooms) were situated in the base of the building which covered much more ground than the office tower. General offices occupied most of the tower. Aydelott designed a structural system of pre-cast, pre-stressed concrete tees that span 49 feet and rest on poured-in-place concrete beams. This system allowed for maximum flexibility so that, as the company's needs changed, the floor plan could easily be adjusted. The executive offices and boardrooms were placed in the crown. Horizontal divisions were linked on the exterior with an elevator shaft prominently positioned off-center on the west side.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "New Pet Headquarters," 1965.

<sup>17</sup> "New Pet Headquarters," 1965.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Hogan, Registered Architect, "The History of the Pet Building," unpublished paper for Landmarks Association, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Hogan, 1997.

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The balcony-surrounded 13<sup>th</sup> floor was one of Pet Plaza's most important and innovative spaces. In a typical company office building design, conference and meeting rooms were placed on each level and often sat unused for days. Consultants Becker & Becker determined, after collaboration with company officials and Aydelott, that boardroom space could be more efficiently utilized if centralized on one floor. Part of Gamble's motivation for constructing a new office building was to bring the company together; meeting space common to the entire staff would likely accomplish that goal. The meeting rooms of various sizes were placed on the north half of the 13<sup>th</sup> floor. Many had the latest audiovisual equipment and were lined in warm rosewood paneling; all had high ceilings and offered spectacular views of the city. Pet's test kitchens, which could easily have been considered a type of laboratory appropriately placed in the base level, were instead showcased on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor behind a glass wall. The test kitchens used products across the entire company's lines. Everyone who visited Pet for a meeting, whether a director from a distant Pet facility or someone from outside the company, could see the kitchens at work.<sup>20</sup>

Before reaching the boardroom level, visitors passed through a covered courtyard to enter the building where they were greeted by a brightly colored abstract mural by Ivan Chermayeff—a friend of Aydelott's and an internationally known designer, painter and illustrator. A short flight of stairs on either side of the mural accessed an indoor plaza level where Pet displayed its products and sponsored modern art exhibits.<sup>21</sup> (The Japan International Art Festival followed the initial exhibit, a photographic history of the redevelopment of the St. Louis riverfront and the construction of Pet Plaza.) These places and also the landscaped outdoor plaza by Harriet Bakewell were fully intended by Chairman Gamble for the enjoyment of his employees and visitors. When the building opened, he remarked, "We have a building we can and will share with St. Louis." The plaza level, indoor and out, was indeed a place for anyone to enjoy.<sup>22</sup>

Fine details permeated the building inside and out. A rugged texture resulted from the wood forms into which the concrete was poured leaving a wood grain imprint in the concrete. This contrasted with the smoother-surfaced concrete that was a slightly lighter shade. Instead of patching the holes at the surface where steel reinforcing bars were trimmed from the poured-in-place concrete, Aydelott left the bars exposed and capped

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<sup>20</sup> Gamble, Nov. 13, 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Hogan, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> "Pet's Gamble Proves Profitable," 1969.



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them with stainless steel disks. Their shiny finish shimmered when the sunlight hit the building. Aydelott detailed the well-proportioned windows with horizontal pre-cast sunscreens that were clearly functional but also added distinctive lines across the facades. The architect carefully chose an assortment of materials for the interior. Travertine marble and glass line much of the lobby and plaza levels; marble and rosewood paneling surround the walls in the upper stories. Aydelott designed unique ceiling and light fixtures for the boardrooms and furniture throughout. One of the fixtures consists of honeycomb-like design with mushroom-shaped lights that is as artistic as it is functional.

Pet Plaza was ready for occupancy just after New Year's Day, 1969. Management originally planned an open house for the spring when the outdoor plaza would be bright with color. The company had received so many requests for tours, however, that dedication was held in February instead. Family members of the roughly 500 employees were the first to participate in the open house. The following day more than 1,000 business, civic and political leaders were treated to a grand tour and dedication.<sup>23</sup> The dedication ceremony included activating a gold-plated switch that lighted the dramatic exterior for the first time. At the ceremony Gamble remarked: "Pet Inc. is exceedingly proud to participate in the revitalization of downtown St. Louis by building, occupying and now dedicating its new world-wide headquarters."<sup>24</sup>

As thrilled as Gamble was to be located downtown, he was even more proud of his new headquarters building. "We believe the new office building will afford a strong identification for the people of Pet everywhere. It will serve as a landmark for St. Louisans and for the millions of tourists who will pass by and will come to recognize it as the headquarters for a world-wide company dedicated to serving their needs."<sup>25</sup>

The distinctive new Pet building immediately earned the media coverage Gamble hoped for. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* art and urban design critic George McCue enthusiastically introduced the new building:

The new image on the St. Louis skyline is a building that is restrained in size, big in ideas and in form arrestingly expressive of its functions. It uses the forthright ruggedness of concrete with confident dignity and

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<sup>23</sup> "Pet's Gamble Proves Profitable," 1969.

<sup>24</sup> Robert E. Hannon. "Corporate Home with a View," *St. Louis Commerce*, March, 1969.

<sup>25</sup> "New Pet Headquarters," 1965.

