

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

218 Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, Detroit, Michigan 48226

Phone: (313) 224-3487 Fax: (313) 224-4336

e-mail: historic@detroitmi.gov



The Masonic Temple with Cass Park in the foreground. Photo: Aidan Wakley-Mulroney

Proposed Cass Park Local Historic District Final Report

By resolution dated November 25, 2014, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Cass Park Historic Local District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The proposed Cass Park Local Historic District consists of a collection of twenty-three buildings built between the early 1860s and the late 1920s, and a small historic city park. The Cass Park Local Historic District is located just north of Detroit's downtown business district in an area

known as the South Cass Corridor. The district is cut off from downtown by the east/west passage of the Chrysler Freeway (Interstate-75) to the south. It lies only two blocks west of Woodward Avenue, Detroit's primary thoroughfare. Woodward Avenue, Michigan Heritage Route and designated National Scenic Byway, cuts through the center of the city from north to south, dividing it into the east and west sides. Cass and Second Avenues, secondary north/south transportation routes, pass through the district. Second Avenue divides on either side of Cass Park before it continues northward toward Wayne State University and the New Center Area in midtown Detroit.

BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of the proposed Cass Park Local Historic District, shown in bold lines on the attached map, are as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of the centerline of Cass Avenue and the centerline of Ledyard Avenue; thence westerly along the centerline of Ledyard Avenue to the centerline of Second Avenue (East of Cass Park); thence northerly along Second Avenue (East of Cass Park) to the South line extended of Lot 17, Block 81 "Subdivision of Blocks 81 and 82 Cass Farm" as recorded in Liber 1 Page 93 of Plats, Wayne County Records; thence easterly along said Lot Line and its extension to the centerline of the north-south public alley first west of Cass Avenue; thence northerly along said alley centerline to a line extended being the north line of the south 5 feet of Lot 16 Block 81 "Subdivision of Blocks 81 and 82 Cass Farm" as recorded in Liber 1 Page 93 of Plats, Wayne County Records; thence westerly along above said line extended to the centerline of Second Avenue (East of Cass Park); thence northerly along said centerline of Second Avenue (East of Cass Park) to the centerline of Temple Avenue; thence easterly along said centerline of Temple Avenue to the centerline of Cass Avenue; thence northerly along said centerline of Cass Avenue to the centerline of Temple Avenue (East of Cass Avenue); thence easterly along said centerline of Temple Avenue to the north-south public alley first east of Cass Avenue; thence southerly along said alley centerline to the centerline of the east-west public alley first south of Temple Avenue; thence easterly along said alley centerline to the centerline of the north-south public alley first west of Park Avenue; thence northerly along said alley centerline to the extended south line of Lot 27, Block 75 "Plat of the Subdivision of Park Lots 72, 73, 74, 75 and 76 City of Detroit" as recorded in Liber 53, Page 196 Deeds, Wayne County Records; thence easterly along said Lot line and its extension to the centerline of Park Avenue; thence northerly along the centerline of Park Avenue to the extended north line of Lot 22, Block 74 "Plat of the Subdivision of Park Lots 72, 73, 74, 75 and 76 City of Detroit" as recorded in Liber 53, Page 196 Deeds, Wayne County Records; thence westerly along said Lot line and its extension to the centerline of the north-south public alley first west of Park Avenue; thence southerly along said alley centerline to the centerline of Temple Avenue; thence westerly along said centerline of Temple Avenue to the centerline of the north-south public alley first east of Cass Avenue; thence northerly along said alley centerline to the extended north line of Lot 33, Block 74 "Plat of the Subdivision of Park Lots 72, 73, 74, 75 and 76 City of Detroit" as recorded in Liber 53, Page 196 Deeds, Wayne County Records; thence westerly along said Lot line and its extension to the centerline of Cass Avenue; thence northerly along the centerline of Cass Avenue to the extended north line of Lot 2, Block 83 "Plat of part of the Cass Farm, Blocks 83 and 84 as recorded in Liber 1, Page 131 as recorded in Plats, Wayne County Records; thence westerly along said Lot line and its extension to the centerline of the north-south public alley first west of

