

VLR 3/16/15  
NPHR 5/26/15

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 Whitesel Brothers  
Building

other names/site number VA DHR File #:115-5048

2. Location

street & number 131 West Grace Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Harrisonburg vicinity \_\_\_\_\_  
state Virginia code VA county Harrisonburg (Independent City) code 660 Zip 22801

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.)

*Catherine J. ...* 4/11/05  
Signature of certifying official Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
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 \_\_\_\_\_

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**5. Classification**

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**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**

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
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u> 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

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   COMMERCE/TRADE   Sub:   warehouse  

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   COMMERCE/TRADE   Sub:   warehouse  

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

  OTHER: Late Depression Era Building  

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**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
roof METAL : Tin  
walls BRICK  
other BRICK, WOOD, STEEL, IRON

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

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

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

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or 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.

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**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance** 1939-1948

**Significant Dates** 1939  
circa 1948

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** UNKNOWN

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

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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**Bibliography**

(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: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property .46 acres

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

Zone	Easting	Northing
1 UTM Zone 17	685209	4257125

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**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.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title: Sarah Edwards

Organization: Sabe Preservation Consulting date 10/19/2004

street & number: 187 Rural Drive telephone (540) 435-1120

city or town Mount Solon state VA zip code 22843

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**Additional Documentation**

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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)

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**Property Owner**

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

name Gary and Annette Beatty

street & number 450 S. Mason Street telephone (540) 433-2126

city or town Harrisonburg state VA zip code 22801

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**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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Whitesel Brothers Building  
City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

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**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

The Whitesel Brothers Building is located within the city limits of Harrisonburg, Virginia. The two-story warehouse building is bordered to the north by West Grace Street, to the east by Chesapeake Avenue, to the west by Blacks Run Creek, and to the south by other warehouse and commercial buildings. The east side of the building is used for parking for the business that is currently occupying its first floor. Located within a commercial section of the city with similar commercial buildings, the Whitesel Brothers Building sets on .46 acres and includes one 1939 Late Depression era building with an addition built at some point between 1939 and 1948, and one addition that was constructed after 1961. The dates of the additions are estimates based on written and historical documentation. Although the designer and builder of the Whitesel Brothers Building are unknown, this building serves as a significant representation of Late Depression era warehouse construction. The innovative systems throughout the interior further add to its significance as an industrial warehouse.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION**

The two-story Late Depression era building, located on the corner of West Grace Street and Chesapeake Avenue in the City of Harrisonburg is a fine example of warehouse architecture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The site contains the main 1939 building and two subsequent additions. The site context is in keeping with a traditional commercial setting as the surrounding buildings are also warehouse-style buildings accessed by the nearby railroad tracks. This red brick building with additions represents an interesting combination of craftsmanship and modern technology. While the building is two stories, there is an elevator shaft that is actually approximately one story higher than the rest of the building. The roofline is somewhat hidden by the metal Whitesel Brothers sign on the east and west elevations; however, it is a standing-seam metal roof with an interior wooden and steel arched truss system. The main building and the two additions are all set on poured concrete foundations. The main building is composed of structural brick with interior steel support systems. The brick bond pattern is a combination of Flemish bond brick and American bond brick. There are also three chimneys that rise from the roof. The open floor plan design is interrupted by partitions in the northeast corner of the building, which likely served as an office location for the farm implement business. There is also an elevator located in the southeast corner of the building. The stairway to the second floor is located on the opposite or southwest corner of the building. The second floor is an open floor plan with an exposed elaborate arched truss roof system constructed from oak. The wood floor is also oak and it is double laid to create added support to the second floor. There are no structural columns on the second floor, but the roof system is further strengthened by steel elements and steel roofing systems.<sup>1</sup>

