MONTGOMERY WARD BUILDING
Burlington

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#### DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Preserving Vermont's historic, architectural and archeological resources

June 20, 1991

Donald Bigglestone, President Capital Stationers, Inc. 52 Church Street Burlington, Vermont 05401

Re: Burlington Montgomery Ward Building (52-54 Church Street)

Burlington

Dear Mr. Bigglestone:

On February 28, 1991, the Division for Historic Preservation sent you a letter notifying you that your property, the old Burlington Montgomery Ward Building, was being considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. We are pleased to inform you that this building has now been officially entered on the National Register. Congratulations!

If you have any questions regarding this action, please feel free to contact Elsa Gilbertson in this office.

Sincerely

Eric Gilbertson

Director/State Historic Preservation Officer

EG/eg

Office location: 58 East State Street
Mailing address: Pavilion Building



#### DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Preserving Vermont's historic, architectural and archeological resources

June 20, 1991

Arthur R. Hogan, Jr., Executive Director Chittenden County Regional Planning and Development Commission P.O. Box 108
Burlington, Vermont 05452

Re: Burlington Montgomery Ward Building (52-54 Church Street)

Burlington

Dear Mr Hogan:

On February 28, 1991, the Division for Historic Preservation sent you a letter notifying you that the old Burlington Montgomery Ward Building was being considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. We are pleased to inform you that this building has now been officially entered on the National Register.

If you have any questions regarding this action, please feel free to contact Elsa Gilbertson in this office.

Sincerely,

Eric Gilbertson

Director/State Historic

Preservation Officer

EG/eg

Office location: Mailing address:

58 East State Street Pavilion Building



#### DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Preserving Vermont's historic, architectural and archeological resources

June 20, 1991

Mayor Peter Clavelle Burlington City Hall Burlington, Vermont 05401

Burlington Montgomery Ward Building (52-54 Church Street)

Burlington

Dear Mayor Clavelle:

On February 28, 1991, the Division for Historic Preservation sent you a letter notifying you that the old Burlington Montgomery Ward Building was being considered for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. We are pleased to inform you that this building has now been officially entered on the National Register.

If you have any questions regarding this action, please feel free to contact Elsa Gilbertson in this office.

Sincerely,

Gilbertson

Director/State Historic

Preservation Officer

EG/eg

cc: Ken Lerner

Office location: 58 East State Street Mailing address: Pavilion Building



#### **DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

Preserving Vermont's historic, architectural and archeological resources

April 26, 1991

Carol Shull, Chief of Registration National Register of Historic Places National Park Service Department of the Interior Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the National Register nomination for the following:

Burlington Montgomery Ward Building Burlington, Chittenden County, Vermont

This property is being submitted under the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in 1980, for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Sincerely,

Eric Gilbertson

Director/State Historic Preservation Officer

EG/EG

Enclosures

Office location: 58 East State Street
Mailing address: Pavilion Building

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines* for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

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Name of Property			
	on Montgomery Ward Buildin	3	
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Location	1 0		VAI not for publication
	urch Street		A vicinity
y, town Burlingt			T
Me Vermont code	VT county Chittenden	code 00	ZID CODE 0340
Classification			
vnership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Reso	urces within Property
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Signature of certifying official Vermont State or Federal agency and bureau	<u> </u>		Amul 22,1991 Date
In my opinion, the property meet	s does not meet the National Regi	ster criteria. 🔲 See	continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official			Date
State or Federal agency and bureau			
National Park Service Certifica	tion		
hereby, certify that this property is:			
entered in the National Register.			
See continuation sheet.			
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determined not eligible for the			
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other, (explain:)			

3. Function or Use		
distoric Functions (enter categories from instructions)		ctions (enter categories from instructions
COMMERCE/department store	COMMI	ERCE/department store
7. Description		
Architectural Classification enter categories from instructions)	Materials (e	nter categories from instructions)
	foundation _	stone
Commercial Style	walls	brick
		concrete
	roof	asphalt
	other	terra cotta
	<u> </u>	

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet for description.

