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 Columbia Oil Company Building

Other names/site number N/A

Name of related Multiple Property Listing N/A

2. Location

Street & number 3419 Papin Street | N/A | not for publication

City or town St. Louis | N/A | vicinity

State Missouri Code MO County St. Louis City Code 189 Zip code 63103

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

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

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

___ national ___ statewide X local

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

Signature of certifying official/Title JP Date 5/11/19

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

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

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

_____ entered in the National Register

_____ determined eligible for the National Register

_____ determined not eligible for the National Register

_____ removed from the National Register

_____ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

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

x	private
	public - Local
	public - State
	public - Federal

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

x	building(s)
	district
	site
	structure
	object

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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION
/manufacturing facility
COMMERCE/TRADE/warehouse

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete, limestone
walls: Brick
roof: Composite
other:

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.)

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

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

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

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

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

Property is:

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

[ ] B removed from its original location.

[ ] C a birthplace or grave.

[ ] D a cemetery.

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

[ ] F a commemorative property.

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

Areas of Significance
COMMERCE

Period of Significance
1923-1952

Significant Dates
1923

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

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Stevens & Pearson, architects

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- X 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
- ___ University
- x Other

Name of repository: Office of preparer

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

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

1	38.626387 (Latitude:)	-90.232922 (Longitude:)	3	_____ (Latitude:)	_____ (Longitude:)
2	_____ (Latitude:)	_____ (Longitude:)	4	_____ (Latitude:)	_____ (Longitude:)

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

1	Zone	Easting	Northing	3	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	Zone	Easting	Northing	4	Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (On continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (On continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Michael Allen
organization Preservation Research Office date 13 November 2018
street & number 3407 S. Jefferson Avenue #207 telephone 314-920-5680
city or town St. Louis state MO zip code 63118
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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: Columbia Oil Company Building

City or Vicinity: St. Louis

County: St. Louis City State: Missouri

Photographer: Michael Allen

Date Photographed: July 29, 2018: 2-3 and 11-15; November 7, 2018: 1, 4-10.

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

1 of 15: View of building looking northwest.
2 of 15: View of building looing northeast.
3 of 15: View of building looking southwest.
4 of 15: View southwest toward boiler house wing.
5 of 15: View southwest toward pump wing.
6 of 15: First floor interior view looking west.
7 of 15: First floor interior view looking southeast toward freight and barrel elevators.
8 of 15: First floor interior view looking southeast.
9 of 15: First floor interior view looking northwest toward north elevation wall.
10 of 15: First floor interior view looking north within tank room.
11 of 15: Second floor interior view looking southeast within office area.
12 of 15: Second floor interior view looking south toward freight elevator and stairs.
13 of 15: Second floor interior view looking west in manufacturing space.
14 of 15: Third floor interior view toward partition looking northeast.
15 of 15: Third floor interior view looking north near west elevation wall.

Figure Log:

Include figures on continuation pages at the end of the nomination.

1. Columbia Oil Company Building Boundary Map. Page 18.
2. Site plan with photographic key.
3. Context map.
4. The Columbia Oil Company Building as it appeared on the 1938 Sanborn fire insurance map.
5. First floor plan with photographic key.
6. Second floor plan with photographic key.
7. Third floor plan with photographic key.
8. Oil barrel elevator at the first floor.
9. View of staircase landing.
10. Colco Oil advertisement from 1922.
11. Radiator Glycerine advertisement in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1928.
12. National Refining Company Warehouse at 5137 Southwest Avenue in St. Louis.
13. Liberty Bell Oil Company Warehouse located at 1430 S. Vandeventer Avenue in St. Louis.
14. St. Louis Gasoline and Fuel Company/United Consumers Oil Company Warehouse at 4142 Union Boulevard in St. Louis.
15. Google Earth Map.

Summary

The Columbia Oil Company Building Is a three-story flat-roofed industrial building located at 3419 Papin Street in St. Louis (Independent City), Missouri. The building dates to 1923 with its third floor added in 1929. Otherwise, the building has had little alteration since. The building likely incorporates an earlier rubble limestone foundation, which supports pressed red brick walls and an original reinforced concrete structure on the first two floors. The upper floor deviates from the base with a steel-framed structure, although it has red brick walls beneath its window ribbons. On the north elevation are two small wings facing a yard that once was an active part of the oil processing and distribution business housed here. Circulation within the building comes through staircases, freight elevator and oil barrel elevator. Most interior spaces are open plan industrial loft spaces, with the exception of an office suite at the east side of the second floor. The only significant change to the building has been the installation of glass block in some window openings. The building demonstrates a high degree of material integrity, with little alteration showing long-term occupancy by the builder as well as continued use of its original purpose even into the 21st century. To the north of the building is an open gravel lot that is considered a non-contributing site due to alteration after the period of significance.

Setting

The building occupies the southeast corner of City Block 2214, which is a typical block created by the gridiron expansion of St. Louis. The surrounding area demonstrates an industrial character, with many adjacent historic buildings built for manufacturing and warehousing occupying adjacent sites. This area developed as an industrial district after development of the Terminal Railroad Association freight lines serving the site in the late 19th century. The main freight trunk lines are one block north of the nominated property. The railroad spur line immediately to the west, and other rail spurs in the vicinity, are now removed, showing the decline of rail service to industrial sites here.

To the west one block is Grand Avenue, which elevates to meet a viaduct over the railroad lines. Although many buildings toward Grand Avenue have been demolished in the last twenty-five years, leaving vacant lots behind, the immediate setting of the building is highly retentive of industrial character (see figure 3). Immediately north is the historic daylight factory building of the Steelcote Manufacturing Company Paint Factory (NR 6/27/2007), and on the west, south and east are other industrial buildings occupied during the nominated building's period of significance that are still in use. The streets here are largely paved up to building walls, with few separated sidewalks, indicative of the utilitarian accommodation of loading in the area.

Exterior

The building has a functionalist design that demonstrates no stylistic influences (see photograph 1). The coursed rubble limestone foundation belies a reinforced concrete floor slab on the first floor (see photograph 6), so likely remains through salvage and adaption of the earlier building that burned on the site before construction of this one. Above the foundation, walls are of pressed red brick laid in Flemish bond. The roof is flat with a composite roof that

drains to the east and north, where a painted metal rounded gutter pan carries water to painted metal downspouts on the north elevation (see photograph 3).

The east elevation has three paired bays distributed symmetrically on the first two floors. There is a four-foot-deep concrete truck dock currently enclosed by a tall chain link fence at the first floor. The dock runs until the northernmost bay, where it terminates at concrete steps descending to a vacated drive. The bays on the lower part have pairs of window openings across the second floor and two pairs at each side of an entrance at the first floor. The entrance contains a double-leaf wooden door with single lights in each leaf. Window openings have jack arches and rowlock course sills. On the first floor are multi-light steel sash windows behind grills, and on the second floor the openings contain glass block around modern single-light windows. The glass block and single-light windows are very likely not original, although no permit specifying this work exists. At the floor division between first and second running across 90% of the elevation is a ghosting of what seems to be a missing canopy or roof structure that could have sheltered the dock. On the third floor are two pairs of steel sash ribbons (with pivot-hinged center sash) with corner piers and a wide center division, all maintaining the brick wall plane. A brick chimney rises at the center of this elevation.

On the south elevation, the wall is divided into nine bays articulated on the two lower floors, with two window ribbons of steel sash divided by an elevator and stair bay toward the east side at the third floor (see photograph 2). There is an elevator shaft penthouse at the top of this bay, clad in masonite with six-light steel sash windows on the east, west and south faces. The five openings at each level at left (west) have steel sash windows of the same size, while the sixth has smaller windows in openings at the stairs. The seventh bay has freight openings with paneled dual-retracting delivery doors in each opening, while the eighth openings has a nonhistoric steel slab person door at first floor below a smaller window (glazed with glass block) and the ninth has a steel sash window at the first level and a glass block window at the second. Above the openings in the seventh bay is a projecting steel beam hoist. The west bay has windows of steel sash in four bays at the first two floors below a steel sash ribbon at the third.

