NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

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 Commerce Tower

Other names/site number Commerce Bank

Name of related Multiple Property Listing N/A

2. Location

Street & number 911 Main Street | N/A | not for publication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 64105

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this _X_ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

___ national ___ statewide _X_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ___ A ___ B _X_ C ___ D

Mark A. Miles FEBRUARY 18, 2014

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

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

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

_____ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

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

X	private
	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

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

X	building(s)
	district
	site
	structure
	object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
1	0	structures
		objects
2	0	**Total**

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/ TRADE: business

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/ TRADE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Miesian

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: GLASS
roof: ASPHALT
other: N/A

X **NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION ON CONTINUTATION PAGES**

8. Statement of Significance

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

- [ ] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

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

Property is:

- [ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] B removed from its original location.
- [ ] C a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] D a cemetery.
- [ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] F a commemorative property.
- [ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
1962-1964

Significant Dates
1964

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

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Keene, Simpson and Murphy (Architect)
Hare & Hare (Landscape Architects)
Eleanor LeMaire Associates, Inc. (Interior Designer)
Henry C. Beck Builders, Inc. (Builder)

[x] **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE ON CONTINUTATION PAGES**

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

ocumentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
- ____ Other State agency
- ____ Federal agency
- ____ Local government
- ____
- ____

Name of repository: **Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City, Missouri Public Library**

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

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.7 Acres

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

	Latitude:	Longitude:		Latitude:	Longitude:
1	39.103108	-94.582931	3		
2			4		

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

Verbal Boundary Description (On continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (On continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Rosin, Principal; Lauren Rieke, Historic Preservation Specialist
organization Rosin Preservation date December 20, 2013
street & number 215 W. 18th Street, #150 telephone 816-472-4950
city or town Kansas City state Missouri zip code 64105
e-mail lauren@rosinpreservation.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Photographs

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

Photo Log:

Name of Property: **Commerce Bank**

City or Vicinity: **Kansas City**

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

Photographer: **Brad Finch**

Date Photographed: **October 15, 2013**

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

1 of 22: Northwest corner. View southeast.
2 of 22: West elevation. View east.
3 of 22: South elevation from 10th and Main streets. View north.
4 of 22: Northeast corner. View southwest.
5 of 22: Northwest corner from 8th and Main streets.
6 of 22: East elevation, lower floors. View south.
7 of 22: Rooftop sign, from 10th and Wyandotte. View east.
8 of 22: Plaza along west elevation. View northeast.
9 of 22: South wing and sunken garden. View east.
10 of 22: Sunken garden. View northeast.
11 of 22: First floor, main lobby. View northeast.
12 of 22: First floor, elevator lobby. View east.
13 of 22: First floor, stoneware mural. View north.
14 of 22: First floor, office space. View southeast.
15 of 22: Basement, main lobby, view south.
16 of 22: Third floor, elevator lobby. View east.
17 of 22: Twenty-fifth floor, typical corridor. View north.
18 of 22: Twenty-sixth floor, typical office partitions. View northwest.
19 of 22: Twenty-ninth floor, typical office space. View southwest.
20 of 22: Twelfth floor, auditorium. View west.
21 of 22: Thirtieth floor, projecting wing. View west.
22 of 22: South wing, third floor. View southwest.

Figure Log:
Include figures on continuation pages at the end of the nomination.

Figure 1: Site Map. *Mapquest.com.*
Figure 2: Contextual Map. *ArcGIS 2013.*
Figure 3: Photo Map, exterior, first floor, second floor.
Figure 4: Photo Map, upper floors.
Figure 5: Historic Plans, Sub-basement.
Figure 6: Historic Plans, Basement.
Figure 7: Historic Plans, 1st floor.
Figure 8: Historic Plans, 2nd floor.
Figure 9: Historic Plans, 3rd floor.
Figure 10: Historic Plans, 5th floor.
Figure 11: Historic Plans, 12rd floor.
Figure 12: Historic Plans, 30th floor.
Figure 13: Historic Plans, Typical lower floor.
Figure 14: Historic Plans, Typical upper floor.
Figure 15: View of Commerce Tower during construction, 1964. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections.*
Figure 16: Illustration of Commerce Tower, c.1965. *Source: Commerce Tower: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*
Figure 17: Historic photograph of Commerce Tower, c. 1965. *Source: Wilborn Photography, Kansas City, Missouri.*
Figure 18: Sunken garden along Main Street elevation, 1966. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections.*
Figure 19: First floor, south office space, c. 1965. *Source: Wilborn Photography, Kansas City, Missouri.*
Figure 20: Thirtieth floor, Top of the Tower Restaurant, c. 1965. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections.*

SUMMARY

Commerce Tower, at 911 Main Street in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri, stands in the heart of the central business district. Constructed from 1962 -1964, the thirty-two story Miesian style office building faces west toward a broad open plaza that is raised several steps above the pedestrian sidewalk. As is typical of buildings designed in the Miesian style, the first two stories are slightly recessed at the base of the tall rectilinear building shaft. A room that cantilevers from north elevation on the thirtieth floor is the only element that disrupts the flat planes of the four shaft walls. A flat roof caps the mass. A secondary five-story wing extends from the southeast corner of the building, connecting it to adjacent structures to the south and east. A contributing structure, a sunken garden sits in front of the wing, aligned with the main building. Following the tenets of architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, a concrete-clad steel frame grid filled with glazing defines the exterior organization of the slender mass. Concrete mullions further divide each bay, emphasizing the verticality of the form, while bands of light and dark tinted glazing create contrasting horizontality. Light red granite and aluminum-framed glazing distinguish the walls of the recessed building base. On the interior a central circulation and service core organizes each floor. Travertine marble walls, granite floors and brass accents enhance the public spaces, including the basement, the first floor and some upper story elevator lobbies. On the upper floors, historic movable partitions and non-historic drywall partitions divide open spaces into varying configurations for offices. Original features, including metal and glazed partitions, acoustical tile ceilings, wood doors, and light fixtures are intact throughout the building. Overall, the building has changed little since the date of construction and it retains excellent integrity.

ELABORATION

SETTING

Commerce Tower occupies a 0.7 acre property in Kansas City's central business district. The building stands at the northwest corner of the block bounded by Main Street on the west, 9th Street on the north, Walnut Street on the west, and 10th Street on the south (Figure 1). The terrain slopes down sharply to the west, and slightly to the north. Interstate 70 lies three blocks to the north, and Interstate 670 lies six blocks to south (Figure 2). The Kansas City Area Transportation Authority bus plaza is two blocks south of the building. The surrounding area is comprised of mixed-use commercial, residential and office buildings of varying styles, forms and periods of construction (Photos 1, 3, 4, 5).

Facing west, the building is set back approximately twenty-five feet from Main Street. Red granite knee walls enclose an elevated plaza that spans the length of the west elevation and continues around the northwest corner of the building (Photo 8). Aluminum framed panels of concrete with a heavy quartz aggregate rise from the top of the knee walls. Horizontal metal slabs extend from these panels on the interior of the plaza, creating bench seating around the perimeter. Wide, shallow, beige granite steps lead from the sidewalk to the plaza. Rectangular red granite planter boxes punctuate the northwest corner of the space. One square and two octagonal concrete planter boxes stand in front of each bay across the façade. Gold letters reading "Commerce Bank Commerce Tower" adorn the exterior face of one panel at the north end of the plaza.

On the south side of the building, a five-story wing connects Commerce Tower to three buildings -- the adjacent seven-story parking garage; the commercial building/parking garage on the southwest corner of the block; and the historic Commerce Bank building on the southeast corner of the block (Photo 9). To the east, an alley separates Commerce Tower from a parking garage, although the buildings connect on the interior. An elevated glazed concrete walkway emerges from the second floor of Commerce Tower and

passes over 9th Street, connecting the tower to a six-story parking garage at the southwest corner of 9th and Main Streets. The public sidewalk abuts the building on the north and west sides.

The property includes a contributing structure, a sunken garden within the L formed by the main building and the five-story wing (Photos 9, 10). U-shaped concrete steps with a white metal railing descend from the front plaza into the garden space. The glazed storefronts and square granite columns of the basement level enclose the north and east sides of the garden. Paired glazed aluminum-framed doors access the building on the north wall, and a single glazed aluminum-framed door accesses the east wall. A rubble stone and corrugated metal wall from the adjacent building forms the south wall of the plaza, and a concrete wall with glazed openings on the north side forms the west wall. An original bronze fountain surrounded by a raised concrete platform with stone aggregate occupies the southeast corner of the space. A geometric configuration of brick and concrete sidewalks, and landscaped areas fills the remaining portions of the garden floor.

EXTERIOR

Commerce Tower, constructed 1962-1964, exemplifies the Miesian approach to Modern Movement architecture. The building has a steel structure and a flat roof (Photo 1). Two of the thirty-four floors are below grade. A grid of cast concrete panels covering the steel columns and beams divides the exterior walls into seven bays on the east and west elevations and three bays on the north and south elevations. Columns are held back from the ends of each elevation, creating open corners filled with glazing. The slender rectangular form, enhanced by concrete mullions in each bay, gives an overall sense of verticality. Banded glazing within each bay creates a contrasting horizontal emphasis.

The cast concrete grid creates seven bays on the primary (west) elevation (Photo 2). Two continuous cast concrete mullions rise from the third floor through the parapet in each bay. Light red granite and ribbed aluminum clad the concrete columns on the first and second floors. Glazing at the lower floors is slightly recessed from the plane of the wall and includes clear and tinted opaque glass in aluminum storefront that is arranged in a gridded pattern that carries the line of the concrete mullions down from the floors above. Small square lights, recessed into the concrete soffit above each bay, draw light into the first and second floors.

Entrances in the third bay from the north and in the southernmost bay provide access into the building. Two sets of revolving doors flanked by single man doors fill each entrance bay. All doors are fully glazed and aluminum-framed. Illuminated letters above the revolving doors read “Commerce Tower.”

Projecting concrete panels at the third floor are pierced by five extremely narrow openings that align with the fenestration patterns above. Wider openings wrap the north and south corners. The base and top of each opening has dark tinted glazing, while the center window portion has glass with a lighter tint.

From the fourth floor to the thirtieth floor the concrete mullions rise unbroken, creating a large opening filled with bands of aluminum-framed glazing. Most bays have three central windows flanked by narrower single openings on either end. Four openings wrap the north and south corners. Most of the glazing is fixed, but awning windows fill some openings. The glazing at the thirtieth floor is slightly taller than on the lower floors.

The two uppermost floors (thirty-one and thirty-two) serve as mechanical space. They have a smaller footprint than the lower floors, though the concrete grid continues seamlessly from the lower floors across each façade. Louvered vents fill the openings.

Three bays organize the north elevation. The height of the first and second floors varies significantly, reflecting the steeply sloping terrain. The same light red granite and aluminum cladding covers the concrete columns. A metal overhead door, accessed via a concrete ramp, fills the east bay at the second floor, which is at grade with the sidewalk. A large rectangular block, projects from the center bay and half of the west bay, covering the lower two floors (Photo 1). Red granite panels, pierced with louvered openings, clad the first floor of this block. Glazed concrete clads the slightly smaller second floor of the projecting block. An elevated walkway, with the same glazed concrete cladding extends north from the second floor across 9th Street, connecting to a parking garage. Recessed aluminum windows, with tripartite glazing similar to the west elevation, fill the remainder of the west bay and wrap the corner.

Above the third floor, the north elevation is nearly identical to the west elevation (Photos 4, 5). In the center bay, louvered vents fill the top portion of the three center openings. On the thirtieth floor a small block supported by steel beams cantilevers from the center bay and portions of bays one and three. It is clad to match the main building.

