

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name 1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building

other name/site number Century Motor Company; Erwin Davis Motor Company; McGee Radio

2. Location

street & town 1901-07 McGee Street N/A not for publication

city or town Kansas City N/A vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64108

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mark A. Miles
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO

December 8, 2008
Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ 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:) _____

1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building
Name of Property

Jackson County, MO
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

0

buildings
sites
structures
objects
Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store

Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN
MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Brick
Stucco
roof Asphalt
other

Narrative Description

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

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building
Name of Property

Jackson County, MO
County and State

8. Description

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1912 -1941

Significant Dates

1912

1941

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Smith, C.C.

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City (MO) Public Library

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building
Name of Property

Jackson County, MO
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

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

1 1/5 3/6/3/3/6/5 4/3/2/7/7/0
Zone Easting Northing

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

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

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

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The East 118 feet of Lots 544 & 545, Block 40, McGee's Addition to Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Property Tax No. N/A

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The National Register boundary encompasses the parcel of land historically associated with the building.

☐ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Rosin, Principal

organization Rosin Preservation, LLC date 1 April 2008

street & number 215 West 18th Street, Suite 150 telephone 816-472-4950

city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs: Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name/title Kay Beldon Winterowd, Trustee

street & number 9400 Madison telephone

city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64114

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Number 7 Page 1

1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building
Jackson County, Missouri

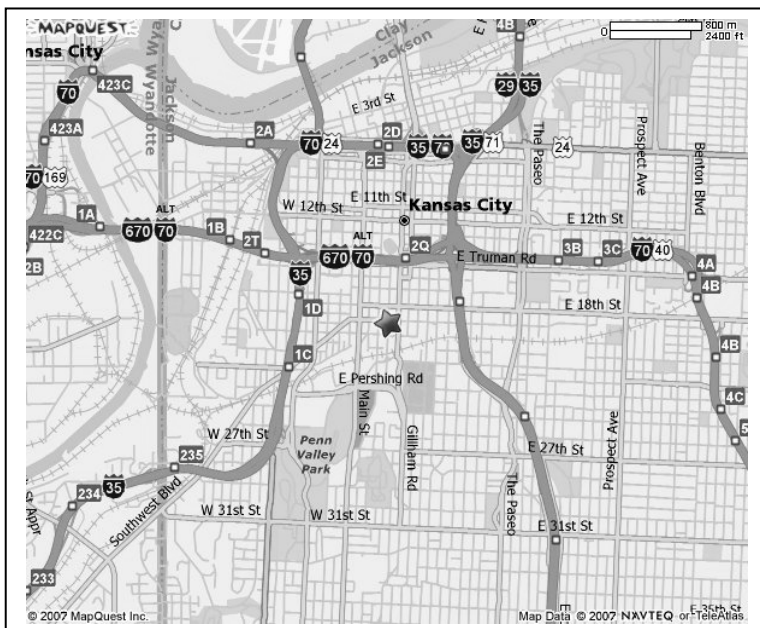
SUMMARY

The automotive service building at 1901 McGee Street, Jackson County, Missouri occupies the southeast corner of the 19th Street and McGee Street intersection, approximately one mile south of Kansas City's central business district and approximately one-quarter mile north of the Crown Center business/entertainment district and the Union Station. The two-story building is a two-part commercial block with simple architectural styling. The brick walls rest on a concrete foundation. The nearly square footprint measures six bays on the east and west (front and rear) elevations and seven bays on the north elevation. Two metal-framed skylights pierce the flat asphalt roof. Interior structural elements include a load-bearing masonry wall that divides the building north-south into two commercial spaces, massive steel I-beams that support the second story, and steel turnbuckle roof trusses that hang below the second floor ceiling. A nearly continuous band of double-hung windows rings the building at the second story. Metal panels, installed in 1968, cover the plate glass windows in the first story openings. The building otherwise retains architectural integrity and clearly communicates its historic associations with the early automobile industry.

