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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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name La Tosca Flats

other names/site number N/A

#### 2. Location

street & number 2700 Observatory Avenue n/a not for publication

city or town Cincinnati n/a vicinity

state Ohio code OH county Hamilton code 061 zip code 45208

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Barbara Power Dept. Head  
Planning, Inventory 12-18-98  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Ohio Historic Preservation Office -- OH SHPO  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____	_____	_____

La Tosca Flats

Name of Property

Hamilton County, Ohio

County and State

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	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: multiple dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: multiple dwelling

Commerce: specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Early 20th century American movements:

Craftsman

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls brick

roof other

other stone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

La Tosca Flats

Hamilton County, Ohio

Name of Property

County and State

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

architecture

Period of Significance

1915

Significant Dates

1915

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Andersen, Alfred E.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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 #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Ohio Historic Preservation Office

La Tosca Flats  
Name of Property

Hamilton County, Ohio  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	6
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7	2	1	0	4	0
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4	3	3	5	0	0	0
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3 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Margo Warminski, historic preservation consultant

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date June 19, 1998

street & number 340 East Second Street telephone 606-581-2883

city or town Newport state KY zip code 41071

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Grandin Properties, Inc.

street & number 2000 PNC Center, 201 E. 5th Street telephone 513-723-2319

city or town Cincinnati state OH zip code 45202

**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. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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La Tosca Flats  
Hamilton County, Ohio

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The La Tosca Flats (HAM-6172-10) is a three-story apartment building, located at the northeast corner of Observatory Avenue and Edwards Road in Cincinnati. Directly east of the building is a driveway leading to a small parking lot in the rear; to the east of the driveway is a row of early 20<sup>th</sup> century residences converted to office use (photo 1). On the south side of Observatory Avenue is a one-story commercial block built in the 1920s (photo 2). Across Edwards Road stands a 1901 public school built in eclectic late Romanesque Revival style. The apartment building, like the nearby school, is a focal point of the intersection.

The La Tosca is located in Cincinnati's Hyde Park neighborhood. Located on the east side of the city approximately five miles from downtown, Hyde Park is a middle- to upper-class neighborhood developed for the most part in the 1910s and 20s. The neighborhood's varied housing stock includes many examples of popular house types of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in particular the American Foursquare and the bungalow. It also includes landmark houses in a variety of academic and revival styles, some of which were designed by local architects, as well as numerous late 19<sup>th</sup> century dwellings. Some of the neighborhood's main streets include two- to four-story apartment buildings of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, most often on corner lots. The building lies one block south of Hyde Park Square, the historic heart of the neighborhood.

The La Tosca is a nine-unit apartment building, rising three stories above a raised basement (photo 4). Built close to the right-of-way, the building fills its lot almost completely; on the south elevation, a small lawn provides buffering from the street. No outbuildings are present. The main (south) facade, which is three bays wide, consists of a central entrance balanced by projecting square balconies on either side; the west elevation, seven bays deep, includes another balcony and a secondary entrance. In contrast with the symmetry of the facade, the building's footprint is irregular (see Sanborn map copy). The main block is rectangular in shape and is connected to the smaller, narrower, rear block by a short hyphen. Sunporches project from the south and west elevations, while the indentation on the east side brings light and air into the center of the building. Toward the rear, facing the driveway, are wooden stairs and balconies providing secondary access to the apartments. The exterior staircases are utilitarian in style with metal posts (which likely are replacements of the originals) and flat wooden balusters. The flat roof is hidden by a low parapet, and tall chimneys rise from the west wall. A dress store is located in the basement, with access through a new doorway in the east wall. Colorful murals dating from the 1960s, intended to draw attention to the shop, decorate the rear basement wall (photo 6).

The street facades of the building are faced with chocolate-colored, wire-cut brick with a rough, irregular surface, laid in seven-course common bond; the north and east walls, however, are of

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smooth-faced brick and are blind above the basement level. The planar facades are enlivened by belt courses, consisting of bricks laid vertically, that encircle the building at each level and also serve as lintels; at the base of the wall are two courses of recessed brickwork. The foundation and water table are of poured concrete. Completing the composition is a cornice consisting of four courses of corbeling, a row of vertical bricks, short pilaster-like stone corbels, and concrete string courses and coping (photo 4).

The La Tosca retains its original, double-hung windows with 3/1 lights; the upper sash contain Craftsman-inspired vertical muntins. The west elevation also contains a series of shallow bay windows of unusual design: actually recessed into the building plane rather than projecting from it, they contain narrow, paired wooden casements with 2/1 panes. Casements of similar design are also found in the front and side sunporches ( a few of the first-floor sash were replaced with plain glass or fixed sash at an unknown date). Facing the rear entrances are paired, 1/1 sash set in segmentally arched spandrels. The basement is pierced by small, fixed sash, some of which contain vertical muntins.

The front and side entrances, identical in configuration, feature paneled brick pilasters rising to stone tablets chiseled with the name of the building. Framing the tablets are stunted stone corbels on corbeled bases. The entrances contain single doors with long panels of clear glass, framed by narrow, single-pane sidelights and surmounted with transoms stenciled with the building's street addresses (photo 5). Inside, the building's floor plan consists of two discrete sections, each served by its individual doorway and staircase; the two sections are not interconnected, and one must exit the building to cross from one to the other. The main doorway (fronting on Observatory) opens to a short hallway with reverse-plan, three-run staircase anchored by a square newel carved with classically-inspired garlands, and bearing a ball finial (photo 7). Angled doorways, framed by rectilinear millwork, open to each apartment; the doors have been replaced with modern fire doors. The mouldings and staircase are oak; the former retain their original, Mission-style fumed finish. The side hallway (facing Edwards) also features an open staircase of similar, yet simpler design.

