NPS Form 10-900
Oct. 1990

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER
LISTED

APR 0 4 2007

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A) Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Keep Klean Building

Other name/site number Wichita Towel Supply 173-5880-05209

2. Location

Street & number 810 E. Third ☐ not for publication

City or town Wichita ☐ vicinity

State Kansas Code KS County Sedgwick Code 173 Zip code 67202

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ 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 ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patrick Zollner DSHPO 2/20/07

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Kansas State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of commenting official /Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I herby certify that the property is

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, (explain:)

Keep Klean Building
Name of Property

Sedgwick County, Kansas
County and State

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		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter Categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Commercial Style

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: CONCRETE
Walls: BRICK
STONE: Limestone
Roof: ASPHALT
Other:

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Keep Klean Building
Name of Property

Sedgwick County, Kansas
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

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

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or 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 it 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1929-1957

Significant Dates

1929/1930

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):
- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:
- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Keep Klean Building
Name of Property

Sedgwick County, Kansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than 1 acre

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	674720	4172520
2			
3			
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title Christy Davis

Organization Davis Preservation Date 10/21/2006

Street & number 2416 SW Sunset Ct Telephone 785-213-1369

City or town Topeka State KS Zip code 66604

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Name Waterman Properties, LLC

Street & number 600 E. Waterman Telephone 316-267-7060

City or town Wichita State KS Zip code 67202

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

Narrative Description

The Keep Klean Building (c. 1929), located at 810 E. Third in Wichita, Kansas (population 354,617), is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as an example of early twentieth-century fire-proof industrial construction. It is also being nominated for its association with the steam laundry and towel supply industries from 1929 until its closing in 1978.

Setting

The Keep Klean Building is located at 810 E. Third (also known as 802 E. Third), three blocks north of Douglas Avenue, downtown Wichita's east/west arterial thoroughfare, 2 blocks west of Washington Avenue, a north/south arterial, in a corridor between two north/south rail lines that served Wichita's industries. In the first decades of the 20th Century, the block and surrounding blocks housed a smattering of single-family residences and the Mount Hope Baptist Church (on the east side of Rock Island north of the Keep Klean Building). By 1935, the area was occupied by a variety of industrial uses, including a junk yard just north of the Keep Klean Building, the Phillips Petroleum Company north of the junk yard, and the General Baking Company Bakery to the northeast. By 1950, the property just north of the Keep Klean Building was occupied by electrical transformers, which remain today. Surrounding residential and industrial buildings to the east, including three residences, a Wholesale Electrical Supply warehouse and Biscuit Warehouse – all extant in 1950 – have been demolished and replaced by a fenced-in parking lot. The building lies just north of Wichita's Old Town shopping, dining and entertainment district listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Wichita Warehouse and Jobbers District. New infill architecture, including a new theater, are located just south of the Keep Klean Building.

Overall

The Keep Klean Building is an L-shaped building. The original 1929 brick building with sawtooth roof lies on the northwest corner of East Third St. and North Rock Island Ave. The 1929 building includes a two-story tower on the southeast corner and one-story bay on the west side. A one-story 1930 addition, with vaulted steel truss roof structure, extends north from the original building. Concrete additions extend to the building's west. The building's principal exterior material is hard-fired multi-earth-tone rough bricks with recessed mortar joints. Horizontal limestone bands delineate the buildings levels. Limestone decorative geometric shapes provide limited detail. Windows, including clerestory windows in the sawtooth roof, are original industrial steel sash with operable hoppers to maximize ventilation. The 1930 addition features storefront windows.

South (Front) Elevation

The building's front elevation faces Third Street to the south. From this view, the concrete additions are visible. The concrete additions are painted white. The south planes of the additions are set back from the front elevation of the main building. The one-story concrete-block addition, the farthest west bay, has three horizontal window openings and an overhead dock door, which accesses an elevated formed concrete dock. The concrete block addition is connected to the main structure with a concrete-block connector/hyphen. The hyphen also has a horizontal window and overhead door, accessible from ground level.