Cass Avenue; thence northerly along said alley centerline to the centerline of the east-west public alley first north of Temple Avenue; thence westerly along said alley centerline to the extension of the easterly line of the west 40 feet of Lot 14, Block 83 "Plat of part of the Cass Farm, Blocks 83 and 84" Liber 1, Page 131 Plats, Wayne County Records; thence northerly along said easterly line of the west 40 feet of Lot 14 and its extension to the centerline of Charlotte Avenue; thence westerly along said centerline of Charlotte Avenue to the centerline of Second Avenue; thence southerly along the centerline of Second Avenue to the centerline of the east-west public alley first north of Temple Avenue; thence westerly along said alley centerline to the extended west line of Lot 21, Block 84 "Plat of part of the Cass Farm, Blocks 83 and 84" Liber 1, Page 131 Plats, Wayne County Records; thence southerly along said Lot line and its extension to the centerline of Temple Avenue; thence westerly along said centerline of Temple Avenue to the centerline of a north-south public alley (now an easement) first east of Third Avenue; thence southerly along said alley centerline to the centerline of Ledyard Avenue; thence easterly along said centerline of Ledyard Avenue to the west line of Lot 14, Block 79 "Plat of the Subdivision Block 79 and 80 of the Cass Farm" as recorded in Liber 1, Pages 92 and 93 Plats, Wayne County Records; thence southerly along said Lot line to the centerline of the east-west public alley first south of Ledyard Avenue; thence easterly along said alley centerline to the centerline of the north-south public alley, first west of Cass Avenue; thence southerly along said alley centerline to the extended south line of Lot 3, Block 79 "Plat of the Subdivision Block 79 and 80 of the Cass Farm" as recorded in Liber 1, Pages 92 and 93 Plats, Wayne County Records; thence easterly along said Lot line and its extension to the centerline of Cass Avenue; thence northerly along said centerline of Cass Avenue to the centerline of Ledyard Avenue and the Point of Beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries have been drawn to include the cohesive enclave of historic buildings surrounding and near Cass Park and the properties associated with them. Surrounding properties are largely vacant as a result of piecemeal demolitions. The boundaries for the proposed Cass Park Local Historic District are derived from the National Register boundaries, but are adjusted to exclude non-contributing buildings as well as vacant land created by the demolition of several buildings since the National Register designation in 2005, as well as to include several historically significant buildings at the northeastern edge of the district.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Cass Park Local Historic District is a collection of buildings representative of the development of the area from an exclusive residential neighborhood in the late 1800s to an important cultural and commercial district during the 1920s. The district is significant because of the wide array of architectural styles and the different uses of its buildings. Located within the district are important examples of residential architecture from the late 1800s such as the Alhambra Flats at 100-112 Temple. Later residential structures dating from the early 1900s are represented by the Ansonia Flats at 2909-23 Second and the group of three apartment buildings. The Cromwell, The Altadena and The Manhattan, at 2942 Second, 2952-2958 Second and 2966-72 Second. This collection of buildings, together with the adjacent Vernon Murphy at 487 Charlotte and the Boulevard Hotel at 2931-2933 Second, exemplifies the density of residential structures that once existed throughout the South Cass Corridor. The district also contains buildings significant to the history of Detroit's business community including the corporate

headquarters buildings for the Standard Accident Insurance Company and the Kresge Company. The district is also an important site for the location of headquarters for fraternal organizations represented by the Masonic Temple at 500 Temple and the Fort Wayne Hotel at 400-426 Temple.

The contents of the report are taken largely from the Cass Park National Register form (Listed February 2, 2005) prepared by Marilyn Florek of BVH Architecture, Inc., with the Historic Designation Advisory Board. Additional description has been added by HDAB staff.

HISTORY

The area encompassing the Cass Park Historic District was originally part of the early French “ribbon farms,” land granted to settlers in the early 1700s. A ribbon farm consisted of a narrow strip of land with river frontage of three hundred to nine hundred feet that then stretched back from the river one to three miles. The river frontage provided the farm with access to the river and transportation; the rear portions of the farm were generally woodlands. In 1808, the United States government fixed the boundaries of the original land claims of “ribbon farm,” which became known as the “private claims.” The Cass Park Historic District is located in Private Claim 55, most commonly known as the Cass Farm. Lewis Cass (1782-1866) purchased Private Claim 55 in 1816 from John, William and David Macomb. Cass, a brigadier general, had been recently named governor of the Territory of Michigan. Cass purchased the land to move his family from Ohio to Detroit, the territorial capital. His first house was located near the river on the north side of Larned between First and Second Avenues. Cass, who served as governor from 1813 to 1831, was a noted statesman and politician. During this time, and later as President Andrew Jackson’s Secretary of War, Cass was instrumental in the formation of many government policies. He was appointed United States envoy to France in 1836, elected Senator from Michigan in 1845, was an unsuccessful candidate for president on the Democratic ticket in 1848. In 1840, Cass built a spacious residence on the northwest corner of Fort and Cass Streets.

Lewis Cass began subdividing the front of his farm in 1836 with the sale of lots between Larned and the river. He proceeded to plat and offer for sale the sections between Larned and Michigan Avenues in 1841, north of Michigan Avenue in 1851 and north of Grand River Avenue in 1859. Cass Avenue formed the east edge of the Cass Farm. The area that includes the Cass Park NR Historic District began to be sold as lots after 1859. Attention was given to the physical appearance of streets in deed restrictions filed with the plat of the Cass Farm. Along the street right-of-way, thirty feet was reserved for sidewalk, shrubbery and ornamental purposes. This setback and the large urban lots encouraged the settlement of the area by professionals and skilled tradesmen.

In 1860, Lewis Cass deeded a section of land, just a little less than five acres, to the city to develop into a park “for public use and enjoyment” subject to the requirement that the land “be used and occupied as a park forever.” A further stipulation was that the city would maintain the park and that if the city neglected the conditions, the premises, with all improvements, would revert back to Cass or his heirs. The small park was bounded by Second; Ledyard, Cass and Bagg (later Temple) Avenues. The park and the surrounding area were platted by Henry Ledyard, Cass’s son-in-law and attorney. When the gift of the park land was presented to the Common Council, a controversy immediately sprang up. Alderman William Hale led the dissent, stating that the park was just a “mud-hole” that would end up being a financial imposition on the city

and that any improvements that the city made would mainly benefit Cass since it would raise the value of the surrounding property. The grant was eventually accepted by the council and Cass Park became a part of the collection of many small, beautiful parks scattered throughout the city. These parks included School, Randolph, East, Linden, Elton, Crawford, Stanton, Adelaide, Campau and Macomb Parks. A Committee on Parks was first appointed by the city in 1854; in 1863, a superintendent was appointed to serve during the summer season. In 1870, the parks came under the care of the Board of Public Works. Cass Park is the only one of these small parks that is still in existence today.

