

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1 Name of Property

historic name Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Building

other names/site number Missouri Poster & Sign Company, Inc., Bellas Hess Antique Mall

2 Location

street & number 715 Armour Road [n/a] not for publication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 [].)

Claire F. Blackwell

27 March 1987

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/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

State or Federal agency and bureau

4 National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date

- entered in the National Register
See continuation sheet [].
- determined eligible for the
National Register
See continuation sheet [].
- determined not eligible for the
National Register.
- removed from the
National Register
- other, explain
See continuation sheet [].

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	0
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	0	0
		1	0

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
 COMMERCE/TRADE: Warehouse

Current Functions
 COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification
 LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
 AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Chicago

Materials
 foundation concrete
 walls brick
 stone
 roof synthetic
 other

Narrative Description

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

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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.

Areas of Significance

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Periods of Significance

1913-1925

Significant Dates

1913

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Nimmons, George C.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9 Major Bibliographic 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

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State Agency

Federal Agency

Local Government

University

Other:

Name of repository: Kansas City Public Library;
Chicago Historical Society

10 Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.42 acres

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	364190	4333540			

C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing
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[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11 Form Prepared By

name/title Cydney E. Millstein
organization Architectural & Art Historical Research date January 13, 1997
street & number P.O. Box 22551 telephone 816-363-0567
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64113

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

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Jerry W. Barham
street & number 715 Armour Road telephone 816-474-6140
city or town North Kansas City state MO zip code 64116

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section number 7 Page 1 Sears, Roebuck and Co. Warehouse Building
Clay County, MO

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The Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse building, located at 715 Armour Road, North Kansas City, Missouri, is a nine-story, brick and stone industrial building measuring five bays wide and eleven bays long. Situated at the northern terminus of North Kansas City's central industrial district, the building is located on a major thoroughfare just west of Interstate-35. Directly to the east of the building is the 1913 industrial Rumley building; to the west is a vacant lot. North of the property is Dagg Playground Park and to the south lies a parking lot.

Designed in what George C. Nimmons called Industrial Gothic (see below), the building remains in good condition, and because there have been so few alterations, the original historic integrity is intact. The overall horizontality of the building, emphasized by the configuration of the ribboned fenestration and wide spandrels is counter-balanced by the strict verticality of the multiple piers and the tower-like end bays. Gothic styled embellishments, rather rare on an industrial building, at the first story and upper floors of the end bays animate the otherwise utilitarian exterior.

The main or north facade is divided into five distinct bays. The central three bays are separated by prominent brick piers with stone amortizements, while the end bays project beyond the central mass. At the base of the far west bay is the main entrance featuring a recessed, non-original paneled, wooden double-door with plate glass, set below a Gothic styled molded stone, tripartite transom (obscured by plywood from the interior) embellished with paired, ogee arches and arabesques. The whole is set into a molded stone surround with a series of stone paterae crowning the doors. Directly above the transom are four grotesques set obliquely into blocks of stone. Two pairs of brick buttresses with stone amortizements and arabesque panels flank the main entrance. A multipaned recessed sidelight with similarly styled ogee arches, arabesques, and grotesques rest between each pair of buttresses.

A clerestory, set beneath a modified pointed stone arch with arabesques and comprised of multipaned trefoil windows and tracery, crowns the first-story entrance. Squat, triangular-shaped stone piers with stone amortizements further articulate the clerestory. A pair of stone jardiniers, with floriated basins on brick and stone plinths, are located at the main entrance.

The Gothic styled detailing of the easternmost bay of the first story and the terminating floors of the end bays are similar to the vocabulary of the main entrance described above. Each bay features a tripartite ensemble of single-hung fenestration set in ogee arches further embellished with stone tracery.

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Brick piers with stone amortizements separate each window, while the whole rests below an attenuated, pointed stone arch with arabesques.

Fenestration of the remainder of the first story and the upper floors of the north facade is one-over-one, wooden, single-hung set in groups of four at the central bays; slender piers divide three units at each floor of the eastern bays, while only a column of single units is featured at the western tower bay. Window units at the first through sixth stories of the central bays feature stone sill coursing, transoms and lintel coursing; only the first story units display stone paterae above a prominent transom. The remaining units of the seventh through ninth floors of the central bays feature stone sill coursing and brick lintels; end bay units of these floors display stone sills and lintels.

In general, the massing and vocabulary of the north facade is repeated at the east and west facades. Massing of the east and west facades is virtually identical: windows are set in groups of four at the central bays and are separated by prominent brick piers with stone amortizements and arabesques. The east facade features an elevator shaft at the center bay which rises above the roofline. The Gothic detailing of the main entrance and fenestration of the main elevation is repeated at the first and ninth floors of the tower bays; however, the first floor of the northern bay of the west facade lacks this treatment. Fenestration of the southernmost bays of the west facade (counting six bays from the south to north) is two-over-two, single-hung, sash-type with stone sills and lintels; the remaining bays feature one-over-one units. Fenestration at the east elevation is one-over-one, single-hung, sash. First-story window units at the loading dock level of both elevations feature single-pane wooden awning-type fenestration at several bays (the central bays of the west facade and the 2nd through 5th and 7th through 8th bays, counting south to north, or the east facade) while other bays have been modified with brick infill and or metal overhead doors. The 10th bay of the east facade, which contains a metal fire escape, features at each upper floor a fire door flanked by two-over-two single hung windows (paired on the south side).

Because the south wall was originally planned to be part of a future expansion and was not designed to be exposed, it features scant fenestration and articulation except for a continuous loading dock and a few single-hung, one-over-one wooden window units with stone sills.

Additional features of the Sears, Roebuck and Co. building include a parapeted roof line with low-pitched pediments at the tower bays and stone coping; four metal-framed, saw-tooth skylights; several brick elevator and stair shafts and

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a prominent brick chimney that rise above the main roof line. The foundation
is concrete.

Original historic features of the interior have been modified throughout the years. Original lobby off the main entrance has been drastically altered. The upper floors which originally functioned as warehouse space feature exposed mushroom-shaped concrete columns and wood floors. The original skylights of the ninth floor are extant and in good condition.

