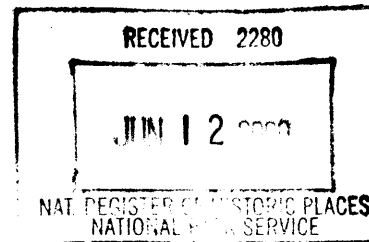


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

195



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 instruction. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden

other names/site number:

2. Location

street and number: 1300 Admiral Wilson Boulevard

N/A not for publication

city or town: Camden City

N/A vicinity

state: New Jersey

county: Camden County

zip code: 08102

3. State/Federal/Tribal 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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Assistant Commissioner, Natural and Historic Resources/DSHPO

State or Federal agency and bureau

American Indian Tribe

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

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

American Indian Tribe

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby 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:)

Patricia Anderson

7/27/00

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	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)

Commerce/Trade

Historic Subfunctions

(Enter subcategories from instructions)

Department Store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade

Current Subfunctions

(Enter subcategories from instructions)

Professional

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation	Concrete
	Limestone
Walls	Brick
Roof	Asphalt

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- 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 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Commerce
Community Planning And Development
Social History

Period of Significance

1927-1971

Significant Dates

1927
1947
1971

Significant Person

(Complete if criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Carr, George Wallace
Nimmons, George C.

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
- See continuation sheet for additional HABS/HAER documentation.

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Local Government (Repository Name: Camden Historic Survey #0408-087)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 3.50

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	490570	4421306	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				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: Paul W. Schopp, Historical Consultant

organization:

date: 2/29/2000

street & number: 223 Elm Avenue

telephone: (856) 786-1499

city or town: Riverton

state: New Jersey

zip code: 08077-1215

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 the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name: Boulevard Management & Leasing Corporation

street & number: 1300 Admiral Wilson Boulevard

telephone: (609) 471-6952

city or town: Camden

state: New Jersey

zip code: 08102-

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.

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

Summary

Completed in 1927, the former Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store in Camden is an outstanding example of commercial Classical Revival architecture designed by a nationally significant architect in the commercial design field. The building features limestone Doric-order columns and embellishments (photograph #1). The building is almost square, measuring 244 feet by 250 feet. It is 36 feet high. A prominent monument and anchor at the western end of the Admiral Wilson Boulevard, the building retains a high level of integrity in its historic exterior. Both the building and its associated rear parking lot are being nominated as they are integral to one another, the parking lot being contemporary to the store's original construction. It was the first lot for automobiles constructed in Camden specifically associated with a singular retail establishment (photograph #6).

Architectural Description

The City of Camden's Sears, Roebuck retail store was designed by the renowned Chicago commercial architectural firm of George C. Nimmons and Company in the Classical Revival style in 1927. Ironically, this was a departure from the typical Sears, Roebuck styling of the period. The design exception was made in deference to the City's Board of Commissioners, who preferred a design more compatible with the new Benjamin Franklin Bridge (1926) and a planned civic center site on property to the south of the Cooper River. Just as the Greek Revival style had served as the norm for civic architecture in the mid to late nineteenth century, the Classical Revival was the standard in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The Sears, Roebuck and Company Building is located at 1300 Admiral Wilson Boulevard in the City of Camden, New Jersey. The structure is oriented in a northeasterly direction and is bounded by Mount Ephraim Avenue on the northwest and Memorial Avenue on the southwest. To the rear is a large, approximately 100,000 square feet, parking lot that runs back to South 11th Street and contains 500 parking spaces (photograph #6). This lot represents the first designed parking area to be specifically associated with a retail store in Camden. The entire property is known as Block 1463, Lot 1 on the City's tax map.

The building is of reinforced concrete construction with a buff, pressed brick exterior and limestone ornamentation. The above grade foundation is faced with a limestone water table (photograph #3). The structure is nine bays wide (244 feet) and eleven bays in depth (250 feet). The building was constructed in two stages: the original 1927 section is seven well-articulated bays in depth on the northwest side (photographs #1, 2, 3) with an addition of less architectural distinction being added to the rear in 1947 (photographs #5, 6, 7) to form a rectangular footprint. The building's facade fronts on Admiral Wilson Boulevard and is set back on a narrow concrete plaza that borders a feeder route to the east bound lane of

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

the Boulevard (photograph #1). Entrances were located on all sides of the building, although it is entered today from the parking area to the rear (see map).

The 1927 section has a flat roof with a built up asphalt covering behind a parapet wall. The parapet is capped by a flat molding that runs the limits of the original structure (photograph #3). The pressed brick parapet wall is interrupted by paired, recessed panels on the projecting corner bays, front and rear, and by short, projecting pilasters in the areas between the corner bays (photograph #1). Beneath the parapet wall is an entablature with a limestone cornice, pressed brick frieze and two part, limestone architrave (photograph #3). Attached to the roof above both the east and west sides of the building are billboard frames currently employed for outdoor advertising. During the building's historic use by Sears, these frames carried the name "SEARS" as large neon signs, along with smaller signage which provided directions for accessing the store's parking lot by using adjacent highway ramps (photographs #1, 9).

Four projecting corner bays and the pedimented portico centered on the facade create recessed areas, front and side, where colossal columns, thirty feet high, are set at regular intervals and support the entablature (photographs #1, 10, 11). There are ten columns on the facade, four on each side of the center block with two columns supporting the pediment and framing the main entrance (photograph #1). There are ten columns on the southeast elevation and six on the northwest side of the building (photographs #2, 3, 8, 9). All are in the Doric order and have a smooth ashlar finish, except the two columns that flank the Admiral Wilson Boulevard entrance, which are fluted (photograph #10). The colossal columns, used to give definition to the divisions of the building's exterior, are its most distinctive architectural feature. As a newspaper account of the day observed, the new building gave "...the impression of an old Grecian temple."

A large, projecting pedimented portico dominates the facade (photographs #1, 10, 11). Pressed buff brick pilasters support the entablature and molded pediment. The entablature is ornamented in typical Doric fashion beneath the pediment. On the frieze are alternating metopes and triglyphs. There are six triglyphs. The frieze is separated from the architrave by a taenia that runs continuously over the building's entablature. Guttae appear on the architrave below the triglyphs. Inside the flat pilasters, and framing the door surround, are colossal, fluted Doric columns that match the smooth shafted columns found elsewhere on the building in height and circumference. The limestone door enframingent has recessed panels to the side and above the door opening with rosettes in each upper corner. Above the door frame is an entablature and molded cornice with dentils surmounted by limestone cresting. A bank of windows, now boarded over, is behind an ornamental metal grille with a rectangle and diamond pattern that is suggestive of early Art Deco influences.

To the northwest and southeast of the portico are colonnades with four columns each (photograph #1). The columns support the entablature and give definition to the three bays that flank the portico. Each bay has a large commercial display window on the first floor divided vertically with a three part transom above, all in an anodized aluminum frame. A section of pressed buff brick wall above is ornamented with

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

a slightly projecting, horizontal panel of buff brick stretchers set both vertically and horizontally. On the second floor is a bank of three metal windows, four over four, with vertical divisions that rise from projecting limestone sills to the bottom of the entablature (photograph #1).

The original display windows were large plate glass sheets without divisions set in metal frames. Above these large windows were three part transoms. The area occupied by the transom is partially obscured today by metal hoods that screen floodlights. Behind these fixtures is cresting matching that found over the building's retail doorways. The original metal window frames have been replaced with the aluminum frames. The display windows with six part transoms that were placed in the projecting corners of the facade have been infilled with recessed buff brick to match original brick found elsewhere on the building.

Despite the loss of the commercial display windows in the front corner blocks of the building, much original fabric survives. Above the infilled areas on the front and northwest sides are two horizontal, limestone bands resting upon and divided by a molded strip, the lower band having vertical fluting and the other has three molded panels front and five panels side. A pair of metal windows, four over four sash, which match the location of the other second floor windows on the facade, rest on a sill above the limestone bands. On the northwest side of the corner block there is a similarly located bank of three metal windows (photographs #1, 2).

The northwest elevation is defined by a colonnade with six evenly spaced colossal Doric columns that divide the central portion of the wall into five bays (photographs #8, 9). In the center bay is an oversized doorway, now secured, that formerly gave consumers access to the store. On each side of the doorway are bronze Classical Revival lamps with round globes. The doorway is surrounded by limestone architrave trim above which is a recessed sign fascia. The sign, which reads, "SEARS ROEBUCK AND CO RETAIL STORE," in Roman script is framed by the architrave trim below, a cornice above and console, or scroll shaped brackets, to either side of the sign fascia. Above the cresting is a sill and a bank of three, second floor, metal windows with four over four sash with vertical divisions (photographs #8, 9, 12, 13).

The four other bay divisions are detailed with a slightly projecting, brick rectangle of stretchers, vertically and horizontally set, in the buff brick wall at the first floor level, a bank of three modern metal first floor windows, one over one, another section of brick wall roughly equal in size to the ground level panel and similarly ornamented, topped by a sill and a bank of three metal windows running to the entablature (photographs #8, 9). In the third bay from the front (or second colonnaded bay) is a double, service entrance metal door of recent vintage (photographs #8, 9). The corner bay to the rear has a recessed brick wall with first and second floor, double metal windows in locations similar to the rest of the windows found on this elevation. Between the first and second floor, a door has been installed to provide access to a fire escape (photographs #8, 9).

The remainder of the northwest elevation is the 1947 addition. A flush limestone faced foundation visually carries the water table of the original structure while the flat, buff brick wall above matches the original in color and feeling. The parapet is capped with a flat cast stone coping. This section of the

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building is about seven feet lower than the 1927 structure. On the first floor is a solid steel door and frame and, near the western corner, an opening, now closed, that was previously used for the delivery of merchandise. The four second floor windows, which are lower than those found on the earlier portion of the building, are paired, one over one, modern metal replacements. Their spacing roughly continues that of the original bays (photograph #8).

On the southeast elevation, the projecting corner bay ground floor has three divisions with a horizontal bar above creating a three part transom (photographs #1, 2). The ground level has two vertical plate glass windows and a doorway with a metal door. The area around the door is infilled with a smooth stucco finish. A contemporary sign obscures the cast stone bands between the first and second floors. The sill and windows above match those found on the northwest side of the corresponding corner bay.

Running back from the projecting corner bay are ten evenly spaced colossal Doric columns that divide the colonnaded portion of the elevation into nine equal bays (photographs 2, 3). For the most part, the bays are designed in the same manner as those found on the northwest elevation with wall, window, wall, window from the water table to the bottom of the entablature. Likewise, the metal windows are arranged in banks of three on the first and second floor levels, the first floor being one over one, metal replacement windows while the second floor retains the original metal sash and frames (photographs #2, 3). The retail entrance is identical to the one on the northwest elevation in both design and location (photographs #2, 3, 12, 13). There is also a service entrance in the third bay from the front that matches that found on the northwest elevation with the same paired, flat, modern metal doors (photographs #2, 3).

There are, however, some notable differences in the northwest and southeast elevations. The metal fire escape on the second floor of the southwest elevation's seventh bay of the building still retains its original metal door (photographs #2, 3). The projecting corner block to the rear of the southeast elevation is also slightly different. Rather than one, there are two recessed vertical panels. They are divided by a raised buff brick pilaster equal in size to the two similar pilasters to the left and right of the recessed panels (photograph #3). The recessed panel to the right, or north, has the same arrangement of as the other bay divisions of the southeast and northwest facades. That is, a limestone faced foundation with a section of buff brick wall with a slightly projecting brick rectangle of stretchers, vertically and horizontally set, on the first floor, metal first floor windows above, another section of buff brick wall roughly equal in size to the lower panel and similarly ornamented, topped by a sill and metal windows running to the entablature. The windows, rather than being in a group of three as elsewhere on the building, are simply paired with modern metal replacements on the first floor and original second floor windows (photograph #3).

The other recessed panel, to the rear, or south, has no first floor windows. Instead, a buff brick wall runs from the water table to the sill supporting the original, paired second floor metal windows. In the brick panel the raised brick stretchers form a large, vertical rectangle rather than the horizontal pattern common to the building's other bay divisions (photograph #3). Two louvered vents, one large and the

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other small, are cut into the brick panel. The time of their installation is unknown although they do not appear to be original to the 1927 structure. These vents are associated with the power plant.

A small, one story, brick structure adjoins the rear corner of the southeast elevation. It currently houses a portion of the newer power plant that was probably installed as part of the 1947 renovations to the building (photographs #3, 4). Projecting to approximately fifteen above the roof of the original power plant bay roof is a circular chimney, eight feet in diameter and constructed of buff brick (photograph #4). On the southeast elevation of the 1947 power plant addition is a double steel door about two feet above grade that leads to a projecting, metal loading platform (photograph #3). On the rear elevation is a flush metal entrance door located in the western corner (photograph #4). In the middle of the rear elevation above the door are two openings, one containing a one over one metal window and the other a louvered vent (photograph #4).

Behind the small power house structure is a rear wall of the southeastern side of the building. A large, buff brick pilaster with the entablature that runs around the original structure, returns and finishes the corner of this portion of the building. The remaining depth of the rear wall is flat and unadorned except for the molded, cast parapet coping. There are two sets of windows in the elevation, slightly off center, first and second floor. The second floor windows are the original four over four metal sash and frames, paired while the three first floor windows, centered below those above, are modern, one over one, metal sash and frames. In the area between the two sets of windows is a flat, metal door that leads to a fire escape (photograph #4).

The return wall is likewise unadorned. The flat buff brick wall is interrupted by two small window openings at the second floor, one with paired, original sash and the other with a single original window. This portion of the building was originally designed and used as the shipping and receiving area for the store (photographs #4, 5). A large loading dock with three doors was located in this elevation. Only one remains, at the southern end of the wall, and this has been closed due to the reconfiguration of the shipping and receiving area during the 1947 renovations. The other two openings have been infilled with buff brick. A stair tower with a door extends above the parapet (photograph #4).

