NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

142

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

Historic name Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School

Other names/site number Business Men's Assurance Company (B.M.A.) Building

Name of related Multiple Property Listing N/A

2. Location

Street & number 215 West Pershing Road | N/A | not for publication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 X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria: X A X B ___C ___D

Mark A. Miles FEBRUARY 14, 2014

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

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register _determined eligible for the National Register

_ determined not eligible for the National Register _removed from the National Register

_other (explain:)

Joe Edson K. Beall 4.11.14

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

X	private
	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

X	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
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	**Total**

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: SCHOOL
COMMERCE/TRADE: BUSINESS

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: BUSINESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVAL STYLES

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: BRICK
TERRA COTTA
roof: ASPHALT
other: TILE

X **NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION ON CONTINUTATION PAGES**

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

[X] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

[ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] B removed from its original location.

[ ] C a birthplace or grave.

[ ] D a cemetery.

[ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

[ ] F a commemorative property.

[ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1917-1930

Significant Dates

1917

1930

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Sweeney, Emory J.

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Keene and Simpson (Architects)

G. M. Bliss Construction Company (Builders)

[X] STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE ON CONTINUTATION PAGES

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

X State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
X Other
Name of repository: **Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School
Name of Property

Jackson County, Missouri
County and State

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84: N/A
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

	Latitude:	Longitude:		Latitude:	Longitude:
1	39.083213	-94.587007	3		
2			4		

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)
_____ NAD 1927 or _____ NAD 1983

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1				3			
2				4			

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Rosin, Principal; Rachel Nugent, Sr. HP Specialist; Lauren Rieke, HP Specialist
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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:**
  - A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
  - A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Photographs**
- **Owner Name and Contact Information**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Photographs

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

Photo Log:

Name of Property: **Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School**

City or Vicinity: **Kansas City**

County: **Jackson** State: **Missouri**

Photographer: **Brad Finch**

Date Photographed: **June 6, 2013**

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

1 of 12: Main (north) elevation. View south.
2 of 12: North and west elevations. View southeast.
3 of 12: East elevation, contextual view showing Post Office. View west.
4 of 12: North and east elevations, contextual view showing Liberty War Memorial. View southwest.
5 of 12: South elevation, contextual view showing Union Station. View north.
6 of 12: Detail of northeast corner tower. View southwest.
7 of 12: Main entrance on north elevation. View south.
8 of 12: Elevator lobby. First floor. View southwest.
9 of 12: Detail of historic terrazzo and hexagonal tile floors. First floor. View south.
10 of 12: Typical upper floor elevator lobby. Seventh floor. View west.
11 of 12: Typical office space in east side of building. Eighth floor. View southeast.
12 of 12: Typical office space in west side of building. Ninth floor. View southwest.

Figure Log:

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

Figure 1: Site Plan, ArcGIS, 2013
Figure 2: Contextual Map, ArcGIS, 2013
Figure 3: Photo Map 1 (exterior, first floor)
Figure 4: Photo Map 2 (upper floors)
Figure 5: Historic Plans- North elevation, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 6: Historic Plans- South elevation, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 7: Historic Plans- West elevation, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 8: Historic Plans- Basement Plan, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 9: Historic Plans- First floor, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 10: Historic Plans- Second floor, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 11: Historic Plans- Third floor, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 12: Historic Plans- Fourth floor, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 13: Historic Plans- Fifth floor, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 14: Historic Plans- Sixth floor, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 15: Historic Plans- Seventh, eighth and ninth floors, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 16: Historic Plans- Tenth floor, 1917. Courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri, Kansas City.
Figure 17: Newspaper advertisement for design options for the Sweeney Automobile School. *Source: Kansas City Star,* July 9, 1916.

Figure 18: Exterior photograph of Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School, 1922. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*
Figure 19: Postcard from Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School, circa 1920. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*
Figure 20: Front cover of *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School* Catalog, June 1925. *Source: Steve Noll, personal collection.*
Figure 21: Early iteration of the Sweeney Automobile School at 1420-1430 Woodland Avenue, c, 1914. *Source: Pen and Sunlight Sketches of Greater Kansas City.*
Figure 22: Postcard of Rahe Automobile and Tractor School, n.d. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*
Figure 23: Exterior photograph after renovations for Business Mens Assurance Company, circa 1930. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*

SUMMARY

The Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School (Sweeney School) is located at 215 West Pershing Road in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. Constructed in 1917, the ten-story, flat-roofed building has a steel and concrete structure clad with brown brick and ornamented with cream colored terra cotta. The main (north) elevation faces Kansas City's monumental Union Station. Green tile coffered cornices accent the parapet on the primary (north and east) elevations. The Sweeney School is a unique example of a vocational training facility strategically designed with a refined exterior to resemble a grand commercial building. Like its commercial cousins, the building has simple rectangular massing and flat, symmetrical façades that are visually divided into a three-part vertical block form (base, shaft, cap) through the use of different building materials and levels of ornament. Intricate terra cotta details across the façade include fleurs-de-lis, festoons and scrollwork, while the rectangular windows feature simple, terra cotta sills. The original raw utilitarian interior was appropriate for the automotive training school and designed to provide an easy transition when the time came to upgrade the building for its new use. Today, structural columns and various combinations of non-historic drywall partitions define the interior configuration on each floor. The historic exposed concrete ceiling structure is intact behind non-historic drywall and dropped ceilings. These minimal, additive alterations do not completely compromise the building's integrity.

ELABORATION

SETTING

The Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School stands at the southwest corner of West Pershing Road and Kessler Road on an irregular L-shaped lot. Part of the Crown Center neighborhood, the property is bounded on the north by Pershing Road, on the east by Kessler Road, on the south by a parking structure and on the west by an alley. The 0.6 acre property slopes slightly to the north, resulting in a rear (south) elevation that is one-story higher than the main (north) elevation. The building abuts the public sidewalk on the north elevation, a small patio space on the east elevation, and a service drive and parking lot on the west and south elevations, respectively.

Set in a largely open landscape, unobstructed views of the free-standing building are possible from multiple vantage points. Within this viewshed, several important civic buildings and monuments enhance the distinctive setting. North of the property lies the elaborate Beaux Arts Union Station and its complex of parking lots, support buildings, and train yards. To the east and south are the open lawn of Penn Valley Park and the commanding hilltop presence of Liberty Memorial. To the west is an office complex occupied by the Internal Revenue Service, anchored by Kansas City's historic main post office, which also fronts Pershing Road. The mixed-use Crown Center retail-residential-office development lies east of Liberty Memorial and Union Station.

EXTERIOR

The ten-story steel and concrete structure, fireproof building measures approximately 119 feet by 217 feet at its base. The first two floors have an L-shaped plan while the third through tenth floors feature a narrower, reversed L-shaped plan. The building has bilateral symmetry on the primary (north and east) elevations. It stands on a concrete foundation and is capped with a flat roof. It has a distinct three-part vertical block form, typical of high-rise commercial buildings from the period, expressed by the two-story base clad in terra cotta with a slightly projecting cornice and balconettes over the main entrances; the minimally ornamented seven-story brick shaft; and the one-story terra cotta-clad cap, which features decorative panels between the windows and terra cotta-cladding on the triangular pediments that ornament the center and end bays of the primary (north and east) elevations. Classically-inspired terra cotta details include urns with stylized floral, festoons, and fleurs-de-lis.

The main (north) façade is clad with brown brick (Photos 1, 2, 4). Cream colored glazed terra cotta blocks clad the first, second and tenth floors as well as the center, east and west bays. Fenestration on the main elevation consists of paired openings in the center bay, flanked on each side by eight single openings. The main entrance is recessed into the center bay, and angled, recessed entrances are at each end bay. Large, storefront openings fill the remainder of the first floor.

Similar to the main façade, the east façade is clad in brown brick with terra cotta on first, second and tenth floors and the north and south bays (Photo 3). Fenestration consists of eight openings of two sizes symmetrically arranged on either side of the center line. A secondary entrance is located on near the center of the east façade. It features a single, glazed aluminum door. The majority of the windows on the primary elevations have a flat brick arch of vertical bricks and a terra cotta sill. Windows on the third floor have terra cotta planters with brackets. Windows on the ninth floor feature a segmental arch with terra cotta keystone and end voussoirs. All openings have replacement fixed windows with tinted glass.

The painted south and west elevations have exposed concrete structure with brick infill (Photo 5). The south elevation is divided into three blocks. From west to east, the west block has eight window bays, a chimney and a bay of louvered openings. The chimney rises from the first floor to above the roofline. The center block has a bay of louvered openings and a single bay of window openings, separated by a wide expanse of solid brick. The east block has three bays of single openings. The east elevation has two blocks. The ten-story north block has three bays of single openings. The two-story south block has six single openings on the second floor. A garage entrance accesses the first floor of this block. All openings have brick sills. Some bays of windows have been infilled with brick.

Two secondary entrances located on the south elevation open into the second floor. One has a non-historic storefront with metal frame doors and provides access to commercial space. The other has paired metal doors set below a metal canopy and opens into a public corridor. In addition to these are two metal service doors and an overhead door on the west elevation.

The terra cotta bays on the primary elevations are highly decorative (Photo 6). A molded festoon separates each floor of the single, central bay. A round terra cotta arch surmounts the tenth story window. The towers end in a wide terra cotta panel adorned with a grid of fleurs-de-lis. An "S" inset in a cartouche adorns the peak of the tower. Pilasters rise on each side of these bays from the second to the ninth floor and feature a scroll design at the base and a fleur-de-lis inset in a cartouche at the capital. Above the

ninth floor, the pilasters continue as vertical panels adorned with urns and stylized vegetation. Historic plans illustrate an open two-story tower with round arch openings originally capped the center bay (Figure 18). By 1930 this tower had been reduced to a shorter pediment similar to the other bays (Figure 23).[1] The pediment was removed at an unknown date, and it now ends in a simple cream-colored block at the roofline.

The first and second floors of primary elevations are clad in cream-colored glazed terra cotta blocks and capped with a simple cornice. In the center bay the recessed main entrance has three pairs of doors (Photo 7). Both corner bays have recessed, angled entrances filled with paired, glazed aluminum doors.

Fixed aluminum-framed replacement windows fill the remaining bays of the first floor. Narrow ornamented terra cotta panels with decorative scrollwork surround each of the second floor windows. Pilasters flank the window above the main entrance. It has an entablature with scroll detail above, and a balconette with large scroll brackets and a metal railing below (Photo 7). The windows in the corner bays feature similar balconettes in addition to a segmental arch window with exaggerated keystone and ornamented spandrels. Additional storefront entrances were originally located on the main elevation and picture windows set in a concrete frame enclosed the corner bays. The current configuration of open corner bays was introduced at an unknown date. Red fabric awnings cover each of the first floor openings and the doors are all aluminum frame.

The terra cotta cap at the tenth floor displays a variety of ornament. A small projecting cornice with an Egyptian running molding is located at the tenth floor line. Decorative panels of urns separate the rectangular windows. In each of the terra cotta bays, rectangular windows have carved frames and arched pediments (Photo 6). An ornate terra cotta cornice features a course of dentil molding set below the square modillions of a green tile coffered cornice.

INTERIOR

First Floor

In keeping with the original design intent, the building interior has been renovated multiple times according to the needs of the occupants.

The main entrance leads into an elevator lobby and reception area (Photo 8). The lobby has drywall walls, tile floor and base trim, and a drywall ceiling adorned with mirrored panels. Three historic elevator shafts with non-historic cabs and two separate staircases provide vertical circulation through the building. One historic stairwell is centrally located in an enclosed stairwell on the south wall, east of the elevators. It has a metal structure with a metal railing. Another non-historic stairwell, located near the center of the west wall of the lower floors, rises into the southwest corner of the narrower upper floors. It has a metal stair structure and railing.

The west half of the first floor is partially finished with no current renovations underway. It has original terrazzo and hexagonal tile floors (Photo 9). Bands of concrete infill on the floors evidence historic partitions that once divided the commercial spaces. The west wall exhibits the ghost of a historic

[1] Photograph of Business Mens Assurance Company, circa 1930. Courtesy of Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

staircase, although no materials are extant. The steel structure of the ceiling is exposed throughout the space. Plaster and drywall cover some walls, although some areas of concrete structure (the historic finish) are exposed.

The east half of the first floor is a finished and occupied commercial space. Non-historic interior partitions divide the space into an irregular configuration. The steel structure and ductwork on the ceiling are exposed. The floor is concrete and the walls are painted and papered drywall.

Floors 2 – 10

Rows of square columns running east-west punctuate each of the upper floors, except the tenth floor. The original mostly open floor plans have been divided into various configurations of offices, conference rooms and reception areas by non-historic partitions (Photos 10, 11, 12). Restrooms are centrally located on each floor adjacent to the center stairwell and a mechanical room. A dropped ceiling hangs below the head of the windows. The non-historic partitions are primarily drywall, with some aluminum, framed glass, and wood paneling. Floors are covered in carpet, tile, or vinyl sheet floor, all with vinyl base trim. Windows are recessed into the wall and have simple, drywall frames and composite sills. While these partitions and finishes presently camouflage the historic exposed concrete ceilings and floors, the original fabric remains intact beneath these surfaces.

Parking Garage and Basement

Located at the southwest corner of the first floor is an integrated parking garage that descends one story into the basement. It is accessed via a metal overhead door on the west wall as well as interior entrances. It has an unfinished steel ceiling and concrete walls and floors, punctuated by concrete columns. Plumbing and electrical components are exposed on the ceiling. One small centrally located commercial space has drywall partitions and a dropped ceiling, although it is currently vacant.

INTEGRITY

Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School retains the key elements that communicate its historic associations with vocational education and with Emory J. Sweeney's contributions to the field. National Register Bulletin 32 states that a standard test for integrity is "whether the significant person(s) associated with the resource would recognize it as it exists today."[2] In the case of the Sweeney School, the exterior design, setting and location, the most significant elements communicating its significance, are substantially intact. There is no doubt that Mr. Sweeney or any of his thousands of students would recognize the building today.

