

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Vitagraph Film Exchange Building

other name/site number Warner Brothers Building

2. Location

street & town 1703 Wyandotte Street N/A not for publication

city or town Kansas City N/A vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64108

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

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

JAN 11, 2008
Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain): _____

Vitagraph [Film Exchange] Building
Name of Property

Jackson County, MO
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

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

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY: industrial storage

COMMERCE: business

COMMERCE: warehouse

Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

Commercial style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof asphalt

other stone

Narrative Description

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

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

Vitagraph [Film Exchange] Building

Name of Property

Jackson County, MO

County and State

8. Description

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY _____

ARCHITECTURE _____

Period of Significance

1930-1957 _____

Significant Dates

1930 _____

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

NA/ _____

Architect/Builder

Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman, architects _____

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

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 _____

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

Vitagraph [Film Exchange] Building
Name of Property

Jackson County, MO
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

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

1 1/5 3/6/2/9/0/0 4/3/2/8/3/3/0
Zone Easting Northing

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

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

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

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

see attached

Property Tax No.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

see attached

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cydney E. Millstein and Mary Ann Warfield
organization Architectural and Historical Research, LLC date July 29, 2007
street & number 1537 Belleview Avenue telephone 816.472.4154
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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

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

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

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

Property Owner

name/title Walnut Creek Ranch, LLC; Shirley Bush Helzberg, Managing Partner
street & number 4520 Main, Street, Suite 1050 telephone 816.753.5531
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64111

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

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

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National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Section 7 Page 1

**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**

SUMMARY

The Vitagraph Film Exchange Building located at 1703 Wyandotte, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri, was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman in 1930. The four-story, reinforced concrete and polychromatic brick building is divided into five bays by slightly projecting brick piers that frame a tripartite fenestration arrangement. Original windows are one-over-one, wood frame with stone sills. Wide spandrels separate the floors. Stone piers extend from the second through fourth stories and terminate in Art Deco inspired capitals. A stone band course is placed at the summit of the fourth story. Another band course is placed above the storefront panels of the first story. The main entrance to the building is located at the far south bay of the west façade and is embellished with a wide stone surround. While the location of the first story windows at all facades are original and extant, some of the openings have been infilled with brick and/or glass block. The north and south facades are articulated in a similar manner to the main façade. The far north bay of the rear of the Vitagraph Building repeats the Art Deco embellishments with the remaining bays displaying the concrete structural grid. Fenestration at this facade is multipaned industrial sash. In good condition, the Vitagraph Building has retained its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Its character-defining physical features, exterior materials and interior spaces are representative of the period of historic significance and therefore, represent its significance. The intact original Art Deco embellishments, the polychromatic effect and the overall essential physical features, including fenestration and door locations (original to the building) are particularly vital to the significance of the building. It is important to note that the Vitagraph building is located in the Midtown area of Kansas City known as Film Row, surrounded by similarly scaled and styled building stock, also designed for the film industry.

ELABORATION

The main facade faces west. A deeply recessed entrance at the far south bay features a non-original double-leaf aluminum framed door with wide transom. The whole is set in a stone surround highlighted at the crown by carved, Art Deco ornamentation. Flanking the entrance are two ornamental sconces (non-original, yet placed there during the period of significance). The entrance bay is marked by polychromatic brick and terminates in an ornamental band featuring zigzag patterning, typical of Art Deco stylization.

Storefront fenestration of the west facade has been modified with brick infill at the third and fourth bays (moving south to north) and glass block at the remaining openings. The piers that divide the bays repeat the polychromatic brick, with bases of stone and crowns of the same Art Deco zigzag patterning found at the entrance bay. Prominent contrasting corbelled brick spandrels in a saw tooth pattern separate the upper floors, while slender stone piers, stretching from the top of the spandrel terminate at the crown of the building. Here the brickwork echoes the patterning over the main entrance, above the transom. Fenestration of the upper floors is tripartite, one-over-one wood, separated at each floor by the slender stone piers.

The arrangement and design of the west facade continues to the north facade. Moving west to east, the storefront windows have been infilled with brick (second bay), concrete block (sixth bay) and glass block (first bay). The center two bays appear to be original when compared to a 1930 photograph of the building that appeared in *The Kansas City Star*. A secondary entrance with a non-original single-leaf

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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**

door is placed at the fifth bay.

The far north bay of the east or rear facade features the brick and stone piers of the main and south facades, as well as the spandrel patterning, while the fenestration slightly varies. At this bay and the remainder of the bays of the rear facade, the fenestration is multipaned, industrial sash with slender stone sills. The exterior of the rear facade beyond the far north bay is characterized by the concrete structural grid. Modifications to the first floor include some brick infill at the north bays and at the loading dock where a new door has been applied. Moving further south, a louvered vent has replaced one of the original windows. The steel double-door at the fourth bay appears original to the building.

A concrete structural grid dominates the south facade, where a light well is placed at the center. Fenestration of the light well is three-over-three, industrial sash at the south, east and west walls.

