

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

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Proposed Motor City Missionary Baptist Church Historic District

Final Report

By resolution dated December 1, 1999 the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Motor City Missionary Baptist Church Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic District Act.

The proposed Motor City Missionary Baptist Church Historic District consists of three individual buildings: a church (1891), a rectory (1892) and a school building (1926). The church complex is located approximately three miles west of Detroit Central Business District. The church is listed individually on the State and National Register of Historic Places; the school and rectory are not included.

BOUNDARIES: The boundaries of the proposed district are shown on the attached map and are as follows:

On the east, the centerline of 28th Street;

On the south, the south line, extended east and west, of lot 371 of Hammond and Rich's Subdivision; (Liber 6 Page 67);

On the west, the centerline of the north-south alley lying between 28th Street and 30th Street; and

On the north, the north line, extended east and west, of lot 377 of the Hammond and Rich's Subdivision.

HISTORY: The two congregations which have occupied the church complex located on Twenty-Eighth Street share the common heritage of a sense of place which reflects Detroit's growth and change. The original congregation, Gethsemane Lutheran Church, and the present congregation, Motor City Missionary Baptist Church, are representative of that change. Both congregations have been dedicated to preserving the church complex.

Gethsemane Evangelical Lutheran Church, originally the Evangelical Lutheran Gethsemane

Church, was the fourth Missouri Synod Lutheran Church in Detroit. The history of the Missouri Synod Lutheran churches in Detroit begins with Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, organized in 1850 as a result of a schism with St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Trinity Lutheran Church is now located east of downtown on Gratiot Ave in the Eastern Market area. A daughter congregation, Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, organized in 1865 at 17th and Pine, was the first of the denomination to locate west of downtown. Then followed Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, organized in 1882 and located on Military Avenue. Gethsemane Evangelical Lutheran Church (now Motor City Baptist Church) was the daughter church of Zion.

Gethsemane Evangelical Lutheran Church was established in 1890 by twenty-six families from the congregation of Zion Lutheran Church, and was organized in part as the result of the growing number of German-speaking immigrants in the area just south of Michigan Avenue in what was then Springwells Township. Members of the newly formed parish were primarily drawn from the growing residential area east of 33rd Street; and the families whose children attended the branch school located on Twenty-eighth Street established by Zion Lutheran Church. The area soon became an enclave for many of the city's German-Americans.

In 1890 Gethsemane Lutheran commissioned the Detroit architectural firm of Spier and Rohns to design a modest wooden church and rectory for \$2000. The firm of Spier and Rohns had achieved prominence among Detroit's colony of German immigrant architects their successful practice designing churches, and commercial buildings for the city's German-American community. Better known for their ponderous masonry structures such as Sweetest Heart of Mary (1890-91), Motor City (formerly Gethsemane) Church is the only known example of the firm's more modest church commission executed in wood.

William C. Rohns was born in Gottingen Germany, and was trained at Hanover Poltechnicum. He ventured to Detroit in 1883 and worked in the offices partnership with Frederick H. Spier. Spier and Rohns was a prolific architectural firm that received many commissions for train stations from the Michigan Central and Grand Trunk Railroads, including the handsome station in Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, Niles, Lansing and Grand Rapids.

In 1926, a parochial school was constructed adjacent to the church to accommodate the growing German-American community.

Although the area around the church remained relatively unchanged until the late 1950s, Gethsemane experienced only moderate growth. By the mid-1960s the neighborhood began to change and many of the members of Gethsemane moved to the suburbs and joined other congregations. In 1978 Gethsemane Evangelical Lutheran Church sold the church, rectory and school to Motor City Missionary Baptist Church.

Motor City Missionary Baptist Church was organized on Palm Sunday 1967 under the pastorate of Rev. John W. Haynes and his wife Inez Haynes. Initial services were held in a shared facility with the congregation of Holy Trinity Baptist Church located on McGraw Street. Within three

months and under the leadership of Rev. Haynes, the church's membership had grown from twenty-seven to over fifty families. With continued growth it soon became apparent that Motor City congregation needed its own building. In July, Motor City purchased a building at 5110-30th Street to be used for church services. The congregation worshiped at this location for the next ten years.

