

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building

other names/site number Haupt, Oliver E., Motor Co.

2. Location

street & number 4160-4166 Olive Street [n/a] not for publication

city or town St. Louis [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county St. Louis [Independent City] code 510 zip code 63108

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [x] 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 [x] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide [x] locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)



09/30/05

Signature of certifying official/Title

Mark A. Miles / Deputy SHPO

Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

I hereby certify that the property is:

[] 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 building
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	0	0 sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	0	0 structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	0	0 objects
		1	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing.

(n/a)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register. 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

Commerce/Trade/Specialty Store

Current Functions

Commerce/Trade/Warehouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

see continuation sheet []

Materials

foundation concrete

walls brick

terra cotta

roof asphalt

other _____

see continuation sheet []

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet [x]

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

Commerce

Periods of Significance

1937-1955

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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: _____

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	<u>739 660</u>	<u>4280 860</u>			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[] 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 Section 7: Susan Sheppard/Researcher Section 8: Carolyn Toft/Executive Director

organization Landmarks Association of St. Louis date _____

street & number 917 Locust Street, 7th floor telephone (314) 421-6474

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63101

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 Gaslight Square Place III

street & number 7925 Forsyth telephone _____

city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63105

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Summary

The Ben J. Selkirk & Sons Building is located at 4160 and 4166 Olive Street in St. Louis, Missouri. The buff brick building consists of a two-story portion with a one-story addition, both rectangular in plan. Originally an automobile dealership, the two-story building at the southeast corner of Olive and Whittier was built in 1919 by the H. W. Herweck Building Company for an estimated cost of \$45,000; the one-story addition dates to 1927. No architect's name is associated with either project. **The site includes a parking lot (east of the addition) which is historically associated with the Selkirk auction business.**

The corner building features an elaborate front facade with a shaped parapet, a terra cotta cornice, and a pedimented terra cotta door surround. The original second-story windows are intact. The attached garage is simpler than the original building, although materials, fenestration, and design are remarkably compatible. The large first-floor storefront windows of both buildings were covered with wood in 1969, but the size of the window openings was never altered. The building is in excellent condition and retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Exterior

The 1919 two-story portion of the Selkirk Building measures approximately 74 feet across Olive Street, on which it fronts, and 154 feet along Whittier. The 1927 one-story addition measures approximately 55 feet across Olive and extends south approximately 100 feet.

A distinctive feature of the two-story portion is its elaborate three-bay front facade with terra cotta details. The original front entrance terra cotta door surround is still intact (photo 5). It is located at the center of the front facade, within the middle bay. It has ornamental pilasters with a diamond pattern molding and Corinthian capitals. Above the door is a terra cotta crown and a rectangular terra cotta panel. Just above each of the two pilasters are scrolled brackets which support a large triangular pediment.

The large first-floor storefront windows were covered with wooden planks in 1969 to the designs of architect Isadore Shank. The square projections which are in the upper portion of each covered bay are wooden, non-functioning, and a completely decorative element of the Shank design. The window openings and brick surrounds were not altered in any

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

way, making it possible to return the building to its original appearance. At the second floor each of these three bays has a grouping of three central opening casement windows divided by wooden mullions, each window with sixteen lights. Each of the three bays or triple windows share a terra cotta sill.

At the corners of the building and dividing each of the bays are brick pilasters, four total. Each pilaster is outlined with raised brick headers which are of a lighter contrasting color. Each pilaster terminates at a simple capital at the uppermost corner of the second floor windows. Above this capital is a terra cotta stringcourse, or a continuous lintel just above the windows, which runs the length of the front facade and continues for one bay on the west facade.

The terra cotta cornice is one of the most distinctive features of the building. This overhanging cornice extends about one foot from the facade, and has large dentils beneath. Like the string course it is continuous, and extends for one bay on the west facade. The pilasters continue above the cornice in the form of simple raised bricks. These culminate at the roof's terra cotta coping. At the second bay, centrally located on the front facade, is the elaborate shaped parapet. The parapet has square steps on each side, which rise to a curved top. It too has terra cotta coping, and decorative terra cotta scrollwork at its sides.

Between the first and second floor windows are decorative brick and terra cotta rectangular panels. Three panels are set within each of the three bays, each panel being the length of the second floor windows. There are nine panels total on the front facade. With one exception, a floral design consisting of a single flower of red terra cotta is centered in each panel. A diamond shape of lighter terra cotta surrounds this design. The entire panel is framed by this same type of terra cotta. An egg and dart pattern in red terra cotta is within this frame, and surrounds the diamond pattern. Surrounding each of the terra cotta panels, and visually tying the design to the rest of the building, are bricks placed in a rectangular shape, all with header side showing. At the corner of each brick rectangle is a terra cotta square. The only panel with a different design is the middle one, directly above the front entrance. This panel lacks a central flower and diamond motif but otherwise the design is the same.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 3

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

The west facade of the building faces Whittier Street (photo 4). The first bay at the northwest corner of the building continues the design and fenestration of the front facade and is distinctly different from the other five bays. It has a large first floor storefront window, which was covered in 1969. Above this window are three terra cotta panels, in the same design as the front facade. At the second floor are three casement windows, with a continuous terra cotta sill. Above the second floor windows is the terra cotta string course and cornice with dentils.

