

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 Town House Hotel
Other names/site number Town House Motor Hotel; Ramada Inn – Center City; Crossline Towers
Name of related Multiple Property Listing N/A

2. Location

Street & number 1021 N. 7th Street Trafficway

N/A

 not for publication
City or town Kansas City

N/A

 vicinity
State Kansas Code KS County Wyandotte Code 209 Zip code 66101

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 B X C D

See File
Signature of certifying official/Title Patrick Zollner, Deputy SHPO Date _____

Kansas State Historical Society
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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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5. Classification

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

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

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

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

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

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Hotel

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Streamlined Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: BRICK
STONE
roof: CONCRETE
other: _____

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Narrative Description

SUMMARY

The Town House Hotel (Town House) at 1021 N. 7th Street Trafficway (N. 7th Street) stands at the southeast corner of N. 7th Street and State Avenue in the heart of downtown Kansas City, Wyandotte County, Kansas (*Photo 2*). The fifteen-story concrete-frame building has a three-story base that occupies the entire lot. A tall, narrow twelve-story tower rises from the center of the base. The stepped tower has two small wings that feature banded corner windows. Painted Indiana limestone panels clad the base, while buff brick clads the tower. Limestone trim articulates the corner windows as well as the center bays of the front (north) façade. The building masses have flat roofs. A large metal sign structure stands atop the roof of the tower. The massing and interior configuration identifies the building as a convention hotel. The large base contains all of the public gathering spaces necessary for this property type. Within the tower, guest rooms (now apartment units) line a double-loaded corridor on each floor. Although the hotel opened in 1951, planning and design began in 1929.¹ This explains why the massing, fenestration, and ornament express the Streamlined Moderne style rather than a vocabulary more contemporary with the date of construction. The building was renovated when it changed ownership for the first time in 1965. The new ownership group added the rooftop swimming pool at this time. Despite the change in function, when the hotel converted to an apartment building in 1978, the building retains excellent integrity. The lobby and function rooms (ballrooms and meeting rooms) retain their original layouts and materials. Although hotel rooms were combined to create apartment units, the double-loaded corridors are intact. The Town House Hotel communicates its historic convention hotel function.

ELABORATION

SETTING

The Town House Hotel occupies a half-acre lot at the northwest corner of the block bounded by State Avenue on the north, N. 7th Street on the west, Minnesota Avenue on the south, and 6th Street on the east. The building stands just one short block north of Minnesota Avenue, the primary historic commercial corridor in downtown Kansas City, Kansas (*Photo 7*). One- and two-story commercial buildings interspersed with the occasional five- to seven-story building fill the surrounding blocks. The Town House Hotel is three blocks north of the city's civic center containing City Hall, the Post Office and U.S. Courthouse, and the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Hall. These monumental buildings occupy large lots, often incorporating landscaped plazas. The city's police headquarters occupies the former Montgomery Ward Department Store building on the west side of N. 7th Street across from the Town House Hotel (*Photo 6*). As one of the tallest buildings in the city, which sits on the bluffs west of the Kansas River, the Town House Hotel is visible from the eastern approach from Kansas City, Missouri.

The building footprint occupies the entire lot. The lot slopes down slightly from south to north. State Avenue slopes more dramatically from west to east, so that the entrance on the north elevation is nearly a full story lower than the entrance on N. 7th Street (*Photo 1*). The base directly abuts a concrete parking garage on the east elevation, although due to the slope, only at the ground level. A narrow alley along the south side separates the building from an adjacent two-story commercial building. Wide public sidewalks abut the primary north and west elevations.

¹ "Success Crowns 30-Year Struggle for Hotel," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 26, 1951, 2D. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

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EXTERIOR

The Town House Hotel has a wide three-story base topped by a narrow twelve-story tower with a stepped profile. The base contains the ground floor, first floor, and mezzanine. The tower contains floors two through thirteen (numbered fourteen). The rectangular footprint is narrow on the east and west sides and long on the north and south sides. Situated on a corner, the concrete-frame building has two primary elevations with similar façade treatment. Painted limestone panels clad the three-story rectangular base. The flat panels form a smooth surface punctuated only by rectangular window openings of various sizes. Buff brick clads the remainder of the building. The central rectangular mass of the tower rises twelve stories above the base. A one-story penthouse rising at the center of the main block is two bays narrower than the tower. Narrow wings, one bay wide and three bays deep, project outward from the center of the east and west elevations. The wings are two stories shorter and two bays narrower than the main block of the tower. The wings and the penthouse effect the stepped massing of the tower. Each section of the building has a flat roof with flat brick parapets. The penthouse level accesses decks at the east and west ends of the main roof. Simple pipe railings attach to the parapets in these areas. A small one-story room with glazed walls was added above the first-floor storefront at the northwest corner of the base between 1958 and 1961. The concrete roof deck at the southwest corner of the base has a sunken swimming pool. The pool, added in 1965, is set within a steel and concrete superstructure placed atop the historic one-story commercial spaces.

North Elevation

The asymmetrical north elevation faces State Avenue and is considered the front elevation (*Photo 1*). A limestone water table steps out slightly from the façade. Following the slope of the street the water table steps down at the center of the façade. The base is eleven bays wide. Raised stone bands surround the three two-story bays at the east end of the façade. Ribbed concrete panels and smooth stone sills divide the openings between each story. On the first floor, the recessed ground-floor ballroom entrance occupies the wider second bay. Black marble panels flank the paired metal entrance doors ornamented with a stylized floral pattern. Large single-pane windows fill the flanking bays. Non-historic multi-light aluminum windows fill the openings in the second story.

The fourth bay contains the ground-floor lobby entrance, historically the main entrance to the hotel. The entrance retains its original configuration of a bronze revolving door flanked on each side by two single glazed doors with bronze frames. Black marble panels flank the entire entrance assembly. A slightly raised stone band frames the window assembly above the entrance. Simple stone mullions separate the deep-set fixed windows. There is a band of five short windows immediately above the entrance and below the flat metal canopy. Above the canopy, ribbed concrete spandrels separate the band of five tall windows from a band of five short windows above. The top band of short windows is part of a narrow penthouse that rises above the roof of the base.

Bays five through seven have punched openings with single ten-light windows. These windows pierce the first story. Bays eight through ten each have a grouping of four small square windows. A stone band surrounds each window. These windows are located high on the first floor. Bay eleven at the west end of the façade is a full-height storefront window with multiple large panes of glass set within aluminum frames. Non-historic painted wood panels fill the transom area. A band of aluminum windows lines the façade of the one-story room that rises above the first floor at the northwest corner of the base. The band consists of two fixed panels alternating with single-hung operable windows (*Photo 2*).

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The north elevation of the tower has bilateral symmetry. Except for the corners of the wings, the entire tower is clad in buff brick. The main block has three separate sections. The outer sections each have three windows per floor and rise to the twelfth floor. The center section is slightly recessed from the outer sections and rises to the thirteenth floor, the penthouse level. The five bays each have a single window. A continuous limestone spandrel panel separates the fourth and fifth floors in this section. Narrow limestone bands run the height of the façade, framing the center three windows from the fifth floor spandrel to the ribbed concrete panel above the windows at the top story. The windows in the tower are non-historic two-light sliding windows with aluminum frames that fill the historic masonry openings. The east and west wings are recessed one full bay from the main block. The wings contain corner windows at each story, separated by smooth limestone spandrel panels. A narrow limestone band runs the full height of the building, framing the entire corner assembly.

West Elevation

The west elevation faces N. 7th Street and is also considered a primary elevation (*Photo 3*). Due to the sloping terrain, the base is only two stories on this elevation. The first story contains five bays. The first bay at the north end of the façade contains a large aluminum storefront window with a single pedestrian door at the south end of the opening. An awning spans the length of this bay above the storefront. The second bay contains the entrance to the lobby. Slightly raised limestone bands and a high limestone water table frame this bay. A historic aluminum storefront with paired glazed doors, single-light sidelights and transom fills the large recessed opening. A large metal canopy covers the entire bay. Aluminum storefronts with large plate glass windows and single pedestrian doors fill the three bays at the south end of the façade (*Photo 5*). The storefronts are set within a single opening in the facade. The display windows with low concrete bulkheads angle inward towards the offset center entrance in the third bay. A low concrete planter with a rounded corner sits below the south display windows. The storefront in the fourth bay has a recessed pedestrian entrance and a straight, full-height display window. The storefront in the fifth bay has the recessed entrance at the north end and the angled display window and curved concrete planter at the south end. A painted concrete band that projects slightly from the façade caps the storefronts.

The second story contains the room with banded aluminum windows at the northwest corner. Matching the condition above the entrance on the north elevation, the area immediately above the main entrance contains wide stone mullions that separate five deeply recessed windows. The windows are non-historic aluminum sliding windows. A wide, smooth stone band caps the windows. Blank brick panels flank the historic window area on the second story. The blank buff brick wall that rises above the south storefronts is not historic. The wall conceals the superstructure that supports the swimming pool added in 1965.

The west elevation of the tower contains five bays. Single windows at each story pierce the plain buff brick walls in the two outer bays of the main block. These windows have limestone sills. The three inner bays articulate the wing. The corner windows with limestone spandrels fill the north and south bays. A narrow concrete band frames the wide center bay. Each floor of the center bay contains a small square window framed with a stone band. The square windows are historic four-light metal windows. The remaining windows are non-historic aluminum sliding windows. The center bay of the main block, above the wing, contains single windows in each story. The west elevation of the penthouse block has two large windows. Single wood slab doors access the rooftop terrace. A non-historic mechanical room clad in metal panels stands atop the twelfth story at the center of the rooftop terrace.

