

CL-AS-009

HISTORIC RESOURCES SURVEY, PHASE II
Hall of Waters District and Central Place District



EXCELSIOR SPRINGS, MISSOURI

Three Gables Preservation

June 30, 1993

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Three Gables Preservation

for the Excelsior Springs Historic Preservation Commission,
Community Development Department,
and the City of Excelsior Springs, Missouri



Hall of Waters pool

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INTRODUCTION

Phase I of the survey of historic resources in Excelsior Springs was begun in September, 1992. The survey was funded by the City of Excelsior Springs with a matching grant through the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Program, which receives allocations from the Historic Preservation Fund of the Department of Interior, National Park Service, under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and subsequent amendments.

The historic resources survey was conducted by Three Gables Preservation, with Deon Wolfenbarger serving as project coordinator. The survey project coordinators for the City of Excelsior Springs were Molly McGovern, Director of Community Development, and Sonya Morgan, member of the Excelsior Springs Historic Preservation Commission. Project coordinator for the Missouri Historic Preservation Program is Gerald Lee Gilleard, Survey Coordinator.

In 1991, the Excelsior Springs Survey Plan was developed in order to guide survey activities in Excelsior Springs over the next several years. It proposed four additional phases of survey, and ranked those phases in order of importance (an initial survey of 20 historic buildings was prepared in conjunction with the Survey Plan; see Figure 1 for boundaries for the survey districts/phases). A number of factors were examined to develop the survey priorities. The Phase I portion of the survey was developed as a grant project with the Missouri Historic Preservation Program and subsequently funded. Two survey districts, the "Hall of Waters" and "Central Park", containing an estimated 137 buildings for inventory were covered in this phase. Inventory sheets were prepared for 142 structures. A more detailed description of the survey methodology follows.



THE ELMS VERANDA - (Music Hall in distance)

EXCELSIOR SPRINGS PROPOSED SURVEY DISTRICTS

Plan A

- Phase I
 - A Central Park
 - B Hall of Waters
- Phase II
 - C Boarding House
 - D Parks & Blvds.
- Phase III
 - E Beacon Hill
 - F Forest Park
- Phase IV
 - G Isley Blvd.
 - H North Main

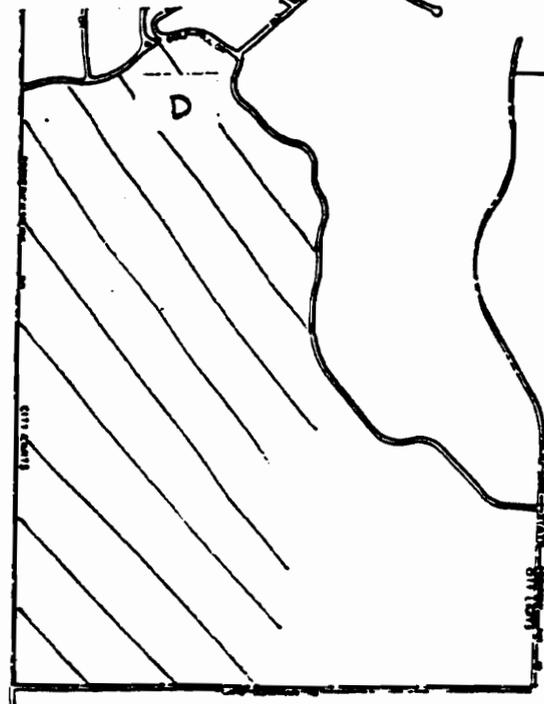
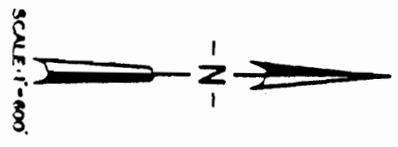
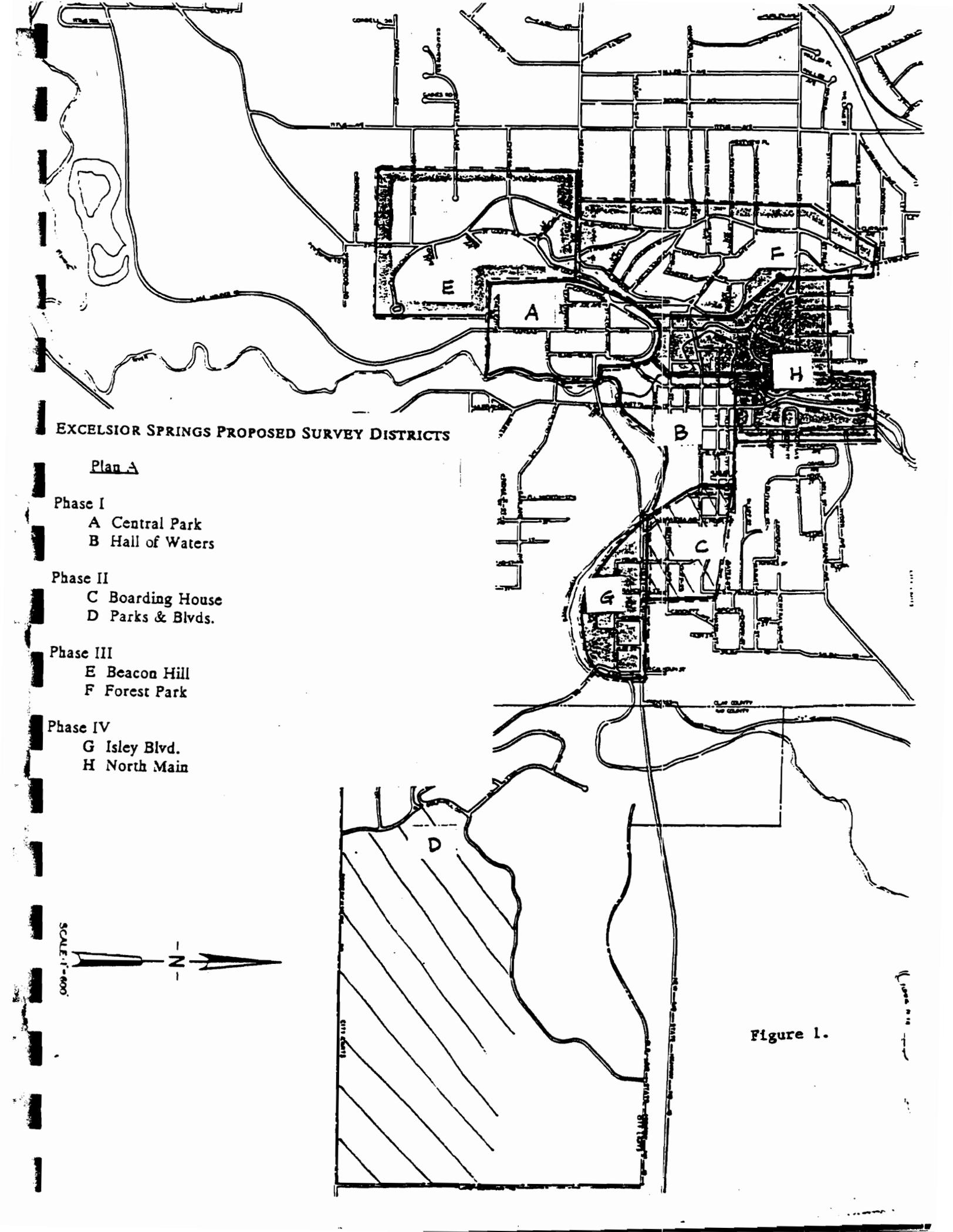


Figure 1.



METHODOLOGY

Field Survey

An intensive level survey, as defined by National Park Service Bulletin #24, was conducted for significant historic resources located within the "Hall of Waters" and "Central Park" districts (Figure 1). The following categories of structures were used as guidelines to determine which buildings were inventoried.

- 1) Any structure which is potentially eligible individually for listing on the National Register.
- 2) Any structure which would be eligible as a contributing structure in a potential National Register district.
- 3) Those structures which would not detract from a historic district.
- 4) Those structures which are necessary to determine boundaries.
- 5) Those structures which are necessary to fully develop and evaluate the historic contexts or property types (identified in the Excelsior Springs Survey Plan).
- 6) Any additional structures which are potentially eligible for local historic listing, the protection phase of preservation planning.

Survey sheets were not completed for obvious non-historic structures, even if within a potential district (although photographs were taken of some of these structures). Occasionally, however, it was not immediately obvious which buildings were non-historic, due to recent alterations. Therefore, a few survey sheets were completed for buildings constructed within the past fifty years. Also, inventory forms were filled out on some historic buildings which have been drastically altered. A few of these buildings had strong historic associations with the mineral water history of Excelsior Springs. In spite of their obvious lack of architectural integrity, the possibility always exists for a sensitive rehabilitation project which would increase such a building's eligibility.