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number7	Page1	Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
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#### 7. Description

Located at 52-54 Church Street near the center of Burlington, Vermont's main downtown commercial district, the Burlington Montgomery Ward Building is an early 20th century, two-story commercial style building with vernacular neo-classical details. The west-facing, 3-bay wide, front facade is sheathed with grey cast concrete "imitation granite." The upper story features three Chicago style windows. Each of these windows have a large fixed sash flanked by narrower double-hung sash. The stiles of the center sash extend above to frame a narrow horizontal fixed sash flanked by quarter-round corner sash. Separating the bays are cast concrete pilasters, graced with stylized neo-classical swags near their tops. The pilasters are capped by concrete knobs cast in the shape of urns filled with foliage. The three sections of the front facade which rise between the pilasters form a low front parapet with protruding cast-concrete capstones. Each section of the parapet is stepped to a centered semicircle. The center section is decorated by a tall, green, terra cotta panel, cast with the Montgomery Ward Company's "Spirit of Progress" torch-bearing figure in bas-relief, while both side bays of the parapet feature red terra cotta paterae centered below the semicircle and green reticulated terra cotta panels below. Small square paterae in red terra cotta flank the large green panels on each bay. Below the Chicago style windows is a fulllength signboard over a line of eleven double-hung, leaded, prism-glass windows. Although the upper windows were masked by louvered shutters and plywood during the 1970's, they have recently been unveiled and restored.

The display windows and doorways were removed during the 1970's when a brick-faced storefront with three large display windows and two

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number7	Page	Burlington Montgomery Ward I	Building
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doorways were installed. This street level storefront was replaced with the current 3-bay design in 1989. Each bay is divided into thirds with wooden double doors opening in the center bay and a similar single door in the northern bay. The northern door leads to a lobby for an automatic banking machine, while the center doors lead to a small lobby. The wood-framed display windows have large, fixed, tempered, insulating glass panes with smaller fixed panes above. The upper panes have etched lines parallel to the edges. A canvas awning supported by a steel frame extends along the length of the front just below the signboard.

The side walls of the building are brick with no windows. On the south, the side wall extends a story above the adjacent one-story store while on the north, the adjacent three story building rises several feet higher toward the front, but drops to only one story toward the rear.

The rear (east) elevation, visible from an alley which extends south from Cherry Street, is also constructed of common brick. Fenestration is irregularly spaced, with 1-over-1 windows marking the first, mezzanine, and second stories. The northeast corner extends a story higher to enclose the machinery for a freight elevator. This penthouse is lit by a 9-pane, fixed sash on the east side. On the first story of the elevator shaft, a large overhead door opens at a raised loading dock. A pair of modern aluminum and glass passage doors are located at ground level, south of the loading dock. An integral brick furnace chimney rises from the southeast corner. Just below the rear parapet. two, small, louvered vents ventilate the attic. The flat roof is covered with built-up roofing and pea-stone ballast.

The interior of the store has been partitioned into two major spaces on the first floor. A new center entry vestibule leads to a branch bank on the forward north side of the first floor, while a stationery store currently occupies

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number7	Page	Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
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the rest of the building. Although little of the original appearance of the interior, with its plastered interior walls and ceilings, is visible behind the suspended ceilings, carpeting, store displays, and merchandise, the original open stairway with wooden balusters and handrails is located near the rear of the building. Flights lead up to the mezzanine and second story, and down to the basement level.

The basement has several rooms at the rear (east) for the furnace and small rooms at the front, southwest corner for utilities and a toilet. Access doors to the freight elevator enclosed in the northeast corner is provided at every level. The rear mezzanine has been partitioned to form two offices. The front mezzanine is hidden by a suspended ceiling above the first floor and is accessible only from a wooden stairway leading down from the second floor. Three rooms used as offices and a lunchroom extend along the rear of the second floor.

