

**United States Department of Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name TOPS Club Inc.
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 4575 South 5th Street N/A **not for publication**
city or town Milwaukee N/A **vicinity**
state Wisconsin **code** WI **county** Milwaukee **code** 079 **zip code** 53207

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State Historic Preservation Office - Wisconsin

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

 entered in the National Register.

 See continuation sheet.

 determined eligible for the National Register.

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the National Register.

 See continuation sheet.

 removed from the National Register.

 other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

 private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

 building(s)
 district
 structure
 site
 object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
1	0 buildings
0	1 sites
0	0 structures
0	0 objects
1	1 total

Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources

previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/organizational

INDUSTRY/communications facility/warehouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/organizational

INDUSTRY/warehouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Concrete

Walls Brick

Roof Asphalt

Other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Health/Medicine _____
 Social History _____

Period of Significance

1965-1979 _____

Significant Dates

N/A _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Baudhuin and Associates, Engineers _____

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

TOPS Club Inc.
Name of Property

Milwaukee
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State Agency
 - Federal Agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Wisconsin Historical Society, TOPS Club Archives

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.31 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	16N 425180 4756864	3	
	Zone Easting Northing		Zone Easting Northing
2		4	
	Zone Easting Northing		Zone Easting Northing

See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Rowan Davidson, Associate AIA	date	August 16, 2021
organization	Legacy Architecture, Inc.	telephone	(920) 783-6303
street & number	605 Erie Avenue, Suite 101	zip code	53081
city or town	Sheboygan	state	WI

TOPS Club Inc.
Name of Property

Milwaukee
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

- Maps** A USGS map (7.5 or 15-minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
- Photographs** Representative black and white photographs of the property.
- Additional Items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	TOPS Club Inc.	date	August 16, 2021
organization		telephone	(414) 482-4620
street & number	4575 South 5th Street	zip code	53207
city or town	Milwaukee	state	WI

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering, and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 7 Page 1

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

Narrative Description

The TOPS Club Inc. headquarters building is a Contemporary style office and warehouse facility constructed for the non-profit weight-loss organization in 1965. The two-story brick and concrete building, designed and engineered by Baudhuin and Associates, features vertical panels and windows spaced evenly with brick walls on the exterior. The rear warehouse sections are painted concrete block, and the interior is generally a modern office space and production floor, remodeled with an addition in 1969 and a renovation in 1979. The building reflects common office design trends of the 1960s with its organization of more public office spaces in front and production and warehouse functions behind.

TOPS, established as “Take Off Pounds Sensibly” in 1948, has been one of the most significant dieting organizations in the nation while influencing other dieting methods and trends, self-help social groups, medical research into obesity, and genetic aspects of metabolism and attracting membership around the world. Led by founder Esther Manz, the group began as a means of support among housewives trying to lose weight. It grew rapidly with a focus on group organizations, commonsense and scientifically based dieting advice, and subscription-based affordable literature. By the late 1950s, the non-profit organization had members in every state in the country and had spread to other nations, eventually reaching a peak membership of over 300,000, women and men. While the organization did not possess as many members as some of the diet groups that became popular during the 1960s, its influence has arguably been greater in the creation of subsequent diet methods. In 1965, TOPS constructed a headquarters and publishing building on the south side of Milwaukee, where the organization had been established. This facility has remained the primary office and distribution point of the group. By the late 1960s, TOPS began funding and arranging for members to participate in medical research trials that would lead to a better understanding of obesity as a disease, the genetic nature of metabolism, and the simple math of caloric intake for dieters. The TOPS diet has not explicitly told its members what to eat, but rather how to eat healthily and track their progress with a self-help ethos supported by other members, unlike many of the other post-war popular dieting plans. The TOPS headquarters building has significance from its date of construction in 1965, to 1979, when the last remodeling effort and expansion were completed and when TOPS reached its approximate peak in membership. The building is the only remaining resource associated with the organization.

Located at the southern edge of the City of Milwaukee, near General Mitchell International Airport, at 4575 South 5th Street, the setting of the TOPS building is suburban, surrounded by other manufacturing and warehouse facilities, contemporary hotels, and a nearby ranch-style residential neighborhood. The building maintains a high degree of architectural integrity on its exterior, which appears much the same as it did when it was constructed. The exceptions are the replaced windows and decorative tile panels that no longer match the originals but have been replaced in the same

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TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

openings and spandrel areas. The large rear addition falls deliberately within the period of significance of the property from 1965 to 1979. The interior spaces have experienced more changes with altered floor plans and changed finishes; however, the basic arrangement of office spaces, both private and open, and warehouse and printing rooms remains the same as it did when constructed.

Site and Setting

The southern edge of the City of Milwaukee, where the TOPS building is located, is a nearly flat landscape divided by a gridded street pattern, highways, and open fields of the nearby airport. The expansion of General Mitchell International Airport, the introduction of Interstate 94, and the development of ranch neighborhoods all during the 1950s and 1960s, meant that most of the surrounding built environment of the area dates from the period of significance with occasional more recent commercial and hotel construction. The TOPS building is located on a single parcel associated with the address 4575 South 5th Street in the City of Milwaukee. The parcel was subdivided and zoned as an industrial/commercial property in the 1960s when it was purchased and developed by TOPS Club Inc. in 1965, the only owners of the property in its history. The building is nestled along the south property line.

To the immediate south of the building is another warehouse/office type building of a similar age, and the two buildings nearly abut each other. To the immediate north is a parking lot, constructed at the same time as the original TOPS headquarters building and repaved repeatedly since and the Wilson Park Creek, a storm water drainage canal leading from the airport to the Kinnickinnic River to the northwest. Beyond the creek to the northeast is a largely residential neighborhood of ranch houses known as the Town of Lake or Tippecanoe.

To the south of TOPS, the building is close to West Layton Avenue, a major east-west divided thoroughfare lined with commercial buildings, hotels, and warehouses due to its proximity to the airfield located to the southeast. surface parking lots and loading docks wrap around the east and north sides of the site. To the east is another contemporary hotel. There is a large open space to the west of the building. This memorial garden is on the TOPS property and was constructed with winding paths, plantings, and resting places in the year 2000 and is considered a non-contributing site resource.

Building Description

Exterior

The primary two-story façade faces South 5th Street to the east. Most of the exterior is a dark brown brick in a common bond and fibrous spandrel panels. The asymmetric façade features a main entry

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TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

and lobby at the north end. This lobby has three equal bays. The two bays to the north have large fixed historic aluminum windows on a low brick bulkhead with a small brick planter. The bay to the south has a pair of historic aluminum doors at grade. The bays are divided by brick piers that protrude like pilasters but lack decoration in keeping with the contemporary modern style. A two-story space on the interior, the entry lobby also has a metal canopy that extends approximately three feet outward from the main entry doors and windows and wraps around the lobby space to the north and south. Above the canopy, the three bays of the lobby continue with the same brick piers, a set of three large fixed historic aluminum windows, and fibrous panel parapet above the windows. The exterior wall is capped with a metal coping.

To the south of the lobby space, the east façade steps back. On the south side of the lobby is a set of three bays, broken horizontally by the wrapping metal canopy. At the first-floor level, there are three fixed aluminum windows on a low bulkhead of fibrous panels. The second floor also has three fixed aluminum windows with fibrous panels above. The window bays are spaced evenly and divided by dark brown brick. This spacing and arrangement of fenestration, panels, and brick in a rhythmic set of bays are continued across the public facades of the building.

The remainder of the east façade to the south of the entry is broken into four bays with one fixed aluminum window at each floor level with the spandrel areas finished with a fibrous panel. Dividing the equal bays is the same brick found elsewhere and there is a date stone at the southernmost brick wall with the date "A.D. 1965" on it.

The south façade is approximately six feet north of the neighboring commercial/industrial building and is thus more utilitarian. The brown-colored brick found elsewhere on the building wraps around the corner from the east façade and extends back approximately forty feet to the west where the interior functions also change from office space to warehouse. There are three fixed aluminum windows, smaller than found elsewhere at each floor level spaced evenly in the brick portion of the south façade. Moving further west, the exterior wall switches to a painted concrete block. There are five similar windows at each floor level spaced across the concrete block wall. The height of the building increases by another floor at the western end of the south façade with the warehouse expansion completed in 1969. The exterior of this addition is entirely painted concrete block. There are four windows, also fixed aluminum with simple concrete sills, two at the first-floor level and two at the second on this section of the south façade. A concrete chimney extends up from just west of center of the façade.

Similarly, the west or rear façade of the warehouse addition is a painted concrete block. There are three windows, one at the first-floor level and two at the second, that are fixed aluminum with simple concrete sills. There are no decorative features, and the exterior wall extends up to a metal-capped low

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parapet, a metal railing above, concealing the flat asphalt roof beyond.

The north façade is a mix of the eastern end front office space architecture and the utilitarian rear warehouse spaces to the west. The 1969 rear warehouse addition at the western end of the façade is significantly taller than the rest of the building, but also has the same brick exterior. From west to east along the façade, there is a recessed side entry with an aluminum storefront system and a narrow slit fixed aluminum window directly above. There is a high loading dock and a pair of small windows, one on each floor and the lower one has been replaced with a glass block. The rear addition has the same metal railing as the western façade. The rear addition extends up an additional story above the front section of the building and has a pair of aluminum windows in an otherwise undecorated second-floor east façade. The north façade continues with a pair of wide overhead garage doors and another loading dock. The side of the warehouse that faces east has a single large aluminum window in the center at the second-floor level. Above and below the window is a continuation of the fibrous spandrel panels found elsewhere. The first bay of the eastern end front office space, wider than the others on the office section is a first-floor bump-out side-entry. This entry has a pair of aluminum doors. Above and behind the bump-out is a fixed pair of historic aluminum windows that align with the other windows along the façade and a fibrous spandrel panel above. There are eight similar bays along the office section of the north façade, each with a fixed aluminum window and spandrel panel, at each floor level. The window bays are divided by the same brick exterior walls found elsewhere and the office section terminates with a metal coping. Like the east façade, the lobby is divided into three bays, each with fixed aluminum windows spanning both floor levels, uninterrupted by spandrel panels seen elsewhere on the building. These panels replaced the historic glazed tile finish, likely in 1979.

