

**AGENDA**  
**VIRTUAL BIRMINGHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE**  
**MONDAY – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

\*\*\*\*\*6:00 PM\*\*\*\*\*

**Link to Access Virtual Meeting:** <https://zoom.us/j/92668352238>  
**Telephone Meeting Access:** 877-853-5247 US Toll-Free  
**Meeting ID Code:** 926 6835 2238

- 1) Roll Call
- 2) [Approval of the Minutes from February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021](#)
- 3) [1390 Northlawn – Historic Designation Request](#)
- 4) [HDSC priority list](#)
- 5) Adjournment

Notice: Individuals requiring accommodations, such as interpreter services, for effective participation in this meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at [\(248\) 530-1880](tel:2485301880) at least on day in advance of the public meeting.

Las personas que requieren alojamiento, tales como servicios de interpretación, la participación efectiva en esta reunión deben ponerse en contacto con la Oficina del Secretario Municipal al [\(248\) 530-1880](tel:2485301880) por lo menos el día antes de la reunión pública. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

**A PERSON DESIGNATED WITH THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE DECISIONS MUST BE PRESENT AT THE MEETING.**

**Historic District Study Committee**  
**Minutes Of February 3, 2020**  
Conference Rooms 202 & 203  
151 Martin, Birmingham, Michigan

---

Minutes of the regular meeting of the Historic District Study Committee ("HDSC") held Monday, February 3, 2020. City Planner Nicholas Dupuis called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**1. Roll Call**

**Present:** Board Members Paul Beshouri, Jake German, Colleen McGough, Michael Xenos

**Absent:** Board Member Jonathan DeWindt

**Administration:** Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner  
Laura Eichenhorn, City Transcriptionist

**2. Approval Of The Minutes From June 17th, 2019**

**Motion by Mr. German**

**Seconded by Mr. Xenos to approve the minutes of June 17, 2019 as submitted.**

**Motion Carried 4-0.**

**VOICE VOTE**

Yeas: German, Xenos, Beshouri, McGough

Nays: None

**3. Collaborative Preservation Projects**

CP Dupuis introduced the item.

There was consensus that the HDSC would support the GCAB in projects if asked but would let the GCAB take point on any Greenwood Cemetery-related projects.

The Committee also discussed updating information regarding historic homes in Birmingham, including going through the files the City has, potentially digitizing the information, and taking photographs of the homes.

**4. Heritage Home Program Study Session**

CP Dupuis introduced the item. He noted that there were minimal records on the program.

There was consensus among the Committee members that updating the City's information on current Heritage Homes would be useful, including surveying and photographing the houses.

They also discussed a public awareness campaign for homeowners and the public regarding current Heritage Homes and homes approaching the 100-year mark which could then be called Heritage Homes.

Mr. Beshouri said it might be worthwhile to have the proceeds from selling the Heritage Home plaques go to something historic-preservation related.

The Committee agreed to seek approval from the City Commission to work on updating the Heritage Home program.

Mr. Xenos said it would also be useful to audit the Wallace Frost homes in Birmingham.

### **5. HDSC Priority List**

CP Dupuis introduced the item. He asked if the HDSC would be interested in revamping and updating their priority list.

The HDSC concurred they were interested in updating their priority list.

There was discussion regarding enhancing the HDSC's online presence. Adding an interactive map of historic and Heritage properties was discussed as one way to do so.

There was consensus that ending the year with a viable Heritage Home program would be a worthwhile goal.

CP Dupuis said he would also be bringing in professionals for historic trainings and that members of the HDSC would be welcome to attend.

Ms. McGough recommended that Birmingham look into historic home walking tours put together by other cities to see if Birmingham could model a similar program of those. She mentioned Charleston, SC, Oak Park, IL, and Shaker Heights, OH as initial potential sources of inspiration. She said that it need not be an item on the priority list, but could just be something that the members of the HDSC casually work towards.

CP Dupuis said he would integrate the Committee's comments into an updated priority list.

### **Motion by Mr. Xenos**

**Seconded by Mr. German to focus on auditing the City's 51 Heritage Homes and to seek approval from the Commission for the audit.**

**Motion Carried 4-0.**

### **VOICE VOTE**

Yeas: Xenos, German, Beshouri, McGough

Nays: None

## **6. ADJOURNMENT**

No further business being evident, the committee members motioned to adjourn at 6:28 p.m.

---

Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner





## MEMORANDUM

---

Planning Division

**DATE:** June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

**TO:** Historic District Study Committee

**FROM:** Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner

**SUBJECT:** 1390 Northlawn – Historic Designation Request & HDSC Report

---

The owner of the house located at 1390 Northlawn, Mr. Jeremy Ball, has requested that the City Commission consider designating the house as a local historic resource within the city of Birmingham. The house was built in 1951 and designed by the renowned local architect Wallace Frost. The history of Wallace Frost architecture in Birmingham is well documented, along with his background, associations, style, and other buildings he designed outside of Birmingham.

In regards to 1390 Northlawn specifically, the applicant and his family have provided supplementary information that they have collected on the home, which is also attached for your review. In addition, the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan houses a collection of Wallace Frost Papers, which includes the blueprints for 1390 Northlawn that are accessible to the City. The history of the home and architect, and the extensive documentation of the house down to the blueprints make this an excellent candidate for local historic designation.

The process for designating a property or structure as historic is outlined in Chapter 127 of the City Code. Section 127-5 (Establishing additional, modifying, or eliminating historic districts) states the following:

- (a) The city commission may at any time establish by ordinance additional historic districts, including proposed districts previously considered and rejected, may modify boundaries of an existing historic district, or may eliminate an existing historic district. Before establishing, modifying, or eliminating a historic district, the standing historic district study committee, as established in section 127-4, shall follow the procedures as stated in section 127-4. The committee shall consider any previously written committee reports pertinent to the proposed action.

The first step in the process towards considering historic designation of this property is for the City Commission to pass a resolution directly the Historic District Study Committee to commence with the creation of a study committee report as outlined in section 127-4 of the City Code.

When directed by a resolution passed by the city commission, the standing historic district study committee shall meet and do all of the following:

- 1) Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within each proposed historic district following procedures established by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.
- 2) Conduct basic research of each proposed historic district and historic resources located within that district.
- 3) Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within a proposed historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the National Register of Historic Places, as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60, and criteria established or approved by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.
- 4) Prepare a preliminary historic district study committee report that addresses at a minimum all of the following:
  - a. The charge of the committee.
  - b. The composition of committee membership.
  - c. The historic district(s) studied.
  - d. The boundaries of each proposed historic district in writing and on maps.
  - e. The history of each proposed historic district.
  - f. The significance of each district as a whole, as well as the significance of sufficient number of its individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the district, relative to the evaluation criteria.
- 5) Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendations to the city planning board, the state historic preservation office of the Michigan Historical Center, the Michigan Historical Commission, and the state historic preservation review board.
- 6) Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public pursuant to Section 399.203(4) of Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended.
- 7) Not less than 60 calendar days after the transmittal of the preliminary report, the historic district study committee shall hold a public hearing in compliance with Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended. Public notice of the time, date and place of the hearing shall be given in the manner required by Public Act 267. Written notice shall be mailed by first class mail not less than 14 calendar days prior to the hearing to the owners of properties within the proposed historic district, as listed on the most current tax rolls. The report shall be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.

- 8) After the date of the public hearing, the committee and the city commission have not more than one year, unless otherwise authorized by the city commission, to take the following actions:
  - a. The committee shall prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and the recommendations, if any, of the city planning board and the historic district commission, to the city commission as to the establishment of a historic district(s). If the recommendation is to establish a historic district(s), the final report shall include a draft of the proposed ordinance(s).
  - b. After receiving a final report that recommends the establishment of a historic district(s), the city commission, at its discretion, may introduce and pass or reject an ordinance(s). If the city commission passes an ordinance(s) establishing one or more historic districts, the city shall file a copy of the ordinance(s), including a legal description of the property or properties located within the historic district(s) with the register of deeds. The city commission shall not pass an ordinance establishing a contiguous historic district less than 60 days after a majority of the property owners within the proposed historic district, as listed on the tax rolls of the local unit, have approved the establishment of the historic district pursuant to a written petition.
- 9) A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a committee in the performance of an official function of the historic district commission should be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.

On May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the City Commission passed the attached resolution directing the HDSC to create a preliminary HDSC report in accordance with Section 127-5 of the City Code of Ordinances.

### **Next Steps**

At this time, the HDSC will need to review the documentation submitted for 1390 Northlawn and begin steps 1-3 as outlined above, following the guidelines noted within. Guidance on photographing a historic resource, as well as the National Register criteria for evaluation is attached for your review. After scheduling and completing steps 1-3, the HDSC will reconvene and begin step 4.

**1390 NORTHLAWN  
HISTORIC DESIGNATION REQUEST  
MAY 10, 2021**

**WHEREAS**, JEREMY BALL, the owner of the Property located at 1390 NORTHLAWN has requested that his home be considered for Historic Designation within the City of Birmingham,

**WHEREAS**, The land for which the Historic designation is sought is located on the north side of Northlawn between Fairway Dr. and Latham St.,

**WHEREAS**, Section 127-5 of the City Code, Historic Districts, requires that the City Commission pass a resolution directing the Historic District Study Committee to prepare a Study Committee Report;

**WHEREAS**, The Birmingham City Commission has reviewed the request of the property owner and has found that a Study Committee Report to determine the historic merit of the home at 1390 NORTHLAWN is warranted;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, The Birmingham City Commission directs the Historic District Study Committee to prepare a Study Committee Report as outlined in section 127-4 of the City Code for the property located at 1390 NORTHLAWN.

I, Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk of the City of Birmingham, Michigan, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and, correct copy of the resolution adopted by the Birmingham City Commission at its regular meeting held on May 10, 2021.

---

Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk

commencement of field work. See Appendix D for a sample field form that can be customized and reproduced.

At this time, the use of survey applications for smart phones is not available for use with the MiSHPO program, but SHPO hopes to develop one in the coming years so surveyors will be able to utilize the technology in the field.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Every property included in the survey, including each building and other surveyed feature in a complex property or district, requires a minimum of one high quality photograph to show as much of the property as possible. Each surveyor is required to use a digital Single Lens Reflex (SLR) camera with a minimum capture size of eight mega-pixels. Images must be shot at the highest photo resolution possible.

Images must be delivered as an unaltered JPEG image on disk or thumb drive. Each image must be a minimum of 2000 pixels and 3000 pixels. Please consult with SHPO staff regarding file naming conventions for survey photos.

Survey photography is documentary. Good photographs can be taken if the photographer keeps several things in mind beyond the normal photographic considerations. These include composition, clarity, lighting quality and direction, and perspective distortion. Prior to beginning photography, a plan should be made based on the direction the building faces relative to sunlight, timing of possible obstructions (holiday decorations, leaves, vehicles, etc.), daylight, and weather.



### CLARITY

The major cause of unclear photographs is camera movement. The best way to avoid this is to place the camera on a firm support or tripod when the photograph is being taken. If a tripod is unavailable, using a faster shutter speed and gently squeezing the shutter button can enhance image clarity.

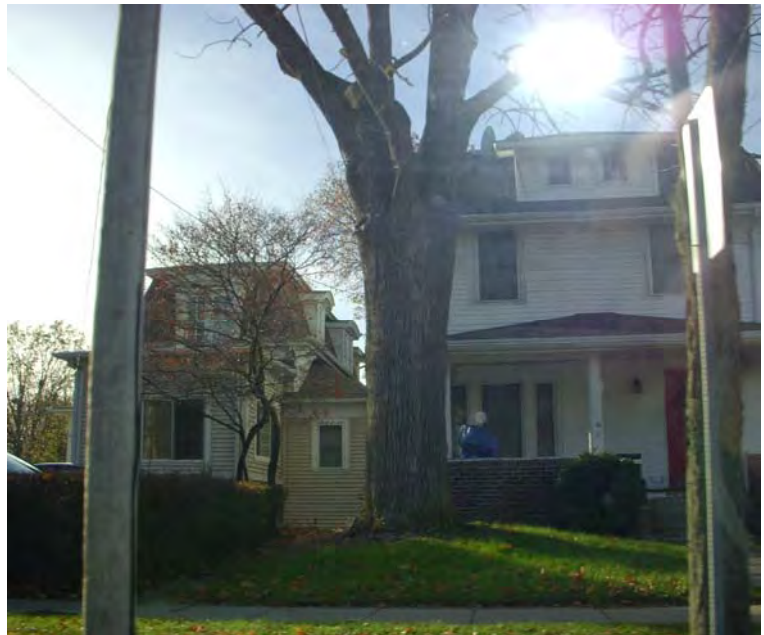
### COMPOSITION

Generally, a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -view of a building is preferred, to show as much building detail as possible in a single view. Since a record is produced for each property, do not include the adjacent buildings in the inventory photographs. If necessary, more than one photograph should be taken to document large or complicated buildings.



### LIGHTING QUALITY AND DIRECTION

A building is modeled and described by the sunlight, and the relationship of the sun to the property varies from case to case. A photo of a rusticated building, for example might be enhanced by sun using direct light to bring out the texture. A building with a broad overhang is sometimes best photographed in hazy sun because deep shadows can obliterate details. It is difficult, therefore, to generalize, except to say that the photographer should study the subject and make a determination based on a building's inherent characteristics.



Be careful about backlighting, or placing the sun directly behind the camera, because such flat lighting can obscure the shadow lines that give a building character and depth.





## PERSPECTIVE DISTORTION

An otherwise well-thought-out photograph can be ruined by perspective distortion. The only way to get rid of this distortion completely is to have the film plane of the camera exactly vertical when taking the photograph. Tipping the camera up to capture the top of the building is the most common perspective distortion, this makes the building appear to be falling over backwards. The best way to limit the impact of this distortion is by using a perspective-control (PC) lens. Those without access to such equipment, however, should follow a few simple tips. The easiest solution is to back up far enough from the subject to include the entire building without tilting the camera upward. This can be accomplished by either moving away from the subject or by changing the camera to a wide-angle setting. Surveyors should use caution when using a wide-angle lens as this can exaggerate any tilting of the camera.

A telephoto lens that tends to flatten buildings can be used to reduce the impact of the perspective distortion. Users of a telephoto lens should be aware that the lens can also exaggerate camera motion, so a tripod is recommended.

Surveyors can also stand on a rise, truck, ladder or other equipment to elevate themselves and reduce the perspective distortion.

More information on photography is available in National Register Bulletin 23 *How to Improve the Quality of Photos for National Register Nominations*.

Other photography tips include the following:

- Avoid signs, cars, people, trees, and poles in the foreground as much as possible
- Lens filters and shields should be used to minimize glare
- Use imagination in finding the position that will allow the best view of the property



# National Register of Historic Places Program: National Register Federal Program Regulations

*The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.*

## **Sec. 60.4 Criteria for evaluation.**

The criteria applied to evaluate properties (other than areas of the National Park System and National Historic Landmarks) for the National Register are listed below. These criteria are worded in a manner to provide for a wide diversity of resources. The following criteria shall be used in evaluating properties for nomination to the National Register, by NPS in reviewing nominations, and for evaluating National Register eligibility of properties. Guidance in applying the criteria is further discussed in the "How To" [publications](#), Standards & Guidelines sheets and Keeper's opinions of the National Register. Such materials are available upon request.

National Register criteria for evaluation. The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and

(a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

(b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

(c) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

(d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations. Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria of if they fall within the following categories:

(a) A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or

(b) A building or structure removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or



(c) A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building directly associated with his productive life.

(d) A cemetery which derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or

(e) A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or

(f) A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or

(g) A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance. This exception is described further in NPS "How To" 2, entitled "[How to Evaluate and Nominate Potential National Register Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Last 50 Years](#)" which is available from the National Register of Historic Places Division, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.





1390  
HUTCHINSON













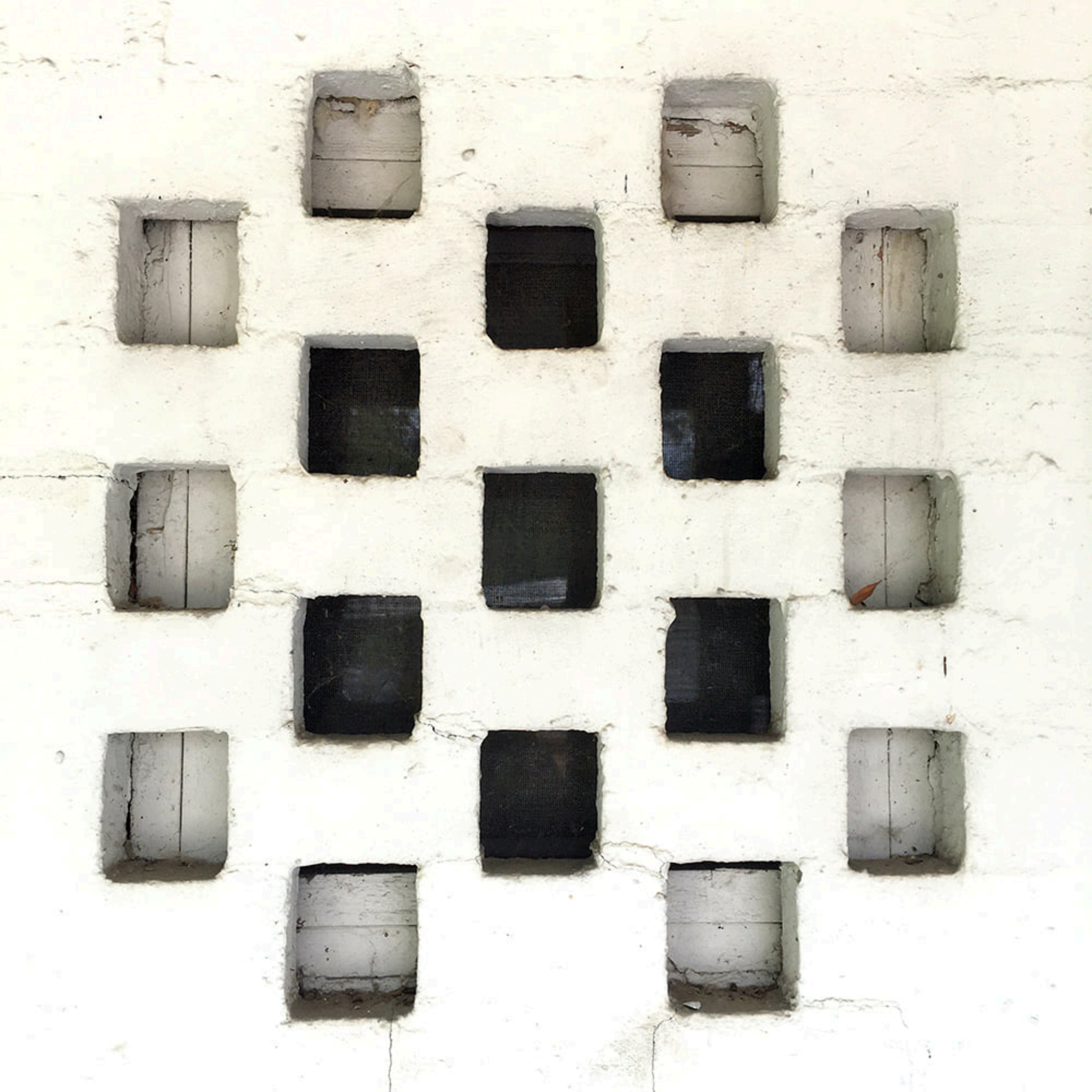
































































































## MEMORANDUM

Planning Division

**DATE:** May 3, 2021

**TO:** Thomas Markus, City Manager

**FROM:** Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner

**APPROVED:** Jana Ecker, Planning Director

**SUBJECT:** 1390 Northlawn – Historic Designation request

---

The owner of the house located at 1390 Northlawn, Mr. Jeremy Ball, has requested that the City Commission consider designating the house as a local historic resource within the city of Birmingham. The house was built in 1951 and designed by the renowned local architect Wallace Frost. The history of Wallace Frost architecture in Birmingham is well documented, along with his background, associations, style, and other buildings he designed outside of Birmingham. Information on Wallace Frost is attached to this report for your review.

In regards to 1390 Northlawn specifically, the applicant and his family have provided supplementary information that they have collected on the home, which is also attached for your review. In addition, the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan houses a collection of Wallace Frost Papers, which includes the blueprints for 1390 Northlawn that are accessible to the City. The history of the home and architect, and the extensive documentation of the house down to the blueprints make this an excellent candidate for local historic designation.

The process for designating a property or structure as historic is outlined in Chapter 127 of the City Code. Section 127-5 (Establishing additional, modifying, or eliminating historic districts) states the following:

- (a) The city commission may at any time establish by ordinance additional historic districts, including proposed districts previously considered and rejected, may modify boundaries of an existing historic district, or may eliminate an existing historic district. Before establishing, modifying, or eliminating a historic district, the standing historic district study committee, as established in section 127-4, shall follow the procedures as stated in section 127-4. The committee shall consider any previously written committee reports pertinent to the proposed action.

**The first step in the process towards considering historic designation of this property is for the City Commission to pass a resolution directly the Historic District Study Committee to commence with the creation of a study committee report as outlined in section 127-4 of the City Code.**

When directed by a resolution passed by the city commission, the standing historic district study committee shall meet and do all of the following:

- 1) Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within each proposed historic district following procedures established by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.
- 2) Conduct basic research of each proposed historic district and historic resources located within that district.
- 3) Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within a proposed historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the National Register of Historic Places, as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60, and criteria established or approved by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.
- 4) Prepare a preliminary historic district study committee report that addresses at a minimum all of the following:
  - a. The charge of the committee.
  - b. The composition of committee membership.
  - c. The historic district(s) studied.
  - d. The boundaries of each proposed historic district in writing and on maps.
  - e. The history of each proposed historic district.
  - f. The significance of each district as a whole, as well as the significance of sufficient number of its individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the district, relative to the evaluation criteria.
- 5) Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendations to the city planning board, the state historic preservation office of the Michigan Historical Center, the Michigan Historical Commission, and the state historic preservation review board.
- 6) Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public pursuant to Section 399.203(4) of Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended.
- 7) Not less than 60 calendar days after the transmittal of the preliminary report, the historic district study committee shall hold a public hearing in compliance with Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended. Public notice of the time, date and place of the hearing shall be given in the manner required by Public Act 267. Written notice shall be mailed by first class mail not less than 14 calendar days prior to the hearing to the owners of properties within the proposed historic district, as listed on the most current tax rolls. The report shall be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.
- 8) After the date of the public hearing, the committee and the city commission have not more than one year, unless otherwise authorized by the city commission, to take the following actions:
  - a. The committee shall prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and the recommendations, if any, of the city planning board and the historic district commission, to the city commission as to the establishment of a historic district(s). If the recommendation is to establish a historic district(s), the final report shall include a draft of the proposed ordinance(s).
  - b. After receiving a final report that recommends the establishment of a historic district(s), the city commission, at its discretion, may introduce and pass or reject an ordinance(s). If the city commission passes an ordinance(s) establishing one or more historic districts, the city shall file a copy of the ordinance(s), including a legal description of the property or properties located within the

historic district(s) with the register of deeds. The city commission shall not pass an ordinance establishing a contiguous historic district less than 60 days after a majority of the property owners within the proposed historic district, as listed on the tax rolls of the local unit, have approved the establishment of the historic district pursuant to a written petition.

- 9) A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a committee in the performance of an official function of the historic district commission should be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.

**SUGGESTED RESOLUTION:**

The City Commission APPROVES a resolution directing the Historic District Study Committee to prepare a study committee report as outlined in Chapter 127, Section 127-4 of the City Code.



**1390 NORTHLAWN  
HISTORIC DESIGNATION REQUEST  
MAY 10, 2021**

**WHEREAS**, JEREMY BALL, the owner of the Property located at 1390 NORTHLAWN has requested that his home be considered for Historic Designation within the City of Birmingham,

**WHEREAS**, The land for which the Historic designation is sought is located on the north side of Northlawn between Fairway Dr. and Latham St.,

**WHEREAS**, Section 127-5 of the City Code, Historic Districts, requires that the City Commission pass a resolution directing the Historic District Study Committee to prepare a Study Committee Report;

**WHEREAS**, The Birmingham City Commission has reviewed the request of the property owner and has found that a Study Committee Report to determine the historic merit of the home at 1390 NORTHLAWN is warranted;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, The Birmingham City Commission directs the Historic District Study Committee to prepare a Study Committee Report as outlined in section 127-4 of the City Code for the property located at 1390 NORTHLAWN.

I, Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk of the City of Birmingham, Michigan, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and, correct copy of the resolution adopted by the Birmingham City Commission at its regular meeting held on May 10, 2021.

---

Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk



### **1390 Northlawn**

Is the last home Wallace Frost built in Birmingham in 1951. The home closest resembles his own located at 404 Bonnie Briar built 10 years earlier in 1941. Both are examples of his California - International style of architecture that featured flat roofs, wide chimneys, brick patterns, multiple windows and concrete block exteriors painted white. The home was built for my parents J. T. and Alice Ball and is the home I grew up in with my two older brothers Kary and Tom.

Where the homes really differ is the setting with 1390 semi sunken into a hilltop overlooking the Rouge River. Frost used cantilevered roofs over every north facing room to showcase the nature spectacle of the Rouge River habitat- the trees, daily atmosphere, wildlife and sunsets. The screened in double height porch was a special place for summer dinners on the picnic table. The boot closet was a source of fascination with its short doors along the basement stairs. The sun was so strong in the living room we had to pull heavy drapes over the windows. The foyer, living room and dining room were open plan. The kitchen was small but no bigger than it had to be which made it efficient. We used to have Charles Chips delivered in our milk chute and they would pick up the empty can the same way. The western sunsets flooded the bathroom and clerestory window in the living room with light. Along the western edge of the property are very tall mature pines and a beautiful birch that provide a handsome natural backdrop for the house. The casement windows with the cranks were fun and simple to use. You could shoot out the basement door and head right to the sandbox, raspberry patch or compost pile and then continue down my Dad's handmade stairs to the river – to the clubhouse maybe for an overnight stay with the sounds of the river just a few feet away then race back upstairs for all the comforts of home. The view out back to the Rouge always gave a constant expanse of unfolding nature that featured birds of all kinds, heron, woodpeckers, ducks, hawks, robin, blue jays, and goldfinch. It was a wilder setting for a Frost and he expanded his vocabulary of styles to suit his last project that included all the trademark styles but went further by putting more emphasis on radically shaped rooms with walls at acute angles and cantilevered roofs that emphasized views which is why he liked 1390 in the first place because of it's view from a hilltop to the Rouge. That is the essence of the house. Here are some of its remarkable features for its time:

- Elegant Arts & Crafts style with acute wall angles, double height ceilings and multiple sloped flat cantilevered roofs with a white concrete block exterior
- Dox Plank construction (1950's antiquated)
- 20 foot deep footings anchored in blue clay required to build as directed by Mr. Nichols at the Cranbrook Institute of Science. Cores drilled by Ralph E. Main city of Birmingham surveyor
- Living Room gas fired wood burning fireplace with off white stone block hearth
- Signature Brick design pattern on bedroom #3 to the left of front entrance
- Wide chimney with multiple flues with its own support beam in kitchen
- North Facing multi paned floor to ceiling curved window 12 x 21 feet overlooking the Rouge
- Open concept living room and dining room
- South facing Patio
- Large south facing front windows placed asymmetrically to front door to maximize light
- Small kitchen set against east side of chimney stack with walk thru and pass thru to dining area
- Attached 2 car garage with interior egress to both upper and basement floors
- Clerestory windows in master, bedroom #2 and bedroom #4 over garage and living room



- Screened in Porch with double height ceiling – has winterized panels for winter option
- River views from every North side room, porch, living room, bedroom #2 and master bedroom
- Cantilevered roofs
- Cantilevered master bedroom with 45 degree angled struts affixed to rear exterior for support
- Curved brick wall detail that leads to east side sidewalk
- Globe style Slage doorknobs and locks (seen in other Frost homes)
- Basement recreation room with door to rural back yard and hilltop river view
- Sloped 2 car width driveway with hedge, rock wall border and trench drain
- Pine views from master bathroom with extra tall shower stall & separate bath
- No additions have been made
- Rouge River access, Fairway Public Park South access, Northlawn Bridge access
- Former site of Desnoyers Mill 1826 – 1836 when Michigan was still a territory
- Casement windows throughout

Fifties early automation (gravity based) conveniences incorporated into the house:

- *Milk chute* with front patio access to kitchen
- *Sweep through* for sweeping scraps from kitchen to basement utility room
- *Tin can hole* – a hole at the left of kitchen sink to the garage – an early form of recycling
- *Clothes chute* – a gravity drop from the first floor bedrooms to the basement laundry area

In 1991, the City Commission asked the Historic District and Design Review Commission to report on the architectural contributions of Wallace Frost in Birmingham and this study attributed 44 houses to the American Architect. Today in 2021, 30 years later, only 16 Wallace Frost houses remain standing in the city of Birmingham. That is 28 homes gone, almost the loss of one per year every year for 30 years. With the overzealous building that is going on in Birmingham, and real life example of our former neighbors house across the street at 1385 Northlawn who had a Le Corbusier inspired contemporary only to see it torn down by builders and replaced by two sideways situated supersized colonials, I am reaching out to the city of Birmingham for assistance to help landmark our property. My grandfather, T. M. Ball also had a Wallace Frost located at 1099 Orchard Ridge Road but it was torn down after the property changed hands. We are hoping to avoid that fate if our property goes on the market and would not want it sold without a landmark designation in place. I did inquire with several preservation organizations before contacting the city of Birmingham and I received a reply from the National Park Service regarding the requirements to submit an application to nominate 1390 Northlawn as a National Historic Landmark. After reading through the criteria it seems appropriate that all remaining 16 Wallace Frost homes be nominated as one body of work and this could help Wallace Frost achieve National recognition for his achievements and could help to broaden his impact on future generations of architects. A multiple NHL designation could be a great way to put him on equal footing with Albert Kahn, Eliel and Eero Saarinen as well as other Michigan architects who are already associated with properties that have received NHL designation.

I think it is time to do a study to confirm the number of Wallace Frost homes left in Birmingham, to enumerate them within their style with regard to pre and post California types in order to better understand the full scope of his homebuilding aesthetic. Because there are so few, perhaps his homes in Bloomfield Hills should be included in the study.