Background Research

Archival research included a review of city and county records; historic city, plat, and Sanborn maps; old photographs; local and county histories. The Excelsior Springs Historical Museum has a wealth of information on specific topics in the city. Their archives include a large postcard and historic photograph collection; city directories for 1908, 1917, and 1922; a 1940 telephone book; and files on specific buildings (such as churches, hotels, mineral wells, etc.).

Copies of Sanborn Maps for the years 1894, 1900, 1905, 1909, 1913, 1926, and an updated version of the latter corrected through 1942 were available from the Missouri State Archives. However, a small portion of the surveyed area was not covered by these maps in the earlier years. The city has copies of all of the plats filed, which were helpful in determining the approximate period of development for different areas of town. However, building or water permits were not available for historic buildings. Therefore, nearly every construction date is estimated.

Oral interviews were utilized when other sources of documentation were not available. In many cases, the information provided here pointed a direction for further research. At times, certain information was available only through oral interviews. While surveying the structures in the field, a few residents and business owners were kind enough to share their knowledge of their own structure's history. In addition, commission member Sonya Morgan provided additional data on some buildings. Several other long-time Excelsior Springs residents undoubtedly could provide a great deal more insight into the development of the town. A worthwhile project for future consideration would be to conduct

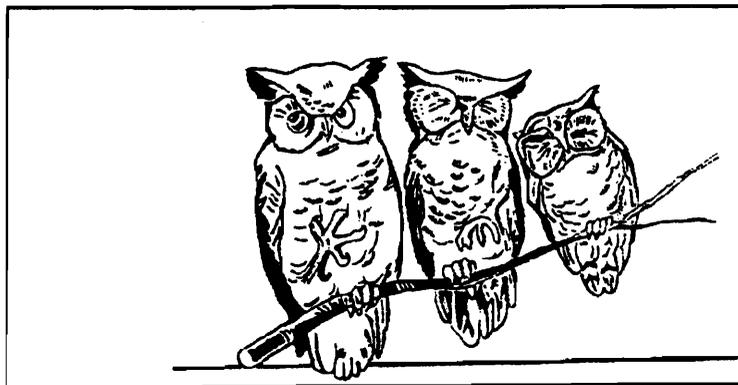
interviews with some of these residents to document their memories about the built environment of Excelsior Springs. As Excelsior Springs has remained a small town, written documentation is lacking in several areas. A project such as this could prove invaluable.

Evaluation

After compiling the field survey results and the background research, the data was reviewed for broad patterns of historical development that were represented by the extant historic resources. A brief outline of the historic context, as defined in National Register Bulletin #24, was already developed for the Excelsior Springs Survey Plan, as well as definitions of property types. Additional information regarding the historic context is provided herein.

Structures were evaluated according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, first for individual eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places, then for their potential to contribute to a National Register district, and lastly for their potential for local historic designation. These evaluations were then noted on a map. Where sufficient concentrations of buildings indicated the potential for listing on the National Register or for local historic designation, district boundaries were also indicated. It is possible that in areas where there were not sufficient concentrations to warrant a historic district, that a few historic buildings would be eligible for inclusion in a Multiple Property nomination. An example of this would be representatives of the "Boarding House" property type, which are located in an area where the surrounding buildings have either been demolished, or have lost their historic integrity. While perhaps not individually eligible for the National Register, these buildings might be listed in a Multiple Property nomination which includes examples of this property type across the city. Further survey is therefore necessary before conclusions regarding the eligibility of these structures can be made.

A brief history of the development of the potential districts, as well as a description of the physical characteristics is provided. The associations of these districts to the historic context is also discussed.



THE "THREE OWLS"
FAMILIAR SIGN OF THE SULPHO SALINE
"We're out all night, Til broad daylight
But we drink SULPHO SALINE, In the morning."

HALL OF WATERS SURVEY DISTRICT

HALL OF WATERS SURVEY DISTRICT

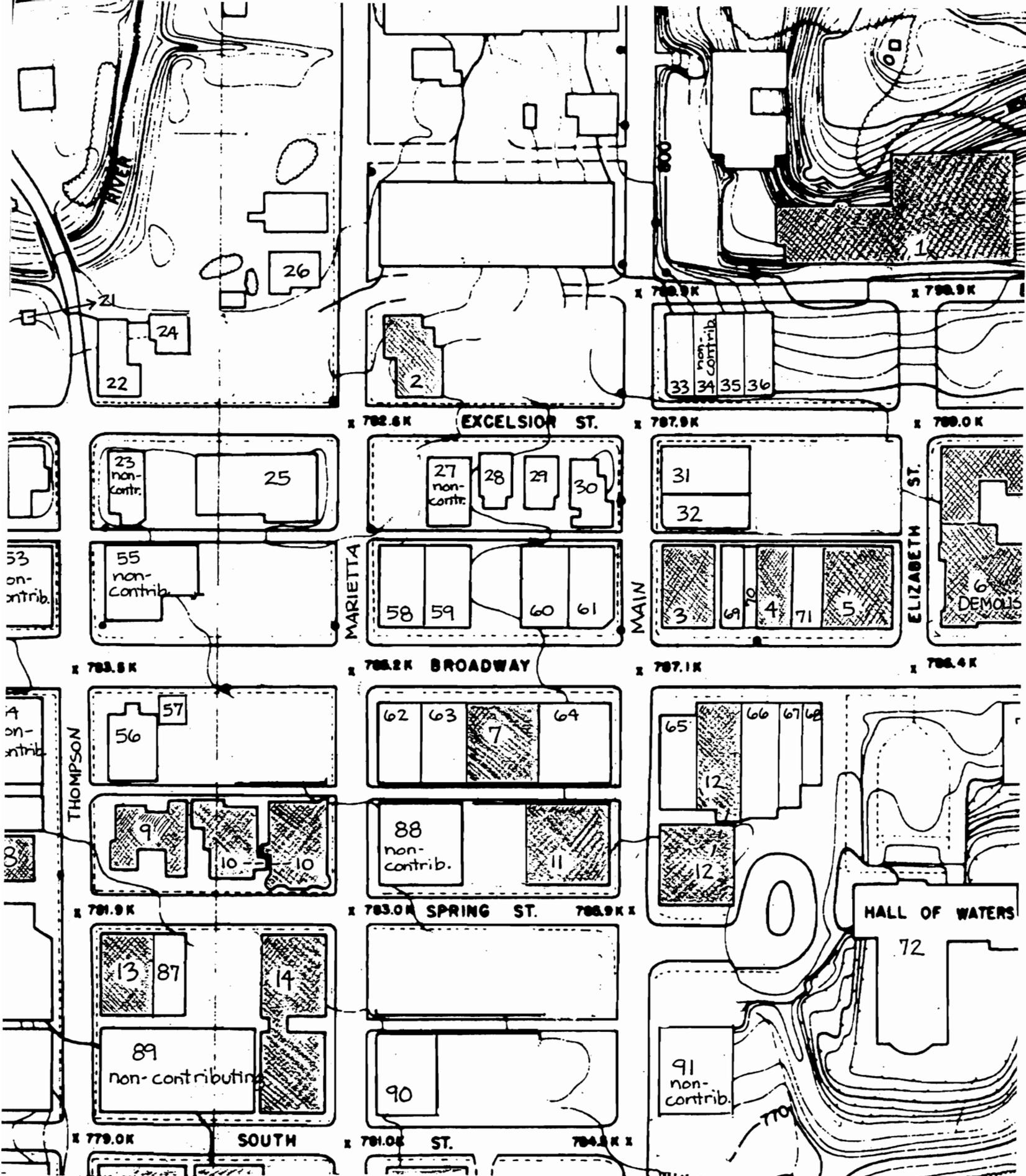
The Hall of Waters Survey District is roughly bounded by Excelsior and Bluff/Foley Streets on the north, Penn Street on the east; Broadway Avenue, the Fishing River Park, and River Street on the south, and Thompson Avenue on the west. Figure 2 shows the buildings which were covered by the inventory (as revealed by the survey number 21 or higher). As can be seen on the map, several buildings in the district were covered by a previous survey, completed in the summer of 1991. A large number of these were the large hotel and health clinic buildings, which are significant for their association with the developed historic context. The remainder of the Hall of Waters District contains the majority of historic commercial structures in Excelsior Springs, and serves as the "downtown" area for the community. In addition, a few residential buildings (including boarding houses) are on Excelsior and Bluff Streets. S. Marietta Street (south of River Street) contained a handful of residential and commercial buildings. These were included in this survey, so that the entire downtown area north of the East Fork of the Fishing River was inventoried (see Figure 3).

