

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

Historic name	El Torreón Ballroom
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Other names/site number The Cowtown Ballroom

Name of related Multiple Property Listing N/A

2. Location

Street & number	3101 Gillham Plaza	N/A	not for publication
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City or town	Kansas City	N/A	vicinity
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State Missouri Code MO County Jackson Code 095 Zip code 64109

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria: x A B C D

Bu K De Deputy SAPO 11-16-21
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official	Date
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Title	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

_____ entered in the National Register _____ determined eligible for the National Register

_____ determined not eligible for the National Register _____ removed from the National Register

_____ other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
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El Torreon Ballroom
Name of Property

Jackson County, Missouri
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION/music-facility

COMMERCIAL/specialty store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION/auditorium

RELIGION/religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Mission/ Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Stone

walls: Brick, Concrete

roof: Asphalt

other: _____

☒

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION ON CONTINUATION PAGES

El Torreon Ballroom

Name of Property

Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE ON CONTINUATION PAGES

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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 # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☒ Other

Name of repository: Missouri Valley Special Collections, KCPL
State Historical Society of Missouri, UMKC

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

Areas of Significance

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1927-1936

Significant Dates

1927

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Shepard, Charles E. and Wagner, Harry L.
(Architects)

John H. Thompson Co. (Builder)

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	<u>39.07016</u> Latitude:	<u>-94.57857</u> Longitude:	3	<u> </u> Latitude:	<u> </u> Longitude:
2	<u> </u> Latitude:	<u> </u> Longitude:	4	<u> </u> Latitude:	<u> </u> Longitude:

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

 NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (On continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (On continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rachel Consolloy, Director of Operations; Molly Maguire, Intern
organization Rosin Preservation, LLC date August 11, 2021
street & number 1712 Holmes telephone 816-472-4950
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108
e-mail rachel@rosinpreservation.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Photographs**
- **Owner Name and Contact Information**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

El Torreon Ballroom

Name of Property

Jackson County, Missouri

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log:

Name of Property: **El Torreon Ballroom**

City or Vicinity: **Kansas City**

County: **Jackson**

State: **Missouri**

Photographer: **Brad Finch**

Date

Photographed: **April 23, 2021**

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

- 1 of 12: North elevation; view south
- 2 of 12: East elevation; view west
- 3 of 12: South elevation; view northwest
- 4 of 12: West elevation; view east
- 5 of 12: Interior; first floor; terrazzo floors in entrance lobby, view south
- 6 of 12: Interior; first floor; concrete beams, arches, and columns; view northwest
- 7 of 12: Interior; first floor; secondary room; view northeast
- 8 of 12: Interior; detail of stairway; view north
- 9 of 12: Interior; second floor ballroom; view south
- 10 of 12: Interior; second floor ballroom; view northeast
- 11 of 12: Interior; second floor ballroom; view north
- 12 of 12: Interior; balcony level; detail of control panel for 'sky effect', view south

Figure Log:

Include figures on continuation pages at the end of the nomination.

Figure Log

Figure 1. Context Map. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*

Figure 2. Site Map with surrounding commercial areas. The red line is the property boundary. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*

Figure 3. Site Map. The red line is the property boundary. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*

Figure 4. Exterior Photo Map. The red line is the property boundary. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*

Figure 5. First floor photo map. *Source: John Ho, Architect, 2021.*

Figure 6. Second floor photo map. *Source: John Ho, Architect, 2021.*

Figure 7. Mezzanine photo map. *Source: John Ho, Architect, 2021.*

Figure 8. Little Sisters of the Poor property, prior to demolition of the Home of the Aged. *Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1909, Vol. 4, Sheet 461.*

Figure 9. Gillham Road (Gillham Plaza) as connector for Parks and Boulevards system (green lined streets), 1925, prior to construction of El Torreon (red star). *Source: Tuttle & Ayers, Atlas of Kansas City, MO & Environs 1925, plate 54. Kansas City Public Library.*

Figure 10. El Torreon (red star) with surrounding commercial resources. *Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1951, Vol. 4, Sheet 461.*

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- Figure 11.** Rendering from announcement of construction. "El Torreon Ballroom," *Kansas City Star*, September 20, 1927. *Source: Newspapers.com*
- Figure 12.** Ad for opening night. *Kansas City Times*, December 15, 1927. *Source: Newspapers.com*
- Figure 13.** Detail of Cloud Effect control mechanism. *Source: Rachel Consolloy, 2021.*
- Figure 14.** Gillham Plaza Buildings. *Kansas City Star*, June 3, 1928. *Source: Newspapers.com*
- Figure 15.** Boxing matches held at El Torreon. *The Kansas City Times*, January 25, 1937. *Source: Newspapers.com*
- Figure 16.** Advertisement for El Torreon Roller Skating, *The Kansas City Times*, December 3, 1944, 55. *Source: Newspapers.com.*
- Figure 17.** Interior photograph, c. 1927. *Source: El Torreon KC, Inc.*
- Figure 18.** Interior photograph, c. 1947. *Source: Collection of M. Lawrence Gallagher / Cowtown Ballroom Friends Facebook page.*
- Figure 19.** Pla-Mor Recreation Center. *Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1951, Vol. 4, Sheet 457.*
- Figure 20.** The Pla-Mor Ballroom was built as a Stop and Shop Market (upper right corner). *Source: Tuttle & Ayers, Atlas of Kansas City, MO & Environs 1925, plate 53. Kansas City Public Library.*
- Figure 21.** The Pla-Mor Ballroom exterior and interior photos, c.1930. *Source: Driggs Collection.* Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop – A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 58.
- Figure 22.** The 1925 Aragon Ballroom, Chicago, Illinois, interior photo, 1940. *Source:*
<http://tomorrowverse.com/story/aragon-ballroom-juxtaposed-photos-from-1926-2015-25027.html>.
- Figure 23.** Lincoln Dance Hall, 1605 E. 18th Street, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*
- Figure 24.** Paseo Recreation Hall, 1414 E. 15th Street, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*
- Figure 25.** Fuges Hall, 4300 Bell Avenue, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*
- Figure 26.** Rose Garden Dance Hall, 2200 Prospect Avenue, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*
- Figure 27.** Municipal Auditorium, 301 W. 13th Street, Kansas City, 2020. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*
- Figure 28.** El Torreon Ballroom Building. *Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951, Volume 4, Sheet 461. Kansas City Public Library.*

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El Torreon Ballroom

Name of Property

Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

SUMMARY

El Torreon Ballroom, located at 3101 Gillham Plaza Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri is a two-story recreational building constructed in 1927. The building is located on the northwest corner of the block bordered on the north by East 31 Street, south by Linwood Boulevard, east by Gillham Road, and west by Gillham Plaza. The primary elevation faces north to a public right of way that has been converted to a parking lot. The secondary west elevation faces directly onto Gillham Plaza; the south elevation abuts a two-story building located at 3115 Gillham Plaza and is largely obscured from view. A free-standing rectangular building, it fills the entirety of the parcel. It is constructed of reinforced concrete and has a partial stone foundation. The exterior is clad in red brick with subtle color variations in the face brick that create a slightly textured appearance. Decorative brickwork is present on the street-facing north and west elevations in the form of alternating recessed courses, diapering, and arched brick corbelling at the roof line. Limestone is used for belt courses, quoins and gargoyles while cream colored cast stone forms the arches of windows and frames the primary entrance. The roof is medium pitched and hidden behind stepped parapet walls. These decorative details give the building a subtle 'castle-like' appearance and reflect the Spanish Revival style present in the dancehall. The building has a regular fenestration pattern comprising a mixture of wood multi-light round arched windows and rectangular multi-light double-hung windows with arched stone lintels and stone sills. The first floor retains historic terrazzo floors and historic structural concrete beams, arches, and columns remain exposed. The second floor contains the building's most significant space, the 16,000 square-foot dancehall with wood floors and tall, clear-span ceiling. A historic Spanish Mission style mezzanine lines most of the walls, clad in stucco and featuring clay tile roofs and embellished iron railings. Despite some alterations, this space retains its character as the only extant example of this type of ballroom. Character-defining features of the property are the overall massing of the building, the brick walls with arched window openings, and the minimal stone ornament. Interior character-defining features include the terrazzo flooring that defines the first-floor vestibule and lobby, and most importantly, the open second floor with its wood dance floor and Spanish Revival style arcade and mezzanine.

NARRATIVE

Setting

El Torreon occupies the northwest corner of the block bounded by East 31st Street on the north, Gillham Plaza on the east, East Linwood Boulevard on the south, and Gillham Road on the east (*Figures 1 and 2*). A large asphalt parking lot covers the land between the building and East 31st Street. The lot is not part of the historic parcel for the nominated building, it is the vacated East Gillham Plaza. The building fills its entire parcel and faces north toward the parking lot (*Figure 3*). The public concrete sidewalk that abuts the west side of the building is not included in the boundary. The block has an irregular shape due to the angle of Linwood Boulevard, and is bisected by a paved alley. The block contains four buildings in addition to El Torreon. There are two twenty-first century buildings at the south end of the block, both surrounded by large

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N/A

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parking lots. A small two-story building that is a contemporary of El Torreon abuts the south side of the nominated building. The 1946 Aines Farm Dairy Building (NR Listed 10/1/08) fills the middle of the east side of the block.

East 31st Street and Linwood Boulevard are commercial corridors that run roughly parallel to one another. There are small pockets of single-family residential resources scattered between the commercial thoroughfares. In the early twentieth century, only 31st Street was the commercial corridor and single-family residences filled the surrounding blocks. Many of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century commercial resources on 31st Street are extant, although most have undergone some renovations, particularly the storefronts. The area north of El Torreon and East 31st Street is primarily residential.

The commercial resources on Gillham Plaza south of Linwood Boulevard are more contemporary of El Torreon. When Thomas O. Bright purchased the former Little Sisters of the Poor land in 1926, the land adjacent to the west was in the process of condemnation for the Kansas City Parks and Boulevards system. The City cleared the land for the construction of Gillham Road/Gillham Plaza as a connector between two important east-west boulevards, Linwood and Armour (*Figures 8 and 9*).¹ Armour Boulevard continues to be a residential thoroughfare, lined with apartment buildings, primarily from the 1920s. An article published in the *Kansas City Star* in 1928 identified four buildings along Gillham Plaza that were recently completed or under construction. The title of the article explains that these are "Structures, completed and now building, which will establish the character of development on the new Gillham Plaza Boulevard link" (*Figure 13*).² The buildings in the article are El Torreon, the newly-built Martha Washington Candy Company Building (3210-3212 Gillham Plaza), the proposed Luzier Special Formula Laboratories building (3218-3220 Gillham Plaza), and the Stine & McClure Undertaking Company building (3225 Gillham Plaza), which was under construction.³ Today, these resources are extant, although many of the commercial resources along Linwood Boulevard date to the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries.

Exterior

The two-story rectangular building has a concrete structure with brick walls. The corner building has two symmetrical street-facing elevations, with a higher level of ornament on these north and west elevations than on the secondary east elevation and tertiary south elevation. The north elevation has five bays at the first story and three bays at the second story; the west elevation

¹ Atlas of Kansas City, MO & Environs 1925, Plate 54. Kansas City Public Library.

² "Structures, Completed and Now Building, Which Will Establish the Character of Development on the New Gillham Plaza Boulevard Link.

³ The Martha Washington Candy Company Building and the Luzier Special Formula Laboratories building were connected in 1933 and the Martha Washington building façade was altered to look like the Luzier building. The unified structure was listed in the National Register on January 2, 2018. Cydney Millstein, National Register of Historic Places, Luzier Special Formula Laboratories Building, Kansas City, Jackson County, 2018, 7-1.

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El Torreon Ballroom

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N/A

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has seven bays at each story. The concrete structure divides the east elevation into seven bays. A historic low-pitched gable roof covers the wood-truss barrel-vault roof that spans the 16,000sf dance floor that is uninterrupted by structural columns. The building has flat parapets except at the center bays of the two street-facing elevations (north and west), where they are peaked. Historic metal flagpoles extend upward from the center of the peaked parapets. A non-historic metal radio tower is attached to the center of the gable roof.

