

# City of Detroit

## CITY COUNCIL

### HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

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Detroit, Michigan 48226

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#### PROPOSED ST. CYPRIAN'S CHURCH HISTORIC DISTRICT

##### Final Report

**CHARGE:** By a resolution dated April 28, 1993, the Detroit City Council has charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed St. Cyprian's Church Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act. The proposed district consists of a single property located on the south west corner of 28th Street and Milford Avenue in the West Warren-Tireman Avenues area along the Grand River corridor. The area is also known as Detroit's "Circle of Churches."

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

On the west, the centerline of 28th Street.

On the north, the centerline of the Milford;

On the east, the centerline of the north-south alley lying between Milford and Cobb;

On the south, the south line, extended east and west, of Lot 59 of the Butterfield and Howlands Subdivision, Liber 16 Page 23.

**HISTORY:** The history of St. Cyprian's Protestant Episcopal Church is entrenched in the traditions of social and political issues which have faced Detroit's black community. Established as a mission parish in 1918, St. Cyprian's was founded during a significant migration of black people from the south to the north. It was this great migration which laid the foundation for the development of large black populations in many of the major cities in the North, including Detroit. Between 1910-1925 Detroit's black population increased from a 5,000 to over 40,000. As the black population increased, the reaction of many in the white community was of heightened racial hostility. This manifested itself in a hardening of patterns of social and residential segregation, and occasional outbreaks of racial violence. St. Cyprian's mirrors the growth and emergence of Detroit's black population in its struggle for justice and

equality. The importance of Detroit's black churches is reflected in the role they have played in the social, political, economic development of the city's black population. It is from the churches that many of the city's civil rights leaders have come.

St. Cyprian's is the daughter church of St. Matthew's, Michigan's oldest black Episcopal Church. St. Matthew's was founded in 1846 by Rev. William C. Monroe and several members of Detroit's Underground Railroad. Located on the city's east side, St. Matthew's grew to become one of Detroit's largest black congregations.

The seed was planted for what was to become St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church as early as 1917, when Mrs. Nellie Warren made a request to Father Robert Bagnall, the rector of St. Matthew's Church, to establish a Episcopal church school on the city's west side. This Sunday School was first housed in the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Lucas on 30th Street, a decision made only after the Rector of St. James Episcopal Church (Warren and 28th Street) withdrew his promise to accommodate the Sunday School in his church because his members objected to black children sharing the building. The church school then moved to the home of Mrs. Gussie Wheeler on Hartford Avenue. Later, a building was rented on Stanford Avenue which, in addition to housing the church school, was used as a general neighborhood house and social center. When the school outgrew these quarters Father Bagnall approached the Diocese about establishment of a west side parish.

In 1918, Father Bagnall's persistent appeal along with Bishop Williams' support resulted in the Episcopal Diocese purchasing three lots and erecting a temporary frame church at 28th Street and Milford Avenue. Although the building was incomplete, the congregation moved in on October 1, 1919. Father Bagnall held Sunday evening prayer services while the diocese searched for a permanent minister. Rev. Charles S. Sedgwick from the New Jersey Diocese was chosen, and on December 2, 1919, he was installed as St. Cyprian's first full time priest.

St. Cyprian's was established as a mission parish in 1919 under Section 1, Canon 4 of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Diocese of Michigan. St. Cyprian's Mission was dedicated January 17, 1920 by Father Bagnall. Twenty-one persons from St. Matthew's Church transferred their membership to St. Cyprian's to form the nucleus of the new congregation. It was determined at the time by the Diocese that the building would serve as both the church proper and the parish house. Father Sedgwick remained at St. Cyprian's until 1924 when he returned to New Jersey.

During the next twelve years St. Cyprian's experienced several changes in leadership. Rev. James K. Satterwhite served from 1924-1930. It was during his ministry that the house at 6108 28th Street, adjoining the church, was purchased and occupied as a rectory. Satterwhite was replaced by Rev. J. R. Lewis in June,

1930, and he served until January 1, 1936. During the tenure of Fathers Satterwhite and Lewis there were attempts made to obtain building funds and to get the sanction of the Diocese to build a new church to replace the temporary structure of 1919. These attempts, however, were unsuccessful.

Malcolm G. Dade took charge as deacon of St. Cyprian's Mission on January 16, 1936. He was ordained as a priest eight months later on August 23, 1936, by Bishop Herman Page. Under Father Dade's leadership St. Cyprian's's continued to grow, and within a year the congregation was faced with growing pains. The need for larger facilities led Father Dade to once again approach Bishop Page for his consent to build a larger structure. The Diocese Executive Council in their January, 1938, meeting sanctioned the building of a new structure for St. Cyprian's with the following provisions: One, the new church would be modeled after Emmanuel Episcopal Church located at John R and Greendale Avenue; and Two, the estimated cost was not to exceed \$25,000 of which St. Cyprian's's Mission was to pay one-half of the cost over a period of ten years. On March 10, 1938, a contract covering these provisions were signed between the Diocese and St. Cyprian's. With diocesan approval, the old church was razed, and plans for the new structure were completed. Ground was broken on March 22nd and the cornerstone was laid on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1938. The Rt. Rev. Frank W. Creighton, S.T.D., Bishop Co-Adjutor, officiated.

