

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 an 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 Armour Theatre Building

other name/site number N/A

2. Location

street & town 400-410 Armour Road N/A not for publication

city or town North Kansas City N/A vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Clay code 047 zip code 64116

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

Mark A Miles May 09, 2008
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural 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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____

Armour Theatre Building
Name of Property

Clay County, MO
County and State

5. Classification

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

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE: office building

SOCIAL: meeting hall

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS:

Spanish Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

terra cotta

roof other: tar and gravel

other

Narrative Description

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

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

Armour Theatre Building
Name of Property

Clay County, MO
County and State

8. Description

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.)

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT

Period of Significance

1928-1958

Significant Dates

1928

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Keene and Simpson, architect

Fritzlen and Hufford, contractors

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other Name of repository:

Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Armour Theatre Building
Name of Property

Clay County, MO
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/5 3/6/3/8/3/0 4/3/3/3/7/7/0
Zone Easting Northing

2 / / / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

3 / / / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

4 / / / / / / / / / / / / /
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)
see attached

Property Tax No

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
see attached

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cydney E. Millstein and Mary Ann Warfield
organization Architectural and Historical Research, LLC date November 30, 2007
street & number 1537 Belleview Avenue telephone 816.472.4154
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

Additional Documentation

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)

Property Owner

name/title Armour Theatre Redevelopment Corp.
street & number 1656 Washington Avenue telephone 816.994.7350
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

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Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri

Summary:

The Armour Theatre Building, located at 400-410 Armour Road, North Kansas City, was designed by the prominent Kansas City architectural firm of Keene and Simpson in 1928 and constructed by Fritzlen and Hufford, general contractors the same year. Sited on a main thoroughfare in the Central Business District of North Kansas City, the polychromatic brick two-story Armour Theatre Building features three separate storefronts; the middle unit (the theater portion) stands taller than the flanking segments. The building has Spanish Eclectic affinities with its regularly laid Mission tile roof, arched fenestration at the main façade and decorative tiles above the canted southwest corner. Glazed terra cotta surrounds, lintels with carved rinceau and the side gabled roofs with shaped parapets at the central unit further define the exterior and are hallmarks of the Spanish Eclectic period of architecture. The neon marquee, extant in September 1995, was removed due to its deteriorated condition. Overall, the theater building remains in good condition and retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Its character defining features, exterior materials and interior spaces are representative of the period of historic significance.

Elaboration:

The main façade faces south. The central unit of the Armour Theatre Building is three bays wide (divided by brick piers) and features modified storefronts. The western most bay has a single leaf door with a single sidelight while the remaining bays feature double-leaf doors. The original plate glass windows have been boarded up for reasons of security. Above the end bays of the central unit are wide, glazed terra cotta lintels with rinceau in high relief. As mentioned in the Summary above, a non-original marquee placed above the central bay, was removed due to its poor condition. Separating the storefront level from the second story is a continuous terra cotta sill course. Above the main entrance at the central bay is a trio of arched windows with the upper sash displaying multipanes. A terra cotta molded surround and Corinthian columns with spiral shafts further define the fenestration, designed as a focal point of the entire building. Non-original, double-hung aluminum framed windows with terra cotta surrounds flank the central window display. A Gothic inspired pointed arch (a design motif also typical of the Spanish Eclectic) cornice is placed below the roofline.

Flanking the central unit of the Armour Theatre Building are two separate storefronts; both the first floor fenestration and doors have been modified from the original. The easternmost unit features a centrally placed recessed entrance with double-leaf doors. Storefront windows are aluminum framed (multipaned) with a narrow transom obscured by a continuous awning. A wide stone continuous lintel is placed above the storefront. Separating the storefront from the second story is a narrow sill course that continues from the central unit. Fenestration configuration of the

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

second story duplicates that of the central unit. A narrow cornice with wooden modillions rests below the roofline. A tiled mansard roof partially hides the barrel-vaulted roof of this unit. A one-story modern commercial property shares the east wall, which it partially obscures.

The westernmost storefront is similarly detailed. A modified aluminum framed storefront displays thick mullions. A single-leaf door is placed at the far west end. A series of cloth canopies are placed above the storefront units, covering the original transoms. At the southwest corner is a canted entrance featuring a non-original aluminum-framed double-leaf door set below a polychromatic tiled arch. The original storefronts (including transoms) at the west façade of this western unit have been boarded up (all five bays). A single-leaf door is extant at the southern end of the west façade. Fenestration at the second story (both the south and west facades) repeats the pattern of the windows of the central and east units. A clipped gable marks the canted entrance.

The majority of the openings at the north façade of all three units have been boarded up. Beginning at the western-most unit, there are two single-leaf fire (metal) doors (which are operable) at the first story and two windows at the second story. The central unit, which extends beyond each flanking unit, is devoid of any openings or doors, except at the eastern wall where a single-leaf door is placed. The eastern-most unit features a non-original one-story addition at the north façade. With the exception of a few single-leaf doors, all windows at this location, and at the original two-story east facade have been boarded up.

Fortunately, the original interior spaces of the Armour Theatre Building are mostly intact, especially at the central, theater unit. While the ticket area of the theater portion has been modified, the theater/auditorium has retained much of its original integrity with about 450 seats remaining. The second floor offices, placed at the southern end of the central unit are intact, as well. The Lodge Room at the second story above the eastern unit retains its original wooden and glass partition, while the dining room space (and the original fireplace) at the second floor above the western section remains, although in poor condition. The first floor interiors of the east and west units have been modernized over the years and function as retail businesses.

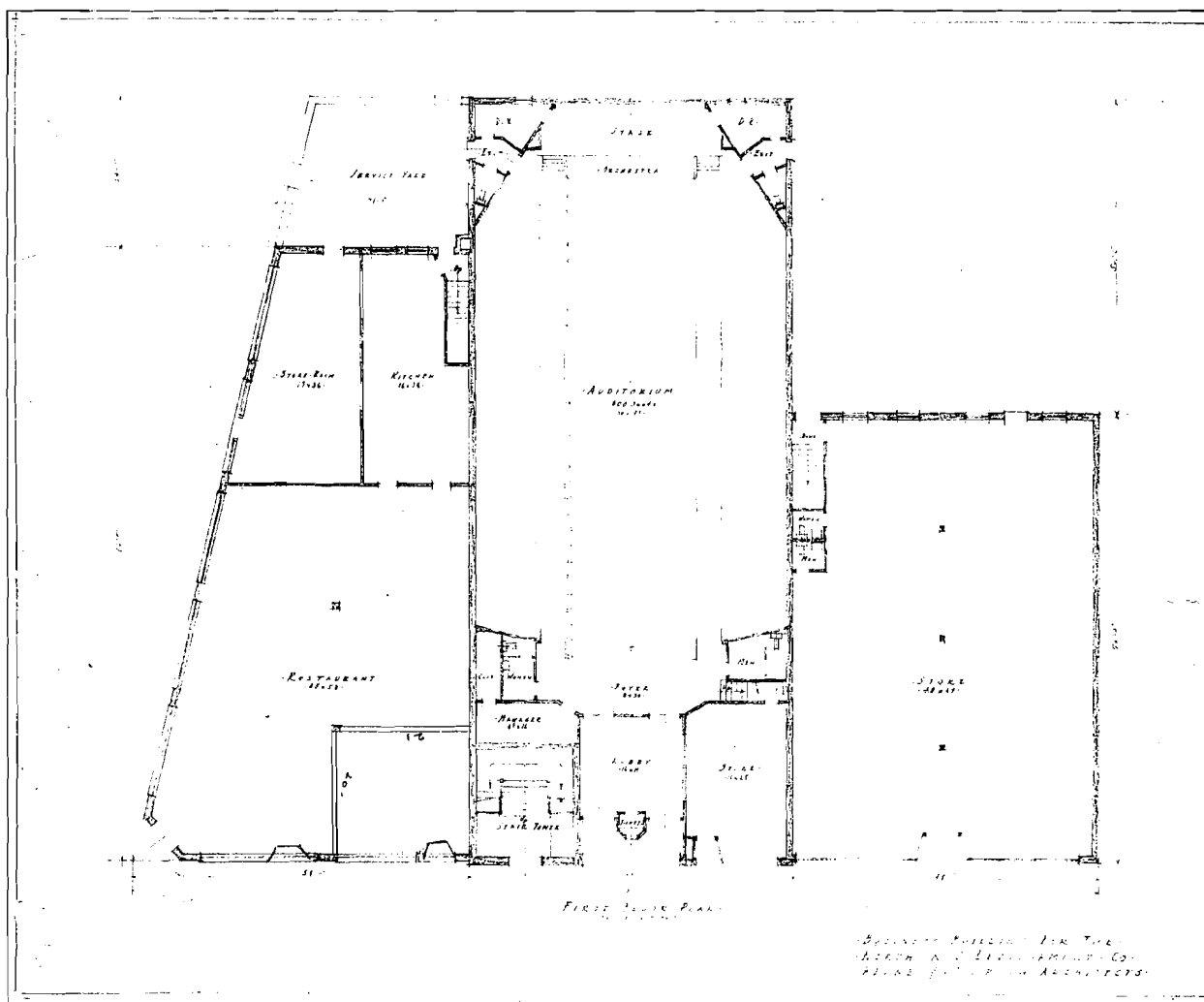
To the east and south of the Armour Theatre Building are modern, one-story commercial buildings. To the west is a Classical Revival commercial building, designed by Greenbaum, Hardy and Schumacker and constructed in 1929. It remains the only stone building in the CBD of North Kansas City. A residential section is located to the north of the Armour Theatre Building.

