

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only  
received JUN 3 1983  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Scimitar Building  
and/or common Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Building

**2. Location**

street & number 179 Madison Avenue N/A not for publication  
city, town Memphis N/A vicinity of  
state Tennessee code 047 county Shelby code 157

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" 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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A <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 Elkington & Keltner  
street & number P. O. Box 171285  
city, town Memphis N/A vicinity of state Tennessee 38117

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Shelby County Registrar  
street & number Shelby County Office Building, 160 North Main Street  
city, town Memphis state Tennessee 38103

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
date N/A N/A federal  state  county  local  
depository for survey records N/A  
city, town N/A state N/A

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

### Check one

unaltered

altered

### Check one

original site

moved

date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Scimitar Building, located at 179 Madison Avenue in downtown Memphis, Tennessee, is a five-story stone-veneer structure on a raised basement with load-bearing brick walls in a combination of Beaux-Arts and Romanesque revival styles. Constructed in 1902, the building has a quarry-faced ashlar base with upper stories of dressed-faced ashlar. Important architectural features include prominent bay windows at the northwest and southwest corners, bow windows on the Madison Avenue and Third Street facades, balconets with iron railings, and festooned lionshead masks below the roof cornice. The structure is rectangular in plan, measuring 46' on Madison Avenue and 149' along Third Street. Although some exterior and interior alterations were made to the Scimitar Building in the 1920's and 1950's, it still retains its architectural and historical integrity to a high degree. Having north and west entrances on Madison and Third respectively, the building was constructed flush with the sidewalk and is bounded on the east and south by vacant lots, on the west by the twenty-five-story First Tennessee Bank (ca. 1965) and Madison, and by the twenty-nine-story Sterick Building (ca. 1929) and Third on the north.

The Scimitar Building is divided into four paired window bays within the Madison Avenue facade, and eighteen paired bays within the Third Street facade. All windows of the structure contain one-over-one double-hung sash lights. Included in the fenestration of both facades are two prominent 3/4-round bay windows of three lights per floor which dominate the northwest and southwest corners of the structure. In addition, two sets of bow windows containing two lights per floor project from the Third Street facade, while one such bow window is featured on the Madison Avenue facade. The bay windows run from the second story to the roofline, while the bow windows run only from the second-through-fourth stories. The street level of the structure contains a storefront that covers all of the Madison Avenue facade and continues along the Third Street facade to the north side of the Third Street entrance. The storefront contained plate-glass store windows along the entire length that have since been covered over or replaced with solid panels. A flat canopy is suspended above the entire length of the storefront, which is unadorned save for a running molding on its exposed edge. A continuous transom of square lights runs above the canopy as part of the storefront design. A dentilled cornice of sheet metal runs above the length of the transom.

The street grade of Third Street drops away from the level at Madison Avenue, thereby exposing an entire raised basement at the southernmost corner of the Third Street facade. The raised basement of the Third Street facade contains a storefront of plate-glass that runs from the south side of the Third Street entrance to the southwest corner. A dentilled cornice of sheet metal decorates the top of the storefronts in this area. The storefront area has been converted in subsequent years to a mechanical equipment room - its windows are now closed with panels or fitted with ventilation louvers.

The design of the Scimitar Building uses a variety of surface textures, materials and ornamentation to enliven the facades of the structure. In addition to the use of the bay and bow windows, the structure employs various textures of stonework as a means of dividing the facades into four horizontal layers. The divisions created are not unlike the basic elements of a Roman classical column-base, shaft, and capital. The raised

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Continuation sheet Scimitar Building Item number 7 Page 2

basement is laid in coursed quarry-faced ashlar; the first floor in dressed-faced ashlar with rusticated horizontal courses; the second-through-fourth floors in tightly-laid dressed-faced ashlar, and the fifth floor in alternating courses of thin, random-range, quarry-faced ashlar separating wider bands of dressed-faced ashlar. The structure is surmounted by a modillioned cornice and dentilled frieze. A plain parapet wall terminates the roofline of the Madison Avenue and Third Street facades.

