

1-03-91

DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUL 22 1975
DATE ENTERED	SEP 5 1975

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME** \*

HISTORIC **Columbian Building**  
AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER **112-114 West Sixth Street**  NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CITY, TOWN **Topeka** CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT **No. 2, Martha Keys**  
STATE **Kansas** VICINITY OF **Shawnee** COUNTY **Shawnee** CODE **20** CODE **177**

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME **Owners Investment Company**  
STREET & NUMBER **112 West Sixth Street**  
CITY, TOWN **Topeka** VICINITY OF **Kansas** STATE **66603**

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. **Register of Deeds**  
STREET & NUMBER **Shawnee County Courthouse**  
CITY, TOWN **Topeka** STATE **Kansas 66603**

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE **Historic Sites Survey**  
DATE **1969**  FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS **Kansas State Historical Society**  
CITY, TOWN **Topeka** STATE **Kansas 66612**

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Columbian Building is a rectangular five-story structure whose architectural style can best be described as Eclectic. Influences can be identified from a variety of architectural styles, including Egyptian, Romanesque, and Richardsonian Romanesque.

Measuring 50 feet wide, 130 feet long and 65 feet high, the building faces south on Sixth street, which was Topeka's major east-west commercial street in 1888. It is located one-half block west of Kansas avenue, the main thoroughfare of the city's central business district, and is flanked by smaller business buildings.

The south front is of Colorado red sandstone, which has been painted a cream color, while the other sides are of red brick. Most of the stone have rock-faced surfaces, but smoother dressed stone with what appears to be a bush hammered or a pecked finish are used for the entry, arched window trim and for the cornice and upper portion of the building. Exterior wall thicknesses, according to a 1913 fire insurance map, are 24 inches for the second floor, 20 inches for the third, 16 inches for the fourth and 12 inches for the fifth. (What is now called the first floor was regarded then as the basement and no dimension given.) The flat roof is hidden from view.

Many things are happening on the south facade but at first glance the building's appearance is dominated by two: the oriel centered on the fourth and fifth floors and the main entry with its large flanking semicircular arched windows.

The entrance opening is centered on the facade and runs the height of the first and second floors. Large cut stones form the framing columns and the flat lintel. The entrance enframing is narrower at the top than the bottom. Over the opening is a simple pediment. Portions of the pediment which had decorative stonework were removed some time after the 1920's. Originally the lintel had the carved raised letters KNOX on its flat surface. These were removed, probably in the early 1890's, and an area was recessed with new raised letters spelling COLUMBIAN. About 12 feet above street level on each flanking column of the entry enframing are intricately carved decorations. On the west column the carving centers around a squirrel, on the east around a bird and snake. Originally the entry way had stone steps from the street level to provide access to the building on what is now the second floor. This had been changed to the present ground floor entry by the 1920's.

Window forms are different for each floor, but all are double-hung sash except for the first floor. The two first floor openings were the original entries to the ground floor. Some time prior to the 1920's they were altered to the present configuration.

Two large semicircular arched window openings flank the entry at the second floor level. The voussoirs are all of smooth cut stone. Decorative stone carvings are located at the end of the extrados.

Third floor window openings are large rectangles with trabeated lintels flush with the wall. The sills are of smooth cut stone and a protruding sill line runs the width of the building. In the center are two smaller rectangular openings with a small column between them. Carved stone designs are placed between the larger windows.

Fourth floor windows are also rectangular but larger than those of the third floor. Each opening is framed by circular stone molding. Windows on the fifth floor are smaller and separated by two engaged columns. The oriel is the dominant feature of the upper two floors. It corbels out above the two small central windows of the third floor. Two large decorative carved engaged columns flank the oriel. Rinceaux cross the oriel at a number of points and at the very top is a band of carved interwoven tracery at least five feet high.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1888

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Seymour Davis

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Knox Building, or Columbian Building as it is now known, was erected in 1888 for William C. Knox at a time when Topeka was experiencing a great building boom. Investors were very optimistic about the city's and the nation's economic future, and many business blocks were under construction in Topeka. Only a very few have survived, like the Columbian Building, without major modifications to the exterior.

Seymour Davis, a prominent Topeka architect in the 1880's and 1890's, designed the building. He was later state architect of Kansas (1893-1895) and prepared plans for the wings of the State Capitol which were under construction during his term of office. (In 1888 he also designed Topeka's Crawford Building, also nominated to the Register.) Davis later returned to his native Philadelphia where he built a reputation as one of that city's leading architects before his death in 1923.