Description

The Hall of Waters Survey District can be categorized into smaller areas, related by the types of historic structures they contain and their original function. Broadway is a linear commercial district, containing one- and two-story commercial buildings. The street itself is broad, with parallel parking provided along both edges. The concrete sidewalks are lined with tall, modern street lights with metal standards. The majority of one-story commercial buildings are located on the eastern and western edges of the surveyed area of Broadway, while the two-story commercial buildings are primarily centered around the Hall of Waters building. The Hall of Waters is a magnificent Art Deco building, which is set back from the street edge with a large lawn. The remainder of commercial buildings on Broadway, however, abut the sidewalk, and form a vertical plane with the storefronts. This visual aspect of the potential historic district has been interrupted recently with the demolition of the Ball Clinic building at 200 E. Broadway (survey building 6 on Figure 2). A large vacant lot now covers the north 200 block of E. Broadway. Other vacant lots also interrupt the continuity of the district.

South of Broadway, between Thompson Avenue and Main street, is a group of historic hotels and commercial buildings. These buildings are two stories, or in the cases of the larger hotels, three or more stories in height. Combined with the narrow width of the streets, this gives some blocks a distinct historic sense of time and place. This is confined to only a few blocks, however. Demolition of nearly every building in the block bounded by Marietta, Spring, South, and Main streets (now occupied only by survey building 90 on Figure 2) has greatly altered the former appearance of this edge of the commercial area. Some non-contributing buildings are found in this area as well. Building 89 is a historic building, but has been so drastically altered that it no longer retains any historic integrity. Completely covered with a modern stone veneer, it is doubtful that this could be removed without damaging the historic fabric beneath. Building 88 is a new, one-story commercial building, and building 91 is the new police station. Although non-contributing, the design of this structure is compatible with the adjacent Hall of Waters.

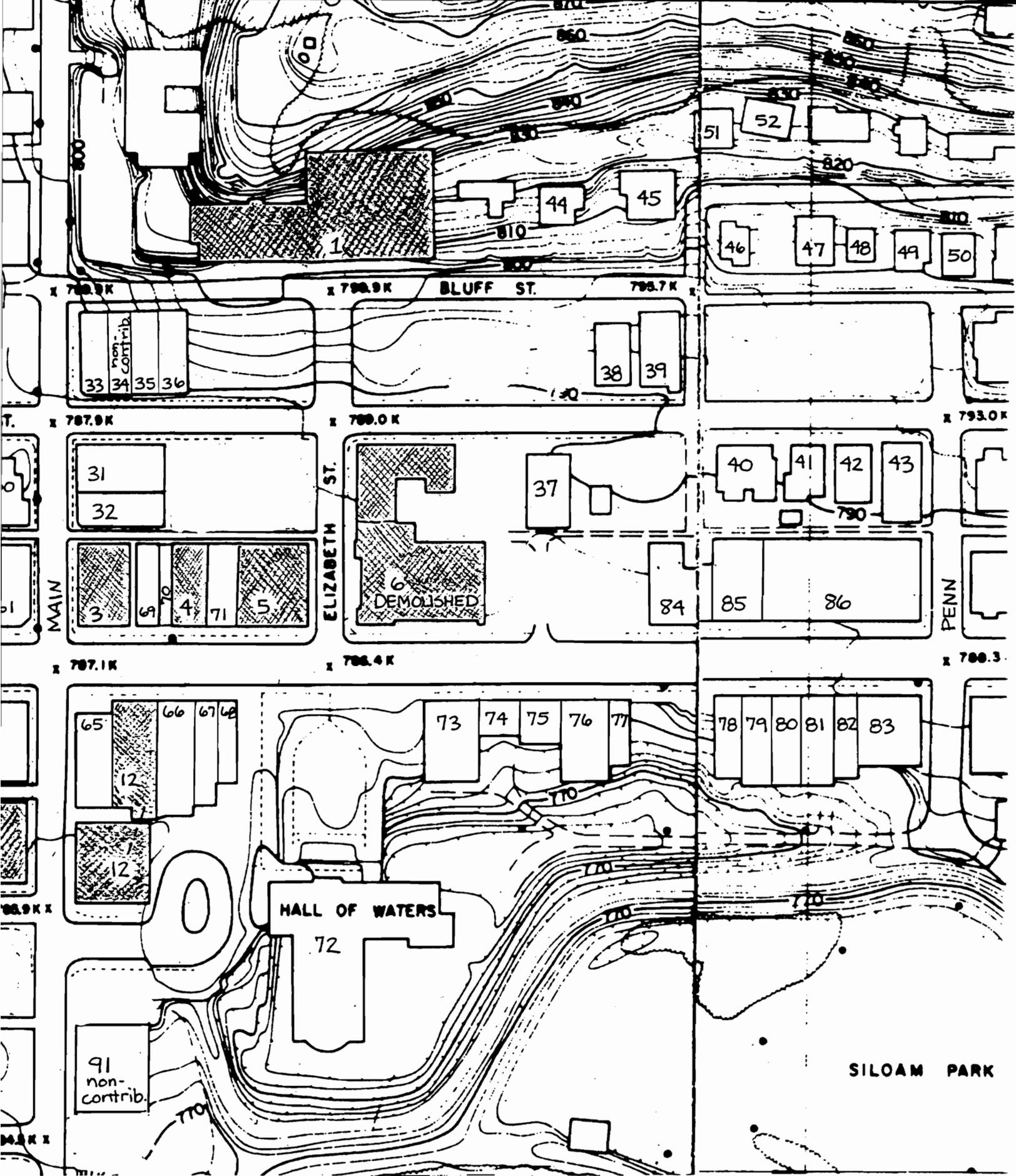
Just north of the Broadway commercial district, Excelsior Street, Bluff Avenue, and Bluff Street contain a variety of property types. Churches, a former hotel/clinic, boarding houses, and single family residences are all found in this area. The land rises steeply to the north of Bluff Avenue (behind the former Castle Rock Hotel, building number 1), forming a natural boundary at this edge of the district. There has been a great deal of demolition in this area over the years, leaving these buildings in small, isolated groups. As with many of Excelsior Springs residential buildings, most of these have been altered in some way. Siding changes and porch alterations are the most common.