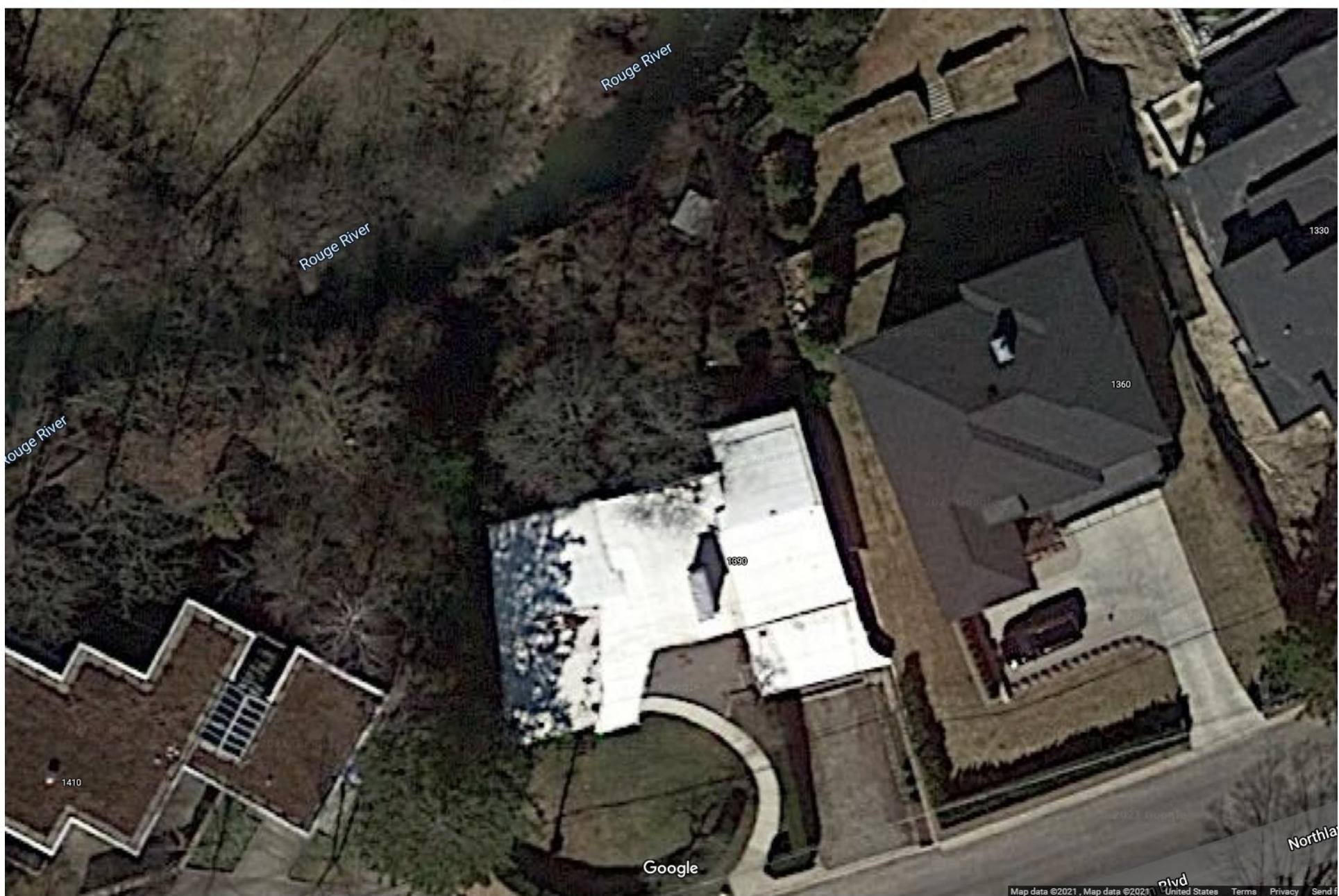
Thank you for considering 1390 Northlawn for landmark designation. Shirley Ball



# 1390 Northlawn















*Wallace Frost*

*His Architecture in Birmingham, Michigan*

*Historic District and Design Review Commission  
August, 1992*



**BIRMINGHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION**

**Keith W. Deyer, Chairman**

**Max B. Horton**

**Donald J. McKeon**

**Eugene J. Gordon**

**Glenda L. Meads**

**Laura B. Cassel  
Vice-Chairperson**

**Marcia R. Rowbottom**

**Patricia McCullough, City Planner**

**Kathleen Bartoluzzi, Assistant Planner**

**Linda Rowat, Secretary**

**August 1992**



## PURPOSE STATEMENT

This report is the culmination of a study of the American architect, Wallace Frost, and the homes he designed in Birmingham from 1921 to 1967. In 1991, the City Commission asked the Historic District and Design Review Commission to report on the architectural contributions of Wallace Frost in Birmingham.

In the past year and a half, we have researched the City's assessment records, read old articles from the Eccentric and other periodicals, talked with residents, and drew from the architectural expertise of two former residents who are considered to be local Frost experts. While our efforts have not resulted in the discovery of every bit of information about each of the structures, we have found worthwhile historic and architectural reasons for believing that the buildings and homes in our report are worthwhile of being acknowledged as a significant part of Birmingham's architectural history and charm.

Frost's unique style of architectural design has contributed to Birmingham's small town feeling and character which has been created by the blending of old and new architecture. Frost's designs have been admired by both residents and visitors. Birmingham has had good fortune to be an economically thriving community, but current development pressures have also served to effect its residential resources.

It is our hope that the following report will provide the City Commission and the community with the background history and information necessary to recognize the architectural contributions of Wallace Frost in Birmingham.



## REPORT INDEX

### PAGE

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 1 - 5   | THE ARCHITECT'S BACKGROUND                  |
| 6       | THE ARCHITECT'S STYLE                       |
| 7 - 10  | WALLACE FROST DESIGNS IN BIRMINGHAM         |
| 11      | INDEX OF FROST DESIGNED HOMES IN BIRMINGHAM |
| 12 - 34 | PHOTOGRAPHS                                 |
| 35      | BACKGROUND INFORMATION SOURCES              |
| 36 - 60 | ARTICLES ON WALLACE FROST                   |



## THE ARCHITECT'S BACKGROUND

As a young man, Wallace Frost studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania from 1911 to 1915 where he took great interest in French architecture. At the university, Frost studied under Paul Cret, a professor of architecture who taught his native French architecture and design. Frost's architectural education ended abruptly when Cret was called back to France in 1915 to serve in the war. Disappointed, Frost withdrew from the university.

During World War I, Frost was an architect for the Air Force and was stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Washington D.C. During his military service, he met Albert Kahn who was a government consultant at the time. After the war, Frost went to work for Kahn in Detroit. Kahn built a reputation for his innovative factory designs that emphasized streamlined and simplified architecture that was functional as well as aesthetically pleasing to the eye. This was achieved at the Ford Highland Park Plant. This type of design was a clear departure from Frost's interest in proportion of design, harmony of materials, and romantic renaissance beauty found in residential designs. Frost worked with Kahn from 1919 to 1925 on such projects as the General Motors Building and the Edsel Ford Mansion in Grosse Point Farms. Inspired by his visit to the English Cotswald Country with Kahn, Edsel Ford commissioned Kahn's architectural firm in 1925 which permitted Frost to travel to Europe on several occasions from 1925 to 1931. During this same time period, Frost was designing residential homes with some locations in Birmingham. Frost and his family moved to Italy until 1932 before returning to the Detroit area.

After a year, Frost moved to California in 1933 to design residential homes. During the 1930's, Californian architecture was experimenting with the modern flat roofed International style. A few years later, Frost returned to Birmingham to settle with his family and to re-establish his architecture practice. He combined his house designs of the early forties with the English Country style and the flat roofed International style he experienced in California. This resulted in modern homes with some decorative detail reminiscent of his earlier house designs.

In 1957, while in Birmingham, Frost was commissioned to prepare design plans for Mr. and Mrs. Sober of Lansing. The 10,300 square foot residence provided for spacious living areas. The house was designed and fashioned to facilitate entertaining with large gathering spaces. The operational activities of the house, such as the kitchen, service areas, and servants quarters, were specifically designed to be concealed from the residence. In 1967, the Sobers donated the house to the State of Michigan for the use as the governor's residence.

Frost included a common theme in all of his post-Californian designs which draws the outdoors into the home with the use of large windows, patios and other similar design elements.

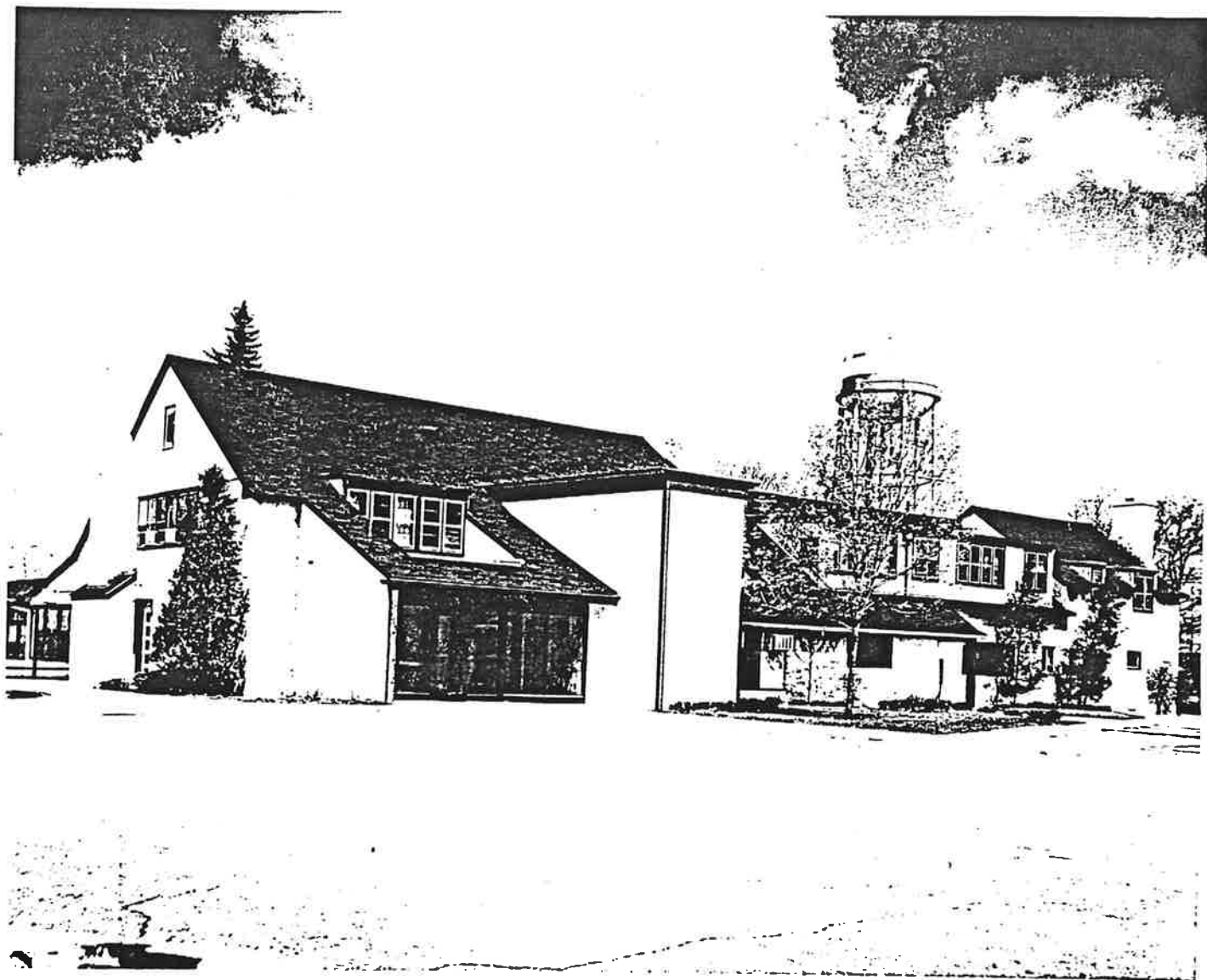


Frost also designed the following more notable accomplishments: the Bowen House in Grosse Point, the cafeteria, gate house, housing facility, and dormitories at the General Motors Proving Grounds in Milford, and the Thom residence, "Lake End," in the Bloomfield Hills.

Through interviews with family members and prior associates, it has come to be known that Wallace Frost had a few interesting qualities and practices. Wallace Frost did not drive. His wife, Grace, drove him to all of his construction sites in order to supervise construction. Due to economic and time constraints at the time, when on a construction site, Frost often drew specific design features for the home on the construction drawings as construction was under way around him. Fortunately, Frost was ambidextrous and had the capability of sketching details with both hands at the same time. Frost continued to design homes in his Birmingham home at 404 Bonnie Brier until his death in 1962.

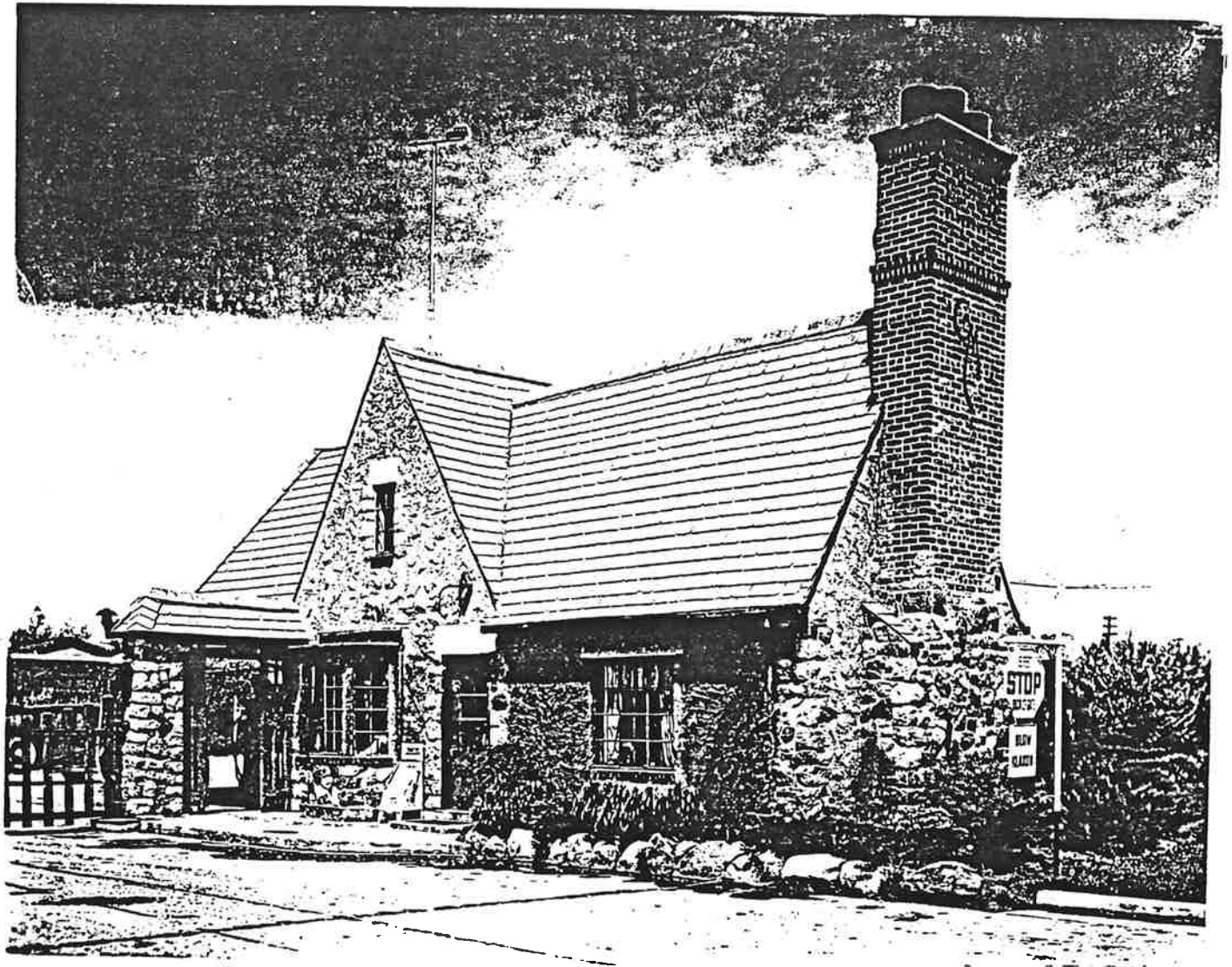






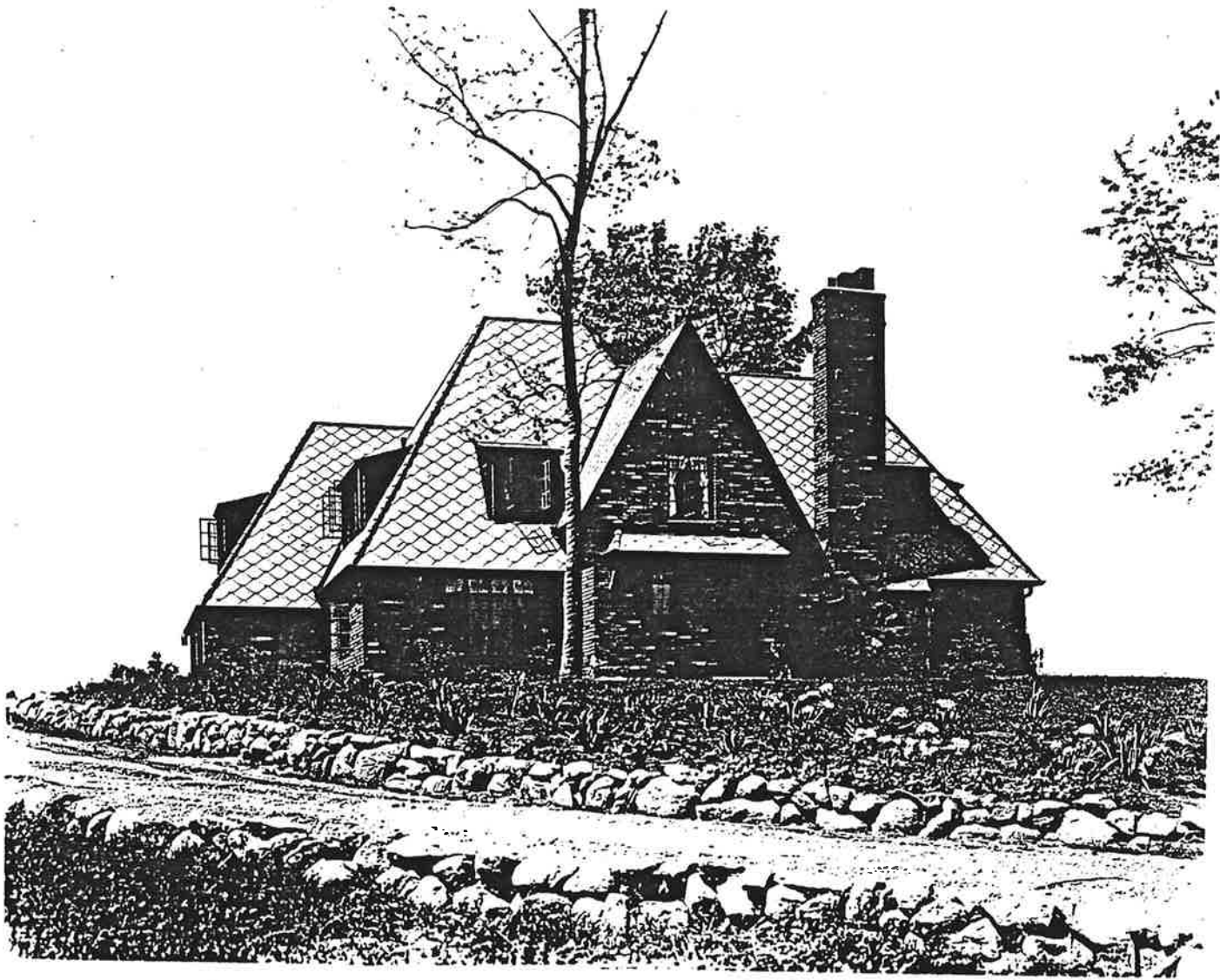
**Cafeteria  
General Motors Proving Grounds  
Milford, Michigan**





Gate House  
General Motors Proving Grounds  
Milford, Michigan





**Housing Facility  
General Motors Proving Grounds  
Milford, Michigan**



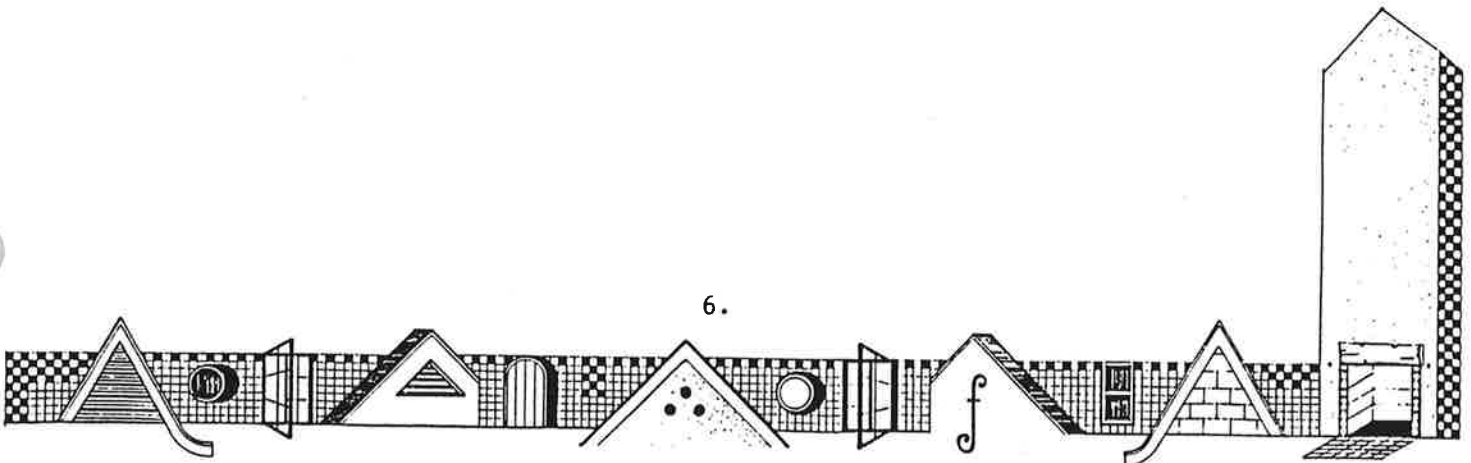
## THE ARCHITECT'S STYLE

With his appreciation of French architecture, and his experience with Kahn's English designs, Frost has incorporated numerous design elements that have become a trademark in his home designs. The following architectural design concepts were common in Frost homes prior to the 1930's.

- \* numerous windows
- \* varied roof lines
- \* high ceilings
- \* interesting design of room space
- \* several fireplaces
- \* asymmetrical exterior appearance of window placement to functionally use natural light in the interior
- \* custom designed light fixtures
- \* innovative use of a variety of building materials, like plaster, wood siding, brick, limestone, and concrete block
- \* use of natural colored materials
- \* multiple chimneys which are not functional including several chimney flues
- \* multiple pane windows
- \* attached garages
- \* interior archways
- \* limestone around windows and doors
- \* elongated windows
- \* second floor dormer windows
- \* prominent roof slopes which blend with the first floor

After designing homes in California and returning to Michigan, Frost combined his new design techniques with some of the previous elements to design a home unique to the Birmingham area. Some of these common design elements are:

- \* large windows designed to bring the outside into the home
- \* one story low sloping roof lines
- \* white painted block
- \* brick design pattern
- \* wide chimney with multiple flues





## WALLACE FROST DESIGNS IN BIRMINGHAM

There are 44 homes in Birmingham known to have been designed by Wallace Frost. He designed his first house in 1921 for himself and his wife at 579 Tooting Lane which has been characterized as a small English yeoman's cottage with curved gable roofs and timber door and window lintels. The house is visually striking with exposed concrete block masonry that has been painted white. This was a departure from the custom of applying stucco to the masonry.

He also designed his last residence in Birmingham located at 404 Bonnie Briar in 1941 which reflects his design experience in California. With flat roofs and white painted concrete block, the design of the home includes common Frost details, such as large floor to ceiling windows, brick dentil patterning at the chimney and entrance wall, and a wide chimney.

The last home design by Frost in Birmingham is located at 1390 Northlawn and was constructed in 1951. This one story home is characterized by the relatively flat roof and large expanse of windows. The entrance is marked by the brick patterning on the adjoining wall.

The most notable home in Birmingham may be the house he designed in 1930 at 440 Lakepark. With the view of Quarton Lake off the rear, the home is an excellent example of French architecture with stone walls capped with red brick dentils. The red brick is incorporated in the forward wing with stone quoins.

The Village Players Theater Building was also designed by Frost in 1926. The Birmingham Eccentric Newspaper headline, "Architect's Plan Of Theatre For Village Players" on May 6, 1926 included Frost's artist sketch for "a kind of a playhouse that is suitable for the needs of the . . . local amateur theatrical organization." The original white painted block building had low sloping black roofs and a large chimney. At the time the article was written, a location was not yet determined for this "unique edifice." The theater was eventually built at 752 Chestnut where it currently stands.

To gain insight into the interior design and qualities found in Frost homes, the Historic District and Design Review Commission toured four homes in Birmingham which reflect his design style at that period in his achitectural career from 1921 to 1945. The following description is a synopsis of the May 6, 1992 tour.

### 236 Puritan

The owners of 236 Puritan have restored the home and updated several rooms, namely the kitchen and the dining room (which is an addition). Built in 1925 and in keeping with Wallace Frost's architectural style, the home has a very small kitchen (which is almost divided in half by the chimney stack), and an expansive living room with a sun room located off of the main



living area. One of the most striking features of the exterior of the home is a decorative leaded bullseye glass window on the front facade, which provides for interesting casts of light in the main living area.

The 5 bedroom home has pewabic tile in the 2 upstairs bathrooms and terra cotta tile in the foyer. A small bathroom is located off of the foyer, in keeping with Frost's penchant for tiny lavatories! A fireplace in the master bedroom was originally a built-in chest of drawers. A separate rear staircase allows access to the second floor bedrooms. Wooden timbers that have been stained a dark color are found in the sun room. Additionally, a similar timber was located above the fireplace in the living room, although it was removed several years ago due to fire hazard.

The owners have installed period light fixtures throughout the home and have decorated the home with several antique collections (eg. birdhouses, evening bags, boxes, etc.). Much of the overgrown vegetation was removed several years ago when the current owners purchased the home. This has allowed for a great deal of natural light to enter the home through the numerous windows throughout.

#### 1691 Oak

This Frost home, built in 1945, has the distinction of being the smallest Frost home in Birmingham. It is a ranch style home that draws a lot of its character from the large lot which surrounds it. When Frost designed this home, it was with the intention of adding on to it at a later date. The owners, who have lived in the home since it was built, said that they are pleased that it was left without the planned addition because the home is a very liveable size for the retired couple now! A significant design feature is the large overhang which provides shade from the summer sun yet allows the (low) slanting rays of the winter sun to enter. The living room, although quite small compared to other Frost homes, has a large picture window in the front and a fireplace as well. The number of windows gives the house an open feeling, which is enhanced by the fact that the home is set in the rear of the corner lot.

The owners have the original plans of the home in their basement, although the plans are not the only "artifact" located below grade. The Alcorns are collectors of rocks, minerals and fossils and have a display area in their basement. A visit to the Alcorns display was once part of the itinerary of schoolchildren in the area, as Mrs. Alcorn introduced numerous groups of Quarton School children to the impressive collection.



### 579 Tooting Lane

The oldest Frost design in Birmingham (1921), the home was originally constructed on a large lot, which was reduced to half the size some years ago. The lot was split into two lots when the in-ground pool cracked and had to be removed from the ground. The home has dark wood shingles on the roof which was once covered with asphalt shingles. The current owner had the roof restored to its original condition.

The interior of the home is open and spacious, with the exception of the kitchen which was certainly not designed for comfort or cooking, in true Frost form! The cupboards in the kitchen can be summed up in three words: tall, small and original. A minuscule bathroom is located off of the kitchen, across from the garage entrance. A collection of doors in this area, as well as throughout the house, gave the home the nickname, "The House of Doors"!

The most impressive room in the house is the living room. Expansive and airy, the room is above all, designed to be lived in and enjoyed. Several windows, window niches, rustic timbers and a rectangular design allow the room to serve as a formal living area that is very liveable also. The timbers throughout the house are thought to have been harvested from a Great Lakes freighter.

A screened in porch is also located on the first floor. The formal dining room has doors that lead to the outside. The room facilitates Frost's desire of bringing the "outside in".

Several Frost features that are found in this house are: wood timbers, small bathrooms, small kitchen, cross shaped layout, large multi-flue chimney, numerous windows of various shapes, built in drawers, small closet space, open floor plan for the first floor, tiled foyer and large entrance door (approx. 42 in.) with wrought iron hardware.

### 1283 Buckingham

The owners of this Dutch colonial Frost design, led the Commission through their home. One of only 2 Dutch colonial designs in Birmingham, this home has several features that were commonly seen in the English Cottage and Tudor style homes. The home was constructed in 1925. The entry foyer has been retiled, although the owners stated that the original tile was similar to the terra cotta tile found in other Frost homes. A sun room is located in the front of the home and functions as living area year round because it is heated and cooled with the rest of the home. A spacious living room and dining area are found just beyond the foyer. Again, an open floor plan and several windows allow natural light and a feeling of the outside to filter into the main living areas.

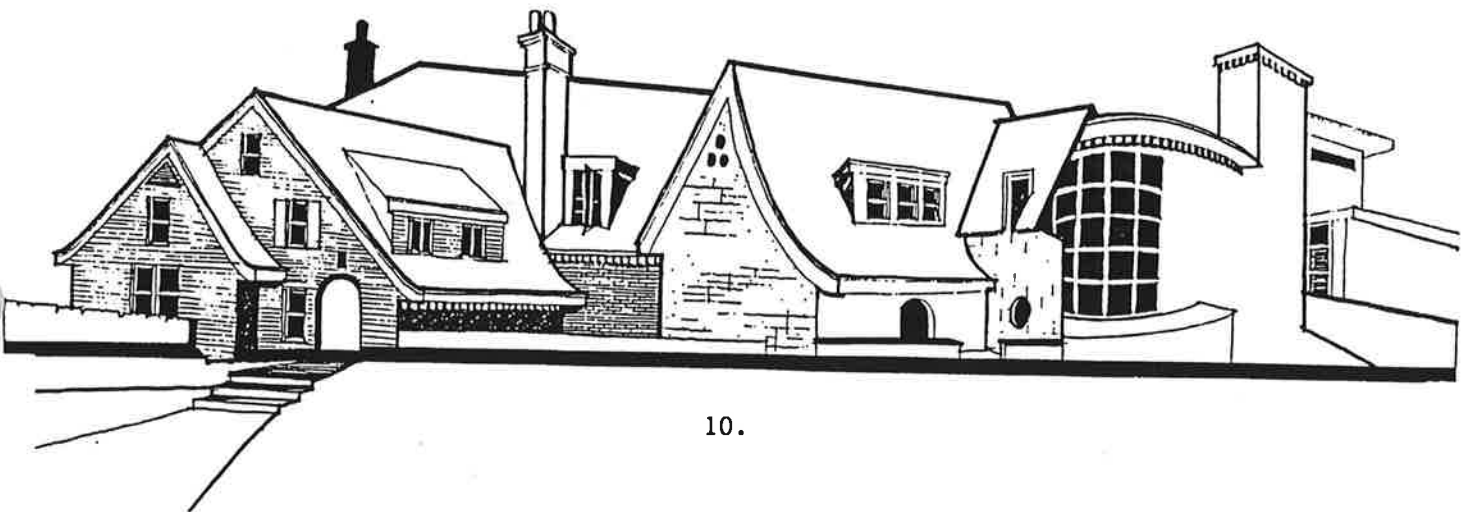


An indisputable characteristic of Frost homes that can be seen throughout the second floor are the assorted window sizes. We are told no two are alike! The kitchen has been updated to make it more liveable. However, the updated features which utilize natural wood, blend in with the overall design of the home. The smallest lavatory that we found was in this home. It is located off of the foyer, similar to other Frost homes. The garage was renovated into a family room in the rear of the home. The owners were originally going to make this space larger than it is currently, but they were told that the wall that separates it from the rest of the house was constructed of at least 18 inches of concrete which caused the owners to change their plans.

The second floor of the house consists of four bedrooms. The master bedroom has an attached sitting room.

After many months of rigorous study, the Historic District and Design Review Commission has come to understand that much of the charm that is characteristic of Birmingham's residential neighborhoods is the result of streetscapes such as those found on Puritan, Lakeside, Pilgrim, Bonnie Brier, and Tooting Lane. Such streets are well established, heavily textured residential environments. Typically, these streets feature a harmonious blend of architecture capturing old and new designs. The Frost homes in Birmingham have contributed to the charm with individualized homes which suit the residents as well as the environment. Many of the Frost homes have withstood the years with little modifications to the original designs. Those earlier designs found on streets such as Tooting Lane and Pilgrim, have architectural characteristics worthy of preserving through historic designation.

The acknowledgement of Wallace Frost as a significant historical figure in Birmingham architectural history is important to Birmingham's heritage. After considerable study, the Birmingham Historic District and Design Review Commission recommends that the City Commission accept this report as justification to acknowledge Wallace Frost as a significant historical person whose architecture has influenced the residential fabric of Birmingham.