Other decorative elements of the facade are employed to focus attention upon key architectural elements, or to break up areas lacking definition. Corbels supporting the bay and bow windows of the facades are carved with dense Romanesque foliation that surrounds a shield motif (it should be noted that the shields featured in the Madison Avenue facade are initialed "N" and "H," referencing the association of Napoleon Hill with the construction of the building). Similarly, corbelled balconets with elaborate iron railings project from the facade at key points. Most of these corbels are decorated with foliated relief carvings - however, a balconet placed directly over the Third Street entrance contains a grotesque mask peering out from behind the foliation. Other elements of note are the festooned lionshead masks placed at key points above and between the semicircular-arched windows of the fifth floor.

Of further note is the design of the Third Street entrance, which features a recessed door behind a semicircular arched entry, and is topped on the second floor level by a pedimented overdoor containing two lights and foliated relief carving.

The rusticated treatment of the first floor exterior walls continues to the voussoirs of the semicircular arch, which is supported by squat, engaged Doric pilasters. A bronze grille containing a laurel wreath lies within the archway above the springline.

The present appearance of the first floor wall treatments differ from the design as built in 1902. Originally, the Madison Avenue facade had a formal entrance at the center, surrounded by the rusticated wall treatments and fenestration evident today on the southern half of the Third Street facade. The same wall treatments and fenestration were present in continuation along the northern half of the Third Street facade.

The original entrance design for the Madison Avenue facade featured a classic modillioned entablature supported by paired Tuscan columns with Doric capitals, which were rusticated by four thin plates of stone placed through the lower half of the shafts. The columns were supported on paneled plinth blocks, between which ran the steps leading from the street to the entrance foyer. The entrance doors featured an Art Nouveau design of kidney-shaped beveled-glass panels.

In ca. 1924, the raised basement and part of the first floor of the structure were altered to accommodate the present configuration of storefronts. In so doing, the level of the first floor lying to the north of the Third Street entrance was lowered by more

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Scimitar Building

Item number 7

Page 3

than three feet to a point nearly at grade with that of Madison Avenue. The portion of the first floor lying to the south of the Third Street entrance remains at its original level. Other exterior alterations include the removal of the early "Scimitar" neon sign from the parapet of the northwest corner in ca. 1924, and the addition of massive neon signs for the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division on the Madison Avenue and Third Street facades in ca. 1950-1955. The basic structure of these signs remains to date, though stripped of their neon tubing and painted lettering. A scaffold for a ca. 1935 billboard remains standing upon the roof of the structure, though now stripped of all advertising.

The interior of the structure contains little in the way of materials, spaces, or elements from the original design due to several periods of alterations after ca. 1924. The majority of interior woodwork, partition walls, etc. present in the structure appear to date from an extensive renovation of the interior in ca. 1950-1955. The exception appears to be that all interior window frames and trim remain intact above the first floor. The present retail space on the first floor level contains a modestly detailed coffer-beam ceiling that may be original to the structure; however, the lower areas of the piers which support the ceiling were stripped and reworked when the floor level was changed in ca. 1924. All existing mahogany paneling, store fixtures, wainscots, etc. in the retail space appear to have been added after the ca. 1924 alterations, possibly ca. 1950. The original elevator was replaced by more modern equipment at the same time, along with the addition of a core fire stair. Another interior stair in the southeastern corner of the structure was apparently removed in ca. 1970.

## 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 type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1902 **Builder/Architect** Chigazola and Hanker

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Scimitar Building is being nominated under National Register criteria A and C as a significant historic resource of the City of Memphis in the areas of architecture and communications. As the home of the leading Memphis newspaper, the Evening Scimitar and the News-Scimitar (now the Press-Scimitary) from 1902 to 1929, the building played an important role in the development of journalism in the city. The structure is further important for its association with two prominent Memphis citizens connected with the newspaper at the turn-of-the-century, Napoleon Hill (1830-1909) and A. B. Pickett (1858-1904). The Scimitar Building is equally significant as one of the finest turn-of-the-century commercial buildings in Memphis based on its skillful and imaginative design. The structure is one of the most outstanding works of two important Memphis architects in the early twentieth century, August A. Chigazola (ca. 1869-1911) and William J. Hanker (1876-1958).