North Elevation:

The north elevation is five bays wide at the first story and three bays wide at the second story (*Figure 4, Photo 1*). It faces an asphalt parking lot, separated by a small grass parking strip and concrete sidewalk (outside the nominated boundary). There is a narrow central bay and wider flanking bays; brick pilasters divide each bay. The first story contains four storefront openings with historic stone knee walls. The non-historic infill consists of aluminum frames with glazed transoms at the top of the opening and stucco panels below. Panels of horizontal stained wood slats cover most of the stucco panels. The two outer panels in each of the two outer bays have punched openings for fixed rectangular windows. The brick pilasters that separate the bays have alternating recessed courses. The center bay contains the main entrance. Although it does not project out from the building the decorative brickwork and cast stone voussoirs frame the opening making it the focal point of the north elevation. A non-historic glass and aluminum door with side lights and transom fills the historic opening.

A pair of cast stone beltcourses that separate the first and second stories frame a band of diaper pattern brickwork. Six pairs of cast stone quoins frame small cast stone medallions, each of which aligns with a brick pilaster on the first story. Above the beltcourse, the central bay contains a single round arched window while the flanking bays each contain sets of three round arched windows. Cast stone pilasters separate the individual window frames. Decorative cast stone capitals, ornamented with small faces, form the spring points of the arches. The arches have plain voussoirs and keystones carved in a floral motif. The windows have cast stone sills. Non-historic metal vents cover the historic wood windows that are extant within the historic openings. Quoin corners in contrasting stone and stepped parapet walls frame the second story, with brick pilasters separating the bays. A blind arcade of small brick arches with cast stone brackets at the bottom of each arch span the entire façade between the brick pilasters. Two sets of four stone gargoyles project from the brick wall above the windows.

East Elevation:

The east elevation is a secondary elevation with exposed reinforced concrete elements that divide the façade into seven bays (*Photo 2*). It is constructed of common brick with the exception of the north bay which meets the front façade and shares its decorative detail, specifically the cast stone beltcourses and quoins. The stone foundation is progressively more visible as the site slopes down from north to south. The first story has an irregular fenestration pattern with one or two non-historic windows of various sizes added to each bay at an unknown date. From north to south, Bays 1 and 2 each contain two small square openings at the upper

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El Torreon Ballroom

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N/A

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north and south corners of each bay; the openings in Bay 1 contain fixed glass panels while the openings in Bay 2 contain vents. Bays 3 and 4 each contain a large opening filled with metal mesh screening. These openings access spaces containing non-historic mechanical equipment. Bay 5 has two small rectangular windows hung windows. Bay 6 contains a larger tripartite window multi-light hung sashes. Bay 7 contains a small rectangular window sliding horizontal panes. The second story contains five historic rectangular multi-light double-hung metal windows all of which are partially or completely boarded up from the exterior. The second story also contains a historic metal fire escape leading to a metal door in the third bay. A non-historic large garage door opening cut into the fifth bay from the north contains a multi-panel wooden door. A simple flat parapet without ornamentation caps the wall.

South Elevation:

The south elevation abuts the building at 3115 Gillham Plaza, leaving a small courtyard between the buildings (*Photo 3*). This elevation is largely obscured from view. It is unfinished in appearance, clad in common brick. There is no apparent decorative detailing. It is identical to the north elevation in width but does not contain defined bays. A simple flat parapet without ornamentation caps the wall. There is a brick chimney located at the east edge of the south elevation that extends from the first floor above the roofline. A one-story block that is part of the adjacent building to the south covers the first story of the south elevation. This one-story block is not connected to the nominated resource.

West Elevation:

The west elevation has brick pilasters that divide the façade into seven bays (*Photo 4*). The first story contains six store front openings. Five are filled in an identical manner as those on the north elevation, with aluminum frames, transoms and wood slat panels covering the stucco panels of the display area. The sixth opening, at the south end of the west elevation is partially filled by narrow rectangular red brick. An aluminum and glass door with transom and two large rectangular display windows span the storefront, with corrugated metal panels covering the area above and below the windows. The center bay contains a secondary entrance. Non-historic wood paneling and a pair of metal slab doors fill the historic opening. This secondary entrance historically had a cast stone surround similar to the north entrance, but was removed during the 1951 renovation. The brick was installed to create a rectangular opening and laid in a way that continued the coursing of the original brick. The second story displays decorative details similar to the second story of the front (north) elevation, specifically the beltcourses with the diaper pattern brickwork, the cast stone medallions, the cast stone arches with the carved head capitals and floral keystones, the gargoyles, the blind arcade, and the peaked parapet over the center entrance bay. The primary difference is that each bay contains only one window.

Interior

First Floor:

The first floor consists of a series of rooms of various sizes organized around the historic central lobby (*Figure 5*). The primary entrance on the north side of the building opens into a vestibule

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N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

and long, wide corridor that leads to the historic lobby at the center of the building (*Figure 28*).⁴ Historically, there were two stairs that led from the east and west sides of the vestibule up to the second-floor ballroom. The east stair has been capped at the floor level. The west stair accesses the second floor. The vestibule, corridor, and lobby retain the historic terrazzo floor, with "El Torreon" is inscribed in the terrazzo floor of the entryway (*Photo 5*). The walls have been slightly altered at the vestibule, with both the east and west walls shifted east a few inches. The first floor was originally divided into separate retail spaces, made apparent by the storefront openings on the north and west elevations. The northwest corner has been reconfigured into a series of small classrooms and a lounge. The northeast corner, likewise, has been reconfigured into several smaller rooms (*Photo 7*). Non-historic ramps access this space that is at a slightly different level as the rest of the building. This secondary room has an unfinished historic concrete ceiling and painted concrete floor. Some of the partitions have been removed between the west storefronts and the lobby, although the concrete structure and flooring changes delineate the historic spaces (*Photo 6*). The east half of the open space at the center was historically open as the lobby. The west half had been part of the west storefront. The historic structural concrete beams and columns are exposed throughout the first floor. The structural concrete elements in the main open space have painted finishes. Mechanical rooms and restrooms line the east side of the building adjacent to the open lobby. This is the historic location of the restrooms, although the finishes and configuration are not original. There is a kitchen on the east side of the first floor between the restrooms and the corner office. Storage, a lounge, and an office line the south wall of the building.

The building has two full sets of concrete stairs. There are two sets of narrow stairs at the north end of the building, flanking the entrance vestibule, although only the east stair accesses the second floor. There is a set of wider concrete stairs at the south end of the building. The stairs have simple wood handrails (*Photo 8*). There is another set of concrete stairs towards the southeast corner of the building, but it has been walled off and is no longer in use. A non-historic freight elevator connects the first and second floors. The elevator shaft is located in the storage area at the south end of the building. Overhead metal garage doors at each floor access the elevator cab.

Second Floor:

The historic ballroom occupies the entirety of the second floor (*Figure 6*). The main access points for the second floor are through the historic narrow west stair at the north entrance or the wide stairway at the south side of the building. The south stair is constructed of concrete and features an historic wrought iron railing with decorative scrollwork (*Photo 8*). The stair leads to the 16,000 square-foot dancehall. It has a clear span thirty-five-foot-high barrel vault ceiling with exposed wood structure. Although the historic ceiling tiles have been removed, the ceiling retains its historic curved shape. Non-historic light fixtures and fans are suspended from the

⁴ There are no historic plans for this building that have been found. The 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Volume 4, Sheet 467, is the only historic document that indicates the historic configuration of the

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El Torreon Ballroom

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N/A

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wood structure (*Photo 9*). Maple wood flooring is mostly intact, although a section along the east wall was removed when the roof was compromised and water infiltration damaged the floor. The concrete structure of the floor is exposed where the flooring has been removed.⁵ The arrangement of the wood flooring reflects the historic design (*Photos 10 and 11*). The wood flooring itself is not the original, but that is not essential to the integrity of the building due to the significant wear and tear inherent in the original function and continued use of the building.

The stage historically stood at the north end of the space, and was removed at an unknown date; a series of partition walls indicate its location in front of the historic west stairs to the north entrance, as well as two non-historic bathrooms (*Yellow block at the center of Photo 11*). The historic arched windows are visible beyond the partition and to the right of the stage area. The historic Spanish Revival style mezzanine spans the south wall, most of the west wall, and a portion of the east wall. This distinctive feature comprises an arcaded promenade punctuated by pavilions with Spanish Revival style balconies clad in stucco (*Photos 9-11*). The stucco has been painted but is otherwise unaltered. The view boxes are supported by Corinthian columns and capped with clay tile roofs. A portion of the mezzanine has been removed on the east wall where a non-historic garage door was installed at an unknown date, after 1974 (*Photo 11, Figure 7*).⁶ A wood staircase on the east end of the south wall provides access to the mezzanine level. A series of historic partitions have been constructed along the south wall at the mezzanine level to create several storage rooms and the historic sound booth. The historic sound booth at the center of the south wall contains controls for the ballroom ceiling's 'sky effect' that are intact but non-functioning (*Figure 7, Photo 12*).

Integrity

El Torreon retains historic integrity from its construction in 1927 for recreational use as a dance hall. The building remains in its historic location at the intersection of 31st Street and Gillham Plaza. The setting has not been significantly altered: the building occupies a prominent corner location along a major thoroughfare in the heart of the city. The surrounding blocks are a mixture of residential and commercial resources, as they were during the time of construction. Alterations to the setting include the demolition of the building that historically occupied the northeast corner of the block, adjacent to El Torreon to the east. This lot is now a parking lot. There have been other buildings constructed on Gillham Plaza and Linwood Boulevard, but they are all in keeping with the historic commercial character of the area. The building retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship in its relatively unaltered exterior. Aside from the non-historic infill at the storefronts and windows, the exterior of the building retains its historic

first floor.

⁵ There was work done previously to remove the damaged flooring. A new membrane was installed to secure the roof and prevent further damage. There is currently no construction or demolition work going on within the building.

⁶ The purpose of the garage door to the second floor was to provide the owner with an entrance large enough to pass through the vehicles he planned to store on the second floor, as there is no interior elevator large enough to transport a vehicle.

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character through its brickwork, cast stone and limestone ornamentation, and historic wood windows. The commercial character of the first story is no longer as clear, but this function was not central to the significance of the building. Additionally, the historic storefront openings remain legible despite the non-historic infill, and could be restored with the removal of the non-historic material. Although some of the first-floor interior partitions have been removed, the historic structural concrete and terrazzo floors that delineate the vestibule, corridor, and lobby are intact, including the inscribed "El Torreon" in the vestibule. The storefronts that originally occupied portions of the first floor were not historically associated with the dance hall, therefore the alteration of those spaces does not impact the building's ability to communicate its historic function. The most significant character-defining feature of El Torreon Ballroom, the second-floor dance hall, continues to communicate the historic feeling and association of the building. A portion of the Spanish Mission style mezzanine, the stage and ceiling tiles have been removed. The stucco of the mezzanine and promenade have been painted. The few historic photographs that are available show what look like voussoirs at the promenade arches (*Figures 17 and 18*). These appear to be a faux treatment as the stucco itself does not appear altered. The thirty-five-foot clear span curved ceiling structure over 16,000 square-feet of wood dance floor and the majority of the mezzanine continue to effectively communicate the historic character of the space. El Torreon Ballroom clearly communicates its significance as the largest purpose-built dance hall in Kansas City, reflecting an important trend in the history of this recreational activity in the city.

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SUMMARY

El Torreon Ballroom (El Torreon), at 3101 Gillham Plaza, Kansas City, Jackson County, is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Recreation. El Torreon Ballroom opened in December 1927, at the height of the "Roaring '20s" and the Jazz Age when live music and dancing dominated the social scene in cities across the country. Although Kansas City already had generic, multi-purpose halls of various sizes, El Torreon stands apart from these buildings with its intentional design as a dance hall, its original Spanish Revival-themed décor, and the sheer size of the free-standing building. The 16,000 square-foot second floor was designed with an arched promenade and balcony that have stucco cladding and clay tile pent roofs to evoke the Spanish Revival style that was popular in Kansas City in the 1920s. The building was modeled after the dance palaces⁷ in other larger cities, specifically the 1925 Aragon Ballroom in Chicago, which has a similar Spanish Revival motif for the arcaded mezzanine, although on a larger scale commensurate with the size of the city. El Torreon is the largest extant dance hall in Kansas City and represents a specific time period in the history of dance halls, when the basement or back room was no longer enough to satisfy public demand and enterprising individuals created much larger and more elaborate and fantastical spaces for the sole purpose of dancing. This trend, which started in New York City, quickly spread to cities across the country, including Kansas City, which developed its own scaled versions of the dance palace. Only the Pla-Mor Ballroom, constructed at the same time, was comparable to El Torreon in scale and ornament, and the Pla-Mor Ballroom is no longer extant. El Torreon Ballroom retains its prominent location and, most importantly, the expansive open dance floor and elaborate Spanish Revival style décor. The period of significance is 1927 to 1936, reflecting years the building functioned solely as El Torreon Ballroom. Criteria Consideration A applies to this building due to its current ownership by a religious organization. However, this type of ownership is recent. The building was not designed or constructed for religious functions nor is it significant for its association with religious doctrine. El Torreon Ballroom derives significance from its secular associations with the context of recreation in Kansas City.