The floor plan of the apartments consists of a short hallway flanked by bathrooms and closets; angled doorways open to the living room, dining room and bedrooms (photo 8), which improved circulation within the apartment. The use of these angled doorways rather than right-angle corners in the units and hallway and the hallways marks a departure from convention and adds visual interest. The hall and bedroom doors have been replaced with modern flush doors. At the rear of each apartment is a galley kitchen with a doorway to the rear porch.

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Much original architectural detailing highlights the interior spaces. Old porcelain bathtubs, and wooden medicine cabinets, can still be found in the baths, while the kitchens retain built-in cabinets with glass-fronted doors (photo 10). The units retain a full complement of oak door and window moldings; in some units they have been painted, while others retain their original finish. The living rooms feature distinctive wooden mantelpieces with tapered pilasters, flattened Tudor arches and stylized corbels embellished with sinuous carving of Art Nouveau or English Arts and Crafts design (photo 9). Matte-finish green and gold tiles surround the firebox (the manufacturer of the tiles has not been identified). French doors open from the living room to the sunroom. Flooring is tongue-and-groove oak. Ornate cast-iron radiators heat the apartments.

The influence of the Prairie style and, to a lesser extent, of the closely related Craftsman style (the two often overlapped in popular examples) can clearly be seen in its detailing. It is evident in the tapestry brick exterior, the rectilinear ornament, the geometrical window muntins, and the unique mantelpieces (see Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, p. 440).

Alterations to the La Tosca have been minimal, are largely reversible and do not seriously affect its integrity. A few of the first-story casement sash have been replaced with plain glass; the change is unobtrusive since the new panes fill the original openings. The murals on the rear wall, and the new basement doorway in the east elevation, are not visible from the street.

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The La Tosca Flats, built in 1915, meets Criterion C and is significant in the area of architecture as a distinguished and uncommonly seen example of the Prairie style as applied to an apartment building. It has been evaluated in the context of apartment house development in Cincinnati c. 1910-1930. The building represents the Prairie-style small apartment building as built in the 1910s. It retains many original features, including masonry detailing, windows, woodwork and mantelpieces. The La Tosca has been little altered since its construction and enjoys a high degree of integrity under all its aspects.

#### Apartment House Development in Cincinnati and Hyde Park

No formal study of apartment buildings in the city of Cincinnati in general, or in Hyde Park in particular, has been conducted to date. Original research by historians, however, has delineated some basic patterns of development. A citywide survey conducted in 1978 provided general information about apartment house styles, and Ohio Historic Inventory forms and National Register nominations provided information about specific buildings.

The development of apartment houses in Cincinnati can best be understood in the context of the process of suburbanization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to 1870, the river city of Cincinnati was primarily a "walking city," much of its growth confined to a basin surrounded on west, north and east by steep hills. Over the next three decades transportation system improvements, including inclined planes, commuter railroads and electric streetcar lines, made it easier for citizens to move away from the central city. A network of suburban communities (some of which were formerly farming villages) thus developed atop the surrounding hills. Many of these towns were eventually annexed by Cincinnati. The first series of annexations took place in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, during which several communities near downtown were added to the Queen City's crown. During the 1890s, 1900s and 1910s many more communities farther from the center—including Hyde Park, where the La Tosca is located—were enveloped by the city (see *WPA Guide to Cincinnati*). Partly as a result of this expansion, Cincinnati's population climbed from 296,908 in 1890 to 325,902 in 1900, 363,591 in 1910 and 401,247 by 1920 (*Population Abstract of the United States*, 1980).

The increase in the city's population created interest in apartment living. Apartment living came to Cincinnati in the 1880s, several years after the new "French flats" had achieved popularity on the East Coast (Elizabeth Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* [Cornell University Press, 1990], p. 101). The earliest buildings, not all of which have survived



