

Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes Historic District, Phase III Ann Arbor, Michigan

A report prepared for the Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes Historic District
Study Committee of the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission

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Appendix A. Significant Structures by Subarea

Section I

A. Abstract

Following designation of five structures in Phase I of the Washtenaw/Hill Historic District, and an additional sixteen structures in Phase II, it has been the intention of the Washtenaw/Hill Study Committee to expand the historic district to include a total of 1003 structures. The current project was undertaken to provide the necessary documentation and research for the Study Committee to pursue designation. The purpose of this report is to consolidate the survey and research data into a comprehensive document which would describe not only the physical characteristics of the proposed district, but would also discuss its historic significance to the city of Ann Arbor. Research revealed the close connection between the growth of the study area to the growth of the University of Michigan, especially in the early twentieth century. It is this connection that will be developed as comprising the primary historical significance of the Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes Historic District, Phase III. In addition, it will be demonstrated that architectural merit is not necessarily the only factor which endows a structure with significance. Other important factors include a building's association with a person or persons significant to the history of the City or the University, or that the building was designed by a noted architect.

B. Methodology

The scope of the project undertaken here required a number of different approaches to be used in obtaining the necessary data and information with which to develop a description and history of significance of the area referred to as the Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes Historic District, Phase III. The project began for me with a collection of data previously assembled by the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission and numerous volunteers. I began with a field survey of the entire district in the summer of 1993. I felt this was crucial since the earlier survey data was out of date. I also felt that it was important

for me to become very familiar with the physical attributes of the area, including not only buildings, but also the natural vegetation and layout of the streets. I identified each building by address and made notes as to its characteristics. I took the opportunity to note which buildings I felt were architecturally significant, based on my education and experiences at Eastern Michigan University in recent years. This provided a necessary double-check against the list of significant structures as previously identified. Although for the most part my list of "significants" correlated with that developed earlier, the survey has produced a list of a number of buildings which I may recommend the Study Committee review for a possible change in their category.

Researching first occupants of the *significant* buildings involved not only checking city directories for the first date that a particular address appeared, but additional methods, when city directories alone proved inconclusive. Exhaustive research was done by me in an attempt to establish accurate first occupants, and even so there were a number of houses for which I had to take the best "educated guess" approach. In addition, I spent some considerable time in establishing the first occupant for the more than 560 buildings classified as *complementary*, a task which had not been tackled before.

In researching the "U of M factor" in the growth of this area, I attempted to learn more about the first occupants who were associated with the University. Two excellent resources for this type of information are the *Michigan Alumnus*, a periodic journal published by the University's Alumni Association, and the proceedings from the monthly Regents' meetings. In addition, *Michigan Ensiants*, the University's yearbook for students, were valuable for verification of fraternity and sorority houses.

An interesting method I undertook to accumulate more data about the history of significant buildings, was to send out survey forms to the owners of significant properties in Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes, with an accompanying letter explaining the nature of my project, to see what they might know of the history of their houses. The response was better than I had hoped, and included phone calls, letters and pamphlets, in addition to the completed survey forms. (They were sent to fraternities, sororities and churches, as well as homes.) Out of 211 surveys sent, 64 were received completed, and another thirty returned as addressee unknown. Beyond the surveys returned, I received eighteen phone calls and had seven in-person interviews. I also received five letters or other written materials instead of a survey form. For example, the First Presbyterian Church sent a booklet on the history of the Church, which included a description of the construction of the Church's buildings. Out of the 211 surveys sent, 94 responses of one kind or another were received, or 45%. Or, out of those sent to approximately 180 correct owner addresses, the 94 responses equal 52%.

An important part of the documentation of the structures lies in photographs and slides. Black and white photographs were taken of approximately one-third of the significant structures in 1987 and 1988, and some 75 color photographs were made in 1992. Many of these were considered out of date, especially the black and white ones. Additionally, there were no photographs of about one-fourth of the significant structures. Consequently, I undertook to photograph some 200 of these buildings in February, March and April of 1995. The best available photograph was then selected for use in Appendix A. Over the years, slides have been made of most of the properties in Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes. Again, these are out of date. Having new slides made of all the structures is a project which should be undertaken in the near future.

C. Introduction

The current project underway to document the properties in the proposed Phase III of the Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes Historic District is an outgrowth of two earlier processes which culminated in the designation of the Washtenaw/Hill Historic District. Identification and designation of historic districts in Ann Arbor has become an important part of the city's cultural heritage. To understand the place Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes occupies in this heritage, it is necessary to reflect on the beginnings of historic districts in Ann Arbor.

