

M-K-T Freight Terminal  
(Katy Freight Terminal)  
1811 Ruiz Street  
Houston  
Harris County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-3395

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
M-K-T FREIGHT TERMINAL  
(KATY FREIGHT TERMINAL)

I. INTRODUCTION

Location: 1811 Ruiz Street, Houston, Texas  
Block 110, South Side Buffalo Bayou, Houston, Harris County, Texas

The M-K-T Freight Terminal is located on Ruiz (formerly Magnolia, before 1931) Street in the warehouse section northeast of Houston's central business district along the south bank of Buffalo Bayou. This area is one of the oldest in Houston, but developed into an industrial/warehouse district in the early twentieth century as Houston's principal railroads built their primary depots and terminals in the vicinity. The Buffalo Bayou location reflects early riverine methods of transportation that were supplanted by Houston's rail network, and the interrelationship between rail and water transport that transformed Houston into one of the nation's largest transportation centers.

Quad: Settegast

UTM: 15/272620/3294345

Date of Construction: 1927

Present Owner: Missouri Pacific Railroad  
c/o Union Pacific Corporation  
P.O. Box 2500  
Broomfield, Colorado 80038-2500

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Houston's M-K-T Freight Terminal is significant for its association with the growth of Houston's rail freight business in the 1920s, the development of the city's port, and the evolution of Houston as a regional and national transportation center.

Historian: Steve Sadowsky, Texas Department of Transportation, March 1993.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History

Date of Erection: 1927 (Houston Post-Dispatch articles)

Architect: Not known

#### Original and Subsequent Owners/Uses:

The M-K-T Freight Terminal was built by the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railway Company of Texas (M-K-T or Katy) as its primary freight facility in Houston in 1927, and has been owned by the M-K-T lines and its successors since then. When the M-K-T built its Eureka yards on Houston's west side in the mid-1950s, much of the freight activity moved from the Ruiz Street facility to the new Eureka yards; however, the railroad maintained ownership of the building and leased it to various warehousing/commercial concerns, including ice wholesalers and industrial surplus merchants through 1991. Following a period of vacancy and structural deterioration, the office portion of the freight terminal was demolished in June 1993.

#### Contractor:

T. H. Johnson, Sedalia, Missouri, under the supervision of F. Ringer, chief engineer, and A. B. Underwood, assistant engineer, Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railway Company, St. Louis, Missouri.

#### Alterations and Additions:

None known, although there are references in late 1940s issues of Houston magazine regarding enlargements to various Katy properties in Houston. Whether or not the Katy freight terminal received any improvements at that time is unknown. The building does match the description given for it in the Houston Post-Dispatch articles announcing its opening in 1927.

### B. Historical Context:

The M-K-T Freight Terminal was constructed in 1927 for the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad of Texas, which had first entered Texas via a link over the Red River near the present location of Denison, Texas in 1873. For the next 20 years, the M-K-T began expanding southward through the state, reaching Houston in April 1893. This rail connection to the north and west provided the city with a direct link to the fertile grain-growing regions of the Great Plains, and helped to build Houston into a major international port for the shipment of agricultural products.

Sidney Sherman's 1851 Buffalo Bayou, Brazos, and Colorado Railroad was Houston's and Texas' first railroad, connecting the rich cotton and sugarcane plantations to the north and west of the city to Houston's primitive shipping facilities along Buffalo Bayou. The concept of Houston rivaling Galveston as a shipping center became the dominant theme of the city's pre-Civil War development, as Houston voters authorized a 6.5-mile Houston Tap Railroad in 1856, and extended the railroad to East Columbia by 1860. By 1861, track led into Houston from the Colorado River near Columbus to the northwest and from East Columbia to the southwest, thus beginning the history of the city as a regional transportation hub for the agricultural produce of southeast Texas.

The post-Civil War years brought even more railroad construction in and around Houston as the Houston and Texas Central Railroad (chartered as the Galveston and Red River in 1852) completed its line northward from Houston into the interior of the state to the Red River near the present location of Denison, Texas. It was at this point that the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad crossed the Red River, and provided a link from Houston to St. Louis and Chicago in March 1873.

