

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Sky Park Manor **March 9, 2016 draft**

Other names/site number Sky Park Apartments. LC13:C08-367

Name of related multiple property listing _____

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & Number 1301 Lincoln Mall

City or town Lincoln State Nebraska County Lancaster

Not for publication Vicinity

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

SHPO/Director

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Nebraska State Historical Society

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official

Date

Title

State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	
_____	_____ Buildings
_____	_____ Sites
_____	_____ Structures
_____	_____ Objects
_____	_____ Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/ Multiple Dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement/International Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete, metal/steel, Other: lava rock

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Description

Summary Paragraph (Briefly describe the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Sky Park Manor is a twelve-story, high-rise, luxury apartment building completed in 1963 in the Modern Movement/International Style. Located one block west of the Nebraska State Capitol in downtown Lincoln, the building is at the southeast corner of Lincoln Mall (formerly J Street) and 13th Street in the heart of the Capitol Environs neighborhood, Lincoln Mall connects the State Capitol with the County-City Building that faces east onto 10th Street. The mall construction in 1983 was part of the 1970s Capitol Environs plan to beautify the cardinal axial streets leading to the Capitol and protect views toward the Capitol.¹ Sky Park Manor, already built when this plan was put into place, is taller than the Plan's suggested height limit of 75 feet, or the current height requirement of 57 feet.

Sky Park Manor is constructed of cast-in-place concrete and steel. Lava rock, ornamental concrete, and steel balcony guard rails provide streamlined, simple design elements. The design of the tall rectangle structure is dominated by full-length balconies on the east and west facades, and smaller balconies on the south and north. Ornamental dark grey concrete spanning the full height of the building on the north screens the smaller balconies on that façade. Sky Park's surroundings accommodate a mix of uses with other, more modest apartment houses, and government and office buildings sharing the immediate vicinity. There is a minimum of green space north and west of the building with a few ornamental trees and a small grass lawn. A drop-off/delivery driveway is located on the west off of 13th Street.

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

Sky Park Manor was the first luxury, high-rise apartment building constructed in Lincoln. It offered many amenities not usually found in the city's apartment houses, and was marketed to Lincolnites seeking to free themselves of the burdens of home ownership. Sky Park is the tallest structure in the immediate vicinity of the Capitol. It is prominent in any view toward the Capitol from the north, west and south, and was built before the Capitol Environs height limits were in place. The building's urban setting is augmented by a few trees, and other landscape materials, planted in the

¹ Laging, Thomas, etal. *The Nebraska State Capitol and Environs Plan*, Architectural College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1975.

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modest green space on the north and west sides of the building, but the area immediately surrounding the building is largely concrete. This includes the main driveway, sidewalks, and an alley to the east.

The twelve-story Sky Park Manor is built of cast-in-place concrete, steel, and glass. The building features balconies on the east and west facades of each floor that run the length of the structure. Smaller balconies are located on the north and south facades. The walls on the east and west facades of the building are largely composed of fixed, floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding glass doors. This provides natural light to the interior of each unit. North and south exterior wall surfaces are concrete penetrated on each story by small balconies. Lava rock covers the first floor of the north and west façades. The building is in nearly original condition with virtually no alterations on the exterior.

East of the tower, flanking the alley, is a one-story, windowless garage, topped by the "Sun and Fun" deck (so called by the builder/owners). That deck features a swimming pool and outdoor recreation space. Originally a putting green and wading pool also occupied this deck. A "Solar Terrace" (again named as such by the builder/owners) on the top floor provides additional space for outdoor living. Each of the 75-plus apartments has private patio terraces accessible from the individual units. These terraces are actually sections of the balconies that run the complete length of the building, north to south, on the eleven residential floors. Fixed privacy screens of steel separate the terrace spaces from one another. The roof projects over the 12th floor terraces and a dark grey steel fascia provides a strong horizontal cap for the building.

Automobile parking for tenants is in the interior of the building. Access to basement parking is provided by a ramp at the southwest corner of the parcel, with an overhead door facing 13th Street. The ramp is concealed in a one-story wing projecting forward from the entrance area. The underground parking that occupies the east half of the basement. More interior parking spots are located at ground level under the Sun and Fun Deck, and are accessed via overhead doors located on the south and north facades of the building.

The main walk-in residential entrance is on the west façade, and is sheltered by a cantilevered canopy bearing the name of the building. The entire west façade is significantly recessed from the plane of the west elevation above first floor. The lava rock continues from the north façade to the west under the recessed area. At the south end of the recessed ground level space is decorative concrete block that screens the private patio of the manager's apartment located in the southwest corner of the building. A curved driveway off 13th Street is located adjacent to the main entrance, and provides an approach for drop-off and delivery.

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The interior of Sky Park Manor has had minimal alterations. The floor plans on each level have been left untouched, except for some adjustments on the second floor Sun and Fun Deck (removal of the putting green and children's pool), and the addition of a glass wall to create an office space from the former waiting room in the outer lobby. The original textured, vinyl wall coverings and light fixtures are in place in all public spaces on all floors -- a veritable time-capsule.

In addition to the underground parking in the east half of the basement, the below-grade level also holds storage cages for apartment units, mechanical rooms, and maintenance storage in the west half. A hobby room for tenant projects, and lounge are located in the southwest part of the basement. The hobby room is intact, but is now used for storage. The lounge is available to current tenants for large group gatherings, and is outfitted with a projector and screen for programs. There is also a kitchenette in this room along the east wall. The lounge originally doubled as a fallout shelter, indicative of the Cold War era.