The secondary east elevation abuts an alley. Due to the sloping terrain, the first floor is below grade. Gray brick clads the second floor (Photo 6). A single metal door near the center of the elevation provides access to the building. Floors three through thirty-two are identical to the west elevation. Louvered vents fill the top portion of some openings.

The lowering grade gives the south elevation a walk-out basement level filled with a sunken garden (Photo 9). A five-story wing projects from the east bay. At the basement level, the west bay extends further west beneath the plaza. A glazed metal door in this bay accesses the building. The detailing of the basement through second floor matches the first and second floors of the west elevation. The upper floors of the south elevation are identical to the west and east elevations (Photo 3).

Large electric signs arrayed at the parapet on each elevation are visible throughout downtown Kansas City and from many miles away on the north and west (Photo 7). On the east and west elevations the signs read “Commerce Tower”; on the north and south elevations the sign is the Commerce Bank logo.

A rectangular circulation wing with a flat roof projects from the east side of the south elevation (Photo 9). Rising from the basement level to the fourth floor, it connects the main building with the adjacent parking garage and with neighboring buildings to the south and east. An aluminum grid divides the visible west elevation of the circulation wing into seven bays. Aluminum-framed glazing covers the entire wall at the basement level. A single glazed aluminum door in the center bay accesses the wing. It was added at a later, unknown date. Above the basement level, concrete panels clad the wall from the first floor to the fourth floor. Three original fixed windows pierce the three south panels on the third floor. Windows with similar tripartite glazing fill the two north bays on the first and second floor. Above this level, this same glazed facade recedes, continuing into the fourth floor and across the parapet at the fifth floor line.

INTERIOR

A central circulation and service core organizes each floor. Varying configurations of offices and public spaces surround the central core. The central core has two elevator banks with six shafts in each. The

south bank services Floors 1 – 17. Two elevators on the west end of this bank also access the basement. The north bank accesses Floors 1, 3, and 17-30. Elevator lobbies on some floors have original travertine marble wall cladding (Photo 16). Others have various non-historic finishes. Original indicator lights for the elevators are intact on all floors. Between two the elevator banks, a stairwell with two separate staircases rises from the basement through Floor 32. Each stair has concrete steps and metal rails.

North of the elevators are men's and women's restrooms, accessed from the east and west, respectively. Some restrooms retain historic light green tile walls and floors, wall-mounted sinks, and light fixtures. Others have updated finishes. A separate freight elevator shaft at the north end of the central core rises from the sub-basement through Floor 32. Mechanical and service rooms fill the space around this elevator on each floor.

The public spaces of the basement and first floor are more elaborate than those on the upper floors. The basement level extends beneath the sidewalk and street to the west and north beyond the main footprint of the building. An open lobby spans the center of the basement level (Photo 15). Small commercial spaces line the west side; a post office occupied the east side. Mechanical spaces fill the north portion of the basement. A pair of escalators along the west wall of the basement lobby rise to the first floor. A green mosaic tile mural adorns this wall next to the escalator. The granite and aluminum-clad exterior columns extend into the basement along the south wall. Historic glazed aluminum partitions and non-historic drywall partitions divide the lobby and commercial spaces. Travertine marble clads the remaining walls. Beige granite with aluminum base molding covers the floors. Original acoustical tiles, some with recessed square lights, cover the ceiling. Banks of historic mailboxes are intact near the post office.

The main public lobby fills the southwest portion of the first floor (Photo 11). A pair of escalators along the west wall descends to the basement. Another pair of escalators at the center of the south wall rises to the second floor, accessing the south wing. An original brass screen covers the drywall partition on the north side of the escalators. The same marble walls, granite floor and tile ceiling continues from the basement. All the original brass elevator doors are intact in the two elevator lobbies (Photo 12). An illuminated panel with a projecting metal grid covers the ceiling in the elevator lobbies. An original brass building directory on a granite base and a Modern style metal clock are extant.

Glazed partitions delineate two office spaces on the first floor (Photo 11). The office in the southeast corner continues into the south wing. Originally, a brass screen enclosed the south and west walls. The travertine lobby walls continue into this space. An original stoneware mural adorns the north wall inside the office (Photo 13). Original brass screen and a metal clock, similar to the one in the lobby, remain along the east wall (Photo 14). It originally functioned as a bank, and an original vault is located in the southeast corner of the space. Within the office there are historic and non-historic partitions. The second office occupies the north portion of the first floor. Glazed doors with original wood pulls access the space. It also has historic and non-historic partitions that divide the space into rooms.

The upper floors are configured for office tenants around the central core. Moveable historic glazed or metal partitions of varying sizes configure the office suites on most floors (Photos 17, 18). The original acoustical tile ceilings have integrated tracks to hold the partitions. Historic wood, glazed, and metal doors with original metal handles access the tenant spaces. Some floors have non-historic drywall partitions, doors and ceilings. Non-historic composition tile, sheet vinyl and carpet cover the floors. Drywall clads the exterior walls. Metal radiator covers line the walls beneath the windows (Photo 19). Some suites have non-historic staircases that rise between two floors.

A service space with gray brick walls occupies the northeast corner of the second floor. A metal overhead door access the concrete loading dock. White glazed ceramic tile covers the interior partitions. A stairwell at the center of the north wall rises from the second floor to the third floor. It accesses the elevated walkway that crosses 9th Street. A short staircase along the center of the east wall descends to a service entrance. At the southeast corner of this floor glazed aluminum doors access the escalator lobby and south wing. The remainder of the second floor is largely open with some partitions on the east side.

A large mechanical room spans the east side of the twelfth floor. An original auditorium and lounge fill the area south of the central core (Photo 20). They have original wood paneled walls and a folding screen between the spaces. Original features include a metal clock, similar to the one in the lobby, and speaker platforms. A law library originally occupied the southwest corner of this floor. Offices now occupy this space.

Several features distinguish the thirtieth floor (Photo 21). The ceilings are slightly higher than on the lower floors and the restrooms are south of the central core. A small room cantilevers from the north side of the building. Stairs rise into this space and the floor-to-ceiling windows have wood trim. Non-historic wood paneling and trim adorn this and an adjacent conference room. The remainder of the floor has a combination of historic and non-historic partitions. The typical modular walls are slightly more ornate than on other floors, with molded trim around doors and glazed partitions. A restaurant originally occupied the entire floor.

The thirty-first and thirty-second floors serve as mechanical space. They have a smaller footprint than the lower floors.

The south wing rises from the basement to the fourth floor. The basement historically functioned as a deli, a use that continues today. Office space, originally a part of the bank, fills the first floor. Original brass revolving doors on the south side of the second floor connect to an adjacent parking garage. Original escalators rise from the second to the third floor in the center of the wing. On the third floor, glazed partitions surround and glass block walls define the space around the escalators (Photo 22). A vestibule with a groin vaulted ceiling extends from the east side of the wing. Original glazed aluminum doors access an adjacent parking garage and office building. A corridor extends from the north side of the wing into the main building. Office space fills the fourth floor of the wing. Historic finishes throughout the wing include original light fixtures comprised of a grid of small square lights, aluminum base trim, and acoustical tile ceilings.

INTEGRITY

Commerce Tower has experienced few alterations since the date of construction and retains all aspects of integrity. Still in its original location and setting, the building occupies a prominent location in Kansas City's central business district. The design, materials and workmanship, as envisioned by the architectural firm of Keene, Simpson and Murphy, are intact. No major alterations have been made to the exterior, leaving the character defining features from the period of construction unchanged. These include the rectangular form, banded windows, plaza, sunken garden. On the interior, the original plan of open office floors surrounding the central circulation/service core remains substantially intact. Changes to partitions and finishes to meet tenant needs were always anticipated and do not harm the integrity of design. Character-defining travertine marble walls, granite floors and light fixtures are extant throughout the public

spaces on the lower two floors. Many original metal and glazed partitions and doors as well as acoustical tile ceilings are intact on the upper floors. Changes to the interior include the addition of non-historic drywall partitions in some office suites; new finishes in some elevator lobbies and bathrooms; and removal of the domed-ceiling circular staircase and other elements of the restaurant on the thirtieth-floor restaurant when this space was converted to office use. These alterations have secured the continued viability of the building and do not compromise the characteristics for which the building is significant. Commerce Tower retains feelings about and associations with the post-war period of office development and the Miesian style architecture that have made it an icon of the Kansas City skyline since its construction.

SUMMARY

Commerce Tower is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for local significance in the area of ARCHITECTURE. Designed by the local firm of Keene, Simpson and Murphy, it exemplifies the influence of Mies van der Rohe on commercial architecture during the mid- twentieth century. The building embodies tenets of functionality and reduced ornament that distinguish the Miesian style. Recalling Mies' signature "glass box," the concrete-clad structure of Commerce Tower is extruded to the wall plane, creating a rhythmic geometry that is identical on each façade. Slender concrete mullions add complexity and emphasis to the vertical building form. The open plaza and sunken garden bring an element of nature to the building within the downtown environment. The building embodied the ideals of the Modern office building as a symbol of progress and urban vitality that American cities sought during the 1950s and 1960s and placed it at the forefront of Miesian style office design in Kansas City. On the interior offices, of varying configurations and free from structural columns, ring the central circulation core. Within the tenant suites an innovative modular system of glazed and metal partitions could be easily arranged to meet tenants' needs. Other notable building features included twelve elevators regulated to respond to peak periods of traffic; state-of-the-art mechanical systems that allowed tenants to control temperatures in individual offices; and enhanced load-bearing floors that accommodated new data-processing equipment. The thirty-two story office tower was also the largest and tallest private office building in Missouri when completed in 1964. All of these features distinguished Commerce Tower from older office buildings in downtown Kansas City and laid the path for the new office development that would follow. The period of significance for Commerce Tower is 1962-1964, the period of construction.

ELABORATION

THE MIESIAN STYLE IN MODERN MOVEMENT ARCHITECTURE

Following trends that shaped urban architecture during the post-World War II period, Commerce Tower exemplifies the tenets of the Miesian style of Modern Movement architecture. Named for its foremost proponent, architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (Mies), the style developed from his unique, American manifestation of the International Style. In Europe during the years prior to World War II, architects such as Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Mies promoted the International Style with an overarching focus that rejected past architectural idioms; utilized modern materials and technology; and simplified design by stripping all ornament from facades and interiors. These ideals inspired the primary features of the International Style that sought a balanced composition rather than an exact symmetry; an overall emphasis on horizontality; smooth, unadorned wall planes, usually painted white; ribbon windows flush with the façade; and open interiors with predetermined functions.[1] After the lean years of the Great Depression and World War II, America experienced an intense building campaign in the 1950s. A pragmatic desire for functional, yet monumental, architecture pervaded the new designs that emerged during this period.[2] Fulfilling these demands, the sleek, geometric, high-tech ideals of the Modern aesthetic, flourished throughout the country.

While many architects remained dedicated to the principles of the International Style, Mies did not. He took its basic elements and refined them, creating a distinct aesthetic that would become synonymous with Modern architecture in the United States in the post-war period. Like the earlier International Style,

[1] Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: Guide to the Styles*, (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1969), 247.
[2] Scully 185-186.

clean lines and a severe reduction of ornament became the prevailing motivation of Mies' work. Mies instituted a strict symmetry in his designs; he used the structural frame of the building to organize the façade; and he created universal interior spaces that were easily adaptable to different uses.[3] The resulting designs were, as Vincent Scully stated, "simplified, pure, clean, generalized, reasonable, abstract."[4] The Miesian style became a hallmark of American architecture in the mid-twentieth century and signaled a revitalization of construction technologies, such as steel structures, that had similarly shaped skyscrapers a half-century earlier. As historian Marcus Whiffen noted, the Miesian style "was peculiarly suited to, perhaps because it was to some degree inspired by, American technology." [5]

Character-defining features of the Miesian style, such as the smooth rectilinear form with glass exterior and exposed frame, emphasized the functional nature of the structure and allowed for open interior floor plans. Unlike the International Style, the open interiors of Mies' designs featured more flexible, universal spaces that accommodated various uses throughout the building. Through these open spaces, Mies sought to build social connections and relationships between the occupants of a space.[6] This was ideal for office towers, which typically housed a variety of businesses with different needs.

