

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Richards and Conover Hardware Company Building

other names/site number Jax Fixture & Supply Company Building

2. Location

street & number 200 West 5th Street [n/a] not for publication

city or town Kansas City [n/a] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64105

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 [X])

Signature of certifying official/Title Claire F. Blackwell/Deputy SHPO

Date 10 Dec. 98

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date

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

5. Classification

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

Name of related multiple property listing.

Number of contributing resources
previously listed in the National
Register.

n/a

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

Commerce/Trade/specialty store

Current Functions

Commerce/Trade specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Commercial Style

Materials

foundation limestone

walls brick

stone

roof asphalt

other

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

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

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

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

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

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

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

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

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

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

Areas of Significance

Commerce

Periods of Significance

1902-1948

Significant Dates

1902-1903

circa 1928

Significant Person(s)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Shepard and Farrar [1902-1903 unit]

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

-

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

-

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☐ Local Government

☐ University

☒ Other:

Name of repository: Kansas City Public Library

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	362900	4329960			
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 Cydney E. Millstein

organization Architectural and Historical Research date August 1998

street & number P.O. Box 22551 telephone 816/363-0567

city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64113

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

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

Additional Items

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

Property Owner

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

name Jack, Francis, Richard, and Darryl Taylor

street & number 200-24 West 5th Street telephone 816/842-4230

city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64105

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

SUMMARY

ELABORATION

The main or primary facades of the original 1902-03 Richards and Conover building face south and east and feature corresponding vocabulary. The main entrance, displaying aluminum sheathing and canopy supported by buttress-like piers, aluminum framed double-door entrance, sidelights and transom (far east bay of the south facade), and a plate glass window (far south bay of the east facade) is modified from the original, canted unit. Prominent wood storefront fenestration (spanning five bays at the south facade and nine bays at the east facade), feature paired, plate glass windows with paneled wood bulkheads, set below paired, fixed transoms. Each unit is slightly recessed and is separated by rusticated brick piers resting on stone plinths. The transom units at the south facade have been obscured by wood paneling, while the following individual storefront bays of the east facade (counting n-s) are slightly varied in their design as follows: the first bay features transoms divided into four lights and the fourth and fifth bays feature a tripartite configuration---the fourth bay with an operable centrally placed transom and single entry with sidelight, the fifth bay features a single-hung, one-over-one, centrally placed window below the transom area.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Upper story fenestration of the south and east facades are aluminum-framed with a fixed upper unit and smaller, sliding units at the base. The units at the second through fifth stories feature contrasting brick quoining, while the sixth story windows display quoined surrounds with keystones. All units exhibit stone sills. The upper story is separated from the storefront level by a terra-cotta, egg and arrow and bead and reel molded water table. A continuous sheet metal cornice with modillions resting above dentils terminates the primary facades.

The north and west facades of the main unit feature a modest arrangement of metal, double-hung, sash two-over-two windows with stone lug sills. There are two columns of windows centrally placed at the north or rear facade. Partially visible at the first story are segmental arched windows that have been bricked-in. The west facade displays a single column of fenestration at the far north bay, some slightly modified from the original with one-over one panes. Two non-original metal door entrances reached by a metal staircase are placed above the ground level.

Fenestration at the west and south facades of the "boot" of the "L" is similar to that of the north and west facades of the main unit, with slight variations. The basement windows visible at the rough-cut, stone foundation level at both facades are recessed, double-hung, two-over-two sash, and covered with metal security bars. Partially visible above the basement windows are segmental arches. The west facade exhibits three columns of original fenestration and a single, non-original wood door entrance at the far north bay. Modified fenestration of the first story of the south facade (counting west) includes the fourth bay which is bricked in and the fifth bay, altered to a shorter one-over-one unit. The two columns of the remaining upper story units follow original two-over-two design except for the window at the far west bay of the 3rd floor, modified to a one-over-two unit.

