

L.H. Mayer Building  
414 Locust Street  
Johnstown  
Cambria County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5385

HABS  
PA,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

L. H. MAYER BUILDING

HABS No. PA-5385

Location: 414 Locust St., Johnstown, Cambria County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: W. Glenn Reitz.

Present Use: Apartment building; currently thirteen apartments are occupied.

Significance: The building was constructed in 1913-14 for physician L. H. Mayer. When it was built, the Mayer Building was by far the largest and most elegant apartment building in Johnstown. It was quite luxurious, with interiors featuring high ceilings, built-in fireplaces, and heavy, dark woodwork.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1913-14. There is a notation in a February 1914 letter from the postmaster of the Johnstown post office to the supervising architect of the U. S. Treasury concerning "the new Mayer Building." Also, the building does not appear on the 1913 Sanborn maps, but it is listed in the 1915 city directory. The drawings are dated May 1913.
2. Architect and consulting engineer: John B. Thomas of Lakewood, New Jersey, was the architect; Charles Higgins of Jersey City, New Jersey, and New York, New York, was the consulting engineer. It is not known how Mayer knew Thomas and Higgins, or why he employed them instead of local professionals.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The original deed for the land was No. 22-96, dated July 25, 1864, whereby Hannah Hoeck left the land to Frederick Mayer. Frederick's son, physician L. H. Mayer, built the apartment building as an income property. The land was in the Mayer family until 1966, when they sold it to Uneeda Plumbing (deed No. 899-372). Uneeda Plumbing sold it to Ray-Mar Realty in 1974 (977-696), and Ray-Mar Realty sold it to W. Glenn Reitz in 1977 (1020-152).
4. Original and subsequent occupants: The building has always been an apartment building. City directories and tax-assessment records from the 1920s reveal that, for the most part, occupants of the building were well-heeled families headed by doctors, attorneys, and aldermen. By the 1930s the Mayer Building attracted less-affluent residents, but the tenants were still solidly middle class:

teachers, nurses, department store buyers, physicians' and lawyers' widows.

The ground-floor storefront has served a variety of commercial purposes, most recently for Uneeda Plumbing. It is presently vacant.

In the original drawings, dated May 1913, the second floor was noted as "physician's office." Perhaps at one time Mayer intended to practice out of the building; it is not known if he did so, except that both the 1912 and 1918 city directories list his office as 413 Main St.

5. Original plans and construction: Blueprints dated May 1913 are in the possession of W. Glenn Reitz, the current owner. Copies of elevation and section drawings are included with this report. Some of the blueprints note that the drawings are order No. 7941 by the Cambria Steel Company. This is a mystery, as Mayer was a private physician and, as far as is known, had no connection with the steel company. Perhaps the draftsmen at Cambria Steel did drawings on contract for the public.
6. Alterations and additions: A two-story building with aluminum siding was connected to the eastern side of the original building at some point, adding two more apartments and a laundry room on the second floor.

B. Historical Context:

When it was built, the Mayer Building was the largest, most elegant apartment building in Johnstown. More important, it symbolized the changing pattern of downtown residential stock. Until the 1889 flood, most of the wealthy and prominent members of the community lived downtown in large houses, the majority of which surrounded Central Park and lined Main Street west of Market Street. Neither prominent nor wealthy, the workers in the mills and mines tended to live in towns outside the downtown district, or in residential hotels (eleven hotels were listed in the 1884 city directory) interspersed throughout downtown and on the edges of the city. After the flood, people who could afford to do so flocked to the hills--Westmont, in particular--as the high ground was much safer than the downtown basin.

The entire upper-middle class of Johnstown did not migrate upwards, however. The Mayer Building is evidence of that. The building was quite luxurious, with interiors that featured high ceilings, built-in fireplaces, and rich woodwork. City directories and tax records from the 1920s reveal that, for the most part, occupants of the building were well-heeled families headed by doctors, attorneys, aldermen, and mill superintendents. By the 1930s, when the suburban areas had matured and housed many more people, the Mayer Building attracted less-affluent