The north elevation has ten bays of steel sash windows at the first and second floors, with a projecting tenth bay at the west with openings at each level (see photograph 3). Grilles cover the first floor windows. The first floor has two window openings at left (east) at full size, then four small openings high on the wall, then two more full-eight windows. The tenth bay at right (west) is blind. Above on the second floor, all ten bays have full-size openings with glass block in the three at left (east) and steel sash in the rest. At the third floor, there is a pier rising between the second and third bays from south, but otherwise the windows form a continuous ribbon except on the east face of the projecting bay, where the window is an eight-light steel window set in an opening in the brick wall.

There is a one-story boiler house starting at the second bay from east, which is low at pavement level between the basement and first floors (see photograph 4). A steel stack rises from the flat-roofed wing. The east elevation features a three-light steel window inset in a jack-arch opening and a jack-arch door opening with a boarded-over wooden door cased inside. On the north elevation there are four of the same windows in openings beneath a stepped parapet. On the west side is a wide boarded entrance with a double rowlock segmental arch header. To

the west of this is a single-leaf door opening on the main building wall containing a replacement steel slab door.

The second wing on this side is an original hydraulic pump house at the west side (see photograph 5). This wing has tall parapets on its east and west sides capped with segmental coping tiles. The east and west elevations have a stepped brick pattern course running beneath dock level. On the east elevation is a tall boarded door opening at the right (north), and an eight-light steel window in an opening at its left (south). These both have jack arches, and the window opening has a rowlock sill. On the north elevation, the roof deck is exposed. There are three window openings, one infilled with brick and the other featuring the same window as at the east. There is a boarded entrance at the east end of the elevation. Below the windows and door is a reinforced concrete loading dock set on four perimeter piers and cantilevered from the other side. Above this on the main building wall is single window opening at the second floor and a fire escape running from the third floor down to the wing roof.

The west elevation is arranged with four bays of windows symmetrically arranged, containing the same steel sash as the east elevation openings have (see photograph 1). The third floor windows form a continuous ribbon. The wall of the wing at the north is blind. The height of the stone foundation raises here. A steel gate is recessed from the south where the railroad spur once was located.

Interior

The building interior largely retains its appearance as a working industrial facility, with its main spaces retaining open layouts and exposed material surfaces. The first floor is divided into two sections: an open processing area on the east with 18’ height, and a tank room with 39’ height separated by a brick partition (see figure 5). The processing room has an exposed reinforced concrete floor, exposed and painted concrete columns, and exposed second floor concrete floor slab above (see photographs 6 and 8). The brick exterior walls are exposed as well. At the east end, two staircases are in place on the outer walls. The southern staircase is contained in a brick skirt (original) and clay block walls (built in 1969), while the northern staircase is open and shows it cantilever from the exterior wall. The stairs are both plain reinforced concrete runs, and the northern stairs has pipe railings (see figure 9). There is a steel mezzanine between the northern stair and the eastern wall (see photograph 9). On the south wall west of the staircase, there is the paired freight elevator and oil barrel elevator shafts (see photograph 7). The freight elevator runs to the roof, and has its original cab with wooden safety gate. The barrel elevator runs to the third floor, although it no longer is operational. The track with barrel arms remains in place between the first floor and second floor, although plywood closes the shaft above (see figure 8).

At the west end of the processing room, there is a raised platform and mounted tank on the south side. Along the north and west walls is a pipe trench used for connecting tanks to each other. There are doors on the north wall connecting to the boiler and pump rooms on the north side, both of which have floor grades lower than the processing room. At the west end is an opening with missing bricks on its sides suggesting that the entrance may have been expanded or a door casing was removed. Steel steps and a rail lead up to the opening that enters into the

tank room. In this room the east side has a reinforced concrete floor while the west side has a steel grate floor built over steel girders. The walls are exposed brick, and the ceiling above is the exposed concrete underside of what originally was the roof (see photograph 10).

On the second floor, there is a processing room and an office suite (see figure 6). The height is 18' again. The processing area is open in plan, like the first floor, with the freight and barrel elevators in place on the south wall with wooden safety gates (see photograph 13). Adjacent to the elevators is an exposed steel staircase to the third floor (see photograph 12). On the west side is a plain brick wall separating the tank room from this area. On the east side, there is an entrance into a suite of offices, where a main reception area opens into several small rooms (see photograph 11). This area is noted on the 1938 Sanborn fire insurance map, so was in place during the period of significance. The office area has a high level of finishing. Walls are plastered and painted, and there is a simple one-part baseboard, window casings and two-panel wooden doors. The concrete floors are painted. The concrete slab above is painted, although also there is a soffit at the east side of finished gypsum board. The glass block windows here most likely date to after the period of significance.

The third floor has a sparse appearance, with bare concrete floors, exposed outer brick walls and two lateral historic brick and clay tile partition walls (see photographs 14 and 15; also figure 7). The grid of steel posts and columns is exposed and partially painted, along with the corrugated steel roof deck above. Beneath some of the window ribbons, the brick walls are parged where repairs seem to have been made.

Non-Contributing Site: Work Yard

On the north side of the building is an open gravel lot extending north to the Steelcote Manufacturing Company building. On this lot, the Columbia Oil Company once had located freestanding oil tanks as well as a set of one-story wooden sheds (see figure 4). None of these structures exist any longer, although the long shed on the north end of the lot appeared on the 1995 Sanborn fire insurance map. Since the yard would have been dominated by the appearance of structures associated with the loading and filling work that would have occurred here, and the structures were removed after the period of significance, the yard is considered non-contributing as a site.

Integrity

The nominated building presents clearly retained integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. The only two impactful changes to the integrity of the building are the enclosure of the south side stairway in 1969 and the installation of glass block in the office area windows (date unknown). All other windows appear to be historic. Neither diminishes the building's ability to narrate its historic use. The replacement of one door at the south elevation and the removal of any covering on the truck dock are minor. Deterioration is evident at windows and doors, but that is not adversely impactful. The loss of adjacent structures in the north yard have not impacted the site's ability to show its historic role in St. Louis automotive history.

Summary

The Columbia Oil Company Building, located at 3419 Papin Avenue in St. Louis (St. Louis City), Missouri, is locally significant for its association with the rise of the automobile in St. Louis, and is eligible for listing under Criterion A for COMMERCE. Built in 1923 and expanded in 1929, the industrial building served as the distribution plant for the Columbia Oil Company, which had been founded by German immigrant Frederick Keitel in 1904. After early years as a wholesale supplier of industrial and mechanical lubricating oils, the company ventured into automotive oil sales in the 1910s and 1920s. As the increase in automobile ownership in St. Louis and surrounding areas soared, the Columbia Oil Company became one of the city's most prominent wholesalers of automobile oil and other products, including antifreeze. After building the new fireproof building, Columbia began producing its own mixed oil under the Colco brand, and distributed across the United States. Columbia Oil Company distributed major brands as well, and its advertisements were prominent in local newspapers throughout the 1930s. Columbia may have been the only independent oil wholesaler in the city to produce its own brands, and was one of a few to thrive against branded or corporate-owned competitors during the vertical integration of branded gasoline, motor oil and filling stations in the twentieth century. Alongside the rise of other automobile-related resources in St. Louis, such as filling stations, sales dealerships and parking garages, the wholesale motor oil warehouses played a key role in supporting expansion of the technology that changes the city forever. Only a few examples of buildings used for this function remain intact. The period of significance for the Columbia Oil Company Building begins in 1923, when the building construction began, and ends in 1952, when changes in company leadership marked a close of its significant business activity.

The Mill Creek Valley Industrial Corridor

The Columbia Oil company Building occupies a site in the western end of an area called the Mill Creek Valley, which is named for a creek that once flowed across the landscape toward the Mississippi River. While today the Mill Creek Valley is marked by industrial, commercial and institutional buildings, in the early years of St. Louis' settlement this area was a bucolic lowland pasture. The French settlers called the creek La Petite Rivíere before Joseph Taillon built a dam in 1766 across the creek to create a flow powering his gristmill.[1] Taillon's dam created a large pond, named Chouteau's Pond after one of the city's founders, and led to a new name for the creek, Mill Creek.