Mies also believed that a building should relate to its setting, ideally standing in the center of a symmetrical, open space to create a balance between the building and its surroundings. While this ideal was hard to achieve in a densely built urban environment, architects working in American cities incorporated open plazas around the base of buildings to create more openness in their settings.[7] The wide front plaza and the sunken garden designed by Hare & Hare help Commerce Tower to meet this ideal by simultaneously relating it to the hard scape of the surrounding dense, downtown and providing a softer, natural escape.

Following Miesian principles, the architectural firm of Keene, Simpson and Murphy gave the Commerce Tower a pure, slender rectangular form and strictly symmetrical facades. Concrete panels divide the facades into a regular grid of horizontal and vertical elements. Banded windows emphasize horizontality while concrete mullions enhanced verticality. By bringing the concrete clad steel grid to the surface of the façade, the architects accentuated the structure. The first and second floors, slightly recessed from the main façade, subtly create the illusion of a floating tower, while the broad open plaza and sunken garden harmonize the building with a naturalistic setting within the constraints of the dense downtown environment.[8] The louvered vents that clad the mechanical space on the upper two floors are another treatment common to Miesian buildings. The interior arrangement showcases the flexibility of the plan and the Miesian concepts of undefined functions. Unencumbered by internal structural framework, the upper floors of Commerce Tower incorporate a modular partitioning system based on four-by-eight foot sections that allowed tenants to arrange each office space according to their needs. This element, vital to the long-term functionality of Commerce Tower, was a natural evolution of the column-free plan promoted by Mies.

Keene, Simpson and Murphy fully embraced the concepts of function and utility that underlie the Modern Movement aesthetic and the Miesian style. During planning, the architects and bank administrators

[3] Whiffen, 255-256.
[4] Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism,* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 184.
[5] Whiffen, 256.
[6] Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979),, 282.
[7] Elizabeth Rosin, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "BMA Tower," Kansas City, 2002, 20.
[8] Whiffen, 255.

travelled around the country to visit newly built office buildings in Dallas, Minneapolis, Chicago and New York. They conferred with professionals in office planning and real estate and with other architects, including I.M. Pei, in order to provide their client with the best materials, mechanical elements, and amenities available at the time.[9] The resulting design reflects the breadth of this research.

Learning that the typical sheer aluminum and glass curtain wall building facades were prone to water leaks, the design team conceived of the concrete grid that carried banded glazing as a means of preventing this potential issue.[10] This design detail also highlights technological advances in pre-cast concrete construction while complying with Modern ideals of stripped ornament. The architects also enhanced the typical translucent window glass with the addition of similarly-framed gray opaque glass panels as a means to better absorb heat and reduce glare. The contrasting light frame and dark curtain wall add visual interest and complexity to the Mieisan box. The architects also paid considerable attention to the circulation core, recognizing that the greatest amount of traffic in the skyscraper would move vertically. They hired elevator consultants Charles W. Lerch and Associates out of Denver, Colorado to set up special operating systems for the twelve elevators that would regulate their movements to accommodate peak rush hour traffic.[11] All of these design details enhance the significance of Commerce Tower not only as an example of Miesian style design and but as a state-of-the-art office tower in the downtown community.

The strong Miesian character of Commerce Tower is balanced by a subtle expression of classical composition and proportion in the subtle three-part vertical organization of the façade. This composition, overwhelmingly applied to skyscrapers built before World War II, reflects the arrangement of a classical column and the associated monumentality that inspired post-World War II design. The recessed storefronts and granite clad columns create a solid “base” that anchors the tower on its plaza; the concrete-clad body serves as a “shaft”; and finally, the louvered top of the tower forms a two-story “capital.” Thus, Commerce Tower melds the essence of classical commercial design with contemporary ideals from its period of construction.

POST-WORLD WAR II DEVELOPMENT IN DOWNTOWN KANSAS CITY

As families relocated to the suburbs in the decades following World War II, the formerly thriving urban centers declined. In an attempt to revitalize these areas, large scale urban renewal projects that focused on highway construction and slum clearance shaped cities throughout the country in the 1950s and 1960s. A hallmark of new development was the high-rise office tower, erected by large corporations to enhance their public persona. Not content to rely on historic precedent, this new construction needed to by wholly modern to showcase the progress of the urban core and its important role in the development of the city.[12] As architectural historian Leland Roth expressed, “architecture became a package in which the ambiguities and complexities of modern institutions were ruthlessly wrapped in sleek monotonous continuities.”[13]

The modern office tower did not appear immediately in Kansas City. The completion of a new freeway system and efforts at downtown land clearance during the 1950s prepared the landscape for new

[9] David Wilkinson, “How Talent on the National Scale Was Recruited to Create Tower,” Kansas City Star, March 21, 1965. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, “Commerce Towers.”
[10] Ibid.
[11] Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City’s Financial District.
[12] Roth, 276- 277.
[13] Roth, 277.

construction, including an area along Main Street between 6th and 9th Streets. A dearth of national businesses with local headquarters and the conservative nature of local investors hindered large-scale redevelopment efforts.[14] Although some low-rise offices were built in Kansas City during this period, including the Public Library and Board of Education Building (Edward Tanner, 1959), the modern high-rise office tower did not arrive until the 1960s.

Understanding the potential benefits to the downtown community, James M. Kemper, Sr., long-time president of the Commerce Trust Company, conceived the Commerce Tower project in the late 1950s. Kemper had played a vital role in the revitalization of downtown Kansas City since the 1940s, acting as chairman of the Downtown Committee and establishing a personal mission to reestablish businesses in neglected areas. The Company's central offices occupied a historic building at 10th and Walnut streets (National Bank of Commerce Building, 1909).[15] While other businesses moved out of downtown, the Commerce Trust Company chose to not only remain in the area but to reinvest in their established neighborhood.[16] The new skyscraper not only housed company offices, but it became a key marketing tool for the Commerce Trust Company. Unlike other companies that hired nationally prominent architecture firms for their signature building projects, Commerce Trust enlisted the help of noted local architects Keene, Simpson and Murphy. When the Commerce Tower opened, community leaders commended the bank for its role in revitalizing downtown Kansas City.[17]

Several other companies erected high-rise Mieisan office towers in Kansas City during the ~~early~~ 1960s. Notable projects included The Traders Bank Building (Thomas E. Stanley, 1963),[18] the Business Man's Assurance (BMA) Tower (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 1961-1963), and Ten Main Center (Charles Lucian, 1968).[19] Of these, Traders Bank is the most similar to Commerce Tower. It too has a concrete exo-skeleton and slender form, but as architectural historian George Ehrlich stated, it is "cautious in design."[20] It lacks the sharp contrast created by the tinted glass and light concrete grid, and at only twenty stories it is less imposing than Commerce Tower.[21] The BMA Tower is also exemplary of the Miesian style. Rising to nineteen stories, the rectangular form has an exposed exo-skeleton and recessed banded glazing that differentiate it from the sleek rectangular Miesian box of Commerce Tower. Additionally, while its location outside the central business district at the edge of Penn Valley Park aligns with Miesian principles of setting, it did not enhance the economic vitality of downtown Kansas City. Like Commerce Tower, Ten Main Center also has a concrete structure. However, the concrete is more-heavily textured and the grid is a dense honeycomb with individual beveled openings. Its squarish plan is stockier than the slender slab of Commerce Tower. Although it opened only four years after Commerce Tower, in many ways it represents the next generation of Modern Movement design.

Among the local milieu of mid-century skyscrapers, Commerce Tower is a unique expression of Miesian style. It has a slender form, emphasized by its towering thirty-two stories and strong vertical elements; the slim concrete mullions that rise through the bays add visual interest and complexity to the rigid exterior

[14] George Ehrlich, *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History, 1826-1990*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 129-130.
[15] The National Bank of Commerce Building is extant. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1999.
[16] Cydney Millstein, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, "National Bank of Commerce Building," Kansas City, 1999, 20.
[17] "New Tower Bows in a Fete," *Kansas City Star*, March 1965. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, "Commerce Towers."
[18] Ehrlich, 130.
[19] All buildings are extant. The BMA Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.
[20] Ehrlich, 141.
[21] Rosin, 23-24.

structure and further emphasize the verticality; the distinct corner windows, which lighten the overall impression of the façade, are unique to Kansas City buildings of the period; and the exclusive sunken garden and exterior plaza harmonize the building with its urban setting. On the interior, wide open floor plans organized around a central core, further adhere to the Miesian style. When completed, the thirty-two story Commerce Tower was the tallest and largest privately owned office tower in Missouri. It was also the first Kansas City skyscraper designed by a local architectural firm since City Hall in 1937. As one article from the period noted, "at 32 stories, and representing a cost of more than 12 million dollars, the Commerce Tower thus becomes the post-war granddaddy of [downtown building projects]."[22] These achievements solidify the significance of Commerce Tower in the architectural development of downtown Kansas City during the post-World War II era.

COMMERCE TRUST COMPANY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMERCE TOWER

The Commerce Trust Company is one of the oldest businesses in Kansas City. Its history began in 1865 with the establishment of the Kansas City Savings Association. From a small bank in an infant city, the company evolved with the growing metropolis. In 1882 it was renamed the National Bank of Commerce. Just three years later the company moved into a new office building at the corner of 6th and Delaware Streets. The National Bank of Commerce survived the economic depression of 1893 to become the largest bank west of Chicago in the early 1900s.[23]

The success of the bank, coupled with the growing population of Kansas City, inspired bank president W.S. Woods to establish the Commerce Trust Company in 1906. Needing new facilities for both companies, Woods erected one of Kansas City's first skyscrapers in 1908 at the corner of 10th and Walnut Streets. This project would become emblematic of the bank and a landmark for the downtown community. After the National Bank of Commerce was merged into the Commerce Trust Company in 1921, the new entity became Kansas City's largest bank with combined deposits of $80 million.[24] Always at the forefront of technology, Commerce Trust started the nation's first 24-hour transit department, which accelerated financial transactions between banks, and instituted a special "Woman's Department," which focused on instructing women in financial matters. The panics of 1929 and 1933 highlighted the financial prowess of Commerce Trust under the direction of President James M. Kemper, Sr. After deposits fell from $80 million to $59 million in 1933, the company recouped funds to reach $90 million in deposits by the close of the year.[25]

After World War II, Kemper was committed to revitalizing downtown Kansas City. He served as chairman of the Downtown Committee and made substantial improvements to his company's central offices, solidifying their position in the downtown economy.[26] With capital funds over $47 million and $500 million total resources in 1960, Commerce Trust was in a prime position to construct a new signature high-rise office tower. Kemper hoped the new building would attract other national companies to Kansas City.[27]

[22] Fred Fitzsimmons, "Tower Could Be a Stimulant to Downtown Activity," *Kansas City Star*, March 21, 1965. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical File "Buildings- Commerce Towers."
[23] Millstein, 18-19.
[24] Millstein, 20.
[25] Millstein, 20.
[26] Ibid.
[27] "Largest in the Area, *Kansas City Star,* August 3, 1960. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, "Commerce Towers."