The entire west facade has a brick parapet which extends about two feet above the roof, and has terra cotta coping. Past the first bay the building is simple brick with no elaborate terra cotta ornamentations. Each bay at the second floor is a grouping of five double hung two-over-two windows, with a continuous terra cotta sill and a brick lintel.

Windows at the first floor were long ago bricked in, possibly during the 1969 alterations. They all retain their terra cotta sills. At the second and third bays are two service doors, flanked by infilled windows. At the fourth and fifth bays are bricked in windows, the same size as the second floor window openings. The sixth bay on the first floor of the west facade consists of two garage doors.

The rear of the building at 4166 Olive is the south facade, and like the front facade has three bays. All windows are bricked in, although they retain their terra cotta sills and brick lintels. The three windows at the second floor are covered in large wooden panels. The first two bays are the same size as the second floor bays. The third bay consists of a garage door and a smaller infilled window to the left of the garage opening.

Like 4166 Olive, the addition at 4160 has three bays on its front facade, which faces Olive Street. Each bay was covered in wooden planks in 1969, but window openings were not altered. Dividing each of the three bays and at the building's corners are simple pilasters, four total. Lighter colored brick creates texture and outlines the shape of each of these pilasters. Each of the two end pilasters has a small terra cotta shield at the top, and culminates in a square terra cotta cap.

Instead of elaborate terra cotta detailing like 4166 Olive, the addition features ornamental brickwork. Above each window opening, a rectangular panel is divided into three subtly recessed sections, each with a slightly projecting cruciform shape in the middle,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 4

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

roughly mimicking the terra cotta panels next door. In the middle bay, a small terra cotta shield is centered in the façade and the parapet rises several inches above the flanking bays. The parapet is subtly corbelled at the top of each bay. Glazed terra cotta coping is visible along the entire facade.

The garage joins 4166 Olive at its east red brick facade (photo 3). This elevation has a single door on the second floor, which is accessed by a large iron stairway, or fire escape. To the right of the door is a small window that has been filled in with bricks. To the left of the exterior staircase, near the rear of the building, is a garage door entrance with loading dock. Above the garage door is a brick infilled window. The sills and brick segmental arched lintels of all of the filled windows remains intact.

At the rear (south) facade of 4160 Olive are five bays, a centrally located garage door, flanked by two separate windows on either side. All four of the windows have been infilled by bricks. The east facade has a stepped parapet with terra cotta coping. The building is about 100' long. At about 60' the exterior wall steps in about one foot. This rear section of the building has six bays; all single rectangular windows which have been filled in with bricks.

Interior

The front room of 4166 Olive has some original features such as plaster medallions on the ceiling, mushroom support columns with plaster swag motifs, and the original entrance vestibule. Behind this front public space is a large open room with more iron support columns. The original plaster crown molding is visible at some places. At the rear of the building is a large car ramp that accesses the second floor. The second floor is a large open space, supported by square wooden support posts. There is an attic level above. The garage, accessible from 4166 Olive consists of two large open rooms with wooden trusses and support beams, concrete floors, and exposed brick walls.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