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to the present day, were built in the 1880s and 1890s on outlying blocks of the central business district. The Lombardy (1885) in the West Fourth Street Historic District (National Register, 1976), for example, was one of several apartment buildings built in the downtown core during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; others included the Brittany Apartments (1885), the Normandy Apartments (1894) and the Courtland Flats (1902). In the 1880s through 1900s the firm of Thomas J. Emery's Sons, perhaps the city's most prolific and influential developer of apartment houses during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, pioneered the construction of apartment houses in middle-class hilltop neighborhoods. The Emery firm built blocks of flats along major thoroughfares well-served by public transit, so tenants could ride streetcars to jobs downtown. Most early apartment blocks (1880s and 1890s) exhibit lively Queen Anne styling, sometimes with Eastlake, Romanesque or Renaissance Revival details. Examples include the Eckert Flats (c. 1895) and the San Marco Apartments (1895), both located in the Madison-Woodburn Historic District (National Register, 1983) in the Walnut Hills neighborhood.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, apartment houses were a familiar part of the streetscape. Following national trends, Cincinnati's apartment builders of this era had a strong preference for classically-inspired styles. "At the turn of the century the classical style...became one of the characteristic architectural styles for large apartment houses.... This new architectural style presented the apartment house as a unified whole rather than as a set of fragments.... This trend toward a more unified classicizing style coincided with a tenant clientele already used to apartment living" (Cromley, p. 204). Thomas J. Emery's Sons, for example, embellished their turn-of-the-century buildings with detailing borrowed freely from a variety of classical traditions. For example, both The Alexandra, built in 1904 (National Register, 1997), and Haddon Hall (National Register, 1982), which dates from 1909, feature gambrel rooflines and classical elements. Likewise, the Melbourne Flats (National Register, 1984), constructed in 1898, includes elements of several popular classical styles. While not built by the firm, it was designed by Joseph G. Steinkamp, architect of many of the Emery buildings including the Alexandra and Haddon complexes. The Park Flats (1904; National Register, 1983), whose architect has not been identified, combines characteristics of the Chicago Commercial and Second Renaissance Revival styles. Other classically inspired apartment blocks of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Cincinnati residential neighborhoods include The Verona (1901) in Walnut Hills, The Glenwood (c. 1900) in College Hill (demolished), The Roanoke (1900) in Clifton, the Bradley Flats (1907) in Columbia-Tusculum, and 3406-3412 West Eighth Street (c. 1907) in Price Hill.

The development of Hyde Park was in many ways typical of the pattern of suburbanization and annexation that characterized Cincinnati's late 19<sup>th</sup> century development. Founded as a railroad suburb in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hyde Park was incorporated in 1896. Originally called

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Mornington, it was renamed for the Hudson River village as a mark of status. The village comprised a triangular parcel bounded by Madison Road, Observatory Avenue and Edwards Road, which would eventually be expanded to the east and the south. A promotional brochure produced in the 1890s (exact date unknown) described the site as “a beautiful rolling plateau...far above the smoke and soot of the city.” It went on to say, “The view is grand. One may see for miles a charming succession of pretty villages separated by stretches of green-topped trees” (“Hyde Park Subdivision,” n.d.). Hyde Park was conceived as a “place of homes” (ibid.): an exclusive residential suburb with broad avenues, expensive homes, regulated commercial districts and no industry.

Hyde Park was annexed to Cincinnati in 1903. Roads were improved, streetcar lines extended and utilities upgraded, and the new neighborhood’s population grew. As it developed a somewhat denser, more urban character, it lost some of the exclusive ambience of its early development. In a pattern typical of Cincinnati in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a growing population meant increased demand for multi-family living units. Apartments were added to Hyde Park’s residential mix in the 1890s with the construction of multi-story buildings around the newly-developed Hyde Park Square. The oldest buildings, built on main avenues close to transit lines, often had ground-floor storefronts, and some built in commercial districts had common walls.

Freestanding six- to nine-unit buildings such as the La Tosca were built in large numbers in Hyde Park, and throughout the city as a whole, in the 1900s, 10s and 20s. “The *quadraplex* or *sixplex* are common arrangements in which apartment units are accessed through a central hall. Units are stacked over one another and usually repeat a basic floor plan...” (Gottfried and Jennings, *American Vernacular Design 1870-1940: An Illustrated Glossary*, p. 4). These buildings are three or four stories in height, with centered entrances (which may be contained in a slightly projecting pavilion), and secondary entrances at the rear. They feature a vertical orientation (taller than wide), balanced facades, and corner balconies or sunrooms. “Some multifamily buildings will organize the facade into projecting and receding planes. For example, a common treatment includes projecting corner pavilions with a recessed entrance area” (Gottfried and Jennings, p. 5). Flat or shed roofs are the norm. Many have raised basements for extra living space. Inside, public spaces are minimal; limited to a small vestibule and one or more stairhalls. Relatively compact in footprint, six-unit buildings were well adapted for smaller urban lots. In neighborhood business districts, they often included shopfronts. The Peebles Flats at 2727 Erie (1910s) and the Sibcy Flats (1920s) on Madison Road are examples of six-unit buildings; the former, built on Hyde Park Square, includes twin storefronts, with the main entrance centered between them.

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On larger parcels of land, generally on main thoroughfares, builders built larger, more imposing structures in the 1910s and 20s. "Another common type of plan that evolved for these larger buildings was an indented plan, a circulation core with wings filling the site and extending toward the street or the rear in the shape of a fat U, or wings extending in both directions like an H... These plans maximized the exterior wall, thereby allowing the greatest number of windows for exterior light and air to every apartment" (Cromley, p. 147). Horizontal in orientation, standing three or four stories high, these larger buildings are set back from the street; they are built around a central courtyard or a series of smaller, interior courts, or face a common green. As a group larger buildings exhibit great variety in plan; they may be V- or U-shaped, rectangular or terrace-like; none, however, are completely enclosed, and all offer a view of the street. The apartment blocks may consist of one large building or a series of smaller structures grouped together, unified by common design and landscaped settings. On more constricted lots, they may be built with narrow end to the street. Large apartment houses also exhibit much individuality in design, but most feature flat or low hipped roofs, corner porches or balconies. Indentations in side walls maximize the light and air available to each unit. They often include elaborate entrances which may be flush with the building plane or contained in projecting vestibules or pavilions. The interiors of the buildings offered the possibility of larger, more expansive—and more elaborately detailed—public spaces than did the more constricted six-unit buildings. Examples of large-scale courtyard apartment buildings of the 1920s include the building at 2570 Madison Road, a wedge-shaped building facing a broad lawn.

