

# City of Detroit

## CITY COUNCIL HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

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**DRAFT**

### **Proposed Garfield Building Historic District**

#### **Final Report**

By a resolution dated December 8, 1999, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Garfield Building Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The proposed Garfield Building Historic District consists of the five-story retail/residential loft building located on the northeast corner of Woodward Avenue and Garfield Avenue, addressed as 4612 Woodward Avenue, approximately two miles north of the center of downtown Detroit. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

**Boundaries:** the boundaries of the proposed district are outlined in heavy black on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the west, the centerline of Woodward Avenue;

On the south, the centerline of Garfield Avenue;

On the east, a line 110 feet east of and parallel to the west lot line of lots 3 and 4 of Hubbard and King's Sub of Park Lot 32 and Part of Lot 33, Liber 7, Page 20, Plats, WCR, and,

On the north, the north line of Lot 4 of Hubbard and King's Sub of Park Lot 32 and Part of Lot 33, Liber 7, Page 20, Plats, WCR.

**HISTORY:** The Garfield Building derives its historical significance from its association with the development of Woodward Avenue and the expansion of the City of Detroit into the automotive capital of the nation. It represents the type of speculative retail/commercial development catering to the auto industry in early twentieth century Detroit, and is one of the few surviving buildings of its period and scale on Woodward Avenue between Grand Circus Park and Grand Boulevard that typify that era. Also contributing to its significance are its architect, Albert Kahn, architect for the automobile age, and its original owner, Edwin S. George, an auto enthusiast who played an important role in the development of Woodward Avenue, Detroit's major thoroughfare. Mr. George was also known for his philanthropic endeavors

centered around aiding children and the Presbyterian Church; the Garfield Building is a reminder of his contributions to the City of Detroit.

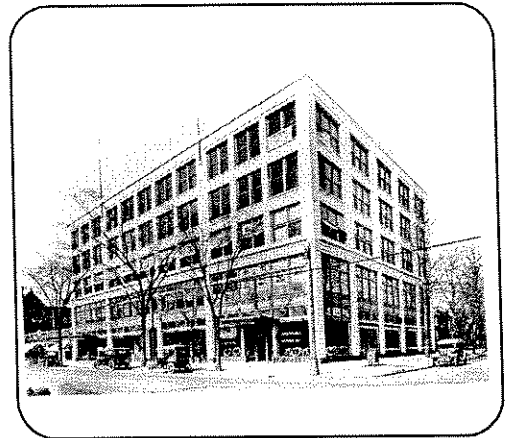
After the fire of 1805, Judge Augustus B. Woodward arrived in Detroit as one of the first Judges of the Michigan Territory. He proceeded to forestall rebuilding until a plan could be drawn, upon which orderly development of the city would be based. This plan, referred to as the "Woodward Plan," was influenced by Pierre L'Enfant's plan for Washington D.C., Woodward's former home, drawn just fourteen years before. Woodward incorporated the diagonal streets of the Washington plan but in his plan for Detroit the diagonals radiated outward from a series of hexagons, creating broad vistas and unique public spaces. The major thoroughfare extending from the Detroit River northward was Woodward Avenue. Originating nearest to the Detroit River, a thriving commercial center developed. From the mid-nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, Woodward Avenue north of Grand Circus Park developed into a highly desirable residential thoroughfare. But the advent and growth of the automobile industry transformed the city virtually overnight. The City's population increased dramatically in the first quarter of the century, as the number of people dependent on the manufacture and sale of the automobile ballooned. Detroit's population rose from 285,740 in 1900 to 465,766 in 1910 to 993,729 in 1920. The mansions on Woodward Avenue were largely replaced by commercial development as their owners moved further away from downtown, freed to do so by their possession of the automobile.

At the time when Edwin S. George began accumulating land on Woodward Avenue, Garfield Avenue was considered to be far out of the city center. The Woodward street car line made downtown accessible, although Woodward north of High Street (Fisher Freeway) remained largely undeveloped for commercial uses. An article appearing in the *Detroit Free Press* in 1906 describes business activity above Grand Circus Park as just beginning to take hold.

