Detroit's Arab and Chaldean Communities

Historic Context Study

Final Report July 2025

Prepared for the
Detroit City Council
Historic Designation Advisory Board

Quinn Evans, Detroit
With Sally Howell, Ph.D.

CITY OF DETROIT

QUINN EVANS

Detroit's Arab and Chaldean Communities
Historic Context Study
Detroit, Michigan

Context Report
Final

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

Prepared for
The Detroit City Council
Historic Designation Advisory Board
July 2025

Prepared by

Quinn Evans, Detroit
Ruth E. Mills, Project Manager, Senior Historian
Saundra Little, FAIA, Principal, Architect and Historian

With
Sally Howell, Ph.D.
Professor of History and Arab American Studies
University of Michigan-Dearborn

Cover Image: Dabish Market, undated photograph (Source: Sam Kassab).

Table of Contents

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

SECTION ONE

Acknowledgements/Funding Credit

This material was produced with assistance from the Underrepresented Community Grant Program from the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior.

Introduction and Project Overview

The Metro Detroit area of southeastern Michigan is home to one of the largest and most established populations of Arab and Chaldean immigrants in the United States. What began as a small community of several dozen Syrians around 1900 has grown into a vibrant metropolitan population of several hundred thousand people.[1] Metro Detroit has the world's largest population of people of Chaldean heritage outside of Iraq, and its broader Arab American community represents an extremely diverse concentration of people of Iraqi, Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, and Yemeni heritage.

The historic significance of Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities extends beyond mere numbers to their foundational role in American business and cultural development. These communities shaped local, state, and national history through lasting institutions including numerous churches, community organizations, and cultural centers. Their presence shaped Detroit's identity as a global city and contributed to its economic development through entrepreneurship and small business ownership. All the while, Arab and Chaldean Detroiters maintained strong cultural ties to their ancestral homelands, preserved ancient traditions, and successfully shared these customs with the broader American public.

In 2022, Detroit became the first city in the nation to receive a National Park Service Underrepresented Communities grant to record and survey Arab and Chaldean history. This project was commissioned by the Detroit City Council Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB), a preservation study committee that seeks to document and protect the historic, cultural, architectural, and archaeological resources that make Detroit unique.

This project aimed to create a historic context study for Middle Eastern histories in Detroit, specifically its Arab and Chaldean communities, and to identify and evaluate the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligibility of properties connected to that context. The project deliverables included a historic context report (with associated documentation) and an NRHP Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF). The context report includes an overarching historic context statement, plus reconnaissance-level inventory forms for thirty-one (31) historic resources and intensive-level survey forms for ten (10) historic resources connected to this context. The MPDF further established property types and registration requirements for NRHP listings related to this context.

[1] Estimated; precise numbers depend on how “Metro Detroit” is defined as well as how the individual populations are counted.

Additionally, two NRHP nominations will be completed by HDAB for at least two historic resources tied to this context, one significant to Arab American history and another significant to Chaldean history.

This project recognized that the contributions of Arab and Chaldean Americans have been largely overlooked in traditional historic narratives. To address this lack of formal documentation, robust public engagement was conducted with Arab and Chaldean community members. Key community historians and organizations were invited to collaborate through the establishment of a Community Advisory Group, coordinated by HDAB. Public information meetings were held throughout the term of the project. Community members identified historic resources and shared individual stories through family records, oral history interviews, photographs, and more. This historic context thus reflects the voices of several generations of Arab and Chaldean Detroiters and includes stories that were previously untold.

This historic context study records the many ways in which Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities have shaped the city's cultural and architectural landscape over the past century. It identified a diverse array of historic properties, from religious institutions and commercial establishments to residential neighborhoods, which embody the equally diverse stories of Arab and Chaldean Detroiters. The findings not only illustrate these communities' deep historical roots, but also the evolving nature of their contributions to Detroit's urban fabric throughout the last 130 years.

Credits and Credentials

This report was prepared by:

Quinn Evans Project Team

Saundra Little, FAIA, Principal, Community Engagement Lead
Ruth E. Mills, Senior Historian, Project Manager
Valerie Reiss, Historian
Rebekah Lawrence, Landscape Architect
Sally Howell, Ph.D., Professor of History and Arab American Studies, University of Michigan-Dearborn

Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board Team

Janese Chapman, Director
Lisa DiChiera, Deputy Director
Ian Tomashik, Preservation Project Associate
Kelsey Maas, Preservation Planner and Grants Manager
Rebecca Binno Savage, Lead Architectural Historian

Community Advisory Group

Emeel Ajluni
Maher Ajluni
Mona Ali
Ronald Amen
Sharkey Haddad
Azucena Hakim
Crystal Jabiro
Sarah Kittle
Zina Lumelsky
Dr. Adhid Miri
Sufian Nabhan
Dr. George Najor
Weam Namou
Mary Romaya
Matthew Stiffler
William Swor
Kyle Wynter-Stoner

Project Objectives and Methodology

Terminology

According to the *National Geographic Style Manual*, "no standard definition precisely outlines the **Middle East**; it is generally accepted as comprising the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian territories, Syria, and Turkey." Afghanistan is also sometimes included in the Middle East. **Near East** is an outdated term for approximately the same area, although there is no universally accepted definition for either term. Middle East/Near East also relate to the term **Far East** denoting the area of China, Japan, Korea, etc.[2]

Figure 1: Countries of the Middle East (source: Encyclopedia Britannica).

The Middle Eastern immigrant populations of Detroit have always been diverse. This diversity arises from the array of homelands people have migrated from, their distinctive religious traditions, and the complicated political environments of the region. Many members of the Arab communities in Detroit today trace their ancestry to homelands that were a part of the Ottoman Empire until World War I, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and parts of Yemen. The Ottomans made use of a political system called the "**Millet System**" to administer their vast territory, in which non-Muslim religious communities were given administrative autonomy in matters of education,

[2] "Middle East, Near East," *National Geographic Style Manual*, https://sites.google.com/a/ngs.org/ngs-style-manual/ng-style-manual/m/middle-east-near-east, accessed October 2024.

family law, and religion overseen by their own judicial and educational infrastructure. This management system encouraged a very strong conflation between ethnic and religious identities, especially for minority communities. An older term for portions of the region is the **Levant,** which referred to the areas along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, including modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordon, Israel, and Cyprus.

Middle Eastern communities in Detroit are thus often referred to by religious identity and country of origin. While there are many Middle Eastern communities in the Detroit region, this survey report focuses on two distinct communities, Arab Americans and Chaldean Americans.

Figure 2: Map of the Ottoman Empire (Source: Palestineportal.org)

The term **Arab Americans** refers to people who migrated to the United States from an Arabic speaking country or trace their origins to one of these countries and identify ethnically as Arabs. Arab Americans today follow many religions, but when their communities first immigrated to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most considered themselves to be Eastern-rite Catholics (Maronites, Melkites, Chaldeans), Orthodox Christians, Druze, or Muslims (Shi`i and Sunni). The first groups arrived from Ottoman Syria and were referred to by the U.S. government alternatively as "Syrians," "Turks," or "Turks from Asia." Thus, Detroit's oldest Arab American communities tended to be referred to and to refer to themselves as "Syrians" until the region was divided into nation-states after the second World War. At this point, many Arab Americans began to describe themselves by national labels such as Lebanese Americans, Yemeni Americans, etc.

By the early twenty-first century, the Arab community living in the city of Detroit was overwhelmingly Muslim and those living in the suburbs were both Muslims and Christians. This survey focuses on Arabs and Chaldeans and not on the broader Muslim American community. Therefore, it does not explore the history of African

American, Asian American, or other Muslim communities in the city and region, including the Nation of Islam.

Chaldean Americans are an ethno-religious minority from Iraq. Historically they spoke the Aramaic language and belonged to the Eastern-rite Chaldean Catholic Church, which follows the liturgy and tradition of the Church of the East as well as Canon Law and the leadership of the Roman Catholic Pope. They lived in what is now Northern Iraq long before the region became Muslim-majority and the nation-state of Iraq was created. Chaldean Americans now mostly speak Arabic. They are considered the Indigenous people of Iraq with roots that stretch back to ancient Babylon and Assyria. Historically they were the largest Christian community in Iraq, and they are a very large ethnic minority in Michigan as well.

Chaldeans first immigrated to Detroit in the early twentieth century, but their community remained small until the 1940s. They then organized religious and ethnic institutions that distinguished them from those of the early Lebanese and Syrian communities.

Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) - In April of 2024 the U.S. Census Bureau announced that the Office of Management and Budget had approved a new race and ethnicity category for people with ancestry in the Middle East and North Africa.[3] The MENA designation includes people from Arabic speaking countries like Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Morocco, and Egypt, as well as those from Israel and Iran. It does not include Turkey, which is otherwise defined as a Middle Eastern country. When the umbrella designation MENA is used in this report, it is intended to reference Arab Americans and Chaldean Americans.

Project Area

This historic resource survey encompasses the entire City of Detroit, Michigan. In some cases, resources are concentrated in specific areas in which Arab and Chaldean Detroiters built communities, such as Chaldean Town, but individual sites can be found anywhere within the city limits.

While there are thriving Arab and Chaldean communities outside of the city, in suburbs such as Dearborn, West Bloomfield, and Hamtramck, historic resources were only surveyed within Detroit city boundaries. Information is included in this historic context study acknowledging the importance of Arab and Chaldean communities in the larger metropolitan Detroit region.

Community Engagement

This project centers community voices, drawing on their knowledge both of general community history as well as information on specific historic resources. This is particularly important as Detroit's Arab and Chaldean history is underrepresented in traditional historical sources. Where it is represented, their histories are often biased or incomplete.

---

[3] Rachel Marks, Nicholas Jones, and Karen Battle, "What Updates to OMB's Race/Ethnicity Standards Mean for the Census Bureau," United States Census Bureau, April 8, 2024. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2024/04/updates-race-ethnicity-standards.html. Accessed May 2025.

The Detroit City Council Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB) and the consultant team worked with community partners and stakeholders on education and outreach opportunities connected to this study. Community engagement included two major components:

Community Advisory Group (CAG)

HDAB and the consultant team developed a list of community members to serve on the CAG. The purpose of the CAG was to provide guidance on major themes, people, and resources to be included in the project. The CAG also advised on other members of the communities or institutions that should be interviewed or contacted for information. The CAG reviewed draft reports and assisted in identifying the properties for reconnaissance and intensive level survey as well as selecting the properties to be formally nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Two at-large CAG meetings were held at the beginning of the project on January 23, 2024, and March 7, 2024. Periodic meetings with individuals, subgroups of CAG members, and recommended advisors were also held throughout the project to share and review consultant deliverables, coordinate meeting opportunities, and correspondence.

Public Engagement Events

The project's first public community engagement event was held on February 20, 2024, at the Wayne County Community College District Downtown Campus at 801 W. Fort Street, Detroit, MI, 48226. This event was advertised and open to the public, particularly members of the Arab and Chaldean communities. During the meeting, attendees were introduced to the project goals and process, and attendees shared input regarding important themes, people, and places. The project's second public community engagement event was held on May 7, 2024, at the America's Community Council Youth

Figure 3: Community engagement meeting held February 20, 2024 (source: Quinn Evans).

Center at 62 W. Seven Mile Road, Detroit, MI, 48203. This event was advertised and open to the public, particularly members of the Arab and Chaldean communities living near the Chaldean Town area along W. Seven Mile in Detroit. During the meeting, attendees were introduced to the project goals and process and attendees shared input regarding important themes, people, and places.

Figure 4: Community engagement event at America's Community Council (ACC), May 7, 2024 (source: HDAB).

On August 23, 2024, HDAB co-organized the Chaldean Town Educators Memory Luncheon at the Chaldean Community Foundation (CCF) at 3601 15 Mile Road, Sterling Heights, MI, 48310. Retired educators who taught Chaldean students in Detroit Public Schools were invited to record oral histories, share photographs, and share memories of Detroit's Chaldean Town area. Copies of scanned photographs and oral histories were shared with the CCF.

This project's final community engagement event was held on April 29, 2025, at Greenfield Union School at 420 W Seven Mile Rd, Detroit, MI 48203 in the historic Chaldean Town neighborhood. The event was advertised and open to the public. The project process and results were shared with attendees, including a summary of findings, examples of eligible places, and future plans. Attendees shared their thoughts and memories during the public comment period.

Throughout this project, HDAB staff members attended scheduled events within Metro Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities organized by partner institutions. HDAB staff

attended events at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, MI; Chaldean Cultural Center in West Bloomfield, MI; Chaldean Community Foundation in Sterling Heights, MI; Islamic Center of Detroit in Detroit, MI; and Mexicantown Community Development Corporation in Detroit, MI. HDAB staff also distributed information about the project at City of Detroit events held in public settings including off-site City Council meetings and resident events.

HDAB and project team members attended various meetings within the communities to promote the project. The consultant survey team developed a flyer to notify community members of surveyors being in the community which was carried by surveyors to provide information about the project to members of the community. HDAB staff created an online questionnaire where community members could self-report their family history and upload images. The questionnaire was available through a QR code on printed posters, on HDAB's website and social media, and shared with project stakeholders.

Survey Method

QE prepared base maps using GIS pre-loaded with survey fields from the intensive-level survey forms. GIS fields included information from City of Detroit data and were augmented by data gathered from the field survey and historic research. Inventoried resources were documented and photographed to HDAB and SHPO standards.

Research Methods

Historic research drew from a variety of sources including archival repositories, online collections and, most importantly, oral histories collected with community members. Sources consulted include the:

Arab American National Museum, Dearborn
Contains special collections on national Arab American history with an emphasis on the communities in Southeast Michigan.

Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Contains special collections on Arab American, Muslim American, and Chaldean American communities from Detroit and the metro region.

Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library
The Burton Collection includes a repository of several of the city's early Arabic language newspapers.

Chaldean Cultural Center, West Bloomfield.
Maintains a Past Perfect database with items and interviews donated by Chaldean historians.

Chene Street Research Project - housed in the U-M IRLEE & Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, Ann Arbor
This digital project includes oral histories with several former residents and workers of Chene Street, which included Arab businesses and an early mosque.

City of Detroit and Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board
The consultant team coordinated research in appropriate city records with HDAB as part of its research plan including historic designation reports, historic building permits and blueprints, and historic survey data.

Community Historians
As part of community outreach, the consultant team worked with community historians to gather photographs and other historic materials and interview key community members. This effort focused especially on the historic congregations of Arab and Chaldean churches in the city and Arab mosques.

Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC
The founder of the collection, Dr. Alixa Naff, grew up in Detroit and recorded several oral history interviews here with pioneering Syrian families in the 1960s and again in the early 1980s. These include useful data on the auto industry, the early Arab churches, the lives of Syrian grocers in the city, etc.

Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University
The Reuther focuses on labor history. It houses the papers of the International Institute of Detroit and had several useful collections for this study.

Data Location

At the conclusion of this project, copies of the full set of survey materials, photographs, and copies of the Context Report and National Park Service Multi-Property Documentation Form (MPDF) will be deposited with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, the City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board, and the National Park Service.

Published copies of the completed Context Report will also be shared with the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in Dearborn, Michigan; the Chaldean Cultural Center in West Bloomfield, Michigan; the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library; and the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. They are expected to be made available online through the AANM.

Evaluation Results Summary

Through research and input from community stakeholders, approximately 32 districts, sites, and buildings were identified as potential survey locations. Three of these resources were already individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including Sts. Peter and Paul Jesuit Church, Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, and Greenfield Union School.[4] Other resources, for example those within Eastern Market, are listed as contributing resources within existing National Register districts. In general, these prior designations lack historic context regarding their association with Arab or Chaldean communities. As a result, these existing NRHP listings have been included in the survey and evaluation to clarify their relationships to Arab and Chaldean history.

Reconnaissance surveys were completed for all individual sites and potential districts identified by community members. Of those, ten were selected for intensive-level survey in consultation with project stakeholders including community members, who identified their cultural significance. Five intensive-level sites relate to the histories of Detroit's Arab communities and five relate to Chaldean community history. Following the completion of this report, two surveyed properties, one related to Arab history and one related to Chaldean history, will be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. These sites will be selected in consultation with stakeholders and the Community Advisory Group. The nominations will be prepared by HDAB staff. See the attached survey forms for further details on the status and eligibility of each resource.

Preservation Issues and Threats

In general, sites associated with the histories of Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities are highly threatened. Large numbers of buildings where significant events happened, significant organizations were headquartered, or significant people who lived or worked have already been lost. Many were located in neighborhoods which were destroyed by urban renewal projects in the 1950s. Others were lost or damaged during the 1967 Detroit Uprising, or by general neglect and demolition which occurred throughout the past sixty years. Many surviving sites are in neighborhoods which are now threatened by the City of Detroit's aggressive "blight clearance" programs. Others are modest in appearance and may have been altered over time. Thus, their significance to Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities is often unrecognized today. The following sections briefly identify and describe some of the major threats to historic resources associated with these historic contexts.

Building Alterations and Modifications

The National Park Service evaluates the integrity of historic places through seven aspects: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, association, and feeling. Many

[4] Constance Henlee, "Saints Peter and Paul Church," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, September 9, 1971; "Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, listed under *Religious Structures of Woodward Avenue* MRA, August 3, 1982; Deborah Goldstein, "Greenfield Union School," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, listed under *Public Schools of Detroit* MPS, March 29, 2011.

Figure 5: Matti Family Store, 3181 Third Avenue. Windows and doors have been infilled/replaced and the exterior brick painted (Quinn Evans, 2024)

of the resources identified in this survey have undergone alterations and modifications over time that potentially impact one or more of those aspects, particularly materials and workmanship. Since many of Detroit's early Arab and Chaldean communities migrated out of the city during this survey's period of significance, the religious buildings, storefronts, and residences they formerly occupied have been altered to accommodate new owners and uses. Changing architectural fashions and regular maintenance have also resulted in alterations including the removal or replacement of windows and doors, infilling openings with brick or concrete block, installation of non-compatible siding and signage over historic facades, painting over brick and other masonry elements, and the removal of historic trim elements.

In many cases, these alterations are reversible, and the non-historic materials they used often have short lifespans. Building owners and community members should be encouraged to replace or repair deteriorated or non-historic elements of their buildings with materials more suited to the historic character of the building. The city's Housing and Revitalization Department offers several programs including low or no interest loans, home repairs for seniors, and others. Even a modest investment in critical repairs can assist business and homeowners in maintaining, and thus preserving, a historic resource.

Deferred Maintenance and Demolition

Many historic resources associated with Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities have already been lost through urban renewal, removal for subsequent development, and demolition following decades of neglect. Resources in areas associated with the initial settlement of community members in the early 1900s, such as the Black Bottom neighborhood and the Syrian Colony near the downtown riverfront, were demolished

before the 1950s. Others remain but are threatened due to decades of disinvestment and subsequent decay.

Resources surveyed included several vacant and/or deteriorated buildings, which are particularly threatened by the city's aggressive blight removal programs. In potential districts such as Chaldean Town, vacant lots are testament to the migration of community members to areas outside the city and the subsequent closure of their businesses. Even in areas such as Eastern Market, where Arab- and Chaldean-owned businesses continue to thrive, resources remain vulnerable to deferred maintenance and demolition for new construction.

Preservation and reuse of significant sites associated with Arab and Chaldean communities can be assisted through education about their historic significance, enhanced awareness through historic designation, and protection through the establishment of local historic districts. The content and findings of this report should be incorporated into future planning efforts, such as the city's master plan and forthcoming citywide historic preservation plan, and shared with key city departments, such as Housing and Revitalization, Planning and Development, and Construction and Demolition, among others. Publishing and promoting the report can also help to raise awareness of the history and significance of Arab and Chaldean communities in Detroit and further support preservation of historic sites.

Development Pressure

Many areas of Detroit are currently experiencing revitalization, particularly in the central business district, Midtown, New Center, and adjoining areas. Other pockets of renewal are scattered throughout the city. Redevelopment pressure, however, also threatens historic resources that appear to be in poor condition or whose significance is not completely understood. The resources studied here are located across the city and so the level of threat varies. Those located in areas within or close to redeveloping zones are most vulnerable to demolition, for example the early Chaldean neighborhoods in what is now known as the Cass Corridor. Preservation efforts should focus on identifying threatened areas, creating local historic districts that will protect resources, and supporting redevelopment that incorporates rather than removes historic resources.

Planning Needs and Recommendations

This context study provides an overview of the history and significant themes related to Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities, a survey of properties associated with these contexts, and initial evaluations of the eligibility of these resources for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This report is not intended as a conclusion, but as a guideline for future investigation and preservation efforts. Additional reconnaissance and intensive-level study will be necessary to further assess the cultural and architectural integrity of resources discussed here as well as those that might be recognized after this project's conclusion. Further research is also recommended to extend and deepen the historic contexts identified in this report.

Resources surveyed at the reconnaissance or intensive level should be further studied, as appropriate: at the intensive level, for designation as local historic districts, and/or for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. This report also recommends that

existing National Register and local historic district nominations within the city of Detroit be reviewed for missing or inadequate Arab and Chaldean context and updated to document this important history. This report also recommends that new National Register or local historic district nominations be required to consider if there are Arab or Chaldean contexts that should be included.

Summary of Surveyed Properties

Below is a summary of properties surveyed for this project and recommendations for listing or further evaluation.

Properties Previously Listed in the NRHP Recommended for Amendment

Arab Foodways (District), Eastern Market Historic District (Listed 1970, boundary increase 2007)
Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament (Listed 1982), 9844 Woodward Avenue
Greenfield Union School (Listed 2011), 420 West Seven Mile Road
Middle East Records, 558 Monroe Street, Greektown Historic District (Listed 1982)
Ransom Gillis House, Woodward East Historic District (Listed 1975), 205 Alfred Street
Sts. Peter and Paul Jesuit Church (Listed 1971), 438 St. Antoine

Properties Recommended as Eligible

Al-Chark Records, 658 Taylor Street
Chaldean Town District
- Sacred Heart Church (District), 236-414 West Seven Mile Road (also Individual)
- Greenfield Union School (Listed 2011), 420 West Seven Mile Road
- S&J Meats, 217 West Seven Mile Road
- Bahi Restaurant, 516-528 West Seven Mile Road
- Sullaf Restaurant, 812 West Seven Mile Road

Islamic Center of Detroit, 15571 Joy Road
Mother of God Chaldean Church, 10219-10223 Hamilton Avenue
Our Lady of Redemption Melkite Church, 2741 McDougall Street
St. George's Orthodox Church of Detroit, 2760 East Grand Boulevard
St. Maron Maronite Church, 11470 Kercheval Street

Properties that Require Further Evaluation

Chaldeans Near the New Center (District)
- Kathawa Home, 750 Hazelwood Street
- Najor Home, 751 Hazelwood Street
- Dickow Family Store, 8900 Third Street

Aljuni House, 824-826 Delaware Street
Al-Sawa Publishing, 6121 Crane Street
Assumption of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Church/St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Church, 2504 Beniteau Street
Chaldean Commercial Building, 8055 Woodward Avenue
Dabish Grocery Store, 8517 Second Avenue
Danish Hall, 1775 West Forest Avenue
Federation of Islamic Associations Headquarters, 17530 Woodward
Karoub Printing, 17514 Woodward Avenue
Masjid Mu`ath bin Jabal, 6096 Dorothy Street
Matti Family Store, 3181-3183 Third Avenue

Moesta Block, 15401 Mack Avenue
Moore Boulevard Market, 3945 Moore Place
Public Lumber, 1001 East Seven Mile Road
Salhamey Market, Wayne Market, Campus Market, 5470-5482 Cass Avenue
St. John Syrian Orthodox Church, 1761 Sheridan Street

Figure 6: Mother of God Chaldean Church, 10219-10223 Hamilton Avenue (Quinn Evans, 2024)

Future Reconnaissance Level Survey

All extant resources identified during this study were evaluated at the reconnaissance level. Because Arab and Chaldean communities were located all over the city of Detroit during various time periods, a full-scale reconnaissance survey of the city is impractical. Instead, resources identified after the conclusion of this report should be surveyed at the reconnaissance level on an individual or district level to determine if they require further study at the intensive level.

Future Intensive Level Survey

Because intensive level survey was limited to ten sites, most resources surveyed at the reconnaissance level are recommended for further intensive level survey, either because their history needs to be further explored to evaluate them for eligibility, or to determine if they retain sufficient integrity and association to be nominated at an individual or district level.

Three potential historic districts were identified during this study. Portions of these districts were studied at the intensive level, but most the areas were only evaluated through reconnaissance survey. Thus, their boundaries, significance levels, and integrity will need to be fully evaluated as part of an intensive level survey or historic designation.

Chaldean Town

Based on the information gathered through this historic context study, Chaldean Town is recommended as a proposed historic district eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with Ethnic Heritage, Commerce, and Community Planning and Development. Metro Detroit is home to the largest concentration of Chaldeans – Christian Iraqis – outside of Iraq. Following changes in immigration law in the 1960s and 1970s, this neighborhood, located near the intersection of Woodward Avenue and Seven Mile Road, experienced a large influx of thousands of Chaldean immigrants. Another wave of Chaldeans arrived in the 1990s following the Persian Gulf War, and by this point, approximately two-thirds of the neighborhood's residents were Chaldean. Chaldeans occupied homes, built businesses and religious institutions, and attended schools in Chaldean Town. While many Chaldean families migrated to the suburbs beginning in the 2000s, resources associated with the community, including storefronts, churches, and community institutions remain intact and reflect Chaldean Town's past. Among those properties surveyed and recommended for listing or further study are the Greenfield Union School, 420 West Seven Mile Road (listed in the National Register in 2011 but without reference to its significance associated with the Chaldean community); Sacred Heart Chaldean Church and Community Center, 236-314 West Seven Mile Road; S&J Meats, 217 West Seven Mile Road; Bahi Iraqi Bakery, 516-528 West Seven Mile Road; and Sullaf Restaurant, 812 West Seven Mile Road.

Boundary. During the public engagement process for this study, current and former members of the Chaldean community were invited to identify the boundaries of the neighborhood as they remembered them. Although responses varied, the most consistent boundaries cited were Woodward Avenue to the west, State Fair Avenue to the north, and Six Mile Road to the south. The eastern boundary was less clear, with some citing John R. Street and others extending it to the Chrysler Freeway (I-75). Chaldean students also attended Nolan Junior High School and John J. Pershing High School (located further east at 1150 East Lantz Street and 18875 Ryan Road, respectively), which therefore extended their community's presence beyond Chaldean Town's traditional eastern boundary.

Arab Foodways District

Portions of Eastern Market, located northeast of the central business district, are already listed in the National Register of Historic Places and as a local historic district. However, previous documentation provided little to no assessment of the area's significance to Arab and Chaldean communities, in particular related to their characteristic foodways. Arab and Chaldean butchers, grocers, and other businesses were critical in providing foods associated with their communities' ethnic heritage and religious requirements and were integral to the development of Eastern Market. Current historic documentation, including past National Register nomination forms and local historic district reports, should be re-evaluated and expanded to include this historic context. Additionally, the periods of significance may need to be extended to encompass businesses established between the 1950s and 1970s, some of which are currently considered non-contributing.

In general, it appears that the current boundaries encompass most of the identified resources, but additional survey may be needed to confirm this.