ELABORATION

SETTING

The commercial building at 1901 McGee Street occupies a corner lot in the Crossroads, a commercial and light-industrial district located between Kansas City's central business district and Crown Center, a mixed-use development constructed during the mid-twentieth century. Just west of Crown Center is Union Station, whose construction a century ago spurred the development of Crossroads as an industrial manufacturing and warehousing district. To the north, the adjacent blocks of McGee Street are densely built with two- and three-story, early-twentieth century commercial buildings and industrial warehouses, many of which also have associations with automobile sales and service businesses. A one-story building survives immediately south of the nominated property and a two-story building of similar vintage anchors the south end of the block. No buildings survive on the west side of the



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street, which presently functions as a surface parking lot. Along Grand Boulevard, one block west of McGee Street, the buildings become larger in both height and footprint. The buildings on the 2000 and 2100 blocks of Grand Boulevard include the National Register-listed Firestone Building and Western Auto Building.

Like the nearby buildings, 1901 McGee Street abuts the concrete sidewalk on its street-facing (west and north) elevations. Behind the building, there is a small asphalt-paved strip between the rear (east) wall of the building and the brick alley that bisects the block. Across the alley to the east is a paved surface parking lot that was historically associated with the building.

EXTERIOR

The brick walls of 1901 McGee Street are painted gray. Historic stucco covers the brick in three locations: above the second story windows, on the unfenestrated section of the north wall, and on the blank walls of the elevator penthouse at the rear of the building. The stucco band above the second story windows has a simple metal cornice that extends across the north and west street-facing elevations. A second beltcourse runs below the second story windows on the same elevations.

The front and side walls rise above the roof to form a parapet. Metal flashing caps the parapet. There are two small brick chimney flues at the rear (northeast and southeast) corners of the building, and at the center of the rear (east) wall, a stucco elevator penthouse rises several feet above the roof.

In the second story, bands of large windows separated by narrow brick piers define six bays on the front and rear (west and east) elevations and seven bays on the north (19th Street) elevation. Each bay contains three, large, three-part wood windows, each composed of double-hung sashes topped by an operable transom sash. Each sash is a single-light.

After a period of rioting in 1968 the building owner installed corrugated metal panels over all of the window openings. Panels have been removed from the second story and these windows (frames and sashes) remain intact. The panels still cover the first story openings. Investigation revealed that some of the first-story plate glass storefront windows have been removed or broken, and it is not clear if the extant windows are historic or were replaced after the period of significance. Wood studs, drywall, and insulation fill some of the first story openings. A substantial remodeling in 1946-47 replaced the original storefront transom with black structural glass. One small section of transom remains visible above the vehicular door at the south end of the west façade. The structural glass was removed prior to the installation of the metal panels in 1968. Plywood covers the first story openings on the rear elevation.

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The building has several pedestrian and vehicular entrances. The primary pedestrian entrance is recessed in a clipped northwest corner, facing the intersection of 19th and McGee Streets. A wood post supports the second story in front of the glazed, metal door. There is also a vehicular entrance at the south end of the primary (west) façade. This configuration conforms to the openings visible on a photograph of the building taken c. 1953. At the center of the rear (east) elevation is a second vehicular entrance with a coiling metal door. This entrance provides direct access into the freight elevator inside of building. Metal slab pedestrian doors in the rear wall flank the vehicular entrance.

INTERIOR

The interior configuration and finishes of 1901 McGee Street clearly reflect its historic commercial function. The substantial structural system, visible on both floors, indicates its intended use for automobile sales and service. The structural masonry wall that divides the building into north and south halves on both floors suggests the original dual-tenant design.

Inside the corner entrance, the original north storefront has a somewhat higher level of finishes than the rest of the building. There is a linoleum tile floor and a hard surface ceiling with fluorescent tube light fixtures. Where the storefront windows were removed the openings are filled with painted gypsum board. The south wall (the structural partition wall) has a painted plaster finish.

Midway back in the space there is a wall with ribbed glass panels separated by chrome-trimmed mullions. Behind this wall a series of sales offices extend along the north wall toward the rear of the building. The office walls are framed with painted wood. Glazing fills in the upper half. Wood doors open from the offices onto a narrow corridor. On the south side of the corridor are utilitarian spaces, such as a restroom and a storage closet.

The south storefront has more utilitarian finishes, including a concrete floor, painted plaster walls, exposed wood joists, and wide beadboard decking at the ceiling. Also visible at the ceiling are massive, riveted steel beams that span the space (north-south) and provide superior structural support to the upper floor. This half of the building is unpartitioned.

