

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received APR 17 1980

date entered JUN 6 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

Michigan State Fair Riding Coliseum, Dairy Cattle Building,  
historic Agricultural Building

and/or common same

**2. Location**

Michigan State Fairgrounds  
street & number Woodward at State Fair Avenue not for publication

city, town Detroit vicinity of congressional district 1

state Michigan code 026 county Wayne code 163

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Exhibition Buildings

**4. Owner of Property**

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
name Mr. Howard A. Tanner, Director

street & number Stevens T. Mason Building

city, town Lansing vicinity of state Michigan 48909

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Wayne County Records, City-County Building

street & number 2 Woodward Avenue

city, town Detroit state Michigan 48226

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

Historic American Engineering  
title Record Survey of Michigan has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1975  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Michigan History Division, Michigan Department of State

city, town Lansing state Michigan 48918

## 7. Description

**Condition**                      **Check one**                      **Check one**  
\_\_\_\_\_ excellent                       unaltered                       original site  
 good                      \_\_\_\_\_ ruins                      \_\_\_\_\_ altered                      \_\_\_\_\_ moved                      \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ fair                      \_\_\_\_\_ unexposed

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Dairy Cattle Building, the Coliseum, and the Agricultural Building are grouped together in the center of the 167 acre State Fairgrounds, which are located at the northeast corner of Woodward Avenue and State Fair Avenue about five miles from downtown Detroit. The three neighboring buildings, which are the largest and most substantial buildings at the Fairgrounds, appear to be the remnants of a much larger planned Fairgrounds complex that was never completed. Today they face a small wooded park surrounded by smaller animal sheds, concession stands, and new exhibition buildings.

The Coliseum, Agricultural Building, and Dairy Cattle Building were constructed at two year intervals between 1922 and 1926. All were probably designed under the supervision of the same architect, Lynn W. Fry of the State Building Department. The three buildings are unified by their common design motifs and materials. All are Roman Classical inspired, white stuccoed buildings with high red brick foundations.

The Agriculture Building, built in 1926, is a long, end-gable-roofed, one-story building with a tall curved roof concealed behind a stuccoed parapet on the facade. The front and side entrances are sheltered by projecting arcades in antis enriched by a denticulated cornice treatment. The exterior walls are fielded into shallow panels.

The Coliseum, constructed in 1922, and its rear extension, the Dairy Cattle Building, built in 1924, are similar in general design to the Agricultural Building and feature the same paneled stucco walls, denticulated cornice treatment and arched porticoes.

The Coliseum is the more exceptional of the two structures. It has an unusual "rain-bow" steel truss roof structure. The building measures 420 feet by 225 feet and contains a riding arena that measures 264 feet by 124 feet surrounded by fixed seating.

The Dairy Cattle Building is a monitor-roofed, basilican-plan building built in 1924 with a modernistic, 1950s brick-and-steel entrance treatment on the west side. Like the Agricultural Building, the interior consists only of a single large utilitarian space devoid of architectural detail.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below							
prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion				
1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science				
1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture				
1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/				
1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian				
1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater				
X 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation				
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)				

**Specific dates** 1922, 1924, 1926      **Builder/Architect** Lynn W. Fry, architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Coliseum, Agricultural Building, and Dairy Cattle Building are of historical significance as a result of their key role in activities of the annual State Fair and in encouraging the development of agriculture in Michigan. They are also architecturally significant as fine examples of the classically inspired exhibition architecture popularized by the various world fairs and expositions held in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Nation's oldest State Fair, the Michigan State Fair, was first held in 1849, only eleven years after Michigan attained statehood. The present site of the Fair was dedicated as State Historic Site #172 on August 29, 1958. The official State marker reads as follows:

"America's first State Fair, conducted by the Michigan Agricultural Society with the support of the Legislature and local citizens, was held in Detroit on September 25-27, 1849. About \$800 in premiums were awarded for those 'articles, productions and improvements' that were 'best calculated to promote the agricultural and household manufacturing interests of the State.' The site of this annual fair was often moved until 1905 when it was given a permanent home here."

