

# DESIGNATION REPORT



## Allerton Hotel 701 North Michigan Avenue

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks on February 4, 1998



**CITY OF CHICAGO**  
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development  
Christopher R. Hill, Commissioner

*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.*

*The designation process begins with a staff study--summarized in this report--discussing the background and significance of the proposed landmark. The next step is a preliminary vote by the Landmarks Commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until the landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.*

*This Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the actual designation ordinance approved by City Council should be regarded as final.*

**COVER: When completed, the year before this 1925 photograph, the Allerton Hotel's North Italian Renaissance style was a novel and striking choice for Chicago. Its style was an exotic variation on the historic types used in residential high-rises built during the 1920s and >30s. Its warm-colored brick facade gave the Allerton an inviting domestic character, and its three story stone base related to the height of nearby residences.**



**Photograph by the noted Chicago photographer, Stephen Deutch, of North Michigan Avenue, (a.k.a., the Magnificent Mile), during the 1950s. The rooftop lighting advertising the Tip Top Tap (center) helped make the Allerton Hotel a focal point for nightlife on the Near North Side.**

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*Chicago Department of Planning and Development*

*320 N. Clark St., Room 516, Chicago, IL 60610*

*312-744-3200; 744-2958 (TTY)*

# Allerton Hotel

701 N. Michigan Ave.

**Built: 1922-24**

**Architect: Murgatroyd & Ogden,  
with Fugard & Knapp**

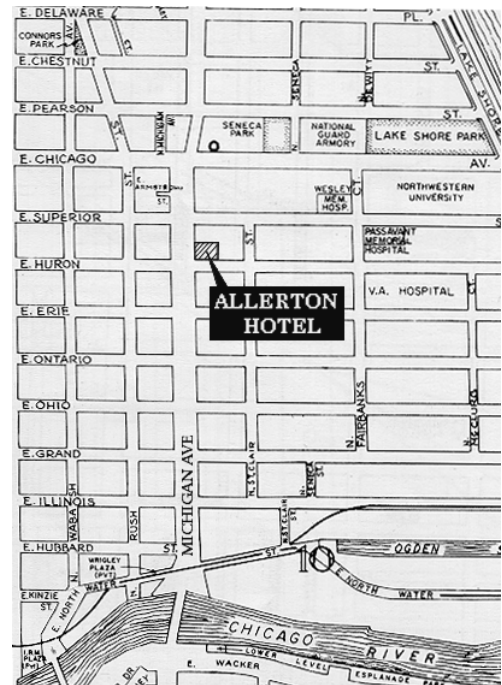
Few buildings recall the jazz era of the 1920s and >30s--and the changes that were taking place with architecture and urban development in Chicago during this dynamic period--better than the Allerton Hotel. Built as a monumental brick tower, the Allerton is a rare example of North Italian Renaissance architecture, characterized by dark red brick walls, round-arched windows and arcades, and visually sculptural rooftop. Moreover, the Allerton was the first building in Chicago to be built with a pronounced setback and towers, introducing an innovative architectural form that was repeated in Chicago skyscrapers over the ensuing decade.

The Allerton was the only example of a Aclub hotel@ in Chicago. Club hotels provided housing that was convenient an economical, but had a greater social cachet than traditional apartment living. They combined the services of traditional hotels and clubs with the economy of small apartments.

The prominence of the Allerton and its design bolstered the transformation of North Michigan Avenue at a critical point in its development as one of the premier thoroughfares in the nation. The Allerton's high-quality design and its use as a hotel closely fit the continental character of North Michigan Avenue as it took shape during the 1920s as a chic boulevard of exclusive clubs, shops, and hotels. It remains one of the avenue's few buildings from this historic era, and is an excellent example of the finely detailed architecture that graced the avenue during this significant period of development.

The Allerton Hotel stands out as emphatically on the North Michigan Avenue skyline today as it did when it opened. Its towers and pronounced setback configuration, as well as its rich coloring, continue to give it a vital and dramatic presence on Michigan Avenue, even amidst the larger buildings that have risen along the street in the years since.

**The Architecture of the Allerton Hotel**



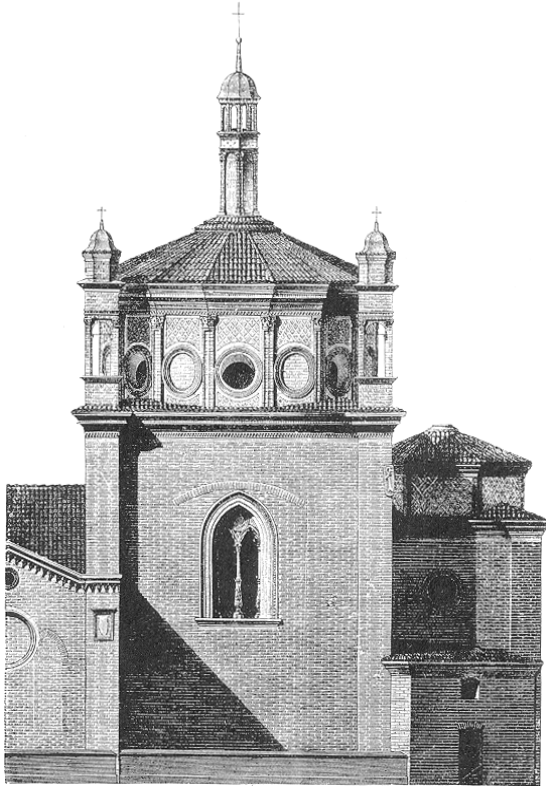
**The Allerton Hotel is located at the northeast corner of Michigan Avenue and Huron Street.**

The tower-like design of the Allerton Hotel, along with its exotic North Italian Renaissance style and monolithic red-brick surface, combined to make it one of the most distinctive buildings of its era. The Allerton Hotel stood out from other highrises of the period due to its picturesque exterior and warmly colored, rugged brickwork. Its urbane and welcoming design presented an inviting residential character that stood out in the city skyline from the harsher lines of stone and terra-cotta clad contemporary office buildings. Although comparable in scale to contemporary office buildings, the overall architectural character of the Allerton reflected a desire to make a skyscraper seem like a home.