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elegance, and it is as painstakingly detailed as a handcrafted object.  
Welcome, Pet Inc. corporate headquarters!<sup>26</sup>

McCue added, "Even the casual passerby becomes aware of the refined detailing. This is evident in the carefully studied proportions of windows with bays, the horizontal lines of balconies and crown with the vertical service core, the pulling back from a tendency toward a 'brutalism' of projecting members in the concrete esthetic by maintaining a serene equilibrium of north and south portions." It "rises with an authoritative individuality" ... distinctive in "the riverfront array of other new buildings of varied form and texture. ..." <sup>27</sup>

Journalist George McCue was nationally recognized as a keen observer and fine writer on architecture and urban design. He and Ada Louise Huxtable were, in fact, among the pioneer newspaper architecture and design critics in the United States. In 1967, *Time* magazine identified him as one of four U.S. writers deserving recognition as a "civic conscience." In addition to his honorary membership in the American Institute of Architects, McCue received the National Award for Journalism in Architecture and The Architectural Critic's Medal in 1968 by the American Institute of Architects. McCue selected Pet Plaza for inclusion in his early guides (1967 and 1981) to important St. Louis architecture. In 1989, Frank Peters joined McCue to coauthor the new version published by the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for the national conference. (Peters, by then retired from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for Distinguished Criticism.)

Beautifully and extensively documented in *Architectural Record* in a 1969 article called "A Powerful Silhouette for a High-Speed Environment" by Walter F. Wagner, Jr. (AIA), the building was declared a "singularly forceful and successful architectural solution to a demanding program." The article praised the architect for articulating the elements into a bold, expressive statement to "create the desired corporate image in this high-speed, 'landmark' environment." "All this has been carried out with meticulous detailing and beautiful craftsmanship, and welded into a very satisfying unity."<sup>28</sup> The *Record* also listed a complete credit line including: structural engineers Severud-Perrone-Sturm-Conlin-

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<sup>26</sup> McCue, 1969.

<sup>27</sup> McCue, 1969.

<sup>28</sup> "A Powerful Silhouette for A High-Speed Environment," *Architectural Record*, September, 1969.

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Bandel; mechanical engineers Samuel L. Burns & Associates; contractor G. L. Tarlton and noted local landscape architect Harriet Rodes Bakewell FASLA.<sup>29</sup>

Although the commission for Pet Plaza came late in his career, Aydelott had not previously designed a headquarters office building. He believes that none of his earlier work was as sculptural as this one. Interestingly, the architect is hesitant today to assign a style category to the building but he favors the term Constructivism over New Brutalism. Constructivism, he says, is a way of using concrete in a plastic sense that makes it more interesting than a rectangular solid.<sup>30</sup> Even when Pet Inc. first presented the model and announced its plans to build, Aydelott emphasized the sculptural qualities:

I think of it as a sculpture, framing one side of a new and exciting skyline. It has space around it. This is extremely desirable, because it permits a design which we believe gives the structure a human feeling, a feeling of warmth, with pleasant views from every vantage point. The design creates a sense of spatial excitement.<sup>31</sup>

Aydelott considers Le Corbusier's late work as somewhat of an influence. Corbusier used concrete in his earlier buildings but later, instead of using the material to draw thin planes around geometric volumes; he created bold sculptural effects with rugged textures of great scale and weight. The style is often called New Brutalism after its aggressive, roughly finished form. Raw concrete, the characteristic material, was typically made rugged when cast in a wooden framework that left its imprint on the surface.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Osmund Overby, nationally recognized author and scholar, recently offered the following context and observations about New Brutalism and St. Louis' Pet Plaza:

As the Modern Movement in architecture evolved in the years following the Second World War, in the effort to move beyond the limitations of the inherited International Style, the New Brutalism of the 1950s and 1960s must

<sup>29</sup> In addition to work at Pet Plaza, Mrs. Bakewell (daughter of the Director of the Missouri Botanical Garden) had a long and accomplished career including influential residential design and major commissions at Lambert St. Louis International Airport, McDonnell Douglass Engineering Campus.

<sup>30</sup> Alfred Aydelott telephone interview with Stacy Sone, 11-15-03.

<sup>31</sup> "New Pet Headquarters," 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Marvin Trachtenberg and Isabelle Hyman, *Architecture from Prehistory to Post-Modernism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986), 541.

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be seen as one of the most interesting and compelling forces leading to change. It was a strong movement throughout Europe and the United States, but it was in England, in particular, that the theories supporting it were most clearly articulated and its most influential exponents practiced. The architects Peter and Alison Smithson were important in both respects. They wrote about the attempt to be objective about 'reality' as an ethical goal and how the movement tried to 'face up to a mass production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work.' From Le Corbusier they found a grammar for poured concrete, from Mies a grammar for exposed steel structure, and from Japanese traditional architecture they learned a reverence for materials.

The New Brutalism was a strong presence in American architecture by the early 1960s and it remained an important influence in the Late Modernism of the succeeding decades. There are a few other examples in Missouri, most notably the building for the Kansas City Division of Employment Security of 1967 designed by Shaughnessy, Bower & Grimaldi. But none come close to matching the authority and nuance of the Pet Building in St. Louis. Those lofty goals that inspired the founders of New Brutalism here find material expression of that 'rough poetry' they envisioned.<sup>33</sup>

Seldom designed as background buildings in a harmonious streetscape, Brutalist-style works were often unpopular with the general public. Even the name, derived from the French *beton brut* (rough concrete), conjures harsh images. (Only very recently has concrete become a status building material for elite commissions, especially museums.) The *Washington University Law Quarterly* (Vol. 76, Number 1, Spring 1998) celebrated the opening of its "magnificent" new building in St. Louis (Anheuser-Busch Hall, a pastiche Collegiate Gothic retro) with a derisive mention of its former (razed) home: "Mudd Hall reportedly an ... example of the hopefully now extinct architectural style of "Neo-Brutalism." Never a popular local style, the demise of Mudd Hall left Pet Plaza with no worthy peer in Missouri.

The late Mudd Hall had been the result of an international design competition. A better-known Brutalist survivor from a competition attracting 256 entries is Boston's City Hall.

