NPS Form 10-900
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
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 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 Plaza Towers

Other names/site number N/A

Name of related Multiple Property Listing Working-Class and Middle-Income Apartment Buildings in Kansas City, Missouri

2. Location

Street & number 209 Emanuel Cleaver II Boulevard | N/A | not for publication

City or town Kansas City | N/A | vicinity

State Missouri Code MO County Jackson Code 095 Zip code 64112

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: ___ A ___ B _x_ C ___ D

Toni M. Prawl 12/30/15

Signature of certifying official/Title Toni M. Prawl, Ph.D., 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:

_X_ 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:)

by Barbara Wyatt 2-23-16

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
1		structures
		objects
2	0	**Total**

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling – apartment building

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling – apartment building

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: CONCRETE
BRICK
roof: ASPHALT
other:

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.)

[ ] 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.

[X] 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
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1950

Significant Dates
1950

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
McIntyer, George E. (Architect)
Morris Hoffman Construction Company (Builder)

[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):

x 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: **State Historical Society of Missouri**

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

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.6

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

	Latitude:	Longitude:		Latitude:	Longitude:
1	39.041860	-94.584288	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			

Verbal Boundary Description (On continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (On continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Rachel Nugent/Associate & Ellis Mumford-Russell/Historic Preservation Specialist

organization Rosin Preservation, LLC date September 2015

street & number 1712 Holmes St. telephone 816-472-4950

city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

e-mail Rachel@rosinpreservation.com; ellis@rosinpreservation.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

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

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: **Plaza Towers**

City or Vicinity: **Kansas City**

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

Photographer: **Brad Finch, f-stop Photography**

Date Photographed: **July 14, 2015**

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

1 of 14: Primary (north) elevation, view S
2 of 14: North & east elevations from across Emanuel Cleaver II Blvd, view SW
3 of 14: East elevation from across McGee St, view W
4 of 14: South & east elevations, from across McGee St, view NW
5 of 14: Rear (south) elevation, view N
6 of 14: West elevation from driveway, view NE
7 of 14: Primary (north) elevation, from across Emanuel Cleaver II Blvd, view SE
8 of 14: Second floor corridor, typical, view W
9 of 14: Third floor unit Type A living/dining room, typical, view NW
10 of 14: Third floor unit Type A living/dining room, typical, view SE
11 of 14: Third floor unit Type A kitchen, typical, view S
12 of 14: Third floor unit Type A bedroom, typical, view NE
13 of 14: Third floor unit Type A bedroom, typical, view SE
14 of 14: Third floor unit Type A bathroom, view SW

Figure Log:

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

Figure 1: Site map.
Figure 2: Context map of Plaza Towers. Source: Google Maps.
Figure 3: Historic rendering of the north and east elevations. Source: *Kansas City Star*, 17 July 1949.
Figure 4: Plaza Towers under construction. Source: *Kansas City Star*, 1 January 1950
Figure 5: Original drawing of north elevation. Source: State Historical Society of Missouri archives.
Figure 6: Original drawing of typical floor plan.
Figure 7: Existing conditions of typical floor plan.
Figure 8: North stair at 3rd floor, typical.
Figure 9: Alexander Hamilton Apartments, 701 E. Armour Blvd, Kansas City, MO. Source: National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Armour Boulevard Post-World War II Apartment Building Historic District.
Figure 10: Typical floorplan of the Alexander Hamilton Apartments, 701 E Armour Blvd, Kansas City, MO. Source: National Register of Historic Place Nomination: Armour Boulevard Post-World War II Apartment Building Historic District.
Figure 11: Historic Photograph of the Professional Building, 1101-1107 Grand Blvd, c.1930. Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

Figure 12: The National Garage, 1100-1110 McGee St, Kansas City, MO. Demolished. Photo 1999. Source: National Register of Historic Places Nomination: The National Garage.
Figure 13: Exterior photo map. Source: SWD Architects Site plan, 2015.
Figure 14: Interior photo map. Source: SWD Architects, 2015.
Figure 15: Original first floor plan. Source: State Historical Society of Missouri archives.
Figure 16: Plaza Towers, first floor lobby and entrance, view north. Source: Brad Finch, 2015.

SUMMARY

Plaza Towers, at 209 Emmanuel Cleaver II Boulevard (nee Brush Creek Boulevard), stands in the midst of the bustling Country Club Plaza district in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. The symmetrical, rectangular nine-story building built in 1950 exhibits vernacular elements of Modern Movement design, including simple geometric massing, restrained geometric ornament, and a lack of applied ornament on the exterior. The blond brick building has orange brick ornament and historic steel-frame and glass block windows. The symmetrical façade features a central stair and elevator tower with an entrance portico that projects forward from the façade and above the roofline. Apartments flank the central section. A double-loaded corridor organizes the interior, lined with eighty-one apartments. Three staircases and two elevators provide vertical circulation within the building. Plaza Towers has experienced little alteration over its lifetime and retains integrity sufficient to convey its significance.

ELABORATION

Setting

Plaza Towers is located mid-block on the south side of Emanuel Cleaver II Boulevard, a busy commercial corridor *(Photo 7; Figure 1)*. Mid-rise and high-rise apartments, mostly dating from the first half of the twentieth century, surround Plaza Towers in the immediate vicinity. The County Club Plaza shopping district is one block to the west and the park-like setting of the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art is one block to the east. Plaza Towers stands at the heart of a bustling high-density commercial, institutional, professional, and residential hub in Kansas City *(Figure 2)*.

Plaza Towers is set back from the street, in line with the neighboring apartment buildings, with a narrow lawn planted with trees and shrubs in front of the building (Figure 13). The concrete public sidewalk parallels the building and intersects a wide concrete sidewalk that leads from the street to the primary entrance. McGee Streets runs north-south along the east elevation of the building with a small lawn between the building and the street. The driveway that leads to the rear parking lot runs along the west elevation with a narrow lawn area between it and the building. Another driveway connects the parking lot to McGee Street at the east end of the lot. The surface parking lot, a contributing structure to this nomination, comprises the rear (south) half of the lot. The parking lot spans the width of the apartment building with areas of grass at the northeast and northwest corners. Rows of parking stalls line the north and south sides of the asphalt lot. A concrete retaining wall lines the south side of the parking lot and marks the property line.

Exterior

The overall form of the building is a rectangular slab with a flat roof. Blond brick with orange brick and stone accents clad the exterior. Historic steel windows are extant on all façades. They are arranged in one of three ways: fixed square central sashes flanked by three-light vertical casement sashes; bands of three such casement sashes; or glass block windows. The symmetrical primary elevation *(Photos 1 and 2)* faces north toward Emmanuel Cleaver II Boulevard. Three sections comprise the elevation: a central elevator and stair core and two flanking banks of apartment units. The central portion of the elevation projects forward from the façade and rises a full story above the parapet. The primary entrance portico with quarry tile flooring projects from the first story, raised several steps from the sidewalk. Square brick pillars and a brick parapet with stone coping create the entrance portico. A historic fully-glazed aluminum door with sidelights provides access to the building with glass block windows flanking the entrance.