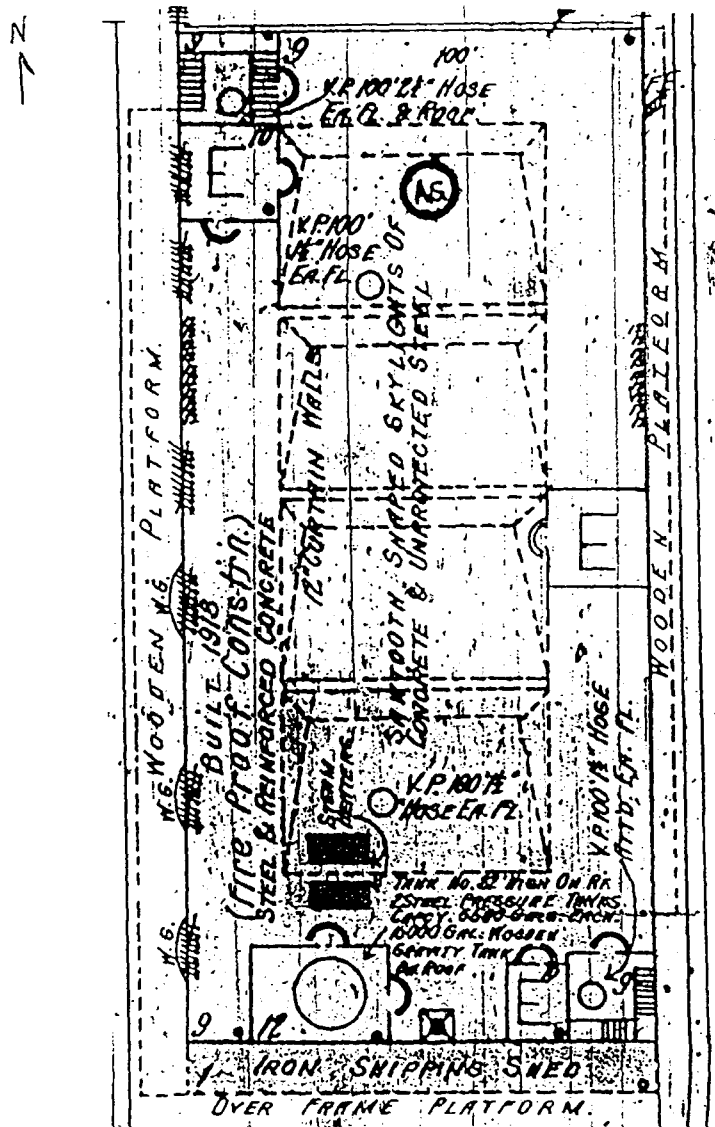
Currently, there are proposed plans for the renovation of the Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse building. These plans are being prepared in accordance with *The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* by Rosemann & Associates, P. C., Kansas City, Missouri. Once the proposed plans are completed, they will be sent to the Lance Carlson, Department of Natural Resources, for their review.

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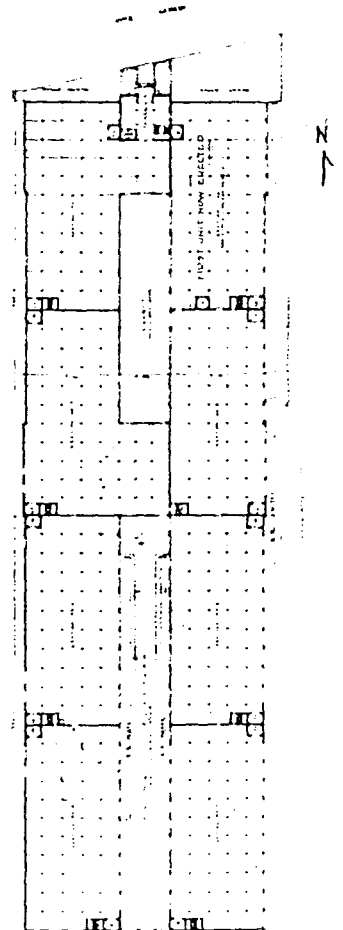
Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Building, North Kansas City, MO
Source: Sanborn Map Company, 1914, plate 4.

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Building, North Kansas City, MO
The floor plan illustrates the 1912-1913 building as it exists today ("first unit now erected"), in addition to future expansion plans, which were never implemented.

Source: *Western Architect*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (January, 1916).

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SUMMARY:

The Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Building, 715 Armour Road, North Kansas City, Clay County, is significant under Criteria A and C in the following areas: Commerce and Community Planning and Development: Constructed in 1912-1913 for Sears, Roebuck and Company, Chicago, Illinois, the building served as an anchor for both the North Kansas City central business district and the central industrial district, ushering in the subsequent establishment of several industrial and commercial enterprises in the area; and Architecture: Designed by George C. Nimmons and Company, Chicago, the North Kansas City Sears warehouse demonstrates the onset of what has been called the American Industrial style of architecture and is an excellent example of its type. The period of significance is from 1913, when the building was completed, to 1925, when the Sears company relocated its warehouse facilities across the Missouri River to Kansas City.

ELABORATION:

The Development of North Kansas City and Its Industrial and Commercial Areas

The city of North Kansas City, unlike most cities, was created and built with commercial and industrial buildings, residences, 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, a division of the Union Depot Bridge and Terminal Railway Company, in 1910.

Early 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. In order to accomplish the construction of the bridge, The Kansas City Bridge and Terminal Railway Company was organized¹ with the purpose of establishing an outer belt line to take care of all railroad lines. Although the first hurdle of Winner's plan, that of building seven piers was accomplished in 1889-1890 at a cost of \$434,000, the collapse of the local real estate boom marred Winner's future plans. Schemes for the

¹Willard E. Winner, F. W. Perkins, J. W. Perkins, Charles A. Peabody and Osman B. Copeland, all from Kansas City, organized the company.

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completion of the bridge were never realized and the Winner piers as they became to be known were acquired, together with the remainder of his holdings,² by Theodore C. Bates of Worcester, Massachusetts.³ In 1902, the interests of the Union Depot, Bridge and Terminal Railway Company, formed by Bates, were taken over by the Armour and Swift meat packing concerns and the Burlington Railway (ASB), backed by local financing.

Thirteen years after Winner's dream collapsed, on February 13, 1903, the North Kansas City Development Company⁴ was formed as a subsidiary of the ASB Company. The NKCD Company continued to purchase the Winner property during the ensuing years.

The three most significant events that accelerated the development of the area were the opening of the ASB Bridge in 1911, the construction of a levee on the banks of the Missouri River which insured protection from flooding and the development of the Kansas City, Clay County and St. Joseph Interurban Railway, which made stops in North Kansas City along Burlington Road and Liberty Road (now Armour Road). As a consequence of these major developments, the NKCD Company launched into their plan to create the industrial, commercial and residential districts of the area⁵; it was on Liberty Road where the first of the industrial and commercial properties were realized.

According to newspaper accounts of the day, F. W. Fratt, president of the Union Depot Bridge and Terminal Railway Company, was in the process of negotiating with several manufacturing plants to locate in the planned industrial district. Private switch tracks to each location were developed which offered a strong motivation to move to the area. This railroad connection was made possible, in part, by the ASB bridge. The lower section of the bridge afforded a connection with the Kansas City Terminal Railway tracks sited on the south bank of the

²Winner, who also owned several lots in the area, had laid out a system of streets which formed the basic pattern of the city's overall structure.