The rear wall of the 1947 addition extends thirty feet west of the southeast wing. In this area is a loading dock with three rolling metal doors, now closed. A flat roof covers this area. At the second floor are two equal sized openings, one with paired, one over one, modern metal windows and the other with louvered vents. Below the windows is a round, metal shoot formerly used to carry packages from the store's shipping area to awaiting trucks. At the end of the loading dock, the wall turns at a right angle and runs southerly about twenty feet. This section of the wall is solid, buff brick (photographs # 4, 5, 6).

At this point, the rear wall of the 1947 addition turns and runs parallel with the rear wall about thirty-five feet northwesterly. On the second floor, there are three paired, one over one, modern metal windows. The second floor wall then turns at a right angle and returns about ten feet to the rear elevation. There is a one over one, modern, metal window in this section of the building. The second floor wall then

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

turns and runs to the southwest corner of the structure. In this portion of the elevation there are two paired, modern, metal windows and between them, two single, modern, metal windows (photographs #6, 7).

The first floor of this section of the building is arranged differently. When the wall turns northwesterly from the blank wall adjacent to the loading area there is a one story addition to the rear of the two story structure. There is an entrance to the rear of the building at this point. A flat roof covers the entrance with a round corner supported by two octagonal concrete columns. The roof extends over the remainder of the one story section of the 1947 addition. Running from the middle column to a section of wall is a glass and aluminum weatherized enclosure with two, metal framed, full glass doors (photographs #6, 7).

To the left, or northwest, of the rear entrance is that portion of the one story structure that formerly housed seven loading docks. The roof has an overhang to protect what had been a large loading area. Although the openings are still evident, all but the two southeastern most loading docks remain open and functional. Solid metal screens cover these openings. The other five openings running to the southeast corner of the building have been infilled with buff brick. The third, or center, closed opening has a flush steel frame and door. The door is accessible from a nine foot by nine foot concrete landing with ornamental metal rail with four steps from ground to landing and three steps from landing to door. The two infilled openings left and right of the door have one over one, modern, metal windows installed in the buff brick walls (photographs #6, 7).

Most of the building's interior was a large, open retail space, first and second floor. Concrete floors were covered with wood flooring, since removed. Reinforced steel encased in concrete to form square columns with molded capitals were placed at regular intervals in a grid to support the second floor. The columns support a steel beam grid encased in hardened concrete. A curtain wall of tile block covered with lath and plaster separated the retail space from the shipping and receiving area and the power plant. The shipping and receiving area and the power plant were located in the rear of the building.

A large, metal stairway with metal railing and balustrade and marble treads led to the second floor commercial space. This stairway, now closed, was located slightly west of center on the first floor. A second stairway to the rear west, similarly designed, also accessed the second floor commercial area. An escalator, perhaps the first in Camden, was installed near the center of the first floor retail space. These features remain although they have been mostly obscured by block and sheet rock curtain walls.

Today, the building's retail space has been converted for use as offices, a computer training school, a day care center and a church sanctuary. Various curtain walls have been erected, mostly of block or studs and sheet rock to create spaces suitable to accommodate the building's contemporary uses. But even during the building's use as a retail department store, its interior design and detailing were periodically modified to coincide with then current fashion. Because of the historic use of the structure's interior, there is little significance to the first and second floor spaces today. However, the areas that defined the store, retail, shipping and receiving, powerhouse, and rest rooms are all easily discernible.

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

To illustrate the ineligible yet adaptive reuse of the building's interior, a series of recent photographs are included with this documentation and added to the photo key plan. Currently within the 1947 addition to the retail store is a daycare center on the first floor (Photograph #14). The exterior wall features a plastered interior finish and a flush metal door as an emergency exit. Interior walls are composed of sheet rock and metal studding. The columns in this addition are steel covered with plaster and feature a molded capital. The ceiling is a suspended metal grid with acoustical tile and light fixture inserts.

A central hallway now provides access between the 1947 rear main entrance and the offices at the front of the 1927 store (Photographs #15, 16). A cinder block wall is a contemporary addition to the 1947 portion of the structure meant to give form to office spaces. The other wall in this hallway is a stud and sheet rock addition with structural members to support the large tropical fish tanks featured in this area. The floor is concrete and finished with modern carpet. An I-beam with a plaster finish separates the old and new sections of the building.

Typical reuse of the former store's interior space, a small meeting room is located at the northwest corner of the 1927 structure (photograph #17). The ceiling is a suspended metal grid with acoustical tile inserts and hanging light fixtures. The walls are a stud and sheet rock finish over the original interior walls.

The Camden City Housing Authority is the largest tenant in the building. The office space this agency occupies includes the front part of the original 1927 store (photographs #18, 19). Modern adaptive reconstruction of this area employed the use of steel stud and sheet rock wall with openings to exits. The original columns are enclosed on all sides with mirrors up to the original molded capitals. Above is the original ceiling with modern light fixtures.

A computer training center and meeting room is also found on the first floor of the 1947 section of the building (photograph #20). The walls are stud and sheet rock construction. The ceiling is a suspended metal grid with acoustical tile and lighting inserts. The original concrete column in the foreground has been enclosed with a stud and sheet rock finish.

The second floor of the building addition features a hallway above the one found on the first floor (photograph #21). Along this hallway are a series of offices typical of the second floor's adaptive reuse construction. The walls are stud and sheet rock construction. The ceiling is a suspended metal grid with acoustical tiles and lighting inserts. The doorways are simply framed and finished with narrow, clam shell moldings. The doors are flush, hollow core stock items with no distinguishable architectural character. The southeast portion of the second floor is occupied by a church (no photographs permitted). The large sanctuary differs from the other second floor spaces simply by virtue of its size. The construction is the same contemporary construction as is found elsewhere on the first and second floors. In general, all the contemporary retrofitting of the structure is reversible. Also, many original features, such as the escalator (framed-in and out-of-service, but still retained), stairways and service spaces, remain intact although they are often obscured by contemporary partitions and additions.

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

The structure's historic significance rests largely with its fine Classical Revival exterior, most of which survives. It is unique among the commercial designs of George Nimmons and the Sears Roebuck Company. Because of its place in a larger effort to achieve City planning goals through the creation of a new civic center for the City, commercial design was subordinated to perceived standards in public architecture. Nimmons and his colleagues, both corporate and public, experienced great success in their mutual attempts to conform to these standards. Camden's Sears Roebuck and Company Building remains a highly visible symbol of the City's historic place as the commercial and civic heart of Camden County and its environs.

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

Significance

The former Sears, Roebuck and Company's Camden retail department store has local and statewide significance for its embodiment of Classical Revival architectural style representative of a nationally significant architect in commercial design. The building, which exhibits a high degree of integrity, is also significant on the local and statewide level because of its association with the history of commerce in Camden and southern New Jersey; its design and composition in the City Beautiful and Greater Camden movement, which culminates in the plan for the Camden Civic Center of which it is a key feature. The store's lasting impact on suburbanization and loss of Camden's commercial district is significant to Camden County and New Jersey social history. The associated rear parking lot is significant because it was constructed simultaneously with the store in 1927 and was the first automobile parking lot constructed in Camden for a singular and specific retail establishment. The building and parking lot are significant during the period 1927, the year of original construction, until 1971, the year the retail store closed.

A Brief History of Camden Retailing

The development of Camden as a South Jersey transportation and commerce nexus can be traced to the establishment of ferries between the Jersey and Pennsylvania shore of the Delaware River. The Gloucester County court licensed the first ferry of record to William Royden in 1688. By 1695, further court action transferred Royden's seemingly fallow license to Daniel Cooper, who began operating from the foot of what was to become Cooper Street. Daniel's father, William the emigrant, also established a ferry, near his house at Cooper's Point, sometime prior to 1708. In 1773, Jacob Cooper, a lineal descendent of William, caused lots to be laid out on a portion of his land. He named this new development "Camdentown," reputedly in honor of Charles Pratt, Lord Camden. This was the first use of the name "Camden" on the river shore opposite Philadelphia. By 1820, five different ferries operated between Camden and the Quaker City. The Jersey terminals of the ferries featured taverns, beer gardens and general stores. These stores represent the seminal foundation of all future commerce and retail operations in the future City of Camden. The earliest records extant for one of these stores date to 1785.¹ This is an account ledger for the retail operation of Mickle & Blackwood at Cooper's Ferry.

Another impetus for development and commerce was the establishment of steam sawmills along the Delaware River's Jersey shoreline beginning in the 1820s. William Carman erected the first steam sawmill in 1822 to process the timber being rafted down the Delaware from Pennsylvania and New York. Other mills soon followed and around each a small village arose to house the millworkers. Retail stores opened quickly to provide all of life's necessities to the villagers. The most notable of these fledgling communities was Carmanville, surrounding William Carman's mill.

¹ CCHS, MSS. #266

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In 1828, the New Jersey legislature simultaneously created Camden Township and incorporated the City of Camden. Although this action brought recognition to what might become in the future, Camden was little more than a series of unconnected settlements. North-south trails and dirt roads joined neighborhoods with long-forgotten names like Ham Shore, Kaighnton, Carmanville, Cooperville, Cooper's Ferry and Fettersville. Ten years after incorporation, Isaac Mickle, writing in his diary, provides a reliable description of Camden and its settlements:

...At the period of incorporation, 1828, the population of the district was 1,143. In 1830, it was 1,987 and in 1833 [it was] 2,341. The increase in three years being 1,354....There are five separate divisions, all included in the act of incorporation: Cooper's Point, Carmanville, Camden, Fettersville and Kaighn's Point. At Cooper's Point there are [sic] a ferry, from which the steamboats "Citizen" and "Kensington" ply, a tannery, a cake shop and twelve or fourteen dwelling houses....Carmanville is about midway between Cooper's Point and Camden, and contains a steam sawmill and lumber yard, a steam grist mill, an extensive cap factory and eight or ten dwellings. It derives its name from William Carman. Camden, the third and principal part, is immediately opposite Philadelphia. There are in it an Episcopal Church, Baptist, Methodist and Friends meeting houses. A town house which formerly answered the quadruple purpose of jail, church, poll and lodge. The second story of this building is dignified with the name of City Hall; the quarter sessions are held here. An academy and two or three school houses; two fire engines—the "Niagara" and "Perserverance"—neither of them very effective.

There are four ferries: English's from which the "Delaware" plies; Paul's from which the "Camden"; Toy's from which the "William Wray" and "Philadelphia"; Elwell's from which the "State Rights" and "No Monopoly" ply. At each of these ferries there is a bar to accommodate passengers! There are three public gardens—Johnson's "Vauxhall"—Edmund's "Columbia"—and Weatherby's "Railroad."

...There are seven taverns in Camden and a Temperance Society; to the honor of the town, let it be said that the latter is gaining ground on the former.

There are two public libraries—Harrison's and "The Washington" [and] two Debating Societies—the "Union"—and the "Franklin." One Benevolent and one Beneficial Society, the latter composed of youth.

Four physicians, six lawyers and one druggist. One bank too many; two printing offices, from which two newspapers are issued—The Mail and The Republican—one neutral in politics, the other a Whig; both would be insufficient to wrap a Lilliputian up in.

Nine groceries, seven extensive coach factories, one hair cloth manufactory, and four or five day goods stores. Many other trades are carried on, but it is not necessary to enter into minutiae.

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Fettertown [Fetersville], alias Hard Scrabble, is built on a bog between Camden and Kaighn's Point. There is a tavern, a homony [sic] mill, a grocery, a garden for "the people of color" and thirty or forty houses, tenanted principally by that unfortunate race....

Kaighn's Point is situated opposite the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and has one ferry, from which the steamboats "Kaighn's Point" and "Southwark" run to South Street—one tavern, a school house, a smithery and grist mill, a coach manufactory, a tannery, and several dwelling houses.

Rail Roads. The Camden and Amboy Rail Road and the Camden and Woodbury Rail Road terminate at Elwell's Ferry....²

By the 1850s the empty land between these villages began to fill with other subdivisions featuring new streets, lots, homes, stores and industries. As the City of Camden developed, the general stores at the ferry terminals moved out along the city's main streets and retailers diversified. In essence, certain streets became centers of business and commerce. In the first half of the nineteenth century there were two Market streets: one in Camdentown and the other in Kaighnton (today's Kaighns Avenue). On these thoroughfares, market houses were constructed. Area farmers, hucksters and tinkers would rent stalls to sell and barter their products and services. The market houses were generally located close to the ferry terminals for the added traffic these transportation hubs generated. Neighborhoods required a wide range of retail stores and services as house occupation reached toward 100%. Corner grocery stores, bakeries, shoemaker shops, hardware stores, drug stores, and shops selling apparel, were soon augmented with haberdasheries, tobacconists, dry good and notions stores, tailors, newsstands, stationers, and numerous other purveyors of products and services.

During the 1890s, several distinct shopping districts were defined in Camden, most notably along Broadway, Market Street, Federal Street, and Kaighn's Avenue, and, to a lesser extent, Arch Street. Retail businesses were not wholly confined to these thoroughfares and did exist throughout the city. However, a review of an 1890 Camden business directory confirms the a high concentration of retailers within the defined commercial districts along the above-named streets. Included in these districts are the following types of businesses:

- A large number of tobacco and cigar manufacturers and retailers
- Several wallpaper and home decorating establishments
- Harnessmakers and carriage builders
- Grocery, Produce, provisions and Meat dealers
- Tailors, dressmakers and millinery shops
- Numerous confectioners and candymakers
- Bakeries and florists

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Pharmacists, druggists and patent medicine providers
Barbers and beauty parlors
Restaurants and dining rooms
Furniture and china stores
Sewing supplies, trimmings and notion stores
Drygoods suppliers
Paint, hardware and glass retailers
Lumber and home construction supplies
and miscellaneous other types of businesses.

Most of the retail establishments classified above were specialty shops which rather narrowly focused their offerings and did not usually stray too far from their stated product(s). Local proprietors who lived with their families above or along side their businesses operated many of these stores. By the 1890s, Joseph B. Van Sciver had founded his substantial furniture factory and showroom opposite the ferries at Delaware Avenue and Federal Street. But only two of Camden's retailers during that decade could be minimally defined as a department store: Christopher Chew's Beehive Discount Store, located at 214 and 216 Market Street, and Toone & Hollinshed's dry goods and notions store, situated at the corner of Broadway and Kaighn's Avenue. Another store, begun in 1887, that grew to department store stature was the Gately & Hurley store at Broadway and Pine Street. These stores differed from their predecessors because they were generally owned by a partnership, or later, a corporation. They were specialized retail operations and buildings.

