LIBRARY DISTRICT
KANSAS CITY

walking tour guide
Kansas City

at the close of the 19th century

was beginning to shed its cowtown image and assume an urbane character. Dramatic physical and architectural growth in both the city’s urban core and in neighboring residential communities brought about stunning changes. With a marked shift in the location of the central business district to the area south of 5th Street, heralded by the construction of the New England and New York Life buildings, Kansas City declared its commitment to building an impressive skyline. At the time, Kansas City also boasted of having the third largest cable car system in the country and had become a national center for manufacturing and shipping, livestock sales and transportation.

Kansas City’s commercial neighborhood was first established along the south banks of the Missouri River. The business district, concentrated along Second and Main streets, was little more than a steamboat landing, a few stores, several warehouses, and a two-story log hotel. Frequent flooding and changes in the river’s course forced the early settlers to move their homes and businesses southward to the top of the bluffs overlooking the river. As the city expanded southward, Second Street lost its influence as a commercial center. The new downtown, extending along Grand and Main beyond Ninth Street, was carved out of bluffs, many sixty feet or higher graded to street level. The homes of early settlers that dotted the hills and ravines were demolished to make way for the expanding commercial district.

An event that attracted major attention of capitalists to the promising downtown core was the construction of the second Kansas City Board of Trade Building, located at 210 W. 8th Street. After a nation-wide competition, the firm of Burnham & Root, Chicago, was awarded the contract. The boldly scaled Richardsonian Romanesque building (razed in 1968), heightened the interest of architects, law firms, banks, real estate firms and insurance companies from Chicago and the East to invest in the area.
Several commercial buildings (no longer extant) located in and around the vicinity of the burgeoning commercial center included: Vaughan's Diamond, designed by the pioneer architect Asa Bebee Cross in 1869 in what was known as The Junction at the convergence of Ninth, Main and Delaware streets; the Broadway Hotel (later the first Coates House Hotel); and Coates Opera House located on opposite corners at Broadway and 10th Street.⁴ Although business was thriving, it wasn’t until the 1880s that a building boom launched Kansas City into a first class metropolis.

Growth in the area continued. Hotels, theatres and amusement ventures gave prominence and new life to the district, while two major building campaigns announced the city’s shift in architectural style: the New England Building (1886-1888) designed by Bradle, Winslow and Wetherall, Boston and the New York Life Building (1888-90) designed by McKim, Mead and White, New York City.⁵ Kansas City’s most desirable business location was now centered on 9th Street.

Printing companies, social clubs and smaller industrial concerns were introduced to the district in the early decades of the 20th century, adding to the spectrum of architectural styles. As the city’s concerns shifted southward during the later part of the 20th century, many of the area’s buildings were abandoned. However, with the rehabilitation of the New York Life Building, the First National Bank Building and many other landmark properties, the Library District has become, once again, a thriving community of mixed use.
The self-guided walking tour begins at the parking garage steps at the center of the 10th Street façade. Established in partnership with the Downtown Council of Kansas City and the Missouri Development Finance Board, the playfully executed, 500-car facility, completed in 2004, was designed by a team of Kansas City architectural firms: 360 Architecture and BNIM. The south façade of the garage displays a series of book spines, spanning significant titles of literature, while photographs of the historic district, enlarged from c. 1910 postcard images, line the west face of the garage.

The Library District is comprised of twenty-two commercial buildings, dating from 1881-1950, in the vicinity of West 10th Street, Baltimore Avenue, West 9th Street and Central Street. The architectural vocabulary of these prominent buildings range from high style designs spanning Neo-Classicism to Modernism, and to the classic two and three-part vertical block, with conformity in articulation, size and scale.
First National Bank Building
(Central Library Building)
14 W. 10th Street
Wilder and Wight (1904-1906)
Wight and Wight (1926)
Marshall and Brown (1964)
HNTB (2001-2004)

