

FINAL

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 McCurdy-Sears, Roebuck and Company Building

AND/OR COMMON  
Sears Store Building

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
101 N.W. Fourth St. (Corner of 4th & Sycamore Sts.)

CITY, TOWN  
Evansville

STATE  
Indiana

VICINITY OF  
CODE  
18

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
8  
COUNTY  
Vanderburgh  
CODE  
163

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

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

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Sycamore 4th Co.

STREET & NUMBER  
101 N.W. Fourth Street

CITY, TOWN  
Evansville

STATE  
Indiana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Vanderburgh County Recorder

STREET & NUMBER  
City-County Building, Civic Center

CITY, TOWN  
Evansville

STATE  
Indiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
Indiana Historic Sites & Structures Inventory

DATE  
1977

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
State Historic Preservation Office, Dept. of Natural Resource

CITY, TOWN  
Indianapolis

STATE  
Indiana

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED    DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The old Sears, Roebuck and Company store is a 110,000 square foot commercial structure in downtown Evansville. It is actually made up of three separate buildings, attached to one another by common walls.

The original store, constructed in 1920, is located on the corner of Fourth and Sycamore Streets and until 1937 was a free-standing rectangular structure of four stories with four bays on the Fourth Street side and seven bays on the Sycamore Street side. In 1937 a two-story addition was attached facing Fourth Street; two more stories were added to this in 1946, so that the two buildings appeared as one with seven major bays on each side.

The first floor is characterized by large display windows flanked by limestone piers and pilasters, which are continued in brick on the upper floors. Each bay originally contained large double-hung windows, which have been bricked-in on the second and third floors and replaced on the fourth. The main entrances on Fourth Street and Sycamore Street have been changed from their original locations. The flat roof with its stone coping was originally trimmed in dentil molding, probably of pressed metal that has since been removed.

The interior of the building features poured concrete floors, with octagonal reinforced concrete columns under a twelve foot high ceiling. There are stairs on the east side of the building, and a staircase in the center of the building going to the basement, which is also used for display. There are elevators servicing all floors, including the basement. A mezzanine was added on the south and east walls of the 1937 addition surrounding the first floor, with an aluminum and glass railing and stairways on the east and north walls.

The building known as The Annex was added in 1943 next to the 1937 addition. This two-story building is faced with limestone, and its four major bays continue the first floor display windows, with large windows on the second floors. An entrance through an arch at the north side leads to a flight of stairs to the second story with a wrought iron railing and slate stairs. The second floor occupies only the front half of the building. There are skylights in the rear half of the building allowing natural light to flood the first floor. The main loading docks are located in the rear of the Annex building, and also the freight elevator, which serves the original building on all floors.

# 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 checked="" 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"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1920-1947

BUILDER/ARCHITECT unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The old Sears Store stands as a landmark in American commercial history. Its conversion as the company's first retail outlet in 1925 marked the very hegemony of city life. Admittedly, the transition from a rural to an urban nation was a far larger phenomenon than the establishment of a retail store by a firm theretofore catalogue-only. Yet 1920 was the first Federal census tipping the balance of population to cities, and buying habits clearly underscore that trend.

In addition to commercial importance, however, the old Sears Store building shares in a significant midwestern architectural development. By 1920, when the building was actually erected, several shipping and manufacturing concerns--notably John Deere--had pioneered the construction of reinforced concrete warehouses and salesrooms. Large buildings--vaguely Chicago School in their ahistoricism--housed farm equipment and hardware in spaces unhindered by complex structural systems and supported by stout concrete floors. Buyers could shop free of pretentious ornament and equipment could be easily moved or rearranged.

Research into the Fourth and Sycamore buildings origin bears out this democratic appeal. Known first as the McCurdy Building, it served as the site of the Hercules Corporation, manufacturers of a gas engine and owned by the building's namesake, Colonel William McCurdy. Until Sears' occupation, McCurdy also rented space to two hardware and automobile accessories companies.

Sears entered the picture through its contract with Hercules. McCurdy produced engines sold under the Sears aegis. For some reason, however, Sears was dissatisfied with the contract and sent General Robert E. Wood to negotiate its termination. When shown McCurdy's building, Wood was told that if Sears would place a retail store there, then the contract would be cancelled. Wood agreed and sold the inexpensive solution to his fellow executives in Chicago. On October 5, 1925 the building opened as site of the first Sears store to operate as a direct retail business independent of a catalogue department.

The early Sears period was one of growth and marketing experimentation. The Evansville employees were responsible for building the personality of the store and for establishing many policies which eventually became an integral part of the national retail organization. By the mid-1930's the store was cramped for space, and an expansion program was started. However, little had been accomplished before 1937 and the disastrous Ohio River flood put a halt to construction. After the flood, though, work resumed in earnest. A new two-story building was completed on an adjacent parking lot in late 1937, and a two-story annex was erected in 1943 to house farm equipment. Finally, two more floors were added to the 1937 addition. By 1943 the Sears store had grown to three times its original size.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Condit, Carl W., American Building (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 240-50.

Evansville, Indiana, City Directories: 1919-26.

(continued on continuation sheet)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 6	4 4, 9 7, 7, 5	4 2 0 2 7 3 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Original Plan, Lots 209, 210, and 211

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Morton Snitzer

ORGANIZATION

Sycamore 4th Co.

STREET & NUMBER

101 N.W. Fourth Street

CITY OR TOWN

Evansville

DATE

July 7, 1978

TELEPHONE

(812) 425-5485

STATE

Indiana

## 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

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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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE

In the early 1950's, with new lines of merchandise--such as televisions--demanding an increasing amount of space, the store again looked to expansion. The warehouse was moved to new and larger quarters, and The Farm Store took over that space. Then it became necessary to move automotive supplies into larger quarters, and a complete new service station was opened in 1955. The old service station site was converted into a parts department, and repair shop.

On Tuesday, October 4th, at 4:00, 1960, a bronze plaque was unveiled by Clarkes F. Kellstrout, Chairman of the Board of Sears, at the building marking Fourth and Sycamore as the site of the first Sears retail store. This bronze plaque was moved to its new home in the Sears Tower in Chicago on January 27, 1976, and was installed in a permanent display build especially for it on the 40th floor of the world's tallest building. The company asked that the plaque be removed to Chicago because it said it believed it deserves a place of honor in the company's history archives. The downtown Evansville Sears store was closed in December, 1976.



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Evansville, Indiana, Courier, 1 January 1920; 4 November 1934; 9 January, 1938.

Leonore Swoiskin, Sears Archivist, to Mort Snitzer, 25 May 1978.