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**



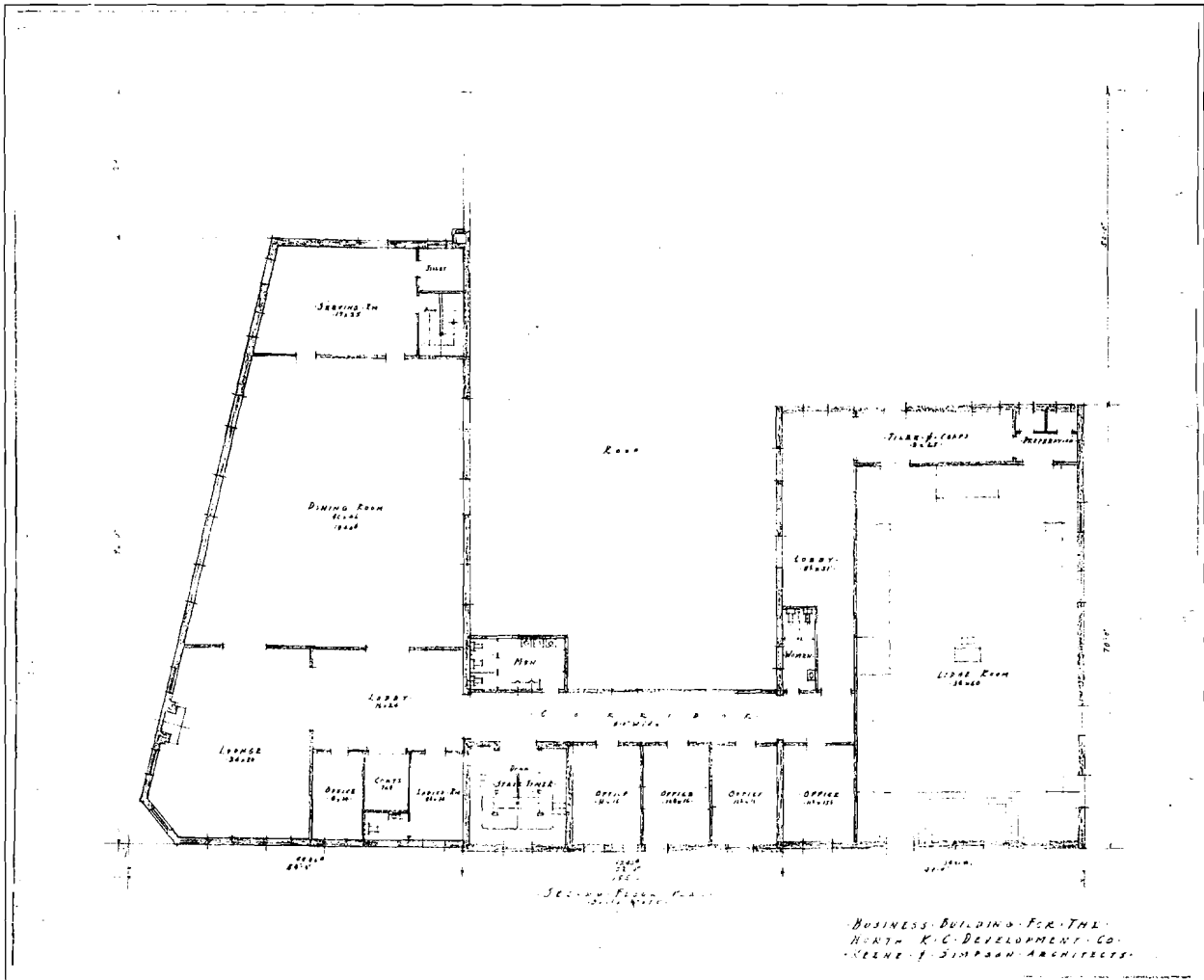
**First Floor Plan c.1927
Keene and Simpson: Armour Theater Building, 400-414 (400-414) Armour Road**

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**



Second Floor Plan c.1927

Keene and Simpson: Armour Theater Building, 400-410 (400-414) Armour Road

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

SUMMARY

The Armour Theatre located at 400-410 Armour Road in North Kansas City, Clay County, Missouri, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C and is locally significant in the following areas: COMMUNITY PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT, ENTERTAINMENT and RECREATION, and ARCHITECTURE. The Armour Theatre building was an integral part in the planning and development of North Kansas City by the North Kansas City Development Company. The theater building, as designed by the well-known Kansas City architectural firm of Keene and Simpson, was constructed in 1927-28 as a "Community and Theater Building." While a complete departure from their work of the period, the Armour Theatre remains representative of their work in the metropolitan Kansas City area.¹ Keene and Simpson, one of Kansas City's most respected architectural firms, was widely known for their monumental high-style designs including the Jackson County Courthouse (1934, with Wight and Wight), the Scottish Rite Temple (1930) and the Truman Courthouse (1933, with David Frederick). Their firm's Spanish Eclectic design for the Armour Theatre, placed in context of their other local designs, stands as an anomaly due to its scale, architectural style and property type. When the building was completed the theater featured approximately 450 seats. Although originally planned to include a billiard room and bowling alley above the theater, these were never realized. The first floor of the building contained a large restaurant, one large and two small store fronts. The development company leased a major part of the floor space of the building even before its completion. The Armour Theatre Building is representative of the entertainment element that was paramount to the overall design and success of a pre-planned community. Although the theater underwent a name change twice after 1960 (The Centre Theatre and The Paradise), the theater, community rooms, and offices have remained operational throughout its history. The period of significance is 1928 through 1958, the arbitrary 50-year cutoff date for National Register listing.

ELABORATION

Historical overview of the Armour Theatre Building and North Kansas City

The Armour Theatre Building at 400-410 Armour Road was built in 1927-28 during a building campaign that was instrumental in the development of the city of North Kansas City.² The project was spearheaded by the North Kansas City Development Company (NKCDC) as part of their overall planning and development of a city that was to provide the foundation and anchor

¹ Western Contractor 27 November 1927; 21 December 1927; 29 February 1928; 14 March 1928.

² An address change was made in the 1940s.