The pond's drainage following the 1849 cholera epidemic would open the opportunity for the use of the depressed area for development of railroad infrastructure.[2] The lowland transformed from a swamp-like valley into a modern metropolitan terminal trunk in the late 19th century, especially following the connection of the Mill Creek Valley rails to the Eads Bridge through a freight tunnel in 1874.[3] Industrial development proceeded west out from the center city,

[1] Stefene Russell, "1854 in St. Louis: Elemental Changes," *St. Louis Magazine* (August 22, 2012). <https://www.stlmag.com/1854-in-St-Louis-Elemental-Changes/>.
[2] Timothy P. Maloney and Karen Bode Baxter, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Steelcote Manufacturing Company Paint Factory*, 2007. p. 7-1.
[3] James Neal Primm, *Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri* (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett Publishing Company, 1981) p. 305.

although the nuisance of pollution cast uncertainty on where industry may spread. In 1880, the Board of Health developed a policy to remove industrial nuisances from "populous residence parts of the city."[4] The western growth of the city without zoning, however, meant that residential plats were still coinciding with industry along the western path of the Mill Creek Valley.

The construction in 1894 of St. Louis Union Station at 18th and Market streets on the western end of downtown St. Louis led to a development of increased terminal railroad infrastructure in the Mill Creek Valley. Anticipating the construction of a new station in 1889, the railroads with lines in the Mill Creek Valley formed a pool leasing all facilities to the Terminal Railroad Association, which provided for sharing common rights-of-way through the valley.[5] The Association would oversee upgrading the Mill Creek Valley to optimize its capacity to serve industries looking to locate west of the center city, where nuisance ordinances seemed a threat, toward the area annexed by the city in its separation from St. Louis County in 1876. The city continued to threaten slaughterhouses, glue shops, tanneries and other industries that emitted odorous emissions along the Mill Creek Valley with heavy regulation, but warehouses, foundries and brick works found welcome accommodation.[6] An 1890 article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that if one walked west from the Union Depot in downtown St. Louis along the Mill Creek Valley tracks, one would come across new industrial facilities producing ice, wall plaster, cut stone, sewer pipe and railroad car wheels.[7]

The real estate industry continued to express anxiety over industrial encroachment upon residential development, however. Real estate developers complained to city government in the early 1910s that the expansion of land used for manufacturing into previously undeveloped areas also sought for residential development was causing lack of predictable profit and land valuation.[8] Factories and residents alike were pressed for available land in the center city, and both took advantage of relatively cheap and abundant new parcels available as developed platted additions west of Jefferson Avenue. The City Plan Commission, supported by planner Harland Bartholomew, pursued the enactment of a land use zoning ordinance to create use restrictions preventing further industrial development in mixed-use and residential areas. The Commission's drafted ordinance was easily passed by the Board of Aldermen and signed by Mayor Henry Kiel on July 18, 1920.[9]

The Mill Creek Valley benefitted tremendously from the zoning ordinance, which created an unrestricted district along the rail line there as far west as Grand Avenue.[10] Adjacent to the Mill Creek Valley were industrial zoned districts where uses that did not create gaseous, smoky or odorous emissions or excessive noise could locate. The site of the Columbia Oil Company plant

[4] Andrew Hurley, "Busby's Stink Boat and the Regulation of Nuisance Trades in St. Louis, 1865-1918," *Common Fields* (Andrew Hurley, ed.; St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), p. 155.
[5] "Filed the Deeds: Railroads Entering the Mill Creek Valley Form a Pool," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (December 22, 1889), p. 14.
[6] Hurley, p. 159.
[7] "Along the Railroad: Interesting Industries Revealed by a Stroll Up Mill Creek Valley," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (October 26, 1890), p. 16.
[8] Hurley, p. 160
[9] Primm, p. 446.
[10] Primm, p. 447.

was just outside of the unrestricted area, in an area zoned for industrial use. The security of the zoning ordinance led to investor confidence in the Mill Creek Valley for funding new building construction, and the press reported that even before the ordinance was enacted parties were buying up remaining land in the Mill Creek Valley for industrial development.[11]

The Columbia Oil Company located in Mill Creek Valley as early as 1906, following trends to locate out of crowded downtown and riverfront districts offering little space for expansion. The company's construction of a new building in 1923 fit into a period of increased development of larger fireproof manufacturing buildings in the Mill Creek Valley, supported by the resolution of land use zonings and permitted activities. Within a year of the construction of its two-story fireproof distribution building, Columbia Oil Company saw a major new daylight factory built by Steelcote Manufacturing Company immediately north. Steelcote and Columbia both added floors to their buildings in 1929, demonstrating the increase in activity at the location. Mill Creek Valley east of Grand Avenue thrived as an industrial district into the twentieth century, but declined as railroad shipping diminished. In 1959, the city began demolishing the mixed use, largely residential Mill Creek Valley neighborhood, which was named for the valley but geographically discrete, and eventually rebuilt the area through an urban renewal project in the 1960s and 1970s. A path for Interstate 64 was cleared north of the nominated property beginning in 1959, forcing relocation of several industries.[12] By then, remaining industries like Columbia Oil Company were no longer among the city's most productive or profitable.

Motor Oil Wholesaling in the Twentieth Century

In the period of significance, the market for commercial sales of motor oil in St. Louis had endured a rapid expansion following years of exponential growth in automotive sales, private automobile ownership and commercial vehicle sales expansion. By 1930, there were 23 million privately owned automobiles in the United States.[13] What had been a novel technology in 1900 and a recreational tool of wealthy Americans in 1910 was a middle class consumer product by 1920, when Missouri recorded 346,838 privately-owned cars.[14] One magazine reported in 1920 that automobile sales volumes were higher elsewhere, but ownership percentages were highest in an area of the Midwest that included Missouri, Kansas and Iowa.[15] By 1930, the automobile was a dominant transportation technology in St. Louis and other American cities, and cities even began removing streetcar trams in favor of motor busses.

Motor oil had an accidental origin around 1866, when physician Dr. John Ellis began experimenting with the refining of crude oil for medicinal use. Ellis' experiments did not yield anything with safe use on humans, but led him to explore its application as a mechanical lubricant. Ellis discovered that the refined oil served to reduce friction in large steam engines,

[11] "Sites for Many Industries Bought This Past Week," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (June 30, 2018), p. A1B.
[12] Maloney and Bode Baxter, p. 8-19.
[13] Karen Bode Baxter, *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: Historic Automobile-Related Resources of St. Louis* (2005), p. E-1.
[14] Bode Baxter, p. E-6.
[15] *The Automobile* 43 (August 26, 1920), p. 406.

and founded the Continuous Oil Refining Company to produce refined oil for lubricants. This company would become motor oil giant Valvoline.[16]

Henry Ford utilized Valvoline motor oil in his quest to set the world land speed record in 1904, and his respect for the product led to Ford Motor Company filling all Model T cars with the product. The company issued a document with each car instructing buyers to afterward only use the motor oil in the car.[17] Ford Motor Company thus issued the first motor oil specification for a private automobile. Motor oil, however, would not be a universal product for over three decades. As different manufacturers specified different blends of oil for engines, there were necessarily different oils needed for consumers. The Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) developed standard viscosity rankings in the 1920s to help guide consumers. The SAE rankings also meant that the claims of early oils for superiority fell to a verifiable equivalence of oils, meaning that any brand that met these rankings was as good as any other.[18]

Motor oil was branded before gasoline was branded, and the SAE rankings brought about industry standards in marketing.[19] Lubricating oil brands established the place, product, and packing approach in which products relied on eye-catching packing and agreements with retailers for exclusive sales to create an aura of reliability and quality.[20] In the 1920s, consumers purchased oil not just at filling stations, but also direct from drums that sellers would use to fill consumers' own containers, and pre-packaged at drug stores.[21] The number of brands proliferated in the 1920s. After Valvoline introduced the first universal oil, X-18, in 1939, there was a general recession in motor oil manufacturers as refineries needed to adapt to production of standard formulas.[22] The diminution in motor oil brands and formulas meant that wholesale distribution became more vertically integrated, with local wholesalers dependent on single brands for business.

Filling stations helped build consumer demand for motor oil. Early filling stations were simple ports for filling gasoline tanks, where the attendant handled the matter.[23] The challenge to petroleum companies was the task of building demand for competing versions of products for which the public could not assess real difference. So long as a car ran, and an engine was lubricated, the qualitative differences between competing brands was unknown to most consumers. Gasoline companies paved the way for building perceived differences by creating brand names and eye-catching logos, and even adding colors to gasoline to suggest a real distinction in quality.[24] In 1920, there were 15,000 stations in the United States, but by 1930 there were 123,979.[25]

[16] Ashland Oil and Refining Company, *Annual Report*. 1936.
[17] "This Is the Hidden History of Motor Oil," *Petrolicious* Productions (February 12, 2016), <https://petrolicious.com/articles/this-is-the-hidden-history-of-motor-oil>. Accessed November 11, 2018.
[18] Tim Russell, *Fill 'Er Up: The Great American Gas Station* (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2007), p. 68.
[19] John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *The Gas Station in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 38.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Bode Baxter, p. E-10.
[24] Daniel I. Vieyra, *Fill'er Up: An Architectural History of America's Gas Stations* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1979), p. 8.
[25] Jakle and Sculle, p. 58.

