

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

J. C. Penney Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

J. C. Penney Historic District

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

J. C. Penney Avenue and South Main Street NOT FOR PUBLICATION At-Large

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Kemmerer

VICINITY OF

STATE

CODE  
56

COUNTY

Lincoln

CODE

023

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

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

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Multiple (See continuation sheet.)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the Tax Assessor

STREET & NUMBER

Lincoln County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Kemmerer

STATE

Wyoming

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Wyoming Recreation Commission Survey of Historic Sites, Markers & Monuments Inventory; National Register of Historic Places

DATE

1967 (1973 revised); 1976

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

(342)

DEPOSITORY FOR

SURVEY RECORDS Wyoming Recreation Commission; National Register of Historic Places

CITY, TOWN

Cheyenne; Washington

STATE

Wyoming; D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE [Penney House only]
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE <u>1975</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The J. C. Penney Historic District, situated near the eastern edge of the Kemmerer business section, consists of the Golden Rule Store, a two-story stone structure with a cast iron facade, which Penney managed from 1904 to 1909; the 1 1/2-story frame cottage where Penney and his family resided from 1902 to 1909 and which he still owned at the time of his death in 1971; and two commercial structures situated on either side of the Golden Rule Store and contemporary with it.

When J. C. Penney moved to Kemmerer in the spring of 1902, he rented a 24-by-45 foot, 1 1/2-story, jerry-built structure on Pine Street (no longer extant) and utilized it as both a store and residence for his family. Because of extremely cramped living conditions, Penney, later in the year, purchased a 1 1/2-story white frame house across the street from the store for \$300 from Peter C. Kettle. By 1904 Penney's Golden Rule Store had outgrown its original location, and on August 1 of that year, he moved it to a new location in the stone building on South Main Street.

In 1909, Penney left Kemmerer and established his headquarters in a 30-by-35 foot office in the Kearns Building in Salt Lake City. Four years later, he moved his headquarters to New York City and established temporary offices first in the Masonic Lodge Building at 71 West 23rd Street and then in a building at 16 East 33rd Street. From 1914 to 1921 the Penney offices were located at 354 Fourth Avenue and then from 1921 to 1926 at 370 Seventh Avenue. In 1926 the Penney Company moved into its own building at 330 West 34th Street and remained here until 1964 when it moved to its present location at 1301 Avenue of the Americas.

Penney had several residences after leaving Kemmerer. In Salt Lake City his family lived in a house at 371 Seventh Avenue, and after the move to New York City in 1913, he lived in an apartment on Riverside Drive for several years. In 1919 Penney purchased a mansion in White Plains (no longer extant) and made it his principal residence until the 1950's. At the time of his death in 1971, Penney resided in a Park Avenue apartment.

(continued)

349

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES Site: 1902-9 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown  
Subject: 1902-present

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

No discussion of American retailing would be complete without James Cash Penney and his nationwide chain of department stores. Although he was by no means the first to establish a department store chain, he was the first to do so nationally and on such a grand scale. Penney's success in turn spawned a host of imitators. In fact, according to Godfrey M. Lebhar, official historian of the chain store movement, "thousands of single-store merchants have followed" his example and methods "and have likewise developed highly successful chains in a number of different fields of retail activity."<sup>1</sup> In the 1920's, even the mail order giants Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward and Company began to imitate Penney by opening retail stores on a nationwide basis.

J. C. Penney opened his first store, which he named the "Golden Rule", in Kemmerer, Wyo., in 1902. By following rigid economies and selling for cash, Penney made substantial profits and eventually established a chain of such stores, which by 1913 were known collectively as the J. C. Penney Company. By 1928, Penney's firm was operating 1,023 stores and doing an annual business of \$176,695,989.<sup>14</sup> The secret of Penney's rapid success, says business historians Tom Mahoney and Leonard Sloane, was the fact "he confined his stores to small communities, refrained from expensive locations, had no fancy fixtures and handled only merchandise that created a general demand."<sup>2</sup> Also, according to scholar Alex Groner, "the Penney chain operated on the principle of moving its merchandise rapidly, turning over inventory five and six times a year."<sup>3</sup>

(Continued)

<sup>1</sup>Godfrey M. Lebhar, Chain Stores in America, 1859-1962 (New York, 1963), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Tom Mahoney and Leonard Sloane, The Great Merchants: America's Foremost Retail Institutions and the People Who Made Them Great (New York, 1974), 275.