The twentieth century ushered in a new age of retail in Camden and a new era of industrialization. Nineteenth century retailing techniques seemed to die with the May 13, 1900 conflagration and total destruction of Camden's last market house, which stood at 414-422 Federal Street. In 1902 another local nineteenth century icon, the mansion of sawmill owner William Carman, was razed at Broadway and Federal Street. This location was in the heart of the city's main retail district, growing south along Broadway from Federal Street and was situated one block north of the Pennsylvania Railroad's Broadway Station—a very promising business location. Rising in place of the mansion was Camden's first modern department store, erected by George Munger. The Munger & Long Department Store opened on April 12, 1904, and continued serving its customers until 1926, when the Stecker Company acquired the store and its fixtures. On the eve of the Great Depression, the former Munger & Long store was occupied by another store of a growing retail giant, J.C. Penney Company. Also in 1904, Mr. Gately, of Gately & Hurley, died and William L. Hurley restyled the firm as W.L. Hurley Company. The new firm not only built up business at their flagship store in Camden, but also became a regional retailing power by opening and operating six other stores in South Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. The Hurley store remained opened until the 1971 Camden riot.

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By the middle of the twentieth century's second decade, smaller department-type or variety retailers—so-called “5 & 10” stores—entered the Camden consumer marketplace. W.T. Grant, F.W. Woolworth, McCrory's and S.S. Kresge all moved into the city in response to Camden being the Mecca for South Jersey consumers, particularly on Friday nights and Saturdays; suburban dwellers, arriving by trolley or railroad, entered the city for its unparalleled shopping experience and to do their banking. Other potential consumers were the thousands of foot passengers using the ferries in crossing to their jobs in Philadelphia. Multiple locations for these stores were maintained throughout the city's main shopping areas. Although some of these stores initially opened as “dime” stores, this marketing concept died in 1917, when the inflation sparked by World War I caused prices to rise to fifteen cents. However, a whole new vista of products was opened to store management by increasing prices and shedding their dime-store mentality.

A circa 1915 view pamphlet titled, *Camden, New Jersey • Its Past and Present*, published by the Publicity and Welfare Committee of City Council and the Board of Trade contains the following paragraph:

The retail business section of the City of Camden is mostly conducted on five streets: namely, Market, Federal, Broadway, Kaighn Avenue and Haddon Avenue covering a space of about 5 miles, on which are located a fine line of up-to-date stores of every description, including several department stores. On these thoroughfares also are to be found all the financial institutions in the city, the newspapers, office buildings, and printing establishments. These five thoroughfares also lead to the many pretty suburbs of Camden, from which the Camden merchants secure much valuable trade.

The Effects of Transportation

As previously indicated, Camden's role as a transportation hub played a critical role in the city's development. The ferries provided the means for intercourse between South Jersey and the important port city of Philadelphia and points west. Roads extending from the north, south and east all led to the Camden waterfront and the ferries. These roads fostered increased travel and commerce to Camden, which, in turn, provided a ready patronage for fledgling stores and retail establishments in the city. On December 29, 1834, a construction train of the Camden & Amboy Railroad and Transportation Co. steamed into Camden after the trestle over Cooper's Creek was finally completed. This first train was followed by the premiere revenue passengers a scant four days later when the roadbed was deemed passable for travelers. Three years later, on January 20, 1838, the first passenger train arrived from Woodbury on the Camden & Woodbury Railroad & Transportation Co. These two railroads transported an unprecedented number of visitors to Camden and its pioneer merchants.

Initially, the railroad's more or less solid roadbed offered a distinct advantage over highways for travelers. It was torturous to travel nineteenth-century highways. Road construction technology was in its infancy

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and local thoroughfares were deeply rutted and scarred by wagon and cart wheels. Rain only made conditions worse with puddles, erosion, deeper ruts and muddy bogs. Winter weather also presented its share of road misery with snow drifts, frozen ruts and icy surfaces. Highway technology development began in England in the 1840s and was present in America by the 1850s.

Improvements in surfacing roads ushered in the age of the turnpike. New Jersey hosted a plethora of turnpike companies, all chartered by legislative act. The turnpike company would either construct a new road or assume control of an existing highway. Initial road improvements were funded by proceeds from stock subscription. Upkeep of those improvements was to be financed by the tolls collected; revenue that exceeded expenses was distributed to the shareholders. All six major roads entering into the City of Camden during the mid to late nineteenth century was operated by a turnpike company. Road surface improvement technology practiced by the turnpike companies enhanced the highway traveler's experience and made the trip more pleasurable. The last turnpike company in Camden County and New Jersey did not pass from existence until 1923.

It was not until the close of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century that modern road construction and surfacing techniques actually began to emerge. The first road in New Jersey paved with concrete—an established standard today—was not accomplished until 1912.

Railroad technological development was also not stagnant during the nineteenth century. On all fronts—locomotives, cars, roadbed and track, signaling and safety, etc.—improvements occurred exponentially. By 1880, Camden was the western terminus for five railroads: Philadelphia & Atlantic City Railway; Camden, Gloucester & Mt. Ephraim Railroad; West Jersey Railroad; Pennsylvania Railroad; and the Camden & Atlantic Railroad. In addition, other rail lines, such as the Delaware River Railroad, the Camden & Burlington County Railroad and the New Jersey Southern, all provided additional trains and rail traffic into and out of Camden. By the 1870s, Camden also hosted horsecar lines, forerunner of the trolley. Thomas Edison's pioneering work with practical electricity during the 1880s paved the way for the electric streetcar. The first car of this type operated in Camden during 1891, and yet another transportation method was introduced to reinforce the concept that Camden was the terminus of choice for South Jersey residents seeking an unparalleled shopping experience on the Jersey side of the Delaware River. Trolley lines extended like a spiderweb from Camden into the surrounding area, creating new opportunities for suburban developments.

The Advent of the Automobile

When mechanical genius Stuart Perry patented the first practical internal combustion engine during the 1840s, it is doubtful that even he could envision how its subsequent application in the horseless carriage industry would transform America. By the 1890s, self-propelled road vehicles sporting a variety of monikers

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were increasing markedly on local roads. Powered by various means such as steam, electric and internal combustion, the automobile initially toured about the countryside unmolested by traffic laws.

As early as August 1903, Camden retailer William L. Hurley called a meeting at his office of all owners of automobiles in Camden and vicinity to discuss the question of securing better outlets or connecting links between the city streets and the country roads. Less than a year later, the following appeared in a Camden newspaper: "The automobile is abroad in the land and seems destined to stay." The author then advocated drastic measures to control the speed of the machines and states that in some towns between Camden and Atlantic City, constables will be armed with guns "to be used in puncturing the tires and machinery of the offending vehicles."

In 1894 the New Jersey State Legislature established the position of the Commissioner of Public Roads. The agricultural community had been agitating for this move as evidenced by the rhetoric found in the New Jersey Board of Agriculture's annual reports. The Commissioner of Public Roads was charged with improving existing county roads, through apportioned state funds, and constructing new roads with state funds using the latest techniques. He also advocated that counties should purchase roadways from turnpike companies and revert them to no-toll public highways. In 1916, with a dramatic rise in automobile registrations throughout the state, the New Jersey State Highway Department superseded the Commissioner. This department's original stated mission was to develop a series of numbered highway "routes" traversing the state in all directions using local and county roads.

Technological research begun by the Commissioner's office was continued and expanded by the highway department to provide the very best road surfaces for the growing number of automobiles, trucks and omnibuses. Initially, superior roads translated into remarkably improved and increased commerce, particularly for a city like Camden. The role of Camden as a regional retail center intensified dramatically when the American public embraced the automobile. The basic road web laid out in colonial times that led to the ferries, augmented by the construction of Broadway in 1815, linking Camden and Kaighnton to Woodbury, remained in place. And the ferries remained the only way to cross the river to Philadelphia.

The Delaware River ferry vehicular traffic is indicative of the number of automobiles in and around Camden. In 1918, because of the heavy automobile traffic crossing the river on Sundays, the abandoned ferryhouse at the foot of Market Street was opened and extra boats operated from there during the summer to relieve the congestion at the Pennsylvania Railroad's Federal Street ferry. During three days in 1921, including the Fourth of July holiday, more than 38,000 automobiles were carried by the ferries of the Pennsylvania and the Reading railroads and more than 20,000 crossed on the Pennsylvania ferries alone. However, the ferries were too small and anachronistic for the driving public. The boats were fine for farmers seeking to deliver their produce to market, but the automobile owner sought to drive efficiently from his house to his destination without an interruption, such as a ferry crossing, in his trip. All of the congestion and inconvenience presented by the ferries was dispelled with the construction of a bridge over the Delaware River.

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Construction of the Delaware River Bridge

Antithetical to nostalgia, the Delaware River ferries were an inconvenience to the traveling public. They were noisy, odorous, slow, smoky, drafty and, at times, dangerous. As early as 1818, local real estate developer Edward Sharp and his associates proposed a bridge be erected between Camden and Philadelphia; but it was never built. Subsequent nineteenth century span construction schemes surfaced periodically, only to be thwarted by various causalities. In 1895, the Pennsylvania Railroad constructed the first bridge over the Delaware River south of Trenton. Erected between the Bridesburg section of Philadelphia and Fisher's Point, Pennsauken Township, this dedicated rail bridge provided the railroad with a much-needed direct connection between the productive farms of South Jersey and the resorts of the Jersey shore, and the region served by the P.R.R. But this bridge was never intended to supplant the Philadelphia-Camden ferry operations. Other schemes were proposed to breach the river's expanse. At the turn of the twentieth century, and even before, tunneling concepts caught the region's imagination. Plans were made for one tunnel that would contain both rail and highway traffic. Again, these plans never achieved fruition. But the need for an alternate river crossing to the ferries was growing with each successive year.

At a January 13, 1914 meeting of the Camden Board of Trade, David Henry Wright addressed the board, promoting that a suspension bridge be built across the river. Presenting a rendering prepared by Architect Joseph M. Huston, Wright's plan called for a bridge with towers reaching 175 feet above the river, with cable anchorages located at Market Street, Philadelphia and Mickle Street, Camden. The bridge was slated to begin its upgrade at Broadway. Wright's arguments for the bridge included the fact that Camden's workforce were currently paying thirteen cents to travel the three miles from Camden to Philadelphia: five cents for the streetcar to the ferry terminal; three cents for the ferry crossing; and another five cents to ride a streetcar in Philadelphia. He reported that South Jersey farmer's favored bridge construction to avoid the delays associated with the ferries when moving their produce to market. Wright even suggested that the bridge could remain toll-free for automobiles, pedestrians, bicyclists and teamsters if the span was wholly constructed with government funds. Huston's drafted plans detailed a large terminal building at each end of the bridge which could serve as cold storage, grain elevators, mercantile or marine offices. Wright suggested that the Philadelphia terminal could serve as a new government custom house for the port. While this proposal never moved from the drawing board to the fabrication shop, it gave impetus to the planning which culminated in the construction of the Delaware River Bridge (today, the Benjamin Franklin Bridge).

Enabling legislation for a New Jersey Bridge and Tunnel Commission was passed April 17, 1914. This commission was enjoined to control bridges and tunnels on or under any river or navigable stream which formed a state boundary. The commissioners were not appointed until March 1916, at which time the body became known as the Delaware River Bridge and Tunnel Commission. In July 1917, Pennsylvania established a similar commission and the bridge study initiated by the New Jersey commission was

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continued as a joint undertaking. A year later, the New Jersey legislature appropriated \$500,000 to finance preliminary work on the proviso that Pennsylvania provide matching funds.

Finally, in 1919, both the New Jersey and Pennsylvania legislatures assumed a serious posture towards this project. Each passed a uniform act to create a bi-state agency, the Delaware River Bridge Joint Commission. After an organizational meeting, the joint commission immediately turned to their appointed purpose. By September 1920, the commission announced that Chicago bridge engineer Ralph Modjeski would assume the role of head or construction engineer and Paul Cret was appointed bridge designer and architect. After winning Congressional and War Department approval for spanning the Delaware River, the commission sought the best routing for the crossing. After reviewing five routes, and ordering an examination of the river bedrock, it was decided to begin the bridge at Franklin Square in Philadelphia. This selection was based on both real estate acquisition values and locating the best bedrock of the five routes examined. Final bridge design approvals were obtained from requisite federal agencies.

January 6, 1922 was denoted as the actual start date for bridge construction. But not before proper ceremonies took place. These festivities began with a parade through Camden to the ferries. Crossing on the ferryboats, the parade participants arrived in Philadelphia and marched up Market Street to Broad with a large-scale model of the bridge on a float in tow. The parade traveled up Broad to Spring Garden Street, whereupon it turned and moved east to the river. After turning on Delaware Avenue, the revelers halted at old Pier 11, where the governor of each state—Pennsylvania and New Jersey—wielding chrome-plated crowbars and pickaxes, each pried a board from the pier to signal demolition for beginning construction. Work on the bridge then began.

Thousands of engineers, designers, artisans and laborers worked on the great bridge for four and a half years. Promises were made to open the bridge for traffic in time for the Sesquicentennial Celebration in Philadelphia; the Delaware River Bridge opened on July 1, 1926. When completed, the bridge was the longest suspension bridge in the world, a record it would hold for three years before being eclipsed by the Detroit's Ambassador Bridge. The Delaware River Bridge measured 1750 feet between towers, with another 717 feet side span between each tower and cable anchorage. The Philadelphia approach adds 2000 feet and the curving Camden approach, 2800 feet. The pronounced curve in that Camden approach was required to avoid an interception of the Pennsylvania Railroad (former Camden & Atlantic Railroad) tracks leading down Main Street to their Cooper's Point yard and the Vine Street Ferry.

To maximize the potential portended by the Delaware River Bridge, Camden extended Broadway from Market Street, its former terminus, to the bridge plaza, thereby allowing bridge users easy access to the downtown retail center. The Walt Whitman Hotel, constructed at Broadway and Cooper Street in 1924-25, was built through community subscription totaling over \$1.25 million; Camden truly anticipated great things from its new bridge.