Constructed in three separate building campaigns for the First National Bank, the concrete and steel building features elements of the Neo-Classical and Chicago School. The original Wilder and Wight three-story building, dominated by colossal Ionic columns and highly embellished double-leaf bronze doors at its main façade, was modified in 1926 when a fourth floor was added and a four-story annex to the east was constructed. The marble-sheathed, five-story expansion to the north occurred in 1964. Edward T. Wilder and Thomas Wight studied architecture under the firm of McKim, Mead and White (the architects of the neighboring New York Life Building). Subsequently, Wight became one of Kansas City’s most influential architects. Later purchased by Boatman’s Bank, the First National Bank Building was substantially renovated for the use of Kansas City’s new Central Library, which opened in Spring 2004.
LAND BANK BUILDING
15 W. 10th Street
Keene and Simpson (1923-1924)

Built for the Kansas City Joint Stock Land Bank, the Land Bank Building was one of five institutions nationwide that received a charter under the Federal Farm Loan Act, passed in 1916. The 12-story, Italian Renaissance styled building was the project of Kansas City entrepreneur Walter S. Cravens, the bank’s first president. Cravens’ rise to fame quickly came to anhalt when in 1927 he was indicted for his phony loan activities. After the fiasco, the Phoenix Joint Stock Land Bank took over the property from 1931-1935. Thereafter, the property was associated with several major financial institutions. The building was rehabilitated in 2003.

NEW ENGLAND BANK BUILDING
21 West 10th Street
Wilder and Wight, (1907)
McKechnie and Trask (1930)
el dorado inc (2004)

As per Wilder and Wight’s drawings, the original plan for the New England Bank Building called for a one-story structure constructed of steel and masonry walls with a main entrance featuring thirteen-foot bronze doors made from a single casting. After years of continued success, the New England National Bank was reorganized and renamed the New England National Bank and Trust Company in April 1925. Subsequently, several plans for a new facility were introduced, including a 28-story replacement office structure. In 1928, all plans for a new building were further stalled when the bank announced a merger. When it was publicized that J. A. Bruehing and William Pitt had purchased the property, plans were unveiled for the twelve additional stories later constructed in 1930. The building was rehabilitated in 2004.
FINANCE BUILDING
1009-1013 Baltimore Avenue
Smith and Rea (1908)
Charles A. Smith, architect (1923)
The original seven-story Finance Building had the
distinction of being built primarily to supply office
space for finance companies and their attorneys.
Smith and Rea’s plans for the two-part vertical block
Commercial style facility called for terra cotta and
granite to match the walls of the adjacent New
England Bank Building. Smith was once again hired
in 1923 to design the addition of an eighth floor.
The building was rehabilitated in 2004.

UNIVERSITY CLUB BUILDING
(Kansas City Club Building)
916-920 Baltimore
McKechnie and Trask, (1922-1923)
William B. Fullerton and Earl McCamis (1959)
The Neo-Classical masonry and reinforced concrete
building was the third location for the University
Club, originally established as a private men’s social
organization. Founded in 1901 by ten alumni of six
local, higher educational institutions, the University
Club merged with the Kansas City Club in 2001.

CARBIDE AND CARBON
BUILDING
912 Baltimore
William A. Bovard, (1929)
Exhibiting the hallmark vocabulary of the Art Deco
style, the Carbine and Carbon Building was built in
the era of the Great Depression, a period in Kansas
City that, surprisingly, displayed unusual growth.
William Hull, Barat A. Guignon and J. North
Mehorney—all real estate tycoons—invested in the
building.
KANSAS CITY SCHOOL OF LAW
913 Baltimore Avenue
Wilkinson and Crans (1926)
Displaying both Jacobethan and Chicago Style elements, the Kansas City School of Law Building is the fourth location for the school. Established in 1895 by prominent attorneys and judges, the Kansas City School of Law originally was housed in the New York Life Building. Kansas City University (now the University of Missouri-Kansas City) merged with the law school in 1938.