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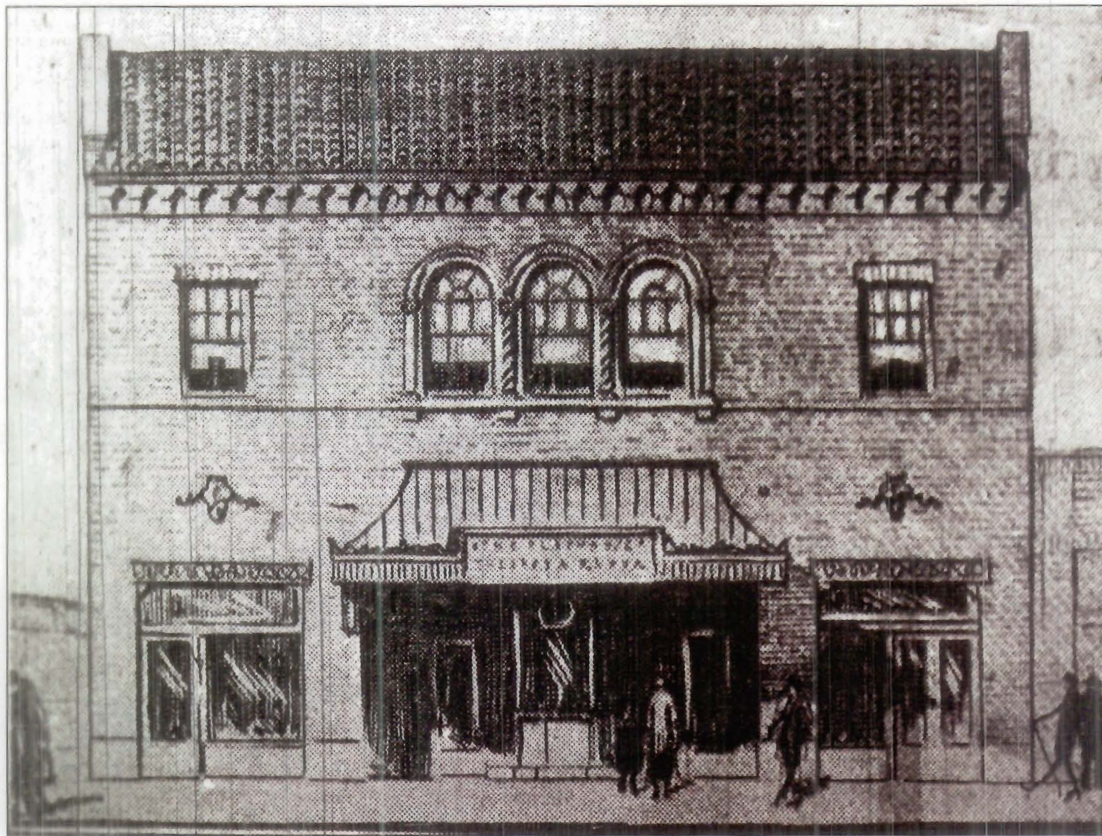
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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

for a community of blue collar workers who supplied the work force for the industrial area that was quickly expanding directly north of Kansas City, Missouri along the north side of the Missouri River.

On December 26, 1926, an announcement was made to build a theater and clubhouse for the community. Mr. N. M Fitch was listed as owner and architect for the project. Initially, the preliminary sketches detailed a building with two-stories and a basement, 50 x 100 feet with a theater to hold a capacity of 1,000 and a clubroom designated as headquarters for the North Kansas City Club.³ The building was to be constructed on the corner of Armour Road and Erie Street, with a narrow fifty-foot façade facing Armour Road.



Preliminary sketch by N. M. Fitch: *Kansas City Journal-Post* 20 March 1927

³ *The Kansas City Journal-Post* 20 March 1927.

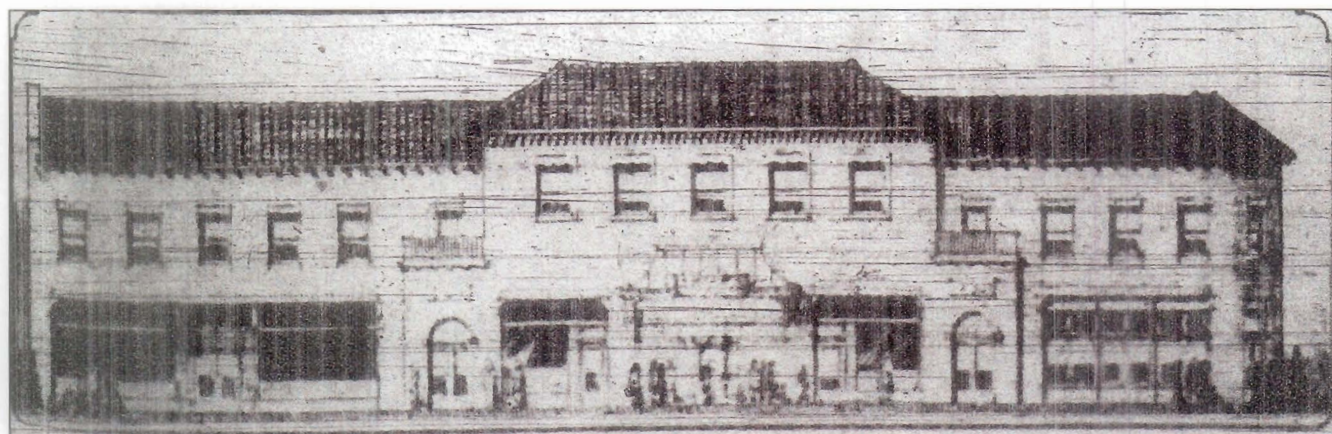
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**Armour Theatre
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On March 27, 1927 further information listed Mr. Fitch as a representative of the NKCDC while the architectural firm of Keene and Simpson were listed as the architects in charge of designing the new building with plans in progress. Seating capacity in the theater had been reduced to 750. Ground for the facility was broken by the end of November 1927. On November 27 a second rendering of the new theater building appeared in *The Kansas City Star* showing a 100 foot façade facing Armour Road with the theater placed as the central unit of the building.⁴



Architectural Sketch, attributed to Keene and Simpson: *The Kansas City Star* 27 November 1927.

The building as designed by Keene and Simpson was constructed by Fritzler and Hufford Construction Co., General Contractors, who also furnished heating, plumbing and electrical work.⁵ As can be seen in the above sketches, the design shifted several times prior to the completion of the building in the fall of 1928.

The final appearance of the building was quite different from the two sketches that appeared in the newspapers. As seen in the first sketch, the building had a smaller main façade that featured arched windows at the second story. The second architectural sketch released in November 1927, shows a much larger main façade, with arched storefront entrances and double-hung fenestration. In a photo of the completed building c. 1930, the final construction appears as a combination of

⁴ *The Kansas City Star* 27 November 1927, n.p.

⁵ *Western Contractor* 14 March 1928,36.

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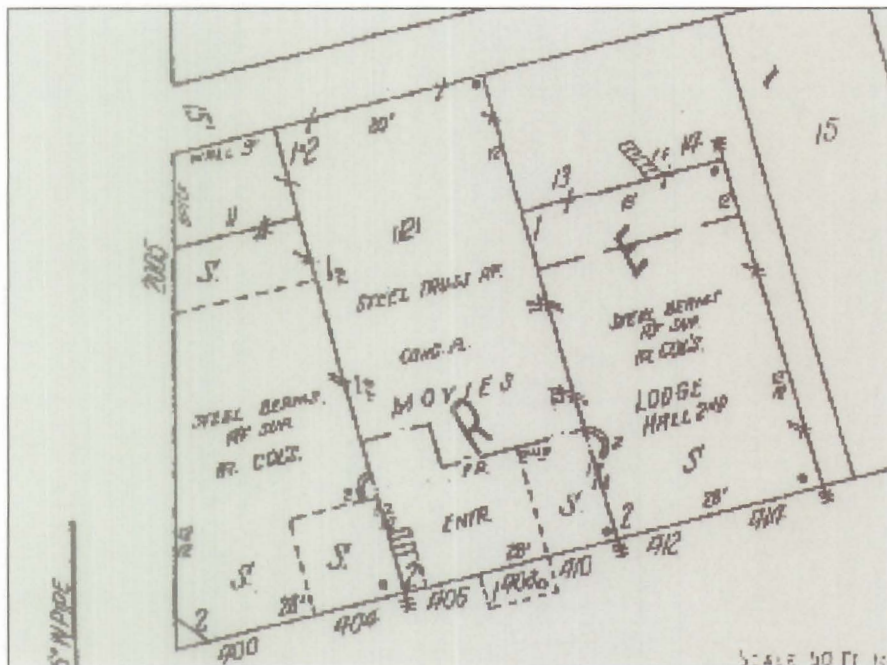
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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

the two sketches along with other modifications to the marquee as well as to the entrances of the building.