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Bridge Entrance Road (a.k.a. Bridge Boulevard) and Crescent Boulevard

With the Delaware River Bridge progressing in design and construction, planners and engineers turned their attention to providing automotive bridge access on the New Jersey side. The newly formed, non-partisan, Camden City Commission form of government retained Charles Leavitt in May 1923 as city planner. He immediately went to work developing a plan that supported the "Greater Camden" movement, a movement based on regional and progressive planning. Jeffrey Dorwart and Philip Mackey, writing in their 1976 Camden County history, reported:

The goal of the Greater Camden movement was to plan and coordinate regional development, direct economic and political unification, establish a uniform educational and public service system and provide a master plan for county building. "It was inevitable," Camden City council president Frank S. Van Hart told a Pennsauken businessmen's club, "that Pennsauken and other nearby communities would soon be annexed to Camden City."

The portended annexation never occurred and, ultimately, townships and boroughs like Pennsauken, Collingswood, Woodlynne, Oaklyn, Haddon Township, and Gloucester City resisted any attempt by Camden to devour any of their territory. This not only eventually destroyed the Greater Camden movement, but the lack of physical growth by the city created a series of problems that aided in the decline of Camden.

On December 7, 1923, city planner Charles W. Leavitt unveiled his comprehensive plan for Greater Camden. Described in detail in the following day's *Evening Courier*, the plan included a boulevard approach to the new bridge, a feeder highway skirting the city (Crescent Boulevard), the beautification of Cooper River and his innovative efforts to relocate the seat of government to a new Civic Center. The Bridge Boulevard, as designed, was comparable in scale to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia, originally designed by Paul Cret as part of Philadelphia's efforts in the City Beautiful movement. (Cret went on to design the Delaware River Bridge [now the Benjamin Franklin Bridge]). Camden's bridge boulevard, however, was to be integrated with nature as part of Leavitt's design for Camden's City Beautiful movement and an effort to redevelop industrial wastelands.

In 1924, some aspects of Leavitt's plan began to bear fruit. By October of that year, a route for the "bridge entrance road" was selected from four slightly different designs. Actual construction of the access road began in 1926 and the roadway was not completed in time for the July 1, 1926 opening of the Delaware River Bridge. Pouring of the first concrete road surface took place in April 1927.

Work on the \$400,000 drawbridge over Cooper River began in May 1926. M. Straub & Koslyn Company, the contractor erecting the drawbridge, encountered many problems during construction, but all were overcome. At the construction site, Cooper River was narrow with treacherous tides, requiring the

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contractor to employ three crews in constantly pouring concrete for abutments and wing walls. When completed, the double-leaf bascule drawbridge featured Classical Revival design elements, compliant with the designated styles incorporated in Leavitt's plan. This bridge was razed and replaced with a fixed bridge by the New Jersey Department of Transportation in 1998. The project schedule designated that all work on Bridge Boulevard be completed by July 1, 1927, the date when the connecting roads would be finished.

Meanwhile, Leavitt's designs for the main feeder highway, Crescent Boulevard, were also being used for construction, beginning in January 1927. This new semi-circular highway (hence its name), which skirted the edge of Camden, would connect Route 45 in Westville to Bridge Boulevard from the south and the Burlington Pike to Bridge Boulevard from the north, bypassing Westfield Avenue, the traditional route from Burlington to Camden. As part of the design, four traffic circles (originally called "round points"), a innovative concept to maintain smooth and continuous traffic flow at intersections, were planned. Moving from south to north, circles would be placed at Noreg Village/Brooklawn, the intersection of Crescent Boulevard and Broadway/Route 45; Westville, the intersection of Crescent Boulevard, Creek Road, a local street and Route 47 (Delsea Drive); Collingswood, the intersection of Crescent Boulevard, Route 30 (White Horse Pike) and Woodlynne Avenue; and the first circle constructed in New Jersey, the Airport Circle, the intersection of Crescent Boulevard, Bridge Boulevard, Kaighns Avenue, Route 40 (now Route 70) and Route 38.

Five bridges to carry railroads over the new road were required, as were numerous highway bridges over streams. Funded by state highway funds, these bridges were all built under the supervision of the Pennsylvania and the Reading Railroad engineering departments. The combined cost for constructing Crescent and Bridge boulevards exceeded \$6 million in state highway construction money.

The first portion of Crescent Boulevard to be completed was the so-called northern section, extending from the Burlington Pike to the White Horse Pike. It opened as scheduled on July 1, 1927, the first anniversary of the Delaware River Bridge's inaugural day. The southern section would open in 1929. At 4:00 p.m. on July 1st, the ribbon was cut opening the northern section. At the *Evening Courier* reported in its issue of the same date, "An immense caravan then will try out what engineers claim to be the biggest individual piece of road-building ever attempted in the entire state, linking Morrisville, five miles above Camden on the Burlington pike, and Collingswood on the White Horse pike." Reportedly, the automobile caravan contained thousands of cars, all jammed with people reveling in a new road specifically constructed for motor vehicle traffic.

Those motorists who turned west onto Bridge Boulevard upon reaching the first "round point" found a broad roadway paralleling the Cooper River with portions still lacking a concrete road surface. Since the section of the boulevard between the circle and Federal Street was all created by infilling the swampy area adjoining the stream. Months of settlement were required before paving could be accomplished without subsequent cracking. The unpaved portions were surfaced with oiled gravel as a foundation for the concrete when poured.

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Without realizing the profoundness of their words, the July 2, 1927, edition of the *Evening Courier* reported, "Those who have been driving from central Camden out Federal street or down Haddon avenue, were amazed last night at the ease with which they drifted out of the city on this broad entrance road, hampered by only one or two cross streets, with a free full stretch." Ironically, it was the modern highway construction so celebrated in Camden during 1927, and the relatively inexpensive availability of automobiles, that ultimately doomed industrialized urban centers like Camden to decay and loss of affluent residents and many of the businesses to the suburbs.

On Armistice Day—November 11, 1929—Bridge Boulevard was named for native son and war hero, Admiral Henry Braid Wilson. Born in Camden in 1861 and graduating from the United States Naval Academy in 1881, Henry Wilson rose to the second highest rank in the U.S. Navy and commanded the Atlantic Fleet off France during World War I. He retired from his commission in 1925, after serving his last appointment as head of Annapolis. The idea originated with Mayor Winfield Scott Price, a former army general and great military supporter, who also wanted a statue of Wilson erected in the center of the circle where Bridge Boulevard intersected with Crescent Boulevard. Admiral Wilson reportedly wept before a crowd in excess of 5,000 when the road was formally dedicated in his honor and the ceremony culminated an entire day of celebration for the admiral. Two months prior to the boulevard's dedication, Camden's Central Airport officially opened on the southwest side of what became known as Airport Circle. The airport represented yet another major advancement in twentieth century transportation technology.

With completion of Bridge and Crescent boulevards, the "car culture" movement soon arrived in Camden County, likely even eclipsing Los Angeles's claim of being the originator of this movement. Beautification of Bridge Boulevard, as designed by Leavitt, was never accomplished, primarily because the state highway department refused to donate or dedicate the narrow strips of land on either side of the traffic lanes to the Camden County Park Commission. Eventually, gas stations and auto dealerships appeared where cherry trees were planned. By the early 1930s, the Admiral Wilson Boulevard was entirely automobile-oriented. In addition to the gas stations, 1933 saw the construction of the very first outdoor drive-in theatre, erected by Camden industrialist Richard M. Hollingshead along the boulevard. Hollingshead patented the drive-in design and his boulevard prototype only lasted sixteen months before being sold to a Union County drive-in theatre company. Hollingshead's contribution to the car culture movement is legendary to those who study pop culture.

Other automobile attractions also appeared along the boulevard, such as the novel Whoopee Coaster, a horseshoe shaped wooden track with vertical undulations. For a quarter, you could drive onto the track with your passengers and have the fun of bumping your head on your car's headliner as you bounced up and down. An outdoor boxing ring and amphitheatre was also built. In 1934 a dog track was constructed along Crescent Boulevard just south of the Airport Circle. After one or two racing seasons, the state closed the track and it became a haven for midget race cars. An outdoor pool near the dog track offered a refreshing pause for motorists and airport passengers alike. Car dealerships soon filled the empty land between Federal

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Street and the Airport Circle. Names like Rohrer Chevrolet, Templin Motors, Berglund Ford, Merlin Lincoln Mercury, Ingram Oldsmobile, Cole Pontiac and many other agencies are well-known car dealers associated with Admiral Wilson Boulevard. Airport Rug and Carpet was a long-time occupant of a building near Airport Circle. Restaurants and night clubs also supported the area car culture. Neil Deighan's on the airport circle still manifests itself as the Pub. Nearby on roads feeding into Airport Circle were the Embers, the Chimney House, the Red Mill, the Red Hill, Hawaiian Cottage, Weber's Hofbrau (at Central Airport), the Holly House and others. All of the above-named businesses catered primarily to the car-driving suburbanite and the highways provided the access.

Upon completion of the boulevard, the roadway stretched from the Airport Circle to Federal Street, whereupon it transitioned into two one-way city streets: Linden and Pearl. The Sears, Roebuck and Company retail department store, erected a block east of Federal was intended as the western anchor for the boulevard and a monument to the City Beautiful and Greater Camden movement. But the boulevard evolved totally different than first envisioned by Charles Leavitt.

Charles Wellford Leavitt

Born in Riverton, New Jersey on March 13, 1871, Charles Wellford Leavitt attended and graduated from the Cheltenham Military Academy. After taking a course in engineering, he began his professional career by obtaining the position of assistant engineer with the East Jersey Water Company. He subsequently became the chief construction engineer for: the Caldwell Railway; the Board of Water Supply, New York; and the North Jersey District Water Commission, Newark and the engineer for the community of Essex Falls. Advancing in his career, he served as engineer for the Palisades Inter-State Park Commission.

Leavitt retreated somewhat from engineering and entered the field of racetrack design, laying out Saratoga, Sheepshead Bay, Belmont Park, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Montreal. He laid out the National Capital Grounds in Havana, Cuba and constructed estates for William C. Whitney, Foxhall Keene, Daniel S. Lamont, and Bethlehem Steel magnate Charles M Schwab. Leavitt also planned new developments, laying out the lands of Mrs. Potter Palmer in Sarasota, Florida and the estate of W.K. Jewitt in Pasadena, California. He designed the community of Grand Marie, Manitoba, Canada. Leavitt acted as principal planner for more than a half-dozen cities across the United States.

Leavitt's design firm, situated on Madison Avenue in New York City, employed several hundred engineers, designers and draftsmen. His wide range of professional experience earned Leavitt an enviable reputation. According to an extensive article appearing in the Camden *Evening Courier* at the time of his death, Leavitt "was considered one of America's foremost city planners and landscape engineers." Charles Leavitt died at his home, Meadow Brook Farm, located in Hartsdale, West Chester County, New York, on Sunday, April 22, 1928 at age 57. Although no longer employed by Camden when he died, he was in the process of becoming planner for the City of Philadelphia.

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Camden Civic Center

Like the Admiral Wilson Boulevard and Crescent Boulevard, the Camden Civic Center was the brainchild of renowned city planner Charles W. Leavitt. By reclaiming an industrialized zone along Cooper River to become the Civic Center, Leavitt was determined to bring beautification to a formerly "blighted" area. The Camden Iron Works, constructed along Cooper's Creek in 1849 by John and Jesse Starr, was, at one time, one of America's largest producers of manufactured gas equipment. Purchased by the R.D. Wood Co. in 1883, the firm was finally driven into bankruptcy during 1916 by the increasing use of electricity and the resultant decrease in gas consumption. In 1917, with bankruptcy court proceedings completed, a Receiver's Sale was ordered for the sale of the land, buildings, equipment and even the unfinished contracts.

Through Charles W. Leavitt's interdiction, the City of Camden acquired the land associated with the Camden Iron Works. Leavitt convinced the Philadelphian who purchased the 45-acre site at the time of the Receiver's Sale to resell it to the City of Camden for the price he originally paid. Upon examining Leavitt's plan for the Civic Center and hearing Leavitt extol the virtues of what this project would mean to the City of Camden, the man decided to sell the land to the city without profit. According to the March 14, 1924 issue of the *Post-Telegram*, an ordinance was slated for passage authorizing the issuance of \$850,000 in bonds to fund land purchases in the Civic Center area. Charles Leavitt presented his plans for what he termed "the geographical center of Camden." In 1899, the City of Camden annexed all of East Camden (Stockton Town), doubling the city's landmass and, eventually, doubling the city's population. This annexation ultimately determined the Civic Center as the geographical center of the city. When Leavitt designed the Civic Center along Cooper River, the tidal waterway remained an industrial sewer, filled with effluent from the chemical banks lining its banks further downstream. Leavitt's plans included cleaning up and beautification of Cooper River in an effort to "knit together" what was traditionally Camden City on the west bank of the river and the formerly suburban area of East Camden on the east bank, forever unifying the city into one cohesive urban center.

Leavitt's plan for the Civic Center included relocating city government functions and fraternal organizations to the site. The city was in desperate need of a new city hall, having outgrown the one on Haddon Avenue designed in 1875 by Stephen Decatur Button. Leavitt incorporated this need into his Civic Center design. The design for the Civic Center would occupy approximately two-thirds of the 45-acre site, with the other third sold to private interests. Sale of the remaining land would fund construction of the public buildings at the site. The area would be rounded out with tree and shrubbery plantings, athletic facilities and a lagoon or reflecting pool dredged out of Cooper River and at the end of a parade ground leading to the new city hall.