Redevelopment in the blocks immediately northwest and west of the site under federal urban renewal programs created synergy with the Commerce Tower project.[28]

The concept for Commerce Tower evolved from the late 1950s through the end of construction in 1964. Around 1958, the Board of Directors conceived of building a modern office tower as a way to promote their bank as well as downtown Kansas City.[29] In 1960, Board Chairman James M. Kemper, Sr. enlisted the services of architects Keene, Simpson and Murphy to design the structure. Having previously worked with the firm on projects at 811 Main Street and at the Walnut Tower Apartments (722 Walnut Street), Commerce Trust was familiar with their Modern Movement design aesthetic. It was important to Commerce Trust that local firms were engaged to design their project. In addition to the architects, others involved included structural engineers Pfuhl & Stevson and Alfred Masterson and mechanical engineer W.L. Cassell.[30]

Commerce Trust wanted their new headquarters to be more than just an office building; it was to be a showcase for the latest innovations in technology, design and functionality that would sustain its place as "the middle west's most distinguished office address."[31] Before completing the final drawings, a three-member planning committee travelled to different U.S. cities to study contemporary high-rise office towers and to interview professionals working in the field. After these meetings and an exhaustive four hundred-page review by the National Association of Building Managers, the concept for the building evolved from a twenty-four story tower that integrated the adjacent buildings into the present configuration, which features a free-standing tower whose footprint extends into the corner of the block.[32] The strategically chosen location at the center of the downtown business district offered patrons access to nearby hotels, restaurants, and public transportation. Near the downtown airport and several major thoroughfares, including the new Interstate 70, the site provided easy access for travelers and Kansas City residents alike.[33] Adding to this convenience were two large covered parking garages north and south of the site that connected directly to the building to provide ample parking for visitors. In conjunction with the Commerce Tower project, Commerce Trust added two floors to the south garage and capped it with a roof-top garden.[34]

Construction of Commerce Tower necessitated the demolition of the Ridge Building and a parking garage, already standing on the site.[35] The Winn-Senter Construction Company broke ground in the spring of 1962. The following year the Kansas City Structural Steel Company erected the steel frame.[36] To commemorate the completion of the steel structure, over 18,000 individuals, including former president Harry S Truman, signed the final steel beam before workers installed it.[37] Construction continued for

[28] "Downtown Plan Given," *Kansas City Times*, November 21, 1961. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, "Commerce Towers."
[29] Wilkinson, "How Talent on the National Scale Was Recruited to Create Tower."
[30] "Commerce Tower 'Skeleton' Aug. 1," *Kansas City Star*, 1963. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, "Commerce Towers."
[31] *Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*
[32] Wilkinson, "How Talent on the National Scale Was Recruited to Create Tower."
[33] *Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*
[34] "Tennis on a Downtown Roof," *Kansas City Star,* July 19, 1964. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, "Commerce Towers."
[35] "Commerce Towers," *Skylines and Midwest Architect* 13:5 (1963), 10.
[36] "Commerce Tower 'Skeleton' Aug. 1," *Kansas City Star*, 1963. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, "Commerce Towers."
[37] "Lofty Place for Last Steel Beam," *Kansas City Times*, December 1963. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Mounted Newspaper Clippings, 1950-1970, "Commerce Towers."

another year under the direction of Henry C. Beck, Builders (Figure 15). Commerce Tower opened to tenants late in 1964, followed by a formal grand opening the following spring (Figure 16, 17).

The thirty-two story building rose 421 feet above the street, as one article noted, making "the majestic Commerce Tower … more than just a major skyline addition…it is, of course, an unmistakable contribution to the central business district as well as the metropolitan area."[38] To commemorate this historic event, around 500 people, including notable bankers and civic leaders, participated in a formal dedication on April 2, 1965, the centennial of the Kansas City Savings Association. In the weeks before and after this date, Commerce Tower was open to the public. Hostesses, known as "Tower Belles," gave guided tours that highlighted the features that made the building a symbol of modernity and progress in Kansas City.[39]

Because the building set back from the Main Street sidewalk, the experience of the skyscraper extended beyond the building to include the surrounding property. Pipes installed under the sidewalk melted snow and ice during Kansas City winters.[40] A granite plaza along the Main Street elevation descended into a sunken garden between the tower and the adjacent parking structure. The notable local landscape architecture firm of Hare and Hare created an exterior setting that harmonized the building with its downtown site (Figure 18). It included a geometric configuration of walkways, bench seating a distinct bronze water and light sculpture designed by artist George Tsutakawa. Special illumination enhanced the setting at night.[41] Commerce Trust wanted the building to be a landmark both day and night. Special interior lighting at every window created a subtle glow, making it visible from many miles away. A special window washing elevator literally helped to maintain the clean look of the Modern façade. [42]

On the interior, modern conveniences and materials created a "city within a city," which included a post office, a bank, drug stores, and a barber shop.[43] Eleanor LeMaire Associates, Inc., a prestigious firm from New York, designed the interior public spaces with imperial travertine marble gracing the walls of the lobbies in the basement and on the first and twelfth floors. Artwork throughout the building represented a variety of mediums and the work of artists from around the world. An art gallery in the basement showcased works by American artists. A large stoneware mural created by Swedish artist Carl-Harry Stahlane graced the north wall of the personal banking area on the first floor. Utilizing over twenty kinds of Swedish clay, the abstract mural makes "symbolic references to the growth of America since its founding."[44]

The technological innovations incorporated into the design enhanced the tenant and visitor experience. Twelve Otis elevators provided vertical circulation. They were specially regulated to maximize efficiency during times of peak traffic at the beginning and end of the day. These were supplemented by three Westinghouse escalators with glass sides that rose from the basement to the third floor. Three power plants located in the building supplied heat, state-of-the-art air-conditioning, and standby electricity.

[38] Fred Fitzsimmons, "Tower Could Be a Stimulant to Downtown Activity," *Kansas City Star*, March 21, 1965. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical File "Buildings- Commerce Towers."
[39] *(Photograph of Commerce Tower with caption),* Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical File "Buildings- Commerce Towers."
[40] *Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*
[41] "Welcome to Commerce Tower," Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical File "Buildings- Commerce Towers."
[42] *Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*
[43] *Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*
[44] "Welcome to Commerce Tower."

Enhanced load-bearing floors supported the anticipated weight of new computer and data-processing equipment.[45]

Commerce Trust Company occupied almost 60,000 square feet on the first five floors of the building and in the sub-basement (Figures 5-9, 19). There were separate areas for commercial activities and a new Family Banking Center, all outfitted with travertine marble walls, adding to the luxury. A separate elevator accessed the 3,000 square foot vault and 8,000 safe deposit boxes in the sub-basement. The entire second floor was devoted to dining and lounge space for bank staff. The company's headquarters remained in the adjacent building at 10th and Walnut Streets, which was easily accessible to Commerce Tower via escalators.[46]

Above the Commerce Trust Company offices, the architects designed a modular system to organize the upper floors (Figures 10, 13, 14). Tenants could lease a specific number of modules and arrange the interior of the suite according to their needs. Cellular floors with moveable electrical outlets, portable office partitions and acoustical ceilings with mobile light fixtures made transformation easy.[47] Additionally, architectural services were included in each lease to assist tenants in the design and configuration of office suites.[48] Several other amenities made the building appealing to tenants. A 100-seat auditorium on the twelfth floor boasted integrated audio-visual equipment and offered tenants a larger space for special meetings and conferences (Figure 11). An adjacent lounge supplemented the auditorium. The twelfth floor also housed a Law Library for attorneys and accountants. It was the first such space located in a private office building in the region.[49]

A restaurant on the thirtieth floor, aptly named 'Top of the Tower,' offered fine dining and an unobstructed view of the surrounding city (Figures 12, 20). The restaurant had five spaces, each offering a distinct international cuisine and design. Diners could choose from French, German and Mongolian themes. An adjacent arbor terrace and banquet area accommodated functions for up to 350 people. A deli in the basement offered more casual dining for building workers and the general public.

The first tenants moved into the building in late 1964. By the following spring, eighty-two percent of the building's 542,800 square feet was leased, with another five percent pending. Among the large and small businesses that boasted of offices in Commerce Tower were the Aetna Casualty & Surety Company, the British Consulate, and Acme Reporting Company, which occupied a 100 square foot space.[50]

In 1985, the Commerce Trust Company moved out of the building. The number of vacancies subsequently increased. Today, Commerce Tower is roughly fifty percent occupied. A new owner plans to develop it as a mixed-use project that includes offices and apartments.

KEENE, SIMPSON AND MURPHY, ARCHITECTS

The portfolio of Keene Simpson and Murphy, established in 1909 by Arthur Keene and Leslie Simpson, showcases the changing trends in Kansas City architecture over the course of its long history. The earliest designs by Keene and Simpson, such as the Land Bank Building (1923) and Scottish Rite Temple

[45] "Welcome to Commerce Tower."
[46] "Welcome to Commerce Tower."
[47] "Welcome to Commerce Tower."
[48] *Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*
[49] *Commerce Towers: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District.*

(1930), reflect their classical training and the revival movements of the period. As architectural fashion changed over time the firm adapted and continued to produce notable buildings. Their work with Commerce Trust began in 1940 with the design of the Commerce Trust Building Annex (southwest corner of 10th and Main streets). In 1947 Keene and Simpson designed a building and garage for the City National Bank and Trust (912- 928 Grand Boulevard), which utilized modern lines, aluminum and glass partitions and several innovative banking features including a drive-up deposit slot.[51]

The ingenuity of the firm was enhanced in 1955 when John Thomas Murphy became a partner after ten years with the firm. As both Keene and Simpson moved toward retirement, Murphy became the driving creative force in the company. The five story concrete frame building with glass curtain wall at 811 Main Street (1958) showcases the firm's Modern Movement design under Murphy's lead.[52] Other projects led by Murphy include the Southeast Junior High School Interscholastic League Fieldhouse (1959) and Grace and Holy Trinity Church (1955).

After the death of Simpson in 1961 and Keene's retirement in the same year, Murphy continued the firm under the same name. The innovative and diverse design aesthetic established by Keene and Simpson influenced the later designs of the firm, including Commerce Tower. The Commerce Tower project marked a peak period for the firm, and it occupied a suite of offices in the tower upon its completion. [53] Murphy died in 1999 at the age of eight-six.

CONCLUSION

Constructed between 1962-1964, Commerce Tower is locally significant under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE as an excellent, intact example of a Miesian style office tower. As expressed by the prominent local firm of Keene, Simpson and Murphy, the slender rectangular form; rhythmic geometry of the concrete grid; vertical emphasis of the concrete mullions; recessed first and second floors; and open exterior plaza and sunken garden exemplify the ideals of this architectural genre. On the interior, movable partitions, twelve elevators and state-of-the-art mechanical systems embraced the most modern technology of the period to enhance the functionality of the building. Commissioned by Commerce Bank, the building illustrates a national trend of the post-war period, when private businesses erected high-style Modern office towers to demonstrate their prosperity. When completed, Commerce Tower was the tallest and largest office building in Missouri, underscoring its significance to the built environment of downtown Kansas City.