By 1870, Detroit was buzzing with the production of carriages, railroad cars, cast iron products, pharmaceuticals, seeds, tobacco, paints, and ships. From 1860 to 1870, the city grew by 74% from 45,000 people to 79,600 people. With the expanding population of the city came a corresponding expansion of the professional classes. The 1870 Fifth Ward tax rolls began to show an increase of development in the area of the Cass Park Historic District. The platting of the Cass Farm, together with the beginning of streetcar service along Woodward Avenue, Detroit's major thoroughfare, which ran parallel to the Cass Farm on the east, resulted in a northwest thrust of city expansion. The Detroit City Railroad Company began service in the summer of 1863 with streetcars running along Woodward Avenue. A second company, the Central Market, Cass Avenue and Third Street railway, began operation in 1873 providing service along Third Avenue, which ran to the west of the Cass Farm plats.

The area surrounding Cass Park soon developed into a fashionable residential neighborhood becoming one of Detroit's early streetcar suburbs. The Fifth Ward, the area west of Woodward Avenue and north of Grand River, encompassing the Cass Park Local Historic District, was sometimes referred to as "Piety Hill," according to Silas Farmer in his *History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan*. It was so named "for the reason that it is largely occupied by well-to-do citizens, who are supposed to largely represent the moral and religious portion of the community" (pg. 928). In 1875, the fence that had enclosed Cass Park was removed and the park was landscaped with a donation of new trees in observance of the nation's Centennial. By the 1880s, many of Detroit's illustrious citizens resided there including Jeremiah Vernor, of Vernor Brothers, insurance agents and brother of James Vernor (of ginger ale fame), and J.B. Wayne, treasurer of the Fulton Iron and Engine Works. The now demolished Romanesque Revival House of Edward W. Voigt at the southeast corner of Second Avenue and Ledyard became an architectural landmark in the neighborhood. Voigt was the founder of the Voigt Brewing Company, located nearby on Grand River. He was also one of the first investors in Edison Illumination Company and a founder of the Detroit Arts Museum. His residence was the only stone house located in the area and was said to be the first house in the city to have electricity installed. E.W. Voigt donated a fountain for Cass Park matching a fountain that he had previously seen on his travels to Germany. The erection of an electric arc light tower in the early 1880s made Cass Park one of the most popular summer evening resorts in the city. It was also well-known for concerts held in the park. Nearby, at the site of the former Cass Technical High School at Second Avenue and Fisher Freeway, was the site of the Detroit Riding Club, an institution reflecting the prestigious nature of the neighborhood. Two distinguished churches were located in the Cass Park (National) Historic District. First Baptist Church (also known as Cass Avenue Baptist Church) was built at the corner of Bagg (now Temple) and Cass Avenues. The Gothic structure served the residents of Cass Park and the surrounding neighborhood until 1913 when it was purchased by the Knights of Pythias who converted it into the Wayne Lodge

Hall of the Knights of Pythias, Lodge #104. The structure was then often referred to as Wayne Castle. Central Christian Church was a red sandstone Romanesque church that, designed by Malcomson and Higginbotham in 1891, stood as the northeast corner of Ledyard and Second Avenues across from Cass Park. Both churches have been demolished.

After the turn of the century, Cass Park continued to be the neighborhood of residents conspicuous in the roster of leading Detroit families. “New residents around the park included A.L. Patrick (contractor and builder), Edward Remick (music teacher), Marshall Godfrey (of Dean Godfrey & Company, decorators), who was twice a candidate for mayor; E.W. Stoddard (President of the Detroit Range Boiler and Steel Barrel Company) and William Yawkey, who made a fortune in lumber and was the father of William Yawkey, Jr. one of the early owners of the Detroit Tigers, C.H. Smith (partner of Mayor Hazen S. Pingree in the shoe manufacturing business), and Reverend David Burnham Tracy (founder of the Scottish Rite Bodies).

As the population of Detroit grew larger by the 1890’s and the availability of vacant lots decreased, housing densities increased dramatically. It was during this period that Cass Park saw the introduction of the apartment building as a respectable housing alternative. The development of the building in Detroit was due to Almon C. Varney ironically the major architect of single family homes in the city. Varney purchased a site in 1887 at the southeast corner of Park and Montcalm in the downtown section of the city. Five years later, in 1892, he built the Varney Apartment which was a four-story building containing sixteen apartment units. Despite the skepticism of his friends who thought that Detroit would never grow sufficiently for apartment structures to be popular like they were in the East, Varney’s investment had been a lucrative one. Just thirteen years later, Varney doubled the number of apartments in the building by cutting each in two, and he was even able to receive increased rent for each unit.

Between approximately 1895 and 1915, similar small scale apartment buildings each containing a small number of spacious apartments, became popular. These buildings were three to four stories tall, generally rectangular in shape filling the footprint of the lot, and designed in the popular architectural styles of the period such as Italian Renaissance Revival or Georgian Revival. Many of these buildings were referred to as flats, a popular term that was used to distinguish these apartments as more spacious residences. Most buildings had two flats per floor with a total of six to eight flats in a building. Flats were considered acceptable substitute living quarters on the same level of a single family house but without the worries of maintenance.

One of the first apartment buildings constructed in the Cass Park Local Historic District, and one of the oldest apartment buildings existing in the city of Detroit, is the handsome Alhambra Flats (100-112 Temple), designed by John R. Gentle in 1895. The six-story Alhambra was one of the largest buildings designed as flats, originally constructed with twenty-four spacious units. The building’s first occupants included Harvey S. Firestone, then the manager of the Columbus Buggy Company, and later the founder of the Firestone Tire Company. Other occupants included George A. Foster, local manager of the Standard Oil Company, and George H. Paine, secretary of the National Loan and Investment Company. The building was renamed the Alhambra Apartments in 1910.

