

JOHN DECKER LIVERY
(Ed's Auto Service)
Lafayette Square
1609 Lafayette Ave.
St. Louis
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1933

HABS
MO-1933

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MIDWEST SUPPORT OFFICE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1709 JACKSON STREET
OMAHA, NEBRASKA 68102-2571

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN DECKER LIVERY
(Ed's Auto Service)
Lafayette Square

HABS No. MO-1933

Location: 1609 Lafayette Avenue, north side of Lafayette Avenue, City of St. Louis, Missouri

Present Owner: St. Louis Development Corporation

Present Occupant: vacant

Present Use: none

Significance: This structure was erected in 1884 towards the end of the Lafayette Square neighborhood's prosperous period. Its placement on the fringes of the neighborhood environs within a block of commercial structures, reflects the pattern of business growth that occurred in the area in the latter part of the 19th century. While slightly modified, the shell structure remains intact. The building exhibits traits of the vernacular classicism typical of the period's commercial structures.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1884.¹ The building was also first occupied in this same year.²
2. Architect: unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: This structure was originally constructed as the carriage house of the John Decker Livery at 1615 Lafayette Avenue. There have been various owners throughout the building's history. Typically these have been the same as the occupants (see below).
4. Original and subsequent occupants: Initially the Ed's Auto building was occupied by John Decker from 1884-85 as a livery and carriage house. In 1887-92 the Lafayette Park Livery and Undertaking Company operated from 1609 Lafayette Avenue. In 1893 this same company continued at this address but also expanded to occupy the buildings from 1609-15 Lafayette Avenue. The listing of The Lafayette Park Livery and Undertaking Company for the following year is at 1615, not 1609. Louis Milentz is listed in the city directories as running an undertaking business from 1609 Lafayette Avenue in 1895.³

Beginning with 1896, Henry Heier and Henry Wiebusch, Jr. operated a livery and undertaking business at the combined 1609 and 1615 Lafayette Avenue addresses. This business continued through 1898. Permits were issued to Henry Wiebusch in June of 1896 for a two-story brick dwelling at this address and in January of 1898 for a one-story brick office. In 1899 and continuing until 1903, Henry Wiebusch became the sole proprietor of the business, continuing to offer the same services of livery and undertaking from a combined address of 1609-15 Lafayette Avenue. Henry Wiebusch died in 1904 leaving his widow Anna surviving him. Following Wiebusch's death in 1904, Lafayette Park Livery opened at the combined address with Frank Kundra as manager. Lafayette Park Livery

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continued to offer livery and undertaking services under various but similar business names at 1609-15 Lafayette Avenue through 1906.⁴

In 1905, the Traube family appears as the operator of Lafayette Park Livery. During this same period the first indication of a residence at 1609 Lafayette Avenue occurs, with Alfred Traube, an embalmer and the business president, listed in the city directory as living at this address. With the venture continuing to remain in the Traube family, the Lafayette Park Livery name disappears in 1907, with Albert Traube being listed as the sole proprietor of an undertaking business at 1609. The years 1909 to 1910 saw a return of a similar nameplate with the Lafayette Livery and Undertaking Company being operated under the joint management of Albert and Edward Traube. This company was taken over by Florenz A. Ordelheide in 1911. During the period from 1912 to 1914, Raymond Ordelheide and Frank Leek expanded the prior business focus and began operating the Leek Undertaking, Livery, and Automobile Company. The automotive portion of the business was listed with a separate address of 1603 Lafayette, this being slightly farther east of the Ed's Auto location. From 1915 to 1916, no records were available. In 1917, three separate occupants are listed at 1609. The Hanna Service Company, an auto repair shop owned by Troy E. Hanna, occupied the location for part of the year. Also in 1917, C.E. McKinney is listed as being resident at the address. The third occupant, Carl J. Schneider, received a permit in May 1917 to open a "repair frame shop." Schneider, at the time of the permit application was the president of the Schneider-Bollman Auto Repair Company at 1516 Locust. The business he opened at 1609, the Schneider Auto Repair Company, continued to operate until 1922. In 1919, Otto Schneider, the manager of the business, is resident at 1609 Lafayette.⁵