NARRATIVE

HISTORY OF DANCE HALLS

Spaces dedicated for the purpose of dancing were not new in 1920s America. Grand private ballrooms and modest public halls had been in existence for hundreds of years in this country and abroad, hosting those interested in participating in whatever style of dance was popular at the time. However, until the early twentieth century, organized dances were a leisure activity enjoyed predominantly by those with the time and means to do so, or they were seedier affairs held in the side room of a saloon, with all its implied vices. While the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century greatly expanded the manufacturing industry and thus the nation's workforce

⁷ Dance palaces are intentionally large, purpose-built dance halls elaborate decorative motifs. These buildings were common in large cities, such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

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and economy, it was the Progressive Era reforms of the early twentieth century that provided the expanded workforce with marginally increased access to leisure activities. Labor and education reforms reduced the number of hours in the workday, stabilized pay schedules, and provided specialized training that opened opportunities for many people, especially women.⁸ By the early twentieth century, with Progressive Era reforms firmly in place and a corresponding loosening of social constrictions from the Victorian Era, a greater portion of the population had the time and disposable income necessary to enjoy the ever-increasing variety of commercial recreation options across the country, including amusement parks, movie theaters, and dance halls.⁹ With the development of new musical styles and techniques, the desire to create new ways of moving to the music was spreading throughout big cities and small towns, characterized as a “dance craze” that lasted from the 1920s into the 1950s.¹⁰

Like many building types, spaces available for dancing varied greatly in size and appearance and accommodated a variety of events. Organizations, such as benefit societies or social clubs, hosted private events that often involved dancing, typically as fundraisers. They would rent a general-purpose hall large enough to accommodate the size of the guest list. Some of these social clubs organized for the sole purpose of dancing and would occupy buildings that had small dance halls.¹¹ These dedicated spaces were not prominently advertised and were often in the rear or basement of the building.¹² For those who were not part of these social clubs but were interested in dancing as part of a night out, bars and saloons often had a side room that allowed music and dancing, but the primary activity remained the consumption of alcohol.

As interest in dancing as a leisure activity increased, so did the need for purpose-built spaces. Dance academies opened in the early 1900s; they provided both the space for dancing as well as specialized instruction in the newest dances of the time.¹³ The offer of instruction helped to legitimize dancing as a respectable activity once it was removed from the back of the saloon or the basement. By the 1920s, entrepreneurs had dispensed with the instruction and focused solely on capitalizing on the public dance craze that was spreading across the country. Enterprising individuals built grand dance halls designed to accommodate thousands of patrons, compared with the capacity of a few hundred, at most, at their predecessors. High-style architecture and opulent ornament characterized these purpose-built buildings. They often included a small stage on which to locate the band, but unlike theaters which had stages and could also accommodate thousands of patrons, the primary feature was the expansive and flat

⁸ Randy McBee, *Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States*, (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 62.

⁹ McBee, 52.

¹⁰ David Nasaw, *The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 150.

¹¹ McBee, 53.

¹² Thomas Bright's first venture prior to El Torreon Ballroom, the Submarine Dance Hall, was an example of this: a mixed use commercial building with a dance hall in the basement.

¹³ McBee, 54.

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dance floor. The earliest of these new dance “palaces” opened in New York City in 1911.¹⁴ More soon followed in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, along with other smaller cities across the country. The new purpose-built dance halls were often free-standing buildings. Some included commercial retail spaces, although the primary function of the building was the dance floor.

The Aragon Ballroom opened in Chicago in July 1925 with its elaborate décor designed to look like the patio of Spanish Revival style palace (*Figure 22*). An arcaded mezzanine that lines the walls were clad in stucco and multi-colored plaster ornament to complete the Spanish theme. The Aragon Ballroom had an octagonal dance floor, three stages, and atmospheric effects such as clouds and stars. Owners Andres Karzas and Milton S. Plotke spent \$2,000,000 in 1925 to build what they promoted as “the largest and most beautiful ballroom in the world.”¹⁵ The dance floor was designed to hold 5,000 patrons.¹⁶ While the Aragon Ballroom likely served as inspiration for many smaller venues in other cities, contemporary newspaper articles drew a direct connection between the Aragon and Kansas City’s newest dance hall: El Torreon Ballroom.¹⁷

HISTORY OF EL TORREON

In the early 1920s, Thomas O. Bright, son of the owner of the Bright Biscuit Company, constructed a three-story mixed-use building at the southeast corner of 31st Street and Prospect Avenue, nearly a mile and a half to the east of the nominated building.¹⁸ The Bright Building contained up to ten retail shops on the first floor, the “Stanley Apartments” on the second and third floors, and a dance hall in the basement.¹⁹ Bright operated the *Submarine Dance Hall* for several years in the mid-1920s.²⁰ Gaging the popularity of the music and dance scene and recognizing an opportunity, Bright purchased a large tract of land farther west on 31st Street in 1926. Previously occupied by the Little Sisters of the Poor, the property had contained the Home for the Aged, which Bright razed early in 1927 (*Figure 8*).

Bright hired prominent Kansas City architect Charles E. Shepard and associate Harry L. Wagner to design the two-story brick building, while John H. Thompson Co. served as the contractor. The City of Kansas City issued a building permit on November 3, 1927, and the building opened on December 15, just shy of six weeks later.²¹ The ballroom opened to an

¹⁴ McBee, 55.

¹⁵ “Aragon Ballroom: Gorgeous Bit o’ Hispanola for Uptown Dancers,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 10, 1925. The \$2 million price tag in 1925 is roughly equivalent to \$29.5 million in 2020 dollars. The 1925 price was roughly ten times more than the amount Thomas Bright spent on El Torreon.

¹⁶ “Aragon Ballroom: Gorgeous Bit o’ Hispanola for Uptown Dancers.”

¹⁷ “A Gay El Torreon Opening,” *Kansas City Times*, December 16, 1927.

¹⁸ Patricia Lawson, “The Last Dance,” *City*, March 1980, 27.

¹⁹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1909 corrected to 1951, Volume 4, Sheet 472.

²⁰ “El Torreon Ball Room,” *Kansas City Star*, September 20, 1927.

²¹ City of Kansas City, Building Permit #15122, November 3, 1927. “A Gay El Torreon Opening,” *Kansas City Times*, December 16, 1927.

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enthusiastic crowd and great fanfare at full capacity of two thousand people (*Figures 11 and 12*).²² The newspapers highlighted the atmosphere and ambiance in the celebratory articles published the following day. The article described the space as the “‘castle in Spain’ turned real” and that the “rough walls of the ancient mission style, architect and dim promenades, orchestra members clad in gay dons, a ceiling of glimmering stars and flowing clouds in dim glow, and Spanish music complete the illusion.”²³ The design was strikingly similar to Chicago’s Aragon Ballroom, although a much smaller version. The promotional ads described the dance hall as “Atmospheric. Spanish. Alluring.”²⁴ The word “Atmospheric” refers to the special lighting effects used to create the illusion of clouds on the ceiling while the mirrored ball reflected the light in every direction. These fixtures are no longer extant, but the control panel for the “Cloud Effect” and various colors of house lights is extant (*Figures 13, 17, and 18, Photo 12*). The dance floor was designed to hold two thousand dancers while the perimeter had a promenade and mezzanine around three sides. Amenities associated with the dance hall included two soda fountains for refreshments on the second floor, and restrooms and coat check rooms on the first floor, accessible from a wide lobby.²⁵ The rest of the first floor was designed to have several retail shops that were not necessarily affiliated with the dance hall, such as Western Radio Co., Allied Laboratories Inc., and Pitman Moore wholesale drug company.²⁶ In addition to functioning as a dance hall open to the public, El Torreon was also available for private events, such as concerts, flower shows, parties, and fundraisers for local philanthropic organizations.²⁷

El Torreon had its own band, a fourteen-piece orchestra; it also hosted guest bands and musicians from around the country. Local jazz musicians, such as Benny Moten and Julia Lee, performed at El Torreon, as well as national artists, such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Fletcher Henderson.²⁸ El Torreon was such a prominent venue that it, along with the nearby Pla-Mor Ballroom, secured Kansas City as an important stop on the national band circuit.²⁹ In the blatantly segregated Jim Crow era, local and national African American bands performed for white audiences at El Torreon and Pla-Mor over the weekend and for Black audiences at places such as the Paseo Recreation Hall or other smaller nightclubs the following Monday.³⁰ Musicians often stated that they preferred El Torreon to the Pla-Mor because it had a warmer

²² Opening night advertisement, *Kansas City Times*, December 15, 1927.

²³ “A Gay El Torreon Opening,” *Kansas City Times*, December 16, 1927.

²⁴ Opening night advertisement, *Kansas City Times*, December 15, 1927.

²⁵ “El Torreon Ball Room,” *Kansas City Star*, September 20, 1927. The terrazzo floor of the lobby is extant.

²⁶ Polk’s City Directory, 1932. Ancestry.com

²⁷ “El Torreon Ball Room,” *Kansas City Star*, September 20, 1927.

²⁸ Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop – A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 61.

²⁹ Driggs and Haddix, 61. The Pla-Mor Ballroom (3142 Main Street) was part of a much larger recreational complex at 31st and Main streets, a half-mile west of El Torreon. Most of the complex has been demolished, including the ballroom. This complex will be discussed in more detail as a comparable property below.

³⁰ Driggs and Haddix, 61. Paseo Recreation Hall is located at 1414 E. 15th Street (Truman Road). It is extant; the integrity of the interior is unknown at this time.

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sound compared to the Pla-Mor Ballroom, which they considered cold and considerably more formal.³¹ El Torreon band leader, Phil Baxter, wrote the venue's theme song, "El Torreon," which the band played to open and close each night it was open for dancing.³²

As the Roaring '20s faded and the effects of Great Depression spread throughout the Midwest, the crowds of the dance halls thinned, mainly due to the diminished disposable income required to spend a night on the town. By 1936, El Torreon had fallen into foreclosure. The new owner operated the ballroom space as a roller-skating rink, although it was available to rent for private events and sometimes it was set up for boxing matches (*Figures 15 and 16*).³³ At this time, the stage was removed to create more space for skating. The flooring was replaced, likely several times, but it has always been hardwood flooring. This was a logical reuse of the large open space with its hardwood floors. In the following decades, various companies operated from the first floor, including Willys Overland, which converted the entire first floor in 1951 to accommodate its automobile sales and service business.³⁴ In addition to public skating on the second floor, El Torreon hosted skating competitions and performances (*Figure 18*). The building continued to operate as El Torreon Roller Rink or El Torreon Skating Rink until 1970.³⁵

When Universal Publications and Universal School Supply Service Company purchased the building in 1970, it closed the skating rink. The first floor housed the publication operations while the second floor was converted to the Cowtown Ballroom. The Cowtown Ballroom operated from 1971 to 1974 and provided a unique, intermediate-sized venue, once again, for local and national bands on tour. Cowtown Ballroom was smaller than Municipal Auditorium and the Convention Hall,³⁶ as well as some of the downtown theaters, but it was larger than most nightclubs and coffee shops where many of the up-and-coming artists performed. Established artists such as Van Morrison, Frank Zappa, and Steve Martin performed for sold-out crowds that brought their own blankets to cushion the wood floor.³⁷

The Cowtown Ballroom closed in 1974. In recent decades, the building has been used as a vintage car museum, briefly as a music venue, and most recently as a church. Throughout all the changes in use, the open space of the second floor has not been subdivided or substantially altered. It retains the expansive open space with wood floors and the Spanish Mission style promenade and balcony (*Photos 9-11*). The first floor retains the historic terrazzo flooring of the entrance corridor and lobby (*Photos 5 and 6*).