The Cromwell Flats (2942 Second), designed by A. C. Varney, was constructed in 1905 and is an excellent example of the small scale, three-story apartment building with two flats per floor. The

Ansonia Flats (2909 Second) was built in 1908 and designed by William S. Joy. The Ansonia is a larger, four-story building constructed with three separate sections and containing a total of twenty spacious flats. The prestige of the Ansonia apartment building is indicated by its first tenants, which included John J. Hayes, manager of Hornblower and Weeks, members of the New York, Boston and Chicago stock exchanges; Arthur W. Kilpatrick of the legal firm, James and Kilpatrick; and Charles A. Wendell, the secretary/treasurer of the Colonial Laundry Company.

As Detroit developed as an industrial center during the 1910s, the ever-increasing population created an overwhelming need for more housing. Instead of flats, apartment buildings with smaller and more numerous units were constructed at an incredible rate in the neighborhood surrounding Cass Park. The architectural firm of Pollmar and Ropes was responsible for a substantial amount of the new apartment house and commercial work throughout the city. The Manhattan Apartments (2966 Second) built in 1905, and the Altadena Apartments (2952 Second) built in 1911, were both designed by the firm. Nearby commercial commissions included the Pierce Brothers Building at 3153-61 Woodward Avenue, former headquarters of the famous candy company.

The growth of the automotive industry in Detroit began to transform the city into one of the world's largest urban centers. The city had become the producer of two-third of the world's automobiles by 1915 with a population increase from almost 500,000 in 1910 to over 1.5 million in 1930. This tremendous expansion in size and population is reflected in the change in character of housing in the Cass Park Historic District during this period. Single family houses disappeared to be replaced by three and four story apartment buildings. Even the prestigious mansions surrounding Cass Park fell victim to the insatiable demand for apartments. Some of the apartment buildings constructed in the district during this period included the thirty-two unit Wilburn Apartments, later renamed the Vernon Murphy Apartments (487 Charlotte, 1916), the thirty-six unit Westchester Apartments (2764 Second, 1916 -demolished), the thirty-seven unit Cass Park Apartments (2714 Second, 1914), the sixty unit Prince Rupert Apartments (439 Temple, 1915), and the twenty-two unit Alden Apartments (145 Temple, 1922). Early occupants of these buildings were business professionals who were drawn to the neighborhood by the perception of Cass Park as a charming, dignified, peaceful area with spacious homes and apartments on tree-lined streets. The district was a residential oasis with close proximity to downtown and easy access to major transportation/commercial corridors of Woodward and Grand River Avenues.

By the 1920s, downtown development, which had spread northward from the river, reached the Cass Park area. The district, a prestigious residential neighborhood, now developed as a prime location for the headquarters of some of Detroit's most prominent businesses. The Standard Accident Insurance Company (640 Temple) was the first to erect their headquarters on Cass Park in 1921. Standard Accident was one of Detroit's prestigious insurance companies, founded in 1884 by many of the city's most respected citizens including Dexter M. Ferry, Francis Palms, Simon J. Murphy, W.C. Yawkey, David Whitney, Jr., and Traugott Schmidt. Dexter M. Ferry was the company's first president and his son, Dexter M. Ferry, Jr. succeeded his father in the position. The company previously had its headquarters in the downtown Penobscot Building, but in 1920 hired one of Detroit's most noted architects, Albert Kahn, to design a new eight story headquarters building. Even though Cass Park was still considered suburban to the downtown area, the decision to move there was based on the beauty and tranquility of the neighborhood.

The relocation of the company led the way for further commercial development on Cass Park.

During the late 1910s, Detroit's Masonic orders, which had outgrown its old lodge headquarters downtown on Lafayette, had been searching for a new site on which to build a larger facility. By 1920, they had acquired an adequate portion of land on Bagg Street (later Temple Avenue) including the former home of the Reverend David Burnham Tracy. Construction on the monumental Masonic Temple (500 Temple) on the north side of Cass Park began in 1920 and was completed in 1926 overwhelmingly changing the character of Cass Park. Designed by George D. Mason and company, the building was a giant ledge hall complex built for Detroit's Masonic bodies, including the oldest lodge of Masons in Michigan. The decision to build on Bagg was made because the site guaranteed a splendid outlook on Cass Park that would forever give an unobstructed approach to the Temple. In addition, Lewis Cass, had been a former Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge. The Temple was built with three separate structures, including a vast, three-level auditorium. It is the largest Masonic Temple ever constructed in the world and one of the most ornate and structurally complex buildings of its kind ever constructed. The temple also served as a civic center for the city and soon became one of Detroit's most important destinations for cultural and social events.

In 1921, the Detroit Burns Club donated a statue of the Scottish poet, Robert Burns that was erected at the north end of Cass Park. The bronze statue of Burns on a granite base is a copy of a statue at Ayr, Scottish artist George A. Lawson. The dedication ceremonies in 1921 included a parade led by Walter Scott, a descendant of the Scottish poet and novelist Sir Walter Scott. Since that time, a ceremony commemorating Burns is held each year on his birthday by the St. Andrew's Society.

In 1922, the Michigan Club planned an elaborate club building comparable to the Detroit Athletic Club, to be built on the corner of Second and Ledyard. The facility, designed by Smith, Hinchman and Grylls, was never built, but the fact that it was planned for this area shows the changing attitude toward Cass Park as a desirable real estate location for large, multi-story business-oriented buildings.