After 1922, the ensuing years brought rapid turnover in the occupants. The Bond M.W. Battery and Electric Company operated at the location in 1923. In 1924, Hewey and Summers Auto Repair occupied 1609 Lafayette Avenue. During 1925 and 1926, D and J Used Car Sales conducted business at the location under the joint ownership of R.L. Durphy and G.I. Jublin. This business was likewise short-lived and was followed by Tillewein's Auto Repair in 1927. No listing was available for 1928. Guidry Auto Sales was located at 1609 Lafayette Avenue during the year 1929. It remained at the location for only the one year. In 1930, the Arthur Motor Car Company opened for business at 1609 Lafayette. This company continued to occupy the location for the next three years, until 1933. Beginning in 1935, there was again a rapid turnover of businesses at the location. The first of these, the Twin City Service Company, an auto radiator shop, occupied the premises during 1935. In 1936, the Metropolitan Radiator and Body Company conducted operations there and in 1938-39, the ABC Games Company followed them.⁶

Two businesses jointly occupied the property in 1939. The Taber and Schneider Music Company and Werner Auto repair conducted business in an association that lasted for one year. Werner Auto Repair remained at the address in 1940. There was, however, no listing of the music company at this address. In 1941, the property was vacant. Following this the Werner Lewis Auto Repair shop opened at 1609 Lafayette Avenue in 1942 and remained at the address until 1968. During this period of occupancy, in 1948, Charles. J. Schneider, a photographer, also used this same location as a business address. The Mid-West Contracting Company occupied the property in 1969 for one year

following the demise of Werner Lewis Auto Repair. The final occupant, Ed's Auto Service, was in residence in 1970 and occupied the premises until sometime in 1997.⁷

5. Builder: John Decker.
6. Alterations and Additions: Soon after its construction, the carriage house must have been enclosed, as the first business occupying this address appears in 1907. Sealing the structure involved filling in the windows and the connecting passage between 1609 and 1611-15 and enclosing the exterior shell. Exact dates for this occurrence are difficult to determine. At about this same time, in 1904, a separate residential address is given in the city directory as 1609A. This mention is apparently the first appearance of the upstairs apartment. Among other additions, the most significant was an extension of the rear of the building another 30' to the north. This later addition can be detected by the position of an interior brick wall in the north portion of the present building, demarking the original rear facade of the structure. Visible alterations have occurred on the south (primary) facade. Inset window panels have been filled with vinyl siding and a large sign has been placed across the face of the building at the 8' height. Photos from a previous report reveal that the present 3' entry door on the west bay of the south facade is also a recent alteration.⁸ Most recently, the north and east walls have been sided with corrugated metal panels. Sometime during recent occupation, the interior partitions and the roof structure were damaged by fire. It is difficult to ascertain when the fire occurred since neither the City of St. Louis nor the St. Louis Fire Department have any record of a fire at 1609 Lafayette Avenue.

B. Historical Context:

1. The John Decker Livery building is situated on acreage once part of a commons set aside for use by the inhabitants of St. Louis. Founded in 1764, the city of St. Louis was organized on a French colonial plan, with settlers assigned a town lot and a strip of agricultural ground in common fields at the town's outskirts. The commons consisted of unimproved acreage outside of town boundaries set aside as a source of firewood and pasturage.⁹ At the close of the colonial period, portions of the commons were awarded to individual claimants. The site of John Decker Livery was within land granted as Survey 3184 to Marie Nicolle Les Bois, who requested the acreage from the government, pleading impoverished circumstances following the death of her parents. Eventually her right to the claim was challenged in a court case of 1840. Evidence taken in the case indicates the area was by then in the initial stages of settlement and development.¹⁰

During the mid-nineteenth century the St. Louis neighborhood of Lafayette Square was established, centered around Lafayette Park which was situated about three blocks to the west of the John Decker Livery building site. Beginning in the 1830s and continuing over the following decades, a large immigration of Germans came to St. Louis, many settling in the Lafayette Square area. Providing medical care for the growing number of new arrivals was City Hospital, located on the north side of Lafayette, between Grattan and Dillon Streets. First built in 1846, then destroyed by fire, the facility as rebuilt in 1857 was the largest of its kind west of the Alleghenies, with a 300-patient capacity.¹¹

In the years after the Civil War, development in the neighborhood included creation of the planned community of Benton Place on the north side of Lafayette Park in 1867; lots within it were restricted to solely residential use.