The interior of the Vitagraph building, built with elaborate fire proofing measures, included storage areas for film in steel vaults set in concrete. While most of the interior is currently filled with non-original partitions, the following features remain: original elevator lobby and vestibule with marble paneling and plaster molding (denticulated); original stairs, the stage and projection room at the 5th floor, and various sections of the corridors on each floor. In addition, the core layout of the bathrooms is original, yet the office layout has been modified and the steel vaults are no longer extant. However, there is enough of the interior fabric that remains to suggest its historic function as a commercial warehouse and film distribution facility.

The Vitagraph building is located in the Midtown area of Kansas City known as Film Row. Several other similarly scaled and styled buildings, including Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Fox Film Corporation, Paramount Pictures and Columbia Pictures, are located within close proximity between Central Street to the west and Baltimore Avenue to the east. Like the Vitagraph building, these buildings were also involved in the film distribution industry. Directly to the north of Vitagraph is Orion Pictures building and to the south is a surface parking lot. To the west are Universal Pictures and 20th Century Fox. To the east are other early 20th century commercial properties.

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VITAGRAPH FILM EXCHANGE BUILDING
JACKSON COUNTY, MISSOURI



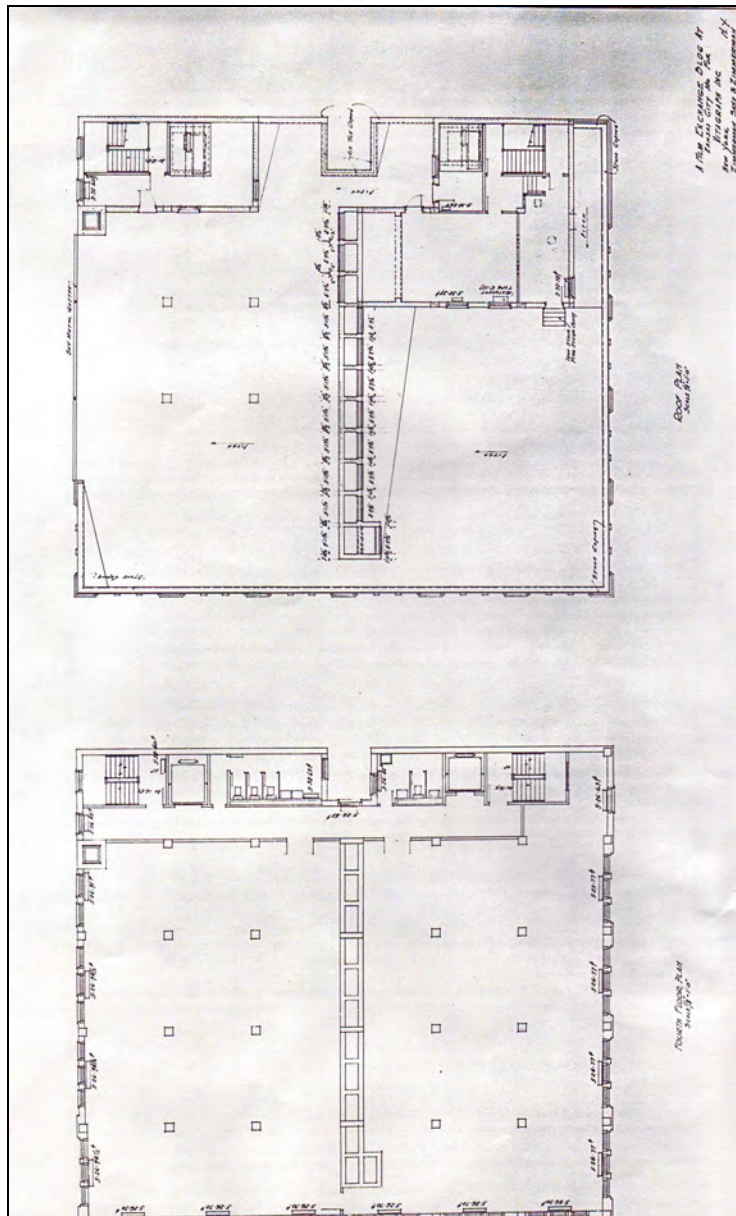
The Vitagraph Building: 1703 Wyandotte (*The Kansas City Star* 31 August 1930, 1D)

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Vitagrqaph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri



Fourth Floor and Rooftop

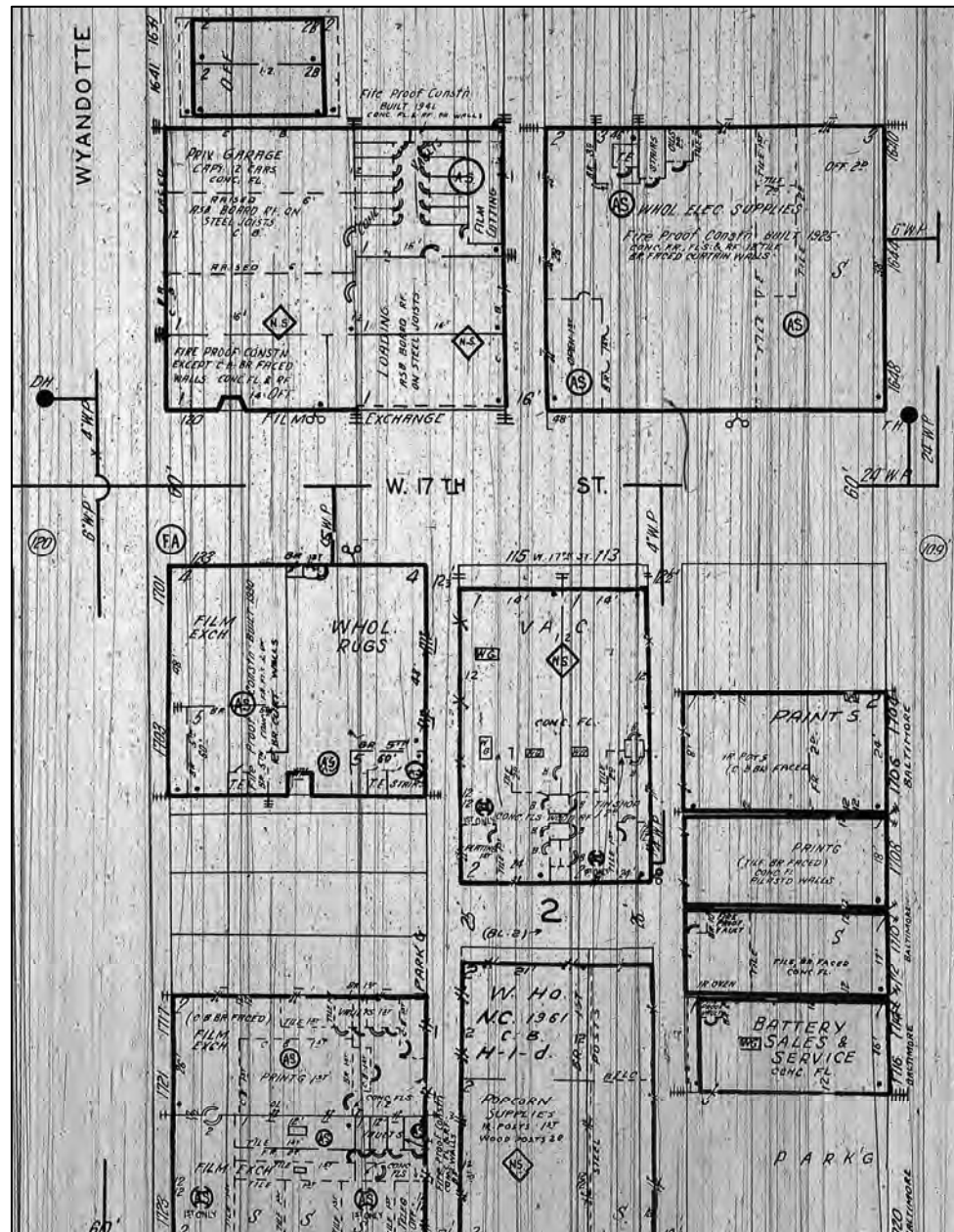
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Vitagrph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri

^
North



Vitagrph Building. Sanborn Insurance Map: Kansas City Missouri, 1939.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Vitagraph Film Exchange Building, located at 1703 Wyandotte Street, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for INDUSTRY and C for ARCHITECTURE. In December 1929 plans were prepared for the construction of a modern film exchange building that included the latest technology in film storage and distribution as well as early sound technology. The Vitagraph Film Exchange building was commissioned by Warner Brothers Film Corporation who had purchased Vitagraph Films in 1926 as a way of expanding their business. American Vitagraph Company, established in 1900, had developed a uniform system of managing and repairing film. This process of distribution and repairing was crucial for the future success of the Warner Brothers Company (est. 1923). As a result of the acquisition, Warner Brothers found themselves with a distribution circuit that expanded throughout the United States, as well as internationally. The name Vitagraph was retained and became the distribution division of Warner Brothers. The acquisition also gave Warner Brothers their first sound stage where the Vitaphone Sound System was developed.¹ The Kansas City office for Vitagraph was the distribution center for the states of Missouri and Kansas and was also the largest of the film exchanges to be built in the city by 1930. The building included sound booths for the production of sound recording. Warner Brothers remained in the building until c. 1970s. The prominent architectural firm of Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman, located at 212 East Superior Street, Chicago, Illinois, was commissioned for the Kansas City facility. The principal, W. Carlys Zimmerman, is well known for many innovative building designs located in and around Chicago, Illinois, several of which, are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Art Deco styled Vitagraph Film Exchange in Kansas City appears to be the only building designed by the firm located in the State of Missouri. It is the most expressive of the principles of the Art Deco buildings within the Film Row district where it is located. The period of significance is 1930, the date of the building's construction to 1957, the arbitrary cut-off date imposed by the National Park Service.

ELABORATION

Over a two-decade period, beginning around 1912, American film companies established a number of distribution offices throughout Kansas City, Missouri. At first the film companies located their businesses in existing office space. When Vitagraph first arrived in Kansas City, Missouri c.1915, the firm occupied the fourth floor of the Boley Building.²

However, the combustibility and explosive nature of nitrate used in the manufacturing of movie film led to government regulations on how film was to be transported, as well as how and where it was to be

¹ Vitagraph had been experimenting with sound on their stage in New York. Although they had not reached ability to produce "talking" movies, they had developed music scores with sound effects that were synchronized to their films. The first talking movie produced by Warner Brothers Film was *Don Juan* (1926), starring John Barrymore. The film premiered in Kansas City at the Globe Theater and was "Vitaphone's first talking movie" in Kansas City on June 11, 1927, at the Globe Theater. The *Kansas City Star* 12 June 1927, 16D:1.