Chaldeans Near the New Center District

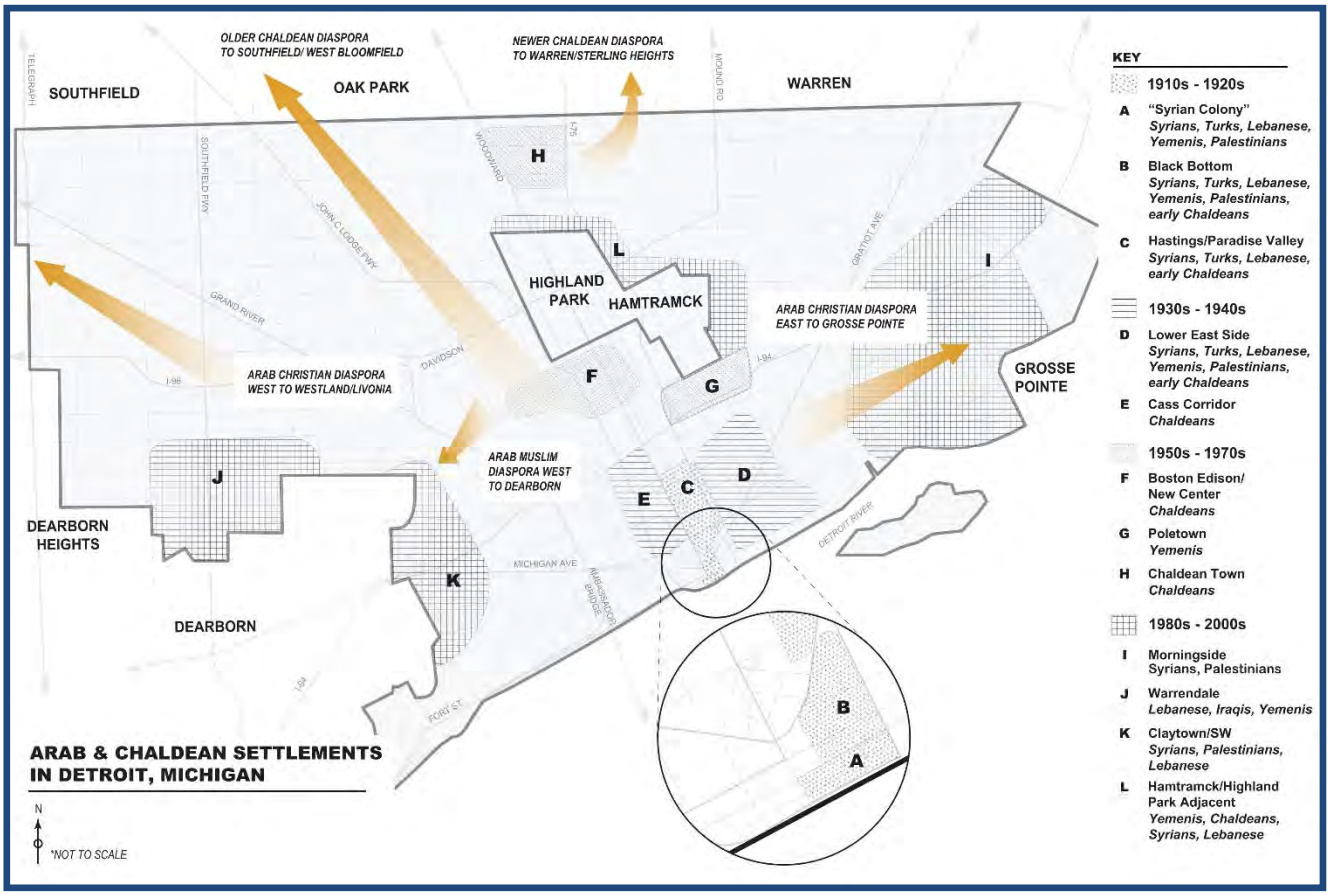
This potential district represents a collection of Chaldean-owned or patronized buildings representative of the group's immigration patterns to Detroit in the second half of the twentieth century. By mid-century, many first- and second-generation Chaldeans lived in the corridor between Woodward Avenue and the present-day Lodge Freeway (M-10) from roughly Mack Avenue north to Highland Park, with concentrations in the New Center, Piety Hill, and Boston-Edison. Between the 1940s and 1960s, Chaldeans emerged as the dominant group in Detroit's grocery market trade, with many businesses located in this area. Store owners and their families often lived above or near their stores. Established families frequently rented rooms to newly arrived Chaldean immigrants as they settled in Detroit.

A cluster of contiguous buildings related to this context are the Kathawas Home, 750 Hazelwood Street, the Najor Home, 751 Hazelwood Street, and the Dickow Family Store, 8900 Third Street. Other nearby sites that might contribute to a thematic/non-contiguous district include Al-Chark Records, 658 Taylor Street; the Aljuni House, 824-826 Delaware Street; Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament (Listed 1982), 9844 Woodward Avenue; the Dabish Grocery Store, 8517 Second Avenue; and Mother of God Chaldean Church, 10219-10223 Hamilton Avenue.

SECTION TWO: HISTORIC CONTEXT

Historic sites associated with Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities are located across the city and represent movements of the community over time. To aid in understanding locations discussed in this report, the map below provides a general overview of Arab and Chaldean communities within the city during the period covered by the study (a larger version of this map is included in Section 3 at the end of this report).

The areas or boundaries depicted in the map are not intended to be definitive, especially because Arab and Chaldean communities were diverse and moved more fluidly than some other racial and ethnic groups in the city; in particular, they were not as restricted in where they could settle in comparison to Jewish and Black Detroiters who were subject to strict racial covenants.



Map 1: Arab and Chaldean Settlements in Detroit (Quinn Evans 2025).

Introductory Historical Overview

Arabs and Chaldeans in Detroit

Immigrants from the Syrian Province of the Ottoman Empire began arriving in Detroit in the 1890s. Many were peddlers who were working their way west across the United States, developing peddling routes as they went. In Detroit they created a peddling hub that fed and cared for peddlers who passed through town, stocked their packs, and produced lace, doilies, and other items for sale on the road. A 1932 "Racial Study of

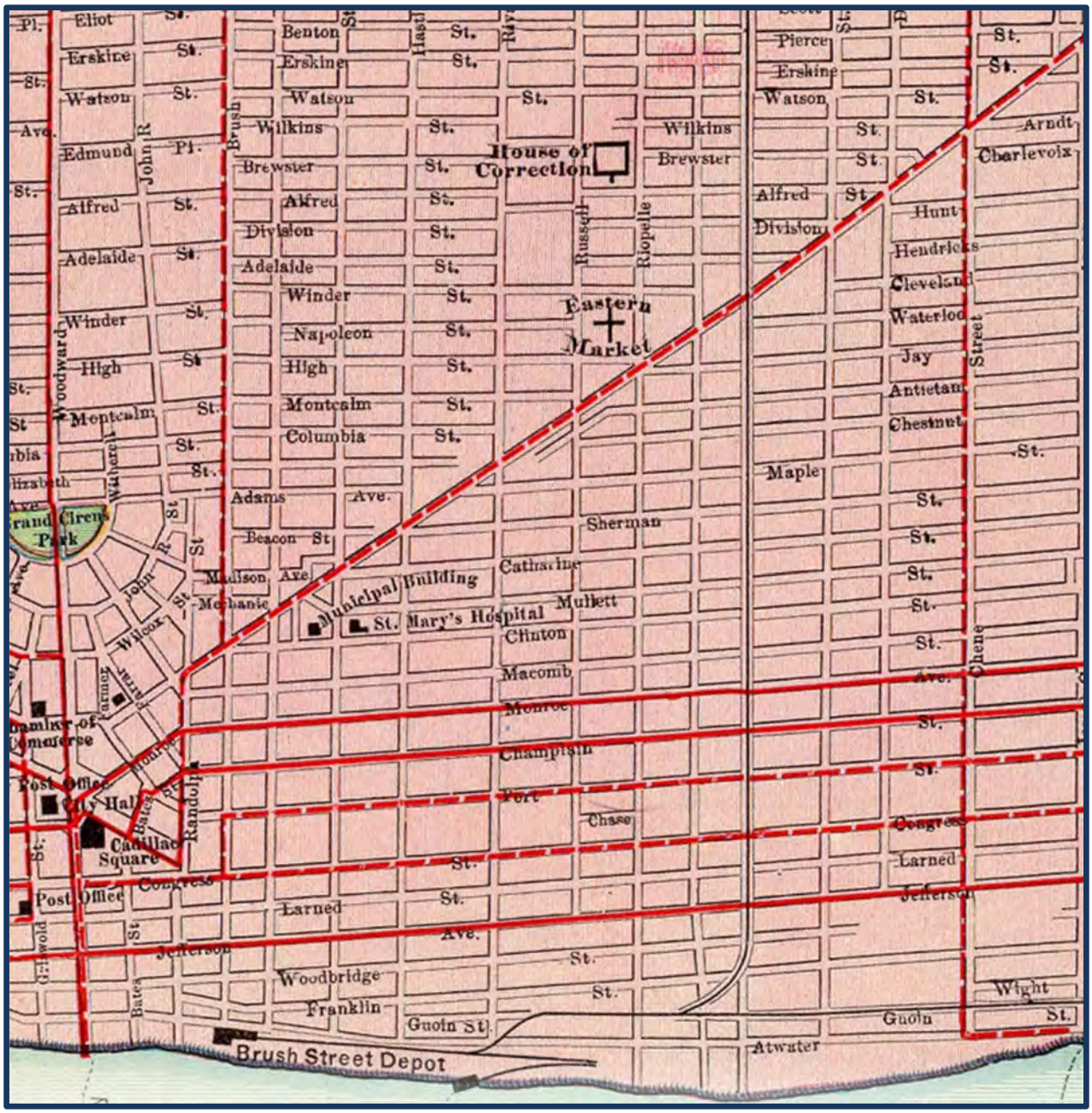


Figure 7: Excerpt from an 1897 map of Detroit. Early Arab and Chaldean immigrants settled in the area just above the Brush Street Depot, lower left, and near Eastern Market and Gratiot Avenue, center. Red lines on map denote streetcar lines (source: Detroit, Vicinity, 1897, Rand McNally and Company).

Syrians," produced by the Civics Division of the Detroit Public Library, later reported that there were roughly 30 Syrians in Detroit at the turn of the century.[5] This group included peddlers and performers who had come to the U.S. to participate in the World's Fair of 1893 and made their way to Detroit at its conclusion. Around this same time, in 1903, the *Detroit Free Press* reported there were approximately 50 Syrians in Detroit, mostly Christians observing a mix of Orthodox and Roman Catholic rites.[6]

Early peddlers did well enough to open two stores in Detroit, one at Gratiot and Brush and the second at Cadillac Square. Peddlers were mostly male until families began arriving in the 1910s. Detroit's earliest Arab families originated from Mt. Lebanon, in the modern-day nation of Lebanon; but there were also families from Damascus, in modern-day Syria; as well as Palestine. Already a diverse community, people tended to settle near their co-religionists. Detroit's Arab Christian settlement thus centered around existing Catholic and Orthodox churches near Congress and Orleans streets and worked its way east and north from there.

Detroit's first Chaldeans began arriving during the 1910s, just before the 1915 or 1916 massacre of Chaldeans in Aldana, Turkey, which was part of the Armenian Genocide.[7] This event sparked the initial movement of Chaldeans away from Turkey, but the migration continued for several decades as they sought safer places to live and raise their families. Detroit's earliest Chaldean immigrants appear to have lived in the Brush Park neighborhood but soon made their way to the Cass Corridor area. Interestingly, these Chaldeans were completely overlooked by the 1920 U.S. census summary. This oversight may have been due to the diversity of their points of origin, with some having immigrated from Jerusalem or Syria, and others having come from the lands of ancient Mesopotamia.[8]

Muslim Syrians also joined Arab Christians and Chaldeans in Detroit during the 1910s. Some Muslims initially settled in the Black Bottom neighborhood, near other Arab groups along Jefferson Avenue and Hastings Street. Many more, however, settled in Highland Park, an independent municipality now located completely within the boundaries of Detroit.

Like other populations that were new to Detroit in the early twentieth century, these immigrants quickly joined the ranks of industrial workers. In 1916 there were a reported 555 Syrians working in Ford's Highland Park facility.[9] In the 1920s, many working-class Muslim and Christian Syrians followed Henry Ford to the nearby city of Dearborn when the River Rouge factory complex opened. Palestinian and Yemeni immigrants also joined this flow of workers by the 1920s with Yemeni seafarers finding employment on the Great Lakes. Many Turkish settlers in Detroit, both ethnic Turks and Kurds, lived on the near East Side of Detroit and worked in heavy industry.

[5] Lois Rankin, "Racial Study of Syrians" (Detroit Public Library, 1932), The International Institute of Detroit, Box 18, Folder 27.
[6] "The Syrian Colony in Detroit," *Detroit Free Press*, April 12, 1903, p. D6.
[7] Jacob Bacall, *Images of America: Chaldeans in Detroit* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Press, 2014), 37.
[8] Bacall, Chaldeans in Detroit, 37.
[9] "Introduction: On Margins and Mainstreams," *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream,* eds. Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), p. 19.

Figure 8: First mosque built in the U.S., Highland Park, ca. 1921 (source: Michigan History Center).

These communities found Detroit a welcoming place, and they quickly began establishing houses of worship for their families.[10] In 1916 the first Maronite Catholic Church, St. Maron, was established at 1555 East Congress Street (not extant) and St. George's Antiochian Orthodox Church was organized a few blocks away. The Muslim community opened their first mosque in Highland Park in 1921 and their first Detroit mosque, the Universal Islamic Society, at 1941 Hastings Street (not extant) in the Paradise Valley neighborhood in 1925. This mosque was established by a very diverse group that included Arabs, Africans, Turks, Albanians, and South Asians. Detroit was an important hub for early Muslim organizations. The Nation of Islam was established in Detroit in 1930 by African Americans, and by the 1950s-1980s the Federation of Islamic Associations of the United States and Canada was headquartered in and around Detroit.[11]

Historian Alixa Naff, whose family moved to Detroit in 1931 when she was a young teen, wrote about the tightly knit "Syrian enclave" her family lived in when they first arrived. She described the housing in the Congress Street area as small, overcrowded, and run down, but the community as supportive and engaged in the process of assimilation. It was peopled mostly by Maronite and Melkite Catholics whose children, like her, were encouraged to attend English language services at neighboring non-Arab churches. However, it was also critical that each community celebrate all the important rites of passage in the denominational home congregation of the family.

As Naff's father struggled to build a grocery business for himself in Detroit, the family moved often to be near his different ventures. They sought to move up the socioeconomic ladder with each move, and by the late 1930s they had settled in a comfortable middle-class home in Highland


THE SYRIAN COLONY IN DETROIT.

AHMER SAID, A MOHAMMEDAN.

PIETRO JOSEPH.

another near the corner of Gratiot and Russell. As a rule they are not inclined to talk much about themselves and their work. They have not forgotten the rigors of Turkish rule and they seem to suspect that when an American shows much interest in them he is preparing for some trick that will not do the Syrians any good. Many of them, too, were robbed by confidence men shortly after their arrival in this country, and having seen the savings of a lifetime go in a moment, they have learned to be careful. The Detroit Syrians say that they have no desire to return to their native land. They make money easier here and are able to live and dress better. They quickly pick up Ameri-

JAKE GEORGE AND SARA ANTONA, HIS CLERK.

Figure 9: Members of the "Syrian Colony" in 1903 (source: Detroit Free Press, *April 12, 1903).*

[10] Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).
[11] Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Park.[12] While Arab ethnic enclaves, including the "Syrian Colony," persisted in Detroit during the early twentieth century, there was also constant movement in and out of these neighborhoods as new immigrants arrived and more prosperous ones sought to move up or to be closer to their places of employment. The 1932 "Racial Study of Syrians" acknowledged that, by the time of the Great Depression, Detroit's Arab communities had dispersed across the city to reside near their places of employment. It also pointed out the large number of Syrians who had moved into the dry goods and grocery trade, and mentioned the small, but growing, number of professionals.[13]

Figure 10: Michael Binno with children Joseph, Mary Ann, and Judy, in front of his store on Third Avenue and Hancock, ca. 1940s (source: Rebecca Binno Savage).

By the middle of the 1930s, the number of Chaldean families in Detroit had increased. At least fifteen Chaldean residents lived together in three rented houses on Third Avenue near West Kirby Street, including members of the Ajlowny, Essa, Abed, Kalef, and Zayled families.[14] There were also several families, including the Garmos, Binnos, and Kilanos who lived on Hancock Street near Third.[15] The three families, all of whom hailed from Iraq, resided in the same place in 1935, but other family members were listed as living in Baghdad or Wheeling, West Virginia, illustrating that the families likely sent their heads of household to find a place to live and work before bringing the remainder of the family to the city. The 1940 census indicates that David Kilano was the owner of a grocery store and his neighbor, Mike Binno, worked as a grocery store clerk at Kilano's store. After saving his wages, Binno opened his own store at 4626 Third.[16] The children of the family attended school, and the families worshiped, at Saint Dominic's Roman Catholic Church (outside Cass Corridor), 4846 Trumbull Avenue.[17]

Detroit grew rapidly in the first decades of the twentieth century and shrank again just as rapidly in the second half, which encouraged mobility among its ethnic populations. The older neighborhoods in or near Black Bottom and along Congress Street were razed in the 1950s and 1960s during urban renewal projects, which displaced the older Arab and Chaldean communities there. Lebanese Maronites made their way east along

[12] Alixa Naff, "Growing up in Detroit: An Immigrant Grocer's Daughter", in *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, by Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (Great Lakes Books, 2000), p. 629 <http://www.amazon.com/Arab-Detroit-Margin-Mainstream-Great/dp/0814328121>.
[13] Lois Rankin, "Racial Study of Syrians" (Detroit Public Library, 1932), The International Institute of Detroit, Box 18, Folder 27.
[14] United States of America, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930).
[15] United States of America, Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940).
[16] "Grocer Draws $50 Fine for Food-Price Violation," Detroit Free Press, October 28, 1944.
[17] Ulia Hakim, "Chaldean History," Email. 2021.

Jefferson Avenue and out into the suburbs. St. Maron's second church opened at 11466 Kercheval Avenue (extant) in 1975, and St. George's also relocated to a site at 2760 East Grand Boulevard (extant) in this period. Both groups moved more recently to newer facilities in Clinton Township and Troy respectively. The Chaldean community, facing a similar displacement, moved to Detroit's Boston-Edison and New Center neighborhoods, and finally into suburbs including Southfield and West Bloomfield.

Figure 11: Three Lebanese cousins, photographed in Detroit circa 1925 (source: Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Smithsonian Institution).

In the late 1960s, newer waves of Chaldean immigrants established a new community center near Seven Mile and Woodward, which later became known as Chaldean Town. A small Yemeni community established a mosque on Chene Street in Poletown in 1976 but was displaced in the early 1980s when the City of Detroit and General Motors razed the neighborhood. They relocated to the outskirts of Hamtramck, Michigan, another independent municipality within the boundaries of Detroit, where their growth reshaped the identity of Hamtramck and its surrounding communities. Lebanese Muslims, with communities in Highland Park and Dearborn, built the Islamic Center of Detroit halfway between, at 15571 Joy Road in 1963 (extant), the first purpose-built mosque in Detroit. Eventually, their community grew significantly in Dearborn and in surrounding Detroit neighborhoods like Warrendale and Southwest.

Metro Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities have grown significantly over the past 130 years. In the 1940s, following independence movements in their homelands, the Syrian community became known as the Lebanese and Syrian communities. In the 1950s, the Chaldean community began to grow anew, and a Palestinian enclave developed in Southwest Detroit and Dearborn. After the Immigration Act of 1965 lifted the quota system on Arab nations, the Arab and Chaldean populations grew quickly and diversified. The Lebanese, Palestinian, Iraqi, Yemeni, and Syrian communities in Detroit and its suburbs have continued to expand in the twenty-first century, often as a consequence of war and conflict in the Middle East. In 2019, Yemenis were the fastest growing foreign-born population in Wayne County, with many Yemenis, Iraqis, and Syrians continuing to settle in the city itself.[18] As of 2024, there were dozens of mosques in Detroit, with the Arab-majority ones concentrated near the cities of Dearborn and Hamtramck.

[18] H. Abbas, "New report shows immigrants contribute significantly to Wayne County's Economy," *Arab American News.* Retrieved 5/10/2021 https://www.arabamericannews.com/2019/10/18/new-report-shows-immigrants-

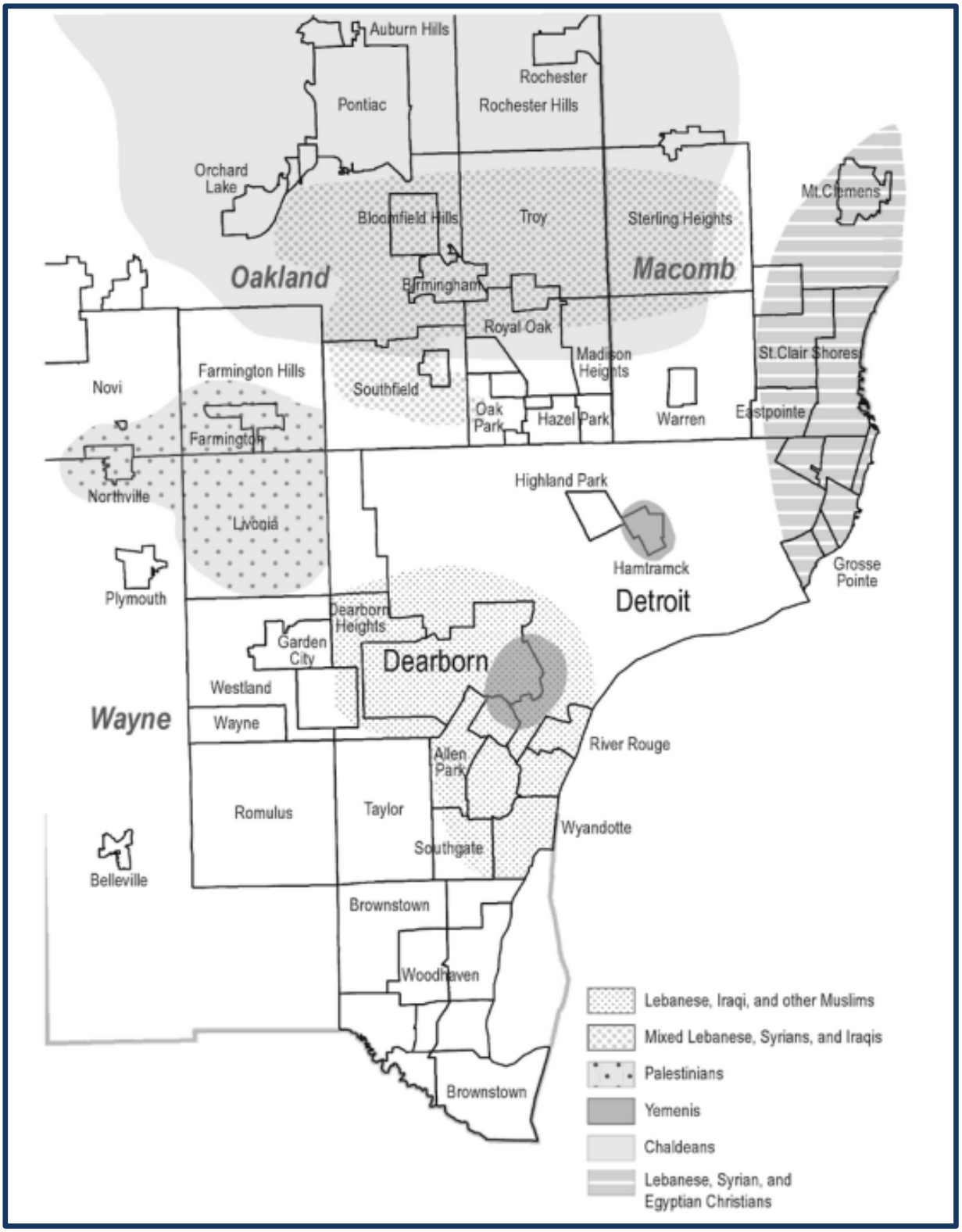


Figure 12: Arab and Chaldean communities in the metropolitan Detroit area, ca. 2000s (source: Abraham, Howell, and Shyrock: Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade).

Citizenship, Race, Rights, Migration

The diversity of Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities reflects many factors: when an immigrant or community of immigrants first arrived in the United States, why they decided to make a new home for themselves here, and how they were received by the American people and government when they first came. Those who came in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries were more likely to be Christian than Muslim and more likely to be seeking security and economic opportunity for their families than fleeing war or conflict. These groups nonetheless struggled in the early years to be accepted as Americans and to be allowed to naturalize as U.S. citizens.

In the early twentieth century, U.S. immigration laws excluded most Asians from citizenship. Only "free Whites" were allowed to naturalize. Immigrants from the Syrian and Iraqi provinces of the Ottoman Empire were described by immigration officers as "Turks from Asia," and judges and other officials ruled on whether they should be considered White or Asian during immigration petitions. Their decisions varied widely. Syrians, many of whom had been in the U.S. for decades, had to go to court and lobby Congress in order to be classified as White persons for immigration purposes.[19] They achieved this status in the 1915 Dow v. U.S. case, but immigration officials and the courts continued to differ over how to interpret these rulings until race was removed as a criteria for citizenship in the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. As recently as 1942, a Yemeni man from Detroit was denied citizenship on the grounds that he was "dark complected" and "of the Muslim faith.".[20]

The perceived racial ambiguity of the Arab community was also reflected in the writings of social workers, reporters, and other observers of the Syrian immigrants who first settled in Detroit. Syrians were frequently disparaged in pejorative language and characterized as out of place and disruptive of the social fabric. Observers were concerned by the heavy physical labor undertaken by women pack peddlers at the turn of the century and by the idea that Muslim men might seek polygamous marriages. They did not approve of immigrant families taking in boarders or newly arrived relatives to help cover expenses, nor of those who preferred the long hours of store ownership over the steady paycheck of a laborer. They wrote frequently of men who gathered in coffeehouses to smoke hookahs and of Muslims who bowed low to the ground for each of their daily prayers.[21] It is ironic, then, that upper middle class White Detroiters frequently joined the Shriners, a civic organization that problematically named its clubhouse the Detroit Moslem Temple and whose members dressed in orientalist fantasy costumes and gave themselves titles such as "Rajah" and "Imperial Deputy of the Desert."[22]

---

[19] Sarah Gualtieri, "Becoming "White": Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States", *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 20.4 (2001), pp. 29–58.
[20] Khaled A. Beydoun, "Between Muslim and White: The Legal Construction of Arab American Identity", *New York University Annual Survey of American Law*, 69 (2013), p. 29.
[21] Charlotte Karem Albrecht, ""A Woman without Limits": Syrian Women in the Peddling Economy Book," in *Possible Histories: Arab Americans and the Queer Ecology of Peddling* (University of California Press, 2023); Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Alixa Naff, *Becoming America: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience.* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Nadine Naber, "Ambiguous Insiders: An Investigation of Arab American Invisibility", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23.1 (2000), pp. 37–61.
[22] Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), doi:10.5149/9780807894057_nance.