Location and Setting

The Sweeney School occupies its original strategic location, conspicuously sited opposite Union Station and prominently within the Station's viewshed. Sweeney made a conscious decision in selecting this location for his building, and the visual juxtaposition of the Sweeney School and Union Station was integral to the marketing strategy for the Sweeney School. Sweeney wanted his grand building to be the first structure new students would see when they exited Union Station, thereby bolstering the reputation of the program by virtue of physical proximity. While elements of the building's setting have changed,

[2]Beth Grosvenor Boland, *National Register Bulletin 32: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Properties Associated with Significant Persons,* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service), 23.

most notably with the construction of the U.S. Post Office to the west and Liberty Memorial to the southeast and with the demolition of smaller early twentieth century commercial buildings along Pershing Road, these changes do not compromise the integrity of the building. The primary relationship between the Sweeney School and Union Station remains intact. The proximity of the other monumental civic structures enhances the prestige of the Sweeney School building, as Emory J. Sweeney originally intended.

Materials, Design, and Workmanship

The formal, high-style exterior design of the building, unique among automotive schools of the period, was an intricate part of the marketing campaign for the Sweeney School. As employed by architects Keene and Simpson, the symmetrical façade, three-part vertical block form, and terra cotta ornament enhance the stature of the building and reflect its planned future use as an upscale commercial building or hotel. Exterior alterations have been limited to the removal of the central tower from the primary parapet (which occurred in c. 1930); reconfiguration of the storefront openings; the addition of an egress stair on the secondary west elevation; and replacement of the original one-over-one windows with fixed sashes within the historic masonry openings. None of these changes diminishes the significance of the building as an educational institution or its association with Emory J. Sweeney.

The original interior featured large open classrooms and industrial workshops with minimal finishes. Designed to accommodate large machines, these utilitarian spaces had exposed concrete beams at the ceilings, painted concrete block and brick walls, and concrete floors. Sweeney planned to convert the building into commercial space just a couple of years after it was completed and welcomed changes to the original interior finishes. When operating as a school, the interior was to be purely functional with the most minimal ornamentation for educational purposes so that it could easily transition into high-end commercial space when it no longer functioned as a school. Subsequent alterations, beginning in 1930 when the Business Men's Assurance Company acquired the building, fulfilled Sweeney's expectations. The alterations have been additive rather than subtractive, protecting the integrity of these historically raw, unfinished surfaces now hidden by dropped ceilings, furred out walls, and partitions.

National Register Bulletin 32 states that "occasionally, the importance and integrity of an interior may be so extraordinary that extensive exterior alterations might be more tolerable than they would be otherwise."[3] This statement can be reversed in the case of the Sweeney School, where the exceptional significance of the exterior design offsets the impact of changes to the interior, which achieved Sweeney's original vision for the building, while leaving the refined and character-defining features of the grand historic exterior unaltered.

Feeling and Association

The building clearly communicates feelings about and its associations with its early educational function and best represents the significant contributions of Emory J. Sweeney to the field of vocational education during its period of significance. This building supported a leading automobile training program and contributed to Sweeney's success as an entrepreneur. Sweeney invested a substantial sum in constructing this building and in promoting his widely successful program. The physical building became a key element in Sweeney's promotional strategy, which drew more students to the school and enabled

[3] Boland, 23.

the educational program to prosper. Historic marketing materials for the Sweeney School almost singularly showcase the building façade, which remains as readily identifiable today as when the building opened.

SUMMARY

The Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School (Sweeney School) is locally significant under Criteria A and B in the area of EDUCATION and for its association with Emory J. Sweeney. The Sweeney School, which opened in 1917, is the building most directly associated with E. J. Sweeney's contribution to the field of vocational education as the developer of a widely successful and innovative instructional program. Sweeney, an adept businessman, capitalized on the growing field of automotive repair and interest in vocational training. In 1908, as founder and president of the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School, he developed and instructed in the "Sweeney System," a wholly unique method of hands-on teaching that combined practical experience with quality instruction. The Sweeney School is significant for its contribution to the field of vocational education. It grew to become one of the most successful automotive training schools in the country, prolifically advertising in national publications and drawing students from a nationwide pool. Fully believing in his product and understanding the nature of business, in 1917 Sweeney commissioned a grand building that, through its very appearance, would enhance the reputation of his school and support his future commercial endeavors. The location and setting directly opposite Union Station, the new train depot constructed in 1914, and the refined classically-inspired exterior of the building were part of his strategic plan to promote his business ventures and create an aura of prestige. Far more extravagant than the typical utilitarian garage utilized by other automobile training institutions, the character of the building rivaled grand downtown commercial buildings and increased both the status of the school as a leading automobile program and Sweeney's image as a prosperous businessman.

All of the earlier and later locations associated with Sweeney's training program have been demolished. The series of residences Sweeney occupied throughout his productive life illustrate the progression of his success. The Sweeney School, however, was the reason for his success and is therefore the most representative property associated with the historic contributions of Emory J. Sweeney in the field of automotive education. Underscoring the building's associated educational significance are the ideal setting, location and exterior design, which Sweeney chose to serve as an advertisement for his commercial ventures. All of these features are substantially intact and retain sufficient integrity to communicate the educational significance for which the building is nominated. Changes to both the exterior and interior are in keeping with Sweeney's original vision for the building whereby "the magic of the architect [was] ...able to strip immediately the building of its present interior characteristics" and convert the automotive training school into a high-end commercial space.[4] The Sweeney School is significant as a leader in the nascent field of automotive education and for its association with the accomplishments of entrepreneur E.J. Sweeney. The period of significance for the building begins in 1917 with the date of construction, and ends in 1930 when the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School removed from the building. Emory J. Sweeney was directly associated with the building throughout the period of significance.

ELABORATION

EMORY J. SWEENEY

Emory J. Sweeney was born on December 23, 1883 in Chicago, Illinois. He moved with his family to the Kansas City area when he was seven, where he enrolled in St. Mary's Catholic School in Kansas City, Kansas. After one year at Manual Training High School in Kansas City, Missouri, Sweeney dropped out of

[4] "Sweeney automobile and tractor school," *Kansas City Star,* May 8, 1919. Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1900-1949, "Sweeney Automobile School." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

school to work in the cattle business with his father and later, on his own.[5] In 1905, Sweeney married Mary C. Smith with whom he had nine children.[6] After Mary's death, he married Virginia Cassuth on September 30, 1918, and the couple had one child.

After multiple failures with the cattle venture and a serendipitous trip to the library, Sweeney rediscovered his interest in machinery and engines. Inspired by a book titled "Self Propelled Vehicles," in 1908 Sweeney pursued a job as a mechanic in an automobile repair shop at 429 West 6th Street, Kansas City, Missouri.[7] His dedication and hard work paid off, as he became a self-proclaimed expert auto mechanic. Constant queries from other young men spurred his desire to teach this trade.[8]

Emory J. Sweeney discovered a gap between the need for individuals trained in the automotive field and the available opportunities to learn these specialized skills. As a motivated and enterprising businessman, he put his own skills to use and started the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School with little capital, but a great awareness of the value in this growing field. The first iteration of the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School began as a joint venture between Emory J. Sweeney and Henry J. Rahe at the garage where Sweeney worked on West 6th Street. Although the exact name is unknown, this short-lived automobile training school began around 1908 and grew enough in six months to expand into a building at 1832 Grand Avenue.[9] After some disagreements the partnership dissolved.

Later that same year Sweeney established his own Sweeney Automobile School in a garage at 2312 East 15th Street. Sweeney advertised in the want ads to attract potential students. Within the span of a few years, enrollment had grown from three persons to one thousand. The Sweeney Automobile School operated out of seven different buildings on the north side of East 15th Street (now Truman Road), directly across the street from Manual Training High School.[10] These early locations were one- or two-story utilitarian brick structures with little architectural ornament, typical of contemporary automobile garages (Figure 21). Although they supported the productivity of the school, they were purely functional buildings that did little to promote the public image of Sweeney or his training school. None of these buildings survives, enhancing the significance of the nominated building in the field of vocational education and the professional career of Sweeney.

Emory J. Sweeney had started the Sweeney Automobile School as a one-room shop focused primarily on training chauffeur-mechanics. Following the trend in many early automobile schools, it quickly grew to offer instruction in automobile construction and maintenance, as well as the repair of other types of motor vehicles, including trucks and tractors. Sweeney's aptitude for business, the high-quality training he offered, and his prolific advertising made the school very successful. Learning the automobile mechanic trade provided working-class Kansas Citians an alternate means of employment from the standard factory or stockyard work in which many were employed. There was a great demand for training, and in 1915 enrollment surpassed 3,000 students. Forty-two well-trained and professionally accomplished instructors,

[5] "Emory J. Sweeney," *Kansas City Star*, May 12, 1929. Mounted Clippings, "Sweeney, Emory J." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.
[6] "Emory J. Sweeney."
[7] "Emory J. Sweeney."
[8] "Emory J. Sweeney."
[9] "Emory J. Sweeney." This building is no longer extant.
[10] "Emory J. Sweeney." The buildings associated with the Sweeney School are no longer extant.

including Sweeney, guided the students through their studies.[11] By 1916, the school taught courses specifically about tractors, and Sweeney even designed and manufactured the "Iron Horse," a gas farm tractor.[12]

Within the field of automotive education, Sweeney offered a unique hands-on approach to training that was known as the "Sweeney System."[13] Students learned through practical experience and direct contact with vehicles and parts in addition to lectures. Text books even became unnecessary due to the advanced equipment and tools available at the school. Sweeney invited outside patrons to bring their vehicles in for repairs, which consisted of quoting a price for work prior to making the actual repairs. Under the guidance of instructors, students performed the work, and if it was not satisfactory to the customer there was no charge.[14] By 1917, over 11,000 men had graduated from Sweeney School.[15] The growing enrollment and new courses in aviation mechanics and truck operations required a larger space for the school.

Ever aware of the next big opportunity, Sweeney carefully chose the design, location and setting for a new building to support not only the training school but also grander, future business endeavors. As such, the exterior design was of singular importance. Sweeney intended that after a short period of time the school would relocate to a more suburban location and the building would be converted into an office building or grand hotel. To achieve this vision, the new school building would be on-par with high-style downtown commercial buildings, rather than a typical functional automotive training school. The area around Union Station, in the early stages of development following the opening of the station in 1914, was the perfect location for the building that Sweeny envisioned as a prominent landmark. Newspapers and periodicals from the period all wrote about the design and progress of the new building. As the first and only large-scale commercial building erected within the viewshed of Union Station, the Sweeney Building was touted as a local landmark soon after it opened. One Kansas City newspaper from the period described Sweeney as a "pioneer builder in the immediate vicinity" who "wants to set an example that will set the character of the approach to the station."[16] Everyone exiting or entering the highly traveled Union Station saw the grand building. It promoted Kansas City, the automobile school, and ultimately Emory J. Sweeney.

When it opened in 1917, the Sweeney School had an enrollment of 3,674 students. This number doubled over the next two years, with students coming from throughout the United States and even other countries to learn their trade.[17] The diverse array of courses, including radio mechanics and vulcanology,

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[11] "New $250,000.00 Home for the Sweeney Automobile School," *Kansas City Star,* July 9, 1916, 13A, Microfilm, Kansas City Public Library.
[12] C.H. Wendel, *Standard Catalog of Farm Tractors 1890-1980*, 2nd Edition (Iola, WI: KP Books, 2005), 658. Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=uhDMcRGcGWMC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed September 23, 2013).
[13] *Popular Science Monthly*, 97, no 4 (October 1920). Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=pykDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed September 20, 2013), 7.
[14] "New $250,000.00 Home for the Sweeney Automobile School."
[15] Wallace B. Blood, "3/4 of a Million for Power-Propelled Vehicle Education," *Motor Age* 31:11, (1917): 20.
[16] "Sweeney Automobile School- new building," *Kansas City Star,* July 2, 1916. Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1900-1949, "Sweeney Automobile School." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.
[17] Pat O'Neill, "Looking Back: E.J. Sweeney found his fortune in stalled automobiles," *Heart of America Irish Life*, (December 2002-January 2003): 7.

trained students to become everything from welders to tractor engineers to chauffeurs.[18] Thus the impact of the Sweeney School spread beyond just automotive repair to the broader field of vocational education.

At the start of World War I, Sweeney recognized the need to train soldiers as aviation mechanics and incorporated such a program into the facilities at the Sweeney School. By the end of the war, over 9,700 enlisted men had graduated from Sweeney's aviation program. The aviation department continued to grow after the war, eventually becoming its own school.[19]

More than just a place for education, the Sweeney Automotive and Tractor School became a nurturing environment for the young men who enrolled. Sweeney took great care with both their academic and personal lives and, as stated in one advertisement, the building was "used exclusively for the training and welfare of Sweeney Students."[20] Tuition in 1917 was $85 for the eight week course, and upon graduation, Sweeney allowed students to stay and learn a specialization at no extra cost.[21] Continuing this attentive role, when influenza epidemics swept through the city in 1919 and 1920, Sweeney paid more than $120,000 of his own money to care for his ailing students. This combination of high-quality education and guardianship offered by Sweeney drew over 85,000 men to the school by 1929.[22]

As an entrepreneur, Sweeney continuously explored a variety of business opportunities, although the Sweeney School remains the most representative of his success. In addition to founding the school, Emory Sweeney developed the Indian Village Subdivision (now known as Santa Fe Hills). He originally purchased the 100-acre farm from the Laforce family with the intention of using it as an airfield for his aviation department. Reflecting on his humble background, he then decided to develop the tract as a residential neighborhood for families of modest income.[23] Much of the existing residential development on the property, however, appears not to have occurred until after Sweeney's association with the property ended. Sweeney also established Kansas City's first radio station, the WHB Radio Station in 1922, which operated out of the Sweeney School.