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South Elevation

The south elevation is the unadorned rear of the building (*Photo 4*). The base has buff brick walls punctuated by rectangular window openings of various sizes and groupings. Some of the openings retain their historic multi-light metal windows while others are covered in painted plywood.

The tower has the same configuration of main block and flanking wings as the north elevation. The main block is ten bays wide. A thirteen-story circulation tower projects slightly outward from the façade in the seventh bay. Square windows framed with concrete pierce each floor. The six bays west of the circulation tower and the three bays to the east each contain single window openings on every floor. The openings have non-historic aluminum sliding windows and limestone sills. The rest of the façade is plain buff brick. The east and west wings on each side of the main block have corner windows.

East Elevation

The east elevation abuts the adjacent parking garage on the ground floor (*Photo 1*). The first floor has two large multi-light aluminum windows at the north end of the façade. These windows are historic. The south half of the elevation has three irregular bays on the first floor and five irregular bays on the mezzanine level. These openings have non-historic aluminum windows.

The east elevation of the tower is identical to the west elevation, with its five bays, corner windows, and center square windows. The penthouse has large expanses of windows and two pedestrian doors to access the rooftop terrace.

INTERIOR²

First Floor

Accessible from the State Avenue entrance on the north and the N. 7th Street entrance on the west, the lobby occupies a large portion of the first floor and provides access to the gathering spaces, commercial spaces, and building management offices. The lobby is comprised of the entrance stairwell at the State Avenue entrance, the main waiting area, the elevator lobby and reception desk, and the corridor to the N. 7th Street entrance.

The entrance from State Avenue opens to a wide travertine landing that is open to the lobby above (*Photo 8*). This space retains its historic finishes. A paired run of pink Tennessee marble stairs leads down to the ground floor. Two quarter-turn stairs at the east and west ends of the landing have marble treads leading up to the first floor. Polished beige marble clads the wainscot and stair walls. Short spiral pillars are carved into the corners of the marble stair walls. Belgian Black marble caps the low walls, interior window sills, and forms the base trim. Limestone urns with fluted receptacles sit atop the stepped stair wall leading to the first floor. Four dodecagonal columns clad in panels of reddish purple marble with extensive veining punctuate the main waiting area (*Photo 9*). The floors have square pink marble tiles surrounded by cream-colored rectangular travertine tiles. The plaster walls have beige marble wainscot, black marble base, and plaster walls. Fluted pilasters articulate the corners of the lobby. A decorative plaster border ornamented in a palmette motif caps the walls. The plaster ceilings have a textured finish. The square brass pendant light fixtures are historic (*Figure 7*).

² Information about existing historic interior finishes comes from "Hotel's Beauty a Compound of Many Factors," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 26, 1951, 2C. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

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The historic reception desk sits in an alcove on the north side of the lobby (*Photo 10*). The long black marble counter sits atop beige marble walls. The back wall of the reception alcove has mail cubbies and a curved soffit. Wood veneer fills the long panel above the reception alcove. An abstract clock, added during the 1965 renovation, adorns the center of the panel. A non-historic, freestanding desk stands in front of the historic desk. Two passenger elevators stand opposite the reception desk. Beige marble panels with black marble trim frame the non-historic elevator doors. The elevator cabs are not historic.

The marble and travertine flooring continue west up a short flight of stairs from the reception area to the corridor that leads to the N. 7th Street entrance. The corridor has plaster walls with slanted coves for recessed lighting. The large recessed can lights are also historic. Two historic aluminum storefronts line the north side of the corridor (*Photo 11*). A historic glazed wall with an aluminum frame and paired pedestrian doors creates a large vestibule for the N. 7th Street entrance (*Photo 11*). The vestibule also has marble and travertine floors, full-height travertine wall panels with a black marble base, and commercial display windows framed with black marble. The commercial spaces adjacent to the lobby are accessible from the vestibule. They have plaster walls, non-historic VCT flooring, and non-historic dropped ceilings. These spaces have been renovated multiple times as tenants changed. There is no historic material extant.

A network of offices and support spaces occupy the area behind the reception desk along the north wall of the building. This area has non-historic floor finishes and dropped ceilings. Non-historic drywall partitions were added as needed. Some doorways retain their historic painted wood trim.

Paired historic wood doors access the two large gathering rooms flanking the elevators. These rooms have non-historic flooring, wall finishes, and dropped ceilings. Both rooms are connected to small commercial kitchens with ceramic tile floors, plaster walls, and dropped ceilings.

The historic doors have a distinctive design that is repeated at important gathering spaces throughout the building. Each wood door has three panels. Each panel is comprised of four small squares with a large circle at the center of the grouping.

A short flight of marble stairs at the east end of the lobby leads to the former lounge. Non-historic partitions divide the space into a network of offices. The space has non-historic carpeting and dropped ceilings. The plaster perimeter walls retain the historic plaster border ornamented with a palmette motif. An open-riser stair with travertine treads and aluminum handrails rises to the mezzanine level.

Mezzanine

Non-historic partitions divide the spaces on the mezzanine. The rooms have non-historic carpeting and VCT tile, and dropped ceilings.

Ground Floor

The ground floor is accessible from the grand stairs at the State Avenue entrance or from a smaller stairwell immediately west of the reception area. The oval space at the base of the State Avenue stairs has four round plaster columns, plaster walls, and a plaster ceiling with recessed lighting (*Photo 12*). The floors have non-historic carpeting. Three doors at the east end of the oval access the main ballroom. Two doors on the south end access the smaller ballroom. Although they are boarded up from the exterior, these rooms retain their historic decorative wood doors, as described above. The ornate plaster frame surrounding the doors to the ballrooms has wide pilasters ornamented with chevrons and a capital comprised of narrower chevrons and a

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stylized palmette and scroll. A short flight of marble stairs at the west end of the oval leads to the elevator lobby and access the network of offices at the east end of the building. These corridors and offices have non-historic flooring, partitions, and dropped ceilings.

The main ballroom is a large open room that occupies the northeast corner of the ground floor (*Photo 13, Figure 11*). The room has carpet and wood veneer tile flooring. The plaster walls have the same decorative plaster border as the lobby. The concrete ceiling has a grid of 4'x4' coffers. A single light fixture is centered within each coffer. A non-historic ramp was added to the east wall and connects to the exterior entrance at the north end of the room. Marble steps with a decorative metal screen on the west side of the entrance lead down into the ballroom. Three large doorways on the west wall access the ground floor oval gathering space. Paired doors in the south wall access the kitchen, storage area, freight elevator, and staff areas. Alcoves flanking the main west entrance contain the original accordion partitions used to subdivide the space. A similar fabric partition separates the main ballroom from the smaller ballroom at the southwest corner of the room.

The smaller ballroom, also accessible through two doors from the oval gathering space, has non-historic carpeting, plaster walls with a wood baseboard, and a dropped ceiling.

The back-of-house spaces have concrete floors, concrete masonry unit walls, and exposed concrete ceilings. These areas include service corridors, offices for custodial staff, and the freight elevator that accesses the three floors of the base.

Tower

The circulation core attaches to the south side of the tower. It includes two historic elevator shafts and a stairwell. The stairwell has plaster walls and metal stairs. The passenger elevators open to a small elevator lobby on each floor. A drywall partition with two large windows and a wood slab door encloses the elevator lobby. This partition may not be historic. These doors access the double-loaded corridors. The corridors have textured plaster walls and wood baseboard (*Photo 14*). The carpet and dropped ceilings are not historic. Unit entrances have historic wood trim and non-historic wood slab doors. The entrances retain their historic marble threshold. When the building was converted from a hotel to an apartment building, hotel rooms were combined to form larger apartment units. Doorways that were no longer needed were infilled with painted plywood. Most of the unused doorways retain their historic wood trim.

The apartment units have plain finishes and simple trim (*Photo 15, Figure 8*). The plaster walls and drywall partitions have vinyl base. The kitchens have non-historic dropped ceilings, while plaster ceilings with a textured finish are exposed in the remainder of the unit spaces. Each apartment unit combines two or three former hotel rooms and retains one original bathroom. The fixtures and finishes have been replaced. The windows retain historic black marble sills. The penthouse units retain historic glazed walls that access rooftop terraces (*Photo 16, Figure 9*). The terraces are simple wooden platforms set atop the roof.

INTEGRITY

The Town House Hotel retains excellent integrity and clearly communicates its historic convention hotel function. The building occupies its original location and setting within the downtown commercial district on the corner of two major thoroughfares. Its original design, materials, and workmanship are also intact. Exterior alterations have been minimal. The most notable was the replacement of windows within original openings, most recently in 2005. The ownership group that purchased the building in 1965 added the rooftop pool and supporting superstructure to the southwest corner of the base. The 1978 ownership group converted the

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building from a hotel to apartments, combining multiple hotel rooms to form single apartment units. The upper floors retain their original organization defined by a double-loaded corridor. The corridors retain their historic width and pattern of entryways. The original configurations of the hotel rooms remain visible in the locations of some of the bathrooms and bedroom walls. These interior alterations occurred behind the corridor walls. Secondary spaces such as offices and service areas in the base were altered or reconfigured as needed to support the building's function. Tenants occupying the commercial storefronts on N. 7th Street altered the spaces to suit their businesses. Throughout each of these campaigns, the lobby has retained its open plan and luxurious finishes. Many of the gathering spaces retain their historic configurations and ornate finishes. The interior and exterior alterations to the Town House Hotel do not diminish its historic character or compromise its ability to convey feelings of and associations with the period in which it was constructed and its historic hotel function.