Regardless of form or size, Hyde Park's apartment buildings were scaled to their domestic context: a neighborhood made up primarily of one- and two-story dwellings. Thus they differ from the tall buildings built in the central business district, where high property values dictated more intensive use of land.

For the first three decades of the century, most Hyde Park apartment builders—like those of other neighborhoods—favored either formal, academic styles or picturesque modes: all of which also were popular as house styles in the neighborhood. This may have been an attempt to present a "proper," dignified image attractive to tenants, or simply to maintain an architectural consistency in the neighborhood. The earliest identified building is the Burch Flats (mid-1890s) at the northwest corner of Hyde Park Square, which may be unique in its use of the late Romanesque Revival style. Some of the oldest extant apartment blocks in the neighborhood employ a Neo-classical vocabulary, with prominent cornices, corner quoins, and classical motifs. Perhaps the most striking example is the A'Laise Apartments at the southeast corner of the square, built in 1904; another classically inspired building, simpler in expression, is the Virginia Flats at 2718 Erie Avenue, which anchors the square's northeast corner. The Georgian Revival

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style, characterized by symmetrical, restrained compositions and embellished by jack arches, quoins and fanlighted entrances, is represented by a number of buildings including: the Monteith (1900s) at 3405 Monteith and the Ravenswood Apartments at 3387-3417 Erie Avenue. The Grassmoor Apartments on Madison Road are inspired by the Italian Renaissance Revival style. The Tudor Revival style, distinguished by steep gables, applied half-timbering, stonework and leaded-glass casements, is represented by a number of buildings, including the Aero at 3634 Edwards Road and two buildings at Madison Road and Kendall Street. Some buildings, such as 2570 Madison Road (1920s) and Georgian Terrace at 2136 Madison Road (1920s), freely combined elements of various styles; still others, such as 2560 and 2580 Madison Road, favored no particular academic style. A locally rare example of an Art Deco apartment house, with a profusion of characteristically stylized and angular terra-cotta ornament, can be found at 2649 Erie Avenue. By the 1930s the Art Moderne style, identified by ribbed or molded concrete ornament, glass block sidelights, and rounded entrance canopies or balconies, became the dominant architectural expression for multi-family buildings. Many Moderne apartment buildings were built in the neighborhood, including a cluster at Observatory and Shaw Avenues. Blocks of four-unit buildings with muted Moderne detailing were built in large numbers throughout the city in the 1930s and 40s; rows of these buildings, some of which incorporate Colonial Revival elements in an incongruous manner, can be found along Shaw Avenue and Linshaw Court.

While the design of the Tosca Flats is characteristic of small apartment buildings in its scale, setback and facade symmetry, its surface treatments and decorative detailing are markedly different from others of the period in Cincinnati. It represents the influence of national trends that revolutionized building design in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This movement rejected European models and classicism in favor of an organic American architecture inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement. The two most important manifestations were the Craftsman style, which developed in southern California, and the Prairie style, which originated in Chicago. The practitioners of the Prairie style, known as the Prairie School, sought to create "honest forms that blended in with the landscape" (Steve Gordon, *How to Complete the Ohio Historic Inventory* [Ohio Historical Society, 1992], p. 107). The result was one of the few indigenous American styles. Prairie buildings are characterized by low-pitched roofs, usually hipped; strong horizontal lines, and often massive, square porch supports (see Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Architecture* [Knopf, 1997], p. 440). Like buildings in the contemporary Craftsman style, Prairie buildings often employed "natural" materials such as dark-hued or wire-cut brick, rough stone, concrete stucco and stained wood shingles; many employed stucco or brick wall surfaces with contrasting dark wood trim. Also associated with Prairie buildings were geometrical ornament, bands of casement windows, and doors and

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windows with geometrical muntin patterns, such as those found in the La Tosca's sunporches. One of the "more short-lived styles," the style enjoyed a brief heyday from about 1905 to 1915; it "quickly faded from fashion after World War I" (ibid.). Landmark Prairie houses, especially those designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, carried the "play of plane against space" to a high artistic level (Eric Johannesen, *Cleveland Architecture 1876-1976* [Western Reserve Historical Society, 1979], p. 107), while popular dwellings borrowed design elements from these high-style examples and applied them to simpler forms. While landmark examples were concentrated in Chicago suburbs and other large midwestern cities, "[T]he style in its vernacular form was spread throughout the country by pattern books published in the Midwest" (McAlester, p. 440).

While no historian has yet addressed the topic, few Prairie buildings appear to have been built in Cincinnati. None are included in the citywide 1978 survey, nor does the accompanying report include the Prairie mode in its appendix of Cincinnati architectural styles. The relative rarity of the style in the Queen City may also have been true of much of the state as a whole. The Ohio historic survey manual states that "Despite its innovative features, the Prairie style did not have a great influence on popular home design in Ohio" (Gordon, p. 107).

