

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Joplin Supply Company
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 228 South Joplin Avenue [N/A] not for publication
city or town Joplin [N/A] vicinity
state Missouri code MO county Jasper code 097 zip code 63357

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Mark A. Miles May 23, 2007
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

[] entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet [].

[] determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet [].

[] determined not eligible for the National Register.

[] removed from the National
Register.

[] other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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Jasper County, Missouri

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5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

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

Category of Property

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

Number of Resources Within Property**Contributing****Non-contributing**

1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing.

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

N/A

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

INDUSTRY: manufacturing facility

Current Functions

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description**Architectural classification**

OTHER: Two-Part Vertical Block

Materials

foundation concrete

walls brick

concrete

roof

other stone

See continuation sheet []

Narrative Description See continuation sheet [x].

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8. Statement of Significance
Applicable National Register Criteria

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

See continuation sheet [x].

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography See continuation sheet [x].

Areas of Significance

Commerce

Industry

Period of Significance

1922-1931

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Dieter, C. A., Builder

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:

Joplin Public Library

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	365393	4105600			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Debbie Sheals, with Becky Snider
 organization Private Contractor date January, 2007
 street & number 29 S. 9th St. Suite 204 telephone 573-874-3779
 city or town Columbia state Missouri zip code 65201

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 FOP for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Ford Lofts of Joplin, L.P. attn: Brian Kimes
 street & number 206 Peach Way
 telephone 573-443-2012
 city or town Columbia state MO zip code 65203

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Joplin Supply Company
Jasper County, Missouri

Summary: The Joplin Supply Company Building, at 228 South Joplin Avenue in Joplin, Jasper County, Missouri, is a five-story, two-part vertical block commercial building. It is located on the north side of downtown Joplin, one block west of Main Street. Constructed in 1923 by the Joplin Supply Company, the building functioned as an auto and tractor showroom and as an assembly plant for Ford Model T cars from the time it was built until 1931. It has a steel reinforced concrete structure, brick exterior walls, large multi-pane windows and simple stone detailing. The building occupies a corner lot, and the two street elevations are more highly detailed than the other two walls. The façade faces east to South Joplin Street, and the south wall faces West Third Street. The street elevations feature open storefronts with prism glass transoms along the first floor, and even bays of windows fill the upper floors. The other two elevations are fairly simple, with concrete and brick walls, and banks of industrial metal windows. The formal entrance to the building is centered on the ground floor of the façade. Like the large display windows of the storefronts, the entrance doors and surrounding trim are fully intact beneath temporary metal coverings. The ground floor of the interior includes an open, relatively formal display room in the front of the ground floor, along with a low mezzanine and other support spaces to the rear. The upper floors all have open plans, with rows of plain square concrete posts and exposed concrete support beams and floors. The building occupies almost all of the lot, and it is the only resource on the property. The period of significance for the property runs from 1922, the year construction on the building was completed, to 1931, the year the last Ford Model T was assembled there. The building has seen few changes of note, either inside or out, since the period of significance, and it appears today very much as it did in the 1920s.

Elaboration:

The Joplin Supply Company Building sits on the northeast corner of the intersection of West Third Street and South Joplin Avenue. It measures 120 feet by 75 feet 9 inches, and is set with its narrow side facing Joplin Street. (Photo 1.) The surrounding properties contain a mix of modern and early twentieth century commercial buildings. The former Joplin Federal Courthouse and Post Office is located directly across Third Street to the south, and the lot across the street to the east is vacant. The two street elevations of the building are set close to the sidewalk, and there is a small paved parking lot to the north. (Photos 2 and 3.) A narrow service alley runs along the west edge of the property. (Photo 4.) The rectangular lot slopes from south to north; on the north elevation, the first floor of the building is approximately four feet above grade.

The building has a concrete foundation with a smooth stone water table and architectural accents, and the concrete structural grid is exposed on the elevations which face the parking lot and the alley. The street elevations (east and south), are sheathed with dark reddish brown wire-cut brick that is laid in an ornamental bond pattern consisting of five rows of running bond and one row of alternating header and stretcher bricks. On the north and west elevations, the

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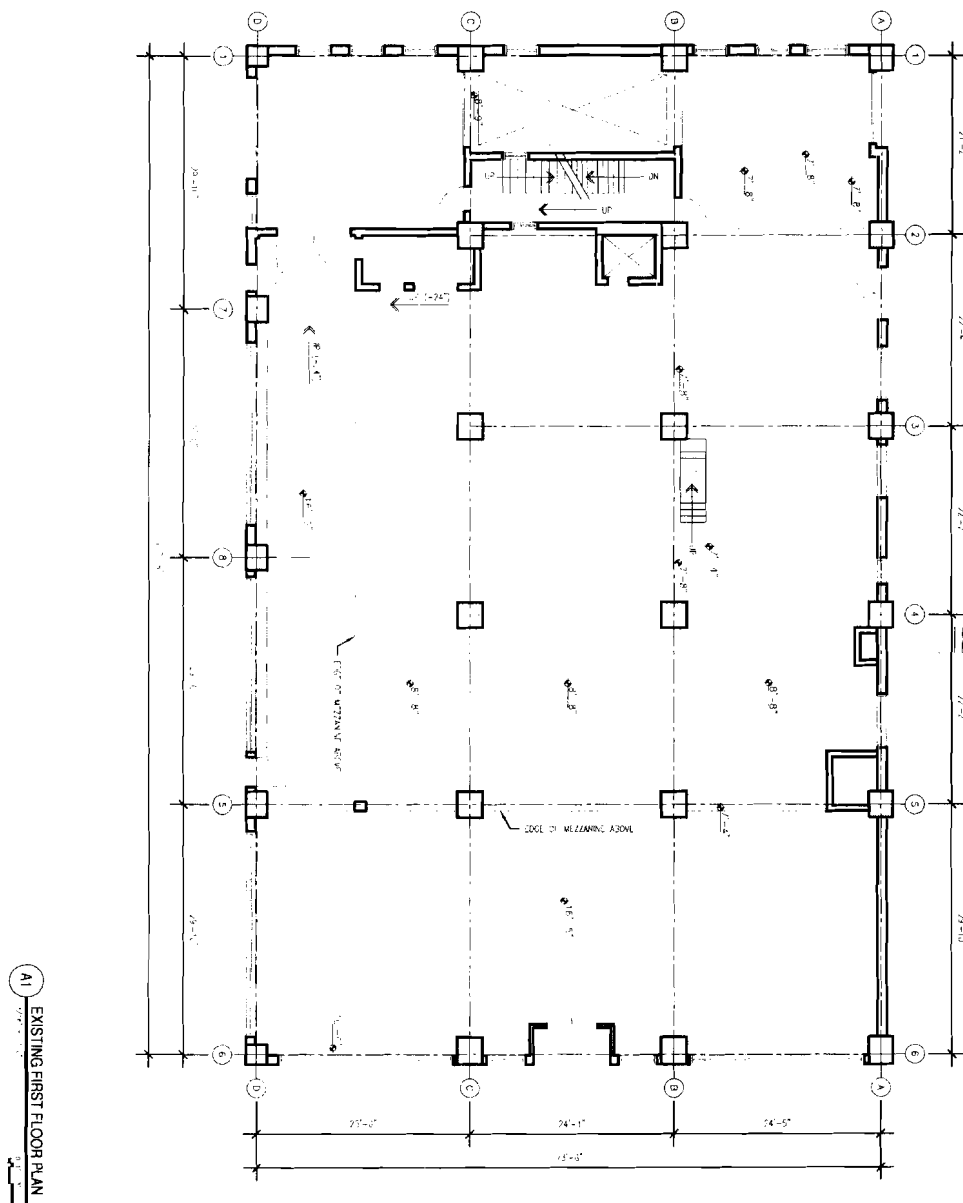
Joplin Supply Company
Jasper County, Missouri

