

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Grande Ballroom

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 8952-8970 Grand River Avenue

City or town: Detroit State: Michigan County: Wayne

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B ___ C ___ D

<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of certifying official/Title:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____</p> <p>Signature of commenting official:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Title :</p>	<p>_____</p> <p>Date</p> <p>_____</p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION/CULTURE: music facility

COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

COMMERCE/TRADE: department store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

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Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Grande Ballroom is a two-story reinforced concrete-frame commercial building designed in the vocabulary of the late nineteenth and early twentieth revival styles, employing Spanish Revival and Mediterranean Revival stylistic influences. The building is square in plan, the first floor containing store spaces while the second contains the ballroom. The first-floor storefronts have been much altered from their original design and are now covered by plywood boards or filled in with cement block, but the second story remains largely intact, if in a state of disrepair. The exposed second story walls are faced in yellow-buff brick pierced by round-arch window openings with limestone friezes, with repeating arch patterns in their lower edges, below low tiled pent roofs that cap the two street-facing facades of the flat-roof building. The ballroom's three street-facing corners feature a slightly projecting tower, with stone quoined corners below a low octagonal cap. A star feature of two squares superimposed at a forty-five-degree angle and containing an urn design occupies the center on each face. Each tower is topped by a low tiled hip roof with flagpole rising from its peak. An entrance located at the rear end of the side street façade leads up to the second-story ballroom with its dance floor and stage and ornamental plasterwork largely intact despite years of disuse.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Grande Ballroom is a two-story commercial and ballroom building located at 8952 Grand River Avenue, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan. The building stands at the northwest corner of Grand River Avenue and Beverly Court in the Petoskey-Otsego neighborhood. The block on

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which the building is situated is of a right triangle shape and bounded by Joy Road to the north, Beverly Court to the southeast, and Grand River Avenue to the southwest. Aerial photography depicts the Grande Ballroom situated within a larger neighborhood in the form of an equilateral triangle bounded by Grand River Avenue, Joy Road, and Mackinaw Street.

Grand River Avenue is a seven-lane wide roadway that runs on a northwest axis from downtown Detroit to the suburbs and beyond. It intersects with Joy Road which proceeds to northeast on an approximate forty-five-degree angle, and to the south at nearly ninety degrees. Beverly Court is a two-lane side street lined with early twentieth-century residential development. The intersection of Grand River Avenue and Joy Road is the historical commercial center of the Petosky-Otsego neighborhood.

Historical aerial photographs show that commercial structures lined Grand River Avenue as late as 1961 (the last year they are available for this area of the city). Likewise, historical streetscape photographs depict the stretch of Grand River Avenue between Beverly Court and Joy Road at the time the Grande Ballroom was constructed. In 1928 two-story marquees for the Grande, the Riviera Annex theater, the Mirror Ballroom, and the Grand Riviera Theater lined the north side of the road. Power lines for Detroit's elaborate streetcar system spanned the roadway. Multi-story buildings and smaller marquees and placards lined both sides of the street. A photograph that appears to have been taken in the late 1950s depicts four full lanes of traffic traveling east and two traveling west. The streetcar lines are gone, but the density of development remains. As of 2018, many of these buildings have been demolished, and many of those that remain have suffered from prolonged disinvestment. Those that were demolished were either replaced with contemporary buildings or the lots were left vacant. While the blocks opposite the Grande Ballroom are almost completely vacant, the block on which the ballroom sits is reasonably occupied, if significantly altered from its historical appearance. According to the 1950 Sanborn Map Company fire insurance map two one-story buildings (8974 and 8986-8994) were located adjacent to and north of the Grande Ballroom. These buildings replaced earlier, two-story buildings, one of which housed the City of Detroit Fire Department Engine Company No. 42. These utilitarian, mid-twentieth century buildings appear to remain, as does the two-story S. S. Kresge Building at 9008-9014 that was constructed circa 1927. Between these two buildings was the three-story entrance and lobby to the Riviera Annex Theatre. The site of the Annex theater is now a gated parking lot. The remainder of the block to the north has been demolished, and the several lots are now solely occupied by what is either a defunct gas station or diner.

Historically, residential development flanked the Grande Ballroom and the rest of the commercial district to the north and south of Grand River Avenue until Interstate 96 was constructed in the 1970s. The highway separated the residential areas to the south of Grand River Avenue from the commercial strip. The housing stock dates from the first quarter of the twentieth century.

While the residential areas contain mature foliage, the commercial areas along Grand River Avenue are largely devoid of vegetation, excepting the occasional shrub or tree, overgrowth in vacant lots along Grand River Avenue, and the community garden in the vacant lot to the south of the ballroom building, opposite Beverly Court.

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Exterior

The original exterior descriptions are based on architectural drawings by Charles N. Agree, dated May 1928. Current details are based on photographic evidence.

The Grande Ballroom is situated on a northeast-southwest axis (simplified hereafter to cardinal directions), with the façade facing south toward Grand River Avenue, a secondary elevation facing east toward Beverly Court, the north elevation facing toward a paved alley, and the west elevation abutting the adjoining one-story building. The building sits at the lot line.

The building is nearly square in form. The 1928 building permit indicates the north and south elevations measure 132 feet. The east and west elevations measure 125 feet. The façade and secondary elevation are divided into seven bays, with the first and seventh bay on both the façade and east elevation containing a tower, resulting in towers at the south, east, and west corners. While the towers are integrated into the south and west corners, the building extends slightly beyond the tower at the east corner. On the first story, the first and second bay on the façade were combined into a single retail space, identified as Store #1 on architectural plans. Excepting Store #1, the remaining bays were visually and structurally separated by either one- or two-foot-wide columns faced in stone.

The first floor was designed as commercial spaces that fronted Grand River Avenue, though two of the spaces had secondary access on Beverly Court. According to architectural plans, the commercial spaces were numbered one through six, with the western-most store identified as “Store # 1.” The eastern-most store at the intersection of Grand River Avenue and Beverly Court is identified as “Store #6.” Each storefront employed low-profile granite bulkheads, large plate glass display windows, prismatic glass transoms, and recessed entries with tile flooring. Entrance doors were constructed of wood with plate glass panels. A wood-framed plate glass transom window surmounted the doors. Stores #2, 3, and 4 were accessed by a single entry door, and recessed approximately four feet. Store #1 had a double-door entry, and was recessed similarly to Stores #2-4. Store #5 had, arguably, the grandest storefront entrance of this building, as it was recessed more than twelve feet, and its entry doors were divided by an approximately four-foot projecting display window centered in the entry. The entry to Store #6 was set on an angle and faced the intersection of the Grande River Avenue and Beverly Court.

Along the east (Beverly Court) elevation, display windows for Store #6 mimicked the storefronts along Grand River Avenue. Stone-faced columns were placed every fourteen feet until meeting the east tower. Granite bulkheads, plate glass windows and prismatic glass transoms filled the openings between the columns. In the fifth bay, a secondary entrance to Store #5 was located in the center of the bay. This entrance was recessed about four feet and had a tile floor.

The first and second floors are separated by a stone architrave and storefront cornice, and differ markedly in their appearance, and in the employment of materials and architectural style. Where as the first floor was a decidedly contemporary design, the second floor exercises the Spanish

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Revival style. As such the second floor utilizes yellow buff brick, stucco, limestone, ceramic tiles and wrought iron. The prominent towers are also set apart from the rest of the second floor by their form and materials. Whereas the second floor of the main building is faced in yellow buff brick laid in Flemish bond pattern, the towers are faced in stucco and quoined with smooth stone blocks. Brick recovered from the east interior wall during a 2016 archaeological investigation was stamped, J.A.M., and produced by John A. Mercier Brick Company, a prominent Detroit brickmaking firm that had been organized in the 1920s. Mercier Brick was actually the second brick-making company Mercier established. The first being Mercier-Bryan-Larkin Brick Company in 1910. It is not clear if all brick used to construct the Grande Ballroom is by the Mercier company.

Between the two towers on the second floor of the south (Grand River Avenue) façade are five round arch window openings. The window openings are spaced equidistant between the towers. Each window sits on a three-panel carved stone sill and is capped by a carved stone hood. Wrought iron balconettes projected from each window, as well as those in the towers. As designed, the windows were of leaded glass set in wood sash. One of the windows contains a carved limestone tympanum featuring opposing winged griffins between a crowned shield in the arch. The tympanum is missing in every other second floor window. Beneath the windows in each of the corner towers, a limestone plaque contains four script letters: "CDSW." These letters, specified on the original 1928 blueprints, are said to represent the first and last initials of Harry Weitzman's three children: Clement, Dorothy and Seymour Weitzman. The roofs of the towers and the building between the towers are clad in ceramic tile. Metal supports that once held the ballroom marquee protrude from the south tower. Flagpoles topped by six-inch balls extend from the roof of each tower. Carved stone medallions featuring an urn and scrolls are centered above the windows of each tower. The medallions are flanked by smaller square medallions.

The tower of the ballroom at the southeast corner of the building is finished in a manner similar to the others. However, the south façade of the tower still retains two large projecting metal brackets that once held a large vertical sign reading "Ballroom" with a horizontal sign at its base reading "Grande." The sign was later replaced with a smaller neon sign reading "Grande" and "Dancing" that then hung in place for many years. There are five windows between the towers along the east façade. The tower at the building's east corner facing Beverly Court is similar to the other two, but contains the entrance door to the ballroom. Above the ballroom doors, two round metal stanchions that originally held an overhanging marquee still remain.

Adjacent to the ballroom entrance doors on the Beverly Court façade is a window that historically was used as an external ticket sales window. The yellow-buff brick of the east façade wraps around to the alley façade for a length of about three feet.

The remainder of the north (alley) façade is faced in red common brick set in a running bond pattern. The alley displays irregular fenestration, suggestion that function superseded form. First floor windows were historically covered by wrought iron guards. Several of the wood paneled access doors were also covered by wrought iron guards. The original fire escape remains in place on the alley elevation. The windows of the second floor did not employ iron guards, but

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were filled with leaded glass. All doors and windows sat on four-inch stone sills. Exposed concrete pillars and beams extended from the west façade in irregular intervals. It is likely the pillars corresponded to the partitions of the retail spaces. As of 2013 some of the doors and windows have been filled with concrete block, but some of the wrought iron guards remain. Many of the stone sills are present, but some have been broken or removed entirely.

While the second story exterior is relatively unchanged from 1928, the exterior of the first floor has seen significant change from the original design. Historical photographs suggest that a significant redesign of the first-floor storefronts occurred in the late 1930s or early 1940s. This broad date range is supported by building permits issued by the city of Detroit. A photograph from October 1946 shows that the storefronts had already been redesigned, or modernized, by then. On the façade, three of four store fronts were faced in white panels (at least two storefronts utilized different types of panels). The granite bulkheads and prismatic glass transoms were no longer visible, but, based on the condition of the building 2017 that the panels were applied to the original structure, and that original materials were removed at a later date.

The storefront at 8956 Grand River Avenue had been remodeled in a manner different from the others, and reflected an Art Deco or Art Moderne influence. Rather than white panels, this storefront featured two relatively narrow columns of dark enamel panels at the outer edges of the storefront with a wider white space between. The low-rise granite bulkheads and original, rectangular display windows had been replaced by the aforementioned cladding, and the windows, though rectangular, employed rounded edges.

The 8952 store appears to have been the most significantly modified. In addition to the covering or removal of the transom, the store itself had been expanded by modifying the entrance to accommodate two display windows on the east and south sides. The corner support column was either replaced or covered with a rounded, accordion-style column, surmounted by a corresponding semicircular display sign. While the original granite bulkheads appear to be present, the height of the windows had been reduced by utilizing a superficial bulkhead. The entry door appears to have been altered as well. Significantly, three of the four display windows along the east elevation had been filled with brick, including the transom area. The fourth, northernmost, window appears to remain but in a modified condition.

As of 2017 the first-floor storefronts on both the façade and east elevation retain little physical integrity from either the building's 1928 construction or later modifications. The original architrave remains intact, but below that, very little remains intact. The complete signboard panels of the 8970 space remain, as does its undulating cornice. Remnants of the panels from the signage band of the 8960 space also remain. No evidence of the prismatic glass transom remains, all of the window spaces on the façade have been filled with brick or concrete block and partially covered with plywood. In 1986 the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, through its Neighborhood Opportunity Fund, provided fifty thousand dollars to the City Temple Seventh Day Adventist church to undertake unspecified rehabilitation of 8960.¹ The 8970 storefront appears to have been clad in white brick laid in roman bond, which, along

¹ *Detroit Free Press*. November 13, 1986.

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with the fenestration of this space, suggests some use of the space beyond the period of significance. The east elevation is entirely filled with concrete block, except for the structural pillars. The pillars, however, do not retain their stone cladding. Notably, the brick that filled the former display windows in the circa 1940s photograph has been replaced with concrete block. The entry to the second-floor ballroom is filled with steel doors, and the adjacent (north) ticket sales window has been filled with brick and concrete block. Many of the windows and doors on the north elevation (alley) have been filled with various materials. However, the original fire escape remains in place.

While the second story retains many of its original features and fenestration, some significant elements have been lost. The wrought iron balconettes that fronted each window have been removed. All but one tympanum has been removed or lost. All of the leaded glass windows have been removed. The grand marquee has also been removed, as has the ballroom marquee on the east elevation.