The proliferation of gas stations led to station owners deploying the capitalist logic of expanding services to people who had no choice but to keep vehicles refueled. While waiting at a gas station, a fuel purchaser was a missed consumer for related purchases. Gas stations began selling motor oils in the 1920s, before adding products such as antifreeze, tires and other convenience products.[26] These products also distinguished themselves through colorful packaging, brand names and logos suggesting high levels of perfection. By the 1920s, the gas station had become a retail location rather than simple service station.[27] Unlike gasoline, motor oil was variable, so stations needed to stock different types to retain the business of drivers of a variety of automobile models.

The automobile industry found an early need to educate the public on the need to keep engines lubricated, and that initial impulse to educate quickly turned into a public relations strategy of brand distinction. For instance, an early article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on motor oil appeared in 1916, written by driving school owner William H. Stewart.[28] The article included an illustration and was fact-driven imploring owners of automobiles to observe their engine oil levels, and keep replenishing the reservoirs. By the late 1920s, St. Louis newspapers were hit with a wave of quarter, half and sometimes full page advertisements promoting motor oils including Lubrite, Shell, Standard and Pierce. The advertisements featured bold graphic design emphasizing mobility and encouraging consumer choice. Occasionally, companies even purchased space for advertisement articles, such as one that the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ran in 1927 stating that the Pierce Oil Company refinery in Oklahoma was producing most of the motor oil used by St. Louis motorists, and frequently mentioning that this oil was sold as Pennant Motor Oil.[29]

Wholesale dealers of oils supplied motor oil to filling stations in the twentieth century. Early wholesalers were primarily selling refined crude oil as mechanical lubricants, and their customers were manufacturers, repair and service companies, and public works facilities. The businesses often expanded sales of oils designed for elevators in the late 19th century, and some adapted early to the small but growing automobile industry. However oil wholesalers generally were not likely to be selling automobile oils until the early 1920s, when the number of automobiles in St. Louis was high enough to create more than a niche market. The listing of wholesale oil dealers in city directories is ambiguous in evaluating which specialized in motor oil, but does show a decline in dealers in the 1920s, especially following the crash of 1929. There are 90 listings in 1923, 85 in 1924 and then declining numbers that reach 63 in 1930. The St. Louis listings fit national patterns, where company-controlled branded jobbers associated with Shell, Pure and other companies functioned alongside unbranded independent companies like Columbia.[30] Columbia Oil Company is constant, and expanding, as competitors are closing up shop in these years. The company's ability to survive the ascent of filling stations and the decline in oil brands attests to keen business skills.

[26] Ibid.
[27] Vieyra, p.9.
[28] William H. Stewart, Jr., "Lubrication Is Best Insurance of a Car's Life," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (April 2, 1916), p. 3S.
[29] "Story of Motor Oils from Well to Automobile," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (November 20, 1927), p. 3A.
[30] Jakle and Sculle, p. 54.

In the 1930s and 1940s, major petroleum companies began integrating sales chains. Service stations could affiliate as a franchiser of motor oil and gasoline brands, but the stations' appearance and quality were up to the proprietors.[31] Major producers like Shell, Texaco and Standard began to vertically integrate distribution from refinery to warehouse to service station, to ensure high quality and seamless branding.[32] Independent filling stations, including many clients of independent oil wholesalers like Columbia Oil Company, had to buy into a corporate franchise that mandated only sales of company products purchased directly from the producer, or face likely elimination. Independent stations still found independent suppliers, and were able to offer other distinguishing features, such as offering self-serve pumps and other cost-saving measures.[33] By the 1970s, there was a resurgence in independent stations, but it was fairly short-lived.

Columbia Oil Company as Automobile Service Product Wholesaler

Frederick Keitel, native of Minden, Germany, founded the Columbia Oil Company in 1904. The company was a wholesaler of industrial and mechanical lubricating oils, sold at first from Keitel's wagon.[34] In 1905, the city directory lists the new company located in a building at 931-33 N. 2nd Street near the riverfront (no longer extant). The same directory lists 29 oil wholesalers, with most specializing in industrial oils and greases. Columbia was one of the few that offered automotive oils, and it would continue to develop a specialty for that supply business in the next three decades. One year later, the company is located at a building at 3400 Papin Street (no longer extant) near the nominated building. By 1918, Columbia assumed ownership of the Art Mosaic Tile Company facility at 3419 Papin Street in midtown St. Louis, which the company later demolished to build the nominated building. The company expanded in the early years of automobile ownership.

The company's prominence would rise alongside automobile proliferation in St. Louis. In 1909 there were a mere 2,000 cars in the city.[35] After the expansion of automotive credit financing, where dealers or manufacturers stopped requiring full cash purchases, the rate of ownership soared. In St. Louis the automotive ownership rate raised from 1 in 13 in 1920 to 1 in 5 persons in 1929.[36] The increase in ownership required an expansion of support companies providing necessary service supplies, including motor oil. The supply of automotive oil expanded in the central US in the 1920s, and the Columbia Oil Company was at the forefront. Keitel's son Elmer J. Keitel rose to vice presidency in 1916, and became active in associations such as the St. Louis Petroleum Men's Club, where he was secretary, and the Missouri Athletic Association.[37]

[31] Chester Liebs, *From Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 104.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Liebs, p. 108.
[34] *Oil Trade Journal* 11.7 (July 1920), p. 118.
[35] Bode Baxter, p. E-6.
[36] Bode Baxter, p. E-8.
[37] Walter Barlow Stevens, *Centennial History of Missouri (The Center State): 100 Years,* vol. 5 (St. Louis, Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), p. 487.

The Central Oil Jobbers Association, founded in the late 1910s, elected Columbia Oil Company founder Keitel as secretary in 1920.[38] Frederick Keitel died the same year at the age of 69.[39]

Ahead of the construction of the nominated building, Columbia Oil Company retained a diverse business line, with automobile products jobbed alongside others. In 1922, the *American Oil Directory* listed that the Columbia Oil Company was wholesaling, marketing and compounding greases, soaps, polishes, kerosenes, oils, fireproof paints and petroleum products.[40]

Columbia Oil Company suffered a fire at the site in early 1923, which was reported by the *Iron Age* magazine that year as $75,000 loss of equipment and facility.[41] The company quickly rebuilt, with the current building as the result. Columbia Oil Company obtained a building permit on May 12, 1923 for a two-story brick warehouse with a cost of $19,000. J.H. Bright Building Company was the contractor, and Stevens & Pearson were the architects. The new building's stone foundation likely was the earlier building's, reused as the shell for a new reinforced concrete floor slab inside. The reinvestment displays that the company was very financially strong and well-insured. There was an earlier permit from 1918 to build a boiler room addition to the earlier building, which Art Mosaic Tile Company built in 1903. That may be the present boiler room, which shows a softer mortar and has one segmental arch opening, which are signs of earlier construction than the 1920s.

In 1924, Columbia Oil Company was purchasing quarter-page advertisements in the automotive section of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch to promote its "Colco" oil, a special blended oil manufactured at the Papin Street building (see figure 10). Colco was designed especially for Ford automobile engines in an era where the motor oil specifications varied between makes. Ford had directed customers to use Valvoline since 1904, so Colco was a way to offer a more affordable alternative to customers in the area round St. Louis. A 1928 advertisement shows that Columbia was one of 20 area distributors for Radiator Glycerine, which demonstrates Columbia's diversification of automobile service product wholesaling (see figure 10).