Leaving several buildings standing for reuse and demolishing the others, the city cleared this expansive industrial property and prepared it for its new role as public space. A convention hall was the very first building to be created at the Civic Center. The design for this building, prepared by the architectural firm

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of Edwards & Green, adaptively reused two of the former iron works's structures adjoining each other perpendicularly. The buildings, constructed of gray granite with white pine roofs, were stripped of all interior features and, when completed, would seat 5,000 in its 32,500 square feet of floor space. While work ensued on the hall, two demolition companies were engaged razing 45 buildings and numerous concrete foundations remaining from the iron works. The inaugural use of the new convention hall was the South Jersey Exhibition, held from July 5 to September 6, 1926, to celebrate the opening of the Delaware River Bridge and the new future planned for Greater Camden. Sponsored by the New Jersey State Commission of the South Jersey Exposition, the event featured numerous displays by state agencies and local industries, similar to today's New Jersey State Fair. Temporary buildings were erected, along with livestock enclosures and a variety of amusement rides. Other events were scheduled into the convention hall, until it was destroyed by fire in 1953.

Charles Leavitt designated Classical Revival as his architectural style of choice for any building to be constructed at the Civic Center. On September 2, 1927, Leavitt expanded his planning influence in Camden City/Camden County when retained by the Camden County Park Commission as principal park planner. This provided him with an opportunity to plan regionally for the area's future. He had already drafted plans for improvements to the Cooper River Valley and designed a parkway to run along Cooper River from Camden to Haddonfield and ultimately on to Berlin. Evidently his plans caught the imagination of the park commission. His park designs for the Cooper River Valley were published in a book, *Health, Sunshine and Wealth*, produced by Eldridge Johnson in 1927. Rowing courses, baseball fields and tennis courts, grandstands and numerous other recreational amenities are shown in elaborate plans and beautiful architectural renderings throughout this book. Eldridge Johnson, chairman of the Victor Talking Machine Company, father of the county park system concept and a staunch supporter of Leavitt, began funding the construction of an athletic club along Bridge Boulevard where it intersected Baird Boulevard in support of the plans drafted by Leavitt.

But an ill wind called politics began to blow across the county. Leavitt declared himself non-political from the beginning and refused to play political games. However, by late November 1927, it didn't matter. On December 1, 1927, at a meeting of the Camden County Park Commission, Leavitt's contract with the commission was terminated by resolution for "economic reasons." Leavitt asked, "What I want to know is if this resolution was caused by dissatisfaction with my services?" The commission responded that they were very satisfied, but that Leavitt had completed enough planning to carry the work schedule through 1928. It appears the commission wanted to terminate Leavitt and replace him with a local engineering firm.

A week later, the other shoe dropped when Leavitt was fired as Camden City planner, a position he had held since 1923. As if to add insult to injury, the city retained Dr. Warren P. Laird, dean of the University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture for "making a survey to determine the necessity for the character of and the location for a new city hall." Eldridge Johnson offered to pay Leavitt's salary for the city and the county park commission for a period of three years, but both parties rebuffed the offer. In retaliation,

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Johnson never funded the athletic club's completion and it never opened its door. Embittered by his shoddy treatment by city and county leaders, Johnson also ceased taking an active role in city and county improvements, withdrawing from past philanthropic activities and washing his hands of former civic duties he took very seriously as an industrialist.

The city commissioners indicated satisfaction with Leavitt's past work but that all of his planning for Camden was now completed and work based on Leavitt's plans could proceed without him. Laird received \$15,000 for the new city hall survey. Six month after being dismissed by the park commissioners and Camden City, Charles Wellford Leavitt succumbed to pneumonia at his home in New York.

Within two years, Leavitt's plan for Camden's ground-breaking Civic Center were officially dead and totally refuted when the city and the county finalized an agreement to construct a new joint city hall and county courthouse downtown, between Market and Federal streets, west of the 1906 county courthouse. Charles W. Leavitt left an indelible mark on both Camden City and the county, but the political leaders had their own plans, which no longer included Leavitt and his ideas. It is most fortunate that Leavitt's voice was still being heard when Sears, Roebuck and Company came to Camden.

Sears, Roebuck And Company

Richard Warren Sears was reportedly born in Stewartville, Minnesota on December 7, 1863, although confusion and contradiction cloud both his birthplace and birthdate. At age sixteen, Sears sought to provide some support for his parents and younger siblings. He began by performing manual labor around the local railroad station in exchange for telegraphy lessons. Within a year he became a station agent and served at several northern midwest stations before being sent to North Redwood, Minnesota. Part of Sears's duties as an agent included handling shipments to local residents of North Redwood and its surrounds.

One day a shipment of watches arrived for a local dealer. Through a misunderstanding with the factory, the dealer refused the shipment and left. Sears looked over the watches and decided to sell them himself to his fellow railroaders. He was successful in selling all the watches and made a small profit in the process. This experience so inspired Sears that he left his railroad position and traveled to Chicago, where he established a store to sell only watches. Mr. Sears hired Alvah Curtis Roebuck, after he answered Sears's advertisement for a watchmaker, to superintend the store's warranty and repair department. Sears and Roebuck quickly developed a personal friendship and great working relationship.

Before reaching the age of 21, Richard Sears had developed a good trade and a good financial future. He sold the watch business and, using the proceeds of the sale, determined to enter the mail-order business with Roebuck as his partner. Good value was the firm's hallmark and, in the very beginning, Sears and Roebuck coined a slogan still in use today: "Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back." Standing behind their products and service encouraged business to build quickly. In response to the rapid increase in orders, the partners developed a series of protocols for dealing with incoming orders, shipments of merchandise and

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returns. The innovation portrayed in this mail-order management paradigm was considered the marvel of the catalog retail trade.

The mail-order business and profits were further enhanced by the 1912 Congressional action permanently instituting Parcel Post. It was tried on a temporary basis prior to 1912 and found to benefit American citizens and business, so after two years of hearings, Congress made it law. Even before Parcel Post was passed, the company's profits rose precipitously. In 1898, Sears, Roebuck and Company had net profits of \$575,000. Ten years later, in 1908, those net profits had risen to \$2,035,000. The company started by Richard Sears and Alvah Roebuck was the king of mail-order houses in the United States in the early twentieth century. In 1913, the firm posted sales in excess of \$91 million. During that same year, the other two major mail-order houses, Montgomery Ward and National Bellas Hess, featured sales totaling \$40 million and \$13 million respectively. Mail-order sales for Sears peaked in 1920, when the company sold over \$245 million in merchandise. Ward's topped \$100 million during the same year and National failed to break \$48 million.

Department stores were beginning to make rather dramatic inroads into mail-order profits. During 1921, when Sears suffered a 10% drop in sales, department stores reported a 1.3% increase. Many smaller mail-order firms passed out of existence during the 1920-21 business depression. Sears weathered the storm by infusions of cash from its top management and the temporary discontinuance of stock dividends. But the company required a progressive response to its sales woes. Reluctantly, Sears management chose to accommodate itself to the growing trend of urbanization in America, a viewpoint supported by successive federal censuses. No longer was Sears's primary customer base found on America's farms and rural hinterlands. Urban population increased 63% between 1910 and 1930, whereas rural population rose by a scant 8%. No longer did the majority of the country's population require merchandise by mail-order. Urban retail centers vended almost anything a consumer could demand. The increasing popularity of the automobile even eroded the company's rural customer base, making cities and their abundant retail stores easily within reach of anyone with a car. In 1900 there were but 8,000 cars registered in America. Twenty years later more than 8 million were in use. Nine years later, the 1920 number was tripled, and 24 million automobiles were being driven in the U.S. America was on the move and the automobile provided an unprecedented sense of freedom.

In the year 1925, Sears, Roebuck and Company opened its first retail store in Chicago, opening a whole new chapter in the company's history. It was a time of unparalleled prosperity for Americans, who entered the decade with new mobility and increased sophistication as consumers. Change did not come easy to Sears and certainly the addition of point-of-sale retail department stores to its operations presented a whole new set of problems to the firm's senior management. Over the years of its existence, the company had elevated mail-order operations to an art form. Management feared it could not readily adapt its mail-order paradigm to retail store operations. Sears's nearest competitor, Montgomery Ward, was already experimenting with retail outlets. In October 1924, Montgomery Ward Vice-President Robert Wood defected to Sears. It was

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Wood who finally pushed Sears management off the fence and convinced them to place the company in the point-of-sale retail arena.

After opening its first retail store at its Chicago mail-order headquarters in February 1925, Sears established four more stores in other mail-order branch facilities: Seattle; Dallas; Kansas City; and Philadelphia. Three stand-alone stores were also opened that same year, two in Chicago and one in Evansville, Indiana. These stores represented a combined sales volume of almost \$12 million during 1925, their first year of operation. Only one store, located in Atlanta, opened in 1926. All of these stores were considered "A" class stores by Sears, a designation to indicate the store's size, management structure and the range of its merchandise. Progressively smaller stores carried designations of "B" and "C." The company continued its now unrelenting retail expansion in 1927 by erecting six more "A" class stores: two in mail-order facilities in Memphis and Los Angeles and four others in Milwaukee, Philadelphia (that city's second), Chicago (that city's fourth) and Camden, New Jersey.

Sears, Roebuck And Company Plans For A Store In Camden

As described above, Sears, Roebuck and Co. was committed to entering the major established retail markets across the United States, including the City of Camden. Evidently, negotiations had commenced between Sears and Camden City officials sometime during very late 1926 or early in January 1927 to bring a Sears retail store to Camden. On January 14, 1927, the *Morning Post* announced that Sears, Roebuck and Co. planned to erect a store at the city's Civic Center, sparking bids on other parcels of land nearby. The city commissioners passed a series of resolutions and ordinances over the subsequent three weeks to make the store a reality. The *Evening Courier* enumerated these required actions:

1. Passage by the commission of a resolution vacating the present location of Memorial Avenue.
2. Passage of a resolution fixing a new location for Memorial Avenue.
3. Passage of an ordinance ordering that the site sought by the Sears-Roebuck concern be placed on public sale and fixing of the date for the sale as the week of February 7.

Restriction to be placed on the 'public' sale—which of course would be public only to the extent of meeting the legal requirements in such matters—would include under the plan being considered, these requirements:

1. That no bid for the property be less than \$60,000 an acre or \$210,000 for the entire tract.
2. That the purchaser construct upon the property within a given period a building to cost not less than \$500,000.
3. That the building to be constructed meet architectural standards to accord with the plans for the civic center as fixed by City Planning Engineer Charles W. Leavitt.

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To further accommodate Sears and the sale of public property, the official "Plan of the Civic Center" was revised on January 17, 1927 and filed with the County Register of Deeds Office. Accompanying the filed plan was a resolution of intent passed by the city commissioners.

On February 10, 1927, Sears purchased the 3.5-acre plot of ground for \$218,000 at the Camden Civic Center during a special public sale held in City Hall, the new store site bounded by Memorial Avenue, Bridge Boulevard and Mt. Ephraim or Starr Avenue. Prior to consummating the land sale, Sears's top management and city officials held a joint press conference to announce the plans to the public. These plans included beginning construction within a month on a building that would cost in excess of \$500,000 and it would be open by September 1927. Sears, Roebuck and Co. vice president Lessing J. Rosenwald stated,

We hope to have our store ready for opening early in September. We will start building as soon as we can get our plans completed by the architects and approved by the Camden city commissioners. We do not anticipate any delay in obtaining this approval. We have agreed that the building will coincide in style and design with the standards required of buildings at the Civic Center. We have instructed our architects to design a building which will be a real credit to the Camden Civic Center. The city commissioners have been so prompt in all their other dealings with us that we anticipate no delay in approval of these plans. In fact, I want to take this occasion to thank the city commission, the city counsel's office and other officials for the prompt and efficient way in which the preliminary transactions have been conducted.... While the conditions of the sale set a minimum cost of the building at \$500,000, we expect to spend considerably more than that sum and to bring the cost of building and land to a probable total of \$1 million." The *Evening Courier's* article about the sale further indicated in a headline that the "Magnificent Building Will Harmonize With Architectural Scheme of Leavitt.

The following day, Sears's management placed this advertisement in the *Morning Post*:

GREETINGS!

Our Camden Store is a certainty, thanks to the splendid co-operation of the Mayor, City Commissioners and City Planning Engineer, also the Newspapers and the Merchants.

And we are mighty glad to become a part of Greater Camden.

Camden shall be proud of the building which we will erect—a fine modern building that will meet with the approval of the City Planning Engineer, and be an asset to the City.

We plan to bring to Camden the same Department Store facilities and conveniences which have made our Roosevelt Boulevard Store in Philadelphia a success, and which will be extended to our

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West Philadelphia Store now under construction. Our location at the Civic Center and the convenience of free parking space will be especially appreciated by motorists, not only of Camden but throughout all Jersey.

The selection of Camden as the location of our twelfth Department Store was influenced by Camden's progressiveness and by what we believe we foresee in the business future of this great commonwealth.

It is our sincere belief that the resultant and new business that will be attracted to and retained in Camden, part of which formerly went elsewhere, will be of benefit to the whole of Camden and will help to stimulate the entire retail business of the city.

It shall be our earnest effort to merit the splendid spirit which Camden has evidenced in her welcome to the Camden Home of The World's Largest Store.

Sears, Roebuck and Co.
"Absolute Satisfaction or Your Money Back"

Also on February 11, 1927, George Carr, an architect and partner from the firm of George C. Nimmons & Company, arrived in Camden to begin preliminary construction work by taking measurements and drawing plans of the site. The Nimmons firm (see below) was the leading architects of Chicago and one of the greatest in America, according to an article in the February 11, 1927 issue of the *Morning Post*, and were responsible for drafting design drawings of all construction for Sears, Roebuck and Co. In Philadelphia, the Nimmons firm designed the large Sears distribution center and retail store complex on Roosevelt Boulevard, imploded in October 1994, and the West Philadelphia Sears Retail Store, located at 63rd and Market streets in the Millbourne section of the city. This store closed in October 1988 and relocated to a vacant Gimbel's Building on 69th Street in Upper Darby.

The morning and evening newspapers in Camden (both published by the same company) announced completion of the store construction site plans on Saturday, February 12, 1927. The newspaper publisher and editorial board were both very bullish on the Greater Camden movement. On the previous day, Sears building experts, including company engineer W.A. Schwab and architect George Wallace Carr, met with city officials to hammer out the final site details. Representing the city at this meeting were: Thomas Daley, city engineer; James Lennon, city surveyor; Frank P. Neutze, assistant city solicitor; William Kelly, a building inspector officer; James Long, chief of the Water Department; and City Commissioner Raymond Staley. It was noted in the articles that George Wallace Carr had designed the Sears retail store on Roosevelt Boulevard in Philadelphia and that the building won a gold medal from the American Institute of Architects for Carr. Like the Roosevelt Boulevard store, the Camden building would be constructed with "the best combination of beauty and utility."