Interior

The lobby space, serving as the public reception area of the building, has significantly more architectural detail than found elsewhere on the interior. This space has patterned carpet, a planting bed at the front windows, wood paneling and exposed brick walls, frosted glass at the second-floor interior windows, and a steel split-level stairway with wood railings. The lower level of the office spaces has different carpeting, cove base, and painted drywall throughout with an acoustic panel ceiling and wood doors with brass-colored hardware. These finishes are typical throughout the basement that served as office space, storage, an accounting department, locker rooms, a lunchroom, and a board room. The only exceptions are the lunchroom, which also has a galley kitchen and linoleum floors, and the board room, which features a stone fireplace and different carpeting. The first floor above is similar with a central open office area and enclosed offices and other rooms at the periphery. The floors are generally carpeted, walls are painted drywall, the doors and hardware are historic, and the ceiling is acoustic tiles. The executive suite has a stone fireplace, slate hearth flush with the floor, a different carpet, and built-in cabinets and shelves.

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The rear warehouse and printing facilities of the original 1965 building are noticeably different in their interior finishes from the office space. On both the basement and first floor levels, the floors are stained and sealed concrete, the walls are painted concrete block, and the ceiling is a mix of exposed structural systems and dropped acoustic panels. The basement level contained storage areas, elevator equipment, heating and cooling, and telephone rooms, while the first floor was the location of the bindery, toilets, loading docks, shipping, and garages. It appears, since they are exposed, that the lighting, plumbing, and heating and ventilation systems have all been updated since the period of significance. The interior stairs are steel with rubber topping, and the floors in the stairwells and toilets are tiled linoleum. Most of the metal doors and hardware are historic.

The interior of the 1969 addition is like the rest of the building in its finishes and functions. The lower basement level has concrete floors, concrete block walls, and an exposed ceiling structure. Functions include storage and maintenance rooms. The first floor also has concrete floors, concrete block walls, and exposed ceiling structure and accommodates the print shop and loading dock. The second floor is office space and has a linoleum tile floor in the corridors and communal spaces and carpet in the offices and other rooms. The walls are painted drywall, and the ceiling is composed of a dropped acoustic tile in the lunchrooms, additional department offices, library, lounges, display room, and darkroom. While some interior finishes have been replaced or repaired, and some walls have moved, the basic historic layout remains the same in the interior office spaces, and the area of more architectural detail and investment from the period of significance during the 1960s and 1970s remain.

Integrity

The TOPS Club Inc. headquarters building, located at 4575 South 5th Street in Milwaukee, maintains its historic architectural integrity. Many of the finishes that are original to the 1965 construction of the building, the 1969 warehouse addition, and the 1979 renovations are still visible on the exterior and interior of the building. The most significant change to the exterior of the building since its construction is the replacement of the ceramic spandrel tile panels on the office section of the 1965 building. The original sections between the first and second floor windows in slightly recessed bays had glazed tiles appropriate to the period of construction. These were replaced with Cementous finish likely in 1979. Likewise, the office windows on the main façade have also been replaced with similar metal frame windows, likely in 1979 given the age of the windows in place. On the interior, the warehouse spaces of the original 1965 building on both floors were reconfigured in 1969 to accommodate the addition. Further changes to the wall locations in this part of the building have been made. Interior finishes, in particular carpeting, lighting, and drop ceiling panels, have also been replaced. However, the original wall materials, casework, floor layout, circulation, and historic use all remain on the interior. The present owner, TOPS Club Inc., is the historic owner as well and intends to maintain the historic appearance of the building to the period of significance from 1965 to 1979 to

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TOPS Club Inc.
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honor the organization's history by including the entirety of the physical plant of publication, printing, and distribution spaces associated with the TOPS organization. The building will continue to serve as office space and a distribution warehouse for printed materials.

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Section 8 Page 1

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

Statement of Significance

TOPS Club Inc., located at 4575 South 5th Street on the south side of the City of Milwaukee, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for its national significance under Criteria A for the history of Health and Medicine and Social Science as one of the most influential dieting organizations in the nation, its pioneering alignment with the medical and scientific community in understanding obesity, and as an inspiration to other group-supported self-help organizations. The international non-profit organization's main building, occupied solely by the company since its construction in 1965, consists of TOPS headquarters, offices, publishing and printing departments, and shipping and warehousing of its publications. TOPS was founded by Esther Manz and a few friends in 1948 to support each other's goals in losing weight. From this humble beginning, it grew rapidly through the 1950s and 1960s with members in every state and across the world, receiving TOPS publications and guides and taking part in local meetings to support other members in their weight-loss goals, reaching a peak of over 300,000 members. The organization also aligned itself with the medical community and only shared clinically sound information while promoting obesity research through funding and patient trials since the 1970s, influencing contemporary medical understanding of weight control. TOPS did not tell its members what to eat, but only shared successful and healthy methods while providing a public support system making it distinct from other popular post-war dieting organizations and trends. The property's significance begins when the building was constructed for the organization in 1965 and continues to 1979 when the organization reached its peak membership. It remains the only extant resource associated with the influential and historic diet organization and maintains a high degree of architectural integrity.

Land Acknowledgement

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral homeland of American Indians for millennia, including the Menominee and Ho-Chunk tribes. From as early as the 17th century, inter-tribal conflict, tribal settlement changes, Euro-American exploration, and settlement, and ensuing military campaigns all had the effect of repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of a new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin; others may not, but numerous count Wisconsin as home: Brotherton, Dakota, Fox/Meskwaki, Ho-Chunk, Kickapoo, Mascoutens, Menominee, Miami, Munsee, Odawa, Ojibwa, Oneida, Potawatomi, Stockbridge, Sauk, and Wyandot tribes. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians and since 1850 by the Potawatomi tribe.

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Section 8 Page 2

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

Historic Context

Dieting, if not body-image concerns, can be dated back to at least the ancient Greeks, who held the belief that external health and internal health were essentially equal, meaning that if you were physically fit, not sickly, and of lean or moderate weight for your size, you were also mentally able and balanced. If you were considered overweight, it reflected some mental or spiritual disease. Hippocrates, the well-known Greek physician of around 400 B.C., believed that overweight people suffered from unhealthy sleep, aches and pains, constipation, and early death. His recommendation was intense exercise and vomiting. The Greeks introduced the gymnasium and beauty contests, and the Romans later followed along similar lines. Getting fit is over two thousand years old in the western tradition. The Greek and Roman ideal were, however, far more balanced in body type than the incredibly thin and slender model of the present.¹

During the early Christian period, the belief that the physical body was the enemy of the soul was commonplace. St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Basil occasionally starved themselves to achieve a state of hallucination and spirituality, an “anorexia mirabilis.” By 600 A.D., Pope Gregory expanded the church’s definition of the sin of gluttony to include eagerly eating, picky eating, and simply enjoying it.²

The first diet book was published in 1558. Its author, Luigi Cornaro, recounts how he had become extremely overweight and unhappy and adopted a diet of 12 ounces of food and 14 ounces of wine a day. He lived a long life on a diet of egg yolks and red wine, and his book became widely popular. In 1614, Giacomo Castelvetro published *The Fruits, Herbs, and Vegetables of Italy*, which criticized the consumption of sugar and meat and promoted the eating of fresh vegetables and oils. By the early 1700s, other popular dieting books such as George Cheyne’s *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body* and Thomas Short’s *The Causes and Effects of Corpulence*, addressed the causes of becoming overweight, moral concerns, and how to devise a diet to lose weight.³

The nineteenth century saw the beginnings of modern dieting. Both masculine and feminine beauty ideals began to move towards thin and muscular, and moral concerns about eating became common during the Victorian era. Lord Byron adopted a diet of apple cider vinegar in combination with meals to lose weight that became popular, and women routinely measured their corseted waists in competition. Anorexia, the use of laxatives, and conscious exercise became common amongst the social and cultural elites of the period. The nineteenth century introduced the first low-carb diet book, diet diaries, and scientific research on metabolism. Both Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin and William

¹ Foxcroft, Louise. *Calories & Corsets: a history of dieting over 2,000 years*. London, Profile Books, 2011.

² Gilman, Sander L. *Diets, and dieting: a cultural encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

³ Foxcroft, Louise. *Calories & Corsets: a history of dieting over 2,000 years*.

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TOPS Club Inc.
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Banting introduced popular low-carbohydrate diets in the 1860s in France and Britain, respectively. Sylvester Graham, the inventor of the graham cracker, taught that fat is bad for one's health and even one's morals. He introduced group health retreats and vegetarianism to the mainstream of American culture. Horace Fletcher introduced a popular diet method at the turn of the century that involved eating as much as you like with the caveat that you must chew each bite a minimum of one hundred times before swallowing or spitting out the remnants. This chewing craze introduced "munching parties" where people stood around masticating.⁴

Dr. Lulu Hunt Peters was possibly the first person to actively count calories and advise others to do the same to lose weight. Her 1918 book *Dieting and Health: With Key to the Calories* sold over two million copies and introduced methods to estimate the number of calories in food, suggesting a diet of 1,200 calories a day for women and 1,800 for men. In 1920, Wilbur Olin Atwater was the first to successfully calculate metabolic rates and the number of calories burned in given activities. Both developments altered the way people dieted in the 1920s with a focus on caloric intake and treating bodily functions in a machine-like way, an approach that has arguably been in favor since.⁵

The 1920s fashion of a slim and boyish look for women encouraged many to spend money, for the first time in large numbers, on diets, purchasing bathroom scales, vitamins, massages, thyroid extracts, sweat baths, chewing gum, and all kinds of dubious pills, widely available in the United States for the first time. Weight loss products and methods were commonly advertised. Many of these were dangerous, including drugs laced with iodine, arsenic, and dinitrophenol, which in some cases could cause death. Packaged cigarettes, developed on a large scale in Europe and America during the First World War, made smoking even more popular and socially acceptable for women and people from all backgrounds. The fact that smoking tobacco is an appetite suppressant helped its growing popularity as doctors frequently recommended smoking for all kinds of ailments, including as a prescription to lose weight. The growing popularity of the film industry only encouraged not only smoking but a thin body image for women during the 1920s and 1930s.⁶

During the 1930s, dieting concerns became increasingly popular and acceptable among men as well. Bodybuilding became more common, and kits designed to aid men and boys in forming muscle and losing weight sold millions. In 1936, Jack LaLanne opened the first health club in Oakland, California, and designed some of the first modern exercise equipment and machines. Despite initial opposition from the medical field, fitness clubs and resistance training machines have steadily grown in

⁴ Carson, Gerald. *Cornflake crusade*. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1957.