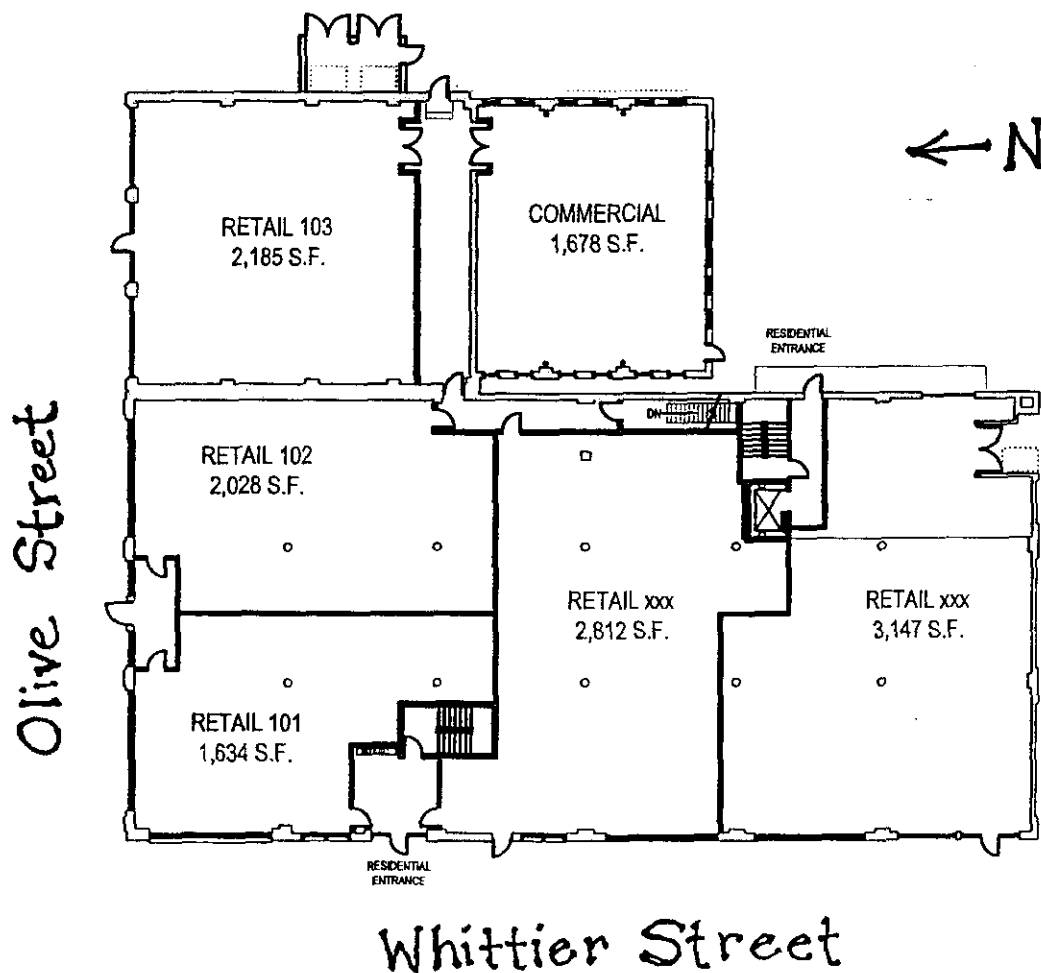
Section 7 Page 5

Ben J. Selkirk & Sons Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Integrity

The building has had minor alterations, but the 1969 boarding of the first floor windows can be removed. The Selkirk Building is in excellent condition and retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Figure 1: Floor Plan of Selkirk Building's.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 6

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Summary

The Ben J. Selkirk & Sons Building at 4160-66 Olive Street is locally significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for Commerce. One of many colorful auctioneers engaged in the thriving business at the turn of the 19th century, Benjamin J. Selkirk was part of an evolving profession that generated an estimated \$7 million locally in 1927. Joined by sons Alex L. and Benjamin Jr. in 1933, the firm managed to outlast all competitors, prosper and reinvent itself during the Depression. The former automobile dealership located on Olive Street near the prosperous Central West End neighborhood is still associated with the firm. A move to this building (built 1919 and 1927) in 1937 made possible the innovative, art dispersal gallery auctions offering antiques and collectibles from the finest homes in St. Louis. The most important one from the perspective of historic preservation occurred in 1941 when Selkirk's offered the contents of the Campbell House (NR 4-21-1977.) Selkirk's became a highly respected, local institution. When the sixth generation Selkirk sold the business in 1998, Senator Tom Eagleton remarked: "With the Selkirks out of the art business, it's like saying the Busches are out of the beer business."¹ The period of significance is 1937 to 1955, the arbitrary cut-off date.

Background

The site at 4160-66 Olive Street most closely associated with Selkirk's auction house was purchased in 1917 for \$20,000. Construction by the H. W. Herweck Building Company of a two-story auto dealership for the Haupt family's Ford and Lincoln dealership was completed in 1919 for an estimated cost of \$45,000. Although the auto business prospered enough to require construction of a one-story addition in 1927, the Great Depression forced the Mississippi Valley Trust to assume ownership until 1944 when it transferred title to Ben Selkirk, seven years after the auctioneer had first entered into a lease on the property.