<sup>3</sup>Alex Groner, The American Heritage History of American Business and Industry (New York, 1972), 248

344

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet.)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY circa 1.2

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>1,2</u>	<u>53,8</u>	<u>5,25</u>	<u>4,6</u>	<u>2,6</u>	<u>9,75</u>	B	<u>1,2</u>	<u>53,8</u>	<u>6,50</u>	<u>4,6</u>	<u>2,6</u>	<u>9,50</u>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING
C	<u>1,2</u>	<u>53,8</u>	<u>6,00</u>	<u>4,6</u>	<u>2,6</u>	<u>7,50</u>	D	<u>1,2</u>	<u>53,8</u>	<u>4,50</u>	<u>4,6</u>	<u>2,6</u>	<u>8,00</u>

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See last page of description.)

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ralph J. Christian, Historian, Historic Landmarks Project

ORGANIZATION

DATE

American Association for State and Local History June 1977

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1400 Eighth Avenue South

615/242-5583

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Nashville,

Tennessee 37203

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

360

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney ITEM NUMBER 4 PAGE one

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Owners

Golden Rule Store at 803-807 South Main Street (Lots 20 and 21, Block 11)

Owner: Royal and Nancy Neilson  
805 South Main Street  
Kemmerer, Wyo.

J. C. Penney House in J. C. Penney Park (Block 17)

Owner: Town of Kemmerer  
City Hall  
Kemmerer, Wyo.

Corner Restaurant at 801 South Main Street (Lot 22, Block 11)

Owner: Sam and Evelyn Carter  
509 Pearl Street  
Kemmerer, Wyo.

Brown's Plumbing and Heating Company at 809 South Main Street (Lot 19, Block 11)

Owner: C. O. Brown  
809 South Main Street  
Kemmerer, Wyo.

343

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE one

Many of these J. C. Penney business and residential structures, including a birthplace and a boyhood home in Hamilton, Mo., are extant. The Kemmerer structures are more significant, however, not only because they show the humble origins of the J. C. Penney Company, but because it was here that Penney formulated the merchandising ideas which enabled him to create the first truly nationwide department store chain.

Golden Rule Store. This northwestwardly-facing, two-story stone structure was probably constructed shortly after Kemmerer's founding in 1897. Measuring approximately 50 by 140 feet, the rectangular-shaped edifice rests on stone foundations and features a partially-raised full basement. On August 1, 1904, J. C. Penney moved his store into the left side of the building, occupying the entire 25-by-140-foot first floor in this section which is known as 803 South Main Street. The exterior walls constructed of rough-cut stone are largely unornamented except on the front (northwest) facade. Here, the building features polished marble facing along its base, and a cast iron front on the first story which is decorated with rosettes and scrollwork. The building stone in this first story section is somewhat lighter than the stone used at the second story and in the rest of the building. The structure is capped with a flat roof and has an overhanging bracketed metal cornice with decorated frieze. Except for the show windows on the first floor, windows are of the one-over-one wood sash variety and are set in rectangular surrounds. The upper sashes of the second story windows on the front facade still contain their original decorative leaded glass.

Inside, this section still exhibits a number of the features it had when Penney managed it. The walls appear to be original, and the show windows look much as they did when Penney was here. Another original feature is the rosette-decorated metal-frame-supported ceiling which Penney often used to display his merchandise to best advantage.