First floor features include the main entrance/outer lobby, storage room, and current office to the north. In the outer lobby, the visitor used an intercom system to announce his arrival to a resident. An updated, functioning intercom panel is currently in place in the exact location of the original. The newer system announces the visitor by telephone, replacing the original call box process. Lava rock covers the north wall near the intercom and in the vestibule. A secure inner lobby, with mail boxes and elevators, is located to the south of the outer lobby. Historically, a cigar stand, beauty salon, and a small manager's apartment with private patio, were also located in the southwest part of first floor. These spaces are intact, but not currently used for those original purposes. Additional tenant storage cages are located on first level above the driveway to the underground parking.

Apartment units feature one, two, or three bedrooms, and each apartment has at least two balcony access points via sliding glass doors. Natural light comes into each unit, from either the east or west, from the fixed-glass window-walls and the sliding glass doors on the balcony facades. The two-bedroom apartments, that are located in the north and south ends of most floors, also have access to the smaller balconies on those facades, and have operable windows in the second bedroom. Solid steel screens separate the long balcony courses into private terraces for each apartment. These screens featured in one of three colors, pale green, pale blue, and pale yellow. The screens are not easily visible from the ground level, however, when in view, they offer the only diversion from the black, white, and grey coloration of the building's exterior.

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On all residential floors, a central hallway runs north to south the length of the building. Elevator doors, two stairwells, meter rooms, and access to a trash chute are located in the hallways. Each one-bedroom unit has balcony entrances from the living room and bedroom. The second floor layout, in the southeast part of the building, is slightly different than the others so as to provide all residents and guests access to the Sun and Fun Deck.² Floors three through nine are of identical configuration and consist mostly of one-bedroom apartments, but have two-bedroom apartments in the northwest and southeast corners of each floor.³

Floors ten and eleven contain large, special penthouse apartments that were designed specifically for owners Solheim and Olson. These units are located in the south quarter of the building and feature three-bedroom apartments and balconies accessible to the east, west, and south. Other more modest units are in the north portion of those floors.⁴ A description of Solheim's penthouse found in an *Omaha World Herald* article tells of the special features he built into his unit. Bronze stars were set into the corners of two marble floor slabs in the foyer. There were hand-carved door casings in the foyer created by well-known Lincoln woodcarver, Keats Lorenz, a recycled wrought iron gate from a Denver mansion to divide the foyer from the living room, and a white marble fireplace, also from the same mansion, in the living room. The andirons, fire screen, and fireplace liner were recycled from the old Nebraska Governor's mansion. Solheim had recently designed the new Nebraska Governor's mansion, and many fixtures from the old mansion were auctioned off.⁵ Several of those repurposed decorative items installed in the Solheim's penthouse are no longer in place.

Approximately one-third of the twelfth floor houses the boiler room. Also on this floor is the laundry room, with access to the Solar Terrace, a Finnish sauna with dressing room and shower, and a restroom. More apartment units take up the remainder of this top floor.

Ceramic mosaic tiles and Italian marble lavatory counters were standard in all bathrooms, while vinyl wall coverings and Formica countertops were installed in the kitchens. Most apartments retain their original bathroom tile; however some of the wall tiles behind the toilets have been replaced due to plumbing repairs. Counter tops and wall coverings in most kitchens have been updated over time.

² Architectural drawings, Sky Park Manor, Selmer A. Solheim and Associates, Lincoln, Nebraska. 1961. In the possession of the Sky Park's current owners and also Berggren Architects, Lincoln.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Omaha World Herald* newspaper. February 14, 1965, Section F, page 6.

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A mechanical room is located on the center of the roof to hold the head house for the cable-suspended elevators. Just north of this room is the cooling tower, original to the building. The cooling tower is disguised with a decorative, concrete screen.

Sky Park Manor is basically in good condition, but is in need of mechanical system upgrades, and also is due for general repairs and cosmetic refurbishing.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- 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

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B Removed from its original location.
- C A birthplace or a grave.
- D A cemetery.
A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- E A commemorative property.
- G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1961-1963

Significant Dates

1961-63 – period of construction

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Selmer A. Solheim

Olson Construction

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance was determined to be the construction era, 1961-1963.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

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Sky Park Manor is significant at the local level under Criterion C: Architecture. The building is a fine, mid-century example of the Modern Movement/International Style in architecture. Architect Selmer Solheim and builder Carl Olson embraced the new Modern Movement in architecture that had emerged nationally by this time. They promoted functional, simple designs, and in the years prior to Sky Park's construction, the men had already created several buildings in Lincoln that departed from traditional architectural styles. Solheim and Olson were clearly pursuing new trends in building design. Sky Park Manor's plan was the result of many visits by the partners to high-rise, luxury apartments in other states, where they took note of amenities to incorporate into their Lincoln building.⁶ Upon completion, Sky Park Manor made a bold statement on the Lincoln skyline that persists today. The building retains its architectural integrity, receiving minimal and largely non-invasive alterations on the interior and exterior since its 1963 completion. It continues to display its original design, which is characteristic of the International Style and of the time period.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

By the mid-20th century, Lincoln, Nebraska had emerged from an 1850s prairie village to a sophisticated city of 155,000 residents (1960 census).⁷ The most significant profile on the Lincoln skyline, mid-century and today, is the Nebraska State Capitol building. The seat of state and county government, Lincoln also boasted several downtown high-rise buildings by mid-century that were in the 10-stories tall range, including the Security Mutual Building (1206 O Street, NRHP), Terminal Building (941 O Street, NRHP), First National Bank and Trust Building (1001 O Street, NRHP), the Stuart Building (13th & P Streets, NRHP), Federal Trust Building (134 S. 13th Street, NRHP), Gold and Company Department Store (1033 O Street, NRHP), and Hotel Capital (139 N, 11th Street, NRHP). The city had developed an urban ambience by this time enhanced by these tall, prominent buildings that generally embodied the traditional design elements popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

By the 1960s, downtown Lincoln was a commercial, governmental, and cultural center. Department stores, theatres, banks, churches, government buildings, and the University of Nebraska were in place to the north and west of the Capitol building. Lincolnites came downtown to the business district from their neighborhoods for employment, business, shopping, and pleasure. Several improvements to Lincoln's built environment that affected the mid-century "look" of Lincoln, and

⁶ *Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska. April 28, 1963, Section F

⁷ www.censusscope.org. Accessed February 24, 2016.