Sales were strong in the 1920s, and the company added a new floor to the new building in 1929 to expand barrel storage. The permit dates to May 14, 1929, and reports a $5,000 project to add a third floor. The expansion was notable enough to warrant reporting in the *Report of the Industrial Bureau of the Industrial Club of St. Louis*, which kept meticulous tabs on signs that St. Louis was rebounding from the Depression.[42] The same periodical reported in June 1931 that Columbia was adding a 6,700 square foot one-story addition to its warehouse and barrel reconditioning department, where workers would remove dents and then wash and repair used oil barrels and drums.[43] This likely was located in another frame building, no longer extant, that appears on the 1938 Sanborn map but was not connected to the nominated building. In the 1930s, the company announced an exclusive distribution deal with national distributor Wolf's

[38] "Central Oil Jobbers to Operate Exchange; Hipp of Louisville is Elected President," *Petroleum Magazine* 10.11 (November 1920), p. 46.
[39] *Oil Trade Journal* 11.7 (July 1920), p. 118.
[40] *American Oil Directory* (1922), p. 16.
[41] *The Iron Age* (April 1, 1923).
[42] *Report of the Industrial Bureau of the Industrial Club of St. Louis* 18 (June 10, 1929).
[43] *Report of the Industrial Bureau of the Industrial Club of St. Louis* 42 (June 10, 1931).

Head, a Pennsylvania engine oil maker, and a deal as one of two wholesalers for DuPont's new automotive antifreeze.[44]

A survey of automobile oil wholesale warehouses extant or under construction in 1929 shows that the Columbia Oil Company Building was on par with the most significant examples in size and construction quality.[45] *Gould's Red-Blue Book* lists six wholesalers by warehouse address, and others by office address. Of the warehouses, three remain standing for a comparison. One warehouse, that of the Puritan Oil Company at 35 W. Ferry Avenue, was demolished in the last five years. Puritan distributed Sinclair and Quaker State oils. The two-story warehouse for the National Refining Company, built in 1925, remains standing at 5137 Southwest Avenue (see figure 12). This building's economical design and steel sash windows compare closely to the Columbia Oil Company Building. Nearby, the Liberty Bell Oil Company warehouse at 1430 S. Vandeventer Avenue, built in 1930, stands a ruin after a recent devastating fire (see figure 13). The primary elevation of this building is executed with Italian Renaissance terra cotta motifs. Finally, the three-story warehouse of the St. Louis Gasoline and Fuel Company and United Consumers Oil Company, built in 1919, remains at 4142 Union Boulevard (originally numbered 4150; see figure 14.) This warehouse is a large, utilitarian structure.

In 1934, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported at the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the company that the company had one of the most modern plants for automotive oil production and distribution in St. Louis.[46] The warehouse function was attenuated by a productive function -- the plant produced compounded and blended oils as well as greases for lubrication. There also was a complete barrel reconditioning works. The company's peers were distributing mass-produced oils and greases, but Columbia could produce its own stock. Evidence in newspaper articles shows that Columbia was the only motor oil wholesaler whose in-house production was significant enough to attract press coverage. The company may have been the only wholesaler producing its own products by the 1930s. In the same 1934 article, Keitel reported to the newspaper a recent 25% increase in sales, promising an expanded sales staff.[47]

Amid the dominance of vertically integrated corporations, Keitel helped found the Independent Oil Compounders Association, a national organization, in 1948.[48] Keitel was one of the first officers of the new advocacy organization, which fought monopolization of the motor oil industry. Elmer Keitel, Sr. not long after retired as Columbia Oil Company president in 1952, and Keitel, Jr. began his presidency. Keitel, Sr. remained board chairman until 1963.[49] The period of significance ends in 1952 with Keitel Sr.'s retirement as president, because that coincides with the end of significant automobile oil activity. The company turned to other products to survive after this year.

[44] "Dupont Introduces New Antifreeze in St. Louis District," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (December 22, 1935), p. 2-I; "New County Distributor for Wolf's Head Oils," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (August 30, 1936), p. 8A.
[45] The preparer conducted a windshield survey of remaining properties in October 2018.
[46] "Columbia Oil Co. Will Celebrate Its Anniversary Feb. 1," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (January 14, 1934), p. 7G.
[47] Ibid.
[48] "New Organization Founded By Oil Industry Men," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (May 21, 1948), p. 2B.
[49] "Services Held for Elmer J. Keitel, Sr." *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (April 22, 1979).

A line of business around this time, true to the entrepreneurial instinct that had built the company, was aviation lubricants, reported in 1956 in *Aviation Week*.[50] The company continued to run newspaper advertisements for its wholesale oils through 1966, but decline was in force. In 1967, the newspaper reported that Keitel, Jr. had begun work as a vice president at competitor J.D. Streett & Company, ending the era of Columbia Oil Company.[51]

The Columbia Oil Company's last year of operation was 1966, and the building sold later that year. The last recorded building permit for the building dates to October 21, 1969, when the Niedt Realty Company obtained a $4,000 permit to enclose the stairway from the second to third floors with 4" clay block. Since then, little has changed at the building as it has been used for storage of oil drums. The continuity in use has not required any change to the building, and despite some deterioration and a few small modifications, it remains in appearance commensurate with its appearance during Columbia's peak years.

By its closure, Columbia Oil Company had completed a distinct path from a small business among many others jobbing in lubricating oils to the city's most prominent independent wholesaler of automobile oils. Along the way, the company had developed its own blending and refining products marketed under its own brands, and also had represented several nationally-distributed automotive products. Columbia Oil Company helped St. Louis expand automobility by providing vital supplies of oil and other products, and had also helped sustain independent filling stations throughout the era where petroleum companies pushed to consolidate integrated branding from refinery to fuel pump. The company's peak years showed significant contributions to the emergence and stabilization of motor oil wholesaling as a local economic sector.

Conclusion

The Columbia Oil Company Building is an unusually intact example of a key automobile industry support facility, and it records an important era of early motor oil distribution in St. Louis. The company's motor oil wholesaling especially relates to the transition between independent production and distribution of oil products and the integration of corporate chains that provided everything from oil refining to service station sales. Columbia Oil Company thrived when it utilized the nominated building, outlasting many competitors and continuing to add sales lines to remain vibrant. Columbia Oil Company showed a determination and prowess that many competitors lacked as they closed up shop in the face of vertical integration by giant petroleum companies. Columbia also fell to changes in the industry, but by then the local industry had long been shaped by the company's activities. The *Historic Automobile-Related Resources of St. Louis, Missouri MPDF* notes that among automobile-related property types excluded from its registration requirements, there are several where few surviving examples – wholesale distributors potentially among them -- exist.[52] Thus listing these examples does not necessitate revising the MPDF and utilizing it for this nomination. The Columbia Oil Company Building embodies a type that may have few extant examples, and a use whose contribution to the development of automobile ownership in St. Louis remains locally significant.

[50] *Aviation Week* 65.1 (1956), p. 77.
[51] "Local Notes," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (April 11, 1967), p. 9C.
[52] Bode Baxter, p. F-29.

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Boundary Description

The nominated property boundary begins at the intersection of Edwin and Papin streets, and runs west to a vacated rail line, north to property boundary, east to Edwin Street and back south to Papin Street. The nominated property is recorded as parcel number 22140002300 by the Assessor of the City of St. Louis, and consists of Lot 8 of the Pitzman Addition to the City of ST. Louis. The property boundary is marked by the yellow line on the Columbia Oil Company Building Boundary Map.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire and only site owned and operated by the Columbia Oil Company during the period of significance.

Figure 1: Columbia Oil Company Building Boundary Map
Based on Google Maps data.

Figure 2: Site plan with photographic key. Source: 1951 Sanborn fire insurance map annotated by Preservation Research Office, 2018.