concrete columns and floors are visible on the exterior of the building, and the space in between these structural elements is filled with brick. Those bricks are much simpler flat red bricks, laid in a common bond pattern.

Figure One. Ground Floor Plan.

Drawing by Rosemann & Associates, Kansas City, MO.

North is to the right.



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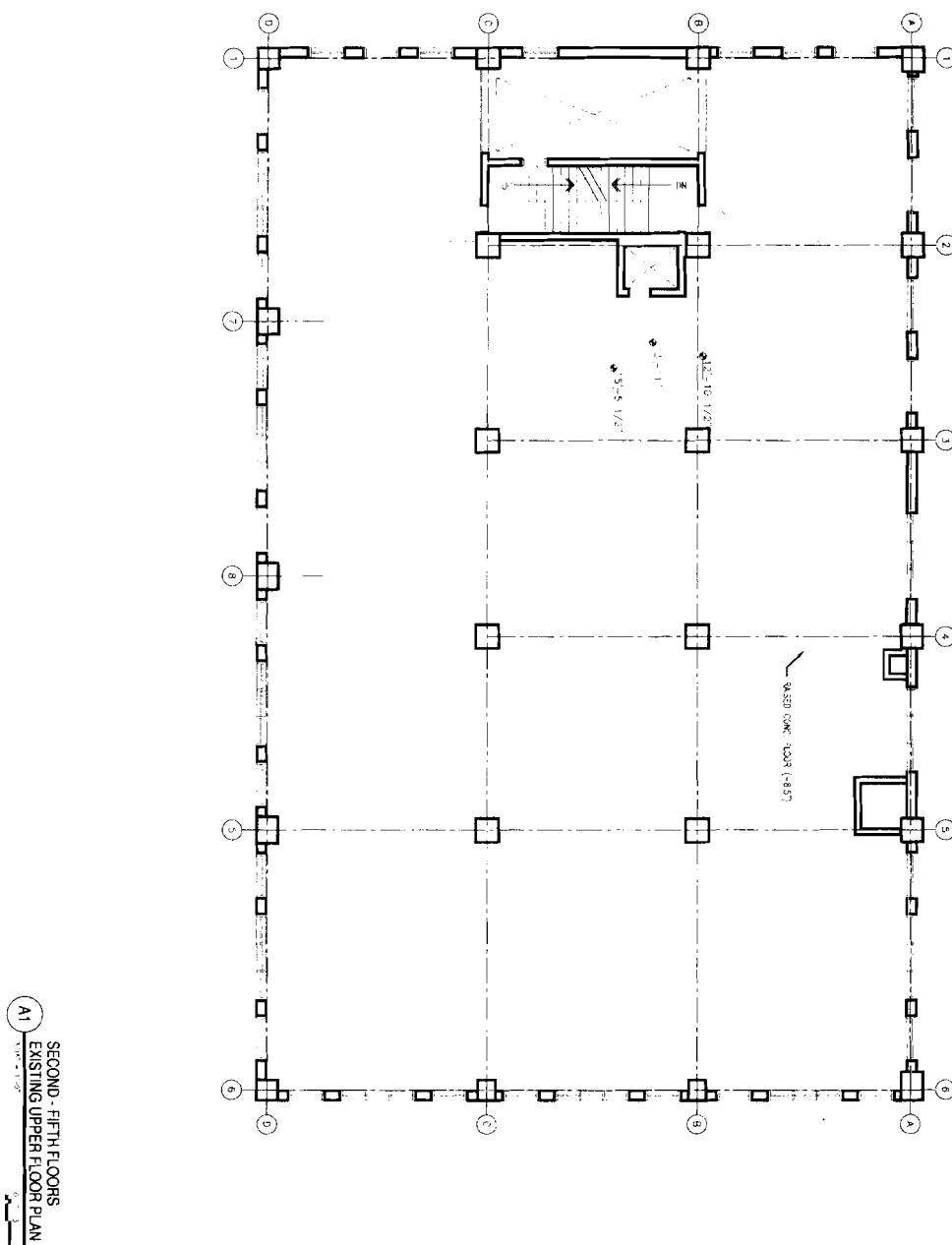
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Figure Two. Typical Floor Plan. Not to scale. Drawing by Rosemann & Associates, Kansas City, MO.

North is to the
right.



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The building has a flat roof, with parapet walls on the south, east and north elevations. On the street elevations, the parapet walls have stepped profiles and are capped with stone coping. On the north elevation, the parapet is flat, with plain terra cotta coping tiles. A large brick chimney is located in the center of the roof, and there is a concrete and brick elevator tower on the west elevation; both of those extend approximately one floor above the roofline.