This 1873 rail connection to the north was the culmination of the "Corporate Plan", which had been tacitly approved by the Texas legislature before the Civil War. Houston stood to benefit from the "Corporate Plan" as transportation planners decided that the best course for the exportation of Texas produce was via rail to transcontinental systems, rather than funneling all Texas trade through the port of Galveston. Although a myriad of reasons have been given to explain the popularity of the "Corporate Plan" over the "Galveston Plan", which would have drawn the state's produce to Galveston's wharves for shipment, the most significant factors appear to be the regularity of storms that lashed Galveston's harbor and the greed of Galveston's municipal authorities, who began levying wharving fees that came close to equalling freightage costs from Galveston to New Orleans. Galveston's devastating 1900 hurricane appears to have foreclosed the "Island City" from further consideration as Texas' principal port, and the hegemony of Houston as the Texas coast's principal transportation center seemed assured.

Even before the turn of the twentieth century, Houston's municipal leaders embarked upon a plan to make the inland city a major port. Most of the city's commerce centered on Buffalo Bayou, a small tributary flowing into Galveston Bay, and providing water access to the city's business district. Dredging on Houston's Ship Channel began in 1870, but the port of Houston did not fully develop until the first two decades of the twentieth century. At the same time, the city's railroads enlarged their facilities with the promise of greater shipping business as the port developed. By 1930, Houston was the leading cotton exporter in the nation and the nation's 8th largest port. The city's railroads showed a corresponding increase in the size and nature of their facilities during the same time period. By the end of the nineteenth century, railroads had constructed a web of lines around the city, with 8,486 miles of track leading into Houston by 1890. By 1910, the city's chamber of commerce could accurately boast that 17 railroads "met the sea" in Houston, thus constituting the city's most important industry. Between 1885 and 1915, several of the city's railroads built new facilities for passengers and freight in Houston, including Union Station, completed in 1911, enlarged a year later, and still standing at the corner of Texas and Crawford Streets just northeast of the central business district.

It was into this fever of development that the first Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad train rolled into Houston in April 1893. Originally chartered as the Southern Branch of the Union Pacific Railway Company under the general laws of the State of Kansas on September 25, 1865 to construct a line from Fort Riley, Kansas down into the Neosho Valley at the southern border of the

state and into the Indian Territory, the Union Pacific's southern branch began to attract a great deal of attention from such formidable financiers as August Belmont, J. Pierpont Morgan, Levi P. Morton, John D. Rockefeller, Levi Parsons, and George Denison. Part of the excitement stemmed from the federal government's announcement that the first railroad to reach the Indian Territory border would receive generous grants of public land to finance its operations. In Texas, railroaders were acutely aware of the need to connect the state with the north, thus providing a link for Texas products with St. Louis and Chicago markets. In 1870, the Union Pacific (Southern Branch) was renamed the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway to commemorate the mission of the railroad and the projected scope of service. The M, K, & T (now referred to as the "Katy" from the last two initials of its name), reached and crossed the Red River just north of present-day Denison, Texas in December 1872, and built its connection to the main northwestern line of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad three months later, so that service was complete via the two lines from the interior of Texas to St. Louis and beyond.

Having completed its link across the Red River, the Katy began expanding into Texas in the 1880s, buying up short lines prior to 1886, then embarking upon its own construction program thereafter. By 1889, the Katy owned 849 miles of track in Texas, but construction ground to a halt when James Stephen Hogg was elected Attorney General of the state on a platform pledging to require railroads operating in Texas to maintain their offices within the state. The legislation that followed was typical of Populist-era reforms to regulate railroad rates and provide relief to farmers and merchants suffering what they viewed as excessively high freight rates as a result of the railroads' monopoly over transportation. Texas in the 1890s was noted for the high activity of Farmers' Alliances and Grange chapters that spearheaded the rise of the Populist Party and the move to regulate the railroads. In response to the legislation aimed at it and other Texas railroads, the Katy was chartered as the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railway Company of Texas on October 28, 1891. During the next two years, the Katy continued its expansion through the state, completing its line from Boggy Tank into Houston, a distance of 75 miles, in April 1893. The Katy gained access to Galveston in August 1893 on the Galveston, Houston, and Henderson Railway Company tracks, which it purchased jointly with the International and Great Northern Railway Company. By 1904, the Katy owned over 1,100 miles of track in Texas, and continued to expand, purchasing other existing railroads and covering the eastern half of Texas with Katy track.

