

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 any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional 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 Boston Store

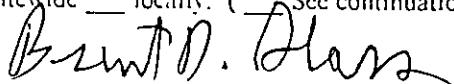
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 716-728 State Street not for publication N/A
city or town Erie vicinity N/A
state Pennsylvania code PA county Erie code 049
zip code 16501

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)



Dr. Brent Glass 10/10/96

Signature of certifying official

Date

PA Historical and Museum Commission

State or 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 commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register _____
 ___ See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the _____
 National Register
 ___ See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the _____
 National Register
- removed from the National Register _____
- other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

1 0 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce / Trade Sub: Department Store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Vacant / Not in use Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

roof Asphalt

walls Brick

other Terra Cotta

Limestone

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

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 a 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

Commerce

Period of Significance 1929 - 1950

Significant Dates 1929

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

The buff brick, six-story by eight-bay Boston Store is the most prominent survivor of Erie's 20th century downtown commercial boom. The principal section of the building was designed in 1929 by Erie architects Shutts & Morrison in a restrained Art Deco style. It was constructed with a steel frame, with masonry curtain walls. The facade of the building is on State Street, and the main block of the store occupies the center of the block defined by State, Peach, W. 7th, and W. 8th streets. The store is a large, almost cubical block of a building, with a 145 foot frontage on State Street, Erie's main commercial artery. A large clock tower rises from the main facade. Two additions to the main block survive, and date from 1949 and 1950. The additions provided entrances to the store from Peach and W. 8th streets. The exterior architectural character of the building is primarily in the major section facing State Street, completed in 1930. Both the Peach and W. Eighth street elevations have contemporary 1950-era modern elevations, with identical detailing. These additions were designed by Erie architects Myers & Krider.

The first floor storefronts of the State Street elevation have been altered slightly, but above the first floor the Boston Store appears to be unchanged since its completion in 1930. Above the tall first floor, the bays are defined by projecting brick piers. Seven of the bays are 17 feet wide, and have two 1/1 double hung wooden sash with simple limestone sills. Secondary brick piers, continuous from the second to the sixth floor, divide the windows in each bay. The single different bay is located to the north of the center of the building, flanked by three bays to the north and four to the south.¹ This off-center central bay is half again wider than the other bays, contains three windows matching the smaller bay, and marks the store's main entrance and bell tower and marquee.

As originally constructed, the tall first floor had seven storefronts and a main entrance with three pairs of glazed rim doors. A simple marquee marks the entrance and protects it from the elements. The same configuration survives, but the doors and storefronts have been replaced with aluminum units. The marquee has been covered with different material, but it appears that the original structure remains beneath the later covering. A photo of the building dated September 1930 shows awnings over all of the storefront windows.

¹ Leonard Scheicher, an employee of the Boston Store for forty-seven years, related the story that the store owners could not purchase an adjacent property to the north for what they considered a reasonable price. As a result, a bay was cut from the building plans, rendering it asymmetrical. This is an interesting story, but is not verifiable from another source.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2 The Boston Store
Name of Property
Erie County, PA
County and State

=====

Above the storefronts and below the second floor windows are short openings which originally contained 2 foot tall single light sash, resembling awning windows. These openings are the same width and directly underneath the second floor windows. Some of these openings have been converted to vents for air handling equipment. The stone sills for the second floor windows run continuously beneath both windows of each bay (or all three in the case of the central bay), forming a strong horizontal element which contrasts with the vertical emphasis starting with the second floor. Beneath the center of each stone sill, under the secondary piers separating the windows within each bay, is a stone cartouche. This element consists of a 6 inch deep entablature over a rounded stone component resembling an inverted bowling pin.

The State Street facade is capped by what appears to be a tall parapet, rather than the projecting cornice common in earlier styles of architecture. At each end of the elevation is a stack of white terra cotta blocks, forming a pedestal which wraps around each corner. This corner element formed a base for a flagpole. These flagpole bases are the only places in the exterior where white terra cotta is used, and though original, it looks like it was added in a remodeling.

The main and secondary piers which divide and subdivide each bay, extend above the parapet, to be capped by stone coping. The panels of each bay of the parapet have two sets of three inset vertical panels. These narrow inset panels are terra cotta, with a tan chevron pattern on a blue background. The bays flanking the central section have only two of the narrow panels in each half bay nearest the center.