The predecessor of the Evening Scimitar, the Weekly Scimitar was begun in 1880 by G. P. M. Turner, at the time, the Attorney General of Shelby County. In 1883, Turner converted the paper to an afternoon daily under the new name of the Evening Scimitar. The newspaper was sold in 1887 by Turner to Napoleon Hill, Sam Tate, and W. D. Bethel, who organized a stock company and continued the publication. A. B. Pickett in 1890 purchased a controlling interest in the Evening Scimitar and became the managing editor of the newspaper. With this change, the newspaper grew rapidly and had to change locations twice in the following decade to accommodate this growth which led to the construction of the Scimitar Building.

Napoleon Hill (1830-1909) was one of the wealthiest and most prominent citizens of Memphis. He came to Memphis from Marshall County, Mississippi, opened a wholesale grocery and a cotton commission house. During the Civil War, he abandoned the cotton business and later turned to real estate and banking. He was the president of the Union and Planters Bank and Trust Company, and remained an honorary stockholder in the Memphis Evening Scimitar after A. B. Pickett gained control of the newspaper. His private residence was located across Madison Avenue on the site of the Sterick Building.

Alfred Brown Pickett (1858-1904) was the managing editor of the Evening Scimitar for fourteen years. Along with C. P. J. Mooney of the Commercial Appeal, Pickett was the most prominent newspaper editor in Memphis at the turn of the century. Prior to joining the Evening Scimitar, Pickett had been involved since 1880 with Memphis journalism working on various newspapers including the Avalanche and the Appeal. He was dedicated to aiding the growth and prosperity of the community. Through his editorial urging while with the Evening Scimitar, Pickett was largely responsible for the development of the city park system and secondarily, the establishment of a city wide artesian water system, which are today two of the city's major assets.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.16 acres

Quadrangle name Northwest Memphis, TN-AR

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	5	7	6	8	7	7	0	3	8	9	2	8	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

All of parcel 1, block 416 in the City of Memphis, containing an area measuring 148.5 feet along Third Street, and 46 feet on Madison Avenue as delineated on the accompanying property map.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Love, Student Intern

organization Memphis Heritage, Inc. date November 22, 1982

street & number P. O. Box 3143 telephone (901) 529-9828

city or town Memphis state Tennessee 38103

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature Herbert L. Hoyer

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission date 5/10/83

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Melores Bryan Entered in the National Register date 6/30/83  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Continuation sheet Scimitar Building Item number 8 Page 2

From a small beginning, the Evening Scimitar grew under Pickett's leadership in size and importance, becoming one of the city's major newspapers. By 1901 the company began planning for its expansion into a new facility to accommodate its growing needs. In so doing, Pickett and Hill turned to the prominent architectural firm of Chigazola and Hanker for the design of the new building.

The architectural partnership of August A. Chigazola ca.(1869-1911) and William J. Hanker (1876-1958) lasted for less than five years, but did provide significant contributions to the architectural history of Memphis during its existence. However, the legacy of this partnership spans a period in excess of sixty years.

August A. Chigazola was born in Memphis and educated locally, graduating from Christian Brothers College of Memphis in 1889. For three years, he traveled and worked extensively in association with projects in Mexico, the southwestern United States and New York. Chigazola returned to Memphis and established his own firm in 1891, and first employed William J. Hanker as a draftsman in 1898. Hanker was accepted as a full partner in the firm in 1900 under the title of Chigazola and Hanker. In 1905, the firm was expanded to become Chigazola, Hanker, and Cairns, bringing in Barnard S. Cairns (1875-1935) as a partner. Chigazola left the partnership in 1906 and died a few years later in 1911. Among the projects executed by Chigazola individually and in partnership with Hanker were the residence of M. E. Carter, the Sacred Heart Church, the Finley Carriage Company, the Osceola Hotel in Osceola, Arkansas.