After the half century of nomadic wandering back and forth across the State when it was held at nine different places, the State Fair was established at its present location in 1905. In 1904 Joseph L. Hudson, founder of Detroit's present leading department store, the still extant J. L. Hudson Company, and three associates determined to give the Fair a permanent home in Detroit. They formed the State Fair Land Company, acquired 135 acres of land, and deeded it to the Michigan Agricultural Society. This Society produced the State Fair from 1905 to 1920 and expanded the land to the present 167 acres. In 1921 the Society voted to transfer the Fairgrounds to the State of Michigan and the State accepted them. With State ownership came a surge in building in the 1920s when most of the main buildings remaining today were constructed.

The Fairgrounds are still owned by the State with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources responsible for its operation. Act 316, Public Acts of 1978, which assigned this responsibility, stated that "the Department shall conduct an annual state fair and other exhibits or events for the purpose of promoting all phases of the economy of this state. This fair and exhibits or events shall encourage and demonstrate agricultural, industrial, commercial, and recreational pursuits."

The Coliseum, Agricultural Building, and Dairy Cattle Building are architecturally significant as well preserved examples of the monumental classical fair architecture popularized by the great exhibitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Advertisement, undated, Pratt Roof Truss Co.

HAER Michigan Inventory, 1975.  
Michigan Archives, various records.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approx. 4 acres  
Quadrangle name Highland Park

ADJACENT QUADRANGLES

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 40	B	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Zone	Easting		Northing		Zone		Easting		Northing		Northing	
C	<input type="checkbox"/>	D	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						
E	<input type="checkbox"/>	F	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						
G	<input type="checkbox"/>	H	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>						

**Verbal boundary description and justification** This nomination includes only the property occupied by these three structures and five feet of land around them contained within a line drawn parallel to the outside walls. The remaining approximately 163 acres of the State Fairgrounds are not being nominated because they are densely built-up with structures not eligible for listing in the (cont)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_  
state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Leslie J. Vollmert, Historic Preservation Coordinator  
organization Michigan History Division date February 19, 1980  
street & number Department of State telephone (517) 373-0510  
city or town Lansing state Michigan

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:  
\_\_\_\_\_ national  state \_\_\_\_\_ local \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*M. J. Sigler*

title Director, Michigan History Division

date 4/9/80

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

date 6/11/80

Attest: *Carma Prue Sive*

date 6-3-80

Chief of Registration *Regional Coordinator*

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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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centuries. All three buildings exhibit the same freely interpreted Roman Classical design motif.

The more remarkable of the buildings structurally is the Coliseum, which is one of the largest trussed structures in the Detroit area.

Together the Coliseum, Agricultural Building, and the Dairy Cattle Building will form a nucleus of restored historic buildings for the development of the improved facilities outlined in the Master Plan for the Fairgrounds. The exterior appearance of these three buildings will be unchanged with the brick and stucco construction repaired and restored.

These buildings are also of agricultural significance as a result of their role in encouraging the agricultural development of Michigan. The State Fair has provided an annual forum for agricultural interests for most of the state's history. It has been a source of encouragement for farmers to improve their products, a valued recreational experience for rural families, and an inspiration and incentive for young people to continue the farming way of life. The nominated buildings have been the major focus of State Fair activities since it was established on this site.



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Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

Farmer, Sillas, History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan, Detroit, 1890.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