The signature exterior feature of the Boston Store is the four-sided bell and clock tower rising from the off-center main bay of the State Street facade. The tower starts from a projecting panel resembling a shallow balcony, supported on four limestone consoles. The front of the projecting panel contains three inset horizontal panels of buff on blue colored terra cotta. The terra cotta panels have Art Deco geometric tracery patterns of triangles, diamonds, and squares.

The bell and clock tower rises nearly forty feet above the parapet. Supporting the clock are four tiers of buttresses, which decrease in size with every level. The buttress elements are capped by pieces of beveled limestone. The lower section of the tower is open, housing a geometric tracery metal screen, executed in shapes matching the larger terra cotta panels in the projecting section of the tower's base. The bell is located behind the open section of the tower. The clock face has black metal Roman numerals a background of white translucent glass panels, and is twelve feet in diameter. The clock faces were internally illuminated. In the outer edges of the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 3 The Boston Store
Name of Property
Erie County, PA
County and State

tower above the last step of the buttresses, and across the top of the tower, are inset panels of the same tan-on-blue terra cotta in a pattern of large and small circles.

As an architectural element, the polychrome terra cotta treatment at the top of the building is ineffective. The mass of the building, the small amount of terra cotta, and the subdued colors make the color invisible from the street. The bell and clock tower is an effective design however, and quickly became the icon for the Boston Store. The tower recalls religious, civic, and collegiate themes, and became an instant landmark on the Erie skyline.

South Elevation - W. 8th Street

The south elevation of the Boston Store includes two main elements: the side of the 1929-'31 main block, and the 1950 W. 8th Street extension.

The south elevation of the main block is exposed for 125 feet west of the State Street facade before meeting the 8th Street extension. This side of the main block is almost unornamented; when originally constructed, the lower three stories were behind an adjacent building. Above the now gone neighboring building, there are six irregularly spaced bays of paired windows. The two bays closest to State Street are closer together than the other bays. The windows in the fourth floor are shorter than those in the upper two stories; this condition was dictated by the adjacent buildings. The surviving windows are 3/3 steel sash, occasionally termed "explosion proof", and commonly used when there was the possibility of the spread of fire from adjacent buildings. The only hint of architectural style in this elevation are two bands of slightly different color brick below the cornice. Also surviving is a sign near the State Street corner of the elevation identifying the BOSTON STORE in painted metal letters. The sign appears in the earliest photos of the completed building. Most of the sign currently is covered by a metal panel attached to the parapet. The east elevation of the 8th Street Annex (facing State Street) is a featureless buff brick wall.

The main elevation of the 8th Street Annex dates from 1950, and has a five stories and four bays, done in a Modern style. The elevation shares themes with the State Street facade, and appears to be constructed of the same brick. The vertical character of the elevation's features are similar to the State Street elevation, with brick piers separating bays, and secondary piers separating the windows within the bays. The 8th Street Annex elevation, like the State street facade, is asymmetrical, with the third bay from the east, the entrance bay, being wider than the others.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 4

 The Boston Store

Name of Property

 Erie County, PA

County and State

The 92 foot wide elevation is divided into three 21 foot bays, plus the entrance bay of 29 feet. The ground floor contains three storefronts plus the entrance, all framed by virtually unornamented flush limestone panels. The surviving entrances and storefronts are aluminum, but do not appear to be original. There is a thin cantilevered marquee over the entrance bay. Above the first floor, three of the bays have three windows each, the entrance bay has four windows. The windows are aluminum framed, four-section, jalousied sash, apparently original. Spandrel panels of brown variegated marble provide vertical separation for the windows, and add some color to the otherwise buff-colored elevation. The piers separating the windows end before the top of the parapet, capped with beveled limestone. The secondary piers between each of the windows within the bays are carried to the parapet by raised courses of brick. The unornamented parapet is capped with thin limestone coping.

Several of the windows in the 8th Street elevation, along with the eastern storefront, have been removed to accommodate air handling equipment. Four metal anchors which once held a vertical sign for the Boston Store remain in the pier between the first and second bays from the east edge of the elevation.

