United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in 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 Pendergast, Thomas J., Headquarters

other names/site number Jackson County Democratic Club

2. Location

street & number 1908 Main Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Kansas City [N/A] vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64108

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this _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 _X_ statewide ___local

Mark A. Miles Sept. 13, 2011

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

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

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

- [X] Private
- [ ] public – Local
- [ ] public – State
- [ ] public - Federal

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

- [X] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	district
0	0	Site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
1	0	**Total**

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business
COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style
OTHER: Two-part Commercial Block

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Brick
roof: OTHER: Tar and Gravel
other
:

8. Statement of Significance

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

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

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

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

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

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

Property is:

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

[ ] B removed from its original location.

[ ] C a birthplace or grave.

[ ] D a cemetery.

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

[ ] F a commemorative property.

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

Areas of Significance
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance
1926 -1939

Significant Dates
N/A

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
Pendergast, Thomas J.

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Sanneman, Raymond H.; architect
Fleminig-Gilcrist Construction Company

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
____previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

_X_State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
_X_Local government
_X_University
_X_Other
Name of repository: Kansas City Public Library

Pendergast, Thomas J., Headquarters
Name of Property

Jackson County, Missouri
County and State

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one (1) acre

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	3 63 020	43 27 760	3			
2				4			

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cydney Millstein and MaryAnn Warfield
organization Architectural & Historical Research, LLC date April 29, 2011
street & number 1537 Belleview Avenue telephone 816-472-4154
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108
e-mail cydney@ahr-kc.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

Property Owner:
(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name Wit Solberg, Mission Peak Capital
street & number 1908 Main Street telephone 816.994.6600
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

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

SUMMARY

The Thomas J. Pendergast Headquarters building, located at 1908 Main Street, Kansas City, Jackson County, is a two-story brick building designed by Kansas City architect Raymond H. Sanneman and constructed by the Fleming–Gilcrist Construction Company, Kansas City, in 1926 at a cost of $15,000. Characterized by its buff brick, contrasting stone trim exterior and shaped parapet, the straightforward, Two-Part Commercial Block styled building features a storefront at the first story and paired fenestration at the second story, typical of this composition. As identified by Richard Longstreth's *The Buildings of Main Street*, the Two-Part Commercial Block building has two zones including a public space at the lower zone and a private space (such as an office), at the second story.[1] The building's exterior and interior spaces, including Pendergast's office located at the northwest corner of the second story, as well as trim and doors, remain virtually as designed by Sanneman, with little alteration through the years. Overall in good condition, the Pendergast Headquarters Building retains the majority of its original character-defining elements and integrity, thereby conveying its historic significance and period of construction. Located at the northern end of Kansas City's mid-town area, the building is situated between the Central Business District and the railroad terminal on one of Kansas City's major thoroughfares. To the north is the Monroe Hotel (1924: NR 2009-3-13); to the south is a one-story commercial building; to the west is an alley and a series of early 20th century buildings are located to the north across Main Street.

ELABORATION

Measuring approximately 25 feet wide by 120 feet long, the Pendergast Headquarters Building contains a basement and two-stories, except for the rear 26', which is a one-story garage. Its main or east façade, facing Main Street, is veneered with buff colored brick, all stretchers. An aluminum framed storefront window placed above a tiled bulkhead is placed to the south of a non-original single-leaf metal security gate with original sidelights. A small transom is placed above the main entrance, while a wide, leaded glass transom, with a vent at the far north bay, runs the length of the storefront windows and door. The second story, divided from the first story by a wide brick spandrel, features two pairs of double-hung, sash windows with a continuous limestone sill and brick header lintels and surround accented at the corners by contrasting limestone squares. A denticulated limestone stringcourse crowns the second story. Vertical strips of slender coursed stone, set below the stringcourse and rising above limestone bases, form "piers" at the edges of the main façade.

The majority of the two-story portion of the south façade is obscured by the adjacent one-story commercial building, while the south façade of the one-story garage is exposed. A single window, modified with glass block is set below an arched lintel of brick headers. The north façade is completely hidden by the five-story Monroe Hotel.

A non-original, recessed one-bay garage, with a non-original paneled overhead door is located at the west façade. Board and batten paneling and face brick also characterizes the west

[1] Richard Longstreth. *The Buildings of Main Street*. (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987), 24.

façade at the garage or first story level. The second story, recessed from the garage entrance, features four, single-hung, sash-type aluminum framed one-over-one fenestration. Butt-end shingles further articulate the second story.

Other features of the exterior include a modest parapet wall capped with original glazed terra cotta coping at the north wall and metal coping at the south wall. Limestone coping is placed at the parapet of the main façade. The flat roofs of the first and second story are covered with tar and gravel.

INTERIOR

The first and second floors of the Pendergast Headquarters building are reached through a vestibule where two, single-leaf wood and glass doors are located. Accessed by the door placed to the south, is a large open space at the east end of the first story with a garage at the west end. A small office is located south of center of the first floor.

A long staircase accessed through the north single-leaf door reaches the second floor. A narrow hallway separates a large office at the west end (measuring approximately 25’ x 91’) from three separate offices and a waiting room at the eastern third of the second floor. The northeast office measures approximately 10 ½’ x 11 ½’, the southeast office measures approximately 10 ½’ x 12’ and with a waiting room and conference room (separated by a non-original wall) measuring approximately 12’ x 20’. Original single-leaf apron doors with decorative glass panes and operable transoms lead to the office proper. A reception window with decorative glass casement windows is set between two original single-leaf doors that lead to the large office space. A bathroom is located at the south end of the hallway.

Currently, el dorado architects, Kansas City, are developing plans to rehabilitate the Pendergast Headquarters building using the *Secretary of the Interiors Standards* as a guide. Mission Peak Capital, the owner, will pursue Historic Tax Credits for this project.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Thomas J. Pendergast Headquarters Building constructed in 1926 is located at 1908 Main, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. This building is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under CRITERION A and B with statewide significance in the area of POLITICS/GOVERNMENT. The Thomas J. Pendergast Headquarters was the site from which Thomas Joseph Pendergast, a notorious political boss for whom the building is named, doled out his own brand of political influence over the Democratic Party in Kansas City between 1926 and 1939. During this period, Pendergast's influence helped to launch the political career of Harry S Truman on his path to the White House. Pendergast's years as a political boss came to an end in 1939 when he was convicted of income tax evasion. Perceptually, Pendergast is a study in contrasts. His working-class supporters respected him as a savior, always on the side of the common man. To his opponents, Pendergast was vilified for his nefarious behavior, which benefitted only himself rather than the city and the workers which he purported to serve. Although his political and business interests are often obscured by the lack of documentation, Pendergast's influence on political operation of Kansas City government in the 1920s and 1930s is undeniable. Under his influence, millions in federal dollars and thousands of jobs were brought to Kansas City during the 1930s. His patronage and influence over the police force allowed illegal gambling, prostitution and liquor sales to prosper even during the height of Prohibition. The Pendergast political machine and his ultimate downfall shaped politics and spurred reform for decades following his incarceration in 1939. Though there are several buildings in Kansas City associated with Pendergast's business and political life, this building at 1908 Main Street was purpose-built by Pendergast as the headquarters of his political machine and served as such during the height of his influence and notoriety. The period of significance is 1926 through 1939, the period during which the building housed the headquarters of the head of Kansas City's political machine.

A draft nomination written by the late Ms. Elaine Ryder was originally submitted for this property in 1978. At that time, the Pendergast family protested the nomination as Ryder succinctly described Pendergast's criminal activity, to which the family objected. The nomination was never submitted beyond the Landmarks Commission, Kansas City. Ms. Ryder's research and body of work was used in this study.[2] Additional material, newly researched since the date of the original nomination, has been added to the following Pendergast biography and history.