residents, but the tenants were still solidly middle class: teachers, nurses, department store buyers, physicians' and lawyers' widows. Downtown housing stock certainly did change from large houses to apartment buildings when suburban development took place, but it did not disappear altogether: there was always a small residential stronghold in the central city. The seventy-five-year existence of the Mayer Building attests to that.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Mayer Building is similar in appearance to the majority of commercial buildings being erected in large- and medium-sized American cities during the period. In its use of red brick with stone detailing, it is similar to the Penn Traffic building, for instance.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent. Except for the ground-floor storefront, the building's exterior is unchanged from the day it was built. The interior shows signs of wear, and the plan has been changed considerably.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The notable aspect of the seven-story red brick building is its extreme narrowness: the dimensions are 22' x 102'. An exercise in symmetry, the front facade is composed of seven sets of paired windows stacked up the building. The side facades are equally symmetrical. There is a full basement. The floor-to-ceiling height is 13'-8" on the first floor, 8'-6" on the upper floors.
2. Foundations: Reinforced concrete.
3. Walls: The walls are brick; the storefront features Doric pilasters and entablature of gray stone. The ground-floor show windows have been altered: originally there were single sheets of plate glass on the sides and front, now they have aluminum frames and aluminum siding at the base. There is a white stone cornice capping the seventh floor; this floor also features stone quoins. A stringcourse separates the sixth and seventh floors.
4. Structural system: Reinforced concrete.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance was originally in the far northwestern corner of the western facade. It matched the windows on that facade, which are discussed below. That

doorway has been bricked over, and replaced with another on the southeast side of the building. There is a door -- also greatly altered -- on the ground-floor storefront.

- b. Windows and shutters: All the windows on the second through seventh stories are double-hung, one-over-one-light sash. On the second through sixth floors, the windows on the west side of the building have ornamental white stone splayed lintels with keystones; on the east side they have white stone sills, but no lintels. The seventh-story architrave windows are trimmed in white stone.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The flat, steel-framed roof is covered with a composition fireproofing material.
- b. Cornice: White stone.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: A heavy wooden stairway runs along the back half of the eastern wall of the interior. Originally there was one apartment on each floor -- all seven apartments were identical. Each apartment was L-shaped: the northern half of the floor met the western length of the floor to form the ell. Each apartment was divided into two sections: large living quarters on the north side of the building, and smaller servant quarters in the rear. Today the apartments have been divided into smaller units; some floors now contain as many as three units.
- 2. Stairways: A heavy wooden stairway runs along the eastern wall of the interior. The runners leading from the first to the second floors are marble.
- 3. Flooring: Pine throughout.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
- 5. Decorative features and trim: Dark, heavy woodwork and built-in fireplaces.
- 6. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Steam.
  - b. Elevator: The elevator shown in the blueprints has since been replaced by a newer model.

D. Site: On the south side of Locust Street, between the old post office and

the GAR Building, the Mayer Building is in the thick of the downtown commercial district.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original architectural drawings: Three sheets of original drawings are in the possession of the owner; copies are included in this report.

B. Bibliography:

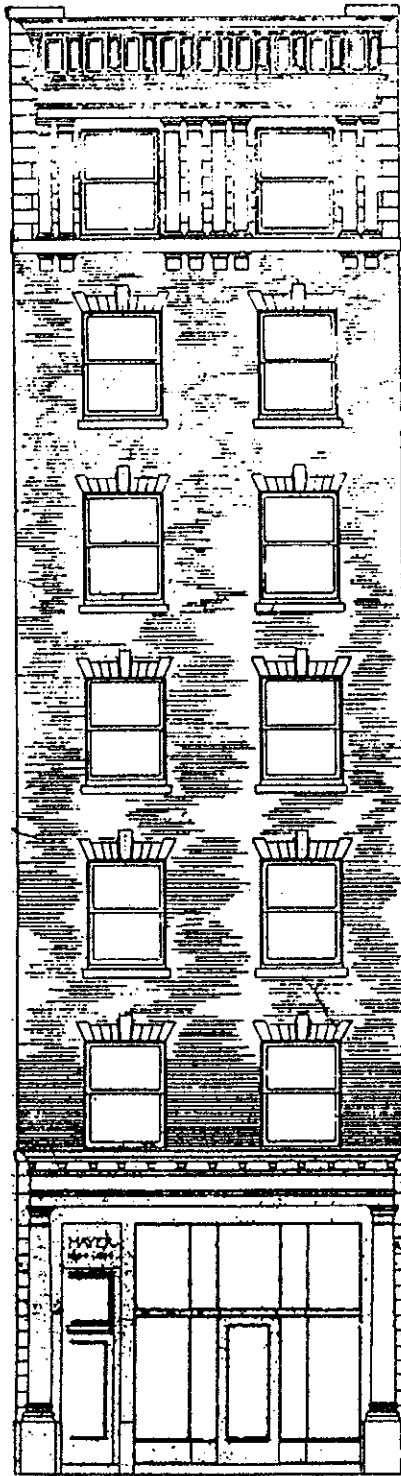
Letter from Frank J. Studeny to Hon. Joseph Gray, May 28, 1935. General Correspondence and Related Records, 1910-1939: Letters of the Supervising Architect, Record Group 121, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Deed and Tax Assessment Records, Cambria County Courthouse, Ebensburg, Pa.