On the second floor, large openings have been cut toward the rear (east) end of the brick partition wall to create a unified space. A second wall near the front of the building divides the south half of the floor east-west. A wide opening is punched through the center of this wall. The historic wood windows are visible on three elevations (north, east, and west). Painted plaster finishes the unfenestrated south wall and the partition walls. The floors are unfinished wood planks. Each half of the space has a single, hipped, multi-light metal skylight.

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1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building
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The most distinctive feature of the second story is the visible ceiling structure. It features a series of metal turn-buckle trusses that hang below square wood beams that tie into the masonry partition wall. Between the beams, painted pressboard panels cover the ceiling.

There is a mezzanine sandwiched between the first and second floors toward the rear of the building. The mezzanine is an irregular space with multiple floor levels. It currently serves as a storage area. The first floor ceiling structure (steel beams, wood joists, and beadboard) are clearly visible on the mezzanine. In some areas one must duck below a beam in order to move from space to space. The mezzanine also has unfinished wood floors and painted plaster walls.

Vertical circulation in the building occurs via one elevator and two flights of stairs. The massive freight elevator is centered on the rear (east) wall. It can be accessed from the exterior in the alley, from the first floor, from the second floor, and from the mezzanine. The elevator is sized to allow the transfer of extremely large, heavy cargo, such as multiple automobiles, in to, out of, and within the building.

The staircases are both located toward the rear of the building. A straight run stair leads from the north commercial space to the mezzanine. It has a single wood handrail attached to one of the flanking walls. The second stair begins along the north wall behind the sales office. It has turned balusters and a wood railing. It winds up from the first floor, providing access to the mezzanine and to the second floor.

INTEGRITY

The commercial building at 1901 McGee Street has experienced a variety of alterations over its nearly one hundred-year history. The most significant was the installation of metal panels and partial removal of the first-story plate glass storefront windows, although no changes were made to the masonry openings at the first story. Panels were also installed over the second story windows, but all of these windows remain intact. The building also retains its two-part commercial block form and the distinct features that communicate its construction to serve the nascent automobile industry. One of two original vehicular entrances on the primary (west) elevation remains extant, as does a vehicular entrance on the rear elevation.¹ The original freight elevator, sized to transport automobiles within the building, also survives. Most importantly, the over-sized steel beams at the first story ceiling and the turnbuckle trusses at the second story ceiling represent unique and early efforts to design commercial buildings capable of supporting the heavy loads required by the automobile service and sales industry. These features accommodated the weight of cars being stored or serviced on the second story with a minimum number of vertical columns, which would restrict movement within the building.

¹ The other vehicular entrance on the west elevation was removed prior to 1953.

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1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building
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SUMMARY

The commercial building at 1901 McGee Street, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of ARCHITECTURE. It deftly illustrates the specialized adaptation of a typical main street commercial building for automobile sales and service functions. As the popularity of automobiles soared, real estate investors constructed this building near the heart of Kansas City's nascent Automobile Row. By blending a traditional commercial façade with physical elements that addressed the specific needs of automobile sales and service, the building met the needs of tenants and consumers. Distinctive features include large storefront windows on the first story, which gave passersby a clear view of the vehicles for sale inside; large expanses of over-sized windows on the second story and skylights in the roof, which provided ample light and ventilation to work areas on the second floor; and an oversized freight elevator capable of transporting vehicles, as well as auto parts, from the back alley to the first floor or the second floor. Most notable, though, is the building's highly unique structural system, which supplements a typical early-twentieth century masonry and wood structure with massive steel I-beams that span the ceiling on the first floor and distinctive turnbuckle trusses that hang from the ceiling on the second floor. These structural enhancements responded to the very heavy loads the building had to support to serve its intended function. The automotive service building at 1901 McGee Street clearly embodies this type and period of commercial design and is characteristic example of the automotive service buildings that survive from the heyday of Kansas City's automobile row. The period of significance, 1912 – 1941, reflects the dates of construction and a significant renovation.

ELABORATION

ARCHITECTURE FOR AUTOMOBILES

When automobiles first appeared early in the twentieth century, they were novelties owned only by the wealthy. Building automobiles was a labor-intensive process that kept automobile costs high – between \$2,000 and \$3,000 – roughly twice the annual income of an average United States worker.² Buying a car, making repairs, servicing vehicles, and even finding fuel were cumbersome, complicated tasks.