Hall of Waters Survey District

37 Surveyed building

12 Prior survey - 1991



eyed building

 Prior survey - 1991

Figure 2

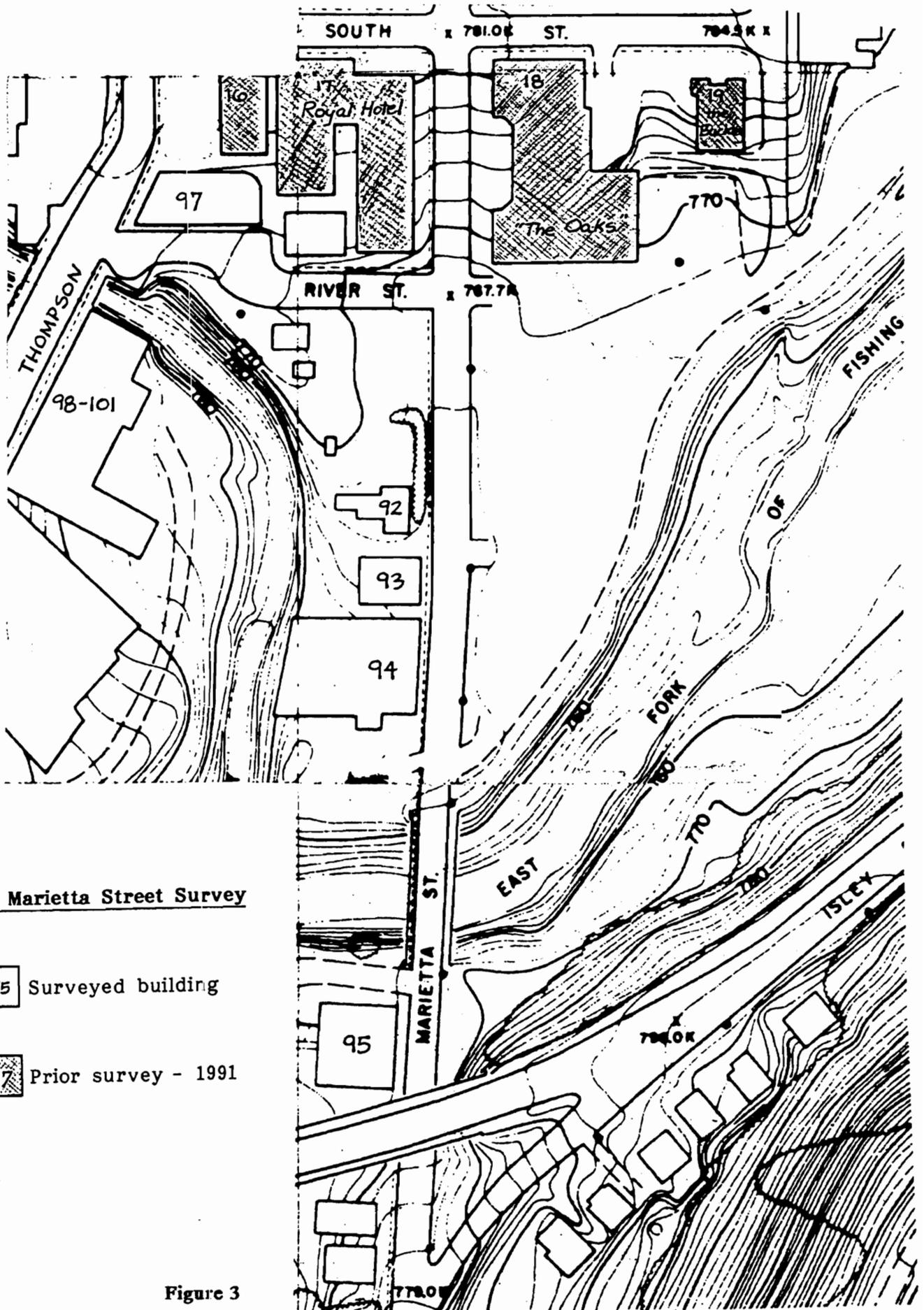


Figure 3

History

The Hall of Waters Survey District includes the Original Town plat of Excelsior Springs, which was filed soon after the founding of the town in 1880. The original forty acre townsite covered the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of Section 1, Township 6~~2~~, range 30. The town's founding was due to the discovery of the "medicinal" qualities of the sulphur spring in the area. The owner of the spring was A.W. Wyman, who, upon the advice of the Rev. J.V.B. Flack, promptly had the town platted by the county surveyor, T. B. Rogers, on September 1, 1880. It was Flack who had the waters analyzed by chemists in St. Louis, and who worked diligently at spreading the word about the curative powers of the waters. By the first of January, Wyman had sold nearly 100 lots. Within a year, two hundred houses had been built in the river valley or along the rugged hillsides. Still, hundreds of visitors to the community, coming to partake of the miraculous waters, had to camp in tents or covered wagons. Rev. Flack not only built a home within the original town site, but opened the first dry goods store, but founded the town's first church and served as its preacher. He was a key figure in the founding of the Christian Union denomination, and the Flack Memorial Christian Union Church is currently located on E. Excelsior, within the Hall of Waters Survey District.

In a very short time, small boarding and rooming houses were constructed, most of these centered around the area of original spring. The sulphur spring had been first named "Excelsior" by the Rev. Flack, after a popular poem by Henry Longfellow. The name was shortly changed to "Siloam" in 1881, when the village became the town of "Excelsior Springs" in 1881. A small wood pagoda with windows was constructed around the well. Eventually, springhouses were built around the other springs which were discovered -- the Regent, Relief, Saratoga, and Superior. The "Cottage" home of William Riggs was the first rooming house built. It was located at the northwest corner of Main and Broadway. The Cooper, Empire, Bailey, Foley, Kansas City, and Caldwell houses were among those that quickly followed. The first hotel was built as close to the spring as possible (very near the existing Hall of Waters, on the south side of Broadway east of Main). The Excelsior Hotel was built in 1881, and had 25 rooms.

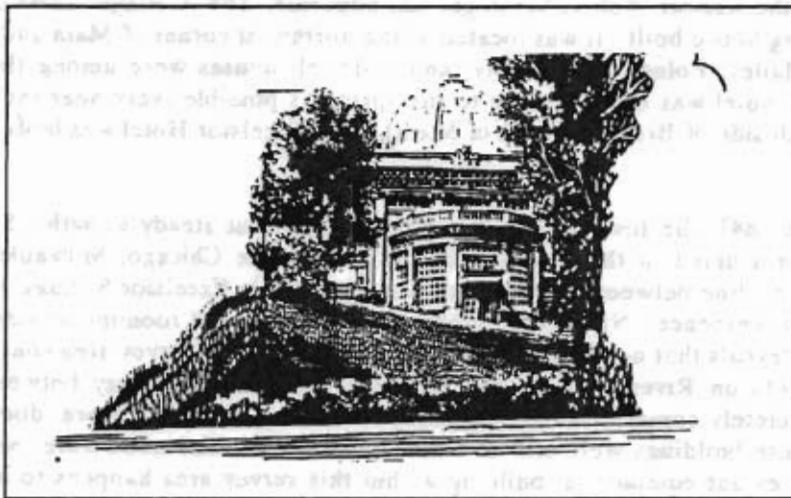
From 1882 through 1887, the town was in a period of slow, but steady growth. Small homes and businesses were constructed in this period. In 1887, when the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railroad opened up its line between Chicago and Kansas City via Excelsior Springs, the town entered an era of national prominence. Numerous commercial buildings and rooming houses were built. An 1894 Sanborn map reveals that nearly every lot in the Hall of Waters survey area contained a building, except for a few lots on River, Spring, and Excelsior streets. Broadway between Marietta and Elizabeth was completely commercial by this time, containing numerous store, doctors offices, and hotels. Most of these buildings were still of frame construction, and none were over two stories in height. The oldest extant commercial building within this survey area happens to be just off of the main commercial area on Broadway. 102 E. Excelsior had been constructed by the time of the 1894 Sanborn map, and has served a variety of commercial enterprises over the years, including a bath house in 1905.

As the population (and popularity) of Excelsior Springs grew, it was only natural that the town itself would expand. In addition to the expansion of the town's boundaries by new additions, the "Original Town" was replatted several times over the years. Some of these subdivisions were as small as a few lots, while others covered several blocks. These small subdivisions often indicate the construction of new commercial buildings, replacing the earlier frame structures. By 1900, a number of two-story brick commercial buildings began to appear on Broadway, as well as in the area south of Broadway between Thompson (then called Wyman) and Main streets. At this point, however, it was rare to find an entire block composed of brick structures. The first of the large hotels had been built. The original section of the Royal Hotel was located on the southwest corner of South and Marietta streets. The other major hotels were still frame. Although the community's population in 1900 was 1,881, with 10 hotels

and nearly 200 boarding houses, it could accommodate twice its population. Most of these hotels were located within the Hall of Waters Survey District.

Just five years later, in 1905, more two-story brick structures had been built in the commercial district. The block bounded by Marietta, Broadway, Main, and Spring streets was almost entirely brick structures, except for the northeast corner. All but the center portion of the north side of the 100 block of E. Broadway was built. These buildings housed commercial enterprises typical of small, midwestern towns, with a few notable exceptions. There was a higher proportion of drug stores and doctors offices per capita in Excelsior Springs. Coupled with the numerous boarding houses and hotels, the commercial district of Excelsior Springs did not have a typical small town, midwestern appearance in the historic period.

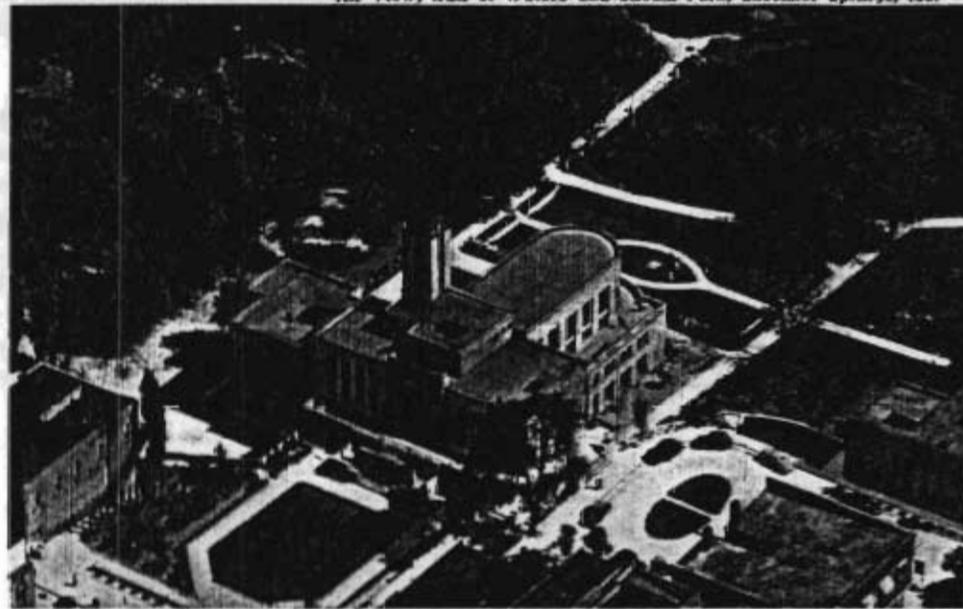
By 1909, and especially by 1913, the vast majority of inventoried buildings within the Hall of Waters Survey District had been constructed. Any construction that followed inevitably replaced an earlier building. The most notable change to the district occurred in the area around the Siloam Spring. Siloam Spring had become the property of the City by 1908. Plans for an elaborate, classically inspired Siloam and Sulpho Saline pavilions were completed by architect Henry F. Hoit. Landscape architect George E. Kessler designed an elaborate setting around the building, although the Siloam Gardens were never completed in their entirety. The buildings, however, were completed in 1923.