The Diocese commissioned Lancelot Sukert, a Detroit architect, to design St. Cyprian's. Sukert was a native of Detroit, born in 1888. He studied architecture at the University of California, Columbia University in New York, and the University of Pennsylvania. During World War I, he was a first lieutenant in the aviation section of the Signal Corps and erected aerodromes at the front; he worked for two years in the office of Albert Kahn before starting his own practice. Among his works are the Scarab Club, St. Columba Church, Boulevard Congregational Church, and St. Paul's Memorial Church, all in Detroit. He also did store fronts and interior work for commercial firms such as Tuttle and Clark and Wright-Kay; one of these was featured in the "Thumb Tack" for 1925.

Under the leadership of Father Dade, St. Cyprian's grew from a "small frame village church" of 100 members in 1936 to over 500 members by the 1960s. St. Cyprian's soon became one of the most politically active churches in Detroit. Following the dedication of the new building on September 25, 1938, there was a large influx of new members. Within a few years membership had almost doubled and new organizations were formed. As membership continued to increase St. Cyprian's established other missions, including The Church of Resurrection in Ecorse. The missions of St. Augustine on West Eight Mile Road and St. Clement's in Inkster, which had become dormant, were reactivated under the supervision of St. Cyprian's.

Malcolm Dade led St. Cyprian's to unprecedented growth and prosperity during his 36 years of service. In 1940 St. Cyprian's gained church status and became the first black Episcopal mission in Detroit to become an independent parish. Six years later, in 1946, Father Dade became the church's first Rector. St. Cyprian's retired its debt by 1950, and Bishop Richard Emrich presided over a Consecration Service. In 1961, Father Dade was given the rare honor of Canon of St. Paul Episcopal Cathedral. In 1970, Rev. Canon Malcolm Dade was appointed Administrative Assistant to Bishop Emrich.

Rev. Malcolm Dade's leadership extended beyond the pulpit and into Detroit's social and political arena. During the 1940s and 1950s Rev. Dade along with the Rev. Charles Hill (Hartford Baptist Church) and Rev. Horace White (Plymouth Congregational Church) helped to unionize black workers at the Ford Rouge Plant. They also challenged many of the discriminatory practices blacks faced in the automobile factories. In 1962 Rev. Dade was the only clergyman elected as a delegate to the State Constitutional Convention. Rev. Dade served on various civic committees throughout the city including the Interracial Committee and the Sojourner Truth Citizens Committee. Rev. Dade retired in 1973, viewed by many as one of the city's most prominent leaders concerning religious, civic, racial affairs.

St. Cyprian's continues to provide spiritual, intellectual and social services to Detroit's community.

#### PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The St. Cyprian's Church building is composed of the original L-shaped section, completed in 1938, and an addition, built in 1962. The original section, containing the church and classroom wing, was constructed of "sand-lime" blocks. It was designed in a dignified and simple Neo-Gothic style, without ornamentation on the exterior.

The entrance is on the west facade, so the orientation of the worshippers is properly east. The entrance vestibule has a pitched roof of the same slope but of lower height than that of the main body of the church. Within the pointed-arched entrance opening are a pair of paneled wooden doors with an arched transom above. Small lanterns flank the quoin-lined doorway. On each of the side elevations of the vestibule are three unadorned narrow windows. The coping of the vestibule as well as the main body of the church is smooth cast stone.

Beyond the vestibule on the exterior is the end wall of the nave, which has one narrow arched window opening in its gable, spur buttresses at its ends, and a cross over its apex. The north elevation consists of six bays divided by shallow wall buttresses. The south elevation of the church consists of four bays before the intersection of the wing. The rear elevation is utilitarian in appearance. The exterior of the addition is

sympathetic to the original structure in color and scale. It consists of a secondary entrance vestibule of colored glass panels applied to the front of the original wing section and an extension of that wing southward.

The overall length of the church portion of the building is 87-1/2 feet by 32 feet; the original south wing is 32 feet by 25 feet. Structural steel girders support the wood first floor joists and exposed wood trusses support the wood purlins over the nave and chancel, carrying a wood plank roof now shingled with asphalt.

Inside the vestibule are stairways to the nave and basement; that to the nave is flanked with closets intended to serve as cloak rooms. The nave is 30 feet wide and 46-1/2 feet long. Windows are of the steel casement variety; those in the nave originally had antique glass set in lead comes. The complete set of English stained glass windows by Wippell and Mobray Church Furnishings Ltd. date from 1972. The side windows depict the story of Christ from the Old Testament prophets to the Crucifixion; the west window shows Christ in glory.