In 1926, the Knights of Pythias demolished its lodge headquarters, the former Cass Avenue Baptist Church at the corner of Temple and Cass Avenues, to build a new eleven story headquarters building, directly adjacent to the Masonic Temple. The Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization with roots originating during the Civil War, constructed its headquarters together with a hotel of lodging for Pythians visiting from out-of-town. The building, called the Fort Wayne Hotel, also welcomed non-member guests. The hotel remained under Pythian ownership until the late 1930s when it was sold to private owners. Because of its location next to the Masonic Temple, the Fort Wayne Hotel was legendary for housing many performers and celebrities who performed in the Temple's auditorium.

The Kresge Building was another monumental headquarters building to be constructed on Cass Park. Commissioned by Sebastian S. Kresge, founder of the Kresge Corporation, designed by Albert Khan, the building occupied 250,000 square feet and the entire length of the block facing the west side of Cass Park. The Kresge Corporation started in 1898 as a single low-price store and grew to a major national retail chain. It moved to Cass Park in 1927 from its first headquarters building, which was located on Grand Circus Park in the downtown area.

The exclusiveness of Cass Park forced smaller businesses to locate along the more heavily traveled streets such as Cass Avenue that bordered the district. The building at 2930 Cass was constructed in 1915 by A.G. Riesterer for his drug store on the first floor and the Riesterer Apartments on the second and third floors. Albert Kahn designed a two story, film exchange building at 2949 Cass in 1922 which housed the Lasky Corporation that later became a part of the Paramount Pictures Distributing Corporation. In 1923 a three story commercial building (146-166 Temple) was constructed at the busy intersection of Temple and Cass Avenues. The building had storefronts on the first floor and professional tenants such as doctors and dentists on the second and third floors. The increased use of the automobile facilitated the construction of the Will Mar Garage at 131 Temple in 1924. A one story, multiple storefront building was constructed in 1925 at 2906-14 Cass Avenue which housed a grocery, dry cleaners and restaurant. Although development in the area died with the depression, smaller companies continued to move to the Cass Park vicinity. In 1936, William F. Voigt, president of the Voigt Land Company son of E.W. Voigt, prominent businessman and founder of the Voigt Brewery, constructed a film exchange building at 479 Ledyard. (The massive Romanesque Voigt house stood next door at Second and Ledyard.) The building was first occupied by Paramount Pictures, Inc. and included a thirty-five seat theater which still exists in the building today. In the 1960s the building became the home of the Michigan Chronicle, Detroit's first black owned and operated newspaper. The newspaper was founded in 1936 by John Sengstacke, whose uncle owned The Chicago Defender one of the largest black-owned newspapers in the country at that time. Sengstacke hired Louis Martin away from the Defender and with only \$135.00 to start the new newspaper persuaded him to become the first editor. Longworth Quinn later took over the job and was editor for forty-seven years. The Michigan Chronicle was purchased in 2003 by a new group of investors who have since developed the largest black newspaper chain in the country whose holdings included the Michigan Front Page, the Pittsburgh Courier, the Memphis Tri-State Defender and the Chicago Defender.

In the 1940s war-time manufacturing brought a burgeoning population, resulting in multiple dwelling units being subdivided further to house factory workers employed in the defense plants. In the years since the 1950s, the Cass Park area has declined again in economic terms, becoming home to a transient student and permanent poverty-level population. An example of the neighborhood's evolution is provided by the Alhambra Apartments. In 1927, the Alhambra Apartment was renamed the Embassy Hotel competing with the Fort Wayne Hotel and the many other apartment hotels that were being constructed in the area. The building was subdivided in the 1950s into forty-one units and by the 1970s, had become a substandard apartment building. Although a few of the apartment buildings around Cass Park, such as the Ansonia Apartments, maintained decent living accommodations, many fell into disrepair or were abandoned.

Throughout the 1950s-1970s, a number of charitable organizations located in the South Cass Corridor/Midtown as a result of the neighborhood becoming one of the poorest in economic terms in Detroit. The Mariner's Inn at 445 Ledyard was built in 1955 for the Episcopal Diocese of Detroit. The Inn originated downtown in the early part of the twentieth century as a shelter and treatment center for alcoholic sailors. It was founded by the Episcopal City Mission Society and was operated in cooperation with Mariners Church, an independent Anglican church located on Jefferson Avenue in downtown Detroit (listed NR). Although sailors were housed in a nearby building owned by trustees, there were many instances where sailors slept on the church benches.

During the mid-1950s, the church stood directly in the path of development plans for a new civic center that included the construction of Cobo Hall, Ford Auditorium and the (former) Veterans' Memorial Building. In 1955 the church was moved 880 feet to its present location. That same year the Episcopal City Mission Society decided to build a new dormitory for the Mariners Inn. It was relocated to Cass Park neighborhood and continued operation in association with Mariners Church. By the 1970s, however, legal differences between the Episcopal Diocese and Mariners Church caused a division between the two religious organizations. Although no longer affiliated with the church; Mariners Inn continued to operate as a substance abuse center for men until it closed. The building still has its emblem in the upper front section of the façade of a ship with a cross-like mast and an anchor, the latter symbolic of hope as well as the earlier maritime history.

