

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Victor F. Lawson House YMCA

other names/site number Lawson YMCA

Name of Multiple Property Listing _____

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

2. Location

street & number 30 West Chicago Ave. not for publication

city or town Chicago vicinity

state Illinois county Cook zip code 60610

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: X A B X C D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
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 or 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 the 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
		site
		structure
		object
1		Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Social: Civic
Domestic: Apartment Building/Hotel

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Social
Domestic: Apartment Building

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Art Deco
Skyscraper

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Brick

roof: Built-up Asphalt
other:

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes 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).

Summary Paragraph

The Victor F. Lawson House YMCA (or simply, Lawson YMCA), opened in 1931, was the main administrative headquarters for the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago for many years. Constructed as a large urban facility, it is a high-rise structure of twenty-four stories designed by Perkins, Chatten & Hammond in the stepped-back vertical Art Deco style of the 1930s. It is located at the northeast corner of West Chicago Avenue and Dearborn Street in a commercial area of Chicago's Near North Side, about five blocks north of the Chicago River and the Loop. The building dominates its corner lot, stretching for 150' along Chicago Avenue and 104' along Dearborn Street, to the property line. Chicago Avenue is a busy, wide thoroughfare. The plan of the Lawson YMCA is a rectangle, which sets back to a U shape from the fifth to the eighteenth floor where it steps back further to the tower. The main entrance faces south, with both south and west elevations treated as primary facades. The north elevation faces an alley and the east elevation faces a small open lot.¹

The two main façades, facing Chicago Avenue on the south and Dearborn Street on the west, are clad in limestone up to the fourth floor, with golden-tan brick above, and limestone and terra-cotta trim along with some cast iron spandrels. The facades are ornamented with chevrons, fluted pilasters, cornices, and other decorative accents. The east and north walls are faced in brick with no ornament except on the spandrels. The interior contains a number of original rooms with historic features. Most of the windows of the building are double hung, dating from 1998 when they replaced the original double-hung windows, in the same configuration. The building contains offices, lodging rooms and amenities for the YMCA. It received some (mostly interior) renovations in 1998, but retains excellent historic integrity in its location, setting, materials, design, construction and feeling.

Narrative Description

Exterior

South Facade

The twenty-four story building has both a sub-basement and basement and rests on a heavy reinforced concrete slab foundation that is supported on piles, with rock caissons under the north and east walls. The fire-proof construction consists of a steel frame with brick walls and lightweight aggregate concrete floor construction. The building is rectangular at the three stories of the base, then the center drops off to form a U shape from floors four through eighteen, with the central block on the south and wings on the east and west. The east and west wings drop off at the eighteenth floor set-back, leaving the tower with two additional setbacks on the east and west of the central block, and creating the verticality of an Art Deco skyscraper.

The south, main façade is five bays across and, while wider than the west elevation, still presents a vertical proportion. The south and west primary elevations are treated similarly, presenting a tri-partite arrangement of ornamented base, simpler vertical shaft and embellished top. In addition to the setbacks, verticality is expressed in the shaft with continuous projecting piers and recessed spandrels. From ground level, limestone faces most of

¹ Descriptive information is taken from original and existing building plans, historical documents and photographs, and personal investigation.

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the first three floors, above polished granite facing on the lower six feet. Golden-tan face brick clads the upper floors. The double-hung windows of the second and third floors are one-over one, while those of the upper floors are three vertical panes over one. The metal windows from 1998 replaced original metal windows.

The south façade base of the building consists of five wide bays. The modest entrance is centered, with a metal entry door assembly placed within a wide, fluted polished-marble surround in a contrasting dark color, topped by a simple canopy. Large, fixed plate-glass windows puncture the polished marble at street level. A flat limestone belt course articulates the first floor from the second. At the second and third floor levels, each bay has a set of three windows. The central windows of each set are between fluted columns that extend above the windows to frame a decorative panel with an angled top. The windows also rest on ornamented panels, and the spandrels on each side have a chevron design while the central spandrel features a stylized Y panel. Flanking the central bay above the entrance are large fluted pilasters, in stone, each with a flag pole. The third floor is taller than the others, and above each of the central windows is a flat-relief stylized figure carved in limestone. These tall panels each feature an athlete in a different position. Between the third and fourth floors is a belt course with a terra cotta triangular shape below each window.

The shaft of the building, floors four through eighteen, has tiers of 3/1 double-hung windows. The window jambs, heads and sills are terra cotta. The fenestration pattern on the south façade presents sets of three windows at the central, western and easternmost bays, in line with the lower floors. On the two tiers on either side of the center, however, there are sets of two windows, with a single window tier set apart closer to the central group. There are continuous projecting piers from the fourth to the nineteenth floor. In the central bay, the windows have cast iron spandrels with a pattern of chevrons framed by flutes. The spandrels of the single-window tiers on either side are of face brick, while the tiers of two windows on either side of that are dark, fluted terra cotta. The eastern and western bays have fluted stone spandrels, except at the eighteenth floor, where they are cast iron.

At the nineteenth floor the tower sets back to three façade bays, and the details change slightly. As a visually significant part of the building, the tower is treated with much the same high level of detail on all elevations. On the south elevation, the central bay of three tiers of windows has cast iron spandrels like the lower, shaft levels, but the projecting piers are emphasized with fluted terra cotta facing, and they terminate in cast iron arches at the twenty-third floor. The single tiers on either side have stone spandrels instead of terra cotta, and terminate at the top of the twenty-fourth floor with stone gable-shaped caps. The spandrels of the double-window tiers on either side of that change to cast iron from the terra cotta on the shaft, and terminate in terra cotta panels each with a large chevron design. Above the twenty-third floor is another setback, leaving only the central bay and flanking areas, which are solid walls above the single tiers below. The central bay has no windows, but has fluted stone piers that rise to the top of the building where they meet a stone parapet that is at the final setback.

West Façade

The western façade, like the southern, is symmetrical but because it is less wide it has a slightly different pattern of window tiers. The central part of the pattern consists of three tiers of sets of two windows each, framed on the shaft by tiers of three windows each, just as the south façade. The polished granite base of the west elevation is like that of the south, except for the entrance, which in this case is a simple storefront door as part of the window assembly in the second bay from the south. At the second and third floor levels, the fenestration pattern of the central bay is repeated, with cast iron spandrels with chevron designs. Above each third-floor window is a vertical fluted stone panel. The pattern and detail of the westernmost bay of the south façade is carried around onto the southernmost bay of the west elevation. This configuration is repeated on the

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northernmost bay, except that the windows at this location contain glass blocks, which are not original. The cast iron spandrels remain, flanking a central spandrel of stone with a stylized Y symbol.

On the building shaft, the central sets of tiers have terra cotta spandrels with chevron designs, while the flanking bays have fluted stone spandrels. Like the south façade, the windows on the corner bays of the eighteenth floor are arched, with fluted stone panels that extend up to the parapet of the setback. From the nineteenth floor, the silhouette of the building changes, with just the tower rising above on the southern block. The west elevations of the tower are like those of the south elevation, with a mix of terra cotta and cast iron spandrels.

East and North elevations

The east elevation faces a parking lot. The east wall of the building base goes to the property line, but above that only one bay of the southern block is flush with the property line, and these portions have no windows. The remainder of the east wall of the building shaft is set back one bay. It has tiers of regularly-spaced single windows. The brick walls have no other ornament. The north, rear of the building, exposes the open courtyard formed by the U shape above the building base. There is a utilitarian rear entrance door and number of windows at ground level, some of which have been bricked up. This condition also exists on some of the single windows at the second and third floor levels. On the shaft of the building, the elevations resemble that of the recessed east elevation, with regularly spaced single windows. On the north walls of the east and west wings are metal fire escapes that extend the full height. On the tower, as mentioned above, there is a higher level of detail, with terra cotta and cast iron spandrels.

Interior

Directly inside the south entrance is a vestibule, with an Art Deco grill on the east wall. The vestibule leads into the lobby, faced with travertine and containing a reception desk. Continuing inside to the north is the interior building core, which is centrally located in the building plan and rises up to the top. In the basement through to the fourth floor it contains a large foyer with a grand open stair and three passenger elevators. It is completely faced in travertine, with Art Deco wall plaques, cornices with gold trim and brass elevator doors and trim. The stair surface is terrazzo, with a stylized curved bronze balustrade. Behind a wall to the west of the grand foyer is a utility core with a set of stairs next to a large stack and another, more utilitarian passenger elevator. There are restrooms surrounding this utility core.

Continuing through a set of double doors in the north wall of the first floor foyer are offices that were originally a lounge. To the east of the core is another utility stair, service elevator, kitchen and janitors' closets. To the west of the core is a reception area and waiting room. The southeast corner of the first floor contains a dining room, while the area at the southwest is for guest relations and a senior center. To the northwest of the core are general offices and a mail room and in the northeast corner are a freight elevator and storage rooms.

The second and third floors contain a number of intact, significant rooms and decorative details. Entering the second floor to the south from the foyer is a long, wide hallway faced with original paneling with fluted pilasters and decorative Art Deco plaques. A cashier's booth faces the foyer. To the west is the large "Fireplace Room," or club lounge, with extant black marble fireplace, paneled walls, etched-glass doors and other details. Through that room to the southwest corner of the building is the library, also intact with similar details to the hallway and fireplace room. On the other side of the cashier, to the east, are a mail room and offices. On the third floor, above the second-floor lounge and library, is a series of historically themed rooms which remain remarkably intact. These consist of a Tudor-style room with exposed dark beams and half-timbered plaster walls; a log-cabin room with a rough stone fireplace and flagstone floors, and a Renaissance

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room with a bracketed-beam coffered ceiling, stone arched fireplace, hexagonal terra-cotta tiled floor, and Fleur-de-Lis shield in the arched transom.

Moreover, there is a beautiful small chapel, with tall, narrow Gothic stained-glass windows, stone walls and a pointed-arch ceiling. It is decorated with delicate stenciled panels between the exposed dark wood ribs and beams. At the corners are stone pilasters with capital/brackets that feature carved monk/scholars, which visually support the ceiling. Between the stained-glass windows is a small, simple altar below an intricate Art Deco panel that rises to the peak of the ceiling.

The remainder of the third floor plan is largely defined by the gymnasium at the northeast corner, and the mezzanine along the north side of the building core that was inserted in what was originally hand ball courts. There are presently offices and computer rooms in the mezzanine area. To the east of the building core is an area for health care that was a satellite of Northwestern Memorial Hospital, and the remainder of the floor is taken up with other offices and conference rooms. The fourth floor is transitional between offices and lodgings. The grand open stair and travertine foyer end at this floor. To the north of the core are general offices and training rooms, and at the northeast corner are offices, conference rooms and a lounge. In addition, there are eight lodging rooms on this floor, plus resident bathrooms, all arranged at the west and south portions, with a residents' lounge at the southeast corner. The fifth floor is still somewhat transitional in plan, with a small passenger elevator foyer as Stair H, just north of the corridor, becomes the main stair. A double-loaded corridor runs east to west, with a north-south corridor extending off it on the west end, forming an L shape.