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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.
- 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

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1951-1964

Significant Dates

1951

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Stern, Eugene John (Architect)

Swenson Construction Company (Builder)

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance begins in 1951, the date of construction, and ends in 1964, the fifty-year closing date for periods of significance where activities begun historically continue to have importance but no more-specific date can be identified. In 1965, the building was sold to an out-of-state investment group that continued to operate it as a hotel, but made some alterations, including construction of the rooftop pool at the southwest corner of the base and the room at the northwest corner of the base. After several subsequent changes in ownership but not function, Cross-Line Cooperative Council purchased the building in 1978 and converted it from a hotel to an apartment building.

Criteria Considerations (justification)

N/A

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Narrative Statement of Significance

SUMMARY

The Town House Hotel is locally significant for the National Register under Criterion A for the area of COMMERCE and Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE. It is an important venture designed to meet a specific commercial need within the community and an excellent example of a convention hotel designed during the mid-twentieth century. Located in the heart of downtown Kansas City, Wyandotte County, Kansas, the fifteen-story building was designed with all of the amenities commonly provided in a city hotel of this status. The building retains the features that define the convention hotel property type, specifically the grand lobby, the numerous ballrooms and gathering spaces, and the double-loaded corridors lined with guest rooms (now apartment units). Constructed in 1951, the Town House Hotel reflects the Modern Movement design aesthetic popular at the time of construction, particularly the use of corner windows, although the massing, streamlined façade, and interior ornament evoke the grand high-rise hotels of the 1920s and 1930s. The presence of Streamlined Moderne features, such as the stepped massing and stylized classical ornament, reflect the long, drawn-out process that brought the Town House Hotel from a line-item on the Chamber of Commerce priority list in the 1920s to a functioning operation in 1951. Architect Eugene John Stern began designing the hotel in 1929 with a wide array of amenities and luxurious decorative materials, modifying the drawings when construction actually began more than a decade later. The history of the property illustrates the community's intense desire for a convention hotel, which was believed to be a key component of a thriving metropolis. City officials, businessmen, and local citizens were involved in the decades-long pursuit of this hotel, from the conception of the idea in the early 1920s; through a major economic crisis, a global conflict, a major flood, and numerous fund-raising campaigns; to the grand opening ceremony that celebrated its completion in August 1951. The Town House Hotel symbolizes the civic pride and determination of Kansas City civic leaders to poise the community as a destination capable of competing with other municipalities on a regional level. The building operated as Kansas City's largest downtown hotel from 1951 until it was converted to residential apartments in 1978.

ELABORATION

COMMERCE

The Town House Hotel represents the desire and determination of an entire community to create a business that would advance the economy and the reputation of Kansas City. The Town House Hotel was a commercial venture new to the city at the time of construction. Prior to the completion of the Town House, Kansas City had several hotels that served visitors. These hotels often occupied the upper two stories of a three-story commercial building, blending with the surrounding commercial streetscape. Kansas City's largest hotels, the Grund (1907) and the Gould (1923), were three and two stories tall, respectively, and were designed as free-standing hotels (*Figures 3 and 4*).³ While these scattered facilities adequately served the traveling salesman or a family on a recreational visit, city leaders felt that Kansas City was missing out on large-scale events, such as organizational and trade conventions. These groups, with widespread membership, sought to advance their common interests by holding regular meetings in relevant economic centers.⁴ Kansas City,

³ The Grund Hotel (N. 6th Street and Ann Avenue) and the Gould Hotel (N. 8th Street and State Avenue) were demolished during the Center City Urban Renewal project in 1969 and 1970, respectively.

⁴ A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel. An American History*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 245.

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Kansas was an important commercial center on the eastern edge of the state. Early in its history it grew into an industrial center, complete with stockyards, meat processing and packing, oil refineries, and steel mills. Development of the Fairfax Industrial District in the 1920s led to additional industrial expansion during World War II.⁵ Without an adequate event facility, however, Kansas City was often overlooked as a host for national and state conventions. State organizations selected Topeka or Wichita, or held their meetings in Kansas City, Kansas, but sent participants to stay in Kansas City, Missouri, with its numerous hotel options. These events attracted large numbers of visitors who would, in theory, spend money outside the convention headquarters, and thus boost the local economy.⁶ Kansas City, Missouri succeeded as a convention hub because of the sheer number of large hotels willing to compete for conventions and the close proximity to Municipal Auditorium.⁷

The Kansas City (Kansas) Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) conceived of the idea of a downtown hotel in 1921, though the first step towards its construction was not taken until 1923.⁸ The Chamber championed the hotel project almost continuously for thirty years, maintaining support among the business community and the general populace, despite the myriad roadblocks that stalled progress, including the economic constraints of the Great Depression, the construction hiatus during World War II, and the soaring cost of materials afterward. Editorials published on the front page of *The Kansas City Kansan* explained how a city lacking adequate hotel facilities was missing out on important patronage and commercial opportunities.⁹ An early 1940s planning study performed by the St. Louis firm Harland Bartholomew & Associates confirmed that commercial centers in annexed areas and nearby cities provided substantial competition for downtown Kansas City. City planners determined to counter this economic strain proposed creating a civic center in the heart of downtown to spur commercial revitalization.¹⁰ Although the business community began planning for a new convention hotel prior to Bartholomew's report, the concept emerged as a potential implementation strategy. Kansas City business and civic leaders, with the emotional and financial support of the general citizenry, commissioned the Town House Hotel as a way to attract conventions and visitors to the city. Retail storefronts on the first floor of the hotel would provide space for local businesses, boosting the commercial core of downtown. The hotel executive committee, formed in 1929, purchased the site and engaged an architect in 1937, but did not break ground until 1949 when they had raised sufficient funds for construction (*Figure 5*).

The Town House Hotel opened with great fanfare on August 26, 1951. It was designed to provide all of the amenities convention organizers looked for when planning events (*Figure 6*). In addition to a large number of hotel rooms, most with stunning views of the surrounding metropolis, the Town House had ballrooms of various sizes, a range of dining options, and in-house barber and beauty shops. Local citizens were proud of their new hotel and optimistic about the economic impact such a large facility would have on the community. By the time the hotel officially opened, fifty organizations had booked conventions through the summer of

⁵ Works Progress Administration, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Kansas*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 211. Joe H. Vaughan, *Kansas City, Kansas*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 18.

⁶ "Need and Opportunity for a Hotel," *The Kansas City Kansan*, December 27, 1935. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁷ Ellen Ugucioni and Sherry Piland, Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, MO., National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "Downtown Hotel District," Section 8. Listed August 8, 1983.

⁸ "Hotel Survey Plan is Adopted by City," *The Kansas City Kansan*, December 12, 1923. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁹ "A Convention City," *The Kansas City Kansan*, January 19, 1936. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

¹⁰ Jacob Wagner, "The Politics of Urban Design," *Journal of Planning History* (November 2003), 331-355. 335.

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1952.¹¹ The conventions scheduled for the first year alone ran the gamut from political groups (Midwest Democratic Conference), to professional organizations (Kansas Association of Real Estate Boards), to medical groups (Kansas Tuberculosis and Health Association), to trade organizations (United Association of Journeymen Plumbers & Steamfitters).¹² Most of these conventions had between 200 and 300 participants, although the Kansas State Bar Association and the Kansas Medical Society had 1,000 and 1,500 participants, respectively.¹³

Throughout the 1950s, the Town House operated as Kansas City's largest downtown hotel, hosting conventions, independent travelers, and long-term guests. Although its popularity waned in the early 1960s, the city and the ownership group were dedicated to its success.¹⁴ A number of factors contributed to the slow decline of the Town House Hotel, a decline that paralleled the general decline of the downtown core. As Kansas City grew outward away from the city center, commercial and industrial areas sprang up and drew businesses from the downtown core. The evolution of the hospitality industry, away from city hotels and toward roadside motels, provided unwanted competition for the Town House.¹⁵ Beginning in the 1950s, the country's new interstate highway system carried travelers around, rather than through, established downtown commercial districts. Instead of searching for downtown city hotels, travelers opted to stay at low-rise motels along the highways.¹⁶ While the roadside motel had been around in some form for decades, the property type enjoyed renewed popularity along these enhanced transportation corridors due to the simplicity and convenience of the services they offered. In one five-year period, the estimated number of motels in the country more than doubled, from fewer than 30,000 in 1954 to over 60,000 in 1959.¹⁷

Like many other urban centers, downtown Kansas City began losing commercial businesses to suburban areas in the mid twentieth-century, leaving the urban core in a state of slow economic decline. These new, expansive commercial developments on open tracts of land with easy access to the new highway system contrasted with the dense late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century built environment and tight grid of city streets in the original commercial core. The city established the Urban Renewal Agency of Kansas City, Kansas in 1955 to provide the framework for planning, implementing, and funding urban renewal projects designed to eliminate blight and revitalize the urban core. Two phases of Urban Renewal projects altered the downtown streetscape, particularly along Minnesota Avenue. The Gateway project (1958-1973), addressed the eastern approach from Kansas City, Missouri and Interstate 70 (I-70). The Center City project (1969-1976) aimed to support existing downtown businesses, attract suburban shoppers, and consolidate public services in the area to provide a more cohesive civic center. These projects required demolishing numerous commercial and residential buildings to make way for multi-story commercial and office buildings, as well as vast expanses of parking.¹⁸ The city demolished both the Gould and the Grund hotels during the second project. Unlike these

¹¹ "Kansas City Kansas to have many conventions," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 26, 1951. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Need Conventions: Loss in Hotel Operation Listed for Fiscal Year," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 19, 1961. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

¹⁵ "For Town House: Motels Tough Competition," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 19, 1962. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

¹⁶ "The Changing Hotel Business," *The Kansas City Kansan*, June 22, 1965. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

¹⁷ John A. Jakle, Keith A. Sculle, Jefferson S. Rogers, *The Motel in America*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 20.

¹⁸ Wagner, 337.

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other hotels, the Town House Hotel conformed to the general aesthetic that Urban Renewal projects were trying to achieve through the construction of modernist high-rise structures with commercial functions.