² Polk Publishing Co. *Kansas City, Missouri, City Directory*, Various dates 1901-1930. Microfilm Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

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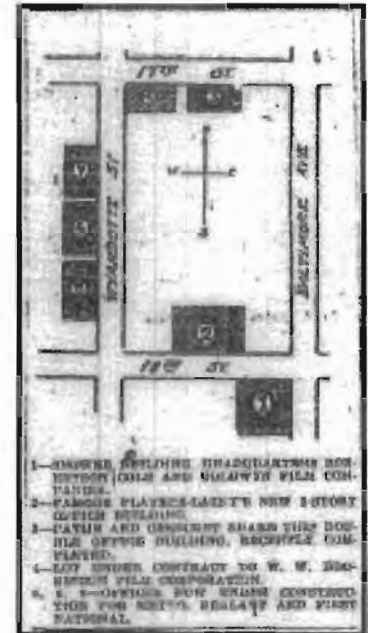
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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**

stored.³ By 1920, most of the film exchange offices began to build their own buildings with fireproof vaults, as well as fireproofing throughout. A building boom of film exchange buildings began c.1920 in the midtown area between 17th and 18th Street and along Main, Baltimore, and Wyandotte Streets. Nearly all of the early film companies relocated their exchanges to the midtown area.⁴

On September 9, 1921, an article discussed the development of a "Film Square" to be constructed in the vicinity of "Eighteenth and Wyandotte."⁵ The article included a map of the block between 17th and 18th Street, between Wyandotte and Baltimore Avenue.

Although the article stated that a new building was to be built for the W. W. Hodkinson Film Corporation at the corner of 17th and Wyandotte, the building was never constructed and no further mention of the Hodkinson Film Corporation could be located. Warner Brothers later acquired the lot for the construction of the Vitagraph Film Exchange Building.⁶ In 1923 Vitagraph was located in the Davidson Building, located on the third floor at 17th and Main Street where they remained until 1925 when they moved to 1820 Wyandotte.



An area of approximately three square blocks surrounding 1703 Wyandotte became known as "Motion Picture Row" in 1930. This area of Kansas City, Missouri became home to the territorial administrative offices and distributing branches of the big film companies of the era. Firms from Hollywood that opened Midwestern distribution offices in Kansas City included; Paramount, Fox, Universal, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers and First National Films (which was also purchased by Warner Brothers Corp. c.1929).⁷ These distribution centers supplied employment for over 250 people in Kansas City, Missouri.

A total of six new buildings, either in the planning stage, under current construction or newly opened, were mentioned in the expansion of Motion Picture Row. Several lots were purchased by two unknown

³ The chemicals used in film production were highly explosive causing many serious fires. Between 1914 and 1918 over 100 film exchanges, nationwide, burned to the ground after nitrate explosions. Kansas City's Universal Film Exchange, located at 214 E. 12th Street was a casualty of such explosions.

⁴ "Polk's" *Kansas City Missouri, City Directory*, 1912-1970. Microfilm, Special Collections, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City, Missouri Public Library.

⁵ "A Film Square Develops Here" *The Kansas City Star* 9 September 1921. Microfilm, Special Collections, Missouri Valley Room, Kansas City, Missouri Public Library.

⁶ Tuttle and Ayers, *Atlas of Kansas City and Vicinity*, 1925 (Tuttle and Ayers: Kansas City, 1925), pl.23.

⁷ "Crop of New Buildings Rises In Motion Picture 'Row' Here" *The Kansas City Star* 31 August 1930, 1D. Warner Brothers also owned thirty other subsidiaries at this time.

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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**

movie companies while, two others in the planning stage, included Universal and Columbia Picture Corp. A new Fox building was already under construction on the northwest corner of Wyandotte and 18th Street. The sixth building was the Vitagraph Building, which began operating by August 1930.⁸

When Warner Brothers purchased the Vitagraph Company in 1925 they retained the Vitagraph name to distinguish between the Warner production company and the Vitagraph distribution division. Warner had successfully developed the first motion picture sound stage in 1926 in the old Vitagraph Flatbush studio in Brooklyn, NY. This division was known as Warner Brothers' Vitaphone. All three of Warners divisions, Warner Brothers, Vitagraph Distribution and Vitaphone, occupied the offices at 1703 Wyandotte, Kansas City, Missouri.⁹

The plans for the Vitagraph Film Exchange Building were completed by the Chicago architectural firm of Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman on January 20, 1930. The four-story Art Deco styled building was designed with state of the art film equipment of the era. Fire proof vaults were located on the first floor. A large water tank located on the roof supplied the sprinkler system. The building was also equipped with remote controlled switches which operated an emergency exit system in case of fire.¹⁰

The Vitagraph Building served as "territorial administration and distributing branch of the big film company."¹¹ As stated in a *Kansas City Star* article, the tasks of these film branches:

...consists of more than storing the reels of film and sound records and shipping them to theaters in the near-by territory. Reconditioning the film after each showing of it is part of the job. Workers inspect every inch of the tape-like rolls and all defects are corrected before the next showing. This often involves removing parts of the strip of film and replacing it. Sound reproduction in those cases in which it is recorded on the film itself makes this an increasingly difficult and intricate task.¹²

From 1930 until the 1970s, Warner Brothers Corporation, along with its Vitagraph and Vitaphone divisions remained in the Kansas City building. According to archivists at Warner Brothers Archives at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, the well-known firm Rapp and Rapp, also of Chicago, made a number of design improvements and updates to the Kansas City facility during the 1950s. These records are archived in the Warner Brothers Archival Collection, located at the University of Southern California, in the form of invoicing. Additionally, during this period Warner Brothers downsized. The technological improvements in the film industry made it possible to utilize less space as the day of the bulky film canister from the 1920s was gone. Warner Brothers used about two-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kansas City Directories, 1915-1970.

¹⁰ Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman, Plans, "A Film Exchange Building in Kansas City, Missouri for Vitagraph Inc. NY, NY" January 20, 1930. MVC 22 #40: 3. Microform, Western Historic Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri.

¹¹ "Crop of New Buildings," Section 1D. The article states that feature films were distributed from the Kansas City Exchanges to the theaters of Western Missouri and Kansas. "Short Subjects," comedies and others of lesser importance were circulated in half a dozen other states.

¹² Ibid.

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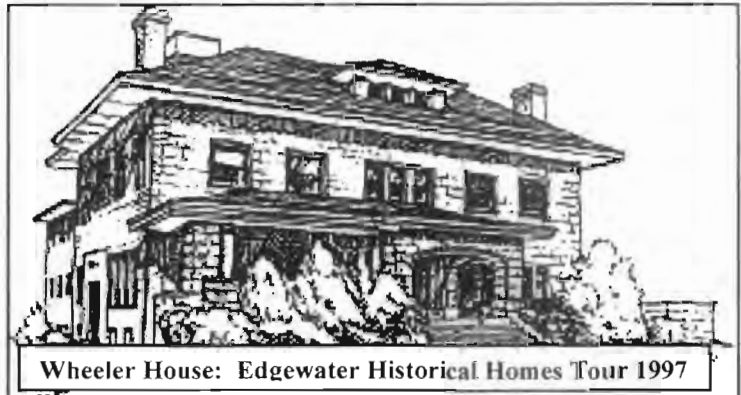
**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**

Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman; Architects of the Vitagraph Film Exchange Building

Wm. Carby (W. C.) Zimmerman, principle, was born in 1856 in Theinsville, Wisconsin. He attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where he studied architecture. After completing the two-year course at MIT in 1880, he took an intern job with the prestigious architectural firm of Burnham and Root where he worked for two to three years. W. C. Zimmerman left Burnham and Root to open the partnership of Flanders and Zimmerman. In 1889 he was made a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and in 1905 W. C. Zimmerman was named Illinois State Architect where he remained until 1913.¹⁴

During this early period, W. C. Zimmerman designed a number of buildings, both public and residential, in the Prairie School style.¹⁵ Some examples of his designs during this period can be found on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He designed an addition to the Natural History building which provided space for a museum and lecture hall and completed in 1909-10. He also designed Lincoln Hall which was completed in 1911 and marked the 100 anniversary of President Lincoln's birth.¹⁶

One of W. C. Zimmerman residential designs is located in the Edgewater Historical area in Chicago which is a community of 62,000 people in an area bounded by the Lake, Foster, Ravenswood and Devon. The house was built for the Wheeler family on West Sheridan in Chicago's Edgewater Beach area as designed by W. C. Zimmerman in 1909. The house was turned over to Mundelein College in 1934. In 1991, Loyola University purchased Mundelein College along with Piper Hall.¹⁷



During the second decade of the 1900s, W. C. Zimmerman partnered with his son-in-law, Albert M. Saxe, who was married to his daughter Irla. His son, Ralph William Zimmerman, joined the firm in 1919. During this period, it appears that the firm began experimenting with various designs and motifs especially in Revival and Art Deco Styles. In 1926 the firm designed a building for the Elks Club located at 77 S. Stolp Avenue, Aurora, Kane County, Illinois. It was designed in a Mayan Revival style that

¹⁴ Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rayburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, 1956. n.p.

¹⁵ "The Prairie School Traveler: City of Chicago," Online, Accessed September 11, 2007.

<http://www.prairieschooltraveler.com/html/il/chicago/listings/chicagoname.html>

¹⁶ University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, "Campus Landmarks," Online. Accessed September 11, 2007.

<http://publicaffairs.uiuc.edu/facts/landmarks.html>

¹⁷ Wheeler House: Edgewater Historical Homes Tour 1997, "Edgewater Historical Society Museum," Online Accessed September 11, 2007.