ELABORATION

A simple definition of a 'political machine' would be to state that it is an organization within a political party that is dedicated to the specific goal of getting a favored candidate elected to a political position, by any measure, including graft if necessary. Most political machines are operated as a party with a machine boss. A more thorough definition of a 'political machine' is

[2] Elaine Ryder, "Pendergast Headquarters Building/Jackson Democratic Club," National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Draft, 1978. Landmarks Commission, Kansas City, MO.

offered by the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary,* a division of *Encyclopedia Britannica Concise,* which states the following:

> [A Political Machine, in U.S. politics], is a political organization that controls enough votes to maintain political and administrative control of its community. The rapid growth of cities in the 19th century created huge problems for city governments, which were often poorly organized and unable to provide services. Enterprising politicians were able to win support by offering favors, including patronage jobs and housing, in exchange for votes. Though machines often helped to restructure city governments to the benefit of their constituents, they just as often resulted in poorer service (when jobs were doled out as political rewards), corruption (when contracts or concessions were awarded in return for kickbacks), and aggravation of racial or ethnic hostilities (when the machine did not reflect the city's diversity). Reforms, suburban flight, and a more mobile population with fewer ties to city neighborhoods have weakened machine politics. Famous machines include those of William M. Tweed (New York), James M. Curley (Boston), **Thomas J. Pendergast (Kansas City, MO.)**, and Richard J. Daley (Chicago).[3] [Emphasis added.]

Not surprising, the name of Thomas (Tom) J. Pendergast, along with a few other infamous political bosses, is synonymous with the term 'Political Machine.' Tom Pendergast was a product of his times. He cut his teeth on the hard and heavy Kansas City political wrangling of the late 19th century under the guidance of his well known oldest brother, James Frances Pendergast, also known as Big Jim. Big Jim was the long reigning Alderman of the First Ward who served the West Bottoms of Kansas City. It was a time when the Kansas City political and social fronts were loaded with vice and corruption. Political history in Kansas City and Jackson County cannot be discussed without recalling the Pendergast Brothers.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pendergast's Early Life and Political Development

Thomas J. Pendergast was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, on July 22, 1872. Tom was the youngest of nine children born to Michael and Mary Reidy Pendergast. The Pendergast family was Irish Catholic and regularly attended church. Both parents emigrated from County Tipperary, Ireland and eventually settled in St. Joseph (c.1860) where they joined other

[3] "Political Machine," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary On-line*, Accessed May 25, 2011. http://www.merriam-webster.com/concise/political%20machine

members of the Pendergast family. Patriarch Michael Pendergast, was a longtime teamster member and many of his children supported the unions, including his youngest son Tom.[4] Tom's school years are clouded by confusion once he completed first through sixth grade at Webster School in St. Joseph.[5] Although he stated in his later years that he attended Christian Brothers College, St. Joseph and in St. Louis, no records of his attendance at either institution were found. Tom also claimed that he boarded at St. Mary's College, which was operated by the Catholic Jesuit order in Kansas. No records were ever found to confirm his claim. It is speculated that Tom made up these stories to help him progress both socially and professionally.[6]

Much of Tom's life, including his marriage to Carolyn (Carrie) Elizabeth Dunn Snyder, is filled with the same type of confusing data as his education. Tom stated in an interview that he married Carrie in February 1907, but public records show he was not married until 1911. Further information states that their marriage was a civil ceremony held in Belleville, Illinois, on January 25, 1911 and was later blessed in a church ceremony in February 1911. The arrival of their first child occurred in April 1911. This data is further complicated by an obituary for Carolyn Pendergast, written in 1951, which stated that she was married to Tom in 1910.[7]

Tom's start in politics began when he moved to Kansas City to work for his oldest brother, James (Big Jim), who had left St. Joseph for Kansas City, Missouri in 1876. James worked for a short time in the meatpacking industry, but by 1879 had found a job as a 'puddler' in the foundry industry. This required James to pour molten metal into molds. Although it was a hot and somewhat dangerous job, it paid well. The money from working six days a week at ten to twelve hour shifts, added to the proceeds from his love for gambling, allowed James to purchase the American House in 1881. The saloon, boarding house and hotel was located in the West Bottoms at 1328 St. Louis Avenue. At that time, the West Bottoms was the Kansas City version of New York's Bowery area. Vice ran rampant in the Bottoms and James Pendergast's American House was right in the middle of it.[8]

Big Jim expanded his business while developing his increasing interest in city politics. Around 1890, he opened a new saloon at 520 Main Street which was operated by his brother John. Jim served as the Democratic Committeeman from 1887-1892 when he decided to run for Alderman of the First Ward. Although an amendment to the city charter put an end to 'mob primaries' (a group or gathering of people on street corners to nominate a candidate from their district), getting elected to any office in Kansas City was still accomplished through bought votes. Jim bought his votes through works of good deeds and ran as a friend to the working

---

[4] Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast*, 12-23.
[5] *Ibid*, 15.
[6] *Ibid*, 22.
[7] *Ibid*, 41. Carrie was the daughter of saloonkeeper, Luke Dunn. As a family, they resided in the West Bottoms.
[8] *Ibid,* 12-23.

class man. In his first candidacy, Big Jim ran unopposed, winning the primary 555 to 180 over the Republican candidate Frank Hueben in 1892.[9]

Big Jim favored gambling and used the proceeds from his gambling business to support his welfare to the poor in the form of buckets of coal for heat in the winter and an occasional turkey to feed the hungry. He was a friend to the police officers of Kansas City and often gave them help when in trouble with superiors. In return, James received protection for his gambling business.[10]

It was this example of political business that young Tom Pendergast observed when he first came to Kansas City after the death of his father, Michael Pendergast on June 30, 1893. In late 1894, at the age of twenty-two, Tom moved permanently to Kansas City and took a job bartending at his brother's Pendergast Brothers Saloon.[11]

James was the spearhead of the Pendergast Machine and once remarked that he was considered "boss" by many of his constituents. To Big Jim, however, it was only a matter of having friends. His political and business acumen were quickly absorbed by Tom.[12] At this time, the West Bottoms continued to exemplify wide-open vice and corruption and Tom was in the thick. Tom stood in as his brother Jim's chief political lieutenant from 1892- 1910, Jim's eighteen years as a Democratic Alderman.[13]

During his political career, James had one foe whose influence split Kansas City Democrats into two opposing factions. The "Democrat Goats" followed Big Jim Pendergast, while "Democrat Rabbits" followed his rival, Joe Shannon. Destructive primary clashes between the two men, starting in 1894, carried over into general elections as well. The symbols of the Goat and Rabbit were printed on ballots for illiterate voters as an aid in voting a straight ticket.[14]

On August 29, 1900, the Jackson County Democratic Club was formed by Big Jim's Goats. By 1902, the club boasted 1,200 members. The Goats furthered the interest of James Pendergast as the cornerstone of his political business and Jackson County Democratic Club established itself as a firm foundation for the party. Despite growing support for Democrat Goats, Joe Shannon controlled a significant number of votes in the local Democratic Party. As a sign of apparent unity within the party, the Goats and Rabbits ran separate candidates in the primaries but agreed to jointly support the winner of the primary election. This became known as the Fifty-

---

[9] Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine,* Reprint, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 9-10.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid*
[12] William M. Reddig, *Tom's Town, Kansas City and the Pendergast Legend.* 1947 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, Reprint 1986), 28-32.
[13] Ryder, n.p.
[14] Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast*, 32. Harry S Truman was a Goat Democrat.

Fifty plan, and while it looked good on paper, it was never really followed by either faction of the Democratic Party.[15]

James's political career is its own unique story, but is only summarized here to understand the political byplays that influenced Tom's early political life and the path he would follow thereafter.[16] Although Tom learned about politics from his big brother Jim, it is important to note that he eventually developed his own style. Where James boasted that his success as a politician came from friends and the fact that he never accepted even one fraudulent vote, Tom was not as scrupulous.

