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Williams' Store
Cherokee County, KS

SUMMARY

The Williams' Store property includes the original mixed-use commercial and residential building, as well as a historic outhouse and a non-historic greenhouse. Located on the north side of US Highway 66 near the heart of Riverton, Kansas, the one-story store/dwelling features a vernacular design executed with hollow brick construction. All three resources reflect function-specific designs completed in small rural towns with available materials. The store and outhouse are considered contributing elements to the property, while the circa 1980 greenhouse is non-contributing to the nomination. The property, in general, and the store, in particular, retain a very high degree of integrity. All of the character-defining features remain intact and the property clearly conveys its historic function, significance, and associations.

Store

Facing south toward Route 66, the Williams' Store is a functional, vernacular, one-story building constructed of hollow, dark red bricks on a concrete slab foundation. The red bricks have a textured surface. Light-colored, hard mortar fills the wide joints. The low parapet that encircles the flat asphalt roof steps down to the north. Capping the parapet is a course of header bricks with tile coping. A parged brick chimney rises from the roof toward the center of the building.

A wood-frame porch with a concrete slab floor covers the primary (south) building elevation. The porch has a very shallow shed roof with wide eaves. Beadboard covers the exterior and interior wall surfaces of the porch and multi-light, bi-fold wood doors fill the open bays. Above the doors, a series of wood hopper windows pierce the transom area. The primary elevation contains three windows per bay. Each bay of the side elevations contains a pair of hopper windows. Applied signage covers many of the hopper windows on the exterior, although all remain intact. Two-inch wood planks, exposed above the joists, form the porch ceiling. The current porch replaced the original open front porch circa 1933.

Beneath the porch, the painted front wall of the building has six openings. The three openings in each half of the building include single wood windows flanking a paneled door with glazing in the upper half. On the west half of the wall, the windows are one-over-one double-hung units, while those in the east half of the wall are larger fixed units with a single horizontal muntin that affects the appearance of a double-hung sash unit. Double courses of header bricks form jack arch lintels above each window opening. Single courses of headers, projecting from the main wall and canted outward, form windowsills. The doorways have square openings with lintels composed of single courses of soldier bricks.

Two wood-frame blocks are attached to the rear (north) of the building. The main block covers the east half of the building and contains the store's meat locker and kitchen. It has a flat composition roof. Functional knee braces support the overhanging eaves on the east and west sides. Faux brick composition roll siding covers the walls. This block has a series of openings in the north and east walls. The north wall has a small one-over-one, double-hung wood window and a small horizontal window

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covered with boards. The east side contains a wood man door and a band of three small one-over-one windows. There is a five-panel wood door on the east elevation. Attached to the west half of the building's rear elevation is a small, shed roof addition with a standing-seam metal roof and wood walls. This element contains the office currently housed at the rear of the former dwelling.

Attached to the east side of the building is another small, shed roof element. Originally the "oil house," this block contained a huge barrel of bulk vinegar from which patrons could dispense smaller portions for purchase. Like the block on the rear, this element has a rolled composition roof and faux brick asphalt siding. The east wall of the main building has a single window opening with a jack arch, which currently contains a window air-conditioning unit.

Fenestration on the building's west wall features single and paired double-hung windows with treatments similar to those on the front façade. These windows retain their original, hinged, wood storms.

The interior of the store has changed little since 1925. It is divided into two primary spaces reflecting the original dual function of the building. The main commercial area retains a concrete slab floor, painted plaster walls, and a pressed metal ceiling. The windowsills are wide wood ledges, and the doors and windows have plain four-inch-wide wood frames. Wood shelves line the east and west walls and, just inside the door, a wood counter runs parallel to the east wall. Additional wood shelving creates aisles of goods at the center of the store. Toward the rear of the store is the refrigerated deli counter. A door in the east side of the rear (north) wall provides access to the meat locker. The kitchen, to the west of the meat locker, has a concrete floor, a wood plank ceiling and walls, and a counter and sink across the rear.