West elevation - Peach Street

The Peach Street elevation of the old Boston Store was doubled in height in 1949, and refaced in Modern fashion with the same architectural elements that would be used in the W. 8th Street elevation. The elevation is five bays wide and six stories high, one each more than W. 8th Street. It has a 112 foot frontage on Peach Street. This elevation is also asymmetrical, with four 21 foot wide bays of three windows, and a larger northern bay 28 feet wide containing two pairs of windows. On the State and W. 8th Street elevations the wider bay marked the entrance; on Peach Street it does not. The entrance from Peach Street is in the center bay. The wider northern bay is the result of a service entrance / emergency exit located against the north wall, which has a pair of steel man doors on Peach Street.

The Peach Street elevation established the architectural vocabulary for W. 8th Street: limestone storefronts, buff brick, brown variegated marble, brick piers dividing bays, jalousied aluminum windows, and a simple coping. The lower three floors are a refaced older building, reported constructed in 1920, and the floor-to-floor heights are different in this section than they are in the rest of the elevation, or on W. 8th Street, which was built all at once. The result is that the second floor windows on Peach Street start immediately above the limestone storefronts, and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 5 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

the marble spandrel above them is taller than the other spandrels. The pier between the southern two bays still has four anchors for a sign.

North elevation - facing W. 7th Street

The north elevation is the only side of the building without an entrance for the public on a street, is entirely utilitarian, and is almost entirely constructed of unornamented buff brick. At the time the 1929-31 main block was built, the Boston Store had a W. 7th Street Annex which did allow public access from the street. The shallow "U" in the north elevation of the Boston Store is stepped around where the older building fronting W. 7th was attached to the main block. Fire insurance maps show 10 foot wide alleys on either side of the W. 7th Street Annex, and these provided some of the loading access required to keep the busy department store stocked.

The eastern section of the north wall, before the stepped-back portion, is 100 feet long and starting at the fourth floor has three sets of paired 3/3 windows per floor, with a single window interrupting the pattern after the easternmost pair. The western 20 feet of this section steps one floor above, and lacks any openings; there is a stair tower behind this part of the wall. The first two floors were behind a now-gone two story building, and are windowless. The third floor has a window in the single column, and a pair in the next bay to the west.

The stepped back section is 20 feet deep at the eastern end. The west-facing wall of the step has a 3/3 window on each floor, and there is a matching window immediately adjacent in the north facing portion of the stepped back section. The next 70 feet of the north wall is seven stories tall and is blank. The elevator bank is behind this section. The western 70 feet of the stepped back section has 36 3/3 windows above the first floor. Thirty of the windows are arranged in two columns of three windows each from the second to the sixth floor in the western two-thirds of the section. The remaining six windows are east of the main group, paired and on the top three floors. There are several irregular window openings in the first floor, below the line left by a shed roof over a long-gone loading dock.

The east facing portion of the stepped back section of the north wall projects 29 feet, and has a variety of window openings. There are three windows in the center of this wall, one in each of the top three floors. On the second and third floor there are two small square openings located off-center, near the main block of the building. The first floor has a loading dock with an overhead door. This door does not appear to be original. The loading door opened into a service area with a freight elevator and trash chute.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 6

 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

The western 90 feet of the north elevation, after the stepped back portion, is a blank brick wall above four 3/3 windows at the west end of the second floor. The remnants of the ca. 1920 building facing Peach Street are visible in the second and third floors, above the adjacent one story building. The wall in this section is red brick, and the ghost outlines of rows of windows are visible.

Interior

The interior of the Boston Store was repeatedly remodeled as fashions changed, new trends evolved in retailing, and interior finishes wore out. Such evolution is typical of department stores. In addition, improvements in building technology had a major impact on the interior design and appearance. The Boston Store was constructed when air conditioning was experimental, before escalators were commonplace and reliable, and before fluorescent lighting was available. By the time the store closed, it was completely air conditioned, escalators served six of the seven levels, and fluorescent lights were installed in several areas.

A 1935 newspaper article gives a brief glimpse of the original decor, describing "Terraza marble" floors and stairways on the main level, and maple or carpeted floors elsewhere. The article mentions "cream colored" paneled ceilings and "pillars." It should be noted that the mild Art Deco themes of the exterior were not continued in the interior. From early descriptions and surviving elements, the architectural style of the interior is hard to categorize, unless "inoffensive" describes a style.