³The new company Bates organized was named the Kansas City & Atlantic Company, backed by the Union Security Company, Boston. In 1901, the company became the Union Bridge & Terminal Company. Bates was named president of both companies.

⁴Hugh J. Curran, secretary/treasurer of the Union Depot Bridge and Terminal Railway Company, was named president.

⁵The NKCD Company controlled 2,300 acres. More than half of the district was originally set aside for industrial purposes.

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Missouri River. The first of the planned sites along Liberty Road was acquired by Sears, Roebuck and Company of Chicago, Illinois, not long after the city of Kansas City, Kansas attempted to woo the mail order giant to settle in their community.

Sears, Roebuck and Company: Site Considerations and Building Campaigns

In June of 1912, businessmen and public officials of Kansas City, Kansas met with representatives of Sears, Roebuck and Company of Chicago regarding the erection of a mail order house in the surrounding area. A tract of 2 1/2 acres at 18th Street and Stewart Avenue, well suited for switching purposes on the Northwestern branch of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, was offered to Sears, Roebuck for the mail order house site free of charge.⁶ Although a small six-story branch office at 1201 St. Louis Avenue in the West Bottoms of neighboring Kansas City, Missouri had been in operation since 1911⁷, there was no room for the expansion needed to erect a mail order house at that location.

While many perks were offered to Sears, Roebuck for the building of the branch house on the Kansas side, including water and electricity at cost, the construction of a special post office branch supplemented with motor car service, and excellent freight service⁸, the company decided to build their plant on five acres of land in North Kansas City, Missouri. The official announcement was made by Julius Rosenwald, the president of the company, on August 1, 1912.⁹

The site for the new plant was leased from the Union Depot Bridge and Terminal Railway Company. The tract was bounded by Holmes and Charlotte Streets and North Eighteenth and Liberty Road. The location for this new building was advantageous because the Excelsior Springs electric trolley line, better known as the Interurban Railway, ran along Liberty Road (now Armour Road) and the navigable Missouri River is eighteen blocks to the south. It was stated that the "navigation of the Missouri River was one of the inducements

⁶*Kansas City Star*, 27 June 1912.

⁷*Kansas City Star*, 15 September 1912.

⁸*Kansas City Star*, 27 June 1912, n.p.

⁹*Kansas City Times*, 2 August 1912, n.p.

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that led the company to come here." The new site also provided room for
future growth and the construction of homes for Sears, Roebuck employees.¹⁰

Boring at the site (to test the soil) began in August, 1912 and plans and final
arrangements for the building's construction were completed in September. F.
W. Fratt, president of the UDB&T Railroad Company, reviewed the bids while in
Chicago and the contract was awarded to the Swenson Construction Company,
Kansas City, Missouri.

Completed in July, 1913, the new North Kansas City Sears, Roebuck and
Company warehouse was designed by George C. Nimmons and Company,
architect of the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant in Chicago.¹¹
This building was not designed as a mail order house, but a warehouse to store
larger, bulkier merchandise such as farm implements, furniture, and buggies.
The central location of North Kansas City was chosen to insure quick delivery
and reduce freight charges on the "heavier class of merchandise" for
customers in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada,
New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Unlike a mail order facility, orders were sent
to the main mail order plant located in Chicago, as the North Kansas City
branch did not maintain an office for receiving orders or addressing
correspondence.¹²

The \$420,000, nine-story building was constructed of reinforced concrete with
terra-cotta and brick. Measuring 220' x 101', the Industrial Gothic-styled
branch office was actually the "cornerstone of a great plant eight times the
size of the building"¹³ which the company expected to erect at a later date.
The full plan of the Sears, Roebuck warehouse, as outlined in the January, 1916
issue of *Western Architect*, was only partially implemented. The building was
to contain a large tower in the center (at the west end of the existing north
facade) of the front of a building arranged around the four sides of a light
court. As in a number of Nimmons' other designs, the tower motif was used not

¹⁰Ibid. It was reported that 12 homes were erected in the vicinity of the
warehouse.

¹¹Robert Craik McLean, "The Modern Factory as Illustrated in the Works of
George C. Nimmons," *Western Architect*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1 (January, 1916): 4-5.

¹²Sears Catalogue, Spring, 1914. A line drawing of the [North] Kansas City
warehouse appeared in this publication. It should be noted that several
periodicals, including this catalogue, erroneously listed neighboring Kansas
City, Missouri as the location for this warehouse facility.

¹³*Kansas City Star*, 15 September 1912, n.p.

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only for its architectural effect, but also as an important accessory to the plant as a water tower enclosure. The expansion of the building also included a large addition to the south, which was planned to flank two sides of a large freight depot and connected above by a series of bridges. Apparently, land adjacent to this structure had been purchased by Sears, Roebuck for the purpose of expansion¹⁴, but because of onset of WWI just one year after the building's completion and the eventual construction of a major mail order plant in Kansas City, Missouri, the erection of the planned additions never materialized.

Following the initial success of this building, many prominent industrial firms moved their operations to North Kansas City including: Rumely Products Co., 801 Armour Road (1913); Joslyn Manufacturing & Supply Co., 1744 Iron (1913); Ingle Brothers Broom, Corn and Supply Co., 716 E. 16th Avenue (1913); Missouri Can Company, 901 E. 14th Avenue (1915); Ideal Safety Steering Device Co., 1402 Knox (1915). Furthermore, the North Kansas City Development Company began the development of North Kansas City's central business district with the construction of The Pioneer Building and the Commercial Building in 1912-1913 and 1913-1914 respectively.

Despite the fact that the nation's largest mail order company sought to enlarge their operations in North Kansas City and establish a future plant at its site on Armour Road, it appears that Sears, Roebuck and Company did not occupy the nine-story Gothic inspired industrial building for long. During WWI, the bulk of the building was the location for a soldiers barracks and mechanics training camp. Truck, tank and airplane engines were stored in the upper floors.¹⁵

According to an article in the *Kansas City Star*, January 8, 1925, Sears Roebuck actually leased the upper six floors of the building and continued to maintain their distribution center from this location during the WWI. At the close of the war, the building became the home to several prominent businesses including The National Bellas Hess Company, a major mail order concern and

¹⁴A 1914 Sanborn Map of North Kansas City, Missouri indicates that land adjacent to the Sears Building was owned by the company.