Armour Theatre Building, c.1930: 400-410 Armour Road.
Photo: courtesy of NKC Historical Society



▲ North

*Sanborn Insurance Map:
North Kansas City, MO.,
1931, Plate 5
(Detail: Corner of Erie and
Armour Road 400-414
Armour).*

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

When the Armour Theatre Building opened in September 1928, it was North Kansas City's first community and theater building. The impact on the community was a tremendous success with the theater at the heart of activity from the very beginning of its construction. The building was under the ownership of the NKCDC and prior to beginning its construction approximately 85-90% of the space had been successfully leased.

As mentioned in the summary paragraph the design for the Armour Theatre was quite an anomaly for Keene and Simpson, considering the context of their most significant work in the Kansas City metropolitan area. The scale, purpose, materials and style of their portfolio of the majority of their buildings is in direct contrast to the Armour Theatre, yet it is no less impressive given the context of the streetscape of North Kansas City. Two years after the completion of the Armour Theatre, Keene and Simpson designed the monumentally scaled Beaux Arts styled Scottish Rite Temple at Linwood and Paseo. Also contrasting to the theater is their best-known Kansas City building, the Jackson County Courthouse, an Art Deco masterpiece designed with Wight and Wight in 1934. The Truman Courthouse, another landmark from the early 1930s (inspired by Independence Hall in Philadelphia), was commissioned along with David Frederick, in the Neo-Classical style. Other buildings designed by the firm include libraries, high-rise commercial properties, hospitals, and hotels, most exacting interpretations of high style architecture. (For a list of some of the firm's buildings included in the National Register of Historic Places, see their biography below.)

When completed in 1928, the address of the theater building was 400-414 (rather than 400-410) Armour Road. Several other businesses located in the theater building opened between October and November 1928. The Armour Café opened at 400-402 Armour Road. In addition, the North Kansas City Homes Department was headquartered at 404 Armour Road and at 410 Armour Road, in the southeast lobby was the Armour Sweet Shop. Kansas City Power and Light was located on the eastside of the building at 412-414 Armour Road.⁶ The North Kansas City Commercial Club relocated to a large room on the second floor on the west end of the building in October 1928. It included a large dining room/ballroom area.⁷ The Masonic Blue Lodge was also located on the second floor over the offices of Kansas City Power and Light.⁸

⁶ Joseph Koppe. Former councilman, North Kansas City, Missouri. Written correspondence dated November 27, 2007. The Capitol Theater closed on the evening of September 5, 1928.

⁷ *North Kansas City Industrial Magazine*, (Kansas City, MO: North Kansas City Development Company, 1924-1931).

⁸ *The Kansas City Star* 27 November 1927.

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Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri

Prior to the completion of the Armour Theatre Building, the Capitol Theater had served the community of North Kansas City. It was a small space, seating around 230 people and was located at the corner of Armour and Swift. George Newell, a blind pianist who played at the old theater. Once the new Armour Theatre was opened Newell was hired to play there as well. His wife always accompanied him to read the title changes as Newell improvised the music. He remained with the theater until talking movies replaced the need for piano accompaniment.⁹

The Armour Theatre was under the management of Mr. George Hartman, who had been the manager of the old Capitol Theater, which closed on the evening of September 5, 1927.¹⁰ Hartman was given an active roll in outfitting the interior of the new theater including seating and projection equipment. Hartman read about a new theater in Webb City, Missouri that had just opened but went broke in the process. Hartman recognized that the theater seating and the projection equipment was virtually unused. He hired Floyd Miller, a North Kansas City resident, to pick up the 'newly installed and barely used' theater seats from the Webb City Theater, along with the projection equipment. Miller was then hired to install the seats. Miller received a salary as well as a lifetime pass to the theater.¹¹

When Hartman opened the Armour Theatre on September 6, 1928, the opening night movie was "Warming Up" starring Richard Dix, a popular silent film star of the era. The movie, distributed in August 1928, also starred actress Jean Arthur. The silent film was a story about baseball and featured several well known ball players from the 1920s New York Yankees. It was one of Paramount's first films with a synchronized musical score and sound effects.¹²

During this period, moving pictures with sound began to replace the silent films. On May 30, 1929, less than a year after the theater opened, Hartman traveled to New York City where he signed contracts for the purchase and installation of new equipment to project "talking pictures." The new sound and projection system was said to have been top notch and similar in quality to the sound system that was installed in the much larger and more opulent Loews' Theater located in downtown Kansas City.¹³

⁹ *Bridges to the Past*, 78.

¹⁰ Joseph Koppe.

¹¹ *Bridge to the Past: A Personal History of North Kansas City, Missouri*. (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1983), 47.

¹² Richard Dix. Silent Film Stars, Online. <http://www.goldensilents.com/stars/richarddix.html>

¹³ Koppe.

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

In addition to movies, the theater also featured live vaudeville performances on stage. In May 1930, Bob Steele was featured in 'Laughing at Death', along with a 12 performer [black face] minstrel show.¹⁴ Preston Williams, who grew up in a house that sat just behind the theater, recalls animal acts that used holding pens for the animals in the lot behind the theater.

Throughout the 1930s, the Armour Theatre was often advertised as "Geo. Hartmann's Armour Theatre." Several forms of media were used to advertise the weekly play bills. A search of area newspapers found that only the local newspaper, *The North Kansas City News*, carried advertisements for the Armour Theatre.¹⁵ Often, postcard and/or handbills would be mailed to the community for one cent per card.¹⁶

¹⁴ *The North Kansas City News* 8 May 1930, 6.

¹⁵ *The North Kansas City News* 1930-1960. Microfilm, Clay County Archives, Liberty, Missouri.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri

ARMOUR THEATRE
NORTH KANSAS CITY, MO.
SATURDAY Aug. 26 7 and 9 P.M.
RCA HIGH FIDELITY Sound System
BIG DOUBLE FEATURE

DOOMED! ONE BY ONE THEY DIED!!
TERROR ABOARD
KATHARINE HAMILTON
DORIS HAMILTON
DORIS HAMILTON
DORIS HAMILTON

TO POSSESS ONE WOMAN HE MURDERED A SHIPLOAD OF PASSENGERS!
© Geo. Hartmann Theatre

AFTER THE BALL
ROMANCE TO SET YOUR HEART AFIRE... ADVENTUROUS THRILLS... LAUGHTER!
A SPICY-COMEDY DRAMA THIS TOO DARING TO BE NAUGHTY... TOO NAUGHTY TO BE MISSED!

With RALSTON BATES and RATHBONE
Romance to set your heart afire... adventurous thrills... laughter!

WED. THURS. FRI. Aug. 30 - 31 Sept. 1

GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933
THE PICTURE THAT HAS EVERYTHING!
12 GREAT STARS!
CLIPPING ROMANCE!
SMOKING COMEDY!
LIFTING MELLICAMPS!
AND GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!

Sec. 562 P. L. & R
U. S. Postage
1c PAID
KANSAS CITY, MO.
PERMIT No. 817

Box Holder
Route No.
City

Handbill/Postcard c.1933
Bridges to the Past

Geo. Hartmann's Theatre
North K.C. ARMOUR Theatre

The only people who are bored with life are those who don't get much out of it—To get more out of life, see a good picture now and then.

Tues.-Wed., June 2 - 3 10c to All

The most laughed-at him-and-her on the silver screen, in a crime story fit to kill!

Another side-splitting adventure of Detective Piper and Miss Snooty Withers.

MURDER ON A BRIDLE PATH
with JAMES GLEASON and HELEN BRODERICK
Enough to make a horse laugh!

