

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

28.

Historic Designation Advisory Board

PROPOSED TRUMBULL AVENUE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORIC DISTRICT

Final Report

The proposed Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church Historic District at 1435 Brainard is at the southeast corner of Trumbull and Brainard near the intersection of Trumbull and Grand River, the latter a major radial artery. It is approximately two miles from the center of downtown Detroit. Included within the proposed district are the High Victorian church, built in 1888, and the adjoining church house/activities building erected in 1914. Scripps Park and a Public Library are across Trumbull to the west, a commercial strip on Grand River Avenue is to the southeast, residential is to the rear, or east, and the Scripps estate, now the Christian Guidance Center, is to the north.

Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church is located in the Woodbridge Neighborhood National Register Historic District and is also listed on the State Register.

BOUNDARIES: The boundaries of the proposed district are outlined in black on the attached map and are as follows:

- On the northwest, the centerline of Brainard;
- On the northeast, the centerline of the alley between Lincoln Avenue and Trumbull;
- On the southeast, the line parallel to and 27.50' south of the Southerly line of Lot 31 of Block 98 of the Woodbridge Farm;
- On the southwest, the centerline of Trumbull.

HISTORY: Rev. John Montieth, commissioned by the Board of Missions of the General Assembly in 1816 to the eastern part of the Michigan Territory, established the First Protestant Society of the City of Detroit. In 1825, under reorganization, the First Protestant Society became the Presbyterian Church, the third Protestant denominational church to be established in Detroit.

As the Presbyterian population in Detroit grew, more and more Presbyterian churches were founded under the mother church, among them the Fort Street Presbyterian Society in 1853. The Mission Sunday School of Fort Street Presbyterian Church was organized on March 18, 1877, in a small wooden building at 484 Trumbull Avenue just east of Elm Street. Because the location of this school proved to be so popular, within two years there was discussion of building another Presbyterian

Church nearby. On October 24, 1879 two lots, 100' X 125', on the corner of Trumbull and Brainard were purchased from the Hodges Brothers by Fort Street Presbyterian Church, the price of \$2,500 being subscribed by friends of the church.

In 1881, a 43' X 80', 500 seat chapel was designed by the Swiss-born architect Julius Hess (1841-1899) for the rear of the two lots. By the time it was dedicated on July 3, 1881, the new chapel building with furnishings cost \$7,300. The two-story building was brick with stone trimmings in a "modern Gothic Style architecture." (Post-Tribune, 3/12/1882) The stained-glass memorial windows, each bearing an emblem, were gifts of friends of the church. Contributed furniture was walnut; the gas lights were suspended from the ceiling in gilt coronas. Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church was established on August 28, 1881, with 70 members, one-half of whom came from Fort Street Presbyterian Church. Rev. Allan M. Dulles became its first pastor. Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church was incorporated in October 1883.

In 1886 steps were taken to build a church building that would be large enough to accommodate the growing Presbyterian population. The property was transferred from Fort Street Presbyterian Church to Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church on December 8, 1886. A permit was obtained in 1887 by the architectural firm of Hess and Raseman to construct a one-story brick church 93' X 78' in front of the chapel on the corner of Trumbull and Brainard at an estimated cost of \$20,000. When completed it cost either \$27,000 or \$36,000, depending on the source, including furnishings. The new church, dedicated on February 26, 1888, seated 800 people. Rev. Robert J. Service was then the pastor; Rev. A. T. Pierson followed him shortly thereafter.