A few elements are still identifiable from the original construction. The open plan remains nearly intact. The floors have large round columns supporting beams that descend eight inches or so below the ceilings. The columns and beams conceal the fireproofed structural steel. The columns flare slightly at the top and have undersized embossed-looking leafy capitals in very low relief. The beams step in from the ceiling in a series of classical moldings. Some of the column and beam effect is lost by modern lighting, occasional suspended HVAC ducts, and many temporary partitions. The elevators are located in the center of the north wall. The shafts of the bank of six elevators are stepped and slightly angled, allowing the bank to be arranged in an arc. This must have aided customers in locating the next available elevator. The elevator doors appear to be original. The escalators, installed in the 1950's are immediately in front of the elevators. One of the few elements to escape the pervasive remodelings are the colorful terra cotta surrounds framing drinking fountains on all but the fifth floor (the fifth floor was not open to the public when the new building opened, and was finished to a lower level of detail).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 7 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

The top floor escaped some of the remodeling done to the lower floors. There are three dining rooms, two relatively large rooms separated by folding wooden partitions, and a smaller private dining room. The rooms currently are dramatically painted with a red and drab yellow color scheme, but are architecturally simple and have the same columns and beams as the rest of the building.

The signature interior element is the four sided clock, suspended from the first floor ceiling in front of the elevators, located at the approximate focal point of straight lines from each of the three public street entrances. The clock is a rough metal cube, about five feet on a side, attached to the ceiling by several feet of metal filigree. Triangular sections are clipped from each corner of the cube, producing an octagon at the plane of the face of each clock. The octagonal and triangular sections are outlined with egg and dart molding, and within each octagon, raised round florets mark each corner. Each triangular face has a floret at its center. The clock itself is about three feet in diameter and has a translucent face with black Roman numerals. A molded pineapple descends from the bottom of the clock. The appearance is that of a multi-faceted jewel, or, perhaps, an oversize pocket watch on a chain. The Boston Store clock became a favorite meeting place for two generations of Erie's citizens.

One of the unusual features of the Boston Store is that it possesses elevations of different dates on three different streets. Many Erie pedestrians took advantage of the Boston Store's three entrances to take a short-cut, or escape the city's occasionally inclement weather. The additions were logical extensions to main block of the store, and reflect the growth of the business. Except for the lower second floor of the Peach Street extension, the two additions are practically indistinguishable from the main block of the building. In exterior style the later Modern sections seem to be a logical progression of the Art Deco main block, and contribute to the architectural composition.

The exterior integrity of the Boston Store is excellent, with the only significant change the replacement of storefronts and doors with aluminum units. The interior retains its original open plan and some components: the clock, column and beam decoration, and other features. The frequent remodelings of the interior reflect changes in department store style and technology, were part of the logical development of the store, and do not detract from the overall architectural integrity of the building.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 1 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

The Boston Store was Erie's largest and most prominent department store of the 20th century. The building, designed in 1929 and completed in 1931, is locally significant for its architecture under Criterion C of the National Register because of its prominence in the city's historic central business district. It is also locally significant under Criterion A as the major surviving element of Erie's 20th century commercial boom. The period of significance dates from the construction of the new building in 1929-30, through the construction of two additions in 1949 and 1950.

The Boston Store grew out of the Erie Dry Goods Company, founded in 1885 by Elisha H. Mack. In that year Mack purchased a bankrupt dry goods store on Peach Street, and named it after the city of Boston, then perceived to be a center of fashion and culture. In 1886 Mack moved the Boston Store to the 700-block of State Street after acquiring a narrow three story building there. This latter location was nearer the center of Erie's commercial district. The Boston Store gradually expanded, purchasing neighboring properties and incorporating the acquired two and three story buildings into the store. More departments and services were added as the store expanded. Between 1886 and 1930 the Boston Store acquired perhaps as many as eleven separate parcels of real estate in the block bounded by State, Peach, W. 7th, and W. 8th streets. By the late 1920's the Boston Store had frontage on all four streets defining its block, and owned about two-thirds of the surface area within the block. It is interesting to note that despite all its real estate purchases, the store never owned a single corner property.

The Boston Store's growth and evolution was typical. In the smaller cities of Western Pennsylvania in the early decades of the 20th century, department stores evolved from old dry goods houses, or were constructed by the first chain retailers. Examples include Meadville's Crawford Store, Sharon's Sharon Store, along with stores in Warren, Oil City, Bradford, New Castle, Butler, and Greensburg. Pittsburgh had a number of large department stores.