COMING SOON
Wm. POWELL in "THE EX MRS. BRADFORD"
JIMMY ALLEN in "THE SKY PARADE"
"SHARK ISLAND" — "SMALL TOWN GIRL"
"UNDER TWO FLAGS" — "MESSAGE TO GARCIA"

Thurs. & Friday June 4 - 5

It may be below zero in this scene but Bob's temperature's way up... He's just seen Robert Montgomery and Myrna Loy... You'll see!

MONTGOMERY MYRNA LOY
Petticoat Fever
with Reginald OWEN

'George Hartmann's Armour Theatre'
The North Kansas City News 1 June 1936, 5

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

As the years progressed and North Kansas City's growth stabilized, the NKCDC made some changes to the exterior of the Armour Theatre Building in the attempt to update the downtown commercial district. Between 1948 and 1949, the Armour Theatre went through extensive exterior changes. Kansas City Power and Light, which was located next door to the theater at 412 Armour Road, moved its offices to 400 Armour Road. Terra cotta ornamentation was removed from the building in order to 'modernize' the facade. Plaster exterior soffits, along with stainless steel trim were added to the west side of the building and the transom windows were removed. It is believed that the original marquee was removed at this time and replaced with the blade style marquee that was on the building until the current owner removed it in 2007.¹⁷

Between 1948 and 1952 the Armour Sweet Shop was closed and the theater began selling its own popcorn, candy and soda pop. It was also during this period that the address numbers were changed, 412 Armour became 410 Armour.¹⁸

In 1963 Commonwealth Theaters Corp. assumed management of the Armour Theatre. For a short period of time, the theater was closed for remodeling. It reopened on Christmas Day 1963 as the Centre Theater and premiered the Jerry Lewis movie, "Who's Minding the Store," followed by a feature presentation of "Come Blow Your Horn," starring Frank Sinatra. The name of the theater remained Centre Theater until 1984 at which time it came under new management and was renamed The Paradise Theater. The new management company also ran a video rental business from the theater lobby.¹⁹

In 1986 the NKCDC, the original building owner, sold the building and NT Realty assumed ownership of the property. In 1988, Byron Jones took over the operations of the Paradise Theater and began running live country western music shows on the weekends. In July 2005 North Kansas City began negotiations to purchase the building from NT Realty. Mr. Jones continued to manage the Paradise Theater as the *Northtown Opry*. The last performance of the Opry was on December 3, 2005 with country singer, Ferlin Huskey, performing.²⁰

It is possible that the building known as the Armour/Centre/Paradise Theatre, after 78 years of continuous operation as a movie and live theater, may be the longest operating movie house in the Kansas City suburban area.

¹⁷ Joseph Koppe

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**



The Centre Theatre c.1965: photo courtesy of NKC Historical Society



The Paradise Theatre c. 2007: photo courtesy of B. Rigby

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

Development of North Kansas City Missouri through the Early 1940s

The city of North Kansas City, unlike most cities, was created and built with residences, commercial buildings, lighted and paved streets a water works system and park in advance of the arrival of its inhabitants. Plans to establish an industrial city north of Kansas City, Missouri inside the curve of the levee of the Missouri River were developed by the North Kansas City Development Company in 1910. But before 3,500 rural acres became the thriving city it is today, more than half of the land was, at the turn-of-the-century, the lost borough of Midway with a ranch which included several hundred acres devoted to corn farming. In the middle of the corn field, October 30, 1910, an eight-room, two-story brick schoolhouse was sited. Access to the area was restricted to ferry transportation (the Annie Cade and the Ella May) and by traveling across the Hannibal Bridge.²¹

Earlier attempts to urbanize the area were unsuccessful. Willard E. Winner, a visionary speculator who initiated one of the biggest real estate booms in Clay County, attempted to construct a bridge across the Missouri River and develop the northland property in 1887. It was Winner's desire to develop an industrial district in southern Clay County that would rival that of Kansas City's. In order to accomplish the construction of the bridge, The Kansas City Bridge and Terminal Railway Company was organized with the purpose of establishing an outer belt line to take care of all railroad lines. Their thought was to make it possible for "through" trains to circumvent the city without having to switch through crowded streets.

The first hurdle of Winner's plan, that of building five caisson piers and four land piers of concrete, was accomplished in 1889-1890 at a cost of \$434,000. During this period, Winner also sold a small percentage of his holdings as residence lots in the area and laid out a system of streets which formed the basic pattern of the city's overall structure. Unfortunately, the collapse of the local real estate boom marred Winner's future plans. Subsequent schemes for the completion of the bridge were never realized and the Winner piers, as they came to be known, were acquired with the remainder of his holdings by the Armour Swift Burlington syndicate in 1902.

Thirteen years after Winner's dream collapsed, on February 13, 1903, the North Kansas City Development Company, incorporating with a thousand shares at \$100 each, was formed as a subsidiary of the Armour and Swift packing interests and the Burlington Railway. The development company continued to purchase the Winner property during the ensuing years.

²¹ *The Kansas City Star* 30 October 1910. Mounted Clippings, Special Collections, Missouri Valley Room Kansas City Public Library.

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

The two most significant events that accelerated development of the area were opening of the ASB Bridge on December 28, 1911, and the construction of a levee (1909-1912) on the banks of the Missouri river, which insured protection from flooding. All but two of Winner's piers were used in the construction of the ASB Bridge, a 4,000 foot structure designed by Waddell and Harrington featuring two separate traffic decks. Stretching from the bottom lands north to St. Joseph, Missouri, the levee was built by the Army Corps of Engineers. The North Kansas City Development Company was responsible for both of these landmark projects.

Soon after the ASB Bridge was completed, the Kansas City, Clay County and St. Joseph Interurban Railway was extended from Kansas City to Excelsior Springs and St. Joseph, Missouri. The electric railway, which made stops in North Kansas City along Burlington Avenue and Liberty Road (now Armour Boulevard), began its operation on January 21, 1913. Two lines were in operation with over eight cars to carry travelers and freight. The upper section of the ASB Bridge carried the interurban street railway in addition to vehicular traffic.

As a consequence of these major developments, the North Kansas City Development Company launched into their plan to create the industrial, commercial and residential districts of the area, which had become part of the Village of North Kansas City (one of the possible names for the town was New Birmingham) established by the Clay County Court on November 4, 1912. "North Kansas City did not just grow, but was modeled according to an approved plan..."²² R. E. Wilson, formerly with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, began negotiations for the location of several manufacturing plants in approximately ninety acres within the newly formed district. Wilson was hired by the North Kansas City Development Company for that sole purpose.

During this period, the company also started to develop the business district located north of the planned industrial area. Known originally as the "junction," this new business center was established at the intersection of the old Fairgrounds Boulevard (later Parkville Road; now called Swift Avenue) and Liberty Road (now Armour Road). It was the practice of the Development Company to secure tenants for these commercial buildings even before construction began.

In addition to the construction of these residential and commercial areas, the Development Company made improvements in order to make the area more attractive to potential residents and businesses. Under the direction of D. E. Sherman, landscape architect for the Kansas City Nurseries Company, thousands of young trees were planted in North Kansas City along new

²² *The Clay County Missouri Centennial Souvenir*,

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

streets and in the yards of homes constructed by the North Kansas City Development Company. Sewers, a water system and street lights were also installed.

In 1914 North Kansas City was described as follows:

Viewed from a distance, North Kansas City still has more the appearance of a straggling hamlet than of a compact and closely built-up city, but on closer inspection the impression changes. Broad paved streets, bordered by curbing, concrete walks and ornamental street lights, towering commercial structures and the general plan of arrangement tell of an anticipated future of large and dense population. Water plugs and lamp posts may stand in the open prairie, but they bound squares that soon are to be blocks of homes and stores; lines of paving stretch into the open where there is none to walk on them, but within a year or two they are to border streets that will be lively with traffic.²³

More than half of the district was originally set aside for industrial purposes. The central industrial district rests between a "Y" created by the Burlington and Wabash rail lines in 1869 when the first tracks were implemented in the area. The industries that required small parcels of land generally were located west of Linn Avenue and were sited on standard blocks approximately 610 feet north-south by 270 feet east-west. Generally, these dimensions were set by the original Winner survey with a slight variation. The North Kansas City Development Company allowed for alleys forty feet in width (running north-south) to accommodate private switch tracks for each industry. A central freight station handled all package freight for all railroads and special trap-car service was available for shipments with a minimum load of 6,000 pounds.²⁴

The industrial sites were sold or leased under contracts calling for the erection of fireproof buildings which, in turn, lowered fire insurance rates. It was reported that nine out of ten industrial buildings were constructed of steel with brick or concrete facades.