Despite these struggles, the Arabs and Chaldeans who settled in Detroit in the early twentieth century were able to purchase homes and to pursue careers like other White immigrant communities of the period. They were not subject to the deed restrictions that Jews and African Americans faced, nor the workplace discrimination meted out to Black workers. This enabled many of them to move quickly into the White working class and for some to enter the middle and upper middle classes.

Exclusionary immigration laws and a restrictive quota system put in place in 1924 made it difficult for Arab immigrants to come to the U.S. for several decades thereafter. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (The McCarran-Walter Act) encouraged the recruitment of skilled workers and foreign students and loosened quota restrictions. This led to the arrival of new Middle Eastern immigrants from urban rather than rural backgrounds and with high demand job skills in fields such as medicine, higher education, and engineering. Auto manufacturers Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler, Wayne State University (located in Detroit's Midtown area), and area hospitals were frequent magnets for this new generation of migrants. Palestinians, many of whom were displaced in the *Nakhba* (the 1948 War that created the State of Israel and displaced roughly half of the Palestinian population from their homes and homeland), were one of the first groups to benefit from these changes in U.S. law. Communities from Ramallah, Al-Bireh, and Beit Hanina, all in the West Bank, began to grow in this period in settlements near the New Center area and in Southwest Detroit. The Chaldean community also began to grow rapidly for the first time during this period and settled near New Center and in the Boston-Edison neighborhood.

The Immigration Act of 1965 completed the process of erasing reference to race, national origins, and ancestry in the immigration process, and opened the possibility of citizenship to the world. While this law created preferences for those with skills critical to the U.S. job market, it also made family reunification a special priority of immigration policies and created some preferences for refugee communities. This law made it possible for Yemeni workers, Chaldean entrepreneurs, and many more Palestinians to join the migration to Detroit.

This new immigration law was part of the package of civil rights legislation passed in the 1960s, starting with the Civil Rights Act in 1963 and the Voting Rights Act in 1964. Together, these laws radically altered the racial makeup of the American populace, ended *de jure* discrimination, and greatly undermined *de facto* discrimination based on race. Despite the long history of activism that made these laws possible, this legislation did little in the short term to alleviate discriminatory policies in the Detroit housing market, public schools, workplaces, and policing. Racial conflict escalated rapidly after most of the Black Bottom and Paradise Valley neighborhoods were razed to make way for new freeways and residential complexes in the 1950s and 1960s, and the city was a cauldron of mistrust and frustration.[23]

The experience of, and reaction to, this racial tension by Arab and Chaldean Detroiters varied based on social class, political inclination, length of time in the city, and the relationships individuals had forged with African Americans. Many Arab and Chaldean Americans, especially those in the professions, chose to leave Detroit at this time, while many store owners and working-class people stayed in the city.

[23] Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

Muslim Arabs, who had been more likely to live in Highland Park or in Dearborn, were also less impacted by these tensions. They were much more likely than their Christian counterparts to have worshiped in mixed race settings and to have found solidarity with Asian and Black Muslims regarding anti-colonial and liberation movements affecting their homelands.[24]

For Arab and Chaldean Americans there were other tensions growing in the 1960s that gradually changed how people saw themselves and how they were viewed by others. Some of this change arose from the growing influence of the Black Power and Chicano movements, which encouraged young minorities to take pride in their distinctive identities and to fight for the liberation of their communities within U.S. society and globally. Some of it stemmed from the support the Non-Aligned Movement generated for new forms of Black and Brown solidarity that included many Arab liberation struggles. This change also developed from the increase in Anti-Arab racism that followed the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the arrival of newly displaced and economically distressed immigrants to Detroit and Dearborn. The rise of the Palestinian Liberation Movement in the wake of this war was especially influential among Arab Americans and led to the creation of a strong and relatively radical Arab Left.[25] It also contributed to a set of racialized stereotypes of Arabs (as terrorists, decadent oil sheikhs, or brutal misogynists) that became prevalent in U.S. media at this time.[26] The new Black and Brown-identifying Arab American identity of many in Dearborn, Detroit, and Highland Park differed from the more White-identifying Arab and Chaldean identities that developed in and before the 1950s.[27]

The story in other areas of Metropolitan Detroit is more complicated still. The new Arab immigrants who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s had been displaced by war and occupation. They tended to be poorer than other residents and lacked the occupational and educational skills of those who had arrived in the 1950s and early 1960s. Voluntary migrants tend to find it easier to fit into their new environments and to have the goal of assimilating as quickly as possible. By comparison, displaced people arrive in a state of shock and mourning, and their goal is often, at least initially, to preserve as much of their previous lives as possible. This difference was an important one in Dearborn where both non-Arabs and older Arab Americans initially saw newcomers as a threat to the city's equilibrium. However, a controversial urban renewal campaign simultaneously threatened Dearborn's Southend neighborhood, the ethnic stronghold of the city's Arab community. For second and third generation Arab Americans who were amid their own ethnic and political awakening, the new immigrants also represented an opportunity to create new forms of solidarity and to build a political base. Together they resisted the city's urban renewal campaign and created the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) in 1971, the Arab Worker's Caucus in 1973, and the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee in 1980, led by civil rights attorney Abdeen Jabara. These organizations

[24] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past*.
[25] Pamela E Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s–1980s* (UNC Press Books, 2017).
[26] Nabeel Abraham, *Anti-Arab Racism and Violence in the United States* (University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 155–214 <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/cultures/nk09/documents/020> [accessed 24 July 2024].
[27] Andrew Shryock and Ann Chih Lin, "Arab American Identities in Question", in *Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit After 9/11* (Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2009).

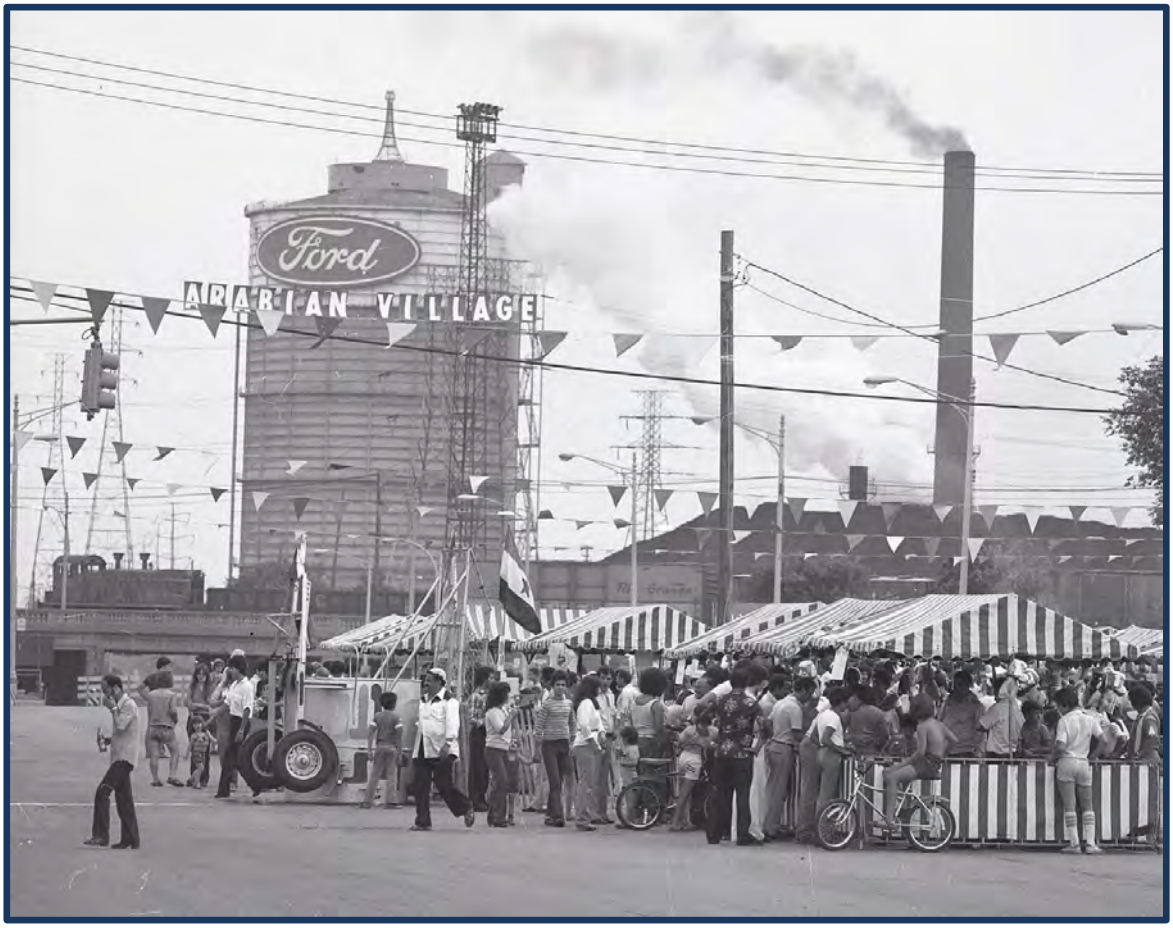


Figure 13: Arabian Village Street Fair in Dearborn's South End, ca. 1980 (Dearborn Historical Museum).

seemed radical at the time to less political Arab Americans and much of Dearborn saw them as a disruption to a hard-won way of life.[28]

Detroit was beset with a different set of problems in the 1970s. Its population declined rapidly after the Uprising of 1967. Over 400 Arab- and Chaldean-owned retail stores were damaged during the rebellion.[29] Cousins Sherry and Benita (Bonnie) Hakim recalled the impact of the unrest on their family store, Hakim's Food and Drug Center, located at the corner of Second Avenue and Delaware Street (not extant). Members of the Chaldean Mother of God Church, they were unable to attend service on the day the uprising began. The store remained open throughout the event, filling prescriptions and selling essential supplies. While the Hakims' store was untouched, both Sherry and Bonnie recalled other Chaldean businesses being

[28] Barbara Aswad, "The Southeast Dearborn Arab Community Struggles for Survival against Urban "Renewal"", in *Arabic-Speaking Communities in American Cities*, ed. by Barbara C Aswad (Center For Migration Studies, 1974), pp. 53–84; Sally Howell, ""Southend Struggles: Diverging Narratives of Power and Place in an Arab American Enclave,"" *Mashriq and Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies*, 3.1 (2015), pp. 41–64; Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock, "Majority Now: Tipping Points and the Right to Be Different in Dearborn", in *Beyond Refuge in Arab Detroit* (Wayne State University Press, Forthcoming); Pennock.
[29] Edward Deeb, June 17th, 2015 · Detroit Historical Society Oral History Archive" <https://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org/items/show/43> [accessed 24 July 2024].

damaged and destroyed, as well as business owners who successfully defended their properties.[30]

The Uprising caused many long-time Detroit residents to sell and move out to the suburbs. However, for recently arrived immigrants, the city's low-cost housing and commercial real estate provided an attractive incentive for them to invest in the city anew. In this period the Chaldean community on Seven Mile Road grew and thrived, a Yemeni community began to develop on the outskirts of Hamtramck, and Lebanese newcomers, many of whom had been priced out of the Dearborn market, bought homes nearby in Detroit's Claytown, Warrendale, and Aviation neighborhoods. In each case these communities revitalized the local housing markets and developed successful ethnic business corridors in Detroit.[31]

Beginning in the 1980s, the U.S. became more directly involved in the conflicts of the Middle East with frustrating outcomes, many of which contributed to new emigration from the region. In 1983, for example, a U.S. Marine barrack in Beirut was bombed and 241 servicemen were killed. In 1990-1991 a U.S.-led military coalition briefly invaded Iraq during the Gulf War, and at the conclusion of the war, the U.S. imposed devastating sanctions on Iraq. Following the Al-Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001, U.S. troops have been active on the ground in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Gaza. These wars contributed to a long series of environmental and human catastrophes, including one of the worst refugee crises in human history. Many of the Middle Eastern peoples who have made their way to Detroit in the past 30 years were displaced directly or indirectly by one of these conflicts. The Iraqi community, including both Chaldeans and Shi'i Muslims, has more than tripled in size. The Syrian, Palestinian, and Yemeni communities have also grown significantly due to war. It has been difficult for Arabs and Chaldeans to explain the cost of these wars for their communities and families to non-Middle Easterners. Together these conflicts have contributed to the further racialization and double consciousness of the local MENA community.[32]

Demographics

Reporting on the demographics of the nation's Arab and Chaldean American communities has always been challenging. The U.S. government, and immigrants themselves, have described these communities differently over time. Historically, Middle Eastern Americans have been counted as Whites by the U.S. Census Bureau. Until recently there were few tools available to help disaggregate their numbers from those of other Whites. As a result, counts of Detroit's Arab and Chaldean

---

[30] Sherry Hakim, "The 1967 Detroit Riots Written from the Memories of Sherry Hakim" and Memoir of the 1967 Riots by Benita (Bonnie) Hakim, manuscript dated 10/30/2024. Provided by Azucena Hakim in an email to the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board, November 2024.

[31] "Edward Deeb, June 17th, 2015 · Detroit Historical Society Oral History Archive" <https://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org/items/show/43> [accessed 24 July 2024]; Sally Howell, "Competing for Muslims: New Strategies for Urban Renewal in Detroit", in *In Islamophobia/Islamophililа: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 209–36; Sally Howell and Rose Wellman, "Unsettled Lives: Iraqi Refugees and the Effort to Reconstruct Self and Community in Dearborn and Detroit", in *Beyond Refuge in Arab Detroit*, ed. by Yasmeen Hanoosh, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shryock (Wayne State University Press, Forthcoming).

[32] Nadine Christine Naber, "Imperial Whiteness and the Diasporas of Empire", *American Quarterly*, 66.4 (2014), pp. 1107–15, doi:10.1353/aq.2014.0068; Andrew Shryock, "Attack of the Islamophobes: Religious War (and Peace) in Arab/Muslim Detroit", in *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*, ed. by Carl Ernst (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 145–74; Andrew Shryock and Ann Chih Lin, "The Limits of Citizenship", in *Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit After 9/11* (Russell Sage Foundation Publications, 2009).

communities have been inconsistent and frequently inaccurate, and thus they have been largely omitted from this survey.

Since the early 1980s, Arab and Chaldean American communities have engaged in significant advocacy for one or more ethnic/racial categories of their own from the Census Bureau. The Detroit MENA community has played a strong national leadership role in this campaign. They have worked closely with the Census Bureau to find the best mechanism for counting their communities and, prior to the "MENA" category's recent creation, they encouraged community members to check "other" and then to write in their ethnic identity or national origins.[33] Even when large numbers of Arab and Chaldean Americans have self-reported their identities as "other" in Michigan, the U.S. Census has added them back into the White category and reported their numbers there. Additionally, many Arab and Chaldean immigrants are new to the U.S. and new to the process of being counted by the government. In their homelands such reporting could be problematic for minority communities, so they have inherited a distrust of the practice. Finally, in the post-9/11 period of extraordinary surveillance, this problem of trust became acute. Therefore, many scholars and community advocates have argued that the census data reflects a significant undercount of Arab and Chaldean Americans. Some demographers go so far as to triple the census numbers in their reporting.[34]

[33] Ismael Ahmed, "Michigan Arab Americans: A Case of Electoral and Non-Electoral Empowerment", in *American Arabs and Political Participation*, ed. by Philippa Strum (Woodrow Wilson International Center, 2006); Helen Samhan, "Losing the Battle: How Political Activism Guarantees Ethnic Integration (in Spite of Defeats Along the Way)", in *American Arabs and Political Participation*, ed. by Philippa Strum (Woodrow Wilson Center, 2006).
[34] Kim Schopmeyer, "Arab Detroit after 9/11: A Demographic Portrait", in *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade*, ed. by Nabeel Abraham, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shryock (Wayne State University Press, 2011), pp. 29–65.

Religious Institutions

Early Syrian and Lebanese Churches

In the early twentieth century, when Arab and Chaldean immigrants first began arriving in Detroit, they were eager to establish houses of worship to provide continuity with their homelands, languages, and the community identities that had been important to them in the Middle East. The first immigrants were mostly Christians who belonged to several indigenous Syrian and Iraqi churches and followed Orthodox, Eastern-rite, and Roman Catholic denominations. Because the Ottoman Millet System provided limited autonomy to these religious minority groups through religious courts and schools, each group's ethno-national identity was tightly intertwined with its religious affiliation. Many of these Christian communities had benefited from close ties to French or American missionaries in the region, who helped facilitate their immigration.[35] When they first arrived in Detroit, they were able to worship at the churches most affiliated with these missionary communities like Christ Church (Episcopal) and Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, both on East Jefferson Avenue. Yet, by the early 1930s, there were several Arab churches in Detroit located in a set of overlapping Syrian neighborhoods that took shape in and near to Black Bottom on the near East side of downtown.

St. George's Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Church was established in 1913 to serve Detroit's growing Syrian and Palestinian communities. By 1918, they were able to dedicate a church building of their own located at 3134 Arndt Street (not extant). During the 1930s, St. George's was led by Archimandrite Antony Bashir, who in 1936 was appointed Archbishop of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese in New York.[36] As their community changed and grew, many members of the congregation entered the grocery store trade and moved across the city to live near their stores. Thus, in 1940 St. George's moved to a more central location at 2903 E. Grand Boulevard (not extant). This move prompted newly arrived Syrian and Palestinian families to purchase homes in the New Center Area, and following Black Bottom's destruction in the early 1950s, many lower East side Syrian families moved closer to

Figure 14: St. George's Syrian Orthodox Church, 2903 East Grand Blvd., ca. 1963 (source: Detroit Historical Society).

[35] May Ahdab-Yehia, "The Lebanese Maronites: Patterns of Continuity and Change", in *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. by Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Wayne State University, 1983), p. 208; Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America; a Study in Religion and Assimilation*, Immigrant Heritage of America Series (Twayne, 1975).
[36] Joseph R. Haiek, ed., *The American Arabic Speaking Community Almanac* (Los Angeles: The News Circle, 1975), 60.

the church as well. In 1968 St. George's built a new church at 2760 E. Grand Boulevard (extant), a round Midcentury-style building with a large copper-clad dome which honored Orthodox architectural traditions. Its convenient location near the interchange of Federal interstate highways I-94 and I-75 allowed St. George's church to continue growing as their member families began relocating to far east- and west-side Detroit neighborhoods like Morningside and Claytown, as well as to suburbs including Grosse Pointe, Livonia, and Westland.[37]

At least three other Syrian Orthodox churches were opened on Detroit's East side to serve the many families that moved further east from original neighborhoods near downtown. These included St. Paul's, located at 3595 McDougall Street (not extant) in the 1930s; St. John's, opened at 1761 Sheridan Street (extant) between 1947-1949; and St. Mary's, located at 2504 Beniteau Street (extant), which was active in the 1950s. Like St. George's, all three initially occupied small buildings located within neighborhoods. St. Paul's shared its building with an Italian Baptist church and Greek Orthodox church, illustrating its neighborhood's diverse ethnic and religious makeup.

Figure 15: St. Maron Maronite Church, 1555 East Congress Street, ca. 1916 (Oscar Gottlesben Archives, courtesy of Maggie Collins).

The Maronite Diocese is an Eastern rite Roman Catholic community. It began as a branch of the Aramaic Antiochian Church, whose followers recognize the teachings of St. Maron, a monk who lived in Northern Syria during the fourth century.[38] "Maronites" who immigrated to Detroit in the early twentieth century worshiped initially at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church on East Jefferson Avenue. They soon petitioned the Maronite Patriarch in Beirut to send a clergy member to help them establish a Maronite Arabic language church in Detroit. In 1915, upon the arrival of Joseph Shabaia, they began construction on a building located at 1555 E. Congress Street (not extant). The first mass was celebrated there in 1916, with Father Elias Asmar appointed their first pastor. A school and convent for nuns were also established near the church and the community grew and prospered until the Great Depression, at which point the school and convent were permanently closed due to financial pressures. (Many families had sent their children to

[37] Terry Ahwal, 2024; William Swor, interview with HDAB staff, September 24, 2024.
[38] Haiek, ed., *The American Arabic Speaking Community Almanac*, 71.

other local parochial schools which were thought to be better drivers of assimilation.) In 1937 a new leader, Peter Abdoo, was sent to Detroit, who encouraged all Eastern rite Catholics in Detroit to attend St. Maron. In 1961 the City of Detroit purchased the property on Congress for urban renewal and the congregation opened a new church at 11466 Kercheval Avenue (extant) in 1966. Father Abdoo was so successful at revitalizing the congregation that it became the first seat of the Maronite Church in the U.S. when it was made an official diocese in 1972.[39]

Figure 16: Our Lady of Redemption Melkite Catholic Church, 2741 McDougall, ca. 1950s (Detroit Historical Society).

Detroit's first wave of Syrian immigrants also included Melkites, a sect of Byzantine Rite Catholics, whose community shared a similar narrative with larger Christian Arab groups. Their community was served initially by itinerant priests, but in 1920 they were supplied a pastor of their own, Father Clement Salman, to help them open a new parish named Our Lady of Redemption Melkite Catholic Church. They celebrated mass temporarily at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church until their own church was completed at 2741 McDougall Street (extant) in 1927.[40]

Early Chaldean Churches

The Chaldean Catholic Church is an Eastern-Rite Catholic tradition governed by the Chaldean Patriarchate, an organizational body based in Iraq. Like other Arab Christians, Chaldeans were granted religious autonomy in the Middle East under the Ottoman Millet System. However, Chaldeans maintained a distinct ethno-religious identity as the native peoples of Iraq who were converted to Christianity in the first century.[41]

When the first Chaldeans arrived in Detroit, they tended to settle with other Arabic speaking Christians near East Jefferson Avenue between downtown and East Grand Boulevard. They often worshiped alongside the Maronites at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, and then later at St. Maron's or Our Lady of Redemption. As their community grew between the 1930s and 1940s and migrated toward the Boston-Edison neighborhood, Chaldeans began worshipping at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament at 9844 Woodward Avenue (extant). This was the primary place of worship for Chaldeans before Mother of God Church was founded. In addition to attending mass

[39] May Ahdab-Yehia, "The Detroit Maronite Community," in *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities*, edited by Barbara C Aswad (Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1980).
[40] Our Lady of Redemption Melkite Catholic Church, *100 Pages for 100 Years* (Our Lady of Redemption, 2020).
[41] Bishop Bawai Soro and Jacob Bacall, *Chaldean Catholic Church* (Charleston, SC: Acadia Publishing, 2025).

here, Chaldean children also attended the church's school and families were included in parish social events.[42]

Under the leadership of Father Toma Bidawid, members of this congregation formed their own Chaldean rite church in Detroit, Mother of God Church, in 1948. Mother of God originally worshipped in a building at Hamilton and Euclid Avenues. When this building was demolished for construction of the Lodge Freeway, the parish purchased the former Dill Brothers funeral home and built a new sanctuary next door at 10213-10223 Hamilton Avenue (extant) in 1954.

Even after Mother of God was established, many Chaldean Detroiters continued to worship at existing Catholic parishes, including Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament. Mother of God remained the only Chaldean church in Detroit until Sacred Heart Chaldean Catholic Church opened on Seven Mile in 1974.

Figure 17: Father Toma Bidawid and members of the Chaldean community, 1947 (source: Unleash the Gospel *magazine, Summer 2021).*

[42] Mary Romaya, oral interview recorded at the Chaldean Cultural Center, 5600 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield Township, MI on November 4, 2024. Recordings held by the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board.

Midcentury and Later Church Developments

Beginning in the 1950s, the arrival of new communities and shifting residential patterns in Detroit led to significant movement for established Arab and Chaldean churches, as well as the establishment of new congregations in Detroit's outer ring neighborhoods and in suburban cities.

Detroit's Palestinian community, many of whom immigrated from the village of Ramallah, started to grow following the *Nakba* displacements of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Some settled in the New Center area, near St. George's church, and others purchased individual homes around the city. By the 1970s, the Ramallah community living in Metro Detroit numbered around 2,000 people, and many Detroiters moved to western suburbs including Redford Township, Livonia, and Westland.[43] Around 1972, they established the Basilica of St. Mary, a large Antiochian Orthodox parish, in Livonia.

The Melkite community noticed that attendance at their church on McDougall began to wane following urban renewal projects on Detroit's near east side. They purchased 20 acres of land and a school in Warren, Michigan, and moved there in 1981. They also opened a second parish in Westland in 1990.[44]

The Maronites and Syrian Orthodox communities, having invested in new churches in Detroit in the late 1960s, were slower to leave the city. Some families moved to Detroit's New Center area, others to east side Detroit neighborhoods, and still others into the suburbs. As the Maronite community continued to grow and expand, they opened a second church, St. Charbel Maronite Catholic Church, in Warren, Michigan in 1993. This church has since moved to Clinton Township, Michigan, while another Maronite parish, St. Rafka Maronite Catholic Church, opened in Livonia during the 2000s.[45]

Father Joseph Antypas of St. George's Antiochian Orthodox Church, observed that his congregation stopped venturing into the city for regular services in the 1990s. Members also began to hold weddings and other special events at other churches outside the city. When the church's leaders learned about "the golden corridor,"[46] and observed the success that other Arab churches were having in that area, they decided it was time to follow parishioners to the suburbs. They bought land in Troy, Michigan, and moved into a new facility there in 1994.[47] Similarly, the congregation of the St. Mary's church on Beniteau Street relocated to suburbs including Berkeley and Oak Park in the 2010s.

The Coptic Church is an Eastern Orthodox tradition established in the first century in Alexandria, Egypt. Beginning in the 1960s, a community of Coptic Christians with professional backgrounds arrived in Detroit seeking jobs in the automotive industry and at area hospitals. Many attended Wayne State University, and some settled on Muirland

[43] Leila Boulos Saba, "The Social Assimilation of the Ramallah Community Residing in Detroit" (thesis, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1971), 82.
[44] Our Lady Redemption Melkite Catholic Church.
[45] "Who Are We?"
[46] The term "golden corridor" typically refers to an area of economic and population boom, generally along a specific road. It was initially used beginning in the 1970s to refer to 16 Mile (Big Beaver) Road in the Troy area, but was later applied to other areas in the suburbs, most recently along M-59 (Hall Road) in Macomb County. For an early reference. See Don Lenhausen, "Troy's Big Beaver Road Struck by Gold," *Detroit Free Press*, March 20, 1972, 3A.
[47] Fr. Joseph Antypas, phone interview with Sally Howell, 2024.