Automobile-related businesses initially functioned as adjunct operations to existing businesses. Livery stables and carriage shops leased and sold cars. Feed stores and groceries sold gasoline. Blacksmiths made repairs. The rocketing demand for vehicles and services soon exceeded the capacity of these existing businesses to provide the support the industry required.³

² Susan Richards Johnson and Nicole M. Sabatini, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for The Kirkwood Building, 1737-41 McGee Street, Kansas City, Missouri, (Kansas City, Missouri: Susan Richards Johnson & Associates, Inc., 2001), 8-18.

³ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), 75-76.

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Before World War I, carmakers developed a variety of technological, marketing, and business strategies that reduced costs and increased profits. Early innovations included the first step-in closed-car design, Cadillac's 1905 Osceola, as well as Charles F. Kettering's 1911 invention of the electric self-starter.⁴ The most significant advance in the industry was Ford's introduction of the assembly line at the Highland Park, Michigan Model T manufacturing plant in 1913. The drastically lower cost of production allowed volume to rise and retail prices to drop. Ford also introduced the concept of the rebate in 1914, a marketing practice that remains popular today. Other automobile manufacturers followed suit and once the automobile became affordable for the average American, its popularity skyrocketed. From 1914 to 1917, annual automobile production in the United States jumped from 573,000 to 1.9 million.⁵

The increasing popularity and availability of the automobile in Kansas City reflected national trends. Listings under "Automobiles" in the business section of *Hoye's Kansas City Directory* grew from a single vendor in 1900 to six vendors in 1903 to 20 vendors in 1906. In 1907, the city's first auto show attracted 20,000 visitors, even though only a few hundred Kansas Citians actually owned automobiles. A mere 400 cars maneuvered Kansas City streets at the time, whereas fifteen years later the number had grown to 55,000.⁶ Listings for automobile and "motor car" companies in Kansas City, Missouri city directories corroborate this trend. The number tripled in less than five years, from twenty in 1906 to seventy in 1910. By the end of the following decade, the number of automobile dealers outranked all other retail establishments, with the exception of food vendors.⁷

Savvy entrepreneurs, like the developers of 1901 McGee Street, seized the opportunity to establish specialized businesses that catered solely to the needs of automobile owners. At first, automotive businesses operated from existing commercial blocks on Main Street. As these merchants outgrew their converted nineteenth century buildings, they constructed buildings specifically to sell and service automobiles. Developers also began building a new type of commercial district — "automobile row." These building clusters were located just outside the traditional downtown, usually along a streetcar line, where land was less expensive than in the central business district. Automobile row included all kinds of automotive-related establishments, from new and used car sales to parts, service, and repair.

⁴ General Motors Corporation, "GM Corporate History – 1910," *General Motors Corporation*, cited in Elizabeth Rosin and Kerry Davis, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Greenlease Cadillac Building, 2900 Gillham Road, Kansas City, Missouri, (Kansas City, Missouri: Historic Preservation Services, LLC, 2002), 8-13.

⁵ Genat, 9.

⁶ "Kansas City's Motor and Street Growth Since 1908." *Kansas City (MO) Star*, 24 June 1923 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm.

⁷ Sherry Lamb Schirmer and Richard D. McKinzie, *At the River's Bend: An Illustrated History of Kansas City, Independence and Jackson County*, (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982) 229.

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Kansas City's automobile row first developed along the north-south arteries of Main, Grand, McGee, and Locust streets between 11th and 18th streets. By 1906, almost 60 percent of the twenty-four listings under "Automobiles" in *Hoye's Kansas City Directory* were in this area.⁸ By 1910, the total number quadrupled, with the majority of new listings located along the same north-south arteries and extending as far south as 35th Street.

As early as 1904 there was talk of improving McGee Street by connecting it to the city's boulevard system. Discussion resumed around the time construction began on Union Station. Specifically, some civic and business leaders raised the possibility of removing street car tracks from McGee Street to improve driving conditions for automobiles. The idea was met with outrage. One local business owner pronounced, "Take the street cars off McGee Street! What bosh!" If the proposal went forward, he believed, "...there won't be a half dozen business houses on McGee street [sic] in six months."⁹ Over the objections of business owners, the Mayor signed an ordinance creating a trackless McGee Street in November 1916. The result, in fact, was quite the opposite of the dire consequences many anticipated. Once dedicated to automobile traffic, McGee Street south of 15th Street thrived as a dense node of automotive sales and service businesses.

