

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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Black Building

Other names/site number: 32CS1953

Name of related multiple property listing:

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

2. Location

Street & number: 114 Broadway N

City or town: Fargo State: ND County: Cass

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this 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 x B x C D

<p style="font-size: 1.5em; margin: 0;"><i>Claudia Bony</i> DIRECTOR</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0;"><u>STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ND</u></p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p style="text-align: right; margin: 0;"><u>10-19-16</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>Date</p>
<p>Title :</p>	<p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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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

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

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Commerce/Trade: Business
- Commerce/Trade: Department Store
-
-
-
-

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- Commerce/Trade: Business
- Commerce/Trade: Department Store
-
-
-

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement: Art Moderne

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Walls: Limestone, Brick
Other: Cast Iron

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

Constructed from 1930 to 1931, the Black Building is located at 114 North Broadway, Fargo, North Dakota and was designed in the Art Moderne architectural style. The eight story structure was constructed of cast in place concrete and faced with Indiana limestone on the main façade and light brick on its other three sides. Though extensive modifications have been made to the building's interior spaces, the Black Building's exterior has retained most of its historic integrity. The majority of the façade, windows, elevator lobby, and other interior details remain relatively unchanged from the original construction, though modifications have been made to the first floor storefronts. As the largest and one of the most historically important buildings within the downtown historic district, it is an impressive and iconic anchor to the downtown historic district.

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Narrative Description

The Black Building is located at 114 Broadway North, between 1st and 2nd Avenues in downtown Fargo, North Dakota. Its east, main façade overlooks Broadway, while its west elevation sits on an alley. The building is flanked by buildings on the north and south sides; with the Scan Design building to the south being connected to the Black Building.

Construction of the Black Building began in November of 1930, with its official grand opening in June, 1931. The building represents the Art Moderne style of architecture. The eight story structure was constructed of cast in place concrete and faced with Indiana limestone on the main façade and light brick on its other three sides. As was typical of the period, the Indiana limestone wraps around to the north and south elevations by one bay. The condition of the limestone and brick indicates that both re-pointing and sandblasting have been done.

The building stands eight stories, 122 feet tall, with the first two floors having taller floor to floor heights, typical of a retail use. From the east elevation, the building appears to have a consistent floor plate. However, the building cuts in on the north elevation at the third floor by one bay and again at the fourth floor by five and a half bays. Stylistic elements include a symmetrical main face, cast iron window and storefront framing, decorative brick and limestone work amongst the building's upper floors, and significant fenestration on all four sides.

While the exterior is mostly original, the interior has been modified throughout the building's history. The Black Building has always featured retail space at the basement through second floors and office space on the floors above. The upper floor office spaces were reconfigured multiple times to suit individual tenant needs, while the lower floors—originally a Sears retail store—remained unchanged until 1975 when a renovation significantly altered the interior space. Remaining historic details that exist throughout the building interior include elevator doors, select handrails, terrazzo flooring, office doors, windows, marble baseboards, lobby walls, and heating radiators.

East (Main) Elevation

The Black Building's east elevation faces Broadway and serves as its main entrance and façade. Originally, the two retail entrance doors were recessed, requiring patrons to walk past multiple large display spaces to enter the shopping portion of the building. An additional third entrance located near the northern end of the façade leads to the elevator lobby and stairs for the upper floors.

Although the main entrance is still located on the north elevation, the large display cases have been removed and that space has been infilled with new storefront doors and windows. The original decorative metal work on the first and second floor was only minimally altered for the

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installation of the new storefront. Currently, the building features ample storefront windows, but these are all modern, with new glass and aluminum frames. In addition to the non-historic materials, the appearance of the storefront windows also does not match the original appearance since the glass is split with aluminum mullions that were not part of the initial design.

Originally, the two entrances into the building's retail area were divided by a central display case. When the display spaces were removed and the entrances were moved to the building edge, the doors were pulled toward the center of the façade and are now grouped together at the center of the decorative cast iron. The polished granite bulkheads that sit below the storefront windows are original materials, but have been salvaged and moved due to the redesign of storefront doors and windows.

Ornate cast iron rises up from the ground to the top of the balcony level windows, which are original and also have intricately designed cast iron frames. Missing from this area are the building's awnings, which have been cut off, leaving just small iron nubs protruding slightly from the window trim. Above the cast iron frame at the mezzanine level, the second floor windows are framed in a coordinating cast iron trim and decorative frieze. While these frames are historic, the windows themselves have been replaced and the current mullions no longer match the original materials or appearance.