By 1977 the congregation of Motor City had once again outgrown its building and was in search of a larger, more permanent edifice. Resolving that the next move would be into the church of their dreams, a building fund drive was started. A year later the congregation of Motor City Baptist Church acquired the church complex from the declining Gethsemane congregation. In 1993 Bible Baptist Church merged with Motor City Baptist Church and formed one congregation under the leadership of Rev. Haynes.

The history of Motor City Missionary Baptist Church continues to be a testament to the tenacity of a congregation commitment to saving an important part of Detroit's built environment as their roots continue to flourish and grow.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: Motor City Baptist Church is an end-gable-roofed, frame, Victorian Gothic chapel with a central tower and vestibule on the front. It is clad in its original, narrow novelty clapboarding.

The facade, facing Twenty-eighth Street, is composed of the tall, square, central tower and the shed-roofed vestibules that flank it. The tower is buttressed at the first floor level with canted wooden piers supporting octagonal, galvanized metal corner buttresses with conical finials. On the tower between two belt courses, two lancet-arched trefoil windows are located above the entry, and three enclosed lancet-arched openings with cross-shaped cut-outs are arranged beneath the belfry. The center arch opening is taller than the flanking arches. Above the open, lancet-arched belfry is a tall, tapering spire. The lancet-arched, double door entry with traceried transom is sheltered by a shallow gabled-hood supported on simple, curved brackets, above which is a panel of scalloped shingling. The entrance is flanked by lancet-arched Gothic windows lighting the vestibules.

The side elevations are identical. Each is composed of five bays of tall, lancet-arched, stained-glass windows. Forward of these is a single door with a lancet-arched transom leading into the front vestibule. The eaves are trimmed with widely spaced, shallow curved brackets and an arcaded paneled frieze. The rear elevation contains the semi-octagonal apse with two lancet-arched, stained-glass windows flanking a small, round stained-glass window placed high on the wall. A small one-story structure connects the church to the school next door.

The interior of the church contains only the shallow front vestibule and the church auditorium. The vestibule is a narrow functional space containing two enclosed stairways to the church balcony. It has plain vertical board wainscoting and walls covered in cream-painted canvas.

The church auditorium is a two-story space open to the slope of the pitched roof. A balcony with an arcaded paneled front extends across the back and down the two sides as far as the sanctuary. It is supported by round metal columns with splayed capitols that continue up to carry the exposed timber roof braces. The rear balcony contains the organ loft; the clustered organ pipes centered on the back wall above a range of large grilles extend up to the peak of the roof.

The raised sanctuary apse is framed by a pointed arch. The vaulted apse is lit by a pair of large stained-glass windows flanking a small, round stained-glass window placed high on the end wall. The apse is now ringed by several rows of choir pews behind a central lecture table at the front of the dais.

The church is remarkable for its unusual decoration. The basic color scheme is cream and gold with touches of blue and red. The vertical board wainscoting is painted in a simple geometric pattern. The walls and ceiling are covered in canvas and decorated with intricate raised geometric patterns formed by small circles and squares of a chipboard-like material glued to the canvas and antiqued in ochre to contrast with the cream painted walls. A wide border with a cruciform motif extends around the room above the wainscoting. The sanctuary arch is outlined in an intricate geometric pattern. The sanctuary apse is paneled with thin concentric banding. On the upper wall where the continuous skin of canvas curves up to form the ceiling, a shallow-linear arch spans the bays between the roof braces, marking the change in hue at the lighter colored ceiling. The organ pipes are framed by a scalloped border while the ceiling is sparsely ornamented with thin lines of raised decoration connecting the vertical members of the trusses. The same raised geometric motif is found on the two large, opaque, bowl-type light fixtures suspended by chains from the ceiling. Simple frosted glass fixtures mounted on the face of the balcony and indirect lighting in the capitols of the columns supporting the roof structure provide supplementary illumination.

The church is lit by ten large lancet-arched, stained-glass windows. These are of the typical late nineteenth century type with brightly colored floral stained-glass top and bottom panels and undecorated rectangular tinted-glass lights between. The church is furnished with old wooden pews of a simple design.