Primary competition for the Boston Store was Trask, Prescott & Richardson, located barely a block south of the Boston Store on State Street. This firm also evolved from a dry goods store, and in 1892 constructed a 6-story Richardsonian Romanesque-styled building at the northeast corner of State and 9th streets. At the end of the 19th century Trask, Prescott & Richardson was Erie's largest department store.

The Boston Store grew with Erie's 20th century industrial boom, and outgrew its hodge-podge of buildings. In 1925 Elisha Mack's longtime business partner, Robert Spittal, died, and Mack

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 2 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

retired later that same year, though he retained an ownership interest, and stayed involved in the store. Succeeding Mack at the helm of the business was forty-year Boston Store employee Peter Fries, along with A.E. Seidel and Thomas Sutherland.¹

In 1929 Erie architects Shutts & Morrison designed a new Boston Store within the block in which the existing store buildings stood. The design of the new store followed the established standard for department store architecture: a large, almost cubical masonry block with a maximum of open floor area. A bank of six passenger elevators provided the vertical circulation necessary to deliver customers to the seven floors (six above grade, plus the basement). The building's signature elements, both inside and out, are two monumental clocks: one four-sided clock is mounted in a forty-foot tower on the roof, a second hangs from the tall first floor ceiling near the building's elevators. Cost of constructing the new store was reported to be \$2 million.

Architects Frank Shutts and Karl Morrison established the firm of Shutts & Morrison in Erie in 1912. The firm is known to have designed residential, commercial, and institutional buildings, although a comprehensive list of commissions has not been discovered. Karl Morrison was active in the Erie Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and the Erie Builder's Exchange. During the 1930's he would oversee the Historic American Building Survey office in Erie. A surviving Shutts & Morrison project in a very good state of integrity is the former Erie Lighting building, now the Meiser Building, 21-23 West 10th Street. Constructed in the early 1920's, this four story commercial block is ornamented with Renaissance elements. The surviving original plans for the Boston Store bear the firm name and "Erie, Pa." and "Cleveland, O.", though both principals were natives of Erie County and lived in Erie.

Shutts & Morrison's choice of a restrained Art Deco exterior treatment may have been influenced by the exterior design of the Erie Trust Building by New York architects Dennison & Hiron. Now the G. Daniel Baldwin Building, the 14-story Trust Building was Erie's first skyscraper, and a symbol of the city's prosperity in the 1920's. The mass of the Boston Store was rivaled in Erie only by a few hotels, and the now demolished Commerce Building. The Commerce Building and hotels generally were constructed of dark brick, and used architectural vocabulary of an earlier era, with elements from classical architecture, including characteristic overhanging cornices.

Early photographs of the new Boston Store convey some of the impact of the building on Erie. A massive block, six-stories tall and 145 feet wide, the sparsely-ornamented and light colored building dwarfs the neighboring two and three story structures, most of which were Italianate in

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 3 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

style and appear to date from the two decades following the Civil War. The store's clock tower was and remains a defining element of the city's skyline.

While the Boston Store was being built, Pittsburgh's Kaufmann's Department Store, at Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street, underwent a well-remembered interior remodeling and first floor exterior re-cladding by Pittsburgh architects Janssen & Cocken in 1930. This remodeling installed a remarkable Art Deco interior in the Renaissance Revival styled building, proving that other department stores found the new style appropriate.

Many Erie suppliers and subcontractors worked on the Boston Store. Local firms manufactured the water heaters and heat exchangers, the copper pipe and fittings, the roofing, and the steel stairs and ornamental ironwork. Erie firms provided the marble and terrazzo, plastering, electrical work, and masonry construction. A photo dated September 1930 seems to show the new Boston Store complete, with awnings over the street windows, and no sign of construction staging. However, the store dated the completion of its new building to 1931.

The new Boston Store made a major impression on the retail commerce of Erie, and firmly established the city as a regional shopping center. The advertised 339,000 square feet of space in the Boston complex far exceeded the space available to rival Trask, Prescott & Richardson. The variety of goods and services available in a modern department store was a revelation to shoppers and a revolution in the retailing industry. The store offered the combination of a wide range of clothing, home furnishings, appliances, and miscellaneous accessories, with restaurants and an array of personal services. As the biggest and best department store in the region, the prestige of the Boston Store was widely acknowledged, and capitalized on by the store's managers and marketers. Returned merchandise was accepted without dispute; the integrity of a Boston Store customer would not be questioned. Patrons of the store's bridal registry, beauty salon, custom tailoring department, restaurants, and other services were made to feel that they numbered among the privileged few. The Boston Store attracted a first-rate staff, and was a major employer, initially providing jobs for 500 of Erie's citizens.