Even before the streetcars were removed, McGee Street was a hub for automobiles. The heart of Kansas City's Automobile Row during the 1910s generally centered around McGee Street and Grand Avenue between 15th and 20th streets. This area included almost one-half of all automotive businesses in Kansas City in 1920.¹⁰ In 1912, the speculative construction of an auto service building at the corner of 19th and McGee Streets was a wise business decision.

This first generation of purpose-built auto dealerships and service centers continued to mimic the designs of traditional Main Street commercial blocks. Like 1901 McGee Street, they were simple one- or two-story brick structures configured with a storefront, an upper story, and a cornice. Their footprints abutted the sidewalk, creating a dense street wall with the adjacent buildings. This adaptation of the traditional commercial building form lent an air of respectability to the still nascent automobile industry.¹¹

While they retained the guise of traditional Main Street commercial blocks, the new automotive business buildings differed from their cousins in ways that addressed the specific requirements of the products they sold and the needs of their customers. Like other commercial buildings, they had to accommodate both more-polished, public areas for sales and utilitarian areas for service. At 1901 McGee, the slightly higher level of finishes in the

⁸ *Thirty-sixth Annual Issue 1906 Hoye's Kansas City Directory*, (Kansas City: Hoye Directory Company, 1906), 1544.

⁹ "M'Gee Trafficway Idea Is Ridiculed," *Kansas City*, 8 July 1915, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library, Mounted Clippings.

¹⁰ Sabatini, 4.

¹¹ Leibs, 40-41.

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north storefront bay reflects its historic role as the auto showroom. The floor has linoleum tiles instead of bare concrete; a hard surface ceiling covers the otherwise exposed structural elements; and the glass and chrome wall clearly delineates the public showroom from the office and service functions to the east. By contrast, the south half of the building is a large open space with a concrete floor and exposed ceiling structure. The second floor service areas are similarly unfinished.

The possibility of fire and the ventilation of gas fumes were real concerns for automotive businesses, and providing ample ventilation was necessary for a successful design. These buildings incorporated a variety of fire proof materials in their construction, such as concrete, hollow clay tile, brick, terra cotta, and stone. In early automotive buildings, the more modern fire proof materials were often used in tandem with more traditional wood framing systems. Abundant windows brought light into the interior and featured operable sashes to expel fumes. Illustrating these trends, the design for 1901 McGee features concrete floors, hollow clay tile walls, and steel I-beams along with wood ceiling joists and floor decks. The large double-hung windows that encircle the second story amply ventilated the upstairs automobile service areas.

Likewise, 1901 McGee Street featured oversized display windows to showcase the oversized products sold inside. The masonry openings and historic photos reveal that the first story was composed almost entirely of plate glass storefront windows resting on very low bulkhead walls. The glazing was virtually uninterrupted by structural elements. While the glazing has been removed, the expansive masonry openings survive intact.

As motor vehicles became more common, traffic congestion became a concern to the public and to business owners. Designs that allowed cars to enter the building were expensive to build but removed congestion from the street.¹² One feature that distinguishes 1901 McGee Street from other non-automotive commercial buildings of this period are multiple vehicular entrances — one at the south end of the primary (west) façade and one centered on the rear (east) façade.

The most significant difference between automotive buildings and non-automotive commercial buildings of this vintage is a hybrid structural system that allowed auto parts and vehicles to be stored, assembled, and moved into and within the building. The structural system had to accommodate heavy, dead weight as well as live loads, while utilizing column spacing that did not obstruct internal circulation.¹³ The structural system of 1901 McGee Street is a highly unique amalgam that combines traditional load-bearing masonry walls and wood beams with enhanced structural elements on both floors to accommodate the weight of the merchandise. At the first floor ceiling massive steel I-beams span each of the original storefront spaces. On the second floor, turnbuckle trusses

¹² Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), 7.

¹³ "American Architecture, 1891-1941: Commercial," *Architectural Record*, Vol. 89 (January 1941), 130-2.

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hang from wood ceiling beams. In both cases, the structural elements anchor into the outer masonry walls and to the masonry partition wall that bisects the building.

