

Spokane Register of Historic Places

Nomination Form

City/County Historic Landmarks Commission
Fourth Floor - City Hall
Spokane, Washington 99201-3333

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Montgomery Wards Building

and/or common Spokane City Hall

2. Location

street & number West 808 Spokane Falls Boulevard

city, town Spokane _____ vicinity of _____

state Washington _____ county _____

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Spokane

street & number North 221 Wall

city, town Spokane _____ vicinity of _____ state Washington 99201

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Spokane County Assessor's Office

street & number 1116 West Broadway

city, town Spokane _____ vicinity of _____ state Washington 99201

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

City of Spokane Landmarks Survey

date 1978 _____ federal _____ state _____ county local

depository for survey records Historic Preservation Office, West 808 Spokane Falls Boulevard

city, town Spokane _____ vicinity of _____ state Washington 99260

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Montgomery Ward building occupies a spectacular site in Spokane's Central Business District overlooking the Lower Spokane Falls and River to the west and northwest, and the spacious Riverfront Park to the east, formerly the "Spokane, Expo '74" site. This portion of the city is used intensely for recreation by the people of Spokane, quite a contrast from the industrial neighborhood that existed there when the store was constructed in 1929. At that time the entire area was industrial in response to the river and elevated railroad trackage which crossed the entire city from east to west. This location was ideal for Montgomery Ward's first department store in Spokane which could receive goods and shipments from the railroad passing directly to the north and still presented a modern retail face to the Central Business District to the south.

The irregularity of the Art Deco building, which deviates from a rectangle by a slight angling of the north wall, is attributed to the fact that it was erected on the property line and follows the configuration of that boundary on all four sides. The Union Pacific trackage that passed just to the north accommodated the new store by constructing a spur directly adjacent to the building's north side at the third floor elevator. The wall at that point had large sliding doors and a cantilevered platform which facilitated freight unloading to the upper storage floors. Against this north wall were two large freight elevators as well as two passenger elevators and a stairway.

The exterior of the north wall reflects the orientation and use of that side of the building with a plain horizontal window banding on a stark industrial face. This is in sharp contrast with the other three elevations which have vertical windows banding accented by the floral motifs characteristic of the Art Deco style employed on the building. The south and east elevations used a precast construction on the first two floors which became the most articulated portion of the building in response to the public exposure of those two sides. The first floor sported large rectangular display windows with copper clad sashes on the exterior. At the southeast and southwest corners, the building cut back at 45°, creating display windows at that point. The show windows on the second floor developed an irregular curving "Deco" line at the top of each opening between which heavy fluted pilasters, capped at the third floor line by inset precast floral panels. Above these panels the pilasters were cast-in-place concrete and took on a less articulate character, but again, they were capped at the parapet line with the floral inset panels. The windows on these upper floors became smaller and were divided by concrete spandrel panels, the center portion of each panel being slightly recessed.

The playfulness of the Art Deco style is again lavishly employed above the line of the parapet in the profile of the wall which assumes a classic pediment shape over the major building entries. These pediments, flanked by heavier pilasters, are accentuated by raised banding which outlines the roof line as well as the fenestration on the corner cuts and the display windows on the lower two floors.

The precast elements on the exterior of the building were of a different color than the cast-in-place work because of the apparent use of rose, ochre, and green aggregated in the concrete mix. This color variation across the facade defined the Deco ornamentat.

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and created a darker base for the building to visually sit on. These colored, ornamented floors were the public retail spaces, the upper areas being used only for storage.

The west side of the building was an intermingling of the starkness of the north and the articulation of the south and the east faces. The west was not so much "in the public eye" and accomodated the building's window banding but the ornamentation became limited to a small area at the third floor line and the parapet. A one store covered area for receiving goods projected from the building at this point. The display windows did not carry around to this facade.

Goods accessed the building from the west and north, as previously described, and the public through two major entries which occured at the mid-point of the south and east facades. These entries were slightly recessed and the inset panel above each read "Montgomery Ward and Co." in brass letters. Below were double leaf doors with one glass panel, wide dark oak frames, and brass hardware and kick plates. On the flanking pilasters at the second floor line were large brass and translucent glass electric lamps, which have since been removed. These entry doors were backed y ample vestibles with revolving doors, which also no longer exist.