The front elevation of the main building lies east of the concrete additions and sets on the plane of East Third Street. The front elevation of the building is split into two sections – a one-story section and a two-story section. The one-story section is separated into three bays, each of which is punctuated by a large window opening. Each window opening houses three 3/3 steel hopper sash. At present, the sashes are covered with metal grilles to protect from vandalism. These grilles will be removed as part of the rehabilitation project.

The front elevation of the two-story section of the main building is divided into two bays. The first bay has window openings on each of the two stories. These openings each house a pair of 3/3 steel hopper sash like those in the one-story section. The easternmost bay of the front elevation houses the building's main entrance. The entrance is punctuated by an arched brick door opening flanked by brick pillasters. Above the door, on the second level, is a single 3/3 steel hopper window. A horizontal stone band separates the water table and first level. A second separates the first and second levels. A third horizontal band separates the second floor from the parapet. The parapet is decorated by stone features cut in a diamond pattern. Pilasters that delineate the entrance tower interrupt the stone bands. The entrance bay/tower is topped by a carved stone plaque that reads "The Keep Klean System." The plaque is topped by a stepped stone parapet.

East Elevation

The east elevation consists of a three-bay two-story section on the south end, and a five-bay one-story section on the north end. The limestone bands and decorative parapet found on the south elevation extend around to the east elevation. Like those on the front elevation, pilasters that punctuate the entry tower bay on the east elevation interrupt the horizontal stone bands. There is no window on the lower level of the first bay. A window opening on the second floor houses a single 3/3 steel hopper sashes. The parapet matches that of the entrance tower on the front elevation with a carved stone plaque that reads "The Keep Klean System" and the stepped stone parapet.

The second bay features window openings on each of its two floors that house two 3/3 steel hopper sashes. The third bay of the two-story section features a window opening with two 3/3 steel hopper sashes on the second floor. On the first floor, there are two small window openings, each with six-pane steel sashes.

The one-story section of the east elevation is divided into five bays, delineated by pilasters. The first, second and third bays have large storefront windows with sills/stools raised a few feet from ground level. The storefront openings have been filled in with aluminum units. They will be re-opened as part of the proposed rehabilitation project. A pedestrian door has been opened on the south end of the second storefront bay. The fourth and fifth bays housed overhead doors. The fourth bay is filled in a manner that matches the infill of the storefront window openings. The fifth bay still houses an overhead door.

North (Rear) Elevation

From the rear, the rear (south) elevations of both the two-story section and one-story section are visible. The south elevation of the two-story section has two window openings, each with a single six-pane steel window. The rear elevation of the one-story section is hollow clay tile painted white. The arched roof of the one-story section is also visible. The rear elevations of the concrete additions are also visible. These concrete masonry unit walls are painted white.

West Elevation

The west elevations of the main building and concrete additions are visible from the west. The west elevation of the concrete addition is a solid concrete masonry unit wall interrupted only by a small horizontal window opening. The west elevation of the main building displays the unique sawtooth roof designed to maximize ventilation. Although the bays are separated by pilasters, there are few details on the west elevation. The exterior material on this elevation is hollow clay tile painted white. The west elevation of the second story of the two-story section is also visible from this view. Like the other elevations of the two-story section, this side's exterior finish is rough brick, interrupted by two small 6-pane steel windows.

Interior

The interior is divided according to the various spaces' historic uses. The two-story section housed the offices of the Wichita Towel Supply Company. This part of the building features a higher level of architectural finish than the industrial areas of the building. Character-defining features include hardwood and terrazzo floors, plaster walls, and wood baseboards. Because the building was not temperature controlled for many years, the plaster on ceilings has failed. The wood floors are severely deteriorated. Where possible, the deteriorated features will be restored. The office section is accessed by an arched doorway on the south/front elevation. Beyond a small reception area on the first floor are restrooms. The front reception area features a staircase with cast-iron railing. The stair leads to the second-floor space. With the exception of a bathroom located west of the stair, the second floor is a large open space.

The office section is accessed by an arched doorway on the south/front elevation. Beyond a small reception area on the first floor are restrooms. The front reception area features a staircase with cast-iron railing. The stair leads to the second-floor space. Like those in the office area on the first floor, the plaster walls on this level are mostly intact. Wood floors are severely deteriorated from water damage.

