This exhibit was prepared by the Missouri Valley Special Collections and the Department of Public Affairs of the Kansas City Public Library.

The Sanborn map digitization project is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the Missouri State Library. Additional funding provided by the William T. Kemper Foundation.
Fires became a hazard of the Industrial Revolution. Uninsured property owners often suffered great financial loss. To protect against such calamity, fire insurance companies sprang up all over the U.S.

Policy writers, however, could not always inspect properties in person. In 1866, D. A. Sanborn, an enterprising surveyor in Massachusetts, began creating specialized maps to help underwriters evaluate the risks.

The standardized maps in meticulous, color-coded detail included number of stories, windows and doors, construction material, location of fuel and chemical storage facilities, hydrants, and sprinkler systems. Over the years, surveyors with the company created maps for more than 12,000 American cities and towns.

Sanborn’s company eventually became known simply as the Sanborn Map Company, and today specializes in geographic information systems. The tens of thousands of fire insurance maps published by Sanborn have become a treasured resource for historians, genealogists, and environmentalists researching buildings, neighborhoods, and the individuals that lived and worked in them.
Fire destroys Nichols & Shepard Co., dealer of agricultural implements, at 1323 Hickory, August 9, 1893. They lost everything but were fully insured.
Sanborn began creating his maps in 1866, but the Kansas City Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps were first published in 1895. Twenty volumes of the Kansas City Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps are now online in the Missouri Valley Special Collections Digital Gallery.
Cities constantly change. New buildings, additions, or demolitions needed to be noted on the maps. Reprinting was expensive, so correction slips were pasted over the old. Correction dates were entered in a small chart on the Key page in each volume.
Page 8 from volume 1 with a base date of 1895 but updated to 1907 shows the former Financial District. Completed in 1906, the First National Bank building has been the central branch of the Kansas City Public Library since 2004.
Scotch merchant John Taylor presided over the largest dry goods establishment in the West. Noted for fine yard goods of silk, cotton, wool, and Irish table linen, Taylor's kept a buyer in Ireland year round.

Drawn by splendid horses, ten elegant delivery wagons, dark olive green with the firm name in gold on black background, left the company's private stable on daily rounds. "Whiskers," a black Percheron, was a blue ribbon winner.
WILLIS WOOD THEATRE

- Northwest Corner 11th St. and Baltimore Ave.
- Opened, August 25, 1902
- Destroyed by fire, August 1917
- Replaced by 22-story Kansas City Athletic Club
- Operated for a time as Hotel Continental
- Sold, May 1982
- Renovated as office space and renamed Mark Twain Tower

Architect Louis Curtis designed the theater financed by Colonel Willis Wood, a St. Joseph dry goods merchant. “Opening night will be remembered as one of the most brilliant society events in the history of Kansas City,” (Carrie Westlake Whitney, 1908).

Although the theater’s program included the reassuring message—Absolutely Fireproof—the theater burned to the ground in 1917.
UNION DEPOT

UNION AVE. AND 9TH ST. INCLINE
- Built in 1878 after fire destroyed prior building
- Closed in 1914 when Union Station opened at Pershing and Main streets

Kansas City was second only to Chicago as a railroad hub, and it had the second “union depot” — a train station shared by multiple railroad companies — in the United States.

Around the depot, pool halls, saloons, hotels, barbershops, and brothels sprang up. “Union Avenue society took a swashbuckling pride in a reputation for picturesque sordidness which was believed to compare favorably with the iniquity of New York’s Bowery.... Booted cattlemen, silk-hatted gamblers, ticket scalpers, bunco artists, blanketed Indians, Kansas yokels and scented ladies, strolling from Paris and New York, mingled in this boisterous democracy,” (William M. Reddig, Tom’s Town, 1947).