The façade is divided into three bays which are separated by brick piers with stone accents. Each bay on the first floor contains a single large opening topped by a stone hood, which extends across the full width of each opening. Each opening is subdivided into three sections. The center bay contains the building's main entrance, flanked by narrow storefront windows. Stone pilasters separate the entranceway from the storefront windows. The recessed entrance contains a pair of single-light wood doors that are early or original, with a three-light transom above. Above the recess for the doorway is matching three-light transom.

The outer bays on the first floor of the primary elevation are filled with what appear to be the original storefronts. Each storefront has a low stone bulkhead wall, with three sections of plate glass, and three sections of transoms filled with prism glass tiles. The plate glass may be newer, but the openings remain unchanged; the prism glass appears to be original. The doorway and the storefront windows have been covered with metal panels, but are intact; a few panels have been removed already, and all of them will be taken off in the near future. (Photo 10.) A wide stone cornice extends across the façade at the line of the second floor window sills.

Each bay on the upper floors of the façade contains three sections of large, steel-framed multi-pane windows. The center sections each contain a pair of windows; the outer sections each have a single window. The windows on the second floor are taller than those on the third, fourth and fifth floors. The second floor windows have twenty-four panes of glass; those on the upper floors have sixteen panes. Each window has an eight-light hinged section above a row of four fixed panes. Stacked stretcher bricks outline each bay of windows on the second, third and fourth floors. Each section of windows on the three middle floors has a stone sill and a flat brick lintel. On the fifth floor, a stone sill extends across all three windows in each bay, and a simple stone cornice spans the wall along the top edge of the windows. Additional detailing on the fifth floor includes projecting stone blocks on the brick piers in between each section of windows, and stone ribs applied on top of the brick piers located between the bays.

The fenestration and detailing of the south wall, which faces Third Street, is almost identical to that of the façade, and the stone cornices below the second floor windows and above the fifth floor windows are contiguous with those on the front. The side wall, which is much longer, is divided into four bays and the bays are wider than on the front. The west edge of the south wall also has a large garage door and a pedestrian door at the ground floor. The other three bays there are filled with storefronts that match those on the front wall, except that they have plain glass in the transoms instead of prism glass tiles. They too are covered, but not permanently. The windows on the upper floors on the secondary elevation are nearly identical to those on the façade. However, because the bays are wider, the center section in each bay

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contains three windows instead of two. All of the windows on the upper floors appear to be original, albeit in just fair condition.

The north elevation is divided into five bays, which are delineated by concrete columns. (Photo 3.) A bracket-like concrete block projects out from each column at the ceiling level of each floor. Wide horizontal bands of concrete form a continuous lintel above the windows. The pattern of fenestration on the north elevation is irregular, but the window styles and sizes are similar to those on the east and south elevations. A concrete loading dock with a ramp that extends across the center and western bays is sheltered by a flat wooden roof supported by metal poles. The dock is probably early or original; the roof and poles appear to be newer.

The west elevation which faces the alley, has the least amount of detailing. Concrete columns separate the three brick bays, and wide horizontal bands of concrete extend across the wall at the ceiling level of each floor. The shaft for a car-size freight elevator is located behind the center bay of the west elevation. Like the windows on the other elevations, the second floor windows are taller than those on the upper floors. In the center bay, there is one sixteen-pane window with an eight-light hinged section on each floor. This window, which provides natural light for the elevator tower, is located on the south end of the center bay. The north bay of the west elevation has two equally-spaced windows and a fire escape door on each level above the ground floor, and there is a steel fire escape on the top four floors.

The interior of the Joplin Supply Company Building is remarkably intact. The first floor showroom space is nearly pristine. This wide open space, which occupies the entire front structural bay, retains all or most of its original interior fixtures and finishes. The plastered ceiling, which is approximately fifteen feet high, is edged with wide crown molding, and early or original pendant light fixtures hang from the ceiling. The bottom half of the showroom walls, the interior of the entranceway, and the concrete support columns are covered with paneled wood wainscoting. The floor of the showroom is covered with tile. A hallway along the south side of the building that leads from the showroom to the elevator is also finished and has the same high ceilings found in the showroom. This hallway was probably used to move the cars from the upper floors to the showroom.

The rest of the first floor of the Joplin Supply Company Building is divided into two levels. The first floor space behind the showroom has an eight-foot ceiling and is largely unfinished. A mezzanine level, which was used for offices and/or part storage, extends from the back of the showroom to the stairwell. The painted brick walls, concrete posts and concrete ceilings on both of these levels are relatively simple, with few architectural embellishments. There are some frame partition walls still in place on the mezzanine, and the south wall of that space may have been partially open to the first floor at one time. Modern wood paneling now fills openings in the top half of the south wall of the mezzanine.

A large elevator, which was built to transport cars and car parts, is still in place on the west end of the building. It was built with doors on both ends so cars could drive in and out without having to go in reverse; the south wall of that shaft appears to have been in-filled at an

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**Joplin Supply Company
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early date. A long enclosed stairwell next to the elevator shaft serves all floors on the building, and a smaller elevator next to the stairway appears to be fairly early, but not original.

Each of the upper floors, as well as the basement, of the Joplin Supply Company Building is a large open space interrupted only by an even grid of structural concrete posts. The floors are of concrete, the walls are plain brick and the ceilings feature exposed concrete beams. (Photos 11-14.) With the exception of a coat of paint on some of the floors, there are no interior finishes or ornamentation, and the only enclosed spaces of note are the stairwell and the elevator shafts. The stairs are simple concrete structures, with metal pipe railings.

The building is highly intact, inside and out. It is currently vacant and used only for light storage; a full rehabilitation is planned for the near future. The rehab will follow to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, and the finished product will continue to reflect the building's important ties to the assembly of Model T's in Joplin, Missouri. The Joplin Supply Company Building is immediately recognizable to its period of significance and it clearly evokes a sense of its time and place.