[50] "Space in Tower is 80 Per Cent Rented," *Kansas City Star*, March 21, 1965. Missouri Valley Special Collections, Vertical File "Buildings- Commerce Towers."
[51] Virginia Simpson Marsh, *A Biography of Leslie Butler Simpson*, (Beaverton, Oregon: 1988), n.p.
[52] Marsh, n.p.
[53] Ibid.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All of Lots 11-20, Block 2, Ridge Place and the north half of Lot 19, Swope's Addition, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

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

Figure 1: Site Map. *Mapquest.com.*

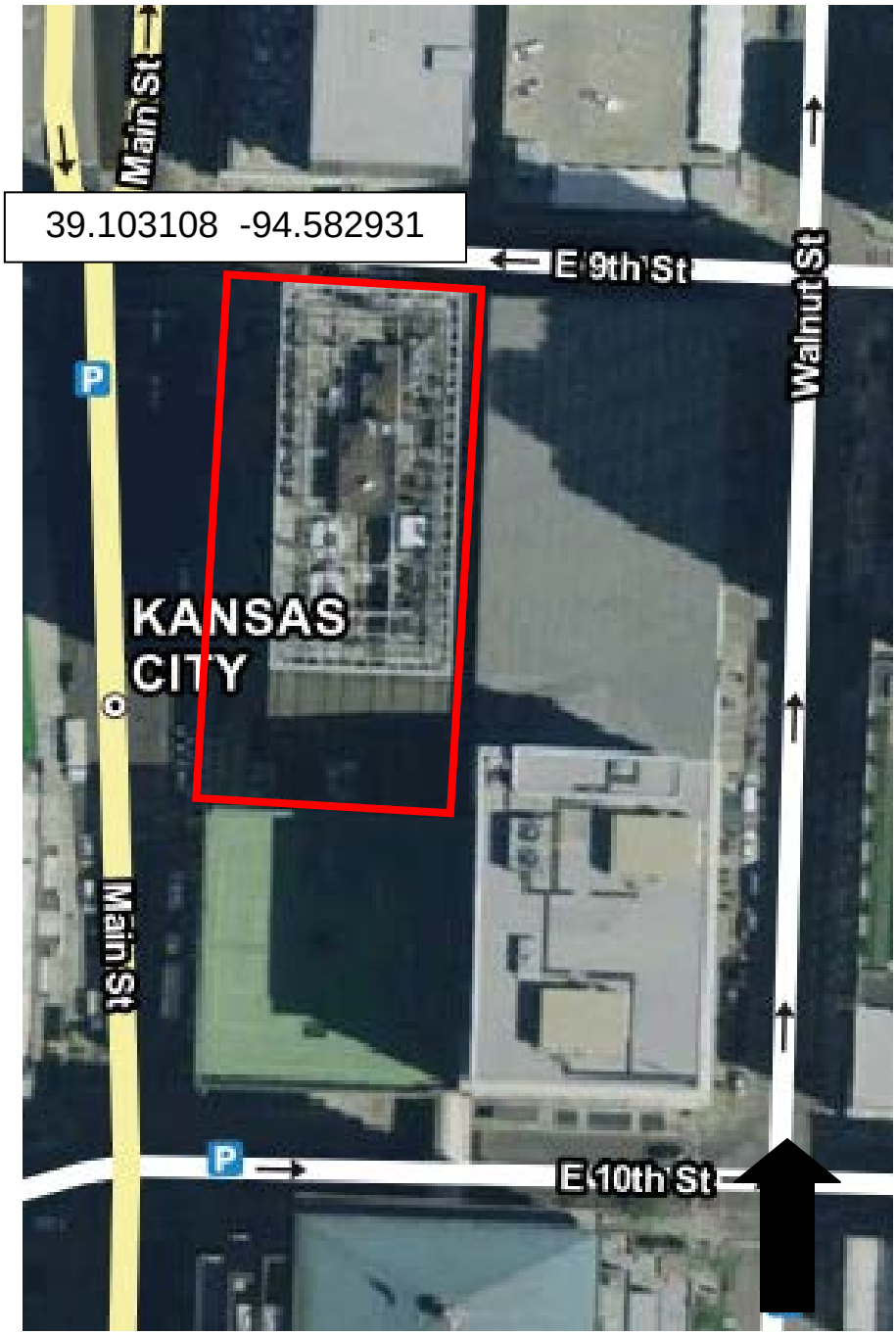

Figure 2: Contextual Map. *ArcGIS 2013.*

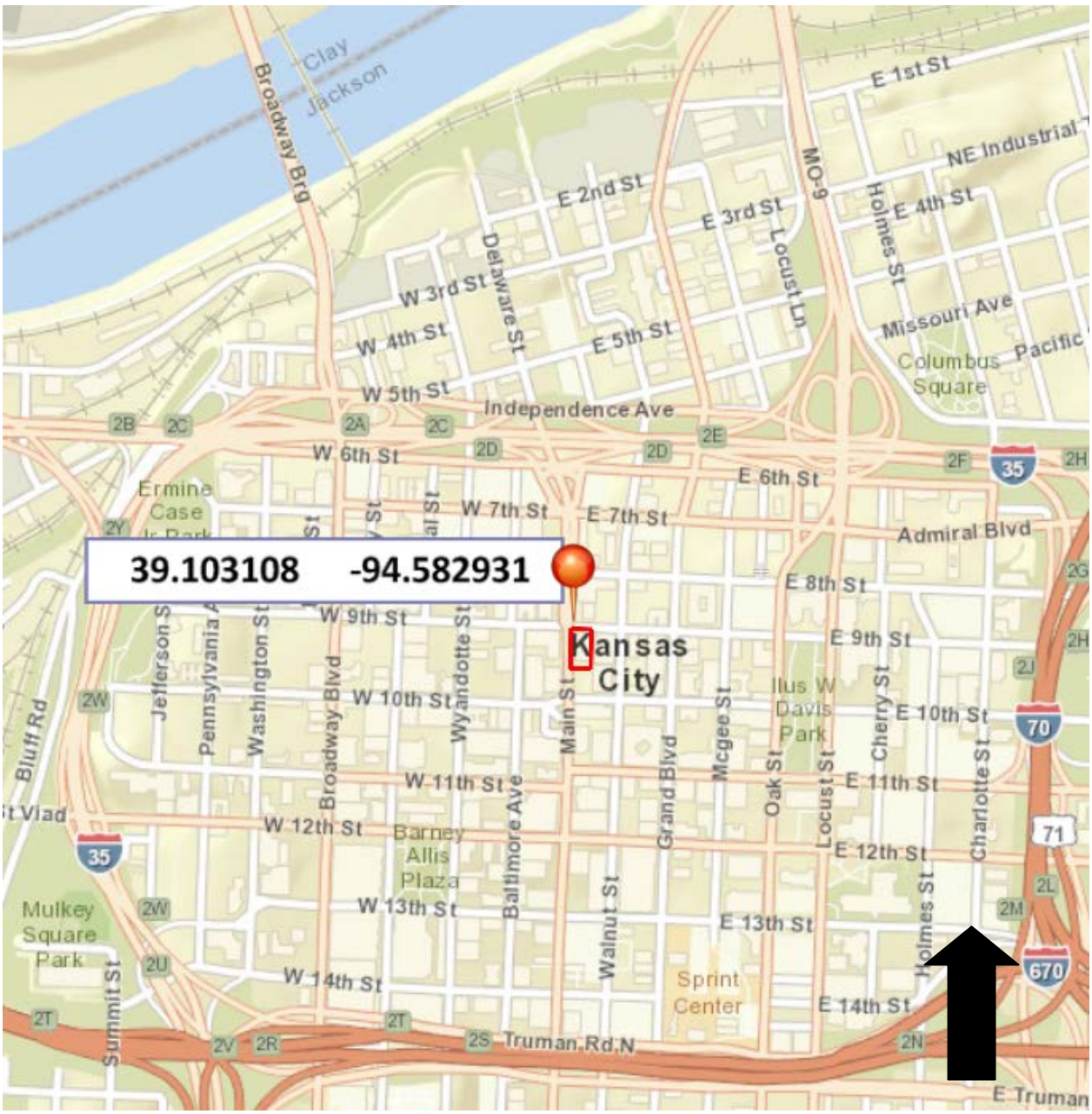

Figure 3: Photo Map, exterior, basement-second floors.

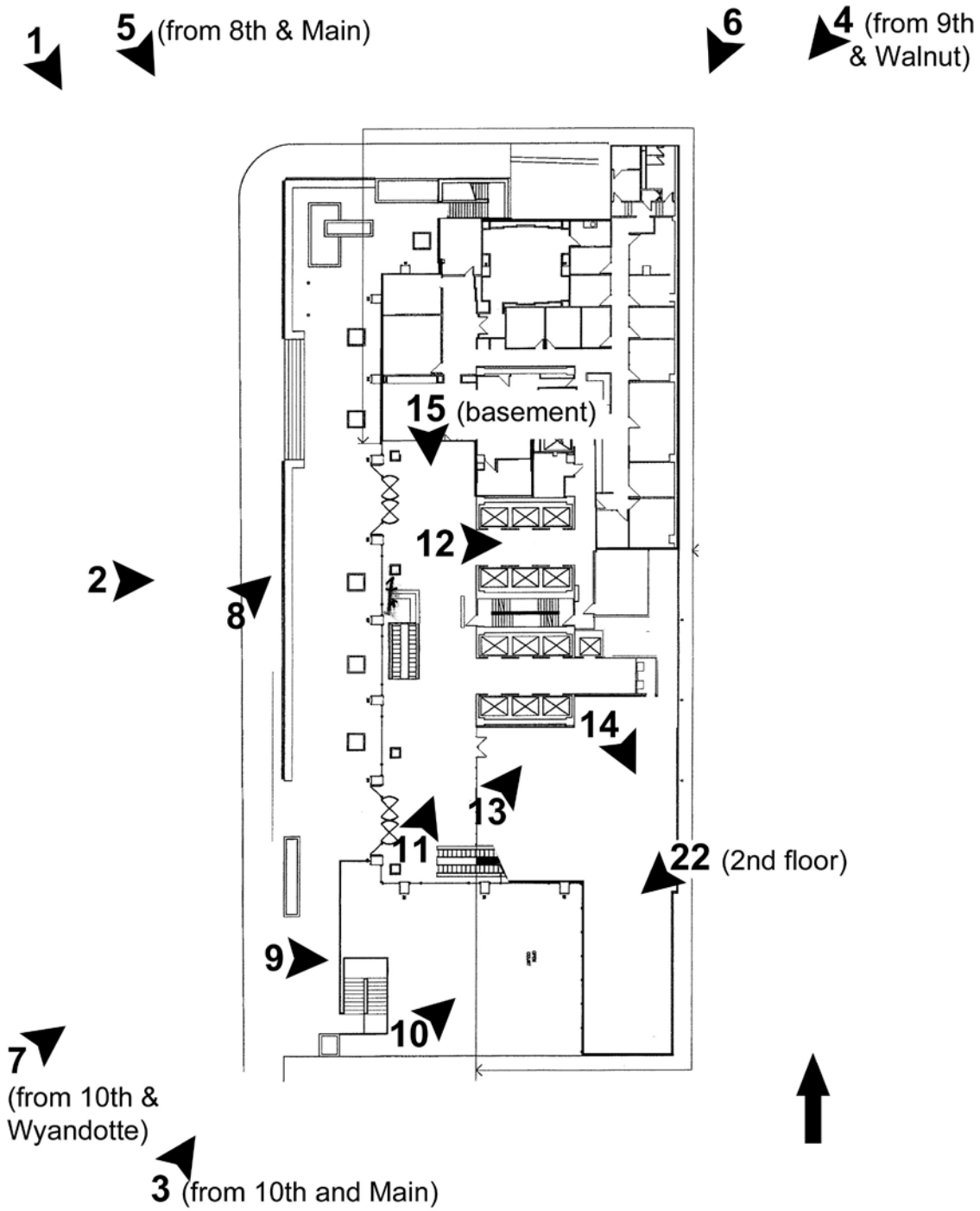

Figure 4: Photo Map, upper floors.