Floors six through eighteen are typical for the building shaft. The U shaped floor plan has a bump out for the north part of the building core, and double-loaded corridors in each wing. There are about thirty-seven lodging rooms on each floor, approximately 11' x 10' each, with a combination of in-room and shared bathrooms. Floors nineteen through twenty-two, in the tower, are similar, with an east-west double-loaded corridor and a short north-south corridor through the core. There are eleven rooms on each of these smaller floors. The elevators stop on the twenty-first floor, so the rooms on twenty-two can only be reached by stair H, which continues up to the building roof. The twenty-third floor, where the plan sets back further, houses a fan room and the elevator machine room. The twenty-fourth floor houses a fan room, water storage tank, and an old radio room.

The grand open stair and foyer near the building entrance continue down to the basement. A few steps down to the south is a recreation room with dark paneled dado, a geometric-tiled floor and a tiled Art Deco fountain centered on its south wall. The back of the fountain is a tall vertical shape with set-backs, echoing the shape of the building, and crafted in geometric black, green and muted blue and red tiles. To the east of this room is a laundry, which was installed in the original barbershop of the building and retains original black glass from the barber stations, with mirrors and Art Deco lighting fixtures. The 60' x 25' swimming pool, no longer in use, is also in the basement. It is set in a natatorium with hexagonal-tiled walls of muted green and aqua, capped by a design of waves in gold and black. At intervals along the walls are tile designs – vertical set-back shapes in dark tones set between green chevron tiles. Adjacent to the pool are the locker rooms and pool maintenance facilities. The basement also housed the Lawson Family Center, no longer in use, along with the boiler room, a switch board room, transformers, and linen storage. The sub-basement contains storage rooms, maintenance workshops, and refuse rooms.

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Integrity

The Lawson YMCA retains the distinguishing characteristics of a large, urban YMCA building in its plan, and of the Art Deco skyscraper style in its vertical massing, scale, set-backs, materials, fenestration patterns, ornament and decorative motifs. It remains one of a handful of Art Deco towers in the city, and is the only one that was not designed for all or mostly commercial purposes. The building presents high artistic values and craftsmanship in its detailing and ornament, which exhibit elements characteristic of both the style and of the particular function of the building.

In the interior, the grand open stair hall and foyer remain, along with the second floor public spaces of hall, fireplace lounge and library. These spaces all have original finishes and decorative Art Deco grills and plaques. Also on the second floor are the historic themed rooms, which are virtually intact, and the extraordinary chapel. In the lower level basement, the recreation room with Art Deco fountain and the natatorium with swimming pool and tiled walls are extant. On the typical floors, many of the original corridors are extant, as are lodging rooms.

On the exterior, the alterations include replacement of most of the windows in 1998, with new metal windows in the original configuration. At the street level, some of the large storefront windows have been replaced, as has the entrance assembly, and a new entry door and storefront assembly was replaced on the west elevation. On the west façade, some of the lower level windows at the north end have been replaced with glass block, and some windows on the north, rear elevation, have been bricked up.

In the interior, the most major change was the creation of a mezzanine in the upper level of the third floor, where the hand ball courts were originally located. That area, at both levels, was built out as offices. Many of the offices and activity rooms in the building have been remodeled over the years to accommodate different functions. A number of minor interior modifications were made in 1998 to create more functional spaces.

With the exception of the alterations mentioned, the building retains a high degree of integrity of setting, materials, design and workmanship, representing its historic and architectural significance.

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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 grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Social History

Architecture

Period of Significance

1931 - 1966

Significant Dates

1931

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

N/A

Architect/Builder

Perkins, Chatten & Hammond, Architects

Frank Randall, Engineer

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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).

The Lawson House YMCA is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Social History, for its association with the evolution of the YMCA movement in Chicago. As a vital flagship of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, the building reflected the organization's expansion campaign in the 1920s to place modern, fully-equipped buildings with lodgings, athletic, social and educational facilities in every city neighborhood. It is also significant under Criterion C for Architecture as an important representative of the building type in which the YMCA carried out its mission, and as an Art Deco tower by noted architects Perkins, Chatten and Hammond that combined modern construction, styling and amenities with the needs of this important social organization.

Chicago was a focus of the country's transition from a primarily agrarian society to that of industrialized urban centers, which caused the city's rapid growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This growth resulted in poor, overcrowded housing and unsavory social conditions for the young men who were flocking into Chicago for employment. Young immigrants from western and southern Europe who poured into the city were often separated from their families and had little in their pockets. As a result, social crusaders looked for ways to help the immigrants and, in turn, the city. The YMCA became the primary organization to provide facilities within a religious and social context, to assist young men, and eventually women, to culturally assimilate, to learn English, to find jobs and to maintain a moral compass.

The 1920s were a period of great expansion for the YMCA, as it charted its course for the twentieth century. Lawson YMCA was conceived in 1929, and constructed in 1931 at the height of the Great Depression by many highly skilled craftsmen and artisans who had been unemployed. It was made possible by a bequest from prominent civic leader Victor F. Lawson, publisher of the Chicago Daily News. During his twenty-nine-year tenure, Lawson made many innovations in the newspaper business and created a foreign news service that became the Associated Press, for which he was president for some years. In early 1929 it was reported that the YMCA board would construct a new building, its largest and most modern, and name it in memory of Lawson. By the time the building was completed in 1931, the YMCA had become less exclusive in terms of religion and ethnic backgrounds, and the organization was renamed the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, bringing together its numerous branches, offices, hotel and educational facilities. In the 1930s, women were finally admitted as members and Lawson was the center of the new "Family Programming" effort. During World War II, Lawson focused on training young men for national defense and was a center of services and activity for soldiers and returning veterans. By the 1960s, there were 165,000 YMCA members in the city, in thirty-eight departments.² The Lawson YMCA represents all of the major movements of the Y during its period of significance.

The Lawson House YMCA is also significant and as a large, urban high rise-structure designed by the firm of Perkins, Chatten & Hammond in the stepped-back vertical Art Deco style of the 1930s. The building represents many of the characteristics of that relatively rare style, and is a complement to Chicago's collection of steel-framed skyscrapers. In addition to the tower, the building's verticality is emphasized by the use of projecting piers, recessed spandrels and series setbacks. Clad in limestone up to the fourth floor, with golden-tan brick above, the building is trimmed in terra cotta and cast iron, and ornamented with chevrons, fluted pilasters, and flat relief stone panels. In the interior, the building reflects the expansion of services of the YMCA to include

² "YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago Records 1853-1980," (Chicago History Museum Research Center, Collection description) Accessed June 16, 2016.

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more social activities, education, recreation, athletics, and vocational training. The inclusion of lounges, libraries, classrooms, gymnasiums, swimming pools and other facilities clearly illustrate the increased importance of these activities and the ongoing efforts to modernize the organization. There are number of architecturally significant original spaces, including the lounge, library, several themed rooms and chapel.

Perkins, Chatten & Hammond were a noted and prolific Chicago firm whose work represents a clear transition in both form and style from block buildings with classical ornament to the tall verticality of the Lawson YMCA. Prominent Chicago school architect Dwight Perkins in 1927 joined with Melvin C. Chatten and C. Herrick Hammond of the firm Chatten & Hammond to form Perkins, Chatten & Hammond. During their years together, from 1927 – 33, this experienced team of architects continued to design Chicago public schools, and in 1928 designed two significant YMCA buildings – Duncan Hall of the West Side YMCA and the vast Lake View YMCA. By 1929, they were able to transition to modernism and completed the design of two notable modern structures with Art Deco features – the Northwest Tower in Wicker Park and the Jones Armory on Chicago’s south side, before designing the Lawson YMCA.

The period of significance extends from 1931 when the building opened, to 1966, the fifty-year cut-off date for the National Register. The building has retained a high degree of integrity in its location, setting, design, materials and feeling to represent its role in the history of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago.

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

History

The YMCA movement had started in England in 1844, and soon spread to North America, as the mid-nineteenth century saw a wave of religious revivalism and political reform sweep the United States. As a part of this broad religious and social pattern, local Young Men’s Christian Associations (YMCA) began springing up in rapid succession, beginning in Boston in 1851. With a large percentage of a typical American city’s population comprised of young men, these local associations were being formed around the country largely in response to the corrupt and morally dangerous conditions to which they were being exposed. So popular was this concept and so great the need in American cities for such organizations that by 1854 forty-nine local associations had been formed nationally. The association offered full memberships with voting privileges only to men who were members of an evangelical church, although all men of "good moral character" could be elected associate members.³ Early work of the association included attending the sick and aiding young men in finding both jobs and respectable, clean boarding places.

Chicago's first YMCA was organized in 1853, but failed as a result of the cholera epidemic of the following year. In 1858, a group of Chicago business leaders and philanthropists—concerned about the welfare of many young men who were new to urban life—met to reorganize the YMCA of Chicago. Their initial aim was to "stimulate vital piety among young men resident in, or visiting this city or vicinity." The association, having gained both members and favorable publicity during its first year, soon decided to expand its programs and goals. By 1860, the YMCA of Chicago was one of 205 associations nationally, with 25,000 members. While originally formed as an interdenominational protestant evangelical group devoted to the spiritual and social needs of young white-color workers, the YMCA soon departed from that mission and took on more general

³ “YMCA Records, Chicago History Museum.

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work including distribution of relief to the poor.⁴

During the Civil War, the YMCA of Chicago conducted religious services and relief work at camps and hospitals, and began programs to aid the "worthy poor." Prominent Chicago businessmen such as John V. Farwell, Benjamin F. Jacobs, Edwin S. Wells, and Henry Weld Fuller were major contributors and served as presidents of the association in the 1860s. Cyrus Hall McCormick, Jr., provided large amounts of financial support in the form of gifts and loans.⁵ At this time, Chicago's YMCA was led by the nationally prominent evangelist Dwight Moody, who insisted that a religious emphasis be embodied in the buildings.

Chicago's first YMCA building, Farwell Hall, was constructed in 1867 and then rebuilt twice, in 1869 and again in 1874, after being destroyed by fire. At the time of its initial construction, it was considered the only YMCA building in the world equipped with a (very basic) gymnasium. Although evangelistic work was a continuing emphasis following the construction of Farwell Hall, YMCA programs in Chicago at this time also included music, literature, sports and general educational activities. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the organization continued to grow in size and scope, and it became an embodiment of nineteenth century ideals, particularly the belief that virtuous character and hard work would achieve material success.

In 1888 a group of Chicago's respected leading family members and philanthropists, including the McCormicks, Fields, and Armours, called on Loring Wilbur Messer from Boston to become the General Secretary of Chicago's YMCA. Throughout his thirty-five-year tenure Messer was committed to expanding the organization and constructing new buildings. Messer's most significant innovation was the application of what later became known as the "metropolitan plan" to Chicago. This plan permitted the association to establish, maintain, and provide general oversight to departments throughout the city while allowing them considerable scope for self-management.⁶ By 1900 the Chicago YMCA had grown to approximately 6,500 members enrolled in five general departments, along with several railroad branches and student associations.