Upon reaching Houston in 1893, the Katy began building its own freight and passenger depots. The first Katy freight depot was located at 1015 North Main Street, just north of the Main Street Viaduct over Buffalo Bayou. (See Figure 1). In 1926, the Katy announced plans to build a \$1,000,000 six-story freight terminal at their North Main Street site (See Figure 2), but apparently abandoned those plans in favor of the Ruiz Street facility, which was acquired for a sum in excess of \$1,000,000, and was located so as to provide more space for industrial development in downtown Houston. The present M-K-T Freight Terminal was constructed on the Ruiz Street site in 1927, and opened on December 17, 1927 to great fanfare. Texas Governor Dan Moody, Texas Lieutenant Governor Barry Miller, the mayors of the four largest cities in Texas, the Texas Railroad Commissioner, and a special train load of Katy officials convened at the new terminal to celebrate its opening. According to the Houston Post-Dispatch, December 17, 1927, ". . . at least 600 persons crowded into the [warehouse]," where "tables, each holding 45 persons, were laid out. . . ." "Many stood at the doors, listening to the speeches [by Texas Governor Dan Moody, as well as a representative for C. Haile, the president of the Katy, and others] which were amplified by four large horns, connected by a special device to a microphone on the main table." (pp. 1, 8). The Katy band, brought in by special train from Waco, Texas and Parsons, Kansas, serenaded the

celebratory luncheon and provided entertainment for the formal dinner at Houston's Rice Hotel later that evening.

The Katy's new Houston freight depot covered a site of nine acres. The main warehouse was approximately 50 x 600 feet, including almost 100 feet of open platform at the north end. The main offices for the Katy's Houston freight department were located in a two-story building at the south end of the complex. Eleven tracks served the terminal, providing storage for 200 cars. The new Houston terminal was part of the railroad's building program through the 1920s. In addition to the Houston freight terminal, the Katy had constructed new freight terminals in other Texas cities, additional yards at Denison, Wichita Falls, Fort Worth, and San Antonio, and new shop plants at Denison, Wichita Falls, and Waco. By 1927, the Katy was heralded as the leading cotton line into Houston, and contributed to the growth and development of the city as a transportation and commercial center.

Railroad activity dominated both sides of Buffalo Bayou in the early twentieth century. The freight stations and passenger depots of all of Houston's railroads were located within walking distance to the banks of the bayou, thus comprising a compact railroad district to the north and northeast of the central business district of the city. Union Station, Grand Central Station, and a number of smaller freight terminals and passenger depots crowded the hotels and warehouses of this transportation district; the Katy's 1927 freight terminal on Ruiz Street was close to the heart of the railroad district's activity. The Katy's freight terminal was also contemporaneous with the expansion of other railroads in Houston. In 1926, the Southern Pacific lines announced the construction of a new million-dollar freight terminal in the city, and the Texas and New Orleans Railroad opened its Grand Central Station in 1934 on the site of the old Houston and Texas Central Depot. Freight tonnage continued to grow in Houston through the mid-1920s, and appears to have stabilized at between 6 and 7 million tons of carload freight received and forwarded in Houston around 1925. Houston freight figures dropped off during the Depression and did not reach the pre-Depression figure of 6 million tons again until 1937. By 1942, the figure had grown to over 10 million tons, and continued to grow until many of Houston's railroads decided that their downtown freight facilities were too small and outmoded to handle the amount of freight passing through the city. By the mid-1950s, the Katy, as well as other Houston railroads, had constructed outlying freight facilities. The Ruiz Street facility was leased out and slowly began its decline as a significant part of the Katy system. The Katy itself began a precipitous fall in the late 1950s, mounting up phenomenal losses year after year. By 1958, the Katy ceased its Houston passenger service. Not long afterwards, the Katy was swallowed up by the Missouri Pacific corporation, and passed out of existence.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The M-K-T Freight Terminal is an example of railroad freight stations with subtle Spanish Colonial Revival ornamental references built by the Katy (which prided itself on being the railroad of the Southwest) in the 1920s.