The Allerton Hotel was designed in the North Italian Renaissance style, an architectural style based on the buildings of the northern Italian province of Lombardy. Sometimes called "Italianesque" by contemporaries, this style mixed elements of both vernacular and high-style buildings, and was appreciated for its romantic, picturesque combination of elements and details from structures built over several centuries, from 12th-century Romanesque churches to 15th-century urban houses and institutional buildings.

The physical characteristics of the Allerton are typical of the style. The building is clad with textured dark red brick laid in decorative patterns. Windows and doors are round-arched, framed in contrasting gray limestone, and ornamented with columns and capitals based on Italian Romanesque precedents. The hotel's roof profile is extremely picturesque, with setbacks and terraces created by a cluster of octagonal towers surrounding a larger, rectangular tower, all topped with red tile roofs.

The Allerton's North Italian Renaissance style was a novel and striking choice for Chicago. Most hotels, apartment hotels, and apartment buildings built in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s were designed in variations of the Georgian Revival or Tudor Revival styles. Architects and real estate developers of the period wished to emphasize the domestic, homelike qualities of these building types, and these two historic styles, based on early American houses and medieval English manors, were the styles most associated by Chicagoans with

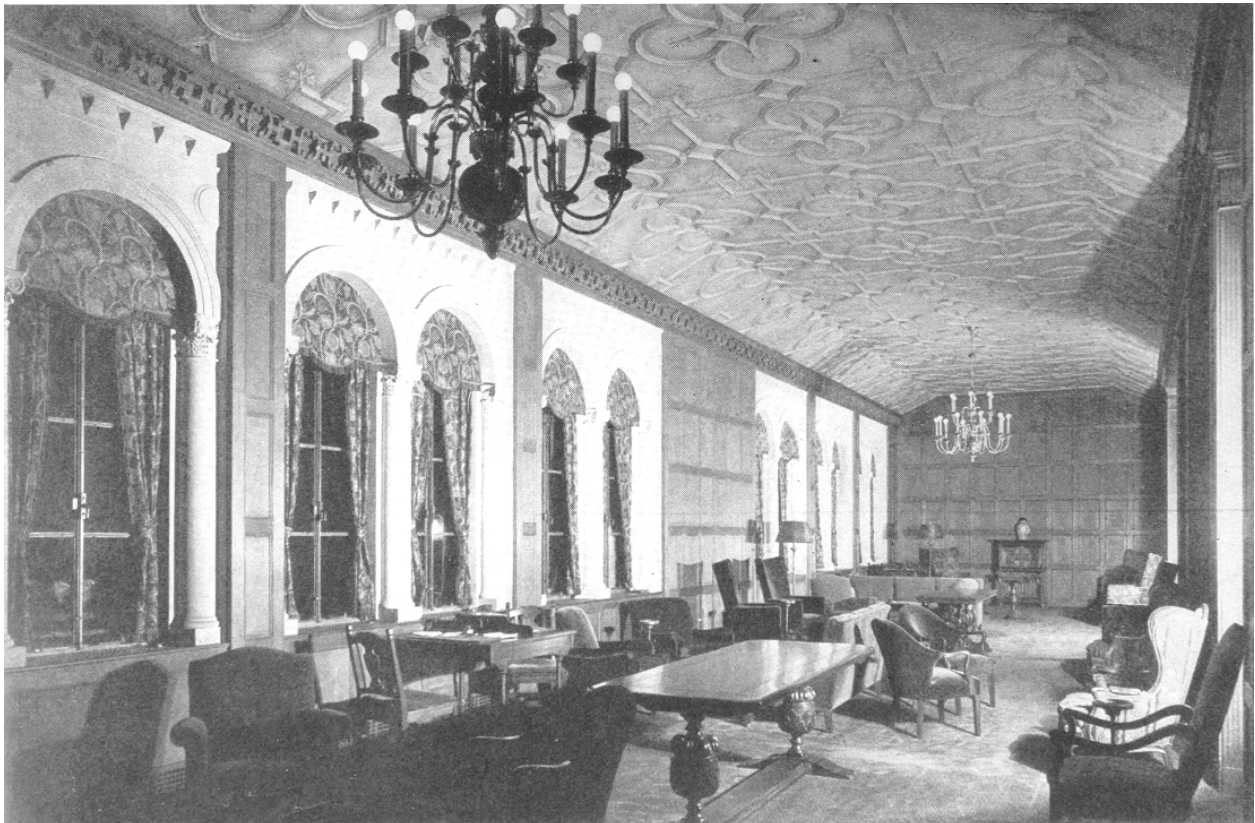


The design of the Allerton Hotel was based on the architecture of northern Italy during the 14th and 15th centuries. As seen in this view of a church in Milan (top, left), the style was distinguished by the use of sculptural brickwork rendered in warm colors and by picturesque rooflines with tile roofs. The Allerton's second-floor arches and column capitals, rendered as carved-stone griffins (top, right), also referred to the style. The base of the Allerton (below, left) is clad in gray limestone and ornamented with round-arched windows and doorways. The decorative brickwork, including patterns and projecting brick courses, gives the Allerton a domestic, handcrafted look that was compatible with the residential architecture of the adjoining neighborhoods.



residential architecture. The North Italian Renaissance was a more exotic variation on this domestic theme.

The brickwork of the Allerton was an important component in reinforcing the domestic character of the building. Although brick was an unusual choice amidst the stone commercial structures along North Michigan Avenue, the quality of the Allerton brickwork gave the building an appearance every bit as lavish as its neighbors. Most of the Allerton is clad with a richly colored red brick, laid in a manner that emphasizes both the building's verticality and the texture of the brick. The decorative patterns of brick, including projecting brick courses, displayed the artistic and homelike qualities of the building, traits much admired by Americans in the residential architecture of the 1920s. It gave this large hotel a small-scale, domestic quality that was important to the image of the Allerton House Company.