The east elevation is a classic example of Art Moderne architecture. There is a strong vertical symmetry, with an 'A-B-A' layout of the architectural features. This verticality is reinforced by limestone clad pilasters at the southeast and northeast corners, and another pilaster one bay in from each end, framing the center grouping of windows. Horizontally, each floor has eight windows. The horizontal pattern at the upper six floors is; pilaster, window, pilaster, six windows, pilaster, window, pilaster. Cast iron spandrel panels, adorned with fluting and dentil details, separate the windows vertically. While storm windows have been installed in some areas, the upper floor windows on this elevation are original.

Additional Art Moderne relief detailing can be found in the limestone. At the capitals of the four pilasters, there is a zigzag pattern infilled with a floral spray. The fluting pattern on the spandrel panels is repeated at the lintels over the window at the northeast and southeast corners of the eighth floor. In contrast, the center windows on the eighth floor have arched lintels adorned with a reed and flower spray pattern. The limestone between these windows is elongated by applied limestone capitals that run from midway up the windows toward the parapet.

Original building drawings indicate four flag poles to be mounted near the second floor, but these are not present today, nor is there any evidence in photographs or limestone condition that these were ever actually installed. Photographs do show, however, that the east façade once featured a vertical blade sign, which, at various points, has said "Sears" and "Blacks". This sign is no longer present on the façade, giving the entire elevation a relatively clean look, free of awnings, signs, flags, or any additional projections.

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North Elevation

The symmetry of the east façade is not present on the north elevation. The elevator tower rises the full eight floors, while the stair tower immediately to the west of the elevator rises just three floors. The first two levels are slightly larger than the third and fourth floors and the fifth through eighth floors have even smaller floor plans. The third floor is mostly consistent in size to the lower levels, except for a relatively small recessed area. Originally, the fourth through eighth floors were all identical, but a fourth floor addition added an extra protrusion matching the third floor footprint below it. An indent on the eighth floor reduces the footprint on that level by approximately 9" – 12" is present on the southwest, southeast, and northeast corners, but is absent on the northwest corner. All of these variations in floor plans can be observed from the exterior north elevation.

Indiana limestone wraps from the east onto the north elevation's elevator tower, but the majority of the façade is faced with light brick. Like the east side, the north elevation features ample fenestration, all of which (except for at the fourth floor addition) is original to the initial construction. The windows in this addition match the others in appearance, but a noticeable difference in color can be observed between the newer masonry and the historic brick facing. The two columns of windows to the east of the elevator tower were originally designed to have iron spandrels identical to the ones on the east elevation, but these were never constructed.

West Elevation

The west elevation overlooks the alley and provides a back entrance for retail patrons, as well as a receiving entrance. The light brick facing and windows are all original to the building construction, but the historic double hung windows on the first and balcony floors and one window on the second floor have been bricked in. The original double receiving doors have been replaced with a single door and the current double door retail vestibule is not historic.

The area around the vestibule is faced with a red tile, while the rest of the first floor exterior consists of a red brick laid in a basket weave pattern. The current appearance was part of later renovations, as were alterations to the fire escape, the bottom of which has been modified to extend further to the north end of the façade. This renovation not only altered the appearance of the fire escape, but also required the infilling of several of the windows and the addition of new framing to bolt the structure to the building.

South Elevation

The south elevation overlooks the adjacent and interconnected ScanDesign building. The two buildings share a common wall at the first and balcony floors and the ScanDesign building has

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structural beams tied into the Black Building at this elevation. Similar to the north elevation, Indiana limestone makes up the eastern edge of the façade, while the rest consists of light brick. All windows are identical and original and, also like the north side, the first two columns of windows on the east side were intended to have iron spandrels, which were never constructed.

Unique to the south elevation are multiple brick protrusions between windows on the eighth floor. The elevation is mostly consistent and symmetrical except for the limestone portion to the east. Slightly recessed areas on the far east and west edges at the top of the elevation provide some added depth and elegance to the south façade.

Interior

The interior of the building has undergone multiple transformations throughout the years and retains minimal historic integrity of the original design. This is especially true for the retail floors; originally, the basement and first, balcony, and second floors were designed to accommodate a department store and the majority of the third floor was used as a stockroom. Today, the retail area consists of the basement, first, and balcony floors.