2. Condition of fabric: Poor. The building was remodelled by various tenants after it was abandoned by the Katy in the mid-1950s; it has been vacant for approximately one year, during which time it has been inhabited by vagrants, stripped of many of its ornamental features, and subject to extreme vandalism inside and out.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story office building at the south end of the terminal complex is 82'-8" wide x 40'-0" deep along Ruiz Street and 81'-4" wide x 49'-8" deep along McKee Street. The one-story dock section along McKee Street immediately north of the two-story office building is 510'-8" long x 50'-0" deep, containing 68 8-foot wide docking bays. To the north of the one-story dock section is a 97'-4" long x 58'-0" wide open platform. The principal facade (facing southwest, fronting on Ruiz Street) is four bays wide with a recessed doorway in the third bay from the left. (See site sketch, Figure 3).

2. Foundations: Both the two-story office building and the one-story warehouse dock section rest on a concrete foundation.

3. Walls: The walls are constructed of cast-in-place concrete framing with brick infill. The bricks are laid in a three-course variation of Flemish bond, with two courses of running bond and a course of alternating headers and stretchers. Along the bottom of each bay, there is one course of bricks laid vertically. The bays are divided by flat cast concrete pilasters with rounded chamfers, ornamented with a flat terra cotta tile diamond-shaped medallion at the roofline, and rise above the flat roof as corbelled battlements. On the principal (southwest) facade, the first and second stories are separated by a flat cast concrete belt course, which forms the top of the bay openings on all but the entry bay. A second classically-influenced cast concrete belt course runs along the top of the second-story bays across the entire facade. The principal entryway is framed in cast concrete with a flat arch modified by ornamental flat scrolling at the corners and a prominent ornamental keystone. The doorway is framed by a flat cast concrete entablature which contains the inscription "M-K-T Lines." Immediately above the doorway is a four-light rectangular metal casement window framed with ornamental volutes at the bottom, crossettes at the top corners and an ornamental keystone. On either side of the cast concrete entryway is a rectangular three-light lantern window opening covered with ornamental metal grating. The roofline is capped by a narrow, classically-influenced concrete coping.

The west (McKee Street) facade of the two-story office building is also four bays wide, with the same pattern of brick infill, the same flat cast concrete pilasters with corbelled battlements and ornamental terra cotta tile diamond-shaped medallions separating the bays, the same crown-

moulded cast concrete belt course at the top of the second story window openings, and the same classically-influenced cast concrete coping at the roofline. In opposition to the southwest facade, however, the west facade contains dock openings on the first story, a classically-influenced cast concrete belt course above the dock openings and rectangular three-light transoms above the first-story belt course. Anchor plates to hold a metal awning are embedded in the brick and the concrete pilasters just above the transoms.

The remainder of the terminal complex along McKee Street consists of 68 open docks in a one-story extension north of the two-story office building. The entire dock section of the building is cast concrete with no exposed brick. Above each docking bay is a rectangular six-light transom. A flat metal awning just below the transoms is suspended from metal anchor plates in between each dock.

4. Structural systems, framing: Cast concrete framing with brick infill. The roof is composed of flat bituminous-impregnated felts covered by gravel. The roof slopes down from west to east. Scuppers penetrate the east parapet wall. The floor is reinforced concrete.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The principal doorway is recessed behind a large cast concrete entablature with modified flat arch. The door is single-leaf, steel, hinged on the left. It is capped by a four-light rectangular transom and flanked by eight-light rectangular sidelights with a rectangular four-light panel at the level of the transom. Beneath the right sidelight, there is a mail opening. As of February 9, 1993, the door to the building had been broken down and steel gates had been placed in the arched entryway to keep out vagrants and vandals.

On the McKee Street side of the building, the first floor of the office building and the entire warehouse section contains open dock bays. Very few of the bays still contain any type of door; the ones that do remain are rolling metal garage-type doors.

b. Windows: The principal (southwest) facade contains large metal-framed industrial-type windows in three divisions of sixteen lights each in the bays on either side of the entryway on the first floor. The first bay (at the far left of the facade) contains a smaller version of the window configuration with three divisions of twelve lights each. Each window has a concrete sill. On the second floor, the three bays other than that containing the entryway have one-over-one double-hung sash windows in groups of three. Above the entryway, there is a paired rectangular four-light metal casement window that reaches from the top of the entryway entablature to the second story belt course.

On the west facade along McKee Street, each bay in the office building contains one-over-one double-hung sash windows in groups of three on the second story. There are no windows on the first story in the office building or in the dock section.