While the Town House was a luxurious convention hotel, it was still the only convention hotel in Kansas City and was thus unable to host large conventions. Without conventions, the Town House had to compete with area motels for short-term business and recreational travelers, including the Holiday Inn constructed at N. 4th Street and Minnesota Avenue in 1963 as part of the Gateway Urban Renewal project.¹⁹ In 1965, the local ownership group recognized that it was time to sell the building but wanted to ensure that it would continue to operate as a hotel.²⁰ They hoped that an infusion of funds from an out-of-state investment group, Ned Bord & Associates of Washington, D.C., could make the modifications necessary to compete with motel chains.²¹ The new ownership constructed the rooftop swimming pool and changed the name to "Town House Motor Hotel," to create an association with automobile travel and imply the convenience of a motel. Executive Manor, a group running Ramada Inn franchises in Topeka and Wichita, purchased the Town House in 1970.²² A survey conducted prior to purchase concluded that in conjunction with the Center City project, the reopened hotel would be a success.²³ They renamed the building Ramada Inn – Center City, to promote its association with the Center City Urban Renewal project. The Town House continued to limp along in operation as a convention hotel until 1978, even hosting the Republican National Convention in 1976. Following in the footsteps of its predecessors, when the hotel business was no longer viable, the owners sold the Town House to an investment group that converted the building to apartments.

ARCHITECTURE

The Town House Hotel exemplifies the city convention hotel property type and was the first of its kind in Kansas City. A convention hotel has two sections that reflect the two distinct functions. The lowest floors contain the formal lobby, commercial spaces designed to serve travelers, dining facilities, and numerous gathering spaces, especially a large ballroom to accommodate hundreds of guests. The upper floors contain the guest rooms, typically arranged along a double-loaded corridor. The Town House Hotel retains both of these sections. The building rises fifteen stories from its prominent location at the southeast corner of State Avenue and 7th Street (now N. 7th Street Trafficway) within the civic and commercial core of Kansas City. The massing of the building clearly communicates its historic function as a convention hotel, with a wide base and a narrow tower. The two-story base that occupies the entire lot was designed with several commercial storefronts; a restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop; and guest amenities such as a barber shop and laundry room. The most important features of the base that identify the hotel as a convention facility were the meeting spaces, including the grand ballroom, the reception room, and several private club rooms. These spaces could be configured to suit a variety of needs, including banquets, meetings, and trade shows. Rooms were designed to accommodate groups large and small. Although some of the finishes have been updated, the Town House retains all of these spaces.

¹⁹ "Retirement center site of old city jail," *The Kansas City Kansan*, July 27, 1986. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas. Wagner, 337. The Holiday Inn was demolished in 1993.

²⁰ Bernard J. McDonald, "Sale of Town House in June Proposed by Hotel Directors," *The Kansas City Kansan*, May 30, 1965. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

²¹ "Sale of Hotel Will Be July 1," *The Kansas City Kansan*, June 17, 1965. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

²² Bob Friskel, "City OK on Town House Bonds Held Up," *The Kansas City Kansan*, December 7, 1970. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

²³ *Ibid.*

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Rising from the center of the base is a long, narrow tower. Each floor in the tower contains a double-loaded corridor lined with units. This layout allows each unit to have unobstructed views of the surrounding city. The narrow wings on the east and west ends of the tower have corner windows, and the penthouse units on the top three floors have open terraces in order to take advantage of the building's height as it sits atop one of the highest points in the city. The Town House was the largest building in downtown Kansas City built during the 1950s. The scale of the surrounding commercial buildings changed with the Urban Renewal projects of the 1960s and 1970s. Large, free-standing buildings designed in a more Post Modern aesthetic rose on cleared lots within the two Urban Renewal project areas. Notable changes to the surrounding streetscape included the façade added in 1968 to the 1925 Commerce Bank Building at 601 Minnesota Avenue, the new City Hall built at 701 N. 7th Street in 1973, and Security Bank, built at 701 Minnesota Avenue in 1977.²⁴

The massing and ornament of the Town House contrast with Kansas City's earlier hotels. The Grund and the Gould were low-rise, red brick buildings with a more domestic or institutional, rather than commercial, appearance. They did not have commercial storefronts on the first floor. While it was likely they did have formal lobbies and possibly dining rooms, they did not have gathering spaces or ballrooms to accommodate larger numbers of guests. Other hotels occupied the upper stories of commercial buildings. While the storefronts occupied the first story, these hotels did not have formal lobbies. One or two double-loaded corridors lined with hotel rooms filled the upper stories.

Across the Kansas River, Kansas City, Missouri offered travelers numerous hotel options. The more extravagant hotels were between eight and twelve stories, had formal lobbies, and could accommodate conventions with multiple ballrooms, meeting spaces, and dining rooms.²⁵ The size, massing, steel or concrete structures, brick or stone cladding of these hotels matched the built environment of the surrounding commercial business district, although the downtown hotels often had more ornament.²⁶ The first few stories of the typical hotel covered the full lot and contained the formal gathering and dining spaces. The upper stories were stepped towers or had recessed light wells, much like their commercial neighbors. The Town House shared more in terms of design and amenities with the convention hotels of downtown Kansas City, Missouri than with those that stood in downtown Kansas City, Kansas, illustrating the city's desire to compete on a regional level.

The 1949 world headquarters of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers at 753 State Avenue is the one other comparable contemporary building in downtown Kansas City.²⁷ This building occupies a quarter-block between State and Minnesota Avenues on the east side of N. 8th Street, exactly one block west of the Town House (*Figure 10*). The Boilermakers' building has stepped massing, buff brick cladding, polished marble panels between the commercial storefronts on the first floor, and ribbon windows on the upper stories. Despite the slightly earlier construction date, the Boilermakers' building reflects more of the Mid-Century Modern design aesthetic than the Streamlined Moderne Town House, particularly in the fenestration.

²⁴ These buildings are extant.

²⁵ Uguccioni, Section 7.

²⁶ Uguccioni, Section 7.

²⁷ Vaughan, 70.

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Architect

Eugene John Stern was born in Budapest, Hungary on October 25, 1884. After completing his education at the Mechanical Institute at the Beaux Arts Atelier of New York, Stern worked as a draftsman for several New York architecture firms, including George F. Pelham and Mann & McNeil.²⁸ Stern formed several brief partnerships in New York and North Carolina before settling in Little Rock, Arkansas prior to World War I.²⁹ He designed monumental works in cities across Arkansas, including the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs (1924), the Albert Pike Hotel in Little Rock (1929), and the Union County Courthouse in Eldorado (1932).³⁰ While both the Arlington and the Albert Pike hotels illustrate the Spanish Colonial Revival style, widely popular at the time of construction, they both have stepped massing with the first two stories occupying the full lot and a narrower tower rising from the center. Like Town House Hotel, both hotels have formal lobbies, ornate ballrooms, and dining rooms on the lower floors, as well as double-loaded corridors lined with hotel rooms on the upper floors. In the 1940s, Stern moved to Mexico City to design the Hotel Spa Ixtapan de la Sal, a hot springs resort located southwest of the capitol city.³¹ Mexican capitalist Sr. Arturo San Roman commissioned Stern to design a hotel similar in style to the Arlington Hotel. Stern died in 1961 at the age of 76.³²

PROPERTY HISTORY

The Town House Hotel was a long-shared dream of the Kansas City, Kansas business community. The idea of building a convention hotel in downtown Kansas City, Kansas first arose in 1917 when the newly-created Kansas City Kansas Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) began the discussion in the abstract. The Chamber created a list of initiatives to promote commerce and tourism, which included building hotel facilities appropriate for the size of the city. The Chamber investigated several options, including expanding existing hotels, such as the Grund Hotel at 6th Street and Ann Avenue.³³ In 1923 they commissioned a study by the Hockenbury System of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to determine the feasibility of a hotel project.³⁴ After consulting with local business leaders, the Hockenbury report concluded that a new hotel building was most desirable and a financial campaign would garner widespread support. In the following years, the Chamber initiated talks with numerous hotel companies from around the region, searching for a suitable collaboration.³⁵ While the parties involved in these discussions could not reach any agreements, the Chamber continued to hone its plan, forming an executive committee in 1929. Local banker, Maurice L. Breidenthal, chaired the executive committee charged with leading fund raising campaigns, finding a suitable site, and developing

²⁸ American Institute of Architects, "Stern, Eugene J.," *The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects*, 1956, page 535. <http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/1956%20American%20Architects%20Directory.aspx> (accessed January 22, 2014). While the directory lists multiple partnerships, it does not indicate in which state these partnerships were formed or the dates in which they lasted.

²⁹ William B. Bushong, "Wheeler, Oliver Duke (1864-1942)," *North Carolina Architects & Builders. A Biographical Dictionary*, The NCSU Libraries, 2009, <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000257> (accessed January 22, 2014).

³⁰ The Arlington Hotel is a contributing resource to the Hot Springs Central Avenue Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 25, 1985. The Albert Pike Hotel was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on November 21, 1978. Union County Courthouse was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 30, 1983.

³¹ Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, "Joseph Taylor Robinson Memorial Auditorium, Little Rock, Arkansas, Pulaski County. http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/historic-properties/_search_nomination_popup.aspx?id=2319 (accessed January 22, 2014).

³² Ibid.

³³ "Hotel Survey Plan is Adopted by City," *The Kansas City Kansan*, December 12, 1923. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas. The Grund Hotel was demolished in 1969.