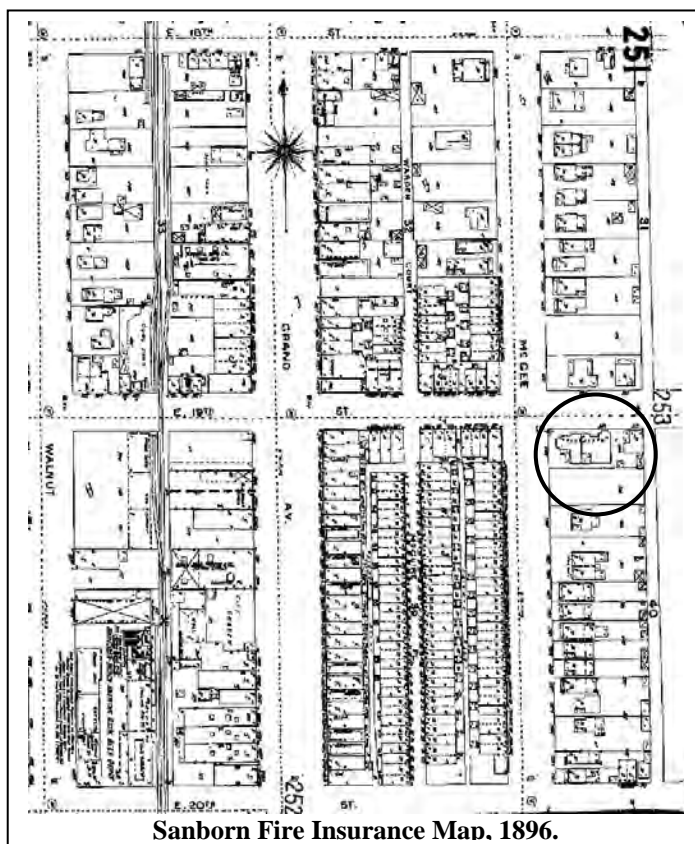
As the popularity and affordability of automobiles grew through the 1920s, the design and siting of automotive buildings became increasingly specialized. Moving away from traditional Main Street density, by the end of the decade it was common for these businesses to occupy larger lots on the outskirts of town, away from the traditional business district. The buildings themselves were placed toward the rear of the lot to provide customers with ample parking and easy street access. Concrete became a preferred building material, although concrete structures were often faced with brick to provide a more-traditional appearance that complemented nearby residential and commercial buildings. By the 1940s, when 1901 McGee Street became an auto dealership, the owners utilized property they owned across the alley to the east (rear) of the building to create a parking lot for vehicle stock.

PROPERTY HISTORY

19th Street & McGee Street

At the end of the nineteenth century, the vicinity of 19th Street and McGee Street was a residential neighborhood. An extremely dense development of one-story row houses lined the west side of McGee Street between 19th and 20th Streets. The north-south alleys bisecting these blocks were named streets also lined with row houses. A less dense assortment of one and two-story, single-family and duplex dwellings lined the flanking blocks of McGee Street. A two-story tenement apartment building anchored the southeast corner of 19th and McGee Streets. Grand Avenue, one block to the west, was a commercial district, with low commercial buildings filling nearly every lot.

This pattern of development remained substantially intact thirteen years later. The 1909 Sanborn Map shows a similar pattern of residential and commercial buildings. The former tenement at the



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1896.

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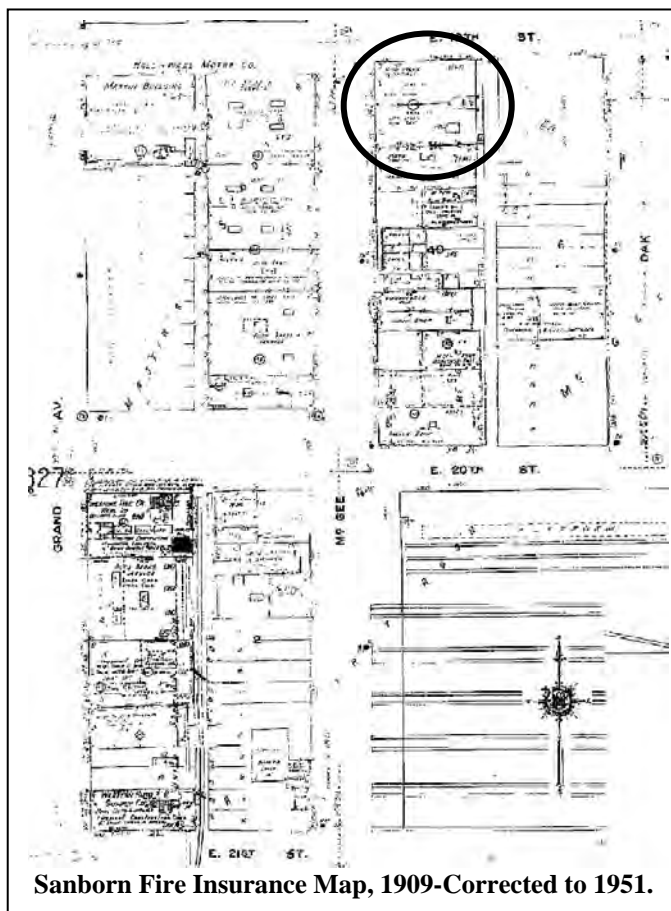
1901 McGee Street Automotive Service Building
Jackson County, Missouri