Given the scarcity of Prairie buildings in Cincinnati, and the local preference for revival styles in apartment houses, it is not surprising that only four apartment buildings have been found to date that use the Prairie vocabulary. Those few that have been identified, such as the La Tosca, exhibit a rather austere appearance, with flat, planar facades; flat or low-hipped roofs, and tapestry brick in russet tones. They may also have deep eaves, heavy console brackets and geometrical ornament. Other examples include the San Carlos Apartments on Madison Road, a large, two part building of L-shaped plan and simple design with deep eaves and projecting sunporches (photo 11). The eaves have been wrapped in vinyl siding. At 2836 Observatory is a small-scale building with twin storefronts, and broad eaves carried by heavy console brackets (photo 12). The storefronts and entrances have been unsympathetically altered and the tapestry brick has been painted in a rainbow of colors. On the east side of Edwards Road south of Observatory stands an unnamed three-story apartment house of rectangular massing whose utilitarian facade is embellished with tapestry brick in geometrical patterns (photo 13). While all these buildings to some degree exhibit the Craftsman/Prairie influence, the style's unique qualities are highly developed in the La Tosca: they are evident in the color, texture and pattern of the brickwork, the stylized entrance and parapet treatments, the window configurations, and the mantelpieces.

The significance of the La Tosca, however, goes well beyond its comparative rarity and rests on the broader importance of the Prairie School to the history of architecture in America. The

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Prairie style was pivotal in the transition to the modern movement. "Architecture's departure from academic revivals or eclectic styles and its movement toward modern design is, perhaps, best embodied in the Prairie style..." (Gordon, p. 107). In its rejection of historical models and precedents, its use of planar surfaces, low rooflines, and spare, geometrical detailing, can be discerned the shape of modern architecture's stripped-down, horizontal forms. The La Tosca Flats' design signals this architectural transition.

In sum, the La Tosca Flats is important to Cincinnati's architectural history as a distinguished and locally uncommon example of the Prairie style and as a unique representation of the style applied to an apartment building. As such it represents stylistic innovation in an era of prolific apartment-building in the Hyde Park neighborhood and in the city as a whole. More significantly it represents the influence of a radical new style in an architecturally conservative city. Well-preserved inside and out, it maintains a high degree of integrity under all its aspects.

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### Historical Development

The La Tosca's neighborhood developed for the most part in the 1900s and 1910s, although some of its main thoroughfares are far older. Edwards Road was built about 1830, extending northeast from the Ohio River toward the present-day city of Norwood (see topographic map). "Observatory Road, then called the City Road, was an old plank-and-gravel way that had been laid down in 1792 and extended from...Walnut Hills to Chillicothe, Ohio" (*The WPA Guide to Cincinnati*, p. 306). Erie Avenue, on the other hand, was built in the 1890s at the insistence of the Mornington Syndicate. An undated photo (c. 1893-96) shows the north side of Hyde Park Square as largely open land; to the northeast lies an unbroken vista of hills and trees. At the corner of Edwards Road the Burch Flats stands alone, surrounded by empty lots. The 1904 Cincinnati Sanborn map depicts the area north of Observatory as platted with a grid of streets but with few buildings, while the area south of Observatory (from Madison east to Linwood) was still largely open land. By 1917 the square and the surrounding streets, including the area south of Observatory, were lined with buildings. Edwards and Observatory were solidly residential, while the square featured commercial edifices and apartment houses. (While the blocks of Observatory and Edwards adjoining the La Tosca are now predominantly commercial, this change in use seems to have taken place after World War II.) At the southeast corner of Observatory and Edwards (opposite the La Tosca) a one-story commercial block and an apartment house are noted on the map as pasted-on additions, indicating they were built between 1917 and 1932. The block of Observatory where the La Tosca is located was not included in the 1904 map; local tradition asserts that a large pond occupied much of the block bounded by Erie, Michigan, Edwards and Observatory until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building is clearly indicated on the 1917 map.

Central Hyde Park, in the vicinity of the square, was a convenient location for apartment buildings such as the La Tosca because it was well served by public transit by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A city directory published in 1915—the year of the building's construction—indicates that the neighborhood was serviced by three streetcar routes, one of which traveled Madison Road eastward to the city limits and two of which followed Madison and Erie. A 1931 route listing and map indicates the neighborhood was served by four regular streetcar lines and one commuter (rush-hour only) route; four of these lines traversed Madison and Erie, while the fifth followed Madison out of the city. The neighborhood also had two bus lines: one ran along Madison while the other followed a convoluted route including sections of Edwards and Erie.

Hamilton County deed records indicate that the La Tosca Flats' lot was originally part of the holdings of local resident Robert Shaw. On March 13, 1915, Louise Shaw (heir of Robert Shaw)

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sold the parcel to Alfred E. Andersen for \$3,000 (deed book 1114 page 236). On April 23, 1915, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* published a notice stating that architect Alfred E. Andersen had received a \$20,000 building permit to construct an apartment building at the northeast corner of Observatory Avenue and Edwards Road. The La Tosca is first listed in the Cincinnati city directory (under "Public buildings and flats") in 1916. The building's name appears to have had a personal connection with its owners. While in the tradition of the fanciful or exotic names given to many apartment buildings of the era, "La Tosca" may also have been named for Andersen's wife, the former Tosca Holz.

In 1921 the Andersens sold the building to August Walter for \$47,000 (book 1238 page 330). In the next five years the building changed hands three more times. In 1927 it was purchased by Katherine and Louis Koerner (book 1449 page 599). The building remained in the Koerner family until 1972.