The chancel, beyond a large arched opening, is 17-1/2 feet wide and 24-1/2 feet long. Choir stalls and the communion rail are of elm, to the designs of the architect, as are the pews in the nave. Other wooden trim in the church is oak, and its floor is beechwood.

On the north side of the chancel is an organ alcove and sacristy; on the south is the rear stair to the basement and the wing containing two classrooms.

**RECOMMENDATION:** The Historic Designation Advisory Board finds that the proposed St. Cyprian's Historic District meets at least two criteria for historic designation: one, association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and two, association with the lives of persons significant in our past. The Board therefore recommends that the City Council establish the St. Cyprian's Church Historic District, with the design treatment level of conservation. A draft ordinance for the establishment of the district is attached for consideration by City Council.

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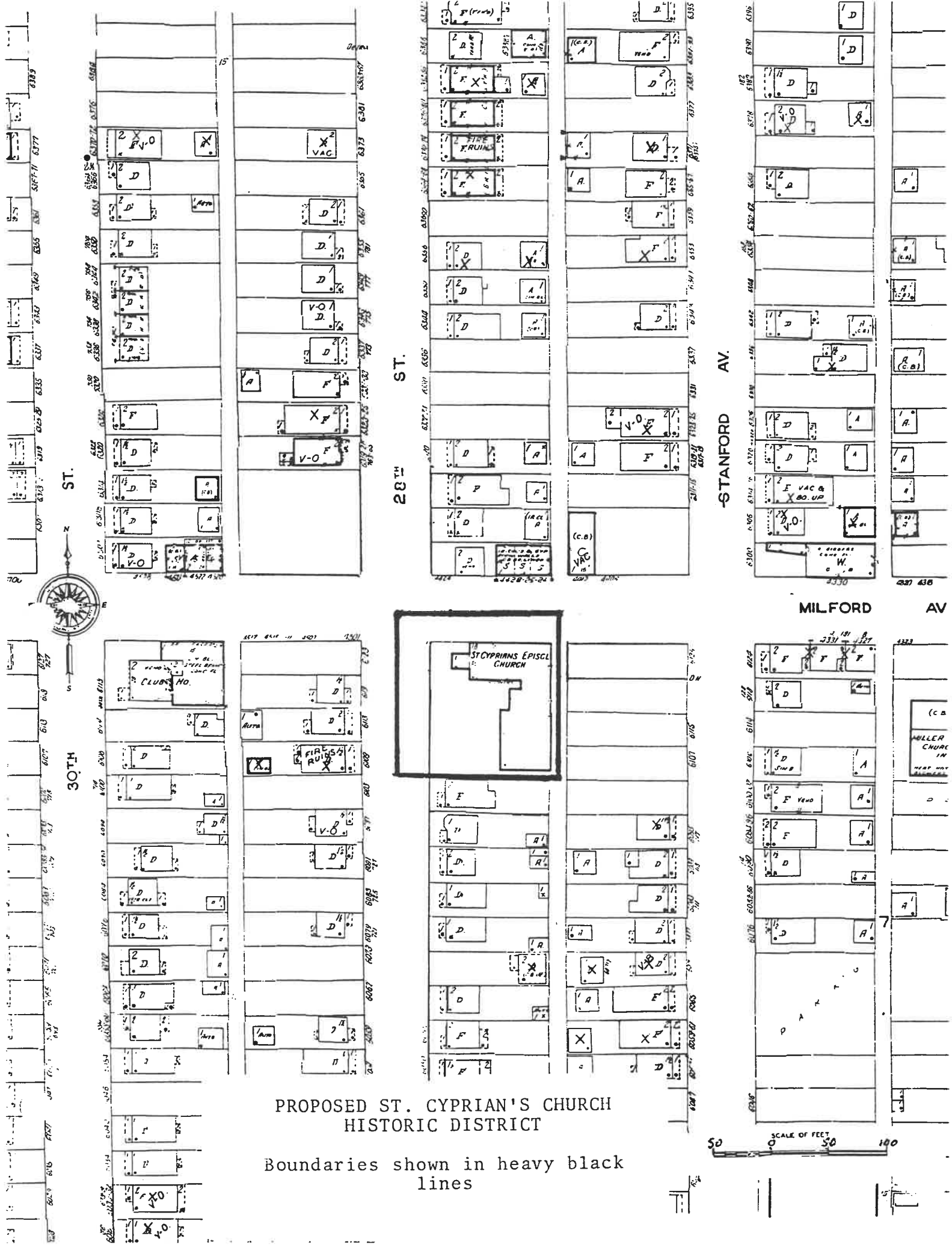
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PROPOSED ST. CYPRIAN'S CHURCH  
HISTORIC DISTRICT

Boundaries shown in heavy black  
lines