Industries that required larger tracts of land were located in three areas: east of Linn Avenue in the Central Industrial Area and east of Saline Street in the area north of Armour Road; east of the

²³ *The Kansas City Star*, 1 February 1914.

²⁴ John Q. Adams, "The North Kansas City Urban District," Thesis 1930 reprint from *Economic Geography* October 1932, Vol 8, No.4.

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North Kansas City Bridge in the Southeast Industrial Section; and along the east side of the Burlington Railway lines.

The early residential sections of North Kansas City included Northtown (north of Armour Road, platted January 30, 1914 as part of the first plat of North Kansas City), Midway (located along Swift Avenue between Tenth and Fourteenth Avenues, platted August 2, 1887) and Harlem, a small Missouri River community tucked between the A. S. B. and Hannibal bridges that developed c. 1836. As the city prospered, Midway was eventually replaced by industrial and commercial buildings. Harlem was absorbed into Kansas City, Missouri. Lowell Place, where some industrial buildings are located, was platted on September 5, 1887.

Northtown, originally a restricted area, was actually the earliest community planned by the North Kansas City Development Company to serve as a place of residence for people who worked in North Kansas City's industrial districts and neighboring cities. In order to attract people to the area, the company also provided for a business section along what is now Armour Road. The major residential area is located just east of Burlington Avenue and north of Armour Road along Clay and Buchanan Streets.²⁵

By 1920, the official population in North Kansas City was 870 and by the middle of the decade, 11 commercial buildings and 26 industrial buildings (identified within the survey boundaries) had been constructed. The town's first newspaper, *The Clay County News*, was published in 1920. Recognizing that the town had outgrown its village rank, the townspeople voted to establish North Kansas City as a city of the fourth class on October 2, 1924. Another event of consequence was that street names were changed to avoid confusing their identity with those of Kansas City, Missouri. All east-west streets were designated as avenues.

Construction of residences and commercial/industrial buildings in the city rose steadily after the toll was removed from the ASB Bridge on July 15, 1927. The opening of the free bridge was "probably the biggest single factor in the tremendous growth of North Kansas City that has marked the passing of the last twelve months."²⁶ At the same time, renovation of the bridge took place, including the construction of new concrete roadways to allow five lanes of traffic to cross the bridge.

²⁵ Cydney E. Millstein, "An Architectural Survey of the City of North Kansas City, Missouri, February 1996.

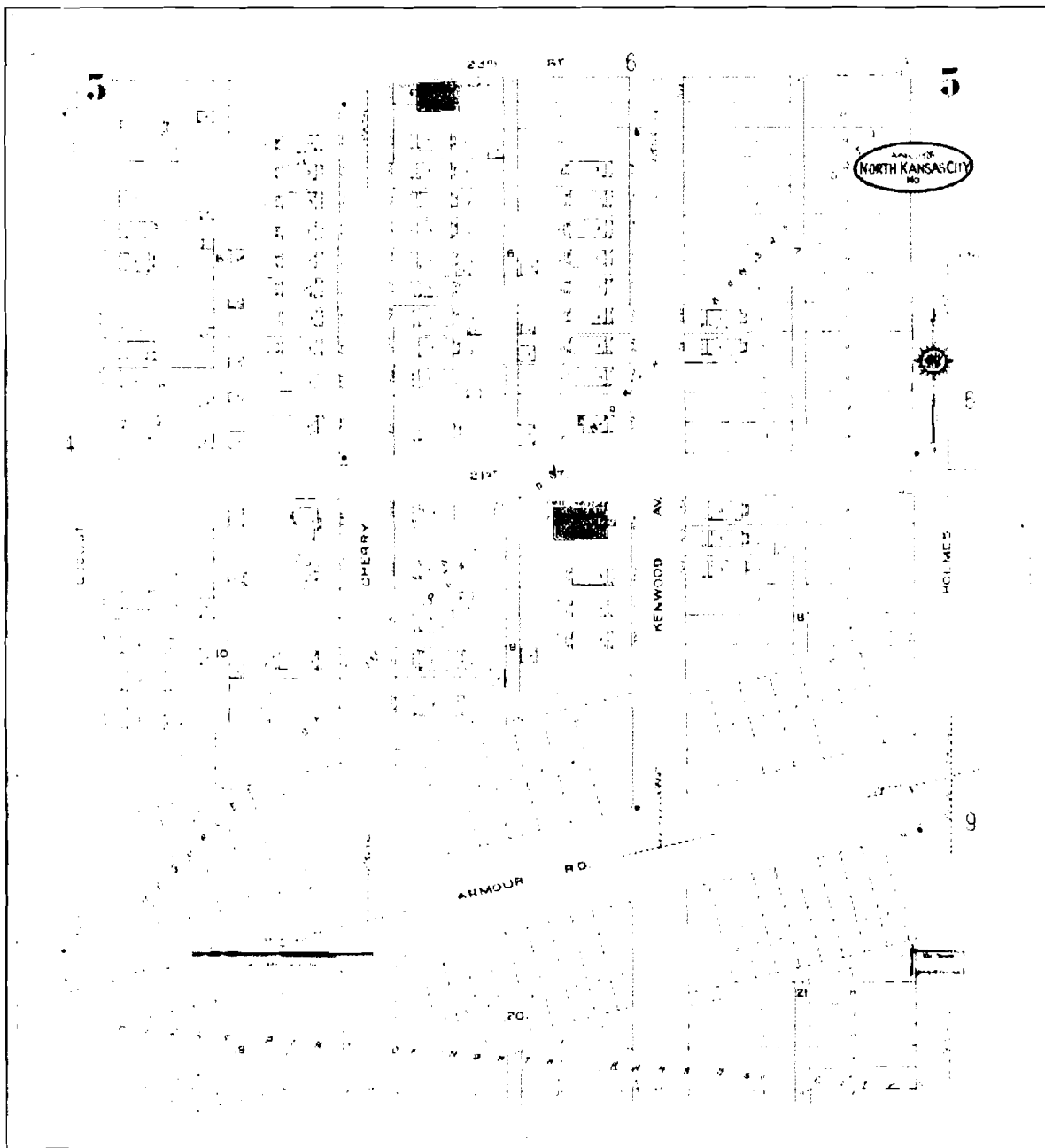
²⁶ North Kansas City Industrial District Magazine March, 1927 (Kansas City, MO: North Kansas City Development Company), 1924-1931.

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Sanborn Insurance Map, 1926 Plate 5.