# INDEX OF FROST DESIGNED HOMES IN BIRMINGHAM (Year Built)

- ✓1. 660 Abbey (1945)
- ✓2. 379 Aspen (1927)
- ✓3. 404 Bonnie Brier (1941)
- ✓4. 420 Bonnie Brier (1941)
- ✓5. 436 Bonnie Brier (1941)
- ✓6. 444 Bonnie Brier (1940)
- ✓7. 467 Bonnie Brier (1941)
8. 1283 Buckingham (1925)
9. 752 Chestnut (1926)
10. 219 Elm (1928) 1936227028?
11. 795 Fairfax (1928) 1926401018 ✓
12. 1040 Gordon Lane (1926) 1935277045 ✓
13. 960 Harmon (1926) 1926427013 ✓
14. 440 Lakepark (1930) 1926477002 ✓
15. 1169 Lakeside (1928) 1926230022 ✓
16. 1290 Lakeside (1946) 1926279024 ✓
17. 633 Lakeview (1929) 1926427027 ✓
18. 650 Lakeview (1930) 1925304010 ✓
19. 371 Linden (1924) 1935229010 ✓
20. 508 Linden (1928) 1935227030 ✓
21. 460 W. Maple (1929) 1925356012 ✓
22. 1390 Northlawn (1951) 1935426019 ✓
23. 1691 Oak (1947)
24. 139 Pilgrim (1926) 1926453028 ✓
25. 187 Pilgrim (1925) 1926453026 ✓
26. 239 Pilgrim (1925) 1926453024 ✓
27. 515 Pilgrim (1925) 1926403031 ✓
28. 551 Pilgrim (1928) 1926403030 ✓
29. 671 Pilgrim (1924) 1926403025 ✓
30. 691 Pilgrim (1926) 1926403024 ✓
31. 783 Pilgrim (1928) 1926403019 ✓
32. 864 Pilgrim (1924) 1926404002 ✓
33. 236 Puritan (1925) 1926476010 ✓
34. 683 Puritan (1927) 1926404022 ✓
35. 788 Randall Court (1928) 1925353016 ✓
36. 967 Rivenoak (1926) 1925428014 ✓
37. 525 Southfield (1940) ? 1936151001?
38. 515 Tooting Lane (1929) 1925376059 ✓
39. 579 Tooting Lane (1921) 1925376009 ✓
40. 584 Tooting Lane (1926) 1925376008 ✓
41. 364 Valley View Lane (1939) 1936103009 ✓
42. 244 Wimbleton (1928) 1925257002 ✓
43. 715 Wimbleton (1928) 1925280018 ✓
44. 1050-1078 Wimbleton (1928)

1925282017 - 1078

1925282018 - 1076

1925282019 - 1072

✓ 1925282020 1070

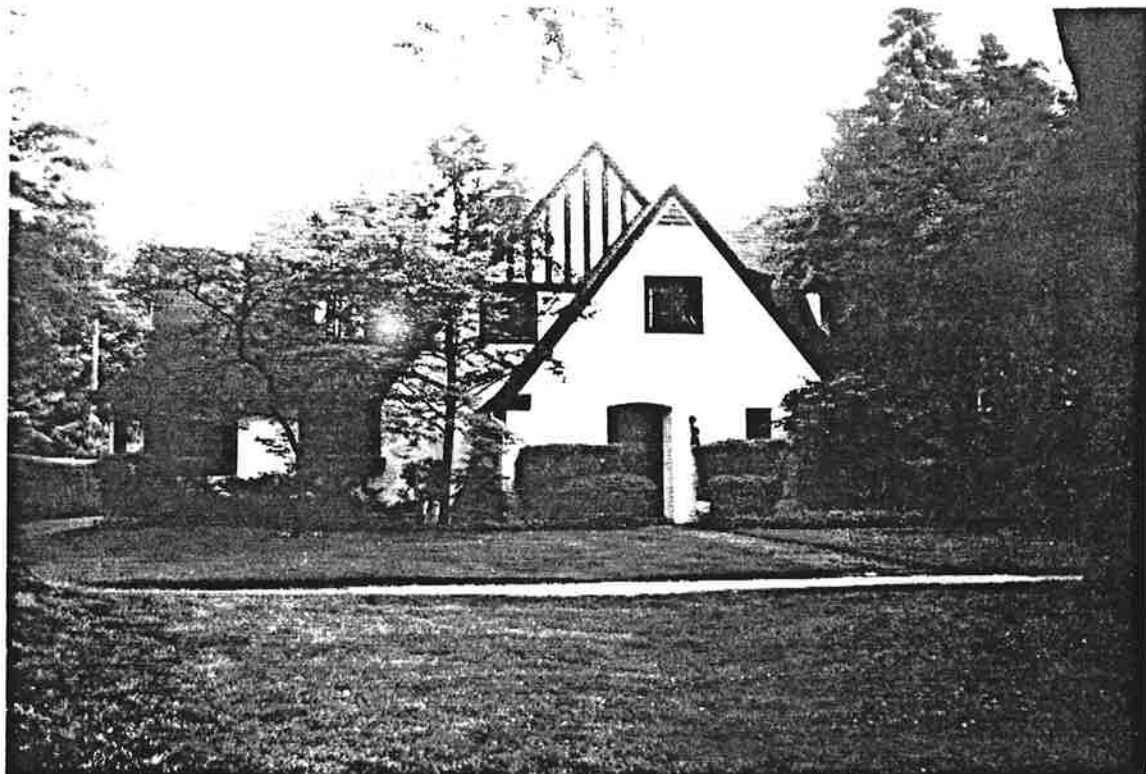
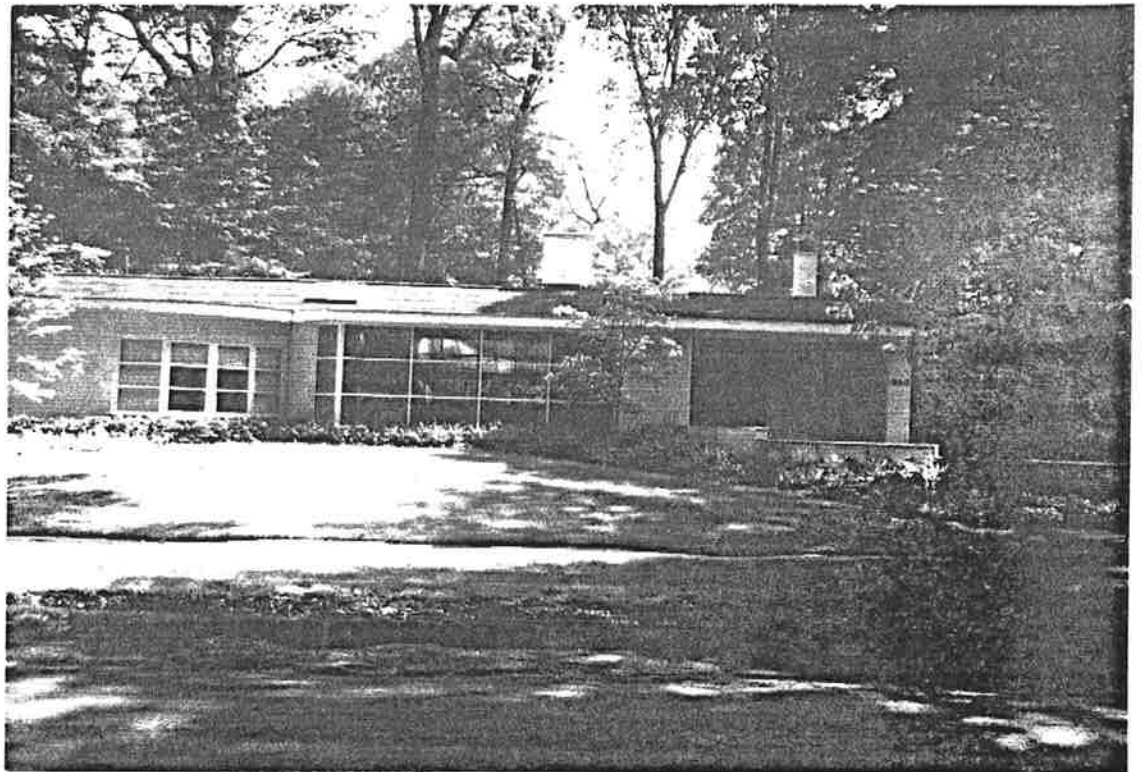
1925282021 1064

1925282022 - 1060

1925282023 - 1050



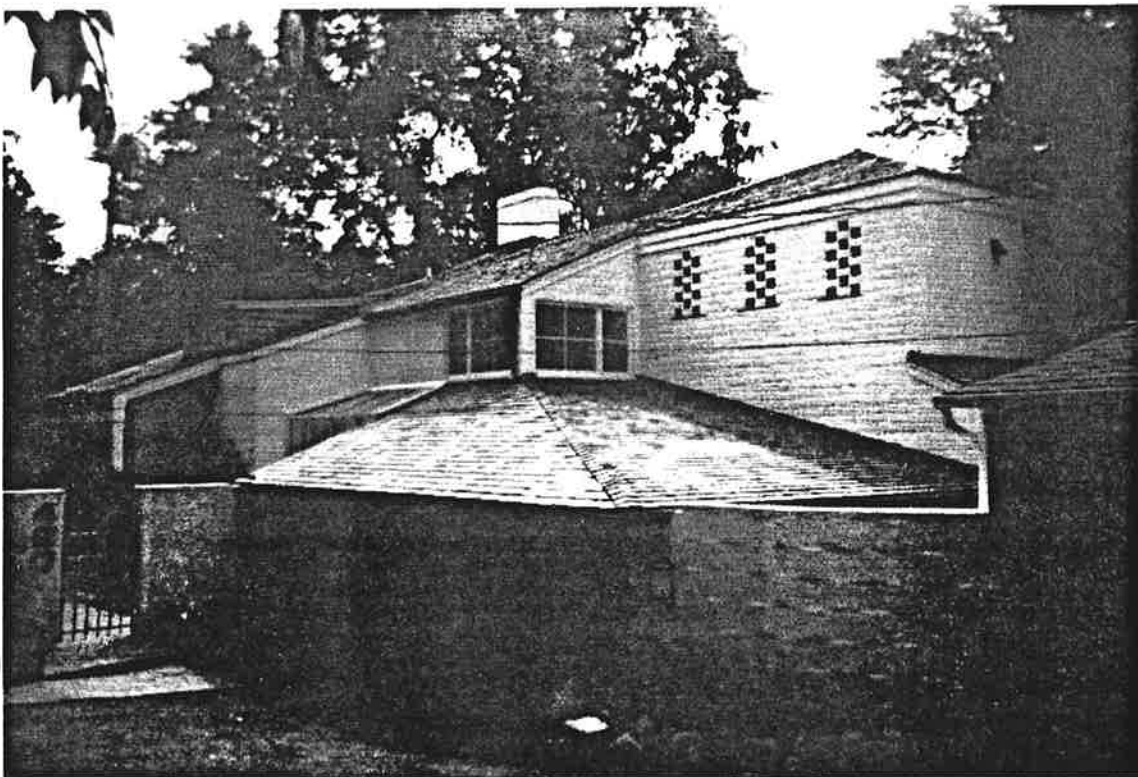
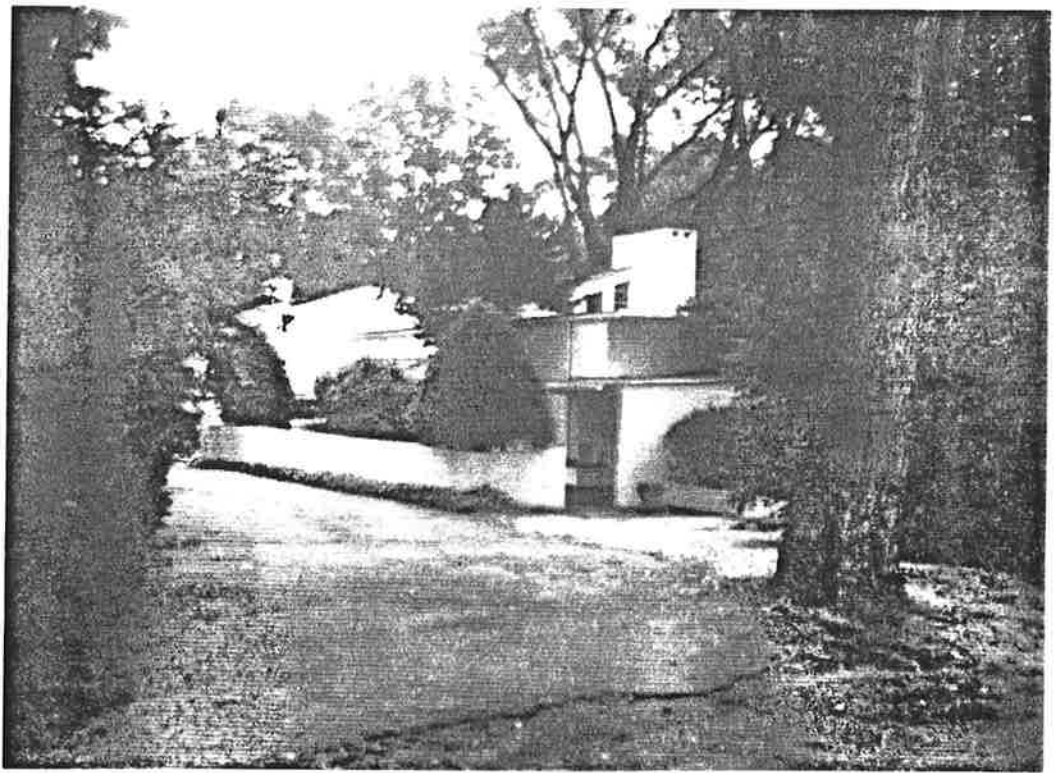
660 Abbey  
Yr Built 1945



379 Aspen  
Yr Built 1927



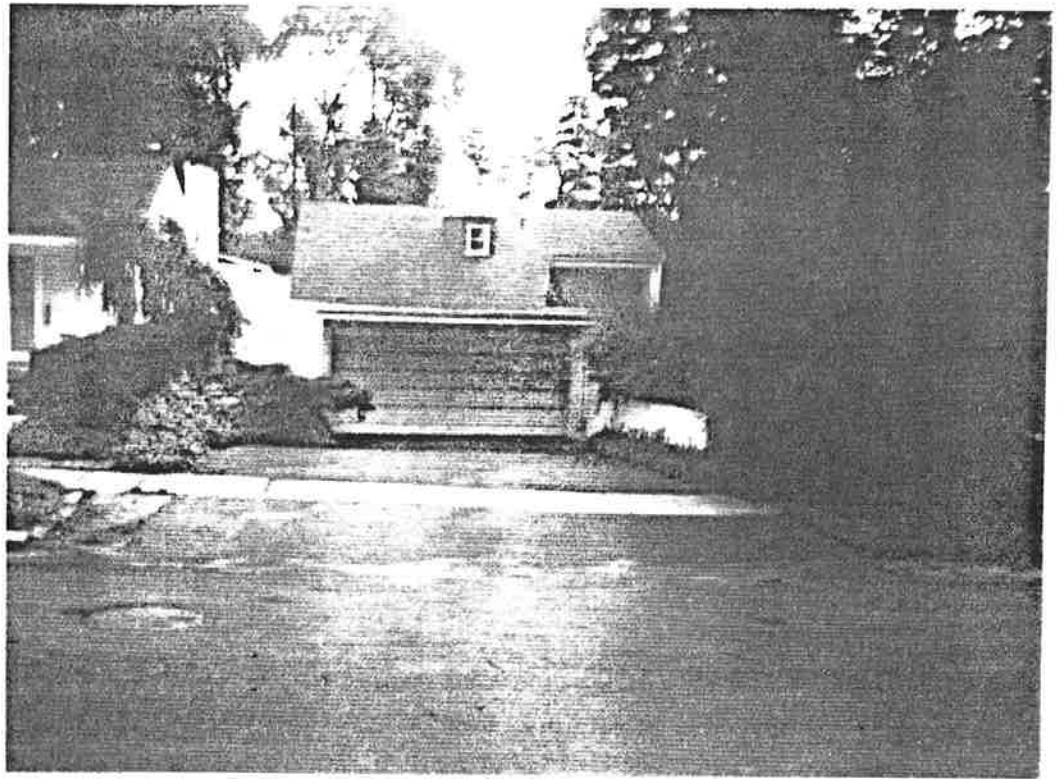
404 Bonnie Brier  
Yr Built 1941



420 Bonnie Brier  
Yr Built 1941



436 Bonnie Brier  
Yr Built 1941



444 Bonnie Brier  
Yr Built 1940



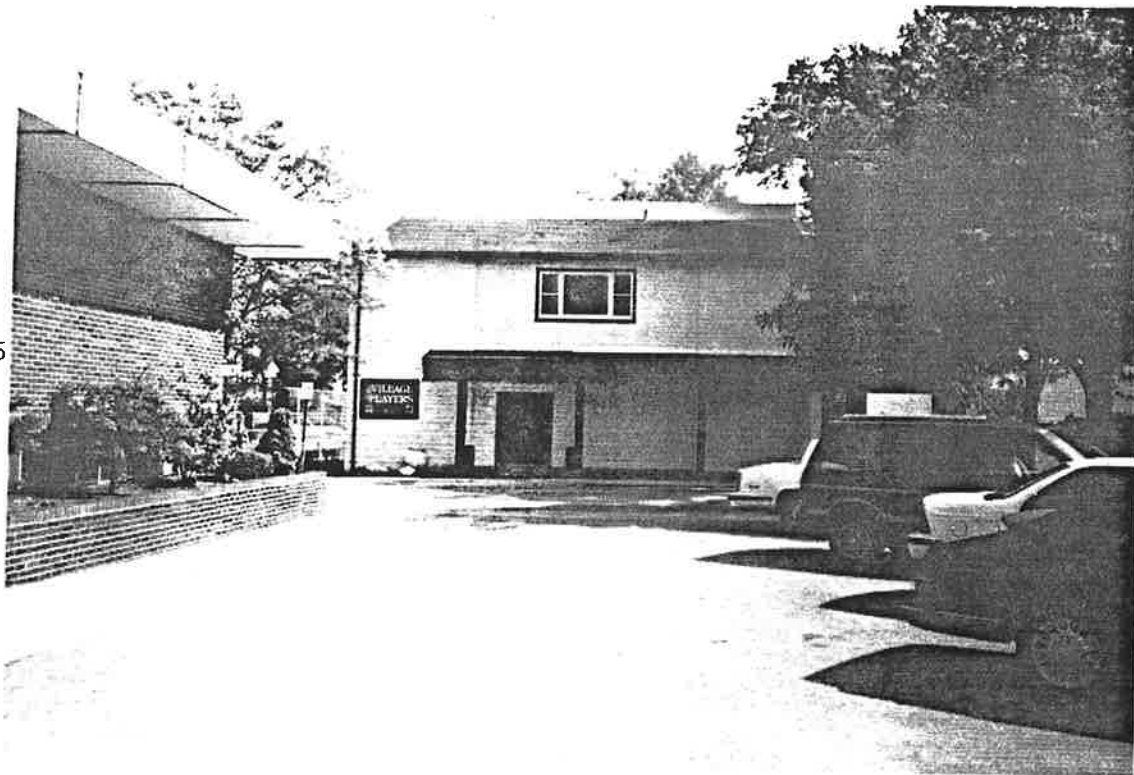
467 Bonnie Brier  
Yr Built 1941



1283 Buckingham  
Yr Built 1925



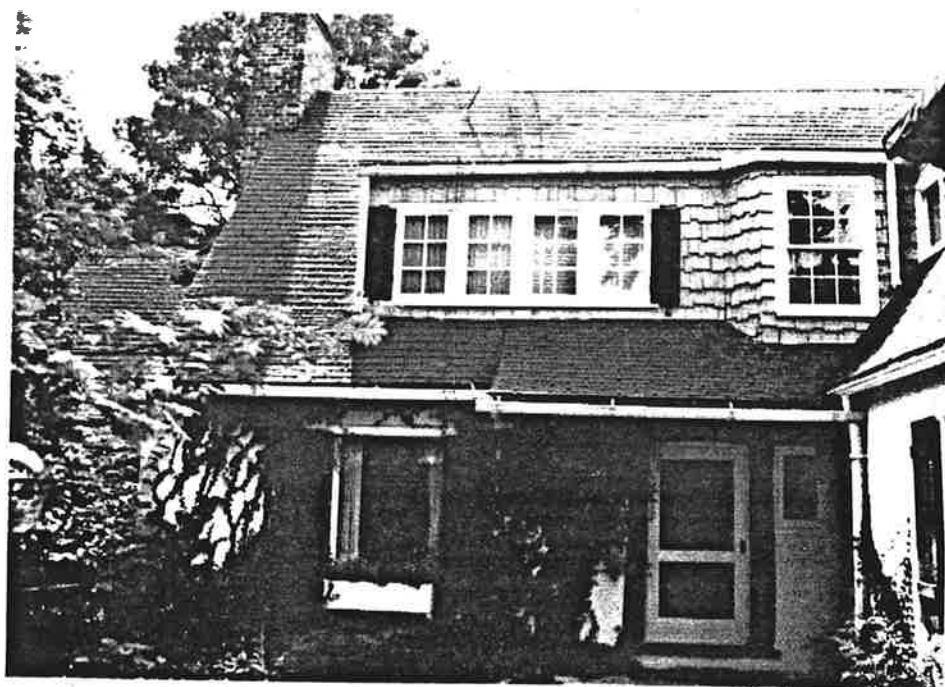
752 Chestnut  
Yr Built 1926



219 Elm  
Yr Built 1926



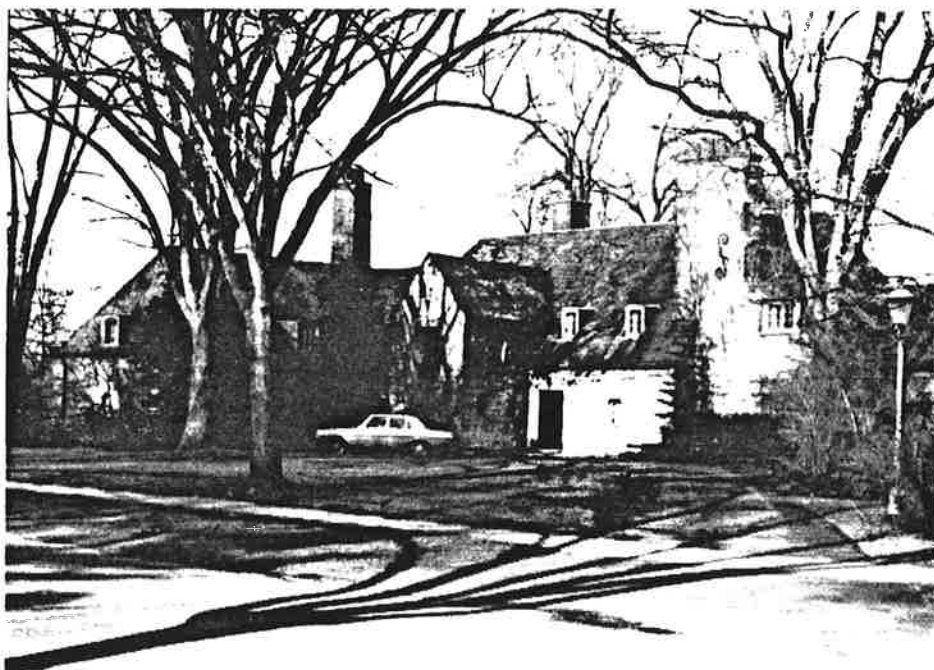
795 Fairfax  
Yr Built 1928



1040 Gordon Lane  
Yr Built 1926



960 Harmon  
Yr Built 1926



440 Lakepark  
Yr Built 1930



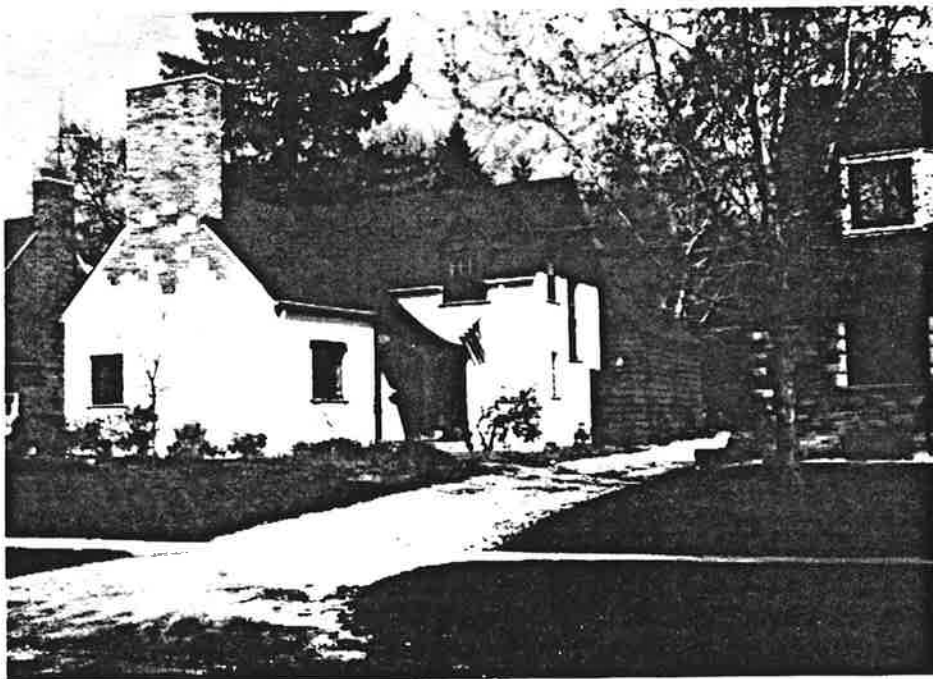
1169 Lakeside  
Yr Built 1928



1290 Lakeside  
Yr Built 1946



633 Lakeview  
Yr Built 1929



650 Lakeview  
Yr Built 1930



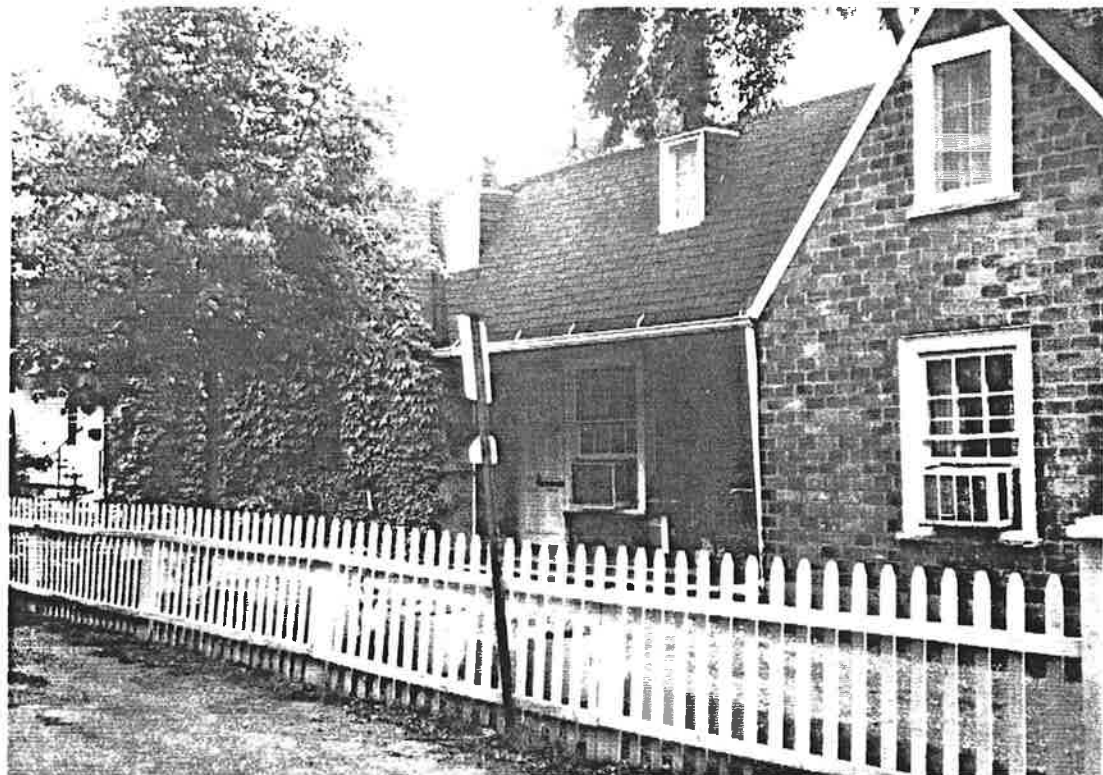
371 Linden  
Yr Built 1924



508 Linden  
Yr Built 1928



460 W. Maple  
Yr Built 1929



1390 Northlawn  
Yr Built 1951



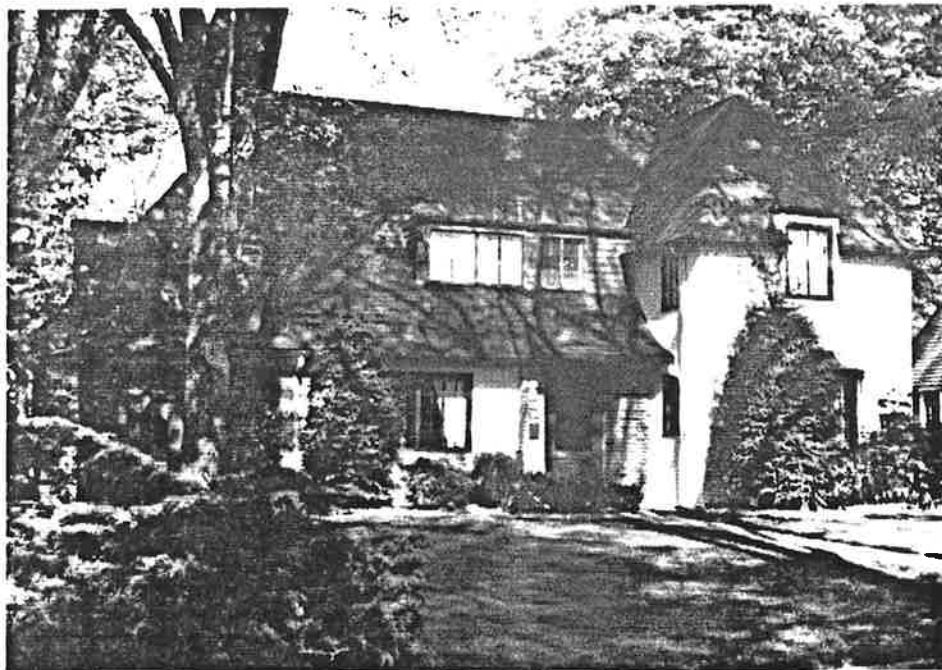
1691 Oak  
Yr Built 1947



139 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1926



187 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1925



239 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1925



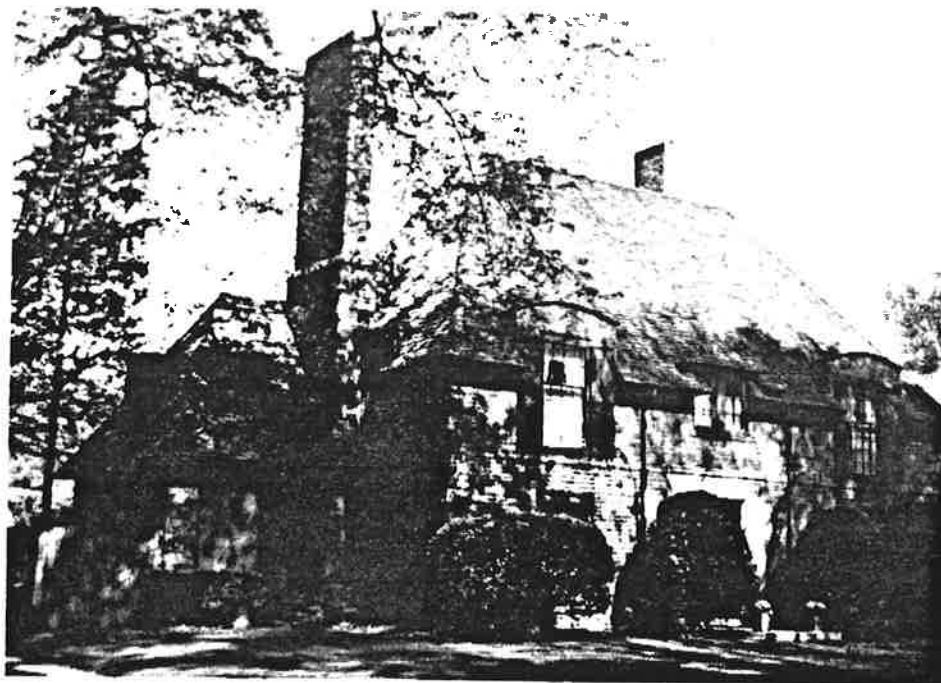
515 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1925