8. Statement of Significance									
Certifying official has considered the s		nce of t ationally	· ·	erty in X state		to other		<b>s</b> :	
Applicable National Register Criteria	AK	□В	Хc						
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)	<b>□</b> A	□в	□с		□E	□F	□G		
Areas of Significance (enter categories ARCHITECTURE COMMERCE	s from ir	nstruction	ons)		Period 192	l Affiliat			Significant Dates 1929
Significant Person N/A					Archited Mor			d Company	
State significance of property, and just	tify crite	ria, crit	eria con	siderati	ons, and	areas	and period	is of significar	ice noted above.

See continuation sheet for statement of significance.

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### United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number8	Page1	Burlington	Montgomery	Ward	Building
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#### 8. Statement of Significance

The Burlington Montgomery Ward Building is significant under National Register criterion A as an important representative example of the historical trend recognized in the "Commercial Development in Urban Areas" historic context included in the Vermont Historic Preservation Plan. This chain store building is a Vermont example of a nationwide historical trend in commercial development, constructed as major merchandising companies swiftly altered their marketing strategies from mail-order to retail sales as consumers shopping habits changed with the advent of affordable automobile transportation. The Burlington Montgomery Ward Building is also significant under criterion C for its architectural design. With its front facade clad in cast concrete decorated with neo-classical motifs, it is one of few such buildings constructed with this material in Vermont. The same design was used on several other Montgomery Ward stores in Vermont cities, however this is the best surviving example. The building is also a significant Vermont example of an early 20th century corporate- designed chain store architecture.

To assess the significance of this building in light of the "Commercial Development in Urban Areas" historic context included in the Vermont Historic Preservation Plan, the first area to examine is how and why one of the nation's largest retail chains chose to establish this store when it did in Burlington, Vermont.

When the Montgomery Ward Company opened its 515th retail store in downtown Burlington on December 28,1929,<sup>1</sup> its bold plan launched less than two years earlier to construct hundreds of retail stores in small cities across the nation was nearly complete. Countering a move by arch-rival Sears Roebuck Company, which was opening a chain of large retail stores on

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number8	Page _	2	Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
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the outskirts of major cities, Montgomery Ward also sought to supplement their mail order business with retail sales. <sup>2</sup> Responding to a drop in mail order sales as more customers began to drive to cities to do their shopping, these new retail chain stores were the product of a major historical transition. Americans were shifting their economic and social focus from the farm to the city with the help of the new-found mobility provided by the automobile. <sup>3</sup> Indeed by 1930, two out of every three Vermont farms had automobiles, while ten years earlier the ratio was only one in four. <sup>4</sup>

From only 36 stores at the end of 1927, within two years Montgomery Ward had well over 500 retail stores nationwide -- 200 more than Sears. But the October 1929 New York Stock Market crash and a slowing economy soon brought Ward's expansion plans to a halt as the company's most urgent concern became its financial survival. <sup>5</sup>

Montgomery Ward's Burlington store, the fourth to open in Vermont,<sup>6</sup> and one of the last constructed during this period of corporate expansion, was probably designed by the company's architectural and engineering staff at their headquarters in Chicago. While no record of these plans has been uncovered at the corporate headquarters, it is likely that the stores were built from standardized plans. The "spirit of progress" company symbol, cast in terra cotta, was prominently installed in the front parapet.

The 3-bay wide vernacular commercial style street facade was nearly identical to several other Montgomery Ward stores constructed at the time in Vermont. The Brattleboro Montgomery Ward store, also finished in 1929, appears to have its front facade constructed from nearly the same design with the same type of materials. It is included in the Brattleboro Downtown Historic District, entered on the National Register of Historic Places on February 17, 1983. 7 The Rutland store, built in 1928, also shares a similar design. This

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number8 Page3	Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
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building, located at 26-30 Merchants Row, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places in the Rutland Downtown Historic District. <sup>8</sup> The Burlington store is the best surviving example in the state.

Although the street level store front was altered in the 1960's, most of the distinctive architectural features remain, including the cast-concrete front facade, the upper "Chicago style" windows and the prism-glass windows which lit the mezzanine.