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<sup>33</sup> Osmund Overby, correspondence to Carolyn Toft and Stacy Sone, March 11, 2004.

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Designed by a firm that had never received a commission for a major building, Boston City Hall (executed 1963-68) has been called the closest emulation of Le Corbusier's late style in the United States.<sup>34</sup> Other well-known examples in the United States include Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale (built 1958-1964) and the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago (opened 1970) by Walter Netsch of SOM along with Moshe Safdie's Habit 67 in Montreal. Less distinguished is the series of hotels by John Portman.

Brutalism, or Constructivism as Aydelott prefers, was a short-lived byway in the Modern Movement—a path not often taken by a corporate client, especially one headquartered in the Midwest with an everyday homespun image. But with Pet Plaza, client and architect forged a trusted design partnership reflecting uncommon levels of sophistication in all aspects of the endeavor. Theodore R. Gamble, Jr. was very close to the planning and construction process from 1965 to 1969. In a communication from December 10, 2003, he recalled Pet Plaza as “a labor of love for all concerned” and gave considerable credit to the detailed project management advice his father received from friends Bill Paley and Frank Stanton of CBS. (CBS had just completed an Eero Saarinen-designed headquarters in New York.)

Aydelott's client and friend, Theodore Gamble, died suddenly in March 1969, exactly one month after the dedication of this masterpiece to which both men had devoted so much time and attention. A few years later the architect himself received a diagnosis of lung cancer. With a prognosis of less than a year to live, Aydelott closed his Memphis office in 1973, moved to Carmel, California and never designed another building. He did, however, win the battle with cancer. In the thirty years since retiring from architecture, Aydelott has had the financial security to travel extensively and indulge his gift of photography, drawing and painting. “He is a man of two careers: one as architect, one as artist.”<sup>35</sup>

Although architect Aydelott had been published in several books and numerous magazines, all citations other than the afore-mentioned *Architectural Record* (1969 September) and a “Buildings of the Sixties” exhibit mounted at the Museum of Modern Art predate the corporate headquarters' project in St. Louis. No attempts to submit Pet Plaza for a national

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<sup>34</sup> *American Architecture Volume 2: 1860-1976*, Marcus Whiffen and Frederick Koeper. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), p. 391.

<sup>35</sup> Exhibition Catalogue “Around the World in Eighty-Eight Years.” (Memphis: Christian Brothers University, 2003).

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award were made, given first the size of his office and soon the state of his health.<sup>36</sup> Now an 88-year-old cancer survivor, Aydelott was honored with a retrospective of his drawings, photographs and paintings in Memphis sponsored by Christian Brothers University—a campus designed by Aydelott in 1954. (Aydelott attended the opening and spoke to students and to the assembled members of Memphis AIA.) Participating schools where the exhibit traveled after January 2, 2004 included the University of Arkansas, Auburn, the University of Tennessee, the University of Texas at Arlington and Tulane. In May of 2004, the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects bestowed the inaugural President's Citation for Design on Pet Plaza. In a citation letter of June 14, 2004, Chapter President Lou Saur FAIA stated: "AIA St. Louis honors buildings in our community whose unique and lasting design and character contribute to the rich architectural landscape of St. Louis" and called Pet Plaza "an important element of the diverse skyline...."<sup>37</sup>

Pet continued at this location until 1995 when it moved to St. Louis County. The next owner was Sverdrup (a design and engineering firm responsible for constructing nearby Busch Stadium) absorbed by Jacobs a few years later. The building has been vacant since late 2002; ownership reverted to the mortgage holder which plans to sell the property for residential adaptive reuse.

St. Louisans still identify the building with the company that contributed so significantly to this city and still comment, sometimes despairingly, upon Pet Plaza as an unusual feature in the downtown landscape. Connoisseurs, however, recognize it as a singularly bold statement from a brief period in recent architectural history. As Dr. Overby summarized in his correspondence of March 11, 2004: A. L. Aydelott was "clearly a major American architect of his time, and this building, which received detailed coverage in the press and professional journals, one of his important projects. It is a very important piece in the story of the architecture of Missouri."

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<sup>36</sup> His brief biography compiled by Aydelott and attached to the letter of October 10, 2003 to Stacy Sone mentioned *The South Builds* (University of North Carolina Press), *Architectural Record*, *Progressive Architecture*, *Architectural Forum*, *Town and Country*, *Time*, *Domus* (Italian), *Architectural Review* (British). A similar two-page resume was carried as a foldout for the catalogue of drawings, photographs and paintings assembled in 2003 at Christian Brother University in Memphis. A search in the Avery Index established the dates.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Lou Saur, FAIA to Don Land, June 14, 2004.