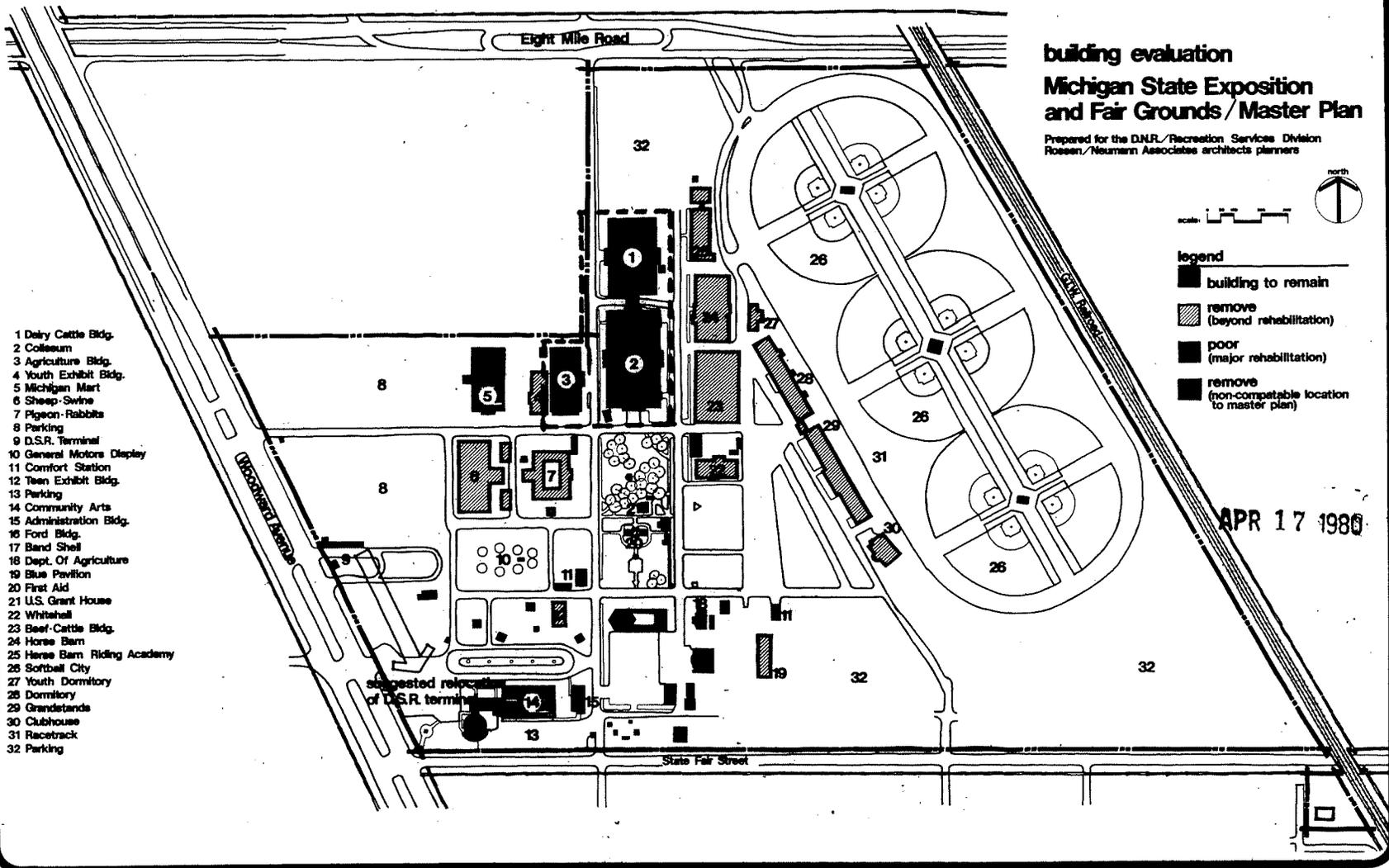
item number10

Page 1

National Register, many of which are currently slated for replacement or alteration as part of a major rebuilding of the Fairgrounds.