To prosper, a department store had to become more than just a retail outlet; it needed to be a destination, entertainment center, and community focal point. The Boston Store succeeded in being all those things to Erie. It was common for Erie's shoppers to arrange to meet under the Boston Store's interior clock. Many of the city's service clubs and social organizations held

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 4

 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

their regular meetings in one of the sixth floor dining rooms. The store pioneered home delivery in Erie, maintained a mail order department, and had its own post office. The Boston Store was an early practitioner of outdoor advertising, installing small signs on the side of main roads leading to Erie advising motorists of the distance to the store. Employee morale was cultivated through a variety of special events and recognition programs. The store chartered excursion trains on the Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad to bring to the city potential customers from Greenville, Meadville, and the Pennsylvania hinterlands. The trip and lunch were free; however, the meal and return ticket were available only inside the Boston Store.

Though unique in Erie, the Boston Store followed well-established principles of department store design. The retail floors were open, allowing sweeping views across the aisles of merchandise. In 1931 Boston Store's basement housed a cafeteria and traditional off-price basement merchandise. In a guarded corner of the basement was the "Tube Room" to which nearly 200 pneumatic tubes brought cash and charge slips from throughout the store. The first floor had a variety of inexpensive impulse-buy merchandise: small household items, toilet goods, hand-kerchiefs, candy, a magazine rack, bookstore, and the like. Following established custom, the men's department also was located on the first floor. Women customers far outnumbered men in department stores, and the industry learned to lure men inside by locating the men's department adjacent to a main entrance. Following another long established industry custom, the Boston Store's women's department was located on the second floor. The third through fifth floors held furniture, flooring, drapes, crockery, china, "Victrolas", and other household goods. The upper floors were the least desirable retailing space. In 1931, the fifth floor was given over to stock room and refrigerated fur storage; eventually it held a well-remembered toy department. The top floor housed a large kitchen, several dining rooms, and the store's administrative offices. The two main dining rooms could be configured as a small auditorium.

The new Boston Store opened during the depths of the Great Depression. Clearly the store suffered from the financial turmoil that devastated industrial Erie, although it is difficult to gauge the impact from surviving records or the memories of individuals. Both the Boston Store and rival Trask's weathered the bad times. The free excursion trains likely were an attempt to mitigate the effects of the Depression by broadening the store's market area. The signs along the highways of the region pointing the way to the Boston Store served the same purpose.

From its humble start until 1930 the Boston Store expanded regularly, initially by purchasing adjacent properties, and finally through constructing a big new building. It is clear that the store

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 5

The Boston Store

Name of Property

Erie County, PA

County and State

began to expand again after World War II. In 1949 three floors were added to the old Peach Street store, making it six stories tall, and the elevation received a new face. The next year the old West 8th Street extension, a three story building, was demolished and replaced by a new five story structure. Escalators were added from the first through the fifth floors in 1953. Architect for the two additions and the escalator installation was the Erie firm of Myers & Krider.

In 1959 the era of local ownership of the Boston Store ended after seventy-four years. Associated Department Stores purchased the Boston Store for just under \$2 million. According to a 1960 newspaper article, the store had 700 full-time employees, and added three hundred more jobs during the Christmas season. Minor modernizations, departmental reorganizations and upgrades continued through the 1960's and 1970's. Rival Trask, Prescott & Richardson, reorganized as Trask's in the 1940's, moved from its old location in 1967, and was purchased by the Carlisle's chain in 1970, the same year Trask's 1892 building was demolished. Trask's / Carlisle's remained the main Boston Store competitor in downtown Erie, but could not rival the larger store in size or volume of merchandise sold.

In the 1970's Boston Store business suffered from the development of regional shopping malls, and the deterioration of Erie's commercial district; a common urban phenomenon of the era. Management of the Boston Store was assumed by Horne's Department Store, a Pittsburgh-based component of the Associated Department Store chain in December 1975. On June 15, 1979 the Erie Times reported:

Officials of the Joseph Horne Company pointed to a regression of Erie's downtown business district and a continued slide in sales revenue in announcing that the Boston Store would quietly close its doors on July 7 and remain closed.