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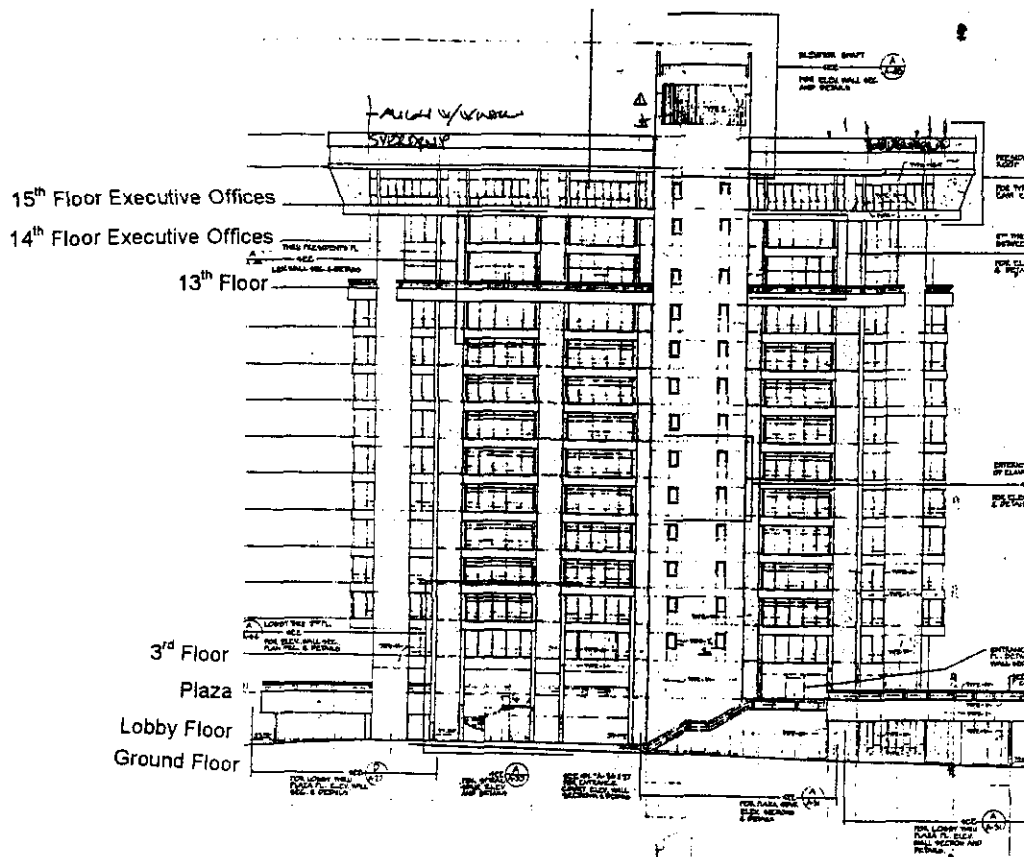


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West Elevation

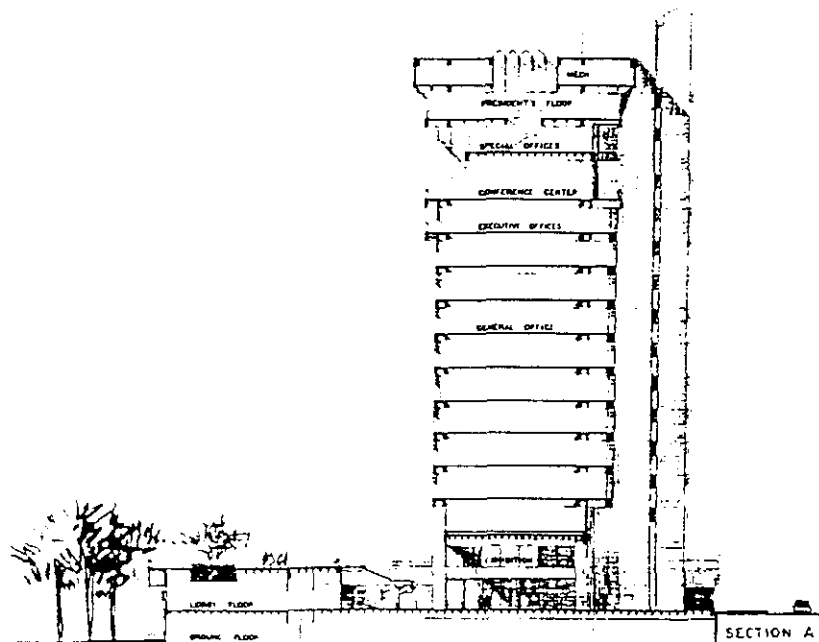


Figure 2  
North Elevation

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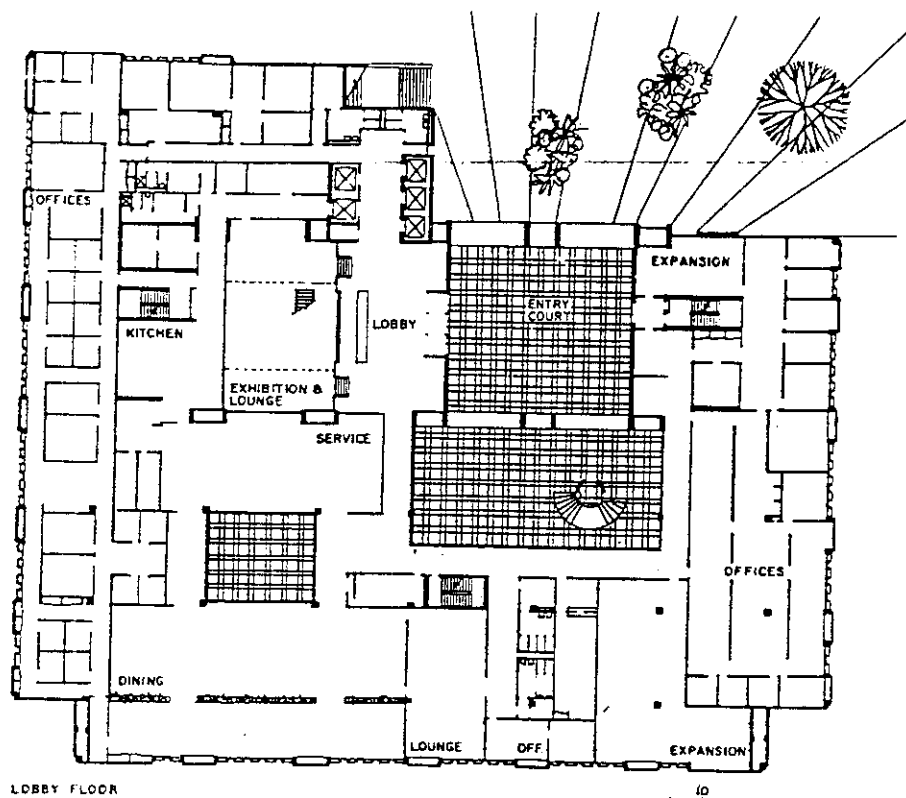