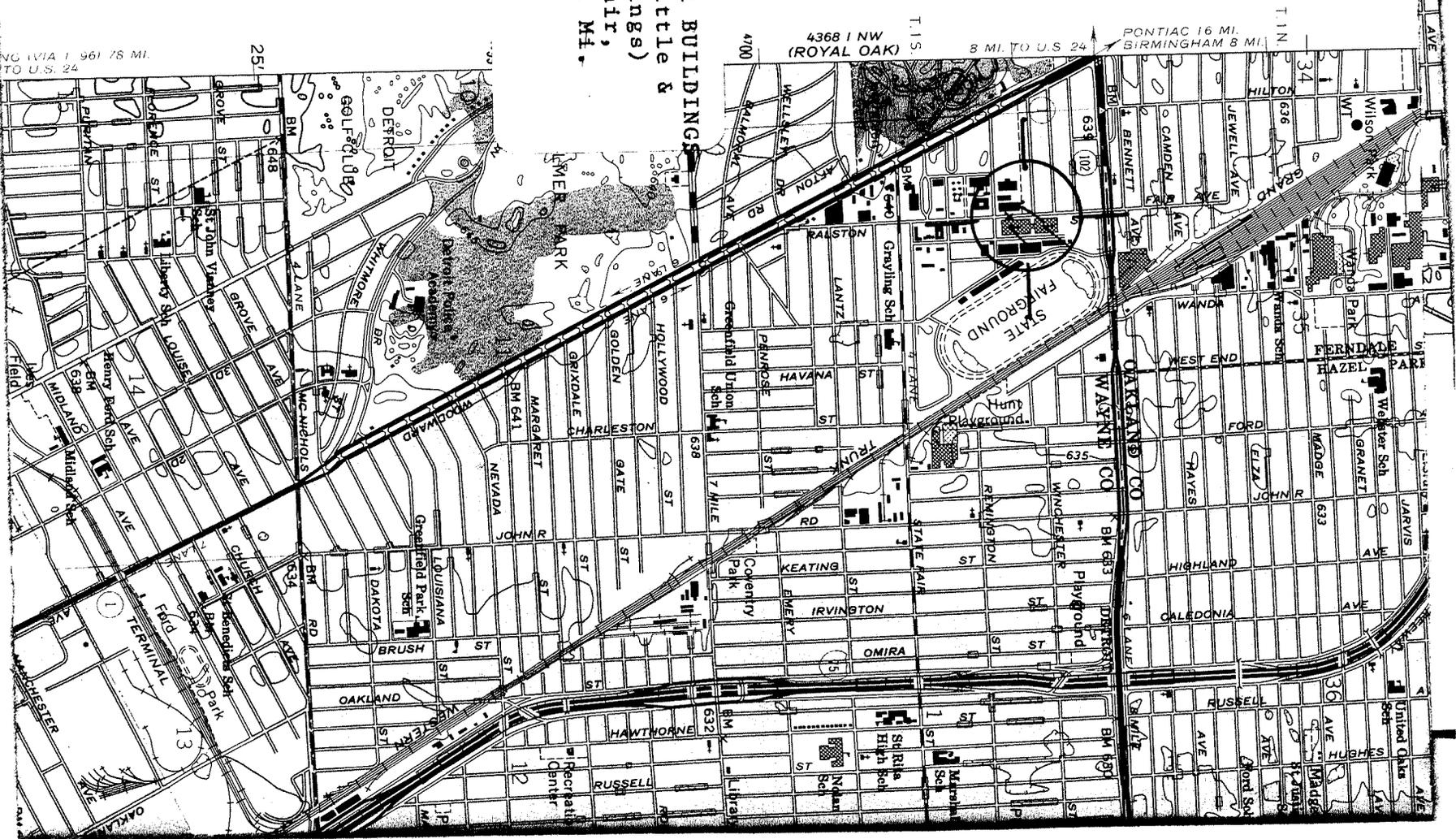


# BUILDING EVALUATION — EXISTING CONDITIONS





MICHIGAN STATE FAIR BUILDINGS  
(Coliseum, Dairy Cattle &  
Agricultural Buildings)  
Woodward @ State Fair,  
Detroit, Wayne Co., MI.  
UTM REFERENCE:  
17/325840/4700960



NC 171A 1 961 75 MI.  
TO U.S. 24





State Fair Buildings  
State Fairgrounds, State Fair Avenue  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

APR 17 1980

Photographer: Les Vollmert  
Date: November, 1979  
Negative: Michigan History Division  
Department of State  
Lansing, Michigan 48918

View: Looking east at the facades of the Agricultural  
Building (left) and the Coliseum (right).

Photo #: 1 of 6

JUN 6 1980



State Fair Buildings  
State Fairgrounds, State Fair Avenue  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