³¹ Driggs and Haddix, 61.

³² Driggs and Haddix, 61.

³³ "Old Ballroom Bought by Publishing Firm," *Kansas City Star*, April 12, 1970.

³⁴ "A New El Torreon Use," *Kansas City Star*, December 2, 1951.

³⁵ The name listed in city directories varied by year.

³⁶ Municipal Auditorium and Convention Hall are combined in one large building in downtown Kansas City. It is a city-owned building used for large-scale public and private events.

³⁷ "Rock Palace," *The Kansas City Magazine*, August 1972, 28. Vertical File – Dance Halls, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

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DANCE HALLS IN KANSAS CITY

When El Torreon opened on December 15, 1927, there was only one other comparable property in the city. The Pla-Mor Ballroom opened at 3142 Main Street in late November of 1927, just one month earlier (*Figure 21*). Pla-Mor Ballroom occupied the second floor of what had been built in the early 1920s as a Stop 'N Shop grocery store (*Figure 20*). The building was not a purpose-built dance hall like El Torreon, but owner Paul Fogel spent an estimated \$1 million to convert it to a recreation center, with bowling alleys and billiards on the first floor and a formal ballroom on the second floor.³⁸ The Pla-Mor property grew to include the Ice Palace indoor ice-skating rink (1932) and the indoor roller-skating rink (1941) (*Figure 19*).³⁹ The Ice Palace housed the area's first ice hockey team in the winter and converted to an indoor swimming pool in the summer, and includes an arena capable of seating 6,200.⁴⁰ The Pla-Mor Ballroom provided direct competition for El Torreon, as both venues provided large open dance floors and contemporary local and national bands. Pla-Mor was considered slightly more formal while El Torreon was more relaxed, which may have led to more raucous crowds (*Figure 21*).⁴¹

While El Torreon Ballroom went into foreclosure in 1936, Pla-Mor Ballroom stayed open until 1957, likely because it had no competition for the reduced dancing crowd and had the rest of the Pla-Mor Recreation Center to subsidize any decline in income from the ballroom.⁴² In 1957, the former ballroom was converted to additional bowling alley lanes, until 1966 when it was converted to a concert venue for rock bands.⁴³ El Torreon converted to a roller-skating rink in 1936; Pla-Mor constructed a new roller-skating rink in 1941.⁴⁴ As more amusements moved out to suburban areas, there was less demand for these types of facilities in Midtown Kansas City. El Torreon closed the skating rink and reinvented itself once again as the Cowtown Ballroom in 1971; the entire Pla-Mor complex closed in 1970. The former Stop N' Shop, turned dance hall, turned bowling alley was demolished, along with the ice-skating rink, in 1972.⁴⁵ A car dealership and a garage facility for the US Postal Service fill the lot. The Pla-Mor roller-skating rink is extant and was converted to an automobile service center.

In the 1920s, city directories did not specifically identify dance halls but included them in the general list of Halls. These spaces included on the list of Halls were used by a variety of organizations for a wide variety of purposes. Most of them were not purpose-built recreational facilities. The 1928 list included seven resources positively identified as dance halls by their

³⁸ Lawson, 28.

³⁹ Arthur McClure, "Memories of the Pla-Mor," *Missouri Life – The Magazine of Missouri*, Holiday 1974, 64.

⁴⁰ "Kansas City's Pla-Mor is Mecca of Amusement," *Kansas City's Centennial Souvenir Program*, 1950.

⁴¹ Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

⁴² Lawson, 28.

⁴³ McClure, 67.

⁴⁴ McClure, 67.

⁴⁵ McClure, 64.

⁴⁵ McClure, 67.

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names, including El Torreon.⁴⁶ Of these seven, only three are extant: El Torreon, Lincoln Dance Hall (1605 East 18th Street, *Figure 23*) and Paseo Recreation Hall (1414 East 15th Street, now Truman Road, *Figure 24*). Both of the other buildings are significantly smaller than El Torreon, and likely to have served a primarily Black clientele, based on their locations in and around the commercial center of Black-owned businesses in Kansas City. By 1935, the city directory includes a distinct section in the business listings for dance halls and pavilions. El Torreon is one of ten dance halls on the list. Again, only two other buildings are extant: Fuges Hall (4300 Bell, *Figure 25*) and Rose Garden Dance Hall (2513 East 22nd Street/2200 Prospect Avenue, *Figure 26*). These buildings are also substantially smaller than El Torreon. In 1935, Pla-Mor Amusements is listed in the alphabetical section where it references the activities available: Bowling and Billiards, Ice Palace, and Swimming Pool, none of which are extant.⁴⁷ Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium complex is somewhat comparable to El Torreon, but is substantially larger at more than twice the size (*Figure 27*). Municipal Auditorium was built in 1935 and includes a 10,700-seat arena and 46,000 square-foot Exhibition Hall, as well as the Music Hall and Little Theatre, but these spaces did not function as public dance halls on a regular basis. There are no extant properties that are comparable to El Torreon in size and function.

Conclusion

El Torreon Ballroom (El Torreon) is significant as one of the largest purpose-built dance halls in Kansas City. When it was constructed in 1927, it was one of two large dancehalls, including the Pla-Mor Ballroom. Owner Thomas O. Bright capitalized on the dance craze that was rapidly growing across the country in the 1920s. The building's Spanish Revival style interior arcade and mezzanine that surrounded the wood dance floor was modeled on the Spanish Revival style Aragon Ballroom constructed just one year earlier in Chicago, Illinois. Bright intended to construct a dance palace scaled for Kansas City. Although the dance hall closed in 1936, the building retained its basic recreational function and outlasted its only comparable competitor, the Pla-Mor, by nearly a half century. El Torreon retains the historic open space of the wood dance floor, the barrel vaulted roof, and the Spanish Revival style mezzanine that clearly communicate its distinct historic recreational function.

⁴⁶ Polk's City Directory for Kansas City, 1928. Ancestry.com. Pla-Mor was not listed at all in 1928.

⁴⁷ Polk's City Directory for Kansas City, 1935. Ancestry.com.

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“Rock Palace,” *The Kansas City Magazine*, August 1972, 28. Vertical File – Dance Halls,
Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1909 corrected to 1951, Volume 4, Sheet 472.

“Structures, Completed and Now Building, Which Will Establish the Character of Development
on the New Gillham Plaza Boulevard Link. Newspapers.com.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary aligns with the footprint of the building, abutting the public sidewalk for Gillham Plaza on the west elevation, the public right-of-way for East Gillham Plaza on the north, the public alley that bisects the block on the east, and the parcel for the adjacent property on the south.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated resource includes the parcel of land historically associated with the property.

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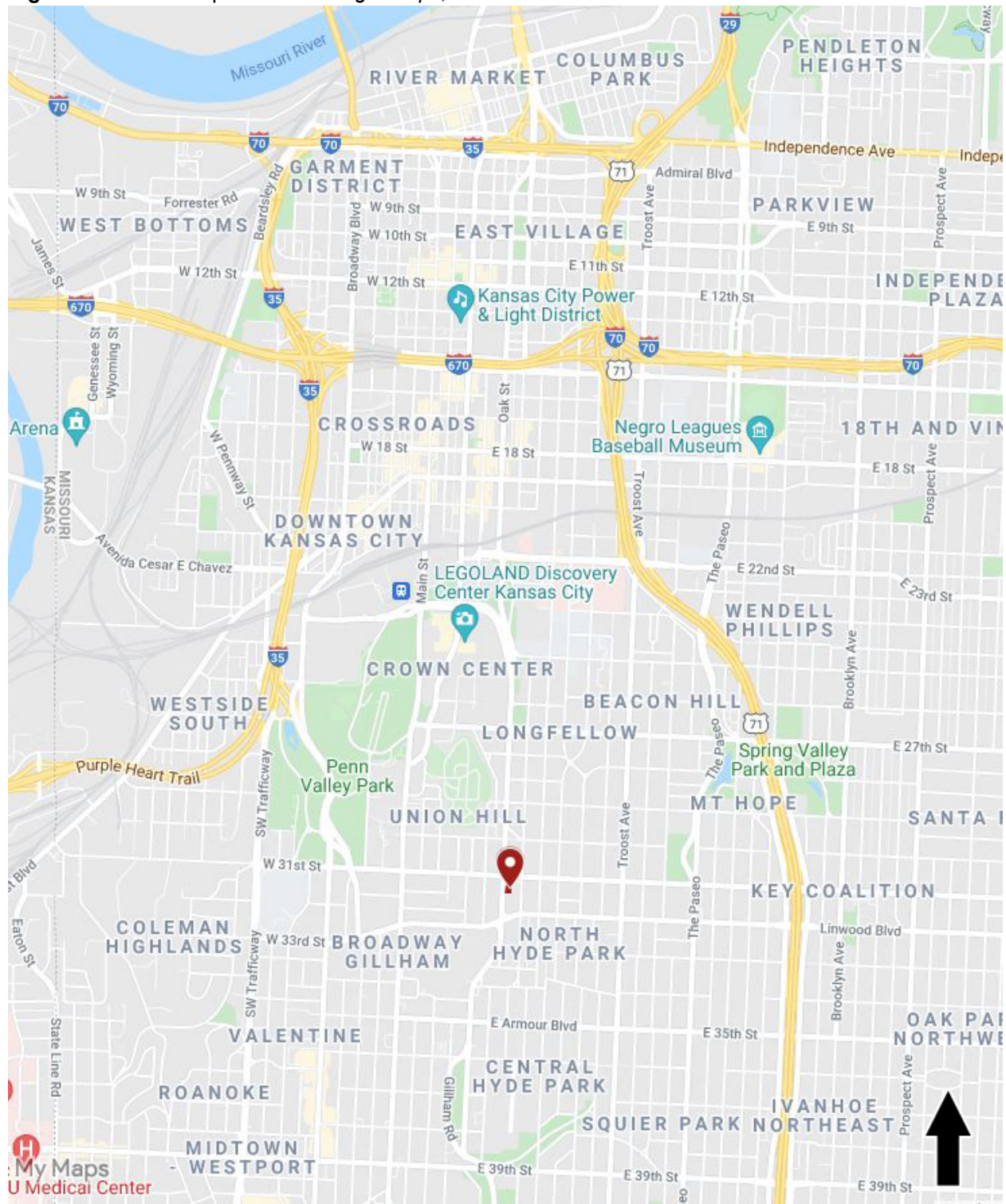
Jackson County, Missouri

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N/A

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Figure 1. Context Map. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*



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Figure 2. Site Map with surrounding commercial areas. The red line is the property boundary. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*