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The north elevation, which serves as the main facade, is a variation of a block design with wings. There are five windows on the front facade. The first-floor windows are metal sash, hinged windows with four rows of six panes making twenty-four panes of glass. The second-floor windows and the remaining first-floor windows are metal sash, hinged windows with three rows of six panes of glass to make eighteen total panes of glass. Each pane measures one-and-a-half-foot-by-one foot. These windows continue throughout the other elevations of the building. There are three exceptions to this pattern of windows. There are two first-floor windows on the west elevation of the building that have fans installed in them, and the east elevation has a window that was converted to a door and only has two rows of panes instead of three, as the third needed to be removed for the total space of the door. It is unclear if these fans are original or installed at a later date. All of the windows appear to have the original glass without any evidence of replacement windows. There is also an entrance on the north facade that provides a means of access to the building from Grace Street. This door is a standard three-foot-by-seven-foot door, which is accessed by a poured concrete slab that creates a front stoop. The east elevation reflects the use of a similar door, which appears to have been installed shortly after 1939 at the location of an original window. The original window remains above the existing door, thus making it easy to determine the installation of the door that occurred following original construction as the original plan called for a window and not a door at this location; thus this provides the explanation for the remaining window structure above the existing door. This window only has two rows of panes, while the other windows have three rows of panes. This door now allows access to the first floor, while a set of large sliding doors also allows access into the building from this elevation. This set of doors, also has a standard size doorway as a way to give access to the building when the sliding doors were closed. These doors are wood and slide on a metal track, thus making it possible to move equipment. These are the original doors and the newer door on this elevation was installed for easier access to the building as the door attached to the sliding doors has a step-up that created an inconvenient entrance to the building. There is also a set of doors for the elevator shaft that can be seen from the outside of the building. The remainder of this elevation has the same windows that were previously discussed. There are a total of ten windows on this elevation. The original south facade has no original windows and had an exit door that was operated on a pulley system and an inclined track that allowed the door to slide at an incline to close on its own. The pulley system allowed the door to be held open by a set of weights located on the inside of the building. This door still remains; however, it now opens into the 1940s machine shop addition. The west elevation reflects the use of the window fans and the repetition of the previously discussed windows. There are a total of twelve windows on the main building's west elevation.

The interior space of the 1939 warehouse building shows the continued use of the building as a warehouse and storage area. While the building is currently the home of an electrical company, it has not been dramatically altered from its original plans. The interior columns are six-inch-by-six-inch steel I-beams set at approximately nineteen-and-a-half-foot intervals east-west and fifteen-and-a-half-foot intervals north-south. These I-beams help to distribute the weight from the floor above and the structure itself. There are also a number of innovative elements through the interior of this building that make it architecturally significant. It has a counter-weight

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pulley system elevator with an electric motor that predates the building that is located in the southeast corner of the building. It has been speculated through oral accounts that this elevator was removed from a previous building and the existing building was built around it. There are also significant original doors that show a great knowledge of engineering principles, as they operate on a weight system. This system is put to use with the first-floor door, which was also constructed to be slanted so that when the weights are released on the pulley, the door will close on its own as it is set on a roller track so that it does not roll beyond its intended path. The door to the second floor also operates on a weight and pulley system so that it automatically closes behind the person going up the stairs. This door is located in the stairway in the southwest corner of the building. These innovative systems show the use of technology popular in the 1930s, and these intact systems make the building an architecturally rich element of American building history.

While the 1939 building reflects few changes and alterations over the years, there are significant additions to the main building that occurred at some point in the 1940s and after 1961. The first addition was constructed between 1939 and 1948. This addition also features an open floor plan. The one-story, front-gabled building is concrete block with a red brick veneer and has a poured concrete foundation. The windows on the west elevation and the north elevation of this building match the 1939 building exactly. The east elevation reflects the use of this building as a garage and repair shop, as it has large garage doors that allow access into the building. This addition was used as the repair shop for the farm equipment retailer, thus showing the growth of the business and its expansion of services. This addition is in good condition, but it has been combined with the later addition to make one building with dividing partitions in the newer section. The date of construction for the second addition is unclear, but it is built of concrete block and shares no architectural characteristics with the two front buildings. There is some oral history speculation that this second addition may have been built in the 1960s. Its lack of inclusion on a 1961 modification of a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map further suggests it was not constructed until after 1961. The rear and latest addition is also constructed on a poured concrete foundation with a concrete block structure; however, it does not feature brick veneer, thus making it easy to distinguish between the two additions. This addition also has concrete block partitions to create a variety of interior spaces and is not in keeping with the open floor plan design of the original building. Its lack of architectural character and prevalent use of standardized methodology and materials suggests that it is significant in the development of the site but not historically significant for the purposes of this nomination.<sup>2</sup>