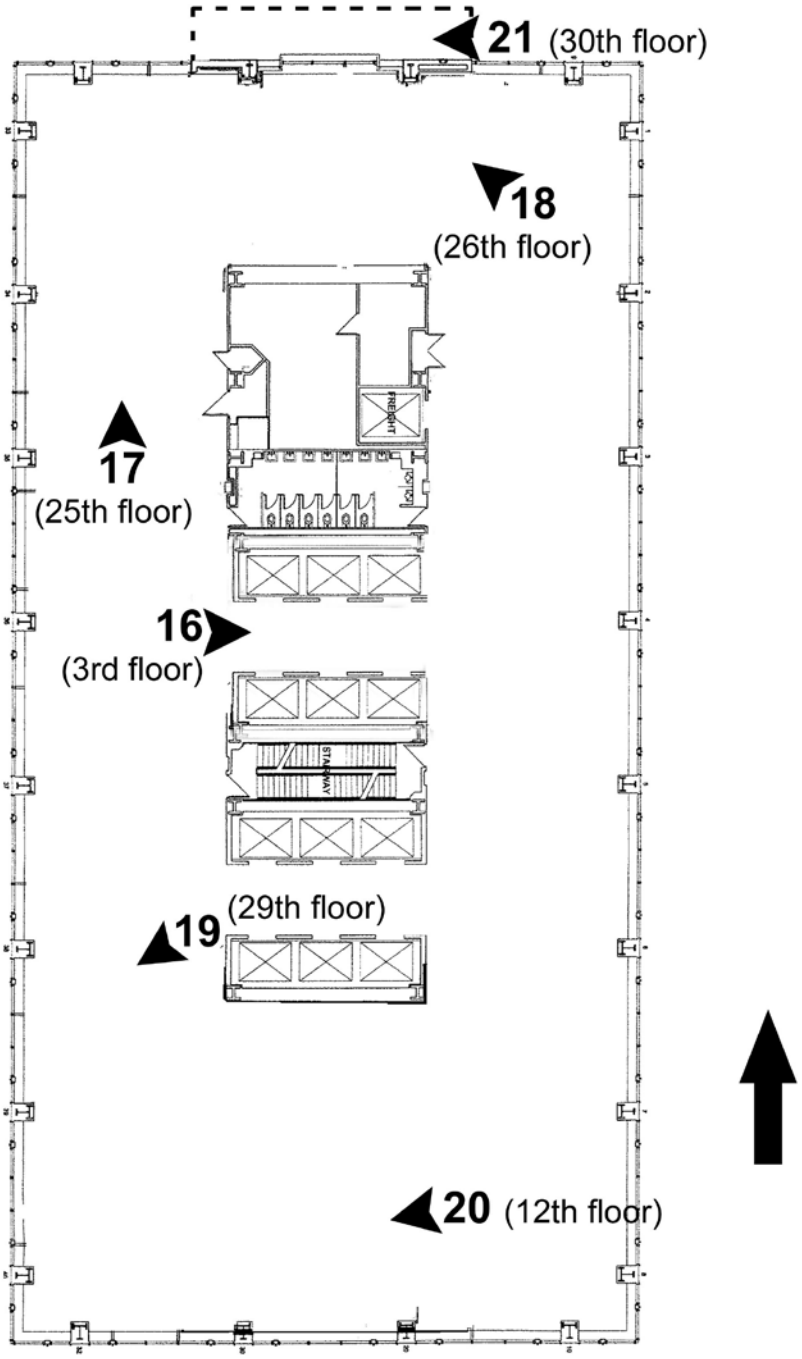

Figure 5: Historic Plans, Sub-basement.

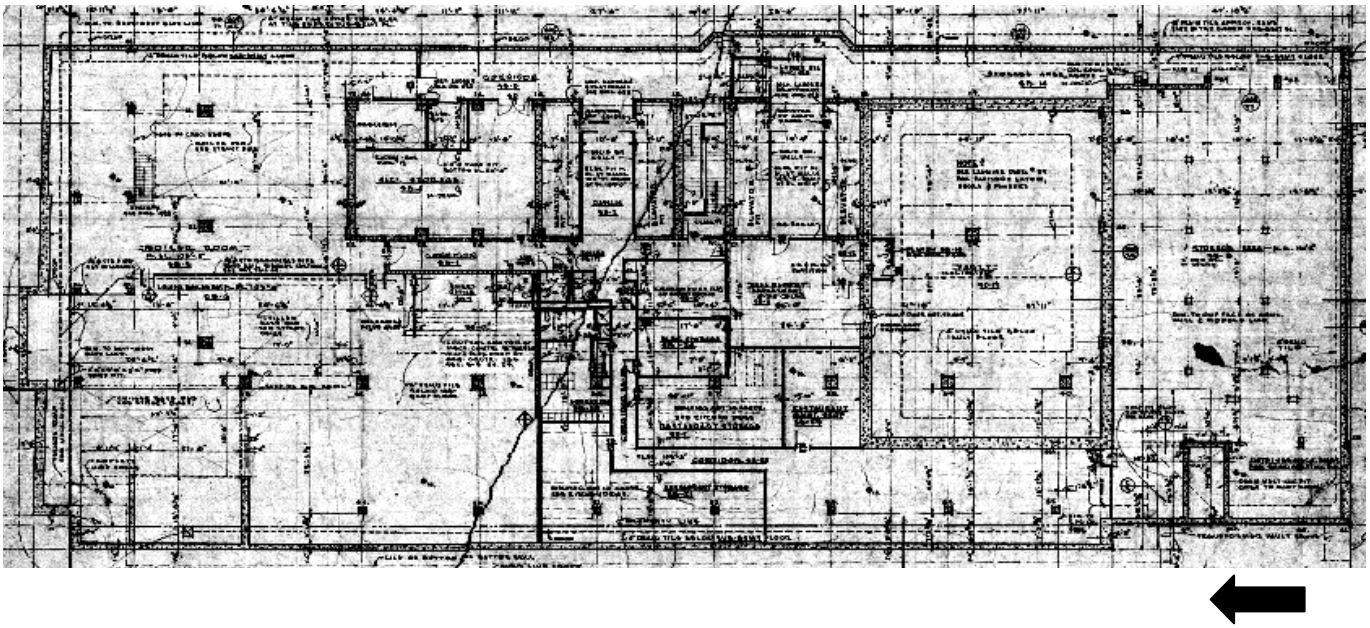

Figure 6: Historic Plans, Basement.

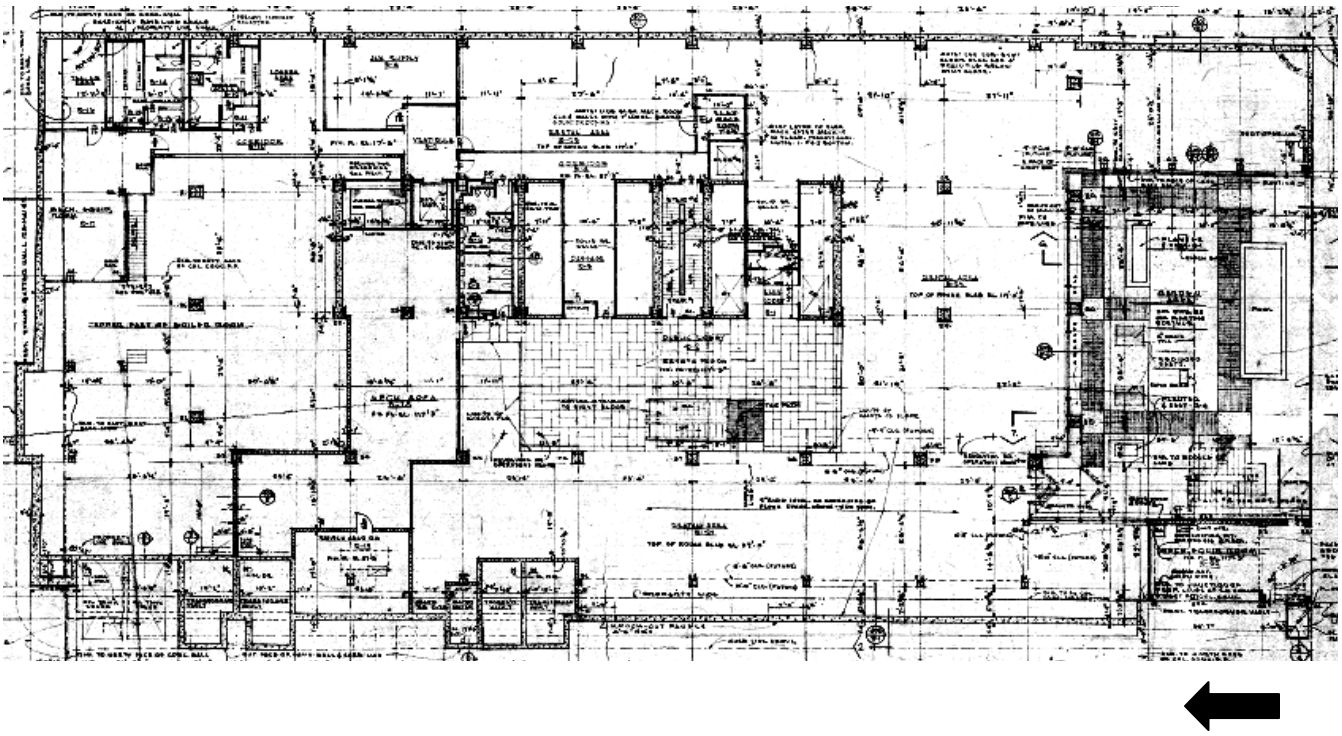

Figure 7: Historic Plans, 1st floor.

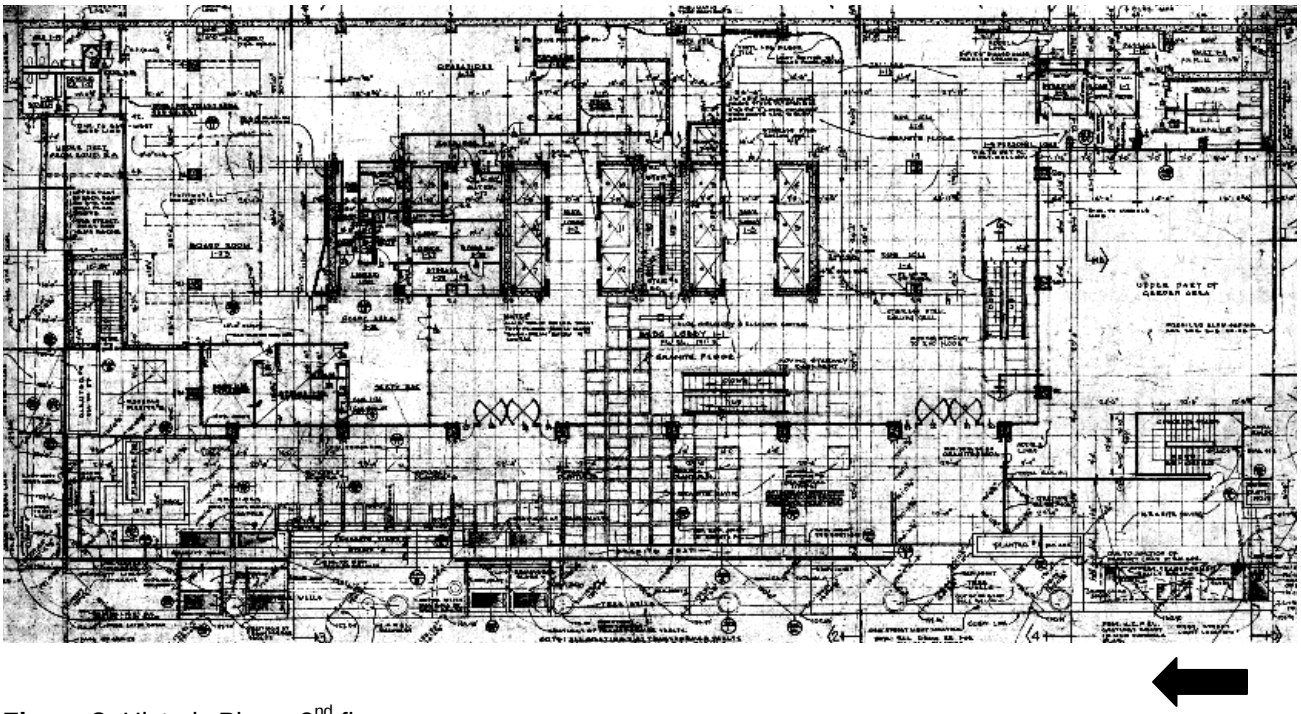

Figure 8: Historic Plans, 2nd floor.