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augmented the lifestyle of residents, had been accomplished, and many other projects were in progress. Pershing Auditorium was completed in 1957, and the Interstate Highway was opened from Omaha to Lincoln in 1961, the same year construction began on Sheldon Art Gallery. Bennett Martin Library opened in 1962, and the "Twin Towers" dormitories, (Cather and Pound) at the University of Nebraska, were dedicated in 1963. In 1962, monies spent on construction set an all-time record high of \$27,409,110.⁸ The newly constructed Gateway Shopping Center (1960), in the eastern suburbs, was the only venue drawing large numbers of people away from downtown for shopping.

It was into this setting that Sky Park Manor was built. With Sky Park, Solheim and Olson introduced a novel architectural element to downtown Lincoln, and added a contemporary, elegant choice in housing for downtown residents.

The International Style

New currents in architecture began to emerge at the end of the 19th century and beginning of 20th century that departed from the trend to design in the revival styles that were popular at this time. Architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan, and others were new ground with design innovations in the first decades of the 20th century. However, it was after World War I, that a bolder design departure materialized in earnest. Led by Le Corbusier in France, J.J.P. Oud in Holland, and Walter Gropius and Mies Van der Rohe in Germany, the International Style was born. These buildings were simplified, massive, geometric, and were generally unadorned. They feature piers of steel and reinforced concrete, and cantilevers. Bands of brickwork, glass walls, and spandrels of metal created simple ornamentation. Carefully placed surface planes, horizontal lines, and pure, regular proportions defined this new appearance in buildings. Symmetry, huge expanses of glass, and concrete terraces were part of the norm.⁹

The International Style was based on three principles:

1) Architecture as volume -- The style encouraged functionalism and not art. When viewed from a distance, the buildings appeared to be a grille of verticals and horizontals, and were perceived as massive.

⁸ Polk, R.L. *Lincoln City Directory*. Kansas City, Missouri, 1965.

⁹ Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and Philip Johnson. *The International Style*, New York, W.W.

Norton and Company, 1995 ed. (First published in 1932 as *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*).

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2) Regularity -- Discipline in a building's design ensured orderliness and economy since the building components were standardized. Supports were spaced at equal distances creating a regular design rhythm.

3) Avoidance of applied ornamentation -- Ornamentation on a building of this style came from the structural elements themselves. The incidental features of the construction components became the decorative elements. The development of simple forms of standardized detail in building elements used with regularity, for example, window frames, provided repetitive "decoration" that enhanced the buildings appearance and was also economical.¹⁰

Sky Park Manor

Sky Park Manor is a clear representation of the Modern Movement/International Style of architecture. Sky Park projects a stark orderliness, via its smooth, planar surfaces. The building materials used in construction, reinforced concrete, steel, and glass, are all universal to the International Style, and Sky Park solidly exemplifies the three principles of the style. The principle of volume (#1), is displayed by the massive bulk of the building, and the strong, immense horizontal lines of the balconies and balcony guard rails. Sky Park's height, and the dark, patterned, perforated concrete screen that shields the stack of balconies on the north façade, give the building a solid vertical definition. Also adding to the perception of volume is the deeply recessed main entrance portico, and the columns supporting the structure above that is protected by the cantilevered canopy and the piers supporting the balconies. Regularity (#2) is also paramount in Sky Park's design. The construction elements of the building are all similar, with the steel balcony guard rails providing a robust repetitive pattern. The plate glass walls and sliding glass doors are the same in all apartments, and all decorative concrete used on the building is of a single pattern. There is no applied ornamentation (#3), save for the lava rock on the first level, north and west facades. As mentioned above, the balcony guard rails on Sky Park provide a very strong design feature, demonstrating that construction components indeed become the ornamentation in a building of this type. When looking at the building, the massive horizontal balcony guard rails are the most prominent feature, and they are perceived as a design element.

The \$1.5 million apartment building was planned with the affluent Lincolnite in mind. The targeted tenant was one who desired a lifestyle devoid of home maintenance, and also wanted the convenience and enjoyment of living in a vibrant downtown. Shopping, dining, and entertainment were

¹⁰ Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and Philip Johnson. *The International Style*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1966.

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available within walking distance, or via a short taxi cab ride. Lincoln professionals and businessmen and their families, retirees, and Nebraska law makers were among those who resided there.

Architect Solheim and contractor Olson formed Sky Park Manor, Inc., for their building project. Olson served as president and treasurer, and Solheim was secretary.¹¹ Sky Park's design and tenant services are the result of the partners making visits to approximately 50 apartment buildings in other states. They incorporated the amenities they found into Sky Park Manor. These included the Sun and Fun Deck, putting green, pool, sauna, rooftop laundry area, individual outdoor spaces, and individual heating and cooling units for each apartment.¹² A doorman was part of the staff when the building opened, and a beauty salon and cigar stand were also provided. An intercom in the outer lobby allowed visitors to announce themselves, and also provided security to the residents, as guests needed to be buzzed into the locked elevator lobby to gain access to the apartment units.