Moreover, Messer revised the constitution to include a more specific statement of the Y's primary purpose regarding its program of physical, social, educational and religious activity, which allowed the departments to enlarge their programs in these areas. Unlike New York YMCAs, until this time women were also admitted to activities in Farwell Hall. However, Messer was most concerned with the moral fiber of young men, and the idea of shaping them into his vision of proper manhood. As author Paula Lupkin explains in her book *Manhood Factories*, the New Yorkers believed that the YMCA should be a place in which "principled manliness would be cultivated through contact with other men."⁷ Messer agreed, and from this time focused efforts on young men, so that women's memberships were discontinued for the next three decades. Theodore Roosevelt had coined the term "manhood factories" for YMCAs, as they were intended to produce healthy young men of manners, education and Christian morals.⁸

Messer and his board then turned their focus to planning of the most modern YMCA building to date. In 1893,

⁴ Emmett Dedmon, *Great Enterprises: 100 Years of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago*. (New York: Rand McNally, 1957) 242.

⁵ Dedmon, *Great Enterprises*, 243.

⁶ YMCA Records, Chicago History Museum.

⁷ Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010) 79.

⁸ Numerous authors have examined YMCAs as sites of gender and identity formation as identified by local mores, and navigating between different concepts of masculinity.

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construction began on the new fourteen story central department YMCA on LaSalle Street, which included a bowling alley, swimming pool and large gymnasium. By 1908 Chicago had twenty facilities of various types located throughout the city. When the Chicago YMCA celebrated its 50th anniversary that year and mounted a successful million-dollar fundraising campaign, it was reputed to be the foremost YMCA in the world in value of its properties and extent of its outreach. This was mainly due to the extraordinary commitment and generosity of Chicagoans to the cause.

YMCA lodgings at that time were open only to a few YMCA members for long-term rentals. In the 1910s, as the flow of immigrants to Chicago increased, Ys began to offer classes in English and citizenship for immigrants. The social centers were considered to be an environment that was religiously wholesome and elevating to the nearly 2,000 men and boys are enlisted in the night and day schools conducted in the buildings of the association. Among those served through these classes in Chicago were: “business men, those in technical and industrial occupations, young men preparing for entrance in particular vocations, those making up academic requirements for college or professional educations, those who want to augment their lower education, foreigners seeking a working knowledge of English, and those wanting intellectual culture and growth.”⁹ By 1923, the Chicago YMCA had a variety of neighborhood branch buildings to serve the needs of particular segments of society, including the Wabash YMCA for “colored men,” the Sears, Roebuck Y, and a number of Ys for railroad workers financed by the railroad companies.

Meanwhile, as demand grew for shorter-term lodgings, the substantial YMCA Hotel (S. Wabash, 1916, NR) was continuing to prove the need for its services. Often it was necessary to turn away more than a hundred young men per day because of a lack of space. To meet this increasing demand, the Board of Trustees voted to erect a 900-room addition to the Hotel, which was completed in 1927.¹⁰ Expansion programs in the neighborhood YMCA’s in the 1920s were largely successful in putting fully-equipped buildings with residences, gymnasiums and educational facilities in nearly every major city neighborhood. It was still a period of enormous growth in Chicago as thousands of men arrived yearly seeking economic wellbeing. Arriving from the countryside and small towns, they were easy prey to the corruptions of the large city. The increase in the number of physical properties in the 1920s did not divert the members of the Chicago Association from their primary concern with principles and ideals. It was during this period of great expansion that the YMCA—both on the local and national levels — was charting a new course to meet the needs of the twentieth century.

Although the Chicago YMCA did not escape the effects of the depression of the 1930s, it survived these hard times remarkably well, in part by establishing partnerships with other social service agencies. The YMCA residences suffered a considerable loss of income, often resulting in drastic salary cuts for staff. However, depreciation reserves, which had been established for buildings constructed through endowment funds, enabled the YMCA to maintain its buildings and to sustain most of its programs. In 1934 the Chicago YMCA greatly strengthened its financial base by joining the Community Fund. A deficit of over \$300,000 in 1932 was converted to a surplus of over \$6,000 by the close of 1934.¹¹

While the Great Depression had placed a strain on YMCA resources, new branches continued to be established. Membership gradually became less exclusive; in 1931, when Lawson YMCA was completed, the requirement for affiliation with an evangelical church was dropped. Just after World War II, a policy was enacted to encourage people of all faiths to practice the customs of their own religion. At the same time, the organization

⁹ Dedmon, *Great Enterprises*, 240.

¹⁰ Wm. MacRostie, “The YMCA Hotel, Chicago, IL” National Register of Historic Places application, National Park Service, 1989

¹¹ Dedmon, 243.

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was renamed the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, and Lawson YMCA became its headquarters.

Near North Side Area

The Lawson YMCA is located in Chicago's Near North Side, which extends roughly from the Chicago River north to Diversey Parkway at 2800 north. In the 1850s and 60s the area as a whole was a hodgepodge of breweries, shipyards, factories and immigrant slums, with a few fashionable homes. The Rush Street Bridge connected this area to the Loop business district as early as 1856, but it quickly became congested and crossing the river was a problem until 1920 when the Michigan Avenue Bridge opened. Chicago Avenue early became one of the important commercial strips outside the Loop. It has been an area of great contrasts.

Germans were the first ethnic group to settle in large numbers on the Near North Side. By the 1850s, however, large numbers of Irish and Swedes had settled there as well, and by the 1860s the Swedes were displacing many of the German residents.¹² They, like the Germans, established many institutions. In the eastern part of the district, in 1868 the Chicago Historical Society had built its first permanent home at the nearby corner of Dearborn and Ontario. During this same time, the area around Washington Square Park at Dearborn and Delaware Place, just north and east of Chicago Avenue, developed into a fashionable neighborhood populated mostly by American-born Protestants of English descent who built stately homes.

The Chicago Fire of October 8, 1871 burned down most of the Loop, including Farwell Hall YMCA, and the Near North Side from the river all the way up to Fullerton Avenue at 2400 north. The wealthy Chicagoans who stayed on the North Side built and rebuilt new brownstones and mansions a few blocks east of Dearborn Street and around the Washington Square Park district, which steadily expanded. LaSalle Street, two blocks west of Dearborn, was the boundary between the fashionable areas to the east and the more working-class neighborhoods to the west.¹³ On LaSalle just north of Chicago Avenue were examples of fine housing, many extant, mixed in with institutions that have also survived.

Throughout the nineteenth century this area around Dearborn Street contained a mix of residences, businesses, churches and other institutions. By the 1890s, Chicago Avenue was the main business district of the area, as well as the south boundary of "Swede Town." Beginning right at the turn of the century, however, Swedes were gradually displaced by Italians, and moved farther north.¹⁴

In the late nineteenth century Chicago's Gold Coast, to the north of Lawson YMCA, expanded to include more mansions and luxury apartment buildings. This building boom continued throughout the 1920s and transformed this section of the Near North Side into the city's most prominent residential district. Urban renewal of the Gold Coast and surrounding areas has kept the Chicago Avenue commercial corridor as a busy street. Along with the ongoing restoration of nineteenth century townhouses and the conversion of factories and commercial buildings into condominiums, the area has been infilled with new apartment buildings and townhouses.

Victor Freemont Lawson

¹² Dominic Pacyga and Ellen Skerrett, *Chicago: City of Neighborhoods*, (Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press, 1986) 37-41.

¹³ Harold M. Mayer and Richard C. Wade, *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973)152.

¹⁴ Pacyga and Skerrett, 40.

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Much of the YMCA building program in Chicago in the 1920s had been made possible by a bequest from Victor Freemont Lawson (1850-1925), publisher of the Chicago Daily News. He was born in Chicago of Norwegian immigrants who came to prosperity buying and selling real estate in Chicago during the mid-1800s. He attended the Phillips Academy at Andover, Massachusetts, with the intention of attending Harvard, but due to poor health was unable to continue his academic studies and returned to Chicago. After his father's death in 1872, he took over the Norwegian language newspaper called the *Skandinaven*. Another tenant in the same building as the *Skandinaven* was Melville E. Stone, who was about to launch an as yet untested one-cent evening newspaper, the *Chicago Daily News*. Stone's *Daily News* struggled financially and Lawson stepped in with capital and became publisher of the *Daily News* in 1876. Lawson headed the *Chicago Daily News* for the next twenty-nine years and made many innovations in the newspaper business that continue today including advancements in newspaper promotion, classified advertising, and syndication of news stories, serials, and comics. In addition, the *Daily News* employed some of the most notable writers and editors of the time, such as Henry Justin Smith and Ben Hecht.¹⁵

Lawson also created a pioneering foreign news service, with offices in London, Paris, Berlin and correspondents in Egypt, South Africa, and Japan. The service employed distinguished journalists to report on world affairs and was vital in providing information on such major events as the Spanish-American War, the Russo-Japanese war, and World War I during Lawson's tenure. He was president of the then newly formed Associated Press from 1894 – 1900 and continued on the board of directors until his death. He was active politically in endorsing local and national candidates, and was a member of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, taking significant part in writing the critical report, "The Negro in Chicago," following the race riots of 1919.¹⁶ He was a generous philanthropist in many areas of need.

Lawson had no official connection with the YMCA in his later years, in order not to compromise his editorial integrity. However, through his friend, John V. Farwell, Jr., Lawson continued to be interested in the YMCA and had been one of the donors of \$100,000 to the 50th Anniversary fund. He was to be even more generous in his bequests after his death. In his will he provided that the Chicago YMCA Association should receive \$100,000 plus one-fourth of his residuary estate. One computation placed the total value of this bequest at \$3,590,571 — the largest single benefaction in the history of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, up to that time.¹⁷

To honor the man who had made it possible for the YMCA to extend its services to so much of Chicago, the Board of Managers and the Board of Trustees voted to erect "a monumental building in honor of Victor F. Lawson." Farwell pointed out that despite Lawson's influence on the city and American journalism, the publisher had been of a retiring nature and had permitted no formal recognition of his place in the city's life during his years of service. A survey of the near North Side area, where Lawson had lived, disclosed there were 25,000 unmarried persons living in rooming houses in the area bounded by the Chicago River on the south and Lincoln Park on the north. The great majority of these were men, some of them students attending the professional schools at the downtown campus of Northwestern University.¹⁸

Building the Lawson YMCA

¹⁵ Charles Henry Dennis, *Victor Lawson: His Time and His Work*. 1935 (reprint Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1968) 20.

¹⁶ Introduction to "Inventory of the Victor Lawson Papers, ca 1860 – 1931," (Newberry Library Collection. mms.newberry.org/xm/xml_files/Lawson) Accessed June 23, 2016.

¹⁷ Dedmon, *Great Enterprises*, 245

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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On February 16, 1929 it was reported in the Chicago Daily News that “The YMCA of Chicago last night announced plans for the erection of a \$2,500,000 building in memory of the late Victor F. Lawson, publisher. The site chosen for the structure, to be known as the Victor Lawson Memorial Building, is the northeast corner of Chicago avenue and Dearborn street... The building will be erected with funds left to the Y.M.C.A. by Mr. Lawson.” The article goes on to announce that Perkins, Chatten & Hammond would be the architects for the new structure, and plans would be ready for bidding about July 1. The plans were being drawn for an eighteen-story structure to provide rooms for between 750 and 1,000 young men.