By 1890 additional seating space was found to be necessary. Hess and Raseman were again brought in to add the galleries around the auditorium, bringing the seating capacity to 1200. The total investments for lots, buildings and furnishings in Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church as of September 1891 was \$48,372, \$16,358 of which was received from other churches. (Celebration of the Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church, 9/19/1891)

The architectural partnership of Hess and Raseman was formed in 1885 and continued through 1891. Julius Hess practiced independently from 1873, the year he arrived in Detroit, to 1885, except for a brief interlude with Louis Mendelssohn as the firm of Julius Hess and Mendelssohn. Richard E. Raseman (born 1855 in Detroit), on the other hand, was starting fresh in his architectural career when he joined with Julius Hess as Julius Hess and Company in 1883. Raseman had a penchant for industrial buildings, having designed several Detroit breweries and the original Edison Illuminating Company building (demolished but replicated at Greenfield Village). Hess worked on a variety of building types in the Medieval sub-styles; his St. John's-

St. Luke Evangelical Church (1873), 107 Erskine (in 1890, in Brush Park), GAR Memorial Hall (1896) and county courthouses in out-state Michigan exemplifying that.

Many prominent members of Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church represented professional and business life in Detroit. A directory of members in 1900 shows some well-known names: James Scripps, president of the Evening News; William Sprague, president of Sprague Correspondence School of Law and Journalism; J. M. Thurber of Buhl Sons and Company; and George Booth, manager of the Evening News. The church boasted of having plenty of young congregants. Its Sunday School in 1889 had 500 members with 50 teachers, the Linden Street Mission School was also associated with the church, and a Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor was organized. Women also took on an active role within church life; the Woman's Christian Work Society of Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church of Detroit was organized in October 1884. Its object was to promote the religious, missionary, philanthropic, and social interests of the church and community.

The chapel, built in the rear of the lots in 1881, was demolished in 1914 to be replaced by a three-story brick church house addition. The permit for its construction was issued on August 4, 1914. The church house opened on April 18, 1915, but the dedication did not take place until September 25, 1921. It was designed by Feldmann and Seeler, a local Detroit firm with offices in the Breitmeyer Building, at an estimated cost of \$26,000.

Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church changed its name to Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church and Society in 1914; in 1958 its name was changed to Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church after the Presbyterian Church of North America joined with the Presbyterian Church of the USA, becoming the United Presbyterian Church.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church is the last remaining Venetian Gothic-style church in Detroit. Several churches in Detroit, including the Westminster Presbyterian Church, were of similar design but have all been demolished.

The revival of Venetian Gothic was encouraged in the mid- to late nineteenth century by the English critic and moralist John Ruskin through his publications, the Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849) and the Stone of Venice (1851) published simultaneously in New York and London. Ironically, the palaces of Venice were the inspiration for his impassioned prose which professed the virtues of the Venetian Gothic style as preferable for ecclesiastical architecture. Ruskin's main belief was that the Gothic was a virtuous style, fit to inspire contemporary architecture. Not just any Gothic style met Ruskin's approval; the Venetian Gothic was the ideal. Patterned planes,

restrained use of ornament, and coloristic effects, as opposed to the heavily three-dimensional carved and molded Northern European Gothic, were the effects to be achieved in High Victorian architecture, according to Ruskin. Polychromy was achieved through the juxtaposition of different masonries; paint or imitation materials were unethical. According to Ruskin in Stones of Venice, "the colors of architecture should be those of stones."

American architects took to the Ruskinian Venetian Gothic in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They had no inhibitions about designing in that mode because the U.S. had no medieval architectural heritage to call its own that they felt loyal to, as did the English. American architects interpreted the Venetian Gothic freely.

Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church, designed by Hess and Rase-man in 1887, has a Greek cross plan, which means its four arms are equal. One-story entrance enclosures occupy the space between the arms at the northwest and southwest corners of the church on Trumbull Avenue. A cylindrical bell tower with an inscription juts up from the entrance enclosure at the corner of Trumbull and Brainard. The top stage of the bell tower is square, has paired arched windows, and is crowned by a four-sided pyramidal spire. Pinnacles project at the intermediate stage of the tower as well as from the tops of the buttresses on each gabled arm of the church.

The church is built of red-orange pressed brick with cut stone trimmings and rough-faced stone foundations. The cross gables contain large wooden geometrical tracery windows and a blind arcade in the gable itself.