Efforts to reserve space immediately around Lafayette Park exclusively for residences led to the creation of supporting services and commercial enterprises at the periphery of the neighborhood, particularly along Lafayette and other avenues to the east. It was under these circumstances that John Decker opened his livery stable and carriage house at 1609 Lafayette Avenue in 1884. During the next two decades the business would change hands several times, but it continued to provide livery services, sometimes combined with undertaking, a common business pairing during the nineteenth-century. Sometime between 1912 and 1914, the business shifted focus, offering automobile services as well as livery and undertaking. The change reflected the shift from horse to motor power then taking place nationally. First introduced into Missouri around 1891, automobiles became an increasingly popular mode of transportation in St. Louis during the early 1900s. Between 1911 and 1917 the number of registered motor vehicles in Missouri increased from 17,000 to 150,000.¹² Over most of the following years, the building at 1609 Lafayette Avenue housed automotive repair or sales operations. The last in a long line of related businesses, Ed's Auto Service was opened at 1609 Lafayette Avenue in 1970 and has occupied the premises since that time.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The structure at 1609 Lafayette Avenue exhibits traits of vernacular classicism typical of late-nineteenth century commercial buildings. Primarily a facade structure, the street face is rigidly divided by three engaged columns into two distinct bays. The remainder of the building is primarily utilitarian, sharing a common wall to the west with its parent structure at 1611-15 Lafayette Avenue. Enclosure to the east is secured through the simple means of a plank wall.
2. Condition of fabric: John Decker Livery is currently in very poor shape. Due to a recent fire most of the interior partitions and the roof structure have been damaged. Although the building still stands, little but the shell remains structurally sound. All exterior windows except that on the south facade have been broken out and boarded over. On the north and east sides, corrugated tin siding masks the original facade.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The John Decker Livery is a two-bay wide structure, measuring 25' x 120'. A common wall to the west is shared with the building at 1611 Lafayette Avenue. From front to back, there are eight bays running north to south, seven in the original structure and one in the rear addition.
2. Foundation: limestone

3. Walls: The common wall to the west and the exterior wall on the north are of structural brick masonry set in a common bond pattern. Tie courses occur at every sixth, seventh, or eighth interval. This ambiguity is indicative of different stages in the growth of the building. For example, differing course patterns are found on the exterior north wall and on the original north facade which is now on the interior. The brickwork on the south street facade is articulated. Engaged columns rise to an upper band of corbeling which runs across the building's width on the exterior face of the parapet wall. Directly beneath this corbeling is a band of dentil molding. All mortar joints throughout have been left flush or standing slightly proud. A large window opening on the west bay of the south facade has been infilled and currently houses a small barred exterior window and an entry door. Comprising the larger portion of the facade, the east bay on the ground floor is presently occupied by an overhead garage door. The south facade brickwork has been painted white. The infill panels on this facade are vinyl sided. The east exterior wall is plank-sided. Over this planking is a layer of insulation board which is, in turn, covered with corrugated metal panels on the outside. The use of corrugated metal also occurs on the north facade.
4. Structural system, framing: To the north, south, and west the walls are structural brick masonry. On the eastern side, wood pillars at 14" on center, support the roof structure. The roof itself is composed of 3" x 16" wood timbers spanning from east to west. The roof deck is of wood planking. The ground floor is a reinforced concrete slab. The second story apartment floor is of tongue-and-groove wood planking. Any interior partitions other than the original rear wall are nonstructural and are platform framed.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are four existing doors in the structure, three on the shell and one on the original north wall. On the south facade the east bay opens with an 8' wide x 7' high wood-grained, steel panel, overhead door of recent design. The west bay has a 3' prehung steel entry door. At the north facade, to the west, is an 11'-05" wide x 7' high wood panel overhead door. This is currently in poor shape. The last of the doors is on the north interior wall, a 7'-11" wide x 7' high sliding wood door located on the eastern half of the wall. Originally this door would have been the exterior, rear entry to the building. Evidence of a prior opening in the common wall with 1611 Lafayette Avenue may be found on recent Sanborn maps.¹³ This connection seems logical given the shared history of these two buildings throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s. Unfortunately, the location of this opening is shown as being behind the present-day second floor apartment stairway. Its existence could not be documented.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Existing windows in the structure are all later additions. Located on the east facade is a series of 2'-06" wide wood sash. These are unglazed and presently sided over. They are currently visible only on the interior. On the north facade, east of the overhead door, is a single 3' x 6' horizontal window opening with no sash remaining. It is currently covered with corrugated green fiberglass. The street facade houses the only remaining window. To the west of the 3' entry door is a 2'-08" square six-over-six lights wooden hung sash protected by a grillwork of iron bars. On the interior west wall is a series of 1'-07" x 2'-06" window openings topped by segmental arches. These openings have been infilled with brick. Originally, considering the beginnings of Ed's Auto Service as a carriage house, these windows probably belonged to the adjoining structure at 1611 Lafayette