6. Roof: The flat roof is composed of built-up tar and gravel.

C. Description of Interior:

1. The original floor plan remains intact; however, the office areas of the two-story section of the terminal complex have been extensively remodeled over time. The interior of the building is in very poor condition, with broken walls, broken mouldings, and fallen ceilings throughout.

2. Flooring: None of the original flooring remains in the building. What is left is either exposed concrete, or covered in simulated wood vinyl tiles. There is a modern-appearing wood parquet floor in the main room of the second floor; however, it is doubtful if this was original to the building.

3. Wall and ceiling finish: No information exists concerning the original appointments to the Katy offices in the building. The vestibule and principal public room of the first floor, as well as the stairwell are all clad in glazed brick: the walls are a deep amber, while the doors and service counter openings are framed in rust brown. The office rooms of the building are finished with plaster. The warehouse section of the building is finished with concrete.

4. There is a metal three-turn staircase ornamented with metal rosettes along the closed stringer and a panelled newel post with pyramidal cap.

D. Site: The building faces southwest towards downtown Houston in an area historically dominated by the railroad and warehousing industries.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Measured Drawings: Measured drawings completed during the summer of 1991 by the Texas Department of Transportation and the University of Texas at Austin are on file with the Texas Historical Commission, Austin.

B. Bibliography:

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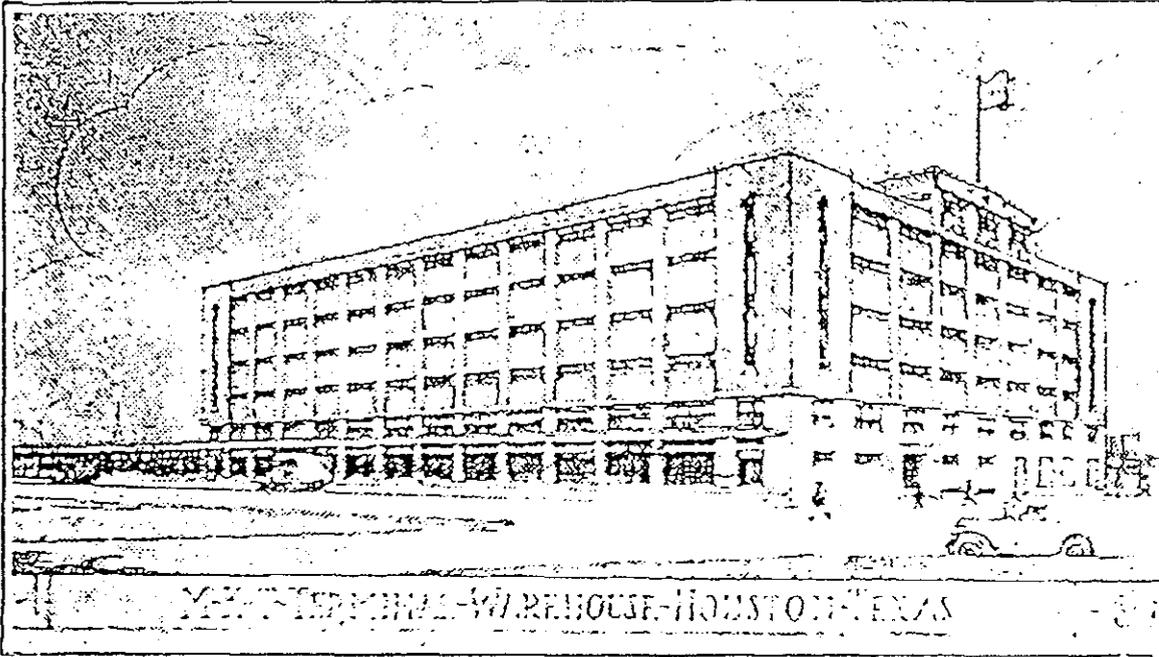
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#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared by Steve Sadowsky, cultural resources administrator for the Texas Department of Transportation in March 1993 as partial satisfaction of the terms of a Memorandum of Agreement entered into between the Texas Department of Transportation, the Texas State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in August 1988. Ann Irwin, of the Texas Department of Transportation, supervised and edited the preparation of this report. Large-format photographs were taken by Texas Department of Transportation personnel Thomas P. Eisenhour, in October 1992, and R. Milton Bell, in February 1993.