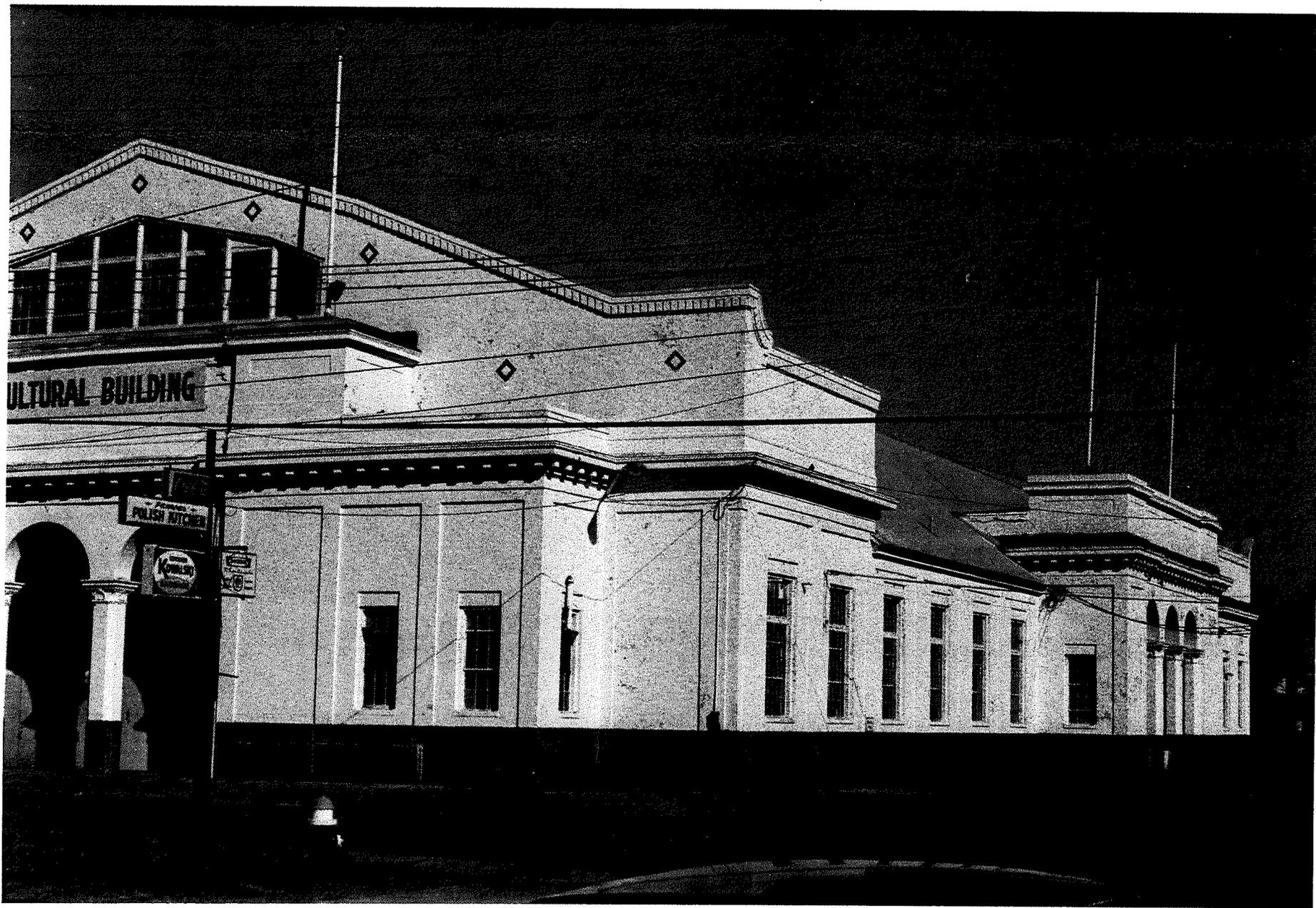
APR 17 1980

Photographer: Les Vollmert  
Date: November, 1979  
Negative: Michigan History Division  
Department of State  
Lansing, Michigan 48918

View: Looking northwest at the south elevation of the  
Agricultural Building.

Photo #: 2 of 6

JUN 6 1980



CULTURAL BUILDING

POLISH KITCHEN

Kowalski

State Fair Buildings  
State Fairgrounds, State Fair Avenue  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