Interior

Ballroom

The following description describes the 1928 interior of the ballroom as delineated in architectural drawings by Charles N. Agree in May 1 1928 and the condition of the ballroom as document in photographs between 2009 and 2018. Little is known about the interior of the ballroom and any modifications that might have been made. Oral history interviews with those who operated the ballroom in the 1960s may add significant understanding to how the ballroom may have changed, beyond paint, during those years.

The interior of the Grande Ballroom is reached via the entrance in the tower on the southeast facade at the east corner on Beverly Court. Through the entrance was a roughly ten-by-twenty-seven-foot foyer with Zenitherm flooring on a wood base. To the north (right) was a short stair that led to a landing. The stairs then turned to the west (left) and proceeded to the dance floor. The treads and risers were constructed of terrazzo with marble stringers. The staircase led up to a promenade and dance floor. This entrance is inaccessible as of 2018.

The promenade was arranged in a U around the dance floor with various spaces around the U between promenade and the exterior walls of the building, and provided for circulation through the various spaces of the second floor. Beginning at the east corner of the building and moving clockwise, was a ladies' room, or lounge. This space was separate from the ladies' restroom and does not appear to have any lavatory facilities. Adjacent to this lounge was an extensive check room, where patrons could store clothing and personal items while dancing. In the southeast corner of the ballroom, and adjacent to the check room, was a men's lounge. Oddly, while the women's lounge had a cement floor, the floor of the men's lounge was covered in terrazzo. The promenade stretched between the southeast and southwest corners of the building, where, at the southwest was the ladies' restroom, roughly twelve feet wide by twenty-one feet long. A small janitor's closet was adjacent to and north of the ladies' restroom. A storage room, roughly seven feet wide by twenty-two feet long extended north from the janitor's closet until it reached the

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stage. Steps and an access door provided access to the stage. Opposite the storage room was a musicians' room, roughly seven feet wide and twenty-three feet long. In the northwest corner of the building was the men's restroom, roughly twelve feet wide by twenty-five feet long. Interestingly, access to the men's restroom was made via the musician's room or through a designated smoking room that fronted the men's restroom from the promenade. From the smoking room the promenade stretched to the stairs at the northeast corner of the building. All of these rooms have been altered and eventually destroyed by weather, vandals, and scappers. Some original fabric remains, in some spaces (men's room urinals, for example), but significant losses of historical material have occurred.

The dance floor was separated from the promenade by a series of double rounded arch openings set in larger blind arches placed between plaster-covered hollow columns on the north, south, and east sides of the dance floor. Wide rectangular pilasters flanked each twin opening on the promenade side, while cabled columns and pilasters supported the arches on both the promenade and dance floor sides of the arches. Capitals were made of opposing fantastical bird-like creatures with rams horns separated by various floral shapes.

At the northeast and southeast corners of the interior arch system are rounded walls punctuated with rectangular openings. Wrought iron grilles originally filled the openings. Aligned with the second arch on both the north and south sides of the promenade, five-foot-square ornamental plaster grilles were placed in the ceiling to obscure ventilation fans. As of 2008, the grille on the north side was intact, while the south grille is partially intact. Significant sections of the promenade ceiling have either deteriorated or been destroyed.

Access to the dance floor was made through the outer two openings on each side, while wrought iron railings were placed between the inner two arches. Incredibly, the wrought iron railings remain in all of the arches. All of the arched openings were embellished in an eclectic Moorish-influenced, Art Deco style. Architectural plans indicate Strips of Zenitherm flooring extended from each pilaster across the promenade to the exterior walls, and across the arch threshold. Many of the ornamental columns and capitals have been at least partially destroyed, either by vandalism or the effects of exposure to the weather.

The sunken dance floor is accessed by two steps down from the promenade through several of the arches. The dance floor proper was made of maple and covers five thousand square feet. Unlike other ballroom dance floors, the Grande's dance floor was not set on springs. While the dance floor is largely intact, sections have deteriorated and are in a poor state of repair.

Much like the ornamental grilles in the promenade ceiling, four round ornamental plaster grilles were placed in the ceiling near the four corners of the dance floor, with a much larger grille in the center of the dance floor ceiling. Each of these grilles hid ventilation fans. As of 2009 the corner grilles were intact, as well as most of the large central grille. Other sections of the plaster ceiling have collapsed or been destroyed.

The stage is located at the west end of the dance floor. The stage is roughly twelve feet wide (east-west) at the widest part, and twenty-four feet long (north-south). The front of the stage is

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curved in a soft undulating form, and connected to curved wood stairs consisting of four steps at the north and south ends of the stage. Above the stage the proscenium remains largely intact. The proscenium is defined by an upper and lower plaster "rope." The original decorative paint was, at one time, covered in white paint, but that paint has deteriorated, revealing what may be the original proscenium artwork.

Research by Wayne State University indicates the plaster used to cover the walls and craft the decorative elements of the ballroom are made of a mixture lime plaster, mixed with animal and plant fibers (hair and straw, respectively).²

At some point, the men's and women's lounges and check room on the east side of the ballroom were reconfigured to house offices, a coat check, and a concession stand. It is unclear if that occurred prior to the 1966 rock-era, or if it came earlier as ballroom dancing faded. What is known is that some minor alterations occurred in 1969. In the fall and early winter of 1969 the old wax "and anything else" on the floor was scraped off, then the floor was painted white and coated in plastic. A foil arch that stretched over the stage was taken down, and underneath was discovered old, rotting velvet. The velvet was removed, and a long-forgotten mural was revealed. That mural, along with others, was to be restored. The bathrooms were also replumbed at that time.³

In the northeast tower was the entrance to the ballroom. Inside the double wood doors was a small carpeted vestibule. Through a set of interior doors was a foyer that led past a ticket office and to the stairs to the ballroom. The foyer floor was terrazzo. The stairs were constructed of concrete with terrazzo treads and risers. The stairs led to a landing that appears to have corresponded to the foyer in materials and design. Another set of stairs then led to the ballroom on the second floor.

In the northeast corner of the building, and to the north of the ballroom entrance were an office (thirteen feet by ten feet), a ticket office (four feet by ten feet), and a closet. It is unclear if either of these rooms had been altered, or what their current condition might be.

Storefronts

Very little is known about the exteriors of these stores and even less of the interior spaces on the first floor of the building, or how they evolved over time. What can be known with some certainty is what is contained on architectural drawings by Charles Agree. Few newspaper reports were made concerning the business that occupied the first floor, and as the pace of change quickened as the decades wore on, it is likely many changes were made to accommodate the various organizations that occupied the spaces.

Agree designed the building to contain six stores, oriented toward south toward Grand River Avenue. Each of the stores were separated by four-inch gypsum partitions. Most of the stores

² Krysta Ryzewski. *Grande Ballroom Archaeological Survey*. October 5, 2016.

³ Mike Gormley. "New-old Grande Something to See." *Detroit Free Press*, December 26, 1969.

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appear to have had access to the basement, but only Store #1 and Store #5, as indicated on Agree's drawings, had finished sales space in the basement.

Store #1/ W.T. Grant Company (8970 Grand River Avenue)

This store occupies two bays (east-west) at the western end of the building, and had a depth of seven bays (north-south). It appears to have been specifically constructed for the W. T. Grant Company, as their name appears on the drawings. It is worth noting that W. T. Grant is the only company name that appears on the 1928 drawings.

Architectural drawings dated May 1928 indicate this store was approximately thirty-nine feet wide and 125 feet in length. On either side of a recessed entry were merchandise display areas. Here the floors were made of oak. Several feet into the store, and slightly west of center was a wood stairs that led to the basement. The stairs were six feet in width and descended twenty steps to the lower level. The remainder of the first-floor sales floor was wood. At the rear of the store was a second wood stairs and a freight slide. A double, wood-paneled service door on the north (rear) façade of the building appears to have provided direct access to the freight slide.

The basement contained a number of spaces, including a sales floor that occupied approximately four of seven bays. The sales floor was made of wood, while the walls and ceiling were covered in plaster. The rear three bays contained the stock room, the freight slide, a L-shaped wood stairs that rose seventeen steps to the first floor, a cloak room (six feet by nine feet), a girls' restroom (sixteen feet by ten feet), a "fixture" room (six feet by seven feet), a candy room (six feet by seven feet), a men's lavatory (five feet by seven feet), a women's lavatory (seven feet by twelve feet), and a fan room. The girls' rest room floor was covered in wood, while the men's and women's restrooms were covered in terrazzo. The rooms at the north end of the basement were arranging in an almost complete square, with the southwest corner used as a receiving bench and desk.

Shortly after the store closed on Saturday, September 6, 1957, a fire in the basement of the store destroyed twenty-five thousand dollars of merchandise, and resulted in smoke and water damage to the first and second floor windows. It was reported that the adjacent Maas Bros. store suffered smoke damage. Company advertisements in the following years suggest that the company did not rebuild the store.

In August 1968 a building permit was issued to "replace front windows with 8" masonry." The permit notes that the space was to be used as "retail stores and warehouse." It is unclear what wares were being housed in the building or where in the building they were being housed. It is possible that this permit was issued in relation to the white, Roman-bond brick now faces the storefront.

Stores #2-4 (8960/8964 Grand River Avenue)

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These storefronts were designed by Charles Agree to accommodate two stores, but historical photographs and city directories suggest these spaces were combined early on, if not during construction.

Architectural drawings indicate that an unfinished basement was present under all three stores. It is not clear if the first tenant, Beverly's, or the subsequent tenant, Maas Bros., used the basement for sales space. In fact, Agree's drawings indicate that five of seven bays were open, "unassigned space," with a concrete floor. The northern (rear) two bays appear to have been a shared L-shaped storage room with a cement floor. Access to the storage room was made by a single door in the center of a wall that stretched the width of this space at the fifth bay. Steel stairs were at the north wall of the basement and adjacent to the boiler room.

On May 15, 1942, the City of Detroit issued a building permit for a "new store front per plan." It appears the modifications to the 8960 were approved by the city inspector, as the permit is marked "O.K." with a date of August 9, 1943. This is likely the time when the storefront was modernized with white panels. Advertisements placed by the company circa 1947 indicate the store was "air-cooled," suggesting an upgraded ventilation system.

Store #5 (8956 Grand River Avenue)

The retail space at 8956 was designed for the third store of A. E. Burns & Co. In addition to the main floor, a basement space was also constructed for the company. The main floor sales space was sixteen feet by one hundred feet. Indirect lighting installed behind display shelves was reflected by a "cone-like" ceiling. Displays cases were created by the American Show Case company.⁴ A steel stairs, finished in Mastic flooring led to the basement sales space. The stairs was surrounded by a railing constructed of iron balusters capped in a wood handrail.

The basement of Store #5 is L-shaped, with a deep horizontal member. The vertical member extends approximately eighty feet north to south, slightly more than four structural bays, while the horizontal member of the L extends forty feet for slightly more than two bays, then continues at a width of twenty feet for the remainder of the space. This space was intended as finished sales space for the Store #5, and had Mastic flooring and plaster walls and ceiling. A stairs located in the second horizontal and vertical bays rose eighteen steps to the first floor.

The City of Detroit issued a building permit on February 8, 1937, to remodel the storefront at a cost of three thousand dollars. Harry Weitzman is noted on this permit. The, in November 1955, the City of Detroit issued a building permit to "alter [the] store front," at a cost of 950 dollars.

It is unknown at the time of this nomination if the store was damaged in the 1967 uprising, but on February 29, 1968, the City of Detroit issued a building permit related to a change in occupancy of the 8952 space. The permit notes that a "Beauty School" was to be located here.

⁴ "Detroit's Third Burns Store Opening Today." *Detroit Free Press*. October 19, 1928.

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Along the south and east windows was a strip of oak flooring, about three feet in width, likely used for merchandise display. Tile flooring ran almost the full the length of the store, from the entrance at the corner of Grand River Avenue and Beverly Court to just beyond the secondary entrance on the east elevation. On either side of the tile floor was terrazzo. A steel stairs was positioned at the north, near the west corner of the store. It descended twelve steps to the basement.

The basement space of Store #6 did not extend the full width of the building. Rather it began at the third structural bay of the basement and extended through the fifth bay. The entire space was roughly nineteen feet wide by almost fifty feet in length. A steel stair was slightly north of center of the fourth bay, and rose twelve steps to the first floor. It appears that two toilets were located in the southeast corner of this space. This space appears to be utilitarian, as the floors were cement and no other materials are noted on the 1928 drawings.

Other Interior Spaces

The building's Boiler Room (thirty feet by twenty-seven feet) was located in the basement, and partially in the L of the storage room below Stores #2-4 and extended behind Store #5. Adjacent to the boiler room to the east was the Coal Room (twenty-six feet by fourteen feet), which was located in the northeast corner of the basement. A Meter Room was located between the Coal Room and the basement of Store #6, and contained water and gas meters for the building.

Integrity

There has been a significant loss of integrity to the ballroom in terms of due to the ravages of use and abandonment, time, decay, weather, and scrapping. The first-floor retails spaces had been modified from their original appearance in the 1930s or 1940s, and possibly again after that, as exemplified by what would have been the former W.T. Grant store at 8970 Grand River Avenue. The lower walls of the storefront were altered from the 1940s modernization to be faced in white brick laid in Roman bond. What appears to be fenestration suggests this brick was not intended to fill the storefront. The other storefronts have been filled in with cement block or covered with plywood.