**The stylistic treatment of the original interior spaces reinforced the traditional residential qualities of the Allerton, as seen in this view of the residents lounge on the second floor facing North Michigan Avenue. Virtually none of these original interior spaces survive today, having been remodeled for retail purposes.**





For decades, the Old Water Tower (center) had been one of the tallest structures north of the Chicago River. Following the construction of the Michigan Avenue Bridge in 1920, new buildings quickly spread north, as seen in this 1926 photograph showing the 25-story Allerton Hotel.

The interior decoration and finishes of the Allerton reinforced its residential and club-like atmosphere. Public rooms, such as dining rooms and lounges, were carried out in a variety of styles. Some rooms were executed in a rustic “Italian country” mode, with rough plaster walls, beamed ceilings, and tile floors. Other spaces were based on English Tudor precedents, with wood paneling, ogee-arched doors and fireplaces, diamond-paned windows, and ceilings with ornamental plaster work. The Allerton management wished to encourage the perception of their hotels as being the equivalent of more expensive clubs, and their public spaces were meant to evoke this sense of exclusivity and domestic good taste.

**The Allerton Hotel and the Development of North Michigan Avenue**

The Allerton Hotel is one of the few surviving buildings from the first period of high-quality development on North Michigan Avenue. When it opened in 1920, Michigan Avenue was conceived of as Chicago’s Champs-Elysees, a great boulevard for a city that increasingly saw itself as a “Paris on the Lake.” Far-sighted businessmen envisioned the avenue as the connector between the

By 1929, the Allerton Hotel had been joined by other tall buildings along North Michigan Avenue, including (right) the Illinois Women's Athletic Club (now Loyola University's Lewis Tower) and the Palmolive Building (from which this photograph appears to have been taken).



Loop, which remained the main business district, and the Gold Coast, the city's most fashionable neighborhood. In their eyes, it was to be lined with Chicago's most exclusive stores, clubs, hotels, and offices. Leading Chicago architecture firms such as Graham, Anderson, Probst & White and Holabird & Root were hired to design high-quality buildings for Michigan Avenue. These were designed in a mix of styles, from the Chicago Tribune Tower's historicist Gothic Revival to the Palmolive Building's modern Art Deco, but all were intended as first-class adornments for the city's premier boulevard.

As a hotel, the Allerton Hotel was an appropriate addition to the mixture of uses developing on North Michigan Avenue. The avenue was widely seen as a prime location for new hotels. In fact, its first hotel, the Drake, was built before the newly widened street was completed in 1920. Like the Drake, the Allerton was built where residents could take easy advantage of the avenue's new stores and restaurants. It also was located near Streeterville, which was developing as a new district of high-quality apartment buildings. The Allerton provided a sense of upper-income domestic respectability, yet was within easy reach of Loop offices.

Construction of the Allerton was announced in the June 7, 1922 issue of *The Economist* when the Allerton Hotel Company stated its plans to spend

\$4,000,000 on a "club hotel" for men, on the northeast corner of Michigan and Huron avenues. Michigan Avenue was seen by Chicago real estate developers as a street for exclusive hotels, clubs and commercial buildings, and locating there was consistent with the Allerton Company's desire to have its hotels located within fashionable commercial and office districts.

The new Chicago Allerton House, as originally named, was touted in a letter and an accompanying brochure that was mailed to selected Chicago companies. Reminded that "a man's living environment largely determines the quality of his work," these businesses were urged by the Allerton Company to encourage their younger, single employees to live at the hotel. As the brochure announced, "The 'Allerton House' realizes the ideal in modern quarters for business and professional men. It offers the wholesomeness of a home, the service of a hotel and the sociability of a club at modest rates." Residents in the company's New York hotels were rather immodestly referred to as "success men."

The Allerton Hotel was financed by a mortgage bond issue underwritten by S. W. Strauss and Company, a Chicago investment banking firm that had underwritten one of the Allerton House Company's previous hotels. A building permit was issued by the City of Chicago on January 15, 1923.

The partnership of Murgatroyd & Ogden, a New York architecture firm that had carried out other buildings for the Allerton Company, designed the hotel. Fugard & Knapp, a Chicago firm, was the associate architect, and in that role supervised construction of the building. Both firms were known for their first-class apartment and commercial buildings.

The partnership of Everett F. Murgatroyd and Palmer H. Ogden designed several hotels for the Allerton Company, including the Fraternity Clubs Building and the Barbizon Hotel, both in New York; the Allerton Hotel in Cleveland; as well as the Chicago Allerton House. For other clients, they designed the Hotel Governor Clinton, near Pennsylvania Station, and a residential hotel for women at Eighteen Gramercy Park, both in New

York.

John R. Fugard and George A. Knapp, the principals of the Chicago firm of Fugard & Knapp, had extensive experience in large-scale residential construction on Chicago's Near North Side. Among their projects were apartment buildings at 229 and 219 E. Lake Shore Drive; 220, 222, and 230 E. Walton Place; and 231 E. Delaware Place, all built between 1917 and 1922. The firm also designed the Lake Shore Drive Hotel (later the Mayfair Regent Hotel) at 181 E. Lake Shore Drive, completed in 1923.

### **Visual Prominence of the Allerton**

The Allerton's design as a freestanding tower, meant to be seen from all directions, contributes greatly to its visual impact. When it was completed in 1924, the Allerton was one of the first high-rise buildings to be built on North Michigan Avenue. The Wrigley



The contrast between the "new" Michigan Avenue of the 1920s and the late 19th-century townhouses of the former Pine Street is markedly apparent in this photograph from 1924.



**View of Michigan Avenue, looking south from Chicago Avenue, in the mid-1920s. Completed in 1924, the Central Life Insurance Co. Building (right, center) and the Allerton Hotel defined the urban architectural character at the north end of Michigan Avenue.**

Company had been pioneers on the newly opened avenue with the construction of the Wrigley Building (400 N. Michigan Ave.), beginning in 1921. Other prominent towers, the Chicago Tribune Tower (435 N. Michigan Ave.) and the Central Life Insurance Company Building (720 N. Michigan Ave.; demolished), were built concurrently with the Allerton. At the time, however, the majority of Michigan Avenue's buildings still consisted of the 19th-century rowhouses and small commercial structures remaining from the avenue's previous incarnation as Pine Street.