FIGURE 1  
1930 American Automobile Association Map of Houston, Texas (detail)



## NEW M. K. & T. TERMINAL WAREHOUSE

Source: "Terminal to be Erected This Year"  
Houston magazine  
May, 1926  
Page 51.

FIGURE 2  
Proposed M.K. & T. Terminal Warehouse (never built)

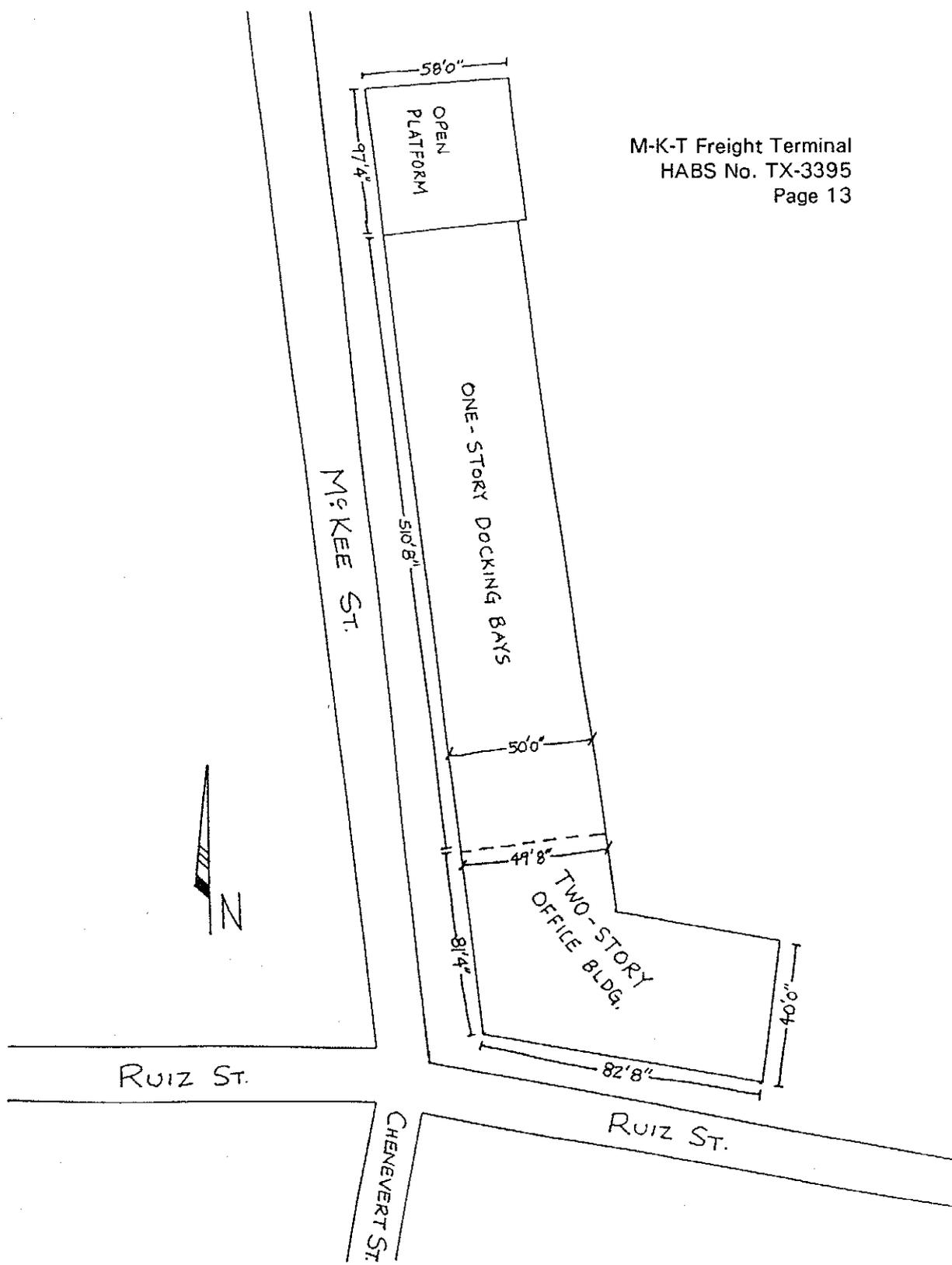


FIGURE 3  
Layout of Building