A 2016 archaeological survey led by Dr. Krysta Ryzewski of the Department of Anthropology, Wayne State University resulted in an extensive description of the physical state of the interior of the Grande Ballroom building. Photographs document the extensive loss of materials, design, and workmanship.

Ryzewski's investigation revealed that the first-floor retails spaces have been "totally destroyed." Though the structural supports of interior retail spaces remain, the rest of the spaces have been heavily damaged. The walls that separated the stores have been removed, and "all that remains

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of the intact infrastructure are stable concrete staircases to the basement and second floor ballroom.”⁵

On the second floor, sections of decorative plaster archways that separate the promenade from the dance floor are partially intact, as are sections of the decorative ceiling. The stage is also present. Certain lights remain and, remarkably, stencil decorations that may date to the opening of the ballroom.⁶

Over the years the windows on the second floor had been removed by scrappers, those seeking a “trophy,” or destroyed by vandals. For some time the window openings were left open, leaving the ballroom exposed to the whims of the weather. Likewise, portions of the roof have collapsed into the ballroom, further exacerbating deterioration. As of September 2017 all windows and openings have been closed by plywood boards, providing some protection from the elements to the interior of the building.

Similarly, the setting of the ballroom has changed somewhat, significantly from 1928, and still from 1966. Many of the buildings that once surrounded the Grande Ballroom have been demolished or extensively altered. The entire block to the east has been demolished, as has the entire block between to the south, opposite Grand River Avenue between Hillsboro Street and Dailey Street. Some substantial buildings remain, however. To the west of the ballroom, the 1927 Kresge building, the 1928 Kelly Furniture Company building, a 1929 Detroit Bank and Trust Co. branch, and a 1948 F. W. Woolworth Company store, all remain to the east of the Grande Ballroom. The four-story, 1926 Business Institute building and a four-story, 1940s commercial building are north of the ballroom on Joy Road. A two-story, 1922 commercial building is a short distance to the southeast. Most of the residences on Beverly Court are extant. The scale and massing of these remaining buildings provides some sense of the commercial and social activity of the area in the 1920s and later.

While the building is in a poor state of repair, Charles Agree’s design is still recognizable. The form, plan, structure, and style and materials of the second floor, arguably the most significant aspect of the building, are largely present.

Yet, the ballroom retains sufficient integrity in terms of location, feeling, and association. Indeed the aspect of association is arguably the most significant for the ballroom. While a 1928 ballroom may be eligible the National Register, the Grande Ballroom’s association with Detroit’s music and countercultural history are potentially one-of-a-kind. One may still walk around the promenade, move across the ballroom floor, and stand before the stage where people danced to numerous bands for over sixty years, and thousands of young adults kicked out the jams with the most rebellions band of 1960s America.

⁵ Krysta Ryzewski. *Grande Ballroom Archaeological Survey*. October 5, 2016.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

SOCIAL HISTORY

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1928

1966-1969

Significant Dates

1928

1966

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Agree, Charles N. (architect)

W. E. Wood Co. (contractor)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Grande Ballroom is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A as one of the few remaining examples of Detroit's numerous early twentieth-century ballrooms. The Grande Ballroom operated as a public venue for dancing from the date of its construction in 1928 until traditional ballroom dancing declined in popularity in the middle of the decade. At the height of the ballroom era the Grande was one of nearly two dozen such venues throughout the city of Detroit. Most have been demolished, and those that remain are like the Grande, in a tenuous state of repair. The Grande Ballroom also represents the explosive growth of the Grand River and Joy Road area of Northwest Detroit in the 1920s. This area, for several years, was the fastest growing area of the city at a time when Detroit was one of the fastest growing cities in the United States.

The Grande Ballroom is also eligible under Criterion A at the local level of significance during the period 1966 to 1972 when it was the foremost rock n' roll venue in Detroit. Local musical acts that gained national and international prominence and were influential in the rock and punk genres began their careers at the Grande, including the MC5, Mitch Ryder, the Psychedelic Stooges (with Iggy Pop), Alice Cooper, the Frost, and the Amboy Dukes (with Ted Nugent), SRC, and the Rationals, among others. During the mid-1960s the Grande Ballroom was the epicenter of the Avant Garde Detroit rock scene, and the favored venue of many national and international acts playing in the city, including the Who, Fleetwood Mac, Janice Joplin, Grand Funk Railroad, Savoy Brown, Led Zepplin, Blood, Sweat & Tears, Cream, and many others. The Grande Ballroom's second period of significance requires Criteria Consideration G, as it extends beyond the fifty-year threshold.

The Grande Ballroom is also eligible for the National Register under Criterion A at the local level of significance as a prominent site in the 1960s counterculture movement in Detroit,⁷ rivaling those in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York, and was the favored musical scene of Detroit's hippie, beatnik, and other subcultures of the 1960s. The ballroom musical and entertainment significance is inextricably linked to the individuals associated with the operation and performances of the ballroom, including John Sinclair, Leni Sinclair, Gary Grimshaw, and others who were also central figures in the countercultural movement in Detroit, and whose writing, art, and music influenced innumerable individuals to

As of 2018 the Grande Ballroom is owned by a Chapel Hill Baptist Church, a religious institution. Although the ballroom is not used for religious services, indeed it is vacant, Criteria Consideration A also applies.

⁷ Ehrmann, Eric. "MC5." *Rolling Stone*. January 4, 1969.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Ballroom Era in Detroit

During the first half of the twentieth century social dancing at ballrooms and dance halls was a prominent recreational activity in many cities. Likewise, many hotels built ballrooms for their guests. In the 1920s, on stages across the country, orchestras and bands played while men and women danced the Fox Trot, the Charleston, the Samba and other Latin dances, the Waltz, and others. Beginning in the 1930s, jazz and swing music captivated many dancers, especially younger dancers, in cities everywhere, and the dances of the 1920s and earlier were largely supplanted by the Lindy Hop, Collegiate Shag, and the Jitterbug.

By the late 1920s Detroit was well supplied with large ballrooms. The premier ballroom in Detroit was the Graystone (1922) on Woodward Avenue near West Canfield Avenue. The Graystone was the city's largest ballroom, opulent in its design, and located near downtown and the theater district. It catered to an older crowd and booked all the major big band acts as they toured the country. The Graystone billed itself as "Detroit's Million Dollar Ballroom," and it could handle three thousand customers on its floors and balconies. The Graystone hosted every important jazz musician in the country as well as every major big band. The Graystone was also home to two nationally-known house bands, McKinney's Cotton Pickers and Jean Goldkette's Orchestra. Goldkette's organization ultimately spawned jazz legends such as Bix Beiderbecke, Hoagy Carmichael, Jimmy Dorsey, and Tommy Dorsey

Other nearby ballrooms near the Graystone on Woodward Avenue, included the Arcadia (1913) and Crystal (1919). The Palais de Danse (1919) was on Jefferson Avenue at the Detroit River a few blocks from the Belle Isle Bridge. In its newspaper advertising, the Palais de Danse asserted: "Strictly censored. Highest Standard." The new ballrooms as opposed to common dance halls, offered a level of safety, elegance, and decorum that dance halls did not. The Jefferson Beach Pavilion (1928) at the Jefferson Beach Amusement Park on Lake St. Clair at Nine Mile Road was a large dance hall on the far east side that was accessed by the Lakeshore Bus Line. Also on the east side was the Vanity Ballroom (1929) and the Pier Ballroom (1914) at Electric Park, an amusement park at the foot of the Belle Isle Bridge. The Pier Ballroom was billed as "a ballroom of refinement" and catered to audiences of relatively high social standing. The Eastwood Gardens dance hall (1925) was located in an amusement park at Gratiot and Eight Mile Road. The Walled Lake Casino served the dancers who patronized the popular summertime vacation area 40 miles northwest of the city center. If Detroiters took a special excursion boat ride out to Canada's Bob-Lo Island amusement park eight miles south of Woodward Avenue in the Detroit River, they could dance at the Bob-Lo Pavilion (1914), which claimed to be the second largest in the country. Smaller scale dance halls and ballrooms operated around town as well. The Mirror Ballroom (near the Grande Ballroom), the Monticello (1928), and others occupied second stories of retail buildings.

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Grand River Avenue and Joy Road



Grand River Avenue between Beverly Court and Joy Road circa 1930. Detroit Fire Department Engine Co. 42 and marquees for Riviera Annex Theater, the Mirror Ballroom, and the Grand Riviera Theater at right. Grande Ballroom would be at right behind photographer. Courtesy of the Detroit News Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

The construction of the Grande Ballroom in the autumn of 1928 is the product of the twin forces of a widespread, popular interest in ballroom dancing, and the physical growth of the city of Detroit, particularly its growth northwesterly from the city center as illustrated by the development of the Petosky-Otsego neighborhood and the commercial development centered on the intersection of Grand River Avenue and Joy Road, approximately five miles from downtown Detroit.

Residential growth for the area was planned as early as 1887 when the plat for the Ravenswood subdivision, north of Joy Road, was filed with the city. Several years later, in 1913, William L. Reed submitted a plat for a subdivision at "1/4 Section 50 of the 10,000 Acre Tract,"⁸ south of Joy Road. Reed's subdivision was centered on Grand River Avenue and Reed Avenue (now Beverly Court). The plat map shows sixteen parcels facing south toward Grand River Avenue, and thirty-three parcels on either side of Reed Avenue between Grand River Avenue and Joy

⁸ "William L. Reed's Subivision."

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Road to the north, with an alley separating the commercial parcels from the residential parcels. In anticipation of that growth the city of Detroit purchased a parcel of land on Grand River Avenue, near what would be Beverly Court, for 5,800 dollars for the Detroit Fire Department Engine Company No. 42. At the time the parcel was purchased, some councilmembers opposed objected to paying such a high price “for a piece of land out in the country.”⁹ By the late 1920s more than 230,000 people lived within one mile of the Grande Ballroom,¹⁰ and when the city sold the land in 1927 it was valued at 170,000 dollars.¹¹

This residential growth coincided with tremendous commercial growth. Commercial growth of what was then the northwest end of the city began in earnest in 1925 with the construction of the Grand Riviera theater, “one of the most beautiful neighborhood theaters in the world” at that time.¹² The Grand Riviera cost more than one million dollars to construct and its auditorium could seat over three thousand people. The theater attracted a “great number”¹³ of people to the neighborhood, and its necessitated a second theater, the Riviera Annex Theatre, nearby. The Annex theater was constructed in 1927, and was located on Grand River Avenue, just to the north of where the Grande Ballroom would soon be constructed. Both the Grand Riviera and the Riviera Annex were designed by noted theater architect John Eberson, and ushered in an era of tremendous growth in the neighborhood.

Just west of the Riviera Annex and near the west end of the same block, the Mirror Ballroom was constructed in 1927. The ballroom provided a venue for more active recreation, and together with the two theaters accounted for more than two million dollars in entertainment facilities within a two-block area.¹⁴

In addition to recreation, local and national chains such as Grinnell Bros., D. J. Healy, Cunningham Drugs, Burns, Shoes, Sanders, S. S. Kresge, and F. W. Woolworth, as well as several banks, established branches of their operations in this fast-growing district. Still more independent and chain stores followed.¹⁵ By 1928 the area was “probably the fastest-growing shopping center in the city of Detroit,”¹⁶ and so congested with traffic that the parking areas in front of the stores along Grand River Avenue were used for additional driving lanes during rush hour.¹⁷ Traffic counts suggested that more than thirty-four thousand cars passed by the ballroom building every day,¹⁸ not including those that traveled by streetcar. So congested was this area that, in June 1932, John Miller, a grocery chain executive, frustrated with being late to work and

⁹ “City to Realize \$164,000 on Land.” *Detroit Free Press*. May 11, 1927.

¹⁰ “Detroit’s Third Burns Store Opening Today.” *Detroit Free Press*. October 19, 1928.

¹¹ “City to Realize \$164,000 on Land.” *Detroit Free Press*. May 11, 1927.

¹² “Rapid Progress of Section Cited.” *Detroit Free Press*. April 24, 1927.

¹³ “Rise of the West Area Recalled.” *Detroit Free Press*. December 15, 1929.

¹⁴ “Rapid Progress of Section Cited.” *Detroit Free Press*. April 24, 1927.

¹⁵ “Rise of the West Area Recalled.” *Detroit Free Press*. December 15, 1929.

¹⁶ “Joy Road Zone Spreads Fast.” *Detroit Free Press*. October 19, 1928.

¹⁷ “Grand River Avenue Traffic Delays Prove Need of Rush Hour Parking Ban.” *Detroit Free Press*. September 23, 1928.

¹⁸ “Detroit’s Third Burns Store Opening Today.” *Detroit Free Press*. October 19, 1928.

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returning home, offered to pay for the installation of a traffic light at the intersection of Grand River Avenue and Beverly Court. The city council considered the matter and offered to find a second-hand traffic light as a means of saving money for Miller.¹⁹

Indeed, the entire city of Detroit seemed to be in a building boom. Since 1923 one skyscraper (ten or more stories) was constructed in the city every sixty days, and by 1928 the city had 120 such buildings.²⁰ In addition to the Grande Ballroom, a number of significant buildings were constructed in 1928, including the Fox Theatre (NHL), Fisher Building and Fisher Theater (NHL), and the Detroit Zoo (NRHP).