Wrought iron railings line the stair and enclose the porch. Above the first story, the remainder of the central portion features three vertical ribbons of windows running the full height of the bay with windows alternating with corrugated metal panels in the spandrels. Central windows are two-part vertical casement windows while flanking windows are glass block. Windows have stone sills. At the top of this central core, orange brick in a diaper pattern adorns the parapet above an orange brick soldier course that tops the windows. Stone coping tops the flat parapet of the central bay. This central section with its continuous vertical ribbons of windows creates a strong vertical emphasis.

The flanking east and west wings of the façade are mirror images of one another (*Photos 3 and 6)*. Five columns of original steel-frame windows pierce each wing while continuous orange brick soldier courses mark the lintels at each story. Brick headers form all window sills. The two outermost columns of windows on each wing have three part windows with two vertical three-light casement sashes. The next two columns of windows have large, fixed central windows flanked by three-light casement sashes. The innermost bays have three-part windows with two vertical three-light casement sashes. At the top outermost corners of the building, a field of orange brick extends from the outer corner across the outermost bays. Metal coping tops the flat parapets.

The rear (south) elevation is simple and features little adornment *(Photo 5)*. Because the parking lot is lower than Emanuel Cleaver II Blvd, the basement is partially above ground on the rear elevation. The same rectangular brick fields seen on the north elevation are present at the upper outer corners. Orange brick soldier bricks mark the window lintels, header courses mark window sills, and small squares of orange brick mark the corners at each story, short extensions of the courses on the east and west elevations. The rear elevation is asymmetrical, comprised of twelve bays. Three-part steel-frame windows, a fixed three-light sash flanked by three-light casement sashes, fill Bays 1, 4, 7, 8, and 12. Larger living room windows of large single-light fixed central sashes flanked by three-light casement sashes fill Bays 2, 5, 6, 9, and 11. Bay 3 contains the west stair and projects above the parapet as a penthouse. Two-part windows with three-light casement sashes fill window openings on stair landings and a partially-glazed metal door provides access to the staircase from the parking lot. A metal downspout with a scupper at the ninth story runs the height of Bay 4. A four-light steel-frame window with metal louvers below fills the basement window opening in Bays 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12. Metal louvers and a partially-glazed metal door with a shallow pent eave pierces the basement level of Bay 6. A chimney for the basement incinerator projects from the elevation between Bays 5 and 6 and above the parapet. Stone coping tops the chimney. Bay 10 contains the east staircase and has two-part windows, like those on Bay 3, at stair landings and a partially-glazed metal door that provides access to the staircase from the parking lot. A metal downspout with a scupper above the ninth-story extends the full height of the building east of the windows of Bay 10.

The east elevation *(Photo 3)* is symmetrical with adornment similar to the primary (north) elevation. Three sections comprise the elevation with a central two-bay section that projects slightly from the elevation, echoing the central projecting section of the primary elevation. Orange brick soldier courses span the elevation at the window lintels, wrapping around to the south elevation. At the corners of the building and of the projecting central section, patterned brickwork within these soldier courses provides subtle visual interest *(Photo 4)*. Rectangular fields of orange brick fill the uppermost section of the two flanking sections of this elevation, wrapping from the north and south elevations. Three-part bedroom windows, like those seen elsewhere on the building, fill all window openings on the flanking bays. Two bays of short glass block windows illuminate restrooms within the central section of the elevation.

The west elevation *(Photo 6)* is symmetrical with adornment that matches the east elevation. Because of a change in grade, the basement is slightly above ground on the west elevation. This basement level is the only difference between the east and west elevations. On the west elevation, a four-part steel-frame basement window fills the northern bay, like those seen on the south elevation. A glass block window fills one bay at the basement level of the central projecting section. A three-part window, like those used in bedrooms elsewhere on the building, fills the southern bay at the basement level.

Interior

A single double-loaded corridor runs east-west through the building with a short corridor that extends to the north and comprises the elevator lobby *(Figures 7, and 16)*. One staircase opens from this short corridor while two staircases are located in the south side of the building, one on each end of the primary corridor. Apartments line both sides of the primary corridor on the first-ninth floors. The basement contains one apartment, storage rooms, and utility spaces. Finishes throughout the building include plaster walls and ceilings; carpet, laminate, and linoleum flooring; wood base trim and door frames; paneled doors with decorative doorknobs; square tiles in bathrooms; and metal cabinets in kitchens. The interior of Plaza Towers retains many of its historic materials and all of its historic configuration (Figures 14 and 15).

Beyond the entry portico, the entrance lobby at Plaza Towers is simple and informal *(Figures 15 and 16)*. Banks of brass mailboxes are inset within the east wall of the lobby, opposite elevators. The elevator lobby/corridor and primary east-west corridor *(Photo 8)* are consistent throughout the building with textured plaster walls and ceilings, carpeting and composite tile on the floors, and carpet or vinyl base trim. Historic plans indicate that flooring in corridors was asphalt tile with wood base trim. Non-historic wood crown molding is extant in various locations of the corridors. Corridor doors are slab doors, replaced periodically over the lifespan of the building. Original wood trim frames the door openings. Historic plans indicate that these doors were originally wood slab doors, making the present replacement doors in keeping with the historic character of the corridors. A parcel delivery and a trash door open between the apartment kitchen and the corridor at all units. These small rectangular slab doors have small metal latches and curved plaster returns.

Three staircases provide vertical circulation in Plaza Towers *(Figure 8)*. Paneled metal fire doors open to the staircases from corridors. The south staircase opens to the short corridor opposite the elevators. The simple metal stair has metal pipe rails and square metal newel posts. The landings have glass block windows with radiators beneath each window. The east and west staircases are mirror images of one another, recessed from the corridors. The simple metal stair has metal pipe rails and square metal newel posts. The landings have steel-frame two-part windows with three-light casement sashes and radiators beneath each window.

Eighty-one apartments fill the interior of Plaza Towers. These apartments are laid out economically and take advantage of abundant natural light from the large windows. Each apartment includes a large living/dining room *(Photos 9 and 10)* and a U-shaped kitchen *(Photo 11)* that opens from the living/dining room. A short corridor with closets with built-in shelving leads to bedrooms *(Photos 12 and 13)* and bathrooms *(Photo 14)*. Historic finishes throughout the apartments include smooth plaster walls and ceilings; wood base trim, window sills, and door frames; square tiles in bathrooms; and metal kitchen cabinets. Bathrooms have square tile wainscot that varies in color with basket weave tile on the floors.

Flooring varies in kitchens, living/dining rooms, and bedrooms. Historic drawings indicate that flooring in these spaces was originally asphalt tile. This tile remains visible in some kitchens, but flooring in most apartments is carpet, laminate, and linoleum. Radiators beneath windows provide heat within units.

There are three types of apartments in Plaza Towers *(Figures 6 and 7)*. These units are mirrored and flipped to efficiently fill the interior. Plumbing stacks are organized on shared walls wherever possible to minimize costs. Type A units are 781 ft^2 two-bedroom apartments at the northeast and northwest corners. Narrow hallways connect the living/dining room to bedrooms and have closets with built-in cabinets. One bathroom at the end of the hallway has square tile wainscot and basket weave tile on the floors. Tile colors vary. Type B units are 580 ft^2 one-bedroom apartments at the southeast and southwest corners. Type C units are 576 ft^2 one-bedroom apartments that fill the remainder of the building.