⁵ MacLevy, Monty, and Walter Hollis Eddy. *Pounds off! with Dr. Eddy's reducing diet*. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1942; and Sadler, William Samuel, and Lena K. Sadler. *Diets and food values: how to reduce and how to gain*. Chicago: The Health Press, 1930.

⁶ Bijlefeld, Marjolijhjn. *Encyclopedia of diet fads*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003.

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TOPS Club Inc.
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popularity.⁷

Women's magazines during the 1940s featured diets, exercise routines, and discussed the outrageous starvation techniques and fad diets of the "stars" in Hollywood. In 1942, Metropolitan Life Insurance created the first age, height, and weight tables that showed ideal weights for men and women for actuarial purposes. The Food and Drug Administration issued the first guidelines for nutrition in 1943, recommending that people eat food from six groups: vegetables and greens, potatoes and fruits, dairy, meat, bread and cereals, and butter and margarine. These guidelines informed the medical community, school lunches, assistance programs, and agricultural policy in the United States. In 1948, Esther Manz and associates created a group called TOPS, or 'Take Off Pounds Sensibly,' in Milwaukee. The group did not follow a strict diet plan but rather encouraged discussion and mutual support with the background of medical advice regarding caloric consumption and balanced diets. The National Obesity Society was formed by a group of doctors in 1949 to study the causes and consequences of obesity.⁸

In 1950, a British study had two groups of people overeat for over a week. The lighter people in the study had a metabolism that raised when they overate; the overweight people did not, leading the scientists to conclude that dieting was largely pointless and that only the fat content of food mattered. The general belief among doctors during the period was that high-fat diets could also cause heart disease. The market responded with low-fat versions of processed and dairy food products. In 1952, the Center for Disease Control began maintaining records of obesity in the United States for the first time. Over the 1950s, they found that the number of overweight and obese people rose from 43% to 50% by 1960.

The main approach during the 1950s and 1960s was to simply count calories. Ancel Keys, a leading nutritionist of the period, found that very low-calorie intake may do psychological and physical damage to a patient. He proceeded to study diets from around the world settling on the Mediterranean diet as the healthiest and convinced nutritionists a similar low-fat diet was best. In 1960, Overeaters' Anonymous was formed using the 12-step program based on Alcoholics Anonymous to combat food addictions. Similarly, self-help approaches like TOPS grew in popularity, and elsewhere groups like Weight Watchers, founded by Jean Nidetch in 1963, began as a group of friends that supported one another. Weight Watchers used a diet for cardiac patients from the New York Department of Public Health and grew rapidly to have over 1.5 million members presently. Low-calorie and low-fat diets

⁷ Segrave, Kerry. *Obesity in America, 1850-1939: a history of social attitudes and treatment*. Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Co., c2008.

⁸ Dorfman, Wilfred, and Doris Johnson. *Overweight is curable*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1948; and Fishbein, Morris, ed. *Reducing; the complete guide to safe, scientific weight control. (Your weight and how to control it)*. Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1951.

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remained popular until the 1970s and are the most practiced to the present. Artificial sweeteners were introduced to make widespread low-calorie foods palatable, and fatty foods, specifically meat and seafood, were avoided. Furthermore, diet pills were developed that contained amphetamines and dinitrophenol to increase a patient's metabolic rate. Millions of Americans took pills and injections that contained methamphetamines, caffeine, hormones, and vitamins routinely by the 1970s to suppress appetite and boost metabolism with negative side effects such as strokes, addiction, nervous disorders, and heart attacks.⁹

Despite all the support groups, medical science, drugs, and people actively dieting, the number of Americans who were overweight or obese continued to climb during the 1970s to 54% by the end of the decade. Dr. Robert Atkins published *Dr. Atkins's Diet Revolution* in 1972 based on his weight-loss experiments. Controversial yet popular to the present, the diet allowed for high cholesterol and calorie diets by focusing on cutting carbohydrates instead. Weight-loss centers, where patients visited a counselor and purchased packaged meals such as The Diet Clinic and Nutrisystem, were both introduced in 1973. Slim-fast, a liquid meal-replacement shake, was established in 1977 and became the model for future food replacement drinks.¹⁰

While the percentage of people who were overweight barely changed between 1960 and 1990, the number of people classified as obese skyrocketed. By the 1980s, scientists primarily blamed suburban lifestyles, the reliance on cars, the popularity of eating out at restaurants, sugary soda, processed food, women returning to the workforce in larger numbers, and advertisements. Physical fitness was increasingly popular during the decade with millions of Americans picking up jogging, aerobics, and sports. Jane Fonda's *Workouts* and *Jazzercise* are just two examples of exercise books and recordings that were purchased by the millions.¹¹

By the 1990s, the number of Americans who were reportedly overweight or obese continued to rise rapidly. The United States government introduced the "food pyramid" in 1992. Essentially a chart of food recommendations, the pyramid advised 8-11 daily servings of grains, 3-4 servings of fruits and another 3-4 of vegetables, 2-3 servings of dairy, and another 2-3 of meat, with fats and oils on top implying they should be eaten sparingly, similar in ways to the descriptive approach of group dieting plans like the TOPS Club approach. In 1994, the Food and Drug Administration required that all packaged foods have labels providing nutritional information. The most popular diets of the decade

⁹ Frances, Evan. *Ladies' home journal family diet book*. New York: Macmillan, 1973; and Bumbalo, Young. "The self-help phenomenon". *The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 73, No. 9. 73 (9): 1588-91; 1973.

¹⁰ Levenstein, Harvey A. *Revolution at the table: the transformation of the American diet*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, republished 2003.

¹¹ Hayenga, Elizabeth Sharon. *Dieting through the decades: a comparative study of weight reduction in America as depicted in popular literature and books from 1940 to the late 1980s* (Thesis), University of Minnesota, 1988.

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included a re-introduction of the low-carbohydrate Atkins approach along with a host of meal plans and calorie counting methods. These trends largely continued into the twenty-first century.¹²

The soundness of commercial diets has varied widely; however, results presently indicate modest long-term weight loss with little variation depending on the brand or method. Comprehensive programs, with counseling, support systems, and calorie targeting, are more successful. A growing number of medical experts have begun questioning the value of dieting in the 2010s as the success rate with overweight patients is approximately five percent and often alters people's metabolism in unsustainable ways. Despite spending sixty-one billion dollars annually in 2018 on diet products, including books, subscriptions, pills, food adjuncts, and meals, 78% of Americans were overweight or obese according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention federal guidelines. With all this said, there is ample scientific evidence to support that there is such thing as a healthy weight and that overeating, and a lack of exercise can lead to an unhealthy weight. The accumulated results of decades of study appear to indicate that successful dieting for improved health typically relies on a combination of physical exercise and being conscious of the food one eats; this is amplified by the presence of a social support system that encourages changes in behavior. The example of TOPS, introduced in Milwaukee in the late 1940s and spreading in popularity in the following decades, is one such organized example.¹³

TOPS Club Inc.

Established in 1948, TOPS, an acronym for 'Take Off Pounds Sensibly,' is a non-profit charitable organization that assists people with their weight-loss dieting objectives through support groups and sponsors medical research about weight loss, gain, and obesity. Founded in Milwaukee by Esther Manz and others, the organization originally formed as a response to the needs of overweight and obese people to lose weight in a healthy manner using support groups. TOPS expanded its scope over time to encompass all manners of weight problems. Unusually, and perhaps uniquely, TOPS has never endorsed a specific dieting plan. Instead, the organization's publications, groups, and guidelines simply emphasize nutrition, exercise, motivation, behavior, and wellness education largely based on scientific medical facts.¹⁴

TOPS has typically relied on the food exchange system, a long-standing regimen created by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the American Diabetes Association, as a guide in their publications. In this system, food is grouped into six categories: starch, meat, fruit, vegetable, milk, and fat, and calories are counted in a ratio within each group. People subscribing to such a diet can

¹² Bundy, Beverly. *The century in food: America's fads and favorites*. Portland, OR: Collectors Press, 2002.

¹³ Yager, Susan. *The hundred-year diet: America's voracious appetite for losing weight*. New York: Rodale, 2010.

¹⁴ "History," Tops Club, Inc. website www.tops.org/tops/TOPS/History2.aspx

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pick what they eat if they follow an equal exchange. However, the main impetus of TOPS is the support system it provides people who are trying to lose weight. TOPS Club Chapter Guides set out a framework for local groups to follow with a point of order and bylaws. Each chapter would include scales, minutes, weight records, and accounts. TOPS Club is considered the ancestor of many of the more popular diet approaches since the 1950s, including Weight Watchers, which bears more than a passing resemblance to the TOPS approach and style.¹⁵

After a year, Esther Manz was traveling daily across Milwaukee carrying record books and a scale and hosting meetings. Neighbors, friends, and children all helped in managing the rapidly popular organization's mailing, printing, and accounting. Local chapters were established to hold meetings weekly. These meetings included a main session of discussion and a weight recording. TOPS members began by establishing a written weight goal in consultation with a medical professional and worked toward the goal. Awards were given out for achievements. Initially, it was difficult to keep up with the demand for information about TOPS, so publication was necessary. Once TOPS began producing printed material, the impetus to create more books, pamphlets, guides, and cards for its members only grew. The first issue of TOPS Club News, printed in 1949, consists of just three mimeographed pages.¹⁶

TOPS does not provide a diet plan, but rather a specific approach for its members. Members, from the mid-1950s to the present, received publications, activities, meeting invitations, fellowship, reference materials, and annual retreats and meetings. The publications include TOPS News, a bimonthly magazine for members first published in 1949, motivational pieces, books about obesity and healthy eating habits, nutrition monographs, pound exchange banks, calorie counters, and even songbooks. While most of this was printed in the past, a shift toward video and then online resources has progressed since the 1980s. TOPS also produces and distributes award items, such as charms, pins, and jewelry, for members who have succeeded in meeting their goals in some way.¹⁷

In 1951, TOPS introduced the first KOPS, a member who has reached their weight goal and can Keep Off Pounds Sensibly, indicating that members were staying with the program. On April 9, 1951, Esther Manz and the TOPS organization were featured in *LIFE* magazine, and, by the end of the year, the organization had over 6,000 members across every state. The *LIFE* article highlighted the organization's methods, such as a description of a typical TOPS meeting where members weighed in, sang songs, planned low-calorie meals, and discussed their successes and setbacks. TOPS was described as both supplying inspirations to other groups around the country while being "kind of a Fat

¹⁵ Knight, Bob, Richard W. Wollert, Leon H. Levy, Cynthia L. Frame, and Valerie P. Padgett. "Self-help groups: The members' perspectives". *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 8 (1): 53-65, 1980.