The Grande Ballroom 1928-1965

The Grande Ballroom was designed by noted Detroit architect Charles N. Agree, and was one of his earliest entertainment projects. Agree had previously been involved in large residential projects and had designed several apartment and apartment hotel buildings in the city. Blueprints and a photograph taken during construction indicate the building was constructed for Harry W. Weitzman, a local real estate investor and surety bond agent. However, actual ownership is more difficult to determine. Local history suggests the building was constructed by Edward J. Strata and David Davis,²¹ local real estate agents and developers, and then almost immediately sold to Weitzman. At the same time, building permits and architectural drawings indicate Weitzman as the owner. A permit issued on July 9, 1928, includes both Agree and Weitzman. A later permit, issued in 1937, notes Weitzman. Moreover, the building was known informally as the Weitzman Building. Thus, it is certain that Weitzman was involved, but exactly when is unclear.

The *Michigan Contractor and Builder* (MC&B) announced in its April 7, 1928, issue that Agree was preparing plans for a two-story building at the intersection of Grand River and Beverly Court. The building was to be 125 feet by 132 feet, and to be constructed of stone and brick, with a tile roof. The multi-use building was planned for a number of commercial spaces and a ballroom. Paul Strasburg and J. L. Wood were noted as lessees.²² Later that month, Agree had completed the plans and was taking figures.²³ In June 1928 the contract to construct the Grande was awarded to the W. E. Wood Co.²⁴

Prior to the construction of the Grande Ballroom, the northwest corner of Grand River Avenue and Beverly Court was occupied by the Ninde Methodist Church, which occupied parcels three

¹⁹ "Traffic Light is all His Own." *Detroit Free Press*. June 11, 1932.

²⁰ "1 Skyscraper Each 60 Days." *Detroit Free Press*. October 28, 1928.

²¹ Some earlier histories suggest Davis's given name as Edward, but the city directories of the 1920s and newspaper accounts suggest his given name is David.

²² "Detroit Architects' Reports: Preparing Plans." *Michigan Contractor and Builder*. April 7, 1928.

²³ "Detroit Architects' Reports: Taking Figures." *Michigan Contractor and Builder*. April 21, 1928.

²⁴ "Detroit Architects' Reports: Contracts Let." *Michigan Contractor and Builder*. June 2, 1928.

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through eight. The Ninde church had merged with another local Methodist congregation in 1927 and had moved to a larger facility, and desired to sell the property. The City of Detroit issued a permit for demolition on May 11, 1928, and then a building permit for six stores and a hall on lots two through eight of the Reed subdivision on July 9, 1928, at a cost of 267,000 dollars. In August of that year the real estate firm of Strata & Davis announced it had negotiated a twenty-year lease for the 8956 Grand River Avenue storefront, valued at 250,000 dollars.²⁵ The lease was for the new branch of the A. E. Burns & Co. shoe store, their third in Detroit. To celebrate the opening a special four-page section was published in the October 19, 1928, issue of the *Detroit Free Press*. The front page featured a photograph of the Grand River Avenue façade of the Grande Ballroom building which indicates the first tenants of the storefronts as the Burns outfit, Beverly's, and W. T. Grant Co.²⁶ These stores, as well as the ballroom itself, joined a growing commercial district that now included stores for "practically every article of merchandise necessary in maintaining a home and equipping a family."²⁷

Opening night for the Grande Ballroom was announced in the *Detroit Free Press* for October 27, 1928. The ballroom billed itself as "newer, smarter, more beautiful,"²⁸ and an opening night advertisement stated that "Ballroom Grande" was "a most beautiful dance place. Built with the idea of giving the dancing public a finer, smarter and cleaner place to dance." The "famous dance band," The Victors played for the crowd who paid an admission of fifty cents for ladies and seventy-five cents for men.²⁹ That there was no special announcement for the ballroom akin to the Grand Riviera is less an indication of any lack of glamour than it was a statement of the quality of ballrooms and theaters in the city in 1928. Grandiose had become commonplace. It is also an indication that the Grande was just one of many ballrooms in the city, and the location of the building in a fast-growing corridor at a time of significant construction in Detroit did not make for compelling news.

Despite its understated opening, the Grande was in high demand throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s as a wide variety of educational, social, fraternal, and religious organizations hosted dances at the Grande, social events, reunions, fund-raisers, and holiday balls. While most organizations were located in Detroit some came from a considerable distance for their events. In the late 1920s and early 1930s groups from Michigan's "thumb" region, seventy-five to one hundred miles to the north, held several reunions and relief dances at the ballroom. In 1929 alone some three thousand people came from Huron and Sanilac counties, a considerable distance to the north in Michigan's "thumb" came to dance the Grande.³⁰ Then, in 1931 a group from Saint Clair County, also in the thumb region of Michigan, held a dance at the Grande to

²⁵ "Firm Reports Leases Involving \$750,000." *Detroit Free Press*. August 19, 1928.

²⁶ "Announcing the Grand Opening of A. E. Burns & Co. New Northwestern Show Store." *Detroit Free Press*. October 19, 1928.

²⁷ "Joy Road Zone Spreads Fast." *Detroit Free Press*. October 19, 1928.

²⁸ "Grand Opening at Grande." *Detroit Free Press*. October 26, 1928.

²⁹ "Ballroom Grande Opens Tonight." *Detroit Free Press*. October 27, 1928.

³⁰ "Huron County Club is Planning Dance Soon." *Detroit Free Press*. March 31, 1929.

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fund relief measures in response to the Great Depression.³¹ These three northern counties, along with their neighbors in Tuscola County held a reunion dance at the Grand in 1934.

More common, however, were public dances during the city's fall dance season. While many orchestras from Detroit and around the country played at the Grande Ballroom throughout the 1930s and into 1950s, one of the more notable bands was Lowry Clark and His Orchestra. Clark spent his early career in Illinois before moving to Detroit in the mid-1930s, where he became "a favorite with Detroit Dancers."³² While the band played at other venues in Detroit and throughout the state, the Grande Ballroom appears to have been their home of sorts. In the later 1930s and pre-war years of the 1940s, Clark was regularly advertised as playing at the Grande, and the September 13, 1950, issue of the *Detroit Free Press* noted that Clark and his orchestra were to open the dancing season for the eighth consecutive year. Suggesting that band was a featured act. Moreover, Clark's retirement announcement in the May 9, 1952, issue of the *Detroit Free Press* noted that he had played at the Grande Ballroom for twenty-one years.³³ In addition to leading the orchestra, Clark also played saxophone and sang.

The ballroom had been leased by Paul Strasburg since its construction in 1928. Strasburg was a third-generation dance instructor, and operated the Grande and Vanity Ballrooms in addition to the Strasburg Dancing Academy on Sproat Street, near Woodward Avenue. The academy was established by Strasburg's grandfather, Herman A. Strasburg Sr., and later led by his father before his father's in 1916, at which point Paul Strasburg led the academy.

Although World War Two resulted in a decline in dancing throughout the city, the Grande continued to host events. While the number of advertised dances declined throughout the early 1940s, local newspapers published a number of employment advertisements for the ballroom, indicating a consistent, if perhaps diminished, business.

After the war had ended and the great many millions of Americans returned to peacetime life, ballrooms again became a popular pastime. In February 1946, Ralph Bowen, "Detroit's most popular dance band leader," Hair Experts spokesperson, and regular at the Graystone Ballroom, played for a week at the Grande. Lowry Clark appeared with a new band, and special dance nights sponsored by various organizations were regularly held once again. Guest bands also appeared at the Grande throughout the early 1950s and into the 1960s. Noted jazz trumpeter Clyde McCoy and his band played in April 1951, and, perhaps an indication of the changes that would come later in the decade, Freddie Shaffer and his "all-girl" orchestra opened the twenty-third weekend dance season in September 1951.³⁴ In the mid-1950s musical and dancing tastes began to change as the Fox Trot and Waltz made room for more "exotic" styles as the Rumba and Cha-Cha. Longtime band leader Lowry Clark retired in May 1952, and the next generation of band leaders Don Pablo, Bobby Rodriguez, and Panchito shared time with Warney Ruhl, Ralph Bowen, Buddy Morrow, Russ Weaver, and other traditional orchestras. In 1954 the

³¹ "Ex-Thumb Folk Organize Relief." *Detroit Free Press*. January 6, 1931.

³² "Rita Rio is Closing Turn on Saturday." *Detroit Free Press*. May 20, 1938.

³³ "Party to Honor Retiring Bandman." *Detroit Free Press*. May 9, 1952.

³⁴ *Detroit Free Press*. September 13, 1951.

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Grande Ballroom announced new programs including a weekly “Mamborama” and a “Motor City Ball for all Michigan residents.”³⁵

It was not only musical tastes that were changing, however. The urban population that supported the large and glamorous ballrooms began moving to the suburbs, and, perhaps more importantly, other forms of entertainment became available. Television and radio challenged dancing for time and attention, automobiles supplanted street cars as a means of transportation, and the ease of access and proximity to the ballrooms was lost in favor of cruising and shopping centers.

In response, ballrooms either changed how they conducted business or ceased to operate. The famed Graystone Ballroom closed in 1957, having succumbed to not only accumulating debt, but a rapid decrease in attendance. Describing the changes that led to the Graystone’s closing, a December 1957 article in the *Detroit Free Press* noted that:

once music filled the ballroom five nights a week as more than 1,000 couples swung through the fox trot and the Lindy hop. Then it was four nights a week. Then Three. Then just Wednesday and Saturday. Then Saturday night, they stopped the music.³⁶

Francis M. Steltenkamp, general manager of the Graystone Ballroom, attributed the declining interest to the fact that “young people nowadays watch television, or go to house parties, or sit in their cars and listen to the radio.”³⁷ What Steltenkamp did not know was that these changes were just the beginning of a fundamental shift in entertainment. The coming musical revolutions of Motown and rock ‘n’ roll would further alter the entertainment landscape.

Despite the loss of the Graystone and the waning interest in ballroom dancing in general, the Grande Ballroom somehow managed to survive. While the number of dancing nights at the Grande declined, weekend and holiday dancing late into the 1950s. In fact, the ballroom held a twenty-eighth anniversary party when the fall dancing season opened in mid-September 1956,³⁸ and when the Graystone closed the following year, an advertisement for the Grande informed “former Graystone dancers” that stags and couples could still dance at the Grande on Friday and Saturday nights.³⁹ In 1958 Don and Helen Hill taught group classes how to Mambo, Cha-Cha, and Fox Trot, and Pat Costello taught Swing and the Tango, in addition to other dances.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the influence of Latin music and dances is evident in advertisements for the Grande Ballroom. An advertisement in November 1960 encouraged readers to “make a date the Latin way” and dance to the sounds of the Andy Gonzalez Orchestra and the vocal stylings of Ollie Tenilado. Remarkably, rather than steadily fewer nights of

³⁵ “Grande Opens.” *Detroit Free Press*. September 17, 1954.

³⁶ “Debts Close Doors of Famed Ballroom.” *Detroit Free Press*. December 3, 1957.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Re-Opening Fri., Sept. 14.” *Detroit Free Press*. September 13, 1956.

³⁹ “Attention Former Graystone Dancers.” *Detroit Free Press*. December 6, 1957.

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dancing, the Grande was open Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, with “Latin rhythms” every Wednesday night.⁴⁰

While group dance classes were again offered in 1963, fundamental changes had occurred by the fall of 1964. The building was sold to Gabriel Glantz, and the Grande Ballroom was renamed the Palladium Dance Hall.⁴¹ Glantz, an attorney and entrepreneur, was involved in numerous ventures, only one of which was ownership of the Grande Ballroom. Glantz and his associates later came to own the Eastown Theater, rival to the Grande for a short time, and the Michigan Palace (the former Michigan Theater, located downtown in the Michigan Building).

In 1965 the ballroom appears in local newspapers as the Soul City Bar,⁴² and in 1966 as the Soul City U.S.A. ballroom, still as the Palladium,⁴³ and the Celebrity Dance Hall.⁴⁴ This two-year period in the history of the ballroom has been little documented, which suggests that the decline of ballroom dancing had finally caught up with the Grande, and the transition to a modern teen dance hall would not be smooth. Indeed, for a few weeks in June 1966 the venue was operated by local disc jockey “Frantic Ernie” Durham. While the venue was popular, Durham failed to obtain a license for the hall, and when neighbors complained of “rowdiness, drinking, gang fights and vandalism” the hall was shut down.⁴⁵ Durham moved his dance operation to the Gold Room at the Twenty Grand, and it appears the Grande sat vacant for the next few months.

Though a prominent and formidable ballroom dancing venue in the first half of the twentieth century, the time for stately waltzes, orchestras, and even the Latin rhythms of just a few years earlier had come and gone. Motown was hot, rock ‘n’ roll was ascendant, and it was the intensity of the next several years that brought international renown to the Grande Ballroom.