The physical separation of the Cass Corridor from downtown Detroit by the construction of I-75 (Fisher Freeway) only hastened the decline of the area. Many buildings were abandoned and left vacant. The area surrounding the Cass Park Historic District contains many empty lots, a result of piecemeal wide scale demolition that had its beginnings in the 1950s. As business followed the population movement to the suburbs during the 1960s and 1970s, the buildings in the Cass Park area were often taken over non-profit organizations or city agencies. The Kresge Corporation donated its building to the Detroit Institute of Technology after Kresge moved its administrative offices to Troy, Michigan in 1972. After the closing of the Detroit Institute of Technology, the building was renovated and became known as the Metropolitan Center for High School Technology in the early 1980s. The former Kresge Building is now owned by Wayne State University and houses various university departments and the City of Detroit's Water and Sewage Analytical Laboratories. Wayne County purchased the former Standard Accident Insurance Company building for governmental offices in the early 1980s. The Fort Wayne Hotel was renovated during the 1960s becoming the American Hotel, but was abandoned in the early 1980s. The Masonic Temple continues to be operated by the Masons who have remained strongly committed to the massive structure. The Temple remains an important cultural center within the city of Detroit. By the mid-2000 the Cass Park district began seeing signs of renewal with the renovations of several of the existing apartment buildings and the construction of a new Cass Technical High School on the southern end of the park. In 2013 Olympia Development began plans for a new Events Center which will once again transform the area.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION and LIST OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Cass Park

Planned in 1860 and open for public use by 1870, Cass Park is a contributing resource.

Robert Burns

Located within Cass Park, this is a 1920 bronze standing figure of Burns on a granite pedestal, by George A. Lawson, a Scottish artist. Inset bronze reliefs on the sides and back of the pedestal illustrate verse from various poems by Burns.

Cass Avenue

2906 Cass Avenue

This Art Deco building, the Temple Bar, features glass block windows and porcelain-enamel

steel panels. It is reflective of the later, mid-20th century development of the Cass Park area.

2930 Cass Avenue

Three-story, four bay, brown brick commercial building, 1915. Built by Riesterer, the building housed his drug store on the first floor and ten apartments known as the Riesterer Apartments on the second and third floors. The decorative elements of the building include panels of green tile in the parapet and iron balconets on two of the upper floor windows. Above the boarded storefront is a multi-light transom with fanlight. The arch with keystone and voisoirs above the entrance to the apartments hold a divided fanlight.

2949 Cass Avenue

Two-story, three bay red brick and reinforced concrete commercial building, 1922, Albert Kahn, architect. The building was originally designed by Kahn as a film exchange building. The first floor windows have been filled in with concrete block. The three bays are divided by projecting piers with a set of three windows in each bay on the second floor.

Charlotte Avenue

487 Charlotte

The Vernon Murphy Apartments was built in 1916. is a three-story Arts and Crafts inspired building with wooden brackets, decorative tile, and brick quoins.

Ledyard Street

445 Ledyard — Mariners Inn

Two-story, rectangular limestone and concrete trimmed, brick office building, 1955, Charles Vogel, architect.

This modern, mid-century office building was constructed for the non-profit agency whose name appears in raised letters in a large stone panel over the entrance, MARINERS INN – AN AGENCY OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH. Above the door surround is a medallion with a ship and cross that symbolizes the organization.

457 Ledyard — John H. Avery House

Three one-half story, three bay, red brick, Italianate house, 1878, with third floor likely added c. 1900-1910. This house was constructed for John H. Avery, prominent businessman and heir to Newell Avery lumberman and real estate dealer. Windows on the first and second floors of the front façades have elaborate carved stone hoods; the third floor windows have flat arches embellished with stone. A denticulated stringcourse separates the second and third floors. The overhanging flat roof has a modillioned cornice that encircles the entire house. The house is now owned by neighboring non-profit agency, Mariners Inn.

479 Ledyard — Michigan Chronicle

Two-story, three bay, brick office building with a limestone Moderne façade, 1936, H.G. Winter, builder.

Originally constructed as a film exchange building, the building is now the home of *The Michigan Chronicle*, Detroit's first black-owned newspaper. The front façade is composed of horizontal stone bands and large metal framed windows separate d by ridged vertical cast stone

piers or pilasters which also flank the entrance doorway on the east end of the building. The name MICHIGAN CHRONICLE appears in raised letters between the first and second floor.

Park Avenue

2753 Park — William E. Cole House

This building has existed since the 1880s but has been altered. The two-story house has been converted, but the addition of a 1910s facade, into a three-story Georgian Revival-style apartment building.

Second Avenue

2714 Second Avenue — Cass Park Apartments

Four and one-half story, three bay, brown brick apartment building, 1914.

The facade of this building with its four-tiered central portico displays a vernacular Georgian Revival/Arts-and-Crafts design with a prominently profiled overhanging cornice. The center bay consists of covered porches with decorative metal rails supported by paneled brick piers that rise the full height of the building. Originally built with thirty-seven units, the building retains its original nine-over-one double hung windows.

2727 Second Avenue — S.S. Kresge Company / Metropolitan Center for High Technology Five and one-half story, brick and limestone office building, 1928-30, Albert Kahn, architect, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Built as the world headquarters for the S.S. Kresge Company, this massive Art Deco building, an outstanding example of the later commercial architecture of Albert Kahn, has a broad façade that fronts Cass Park's entire west side. The building has a projecting five and one half story central pavilion flanked by four story wings with forward-projecting ends. The symmetrical fenestration is broken by three-story fluted Doric pilasters interspersed with carved relief blocks. The fourth floor is visually separated from the lower levels by a bandcourse and different fenestration. The building is capped with a standing-seam copper Mansard roof decorated with terra cotta cresting.

2900-23 Second Avenue — Ansonia Flats / Ansonia Apartments

Four and one-half story, yellow brick apartment building divided into three sections with three separate entrances, 1908, William S. Joy, architect.