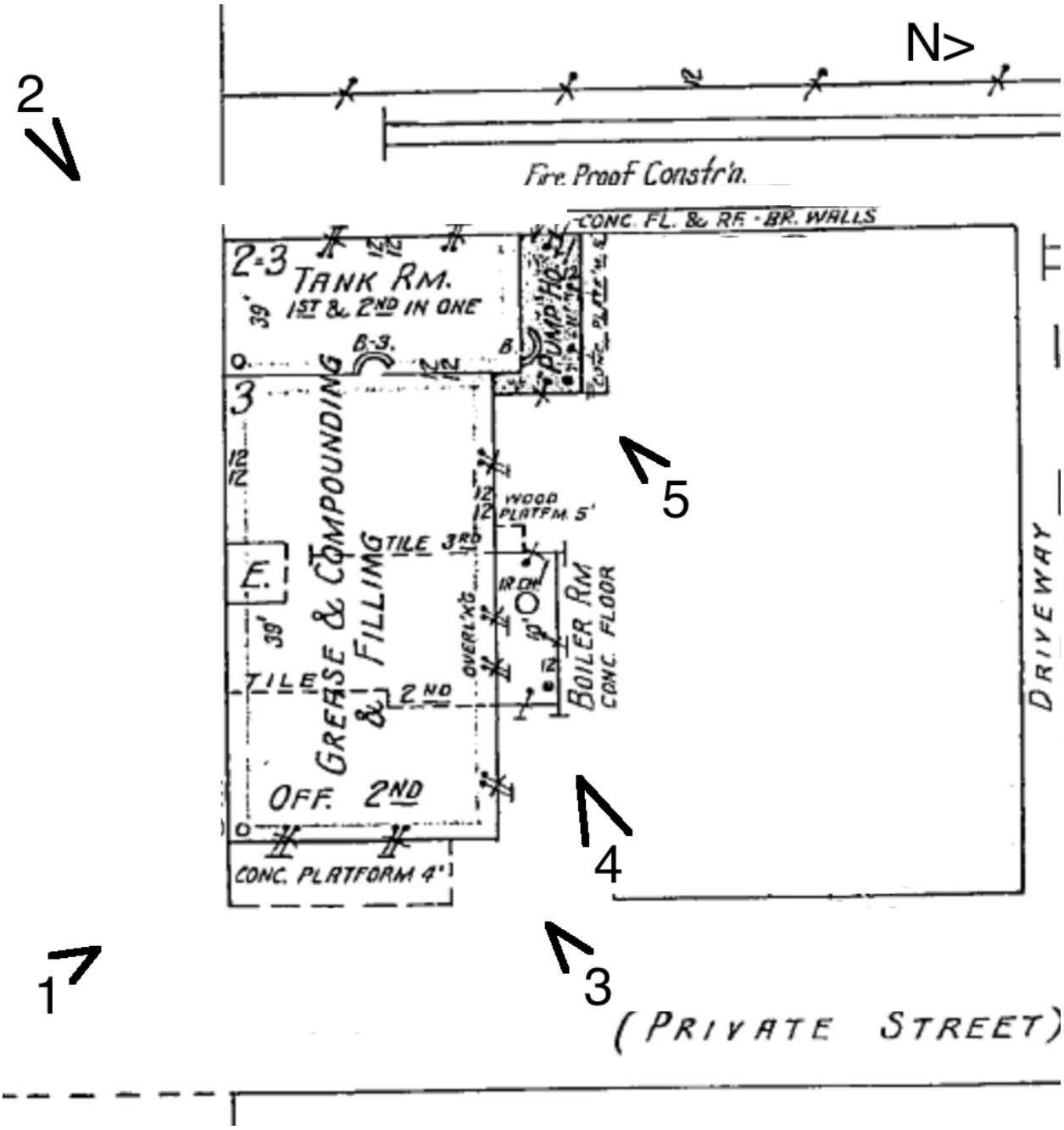

Figure 3: Context map. Nominated property marked by yellow box. Source: Google Maps data, 2018.

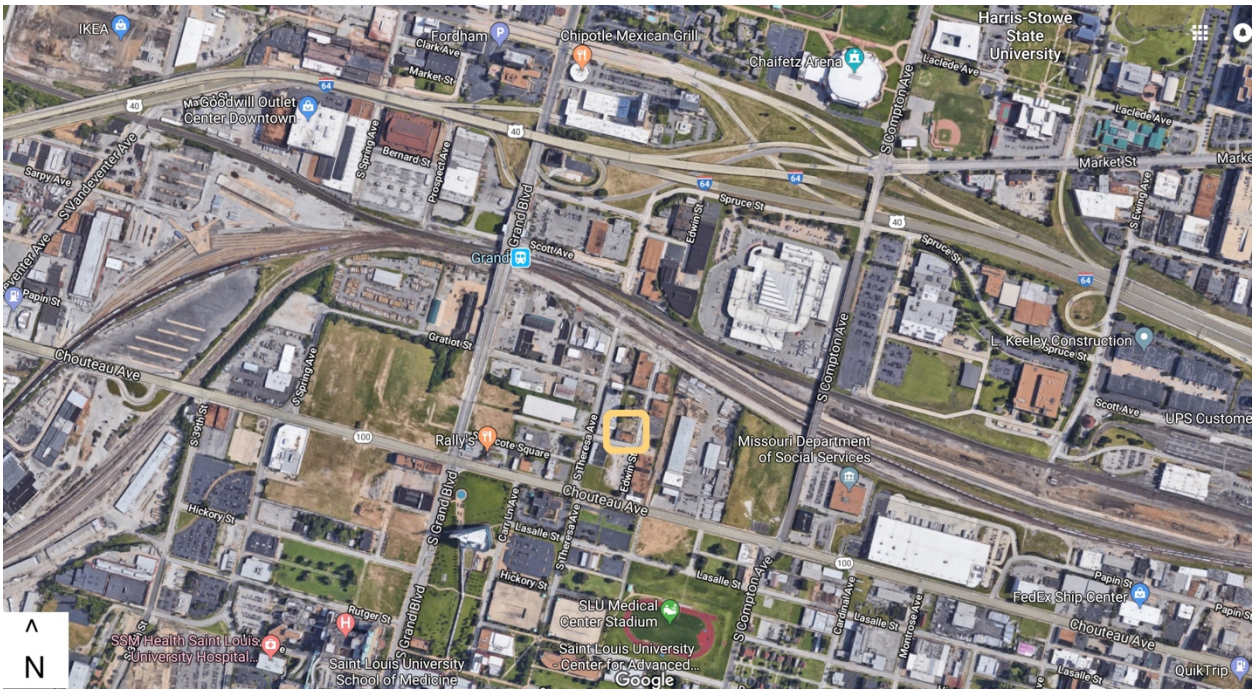

Figure 4: The Columbia Oil Company Building as it appeared on the 1938 Sanborn fire insurance map. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps through UMI.

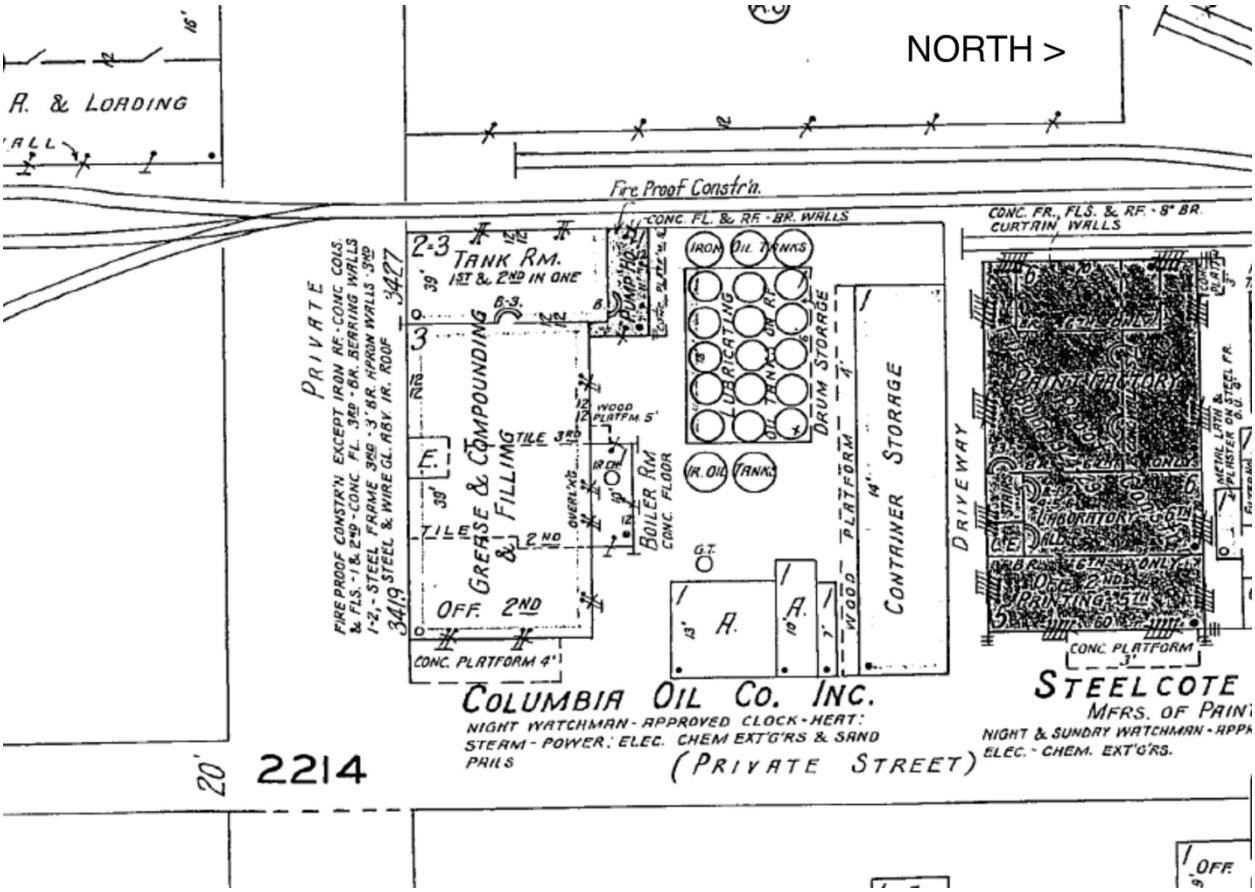

Figure 5: First floor plan with photographic key. Source: Trivers Associates Architects, 2018.