Constructed c. 1928 is the one-story, flat roofed, brick unit, six bays wide and twelve bays deep, adjoining the west facade of the original 1902-03 building. The main facade of this unit faces south and features a recessed, aluminum-framed, double-door entrance at the far east bay, reached by a series of concrete steps. Storefront fenestration is non-original, aluminum-framed plate glass with modern wooden hood molding. Fenestration of the west and north facades is multipaned, industrial metal sash with centrally-placed hopper units and brick sills. Windows at the west facade have been obscured by mesh screening and security grates. A non-original wood overhead door and entry are located at the far north bays of the west facade. Paired, bi-fold wood paneled freight doors are placed at the far west bay of the north or rear

The interior of the original 1902-03 unit of the Richards and Conover Hardware Company Building consists of unfinished warehouse space; columns, supports and brick walls are exposed throughout. The interior of the c. 1928 addition has been modified from the original with office partitions.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Page 4

Richards and Conover Hardware Co. Building
Jackson County, MO

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Richards & Conover Hardware Company. From the cover of *Hardware and Farm Equipment*, March 1957.

HARDWARE AND FARM EQUIPMENT



Headquarters of the vast Richards & Conover Hardware Company are located at 5th and Wyandotte in Kansas City, Mo. The plant is pictured here on the 100th anniversary of the company. A complete history of the Rich-Con operation is recorded on pages 14-15.

Spring And Garden Issue

MARCH, 1957

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

SUMMARY:

The Richards and Conover Hardware Company building is significant for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and is significant in the following area: COMMERCE. Constructed in 1902-03 (with a ca. 1928 addition), for the Richards and Conover Hardware Company, Kansas City, Missouri, the building is significant because it reflects the growth and fortunes of the business during its period of greatest expansion and prominence. The building located at 5th and Wyandotte Streets was the third location of the Richards and Conover Hardware Company, a wholesale business which began in Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, in 1857. Housed at this location for over fifty-five years, Richards and Conover Hardware Company is a renowned and exceptional example of the wholesale hardware jobbers trade, reaching its zenith during the first decades of the twentieth century in Kansas City. Because of continued success throughout its history, the Richards and Conover Hardware Company became known as one of the nation's oldest and largest wholesale hardware, iron and steel distributors, covering western Missouri, Western Arkansas, southern Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, northern Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Additionally, the building remains the sole surviving historic property constructed by the company. Today, the company claims the distinction of being the oldest continuously existing commercial enterprise in Kansas City. The period of significance is 1902-1948, the end date established by the National Register's arbitrary fifty year limit.

ELABORATION:

Originally known as J.F. Richards and Company, the Richards and Conover Hardware Company was established by the pioneer hardware merchant John Francisco Richards, a native of Virginia. Along with his family, Richards emigrated from Warm Springs, Bath County Virginia, to Sibley, Missouri, in 1849, at the age of fifteen. Upon the death of his parents, he managed to work in a small store at Sibley near the abandoned site of Fort Osage, an old Indian fur-trading point. Following a year of schooling at an academy in Pleasant Hill, Cass County, Richards traveled to the Pacific northwest with an Indian trader as a wagon train guide. On his return to Missouri, he landed a job with the St. Louis hardware firm of Child, Pratt and Company, the largest wholesale hardware dealer in the city, in 1854. Looking toward Leavenworth, Kansas, for new marketing possibilities, Child, Pratt put Richards aboard the steamer "New Lucy", providing him with a letter of credit and \$1700 worth of merchandise in 1857. Arriving on March 4, Richards immediately launched his business in a building sized 12 by 40 feet. A poster conceived by Richards advertised plows, horsepower mills and the combined mower and reaper . . . "hardware for the emigrants, farmers and the whole of Kansas and Missouri." (*Journal-Post*, September 6, 1925). Richards' journals of his early

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 6 Richards and Conover Hardware Co. Building
Jackson County, MO

=====

years in business "reflect time spent on horseback combing the adjacent counties seeking collection of past due payments on corn shellers, wagon accessories, and other large farm equipment." (Worley, 2). Richards also traveled to St. Louis on buying trips via the steamboat "White Cloud" and later on the main line of the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railway. After three years of successful trade, by the close of 1860, Richards net worth totaled almost \$14,000.

At the end of the Civil War, Richards hired New Jersey native John Conover as the company's first traveling salesman. He did his traveling on horseback; his territory reached the Rockies and his trips sometimes lasted three months. Newspaper accounts reported that Conover was "on the road" for five years and that he was, perhaps, "the first traveling salesman known in the entire west." (*Journal-Post*, September 6, 1925). Despite the effectiveness of Conover's travels and a burgeoning trade, it became clear to Richards that Leavenworth was not destined to become the railroad center that he had hoped it would. The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad had chosen Kansas City as the site for its bridge across the Missouri River (now known as the Hannibal Bridge), opening a direct route to Chicago on July 4, 1869.