Figure 3  
Lobby Floor

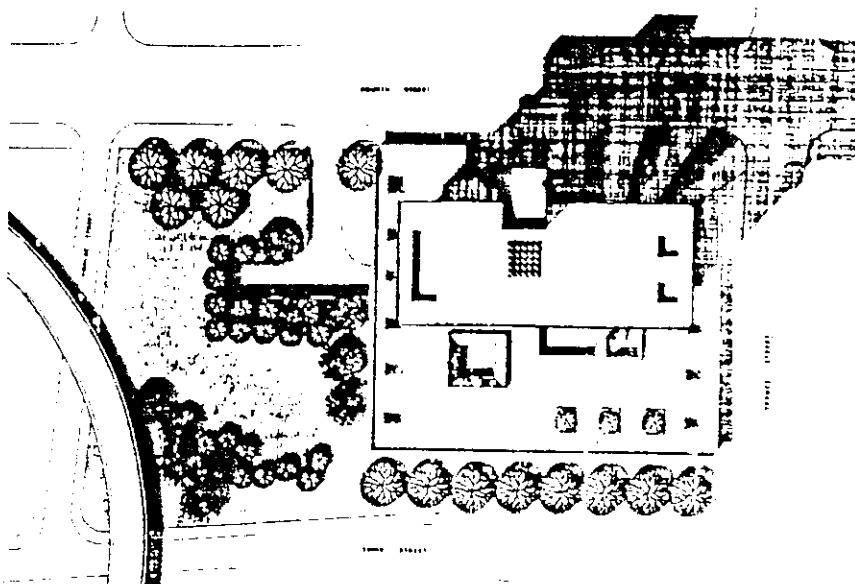


Figure 4  
Site Plan



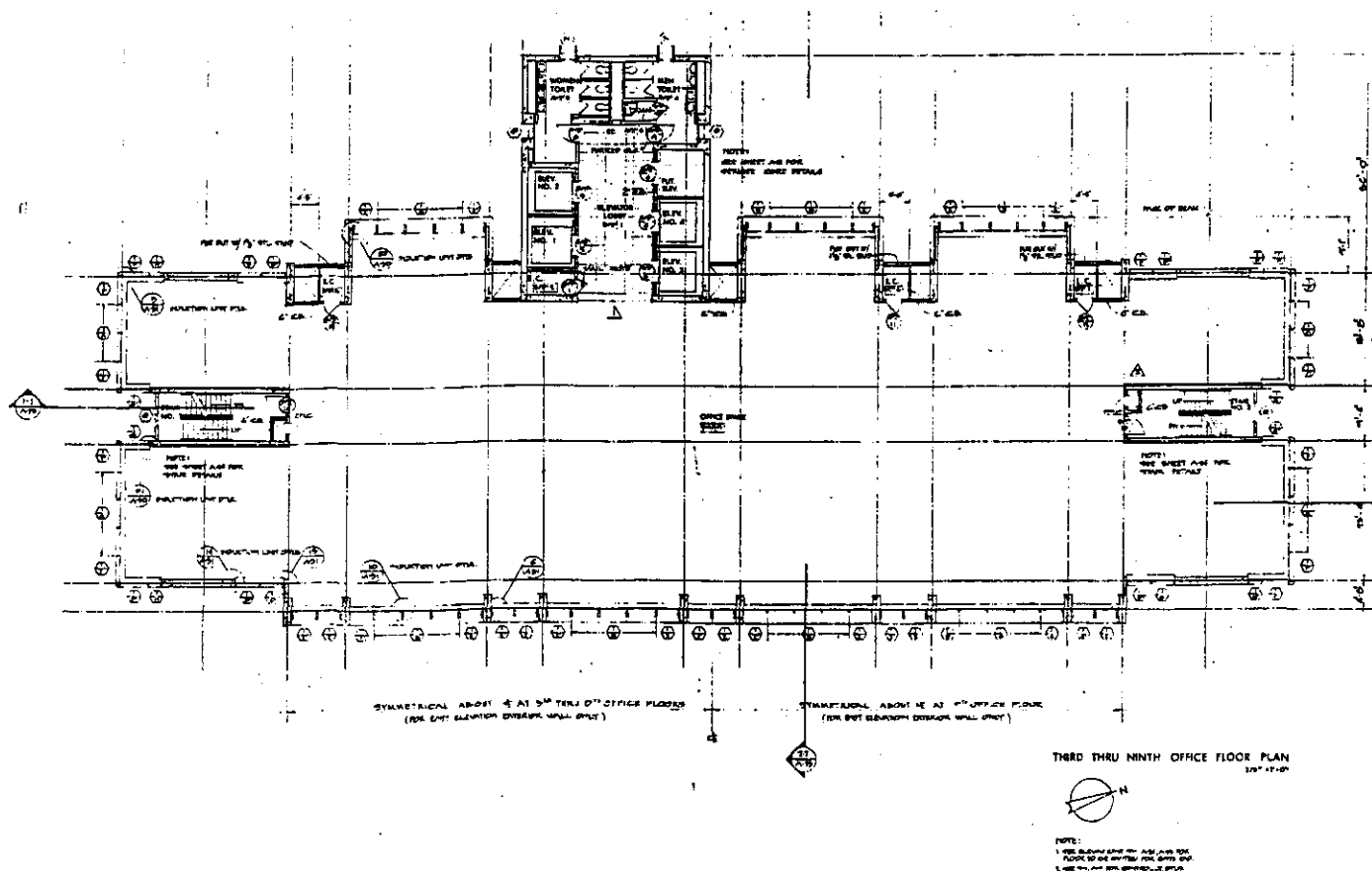
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**Figure 5**