The steep slope of the roof of the church is sympathetically mirrored in the slope of the three-story church house/activities building adjoining it. Executed in a neo-Gothic style, the 1914 church house/activities building replaced the chapel built in 1881. Its exterior is of red/brown brick and it, like the church, has stone trim. The most prominent feature of its front gabled elevation is the bank of arched windows facing Brainard.

On the interior of the church, pews radiate outward from the platform in front of the organ in amphitheatre style; the gallery, added in 1891, occupies three sides of the auditorium, bringing the seating capacity of the church up to 1200. Large colorful, stained glass windows are illustrated with biblical subjects and texts.

The organ in Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian is of exceptional historic interest. It was built in 1889 by Granville Wood and Son of Northville, Michigan, at a cost of \$4,000, and is today by far the largest known surviving instrument built by that firm.

Granville Wood was a native of New England, and entered the field of musical instruments working with reed organs and melodians. He eventually came to Detroit, where he worked with one of the large firms then located here. Seeing a need for economical "stock" instruments which could be produced in numbers to save costs, he established his own firm in Detroit, and after a short time moved to Northville, where the town had offered him inducements to locate. In the early 1890's, he sold out his firm to Farrand and Votey of Detroit.

The organ at Trumbull Avenue is a two manual and pedal instrument of 29 ranks; all other surviving Wood instruments are small one manual organs. Organs by the firm were once quite common in Detroit; this is the last in the city. A similar instrument built a little earlier for Ste. Anne's Church was rebuilt in the 1940's, and that is the only other surviving material from a Wood in Detroit.

The organ is in excellent unrestored condition; during 1981, the church invested in a thorough cleaning of the organ, reconditioning of the pipework, and adjustment of the action.

The organ stands in an alcove at the center front of the church; the choir space is in front of the organ and the platform and pulpit is below and in front of the choir loft. The alcove was originally open to the church space, and behind the organ the original wall paintings survive without the overpainting that has taken place throughout the rest of the church. The wall and ceilings were richly decorated with painted textured plaster in harmonious colors.

The original painted plaster interior owes much to the Aesthetic Movement an artistic movement that brought about a revival of decorative arts in connection with a certain social consciousness, nationalism, and matters of taste in the 1870s and 80s in England. The movement was typified by the use of subdued or dull colors, particularly a range of dull greens. Secondary or tertiary colors replaced the bright, harsh colors popular in the middle of the nineteenth century. This is evidenced on the walls behind the organ at Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church where the unaltered textured plaster remains painted in hues of muted green, maroon, and gold.

Oscar Wilde, poet and contemporary of the Aesthetic Movement in England, was responsible for turning the sunflower into a symbol of the movement. The sunflower, symbolizing constancy, was present in Japanese ornament and became popular in the 1870s and 80s in England after the opening up of Japan to the western world. Sunflower motifs can be seen throughout the painted interior surfaces of Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church, as can other decorative motifs in the textured plasterwork of the ceilings and walls. Perhaps the