The basement is organized around the same corridor configuration as the upper stories. One apartment, potentially for the apartment maintenance worker, occupies the southwest corner of the basement (Type B) and utilitarian spaces comprise the remainder of the basement including the laundry room, tenant storage rooms, and utility rooms. Finishes in the basement, excluding the apartment, are utilitarian including exposed concrete floors, walls, and decking. Acoustical tiles are adhered to the concrete decking in the corridors.

Integrity

Plaza Towers has experienced few changes since the period of significance and retains all aspects of historic integrity. The setting of the building today resembles that of the past, alluding to the continued significance of this property type. Still in its original location adjacent to the Country Club Plaza, the building stands among a neighborhood of mid-rise and high-rise apartment buildings. The design, materials, and workmanship of Plaza Towers are intact throughout the building and it remains an excellent example of Modern Movement residential design. Distinguished by the symmetry and simplicity of the façade, geometric application of masonry cladding, and absence of applied ornament, the building reflects the primary tenets of the style and contemporary FHA housing standards. Alternations to the exterior have been minimal, the greatest being the installation of impermanent window air conditioning units. The building retains its historic interior configuration of apartment units organized around a double-loaded corridor. The original windows, many doors, and the bank of mailboxes in the lobby are all extant. Original flooring has been replaced throughout the building as part of regular maintenance. The apartment units retain their historic configuration. Original historic fixtures, such as kitchen cabinets, bathroom fixtures, built-in shelving, door hardware and frames, and milk delivery doors are extant and in good condition. Plaza Towers fulfills all of the registration requirements for the High-Rise Apartments property subtype as described in the MPDF “Working-Class and Middle-Income Apartment Buildings in Kansas City, Missouri,” which further contributes to its feeling and association with the development of Kansas City during the 1950s.

SUMMARY

Plaza Towers in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri is eligible for inclusion on the National Register under Criterion C for local significance in the area of ARCHITECTURE. It meets the registration requirements defined by the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "Working-Class and Middle-Income Apartment Buildings in Kansas City, Missouri" for the High Rise Apartment Building property subtype. One of Kansas City architect George E. McIntyre's two surviving apartment buildings, Plaza Towers is an early local example of a high rise apartment tower with vernacular Modern Movement elements, economically designed to house middle-income families. Constructed in 1950, the period of significance, the nine-story building contains eighty-one apartments arranged around a single double-loaded corridor. Accessible from a centralized elevator bank, the apartment units on each floor have efficient floor plans and simple finishes. Defined by its geometric massing, juxtaposed horizontal and vertical emphasis, and distinct rejection of historical references, the exterior design and interior configuration of Plaza Towers are consistent with the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) guidelines as applied to privately developed multi-family housing projects that received FHA mortgages. The building retains integrity of its character-defining features, both on the interior and exterior.

ELABORATION

Plaza Towers is an intact example of the High Rise Apartment Building property subtype as defined by the MPDF "Working-Class and Middle-Income Apartment Buildings in Kansas City, Missouri." Plaza Towers has undergone little change since construction, retaining integrity sufficient to meet the registration requirements outlined in the MPDF. Following the MPDF criteria, this purpose-built apartment building has a single, primary public entrance with secondary entrances at the rear; it has more than twenty-seven self-sufficient units (eighty-one); is between eight and twelve stories tall (nine); and has at least one elevator (two) with an adjoining lobby. Additionally, it meets the optional criteria of a small lobby and a double-loaded corridor plan. This building type, as described in the MPDF, marks a crucial shift in both the broad settlement patterns of the city, wherein middle-income and working-class tenants lived densely and remained within city limits rather than migrating to single-family houses in the suburbs. The building also reflects changes in popular design aesthetic as the expressly Modern form of Plaza Towers stands in contrast to its neighbors and reflects the use of new building technologies.[1] Furthermore, the use of FHA financing and adherence to FHA design guidance, typical of apartment buildings of this era, reflects shifting attitudes toward the importance of economy, utilitarianism, and simplicity of residential design. Simple architectural details, inexpensive materials, and logical building and unit configurations made these new apartment buildings affordable to construct, which translated to rents manageable for working-class and middle-income tenants.

Post-War Housing in Kansas City

Plaza Towers was constructed during a period of progress and expansion in Kansas City following the slower decades of the 1930s and 1940s. Nationally, by the mid-1940s, there was a pent up demand for new housing resulting from the shortage of construction materials during World War II and flood of returning GIs after the war that necessitated the construction of new housing. Accelerated by the annexation of land north of the Missouri River and the end of the war, Kansas City experienced a surge of new businesses, industries, and construction and underwent a marked shift in its residential patterns. Built at a time when many middle-class families were moving away from the center of the city and into the north

[1] Sally Schwenk, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form "Working-Class and Middle-Income Apartment Buildings in Kansas City, Missouri," 7 November 2007, Kansas City, Missouri, F-19-20.

and southwest suburbs, Country Club Plaza, including 47th Street/Brush Creek Blvd[2], remained a vital high-density commercial and residential district.[3] Multi-family housing dominated this neighborhood *(Photo 7)*. Not only did the larger massing and higher occupancy of such buildings differ from the existing single-family houses, but the application of Modern Movement design elements further distinguished them from their surroundings. Additionally, the increased height of these buildings allowed efficient interior organization of the building and individual dwelling units. Plaza Towers is efficiently designed, with apartments arranged around a double-loaded corridor with a central elevator lobby, which maximized the number of units on each floor *(Figures 6 and 7)*. Apartment units are also laid out to economize space and take advantage of natural light and ventilation from large windows.

After World War II, housing pressures led to numerous new laws and incentives for rental housing, including Federal Housing Administration (FHA)-backed mortgages for housing developers. The FHA, in an effort to ensure that residential projects they financed maintained a level of utility and comfort, released a document in 1947 that outlined the key design features that were required for rental housing projects that received FHA mortgage insurance.[4] The goal of these design guidelines was to create units that would both appeal to tenants and provide low operating and maintenance costs. These guidelines advocated for designs that were "simple" and "direct […based on] mass, scale, and proportion" that were economical and well-organized. These utilitarian buildings would be "more attractive to tenants […and] sounder investments than those which strive for picturesque or unusual effects by means of over-ornamentation or the startling use of materials."[5] FHA guidelines preferred efficient configurations, geometric forms, and vernacular Modern Movement facades and frowned upon all ornament. The guidelines advocated for units that provided both natural light and air as well as tenant privacy. Buildings were also required to be of fireproof construction.

A newspaper article announcing the construction of Plaza Towers stated that "an FHA [mortgage] commitment has been obtained for the project" and the design of Plaza Towers abides by the FHA guidelines.[6] The brick-clad concrete building with a simple rectangular form and no applied ornament minimized cost. Apartments featured open living/dining rooms with large picture windows, providing ample light and air. The "great room", a midcentury trend in residential design of living areas, was an economical use of space, allowing for adaptability. The kitchen, U-shaped and efficient with up-to-date electric appliances, opened from the great room. A corridor separated the more public spaces, the great room and kitchen, from the bedroom(s) and bathroom, providing privacy for the tenants *(Figure 7)*. Hot water radiators heated the apartments. All of these features were a direct reflection of the FHA design guidelines and are extant in the nominated building.