The Edwin S. George Building was designed as a two-story building by Albert Kahn in 1908 (Kahn Job #370). The majority of its first tenants were involved in the automobile industry as parts suppliers and manufacturers. B.F. Goodrich & Company, rubber goods; C.F. Splitdorf, magnetos, electric specialties and spark plugs; Harry H. Bailey & Company, auto parts; Wheeler & Schebler, carburetors; RIV Company, ball bearings; Prest-O-Lite Company, gas tanks; and the Hartford Machine Screw Company were among the early tenants occupying the storefronts.

By 1914, Mr. George was known as the largest owner of Woodward Avenue frontage. His holdings on Woodward Avenue were more extensive than any other individual. He began acquiring choice parcels on Woodward before the development boom, which was largely due to the success of the automobile, specifically the model "T". He concentrated his real estate holdings between Grand Circus Park and the Boulevard. It was said that at one time, his ownership along this frontage was one-quarter mile.

The three upper stories of the Edwin S. George Building were added in 1914 (Kahn Job #391), and the building became known as the “Garfield Building” shortly thereafter. Still, it housed offices and retail outlets of many industrial suppliers in the late teens and early 1920's. Among the storefront occupants were Pennsylvania Rubber Company, manufacturers of vacuum cup tires; Kingstone Carburetor and Coil Company; E.T. Barnum Iron & Wire Works; and Standard Parts Company, auto parts. Offices above were occupied by manufacturers representatives, engineering labs, and automobile organization's offices, including the Lincoln Highway Association, the Detroit Auto Dealers Association, and the National Association of Purchasing Agents. Individuals or firms providing professional services also occupied the building, including Work and Fretz, traffic managers, and Patrick H. Carey, construction engineer. George's office and the office serving the building occupied space on the fifth floor.



**Garfield Building, c. 1915**  
Credit: Albert Kahn, Architects & Engineers, Detroit, MI

*Michigan Manufacturer and Financial Record* of 1920 reported that Woodward Avenue had overtaken Jefferson Avenue as the center of automobile sales in Detroit. As the automobile passed through its experimental phase and became a commercial reality with the help of mass production, Woodward Avenue between Grand Circus Park and Grand Boulevard became Detroit's “Automobile Row.” It was on Woodward, already Detroit's busiest thoroughfare, that most of the big sales establishments founded headquarters. North of Grand Circus Park to Grand Boulevard and beyond, Woodward was dotted with all kinds of automotive-related establishments, including show rooms, sales and office buildings, suppliers, and auto, truck, tire and accessory firms.

In the late 1920's and early 1930's, vacancies occurred in the Garfield Building as the Depression set in. Although several manufacturer's agents and tool and parts businesses were listed as occupants in the city directories, other types of businesses began to occupy space. Notable ones were the Michigan Children's Aid Society, a special project of Edwin George; the Central District Protective Association, the Woodward Avenue Improvement Association, a furniture store, household goods store, Western Union Telephone Office, commercial photographers, general contractors and the office of the City of Detroit's Rapid Transit Commission. Many storefronts went vacant by the early 1930's. Edwin George sold the property in 1942 to a property investment company. The Garfield Building became home to Wayne County Community College in the 1970's; it had been largely vacant since that institution moved to its downtown location in the late 1970's until 1999, when it was converted into retail space on the first floor and 56 residential loft units on floors two through five.

**Albert Kahn** was established as Detroit's leading industrial architect by the time he was

commissioned to design the Edwin S. George Building in 1908. He had used the reinforced concrete frame successfully in Packard Plant #10 on East Grand Boulevard in 1905 for Henry B. Joy's Packard Motor Car Company, and that became the standard for industrial design. Perhaps George's association with Kahn stemmed from the Packard plant, for George was the proprietor of Standard Automobile Company, distributor for Packard Motor Car Company. The first office building of concrete construction in Detroit was Kahn's Trussed Concrete Building, built in 1907 on the corner of Lafayette and Wayne (demolished 1957). The Trussed Concrete Steel Company, (owned by Julius Kahn, Albert's brother) and Albert Kahn's architectural offices were housed in that building for many years.