¹⁵The building also served as an induction center and featured a barracks, hospital and training divisions. See *The North Kansas City News-Supplement to the Press Dispatch and Liberty Tribune News*. December 26, 1990. Files, Economic Development, City of North Kansas City, Missouri; *North Kansas City Annals, 1912-1987*, 4; "A soldier's story." *The Press Dispatch*, November 6, 1991, 1B.

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retail chain based in New York; Corn Products Refining Company; Hooven & Allison Company; Curtis Harvesters, Inc., and the Kent Percy Bag Company. At the start of WWII, Stern Slegman Prins Company (coat manufacturers); Bigelow Sanford Carpet, and S. R. Seaver and Company were located in this building. In 1947, several other smaller companies including Nor Kay Woolen company and Coronet Manufacturing Company leased space at this location.

Twelve years after the completion of the North Kansas City warehouse, negotiations to select a new site for the location of a huge \$4 million plant for Sears, Roebuck and Company were finalized. Like the nine-story building in North Kansas City, this new plant for Sears, Roebuck was designed by Chicago architect George C. Nimmons.¹⁶ Work on the 1,455,000 square foot building, located at 3825 Truman Road, comprised of a two-story administrative and retail wing connected to a nine-story merchandise wing, was begun immediately "in an effort to complete the immense plant for the fall business of [1925]."¹⁷ Work on the Sears Kansas City plant began in March, 1925, three months after site negotiations were finalized. Originally estimated as an eighteen-month project, the erection of the Kansas City Sears, Roebuck and Company plant "established a world construction record."¹⁸ No other "single unit structure as large . . . ever has been erected in an equal period of time."¹⁹ According to Nimmons, the Sears plant was "completed, ready for business, September 14, 1925,"²⁰ while an article in the *Kansas City Star* stated that although the building was in operation, workmen had remained on the site to complete the project.²¹

¹⁶George C. Nimmons and Co. Sears, Roebuck and Company, Kansas City, Missouri. Plans, Job No. 403, January 24, 1925.

¹⁷*Kansas City Star*, 8 January 1925.

¹⁸*Kansas City Star*, 27 August 1925.

¹⁹*Kansas City Star*, 5 July 1925. The concrete plant, located on the construction site, was said to have cost \$80,000. In eighteen hours, seventeen hundred cubic yards of concrete was poured. Approximately 3,000 men worked on this site in a single day.

²⁰Nimmons, "Industrial Buildings Their Great Architectural Opportunities," 24.

²¹*Kansas City Star*, 15 September 1925, 2. Unfortunately, as of December, 1996, the Kansas City Sears, Roebuck and Company building is scheduled for demolition.

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Historic Architectural Context and Significance

The design of the North Kansas City, Missouri Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant by George C. Nimmons and Company has its roots in the Chicago School of Architecture and can be placed among the best of the industrial designs of the first decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the overall arrangement and design of the Sears warehouse, along with other facilities designed for Sears, Roebuck demonstrates the efficiency of what has been called the American Industrial Style of architecture.

The evolution of the buildings of the Chicago School, with their cellular facades, continuous piers and wide fenestration can be traced to the work of William Le Baron Jenney (1832-1907), who has been called the founder of the Chicago School of Architecture.²² Jenney, an engineer who studied at Harvard University and the Ecole Centrale des Arts et Manufactures in Paris, was an innovator in building technology; he was the first to arrive at iron skeletal construction. Also a park and town planner, Jenney's "fame rests mainly on his commercial buildings in Chicago."²³

Although the Home Insurance Building (1883-1885) is undoubtedly the principal monument of Jenny's work as it was the first completely metal-framed building, it was the design for the second Leiter Building (1889-1891), exhibiting wide corner piers, continuous wide banks of fenestration, and generous storefront windows, that has been noted as one of the important, initial ventures of the Chicago School.

Other late nineteenth century designs of the Chicago School (i. e. the Tacoma Building, Holabird & Roche, 1886-1889; and The Gage Group, Holabird & Roche and Louis Sullivan, 1898-1899) also paved the way for industrial design of the 20th century, yet quite possibly the one building to have the most influence on George C. Nimmons was the Reliance Building (1893-1895). Designed by Burnham & Root in 1893-1895, the elegant Reliance Building "is considered by many to be the masterpiece of the Chicago School and certainly its most germinal building."²⁴ It was during Nimmons' employment with the firm of Burnham & Root that this building was designed.

²²Diane Maddex, ed., *Master Builders A Guide to Famous American Architects* (Washington, D. C.: The Preservation Press, 1985), 99.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Milton W. Brown, Sam Hunter, John Jacobus, et al., *American Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979), 258.

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One other building from the Chicago School that should be mentioned here is the Carson, Pirie, Scott building, Louis Sullivan's last major work (1899, additions 1903-04, 1906). Here Sullivan, a former student of Jenney, juxtaposed a vertical element with the overall horizontality of the cage-like main block. Like his Wainwright Building (1890-91), the form of the Carson Pirie Scott building expresses its utilitarian and structural function.

Springing from the Chicago School and the works of Jenney, Burham & Root and Sullivan was the 1905-06 design for the Sears, Roebuck and Company Plant, Chicago, Illinois, by Nimmons and Fellows. The Chicago architectural firm was awarded "what was very likely the largest single commission in the history of Chicago building up to that date."²⁵ Nothing better "demonstrated the power and efficiency of the building industry of [that city] than the construction of this immense complex."²⁶ Embracing the fundamental theme and defining principles conceived by the early works of the Chicago School, Nimmons and Fellows incorporated cellular groups of windows and spandrels and broad buttress-like piers into their design. Carl Condit, author of *The Chicago School of Architecture*, suggests that the verticalism of the merchandise building, bears a likeness to Sullivan's Garrick Theater Building (1891-1892). The complex also demonstrated what the salient characteristics of an industrial building should be.

Nimmons, in his series on "Modern Industrial Plants" cited the work of several architects whose innovative designs for industrial buildings were primarily derived from the Chicago School. It appears that many architects working in the early twentieth century including S. Scott Joy (Freight Station and Loft for Montgomery Ward & Company and the Chicago Junction Terminal Building), Alfred S. Alschuler (Chicago's John Sexton & Company Building and the Albert H. Loeb Building) and Albert Kahn (Ford Service Building, Omaha and the Goodrich Tire Service Building, Detroit) also were influenced by the work of their contemporaries.²⁷

The design for the North Kansas City Sears, Roebuck and Company plant closely suggests the industrial designs of Chicago architects S. Scott Joy and

²⁵Carl W. Condit. *The Chicago School of Architecture*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 179.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷See Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants, Part II and III.