Avenue. At present, they are only partially visible beneath sheet paneling remnants on the interior of Ed's Auto Service.

6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Ed's Auto Service is fronted by a parapet wall on the south side. The roof is flat, tarred, and pitches to both the north and east.
 - b. Cornice: The street facade on the south is crowned with a masonry cornice molding over courses of corbeled bricks. The profile is a Roman ogee pattern about 3' deep x 7" high.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The building is primarily open plan (see page 12). It is divided only at its south end by an enclosed office area in the west bay, a recent addition, and at its north end by an interior cross wall, the original rear wall. A second-story apartment spans the area above the ground floor office and the drive-through which are both located on the southern end of the structure (see page 13). The second-story loft, located at the north end of the building, was haphazardly constructed and used primarily for storage space.
2. Stairways: In the northwest corner of the front office area there is a 3' wide stairway to the second story apartment. The area immediately beneath these stairs has been enclosed for storage. To the north, the second-story storage lofts show no evidence of prior staircases. Access appears to have been by ladder.
3. Flooring: The ground floor is all concrete. Upstairs, the front apartment area is floored with Douglas fir tongue-and-groove flooring. The rear lofts use pine planks as floorboards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: For the majority of the building, the brickwork is exposed. On the east wall, the planks making up the exterior facade are partially visible beneath an array of storage cabinets and shelving. The west wall still exhibits remnants of plywood sheet paneling at its north end. The extent originally covered by this cannot be determined due to later fire damage. At the front of the structure the ground floor office walls and ceiling are sheetrock-over-wood stud. Upstairs in the second floor apartment, remaining evidence surviving the fire indicates that the walls were plaster over lathe. The apartment ceiling is indeterminate. In the shop the ceiling is exposed (joists/roof planks).
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: The only interior doors in this building are to be found in the office and in the upper apartment. On the second floor, the fire damage was at it most severe consequently the door types and construction could not be determined. Doorway locations on the second floor are indicated on the plan. The ground floor office door appears to have been a pre-hung unit that is currently missing. In the northwest corner of the office, the stairway entrance has a 3' wide wood panel entry door.

- b. Windows: On the north side of the east corner of the office there are two 4' wide plate glass windows rising from a height beginning at 3'-06" above the floor up to the ceiling level at 7'-06" high. These face onto the interior of the building. In the upstairs apartment, while no evidence remains of windows, there is an opening in the ceiling centered above the kitchen (southwest corner) that indicates the possibility of a skylight.
6. Hardware: All the hardware remaining and undamaged is off-the-shelf and relatively recent.
7. Mechanical equipment:
- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: At the rear most north side of the apartment, stands remains of a gas furnace. An additional gas furnace hangs in the shop area. No evidence could be found of air conditioning equipment.
 - b. Lighting: All remaining lighting throughout is florescent fixtures.
 - c. Plumbing: Indeterminate.