Motor City Baptist Church suffered extensive damage during to a serious thunderstorm. On the exterior, the spire has a large opening on the south side where a portion of the roofing was torn away. It appears to have suffered structural damage, and due to the possibility of falling debris, the area around the base of the church has been secured with caution tape. The interior also suffered extensive water damage over the pews on the north side of the sanctuary. The ceiling plaster behind the decorated canvas wallpaper is destroyed, requiring that portion of the sanctuary to be closed off.

The rectory is located south of church at 4459 Twenty-eighth Street and is a modest cross gable-roofed, one and one-half story, asymmetrical frame Queen Anne Victorian cottage. It is clad in its original white clapboard siding. The front-facing gable is positioned symmetrically over the

center of the house, and is intersected by a steeply pitched gable roof forming a gable projection over the side elevations. The frontal gable is clad in imbrication consisting of rows of wooden fish-scale shingles that alternate with rows of diamond shaped shingles, resulting in an interesting pattern. The red brick chimney is located in the center of the front-facing gable roof, behind the point where the roofs intersect.

The porch and north bay on the front facade are possibly the results of 1917 modifications, as an alteration permit was issued in that year. A shed roof that projects from the facade shelters the porch and is supported on three sets of red brick piers. There are three square posts on the corner brick piers and two square posts on the center brick pier, all having a somewhat stylized arts and crafts strapwork detailing on top. These features give the first floor of the house a bungalow-like appearance. The front door is located on the right of the facade, and has a large full length single window set in a solid wood frame that is obscured by a white security door. A grouping of three one-over-one double hung sash windows is centered on the first floor of the facade. Above, in the center of the frontal gable, two one-over-one double hung sash windows are surmounted by a window hood with a slightly projecting slanted mansard roof on brackets. The crawl space under the porch has a white, wooden lattice-like porch base. Queen Anne detail still present is centered around the pair of windows in the gable, with the decorative wooden shingles and the window hood; otherwise, there is no other applied ornament.

The porch on the south side is also possibly a result of the 1917 modifications. It is set back at the intersection of the front and south side projections. The half-hipped roof that shelters the small front facing porch and side door is supported by a wooden square post.

The arrangement of the side door is similar to that of the front door, and it also has concrete stairs leading up to it. In contrast to the front gable, the other elevation walls beneath the gables are plain clapboard. The second story side elevation windows are similar to the front elevation in arrangement, except that lintels shelter them instead of a hood. The red brick foundation, with basement windows, is visible on the side elevations.

The two-story educational facility situated to the north of the church building is set back significantly on its site; a chain-link fence surrounds the perimeter of the paved parking lot in front of it. The red brick facade, somewhat Collegiate Gothic in style, is arranged symmetrically on a high basement with concrete stairs leading to the central entrance. At the entrance, recessed within the masonry shallow arched architrave, are a pair of wooden double door frames flanked by narrow sidelights, above which is a large arched transom subdivided with square lights.

Most stylistic detail on the school is concentrated on the central entrance bay. Flanking the architrave are stylized brick wall buttresses with masonry upper ends decorated with blind tracery. Spanning the area between the buttresses are masonry panels bearing blind lancet arches with trefoil tracery. Above is a quoin-framed grouping of three double-hung sash windows with transoms above; the upper sashes and transoms are divided into three vertically rectangular lights. Fenestration to the sides of the central bay consist of two stories of similar groupings of

three-over-one double hung sash windows, with a single similar window at the extreme ends of the facade. A continuous masonry water table serves as the sill for the first story windows; individual windows in groups at second story level share sills. Above the second story windows is a raised masonry belt course serving as a cornice; the parapet wall, alluding to a battlement in silhouette, has a masonry coping.

Criteria: The proposed historic district meets two of the criteria contained in Chapter 25: Section 25-1-1: Sites, building, 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. Section 25-2-2: Sites, buildings, structures, or archeological sites which are identified with historic personages or with important events in community, city, state or national history.

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.