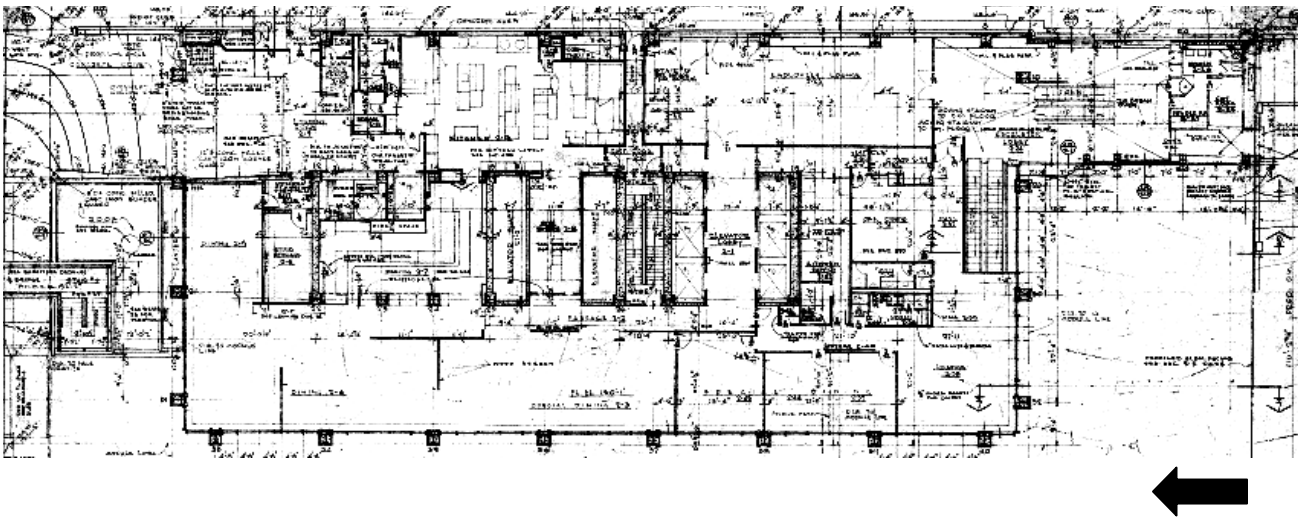

Figure 9: Historic Plans, 3rd floor.

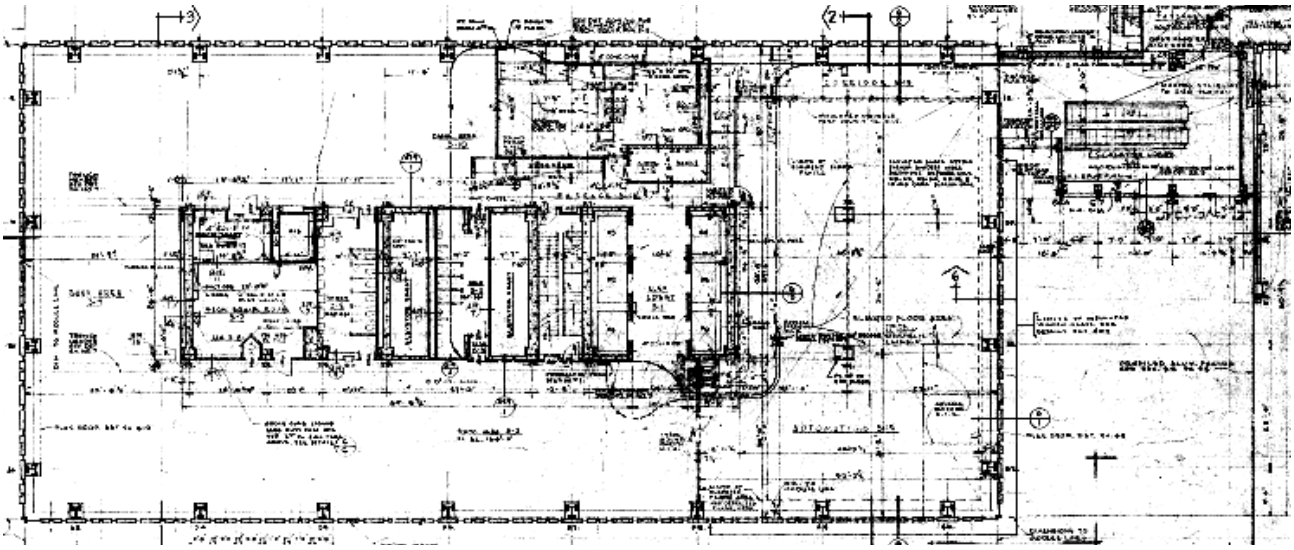

Figure 10: Historic Plans, 5th floor.

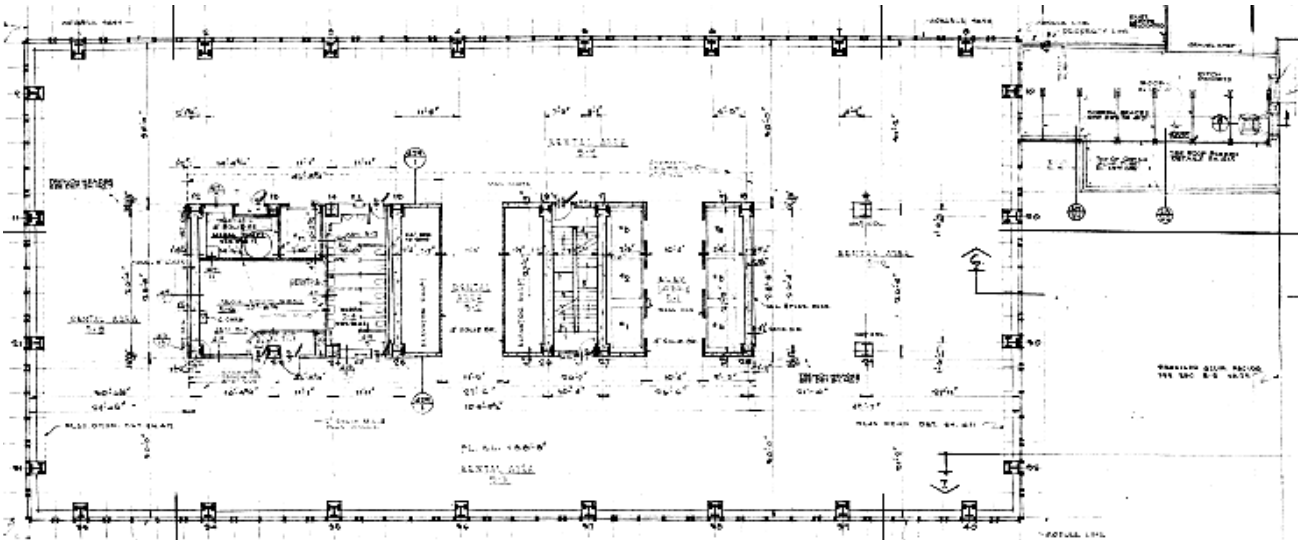

Figure 11: Historic Plans, 12th floor. Note auditorium and law library on south side.

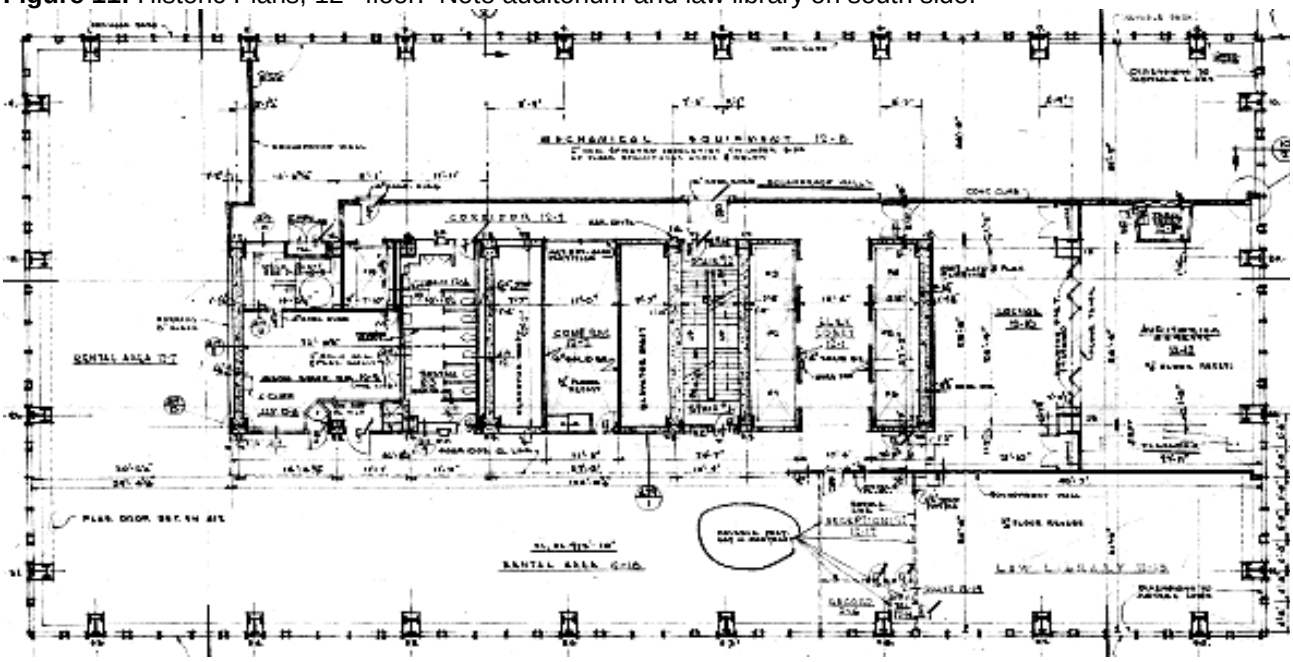

Figure 12: Historic Plans, 30th floor.

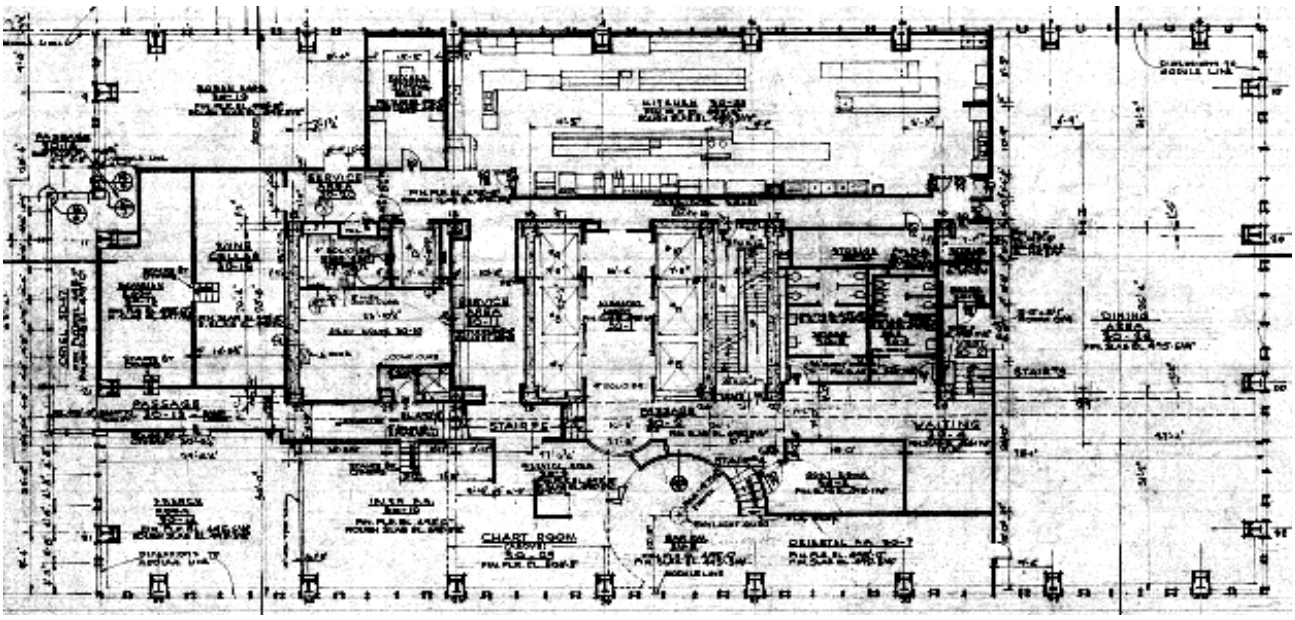

Figure 13: Historic Plans, Typical lower floor.