Other reinforced concrete-framed commercial buildings on Woodward Avenue designed by Kahn around the same time as the Edwin S. George Building were the Grinnell Building (1908) and the Woodward Building (1915), both south of Grand Circus Park, and the Ford Motor Company Sales Office (1913) on the corner of East Grand Boulevard and Woodward Avenue. The frames of all four were covered in terra cotta with pleasing Renaissance detailing. Another notable automobile-related building, the B.F. Goodrich Building on Woodward at Hancock, was designed by Kahn in approximately 1919. Its frame is faced with brick and decorative tile.

**Edwin S. George** was born in Slatington, Pennsylvania on September 23, 1873. He ventured to Detroit as a young man in 1890 and was employed by Annis and Miller, furriers. He continued in the business with the junior partner, William H. Miller, until 1897, when he began his own business. Soon after, he bought out the business of Walter Buhl & Company and merged it with his own, resulting in his becoming a wholesale and retail dealer, importer and exporter of furs. He remained as such until 1910, when he left the fur business altogether. George was also the proprietor of Standard Automobile Company, distributors of Packard automobiles, with offices and a garage on Woodward Avenue, from about 1906, and held large real estate interests by 1908. In fact, in 1914 he gave up his automobile holdings so that he could devote his full attention to real estate.

Mr. George married Bessie Scotten, the daughter of Oren Scotten, in 1899. Oren Scotten was the brother of Daniel Scotten, wealthy manufacturer of tobacco products. The Georges made their residence at 221 Vinewood in the Hubbard Farms neighborhood just south of the Daniel Scotten estate (replaced by Fisher Freeway). Later, the Georges kept a residence in Detroit and one in Bloomfield Hills named "Erdenheim", a house designed for them by Albert Kahn in 1908. Kahn also designed the stables, a cottage, and a cow barn on the property. Mr. George's major recreational pursuits were "motoring" and farming. However, his business and recreation were interrupted by World War I; he enlisted in the Officers' Reserve Corps in December, 1916 and received the commission as captain in that organization in 1917, assisting in the organization of base hospitals. In October of that year he was ordered to Washington to do a job that seemed to be right up his alley - he purchased motor trucks and automobile equipment for the Signal Corps. In 1918, George was promoted to lieutenant colonel in the Signal Corps, and was made full colonel in July, 1918. He became chief of the motor branch, Motors and Vehicles Division, before being discharged in 1919.

Mr. George continued with his real estate interests after the war, becoming the expert on Woodward Avenue values. He became active in civic affairs, as a director of the Board of Commerce, and was an advocate of the "good roads movement." He also helped found the Automobile Club of Detroit and the Bloomfield Hills Country Club. In 1923, the Detroit architectural firm of George D. Mason built a large English Neo-Tudor style home for the Georges, named "Cedarholm," in Bloomfield Hills.

In his later years, George concerned himself with the foundation he set up in 1935, the Edwin S. George Foundation, which was located on the fifth floor of the Garfield Building. George conveyed a large tract of land adjacent to his home in Bloomfield Township and a commercial building in downtown Detroit to five trustees for religious, charitable and educational purposes. The Bloomfield Hills land was designated as the site for a Presbyterian Church, although the foundation did not yet have the money to build. In his later years, Mr. George worked very closely with Wirt C. Rowland, then a former architect with Smith Hinchman Grylls, on sketches for the church. When Rowland died in 1946, the firm of George D. Mason was commissioned to undertake the design. However, George died on January 25, 1951, shortly before construction began on Kirk-in-the Hills.

Mr. George traveled extensively to such exotic places as Africa and Asia. He joined a big game hunt in 1925 and brought back a pair of elephant tusks which he removed from an elephant he had shot. Hunting and fishing were amongst his favorite pastimes. In fact, his love of wildlife resulted in one of the Foundation's major gifts in 1930 and 1944 - 1300 acres of land near Pinckney in Livingston County named the Edwin S. George Reserve of the University of Michigan, to be administered by the University's Museum of Zoology. The preserve was to be a laboratory for the study of wildlife.