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Clay County, MO

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Alfred S. Alscuhler, and the work of Nimmons himself while he was practicing on his own. The form and vocabulary of the Sears building mirrors that of Alscuhler's John Sexton & Company Building (1916-1917) and his design for the Albert H. Loeb Building in Chicago (c. 1914) and Joy's Montgomery Ward and Company Freight Station and Loft Building (date unknown). These formidable structures, constructed of reinforced concrete with brick veneer, employ the use of enlarged piers and distinct spandrels with ribboned sash fenestration. Stone detailing, shaped parapets and projecting bays which house the elevator and stairwell bays, add vigor to the vast exteriors.

Also of influence was the Reid, Murdoch & Company Building (see below) by Nimmons, an office and warehouse structure that was planned to conform with Burnham's civic plan for Chicago. The scheme for this waterfront building, which called for a centrally placed tower at the main facade's central bay, the separation of the end bays, more emphatic piers and wider spans of fenestration, is more analogous to the design of the what the proposed final design was to be for the North Kansas City, Missouri, Sears warehouse. Overall ornamentation of the Reid, Murdoch & Company building, like that of the Sears warehouse, is mostly confined to the entrances and tower.

In the final form of the North Kansas City, Missouri Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, the upper-level arcade as featured on the Reid, Murdoch & Company building was abandoned and the end bays were made more pronounced by the use of exaggerated piers and heavy stone banding. In addition, Gothic styled embellishment was now adhered to, instead of the Renaissance, which according to Nimmons, was more costly and more confining.

The Renaissance style often demands the use of projecting cornices, which when applied to some types of industrial buildings involve more expense than the Gothic. The characteristics of the style of treatment of industrial buildings that is mostly in favor now are Gothic in character and consist usually of piers marked on the exterior of the buildings, carried up only to the point where the concentrated loads disappear, similar to buttresses, and also walls continued up without projecting cornices and terminated with ornamental copings; the corners of the building are strengthened by the use of piers heavier than the intermediate ones, the entrances emphasized by the use of ornamental tracery and ornament, and the sprinkler tank inclosed in a tower often placed at the main entrance and including one of the principal stairways. While such designs are Gothic in character they are more and more exhibiting a freedom and originality that promise in time to

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Section number 8 Page 15 Sears, Roebuck and Co. Warehouse Building
Clay County, MO

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develop into a well-defined architectural style for American industrial
buildings.²⁸

Nimmons' plan for the North Kansas City, Missouri Sears warehouse, along with his later, more progressive designs for the company, is a representative example of American industrial design for the mail order trade developed in the first decades of the twentieth century.

George C. Nimmons, Architect

Born in Wooster, Ohio, in 1867, George Croll Nimmons, FAIA, was a prominent Chicago architect, mostly known for his innovative industrial designs. After graduating from the local academy, Nimmons traveled to Europe where he began his study of architecture. In 1885, he returned to the United States and entered the firm of Burnham & Root, where he was employed as a draftsman for ten years. In 1897, Nimmons formed a partnership with William K. Fellows.²⁹ During this thirteen-year association, the firm became best known for their large commercial and industrial designs, most notably the mail order plant headquarters for Sears, Roebuck and Company (1905-06, with several additions). One of their most successful works, this commission led the firm to design several more warehouses, mail order plants, and retail stores for the company throughout the United States. Residential designs from that period included the R. W. Sears home located in Grayslake, Illinois (1906), and the twenty-room Prairie-style mansion built for Sears, Roebuck and Company president Julius Rosenwald in Chicago (1903).

After leaving Nimmons and Fellows, Nimmons practiced alone from 1910-1917 (George C. Nimmons & Company); subsequently, he continued his practice as principal of his firm, Nimmons & Company, until 1933.³⁰ Some of the projects from these two periods include The Sears, Roebuck and Company Building, North Kansas City, Missouri (1912-13) and several works in Chicago including the Franklin Building (1912), the C. P. Kimball & Company Building (1913), the Reid, Murdoch & Company Building (1913), the Adams Schaaf Building (1916), the Union Special Machines Company Building (1918), the Kelley Building (1921) and the American Furniture Mart (1923, 1926).

²⁸Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants Part IV", *AR*, (February, 1919): 166, 168.

²⁹Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc, 1970), 442.

³⁰*Ibid.*

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Clay County, MO

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In the final phase of his career, Nimmons continued practice as senior partner of the firm of Nimmons, Carr & Wright from 1933-1945, where their work in designing buildings for Sears, Roebuck and Company continued. Nimmons, who married Justine V. Wheeler in 1898 (they had three children), retired in 1945. After being active in practice for nearly half a century, Nimmons died on June 17, 1947.³¹

In addition to his architectural practice, Nimmons also published extensively. He was the author of articles on several of the Sears, Roebuck buildings which he or his firm designed. He also wrote essays on the future of concrete and an introduction to a college textbook entitled "The Significance of the Fine Arts."³² Quite possibly, his most important writing---a series of well-illustrated articles on "Modern Industrial Plants"---appeared in *Architectural Record* from 1918-1919. In these articles, Nimmons outlined and discussed the various types of industrial plants, the essentials of securing the best location, and factors to consider in the overall planning and design.³³

³¹Deborah Slaton, Jeffrey Koerber and Harry J. Hunderman, Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, (Historic American Buildings Survey, April 20, 1994), 20.

³²Ibid., 21.

³³George C. Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants: Part I," *Architectural Record*, Vol. XLIV, No. 5 (November, 1918), 414-421; "Modern Industrial Plants: Part II," *Architectural Record*, Vol. XLIV, No. 6 (December, 1918), 531-550; "Modern Industrial Plants: Part III Plans and Designs," *Architectural Record*, Vol XLV, No. 1 (January, 1919), 27-44; "Modern Industrial Plants: Part IV Discussion of the Various Types of Windows for Industrial Buildings," *Architectural Record*, Vol XLV, No. 2 (February, 1919), 148-168; "Modern Industrial Plants: Part V Discussion of the Various Types of Windows for Industrial Buildings," *Architectural Record*, Vol XLV, No. 3 (March, 1919), 262-282; "Modern Industrial Plants: Part VIa The Excessive Turnover of Labor and the Influence of Employee's (sic) Welfare Work in Reducing It," Vol. XLV, No. 4 (April, 1919), 343-355; "Modern Industrial Plants: Part VIb The Excessive Turnover of Labor and the Influence of Employee's Welfare Work in Reducing It," *Architectural Record*, Vol. XLV, No. 5 (May, 1919), 450-470; "Modern Industrial Plants: Part VII Sears, Roebuck & Co.'s Plant, Chicago," *Architectural Record*, Vol XLV, No. 6 (June, 1919), 506-524.