The Lawson YMCA was more elaborate than any other Y building that had been constructed in Chicago. As it was intended to appeal to young men with white-collar jobs or young professional men, its furnishings were more elaborate than those of the other department dormitory rooms or the YMCA Hotel. An original plan by the architects to use brick of increasingly lighter shades up to the top was abandoned early on for reasons of both cost and maintenance, but many other luxurious amenities were left in the plans. Early construction was difficult, as up to 1,413 piles were eventually required to support the concrete slab on which the building was constructed.¹⁹ Inside the building were to be a chapel, gymnasium, hand ball courts, club rooms, swimming pool, cafeteria, shooting range, barbershop, dry cleaner, auditorium and roof garden. Lawson's brother and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Iver Lawson, augmented the publisher's bequest with the gift of a Lawson Memorial Library of 5,000 volumes.²⁰ By the time the plans were finished, the structure would be twenty-five stories – and the tallest building in the Near North area.

On October 25, 1931, the Chicago Daily Tribune announced “\$2,750,000 Y Ready to Open Next Sunday.” It was described as “The largest, most modern (and probably the costliest to erect) of all the YMCAs in the world.” In the end, it was paid for by \$1 million from the Victor Lawson bequest, plus the remainder from other YMCA funds. The finished building offered 650 residence rooms, and “Each room is equipped with a centrally located radio speaker with wall switches giving a choice of five programs. Hot and cold running water (and sometimes showers) are neatly concealed in wall closets.”

A follow-up article on November 1, 1931, described the opening of the new building thusly, “At 3:00 this afternoon the main dedication exercises will be held with the unveiling of a portrait of Victor F. Lawson, the late publisher of the Chicago Daily News, by Mr. Lawson’s niece, Mrs. Clark M. Cavenee, who is also the wife of the chairman of the board of directors of the new department.” The dedication included speakers, prayer, and music. Among the speakers were John Farwell and William Francis, president of the Chicago YMCA.

Lawson YMCA 1931 – 1960s

The Great Depression had only underscored Chicago’s need for associations, like the Y, that aided the thousands of people left jobless and poverty stricken. In 1933, “Family Programming” was created, which allowed for the merging of the YMCA with the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the reinstatement of membership of women and girls at Chicago YMCAs. Some of the early family programs included mothers’ clubs, parenting and fitness classes, and many other family activities. In years to come, YMCAs across the United States would model their own programs after the Chicago Y’s “Family Programming.”²¹

¹⁹ Frank Randall, *History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago*, (Urbana, University of IL Press, 1949) 289

²⁰ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 25, 1930.

²¹ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 29, 1933.

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On December 31, 1934, with the country still in deep depression, the Chicago Metropolitan YMCA was able to report that, with help from the Chicago Community Fund plus improving economic conditions generally, the position of the Association had changed from an accumulated deficit of \$317,000 in 1932, to a surplus of \$6,318. While this was a meager surplus for a budget of more than \$6 million, it justified both the faith and judgment of the Board of Managers and Board of Trustees as they sought to deal with the problems of the Depression era. In the annual report for that year, it was reported that "Our problem has been threefold. First, to operate the Association without financial loss; second, to preserve the vigor and enthusiasm of the organization; and third, to protect programs from disintegration."²²

Educational programs that in the nineteenth century had emphasized trade and vocational skills, began in the twentieth century to also offer standard high school and college level work. In 1936 the Central YMCA College of Chicago was made a fully accredited member of the North Central Association as a four-year college. Then partly as a step in combating juvenile delinquency, educational programs were expanded further in the 1940s.²³ As Lawson YMCA thrived, in 1938 the total facilities of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago encompassed its Central Department and Central YMCA College in the building located at 19 South LaSalle Street (erected 1893); sixteen branch departments, three community departments, and the hotel. With the exception of the community departments, all of the facilities, building and equipment were owned by the Association.

In 1940, with war on the horizon, it was announced that "The Lawson YMCA Trade School will open Sept. 30 to train skilled workmen for industry and in fields important to national defense," in cooperation with other community organizations such as the Chicago Community Trust, Ford Motor Company, Studebaker Corporation, General Motors, Black & Decker and others."²⁴ But just as the YMCA had offered special services to soldiers in the Civil War and World War I, it provided for the needs of soldiers and their families during World War II, when the Lawson Y was filled with servicemen. YMCA facilities were open to men in uniform free or at reduced rates. Special recreational activities were planned by the Girls' Service Organization, and a program was developed to aid American prisoners of war and their next of kin.

Meanwhile, further attempts were being made to reach underprivileged boys on the near North Side through an outpost for boys established in 1944 by the Lawson YMCA. This program was designed to provide recreation for almost 1,200 boys who lived on a fringe of the downtown area with virtually no playground space. Support for the outpost was augmented by many of the business and civic organizations in the area.²⁵ In 1945, when the Chicago YMCA had 84,000 members and twenty-three departments, the Board of Managers approved an anti-discrimination policy in membership, restaurant patronage, residential accommodations, and participation in athletics. YMCA privileges were to be open to all races and religions without restriction, as it changed in response to the evolving ethnic and racial composition of the city's population. That same year, 1945, the Chicago YMCA's by-laws were finally amended to admit women as voting members of the association. After the war ended, information and counseling bureaus and grants of three months' free memberships were offered to help veterans make the transition to civilian life.²⁶

In the decade of the 1960s the Metropolitan YMCA of Chicago continued to offer its traditional programs of recreational and educational activities, serving 165,000 members through thirty-eight departments and operating twelve summer camps by 1963. Additionally, the YMCA became involved in a variety of programs, largely

²² YMCA Records, Chicago Historical Museum.

²³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 10, 1949

²⁴ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 21, 1940.

²⁵ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 13, 1952.

²⁶ Dedmon, *Great Enterprises*, 297.

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federally-funded, to provide basic education and vocational training for disadvantaged inner city youth. From 1960 to 1965, as part of the Chicago Area Project the Lawson YMCA provided "detached workers" to counsel those teenagers who were more likely to frequent the streets than the YMCA facilities. Another federally-funded program, J.O.B.S. (Job Opportunities through Better Skills) which began in January 1964, brought the YMCA together with the Chicago Boys Clubs and Chicago Youth Centers in cooperative efforts to offer 46-week training courses for high school drop-outs.

Architecture

YMCA Building Design

The styles and plans of YMCA buildings evolved over the years along with philosophical transformations, programmatic changes and architectural modifications brought about by advances in technology and prevailing tastes. The progression of the building type offers insights into society's perceptions of social values and identity. Facilities, floor plans and exterior design developed in response to these factors. YMCA buildings, as they began to appear on America's main streets following the Civil War, were usually a few stories tall and constructed of red brick with limestone trim. Architectural details were typically classical revival or some variation of Victorian, depending on the location and decade. Street level offered retail stores, with association facilities above and perhaps a few rooms to let.

In Chicago, the short-lived Farwell Hall from 1867, mentioned above, reflected the prevailing local notion as promulgated by Dwight Moody, that YMCA buildings should focus on religious activities. With its large auditorium, the hall was most known as a site for revival meetings. The five-story building with Mansard roof and gothic dormers contained ground floor retail spaces and rental offices that provided income. Like other YMCAs from the time, Farwell Hall did not include "dormitory" style rooms, but only rented out a small number of rooms. It had a library and a parlor – a typical feature at the time – which served as a reception area and was probably decorated in the popular Victorian fashion. The original Farwell Hall burned down a few months after its completion, and its replacement burned down in the Great Fire of 1871. Another was built on the site in 1874, touted as the first with a real gymnasium and dormitory rooms.

Chicago YMCA buildings were generally on the forefront of the programmatic and architectural advances. By 1893, when the Chicago YMCA began planning their new structure to reflect the most modern ideas of the organization, they no longer focused quite so much on religion. The program became more varied and complex, to include athletic facilities with large swimming pools and gymnasiums in place of revival halls. The Chicago Central YMCA building, constructed near the same location as the earlier Farwell Hall at LaSalle and Arcade Court in the Loop by architects Jenney & Mundie, was completed in 1894. It also echoed the notion, made popular by Farwell Hall, that urban YMCAs should include rentable office space in addition to retail, in order to produce income for the organization. This fourteen-story building was referred to as a fusion of commercial and public interests, "daring, original, and well-equipped," and "the crowning glory of the building movement of our associations."²⁷ The steel-framed skyscraper included 40,000 square feet of modern office space. Unlike the office spaces of the earlier Farwell buildings, which were rented primarily to ecclesiastical or other social improvement not-for-profit organizations, it was now considered wise to rent to any commercial concern.

By the turn of the century, however, there was a movement away from the commercial associations, with an emerging emphasis on the YMCA as a clubhouse and hotel, to entice more young men to the facility and to

²⁷ Lupkin, *Manhood Factories*, 112.

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provide them with safe lodgings. So while the athletic facilities remained and were augmented by popular social spaces, the retail and commercial spaces were replaced by dormitory-style rooms that were let out. This had the effect of both producing alternate income and furthering the mission of the organization. Following the construction of the “Big Y,” or Brooklyn Central YMCA in New York, in 1913, which encompassed an entire city block and offered over 400 rooms, the demand for rooms in Chicago became such that the YMCA Hotel was constructed downtown, completed in 1916. In other locations, commercial space was adapted to rooms. To emphasize the club-like feeling, the old parlors were replaced with lounges that were decorated like men’s clubs with wood beams, huge rustic fireplaces and oak and leather furniture. It became popular also to include a billiard room off the lounge, as billiards became a more morally acceptable pastime for young men.

A further programmatic development that affected the size and plans of YMCAs in the early twentieth century was the incorporation of facilities for boys aged fourteen to seventeen. It was felt that these facilities should be separated from those of the young men, so buildings plans provided for separate entrances and different kinds of activity rooms. Some of these were themed rooms, inspired by activities such as camping that were meant to be reminders of the character-building experience of frontier life. They were used for club activities and meeting rooms to prepare the boys for adult life.²⁸

The Lawson YMCA incorporated all of the evolved, modern ideas and contained the latest features of YMCA architecture. Many of these features are extant, such as retail spaces confined to the street level, with association administrative and activity rooms in the basement and on floors two through four. Beginning on the fourth floor and continuing to the twenty-second were over 600 dormitory rooms. The association rooms reflected all the latest ideas for a masculine club with the fireplace lounge, library, recreational and athletic spaces. It also had a division of spaces for men and boys, and featured themed rooms as activity rooms, like other urban YMCAs. Extant at the Lawson Y are a Tudor room, a Renaissance room and another designed to resemble a log cabin – one of the most popular themed rooms at the time. It has flagstone floors, hand-hewn log walls, stone fireplace, a timber roof and would have been “strewn with props of preindustrial masculinity” including appropriately rustic furnishings.²⁹

The YMCA took seriously its responsibility to construct buildings that were not only functional, but that contributed architecturally to their surrounding neighborhoods. But in the late nineteenth century across America professionally trained architects, eager to display their prestige educations, were often at odds with the financial constraints, programmatic needs and business-oriented culture of the YMCA. In the urban centers, leaders often had more financial resources at their disposal to construct buildings that were not only programmatically functional but also in the most modern styles. This was in part inspired by the City Beautiful Movement that had influenced business and civic organizations to construct buildings that would have an impressive visual impact. In both cases there were difficulties in merging all the facets of YMCA building construction. To resolve these problems, in the midst of a YMCA construction boom in 1910, national leaders hired Chicagoan Neil McMillan to lead a new planning division. As an architect who was also familiar with the workings of the YMCA, McMillan conducted research and collected information on past experience. Then, in 1915 at a convention of the International Committee, a new department was created called the Building Bureau. It began as an advisory group, but evolved a system whereby the technical and planning issues of construction were given to the accountant, engineers and efficiency experts, whereas the architect was responsible only for the artistic elements. Despite many differences of opinion and shifting responsibilities between the two