Selkirk's auction house lineage can be traced back to 1830 when "one W. Johnstone, a canny Scot, clanged the huge brass bell on Main Street" to summon buyers to his auction block. Another Scot entered the family business when Alexander A. Selkirk married

¹ Thomas Newsom, "Bruce Selkirk is Sixth Generation to Head City's Famed Dynasty of Auctioneers," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 30 June 1979.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 7

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Johnstone's daughter, Louisa.² One of their sons, Benjamin Johnstone Selkirk, would carry on the family occupation and participate in the evolution of what had been a socially marginal profession. Indeed, the stereotypical 19th century auctioneer was described as a flamboyant figure "with a fog-horn voice, a walrus mustache and ingratiating manner.... His wardrobe consisted of a Prince Albert coat, trousers tucked into knee-length leather boots and wide brimmed hat and a hard-front shirt all but obscured by a flaming cravat into which was thrust a piece of ornate jewelry—a real diamond if he owned one."³ Akin to traveling salesmen, auctioneers depended upon their persuasive oratory talents as well as distinctive attire as they moved from town to town. "I understand that the early members of the family sold anything and everything—with one exception. They did not deal in slaves, although they owned them."⁴

Benjamin Johnstone Selkirk's career as a second-generation St. Louis auctioneer started in the hardscrabble traveling era and concluded with newly found respectability. Born in 1863, Ben Selkirk began his career as a messenger with Western Union Telegraph in 1878. The following year he opened a unique, street-side cigar business that attracted the attention of W. H. Haggerty who brought him into the auction jobbing business. Selkirk worked both for Haggerty and for himself, traveling all over the country. In 1889, he became a founding partner with his brother Alex in the firm of A. A. Selkirk & Co., general auctioneers and storage warehousemen. By 1906, Ben Selkirk rated a biography in the *Book of St. Louisans*.

Within a few years, brothers Ben and Alex parted company to become "friendly" competitors in the growing auction/storage business. No longer conducted on Main Street, Selkirk auctions depended upon warehoused stock or large-scale events staged at the site. A fire sale after a conflagration at Ely & Walker Dry Goods netted \$500,000; the bankruptcy of Ferguson & McKinney Dry Goods was also profitable. Furnishings auctioned from the old Southern Hotel included "costly tapestries and draperies imported from Europe and the handiwork of recognized artists." In a 1927 interview, Alex Selkirk reflected on the changing credentials required of the profession—noting that auctioneers historically had to be good judges of common merchandise since they dealt in articles of a value pretty well known to the public. "It's different now. An auctioneer must be an expert in many lines. He must be able to differentiate between a Flemish tapestry and a

² "Auctioneers for a Century," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 25 March 1934.

³ Selkirk, Ben J., Jr. "Auctioneers for a Century," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 25 March 1934.

⁴ *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 8

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Gobelin. He must know real Chinese jade when he sees it. He must be an expert judge of rugs, of jewels, of pottery. Moreover, he must be something of a lawyer and a pretty finished diplomat.... I might say that the change has been one toward more dignity."⁵

Meanwhile, the next generation at Ben J. Selkirk's was learning on the job; Ben Jr. and Alex A. Selkirk had been working for their father since ages thirteen and fourteen. By 1920, when they took over company management of Ben Selkirk & Sons, the brothers had acquired diversified knowledge about the "intrinsic values of articles whether objects of art, musical instruments, a library, a stock of hardware, a locomotive or a junkyard."⁶

Throughout the 1920s between eight to nine auction houses operated in St. Louis with total sales (excluding the Fur Exchange and Commission Row) estimated at \$7 million in 1927.⁷ The 1930 City Directory listed six auction houses still in business; by 1931, that number had dropped to three: Fleischer-Brown Mercantile Co., Missouri Auction Co. and Ben J. Selkirk & Sons. Fleischer-Brown would be gone within two years; Missouri Auction Co. closed around 1940. Ben Selkirk & Sons maintained offices in various downtown locations throughout the 1920s. Around 1933, they relocated to a small building at 4519 Olive Street in the Central West End. In March of 1936, the city was shocked to learn that Alex L. Selkirk had committed suicide.⁸ Within months, Ben made the decision to lease a larger building and recast the business a few blocks east in a large, vacant Ford/Lincoln dealership (the Ollie E. Haupt Motor Co.) owned by the Mississippi Valley Trust Company.

Elaboration

A permit to erect a \$200 sign was issued to Ben Selkirk on January 20, 1937 and the Selkirk Art Dispersal Auction Galleries made its debut, attracting hundreds of people to previews and auctions including in May of 1938 a reporter from the *Post-Dispatch*.

⁵ Selkirk, Alex. "The Old Time Auctioneer is Gone From St. Louis but the Business Flourishes," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 23 Oct. 1927.

⁶ "Auctioneers for a Century," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 25 March 1934.

⁷ Selkirk, Alex. "The Old Time Auctioneer is Gone From St. Louis but the Business Flourishes," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 23 Oct. 1927.