El Torreon
3101 Gillham Plaza, Kansas City, Missouri
39.07016
-94.57857

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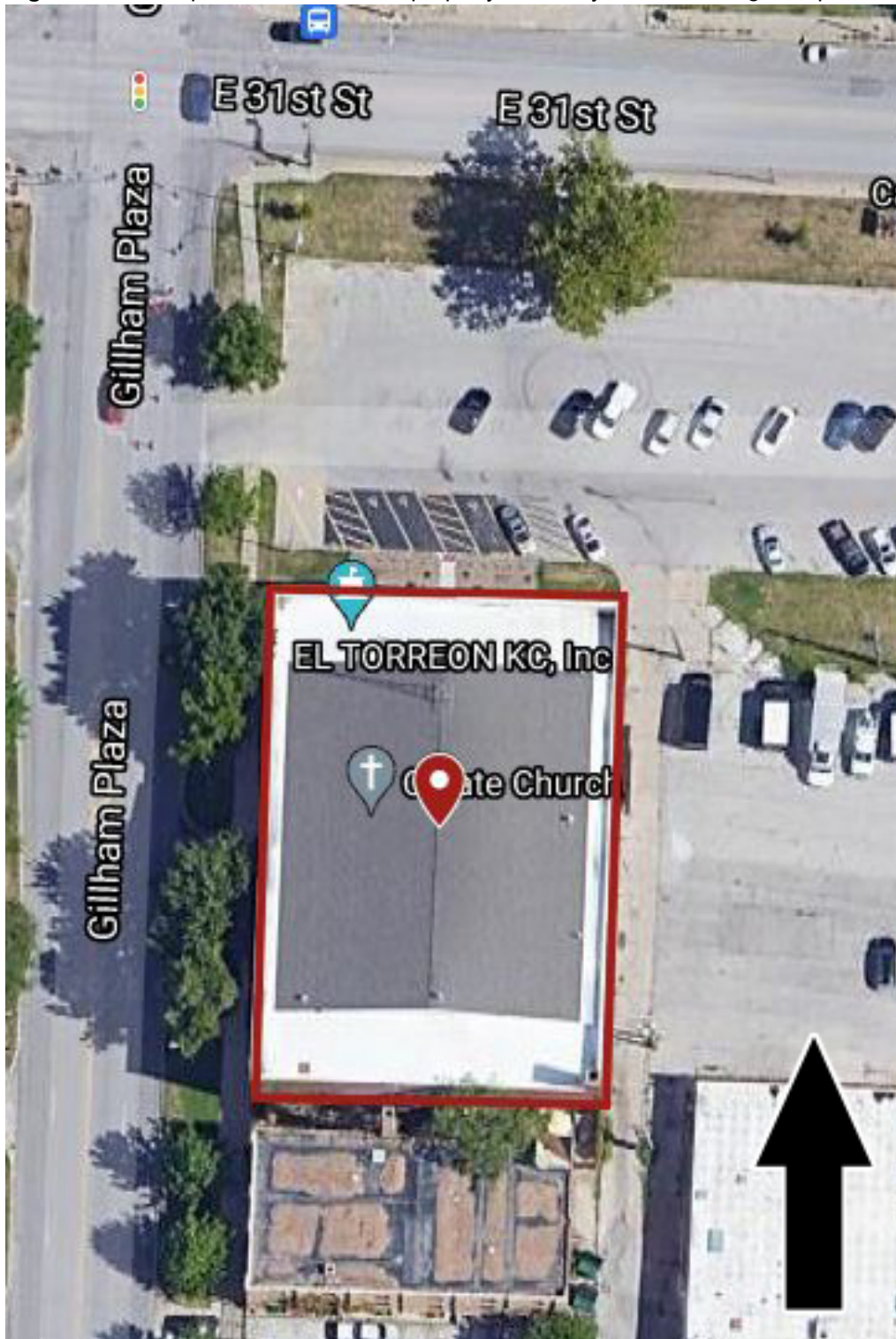
Jackson County, Missouri

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N/A

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Figure 3. Site Map. The red line is the property boundary. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*



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Figure 4. Exterior Photo Map. The red line is the property boundary. *Source: Google Maps, 2021.*



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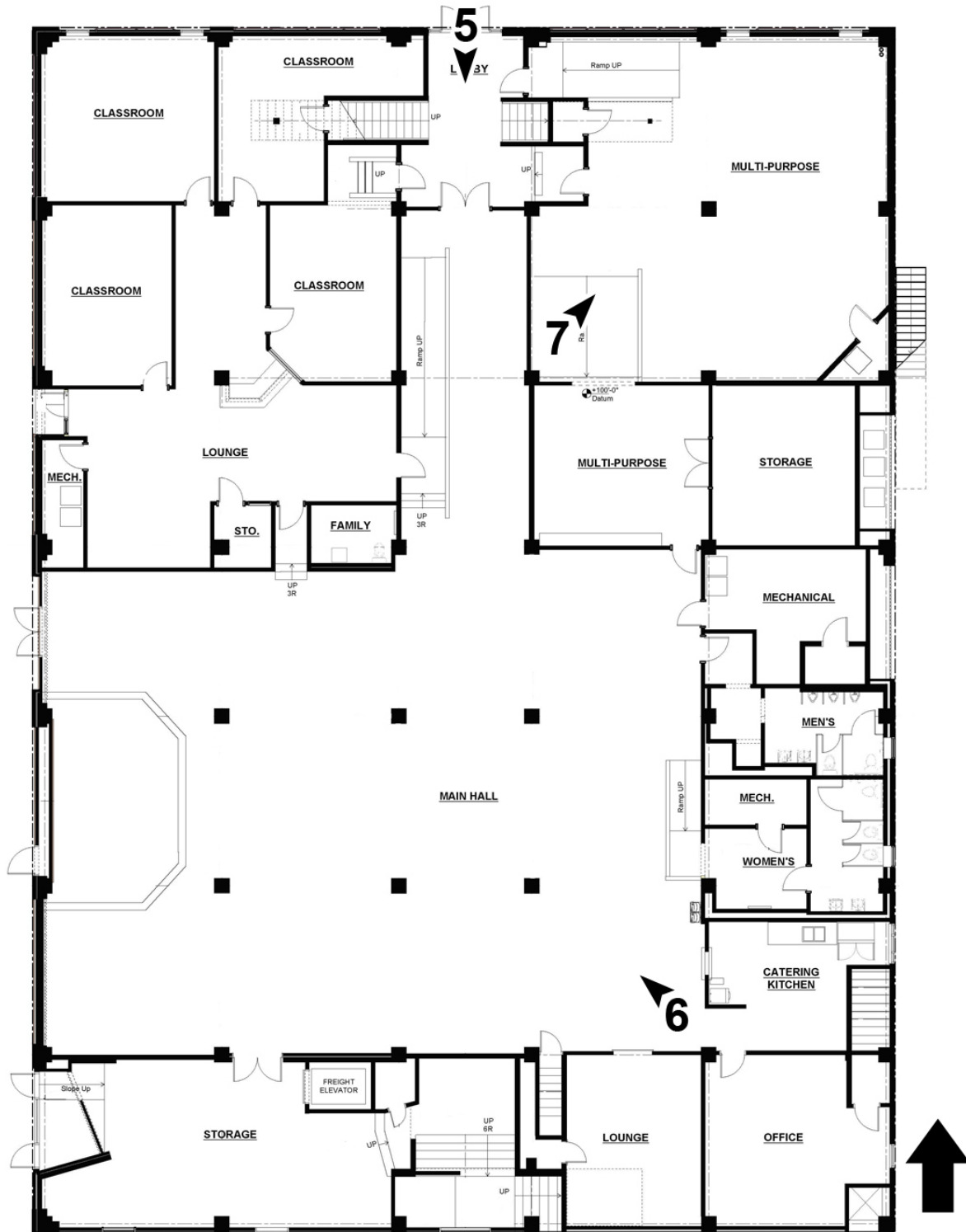
Jackson County, Missouri

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N/A

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Figure 5. First floor photo map. Current plan; not to scale. *Source: John Ho, Architect, 2021.*



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El Torreon Ballroom

Name of Property

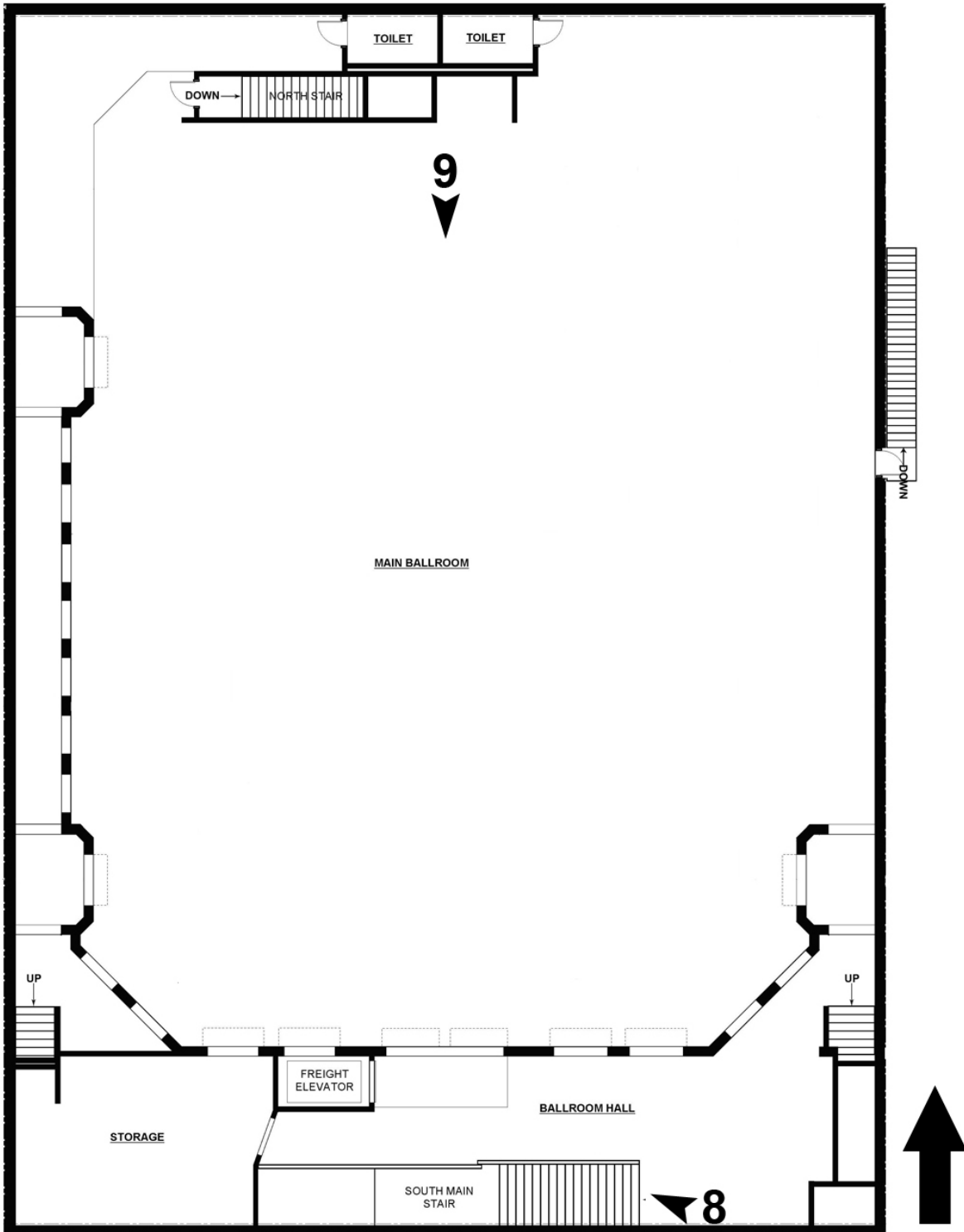
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 6. Second floor photo map. Current plan; not to scale. *Source: John Ho, Architect, 2021.*



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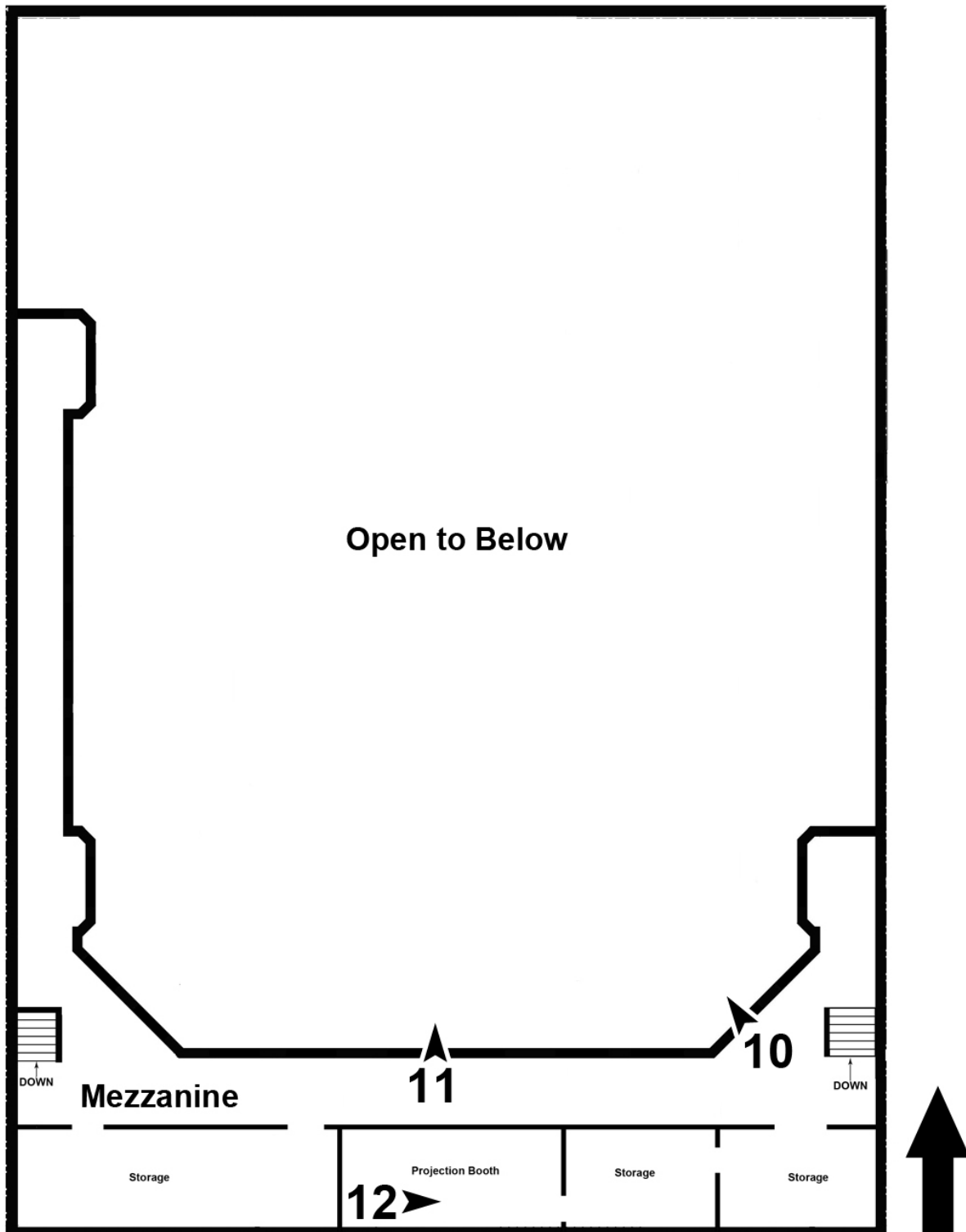
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 7. Mezzanine photo map. Current plan; not to scale. *Source: John Ho, Architect, 2021.*