With matching facades, windows and ornamentation of cast concrete and terra cotta, these matching Montgomery Ward chain stores are also important Vermont examples of standardized American corporate architectural design constructed in the early 20th century. By sharing a similar appearance, these chain stores established a visual identity for the company which extended from city to city. Along with grocery stores, drug stores, and five & ten cent stores, the corporate architectural design of the front facades of chain stores became part of the marketing strategy to distinguish these outlets from independent businesses, a trend which continues to this day. <sup>9</sup>

The prime Burlington location at 52-54 Church Street (the main retailing street in Vermont's largest city) had been made available by a fire which destroyed the Bundy-Barrows block in the spring of 1929. Rather than constructing a traditional "Main Street" type of three or four story building, the Montgomery Ward Company chose to infill the site with a two-story commercial style design similar to those being built in new commercial blocks along shopping strips nationwide. <sup>10</sup> Construction of the building was announced in the Burlington Free Press in August 1929, with Victor A. Bergeron identified as the contractor. <sup>11</sup> By early October most of the steel frame was erected and a lease agreement between the Montgomery Ward Company and Barrows Real Estate Corporation had been settled. <sup>12</sup> One of

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8	Page4	Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
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very few buildings constructed with ornate cast-concrete facades in Vermont, the facade pieces were probably imported from an out-of-state supplier. This "front of cast granite... of an unusual design" was finished by mid-November, according to accounts in the local newspaper, but hopes to open the store before Christmas faded as the contractor moved to quicken the pace with 24 hour shifts with plastering, carpentry and painting work still remaining. <sup>13</sup> The store was ready for its grand opening on Saturday, December 28th, announced by a double-paged advertisement in the Burlington Free Press featuring such items as an electric washing machine, vacuum cleaner, men's suits, ladies' dresses, automobile tires, radio, and a "smart three-piece living room suite covered with peach mohair." <sup>14</sup>

The Montgomery Ward Company continued to operate the retail store at 52-54 Church Street with few changes to the building for 32 years, closing in December 1961. <sup>15</sup>

Since then, the building has continued to serve as a retail store. Directories indicate that between 1963 and 1966 the building was occupied by Uncle Phil's Bargain Store. From 1967 to 1972, it housed the Smith Furniture Company. The G. B. Rood Co. then used the building to sell office supplies. In 1975, the north front half of the main floor was partitioned off for a branch of the Howard Bank (followed by a Burlington Savings Bank Branch, now the Bank of Vermont). <sup>16</sup> Along with the interior partitions for the bank, the front was altered with a new recessed street-level storefront with large plate glass windows, imitation brick and a sign board masking the leaded glass windows at the mezzanine level. <sup>17</sup> The three "Chicago style" windows on the upper story were also covered by wooden shutters.

Capitol Stationers, current owners of the building, have retailed office products from the first floor since 1979. The second floor and basement are

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section	number	8	Page	5
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Burlington Montgomery Ward Building

used for offices and storage. The Bank of Vermont also operates a branch bank through a separate entrance on the main floor.

In the fall and winter of 1989 - 90, renovations were made following a design by Northern Architects of Burlington, Vermont, repairing the front facade, uncovering the "Chicago style" upper windows, restoring the leaded glass mezzanine windows and replacing the 1970's recessed storefront with a new 3-bay design. Unfortunately insufficient photographic evidence of the original storefront design could be uncovered, so new display windows and entrance were designed to be compatible, yet distinguishable from the historic features. Although the front street-level display windows and doorways are new, the front facade has retained most of its key architectural features and the historic character and integrity of the building has clearly survived. The distinctive cast-concrete street facade, with its neo-classical parapet crowned by cast-concrete urns atop the four decorated pilasters, distinguishes the building while adding to the historic character of the streetscape.