George left most of his wealth to the foundation. The total value of gifts made by the foundation at the time of George's death was over \$3 million, including "Cedarholm," George's estate that was conveyed to the Foundation in 1946 and 1947 and valued then at \$550,000. "Cedarholm" was then transferred to the Detroit Presbytery for church purposes; it became the church house to the church building known as "Kirk-in-the-Hills". Mr. George's body now rests in a crypt beneath the floor of the narthex of Kirk-in-the-Hills. At the time of his death, he was on the Board of Library Commissioners and the Board of Trustees of the Cranbrook Institute of Science. He was also president of the Children's Aid Society from 1926 until he died.

### **Physical Description:**

**Exterior:** The Garfield Building is a decorated version of the plain industrial structures that were the forte of Albert Kahn, its architect. It has a flat roof and relatively slender structural members that create large openings filled with windows. The building is a nearly-rectangular

parallelogram with dimensions of 92 feet along Garfield by 140 feet comprising the Woodward Avenue frontage. It is not a perfect rectangle because it follows the lines of Woodward Avenue and Garfield Street, which are not perpendicular to each other, a characteristic common to most cross streets at Woodward because Woodward does not run true north and south and the cross streets do run true east and west.

The building has a five-story, reinforced-concrete frame structure. The structural system employed by Kahn is a post and beam system of reinforced concrete, with steel columns at the first floor storefronts on the front (west) facade. The floor slabs are reinforced concrete with a very shallow arch on the underside, spanning east-west. Its structural grid has five bays in the east-west direction, each bay approximately 18 feet wide. The grid has six bays in the north-south direction; the center two bays are 32 feet wide and the two bays at each end are approximately 18 feet 6 inches wide. (All these dimensions are center-of-column to center-of-column.) The floor-to-floor height of the basement to first floor is 10 feet 4 inches; of the first to second floor is 16 feet 3 inches; and at each of the upper floors is 13 feet.

The frames on the front (west) and south facades are clad in white-glazed ornamental terra cotta. The terra cotta at the columns is ornamented with regularly spaced rosettes, interrupting their verticality. With the exception of the rosettes, decorative detail was concentrated on the cornices at the second and fifth floors and the first floor entry to the upper floors from Woodward Avenue. These details primarily consisted of repeating patterns of squares, circles and abstract floral forms.

At the first two floor levels (which comprised the original building), columns divide the front facade (west elevation) into three bays (a central bay flanked by smaller bays at each end) and the south and north elevations into five bays. The first floor bays of the front facade are occupied by storefronts with large display and transom windows. Recessed entries, centered at each bay, had simple metal canopies that no longer exist. When the addition was constructed in 1914, a segmentally arched decorative terra cotta entrance was added at the central bay of the front facade and remains today, its classical moldings including egg and dart, beaded patterns, and running acanthus leaves. Centered below the cornice of the entrance is a nameplate, also of white terra cotta, that bears the name of the building, "Garfield Building." Pressed metal spandrel panels divide the first and second stories.

The west bay of the south elevation contains a display window matching the storefronts of the front facade; the west bay of the north elevation contains a sympathetically designed storefront entrance into the present first floor retail store. The remaining four bays of each side elevation are filled with red brick with small areas of stone trim. Above the brick of the south elevation are transoms similar to those of the front facade.

The second-story windows of the front facade and south elevation are large, single pane wood casements with transoms. The original casements pivoted on hardware mounted on their central axis points. These windows were replaced at an unknown date by steel, industrial-style windows,

and have once again been replaced in the latest rehabilitation by windows that are hinged at the top. A simple terra cotta cornice wraps the top of the two-story, 1908 portion of the building above the second floor; it was retained as a decorative band when the three-story addition was constructed but replaced during a facade renovation in the late 1960's with black, enameled-metal panels. It has been reconstructed in the recent rehabilitation.