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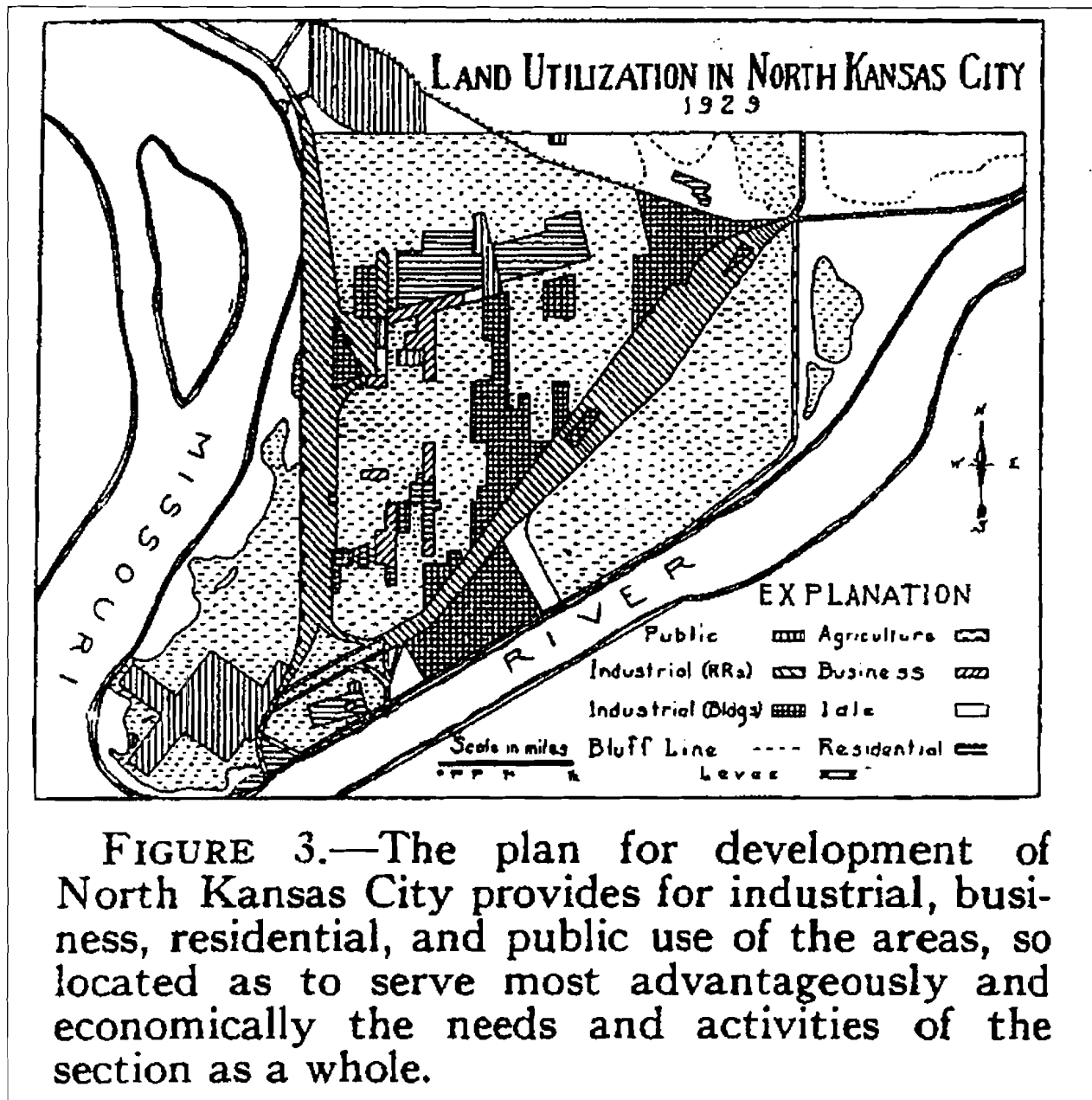


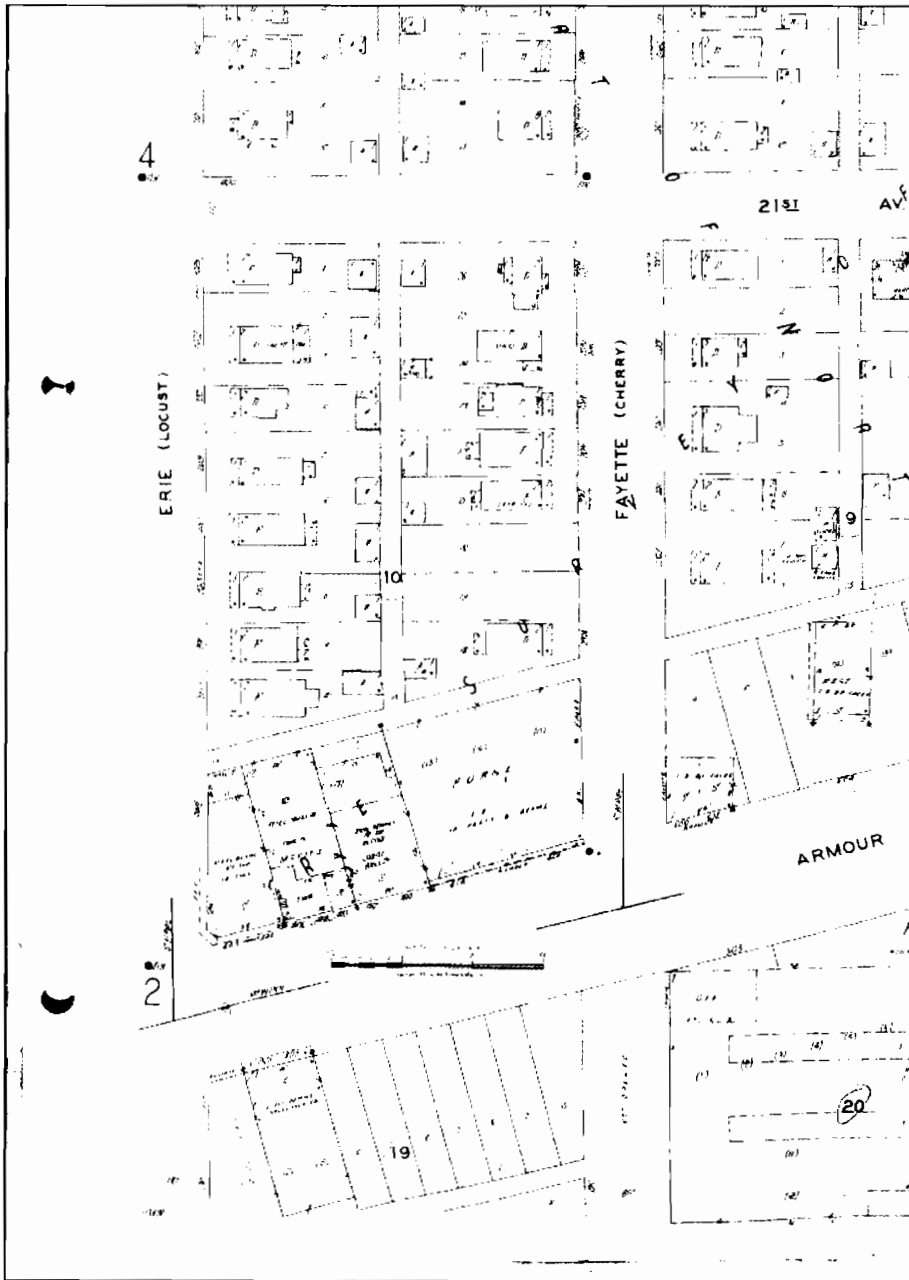
FIGURE 3.—The plan for development of North Kansas City provides for industrial, business, residential, and public use of the areas, so located as to serve most advantageously and economically the needs and activities of the section as a whole.

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Sanborn Insurance Map 1929, Plate 5

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In the downtown area which was resurveyed by the North Kansas City Development Company eight commercial, nine industrial and two domestic structures were erected from 1927 through 1930. The next substantial growth period for North Kansas City was from 1938 through 1946. A. W. Zimmer, vice president and general manager of the North Kansas City Development Company commented on the area's activities one month after the outbreak of World War II:

“Up until the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, I should have said the outlook for the continued development of the North Kansas City industrial business and residential districts was the most favorable of any time in our history. We had more deals pending than ever before. They're still pending ---and may remain so indefinitely, until we adjust our industries to the needs of the national effort. At present no one can foretell accurately what the future holds.”²⁷

In spite of the war, several sprawling, one story buildings designed in brick and stone were constructed, mainly along Burlington, Fourteenth and Sixteenth Avenues where large tracts of land had remained vacant. In the survey area, one industry that benefited from the war was Baker-Lockwood. This company, which began its operation in Kansas City, Missouri in 1870, manufactured tents for the military from its North Kansas City location. Standard Steel Company, another business sited within the survey boundaries, began a major building expansion at the close of 1941. Like Baker-Lockwood, they were engaged in defense work. North Kansas City had developed into a solid community.