LANE BLUEPRINT COMPANY BUILDING
906-908 Baltimore
Architect unknown (c. 1905)
This masonry and reinforced concrete three-story building has its ties to the New-Classical tradition of architecture. Like other commercial buildings in the immediate area, this property was the location of a printing-related concern. The Camerograph Company, a Delaware-based operation specializing in the photographic-facsimile machine, was the first industry to occupy the building. The neighboring LaRue Printing Company later used this address as their second home.

WOOD'S BUILDING
101-107 W. 9th Street
Architect unknown (1881)
Erected by James W. Wood on speculation, the Wood's Building for years was the office location of several prominent physicians, including Dr. Martha C. Dibble, one of the few female medical practitioners in Kansas City during the late 19th century. At the turn of the 20th century, Joseph D. Cosby purchased the Wood's Building and the adjacent Wright House Hotel (109-133 W. 9th Street; later demolished), combining them into the Hotel Cosby, a sixty-six-room facility.
NEW YORK LIFE BUILDING
20 W. 9th Street
McKim, Meade and White (1887-1890)
Gastinger Walker Harden (1996)

Designed by the highly influential New York firm of McKim, Meade and White, the Renaissance Revival style New York Life Building was commissioned by the New York Life Insurance Company as one of their main business locations. Assisted locally by Van Brunt and Howe and Frederick E. Hill, the New York Life Building was recognized as a divergence from the ubiquitous Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture that had defined much of the area’s commercial streetscape toward the last years of the preceding century. It was considered Kansas City’s first skyscraper. Marking the south façade of this ranged brownstone ashlar, terra cotta and brick building is a bronze eagle designed in the studio of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts trained Louis Saint-Gaudens, one of the leading American sculptors of heroic, “new movement” realism. In 1996 UtiliCorp United rehabilitated the building. Gastinger Walker Harden, architects of the 1996 rehabilitation, received an award from the American Institute of Architects for their design.

LARUE PRINTING COMPANY BUILDING
810 Baltimore
Frederick C. Gunn, (1910)

Employing Chicago style elements in this two-story, rapetry brick building, prominent local architect Frederick Gunn designed the LaRue Printing Company Building for brothers Charles O. and George A. LaRue. Small companies such as LaRue (founded in 1896 by Charles) were welcome additions to the expanding commercialization of the district. The company remained in the building until 1943.
BUNKER BUILDING
820 Baltimore and 100 W. 9th Street
Architect unknown (1881)

Financed by real estate moguls Walter A. Bunker and John McEwen, the Bunker Building is representative of a fusion of styles including Gothic, Romanesque and Late Victorian. Bunker and McEwen, both staff members of the Kansas City Journal, founded the Western Newspaper Union, a supplier of sheets for more than 400 Midwestern newspapers. Western Newspaper Union, located in the Bunker Building for several years, remained one of the largest printing companies in the United States. Although the architect of this property remains unknown, the eclectic vocabulary was a common expression of late 19th century design in Kansas City and provides a distinct contrast to the New York Life Building, constructed just six years later.

LYCEUM BUILDING
102-106 W. 9th Street
Attributed to George Mathews (1895)

This four-story, late 19th century masonry and steel building, constructed in 1895, incorporates Chicago style elements in its richly ornamented, asymmetrical facade. Built as an office facility, the Lyceum served Kansas City as a ticket office for the Kansas City, Pittsburg and Gulf Railroad. Arthur E. Stillwell, who in 1889 organized the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Trust, was also the financial manager of the KCP&GRR—a line that stretched from Kansas City to Port Arthur, Texas. The line later became the Kansas City Southern Railroad. Lyceum Hall, an elegant interior space for social events, served the building for many years. Over the ensuing decades, the Lyceum Building was remodeled, becoming the Orient Hotel, and later, the Delmar Hotel.
14 KANSAS CITY DIME MUSEUM
110 W. 9th Street
Architect unknown (1885)