“Big Jim” Pendergast owned one of the more popular saloons where his brother Tom worked as bartender in the late 1890s.
WEST BOTTOMS

RIDENOUR-BAKER
- 933 MULBERRY ST.
- Consolidated four Kansas locations to Kansas City, 1878

Located in the West Bottoms, Ridenour-Baker was the first wholesale grocery company to own “extensive switch property adjoining their mammoth warehouses, connecting with all the [railroad] lines running out of Kansas City.” The company also had a fleet of vehicles emblazoned with F.F.O.G., abbreviation for “Finest Fruits of the Garden.”

Quantrill’s band of guerrillas destroyed the first Ridenour-Baker store in Lawrence, Kansas, August 21, 1863. Harlow Baker, shot three times, was left for dead. Six weeks later, he was back on his feet.

One of numerous outlets for the Moline Plow Co. from Moline, Illinois, the Kansas City branch specialized in the sale of the Flying Dutchman, a “reliable three-wheeled plow, turning a square corner either right or left.”
In 1975 the St. Vincent parish of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph merged with Holy Name and Annunciation to form Church of the Risen Christ parish. Using intermediaries, the Society of St. Pius X, traditional Catholics who use the centuries-old Latin Tridentine liturgy, secretly purchased the buildings in 1980. “Diocesan officials later said the Gothic structure would not have been sold if they had known who the buyer was,” (Robert J. Pessek, 1980). Traditionalists still worship in the church.

“About 5 o’clock in the morning of New Year’s Day, 1954, a group of late revelers, passing St. George’s on their way home, saw a man running from the church. Fire was spurtting inside the windows at the rear of the building. One of the merry-makers ran to the St. Regis Hotel across the street and called the Fire Department,” (Calvin Manon, 1966).

After the fire leveled the church, members relocated to 58th St. and Highland Ave.
This elite and fashionable family hotel housed not only travelers but permanent residents like Theodore Gary, president of the Kansas City Home Telephone Company. Built on a naturally high ridge running through the city, the hotel ballroom on the top floor at the time of construction was considered the highest place in the city. In the 1970s the hotel became the St. Regis Apartments.

The land across the street from the St. Regis Family Hotel remained vacant for 15 years until the imposing Scottish Rite Temple was constructed. Unfortunately, financial difficulties caused by the Great Depression forced the Masonic body to leave in 1939. Subsequent occupants included the American Legion as well as a post office branch and a printing company. Since 1971, 1330 Linwood Blvd. is again the Scottish Rite Temple.
When the school moved to new quarters at 3715 Wyoming St. overlooking Roanoke Park, the original four-room schoolhouse became part of the Roanoke Baptist Church. In 1955 the Van Horn name transferred to the high school built on the former Van Horn homestead at Winner and Van Horn Roads, the intercity area between Kansas City and Independence.

At the mid-winter Play Festival, kindergarteners gave a “delightful representation of Christmas games and winter sports as played in the kindergarten . . . and, finally, closed the festival occasion with rhythmic games, when 1,000 children in two alternate groups covered the entire floor of Convention Hall, doing at one time, freely and happily, the dances which all played ‘at home’.” (Cora L. English, 1913).
Steep wooded hillsides, rugged ravines, limestone outcroppings, and an irregularly shaped valley with playing fields, picnic area, and tennis courts entice Kansas Citians to enjoy Roanoke Park.

One-mile-long Valentine Road forms the southern border of the park and northern border of a residential district of attractive homes made from native stone. Bisecting the park, the red brick Roanoke Road was designated an historic landmark in 1971 by the Parks Board.

Local legend claims Jesse James hid in a cave at the park where later, between 1940 and 1950, some children became lost. Subsequently, the cave was sealed to prevent further tragedies.
A variety of resources from the Missouri Valley Special Collections have been utilized to create this exhibit. The postcards, photographs, advertising trade cards, and other items offer an insight about life in Kansas City in earlier times.
Material in the Missouri Valley Room can help you:

- Research the history of a building and surrounding area
- Learn little known facts regarding a residence, school, church, park, business, and more
- Trace neighborhood change and development
Provide clues for renovating a building

Discover former owners of residences and details about their life

Make your ancestors come alive by tracing the route they would walk to school, a business, or church
Ask a librarian in the Missouri Valley Room for help!