¹⁶ TOPS Club Inc. Headquarters, Milwaukee Museum, and company archives.

¹⁷ TOPS Club Inc. company archives.

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Ladies Non-Anonymous” based on the popular Alcoholics Anonymous and self-help movements. Members would use the buddy system while grocery shopping and reward each other with pins and stripes representing five-pound increments lost. The following year, TOPS was incorporated as a non-profit business. By 1953, TOPS had moved into its first office space on the south side of Milwaukee, which is now non-extant, and had rejected a million-dollar offer to buy the company. The first annual TOPS convention, held at the American Medical Association’s offices in Chicago, to place the same year, introducing International Recognition Days, the annual TOPS meeting for all members. International Recognition Days are an annual two-day event for TOPS members held in the United States or Canada. The recognition days are used in a similar way to the local chapter meetings with an emphasis on awards, education, and socialization. The first TOPS chapter in Canada was established in 1955, and European groups soon followed.¹⁸

National magazines and newspapers, such as *People*, the *New York Times*, *Magazine Digest*, *Better Homes*, *Family Circle*, and others, highlighted TOPS’ work frequently during the 1950s contributing to its rise in popularity. Men were included in TOPS beginning in 1957, and TOPS began sponsoring activities, like a bowling team, that were popular with its members. The organization had 21,660 members and 985 chapters by 1960, mostly in the United States, but with large representation in other English-speaking countries such as Canada in addition to Germany. Everyone worked for TOPS voluntarily until 1957, when Esther took on the full-time role of President, and the organization quickly had six full-time and four part-time employees, many of the original members and relations.¹⁹

At first, TOPS met at the non-extant Beulah Brinton recreation center along South Bay Street, not far from Esther Manz’s home at the time. However, the organization grew quickly and soon could no longer meet or conduct business in a public place. Instead, TOPS was primarily operated from Esther’s home by the end of 1948. In 1953, TOPS outgrew Esther’s house and moved into rented office space on the second floor of the non-extant Kinnickinnic Savings and Loan at South Kinnickinnic Avenue and East Lincoln Avenue in Milwaukee at 2306 S. Howell Avenue. Additional space was rented in the same location in 1957 to expand with six full-time staff and four part-time employees. The organization purchased its first printing press in 1955 and its first color press in 1961 and would become the largest printing shop outside of newspapers by volume in Wisconsin by the 1970s. The next location was an extant two-story brick contemporary office building at 3180 South 27th Street in Milwaukee in 1962. However, the same year TOPS began raising money for a permanent office and print shop, and the organization only remained in the space for three years.²⁰ In 1965, having quickly outgrown all their previous locations, TOPS began construction of a new

¹⁸ “History,” Tops Club, Inc. website.

¹⁹ “TOPS Memory Book” *TOPS News*, multiple years, volumes, and issues. 1960-1992; and TOPS Club Inc. company archives.

²⁰ Holtz, Carol (correspondence).

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headquarters building on the south side of Milwaukee. The new headquarters building was sited on a three-acre industrial parcel not far from the Town of Lake neighborhood, Manz's home, and General Mitchell International Airport off Layton Avenue on the south side of the city. The building was largely paid for by members, who donated money and purchased bricks in support of the weight-loss organization. Located at 4575 South 5th Street and completed in September of the same year, the new facility contained an executive suite, general offices, data processing, shipping and receiving, print shop, a bindery, accounting, the KOPS department, display rooms, darkroom, and a news department for the international non-profit organization. The headquarters building was designed and completed by the engineering firm of Baudhuin and Associates of Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin as a simple two-story modern office building attached to a warehouse, printing facility, and loading area behind it.²¹

By 1965, when TOPS moved into its contemporary purpose-built headquarters building, the organization had chapters in all fifty states. The TOPS Club Inc. Obesity and Metabolic Research Program was established as a branch of the organization in 1966, and, within the first five years, more than 200 TOPS members had participated in clinical studies in Milwaukee. TOPS donated \$250,000 to the Deaconess Hospital in Milwaukee, beginning a direct relationship with the medical research field that would later become the Obesity and Metabolic Research Program at the Medical College of Wisconsin and lead to later genome registries of TOPS members that have been used extensively since for genetic research into obesity and metabolism science. TOPS has been actively involved in the clinical study of obesity and related metabolic research, donating millions over the years to the Medical College of Wisconsin in support. The organization's ties to the medical field set it apart from other weight-loss organizations, which may draw on scientific evidence but rarely engage in the research.²²

Additions and alterations were planned for the growing organization by 1967, and the headquarters required more space for a printing press, a larger shipping department, and offices to manage the growing KOPS program. A three-story warehouse expansion was completed in 1969 at the rear of the building on the western side. The entire facility was extensively remodeled with new interior carpeting and ceilings in 1979, and interior spaces were reconfigured in the printing and distribution sections of the joined building. Little has changed since that date to the 48,000 square foot building apart from general maintenance. The Esther S. Manz Memorial Garden, consisting of contoured hills, winding gravel paths, stone walls, and plantings, is located behind the headquarters building and was added in the year 2000. The gardens replaced an empty lot also owned by TOPS at that time. The TOPS headquarters building presently serves the same purpose that it was constructed to serve.²³

²¹ Building Permit Records. On file at the City of Milwaukee Development Center; and TOPS Club Inc. company archives.

²² "TOPS Memory Book" *TOPS News*.

²³ "TOPS Memory Book" *TOPS News*.

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In 1969, TOPS had been featured in popular national magazines, such as *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Changing Times*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *McCall's*, and *Lady's Circle*, while also receiving over 7,000 annual inquiries from physicians regarding the program. TOPS membership peaked in 1969 with 11,195 chapters around the world and 300,864 active members. The organization also hosted annual motivational retreats for members that serve the same purposes as a prolonged meeting combined with a vacation; the first one was arranged in 1975 in Catalina Island off the California Coast for 59 members.²⁴ The primary distinction between TOPS and completing popular diet organization of the 1950s and 1960s was that TOPS was a system of behavior and support, and not a meal plan diet like Weight Watchers, Atkins, Jenny Craig, or Slim Fast that appeared on the scene and become popular from 1963 to the early 1980s. It is common for TOPS subscribers to try a variety of meal-based diets, so the two models are not necessarily in competition.

In 1984, the TOPS Center for Obesity and Metabolic Research was founded at the Medical College of Milwaukee in recognition of TOPS' research support based on ties between TOPS and the medical field in Wisconsin since 1965. The research program moved to the Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital in Milwaukee in 1985. The Center was established under the leadership of Dr. Ahmed Kissebah who headed the Endocrinology and Molecular Medicine department at the Medical College of Wisconsin. Since its formation, the Center has contributed to obesity research producing several important published studies on the subject including "Biology of Regional Body Fat Distribution: Relationship of two non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus." The Center published documents including guidelines for nutrition, fitness, and medical information and studies on evidence-based weight loss in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* and the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. Following these studies, weight gain and obesity are now considered major risk factors for co-morbidities such as cancer, diabetes, insulin resistance, and heart disease. By the late 1980s, membership and the number of chapters had remained steady.²⁵

Members of TOPS have participated in projects like the TOPS Obesity Genes Project, which was one of the largest obesity and metabolic syndrome studies in history that began in 1993 and continues to the present. Since Manz's retirement, ongoing studies supported by TOPS have included one of the largest family-based genetic cohorts included over 6,000 people in the Midwest of all ages, beginning in 1993. TOPS partnered in the Bias, Discrimination, and Obesity study of Yale University. The organization established the TOPS Achievement Award for scientists who have made major contributions to the field of obesity research in affiliation with The Obesity Society. TOPS members

²⁴ McCall, Raymond J., and Mary Anne Siderits. *Becoming a Graceful Loser: Psychological Factors in Weight Control*. Milwaukee, WI: TOPS Club Inc., 1977.

²⁵ Mitchell, Nia S.; L. Miriam Dickinson, Allison Kempe, and Adam G. Tsai. "Determining the Effectiveness of Taking Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS), a Nationally Available Nonprofit Weight Loss Program". *Obesity*, 19 (3): 568–573, 2011; and Gilman, Sander L. *Fat: a cultural history of obesity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2008.

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also participate in the National Weight Loss Registry, which is sponsored by the Brown Medical School. At present, TOPS has spent millions of dollars, and its members have given their time and experience in support of obesity research. Findings from TOPS-supported medical research have been published in over 140 papers and medical journals. An independent study published in the journal *Obesity* followed 42,500 members over three years and found TOPS works as well as commercial weight-loss programs at fewer costs and likely better long-term outcomes. TOPS and the Medical College of Wisconsin announced the discovery of two new genes that may influence obesity.²⁶

TOPS member numbers have declined steadily since the late 1980s due in a large part to the increase in competition from commercial weight-loss programs and perhaps because of the widespread use of the internet as a means of communication and information, making the community and print-based methods of TOPS less compelling to the public. Esther Manz retired in 1991, though she remained the chairman of the board. Presently, membership holds steadily at approximately 100,000 members, mostly in the United States and Canada. The frequently listed advantages of the TOPS method are the group support given regardless of what weight loss regimen is used, the abundance of printed resources and references, a basis in the advice of healthcare professionals, local meetings, and a lifetime of support. On the other hand, people who seek more structure and a prescriptive method have often found TOPS too loose. Likewise, regular involvement and attendance at meetings are fundamental to the approach and may be difficult.²⁷

It is not uncommon for TOPS members to simultaneously use diet plans like Atkins, Jenny Craig, Ornish, Slim Fast, Weight Watchers, and the Zone. A rare 2011 clinical trial comparing these diets, along with TOPS, found that the combination of a support system, such as TOPS, along with a dictated diet, tended to lead to the best results in the long term. Another study, conducted by the University of Colorado and published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, found that the peer volunteers keep costs low and have a longer-term efficacy. Weight loss often fluctuates with modern dieting techniques. People who renewed membership in self-help programs like TOPS, as the primary model, were far more successful.²⁸ TOPS has also become increasingly tied to underserved communities and socioeconomically disadvantaged people who may not have access to the expensive program and food plans that other dieting organizations and products provide, instead, a social self-help group has proven to often work best in such conditions.