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Joplin Supply Company
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Summary: The Joplin Supply Company Building in Joplin, Missouri is significant under Criterion A in the areas of COMMERCE and INDUSTRY. The building, which was completed in 1922, was constructed by the Joplin Supply Company to serve as a car and tractor showroom, and a branch assembly plant for Ford Model T cars. The Joplin Supply Company started out as a mining supply dealer in 1899, and in 1903, became one of the first Ford automobile dealers in the state. Years later, that relationship with the Ford Motor Company resulted in a contract to operate a branch assembly plant in Joplin, a move which spurred the construction of the building at 3rd and Joplin Streets. The Joplin plant was built at a time when it was common practice for Ford automobiles to be assembled in locally-owned branch assembly plants, and this was one of several such assembly plants in operation at the time. The building was constructed to meet Ford's standards, and outfitted for the assembly of Ford's extremely popular Model T. It is a relatively late example of a privately owned, multi-story Ford assembly plant; just a few years after it was constructed, Ford returned to doing all of their own assembly, often in sprawling single story complexes. The Joplin Supply Company assembled Model Ts in this building from 1922 until 1931, when changing technologies and strained relations with Ford led the Joplin Supply Company to get out of the car assembly business. The period of significance runs from 1922, the year the building was completed, until 1931, when the last Model T was assembled there. The building has seen remarkably few changes since that time, and it appears today very much as it did when "Tin Lizzies" were coming off the Joplin assembly line.

Elaboration:

Joplin is situated in the southwestern corner of Missouri, and it is the largest town in Jasper County. Between 1837 and 1839, the first permanent settlers to the area where Joplin stands today began arriving from Tennessee, Delaware and Pennsylvania. The town gets its name from one of these settlers, Reverend Harris G. Joplin, a Methodist home missionary who came to the area in 1839 and built a log cabin large enough to hold church services.¹ Jasper County was organized in 1841 and Carthage was named as the county seat. The discovery of lead deposits spurred settlement in the county. However, the lack of area transportation routes and the fierce battles that took place throughout southwest Missouri during the Civil War hindered widespread settlement in Jasper County until after the late 1860s.

Although several lead mining communities were established in Jasper County in the 1850s, Joplin was not officially founded until after the Civil War.² Like many of the towns in the area, the impetus to the founding of Joplin was the discovery of a rich source of lead in Joplin Creek. In the fall of 1870, two miners, Elliott R. Moffett and John B. Sargeant, leased a tract of land along the

¹ Kay Kirkman and Roger Stinnett, Joplin: A Pictorial History. (Joplin: Joplin Historical Society, 1981) p.13.

² James W. Goodrich and Lynn Wolf Gentzler, eds. Marking Missouri History. (Columbia, Missouri: The State Historical Society of Missouri, 1998) pp. 204-206.

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creek from John Cox and began mining the site. They discovered a deposit that “reportedly produced \$60,000 worth of lead in the first ninety days.”³ Shortly after the discovery, John Cox platted a town called Joplin City on the east side of Joplin Creek. An article that appeared in The Carthage Banner on June 22, 1871 sparked a population boom in the area. The article reported:

There is a new town in Jasper County. Its name is Joplin, and it is located fourteen miles southwest of Carthage on the farm of J. C. Cox. It has lead in unlimited quantities under it. Everybody out of employment ought to go there and dig.⁴

Less than two months after Joplin City was platted, a town called Murphysburg was established by Patrick Murphy on the other side of Joplin Creek.⁵ Both Joplin City and Murphysburg grew quickly, but rivalry between the two towns, combined with an assortment of nefarious businesses and rough characters, led to widespread lawlessness and intolerable living conditions. A meeting of leaders from the two towns resulted in a petition to the county court for the incorporation of the two towns into one. The new town of Union City was incorporated on March 14, 1872 by the Jasper County Court, and a marshal was appointed to help establish order. Unfortunately, the continued rivalry between the two communities and a legal challenge to the validity of the petition to join the towns resulted in a reversal of the court’s decision. Thus, the two towns were reinstated. However, a year later, a local election in favor of a merger prompted civic leaders to apply to the state legislature for a special charter which would give the new town of Joplin status as a fourth-class city. With the approval of the charter by the legislature on March 23, 1873, Joplin was officially born.⁶

The new town of Joplin grew quickly both in population and physical size. By 1877, Joplin had more than 7500 residents, and eight additions to the town had been platted.⁷ In addition to the opening of additional mining operations in and around Joplin, businesses of all types were established during the town’s early years. According to G. K. Renner, the author of Joplin: From Mining Town to Urban Center, “in 1875, the fledgling city already had fifty-two mercantile establishments. Additional businesses included twelve blacksmith shops, five hotels, two banks, and sixteen physicians.”⁸

3 G. K. Renner, Joplin: From Mining Town to Urban Center. (Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1985), p. 25.

4 The Carthage Banner, June 22, 1871.

5 The History of Jasper County, Missouri, including a condensed history of the state, a complete history of Carthage and Joplin, other towns and townships. (Des Moines, IA: Mills & Co., 1883), p. 393.

6 Renner, p. 27.

7 Dolph Shaner, The Story of Joplin. (New York: Stratford House, Inc., 1948) p. 46 and The History of Jasper County, Missouri, pp. 396-400.

8 Renner, p. 27.

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In the 1880s, Joplin became known as the “town that Jack built” as zinc ore, nicknamed “Jack”, once thought of only as a by-product of lead mining, became a valuable commodity.⁹ However, within a few years, mining was only one aspect of Joplin’s booming economy. Although it was the mining industry that first drew Joplin’s earliest settlers, it was the town’s diversification into other industrial and commercial enterprises that resulted in its unprecedented growth in the 1890s and early 1900s and sustained its economy after the mines were depleted. Many of the businesses established during this period catered to the hundreds of miners who made up the bulk of Joplin’s population. As Jim Henry, the author of the article “Downtown once heart of Joplin” noted:

Main Street in Joplin on Saturday nights was festive during the height of the mining era. Saturday marked the end of a six-day work week, and miners’ wages and the operators’ accounts for ore were paid at this time

Banks were open Saturday nights from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. and operators set up booths inside the banks or in saloons where they paid the miners. During that hour, more than \$100,000 was usually disbursed, and from 8 p.m. until midnight the stores and sidewalks were crowded with shoppers and with people socializing. Stores usually transacted one-fourth of their week’s business on Saturday night.¹⁰

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, “the young city grew by a spectacular 161.7 percent, reaching a population of 26,023 by 1900.”¹¹ It was by far Missouri’s fastest growing city. During this period, Joplin began to shed the rough mining camp image for that of a sophisticated city. Substantial brick commercial buildings quickly replaced Joplin’s earliest commercial buildings, which were simple frame structures. By the turn of the twentieth century, the streets of the downtown area were lined with two and three story commercial buildings containing retail stores and offices.