END NOTES:

1. City of St. Louis Building Permits, 1884, on file at the Building Permit Office, City Hall, St. Louis, Missouri.
2. City of St. Louis Directory, 1884, on file at the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.
3. *Ibid.*, 1844-95.
4. City of St. Louis Building Permits, 1898; City of St. Louis Directory, 1896-1906.
5. City of St. Louis Directory, 1905-19; City of St. Louis Building Permits, 1917.
6. City of St. Louis Directory, 1922-39.
7. *Ibid.*, 1939-70.
8. Barbara Lang, Architectural/Historic Inventory Forms, St. Louis Landmarks Association, on file at the Missouri Office of Historic Preservation, Jefferson City, Missouri, 1985.
9. Charles E. Peterson discusses the organization and the plotting of common fields on a French Colonial plan. Charles E. Peterson, *Colonial St. Louis*, 2d ed. (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1993), 12-16.
10. Hamilton R. Gamble's papers detailing Marie Nicolle Les Bois's legal claim to property within land granted as Survey 3184, indicates evidence that the area in the proximity of the John Decker Livery was in the initial stages of settlement and development. Hamilton R. Gamble, "Case of Marie Nicolle Les Bois vs. Samuel Brammel," in Hamilton R. Gamble Papers, 1840 archives, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.
11. Carl L. Kohl writes about the growing medical care available at City Hospital, the destructive fire in 1846, and the rebuilding of the hospital with increased capacity. Carl L. Kohl, *Those Hospital Days*. n.p. 1911, 22.
12. William E. Parish, Charles T. Jones, and Lawrence O. Christenson discuss the change from horse to motor power and the marked increase in the number of registered motor vehicles in Missouri. William E. Parish et al., *Missouri: The heart of a nation* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1992), 298.
13. The Sanborn Maps show the previous openings in the common wall between 1609-11 Lafayette Avenue. Sanborn Map Company, Fire Insurance Map of St. Louis on file at City Hall, St. Louis, Missouri, 1990, 1:78.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: None available.

B. Bibliography:

Gamble, Hamilton R. Case of Marie Nicolle Les Bois vs. Samuel Brammel, in Hamilton R. Gamble Papers, archives, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri, 1840.

Kohl, L. Carl. *Those Hospital Days*. n.p., 1911.

Lang, Barbara. Architectural/Historic Inventory Survey Form, St. Louis Landmarks Association, Missouri Office of Historic Preservation, Jefferson City, Missouri. 1985.

Parish, William E., Charles T. Jones, and Lawrence O. Christenson. *Missouri: The Heart of a Nation*. St. Louis Missouri Historical Society Press, 1992.

Peterson, Charles E. *Colonial St. Louis*. 2d ed. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1993.

St. Louis Building Permits. Building Permit Office, City Hall, St. Louis, Missouri, 1884, 1898, 1917.

St. Louis City Directory. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri, 1884-1919, 1922-70.

Sanborn Map Company. Fire Insurance Map of St. Louis. City Hall, St. Louis, Missouri, 1990.

C. Supplemental Material:

1. Site Map: USGS 7.5 Minute Series, Cahokia Quadrangle.

2. Site Plan: USGS 7.5 Minute Series, Cahokia Quadrangle showing site location within Lafayette Square.

3. First and second floor plans as currently standing.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Architecture Consultant: Eric Roselle