<http://www.edgewaterhistory.org/tour910915/index.html?9>

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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**

included stylized Mayan symbolism in bas-relief.¹⁸



**The Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks,
Aurora, Illinois (1926). Detail of bas relief at right.**



W. C. Zimmerman designed many public buildings in the East and Middle West, including the Illinois State Prison at Joliet and the Pennsylvania State Prison. He died in 1932. After W. C. Zimmerman's death in 1932, Albert Saxe and Ralph Zimmerman continued under Zimmerman and Saxe. By 1936 the firm was known as Zimmerman, Saxe, Mac Bride and Ehmann.¹⁹

Albert Moore Saxe was a student at the University of Illinois and began his architectural career in 1910 in Illinois and Florida. While in partnership as Zimmerman, Saxe and McBride Albert Saxe's best-known design is that of the Streamline Moderne style Walgreen Drug Building in Miami, Florida. It was built in 1936 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places January 4, 1989.²⁰ During his career, Saxe held various positions of note in both Illinois and Florida Architecture Associations.

¹⁸ Stolp Island National Historic District, Online. Accessed September 14, 2007.
http://www.aurora-il.org/communitydevelopment/historicpreservation/list_stolpiland.asp

¹⁹ Ralph Zimmerman, Correspondence, July 26, 2007

²⁰ State of Florida, "Cultural, Historical and Information" Online. Accessed September 11, 2007.
<http://www.flheritage.com/facts/reports/places/index.cfm?rusaction=FloridaArea&county=trndg>

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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
Jackson County, Missouri**



Miami, Dade County, Florida: Walgreen Drugstore, 200 E. Flagler St. built in 1936. Zimmerman, Saxe, MacBride, and Ehmann, architects.

To date there have been seven buildings designed by Wm. Carbys Zimmerman and/or the firm of Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman that are listed in the National Register Information System Database (NRIS):

Property Name	County, State	Date Listed
Aurora Elk's Lodge	Kane, Illinois	March 31, 1980
Pulaski Park and Field House	Cook, Illinois	August 13, 1981
Pemberton Hall and Gymnasium	Cole, Illinois	August 26, 1982
Peoria State Hospital	Peoria, Illinois	February 17, 1982
Ed. Kirk Warren House	Cook, Illinois	January 30, 1986
Casa del Rey Apartments	Oakland, Michigan	June 29, 1989
Robert Hosmer Morse House	Lake, Illinois	August 10, 2000

It is possible that Zimmerman Saxe and Zimmerman were commissioned by the Warner Brothers to design several film exchange buildings during a period beginning in 1926 through the early years of the 1930s. With the success of the new audio technology, Warner Brothers built film exchange buildings in all major cities across the United States. One such building is located in at 1307 Wabash, Chicago, Cook County Illinois:

The building was constructed in 1929 at the end of a post World War I building boom and just as the nation was headed into The Great Depression following the Stock Market Crash of 1929. Designed in the Art Deco architectural style by Zimmerman Saxe and Zimmerman Architects, the building was originally constructed as a film exchange facility for Warner Brothers Pictures. Warner Brothers used the building for their Chicago corporate offices and to house highly combustible motion picture films as they were distributed to Chicago area theaters. For this reason, the building structure is constructed entirely of cast-in-place concrete to provide maximum resistance to fire. Fire-proof concrete construction was a relatively new innovation in Chicago at that time born out of concerns generated by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. ...The Chicago Landmarks Commission has identified the Film Exchange Lofts Building as a historically significant structure – one designation short of naming the building a Chicago Landmark.²¹

²¹ Film Exchange Lofts, "History / Home." Online. Accessed September 14, 2007. <http://filmexchangelofts.com/default.asp>

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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
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A film exchange building located at 508 Park Ave. Dallas, Texas, also constructed for Vitagraph, is currently being reviewed for preservation. To date, the architect has not been identified and all efforts to locate this information through the Dallas Historic Preservation Office were unsuccessful. However, due to the Art Deco design similarities between the Warner Brothers Film Exchange buildings in Kansas City, Missouri, and at 1307 S. Wabash, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, along with the dates of construction, and the use of building, there is a strong indication that the Dallas building may be attributed to Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman.

**Zimmerman Saxe & Zimmerman:
Warner Brothers Film Exchange (1929)
1307 Wabash, Chicago, Cook County IL**



**Warner Brothers Film Exchange:
508 Park Ave. Dallas TX (1929)**

Vitagraph/Warner Brothers: 1896-1970

By the time Vitagraph opened a film exchange in Kansas City c. 1915, the company had the unique position of being the oldest surviving film company in America. With the exception of the French company, Pathé, it was the oldest extant film company in the world. When it was purchased by the Warner Brothers in 1925, Warner incorporated the history of Vitagraph into their own. Vitagraph's technological evolution, as well as its distribution methods, set the standards for what was to become one of the largest and best known film company's in American History, namely Warner Brothers Film Corporation.