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The February 22nd edition of the *Morning Post* proclaimed tentative approval for the building's design. The article was illustrated with an architectural rendering of the store's facade along with a group portrait of senior Sears's executives. "The plans revealed that the structure will be one of the most modern and beautiful business buildings in the city. It will be Colonial in design, with a graceful white pillar effect in the walls" reported the article. Design drawings detailed a building constructed of steel and masonry to be fireproof. The plans were presented at a conference in the mayor's office by senior Sears management, including: Lessing J. Rosenwald, vice president; Harold Rose, manager of retail stores; C.H. Roeder, advertising manager; and Gordon B. Hattersley, Rosenwald's assistant. The mayor and board of commissioners pronounced their satisfaction and referred the plans to Charles Leavitt for final approval. The building would contain 100,000 square feet, spread between two floors, and would be 40 feet in height. A wide triangular plaza would abut the facade along Bridge (Admiral Wilson) Boulevard, with a structural frontage of 236.7 feet. Management expected to open bids and award contracts by March 15, 1927.

On March 17, 1927, Sears's management displayed an architectural rendering at the city commissioner's meeting. At that same meeting, ordinances were passed authorizing the necessary construction of city sewers, drains and outlets at the future store site.

The Firm of George C. Nimmons & Company and its Successors

A native of Wooster, Ohio, George C. Nimmons was born on July 8, 1865. After graduating from the local Academy, he obtained an A.B. from the University of Wooster in 1887. Upon receiving his A.B. degree, Nimmons departed for Europe to further his studies in architecture. He returned to the United States and registered at the Art Institute of Chicago for additional education. He began his professional career as a draftsman at D.B. Burnham & Company. While working for Burnham, Nimmons, at the age of 28, served as superintendent of buildings for the 1893 World's Columbia Exposition under the direction of his employer. He may have gained valuable retail department store design experience during his tenure at the Burnham firm when the firm received the contract for the John Wanamaker store in Philadelphia.

After leaving D.B. Burnham and Company, Nimmons established his own architectural design practice in partnership with William K. Fellows in 1897. It was during this initial partnership that Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., approached Nimmons in 1903 about designing a new home for him. Evidently, Rosenwald was so pleased with Nimmons's residential design skills that he determined Nimmons and Fellows would design all future Sears buildings. In 1905-06, the Sears, Roebuck and Company mail-order headquarters on South Homan Avenue in Chicago was erected under the direction and designs of Nimmons & Fellows. (Reportedly one of their most successful works, today this building is on the National Register of Historic Places and serves Lesley College as their Porter Exchange center.)

Dissolution of the Nimmons-Fellows partnership occurred in 1910. Nimmons maintained a sole proprietor styled practice until 1917, even though George Wallace Carr had joined the firm in 1914. Carr

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was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on March 19, 1879 and, like Nimmons, attended the Art Institute of Chicago. He also received additional education at the Armour Institute, now part of the Illinois Institute of Technology, and, again like Nimmons, traveled to Europe as a student of engineering. Before working with George Nimmons, Carr worked as a draftsman for Crane & Barkhausen of Milwaukee and as a draftsman that rose to chief of staff at Pond & Pond of Chicago.

Sears, Roebuck and Co. continued to be a major client for Nimmons, with designs drafted for several new branch mail order buildings. In 1925, when Sears entered the point-of-sale arena, George C. Nimmons & Company (1917-1933) designed all of the retail stores for the merchandising giant. Beginning in 1919, George Wallace Carr was a full partner in the Nimmons company and supervised all plans, designs and layout. Carr held this position through the series of successor firms to George C. Nimmons & Co.—Nimmons, Carr & Wright (1933-1945) and Carr & Wright, Inc. (1945-1952)—until his retirement in 1952. George Nimmons had retired from the practice in 1945 and died in June 1947. Carr survived Nimmons by almost eleven years, dying in March 1958.

Both Nimmons and Carr were fellows of the American Institute of Architects and won gold medals for their commercial building designs from the AIA. They were also both well-versed in the Prairie and Chicago Schools of Architecture. The Nimmons firm grew to be one of the largest architectural company in Chicago and one of the most influential in the country. Outstanding designs by Nimmons and his partners include: the Oak Woods Cemetery Chapel, Chicago; Pompeiian Villa, Port Arthur, Texas (NR); Reid Murdoch Building, Chicago (NR); Sears, Roebuck & Co. complex, Chicago (NR); Sears, Roebuck & Co. retail store, Louisville, Kentucky (NR); Sears, Roebuck & Co. mail order center, Boston, Massachusetts (NR); Sears, Roebuck & Co. retail store, Miami, Florida (NR); Sears, Roebuck & Co. warehouse, Kansas City, Missouri (NR); William M. Hoyt Co., Chicago; Railway Terminal and Warehouse Co., Chicago; Sears, Roebuck & Co. retail store, Chicago; Dixon Building, Chicago; The Furniture Mart, Chicago; and the United States Customs House, Chicago.

Construction Begins

Ten men arrived at the store construction site on March 18, 1927, with pile drivers and excavating machinery, according to an article in the March 25th issue of the *Evening Courier*. After assembling their equipment, the men began the preliminary work necessary for the store's erection. Within a week, the ten-man crew had grown to 150 workers scurrying over the construction site, representing various trades including excavators, pile drivers, concrete masons and carpenters. An ambitious work schedule was maintained, with two shifts of men laboring from 7:30 a.m. to 12:00 midnight. Large electric lights on high poles lit the construction site after sundown.

Railroad flatcars arrived daily with loads of 50-foot tree trunks until 928 of these piles were on-site for use by the Raymond Concrete Pile Company of New York. The number of pilings is indicative of how marshy

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the land was at the Civic Center. A basement was originally desired for the building, but the water table was found to be too high. Prepared to receive the piles were 116 square holes on 21-foot centers, all seven feet deep and seven feet square. Eight piles were driven into each prepared hole to a depth of 65 feet, reaching a firm gravel strata. The piles were topped with concrete, poured into forms, to a level height of fifteen feet above the datum line. Once cured, these concrete-topped piles would form a solid foundation for the preformed concrete columns designed to support the store's structure.

At the western end of the property, two horse-drawn scoops dug two large holes, one for the fuel oil tanks and the other for the smokestack foundation. Representatives of the George C. Nimmons architectural firm provided supervision of all construction work, guided by the blueprints prepared in the Chicago office. Reportedly, Sears and Roebuck wanted to beat the construction record set by the store they had previously erected in West Philadelphia, which took four months. The pile-driving contract indicated that all pile work would be completed by April 9, 1927, and the crews would work Sundays, if necessary, to fulfill the contract requirements. Meanwhile, preparations were underway for shipping the steel framing to the construction site.

The article finished by providing an updated description of the building to rise on the site: "The building will be two stories high, 240 by 160 feet, with a wing of 48 by 104 feet, and its appearance will be much the same as the beautiful West Philadelphia store. It will be of light brick, re-inforced concrete, and cut stone. A basement was to have been included, but the ground was found to be too damp for that. The building will have structural concrete roof, maple floors, hollow tile walls, roof ventilators, integral waterproofing, dampproofing, metal lath, tile, marble and terrazzo work, rolled steel sash and skylights, steel rolling and hollow metal doors, concrete stairs inset with rubber treads."

The local newspapers indicate that pile-driving was completed three days early, on April 6, 1927 and the main concrete support columns for the store would be erected the following week. Obviously, this placed the pace of construction ahead of schedule. Little else is reported in the newspapers about the store's actual construction. On June 23rd a fire broke out on the scaffolding surrounding the store when pitch overflowed its containers and caused the wooden walkways to ignite. The fire broke out on the south side of the near-completed building, forcing workmen to dash across the smoldering boards to gain a safe passage to the ground. Contractor William Penn Corson assembled a group of workers to act as a volunteer fire brigade, who had gained the upper-hand on the fire by the time the city fire department arrived on the scene. Personnel from the enginehouse at Fifth and Arch streets in Camden nonetheless unpacked their hoses and played several streams of water on the fire. The fire, at times, issued dense smoke which rose 60 feet into the air and attracted a rather large crowd. The damage to the scaffolding and building was slight, but productive work time was lost as the fire broke out immediately after the workmen had ascended to their job locations.

A week later, on June 30, 1927, the newspapers were reporting on a labor action at the store construction site. When union officials learned that a crew of non-union coppersmiths were employed by a contractor to install the large windows, more than 200 union workers walked off the job. The non-union coppersmiths,

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twenty in number, were discovered when they were asked for their union cards and failed to produce them. No violence or disorder ensued as bricklayers, roofers, plasterers, tinsmiths carpenters and others dropped their tools and milled around the outside of the building. A police presence was maintained at the site while the executive committee of the Camden Building Trades Council attempted to settle the non-union worker issue to the satisfaction of their members. A representative of the council indicated that "Sears, Roebuck and Co. had always been fair to organized labor and that the walkout was due solely to the arbitrary attitude taken by the sub-contractor from Philadelphia." Sears management worked with the council executives to settle the strike and to resume work, avoiding an impact on the construction schedule. However, the July 2nd edition of the *Evening Courier* reported on a continuation of the strike. Work on the building had practically come to a standstill as only the non-union coppersmiths and common laborers were active. Taking a more strident position, the union ordered not to return to work until non-union coppersmiths were dismissed from the site and all of the work they installed was removed from the building. Contracts called for the building to be completed July 16, 1927, but there was no indication of just when the union tradesmen would again pick up their tools. Police continued their presence at the building, but the union members never assumed a belligerent posture. The local press did not reveal when the strike ended.

Opening Day Preparations

The next notoriety garnered by Sears was its preparations for the store opening. On July 29, 1927, both of Camden's daily papers provided extensive coverage of the store's next-day premiere. The *Morning Post* described the new store as "Architecturally beautiful, a modern temple of commerce and the pioneer business house to be built on the Civic Center, blazing the way for many new fine buildings, the 'million dollar retail store' of Sears, Roebuck and Co. will be formally opened to the public of Camden and South Jersey tomorrow." The article continued, "Begun five months ago, its completion marks another step forward in Camden's steady march to progress. The building...has been constructed in keeping with the architectural beauty of the bridge and its plazas." The new Camden store was the twelfth one erected by Sears and incorporated all of the latest concepts in retail convenience.

George C. Nimmons and Co., of Chicago, the architects, were commissioned to create a building that would be a credit to Camden and its progress. The building is rectangular in shape, two stories high, and Doric in design. The roof is supported by 26 massive stone columns. The front is faced with beautiful buff brick. These, with the magnificent doorway and the general unity and strength, give the impression of an old Grecian Temple.

The store featured a cleansing system that washed and purified the circulated air. Drinking water, dispensed through a generous number of fountains, was run through coils for cooling and filters for sanitary

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consumption. A large free parking lot for shoppers' automobiles was located immediately behind the store, an innovative first in Camden retailing.

Ross Meyers, the initial store supervisor and career Sears manager, would oversee the work of 250 employees. Most of the men and women hired by the store would come from the local area. According to an advertisement, many of these people were hired through classified listings.

Sears, Roebuck and Co. secure employes [sic] for both their Camden and Philadelphia Stores through South Jersey's Great Help Wanted Medium COURIER-POST WANT ADS If you want a job, or wish to hire help of any kind, read the Only Newspapers Printing the Help and Situation Wanted Ads of the Big Factories and Department Stores on BOTH Sides of the River.

The *Evening Courier* of the same date (July 27th) reported that Sears expected record attendance and sales on opening day. "Ross B. Meyer, manager of the million-dollar institution...made that confident prediction today as his army of 250 employees put the finishing touches to display counters and stock shelves. No ceremony will mark the official opening at 9 a.m., all of the eastern officers of the company now being in Europe. Ferns will be placed about the store, as a permanent decorative effect, but they will comprise practically the only 'trimmings.' As Meyers put it, 'the only music will be the humming of the cash registers.'"

Sears placed a two-page advertisement in the *Evening Courier* on the 29th, illustrating a wide variety of products from many departments. The center of the ad spread announced the opening of the store the following day. Also placing advertisements in this same issue were some of the contractors and equipment suppliers for the store. The Walter J. Pace Co., painting and decorating contractor of Philadelphia, was responsible for the interior and exterior painting and trimwork. They had formerly performed similar work for the two Sears Philadelphia locations. Camden manufacturer Warren Webster provided a steam heating plant for the new Camden store. Advertising that they were the "Pioneers of the Vacuum System of Steam Heating," Webster proclaimed they had supplied similar heating apparatus to "Wanamakers, Gimbels, Macys and other great retail establishments...." The Webster boilers were fired by oil-burning guns from the Ballard Oil Equipment Company of Philadelphia. The final paid promotion was placed by the Wielandt-Tennesen Corporation, stone setters, riggers and steel erectors. This ad indicated that "All of the STONE WORK on Camden's New Sears, Roebuck and Co. Building was Hauled, Set, Cleaned and Pointed by this Philadelphia firm of craftsmen.

Opening Day Finally Arrives

Apparently, area residents began lining up in front of the new Sears Camden store early in the morning of Saturday, July 30, 1927. By the time the doors were unlocked at 9:00 a.m., over 800 people were waiting

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to enter; the August 6th issue of the *West Jersey Press* stated the number as closer to 1,000. In either case, the number of customers in the first hour of business exceeded all company expectations. By noontime, a constant stream of people was passing through the entrances to the store. Some came looking for a job, many were there to look around and enjoy the new store, but the majority were customers who kept the clerks in the 25 various departments fully occupied.