Tom Pendergast's role in the Jackson County Democratic Club grew with his first political appointment in 1900, at the age of twenty-eight. Then Kansas City Mayor, James A. Reed, offered him the position of superintendent of streets as a payment for Pendergast's support in Reed's election. Tom took the position seriously and could be found in the dead of winter or the heat of summer, supervising the street crews.[17]

In 1902 Tom was nominated to a two-year term by the Jackson County Democratic Convention for the position of County Marshal. Although the *Kansas City Star* opposed him due to his gambling connections, Tom won by more than 5,200 votes. Tom was thirty-years old and received a salary of $4,000 a year. At the time, *The Rising Son*, a newspaper with a Republican editor and a black readership, stated that "… [Pendergast] stood for the Negro as well as the white man. No cruel treatment of prisoners. No jail scandals."[18]

Tom lost the following election for County Marshal and in 1908, once again but temporarily, accepted the appointment of street superintendent offered to him by Mayor Thomas T. Crittenden, Jr. By this time, Tom felt this position was a demotion from that of Marshal and began turning his attention to the daily business of the Pendergast organization.[19]

In 1910 Big Jim was anxious to retire. He had lost his wife Mary in 1905 and had become ill. He had a decreasing interest in business or politics and decided to turn his aldermanic seat over to Tom who won the election easily. Losing his will to live, James died November 10, 1911.

Tom Pendergast: Businessman and Political Boss

After Big Jim's death in 1911 Tom inherited Jim's followers, the Democrat Goats as they were called. By 1916 Tom was in charge of the Jackson County Democratic Club and would remain in charge until his incarceration in 1939. Tom took the Club to new heights, reaching beyond

---

[15] Larsen and Hulston*, Pendergast,* 32-34.
[16] Ryder, n.p.
[17] Larson and Hulston, *Pendergast*, 34-35. Reed also allowed James to name 123 policemen out of a total force of 173 officers, which would later prove to adversely affect the Kansas City Missouri police force.
[18] *Ibid*, 36.
[19] Ibid.

Jim's expectations but not by Jim's rules. Where Jim would buy votes through favoritism in the form of jobs, food and coal for winter heat, Tom would pad the voting ballots by using the names off the head stones of loyal yet dead democrats. This became known as the 'ghost vote'.

Under Tom's rule, the Club was fine tuned as it expanded its original operation beyond the First Ward of the West Bottoms, insinuating its influence into Kansas City government, and into the operation of the State of Missouri, even attempting to move beyond into national politics. His downfall and eventual death would occur shortly before a Missouri Democrat inherited the Oval Office.

According to historian Elaine Ryder, Kansas City's Democratic Party was splintered during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Following James's death, Tom worked to expand the organization in both Kansas City and Jackson County as he took over the Goat Democrats from James. Tom largely followed his brother's tried and true method of wooing the ward and precinct workers with promises of social welfare services along with jobs for supporters and business for Goat-friendly firms. Unlike his brother who relied only on political favors, under Tom's leadership were an amazing number of voters who seemed to rise from the dead for each and every election. Pendergast had his Goats collecting names from the cemetery that would later appear on ballots. These padded votes were known as 'ghost votes.'[20] Voter fraud was just part of the political game of control and manipulation for Tom.

Tom's image in the media was also much different than that of his brother Jim. As a city builder, James Pendergast had a good relationship with newspaper mogul William Rockhill Nelson. Nelson was a national leader of the Republican Party at that time. Upon James's death he wrote a very positive obituary in both of his newspapers, the *Kansas City Star* and the *Kansas City Times.*[21] However, Nelson "learned to dislike and vilify" Tom Pendergast and would use his newspaper to vent his hostilities, and those of the Republican Party towards Tom.[22] As early as 1910, *Kansas City Star* editorials all but stated that Tom was a person of unmitigated evil. The *Star's* opinion of Tom remained long after Nelson's death in 1915 and continued to be propagated by his newspaper.[23]

By 1915, Tom announced his resignation from the City Council on May 3, to the surprise of everyone. When asked why he resigned, he stated that "I have moved into my new home at Fifty-fourth and Wyandotte streets and I could not represent my ward and not live there very well, so I resigned."[24] His resignation from the council removed him from political office, but did not decrease his political influence over his old ward or the city as a whole.

---

[20] Ibid.
[21] *Ibid*, 37.
[22] *Ibid,* 38-39.
[23] *Ibid*, 55.
[24] *Ibid*, 55.

In addition to political control of the Kansas City and Jackson County Democratic Party, Tom had numerous business ventures throughout his life. Again and much like his school records and his marriage to Carrie, the account of his businesses cannot be fully substantiated as true and complete. In addition, Tom was not a man who put things in writing, especially his financial records. He also strongly preferred a gentleman's verbal agreement with a hand shake.

After Tom left his council seat, politically speaking, it was business as usual. He now had more time to devote to his business interests while using his political influence to expand his political and personal business ventures through the Pendergast Machine. Having given up the saloon business, Tom founded the T. J. Pendergast Wholesale Liquor Company. He used his political ties to coerce tavern owners in the First Ward into buying from his wholesale company with threats of code and license violations if they did not comply. In addition, Tom arranged for the Ross Construction Company, owned by one of his ward captains, Michael Ross, to be awarded lucrative city and county road paving contracts. It is thought that Tom may have had a silent share in the Ross Construction.[25]

The two most prominent businesses owned by Tom were the T. J. Pendergast Liquor Distributing Company and Ready Mixed Concrete Company. These two businesses served as his primary source of income, and were noted as such on income tax reports.[26] During his years sitting on the council, Tom also had two minor business interests: The Oriental Café on the corner of East 8th and Walnut and the Jefferson Hotel, an old and dilapidated, six-story hotel located on West 6th Street. Just off the lobby there was a small office that served as Tom's headquarters for the Jackson County Democratic Club until he built the building at 1908 Main in 1926.[27] In addition to these operations, Pendergast was a silent partner in several ventures including the company that disposed of the city's garbage. He also held stock in a local race track and owned several race horses.[28]

By 1918, tension between the two Democratic factions, the Goats and Rabbits, as well as the Republican Party accelerated. Thugs and ruffians, both local and from elsewhere, began showing up at the voting polls. Innocent voters and bystanders were victimized by ruffians, simply for being at the polls. This kind of activity was played out in the 1918 general election when Albert L. Reeves, Republican, ran for the office of U.S. Representatives. Goat-controlled police stood by and watched as one voter was beaten unconscious and left bleeding. Witnesses carried him out, only to witness even more brutality as thugs intimidated journalists and other onlookers.[29] In this election, Albert Reeves suffered a serious defeat. He charged that at many of the Goat- controlled polling stations, Pendergast election officials threw out the legitimate

[25] *Ibid*, 60. Tom's ownership could not be substantiated but is most likely the case according to Larsen.
[26] Sherrie Smith, "What Companies did political boss Tom Pendergast own? " Kansas City Public Library Online, http://www.kclibrary.org/?q=kchistory/what-companies-did-political-boss-tom-pendergast-own
[27] Ibid.
[28] Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast*, 60-61, 87.
[29] *Ibid*, 59.

votes and replaced them with votes already prepared by the Pendergast machine. At the time, with the end of World War I in the foreground, election fraud was paid little attention.[30]

Prohibition came into play in 1919. Since most of his business relied on liquor sales to taverns, Tom filed a suit claiming that the Volstead Act, which enforced Prohibition, was unconstitutional. Tom's case was unsuccessful and he found that he and his partners had to close the wholesale liquor company. The remaining inventory of liquor was stored in government warehouses. Tom reorganized his company as the T. J. Pendergast Distributing Company, selling wholesale medicinal-waters and soft drinks. Tom often stated that he could have made a fortune from bootleg sales but nonetheless he strictly adhered to Prohibition law. Yet, Pendergast had the police department turn a blind eye to those establishments that freely poured bootleg liquor.[31]