The 1927 directory—one of the first to be cross-indexed by street address—offers a glimpse into the lives of the La Tosca's early tenants. In the occupied units resided three salesmen, an insurance company clerk, a designer for a clothing firm, an attorney, and a research department assistant. In 1931 the building included two insurance agents, a salesman, the managers of an auto laundry and an advertising agency, and a janitor (who occupied a basement apartment). All except the janitor worked in downtown Cincinnati, which was readily accessible by streetcar or automobile. Over the next two decades the tenant mix continued to include a predominance of white-collar workers from many walks of life, including professionals, lower-level managers, clerks, salesmen and clerical workers. In the 1940s and 50s, however, it began to include more single or widowed women, and a greater number of people employed at various locations on the east side of Cincinnati. The basement apartment was converted to a store c. 1965.

The designer and original owner of the La Tosca Flats, Alfred E. Andersen (1889-1959), was a builder, architect and engineer born and educated in Chicago. Formerly a teacher at Cincinnati's Woodward High School, Andersen started a building contracting business in 1915. (Although he is listed as an architect in city directories of the 1920s and early 30s, he was not registered with the state of Ohio.)<sup>1</sup> A Hyde Park resident, Andersen resided on Michigan Avenue during the 1910s; during the 1920s he and his wife moved to the La Tosca. In the 1920s Andersen formed a

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<sup>1</sup> Neither the Ohio Architects Examiners Board nor the Registration Board of Ohio Engineers had any record of a license being issued to Alfred Andersen.



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contracting and engineering partnership with Robert Holz (1894-1969), a native Cincinnati educated at the University of Cincinnati. During World War II Andersen worked on dam and pumping station projects with the Army Corps of Engineers in Cincinnati. By 1951 the two partners are listed separately in city directories: Andersen as an engineer and Holz as an employee of the Paxton Building Company.

During Andersen's tenure in Chicago he was undoubtedly influenced by the architectural innovations that took hold in that city in the decades of rebuilding after the Great Fire of 1876: an era when the city evolved into the nation's architectural capital. Although the details and exact dates of his education have not been learned, his formative years (late 1900s-early 1910s) coincided with the heyday of the Prairie style (1905-1915). One of the few indigenous American styles, it originated in the work of a remarkably creative group of architects, centered around Frank Lloyd Wright and his atelier. All these designers lived and worked in Chicago (although some eventually practiced in other cities, especially in the Midwest). Of all historic styles popular in America, the Prairie style is perhaps the most strongly associated with a particular locale. Its influence, as stated earlier, can clearly be seen in the locally unique design of the La Tosca Flats. Its design almost certainly resulted from Andersen's years in Chicago during a period of tremendous innovation and creativity.

Little has yet been learned of the other building projects of Andersen and Holz. They may have been responsible for the Ravenswood Apartments at 3387 Erie Avenue, a large, multi-building complex which, as mentioned previously, employs eclectic Georgian styling. While no source directly links the firm with the building, the firm maintained an office there in the 1920s and 30s; in addition, Andersen resided there for many years. In addition, the Priscilla Flats, a U-shaped block on Michigan Avenue built in the 1920s, bears some resemblance to the La Tosca in cornice treatment and the handling of surfaces and may also be the work of the partnership. The building's styling, however, is much more traditional than that of its earlier neighbor. Andersen's obituary states that the firm specialized in apartment buildings, industrial structures and drive-in theaters. Both men were members of the Engineers Club of Cincinnati.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal boundary description

All the parcel of land situated at the northeast corner of Observatory and Edwards Roads, beginning at a point in said corner and running north on the east side of Edwards Road 150 feet; then east at right angles 55 feet to a point lying 150 feet north of the north line of Observatory Road ; then south parallel to Edwards Road 150 feet to the north line of Observatory Road; then west with the north line of said road 55 feet to the place of beginning.

Verbal boundary justification

The nominated property includes the parcel of land historically and visually associated with the building.

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Additional documentation

Photograph key

Name of property: La Tosca Flats (same for all photographs)

Location: Hamilton County, OH (same for all photographs)

Photographer: Margo Warminski (same for all photographs)

Date taken: March 1998

Location of negatives: Grandin Properties, 2000 PNC Center, 201 East Fifth Street, Cincinnati,  
OH 45202 (same for all photographs)

View: Streetscape view of Observatory Avenue, looking northwest

Photo 1

May 1998

Streetscape view of Edwards Road, looking northeast

Photo 2

May 1998

Streetscape view of Edwards Road, looking southeast

Photo 3

March 1998

Main facade (south elevation) and west elevation, looking northeast

Photo 4

March 1998

Main doorway

Photo 5

March 1998

Rear (north) and east elevations, looking southeast

Photo 6

March 1998

Newel post, main staircase

Photo 7

March 1998

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Living and dining rooms  
Photo 8