Financial stresses beginning in 1928 led to the loss of his fortune, leaving Sweeney in debt and forcing him to sell his radio station, the school building, and his mansion. Never one to remain down, Sweeney re-established his wealth through the continued operation of the automobile school at 1615 Grand Avenue,[24] although the Sweeney School never again attained its earlier prominence. Even after he changed the name to Sweeney Schools, Inc. in 1933, it closed within the year.[25] In 1942, Sweeney, in partnership with local investment broker Louis Lowenstein and Robert Johnson, an associate of builder

[18] Emory J. Sweeney, *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School Catalog*, 16 (June, 1925), 30th ed., (Kansas City, MO: Emory J. Sweeney, 1925).
[19] "Financial Difficulties," *Kansas City Star*, April 30, 1929. Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1900-1949, "Sweeney Automobile School." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.
[20] "Sweeney Auto and Tractor School," advertisement, *Popular Mechanics,* 36. Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=a4bVAAAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA124&dq=sweeney+automobile+and+tractor+school&hl=en&sa=X&ei=yX8vUvTWAeOO2wWdpoGAAw&ved=0CFoQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=sweeney%20automobile%20and%20tractor%20school&f=false, (accessed November 18, 2013), 124.
[21] Blood, 21.
[22] "Financial Difficulties." Sweeney limited enrollment to men. A later iteration of the school that opened at the start of World War II did allow women.
[23] Emory J. Sweeney, *Indian Village Country Club: Homes not Houses* (Kansas City, MO: E.J. Sweeney, ca. 1925), n.p.
[24] "Sweeney Building," *Kansas City Times*, April 19, 1928, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1900-1949, "Sweeney Automobile School." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library. This building is no longer extant.
[25] *Kansas City (Jackson County) Missouri, City Directory,* (Kansas City, MO: R.L. Polk & Company, 1933-1934). Microfilm, Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

George Bliss, opened Sweeney Trade Schools, Inc. at 17th Street and Grand Avenue in Kansas City.[26] Like his earlier institution, training at the school focused on aviation, mechanics, and "other war industries" to support the new war effort. This school, however, was much smaller, with space for only 350 students. Once again, recognizing a gap between needs and opportunities, Sweeney opened the school to female students, understanding there would be a lack of men during the war to fill the available positions.[27] This school presumably did not flourish, because he began yet another school venture in 1947 at 1401 East 14th Street.[28] Emory J. Sweeney died on October 17, 1953. The Sweeney School remains a legacy to the life of Emory J. Sweeney and his significant contribution to the field of automotive and vocational training.

THE RISE OF AUTOMOTIVE EDUCATION

The Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School was a pioneer in the field of automotive education. The profession of automobile mechanics was still undefined in the early 1900s. Car owners had to rely on services from an allied field, such as a bicycle mechanic or carriage maker, or perform repairs themselves. Alternatively, some men acted as private chauffeur-mechanics, taking responsibility for both operating and maintaining their employers' vehicles. With the advent of assembly line technology and the popularity of the Model T, automobile use skyrocketed throughout the country, creating a demand for individuals trained in automobile repair and operation. Mass production and the use of interchangeable parts helped to standardize the arena of vehicle repair, making it easier to train workers for the industry. Contributing to this growth was the novelty of the field, and the perceived necessity of learning the minutiae of this new technology.[29]

With the profession in its infancy, there was no standardized means of obtaining proper mechanical knowledge. Those interested in the field educated themselves through hands-on exploration of vehicles, by reviewing publications, or through the few available correspondence courses. In order to become part of a recognized field, auto mechanics needed a new, more regulated and official form of education. In 1904 New York's West Side YMCA established one of the first automotive schools in the country. The program was tasked with offering structured coursework for chauffeur-mechanics and wealthy car owners.[30] On the heels of its success, the field of automotive education expanded as new automotive training facilities opened throughout the country. The appeal of a career as an auto mechanic, or someone trained to service and repair motorized vehicles, including trucks and tractors, was soon widespread. It offered the possibility of shifting one's position to a higher profession; it assured higher wages due to the need for specially trained, skilled workers; and finally, it offered blue collar workers the prospect of becoming their own boss.[31]

Early automotive training programs, such as the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School, typically offered four- to twelve-week courses that focused on vehicle operation and instruction for chauffeur-

[26] This building is no longer extant.
[27] "Sweeney Trade Schools, Inc.," *Kansas City Star,* February 15, 1942, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1900-1949, "Sweeney Automobile School." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library. This building is no longer extant.
[28] "New Enterprise," *Kansas City Star,* April 13, 1947. Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1900-1949, "Sweeney, Emory J." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library. This building is no longer extant.
[29] Kevin L. Borg, *Auto Mechanics: Technology and Expertise in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 53.
[30] Borg, 53.
[31] Borg, 62-64.

mechanics.[32] The quality of instruction varied greatly, reflecting the needs and desires of the founding organizations. Automotive training programs were not controlled by automobile makers or labor unions, providing an opportunity for enterprising individuals to start smaller, private institutions. These private institutions were often more concerned with financial gain than with proper education, and their sub-par instruction led to their closing shortly after they opened. Unlike these, the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School is significant for its longevity. Based on its founder's reputation, the high-quality training offered, and prolific advertising, it became a highly successful venture.

The start of World War I made the profession of auto mechanic not only desirable but also a patriotic duty. As motor vehicles replaced horses as standard military equipment, the United States Army needed soldiers who could operate and maintain the vehicles. Initially, the Army focused on recruiting skilled workers or training them at Motor Transportation Schools run by the federal government. As the need for soldier-mechanics surged with the reliance on vehicles, these federal training programs could not meet the demand for skilled workers. The Army turned instead to some three hundred public and private institutions to train soldiers in everything from aviation to blacksmithing to motor repair.[33] The Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School was one such facility, noted for training soldiers in its new aviation department, as well as other types of motorized vehicles.

Sweeney had recognized the need for aviation mechanics early on and incorporated the program into the school around 1916. By the end of the war, over 9,700 enlisted men had graduated from Sweeney's aviation program. Utilizing the same methods of the "Sweeney System," students worked on actual engines under the direction of trained mechanics to learn carburetor and magneto work, as well as general service and repair. As one of the early schools training aviation mechanics, the department continued to grow after the war. The Sweeney invested over $50,000 in new equipment for the department around 1925.[34] It eventually became its own entity, relocating to the Sweeney Airport in the Fairfax district of Kansas City, Kansas when the school moved from the building in 1930.[35]

As access to personal vehicles soared after World War I, the automotive field remained popular. Educational opportunities increased during the 1920s. By the 1930s, professionals in the field joined educational reformers in lobbying for automotive educational programs to be included in public school vocational programs. With the aid of federal funds, this method of automotive education eventually surpassed private institutions, such as the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School, as the preferred means of instruction.[36] While this trend contributed to the decline of the Sweeney School, it remains significant as one of the earliest, most prominent, and most enduring automobile training institutions in the country.

[32] Borg, 61.
[33] Borg, 67.
[34] *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School Catalog*, 35.
[35] "Sweeney Building."
[36] Borg, 75-77.

COMPARISON TO OTHER AUTOMOTIVE TRAINING SCHOOLS

The rise in automobile use impacted the development of the entire country. In Kansas City these effects are reflected in both the architecture and settlement patterns of the city. In 1901, there were only two automobiles in the city, but by 1906 Kansas City boasted a private automobile manufacturing company. The first automobile show in 1909 drew 20,000 attendees. In 1916 the *Kansas City Star* reported Kansas City as being at the forefront of automobile education in the world, propelled to this status by the presence of the Sweeney and Rahe schools, both of which advertised nationally.[37] The area from McGee to Main Streets, between 15th and 28th Streets, just east of the school, became the prime location for automobile dealerships, parts stores and battery shops.[38] Multiple brick buildings were constructed during this time to serve auto-related functions, including automotive education.

Rahe Automobile Training School

The life and career of Emory J. Sweeney's primary competitor, Henry J. Rahe, is most comparable to Sweeney's and illustrates the level of importance that Sweeney achieved. Rahe was born in Pennsylvania in 1879. He moved his growing family several times before settling in Kansas City before 1910.[39] After his brief partnership with Sweeney, Rahe established the Rahe Automobile Training School at 1112 Locust.[40] Rahe expanded his school in 1917 to include a large industrial building at 22nd Street and Gillham Road, just two blocks east of Union Station and the Sweeney School. This building was the former home of the Hudson Publishing Company.[41] Like the "Sweeney System," the "Rahe Way" involved six to eight weeks of hands-on training in the presence of Master Mechanics. Rahe's school occupied four sites in the Kansas City area: the original school and garage at 11th and Locust; the main training center at 22nd and Gillham; a four-story apartment building for student housing in a nearby neighborhood; and a tractor training facility in the open land of North Kansas City.[42] Two additional schools teaching the Rahe Way opened in Chicago and Cleveland. Rahe's full-page ad inside the November 1921 issue of *Popular Mechanics Magazine* included sketches of the main training center in Kansas City and the two out-of-state buildings. The message of the ad emphasized the economic benefits of the training program, as suggested by the heading "Money Money more Money."[43] Just three years later Rahe's ad in the 1924 Kansas City city directory featured only the building at 11th and Locust.[44] The Rahe School is not listed in city directories after 1924, and Rahe moved away from Kansas City shortly thereafter. He returned to live at 5403 Harrison Street in the 1950s and died in 1958 at the age of 80.[45]

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[37] "Sweeney Automobile School- new building," *Kansas City Star,* July 2, 1916,
[38] DeAngelo Dory, Jane Fifield Flynn, and Rosanne Wickman, *Kansas City Style: A Social and Cultural History of Kansas City As Seen Through Its Lost Architecture*, (Kansas City, Mo: Fifield Publishing Co, 1992), 13.
[39] "Henry J. Rahe, Sr.," *Kansas City Star* February 14, 1958, p. 28, Obituary, Vertical File "Rahe Auto & Tractor School," Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.
[40] Kansas City (Jackson County) Missouri City Directory, 1910. This building is no longer extant.
[41] Kansas City (Jackson County) Missouri City Directory, 1916, 1917.
[42] Henry J. Rahe, *Rahe's Auto & Tractor School Catalog* (Kansas City, MO, 1918), Vertical File "Rahe Auto & Tractor School," Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.
[43] "Rahe Auto and Tractor School," advertisement, *Popular Mechanics Magazine* 36.5 (1921) Inside Cover. Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=GOIDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA636&dq=rahe+tractor+school&hl=en&sa=X&ei=WG04UonSK8TB2QX4kYDYCQ&ved=0CGEQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q&f=true (accessed September 17, 2013). None of buildings that housed Rahe's schools are extant.
[44] Kansas City (Jackson County) Missouri City Directory, 1924.
[45] "Henry J. Rahe, Sr."

Although his school was successful in the 1910s and early 1920s, Henry J. Rahe never reached the same status as Emory J. Sweeney in their professional field. No buildings associated with the Rahe Auto and Tractor School survive, including those in Chicago and Cleveland.

Nationwide Comparison

The Sweeney and Rahe schools were the primary automotive training schools in Kansas City and two of only a few reputable programs across the country. Other institutions, such as the Kansas City Automobile School, operated as early as 1908. Although located in the same area of automobile-related businesses, these schools lasted for only a few years.[46] According to historian Kevin Borg, the Sweeney and Rahe schools were considered to be on par with Detroit's premiere training program, Michigan State Auto School and the original West Side YMCA program in New York City. These were the few programs nationwide that truly focused on the curriculum, rather than profiteering through sales commissions or recruitment.[47] Although all of these schools experienced marked growth during the late 1910s and early 1920s, the prominence of Sweeney School is evident in advertisements from the period which appeared in countless national periodicals. In 1916, only one other training program, the Michigan State Auto School, advertised alongside Sweeney in *American Chauffer* magazine. The magazine's "Query Box" listed a question from an individual asking where to find the best training program for auto repair. The answer listed three schools: the Y.M.C.A. Auto School in Cincinnati; the Cleveland Auto School; and the Sweeney School.[48] A 1917 issue of *Popular Mechanics*, features two full-page ads promoting Sweeney School, attesting to the success and significance of the school in the field of automobile education.[49] In all of these advertisements, the Sweeney School building is prominently featured as the icon for the program.

The advertisements for auto training programs in the October 1920 issue of *Popular Science* illustrate the importance of the Sweeney School in this field. Small, square ads tucked among the articles advertise schools in Buffalo, New York; Sioux City, Iowa; Lincoln, Nebraska; Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the Kansas City Auto and Tractor School at 15th and Lydia.[50] The Rahe Automobile Training School had a large ad that filled nearly two-thirds of a page. Significantly, only the Michigan State Auto School and the Sweeney School had full-page ads, and both ads showcased their facilities.

The Sweeney School was architecturally unique among its contemporaries. Rahe's building on 22nd Street was similar to the early Sweeney School buildings (Figure 22). The repurposed industrial structure was highly utilitarian, similar to a large-scale garage. Large bands of fenestration defined the exterior, and the only ornament was simple, shaped parapets, arched windows, and small medallions at each corner. This building was demolished in the mid-1960s during the development of Crown Center. The Michigan school, shown in the 1920 *Popular Science* advertisement, was also a two-story brick industrial building

[46] Kansas City (Jackson County) Missouri City Directory, 1908-1924.
[47] Borg, 62.
[48] "Query Box," *American Chauffer: An Automobile Digest* 4 (1916): 80. Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=whRaAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed September 20, 2013).
[49] "Sweeney Auto and Tractor School," advertisement, *Popular Mechanics,* (November 1917), Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=edoDAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA17&dq=sweeney+automobile+and+tractor+school&hl=en&sa=X&ei=ROOcUcKVBLbi4AOYpIH4Dg&ved=0CF8Q6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=sweeney%20automobile%20and%20tractor%20school&f=false (accessed November 15, 2013), 16-17.
[50] *Popular Science Monthly*, 97, no 4 (October 1920). Google Books: http://books.google.com/books?id=pykDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, (accessed September 20, 2013).
The building for the Kansas City Auto and Tractor School at 15th and Lydia is no longer extant.

with wide bands of windows shown. Even a newer building promoted in later ads for the school was a similar utilitarian structure. Sweeney, on the other hand, promoted his training center as the "Million Dollar School." He touted it as the "largest in the world," highlighting the state-of-the-art equipment and the ingenuity of the Sweeney System.[51] Sweeney not only discussed his training facilities, but always prominently showcased exterior views of the building in advertisements and in the school catalog. These images skew the perspective slightly to highlight its proximity to Union Station (Figure 20).