A description of Joplin in the 1898 Missouri State Gazetteer and Business Directory points out the city’s amenities and its commercial development.

In the rush of mining development, comfort and advancement of the city have not been neglected. There are excellent public school buildings, mostly brick structures, all commodious and well arranged....It is lighted by electricity and gas, has a splendid system of waterworks, built in 1881 at a cost of \$120,000, electric street railway, an

⁹ Shaner, p. 78.

¹⁰ Jim Henry, “Downtown once heart of Joplin,” Joplin Globe. (Undated article from the vertical files of the State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.)

¹¹ Renner, p. 40.

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Joplin Supply Company
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efficient and thoroughly equipped fire department, an elegant theater, costing \$40,000, zinc smelting works, the most extensive lead smelting works in the state, white lead works, flouring mills, paint works, brewery, boiler shops, 2 newspapers, 5 banks, wagon factories, foundries and machine shops, cigar factories, planing mills, powder works, ore dressing plant manufactory, ice factories, etc.¹²

E. B. Rhea, W. A. Haglin, and I. D. Laroun were three of the many entrepreneurs who joined the business boom in Joplin in the late nineteenth century. In 1899, the three men incorporated the Joplin Supply Company.¹³ The men joined the more than a dozen Joplin firms selling mining machinery and supplies. At their store in the Aldrich Building at 219 West Fourth Street, they sold Worthington pumps, engines, boilers, steam heads pulleys, belts, fittings, brass goods and wire cloth. In 1901, Frank C. Ralston purchased an interest in the Joplin Supply Company.¹⁴ Ralston was elected secretary and treasurer, and soon became the driving force in the company's management and growth. He was instrumental in establishing the Joplin Supply Company's relationship with Ford Motor Company.

Figure Three: Joplin Supply Company, 219 West Fourth Street, 1913.

Source: Joplin 1913 Picture Booklet



¹² Missouri State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1898-99, (St. Louis: R. L. Polk & Co., 1899).

¹³ Jefferson City State Tribune, October 16, 1899, p. 4.

¹⁴ Missouri Mother of the West, Vol. 4, (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1930), p. 210-11.

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The Ford Motor Company was established just two years after Ralston joined the Joplin Supply Company. In 1902, after several failed attempts in the automobile manufacturing industry, inventor Henry Ford, supported by eleven investors, incorporated the Ford Motor Company. The company leased a small, converted wagon factory near the Michigan Central Railroad in Detroit and began producing cars. As one history of the company put it, "in an area illuminated by six lightbulbs, ten employees worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week, assembling the first Ford

commercial automobiles, beginning with the Model A."¹⁵ Ford Motor Company sold 215 Model A's in the first two months and by the end of the company's first production year, more than 1,000 Fords had been shipped to buyers across the country.

The Joplin Supply Company purchased four of those Model A's; they were among the first automobiles to be sold anywhere in Missouri. That purchase marked the start of a twenty-seven year relationship between the Joplin Supply Company and the Ford Motor Company.¹⁶ Soon, the Joplin Supply Company was part of the network of official Ford Motor Car dealers. By 1907, the Joplin Globe "boasted that Joplin with 125 autos on its streets, had more motorcars for a city its size than any other city in the United States."¹⁷



Figure Four: Joplin Supply Company Ford Ad, 1923. Source: Joplin Globe, January 7, 1923.

¹⁵ Russ Banham, The Ford Century: Ford Motor Company and the Innovations that Shaped the World. (New York: Artisan, A Division of Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), p. 34.

¹⁶ Andy Ostmeier, "When Joplin Cranked Out Model Ts," Joplin Globe, October 30, 1988, p. E1.

¹⁷ Leslie Simpson, "Tin Lizzies," In Brad Belk, David Cunningham, Andy Ostmeier and Leslie Simpson. Joplin Souvenir Album. (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing Co., 2001), p. 61.

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Between 1903 and 1908, the Ford Motor Company worked its way through the alphabet, designing the Model A through the Model S, and manufacturing more than 20,000 automobiles.¹⁸ It was the next design, the Model T, that skyrocketed the Ford Motor Company into position as the largest automobile manufacturer of the early twentieth century. With the Model T, Henry Ford achieved his dream of building a reliable and economical utilitarian automobile. Ford wrote:

I will build a motor car for the great multitude. It will be large enough for the family, but small enough for the individual to run and care for. It will be constructed of the best materials, by the best men to be hired, after the simplest designs modern engineering can devise.... But it will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one.¹⁹

The Model T was the lightest and smallest car made in the United States, but it also had a powerful engine and a modest price tag. Furthermore, as Douglas Brinkley, the author of Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company and a Century of Progress, 1903-2003 noted, "the genius in the Model T's design was that the car could be adapted to almost any use, be it as a portable power source around the farm, a delivery van for rural mail carriers, or a traveling salesman's trustworthy colleague."²⁰ This versatility created a huge demand as well as a long life for the Model T, the car affectionately known as the Tin Lizzie. The "Tin Lizzie" phenomena lasted until the mid-1920s, by which time the car accounted for two-thirds of all the automobiles in the United States. "Ford" became virtually synonymous with the word "car."²¹

Although the genius of Henry Ford was demonstrated in the design of his automobiles, that acclaim was proven many times over by his innovations in the manufacturing process. Like other early automakers, Ford Motor Company began by building one car at a time; one group of employees assembled the entire car. This process was costly and time-consuming; each car took twelve and a half hours to complete. Henry Ford recognized that the only way to make his cars as affordable as possible was to develop a way to mass produce them. As Russ Banham noted, "Henry latched on to the concept that was, for manufacturing, rather revolutionary - instead of bringing the man to the work, work must be brought to the man."²²

For several years, Ford experimented with different ways to effect this change. Finally in 1913, the moving automobile assembly line was born at the Ford Motor Company Highland Park Factory. A Model T chassis was rigged up to a winch and was pulled slowly across the factory floor

¹⁸ Banham, p. 34.

¹⁹ David Weitzman, Model T: How Henry Ford Built a Legend. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), n.p.

²⁰ Douglas Brinkley, Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company and a Century of Progress, 1903-2003. (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), p. 128.

²¹ Ibid., p. 129.

²² Banham, 37.