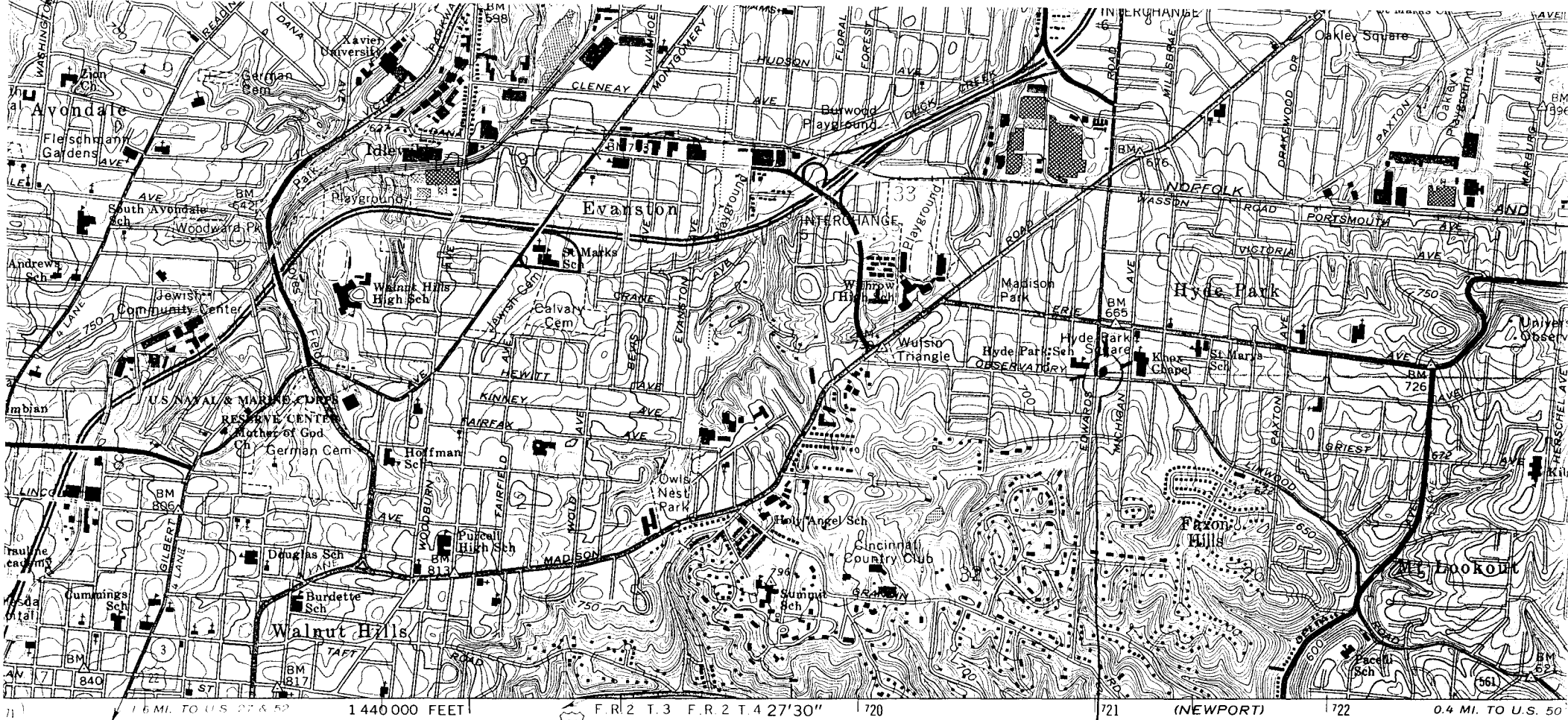
March 1998  
Fireplace, living room  
Photo 9

March 1998  
Built-in kitchen cabinet  
Photo 10

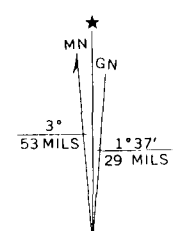
May 1998  
San Carlos Apartments, looking northwest  
Photo 11

May 1998  
2836 Observatory Avenue, looking northwest  
Photo 12

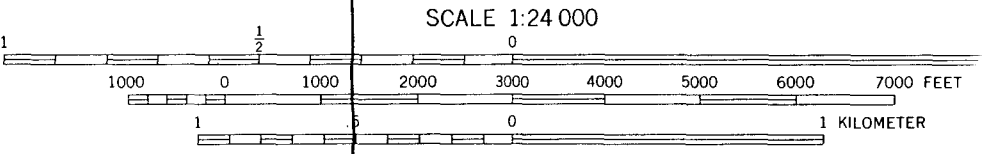
May 1998  
Apartment building, Edwards Road, looking east  
Photo 13



edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
 USGS, NOS/NOAA, USCE, and City of Cincinnati  
 by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
 9 and in part by City of Cincinnati. Field checked  
 revised 1961  
 projection. 10,000-foot grid ticks based on Ohio  
 system, south zone. 1000-meter Universal Transverse  
 grid ticks, zone 16, shown in blue. 1927 North  
 Datum. To place on the predicted North American  
 83 move the projection lines 3 meters south and  
 west as shown by dashed corner ticks  
 indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
 of the Little Miami River lies within the Virginia Military  
 Area west of the Little Miami River lies within the Between  
 is. Land lines based on the Great Miami River Base. Dotted  
 established by private subdivision of the Symmes Purchase  
 y be private inholdings within the boundaries of  
 nal or State reservations shown on this map