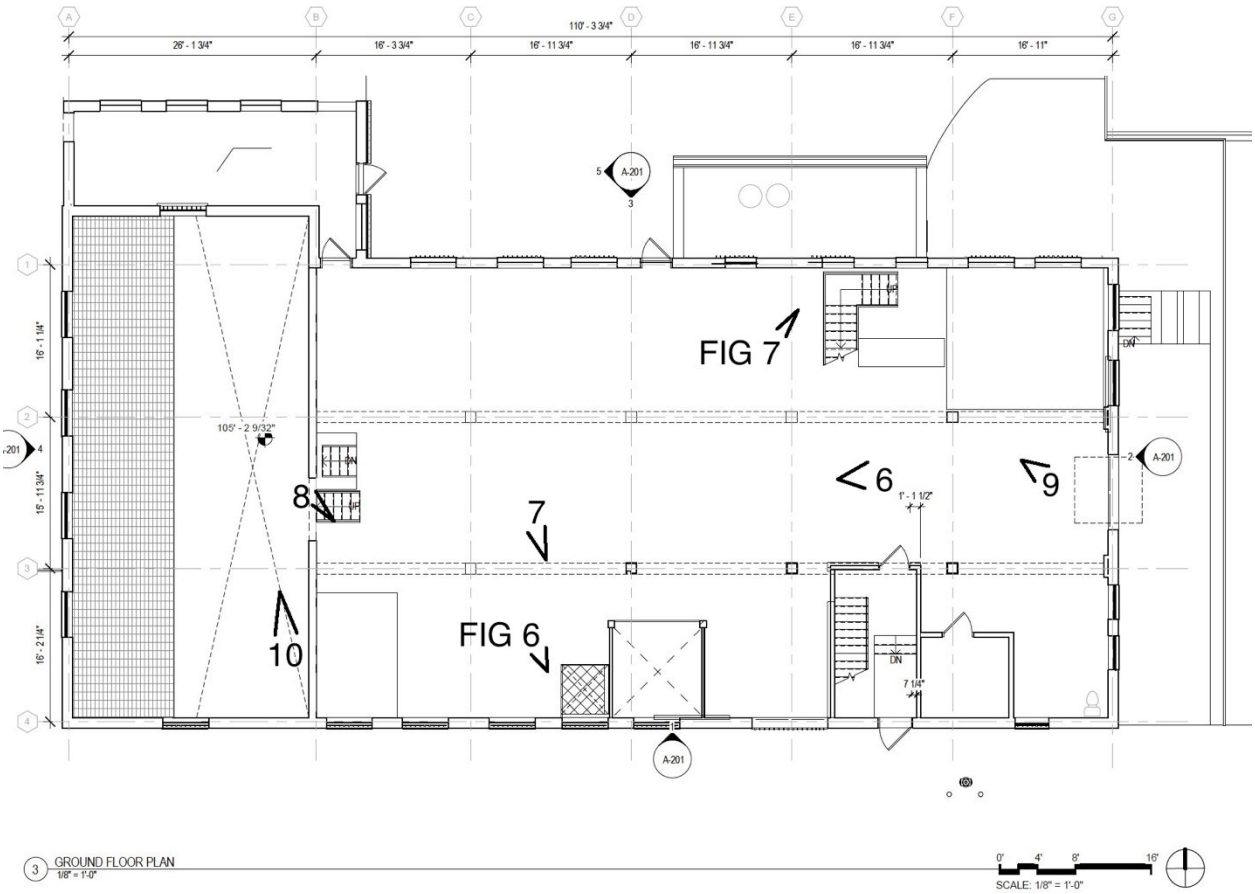

Figure 6: Second floor plan with photographic key. Source: Trivers Associates Architects, 2018.

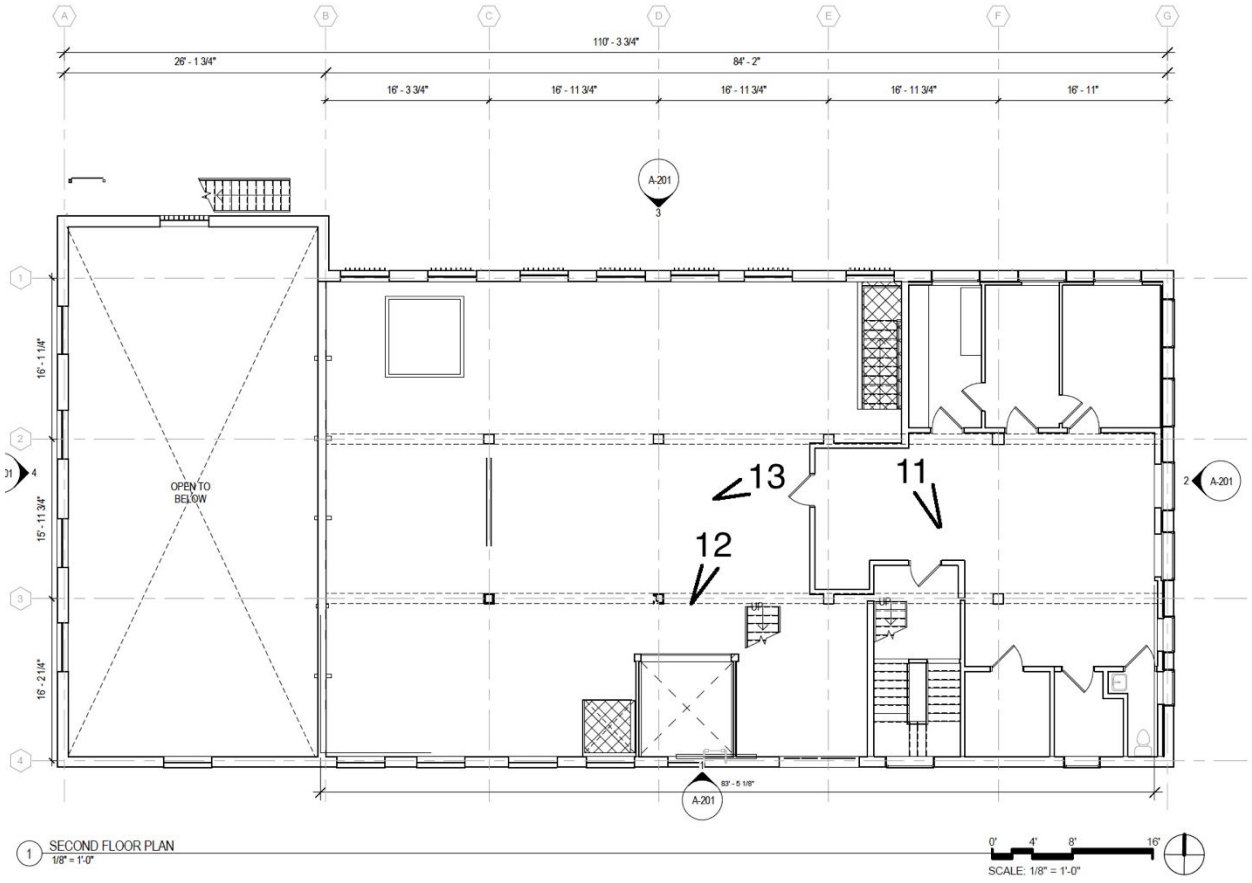

Figure 7: Third floor plan with photographic key. Source: Trivers Associates Architects, 2018.