⁸ "Funeral Services for A. L. Selkirk Tomorrow Morning," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 12 March 1936.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 9

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

It has a curious resemblance to a combination art gallery showing, warehouse, antique shop, informal reception, and revival meeting, this public auction of the collections of two prominent St. Louisans and a group of art objects from an English gallery.⁹

The nameless scribe opened the feature article with an exhaustive description of the surroundings. Along the walls were glass cases filed with silverware, silver plate, porcelain, bronzes, glassware, figurines and bibelots of every description; nearby hung magnificent oriental and occidental carpets and paintings. On the floor stood an "amazingly heterogeneous assortment" of furniture, antique and modern, English and American and Chinese, statues, clocks, lamps, pedestals, "everything needed to furnish a most sumptuous home."¹⁰ Gallery administrator Frances Moore told the reporter that Selkirk's was one of three auction houses in the country operated for the sale of art properties where consignments received for final disposal went to the highest bidder, regardless of value.¹¹ Strenuous efforts were also made to prevent the artificial boosting of prices by "shillabers" representing the owners as items sold at a rate of one per minute.

If one had retained wealth during the Depression, it was an ideal time to buy. It was also an opportune time to be in the business. Ben J. Selkirk recalled later that they had begun the gallery auctions as a kind of "academic challenge." "Most of these things used to go to Eastern markets, and many people said we couldn't sell objects d'art in St. Louis. Well, the people who owned these things lived here. We started out by soliciting consignments. Then the work began to come in."¹²

Outside the fast-moving auction floor, times were tough as year by year, more homes of the elite were sold for back taxes. Some were razed. Estates that had been retained in the family now showed up at Selkirk's. Collections auctioned in 1939 included that of Frank Hamilton Britton (wealthy President of the Cotton Belt Railway who died in 1916). The dispersal of his estate including 175 oil paintings, a limited edition library, Early American furniture, English and American silverware and decorative arts took two afternoons and

⁹ "Public Auction of Art Objects," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 May 1938.

¹⁰ "Public Auction of Art Objects," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 May 1938.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² William F. Woo, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 29 April 1963.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 10

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

three evenings in April. Appointments from #26 Westmoreland Place along with those acquired by a former resident of Tokyo and an architect/artist/connoisseur were featured in October. The vast collection "achieved by the late Frank A. Ruf and belonging to the estate of the late Alpha H. Ruf" took eight sessions in November. That catalogue ran 231 pages and included 66 photographs.¹³

Figure 2: The Selkirk Building at 4166 Olive, circa 1945.



¹³ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 11

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

But by far the most significant auction from the perspective of historic preservation began on February 24, 1941 when Selkirk's began selling the contents of the Robert G. Campbell House (NR 4-21-1977) at 15th and Locust Streets. Built in 1851 as part of the prestigious Lucas Place and purchased by Robert and Virginia Campbell in 1854, the house had become isolated in a smoky commercial district. When the last Campbell son died in 1938, most of the estate including the house (little changed since the mid 19th century) was bequeathed to Yale University. (Two remaining family servants received \$60,000 each.) The local William Clark Society formed a committee to try and save the house and furnishings. In just a few weeks the committee raised over \$6,500 to purchase most of the contents at auction. Other items were bought and donated by sympathetic individuals.

Furnishings of the ornate Victorian home that Fur Trader Robert Campbell had assembled and which his two sons, Hugh and Hazlett, had guarded from alien eyes in a new and changing world, continued to be sold yesterday under the decisive thumping of the auctioneer's hammer. The contents ...including Indian buckskin suits, Victorian dresses and massive eighteenth century furniture were sold at the Selkirk Galleries, 4166 Olive Street, before an afternoon and evening audience of 1,800 persons.¹⁴

Later that year the Campbell House Foundation was officially incorporated with the intent of turning the relic into a house museum. In 1942, department store Stix, Baer & Fuller purchased the house from Yale and donated it to the Foundation which opened the house to the public in 1943. The collection of original furnishings from that auction has been carefully maintained over the years, providing the foundation for one of the most authentic museum houses in the Midwest.

In January of 1944, the Mississippi Valley Trust Company transferred the property at 4166 Olive Street to Ben J. and his wife Maryrose Selkirk for \$100. Gradually antiquarians and Oriental rug shops joined the quiet little commercial district well served by the Olive streetcar line. Over the next decade the periodic gallery dispersals held on Selkirk's second floor provided cache, free public entertainment and 25% commissions, but the smaller, more utilitarian Wednesday morning auctions on the first floor helped

¹⁴ "Campbell Auction Goes On With Museum Group Still Chief Buyer," *St. Louis Star-Times*, February 1941.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 12

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

pay a staff of a dozen, as did appraisals for all the local trust companies for inheritance tax purposes. At some point Selkirk's became the official auctioneers for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, a point of great pride for self-taught Ben Selkirk. "This brings us in contact with a different phase of commerce every time somebody goes into bankruptcy."¹⁵ Known as "Mr. Ben" to his staff, Selkirk drove a sporty red Thunderbird and peppered his interviews with pithy quotes: "An auction is still an auction, whether you're selling French furniture or a pig. We just give it a little more *éclat* here." "Why, we've had customers die and stipulate in their will that their property is to be sold by us."¹⁶