“This Is Where It’s At:” The Grande Ballroom, 1966-1972

While Detroit’s popular musical history is dominated by Berry Gordy’s Motown Records and the incredible number of artists that produced “the sound of young America,” the city has also played a significant role in the development of American rock ‘n’ roll and its variants. While there were many venues in the city for teens and young adults to dance and hear live popular music, there was not yet, in mid-1960s Detroit, a concert venue like the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco, California. Instead, Detroit disc jockeys played Top-40 records, and bands played covered songs of the same. That changed in late October 1966 when Russell J. Gibb reopened the Grande Ballroom as a psychedelic rock music venue.

⁴⁰ “Make a Date the Latin Way.” *Detroit Free Press*. November 7, 1960.

⁴¹ “Teens Accused in 2 Stabbings.” *Detroit Free Press*. October 1, 1964.

⁴² Patrick J. Owens. “Is TULC Swinging to Cavanagh?” *Detroit Free Press*. April 8, 1966.

⁴³ “Three Dances at the Palladium.” *Detroit Free Press*. June 3, 1966.

⁴⁴ “Teen Dances Banned.” *Detroit Free Press*. June 16, 1966.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

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After a trip to San Francisco in early 1966, where Gibb attended a performance by the Byrds at the Fillmore Auditorium (perhaps on June 24, 1966), which took place in the midst of a “socio-musical revolution” happening in San Francisco.⁴⁶

The May 6, 1967, issue of *Billboard* described what the scene Gibb experienced might have been like: “rock bands played, all manner of dancing went on... black light, strobe light, full-wall liquid visuals... the works... it was a taste of things to come and the kids dug it.”⁴⁷ Taken in by it all, Gibb made contact with the owner and obtained the source of the strobe lights and other resources. He then returned to Michigan intent on establishing a similar venue in Detroit.

A short search for a building to host this venture resulted in a rent-to-buy contract with the building’s owners. Gibb next sought out a musical act. Through Harold Ovshinsky, publisher of the *Fifth Estate*, a local “anarchist, anti-capitalist, and anti-authoritarian, anti-profit”⁴⁸ newspaper, and John Sinclair, the music and literary editor for the newspaper and a leading voice in Detroit’s counterculture movement, Gibb came in contact with the MC5.

The 5 had formed in the early 1960s and had played at various halls, school dances, and record hops. Band members Rob Tyner, Wayne Kramer, Dennis A. Thompson, Michael Davis, and Fred Smith had been neighbors in the downriver (south of Detroit) community of Lincoln Park. They had relocated to Detroit and lived in a burgeoning arts district near Wayne State University. There they had come in contact with John Sinclair through the Detroit Artists Workshop, which had been established in 1964. The 5 had sought out rehearsal space at the workshop, which was located near the university, and about four miles east of the Grande Ballroom. At first rebuffed, Rob Tyner eventually persuaded Sinclair to let the band use their space.

The MC5 billed themselves as an “avant rock” band and played a mix of cover songs and original material. More importantly they played with the energy, creativity, and originality that Gibb desired and was absent from most bands in the area. Gibb hired the band as the Grande Ballroom house band. Though they were initially unpaid, the band viewed this a chance to bring their music to a larger audience.

Through Rob Tyner, lead singer of the MC5, Gibb was introduced to artist Gary Grimshaw, a “pioneering concert poster artist,” according to *Billboard* magazine.⁴⁹ Grimshaw was living in the same apartment building as Tyner. Gibb needed a way to promote the performances at the Grande, and Grimshaw’s art jived with scene Gibb sought to create. Grimshaw’s opening night poster featured a seagull in flight, and dynamic text that proclaimed, “Detroit’s First Participatory Zoo Dance” that was “in the San Francisco Style.” Opening weekend was October

⁴⁶ Philip Elwood. “Psychedelic Rockers: Musical Revolutionaries.” *Billboard*. May 6, 1967. <https://books.google.com/books?id=BCgEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=RA1-PA3&dq=%22strobe%20light%22%20fillmore&pg=PA40#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “About us.” *fifth estate*. www.fifthestate.org/about/. Accessed July 12, 2018.

⁴⁹ Gary Geff. “Psychedelic Rock Poster Artist Gary Grimshaw Dead at 67.” *Billboard*. <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/5869661/gary-grimshaw-dead-psychedelic-rock-poster-artist-dies>. Accessed February 9, 2018.

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7 and 8, 1966, and featured the MC5 and another local group, the Chosen Few. Seagulls were admitted free. In addition to his other artistic accomplishments, Grimshaw was the principal poster designer for the Grande Ballroom. A brief article in the Detroit Free Press the day the "Grand-De Ballroom" opened stated the new young adult club "will be going every Friday and Saturday night with the wild sounds of today's music" as well as "other way-out goodies."⁵⁰

Some of those "goodies" were the psychedelic lightshows produced by Trans-Love Energies Unlimited's (TLE) and the Magic Veil Light Company. Several members of the TLE community set up overhead projectors and movie players at the back of the ballroom to project amoebic shapes, a rainbow of colors, and old movies.

Lorraine Alterman, *Detroit Free Press* Teen Writer, who later wrote for *Billboard* as well, responded to the Grande Ballroom experience like this:

Pow! Wham! Bang! Zow! That's how the new op-pop scene at the Grande Ballroom... hits you. No doubt about it – it's the grooviest, most exciting teen spot in town. If you're 17 or over and don't hit the Grande... you are out of your skull... the Grande has that big, big spark of imagination that sets it apart from any other club around.⁵¹

Not only did the Grande have that "big, big spark," but it was the epicenter "a whole new lifestyle and music that was sweeping the country." It was the "birthplace of high energy Michigan music."⁵²

Alterman then described what it was like walking into the ballroom:

You enter by walking up a wide staircase. On the landing the ticket taker is perched on a motorcycle. Next to him are pots of phosphorescent makeup. Paint a big flower on your face or stripes on your hands. When you get inside they'll glow in alive pinks, greens, blues. Step up a few more stairs. The wild vibrant sounds of today's music hits you... Then you're inside the big ballroom lined with fluted marble columns. There in a past era your parents danced to the big bands. But now it's today and today hits with the force of a blast furnace... the walls are a light show projected from the rear of the ballroom. Huge multi-colored bubbles and amoeba-like shapes are changing, rolling, dancing on the walls. Maybe an old Clark Gable flick is flashed over it. Fantastic!⁵³

Frank Bach, stage manager of the Grande Ballroom and associate of John Sinclair and TLE, recalled in 1971 his impression of that first night at the Grande:

⁵⁰ "The Scene at a New Club." *Detroit Free Press*. October 7, 1966.

⁵¹ Lorraine Alterman. "Teen Club That's Absolutely Wow." *Detroit Free Press*. October 21, 1966.

⁵² Frank Bach. "Rock and Roll Dope." *Ann Arbor Sun*. June 25-July 1, 1971.

⁵³ Lorraine Alterman. "Teen Club That's Absolutely Wow." *Detroit Free Press*. October 21, 1966.

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we heard it and felt it and it started to change us, just as it was going to shape the lives of literally millions of our sisters and brothers in the months and years to come. If you were one of the hundred or so people that were at the Grande you HAD to hear it, because the band on stage that night was smashing out the kind of rock and roll that eventually had to find that name it HAD to be called high energy because it made you stop whatever you were doing and get up and move and dance in it and with it. I didn't even know how to dance back then myself, but by their second set the force of the music had me down off the light show platform and jumping around and shouting with the band that called themselves the MC5.⁵⁴

This was the first such club in Detroit, and it clearly made an affected those who came. It provided a place for older beatniks, younger hippies, and everyone in between who felt a dissatisfaction with “the neatly manicured lawns of suburbia,” the “deep dissatisfaction with traditional middle class values,” and “the condition of society” in the mid-1960s.⁵⁵

Because of this appeal and its proximity to the artist community at Wayne State University, the Grande Ballroom became the favored location for Detroit’s hippie and counterculture community. The allure of the Grande was facilitated in large measure by the involvement of John Sinclair, the Detroit Artists Workshop, Trans-Love Energies (TLE), and the associated artists and musicians, as well as frequent discussion in countercultural publications, *Fifth Estate* and *Warren-Forest Sun* (later *Ann Arbor Sun*). While bands played at other venues around the city, the energy of the crowds, the proximity of the bands to the patrons at the Grande, and the sense of total involvement with what was happening on the stage was one of the aspects of the ballroom that set it apart and above the other locations. Between October 1966 and July 1967 the Grande featured local bands. Most of often the MC5 were joined by the Chosen Few, Prime Movers, the Wha?, and South Bound Freeway, among others. Soon, however, Gibb was able to bring well-known national and international acts (and those that would soon be so) visiting the city to the Grande. Tom Wright, former road manager for the Who, came to work for Gibb and provided a significant connection to many English rock bands that performed at the Grande.

Nearly every weekend hundreds and thousands of people packed themselves onto the dance floor to experience “the high-energy rock scene exploding at Detroit's Grande Ballroom.”⁵⁶ That scene and the energy therein was due in large measure to the MC5.

Tom Greenwood, writing in the *Detroit Free Press* many years later, observed that while the Grande “was a dark, dirty, drug-filled reservoir jammed mostly with suburban kids who had a lot of tough questions for adults,” it was also the place in Detroit for “rip-saw rock that punched you

⁵⁴ Frank Bach. “Rock and Roll Dope.” *Ann Arbor Sun*. June 25-July 1, 1971.

⁵⁵ Loraine Alterman. “Our Hippies-What They Say and Do.” *Detroit Free Press*. May 19, 1967.

⁵⁶ David Fricke. “Fricke’s Picks.” *Rolling Stone*. July 10, 2008.

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in the chest and left your ears roaring for days. Groups like the MC5 kicked out the jams... while The Who trashed guitars and thrashed the audience's ability to hear."⁵⁷

Motor City Rock and Roll

Every major city or region in the United States has had, at one time or another, its own distinctive musicians or sound or genre. Some, like Detroit, have both generated its own sound (like Motown), and taken a genre and filtered it through the history, people, and zeitgeist to create something similar yet truly distinctive. In much the way jazz was impacted in Chicago, rock 'n' roll in Detroit took on the three-hundred-years of history of the city and was changed in very distinctive ways.

Indeed, tumult seems to have been born into Detroit, as Julius P. Bolivar observed in 1837:

Founded in the strife for sovereignty between the English and French governments, [Detroit] became at an early day, a point of central influence and action. 'No place in the United States... present such a series of events, interesting in themselves, and permanently affecting, as they have occurred, its progress and prosperity. Five times its flag has changed, three different sovereigns have claimed its allegiance... twice it has been besieged by Indians, once captured in war, and once burned to the ground.'⁵⁸

The city's incredible industry, the artistic and architectural achievements, its long history as well as the legacy of racial discrimination and the emerging counterculture of the 1960s all poured into the rock 'n' roll music that came from the city. By the mid-1960s that sound took on an edge, velocity, and energy that was seldom found in other cities. That sound, for a few brief years, was led by the MC5. According to Frank Bach, former manager of the Grande Ballroom:

"the 5 were more than just a good rock and roll band they played every note and sang every word with as much meat energy that they could find in their bodies... The music was so high that it had to take you with it to a realization of the message of total joy and liberation which the lyrics told you about: 'Kick out the jams, [expletive removed]!'"⁵⁹

Yet, outside of Michigan and the Great Lakes region, the MC5 had to fight against the "uptight honky biz" that considered the obscenities of their music to be dangerous to American society.⁶⁰

Detroit, the Counterculture, and the Grande Ballroom

⁵⁷ Tom Greenwood. "A Wilted Flower Child." *Detroit Free Press*. January 10, 1993.

⁵⁸ Julius P. Bolivar. "History of Detroit." *Directory of the City of Detroit*. 1837, p. 6.

⁵⁹ Frank Bach. "Rock and Roll Dope." *Ann Arbor Sun*. June 25-July 1, 1971.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

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As much as the Grande Ballroom was a venue for music, it was also a venue for people who rejected, or thought about rejecting, the status quo, or who were frustrated and angry with social, racial, and political events occurring at that time. While the generation that came of age during the Great Depression and World War II understandably sought out the peacefulness and stability that suburban development and postwar consumer abundance represented, and gladly conformed to white, middle class values, some of the young people who came of age in the 1960s desired something else. They valued certain freedoms, and despised certain rules and systems that seemed to benefit some and oppress others. According to John Sinclair, "the general cultural values in this country have evolved to a stage where they have to do entirely with jobs and products. If you don't have a job, you aren't a human being."⁶¹

In the early 1960s several significant events occurred that began to crystallize these feelings of disenchantment. In 1963 John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference began a campaign against racial segregation, thousands of African Americans were later arrested while protesting segregation, the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed, and Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. led marches and made speeches that galvanized untold thousands against the injustices of the day.