St. in the University District neighborhood.[48] Coptic families originally attended existing churches including St. George's and St. Mary's, but around 1966, a priest from Toronto began visiting the area and providing Coptic religious services in people's homes. In 1969 Abouna Mikhial Melika arrived and worked to establish a church. The community purchased property in Troy and opened St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in 1979. Today the congregation has 600 members, and the community has opened additional churches in Farmington Hills (Holy Cross Coptic Orthodox Church), Shelby Charter Township (St. Mina & Pope Kyrillos VI Coptic Orthodox Church), and in Troy (Virgin Mary & St. Philopateer Coptic Orthodox Church).[49]

Like the Arab Christian communities, by the 1970s many established Chaldean families had also begun to leave Detroit for the suburbs; the Mother of God Church relocated to Southfield in 1973.[50] However, a new wave of Chaldean immigrants began arriving in the late 1960s, caused by continued persecution in their ancestral homelands in Iraq, as well as loosened immigration restrictions for Middle Easterners following the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. These new arrivals established a residential and commercial neighborhood in Detroit near Seven Mile and Woodward Avenue, north of the Arab enclave of Highland Park, which became known as "Chaldean Town." By the end of the 1970s, Chaldean Town was home to nearly a quarter of Metro Detroit's Chaldeans. It was densely packed with houses, and the community's economic and social life centered on Seven Mile Road, which hosted Chaldean-owned and operated bakeries, restaurants, barber shops, stores, and social halls. Students attended Greenfield Union Elementary School, Nolan Intermediate School, and Pershing High School. Chaldean Town's central location and proximity to the suburbs helped it thrive during a period of growth and transition for Chaldean communities in the 1970s and 1980s.[51]

The second Chaldean church in Detroit, Sacred Heart Chaldean Catholic Church, was established in 1973 by Father Jacob Yasso. In 1974 they remodeled a commercial building located at 236-240 W. Seven Mile Road (extant) into a church sanctuary with a unique Assyrian Revival-styled exterior. Another building next door, located at 302-314 W. Seven Mile (extant), was similarly remodeled to house Sacred Heart's rectory and community room. Sacred Heart's attendance swelled in the 1970s and 1980s, by which point approximately two-thirds of the neighborhood's residents were Chaldean. Its presence helped welcome additional immigrants in the 1990s following the Persian Gulf War and furthered Chaldean Town's success as a modern ethnic enclave.

[48] Christina Guirguis, email communications with HDAB staff, December 2024.
[49] Richard R. Jones, "Egyptian Copts in Detroit: Ethnic Community and Long-Distance Nationalism", in *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, ed. by Nabeel Abraham and Andrew J Shryock (Wayne State University Press, 2000); "Directory", NIHOV.ORG.
[50] Chris Kado, "Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Detroit: The Chaldean Community and Their Rise to Majority Ownership in the Grocery Markets, 1943-1990." (unpublished M.A. Thesis, Harvard University, 2017); Mary C. Sengstock, "Detroit's Iraqi-Chaldeans: A Conflicting Conception of Identity", in *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. by Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham (Wayne State University, 1983), p. 208; Ansam `Sitto, "Mother of God Celebrates Its 75th Anniversary", *Chaldean Diocese of St. Thomas the Apostle U.S.A*, 2024 <https://chaldeanchurch.org/mother-of-god-celebrates-its-75th-anniversary/> [accessed 24 July 2024].
[51] Miri, "Remembering Chaldean Town."

Figure 18: Sacred Heart Catholic Church and Community Center, ca. 1970s (Father Jacob Yasso Collection, provided by Paul Manni).

Mosques

Arab Muslims began immigrating to Detroit somewhat later than their Christian counterparts, but by 1910 there were established communities in Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood and in the City of Highland Park. Most of these Muslim immigrants worked in the auto industry, particularly at the Ford Motor Company's Highland Park factory. Working and living adjacent to other Muslim immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, Turks, Kurds, and Eastern Europeans, they were able to build and open the first purpose-built mosque in the United States at 242 Victor Avenue in Highland Park (not extant) in 1921, just a block away from the factory. Led by imams Hussien Karoub and Kalil Bazzy, this congregation was beset with conflict and could not sustain itself financially, largely because many of its potential members were already moving to Dearborn as Ford's River Rouge factory pulled more workers into its orbit.[52]

A second mosque, the Universal Islamic Society (UIS), opened in 1925 at New Oriental Hall on Hastings Street in Detroit (not extant). The UIS was led by Kalil Bazzy (Syrian/Lebanese), Shah Zain Ul-Abedin (Indian) and Duse Ali. Duse Ali was a British subject, likely from the Caribbean, who had been an important figure in the pan-African movement during World War I and a mentor to Marcus Garvey. Ali and other members of the UIS, who lived in Black Bottom in the 1910s and 1920s when it became the center of Black life in Detroit, were influential in promoting the idea among African Americans that Islam was a faith tradition common among their African ancestors and one that refuted the kinds of racial prejudice many Black Detroiters were then experiencing in local Christian churches. Nation of Islam founders Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad (ne Poole) began their collaboration and recruiting members in the immediate vicinity of the UIS and the highly diverse Muslim community that worshiped there. The UIS, like the earlier mosque in Highland Park, did not last long. The Muslim community did not receive help getting started from area churches like the Arab Christians had, nor did they have a denominational structure that supported new church development in far flung corners of the world. They were also a culturally and linguistically diverse community of believers. They seem to have been pulled apart by forces set in motion by the Great Depression and the migration of so many of the Arab and Turkish Muslim workers to Dearborn, where the Progressive Arabian Hashemite Society opened in 1937, and the

[52] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past*.

Figure 19: Islamic Center of Detroit, ca. 1963 (source: HS5361, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan).

American Muslim Society (AMS) opened in 1938. The AMS is now the oldest continuously operating mosque in Michigan and one of the oldest active congregations in the U.S.[53]

In 1963, Arab American Muslims opened a second new mosque in Detroit, the Islamic Center of America (ne Detroit), at 15571 Joy Road (extant). This midcentury structure was intended to fit comfortably into the Detroit cityscape. It included a prominent dome to suggest Islamic design but otherwise followed modernist design principles. In 1965 a minaret was added to further highlight the community's Islamic roots. Located halfway between Highland Park and Dearborn, the mosque eventually replaced earlier Shi'i congregations in both cities. Established by Imam Mohammad Jawad Chirri, this congregation has been highly influential over the decades.[54] It anchored the new migration of Lebanese Muslims to the area during the Lebanese Civil War and Israeli Occupation of South Lebanon from 1970-2000. Several rival mosques spun off from it in the 1980s and 1990s in Dearborn and Dearborn Heights. After the two U.S.-led wars in Iraq, this congregation also attracted a large refugee population from Iraq, which began

[53] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past*.
[54] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past*.

opening mosques and *mawakib* (sites of pilgrimage and ritual performance) along Warren Avenue in the 1990s. Today, the area is a thriving Iraqi business district. The Al-Zahraa Islamic Center purchased the mosque on Joy Road from the Islamic Center of America in 2009, several years after the Lebanese congregation moved to a monumental new home in Dearborn. There are now at least eight Iraqi Shi'i religious establishments in Detroit's Warrendale neighborhood and another four Sunni mosques managed by Palestinian, Egyptian, Yemeni, and African American Muslims. Wrapping around Dearborn into Southwest Detroit are another four Yemeni congregations and a growing Yemeni residential and business district along Lonyo Avenue and Michigan Avenue in the Claytown neighborhood.[55]

A second Arab Muslim enclave developed on the outskirts of Hamtramck in the 1980s. A small community of Yemeni autoworkers established a coffeehouse on Chene Street in Detroit's Poletown neighborhood in 1972, and converted it to a mosque, Masjid Mu`ath bin Jabal, a few years later. When the building was bought out by the city and the neighborhood was largely razed for a new General Motors factory, the congregation reestablished themselves at the intersection of Dorothy and Miller Streets. Michigan's Yemeni population grew significantly in the 1980s. In 1990, Masjid Mu`ath bin Jabal purchased a former Roman Catholic church across the street at 6096 Dorothy (extant) and converted it into a large mosque and school. A South Asian Mosque, Masjidun-Nur, was opened in the 1970s also in Detroit at 11311 Mound Road (extant), on the north side of Hamtramck. Between these two congregations a large and diverse Muslim American enclave has grown in the ensuing decades in both Hamtramck and Detroit. Today there are over 16 mosques in Hamtramck, Banglatown, and the surrounding neighborhoods.[56] In 2024, several Yemeni American politicians represented this community in Hamtramck's government and the state legislature. The long history of mosque building in Detroit continues today with Arab immigrants accounting for the fastest growing foreign-born population in both Detroit and Wayne County.[57]

The Druze religion is an esoteric, monotheistic religious tradition with origins in the Levant that is an offshoot of Isma'ili Islam. The Druze today, however, do not refer to themselves as Muslims. A small community of Druze was established in the early 1900s in Detroit. They joined the national Druze Association, called the El-Bakaurat Ed-Dirziyat, in 1917 as the group's second branch, located at 1337 East Palmer Street (not extant). In 1973 they created the first chapter of the newly organized American Druze Society. The group hosted national banquets in Detroit in 1940 and 1966 and played a leading role in supporting the community's newspaper, *al-Bayan*, from 1911-1940s. Prominent members of the Detroit chapter included Abbas Abu Shaqra (see the diaspora politics section), Casey Kasem (see the Arts and Literature Section) and Julia Makarem, a community historian who served two terms as President of the American Druze Society in 1963-1964 and again in 1995-1996. It is unclear how long they used the building on East Palmer as their branch headquarters. In the 1990s, they purchased a building in Dearborn Heights which they still use for social, religious, and educational purposes.[58]

---

[55] Howell Wellman, "Unsettled Lives."
[56] Greater Hamtramck is loosely bounded by Davison to the north, Mt. Elliot to the south, Mound on the east, and I-75 on the west.
[57] Sally Howell, ""Mosqueing the Marketplace: Business as (Un)Usual in Hamtramck,"" *Polish American Studies*, 79.2 (2022), pp. 26–49.
[58] Julia Makarem, "Branches of the El Bakaurat Ed Dirziyat", *American Druze Heritage* <https://www.americandruzeheritage.com/Branches.html> [accessed 18 October 2024].

Diaspora Politics and Civil Rights Engagements

Over 13,000 Syrian immigrants enlisted in the U.S. military during World War I. Some American Syrians were eager to fight for their new country, but many were also Arab nationalists who were equally eager to defeat the Ottoman Empire and help the Arab region gain political independence. The Arab nationalists were thwarted at the end of the war when the League of Nations instead gave France and Britain control over former Ottoman territories. They were likewise disappointed by the Balfour Declaration, which Britain signed in 1917 supporting the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Detroit quickly became an important hub in Arab American resistance to these plans. Muhammad Muhaisen, a vocal advocate of Arab independence, visited Detroit in 1919. He found enough support among local Arabs, especially in the Muslim community, to move to the city and establish the headquarters of the New Syrian Party in Highland Park. With Abbas Abu Shaqra, he published *Al-Difa al-Arabi* (*The Arab Awakening*) to advocate for a free Syria and Palestine. They were not alone. There were several Arabic language newspapers produced in Detroit and Highland Park in the first decades of the twentieth century, each of which reflected the political aims of its editors regarding U.S. citizenship, Americanization, and the "long distance nationalism" of the disparate Arab groups toward Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine in the interwar period.[59]

Similarly, Arabs and Chaldeans in Detroit established many social clubs and civic associations that mixed politics and religion, both in relation to American life and to developments in their homelands. When the First Lady of newly independent Lebanon, Madame Lore El Khouri, visited Detroit in 1946, 500 Lebanese Americans celebrated her visit at a banquet sponsored by the Lebanon Clubs of Detroit.[60] Representatives of each of the city's Arab churches and mosques were in attendance. A year later, when the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament visited Detroit, Highland Park, and Dearborn, he was feted in similar style.[61] In 1949 the Archbishop of Metropolitan Jerusalem and Transjordan, Mar Anastosius Samuel, received a banquet at St. John's Syrian Orthodox Church to raise funds "to rehabilitate war-torn schools and churches and to aid refugees" in Palestine.[62]

Such careful attention to homeland politics continued during the 1950s and 1960s. The 1967 Israeli occupations of the West Bank, Gaza, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights galvanized the political ambitions of a new generation of U.S.-born Arab Americans. The campus of Wayne State University played a critical role in this political awakening as young Arab Americans got to know foreign students, many of whom were Palestinian. They worked together to create and strengthen local chapters of groups like the Organization of Arab Students (est. 1952), the Muslim Student Association (est. 1963), and the Association of Arab University Graduates (est. 1967). These groups campaigned for the economic development and political independence of the Middle East and Muslim majority nation-states, for religious freedom in the U.S. and abroad, and for many human

[59] Julia Makarem, "Branches of the El Bakaurat Ed Dirziyat", *American Druze Heritage* <https://www.americandruzeheritage.com/Branches.html> [accessed 18 October 2024]; Hani Bawardi, 'Arab Immigrant Political Organizations from 1915 to 1951: Transnationalism as a Marker of Arab-American Identity and Development' (Wayne State University, 2009); Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*; Naff, *Becoming American.*; Alixa Naff, "The Arabic-Language Press", In Miller, Sally, M.*, The Ethnic Press in the United States: A Historical Analysis and Handbook, Greenwood Press, New York*, 1987, pp. 1–14.
[60] John Najduch, "A Betsy Ross of the East: Mme. El Khouri Helped Liberate Lebanon", *Detroit News* (1 October 1946), p. 20.
[61] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit,* pp. 137-138.
[62] "Fete Archbishop", *Detroit News* (26 September 1949), p. 6.

rights causes, especially the liberation of Palestine. Campus organizers from these different organizations, reflecting the New Left values of the period, recruited allies among both working-class Arab enclaves in Dearborn and Highland Park and middle-class ones in Detroit. The influential new alliances they forged helped create long standing service organizations like the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services of Dearborn (ACCESS, est. 1971) and the Arab American and Chaldean Council of Detroit (ACC, est. 1979). They also developed alliances and close working ties with non-Arab members of the New Left like Latino Family Services, Casa de Unidad, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.[63]

Figure 20: Annual Convention of the Midwest Federation of American Syrian Lebanon Clubs, July 1942, held at the Book-Cadillac Hotel, Detroit (source: Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Smithsonian Institution).

During the Cold War, American power and influence grew in the Middle East. The proxy wars of the period complicated things for those Arab Americans and Chaldeans still invested in their homelands. The civil wars fought in Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq created rifts among Detroit's different Arab and Chaldean factions, many of which lobbied Michigan's congressional delegations, the local media, and presidential administrations in support of sometimes complementary and sometimes competing outcomes. During the Iran Hostage Crisis, for example, Detroit's most prominent imam, Mohammad Jawad Chirri, met with President Carter in the White House and offered to negotiate the release of the American hostages with Ayatollah Khomeini directly. While most Arab Americans saw the Ayatollah as a political pariah, Chirri's desire to intervene personally in the conflict between Iran and the U.S. grew out of his sincere love for both polities.[64]

[63] Howell, "Southend Struggles: Diverging Narratives of Power and Place in an Arab American Enclave."
[64] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit.*

Many Arab and Chaldean Americans have shared this impulse over the ensuing decades, which intensified after 2000 as the U.S. became more directly involved in Middle Eastern conflicts. Many Iraqi immigrants worked for the U.S. military and intelligence services during the occupation of Iraq, for example, as translators, drivers, and logistics support. Others, like the Chaldean Federation of America (est. in 1982), the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce (est. 2003), and the Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council of America (est. in 2007) lobbied effectively for increased immigration and refugee status for their communities, and, in some cases lobbied for the creation of an autonomous homeland for the Chaldeans and other Christian communities of Iraq.[65]

In the post-9/11 period, many civil rights and political organizations were created in Detroit and surrounding cities that reflect these shifts in political belonging. These include the Council on American Islamic Relations, Emgage, the Arab American Political Action Committee, and the Arab American Civil Rights League. A group called BRIDGES - Building Respect in Diverse Groups to Enhance Security – was founded to facilitate closer ties and better communications between government agencies and the Arab and Muslim communities at a time of intense strain on these relations.[66] Voter participation also rose, especially in and around Dearborn and Hamtramck where Arab Americans moved gradually into the majority and new political leaders came to the fore to represent the interests of Arab Americans and Chaldean Americans.[67]

Both communities also strengthened their communications and representational infrastructure. The Arab American National Museum opened in Dearborn in 2005, and the Chaldean Cultural Center opened in West Bloomfield in 2009. Both communities now have strong Chambers of Commerce, a wide array of ethnic clubs and charitable associations, and a greatly enhanced media infrastructure. The number of churches and mosques that serve these communities has more than doubled in the past 20 years. Some of this expansion is due to the demographic growth of these populations, some to their political maturation, and some to the changing demands placed on communities in times of stress. In many ways the Arab and Chaldean communities of Detroit today resemble those of the early twentieth century. People want peace and prosperity in their homelands, and they want it for themselves and their children in Southeast Michigan. Increasingly Arab and Chaldean Americans realize that these two zones of interest are intimately connected. The difference between 2024 and 1924 lies in this: while many of Detroit's Arab and Chaldean immigrants are just getting started on the American chapters of their life, there are many well established Arab and Chaldean American institutions to lend a helping hand.

---

[65] Hanoosh; Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*.
[66] Howell, "Muslims as Moving Targets: External Scrutiny and Internal Critique in Detroit's Mosques," in *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade* edited by Nabeel Abraham, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shryock. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011, 151-185).
[67] Abdulkader Sinno, "Muslim, Christian Arab, and Chaldean Paths to Political Integration: Representation, Participation, and Activism in Metro Detroit", in *Beyond Refuge in Arab Detroit* (Wayne State University Press, 2025), 64-104; Niraj Warikoo, "Arab Americans Now a Majority in Dearborn, New Census Data Shows" <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/wayne/2023/09/26/arab-americans-now-a-majority-in-dearborn-new-census-data-shows/70929525007/> [accessed 25 July 2024].

Government Service and Electoral Politics

Arab and Chaldean Americans have long been active in city, county, and state politics as well. During the twentieth century, it was difficult for their small minorities to have much political influence as a collective. Individuals, nonetheless, did make a difference. While it is not possible to describe every influential individual in the communities, the short biographies below provide a sample of the contributions of some community leaders in law and public service during the twentieth century.

George Bashara (1901-1980) was born in Indiana, raised in Lebanon until he was 7 years old, and then grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. After attending law school at the University of Michigan, he moved to Detroit where he practiced law for 50 years. One of the first Arab lawyers in the city, he worked tirelessly to try and generate greater understanding of the Middle East and its peoples throughout his life. He ran (unsuccessfully) for a judgeship in the 1940s and many Arab entrepreneurs in Detroit rallied behind him. Many others followed his example, like Alfred Sawaya, John Koury, and Joseph G. Rashid, who were all appointed to the Prosecuting Attorney's Office for Detroit and Wayne County in the 1940s and 1950s, taking on prominent cases.[68]

Figure 21: George Bashara, Jr., undated (source: Find A Grave.com).

Bashara's son, George Bashara Jr. (1934-2002), succeeded where his father had not. Born and raised in Detroit, he graduated from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and received a law degree from the Detroit College of Law. Mr. Bashara's family was active in a variety of Episcopal churches in the Detroit region throughout his life. He served on the State Advisory Commission on Drug Abuse and Alcoholism and as a judge of the Wayne County Probate, the Circuit courts, and the Michigan Court of Appeals. Judge Bashara was active in bar associations at the national, state and local levels, including the Arab American Bar Association. He served as president of the Detroit College of Law and on the Board of Directors of Wayne State University.[69]

Joseph G. Rashid (1914-1981) was born in South Dakota and moved to Detroit in 1926. He grew up attending St. George's church and Visitation Grade School and High School. After graduating from law school at the University of Detroit in 1938 he was quickly appointed an assistant prosecuting attorney for Wayne County in 1940, where he became the chief trail lawyer for the county. He went on to serve as a judge in the 3rd Circuit Court from 1957-1977. He was active in the Arab American community of Detroit and nationally, serving as honorary first vice president of the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC), which raised funds for St. Jude's Children's Hospital. He taught law at the University of Detroit for over 20 years and received the school's William Kelly Joyce Award for outstanding service. His son, James Rashid, also became a judge in the 3rd District Court (from 1987-1995).[70]

---

[68] Diane Haithman, "Obituary, George N. Bashara, Sr., Lawyer", *Detroit Free Press* (13 September 1980), p. 20.
[69] "Obituary, George. N. Bashara, Jr." <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/28638740/george-n-bashara> [accessed 15 October 2024].
[70] Martin Kohn, "Circuit Judge Rashid Dies", *Detroit Free Press* (11 August 1981), p. 35.

Walter C. Shamie (1921-2016) became an influential Republican businessman in Detroit and ran for mayor twice in the 1960s. He grew up attending St. George's church and was a founder of the Syrian Orthodox Youth Organization. Mr. Shamie served in the Army during World War II as a Sergeant. When he returned to Detroit in the 1950s, he became the editor and publisher of *Grocer's Spotlight* newspaper and later worked in advertising and management for several Detroit-area corporations. In the 1960s he was president of a development project, International Village, which sought to establish a business and tourist destination on land reclaimed by the city through its urban renewal campaigns.[71] He ran for mayor twice, highlighting the city's problems with crime and racial tensions.[72]

Figure 22: Walter Shamie casting his vote for mayor, 1965 (source: Detroit Free Press).

James Karoub (1929-1994) was also an attorney, lobbyist and legislator in Michigan. Born in Highland Park, the son of one of the city's first imams, Hussein Karoub, James Karoub pursued a career in law and in local politics. After serving as Police and Fire Commissioner for Highland Park in the late 1950s, he won a seat in the state legislature as a Democrat and held office from 1961-1963 and 1965-1967. He also ran for mayor of Highland Park in 1967 and won the primary but was ruled ineligible to run because he was still serving in the state legislature at the time. After leaving office, Karoub ran a highly influential lobbying firm in Detroit, Karoub Associates, which championed legalized gambling in the state.

Arab Americans have also been influential in Wayne County politics. James Kalil was a close partner of Bill Lucas in the Wayne County Sheriff's Department and when Lucas served as Wayne County Executive in the 1960s and 1970s. He was also an influential leader of the Muslim community locally, serving as the President of the Board at the Islamic Center of America for many years and as the President of the Federation of Islamic Associations in the U.S. and Canada in the 1960s. In 1961 he travelled to Egypt with a delegation from the FIA and met with President Gamal Abdel Nasser about the needs of the Muslim community in the U.S.[73]

[71] International Village was envisioned for a 23-acre tract bounded by the Lodge Freeway, Bagley Street, Third Avenue, and Lafayette Boulevard. Shamie was unable to secure funding for the project and it ended without any construction in 1964. See "Walter Shamie: Taking on the Moon," *Detroit Free Press*, August 17, 1969, 4B.
[72] Ismael Ahmed, "Michigan Arab Americans: A Case Study of Electoral and Non-Electoral Empowerment", in *American Arabs and Political Participation*, ed. by Philippa Strum (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2006) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/DUSS_Arab_America.pdf>.
[73] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit.* p. 159.

Figure 23: Michael Berry, undated (source: Arab American News)

Michael Berry (1920-2015), a prominent attorney who was born in Detroit and raised in Dearborn, started his career as an advocate for the Arab community in Dearborn when it resisted plans by the Ford Motor Company, Levy Asphalt, and the City of Dearborn to rezone their neighborhood for industry and displace its residents. Berry also mounted a recall campaign against Dearborn's segregationist Mayor Orville Hubbard in the 1970s. Through these and other efforts, he caught the eye of the leadership of the Democratic Party of Michigan. After he supported G. Mennen William's candidacy for Governor in 1948, he joined the Executive Committee of the state Democratic Party. In 1967 he was elected the Wayne County Road Commissioner, then the highest-ranking position in county government. In 1974 the international terminal of the Detroit Metro Airport was named the Michael Berry International Terminal in acknowledgement of his contribution to the airport's expansion. (The terminal was retired as a passenger terminal in 2008). Berry continued to play a role in the state and county Democratic parties until his death in 2015. Like Kalil, Berry was also affiliated with the Islamic Center of America.[74]

Business and Labor

Automotive Opportunities and Entrepreneurism

From their earliest days in the city, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities were involved in a wide range of careers. Many got their local start as peddlers selling artifacts from the "Holy Land," including household items and oriental rugs. Others were lured to Detroit by the promise of jobs in the automotive industry. Still others migrated to Michigan because they saw opportunities for themselves within the growing Middle Eastern enclaves in the region. Regardless of how and why people came to Detroit, many Arabs and Chaldeans found opportunities in retail trades, first in neighborhood grocery stores, then as suppliers to these stores, and later as industrial producers and suppliers of a broad ranges of goods and services. Others entered a broad range of careers and occupations in the ensuing decades.

Entrepreneurial peddlers from Mt. Lebanon, Jerusalem, and smaller communities in the Levant made their way to Detroit in the 1890s. Some arrived as they were returning east after having performed and traded at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. They sold craft items from the "Holy Land" along with more mundane merchandise needed for everyday life. Others joined the already established network of Syrian peddlers who crisscrossed rural communities in Ontario, Canada, Michigan's Lower Peninsula, and Ohio, selling domestic products not readily available in rural communities. Peddling was a physically challenging form of labor, but one with a low bar of entry for those with little education, few industrial skills, and limited English. By 1900, Detroit was already a hub for

[74] Ahmed; Susan Giffin, *Michael Berry* (AuthorHouse, 2007) <http://www.worldcat.org/title/michael-berry/oclc/155715567&referer=brief_results>.