551 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1928



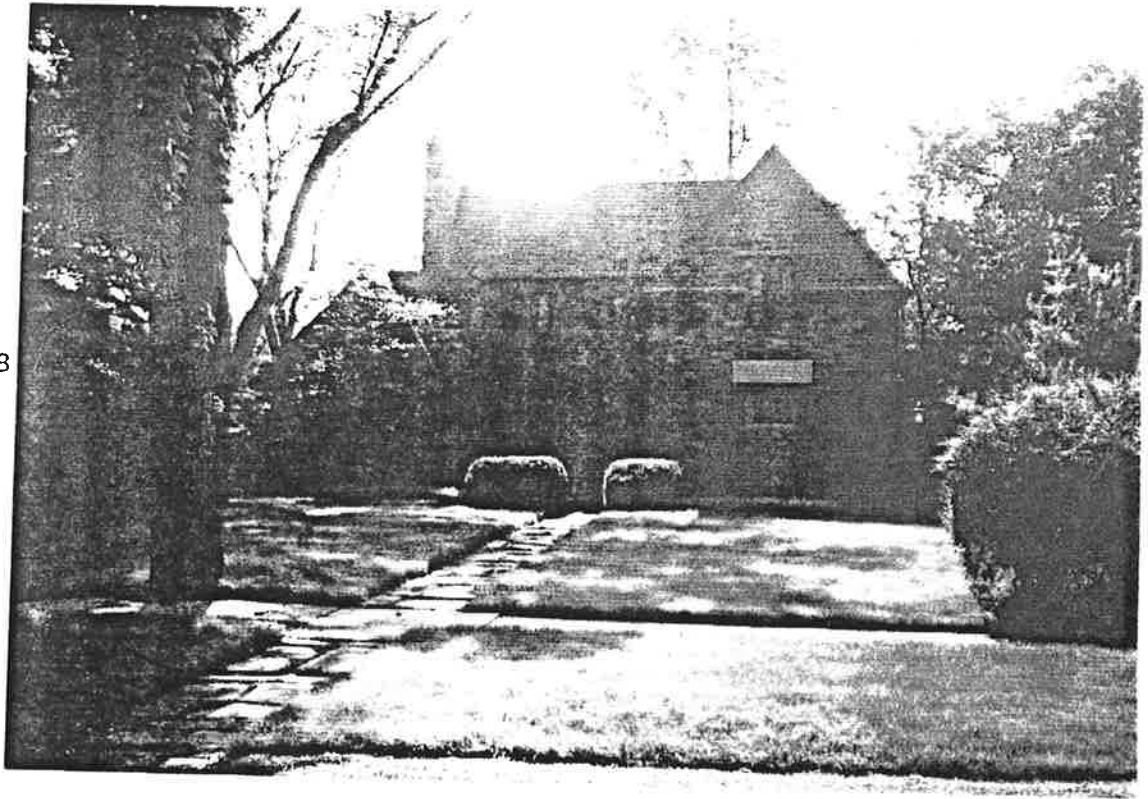
671 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1924



691 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1926



783 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1928



864 Pilgrim  
Yr Built 1924



236 Puritan  
Yr Built 1925



683 Puritan  
Yr Built 1927



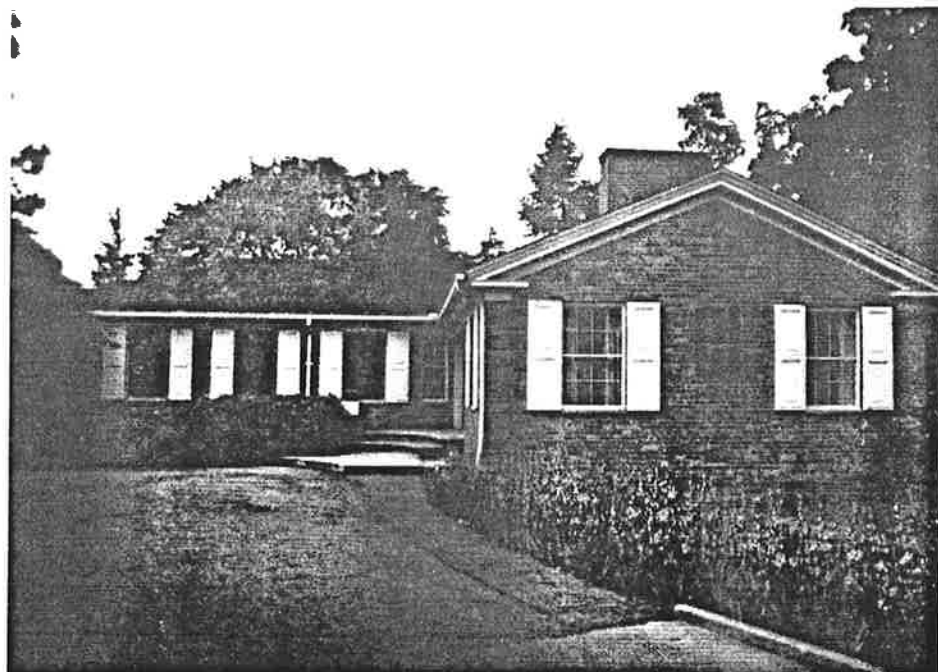
788 Randall Ct.  
Yr Built 1928



967 Rivenoak Ct.  
Yr Built 1926



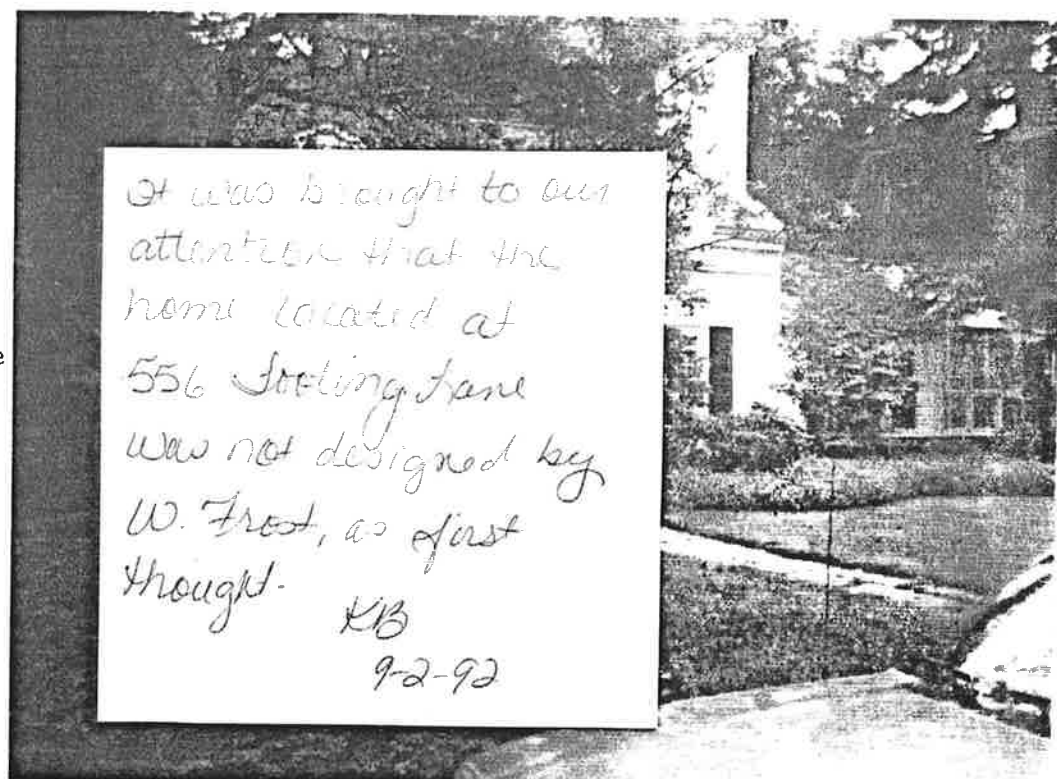
525 Southfield Road  
Yr Built 1940



515 Tooting Lane  
Yr Built 1929



556 Tooting Lane  
Yr Built 1926



It was brought to our  
attention that the  
home located at  
556 Tooting Lane  
was not designed by  
W. Frost, as first  
thought.

KB

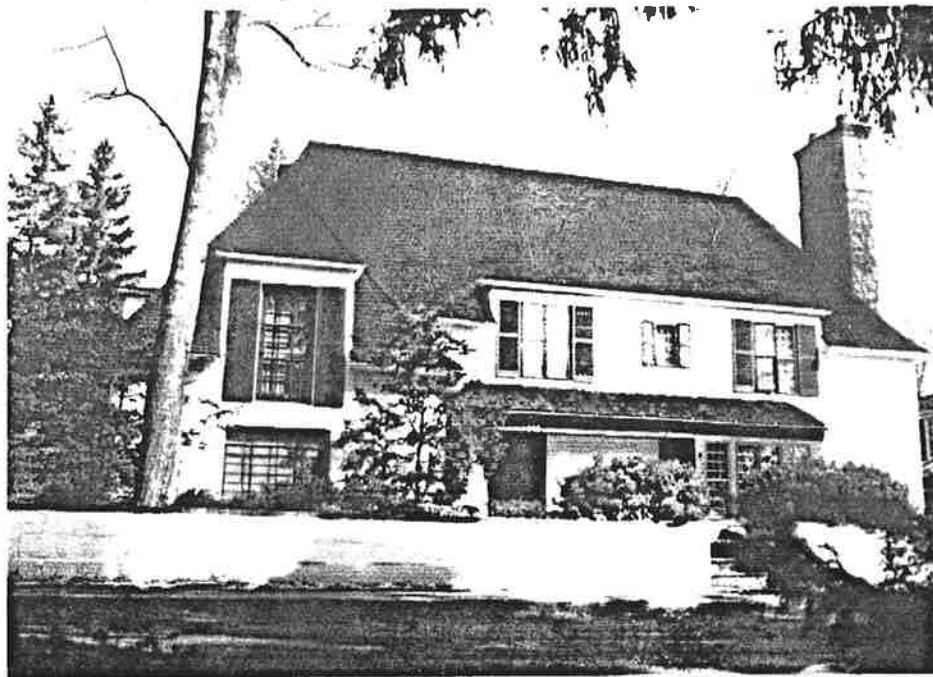
9-2-92



579 Tooting Lane  
Yr Built 1921



584 Tooting Lane  
Yr Built 1926



364 Valley View Lane  
Yr Built 1939



244 Wimbleton  
Yr Built 1928



715 Wimbleton  
Yr Built 1928



Wimbleton Terrace  
1050-1078 Wimbleton  
Yr Built 1928





## BACKGROUND INFORMATION SOURCES

The Historic District and Design Review Commission would like to extend its appreciation to Mr. Bruce Brooks, Ms. Harah Frost and Mr. John Richardson for their contribution to this study.

\*\*\*\*\*

- A. "The Howard Sober House: Artifact of the 1950s" by Rochelle S. Elstein, Chronicle, Fall 1980, Vol. 16, No. 3.
- B. Ferry, W. Hawkins, The Building of Detroit: A History. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980.
- C. Kleerekoper, Robyn, "Architect's Homes Called Landmarks." Daily Tribune, October 4, 1990.
- D. Bugbee, Peg and Gordon, "Wallace Frost: Appreciation of Houses." Birmingham Patriot, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1977.
- E. "Architect's Plan Of Theatre For Village Players." Birmingham Eccentric, May 6, 1926.
- F. Niemiec, Helen, "Architect's Repute Keeps Growing Among Owners." Birmingham Eccentric, January 30, 1992.
- G. Niemiec, Helen, " 'Wally' Signature Puts Frost Homes In A Class Of Their Own." Birmingham Eccentric, January 30, 1992.
- H. Powers, Rebecca, "Final Recognition At Last." The Detroit News, December 22, 1991.
- I. LaMarre, Linda, "Tour Stars 'Little House' For Big Need." The Detroit News, October 15, 1978.
- J. "Early Or Late, Frost Houses Are Warm And Charming." by Julia Candler, Birmingham Bloomfield Lifestyles.
- K. "The House Of Frederick E. Good." The Afterglow, April, 1926.
- L. Abbatt, Corinne, "Architect's Name Sold The House." Birmingham Eccentric, September 27, 1979.
- M. The Village Players Sixtieth Anniversary Pamphlet, 1983.



# The Howard Sober House:

## Artifact of the 1950s

Rochelle S. Elstein

"Much of the character of everyman may be read in his house," said the famous landscape architect, Andrew Jackson Downing. In the nineteenth century, more than just the character of the householder was expressed in the building; personal values, literary tastes, or political affiliation might find expression as he and the architect chose from many styles and periods to select that which best captured his ideology and self-concept. When our founding fathers chose Roman architecture, it was to express the hope that the infant Republic would realize those noble ideals of the great Roman state. The choice of style was so tied to the expression of political ideals that when Napoleon appropriated Roman forms for his buildings, thereby forging the link between the dome and dictatorship, America turned to Greece for her building forms and the Greek Revival was born. Aspirations that have little to do with architecture, per se, seek external form, not only in our governmental monuments but in our private homes as well. May we assume that when Vanderbilt commissioned Richard Norris Hunt to build a palace at Newport, Rhode Island, the Commodore nurtured a hope that his children might subsequently make the transition to actual royal or noble status? When Mrs. John Dodge decided to build her estate in Rochester, Michigan in the late 1920s, she looked not to America, not to the architects of the Middle West Prairie School, but to the great country houses of England. Meadowbrook Hall was a product of close study of English tudor mansions. What William Kapp of Smith, Hinchman and Grylls provided Matilda Dodge and Alfred Wilson was not only a house, but a heritage.

For our century, the forms of modern architecture are those of the International Style: flat roof, horizontal window strips, plain wall expanses, exposed steel, concrete and glass, aluminium panels, Fiberglass, new kinds of tiles, laminates, plastics. There are new construction techniques as well: concrete slab construction, sandwich

walls, T-beams, Lally columns. One element of the spirit of the age is a delight in the new technology, a joyful exploration of the potential of the new materials and, by inference, a complete acceptance of the machine as being central to society. The twentieth century person's relationship to nature is one of equality and acceptance. The builder should be aware of the landscape—not to subdue it but to work within it. The building and the site are a continuum. The twentieth century also has a place for the individual innovator. Movements can be traced to individual creators whose unique vision promotes a new and personal style. New forms, new materials, the end of eclecticism, the death of romanticism, the impossibility of architectural revivals—these are the themes sounded by all the architectural and cultural historians of twentieth century America.

But the built environment does not fit the theory or the description. When Henry Ford hired William Van Tine to build Fair Lane, we may mourn his aesthetic insensitivity but it must be acknowledged that Mr. Ford, being a man who got what he wanted, wanted not the innovative and cohesive design of the Prairie School but that pastiche of borrowed forms that makes "Victorian" an epithet, not a description, among architectural critics. A trip through Grosse Pointe, or Lake Forest, or Wellesley in 1940, is an excursion through the Cotswolds, Tudor England, the Valley of the Loire. It is a paradox that the very same people who changed the face of twentieth century America, the motor car pioneers who made the future come a lot sooner, escaped to the past every time they went home. Alvan Macauley of Packard, Roy Chapin of Hudson, Edsel Ford—they made a revolution. They put a machine at the center of American life and they lived in houses that were physical and spiritual expressions of the Renaissance and Middle Ages. Edsel Ford's architect, Albert Kahn, imported some of the materials and workmen from England, even going so far as to use stones from demolished

buildings "to obtain the desired weathered effect" in Ford's Grosse Pointe house. This was the same architect who in 1909 had built the most innovative, most functional, most visually exciting factory building in the world—the Ford Highland Park Plant. It is not simply a matter of chronology; Kahn did not experiment briefly with the engineer's aesthetic and reject it for romantic revival architecture. He continued to design superlatively modern factories—Chrysler-DeSoto Press Shop, 1936; Chrysler-Dodge Half-Ton Truck Plant, 1937; Willow Run Bomber Plant, 1943—and picturesque eclectic houses.

We might look for the source of this architectural schizophrenia in the inherent conservatism of culture in general, which devises new forms only in response to radically new requirements or a new social order. Also reinforcing this reluctance to change is the view of social arbiters that the best comes from the past.

While eclecticism continued to flourish in suburbia as late as the 1930s, it did eventually die. What changed in mid-century America that made the historical tradition totally irrelevant to the society that had nurtured it for one hundred years? To focus this issue, I have chosen a house by an architect who had worked with Albert Kahn, a man who was artistically and in temperament more European than American, Wallace Frost. A Birmingham, Michigan architect, in 1957 he designed a home for Mr. and Mrs. Howard Sober of Lansing. Ten years later, the Sobers donated the house to the State of Michigan for use as the governor's residence. (The furnishings were purchased by the State as part of the agreement to keep the property intact.)

The Letha and Howard Sober house reflects its era in a variety of ways. The 1950s was a period of economic growth that the United States had not enjoyed since the 1920s. The disaster of the Great Depression affected the architectural profession as adversely as it did the



whole of American society. The Historic American Buildings Survey begun in 1933 under the auspices of the WPA, hired architects and engineers to make measured drawings of notable buildings, many of which would fall to the wrecker in the fifties as urban renewal and rising land costs combined with the exodus to the suburbs made whole neighborhoods obsolete. The 1940s found the architectural profession involved in the war effort; many served in the military. Others like Wallace Frost, worked for civilian contractors building military installations. By the next decade, there was an enormous building boom in both commercial and residential construction. Families who had become wealthy and ambitious to express their own values and lifestyles in new houses, hastened to find the right architect. The houses that they built are monuments to the prosperity of mid-century America.

The Sober house, deceptively compact from the exterior, due to the L-shaped plan, contains 10,300 square feet of space. The living room is exceptionally

characteristic of the new architectural look." Not so large nor so lavish as the inaccurately named "cottages" of Newport of the nineteenth century, the housing of upper-middle-class America at mid-twentieth century, nevertheless, indicated that neither the New Deal nor the Internal Revenue Service had totally succeeded in redistributing the wealth. Too costly for the "Organization Man," as William Whyte had characterized America's middle managers, architect-designed housing was within reach of the men at the top of the corporation pyramid while technology graciously bestowed its benefits on worker and employer alike.

Houses communicate a number of things about the owner and the designer. The way in which space is allocated, for example, is a clear indication of the priority of the function carried on in each space. The ratio of private to public space—bedrooms to living room—is a clue to the way the owner regards his family's needs for isolation as compared with group involvement. The size of the kitchen,

taining of a particular sort. The kitchen area is totally concealed from the public space; one can assume that the guests will not be informally received by a hostess who cooks and serves and can at the same time participate in the conversation. The size of the living room compared to the dining room suggests that the house was designed for large groups of people for other than dinner parties. The stage-like quality of the entry is a sign that the guests are presented, their visit to be of short duration. The proximity of the bar clearly indicates that the cocktail party will be the usual form of entertaining. The size and centrality of the entertaining complex—living room, bar, dining room—indicates that high among the family's needs that the architect had to accommodate was the party-space requirement.

In addition to spatial allocation, an excellent indicator of values is that which is hidden compared to that which is visible. In many of Frank Lloyd Wright's designs, for example, the front door is very difficult to locate and the message to the would-be visitor is very clear. Conversely, choosing to live in a glass box communicates a very different message from a house that resolutely turns its back on the neighbors. In the Sober house, the service wing of the house is quite concealed; the servants' living area and their work area is separate from the family space and implies a clear separation between the status of the two groups that inhabit the building.

The dining room is a prominent part of the design, easily visible from the living room and porch and richly decorated to serve as a focus for the house. Obvious care was taken to emphasize and complement the interesting shape of the room through the choice of furniture and carpeting. Dining, more particularly, formal dining, is a part of the family's lifestyle and one that is regarded as suitable for open expression. Conversely the bar is hidden; its location suggests its centrality in the scheme of things: that is to say, it occupies a significant place in the living area and yet is carefully concealed from view. Ambivalence toward drinking would certainly seem to be the message. Similarly the prominent display of books in the library contrasts with the



large but every room is spacious and the ceilings are more than fifteen feet high. It reflects what some social historians have called "the subsequent (post-war) rise of the nation to Texan standards of living." Popular periodicals of the day reveled in what Thorsten Veblen, fifty years earlier, had called "conspicuous consumption." "Spaciousness, and not simply the illusion of spaciousness, is

especially in a house without servants, reveals the centrality of meal preparation and tells us much about "woman's place" in the scheme of things. "Spatial messages" are easily read in designs where the children's bedrooms and play space are in a separate wing of the house. One of the messages the Sober house communicates is the centrality of entertaining but enter-



position of the television set behind doors and would imply that reading is a more desirable activity than TV watching and that the designer was asked to put the books within easy reach and in full view, while allocating to the television a more removed and less visually prominent place.

Technology, or more properly, science and technology spawned the bomb and the mushroom cloud darkened the entire post-war world. For a time, it was believed that technology could solve the problems that it had created and bomb shelters were privately built as the government advocated that shelters offered the best hope for survival in an atomic attack. The Sober house was one of the houses built during this period with a bomb shelter in the basement. Like much of human activity, it is a paradox to be confident enough to build a spacious luxurious home for one's family—and every building is, in a sense, an affirmation—at the same time one harbors conscious fears of destruction not only for one's own family but for the entire society. It does, however, support the thesis that the Sober house is not only an artifact of the decade but, in some respects, an archetype. By the 1960s bomb shelters were no longer being built and if Americans were still haunted by the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, they were unpersuaded that the apocalypse could be averted if enough people had a handy fallout shelter.

In another area of expression of mid-century values, the Sober house is archetypal, that being the relationship of man and nature. The nineteenth century regarded nature as a retreat—a quiet, wild corner from which to escape industrialism. The twentieth century reveled in its total control of nature; not more powerful than man but not subservient, man and nature were co-equal. Buildings expressed this relationship by bringing the indoors out—through patios, balconies, glass walls—and by bringing the outdoors in, through garden courts, atria, and an abundance of houseplants. It can be said of the Sober residence as it was of another fifties home, "this house proves . . . that the indoor-outdoor relationship need not be confined to the benign climate of California. . ."

Several elements have been identified as characteristic of the 1950s in the design of the Sober house. The size of the house reflects the prosperity of the decade; the investment in the house and furnishings suggests the importance of family life. Other features add to this image: the centrality of alcohol and its place in entertaining; the significance of nature reflected both in the way in which the house opens to the outside and in the way plants become a prominent decorative and design feature. The presence of a bomb shelter indicates the implied fear of nuclear attack. The California lifestyle, the patios and the



enclosed porch with barbeque, is in evidence. The conservatism of the design reflects the period, as does the synthesis of modern and traditional elements.

The Sober house cannot, however, be considered characteristic of the way the majority of Americans lived during the 1950s. The house is too large, too well-finished and too expensive ever to be considered a house for the masses or even the middle class. It is a house that was built with servants' quarters and that fact alone makes it an upper-middle-class dwelling. The very large lot was landscaped with a gardener in mind. And yet it is quintessentially an expression of America at mid-century. It represents a conservative fusion of modernity and traditionalism, the elliptical room from the Federal period, combined with the glass wall of the International Style, an accommodation to a new world order, a synthesis of the classical past and the machine-age present.

Albert Kahn, Frost's employer and mentor wrote in 1931:

Is all that has proven of merit in the past to be abandoned and replaced with crude vagaries? Must the grotesque be substituted for the beautiful? To the dyed-in-the-wool modernist, the work of the past is a closed book to be forgotten and never to be referred to. But is progress in ar-





chitecture or any art not to be sought as is progress in architecture or any other field? Are basic principles, developed through unending experiment and thoroughly proved, to be done away with, untried forms to take their place? Is all that the past has taught to go for naught?

But even an architect as steeped in the past as Wallace Frost, as rigorously trained in the Beaux Arts methods, as sympathetic to the Renaissance ideals of balance, proportion, beauty, could not return to the Renaissance idiom. The "untried forms" were not untried at all—in Kahn's own factory designs, the streamlined, simplified, machine aesthetic created a building that was functional to work in and beautiful to see. For more than a generation, architects and clients had lived and studied and worked in a new environment. It would have been false and theatrical in 1957 to return to sixteenth century Florence. Indeed, it was Kahn, among others, who helped build the new world that so separated this society from the old.

The fifties was a period of "domesticity, religiosity, respectability, security through compliance with the system," in short, a decade of fear and conservatism when old values seemed safest. It is probably a predictable reaction to the upheaval of war that there is a great yearning for an appearance of normalcy in its aftermath. One index of the profound change that American society had undergone is the new dominance of the modern style in architecture. The style itself had emerged two decades before, in the turbulent twenties and thirties but a measure of its acceptance is the incorporation of modern design elements in the work of a traditional architect. The architecture of the past could not be recreated. The avant garde was building sleek glass and steel boxes, elegant, functional, beautifully machined. Those who advocated older values of warmth, comfort, luxury, and who looked to the past for inspiration were designing less innovative houses, but even these revealed the modern sensibility—predominantly horizontal, large expanses of glass, open plans. Of these, Wallace Frost's house for Letha and Howard Sober stands as a true artifact of the fifties.

## The Architect

Wallace Frost, the designer of the Sober house, presents an interesting contrast to the Europeans who came to America. He wanted to live and work in Europe.

Mr. Frost received his architectural training in the United States; from 1911 to 1915 he studied at the University of Pennsylvania. The strongest influence on his education was Professor Paul Cret, a teacher at Penn until 1915 when military service took him back to his native France. Frost's respect for Cret was so great that he left the university rather than study under anyone else.

The influence of French architects on American architectural education had a long history. The earliest institutions hired French architects to teach; M.I.T. brought Eugene Letang from France as its first instructor of architecture. Previously, American architecture students went to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts to study; some, such as Henry Hobson Richardson, found it useful. Others, notably Louis Sullivan, left soon after arriving. Not surprisingly, what French architects taught was the Beaux-Arts approach which "had encouraged an enormous proficiency in drawing, audacity in composition, exact knowledge of forms, and details and a keen sense of the kinds of space and finish that accompanied the good life."

When, after World War I, Frost left Washington D.C. where he had been an architect for the Air Force, he went to work for Albert Kahn whom he had met when Kahn served as a government consultant. His association with Kahn was a productive one but not ultimately satisfying. The firm had established its fame on the basis of factory designs and Wallace Frost preferred to build houses. He left the Kahn office in 1925. He spent several months in Europe during the years 1925-31 and lived in Settignano, Italy, for eighteen months in 1931-32. He would have remained in Europe were it not for his family's reluctance to live outside the United States on a permanent basis.



Photo credit: From the collection of Grace (Mrs. Wallace) Frost.

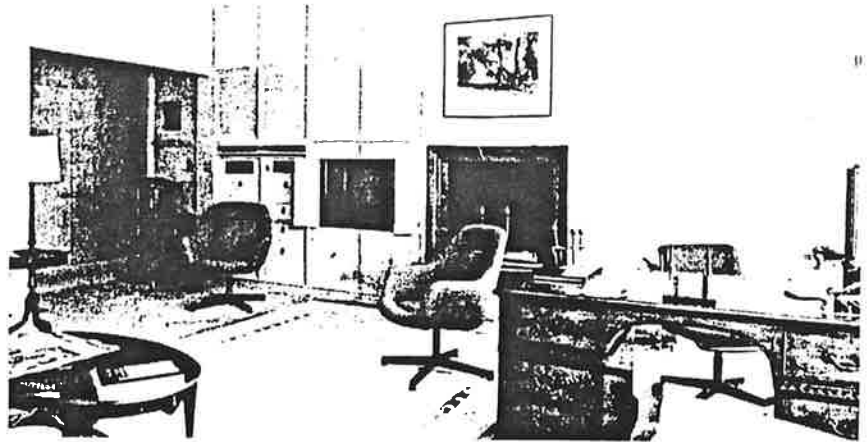
Frost was not sympathetic to the modern movement. Having been a student of Cret, he was fond of French neo-classical architecture but most of all he admired Italian Renaissance building. When he returned to the United States, the family moved to Motocito, California where he built a house for himself and a few homes for clients. He was no more successful than his fellow practitioners of the building art, eighty percent of whom went to work for the government during the dismal days of the thirties. Then Frost returned to the Detroit area where he opened an office in suburban Birmingham which is where he was working when he prepared plans for Mr. and Mrs. Sober in 1957.



## The House

The Letha and Howard Sober house is located in the southwest area of Lansing, known as the Moore's River Drive section, through which the Grand River flows making it the most picturesque and desirable neighborhood in the city. The 2.3 acre lot is handsomely landscaped and a circular drive brings the visitor to the entrance of a long, low L-shaped house with overhanging roof, deep eaves, and broad slab chimneys. The facade is of rock-faced coarse ashlar and painted brick with latticed brick rectangles to provide textural color and contrasts. There are two bowed bays with large rectangular panes that the architect favored in many of his houses. The entrance is framed in limestone, with a molded architrave and plain lintel surmounting a handsome paneled door. The garage is to the right; the drive continues around the end wall and to the patio side where the garage opens. From the front door, only the large windowless expanse of garage wall indicates the function of the space behind it.

The interior of the entry is a molding trimmed paneled convex wall containing closets. The entry and gallery are continuous with the living room but since the main living area is sunken three steps, the travertine floor of the entry forms a kind of stage on which the visitor appears when making an entrance. The living room is a large, high-ceilinged room with a wall of windows on the garden side, a large rectangular raised fireplace framed in marble on the dining room wall, and a grasscloth-covered wall with the elevated floor (continuing from the entry) serving as a gallery and separating the more private library from the public entertaining space of the living room. A dark hall connects the bedroom wing—very clearly a private space—to the entry and library. Two bedrooms and a lavishly appointed dressing room plus a powder room for guests opposite the library, constitute the private area. Entry to the library is from the hall and



from the living room gallery, making it a separate but accessible semi-public area. The library itself is paneled in the same molded square paneling used in the entry and lanai area. Two walls contain bookcases with concealed storage; the third centers a fireplace which repeats the proportions of the living room fireplace on a smaller scale. To one side is an entertainment center that contains storage and a television set that may be concealed behind folding doors.

On the other side of the living room is the formal dining room; an interesting elliptical space with floor to ceiling windows on the garden side and a concave wall with built-in serving shelf on the kitchen side. Two decorative features dominate the room: a mural evocative of Chinese landscape painting covers the wall and an elliptical carpet with carved bands covers the floor. The mural is one of several elements in the house that reveal the owner's enthusiasm for oriental art. It is obvious, however, that this did not enter into the design of the house itself; in size, scale and proportion, the Sober house is distinctly American and owes nothing to the architecture of China and Japan. The carpet is ringed with two wide bands that repeat the shape of the room, reiterating the rounded walls that were encountered earlier in the

entry hall and will be seen in the lanai as well.

The same curve encloses the bar or lanai area between the entry and service wing. This wall features a sliding door behind which is a large well-stocked bar; with the door closed, nothing of the function of the space is apparent. With the door open, the area becomes a focus for the elevated portion of the living/entertainment complex. Entertaining of a more casual sort takes place on the patio area outside the kitchen and on the porch off the dining room that accommodated a built-in barbeque grill.

Despite some remodeling and altering necessitated by the transformation of the Sober house into the Governor's mansion, the home remains today essentially as it was designed almost twenty-five years ago. Like every structure in the built environment, it has a private function and a public one; it is both a comfortable and attractive residence and a superb example of the material culture of America at mid-century. It remains a notable addition to Michigan's architectural heritage.