SWEENEY AUTOMOBILE AND TRACTOR SCHOOL BUILDING

As the Sweeney School continued to grow in the mid-1910s, Emory Sweeney began contemplating a new, larger building to house his venture. His facilities were becoming inadequate for the ever increasing numbers of students, and they lacked the space to teach the breadth of skills required to keep pace with automotive technology. As a savvy businessman, he was constantly looking to the future for the next big opportunity. He envisioned the success of the automobile school as the springboard for future commercial endeavors. Understanding the factors that contribute to a successful business venture, he sought the best possible combination of location, setting, and exterior design. Rather than construct a large functional garage as the new home for the school, Sweeney wanted to erect a grand building that would emblemize the prominence and prestige of the school.[52]

A new, monumental Union Station opened in Kansas City in 1914, sited among mostly open land two miles south of the main downtown commercial district. With his great business sense, Sweeney understood the potential benefits of placing a building immediately across from Union Station. Not only did he consider his new building "life insurance for his old age," but he had "seen...old structures outgrown by the city...[and] chose a site in the path of growth."[53] Sweeney could recall the exact moment when he realized the potential of the site. "As I walked out of the depot here I looked across to the vacant lot where this building stand now and I said to myself: 'I'll buy that lot and put up a school building that will be a credit to Kansas City.'"[54] He even researched buildings surrounding other railroad terminals along the east coast to construct the most appropriate building for this specific type of setting and location.

In July of 1916 Sweeney bought a vacant lot across from Union Station for $76,000. Constantly taking advantage of opportunities to promote his school, Sweeney involved the citizens of Kansas City in the building design. He hired the prominent local architectural firm of Keene and Simpson to create four distinct exteriors for the school, each applied to the same basic building form (Figure 17). Through newspaper ads, Sweeney encouraged the public to vote for their favorite. Over 3,000 people voted. Winning by a margin of five-to-one was the classically-influenced façade that stands today.[55]

Sweeney School was completed in 1917 for approximately $750,000 by the George M. Bliss Construction Company (Figures 4-16).[56] To accommodate the ever-growing school enrollment, during construction the footprint of the building grew from 110 feet by 116 feet to its current size of approximately 119 feet by 217 feet. The completely fireproof building had a concrete and steel structure. Atop the roof was a series of

[51] Ibid, 7.
[52] *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School Catalog*, 4.
[53] Financial difficulties, April 30, 1929.
[54] "Emory J. Sweeney," *Kansas City Star*, May 12, 1929.
[55] "Mortgage Foreclosure on Building opposite Union Station," *Kansas City Times*, March 18, 1929, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1900-1949, "Sweeney Automobile School." Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.
[56] Blood, 21.

eighty-foot high electric signs reading "Sweeney School," "Auto," "Tractor" and "Aviation," the largest illuminated signs in Kansas City at the time (Figures 18, 19), offering more advertisements for the school.[57] The new Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School offered "almost twelve acres of floor space, every foot of which [was] devoted entirely to [the] students."[58] This included classrooms, workshops, dormitories, and commercial services. It featured functional spaces specifically designed for the curriculum, including vulcanizing, forging and wiring rooms.[59] The workshops and classrooms were raw and unfinished spaces, ideal for disassembling and reassembling large pieces of machinery. The wide open rooms featured exposed concrete framing at the ceiling and painted brick and concrete block walls.[60]

A variety of businesses that catered to the students occupied the first floor commercial spaces. The Eugene Bagby Drug Company (1918) and the Kansas City Tractor Club (1919), a social club, were the earliest commercial tenants. In 1920, businesses, including John Hardy men's furnishings, the Plaza Tool Supply Company, a service garage, a barbershop and Sweeney's Restaurant, primarily served students. Sweeney promoted these businesses in the school catalog as amenities for students that created a "city within a city."[61] Later tenants were oriented more toward the general public, including the Plaza Haberdasher and A. A. Reiderer photos (1924), the Plaza Printing Company (1925) and Gough Publishing Co. (1930).[62]

Always on the lookout for new technologies, Sweeney established Kansas City's first radio station, WHB radio station, to help promote the school as well as the cultural life of Kansas City.[63] John Schilling, Henry Goldenberg, and Sam Adair built the original transmitter and began broadcasting in April 1922. The studio operated out of the tenth floor from a special sound-proof space large enough to hold a fifty-piece orchestra.[64] The station was a forerunner in the industry, boasting the country's first all night broadcast, broadcasting concerts from an eight-piece orchestra that performed live in the studio, and pioneering a variety of radio entertainment programs. It became known throughout the world for its distinct siren, which sounded at the beginning and end of the daily broadcast schedule.[65] Sweeney also used WHB to promote his Indian Village (Santa Fe Hills) residential development, by broadcasting from that location twice each day. He encouraged listeners to attend the broadcasts, thus exposing thousands of potential buyers to the vacant tracts of real estate. Sweeney sold the station in 1930, although it continues to operate into the present day.[66]

With future development in mind, Sweeney expected the school to be a short-term tenant in the building and that it would be converted into an office building or station hotel. The design would allow "the magic of the architect... to strip immediately the building of its present interior characteristics..." for this

[57] Emory J. Sweeney, *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School Catalog*, 16 (June, 1925), 30th ed., (Kansas City, MO: Emory J. Sweeney, 1925) 8.
[58] Emory J. Sweeney, *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School Catalog*, 4.
[59] Keene & Simpson Architects, "Building for Mr. Emory J. Sweeney," Architectural Plans, 1916, Sheets 1-7, Keene, Simpson, and Murphy Architectural Records, State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center – Kansas City.
[60] *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School Catalog*, 10, 11, 13, 15, 28, 37.
[61] *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School Catalog*, 5.
[62] *Kansas City (Jackson County, Missouri) City Directories*, 1918, 1919, 1920, 1924, 1925, 1930.
[63] Verna Dean Ferril, "Your Favorite Neighbor," *Swing* 6:4, (1950): 403.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, 404.
[66] Ibid, 405.

conversion.[67] Like others in the area, he planned to capitalize on the commercial opportunities that might arise from proximity to Union Station The exterior design of the building, likewise, reflected these future plans. The elaborate and decorative façade was reminiscent of a grand commercial building or posh hotel of the period. This plan almost came to fruition just a few years after the building opened when Sweeney purchased the tract near 85th Street and Wornall Road to develop a larger automotive educational complex.[68] Ironically, Sweeney had selected the property opposite Union Station anticipating commercial expansion in the area, but its location within the area of a proposed civic center meant it was continually in the shadow of condemnation. This greatly affected its marketability, hampering Sweeney's ability to redevelop it as a hotel or even to lease retail space. Sweeney never realized the return he had anticipated on his investment in the building.[69] Sweeney's vision finally came to fruition in 1930 when the BMA Corporation purchased the building and renovated it as office space.[70] They remained in the building for thirty years.

By 1928, Sweeney began to experience additional financial difficulties, due in part to the personal investment he made to care for his students during the flu epidemic and problems with WHB Radio Station. The former millionaire was now $1 million in debt. He was forced to sell not only the Sweeney School building but his lavish mansion and other assets, including the Indian Village residential subdivision. A group of investors purchased the Sweeney School building in 1928 for $850,000 with the intention of repurposing it as a hotel, office space, or mail order house.[71] The automotive school and the radio station remained in the building for about two years after the sale. Around 1930 the aviation school relocated to new facilities at the Sweeney Airport in the Fairfax district, while the automotive school moved a few blocks north to a three story building at 1615 Grand Avenue.[72]

In 1930, the Business Men's Assurance Company (BMA) purchased the Sweeney School building (Figure 19). BMA was founded in 1908 to provide insurance to professionals and businessmen. The company grew rapidly, and by the late 1920s needed new facilities to house its offices. BMA ordered a $100,000 remodel of the Sweeney School building in 1930 and just seven years later authorized a second remodel of the first floor.[73] Some improvements included replacing the iconic rooftop sign with a similar, though smaller, one with their company name and removing the parapet tower at the center of the facade. In addition to BMA offices, tenants in 1930 included the Medical Herald and three publishing companies. By 1933, a wide variety of businesses shared the building with BMA, including Carnation [milk] Company, Quaker Oats Company and Brown Instrument Company.[74] As BMA expanded through the next two decades it came to occupy the entire building. In 1963, having outgrown the building, BMA relocated to a new office tower on the south edge of Penn Valley Park.

After BMA relocated, the Sweeney School building continued to house offices and limited ground floor retail tenants. Currently, it is mostly vacant with tenants on the first, fourth and sixth floors. Plans call for

[67] "Sweeney automobile and tractor school." *Kansas City Star,* May 8, 1919.
[68] As described above, Sweeney later developed this parcel as the Indian Village subdivision.
[69] "Financial Difficulties."
[70] City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission, building permit #91787 (March 19, 1930).
[71] "Sweeney Building."
[72] "Sweeney Building." The building is no longer extant.
[73] Building permit #91787 (March 19, 1930). City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission, building permit #4608A (September 16, 1937).
[74] *Kansas City (Jackson County, Missouri) City Directories*, 1933.

a mixed-use rehabilitation that will accommodate residential, office and commercial uses in a historically sensitive design.

CONCLUSION

The Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School is the last remaining and most prestigious location of the highly successful vocational training program started by entrepreneur E.J. Sweeney. At a time when the field was in its infancy, the Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School grew to become one of the leading automotive training schools in the country. Strategic in selecting a location and design, Sweeney constructed an edifice that met the functional needs of his curriculum while also becoming a landmark in the city. It is the property that best reflects the significant contributions Emory J. Sweeney made to the field of vocational education, and it retains sufficient integrity to communicate this significance. Exterior alterations, including the replacement of windows and storefronts, do not impact the image of the building that Sweeney used exclusively and extensively in his promotional material for the school. Interior alterations are entirely additive and preserve the historically raw and unfinished walls, ceilings and floors. The Sweeney School is significant as a leader in the nascent field of automotive education and for its association with the accomplishments of entrepreneur E.J. Sweeney.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School occupies the north five feet of lot 51 and all of lot 52 in Walnut Ridge, all of lots 13 and 14 and that part of lot 15 lying south of Pershing Road in Waldo Place an lots 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Waldo Tract.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated resource includes the parcels of land currently associated with the resource.

Figure 1: Site Plan. *ArcGIS 2013.*

Figure 2: Contextual Map. *ArcGIS 2013.*

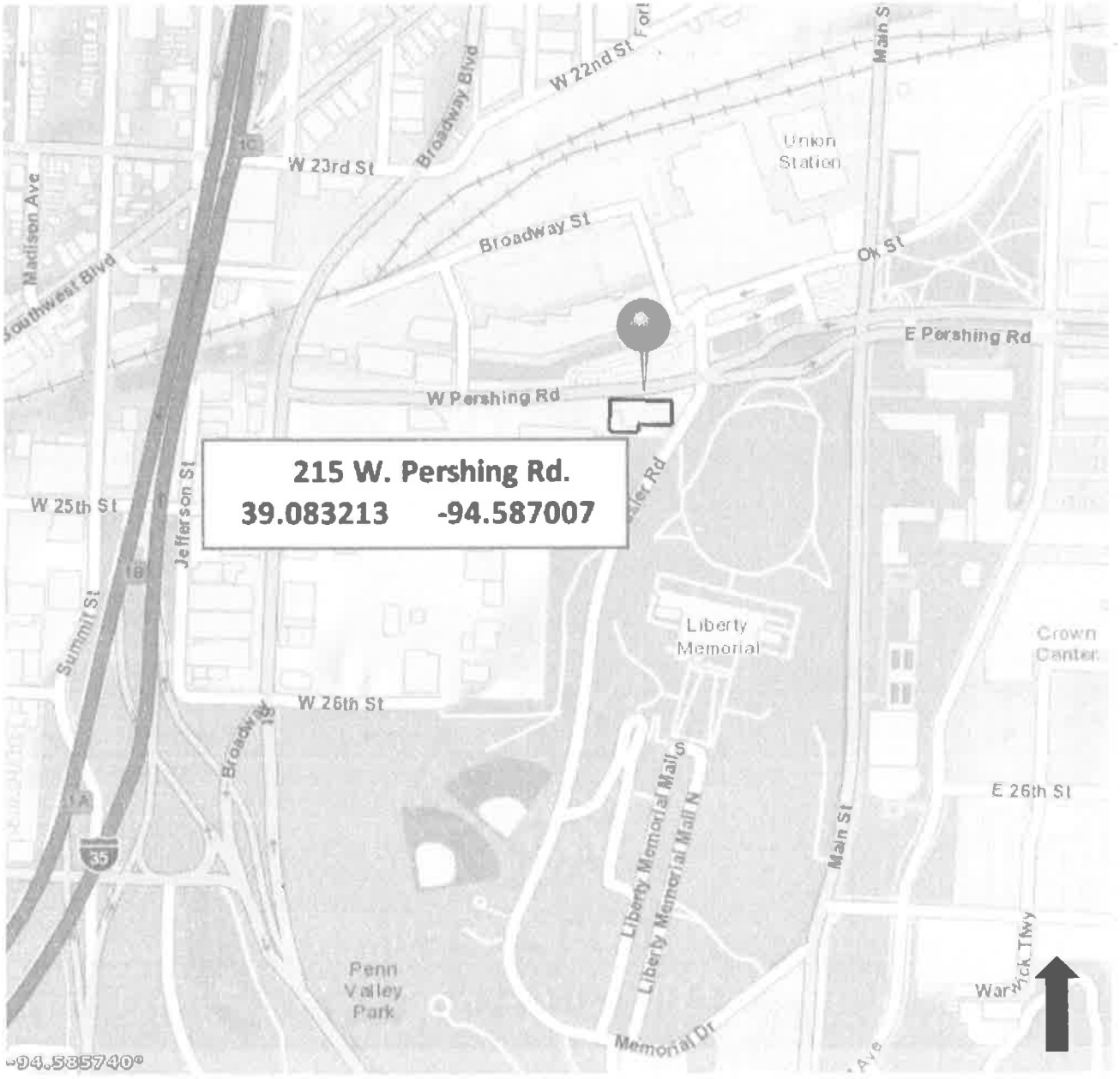


Figure 3: Photo Map 1 (exterior, first floor)