Financed by Abraham Judah, “a pioneer of theatrical activities in Kansas City,” the Kansas City Dime Museum operated as a theatre and exhibition hall from its inception through 1890. Judah, who brought the “Wild Man of Borneo” to the city, continued to headline exotic shows, including “Zella Zubalon, Cirassian,” “James Wilson, the Human Balloon” and “Sig Franco, the Stone Eater,” in addition to light opera. The building also served as the location for Kansas City’s first public art gallery, a collection that was later moved to the first Public Library. Called the Western Gallery of Art, this temporary home, founded by William Rockhill Nelson, was the precursor to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

15 NEW ENGLAND BUILDING
112 W. 9th Street
Bradlee, Winslow and Wetherell, Boston (1887-1888)

Constructed during one of the biggest building booms in Kansas City, the Renaissance revival influenced New England Bank Building was the location of the New England Safe Deposit and Trust Company, which occupied offices on the first floor. Its richly ornamented brownstone façade, punctuated at the southwest corner by a large, canted oriel window, provides a contrast to the neighboring streetscape.

16 SAVOY HOTEL AND SAVOY GRILL
219 W. 9th Street
Simeon Chamberlain (c. 1888)
Van Brunt and Howe (c. 1898-1900)
Howe, Iloit and Cutler (1903)
Architect, unknown (c. 1905-1906)

Built in four separate phases, the Neo-Classical and Art Nouveau hotel and restaurant unites 19th century wood frame construction with 20th century steel framing. The northeast wing, designed by Chamberlain, was constructed by the Arbuckle Brothers, the “Coffee Kings” of Kansas City. Succeeding additions were financed by the Ewins-Child Hotel Company, which was also responsible for the Savoy Grill. Frank Anderson, a local craftsman, designed the leaded art-glass dome over the hotel lobby.
BAKER-VAWTER BUILDING
915-917 Wyandotte
Hoit, Price and Barnes (1920)
In March 1920, the Baker-Vawter Company, with offices in Benton Harbor, Michigan, San Francisco, Indianapolis and Holyoke, Massachusetts, hired the prominent Kansas City architectural firm to design their local facility. Baker-Vawter manufactured office supplies for their nationwide clientele. Around 1935, the Remington Rand Corporation acquired Baker-Vawter and moved into the location through 1950 when the Kansas City Sosland family, with interests in grain and publishing, consolidated their facilities into the two-part, vertical block building.

GRAPHIC ARTS BUILDING
934 Wyandotte
Samuel B. Tarbet (1917)
Fickel & Scott Architects (1984)
Constructed to house businesses in the publications and graphic arts trades, the Three-part Vertical Block Graphic Arts building is treated with contrasting stone bands at the end bays and attic story. An annex, located at 208 W. 10th Street, actually predates the Graphic Arts Building. Designed by Tarbett and constructed in 1915, the one-story annex was modernized in 1952.

THE BOARD OF TRADE/ CENTENNIAL GARAGE
210 W. 10th Street
Frank E. Trask (1946, 1950)
Posing a similarity in massing to the neighboring Graphic Arts building, the brick, eight-story building was constructed as a garage for the Board of Trade. The facility remains the only expression of post-WWII Modernism within the Library District. The original design was modified in 1950 with a four-story addition and renamed the Centennial Building.
BOARD OF TRADE BUILDING
127 W. 10th Street
McKechnie and Trask (1923-1924)
The third home of the Kansas City, Missouri Board of Trade, this 13-story, highly embellished commercial building, characterized by colossal pilasters, triglyphs and medallions, is H-shaped in plan. Joseph A. Bruening, a Kansas City entrepreneur and real estate investor, built this landmark building as “a monument to the phenomenal growth of the Southwest as the world’s greatest grain empire.” When the Board of Trade Building was completed, it was the largest grain exchange in the world. The Board of Trade moved to a new building on the Country Club Plaza c. 1965. The building was rehabilitated in 2003.