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP). An overview of history of the city (HABS No. PA-5669) provides context for the neighborhoods. See additional HABS reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Terri Hartman in August 1988 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the supervisory historian of the project. Hartman's and other project historians' work was published as The Character of a Steel Mill City: Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1989), edited by Kim E. Wallace. Illustrations in the publication include large format photographs taken by HAER photographer Jet Lowe and 35 mm photographs taken by the project historians.

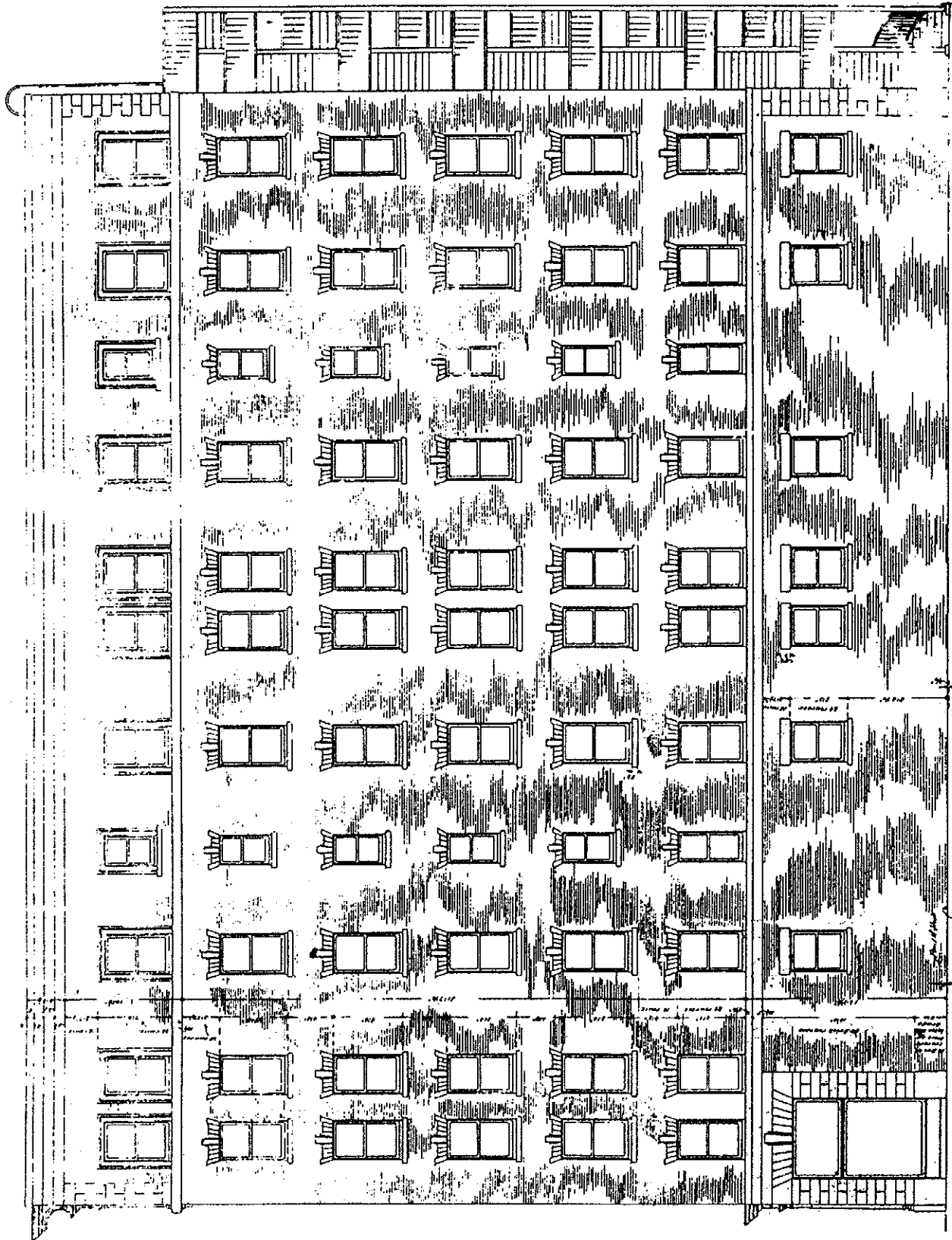


FRONT ELEVATION  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"

MAYER BUILDING  
419, LEXINGTON STREET  
JOHNSTOWN, PA.