³⁴ "Success Crowns 30-Year Struggle for Hotel," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 26, 1951, 2D. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

³⁵ "New Move Stated for Big Hotel Here," *The Kansas City Kansan*, November 10, 1927. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

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preliminary architectural plans.³⁶ The campaign to finance the estimated \$500,000 cost of construction began in January of 1929 and effectively stalled by the end of the year.³⁷

Throughout the Great Depression, the Chamber continued to promote the idea of a new hotel and the services it would provide to the city, despite the inability to finance the plan.³⁸ By late 1935, weekly newspaper editorials continued to advocate for making Kansas City, Kansas a convention city. They noted that 7th Street was as important a north-south thoroughfare as Minnesota Avenue was an east-west thoroughfare, and bemoaned that Kansas City was “the only city of 125,000 population in the United States that hasn’t at least one first class commercial hotel.”³⁹ A front-page editorial from April 1936 identified the equally pressing need for a department store as well as potential sites to suit these two commercial ventures.⁴⁰ The hotel committee continued to develop its plans for a new hotel, including engaging an architect.

The brick courthouse at the northwest corner of N. 7th Street and Minnesota Avenue and the sheriff’s residence and county jail at the southeast corner of N. 7th Street and State Avenue, were both built in the early 1880s. When the county constructed a new courthouse in 1927 on the west side of N. 7th Street between Ann and Barnett avenues, they vacated the small outdated buildings, converting them to storage facilities. In March 1937, the board of county commissioners offered up both sites for public auction. J.W. Perry, a local banker and financier, purchased the old courthouse site for the purpose of constructing a Montgomery Ward department store.⁴¹ Breidenthal led a group of local investors who formed the Wyandotte Hotel Company to purchase the county jail site.⁴² An article published in *The Kansas City Kansan* the day of the sale revealed that the group had already engaged architect Eugene J. Stern of Little Rock, Arkansas to draw up tentative plans. The article went on to describe the details of the proposed hotel, including the estimated cost, the planned amenities, and the number of hotel rooms.⁴³ The public fund drive began almost immediately after the purchase of the site, but stalled later in the year when the nation slid back into recession.⁴⁴

As the country climbed out of the Great Depression, the advent of World War II prevented any action on a new hotel for downtown Kansas City. Citizens devoted their time and economic resources to supporting the war effort. Throughout this hiatus the *Kansas City Kansan* continued to publish editorials about the need for a convention hotel, recapping the status of the stalled project. When the war ended, Kansas City was ready to focus on local commercial ventures. Topping the list was building the new convention hotel.⁴⁵ The Chamber’s

³⁶ “M.L. Breidenthal Heads Hotel Body,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, February 10, 1929. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

³⁷ “Campaign for New Hotel to Start Monday,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, January 4, 1929. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

³⁸ “A Hotel for Kansas City Kansas,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, December 15, 1935. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

³⁹ “A Hotel for Kansas City Kansas,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, December 15, 1935; also “Traffic Moves North and South,” December 31, 1935 and “Bring Conventions to K.C.K.,” May 5, 1936. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁴⁰ “Two Essential Buildings,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, April 10, 1936. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁴¹ “Auction Old Courthouse, Jail Sites Tomorrow,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, March 24, 1937. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas. This building is extant.

⁴² “Purchase of Hotel Site puts Project Officially Under Way,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, March 25, 1937, page 1. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Delay Drive for a Hotel in View of Recession,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, December 21, 1937. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁴⁵ “Our No. 1 Civic Project,” *The Kansas City Kansan*, February 17, 1946. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

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hotel executive committee again hired the Hockenbury System to conduct a survey to determine the viability of a hotel project. Unsurprisingly, the report again found that the project was poised for success.⁴⁶ The fund drive to finance the hotel restarted less than a week after the report was issued.⁴⁷ Daily articles and editorials about the proposed hotel and the ongoing fund drive kept the project in front of the citizens from 1946 until it opened five years later.

The project required four fund-raising campaigns as building costs soared. Through the sale of stock and direct contributions, the Wyandotte Hotel Company finally raised sufficient funds. The city celebrated with a ground-breaking ceremony on December 4, 1949.⁴⁸ Construction materials delays, labor strikes, and the 1951 flood hampered progress, but the new hotel continued to rise above the commercial district. The grand opening celebration occurred on August 25, 1951. The enthusiasm for the Town House Hotel spread throughout the city. The *Kansas City Kansan* issued a special thirty-two-page souvenir edition that reported on the opening ceremony, the building's materials and finishes, and its construction history. This special edition contained photos of the construction, finished spaces, and the ceremony itself.⁴⁹

For the first few years the hotel was a success, although the number of convention bookings slowly diminished. In the early 1960s, the hotel began to consistently operate at a loss.⁵⁰ The prevailing theory was that the new highway system and the proliferation of roadside motels attracted the transient traveler, and organizers of large conventions selected much larger cities as hosts.⁵¹ In 1965 the Wyandotte Hotel Company sold the building to Ned Bord & Associates, a Washington, D.C. investment group. The new ownership immediately embarked on interior and exterior improvements, including redecorating the hotel rooms and constructing a rooftop swimming pool at the southwest corner of the building.⁵² It was renamed the Town House Motor Inn to evoke an association with highway travel. Despite the capital improvements, the hotel remained unprofitable. By 1969, with foreclosure imminent, rumors about the fate the Town House circulated in the press. The ownership group explored the feasibility of converting the building into an adult care facility.⁵³ They dismissed this option, as it would require extensive renovations.⁵⁴ The Wyandotte Hotel Company repurchased the building at a public auction on July 27, 1970 and sold it to Executive Manor, Inc. of Topeka in March 1971. The hotel reopened as the Ramada Inn – Center City after more than \$1.5 million in improvements.⁵⁵ For the next eight years, the Town House operated as a Ramada Inn franchise, hosting a small but steady number of conventions and trade shows. During the 1976 Republican National Convention,

⁴⁶ "'Go Ahead' on Hotel for City Given O.K.," *The Kansas City Kansan*, May 7, 1946, page 1. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁴⁷ "To State Fund Drive for New Hotel Here," *The Kansas City Kansan*, May 12, 1946, page 1. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁴⁸ "Success Crowns 30-Year Struggle for Hotel," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 26, 1951, 2D. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁴⁹ *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 26, 1951. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵⁰ "Need Conventions: Loss in Hotel Operation Listed for Fiscal Year," *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 19, 1961. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵¹ "A Town House Era Ends," *The Kansas City Kansan*, June 2, 1965. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵² "Town House Details Improvements," *The Kansas City Kansan*, April 10, 1966. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵³ "Adult Care Considered for Hotel," *The Kansas City Kansan*, September 17, 1969. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵⁴ "For Adult Care: State Says Renovation of Town House Needed," *The Kansas City Kansan*, November 12, 1969. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵⁵ "Hotel Readied for Comeback," *The Kansas City Kansan*, March 21, 1971. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

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held across the river in Kansas City, Missouri, the Town House hosted the CBS and NBC television crews.⁵⁶ This was not enough to sustain the hotel, however, and talks began in the fall of 1976 to sell the hotel to the Cross-Lines Cooperative Council, a local group organized to facilitate the housing assistance program. Cross-Lines received a loan grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to convert the building to subsidized senior housing.⁵⁷ Executive Manor sold the building in 1978 and conversion of the hotel rooms to apartments began.⁵⁸ The building reopened the following year as Crossline Towers. Today, the building continues to operate as subsidized senior housing.

CONCLUSION

The Town House Hotel is an excellent example of a convention hotel and reflects the perseverance of the Kansas City community in procuring such an establishment to promote the reputation and economy of their city. The building retains all of the gathering and dwelling spaces necessary to identify this property type. Business and civic leaders wanted to attract conventions to the city to boost commercial activity and promote Kansas City as a city of the first class. The luxurious lobby materials express the grandeur that the hotel founders intended for Kansas City's first purpose-built convention hotel. In the first year of operation, the hotel hosted nearly one convention each week. A declining downtown commercial economy paired with increased competition from smaller, more convenient roadside motels prevented the Town House from achieving its envisioned success. The building managed to survive Urban Renewal projects that altered the downtown streetscape due to its size and the way the business fit with the goals of the Urban Renewal program. After two attempts to refurbish the interior did not increase business, the hotel ceased operations in 1978. Although the new owners converted the building to housing, they retained the defining features of the convention hotel property type, including the lobby, the grand ballroom, several other meeting spaces, first-floor commercial spaces, and the double-loaded corridors on the upper floors. The Town House Hotel clearly continues to communicate its historic function.

⁵⁶ "Home for TV Crews..." *The Kansas City Kansan* photo, 1976. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵⁷ "Sale of Ramada Inn Looms," *The Kansas City Kansan*, September 30, 1976. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

⁵⁸ "Building vandalized..." *The Kansas City Kansan*, September 11, 1978. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

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- "Our No. 1 Civic Project." *The Kansas City Kansan*, February 17, 1946. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- "Purchase of Hotel Site puts Project Officially Under Way." *The Kansas City Kansan*, March 25, 1937, page 1. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- "Retirement center site of old city jail." *The Kansas City Kansan*, July 27, 1986. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- "Sale of Hotel Will Be July 1." *The Kansas City Kansan*, June 17, 1965. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- "Sale of Ramada Inn Looms." *The Kansas City Kansan*, September 30, 1976. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- Sandoval-Strausz, A.K. *Hotel. An American History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.
- "Success Crowns 30-Year Struggle for Hotel." *The Kansas City Kansan*, August 26, 1951, 2D. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- "The Changing Hotel Business," *The Kansas City Kansan*, June 22, 1965. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- "To State Fund Drive for New Hotel Here." *The Kansas City Kansan*, May 12, 1946, page 1. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.
- "Town House Details Improvements." *The Kansas City Kansan*, April 10, 1966. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

Town House Hotel
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“Traffic Moves North and South.” December 31, 1935 and “Bring Conventions to K.C.K.” May 5, 1936. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

“Two Essential Buildings.” *The Kansas City Kansan*, April 10, 1936. Microfilm, Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

Uguccioni, Ellen and Sherry Piland. Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, MO. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Downtown Hotel District. 1983.

