Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC: Kansas City Public Library

AND/OR COMMON: U. S. Trade Schools, Inc.

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 500 East 9th Street — ___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN: Kansas City — ___ VICINITY OF — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: #5 - Hon. Richard Bolling

STATE: Missouri 64106 — CODE: 29 — COUNTY: Jackson — CODE: 095

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
___DISTRICT	___PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	___AGRICULTURE	___MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	___UNOCCUPIED	___COMMERCIAL	___PARK
___STRUCTURE	___BOTH	___WORK IN PROGRESS	X EDUCATIONAL	___PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	___ENTERTAINMENT	___RELIGIOUS
___OBJECT	___IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	___GOVERNMENT	___SCIENTIFIC
	___BEING CONSIDERED	___YES: UNRESTRICTED	___INDUSTRIAL	___TRANSPORTATION
		___NO	___MILITARY	___OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME: U. S. Trade Schools, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER: 500 East 9th Street

CITY, TOWN: Kansas City — ___ VICINITY OF — STATE: Missouri 64106

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Office of Recorder of Deeds, Jackson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER: 415 East 12th Street

CITY, TOWN: Kansas City — STATE: Missouri 64106

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE: 1. Missouri's Contribution to American Architecture, John A. Bryan, Ed.

DATE: 1928 — ___FEDERAL X STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Published--St. Louis, Missouri: St. Louis Architectural Club

CITY, TOWN — STATE

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KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY

2. Preliminary Inventory of Architecture and Historic Sites of Kansas City, Missouri
November, 1974 — Local Survey
Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, Missouri
City Hall, 414 East 12 Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64106

3. Historic Kansas City Architecture
1975 — Local Survey
Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, Missouri
City Hall, 414 East 12th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64106

4. State Historical Survey
1976 — State Survey
Office of Historic Preservation
Division of Planning and Policy Development
Department of Natural Resources
P. O. Box 176
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	__UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
X FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The former Public Library building of Kansas City, Missouri, 500 East Ninth Street, is a fine example of a locally designed public structure, in the Second Renaissance Revival style, erected just before the turn of the twentieth century. It is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Ninth and Locust streets, its main facade facing south on Ninth Street. Its Locust Street facade, facing west, and its north facade, overlooking a parking lot, are like the south facade, faced with ashlar. The east side of the building, lying along an alleyway, is veneered with brick. The site is level along Ninth Street, but slopes sharply downward toward the north.

EXTERIOR

Over-all Dimensions

When originally constructed in 1895-97, the Public Library building was a nearly square, U-shape mass, measuring 132 x 144 feet. An addition built in 1917-18 made it an enclosed rectangle presently measuring 132 feet east-west and 222 feet north-south. The remainder of the site, 132 x 65 feet north of the building, was planted with grass and trees after the 1917-18 addition was built, but has since been converted into a parking lot.

The south facade, fronting on Ninth Street, consists of two full stories above a half story at ground level, and is divided into three bays. Along the west the ground floor slopes to a full story in height at the point which was the northern terminus of the building in 1897, and the 1917-18 addition saw the former ground story become the first story and a new ground story introduced near the northwest corner of the building, making it slightly over three stories in height at this point. Originally consisting of five bays along this facade, the 1917-18 construction added three more bays.

Foundations

The ground story of the original building is of coursed, grey, rusticated Texas granite, thirty-six inches thick at this level.[1] Along the north, the slope of the site dictates that the rusticated granite courses become the first story, whereas the half story below, here the foundation, is of smoother limestone (similar to that of the upper stories) in order to maintain the contrasts of texture. Along the east, rusticated stones form the foundation material for the original part of the building, but red brickwork was used beneath the 1917-18 addition.

Wall Construction

The Public Library building has three primary faces, south, west, and north; on these faces, over a framework of steel girders, the upper stories of the building, twenty-two inches thick on the first floor and eighteen inches thick on the second, are constructed of lightly ridged grey limestone ashlars, quarried at Carthage, Missouri, and laid in regular courses.[2] A narrow stringcourse separates the top floor from the floor below.

Classically inspired loggias break the austere planes of the south and west faces of the building. Recessed into the mass of the building over an entryway, the south gallery has two sets of paired Ionic columns in the center and a single column at each end. The columns are of dark polished marble and are set on square pedestals; between them runs a small stone balustrade of vasiform balusters. On the west, a slightly smaller, yet similar, loggia is contained on the top floor of a projecting central bay. One set of paired columns and two flanking columns, with balustrade between, front this gallery.

Single pilasters with Doric capitals are spaced evenly (between the windows) around the top story. At the corners the pilasters are paired. The pilasters bear an entablature on all the primary facades. The most prominent feature of the entablature is a wide frieze on which the names of distinguished Americans, including many distinguished nineteenth century authors and statesmen, project in low relief, separated one from the other by classical wreaths, also in low relief. Above the frieze a denticulated cornice overhangs narrowly.

The ashlar facing and other features of the building continue for approximately sixty feet around its southeast corner onto the east facade. The balance of this facade is a secondary one; its yellow brick veneer is laid in common bond, with stringcourses and cornice of terra cotta adding slight embellishment. Engaged piers buttress the wall along part of its length.

Openings

Doorways: There are three public entrances to the library building: one, on Ninth Street, and one, on Locust Street, were important features of the original building; a more northerly door on Locust Street gives access to the 1917-18 addition. The Ninth Street doorway was usually described as the main entrance. It is located in the middle of the south facade, centered beneath the second floor loggia. It is approximately at grade level, there being only three short steps, and is flanked by attached limestone pedestals which protrude five feet from the building's face. Each pedestal bears an Ionic column of polished marble. Originally, the stone pedestals also held a pair of iron and bronze lanterns resting on twisted stems and footed bases; these have been removed recently. The marble columns support a frieze on which is empossed "Public Library," and above which is a cornice bearing the date "MDCCCXCV," the year in which construction on the building was begun. The door, of golden oak and beveled glass, with semicircular fanlight above, stands within a round archway. Dark Tennessee and yellow Sienese marble, in rail and stile design, face the outer part of the reveal and intrados of the arch, while the coffered inner intrados is painted blue and gilt. Folding brass gates were originally closed across the archway at night, but these are no longer in place.[3]

The Locust Street entrance, in the third bay north of Ninth Street, is nearly identical to its counterpart around the corner except that its entablature is unembellished. The rake of the ground dictates that a short flight of steps rises to this doorway.