William J. Hanker gained tremendous significance during his career in Memphis. Hanker was born in Toledo, Ohio, and graduated from the University of Illinois at Champaign in the class of 1896. After working as a journeyman in Chicago and Cincinnati, Hanker was brought to Memphis by August Chigazola to work in his firm. His association with Chigazola served as a springboard for his career, which gained momentum after forming the partnership of Hanker and Cairns in 1906. The firm continued until the death of Cairns in 1935, when Carl C. Heyer was accepted as a partner under the name of Hanker and Heyer. In 1958, William J. Hanker retired from the architectural profession and moved to Baltimore, Maryland. He died shortly thereafter.

Among the many structures associated with Hanker as architect are the Commerce-Title Building (1905, 1915), Chisca Hotel (ca. 1915), Tennessee Hotel (ca. 1920), the National Bank of Commerce (ca. 1905), Lowensteins Department Store (1924), Adler Hotel (1908, 1920), Black-and-White Store (Shainberg's ca. 1948), St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Patrick's Church, Marx and Bendorf Building, and many others.

While on the construction of the Scimitar Building began in earnest on April 1, 1902, and was completed on December 29, 1902. The new structure provided over three floors of office space for the staff of the Evening Scimitar, while allowing additional room for two floors of office tenants. The raised basement was built to accommodate the stereotype and composing rooms of the newspaper, along with the giant "Sextuple press" built by R. Hoe and Company at a cost of \$35,000. From the street, passersby could clearly view the press and its drive-train machinery at work.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Scimitar Building

Item number 8

Page 3

In 1904 A. B. Pickett died leaving the newspaper in the hands of a new generation of journalists. That same year the Evening Scimitar merged with the Morning News and became the News-Scimitar. During the following twenty years, the newspaper expanded further, creating the need for a new location. The Scimitar Building was sold in 1924 to the Memphis Power and Light Company, the city's privately owned utility company. However, the News-Scimitar remained in the building until 1926 when the newspaper was bought by the Scripps-Howard chain and combined with that company's minor Memphis newspaper, the Press. Continuing as an afternoon paper, the resulting Press-Scimitar moved in 1926 to a building at 201 Union Avenue (now demolished). As one of only two major newspapers remaining in Memphis (the other being the Commercial Appeal), the Press-Scimitar has continued as an important source of news and influence in the city and the surrounding area to this day.

The Memphis Power and Light was acquired in 1937 by the City of Memphis for the inception of the public utility company known as the Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division which continues its service to the city today. The Scimitar Building was used as the headquarters of the Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division until 1970 when it moved to its new facility on South Main Street. Since 1970, the building has been privately owned. A major restoration and rehabilitation of the building for prime office space is planned to begin in the summer of 1983.



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National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Scimitar Building

Item number 9

Page 2

Baker, Thomas Harrison. The Memphis Commercial Appeal: the History of a Southern Newspaper. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.