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Clay County, MO

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History of Sears, Roebuck and Company

The development of Sears, Roebuck and Company can best be traced by examining the careers of the principal founder, Richard Warren Sears, and executives Julius Rosenwald and Gen. Robert E. Wood "Each man made a vital contribution to the company at a critical juncture, and each left a lasting impact on its operations."³⁴

Richard Warren Sears (1863-1914), born in Stewartville, Minnesota, was forced to leave high school after the collapse of his father's business. In 1878, shortly after his father's death, he learned telegraphy, and subsequently supported his mother, sisters and himself by combining this skill with that of railroad station agent. By the early 1880s, Sears was telegrapher and station agent in Redwood Falls, Minnesota, where he supplemented his income by exchanging lumber and coal for venison, blueberries, and other commodities.

In 1886, Sears unexpectedly began his career as a mail order entrepreneur when he purchased a shipment of watches for half-price that a Redwood Falls jeweler had refused. He was able to buy the watches for \$12.00 and sell them for just two dollars more rather than the retail price of \$25.00. Sears sent samples to other agents along the railroad and within six months, Sears cleared \$5,000. That same year, Sears quit railroading and moved to Minneapolis, where he founded the R. W. Sears Watch Company. During this venture, he continued to use express agents for selling as they were bonded, but he began to rely on advertising in national periodicals. One year later, Sears moved his business to Chicago and hired Alvah Curtis Roebuck (1864-1948), a native of Indiana, to assemble watches and furnish repairs.

In 1889, Sears sold his business for \$100,000 and moved to Iowa to become a country banker; within a year, he returned to Minneapolis and founded the Warren Company, a watch and jewelry business. "The faithful Roebuck returned to his employ, purchased the company from Sears for a brief period in 1891, and then promptly resold it to him when requested to do so a few weeks later."³⁵ In 1892, the Warren Company became A. C. Roebuck, Inc. On September 16, 1893, the company was renamed Sears, Roebuck and Company, with Richard Sears as president. The company began to offer a much wider

³⁴Ralph J. Christian, Sears, Roebuck and Company Complex, (National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form), Copy, n. d., item 8, p. 2.

³⁵Ibid., item 8, p. 3.

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Clay County, MO

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range of merchandise than just watches and jewelry. A branch office and shipping depot was opened in Chicago and in 1895, the company permanently moved its operation to that location. "During the next five years, Sears, concentrating on the rural market, waged a whirlwind advertising and promotional campaign which enabled his company to surpass Montgomery Ward with sales of \$11 million by 1900."³⁶ Although Sears advertised widely in magazines and newspapers, his principal selling tool was his catalogue.

On August 17, 1895, Alvah Roebuck, feeling the strain of long hours, sold his shares in the company for \$25,000. Shortly thereafter, Richard Sears was introduced to Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932), a wholesale clothing entrepreneur from Springfield, Illinois. On August 23, 1895,³⁷ the firm was reincorporated with Sears as president, Rosenwald as Vice-president and Aaron E. Nusbaum, Rosenwald's brother-in-law, as treasurer and general manager. Rosenwald quickly improved the manner of business and the quality of merchandise offered by Sears, Roebuck and Company. "Influenced by the success of Montgomery Ward and Company, Rosenwald encouraged the expansion of a range of merchandise carried by Sears."³⁸ By 1896, the Sears catalogue carried a wide range of general merchandise including harnesses, farm equipment, household furnishings, dishes, dry goods, firearms and musical instruments, etc. By 1900, Sears had surpassed Montgomery Ward and Company with more than \$10 million in sales.

By 1908, despite Rosenwald's endeavors, the company was in severe financial trouble due, in part to to Sears' "profit-sharing" plan where customers were given coupons which could be redeemed for expensive premiums---a scheme opposed by Rosenwald and the men he had personally trained. Subsequently, Sears resigned as president on November 21, 1908. After a brief tenure as chairman of the board, he withdrew from active involvement in the company and eventually sold his stock for \$10 million. Julius Rosenwald succeeded Sears as president and the company once again prospered. By 1910, total sales rose to \$40 million. Branch offices had opened at Dallas, Seattle and Philadelphia and by 1914, the company's sales increased to \$100,000,000.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷The date of incorporation, as well as the date of Rosenwald's introduction to Sears was listed in error in the HABS report on the Chicago plant. See Boris Emmet and John C. Jueck, *Catalogs and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), 49.

³⁸Slaton, et al., *Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, Chicago*, 10.

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Clay County, MO

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During World War I, Rosenwald entered government service, leaving the company in less capable hands. When the 1920-1921 depression severely reduced farm incomes, the company found itself overstocked and unable to dispose of its goods. The company avoided collapse only because Rosenwald lent it \$20 million from his own fortune. By 1922, Sears, Roebuck and Company had recovered its financial status.

Another major change occurred in 1924 when Rosenwald selected Charles M. Kittle, executive vice president of the Illinois Central Railroad as the new president of the company. In addition, at a time when company officials became increasingly concerned with the threat to the mail order business because of the shift of population from the country to the city, the decline of farm incomes, and the spread of chain stores, Rosenwald also brought in General Robert E. Wood (1879-1969). Wood, a Kansas City, Missouri native and 1900 West Point graduate, had risen to the rank of brigadier general during WWI and had also assisted Goethals in constructing the Panama Canal.

Under the direction of Kittle and Wood, the first Sears retail store opened on February 2, 1925 in the Chicago mail order plant and openings in Seattle, Dallas, Kansas City, and Philadelphia followed. After the unexpected death of Kittle at the age of 46, Wood was named president; in 1939, he became chairman of the board, serving in this capacity until his retirement in 1954. By 1964, Sears, Roebuck and Company had surpassed the A & P grocery chain as the world's largest retailer. In 1973, the company's 837 retail stores, 12 catalogue order plants and 2,647 catalogue and telephone sales offices reported total sales of approximately \$11 billion. In 1974, the company moved its headquarters from the historic plant on South Homan Avenue to the 100-story Sears Tower in downtown Chicago. In 1987, due to the decline in catalogue sales, and the relocation of the company's headquarters, the Merchandise Building closed---ending the mail order portion of the business at the Chicago plant.³⁹

³⁹Information regarding the history of Sears, Roebuck and Company was, in part, gleaned from two major sources previously cited: Slaton, et al., *Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, Chicago*, (HABS, 1994) and Christian, *Sears, Roebuck and Company Complex*, NR nomination form, n. d. See also Boris Emmet and John C. Jueck, *Catalogs and Counters* and Donald R. Katz, *The Big Store Inside the Crisis and Revolution at Sears* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1987).