The quality of design on North Michigan Avenue was an important issue for the public, and criticisms of other buildings on North Michigan Avenue underscored the importance of the Allerton Hotel's design to its owners and architects. A case in point was the sixteen-story Central Life Insurance Company Building, built in 1922-24 directly across Michigan Avenue from the future site of the Allerton. It was designed by D.H. Burnham & Company and was the first high-rise commercial building built so far north on the avenue. The building was not designed as a

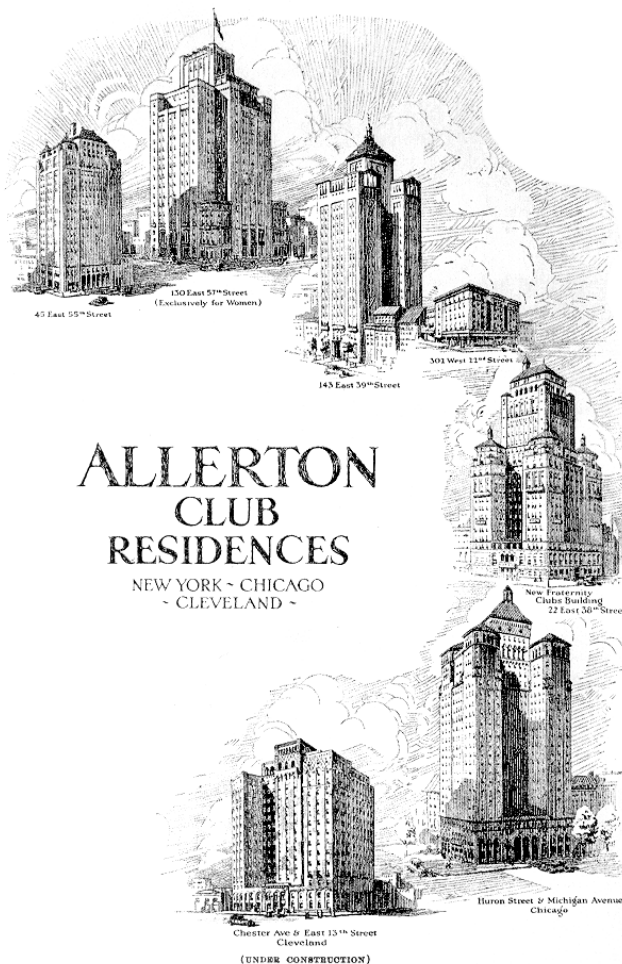
freestanding tower; instead its west facade was left bare of any architectural treatment. The *Chicago Tribune*, in its December 17, 1922 edition, criticized the building's design as not taking into consideration the conspicuous size and location of the structure. The reporter stated that the design should have recognized that it would be seen from all four sides.

The deep setback and towers of the Allerton gave an innovative sculptural form to Chicago architecture. Previously, large commercial structures were constructed with uniform, nonrecessed elevations. However, the emergence of municipal zoning laws during the 1910s and '20s affected highrise design by encouraging architects and builders to erect buildings with pronounced setbacks and towers in exchange for the city's permission to construct taller buildings with more rentable space.

The buildings constructed by the Allerton Hotel Company in New York were subject to that city's ordinance, which had been adopted in 1916. The company incorporated the necessary setbacks and towers into their designs, cloaked in North Italian architectural imagery. With time, they became part of the overall look of Allerton Hotels, including their building in Chicago.

On January 15, 1923, when the building permit for the Allerton Hotel was issued, Chicago did not have a zoning ordinance, although one similar to New York's had been submitted to the Chicago City Council by the Chicago Zoning Commission less than two weeks earlier, on January 5. Instead, construction within the city continued to be governed by an earlier ordinance that simply limited the overall height of Chicago buildings. At 260 feet, the maximum allowable building height in early 1923, the Allerton Hotel's height was "as-of-right," even without any setbacks.

The dramatic building setback of the Allerton Hotel in Chicago was in furtherance of the architectural image established in the company's New York hotels. This transplanted architectural form, although not required under the existing Chicago building ordinance, nevertheless was a precedent for the design of skyscrapers, such as the Field (1934; 135 S. LaSalle St.) and Civic Opera (1929; 20 N. Wacker Dr.) buildings, constructed in Chicago during



A page from a 1923 advertising booklet for the various "Allerton Club Residences" located across the country. The buildings showed a common architectural style, with slight variations.

the ensuing decade.

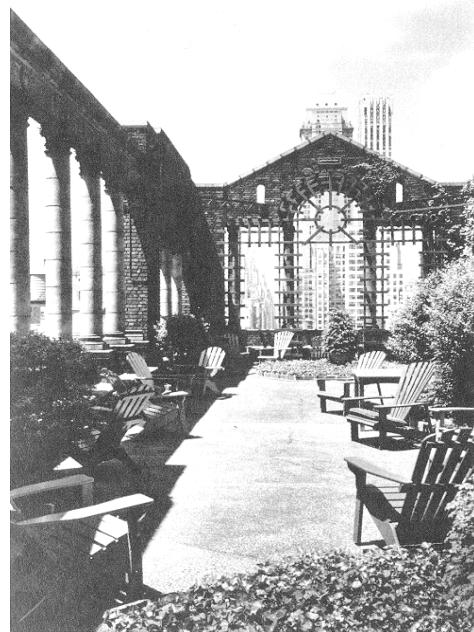
### **The Allerton House Company**

The Allerton Hotel in Chicago was the sixth in a chain of similar “club hotels” built and operated by the New York-based Allerton House Company. Allerton hotels combined the services of a hotel with the image and facilities of a residential club. Their clientele was the large number of middle-class single men (and later women) who were coming to cities such as New York and Chicago.