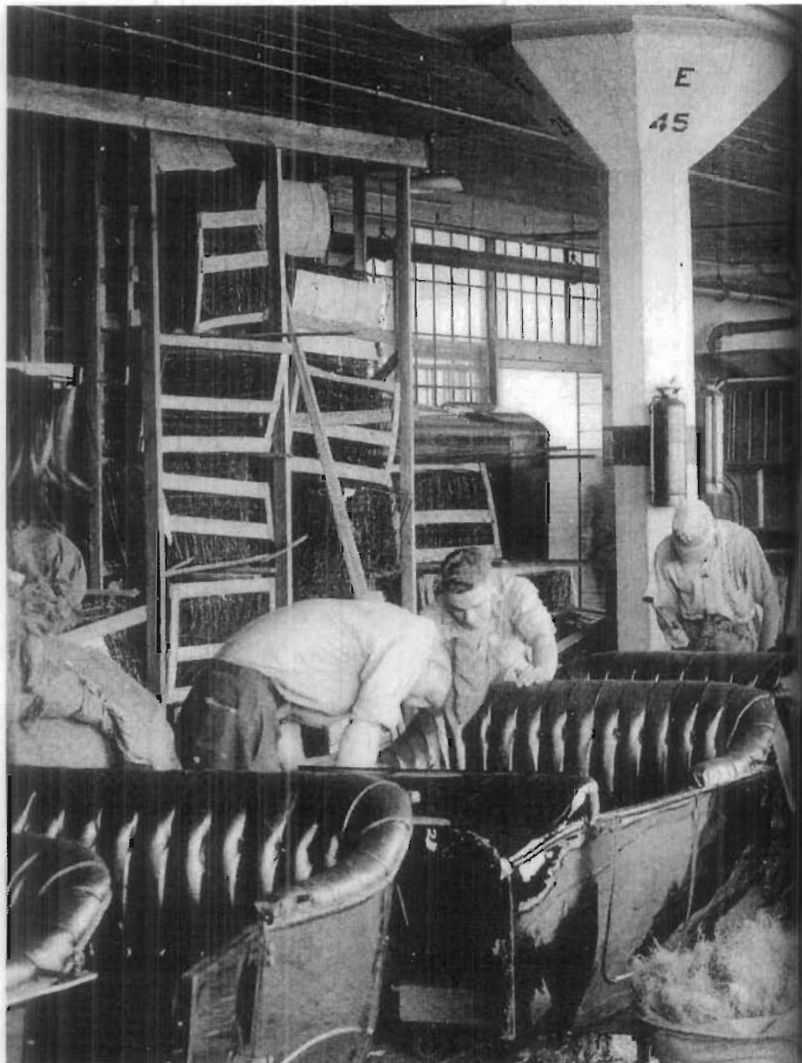
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as 140 assemblers stationed at different intervals attached the appropriate parts. Soon, a power-driven conveyor system moved the chassis along throughout the factory. Within a year of the first assembly line's trial, Ford had exponentially reduced the time it took to make a Model T.

Figure Five. Ford Highland Park Factory Assembly Line, Detroit, 1923. Source: The Ford Century: Ford Motor Company and the Innovations that Shaped the World, p. 40.



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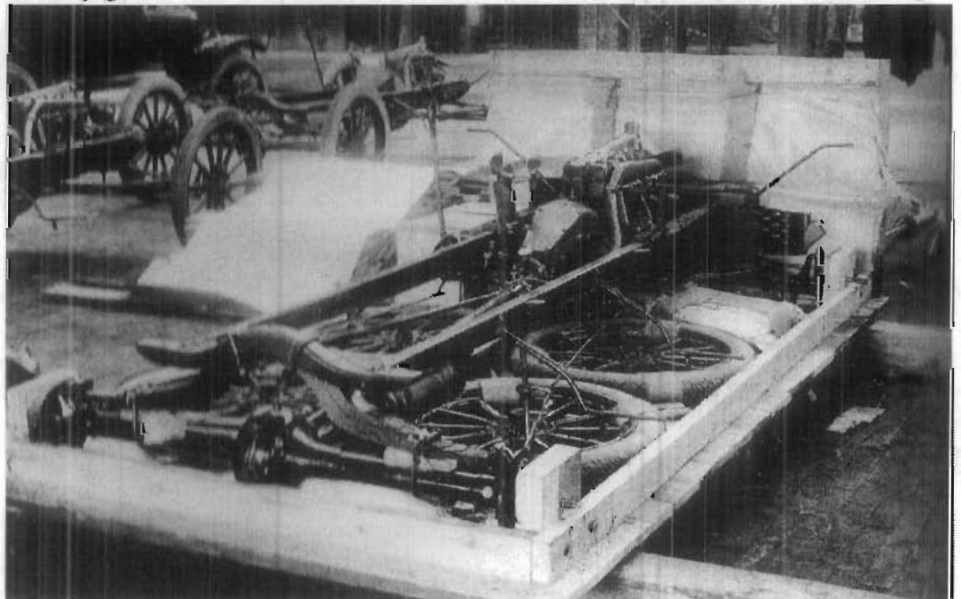
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Constant revision improved the time it took to make a single car to ninety-three minutes in 1914. The results were immediate and extraordinary. In 1913, Ford had produced only 82,388 Model Ts, selling the touring car for \$600. In 1914, it produced 308,162 cars, more than all other automakers combined. By 1916, Model T production had risen to 585,388 and the price had plunged to \$360. More than 700,000 Model Ts were churned out and sold the following year, and Ford's industrious dealer network was poised to sell every last one of them.²³ The Joplin Supply Company was able, for a while at least, to sell as many Model Ts as they could get. Charlie Ritchie, a car salesman for the company, "remembered an astonishing day in 1911....In less than twelve hours, he sold forty-six 'Tin Lizzies' for \$375 each."²⁴

From 1903 until 1923, all of the Ford cars that the Joplin Supply Company sold were shipped to them completely assembled and ready to drive. For the first few years, the cars were shipped directly from Detroit. Then, beginning in 1906, the cars were fully assembled in Detroit, knocked down (wheels removed and prepared for shipment), and shipped to Ford-owned branches in one of seven cities including St. Louis and Kansas City. At these regional branch assembly plants, the cars were reassembled and then shipped on to the local dealer. In 1910, the Ford Motor Company production system was further modified. That year, the first Ford branch plant in the nation to assemble autos from parts supplied by Ford opened in Kansas City. In the following years, similar Ford branch assembly plants were established dozens of cities around the country.