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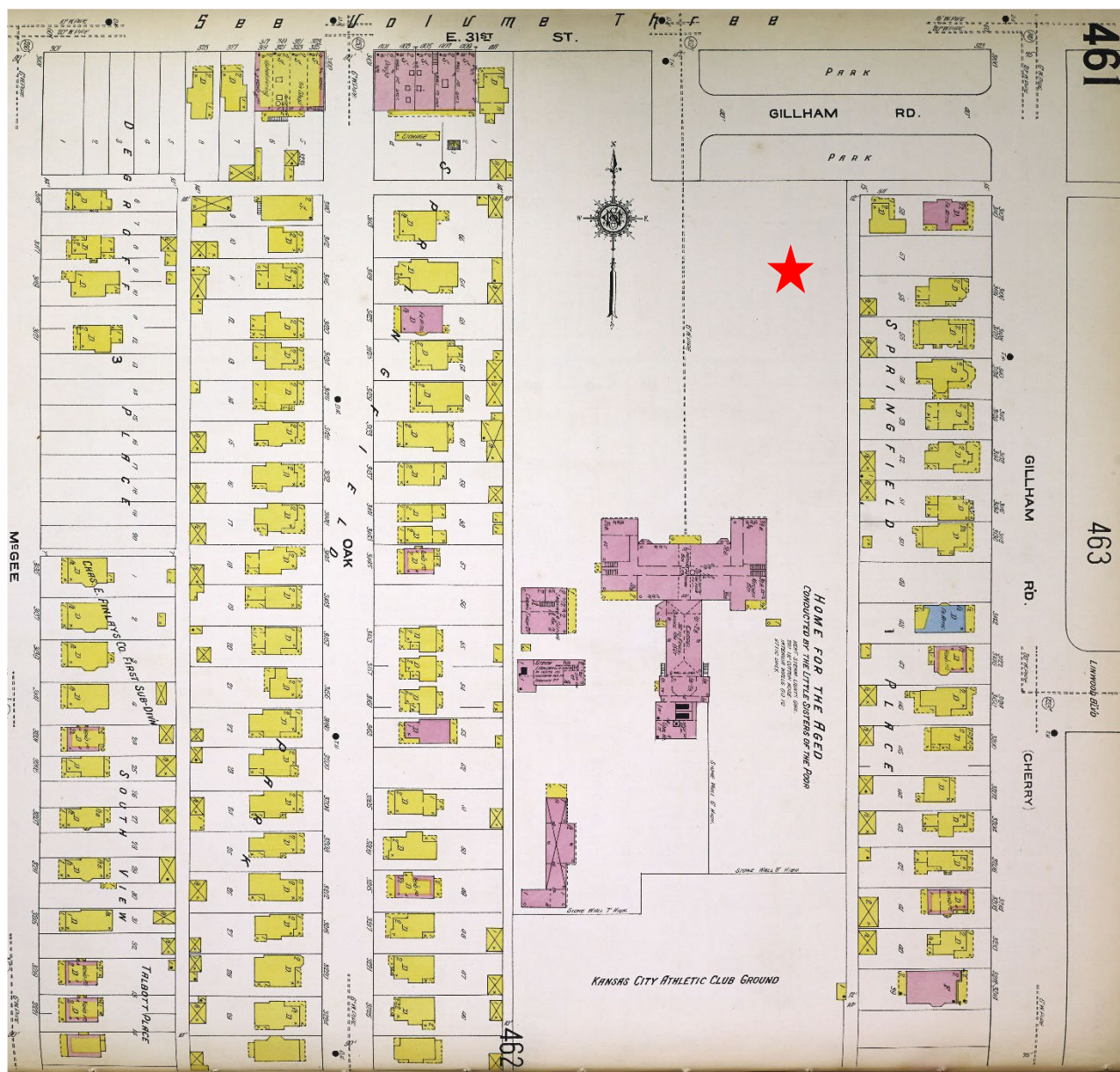
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 8. Little Sisters of the Poor property, prior to demolition of the Home of the Aged (the large Y-shaped pink building at the center of the open space), and construction of El Torreon (red star). Source: *Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1909, Vol. 4, Sheet 461.*



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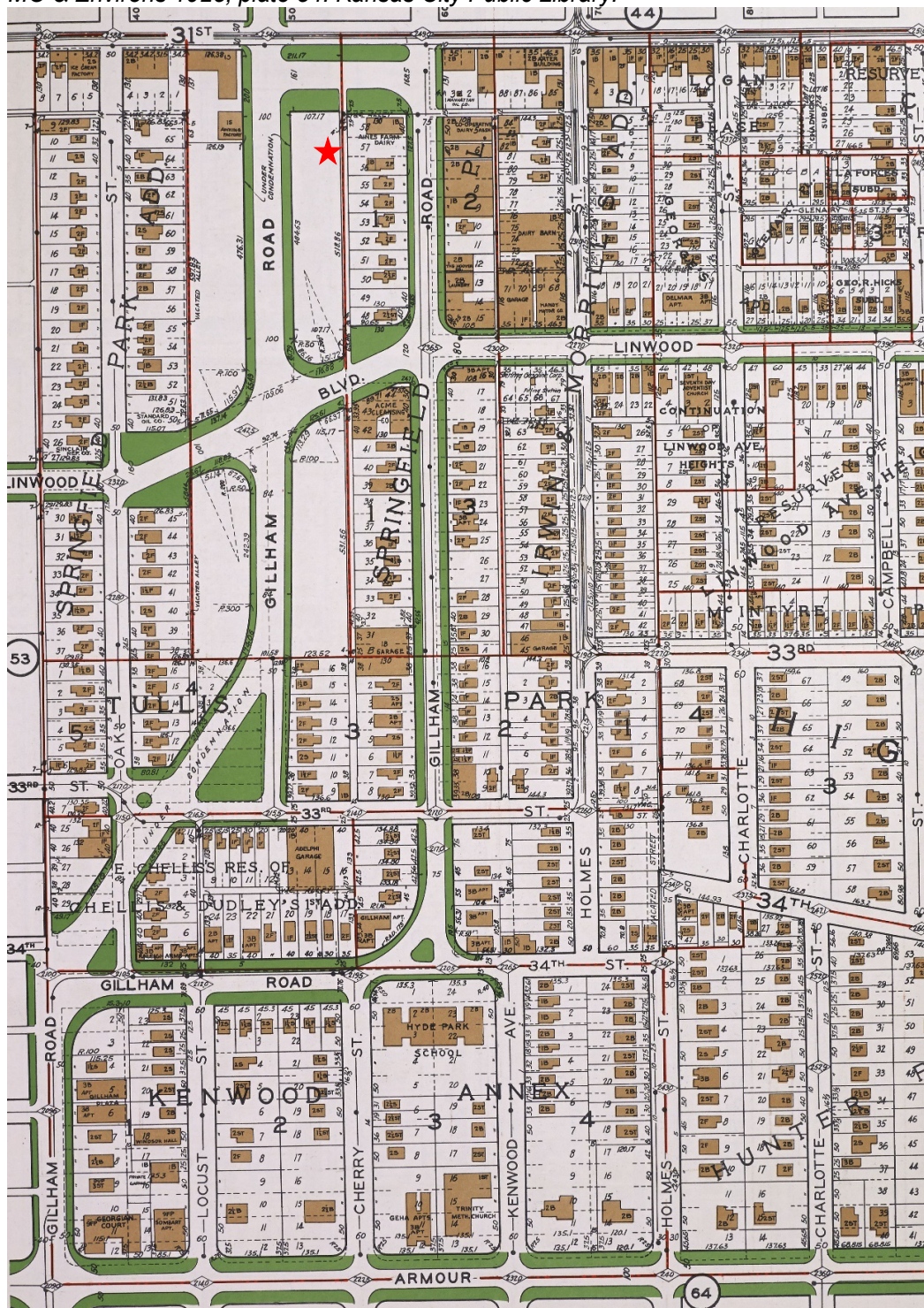
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 9. Gillham Road (Gillham Plaza) as connector for Parks and Boulevards system (green lined streets), 1925, prior to construction of El Torreon (red star). *Source: Tuttle & Ayers, Atlas of Kansas City, MO & Environs 1925, plate 54. Kansas City Public Library.*



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El Torreon Ballroom

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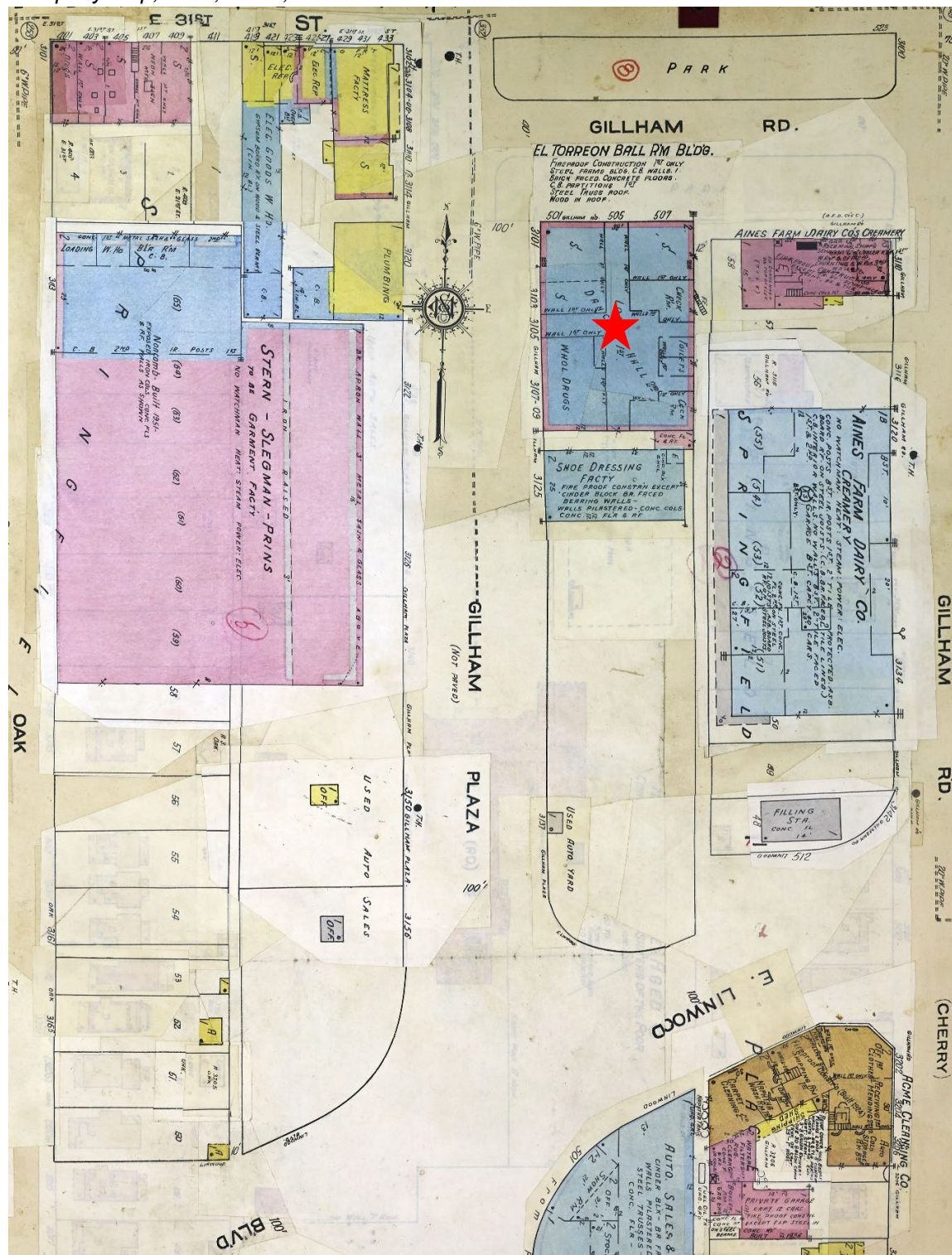
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 10. El Torreon (red star) with surrounding commercial resources. *Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1951, Vol. 4, Sheet 461.*