The second entranceway in this facade serves the ground floor, at that point exposed a full story. The location of the latter entrance demanded that it be treated somewhat differently. It is flanked by Ionic columns, as are the other entries, but here the columns are placed on small pedestals and support an entablature on the frieze of which are medallions and fleurs-de-lis. Above a narrow cornice there is a small balustrade matching those on the loggias. The door itself is not arched and only slightly recessed. Presently, it is not in use and has been closed over with corrugated metal.

A service entrance to the basement of the original building is also located in the west facade, near the northern edge of the projecting bay. A garage entrance and four service doors along the east are no longer used, while on the north, a center window of the first story has been converted to a door and a concrete ramp has been constructed, mounting to it.

Windows: Double-hung sash windows are used throughout the building. The windows are enframed in masonry and are set singly and equidistant on the primary facades. In general, they are similar on each story. On the south, the six windows of the ground story, three on either side of the entrance, are short, protected by wrought iron grills with interlacing scrolls; similar fenestration of the lowest level along Locust Street, are progressively larger as the ground slopes away; no grills protect the largest windows at the north end. Eight windows on the lowest story of the north facade have leaded sidelights containing radiating muntins, an arrangement found only on this facade.

The fenestration of the next story is topped with flat arches. Radiating voussoirs contrast with the ashlar courses. The keystones feature stylized masks in relief. On the north, the shorter windows of this story are flanked by sidelights, identical to those of the floor below. The windows of the top floor bear individual friezes, decorated with an anthemion motif, and small cornice caps.

Only on the secondary, eastern facade does the fenestration differ markedly, and here it is rather irregular. On the older portion of the buildiing some windows have masonry sills and are segmentally arched at the top; others have wooden frames. Along the alleyway the lowest level of fenestration is barred. Three levels of windows increase to five as the elevation accommodates the terrain. While all have double-hung sash, the windows vary in size and in number of lights.

Roof

The library building has a red clay tile hipped roof of moderate height which slopes down on the inside to the light court within the building. Antifixae trim the edge of the roof above the primary facades. Over part of the eastern portion of the structure the roof is flat, surfaced with tar and gravel. There are six chimney stacks of dressed stone and three of brick.

Decorative Details

The Public Library building is quite austere and formal, its outstanding effects being its symmetrical proportions and its textural surfaces. Its ornamentation consists of classically inspired motifs. These include Ionic columns and Doric pilasters, reliefs of stylized masks and running anthemions decorating window arches and friezes, classic entablatures, and antifixae lining the edge of the roof.

INTERIOR

The building, when completed in 1897, was almost square in plan on the ground floor level, and U-shaped around a light court on the first and second floors. As enlarged in 1917-18, it became rectangular on its extended ground floor level. The slope of the site permitted a subbasement to be built under the addition. On the upper floors the structure is a hollow rectangle around its interior light court.

Subbasement

Under the northern third of the building, the subbasement contains heating equipment and storage space.

Ground Level

The ground level is twenty feet below grade along the south (Ninth Street) side of the building, and on the north the entire ground floor is above grade. In 1897, two large rooms along the west held a museum. The library's own bindery was located on this floor. The northeast section housed book stacks. Supply rooms and the furnace, which utilized steam heat, filled the remainder of the space. After completion of the addition, the reading room was relocated from the first floor to the northwest corner of the ground floor, here above grade, and supplied with an entrance directly from the street. According to the architect's report at the time, "the walls and columns in the reading room are finished in Caen stone and the ceiling is a series of groined arches."[4] Additional space was

made available to the bindery, and the museum was enlarged to approximately 15,000 square feet. Heating equipment was relocated to the subbasement. An underground garage was constructed on the east side of the building. The flooring throughout this level is concrete.

First Floor

Both of the library's main doorways lead into vestibules in which one mounts a half flight of marble stairs, passes through swinging doors of oak and beveled glass, and enters into the "rotunda," the most imposing room in the building and the one around which the rest of the first floor rooms are grouped. The rotunda was apparently so named by the architects, although it is neither circular nor domed.[5]

The flooring in the rotunda, as throughout most of the public areas of the first floor, is terrazzo, laid over concrete. Narrow bands of red and white ceramic tiles, set in a stylized geometric pattern, divide the floor into sections of equal size. A wainscot of grey and yellow marble, in rail and stile design, faces the lower walls of the rotunda. Originally, the upper walls and the large coffers of the ceiling were decorated with frescoes painted by Jerome Fedeli, a local artist and Foreign Consul for Italy. The ceiling frescoes depicted angels and cupids, birds, ribbons and roses, all against a background of clouds.[6] This rococo contrast to the Renaissance austerity of the building's exterior has long since been painted over. Freestanding Ionic columns and engaged Ionic pilasters visually and structurally support the ceiling. These columns and pilasters, placed atop grey marble pedestals, are composed of Scagliolia, fabricated to resemble yellow marble with red veining. They are placed within the first floor level, particularly in the rotunda and north reading rooms.

When the library opened in 1897, a long counter of polished Tennessee marble, set two-thirds of the way north, within the rotunda space, bore a metallic screen which separated the library attendants from the public. Set into the wall behind the counter and backing up to the light court, were two large rectangular stained glass windows. A likeness of Longfellow, positioned in a circular background, was in the center of one window; Bryant, in the other; flowers and leaves bordered the head of each poet. The windows, which were made by a local firm, Campbell Paint and Glass Company, have been removed and a plaster wall is now in place.[7]

The most impressive feature of the rotunda, placed on its east wall, is a handsome fireplace. Framing the fireplace opening is a mosaic of soft rust-brown tesserae, inset with a design of fans and trailing ribbons. Paired colonnettes of black Egyptian marble carry a frieze of yellow marble, veined in brown. In the center of the frieze the marble has been beveled to a circle, flanked by squared panels. An egg and dart molding makes the transition to the mantelshelf of mottled dark

brown marble.