In February of 1959 a tornado hit near the corner of Olive and Boyle, narrowly missing Selkirk's. Many of the businesses along Olive received insurance money to rebuild, but the neighborhood began to change into a club and restaurant destination known as Gaslight Square. Most of the antique stores in rented space were priced off the street. Ben Selkirk decided to remain, even though his son Bruce had elected to pursue another career. In 1967, Georgetown-educated Bruce Selkirk Jr. joined his grandfather Ben in the family business in time to receive training from the master—described in 1963 as part sideshow pitchman, part art connoisseur, part stump orator and part P. T. Barnum.¹⁷ Bruce's lunchtime was often spent in arguments about the merits of modern art and furniture even though Ben insisted: "*degustibus non est disputandum*" taste may not be argued.¹⁸ Ben Selkirk, the "Dean of Auctioneers," died of a heart attack at his home in upscale Ladue in 1971 at the age of 74.

The business continued to prosper under mild-mannered Bruce Selkirk's leadership, attracting purchasers even as Gaslight Square imploded and the neighborhood began to deteriorate. After holding a few experimental auctions in rented quarters in St. Louis County in the 1970s and discovering the price of available real estate, Bruce Selkirk recalled something his grandfather said: "... there is a lot of success waiting for companies going against the tide. Many others have left this area, but this building has been Selkirk's for so many years it would be a shame to leave it unless we had to..."¹⁹

¹⁵ William F. Woo, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 29 April 1963.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, "Heredit's a Potent Thing," 16 Nov. 1968.

¹⁹ Thomas Newsom, "Bruce Selkirk is Sixth Generation to Head City's Famed Dynasty of Auctioneers," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 30 June 1979.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 13

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Finally, in April of 1994, Bruce announced that Selkirk's would move to the old Famous Barr department store at Forsyth Boulevard and Jackson Avenue in Clayton, Missouri. Notice of the last auction at 4166 Olive Street (June 25, 1995) was covered by Robert Duffy, Cultural News Editor of the *Post-Dispatch*.

Opera Theatre of St. Louis purchased the Olive Street building for rehearsal and storage space in 1998. In April of that year, Phillips Fine Art Auctioneers (British-based) bought Selkirk's business in Clayton for an undisclosed amount. Senator Thomas F. Eagleton remarked: "The Selkirk name is an institution in St. Louis. With the Selkirks out of the art business, it's like saying the Busches are out of the beer business."²⁰ Eight months later Bruce Selkirk Jr. died of cancer at age 53. Opera Theatre recently sold the Olive Street building to a developer. It is scheduled to become the only adaptive reuse in a brand new housing development dubbed "Gas Light Square."

²⁰ Barbara Hertenstein, "Going, Going, Gone...." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 3 June 1998.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 14

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

Bibliography

Hertenstein, Barbara. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "Bruce Selkirk, 6th-Generation Auctioneer, Dies." 17 Dec. 1998.

Hertenstein, Barbara. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "Going, Going, Gone...." 3 June 1998.

Marcella, Marlene. Email correspondence between Ivey-Selkirk employee and Susan Sheppard, February 2005.

Missouri Historical Society. *Mercantile and Manufacturing Scrapbook*. Vol. 6, p. 79.

Newsom, Thomas. *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*. "Bruce Selkirk is Sixth Generation to Head City's Famed Dynasty of Auctioneers." 30 June 1979.

St. Louis Commerce. "Auction Fever." May 1977, p. 52-55.

St. Louis Commerce. "Going Once, Going Twice." March 1989. p. 62.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. 14 Sept. 1972.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. "Auctioneers for a Century." 25 March 1934.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. "Funeral Services for A. L. Selkirk Tomorrow Morning." 12 March 1936.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. "Heredity's a Potent Thing." 16 Nov. 1968.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. "The Old Time Auctioneer is Gone From St. Louis but the Business Flourishes." 23 Oct. 1927.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. "Painting by St. Louis-born Artist Sells Here for \$190,000." 20 May 1983.

St. Louis Globe-Democrat. "What Am I Bid for a Notable Collection?" 4 Dec. 1975.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 15

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "Ben J. Selkirk, 74, Dies; Dean of Auctioneers Here." 15 Feb. 1971.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "Public Auction of Art Objects." 2 May 1938.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "Selkirk's Shift to End Gaslight Era." 11 April 1994

St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "Selkirk is Moving Part of Operation to Clayton." 14 April 1994.

St. Louis Star-Times. "Campbell Auction Goes On With Museum Group Still Chief Buyer." February 1941.

West End Word. "Selkirk's Still in the Family After 150 Years." Vol. 20, No. 24. 27 Nov. 1991.