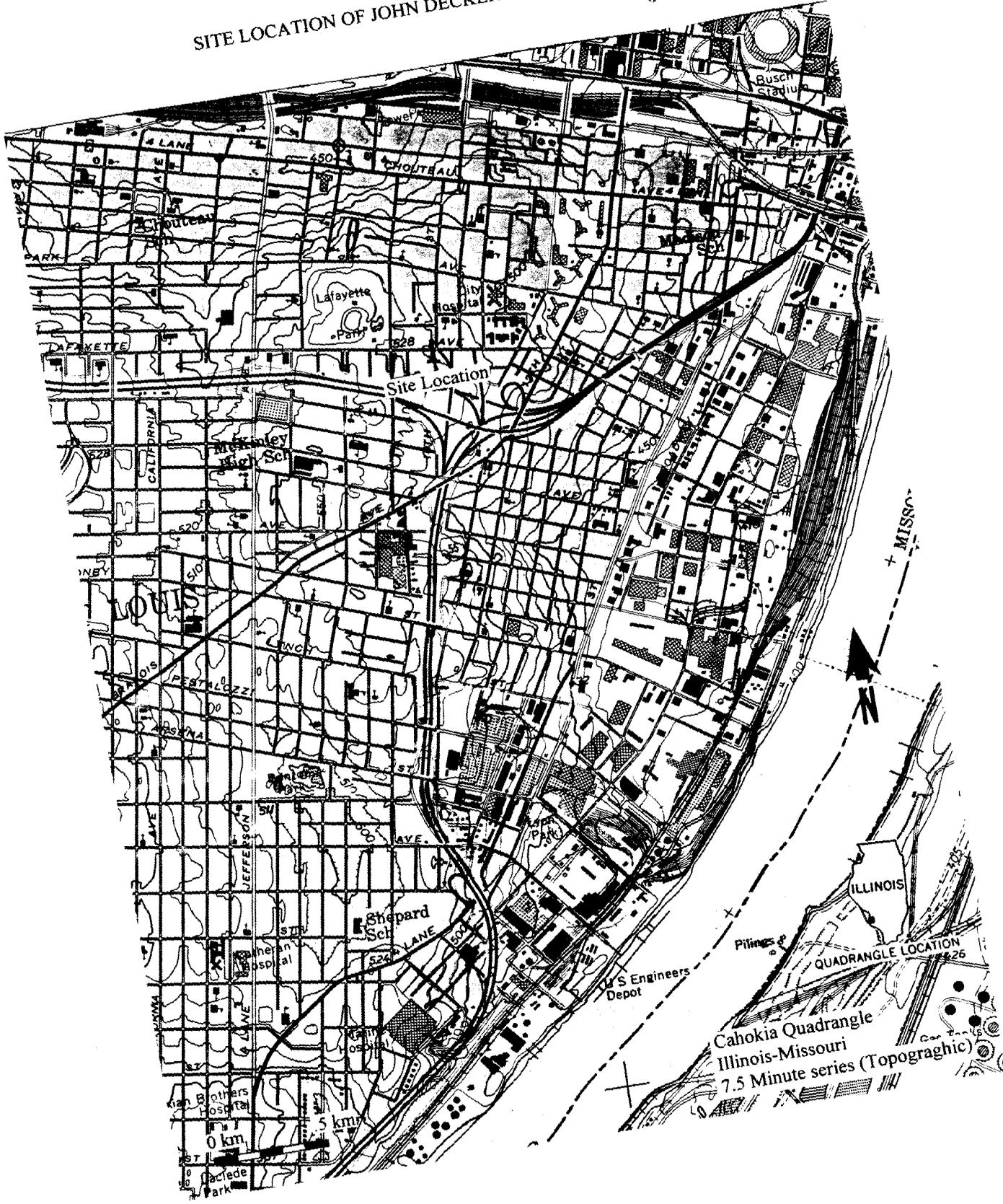
Historian: Dennis Naglich

Photographer: Ed Spence

Principal Investigator: Janet Kneller

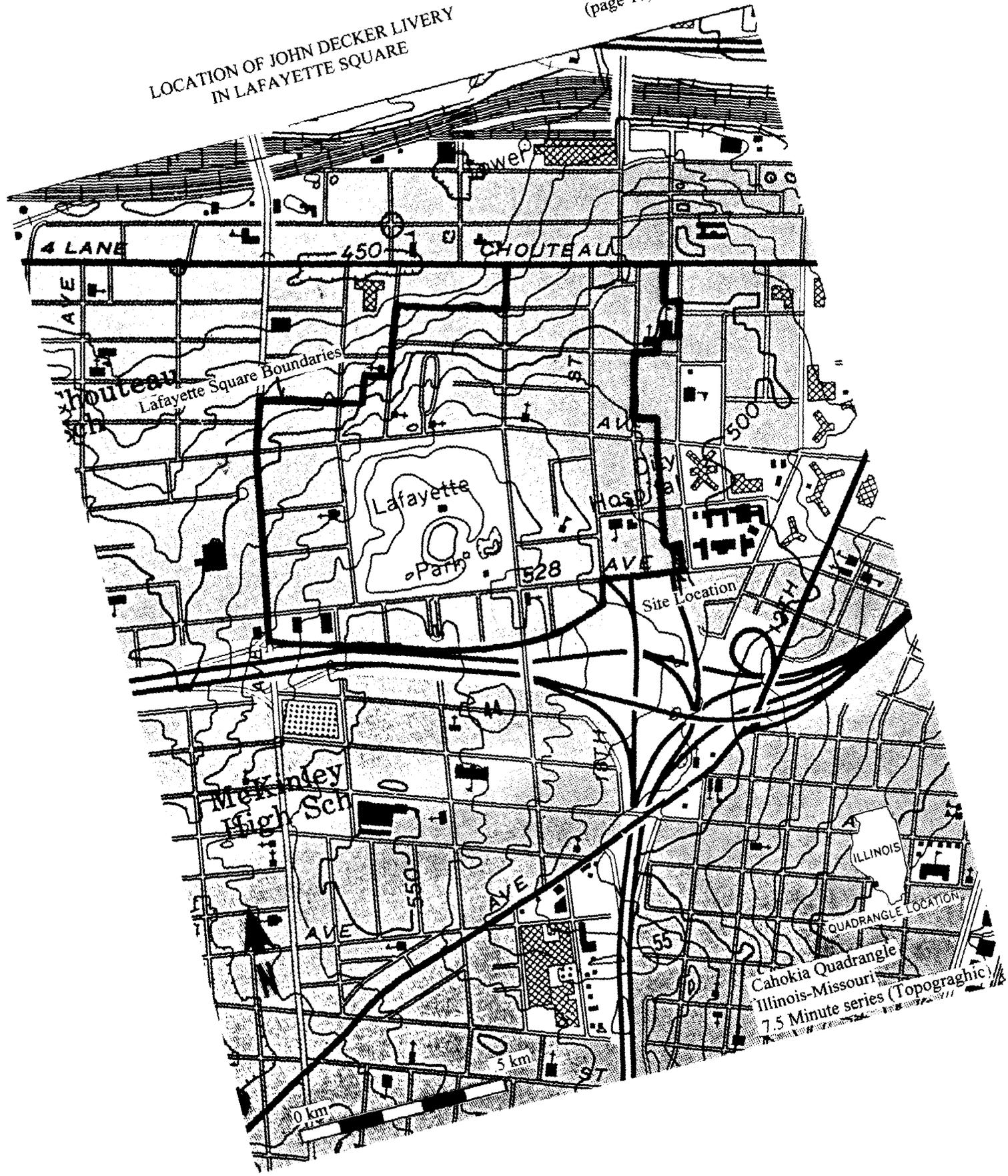
SITE LOCATION OF JOHN DECKER LIVERY

JOHN DECKER LIVERY
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Lafayette Square
