



**County of Galveston**  
P.O. BOX 17253  
COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
GALVESTON, TEXAS 77552-7253

Mary Ann Daigle – County Clerk

December 10, 2009

Ann McGeehan  
Director of Elections  
Office of the Texas Secretary of State  
amcgeehan@sos.state.tx.us  
512-463-9871

Dear Ms. McGeehan:

Please find attached Galveston County's report regarding the local countywide election program attached as Exhibit A.

Should there be any following inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact our office and should there be any public or legislative hearings regarding this matter, please notice our office so we may participate.

Your consideration, as always, is greatly appreciated.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas T. Godinich", written over a horizontal line.

Douglas T. Godinich  
Galveston County Election Coordinator

**GALVESTON COUNTY  
COUNTYWIDE ELECTION PRECINCT PROGRAM REPORT**

**I. PURPOSE FOR APPLICATION**

Galveston County (the County) applied for the vote center program for one (1) primary purpose. The primary purpose was to increase voter turnout. This was to be accomplished by addressing the most common complaint of precinct specific voting which is redirecting voters to their correct polling location. By eliminating the redirection of voters, it was Galveston County's position that we would increase voter turnout by making the process less complicated.

Galveston County has 101 voting precincts. The County has historically consolidated voting precincts into fewer locations than the total number of precincts. In the November, 2007, Constitutional election, Galveston County utilized seventeen (17) precinct specific voting locations. Galveston County used forty (40) voting center locations for the November 3, 2009, election. This was also done for another purpose.

Galveston County conducted a public hearing on September 12, 2009, to receive input on the vote center plan. There was one (1) consistent complaint at the hearing. The vote center program was a widely popular concept, but the reduction of the number of polling places was met with great animosity. The County saw this as an opportunity to address an additional change in the Galveston County voting process.

Galveston County had decided that the November 8, 2008, general election would be the last election the County would use paper ballots on election day. The County had purchased additional electronic voting equipment in August, 2008. In the November, 2008, election, the new equipment was not fully deployed since paper ballots were also used with the electronic equipment. The November 3, 2009, vote center plan was to expand not reduce, the number of voting locations from the previous Constitutional Election. It was anticipated that this plan would lessen the impact of eliminating paper ballots.

**II. HISTORY OF THE VOTING PROCESS IN GALVESTON COUNTY**

Galveston County created an Elections Department with a Coordinator in September, 2007. One of the purposes of creating this division within the Galveston County Clerk's office

was to expand election services within the County. As elections have become more procedurally, mechanically and financially burdensome, the County determined that it was necessary to provide more election assistance to the forty-two entities within the County. By providing additional resources to the County Clerk, the additional assistance could be provided to the entities and improve the county elections without retaining an Elections Administrator and creating an entirely new County department.

Immediately upon its creation, the Galveston County Elections Department began marketing its services heavily to the municipalities, Independent School Districts, Municipal Utility Districts, Special Utility Districts, Water Districts, Colleges and the Navigation District within the County. Heavy marketing resulted in more joint elections with the County each November and more entities turning over their entire election process to the County each May.

In May, 2008, Galveston County conducted fifteen separate (15) municipal, school district and water district elections. In November, 2008, the County conducted five (5) joint elections with county entities. In May, 2009, Galveston County conducted thirteen (13) separate entity elections, though the number was fewer than the previous year, services were provided to all county entities who were conducting elections at that time. In November 2009, the County conducted three (3) joint elections with county entities, which were also all of the entities conducting elections at that time. The May, 2009, and November, 2009, elections were all conducted without paper ballots on election day. The speed, accuracy and ease of conducting a paperless election has contributed to increased security and integrity of the Galveston County election process.

The 2009, county wide vote center plan was an expansion of the system already used by Galveston County.

### **III. COUNTY WIDE VOTE CENTERS IN GALVESTON COUNTY**

Since 2006, Galveston County has utilized countywide vote centers for early voting. The County early voting locations have varied from eight (8) locations for the 2007 Constitutional Election, ten (10) for the 2008 primary election and sixteen (16) for the 2008 General Election. There were eight (8) early voting locations for the 2009 Constitutional Election. Galveston County has also seen forty (40%) to forty-five (45%) percent of voters, vote early in the elections from 2006 through 2009. Approximately two (2) weeks of early voting, greatly relieves the volume of election day voters.