Pendergast's distribution business may have been hurt by Prohibition, but his political influence grew throughout the decade of the 1920s, peaking in the first few years of the Depression. Missouri State archivist, Kenneth H. Winn PhD gives an assessment of Tom Pendergast's influence on local, state and national politics in a thesis covering the reforms and erosions that have occurred in the history of the State of Missouri's 'Representative Government':

> The politician with the greatest effect on Missourians during the twentieth century was Thomas J. Pendergast. Harry Truman may have broadly shaped American life in the Cold War, but his friend, Tom Pendergast, shaped the everyday life of thousands of Missourians, first in Kansas City, then across the entire state. Indeed, the reworking of much of Missouri government came in the wake of his fall from power. Perhaps only Franklin Roosevelt, who fed hungry Missourians and taught them to think differently about their government, had a larger impact. Even then, Roosevelt worked hand-in-hand with Pendergast—until he helped break him.[32]

This assessment of the impact of Tom's political influence refers to the years that were his most productive, yet also his most corrupt. At no time during Tom's political bossism was he more organized or more influential than when he conducted political business under the guise of the Jackson County Democratic Club from his building at 1908 Main Street between 1926 and 1939. The three-room office on the second floor was unassuming, not reflecting the power or influence wielded within its non-descript walls.

---

[30] *Ibid.* Reeves never ran for any office after the 1918 election. However, later appointed to the Western District US Supreme Court, Judge Albert L. Reeves, along with Judge Merrill E. Otis, would later convict Pendergast for Income Tax Evasion in 1939 resulting in a 15 month term in Leavenworth for Pendergast. See also Maurice M. Mulligan, *Missouri Waltz: The Inside Of The Pendergast Machine By The Man Who Smashed It.* (New York: Scribner's, 1948).
[31] *Ibid*, 62.
[32] Kenneth H. Winn, *It All Adds Up: Reform and the Erosion of Representative Government in Missouri, 1900-2000,* Online, SOS, Missouri – State Archives, Accessed June 6, 2011. http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/pubs/article/article.asp

While Tom's influence on Kansas City politics and beyond is indisputable, it is another thing to try to list every individual that made up the "Pendergast Machine." For one, as in business Tom Pendergast did not keep a written record as his memory served him well enough for political favors and payoffs. To this end, no written records from Tom Pendergast's hand exist.

The Pendergast Machine was made up of block captains, precinct captains and ward captains, for whom positions were political payments for favors done for the Machine. These positions could be changed frequently on the whim of the Boss. These individuals answered to an organized system of favors and payoffs, while working in Tom's favor. The organization was so well established that every five voters had a captain. This volunteer force of 'reporters,' served as Tom's eyes and ears, throughout Kansas City, Jackson County and the state. Most of Kansas City's electoral outcomes were decided prior to any actual election taking place. He also kept his political promises, and yet politically, what Tom wanted, Tom got.

One prominent individual who was instrumental in the Pendergast Machine and had a respectable amount of influence with Tom was his nephew, James M. (Jim) Pendergast, the oldest son of Tom's brother Mike. It was Jim who strongly suggested that Tom give his support to Harry S Truman in the 1934 elections for the US Senate. During his years sitting in for his uncle in the Main Street office, Jim was being groomed as the next leader of the Democratic Goats. By 1939, Jim had become the director of the Jackson County Democratic Club even though it was upon his uncle's forced retirement from politics.[33]

1908 Main Street: The Unofficial Seat of Kansas City Government (1926-1939)

It was not by accident that Tom Pendergast had the office of his political operations constructed and attached to his hotel property at 1904 Main Street, which he had purchased in 1924 from the Dubinsky Brothers. The second floor access from the Monroe Hotel, to Tom's office at 1908 Main, served as a secret portal between the outside world and the Jackson County Democratic Club. By entering the hotel, appointments related to Pendergast's political dealings could remain a clandestine affair and the world was less the wiser. Enemies of Pendergast were never quite sure who was visiting the Boss or why.

Historian Robert H. Ferrell wrongly stated that the Monroe Hotel located at 1904 Main Street "…in which Pendergast housed his homeless supporters and retired minions, disappeared under the wrecker's ball." He also stated "…the two-story [Pendergast] brick building stands by itself."[34] Nonetheless, the Monroe Hotel is extant and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (2009-3-13).[35]

---

[33] William A. Reddig, *Tom's Town,* (Columbia; University of Missouri Press, 1986), 369-386.
[34] Robert H. Ferrell, *The Kansas City Investigation: Pendergast's Downfall 1938-1939*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 9.
[35] Cydney Millstein and Mary Ann Warfield, "Monroe Hotel" National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 2009.

Located in the mid-town area of Kansas City, less than a mile from Union Station, the Monroe Hotel was readily accessible to travelers from all walks of life. An empty lot sat between the Monroe Hotel and what was once the Globe Hotel that was demolished sometime in the 1950s. The lot was perfect as the site of a new two-story brick building that would contain the future offices of the Jackson County Democratic Club. Tom Pendergast was the chairman of the club's board for over two decades.

Raymond H. Sanneman, the architect for the Monroe Hotel, was hired by Tom to design the new office building. It was constructed adjacent to the south side of the Monroe Hotel by the Fleming-Gilcrist Construction Company in 1926 at a total cost of $15,000. As the new headquarter of the Jackson County Democratic Club it was also where Pendergast spent his most productive and controlling years over the Democratic Party of Kansas City.[36]

Although a small building, 1908 Main Street featured a storefront for two commercial businesses on the first floor, while the second floor served as Tom's office when conducting his political business.[37] Additionally, Tom utilized the Monroe Hotel by cutting through the wall at the second floor level between the Monroe and his newly constructed office in the northeast corner of the new building. The second floor doorway from the Monroe to his office allowed certain politicians and businessmen access to meetings with Tom without being directly seen entering 1908 Main. To Tom, politics was a business-like, no-frills operation. However, due to its secretive nature and almost espionage-like access, the Monroe Hotel access was also more closely guarded by Pendergast's secretary, Captain Elijah Matheus, who carefully screened all visitors entering through the Monroe.[38]

When Tom Pendergast was not in his office, his nephew Jim would sit in, issuing decisions based on what he learned from his uncle. However, those who came always hoped for an audience with the boss himself. Lines for the common folk to enter 1908 Main would total fifty to sixty men, including job seekers and the homeless, as well as vendors and small town politicians looking for favors. These court-like meetings were held three days a week from six a.m. until noon by Tom. At other times, especially during busy election campaigns, other Pendergast lieutenants or his nephew, Jim, would keep the office open.[39]

---

[36] Ryder, "Pendergast Headquarters Building/Jackson Democratic Club, Section 8.
[37] *Gates City Directories* listed the Baird Machinery Company at 1908 Main Street from 1927 through the early 1940s. Curiously, the first entry for Pendergast's 2nd floor office was in 1929. It listed the 'Jackson Democratic Club' (for reasons unknown, 'County' was left out of the title). Pendergast was listed as the Chairman of the Board with George Harrington President; Fred Bellmere, Harry Truman and Herman Sonken Vice Presidents; E. H. Mathews, Secretary; and J. J. Manning, Treasurer.
[38] Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast*, 74. The office for Pendergast's Ready Mixed Concrete Company, established in 1928, was located at 908 West 25th Street where he would go after he finished his political business on Main (p. 85).
[39] Ryder, 8.1.