To create the new Elm Tree Square shopping center in 1975, the space underwent a major renovation that included removing a large portion of the first floor and filling in portions of the balcony level to create a uniform atrium from the basement to the balcony level. The columns rising through this new atrium were covered with faux bark, branches, and leaves to resemble the shopping center's namesake elm trees.

A staircase from the basement to the second floor, one from the basement to the balcony level, and a third from the balcony to the second floor have all been removed during multiple renovations. An added staircase currently sits at the northeast corner of the new atrium and connects the basement with the first floor. None of the current decorative metal handrails around the atrium or stairs are original.

The basement currently features restaurant and retail space, as well as built-in seating and open areas for dining use. A circular fountain was also added to this area, built around one of the central columns. The open space of the first and balcony floors no longer exists, as the area has been built-out for multiple retail tenants. The floor surface of all of three retail levels now consists almost entirely of herringbone patterned brickwork, though some of the original terrazzo flooring can be found in select locations.

Another significant impact to the Black Building's interior integrity was the interconnection of the adjoining ScanDesign building. When this small building was constructed, portions of the Black Building wall were removed on the First and Balcony levels to allow corridors and retail spaces to extend between the buildings. These interconnections remain in place and in use.

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One of the few remaining historically significant portions of the Black Building's interior can be found in the office entrance and elevator lobby. While the retail entrance has been modified significantly with the removal of the large display spaces and the addition of newly built-out retail areas, the office entrance remains largely intact. This space was once separated from the retail side of the first floor by a wall and a door, which have since been removed. A separate entrance at the north end of the east elevation allows direct access to the office portion of the building, where elevators and stairs make navigation up to the building's eighth floor possible.

The floor of this lobby area has been bricked over in the same herringbone pattern as the other retail spaces, but it still has its original marble and wood walls, mail box, metal vent grille, and the original directory and display cases with their intricately designed metal framing. Two staircases, one leading to the basement and the other ascending to the third floor, still remain and have original terrazzo flooring and metal handrails.

The unique first floor elevator doors are also original. These doors are adorned with imprinted rays of light, flowers, and birds—details that do not match the more geometric details that make up the other aspects of the lobby and building exterior. The elevator doors were thought to have been originally designed for a North Dakota governmental building, but were determined to be too ornate for a public facility, at which point they were purchased and installed in the Black Building during its construction.

Also of note, the original building drawings were for an eight story structure that could be extended up to ten stories, if desired. While only eight floors were constructed, the original elevator dial, which currently sits in the lobby's historic display case, counts up to ten floors. Details such as the doors and dial provide an interesting story and impressive detail to the lobby area.

The second floor of the Black Building was originally open space for the Sears store, but has since been built-out to provide office space. Some historic details can still be found, such as windows and some exposed radiators, but the majority of these elements are currently altered. Some of the radiators, for instance, have been enclosed and while terrazzo can be found in the restrooms, the majority of it has been covered. These floors also originally had multiple staircases to allow navigation for Sears patrons, but two of the sets have been removed, leaving only the staircase near the elevators remaining.

The third floor takes on a slightly smaller footprint than the floor below it. "Stair B" near the elevator terminates on this floor and "Stair C" allows access to all of the upper level floors. This new staircase is less intricately designed than "Stair B", consisting of concrete steps and landings and simple wooden handrails instead of terrazzo steps and metal rails.

Historically, the floor was designed to include a large stockroom, with the remainder of the floor used for office space. The layout of the original office space corridor remains, as does much of the terrazzo flooring and marble baseboard trim. Office doors are original and consist of wood,

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“fogged” or frosted glass, and transoms. The original stock room area has been built out with a corridor of its own and the open space has been divided. A single doorway is clearly a newer design, but the corridor is generally built to match the existing hallway; it features identical terrazzo, marble baseboards, and wooden doors and transoms. The baseboards and doors match so well, in fact, that they were either replicated with great precision or, more likely, were transplanted from elsewhere in the building during an alteration project, such as the renovations made to the fourth floor.

With the exception of the staircase that ends on the floor below, the fourth floor has an identical footprint to the third. This is due to an addition at the northwest corner of the floor. Originally, floors four through seven were identical in size and layout, with a central corridor running in an L-shape from the main elevators to the freight elevator and fire escape on the west side of the building. Along with the addition, the fourth floor has also been significantly renovated, however, and the east-west portion of the corridor has been moved closer to the southern building edge. The corridor was built along a row of columns, which currently jut out into the hallway along one of the walls. Additional alterations include carpet installed over terrazzo, new doors, wood baseboards instead of marble, and a new, large vent that runs through a portion of the interior and penetrates through a northern window.