The residential side of the building has three rooms in a linear arrangement. The large living room is at the front of the store. Behind it is the first bedroom. Along the east wall of this room are a built-in oak display cabinet and a small bathroom. Behind the first bedroom is a second, smaller bedroom, which was added to the building for the owners' daughter. Carpet covers the floor and wood planks cover the walls. The pressed metal ceiling continues into the dwelling space. The small bathroom retains beadboard ceiling and wall finishes and a five-panel wood door. The linoleum floor and the fixtures in the bathroom are more recent additions.

Secondary Buildings

Behind the store are two secondary buildings. At the rear of the parking lot is a circa 1980 arched-roof greenhouse structure. Heavy-gauge, opaque plastic covers the arched wood frame, which is anchored to a built-up wood sill. There are doorways and operable double-hung windows in the east and west gable ends. Because of its age, this is a non-contributing resource to the property.

West of the greenhouse is a small, square, wood-frame outhouse. Composition roll roofing covers the shallow shed roof. Beadboard clads the exterior walls. The door in the front (southeast) elevation has a cutout of a thin moon silhouette. There is also a small square cut out at the top of the front wall and a

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horizontal opening high under the eaves on the northeast wall. One of two outhouses originally constructed on the property, this resource is contributing to the nomination.

Setting

The Williams' Store occupies a prominent position on old Route 66 near the heart of Riverton. The store itself sits close to the road with a grassy lawn surrounding it on the south (front), west, and north. Mature trees dot the yard behind and alongside the building. Originally, a pair of gasoline pumps was directly in front of the store. During the early years of the store, the eastern half of the lot was a croquet course. Once traffic increased the owners removed the croquet field and provided off-street parking for patrons. It was paved with asphalt in 1974.

A chainlink fence marks the west property line and encloses the yard behind the building. Slightly northeast of the fence and south of the barbed wire fence that marks the lot line is the outhouse, which is oriented toward the southeast. To the east of the outhouse and at the rear of the parking lot is the greenhouse. The remnants of a gravel drive circle behind the greenhouse.

INTEGRITY

Although a few alterations have been made to the property, the Williams' Store remains virtually unchanged from its historic appearance. The most significant alteration was the enclosure of the front breezeway, which was completed around 1933. The primary non-historic changes, affecting only the setting and not the physical building, include construction of the circa 1980 greenhouse and paving the parking area next to the store in the mid-1970s. Prior to paving, the open space held a gravel parking area for many years. Even though the materials of this area changed, it continues to serve its historic function. Likewise, the store continues its historic function as a grocery and deli serving local residents, as well as Route 66 tourists. With its design, materials, and workmanship unaltered, this property clearly conveys its historic feeling and its associations with the Williams family and with Route 66.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Williams' Store is significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of COMMERCE for its association with Route 66 as described in the Multiple Property Documentation Form *Historic Resources of Route 66 in Kansas*. The short, thirteen-mile stretch of Route 66 through Kansas retains a very limited number of historic commercial resources associated with this early interstate highway. The paucity of resources increases the significance of the Williams' Store as a rare surviving example of 1920s vernacular commercial architecture that is virtually unaltered from its historic appearance. Built in 1925, the year prior to the designation of Route 66, the Williams' Store housed a multi-function business that included a gas station, a restaurant, and a grocery and general merchandise store. Already a popular local gathering place for the Riverton community, the business grew following the designation of Route 66 as long-distance travelers stopped for food, gas and sundries.