Figure Six. A "Knocked Down" Model T. Source: *The Ford Century*, p. 92.



²³ Banham, p. 39.

²⁴ Simpson, p. 61.

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In the late 1910s, prompted by the Joplin Supply Company's great success selling Ford autos, Ford Motor Company selected the Joplin company to be a branch assembly operator. This necessitated the construction of new building exclusively for the sale, service and assembly of Ford vehicles. The Joplin Supply Company selected a lot for the new building at the corner of West Third Street and South Joplin Avenue, just a block northeast of their original building, and by late 1919, they had broken ground. An article printed in the Joplin Globe on December 28, 1919 reported that the excavation work for the new Joplin Supply Company Building had recently begun.²⁵ A few months later, after the foundation for the building was completed, construction on the building was halted, apparently due to a local economic slowdown.

Nearly two years later, the project was resumed. On June 11, 1922, the Joplin Globe reported that

F. C. Ralston, president of the Joplin Supply Company, announced yesterday that construction of the company's new \$225,000 home for the Ford and Lincoln service, northwest corner Third and Joplin Streets, will be resumed tomorrow and that it will be ready for occupancy December 31. The structure is to be five stories with seven floors and is to be fireproof and modern in every respect. The contract has been awarded to Captain C. A. Dieter, Joplin contractor.²⁶

The article also noted that "a revival of business prosperity has warranted the resumption of work on the new building."²⁷ Five months later, an article in the Joplin Globe titled "Much Building Is In Evidence Here" cited the Joplin Supply Building as "the largest improvement now under construction."²⁸

The building constructed by the Joplin Supply Company was typical of the early plants erected for the assembly of Ford automobiles. By 1914, fifteen of the twenty-nine branch assembly plants around the country had been constructed using a layout modeled after the Ford Motor Company's Highland Park plant in Detroit. Like the Joplin building, those multistory branch assembly plants were generally located in close proximity to the railroad and were arranged with a showroom on the first floor, a mezzanine for offices, and several upper floors for industrial use. One or more large freight elevators with doors on both ends facilitated the movement of the partially assembled vehicles from floor to floor.²⁹

25 "Realty Deals and Building Here Takes Big Jump in 1919," Joplin Globe, December 28, 1919, p. 2.

26 "Joplin Supply to Complete Building," Joplin Globe, June 11, 1922, p. 1.

27 Ibid.

28 "Much Building Is In Evidence Here," Joplin Globe, November 23, 1922, p. 1.

29 Gerald T. Bloomfield, "A Geography of the Ford Branch Distribution System, 1904-1933," in Jennings, Jan (ed). Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), pp. 44-45.

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Figure Seven. Joplin Supply Company Building, 1923.

Source: Joplin Globe, February 21, 1923, p. 1.



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The Joplin Company apparently met their self-imposed December 1922 deadline. In January 1923, the Joplin Auto Dealers Association announced that they were planning an auto show, which would be held the following month in the new Joplin Supply Company Building.³⁰ A week prior to the auto show, an article about the building appeared in the local newspaper. The article titled "Handsome Building for Motor Show," noted that "the entire building is to be used exclusively by the Ford and Lincoln departments including Ford and Lincoln cars and Fordson tractors, all of the sales and service departments being housed there."³¹ The day prior to the opening of the Joplin Auto Show, a photo of the new Joplin Supply Company Building appeared on the front page of the Joplin Globe. (See Figure Seven.) The Joplin Supply Company's displays for the auto show, which took up all of the first floor of the building, included a Lincoln seven-passenger sedan, a Lincoln four-passenger phaeton, a Lincoln chassis, a chassis for a Ford truck, a Fordson tractor, five Motel T Fords and a display of Ford parts.³²

After the auto show, the building was outfitted with the necessary parts and machinery, and the Joplin Supply Company began assembling cars and tractors that it would sell in the first floor showroom or ship to other local dealers. Unfortunately, within a few years, industry changes began to have a negative impact upon the company's chances of success. By the mid-1920s, Ford had begun a shift to a new assembly mode, and the popularity of the Model T waned.

Just a few years after the Joplin Supply Company completed the Joplin Assembly Plant, Ford company began to change the way they put cars together. In 1925, Ford opened its new River Rouge assembly plant, a sprawling single story complex that covered several acres of land. That large complex was an immediate success, and soon became an industry model.³³ The success of the River Rouge Plant marked a change in preference from smaller multi-story local operations, to large company owned assembly plants that combined many facets of the manufacturing process in one operation.³⁴

And, after years as the dominant car model in the country, the Model T finally began to see competition from other automobile brands as well as used cars. Douglas Brinkley pointed out the Model T's shortcomings in his book Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company and a Century of Progress. "Slower, noisier, and trickier to drive than its competitors, it was not even the bargain it had once been."³⁵ On May 25, 1927, the day before the fifteen millionth Model T came off the assembly line, Henry Ford announced that Ford would discontinue production of the Model T. A month later, the Ford factories shutdown to retool for the production of a new model and

30 "Plans for Auto Show Here," Joplin Globe. January 17, 1923, p. 2.

31 "Handsome Building For Motor Show," Joplin Globe. February 18, 1923, p. 2

32 "3,000 Attend Auto Show Opening; Great Display of Cars Features," Joplin Globe. February 22, 1923. p. 1.

33 Gerald T. Bloomfield, "A Geography of the Ford Branch Distribution System, 1904-1933," in Jennings, Jan (ed). Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), pp.44-45.

34 Ibid.

35 Brinkley, p. 347.

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60,000 Ford Motor Company employees were laid off. At the end of 1927, Ford announced the introduction of an all-new Model A. The new Model A was so drastically different that former Model T assembly plants, like the one in Joplin, would be unable to produce them without significant alterations to the plants. That, combined with changes in the overall manufacturing process, assembly practices, ultimately closed the doors of many smaller assembly plants.