The Ann Arbor Historic District Commission was established by City Council in 1971, following the adoption in 1970 of Michigan Public Act 169. This act is the State's enabling legislation providing for the establishment of historic district commissions by local governments. The Ann Arbor Historic District Commission's duties and responsibilities are defined in Chapter 103 of the city code. As described in this code, the purpose of historic preservation in Ann Arbor includes to "safeguard the heritage of the city by preserving historic districts as well as individual buildings, structures, sites and objects within the districts of the city which reflect elements of the City's cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history." The Ann Arbor Historic District Commission is the tool by which these goals are achieved.

The people of the city of Ann Arbor have long recognized the richness and value of their history and heritage. Establishment of historic districts is a legal method of helping to preserve that heritage as it is embodied in the built environment. Guidelines established for historic districts help preserve their character by providing a review process through which proposed changes to structures within historic districts can be evaluated for their appropriateness. These include additions, changes to features such as porches, windows, roofs, cladding, etc., and even demolition. Resources other than structures are also protected, such as old growth trees.

In order to create a historic district, a study committee must be appointed to research, document and produce a report on the proposed district. In 1972, not long after the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission was established, the owner of the Frieze house at 1547 Washtenaw became concerned with the protection of the house and property. A striking Italianate building of multicolored stone, this house achieved its high level of significance not only for its architectural merit, but also for its association with Henry Simmons Frieze, a University of Michigan professor, who became acting president of the University in 1868. Although listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this afforded the house no true protection. At the urging of this homeowner, and some neighbors, City Council appointed a study committee in 1972 to research this area near the intersection of Washtenaw and Hill Streets, for potential designation as an historic district. For many reasons, including lack of sufficient manpower, the Study Committee did not meet for seven years.

In 1979, the owners of the Campbell-Hays house at 1555 Washtenaw became concerned for the preservation of their property, since it was part of an estate that was to be sold. With the support of four other homeowners near Washtenaw and Hill, the Study Committee met to proceed with designation. Although originally intending to create a larger district, the committee chose a phased approach in order to expedite the process. Since the owners of the five properties in question were supporting designation, the Study Committee felt that the establishment of the district would move quickly through Council. In 1980, on recommendation of the Study Committee, City Council designated these five non-contiguous structures as the Washtenaw/Hill Historic District. All five structures were associated with persons who were on faculty at the University of Michigan, and two were designed by noted architects. These are 1410 Hill Street, by Irving Pond, and 1555 Washtenaw, by Albert Kahn.

Following this designation, the Study Committee continued to work on their plan for a much larger Washtenaw/Hill district. In 1984, they were again spurred into quick action when the First Presbyterian Church applied for a permit to demolish a house they owned at 1421 Hill. This house had been built in 1894 by University of Michigan Professor Henry Carter Adams, who was to found the Economics Department. In later years the building housed *The Ark* coffeehouse, a locally popular club which featured live performances by noted folk musicians.

Once more faced with severe time limitations, the Study Committee chose to limit Phase II of the Washtenaw/Hill Historic District to include only those structures in the 1300, 1400 and 1500 blocks of Hill, and one on the corner of Washtenaw, thereby making Washtenaw/Hill a district of contiguous structures. On recommendation of the Study Committee, City Council adopted Phase II in 1986, adding sixteen structures to the Washtenaw/Hill Historic District. Although successful in achieving this designation, they were unable to save *The Ark*, which was demolished in April, 1986.

The Washtenaw/Hill Study Committee still intended to expand the historic district into a much larger area, and proceeded to establish boundaries for this proposed Phase III. Consisting of over one-thousand structures, the goal was to encompass not only the truly stately homes south and east of central campus, but also the distinctive neighborhoods which abutted the campus. Together the Study Committee surveyed this area, determining which structures were *significant* and which contributed to the overall character of the neighborhoods (considered *complementary* structures).

The district now stretched west along Hill Street to South State, southeast out Washtenaw to Tuomy, south to the Burns Park area, and east-northeast to Geddes and the neighborhoods north of Geddes (see maps). The desire not to disrupt the cohesiveness of neighborhoods created a district that appears quite large. Again, the process stalled. Although the Study Committee had done some initial survey and research work, they have not met now in many years, and little work had been done on the project as of 1993 when work was begun on this paper.