The reading room was northwest of the rotunda. It was larger than the rotunda, but quite similar in appearance, although its frescoes were less elaborate. Originally, there were two fireplaces, one on the north and one on the south walls of the room.[8] Counterclockwise from the reading room and surrounding the rotunda were, in order, a cataloguing room, an art room in the southwest corner, two narrow reference rooms on either side of the Ninth Street entrance, the children's room in the southeast corner,[9] a "ladies reception room", the librarians' office, and the book stacks.

Behind the delivery desk the stacks occupied the entire northeast wing of the first floor and a corresponding area of the ground floor. On each floor there was enough space for three tiers of the then most modern, adjustable metal shelving. The uprights forming the ends of the bookcases were appropriately decorated with reliefs of open books encircled with laurel wreaths. The flooring of the upper tiers of the stacks was made of heavy plate glass enclosed in steel frames, thus admitting light to the area below. Great effort was made to fireproof the part of the building containing the books: no wood at all was used in these areas, the stacks could be sealed off from the rest of the building by iron doors, and every window had steel shutters to be rolled down in case of fire. The equipment in the stacks duplicated that used in the Boston Public Library and Pittsburgh's Carnegie Library.[10]

With completion of the addition to the building in 1918 and with removal of the reading room to the floor below, the northwest section of the first floor, as enlarged, was assigned to the reference room. At that time, the architect reported that the reference area was "wainscoted with paneled oak. The heavy ornamental beamed ceiling is supported by Sienna[sic] marble columns." The order and cataloguing departments were consolidated in a large room on the east side of the building, and, on the northeast, the stacks were extended into the addition.[11]

Second Floor

One east-west and two north-south corridors on the second floor of the original building outlined the light court located between the north-south wings. The hallways had terrazzo floors and grey marble wainscots. Fluted oak pilasters on marble pedestals line the hallways and flank the doors; each pilaster has a modified Corinthian capital of carved oak with a putto among the acanthus leaves.

At the time the library building was erected, the Board of Education occupied approximately one-third of the second story rooms: there was a room for board meetings directly behind the loggia at the center of the south side of the building, while the business offices and the superintendent of schools were located in the

corner room on the southeast and three other rooms ranging along the east side of the building.[12] On the northeast, above the stacks, there was a large area, illuminated by a specially designed skylight, for an art gallery, and also a newspaper room in which, for the convenience of readers, the papers were placed on special steel shelving that rolled in and out. The west side of the second floor contained a "ladies club room," in the southwest corner, for the use of "reforming" women's groups, a high school room, and, on the north, a large lecture or assembly hall, also with a frescoed ceiling.[13]

Except for the art gallery and assembly hall, all the second story rooms of the original building have fireplaces on which glazed tiles, either green or brown, surround the fireplace opening. The carved oak mantelshelves are decorated with masks and foliate motifs. Oak pilasters, similar to those in the corridors, flank the windows, and a number of the rooms have oak bookshelves built around the walls.

Enlarging the building in 1917-18 permitted the art gallery to occupy the entire northeast area above the stacks. Special plates of opaque glass provided good daytime illumination, with artificial lighting concealed above the glass panels. The room was wainscoted in oak, above which the walls were covered with a brown fabric.[14] The balance of the additional space created on this floor was consigned to Board of Education officer.

Attic

An L-shaped attic over the south and west portions of the original building was extended along the west when the building was enlarged. The area is unfinished and has always been used for storage.

Stairways

In the original building public stairways were grouped in the stairwell of the Locust Street entrance. An enclosed straight-run staircase leads from the first to the ground floor. Between the first and second stories the staircase consists of two long runs, with a half-turn landing between. At the first floor, the landing, and the top floor there are bronzed cast iron newel posts decorated with lions' heads and topped with vase-shaped finials. An openwork bronzed cast iron webbing between the string and the shaped wooden handrail is both functional and very decorative. While the treads are terrazzo, the risers are bronze, and each is ornamented with a series of medallions. Above this stairway, an enclosed two-run staircase, not for the public, proceeds to the attic. On the east side interior wall of the building, directly behind the fireplace of the rotunda, there is a service stairway running from basement to second floor. In the 1917-18 addition, a stairway for staff use connected the first and second floors on the northeast.

Alterations

The 1917-18 addition to the Public Library building, which approximately doubled the original floor space, was the only alteration which changed its external appearance. Further alterations were all interior rehabilitations, which attempted to keep the building functioning adequately, serving the needs of an ever increasing number of library and school patrons. The most important structural changes were made in 1933, following the removal of the art gallery from the building. There was an extensive remodeling of the second floor, which was then given over to the exclusive use of the Board of Education; an iron grill and gate were installed at the top of the public stairway to the second floor in order to keep library patrons from trespassing at night. Each of the large gallery rooms on the northeast was divided into several smaller rooms.[15] A 30 x 50 foot auditorium, seating approximately 150 persons, was constructed across the north end of the building. In later years, probably in a 1952 renovation of the entire building, a glass and plywood partition closed off the second floor east-west corridor along the front of the building, the terrazzo flooring was covered with linoleum on the second floor, and acoustical tile walls and/or ceilings were installed in some of the offices on this floor.[16]

The present owner of the building, the U. S. Trade Schools, has further modified the interior. A diesel transmission shop, and the appropriate machinery for teaching this trade, have been located on the ground floor, occupying the entire west and north sides of the building. The west door to the outside has been permanently closed. An elevator, large enough to accommodate automobiles, approximately 9 x 20 feet, has been installed on an interior wall of the northern part of the building. It serves the ground and first floors.