Unlike other residential areas of the city that saw the population decline after World War II, the area around the Country Club Plaza shopping district was generally exempt from this exodus of people and continued to thrive and develop, thus necessitating the construction of dense housing such as Plaza

[2] Emanuel Cleaver II Boulevard, on which Plaza Towers stands, is also known as 47th Street. It was previously known as Brush Creek Boulevard.
[3] George Ehrlich, *Kansas City, MO: An Architectural History, 1826-1990, revised and enlarged edition,* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press: 1984), 138.
[4] Federal Housing Administration, *The FHA Story in Summary, 1934-1959* (Washington, DC: Federal Housing Administration, 1960) 16-17.
[5] Ibid., 8.
[6] "Plans 81 Units," *Kansas City Star*, 17 July 1949, Microfilm, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library.

Towers.[7] The building's central location within the city and proximity to transportation routes along 47th and Main Streets and important businesses near the Plaza as well as entertainment, such as shopping and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and medical facilities at St. Luke's Hospital (4401 Wornall Road), both located less than a mile away, provided another incentive for people to move into the neighborhood. Apartment dwellings remained a viable and affordable option for working-class and middle-income families and individuals who could not afford a single-family residence. Thus, the erection of Plaza Towers, a high-rise apartment building in an urban environment, fulfilled the need of providing housing for large numbers of people at a reasonable expense,[8] while the use of Modern Movement design facilitated its affordability in its use of basic form, simple ornament, logical and efficient configuration, and inexpensive materials.

Modern Movement Apartments in Kansas City

The design of Plaza Towers follows the Modern Movement style, popular from the end of World War II to the 1980s. The building, in its simplicity, stands in stark contrast to the exuberant ornament of the 1920s Jacobethan, Tudor Revival, Beaux Arts, and Spanish Colonial Revival apartment buildings that surround it *(Photo 7)*. The Modern Movement period marked a transition from designs of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century based on classical elements to designs characterized by a marked break from the past through the use of geometric forms and simple ornamentation.[9] Modern Movement was influenced by the International Style, which was characterized by flat, smooth surfaces, ribbon windows, exposed structure, and flat roofs.[10] Influenced by the increased military presence during World War II, Modern Movement tenants are based on functionality and focused on utilization of innovative materials, such as reinforced concrete and steel structural systems which allowed for open interiors and enhanced wind resistance. Specifically, the flat-roofed designs exhibit the influence of the International School. As described in the context "Architecture of Working- and Middle-Class Apartment Buildings: 1885-1960: Post World War II Modern Movement Style," the simplified, less formal versions of International Style apartment buildings exemplify "tentative utilitarian vernacular" interpretations of Modernism in America so frequently adapted to high-rise buildings.[11] In Kansas City in particular, however, architects approached this new unfamiliar design with caution so as not to so dramatically reject more traditional, popular forms.[12] At Plaza Towers, that caution is expressed in its restrained ornament as well as in the adaptation of a single-family residential window type, the picture window flanked by narrow vertical windows *(Photos 1-6; Figure 5)*, to the apartment building type. The picture window was a ubiquitous feature of the ranch house, the single-family equivalent of a working-class/middle-income apartment building. Plaza Towers, although it cautiously embraces Modern Movement design tenets, is vastly different in form, ornament, and feeling than its neighboring 1920s apartment high-rises (*Photo 7)*.

As expressed by the design of Plaza Towers, the Modern Movement is characterized by restrained ornament and detail, simple geometric form and massing, an emphasis on the interplay between horizontal and vertical planes, and defined window and door openings. The overall form of the building is rectangular. Soldier courses of orange brick above horizontal rectangular windows contrast with the field of common bond blond brick, creating an overall sense of horizontality. The central bay containing the

[7] Ibid., 124.
[8] Historical documentation of rental rates for Plaza Towers has not been found.
[9] Ehrlich, 124
[10] Schwenk, E-34-35.
[11] Schwenk, E-40.
[12] Ehrlich, 121.

primary entrance, stairs, and elevators, projects from the face of the building with spandrel panels that contrast with solid brick piers that run the height of the central bay *(Photo 1)*. These features create a strong sense of verticality, in contrast with the overall horizontal character of the slab-shaped building. This interplay of horizontality and verticality as well as varying planes of the façade are typical Modern Movement apartment building articulations. Diaper patterned brickwork at the parapet of the central bay and rectangular fields of orange brick at upper corners provide visual termini to the façade and reflect a larger trend of patterned brickwork that historically adorned apartment buildings throughout the city.

The interior of Plaza Towers is similarly simplistic, alluding to the utilitarianism and efficiency of the Modern Movement and FHA standards, which promoted larger, multi-purpose living spaces.[13] Apartments are open and spacious, with public living/dining rooms *(Photos 9 and 10)* grouped together off of the kitchen *(Photo 11)*, separate from the more private bedrooms located off small corridors, which have built in closets and cabinets, and adjacent restrooms.

Architect: George E. McIntyre (1884-1965)

George E. McIntyre graduated from the University of Illinois in 1913 and was associated with the Smith, Rea, and Lovitt architecture firm as an architectural engineer.[14] He eventually opened his own architectural practice and designed at least eighteen buildings in the Kansas City area from 1922 to 1960, several of which have been demolished. McIntyre primarily designed commercial buildings including the National Garage (1100-1110 McGee St; 1930)[15], the Capitol Garage (13th St & Main St; c. 1929)[16], and the Professional Building (1101-1107 Grand Blvd; 1929)[17].

McIntyre collaborated with famed Kansas City architect Charles A. Smith on several buildings, including the Professional Building *(Figure 11)*. The Professional Building is a significant example of early Modern architecture in Kansas City, part of the rise of Modern office towers in downtown Kansas City in the 1930s.[18] Predating Plaza Towers by 21 years, built for a different purpose, and collaboratively designed, the Professional Building is decidedly distinct from McIntyre's later Modern apartment buildings. Still, this tower exhibited McIntyre's affinity for modernism and the Art Deco styling is appropriate both for its time period and downtown location. Like the Professional Building, nearby National Garage *(Figure 12)* exhibited early Modern style with Art Deco ornament. The reinforced concrete building with brick and terra cotta ornament was, at the time, the largest parking garage in Kansas City, built to serve the central business district of Kansas City.[19] Like the Professional Building, the National Garage was much different than McIntyre's later apartments.

Plaza Towers is among the three apartment buildings attributed to McIntyre.[20] The Alexander Hamilton (701 E. Armour Boulevard; Figure 9), though smaller (six stories), is similar in form, massing, material and

[13] Schwenk, E-40.
[14] Patricia Brown Glenn, National Register of Historic Places Nomination "Professional Building," 17 July 1979, Kansas City, Missouri, 8:1.
[15] National Garage was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. Demolished circa 2006.
[16] Demolished.
[17] The Professional Building was listed in the National Register on July 17, 1979.
[18] Glenn.
[19] Cydney E. Millstein, National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "The National Garage," 20 March 2000.
[20] Kerry Davis and Sally Schwenk, National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Armour Boulevard Post-World War II Apartment Building Historic District," 20 September 2007, 24.

ornament to Plaza Towers, with rectangular massing, patterned bi-color brickwork, and an overall stripped down Modern aesthetic. The floorplans of the units in the two apartment buildings *(Figure 10)* are nearly identical with U-shaped kitchens located off open living/dining rooms, separated from bedrooms and bathrooms by short corridors. The other apartment building credited to McIntyre is the Madison Apartments at 718 E. Armour Boulevard, which was demolished and its form unknown.[21]