Although the city experienced several economic downturns over the following three decades the downtown commercial district remained fairly static. Beginning in the early 1990s and continuing into a currently progressive building boom, new interest in business and housing has revived the downtown area. Today the city boasts a state-of-the-art community center with a swimming pool, work-out center and community meeting rooms. The North Kansas City Public Library was expanded and several 1910-1920s era brick buildings have been converted into loft homes. Population of North Kansas City has increased due to its location which offers easy access for commuters to the Kansas City Metro area.

Architects: Keene and Simpson

Arthur S. Keene was born in Brighton, Massachusetts in 1876. He graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1898, where he studied architecture. He moved to

²⁷ *Annals of the City of North Kansas City, 1912-1987*. North Kansas City, MO: City of North Kansas City, 1988. n.p.

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Kansas City in 1907. Keene, active in the Kansas City community, was a member of the city planning commission and a chairman on the commission assigned to revise city codes for Kansas City. In addition, he was a member of Country Club Congregational Church, a charter member of Mission Hills Country Club and served a term as president of the Lions' Club.²⁸

Leslie B. Simpson was born in 1885 in Calhoun, Missouri, where he also received his early education. Simpson had no formal schooling in architecture. He received his training through a correspondence course. He moved to Kansas City and opened an office in 1907. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects and the Missouri Association of Registered Architects as well as the Kansas City Club and the Ararat Shrine Temple. He died at the age of 70 on December 15, 1961.²⁹

Keene and Simpson joined forces to form the architectural firm of Keene and Simpson in 1909. Their practice spanned over fifty years and produced many winning designs for buildings both in Kansas City and beyond. Buildings listed in their architectural design legacy include: the old St. Luke's Hospital; the old Business Men's Assurance building; Emory J. Sweeny residence; the State Office Building, Jefferson City, Missouri and the Philtower Building in Tulsa, Oklahoma.³⁰

Currently, Keene and Simpson have eight buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places: Lyndon Carnegie Library, Osage County, Kansas (6/25/1987); Hall of Waters, Clay County, MO. (06/09/1983); Major Hotel, Clay County MO. (12/22/1998); Thos. Corrigan Building, Jackson County, MO. (09/16/1982); Gate City National Bank, Jackson County, MO. (09/02/1982); Kelley-Reppert Motor Company Building, Jackson County, MO. (11/12/2004); Land Bank Building, Jackson County MO. (1/18/1985); Levi McIntire House, Jackson County, MO. (07/28/1983). The Argyle Building, Jackson County, MO. (8/17/2005) as designed by Arthur S. Keene, is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places.³¹

28 The Kansas City Star 15 May 1966. Vertical File, Missouri Valley Room, The Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

29 Architect Obituary, News Clipping File, Landmarks Commission, City of Kansas City, Missouri.

30 Ibid.

31 "Keene and Simpson," NRIS Online, Accessed 25 November 2007.

http://www.nps.gov/iwisapi/explorer.dl?IWS_SCHEMA=NRIS1&IWS_LOGIN=1&IWS_REPORT=100000084

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**Armour Theatre
Clay County, Missouri**

Verbal Boundary Description

LOTS 11 through 14, except the Easterly 9.85 feet of said Lot 14 as defined in the Party Wall Agreement recorded in Book 424, at Page 419, BLOCK 10, NORTH KANSAS CITY DEVELOPMENT COMPANY'S RESURVEY, 1st PLAT.

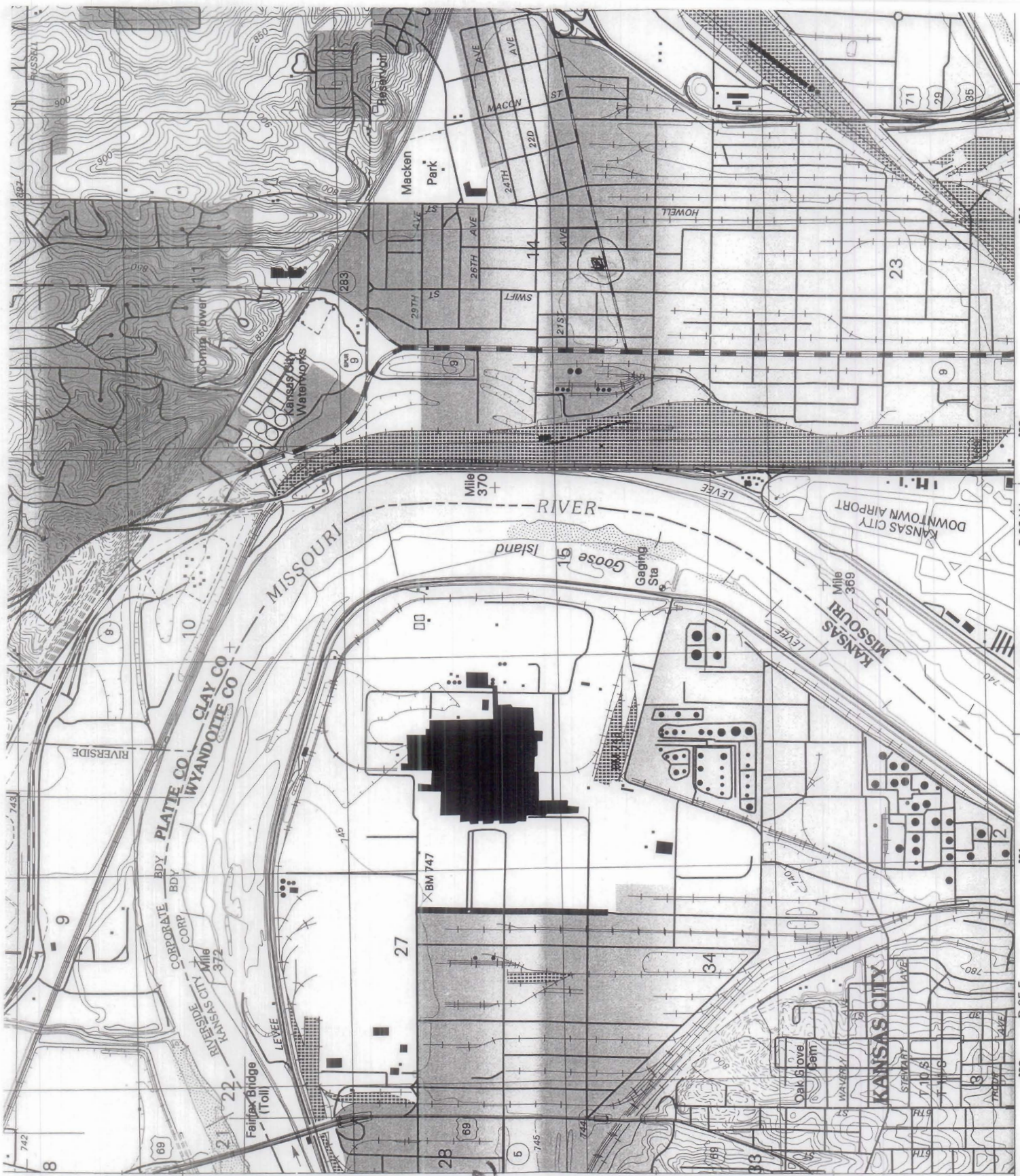
Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Armour Theatre Building.

Key to Photographs

Len Fohn, photographer. October 2007. Negatives are located at the office of Architectural and Historical Research, LLC, Kansas City, Missouri.

1. Main (south) and west facades; view facing northeast.
2. Detail of the theater entrance, south façade; view facing north
3. South façade; view facing northwest
4. West façade; view facing east
5. West and north façades; view facing southeast
6. North façade; view facing south
7. North façade; view facing south
8. Theater proper, first floor; view facing north
9. Partition to the Lodge, second floor; view facing west
10. Original Lodge Hall, second floor; view facing south
11. Dining Hall, second floor; view facing south



Armoire Theatre
 Building
 400-410 Armore
 Road
 North Kansas
 City
 Clay County
 Missouri

UTM AEFs:
 15/363830 E
 4333770 N



STATE
20



ONE WAY





