On the first floor, the rotunda retains a good deal of its original appearance, but the surrounding rooms have been considerably altered. North of the rotunda, the light court has been roofed over to make a classroom for engine repairs. To the west and north of this area is the body repair shop, once the reading room, later the reference room, now partitioned off from the rotunda. The terrazzo has been removed from the floor; only the concrete foundation floor remains. Corrugated metal contains concrete bases which reinforce all the scagliola columns. One of the central windows of the north wall has been converted to a door wide enough to admit automobiles. Next to the elevator, behind a heavy wire mesh, is a big tool crib.

There is a large classroom on the west side of the first floor. Here also the terrazzo has been removed and replaced with grey tile. The inner half of this room contains a balcony, an apparent attempt by the library, probably dating from its 1952 remodeling, to utilize some formerly wasted airspace and alleviate its

inadequate facilities. Some of the library's original stacks still stand on the balcony, which was clearly a makeshift. Exposed I-beams are visible underneath it, contrasting with the restrained elegance of original oak bookcases still remaining along the south wall.

The trade school's administrative offices occupy the southwest corner of the first floor, behind a recent glass and plywood partition, while the southeast corner contains a canteen and dining room. Along the east side of the building, in part of the area where once the book stacks were located, there are now facilities for teaching motor repairs.

There is a print shop on the second floor. A few other rooms on this floor are used for classes or storage, but the majority are vacant.

Present Condition

The exterior of the building is presently in reasonably good condition. Except for some advertising signs which have been attached to the Ninth Street and Locust Street facades, its appearance is essentially unchanged. Deterioration and neglect are more evident on the inside, although the present owners within the constraints of their budget and their adaptation of the building to their present purposes, are trying diligently to keep the building well maintained. Considerable disrepair is evident on the second floor. There are approximately seventy-five to eighty rooms in the building, just over 63,000 square feet of interior space. There is no immediate threat to the structure.

Site

Ninth Street, on which the Public Library fronts, was, at the time the building was constructed, one of the major arteries of Kansas City. The library was built six to eight blocks east of concurrent commercial development in what was, in 1895-97, predominantly a residential district, although no longer a prime one. Today the library building is isolated on the northeast periphery of the downtown area, and is surrounded by small businesses, second-rate hotels, and the ubiquitous parking lot. St. Patrick's Church, the oldest Roman Catholic parish in Kansas City, shares the library's block. Some urban redevelopment has occurred north and east of the library building.

FOOTNOTES

1. "New Library Building Ready for the Public," Kansas City Times, 8 August 1897, p. 12; "Grid Records," Jackson County Assessor, 1940, Jackson County Courthouse, Kansas City, Missouri.

2. Ibid.

3. Kansas City Times, ibid.

4. Kansas City Public Library, Thirty-Seventh Annual Report: Year Ending June 30, 1918 ([Kansas City]: Cline Printing Co., [1918]), p. 46.

5. "Urge the New Library," Kansas City Star, 14 February 1894, p. 6.

6. "New Library Building Ready for the Public," Kansas City Times, 8 August 1897, p. 12.

7. "Inside the New Library," Kansas City Star, 20 June 1897, p. 11; The New Kansas City Public Library, 1898 (Kansas City: Architect and Builder Publishing Co., 1898), unpaged, [p. 9].

8. Kansas City Star, ibid.

9. Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri, Seventeenth Annual Report: For Year Ending June 30, 1898 (Kansas City: Burd and Fletcher Printing Co., 1899), partially unpaged, [p. 6]; The New Kansas City Public Library, 1898, op. cit., [p. 7].

10. "Inside the New Library," Kansas City Star, 20 June 1897, p. 11.

11. Kansas City Public Library, op. cit., p. 8.

12. Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri, op. cit., [p. 6]; The New Kansas City Public Library, 1898, op. cit., [p. 7].

13. The New Kansas City Public Library, 1898, op. cit., [p. 25]; "Inside the New Library," Kansas City Star, 20 June 1897, p. 11.

14. Kansas City Public Library, op. cit., p. 46.

15. "Expansion of Office Space . . . for Board of Education," Kansas City Times, 28 August 1935, p. 7.

16. "New Services . . . in Renovation of the Public Library," Kansas City Times, 20 September 1952, p. 34.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	X SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	X EDUCATION	__MILITARY	X SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	X ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1895-1897;Addition 1917-1918 BUILDER/ARCHITECT W. F. Hackney and Charles A. Smith; Adriance Van Brunt, Consultant

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Kansas City Public Library building, erected in 1895-97, at a cost of $200,000 in public funds, is significant as a symbol of the growing cultural and political consciousness of a burgeoning midwestern city in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Concomitant with Kansas City's industrial and commercial maturation was an increase in prosperity and leisure for its middle class, which in turn, resulted in their desire for enlarged intellectual and cultural horizons. In addition, this period saw, both locally and nationally, attempts by the more affluent to fulfill the promises of democracy and to extend opportunities for education and enlightenment to the working people of the nation. In the 1880s one of Kansas City's leading citizens declared:

> Our city is rapidly assuming metropolitan proportions. We need a large circulating library with reading room, art galleries and the like--a fountain of intelligence and refinement, whose pure waters will flow into the palace of the rich and the cottage of the poor, bringing health, prosperity and happiness.[1]

The Kansas City Public Library building formed a focal point where, for sixty years, devoted public servants attempted to bring this hope to fruition.

From its inception Kansas City's library was established as an adjunct to its school system, and the Kansas City Board of Education has always shared the library's quarters, an anomaly among major American cities. Thus, the library building served a dual function.