UTM GRID AND 1981 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



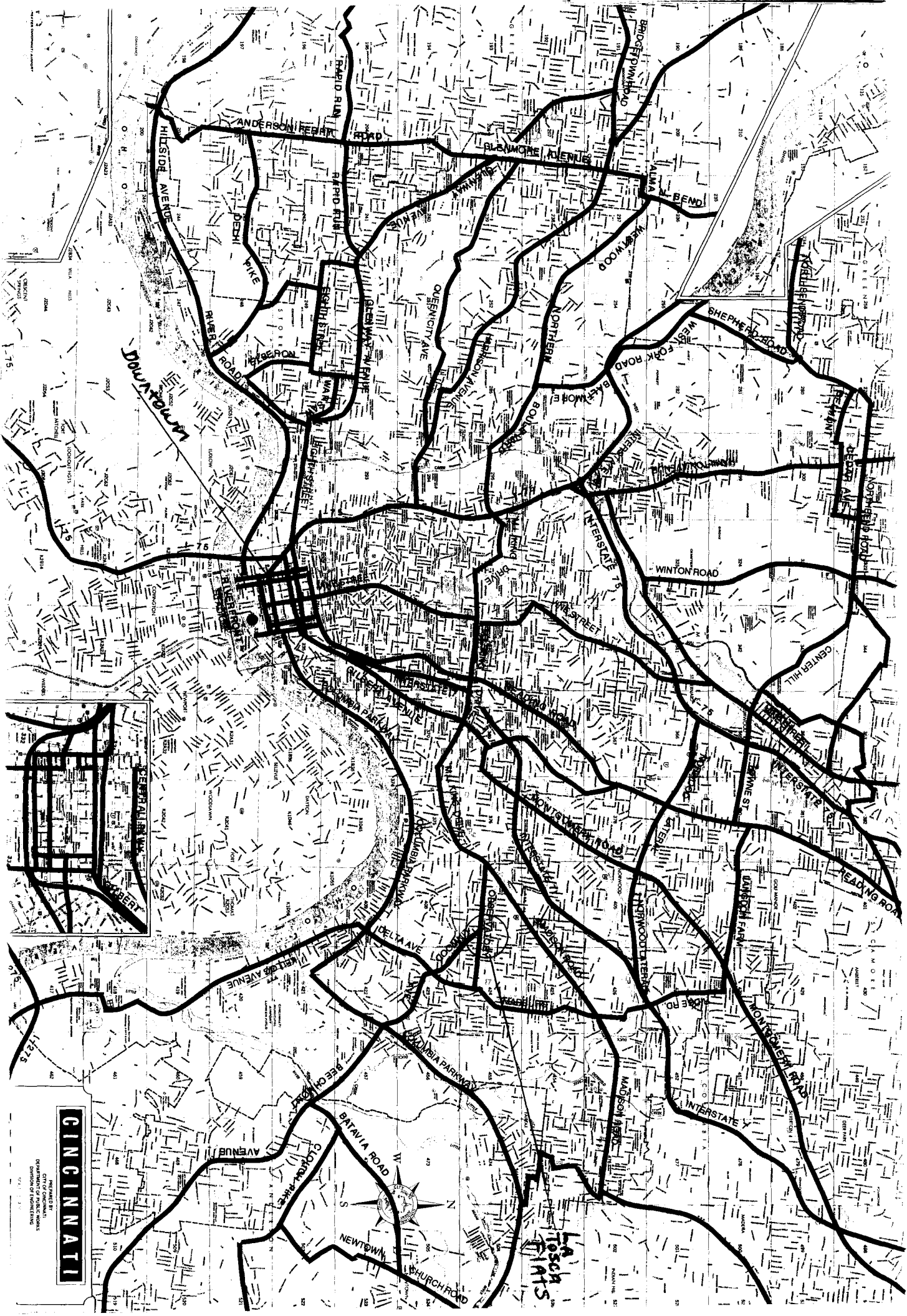
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
 NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
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 A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

*La Tosca Flats, Hamilton  
 Ohio 16/721040/43350*







**CINCINNATI**

PREPARED BY  
CITY OF CINCINNATI  
DIVISION OF PLANNING

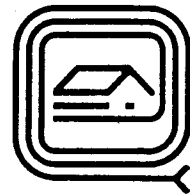


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Ohio Historic Preservation Office

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March 2, 1999

OHIO  
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Grandin Properties, Inc.  
2000 PNC Center  
201 East Fifth Street  
Cincinnati OH 45202.

Dear Sir/Madam :

Congratulations on the recent listing of your property into the National Register of Historic Places!

The National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior listed the **La Tosca Flats** at 2700 Observatory Avenue in Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio on February 5, 1999. The nomination was made in connection with a state plan to identify and document prehistoric and historic places in Ohio which qualify for National Register status under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended.

The Ohio Historic Preservation Office (OHPO) is available to advise you in maintaining the historic character of your property. As you know from previous mailings received from this office, there are no restrictions placed on your property following the National Register listing. However, the OHPO strongly encourages owners of historic properties to consider all options before completing work that could damage the structure or impair its historic integrity. Careful planning can facilitate the sensitive incorporation of contemporary alterations with the historic fabric. The OHPO provides free information on how to sensitively rehabilitate and repair historic properties, upon request.

Thank you for your interest in historic preservation and the National Register of Historic Places.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Powers  
Department Head  
Planning, Inventory and Registration.

Cc: Margo Warminski, Form Preparer  
John Shirey, City Manager  
Senator Richard H. Finan, Senate District 7  
Representative Jacquelyn K. O'Brien, House District 37  
Dan Young, CLG Representative  
Ohio Department of Transportation  
OKI- Regional Council of Governments

# Ohio Historic Preservation Office

## National Register of Historic Places File Checklist

The following materials are contained in this file of the National Register form for:

Name: La Tosca Flats

County: Hamilton

Original National Register of Historic Places nomination form

Multiple Property Nomination form

Photographs

Photographs (copies)

USGS maps

USGS maps (copies)

Sketch map(s)/figure(s)/exhibit(s)

Correspondence

Other oversize map

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