As the 1960s progressed there were "signs that a serious rejection of Western values was underway with the emergence of a college-age population in the United States."⁶² With ties to the Civil Rights movement, and the earlier Beatnik generation, the 1960s counterculture movement produced both political activism, some of it radical, and the "liberated sector," known more commonly as the "hippies." In Detroit this countercultural movement was centered on Plum Street, west of Wayne State University. There the radical *Fifth Estate* newspaper was published, and the Detroit Artists Workshop (DAW), of which John Sinclair was a founding member promoted a new vision for America. DAW, a creative collective, organized music (primarily jazz) and poetry performances and artistic exhibitions, among other things, notably the Artists Workshop Press. The press produced publications that communicated and furthered ideas of the counterculture. By 1966 DAW had evolved to become Trans-Love Energies Unlimited (TLE). Founded by Sinclair, Tyner, Grimshaw, and others, including serving as booking agents for bands, operating the Magic Veil Light Company, the Artists' Workshop Press, Warlock Studios, Detroit LEMAR, the *Fifth Estate* and the *Sun* newspapers, and provided other services on a non-profit or cooperative basis. TLE expanded the reach of DAW by incorporating rock 'n' roll into the type of music it promoted, and by providing other services. TLE provided the visual effects, lightshows, and graphics for the Grande Ballroom. It was a synergistic relationship. Russ Gibb and the Grande received these services and TLE promoted its counterculture, communal message to a wider audience. TLE also promoted their message through books, pamphlets, newspapers, events like the April 1967 Love-In on Belle Isle, and through the management and promotion of musical acts like the MC5.

⁶¹ Eric Ehrmann. "MC5." *Rolling stone*, January 4, 1969.

⁶² James L. Spates. "Counterculture and Dominant Culture Values: A Cross-National Analysis of the Underground Press and Dominant Culture Magazines." *American Sociological Review*, 1976, 41, p. 868-883.

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So much of the social, cultural, political, and economic frustration of growing up in Detroit, Michigan, and in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s is expressed in the music and performances of the MC5. Eric Ehrmann of *Rolling Stone* observed in 1969 that MC5 drummer, Dennis Thompson played “with such fierceness because he has, along with the rest of the 5, experienced twenty years of repression in the middle-class rut. He says this with every pulsation of the band.”⁶³

In his article Ehrmann captured the impact the 5 had on those uninitiated souls who attended their shows in the sentiments expressed by two students at Michigan State University after the 5 put on a show there. “A straight fraternity type... commented: ‘Jeez, they sure are crazy, but their music really gets to me... it is really hard for me to identify with anything after hearing this.’” Then, “a quiet little girl” added, “I’m so useless. What will happen to me when the revolution comes. They have so much energy. I’ll never do anything.”⁶⁴

Grande Days

As the Grande was developing into an important Detroit music venue and rock and roll was emerging as a new Detroit sound, the rebellion in July 1967 altered the city in significant ways. Over the course of eight days at the end of July, more than one thousand buildings were damaged and destroyed, and hundreds of stores were looted. Yet it was not just residents of the city who were involved. Indeed, “cars full of sightseers and looters” – black and white – “clogged side streets” around the affected areas.⁶⁵ Early estimates suggested more than 250 million dollars in property damage.⁶⁶ Yet the Grande Ballroom, well within the zone of the uprising, was remarkably untouched by those involved in the looting or destruction (the fate of the first-floor stores is unknown). In fact, Chuck Thurston of the *Detroit Free Press* found that many of the city’s nightlife venues had not been damaged. Indeed, there were “burned out blocks at Grand River and Joy Road,” but the Grande and the nearby Riviera Theater remained virtually untouched.⁶⁷

Russ Gibb reopened the Grande Ballroom on August 4, 1967, just four days after the end of the rebellion. The August 4 show featured local artists, but within a few short weeks, major national acts began to appear at the Grande. The Chambers Brothers appeared on August 27, 1967, and Vanilla Fudge, “a Psychedelic-symphonic”⁶⁸ rock band based in New York played the Grande in December 1967. The Fudge, “a group unlike any other”⁶⁹ reached number six in 1967 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart with their version of *You Keep Me Hangin’ On*, a track that was written

⁶³ Eric Ehrmann. “MC5.” *Rolling stone*, January 4, 1969.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Neighborhoods Burn as Residents Watch.” *Detroit Free Press*. July 24, 1967.

⁶⁶ David C. Smith. “Losses are Pile as High as the Ashes.” *Detroit Free Press*. July 30, 1967.

⁶⁷ Chuck Thurston. “City’s Nightlight Landmarks Escape Serious Damage.” *Detroit Free Press*. July 29, 1967.

⁶⁸ “Vanilla Fudge: Music to ‘Feel’ By.” *Detroit Free Press*. October 27, 1967.

⁶⁹ Mike Gormley. “Taking Apart the ‘Fudge’: Can They Survive Now?” *Detroit Free Press*. October 4, 1968.

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by the renowned Motown writing team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland, and first performed in 1966 by Motown artists, The Supremes.

In the March 1, 1968, edition of the *Warren-Forest Sun*, an anonymous author wrote of the developing rock scene in Detroit, noting:

Detroit is turning into ROCK CITY before our eyes, and we love it! All over the country groups are being “discovered,” and cities like Boston are being hailed as “the new San Francisco,” and San Francisco goes on as the new Liverpool, and meanwhile the scene in Detroit just gets scarier and scarier and no one seems to pay it any notice. The kids here are just beginning to find out how heavy the Detroit music scene is, though, as week after week bands come into the Grande from near and far and the kids can hear them and see them in front of everyone, naked on the stage, and find out that the music business is really about MUSIC, after all, and all the fantastic promotion jobs in the world can't cover it up.⁷⁰

Between February and November 1968 the number and quality of local, national, and international bands that played at the Grande reads like the roster of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and several other notable performers: Amboy Dukes, which included Ted Nugent; B.B. King; Blood, Sweat & Tears; Buddy Guy; the Byrds; Canned Heat; Cream; Creedence Clearwater Revival; Chuck Berry; the Doors; Frank Zappa; the Grateful Dead; Big Brother and Holding Company, the Jeff Beck Group; John Lee Hooker; Pink Floyd; Savoy Brown; Sly and the Family Stone; Steppenwolf; the Steve Miller Band; Three Dog Night; Van Morrison; the Velvet Underground; the Who; and the Yardbirds. On one mid-July weekend in 1968 alone, the Grande featured Fleetwood Mac, Pink Floyd, the Who, the Thyme, Jagged Edge, and the Psychedelic Stooges, all for two dollars and fifty cents.⁷¹

Integral to the Grande Ballroom experience was the MC5. The band did not just perform, but set out to create “a total destroy experience.”⁷² Under Sinclair’s management and Tyner’s artistic leadership, the 5 developed into the “quintessential late-1960's rock band, playing anarchic live concerts of music with a pounding beat, distorted guitars and radical exhortations delivered in... Tyner's howling voice.”⁷³ As Tyner himself wrote in 1991, “we were Punk before Punk. We were New Wave before New Wave. We were Metal before Metal. We were even “M.C.” before Hammer.”⁷⁴

The 5, however, was more than just music. They were the “propaganda machine” of TLE (and eventually the White Panther Party), and provided means of bringing about a “total assault on the

⁷⁰ “Rock & Roll Crusader.” *Warren-Forest Sun*. March 1, 1968.

⁷¹ Tom Greenwood. “A Wilted Flower Child.” *Detroit Free Press*. January 10, 1993.

⁷² Eric Ehrmann. “MC5.” *Rolling Stone*, January 4, 1969.

⁷³ Jon Pareles. “Rob Tyner, Singer with MC5 Group in 60s, Dies at 46.” *New York Times*. September 20, 1991.

⁷⁴ Rob Tyner. *Kick Out The Jams*. Elektra Entertainment. 1991.

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culture” to effect a social, political, and cultural revolution through rock ‘n’ roll.⁷⁵ Sinclair and the MC5 “felt, in terms of a cultural revolution, you had to overturn the popular culture—television and movies, radio—and instead institute something that led people into a new era. A life where people cooperated, where they helped each other, where people gave from their heart, where creativity was rewarded.”⁷⁶

In March 1968 Columbia Records recorded Big Brother and the Holding Company’s performances at the Grande. The recordings were used several years later on a live album for Janis Joplin, the band’s lead singer. The album, *Joplin In Concert*, was released in 1972, and featured live tracks performed at various times, included two tracks recorded at a performance at the Grande in March 1968, “Down on Me” and “Piece of My Heart.” The performances chosen for by the record demonstrate the stature of the Grande, as it was one of just three rock venues (the other a Canadian music festival) chosen to represent Joplin’s work.

Rock critic Lester Bangs review of the album for *Rolling Stone* suggests Joplin’s Grande performances may have been chosen for the album because, while much of the music on the album was “rather second rate,” the recording of “Down On Me” shows “everyone is having a ball... Janis, the band, the audience, all feeding off of each other and giving back as much as they can of what they get. James Gurley’s guitar solo ... directed with a kind of joyous fury at an audience who couldn’t get enough of it.”⁷⁷ The environment that Bangs described was precisely the reason the Grande became a pre-arena destination for so many influential bands.

The summer of 1968 would be a pivotal year for the MC5, and subsequently the Grande Ballroom. By this time the MC5 had established a regional following, and were admired by their fans for their “devastating stage shows.”⁷⁸ The band became increasingly political and antagonistic toward established power structures. After their performance at a protest rally in Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois, during the 1968 Democratic National Convention, the 5, Sinclair, Pun Plamondon, and other members of TLE formed the White Panther Party in response to what they witnessed and in solidarity with the Black Panther Party. The WPP:

was a radical political party that combined the discipline and militancy of the BPP [Black Panther Party]; the economic development program of the Nation of Islam; and the theatrics and media manipulation of the YIPPIES! All guided by the principles of Marxism/Leninism as practiced in the Russian, Chinese, Cuban and

⁷⁵ Mathew Bartkowiak. “Motor City Burning: Rock and Rebellion in the WPP and the MC5.” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*. Vol. 1 No. 2, 2008.

⁷⁶ Ann Larabee and Mathew Bartkowiak. “Interview with John Sinclair.” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*. Vol. 1 No. 2, 2008.

⁷⁷ Lester Bangs. “Janis Joplin: In Concert.” *Rolling Stone*. June 8, 1972.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/in-concert-19720608>

⁷⁸ John Sinclair. “Back in the Day: An Abbreviated Memoir of Ann Arbor 1968-1975.” Ann Arbor District Library.
https://aadl.org/freeingjohnsinclair/essays/back_in_the_day. Accessed August 5, 2018.

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Vietnamese revolutions, using culture and art, spearheaded by rock n roll, to bring about a revolutionary change in America.⁷⁹

This revolutionary attitude in a revolutionary time propelled the band forward and brought them national attention. Elektra Records sent Danny Fields to Detroit to hear the MC5. Fields saw them whip a capacity crowd... into near hysteria.”⁸⁰ The record company signed the band September 1968, and on October 30 and 31, 1968, the band recorded their first album, *Kick out the Jams*, live at the Grande Ballroom. “The title of the song “Kick Out The Jams” originated from MC5’s exhortations to visiting English groups at the Grande to put more energy into their performance, as the home team more often than not would steal the show with their own brute power.”⁸¹

In September 1968 the MC5 and the Psychedelic Stooges were signed by Elektra Records. The record company quickly set out to produce the 5’s first album. It was to be a live album which virtually unheard of for a debut album on a major record label. Yet, the MC5 thought a live recording at the Grande Ballroom was the only way to capture the energy of their music. The record company agreed, and the 5 recorded their album at the Grande over the course of two shows on October 30 and 31, 1968. Rob Tyner recounted in the liner notes of the 1991 compact disc reissue of *Kick Out The Jams* that this moment at the end of October was what the band had “been working for all our lives, when the MC5 will unleash sonic fury and devastate the cosmos with mega-bursts of thunder.”⁸² The 5’s live album “marked the first time that a unique cultural form has been captured in its own midwestern environment,” meaning it wasn’t produced in a studio in New York or California.⁸³ That environment – the Grande Ballroom – was a symbiotic and synergistic experience with the MC5.

When *Kick Out The Jams* was released in February 1969 it was an immediate success but also instantly controversial. The album contained profanity in the song lyrics and in the song text, most notably in Rob Tyner’s opening exhortation of the title track. This resulted in the album being restricted in some Detroit-area stores and unavailable in others. In fact, the police issued warnings to store owners about selling the albums, and store owners and clerks in neighboring communities were arrested and fined for selling the album to teenagers. Then-prominent Detroit retailer, J. L. Hudson Co. refused to sell the album. A review of the album in the *New York Times* stated that the MC5 “played at a volume often beyond the threshold of pain.” The review went further stating, “one must be prepared to accept as a valid criterion in rock raw strength and barely bridled energy... few groups have explored the possibilities offered within rock itself. The Who and the MC5 play pure rock with high energy and happy feeling.”⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Pun Plamondon. “Interim Report on the Background of Pun Plamondon and the Founding of the White Panther Party circa 1968.” Ann Arbor District Library. https://aadl.org/freeingjohnsinclair/essays/interim_report_on_the_background_of_pun_plamondon. Accessed August 6, 2018.

⁸⁰ Robert Palmer. “Walk on the Wild Side.” *Rolling Stone*, October 5, 1995.

⁸¹ James Thompson. “MC5: Kickin’ out the Jams.” *Goldmine*. March 10, 2000.

⁸² Rob Tyner. *Kick Out The Jams*. Elektra Entertainment. 1991.

⁸³ Eric Ehrmann. “MC5.” *Rolling stone*, January 4, 1969.

⁸⁴ Mike Jahn. “MC5 Plays Basic Rock.” *New York Times*. June 21, 1969.