It is said that Tom conducted political affairs in such a manner that it never occurred to people that it was an odd way to run a democracy. What they saw was a man who got things done on their behalf. After meeting with the Boss, a person knew they would go away with a few dollars to buy bread or more treasured, piece of paper stating that the bearer be added to a payroll by cutting through all red-tape to do so. Although many of the jobs doled out through Pendergast were for public employment, a number of companies owed Tom as well, and paid him back by honoring similar employment requests.[40]

Pendergast succeeded in placing his Democratic Club backed politicians into positions of great importance to him. Tom owned Kansas City, as well as Jackson County. His democratic machine was working to finely line his pockets, as well as those of men loyal to him. Pendergast clinched his power in Kansas City after a new city charter was written in 1925. The new charter would change the structure of city government by placing a city manager in charge of all business transactions while answering to the city council. The position and power of the mayoral office was greatly reduced. The charter was to change Kansas City into a non-partisan government. Pendergast gladly backed the charter as he found that it would give him even more control over the council if he could place one of his men into the City Manager's position.

Shortly after the new city charter was established two important Pendergast-backed individuals were placed into prominent political offices. A small group of Kansas City businessmen, including Tom, met in the office of banker William T. Kemper in November 1925 to determine who would become City Manager. Henry F. McElroy, one of Pendergast's lieutenants and a former judge in Western Jackson County was chosen to the position of Kansas City Manager.[41] In 1927, Harry S Truman won back a seat in Jackson County government as the presiding Judge of Eastern Jackson County. These two men greatly impacted the Pendergast Machine as one brought out the worst of Pendergast's party while the latter, brought out the best.

McElroy liked an audience. Once he settled into his newly formed position, Henry McElroy appropriated the mayor's office at City Hall, and sent then second term Republican mayor, Alfred I. Beach, to an office behind the City Clerk's office. The mayor became little more than a figure head. In addition, normal mayoral duties such as welcoming dignitaries on their visits to Kansas City or throwing out the first ball during baseball season, were also usurped by McElroy.[42] While Mayor Beach was a Republican, as was the police department, McElroy was the "hired man" of the democratic majority that lead the city council. Tom Pendergast knew McElroy to be a dependable disciple to his machine which was why McElroy was able to land the job in the first place.[43]

---

[40] Reddig, *Tom's Town,* 130-133.
[41] Reddig, *Tom's Town*, 120-130. Several chapters of this book discuss, in depth, the position that McElroy played within the Pendergast Machine.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid*, 126.

During his thirteen years as City Manager, McElroy pleased Pendergast with his success in hiding a huge deficit while the city's credit continued to rate high with bankers. The city government was managing to meet all of its current obligations under McElroy, as he knew how to throw up a smoke screen if anyone came looking for improprieties in his book-keeping.[44]

McElroy doled out city contracts for public works and supplies to politically favored entities. Although Pendergast's Ready-Mixed Concrete had a monopoly on these jobs, as well as fixed prices, McElroy always diverted public attention by touting the high quality of the material purchased under the political system. In addition, when the public grumbled about partisan jobholders, McElroy would tell them that they did great work for little pay thereby saving the taxpayer in the long run.[45]

In 1930 Pendergast was instrumental in writing the Kansas City's Ten Year Plan which would pave many miles of city and county roads and add buildings to the Kansas City's sky-line, mostly with Pendergast Ready-Mix concrete. Pendergast never set foot in city hall during McElroy's years as City Manager. Instead, all political and business issues were handled at 1908 Main. It was Pendergast who wrote the script, while McElroy delivered the performance.[46]

In direct contrast to the Pendergast-McElroy connection was the relationship that Pendergast developed with Harry S Truman between 1926 and 1939. Tom's nephew Jim served as a lieutenant under Captain Truman during World War I. In 1921, Truman and Jim roomed together during the American Legion annual state convention in St. Joseph, Missouri. Truman was still in business as a haberdasher at the time but it was doing poorly. Truman saw politics as a way to make positive changes to in government.

At this time, Truman expressed his desire to enter politics to his wife Bess who thought he would make an honorable judge (county commissioner). In 1922 Truman entered the primary elections in Jackson County and came out a front running candidate for eastern county judge. The Pendergast Machine carefully waited until Truman had the support of veteran friends before throwing their support in his favor.[47] Once Pendergast offered his backing, Truman easily won his seat as eastern county judge from 1923 -1924. However, he failed in his re-election bid largely due to a split in the Democratic Party. Later, Truman was again elected, this time wining two four-year terms as the presiding judge of Jackson County in 1927-1930 and again in 1931-1934, with Tom's full support.

While McElroy was a showman as the City Manager, Truman was a solid and honest politician often described as stubborn for the truth. Unlike McElroy, Truman's actions were not completely scripted by Pendergast. Truman only acquiesced to Pendergast's requests once he was personally convinced 1) it was legal 2) the best solution and 3) beneficial to all. When McElroy

[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid*, 128.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ferrell, Truman and Pendergast, 7-10.

did as Pendergast ordered, Truman did what was right. Where McElroy was perhaps the dark side of bossism politics, exemplifying the worst values of a political machine; Truman would question Tom's requests and seldom do his bidding unless he thought Tom was right. This conundrum ran parallel to Pendergast's own personality.

The golden years of Tom's power are recognized as 1926 through 1932. During this period, Pendergast presented himself as a kind and compassionate man who only wanted to serve his city and its people and quite often Tom acted as a benefactor to the underdogs of society.[48] He offered his help to men looking for work, or paid fines they could not afford to pay from their own resources. In addition he frequently assisted the "needy" with their medical bills. During the Depression, these acts of charity were especially warranted. In Pendergast's words:

> What is government for if it isn't to help the people? They're only interested in local conditions—not about the tariff or the war debts. They've got their own problems. They want consideration for their troubles in their house, across the street or around the corner—paving, a water main, police protection, consideration for a complaint about taxes. They vote for the fellow who gives it to them…We never ask them about their politics. We know pretty well how they will vote after we help them.[49]

As the Great Depression took a heavy toll on the financial well being of the entire nation, Kansas City was not doing too badly in the way of construction projects financed through President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA). From the urging of the two Missouri Senators in 1935, one of Pendergast's cronies, Matthew S. Murray, was made the Missouri WPA Director and given the responsibility of 60,000 to 80,000 jobs to dispense. Pendergast's political influence brought many of these jobs to Kansas City and Jackson County—increasing his political power and profits to his business. Pendergast's concrete company benefitted from the many WPA projects in Missouri, with the majority of the monies granted by the WPA, winding up in Kansas City and Jackson County.[50]

In 1931, Kansas City was given home rule over its police department. However, this actually meant that the Pendergast Machine would control the department. In addition to the police, Tom ruled the city and the county. Kansas City was at work and progressing with numerous buildings under construction including the Municipal Auditorium and The Municipal Police Headquarters

---

[48] Larsen, *Pendergast*, 71.
[49] *Ibid*, 72.
[50] Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast*, Introduction, 3. Pendergast was successful in getting Matthew S. Murray, appointed to the position of director of Public Works by City Manager Henry F. McElroy. Both were later investigated and tried for tax evasion. McElroy suffered a fatal heart attack before serving out his sentencing.

while Brush Creek was being paved. The Pendergast Ready Mixed Concrete Company was involved in a majority, if not all, of these civic projects.[51]

Throughout this period, Pendergast's political activity had become bolder, more self-assured. He saw himself as a clever genius who could work all the political and business angles to his own advantage. At the same time, his gambling habits were growing out of hand. Although he thought of himself as invincible, always on the top of his gambling habit (even when losing), it was this frame of mind that would lead to his world crashing down around him.