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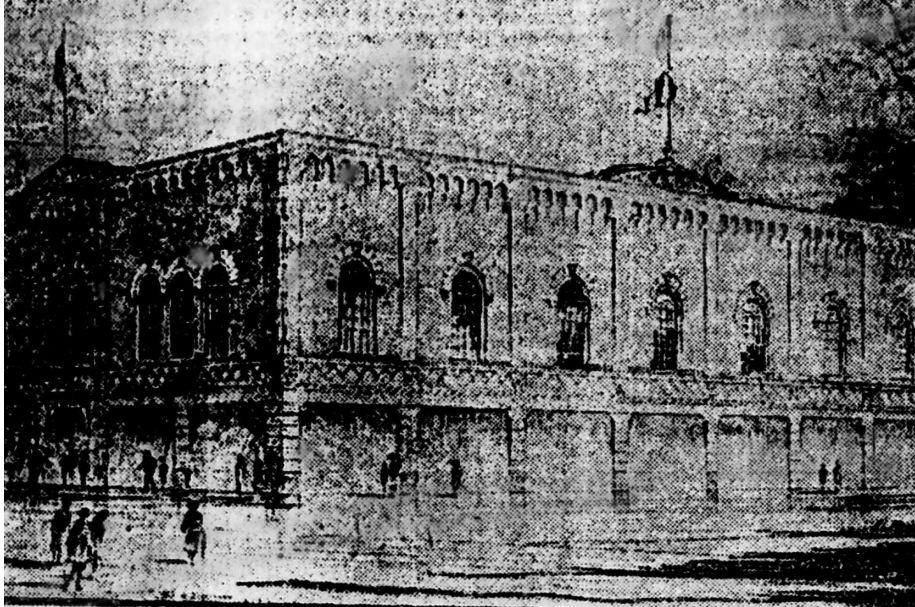
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 11. Rendering from announcement of construction. "El Torreon Ballroom," *Kansas City Star*, September 20, 1927. Source: *Newspapers.com*



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El Torreon Ballroom

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N/A

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Figure 12. Ad for opening night. *Kansas City Times*, December 15, 1927. Source: *Newspapers.com*



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N/A

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Figure 13. Detail of Cloud Effect control mechanism. *Source: Rachel Consolloy, 2021.*



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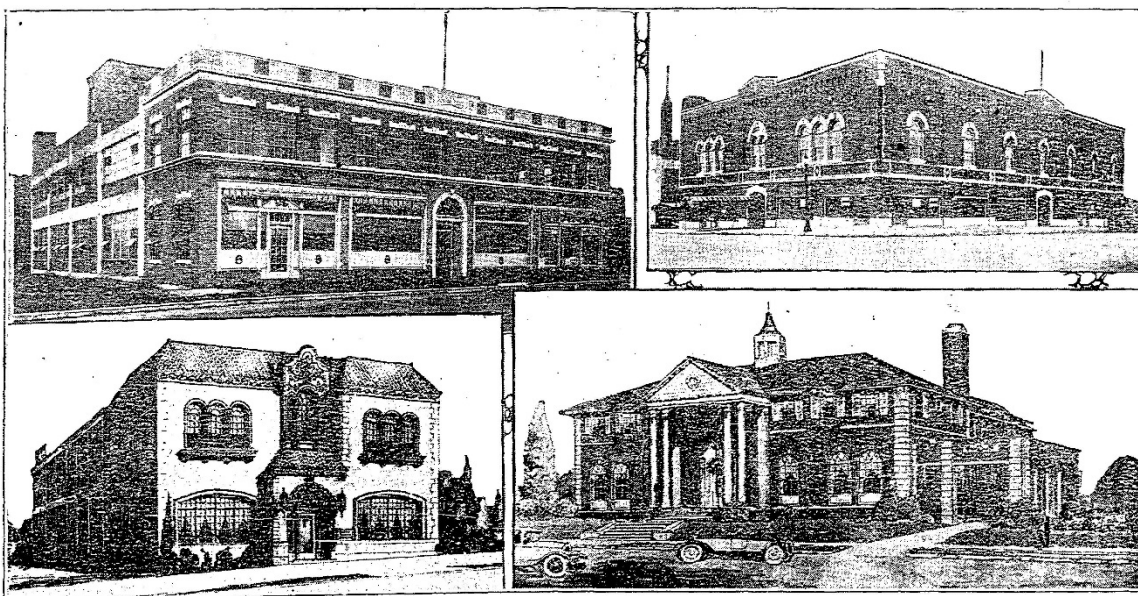
County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 14. Gillham Plaza Buildings. Top right is El Torreon; top left is Martha Washington Candy Company and Bottom left is Luzier Special Formula Laboratories Building (these two are now combined with a unified façade similar to Luzier); bottom right is Stine & McClure Undertakers Building. *Kansas City Star*, June 3, 1928. *Source: Newspapers.com*

STRUCTURES, COMPLETED AND NOW BUILDING, WHICH WILL ESTABLISH THE CHARACTER OF DEVELOPMENT ON THE NEW GILLHAM PLAZA BOULEVARD LINK.



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N/A

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Figure 15. Boxing matches held at El Torreon. *The Kansas City Times*, January 25, 1937. Source: *Newspapers.com*



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El Torreon Ballroom

Name of Property
Jackson County, Missouri

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N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 16. Advertisement for El Torreon Roller Skating, *The Kansas City Times*, December 3, 1944, 55.
Source: Newspapers.com.

EL TORREON ROLLER RINK

WHERE SKATING IS A PLEASURE!!

Kansas City's Finest and Only R. S. R. O. A. Rink

★ **31st and Gillham Plaza** ★

SKATING EVERY NIGHT AT 8:00 P. M.
ADMISSION 35c INC. TAX

**Sundays 2:30 p. m. to 5:30 p. m.,
5:00 to 8:00 p. m., 8:00 to 11 p. m.**

Children's MATINEE Every Saturday
★ **2:00 P. M. TO 4:30 P. M.—20c** ★

**EVERY MONDAY AND TUESDAY WITH YOUR
OWN SKATES—20c. ALL MEMBERS OF THE
ARMED SERVICES ADMITTED FREE.**

Those of You Who Have Seen the Skating Vanities Will
Appreciate the Art of Graceful Skating. You Now Have the
Opportunity to

LEARN to DANCE on SKATES

Join Now! El Torreon Roller Skate Club!
Classes Every Sunday, 1 P. M.-2:30 P. M.
Our Instructor Is a Registered R. S. R. O. A. Professional.

Parents Always Welcome

**FOR CHURCH & PRIVATE PARTY RESERVATIONS
CALL VALENTINE 9469 AFTER 6:00 P. M.**

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N/A

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Figure 17. Interior photograph, c. 1927. *Source: El Torreon KC, Inc.*



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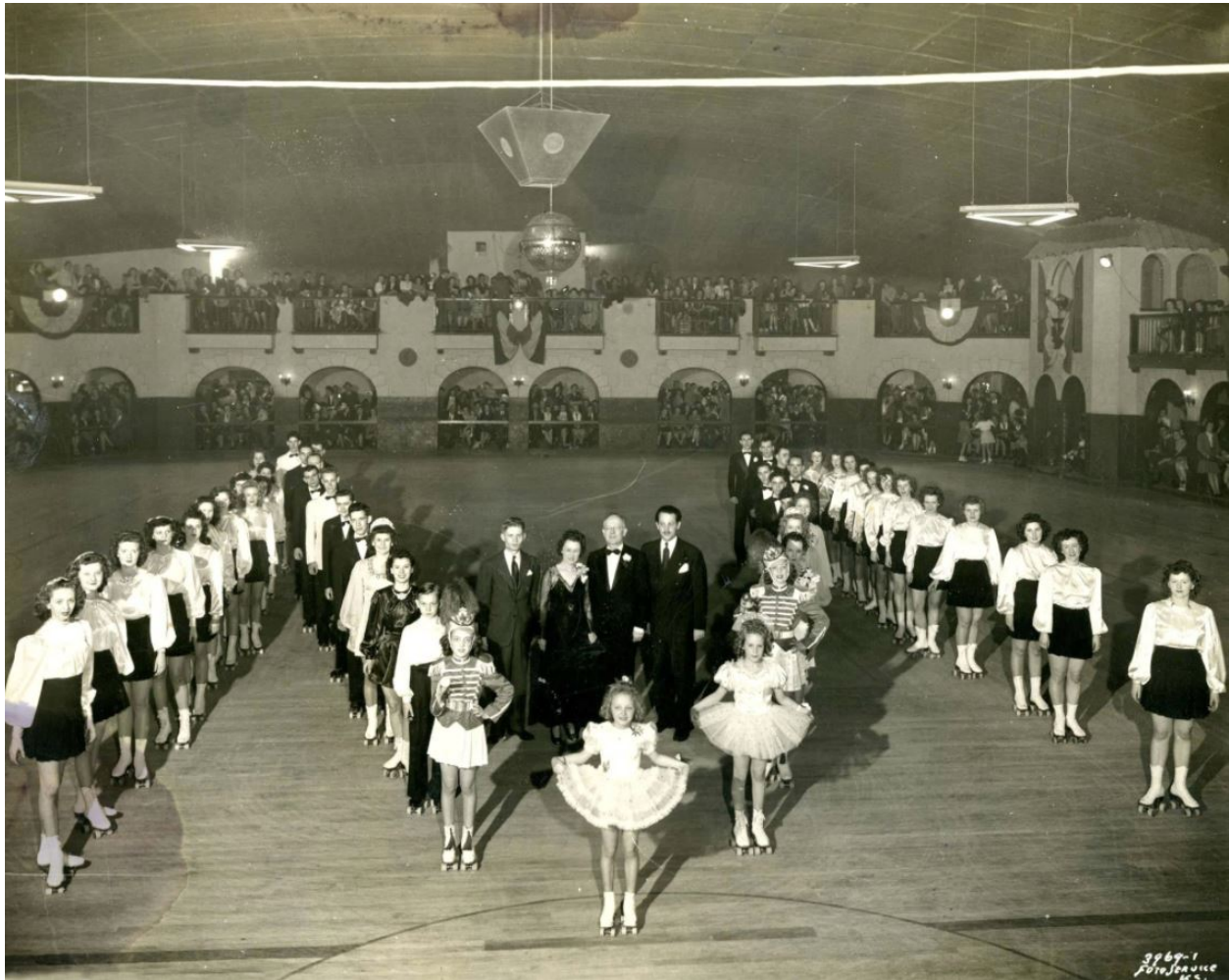
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 18. Interior photograph, c. 1947. The mirrored ball and the cloud effect mechanism are visible at the center of the photo. *Source: Collection of M. Lawrence Gallagher / Cowtown Ballroom Friends Facebook page.*



El Torreon Ballroom

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N/A

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Figure 19. Pla-Mor Recreation Center. The three large blue buildings at the center of the map are the Pla-Mor complex. The ballroom and bowling/billiards are the top center (1925, demolished), the ice rink and pool are the lower right (1932, demolished), and the roller-skating rink is the center left (1941, extant). *Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, 1951, Vol. 4, Sheet 457.*