Outside of the office section is the large open area that occupies the remainder of the original 1929 building. From this space, the sawtooth roof is visible. Wood posts support the exposed steel roof trusses. This space was originally occupied by the linen room. The walls in this space are exposed brick. These walls were historically left unpainted. According to recent paint analysis, the walls were first painted during the 1950s. The paint will be removed using safe chemical means as part of the proposed rehabilitation project. Other character-defining features in this space include terrazzo floors. These will be re-exposed and restored as part of the planned rehabilitation project.

North of the linen room is the laundry/boiler room, a large open space constructed in 1930. This space was historically accessed via overhead doors on the exterior east elevation and via a large opening on the north end of the linen room. This space is characterized by an exposed arched steel truss roof system. The ceiling/roof is divided into three sections. The ceilings in the northernmost and southernmost sections are of equal height. The center section is raised three feet higher. The ceilings have been covered with foil-covered insulated panels.

The concrete block connector/hyphen lies west of the linen room and may be accessed via a steel fire door on the linen room's west wall. The concrete block additions will lie outside of the scope of the current rehabilitation project. This space has very few architectural details; the concrete block walls are exposed on the interior.

Summary

The Keep Klean Building is an architectural interpretation of the towel supply industry and Keep Klean System. Extant original features include original steel windows, historic plaster walls, historic main entrance door, baseboards, terrazzo floors. Although some of the historic features, such as plaster and some hardwood floors, have been lost due to neglect, the building retains a high degree of integrity.

Statement of Significance

The Keep Klean Building, built principally in two phases in 1929 and 1930 to house the Wichita Towel Supply, is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the Linen Supply Industry and Wichita's industrial heritage and under Criterion C as an example of a commercial-style industrial building.

Brace A. Helfrich, Sr. (1884-1978) and the Wichita Towel Supply

Brace A. Helfrich, proprietor of Wichita Towel Supply, was born in Ohio in 1884. In 1890, he moved with his family to Missouri, where he spent the remainder of his formative years assisting with his father's business. After completing his education, Helfrich started a business manufacturing canvas gloves and mittens. By 1910, Helfrich had left his business and had set out for a New Mexico farm.

On his way to New Mexico, in Muskogee, Oklahoma, Helfrich had a chance encounter with Fredrick Martin, a man who would change his life. By the time he met Brace Helfrich, Fred Martin had established a successful linen supply company in Lincoln, Nebraska and was opening a new chain in Muskogee, Oklahoma. 90% of Martin's linen rental business was supplying linens for roller towel cabinets in office restrooms. As an early linen supply pacesetter, he was poised to become the general chairman of the yet-to-be-founded Linen Supply Association of America.[1]

When Helfrich asked him for a job, Martin gambled on him – and Helfrich did not disappoint. According to Helfrich's own account, he "went out and got more orders than [Martin] did." Impressed with the young man's salesmanship, Martin sent Helfrich to Kansas City, where he would be sales manager. After Helfrich helped build the Kansas City branch, Martin transferred him to Oklahoma City to start another plant.[2]

Helfrich married Stella Kilgore in 1912. Stella and Brace were living in Oklahoma City at the time of the births of their first two children, Rama Elizabeth (b. 1914) and Brace Jr. (b. 12/16/1914).[3] With a young family to support (and with Fred Martin's blessing), Stella and Brace decided to set off on their own. Soon, Helfrich had raised $4500 in capital for his own business, borrowing money from friends and colleagues, including his boss Fred Martin.[4]

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[1] Cross, Wilbur and Jerry Steinman, Service Imperative: The Past, Present, and Future of the Linen Supply Industry (Miami, Florida: Linen Supply Association of America, 1970), 32.

[2] Ibid, 50.

[3] US Census, 1920; Social Security Death Index.

[4] Cross, 50-51.