Inside, the Art Deco style was carried through the basement, first and second floors which were dedicated to retail space. These floors had plastered columns, twenty feet on center, with simplistic elegant plaster moulding at the top. The floors were a polished green terrazzo. The backs of the display windows, several feet deep, were decorated with wood panels, inset with moulding and flanked by fluted pilasters similar to those on the exterior. Above these panels were geometric monel metal ornament, topped with a seven inch triangular patterned wood cornice. This wall surface decoration carried throughout the retail floors. The Art Deco ornamentation on the interior was restricted to the geometric forms of the Deco movement, leaving the floral designs for the exterior.

The upper five floors remained unfinished as they were used solely for storage during the time the building was owned by Montgomery Ward Co.

The exterior of the building has remained essentially intact over the years with a few exceptions. In 1946, a portion of the penthouse was removed when the building was re-roofed. In 1952, the number of loading docks on the west were increased. Other work on the building was confined to repair work and interior alterations. Little remains of the interior decoration that once graced the building. The exterior remains in excellent condition, though in recent times it was painted a monotone off-white. The structure is strong and sound, and the sprinkler system surpasses the requirements of modern codes. With the advent of Riverfront Park, the siting this building is spectacular and its location is prime in relation to the central downtown area.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1929 **Builder/Architect** Montgomery Wards Engineering Dept.
and Wells Brothers of Chicago.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Montgomery Wards building is significant for both historic and architectural reasons. Historically, the Montgomery Wards building symbolizes an important chapter in the history of American commerce. The highly stylized Art Deco architecture of the building was new to Spokane at the time the store was built. An analysis of the Art Deco style nationally shows that Spokane's Montgomery Wards building is representative of this short lived architectural style.

In 1872, Aaron Montgomery Ward introduced a marketing innovation that changed the American system of commerce: the catalog mail order business. As the first mail order merchandising firm, Montgomery Wards was greeted with much skepticism and hilarity by members of the retail trade. However, it soon became apparent that Aaron Ward had correctly perceived the needs and the method of supplying those needs of a large, rural, agricultural society. Despite the depression of 1893, and the abrupt drop in price of war time inflated goods in 1918, Montgomery Wards continued to expand its mail order coverage.

The years following the first World War were times of economic uncertainty. Faced with a Christmas "buyers strike" in 1920, Montgomery Wards decided to sell their catalog merchandise using retail methods and was thus able to turn a profitmaking season.

This isolated incident forced the administration of Montgomery Wards to consider branching into the retail trade market. They reasoned that with the price of goods fluctuating drastically from day to day that attempting to sell those same goods through an annually published catalog was tantamount to committing financial suicide. They needed the flexibility to respond to the uncertain turns and twists of the economy.

In addition to an unstable economy, the centers of population were also shifting. Increased mechanization of farm methods forced large numbers of people off the land into urban areas in search of new livelihood. Montgomery Wards soon discovered that their original target clientele -- the folks on the farm -- no longer constituted the majority of the population.

In a cautious attempt to test their new retail selling philosophy, Montgomery Wards opened their first retail store in Evansville, Indiana in 1925. By 1928, Montgomery Wards had drafted a major expansion program directed towards gaining new customers. It was at this time that Spokane, the center of commerce for the Inland Empire, was targeted for a large Montgomery Wards catalog and department store.

In the period between 1900 and 1920, Spokane's population had more than tripled. The City played host to several major national railroads, provided supplies to the mining country of Idaho, support services to those building Grand Coulee Dam, and

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was the regional retail center for northern Idaho, eastern Washington, and parts of Canada. It was no great surprise that Montgomery Wards located their first major department store in Washington, in Spokane.

At the time of construction in 1929, Montgomery Wards was one of only two chain department stores in Spokane. Sears and Roebuck had been in the area for some time, and coincidentally, in late 1929, had a large store built only a block away from the new Wards store.

The Montgomery Wards building was one of the first to be built in Spokane using the progressive, new architectural style of the period called Art Deco. It was primarily a commercial style reflective of the urbane lifestyle found in cities. Often viewed as a style caught in the middle of the evolution of American architecture, Art Deco stood between the Beaux Art goos of the past and the International streamlined qualities of the future.

Popularized by the Paris Exposition of 1925, Art Deco was considered architecture for the people. Preceding forms of architecture which were directed toward a small, elite audience, were replaced by this more popular commercial style. "...the architecture [Art Deco] was good advertising meant to entertain and draw the public."