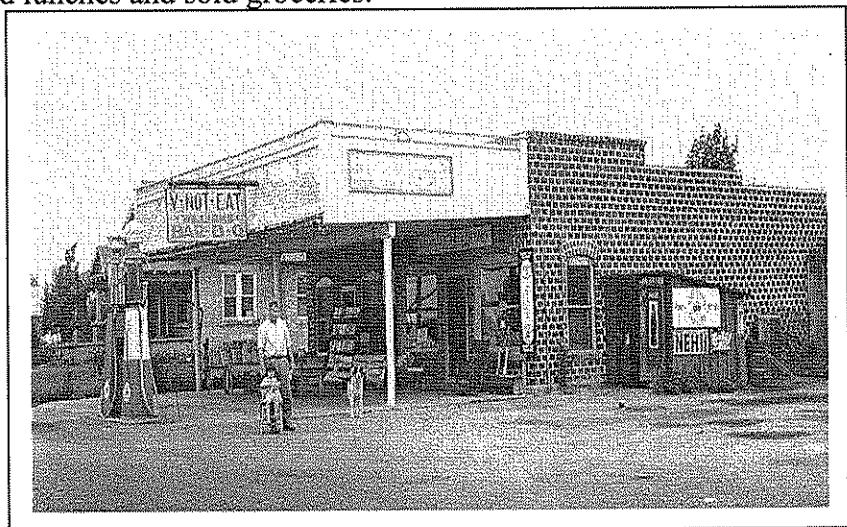
The period of significance for the Williams' Store begins in 1926 with the designation of the federal highway and ends in 1953, the arbitrary fifty-year cutoff imposed by the National Register. Because the significance of Route 66 continues through 1961, the year Interstate 44 bypassed the Kansas segment of Route 66; in the future, the end date of the period of significance for this resource could extend to 1961.

PROPERTY HISTORY¹

Following his return from World War I, Leo Williams and his wife Lora Leona Williams opened a small diner and garage on the eastern edge of Riverton, Kansas. Leo worked at the Empire District Electric Plant across the street, while Lora served lunches and sold groceries.

After a tornado destroyed that building in 1923, Leo built the current store on an adjacent lot. The new store opened on March 20, 1925 with a small apartment in the west half of the building for the Williams'. Three years later, Lora and Leo's only child, Jane, was born in the apartment on February 29, 1928.

The 1930 Sanborn Insurance map for Galena describes the property as a one-story masonry store with a



¹ Unless otherwise noted, the history of the Williams' Store is from Isabell Eisler, "Excerpts from *A Store by the Side of the Road*," unpublished manuscript, [November 20, 2002]. All photographs are from the collections of Jane Williams Ball and Joe and Isabell Eisler.

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composition roof.² The map shows the main store with a dwelling unit on the west side, smaller one-story rooms on the north and east, and an open porch across the front. A single-car garage stood at the rear of the property. The Williamses leased the gasoline rights first to Texaco and later to Standard Oil. Signage on the building from this time reads, "Y Not Eat/Williams/Bar-B-Q" and "General Merchandise."

The Williams' Store carried everything from groceries to general merchandise. Patrons could buy shoes and clothes, as well as food staples such as ice, milk, eggs, bread, fresh meat, canned goods, and penny candy. There were also sold bulk foods such as lard, peanut butter, and vinegar. Lora continued to serve chili, and Leo barbecued beef and venison in a pit behind the store. Leo was also known for selling high-quality produce at the store. According to his daughter, Jane Williams Ball, Leo purchased produce every evening at the Joplin Market Square.



Like most businesses in the area, the Williams' Store catered primarily to local customers, although it also played an important role on Route 66. As current owner Isabelle Eisler wrote:

Travelers stopped to enjoy a slice of cold watermelon, to have a fairly famous Barbecue sandwich...or to fill a thermos with coffee. It was a Pit Stop with a graveled parking area and, out back, a familiar white closet, with a half moon cut-out in its door. Two closets, in fact. The store front had red and green neon tube lighting to pierce the early darkness of a cold, snowy night and people in the store, owners, clerks and customers, all served as veritable verbal Mapsco if you needed directions.³

Over the course of their long ownership, the Williamses made a few modifications to the property. Around 1933, they enclosed the front of the store, creating a protected breezeway for produce and customers. In 1939, a few years before the family moved their residence to the house next door to the store, a small bathroom was installed in the apartment.

² Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Galena, including Riverton, Cherokee County, Kansas*, (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1930).

³Eisler, 3.