With the necessary funds in place, Helfrich embarked on a covert investigative trip to Wichita, which he heard had an open market for a first-rate linen supply business. He later described his clandestine visits to the offices of potential clients:

> First, I went to real estate, insurance companies, and other offices to see what kind of linen supply they were getting. In those days, almost every office had a washbasin in it. So I'd walk in, see if there was service, and if there was a cabinet. Then I asked if I might use the washroom. This was mainly an excuse to see what it was like, and what was in it. If the office or the washroom didn't have towels, you know darned well the field wasn't covered. We did a lot of detective work this way, and we kept notes. When we finished we felt Wichita would be a good place for us to start.[5]

Helfrich's on-site research confirmed its potential as a location for his new business. So as not to tip off his competitors, which in 1917 included Domestic Towel Supplies and Orr Towel Supply, he went about establishing the company in a manner just as secretive as his fact-finding mission.[6] He sent his supplies to Wichita in unmarked crates numbered by a secret code:

> We started off completely in secret. I didn't let anyone know I was going to start the business. Fred Martin even rented the building for me. Then, when I was ready, I came into town, carrying all our money in $100 bills. We opened the business with a blast, soliciting all of a sudden.[7]

Linen supply pioneer and patron Fred Martin helped Helfrich get started in a rented building at 110 E. 2nd. With hard work and determination, the salesmen succeeded in nurturing the young business:

> Martin and I went out selling. We carried cabinets [for roller towels], brushes, and towels, and demonstrated with a flair. To obtain entry into an office, we gave a soft blotter and then tried to give an ad lib sales talk – too many were already using canned talks. We didn't ask for an order at first, acting as though it was a demonstration, just as free as the air you breathe. Then we made the sales.[8]

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[5] Cross, 51.
[6] 1917 Wichita City Directory.
[7] Cross, 51.
[8] Ibid.

Once he was ready to make his intentions public, Helfrich marketed tirelessly. In 1914, he was one of the first linen suppliers in the nation to purchase a motorized delivery truck. It was a 1914 Ford chassis customized by McKenzie Carriage Works. At a time when Henry Ford insisted his cars be black, Brace Helfrich had his new delivery truck painted cream to signify the sanitary nature of his business. The gold leaf letters read "KEEP KLEAN."[9]

In 1915, Helfrich moved his young family to Wichita, where his son John was born (b. 9/18/1916).[10] Despite local competition, the company was thriving by 1928, handling "weekly more than eighty thousand pieces of their own linens, and all the towels and linens are owned by the company. They also [did] a large rental business in butchers and soda fountain operators on coats and aprons."[11] By then, Helfrich had franchised his operation, opening chains in Kansas (El Dorado, Augusta), Tennessee (Knoxville, Johnson City, Elizabethton, Kingsport, Bristol) and Texas (Amarillo, Borger).[12]

In 1929, Wichita Towel Supply expanded its base of operations into a new fireproof building at 810 E. Third "to accommodate their Wichita service, the manufacturing plant and their general offices."[13] Like the 1914 delivery truck, the building was called "Keep Klean," a name that was inscribed in the limestone above the main entrance. "Keep Klean" referred to the "Keep Klean System" that Helfrich developed and franchised. The Keep Klean System, according to one primary source, was "a manufacturing and service organization that has had a notable development and success, and is illustrative of some of the modern tendencies in business where what has formerly a purely localized service has been developed to proportions where a single organization reaches out over several states."[14] Helfrich applied for a second permit in 1930 to add a new laundry/boiler room to the new building. The business was first listed at 810 E. 3rd in the 1930 City Directory.

Despite hard times during the Great Depression and World War II, Helfrich continued to innovate. In the 1940s, he was one of the first linen suppliers nationwide to institute the practice of prepayment for services. To encourage his salesmen, he offered each a $10 monthly bonus for collecting 80% of accounts in advance. If a salesman collected 100% of his accounts in advance, Helfrich would pay him a $20 bonus. Helfrich later commented on the practice:

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[9] Cross, 52.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Connelley, 2330.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Connelley, 2329.

> ...during World War II, I also started the system of collecting in advance. No one had done that before. When the industry met at conventions, everyone was astounded to hear that I was able to institute this system. Most customers accepted this innovation readily. The percentage against it at first was relatively small; in due time everyone agreed to it.[15]

In addition to managing the towel supply, Helfrich also established and managed the Western Cabinet Manufacturing Company. Helfrich was the President of the Wichita Service Garment Company, Inc.