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The two-story 1939 Whitesel Brothers Building is an excellent example of warehouse construction from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The building, located at 131 West Grace Street, is situated within a commercial section of the City of Harrisonburg, Virginia. The building consists of an original block with wings that represents a combination of Late Depression era craftsmanship and technology. The most important element of this combination is the second-floor arched truss system that embodies the fundamentals of early-20<sup>th</sup> century technology, while the building also reflects old construction methodologies in its brickwork and woodwork. The intact nature of the original mechanical systems, which rarely survive in warehouse buildings of the period, further contributes to its significance. The building is one of the best preserved examples of commercial architecture within the City of Harrisonburg. Though the building is being nominated for the National Register of Historic Places strictly under Criterion C for its architectural merit, the company that built the Grace Street building also reflects a great deal about the time period and the economic and commercial issues confronting Late Depression era buildings. The farm implement business also helped to bridge the gap between the urban and the agricultural communities of the City of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. In short, this building is an architectural gem that has remained largely intact since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and is a shining example of Late Depression era architecture.<sup>3</sup>

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The surrounding Rockingham County is extremely rich in agriculture, but the location of farm implement retailers downtown and within the City of Harrisonburg allowed the gap between the two communities to be bridged and helped to facilitate harmonious living and working environments. One company that helped to bridge this gap was the Whitesel farm implement firm, which was founded in 1880 by H.N. and J.D. Whitesel, who later trained Frank Whitesel to perform the operations of the company. Due to declining health, family deaths and corporate shifts, the company was later owned by J.O. Stickley and known as the Cunningham farm implement firm. Frank Whitesel sold his interest in the company and bought another firm older than the Whitesel and the Cunningham firms. Frank Whitesel's new endeavor would lead to the business that was placed within the 1939 West Grace Street building. In addition to his being a businessman, Frank Whitesel was a member of the local community whose service can be seen through his enlistment in the military and his position as a past president of Virginia Farm Equipment Association. His support of organizations such as local 4-H and Future Farmers of America further indicated his dedication to the growth and development of his community. During the Great Depression, the farm implement business experienced the same downward spiral as other industries throughout the country. Being located in such an agriculturally rich area like Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg, money was extremely short among the farming community so it was difficult for people to afford farm machinery. Mr. Whitesel decided to expand his business realm instead of closing down his farm implement store so that his employees could keep their jobs. It was at this time that he began a lumber business to generate more income to offset the losses with the farm implements business. In 1938, Mr. Whitesel and his brother

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Lynwood Whitesel purchased the lot next to the Farm Bureau building. After borrowing money against their life insurance policy and acquiring a loan from a family member, the Whitesel brothers were ready to begin the construction process. This move shows Mr. Whitesel's dedication to his employees and his community. The construction of his new building, however, proved to be beneficial, and by 1948, the borrowed money had been repaid.<sup>4</sup>