Galveston County has not used vote centers for early voting for the May entity elections. To reduce voter confusion and facilitate the process, one (1) early voting location per entity is provided within each city or school district as applicable.

The County plan was as simple as expanding the current early voting system to include one (1) additional day. Galveston County has used an in-house database on a county server to provide a real time vote marking system. This would be the system used on election day, November, 2009.

#### **IV. THE RESULT OF ELECTION DAY COUNTYWIDE VOTE CENTERS**

The Office of the Texas Secretary of State (SOS) predicted a three percent (3%) voter turnout for the 2009 Constitutional Election. Galveston County voter rolls showed 176,592 eligible voters for the election and 12,942 voters cast ballots or seven point three percent (7.3%). This high voter turnout may be attributed to additional entities conducting joint elections with the County, especially one (1) contested bond proposition in the City of Santa Fe. Regardless of the reason, Galveston County conducted a high volume election using more electronically linked locations than it had previously done.

The County real time voter marking system relies on two (2) primary components functioning properly, the County server using the AS-400 database and connectivity to the remote sites. An additional factor in this election that also became a major component was the individual, laptop user at each location.

Each of the forty (40) election day locations had two (2) laptops. One (1) laptop was used solely to reference voters on the statewide TEAMS database and the second (2<sup>nd</sup>) laptop was used to mark the voter as voted on the County AS-400 database. Eight (8) of the forty (40) locations were county owned facilities which allowed for hardwire connectivity, three (3) of the locations were Galveston Independent School District locations which allowed for hardwire connections, and Clear Creek Independent School District allowed for three (3) hardwire connections. The remaining twenty six (26) locations used wireless air-cards for connectivity.

The wireless air-card locations were tested for connectivity the weeks leading up to election day. Each location was individually tested by county technicians who were able to visit each location. Unfortunately, there are multiple factors that affect wireless connectivity from the time of day, wireless traffic and weather. To keep all of the locations fully operational

throughout the entire day, proved to be a test as to the creativity and ability of the County technology personnel.

The laptops were also tested individually to access the County AS-400 database. However, to utilize all eighty (80) laptops simultaneously for a full twelve (12) hour day also proved a test of the County's desk top technology personnel who maintain the AS-400 database.

As directed in training class, the pollworkers and judges arrived approximately one (1) hour prior to the opening of each polling location. Thirty-eight (38) polling locations reported one or more problems, between 6:00 am and 6:30 pm. The problems included the following:

- a. The inability to log onto the server to access the AS-400 database. (5)
- b. The inability to receive a wireless signal. (5)
- c. The server "timing out" the user, where the user was being logged off of the server automatically after a few minutes. (5)
- d. The Hart Intercivic JBC printer would not stop printing the open polls tape. (20)
- e. Username and password problems to access the TEAMS and the County AS-400 database. (6)
- f. The hardwired locations were unable to access the outside server. (3)
- g. Inability to access the TEAMS database. (20)
- h. Poll workers unable to locate miscellaneous forms. (18)
- i. Laptop battery failure. (1)
- j. Locations were not handicap accessible. (2)

When the polls opened at 7:00 am on November 3, 2009, eight (8) locations were fully functional and remained that way throughout the day. By 7:30 am, twenty (20) locations were fully functional. By 8:00 am, thirty-one (31) locations were fully functional. Difficulties remained for the remaining nine (9) locations until 11:30 am when thirty-nine (39) locations became operational.

One (1) location, Friendswood Church of Christ, had continued problems throughout the day. That location was able to connect to the County server for about one (1) hour throughout the day. Each time a voter came into vote, the judge would call the County elections office to confirm that a voter had not previously voted and the County elections office would mark the voter as voted in the system. That location had 123 voters for the entire day.

Past Galveston County elections have had significant problems. For this election,

Galveston County had pre-positioned eight (8) technicians across the county for election day to address laptop problems. The Elections Department had pre-positioned three (3) support persons to address election equipment and supply problems. The three (3) equipment support persons quickly joined the other eight (8) technicians in addressing server and connectivity issues (problems a, b & c) because election equipment issues never materialized. At one location, antennas had to be improvised to increase laptop connectivity with the antennas taped to an exterior door. Another location required the room to be rearranged to have the laptop location oriented to a window and away from a steel wall.