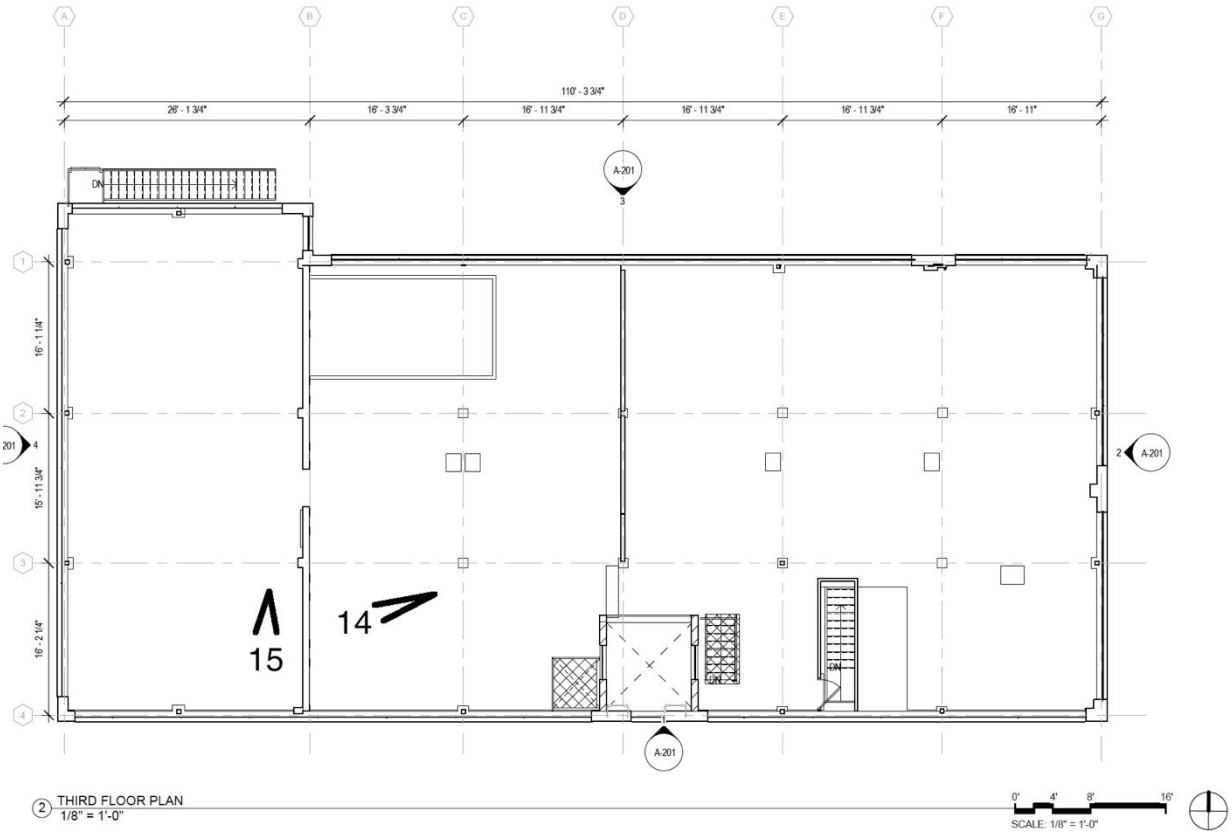

Figure 8: Oil barrel elevator at the first floor. Source: Preservation Research Office photograph, 2018.

Figure 9: View of staircase landing. Source: Preservation Research Office photograph, 2018.

Figure 10: Colco advertisement from 1922. Source: *Petroleum Age* 9.7 (1922).

Figure 11: Radiator Glycerine advertisement in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1928. Source: *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (December 13, 1928).

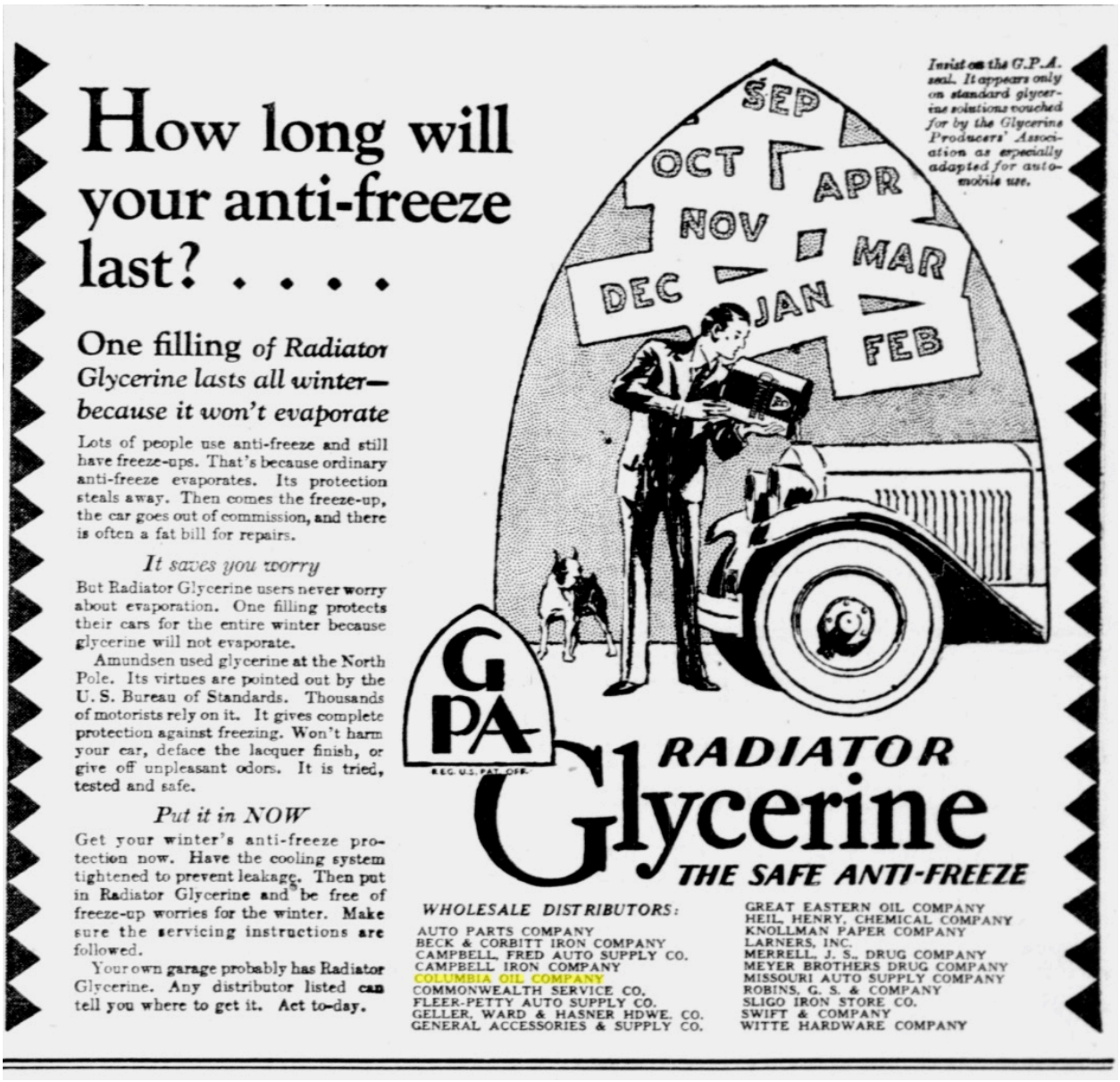

Figure 12: National Refining Company Warehouse at 5137 Southwest Avenue in St. Louis. Source: Photograph by the preparer, December 2018.

Figure 13: Liberty Bell Oil Company Warehouse located at 1430 S. Vandeventer Avenue in St. Louis. Source: Photograph by the preparer, December 2018.

Figure 14: St. Louis Gasoline and Fuel Company/United Consumers Oil Company Warehouse at 4142 Union Boulevard in St. Louis. Source: Photograph by the preparer, December 2018.

Figure 15: Google Earth Map.

Latitude: 38.626387
Longitude: -90.232922