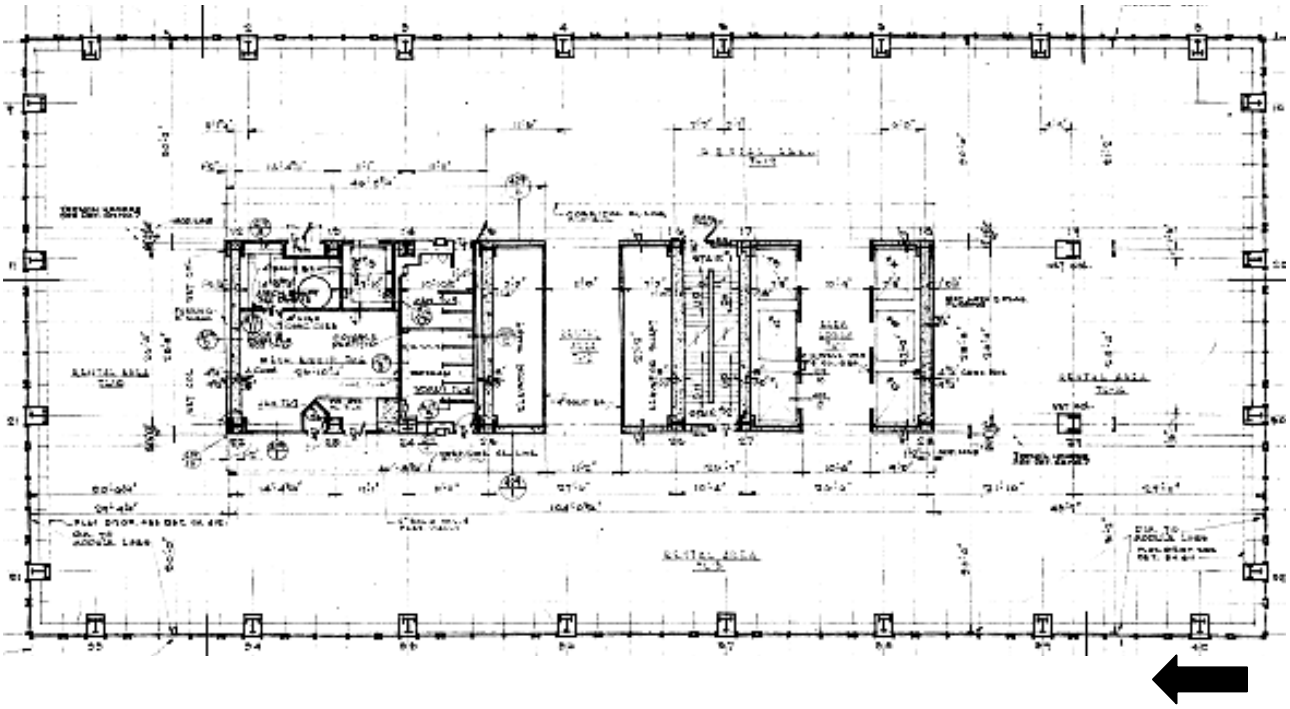

Figure 14: Historic Plans, Typical upper floor.

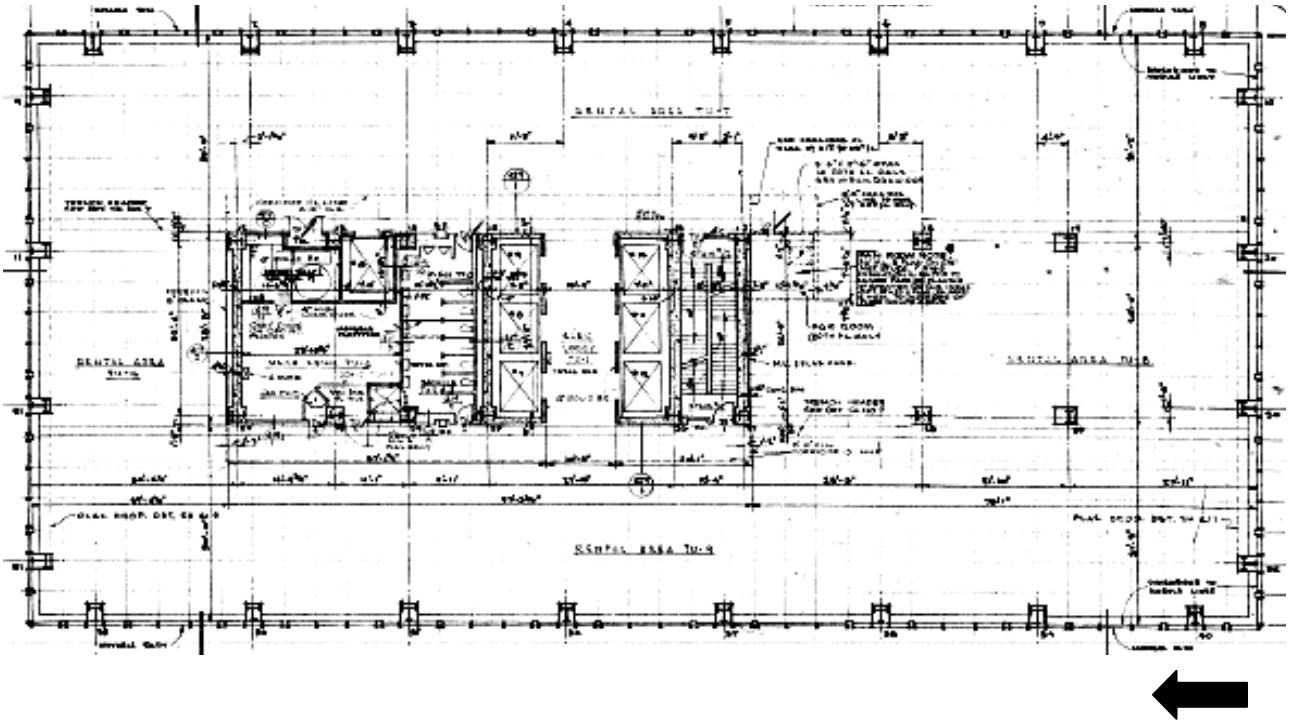

Figure 15: View of Commerce Tower during construction, 1964. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections.*

Figure 16: Illustration of Commerce Tower, c.1965. *Source: Commerce Tower: In the Heart of Kansas City's Financial District*

Figure 17: Historic photograph of Commerce Tower, c. 1965. *Source: Wilborn Photography, Kansas City, Missouri.*

Figure 18: Sunken garden along Main Street elevation, 1966. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections.*

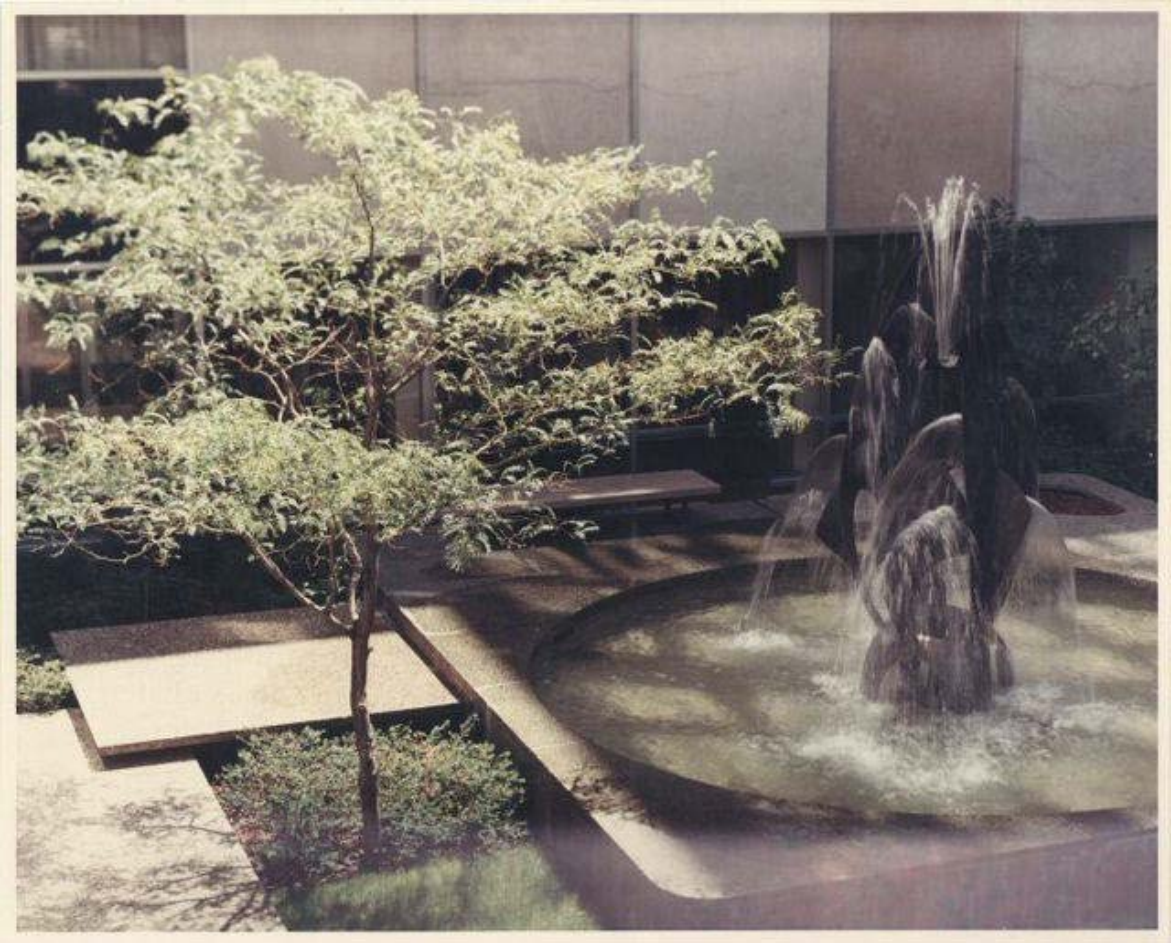

Figure 19: First floor, south office space, c. 1965. *Source: Wilborn Photography, Kansas City, Missouri.*

Figure 20: Thirtieth floor, Top of the Tower Restaurant, c. 1965. *Source: Missouri Valley Special Collections.*

SBD2484
10th St
GARAGE

9th St
Walnut St

Good things grow from
SYSCO
173 TO CASINO
The Metro

PRIVATE
ALLEY
NO
TRESPASSING

COMMERCE BANK

PARK
UNIVERSITY
911 MAIN
COMMERCE TOWER

NEO

NEO

GARDEN LEVEL
DOWNTOWN COUNCIL
OF KANSAS CITY
DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY
IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

COMMERCE TOWER
Commerce
Tower

DOWNTOW
COUNCIL
OF
KANSAS
CITY

EXIT
MEN'S ROOM
WOMEN'S ROOM

3
3
3
3
3
3

Commerce Trust Building
Commerce Tower Building
Registration
PARK