Figure 24: A pair of Syrian fruit peddlers pause from their work to pose for a photograph, ca. early 1900s (Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.)

such peddlers with several Syrians setting up shop in the city to outfit their travelling peers.[75]

As the auto economy heated up in the early 1900s, Arab and Chaldean newcomers on the East Coast flocked to Detroit looking for work. During the 1910s a small colony of Arabs had settled near Ford Motor Company's factory in Highland Park. They were a mixed group of Muslims and Christians and included both families and single workers. Some sent money home to their relatives, who then sent brides or siblings to join them in Detroit. When Kalil Bazzy arrived in 1913, he was sponsored by a brother who had been in the city long enough to afford a home on Labelle Street. In 1962 he recounted to historian Alixa Naff what this Highland Park neighborhood (Manchester, Victor, and Labelle Streets) was like at the time: "Arab. All Arab. All Shi`a from Bint Ijbayl and Tibneen [neighboring villages in what is today the South of Lebanon]. There were Christians, but our neighborhood was Muslim."[76] Alex Ecie, also interviewed by Naff, arrived in Detroit a

[75] Naff, Becoming *American*; Rankin, "Racial Study of Syrians."
[76] Shaykh Khalil Bazzy, 1962, interview with Alixa Naff, Naff Arab American Collection, National Museum of American History, Series 4/C.

few years later, and he confirms Bazzy's description: "you could walk up and down Victor Avenue and not hear one word of 'American.' There were thousands of Arabs there."[77]

While U.S. Census figures from the era did not capture the number of Arabs in the metropolitan Detroit area, the *Free Press* cited the number as over 6,000 by 1916.[78] Nonetheless, the *Free Press* sometimes also undercounted Detroit's MENA communities. In 1915, the paper ran a story about John Joseph, claiming he was the first Chaldean in the city. The story described the hardships of Joseph's life in Iraq and in Detroit prior to his employment at Ford. It claimed that once he began receiving the benefits of the $5 workday profit-sharing plan, he was able to leave the overcrowded boarding house he had first lived in, move to a "better neighborhood," and begin studying English.[79] However, according to community sources, Joseph was hardly the first Chaldean in Detroit. Zia Acho and Jajo Kas-Marougi both claimed to be the first Chaldean arrivals in Detroit, and likely arrived around 1912 or 1913, drawn by the high pay at the Ford Highland Park plant.[80]

In 1916, the Ford Motor Co. Sociological Department published an inventory of all their foreign-born workers that included 555 Syrians.[81] It is likely, however, that many more Arabs and Chaldeans worked for Ford in the 1910s and 1920s. Most migration narratives from this period reference landing a job at Ford or one of the other auto manufacturing facilities as a first step in getting acclimated in the U.S. Many Middle Eastern Americans worked in manufacturing for their entire careers, especially those who settled in Highland Park or, a few years later, in Dearborn. Many others, however, looked for work outside the factories as quickly as they were able to due to the challenging, unstable conditions of automotive labor.[82]

Both peddlers and factory employees found more stable ways to support their families during the 1920s. In 1932, a team of social workers at the International Institute reported:

> The merchants, soon finding it un-profitable to deal entirely in trifles and trinkets imported from Syria, began to open fruit and vegetable shops in various parts of Detroit. Later they included groceries also. It is reported that the custom, followed now by all grocery stores, of making an artistic display of massed fruit and vegetables was instituted in Detroit by a Syrian shopkeeper on East Jefferson Avenue.[83]

Syrian immigrants' quick establishment in the grocery trade is also documented through city directories. For example, the R.L. Polk & Company's 1908 city directory listed fourteen dry goods stores whose owners can be identified as Middle Eastern by their names and other known details. Most of these stores were in locations that later became a part of

---

[77] Alex Ecie, 1962, interview with Alixa Naff, Naff Arab American Collection, National Museum of American History, Series 4/C.
[78] "Mohammedans to Celebrate Feast," *Detroit Free Press*, September 28, 1916, p. 5.
[79] "Chaldean Finds "Eden" at Ford", *Detroit Free Press* (11 April 1915), p. D7.
[80] Bacall, *Chaldeans in Detroit,* p. 10, 44. Acho family member Badie Atchoo recounted that Zia Acho arrived as early as 1909 (information provided at "Coming to America" oral history meeting, October 10, 2005, at Shenandoah Country Club, West Bloomfield, MI). The Highland Park plant did not open until 1910 and Ford did not implement the $5 workday until January 1914.
[81] "The Ford Profit-Sharing Plan", 1916, Henry Ford Museum, Accession 293, Marquis Papers.
[82] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*; Naff, *Becoming Arab American*; Rankin, "Racial Study of Syrians," et al.
[83] Rankin, "Racial Study of Syrians."

the city's downtown and Riverfront developments, and none are extant today. These included:

John & Michael	Dry Goods	65 Atwater
Joseph Mayerd	Dry Goods and Groceries	105 Atwater
Nicolas Nehra	Dry Goods	264 Woodbridge
Simon Elias	Dry Goods	582 Gratiot
Abdo N. Coury	Fruits and Confect.	566 Gratiot
Abraham Kouri		370 High (later Vernor Highway)
Feris Matar	Groceries	86 Abbot
Kaleel Coury	Groceries	454 Gratiot Ave.
Peter Moses	Groceries	103 Grand River
Simon Elias, H.B.-Co.	Groceries	9-13 Brush
E.A. Saba	Tailor	86 Grand River
Kaleel B. Bonahoom	Oriental Rugs and Goods	118 Farmer
Saheed Abdo	Oriental Goods	308 Orleans
George Joseph Makael	Dry Goods	441 Riopelle

Figure 25: Sanborn map, 1897. Syrian businesses and residences were located on these blocks of Atwater, Franklin, and Woodbridge in the early 1900s (source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1897, Volume 4, Sheet 13).

Figure 26: Dabish Market, undated photograph (Source: Sam Kassab).

By 1929, city directories listed more than 200 businesses owned by familiar Arab and Chaldean family names, located in many places across the city: one bakery (Oriental Pastry Shop at 1218 Brush), 5 confectioners, 5 dry goods stores, 9 fruit dealers, 155 grocery stores, 14 meat wholesale and retail stores, and 33 restaurants and coffeehouses.[84] These businesses enabled Arab and Chaldean entrepreneurs to employ recently arrived relatives and co-ethnics and to support them as they opened businesses of their own. Gradually, these families also began to work and invest in food production companies such as bakeries, dairies, and slaughterhouses as their experience, capital, and ambition grew. The International Institute report claimed there were more than 1,200 Arab grocers in the city in 1929, many of whom would have actually been Chaldeans. While the report was oddly silent on the hardships created by the Great Depression in Detroit, it nonetheless documented the loss of two thirds of the communities' businesses due to competition from non-Arab chain grocery stores, after which approximately 400 Middle Eastern-owned stores remained.[85] This reporting provides insight into why some Arabs remained in factory jobs, why others emphasized getting their children a college education, and others still invested instead in food production and wholesale businesses.

By the 1940s, several American-born Middle Easterners had moved solidly into the middle class and had begun competing for professional jobs like prosecuting attorney, chief of surgery, and positions in public offices (see Government Service and Electoral

[84] Matthew Stiffler, "Notes of Arab Grocery Store History" (Arab American National Museum, 2024).
[85] Rankin, "Racial Study of Syrians."

Politics). Other groups, like the Palestinian and Chaldean communities, grew rapidly in numbers and came to dominate Detroit's grocery trade during this period. Both Chris Kado and Mary Sengstock describe how the Chaldean community's entry to the grocery trade was facilitated by their close ties to earlier Syrian store owners with whom they socialized and worshipped. Newly arrived Palestinians had a similar relationship with those in local Orthodox communities. By the 1950s both communities had established wide distribution networks which allowed their businesses to grow. Many Chaldean merchants also purchased stores from Jewish entrepreneurs who moved north through the city, from Black Bottom and Paradise Valley up the Cass Corridor, to New Center, and along the Hamilton and Woodward Avenue corridors. Because they too faced displacement from interstate highway and urban renewal projects that cleared their earlier neighborhoods downtown, many Chaldeans also followed this route north and northwest through the city.[86]

Figure 27: Aziz Najor (left) and Alia Najor (right) in Alia's new store, Woodward and Euclid, undated but prior to 1965 (source: Dr. George Najor).

[86] Kado, "Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Detroit;" Sengstock, *The Chaldean Americans*.

Consequently, the 1950s were a time of rapid economic expansion for Chaldean entrepreneurs. By the 1960s, there were more than 120 Chaldean-owned businesses in the metropolitan Detroit area.[87] Several were in the Cass Corridor and New Center neighborhoods, including:

Tom Matti Market	3189 Third at Peterboro (not extant)
Third & Brainard Cut Rate Grocery	3437 Third at Brainard (not extant)
Dickow/Sarafa family store	3557 Third Street at Brainard (not extant)
Michael Binno Family store	Third and Hancock (not extant)
George Najor family store	Grand Boulevard and Third (not extant)
Hakim Food and Drug Center	7751 Second at Delaware (not extant)
Aziz Najor family store	8410 Woodward at Euclid (not extant)
Acho family store	Second and Euclid (not extant)
Dabish Market	8517 Second Street (extant)
Donald Barko/Dickow family store	8900 Third at Hazelwood (extant)

Many of these stores were among those affected by looting or violence during Detroit's 1967 Uprising. While the memories of store owners like Sherry and Bonnie Hakim recount the heroism with which family members weathered the Uprising, many entrepreneurs suffered significant losses in terms of property and lives. Between 1966 and 1994, at least 68 Chaldean merchants, with familiar last names including Binno, Dickow, and Yaldo, were killed in their stores throughout Detroit.[88] These victims were later honored by a Michigan Senate resolution which acknowledged how "our communities could not exist without these stores, and yet, those who work in them are risking their lives." Despite the risk, many store owners and their families took great pride in serving their neighbors. Chaldeans continued to purchase and open stores as older residents and large chain retailers left Detroit between the 1970s and 1980s. By 1984, the year that Kroger closed all their stores within the city, Chaldeans were estimated to own 80% of the city's 1,400 independent grocery markets.[89]

During this same period, other Chaldean food entrepreneurs established grocery support services. For example, Tom George established a dairy and distribution company called Tom George & Sons Dairy Distributors (16247 Hamilton Ave., Highland Park) in 1950. When the company began marketing Vitamin D enhanced milk products, they changed their name to Melody Farms to emphasize their distinctive product. The company grew into one of the main producers and distributors of milk, ice cream, and other dairy products in the city. They also sold juices, bottled water, and beer. The George family made a point of supporting other members of the Chaldean community, providing loans or loan guarantees to help people start owning retail stores and other businesses, purchase equipment, and share experience and know-how. In 1977 the family launched the Metro-Detroit Investment Company to formalize their financial holdings. A decade later they were reported to have helped over 700 businesses get started and to have a

[87] Cal Abbo, "From Mesopotamia to the Motor City," *Chaldean News*, February 2024.
[88] Chaldean Federation of America, "Commemoration of Chaldeans Slain in their Place of Business," program for memorial mass held on April 8, 1994, at Mother of God Cathedral, Southfield, MI.
[89] Kado, "Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Detroit," 63-65.

loan portfolio of over $40 million. The company sold in 2003 as large chains like Walmart began squeezing the Detroit market from outside.[90]

In 1960 a group of Chaldean store owners created the Associated Food Dealers of Greater Detroit (later of Michigan) to provide further support and bring their businesses in line with industry standards. They advocated for their members with city, county, and state governments, they bargained with distributors on behalf of store owners and represented their members' interests with advocacy groups and civil rights organizations in the city. After the uprisings of 1967, when over 400 of their member stores were looted or burned to the ground, the organization also represented the interests of store owners with the local law enforcement establishment. It sought to ease tensions in the 1980s and 1990s when the city's crime rate was high and neighborhood stores became sources of threat and conflict for Black, Arab, and Chaldean Detroiters. The stores were hardened with bullet proof glass in this period and the Association was sometimes seen as siding with law enforcement over city residents.[91] *The Food Dealer*, the group's quarterly publication, provided great insight into the inside workings and challenges of the grocery business while also sharing news and updates about members of the Chaldean business community. The group's long time President and CEO, Edward Deeb, became an influential power broker in Detroit in the 1970s and 1980s and was instrumental in reviving Eastern Market in the 1980s when the city was short on cash. The Associated Food Dealers was later renamed the Associated Food and Petroleum Dealers (AFPD) and helped organize independent retailers to compete with large commercial retailers. The AFPD still exists today to support independent retailers in metro Detroit.

As newer waves of Chaldean immigrants settled in Chaldean Town during the 1970s and 1980s, they opened new businesses that complimented their community's long history of grocery store ownership. Among the many businesses in Chaldean Town were markets, bakeries, restaurants, and *chai-khanas* (discussed further in Foodways, below). Barber shops like Slewa Yono, Wadi Barash, and Golden Scissors served not only as a place to get a haircut and a shave, but also as social centers for local men. Professions such as medicine (Dr. Albert Kuhn), dentistry (Dr. Shakib Halabu), and pharmacies (Najah Sitto/Babylon Pharmacy) were well represented, as well as specialty shops like the Salha Spring Music Store. Business owners in Chaldean Town later passed ownership through their families and mentored young people and newer immigrants. They, in turn, established their own businesses, at first in Chaldean Town and then in the suburbs as Chaldean communities migrated north. Chaldean Town's central location and proximity to the suburbs helped it thrive during a transitional period for Detroit's Chaldeans in the 1970s and 1980s.[92]

One of Detroit's last businesses related to peddling also moved to the suburbs in the 1970s. The Orient Tapestry Co. was founded by Palestinians George M. Ajluni (also spelled

[90] Michael Strong, "Melody Farms Changes Hands", *Crain's Detroit Business* (23 June 2003) <https://georgeco.com/melody-farms-changes-hands-crains-detroit-business-june-23-2003/> [accessed 18 October 2024].
[91] Kenneth Alyass, "Murder At The Corner Store: Immigrant Merchants and Law and Order Politics in Postwar Detroit", *The Metropole Blog*, Offiicial Blog of the Urban History Association, 11/17/2022, 2022 <https://themetropole.blog/2022/11/17/murder-at-the-corner-store-immigrant-merchants-and-law-and-order-politics-in-postwar-detroit/> [accessed 18 October 2024].
[92] Miri, "Remembering Chaldean Town."

Ajlouny) and John D. Sallah between 1934-1935. Orient Tapestry became a wholesaler of carpets, fabrics, and tapestries imported from Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Persia, Spain, and other countries, all notable for their distinctive Middle Eastern designs. The business was first located at 515 W. Grand River Ave. (not extant) and later at 1755 Cass (not extant). In the 1940s, George returned to Palestine and his brother, David M. Ajluni, assumed his stake in the business. Another brother, Farid M. Ajluni, joined around 1950. Farid also employed his son, Suheil, to peddle on behalf of Orient Tapestry in cities north of Detroit including Utica and Mt. Pleasant. In the mid-1970s, a third brother, Hanna Ajluni, moved Orient Tapestry's operations from Detroit to the northern suburb of Birmingham. It operated there until the 1980s.[93]

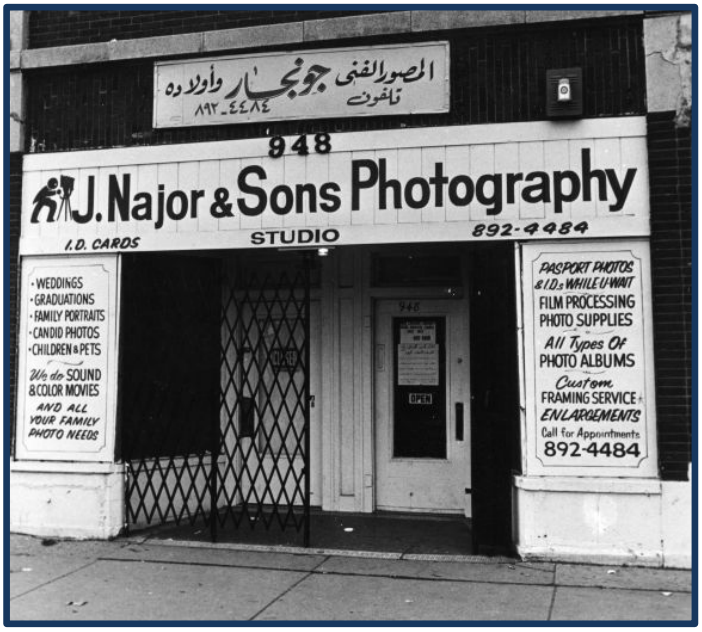


Figure 28: Chaldean Town business at 948 West Seven Mile Road (no longer extant) (Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.)

Around the same time, a different group of newly arrived immigrants from Lebanon established themselves in another zone of commercial investment. Ali Jawad described his experiences in an interview with a researcher at the Arab American National Museum in 2013: "Back then, in the '70s, if you offered somebody to work in the Ford Motor Company or at a gas station, they would tell you, 'No, I want to go to Ford because it is more stable.'" Ford was not hiring in 1975 when Ali first came to Michigan, "so, I worked for my cousin who had a successful gas station. I started pumping gas, and the opportunity came to be a partner with my brother on one of the Mobil stations."[94] He continued:

> Our community likes to copy; they see someone successful in that field, and they all want to do it. In the late 80s, most of the Lebanese – if not 80% of resources of the community – came from gas station owners. Because that field improved from just pumping gas outside to a mini-store garage bay, then it became a big store competing with the supermarket. It improved and most of the community got into that field.[95]

In 1985 Jawad launched the Armada Oil and Gas Company and became to area gas stations what Melody Farms had been to the city's grocers a generation earlier.

Throughout the twentieth century, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities both experienced tremendous economic gains. Business interests in both communities

[93] Emeel and Maher Ajluni, email conversation with HDAB staff, January 2025.
[94] Arab American National Museum Staff, Ali Jawad Interview, 2023, Ned Fawaz Interview Folder, Ali Jawad.
[95] Arab American National Museum Staff.

eventually created chambers of commerce that continue to advance their needs and interests. The American Chamber of Commerce was launched in Dearborn in 1992, initially as the Arab American Chamber of Commerce. The Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce was founded in 2001. The list of accomplishments of these organizations is significant and attests to how far both communities have come over the past century.

Automotive Union and Labor Movements

The years of the Great Depression and World War II were extremely important for the labor movement in Detroit. Events including hunger marches and sit-down strikes likely included Arab and Chaldean participants, although records of their involvement are scarce. As Arab workers employed at Ford Motor Co. moved from Highland Park to Dearborn, many remained loyal to their employer, and some worked with Harry Bennett and the Service Department security team. Others developed strong union connections. Although he was from Flint, Arab Americans today take pride in the role that George Addes played in the Battle of the Overpass in Dearborn and other pro-union actions of the 1920s.[96] No matter their relationship to union movements, however, it is likely that the Great Depression and labor tensions in the 1930s prompted many Arab and Chaldean autoworkers to leave these jobs and invest more heavily in entrepreneurial pursuits like grocery stores and markets.

The situation was somewhat different in the 1960s and 1970s. Automation and decentralization in the automotive industry led to jobs leaving Detroit. United Auto Workers (UAW) members' close relationships with the manufacturers also meant that the workers were not necessarily being heard by their supervisors or union representatives. In response, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers was launched in the city of Detroit, one factory at a time, and called attention to the plight of Black workers. The movements' leaders in the Chrysler Corporation's Dodge Main factory were also concerned to see that recently arrived Yemeni and Palestinian employees worked in even worse conditions. Because of their poor English skills and desperation to work, these Arab workers could not protest their work conditions, which were routinely the dirtiest and most dangerous in the factory. When the League organized a wildcat strike[97] in 1968 at Dodge Main, their call to action claimed that Chrysler was seeking "to make conditions worse for all of us by first attacking conditions for the Arab workers."[98] Many Arab workers supported the strike. The League members thus became part of a coalition of activists in the city who connected the Palestinian liberation movement with similar struggles in Africa and elsewhere. A few years later, in 1973, when the UAW purchased Israeli war bonds during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Arab workers held a wildcat strike of their own, pushing for UAW disinvestment.[99]

Arab Americans also contributed to the auto industry in Detroit in white collar occupations such as engineering, design, and management. Richard Caleal, for example,

---

[96] Barbara Aswad, "The Southeast Dearborn Arab Community Struggles for Survival against Urban "Renewal"", in *Arabic-Speaking Communities in American Cities*, ed. by Barbara C Aswad (Center For Migration Studies, 1974), pp. 53–84; Sally Howell, " Southend Struggles: Diverging Narratives of Power and Place in an Arab American Enclave; Janice Terry, "Community and Political Activism Among Arab Americans in Detroit," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. by Michael Suleiman (Temple University Press, 1999).
[97] A wildcat strike is a strike action carried out by workers but unauthorized by union leadership.
[98] Dan Georgakis and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying.* (South End Press, 1998).
[99] Pamela E Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s–1980s* (UNC Press Books, 2017).

Figure 29: Autoworkers striking protesting UAW investment in Israel, November 1973 (source: David Sole).

helped design the iconic post-war 1949 Ford, which ushered in a new era of more streamlined and commercially popular vehicles. He was inducted in the Automotive Hall of Fame for this work and his work on many other iconic vehicles in 2009.[100] At the turn of the twenty-first century, Jacques "Jac" Nasser served as the President and CEO of the Ford Motor Company from 1999-2001 and Steve Yokich served as President of the UAW from 1994-2002.[101]

[100] Automotive Hall of Fame Inductee, Richard D. Caleal, https://www.automotivehalloffame.org/honoree/richard-d-caleal/, accessed on June 13, 2025.
[101] "Celebrating Arab American Heritage Month: Stephen Yokich," Office of Global Michigan, https://www.michigan.gov/ogm/commissions/cmeaa/cmeaa-updates/aahm-spotlight-stephen-yokich, accessed on July 3, 2025.

Foodways

Most early Arab immigrants to Detroit came from the countryside of the Levant region, or from cities like Beirut, Damascus, or Jerusalem. Their traditional diet would have been a very healthy one, rich in fresh produce, whole grains, and healthy fats. This mostly plant-based diet included seafood and reserved red meat for special occasions or small roles in dishes like stuffed grape leaves or meat pies. Turkey and the Levant historically served as cultural crossroads that brought together peoples and cuisines from Eastern and Southern Europe, the Arabic speaking countries, North Africa, Persia, and India. Thus, Arab and Chaldean Americans shared many dietary preferences with other immigrant communities in Detroit, especially those from Italy, Greece, Armenia, and Bulgaria.

Early Syrian immigrants were quick to open coffeehouses in Detroit where they gathered for a taste of home and to hear the news in their native tongues. These coffeehouses initially served multiple (national or sectarian) communities, and then specialized along national, cultural, or religious lines as more entrepreneurs joined their ranks. Some coffeehouses turned into boarding houses or restaurants, and by the 1920s began spreading outward from downtown, carrying Middle Eastern food to other parts of the city. As more families settled in Detroit, they opened grocery stores, bakeries, and fully fledged Syrian/Lebanese restaurants. In the 1960s and 1970s, Iraqi, Yemeni, and Palestinian dishes joined Lebanese/Syrian staples, and Muslim Arabs began to place a greater emphasis on procuring and serving *halal* meats (ritually slaughtered meat, akin to kosher). Middle Eastern foods have now become ubiquitous throughout the metro region, acting as a cultural ambassador for Arab and Chaldean Americans. Detroit's halal meat distributors now dominate the U.S. market. Today Detroit, along with Dearborn, Hamtramck, and Sterling Heights, are known as centers of Arab American and Chaldean American culinary innovations.

Coffeehouses and Chai Khana

Coffeehouses

Christian and Muslim Arabs quickly established several coffeehouses in Detroit and Highland Park in the first decades of the twentieth century. Major streets including Lafayette, Victor, Michigan Avenue, and Congress each had multiple establishments. Initially, these coffeehouses served as surrogates for churches, mosques, and mutual aid societies, and were organized loosely along linguistic and cultural lines. These provided men with a place to relax and socialize when not working. As reporter Charles Cameron observed:

> There he may converse. There he can hear the news. There he may hear of letters from the old country. The coffee house, either normally set out as one, or arranged in connection with a restaurant, or added as part of the purpose of a club, is to the customer a newspaper and a marketplace.[102]

[102] Charles Cameron, "A Block from Woodward: Victor Avenue in Highland Park, Where Little Arabia Meets Little Persia", *Detroit Saturday Night* (7 July 1926), p. 10.

Figure 30: Men in a coffeehouse in the Greektown area, date unknown (Source: Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University).

The coffeehouses were similar in that they provided *narjilahs* (waterpipes), cards, *tawilah* (backgammon), and other ways to pass the time. All served "Turkish" coffee, a thick and strong beverage unfamiliar to most Americans of the period. Many had adjoining restaurants that provided meals for their clientele, most of whom were male. Muslim coffee shops were distinctive in their décor. They tended to feature Arabic calligraphy from the Qur`an, usually the *shahada* (confession of faith) or *fatiha* (the opening verse of the Qur`an), often easily visible from outside the shop. Hussein Abbass's New Bagdad Café, at 1002 Hastings Street (not extant), made prayer rugs available to patrons and set aside a corner or back room for collective prayer on special occasions. One located at 588 St. Antoine Street (not extant) was also used for holiday prayers in the 1930s. Joe Hassan ran a coffeehouse at 574 E. Lafayette (not extant) that served as a halal soup kitchen during the lean years of the Depression.[103] Whether Christian or Muslim, coffeehouses provided immigrant men with a place for solidarity and mutual acquaintance, and they

[103] "Religion Bars 400 from Soup Lines: Mohammadans Can't Eat Relief Food", *Detroit Free Press*, 12 December 1932.

routinely served as platforms for the organization of more formal ethno-national associations, religious mutual aid societies, social clubs, and fraternal societies.[104]

Coffeehouses remained important spaces for political organizing in the years following the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars, among others. As in the past, when journalists wanted to learn about Arab American reactions to political events overseas, they would frequently stop at one of these coffeehouses on Dix Avenue in Dearborn.[105] Today the tradition continues along Warren Avenue on Detroit's West side, where Iraqi coffeehouses like Al-Raffedein (16807 W. Warren) began opening in the 1990s. Visitors to these coffeehouses today will find Syrian, Afghan, and Yemeni patrons in addition to Iraqis. Several of the Iraqi mosques that opened in Warrendale in and after the 1990s (like the Imam Ali Masjid at 15804 W. Warren and Mawkib Shibab al-Qasim at 16341 W. Warren) grew out of these nearby coffeehouses.[106]

Chai-Khanas

When new Chaldean immigrants began arriving after World War II, they were quick to re-establish the coffeehouse for a new generation. They simultaneously brought a related institution, the *chai khana* (tea house), to Detroit. Chai khanas provided a similar place to socialize, drink tea and coffee, and occasionally to indulge in *araq* (an anise seasoned distilled spirit). As in some of the Arab coffeehouses, the chai khanas also featured gambling and opportunities for deal making among businessmen. The Sacred Heart Chaldean Church, established at 310 W. Seven Mile in 1975, reportedly grew out of and replaced a chai khana on the same lot, originally opened by Bottani Abro and Fouad Garmo.[107] Similarly, Bahi's Kabob restaurant grew out of a chai khana which Bahi Jarbo first opened 524 W. Seven Mile in 1982.

Dr. Adhid Miri captured the importance and atmosphere of the chai khanas in the Chaldean Town neighborhood in his article "Remembering Chaldean Town:"

> Coffee and tea houses (Chai-khanas) were a mainstay in Chaldean Town and the center of entertainment for years. They were for men who enjoyed playing cards, billiards, and backgammon before or after going to the DRC [Detroit Racing Club] or Hazel Park racetrack. They were a place of gathering and played a significant role in making sure the community stayed connected, as one close-knit family, and that clients and visitors felt like they were at home. There were no menus at the Chai-khanas; all the customers knew what was available. There were few grilled choices, and the entrées (if any) were whatever the cook made that day. Depending on when you were there, the smoke from the charcoal grill was thick and the whole scene was a bit chaotic; it was a personal place, and that is partly what made it fun.
>
> …Interestingly, these operations were incognito, almost clandestine in their nature, for there were no door signs, banners, or establishment names on any of these

[104] Shiraz Ahmad and others, "Halal Foodways", *Halal Metropolis*, 2022 <https://halalmetropolis.org/story3> [accessed 25 July 2024]; Charles Cameron; Charles D. Cameron, "The Near East in Detroit", *Detroit Saturday Night* (10 July 1926); Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (Oxford University Press, 2014).
[105] Sameer Y. Abraham, Nabeel Abraham, and Barbara Aswad, "The Southend: An Arab Muslim Working-Class Community", in *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities* (Wayne State University, 1983), p. 208.
[106] Howell and Wellman, "Unsettled Lives."
[107] Miri, "Remembering Chaldean Town."