The Siloam Pavilion

The Depression of the 1930's took its toll on the city, as it did across the nation. However, Excelsior Springs did not suffer as much as some cities, perhaps, as the town continued to promote the health aspects of the mineral waters. In 1933, Missouri Governor Guy Park signed a bill authorizing the city to operate a mineral water system with funds obtained from a Reconstruction Finance Corporation loan. Over half a million dollars was spent constructed the elaborate Hall of Waters, on the site of the Siloam and Sulpho Saline pavilions constructed just a decade earlier. This, in addition to the enlargement of the Veterans Hospital, greatly boosted the local economy. Eventually, however, fewer railroad lines to town led to rising costs for the city in the 1940's. Only the larger clinics, such as the Ball, McCleary-Thornton Hospital, and the Excelsior Clinic, were able to survive in the health field. The paving of Highway 69 from Cameron to Liberty, by way of Excelsior Springs, helped greatly in

providing transportation opportunities to the city. The Rock Island Railroad inaugurated passenger service in 1931, helping to offset the later abandonment of the Interurban Railroad and the Wabash. Highways and bus lines were increasingly relied upon. Many of the city's streets were paved for the first time in this period, with much of the work financed by the WPA.



Postcard depiction of the Hall of Waters

A fire at the end of the 1930's destroyed the 200 block of E. Broadway. Another fire occurred on E. Broadway in the 1950's. The Fishing River flooded numerous times, often affecting the Hall of Waters Survey District. A 1940 flood resulted in twenty feet of water in the Hall of Waters basement. Another flood in 1943 completely filled the bottling works.

The mineral waters period of the city's history clearly extends into the 1960's. Due to a number of factors, the clinics ceased to prosper. The city's mineral water system suffered increasing losses over the years, averaging around \$25,000 per year in the 1960's. In 1967, the city manager suggested that the city forget its mineral water past. The Hall of Waters was closed for four years of repair. In 1971, a state health agency ordered Excelsior Springs to stop bottling mineral water, as bottling and capping could not be done by hand. In November, 1978, the city-owned bath house at the Hall of Waters finally reopened after twelve years.

Recommendations for Historic Designation

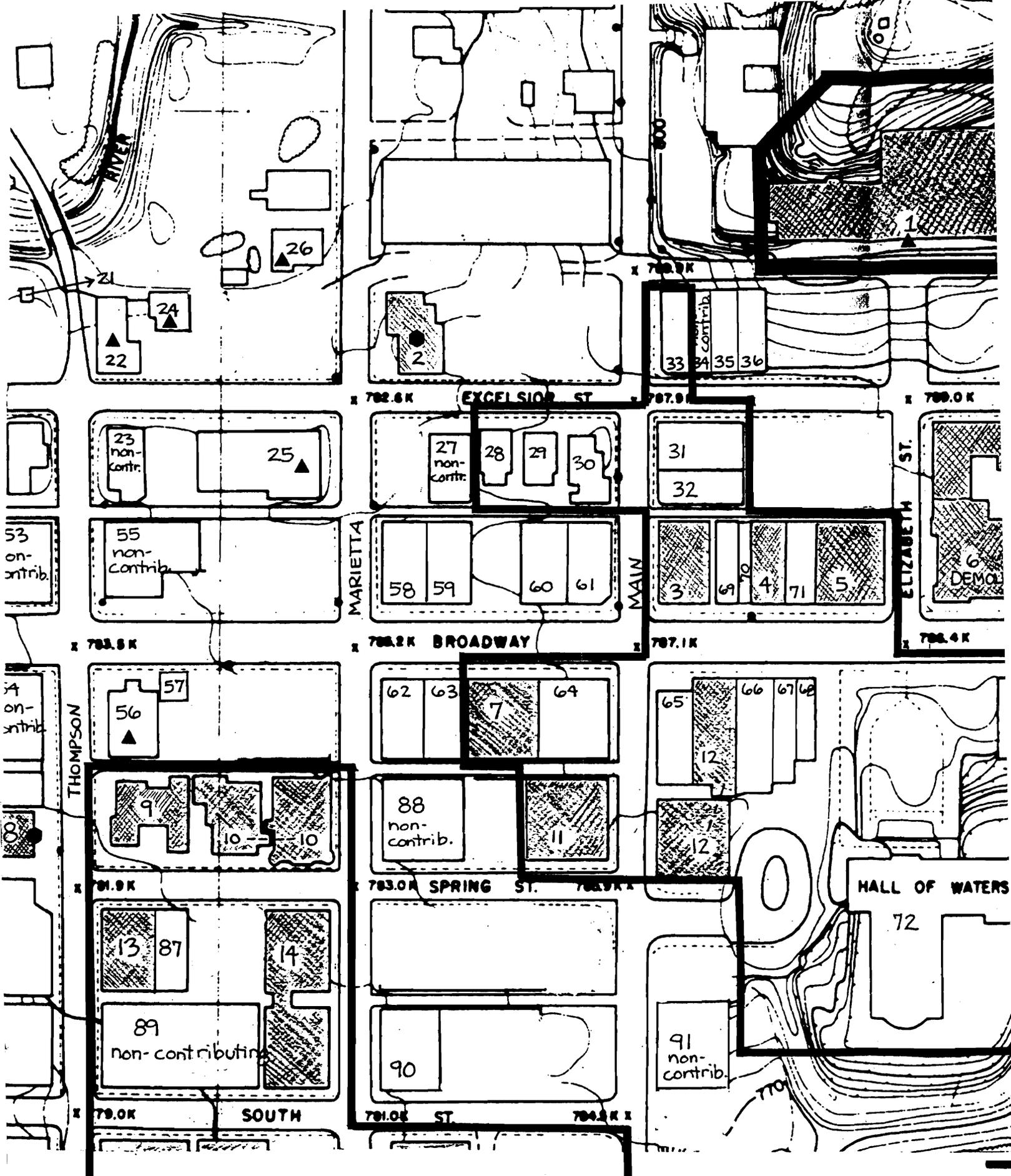
The biggest obstacle to recommending potential historic districts in the Hall of Waters Survey District is the demolition of historic buildings. In many places, a coherent street pattern has been lost with the demolition of key historic structures. Even the loss of seemingly secondary structures has affected the historic sense of time and place. Thus only small districts of a few buildings show any potential for historic designation. Another drawback to listing is the alterations over the years which have occurred on historic structures. However, it is the belief of this consultant that a strong argument can be made

for extending the period of significance beyond the typical fifty year limit for historic structures. The town of Excelsior Springs possesses exceptional significance due to its unique position as a health and resort town. The historic context defined in the survey plan - "Excelsior Springs - Missouri's National Health Resort: 1880-1963" - outlines such an argument. Legislation was passed in 1963 which prohibited the clinics from advertising cures with their treatment of conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism. In addition, unfavorable articles began appearing in national magazines about the mineral water clinics. The decline of the town's economy based on the waters can be traced from this point. If this argument is accepted, then some of the buildings which are viewed as marginally eligible (due to alterations dating from the 1960's or earlier) increase their chances for eligibility.