The announcement of the discontinuation of the Model T was undoubtedly seen as a mixed blessing for the Joplin Supply Company. The company had only been assembling the vehicles for a few years, in a building constructed specifically for that purpose, but it probably also had felt the slump in sales. By 1930, relations with Ford were strained. F. C. Ralston, president of the Joplin Supply Company, announced that year that his company would cease to make or sell Fords, and that "the direct cause of our quitting the Ford Company was the factory's shipping in automobiles, which were not ordered, and were refused by us because of large stocks already on hand."³⁶ The last Ford was assembled in Joplin the next year, and most of the 50 assembly line operators had to find new jobs.³⁷

Although the Joplin Supply Company ceased its sales of automobiles and tractors, the company did not close its doors. They continued to provide auto repair and maintenance services in the Joplin Avenue building until the late 1930s, and throughout their association with Ford, the company had maintained its mining and machinery sales departments. They continued with that line of business until the mining industry died out in the 1940s, after which they became a distributor of plumbing, heating and refrigeration supplies. With that change, the building on South Joplin Avenue was used for sales and storage. The Joplin Supply Company is still in business in Joplin today. In the 1960s, the Joe Harding Restaurant Supply Company purchased the Joplin Avenue building, and used it as a warehouse until recently. Plans now call for a complete rehabilitation of the building in the near future.

The Joplin Supply Company Building is a significant, highly intact example of a local Ford branch assembly plant, and an important link to the early industrial and commercial history of Joplin.

³⁶ Ostemeyer, p. E1.

³⁷ Ibid.

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Verbal Boundary Description

All of Lots 72, 73, and 74 in original Murphysburg, now a part of Joplin, in Jasper County, MO.

Boundary Justification

The current boundaries encompass all of the land currently and historically associated with the building.

Photographs

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Joplin Supply Company
228 South Joplin Ave., Joplin
Jasper County, MO, 63357
Debbie Sheals
December, 2006

List of Photographs

See photo key for description of camera angle.

1. Southwest corner; street elevations.
2. Façade; east elevation
3. Northeast corner, and parking lot.
4. Alley and west elevation.
5. View from the west, on Third Street.
6. View from the south, on Joplin Avenue.
7. Detail, upper façade.
8. Detail of south elevation.
9. Interior, ground floor showroom.
10. Main entrance, with window coverings.
11. Second floor.
12. Third floor.
13. Fourth floor.
14. Fifth floor.
15. Façade; entrance, looking northwest.
16. Façade; entrance, looking west.

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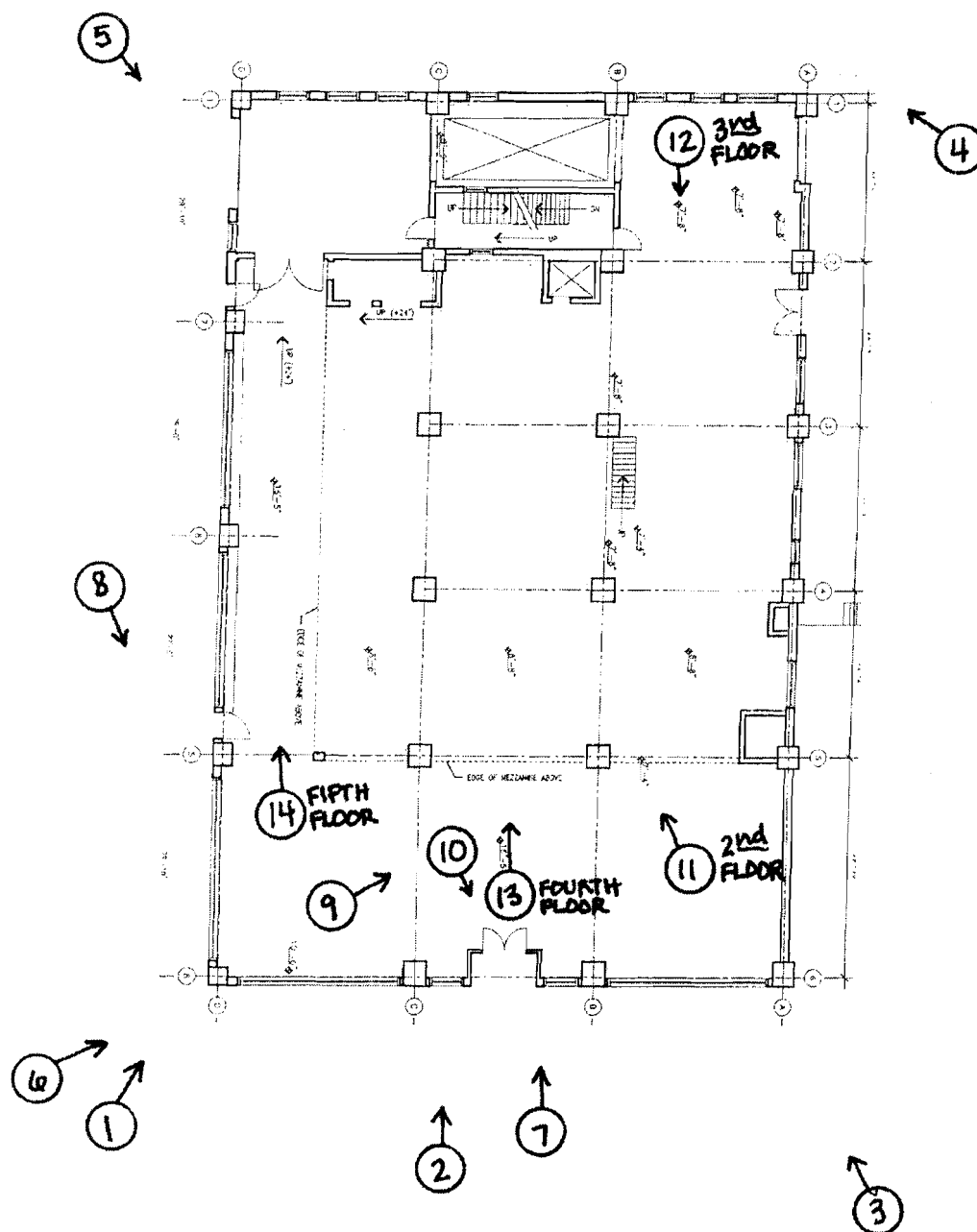
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Photo Key.

North is right.





S JOPLIN AVE 200 W

ONE WAY

ONE WAY

NO PARKING



422

↑ THIS SIDE UP ↑

1st United Methodist Church

VC4ED-9
34-100/007
CONSTRUCTION ONLY - DO NOT REMOVE













ENTRANCE ON NORTH
SIDE OF BUILDING

HOURS
Monday - Thursday







Press & HeartSpring Publishing

ONE WAY

223

JOHN
SUPPLY