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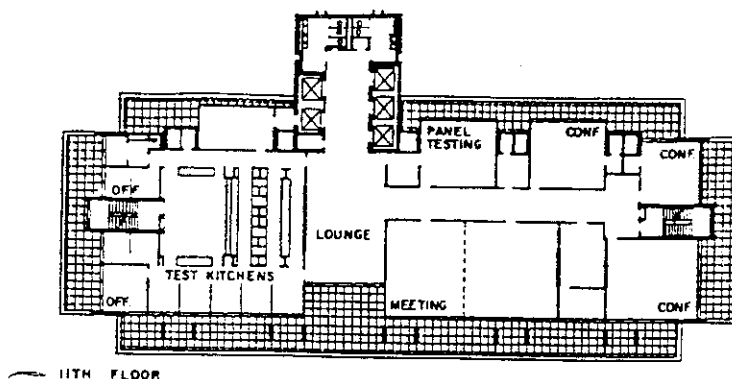


Figure 6

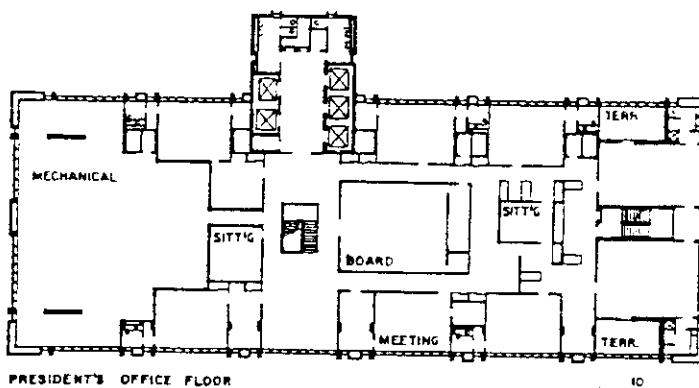


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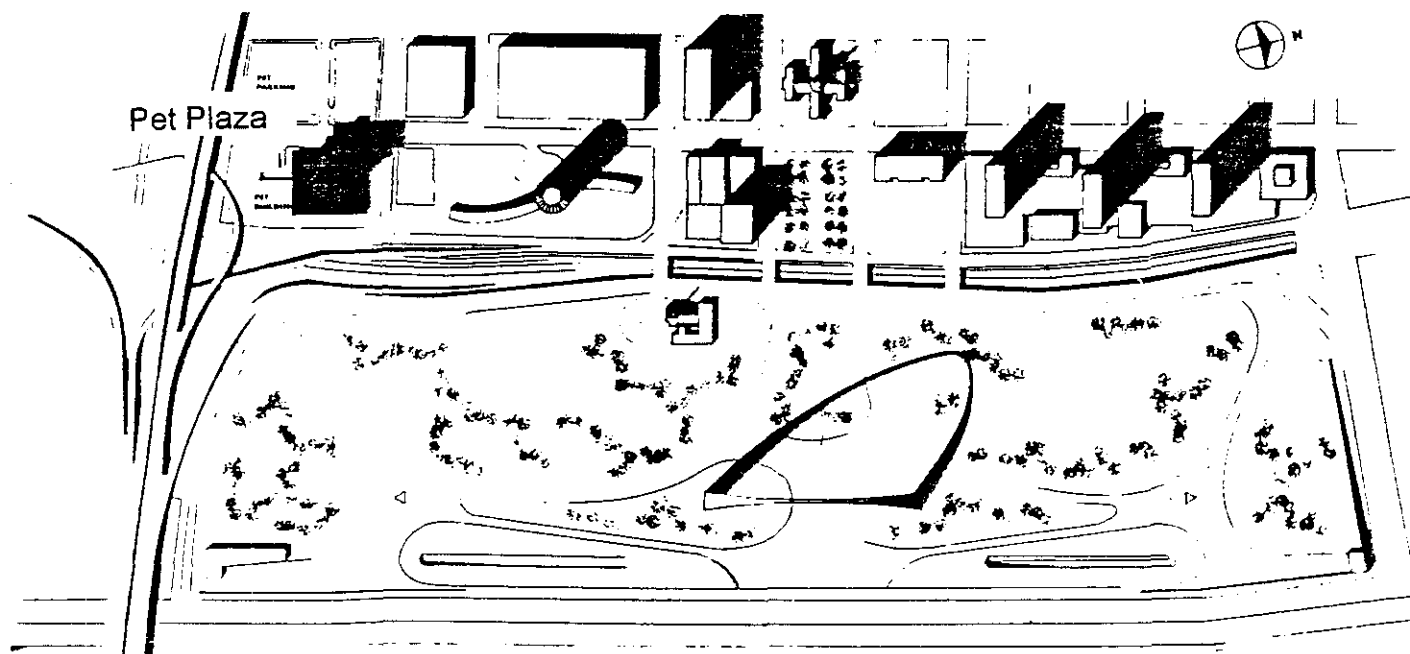
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Figure 8