William C. Knox was the son of John D. Knox, a pioneer Methodist minister and the head of one of the city's leading investment banks from 1874 to 1891. William had worked as a clerk in his father's bank, and in the mid-1880's he organized his own investment company. The company guaranteed eight per cent interest to investors and like so many other companies of the day its advertisements held promises of much greater rewards. According to newspaper reports, the company invested in Kansas real estate, primarily in Topeka.

A building permit to erect a five-story office block was issued to William C. Knox and Co. on March 31, 1888. It was expected to cost \$50,000 and to be ready for occupancy by December of that year. The excavation work began on Saturday, April 14, and the foundation was completed toward the end of May. Construction work progressed rapidly. A July 1 newspaper account of the city's building boom reported the cost estimate to be \$60,000. By the end of September the estimate had risen to \$75,000. The plumbing contract amounted to \$10,500, reportedly the largest job of that type ever awarded in the state at that time. Early in 1889 the Knox Building was ready for tenants. The United States Savings Bank of William Knox was to occupy half of the first floor (the present second floor). The remainder of the building housed offices of law firms, insurance companies, investment companies, land agents, and other tenants. The structure was known as the Knox Building for only a few years. The city directory of 1891 was the last to so identify it. Evidently Knox's firm, like that of his father and so many others, failed when the boom collapsed in the early 1890's.

The 1893 city directory listed the structure as the Columbian Building. The Columbian Title and Trust Co. and the Columbian Securities Corp were long-time occupants; and the latter continues to maintain offices there. The Weather Bureau offices were here from 1902 to 1907. Over the years many of the city's most prestigious law firms, real estate agencies and insurers had their offices in the Columbian Building.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Album of Topeka (Columbus, Ohio, Ward Bros., 1888), reprinted in Shawnee County Historical Society Bulletin, No. 41 (Dec., 1964), pp. 5-18.  
 "Another Big Building," Topeka Capital, April 1, 1888.  
 "Beats the Record," Topeka Capital-Commonwealth, Jan. 1, 1889.  
 "Best in Its Time," Topeka Journal, Aug. 28, 1929.  
 "Building Boom," Topeka Capital, July 1, 1888.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	5
ZONE	

2	6	8	6	12	9
EASTING					

4	3	2	5	7	6	0
NORTHING						

B 

ZONE						

EASTING						

NORTHING						

C 

ZONE						

EASTING						

NORTHING						

D 

ZONE						

EASTING						

NORTHING						

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard Pankratz, Director, Historic Sites Survey

ORGANIZATION

Kansas State Historical Society

DATE

July 14, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

120 West Tenth Street

TELEPHONE

(913) 296-3251

CITY OR TOWN

Topeka

STATE

Kansas 66612

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

*Nyle H. Miller*

TITLE Executive Director, Kansas State Historical Society DATE July 15, 1975

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

*9/5/75*

ATTEST

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE **SEP 4 1975**

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 7, 8, 9 PAGE 1

7. cont.

Perhaps the outstanding feature of the building is the intricate detail of the carved stonework. Although it was not unusual for Topeka buildings of the late 19th century to be heavily ornamented, most examples of the stone carver's skill have survived in photographs only.

8. cont.

A fire of unknown origin caused extensive damage to the hallways of the upper two floors in 1937 and water and smoke damage was incurred throughout the building. The estimate of the damages was \$45,000. Repairs were soon made and most of the tenants were able to return to their offices within a few months, some on the lower levels in a matter of days or weeks.

The exterior of the Columbian Building displays extensive decorative stone carving and has not been greatly altered. It was the work of Seymour Davis, a noted architect of the day, and it exhibits the craftsmanship of the unknown artisans who built it. The Columbian Building has had an important place in the city's economic and commercial development because of the tenants it has housed. It stands as a reminder of the expansive boom period of Topeka's history and is one of the few major buildings of that era to survive basically unaltered. It has been a Topeka landmark for many years.

9. cont.

"Columbian Building to Be Restored at Once," Topeka Capital, July 4, 1937.

"Columbian Fire Damage \$45,000," Topeka State Journal, July 3, 1937.

Financial Situation in Topeka and Kansas (Topeka, Geo. W. Crane and Co., 1888), pamphlet distributed by Wm. C. Knox and Co.

"John D. Knox Dead," Topeka Journal, Jan. 11, 1912.

"The Knox Building," Topeka Capital, Sept. 30, 1888.

"A Magnificent Building," Topeka Capital, May 20, 1888.

"Rev. John D. Knox," United States Biographical Dictionary, Kansas Volume, (Chicago, S. Lewis and Co., 1879), pp. 240-243.

Topeka Capital, April 15, 1888; Jan. 12, 20, 1912.

Topeka City Directories, various dates and publishers.