With the coming of the railroad to Kansas City, Richards knew what had to be accomplished in order to keep a competitive edge. In 1875 he opened J.F. Richards and Company as a small wholesale location at 425 Delaware (demolished c. 1990) in Kansas City, Missouri, with Conover as manager. Richards expanded the Kansas City business in 1878 with the buy-out of a competitor, D.A. Knight and Company. This pattern of "taking advantage of opportunities to consolidate the company position when purchase opportunities developed" (Worley, 5), has been the company's philosophy throughout its prosperous history.

In 1881, Richards convinced his son, Walter, who had been attending Cornell University, to join him the growing business as secretary. To accomplish this, and to acknowledge the central role played by John Conover in expanding the wholesale side of the business through the Kansas City location, John Richards reorganized the company as Richards and Conover Hardware Company and moved the Kansas City branch to a larger quarters at the southeast corner of 5th and Wyandotte (demolished c. 1996). Two years later, when the Richards decided to expand his presence in the wholesale hardware trade, the company bought out an Atchison, Kansas, competitor, Western Hardware Company and assumed control of its inventory valued at over \$75,000. Much of the inventory was transferred to the Kansas City location. In 1884, acknowledging the decline of the Kansas operation, Richards sold the Leavenworth interests and moved his family to Kansas City. Following a national trend, Richards converted his hardware

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

business entirely as a wholesale trade; much of the company's merchandise was stocked at a four-story warehouse located at the corner of Union Avenue and Hickory Street.

The wholesale hardware business of Kansas City is both prosperous and progressive. There are jobbing houses engaged in this line and the amount of business annually transacted amounts to fully \$3,500,000. . . . The rapid settlement of the West, the constant acquisition of new territory to this market and the steady building demands of Kansas City all tend to increase trade in this line and to extend the operations of the houses engaged in this business Unlike the eastern houses, who seem to consider that anything is good enough for the west, and who got into the habit of sending low grade goods under high sounding names to this market, the Kansas City firms sold nothing but the best, and nothing under false or deceptive names. In consequence they have not only gained complete control of the entire trade of the territory westward that is naturally tributary to this city, but they are constantly extending the area of the trade both in the north and south.

In his book, Howe also highlighted Richards and Conover, extolling the business "is of great magnitude and covers a vast extent of territory." Merchandise included tinner's stock, cutlery, iron, steel, nails, scales, safes, circular saws, barbed and plain fence wire, springs and axles, etc. In Theodore Case's *History of Kansas City* (1888), the annual sales of the company were reported at \$1,250,000, more than a third of the combined sales of the entire wholesale hardware trade in Kansas City in 1886.

Throughout the United States, there was a growing reliance on the full-line, full-service wholesaler like Richards and Conover. As American manufacturers replaced imported goods in the market, from the 1860s through the 1880s, producers increasingly turned to the full-line wholesaler to distribute their output. American producers of manufactured goods turned from the commissioned agent of jobbers, like Richards and Conover, who became an important link between the American manufacturer of hardware and the retail trade. The role of the jobber, which originally referred to a merchant who "broke down" the large lots of imported goods for sale to retailers, was that of the middleman

Section number 8 Page 8 Richards and Conover Hardware Co. Building
Jackson County, MO

Then in 1902 it was announced that the company would construct a new facility just across the street to the north and west to house the hardware concern's growing stock. Designed by Kansas City architects Shepard and Farrar and constructed by William Davis in 1902-03, the six-story, 95,000 square foot building marked a new era for the company. For the first time in Richard and Conover's history all of the available stock could be consolidated into one location, which in turn, dramatically improved the company's efficiency and sales. It was important, too, because the company maintained their location adjacent to the original market square of Kansas City, accessible to rail connections. Stock included light and heavy hardware, sporting goods, sewing machines, hollowware, sheet and iron roofing, harness, paints and contractor's supplies.