One feature that undeniably speaks to the time period of Sky Park's construction was the inclusion of a fallout shelter in the building. Built during the height of the Cold War and during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Sky Park Manor offered residents a place to take cover in the event of a nuclear attack. The basement lounge, located in the southwest corner of the building, doubled as the fallout shelter. It is questionable whether all tenants could have fit into the space.¹³ The city of Lincoln took the threat of nuclear attack seriously, being located just 50 miles from the Strategic Air Command in Bellevue, a potential target. Lincoln also hosted its own Lincoln Air Force Base at the time of Sky Park Manor's construction.¹⁴ The city responded to the threat of attack by converting an abandoned water reservoir in Irvingdale Park into a space for 1,500 people. The space was the size of half a football field and was outfitted with water and rations. It was abandoned as an at-the-ready shelter in 1975, and used for storage.¹⁵ Also, in 1963, during Sky Park's construction, the state of Nebraska built an Emergency Operating Center behind National Guard Headquarters at 10th and Military Streets. A non-descript brick building provided entrance to an underground, fortified bunker that could hold 209 people. Known as the "Underground Capitol," the space was to provide headquarters for state government operation in the event of attack.¹⁶ It is not known if other multi-unit residential structures like Sky Park had fallout

¹¹ *Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska, April 28, 1963, Section B.

¹² *Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska. April 28, 1963, Section F

¹³ Ibid. Selmer Solheim and Associates, Sky Park Manor architectural drawings, August 1, 1961.

¹⁴ Anne Diffendal, "The Rise, Decline, Resurrection and Demise of the Lincoln Air Base," in *City Shapers: Five Events that Defined Lincoln*. Lincoln, Nebraska: Star Venture, 1987.

¹⁵ *Lincoln Journal Star*, March 26, 2012.

¹⁶ www.nebraskastudies.org Civil Defense. Accessed February 26, 2016.

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facilities. The Nebraska Governor's Mansion (1958), designed by Solheim, was also equipped with a small fallout shelter entered through the basement. This shelter was added in 1961 during Governor Morrison's administration.¹⁷

It is significant that at the same time the city of Lincoln and state government prepared for the possibility of a nuclear attack in the 1960s, Sky Park Manor's builders also made sure their new apartment building had the modern convenience of a safe haven during such a strike.

Marketing Sky Park Manor

Solheim and Olson were proactive in marketing their new project. During construction, the partners ran display advertisements in the Lincoln newspapers announcing Sky Park's progress, and posted invitations to open houses using the headline, "Elegance in Cosmopolitan Living," and the SPM initials that would become a brand on printed materials that lasted for decades.¹⁸ In April 1963, a *Sunday Journal and Star* ran a feature on the building with photographs, announcing an open house that day. The article entitled "Sky Park Manor Nearing Completion," also had large caption above the photo that boasted a "Balcony at Every Level."¹⁹ Solheim and Olson also created an eight-page, elaborate advertising insert for the building for that same April issue of the newspaper. The insert cover featured a photograph of a uniformed doorman meeting a resident near the entrance under the headline, "Lincoln's New Elegance in Cosmopolitan Living." The open house times for that Sunday were printed, as well as the announcement that display apartments were open for viewing daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Subsequent headlines throughout the piece touted that "Modern is the new Sky Park Manor...the Prestige Address in Downtown Lincoln," and "Ultimate in Luxurious Living...a Private Landscaped World of Your Own." The text mentioned how the building was a strikingly beautiful addition to the city's skyline, and that the Manor "has many sparkling extra features never before available in a Lincoln apartment building." The lobby and spacious corridors were decorated with textured vinyl wall coverings, plush carpet, and elegant light fixtures. Soft music played in all public areas, an amenity that continued into the 1990s. Floor plans and photos of apartment units were included, as well as descriptions of the fine features in each apartment, such as ceramic mosaic tiles and

¹⁷ www.nebraskastudies.org Civil Defense. Accessed February 26, 2016. "Governor's Mansion," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Jill Dolberg, 2007.

¹⁸ *Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper. Lincoln, Nebraska . June 3, 1962, 2C. *Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper. Lincoln, Nebraska, January 6, 1963, 6C.

¹⁹ *Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper. Lincoln, Nebraska, April 28, 1963, B1.

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Italian marble lavatory counters in the bathrooms, and vinyl wall coverings and Formica countertops in the kitchens.²⁰

Another component of the advertising insert was a full page of questions and answers, similar to a “Frequently Asked Questions” section found on modern websites. This exercise was to help convince the prospective tenant that “Sky Park Manor is the Answer.” First, a paragraph told the potential tenant that Sky Park would free them from the trials of home ownership and maintenance. It said tenants would “bid farewell” to home mortgage interest, snow removal, regular repairs, and more. Questions were posed regarding fees, leases, garages, the neighbors, utilities, carpet and draperies, payments, etc. The answers were also provided along with a comparison in costs to owning a home versus renting a unit in Sky Park. Following the questions and answers, a chart was provided for the interested party to list his current costs as a homeowner. The figures were to be totaled and compared to the rent for a Sky Park unit.²¹ At the time Sky Park opened to residents, unit rents were \$175 to \$325 per month for most apartments, depending on number of bedrooms, and \$365 to \$450 per month for the penthouses.²²

As an endorsement for the project, Solheim and Olson designed two large penthouses for themselves, and moved their families into the building -- Olson on 10th floor and Solheim on the 11th floor. Their units featured much more lavish decorative details than the other units, and were substantially larger. By 1964, Solheim had also moved his architectural offices to apartment #208 in Sky Park from an office building he had built earlier at 1335 H Street.²³ By 1964, a year after Sky Park opened, 47 of the apartment units out of 78 were occupied.²⁴

The partners were apparently pleased with Sky Park Manor, as they hoped to build a second version directly to the south. In 1964, Solheim took a proposal to the city council to change the zoning on the lots south of the new building for an additional \$1.4 million high rise apartment building. The new structure was also to be 12 stories high, but would contain 100 units, an increase from Sky Park. The square footage of land per unit was in question as the lot was not large enough under the existing zoning regulations. The council denied the zoning change and the project was discontinued.²⁵

In addition to Sky Park Manor, Lincoln boasts two additional significant examples of the Modern Movement in architecture. They are much smaller in stature, but nevertheless make important

²⁰ Ibid. section F.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Polk, R.L., *Lincoln City Directory*. Kansas City, Missouri, 1963, 1964.