Floors five, six, and seven, retain some aspects of the original design. The central corridors generally match the historic locations, and terrazzo flooring, marble baseboards, wooden doors and transoms, and restroom wall tiles are all represented, but show scarring and wear in some areas, and have been altered or removed in others. Great variation is found on the seventh floor, where some of the marble trim is missing, wood panels have been installed on each side of two doors, and stanchion holes have been punched into the corridor floor.

One area within the seventh floor appears to more closely represent the open office space that was original to the building than any of the other floors, where the spaces have been built-out and altered multiple times. This room has freestanding radiators, exposed columns along the exterior building edge, slate window sills, and wood baseboards. The plaster ceiling can also still be seen in this room, while the majority of the ceilings throughout the building have been replaced with tiles.

The eighth and final floor of the Black Building was the only one of the upper levels that was designed for a specific tenant—the WDAY radio station. The interior demarcations have been altered so that the space no longer resembles the original studios, lounges, and offices used by WDAY. The main corridor has been slightly modified but retains the same layout as the original design. Like many of the other floors, remaining historic details include terrazzo flooring, select exposed radiators, and wood doors.

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Historic Integrity

The Black Building's original drawings, as well as numerous historic photographs and illustrations, still exist and provide a detailed view of the initial design and construction. The current storefront is not original and has been altered multiple times, and although the building's numerous windows match their historic appearance, glass has been replaced in many locations, storm windows have been installed, and interior slate window sills are largely missing or damaged. The historically significant elements of the Black Building's exterior include the cast iron window details, limestone and brick facades, and overall appearance, especially the extensive fenestration and symmetrical main elevation.

The building interior has also seen numerous alterations throughout its history, but original designs and materials can still be observed. Some office floors, for instance, contain original central corridors and some radiators, terrazzo, marble baseboards, and wood doors. The building's elevator lobby retains significant historic integrity, with original decorative elevator doors, directory, display case, and wood and marble walls.

The Black Building is listed as "pivotal in the downtown Fargo district" in the Downtown Fargo District National Register Nomination Form.

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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.)

- 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

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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 Black Building is eligible for the National Register at a local level under Criterion A due to its association with both communication and commerce, Criterion B because of its owner, George Black, and Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The building housed the WDAY radio station on its eighth floor, while the first Sears department store in Fargo occupied its basement and first, balcony, and second floors until the mid-1970s. The building was commissioned by George Black, a local business owner who was a dominant figure in Fargo's early 20th century retail landscape, and whose "one-cent sales" have been adopted by retailers across the country and are still used to this day. The Black Building is considered to be a pivotal property in the Downtown Fargo District National Register Nomination, and is an excellent example of Art Moderne architecture, with its facades and interior elevator lobby being particularly impressive illustrations of this style.

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

George Mumford Black

In 1910, George Mumford Black was managing the basement level of the Dayton's store in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His father, Leslie, was already an experienced merchant, having owned a general store in Parsons, Kansas and, in 1900, purchasing a store in Red Oak, Iowa. The father and son would eventually open a store in Little Falls, Minnesota and, dreaming of a chain of Black stores, George set out through western Minnesota in the spring of 1912 to observe potential cities in which to open a new store.

The search took George to Fergus Falls, Brainerd, and Crookston, Minnesota before he stopped in Fargo, North Dakota in May, 1912 to catch a train back to Minneapolis. He observed the number of women out shopping and visited several stores, noting that they were not only busy, but also had good prices. George described the experience as "exhilarating" and returned to Minneapolis to tell his father about the "fine town we had been overlooking."¹

¹ G. Gilmour, "The 20th Century in Review, Fargo's Black Building rose as pillar of commerce, Early Sears presence started retail surge," Fargo, p. 1, 1999.

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Leslie Black was doubtful of Fargo's potential, but still traveled to the city and ended up agreeing with his son regarding the city's prospects. The two leased and fixed up an out of business movie theater at 112 Broadway and opened their new Black store. Leslie returned to Minneapolis and George remained in Fargo to run the store. Business was good during the first three years, with sales increasing exponentially, so George soon acquired the neighboring properties at 114 and 110 Broadway to expand.