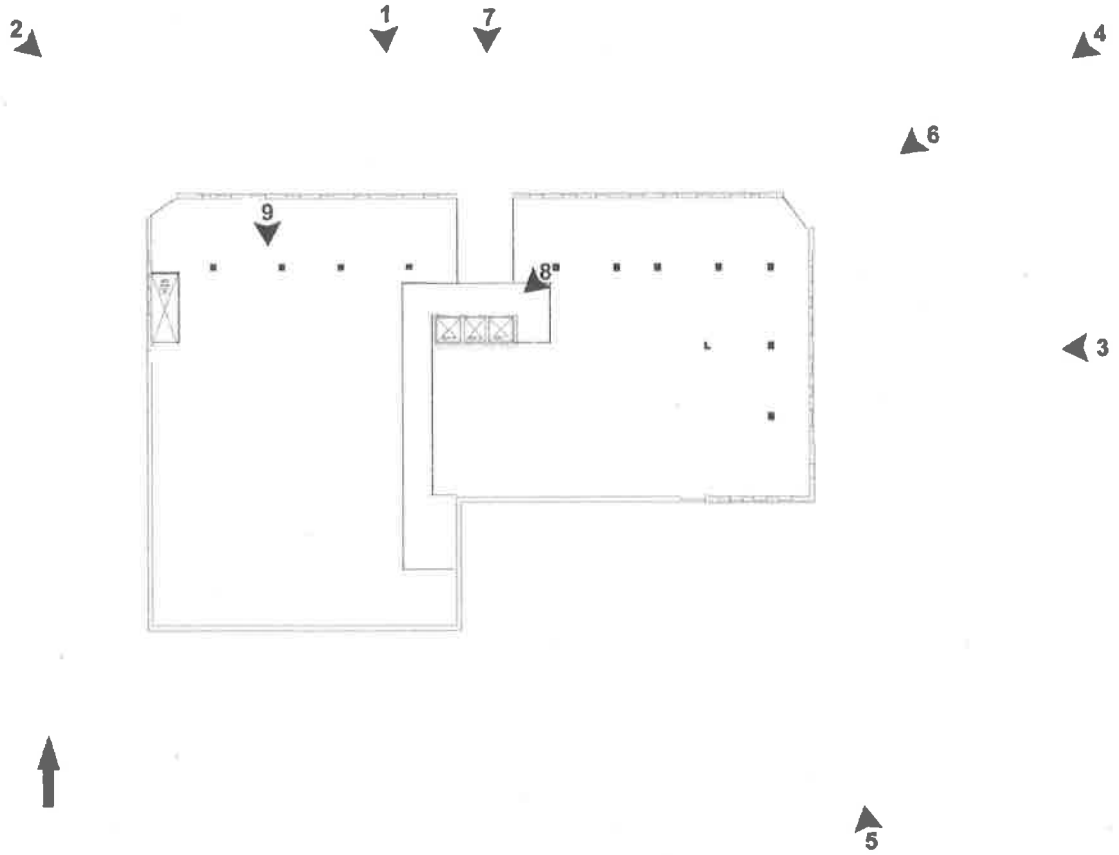


Figure 4: Photo Map 2 (upper floors)