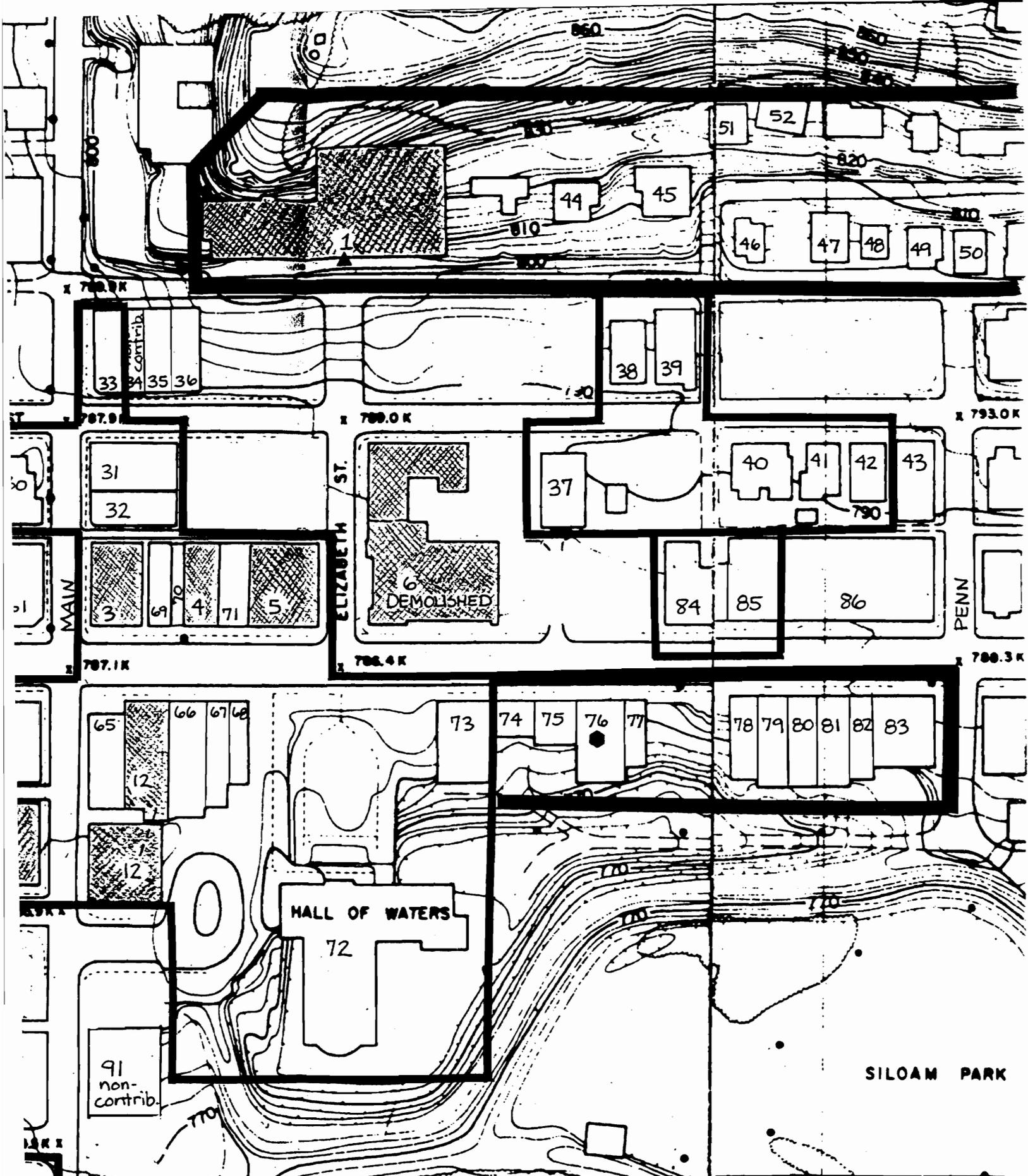
Based on this slightly more expansive view, the districts in Figures 4 and 5 include buildings which have undergone some alterations. However, historic buildings which have been completely altered beyond recognition from their period of construction, such as those on the north side of the 100 block of W. Broadway, are not included at this period. However, many of these buildings do have significant historical associations with Excelsior Springs. Therefore, it is possible to consider local designation for many of these buildings. With its accompanying power of review over proposed rehabilitation, new construction, and demolition, local district designation can greatly affect the appearance of the area. There are instances in other communities where a sensitive rehabilitation, overseen by a local preservation commission, has resulted in changing a previously ineligible building to one which was then eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.



102 to 120 E. Broadway is one of the few intact commercial blocks remaining on Broadway.



Hall of Waters Survey District 37 Surveyed building 12 Prior survey - 1991



12 yed building 12 Prior survey - 1991 Proposed National Register District Boundaries Proposed Local Historic District Boundaries
 Individually eligible -- National
 Individually eligible -- Local

Figure 4

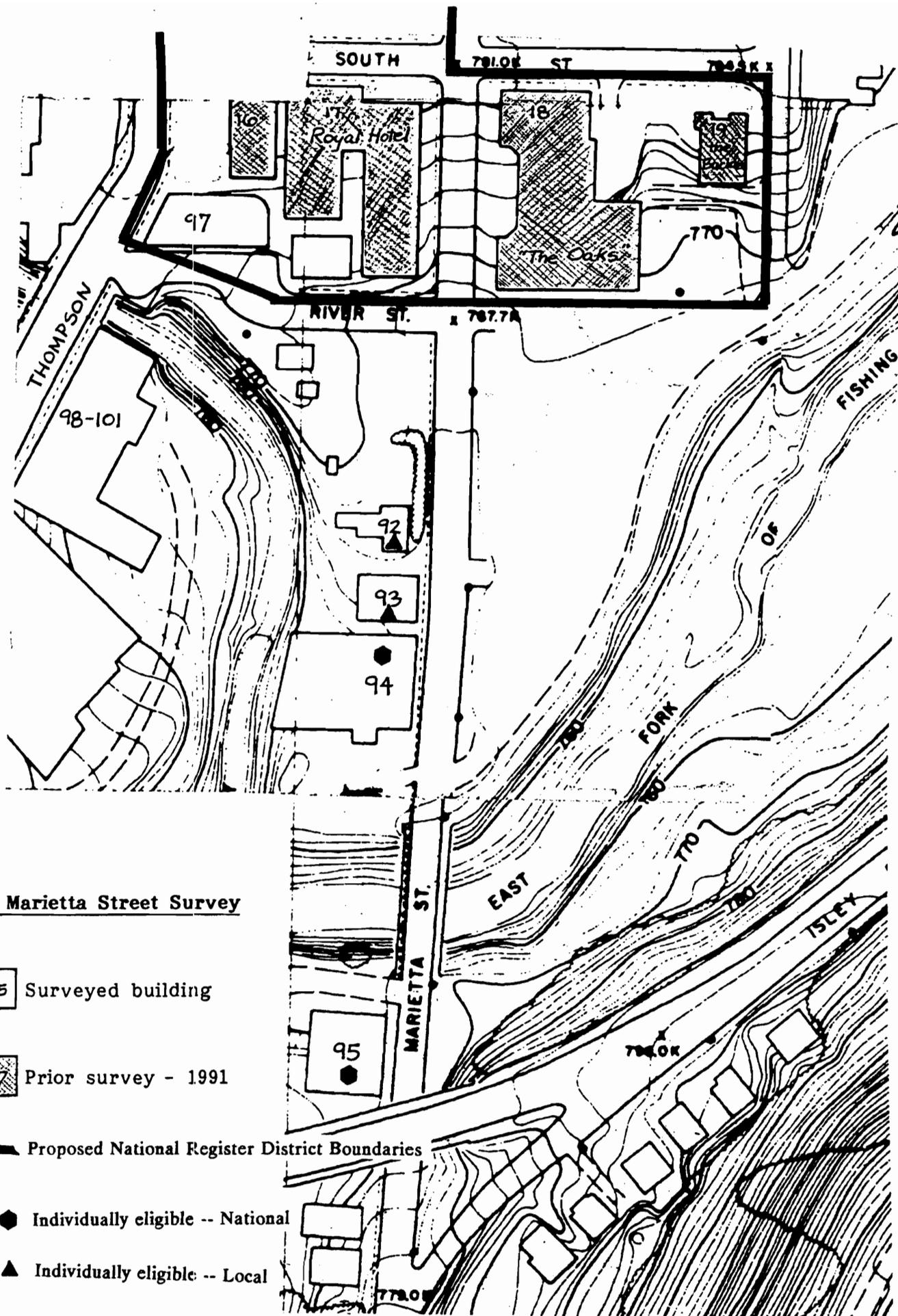


Figure 5

CENTRAL PARK SURVEY DISTRICT

CENTRAL PARK SURVEY DISTRICT

The Central Park Survey District is roughly bounded by Concourse on the west and north; Regent and the Fishing River on the east; and the Elms Hotel and Chillicothe on the south. Figure 6 shows the buildings which were covered by the inventory (as revealed by the survey number 97 or higher). As can be seen on the map, one building in the district was covered by a previous survey, completed in the summer of 1991. This health clinic is significant for its association with the developed historic context. The remaining buildings in the Central Park Survey District are residential and commercial. Regent Avenue, Elms Blvd., Kansas City Avenue, and The Concourse contain historic residential buildings, including several boarding houses, while Thompson Avenue contains commercial buildings. A large hotel complex, the Elms, is south of the junction of Elms Blvd. and Regent Avenue.

Description

The Central Park Survey District can be divided into smaller districts, related by virtue of building types and bounded on the edges by non-contributing buildings. On such dividing line is St. Louis Avenue. Although it formerly contained numerous historic structures, today only the McCleary Clinic (survey building number 20 on Figure 6) remains associated with the historic context. All of the other buildings on St. Louis Avenue are non-contributing, including a 1960's post office, new gas/convenience stations, a high-rise elderly housing building, and several former gas stations. A few of these gas stations will soon become fifty years old, and therefore have the potential for listing in the future. For the present time, however, St. Louis Avenue serves as an effective boundary edge.



Tree-lined S. Kansas City Avenue

South of St. Louis Avenue to the Elms Hotel complex is a historic residential district. There are two primary streets running north/south to the hotel -- S. Kansas City Avenue and Elms Boulevard. These contain primarily two-story residential structures of frame and brick. One-story, non-contributing

school buildings are at the junction of Leavenworth and S. Kansas City avenues. This area also contains two church buildings, two train stations, a three-story apartment building, and the large Elms hotel with its associated buildings and grounds. Elms Blvd. has a grassed and landscaped median area running the entire length between Isley Blvd. and Regent Avenue. Regent Avenue has three small landscaped islands, as well, in front of the Elms Hotel. Regent Avenue runs east/west in front of the Elms Hotel, and becomes a one-way street running north/south just west of the Fishing River. Here it is at a lower elevation than the parallel Elms Blvd. One- and two-story frame residential buildings are located along this section of Regent.