Probably even more significant to Montgomery Wards, the streamlined style of Art Deco architecture was... "an architectural symbol for the progressiveness of commerce and industry...". Choosing this style of architecture for their new building in Spokane indicated the modern thinking of the Montgomery Wards company as they embarked on their aggressive new expansion program.

The ornamentation of the Wards building in Spokane is typical of Art Deco styling which is best characterized by visually entertaining decorative features. As can be seen in the Montgomery Wards building, the decorative motif involving sharp angular lines and curved, almost Egyptian features, adds character and softens the angular composition of the building. It is stylized and highlighted by the use of color and contrasting textured material which has an impact on the entire skyscape.

In 1929, the use of Art Deco styling was relatively new to the Montgomery Wards company. They experimented with this style in Spokane's department store and three catalogue warehouses in Portland, Oregon; Oakland, California; and Kansas City, Missouri.

The design of the Montgomery Wards building must have influenced the architectural style of several other prominent structures in Spokane. Only one, the City Ramp Garage, designed by a local architect, preceded the Wards building by a year. The other Art Deco buildings were built in the years immediately following the construction of the Wards building.

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Spokane's Montgomery Wards building was a product of the Engineering Department of Montgomery Ward's main Chicago office. The influence of structural engineering is very apparent in the building. Montgomery Wards had experimented with ferro-concrete as early as 1907 with the construction of their large Chicago warehouse. Reinforced concrete was relatively new to Spokane and the local construction trade watched closely the techniques used by Wells Brothers of Chicago in the building of this structure. Concrete and reinforcement act together in resisting forces. In contemplating demolition of the Wards building, recently a local structural engineer said it would be impossible to destroy without blasting.

Times have changed the environment surrounding Spokane's Montgomery Wards building considerably. Gone are the fast moving freight trains and interurbans that used to pass by. Also, the industrial nature of the immediate area around Wards has been changed completely, assuming a new identity of Spokane's Civic Center. But the history of Montgomery Wards coming to Spokane remains with us today, a fitting story of American commerce in the years following World War I. New vistas have been opened to view one of Spokane's few Art Deco buildings. Spokane is a city with a complete chronicle of western architectural styles and the Montgomery Wards building is a significant representative of the short lived but well appreciated Art Deco style.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Books:

Giedion, S. Space, Time and Architecture. Cambridge, 1963.

Latham, Frank. 1872-1972 A Century of Serving Consumers: The Story of Montgomery Ward, Chicago, 1972.

10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property Less than 1 acre

Verbal boundary description and justification

Post addition resurvey and extension, part of block 14, beginning at Southeast corner of block 14; thence West 239.83 feet; thence north 9 degrees, 49 minutes.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state _____ county _____

state _____ county _____

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Historic Preservation Office

organization City of Spokane

date February 18, 1986

street & number West 808 Spokane Falls Boulevard

telephone (509) 456-4378

city or town Spokane

state Washington 99201-3333

12. Signature of Owner(s)

Tony L. Wash

For Office Use Only:

Date Received: 4-1-86

Date Heard: 5-10-14-86

Commission Decision: APPROVED

Council/Board Action: Approved

Date: June 2, 1986

Attest: Phanilyn J. Montgomery
City Clerk

Approved as to form: J. J. [Signature]
Ass't. Corporation Counsel

We hereby certify that this property has been listed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places:

Robert M. Higgins
Mayor, City of Spokane or Chair, Spokane County Commissioners

[Signature]
Chair, Spokane City/County Historic Landmarks Commission

[Signature]
City/County Historic Preservation Officer

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Robinson, Cervin and Bletter, Rosemarie Haag. Skyscraper Style Art Deco
New York. New York, 1975.

Schmidt and Schmidt. Growth of Cities and Towns, State of Washington.
Olympia, WA. 1969.

Wren, Tony P. and Malloy, Elizabeth D. America's Forgotten Architecture.
New York, 1976.

Newspaper Articles:

Spokesman Review: July 24, 1927, November 3, 1929, July 15, 1951, October
16, 1958, June 25, 1959.

Spokane Chronicle: June 7, 1929, June 8, 1929, June 16, 1929, July 26,
1929, September 19, 1929, June 5, 1968.