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Clay County, MO

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Clay County, MO

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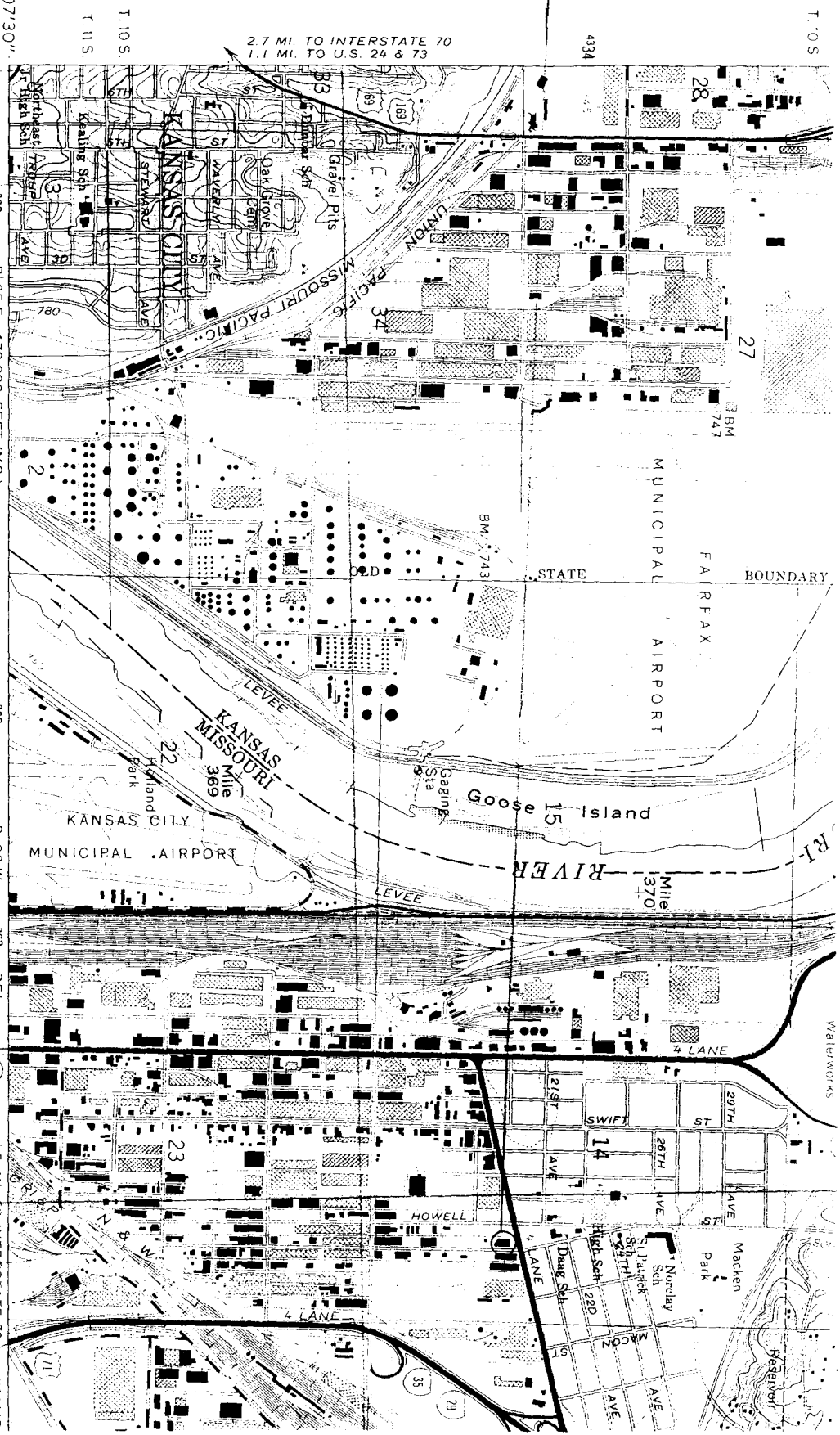
Sears, Roebuck and Company, Kansas City, Missouri. Job No. 403, January 24, 1925. Nos. 50.22 7; 104.29 2-5, 7; 104.30 4, 5, 7-10; 104.5 3, 5, 6; 106.26. Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Kansas City.

SEARS, ROEBUCK & COMPANY WAREHOUSE BLDG., CLAY COUNTY, MO

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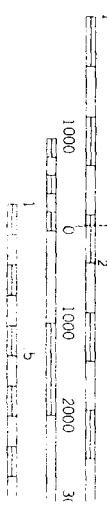
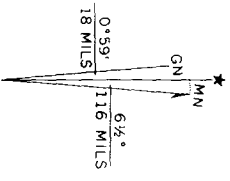
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Seaks, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Building

715 Armoniz Road

North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

Cydney Millstein, photographer

Dec. 1996

Main and East facades facing Southwest

#1 of 17



Seaus, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Building
715 Arkmore Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstein photographer

Dec. 1996

west and main facades, view facing
southeast

2 of 17

Seaus, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Arkmore Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo.

C. Millstein, photographer

Dec. 1996

west facade, view facing east

3 of 17



Seaus, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.

415 Armour Road

North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstein, photographer

Dec. 1996

Detail of main entrance, view facing south

4 of 17



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CONSENT OF
OWNER
OR LESSEE

Denny's
Guns
ENTRANCE

75 ARMOUR RD

Guns

NO PARKING

Seans, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg. 4
715 Armonk Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstein, photographer
December, 1996

South and west facades; view looking
northeast

#5 of 17

(slightly different than original)



Seans, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armour Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo.

C. Millstein, photographer.

Dec. 1996

South and east façades, view facing
northwest

#6 of 17



Seamus Kolbouch and Company

715 Armonk Road

North Kansas City, Clay County, MO

C. Millstem, photographer

Dec. 1996

Detail of main entrance, view facing south

7 of 17



Seaus. Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.

715 Armonk Road

North Kansas City, Clay County. Mo

C. Millstem. photographer

Dec. 1996

Detail of main entrance, view facing south

8 of 17



Seans, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.