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Even though 1968 was a significant year for the Grande Ballroom and for rock 'n' roll in Detroit, there were seeds of change in the cultural scene that fueled the Grande. In the spring and summer of 1968 John Sinclair, Leni Sinclair, Pun Plamondon, Gary Grimshaw, the MC5, and the rest of the Trans-Love Energies community left Detroit for Ann Arbor, which at the time was a hotbed of political activism, and perceived to be more welcoming to groups like TLE, and tolerant of its own student radicals. The entire collective was still involved with the Grande, and the MC5 continued to appear there regularly, but TLE had grown weary of constant harassment and surveillance, threats, and property damage.⁸⁵

In May 1969 the Who, "British rock's toughest and most innovative group"⁸⁶ began a tour of the United States in support their now-legendary rock opera album *Tommy*. The tour began with a three-night stop at the Grande Ballroom beginning on May 9, 1969, but had been rehearsing in the ballroom for several days prior to the shows. Each successive night saw larger crowds, and each night set attendance records at the Grande. *Tommy* was the fourth album from the band, was written by Pete Townsend, and told the story of a deaf, dumb, and blind boy – Tommy. According to Albert Goodman, then a professor at Columbia University, the album, "for sheer power, invention and brilliance of performance outstrips anything that has ever come out of a rock recording studio."⁸⁷ Since that time the album has been performed by various operas, orchestras (including the Detroit Symphony Orchestra), and ballet companies, and adapted into both a film and a Broadway musical.

Despite these achievements and milestones, times continued to change. In late 1969 Elektra Records parted ways with the MC5, the MC5 parted ways with Sinclair, TLE, and the WPP, and Sinclair himself had been arrested and incarcerated (along with other leading members of the WPP) in July 1969. The Eastown Theater opened as a competing rock venue and Gibb started booking shows at the Grand Riviera Theatre. The financial guarantees and higher fees required to secure acts continually increased, as did a promoter's requirement for the size of a venue. In Detroit, larger theaters and sports arenas like the Detroit Olympia arena (interestingly built at the same time as the Grande Ballroom and also on Grand River Avenue) and Cobo Hall were much larger and therefore more financially lucrative, and were thus able to book shows with the more popular acts of the day, drawing those acts, audiences, and ultimately money away from the Grande. At the same time many acts that had built their Detroit audiences at the Grande had also outgrown its limited space.

What is more, Russ Gibb started to organize large outdoor festivals along the lines of the now-famous Woodstock Music and Art Fair held in Bethel, New York in August 1969, chiefly the three-day Goose Lake International Music Festival held in Leoni Township, Michigan. The Goose Lake festival occurred in August 1970 and featured an unbelievable roster of the day's top musical artists, including Rod Stewart, Jethro Tull, Chicago, the James Gang featuring Joe Walsh, alongside Detroit's best rock bands, Bob Seger, the MC5, The Stooges, Detroit featuring Mitch Ryder, Brownsville Station, Savage Grace, Third Power and SRC. Festival planners

⁸⁵ Leni Sinclair. "1520 Evicted." *Ann Arbor Sun*. September 4-17, 1971.

⁸⁶ Albert Goldman. "A Grand Opera in Rock." *Life*. October 17, 1969.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

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estimated that around sixty thousand people would the festival, but by the end, nearly 200,000 people had attended.

Around 1970 Gibb closed the Grande Ballroom as a regular venue,⁸⁸ but the ballroom was available to rent for 450 dollars per day and union-scale wages for musicians,⁸⁹ and often hosted special events, benefits, and fund-raisers. Notably, a benefit for John Sinclair was held at the Grande Ballroom in January 1970. Nearly two thousand people attended the benefit in support of Sinclair.

Events at the ballroom were organized by various promoters through December 1972 when the MC5 were hired to perform a final show (for both the ballroom and the band) on December 31, 1972. Then, the lights went out and the bands left.

As soon as 1973 the former ballroom was turned into a roller skating rink, Astro-Dome Skating. The rink was short-lived, and no longer appears in directories by 1977. After 1977 any occupation becomes harder to ascertain, as city directories sometimes blended listings for 8952 with the ballroom and the corner storefront.

“A World that was Destined Never to be.”

The end of the Grande Ballroom was multifaceted, and strangely tied to both the success and failure of Detroit’s music scene. From its inception as a rock venue until about 1970, the Grande was able to accommodate most musical acts. The unique environment of the ballroom undoubtedly played into its favor. Increasing consumer interest in major local, national, and international acts, and the changing economics of the music industry, however, led to a need for larger capacity venues that could produce correspondingly larger profits. The Grande had become obsolete, a victim of the success it facilitated.

The decline of the Grande happened so suddenly it was somewhat surprising. Author David Carson observed that Detroit seemed of the verge of becoming the next big music scene.⁹⁰ Yet it somehow failed to materialize as many seem to have expected. Wilson Lindsay, writing in the *Detroit Free Press* in March 1971 asked, “Where Has the Detroit Sound Gone?” Lindsay pointed out that in just a few short years, a once promising local music scene had largely evaporated. He observed the causes as some bands having left the state, others having broken up, and venues – including the Grande – closing. Ancillary businesses like booking agents soon followed. In the 1971 *Detroit Free Press* article Lindsay quoted Hank Malone, a former disc jockey at WRIF/WXYZ, an FM radio station in Detroit. Malone suggested that the downfall of the “Detroit Sound” was due in part to the “crumbling aspects of the whole hippie-culture scene... that rock and roll and the culture [were] so entwined,” that when one falls apart, so does

⁸⁸ George Knemeyer. “Midwest Makes Music Gains as Rock Ballrooms Blossom.” *Billboard*. October 3, 1970.

⁸⁹ “People’s Ballroom Progress.” *Ann Arbor Sun*. September 4-17, 1971.

⁹⁰ David Carson. *Grit, Noise, and Revolution: The Birth of Detroit Rock ‘n’ Roll*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

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the other.⁹¹ In his liner notes for a 1991 compact disc reissue of *Kick Out The Jams*, Rob Tyner stated that the album “is a microcosm of the times that spawned it... this music expresses the frustration and future shock of the sixties. This is a portrayal of the struggle to create a world that was destined never to be.”⁹² Tyner’s words can be applied not only to the album, but to the MC5, and to the Grande Ballroom as well. The three are inextricably linked.

Writing in the *American Sociological Review* in 1976 James L. Spates made a similar observation: that by that time [1976] the hippies and political radicals, “seem to have all but vanished. Their once flourishing communities... have returned to their pre-late 1960s demographic structure and virtually all hippies who remain in them are living a life style more akin to down-and-out skid row types than the ideal” that promulgated cooperation, expression, communalism, autonomy, art, and being over doing. In Detroit, the arrests of significant countercultural figures further dampened the movement. By 1974 it was all over.

Today only a handful of Detroit’s ballrooms remain standing: the Vanity, the Monticello, the Crystal, and the Oriole Terrace (originally built as the Duplex Theater in 1915). The Grande is in a similar condition as the Vanity and Oriole Terrace, stable, but deteriorating due to lack of heat, investment, and protection from the elements. In 2005 the Monticello Ballroom benefited from state grants and now has first-floor tenants. The Crystal Ballroom underwent a complete reconstruction and reopened as the Crystal Lofts opening in 2008. The Grande Ballroom’s significance to Detroit’s musical history goes far beyond that of the remaining ballrooms. It was the site of a short-lived but intense musical and social revolution where thousands testified to the Detroit sound and witnessed the city’s urbanized, industrialized rock lead the way to the later punk, alternative, heavy metal and grunge.⁹³

In 1995 the Boston, Massachusetts, PBS affiliate WGBH co-produced a television series on the history of rock music, *Rock & Roll: An Unruly History*. The series featured *Rolling Stone* contributor, former rock critic at the *New York Times*, and author Robert Palmer. Palmer, in a companion piece to the series, places the MC5 alongside the Doors, the Stooges, and the Velvet Underground as significant bands in the development of American punk rock.

In 2011 Fender Musical Instruments released a special-edition Stratocaster that replicates the stars-and-stripes look of the guitar that Wayne Kramer used while a member of the MC5.

In the 2012 documentary of the Grande Ballroom, *Louder Than Love*, John Sinclair stated that “whatever happened in Detroit in those days relative to rock and roll music was centered on the Grande Ballroom.” Blues legend B. B. King recalled that when he played at the Grande, the crowd stood up and yelled and screamed, and that he “had never been treated that well before.” Lemmy Kilmister, founder of the English rock band Motörhead, revealed that the music of Detroit and the MC5 in particular were of significant influence in the development of the band.

⁹¹ Lindsay, Wilson. “Where Has the Detroit Sound Gone?” *Detroit Free Press*. March 5, 1971.

⁹² Rob Tyner. *Kick Out The Jams*. Elektra Entertainment. 1991.

⁹³ Tom Greenwood. “A Wilted Flower Child.” *Detroit Free Press*. January 10, 1993.

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In a 2013 interview with rock musician Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones, Alice Cooper stated that the Detroit is the “best rock city in the United States,” and Wood noting that it “started at the Grande Ballroom.”⁹⁴

Gary Grimshaw passed away in 2014. Not only a renowned rock poster artist, he was a veteran of the Vietnam war, active in the White Panther Party, and served as art director for the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival (1972-1973), *Creem Magazine*, Detroit’s rock ‘n’ roll magazine (1976-1984), and ArtRock, a concert poster producer (1988-1991). In 1999 the *Detroit Free Press* included Grimshaw in its list of Michigan’s 100 greatest artists and entertainers of the twentieth century,⁹⁵ a list that included Aretha Franklin, Albert Kahn, Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Charles and Ray Eames, Marvin Gaye, and of course the MC5. In 2014 the Detroit Historical Society hosted an exhibition of Grimshaw’s posters.

The MC5 have been nominated to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003, 2017, and 2018. Though not yet inducted, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame itself has stated that “with the most anti-establishment credentials in rock and roll (the f-bomb was their go-to expletive) the MC5 prefigured much of American punk rock. Forty-five years after their historic finale at Detroit’s Grande Ballroom on New Year’s Eve (1972), the Motor City 5 are about as ballsy as it gets.”⁹⁶

Much like the role of Detroit and Michigan in the development of American architectural Modernism, the history and significance of the Grande Ballroom has been largely forgotten, yet these two movements, that could not be further apart, had a significant impact throughout the United States and around the world. The history unappreciated, unvalued, and left to a relatively few individuals. Indeed, Bob Talbert of the *Detroit Free Press* had observed in 1977 that “the move from Motown to Rock City... dates back to the rebellious days of the MC5 and the Grande,” when Detroit, and thus the Grande, “probably rocked harder in the ‘60s and ‘70s than anyone will ever know.”⁹⁷ This nomination is a testament to that history.

Storefronts

⁹⁴ Ronnie Wood. “Alice Cooper on 1960s 1970s Detroit.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkR1EaHukL8>.

⁹⁵ “Michigan’s Greatest Artists and Entertainers.” *Detroit Free Press*.
December 12, 1999.

⁹⁶ “MC5.” Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. <https://www.rockhall.com/nominee/mc5>.

⁹⁷ Bob Talbert. “Detroit’s a Mother for Rock and Roll.” *Detroit Free Press*.
April 1, 1977.

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Grand River Avenue near Clarendon Street, looking east, with marquees for the Grande Ballroom and Grand Riviera Theater in background at right. Undated. Courtesy of Detroit News Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

From the time of its construction until the mid-1960s, the Grande Ballroom building housed several commercial spaces on the first floor of the building, along Grand River Avenue and Beverly Court. The occupants of these spaces served a growing and evolving section of the city during a period of tremendous growth for the city of Detroit. Local and national stores sought access to this expanding market, and as times changed so did many of the merchants. By the mid-1960s, however, the area was in decline, and by 1971 “about 50 percent of the businesses [had] closed down.”⁹⁸

The 1930-1932 City directories suggest the storefronts were addressed (east to west) as 8940, 8956, 8960, and 8970 when the building was constructed. By 1936 the 8940 address no longer appears, and in its place is 8952. The 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for the building provides both original and revised addresses, and notes the storefronts as historically being addressed as 8950, 8956, 8960, and 8970, and the revised addresses as 8956, 8960, 8964, and

⁹⁸ Hugh McCann. “Black Department Store to Open.” *Detroit Free Press*. January 24, 1971.

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8970. Additionally, 8952 is occasionally listed for one of the retail spaces, the Grande Ballroom, or both. Bresser's Directories in later years provide addresses of 8952, 8956, 8960, and 8970, which more closely correspond to the pre-revision addresses.

8940/8950 (8952) Grand River Avenue

This space, situated at the southeast corner of the building, was initially occupied by the Economical Drug Co., a drug store that had some fifty stores in Detroit. The Economical Drug company was established by Nate S. Shapero in 1918 in Detroit. A second store was opened in 1920, and still others quickly followed. By 1931 Shapero operated more than forty stores and sought to expand its operations. That same year, Economical merged with another local drug store chain, the Cunningham Drug company, which had been established by Andrew Cunningham in the late 1880s. While Cunningham had operated primarily in the downtown area of the city, Economical operated in the neighborhoods. Rather than compete, the two companies merged, and operated for several years as Economical-Cunningham drug stores. By 1935 the company operated more than seventy stores. In 1937, the company changed its name to "Cunningham Drug Stores, Inc." The company still exists today, but is much smaller and has been bought and sold several times, and is no longer associated with Detroit or Michigan. It is not clear when or why the drug store left 8952, but by 1936 Economical-Cunningham had been replaced by Lord's Jewelers, which remained here until 1942, when advertisements appeared for a Grand Jewelers store at 8952. Grand Jewelers, "the home of the blue-white diamond," and "Detroit's largest credit jewelry chain institution,"⁹⁹ had been in business for twenty-one years at that point and maintained several locations around Detroit. Just a few years later, however, the jewelry store had been replaced by Jack & Jill, a children's clothing store operated by Ernest & Lillian Golumbia. In August 1948 the company announced the opening of a children's shoe department and offered "carefully supervised x-ray fitting,"¹⁰⁰ and later opened a men's shop at 8956. Both stores remained at their locations until June 1966 when they were liquidated, likely in response to a series of burglaries.