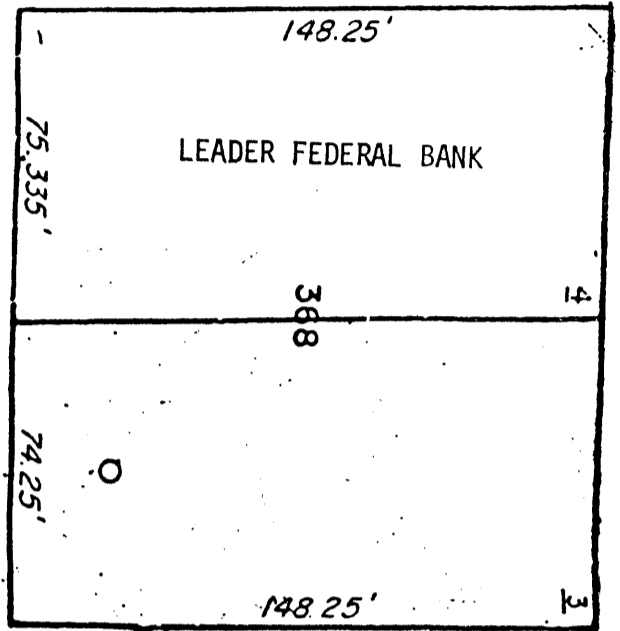
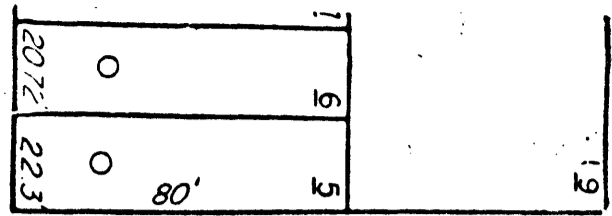
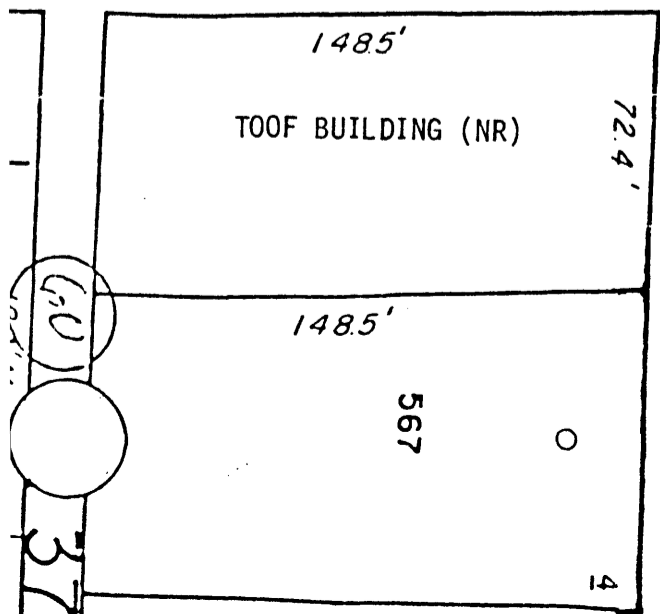
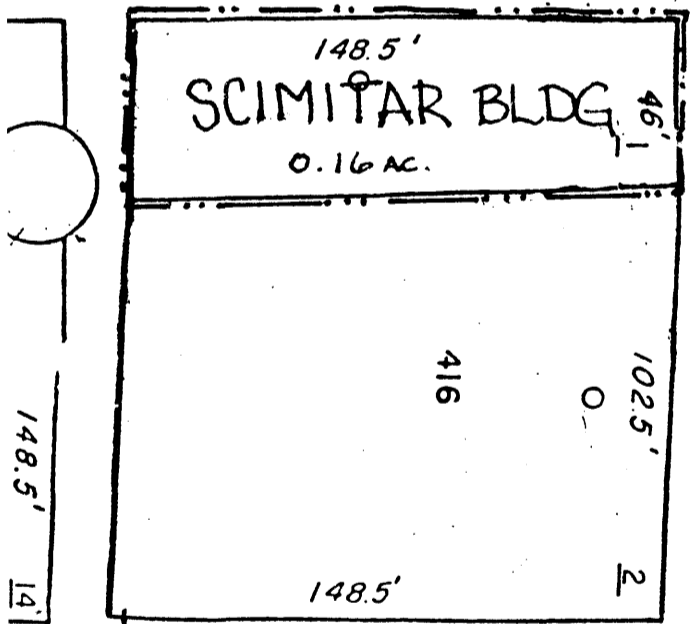
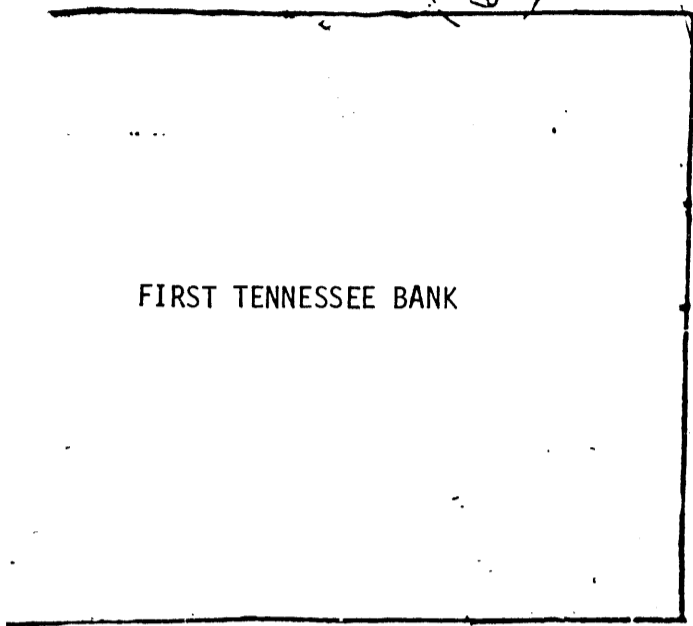
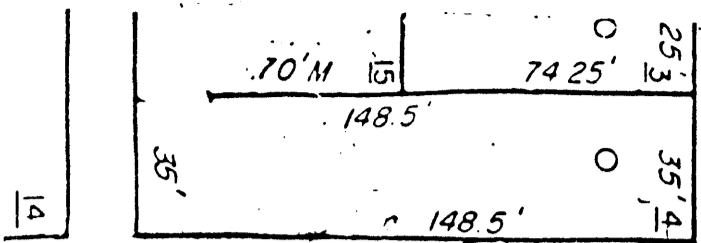
Caldwell, Charles. "Strong Team: Mid-South, Memphis and the Press-Scimitar." Press-Scimitar, October 12, 1955, p. 21.