²⁸ Lupkin, *Manhood Factories*, 128.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

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divisions, the Building Bureau became widely used during the inter-war years.³⁰

Architects Perkins, Chatten and Hammond

The YMCA of Chicago continuously chose highly respected architects, many of whom had previous experience designing schools and other institutions. For the Lawson YMCA, the board of directors chose as architects the experienced and creative team of Perkins, Chatten and Hammond. In 1927 Dwight Perkins joined with Melvin C. Chatten and C. Herrick Hammond of the firm Chatten & Hammond (1907-27) to form Perkins, Chatten & Hammond. During their years together, from 1927 – 33, they were responsible for the design of a number of YMCA facilities as well as buildings that combined modern Art Deco massing and design with Prairie school features and details. The senior architect of the firm, Dwight H. Perkins (1867-1941) was born in Memphis, Tennessee but raised in Chicago. With the help of a family friend, he attended MIT as an architecture student, graduating in 1887. After a year there, where he briefly worked in the office of Henry Hobson Richardson, he returned to Chicago where he secured a position with Burnham & Root where he worked for five years, and was given the responsibility of running the office after John Wellborn Root's death when Daniel H. Burnham was deeply involved in preparations for the World's Columbian Exposition.³¹ After the exposition, Perkins embarked upon his own practice with the commission to design a large office building for the Steinway Piano Company. He occupied one of the upper floors of Steinway Hall, and soon several other young architects, such as Robert and Allen Pond, Robert Spencer, Walter Burley Griffin, and Marion Mahoney joined him there. This became a gathering place for what was to become the Chicago Architectural Club, a group which made important contributions to the development of the Prairie style of architecture. Here Perkins developed his Prairie-influenced design aesthetic.³²

In 1905, Perkins formed a partnership with John L. Hamilton, who had recently resigned as a Board of Education draftsman. Perkins and Hamilton added a third partner, William K. Fellows in 1911. The firm practiced together until 1927, designing many Prairie style buildings. From 1905-10 Perkins was the Chief Architect for the Chicago Board of Education, where he brought his creative skills and aesthetic to the design of forty public schools. His extant Chicago schools include: Bernhard Moos (1711 N. California Ave, 1910); Stephen Hayt (1907), others such as Graeme Stewart, Cleveland, Pullman, Jahn, Tilton, Trumbull, and Bowen as well as the most prominent, Carl Schurz High School (3601 N. Milwaukee Ave, 1908-1910), cited by the American Institute of Architects as an "important example of early twentieth century architecture, utilizing elements of both the Chicago and Prairie Schools of Architecture."³³ In his school designs, Perkins created earth-toned brick buildings that emphasized geometric planes and had minimalistic, Prairie-style terra cotta details.

Perkins also brought his sense of humanity and progressive spirit to the design of school architecture, instituting features to make schools safer and more comfortable. Following his stint as Chief Architect for the schools, the firm remained busy designing settlement houses, park buildings, and private residences. As an open space advocate, Perkins was appointed as a member of the Special Park Commission, where he and his friend and colleague Jens Jensen developed the original plans for the Cook County Forest Preserve system. Perkins played an important role in Chicago's Playground Movement and focused on the open spaces around schools, recommending larger setbacks, landscape improvements, and more playgrounds. He also co-wrote the 1905 Metropolitan Parks Report that ignited the forest preserve campaign. His plans were far-reaching, including

³⁰ Ibid, 158.

³¹ Henry Withey and Elise Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1956, Second Ed. 1970) 468.

³² Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, *The Chicago Architectural Club: Prelude to the Modern*, (NY: Monacelli Press, 2005) 210

³³ Prairiestyles.com/Perkins. Accessed June 23, 2016.

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boulevards, parks, beaches, and forests throughout the city and suburban Cook County. Many of these ideas were incorporated into the 1909 Daniel Burnham Plan of Chicago. Perkins continued to sit on the Park District and Forest Preserve boards and in 1930 he became a consultant for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition.

In 1927, the firm of Perkins, Fellows & Hamilton was dissolved and Perkins joined with the firm of Chatten & Hammond (1907-1927) to form Perkins, Chatten & Hammond. Melville Clarke Chatten (1873-1957) was from Quincy, Illinois. He graduated in architecture from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana in 1896, and then worked for the architectural firm of Frost & Granger in Chicago. In 1905 he continued his studies in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts for a year before taking on Charles Hammond as a partner to start the firm of Chatten & Hammond in 1907. Younger partner Charles Herrick Hammond (1882-1969) was born in New York, and graduated in 1904 from the Armour Institute of Technology (now the Illinois Institute of Technology) in Chicago and then attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he and Chatten probably began a friendship, as they established their partnership shortly after both returned to Chicago.³⁴

Buildings designed by the firm of Chatten & Hammond include both residences and manufacturing buildings such as the Thomson & Taylor Spice Co. Building at 500 W. Cermak Rd. (1911; a contributing building in the Cermak Road Bridge Chicago Landmark District), and other factories in this near south side manufacturing corridor including the Pure Carbonic Company Building (now demolished). They likewise designed the Columbus Park Refectory (500 S. Central Ave, 1922, NR), and the gymnasium wing of the Kenwood United Church of Christ (1924). During the time Lawson YMCA was designed and constructed, Hammond served as president of the American Institute of Architects (1928 – 30) and was concurrently Supervising Architect for the State of Illinois (1929 – 40).

This team of architects combined Perkins's vast experience and interest in civic-minded and humanitarian architecture with Chatten's and Hammond's experience with utilitarian structures. In 1928 they designed two significant YMCA buildings, so they were familiar with YMCA programmatic needs and development methods with the Building Bureau. Duncan Hall is a handsome classical revival-style building, the largest and most imposing of the West Side YMCA complex; and the Lake View YMCA (3333 N. Marshfield) is a large, five-story red brick and limestone classical-revival building. Despite these commissions and their Beaux Arte backgrounds, the three architects had all been interested in the Prairie School precepts and in the modern Art Deco, as a form that was appropriate for taller structures.

By 1929, they had completed the design of two notable modern structures with Art Deco features. The first of these was the General Richard L. Jones Armory (Cottage Grove, 1929) which is not a tall building but has many vertical elements and flat, geometric decoration rendered in simple lines and planes. It displays forty-eight flat-relief carved figures in the theme of fighting men through the ages, including fifteen-foot high incised panels of symbolic figures on either side of the arched entranceway. Another important commission was the Northwest Tower (1929, 1608 N. Milwaukee Ave, contributing structure within Wicker Park NR Historic District, and within Milwaukee Avenue Historic District designated by the Chicago Commission on Landmarks, 2007). Popularly known as the Coyote Building, the twelve-story, flat-iron art deco building was one of the first speculative concrete-frame office buildings constructed outside of downtown Chicago. The vertical silhouette is topped with a prominent, pointed tower, and it has the continuous projecting piers and recessed windows with ornamented spandrels that also characterize the Lawson YMCA building. Lawson YMCA was their first opportunity to design an Art Deco tower in downtown Chicago, and working with the Building Bureau they

³⁴ Hammond, Charles Herrick, Papers, 1894 – 1963, (digital.libraries.saic.edu/cdm/ref/collection/findingaids/id/13539, accessed June 23, 2016)

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were able to realize it

The architectural team of Perkins, Chatten and Hammond was short lived. In 1933, Hammond left the partnership and joined with Hubert Burnham to form Burnham & Hammond (1933-51). Together with Burnham, he designed the Belgian, Dutch, and Mexican villages for the 1933 Century of Progress exposition in Chicago. In 1939, Hammond designed the Illinois Buildings at the Golden Gate International Exposition and the 1939 New York World's Fair. Then in 1934, Chatten left the firm to go on his own, although he would continue to work with Perkins on school architecture.³⁵ By 1935, the ailing Perkins withdrew from practice, but he remained active in civic affairs, serving on the City Planning Commission of Chicago and Municipal Art Commission, among others.

Lawson YMCA Architectural Style

The Lawson YMCA is an excellent merging of Perkins, Chatten and Hammond's Chicago and Prairie School backgrounds with Art Deco, as adapted to a specific purpose but having similarities to tall commercial buildings and hotels. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, some architects, including Dwight Perkins, began to explore a modern style emancipated from tradition and consistent with the new structural materials and utilitarian demands. The tall commercial building was the outstanding contribution of American, and especially Chicago, architects in the later part of the nineteenth century. It emerged following the technical developments that arose prior to 1880, including the use of metal frames to replace masonry bearing walls; the introduction of elevators; methods for fireproofing metal structural members; and the development of effective pier foundations. Thus the early architects of what became known as the Chicago School were able to develop the modern office and industrial buildings. These buildings became typically characterized by cellular grid elevations with wide three-part Chicago windows set between continuous piers and simple spandrels, with careful proportions, clean-cut lines and craftsmanship that were key to the harmony of a functional façade.

The evolution of the skyscraper in Chicago in the early twentieth century was a product of urban environment, advances in building technology, increased demand for office space, and changes in zoning regulation. Commercial style, as it applies to commercial architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was primarily a result of the requirements of commerce and business principles. Usually calculated for high floor loads, the structural systems are often column and beam framing, which create the characteristic articulated cellular wall. The facades tend to be symmetrical, with often a somewhat formal tri-partite treatment with ornament at the base and top stories and simpler treatment on the shaft. Variations in commercial structures are usually derived from the different styles of brickwork, changes in the width treatment of piers and spandrels, and the ornament, in addition to the size and functional requirements.

In Chicago commercial buildings were also often imbued with the spirit of the Prairie School, which referred to that group of architects such as those in the Chicago Architectural Club, who shared the common ideal of producing original architecture. It was a uniquely American style in both its manifestations and its point of view, by exalting both natural materials and the machine, and honored the abstract pattern of structure itself rather than historical forms or ornamentation.

The vertical lines of these commercial style, or Chicago school, buildings adapted very easily to the verticality of Art Deco. By the late 1920s, many architects had begun to move toward an even more simplified, abstracted design meant to reflect the modern age in which they were living, and one manifestation of this move toward

³⁵ Chicago Daily News, Jan. 7, 1934

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modernism was the Art Deco style. The term Art Deco derives from the *Exposition Des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, held in 1925 in Paris. The Exposition marked the coming together of several progressive design schools from Europe and the United States, including Art Nouveau, the Glasgow School, the Viennese Secession, and the Prairie School.

When applied to architecture in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, Art Deco was given another dimension. New zoning laws requiring set-backs above a certain level inspired architects in Chicago and elsewhere to move toward more modern, simplified forms, which, when combined with Art Deco design tenets produced the Art Deco skyscraper. Characteristics of the Art Deco skyscraper include an emphasis on verticality, craftsmanship and materials, with ornamentation given prominence at the base and top of the building between a more simplified shaft. Verticality in these new skyscrapers was emphasized through the use of projecting piers and recessed spandrels, along with deep channels rising through sections of the buildings. Materials used on the exterior tended to be smooth and flat, with a minimum of ornamentation. Decoration on the exterior tended to be stylized, low relief and non-historical. The visual impact of the Art Deco skyscraper exterior derived from the texture and color of the materials, and the use of setbacks and dramatic exterior lighting. The relative simplicity of the exterior of the Art Deco skyscraper often belied the extravagance of its interior, especially in the public spaces. Lobbies and entrances tended to be lavishly and dramatically decorated, using the most luxurious materials.