Interviews:

Ken Darre, Corporate News and Field Public Relations Director. Chicago,
Illinois. March 12, 1980.

Jerry Butner, Northwest Field Engineer, Montgomery Wards Company. Oakland,
California. March 14, 1980.

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east 61.72 feet; thence north 20 degrees, 35 minutes, east 70.98 feet; thence south 81 degrees, 52 minutes, 30 seconds, east 206.52; thence 50 degrees, 3 minutes, west 98.08 feet to point of beginning.



587
1885



#188729
140837

WELLS BROS. GONS. CO.
MONTGOMERY WARD BLDG.
31-29 - SPOKANE, WASH. - # 18.

© 1980



0196

Wells Bros. Cons. Co.
Morey Bldg. Wash. D.C.
11-14-24 - Stearns, Wash. - R 20.

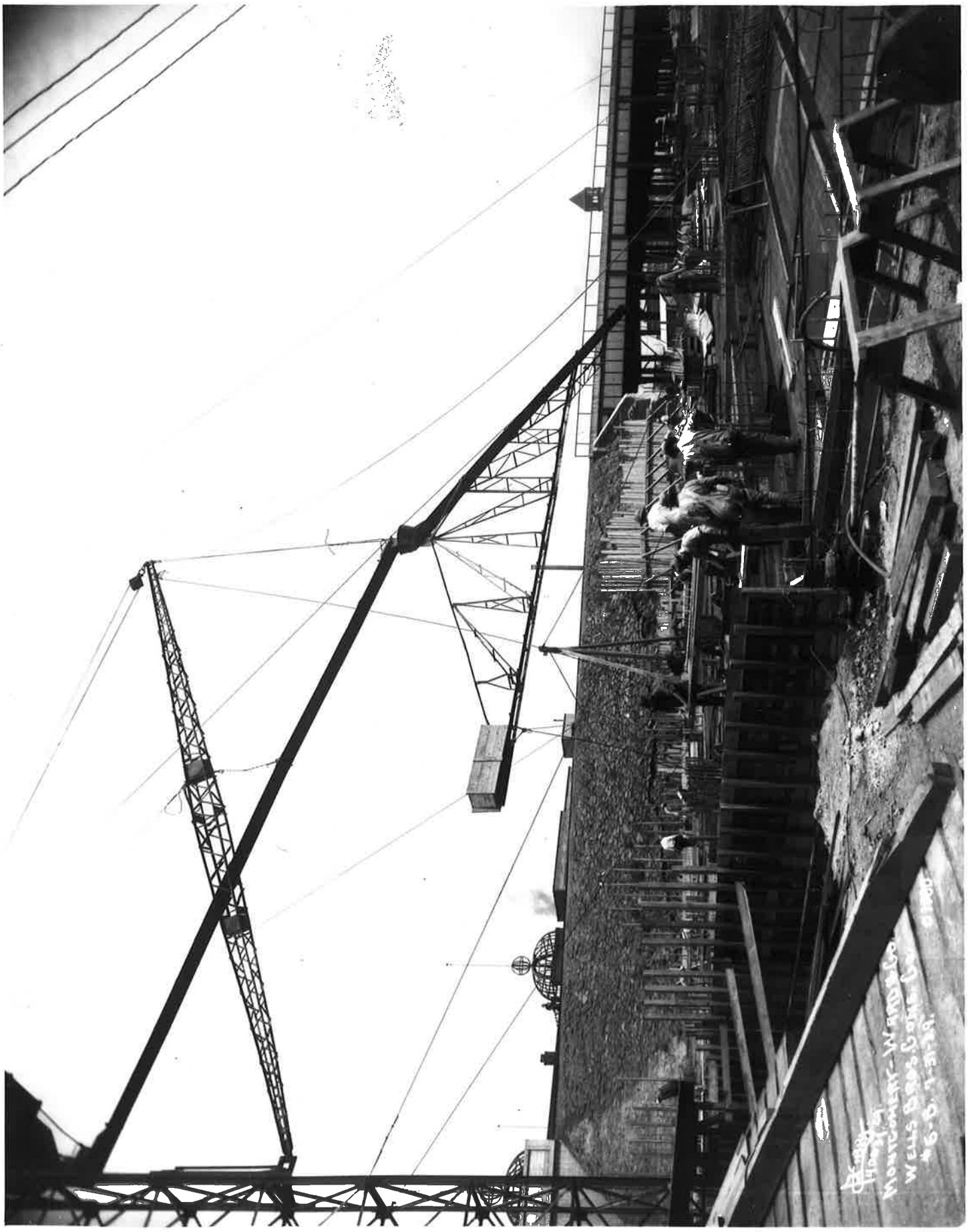
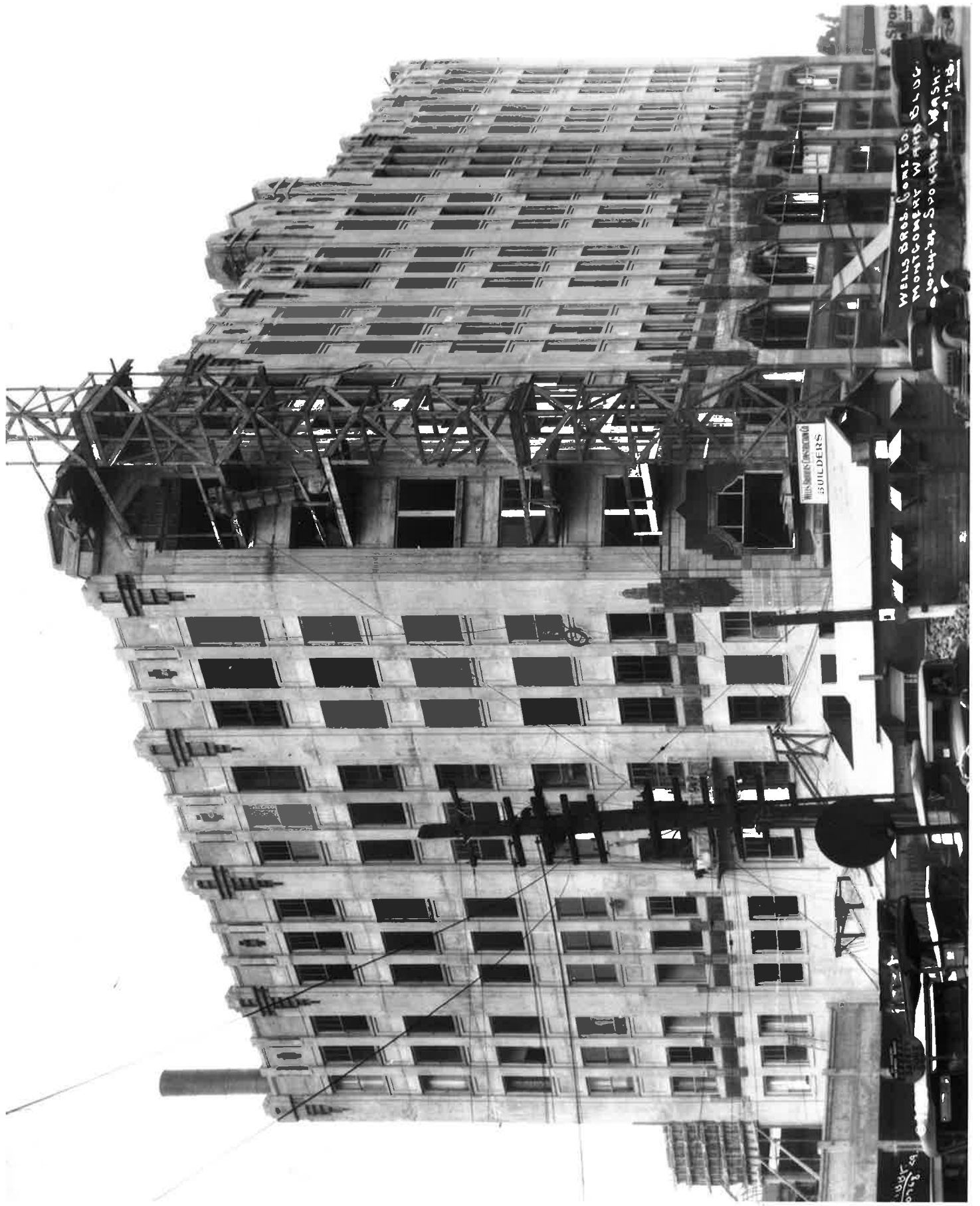


Photo
Library
Montclair-Walpole
Wells Bros. Camera Co.
#6-D-7-21-39.