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Vitagraph began when two Englishmen, J. Stuart Blackton and Albert E. Smith, acknowledge the potential in film making and acquired an Edison Projecting Kinetoscope in 1897 which was manufactured by Edison's company. They called their first film company "Edison's Vitagraph Company."²²

By 1898, Edison's firm brought three suits against Blackton and Smith: the first was for violating copyrighted material, the second and third were for infringing on Edison's motion picture patents. To avoid further action in the lawsuits, Blackton and Smith decided to enter into a licensee agreement with Edison's firm, after which, the two continued to pursue their film business. However, this also gave Edison control over Vitagraph's success. If they should become a business threat, Edison could simply pull their license rights.²³

On January 29, 1900, Vitagraph terminated their agreement with Edison, who in turn, attempted to close Vitagraph down. Smith and Blackton formed a new corporation, the American Vitagraph Company (Vitagraph) on February 15, 1900, in the State of New Jersey. Edison presented them with further legal threats which forced Smith and Blackton to temporarily cease production until January 1901, at which time they returned to production under a new license agreement with Edison.²⁴

After Vitagraph returned to production in 1901, it began to expand quickly. One of the decisions made in the expansion process was to purchase a new studio and set up a separate business to sell their films. Construction of the Vitagraph studio in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn at East 15th Street and Locust Avenue began in 1905. The first film to be produced at the studio was titled *The Adventures of Raffles, the Amateur Cracksman*. In this process, Blackton and Smith decided to build a regular stock company. The number of employees grew as actors were added to the Vitagraph family.²⁵

Vitagraph was making movies that legitimized the industry and took it beyond vaudeville and nickelodeon standards. To illustrate Vitagraph's importance to film production, they received the right to film inauguration ceremonies of President Taft on March 9, 1909. Two days later the film was released nationwide.²⁶

Vitagraph became a forerunner in the growth of the motion picture industry. The techniques employed in their early projects laid a foundation of success that many motion picture companies would later attempt to duplicate. The elements of literary quality along with an artistic vision gave Vitagraph an edge in the industry with their presentation of quality film productions. When Vitagraph opened a distribution center in Kansas City in 1912 the theater had become a big business in the big city and small towns alike.

22 Charles Musser, "American Vitagraph: 1897-1901," *Cinema Journal* Vol. 22, No. 3 Spring, 1983, pp 4-46. Mr. Musser is a film historian for the Thomas Edison Papers at Rutgers University. Musser details the relationship between Edison's and the Vitagraph Company's very early years.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Anthony Slide, *The Big V: A History of the Vitagraph Company* (Scarecrow Press Inc.: London, 1987), 13-14.

26 Ibid. 17.

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Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
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Vitagraph had two major studio complexes, one in Brooklyn and one in Hollywood to which it was preparing to add another ten acres. More importantly to its value was the number of exchanges throughout the United States. In 1919 Vitagraph had also purchased the oldest film exchange in Europe which was located in the north of England. This new branch of Vitagraph controlled distribution to over 800 theaters in Europe. The distribution to Latin American theatres was handled from their large Paris office.²⁷

By the early 1920s Vitagraph's Flatbush studio in Brooklyn, New York, began experimenting with the addition of sound tracks. These early sound recordings consisted of nothing more than orchestral music and sound effects used to illustrate the mood of the film. After 1922 Vitagraph's success began to wane. They could not find theaters to show their films as other companies, like Paramount who owned their own branch of theaters, were out-producing Vitagraph's quality films with more films, bigger stars and much bigger productions. These studios were also able to beat Vitagraph with lower rental rates which easily persuaded theatre owners to block-book other production companies' feature films.

Vitagraph considered filing an anti-trust suit against the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association but, rather than sue, Vitagraph decided to sever their ties with the Association on January 29, 1925. The total estimated value of Vitagraph that year was \$4,200,000. The company paid off its indebtedness of \$43,000 on March 13, 1925. At that point, Vitagraph belonged solely to Albert E. Smith, J. Stuart Blackton and John Rock, who had joined Vitagraph in 1920.²⁸

In 1924 a series of events set the stage for the young and struggling Warner Brothers Corporation to buy out Vitagraph. They desperately wanted Vitagraph's sound stage which had been making headway in sound technology. Warner brothers held out for another year. By April 20, 1925, Smith, Blackton and Rock were eager to sell Vitagraph to Harry Warner for a then whooping \$735,000. On April 22, 1925, Albert Smith, who joined the Warner Brothers Corporation, cabled the west coast staff at Vitagraph:

We have sold control of Vitagraph to Warner Bros. Albert Warner is president. I remain as Chairman of the Board. Everything will continue as formerly. I hope everyone will cooperate with the new management as they did with me for success. Will arrive Monday. Jack Warner will be glad to help you in any way.²⁹

After purchasing Vitagraph in 1925, Warner Brothers was quickly becoming the most advanced film company of the era. They also consider Vitagraph's historic markers in film technology as part of their own. Warner Brothers used Vitagraph's Flatbush studio for its sound experiments with Western Electric (Bell Laboratories) to produce "Vitaphone" synchronized sound shorts and music scores for feature films. The first feature film to debut the new Vitaphone Sound System was *Don Juan* (1926). Then in 1927 the biggest theatrical attraction of its day—*The Jazz Singer* with Al Jolson launched the feature film "talkie" revolution. Shortly after purchasing Vitagraph, Warner Brothers acquired the First

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 121-123.

²⁹ Ibid. 122.