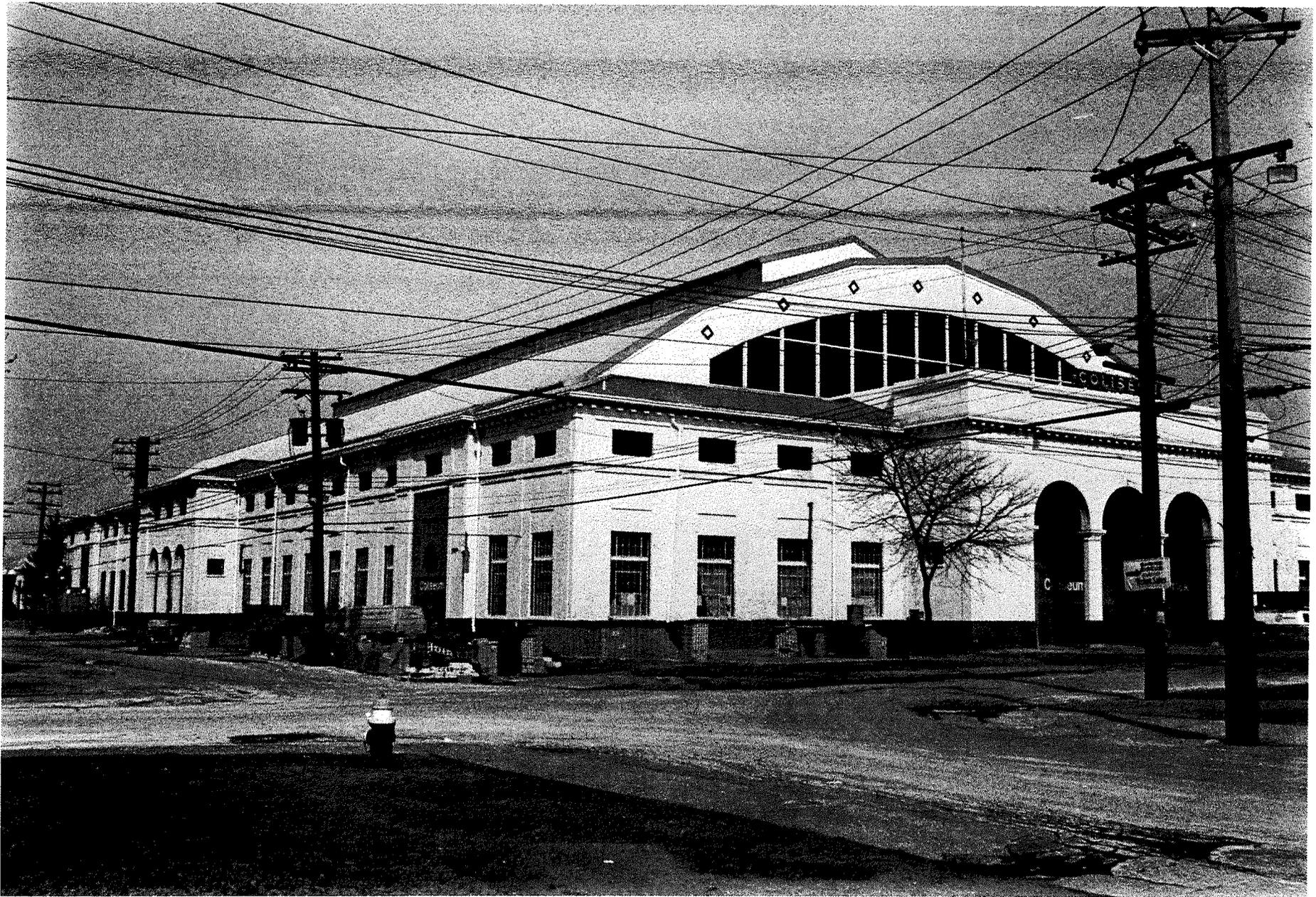
APR 17 1980

Photographer: Les Vollmert  
Date: November, 1979  
Negative: Michigan History Division  
Department of State  
Lansing, Michigan 48918

View: Looking northwest at the east side elevation  
of the Agricultural Building

Photo #: 3 of 6

JUN 6 1980



State Fair Buildings  
State Fairgrounds, State Fair Avenue  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

APR 17 1980

Photographer: Les Vollmert

Date: March, 1980

Negative: Michigan History Division  
Department of State  
Lansing, Michigan 48918

View: Looking northeast at the Coliseum.

Photo #: 4 of 6

JUN 6 1980



State Fair Buildings  
State Fairgrounds, State Fair Avenue  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

APR 17 1980

Photographer: Les Vollmert

Date: March, 1980

View: Looking southeast at the north elevation of the  
Dairy Cattle Building.

Photo #: 5 of 6

JUN 6 1980



State Fair Buildings  
State Fairgrounds, State Fair Avenue  
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

APR 17 1980

Photographer: Les Vollmert

Date: March, 1980

Negative: Michigan History Division  
Department of State  
Lansing, Michigan 48918

View: Looking northeast at the west elevation of the  
Dairy Cattle Building

Photo #: 6 of 6

JUN 6 1980