As Galveston County has continually conducted more elections throughout the last two (2) years, a more consistent pool of workers has been developed. The workers for this election played a significant part in reducing and eliminating many of the equipment problems that were common from lack of equipment familiarity. The extremely long open polls tape (problem d), caused many phone calls on election morning. Many workers who were accustomed to precinct specific voting had never seen a JBC tape with every precinct and ballot style being printed. However, once the initial shock was overcome, that issue never resurfaced and the workers easily adapted.

The November 3, 2009, election did require more workers using technology that they were not accustomed to. The locations that had workers familiar with the early voting process did not have the user issues that other locations had (problem e). These problems were minimized throughout the day as the workers became more familiar with the system. Additional training would be required to address the familiarity problems.

Galveston Independent School District (GISD) had firewalls set at the school voting locations (problem f). Galveston County technical support was able to address these issues with the assistance of the GISD technicians.

Connectivity was lost with the TEAMS database for approximately one (1) hour for all of the locations (problem g). However, there was no impediment to the voting process. Galveston County had installed a backup icon on the desktop of each laptop with the complete voter roll. It was a file that could be searched alphabetically and there was actually no need to reference the TEAMS database because of the available voter file.

There was one (1) laptop battery failure due to the poll worker not plugging in the power cord and running the laptop on the battery until it shut down and another location that could not

find their statement of compensation forms (problems h & i). These problems were resolved over the telephone and are attributed to the poll workers' lack of familiarity with the process. Even though Galveston County utilized an experienced pool of poll workers, there were still locations that utilized workers who were not as familiar with the new process or equipment which affected their ability to address some routine tasks. These are ongoing issues continually addressed during training prior to each election.

Two (2) weeks after the election, Galveston County received complaints from Advocacy Inc. regarding two (2) polling locations. Alamo School located in Galveston and Mooney Gymnasium in Hitchcock were reported as not being handicap accessible. After reviewing with the location judges, one of whom is wheel chair bound, and discussing with the representative of Advocacy Inc. the reports were not completely accurate (see Exhibits A, B, C, D).

Mooney Gymnasium, Exhibits A and B, illustrate that the wheel chair ramp on the side and front of the building are adjacent to the front entrance. One problem we did find was that the handicap parking was not clearly posted at the front of the building. The location judge who is wheel chair bound, confirmed that the side entrance where one ramp, Exhibit A, is located was open as well as the front doors of the building where the second ramp to the left of the front steps is located, Exhibit B.

Alamo School, Exhibits C and D, illustrate that the wheel chair ramp is approximately 65 feet from the front door. The location judge did confirm that the doors to the wheel chair ramp were open and used by several voters to access the polling location. The location judge also confirmed that the wooden pallets and forklift present in the photos were not there on election day and the sidewalk was clear for pedestrian traffic.

## **VI. THE FUTURE OF VOTE CENTERS IN GALVESTON COUNTY**

There are several obstacles in Galveston County if the vote center plan is to continue. Galveston County's primary obstacles are resources and protecting the people's rights. A lower turnout election using vote centers such as a Constitutional Election can be accommodated easier in the future by expanding existing resources such as training and modifying certain locations. Galveston County will have to purchase additional equipment to accommodate locations that service voters in areas that would be prevented from voting if there traditional location were permanently absorbed.

The equipment that will have to be purchased would specifically address the real time

voter marking system. The system currently used for early voting in Galveston County cannot accommodate any further expansion. The November 2009, election illustrated issues in the existing system which did not materialize in the past when the system was used solely for early voting at a smaller number of locations, ten (10) to fifteen (15) with approximately forty-five (45%) percent of the voters voting over a two (2) week period. The home-grown system currently used cannot manage the necessary services a use specific system can provide. The County will have to find a better system.