Pendergast's fall from grace is rooted at the height of his political influence. When the 1932 Missouri gubernatorial race rolled around, Pendergast threw his support behind Guy B. Parks for governor. Park's won yet his governorship was marred by voting fraud and an insurance kickbacks scandal, all while under Pendergast's watchful eye. The governor's mansion in Jefferson City became known as 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' while the Jackson County Democratic Club's office on Main Street was referred to as the state capital. Unknown to Parks at that time of his victory, is that he was about to become instrumental in the insurance scandal that would break the Boss in 1939.[52]

In 1930, insurance companies operating in Missouri complained of a 10% roll-back in rates ordered by the Insurance Department of Missouri, specifically, on fire insurance. Companies claimed that this was a confiscatory act that infringed on their constitutional rights. It was taken to federal court where a three-judge panel ruled that the insurance companies could continue to collect the higher-rate but ordered the monies to stay in escrow until they could bring forth a ruling. Rather than simply collecting the 10% roll-back, the companies actually raised the rates by $16^{2/3}$ %. The federal court ruled against this increase and ordered that the collected amount be added to the escrow account which resulted in escrowing nearly $10 million.[53]

In 1935, Pendergast was asked to help get the insurance monies released by influencing Governor Parks and members of his cabinet. Charles Street, representative of eight insurance companies, approached Pendergast and offered him $200,000 to help him get $10 million in funds that had been impounded. Pendergast declined so Street upped the ante to $500,000 to which Tom agreed. To quicken the favor, the amount was increased to $750,000.[54] Pendergast pressured Governor Parks, well known as a Pendergast puppet, and his appointee, Robert Emmet O'Malley, superintendent of insurance in Missouri, to release the escrow funds.[55]

---

[51] Kansas City Public Library Online, http://www.kclibrary.org/?q=kchistory/what-companies-did-political-boss-tom-pendergast-own
[52] Robert H. Ferrell, *Truman and Pendergast,* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 20-29.
[53] Lawrence H. Larsen and Nancy J. Hulston, *Pendergast* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), 131-136.
[54] Ibid.
[55] *Ibid*.

Pendergast received the first installment on the insurance kick-back of $50,000 cash delivered to his 1908 Main Street office on May 9, 1935. The deal to release the insurance money was worked out at the Muehlebach Hotel between Street, O'Malley and attorneys for the insurance companies. Payments on the bribe continued, including one large payment of $330,000 that was sent to the Pendergast residence on Ward Parkway during the spring of 1936.[56] These kickbacks may have been financially successful, but would later be the cause of Pendergast's fall from power and the extensive reform of Kansas City and state government.

Though politically successfully in his choice for Missouri governor in 1932, cracks in his influence on state and federal politics began to appear at the same time. That year, Pendergast failed to commit the Missouri delegation to Franklin Roosevelt at the Democratic Convention. Roosevelt was still seeking support for the presidential nomination. Pendergast had pledged the Missouri delegation to former mayor and Senator of Missouri (1929), James A. Reed who had been a Pendergast ally for over thirty years. Roosevelt retaliated by appointing Maurice Milligan, a Pendergast antagonist, to the position of U.S. District Attorney for Western Missouri. Pendergast tried to appease Roosevelt by sending a 'New Dealer' to the Senate in the guise of Harry S Truman. This is the major reason Pendergast supported Truman's candidacy when Truman decided he was ready to climb the political ladder.[57]

Then in the 1934 Democratic primary for the United States Senate, Truman beat his chief opponent, Congressman John C. Cochran of St. Louis, by 120,180 to 1,221 votes in Kansas City. The margins were similar for Jackson County as well. Ironically, Pendergast had backed Cochran two years earlier in which Cochran won his seat with 92,868 total votes in Jackson County with 89,972 votes coming from Kansas City alone. But it was Harry S Truman that believed in Roosevelt's New Deal measures to get the country back on its feet during the Great Depression.[58] When Harry departed for Washington D.C., "Pendergast told him…'work hard, keep your mouth shut, and answer your mail.'" [59]

Ironically, Pendergast's successful support of Missouri's next gubernatorial candidate (1936) quickened his fall from power. According to Ryder

> Pendergast slipped in 1936 when he miscalculated by backing Lloyd C. Stark in the Missouri gubernatorial race. Soon after Stark won the governorship, he turned his back on Pendergast and began working to dislodge the Pendergast Machine's hold on state level government. Stark "…named Pendergast adversaries to Kansas City election and liquor control boards, successfully lobbied the legislature for a permanent voter registration law and for authority to control the Kansas City Police Department. He also solicited

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.8.1. Milligan would soon play a roll in Pendergast's final days as Boss Tom.
[58] Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast*, 4. See also, McCullough's *Truman* Chapter 6, "The Senator from Pendergast," for an account of the Senatorial race between Cochran, Truman and Milligan. 207-213.
[59] McCullough, 213.

the Internal Revenue Service to begin an audit of Pendergast's income tax returns."[60]

In 1936 Maurice Milligan with the help of Missouri governor Lloyd C. Stark, began an investigation on the Pendergast Machine, first looking into voter fraud in the 1936 election which led to the conviction of 279 Kansas Citians who defrauded their voting rights. Both Stark and Milligan went to Washington D.C. to meet with President Roosevelt, on a tip from Bennett Clark that Pendergast had failed to report large sums of income from his various dealings. Roosevelt notified the Treasury Department and an investigation into Pendergast's financials was launched.[61]

Three years later, after a lengthy and thorough investigation was completed into Pendergast's wheeling and dealing, J. Edgar Hoover arrived in Kansas City on April 3, 1939, to attend the trial.[62] The trial was held in the Western District of the Federal Supreme Court, located on the southeast corner of 8th and Grand Streets. It is counted among the most important trials held in the court of Western District Missouri.

A complete history of Pendergast's trouble with the Treasury Department is well documented in a number of books, specifically McCullough's *Truman.* In addition, Robert Ferrel's editing of Special Agent Rudolph H. Hartmann's research for the Treasury Department in the late 1930s on Pendergast's investigation and court records appear in the book, *The Kansas City Investigation: Pendergast's Downfall 1938-1939.*

Despite hefty kickbacks from insurance companies and profits from New Deal funded projects, Pendergast was nearly in financial ruin as a consequence of his gambling addiction, which was later estimated as a $6 million loss on horses—well hidden from family, friends, and the government. He used only cash and devised fictitious names to hide his income sources. By the late 1930s his debt to bookies and other gamblers gave those he owed virtual control of Pendergast business.[63]

The final nail in Pendergast's coffin, literally and figuratively, was his health. Prior to the Treasury Department's investigation, Tom had become seriously ill and unable to handle the staircase in his own building. His stamina had been damaged by the serious heart attack he had suffered a few years earlier. This illness was complicated by his sixteen year battle with syphilis, for which he received continuous treatment. With little strength, he would enter through the Monroe Hotel and take the elevator to the second floor where he would then enter his building through the second floor doorway.

---

[60] Ryder, 8.2.
[61] *Ibid*, 236.
[62] McCullough, 239.
[63] McCullough, 235.

On April 7, 1939, Tom was sentenced on two counts of tax evasion. On the first count he received a sentence of 15 months incarceration. On the second count, he was sentenced to three years and a $10,000 fine. Judge Otis then suspended the sentence due to Tom's poor health to five years probation after serving 15 months in prison. Tom was also banned from gambling in any form, banned from all political activity unless he received a pardon from the President, and was not allowed to set foot in his office at 1908 Main Street during his probationary period.[64]

Tom lived out the remainder of his life in his home at 5650 Ward Parkway. One day Tom Jr. discovered his father sleeping on a cot and could only move around in three rooms of his mansion. Subsequently, Tom Jr. moved his father to the Ambassador Hotel for a few days. When he brought his father home, Carolyn, Tom Sr.'s wife, left him and took her furs and other valuables with her. Tom had never changed the will he made in 1939, so Carolyn received what remained in the estate upon Tom's death on January 26, 1945. He was only visited by two of his daughters and died at Menorah Hospital of a massive coronary thrombosis. [65] Tom's funeral was held at Visitation Church on Main Street on January 29, 1945. Harry S Truman was in attendance along with over 700 mourners. Tom's wife, Carolyn Pendergast did not attend her husband's funeral. Thomas J. Pendergast is buried at Calvary Cemetery on Kansas City's south side.[66]

Political Reform after the Fall of Boss Pendergast

After Tom Pendergast's hard fall from political bossism, his Kansas City political machine quietly dissolved into the background of local and state politics. Although the club remained intact after Tom's death in 1945 under his nephew James M. Pendergast, it never again resembled the machine for which Big Jim had laid the ground work in the West Bottoms during the 1890s.