Property History

A 1916 building permit indicates that a frame dwelling occupied this land before Plaza Towers.[22] In 1949, Morris Hoffman Contracting Company pulled a permit to demolish that frame building and construct an apartment building.[23] A July 1949 newspaper article announced that the project would include 81 units (63 one-bedrooms and 18 two-bedrooms), 44 parking spots, a play area, steam heat, 2 passenger elevators, basement storage lockers, and modern kitchens with electric stoves, refrigerators, and asphalt floor tile.[24] Construction was complete in spring of 1950 and the building has remained an apartment building, with few alterations, for the last 65 years (*Figures 3-5)*.[25]

The building held full or nearly full occupancy from the time of its construction, with many occupants living in the same apartment for several years at a time. In keeping with the requirements as identified in the MPDF, during the period of significance and for many years thereafter, residents exhibited a range of employment, primarily middle-income jobs such as managers, typists, salespeople, and cosmetologists. Additionally, following the trend of this property type in the Kansas City area, the building was occupied by many single adults and childless couples who could take advantage of nearby amenities that the Country Club Plaza shopping and business district offered.[26]

Conclusion

Plaza Towers is significant as a High Rise Apartment Building property subtype as defined in the MPDF "Working-Class and Middle-Income Apartment Buildings in Kansas City, Missouri." The nine-story building boasts eighty-one apartments that have been continually occupied since construction completed in 1950. Architect George E. McIntyre designed the building using Modern Movement elements, marking a distinct shift from historically-derived building forms observed in the immediate vicinity of Plaza Towers. Distinguished by its geometric form and massing, bilateral symmetry, contrasting horizontal and vertical organization, and use of patterned brickwork, the building illustrates a restrained interpretation of the Modern Movement style that highlights the functionalism and utility associated with this period and the design guidelines applied to FHA-financed multi-family apartment projects nationwide. Plaza Towers retains much of its historic fabric and all aspects of historic integrity, rendering it locally significant for Architecture under National Register Criterion C.

McIntyre's other apartments are the Alexander Hamilton Apartments (1949), listed on the National Register as part of the Armour Boulevard Post-World War II Apartment Building Historic District on November 7, 2007, and the Madison Apartments (1950) at 718 East Armour, which was demolished prior to 2007.

[21] Ibid.
[22] City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission, building permit #34518 (7/7/16).
[23] City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission, builder permit #26221A (7/20/49).
[24] "Plans 81 Units," *Kansas City Star*, 17 July 1949, Microfilm, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library.
[25] "The Plaza Towers Apartment," *Kansas City Star* 1 January 1950, Microfilm, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library.
[26] *Polk's Kansas City Directory*. (Kansas City: R.L. Polk & Co), 1950-1980.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Plaza Towers, 209 Emanuel Cleaver II Boulevard, stands on 0.635 acres on New Southmoreland Lots 1-4 on block 2 in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated property include the parcels of land historically associated with the resource (*Figure 1)*.

Figure 1: Site map. ↑
Latitude: 39.041860
Longitude: -94.584288
Source: Google Earth

Figure 2: Context map of Plaza Towers. Source: Google Maps. ↑

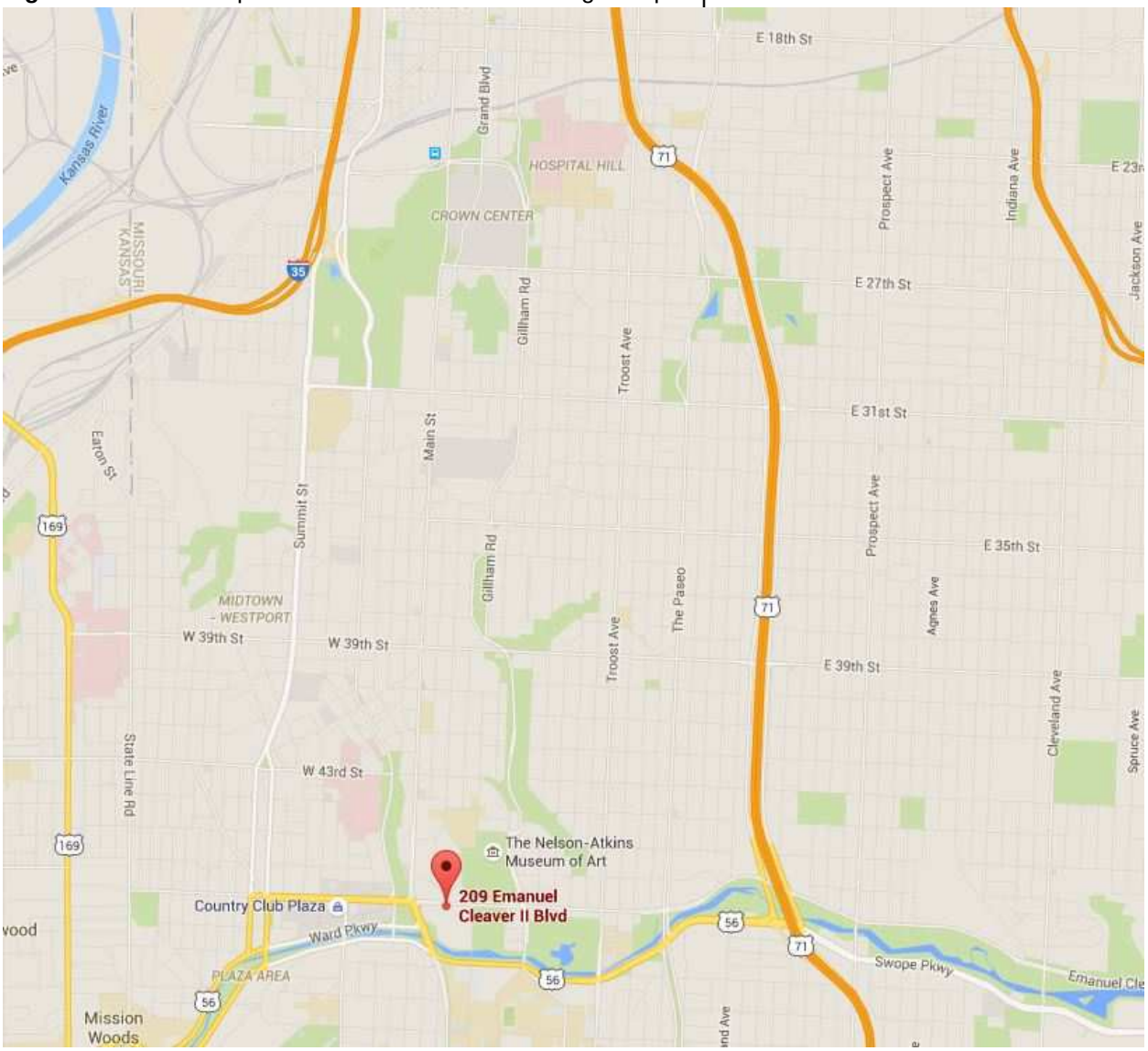

Figure 3: Historic rendering of the north and east elevations. Source: *Kansas City Star*, 17 July 1949.