> buildings, just a number. However, every gambler in the area knew exactly what they were and what they offered. People would come late at night and hang out all day; many establishments stayed open until 4 in the morning and were always busy. The exterior of these operations was nondescript, the doors, windows (if any) were foggy, tinted with tobacco smoke, and covered with a combination of thick layers of frying oil. Ventilation being non-existent, the indoor odor was distinct, with the occasional exceptions upon opening the back kitchen door to allow for a short breeze.[108]

Dr. Miri mentions several chai khanas in the Chaldean Town area, including those owned by Salim Malak; Malak Anan; Gabriel Rabban and Adil Aqrawi; Zuhair Shina, Ramzi Zakar, and Emad Samona; and Sabah Qadesha.[109]

Restaurants

While the first Arab restaurants that opened in Detroit satisfied the needs of immigrant workers, it did not take long for the community to open restaurants that also reflected the needs and consumer tastes of the growing Arab American middle class. A 1929 city directory included over 30 Arab American entries, including the Eastern Cafe at 15405 Mack (extant), the Orient Coffee House at 1213 Brush (not extant), the Oriental Cafe at 249 Michigan Avenue (not extant), the Oriental Restaurant at 97 Victor (in Highland Park), the Palestine Restaurant at 537 Michigan Avenue (not extant), and other entries in the names of individual proprietors, most of which were located in or near the Syrian enclaves near Black Bottom and Highland Park.[110]

The Sheik was the first restaurant in Detroit that reportedly marketed itself as providing Middle Eastern food for a broader Arab and non-Arab clientele, "serving Syrian and American meals" as a 1948 advertisement asserted.[111] It was initially opened by Fadel Ganem in the 1920s at the intersection of East Lafayette and Randolf to meet the needs of the Maronite community to which it was adjacent. With a simple sign in the window that said "Arab Food" in Arabic, the emphasis was on providing an approximation of home cooking for men who were in Detroit without families. It was one of several Syrian food establishments on Lafayette in the 300-900 block area. Forced to close during the first years of the Great Depression, it opened again in 1936 across the street, at 313 E. Lafayette (not extant), now with a new English language name and a new target clientele. Initially the Sheik served a mix of American restaurant food (hamburgers and meatloaf) alongside many of the traditional foods of the Lebanese home: rice and meat stuffed vegetables, beef and vegetable stews, fresh salads, and some of the mezze for which Middle Eastern restaurants are now famous. Similar restaurants began opening across the city as the Arab community grew and spread out. As in these other restaurants, the menu at the Sheik evolved over time to sync up with the evolving restaurant culture of the Middle East and U.S. markets. Eventually it placed a heavier

[108] Miri, "Remembering Chaldean Town."
[109] Miri, "Remembering Chaldean Town."
[110] *Polk's Detroit City Directory* (R.L. Polk and Co., 1929).
[111] William Lockwood and Yvonne Lockwood, "Continuity and Adaptation in Arab American Foodways", in *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (Wayne State University Press, 2000), pp. 515–50.

Figure 31: The Sheik Restaurant, ca. 1950. Fadel Ganem is seated, left (source: Arab American National Museum, Dearborn).

emphasis on grilled meats, rice, and an expanded mezze menu like that of many Lebanese American restaurants today.[112]

New immigration to the U.S. following the 1965 Immigration Act led to radical changes in the availability of Middle Eastern food in Detroit. Many restaurants moved with their owners and clientele as more established communities of Arabs and Chaldeans relocated throughout the city and eventually into the suburbs. Simultaneously, a persistent set of Middle Eastern restaurants developed in the 1970s in Chaldean Town, along Woodward Avenue near Highland Park, in the immediate vicinity of Wayne State University, and in the Warrendale area in northwest Detroit.

In Chaldean Town, these included: Yaldo, Jerry's, and Fatoohi Markets; the Iraqi Bakery (528 W. Warren), Golden Star Bakery, and Beirut Pastries; Bahi's Kabob (524 W. Seven Mile), Firdous, Royal Kabob, Mr. Kabob, Al-Shimal, Dijla, Sullaf (814 W. Seven Mile), and Mosul (443 W. Seven Mile) restaurants; Halo Fish and Chicken (114 W. Seven Mile) and S & J Meats (217 W. Seven Mile). The Great Lakes Fish and Seafood warehouse in the area, owned by Ramzi Acho, also contributed to the Iraqi food available to the community there. S&J meats is still open, but these other businesses eventually closed and moved to suburban cities like Sterling Heights, where the number of Chaldean-owned food

[112] Lockwood and Lockwood, "Continuity and Adaptation in Arab American Foodways", pp. 515–50.

Figure 32: Sullaf Restaurant in Chaldean Town, ca. 1980s (Source: Arab American National Museum).

establishments rival the number of Lebanese establishments one finds today in Dearborn.[113]

A newer Iraqi business district thrives in Detroit's Warrendale neighborhood today. It extends west along West Warren Avenue from Dearborn's western border to the eastern border of Dearborn Heights. The Samawah Barber Shop (16545 W. Warren) opened next to a small coffeehouse in 1996. Arbeel Kabob followed in 1998. A coffeehouse and a kabob restaurant, both called Rafedain, opened in Warrendale in the early 2000s. Named after the hometowns of their proprietors, or after Iraq itself, these spots stood out in neighborhoods where Polish businesses once predominated and Lebanese entrepreneurs were well established. They became welcoming landmarks and signs of success for Iraqis. Grocery stores and bakeries followed a similar pattern. The Alsheik Bakery (16107 W. Warren) and Baraka Poultry opened at 17007 W. Warren in 2004 and 2006, again in Warrendale. These establishments made a point of advertising Iraqi-specific ingredients and products. Naba Brick Oven, for example, lists *tantour* bread, Iraqi *qemar* (clotted cream), and *masgouf* (a fish specialty) on its front window.[114]

Detroit's newer Yemeni and Syrian communities are rapidly capitalizing on this growing halal marketplace, opening restaurants and bakeries of their own, as well as upscale Yemeni coffeehouses. Additionally, the Yemeni community is contributing to the vibrant

[113] Miri, "Remembering Chaldean Town."
[114] Howell and Wellman, "Unsettled Lives."

and diverse ethnic and culinary marketplace of Banglatown adjacent to Hamtramck. Here Yemeni and Bangladeshi entrepreneurs (among many others) have opened a thriving marketplace of clothing stores, stores selling household goods, and especially businesses selling the culinary treats of the Middle East and South Asia. Joined by Bosnian, African American, and other Muslim entrepreneurs, the Hamtramck area is home to some of the most interesting (and affordable) food in the region.[115]

Meatpacking and Halal Food Industry

Eastern Market, located just north and east of Detroit's central business district, has long played an outsized role in Arab and Chaldean American foodways. Middle Eastern immigrants to Detroit, favoring the Mediterranean diet, have long tried to keep fresh vegetables on the table as much as was seasonally possible and affordable in Michigan. Many store owners visited the market daily to procure the freshest and best available produce. This history has been memorialized by Arab American poets like Larry Joseph, who sometimes refers to himself jokingly as the "poet of grocers" and mentions his grandfather's daily walk to the market in several of his poems.[116] The documentary film *Tales from Arab Detroit* follows another grocer, the then-recently retired Fandy Rashid, as he made the rounds through the market and reflected back on how his daily visits there had grounded him and given him a sense of community through the many decades he worked at the Rashid Quality Market (that opened in 1935 at 7525 Linwood Avenue, not extant).[117]

Eastern Market wholesalers began importing spices, coffees, and other goods from the Middle East in the 1920s. The first recorded store of this nature was the N. Nahhat Distribution Co. at 2481 Russell (not extant) that sold "Syrian, Greek, and American Products".[118] The most recent of these was the Gabriel Import Company, a Middle Eastern import grocery store established in 1954 at 2543 Market Street (extant) by Gabriel Wadia. This store closed in 2023.

Meatpacking has also been a stable business for Middle Easterners in Detroit. Among the earliest was Mahooly & Azar, located at 2510 Orleans (extant) which was run by Lebanese immigrants and active from at least the late 1920s. The Bonohom family from Syria opened the N. Bonohom & Co. packing business in 1937 and sold lamb and veal to other Syrian immigrants. Their business, now known as Wolverine Packing, has thrived and risen to prominence as one of the area's largest meat distributors. Still located at 2535 Rivard Street in the Eastern Market, their annual revenues are now over $1.5 billion, and they employ over 700 people in their Detroit facilities.[119]

---

[115] Howell, "Mosqueing the Marketplace: Business as (Un)Usual in Hamtramck."
[116] Anne Rashid, "Eastern Market: Detroit Arts and Culture" website, https://detroitartsculture.wixsite.com/detroitstudies/eastern-market. Accessed on June 19, 2025.
[117] *Tales from Arab Detroit*, dir. by Joan Mandell (Olive Branch Productions, 1995).
[118] *Polk's Detroit City Directory*, 1929
[119] Francisco Hernandez, "About | Wolverine Packing Co.", 2024 <https://www.wolverinepacking.com/about-us-2/> [accessed 24 July 2024].

Figure 33: Veal being displayed at the Wolverine Packing Company, undated image (source: Wolverine Packing Company).

Halal meat, which is ritually slaughtered according to Muslim religious traditions, was not always available in Detroit. While there were Middle Eastern butchers in Eastern Market by the 1920s, the meat marketed there was not halal. In the early days, Muslims would simply avoid eating pork products and drinking alcohol (which are forbidden to them). On religious holidays, they would sometimes take a trip to a nearby farm to buy a fresh lamb that they would slaughter and butcher themselves at home according to Islamic customs.[120] This changed in 1947, when Abdul Karim Berry immigrated from Palestine and established a small butcher shop in Dearborn. Berry's son, Ronnie, who runs the store today with his two sons, remembers that in the early days people would mostly buy whole animals from his father to be butchered at home. They would bring back certain cuts of meat for him to grind and process in the store. The business was popular with Muslims throughout the region, but otherwise not very well known. Today it mostly sells meat by the pound, already packaged for consumers, and includes a line of jerky, sausages, and other processed and cured meat products.[121]

[120] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, pp. 158, 201.
[121] *Culinary Pioneers*, dir. by Halal Metropolis Team, Conversations (Halal Metropolis, 2019) <https://halalmetropolis.org/culinary-pioneers> [accessed 24 July 2024].

In 1973 a young butcher from Lebanon, Aref Saad, immigrated to Dearborn. Saad was eager to practice his trade in the now growing Arab and Muslim enclaves of the region. After working on the assembly line at Ford for a few years, he saved enough money to open the Aref Saad Meat Market in 1976 in Eastern Market (2814 Orleans Street, extant). This centralized location and his wholesale prices helped Saad attract customers from across the metro area, including both grocers and individuals. Saad originally bought meat from other butchers in Eastern Market, but they were not familiar with halal slaughter, and so he began buying animals directly from farmers instead. In the 1980s he worked to put in place a halal certification process through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and with this legitimacy was able to begin partnering with Wolverine Packing Co., the largest meat packing company in Michigan, to slaughter animals through their abattoir.[122]

In 1979 a third halal butchering business was established, also in Eastern Market (2496 Orleans Street, extant). Berry and Sons Islamic Slaughterhouse was also established by an immigrant family from Lebanon and Syria. Like its two predecessors, Berry and Sons marketed its product to the growing Muslim immigrant community in the city, South Asian students at Wayne State University, Palestinians, a Lebanese community that was swelling rapidly because of the Lebanese Civil War, and an African American Muslim community that was also growing and learning to appreciate halal food for the first time.[123] Both of these businesses have grown and diversified their offerings over the years. Today Saad Meats is the largest wholesaler of halal meat east of the Mississippi River. Their products are found in grocery stores throughout the area and on the tables of many non-Arab restaurants. Muslim families continue to frequent the original locations of both the Berry and Saad stores, which have been serving up halal meat products for over 40 years in Southeast Michigan.

[122] Arif Saad, Arif Saad Interview, 2019; “About Us” <https://saadmeats.com/about-us/> [accessed 24 July 2024].
[123] After the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, his son Imam Warith Deen Muhammad became the spiritual leader of the Nation of Islam and he led this community toward Sunni Islam. Under his father’s leadership the community had avoided meat in favor of a plant-based diet supplemented with fish. Under Imam Warith Deen’s leadership the group joined the Sunni Muslim community and the halal prohibitions that went with this faith tradition. “About - #1 Best Finest Halal Meat Provider”, 2021 <https://berryandsonshalalmeat.com/about/> [accessed 24 July 2024].

Arts and Culture

Detroit's largest global music festival today is the Concert of Colors, a cultural celebration launched in 1993 by the ACCESS Cultural Arts Program in close collaboration with New Detroit Incorporated. The brainchild of then ACCESS Executive Director Ismael Ahmed, the festival was intended to bring together the city's people of color to explore their cultural contributions to Detroit. Ahmed, a music promoter, hosted a radio program on WDET called "This Island Earth" that focused on contemporary world music. He was motivated by his love of world music and by his desire to share the music of the Arab world with larger public audiences.[124] Today, ACCESS partners with the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) and The Scarab Club of Detroit to host the four-day annual festival that draws an audience of roughly 10,000.

Long before Ahmed's Concert of Colors, the DIA hosted another purveyor of Arab music and film, Albert Rashid, in an equally long-lasting effort to expand the city's cultural diversity. Rashid moved to Detroit in the early 1930s with his family and attended the University of Detroit. After graduating in 1934, he acquired the rights to a 1933 Egyptian musical called *Al-Warda al-Beida, the White Rose*, which featured a soon to be prominent composer and musician, Mohammed Abdul Wahab. The film's American premier, held at the DIA, was such a success that Rashid traveled the film to other Arab communities throughout the Midwest. He then used this network to provide regular screenings of Middle Eastern cinema in Detroit. In 1937 he traveled to Egypt and Lebanon to meet with musical and cinematic leaders who named him their sole distributor and representative in the U.S. market. Rashid also started the Al-Chark Records Company from his home at 658 Taylor Avenue (extant) and began pressing recordings of local artists and reproducing works from the Middle East during the 1940s. In 1947, Rashid moved his recording studio to New York but continued to screen films at the DIA through the 1950s. He also continued selling music and films at Detroit music festivals and through his mail order business. The Rashid Sales Company in New York became a mainstay of Arab American cultural consumption well into the 21st century.[125]

Figure 34: Al-Chark record, ca. 1940s (source: Richard M. Breaux collection).

[124] Sally Howell, ""Cultural Interventions: Arab American Aesthetics between the Transnational and the Ethnic."", *Diaspora*, 9.1 (2000), pp. 59–82.
[125] "Albert Rashid: Rashid Sales Company, Al-Chark /the Orient and the Largest Selection of Arabic Records in the United States" <https://syrianlebanesediasporasound.blogspot.com/2020/02/albert-rashid-rashid-sales-company-al.html> [accessed 23 July 2024]; Rashid_Admin, "Starring: Rashid Sales Co. | Rashid Club of America", 2014 <https://www.rashidclub.com/starring-rashid-sales-co/> [accessed 24 July 2024]; Anne Rasmussen, "The Sound of Culture, the Structure of Tradition: Musicians' Work in Arab Detroit", by Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (Wayne State University Press, 2000).

A second musical and cinematic promoter moved to Detroit in 1954 from Brooklyn, in part to fill the gap left behind when Albert Rashid left the city, and in part to be nearer to his wife's family in Dearborn. Ismail Ahmed, an Egyptian immigrant and the father of future ACCESS Executive Director Ismael Ahmed, moved his growing family to Southwest Detroit and opened the Middle East Records store in Greektown (behind 558 Monroe Street, extant). Middle East Records carried many items made available in the U.S. through Rashid Sales. Ahmed also took up the mantle of screening Arabic language films in Detroit.

Arab and Chaldean musicians and writers have long contributed to the vibrant cultural scene of the city. In the music field, for example, a few Detroiters became genuine celebrities and national figures. Amos Muzyad "Muzzy" Yakhoob Kairouz, later known as Danny Thomas, was born in rural Michigan and raised in Toledo, where he and one of his many brothers formed a vaudeville duo in the 1920s. When his brother married in 1932 and quit performing, Danny moved to Detroit to pursue the greater opportunities available here. He began his radio career at WMBC and became a comedian, crooner, and actor. He worked in the food industry and in factories as well. In 1940 he moved to Chicago, changed his name to Danny Thomas, and was a regular in the nightclub scene there. Thomas is best known for his 11-year run on the hit comedy series *Make Room for Daddy* and for his work on behalf of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which was largely funded through the American Lebanese Syrian Associated Charities (ALSAC) that Thomas founded in 1957.

Figure 35: Danny Thomas in front of the St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital (source: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital).

Casey Kasem, another well-known Arab American celebrity, was born in Detroit in 1932 to a Druze family who lived at 646 W. Alexandrine (not extant). He got his start in radio at Northwestern High School and Wayne State University and went on to a prominent career as a DJ and voice actor. His most notable work was as the announcer for the *America's Top Forty* radio program from the 1970-1988 and as the voice of Shaggy in the cartoon series *Scooby-Doo*. Like Thomas, Kasem was a longstanding advocate for the Arab American community nationally. He was active in the American Druze Society and received significant support from that community in Detroit.

Figure 36: Casey Kasem in the DJ booth at WJBK radio station, Detroit, 1957 (source: Getty Images).

Figure 37: Helen Thomas at a press conference with President Gerald Ford, 1976 (source: Library of Congress).

In the field of journalism, Helen Thomas's career stands out. Her family moved to Detroit when she was four years old. She graduated from Eastern High School and eventually from Wayne State University. Thomas attended St. George's Antiochian Orthodox Church in Detroit, part of a tightly knit Lebanese community, but she moved to Washington DC after her graduation to pursue a career in journalism. In 1943 she joined the United Press in Washington, DC. In 1960, she covered president-elect John F. Kennedy's campaign. Once he took office, Thomas became a White House correspondent for United Press International (UPI). She remained a White House correspondent for 50 years, covering the White House years of 10 American presidents. She was the longest standing member of the U.S. Press Corps and was often referred to as the "first lady of

the press."[126] During her first years in the White House, she tended to keep her political views to herself, but in the post-9/11 period, in particular, she became a vocal critic of U.S. foreign policies in the Middle East. In 2010 she was forced to resign from her position due to her comments on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Figure 38: Alixa Naff meeting with students, 1980 (source: Arab American National Museum)

Alixa Naff's family moved to Detroit in 1931 when she was twelve years old. Like Thomas, her family attended St. George's Church. Her family moved to California after World War II, but Naff's years in Detroit shaped much of her career as a historian of the Arab American experience. In 1962, while still an undergraduate at UCLA, Naff traveled across the country with a tape recorder and $1,000 in a Volkswagen Beetle visiting Arab American communities throughout the Midwest. She recorded oral histories and collected artifacts which were then donated to the Smithsonian Institution's Ferris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection. Eventually she received a PhD in history from UCLA and set out on the road again in the early 1980s to record more oral histories. These testimonies became the basis of her book, *Becoming American*, a seminal work in the field of Arab American Studies. Naff was also a memoirist; one of her most moving essays is entitled "Growing up in Detroit: An Immigrant Grocer's Daughter," and documents the life of the Arab community of which she was a part. Naff advocated fiercely for her collection at the Smithsonian Institution, produced a documentary film about it, and worked with ACCESS in 1995 to curate an exhibition on the history of Detroit's Arab communities at the National Museum of American History that drew heavily from her archival materials.[127]

[126] Helen Amelia Thomas Obituary, July 20, 2013, Khoolood, https://www.khoolood.com/obituaries/15213/Helen-Amelia-Thomas , accessed on June 13, 2025.
[127] Naff, *Becoming America: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience.*; Naff, "Growing up in Detroit: An Immigrant Grocer's Daughter."

Music and Entertainment

Ethnomusicologist Anne Rasmussen argues that churches provided the most consistent outlet for the public performance of Arab music in Detroit prior to the 1940s. They held regular festivals, called *mahrajan/at*, to create a sense of community and raise funds for church and other community building projects. The churches frequently sponsored Knights of Columbus chapters that included musical performances in their public events.[128] Some used their social halls for concerts. Detroit's mosques also made use of festivals for fundraising prior to the 1980s.[129]

Professional Arab musicians played at weddings and other personal celebrations. Home movies and photographs make clear that Arab Americans of all backgrounds played instruments for and with guests when they hosted smaller parties in their homes. The families would sing along to folk music from their homeland or the popular Arabic music of the era. Starting in the 1940s and 1950s, younger generations would also include popular American hits, patriotic songs, or, in the case of the Karoub family from Highland Park, soundtracks to popular movies like the Wizard of Oz or the Sound of Music.

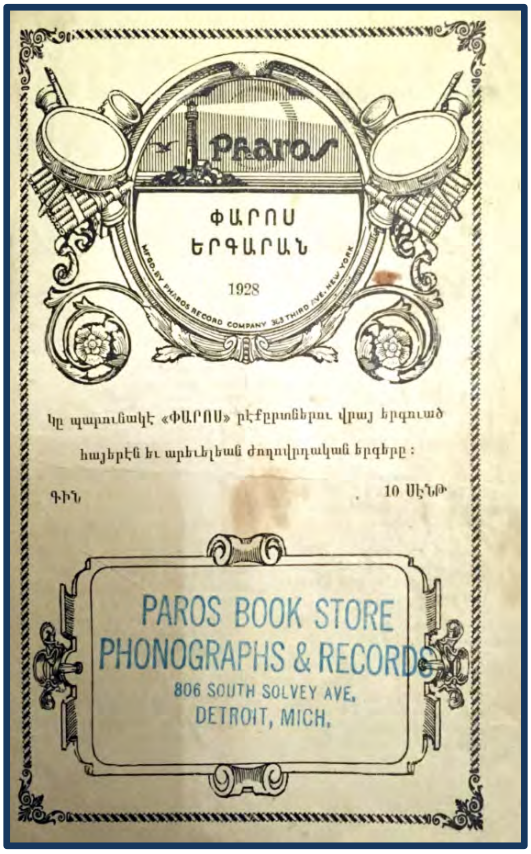


Figure 39: Advertisement for the Paros Bookstore, Phonographs, and Record Shop, which sold, among others, Turkish-Armenian sheet music, 1928 (no longer extant) (source: https://translatingmichigan.org/the-middle-east-in-metro-detroit).

In 1935 Palestinian musician Toufic Barham moved to Detroit with his Lebanese wife Alice, to live in a vibrant Arabic speaking community in which he could hone his musical career. The couple purchased the Sheikh Restaurant in the late 1930s and through it became patrons of the Arab arts and music scene in Detroit. Barham led the Egyptian Melodies Orchestra, which was made up of local talent and performed alongside leading Arab musicians of the day, including John Fayad, Louis Wardiny, Wadeeh Bagdady, Amer and Sana Kadaj, and Violet Tyson. The Barhams and their ensemble backed many cultural fund-raising events in Detroit at local churches, concert halls, and in city parks. They also traveled the *mahrajan* circuit, entertained at their restaurant, and recorded songs with Alamphon Records. Toufic later connected with Danny Thomas and the two worked together for many years raising funds for St. Jude's Hospital. Thomas performed both in

[128] Anne Rasmussen; Anne Katharine Rasmussen, "Individuality and Social Change in the Music of Arab-Americans" (unpublished Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992).
[129] Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 242-247.

Figure 40: The Egyptian Melodies, led by Toufic T. Barham, seated, far right, 1953 (source: Arizona Republic *(newspaper), April 26, 1953).*

English and in Arabic, but when performing in Arabic, he preferred to be accompanied by Barham and his band.[130]

In 1947, war conditions in Palestine forced the popular husband and wife singing duo Amer and Sana Kadaj to immigrate to Detroit. Like Barham, they chose Detroit because they heard it had the largest Arab community in the U.S. at the time. Amer played many percussive instruments but was better known as a vocalist. Sana was also a vocalist. Performing at social events and *haflis* (parties) at places like the St. Maron Hall (2940 Mt. Elliott, not extant), they quickly developed a strong reputation and began performing throughout the U.S. In the 1950s they recorded dozens of songs for the Alamphon label in Brooklyn, which increased the demand for their work. The Kadajs became regular performers at Arab American restaurants like the Sheikh in Detroit and Uncle Sam's in Dearborn, as well as at new nightclubs which opened during this time.[131] Meanwhile, Amer supported the family by opening a corner grocery store near Wayne State University at (5482 Cass Avenue, extant).

Jalil Azzouz also came to the U.S. from Palestine in this period and was encouraged to settle in Detroit by his relative from Ramallah and by the Kadajs, with whom he had performed in Jerusalem. Azzouz played the *oud* and was quickly embraced by Detroit's active music establishment. Like the Kadajs, he performed for special occasions in churches and clubs, toured with the *Mahajan* circuit in the summers, and also performed with Thomas for ALSAC/St. Jude's. Working with the best artists of his day, Azzouz was featured on many recordings made in Detroit and New York on the Es-Shark and Alamphon labels. He was such a close partner with Amer Kadaj that after Kadaj's death in 1979 Azzouz's travel schedule was significantly curtailed. As a new generation of Arab artists (and

Figure 41: Sana Kadaj singing at an unidentified Detroit nightclub, ca. 1950s (source: Arab American National Museum, Dearborn).

[130] Richard Breaux, "The Midwest Mahjar: The Recorded Sounds of the Arabic-Speaking Diaspora in the United States at 78 RPM", *For the Children at St. Jude - Toufic Barham and Danny Thomas*, 2019 <https://syrianlebanesediasporasound.blogspot.com/2019/05/toufict.html> [accessed 18 October 2024].
[131] Breaux, "The Midwest Mahjar."

immigrants) began arriving in Detroit in the 1970s and 1980s, Azzouz found new partners and new audiences for his work.

Greektown clubs provided another outlet for Arab musicians in Detroit in the 1940s. They featured a mix of Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Middle Eastern music for audiences that were equally diverse. The audience at one Turkish club, Harry's, was described by the Turkish press in 1948 with this language:

> A big crowd of men and women were sitting almost knee-to-knee. In addition to Turks, there were Lebanese, Syrians, Iraqis, Egyptians, Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Iranians, or rather, the entire Balkans and the Middle East and the Near East was there. And some Americans—playing the role of tourists in their own country—had come there out of curiosity.[132]

While these clubs featured dancing in the 1940s, their focus was on music, and they presented both male and female singers and artists from throughout the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. This changed in the 1960s, when the belly dance craze came to dominate the night club scene. Many female performers from earlier generations stepped back from the limelight, as this popular art form had a somewhat shady reputation among Arab Americans.[133] Singers like Sana Kadaj yielded the stage to the dancers. By the 1960s she had more or less retired from her performing career to focus on her two children, who were raised at 24328 Leewin Street (extant). Amer continued performing until he was killed in 1979 during a robbery in his store.[134]

Detroit in the 1960s rivaled Chicago and Los Angeles for the quality of its belly dancers. Women like Aziza Ammar and Princess Madiha were leading dance instructors as well as performers. They danced for dinner crowds in Greektown nightly, and then for after dinner crowds late into the night. These venues allowed Detroit's Arab musicians to make a living as performers rather than pursue day jobs while performing for extra cash. The nightclubs' musical ensembles often included Greeks, Turks, Armenians, and Arab Americans, and the repertoire they performed was an amalgam of the cultures the different performers represented.[135] Both Jalil Azzouz and Amer Kadaj played in such groups.