In the immediate post-war years, sales increased dramatically as a result of pent-up demand for hardware and building products in general. From 1946 through 1948, Richards and Conover and other wholesale hardware companies profited from this trend. By 1949, the surplus demand had been met; sales and profits dropped somewhat. Several changes in the buying habits of Americans

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

and in the makeup of the wholesaling world accounted for these difficulties. After World War II, Americans generally and residents of the Midwest and Southwest, in particular, were ready to spread out, build new houses and generally consume the goods flowing off American production lines. The expanded number of homeowners, swelled by the availability of FHA and VA loans, tended to own more cars and paid more attention to price than to dealer loyalty or commercial quality. Longtime Kansas City hardware wholesalers like Townley Hardware (established 1884) joined with other wholesalers to form buying groups and regional warehouses under the Sentry Hardware brand. Similarly, another competitor, True Value Hardware, a cooperatively-owned buying company began to take business away from Richards and Conover. In addition to these new chains, drug stores, the early discount stores, and even groceries carried more and more traditional hardware. These stores bought directly through the manufacturer, bypassing the merchandise, and thus the role of the robber, that Richards and Conover could supply.

Another important change in Richards and Conover's business occurred in 1953 when the company built its first separate steel division warehouse at St. John and Bennington avenues in northeast Kansas City, separating its steel operations from wholesale hardware. While the company had long dealt in small amounts of steel and other bulk metals as needed by contractors and hardware stores, this was not a significant part of the business until the 1950s. As late as the early 1950s, steel accounted for no more than 5% of the company's gross sales. President Samuel Locke Sawyer, great-grandson of founder J.F. Richards, decided that the company had to change its direction or simply fold, so in 1958, the company approved abandonment of the firm's wholesale hardware operations and liquidated its hardware business entirely. Subsequently, the company transferred its headquarters from its 5th and Wyandotte building to the industrial steel warehousing plant on St. John Avenue. The closing of the wholesale hardware trade allowed Sawyer to gain control of the steel segment of the company's sales. In 1957, the last full year of combined business, Richards and Conover had gross sales of \$15 million and had over 400 people on its payroll. Rich-Con, as the company is now called, continues to operate its steel business from the St. John headquarters.

It should be noted that pioneer merchant John F. Richards, the founder of Richards and Conover Hardware Company, was also vice-president and one of the founders of the First National Bank of Kansas City, and a member of the Kansas City Board of Park Commissioners from 1900 to 1904. Additionally, Richards participated in the Battle of Westport, October 23, 1864.

Currently, there are proposed plans for the renovation of the Richards and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 11 Richards and Conover Hardware Co. Building
 Jackson County, MO

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Conover Hardware Company building. These plans are being prepared in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation by Duncan Architects, Inc., Kansas City, Missouri, for the developer, Jeffrey E. Smith Companies. Once the proposed plans are completed, they will be sent to the Historic Preservation Program, Missouri Department of Natural Resources for their review.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 9 Page 12 Richards and Conover Hardware Co. Building
 Jackson County, MO

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 10 Page 14 Richards and Conover Hardware Co. Building
 Jackson County, MO

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10. Geographical Description

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Verbal Boundary Description:

All of Lot 238, Block 24; Lots 1 to 7 and the East 5 feet of the vacated alley West of and adjoining Lot 7, and all the vacated alley lying North of and adjoining said premises which lies East of a line 141 feet West of the West line of Wyandotte Street; Lots 8 to 14, except that part of Lots 8 and 9 conveyed to Kansas City, Missouri, for alley and all the vacated alley lying North of and adjoining Lots 12 to 14; except that part of said premises in Fifth Street; THEO S. CASE'S SUBDIVISION OF LOTS 234, 235, 236, AND 237, Block 24 Old Town, a subdivision in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Richards and Conover Hardware Company building, including the one-story addition constructed c. 1928.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