*The author wishes to thank Professor Russel B. Nye at Michigan State University for his encouragement and support.*



century, it exhibited a fine feeling for detail and texture. The formal stone portico enclosing graceful curved steps stood out against the gray brick of the main mass of the house with its lighter gray window architraves. Also the balustrades surmounting the portico and at the base of the ground floor windows contrasted pleasingly with the fragile wrought-iron railing of the entrance steps. On the less formal lake side of the house French doors opening upon a broad terrace took advantage of the lake exposure. The Seyburn house was elegant and at the same time livable. Architecture and landscaping merged in a unified design. Painsstaking refinement and adherence to the period created an old-world charm and authenticity which was augmented by the incorporation of genuine antiques as architectural features and motifs. (278)

For those not prepared to indulge in an establishment on the scale of the Seyburn estate, the French *manoir* satisfied the increasing desire for the intimate and picturesque without sacrificing the essential French spirit. In his Edwin H. Brown residence of 1926 on Lake court in Grosse Pointe, architect Robert O. Derrick combined mansard roofs and French fenestration with a characteristic round tower to produce the desired effect. The next year Wallace Frost, in his Julian P. Bowen house on Jefferson avenue in Grosse Pointe, created a more rustic atmosphere with steep roofs, small windows, and the rough textures of slate and stone. The masses of the roofs, gables, and tower were resolved into a dramatic plastic composition, marred only by too great a diversification and scattering of window openings. (281) (280) (324)

Anna Thompson Dodge, the widow of Horace E. Dodge of automobile fame and one of the nation's wealthiest women, could afford to ignore the trend toward simplicity. Her Louis XV château built in 1934 on Lake Shore road is unquestionably Grosse Pointe's most regal residence. Inspired by the work of the great eighteenth century master Jacques Ange Gabriel, Philadelphia architect Horace Trumbauer strove for monumental splendor. Somewhat belatedly he attempted to recapture the luster of the 'Gilded Age,' for no less than twenty years earlier he had built an almost identical though somewhat smaller palace for A. Hamilton Rice at Newport,<sup>91</sup> and in 1916 he had built one of America's most sumptuous houses for Edward T. Stotesbury at Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania.<sup>92</sup> (279)

Mrs. Dodge's dreams of grandeur were tinged with the illusion of history. Steeped in the lore of the past, she spoke of the crowned heads of Europe with the same knowing regard as if they were her neighbors.<sup>93</sup> In a portrait in her library Sir Gerald Kelly depicted her in the elaborate costume of the court of Versailles.<sup>94</sup> Early in her life her husband gave her pearls that had belonged to Catherine the Great and later she was to acquire a piano once owned by Louis XV.<sup>95</sup> Much of the decor of Rose Terrace, as the Dodge abode is called, was retrieved by Sir Joseph Duveen from the imperial palaces of Russia. There are French inlaid furniture, Beauvais tapestry chairs, four cases of Sèvres porcelains, and paintings by Boucher, Gainsborough, and Van Dyck. The late Dr. William R. Valentiner, when director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, "unhesitatingly proclaimed the completed collection at least the equal of any French eighteenth century art ensemble in the world."<sup>96</sup>

No French château would be complete without a garden. To lay out hers, Mrs. Dodge employed Ellen Shipman of New York. To the west of the house is a formal French garden edged with boxwood and adorned with antique marble statues. In the background is a fountain. Adjoining this is a formal flower garden containing beds edged with wisteria trees and fruit trees, from which two flights of stairs lead down to the rose garden. Beyond lies the swimming pool, and beyond that the sweep of Lake St. Clair.<sup>97</sup>



# Architect's homes called landmarks

By Robyn Kleerekoper  
Special Writer

Do you own a Wallace Frost home? Do you even know who Wallace Frost was? If you own one of his homes, you may be living in a future historic landmark.

Frost was an architect who designed approximately 40 Birmingham homes and one multiple dwelling structure on Adams Road and Wimbleson Drive.

Frost homeowners include renowned sculptor Marshall Fredericks, whose studio is in Royal Oak. He lives in a Frost house overlooking Quarton Lake in Birmingham.

Frost worked from World War I until he died in 1962. He is relatively obscure, even by local stan-

dards.

But the Birmingham Historic Design and Review Commission wants to honor him. The commission plans to designate Frost homes as historic in an effort to recognize and preserve them.

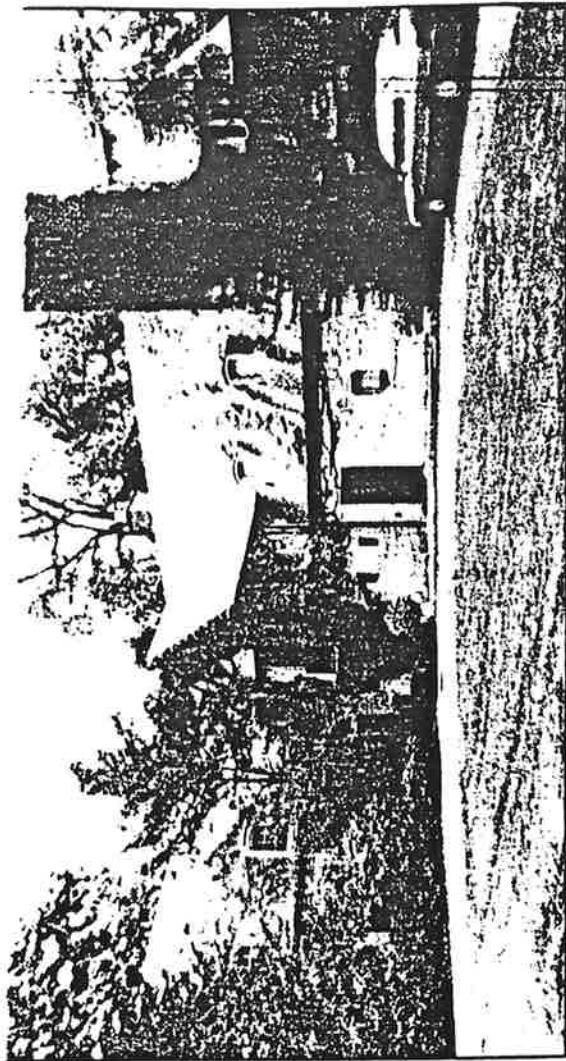
Frost was probably Birmingham's most prominent architect, says Max Horton, a member of the historic commission.

Mayor Henry Forster says, "There is a premium attached to a Wallace Frost home on the market."

Frost dabbled in various styles.

Ten of his homes are a contemporary style, according to local architecture buff Bruce Brooks, who

See ARCHITECT, Page 9A



Noted sculptor Marshall Fredericks' home on Lake Park Drive in Birmingham was designed by

Staff photo by Dick Hunt

Continued from Page 1A

once lived in a Frost home that was a French Norman country style.

Brooks says a typical Frost home is of French colonial or country style, although many people use the label of Tudor for some of them. He made use of curved gables and heavy door and window lintels.

In the earlier days of his work, he used more brick and stone, and the homes were of a "grander nature," Brooks says.

After he moved to California, his style changed to a more Spanish influence.

Frost was influenced by Albert Kahn, for whom he first worked on his arrival in Michigan from Pennsylvania, and by French architect Paul Kirt.

Many of the city's Frost homes have had alterations since they were first built.

Marshall Fredericks' Frost home is about 55 years old, has four fireplaces and is built on several different levels connected by a series of small staircases.

It is mainly constructed of stone, and has reinforced concrete floors, a feature that Fredericks believes is the first in the area. He has lived there 30 years.

Fredericks says, "It is a very liveable and warm home, extremely comfortable. That is one of the assets of a Frost home, his ability to make a warm, friendly atmosphere. Frost was a master of detail and always adapted a home to the site on which it stood."

Fredericks speaks highly of Frost's fidelity to the classic styles in his earlier days. Later, he adopted

more modern styles.

If the city designates Frost homes as historical buildings, it would be unlike other such designations.

Any future major alterations of a Frost home would mean the homes would be removed from the historically designated list.

Usually, the historical designation restricts what owners can do in alterations, modifications and renovations. Prior permission also must be sought from the Review Commission.

In the case of the Frost homes, review commissioners and city commissioners agreed that a list of acceptable alterations and guidelines be drafted, so that homeowners would be aware of how much work could be done before jeopardizing the historic designation.

Frost grew up in Pennsylvania and started studying architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. He fought in France in World War I and lived in Italy during the Depression.

He moved to Michigan, then to California and then back to Michigan, settling in Birmingham.



WALLACE FROST



# Patriot

THE ARCHITECT'S ARCHITECT:  
A CONSTANT INSPIRATION  
pages 1, 6 and 7  
CITY MANAGER SETS TONE FOR '77  
page 2  
BIRMINGHAM IN STITCHES  
page 6  
HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS  
Special Home Section

## Wallace Frost: Appreciation of Houses

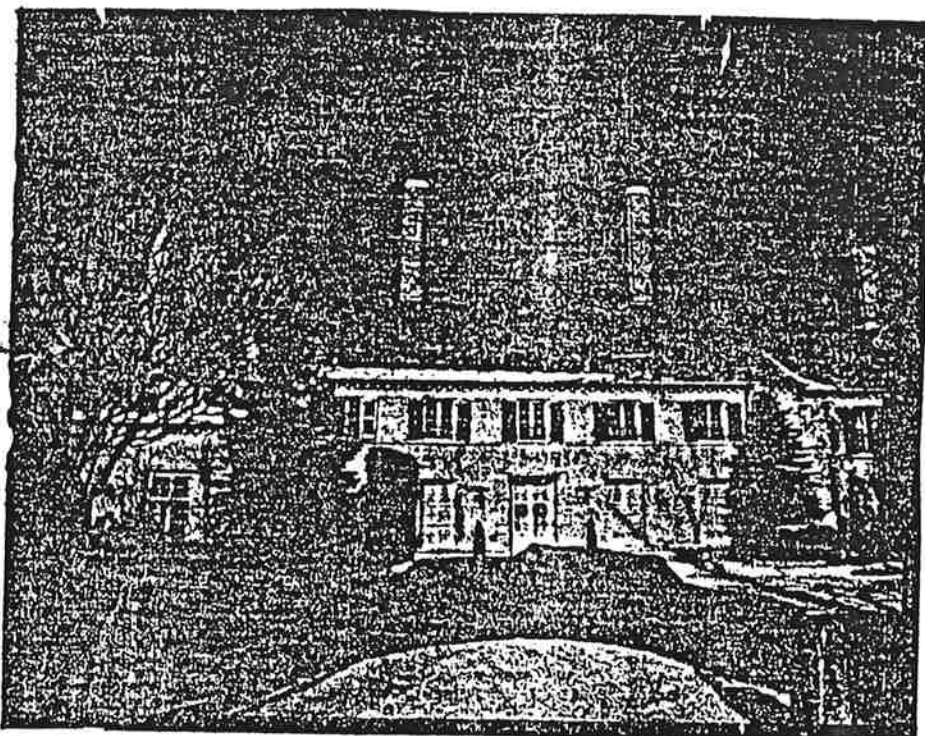
When historic districts for Birmingham were proposed to the City Commission in the fall of 1976, the criteria suggested for "historic" buildings concerned were mostly nineteenth century Victorian structures plus "houses designed by Wallace Frost." The historic district study committee was later persuaded to omit the Frost houses, because many are located on narrow private lanes scarcely able to accommodate the traffic of visitors that a proclaimed historic district would draw. But fifty years after he first began practicing in Birmingham, the reputation of Wallace Frost is still growing.

Frost's career coincided with the coming of large suburban houses to Birmingham, belonging to well-to-do executives of Detroit companies. Before the 1920's, Birmingham was still largely a village of plain Victorian farmhouses. The splendid houses of the 20's in Birmingham were not quite mansions, but with more moderate scale and richness, they imitated the mansion showplaces being built in Grosse Pointe and Bloomfield Hills for auto company presidents. These fine houses of Birmingham today appear to be the first generation of old houses in the Detroit area that does not seem destined to a period of neglect and blight, as fine homes of the turn of the century period and before have been.

The first three decades of the twentieth century were still a time when an architect could make a name for himself and a comfortable living from a practice based on the design of homes alone. Frank Lloyd Wright in his early career is one of the best examples that comes to mind, but there were many others who worked in the more traditional styles that prevailed.

Design in this time was largely pictorial, and the best work was not ashamed to be a sort of stage

*Continued on page 6*



Photography by Steve Benson



# Houses

Continued from page 1

setting. Forms were by and large derived from historical precedents such as colonial houses or English Cotswald cottages. Other than visual rules that came from these historical forms, there were few theoretical treatises being written, which baffles a modern historian accustomed to the more recent writings of Wright, Gropius and Le Corbusier.

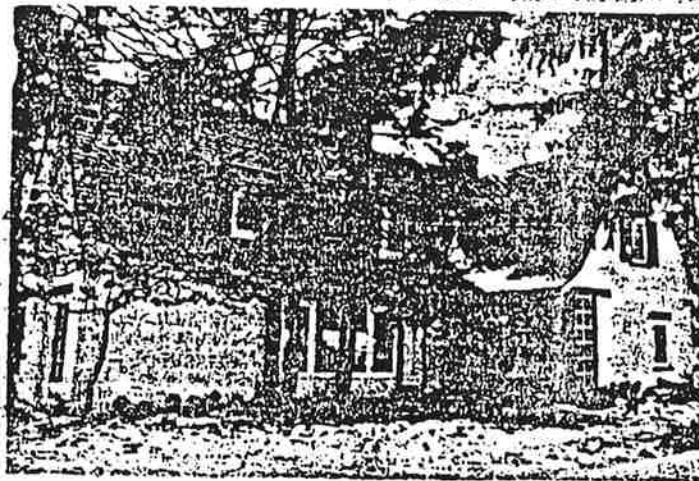
Above all, an architect was trained to observe materials and textures and to draw suitable illustrations of what he observed or what he proposed to design.

Frost came to Michigan in 1919 from Uniontown, Pennsylvania. He had already studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. This was a school much influenced by the imaginative work of a Philadelphia architect named Wilson Eyre who built upon loosely medieval forms with his own inventive detail added. Detroiters may appreciate Eyre's work in the shingle-style Charles Freer house of 1890, now the home of the Merrill Palmer Institute.

In Detroit, Frost spent six years working for the firm of Albert Kahn. Kahn is best known for his innovative industrial architecture, but his practice extended to all types of buildings. During these years when Frost worked for him, for example, Kahn was designing the Grosse Pointe Farms mansion of Edsel Ford, client and architect having previously visited the Cotswald country for inspiration. It is hard to say that Kahn's English designs influenced Wallace Frost, any more than one can insist that Wilson Eyre influenced him. But Frost was to design a rather similar medieval house in slate and stucco for Julian Bowen in Grosse Pointe soon after he opened his own practice in Birmingham in 1925.

Frost's new practice attracted other commissions or houses in Grosse Pointe or Detroit's Indian Village, but most of his work was to be in the vicinity of Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills. For himself, he built a small English yeoman's cottage above a wooded ravine just north of the heart of Birmingham. This house shows the same attention to subtleties as before; the edges of the gables are gently curved, and the door and window lintels are stained timbers taken from a demolished flour mill in Birmingham. Rather startling to a visitor, however, is the masonry of white painted exposed concrete block without a facing of stucco. Frost went on to design a neighborhood of houses along the ravine, generally in the same manner.

The English medieval form of house had an informal, rambling manner that seemed more congenial to modern living habits than the colonial fashion that otherwise prevailed. Colonial houses were inhibited with center halls and formal furniture arrangements. Architects of the 20's also liked medieval fashions for their picturesque massing and ribbon windows. Frost had mastered the art of designing windows that looked small but "worked" in terms of light and air. But some clients found medieval houses too dark and drafty. In the late 20's, Frost combined the best advantages of both colonial and medieval styles in designs adapted from the French countryside ("French Provincial" conjures up an image too recent and too bland). It was a formal manner softened by picturesque features that offered the architect a lead to inventive design. In a house Frost designed for a Quorton Lake site in Birmingham, the inspiration seems French, although not precisely so. Capping the tan stone walls is a cornice of red brick dentils, a rather startling combination of materials. One side of the massive chimney curves down to embrace a dormer window in the roof. The house terminates in a brick wall with a single great arch for a screened-in porch. The details are hardly from historical sources, but they seem very compatible with the forward wing and other portions one can identify as "French." More precisely true to historical precedent is "Lake End" the house Frost designed for Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Thom in Bloomfield Hills in the early 30's. It is one of the most impressive houses in the Detroit area. Frost visited France with these clients to sketch and study buildings. Indeed, the house feels as if one has just stumbled into a corner of France. The house, itself, is severely formal in its



Photography by  
Balthazar Korab

setting overlooking the lake, and any architect would have been proud to claim such a mansion. But it is the gatehouse and walled forecourt with its foundation that makes the house outwardly so remarkable. The whole image bursts unexpectedly upon the motorist beyond a hill after a turn in the road.

"Lake End" was completed during the deepening Depression years. For an architect in his productive early forties, the Depression and the war years that followed should have stifled his career. In 1933 Frost left Birmingham to live in Santa Barbara, California. It was that part of the country which was most receptive to the new "International Style" from Europe, but California architects were softening its severity with the warmth of their own traditions. With his own sensitive feel for materials and proportions, it is understandable that Wallace Frost would be sympathetic to the California trends. Frost was one of the few architects trained in the traditional disciplines who could take up modern design successfully. But it was his previous experience in his Birmingham work that perhaps explains why he could improve upon the California practices when he returned to Birmingham in 1938. Further east along the plateau from his own house of the mid 30's, Frost built himself a new house beside three similar ones in 1940-42. Both Frank Lloyd Wright and Alden Dow had already designed new houses in the metropolitan Detroit area, but...

Wallace Frost perhaps became the first Detroit architect to design innovative modern houses. These four houses today do not seem as dated as flat-roofed "International Style" houses of the thirties usually do. They combine flat roofs with gently sloping planes embracing massive chimneys. Instead of traditional picturesque houses, one might say these are modern picturesque ones. The new Frost houses have not completely suppressed decorative detail as was expected of modern houses, for here and there one sees the same brick dentils of a cornice line, in white painted masonry this time, and windows formed of geometrical apertures in the walls. Inside, as before, there are changes in the level of floors and ceilings, according to the size of rooms. One of the residents aptly compares this "cubic space" to the square footage of traditional two-dimensional plan designs. The houses are tightly compressed in small lots, but are sited to enjoy the freedom of more distant views beyond their property lines.

In his newer house in Birmingham, at the age of nearly seventy, Wallace Frost passed away on a Sunday morning, June 24, 1962. Mrs. Frost continues to reside in the house. In his long career, Frost greatly enriched Birmingham with the creative range of his whole work. And for Birmingham, he was the pioneer architect in a town which has since come to be home to many of the best known architects of Michigan.

by Peg and Gordon Bugbee

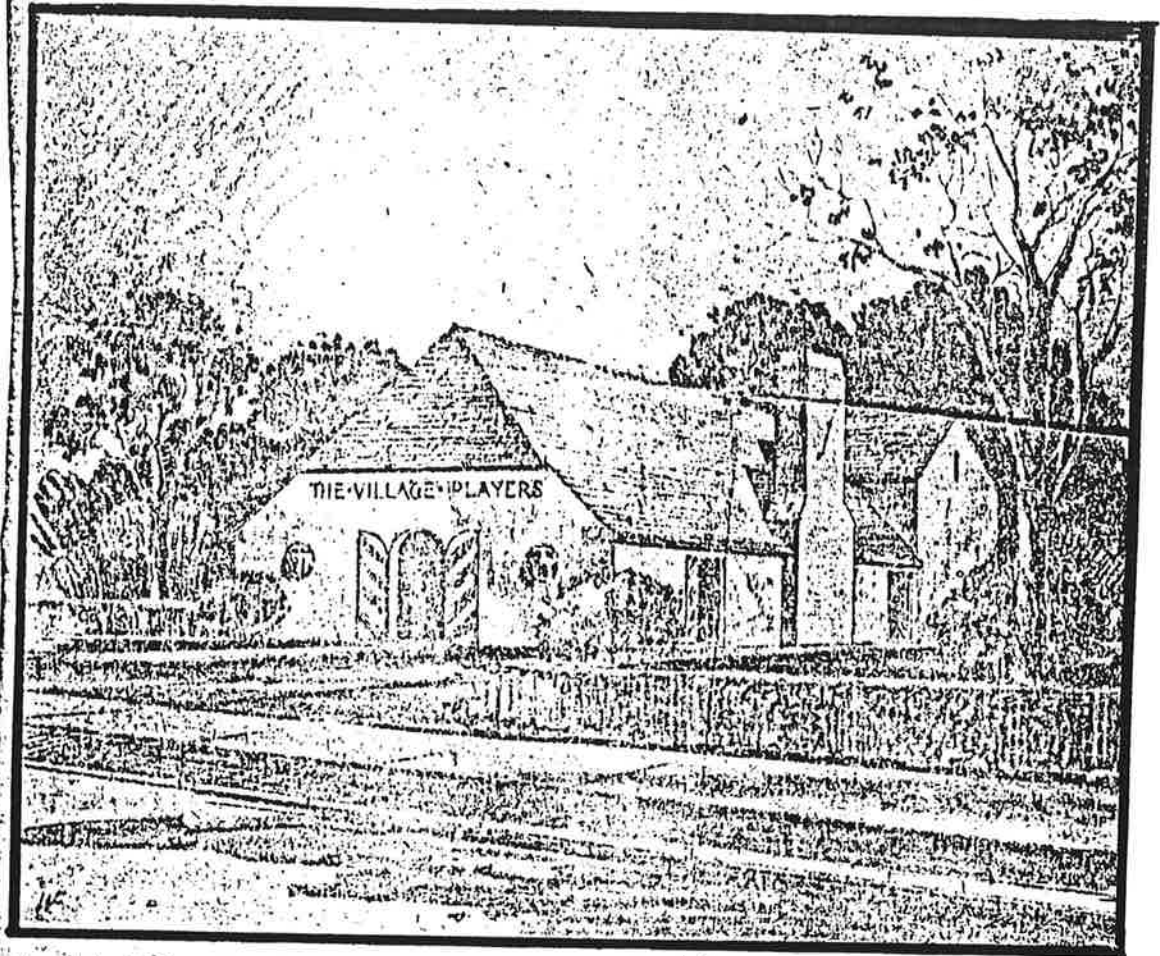


# Birmingham Eccentric

"For a Bigger and Better Birmingham"

BIRMINGHAM, OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN, THURSDAY, MAY 6, 1926

## Architect's Plan Of Theatre For Village Players



Above is Wallace Frost's, local architect, conception of the kind of a playhouse that is suitable for the needs of the Village Players, local amateur theatrical organization. Without doubt this unique edifice will be constructed some place in Birmingham this summer, ready to be opened next October when the Players begin their next season.

At the regular meeting of the Players last Saturday night at the Community House, Waldo Fellows, president of the organization, told 80 members present that the old Town Hall, given to the Players some time ago, was found to be in such aged

condition that it could not be moved with any degree of satisfaction. He recommended that the Players consider a brand new building, at a cost not to exceed \$10,000.00, to be paid for by individual subscriptions from the membership.



The home of Connie and Helen Bouchard on Tooting Lane is the first house built by architect Wallace Frost. The 1921 structure was home for Frost and his wife, Grace. The Birmingham architect died in 1962.



## Architect's reputé keeps growing among owners

By Helen Niemiec  
staff writer

Some "Wally" owners knew architect Wallace Frost personally, others knew of the Frost reputation and yet others "lucked" into their houses.

But all agree that the architect designed interesting houses.

Common threads wind through the 39 identified Frost houses in Birmingham: floor to ceiling bookcases or nooks, large fireplaces, pegged oak floors on the main level, catwalks or "windows" in a second story room that overlook spacious living rooms and "tiered" styling that requires several steps up or down to access garages or basement landings from the main hallway.

Frost also had a quirky dislike of uniform ceiling heights. Living room ceilings were high, but dining room and hallway ceilings might only be seven or eight feet high. Coved ceilings are the hallmark of the second story.

**THE VERY FIRST** Wallace Frost house is located on Tooting Lane, built for the architect himself. The house features a "cross" design, with a hallway that allows access to rooms without having to cut through other rooms.

Connie Bouchard and his wife, Helen, have owned the house for 40 years and are the fourth owners.

"It's very special," Bouchard said.

Harah Frost, granddaughter of the architect, lives in one of her grandfather's later creations on Bonnie Briar. The house was built in 1941.

"The site is really exceptional," Frost said of her house. "It looks out on a sort of wild area. The staircase

Please turn to Page 6



The use of multiple levels that Wallace Frost liked to employ are evident by looking at the windows in this house on Lakeside owned by Dale and Randi Watchowski.



# Architect's reputation grows among homeowners

Continued from Page 3

in the center of the house affects the entire design."

The relationship between outside environment and house were integral in Frost's designs, biographer John Richardson told the Birmingham Historical Society in 1981.

**HARAH FROST LIVED** in Birmingham with her grandparents until she was 7 years old and then moved west with her parents. Wallace Frost died when she was 12. "I never saw him working or talking about architecture," Harah Frost said.

But she is pleased with "the emerging kinship" that is forming with Wallace Frost homeowners.

Connie Barnes and her late husband moved into their Randall Court house in 1935, seven years after it was built. The Barneses were the fourth owners, with others having left the house because of the economic conditions from the Depression, Barnes explained.

"I liked the home and I didn't know anything about it," she said. "I liked the arrangement. It has a tiled entrance and a most unusual thing — a sunken bath tub on the second floor because of the slant in the roof."

The house is a French farmhouse style and has four bedrooms and two baths, one of the larger Frost homes.

**BARNES BECAME** acquainted with Wallace and Grace Frost after moving into the house. The Barneses and the Frosts shared mutual friends.

"He was a very quiet man with a good sense of humor," Barnes said. "He was very clever in his conversations but didn't talk about his work."

Barnes is still quite taken by her house and refuses to make any renovations for fear of disturbing the original plan.

Randi and Dale Watchowski

moved into their "Wally" on Lakeside three years ago and didn't know who Frost was.

"I wasn't sure about the house. I walked in and walls were painted black and there was shag carpet on the floors," Randi Watchowski recalled. "But there was a special feeling about the house."

The couple purchased the house and then started an extensive restoration project — changing walls to off white, removing the carpet to show the oak floors and using period light fixtures and accents to enhance the 1928 structure.

**WITH THE RESTORATION**

work, Watchowski started to research Wallace Frost to get more information about his background and style.

"I found one book where he was listed as a quintessential architect, along with Frank Lloyd Wright," she said.

Her living room has two recessed niches on both sides of the fireplace and a built-in bookcase on a sidewall. A timber piece — a common Frost design element — stretches across the width of the fireplace.

"Some of the timbers had come

from the old mill pond," Watchowski said.

The Birmingham Historical Commission recently completed a videotape of the houses and the history of Wallace Frost. It will be available for viewing after city officials approve a Wallace Frost report next month.

"The copy is available at the (Baldwin Public) library," said Max Horton of the Birmingham Historical Commission. "The homeowners have been very enthusiastic about this entire process. And they like getting together to discuss the good and bad points of their houses."



# Tie that binds

## 'Wally' signature puts Frost homes in a class of their own

By Helen Niemiec  
staff writer

Nearly a decade before the Great Depression, architect Wallace Frost envisioned a house that would emphasize living rooms, inviting entry halls and fireplaces.

At the same time, Frost's kitchens were small and ceilings outside the living room were rather low.

Owners of the "Wallies" say the houses are mixed blessings when it comes to decorating, but they have a personality unique from other houses.

The affection homeowners have for the Wallace Frost creations has started to snowball into a quasi-neighborhood association. Though there are 39 houses scattered throughout Birmingham, the "Wal-

lace Frost, architect" signature on the original plans is the tie that binds.

The 39 Wallace Frost-designed houses in Birmingham are getting an extra measure of attention, as the historic design and review committee nears its goal of presenting certificates of authenticity to each owner.

The homeowners are not seeking an official historical designation. That type of designation would require that homeowners seek approval from the historic district and design review commission before any interior or exterior improvements are made.

**THE HOUSES**, built between 1921 and 1951, generally are clustered on streets in Quarton Lake Estates and Poppleton Park, though the last Wallace Frost house was built on Northlawn.

The Uniontown, Pa., native attended the University of Pennsylvania's school of architecture, leaving in 1917 after three years of study because of World War I.

During the war, he served in the construction division of the military aviation section in Washington and in 1919 he settled in Birmingham and worked for the noted Albert Kahn architectural firm in Detroit.

The first Wallace Frost house was built on Tooting Lane in 1921. Frost built the house for himself and his wife, Grace. Even the first house caused ripples in the architectural community, as it was the first residence made of cement block.

**"WALLIES" ARE** divided in look, with more traditional looks in houses built before Frost's extended stay in California in the late 1930s. Houses built in the 1940s and early '50s are more contemporary looking.

"The early houses have steep roofs and a French look. There are some Dutch colonials and a few remnant of American colonials, though those are rare," explained Max Horton of the Birmingham Historical Board.

"After his trip to California, he picked up on the style there. The houses built after had much flatter roofs and floor to ceiling windows. The brickwork and detailing in the early homes carried over to the later ones as well," Horton said.

Randi Williams Watchowski, a Frost house owner, said the uniqueness of his designs rates Frost as one of the area's premier architects.



A "window" in a second story room affords a view of a typical Wallace Frost house — high ceilings, timber beams and built-in shelves. Owner Randi Watchowski calls the layout "cozy" and "definitely something special."

Please turn to Page 6

Birmingham Eccentric 1/30/92  
page 1 of 3



# Frost designed homes have a charm all their own

Continued from Page 3

"HE DESERVES recognition," she explained. "His homes have beautiful characteristics."

City planner Patricia McCullough is compiling all information on Frost and his houses so there is a complete history available.

A report will be given to the Birmingham City Commission, which ultimately will decide how the Frost houses are recognized.

The goal of the report, McCullough said, is twofold: first, to identify and recognize Wallace Frost as a significant person in Birmingham history and, second, to identify those Birmingham houses that Frost designed.

"Because of his popularity in the late 1920s and early '30s, his design styles are mimicked in other homes," McCullough explained. "But the interior holds the key. You can

tell a Frost house when you walk into one — he loved big spaces, big living rooms and big dining rooms. He was very much into the living area."

The historical group has tried for more than two years now to have the Frost houses recognized, though Horton explained that interest in the project "has snowballed" in the last three or four months.

**THE HISTORIC** Plan and Review Board held a special meeting in mid-January, trying to get together as many Frost homeowners as possible. Despite the foot of snow that had fallen the day before, about 30 made it to the session. The two-hour meeting featured the owners talking about the particular characteristics of their houses.

"It's nice to see the interaction between the homeowners," McCul-

lough said.

The influence of Wallace Frost isn't confined to Birmingham houses. There are approximately 25 other Frost-designed houses in Bloomfield Township and Bloomfield Hills. Outside of the immediate area, there are two "Wallys" in Detroit's Palmer Park and Indian Village, and a number in Colorado and California.

Several wealthy families were taken by the Frost creations and commissioned family houses by the Birmingham architect. He designed homes for Bruce Anderson (son of R.E. Olds) near Lansing, and the Powers family in Ann Arbor, of University Microfilms fame.

The Village Players of Birmingham building also is a Frost design.

He also designed the original Forest Lake Country Club in Bloomfield Township.

The two structures were built in the mid-1920s and both have been enlarged from the original design.





STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Randi Watchowski stands in the doorway of sports not only a cedar covered entrance but her front entrance. The Gothic-styled entry also a Gothic-shaped door as well.

Birmingham Eccentric 1/30/92  
page 3 of 3





MICHAEL S. GREEN/The Detroit News

"His homes are domiciles. . . . Every day I find something new to enjoy," said Marshall Fredericks, who lives in this Frost home.

# Final recognition, at last

■ **Unique:** City honors the late architect Wallace Frost by giving homeowners certificates of pedigree.

By Rebecca Powers  
THE DETROIT NEWS

Architect Wallace Frost, who put his trademark touch on 39 Birmingham homes, is finally getting his due.

For the past year, the Birmingham Historic District and Design Review Commission has been studying the residential works of Frost, documenting the various design influences during his 42-year career.

Next month, the city will present owners with a certificate verifying the Frost pedigree of their homes.

"Frost homes are different than the houses going up now that are just so many boxes transferred to plywood," said Birmingham sculptor Marshall Fredericks, who lives in a Frost home beside Quarton Lake.

"His homes are domiciles. You get attached to them. Every day I find something new to enjoy."

Because Frost studied at the University of Pennsylvania under Paul Philippe Cret, his ear-

ly design influence was French.

Frost was brought to Detroit in the 1920s by Albert Kahn, who designed several notable Detroit landmarks, including the Fisher Building.

Early Frost houses, circa 1925, have a farm colonial look. Later, the French influence from Cret appeared.