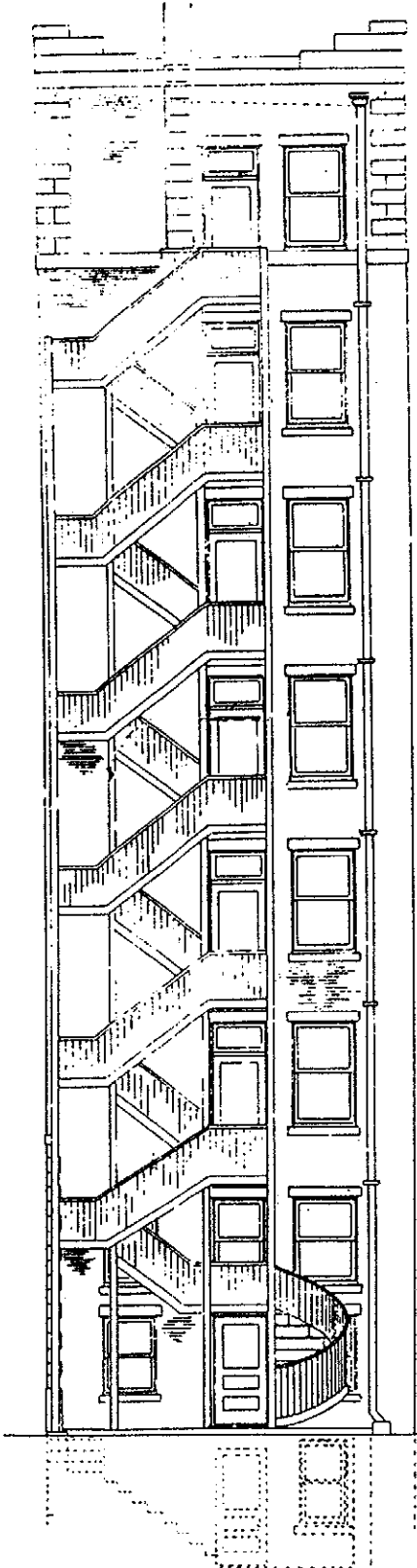
JOHN B. THOMAS  
ARCHITECT  
LANSDOWNE, NEW JERSEY.

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NORTH WEST (GOVERNMENT BUILDING) ELEVATION  
Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"

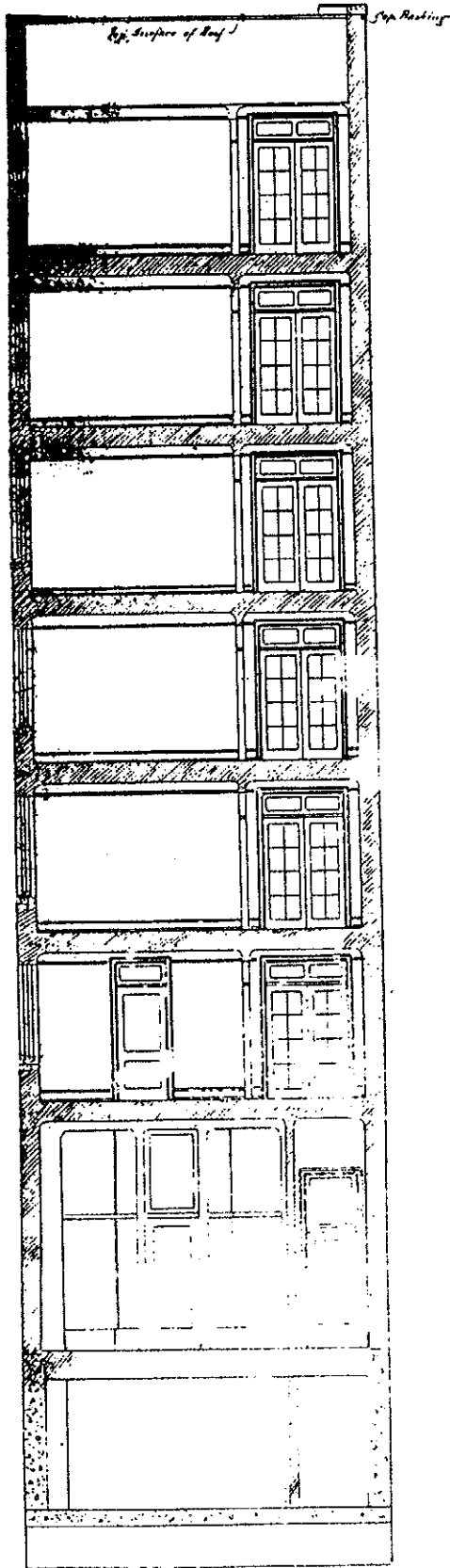




REAR ELEVATION  
Scale: 1/4" = 1'-0"

MAYER BUILDING  
415, East St. Street  
JOHNSTOWN, PA.

John B. Thomas  
ARCHITECT  
LANE 1000, NEW JERSEY.



CROSS SECTION ON A-B  
Scale 1/4" = 1'-0"

JOHN B. THOMAS  
ARCHITECT  
LAKEWOOD, N.J.

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