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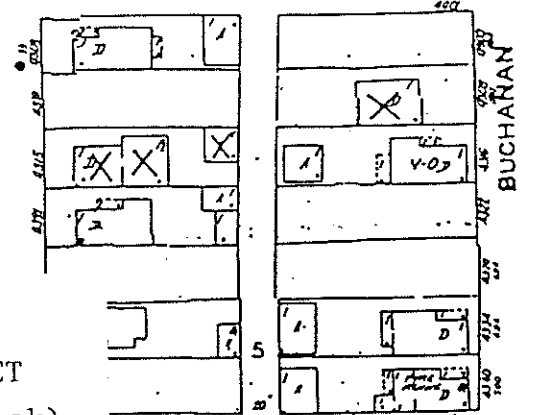
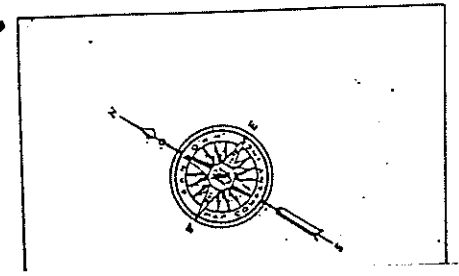
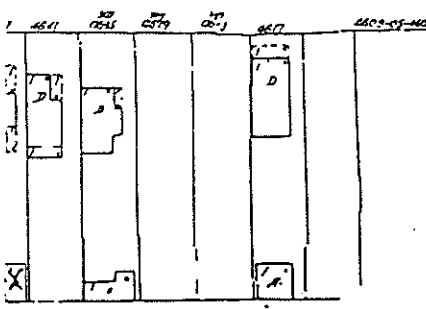
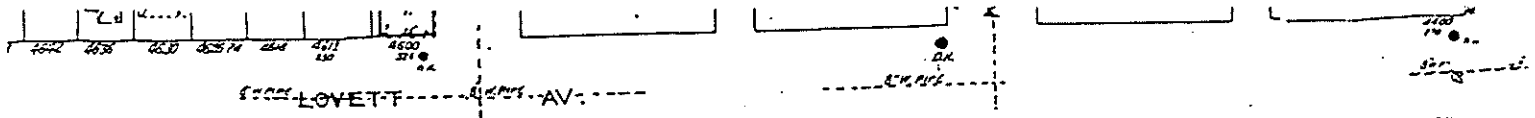
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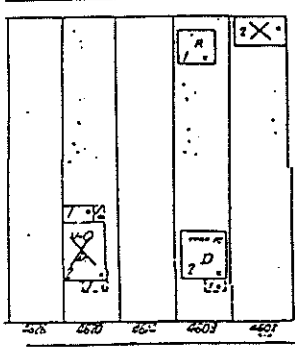
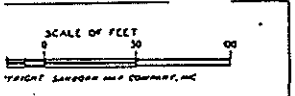
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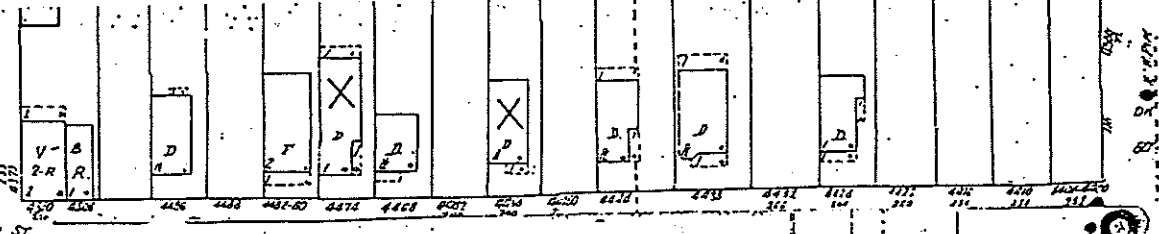