In 1973 the storefront was occupied by Blondie Brown's University of Beauty and Charm, and then next year a hair weaving specialty shop. Then in 1977 the 8952 storefront was occupied by Pastor George Bogle who operated the House of Prayer, and perhaps the Evangelechoes. Bogle remained at 8952 through the 1980s.

8956 (8960) Grand River Avenue

At the time of construction, 8956 was leased by the A. E. Burns Shoe company. The Burns outfit announced the new northwestern branch store with a special four-page section in the *Detroit Free Press*. It was the company's third store. The special section provides some of the details of the store. The L-shaped designed provided entrances to the main floor on both Grand River Avenue and Beverly Court. The main floor provided sales space for both men's and women's shoes. The basement was "colorfully decorated for the kiddies," and spaces were planned for a play room and barber shop.¹⁰¹ A fourth Burns shoe store was added the following

⁹⁹ "Grand Jewelers." *Detroit Free Press*. December 24, 1942.

¹⁰⁰ *Detroit Free Press*. August 29, 1948.

¹⁰¹ "Announcing the Grand Opening of A.E. Burns & Co. New Northwestern Shoe Store." *Detroit Free Press*. October 19, 1928.

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year at the Vanity Ballroom on the east side of downtown Detroit. The Vanity was designed and developed by Charles Agree and his partners in the Metropolitan Holding Company, which included Edward Strata.

Arthur Eliot Burns had established a shoe firm in 1912 after graduating from the University of Detroit and working for R. H. Fife. Shoe Company. In 1918 Burns bought his partner's interest in the firm and established the A. E. Burns Company.¹⁰² Between 1918 and 1928 Burns opened a second store, and in 1928 opened the Grand River Avenue store.

It appears that within two years of opening at the Grande Ballroom building, the Burns shoe concern had left this space, as advertisements at that time indicate the store was occupied by the Foot Saver Shoe Shop, and that Burns operated fewer stores, the Grand River address not among them. The Foot Saver was replaced within a few years by the W. L. Douglas Shoe Company, a national chain from Brockton, Massachusetts. Also within this time, the barbershop (or perhaps a salon) noted in the A. E. Burns articles had been implemented, as the 1936 city directory shows the space occupied by the Douglas company and James Symon's Grande Beauty Shop. By 1937 W. L. Douglas had eight stores in Detroit.

After the Douglas company left the store it was taken over by the House of Jackets, and then the Jack & Jill shop that had been at 8952 for several years expanded to this location. While Jack & Jill sold children's clothes from 8952, this store was designed as a men's clothing store and operated under the name of Jack & Jill High College Shop. The Jack & Jill men's store was liquidated along with the children's store in June 1966. The 1968 city indicates 8956 was occupied by Les Coiffeurs Beauty salon. By the early 1970s the store is vacant or otherwise left off of city directory listings entirely until 1975 when Revelation True Faith appears there for one year. According to city directories 8956 has been vacant since 1976.

8960 (8964) Grand River Avenue

At the time of construction, 8960 was occupied by Beverly's, a dress shop associated with Harry Weitzman and Charles N. Agree. According to city directories Beverly's had been replaced by Lord's in 1930, and Allen's, a ladies' furnishings store, in 1931, but by 1932 the space appeared as vacant in the city directory. The Maas Bros.¹⁰³ department store appears to have leased the space shortly thereafter. The 1939 city directory lists the Standard Beauty Shop sharing the address with Maas Bros, suggesting, like the Douglas company, Maas Bros. may have had a salon space within its store.

Maas Bros. was established by brothers Earl D. and Royal S. Maas of Massillon, Ohio, in February 1930.¹⁰⁴ By the late 1930s the brothers had established a Maas Bros. store in Flint, Michigan, and then the store at 8960 Grand River Avenue in Detroit. In 1954, after the death of Royal Mass earlier that year, his heirs sold their interest in the store to George S. Pearlman, who

¹⁰² Clarence M. Burton. *The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922*, vol. 3.

¹⁰³ Available evidence suggests that this is not related to the Maas Bros. retail chain prominent in Florida.

¹⁰⁴ "Ohio Incorporations." *Chillicothe Gazette*. February 25, 1930.

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had been a partner in the store since 1943.¹⁰⁵ Advertisements dated to 1961 and 1967 suggest the Detroit and Flint Maas Bros. stores remained in business until those dates, respectively. The store then appears as vacant in city directories until 1971.

In 1971 the *Detroit Free Press* reported that the former Maas store became home to “Detroit’s first black-owned-and-operated department store,” Bargain Center, Inc. The store was a special project initiated by Montgomery Ward company.¹⁰⁶ The store, however, appears to have folded rather quickly and was replaced in 1973 by the Detroit Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), which provided job training and education to unemployed individuals. OIC seems to also have been short-lived as it does not appear in later (after 1974) city directories. The

8970 Grand River Avenue

From 1928 until 1957 this space was occupied by a branch of the W. T. Grant Co., a mass-merchandise department store founded in 1906 in Massachusetts. The company operated nearly five hundred stores by the mid-1940s, and more than one thousand by the time it filed for bankruptcy and ceased operations in the mid-1970s. The branch at 8970 Grand River Avenue was one of five stores in the Detroit area,¹⁰⁷ and was operated by the company until a basement fire in 1957. The company did not rebuild the store, and in subsequent city directories it appears as either “vacant” or is not listed.

Architecture

Charles N. Agree

Charles Nathaniel Agree (1897-1982) was born in Petroplovsk, Kamchatka Krai, Russia, in the far east of the country, on the coast of the Bering Sea. Agree arrived in the United States with his parents in 1904, and moved to Michigan in 1909. Agree was educated at the University of Michigan and at the Detroit Institute of Technology. Prior to establishing his own firm, Charles N. Agree and Associates in 1919 and operating out of Detroit’s Book building, Agree worked for Wood Bros., Fred Swirsky, and W.E.N. Hunter. The first years of Agree’s career produced numerous apartment and apartment hotel buildings in Detroit, including the Whittier Hotel, which the *Detroit Free Press* deemed “magnificent,” “so novel, so original,” and the “finest of its kind,”¹⁰⁸ and the massive Wiltshire Court apartments, both in 1923. The Whittier was one of his largest and most important projects of the 1919-1930 period. Agree also produced a number of small-scale apartment buildings, like the 1924 Euclid-Linwood Apartments and a 1923 three-story apartment building on Maplewood and Grand River Avenue, about six blocks east of the Grande Ballroom.

Shortly after the construction of the Grande Ballroom building, Agree, Edward Strata, and others formed the Metropolitan Holding Company, a real estate development company. The first

¹⁰⁵ *Detroit Free Press*. November 11, 1954.

¹⁰⁶ Hugh McCann. “Black Department Store to Open.” *Detroit Free Press*. January 24, 1971.

¹⁰⁷ *Detroit Free Press Roto*. December 2, 1956.

¹⁰⁸ “Palatial Hotel in Indian Village.” *Detroit Free Press*. February 18, 1923.

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project for the newly-formed organizations was the construction of the Vanity Ballroom.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly the vanity involved many of the same individuals and companies as the Grande. Paul Strasburg leased the second-floor ballroom for a dance school, while Cunningham Drugs, later to join with Economical Drugs, A. E. Burns Shoe company, and the Beverly Shop occupied the first-floor commercial spaces.¹¹⁰

Agree's firm later specialized in store buildings, particularly Detroit's neighborhood retailers. Many of the buildings for the Detroit-based Federal Department Stores and Winkelman's were designed by Agree's firm, as were many local Woolworth stores. Detroit's Kinsel and Cunningham Drug Stores buildings and other major retailers also commissioned stores by Agree, including Michigan-based Kresge (later Kmart) as well as Kroger, Wrigley, and Big Bear Super Markets.

Charles Agree was joined by his son, A. Arnold Agree, in 1953. The firm also moved its offices from downtown Detroit to a modern office closer to the suburbs. Like his father, the younger Agree was educated at the University of Michigan, and had graduated in 1948. The move away from downtown coincided with another turn in the focus of the firm. In the 1950s, with Americans experiencing greater mobility, Agree's firm pioneered the suburban shopping center in Michigan. These developments outside of Detroit served wider markets with dense collections of multiple stores as opposed to disparate smaller individual neighborhood stores.

W. E. Wood Co.

The contractor for the Grande Ballroom, the W. E. Wood Co., was established in 1909 by William E. Wood and associates. and constructed many prominent buildings and structures throughout country and in Canada. Among the company's works are the state office building and library (1919, now the Lewis Cass Building, NRHP 1984) in Lansing, Michigan; the Rackham Education Memorial Building (1921, NRHP 1983), the Book Tower parking garage (1928, NRHP 1982), Ambassador Bridge terminal buildings (c. 1929), and Ponchartrain Club (c. 1929, NRHP 2016) in Detroit; numerous school buildings in both Michigan and Canada; and buildings in Muncie, Indiana, Fort Worth, Texas, and Oakland, California, for the General Motors Corporation.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

¹⁰⁹ "Realty Development Company Organized." *Detroit Free Press*. April 21, 1929.

¹¹⁰ "New Business Block Fills Great Demand." *Detroit Free Press*. June 16, 1929.

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Name of Property

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property .40 _____

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 42.364868 Longitude: -83.128480

2. Latitude: Longitude:

Grande Ballroom
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3. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

4. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____

2. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____

3. Zone: _____ Easting: _____ Northing: _____

4. Zone: _____ Easting : _____ Northing: _____

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The east 9 feet of Lot 2, also Lots 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 on the North side of Grand River Avenue in the William L. Reeds Subdivision according to the plat thereof. Recorded in Liber 29, Page 90, Plats, Wayne County Register 14/168.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries are the legal boundaries of the several parcels on which the building is situated.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Todd A. Walsh, National Register Coordinator

organization: Michigan State Historic Preservation Office

street & number: 735 Michigan Avenue

city or town: Lansing state: Michigan zip code: 48909

e-mail walsht@michigan.gov

telephone: (517) 373-1630

date: August 10, 2018

Grande Ballroom
Name of Property

Wayne Co., Michigan
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name/title: Leo Early
organization: Friends of the Grande
street & number: 22634 Michigan Avenue
city or town: Dearborn state: Michigan zip code: 48124
e-mail: leobearly@gmail.com
telephone: (313) 565-1550
date: August 10, 2018

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Mark Childress

Date of Photograph: August 6, 2017

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn, Michigan 48124

Grande Ballroom
Name of Property

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MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0001.tif
Grand River Avenue Elevation, Beverly Court - right, camera facing northeast.

2 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Mark Childress

Date of Photograph: August 6, 2017

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0002.tif
Beverly Court Elevation, Camera facing west

3 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Mark Childress

Date of Photograph: August 6, 2017

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0003.tif
Alley elevation, Camera facing west-northwest.

4 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Harry Arnold

Date of Photograph: December 19, 2017

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0004.tif
Aerial perspective, Grand River and Beverly Court lower left, camera facing northwest.

5 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Harry Arnold

Grande Ballroom

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Name of Property

Date of Photograph: December 19, 2017

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0005.tif

Aerial perspective of building and Grand River Avenue – Beverly Court intersection, camera
facing -90 degrees vertical, Grand River Avenue at bottom.

6 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Beau Kromberg

Date of Photograph: October 5, 2016

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0006.tif

Grande Ballroom second level, dancefloor, camera facing north, stage at center is on
northwest wall.

7 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Leo Early

Date of Photograph: January 21, 2009

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0007.tif

Ex: Grand River elevation, Ballroom level window and tympanum, camera facing northeast.

8 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Leo Early

Date of Photograph: January 21, 2009

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0008.tif

Ex: Ornate column at promenade perimeter of dance floor, stage at northwest wall, camera
facing northwest.

Grande Ballroom

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9 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Leo Early

Date of Photograph: January 21, 2009

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0009.tif

Southeast wall of dance floor, promenade columns, spotlight portal in far office wall with
Beverly Court windows at far extent, camera facing southeast.

10 of 10

Name of Property: Grande Ballroom

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: Michigan

Name of Photographer: Leo Early

Date of Photograph: March 5, 2006

Location of Original Digital Files: Friends of the Grande Archive, 22634 Michigan Avenue,
Dearborn, Michigan 48124

MI_Wayne County_Grande Ballroom_0010.tif

Ballroom dance floor ceiling rosette.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.























Grande Ballroom

8952-8970 Grand River Avenue, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan





Grande Ballroom

8952-8970 Grand River Avenue, Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