BURNAP BUILDING
107-09 W. 10th Street
John McKechnie (1909)
This Sullivanesque inspired, six-story commercial building is of reinforced concrete construction. The Burnap Stationery Company, originally established in Kansas City in 1878, became one of the largest retail stationery and office supply companies in the United States. Due to its rapid success, the firm remained at the West 10th Street location for only fifteen years. By 1925, the company had outgrown the six-story building and subsequently relocated to a new facility at 1023 McGee. The building was rehabilitated in 2003.

DWIGHT BUILDING
1004 Baltimore Avenue
Charles A. Smith (1902-03)
McKechnie & Trask, architects (1927)
The ten-story Dwight Building is considered to be the first all-steel framed building constructed in Kansas City. Smith’s design for the original seven-story portion of the building, with its richly ornamented Commercial style, more than likely influenced the design of the buildings in the immediate vicinity. Stephen N. Dwight, the original owner of the Dwight, held multiple real estate investments throughout Kansas City. In 1927 an addition of three stories crowned the building. The building was rehabilitated in 2002.
END NOTES

1 Henry Van Brunt, “Main Street Hills Level Out as City Grows in 100 Years,” Kansas City Star 18 January 1953, C1-C3.


3 George Ehrliech, Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History, (Kansas City: Historic Kansas City Foundation, 1979), 41-49.

4 Ehrliech, Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History, 22-30. Other notable buildings that have been demolished include: Rothheils, 1000 Main Street and the Victor Building located at the northeast corner of 10th and Main Streets. Referred to as the “tobacco building,” the Victor Building measured just 27.5 feet wide and featured the Valenzo’s Café in the basement. The property was razed in June 1965.

5 Ibid, 50-51. Both buildings were equipped with elevators, invented by Elisha Graves Otis, who in 1852 produced an automatic safety device to prevent the fall of hoisting machinery, which led to the development of the first passenger elevator in 1857. Subsequently, Otis’s invention led to the building of America’s skyscrapers, the first of which was the Montauk Building, Chicago. The use of steel, another technological advance that impacted the overall design of American architecture at the turn of the 19th century, was employed in the construction of the New York Life Building.

6 The Library District generally encompasses the National Register of Historic Places West Ninth Street/Baltimore Avenue Historic District and its Boundary Increase.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Van Brunt, Henry. “Main Street Hills Level Out as City Grows in 100 Years,” The Kansas City Star, 18 January 1953, C1-C3.

Further Reading: Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library


Photograph Scrapbook Collection, Number 1, c.1870s-1880s. Ninety-four photographs representing buildings under construction, including the Board of Trade, 210 West 8th Street and the Exposition Building, as well as businesses and hotels in the downtown district.


Photographs courtesy of the Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri
1. FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING
   (Central Library Building)
   14 W. 10th Street

2. LAND BANK BUILDING
   15 W. 10th Street

3. NEW ENGLAND BANK BUILDING
   21 W. 10th Street

4. FINANCE BUILDING
   1009-1013 Baltimore Avenue

5. UNIVERSITY CLUB BUILDING
   916-920 Baltimore Avenue

6. CARBIDE AND CARBON BUILDING
   912 Baltimore Avenue

7. KANSAS CITY SCHOOL OF LAW
   913 Baltimore Avenue

8. LANE BLUEPRINT COMPANY BUILDING
   906-908 Baltimore Avenue

9. WOOD’S BUILDING
   101-107 West 9th Street

10. NEW YORK LIFE BUILDING
    90 Main Street

11. LARUE PRINTING COMPANY BUILDING
    810 Baltimore

12. BUNKER BUILDING
    820 Baltimore and 100 West 9th Street

13. LYCEUM BUILDING
    102-106 West 9th Street

14. KANSAS CITY DIME MUSEUM
    110 West 9th Street

15. NEW ENGLAND BUILDING
    112 West 9th Street

16. SAVOY HOTEL AND SAVOY GRILL
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20. BOARD OF TRADE
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22. DWIGHT BUILDING
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