In addition to his business enterprises, Helfrich was also involved in a number of service, trade, and social organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, Associated Industries of Kansas, Wichita Flying Club, Rotary Club, Apela Club and Elks Order. In 1955, Helfrich was named president of the Wichita Historical Museum Association. He served as vice president of both the Southwest Linen Supply Association and Linen Supply Association of America.[16]

By the early 1950s, Brace's sons John J. Helfrich and Brace A. Helfrich Jr. were managing the family business. In the 1960s and 1970s, Mrs. Lois Hamelin was the office manager. In 1970, Ralph Leftwich was listed as the sales manager.[17] Brace's wife Stella died in 1975. Wichita Towel Supply closed following Brace Helfrich's death in February 1978.[18] Brace Jr. died in San Diego, California in 1994. John Helfrich died in Boulder in 2006.[19] Since 1978, the building has been used for storage. The building is being remodeled for offices.

The Public Sanitation Effort, the Towel Supply Business and the Linen Supply Association of America

The towel supply business was a sub-trade of the steam laundry industry, which proliferated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The steam laundry industry took hold at a time of unprecedented cultural concern for cleanliness and increased reliance on mechanization of formerly manual tasks. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the public began to apply Louis Pasteur's germ theory to daily life. Before then, even basic acts of personal hygiene, like regular bathing, were seen as not only unnecessary but also unhealthy. The acceptance of the germ theory corresponded with a plethora of reform and religious

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[15] Cross, 51.
[16] William Connelley, History of Kansas State and People (New York/Chicago: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1928), 2329-2330 (V. 5). Social Security Death Index. US Census, 1920.
[17] Wichita City Directories, 1930, 1936, 1951, 1955, 1962, 1964, 1970, 1978.
[18] Social Security Death Index.
[19] Wichita City Directories. "John J. Helfrich," (obituary) The Boulder Daily Camera 17 February 2006.

movements. John Wesley, father of the Methodist Church, was known to say "cleanliness is, indeed, next to godliness."[20] In 1915, Kansas Governor Arthur Capper announced that Kansas was leading the way in the cleanliness movement. Kansas reformer Samuel Crumbine led the chorus with his pleas to "Swat a Fly" and "Don't Spit on the Sidewalk."[21]

In the era of an emerging middle class, cleanliness played an important role in upward social mobility. Fashionable social climbers demanded crisp white shirt collars and cuffs. Restaurants, tea rooms, groceries and butcher shops required clean white linens and hand towels. In the nineteenth century, the average housewife spent two days each week laundering her family's clothes and linens.[22] Before the advent of the steam laundry, both housewives and businesses relied upon washerwomen to complete the labor-intensive task.

The steam laundry was the entrepreneur's answer to the growing laundry problem. Steam laundries drew on the proven methods of industrial mass production to streamline the laundering process. At the turn of the century, the industrial laundry business was seen as a cutting edge investment for a new breed of entrepreneurs. By 1909, 124,214 U. S. citizens, 71.2% of them women, were employed as wage laborers in laundries.[23] Wichita's first steam laundry business, the Wichita Steam Laundry Company, was incorporated with a stock of $10,000 in 1885 and opened with much fanfare in 1886.[24] The business was located next to the post office, adjoining the Garfield Hall building on First Street between Water and Main.[25] The Kansas Steam Laundry opened at 240 North Water in 1890.[26] Another laundry, Peerless Steam Laundry, had opened in the old Turner Hall by 1902.[27] In the first two decades of the twentieth century, as these businesses thrived and expanded, others joined them. By 1925, there were ten industrial laundries in Wichita. These included Domestic Laundry, Kansas Independent Laundry, Luling's City Laundry (1736 E. Douglas, still extant), Peerless Laundry, People's Cleaning, Right Way Laundry, Southwest Laundries, Wichita Laundry, and Wichita Wet Wash.[28]

The new industrial process of laundering goods was complex. The workday began between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m. Laundry was either delivered by customers or brought in by drivers. All laundry was checked for