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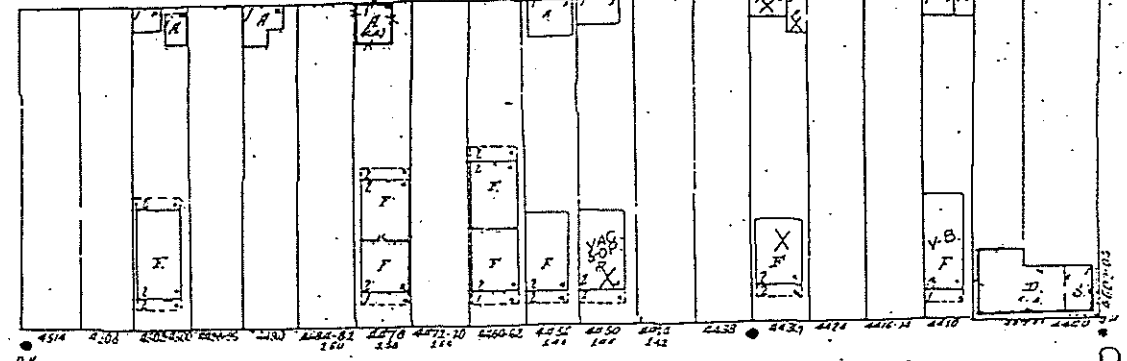
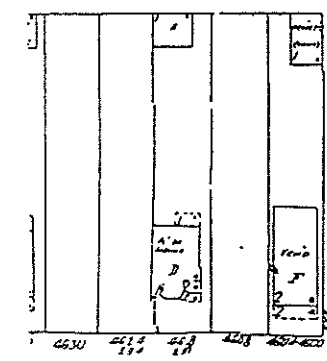
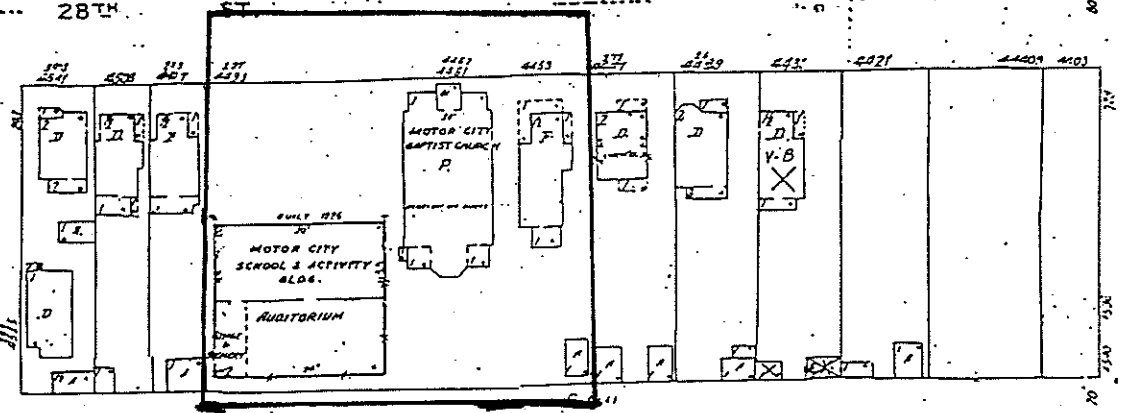
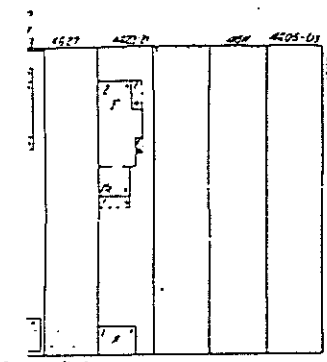
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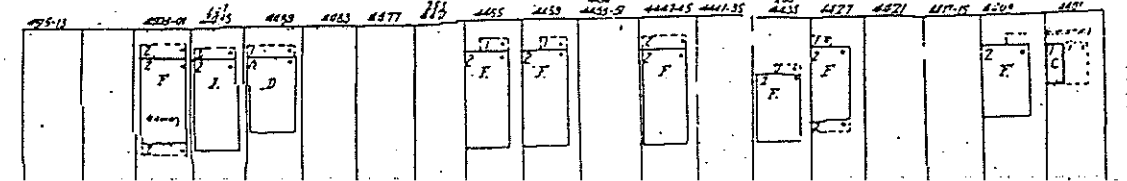
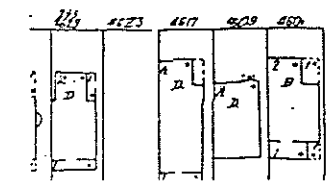
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28TH



30TH ST.



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