The store remained successful, even during World War I, and business continued to boom into the late 1920s, thanks in part to George's marketing prowess. He has been attributed with the creation of the "one cent sale" in which a customer could buy one item at full price and get the second item for one cent.²

As the 1920s came to a close, George received an offer from Sears Roebuck to buy his store and enter the Fargo market. Despite being in New York in October, 1929 and witnessing the October 29 Black Tuesday stock market crash and resulting chaos, he decided to take a chance and sell the store and use the proceeds to construct a new building.³

Designed by Oscar Lang of Lang, Raugland & Lewis out of Minneapolis and Fargo architects Braseth and Houkom, the Black Building was constructed by T.F. Powers and Co. out of Fargo,⁴ with the cornerstone being laid on November 17, 1930. The cornerstone laying was a grand event that was attended by several hundred people and broadcast over the radio. It featured speeches by L. B. Hanna, former North Dakota Governor, the president of the Fargo city commission, and George Black,⁵ as well as the burial of a copper box within the cornerstone that contained North Dakota grain products, newspapers, photos, and other miscellaneous mementos.⁶

The Black Building's grand opening took place on June 11, 1931. The three day celebration included a gala on the opening night and gave anyone a chance to visit "the Northwest's largest and most complete Department Store."⁷ The event was large enough to warrant a sixteen page Black's Store Section in The Fargo Forum newspaper, which provided details about the building and its construction, advertisements, and notes of congratulation from local businesses to George Black.

The Black Building turned out to be a huge success, leaving a significant imprint on Fargo's commercial and retail landscape. The office space filled quickly with local doctors, dentists,

² C. Eriksmoen, "Black Building found behind 'one-cent sale,'" 1 April 2007. Retrieved from: <http://www.inforum.com/content/black-building-founder-behind-one-cent-sale>. [Accessed 13 April 2016].

³ G. Gilmour, "The 20th Century in Review, Fargo's Black Building rose as pillar of commerce, Early Sears presence started retail surge," Fargo, p. 2, 1999.

⁴ Works Progress Administration. 1950. North Dakota American Guide Series. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁵ "Lay Cornerstone of New 8-story Black Structure," Fargo Forum and Daily Republican, p. 1, 18 November 1930.

⁶ "Contents of Copper Box will be "Treasure" in Year Two Thousand," *The Blue Print*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1, 3, 1934.

⁷ The Fargo Forum. 1931. "Grand Opening The Greater Black's." June 10.

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lawyers, architects, insurance companies, and other business professionals, and Sears remained the prime retail tenant until the early-1970s, when it moved to the newly constructed West Acres Mall.

West Acres Mall was actually created by George Black's son-in-law, William Schlossman, whose plan to create a retail center in downtown Fargo was rejected by the Fargo Urban Renewal Agency.⁸ Instead, the mall was built on the outskirts of Fargo and, to address critics who said that the mall would bring about a decline in downtown commercial activity, Schlossman renovated the basement, first, and balcony floors of the Black Building to create the Elm Tree Square shopping center. This project removed much of the historic integrity of the lower levels, and also added large Elm Tree Square signage to the front and back of the building, which has since been removed.

Just as the West Acres Mall played a role in moving much of the commercial activity to the outskirts of the City, George Black had played a role in establishing downtown as the commercial center. His role in Fargo's commercial and retail development cannot be understated. Black's original 1912 store did \$75,000 in business its first year and sales continued to rise year after year, allowing him to purchase neighboring properties and expand his store. By the late 1920s, Black's store had reached \$1,000,000 in annual business. It was this success that attracted Sears to the area and purchase his store, giving him the capital to build the Black Building.

Black did more for the community than run a successful store, though. He was constantly committed to using local companies during the construction of the Black Building; he hired the Fargo firms Braseth and Houkom to serve as associate architects, T. F. Powers and Co. as general contractor, and local subcontractors to complete the building's plumbing, steam fitting, electrical wiring, windows, painting, interior decorating, roofing, and ventilation.⁹ His commitment was recognized by community members, and was noted in newspaper articles and ads praising Black for his "faith in Fargo" and belief that the city "is only at the beginning of its growth and progress."¹⁰

Black expected to serve as the manager of Sears for about a year, but stayed on longer, finally resigning in 1934. With some time away from business concerns, he and his wife began to travel, but this was cut short as he received word that Sears had laid off some of his best former employees. Black returned to Fargo and opened a new store—Store Without A Name—and proceeded to hire any of his "loyal sales people" who had not found employment elsewhere, further solidifying not only his commitment to the City of Fargo, but also to its people.¹¹

⁸ NDSU Archives. (n.d.). *West Acres*. Retrieved from Fargo, North Dakota: Its History: <https://library.ndsu.edu/fargo-history/?q=content/west-acres>

⁹ Final Building Stone Arrives. (1931). *The Fargo Forum*.