West End Word. "Selkirk's to Move Auctions to Clayton's Old Famous-Barr Site." Vol. 23 No. 9. 5 May 1994.

West End Word. "Opera Theatre Buys Former Selkirk Building." Vol. 27, No. 19. 14 May 1998.

Woo, William F. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 29 April 1963.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10 Page 16

Selkirk, Ben J. & Sons, Building
St. Louis [Independent City], Missouri

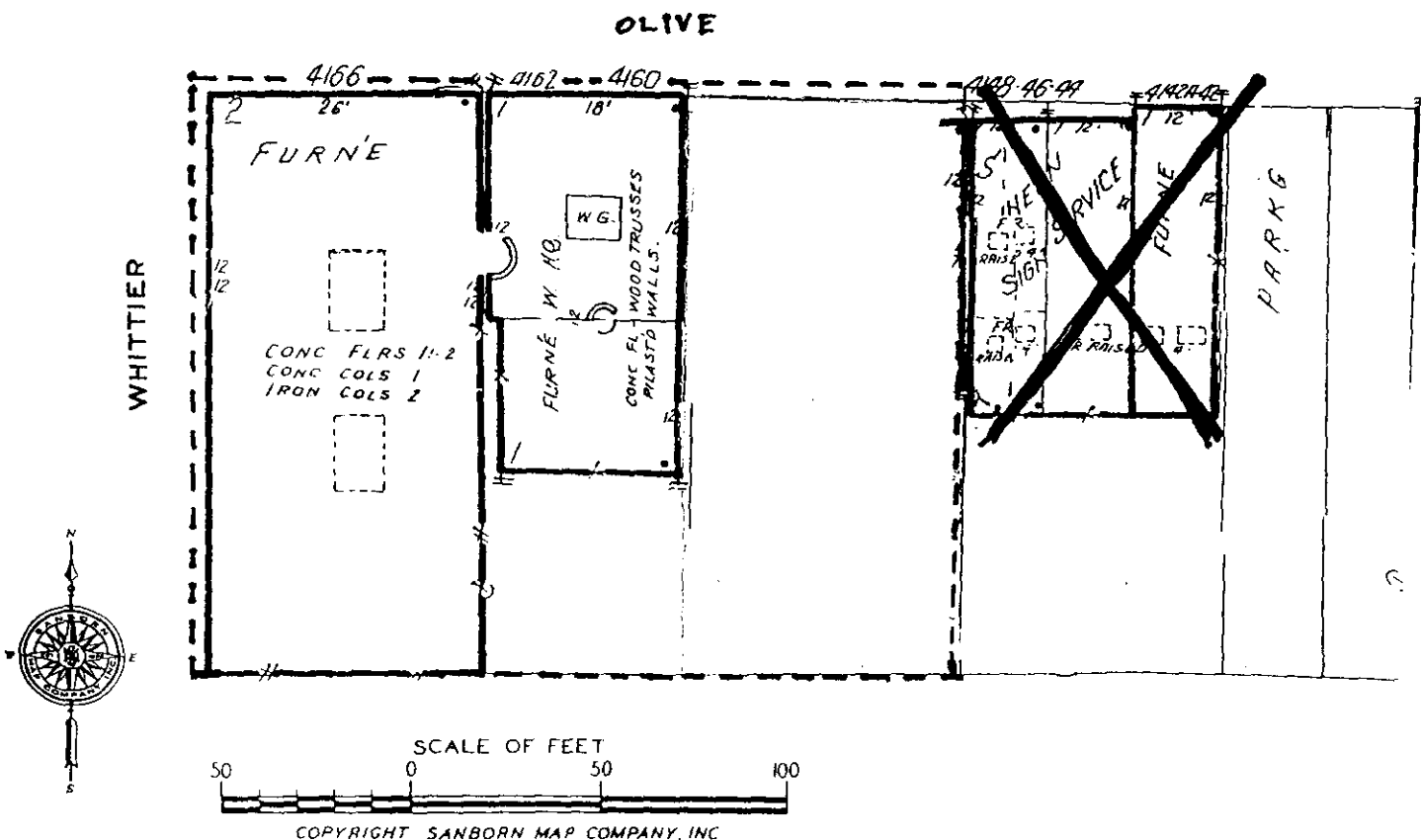
Boundary Description

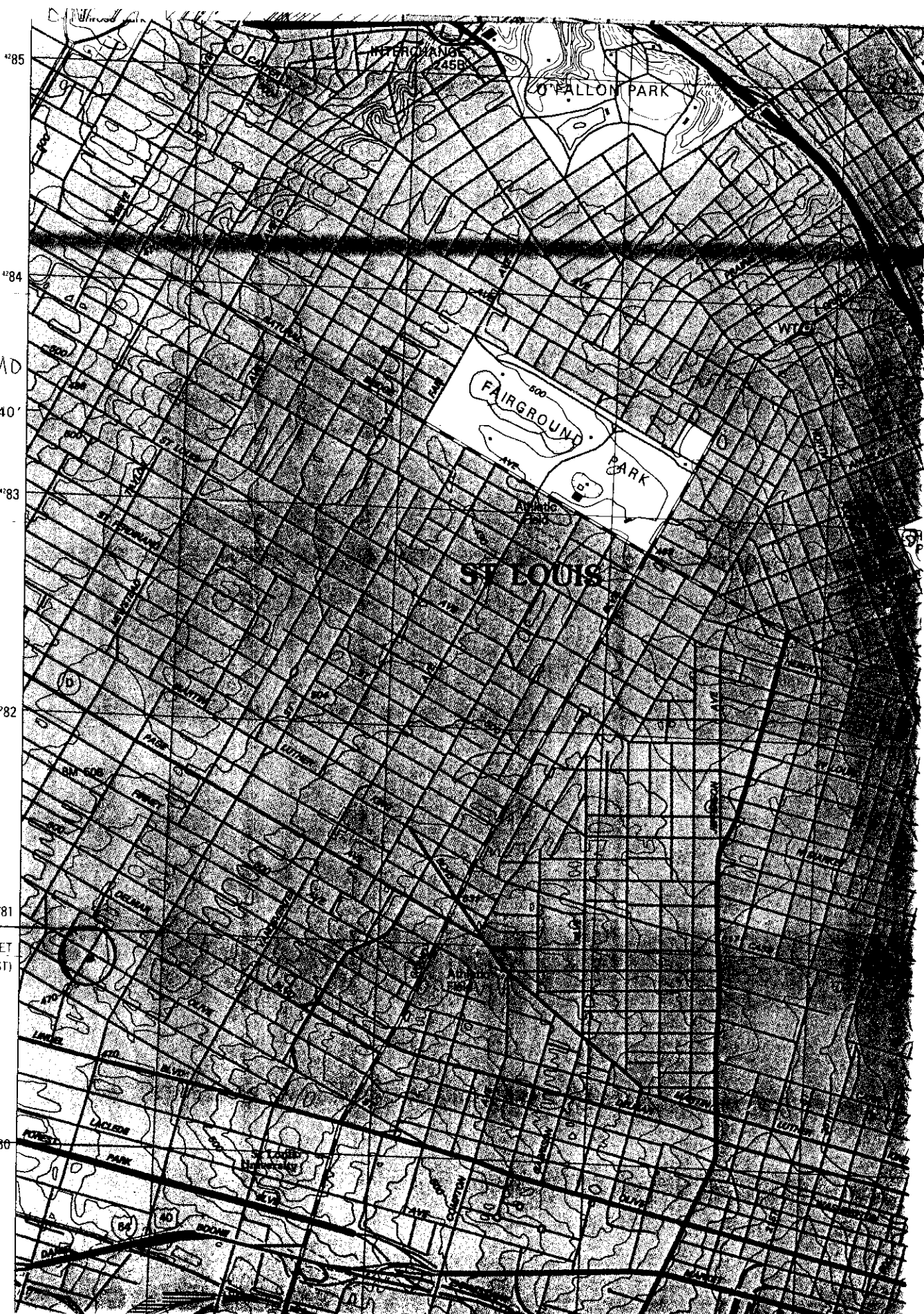
The Ben J. Selkirk and Sons Building is located at 4160-66 Olive Street in St. Louis, Missouri. The building is on city block 3911; it is a parcel of Lindell's Addition. It measures approximately 129' by 154' and is bound by Whittier on the west, Olive Street on the north, a parking lot on the east, and an alley on the south. The nominated parcel also includes the parking lot at 4152 Olive, which has been historically associated with and used by the Selkirk business. The nominated parcel is indicated by a dashed line on the accompanying map entitled "Selkirk Building Boundary Map."

Boundary Justification

The nominated parcel includes all of the property historically associated with the Ben J. Selkirk & Sons Building.

Selkirk Building Boundary Map. Source: Sanborn Map Company, vol. 5, plate 46, circa 1968.





Selkirk & Sons
ing
o Olive St.
ns [Ind. City], MO
15
ing 739 660
ing 4280 860

720 000 FEET
(1:125,000)

38°50'

38°40'

38°30'

38°20'

38°10'

38°00'

90°00'

90°10'

90°20'

INTERCHANGE
245B

O'FALLON PARK

500
FAIRGROUND

PARK

ST LOUIS

FOREST PARK

ROCKY

DANCE



172



176





74



OPERA
THEATRE
of SAINT
LOUIS
4166
OLIVE
BLVD.