Vaughan, Joe H. *Kansas City, Kansas*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012.

Wagner, Jacob. “The Politics of Urban Design.” *Journal of Planning History*. November 2003, 331-355.

Works Progress Administration. *The WPA Guide to 1930s Kansas*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984.

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:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Kansas City Kansas Public Library
Kansas City Missouri Public Library

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

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

Provide latitude/longitude coordinates OR UTM coordinates.

(Place additional coordinates on a continuation page.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1 39.116261 -94.626382 3 _____
Latitude: Longitude: Latitude: Longitude:

2 _____ 4 _____
Latitude: Longitude: Latitude: Longitude:

OR

UTM References

_____ NAD 1927 or _____ NAD 1983

1 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Town House Hotel
Name of Property

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Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The nominated property occupies Lots 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28, Block 116, Wyandotte County, now in and a part of Kansas City, Wyandotte County, Kansas, except that part thereof on the North condemned for State Avenue.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Rosin (Principal) and Rachel Nugent (Associate)
organization Rosin Preservation, LLC date March 13, 2014
street & number 215 W. 18th Street telephone 816-472-4950
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108
e-mail rachel@rosinpreservation.com

Property Owner

name Patricia A. Jordan, Cross-Line Towers, Inc.
street & number 1021 N. 7th Street telephone 913-321-2262 x116
city or town Kansas City state KS zip code 66101

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 100 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.

Town House Hotel
Name of Property

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Photographs

Photograph Log

Name of Property: Town House Hotel

City or Vicinity: Kansas City

County: Wyandotte State: Kansas

Photographer: Brad Finch, f-stop Photography

Date Photographed: January 17, 2014

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

- 1 of 16: North (front) and east elevations, view southwest.
- 2 of 16: North and west elevations, view southeast.
- 3 of 16: West elevation, view east.
- 4 of 16: South elevation, view northwest.
- 5 of 16: N. 7th Street storefronts, view southeast.
- 6 of 16: N. 7th Street Trafficway, view north.
- 7 of 16: Minnesota Avenue, view northwest.
- 8 of 16: State Avenue entrance lobby, view southeast.
- 9 of 16: First floor lobby, view east.
- 10 of 16: First floor lobby and reception desk, view northeast.
- 11 of 16: First floor corridor and storefronts, view northwest.
- 12 of 16: Ground floor, oval area outside ballroom, view west.
- 13 of 16: Grand ballroom, view north.
- 14 of 16: Typical corridor, upper floors, view west.
- 15 of 16: Typical bedroom (former hotel room), view northwest.
- 16 of 16: Penthouse living room, view southeast.

Figures

Include GIS maps, figures, scanned images below.

Figure 1. Site Map. ArcGIS 2013

Figure 2. Context Map. ArcGIS 2013

Figure 3. Grund Hotel (1907). Postcard. Courtesy of the Kansas Collection, Kansas City (Kansas) Public Library

Figure 4. Gould Hotel (1923), c. 1950. Courtesy of the Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library

Figure 5. Town House Hotel during construction, c. 1950. Courtesy of Monte Gross, personal collection.

Figure 6. Town House Hotel, c. 1951. Courtesy of the Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.

Figure 7. Lobby at State Avenue entrance, c. 1951. Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.

Figure 8. Typical Hotel Room, c. 1951. Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.

Figure 9. Penthouse Room, c. 1951. Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.

Figure 10. Minnesota Avenue from Penthouse, view west, c. 1951. Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.

Figure 11. Grand Ballroom, c. 1959. Photo courtesy of the Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas

Figure 12. 1st Floor and Exterior Photo Map

Town House Hotel

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Figure 13. Ground Floor Plan and Photo Map

Figure 14. Mezzanine Floor Plan and Photo Map

Figure 15. 2nd Floor Plan and Photo Map

Figure 16. 3rd Floor Plan and Photo Map

Figure 17. 4th – 10th Floor Plan and Photo Map

Figure 18. 11th – 12th Floor Plan and Photo Map

Figure 19. Penthouse Floor Plan and Photo Map

Town House Hotel
Name of Property

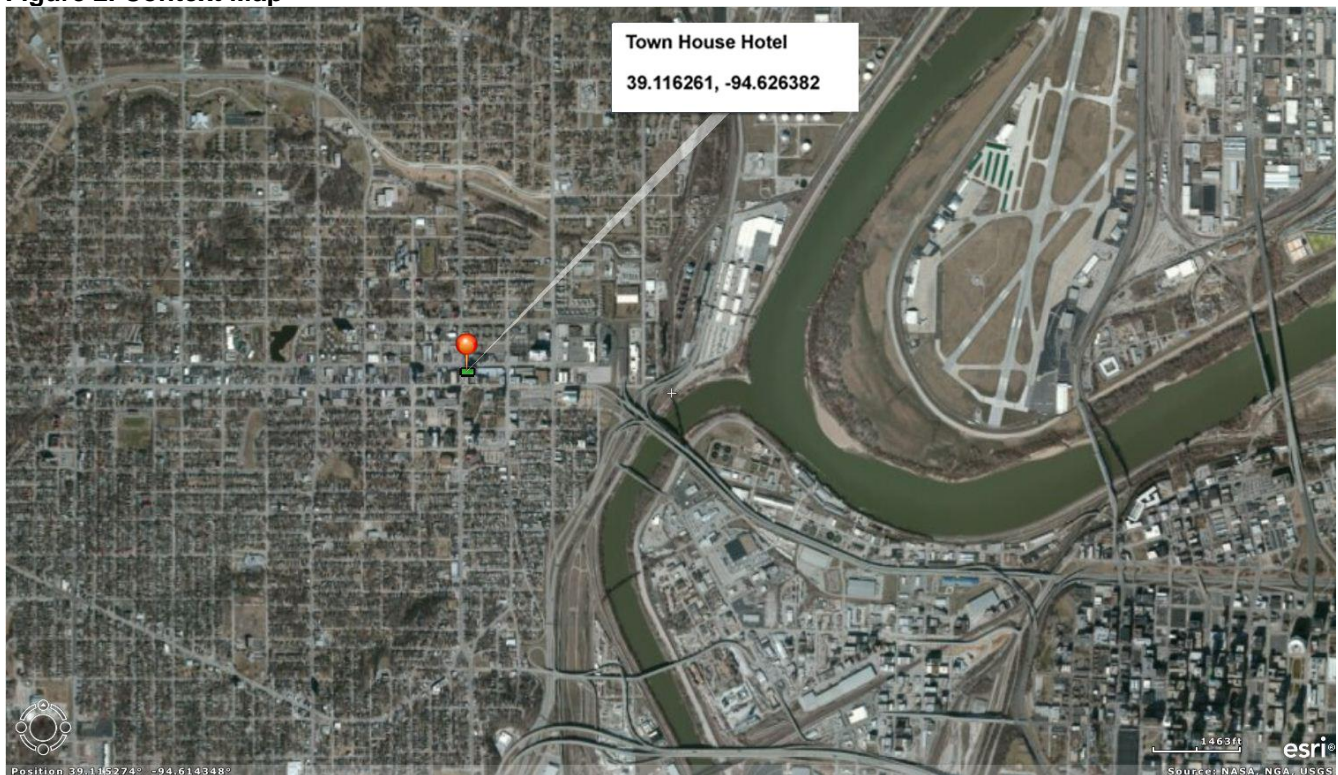
Wyandotte County, Kansas
County and State

Figure 1. Site Map



Town House Hotel
1021 N. 7th Street Trafficway
Kansas City, Wyandotte County, Kansas
(Datum: WGS84) Lat/Long:
1. 39.116261, -94.626382

Figure 2. Context Map



Town House Hotel

Name of Property

Wyandotte County, Kansas

County and State

Figure 3. Grund Hotel (1907). Postcard.

Courtesy of the Kansas Collection, Kansas City (Kansas) Public Library



Figure 4. Gould Hotel (1923), c. 1950.

Courtesy of the Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City (Missouri) Public Library



Town House Hotel
Name of Property

Wyandotte County, Kansas
County and State

Figure 5. Town House Hotel during construction, c. 1950.
Courtesy of Monte Gross, personal collection.



Figure 6. Town House Hotel, c. 1951.

Town House Hotel
Name of Property

Wyandotte County, Kansas
County and State

Courtesy of the Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.



Town House Hotel
Name of Property

Wyandotte County, Kansas
County and State

Figure 7. Lobby at State Avenue entrance, c. 1951.
Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.



Town House Hotel

Name of Property

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Figure 8. Typical Hotel Room, c. 1951
Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.



Figure 9. Penthouse Room, c. 1951.
Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.



Town House Hotel
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Figure 10. Minnesota Avenue from Penthouse, view west, c. 1951.
Photo courtesy of Cross-Line Towers, Inc.



Figure 11. Grand Ballroom, c. 1959.
Photo courtesy of the Trowbridge Research Library, Wyandotte County Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas.