American-born children of Arab musicians were often less interested in traditional nightclub music. Carl Karoub, for example, a son of Imam Husayn Karoub of the Highland Park and Dearborn mosques, studied the classical French horn in college. He taught music in the Livonia Public Schools and performed with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra for over 30 years. In the 1960s, Karoub had a second gig as well. He was a studio artist at Motown Records and performed with many of the label's most iconic

---

[132] This text is from a Turkish language newspaper, *Amerikada Turkler* that was published on June 23, 1948 and is reproduced on the "Coffeehouses, Cafés, and Nightlife: A Tale of Traveling Musicians, Cultures, and Communities in the Motor City," website of The Middle East in Metro Detroit: (Post) Ottoman Migrations research project at the University of Michigan, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7b00df17499c43c3b509389064186d90, published on May 1, 2024 and accessed on October 18, 2024.
[133] Meiver Delacruz, "Migration Moves: Arab Dance in the US in the Ebbs and Flows of War" (Northwestern University, 2021).
[134] Breaux, "The Midwest Mahjar"; also "Slaying Suspect," *Detroit Free Press*, September 9, 1979.
[135] Delacruz, "Migration Moves."

artists, including the Supremes and Marvin Gaye. He was featured on popular music hits including Gaye and Tammi Terril's "Ain't no Mountain High Enough," from 1967.[136]

In 1973 the City of Detroit worked with nonprofit organizations in the Arab and Chaldean communities of the area to create the first Arab World Festival in Hart Plaza. This three-day, and later two-day, festival was part of a series of ethnic events the city began organizing in the early 1970s.[137] For the Arab and Chaldean communities, their inclusion in the city series represented a moment of cultural arrival. The festival gave community arts and culture activists the opportunity to represent Middle Eastern food, music, and culture to the whole city. Several organizations, like the Arab Media Society, ACCESS, and the Arab American and Chaldean Council collaborated to make this event a genuine showcase of Arab and Chaldean culture and arts. They commissioned well known Palestinian artist Kamal Boulatta to design the stage backdrop and festival logo and hired the best Arab and Chaldean performing artists they could identify in the city. Churches, mosques, and civic groups worked together selling food, beverages, and other items to raise money for their activities. In later years, volunteer interest died off and the food booths were rented instead to local businesses. For over 50 years the event has presented live music, belly dancing, dubkeh, food, fashion, and cultural displays. In 2003 the festival adopted a new name – the Arab and Chaldean Festival – which acknowledged more recent growth in the Chaldean community and its commitment to the festival itself.

Figure 42: Dancers with the Ta Amullat Fi Buharit Al Zeman Troupe at the Arab World Festival (source: Detroit Free *Press, July 30, 1995, 1b).*

[136] Jeff Karoub, "Personal Communication", 18 October 2024.
[137] Julie Longo, "Remembering the Renaissance City: Detroit's Bicentennial Homecoming Festival and Urban Redevelopment," Michigan Historical Review, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall, 2006), pp. 89-118.

In the 1980s, the Greektown nightclub scene began to wane, and Arab and Chaldean entrepreneurs moved to open clubs of their own in the suburbs, places like Mitch Housey's, Uncle Sam's, Omar Khayam, and Cedars of Lebanon. More recently the scene has moved to the Soraya Nightclub in Southfield, to Adonis or Beirut by Night in Dearborn, or to a small club on Tireman in Detroit called Delouna. Today the belly dance scene has largely faded away.

Literature

Detroit's music scene is important nationally, but the city really shines when it comes to the literary arts. Two of the country's leading Arab American poets were born in the city and it has been a home to many others, including several winners of the Arab American Book Award. Larry Joseph was born into a Maronite family on the near East side of Detroit in 1948. His father and grandfather worked in the grocery trade, as did many others in his family. Joseph's work is suffused with the grit and feel of the streets of Detroit, with the smell of pork in his grandfather's store, and with the play of light in people's eyes as they jostle one another over their sense of belonging in the city. A graduate of the University of Michigan with a BA and a JD, Joseph is currently the Tinnelly Professor of Law at St. John's University in New York. He taught poetry at Princeton University. His work has been much anthologized, and he has received many honors and recognition for his writing.

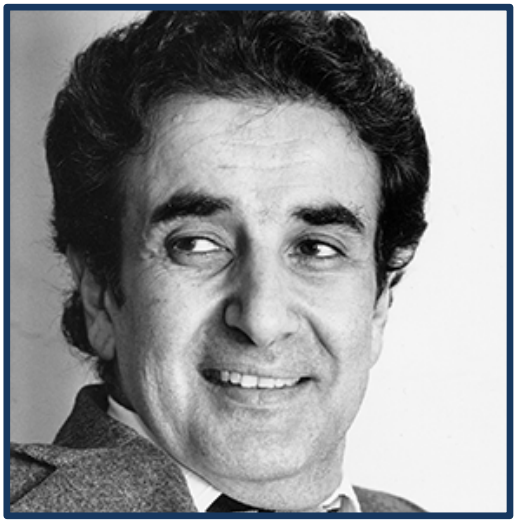


Figure 43: Lawrence Joseph (source: Dorothy Alexander for poets.org)

Hayan Charara was also born in Detroit in 1972. He was raised at 8090 Carlin Street (extant) on the outskirts of Dearborn, where his mother taught school and his father worked in a grocery store. Born a generation after Joseph and to a Muslim family from South Lebanon, the Detroit that Charara grew up in was a very different one than Joseph's, but the love and curiosity the younger man writes for his city is just as sharp and profound. An alum of Wayne State University (BFA) and the University of Texas at Houston (PhD), Charara has published several collections of poetry. He has won many awards for his poetry and essays. Charara has also been active nationally bringing Arab American poets together. In 1994, he helped found the Radius of Arab Writers and he has served several terms as the group's president and in other leadership roles.

Other prominent local writers with Detroit ties include Kevin Rashid, Marilyn Rashid, Nur Hindi, Hajjar Baban, Ghassan Zeineddine, and Alise Alousi. Alousi currently leads the InsideOut Literary Arts Program (5201 Cass) that encourages high school youth to develop their poetry voices. The Maamoul Press is a collective of Arab women writers, artists and graphic novelists based in Detroit and led by Layla Abdelrazak and Aya Krisht. Some of their authors have produced best-selling and award-winning graphic novels

that address topics set in the U.S., the Arab world, and the fantastical spaces that connect them.

Detroit also hosts many talented artists of the visual arts. Hashim Al-Tawil is an internationally acclaimed painter from Iraq, who had lived in the Detroit area since 1990. He currently teaches at Henry Ford College in Dearborn. Adnan Charara is an equally celebrated painter, sculptor, and conceptual artist who runs Gallery Camille at 4130 Cass Ave. (extant). Nour Balloutt is a photographer and conceptual artist who runs Habibi House - a community art and social engagement space in Detroit. Lila Kadaj also attended Wayne State University and taught art for the Detroit Public Schools for over 30 years. Her oil canvases are deeply personal. Athir Shayota is a Chaldean artist who grew up in Chaldean Town in the 1980s. His early work focused exclusively on the people and cultural expressions of the neighborhood. Sabah Wazi was born and raised in Iraq, but immigrated to Detroit in 1979, when he also settled initially in Chaldean Town. His work is also concerned with Iraqi culture and history. He has been the most sought-after artist in the Chaldean community in recent years when cultural institutions seek to tell the story of Chaldean and Babylonian history and culture. His works in sculpture and painting both and his work and career have evolved radically over the past 40 years in Detroit and its suburbs, right alongside the Chaldean community.

Newspapers and Journalism

The Arab and Chaldean communities of Detroit have long produced news media in the Arabic and English languages. For newly arrived immigrants, having a source of information in their native language is crucial to their social well-being and to maintaining connections with their communities nationally and internationally. Early settlers had to rely on newspapers published in New York and other cities, but by the 1940s, several journals were published in Detroit in the Arabic and Aramaic languages. English-language ethnic newspapers have also helped recent immigrants develop language skills and connect them to their English-speaking neighbors.[138] The following sample of Arabic- and Aramaic-language newspapers highlight some of the many people and organizations that supplied printed news to newly arrived immigrants:

> The *Arab American Message* was published by Imam Hussein Karoub starting in the late 1940s. It was first published at 150 Victor Ave. in Highland Park, Michigan (not extant). By the 1970s, the paper moved to 17530 Woodward Avenue (extant) and Imam Hussein's son Mike Karoub took over editing and publishing the paper. This monthly paper included news from the Middle East and original stories about the Arab American and Muslim American communities. It continued as an online publication into the 2000s, edited most recently by Carl Karoub, a son of Mike Karoub, with a local subscriber base.
>
> *As-Sabah (The Morning Tribune*) was published by Joseph Kahwajy in the 1940s.
>
> *As-Salwa (The Entertainer)* was a monthly arts and culture newsletter founded in 1945 by Shaker Solomon. It was first published from a commercial building at 6028 Iroquois Street (not extant) and, during the 1950s, from Solomon's home at 6121 Crane Street (extant).

[138] Alixa Naff, "The Arabic Language Press."

In the 1950s the Federation of Islamic Associations of the U.S. and Canada (FIA) began publishing a biannual paper called the *FIA Journal* from the group's headquarters at 17530 Woodward Avenue (extant). This Journal published academic essays on Islam, the history of Islam, and the role of Islam in American society, including pioneering feminist works by Aliya Hassen and the writings of two prominent Detroit imams, Muhammad Jawad Chirri and Vehbi Ismail.

In 1952 Palestinians from the village of Ramallah began distributing *Hathihe Ramallah* magazine to "unite the greater Ramallah community throughout the U.S. and preserve their rich Palestinian cultural heritage."[139] Organizers included Wayne State University students Karim F. Ajluni, Shawqi Ghannam, Naim Kawwas, Salah E. Salah, and Farid Sackllah. Organizers and members initially met in their homes and at the Fisher Branch YMCA (2051 W. Grand Blvd, extant).

Leesan al-Adl (Voice of Justice) was a Lebanese daily, published from 4478 Cass (not extant) by Checri Kanaan starting in 1944. The Ad-Daleel Publishing Company, operating at the same address, published a weekly Arabic journal called *The Guide* beginning in 1944.

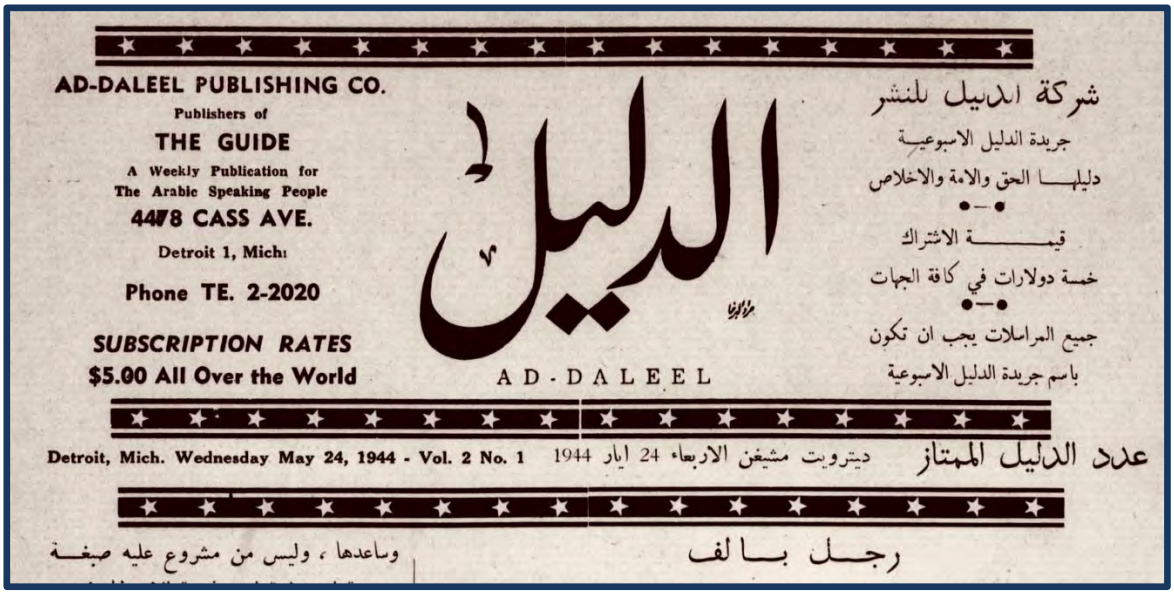


Figure 44: Advertisement for "The Guide" published by the Ad-Daleel Publishing Company, 1944 (source: https://translatingmichigan.org/the-middle-east-in-metro-detroit)

The Muslim Star was a quarterly newsletter also produced by the FIA from 17514 Woodward Avenue (extant). The newspaper started in 1963 and was published into the 1980s. Its first editor was Eide Alawan and the paper was published by Mike Karoub. Over the years it had many managing editors. The newsletter is important because it provided news from each of Detroit's mosques; Arab, African American, and Albanian American, as well as news from other Muslim communities in the

[139] American Federation of Ramallah Palestine (AFRP), "AFRP History," accessed January 23, 2025, https://afrp.org/about-us/afrp-history/.

U.S. In the 1970s the newspaper became more political and started covering events in the Middle East in more detail.

Nahdat al-Arab (*The Arab Renaissance*) was published by Said Fayad and focused on news of the Muslim and Druze communities in the 1940s and 1950s.

In more recent years, newspapers published by Arab and Chaldean Americans have tended to be in English or to be run as bilingual papers. Beginning in the 1970s, Arab and Chaldean voices also appeared on radio and television to discuss news, entertainment, and local culture. Several media outlets have replaced Detroit's early Arabic and Aramaic newspapers:

The first bilingual (Arabic/English) Chaldean paper was launched by Faisal Arabo in 1968 and named *Voice of the Immigrant/Sout Al-Muhajir*. The self-described "newspaper of record for the American Arab community" was short-lived, but Arabo went on to broadcast a weekly radio program for WJLB, 1400 am, in the 1970s (based at 3146 E. Jefferson, extant) and a television show starting in 1979 for WWJ (channel 62). *Arab Voice of Detroit*'s distinctive mix of news and entertainment was widely consumed by Arabic speakers throughout the metro area for over 20 years.

Fouad Manna started publishing a weekly newspaper named *Al-Hadaf ("The Objective"*) in September 1970. Located 716 W. Seven Mile Road (not extant), it was a neighborhood paper that covered a wide range of cultural, social, and political subjects of interest to the Chaldean community.

The *Arab American News* is a bilingual newspaper published from Dearborn by Osama Siblani since 1984. The paper is published weekly, covers news from the Middle East, and provides a great deal of reporting on Arab American stories from around Metro Detroit.

The Chaldean Detroit Times began publication in 1990 and was edited by Amir Denha. It covered news of the Chaldean American and Arab American communities of the Detroit region, news of Iraq, and news of the larger Chaldean Community globally. It ended in 2012.

The Chaldean News was founded in 2006 by Tony Antone, Vanessa Denha (Garmo), Martin Manna, and Michael Sarafa as a monthly print and online newspaper that covered news, business, and culture pertaining to the local Chaldean community. It quickly grew into a lively community newsletter that runs human interest stories, and obituaries, about local community members.

The Yemeni American News was established in 2007 by Rashid Al-Nozili in Detroit and Hamtramck (3201 Roosevelt Street, Hamtramck). It covers local Yemeni and Arab news in Detroit, Dearborn, Hamtramck, and more. It also provides news from Yemen and the Middle East. The paper is bilingual and is published weekly online and in print.

Faisal Arabo was not the only Arab American or Chaldean broadcaster in the area. WDET ran a Peabody award-winning weekly cultural history program in the 1980s called *Arabesque* that was produced by the Arab Media Society. Ahmed Berry moved into the cable market in the 1980s with the two-hour daily show *Arabic Time Television (al-Fatra al-Arabiyya*) that ran on the Ethnic Access channel in Dearborn and neighboring communities. The show was extremely popular and generated a rival program by Nabeel Hammoud, *Sada al-Arab (Echo of the Arab*). Imam Ahmed Berry, from the Islamic Institute of Knowledge, also began religious programming in the 1980s and 1990s and presented on Dearborn's Ethnic ACCESS Channel. These programs were as popular for the commercials they featured representing local businesses as they were for their news and other programming. *TV Orient* was a similar cable network broadcast in Detroit's northern suburbs that was managed by several producers from the Chaldean community, starting with Norman Kiminaia in 1996. In addition to local news programs and interview format shows, the channel also featured a program called *Afrah al-Jaliyah (Community Celebrations)* that presented highlights from local Chaldean weddings.[140]

Conclusion

The people, places, events and organizations described throughout this context report have played vital roles in shaping the histories of Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities over the last 130 years. Future research will undoubtedly reveal more stories related to the themes outlined above. Just as this report drew upon community memories and voices to assemble its narrative themes, it is hoped that this report is only the beginning. That future work will expand upon this report, and its contexts can help to establish historic significance of other Arab and Chaldean communities throughout the United States.

Moreover, historic themes related to Detroit's Arab and Chaldean history continue to develop today. The many generations of immigrants and citizens that built their lives in and around Detroit facilitated its growth into one of the largest and most established Middle Eastern communities in the country. Recent migrants from Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen and other nations now rely on, and are building upon, the accomplishments of past generations. In neighborhoods like Warrendale and Chaldean Town, and in areas that adjoin strong Middle Eastern communities in Hamtramck, Highland Park, and Dearborn, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean communities continue to make history.

Future surveys and research will establish the historic significance of sites that shaped Arab and Chaldean community experiences beyond the years covered in this report. In these recent decades, both communities have experienced significant gains and challenges which will, one day, merit historic recognition. Undoubtedly, such developments will continue to demonstrate Middle Eastern immigrants' commitment to the cultural, economic, and religious wellbeing of their communities and Metro Detroit at large.

[140] Andrew Shryock, "Public Culture in Arab Detroit: Creating Arab/American Identities in a Transnational Domain", in *Mass Mediation: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond* (University of California Press, 2000).

Despite the cultural significance represented by the historic sites identified in this report, many of them are at risk of being lost. Deferred maintenance and demolition and redevelopment pressures pose serious threats to properties that embody Arab and Chaldean community histories from the 1920s to 1970s. The alterations made to these structures over time—whether through renovations that obscure original features or through neglect that accelerates decay—underscore a pressing need for intervention. Preservation challenges are further compounded by the broader socio-economic shifts in Detroit, where economic decline and aggressive blight removal programs have often prioritized new development and demolition over heritage conservation.

Considering these challenges, a strategic response to safeguard these invaluable cultural assets is required. The establishment of local historic districts will help to recognize and protect the unique contributions of Arab and Chaldean communities. Existing National Register nominations should be reviewed and revised to fully incorporate the historical contexts and significance of these sites. New National Register nominations should be completed for eligible Arab and Chaldean sites. Documentation through local and national designations and this historic context report ensures this unique history is accessible to planning professionals, building owners, and other important stakeholders that interact with and impact the built environment. Financial incentives and technical support for building owners are also crucial to ensure that restoration efforts respect the original character of these properties.

The work embodied in this historic context study serves as a reminder that the stories embedded in these buildings and neighborhoods are integral to the city's identity. As Detroit continues to evolve, it is imperative that these histories are not only acknowledged but actively preserved for future generations. The recommendations set forth in this study pave the way for further research, enhanced heritage designations, and proactive preservation strategies that honor the city's multifaceted historical legacy.

References

Abraham, Nabeel, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shryock. *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011.

Abraham, Nabeel and Andrew Shryock. *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000.

Abraham, Sameer. "Detroit's Arab-American Community: A Survey of Diversity and Commonality." In *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*. Sameer Abraham and Nabeel Abraham, eds. 109-134. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983.

Abraham, Sameer and Nabeel Abraham. *The Arab World and Arab-Americans: Understanding a Neglected Minority*. Detroit: Center for Urban Studies, Wayne State University, 1981.

_____. *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*. Detroit: Wayne State University, Center for Urban Studies, 1983.

Ahdab-Yehia, May. "The Detroit Maronite Community." In *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities*, edited by Barbara C Aswad, 137–53. Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1980.

Albrecht, Charlotte Karem. "'A Woman without Limits': Syrian Women in the Peddling Economy Book."Iin *Possible Histories: Arab Americans and the Queer Ecology of Peddling*. University of California Press, 2023.

Ameri, Anan, and Yvonne Lockwood. *Arab Americans in Metro Detroit: A Pictorial History (Images of America)*. New York: Arcadia Publishing, 2001.

American Federation of Ramallah Palestine (AFRP). "AFRP History." Accessed January 23, 2025. https://afrp.org/about-us/afrp-history/.

Aswad, Barbara. *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities* Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1984.

Aswad, Barbara and Barbara Bilge. *Family and Gender among American Muslims: Issues Facing Middle Eastern Immigrants and Their Descendants*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

Bacall, Jacob. *Images of America: Chaldeans in Detroit*. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Press, 2014.

Beydoun, Khaled A. "Between Muslim and White: The Legal Construction of Arab American Identity." *New York University Annual Survey of American Law*, 69 (2013), p. 29.

Bilici, Mucahit. *Finding Mecca in America: How Islam Is Becoming an American Religion*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Curtis, Edward. *Muslims of the Heartland: How Syrian Immigrants Made a Home in the American Midwest.* New York: New York University Press. 2022.

DAAS Team (Wayne Baker, Sally Howell, Amaney Jamal, Ann Lin, Andrew Shryock, Ronald Stockton, and Mark Tessler). *Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit after 9/11*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009.

Elkholy, Abdo A. *The Arab Moslems in the United States: Religion and Assimilation*. New Haven: College & University Press, 1996.

Georgakis, Dan and Marvin Surkin. *Detroit: I do Mind Dying*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1998.

Gualtieri, Sarah. "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States." *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 20.4 (2001), pp. 29–58.

Hagopian, Elaine & Ann Paden. *The Arab American: Studies in Assimilation*. Wilmette: Medina University Press International, 1969.

Haiek, Joseph R., ed. *The American Arabic Speaking Community Almanac*. Los Angeles: The News Circle, 1975.

Hanoosh, Yasmeen. *The Chaldeans: Politics and Identity in Iraq and the American Diaspora*. New York: I.B. Taurus, 2019.

Hanoosh, Yasmeen, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shyrock, ed. *Beyond Refuge in Arab Detroit*, Wayne State University Press, Forthcoming.

Hassoun, Rosina. *Arab Americans in Michigan*. Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005.

Howell, Sally. "Picturing Women, Class, and Community in Arab Detroit: The Strange Case of Eva Habeeb." *Visual Anthropology*, 10 (2-4):209-226, 1998.

_____. "Cultural Interventions: Arab American Aesthetics between the Transnational and the Ethnic." *Diaspora,* 9 (1):59-82, Spring 2000.

_____. "Competing for Muslims: New Strategies for Urban Renewal in Detroit". In Shryock, Andrew, editor. *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

_____. "Mosqueing the Marketplace: Business as (Un)Usual in Hamtramck." *Polish American Studies*, 79.2 (2022), pp. 26–49.

_____. *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

_____. "Southend Struggles: Diverging Narratives of Power and Place in an Arab American Enclave," *Mashriq and Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies.* 3(1):41-64, 2015.

Kado, Chris. "Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Detroit: The Chaldean Community and Their Rise to Majority Ownership in the Grocery Markets, 1943-1990." Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Harvard University, 2017.

Marks, Rachel, Nicholas Jones, and Karen Battle. "What Updates to OMB's Race/Ethnicity Standards Mean for the Census Bureau." United States Census Bureau, April 8, 2024. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2024/04/updates-race-ethnicity-standards.html. Accessed May 2025.

"Middle East, Near East." *National Geographic Style Manual*. https://sites.google.com/a/ngs.org/ngs-style-manual/ng-style-manual/m/middle-east-near-east. Accessed October 2024.

Miri, Adhid. “Remembering Chaldean Town.” Chaldean, 2023. <https://www.chaldeannews.com/2023-content/2023/6/1/remembering-chaldean-town> Accessed July 2024.

Naff, Alixa. *Becoming America: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985.

Orfalea, Gregory. *The Arab Americans: A History*. New York: Olive Branch Press, 2006.

Rankin, Lois. “Racial Study of Syrians.” Detroit Public Library, 1932, The International Institute of Detroit, Box 18, Folder 27.

Saba, Leila Boulos. “The Social Assimilation of the Ramallah Community Residing in Detroit.” (Thesis, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, 1971.

Sengstock, Mary. *Chaldean Americans: Changing Conceptions of Ethnic Identity*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1982.

Stiffler, Matthew. “Orthodox, Arab, American: The Flexibility of Christian Arabness in Detroit.” In Arab *Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade,* edited by Nabeel Abraham, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shyrock. Pp. 105–25. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011.

Sugrue, Thomas. *The Origins of Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press, 1996.

Swanson, Jon. “Sojourners and Settlers in Yemen and America.” In *Sojourners and Settlers: The Yemeni Immigrant Experience*, edited by Jonathon Friedlander. Provo: University Press of Utah, 1988.

Terry, Janice. “Community and Political Activism Among Arab Americans in Detroit.” In *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, edited by Michael Suleiman. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.

Zeineddine, Ghassan, Nabeel Abraham and Sally Howell. *Hadha Baladuna: Arab American Narratives of Boundary and Belonging*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2022.

This page intentionally left blank.

SECTION THREE

Map of Arab and Chaldean Settlements in Detroit

This page intentionally left blank.