The Lawson YMCA building exhibits many of the typical characteristics of the Art Deco skyscraper. Most dominant is its verticality, emphasized with continuous piers between recessed windows and spandrels, and setbacks which draw the eye upward toward the tower which is located at the front façade of the building to underscore its full height. The variations of materials and use of both dark and light color in the spandrels further highlight the verticality and add interest, along with changes in the depth and treatment of the piers. The symmetry of the design presents a geometry that is accentuated by the tri-partite treatment, with emphasis on art deco ornament at the base and top of the building. However, geometric shapes, including chevrons, decorate the building at all levels, and can be found on the belt courses and window heads as well as on the spandrels. Of particular note are the tall stylized low-relief carved figurative panels above the entry on the façade.

Excellent art deco craftsmanship is also evident in the interior, with the lavish travertine grand open stair and elevator foyers and the many abstract art deco grills and plaques found throughout the building. Of special significance is the second floor fireplace lounge and library, plus the tiled fountain and pool surround in the basement.

The YMCA's carefully considered design, construction technology, materials and details exemplify the trend for skyscrapers of the time to combine the best of art and technology. The combination of materials and artistry well represents its various early twentieth century derivations.

Later History

In the 1980s, the near north side gentrified, and the Lawson YMCA suffered from deferred maintenance as it needed new plumbing, electricity, painting and masonry repair. By 1988, 116 of 595 lodging rooms were out of service, as the rents generated by residents were not enough to pay for basic maintenance. Still, it has remained the largest single-room-occupancy supportive housing facility in the Midwest, providing housing and wrap-around social services for extremely low-income and/or formerly homeless men and women. The Chicago Metropolitan YMCA faced tough decisions for years, as they did not want to evict or relocate tenants or reduce

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the programs. A complete overhaul was not possible, as the requisite money could not be raised; traditional financing was not possible as income did not support a loan; and private financing sources did not come through. In 1997 funds were raised to perform some needed upgrades, but not enough to modernize the electrical and plumbing systems, bring everything up to current building codes and restore significant features.

Finally, in 2013 the YMCA successfully sold the building for a nominal sum to a developer who has raised the needed capital to completely rehab the building and its systems to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The work includes cleaning, repair and restoration of the exterior, including rehab of the ground floor storefronts and entries. In the interior, significant features including stair hall/elevator foyers, second floor lounge, library, chapel and themed offices will be restored. The residence rooms will be made slightly larger and will have private baths, and many current offices spaces will be converted to apartments. It is planned that work will be accomplished in such a way that the current residents will remain in the building or be only temporarily situated in nearby lodgings. The building will remain a residence for low and extremely low-income renters.

Comparable YMCA Buildings in Chicago

The Lawson YMCA building represents a Chicago Art Deco skyscraper as adapted to the purposes of this charitable organization. Other Art Deco towers in the city are commercial, whereas the specific purpose of the Lawson YMCA lent a set of explicit parameters to the design. The resulting building is a unique representative of its important history. The building is rated "Orange," the second-highest category of significance, by the Chicago Historic Resources Survey, for its favorable comparison to other Near North and Art Deco buildings.

Within the work of the firm of Perkins, Chatten, & Hammond, the Lawson YMCA building remains their most significant commission, as it is the most complete expression of their combined talents to design a modern, high-rise structure in the new Art Deco style. The Northwest Tower, mentioned above, has many of the same exterior features but is a block-and-tower commercial structure rather than a stepped-back, fully formed Art Deco tower. In the Lawson YMCA building, Dwight Perkins was also able to bring his design ethos together with his life-long humanitarian concerns. With its extensive range of up-to-date facilities and amenities it was most reflective of the Chicago YMCA's purposes and goals at the time, and remains significant to the organization.

Many YMCA and numerous YWCA buildings were built throughout the city but relatively few of them remain and of those, most have been considerably altered. Those that have been demolished include the original Hyde Park YMCA (53rd and Dorchester, 1907); and the first YWCA Residence (830 S. Michigan, 1895). The most important of the extant buildings, (only one of which remains as a YMCA facility), are:

The West Side YMCA/YWCA Complex, which consists of five buildings that were completed in stages between 1907 and 1931 at the southeast corner of Ashland and Monroe streets. The buildings, which range in height from three and a half to six stories, are all faced with red brick and have limestone and/or terra cotta trim, offering a fairly uniform appearance. The exteriors have retained good integrity, with some slight alterations in openings. The interiors retain some original features, as noted, and much of the original basic layouts. Of the five buildings, the largest and most detailed is Duncan Hall, designed by Perkins, Chatten & Hammond in 1928. In 1976, the West Side YMCA closed and the complex became the Salvation Army's Harbor Light Center. In October, 2015, the Salvation Army moved out and the property was purchased for development as residential apartments. The Lake View YMCA (Perkins, Chatten & Hammond, 1928) mentioned above, remains in fair condition but in need of upgrading.

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The Central YMCA building (19 S. LaSalle St., 1893; significant in the West Loop – LaSalle Street NR Historic District), was built on the site of and as a replacement for Farwell Hall, the original headquarters of the YMCA in Chicago, and also served that purpose for many years. Designed by William LeBaron Jenney, this twelve-story building was expanded to sixteen stories with the removal of the original roof. It is an early Chicago School façade, with Romanesque stonework. It now serves as a professional office building.

The Wabash Avenue YMCA (3763 S. Wabash, 1913; significant in the Bronzeville NR Historic District, 1986). This building was a center for the south side department. It was initiated by and financed in part by Julius Rosenwald, and focused on providing YMCA services for the African-American community. Designed by Robert C. Berlin, it is four-and-a-half stories on a raised basement, in red brick with limestone trim and Prairie-style detail. An addition was made to the rear in 1945. It was closed in 1970, but reopened in 2000 with apartments after a rehabilitation and remains in good condition.

The YMCA Hotel (820 – 828 S. Wabash, 1916 & 1926); NR 1989) is a behemoth building of twenty stories, which provided over 1,800 rooms for transient young men. This was the first of its kind in the nation, built as a separate building for lodgings rather than adding on to an existing building or incorporating lodging rooms into an existing plan. It was designed by Robert C. Berlin in association with James Gamble Rogers. A large addition was made ten years later. The restrained Renaissance Revival façade is faced with grey tapestry brick and ornamented with terra cotta decorative details. The hotel closed in 1979 and the building was rehabbed and converted to private apartments in 1985. The exterior is mostly intact, though the first and second floors have been altered.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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“YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago Records 1853 – 1980,” Chicago History Museum Research Center (Accessed from chsmedia.org, June 16, 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: Chicago History Museum Library

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned)

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10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	<u>41°53'48.85"N</u> Latitude	<u>87°37'46.00"W</u> Longitude	3	_____ Latitude	_____ Longitude
2	_____ Latitude	_____ Longitude	4	_____ Latitude	_____ Longitude

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

That part of lots 12 to 15, both inclusive and all of the vacated public alley, lying north of and adjoining lots 12 to 15, both inclusive in assessor's division in block 1 in Bushnell's addition to Chicago in Section 4, Township 39 north, range 14, east of the third principal meridian, described as follows:

Beginning at the southwest corner of said lot 15; thence north along the west line of said lot 15 to the north line of the aforesaid vacated public alley; thence east along the north line of the vacated public alley, a distance of 154.10 feet; thence south parallel with the west line of said lot 15, a distance of 31.20 feet; thence west parallel with the north line of the aforesaid vacated public alley, a distance of 14.88 feet, more or less to a point 2.07 feet east of the west line of said lot 12, being the east line of a 23-story brick building; thence south along said line of said lot 12; thence west along the south line of said lots 12 to 15, a distance of 139.08 feet, more or less to the point of beginning, all in Cook County, Illinois.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The above described lot constitutes the property historically associated with the Lawson YMCA building.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Baldwin Burian date June, 2016
organization MacRostie Historic Advisors telephone 312.515.9170
street & number 60 E Monroe St, #2402 email sbburian@gmail.com
city or town Chicago state IL zip code 60603

Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
Name of Property

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **GIS Location Map (Google Earth or BING)**
- **Local Location Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Include for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
Name of Property

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, 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: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
City or Vicinity: Chicago
County: Cook **State:** IL
Photographer: Susan Burian; John Cramer
Date Photographed: June 8, 2016

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

- Photo 1 of 17:** West and south elevations, looking northeast
- Photo 2 of 17:** South elevation, looking northwest
- Photo 3 of 17:** South elevation entrance detail, looking north
- Photo 4 of 17:** East and north elevations, looking southwest
- Photo 5 of 17:** North elevation, looking southeast
- Photo 6 of 17:** First floor entrance lobby, looking east
- Photo 7 of 17:** First floor elevator lobby, looking northeast
- Photo 8 of 17:** Main stair, looking east toward first floor elevator lobby
- Photo 9 of 17:** Basement natatorium, looking southwest
- Photo 10 of 17:** Basement fountain detail, looking south
- Photo 11 of 17:** Second floor lounge, looking west
- Photo 12 of 17:** Second floor library, looking northeast
- Photo 13 of 17:** Second floor corridor, looking east
- Photo 14 of 17:** Third floor log cabin room, looking west
- Photo 15 of 17:** Third floor chapel, looking south
- Photo 16 of 17:** Typical upper floor corridor
- Photo 17 of 17:** Typical upper floor room

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Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
30 W. Chicago Avenue
Chicago
Cook County, IL

41°53'48.85"N
87°37'46.00"W

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.

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List of Figures

(Resize, compact, and paste images of maps and historic documents in this section. Place captions, with figure numbers above each image. Orient maps so that north is at the top of the page, all document should be inserted with the top toward the top of the page.