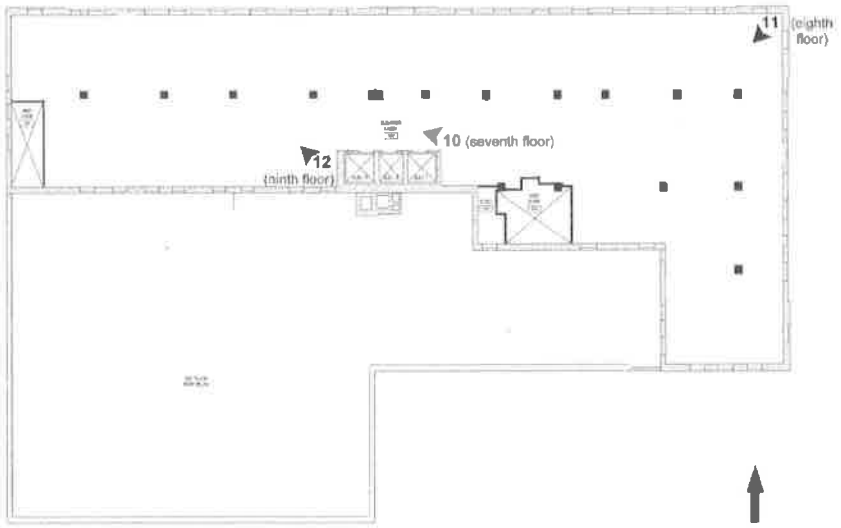


Figure 5: Historic Plans- North elevation, 1917

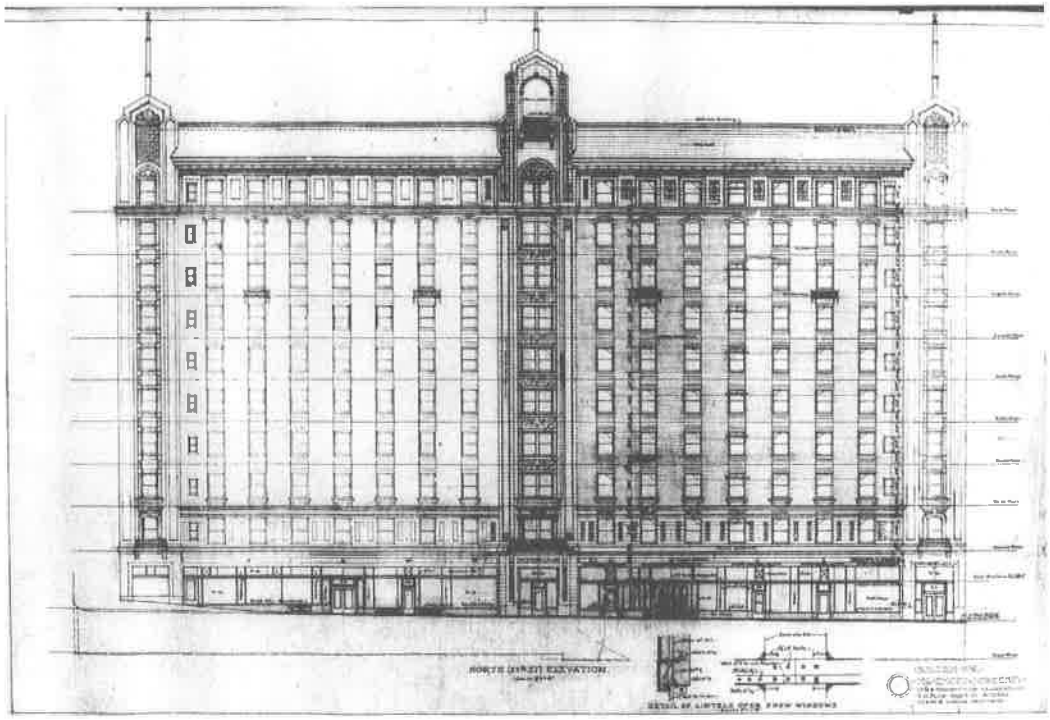


Figure 6: Historic Plans- South elevation, 1917

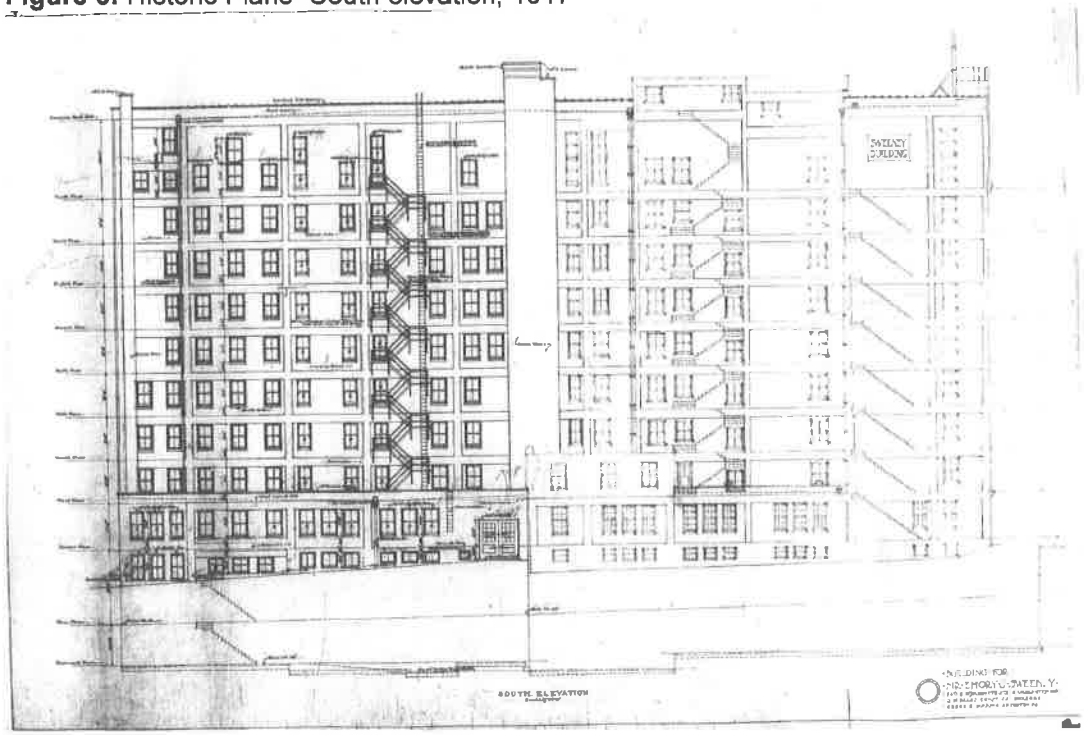


Figure 7: Historic Plans- West elevation, 1917

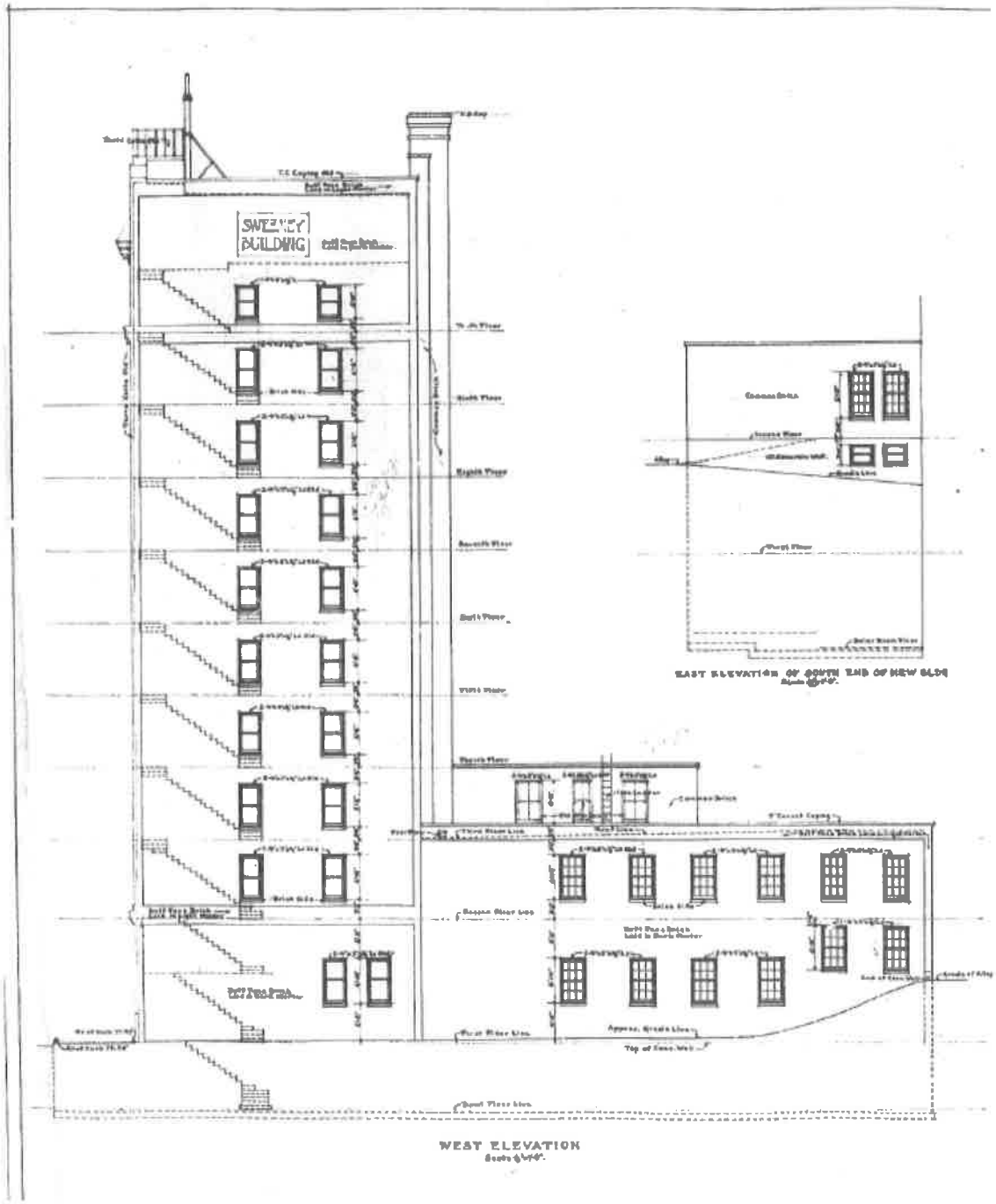


Figure 8: Historic Plans- Basement Plan, 1917

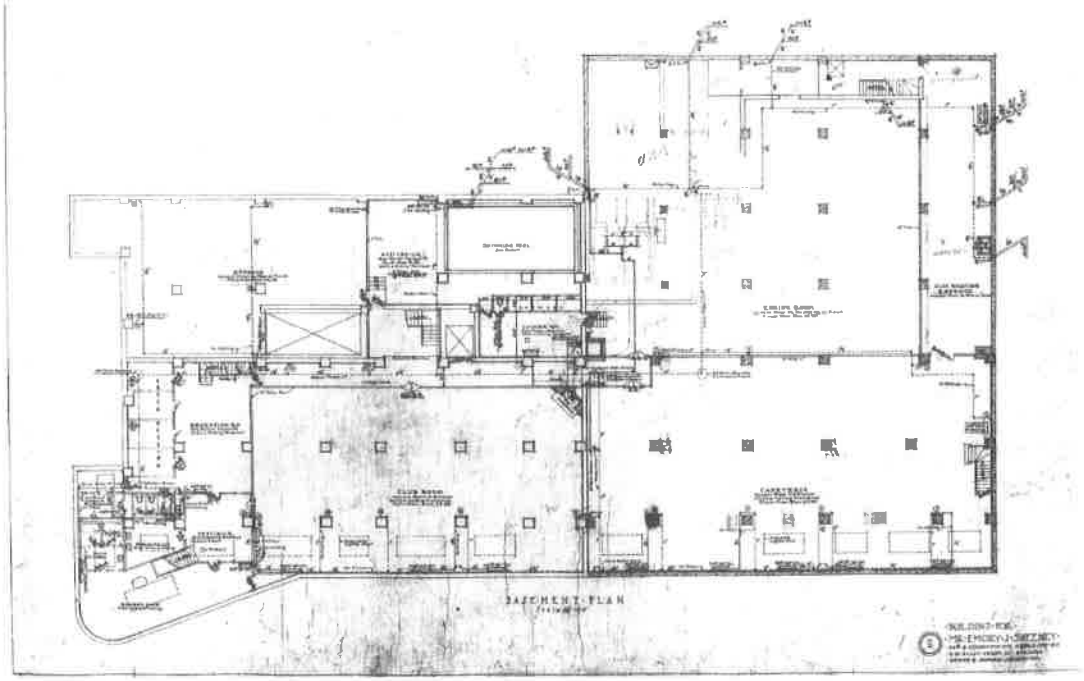


Figure 9: Historic Plans- First floor, 1917

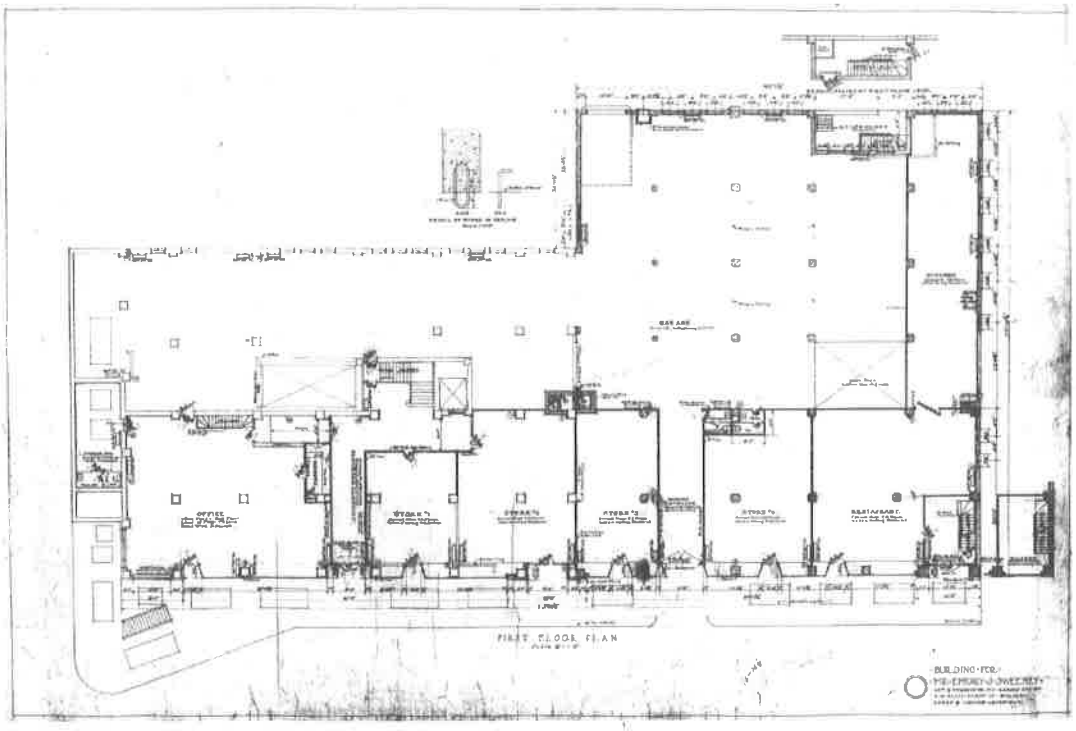


Figure 10: Historic Plans- Second floor, 1917

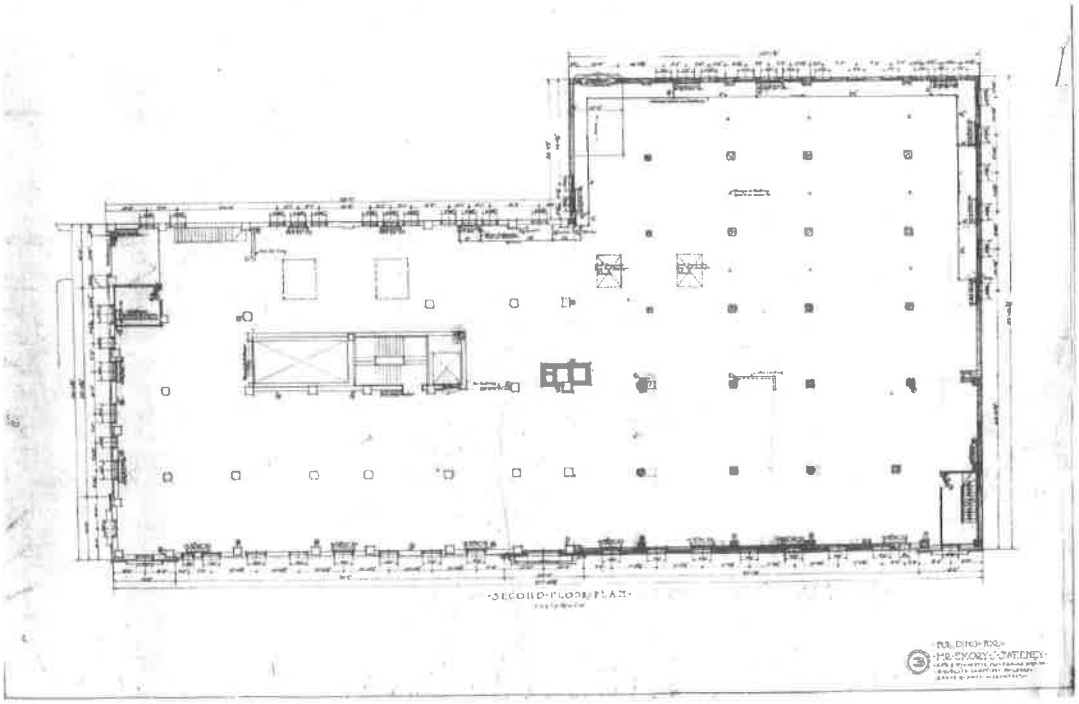


Figure 11: Historic Plans- Third floor, 1917

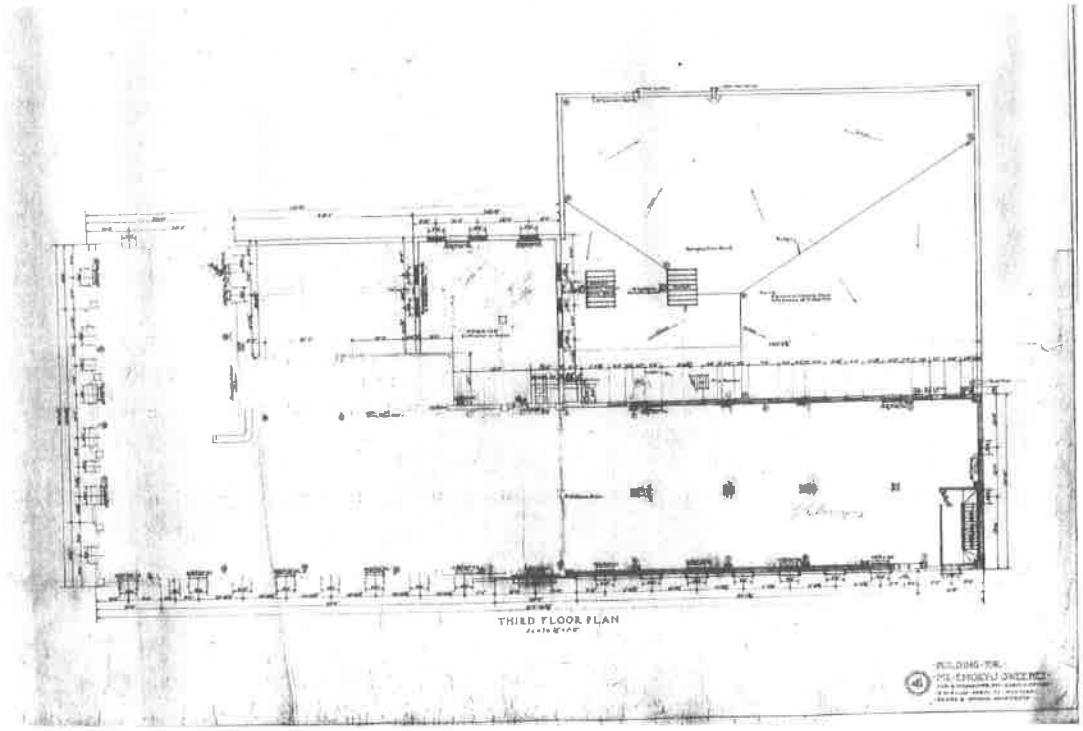


Figure 12: Historic Plans- Fourth floor, 1917

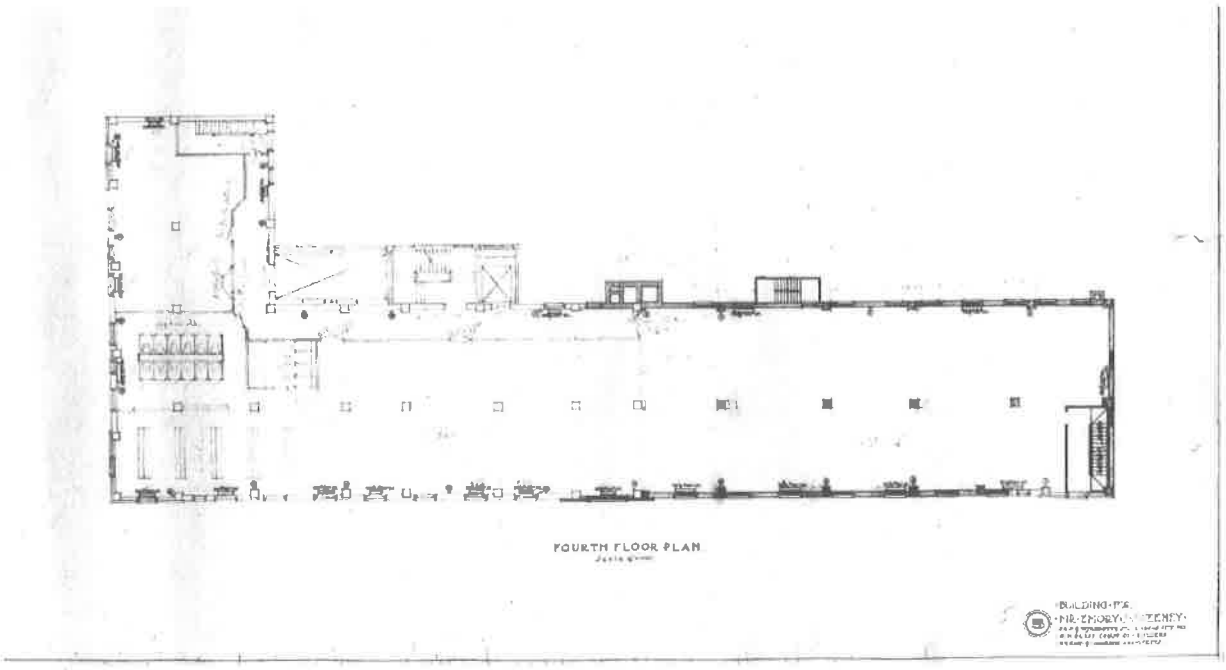


Figure 13: Historic Plans- Fifth floor, 1917

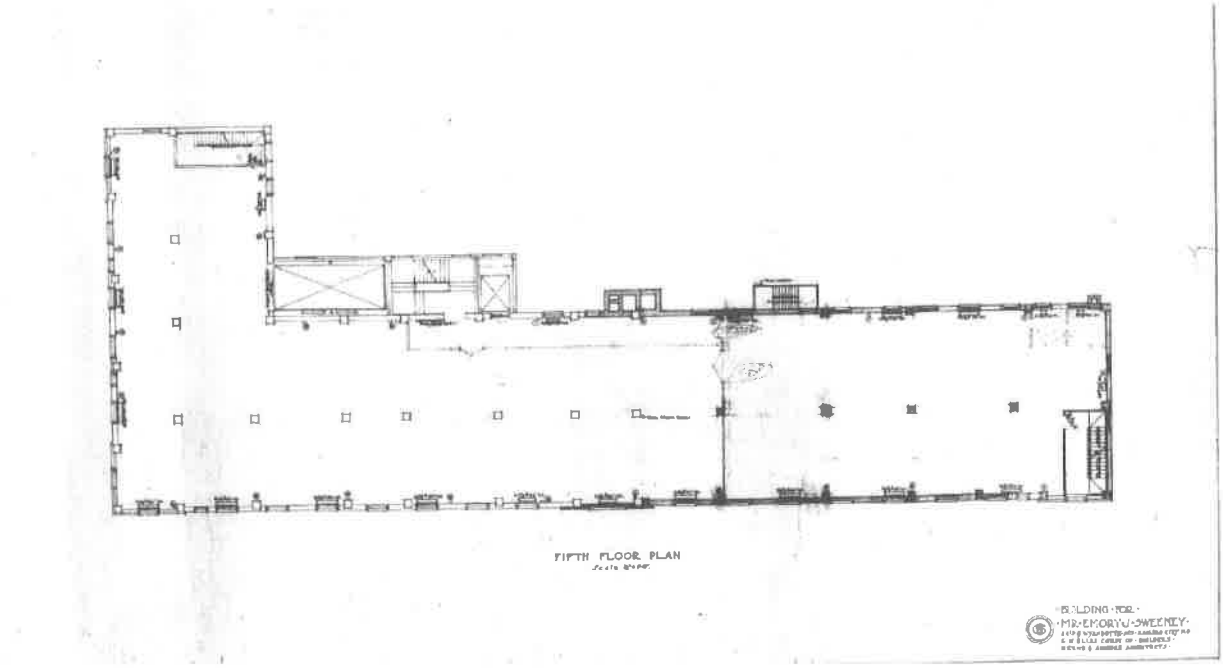


Figure 14: Historic Plans- Sixth floor, 1917

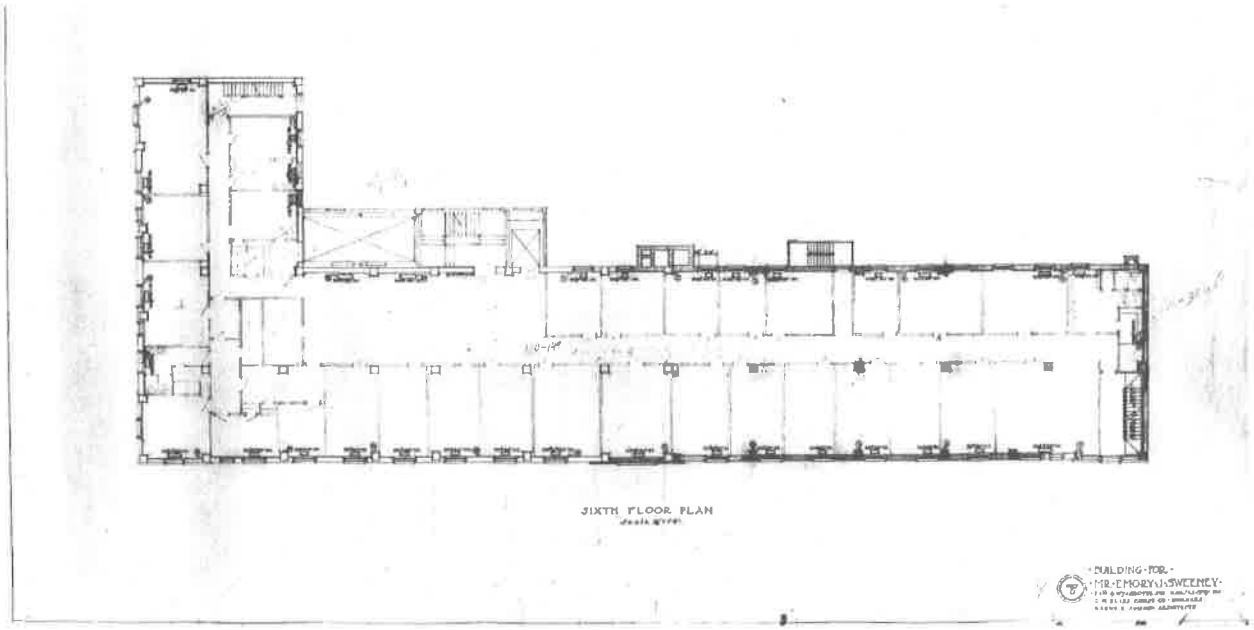


Figure 15: Historic Plans- Seventh, eighth and ninth floors, 1917

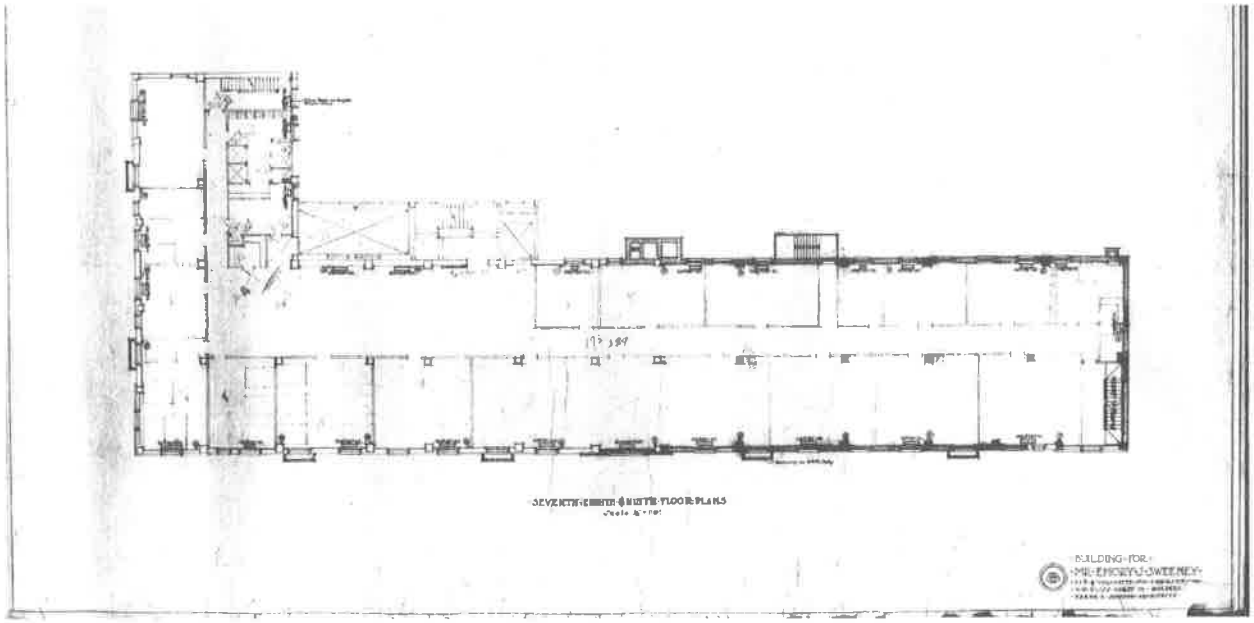


Figure 16: Historic Plans- Tenth floor, 1917