ARAB & CHALDEAN SETTLEMENTS IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN

OLDER CHALDEAN DIASPORA
TO SOUTHFIELD/ WEST BLOOMFIELD

NEWER CHALDEAN DIASPORA
TO WARREN/STERLING HEIGHTS

ARAB CHRISTIAN DIASPORA
WEST TO WESTLAND/LIVONIA

ARAB CHRISTIAN DIASPORA
EAST TO GROSSE POINTE

ARAB MUSLIM
DIASPORA WEST
TO DEARBORN

SOUTHFIELD
OAK PARK
WARREN
HIGHLAND PARK
HAMTRAMCK
GROSSE POINTE
DEARBORN HEIGHTS
DEARBORN

TELEGRAPH
SOUTHFIELD FWY
JOHN C LODGE FWY
GRAND RIVER
WOODWARD
I-75
MOUND RD
GRATIOT AVE
I-96
DAVIDSON
I-94
MICHIGAN AVE
AMBASSADOR BRIDGE
DETROIT RIVER
FORT ST

H
L
I
F
G
J
K
E
C
D
B
A

N

*NOT TO SCALE

KEY

1910s - 1920s

A **“Syrian Colony”**
Syrians, Turks, Lebanese, Yemenis, Palestinians

B **Black Bottom**
Syrians, Turks, Lebanese, Yemenis, Palestinians, early Chaldeans

C **Hastings/Paradise Valley**
Syrians, Turks, Lebanese, early Chaldeans

1930s - 1940s

D **Lower East Side**
Syrians, Turks, Lebanese, Yemenis, Palestinians, early Chaldeans

E **Cass Corridor**
Chaldeans

1950s - 1970s

F **Boston Edison/ New Center**
Chaldeans

G **Poletown**
Yemenis

H **Chaldean Town**
Chaldeans

1980s - 2000s

I **Morningside**
Syrians, Palestinians

J **Warrendale**
Lebanese, Iraqis, Yemenis

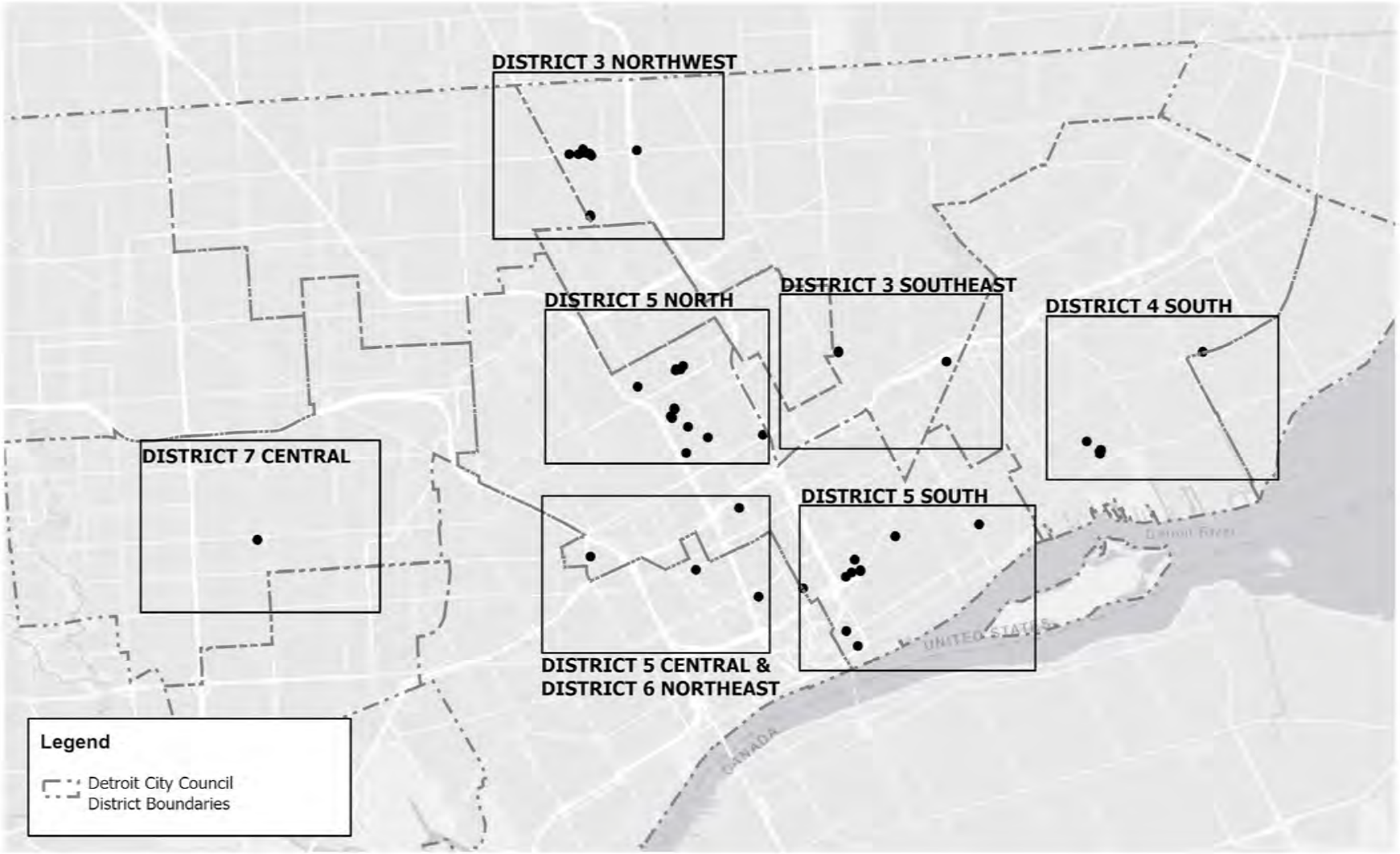
K **Claytown/SW**
Syrians, Palestinians, Lebanese

L **Hamtramck/Highland Park Adjacent**
Yemenis, Chaldeans, Syrians, Lebanese

Index List and Map of Surveyed Properties

This page intentionally left blank.

Map Number	HISTORIC_NAME	Eligibility_Recommendation	Address	Zip Code
1	Commercial Building	More research needed	810 W SEVEN MILE	48203
2	Bahi Iraqi Bakery, Jerry's Fruit Market, Chai-Khana	More research needed	528 W SEVEN MILE	48203
3A	Greenfield Union School	Previously listed	420 W SEVEN MILE	48203
3B	Greenfield Union School Boiler Building		420 W SEVEN MILE	48203
3C	Greenfield Union School Modern Building		420 W SEVEN MILE	48203
4A	Sacred Heart Community Room and Rectory	Individually eligible	312 W SEVEN MILE	48203
4B	Sacred Heart Chaldean Catholic Church	Individually eligible	240 W SEVEN MILE	48203
5	S & J Meats	More research needed	217 W SEVEN MILE	48203
6	Public Lumber	More research needed	1031 E SEVEN MILE	48234
7	Federation of Islamic Associations Headquarters	More research needed	17540 WOODWARD AVE	48203
8	Karoub Printing	More research needed	17518 WOODWARD AVE	48203
9A	Masjid Mu`ath bin Jabal, Resurrection Roman Catholic Parish	More research needed	6096 DOROTHY	48211
9B	Masjid Mu`ath bin Jabal School	More research needed	6096 DOROTHY	48211
10	Al-Salwa publishing site	More research needed	6121 CRANE	48213
11	Moesta Block/Eastern Cafe coffee house	More research needed	15401 MACK	48224
12	Assumption of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Church/St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Church	More research needed	2504 BENITEAU	48214
13A	St. Maron Maronite Church	Individually eligible	11470 KERCHEVAL	48214
13B	St. Maron Maronite Church Office		11470 KERCHEVAL	48214
13C	St. Maron Maronite Church Hall		11470 KERCHEVAL	48214
13D	St. Maron Maronite Church Rectory		11470 KERCHEVAL	48214
14	Dill Brothers Funeral Home, Mother of God Chaldean Church	Individually eligible	10225 HAMILTON	48202
15A	Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament	Previously listed	9844 WOODWARD AVE	48202
15B	Most Blessed Sacrament Rectory		9844 WOODWARD AVE	48202
15C	John F. Dodge Garage		9844 WOODWARD AVE	48202
15D	John F. Dodge House		9844 WOODWARD AVE	48202
15E	Most Blessed Sacrament School		9844 WOODWARD AVE	48202
16	Al-Chark Records Co./Rashid Home Garage	Non-contributing to district	658 TAYLOR	48202
17	Al-Chark Records Company (Rashid Home)	Individually eligible	658 TAYLOR	48202
18	Sam's Market (Dickow Family Store)	More research needed	760 HAZELWOOD	48202
19	Kathawa Home	More research needed	750 HAZELWOOD	48202
20	Jack Najor Home	More research needed	751 HAZELWOOD	48202
21	Dabish Market	Individually eligible	8517 SECOND	48202
22	Ajluni House	More research needed	824 DELAWARE	48202
23	Commercial Building	More research needed	8055 WOODWARD AVE	48202
24	St. George's Orthodox Church of Detroit	Individually eligible	2760 E GRAND BLVD	48211
25	Moore and Boulevard Market	More research needed	3945 MOORE PL	48210
26	Salhamey/Wayne/Campus Market	More research needed	5470 CASS	48202
27	Danish Brotherhood Lodge 227	More research needed	1785 W FOREST	48208
28	Matti Family Store	More research needed	3181 THIRD	48201
29	Ransom Gillis House/Alfred John R. Market	Contributing to district		48201
30	Wolverine Packing Company	Contributing to district	1337 WINDER	48207
31	Fermanis Building/Gabriel Import Company	Contributing to district	1468 ADELAIDE ST	48207
32	Aref Saad Meat Market		2814 ORLEANS	48207
33	Malooly & Azar Company	Contributing to district	2500 ORLEANS	48207
34	Louis Fineman Building/Monarch Packing Company	Contributing to district	2496 ORLEANS	48207
35	Our Lady of Redemption Melkite Church	Individually eligible	2731 MCDOUGALL	48207
36	St. John's Syrian Orthodox Church	More research needed	1761 SHERIDAN	48214
37	Traugott Schmidt & Sons/Middle East Records	Contributing to district	562 MONROE	48226
38	St. Catherine Chapel, Saints Peter and Paul Jesuit Church	Previously listed	601 E JEFFERSON	48207
39	Al-Zahraa Islamic Center	Individually eligible	15571 JOY RD	48228

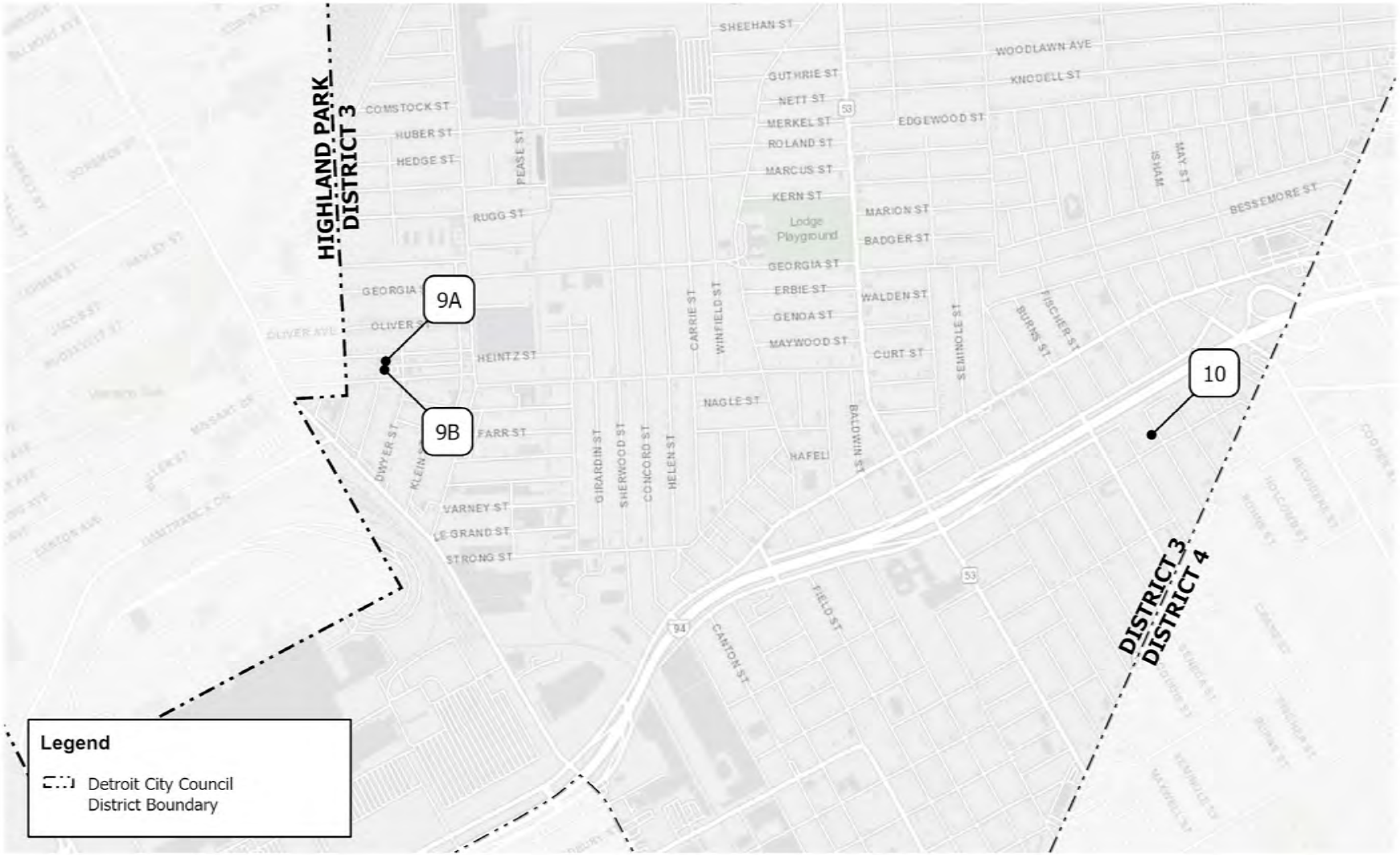


CITY COUNCIL DISTRICTS	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.5 1 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base
ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data,
Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean
Communities Historic Context Study

CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 3 NORTHWEST	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base
ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data,
Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean
Communities Historic Context Study

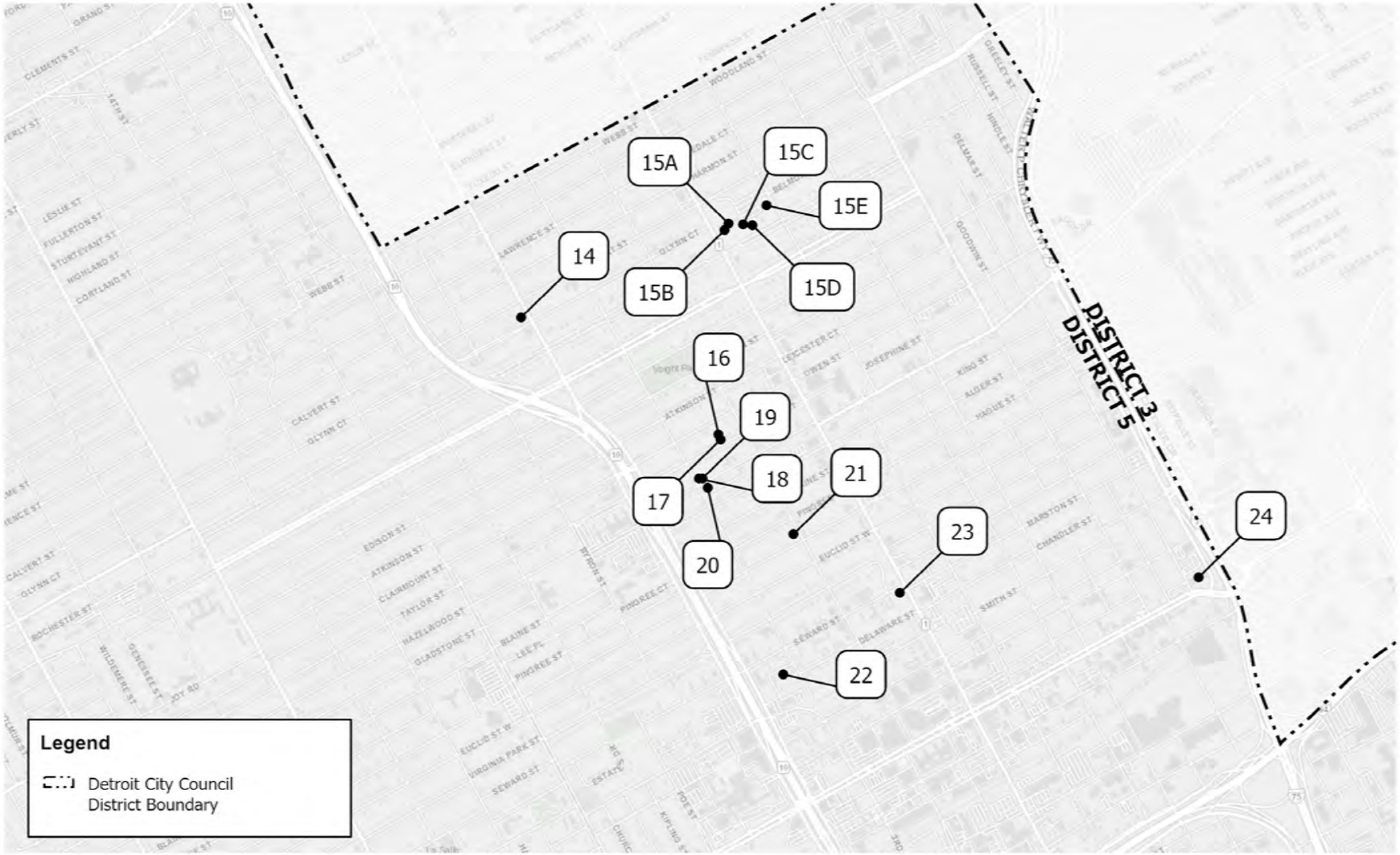


CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 3 SOUTHEAST	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data, Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean Communities Historic Context Study

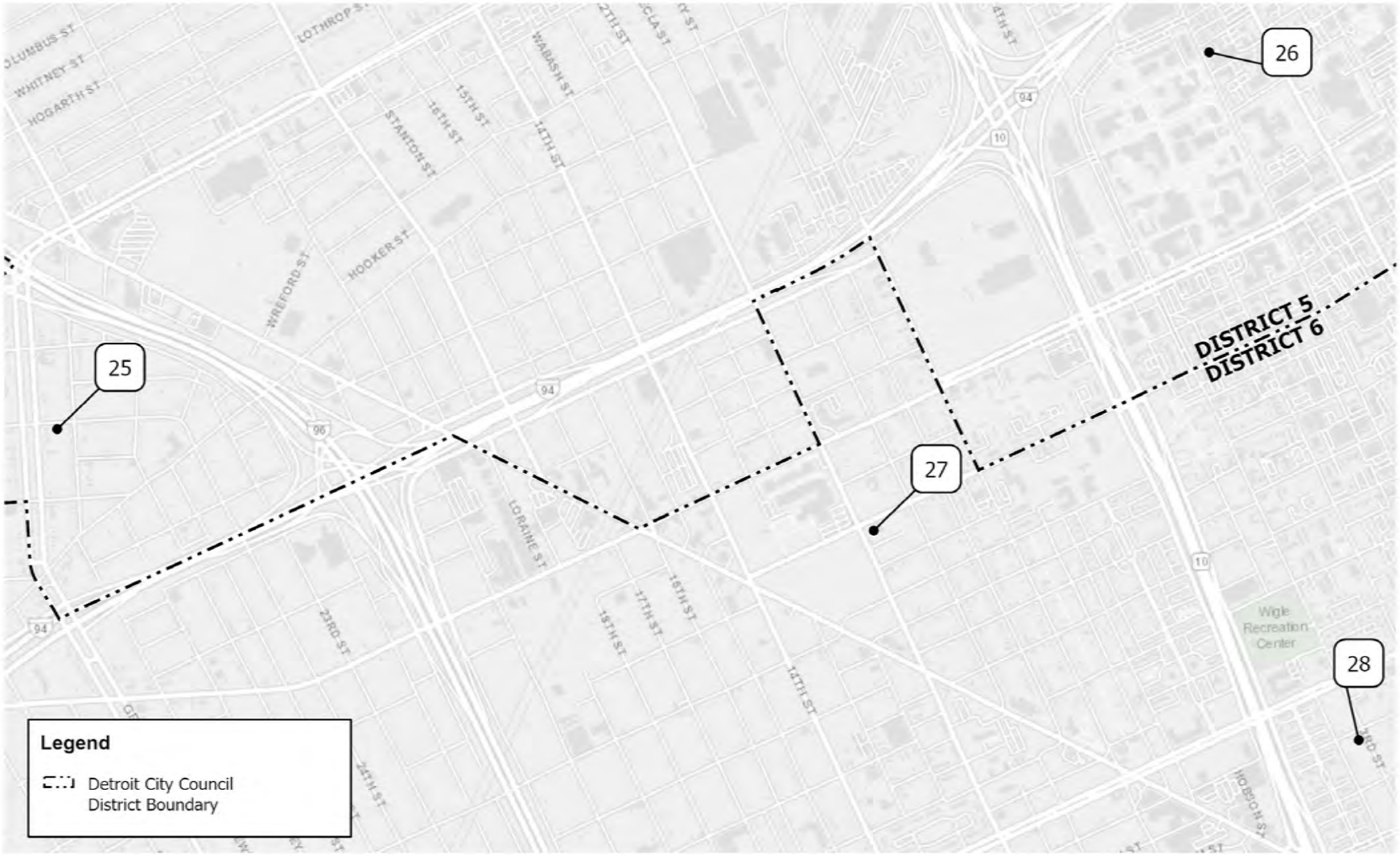
CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 4 SOUTH	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base
ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data,
Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean
Communities Historic Context Study



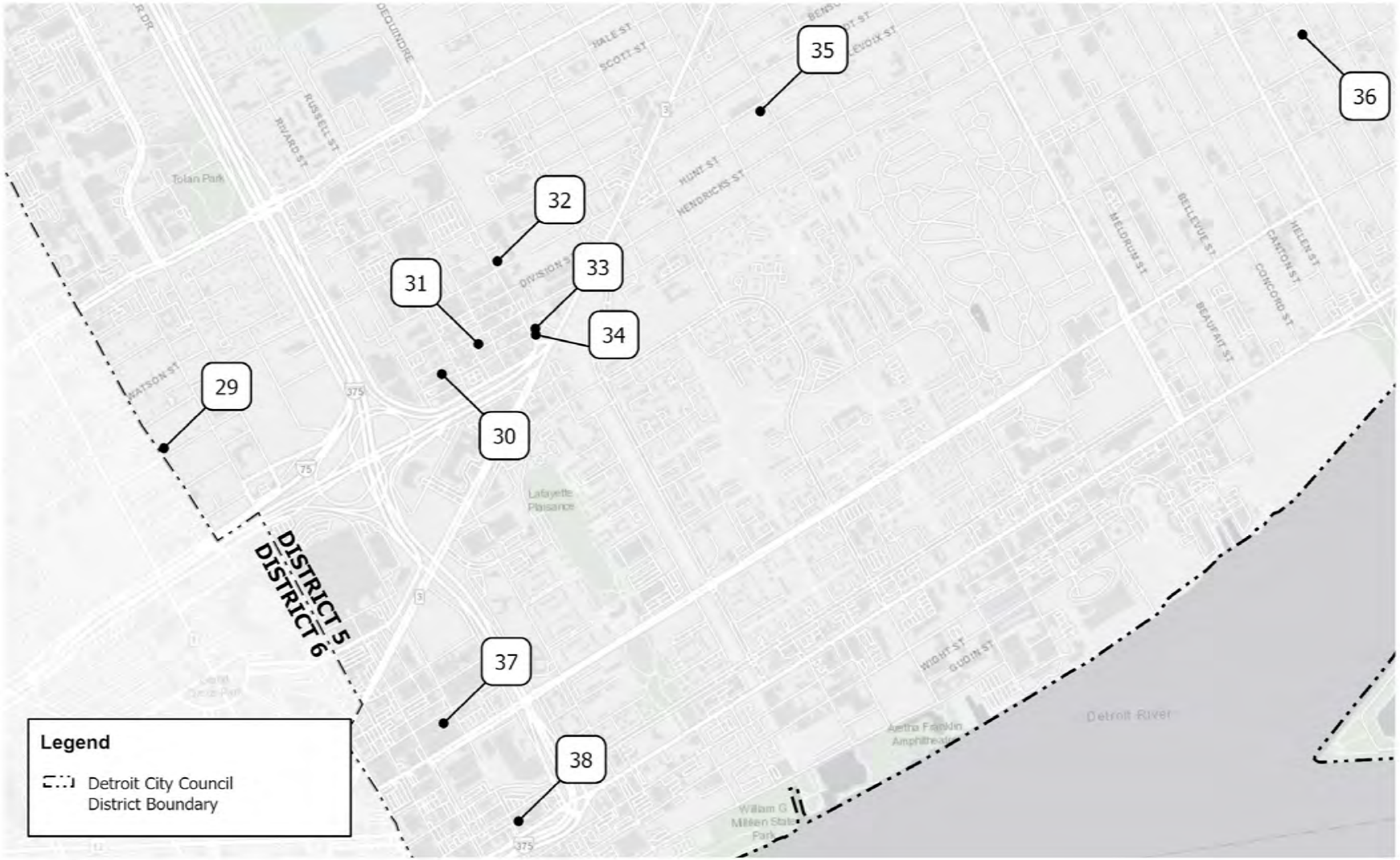
CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 5 NORTH	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base
ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data,
Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean
Communities Historic Context Study



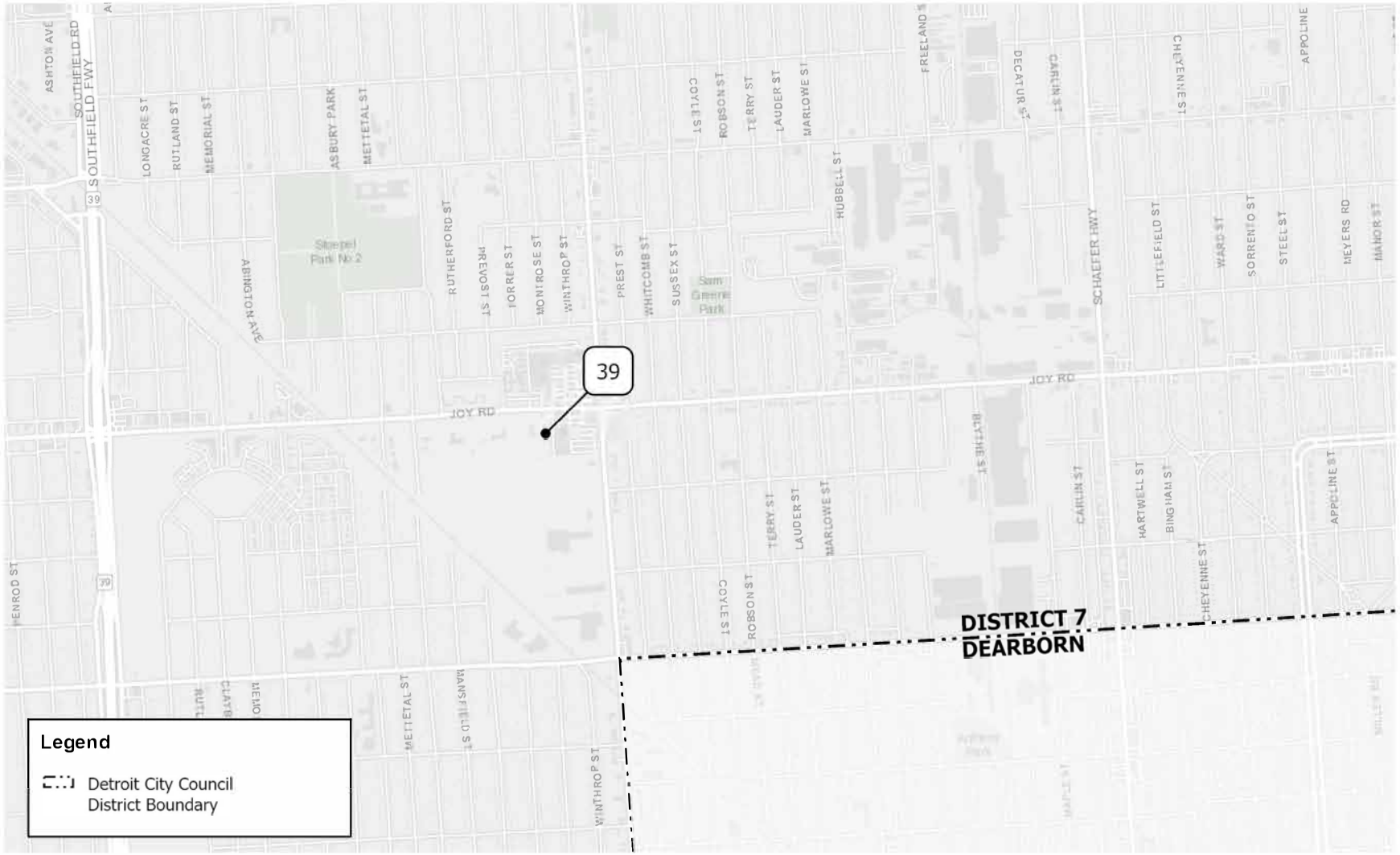
CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 5 CENTRAL & DISTRICT 6 NORTHEAST	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base
ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data,
Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean
Communities Historic Context Study



CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 5 SOUTH	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base
ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data,
Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean
Communities Historic Context Study



CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 7	ARAB AND CHALDEAN SURVEY SITES DETROIT, MICHIGAN	N 0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources:
1. 2025, World Light Gray Base
ESRI, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap
2. 2025, City of Detroit Open GIS Data,
Detroit City Council District Boundaries
3. 2025, Detroit's Arab and Chaldean
Communities Historic Context Study