Figure 1: Current map, showing the location of the Victor F. Lawson House YMCA within the context of Chicago

Figure 2: Original site plan, 1930

Figure 3: Original first floor plan, 1930

Figure 4: Original second floor plan, 1930

Figure 5: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA under construction, January 24, 1931

Figure 6: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA after completion, late 1931

Figure 7: Historic post card (date unknown)

Figure 8: Historic post card (date unknown)

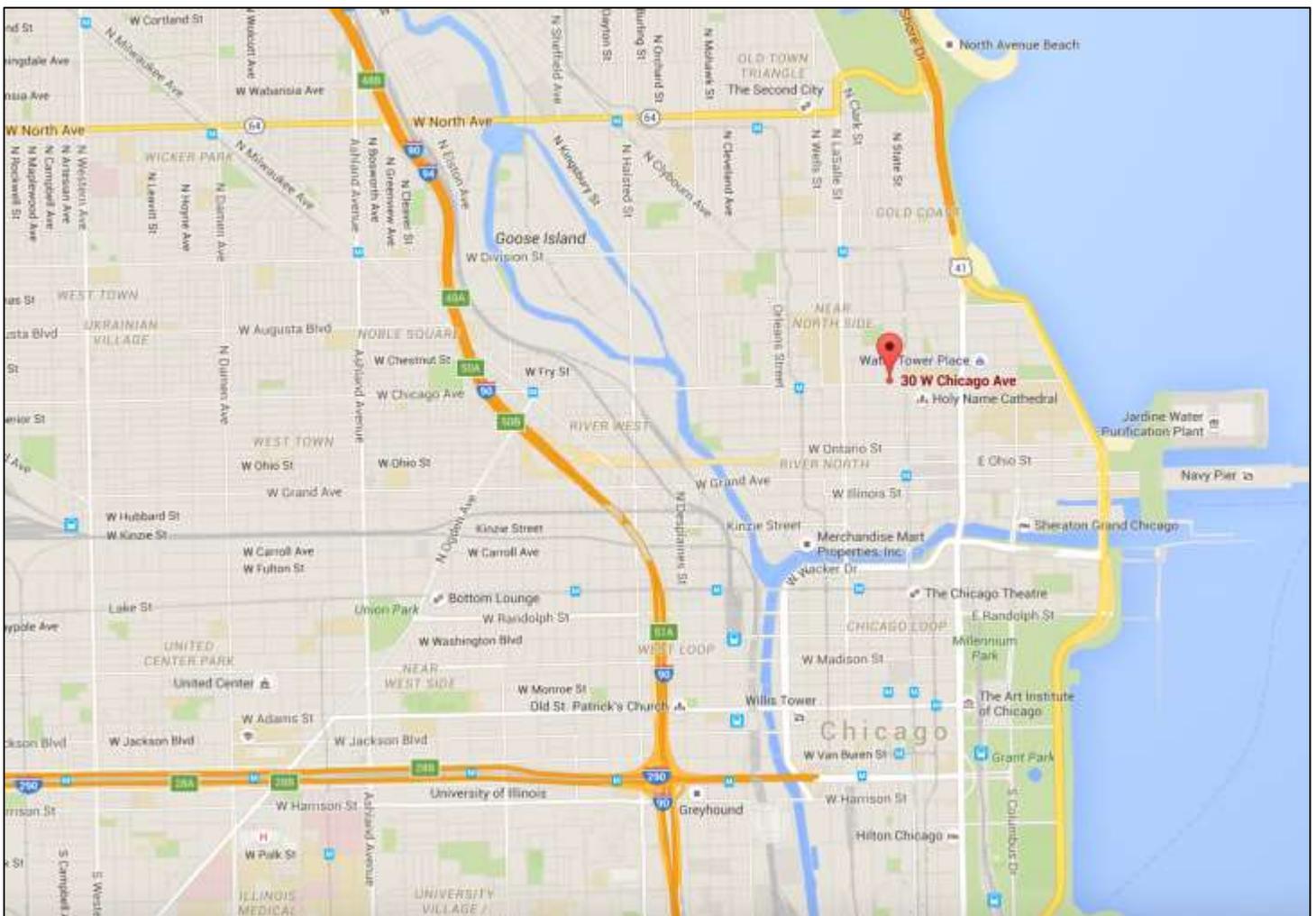


Figure 1: Current map, showing the location of the Victor F. Lawson House YMCA within the context of Chicago

Property name: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
Illinois, County: Cook

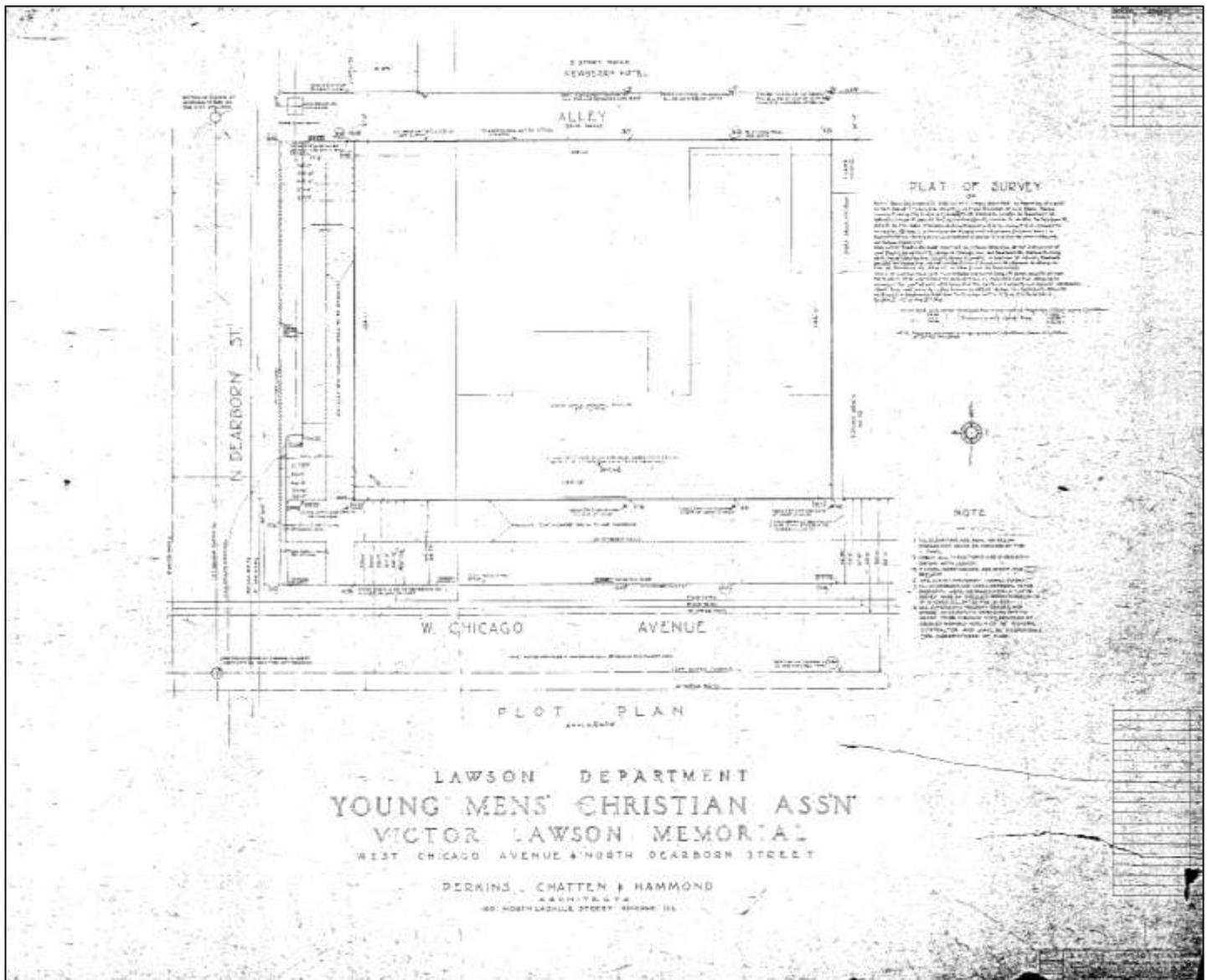


Figure 2: Original site plan, 1930

Property name: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
Illinois, County: Cook

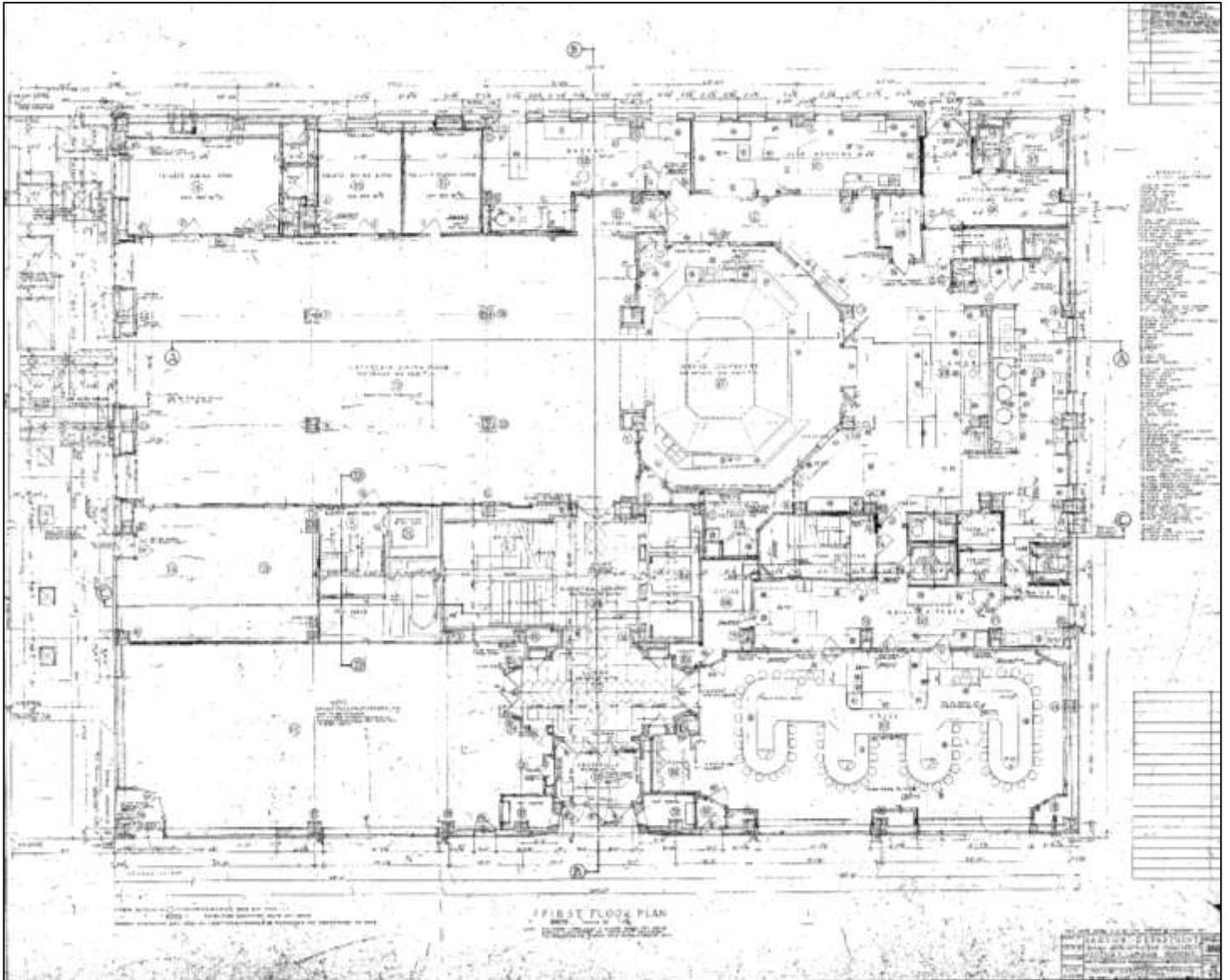


Figure 3: Original first floor plan, 1930

Property name: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
Illinois, County: Cook