The architectural elements of the original construction of the Whitesel Brothers Building reflect a great deal about the available resources and the importance of craftsmanship. One of the most interesting elements of this building is the elaborate nature of the woodwork and the prevalent use of quality wood in a Depression era building, when there were more cost effective materials available at that time. For instance, structural brick was used for the walls instead of concrete block walls with brick veneer. The brickwork is also interesting as it appears to be a combination of Flemish bond brick and American bond brick. Although the first floor of the building resembles most other warehouse buildings, it is the second floor that houses a beautiful trussed arch roof made from oak with steel supports. The exposed roof structure shows an unprecedented use of craftsmanship that was often lost with the introduction of standardized construction methodology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The era of this building also suggests that there should have been many steps taken to cut costs and keep to a strict budget, but this does not appear to have been the case as the second floor is constructed from what appears to be a hand-cut oak and steel system. Rumored to have been constructed by a Mennonite man of the older order, this building reflects the important dedication to quality building materials and craftsmanship prevalent in the Mennonite community throughout the Harrisonburg area at that time and to this day. This building is also significant because of its combination of quality materials and craftsmanship with modern materials, such as steel for the roof structure and the support columns on the first floor. Not only was oak used in the roof structure, but it was also used in the double laid floors. The finished floor is constructed from east-west installed beams, and the sub-floor is laid at an angle to give the floor more strength. There is also a series of innovative systems throughout the building that make it architecturally and historically significant. For instance, the elevator that is located in the southeast corner of the building predates the building, and the 1939 building is said to have been built around that elevator. This elevator still operates the way it was originally intended as a counter-weight pulley elevator with an electric motor used for transporting freight. The interior doors are also significant and interesting because of their innovative systems. The first-floor door that currently leads into the first addition is an interesting example of a weighted pulley system. This door, which measures eight-foot-by-eight-foot-eleven inches, is set on a west-to-east slanted track so that it travels on a specified path. The door is operated by a pulley system that keeps it open, and when the cord of the weights is released, the door travels on the slanted path to close. The original weights are no longer used as the door is kept open at all times now, but they remain in the building. The door leading to the second floor also has a weighted pulley system so that the door automatically closes. These innovative pulley systems throughout the building and the use of quality wood products mixed with modern materials makes this building truly significant. In essence, this building is architecturally significant because of its innovative systems, elaborate roof system, unchanged nature and intact original materials.<sup>5</sup>

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ward Bucher ed., *Dictionary of Building Preservation*, 496.

<sup>2</sup> Burkholder Interview, July 2004. Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture*, 293-294. Gabrielle M. Lanier and Bernard L. Herman, *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes*, 230-231.

<sup>4</sup> *The First One Hundred Years Whitesel Bros. Inc. 1880-1980*, 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Rifkind, 293-294.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Bucher, Ward ed. *Dictionary of Building Preservation*, Preservation Press: New York, 1996.

City of Harrisonburg, Tax Map 24.

City of Harrisonburg Deed Book 1724, Page 457.

City of Harrisonburg Deed Book 2381, Page 9.

Lanier, Gabrielle M. and Bernard L. Herman, *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes*, 230-231.

Personal Interview with Lloyd Burkholder Interview, July 2004.

Rifkind, Carole, *A Field Guide to American Architecture*, The New American Library: New York, 1980.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1961.

The First One Hundred Years Whitesel Bros, Inc. 1880-1980.

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**GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

This building and its lot boundaries can be defined by as the property indicated as parcel 10 of tax map 24 in the City of Harrisonburg. The building's north façade faces West Grace Street, giving the property the address of 131 West Grace Street in the City of Harrisonburg, Virginia. The building is bordered to the east by Chesapeake Avenue and to the west by Blacks Run Creek. The southern border is a small strip of land between this building and the building located directly behind it. The property is an individual building with two additions that are all attached to the main building, thus making one cohesive built unit.

**Boundary Justification**

The property boundaries are clear, because of the building's location within an urban setting. It is situated on the corner of West Grace Street and Chesapeake Avenue. There is also a natural border for the western side of the property, Blacks Run Creek. The current property boundaries are the same as those defining the lot in 1939, the year the building was constructed.

CHESAPEAKE AVENUE

PARKING

PARKING

WHITESEL BROTHERS BUILDING  
CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VA

66'

50'

1 STORY  
ADDITIONS

100'

2-STORY  
MAIN WAREHOUSE  
BUILDING  
1939

60'

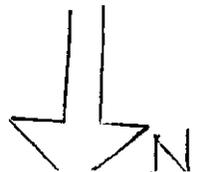
SIDEWALK

BRIDGE

BLACKS RUN CREEK

WEST GRACE STREET

NOT TO SCALE



SITE PLAN 131 WEST GRACE STREET