In the top three floors (which comprised the building's addition in 1914), terra cotta-clad columns further divide the bays of the front facade. The central bay is subdivided into five bays and the end bays are subdivided into three bays, all filled with pairs of large, double-hung sash wood windows. Terra cotta spandrels covered the spaces between the terra cotta columns above the third and fourth floor windows. A terra cotta band with an ornamental projecting parapet wrapped the top of the building above the fifth floor. The terra cotta spandrel panels and band were replaced with black, enameled-metal panels during a facade renovation in the 1960's and have since been restored to their original appearance.

The east and north elevations are industrial in character. The concrete columns and beams are exposed at both elevations. There are five bays in each floor on the north elevation and eight bays in each floor on the east elevation. The bays between the structural members in the north elevation are filled with brick, with few windows present. Those at the first floor are filled with the remnants of a common wall from a one-story commercial building which was once located to the north. At the upper floors of the east elevation, the bays are filled with groups of three wood, double-hung sash windows set on low brick walls. The bays of first floor were originally filled with service entries detailed with large windows divided into small panes. These entries had previously been replaced with a variety of non-historic materials, primarily cement block; the first floor of the second bay from Garfield Avenue now serves as the main entrance into the lobby of the 56-unit residential loft component of the building.

**Interior:** The first floor of the Garfield Building was historically divided into sections for use by small commercial businesses. The upper floors were divided in half by a north-south corridor and further divided into smaller spaces to accommodate a mixture of office and manufacturing uses while the basement space was used for storage and mechanical equipment. The floors and exterior walls are concrete and the dividing walls are brick and structural block. Interestingly, there is a bank of windows in a window well on the south elevation below sidewalk level on Garfield Avenue.

The entry from Woodward Avenue to the upper floors has undergone at least three transformations. Built as a simple stairway to the second floor, it was replaced with a single elevator and a stairway which wrapped around it when the addition was constructed in 1914. The elevator and stairway were replaced with a pair of elevators and a metal stairway going only to the second floor in 1931, and the ceiling in the elevator lobby was dropped to ten feet and finished with simple decorative plaster. The walls were finished with a door-height travertine wainscot and the floor was travertine. A revolving door was also installed. While the elevators are gone, the interior finishes of the lobby remain.

The second story was originally constructed with three major spaces. The south end of the building was one space, used in conjunction with the retail space at the first floor. The remainder of the building was divided by a north/south corridor. The upper three stories each have a central corridor running north-south from the south end of the central bays . The walls are structural tile with transom windows along the ceiling line. While much of the first floor has been opened up for a single user, the double-loaded central corridors, transoms, and concrete structural slab floors and ceilings have remained as major features of the loft housing.

The Garfield Building has been adapted into commercial space on the first floor and residential lofts above. The exterior of the building has been sensitively rehabilitated to evoke its original appearance. Since the rental spaces at the upper three floors were originally left unfinished, to be completed as needed to accommodate individual tenants, they were configured and altered in many ways over the years. Their conversion for loft housing has resulted in their reconfiguration once again.

**Criteria:** The proposed historic district would appear to meet the first, third and fourth of the criteria contained in section 25-2-2: (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; (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 works of a master designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age. The Garfield Building itself is the only contributing resource in the proposed historic district.

### **Composition of the Historic Designation Advisory Board**

The Historic Designation Advisory Board has nine appointed members and three ex-officio members, all residents of Detroit. The appointed members are: Russell L. Baltimore, Melanie A. Bazil, Gordon P. Bugbee, Beulah Croxford, De Witt Dykes, Lucile Cruz Gajec, Marie M. Gardner, Calvin Jackson, and Florence (Peggy) LaRose. 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.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that City Council adopt an ordinance of designation for the proposed historic district with the design treatment level of “rehabilitation.” A draft ordinance is attached for City Council’s consideration.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Most of the Garfield Building local designation study report was adapted from the "Edwin S. George Building" National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, submitted by Elisabeth E. Knibbe, 12/14/92 (statement of significance by Deborah M. Goldstein, H.D.A.B. The references contained in the nomination are listed below:

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