¹⁰ Faith in City is Vindicated. (1931, June 10). *The Fargo Forum Black's Store Section*, p. 2.

¹¹ Black, G. M. (n.d.). *The Story of My Life*. pp. 46-47.

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Impact on Local Commerce and Communications

By the time of the Black Building's grand opening in 1931, George Black had already made a name for himself in Fargo's commercial market, but the Black Building itself was also significantly important independent of its namesake. The lower levels housed Sears for over forty years (until 1972) when it relocated to the West Acres Mall, a change that triggered a downturn in downtown shopping and moved the retail heart of the city to the outskirts of Fargo. The Elm Tree Square shopping center replaced Sears, and despite the Black Building's location and its association with local shopping, the Elm Tree Square retail occupancy has struggled compared to the success seen when Sears was the primary retail tenant.

The building has been more consistently successful in serving Fargo's professional industry, however. The Black Building answered a significant need for downtown office space and was Fargo's "first building to provide modern professional office space."¹² It filled quickly with doctors, dentists, lawyers, and other professionals, and continues to house office tenants to this day.¹³ One of its original and more notable tenants was WDAY radio station, which was a significant influence in local communications.

WDAY is North Dakota's oldest radio station and is noted for helping launch the career of singer and actress Peggy Lee, who performed on the station early in her career. The association between WDAY and the Black Building were linked quickly due to a portion of the station's lease agreement, which stated that the station had to begin broadcasts with the line, "this is WDAY from the Black Building, Fargo."¹⁴ This tagline, coming from the most heard radio station in North Dakota, helped quickly spread the Black Building name and formed a connection between the building and the communications industry.

Architectural Characteristics

The Black Building was designed in the Art Moderne style of architecture. It is one of the most significant examples of this type in the upper Midwest, and the only significant representation in the Fargo area. The Black Building has a light or "white" exterior, a fact that was mentioned with amusement in Ripley's "Believe it or Not" at the time of its opening. The building's main façade consists of Indiana limestone, while its other three sides are faced with light brick. A significant portion of each elevation is made up of fenestration; both the extensive daylighting and the fact that the office levels sat above neighboring buildings were eagerly advertised to potential office tenants.

¹² Black, G. M. (n.d.). *The Story of My Life*. p. 47.

¹³ Black Building Nearly Filled. (1931). *The Fargo Forum*.

¹⁴ NDSU Archives. (n.d.). Black Building. Retrieved from Fargo, North Dakota: Its History: <https://library.ndsu.edu/fargo-history/?q=content/black-building>

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State

Standing eight stories tall, the Black Building was the tallest building in North Dakota upon its completion. This distinction was short-lived, however, as the North Dakota State Capitol became the State's new tallest building after it was constructed in Bismarck in 1934.¹⁵ Still, the Black Building remained Fargo's largest building for many years and remains the tallest in the downtown historic district.

Its main façade, which fronts Broadway and faces east, is faced with Indiana limestone and features intricate cast iron frames on the lower level windows, as well as black polished granite bulkheads. The storefront area has been altered over the years, with the first floor interior footprint extending to envelop and remove the original large, 360 degree display spaces.

Despite some alterations, the east elevation is a classic example of Art Moderne architecture. There is a strong vertical symmetry, which is reinforced by limestone clad pilasters at the southeast and northeast corners, and another pilaster one bay in from each end, framing the center grouping of windows. Cast iron spandrel panels, adorned with fluting and dentil details, separate the windows vertically.

The elevator lobby is an excellent interior example of the Art Moderne design. It features a metal trimmed directory and display case with geometrical detailing that match the exterior cast iron window frames. The lobby also contains historic marble and wood walls and unique elevator doors.

¹⁵ NDSU Archives. (n.d.). Black Building. Retrieved from Fargo, North Dakota: Its History: <https://library.ndsu.edu/fargo-history/?q=content/black-building>

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Black Building Nearly Filled. (1931). *The Fargo Forum*.

Black, G. M. (n.d.). *The Story of My Life*.

Contents of Copper Box will be "Treasure" in Year Two Thousand. (1934). *The Blue Print*, 1(1), 1, 3.