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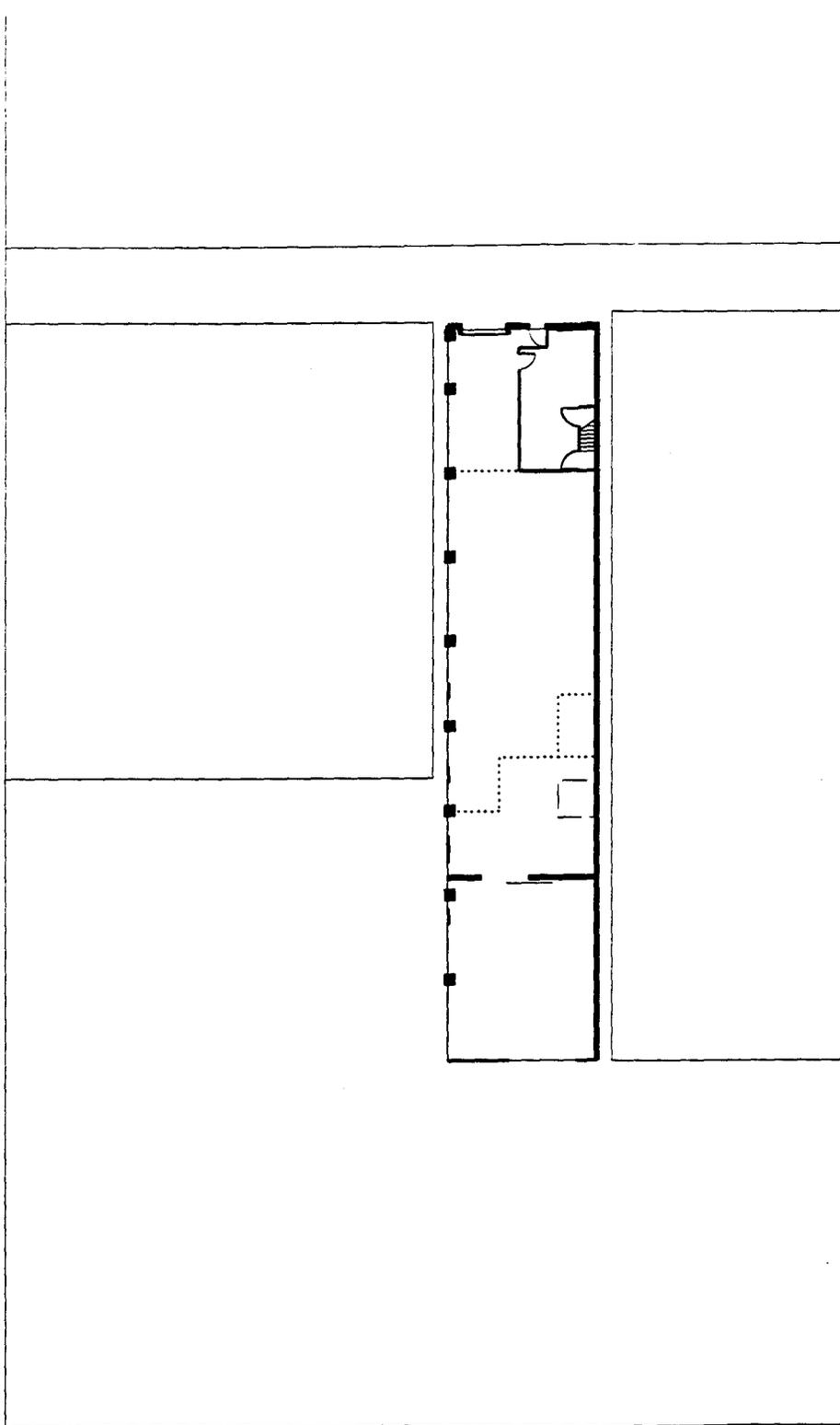


JOHN DECKER LIVERY
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LOCATION OF JOHN DECKER LIVERY
IN LAFAYETTE SQUARE



JOHN DECKER LIVERY
(Ed's Auto Service)
Lafayette Square
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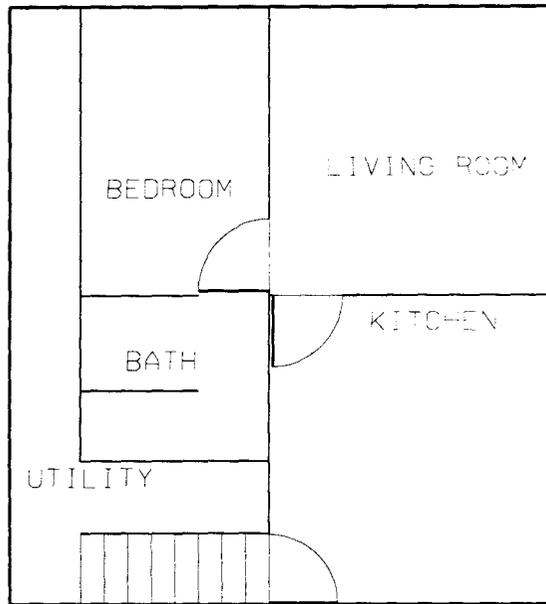


SCALE: 1/30



FLOOR PLAN OF FIRST FLOOR

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SCALE: 1/8



FLOOR PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR APARTMENT