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El Torreon Ballroom

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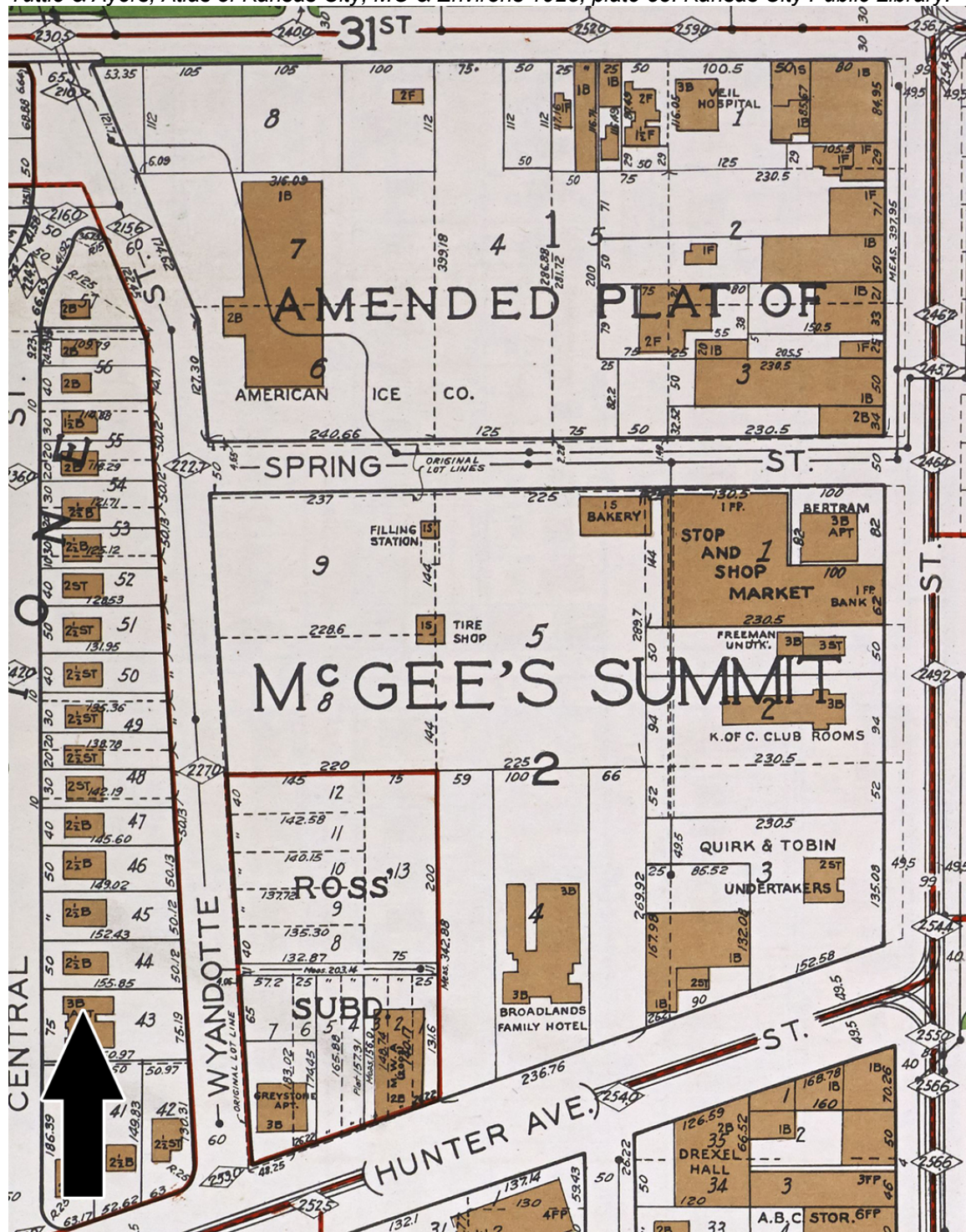
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 20. The Pla-Mor Ballroom was built as a Stop and Shop Market (upper right corner). Source: Tuttle & Ayers, *Atlas of Kansas City, MO & Environs 1925*, plate 53. Kansas City Public Library.



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Jackson County, Missouri

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N/A

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Figure 21. The Pla-Mor Ballroom exterior and interior photos, c.1930. *Source: Driggs Collection.* Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix, *Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop – A History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 58.



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Jackson County, Missouri

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N/A

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Figure 22. The 1925 Aragon Ballroom, Chicago, Illinois, interior photo, 1940. Source:
<http://tomorrowverse.com/story/aragon-ballroom-juxtaposed-photos-from-1926-2015-25027.html>.



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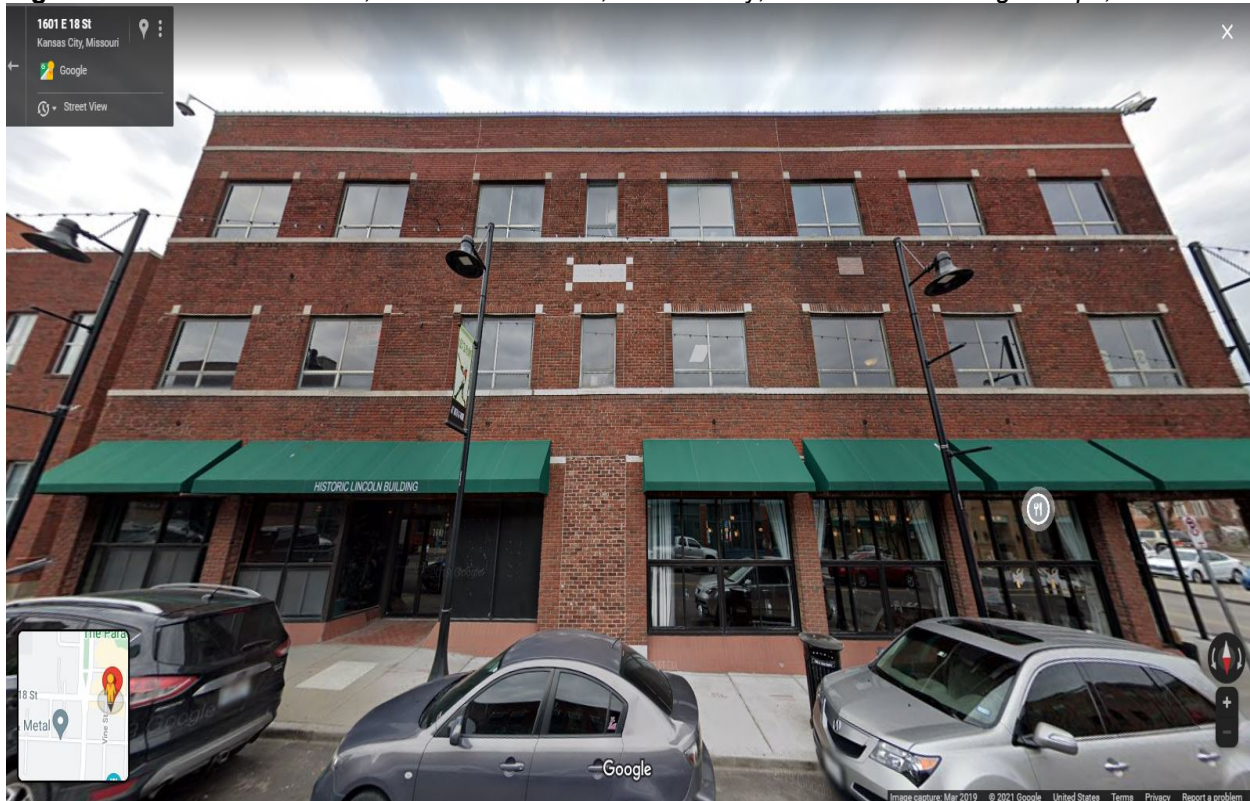
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 23. Lincoln Dance Hall, 1605 E. 18th Street, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*



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N/A

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Figure 24. Paseo Recreation Hall, 1414 E. 15th Street, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*



Figure 25. Fuges Hall, 4300 Bell Avenue, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*



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N/A

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Figure 26. Rose Garden Dance Hall, 2200 Prospect Avenue, Kansas City, 2019. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*



Figure 27. Municipal Auditorium, 301 W. 13th Street, Kansas City, 2020. *Source: Google Maps, 2019.*



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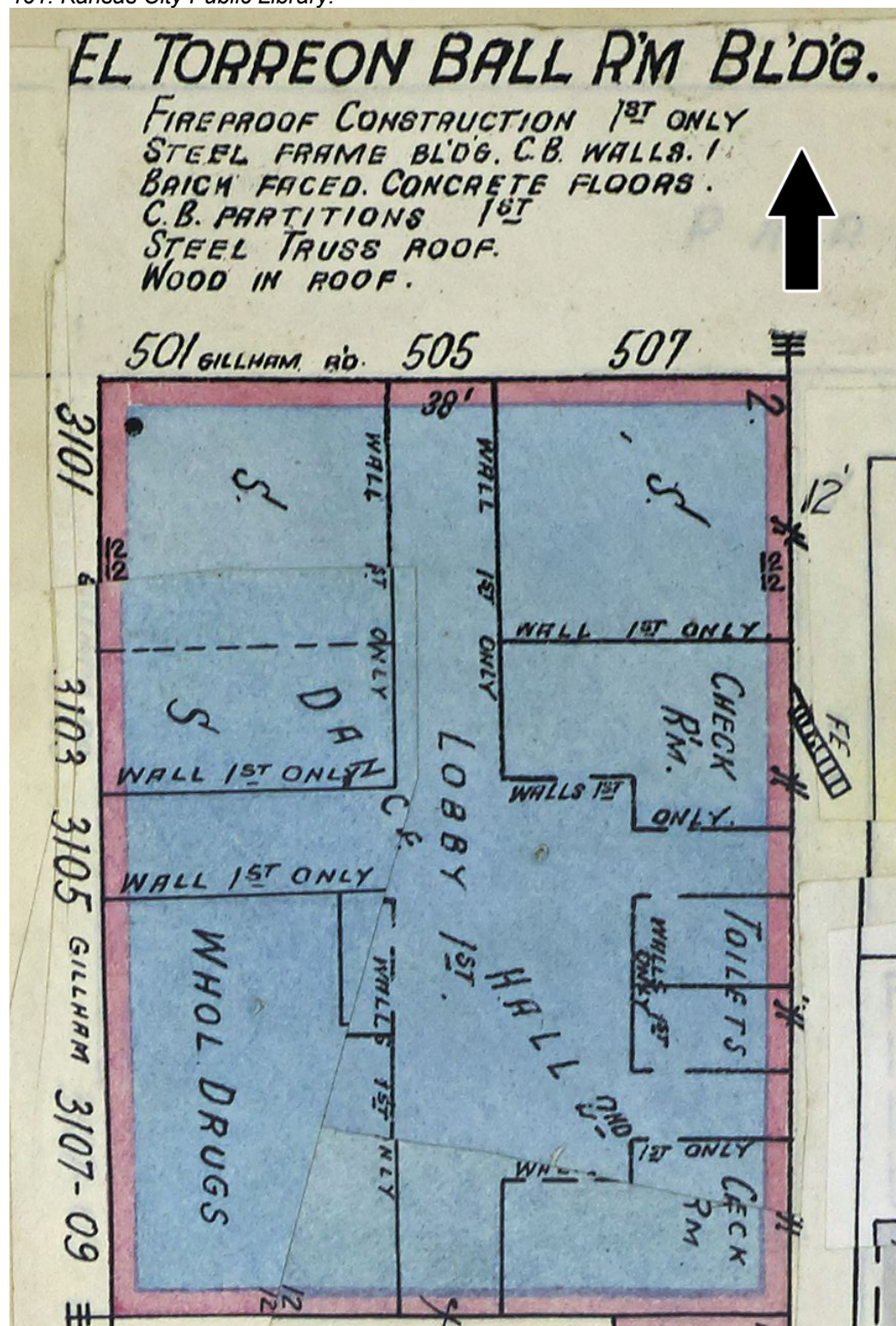
Jackson County, Missouri

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 28. El Torreon Ballroom Building. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951, Volume 4, Sheet 461. Kansas City Public Library.









[illegible]

EL • TORREON