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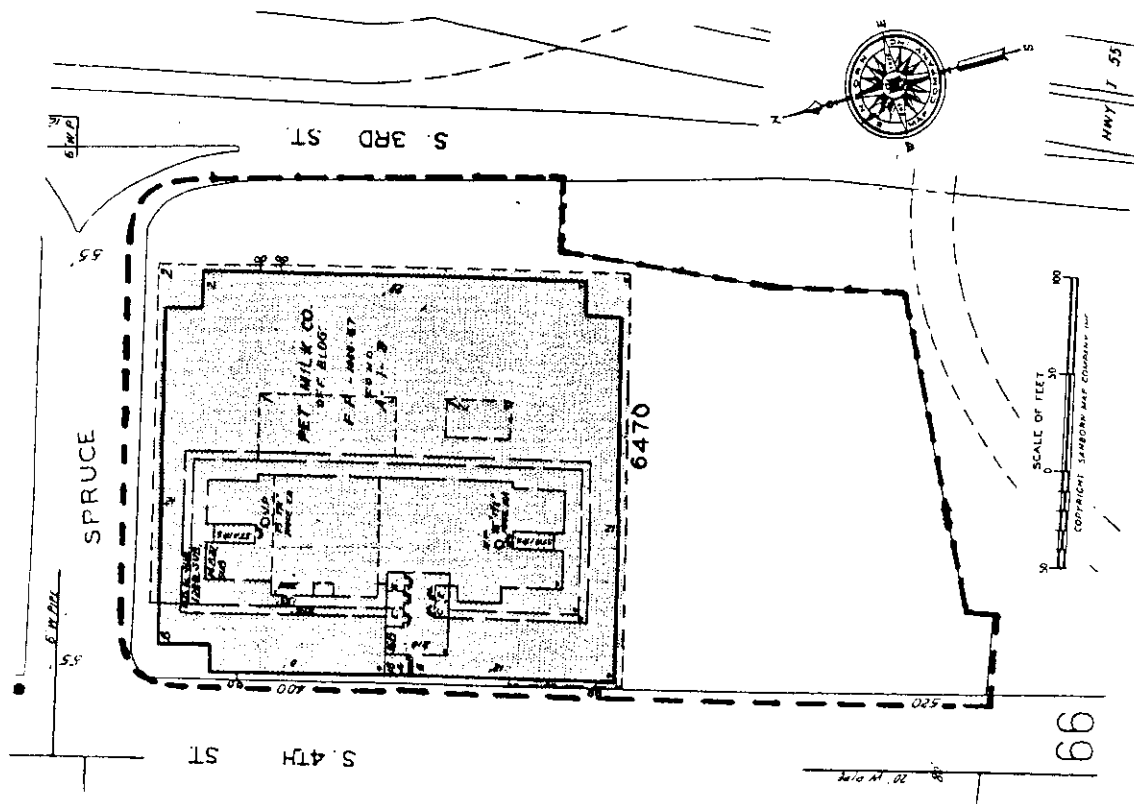
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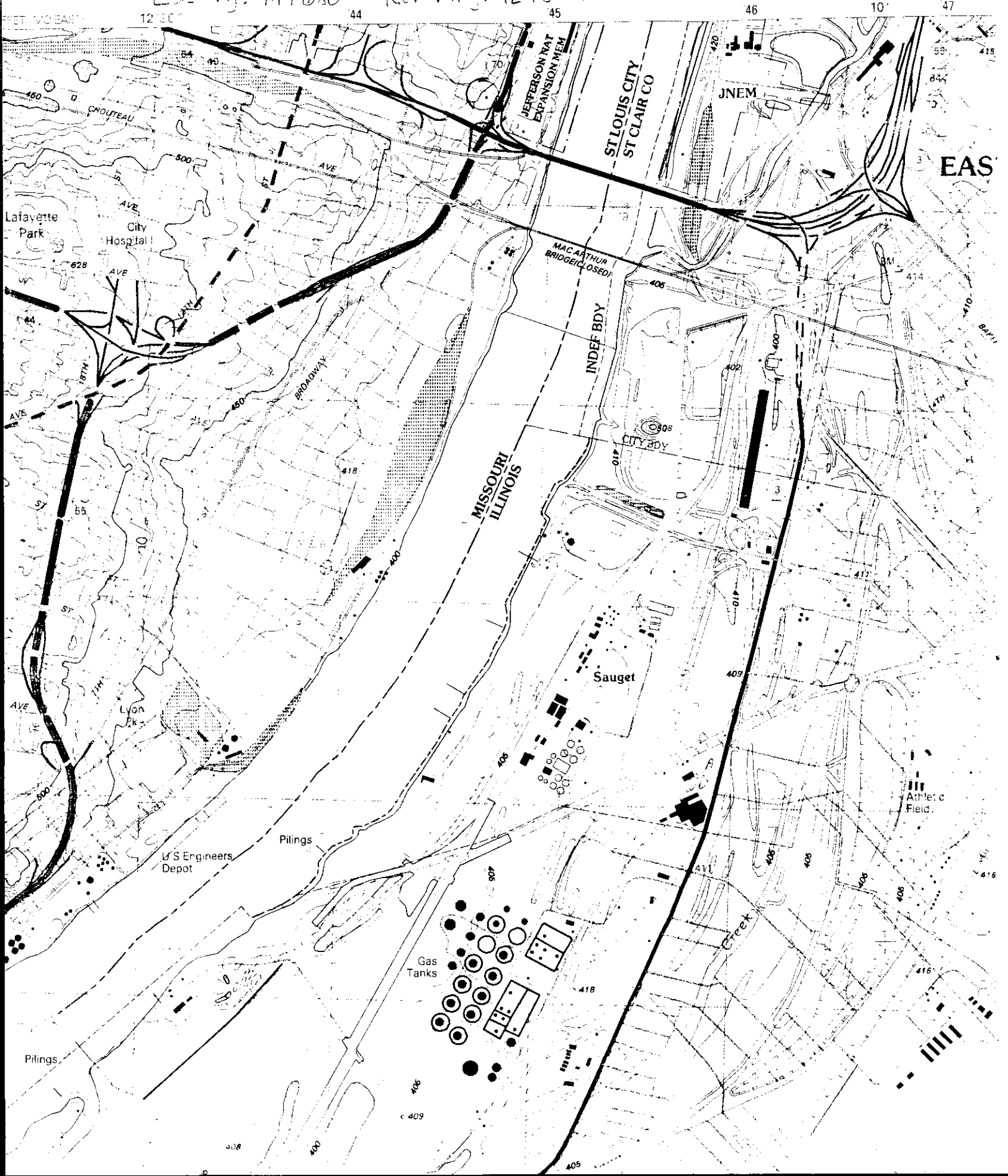
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Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building  
St. Louis (ind. city), MO