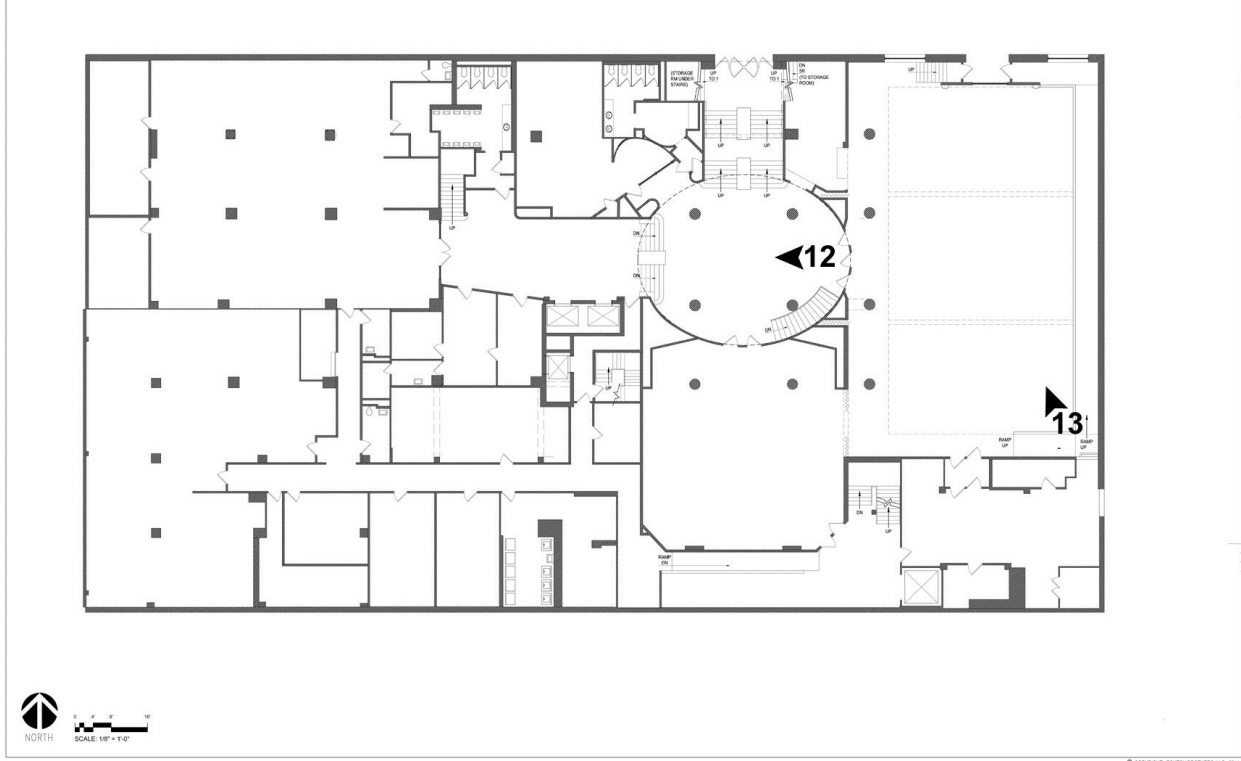
Town House Hotel
Name of Property

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Figure 12. 1st Floor and Exterior Photo Map



Figure 13. Ground Floor Plan and Photo Map



Town House Hotel
Name of Property

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Figure 14. Mezzanine Floor Plan and Photo Map

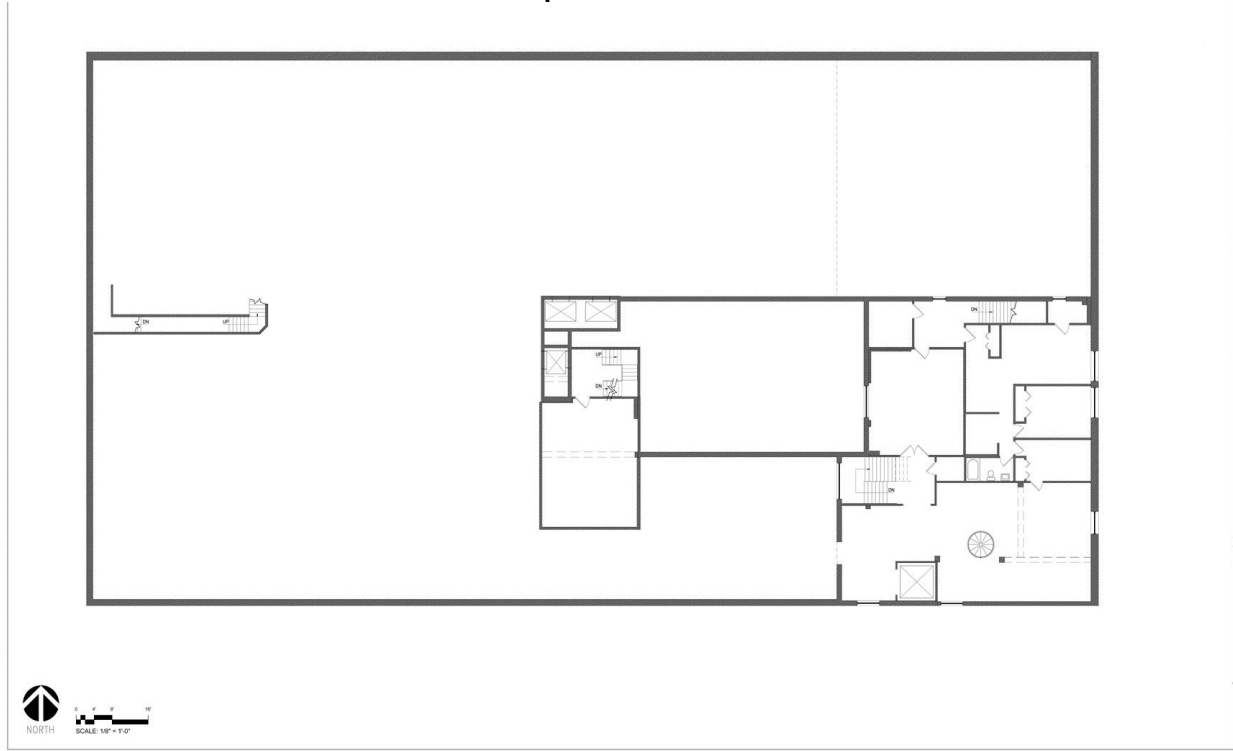
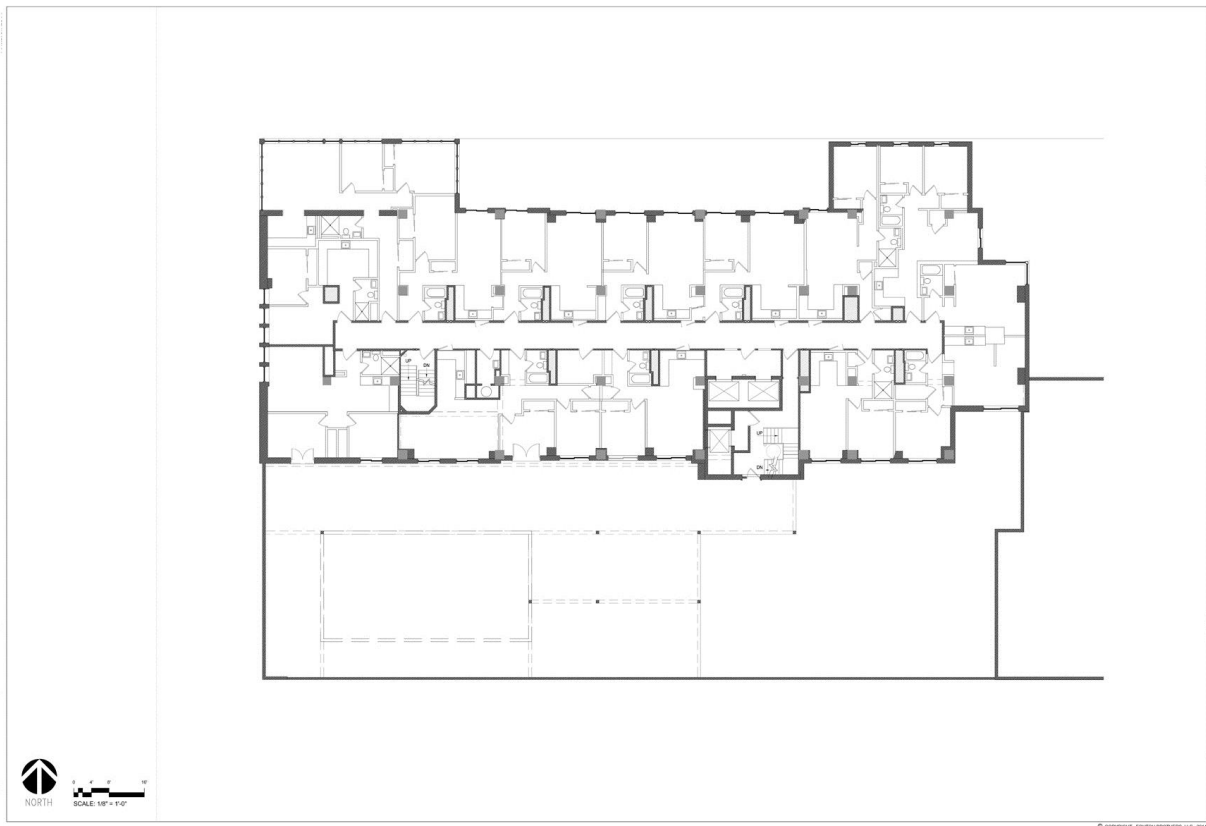