After Penney left Kemmerer in 1909, the Golden Rule Store remained in this same location under another manager, and in 1913 became a J. C. Penney Store. The Penney Company continued to operate here until 1935 when they moved into

550

(continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE two

a new location at 722 North Main Street. Presently, the old location is utilized by a locally owned agency for Sears, Roebuck and Company. The right side of the structure, which served as a combination saloon and billiard parlor in 1904, is currently utilized by the local gas company as office space. Generally, the building appears much as it did when Penney first occupied it in 1904. Its overall condition is good.

J. C. Penney House. This westward-facing, 1 1/2-story frame edifice was probably constructed around 1900. Exterior walls are covered with white-painted clapboards which are trimmed in brown at the corners and along the roofline. The structure is capped with a salt box roof covered with modern asphalt shingles and features a small, unadorned rear slope chimney. Windows are generally of the one-over-one wood sash variety and are set in rectangular surrounds which feature brown trim. On its front (west) facade the house exhibits a one-story, hip-roofed porch, supported by four carved wooden columns and featuring carved balustrades and scrollwork. Presently, the porch area has a cement floor. A centrally located front door, featuring curved glass in its top portion and two wooden panels in its bottom portion, and set in a brown-trimmed doorway, serves as the main entrance.

Inside, the house follows a central plan on the first floor with two rooms on each side. On the right are a medium-sized parlor and dining room separated by a partial wall. On the left are a small bedroom and the kitchen. At the rear are a sideroom, which may have served as the bathroom, and an enclosed porch. Upstairs, in what might best be described as a loft, are two additional bedrooms. According to Penney, his first wife, Berta Hess Penney, built the enclosed porch herself of wood reclaimed from shipping crates and finished the upstairs portion of the house as well. The interior appears to have changed little since the Penneys lived here except for painting and wall papering. With the exception of the kitchen, the structure retains its original flooring. The Kitchen cabinets and dry sink probably date back to the Penney occupancy as well.

Penney and his family resided in this house from late 1902 until 1909 when they moved to Salt Lake City. Penney did not sell the house, however, and it was still in his

351

(continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE three

possession as rental property when he died in 1971. Originally, the house was located on Pine Avenue, almost directly across the street from the site of the first Golden Rule Store. In 1975, after the town of Kemmerer was given title to the structure, it was moved to Union Pacific Park which has recently been renamed J. C. Penney Memorial Park. Thus, the house is now located approximately 275 feet east of the second Golden Rule Store. Presently, the house is undergoing restoration and will eventually become a J. C. Penney Museum. Most of the exterior restoration work has been completed while renovation of the interior is just getting underway. Generally, the house is in good condition.

Other Commercial Structures. Flanking the Golden Rule Store Building are two two-story frame edifices which were probably constructed about the same time as the Penney store. They feature false fronts typical of western architecture during this period. They appear to have flat roofs, but they actually have gabled ones hidden behind their false facades. Originally they housed saloons, but presently they serve as a local eatery and as a headquarters for a local plumbing and heating firm. Neither building has changed much since J. C. Penney's time in Kemmerer.

Boundary Justification. The boundary of the nominated area consists of approximately 1.2 acres and contains the J. C. Penney House, the Golden Rule Store, and the two commercial structures on either side of the store which are contemporary with it and help preserve its authenticity. Also included within the boundary is the County Community Center Building which does not contribute to the national significance of the district.

Boundary Description. As indicated in red on the accompanying maps [(1) U.S.G.S. 15' Series, Wyoming, Kemmerer Quad., 1954; (2) Town of Kemmerer Map, 1977; and (3) AASLH Sketch Map, 1977], a line beginning at the northwest corner of Block 11, Lot 19 and extending northeastward approximately 225 feet along the southeast curb of South Main Street and across J. C. Penney Avenue to the east curb of J. C. Penney Avenue; thence, northeastward approximately 150 feet along the east

352

(continued)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE four

curb of J. C. Penney Avenue as it follows the semicircular boundary of J. C. Penney Memorial Park to the western edge of the right-of-way of the Union Pacific Railroad; thence, southeastward approximately 240 feet along the western edge of the right-of-way of the Union Pacific Railroad to the east curb of J. C. Penney Avenue (or the southeast edge of J. C. Penney Memorial Park); thence, westward approximately 100 feet along the east curb of J. C. Penney Avenue as it follows the semicircular boundary of J. C. Penney Memorial Park to an unmarked point parallel to an unpaved alley which marks the southeastern boundary of Block 11, Lots 19,20,21; and 22; thence, southwestward approximately 220 feet across J. C. Penney Avenue and along the northwestern curb of said alley to an unmarked point at the southwest corner of Block 11, Lot 19; thence, northwestward approximately 150 feet along the edge of Block 11, Lot 19 to the point of beginning.