In the mid-1930s, after spending time in California during the Depression, Frost returned to Michigan and, until his death in 1962, built several homes with a Spanish contemporary look.

The architect's granddaughter, Hanah Frost, lives in one of the Birmingham contemporaries.

"I was in this house at ages 6 and 7, and it has effected my dreams ever since," she said. "I have the most amazing sort of spaces in my dreams."

In her home, the spaces include 14-foot-high ceilings, a curved glass wall and a curved staircase at the center of the house.

She described Frost's homes as exhibiting joy of design.

That pleasure of architecture is evident in Fredericks' house where a hidden spiral staircase leads from the living room to the master suite.

"The original owner told me he liked to slip down into the living room and read in his pajamas," said Fredericks, who has lived in the home for 40 years.

There are other eccentricities.

"Frost doorways are not just rectangles,"

Fredericks said. "He seemed to be able to individualize everything."

Bruce Brooks, who once lived in a Frost home on Wimbelton in Birmingham, helped the city compile background on Frost.

"He had a way of presenting the house so that when you entered it, the space was confining. Then the rooms opened up from there."

Other signature Frost details included peaked roof lines, detailing under the eaves and changing from brick to cinder block at the corners.

"He used yellow pine on the floors, alternating seven- and nine-inch planking," Brooks said.

While living in California, Frost built a home now owned by conductor Zubin Mehta, Brooks said. That home was featured in a 1985 issue of *Architectural Digest*, which described the house as reminiscent of a Provencal manor.

Frost's only child, Jon Frost, who is a rancher in Pueblo, Colo., describes his father as a "kind person who was somewhat arrogant in his ideas of architecture."

"He and Frank Lloyd Wright did a lot of arguing," the younger Frost said. "He felt Mr. Wright did too much advertising of himself."

"Another thing that galled him was when someone came in and wanted him to build a home. He said a house is something you build. A home is something your family creates."

The Detroit News 12/22/91

page 1 of 1



# Tour stars 'little house' for big need

by LINDA LaMARRE  
Iowa Staff Writer

"Why can't people live as informally in the city as they can in the north woods?"

"They can."

"I'm glad, because that's what I want to do."

That exchange — or something like it — occurred 39 years ago between Irene Murphy and architect Wallace Frost.

As clearly as Mrs. Murphy can recall, it amounted to the sum total of the specifications she gave Frost, who now is deceased, for the design of her home.

**ACCORDING TO THE** Detroit chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Mrs. Murphy's house, located in Birmingham, probably represents the "first serious modern residential design" by a Detroit-area architect.

As such, the institute is featuring her house and five others on its first architects' house tour from noon to 5 p.m. next Sunday.

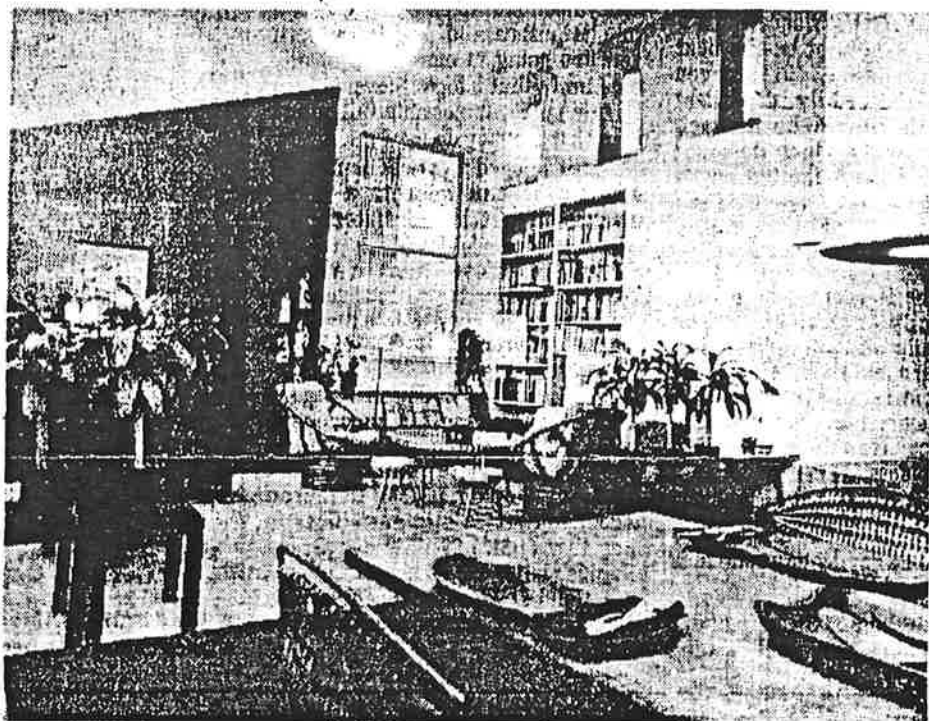
Mrs. Murphy says that Frost looked upon her house as a "guinea pig," a challenge to see how much space and romance could be achieved in a little house.

The experiment has proved successful. From the time Mrs. Murphy, her young daughter, sister, housekeeper and housekeeper's granddaughter moved into it in 1940, it has met a variety of needs.

**"HE PROVIDED** secret places my daughter enjoyed as a young girl and teen, endless nooks for hobbies, so you don't have to spread everything on the dining table, and little places for sewing, writing and business, so you don't have to clean up every night," she says.

Mrs. Murphy's demands on a living space are many.

The house had to accommodate art, collections and the furniture she acquired in Manila during the time she lived there with her



BY DUANE E. BELANGER OF THE

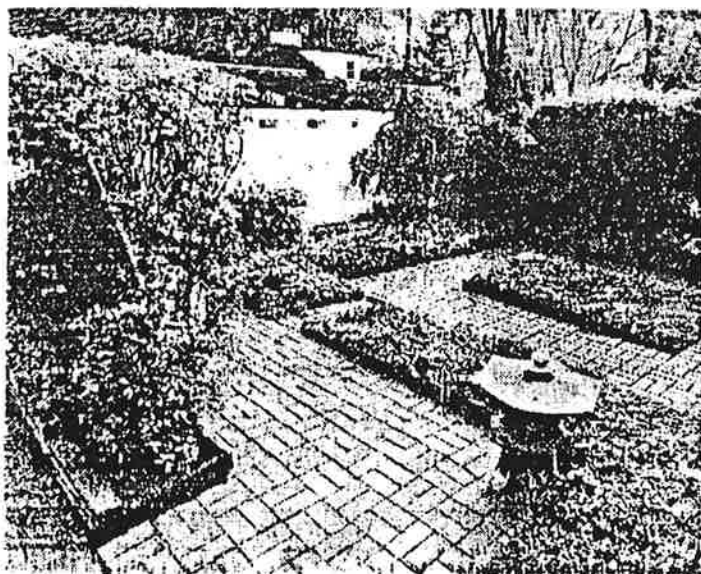
**SURPRISE** — Spacious, two-story high living room extending off small, low-ceiling entry foyer is among architectural "surprises" employed by late architect Wallace Frost. Rice paper temple lanterns between shoji screens light balcony above bookcases.

brother-in-law, Frank Murphy, governor-general to the Philippines from 1933-35 and Michigan Governor from 1937-38

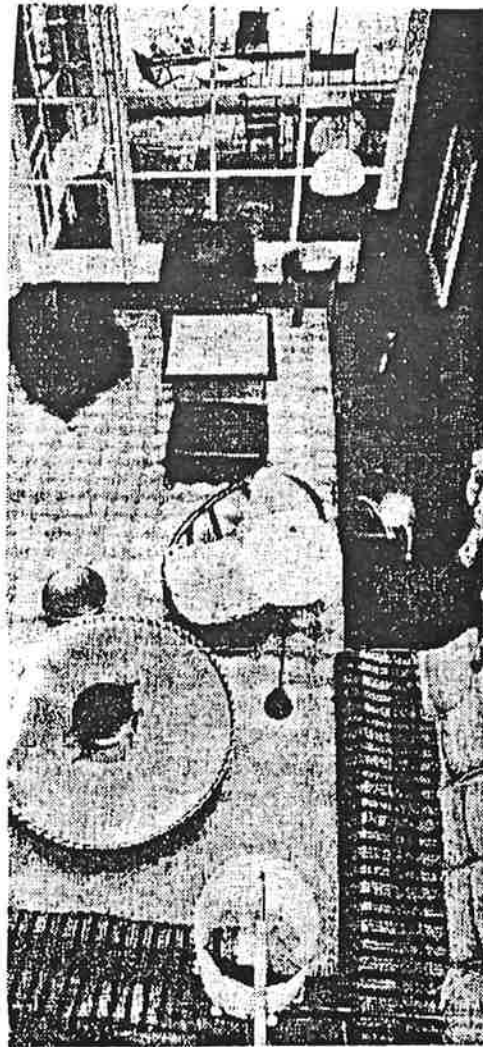
Mrs. Murphy, who was widowed in 1936, was later appointed social affairs officer by the United Nations and, with government funding, worked with Cranbrook artists in developing Philippine arts and crafts for export.

**THE HOUSE ALSO** has provided office space for the import/wholesale business, dealing largely in Philippine-made goods, she has operated for 24 years, for her work as University of Michigan regent (she is now a regent emeritus), and for her writings and those of her sister, Helen Ellis, a retired

Continued on Page 5D







BY DUANE E. BELANGER OF THE NEWS

**OVERVIEW** — The living room (as seen from balcony). Two-level deck addition beyond window was designed by Finnish architect Olav Hammarstrom.

## *Tour a 'little house' made for big needs*

Detroit librarian and expert on Michigan during the Civil War.

It looks from the approach like a one-room garage home, but visitors will be surprised to learn it contains approximately 2,000 square feet, three floors, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, three walled gardens and a partially covered, two-level deck on a lot just 50 by 120 feet.

The lot, with three others containing Frost-designed homes, is located at the end of a secluded Birmingham lane where trees, shrubbery and ground plantings create pleasant vistas and all the privacy of a tropical rain forest.

"He told me to get as little land as you can as long as you can control the view," says Mrs. Murphy. "He told me to build your house all over the land, with 'human dimensions,' so that it doesn't look like you couldn't go out, walk over and touch something.

"It's just the kind of house that people want today."

**OTHER ARCHITECTS'** homes on tour are the Affleck house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1941, located in Bloomfield Hills and a gift this year to Lawrence Institute of Technology; private residences designed by Sigmund Blum (1971) in Franklin and Peter Else (1970) in Bloomfield Township; a contemporary addition to a traditional home by Ed and Betty-Lee Francis (1974) in Franklin and a Birmingham cluster house by Carl Luckenbach (1962).

Tickets are \$7.50 and include a map and brochure. A bus ticket is \$3. Both are available by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Detroit chapter, American Institute of Architects, Beaubien House, 553 East Jefferson, Detroit 48226, or by phone at 965-4100.

On tour day, tickets may be purchased at the Great American Building Concourse, 280 North Woodward (at Oakland) in Birmingham. Children under 12 will not be admitted, nor are cameras permitted.

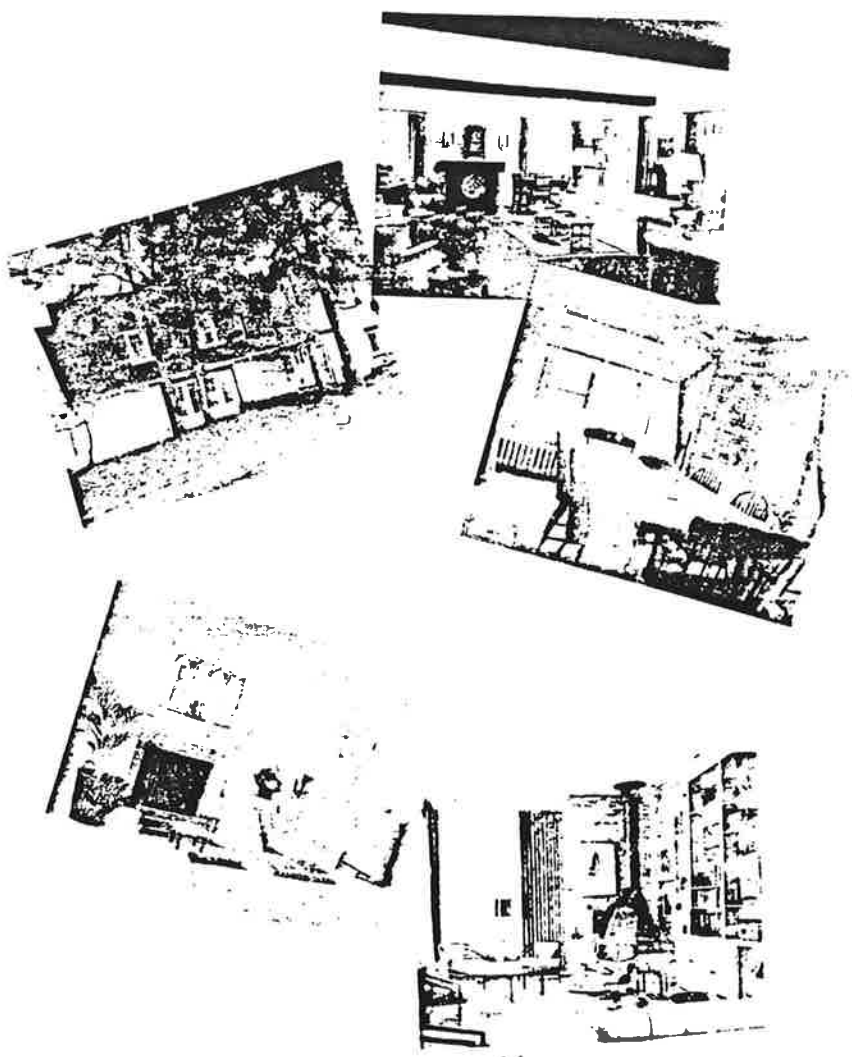


# EARLY or LATE, Frost Houses are Warm and Charming

by Julie Candler



Photo of architect Wallace Frost  
courtesy of Frost family.



Design elements of some Frost homes. Photos courtesy  
of homeowners. Mark Arpin photographer.

Tucked in among the trees and greenery of Birmingham, sometimes down lanes hardly anyone knows are there, are about 50 houses that are different from the rest. They are architectural gems, so full of charm and personality that anyone who knows about architect Wallace Frost can recognize them as his work.

From the '20s until his death in 1962, Frost designed houses that nestle into their sites as if nature had intended it that way. The architect once said that his goal was to achieve "a feeling of joy." Occupants of his houses say he succeeded.

Connie Bouchard and his wife, Helen, call their house "Wallace Frost #1." Bruce Brooks, Birmingham resident who has researched the Frost works, thinks it is the only one inspired by an English yeoman's cottage. Most of Frost's early houses borrowed from French country residences.

Frost built the Bouchard house, at 576 Tooting Lane in Birmingham, for himself and his wife in 1922. It was the house her husband liked the best, Grace Frost once told Bouchard.

"This was the first house to be built in the Midwest of cement blocks," says Bouchard, referring to the architect's frequent use of the white-painted blocks.

There's nothing symmetrical about this house's low rectangular exterior. Stone steps descend from the sidewalk toward the front door. To a visitor's left is a long section that houses the living room, with dormer windows on the roof above it. To the right of the stone walk, a smaller section of house extends toward the street. It contains the entrance foyer and a small den.

The front door is at right angles to the house. Beside it is a white-painted, wooden bench. Another section to the right of the entrance foyer and den contains the kitchen and a two-car garage (originally one-car).

"We absolutely love the cross-shaped floor plan of this house," says Bouchard, who has lived in it 40 years. "You don't have to go through any other room to get to a room."



Like many Frost houses, the far wall of the big living room (22 feet x 34 feet) features a large fireplace. In some of the structures, fireplaces are massive. Windows are the casement type and sectioned. A long bay window looks out on Tooting Lane and another big window on the opposite side makes the room part of the woody scene behind the house.

"He seemed to do as much as he could to use light," says George E. Eads, who once lived in a Frost house at 691 Pilgrim. "Winters are dark. In all the Frost houses I have seen he built large windows on two sides of the living room. The living rooms are just absolutely beautiful."

Another feature of Frost houses, including the Bouchards', is massive wooden ceiling beams. They are 12-inch by 12-inch, Bouchard claims, and were taken from an old schooner being dismantled on the Detroit riverfront. Other owners say their similar wooden beams were brought from Oregon.

The room displays other Frost characteristics: recessed windows on either side of the fireplace, elegant woodwork, including floor-to-ceiling bookshelves along the wall near the entrance, and a lower level requiring a step down from the foyer.

"You get a great feeling when you go up the stairs of a Frost house," says Birmingham architect George Zonars, who particularly admires the earlier houses.

Upstairs at the Bouchards', there's a fireplace in the master bedroom. Frost designed the house with three bedrooms plus a two-room live-in suite for the servant. (In the '20s nearly every family had a maid.) A back stairway leads from the kitchen to the maid's suite, which was occupied by the Bouchards' sons. "Our boys liked those stairs because they could sneak out without our knowing it."

Most of the same features are in the Frost house occupied by Trudy and George White. It was inspired by the French country style.

"You know how most houses look terrible without furniture in them?" asked Trudy White, whose house was empty when she first saw it 22 years ago. "This house looks better without furniture. With all the nice architectural details, it doesn't need furniture."

Her husband adds, "You don't get bored with this house."

Trudy White agrees. "You go away and come back and you always feel like you are seeing home for the first time and you think what a really unique house this is."

The Whites' beamed living room is dominated by a huge copper-hooded fireplace. As he did with his first house, Frost made interesting use of levels to root the Whites' place onto its lot. There's a step down into the living room, and another into the kitchen. Two wide doorways off the Whites' living room are arched, another Frost signature.



In the upstairs hall, another Frost trademark is a door leading onto a tiny railed balcony, intended for shaking out the dust mop or airing bedding.

The dining room floor is laid with pegged oak planks of different sizes. Outside a front door displaying finely-crafted hardware hangs a handsome wrought-iron lantern. The thick door opens into an entranceway leading to a second door, which is the old-fashioned Dutch variety Frost favored. Either the top or bottom half can be opened separately.

"My husband likes to open the top of our Dutch door and tell Halloween trick-or-treaters that they broke our door," says Pat Coe, who lives in a more traditional Frost house with a Dutch Colonial look at 967 Rivenoak.

Coe's husband caught the spirit that Wallace Frost deliberately designed into the houses. "It was a feeling of fun and warmth," said John Richardson.

Richardson, who once lived in a Frost design at 715 Wimbleton, became so enthusiastic that he began assembling

material for a book about the architect. Bruce Brooks, former occupant of a Frost, collaborated with Richardson. Brooks can show you his photographs of every one of the architect's designs he has been able to discover.

Altogether, Brooks knows of 90 Frost designs around the country. A few are in Grosse Pointe Park.

It's not uncommon for the houses to sell even before the real estate company gets a call. Before the Brookses found theirs, Leslie Brooks identified Frost houses and began giving owners her name on the back of a recipe card.

Owner John Richardson heard the brick and stone French Norman house at 244 Wimbleton might be sold and called Leslie and Bruce Brooks. The Brookses made an appointment. They stepped into the foyer, took one look at the living room and bought the house.

"Wallace Frost was a charming, shy person, who loved people," Richardson told The Birmingham Historical Society in 1981.

Frost was born in 1892 in Uniontown, Pennsylvania and studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. His first job was as a civilian with the U.S. Army in Washington, D.C. during World War I. He worked with the well-known architect, Albert Kahn.

After the war, Kahn persuaded him to join his Detroit firm. Frost's job included work on projects such as portions of the General Motors Building.

Frost's great interest was in country homes, so he resigned and set up his own office in Birmingham in 1925. "He was sensitive to tradition," Richardson said. "He studied houses in Europe and gleaned many ideas there."

"He was a cosmopolitan man who was well-traveled. Not many architects were at that time," says Brooks. "He was influenced by Spanish, Italian, French and English houses, and mixed things he liked."

In 1928 Frost built the house at 244 Wimbleton where the Brooks family once lived. "He and his wife intended to live there," says Bruce Brooks. "By the time



they were ready to move in, the depression hit. The house remained vacant until about 1933."

Connie Bouchard says Frost also lost the house on Tooting Lane. "The bank auctioned it off for about \$3500," claims Bouchard. "Nobody could keep anything then."

That was when the Frosts went to live in Florence and toured and studied more houses, says Brooks. "You could live inexpensively in Europe."

When he came back to the Detroit area, there was no work, so he went to California and worked there until 1938.

"He came under the California Spanish influence and started to do contemporary houses when he returned here," says Brooks.

One of the contemporaries belongs to Edwin W. Deer, DDS, and his wife, Jean. It shows the California ranch influence, all on one floor except for a guest suite over the garage.

Dr. Deer says it was built in 1946 and was the first of the contemporaries here. The

house was a style all its own, with a modern look that seems timeless.

Instead of big sectional bay windows of the earlier period, the Deer house was unbroken panes of floor-to-ceiling picture windows looking out on the backyard pool. In place of a separate dining room, a section of the big L-shaped living room serves that purpose. The Deer residence has a large fireplace in the living room and a smaller one in the master bedroom.

Says Dr. Deer, "We wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Jean says the only way she's going to get out of here is when they wheel her out."

Another of the Frost structures in Birmingham is the playhouse of The Village Players at 752 Chestnut, where Frost was a member. The original entrance is concealed by the addition of a lobby. But the huge fireplace and the arched door to the theatre are among the telltale Frost signs.

John Richardson didn't write the book about Frost. After five years in Birmingham, he was transferred back to the West Coast. Bruce Brooks remains the community's authority. Whenever there's

doubt about the authenticity of a Frost house, they call in Brooks. "The houses are dramatic and dynamic. It's an identifiable style that reads so well you can pick it up," he says. He knows all the clues to look for.

Neither Brooks nor Richardson knew Wallace Frost. They became close friends with Grace Frost, a witty and charming woman who died two years ago. She helped them find and identify many of her husband's designs.

Once Brooks drove her by a house whose owners claimed a Frost heritage. Mrs. Frost looked and said, "No way that was done by him."

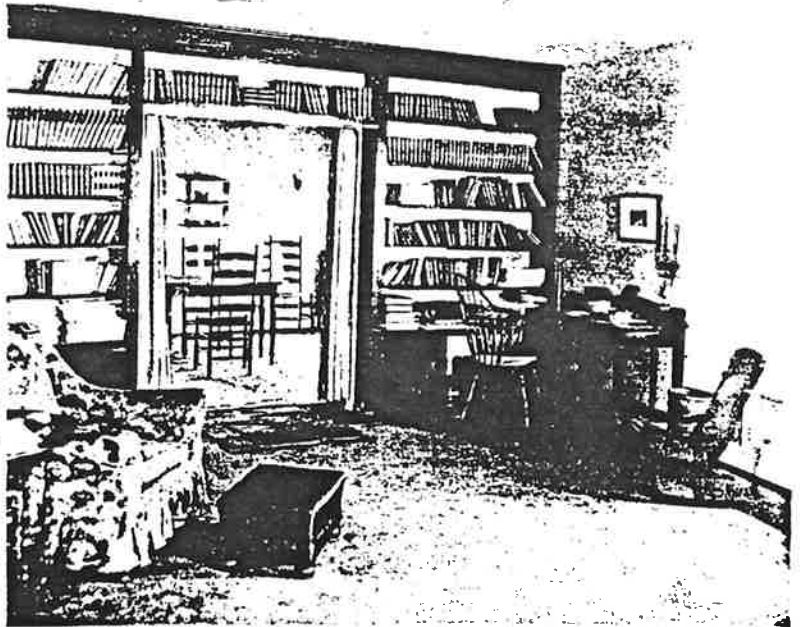
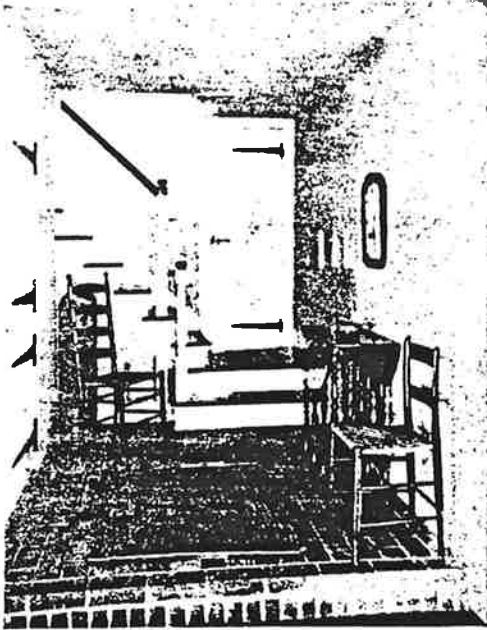
"He was a stickler for detail," says Brooks. "If you go inside there are some really telltale signs. He used the same suppliers and fixtures a lot. He was very precise in providing a quality and a feeling that makes the people in a house think about the architect and realize that he must have been a special person.

"I'm sorry," he says, "that I never knew the man." ■



The House of  
Frederick E. Good  
Buckingham Road  
Birmingham

Wallace Frost, Architect



*Above: Although the rooms are rather small they are given the effect of spaciousness by the wide openings between. The living-room and dining-room occupy the back of the house overlooking the garden.*

Photographs by T. Ellison

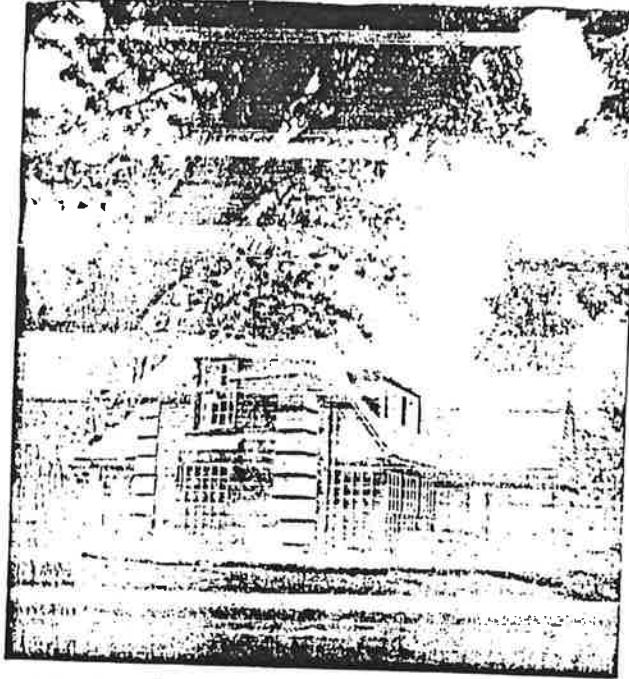
*Left: This delightful little entrance hall sets the character of the house with its white board doors, iron hinges and fixtures and scrubbed brick floor. The front door opens in sections.*

*Below: The white clapboard house is Dutch colonial in type. Note the deeply recessed front door with its outer storm door and brick steps. Behind the open porch is a charming small sunken garden.*





## "LONG SEARCH ENDS HAPPILY"



A heavy growth of ivy had completely covered the beautiful exterior or detailing of this home designed by Wallace Frost.

# Architect's name sold the house

Story: CORINNE ABATT  
Photos: DICK KELLEY

Would you buy a house purely because it was designed by a particular architect? Many people would probably say no — price, location, size, style and condition would all have priority.

But those who search for and find Wallace Frost houses are a different breed. There's a magic about the architect who designed houses in the metropolitan area in the late '20s and early '30s that has a lure that equals great paintings, diamonds or Oriental treasures.

Finding a Frost home isn't easy; most sell before they ever go on the market. Leslie Brooks of Birmingham was aware of that when she and her husband, Bruce, used to talk about Frost in reverent tones. In her search, Mrs. Brooks took the most direct route. She identified the Frost homes in the Birmingham area in which she wanted to live and further refined her list to the ones she figured she and her husband could afford. Then she contacted the owners directly although none of the homes were for sale.

"I would stop by and leave my name on the back of a recipe card," she said. "My friends used to tease me saying I was getting a reputation as that crazy lady who was always putting messages on the back of a card that said 'from the kitchen of.'"

But she never had any luck contacting the people who lived at 244 Wimbleton although this happened to be a Frost home she and her husband particularly admired from the outside.

SHE DID LEAVE a card with another Frost home owner, John Richardson, and when he heard that 244 Wimbleton might be sold, he called the Brooks. She said Richardson understood her quest, he had gone through a similar hunt himself. When he was transferred to this area from California, he told his family the only solace for leaving the Pacific Coast sunshine would be to live in a Wallace Frost home.

Leslie and Bruce Brooks made an appointment to see the home on Wimbleton, stepped into the foyer, took one quick look at the living room and bought the house. They moved in last December.

No second thoughts — and no regrets.

"I saw that bay window in the living room and I knew my grand piano belonged there," Mrs. Brooks said. "Every morning when we get up we find something else to enjoy — it's like living in a dream."

All of the elements that characterize Frost homes of that period when he was taking his inspiration from European architecture — particularly French Norman — are present in the Brooks' home — fine woods, natural materials, many levels, imported hardware — the best of everything, plus charm.

All the dormers are insulated. The attic is plastered, all floors are hardwood. In the living room, all the natural wood beams around the fireplace are faced with copper.

One pleasing touch is that all of the brass hardware was imported from

(Continued on page 5A)



## "FROST HOME ADAPTS TO MODERN LIVING"

(Continued from page 3A)  
England — and in true Gilbert and Sullivan style, the couple have polished up the handle of the big front door — and many other doors as well.

When they took up the living room carpeting, they found an extra wide perfectly matched pine-board floor. The dining room floor is oak. Natural brick is used in the entryway. To add to the French Norman look, the architect used natural wood beams in the foyer. An arched doorway with a paneled cherry wood door leads down several steps from the foyer to the kitchen. A circular stairway leads from the foyer to the upstairs, and this one has a vaulted ceiling, another detail characteristic of Frost.

Mrs. Brooks said the rough plaster walls in the downstairs area are still in excellent condition after 52 years with only a few tiny cracks. Bay windows were another typical Frost detail and this home has one in the living room and another in the dining room along with other windows set deep enough for window seats.

WHILE THE basic structure was in excellent shape and had remained unaltered through the years, the minute the Brooks moved into the home, their efforts went into bringing the home back to as close to its original shape as possible. All carpeting was removed to expose the natural wood floors. All drapes were taken down from the paned glass windows and all paint removed from the solid wood doors.

One of the most tiring jobs and one that elicited pro and con comments was to take 50 years growth of ivy from the brick exterior. But this wasn't the desirable house ivy; this type was a natural hiding place for mice and other small undesirable wildlife.

As the heavy vines came down, the structural details of the outside were uncovered to show the natural stone and brick patterns.

The Brookses made little attempt to maintain pure period furnishings, except in the master bedroom. Longtime antique collectors, they gathered a pleasing assortment of things they liked.

"We bought most of them as junk and my husband refinished them," Mrs. Brooks said.

They were sure, however, that they wanted a master bedroom that was middle or late 19th century, all the way. The Victorian bedroom set was acquired at an estate sale. It had been stored in a barn and was badly water damaged before Bruce Brooks took over and turned it into a beautiful set with a gleaming finish.

Mrs. Brooks covered the master bedroom walls with a mauve and brown print material, something she swears she'll never use for wallcovering again (too difficult to hang), and made curtains and pillows to match. When they bought the bed, they guessed the headboard would fit in the master bedroom with little room to spare. In actual fact, the ceilings are hip and there is but one place where the bed fits, but that's where they hoped it would go anyway.

Mrs. Brooks sat on the enclosed porch, looked through the doorway to the living room and dining room and said, "The thing that is so remarkable to me about Frost is that he could design a house 52 years ago that is so viable for a family now. With very few structural changes — he saw it all 50 years ago."

THE NATURAL woods of the antiques which Bruce Brooks refinished, the splashes of color in the Oriental style rugs which highlight the natural

wood floors, the live plants and the touches of another era in the brass accessories, Tiffany-style lamps and handwoven pillows all make this home one that is full of natural light and natural materials, sparked by touches of vibrant color.

Two daughters, Becky and Lisa, have what amounts to a separate suite of bedrooms on the second floor connected by a bathroom, and there is ample room for guests.

Bruce Brooks just completed laying a herringbone pattern wood floor in the kitchen and now the major tasks are almost complete.