²⁴ Polk, R.L., *Lincoln City Directory*, Kansas City, Missouri, 1964.

²⁵ *The Lincoln Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska. August 11, 1964.

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statements in the cityscape. The Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS), built in 1953 at the northern terminus of 15th Street (now Centennial Mall), made a daring departure from the norm in new construction for the time. The essentially unadorned but graceful building was designed by architect Ellery L. Davis, and built by Olson Construction to complement the magnificent Nebraska State Capitol, located at the opposite end of 15th Street/Centennial Mall.²⁶ Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery (1963) was constructed at the same time as Sky Park Manor. It was designed by renowned architect, Philip Johnson, who along with architectural historian, Henry Russell Hitchcock, championed the International Style of architecture in the United States.²⁷ Both buildings are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Architect Selmer A. Solheim

Architect and developer, Selmer A. Solheim AIA, played a major role in building Lincoln during the 20th century, and brought many forward-thinking ideas to the table during his career.

Born in Minnesota in 1912, Solheim was a product of the University of Nebraska's Architectural College, class of 1935. After working for various architectural firms and partnering with other architects in Lincoln, he formed a business under the name Selmer A. Solheim & Associates in 1952. His partner for several years was William A. Treadway. The firm also operated in Estes Park, Colorado.

Many of Solheim's single and multiple unit housing projects utilized Federal Housing Administration (FHA) funds, particularly in times of war, and showed Solheim's resourcefulness as a developer. The FHA was a product of the 1934 New Deal. It guaranteed private home mortgages, especially for people with limited funds, but also assisted developers and private citizens in supporting construction.²⁸ The FHA's creation was in response to the banking and real estate crisis that had produced a serious strain on new construction. Other Solheim projects utilizing FHA loans were houses he designed on the Lincoln Air Force Base in the early 1950s, war housing projects in Sidney, Grand Island, Fremont, Bellevue and Kearney, and a half-dozen houses in Lincoln's Brownbilt neighborhood.

Several of his FHA projects received national recognition. In 1946, he won an award for home design from the Association of Home Builders in Chicago. In 1950, Solheim won a prestigious award in

²⁶ "Nebraska State Historical Society Building." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Stacy Stupka-Burda, Bill Callahan, and Greg Miller, NSHS staff; and Jennifer Brockmeier, NSHS volunteer, 2003.

²⁷ "Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Melissa Dirr Gengler and Greg Munn, 2013.

²⁸ www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu accessed February 28, 2016. www.myfha.net accessed February 28, 2016.

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neighborhood building design development from the National Association of Home Builders Award for his Lincoln apartment complex, Colonial Terrace, also an FHA project.²⁹

At the time of Sky Park Manor's construction in Lincoln, in 1961, Solheim and Associates built two similar high rise apartment buildings in Denver, Sky Manor and Cheesman Park Apartments, near the Colorado State Capitol. Cheesman Park is located across the street from the Colorado Governor's Mansion. Both buildings had two other Nebraska backers in addition to Solheim, and utilized FHA insured loans.

Solheim, who was licensed to practice in 16 states, was a forward-thinking architect who left a significant imprint on Lincoln's built landscape. His buildings were often quite stark and compared to other structures, could be perceived as unattractive.³⁰ Solheim wrote articles for building trade journals and via that medium, promoted the inclusion of modern mechanical devices such as dishwashers, garbage disposals, air conditioning, and intercoms into the popular ranch style house of the day, and also into multiple resident units. He encouraged builders to utilize large glass areas and orient their designs toward the prevailing sun.³¹ The exception to Solheim's own philosophy was his design for Nebraska Governor's Mansion which he described as being a modified Georgian Revival, a style that reflected our American heritage. Much controversy took place over the design since, in style and in its red brick material, did not at all complement the nearby Capitol building; however it was approved by the State Building Commission and completed. The Commission was blamed for not having "good taste" in this matter and for setting parameters for Solheim on the mansion project that did not honor the design of the Nebraska State Capitol.³²

Solheim combined design and development activities throughout his career. He partnered with a local house builder, Tom Sweeney, in Sweeney-Solheim and Company in the late 1940s. Solheim served as president of this company that produced modest homes, typically constructed of masonry in period revival styles. In Solheim's larger projects—schools, other public buildings, and multi-family housing such as Sky Park—the International Style was predominant, however the International Style did not replace the more traditional designs in his work. Instead his versatility offered choices for his clients. For example, in 1957-58, Solheim's red-brick, "Georgian Revival" design for the Nebraska

²⁹ *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska, February 26, 1950.

³⁰ Murphy David, R. and Edward F. Zimmer, comp. "Selmer Alfred Solheim (1912-1979), Architect." *Place Makers of Nebraska: The Architects*. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society. Draft accessed December 29, 2015 http://www.e-nebraskahistory.org/index.php?title=Place_Makers_of_Nebraska:_The_Architects

³¹ *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska, February 26, 1950.

³² "Nebraska Governor's Mansion." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Jill E. Dolberg, 2007.

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Governor's Mansion was under construction at 1425 H Street across from the limestone State Capitol. Simultaneously, Solheim designed and built a small office for his own firm just a block away from the mansion at 1335 H Street. The latter was a modest-sized, International Style, buff-brick box with a glass curtain-wall façade.