TOPS membership has increasingly become an intervening action by local government, specifically rural ones, to address the health care needs of those who suffer from obesity-related diseases, such as

²⁶ "TOPS Memory Book" *TOPS News*; and TOPS Club Inc. company archives.

²⁷ TOPS Club Inc. company archives; and "Jenny Craig tops CR diet Ratings." *Consumer Reports*. May 2011.

²⁸ Kelly, David. "Study show non-profit, low-cost weight loss program has term results." *University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus*. Jun 3, 2015.

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state-sponsored actions in rural Illinois and Indiana from 2015 to 2018. In 2015, TOPS also opened a Nutrition and Obesity Research Center as a joint initiative with the Texas Biomedical Research Institute in San Antonio, Texas, and the Center for Precision Medicine at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, North Carolina as a program to continue studying the causes, health risks, and treatment of obesity through genetic research, all leading to the use of genetic mapping to better understand facets of obesity.²⁹

Esther Manz

Esther Adelia Barbara Shuland was born on October 22, 1907, on a farm near Lomira, Wisconsin. Within a few years, her family moved to Plymouth, Wisconsin. After high school, she attended the Wisconsin State Teachers College in Oshkosh and taught in a rural one-room school in Sheboygan County for two years after graduating in 1926. Esther married Gilbert Manz, also of Plymouth, in 1929 and remained in Sheboygan County until the early 1940s. The couple had four children in Plymouth and one more in Milwaukee. The Manz family moved to Milwaukee in 1942 and lived at 1448 E. Seeley Street until 1946. Gilbert worked at the Milwaukee Mill Forge and Machine company while Esther raised the children and worked briefly at a brewery in a writing and secretarial role. Esther soon began writing occasionally in the *Milwaukee Journal* 'Green Sheets,' working on human interest stories in the late 1940s. In 1946, the family moved to 517 E. Otjen Street on the south side of the city. The house is still extant and maintains decent integrity as a vinyl-sided vernacular cottage; however, the house was only utilized as the offices of TOPS Club Inc. for a few years and Esther's influence was through the organization that operated out of a collection of offices and meeting locations across the country and eventually a headquarters building on the south side of Milwaukee.³⁰

After Esther had her fifth child, she and a few friends, Grace Messner, Verna Konings, and Mary Williams, were talking about their struggles with weight gain and decided that they could support their efforts at losing weight by discussing their progress with each other. Their first meeting took place on January 21, 1948, in the kitchen of the Beulah Brinton Recreation Center because it had a scale. The inspiration for the group came when Esther was waiting at her doctor's office and read a magazine article on Alcoholic Anonymous and other support groups. She then asked her physician what he thought of the idea of such a group dedicated to weight loss. Verna Konings suggested they call it TOP, Take Off Pounds, and, in a *Milwaukee Journal* article later that year, the name was inadvertently changed to TOPS. The S was kept and added as "sensibly." After initial success, the small group

²⁹ Hartmann-Boyce, Jamie, Susan A. Jebb, Ben R. Fletcher, and Paul Aveyard. "Self-Help for Weight Loss in Overweight and Obese Adults: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *American Journal of Public Health*. March 2015, 105(3): e43-e57.

³⁰ "Esther S. Manz, 88, Founder of TOPS Weight-Loss Group (obituary)," *New York Times*, February 28, 1996; and Holtz, Carol (correspondence), TOPS Club Inc employee, and granddaughter of Esther Manz.

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decided that Esther Manz should lead because the concept was hers, and she was the most active in promoting TOPS. The group's popularity grew by word of mouth and through the writing connections that Esther had made with the *Milwaukee Journal*. The group was entirely made up of middle-aged women at first; they would meet, weigh themselves, discuss dieting methods, and compare notes.³¹

In 1950, Esther quit her various writing jobs to work full-time managing the fledgling TOPS. The following year *Life Magazine* interviewed her for a story highlighting the organization. During the 1950s, Esther Manz took part in a weekly radio show panel on WTMJ and conducted television interviews in Chicago to promote TOPS; however, advertising was scarce for the organization for the first decade or two as word of mouth and news articles was enough to propel its popularity. Esther became the president and chairwoman of the TOPS board in 1952 when the group was officially organized as the first weight-loss support group in Wisconsin. She remained the leader of the popular non-profit organization for the following four decades.³²

In 1962, Esther and Gilbert moved into a ranch house at 3626 West Edgerton Avenue in Greenfield, three miles directly to the west of the TOPS headquarters. This ranch house was the home of the Manz family until their deaths. The Manz children all worked at TOPS for a time. Her daughter Maureen was the first full-time employee of TOPS and Gilbert Manz, Jr., Esther's son, took on the role of the headquarters director and led the print shop in the 1960s. The message of TOPS through Esther Manz's understanding shifted somewhat during her time as president away from simply dieting to encouraging lifestyle changes. The argument being that diets work to lose weight for nearly everyone as simply a way to cut caloric intake, but permanently altering one's behavior would allow people to maintain a healthy weight. The focus remained on support, but with an added emphasis on pairing with the medical field, funding, and joining with clinical trials and obesity research. Esther worked with the Deaconess Hospital, the American Medical Association, and later with Froedtert Hospital and the Medical College of Wisconsin, pairing TOPS with medical research efforts from the 1960s to the present. Esther retired as president of the organization in 1991, though she remained the chairwoman of TOPS. Esther Manz died on February 26, 1996. Gilbert, who was four years older than Esther, died one year later.³³ Esther's work with TOPS Club Inc. is significant in the history of weight-loss organizations in the United States; however, the Manz family home at 3626 West Edgerton Avenue in the City of Greenfield, where the family lived from 1962 until the 1990s, is likely the most appropriate resource to associate with her life. The house, a ranch in style, appears to have a high degree of integrity as well.

³¹ Holtz, Carol (correspondence).

³² Milwaukee City Directories, 1933-1998. On file at the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives and Library, Madison, WI; and TOPS Club Inc. company archives.

³³ Milwaukee City Directories, 1933-1998; and Holtz, Carol (correspondence).

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Health / Medicine and Social History

The TOPS Club Inc. headquarters building, as the only remaining prominent site of the organization and its historic headquarters, publishing, and distribution location, is significant as a prominent pioneer in modern dieting techniques during the post-war period. Organized and developed in the 1950s and 1960s, TOPS became widely popular around the nation and the world and served as the model for many other dieting techniques. Eventually, with its scientifically and socially based methods, TOPS funded a series of diet and obesity research institutions not only in Wisconsin, but throughout the country, supplying financial support in addition to the involvement of its members in clinical studies that have led to a better understanding of the genetic origins of obesity. The headquarters building, located at 4575 South 5th Street in Milwaukee, is significant under Criterion A: Health and Medicine from the construction of the building in 1965 to 1979, when the organization approximately reached its peak membership, and the last addition was made to the building. Likewise, the TOPS building is significant for its relation to the organization's contributions to post-war social history. Using other self-help organizations as a conscious model, TOPS branched out by creating small, local groups of people that would actively support each other's dieting goals and healthier lifestyles. Its popularity grew and inspired other dieting organizations to be established with a different model of set meal plans. This model is the dominant one for those trying to lose weight up to the present. The headquarters building is also significant under Criterion A: Social History for the same period.

Architecture

The TOPS Club Inc. headquarters building, located at 4575 South 5th Street in the City of Milwaukee, is an example of the Contemporary style. Designed by the engineering and construction firm of Baudhuin and Associates of Menomonee Falls, the two-story office and warehouse building demonstrates the popular commercial and industrial architecture of its period in the 1950s and 1960s. The exterior's simple red brick, fibrous panels, vertical unadorned windows, and flat roofs all indicate an austere version of simple modernism. The organization of the building, with the emphasized architecture and balanced fenestration on the main east and north facades, align with the office space, and the rear warehouse and production sections of the building are left more utilitarian in design. This organization, with a 'decorated' office in front of a plain warehouse behind, was a common industrial building type in the post-war period and is still common presently.

The term Contemporary applied to architectural style is a generalist term that is intended to include a wide variety of ahistorical buildings of the twentieth century. While it does indicate some architectural style as such, it says very little about the details of a specific building beside their likely construction techniques, materials, and details. Generally, the TOPS building fits into this category for the lack of a more specific term and the obvious design elements such as its flat roof, steel and masonry

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construction, and lack of historic precedent outside the tropes of modern architecture commonly practiced by designers of the period. The Wisconsin Historical Society maintains an Architecture and History Inventory (AHI) with records of many historic buildings and sites throughout the state. There are 1,355 properties listed in the AHI of the Contemporary style. It must be stated that, until recently, Contemporary style properties were often not included in architectural surveys due to their age, so there are likely even more with sufficient integrity. Among these, 254 of them are industrial or office buildings like the TOPS headquarters.

Among the records in the AHI, there are many organizational buildings related to non-profit organizations and many more that served as modern offices and distribution centers. However, none are specifically related to a dieting organization. There are no other resources in Wisconsin related to the science or social aspects of dieting in the National Register of Historic Places. Nationally, the only resource associated with dieting and social movements listed in the National Register of Historic Places is the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan (NRIS #74000980). Associated with the work of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg in the late nineteenth century, the property is arguably related to the dieting practices of a previous era than the focus on scientific caloric intake and self-help support groups related to TOPS.

Since the TOPS Club Inc. headquarters building was completed in 1965, the non-profit organization and its publishing wing have been the only tenant to the present. A rear warehouse addition with upper offices were added shortly thereafter in 1969, and an interior remodeling effort was undertaken in 1979. The building maintains its historic form, style, and interior layout from the period of significance from 1965 to 1979; however, some notable changes include the replacement of windows and addition of exterior decorative tiling. As a continuously running operation, the building's interior has undergone various alterations throughout its use by the original owner. The property and grounds largely retain their historic integrity and location. Given the prevalence of the building type and style in Milwaukee and the rest of the state, combined with some exterior changes, the TOPS Club Inc. building is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance.