He, a designer for General Motors, and his wife, a pianist and piano teacher, can begin to relax. All of their work over the past nine months to bring the home to prime condition has paid off.



## '23 — HOW VILLAGE PLAYERS BEGAN — '83

"Let's give a show, kids! My uncle has a barn." The line, immortalized in the ancient Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland movies, was (and is) what raised the curtain on The Village Players of Birmingham in 1923. Trouping with their dream, Players have mounted some 400 productions — around 900 performances, with never a dark house.

They trouped without a theater to begin with, with home-made tools of their craft, with ice forming under the leaky doors; with a boom, a depression, a war. They triumphed and, occasionally, they bombed, but they never let go of the dream.

Jack Gafill (deceased) a high school student in 1922, first proposed the formation of a dramatic group in the tiny village of Birmingham. Sixteen fellow citizens, and charter Players thereby, considered and kindled and in February of 1923, they organized as The Village Players, a private amateur theatrical club. Not a community theater — their stated purpose: "To produce at intervals, small plays which have been worked out on an artistic standard, and not with a view of financial benefit."

The Charter Players quickly enrolled a number of interested others on their roster, and elected Loren Robinson president. Their purpose went into the by-laws: "... shall be to produce plays, study the drama, play direction, costuming and scenery design, to encourage the writing of plays and to promote interest in the drama."

Curtains parted, for the first time ever on the Players' show, in spring of 1923. *"The Maker of Dreams,"* described as "a one-act Pierrot fantasy" by author Oliphant Downs, had as actors, Rolfe Spinning, Caroline Reilly and Forbes Hascall. The original Birmingham Community House, a renovated farm house on the present site of the post office truck lot, was their Playhouse. Makeup and dressing rooms were across the street, in the living room of another Player, with cast and crews sprinting through the scant traffic of the era, to the theater.

Players huffed and puffed the pool table in the small main room into a corner, and strung wire from wall to wall to hang a sleazy black curtain. Scenery, constructed in the Robinson's basement, was of paper, tacked to wood frames. Lights were a row of tin dishpans reflecting bare bulbs.

But it was theater! Members and a few guests sat on floor cushions for the first few rows, on kindergarten chairs in the center of the house and on full-sized chairs at the back, simulating the usual ramp floor of a regular theater.

Next year (1924-26) Players built membership, audiences and play schedule. A one- (eventually two-) night public performance at the old Baldwin High School auditorium, under the loving and tireless sponsorship of Player Ruth (Mrs. Charles J.) Shain. They were a smash!

It was time to build the dream's muscle with money. The Players bought the present property on Chestnut Street to be within walking distance of most of the town. To build the Playhouse, they devised a system of five-year pledges, guaranteed by the signatures of those players who were local businessmen, to satisfy the old Birmingham National Bank. Architect and member, Wallace Frost, designed the building. Construction was by member Bob Tillotson, with materials provided by member Spud Simpson, both on a non-profit basis.

Special gifts were many and generous. Mr. and Mrs. Loren Stauch gave the maple floor for the auditorium; Bess (Mrs. Graham John) Graham the stage curtain, which served until 1958 when the stage was widened. The Robinsons donated the curtain mechanism; the Zelter Dowlings the rope, rigging and overhead mechanisms; the Shains, the fireplace and fittings.

First performance in the present theater was given in November of 1926. Heaven for the theater nuts, with a backstage area designed by Robinson, one of whose status symbols was a card in the stagehands' union; real footlights, real costumes and makeup applied by Jake Hirschfield, who brought his professional crews out from Detroit until Players learned how to do it themselves.



---

**Sec. 127-4. Historic district study committee and the study committee report.**

- (a) The city commission shall appoint a standing committee to serve as the historic district study committee. The committee shall consist of seven members in addition to a city appointed liaison. A majority of the members shall have a clearly demonstrated interest in or knowledge of historic preservation, although city residency is not required if an expert on the potential historic district topic is not available among city residents. Members shall be appointed for a term of three years, except the initial appointments of three members for a term of two years and two members for a term of one year. Subsequent appointments shall be for three-year terms. Members shall be eligible for reappointment. In the event of a vacancy on the committee, interim appointments shall be made by the city commission within 60 calendar days to complete the unexpired term of such position. The committee shall include representation of at least one member appointed from one or more duly organized local historic preservation organizations.
- (b) The business that the committee may perform shall be conducted at a public meeting held in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended. Public notice of the date, time, and place of the meeting shall be given in the manner required by Public Act 267. A meeting agenda shall be part of the notice and shall include a listing of each potential district to be reviewed or considered by the committee.
- (c) When directed by a resolution passed by the city commission, the standing historic district study committee shall meet and do all of the following:
  - (1) Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within each proposed historic district following procedures established by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.
  - (2) Conduct basic research of each proposed historic district and historic resources located within that district.
  - (3) Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within a proposed historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the National Register of Historic Places, as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60, and criteria established or approved by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.
  - (4) Prepare a preliminary historic district study committee report that addresses at a minimum all of the following:
    - a. The charge of the committee.
    - b. The composition of committee membership.
    - c. The historic district(s) studied.
    - d. The boundaries of each proposed historic district in writing and on maps.
    - e. The history of each proposed historic district.
    - f. The significance of each district as a whole, as well as the significance of sufficient number of its individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the district, relative to the evaluation criteria.
  - (5) Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendations to the city planning board, the state historic preservation office of the Michigan Historical Center, the Michigan Historical Commission, and the state historic preservation review board.
  - (6) Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public pursuant to Section 399.203(4) of Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended.



- 
- (7) Not less than 60 calendar days after the transmittal of the preliminary report, the historic district study committee shall hold a public hearing in compliance with Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended. Public notice of the time, date and place of the hearing shall be given in the manner required by Public Act 267. Written notice shall be mailed by first class mail not less than 14 calendar days prior to the hearing to the owners of properties within the proposed historic district, as listed on the most current tax rolls. The report shall be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.
  - (8) After the date of the public hearing, the committee and the city commission have not more than one year, unless otherwise authorized by the city commission, to take the following actions:
    - a. The committee shall prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and the recommendations, if any, of the city planning board and the historic district commission, to the city commission as to the establishment of a historic district(s). If the recommendation is to establish a historic district(s), the final report shall include a draft of the proposed ordinance(s).
    - b. After receiving a final report that recommends the establishment of a historic district(s), the city commission, at its discretion, may introduce and pass or reject an ordinance(s). If the city commission passes an ordinance(s) establishing one or more historic districts, the city shall file a copy of the ordinance(s), including a legal description of the property or properties located within the historic district(s) with the register of deeds. The city commission shall not pass an ordinance establishing a contiguous historic district less than 60 days after a majority of the property owners within the proposed historic district, as listed on the tax rolls of the local unit, have approved the establishment of the historic district pursuant to a written petition.
  - (9) A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a committee in the performance of an official function of the historic district commission should be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.

(Ord. No. 1880, 7-24-06; Ord. No. 2154, 6-29-15)

#### **Sec. 127-5. Establishing additional, modifying, or eliminating historic districts.**

- (a) The city commission may at any time establish by ordinance additional historic districts, including proposed districts previously considered and rejected, may modify boundaries of an existing historic district, or may eliminate an existing historic district. Before establishing, modifying, or eliminating a historic district, the standing historic district study committee, as established in section 127-4, shall follow the procedures as stated in section 127-4. The committee shall consider any previously written committee reports pertinent to the proposed action.
- (b) In considering elimination of a historic district, a committee shall follow the procedures set forth in section 127-4, as amended for the issuance of a preliminary report, holding a public hearing, and issuing a final report but with the intent of showing one or more of the following:
  - (1) The historic district has lost those physical characteristics that enabled the establishment of the district.
  - (2) The historic district was not significant in the way previously defined.
  - (3) The historic district was established pursuant to defective procedures.

(Ord. No. 1880, 7-24-06)





## MEMORANDUM

Planning Division

**DATE:** March 3, 2017  
**TO:** City Commission  
**FROM:** Historic District Study Committee  
**SUBJECT:** 927 Purdy – Historic Designation request

---

In accordance with the resolution passed by the City Commission at the March 14, 2016 meeting, the Historic District Study Committee has prepared a report on the request for historic designation submitted by the owner of the property located at 927 Purdy, Birmingham MI. As required by Section 127-5, **Establishing additional, modifying, or eliminating historic districts**, the HDSC has prepared the following report for consideration by the City Commission. Photographs submitted by the applicant and aerial photos from Oakland County have been attached in support of this report.

**Charge of the Committee** – Evaluate the property located at 927 Purdy for potential designation as a historic resource.

**Committee Members:**

Gigi Debbrecht  
Michael Xenos  
Gretchen Maricak  
Patricia Lang  
Paul Beshouri

**District studied**

927 Purdy, Birmingham MI, 48009  
PIN – 1936256003

Legal Description: T2N, R10E, SEC 36 BUELL'S ADD LOT 41, ALSO W 1/2 OF VAC ALLEY ADJ TO SAME.

**Boundary Description** - The boundary of the proposed zone would be limited to the legal description of the property. As a proposed non-contiguous historic resource, no other properties are currently included in this study. Non-contiguous historic districts are historically designated homes in the City of Birmingham that are not part of a larger historic district. There are currently fourteen (14) non-contiguous districts in the City.



## **History**

The Birmingham Historical Museum and Park records indicate that the house was built in approximately 1880. The original plat for the property was established in 1842 as Lot 3 of Hunters plat was where the house was built (see 1842 map attached) James Hunt owned lot 3 in 1874 (The house was later built on that lot, but was not there in 1874) The south west side of lot 3 was purchased by Almeron Whitehead, founder of the Birmingham Eccentric. The house appears to have been there in 1881 (see bird's eye view attached). Almeron Whitehead paid taxes for the property, as indicated by records dated 1885, 1887, 1890, 1897, 1902, 1904. A copy of a newspaper article mentioning that Almeron Whitehead owned a house on the east side of Pierce Street that was rented in the 1890s was discovered (attached). According to the Federal Census of 1910, the property was later re-platted and the legal description of the house changed to Assessor's Plat 24, part of lots 15 and 16, at 121 Pierce St. (current day 217 Pierce St.) along with an oil station on the same parcel. Records indicate that Irving Bailey purchased and remodeled the home between 1904 and 1910. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1910 shows the house with the exact footprint as the current basement.

In September 1945, the house, which at the time was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Bailey, was moved from its original location to its current day location at 927 Purdy St. (then 929 Purdy). An article from the September 20, 1945 issue of the Birmingham Eccentric explains that the house was relocated to make way for a new commercial building that would contain three establishments. Upon completion of the move, the house was repaired, improved, and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Russell McBride.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

Description - The primary building at 927 Purdy St. is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse-style home. All elevations are faced with wood siding and fenestrated with tall single-hung windows. A covered porch enclosed by baluster spindles and supported by two detailed wooden posts creates an opening to the house's main entry door. The front elevation features a gabled roof at its right side and a centrally located chimney, giving the house an asymmetrical look.

The subject house at 927 Purdy has recently undergone some exterior renovations. (Changes demonstrated in recent photos). Other homes in the area from the same time period were used as the basis for these changes, which are contrasted with the accompanying before photos. New ornamentation was added to the façade of the house to recreate original detail as closely as possible. On the porch, there are now brackets joining the posts with its roof. A bracket pediment is affixed to the gable roof. It is also of note that the windows have been re-encased with a new trim. The entirety of the house's exterior has received new paint, from the wood paneling that is now beige, to the porch, ornamentation, and fascia that are now accented with a vintage white.



### Significance

Aside from its architectural style as reminder of the past, the structure bears historical distinction as it was once owned by Almeron Whitehead. Mr. Whitehead is known to have been extremely active in the Birmingham Community (including 13 years as village president), but was most well known as one of the co-founders of the Eccentric Newspaper, which is still in print today. The house was later sold to a man name Irving Baily who occupied the home from approximately 1904 to 1944 whilst also owning and operating an oil station next door.

In 1945 the house was purchased by the McBride family and subsequently moved to its present location on Purdy St. in order to construct a new commercial building on the original site. Once moved, the home was remodeled and occupied by Russell McBride. Russell's father, Harry McBride, was a progressive business man and influential citizen who owned the Hardware House of Birmingham. He served as mayor of Birmingham. Russell was treasurer of the Birmingham board of education from 1917 to 1921 and was later elected mayor of the city in 1922. His term in office was marked by liberal and progressive policies.



February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016

City Of Birmingham

151 Martin St.

Birmingham, MI 48012

Att.: Matthew Baka, Senior Planner

Re.: Historic Designation

Dear Matthew,

Thanks a lot for your time and help last week. I would like to submit for your and the Historic District Commission a request to give my house historic designation.

My house was originally built in the Historic District; I made a research with the Baldwin Public Library, the Birmingham Historical Museum and Park, the Oakland County Recorder of Deeds, Ancestry, and other web sites. Here below are my findings

- The Birmingham Historical Museum and Park records indicate the house was built between 1880 and 1900 (see Annex 1)
- The lot where the house is located today (927 Purdy St.) was purchased by Mr. J. Harry McBride, former Birmingham Mayor for two terms (Annex 2) from MM Baker on September 11, 1945 (per the Oakland County Recorder of Deeds records)
- The house was moved from its original location to the present location in September 1945, per the Birmingham Eccentric Edition of 9/20/1945 (see Annex 3)
- The house was purchased by Edith and J. Harry McBride, and Dorothy and Russell McBride (Edith and J. Harry's son) from Irving Bailey on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1940 (per the Oakland County Recorder of Deeds records, see Annex 4)
- The house was located at the Assessor's plat 24, part of lots 15 and 16, current street address 217 Pierce St.
- Mr. Irving Bailey Purchased and remodel the house between 1900 and 1910. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1910 shows the house with the exact footprint as current basement (see Annex 5)
- The address of the house in the 1910s was 121 Pierce St., and Mr. Bailey had an oil station in the same address (as shown in the Federal Census of 1910 and city directory , see Annex 6)
- There is a picture of the house on Pierce Street during that period (see Annex 7)



- The house was there in 1900 and 1893, in the exact same location, the front part of the house was the same, the back part of the house was later modified by Mr. Bailey (see Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in Annex 8)
- The house was not there in 1872 (see Annex 9)
- The house has the same design as the historical houses across the street from the City Hall, and same architectural fixtures (404 Bates St. built 1880, 339 Townsend St. built 1881, 211 Townsend St. built 1885., see Annex 10).
- Federal Censuses prior to 1910 (1880 and 1900), and State Censuses prior to 1900 (1894 and 1884) do not have the street names and numbers; it is very difficult to know what family lived in what house. Mr. Bailey was living in Detroit in 1900. Out of all Mr. Baileys Pierce St. neighbors in 1910, only one lived on Pierce St. in 1900. None lived there in the State Census of 1894.
- My conclusion is that the house was built circa 1880.

I have much more information after the house was moved, but the important part is between the years 1872 and 1893. I will very much appreciate any help you can provide me investigating the house history during those years.

I remain at your disposition for any question or additional information you may need.

Best regards,



Luis Barrio

927 Purdy St.

Birmingham, MI 48009

Cell: 248 729 6299



② 927 PURDY  
929

NO BUILD DATE  
MOVED FROM 205  
PIERCE  
(VILLAGE STREET)

FARM HOUSE STYLE CIRCA 1880-1900  
ALUM. SIDING

CITY E.C. 45-41



1881 - 1968

vol. 10  
See Original  
Accession File

## Michigan: A History

Lillian Drake Avery, 1925

J. Harry McBride, the progressive business man and influential citizen who figures as the proprietor of the Hardware House of McBride, one of the leading business establishments in the city of Birmingham, Oakland county, is known as one of the liberal and public spirited citizens of this community and has served as mayor of Birmingham. Mr. McBride reverts to the old Buckeye state as the place of his nativity, his birth having occurred at Beaver Dam, Allen county, Ohio, January 24, 1881. He is a son of William and Lillie (Gates) McBride, the former of whom was born at Chardon, that state, in 1850, and the latter of whom was born at Cortland, Ohio, in 1854. The public schools of his native place afforded Mr. McBride his early education, which was therein continued until 1899, and later he attended the Ohio Northern University, at Ada. He made a record of specially successful service as a teacher in the public schools of his old home town of Beaven Dam, where his professional activities along this line were continued from 1899 to 1903. Thereafter he was for a time employed as a clerk in the establishment of the J. J. Ewing Hardware Company, of Lima, Ohio, and since November 3, 1910, he has been engaged successfully in the retail hardware business at Birmingham, Michigan. His large and well equipped establishment is maintained on a metropolitan standard and is known as the Hardware House of McBride. In the conducting of this substantial business Mr. McBride now has as his valued assistant his son, Russell A. Mr. McBride has not abated his lively interest in educational affairs, and he was treasurer of the Birmingham board of education in the period of 1917-21.

In 1922 he was elected mayor, or president of the municipal board of trustees of Birmingham, and his two terms of service in this office were marked by characteristically liberal and progressive policies. Mr. McBride married Miss Edith M. Wood, of Detroit, and the one child of this union is Russell A., who was born February 26, 1903, who was graduated in the Birmingham high school as a member of the class of 1921 and who is now actively associated with his father's hardware business. Thomas L. Wood a brother of Mrs. McBride, served with the Shirley hospital unit over seas in the World war period, and another brother, Harry Wood, was in the aviation service of the United States navy, he having been at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, near Chicago, at the time when the armistice brought the great World war to a close.



203 - 235 Pierce

According to the Birmingham Eccentric, dated September 20, 1945, construction began for a new store building on Pierce Street for three establishments. According to the article, the old house on the property was moved to 929 Purdy. The home, for many years occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Edwin Bailey, was to be repaired, improved and occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Russell McBride. J.H. & Russell McBride had completed the plans for the new Pierce Street building for which Edward Bissell was the architect. The architectural design was intended to harmonize with the municipal building across the street and the public library.

*no info found on them*  
*some info found*

Whaley's

Van Interiors

Hack's

# The Birmingham Post-Herald

PART ONE

THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR—NO. 28

BIRMINGHAM, OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1945

12.00 PER COPY (Outside County) SINGLE COPIES 5c

## THIS and THAT

By G. R. A.

**Just A Few Thoughts On Relations Of Citizens To City Affairs**

Birmingham (every loyal reader will agree) is a nice little city.

Its people are intelligent to an above-average degree.

Its income is above the average in most parts of the country.

Its progress is above the average in most parts of the country.

Birmingham has within its borders more important organizations than, probably, any community of its size in the U.S.A. (Twenty or thirty of them.)

Birmingham occupies under the Commission-Manager type of government, an important position over the antiquated Council-Manager type of government.

Mayor is the political administrator. Birmingham's City Commission is composed of seven members, each elected for a three-year term.

The present Commission is composed of men who give every Monday evening, in consideration of the problems, to the city.

These men, each versed in his own particular business or profession, depend upon a City Manager to advise them, weekly, of matters that should be before them.

Another Group Help

The Commission has, as an advisory group, a Planning Commission, composed of local men and women who meet each month with an executive staff meeting when necessary.

The Planning Council, from a long-range angle, considers the future of the city, in relation to its growth, its needs, its problems, its opportunities.

The two groups, the City Commission and Planning Commission, are the two main groups in the city.

Everything they do is of a public nature, and they are the two main groups in the city.

While these groups are of a public nature, they are the two main groups in the city.

The officials have no official control over the community, of course.

They set for ALL of us who say that this is the way to live.

Well, folks, I'm pretty sure that this is the way to live.

According to the report carried in the Birmingham Post-Herald, Mr. Albee said, "I think that if Mr. Albee had been better acquainted with Birmingham and with the things we have been trying to do, he would have been better acquainted with Birmingham and with the things we have been trying to do."

It is not part of the very common knowledge that every citizen has the right to be heard.

It is not part of the very common knowledge that every citizen has the right to be heard.

It is not part of the very common knowledge that every citizen has the right to be heard.

## His Ship Escapes

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

## Birmingham's Ration Board To Be Closed

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

## Birmingham Led Is Michigan Center

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

## Thanks Davies For Letter Asking City Improve Its Streets

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood

By John M. Harwood



# New Building Will House Three Stores Along Pierce Street

Pierce street is to have a new store building housing three mercantile establishments. J. H. and Russell McBride of the McBride Hardware have plans completed for the new structure, just south of Maple street. The new building will face west and will be of an architectural design to harmonize with the municipal building and the public library.

Work started last week when the old house on the property was moved to 325 Purdy street. The house is to be repaired and improved into a modern home and will be occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Russell McBride. The residence property was known as the Bailey home and was occupied for years by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Bailey, now residing at East Tawas, Mich.

The new store building will have a frontage of 80 feet on Pierce street. Edward E. Bissell is the architect now drawing the plans. Contracts are now being let for various parts of the building operations and the excavation for the basement is expected to be started this week.

J. H. McBride stated today that no leases had been signed for the stores because of the uncertainty of date of completion of the structure.

September 20, 1945

(08) 19-36-201-020

|                  |                    |                       |                      |
|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>CVT:</b>      | City of Birmingham | <b>PIN:</b>           | (08) 19-36-201-020   |
| <b>Status:</b>   | Active             | <b>Parcel Type:</b>   | Land                 |
| <b>Add Date:</b> | 12/14/1976         | <b>Delete Date:</b>   |                      |
|                  |                    | <b>Last Activity:</b> | 1/5/2016 11:41:53 AM |

| Tax Description |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
| 1               | T2N, R10E, SEC 36          |
| 2               | ASSESSOR'S PLAT NO 24      |
| 3               | PART OF LOTS 15 & 16       |
| 4               | BEG AT PT DIST             |
| 5               | N 01-52-25 W 22 FT         |
| 6               | FROM SW COR OF LOT 16,     |
| 7               | TH N 87-00-00 E 100.56 FT, |
| 8               | TH N 05-21-50 E 20.34 FT,  |
| 9               | TH N 35-22-05 W 57.55 FT,  |
| 10              | TH N 11-52-30 W 17.15 FT,  |
| 11              | TH S 54-26-10 W 82.08 FT,  |
| 12              | TH S 01-52-25 E 41.48 FT   |
| 13              | TO BEG, ALSO               |
| 14              | SLY PART OF LOT 17 MEAS    |
| 15              | 3 FT ON ELY LOT LINE &     |
| 16              | 48.53 FT ON WLY LOT LINE   |

*March 18, 1940*  
*Irving Bailey (I) sold it to*  
*Edith J Harry McBride and (parents)*  
*Russell + Dorothy Grace McBride*  
*(son)*  
*Ass PLAT #24 Lot 16*  
*McBride purchased the lot @ 927 (929)*  
*Purdy St from MM Baker on 9/11/45*  
*for \$3700*

| Legacy Lineage         |             |            |          |
|------------------------|-------------|------------|----------|
| Parent(s)              | Delete Date | Child(ren) | Add Date |
| FROM 19-36-201-003/004 | 12/14/1976  |            |          |

| Address Information                 |                        |                 |   |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Primary Mailing Address             | Site Address Indicator | Addressee(s)    | Address   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |                        | ★Cedarcliff LLC | 18855 Warwick St<br>Beverly Hills MI 48025-4068 |
|                                     | 🏠                      | ★Cedarcliff LLC | 165 Pierce St<br>Birmingham MI 48009            |
|                                     | 🏠                      | ★Cedarcliff LLC | 217 Pierce St<br>Birmingham MI 48009-6046       |

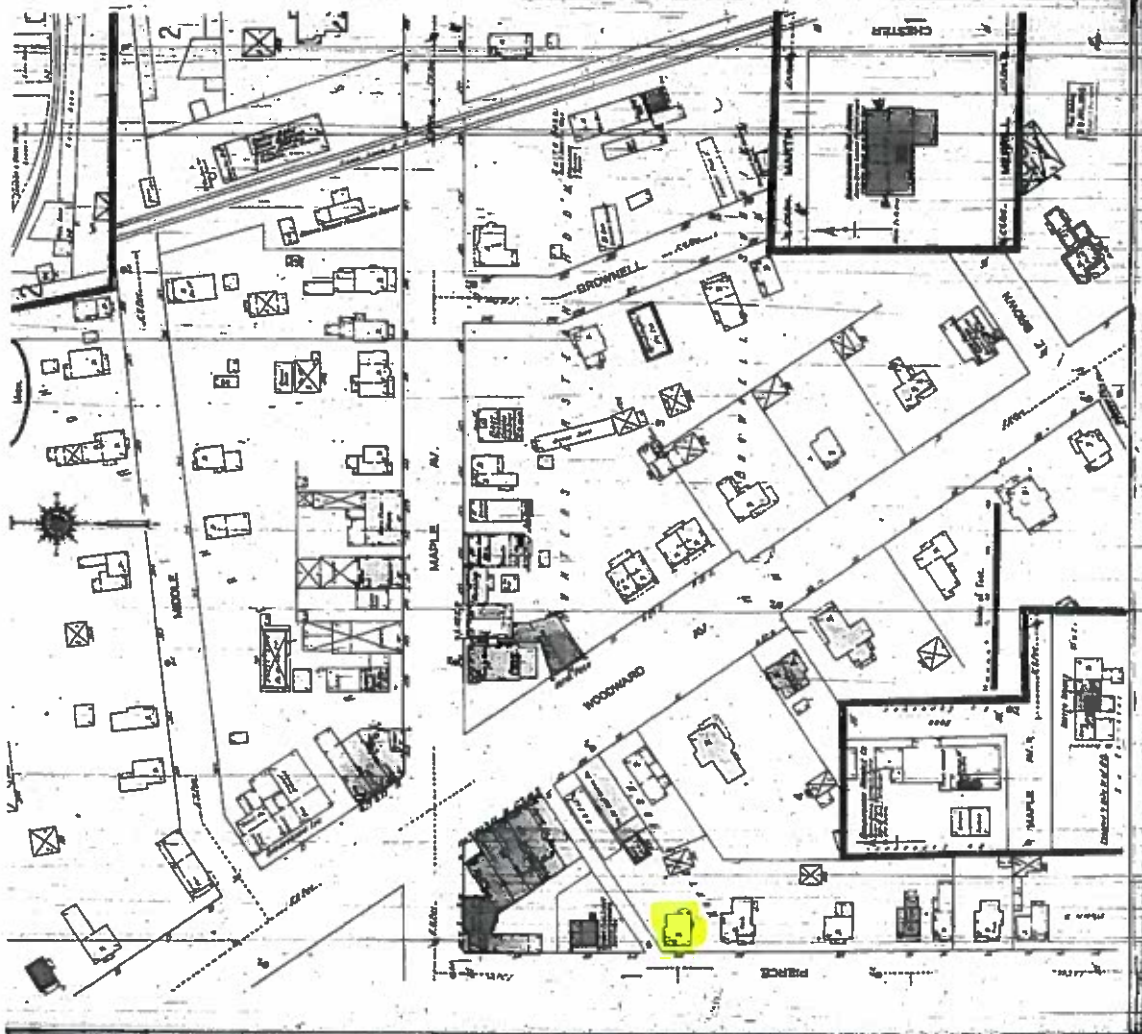
*Crimson Rose Antiques*  
*Built 1968*

| Related PINs |               |                  |          |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|----------|
| CVT          | PIN           | Parcel Type      | Status   |
| 08           | 99-00-000-019 | Business Account | Inactive |
| 08           | 99-00-000-158 | Business Account | Inactive |
| 08           | 99-00-003-063 | Business Account | Active   |
| 08           | 99-00-003-097 | Business Account | Inactive |
| 08           | 99-00-003-098 | Business Account | Inactive |
| 08           | 99-00-005-064 | Business Account | Inactive |
| 08           | 99-00-010-098 | Business Account | Inactive |





sanborn map 1910

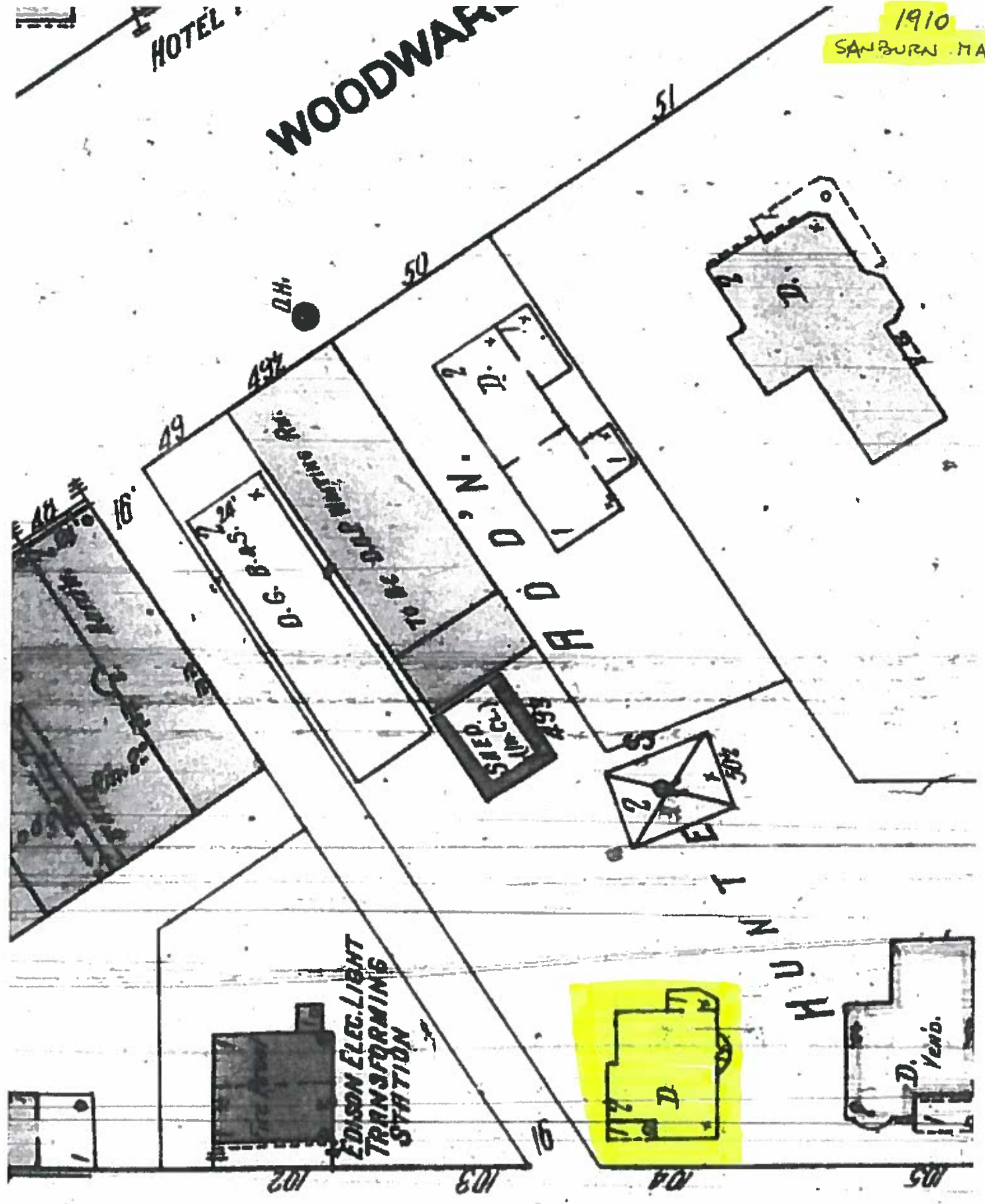




HOTEL

WOODWARD




1910  
SANBURN MAP



# Irving Bailey

## in the 1910 United States Federal Census



-  [View blank form](#)
-  [Add alternate information](#)
-  [Report issue](#)

**Name:** Irving Bailey  
**Age in 1910:** 44  
**Birth Year:** abt 1866  
**Birthplace:** New York  
**Home in 1910:** Bloomfield, Oakland, Michigan  
**Street:** Pierce Street  
**Race:** White  
**Gender:** Male  
**Relation to Head of House:** Head  
**Marital Status:** Married  
**Spouse's Name:** Hattie Bailey  
**Father's Birthplace:** New York  
**Mother's Birthplace:** New York  
**Native Tongue:** English  
**Occupation:** Repairer  
**Industry:** Rep Shop  
**Employer, Employee or Other:** Own Account  
**Home Owned or Rented:** Own  
**Home Free or Mortgaged:** Free  
**Farm or House:** House  
**Able to Read:** Yes  
**Able to Write:** Yes  
**Years Married:** 26

**Neighbors:** [View others on page](#)

### Household Members:

| Name          | Age |
|---------------|-----|
| Irving Bailey | 44  |
| Hattie Bailey | 44  |



**PARTIES and SUNDAY DINNERS A SPECIALTY****172 S. Woodward Avenue****Phone 294**

Atkinson, Frank W., lawyer, 411 Harmon.