Along the western edge of this area, herein referred to as the "Elms District", numerous non-historic structures are found on the Concourse and the south end of S. Kansas City Avenue. Some of these are motel structures which are nearing the fifty-year period of eligibility. These should be considered for future survey. Others, such as the school buildings, are definitely non-contributing.

Several of the historic buildings which were inventoried have undergone some sort of alterations. This was, in fact, a very frequent occurrence, as the owners of boarding and rooming houses made conscious efforts to retain the patronage of the numerous visitors to Excelsior Springs. In order to keep their places "up-to-date", false siding and porch alterations were among the most common exterior changes.



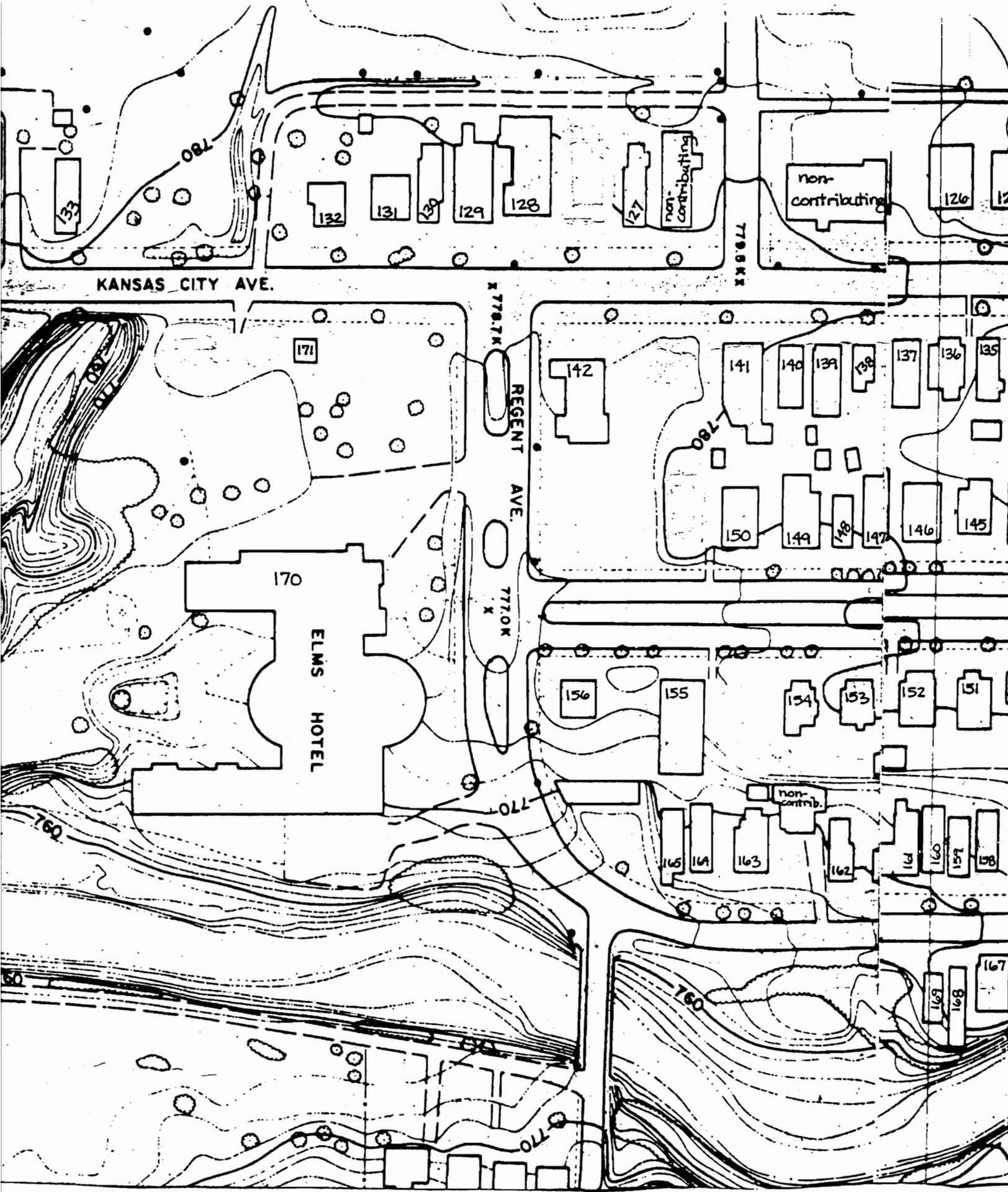
Although the building on the right has false siding and is in poor condition, its retains key design features which contribute to the visual continuity of the potential historic district.



Central Park Survey District

134 Surveyed building

20 Prior survey - 1991



building  Prior survey - 1991

North of St. Louis Avenue, between Kansas City and Thompson avenues, the Concourse is a curving residential street running primarily east/west. It contains a small enclave of eleven historic residential buildings, a historic church, and one non-historic residence built at the rear of another house. The curving brick street is lined with street trees and sidewalks.



Concourse Avenue, looking northwest

Thompson Avenue changes direction three times in a short span within the Central Park Survey District. From St. Louis Avenue it heads due north, then angles northeast at the intersection of Concourse, then angle north, northeast at buildings 101 and 102 (see Figure 6), then again due north just past the bridge over the Dry Fork of the Fishing River. From St. Louis Avenue northward, it contains one- and two-story brick commercial buildings. There is also a large three-story building, the former Silvers Garage, on the west side of Thompson.

History

The Central Park Addition was platted in 1887, and included a large area surrounded by an oval street known as the Concourse. It roughly followed the present day alignment of the Concourse on the west and north. Regent Avenue today approximates the eastern alignment, and the southern edge was in the Elms Hotel property. The plat included a large area for the Elms Hotel and divided lots on the west side of S. Kansas City Avenue.

Henry C. Fish had purchased the Excelsior Hotel on Broadway with Kansas City businessman John Henrie. Impressed with the money-making potential of the city, he attempted to interest outside capital in the possibilities of Excelsior Springs. Fish formed the Relief Springs and Land Company, and in 1887, managed to secure the right-of-way for the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. The Relief Springs Company evolved into the Excelsior Springs Company. As its manager and founder, Fish succeeded in attracting a group of Kansas City capitalists in investing over \$500,000 to

start a resort. This group financed the construction of the 200-room Elms hotel in 1888, as well as the 1,350 seat Music Hall. The Elms Annex, containing 75 additional rooms, opened in 1889. The company eventually acquired nearly 1,000 acres of land, including the Siloam, Regent and Relief Springs, as well as all territory within a radius of one mile west and south of the Fishing River. The company then platted the Central Park addition, as well as Forest Park and Beacon Hill. In all, they were responsible for constructing many of the amenities of the city, and discovered additional wells in numerous other locations. It spent thousands in advertising worldwide, and was responsible establishing much of Excelsior Springs international fame.

The focal point of all of their attention was the Elms Hotel. The history of the Elms Hotel, however, is marred by two disastrous fires and numerous bankruptcies. The first fire was in 1898; the second in 1909, only one year after the second Elms Hotel had been built. In order to finance the construction of the second hotel, it was necessary to raise capital by selling off lots in the Central Park addition. A new subdivision, the Elms Addition, was platted on October 5, 1908. This eventually led to the selling of lots on the east side of Kansas City Avenue, and on Elms Blvd. and Regent Avenue. The location of the present (third) hotel is further south than the original, which was nearly at St. Louis Avenue.

After the platting of the Elms Addition, residential structures were quickly built on the three streets south of St. Louis. By 1913, nearly every lot on the west side of Regent Avenue had a residence. The east side of Elms Blvd. was also nearly full, and the north half of the west side of the same street had a continuous row of buildings. S. Kansas City Avenue was a little slower to develop, particularly the east side. The west side, between Leavenworth and Chicago Avenues, and the central section of the block above Leavenworth, had numerous homes, as well as the Catholic church. Several other residences were built along Kansas City in the 1910's until nearly the entire block north of Regent was filled. A few lots, owned by the Catholic Church, remained vacant until they constructed school buildings on them. A few houses of more recent construction are interspersed within the Elms District, as the area remained popular around the hotel. Most of these are non-contributing. However, an interesting metal house is at the northeast corner of Regent and Elms, and is a rare example of an experimental construction method.

The north end of the Concourse remained virtually empty, except for the Christian Church, until the platting of the Concourse Park subdivision in 1903. Only four lots were involved in this venture by the McLain Investment Company. However, construction on these lots led to development on every lot in the north loop within a span of approximately a decade.