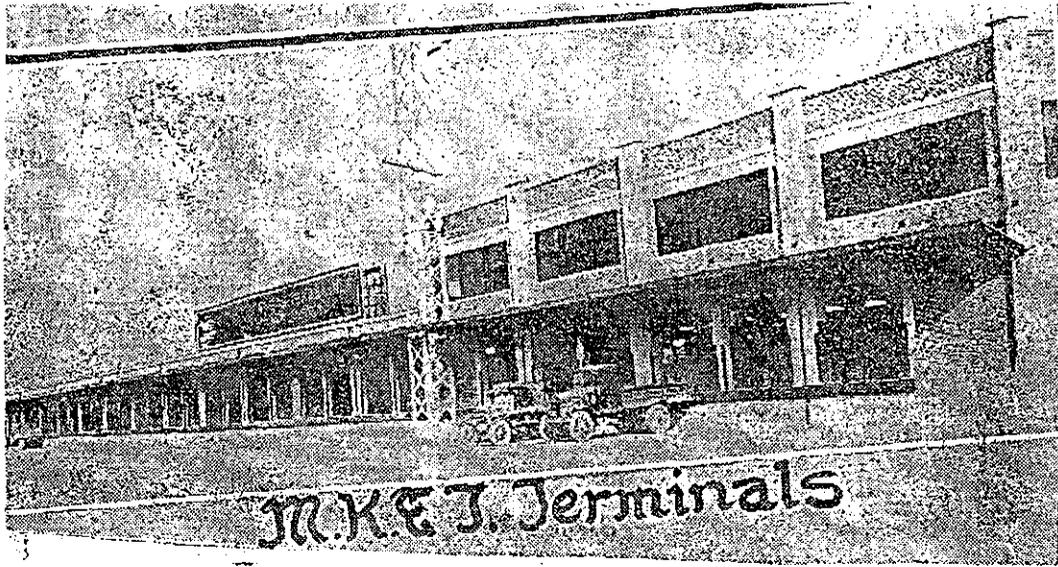
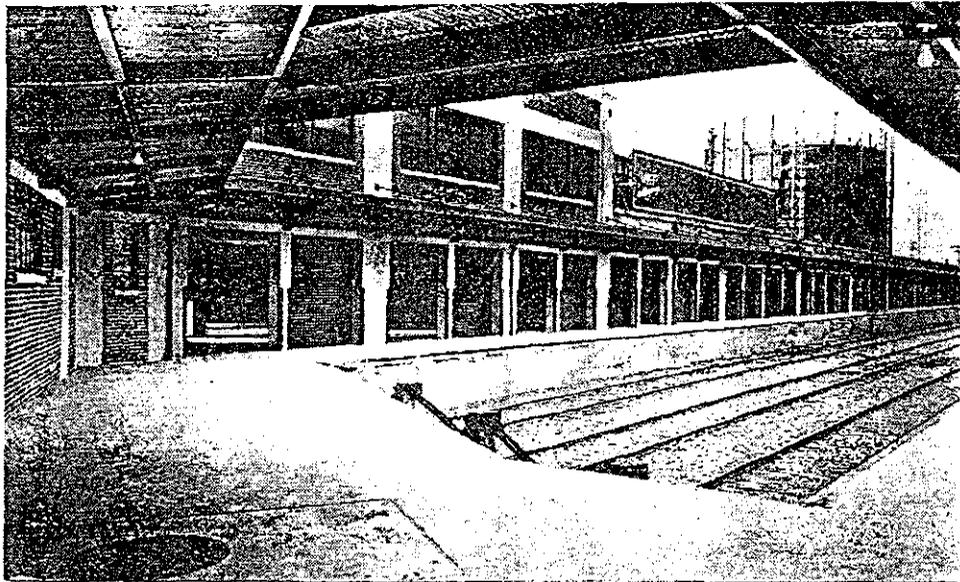


FIGURE 4  
EARLY VIEW OF FREIGHT TERMINAL (Date unknown)  
(Courtesy of the Houston Public Library)



M-K-T. FREIGHT STATION IN HOUSTON  
Facilities such as this Houston freight house serve shippers on the Katy.

FIGURE 5  
TRACKSIDE VIEW OF DOCKING BAYS, ca. 1948  
(Source: Houston, July, 1948)