Atkinson, Olivia, housewife, 411 Harmon.

Atwell, James, Ford Motor, 311 Townsend.

Atkinson, Nancy I., student, 411 Harmon.

Atkinson, Frank W. Jr., student, 411 Harmon.

Atwell, Elizabeth, housewife, 311 Townsend.

Austin, Melville M., oil broker, Lincoln.

Austin, Edna M., housewife, 521 Lincoln.

Averill, George R., owner Birmingham Eccentric, 203 Poppleton.

Averill, Louise, housewife, 203 Poppleton.

**B.**

Babcock, Maud, maid, 314 Frank.

Babcock, May Miss, 401 Townsend.

Babcock, Clyde, Ford motor, 401 Townsend.

Bacon, L. W., Chevrolet sales, 511 Watkins.

Bailey, Irving, oil station, 121 Pierce

Bailey, Hattie, housewife, 121 Pierce

Bailey, E. L., Detroit United Lines, 227 Hamilton.

Bailey, Alice, housewife, 227 Hamilton.

Bailey, Manley, student, 227 Hamilton.

Bailey, Milo L., Radio eng., 218 N. Woodward.

Bailey, Elsie, housewife, 218 North Woodward.

Bailey, Edgar L., electrical engineer, 233 Ferndale.

Bailey, Margaret W., housewife, 233 Ferndale.

Baird, J. W., plumbing, 206 Park.

Baird, Rose, housewife, 206 Park.

Baird, Ella V., 631 Wallace.

Baird, Russel, 631 Wallace.

Baird, Ella Mrs., housewife, 631 Wallace.

Baker, R. D., contractor, 536 Southfield.

Baker, Harriet, housewife, 536 Southfield.

Baker, L. M., salesman, 423 E. Maple

Baker, Adele, housewife, 423 East Maple.

Baker, Carrie Mrs., Ford motor, 315 Haynes.

Baker, Howard, cement blocks, 315 Haynes.

Baldwin, Ruth, housewife, 614 Dorchester.

Baldwin, Stowe D., salesman, 614 Dorchester.

Baldock, L. F., veterinary, 401 Brown

Baldock, Maud, housewife, 401 Brown.

Baldwin, J. W., retired, 416 Harmon

Baldwin, Florence C., housewife, 416 Harmon.

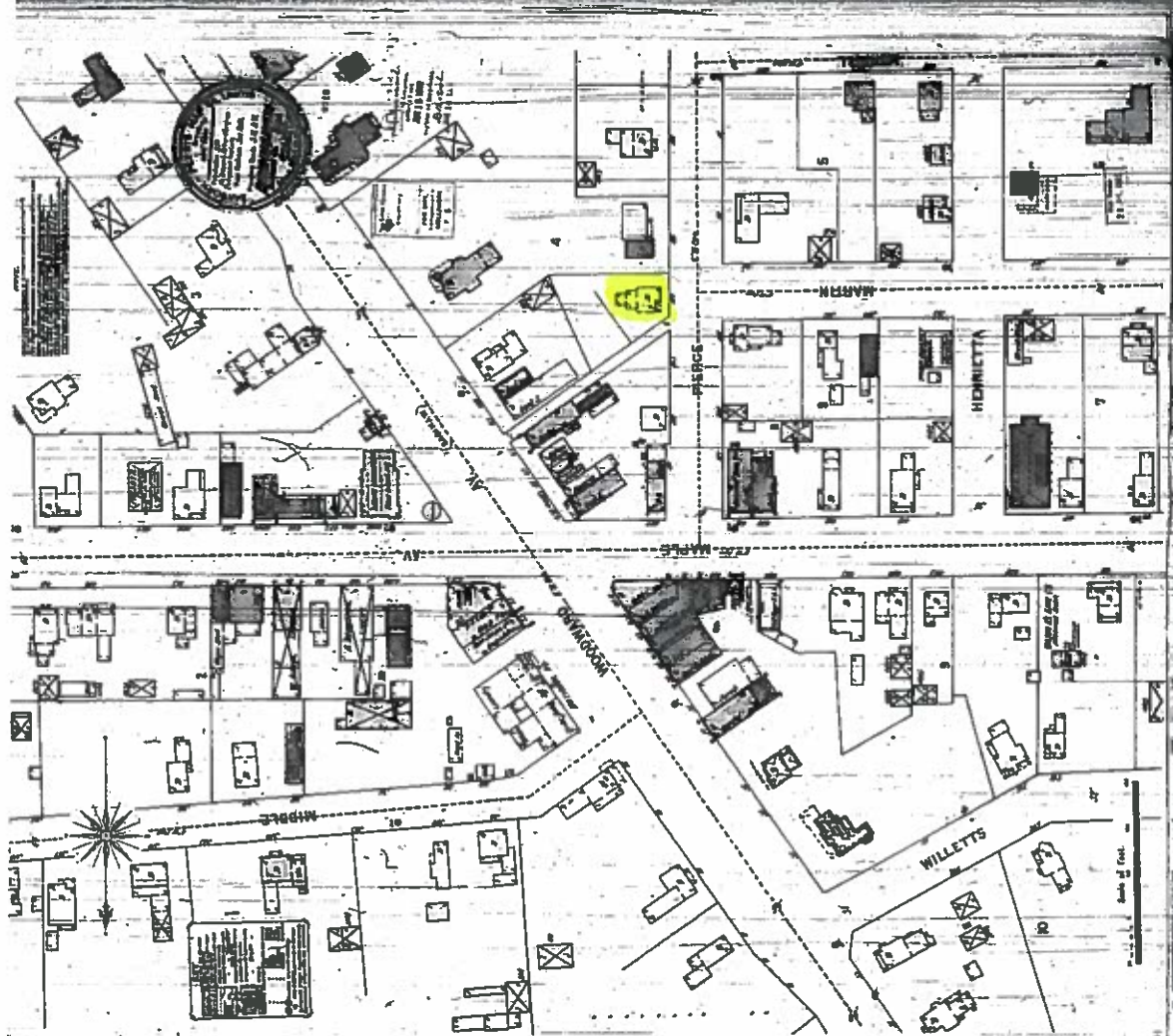
Baldwin, Geo. E., Fuel Co., 600 Pierce.



South on Pierce St 97.114  
SHAW'S Drug Store R.H.

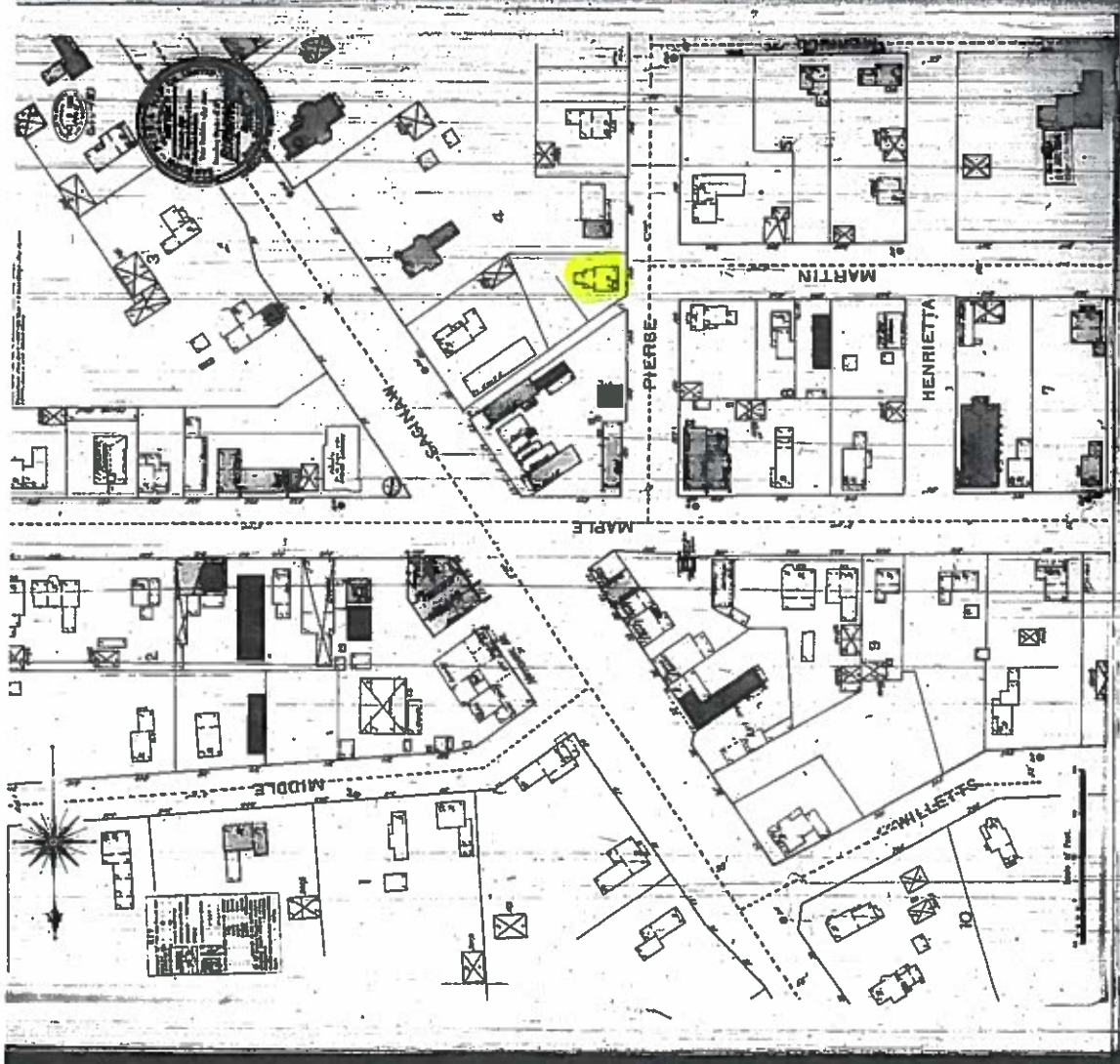


SANBORN MAP 1900



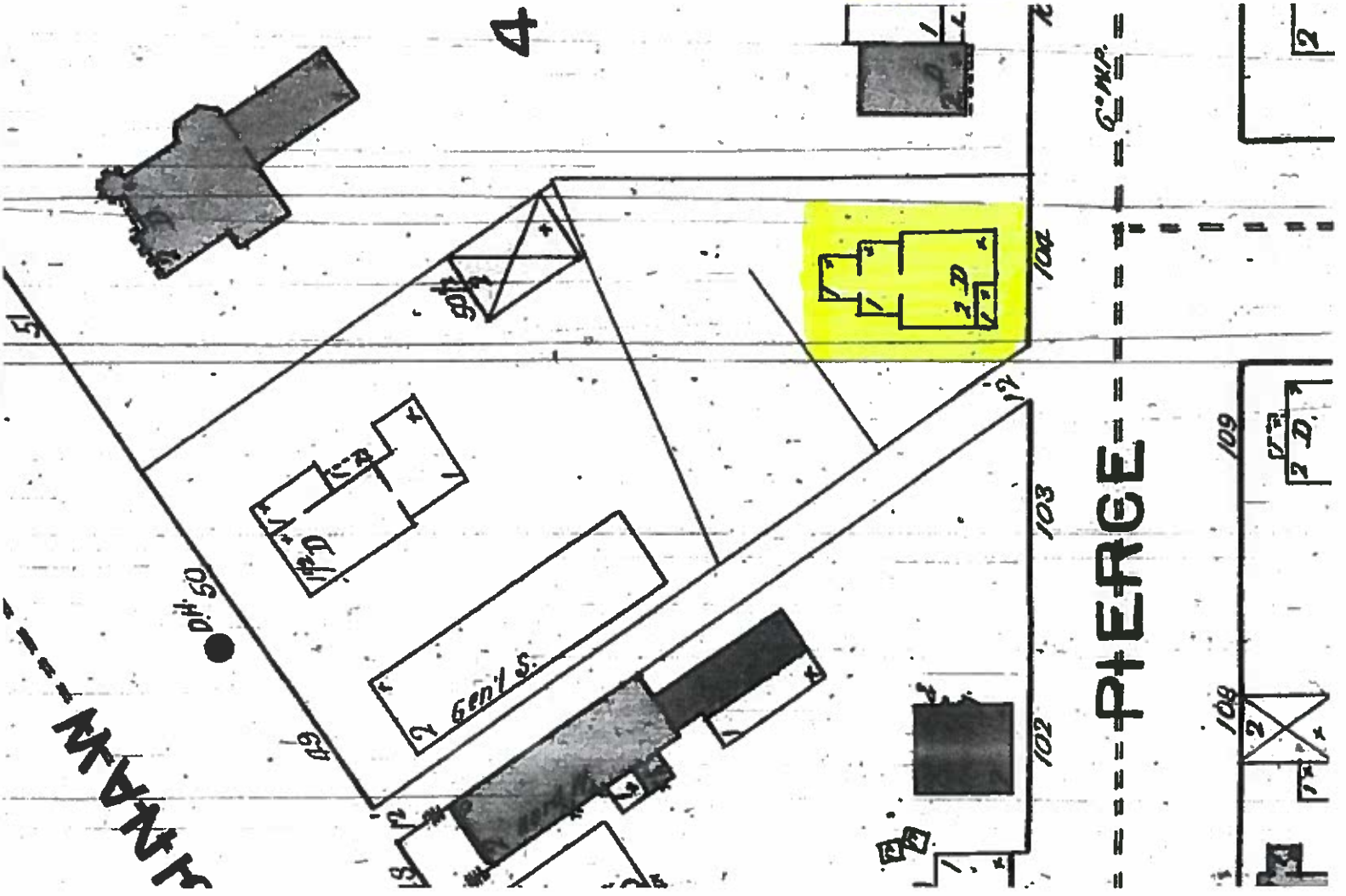
SANBORN MAP

1893

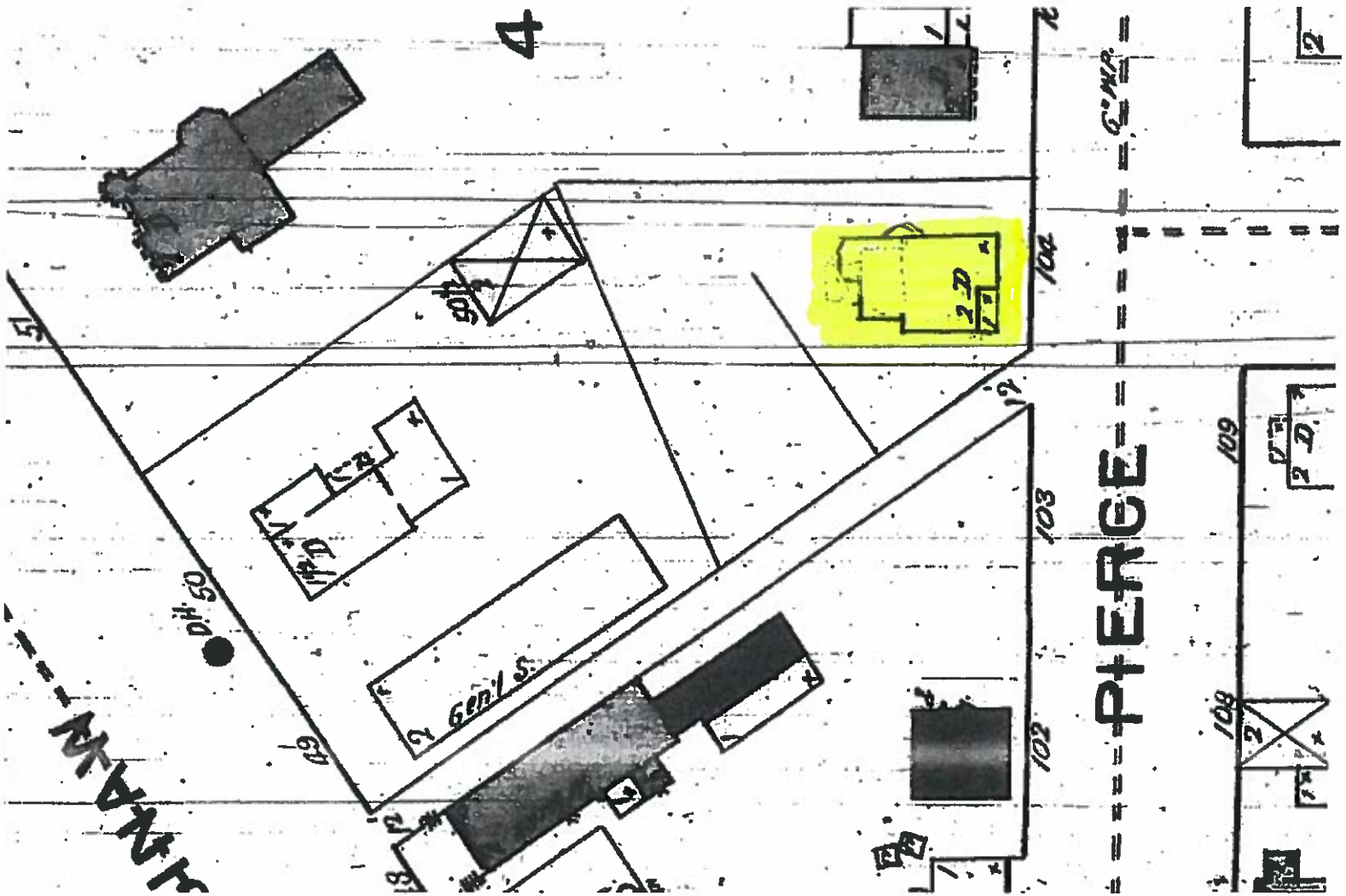




SANBORN MAP 1893



1893



Remodelling done by Irving Bailey c1904





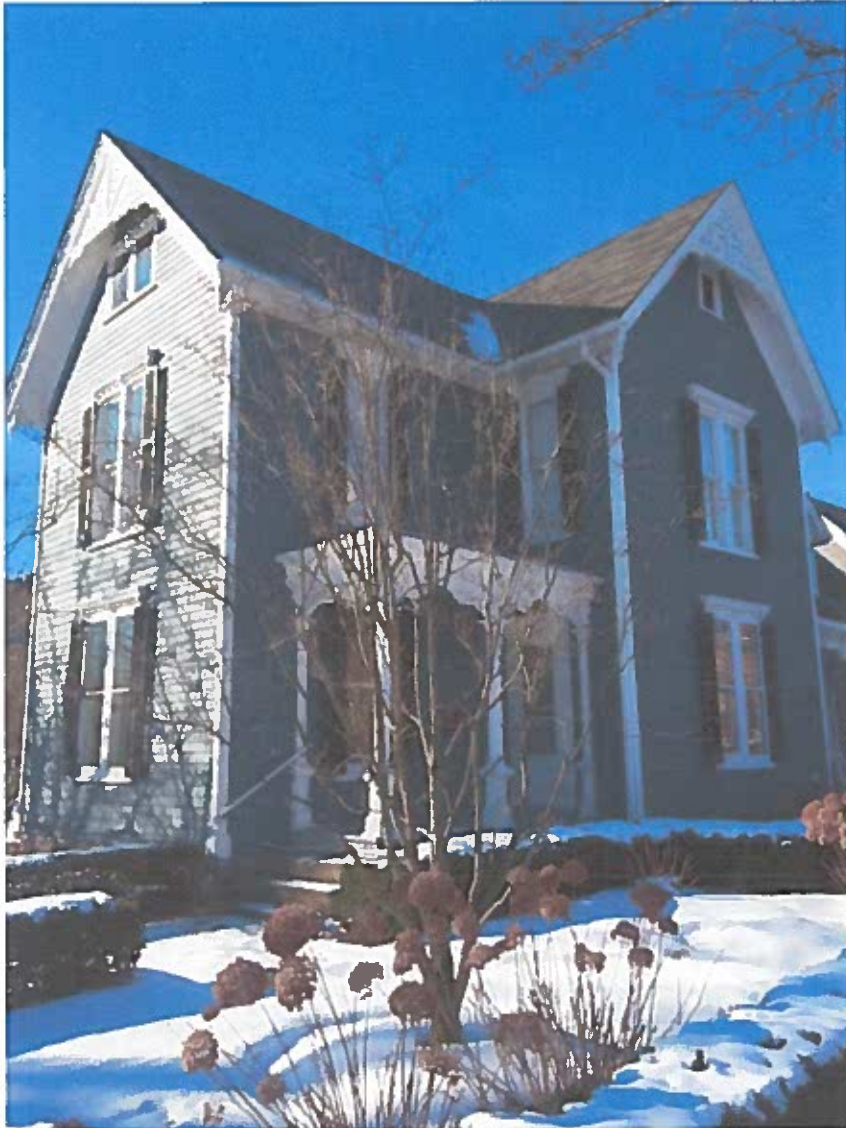


927 Purdy St., formerly @ 121 Pierce St. (Today 217 Pierce St.)





404 Bates St.



Built 1880

339 Townsend St.



Built 1881



211 Townsend St.



Built 1885



339 Townsend St. Trim (1881)



927 Purdy St. Original Trim



Historic District Study Committee  
Draft Report

560 Southfield  
Birmingham, Michigan

City of Birmingham

Historic District Study Committee Preliminary Report

560 Southfield

Jenny Roush, Chairwoman

Darling M. Gehringer

John Jickling

Jane McKee

Gordon Rinschler

Nancy Thompson

Rosamond Weber

*Special Thanks to Past Members:*

Patricia Andrews

John Bluth

Betsy Coates

Robert Saarnio

Elizabeth Stone

Mark Thomas

*City Staff Liaison*

William K. McElhone, Birmingham Historical Museum, Director

Shelia Bashiri, City of Birmingham, Planner



**Historic District Study Committee  
Final Report - 560 Southfield**

Table of Contents

Charge of the Historic District Study Committee

Study Committee Members

Inventory

Description

Count of Historic and Non-Historic Resources

Boundary Description

Boundary Justification

History

Significance

The national Register Criteria

Bibliography

Attachments

Photos, articles and maps

### Charge of the Historic District Study Committee

The Birmingham City Commission on March 26, 2001 established the Historic District Study Committee for the purpose of conducting historical research regarding the proposed designation of historic landmarks or districts in the City of Birmingham. The Committee was charged with reviewing the list of 17 properties.

### Study Committee Members

**Darling Gehringer** lived in southeastern Michigan all her life. Has a MBA from Wayne State University. She and husband, Dan Wilson, have been residents of Birmingham for 21 years and are in the never-ending process of restoring their older home. She is also an avid scuba diver/underwater videographer.

**John Jickling**, a graduate of the University of Michigan's College of Architecture and Design, has been a registered architect in Michigan since 1951. A Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and past president of the Michigan Society of Architects, Mr. Jickling has many projects to his credit including buildings at the University of Michigan, Wayne State University and Eastern Michigan University. He is a member of the Birmingham Historic District and Design Review Commission.

**Jane McKee**, was born in Birmingham and graduate from Baldwin High School. She earned a Master at Stanford University in Education and was a teacher before her retirement. McKee is member of the Birmingham Historical Society, an avid gardener and volunteer.

### **Gordon Rinschler**

**Jenny Roush** has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in interior design and historic preservation from the Savannah College of Art and Design. She is a museum assistant at the Birmingham Historical Museum and is the editor of the Birmingham Historical Society's newsletter, *The Heritage*, as well as a member.

**Nancy Thompson** is an urban geographer, specializing in housing and Treasurer of the Michigan Historic Preservation Network. She works for Oakland County's Planning and Economic Development Services as a community economic development specialist involved in destination and heritage development activities.

**Rosamond Weber** graduated from the University of Missouri and is a journalist and genealogist. She has been a resident of Birmingham since 1953.

William McElhone, Director of the Birmingham Historical Museum, and James Sabo, City of Birmingham Senior Planner, assisted the study committee in its work. Mr. McElhone has a master degree in American History from Wayne State University, and more than twenty years experience working in historical museums and archives. Ms. Bashiri has a Master of Urban Planning degree with an emphasis in Historic Preservation from Wayne State University, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Historic Preservation



from Savannah College of Art and Design. She has five years of experience as an architectural historian and a preservation planner.

### Inventory

This property was included in two lists of potential historic landmarks that were compiled by the Historic District and Design Review Commission, dated April 25, 1996 and January 4, 1999. The only available photographs of the exterior are those taken from the public sidewalk and aerial mapping photographs taken by Oakland County. These images are included in this report.

### Description

The primary building at 560 Southfield is a two-story gable front and wing Queen Anne style wood frame residence from the 1890s. It has an asphalt cap shingle roof that was originally wood shingle and a fieldstone chimney. The clapboard siding and fish scale siding in the gables are painted white with green shutters at the windows. The oldest part of the home has an L-shaped plan, with several additions put on at different dates.

### Count of Historic and Non-Historic Resources

There is one historic resource: the house, and a non-historic garage on the property.

### Boundary Description

T2N, R10E, section 36 Stanley and Clizbe subdivision, lots 23 & 24.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary describes the property at 560 Southfield as a single resource historic district. The house at 560 Southfield is in the Stanley and Clizbe Subdivision, which is named for two prominent Birmingham Residents. In 1872 the land the house sits on was owned by T. Trollop and by 1896 was sub-divided. The subdivision is bound by Southfield Road on the east, Maple to the north, the Rouge River to the west and Lincoln on the south.

### History

Luther Stanley and Warren D. Clizbe sold the property to John Bell in 1892. Stanley was a respected and prominent member of the Birmingham area and was very active in local politics. He made his wealth from farming and gave liberally to support the good of the community and those less fortunate. He served as Village president in 1882, 1887 and 1888. He was also the Village Supervisor for many years and Bloomfield Township supervisor from 1859-1862, 1876, 1877. He acted as Revenue Assessor for the Sixth Congressional District of Michigan during the Civil War and was appointed by Abraham Lincoln. Warren D. Clizbe also served as Village President from 1917-1921. He was the principal of Union School and Superintendent of schools in Birmingham. His daughter, Marion Clizbe, married Harry Allen, Birmingham's first mayor and was mother to James Allen, also a mayor of Birmingham. John Bell built the house from 1891-1893 and in turn sold it to Joseph Bell in 1898. Over the next hundred years the house has had only five owners and several additions. Today the house is in the Southfield Road Residents Association neighborhood and is informally called the John Bell House.



### Significance

The study committee has evaluated the significance of 560 Southfield, according to the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The committee finds that the house is significant under national Register criterion c, because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Queen Anne styles of architecture.

### The National Register Criteria

*The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and association, and:*

*C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*

The Queen Anne style was used for houses, churches and other public buildings. Most buildings in the style are irregular in form, with hip, gable or clipped gable roofs, and projecting bay windows, towers, and dormer windows.<sup>1</sup> This example of the Queen Anne style is a two-story dominant front facing gable and wing house. It has patterned fish scale shingles on the gable. A bay window and a one story room on the south side, all to avoid a smooth walled appearance. The roof line has several gables projecting from it. This was the dominant style of domestic building from about 1880 until 1900<sup>2</sup> which fits the time period this house was built.

### Bibliography

*Book of Birmingham*, 1976 page 52

Portrait and Biographical Album, 1891, pages 340-341

Archival Records maintained by the Birmingham Historical Museum

### Attachments

Detail architectural description by Robert Saarnio, Photos, articles and maps

---

<sup>1</sup> *Windows to our Historic Architecture*, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Addison, Vermont 1996. (Internet [www.uvm.edu/~vhnet/histarch/haas06.html](http://www.uvm.edu/~vhnet/histarch/haas06.html))

<sup>2</sup> *A Field Guide to American Houses*, McAlester, Virginia & Lee, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1984, p 266.

Description Narrated by Robert Saarnio in August 9, 2002

*The following is transcription of Robert Saarnio's oral description he provided during an August 9, 2002 visit to 560 Southfield. Jenny Roush, William McElhone and one of the homeowners were present during this site visit.*

This is a two-and-a-half story, attic gabled wood frame residence circa 1890, confirmed anecdotally by the owner's verbal information, from prior owners, and through deed document research where the record starts in the 1890s. The house immediately north of the property is presumed built circa 1840, the oldest property in the neighborhood and a very old property generally for Birmingham.

The property depth runs 120 feet west from Southfield Road. The house has a history of sympathetic additions.

The front/east elevation faces Southfield Road and the massing at this elevation consists of cross gables in an "L" shape configuration with the northern side projecting forward about twelve feet and gabled. Corner boards are found at every corner. The southern half of the elevation consists of a porch with multiple square posts with moldings and a one-story porch with a balustrade which the owner believes is not original. Above the balustrade is a flat roof and a window at the second story centering on it. The door has four lights in its upper precinct and a five light pair of sidelights flanking the main door which is reached by a four-step porch with its own posts and finials at the bottom step. The shutters (currently green) on all windows are not original. The present owner however has retained an original shutter thus keeping a documentary record. Distinguishing characteristics on this elevation include, in the gable of the projecting or northern volume of the massing, fish scale siding in the pediment, and window hoods with full profiled cornice moldings above all the windows.

The north elevation is distinguished primarily by a very large fieldstone with mortar chimney projecting from this north wall at a depth of about three feet and raising the full height of the house. Its stack with beautiful ceramic chimney pots reaches the ridge line of the house in height. Like all other elevations, the first floor windows have cornice moldings on their hoods but at the second floor window hoods are not present. The top of these windows reach the frieze board of the under eave area. The large windows on the first floor of the north and east elevations have a configuration of eight lights over one, presumably added later but certainly appropriate to the period of the house.

On the west side of the north elevation, there are two porches of different construction era with different detailing and framing. There is also a gable with fish scale siding in the pediment and a triangulated vent like that at the front of the house. At the farthest west twenty feet of the house there is a presumed later addition of unknown date, though the detailing has been matched. At the western end of the house, there is a sequence of additions that is somewhat hard to determine in date. A fieldstone foundation runs along the entire north and the east elevations.



The west elevation of the house includes new construction (that post-dates 1993 when the current owner acquired the house) and also gives evidence of the original depth of the house on the property. At the second story the builder/architect matched the fish scale siding motif and the triangulated vent in the pediment of the gable from other parts of the house.

On the south elevation of the house, multiple eras of additions are evident. In the past decade, the current owner has added a porch and a gable on the western half. The gable has a tripartite window that is somewhat Palladian in inspiration with a taller central sash flanked by lower sash. The prominent feature on this south elevation is a porch which extends fairly deeply to the south of the main block of the house. It has a mix of old glass, likely restoration glass and newer glass. The soffit overhang of this porch roof has beaded board tongue-in-groove woodwork which may indicate that it has early origins in the life of the house though presumably not original. Proceeding along this south porch to its easternmost point toward the front of the house there is evidence of a projecting window bay. There is another gable above the second floor with fish-scale siding and a triangulated vent at the peak. There is a roof balustrade above the projecting window bay. The bay has an interesting siding detail, a scalloped-shingle siding motif that differs from the fish scale above. This may be a surviving early siding trim element where presumably the bay window later received this deeply projecting porch.

# Historic District Study Committee Priority List 2019

| Rank | Project   | Collaboration                           |
|------|---|---|
| 1    | Reinitiate the Heritage Home program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase recognition plaques and certificates</li> <li>• Create an application</li> <li>• Re-evaluate guidelines</li> </ul>   | Museum<br>Museum Board                  |
| 2    | Audit designated historical homes and buildings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate historic plaque conditions – repair/replace</li> <li>• Update City information</li> <li>• Create detailed electronic database</li> </ul>  | Museum<br>Museum Board                  |
| 3    | Promote the history and designation of historic properties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an ArcGIS Story Map for City website</li> <li>• Research and create themed walking tours</li> <li>• Write regular newsletter articles</li> <li>• Increase social media presence</li> </ul> | Garden Tours*<br>Museum<br>Museum Board |
| 4    | Publish Eco City survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update photograph database</li> </ul>  | Museum<br>Museum Board                  |
| 5*   | Obtain a plaque for the Community House <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create detailed information database</li> </ul>  | Museum<br>Museum Board                  |