Not only is the library building significant for its roles in the life of the community, but it is also significant for the fact that it is intrinsically a handsome and imposing edifice, one of the last remaining public buildings in Kansas City in the Second Renaissance Revival style. When erected it contained, as a contemporary newspaper account stated, "all that was convenient and modern in its own time."[2] This included its fireproof construction, its expensive and up-to-date equipment for the handling and care of books, and its modern ventilating system, which blew either hot or cool air as required.[3] In addition, it is possibly the first library in the country to install a separate department, with special librarians and appropriate seating, solely for young children.[4]

Lastly, an extremely significant aspect of the Kansas City Public Library is the fact that it was the building within which developed two outstanding Kansas City institutions, the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and the Kansas City Museum

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KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY

of History and Science. Concurrent with the post-Civil War development of the public library movement in the United States was the establishment of a number of museums, both of art and of science, open to the public for its edification and enjoyment. In many cases a private collection formed the nucleus of a museum collection, and such was the situation in Kansas City. Both an art collection and an historic and scientific collection were first exhibited to the public of Kansas City in its library building, and remained there for many years, until each could be established as an independent institution with a home of its own.

Historical Information

In 1873, when the Board of Education resolved to establish a library, Kansas City was not far removed from a frontier community; the first public schools had been opened only six years previously. At first the superintendent of schools also acted as librarian, but, in 1881, the first full-time librarian was hired at thirty dollars per month to take charge of two thousand books.[5]

Between 1873 and 1888, the library and the school board moved five times, each move being to successively larger quarters. The growth of the book collection was accelerated when the Missouri legislature, in 1883, permitted school districts to appropriate for library purposes up to twenty-five hundred dollars annually from their general funds. In its earliest years the library was open only to subscribers, although gradually more and more classifications of students in the public schools were allowed free access. In 1898, it became completely free to anyone who lived or worked in the school district.[6]

By 1908, a member of the school board was saying that the library had been hampered by insufficient space for the previous several years; it was to be almost ten more years before an addition, doubling the floor space, would be completed. Construction was begun in 1916, but was delayed by shortages of labor and supplies during the war. The addition, and some remodeling of the existing structure, cost slightly more than $200,000, the same amount as was spent on the original building, and was financed by a bond issue, as was the initial construction, approved by the voters in 1912.[7]

Kansas City, its school district, and its library system entered a period of expansion following the first World War. Several branch libraries had been inaugurated before the war, but following it, the policy was instituted of establishing branches in school buildings--every high school and some elementary schools--as new buildings were erected; by the middle of the 1930s, there were nineteen branches, all except three or four in schools. The main library was the administrative headquarters for all the branches, supervising and coordinating their activities, while at the same time its own operations were continually growing.

In 1921, the reference department extended its operations to a "teachers' library," an attempt to assemble in one place any information which might be sought by teachers and/or administrators; as this operation gradually embraced more and more fields of study, it eventually became the foundation for a social science department. The impetus of the war had stimulated an interest in technical subjects, resulting in the organization of a business division in 1919; the second World War impelled the expansion of this into a separate business and technical department. During both world wars the library was involved in providing technical materials to help the war effort and in serving personnel of the armed forces.[8]

Between the wars the library concentrated on internal development in response to changing trends in the community and new demands from its patrons: a young people's department, serving those between fourteen and twenty, was inaugurated; a film library and record collection were assembled; reproductions of well-known paintings could be borrowed; a local history department centralized all the materials about the city and surrounding region and provided professional staffing for this important collection. External conditions, depression followed by war, curtailed construction throughout the school district, but, in 1950, the library began a bookmobile program through which it could serve patrons unable to visit library buildings.[9]

The symbiotic relationship between the library and the Board of Education, beneficial in many ways, was also antagonistic to a certain extent--most notably the fact that, as their building aged, the library and the school district were expanding, resulting in a continual competition for space between the two tenants. Even in the 1920s the chief librarian had reported: "It was finally recognized that anything done for the library in the present building was at best but a temporary expedient. The only solution is the erection of a [new] building."[10] Even so, various attempts at internal reorganization tried to compensate for inadequate space. There was a major remodeling of the second floor in the middle 1930s, and, from 1950 to 1952, more than $100,000 was spent to rehabilitate the interior of the building, reorganizing and remodeling the library operations. However, cramped quarters frustrated internal reform, high maintenance costs thwarted remodeling, and inconvenient location and lack of adequate parking discouraged patronage.[11]

In 1956, the voters approved a six million dollar bond proposal, which was used to finance, among other things, a new building for the main library and the administrative offices of the school district. The structure, located at 12th and McGee streets, was completed and occupied in 1960.[12] Two years later the building at Ninth and Locust streets, which the library and school board had inhabited for sixty-three years, was sold to U. S. Trade Schools, Inc., its present owner, for $125,000.

The art gallery, for thirty-five years located in the northeast section of the second floor of the library building, resulted from the benefactions of William Rockhill Nelson, owner and editor of the Kansas City Star and one of the wealthiest men in Kansas City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nelson, who traveled considerably in Europe in the mid-nineties, began assembling a collection of original paintings for his home,[14] evidently infected with the same contagion for art then afflicting other American tycoons. However, Nelson's wealth could not compare to that of a Morgan or a Mellon, and, in addition, his taste was very much more pedestrian. However, Nelson was imbued with the conviction that it was he who would be most instrumental in the metamorphosis of Kansas City from a frontier outpost to a cosmopolitan metropolis. Not only did he wage a ceaseless campaign toward this objective in his newspaper, but he determined to bring culture to his community in the form of great art. Rationalizing that it would be prohibitively expensive to acquire a collection of original masterpieces, he began purchasing copies of great Renaissance works.[15] Nelson's collection reflected the general American view at that time of the aims and purposes of public art museums. On the whole, it was agreed that a museum should fulfill a moral, almost a missionary, function, that it should be "an institution where the city's temptation to vice would be countered by the wholesome, ennobling, and instructive appeal of works of art." In addition, it was believed that a museum ought to be a historical repository, illustrating by reproduction, model, and photograph all the great works of previous ages.[16]

Nelson acquired for Kansas City approximately twenty copies of great paintings and a slightly larger number of casts of famous sculptures. These had been installed in the northeast room on the upper floor of the library by the time of its public opening in September, 1897. In addition, more than five hundred photographs of important works of art, also purchased in Europe by Nelson, were mounted and displayed in the lecture hall on the west side of the same floor. Officially, the collection was designated the Western Gallery of Art, a title chosen by Nelson in honor of the locale, but colloquially it was usually referred to as the Nelson Gallery. Space in the library was initially tendered only until a permanent location could be arranged. From the beginning, the gallery was a very popular department of the library; in its first nine months alone more than 50,000 people were reported to have visited it.[17]

One of the arguments often advanced, over the ensuing years, for enlarging the library building was the gallery's pressing need for additional space. Nelson continued to make donations of paintings, all copies and many of rather indifferent quality; by the time he died in 1915, there were sixty paintings in the collection.[18] The 1917-18 addition to the building expanded the gallery's space from one room to three.