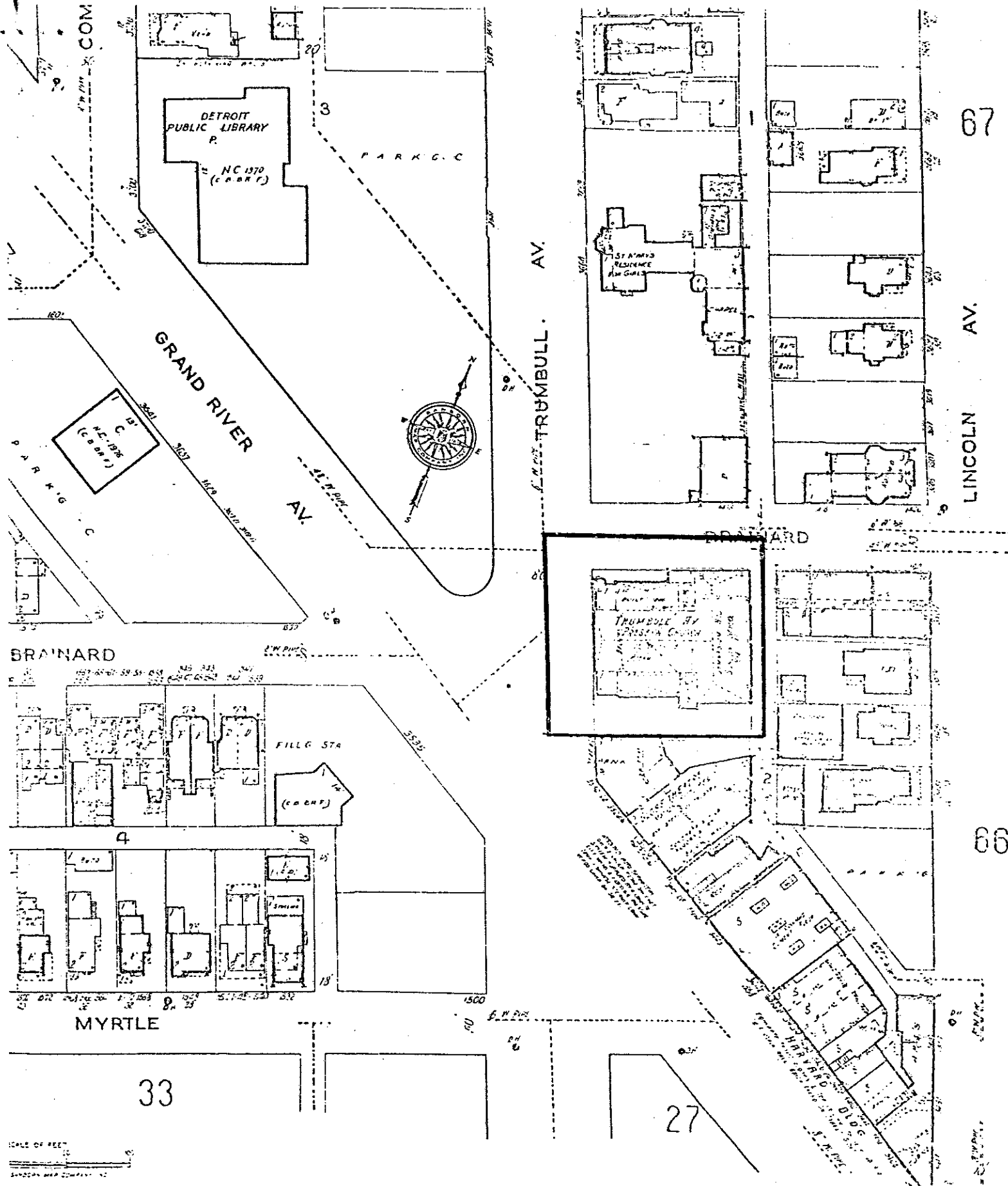
artist who created the interior of the church was attempting to create in the plaster medium the look of embossed wallpaper or the naturalistic effects of William Morris' textile designs so popular in England and the United States at that time.

The Aesthetic Movement had run its course by the end of the 1880s but left its mark on the history of design through its influence on the Art Nouveau of the 1890s. The interior wall and ceiling surfaces at Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church are the only ones known to have this unique stylistic and technical treatment in Detroit.

Built in 1914, the church house/activities center is three-stories tall with a gymnasium occupying the basement through the first story and a skylighted room extending the length of the building rising through the upper two stories. The simple, Mission style room contains large recessed blind arches on its western side where it connects with the church, as if to mimic its large windows.

Trumbull Avenue United Presbyterian Church provides a prominent visual image by its location on Trumbull near its intersection with Grand River. It is rare in style and unique in interior treatment.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that the City Council establish the Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church Historic District, with the design treatment level of rehabilitation. A draft ordinance for the establishment of the district is attached for consideration by the City Council.



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 HISTORIC DISTRICT
 (Boundaries of proposed district outlined in black)