#### Notes

- 1. "Montgomery Ward Co. Opens Store Tomorrow," <u>Burlington Free Press</u>, 27 Dec. 1929: 1.
- 2. Frank B. Latham, <u>The Story of Montgomery Ward</u> (Chicago: Montgomery Ward & Co., 1972) 72-74.
- 3. William J. Baxter, <u>Chain Store Distribution and Management</u> (New York: Harper, 1928) 156-7, 285-7.
- 4. Howard S. Russell, <u>A Long Deep Furrow</u> (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1982) 313.
- 5. Cecil C. Hoge, <u>The First Hundred Years Are the Toughest</u> (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1988) 103-105.
- 6. "Montgomery Ward Co. Expects to Stimulate All City's Business,"

  <u>Burlington Free Press</u>, 28 Dec. 1929: 8.
- 7. Hugh Henry, "Brattleboro Downtown Historic District," National Register of Historic Places, Washington, 1983.

#### National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6 Burlington Montgomery Ward Building

- 8. Curtis Johnson and Elsa Gilbertson, ed., <u>The Historic Architecture of Rutland County</u> (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 1988) 307, 373.
- 9. Baxter, 12, plate facing 106, 150, 160.
- 10. Chester Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile, (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1985) 3-37.
- 11. "August To See Much Construction Work", <u>Burlington Free Press</u>, 3 Aug. 1929: 16 and "One Contractor Has 115 Men Engaged in Construction Work In Burlington", <u>Burlington Free Press</u>, 17 Aug. 1929: 14.
- "Montgomery Ward Building To Be Ready For Use December 15,"
   Burlington Free Press, 5 Oct. 1929: 8; and "Barrows Real Estate Corp. to Montgomery Ward & Co, Inc.," City of Burlington Deeds, 91: 521.
- 13. "Work On Montgomery-Ward Building To Be Rushed Day and Night," Burlington Free Press, 16 Nov. 1929: 14.
- 14. "Montgomery Wards New Retail Store Opens Saturday!" <u>Burlington Free Press</u>, 27 Dec. 1929: 11.
- 15. "Ward's Store To Close Dec. 30," Burlington Free Press, 14 Nov. 1961:9.
- 16. Manning's Burlington Directory, H. A. Manning, Co., Greenfield, Mass., 1961-1984.
- 17. "52-54 Church", Historic Sites & Structures Survey, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Montpelier, Vt., 14 June 1977.

	See continuation sheet
Previous documentation on file (NPS):	<del></del>
preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested	Primary location of additional data:  X State historic preservation office
previously listed in the National Register	Other State agency
previously determined eligible by the National Register	Federal agency
designated a National Historic Landmark recorded by Historic American Buildings	Local government X University
Survey #	Other
recorded by Historic American Engineering	Specify repository:University.of_Vermont
Record #	ONIVERSITY OF VERMONT
10. Geographical Data	
Acreage of property 0.14 acres	
UTM References	
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	See continuation sheet
Verbal Boundary Description  This is a nearly rectangula	r lot of land that begins at a point
in the east line of Church Street a distance of 1	
of the south line of Cherry Street and said east	
easterly a distance of 130 feet to a marked corne 47 feet parallel to the east line of Church Stree	
on the east line of Church Street, and thence nor	•
place of beginning.	See continuation sheet
Boundary Justification	
The boundary includes the entire lot that has bee	n historically occupied
by 52-54 Church Street.	
	See continuation sheet
11. Form Prepared By	
name/title Thomas Visser, Coordinator	
organization Architectural Conservation & Education S	
street & number History Dept., University of Vermont	telephone (802) 656-3180
city or town Burlington	state Vermont zip code 05405

9. Major Bibliographical References

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number	9	Page	Burlington Montgomery Ward Building

- "52-54 Church Street, Burlington, Vermont." "Historic Sites & Structures Survey." Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Montpelier, Vt., 14 June 1977.
- "August to See Much Construction Work." <u>Burlington Free Press</u> 3 Aug. 1929: 16.
- "Barrows Real Estate Corp. to Montgomery Ward & Co, Inc." <u>City of Burlington Deeds</u>. 91: 521.
- Baxter, William J. <u>Chain Store Distribution and Management</u>. New York: Harper, 1928.
- Henry, Hugh. "Brattleboro Downtown Historic District." National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D. C., 1983.
- Hoge, Cecil C. <u>The First Hundred Years Are the Toughest</u>. Berkely: Ten Speed Press, 1988.
- Johnson, Curtis and Elsa Gilbertson, eds. <u>The Historic Architecture of Rutland County</u>. Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 1988.
- Latham, Frank B. <u>The Story of Montgomery Ward</u>. Chicago: Montgomery Ward & Co., 1972.
- Liebs, Chester. Main Street to Miracle Mile. New York: New York Graphic Society, 1985.
- Manning's Burlington Directory. Greenfield, Mass.: H. A. Manning, Co., 1961-1984.