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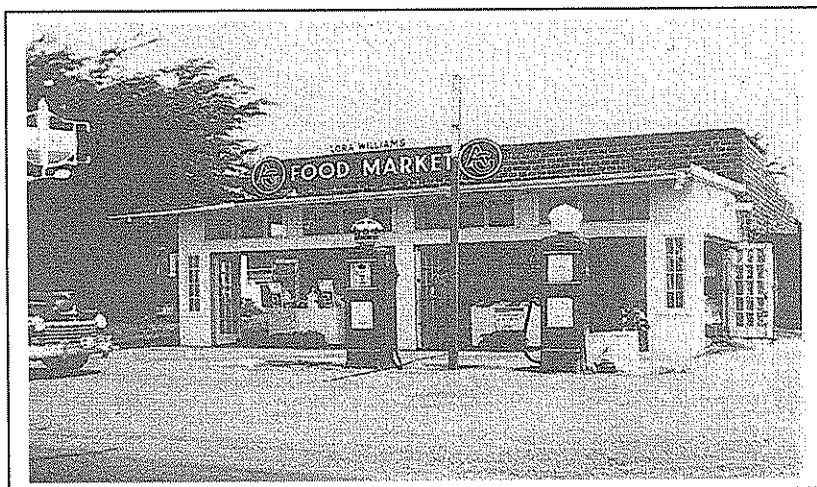
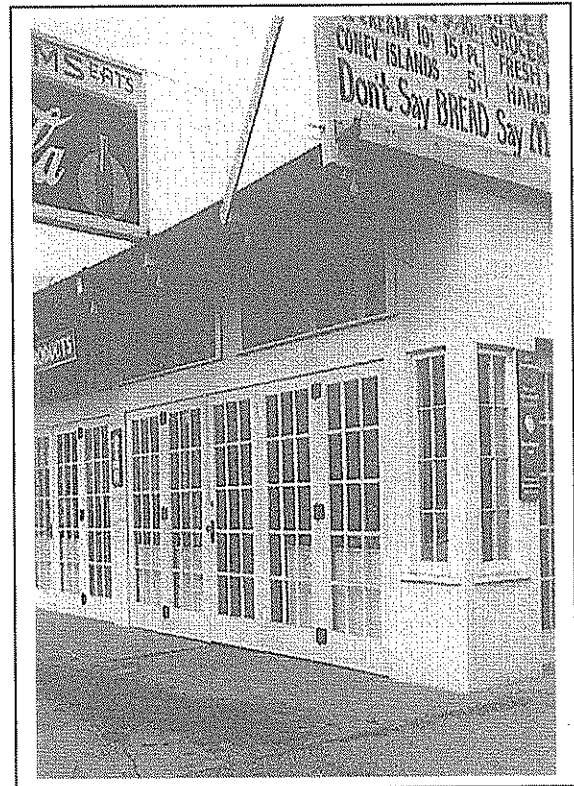
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Leo also built a regulation croquet court in the open lot east of the store. Constructed to standard specifications and with low walls surrounding the playing field, the court was lit for night games. It was an entertainment focal point for Riverton, drawing crowds for tournament play. When parking needs increased, the court was removed.

In 1945, after spending over twenty years in the grocery business, Leo Williams purchased a skating rink in Galena and leased the grocery to Lloyd Paxon. After Leo's death in 1948, at the age of 56, Lora ran the Galena Roller Rink until Paxon's lease on the grocery expired. Lora returned to the store, operating it until about 1970. She affiliated with Associated Grocers (AG) out of Joplin, Missouri, an organization similar to the Independent Grocer's Association (IGA). The store became known as the "Lora Williams AG Food Market."

Lora retired around 1970 and lived in the house next to the store until her death in October 1977. Thelma Ball, her daughter Jane's mother-in-law, assumed responsibility for the store after Lora's retirement. In 1971, Lora transferred



icon for Route 66 in Kansas.

the property to her daughter Jane. Thelma Ball purchased the property from Jane in 1972.

The current owners, Joe and Isabell Eisler, purchased the property from Thelma Ball in 1973. The Eislers erected the greenhouse, but have otherwise maintained the historic character of the property. The store continues to operate as a grocery and deli run by their nephew Scott Nelson, President of the Kansas Route 66 Association. It remains an