353

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney    ITEM NUMBER    8    PAGE one

Today, 6 years after J. C. Penney's death, the company he founded consists of over 1,600 stores and does an annual business in excess of \$5.5 billion. It is the "nation's second largest retailer of general merchandise," says Mahoney and Sloane, and the "nation's largest seller of women's hosiery, sheets, blankets, cotton dresses, work clothes and men's underwear."<sup>4</sup>

The J. C. Penney Historic District, situated near the eastern edge of Kemmerer's business section, consists of the Golden Rule Store, a two-story stone structure with a cast iron facade, which Penney managed from 1904 to 1909; the 1 1/2-story frame cottage where Penney and his family resided from 1902 to 1909 and which he still owned at the time of his death in 1971; and two commercial structures situated on either side of the Golden Rule Store and contemporary with it. Although several buildings and residences associated with Penney and his company are extant in Utah, Missouri, and New York (the residences include only a birthplace, boyhood home, and an apartment he occupied in his later years), the Kemmerer structures are more significant not only because they show the humble origins of the Penney Company, but because it was here that Penney formulated the merchandising ideas which enabled him to create the first truly nationwide department store chain.

History

James Cash Penney was born September 16, 1875, on a farm near Hamilton, Mo., to James Cash and Mary Paxton Penney. Shortly after his son's birth, the elder James C. Penney, who combined the occupations of stock farmer, Primitive Baptist preacher, and politician, purchased a house in Hamilton and moved his family there so that his children could attend the village's school system. Although the elder Penney was a figure of some consequence in the community and a large landholder, he was constantly strapped for cash like so many middle class farm families of that era. When Jim was 8, his father informed him that he would be responsible for purchasing his own clothing. Over the next few years, young Penney earned his keep by running errands, performing farm labor, raising pigs, trading horses, and growing watermelons. (395)

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<sup>4</sup>Mahoney and Sloane, The Great Merchants, 271.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE two

In 1895, 2 years after his graduation from high school, Jim discovered what would prove to be his life's calling when J. M. Hale, proprietor of a Hamilton general store, hired him as a clerk for his establishment. Although his first year's salary was only \$25, young Penney worked extremely hard and proved himself so adept at merchandising that his advancement in the Hale store was rapid. By 1897, he was making \$300 a year, and his future appeared bright. Then, his health began to suffer, and the family doctor informed him that unless he moved to a dryer climate he would die of tuberculosis.

In June, 1897, young Penney went west in search of health and fortune. He first traveled to Denver where he worked briefly as a dry goods clerk before moving to Longmont, Colo., where he purchased a butcher shop. This enterprise soon failed, however, because Penney refused to furnish the chef of the local hotel, which provided the shop with the bulk of its business, with free liquor. At this juncture, Penney decided to return to the dry goods business, and he obtained temporary employment as a clerk in T. M. Callahan and Guy Johnson's store in Longmont. Early in 1899, Callahan and Johnson offered Penney a clerkship in their Evanston, Wyo., store and a monthly salary of \$50, and he readily accepted.

Penney did so well in Evanston that Callahan and Johnson decided to make him a partner in a new store they planned to open in 1902. Originally, they had planned to locate the store in Ogden, Utah, but Penney objected on the grounds that Ogden was too large and that a smaller town like Diamondville or Kemmerer, Wyo., would be preferable. Finally, they all agreed on Kemmerer, and Penney moved his family there.