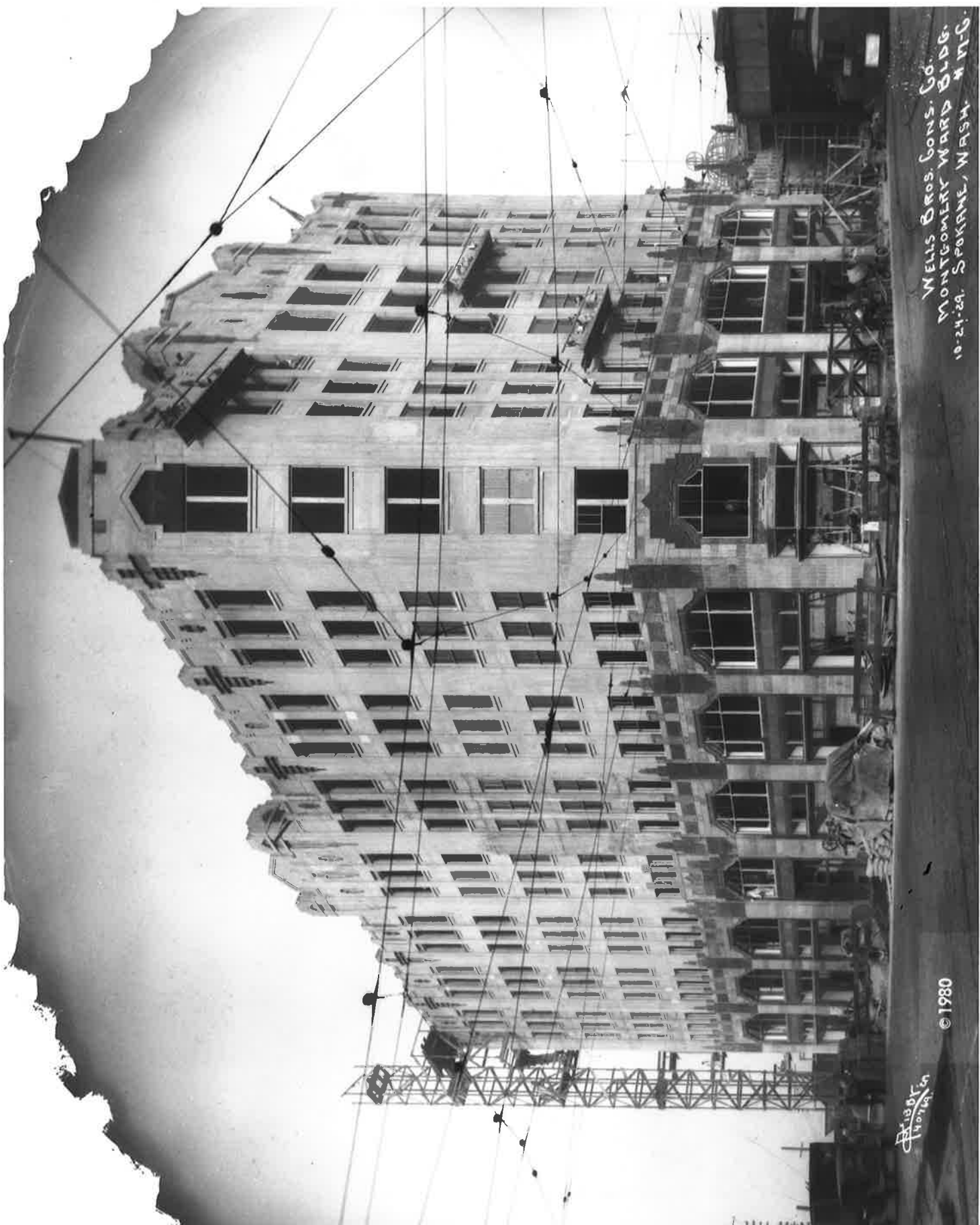
WELLS BROS. Bldg Co.
MONTGOMERY WING BLDG.
20-24th - S.W. CORNER, WASH.
4-11-23

WELLS BROS. BLDG. CO.
BUILDERS

11/11/23
11/11/23



#1324
140924
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WELLS BROS. BONS. CO.
MONTGOMERY WARD BLDG.
10-24-28. SPOKANE, WASH. 4116.

Hobby
1407 1/2

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