Under the terms of Nelson's will, his entire estate was put into a trust, the income from which, after the deaths of his immediate family, was to be used for "the purchase of works and reproductions of works of the fine arts."[19] By the mid-twenties, trustees had been appointed to administer Nelson's bequest and, by the end of that decade, the first members of a professional staff had been selected. Collecting began and plans were going forward for a building which would house the collection; funds for the building were bequeathed by members of Nelson's family and by other benefactors.

By this time also it was widely recognized that, not "reproductions of works of the fine arts," but rather original works of unquestioned quality and authenticity were the essential elements in the creation of an eminent art museum. As the time approached for the 1933 opening of the new William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, being constructed at 45th and Oak streets, a controversy arose as to the fate of the older "Nelson Gallery," on the second floor of the Public Library. Nelson's successors, the editors of the Kansas City Star, seemed to feel a proprietary interest in the reproductions which Nelson had personally selected; on the other hand, the professional staff of the new Gallery was understandably reluctant to be burdened with a legacy which they felt had no artistic merit.[20] In a compromise settlement, the best of the reproductions were segregated in a room at the farthest corner of the new Gallery. They remained on display for ten years. When, at that time, additional space was needed for new accessions, some of the copies were lent to nearby schools and colleges; the rest were quietly sent to storage.[21]

In its thirty-six years of existence the Public Library's art gallery made a great contribution to the artistic education of the community. Undoubtedly, it was also instrumental in stimulating a more sophisticated attitute toward art collecting, and in nurturing the city's aspirations to have a first-rate art museum.

In addition to an art gallery on its second floor, the Public Library, at its opening in 1897, also contained a science museum on its ground floor, the progenitor of the Kansas City Museum of History and Science, today an independent institution and increasingly important in the educational and cultural life of the community. The most important feature of the library's museum in 1897 was the group of artifacts then called the "Dyer Indian collection," lent to the library by Colonel Daniel B. Dyer, a former Indian agent among plains and northwestern tribes. In 1904, Colonel Dyer made the loan into a gift, and, as a tribute to his generosity, the museum was thenceforth named for him. Other Kansas Citians had emulated the example set by Colonel Dyer, and, when the museum was settled in its quarters in the library, it held quite a miscellaneous assemblage of items, including apparel and implements of both Eskimos and East Indians, archaeological and fossil specimens, porcelains and pottery, birds and animals. Over the ensuing years,

other donations were received, some of merit, but many of such dubious value that, in 1918, strict standards were formulated, regulating the quality of acceptable contributions. In that same year the construction of the library's addition permitted the museum to expand. New exhibition cases were purchased, and a knowledgeable curator was appointed.[22]

Serious endeavors began during the early twenties on behalf of a proper building to house the Dyer Museum; by 1926 a group of citizens was announcing its intention of establishing a museum of natural history modeled on that in Chicago; it only remained for them to locate the Marshall Field of Kansas City, but this was not accomplished until 1939. With a little prodding, the heirs of Robert A. Long, a pioneer lumber magnate, donated his former home, unoccupied for many years, to a newly formed Kansas City Museum Association. Completed in 1911, at a cost of almost three-quarters of a million dollars, the Long home is a five-story, seventy-room mansion located in a scenic spot in the northeastern area of the city. It was proposed that the 24 collections then located in the public library, numbering nearly 40,000 items and variously valued between one and three million dollars, would be moved to the new location, along with several other collections scattered about the city. This nucleus prompted a number of other donors to make worthwhile contributions, so that, by the time the museum opened for public viewing in May, 1940, it had already acquired more than 160,000 items. In adequate quarters and under competent professional and scholarly management, the Dyer and other collections, now the Kansas City Museum of History and Science, have become increasingly vital community assets.[23]

Architects

The architects of the Kansas City Public Library, William F. Hackney and Charles A. Smith, with Adriance Van Brunt as consultant, all were, or became men of considerable local or regional repute. Before designing their Kansas City library building, they visited a number of important libraries around the country; this permitted them to survey all the latest developments in both interior construction and architectural style.[24] In March, 1895, three architectural renderings were presented to the Board of Education for its consideration: one incorporated classical Greek elements; the second was a Renaissance Revival design; the third, drawn after objections that the first two were not sufficiently "showy," combined various features of Second Empire and High Victorian Gothic.[25] The board, in selecting the Renaissance style, seems to have opted firmly in favor of the then modern trend which was being set by such firms as McKim, Mead and White in their design for Kansas City's New York Life building, completed in 1890, and the Boston Public Library, finished three years before.

William F. Hackney (1854-1899), the principal architect for the original portion of the Kansas City Public Library, was born in Springfield, Missouri, trained as an apprentice in an architectural firm in Des Moines, and came to Kansas City in 1887, probably in response to the growth potential he saw there. Within a short time after his arrival in Kansas City, Hackney secured appointment as architect for the Board of Education. During the next ten years, he designed twenty public school buildings, chief among which were the Central and Manual Training high schools. When a Kansas City chapter of the American Institute of Architects was founded in 1890, Hackney was elected the first president. He committed suicide in 1899, presumably despondent over some unprofitable investments.[26]