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[20] Arwen P. Mohun, Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology, and Work in the United States and Great Britain, 1880-1940, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1999), 30.
[21] Craig Miner, Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 225-233.
[22] Mohun, 19.
[23] Ibid, 49.
[24] Wichita Beacon, 9 March 1885, 4.
[25] Wichita Eagle, 12 November 1886, 4.
[26] Wichita Eagle, 1 August 1890, 5.
[27] Wichita Eagle, 10 September 1902, 6.
[28] Wichita City Directory, 1925.

damage and against lists provided by customers, then marked with thread or ink to identify its owner. Once marked, it was separated by color. Batches were washed in drums with soap made of fats and alkali in water heated to 100-125 degrees. The wash was agitated, rinsed, then treated with chemicals meant to counteract yellowing from cleaning chemicals. It was then moved to a centrifugal extractor, which helped spin the water out. Workers shook the spun laundry to untwist it – then mangled flat goods with a steam mangle and ironed clothing. By the 1920s, workers dried the laundry in drying closets with blowers that heated to 200-300 degrees. Once the items had been laundered and pressed, they were sent to a packing room where they had to be resorted to ensure they were returned to their owners.[29]

The marking and resorting process, required each piece of thousands of pieces of laundry was returned to its original owner, was the bane of most laundries' existence. Losses were inevitable. The industry's solution, and a natural extension of the laundry business, was the linen supply business. When the business responsible for cleaning items such as towels also owned them, the process could be streamlined. Linen supply businesses rented out coats, aprons, towels and table linens to clients. They would pick up dirty items, usually once a week, and, at the same time, supply clean goods. No marking, sorting and resorting was required. The Keep Klean ads urged businesses to "Rent [their] towels and aprons." The Wichita Towel Supply was a towel rental company with its own industrial steam laundry. In this way, the linen supply business was a natural extension of the steam laundry business.

By 1913, linen supply companies had organized to form the Linen Supply Association of America (later known as the Textile Rental Service Association). Members paid dues based upon their revenue. Brace Helfrich, who in 1913 was involved in the business in Oklahoma, served as the organization's vice president during its formative years. By 1933, the association's annual meeting drew 600 delegates.[30] By the 1930s, however, events that would lead to the decline of the linen supply business were already in motion. According to Industrial Launderer, a trade journal, the business was "decimated by the advent of supermarkets and the hand-towel business had largely been replaced by paper towels…"[31] Paper towels, sold for commercial applications beginning in 1907, were introduced to the residential market in 1933.[32] The 1930s also brought the first modern washing machines, made feasible by electricity and an increasingly reliable and clean municipal water supply. Thirty-five percent of people who discontinued laundry service reported that they had just purchased electric washing machines.[33]

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[29] Mohun, 74-93.
[30] A Special Report: UTSA, TRSA unite," Industrial Launderer, September 2005; "Crossing the Great Divide," Industrial Launderer, September 2004; "10,000 Visitors Invaded City for Conventions," Chicago Daily News, 5 June 1933, 5.
[31] "Crossing the Great Divide"
[32] "History" (of the Scott Company), http://www.scottbrand.com/us/history/index.asp
[33] Mohun, 150.

The Linen Supply Association was forced to innovate in the changing market. In 1962, Time Magazine introduced the organization's latest gadget, the roller linen tablecloth:

> In case of a roadside stop for a quick snack, customers may be spared the soggy sponge with which the waitress often swabs down the counter. The Linen Supply Association of America now offers a gadget that, in effect, provides fresh linen tablecloths for each counter diner. Operating on the old roller-towel principle, the fresh section of mat is pulled into place after each meal by the waitress.[34]

Despite the industry's efforts to change with the times, the time of the linen supply business had passed. By the time the roller linen was introduced, the market for table linens had fallen off. A growing fast food industry relied upon drive-in and walk-up customers who ate either at tables without linens or in their cars. Hotels, and even supermarkets, had their own washing machines. Households and businesses came to rely upon paper towels and disposable aprons. Like many other related businesses, the Wichita Towel Supply closed its doors in 1978. In 1979, the membership of the Linen Supply Association of America, which had expanded their market past linens, voted to modernize its name to Textile Rental Services Association of America.[35] In 2003, the TRSA merged with the UTSA, the Uniform and Textile Service Association.