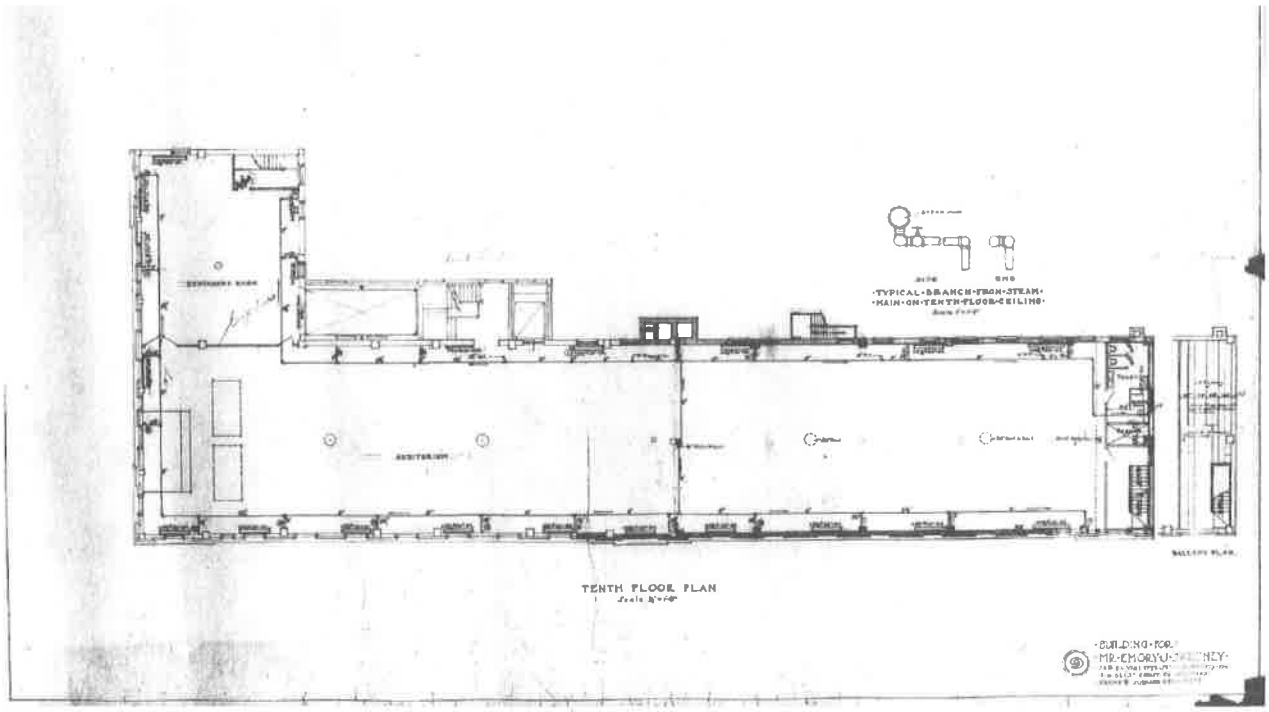
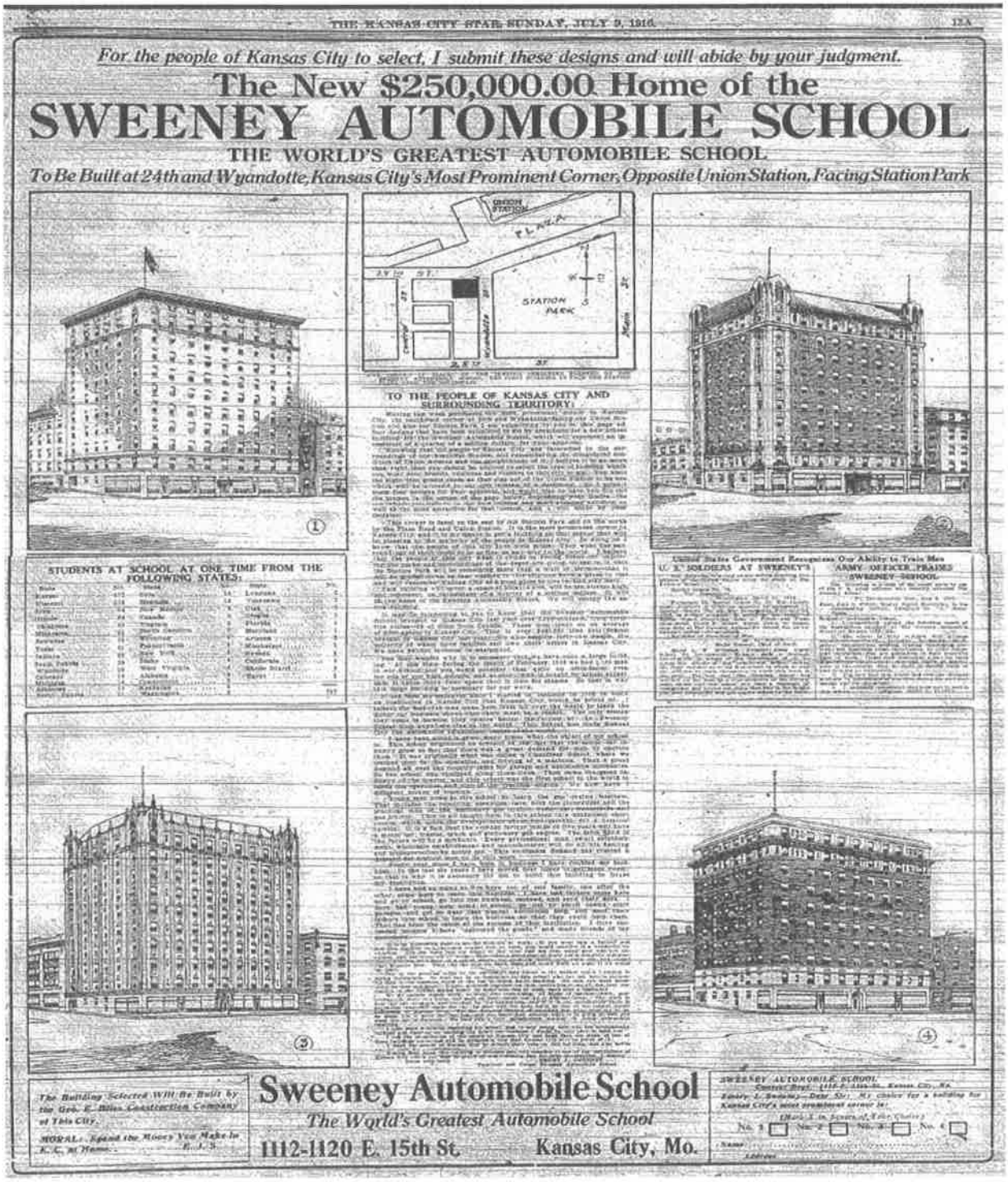


Figure 17: Newspaper advertisement for design options for the Sweeney Automobile School. *Source: Kansas City Star,* July 9, 1916.



THE KANSAS CITY STAR, SUNDAY, JULY 9, 1916. 12A

For the people of Kansas City to select, I submit these designs and will abide by your judgment.

The New $250,000.00 Home of the

SWEENEY AUTOMOBILE SCHOOL

THE WORLD'S GREATEST AUTOMOBILE SCHOOL

To Be Built at 24th and Wyandotte, Kansas City's Most Prominent Corner, Opposite Union Station, Facing Station Park

UNION STATION
PLAZA
STATION PARK
Wyandotte St.
Main St.

TO THE PEOPLE OF KANSAS CITY AND SURROUNDING TERRITORY:

STUDENTS AT SCHOOL AT ONE TIME FROM THE FOLLOWING STATES:

United States Government Recognizes Our Ability to Train Men
U. S. SOLDIERS AT SWEENEY'S
ARMY OFFICER-TRAINS SWEENEY SCHOOL

The Building Selected Will Be Built by the Geo. E. Bliss Construction Company of This City.

MORAL: Spend the Money You Make in K. C., at Home.

Sweeney Automobile School

The World's Greatest Automobile School

1112-1120 E. 15th St. Kansas City, Mo.