Memphis City Directory: various years.

"Supplement to the House-Warming Edition of the Memphis Evening Scimitar." Evening Scimitar, January 1, 1903, pp. 1-38.

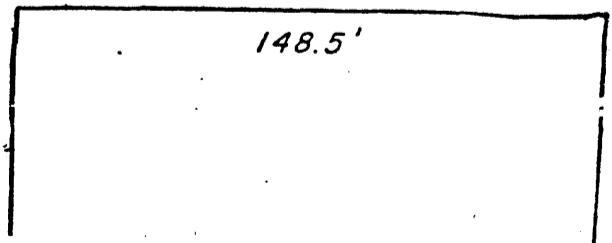
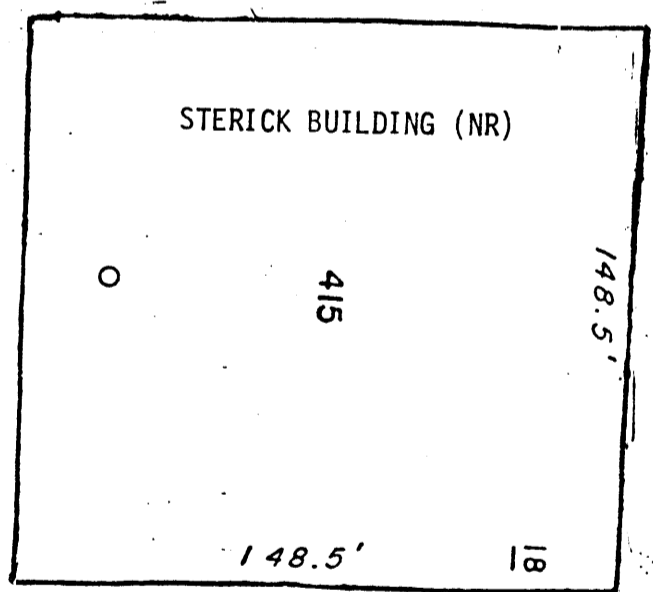
Vertical Files: Memphis Public Library: various subjects.

Whisenhunt, Elton. "A. B. Pickett of Scimitar Fame Began Career in Rough 80's." Press-Scimitar, October 12, 1955, p. 53.



NO. THIRD ST.

MADISON



SCIMITAR BUILDING

179 Madison Ave.  
 Memphis, Shelby Co., Tennessee

Boundary Map  
 Scale 1" = 50'

N ↑