Eriksmoen, C. (2007, April 1). *Black Building found behind 'one-cent sale'*. Retrieved from <http://www.inforum.com/content/black-building-founder-behind-one-cent-sale>

Faith in City is Vindicated. (1931, June 10). *The Fargo Forum Black's Store Section*, p. 2.

Fargo Historic Preservation Commission. (2007). *Look Around Downtown Fargo Heritage Discover Walk*.

Final Building Stone Arrives. (1931). *The Fargo Forum*.

Gilmour, G. (1999). *The 20th Century in Review, Fargo's Black Building rose as pillar of commerce, Early Sears presence started retail surge*. Fargo.

Grand Opening The Greater Black's. (1931, June 10). *The Fargo Forum*.

Lay Cornerstone of New 8-story Black Structure. (1930, November 18). *Fargo Forum and Daily Republican*, p. 1.

NDSU Archives. (n.d.). *Black Building*. Retrieved from Fargo, North Dakota: Its History: <https://library.ndsu.edu/fargo-history/?q=content/black-building>

NDSU Archives. (n.d.). *West Acres*. Retrieved from Fargo, North Dakota: Its History: <https://library.ndsu.edu/fargo-history/?q=content/west-acres>

Works Progress Administration. (1950). *North Dakota American Guide Series*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State

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 (#65004799)
- 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: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Approximately .25 acres

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|-------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Zone: 14 | Easting: 668,604 | Northing: 5,193,801 |
| 2. Zone: 14 | Easting: 668,604 | Northing: 5,193,823 |
| 3. Zone: 14 | Easting: 668,557 | Northing: 5,193,823 |
| 4. Zone: 14 | Easting: 668,557 | Northing: 5,193,801 |

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

AdditionName Roberts
BlockLegal 2
LotLegal 3 & S 4 FT OF 4 & N 25 FT OF S 29 FT OF 4 & N 21 FT OF 4 & S
1/2 OF 5
LegDescAdditional LESS SKYWAY AREA; 6/17/16 COMB/FR 01-2381-00290-000&
00300-000 SPL#2016-071

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Legal description from the City of Fargo.

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: William Hickey, Principal
organization: Collaborative Design Group, Inc.
street & number: 100 Portland Avenue South, Suite 100
city or town: Minneapolis state: MN zip code: 55401
e-mail: bhickey@collaborativedesigngroup.com
telephone: (612) 332-3654
date: June 20, 2016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