SWEENEY AUTOMOBILE SCHOOL
Central Blvd. 1112-1120-1122 E. 15th St., Kansas City, Mo.
Kindly L. Sweeney—Dear Sir: My choice for a building for Kansas City's most prominent corner is:
(Mark X in Square of Your Choice)
No. 1 ☐ No. 2 ☐ No. 3 ☐ No. 4 ☐
Name
Address

Figure 18: Exterior photograph of Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School, 1922. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*

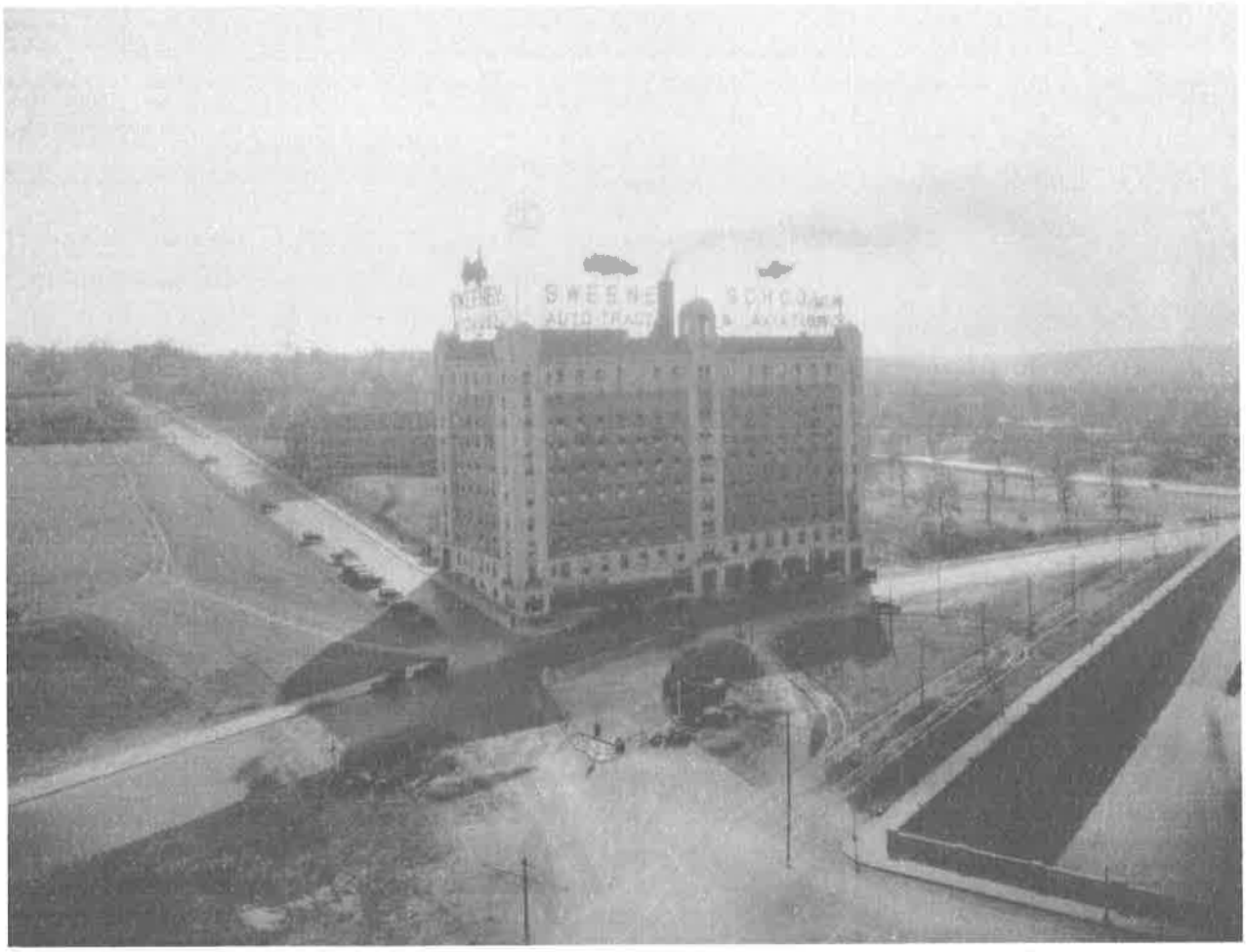


Figure 19: Postcard from Sweeney Automobile and Tractor School, circa 1920. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*

Figure 20: Front cover of *Sweeney Automotive and Electrical School* Catalog, June 1925. *Source: Steve Noll, personal collection.*

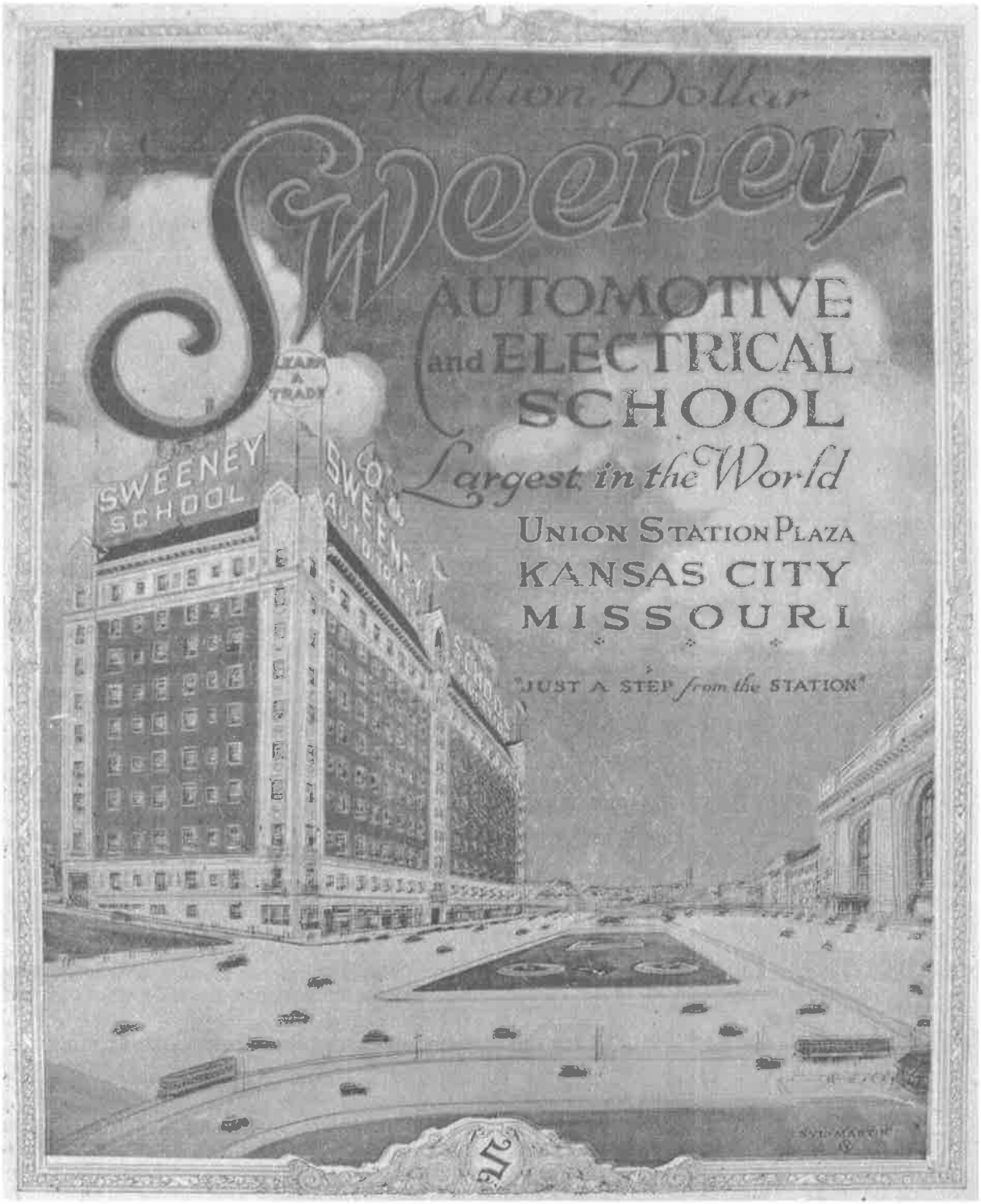


Figure 21: Early iteration of the Sweeney Automobile School at 1420-1430 Woodland Avenue, c, 1914. *Source: Pen and Sunlight Sketches of Greater Kansas City.*

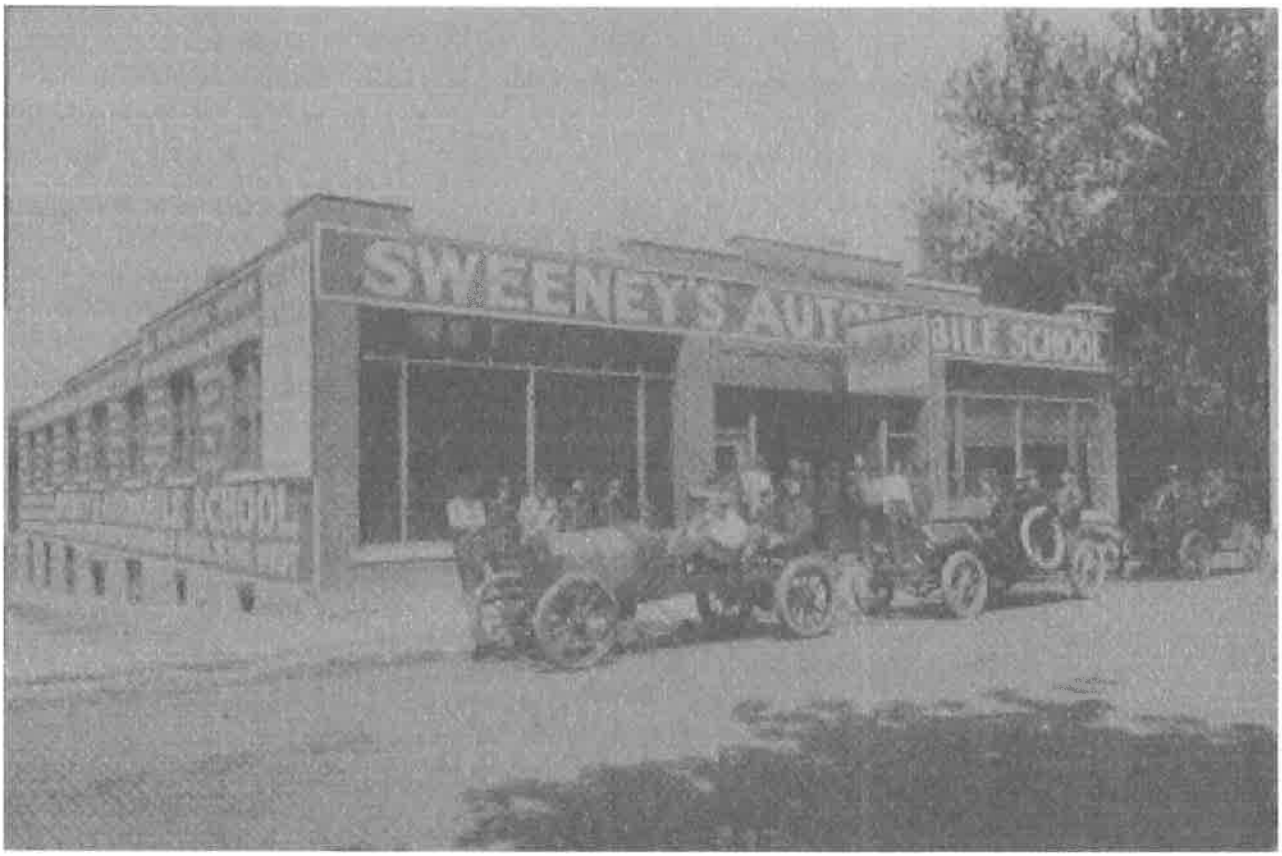


Figure 22: Postcard of Rahe Automobile and Tractor School, n.d. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*

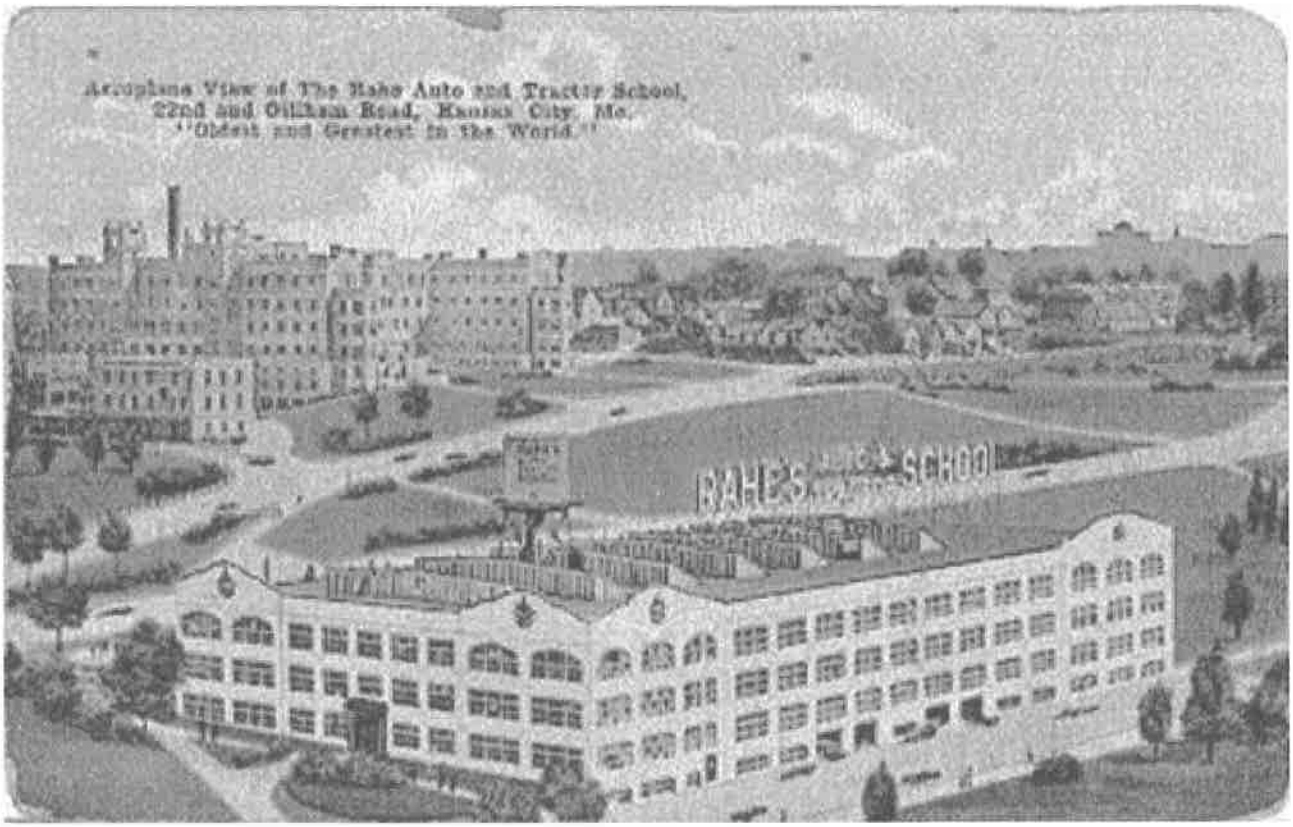


Figure 23: Exterior photograph after renovations for Business Mens Assurance Company, circa 1930. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.*

Portfolio Kitchen & Home

Portfolio
caesarstone

Portfolio

Kessler Rd
Pershing Rd
Portfolio Kitchen & Home

Portfolio

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EXIT