Industrial Wichita

After Wichita was incorporated as a village in 1869, town boosters set out to secure its place as a regional industrial and commercial center. Its status was threatened when the Atchison, Topeka, Santa Fe Rail line chose to bypass the new town, with its then-unclear Osage land titles, and passed through the then-paper town of Newton instead. In 1871, townboosters' efforts to secure $200,000 in bonds to construct a spur line from Newton to Wichita, helped assure the city's future as an industrial center. By the end of the nineteenth century, three major rail lines passed through the city. The area of Wichita flanked by these rail lines had become an industrial center by the early twentieth century, housing industries from Keen Kutter to broomcorn factories. By 1920, Wichita was the nation's 96th largest city and Sedgwick County had a population of 92,234. By 1930, the county's population had ballooned to 136,330. A detailed historic context on industrial Wichita may be found in the Wichita Warehouse and Jobbers historic district nomination. It was in this industrial climate and center that the Keep Klean Building was built for the Wichita Towel Supply.

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[34] "Modern Living," Time Magazine, 1 Jun 1962.
[35] "Board Approves Change in LSAA's Name," Linen Supply News, January 1979.

The Commercial Style

The exterior of the Keep Klean Building represents the early twentieth-century Commercial Style. This style is most often seen in downtown commercial buildings from the 1910s and 1920s. Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors, these buildings feature simple lines, without applied or projecting decorative elements such as elaborate cornices. These buildings had an emphasis on fire-resistance with fire-proof materials such as reinforced concrete, brick and steel. In addition to their clean lines, Commercial Style buildings are defined by a number of exterior features such as parapets capped with squared-off stone or concrete, rough brick with raked mortar joints, and double-hung windows with square upper and lower sashes – in contrast to the tall, narrow windows seen in late-nineteenth-century commercial buildings. These windows can be 1/1 double-hung sash, or a multiple-pane upper sash over a single-pane lower sash. Stylistic elements were limited to brick corbelling or the incorporation of integrated decorative masonry elements such as geometric stone patterns or applied terra cotta.

Like other Commercial Style structures, the Keep Klean Building features geometric masonry patterns including applied carved decoration, multiple-pane sash, rough brick with raked mortar joints, and a capped parapet at the roofline. The building's brick façade and steel windows are attributes common among fire-proof commercial construction that became the norm during the Progressive Era.

Summary

The Keep Klean Building retains a high degree of architectural integrity and interprets its long history serving the Wichita Towel Supply Company. The building is being nominated for its historical associations to industrial Wichita and the linen supply industry as well as for its architectural significance as an industrial interpretation of the Commercial Style of architecture.

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Wichita Sanborn Maps, 1914, 1935, 1950.