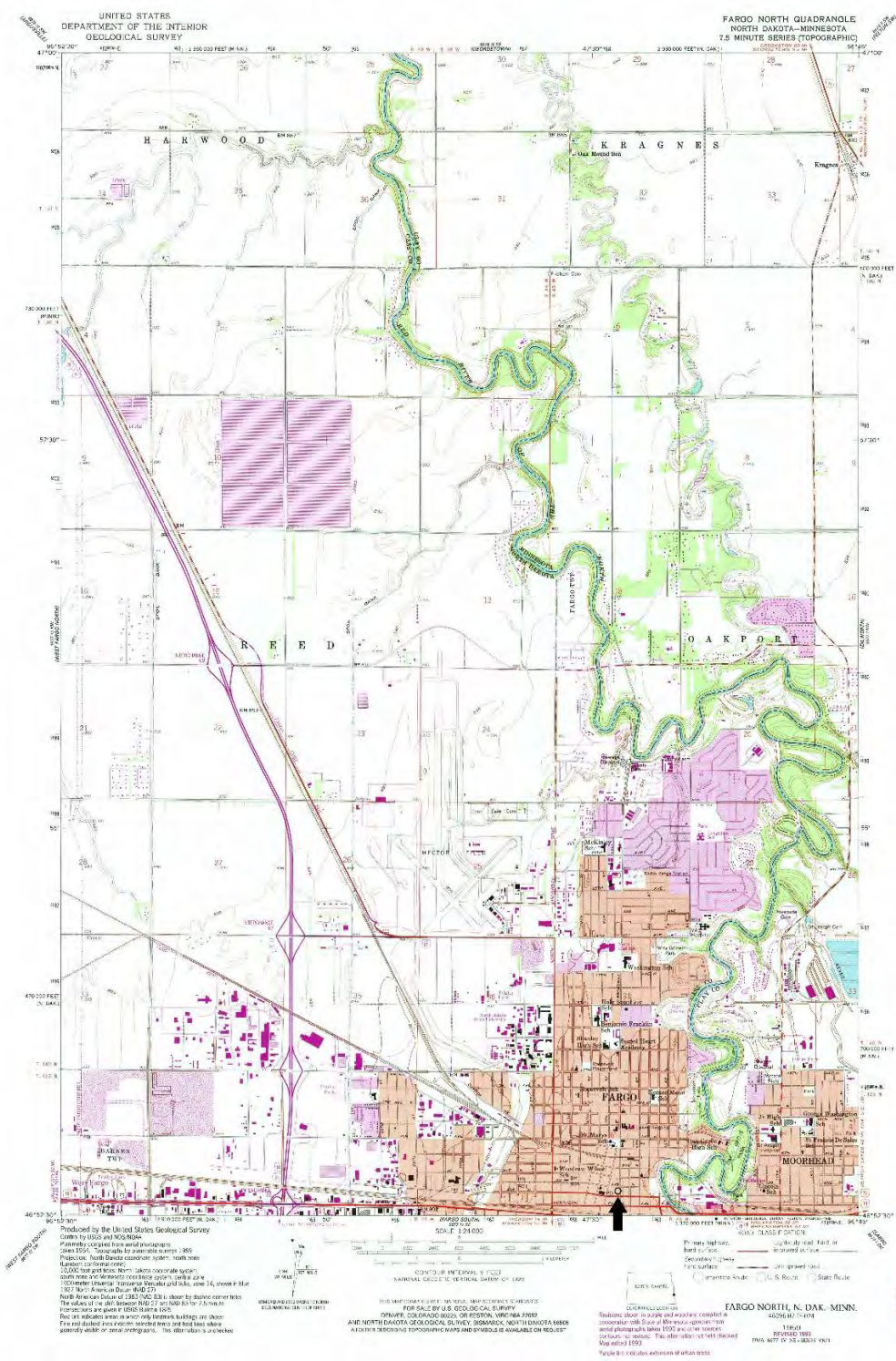
Property Owner

name/title: Mike Allmendinger
organization: Kilbourne Group
street & number: 210 Broadway, Suite 300
city or town: Fargo state: ND zip code: 58102
e-mail: mike@kilbournegroup.com
telephone: (701) 237-2279

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
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Black Building, Fargo, ND—located near the bottom right of the map, west of the Red River.



Black Building
 Name of Property

Cass County, ND
 County and State



NAD 1927

14	668,604	5,193,801
14	668.604	5.193.823
14	668.557	5.193.823
14	668,557	5,193,801

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State

Photographs

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

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.

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Unknown

Date Photographed: 1930s

View: Southwest, east and north elevations

Photograph 1 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0001.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building
City or Vicinity: Fargo
County: Cass State: ND
Photographer: Unknown
Date Photographed: 1968
View: North, south elevation
Photograph 2 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0002.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date Photographed: June 16, 2016

View: West, east elevation

Photograph 3 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0003.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building
City or Vicinity: Fargo
County: Cass State: ND
Photographer: Craig Milkert
Date Photographed: March 21, 2016
View: Southwest, east and north elevations
Photograph 4 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0004.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building
City or Vicinity: Fargo
County: Cass State: ND
Photographer: Craig Milkert
Date Photographed: June 16, 2016
View: East, west elevation
Photograph 5 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0005.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building
City or Vicinity: Fargo
County: Cass State: ND
Photographer: Craig Milkert
Date Photographed: March 21, 2016
View: North, south elevation
Photograph 6 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0006.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building
City or Vicinity: Fargo
County: Cass State: ND
Photographer: Craig Milkert
Date: March 22, 2016
View: Southwest, decorative cast iron
Photograph 7 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0007.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date: June 16, 2016

View: Interior, elevator lobby

Photograph 8 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0008.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date: June 16, 2016

View: Interior, office corridor with original layout and doors

Photograph 9 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0009.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date: March 21, 2016

View: Interior, open office space

Photograph 10 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0010.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date: March 21, 2016

View: Interior, typical window condition

Photograph 11 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0011.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date: March 21, 2016

View: Interior, 4th floor corridor with altered layout and doors

Photograph 12 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0012.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date: December 2, 2015

View: Interior, altered basement, first floor, and mezzanine

Photograph 13 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0013.tif

Black Building
Name of Property

Cass County, ND
County and State



Name of Property: Black Building

City or Vicinity: Fargo

County: Cass

State: ND

Photographer: Craig Milkert

Date: March 22, 2016

View: Interior, altered retail entrance

Photograph 14 of 14: ND_Cass County_Black Building_0014.tif