Charles A. Smith (1857-1948) succeeded Hackney as architect for the Kansas City school district. Schooled in Des Moines, Smith came to Kansas City with Hackney. Smith trained with Hackney for five years, and, in 1894, became Hackney's partner. As architect for the Board of Education from 1899 until his retirement from the position in 1936, he was responsible for the 1917-18 addition to the library and for most of its later alterations; furthermore, he designed more than fifty public school buildings during that period of time. Smith obviously became very expert in school construction; in fact, says an encomium about him written early in his career, "many of the plans he has incorporated [in Kansas City schools], looking to scientific ventilation and other sanitary features, have been adopted throughout the country."[27] By the 1920s, he was acquiring numerous commissions for schools beyond the immediate school district, and soon branched into designing buildings for a number of colleges around the state of Missouri, including, in the late 1930s, the first three buildings for the newly born University of Kansas City (now the University of Missouri at Kansas City).[28]

Smith's architectural practice was not limited to schools. During his long career he designed many office buildings, theaters, churches, and specialized structures. From 1908 until 1920, he was the senior partner in the firm Smith, Rea & Lovitt. When this partnership was dissolved, he again practiced alone.[29]

Adriance Van Brunt (1836-1913) came from New Jersey to Kansas City in 1878. He had been a practicing architect since being mustered out of the Union army. By the 1890s, Van Brunt had achieved a distinguished reputation among local architects, and it is probably for this reason that he was asked to consult with the less experienced Hackney on the important library commission. Previously, Van Brunt had designed homes, an apartment house, a number of commercial buildings, churches, and the County Jail. Van Brunt was as well known for his work on behalf of a park and boulevard system for Kansas City as he was for his capabilities as an architect. He was first appointed to the Park Board in 1892, and was instrumental in formulating its earliest plans and surveys, and of putting these into effect. His contribution was such that, upon his death, an important boulevard was renamed Van Brunt in his memory, and still retains the name today.[30]

FOOTNOTES

1. Board of Education of Kansas City Public Schools, Tenth Annual Report: 1880-81 (Kansas City: W. F. Weber, 1881), p. 73.

2. "Inside the New Library," Kansas City Star, 20 June 1897, p. 11.

3. Ibid.

4. Kansas City Journal, 7 December 1900, Mounted Clipping Files, "Kansas City: Kansas City Public Library," Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri (material from this collection will hereinafter be cited Mounted Clipping Files, Missouri Valley Room).

5. Kathryn Lynn Jennings, "The Kansas City Public Library, 1873 to 1898" (research paper, University of Missouri, 1971), p. 10 (Typewritten.); Kansas City Times, 4 December 1941, Mounted Clipping Files, Missouri Valley Room; William H. Hoffman, comp., Kansas City, Missouri, Public Library: 1873-1973 ([Kansas City]: n.p., [1973]), p. 4.

6. Jennings, op cit., p. 18; Hoffman, op. cit., p. 41; Theo S. Case, ed., History of Kansas City, Missouri (Syracuse: D. Mason and Co., 1888), p. 119; Kansas City Times, 4 December 1941, Mounted Clipping Files, Missouri Valley Room.

7. Kansas City Journal, 17 April 1908, Mounted Clipping Files, Missouri Valley Room; "A Library Annex Planned," Kansas City Times, 30 May 1912, p. 11; Kansas City Public Library, Thirty-Seventh Annual Report: Year Ending June 30, 1918 (Kansas City: Cline Printing Co., [1918]), p. 8.

8. Purd B. Wright, comp., Historical Sketch of the Kansas City Public Library, 1911-1936 (Kansas City: Lowell Press, 1937), pp. 18-26; Hoffman, op. cit., p. 20.

9. "New Services . . . in Renovation of Public Library," Kansas City Times, 20 September 1952, p. 34; Hoffman, op. cit., pp. 20,22.

10. Wright, op. cit., p. 13.

11. "New Services . . . in Renovation of Public Library," Kansas City Times, 20 September 1952, p. 34.

12. Hoffman, op. cit., p. 23.

13. "Public Library Building Sold," Kansas City Times,12 May 1962, p. 1.

14. Members of the Staff of the Kansas City Star, William Rockhill Nelson (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1915), p. 177.

15. Ibid., pp. 177-178.

16. Oliver W. Larkin, Art and Life in America, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 251.

17. Kansas City Art Association, The Western Gallery of Art: Illustrated Catalogue (Kansas City: Lawton and Burnap, 1897), unpaged, [pp. 2, 3]; "A Gift to Kansas City," Kansas City Star, 12 November 1896, p. 1; "Inside the New Library," Kansas City Star, 20 June 1897, p. 11; Members of the Staff of the Kansas City Star, op. cit., p. 179; Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri, Seventeenth Annual Report: For Year Ending June 30, 1898 (Kansas City: Burd and Fletcher Printing Co., 1899), pp. 26-27.

18. Members of the Staff of the Kansas City Star, op. cit., pp. 179-180.

19. William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Handbook (Kansas City: Joseph D. Havens Co., 1933), p. 4.

20. "The Nelson Collections," Kansas City Star, 9 May 1930, Mounted Clipping Files, Missouri Valley Room; "Poor Copies of Masters," Kansas City Times, 28 May 1932, p. 3, after October, 1901, when Nelson purchased the Kansas City Times, it became the norning edition of the Kansas City Star; "The Western Gallery of Art," Kansas City Star, 30 May 1932, p. D.

21. Interview with Ross E. Taggart, Senior Curator, William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, 4 December 1974.

22. Sarah Erwin McLean, "The Public Library," Scottish Rite Progress, 6, no. 4 (April, 1928), p. 63; Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri, op. cit., pp. 28-29; Wright, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

23. Kansas City Journal, 21 May 1939, Mounted Clipping Files, Missouri Valley Room; "Old Mansion Throbs With Life," Kansas City Journal, 7 March 1942, p. 3; "Progress Report," Kansas City Times, 31 August 1940, p. 20; "Indian Relics Face the Experts," Kansas City Star, 5 March 1961, p. 23A.

24. "The New Library Is Open," Kansas City Star, 1 September 1897, p. 2.

25. "Two Plans for a Library," Kansas City Star, 3 March 1895, p. 10; "New Plans for the Library," Kansas City Star, 17 March 1895, p. 4.