THE NEW PLAZA TOWERS apartment project, as it will appear on construction at the southwest corner of Brush Creek boulevard and McGee street. Morris Hoffman, contractor, and members of his family will erect the 9-story and basement building, which will have eighty-one single and double apartment units. Hoffman said yesterday the project will cost nearly 1 million dollars. The architect is George E. McIntyre.

Figure 4: Plaza Towers under construction. Source: *Kansas City Star*, 1 January 1950.

THE PLAZA TOWERS APARTMENT project rises at the southwest corner of Brush Creek boulevard and McGee street. Costing 1 million dollars, the development is that of Morris Hoffman, contractor, and members of his family. The building will have eighty-one units. Hoffman said yesterday that first apartments will be available by April—(Kansas City Star photograph).

Figure 5: Original drawing of north elevation. Source: State Historical Society of Missouri archives.

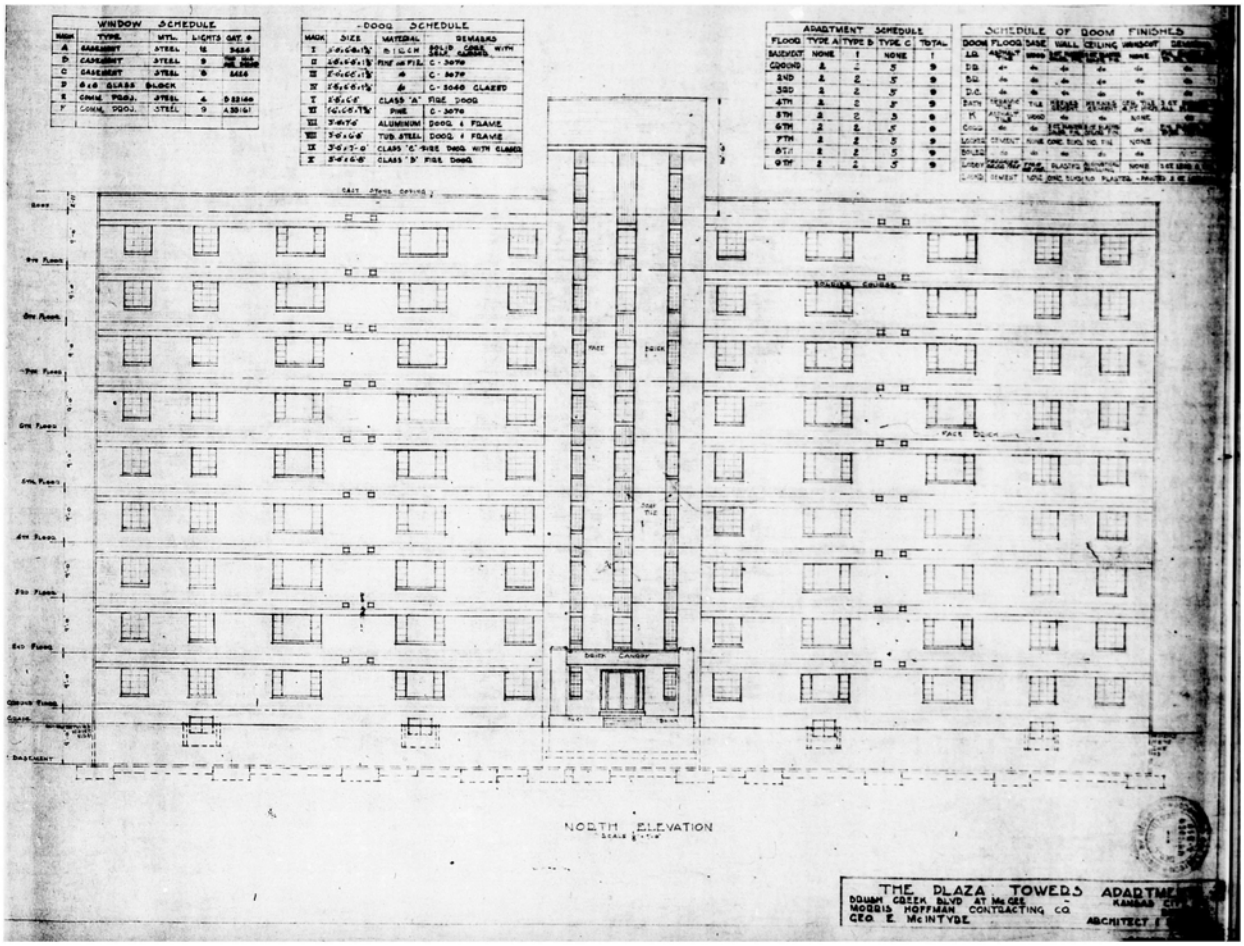

Figure 6: Original drawing of typical floor plan. Note: the exact configuration of apartments depicted on these plans does not reflect the current as-built condition. The apartment configurations must have been altered during construction.

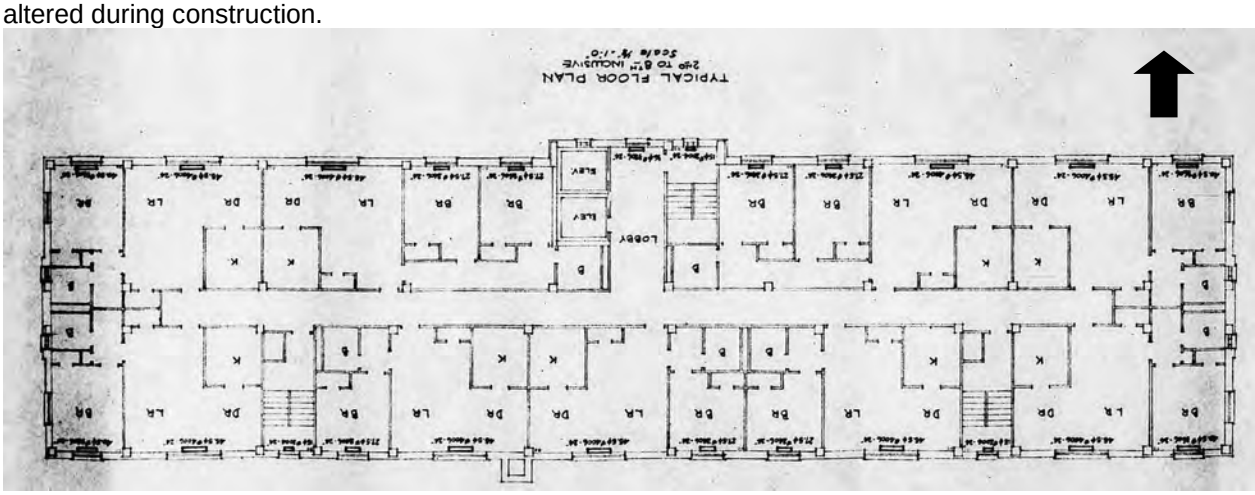

Figure 7: Existing conditions of typical floor plan. Note: There is no evidence that apartment partitions were relocated or removed, suggesting that the existing configuration is original.
Source: Stark Wilson Duncan Architects.