Solheim was a member of Airport Authority in the 1960s,³³ and was instrumental in improving the Lincoln Municipal Airport. For decades, he was involved in many building projects at the airport and at the Lincoln Air Force Base, and he also designed the street plat and housing for families stationed at the Air Force Base (present day Arnold Heights/Air Park).³⁴ Solheim made two unsuccessful runs for City Council.³⁵

Solheim and the Capitol Environs

In the 1970s, Solheim served as chairman of a task force to create a design for J Street west of the Capitol during the time an updated Capitol Environs plan was being developed.³⁶ The J Street corridor terminated at the City-County Building on 10th Street, and passed by Solheim's Sky Park Manor. The Downtown Advisory Committee was part of that effort to reclaim and preserve the original landscape plan envisioned by Bertram Goodhue and Ernst Hemminghaus for the area surrounding the Capitol to ensure that the statehouse retained its prominence in the city. The 15th Street and J Street corridors leading to the Capitol were of particular concern, with attention paid to parking, pedestrian traffic, and height limits for new construction. Solheim's Sky Park Manor was actually a problematic building in the 1970s discussions, as this ten-year-old building did impede the view of the Capitol from several angles. The task force plan for west J Street called for creating a median with landscaping, providing pedestrian scale lighting, and encouraging new construction in the underutilized lots. Landscaping with trees, grass and other vegetation were in the design plan to provide a human scale to the mixed-use neighborhood. The mall development along J Street was a major component of the 1970s Capitol Environs study/master plan, to safeguard the cardinal direction approaches to the Capitol - Centennial Mall (North 15th Street), J Street west (now Lincoln Mall), Goodhue Boulevard (South 15th Street) . The project component to potentially straighten J Street to the east of the Capitol and extend the mall concept was abandoned. The Capitol Environs plan endeavored to guard against over-

³³ *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska, March 19, 1967.

³⁴ Jim McKee, "From Lincoln Airport to Lincoln Neighborhood," *Lincoln Journal Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska, February 10, 2013.

³⁵ *Lincoln Journal* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska, December 5, 1979.

³⁶ Laging, Thomas, et al., *The Nebraska Capitol and Environs Plan*, Architectural College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1975.

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permissive height limits for future buildings and utility towers that might lessen the visual effectiveness of the Capitol as a major city landmark. Height restrictions on buildings were not mentioned in the 1970s J Street report, as they were in the South 15th Street mall development plan, but of course Solheim's high-rise building was already in place, and perhaps influenced by the fact that he was the chair of the project. Ironically, Sky Park Manor has become, over time, somewhat of a landmark itself in the Capitol skyline.

Solheim's Lincoln Buildings

Among Lincoln buildings to Solheim's credit, are Lincoln Air Force Base housing (1940s), Colonial Terrace Apartments (late 1940s), the city's first commercial airline terminal (1954), Military and Naval Science Building, UNL (1955), Pershing Elementary School (1955),³⁷ Nebraska Center for Continuing Education (1959- 1960), Nebraska Governor's Mansion (1958, NRHP 2008), Union Loan & Savings, Weaver Potato Chip Company, Clare McPhee Elementary School, Dawes Junior High School, Pound Junior High School, several houses in the Brownbilt neighborhood (NRHP 2012),³⁸ and many other Lincoln business and residential buildings.

Several of Solheim's Lincoln projects garnered significant attention and awards. The Nebraska Governor's Mansion, mentioned above is one, and the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education (NCCE) and nearby Colonial Terrace Apartments are two others.

Colonial Terrace Apartments, adjacent to East Campus, was built in the late 1940s, and earned Solheim recognition in 1950 by the National Association of Home Builders for neighborhood design development.³⁹ The apartment complex, located at 33rd and Starr Streets, was innovative in that it offered two and three-bedroom apartments in either a townhouse design or as one-level units. It also had a landscaped site that allowed green space for tenants. Townhouses featured a private basement, but residents in one-level units, shared basement space with the unit above or below. Colonial Terrace was built in close proximity to the University's Agricultural Campus (later called East Campus) with the idea that students, faculty and staff from that campus would have a convenient residence option. Solheim created the Colonial Terrace Corporation to manage the property and he served as president. In 1956,

³⁷ American Institute of Architects, comp. *American Architects Directory*. First Ed., New York: R.R. Bowker Co. 1956.

³⁸ "Brownbilt Residential Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Edward Zimmer and Stephanie Brady, 2012.

³⁹ Murphy David, R. and Edward F. Zimmer, comp. "Selmer Alfred Solheim (1912-1979), Architect." *Place Makers of Nebraska: The Architects*. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society. Draft accessed December

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the University of Nebraska bought Colonial Terrace to use as faculty housing.⁴⁰ The property is still owned by UNL, and inhabited by students as part of the Family Housing program.⁴¹

The Nebraska Center for Continuing Education (NCCE), located at 33rd and Holdrege Streets opened in 1960. The NCCE was built to host conferences, workshops, and seminars for Nebraskans from all across the state. Partially funded by the Kellogg Foundation, the building was sometimes called the Kellogg Center. The Center was an innovative project spearheaded by then UNL Chancellor Clifford Hardin, and given architectural form by Solheim. It is a striking, high-rise, modern building that, at the time of construction, was quite urban in design for its setting on the agricultural campus. It exhibits features that are suggestive of the International Style, but not nearly as pronounced as those of Sky Park Manor. The completion of the cosmopolitan-looking NCCE led the University to rename the campus East Campus. A nine-story wing contained the hotel and meeting rooms, and the low-rise wing was home to the youth programs. In 2003, the building was remodeled, and now houses the School of Natural Resources.⁴² Solheim and the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education were co-winners of an *Institutions Magazine* Interiors Award in 1962 for outstanding achievement in interior design. Solheim also received the Nebraska Architects Association Award for his work on the NCCE.⁴³

Ever the innovator, Solheim created a forward-thinking circular school design in 1957 that he felt would make elementary schools more efficient and pleasant. He submitted his unsolicited plans to the Nebraska State Education Association. The plans included two wheel-like structures, with interior courtyards, to house classrooms. The circular structures would be joined by a center foyer that would be backed by a fan-like building. These central components were to house the administrative offices, auditorium, cafeteria, and library. Solheim told education officials that this design would offer more natural light due to more window space, that the interior courtyards would offer the option for open air classes and play areas, and that traffic would move smoothly in the circular pattern as there would be no backtracking. It does not appear from research that plans were adopted by any school districts.⁴⁴

There is no doubt that Selmer Solheim's building designs and development enterprise had a beneficial impact upon the city of Lincoln.