715 Armonk Road

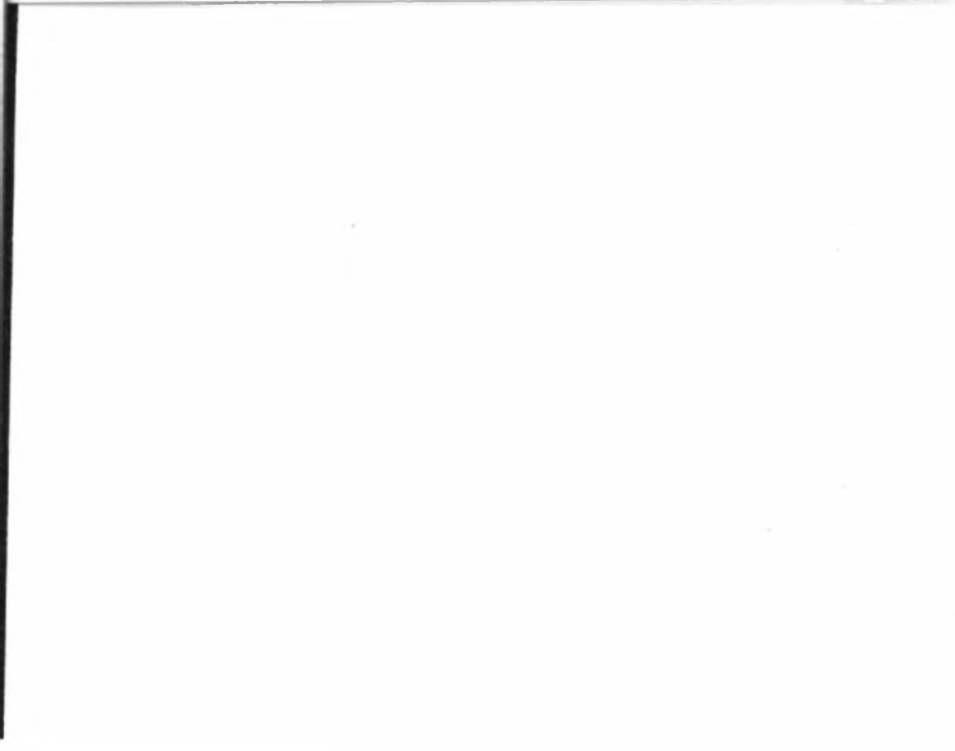
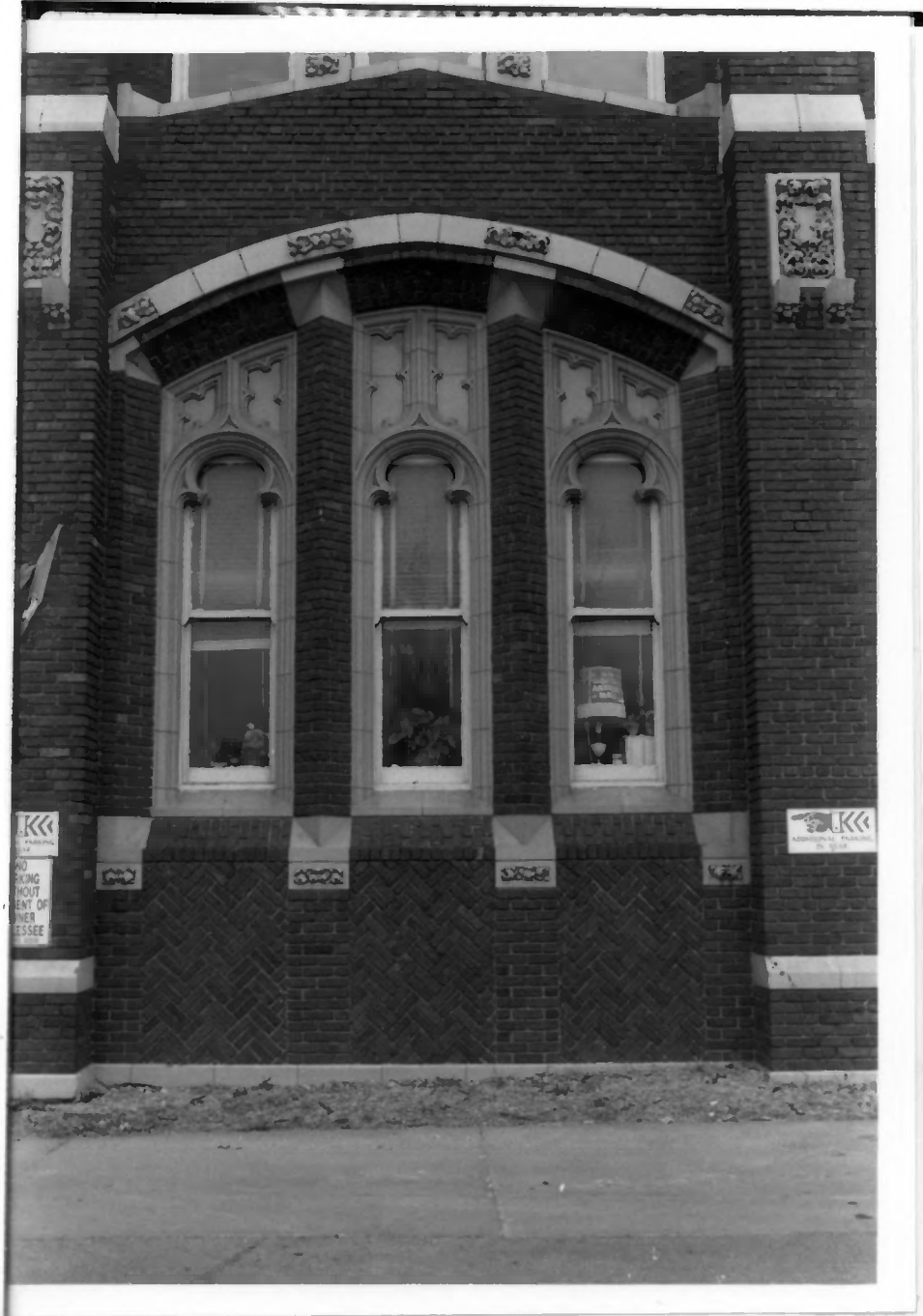
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstem, photographer

Dec. 1996

Detail of far east bay, north facade
view facing south

9 of 17



Seans, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armonk Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstein, photographer
Dec. 1996

Detail of first story, north facade
view facing south

10 of 17



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Seaves, Toelback and Company Warehouse Bldg.

715 Armonk Road

North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstein, photographer

Dec. 1996

Detail of west facade, view facing east

#11 of 17



Seaus, Roelsuch and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armour Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstein, photographer
Dec, 1996

Detail of east facade, view facing west

12 of 17



Seans, Roelsueck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armonk Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Millstem, photographer
Dec. 1996

Interior, 6th floor, view facing northwest

#13 of 17

Seans, Roelsueck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armonk Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo
C. Millstem, photographer
Dec. 1996

Interior, 6th floor, view facing southwest

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armonk Road
North Kansas City, Clay County Mo
C. Millstein, photographer
Dec. 1996

Interior, 6th Floor, view facing west
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Sears, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armonk Road
North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo
C. Millstein, photographer
Dec. 1996

Interior 6th Floor view facing northeast
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Seans, Roebuck and Company Warehouse Bldg.
715 Armonk Road

North Kansas City, Clay County, Mo

C. Mullstein, photographer

Dec, 1996.

Interior, 9th floor, view facing north

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