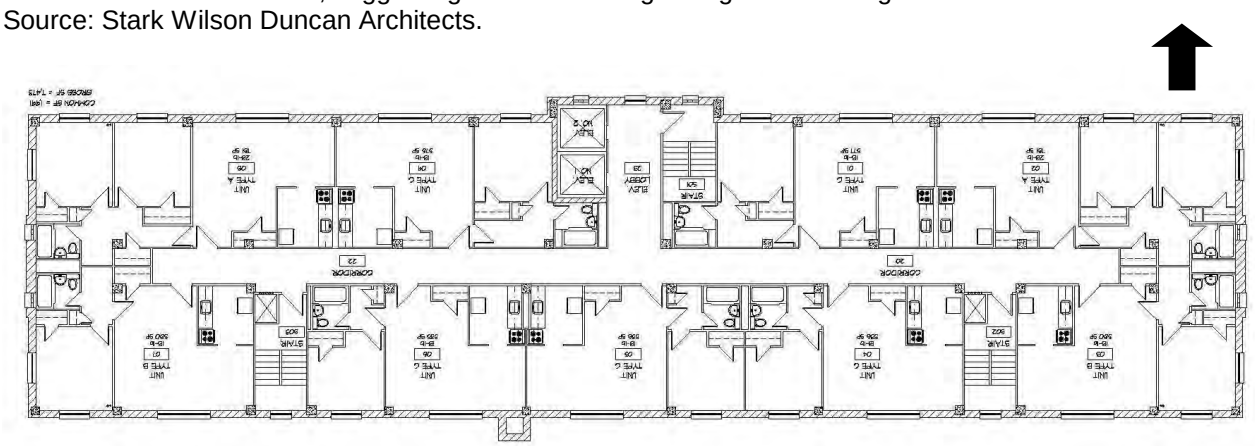

Figure 8: North stair at 3rd floor, typical.

Figure 9: Alexander Hamilton Apartments, 701 E. Armour Blvd, Kansas City, MO. Source: National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Armour Boulevard Post-World War II Apartment Building Historic District.

Figure 10: Typical floorplan of the Alexander Hamilton Apartments, 701 E Armour Blvd, Kansas City, MO. Note that the layout of the apartment units in the Alexander Hamilton is nearly identical to that of Plaza Towers. Source: National Register of Historic Place Nomination: Armour Boulevard Post-World War II Apartment Building Historic District.

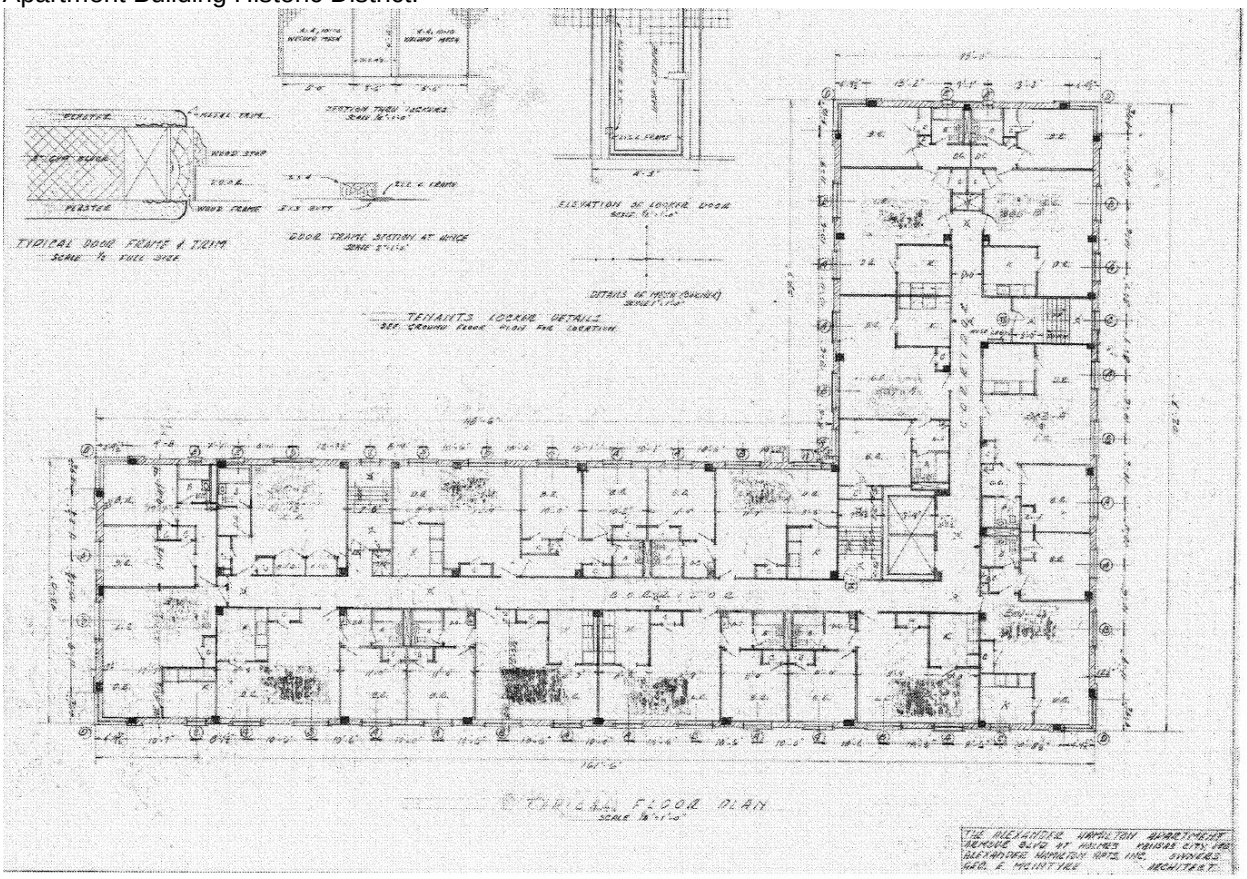

Figure 11: Historic Photograph of the Professional Building, 1101-1107 Grand Blvd, c.1930. Built in 1929 and designed by George A. McIntyre and Charles A. Smith. Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library.

MVSC, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

Figure 12: The National Garage, 1100-1110 McGee St, Kansas City, MO. Demolished. Photo from 1999. Source: National Register of Historic Places Nomination: The National Garage.

Figure 13: Exterior photo map. Source: SWD Architects Site plan, 2015.