corner of 19th and McGee now housed the Franklin Institute, a charitable organization, while an influx of industrial concerns south of 20th Street foreshadowed the construction of Union Station a few blocks to the southeast in the coming decade.

In addition to the Franklin Institute, there were three other structures on the parcel at the southeast corner of 19th and McGee. Two of these were one story sheds located south of the main building. East of the Institute and just west of the alley was the third building, a small one-story dwelling facing 19th Street.

The construction of Union Station a few blocks to the southwest in 1914-17 spurred dramatic changes to the built environment around 19th Street and McGee Street. In conjunction with the development of the train station, the Kansas City Terminal Railway Company built a large rail yard south of 20th Street. Rail spurs extended north from rail yard along the alleys that bisected most blocks west of McGee Street. By 1925, a variety of large and small industrial buildings had replaced the row houses and small commercial blocks in the vicinity of the nominated property. This pattern encompassed both sides of McGee Street as well as the blocks to the west, while the area east of McGee retained the earlier development pattern.

By 1951, no residential buildings survived in the vicinity of 19th and McGee Streets. The area had attained the larger commercial character that it retains today. During the subsequent decades, demolition significantly reduced the density of the area. Notably, no buildings survive west of the nominated property to Grand Boulevard nor on the south end of the 1900 block of McGee Street.



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Building History

The nominated building at 1901-07 McGee Street was erected in 1912 for \$20,000. A building permit issued that August identifies the Belfast Investment Company as the owner. Architect/builder C.C. Smith erected a 99-foot by 111-foot, two-story, brick and stone building with hollow tile walls.¹⁴ The roof was tar and gravel. Five years later, the storeroom at 1905 McGee Street was remodeled for \$1,000.¹⁵

For five decades, a series of auto-related businesses rotated through the building. Some sold new or used vehicles; others sold car parts and supplies. Until the 1940s, the building housed two distinct businesses in storefronts at 1901 and 1905 McGee Street. Typically, an auto sales company occupied the more-prominent corner storefront, while an auto parts supplier occupied the adjacent, south storefront.



The first building tenants, listed in the 1915 city directory, were the Gate City Motor Company and Wilcox Trux, a division of the Chamberlin-Goodloe Motor Company. Interestingly, the city directory identifies both as tenants of 1905 McGee Street. Subsequent occupants of the south storefront included, the Prest-O-Lite Company (auto headlights, 1917), Kansas City Battery & Supply Company (1920), Kansas City Motor Sales Company (used cars, 1925), Martin-Parry Corporation (commercial auto bodies, 1930), the commercial body division of the Dahl Chevrolet dealership (1931), and the Luthy-Emmons Corporation (brakes, 1932). Tenants of the corner storefront were the King Motor Car Sales Corporation (a distributor of King Motor Cars, 1916), the Dey Motor Car Company (1920s), and the Hughes Brothers used car dealership (1930). The corner storefront sat vacant from 1931 thru 1940. The adjacent storefront at 1905 McGee was also vacant between 1935 and 1940. While it does

¹⁴ Review of city directories identified contractors named Charles N. Smith and Charles E. Smith in 1912. A contractor named Charles C. Smith appeared in 1914. It is unclear which of these individuals, if any, built this property. None appears to be related to noted architect Charles A. Smith, who was also active during this period.