26. "W. F. Hackney Ends His Life," Kansas City Times, 26 May 1899, p. 8; "W. F. Hackney a Suicide," Kansas City Star, 26 May 1899, p. 8; Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1970), p. 254.

27. Kansas City Press Club, comp., Men of Affairs in Greater Kansas City, 1912 (Kansas City: Gate City Press, 1912), p. 224.

28. Citizens Historical Association, ["Biographical Data of Kansas Citians"] (Indianapolis: n.pub., 1938), p. 395 (Typewritten.); Walter P. Tracy, comp., Kansas City and Its One Hundred Foremost Men ([Kansas City]: By the Author, [1924]), p. 99; "Charles A. Smith Dies," Kansas City Times, 12 January 1948, p. 9.

29. John Albury Bryan, ed., Missouri's Contribution to American Architecture (St. Louis: St. Louis Architectural Club, 1928), pp. 190,197; Citizens Historical Association, op. cit., pp. 395-396; Tracy, p. 199.

30. The Commerce of Kansas City in 1886 (Kansas City: S. Ferd Howe, 1886), p. 253; Frank Maynard Howe, "The Development of Architecture in Kansas City, Mo.," The Architectural Record, 15, no. 2 (February, 1904), pp. 138, 151, 155; The Kansas City Times, Kansas City: Its Resources and Their Development (Kansas City: Interstate Publishing Co., [1890]), pp. 28-30; "Adriance Van Brunt Dead," Kansas City Times, 13 November 1913, p. 2.

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3. Case, Theo S., ed. History of Kansas City, Missouri. Syracuse: D. Mason and Co., 1888.

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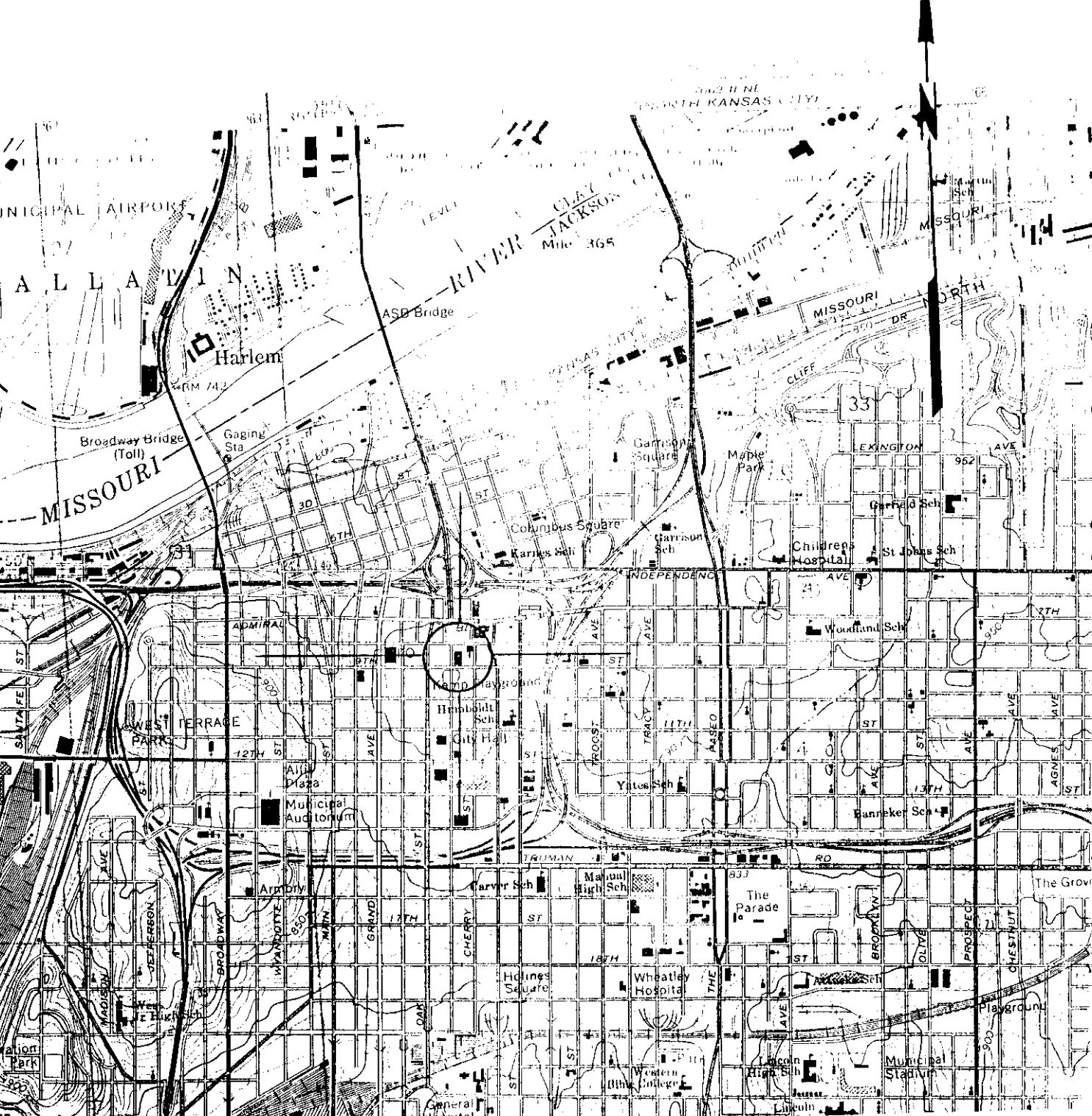

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Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 5. View looking NW, view shows E façade of original library structure and 1917-18 addition.
2 of 5. View looking NE from the intersection of Locus and East Ninth Streets, view shows the S façade of the building on the right and the W façade on the left.
3 of 5. View looking SE, view shows N façade.
4 of 5. Interior view showing portion of rotunda space on the first floor. View looking E-SE.
5 of 5. View looking W-SW, interior view showing portion of the main staircase on the left and the W (Locust Street) entrance on the right.


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