⁴⁰ *The Lincoln Star* newspaper, February 5, March 3, March 15, 1956.

⁴¹ <http://housing.unl.edu/units>, accessed March 5, 2016.

⁴² <http://historicbuildings.unl.buildings>, accessed March 4, 2016.

⁴³ Murphy David, R. and Edward F. Zimmer, comp. "Selmer Alfred Solheim (1912-1979), Architect." *Place Makers of Nebraska: The Architects*. Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society. Draft accessed December, 2015.

⁴⁴ *Lincoln Star* newspaper. Lincoln, Nebraska, July 5, 1957, page 18.

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Carl Olson and Olson Construction Company

Solheim's partner in Sky Park Manor, Inc., and builder/contractor of the project, was successful contractor Carl W. Olson, the second-generation CEO of Olson Construction Company founded in Lincoln by his father in 1914. This firm was a commanding force in creating Lincoln's built environment. Olson Construction Company, was responsible for building more than 300 structures in the city, many of them Lincoln landmarks. They also built 44 hospitals throughout the United States.⁴⁵

Olson was a product of the Lincoln Public School system. An athlete, he went to Minnesota as a teenager to play collegiate basketball at Gustavus Adolphus. He returned to Nebraska to attend the University of Nebraska where he was a member of the 1929 graduating class. At his 1995 induction into the Nebraska Basketball Hall of Fame, the 90-year-old Olson was introduced as the oldest living Cornhusker basketball letterman.

Olson joined the family construction company as a young man, and became president in 1945 after his father died. Olson Construction was responsible for building and/or collaborating on the construction of Memorial Stadium, the Stuart Building (now University Towers), Miller and Paine Department Store, Gold and Company Department Store, First-Plymouth Congregational Church, Pershing Auditorium, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Love Library, Lincoln Benefit Life Building, the Ralph Mueller Carillon Tower, St. Elizabeth Community Health Center, Gateway Mall, and Southeast Community College.⁴⁶

Olson was recognized for his achievements by several entities. He received the University of Nebraska Distinguished Service Award in 1979 and the Nebraska Builders Award in 1983. A leader in the Lincoln community, Olson served on the board of First National Bank and Trust company, the Lincoln Telephone and Telegraph Company, and Security Mutual Life Insurance Company, among others. He also held leadership roles with the Lincoln Community Chest, the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, the Lincoln Country Club, the Lincoln Foundation, the University of Nebraska Foundation, and the University Club. Olson was an organizer of the Nebraska Club and served on its board. Olson served as president of the Nebraska Building Chapter, Associated General Contractors of America and for a time served as national chairman of that group's building division.⁴⁷

Conclusion

⁴⁵ *Lincoln Journal and Star* newspaper, Lincoln, Nebraska, June 22, 1996, B1.

⁴⁶ *Lincoln Journal Star* newspaper, June 22, 1996, B1.

⁴⁷ *Lincoln Journal Star* newspaper. June 22, 1996, B1. "Olson 1881- Lincoln, Nebraska," www.genealogy.com accessed January 14, 2016.

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In 1975, two-thirds interest in Sky Park Manor was sold to Lincoln businessman Johnny A. Johnsen. In 1973, Johnsen had sold control of several of his corporations, including Nebraska Book Company, that involved the nationwide buying and selling of college textbooks.⁴⁸ For a time, Solheim stayed on as resident manager. Not too long after the sale of Sky Park, Selmer Solheim died in December, 1979. He was 67 years old.⁴⁹

Johnsen's heirs now own and operate Sky Park. Carl Olson was apparently not involved in the apartment building at the time of the sale, and it appears that the remaining interest was held by a bank. The Lancaster County Register of Deeds shows the National Bank of Commerce involved in the Johnsen transaction as a seller of one-sixth of the property.⁵⁰

Sky Park Manor's current owners are Johnsen's grandsons. They plan to do necessary upgrading to mechanical systems, and repair and restore exterior components that have become compromised, with the intention to retain the architectural integrity of the building.

⁴⁸ *Lincoln Evening Journal* newspaper. Lincoln, Nebraska, April 3, 1975, page 22.

⁴⁹ *Lincoln Evening Journal* newspaper. Lincoln, Nebraska, December 5, 1979.

⁵⁰ *Lincoln Evening Journal* newspaper. Lincoln, Nebraska, April 3, 1975, page 22.

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9. Major Bibliographic References

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Lincoln Journal Star newspaper

Lincoln Star newspaper

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Lincoln Sunday Journal Star newspaper

Omaha World Herald newspaper

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www.genealogy.com, Olson, 1881, Lincoln, Nebraska, accessed January 14, 2016.

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 #
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other (Name of repository)
Berggren Architects

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): LC13:C08-367

10. Geographical Data

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- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property Sky Park Manor

City or Vicinity Lincoln County Lancaster State Nebraska

Photographer _____ Date Photographed _____

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.