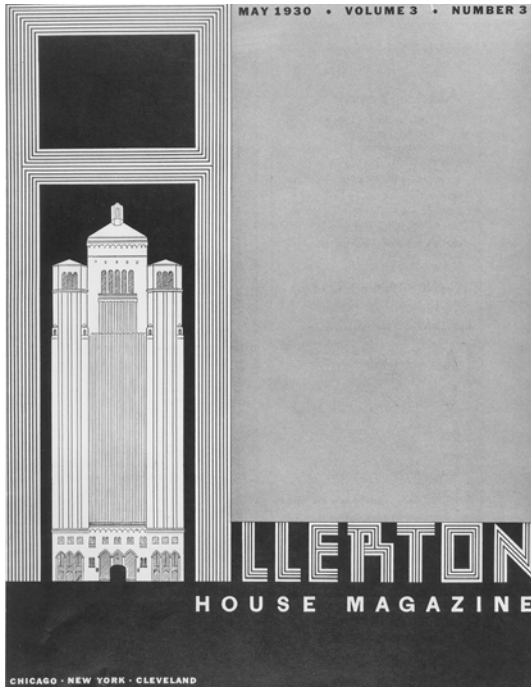
These college-educated individuals were interested in finding a friendly affordable living environment that eased the transition from college life, with its readily available social amenities, to life in the big city, with its potential for loneliness and greater social isolation. At the beginning of their careers these men and women did not have the financial wherewithal to live on their own, yet they aspired to gracious living and wanted domesticity in their lodgings. Old-fashioned rooming houses no longer were considered socially acceptable for these upwardly striving individuals. They desired the convenience and social cachet of club life, and wanted to be situated conveniently near work and social activities such as theaters, clubs, and shops. The Allerton House Company provided its hotels with services similar to those of residential clubs, and built them in fashionable neighborhoods that allowed its residents easy access to the best that big-city life had to offer.

The Allerton House Company was founded by a New York businessman James Stewart Cushman. It was named after its first hotel, the Allerton House at 301 West 22nd Street, which was built on land once owned by Isaac Allerton, an early New York resident said to have crossed the Atlantic on the Mayflower. Beginning in 1919, a series of ever-larger and more elaborate Allerton House hotels were built. These hotels, unlike the original hotel in the downtown Chelsea neighborhood, were built in midtown Manhattan, which developed during the 1910s and 1920s as New York’s fashionable new business, commercial and hotel center.

The architectural style employed by the Allerton House Company for its properties was



**The Allerton House Company prided itself on the public amenities that its hotels provided. The Allerton House 39th in New York offered its residents this stylish rooftop terrace with views of the Manhattan skyline. Chicago’s Allerton Hotel never featured such an outdoor space.**



**The owners of the Allerton Building published a "house magazine" that provided information about club activities, as well as the accomplishments of its buildings' residents. The magazine was distributed to the Allerton Company buildings in three cities. This cover, from May 1930, pairs a handsomely styled drawing of Chicago's Allerton with Art Deco**

intended to reinforce the impression of domesticity and social respectability. The architect, Arthur Loomis Harmon, set the visual tone for the Allerton chain with his design for the Allerton House 39th, which opened in 1919. Like the site of the Chicago Allerton Hotel, the site for the 39th Street building was surrounded mostly by older, lower-scale rowhouses. Harmon recognized that this sixteen-story hotel would rise high above these houses, and would be visible from every direction. Therefore, he designed the building as a freestanding tower. The overall exterior form of the Allerton House 39th, an H-shaped tower atop a two-story base, was a standard response to the programmatic needs of a hotel.

Harmon chose to clad the building in red brick, rather than stone, both for economy and for the residential, homelike appearance of the material. This use of brick gave the facade a delicacy of scale and detailing that allowed the building to fit more gracefully into its residential setting. Harmon emphasized the visual texture of brick walls by having projecting header bricks and wide, irregular mortar joints, giving the building a picturesque quality in keeping with its North Italian Renaissance style.

The use of this style, a rather unusual choice in the context of New York architecture of the period, was seen by Harmon as a logical, even inevitable, choice for the Allerton House 39th. He understood that the building would be, at least for some time to come, a freestanding tower that needed to look attractive from all sides. He also accepted that a style based on historic architecture was appropriate for the building. This style needed to be one that would look good rendered in brick and be appropriate for a residential building. The north Italian tradition of building in brick, combined with the rather picturesque profile of North Italian Renaissance buildings, with their round-arched windows and arcades and tile-clad roofs, seemed to Harmon to be the right choice for the Allerton House 39th.

The management of the Allerton House Company considered the aesthetics of the Allerton House 39th to be so successful that the same North Italian Renaissance style was used for the company's next several hotels in New York and Cleveland, as well



as Chicago.

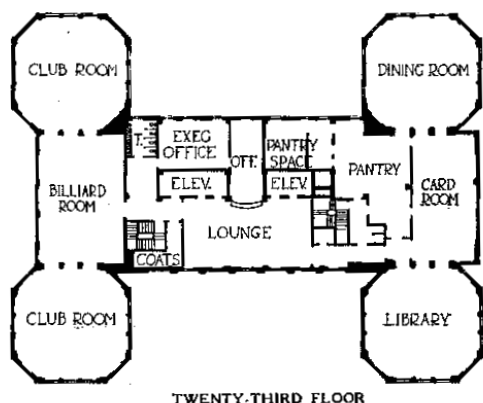
### The Allerton as a Club Hotel

The Allerton was known by contemporaries as a “club hotel,” providing a residential experience for young middle-income men and women that was meant to approximate that of private clubs. Club hotels were a variation on the more common “apartment hotel” building type, which achieved a great popularity in Chicago and other American cities during the 1920s. A distinctively urban building type, apartment hotels offered tenants the economy of small apartments and the services of large hotels.