Conclusion

The TOPS Club Inc. headquarters building, located at 4575 S. 5th Street in Milwaukee, is representative of the history of Health and Medicine and Social History during the post-war period. The building, constructed in 1965 with a large warehouse and office addition completed shortly thereafter in 1969, reflects a significant period when the non-profit organization was instrumental in spreading the application of support groups and scientific approaches to weight loss and dieting across the country. The headquarters was remodeled in 1979, marking the end of the period of significance,

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TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

which roughly aligns with the organizations peak of over 300,000 members across the United States and internationally. The present appearance of this building is much the same as it was during this period. While the adjacent memorial garden to the west of the building is a non-contributing resource on the same site. The historic TOPS Club is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for its national significance under Criteria A for its association with the development of a significant weight-loss organization and contribution to medical fields and modern dieting methods.

Statement of Archeological Potential

This area of the state, in urban Milwaukee County, was home to considerable Native American occupation and early European settlement during the nineteenth century and before. The region, where the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic Rivers come together, was specifically occupied by the Potawatomi tribe but considered neutral ground when French and British trappers and explores visited the area from the seventeenth century on. Small European settlements spread across the immediate area during the first half of the nineteenth century. The area around the site of the TOPS Club building was extensively graded from 1926 when the first airport facilities were constructed directly to the south and expanded. Post-war suburban development and highway construction further disturbed the area. While it is almost certain that the construction of the subject building would have greatly disturbed remaining archeological artifacts directly within its footprint, it is possible that archaeological remains may be extant. The specific history of Native American archaeological investigation was outside the scope of this nomination project and further archaeological potential for the property remains unassessed.

Preservation Activities

The TOPS Club Inc. building has been occupied and operated by TOPS continuously since its construction in 1965. The property has retained much the same appearance as it did during the period of significance. TOPS privately funded this nomination to the National Register of Historic Places to celebrate and mark its significant history and influence on dieting and public health as an honor. The intention is to maintain the headquarters building in much the same appearance into the future.

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TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

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Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 2

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

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TOPS Club Inc. Headquarters, Milwaukee Museum, and company archives.

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Section 9 Page 3

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

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Section 10 Page 1

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

Verbal Boundary Description

The property that is the subject of this nomination consists of a single contributing resource located on the lot described as Parcel 2, Bid 40 in the southeast quarter of section 20-6-22 on certified survey map 7622 in the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin. The lot is associated with the address of 4575 South 5th Street and consists of a single parcel number 5950842000. The boundary for the TOPS Club Inc. headquarters building is delineated on the accompanying sketch map and encloses an area of approximately 2.31 acres.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encloses a single parcel that occupies the northeast corner of the block delineated by West Layton Avenue to the south, South 6th Street to the west, a City of Milwaukee Sewerage drainage canal to the north, and South 5th Street to the east. The parcel has always been associated with the property since it was subdivided in the early 1960s and has since been owned by TOPS Club Inc.

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Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 1

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

Name of Property:	TOPS Club Inc.
City or Vicinity:	City of Milwaukee
County:	Milwaukee County
State:	Wisconsin
Name of Photographer:	Rowan Davidson
Date of Photographs:	December 14, 2020
Location of Original Digital Files:	Wisconsin Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, Madison, WI

Photo 1 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0001)
Exterior, view from the east

Photo 2 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0002)
Exterior, view from the southeast

Photo 3 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0003)
Exterior, corner detail, view from the southeast

Photo 4 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0004)
Exterior, view from the northeast

Photo 5 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0005)
Exterior, corner detail, view from the northeast

Photo 6 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0006)
Exterior, view from the north

Photo 7 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0007)
Exterior, view from the northwest

Photo 8 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0008)
Exterior, view from the west

Photo 9 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0009)
Interior, entry lobby and stairs, view from the southeast

Photo 10 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0010)
Interior, first floor, office area, view from the southwest

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Section photos Page 2

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

Photo 11 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0011)

Interior, first floor, office area, view from the west

Photo 12 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0012)

Interior, first floor, executive suite, view from the northeast

Photo 13 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0013)

Interior, first floor, bindery and loading dock, view from the south

Photo 14 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0014)

Interior, first floor, rear addition print shop, view from the northeast

Photo 15 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0015)

Interior, second floor, stairwell, view from the south

Photo 16 of 16 (WI_MilwaukeeCounty_TOPSClub_0016)

Interior, second floor, reception area, view from the northwest

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Section figures Page 1

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI



Figure 1: *Photograph, Spring 1965. TOPS Headquarters under construction. On file with the TOPS library and archives.*



Figure 2: *Photograph, Spring 1965. Esther Manz and cornerstone during construction. On file with the TOPS library and archives.*

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Continuation Sheet

Section figures Page 2

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI



Figure 3: Photograph, Summer 1965. TOPS Headquarters upon completion, exterior. On file with the TOPS library and archives.



Figure 4: Publicity Photograph, 1974. TOPS Headquarters lobby. On file with the TOPS library and archives.

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Section summary statement Page 1

TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI

Summary Statement

TOPS Club Inc., located at 4575 South 5th Street on the south side of the City of Milwaukee, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for its national significance under Criteria A for the history of Health and Medicine and Social Science as one of the most influential dieting organizations in the nation, its pioneering alignment with the medical and scientific community in understanding obesity, and as an inspiration to other group-supported self-help organizations. The international non-profit organization's main building, occupied solely by the company since its construction in 1965, consists of TOPS headquarters, offices, publishing and printing departments, and shipping and warehousing of its publications.

TOPS was founded by Esther Manz and a few friends in 1948 to support each other's goals in losing weight. From this humble beginning, it grew rapidly through the 1950s and 1960s with members in every state and across the world, receiving TOPS publications and guides and taking part in local meetings to support other members in their weight-loss goals, reaching a peak of over 300,000 members. The organization also aligned itself with the medical community and only shared clinically sound information while promoting obesity research through funding and patient trials since the 1970s, influencing contemporary medical understanding of weight control. TOPS did not tell its members what to eat, but only shared successful and healthy methods while providing a public support system making it distinct from other popular post-war dieting organizations and trends.

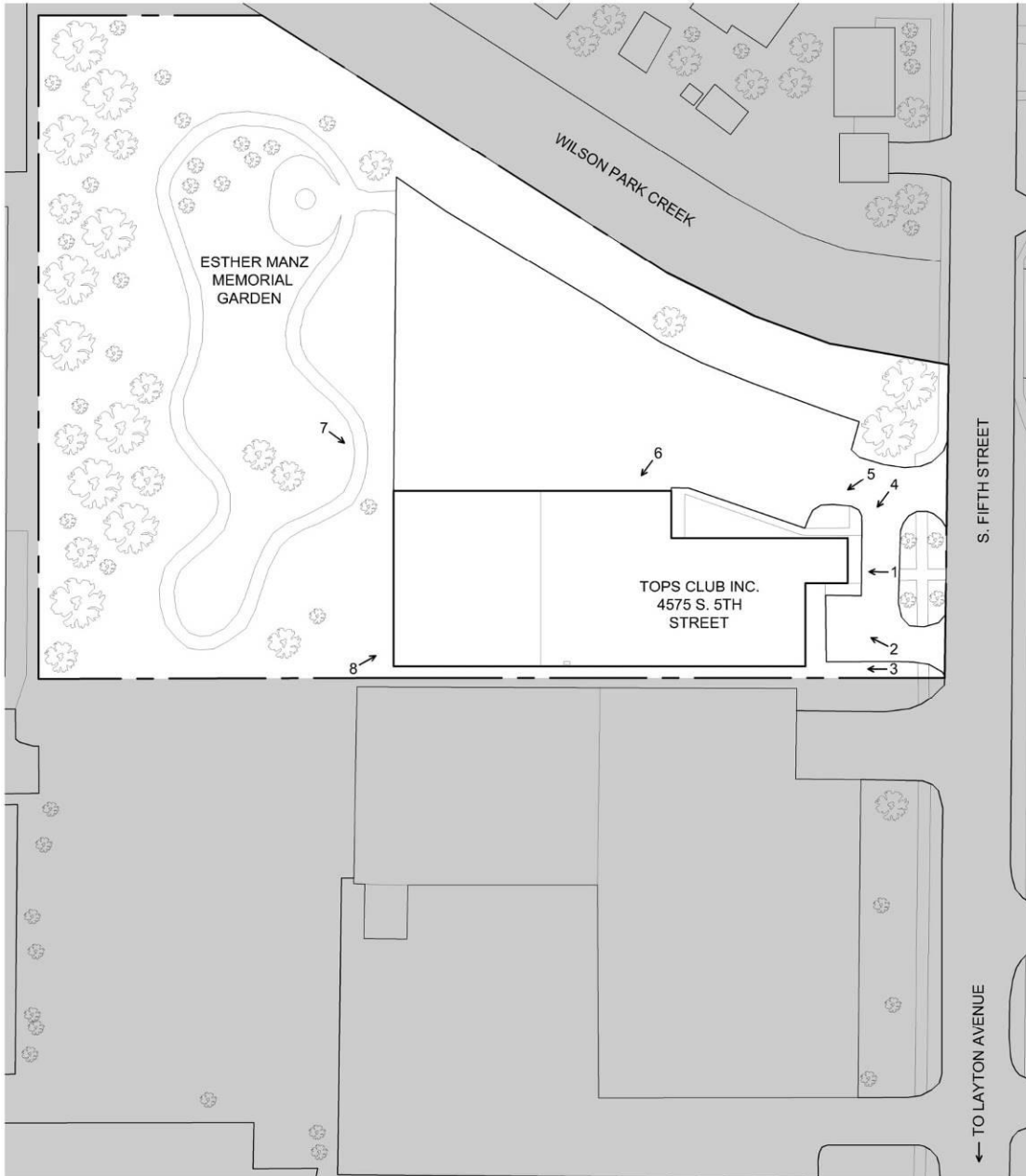
The property's significance begins when the building was constructed for the organization in 1965 and continues to 1979 when the organization reached its peak membership. It remains the only extant resource associated with the influential and historic diet organization and maintains a high degree of architectural integrity.