Figure 15. 2nd Floor Plan and Photo Map



Town House Hotel
Name of Property

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County and State

Figure 16. 3rd Floor Plan

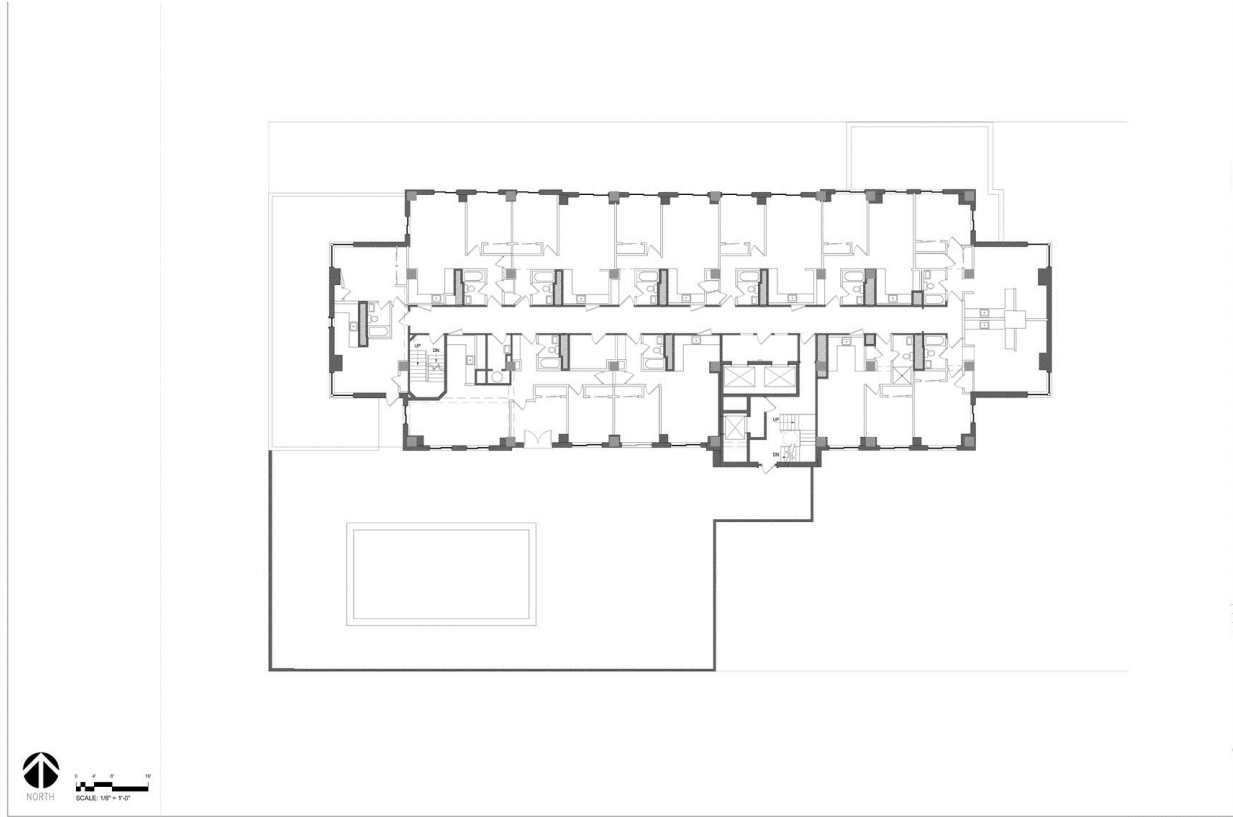
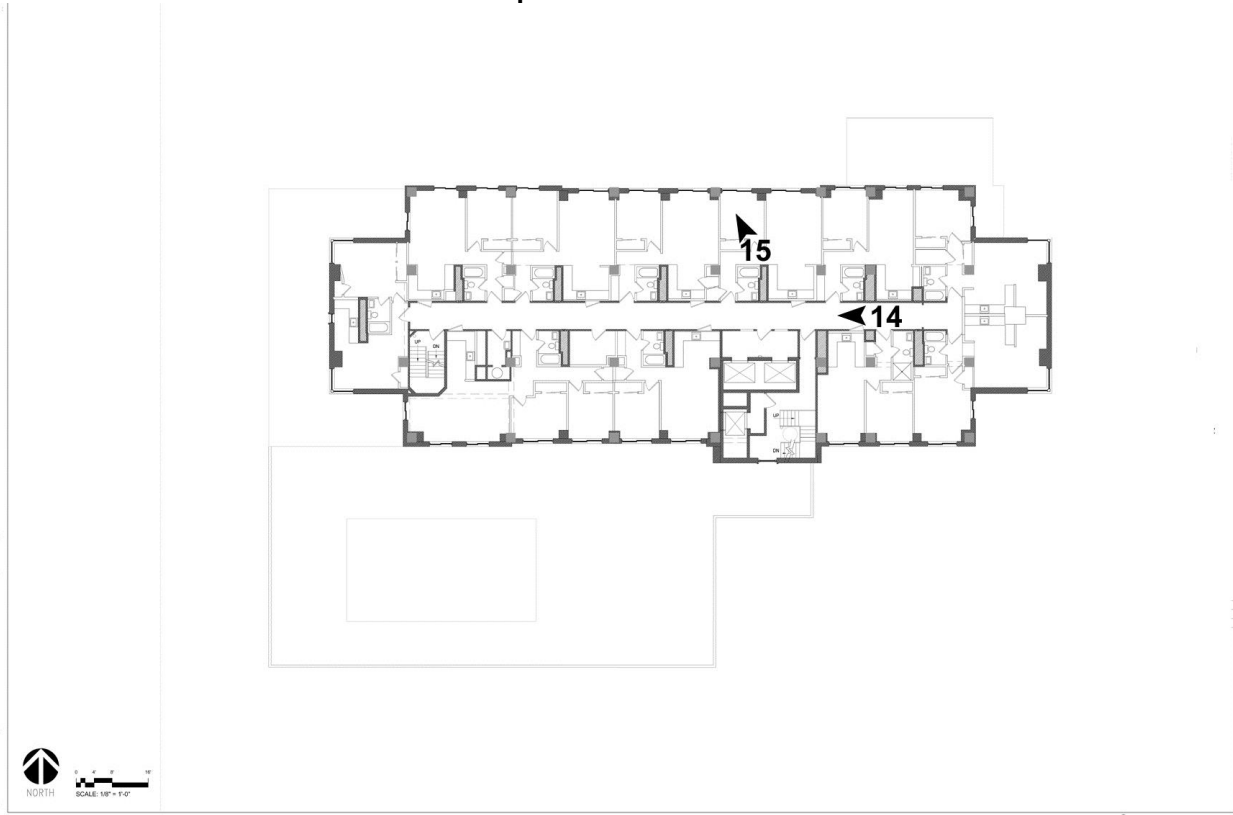


Figure 17. 4th – 10th Floor Plan and Photo Map



Town House Hotel
Name of Property

Wyandotte County, Kansas
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Figure 18. 11th – 12th Floor Plan and Photo Map

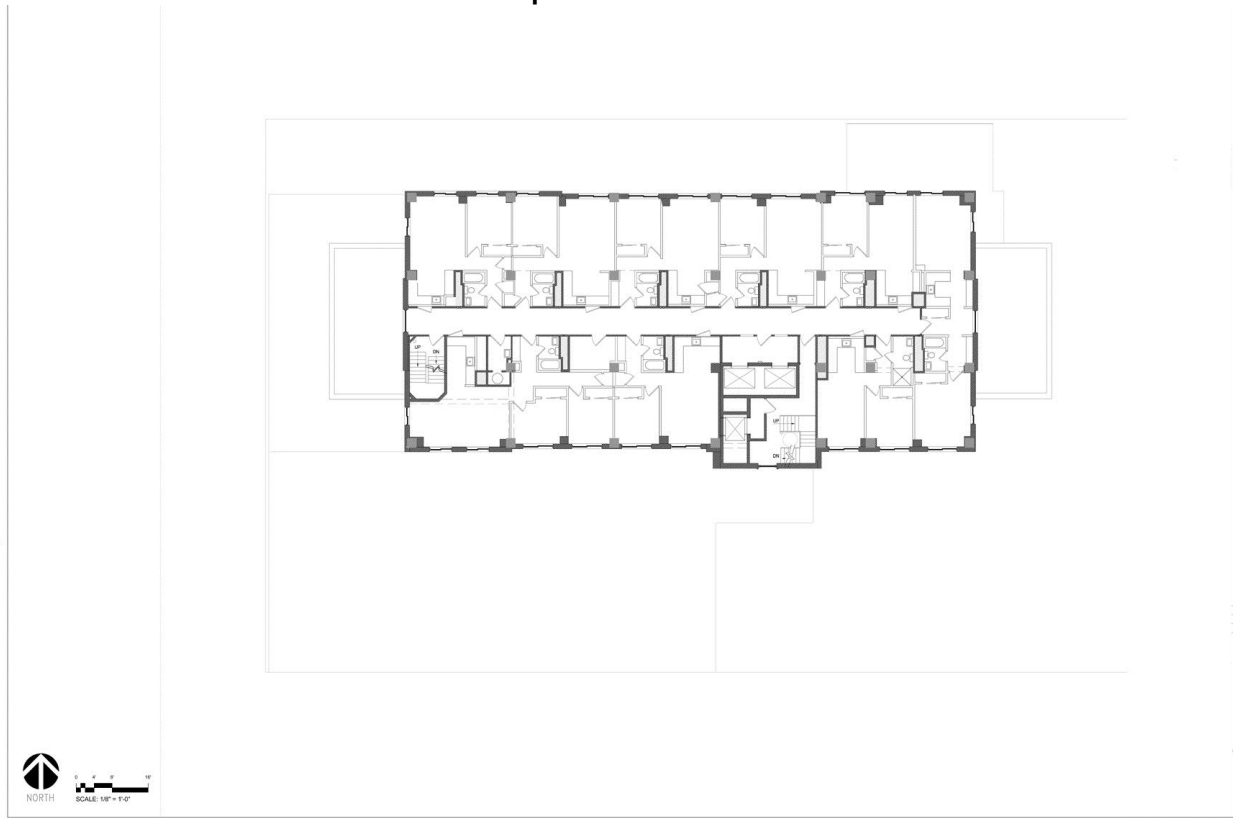


Figure 19. Penthouse Floor Plan and Photo Map