Stacy Sone

10/03

Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis

view to SE

# 1 of 9



Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building  
St. Louis (Ind. City), MO  
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Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis  
View to NE  
#2 of 9



Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building  
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Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis

view to SE

# 3 of 9



Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building  
St. Louis (ind. city), MO

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Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis  
view to SW  
#4 of 9

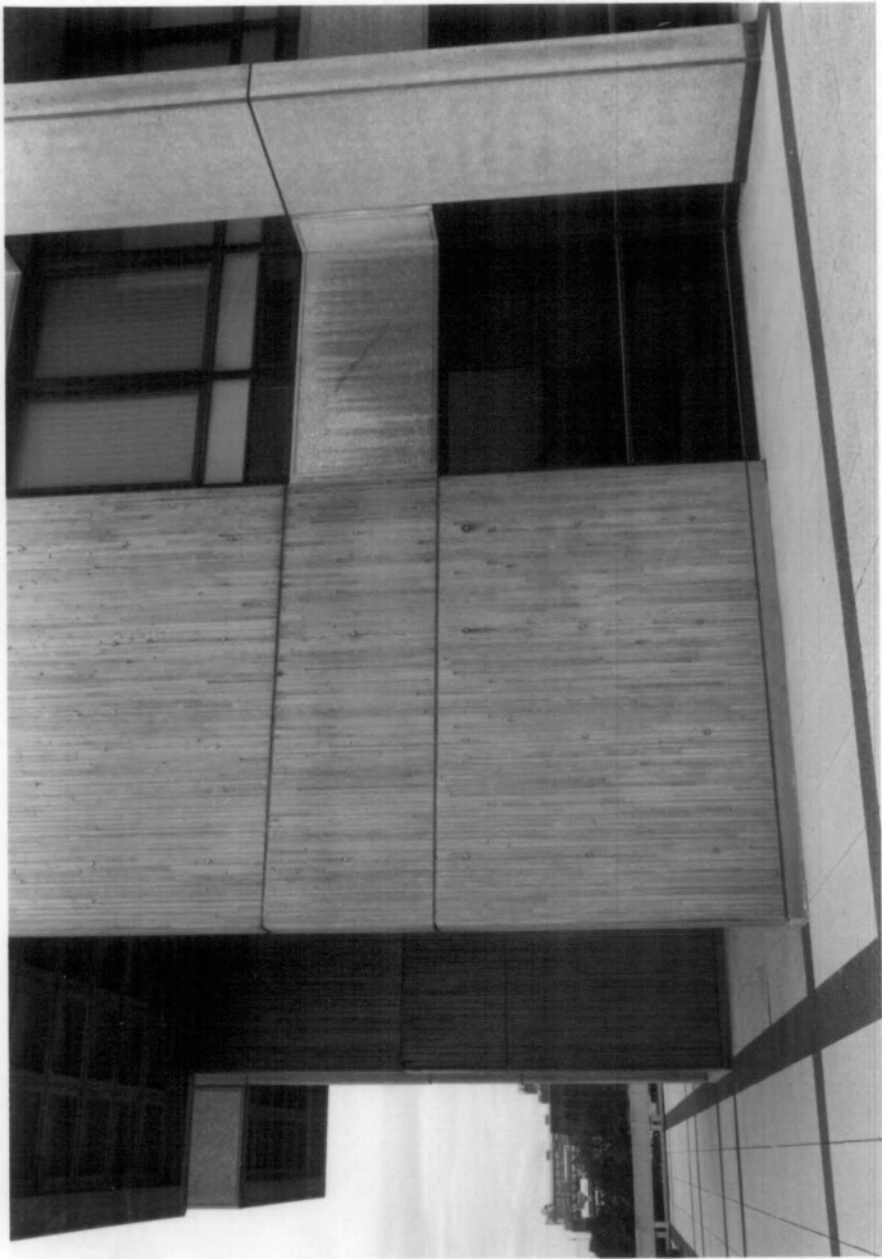




Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building  
St. Louis (ind City), MO  
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Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis  
view to NW  
# 5 of 9



Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building

St. Louis (ind. city), MO

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Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis

view to NE

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Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building  
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view to N  
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Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building

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Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis

view to SE

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Pet, Inc. Headquarters Building  
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Landmarks Assoc. of St. Louis  
view to NE  
#9 of 9



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 04000749

Date Listed: 10/18/04

Pet Plaza  
Property Name

St. Louis (City) MO  
County State

Multiple Name

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

*Beth Boland*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

*11/22/04*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**Amended Items in Nomination:**

Sections 3 and 8 of the nomination form are inconsistent in designating the level of significance. The correct level of significance is state.

This was verified by Roger Masserang on the staff of the Missouri SHPO.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**DISTRIBUTION:**

National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)