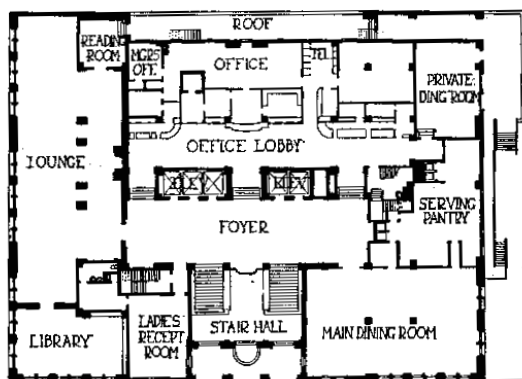
Club hotels were meant to provide housing that was convenient, economical, and with greater social cachet than the traditional apartment hotel. They dispensed many of the facilities and services of the standard apartment hotel, including public dining rooms, housekeeping service, and the rental of rooms on a weekly, monthly, or yearly basis. However, there was a greater emphasis on the kinds of public facilities for entertainment and recreation that typically would be found in private clubs. Club hotels were well appointed with public lounges, libraries, and athletic facilities such as swimming pools and gymnasiums. In comparison



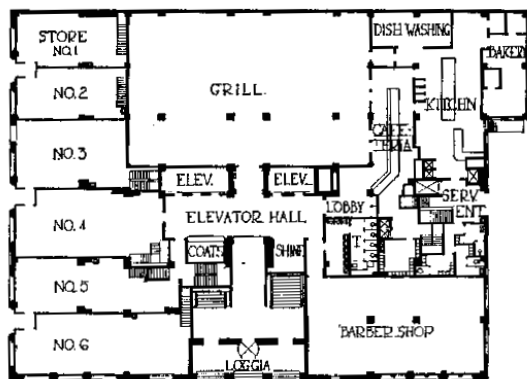
This promotional postcard from the early 1930s emphasized the proximity of the Allerton Hotel to the chic residential districts of Streeterville, East Lake Shore Drive, and the Gold Coast.



TWENTY-THIRD FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



The first floor of the Allerton Hotel has featured retail stores along its North Michigan Avenue frontage (bottom, left) since its construction. Most of the hotel's public spaces were located on the second floor (middle plan). The building's 23rd floor originally contained meeting rooms for hotel residents; these spaces later were converted into a popular club, the Tip Top Tap Room.

with apartment hotels, though, room accommodations in club hotels were less elaborate, consisting of single rooms without kitchenettes.

During the 1920s, the Allerton House Company developed its reputation as the best-known provider of club hotel accommodations in the United States. At the height of the company's success, it owned and operated, besides the Allerton Hotel in Chicago, seven hotels in New York and one in Cleveland. Allerton hotels were described in company literature as quiet, refined, club-like homes that provided socially respectable, economical housing for hardworking, refined, ambitious young men and women. A brochure sent to Chicago businessmen during the construction of the Chicago Allerton stated:

An Allerton man is regarded as one who is particular in the choice of his residence, selective in the matter of his associates, appreciative of the better things of life, while mindful of the kind of economy that makes for success. . . . The man who lives comfortably, works well. The man who lives economically, saves. He is on the road to success. That is why "success" men make an Allerton House their permanent residence. They are men who recognize the value of happy living environment as applied to their work.

The Chicago Allerton House originally had a variety of facilities and programs that emphasized its club-like atmosphere. Its library, just off the lounge, was the location for both group book discussions and private reading. A private dining room was available for special occasions, while a grille room on the first floor provided informal meals. Also on the first floor were a barber shop and pharmacy. A small gymnasium with squash courts was available in the building's basement, as well as a miniature golf course. The 23rd floor was occupied by lounges, another small library, and a solarium.

Besides these facilities, the Allerton staff organized programs of interest to its residents, including Christmas and other holiday dinners, "movie nights," and outings to the theater and opera. The company also provided other services and novel promotions, including door-to-door

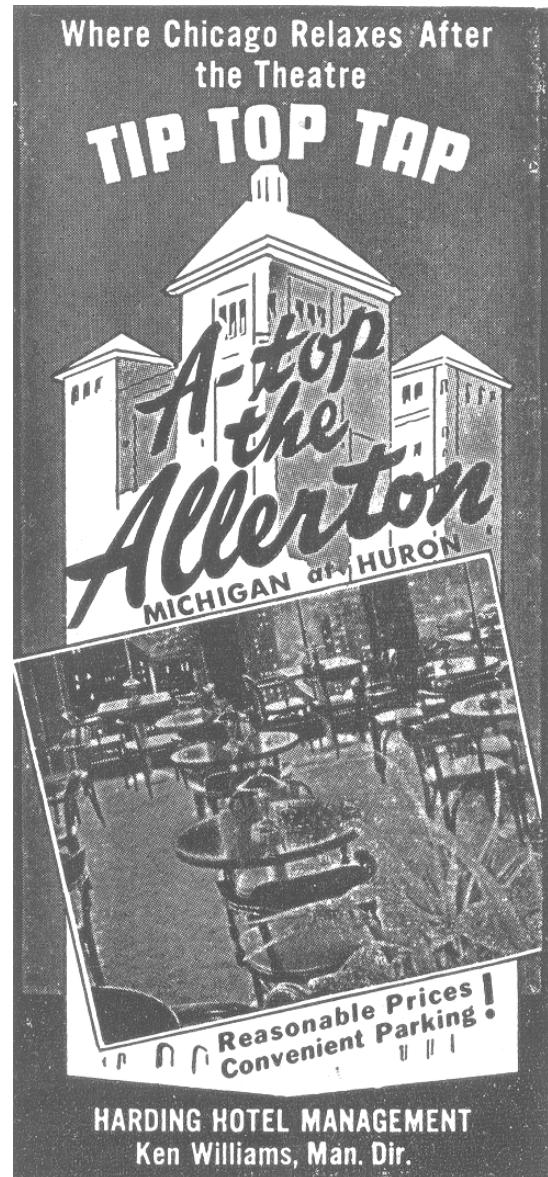
service (via bus and plane) between the Allerton hotels in Chicago and Cleveland.