The *West Jersey Press* further revealed that a salesforce of over 400 were present for opening day to aid in handling the crowds. This represents 150 more clerks than the normal employee compliment. The *Evening Courier* for the 30th reported, "The crowds were handled smoothly and without confusion for there was plenty of room in the broad aisles. Outside, a detail of traffic and motorcycle police, under direction of Inspector Humes and Captain Lalb, handled the scores of automobiles bringing customers from all over the city and suburban towns, directing them to the spacious parking grounds in the rear of the building. At noon, nearly 400 cars were parked there, giving some indication of the number of persons within." Although little time was available for stocking and equipping the store prior to opening, every department was fully prepared for the first-day rush. Manager Meyers and his superior handled whatever small problems arose, but express complete satisfaction with the day's activities. "The crowd exceeded our fondest expectations," said Meyers. "Camden has certainly given us a warm and sincere welcome." The same August 6th edition of the *West Jersey Press* reported that more than 18,000 people visited the store on its inaugural day. This represents more than 7% of the county's 1930 population figure of 252,300.

Sears Given A Warm Reception By Other Camden Retailers

The city's business community gave the new Camden Sears store an extremely warm welcome. Editorials heralded the new store as benefit to the retail arena in Camden, noting, "...the new Sears, Roebuck store, instead of being a competitor of Camden's merchants, will actually increase the business of all the local stores. The new store will make Camden more attractive as a shopping center; once the city is recognized as such, it will bring more trade to every business house in the town." This was certainly the mindset of the existing major retailers in town. Hurley Stores treasurer James Moran, responding to questions by a *Morning Post* reporter on July 29, 1927, about the impact of Sears, responded, "The coming of the Sears, Roebuck department store to Camden is great news for the city. It will help make Camden a retail center and will indirectly benefit every store in the city by attracting shoppers from all parts of South Jersey, if not from Philadelphia itself." Similarly, J.B. Van Sciver, Jr., general manager of the J.B. Van Sciver Co., a large Camden furniture manufacturer and retailer, stated, "We welcome this new store to Camden. I believe it will be of the greatest benefit to all the merchants of this city, as well as to the city as a whole."

Leonard Baker, second vice president and treasurer of the downtown Baker-Flick department store specifically addressed the Greater Camden movement and how the arrival of Sears would usher in a new age of growth in his comments. He said,

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Anything that helps the Greater Camden shopping convenience, anything that contributes towards this city being able to offer a shopping center of real metropolitan attractiveness, will certainly have our approval and co-operation. The very fact that a concern of such national importance has selected our city for the investment of over a million dollars, will, in our opinion, be broadcast nationally to the extent that other lines of both retail and industrial big business will see the future of Camden as we all see it today. They will likewise be attracted to locate here.

Some of these same retailers placed advertisements in the city's newspapers welcoming Sears, Roebuck and Co. to Camden. These stores included the Hurley Store, Stecker, Inc., Schoenagle's, and others. Sears responded on August 2nd with an ad of their own. "Our Thanks to Camden...for the wonderful welcome you gave us." This camaraderie fostered between businessmen ushered in a new feeling of cooperation and a "Good Will" sale was planned for August 4, 5, 6, to promote friendship between dealers and patrons. The slogan of this history-making sale was "Not Profits, But Friends." The good feelings between retailers precipitated by Sears's arrival continued for some time. A December 1928 advertisement placed by Sears indicated that the company had inaugurated a free bus service operating between the parking lot behind the store and the courthouse at Broadway and Federal, delivering shoppers downtown. The bus ran every twelve minutes between noon and 9:00 p.m. weekdays and from 9:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. on Saturdays. Through the years, the Camden business community looked to Sears as the main attraction for suburban shoppers coming into the city. Once there, these shoppers would normally venture to the other stores in the downtown shopping district.

The management of Sears was very deliberate in choosing the location for its Camden store. The store was to be situated at a planned Civic Center on the edge of a boomerang-shaped city and not downtown like the other retail establishments. With the Sears's Camden retail operation placed along a new and major parkway constructed specifically for automobiles, drivers who lived outside the city gained easy access to the store. This concept is further reinforced by the provision of a 500-space parking lot in the rear of the store. City dwellers normally traveled by trolley or bus and many did not own a car. Essentially, the Camden Sears store represent an archetype of the suburban shopping centers and malls constructed beginning in the late 1950s. It was readily accessible by automobile along a major thoroughfare and carried merchandise demanded by the sophisticated suburbanite.

The 1947 Store Expansion

Retail operations at the Sears Camden store continued with little physical change from opening day through World War II. Product lines were added or dropped according to the changing fashions and needs of the times, but the building remained a strong commercial icon along the Boulevard. Sears's management, pleased with the increasing patronage at the store, began planning an expansion in 1946. The construction

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of this addition was undertaken late in 1946. Requiring almost a year to complete, the new wing added over 25,000 square feet to the store's existing 100,000 square feet. Added to the rear of the building, the second floor contained new executive and customer service offices. Although no documentation has been found to identify the architectural firm who designed this addition, it is a safe assumption that the firm of Carr & Wright prepared the drawings and provided construction oversight, since they were still the primary firm for the Sears Company.

The rear of the first floor contained a luncheonette and, in deference to South Jersey's strong agrarian economy, the first floor also contained a Sears Farm store, consuming 12,000 square feet of the new building, which opened in July 1947. The addition to the Camden store reflected the pent-up demand for consumer goods prevalent during the post-war years. An article in the October 29, 1947 issue of the *Courier-Post* said the farm store was:

...where everything from milk cans to milking machines can be purchased. Bright red power sprayers, green trailers, shining leather saddles, and farm implements are spotted around the farm store, one side of which has a great pile of slatted cages for baby chicks in season. The farm store also houses the enlarged plumbing, heating and paint departments and has been a real boon to farmers who wish to see and handle implements before purchasing.

Touted as the "newest and most complete farm store in the southern part of the state," farmers of the region found all the latest equipment for their crop and husbandry production. The farm store was yet another indication that Sears's deliberate choice of an automobile corridor for its Camden store was an effort to serve the great expanse of suburban territory surrounding the city.

Leonard M. Wolper, the store's manager since 1934, planned a special sale at the store for the end of October to celebrate the expanded store. Commenting on the sale and his strengthening customer base, Wolper stated,

We had thought of calling the event a 'Thank You' sale in appreciation of the increasing support we've had through the years from the people of South Jersey. Then we called the celebration 'Progress Days' in recognition of the outstanding progress which has been made in building up the community life of this area. We want to show our confidence in the future of South Jersey. We hope these 'Progress Days'...will attract many people who have not yet seen the new farm store, recently opened and the general remodeling and enlargement which has been achieved throughout the whole store.

For the convenience of its shoppers, store management arranged for repaving the rear parking lot and erected new lighting. The Camden Sears store also gained an automotive service center during this 1947

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period of enlargement and modernization. Located across Memorial Avenue from the retail store and facing the Boulevard, the facility was doubled in size during a 1962 facelift. This building still stands today, but it is vacant and derelict.

The 1960s Herald a Gradual Decline in Camden

The suburban growth of Camden County was nothing short of phenomenal during the 1950s and 60s. The rise of Cherry Hill and other developments around the county caused a series of mass exoduses from the city to the suburbs. With this loss of their urban customer base and their location in a downtown area now deemed inconvenient, some Camden stores followed their patronage out of the city. It was now vital to be on automobile routes in the suburbs to service the driving public. In the late 1950s, the Black Horse Pike Shopping Center opened in Audubon, luring J.C. Penney to abandon its downtown Camden location. This shopping center also featured E.J. Korvettes, Woolworth's and a number of smaller retailers, some of which also moved from Camden. In 1961, the Cherry Hill Mall opened, one of the first shopping centers of its kind in America and the largest enclosed mall in the Eastern United States. For the first time, suburban dwellers could satisfy their appetite for consumer goods without driving to Camden. Other malls soon followed: Moorestown Mall, 1963; Echelon Mall, 1970; and Deptford Mall, 1975. These malls provided expansive parking lots and safe surroundings in a park-like setting.

The Camden Sears store responded in the only way it could to ensure its survival—it made plans to relocate to a suburban shopping center. On April 6, 1971, Sears management announced it would be moving to the Moorestown Mall as soon as its new retail store was ready for occupancy. The new store would be 25% larger and would contain three floor levels, versus only two at the Camden building. Most Camden store employees reacted enthusiastically. Words like "It's great; We're moving" began an article in the April 7, 1971, issue of the *Courier-Post*. Joe Loris, a washer and dryer salesman said, "I think it's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to Sears, Roebuck and Company. Camden has been a wonderful city. We have a lot of friends here and customers. But we've been pulling a lot of our customers from outlying districts near Moorestown."

Other employees responded with statements about sales decreases, blaming it on the national recession and "the crime problems in the city. Women stopped coming to the store by themselves because of traffic and the element of people living in the area. A lot of employes' [sic] automobiles were stolen off the parking lot." With the population boom and the ease of obtaining store credit in the early 1970s, women would go shopping almost daily. It was much more difficult to visit the stores in Camden with children in tow than it was to drive to a nearby mall. One salesman indicated that Sears should have made this move ten years prior. Harry Burg, a part-time jewelry department salesman stated, "This place is dying. People won't come here at night." Not all of the employees were pleased with the decision to move. Those who resided within

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Camden ruminated about being forced to take two busses to get to the new store. Several thought they would quit rather than continue their employment with Sears at a different location.

Roger L. Larson, general manager of Sears Delaware Valley stores indicated that the closing was in line with the company's policy of dropping older stores when new larger units are built to serve the same trading areas. Another Sears spokesman, responding to questions about the decision to move, stated,

We are concerned about leaving Camden. We had looked at it very hard and very long. But the store which was one of the first retail stores to be built in the East is in such a configuration today that it cannot serve the needs of the company or its customers. We realize that the City of Camden feels like it's losing something. But I don't think they're losing a great shopping area or a ratable. Whoever moves into that building will be paying taxes.

Initially, Sears, Roebuck and Co. did not include the Camden store's future in the company's plans to relocate. Although the company made no decision about its old store, Camden Mayor Joseph Nardi drafted some contingency plans by working with the Greater Camden Movement and the Business Improvement Association. All these plans required some level of commitment by Sears, and included such ideas as Sears operating a discount store or even a Sears Surplus Store in a portion of the building.

Other Camden merchants were asked to provide their opinion about the Sears's decision. They responded, "Sears ads brought a lot of people into the city because they read SEARS CAMDEN." Mayor Nardi reported he was "terribly disappointed" and attempted to set up a meeting with Sears's senior management. Nardi said, "I'm going to ask them to meet informally. I'm not demanding. I'm asking them to please stay open because we need them." Assemblyman (later Governor) James J. Florio requested the state Department of Community Affairs appoint a team to investigate the reasons behind the planned closure of Sears Camden. Florio was seeking some way to "cushion the city from the full impact of the blow" expected from the Sears abandoning its Camden location.

Within a week of the closure announcement, Mrs. Carolyn DiCicco, a Camden waitress began a one-woman campaign to keep Sears in Camden. She asked every one of her patrons to sign petitions forms asking Sears to stay. However, in the end, neither the petitions nor scathing newspaper editorials, or even the efforts of state and local officials were persuasive enough to change the mind of Sears's management. The Moorestown Mall store opened during the first week of October 1971 with the Camden store closing during the month of September. No information is available about how many employees actually transferred from Camden to the new store.

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Subsequent Uses for the Former Sears Store in Camden

Rumors abounded in early 1972 that the former Sears store in Camden was sold, but Sears's management continually denied it. In January of that year, Major Benjamin Coxson, a self-declared candidate for Camden's 1973 mayoral election, reported he was negotiating to purchase the building. On February 18, 1972, mystery surrounded the Camden store and any possible suitors. Major Coxson announced on the 18th that a Big C discount store would be opening in the building by April 1, 1972. The name of "Samuel Rappaport" circulated repeatedly as a purchaser of the former retail store. Rappaport was a Philadelphia lawyer and a member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The rumors finally proved to be true when it was announced that Rappaport had, indeed, purchased the building from Sears. Paying \$625,000 for the property, the sale included the former Sears Automotive Center, located across Memorial Avenue from the main store.

On June 7, 1972, Rappaport sold the building to his own company, the S. Rapp Corporation. Charles Podhaizer, Big C president, announced that Rappaport would join the Big C operation as a vice president and manager of the Camden store. Big C was already operating stores in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania and Hamilton Township, New Jersey. A store run by Big C was a discount department store featuring hardware, clothing and appliances all under one roof.

The Camden store did not open April 1st or even May 1st as announced in various newspaper articles; it finally unlocked its doors on August 30, 1972. And it was a big event! Over 7,000 people lined up to enter the new store, the first department store to open in Camden in many years. The new discount store offered employment to 178 people, many of whom previously worked only part-time or not at all. Reportedly, it cost Big C \$2 million to open its new Camden store, although a large portion of that amount was spent on surveillance equipment and security measures. Podhaizer feared theft and vandalism more than anything else, but he was determined to test his faith in people.

Robert Hall, president of the Camden Black Businessmen's Association, called the new store a "shot in the arm." This association coordinated the opening of the Big C store and worked to assure a sizable minority presence in its workforce; over 80% of the store's employees were either black or Latino. Responding to questions about what the store meant to Camden, Hall responded, "maybe it will bring back some of the 348 businesses that have left." The racial unrest of 1971 caused a mass exodus of businesses from the city. And not all of the businesses were small. Lit Brothers, the city's last remaining downtown department store folded its tents in April 1972, seven months after Sears left for Moorestown. Erected in 1954 on the site cleared of the 1906 Camden County Courthouse to make way for this modernistic retail operation, the Lit Brothers store was only operational for 18 years before closing.

Unfortunately, the Camden Big C store only remained in business for six months, closing in February 1973. Prospective buyers, including Major Coxson, were again involved in negotiations for purchase of the building. Podhaizer indicated his desire that the store would continue being used as a discount store rather

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than a factory or warehouse. Podhaizer lamented to a Courier-Post reporter that the black business community in Camden did not like or support the Big C store. It is unknown whether this was correct or Mr. Podhaizer's personal perception.

The building's use subsequent to the Big C store is unknown. In March 1977, the S. Rapp Corporation sold the store back to Samuel Rappaport, who then sold it to the Rainer Corporation of Delaware, formerly the Maurlee Modular Corporation, for his original investment of \$625,000. Rainer sold the building in March 1985 to Rahn J. Farris for \$550,000. Farris leased at least a portion of the building to Camden County for office space. Sometime during the 1980s, the first floor was use by the Boulevard Limousine Company as a showroom. In August 1996, Farris, now bankrupt, sold the building to Boulevard Management & Leasing Corporation, its current owner.