The same article quoted Boston Store manager Robert Salachi:

During the past five years, traffic and sales have been deteriorating, ... the competition from Millcreek Mall was just too much. We were losing customers to Millcreek Mall.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 6 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

Horne's had an outlet in Millcreek Mall, and some of the downtown Boston Store employees were transferred there after the store's closing.

Since 1979 the vacant Boston Store has been the subject of a number of studies and redevelopment proposals. The prominent location of the old store, a block from Perry Square and Erie's city and county civic buildings, and its size, made it a very visible reminder of the decline of the city's historic central business district in the late 20th century.

The Boston Store remains revered in Erie, seventeen years after it closed. Former employees and customers hold annual dinners to meet friends and reminisce about the old store, and all it meant to Erie.

¹Although founder Elisha H. Mack's involvement in the day-to-day management of the Boston Store after 1925 is not clear, his contribution to Erie extends decades after his death in 1952 at age 94. Mack established a \$270,000 trust fund in 1935 "for the benefit and betterment of the people of Erie and Erie County." Mack's legacy, now the Erie Community Foundation, has grown to millions of dollars and is the largest private non-profit charitable foundation in Erie.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 1 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

Books and Articles

"Annual Boston Store Picnic, July 9, 1930." Pamphlet in the Archives of the Erie County Historical Society, Erie Pennsylvania.

Central States Architect Quarterly, Cleveland, Ohio. September 15, 1930.

Claridge, John R. "The Boston Store," Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Historic Resource Nomination, 1981. Typescript in the Archives of the Erie County Historical Society, Erie, Pennsylvania.

Claridge, John R. Lost Erie. The Vanished Heritage of City and County. Erie: Erie County Historical Society, 1991.

Federal Writer's Project. Erie: A Guide to the City and County. Philadelphia: William Penn Association, 1938.

Ferry, John William. A History of the Department Store. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960.

Grasso, Russell "The Boston Store: A History of the Term and The Stores." Rochester, N.Y., 1992. Typescript in the Archives of the Erie County Historical Society, Erie, Pennsylvania.

Hendrickson, Robert. The Grand Emporiums. The Illustrated History of America's Great Department Stores. Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.: Stein & Day Publishers, 1979.

Hurley, Mollie K. "History of the Boston Store On the Occasion of its Golden Anniversary". Typescript in the Archives of the Erie County Historical Society, 1935.

Polk, R.L., and Company, Compilers. City Directory of Erie, Pennsylvania. Chicago: R.L. Polk & Company, 1910 - 1955.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 2 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

Reed, John E. History of Erie County, Pennsylvania. Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Company, 1925.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Atlas. New York: Sanborn Map & Publishing Company, 1932.

Wellejus, Edward. Erie: Chronicle of a Great Lakes City. Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, 1980.

Archives:

Erie Community Foundation, Erie, Pennsylvania
Erie County Historical Society, Erie, Pennsylvania

Interviews:

Michael L. Batchelor, President, The Erie Community Foundation, Erie, Pennsylvania.
John R. Claridge, Author and Historian, Erie, Pennsylvania
Leonard Scheicher, Boston Store Facilities Manager and employee from 1929 - 1976

Videotape:

"The Boston Store, " Remembering Erie, WQLN-TV, Erie, Pennsylvania, 1994.

Newspapers:

Erie Dispatch Herald
September 30, 1935
May 28, 1949
December 24, 1952

Erie Times-News
September 25, 1960
July 22, 1979.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 3

 The Boston Store
Name of Property
 Erie County, PA
County and State

Erie Times
 October 16, 1975
 June 15, 1979
 July 7, 1979
Erie Morning News
 October 17, 1975

Public Records:

Erie County Deeds

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Shutts & Morrison, 1929

Meyers & Krider, 1949-1950

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: Erie County Historical Society 419 State Street Erie, PA 16501

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.2 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 17 575590 4664090 3 _____

2 _____ 4 _____

See continuation sheet.

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

Erie County Deed Book 1527 page 91

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

The boundary includes the city lots historically associated with the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Charles H. Uhl

organization Historic Preservation Services date May 8, 1996

street & number Box 77080 telephone (412) 492-9100

city or town Pittsburgh state PA zip code 15215