Unlike his Uncle Tom, Jim Pendergast was a graduate of the Kansas City School of Law and an accomplished attorney. James continued on as president to the organization of the Jackson County Democratic Club after Tom's incarceration for tax evasion. His guidance kept the organization running within the legal parameters of political influence. The "machine" was gone and never again aspired to influence and control Missouri politics in the manner in which Tom had excelled during his years sitting behind his desk at 1908 Main Street.

'Pendergastism,' as imprinted on Kansas City's political history, is a topic that will be analyzed for decades to come. One Pendergast legacy on Missouri politics is the establishment of the Non-Partisan Court Plan which evolved as a result of Pendergast's manipulations of the

[64] Larsen and Hulston, *Pendergast*, 147-149.
[65] *Ibid*, 185-187.
[66] *Ibid.* 187.

Missouri judicial system through crony influenced judicial seats. While not perfect, and not totally non-partisan, it has been in use since the 1940s.[67]

Pendergast-Truman Connection: 1926-1939

The previous section touched briefly on the political relationship between Tom and Harry S Truman. Truman knew that Pendergast wielded the largest portion of political power in Jackson County. Truman had been a vice-president of the Jackson County Democratic Club for several years and continued to pay his annual dues well after Tom sent him off to his Senate seat in Washington D.C. in 1934. Truman knew that Tom was not always on the right side but he also knew he needed Tom's support to win any kind of political position coming out of Jackson County, Missouri.

Tom McCullough, in his book *Truman,* stated that:

> The power of Tom Pendergast had become as great as or possibly greater than that of any political boss in the country. Major changes had taken place, promising larger roles for nearly everyone of ability in the organization.[68]

Democrats, holding various kinds of political aspirations, found themselves meeting in Tom Pendergast's office. As previously mentioned, Harry S Truman received Pendergast's endorsement when he ran for the seat of judge in Jackson County in the 1922 county elections. This was the beginning of an affable, yet at times, tenuous relationship.

As Truman had begun to make a name for himself in Missouri politics, his political career could only advance with support from the Pendergast machine. To this end, David McCullough also stated:

> [Truman's] anguish over his future was deep-seated and painful. Having served two consecutive terms in the court, he was ineligible to run again for county judge, and unlike so many others in public life, he had no law practice or insurance business to fall back on, nor any private income. …with the end of his term in 1934, Harry S Truman would be fifty years old, and without the blessing of Tom Pendergast there was really not a lot more he could do in politics, whatever his aspirations. As he himself said, everything would be alright as long as the Big Boss believes in me….[69]

---

[67] Winn, http://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/pubs/article/article.asp For more information on the Non-partisan Court Plan please see Dr. Winn's essay.

[68] David McCullough, *Truman,* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 195.
[69] *Ibid*, 194-196.

In the fall of 1933, Truman had set his hopes on running for a seat in Congress but Pendergast decided to back another man. Truman's hopes were dashed, but only for a short time. In May 1934, Pendergast was looking for an amenable Missouri senatorial candidate to send to Washington, D.C. Although Pendergast had at least five men to choose from, none were quite who he wanted to back. It was again on the advice of Tom's nephew Jim, that Harry S Truman was placed on the Democratic ballot. Truman was honest and upstanding, but had on occasion gone against Pendergast's urgings while serving as judge in Jackson County.[70] Reluctantly, Pendergast backed Truman. Truman accepted the offer but at a price from his opponents who saw him as a Pendergast stooge. Once he completed his freshman term in the US Senate, Truman distanced himself from Pendergast influence to become his own man.[71]

When the voting fraud trials were held in Jackson County, Truman had been in the Senate for only a few years. The possibility of fallout from the voter fraud trials in Kansas City would tarnish him. Later the Pendergast income tax evasion hearings would also weigh heavily in Truman's mind, wondering if by accident he could be culpable in any way. Truman was investigated and found to be cleared of any wrong doing in both instances. Although Tom Pendergast served 15 months in the Leavenworth Penitentiary, the two men remained on friendly terms. When Pendergast died in January 1945, Truman attended his funeral at Visitation Catholic Church on Main Street.[72] Just months later, on April 12, 1945, Truman became the 33rd President of the United States.

Again, much has been written about the relationship between Tom Pendergast and Harry S Truman and can be found in the bibliography of this study. Since Pendergast never recorded anything in writing, part of the full story is already lost. The pieces of information taken from news interviews, written statements of first person accounts, family records and those of the final court hearings during Tom's trial in 1939, only give a one dimensional picture of this historic figure. Data located in the Harry S Truman Library present a more human side of Pendergast through the person notes and letters as written by Truman.

CONCLUSION

The Pendergast Machine, as originally established by James Pendergast in the late 1890s, was a political organization through which Thomas J. Pendergast rose to the heights of his political influence in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri, between 1926 and 1939.
While Big Jim Pendergast maintained a somewhat clean organization within the Democratic Party, his younger brother Thomas J. would take the organization beyond Big Jim's dream. Although Tom ran a dirtier Machine than his brother, he was able to maintain a loyal following of

[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid*, 195-207.
[72] Truman's attendance infuriated the Pendergast children. Tom Pendergast Jr. called Truman's presence an act of grandstanding by taking the attention away from his father's funeral.

voters that continued to support their Boss and the Jackson County Democratic Club even after his incarceration for income tax evasion in April 1939.

Tom's years of political activism in Kansas City, Jackson County, as well as the State of Missouri, and his bid to insinuate his power into national elections, gave him an unprecedented amount of notoriety as a powerful contingent in the Democratic process. Some would say he was a kind and generous man who took care of the poor of Kansas City. There are those, along with William Rockhill Nelson, who vilified Pendergast as a self-serving crook who never did anything that would not be of personal benefit. Nonetheless, Thomas J. Pendergast left a lasting impression on the City of Kansas City, through his vision of general welfare for the public that kept so many citizens working during the era of the Great Depression.

Thomas J. Pendergast attained national notoriety while seated in his office as chairman of the board of directors for the Jackson County Democratic Club at 1908 Main Street. It was while making decisions, meeting with politicians and other powerful political figures at this location that Tom reached the very pinnacle of his political career.

His lasting legacy is the fact that for all of Pendergast's wrong doing, one of America's great presidents, Harry S Truman, known for his straight talk and honorable demeanor was the greatest success story of Pendergast's years as Boss of the Democrat Party in Kansas City, Missouri.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Published

Dorsett, Lyle W. *The Pendergast Machine.* Reprint. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980.

Hartmann, Rudolph H. with Robert H. Farrell ed. *The Kansas City Investigation: Pendergast's Downfall 1938-1939.* Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 1999.
Special Agent Rudolph Hartmann led the investigation into Pendergast's income tax evasion for which he was convicted in 1939. Robert Ferrell edited Hartmann's work which goes into detail of Pendergast's political and business dealings leading up to his incarceration in Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1939. The book also covers the conviction of his aides in the Kansas City voter fraud case as well as others connected to him that were sentenced to tax evasion as well, after being stored away in the Treasury Department archives for fifty-six years. Robert Farrell is known as a leading scholar on the American Presidency, he is also Professor Emeritus of History at the Bloomington campus of Indiana University.

Larsen, Lawrence H. and Nancy J. Hulston. *Pendergast.* University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 1997.
Larsen and Hulston's book gives an insightful history of Tom Pendergast's life prior to the 1920s and his rise as Kansas City's Democratic political boss. Larsen's comprehensive research covers the local, state and national news stories surrounding the Pendergast Machine. In addition, research for this book extended into the Thomas J. Pendergast vertical files at the Truman Library. The bibliography offers an extensive list of resources for further study. At the time the book was published, Larsen was a Professor of History at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

McCullough, David. *Truman.* New York; Simon and Schuster, 1992.
Includes an excellent account of Truman's relationship with Thomas J. Pendergast and how the Pendergast machine backed Truman's bid for the Senate.