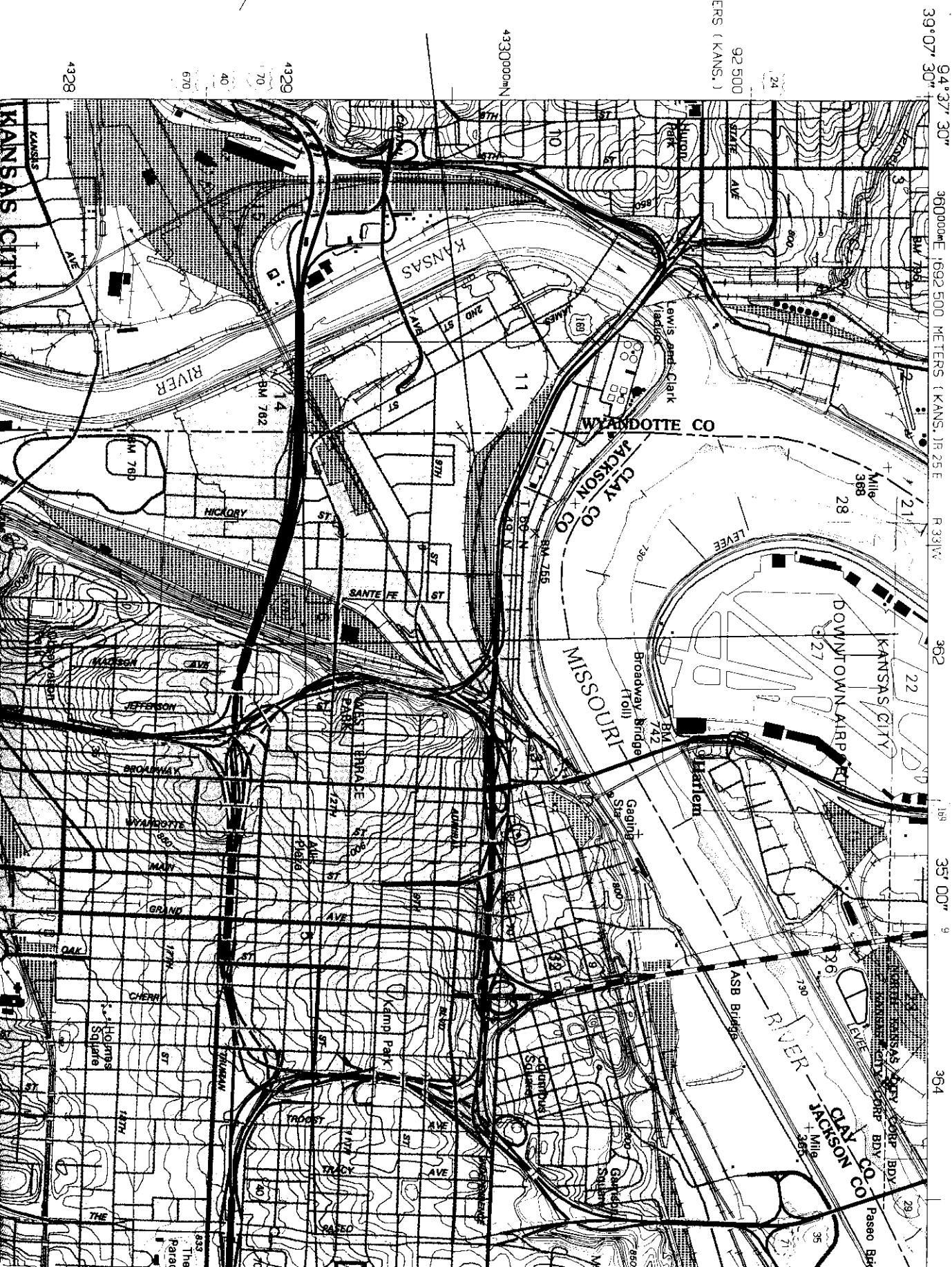


Photo Log:

Name of Property: **Richards and Conover Hardware Co. Building**

City or Vicinity: **Kansas City**

County: **Jackson County** State: **MO**

Photographer: **Cydney E. Millstein**

Date

Photographed: **Aug., 1998**

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

- 1 of 5. S and E facades, view looking NW.
- 2 of 5. N and E facades, view looking SW.
- 3 of 5. N façade, view facing S.
- 4 of 5. S and W facades, view looking NE.
- 5 of 5. E façade, view looking W.





FOOD SERVICE EQUIPMENT

SHELLY
MAR
CJ



RICHARD J. TURK
EST. 1911
FOOD SERVICE EQUIPMENT



RICHARDS & COMPANY VETERINARY HOSPITAL

HARDWARE CO.
Jax
FIXTURE & SUPPLY CO.
FOOD SERVICE
EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES
HOTEL · RESTAURANTS · DRIVE-INS
INSTITUTIONS · CLUBS · SCHOOLS

BUDGET
BEE

DISCOUNT

OFFICE
FURNITURE

OS

VI
AL

NE

G
TS

RECREATIONAL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

MOVING
SALE

DESK · CHAIRS
FILES

UP TO
75%
OFF