Today, in February 2000, 72,500 of the former Sears store's 125,000 square feet are under lease. Current occupants include: the City of Camden Housing Authority (60,000 square feet); Occupational Industrial Center (1,500 square feet); Promise Ministries (6,000 square feet); and First Fidelity Credit Corporation (5,000 square feet). The building's interior has been adapted to each of the lessee's needs. The original Otis elevator and escalator remain *in situ*, both in good working order. The fire sprinkler, plumbing and electrical systems were all replaced in 1989, bringing these systems up to code. The building is also fully computer compatible with full fibre optic communication links and CAT 5 full computer infrastructure/interface system. Recently, the installation of a satellite system provides support for the interactive library and video conferencing. All of these upgrades makes this former Sears retail store a viable, modern building, while retaining the integrity of its historic exterior.

Historical Summary of Camden Retailing

The Sears building is significant in the evolution of Camden's commercial development because it represents a major turning point in the local retail and social economy of Camden and the rest of South Jersey. The earliest form of commerce in Camden began in the ferry terminals along the Delaware river. These stores and trading places were operated by the ferry proprietors, their relatives, or a lessee who lived in or in close proximity to the store. South Jersey people would come here to shop and trade on their way into and out of Philadelphia.

The next progression of commercial development in Camden began as independent proprietors opened retail establishments in stores on the roads to the ferries and taverns, primarily west of Broadway. These merchants and their familial employees generally lived above their stores. These establishments featured point-of-sale retail in either general stores or specialized retail stores. Market houses, operated by the city, were the earliest form of "departmentalized" store or department stall, but these were primarily farm produce booths. People from outside Camden still came to these stores by foot, horse, or wagon, on their way to the ferries. Local stores began to service Camden City residents as the city evolved.

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The next evolutionary stage were stores that focused around railroad passengers and clientele from the city and suburbs. New buildings were specifically designed and built as stores, and no longer constructed as mixed use buildings, i.e. the proprietor's family ceased living above the business. In fact, these new stores tended to have local business partners, such as Munger & Long. A concentration of stores soon appeared along Broadway. These are the stores upon which Camden and the rest of South Jersey depended on from 1900 to 1950. At this point, consumers seeking to purchase merchandise could do so without traveling across the river to Philadelphia. Everything they could desire or need was now available in Camden.

The most recent developmental stage involved the automobile and the Delaware River Bridge to Philadelphia. The Admiral Wilson Boulevard and the bridge allowed suburban dwellers to increasingly bypass Camden's retail Broadway and its ferries. The Sears store is this turning point in abandoning the downtown pedestrian/railroad commercial district in favor of suburban, auto-oriented, establishments. Sears had an automobile parking lot and was built as a temple of commerce. It was built at the edge of the city on the automobile boulevard to the suburbs. Store ownership resided not with local people, but with a Chicago-based corporation that ultimately had no vested interest in the city other than the store itself. The Camden Sears store paved the way for the eventual movement of retailers to the suburbs with big parking lots, which, in turn, led to the virtual abandonment of downtown Camden as a center of commerce.

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

Boundary Description

The Camden Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store and its associated parking lot is located at 1300 Admiral Wilson Boulevard and is currently designated as Block 1463, Lot 1 on the Camden City, New Jersey tax map. The property encompasses an entire city block beginning at the northwest corner of Memorial Avenue and Admiral Wilson Boulevard, thence, running on an angle along Admiral Wilson Boulevard 220' ± to a small radius at the southwest corner of Mount Ephraim Avenue and the boulevard, thence, turning the radius, the property runs along Mount Ephraim Avenue 842' ± to a 38' radius at the southeast corner of Eleventh Street and Mount Ephraim Avenue, thence, turning the said radius, running along Eleventh Street 185' on an angle to a 160' radius at the northeast corner of Memorial Avenue and Eleventh Street, thence, turning the said radius, running along Memorial Avenue 581' ± to the place of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel of land historically associated with the Camden Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store and its parking lot.

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Photograph List

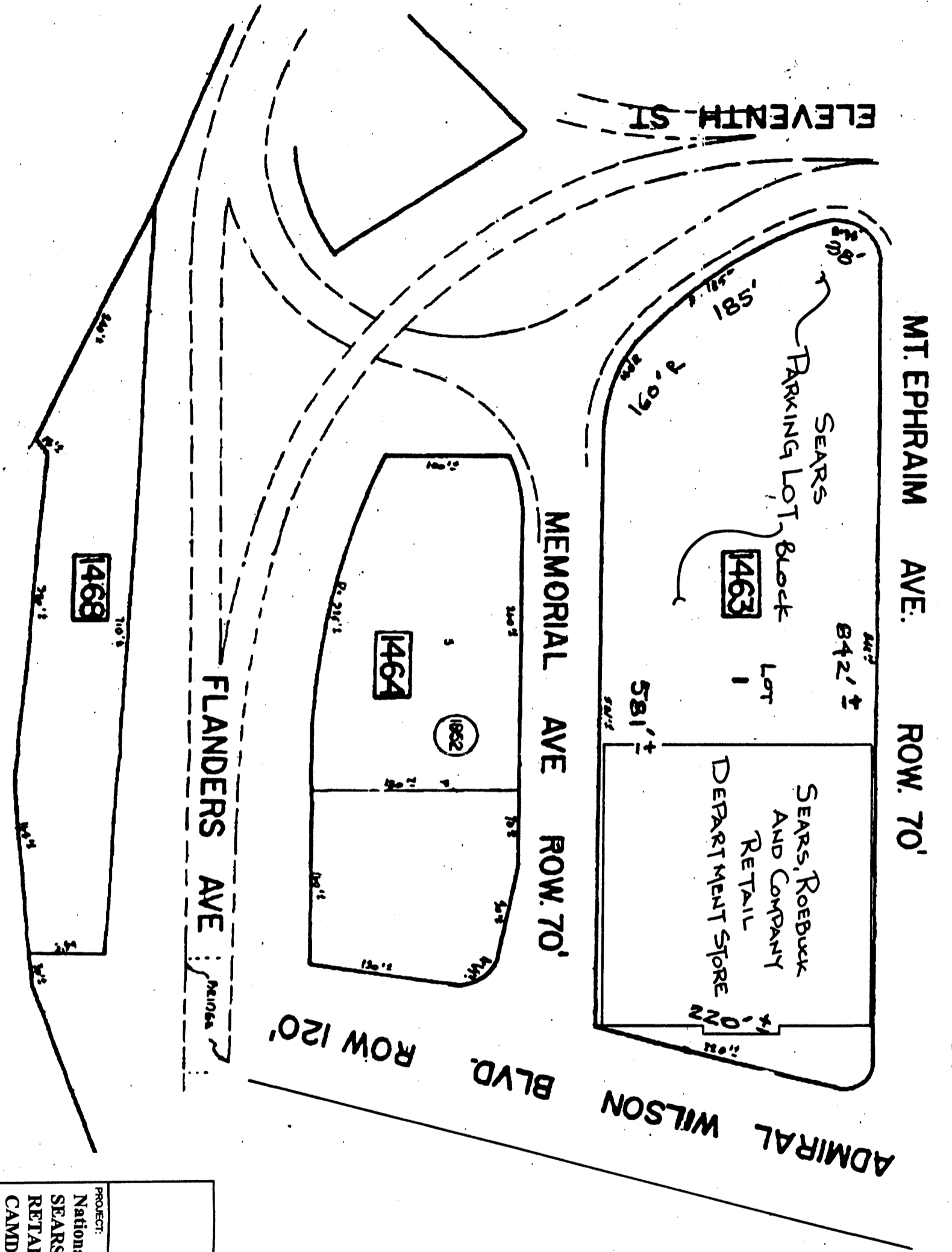
Sears, Roebuck and Company Retail Department Store, Camden City, Camden County, New Jersey

Photographs

1. Facade along Admiral Wilson Boulevard and building corner at Memorial Avenue.
2. Memorial Avenue Elevation from the front.
3. Memorial Avenue Elevation from the rear.
4. Back bay of original building containing original power plant.
5. 1947 rear building addition connecting and adjoining original power plant bay.
6. 1947 rear building addition and a portion of the parking lot.
7. 1947 rear building addition taken from Mount Ephraim Avenue.
8. 1947 rear building addition and Mount Ephraim Avenue elevation.
9. Mount Ephraim Avenue elevation.
10. Projecting pedimented portico and main store entrance facing Admiral Wilson Boulevard.
11. Projecting pedimented portico and main store entrance facing Admiral Wilson Boulevard.
12. Mount Ephraim Avenue store entrance.
13. Detail of sign fascia, architrave trim surrounding door, cornice and console, and cresting above the Mount Ephraim Avenue store entrance.

Photographs by Paul W. Schopp and taken on February 11, 2000.

Negatives retained by Paul W. Schopp, Historical Consultant • 223 Elm Avenue, Riverton, NJ 08077-1215



MT. EPHRAIM AVE. ROW. 70'

ADMIRAL WILSON BLVD.

MEMORIAL AVE ROW. 70'

ROW 120'

FLANDERS AVE

ELEVENTH ST



Scale: 1" = 100'

PROJECT: National Register Nomination SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY RETAIL DEPARTMENT STORE CAMDEN CITY, CAMDEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY	
PAUL W. SCHOPP HISTORICAL CONSULTANT 223 ELM AVENUE RIVERTON, NEW JERSEY 08077-1215	
DRAWING TITLE: Site Plan	SCALE: 1" = 100"
PREPARED BY: Paul W. Schopp	DATE: 28 February 2000

1300 Admiral Wilson Blvd.

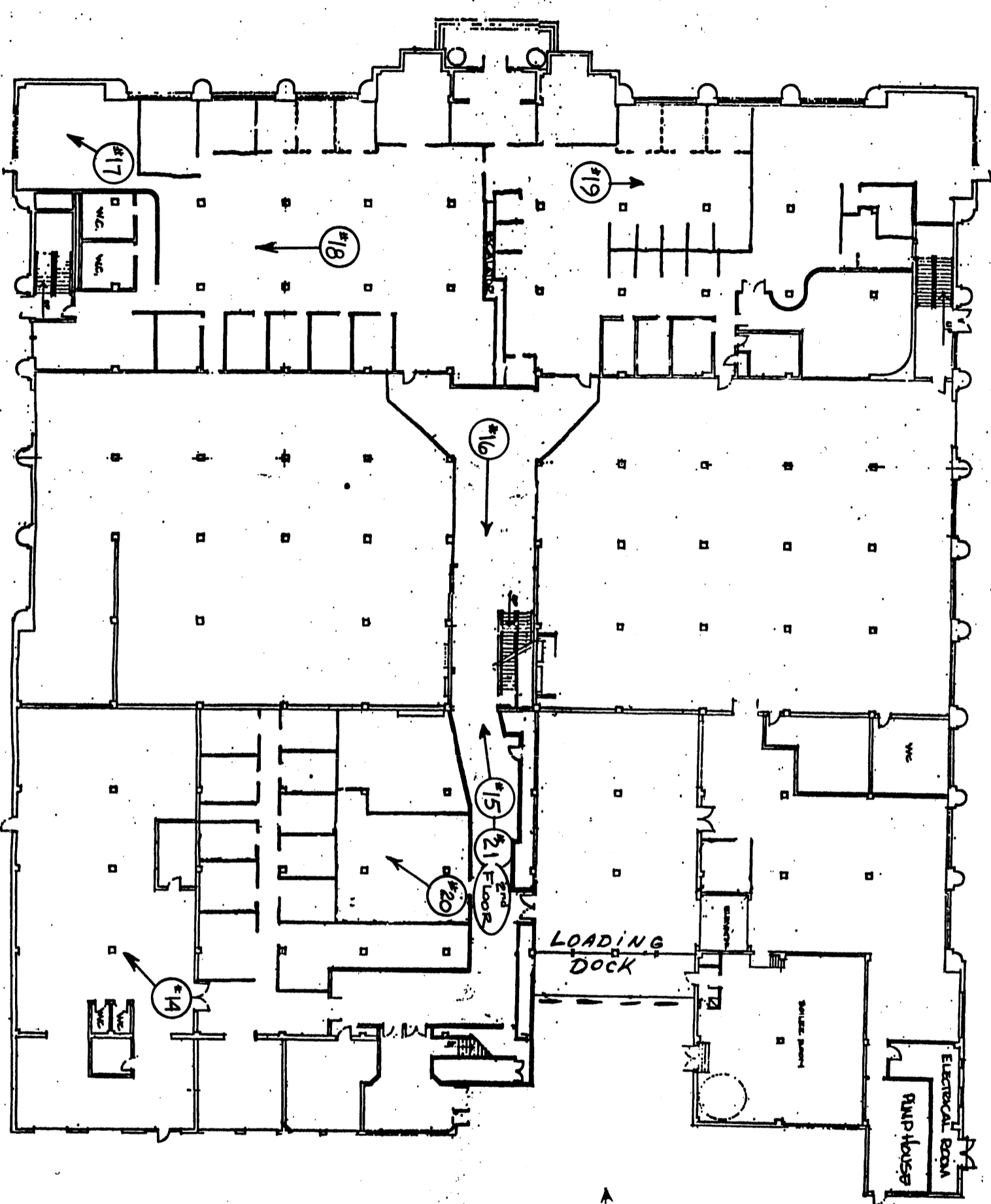


PHOTO KEY

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PROJECT: National Register Nomination SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY RETAIL DEPARTMENT STORE CAMDEN CITY, CAMDEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY	
PAUL W. SCHOPP HISTORICAL CONSULTANT 223 Elm Avenue RIVERTON, NEW JERSEY 08077-1215	
DRAWING TITLE:	SCALE:
Ground Floor Plan Sketch	Not To Scale
PREPARED BY:	DATE:
Paul W. Schopp	28 February 2000

#7

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#6

#4

#3

#1

#2

#11

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#19

#18

#17

#16

#15

#21

#20

#14

LOADING DOCK

ELECTRICAL ROOM
PUMP HOUSE