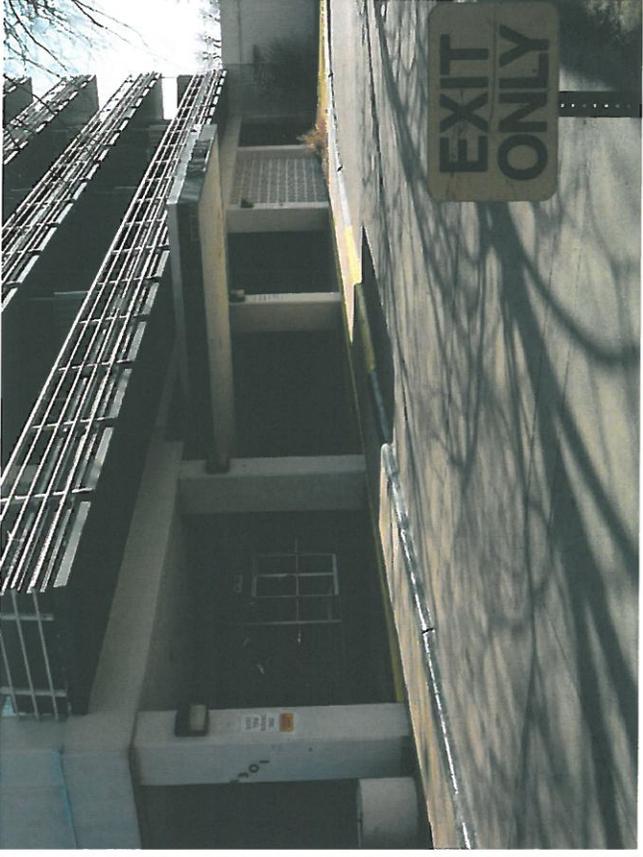
1. [Begin]

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

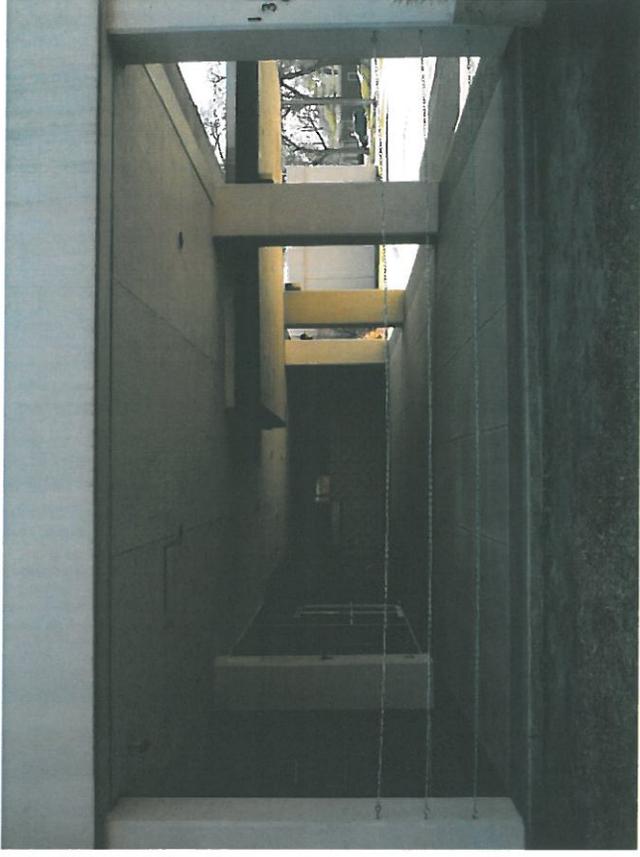
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



View from northwest



Main entrance, from NW



Entrance recess, from north



East façade, from ENE

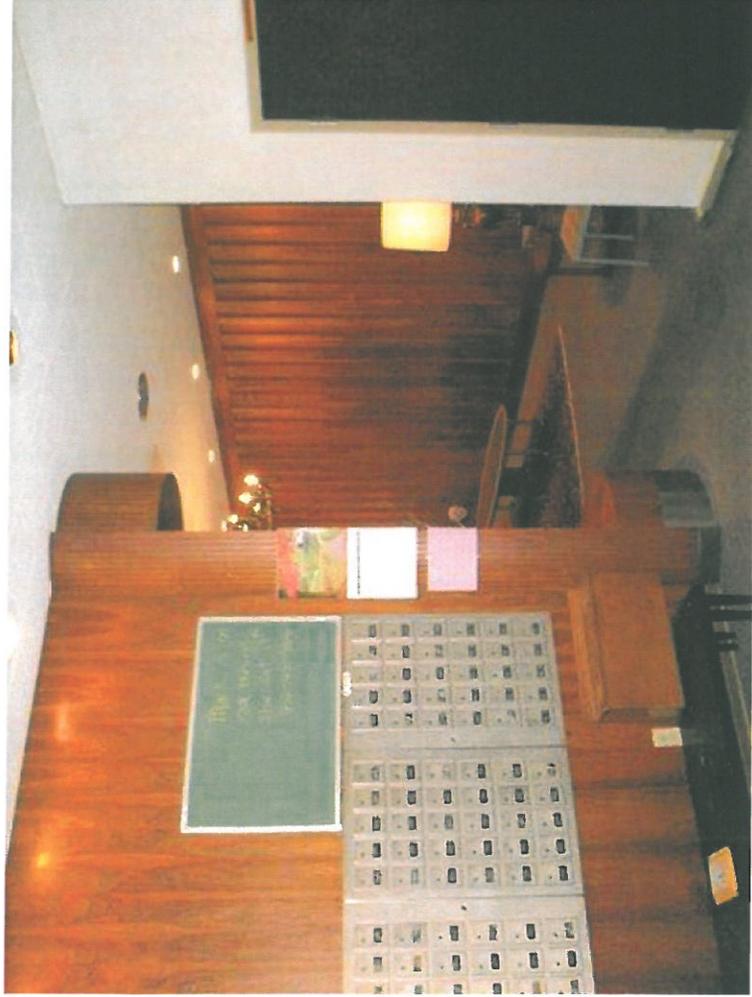


South and east
façades, from SE



South façade, from S

Mailbox lobby,
Ground floor



Elevator lobby,
looking north

Central corridor,
Upper floor





Cigar stand, main lobby



Living room, view west



Bedroom, from balcony