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1. What are Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps?

- Large scale, 21 x 25 in., maps of each city block with building details
- Bound in volumes
- Color-coded according to construction material
- Usually on a scale of 50 feet to an inch
- Used by fire insurance companies to assess risk for properties
Typical Sanborn maps include

- Business and building names
- Building footprints and construction materials
- Addresses, new and old
- Street names and dimensions
- Types of businesses
- Churches, schools, and public buildings
- Railroads, parks, rivers, and viaducts
- Addition and subdivision names
2. History

Fires, a hazard of the industrial revolution, often caused uninsured property owners to suffer great financial loss. To protect against such calamity, fire insurance companies sprang up all over the U.S.

Fire destroys Nichols & Shepard Co., dealer of agricultural implements, at 1323 Hickory, August 9, 1893. They lost everything but were fully insured.
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 color-coded detail include number of stories, windows and doors, construction material, hydrants, street elevation, and much more.

• 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 the Sanborn company up to the 1950s have become a treasured resource for

- Historians
- Genealogists
- Environmentalists
- Archaeologists
- Students and
- Others
The Missouri Valley Special Collections (MVSC) has 20 bound Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps volumes for Kansas City, 1895-1957.

These have been digitized and are online at www.kchistory.org under Maps.
3. Using the maps

- Each Kansas City volume has two dates. The first indicates date of creation. The second reflects when the last correction was made, i.e. Vol. 1, 1895-1907.

- It was costly to reprint the maps. If changes occurred, correction slips were pasted over the original.
The correction dates were noted on a table on the Key page.
The Key page also indicates what areas of the city are covered in the volume. The number refers to the sheet in the volume for that portion of the city.
The Key provides explanations for the various symbols and colors on the maps.

Not sprinklered. 24 Reference to adjoining page.
Fire engine house, as shown on key map.

Outside vertical pipe on fire escape.
Fire alarm box.

Single hydrant. 36 Under page number refers to corresponding page of previous edition.

Double "
Triple "

Quadruple hydrant of the "High Pressure Fire Service".
Fire alarm box of the "High Pressure Fire Service".

"Water pipes of the High Pressure Fire Service" and hydrants of the "High Pressure Fire Service" as shown on key map.

Water pipes and size in inches.
Colors indicate construction material. Shades vary between volumes.

- Fire proof, shades of brown
- Iron, light grey
- Stone, blue
- Brick, pink
- Frame, yellow
- Adobe, drab olive
• YMCA building is brick, pink.

• The Willis Wood Theater, fireproof, brown.
• St. Vincent’s Church and Academy, stone, blue.

• Filling station, brick, pink.
• Residences 500 Block Tracy, frame, yellow
Each volume also has an Index page in the front that lists streets with address ranges and their page number. Under “Specials” are names of buildings like churches, schools, businesses, etc.
The Index page is helpful when using microfilm or the ProQuest database of the maps. These differ from the 20 volumes online in the Digital Gallery.

As corrections are made, new indexes are pasted over the old.
The maps include block numbers and street names.

- Kansas City Blocks 4 and 5, 1907
- Street Names
• Width of streets
• Street elevation

• Location and size of water pipes

• Location of hydrants, whether single, double, or triple
• Detailed information about each fire station including number of vehicles and firefighters.
• X=Shingle Roof
• “D”= Dwelling
• “F”=Flat
• #2=Number of Stories
House numbers shown nearest to buildings are official or actually up on buildings. Old house numbers shown furthest from buildings.
4. How to make the most of the images in the MVSC Digital Gallery

kchistory.org
You have several options from the home page. You can click on the Browse/Search link on the navigation bar and scroll down to the Sanborn Maps. Or you can click on the Maps category in the middle of the page.
Addresses are not searchable, but you can narrow the results by entering two street names. For example, if you are searching for 3714 Roanoke, you would put Roanoke and 38th in the search box.
Another option is to go directly to the Advanced Search.
Select Sanborn Maps from the list of collections on the left and then “add.” Enter exact phrase for more targeted search results.
The collection has eight searchable subject fields:

- Subjects (Library of Congress Thesaurus for Graphic Materials)
- Local Subjects
- Buildings or Structures
- Businesses
- Street Names
- Districts
- Additions or Subdivisions
- Neighborhoods
Once you’ve located the right map, click on the image to open it. When you have the full record along with the image, you will want to enlarge the image for better viewing. Click on the Zoomify icon on the tool bar. The map opens in a new window and is easily enlarged and navigable.
You may also want to explore the Help pages, especially the information about using the toolbar.
Note:

Two volumes, Vol. 9, 1930-1941 and Vol. 9, 1930-1957 may only be viewed within the library. You may still access each record.
For more information see

Kansas City Public Library
kclibrary.org/kchistory/maps

Missouri Valley Special Collections
Home Page
kchistory.org