The building, originally constructed with twenty units, sits on the northwest corner of Second and Temple with two of the entrances on Second and the third on Temple. The Georgian Revival Ansonia Apartments has an undulating appearance with multiple bays of different composition. The façade facing Temple has three slightly curving "bow front" bays and a semi-octagonal corner bay. The façade facing Second Avenue has three round bays and one square bay. The carved stone entrance surrounds have recessed arches and the name Ansonia in raised letters on the door heads. The old addresses are carved into the stone door jambs. The building has a denticulate stringcourse between the third and fourth floors and a heavy modillion cornice.

2931-33 Second Avenue — Boulevard Hotel

Three and one-half story, brown brick apartment building, 1924.

The building was constructed in the Craftsman style and originally had thirty-six units. The façade is composed of five bays with the central bay flanked by two projecting bays that have

Flemish gables. The central bay has a gable covered entrance that was later enclosed with shingle siding. The central bay has nine-over-nine windows, the remaining bays have unique eight-over-two sash windows. The roof has exposed rafters ends that support overhanging eaves.

2942 Second Avenue — Cromwell Flats / Cromwell Apartments

Three and one-half story, three bay, brown brick apartment building, 1904, A.C. Varney, architect.

The Cromwell is one of three apartment buildings constructed on the east side of Second at Peterboro that complement each other in style and setback. The building displays Jacobethan elements including the stone entrance surround with the name Cromwell carved in the door head. The central entrance bay is flanked by three-sided window bays with alternating bands of brick and stone. The center bay has two arched windows each on the second and third floors. The building has brick quoins at the corners and a parapet detailed with blind pointed arches.

2952-58 Second Avenue — Altadena Apartments

Four and one-half story, brown brick apartment building, 1911, Pollmar & Ropes, architects. Originally designed with twelve units, the building has two entrances at street level. Located between the Cromwell and the Manhattan apartment buildings, the Altadena closely matches its neighbors in setback and design. The entrance surrounds have elaborate Jacobethan detailing with the name Altadena in raised letters in both door heads. Two three-sided window bays rising from elaborately detailed metal corbel panels run from the second to the fourth floor on both ends of the facade. The façade has metal detailing including the bay window spandrels and the paneled cornice.

2966-72 Second Avenue — Manhattan Apartments

Four and one-half story, five bay, brown brick apartment building, 1905, Pollmar & Ropes, architects.

Like its neighbors, the Cromwell and the Altadena, the Manhattan displays Jacobethan detailing in its design. The main entrance sits in the center of the building with an elaborate door surround with the name Manhattan in raised letters in the door head. The second to fourth floors have three-sided window bays that flank the central entrance bay. Decoration includes green painted metal spandrels in the window bays, a cornice detailed with quatrefoils, and a battlemented parapet.

Temple Avenue

100-112 Temple — Alhambra Flats / The Embassy

Six-story, brick and stone, Romanesque Revival apartment building, 1895, J.R. Gentle, architect. The building sits on the northwest corner of Temple and Park. The first and second floors of the east and south elevations are faced in coursed rock-faced stone. Both elevations have recessed entrances under heavy arched doorways. The third through sixth floors are finished in pink brick. The second through sixth floors have rounded bays on the corners and a three-sided bay in the center of the south elevation. Both elevations have recessed open porches supported by single columns; the south porches are covered with a fire escape. The windows are single pane with transom, arched on the first floor and squared on the remaining floors. At the top of the building is a patterned frieze with a finely denticulated stringcourse. The cornice of the building has been removed.

131 Temple — Will Mar Garage

This is a two-story, four-bay brick window with a flat roof. The first floor consists of a central entrance flanked by large window openings, now enclosed, above continuous masonry sills, and a truck bay covered by a rolling metal door at the west end of the building. The cornices and pilasters as well as any ornamental details have been removed from the building.

145 Temple — The Alden

Three and one-half story, brick, with limestone Renaissance Revival facade, apartment building, 1922, George P. Rogers, builder.

Originally built with twenty-two units, a brick and tile addition to the building was constructed six months later with another twenty units. The entire front façade is composed of limestone with Renaissance detailing including festoon reliefs, a denticulated cornice and a balustrade parapet. The entrance to the building is set in a Classic door surround with stylized columns that support an entablature with a rounded pediment. The frieze of the entablature is inscribed with the name ALDEN. The door surround supports two posts with urns and a window with a bracketed pedimented hood. The first floor has arched window openings with French doors and engaged balustrades beneath the windows. The remaining windows are eight-over-eight, one-over-one, or eight-over-one double hung.

146-166 Temple

Three-story, reinforced concrete commercial building, 1923.

This Classical Revival commercial building sits on the northeast corner of Temple and Cass Avenues with its length consisting of seven bays along Temple and its depth consisting of two bays along Cass. The first story is comprised of storefronts and display windows, most of which have been filled in. The second and third floors have 1/1 double hung sash windows in groups of three along Temple and in pairs along Cass. The window groupings are separated by pilasters that span both stories. The pilasters are decorated at both the top and bottom with paterae. Ornamental paneled spandrels separate the second and third floor windows. There is a simple dentiled cornice

400-426 Temple — Fort Wayne Hotel / American Hotel

Eleven-story, brown brick and terra cotta, three-part stacked vertical block building, 1926, Ellington and Weston, architects.

The Fort Wayne Hotel was originally constructed for the Knights of Pythias as a hotel and lodge headquarters. The building sits on the northwest corner of Temple and Cass Avenues. Its design reflects Italian Renaissance styling. The first and second floors are finished in smooth ashlar. The main entrance is in the center of the front façade facing Temple but the door and all first floor storefronts have been altered. A decorative polychromatic band of red and blue terra cotta separates the ninth and tenth floors. The tenth and eleventh floor windows have decorative stone surrounds. A stone cornice supports a balustrade parapet. The windows are 1/1 double hung sash with single windows at the corners of the building and groupings of two and three windows throughout the main wall sections.