¹⁵ It is possible that the permitted work actually referred to "storefront" alterations rather than "storeroom" alterations.

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not appear in the available city directories, a newspaper article reports that Esquire Motors, a Lincoln-Mercury dealer owned by Dean Redfield, occupied 1901 McGee in the early 1940s.¹⁶

By 1940, the lingering effects of the Great Depression were nearly gone, and the American car industry was flourishing. The auto boom came to an abrupt halt in December 1941 when the U.S. entered World War II. Almost immediately private industrial plants converted to government defense functions, and the production and sale of automobiles ceased. With their stock frozen, many dealers sought a way out of the auto business. The federal government ultimately paid car dealers a monthly stipend to cover vehicle storage costs and also purchased at full retail price all new cars and trucks that remained unsold for eighteen months.¹⁷

One local car dealer saw an opportunity in the frozen car stock. At the end of 1941, Berl Berry, a local Ford dealer, began purchasing all available Ford vehicles in the Kansas City area, ultimately amassing 600 new cars that he housed in fifteen warehouses. After a meeting with Dean Redfield of Esquire Motors, Berry also purchased Redfield's dealership, increasing his frozen stock to 700 new vehicles. Within three years, Berry had liquidated his entire back log of vehicles. Many were purchased by government agencies, local police and public works departments, and individuals with ration permits.

A building permit issued in February 1941, documents that Berry undertook a substantial (\$12,000) renovation of the building. The permit approved remodeling the storefront as well as interior work using glass, metal lathe, and tile flooring. As Berry converted the building to house a single tenant instead of two tenants, the specific scope of work likely included removing the second vehicular entrance from the west elevation and installing the new plate glass



Erwin Davis Motor Company, c. 1952

¹⁶ J.D. Bowersock, "From A 'Country Boy' From Oklahoma to Nation's Top in Motor Sales," *Kansas City Star*, 24 February 1952, C1, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library, Mounted Clippings.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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display windows and the black structural glass over the original transom. Changes such as these would have been current with the latest design trends and eye catching to consumers eager to make a purchase.¹⁸ A photo from c. 1953 documents the sleeker, up-to-date appearance of the building following this investment.

Berry made a second round of improvements to the building in 1946 after the World War II rationing of construction materials was lifted. With a value of only \$1,000, this scope of work probably included updating the sales floor with the installation of the ribbed glass and chrome mullions to the back (east) wall.

Berl Berry's Century Motor Company had the longest tenancy at 1901 McGee Street, remaining in the building until March 1952. After Century Motors moved out, the building housed one final automotive tenant. Erwin Davis Motors, a seller of used cars, operated from 1901-07 McGee Street thru 1953.

In 1954, Berry's partner Rudy Frick sold the building to Asa Kaler, who opened McGee Radio, a wholesale supplier of radios and radio parts. The business remained at this location into the 1980s. During this time, a final building permit, issued in June 1968, documents the removal of the first story storefront windows and the installation of metal panels over the first and second story window openings. This alteration was a frightened response to riots that broke out in Kansas City following the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. earlier that year.

The building currently houses a wholesale hardware company. Plans call for a historic rehabilitation to house a pharmaceutical distribution company.

¹⁸ Robert Genat, *The American Car Dealership*, (Osceola, Wisconsin: MBI Publishing Company, 1999), 43. Leibs, 87-88.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Photographer: Brad Finch
F-Stop Photography
Kansas City, Missouri

Date of Photographs: January 2008

NOTE: Digital copies of the images have been submitted on CD-ROM.

Image #	Description	View (Facing)
1	North and west elevations	SE
2	West elevation	E
3	West and south elevations	NE
4	South and west elevations	NE
5	East and south elevations	NNW
6	East elevation	W
7	North and east elevations	SW
8	Storefront and entrance, north elevation	SSE
9	First floor, north storefront (showroom)	ESE
10	First floor, south storefront	SW
11	Detail of structural members at first floor ceiling	UP
12	North side of second floor	W
13	Detail of structural members at second floor ceiling	UP
14	Exterior view of second story windows, west elevation	E
15	Interior view of second story windows, west elevation	W
16	Exterior view of second story windows, east elevation	W

1900 McGee Automotive
Services Building
Kansas City, Jackson
County, Missouri
UTM Reference:
15/363365/4327706









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