Verbal Boundary Description

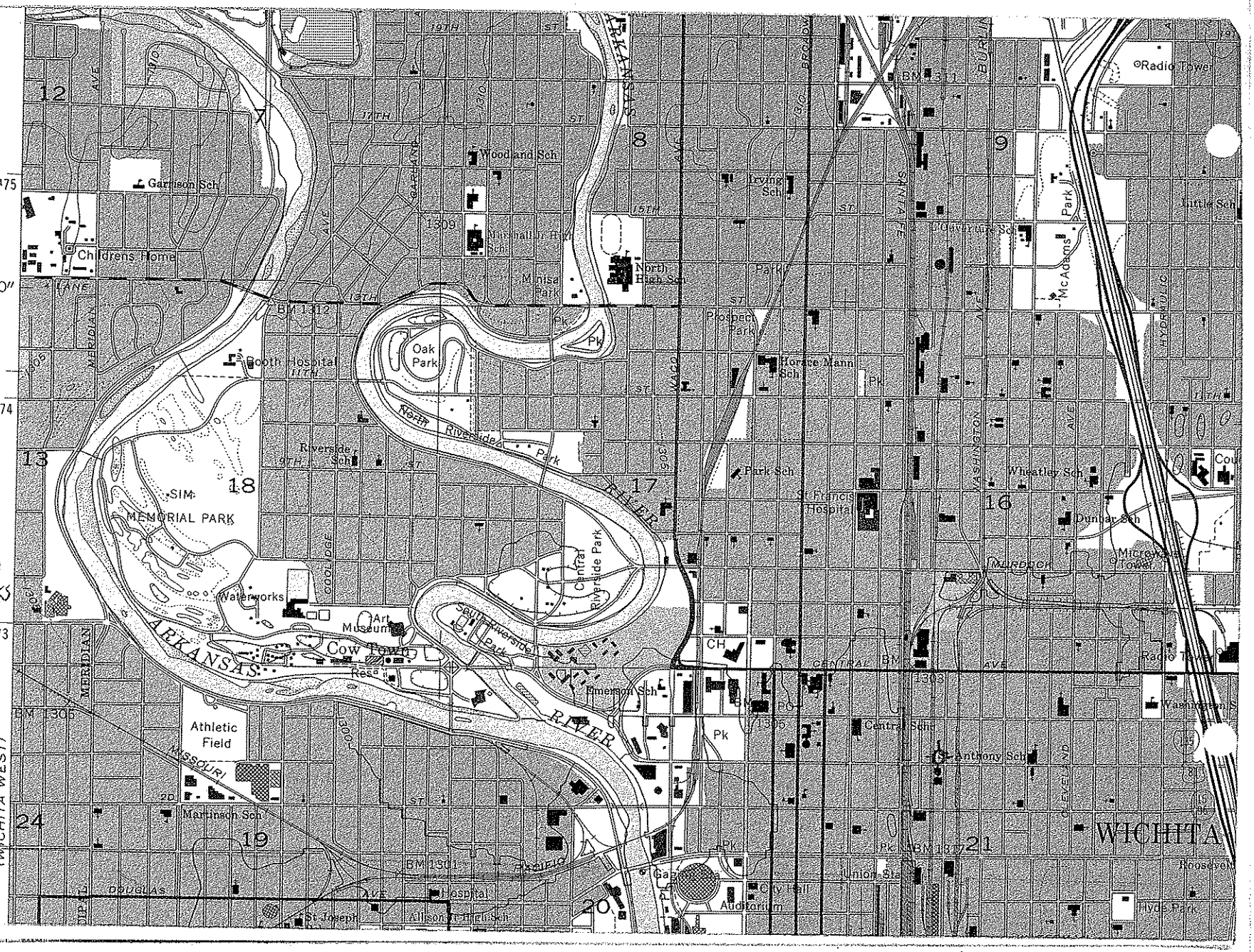
BEG 661 FT W & 630 FT S NE COR NW1/4 N 125 FT E 137.02 FT S 125 FT W TO BEG. SEC 21-27-1E.

Boundary Justification

The above is the legal description for the parcel on which the Keep Klean Building at 810 E. 3rd sits.

Photo Log

1. Exterior, Southeast corner, South (front) elevation, looking northeast.
2. Exterior, South (front) elevation, looking north.
3. Exterior, East (side) elevation, looking northwest.
4. Exterior, East (side) elevation, looking southwest.
5. Exterior, North (rear) elevation, looking southeast.
6. Exterior, West (side) elevation and west addition, looking northeast.
7. Exterior, Southwest corner, looking northeast.
8. Exterior, South elevation, Close-up of stone "Keep Klean" sign on two-story office tower.
9. Interior, First floor of office tower, looking northeast toward stair.
10. Interior, Second floor of office tower, looking northeast.
11. Interior, Second floor of office tower, looking northwest.
12. Interior, First floor, looking east from linen room toward office bay.
13. Interior, First floor, looking north in linen room.
14. Interior, First floor, looking south from linen room toward office bay.
15. Interior, First floor, looking east from linen room toward storefronts on east perimeter wall.
16. Interior, First floor, looking north at clerestory windows in sawtooth roof in linen room.
17. Interior, 1930 addition, looking northwest.



KEEP KLEAN BUILDING
WICHITA, SEDGWICK Co. KS

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