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Section sketch map Page 1

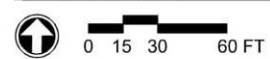
TOPS Club Inc.
City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI



LEGEND

- 1 → PHOTO NUMBER & VANTAGE POINT
- · - · - PROPERTY BOUNDARIES

SKETCH MAP

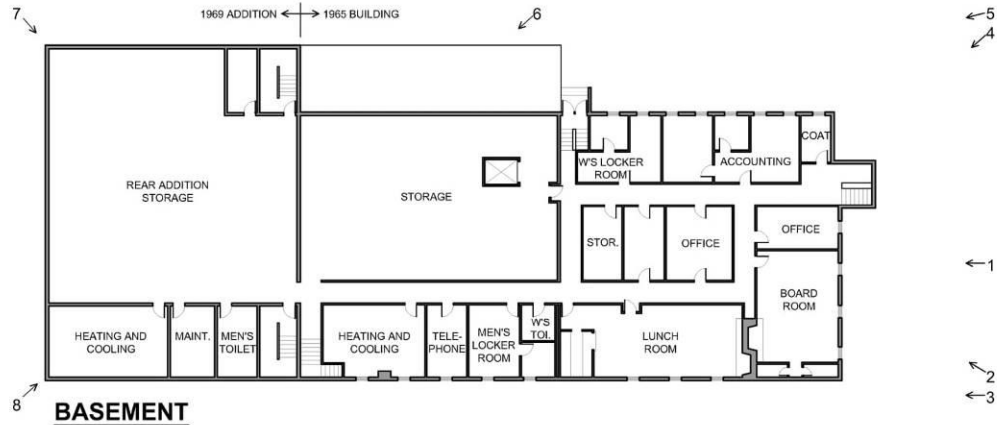
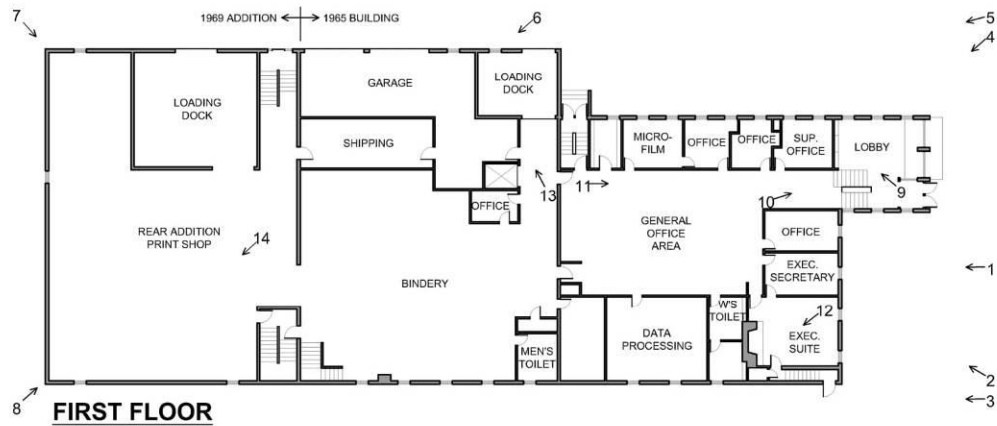
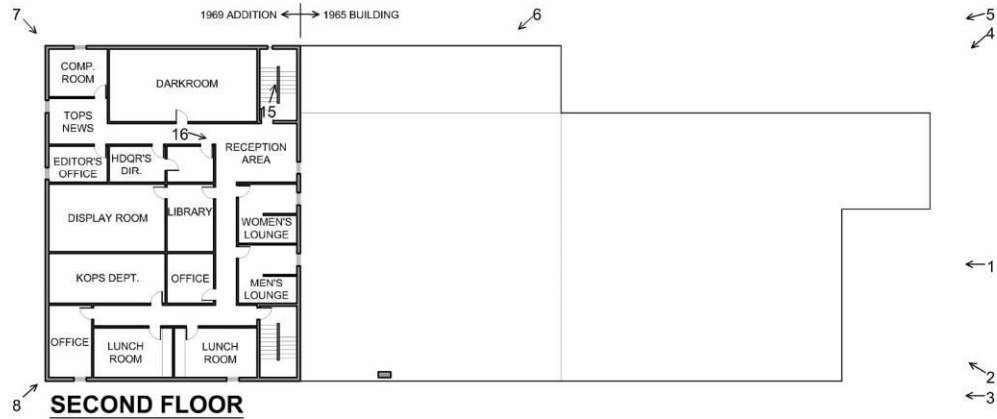


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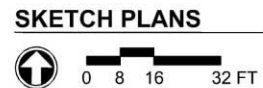
National Register of Historic Places
 Continuation Sheet

Section sketch plan Page 1

TOPS Club Inc.
 City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, WI



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TOPS Club Inc.

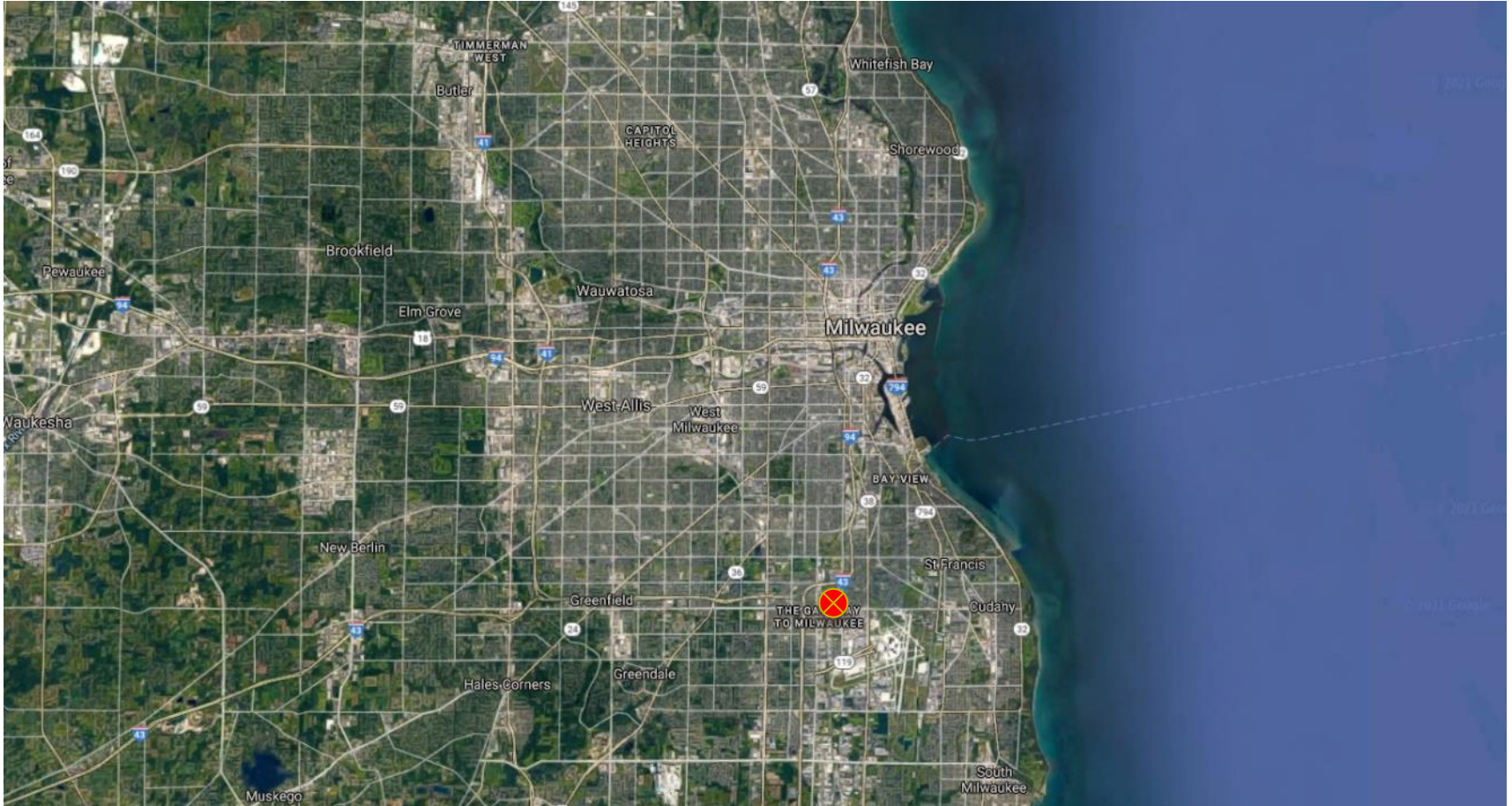
Prepared for:

State Historic Preservation Review Board

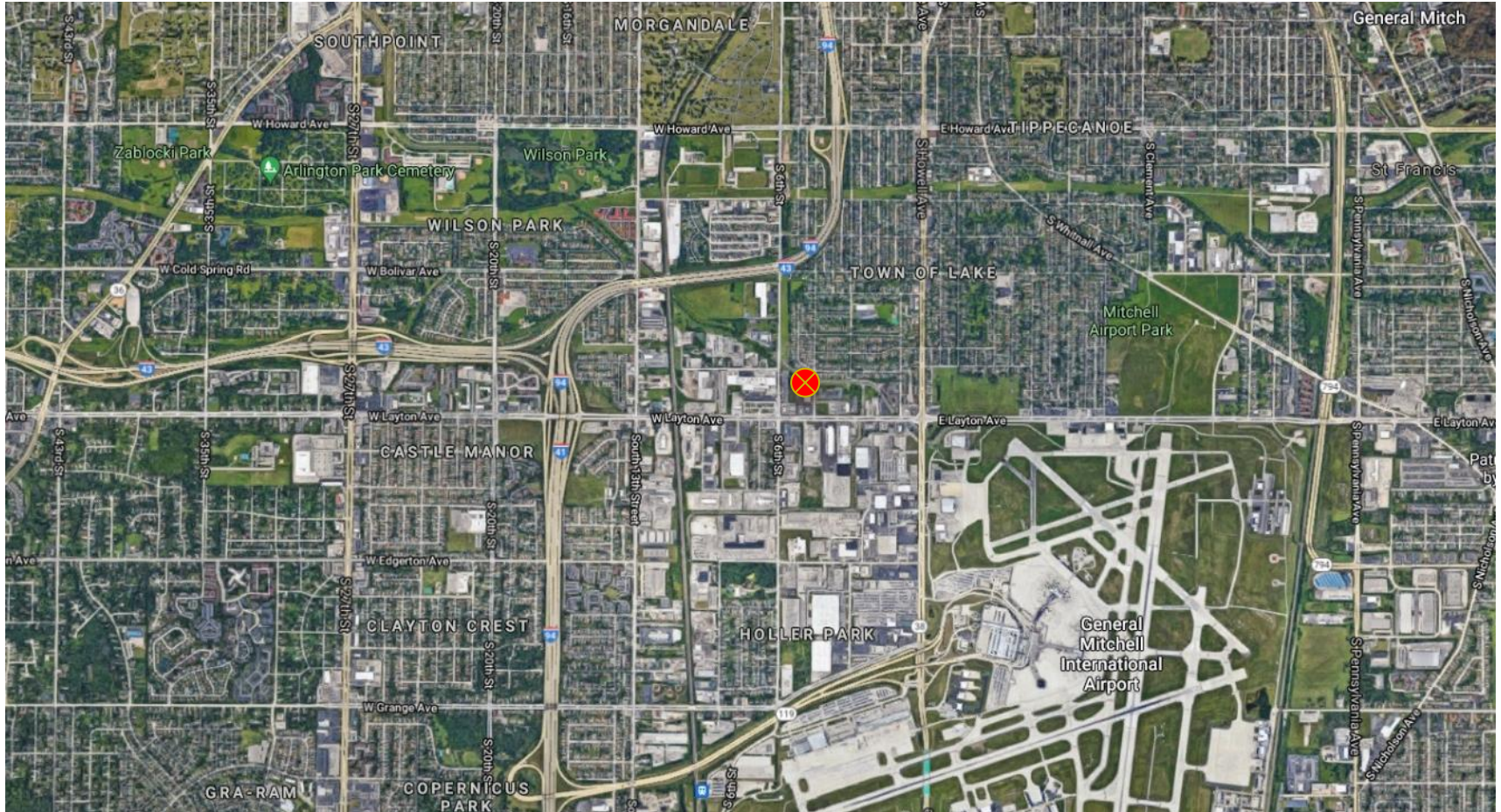


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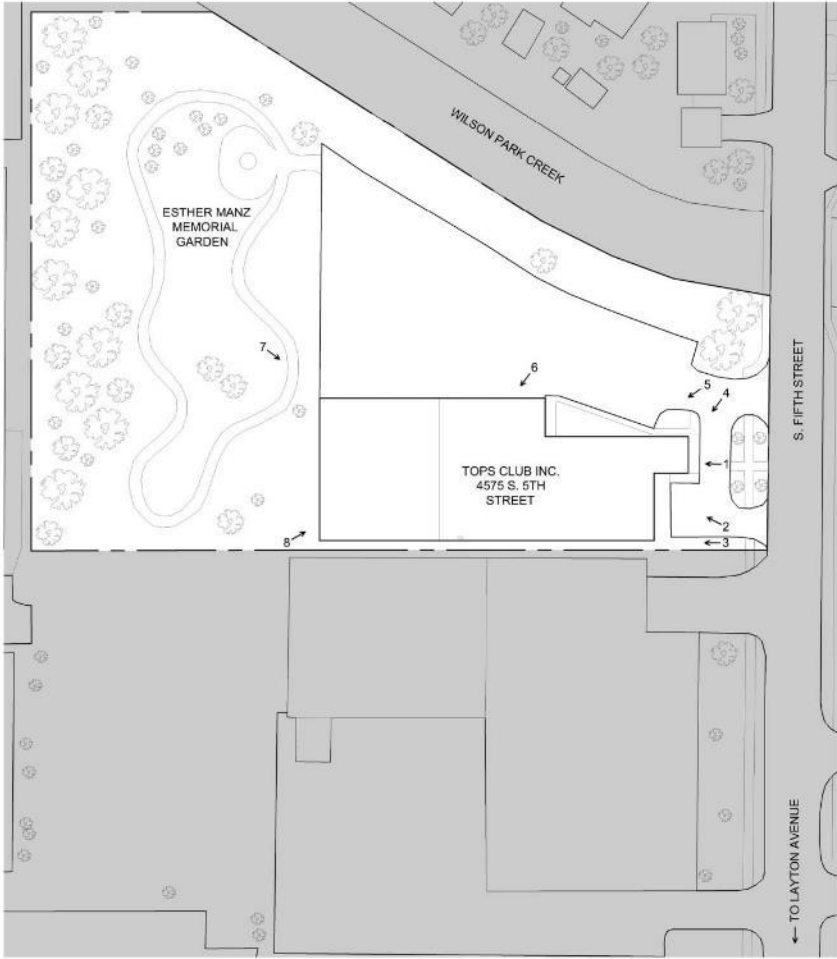
DISTRICT LOCATION



DISTRICT LOCATION



SKETCH MAP



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SKETCH PLANS



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SKETCH PLANS
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HISTORIC PHOTOS



PHOTOGRAPH, SPRING 1965. TOPS HEADQUARTERS UNDER CONSTRUCTION.



PHOTOGRAPH, SPRING 1965. ESTHER MANZ AND CORNERSTONE DURING CONSTRUCTION.



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, VIEW FROM THE EAST



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, VIEW FROM THE
SOUTHEAST



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, CORNER DETAIL, VIEW
FROM THE SOUTHEAST



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, VIEW FROM THE
NORTHEAST



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, CORNER DETAIL, VIEW
FROM THE NORTHEAST



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, VIEW FROM THE
NORTH



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, VIEW FROM THE
NORTHWEST



TOPS CLUB INC.

EXTERIOR, VIEW FROM THE WEST



TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, ENTRY LOBBY AND
STAIRS, VIEW FROM THE
SOUTHEAST



TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, FIRST FLOOR, OFFICE
AREA, VIEW FROM THE
SOUTHWEST



TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, FIRST FLOOR, OFFICE
AREA, VIEW FROM THE WEST



TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, FIRST FLOOR,
EXECUTIVE SUITE, VIEW FROM
THE NORTHEAST



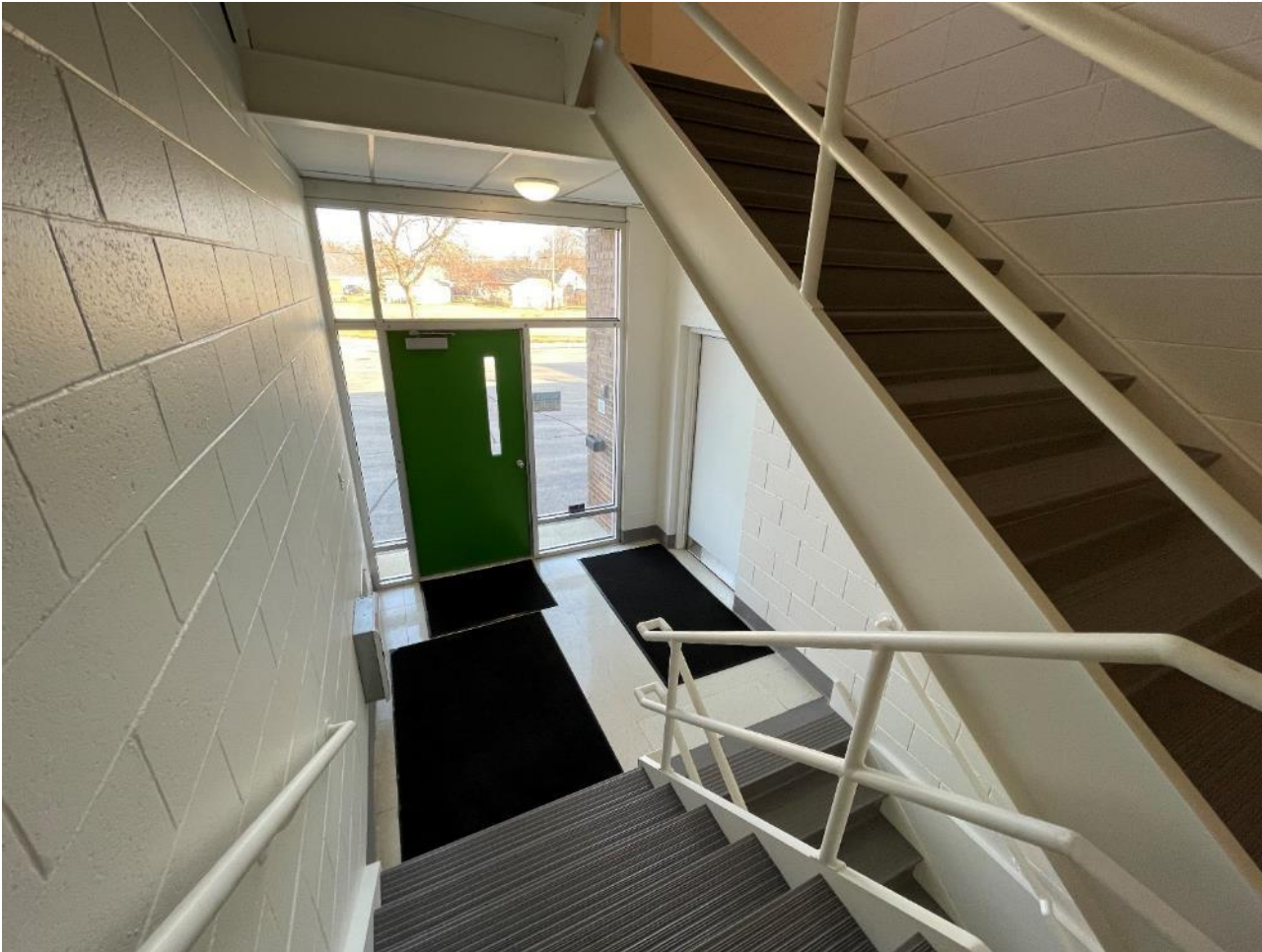
TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, FIRST FLOOR, BINDERY
AND LOADING DOCK, VIEW FROM
THE SOUTH



TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, FIRST FLOOR, REAR
ADDITION PRINT SHOP, VIEW
FROM THE NORTHEAST



TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, SECOND FLOOR,
STAIRWELL, VIEW FROM THE
SOUTH



TOPS CLUB INC.

INTERIOR, SECOND FLOOR,
RECEPTION AREA, VIEW FROM
THE NORTHWEST

HISTORIC PHOTOS



PHOTOGRAPH, SUMMER 1965. TOPS HEADQUARTERS UPON COMPLETION, EXTERIOR.



PUBLICITY PHOTOGRAPH, 1974. TOPS HEADQUARTERS LOBBY.