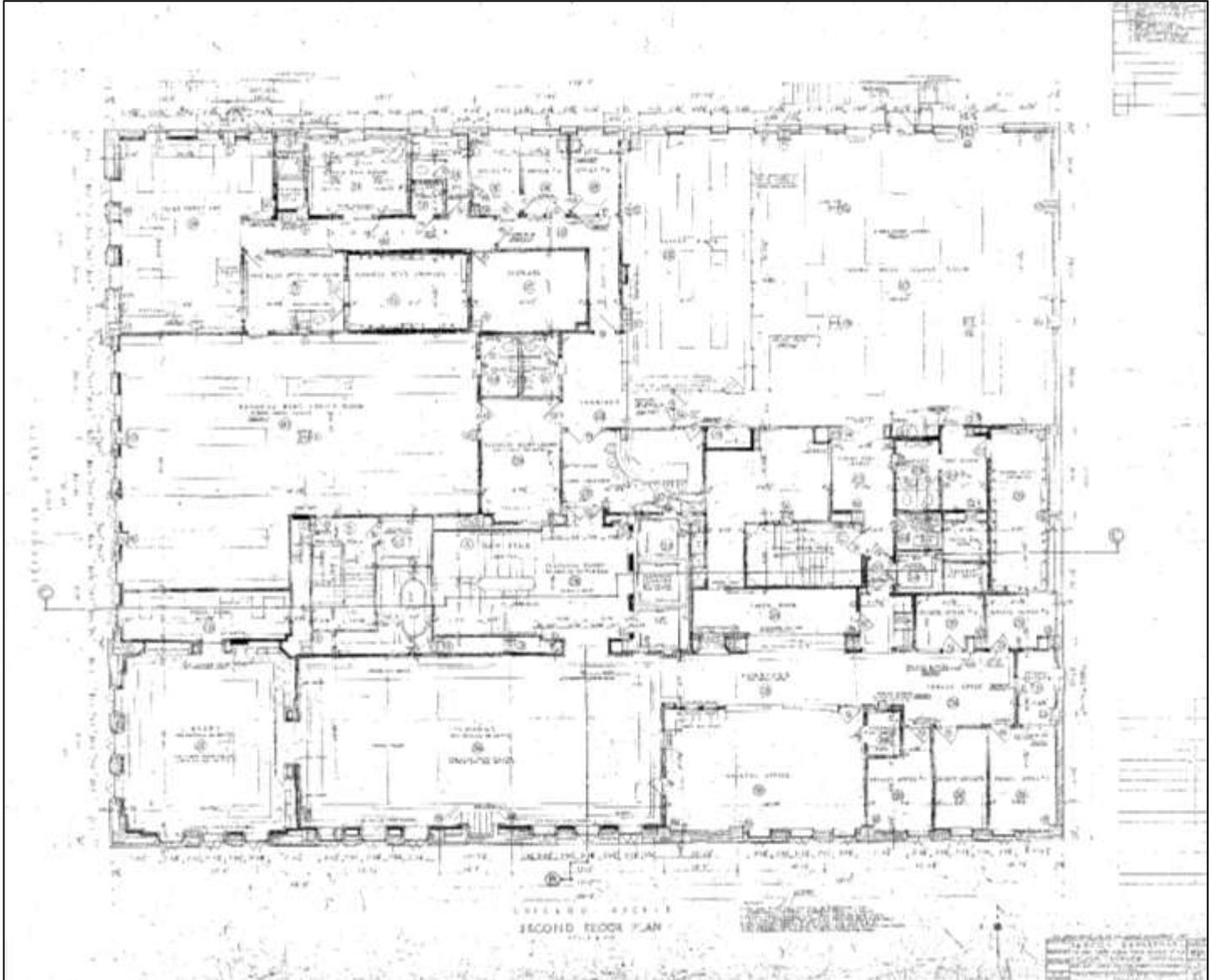


Figure 4: Original second floor plan, 1930

Property name: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
Illinois, County: Cook



Figure 5: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA under construction, January 24, 1931

Property name: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
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Figure 6: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA after completion, late 1931

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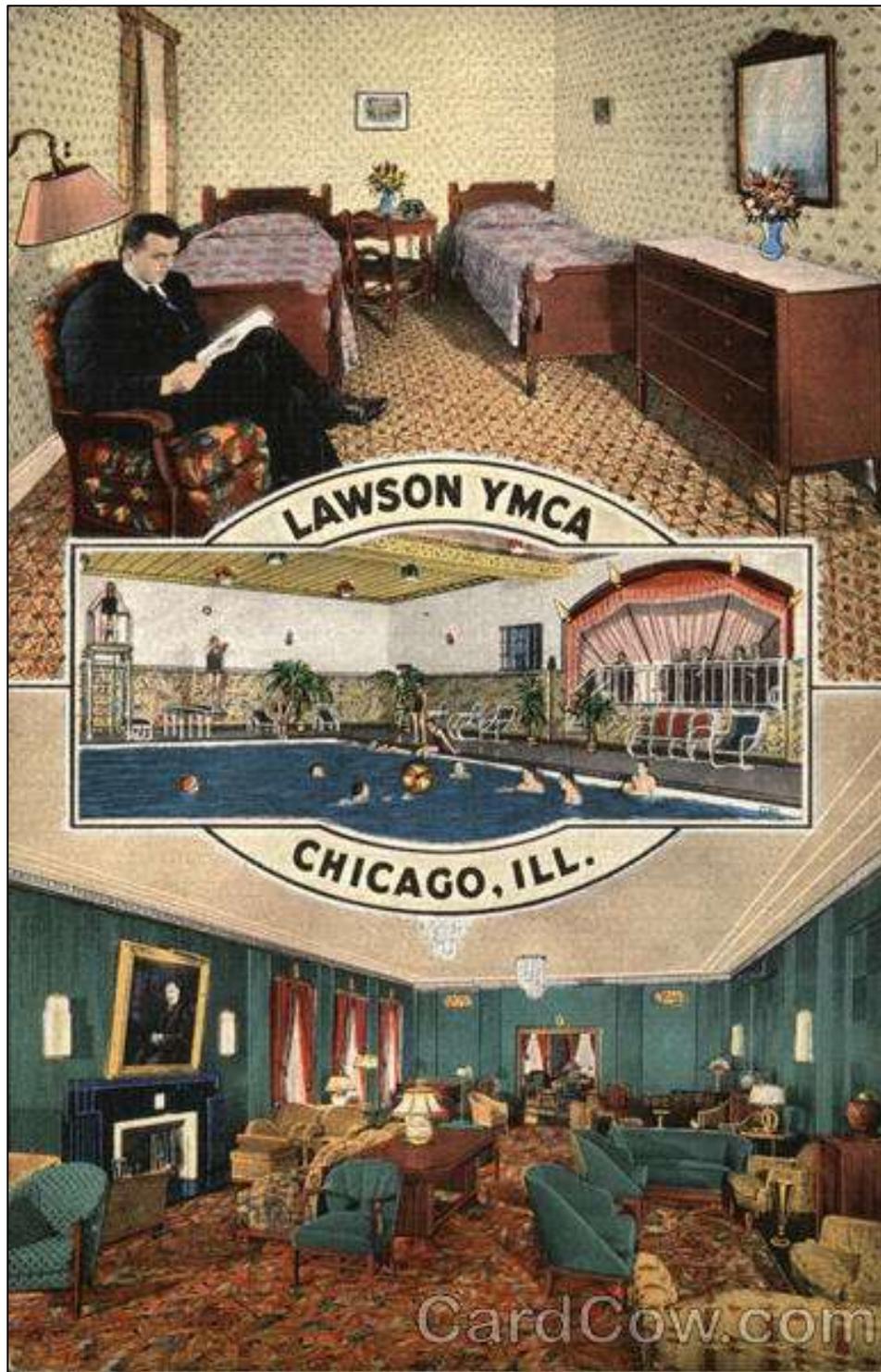


Figure 7: Historic post card (date unknown)

Property name: Victor F. Lawson House YMCA
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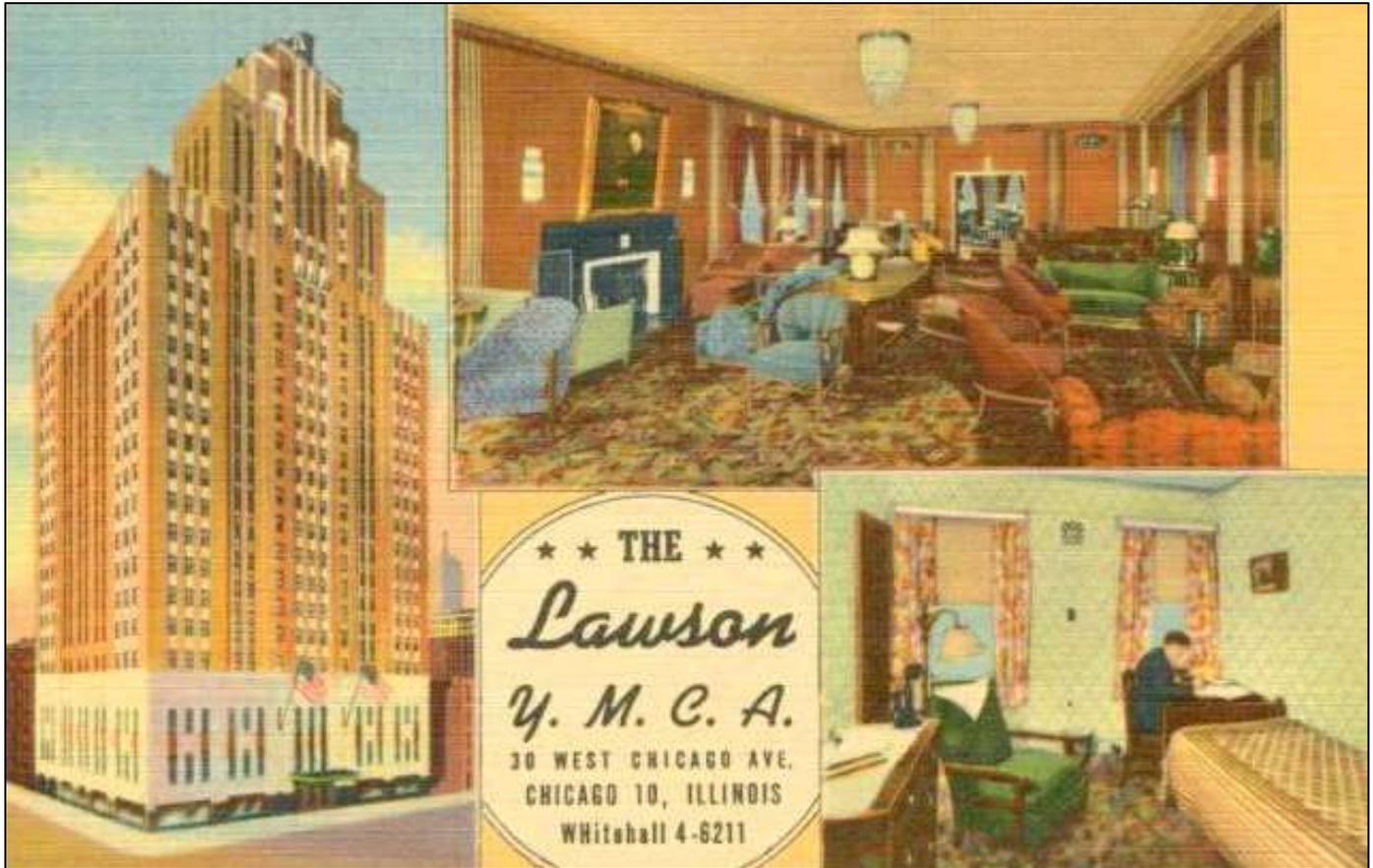


Figure 8: Historic post card (date unknown)