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National Studio chain of theaters. This gave them a complete 'studio production to audience' business. Warners decided to equip these newly acquired theaters with the new sound system from the very beginning to feature their new "talking movies".³⁰

Kansas City moviegoers did not see *Don Juan* until June 11, 1927, when it opened at the old Kansas City Globe Theater located at 13th Street and Walnut. *The Kansas City Star* reviewed the new Vitaphone sound system stating:

The tones of the Vitaphone both in the human voice and in the instrumental effects were distinct at all times and for the most part free from metallic quality. They were always as clear as are the voices of singers reproduced on phonograph record or on the radio. What is more remarkable is the perfect synchronization... [This] perfection of synchronization is the quality that differentiates the Vitaphone from all other efforts called to make 'talking movies.'³¹

Warner Brothers Corporation continued to use the building at 1703 Wyandotte into the 1970s. Warner had a sound studio located in the building was later taken over by a private enterprise which remains in the building as of this study. To date the Warner Brothers Corporation is one of the largest multimedia corporations and includes magazines as well as home entertainment and cable service.

Conclusion

The period in which the Vitagraph Exchange Building at 1703 Wyandotte was constructed was a vibrant era for the motion picture industry. Vitagraph, unlike its predecessors was able to weather the on-going technological advances in film production as it transitioned from silent movies into the talking movie era. The quality of the film produced by Vitagraph seemed to help its longevity. If it had not been for Vitagraph's extensive system of film distribution throughout the United States and Europe, they may never have been chosen as an investment opportunity by the Warner Brothers Corporation. From Warner Brothers' perspective, they could not have gone on to become one of the world's largest internationally known media businesses. Warner Brothers considers the history of Vitagraph strongly linked to their own history giving them the distinguished position of being the longest operating company in the history of film.

Architecturally, the building at 1703 Wyandotte, as designed by Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman, is an example of the influence of American Art Deco Modernism in Kansas City architecture and is located within a limited geographic area of the city. The Art Deco influence found in the Vitagraph building is a toned down version of the highly ornamental movie palaces that were designed in the Art Deco style during this same period. It is as though the architects used their design to identify the building in relation to the film industry itself. Outside of Illinois, there are few records of buildings designed by Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman. Contracts between Warner Brothers Corporation and Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman may well go beyond the Kansas City and Chicago film exchange buildings, as well

30 Kevin Lewis, "Original Vitagraph Studio Enters Its Second Century" *Editors' Guild Magazine*, Online, May-June 2006: Vol. 27, Number 3

Accessed July 15, 2007. http://www.editorsguild.com/v2/magazine/archives/0506/features_article01.htm

31 Bill Vaughn, "First Talking Movie in Kansas City, Jazz Singer" *The Kansas City Times* 21 June 1946.

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as that of the film exchange building attributed to Zimmerman, Saxe and Zimmerman located in Dallas, TX. In addition to consistent use as a distribution center and sound recording studio, the Vitagraph Film Exchange Building is the largest and most intact of all the buildings constructed in what is known as Kansas City, Missouri's "Film Row."

The Art Deco style flourished in Kansas City during a nineteen-year period from 1920-1939 and included such highly visible icons as the Power and Light building (Hoit, Price and Barnes; 1932), Municipal Auditorium (Gentry Voscamp & Neville with Hoit, Price & Barnes; 1934-1936), the Civic Center complex (1934-1939) and the Professional building (Charles A. Smith; 1929), among others located in the city's central core. Buildings such as the Vitagraph Film Exchange adapted to the popular style of this modernist approach. Architects of these buildings eschewed traditional forms of revivalist architectural expression of the first decade of the 20th century to a style more in tune with the "Machine Age." In the Film Row neighborhood where the Vitagraph building is located, it stands as the most elaborate example of that architectural idiom, albeit at the cusp of the trend toward the International Style. Among the other Art Deco inspired buildings in Film Row (including Orion Pictures (120 W. 17th Street), 20th Century Fox (1720 Wyandotte Street), Commonwealth Theatres (215 W. 18th Street), Vitagraph is most expressive of the principles of the Art Deco; the later named buildings, with their all but rejection of décor, use of glass block and curved facades, lean toward the sleekness of the Art Moderne/Streamline style of architecture.

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**Vitagraph Film Exchange Building
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Verbal Boundary Description

Tract 1, Lots 1,2,3, and the north 16 feet of lot 4, block 2 located in the Goodrich Addition, a subdivision in the City of Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Tract 2, The south 8 feet of Lot 4 and all of lots 5, 6, and 7, block 2 located in the Goodrich Addition, a subdivision in the City of Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Note: The North 16 feet of Lot 4 (Tract 1) and the South 8 feet of Lot 4 (Tract 2) combine to be all of Lot 4.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Vitagraph Film Exchange building.

Key to Photographs

Len Fohn, photographer. July 2007. Negatives are located at the office of AHR, LLC, and Kansas City, MO.

Number	Description and View
1.	Main or west facade; view facing east
2.	Detail of main entry; view facing east
3.	Northwest facade; view facing southeast
4.	North facade; view facing south
5.	Northeast facade; view facing southwest
6.	Rear or east facade; view facing west
7.	Rear or east facade and south facade; view facing northwest
8.	South facade; view facing north
9.	Main and south facades; view facing northeast
10.	Third floor, western section; view facing southwest
11.	Second floor hallway; view facing west





1703

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