Thompson Avenue was the last historic commercial area to develop in the city. Although most of the commercial construction centered around the Siloam Springs on Broadway and the hotels around Spring and South streets, residential additions to the town were expanding the western boundary of the town. The Elms Hotel and resultant construction in the Elms District, which included several boarding and rooming houses, led to an increased traffic along Thompson (then called Wyman north of the Fishing River bridge). It was only natural that enterprising business owners thought to take advantage of this traffic by constructing commercial buildings along the route into the central part of town. By 1913, the southeast side of Thompson contained a continuous row of brick commercial structures. Although difficult to ascertain from the present available data, it is believed that several of these buildings were replaced with later brick commercial structures, perhaps in the 1920's and 1930's. In spite of its disconnected appearance from the rest of the commercial buildings, it remained a viable center for several years. City hall was located on the northwest side of Thompson, just north of the extant Silvers Garage building.

Recommendations for Historic Designation

Except for along St. Louis Avenue, demolition does not presently pose nearly the obstacle to historic designation in this survey district as it does in the Hall of Waters District. The biggest drawback is alteration of extant historic buildings. The area which this causes the most problems is in the commercial buildings along Thompson Avenue. While nearly every building here is historic, a majority have been drastically altered, leaving them with little historic architectural integrity. A few of these buildings, however, do retain historic integrity, and are either individually eligible for the National Register, or would be eligible in a multiple property nomination.



Elms Blvd. contains the highest concentration of virtually unaltered residences and boarding houses among those structures inventoried to date in Excelsior Springs.

The greatest potential for historic designation lies in the residential districts, here referred to as the Elms District and The Concourse. S. Kansas City Avenue suffers the greatest loss in integrity due to alterations. Most of these buildings, however, have strong historic associations with the context developed around the mineral waters. As their significance would be historic, rather than architectural, slightly less integrity is required for designation. The present appearance of a few historic buildings does eliminate them as contributing to a National Register district. As with the Hall of Waters area, though, local district designation may actually improve the chances of a few of these buildings. Sensitive rehabilitation of porch areas, or removal of false siding, would render some buildings eligible for the National Register.

As stated in the previous section on the Hall of Waters Survey district, a strong argument can be made for extending the period of significance in Excelsior Springs beyond the typical fifty year limit for historic structures. The town of Excelsior Springs possesses exceptional significance due to its unique position as a health and resort town. The historic context defined in the survey plan - "Excelsior Springs - Missouri's National Health Resort: 1880-1963" - outlines such an argument. Legislation was passed in 1963 which prohibited the clinics from advertising cures with their treatment of conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism. In addition, unfavorable articles began appearing in national

magazines about the mineral water clinics. The decline of the town's economy based on the waters can be traced from this point. If this argument is accepted, then some of the buildings which are viewed as marginally eligible (due to alterations dating from the 1960's or earlier) increase their chances for eligibility. As was also noted earlier, several of the historic buildings which were inventoried have undergone some sort of alterations. This was, in fact, a very frequent occurrence, as the owners of boarding and rooming houses made conscious efforts to retain the patronage of the numerous visitors to Excelsior Springs. In order to keep their places "up-to-date", false siding and porch alterations were among the most common exterior changes. Figure 7, in its boundary recommendations for historic designations, reflects an awareness of these common alterations.



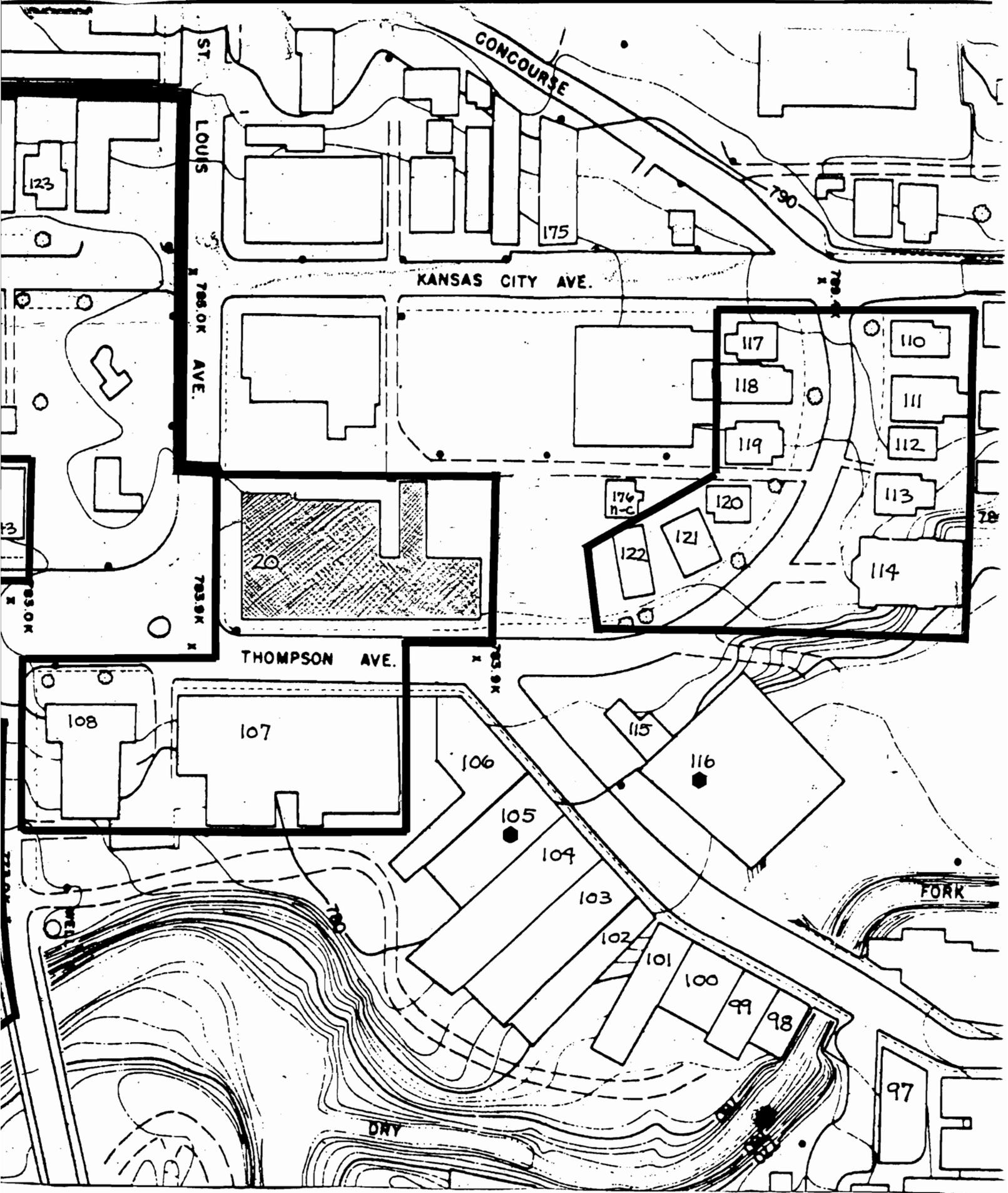
The changes to the facade of this house on S. Kansas City Avenue are examples of the types of alterations which would make a historic building "non-contributing" within a potential district.



Central Park Survey District

134 Surveyed building

20 Prior survey - 1991



● Individually eligible -- National

▲ Individually eligible -- Local

Figure 7

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Excelsior Springs Historic Preservation Commission is charged with certain powers and duties, outlined in the preservation ordinance. One duty is recommend property and/or properties for proposed designations as a historic landmark and/or historic district, in addition to reviewing and commenting on proposed designations brought before the commission. To date, only a handful of individual structures have been designated as a Historic Landmark. With the recommendations from this report, the Commission should consider establishing a Nominating Committee. By reviewing the goals of the citizens, city staff, and the Commission; assessing the potential threats to the historic resources; and by analyzing the political realities in Excelsior Springs, the Nominating Committee should develop a list of proposed historic districts and landmarks and assign priorities to this list.

Concurrent with the efforts of the Nominating Committee, a Public Education committee could be formed to work on explaining the purpose of the Commission, the ordinance, and the benefits of designation. By the time the Nominating Committee is ready with its recommendations, the first district (or other Landmarks) could be presented for designation. This Nominating Committee could also make recommendations for the city to pursue federal grant money available for National Register nominations.

In addition to utilizing grant money for National Register nominations, the Excelsior Springs Survey Plan recommended two additional survey phases, one of which has been funded in the next fiscal year grant cycle. The last phase would be also be eligible for the Historic Preservation Fund money. A thorough understanding of the property types in Excelsior Springs, particularly the numerous boarding and rooming houses, cannot be completed until the next phases of the survey are completed.

Another duty of the Commission is to increase public awareness of the value of Excelsior Springs's historic resources. Hopefully, this survey will be a useful tool for the Commission when it continues with public education efforts. This has proven to be the single most effective manner to gain public support for protection of historic resources. Considering Excelsior Springs's unique place in this nation's history, it is time to garner public acceptance for preservation of this community's special character.

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