On April 14, 1902, J. C. Penney opened his first store. He gave it the name "Golden Rule," he said, because "our idea was to make money and build business through serving the community with fair dealing and honest value."<sup>5</sup> Although many in Kemmerer predicted Penney would fail because of his cash sales policy and competition from company stores, owned by the local coal mining firms and offering credit, he did well from the start. His first day's receipts totaled \$466.59, and by the end of the year he had sold \$28,898.11 worth of

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<sup>5</sup>J. C. Penney, Fifty Years With the Golden Rule (New York, 1950), 55.

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE three

merchandise. Because Penney concentrated on merchandise lines that sold well and held his overhead to a ridiculously low figure, he showed a substantial profit.

By following rigid economies and selling on a strictly cash basis, Penney increased the profits of his Kemmerer store each year. In 1907 he bought out the Callahan and Johnson interests in the store, and purchased two additional stores, located in Rock Springs and Cumberland, as well. By this time, he had begun to envision a chain of Golden Rule Stores, and to develop the partnership plan which would be the blueprint for company expansion until well into the 1920's. This plan, according to Penney biographer Norman Beasley, "enabled a store manager who had accumulated sufficient capital out of earnings to finance a one-third ownership in a new store in order to get into business for himself, provided he had trained a new man capable of opening and managing the new link in the chain."<sup>6</sup>

In 1909 Penney gave up management of the Kemmerer store and moved to Salt Lake City where he established a central purchasing headquarters for his six stores. During the next 3 years, 28 new stores were opened in Utah, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Colorado. In 1913, Penney and his partners incorporated their firm as J. C. Penney and Company, deciding to abandon the name "Golden Rule" because of its widespread use by less scrupulous competitors.

In 1913 Penney also moved his firm's headquarters to New York City so that it would be closer to the major source for its soft line merchandise. The company continued its expansion program and opened stores in almost every State in the Union. By 1928, the J. C. Penney Company was operating 1,023 stores and doing an annual business of \$176,695,989.14. The secret of Penney's rapid success, says Mahoney and Sloane, was the fact "he confined his stores to small communities, refrained from expensive locations, had no fancy fixtures and handled only merchandise that created a general demand."<sup>7</sup>

(continued)

<sup>6</sup>Norman Beasley, Main Street Merchant: The Story of the J. C. Penney Company (New York, 1948), 58.

<sup>7</sup>Mahoney and Sloane, The Great Merchants, 275.

347

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney    ITEM NUMBER 8    PAGE four

Also, according to Groner, "the Penney chain operated on the principle of moving its merchandise rapidly, turning over inventory five or six times a year."<sup>8</sup>

The success of the Penney Company in creating a nation-wide chain of department stores spawned a host of imitators. In the 1920's, even the mail order giants Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward and Company began to open similar retail stores nationally. In 1929 negotiations were conducted with both Sears and Ward concerning a possible merger with the Penney organization, but no agreement was ever reached.

Even the Great Depression did little to halt the Penney expansion program. Between 1929 and 1932, the number of stores increased from 1,392 to 1,473. Although seven stores had to be closed in 1933, the company's profit picture was much better, almost double the 1932 figure. Penney himself was not so fortunate. Because of bad investments in Florida real estate and banking ventures, he lost almost his entire fortune of \$40 million. He met this crisis by going back to work full time for the company, and eventually he recouped most of his losses. Penney served the company as chairman of the board until 1958 and as a director until his death in New York City on February 12, 1971, at the age of 95.

Today, 6 years after J. C. Penney's death, the company he founded consists of over 1,600 stores and does an annual business in excess of \$5.5 billion. It is the "nation's second largest retailer of general merchandise," according to Mahoney and Sloane, and the "nation's largest seller of women's hosiery, sheets, blankets, cotton dresses, work clothes and men's underwear."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Groner, American Heritage History of American Business and Industry, 248.

<sup>9</sup>Mahoney and Sloane, The Great Merchants, 271.

342

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET J. C. Penney    ITEM NUMBER    9    PAGE    one

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359