It is important that the process continue. The area encompassed in Phase III reflects a crucial era in the growth of the city, and its importance to our heritage must be recognized. This area, south and east of the University of Michigan's Central Campus, is linked to the University by providing a primary residential zone for University students, faculty and staff. The history and character of this area is reflected in the structures themselves. Nearer to campus, old homes have been converted for student apartments. In addition, most of the sororities and fraternities associated with the University are housed in architecturally significant structures located in this district.

This area is also significant for the number of houses associated with University faculty and administrators. For the most part these are large, elegant dwellings, reflecting primarily the huge surge in growth of the University in the early part of the twentieth century. This is reflected by the widespread use of the Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, Craftsman and Bungalow styles.

All these factors make Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes unique among Ann Arbor's historic districts, and afford the area an importance in our city's heritage which should be recognized through designation. It is hoped that this report will provide the necessary momentum to put the Study Committee back on track.

Section II

A. General Description

Phase III of the Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes Historic District proposes to designate an area of approximately one to one-and-a-half square miles, which contains just over one thousand structures. This phase expands the current boundaries of the Washtenaw/Hill Historic District in all directions, but primarily to the east, southeast and northeast (see maps). This is almost exclusively a large residential area, but also includes a number of churches, a synagogue, and one public elementary school. Subareas were created to help define different regions which themselves reflect a similarity of characteristics. Such characteristics include lot sizes, street patterns, and building usage. Some of these characteristics are outgrowths of the subdivision of large properties, and give to the various neighborhoods their individuality and cohesiveness. Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes, Phase III, is located in eastern Ann Arbor, east-southeast of the University of Michigan's Central Campus. It is unique among Ann Arbor's fourteen historic districts in that it is primarily an area of twentieth century development. This is quite unlike the other districts, which reflect Ann Arbor's earlier history, both in terms of residential settlement, as well as commercial growth.

Although forces at work in the nineteenth century had an influence on the history of the Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes area, it is not this early history that we see reflected in the landscape today. This district is a product of the explosion of growth in residential development experienced by the city between 1890-1930. What you see now are truly twentieth century neighborhoods which reflect the popular building practices which so define much of America today.

Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes Historic District, Phase III

	Subarea 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total #	Percentage
Significant	30	11	30	9	18	29	18	23	3	17	31	27	1	4	12	263	26.2
Complementary	82	31	11	22	16	87	3	36	3	67	27	43	12	98	24	561	55.9
Non-Contributing	18	3	5	5	4	7	1	12	6	19	32	38	0	19	8	179	17.9
Total	130	45	46	36	38	123	22	71	12	103	90	108	13	122	44	1003	100
Pre-1880	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	8	0.8
1880-89	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	7	0.7
1890-99	28	10	17	16	3	1	0	0	0	4	4	8	0	17	0	108	10.8
1900-09	43	7	6	1	15	6	0	0	1	4	5	1	1	15	0	105	10.5
1910-19	28	21	6	13	11	47	12	3	2	4	20	5	7	53	0	232	23.1
1920-29	10	3	5	1	5	42	7	40	2	44	23	36	5	13	17	253	25.2
1930-39	1	1	1	1	0	15	0	15	1	26	5	18	0	2	21	109	10.9
1940 & after	16	2	6	5	4	11	3	13	6	21	33	37	0	18	6	181	18.1
																1003	100%
Tudor	10	5	9	6	5	31	0	29	1	24	17	18	4	2	12	173	
Modern	16	2	5	5	4	7	3	12	6	18	32	39	0	18	5	172	
Vernacular	27	9	2	3	1	22	0	6	3	17	4	16	1	34	12	157	
Craftsman	5	9	0	2	8	20	5	4	1	10	13	8	4	31	0	119	
Colonial Revival	8	0	7	0	3	17	4	12	0	17	10	11	0	0	4	93	
Dutch Colonial	17	3	4	1	4	8	2	0	0	4	1	6	1	8	0	59	
Vernac Col Rev	12	1	1	5	4	6	0	0	0	6	3	3	1	8	8	58	
Queen Anne	14	8	6	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	10	0	49	
Georgian	4	1	2	3	5	3	4	7	0	4	5	0	0	0	2	40	
Bungalow	3	4	0	2	3	7	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	7	0	25	
Classical Revival	5	0	4	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	16	
Spanish	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	8	
French Eclectic	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	
Shingle	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	6	
Prairie	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	4	
Italianate	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	
Vernac Italianate	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	
Gothic Revival	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	
Collegiate Gothic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	
Art Deco	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
International	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	
Victorian Eclectic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	

Table 1. Washtenaw/Hill/Geddes, Phase III Resources, by Subarea