500 Temple — Detroit Masonic Temple

Fraternal lodge headquarters building and auditorium, 1922, George D. Mason, architect, listed

on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Temple is a massive English Gothic complex comprised of three distinct structures that are unified by its exterior architectural treatment. The complex consists of two towers, the fourteen-story Ritualistic Building and the ten-story Shrine Club, which are connected by the seven-story Auditorium Building. The three structures are sheathed in Indiana limestone with architectural sculpture by prominent local artist Corrado Parducci. The Ritualistic Building is home to twenty-six lodges and contains a number of ornately decorated meeting rooms, most of which were designed by Anthony DiLorenzo Studios of New York. The 210 foot tower of the Ritualistic Building dominates the neighborhood and can be seen from a distance in many parts of the city. The Auditorium Building is a vast four-level, entertainment and recreational complex consisting of the Drill Hall, the Main Auditorium, the Fountain Ballroom and the Crystal Ball Room. The Shrine Club was built for exclusive use by the members with a lounge, gymnasium and eighty guest rooms. The structure is the largest Masonic Temple in the world and one of the most ornate and structurally complex buildings of its kind ever built.

640 Temple — Standard Accident Insurance Building / Wayne County Department of Social Services

Eight-story, seven bay, brick and stone, two part vertical block office building designed in the Classical Revival style, 1920, Albert Kahn, architect.

The first and second floors have sets of three double hung windows divided by stone pilasters which support a frieze inscribed with the name STANDARD ACCIDENT INSURANCE COMPANY. The windows are set in metal frames and separated between the floors by metal panels. The remaining floors have sets of two 1/1 double hung windows. The main entrance has an austere Classic door surround with a cartouche in the center of the door head. The cornice is decorated with an anthemion patterned copper band under a slightly stepped parapet.

CRITERIA

The proposed Cass Park historic district appears to meet National Register Criteria A, B, and C as well as the following criteria adopted by the Historic Designation Advisory Board

- (1) Sites, buildings, structures or archeological sites where cultural, social, spiritual, economic, political or architectural history of the community, city, state or nation is particularly reflected or exemplified.
- (2) Sites, buildings, structures, or archeological sites which are identified with historic personages or with important events in community, city, state or national history.
- (3) Buildings or structures which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural specimen, inherently valuable as a representation of a period, style or method of construction
- (4) Notable work(s) of a master designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age.

COMPOSITION OF THE HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

The Historic Designation Advisory Board has nine members, who are residents of Detroit, and three ex-officio members. The appointed members are Kwaku Atari, Melanie A. Bazil, Keith

A.Dye, Zené Frances Fogel-Gibson, Edward Francis, Calvin Jackson, Harriet Johnson, Victoria Bird-Olivier, and Kari Smith. The ex-officio members, who may be represented by members of their staff, are the Director of the Historical Department, the Director of the City Planning Commission, and the Director of the Planning and Development Department. Ad hoc members for this study are Francis Grunow and Michael J. Boettcher.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baist, G. Baist's Real Estate Atlas. Philadelphia: Baist Publishing, 1911 and 1923.

Burton, Clarence M., ed., The City of Detroit, Michigan. Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922.

“The Cass Park.” Detroit Free Press, June 2, 1860.

Carlin, George B., “Backward Glances-A Column of Real Estate Reminiscences.” The Detroit News, 1926-1928.

“Common Council-Report of the Commissioners on the Cass Park.” Detroit Free Press, July 11, 1860.

Farmer, Silas. The History of Detroit, Wayne County, and Michigan, (1894). Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1969.

Ferry, W. Hawkins, The Buildings of Detroit, A History. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968.

The Historic Masonic Temple of Detroit. <<http://themasonic.com/>>.

Ingalls, Rev. Richard W. – rector of Historic Mariners Church. Personal interview. March 31, 2004.

The Legacy of Albert Kahn, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1970.

Logan, Sam – owner of The Michigan Chronicle. Personal interview. March 30, 2004.

Mann, James, N. “The E.W. Voight Home and Its Reflection of the History of Detroit.” Diss. Wayne State University, 1969.

Masonic Temple in Detroit. Detroit Masonic Temple Association. December 31, 2003. <http://detroitmta.lodges.gl-mi.org>

“Masonic Temple.” “Kresge Building.” Michigan Historic Sites On-Line. Michigan State Preservation Office, Michigan Historical Center. <www.michigan.gov>

Nawrocki, Dennis. Art In Detroit Public Spaces. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980.

Polk, R.L. Detroit City Directories. Detroit: R.L. Polk Publishing, 1883-1974.

Resource Assessment, Inc. (RAI). “Archeological Reports from the City of Detroit.” Unpublished, 1980s.

Robinson, E. Atlas of City of Detroit. New York: E. Robinson, 1885.

Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Detroit, Michigan. New York: 1884- present.

South Cass Corridor Intensive Level Survey, University Cultural Center Association, 2002.

Stark, George W. The Best Policy- The Story of Standard Accident Insurance Company. Detroit: Power & Company, 1959.

Wayne County Register of Deeds, Tract Index.

Weeks, J.W. Detroit City Directory. Detroit: J.W. Weeks Publishing, 1873- 82.

White, Lee A. “Cass Park- Its Story.” The Michigan Clubman. Oct., 1922, Vol. IV, No. 7.

Cover photo: Aidan Wakely-Mulroney, Creative Commons license.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/>

Proposed Cass Park Local Historic District

- proposed historic district boundary
- parcel boundary