### **The Allerton Hotel since the 1920s**

Throughout the prosperous 1920s, the Allerton Hotel attracted a diverse clientele that included both short-term visitors to Chicago and long-term residents. By 1930, the hotel was accepting women guests, although men and women were segregated by floor. Around this same time, the Allerton management in Chicago began publishing the *Allerton House Magazine* as a service to its customers and to further market the hotel. The magazine touted hotel services and chronicled the goings-on of hotel residents. Among the residents mentioned in the January 1930 issue of the *Allerton House Magazine* was Louis Skidmore, who later founded the important Chicago architecture firm of Skidmore Owings and Merrill, who had come to Chicago to work as a designer for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition.

The Depression years of the early 1930s took their toll on many Chicago businesses, and the Allerton Hotel was not immune, forced into foreclosure in 1934. It eventually was taken over by the Harding Hotel Company, which also operated a chain of cafeterias. By the late 1940s, the Tip Top Tap, a cocktail lounge with striking views of the Chicago skyline, was in place in the hotel's former club rooms on the 23rd floor. During its years of operation, the Tip Top Tap became well-known to Chicagoans through radio broadcasts by Don McNeil, a popular radio personality, that originated from the space.

The building continues in use today as a hotel. With its bold vertical form, strong coloring,



A 1948 advertisement for the Allerton's Tip Top Tap. Located on the top floor of the hotel, the Tip Top Tap was a cocktail lounge popular for its excellent views of the Chicago skyline. For many years, it also was the location of Don McNeil's "Breakfast Club" radio broadcasts.

and distinctive rooftop, the Allerton Hotel asserts a bold architectural presence on North Michigan Avenue that has been maintained over the decades.

# APPENDICES

## Criteria for Designation

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Chapter 21, ' 2-120-620 and 630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to recommend a building or district for landmark designation if the Commission determines that it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

Based on the findings in this report, the following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Allerton Hotel be designated as a Chicago Landmark:

**CRITERION 1 (*Critical Part of the City's History*)**  
*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.*

The Allerton Hotel is an important contributing building to the historic character of North Michigan Avenue. It is one of the few surviving buildings from the first period of high-quality development on North Michigan Avenue. The prominence of the Allerton and its design bolstered the transformation of North Michigan Avenue at a critical point in its development as one of the premier thoroughfares in the nation.

It opened in 1924 as a residential "club hotel" for young professional men, owned and operated by the New York-based Allerton House Company. This company was known for its comfortable, club-like residential hotels in midtown Manhattan. The addition of this exclusive hotel operation to North Michigan Avenue, together with the dramatic



The top of the Allerton Hotel, as seen from the north, offers an assortment of setbacks and towers clad in patterned brick in a style meant to evoke the image of picturesque Italian towers.

character and high-quality of the Allerton's architecture, helped set high standards for North Michigan Avenue's continued development.

**CRITERION 4 (*Important Architecture*)**

*Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.*

The Allerton Hotel is a rare example of the North Italian Renaissance architectural style in Chicago. Most hotels, apartment hotels, and apartment buildings built in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s were designed in variations of the Georgian Revival or Tudor Revival styles. Architects and real estate developers of the period wished to emphasize the domestic, homelike qualities of these building types, and these two historic styles, based on early American houses and medieval English manors,



The dark red brick, laid in artistic patterns (above), gives the Allerton a rich textural appearance and is characteristic of the North Italian Renaissance style. Images of griffins (below) in the stonework at the base of the building add to the exotic character of the style.



were the styles most associated by Chicagoans with residential architecture.

The North Italian Renaissance style, derived from the regional architecture of the northern Italian provinces of Lombardy, was rarely used in Chicago. Its visual characteristics--dark red brick laid in a picturesque, textured manner; round-arched windows and arcades; column and pilaster capitals ornamented with griffins and exotic beasts, and a sculptural-appearing rooftop of towers, setbacks, and red tile roofs--give the Allerton a distinctive appearance, unique among Chicago commercial buildings in general and North Michigan Avenue buildings in particular.

In addition, the Allerton exhibits excellent craftsmanship in the quality of its brickwork. The use of faceted brick and projecting headers, meant to add physical and visual texture to a large commercial building, is unusual within the context of Chicago architecture. Such brickwork was meant to emphasize the artistic quality of the Allerton's design, a trait much admired by America's urban elite in the residential architecture of the 1920s. It gave the

large-scale hotel a small-scale, domestic quality that was important to the image of the Allerton House Company.

The Allerton is also significant for being the city's first highrise that utilized dramatic building setbacks, a form that influenced the city's skyline over the next decade. The deep setback of the central tower was based on the design of Allerton hotels in other cities. This dynamic architectural form influenced the design of such other prominent landmarks as the Chicago Board of Trade (1930; 141 W. Jackson Blvd.) and the Civic Opera (1929; 20 N. Wacker Dr.) buildings.

### **CRITERION 7 (*Unique Visual Feature*)**

*Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.*

As a large-scale building with a prominent profile and distinctive coloring, the Allerton has been a visual landmark on North Michigan Avenue since its completion in 1924. As one of the earliest high-rise buildings to rise on the avenue, the Allerton appeared for years as a freestanding tower amidst the older, 19th-century rowhouses with which the neighborhood was originally developed. The building's North Italian Renaissance style, expressed through dark red brick and a distinctively sculptural roofline, gave it an individual design prominence that remains today, even amidst the larger buildings that have risen along the avenue in years since.

### **INTEGRITY**

*The integrity (of the proposed landmark) must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express its historic community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value.*

The Allerton Hotel retains a significant degree of its historic integrity--in terms of its location, exterior design, setting, materials, and



**Once the tallest building on North Michigan Avenue, north of the Tribune Tower, the Allerton Hotel today is surrounded by newer taller skyscrapers. Yet it remains a distinctive presence on the Magnificent Mile.**

workmanship.

Virtually all of its distinctive masonry, including its patterned brickwork and stone ornament, is intact. In addition, its historic, upper-story signs for the "Allerton Hotel" and the "Tip-Top-Tap" (installed c.1928 and c.1946, respectively) remain. Other changes to the exterior and interior, are detailed in the following discussion on "Building Rehabilitation Issues."

The relatively minor exterior alterations do not seriously affect the building or its significant historical and architectural features.

## Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Allerton Hotel, the Commission staff recommends that the significant historical and architectural features for the preservation of this building be:

- C all building elevations, including their rooflines.