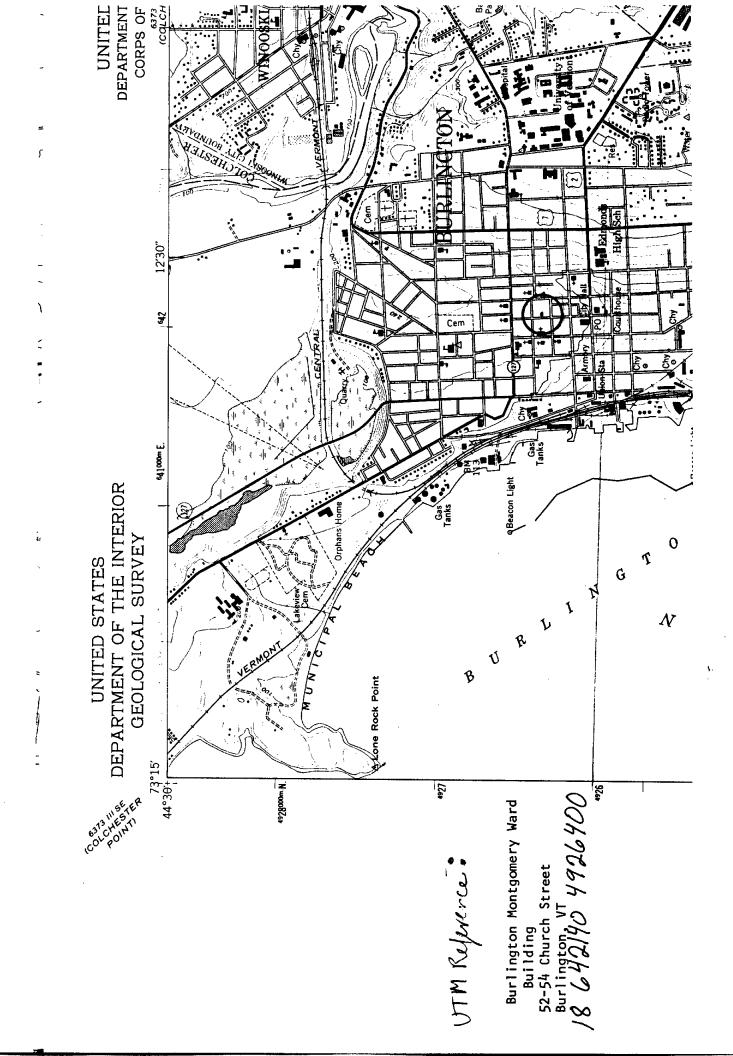
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2 Burlington Montgomery Ward Building

- "Montgomery Ward Building To Be Ready For Use December 15." <u>Burlington</u> <u>Free Press</u> 5 Oct. 1929: 8.
- "Montgomery Ward Co. Expects to Stimulate All City's Business." <u>Burlington</u> <u>Free Press</u> 28 Dec. 1929: 8.
- "Montgomery Ward Co. Opens Store Tomorrow." <u>Burlington Free Press</u> 27 Dec. 1929: 1.
- "Montgomery Wards New Retail Store Opens Saturday!" <u>Burlington Free Press</u> 27 Dec. 1929: 11.
- "One Contractor Has 115 Men Engaged in Construction Work in Burlington."

  <u>Burlington Free Press</u> 17 Aug. 1929: 14.
- Russell, Howard S. <u>A Long Deep Furrow</u>. Hanover, N. H.: University Press of New England, 1982.
- "Ward's Store To Close Dec. 30." Burlington Free Press 14 Nov. 1961: 9.
- Work On Montgomery-Ward Building To Be Rushed Day and Night."