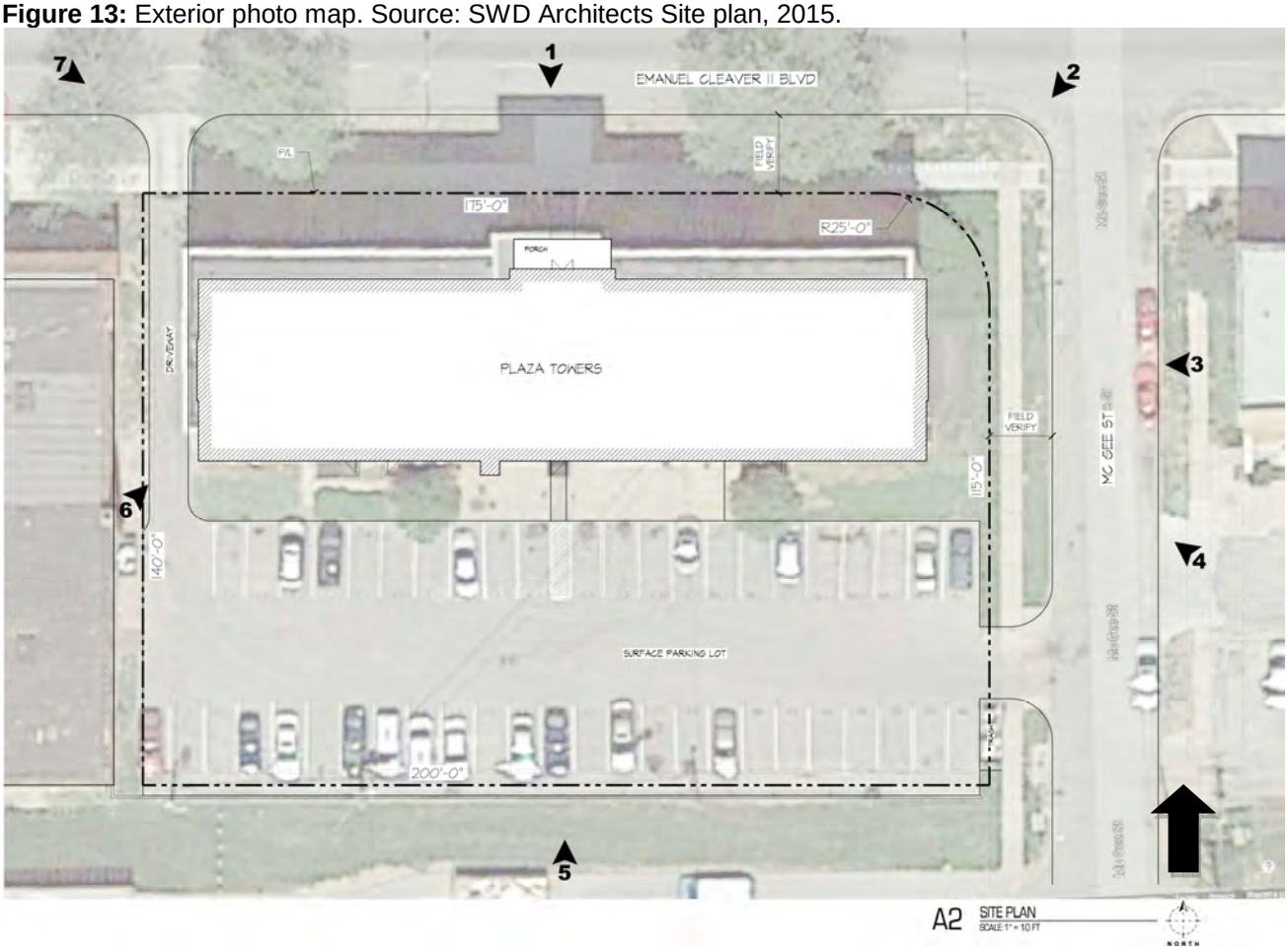

Figure 14: Interior photo map. Source: SWD Architects, 2015.

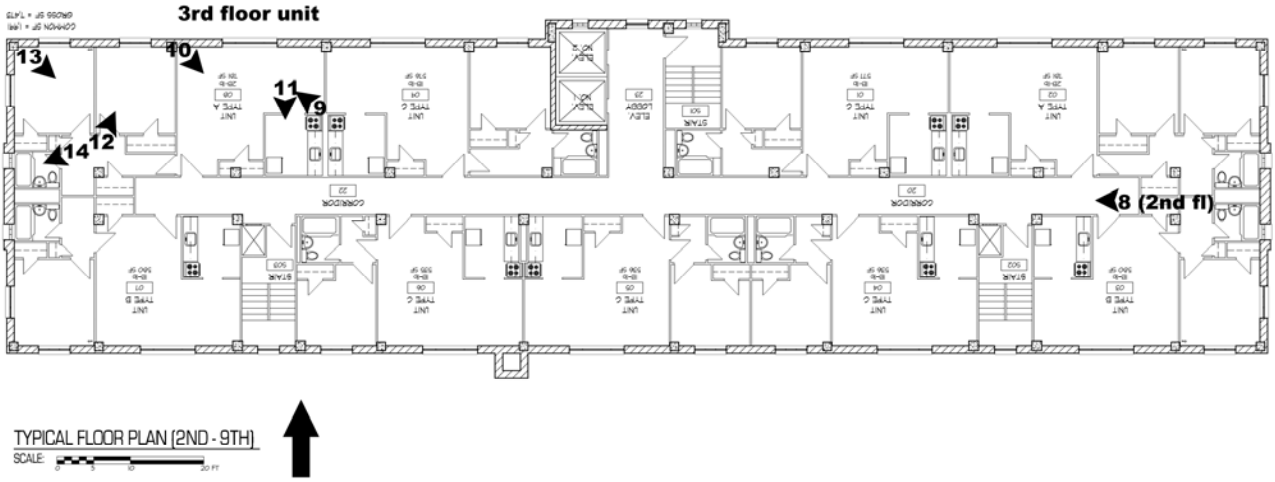

Figure 15: Original first floor plan. Source: State Historical Society of Missouri archives.

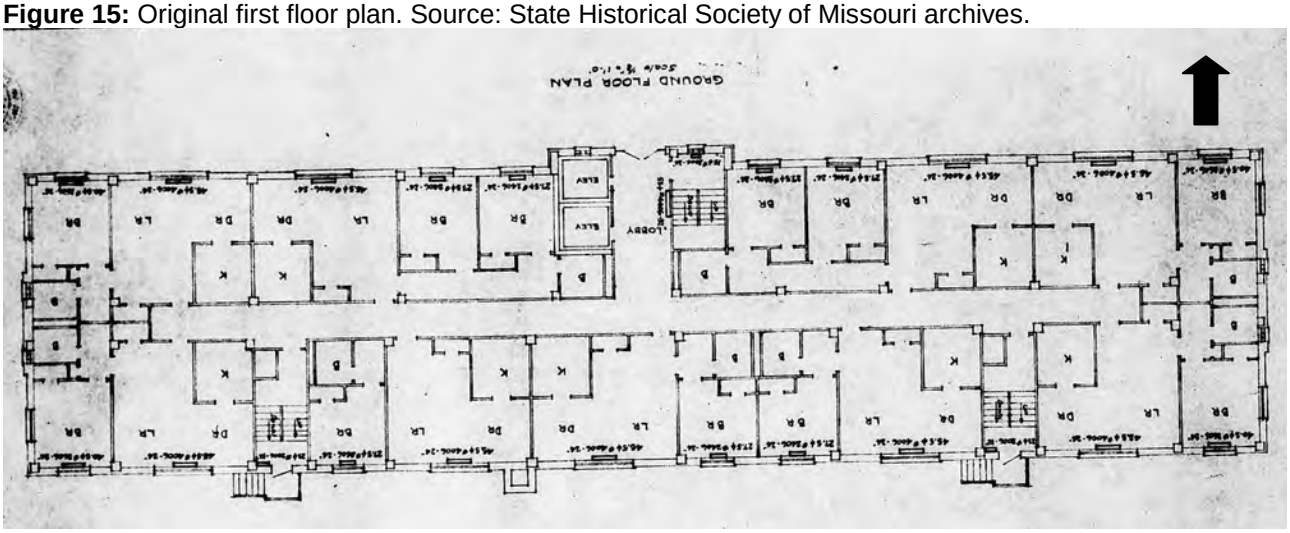

Figure 16: Plaza Towers, first floor lobby and entrance, view north. Source: Brad Finch, 2015.

PLAZA TOWERS
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EXIT