Reddig, William M. *Tom's Town: Kansas City and the Pendergast Legend*. Reprint. Columbia: Missouri University Press, 1986.

Unpublished

Millstein, Cydney and MaryAnn Warfield. "The Monroe Hotel." National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 2009.

Pendergast Files Online. "A Man A Plan and a Lot of Concrete," Online, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City Missouri.
http://www.kclibrary.org/?q=blog/week-kansas-city-history/man-plan-and-lot-concrete

_____. "What companies did political boss Tom Pendergast own? " Online, Kansas City Public Library. http://www.kclibrary.org/?q=kchistory/what-companies-did-political-boss-tom-pendergast-own

Ryder, Elaine. "Pendergast Headquarters Building/Jackson Democratic Club," National Register Of Historic Places Inventory, Draft, 1978.

Verbal Boundary Description

The North 24.75 Feet of Lot 484 EXC Part taken for alley and Main Street, Block 36 McGee's Addition, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property of the Pendergast Headquarters' Building, 1908 Main Street, Kansas City, Jackson County, includes the entire parcel historically associated with the property.

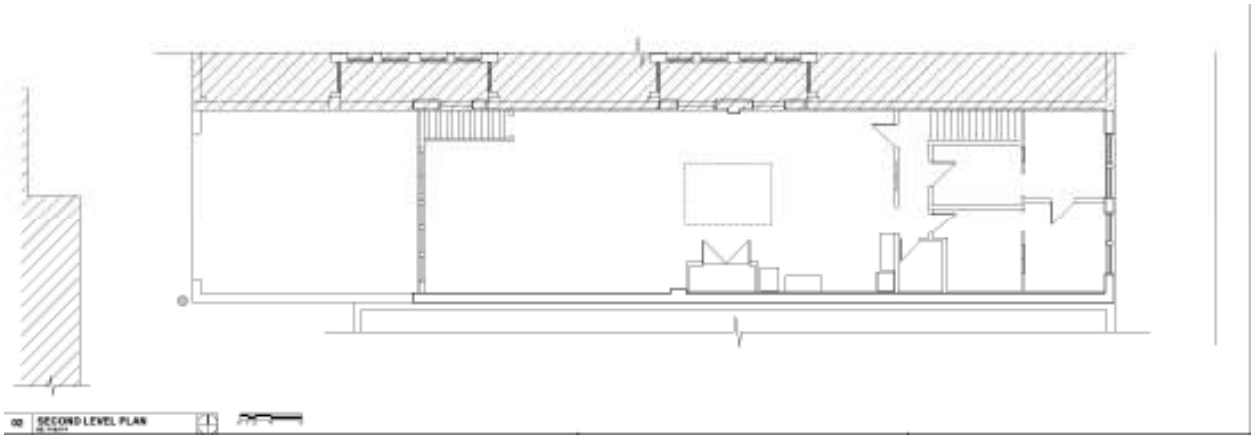
Key to Photographs

Richard Welnowski, Kansas City, Photographer. April 2011.

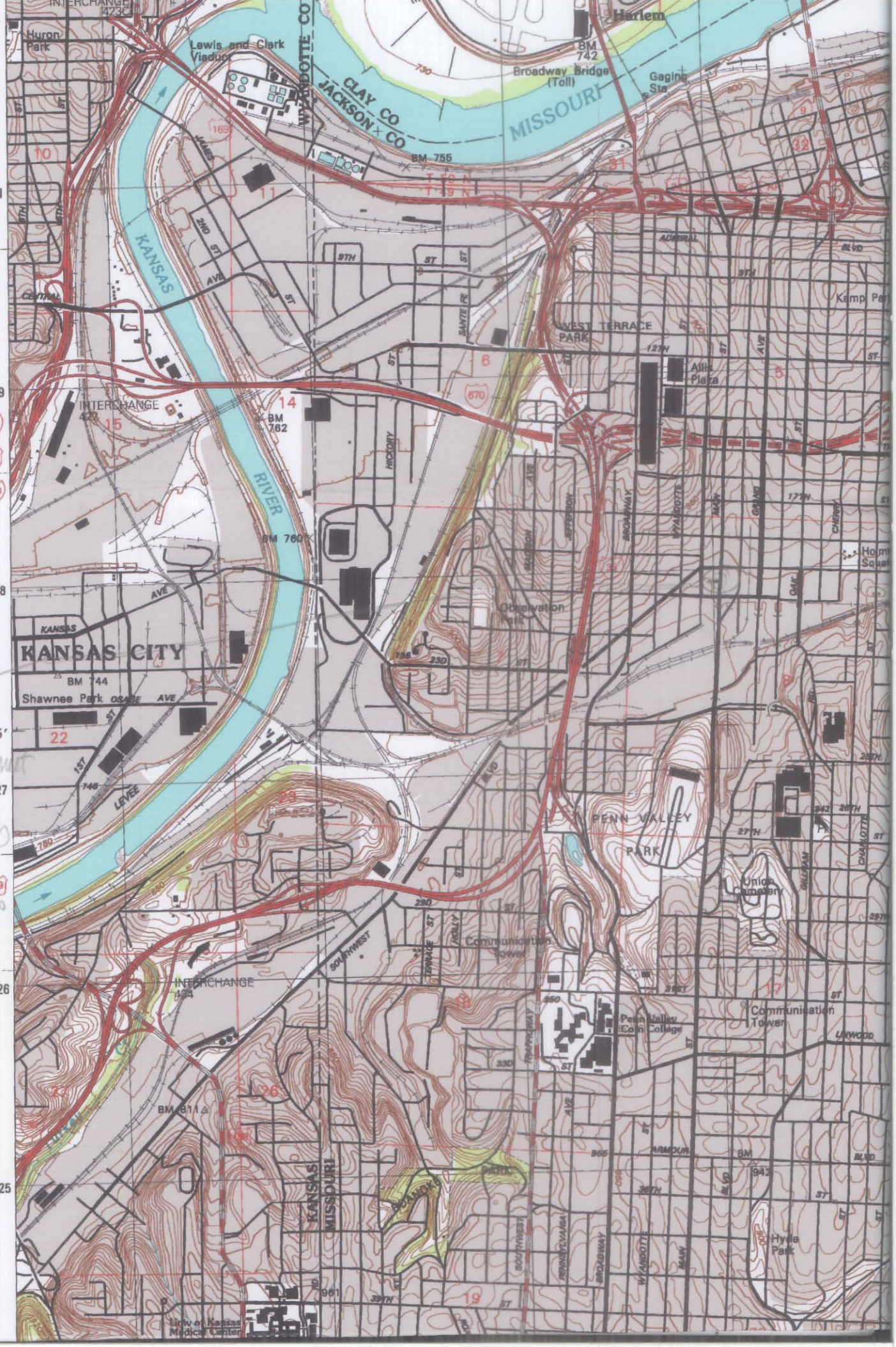
1. Main or east façade; view facing west
2. Main or east and south façade; view facing northwest
3. South and west facades, view facing northeast
4. Vestibule at first story; view facing northwest
5. Second floor hallway; view facing south
6. Office commons, second floor; view facing west
7. Waiting room, second floor; view facing east
8. Northeast office, second floor; view facing east
9. Northeast office, second floor; view facing southwest
10. Southeast office, second floor; view facing north

Pendergast Headquater's Building, 1908 Main Street, 1940s. Source: Landmarks Commission, Kansas City, Missouri.

Existing Conditions, Main or east elevation. Source: el dorado architects, Kansas City, Missouri



Second Floor, Source: el dorado architects, Kansas City, Missouri



Thomas J. Pendergast Headquarters Building, 1908 Main Street Kansas City Jackson County MO
15/363080/4327760

1910
1905

1910

908

MISSION