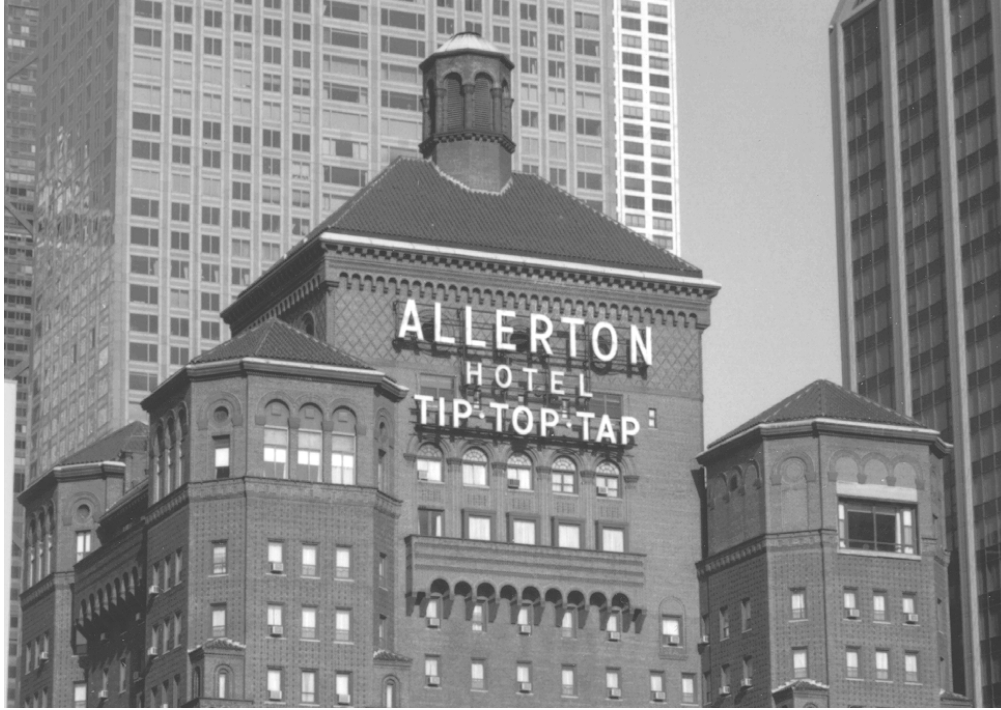
**Although largely still intact, some elements of the ground floor have been altered in recent years. Along Huron Street the two-story arches flanking the entrance were enclosed and the projecting metal canopy over the doorway was added, both probably during the 1970s.**



## Building Rehabilitation Issues

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks bases its review of all City-issued permits related to a landmark property on its adopted Guidelines for Alterations to Historic Buildings and New Construction. The purpose of the Commission's review is to protect and enhance the landmark's





**The Allerton Hotel and Tip Top Tap signs have been fixtures on North Michigan Avenue for decades. However, large picture windows (seen here at right), probably added circa 1960, detract from the building's overall window pattern and quality of brickwork.**

existing "historical and architectural features." The Allerton Hotel retains virtually all of its prominent original exterior features, including its distinctive masonry work and the overall setback configuration. The following discussion identifies the general nature of the changes that have occurred to the building over the years since its completion.

The exterior of the Allerton Hotel retains much of its original appearance, although some changes have occurred. At the base of the building two of the three two-story arches at the main entrance have been enclosed. A projecting, rectangular metal canopy was built, probably in the 1970s, over the hotel entrance. The original storefront windows facing Michigan Avenue have been remodeled several times over the years, with the original round-arched windows changed to rectangular openings and new layers of building materials, including marble and metal, laid atop the original gray limestone.

Original upper-floor windows, with one-over-one, double-hung sash, have mostly been replaced with newer sash. Some of the original sets of



**The building originally featured a two-story entrance foyer with a stained-glass ceiling and staircases leading to the second floor. Much of this space has been lost to subsequent remodeling.**

arched windows that lighted public rooms on the 23rd floor have been remodeled with larger, picture-window sash.

The two very distinctive signs atop the building are intact. They are later additions. The “Allerton Hotel” sign was installed relatively early, with historic photographs showing it in place by 1929. The “Tip Top Tap” sign was not installed until sometime between 1948 and 1958, after the lounge’s opening.

The original interiors of the Allerton have largely been altered and are no longer apparent. The second-floor lounge, the most impressive room originally, has been completely remodeled and replaced by retail space. Also gone are the historic finishes of the main dining room and the grille.

The entrance and elevator lobbies retain some of their original configuration and ornamentation, but overall have been drastically altered. In the entrance lobby, one of two original staircases has been removed, while the other staircase has been greatly remodeled, obscuring its original profile. An original stained-glass skylight has been replaced by a modern opaque ceiling. The elevator lobby retains curved moldings over the elevator doors, as well as part of its ornamental frieze and beamed ceiling.

Upper-floor interiors also have been drastically changed. Over time, the original 1,010 units have been pared to under 400, as remodelings have enlarged rooms to modern levels of comfort. During a 1980s renovation, former bedrooms on the third floor were transformed into meeting rooms. The 23rd floor, originally club rooms and later converted to the Tip Top Tap, is now also used as conference space.

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*Architectural Forum* 42 (May 1925), front cover,  
pp. 3 (bottom left), 4, 14, 22.

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pp. 6, 13, inside back cover.

*Lost Chicago*, p. 9.

Anthony May, photographer, pp. 19, 20.

*New York 1930*, p. 11.

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**Christopher R. Hill**

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**Seymour Persky**

*Chicago Department of Planning and Development  
320 N. Clark St., Room 516, Chicago, IL 60610  
312-744-3200; 744-2958 (TTY)*



**Photograph by the noted Chicago photographer, Stephen Deutch, of North Michigan Avenue, (a.k.a., the Magnificent Mile), during the 1950s. The rooftop lighting advertising the Tip Top Tap (center) helped make the Allerton Hotel a focal point for nightlife on the Near North Side.**