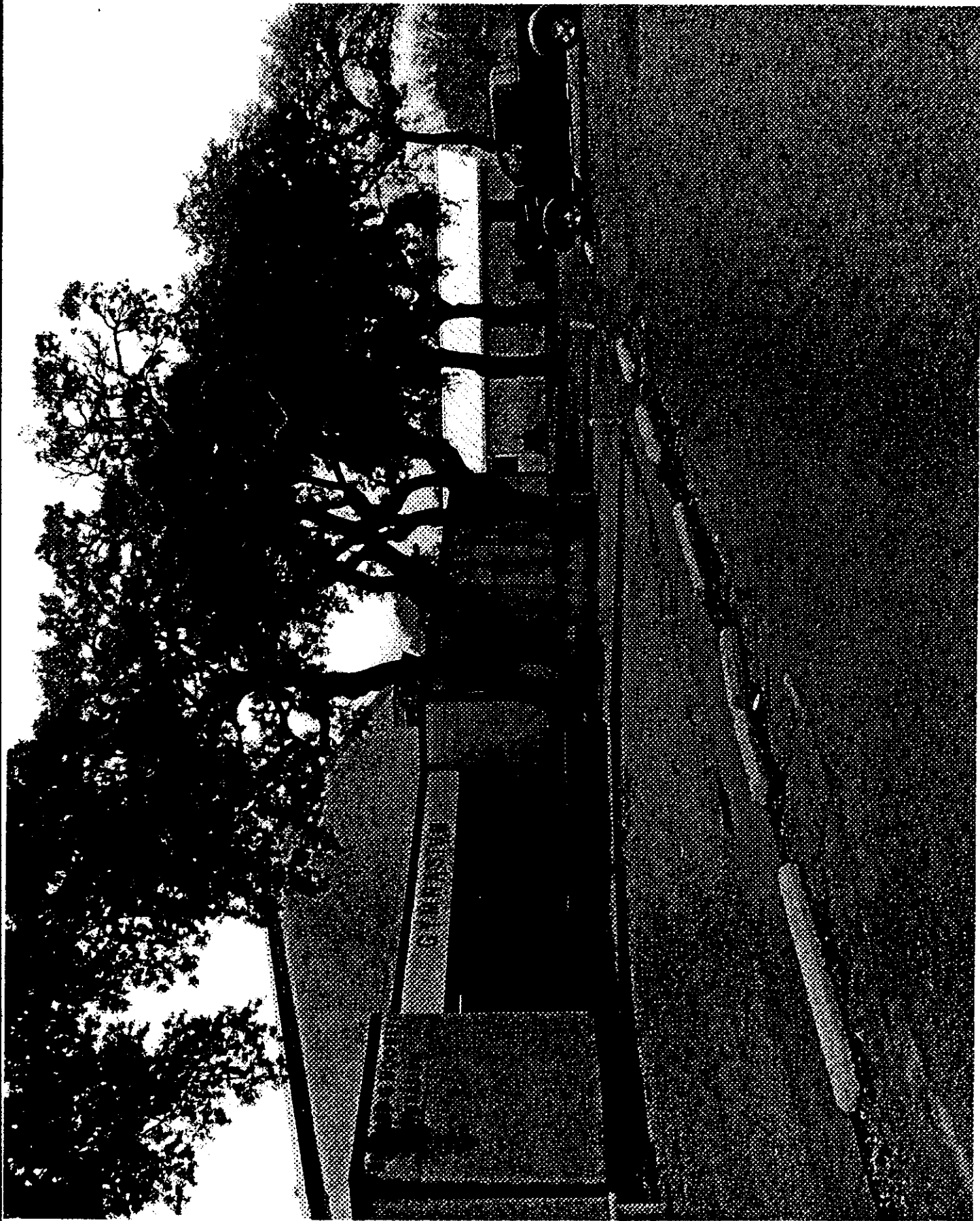
The forty (40) locations used cannot accommodate the County for a large election. In the November, 2008, General Election, sixty one (61) locations were used. There were seventy five (75) planned but Hurricane Ike eliminated fourteen (14) of the planned locations. A factor that is unique to Galveston County is that more entity elections are being conducted by the County each election cycle. Along with the voters, the interest of those entities must be protected, i.e. locations accommodating the individual entities. If the County is to continue with its plan of unifying the election process the reduction of polling locations will be a major obstacle.