  <u>Burlington Free Press</u> 16 Nov. 1929: 14.

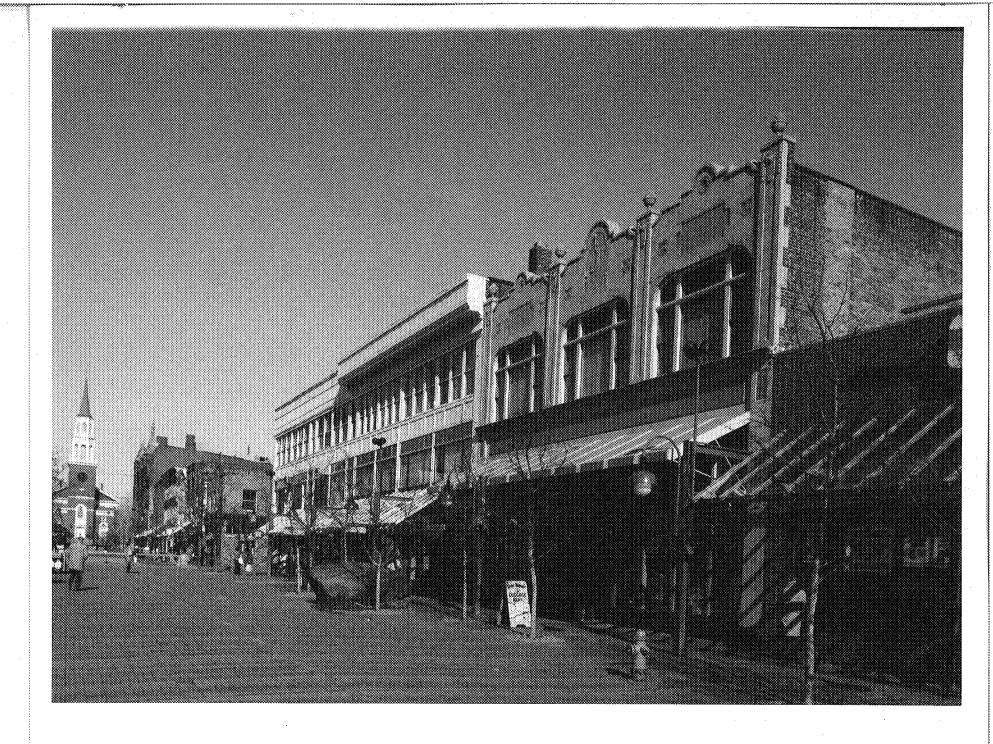


# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number	Page	Burlington 1	Montgomery	Ward Building	
		Burlington,	Vermont		

OWNER:

Donald Bigglestone
President
Capital Stationers, Inc.
52 Church Street
Burlington, Vermont 05401



Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
52 - 54 Church Street
Burlington, Vermont
Credit: Thomas Visser
Date: February 1990
Negative filed at Vermont Division for Historic Preservation
Streetscape along Church Street, looking northeast.
Photograph 1.





10-A-5> # 20

Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
52 - 54 Church Street
Burlington, Vermont
Date: February 1990
Credit: Thomas Visser
Negative filed at Vermont Division for Historic Preservation
Streetscape along Church Street, looking southeast.
Photograph 2.



Burlington Montgomery Ward Building 52 - 54 Church Street Burlington, Vermont
Date: February 1990
Credit: Thomas Visser
Negative filed at Vermont Division for Historic Preservation
Front facade, looking east.
Photograph 3.



Burlington Montgomery Ward Building 52 - 54 Church Street Burlington, Vermont
Date: January 1990
Credit: Thomas Visser

Negative filed at Vermont Division for Historic Preservation Rear facade, looking west. Photograph 4.



Burlington Montgomery Ward Building
52 - 54 Church Street
Burlington, Vermont
Date: September 1989
Credit: Thomas Visser
Negative filed at Vermont Division for Historic Preservation
Interior, first floor, looking west.
Photograph 5.

70-A-S)

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