The public perception of the vote center system was received with broad approval. The public was more than forgiving with any delays due to the increased convenience of non precinct specific voting. Galveston County would like to continue to participate in the system but there are internal and external reservations. For a large election with entity involvement, Galveston County will need to supply more vote centers if the system is to sustain long term viability and public support. Galveston County will have to locate resources to supply the additional technological infrastructure necessary to support any future election day vote centers. Once, these two (2) issues are addressed, Galveston County would pursue vote centers for future elections.





EXHIBIT A



**EVIRIT R**

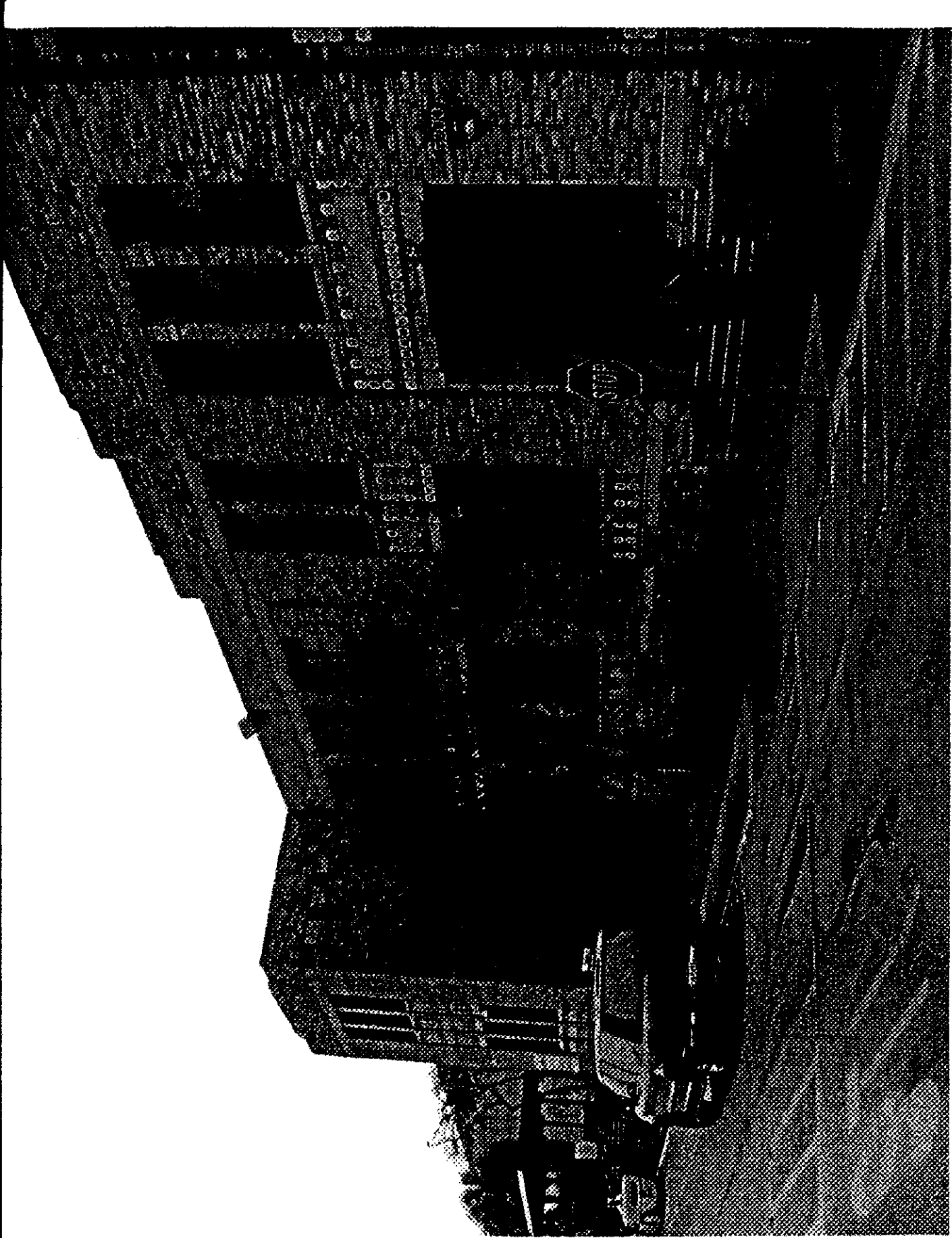


EXHIBIT C

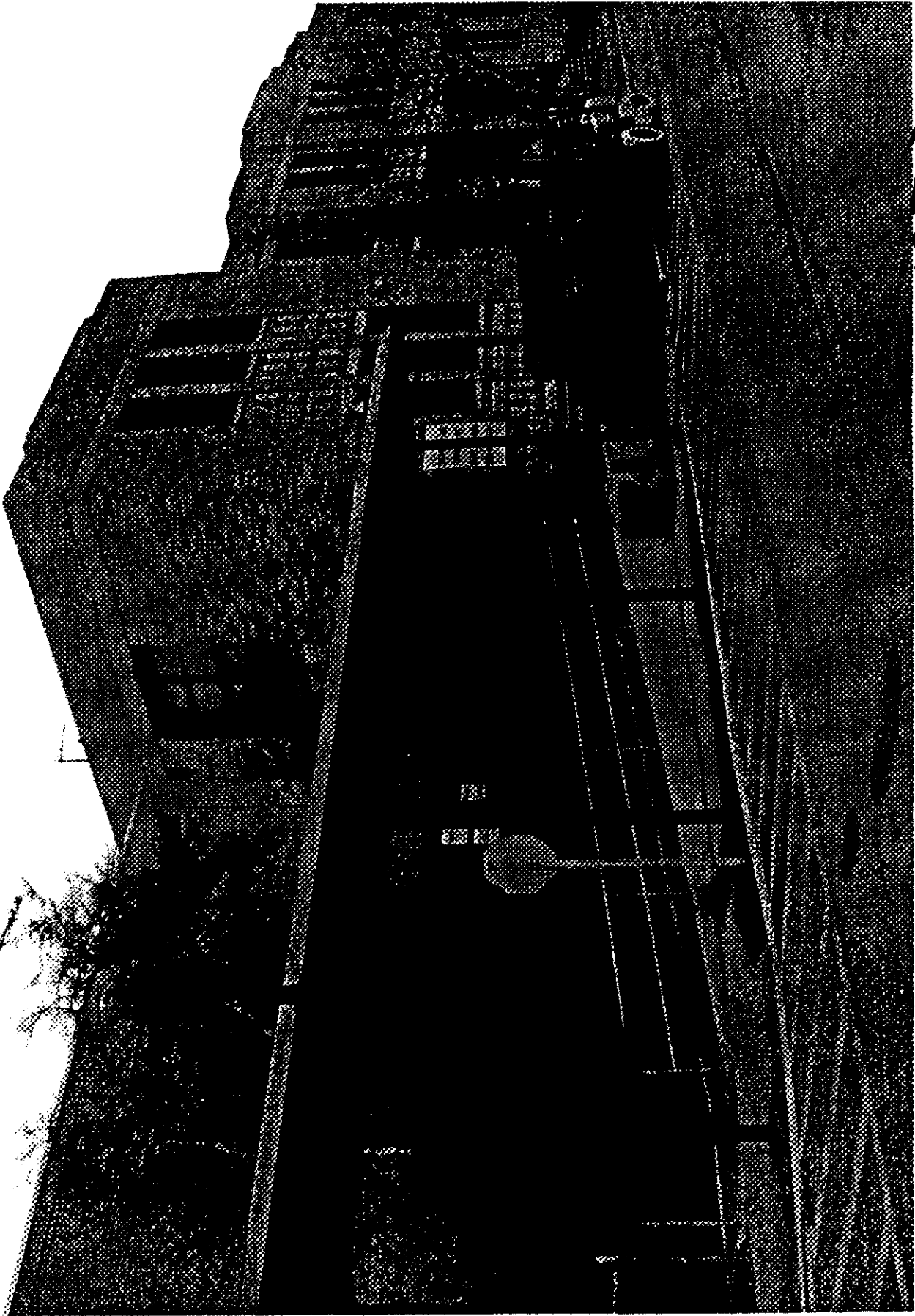


EXHIBIT 7