

**State Historic Preservation Office
Michigan State Housing Development Authority**

**Staff Comments, April 22, 2016
St. Clair Inn Local Historic District, St. Clair**

The report needs to include a period of significance for the resource.

A floor plan of the building that indicates the additions and when they were added would be helpful. Also some analysis as to whether additions, like the 1961 expansion of the Coach Room noted in the report, have become significant over time.

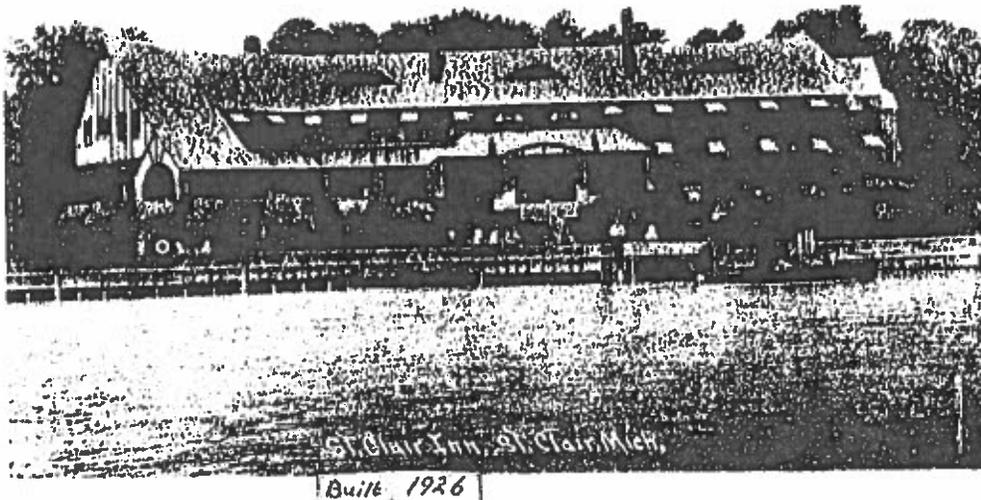
More information on landscape features would be helpful. They are noted in a general way on page 5. Are the gardens in their original location? Are there any historic pathways, trees, retaining walls or other features? Are the pier and boardwalk in their original location? Contributing and non-contributing features should be identified.

What is the list of historic properties on page 6? Is there more than one resource on the site?

The map should include the name of the district, community, county, date and a north arrow.



HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY REPORT
ST. CLAIR INN HISTORICAL DISTRICT



St. Clair Inn, St. Clair Mich.
Built 1926

received 9/2/2015

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT COVER FORM

Historic District Name: St. Clair Inn Historical District

City/Village: City of St. Clair, Michigan

County: St. Clair

Date Transmitted:

Report Type: Preliminary

Total Number of Resources: 4

Historic: 3

Non-Historic: 1

Percentage of Historic Resources: 75%

Districts are Significant under the Following National Register Criteria:

Criterion A: Significant Event(s) - Reason: St. Clair Inn Historical District for its origins as a community hotel

• **Criterion B: Significant Person(s) - Reason:**

Criterion C: Design/Construction- Reason: St. Clair Inn Historical District for its Tudor Revival architecture

• **Criterion D: Information Potential – Reason:**

Legal Boundary Description: The properties considered to be part of the St. Clair Inn Historical District consist of parcel numbers: 74-07-053-0169-000, 74-07-049-0353-000, 74-07-049-0354-000, 74-07-049-0355-000, 74-07-049-0356-000, 74-07-700-0019-000, 74-07-049-0040-100 and 74-07-049-0040-000. The St. Clair Inn Historical District is bounded by the St. Clair River, the North end of Palmer Park, M-29, Vine Street, Second Street, across properties back to M-29.

Charge of the Committee: The Historic District Study Committee was appointed by the City of St. Clair City Council on May 19, 2014 pursuant to the City of St. Clair Resolution 15-01. The study committee is a standing committee charged with conducting duties and activities of for an undesignated period of time. These duties include inventory, research, and preparation of a preliminary historic district study report for a proposed historic district, and the organization of a public hearing.

Committee Members: Sally Achatz, Michael Booth, DJ Boulier, Bill Cedar, Jr., Robert Freehan, Chrissy Gorzen, Dan Lockwood and Annette Sturdy

Contact Name: Annette Sturdy
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St. Clair MI 48079
810-329-7121
asturdy@cityofstclair.com

CHARGE OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

The Historic District Study Committee was appointed by the City of St. Clair City Council on May 19, 2014 pursuant to the City of St. Clair Resolution 15-01. The study committee is a standing committee charged with conducting duties and activities for an undesignated period of time. These duties include inventory, research, and preparation of a preliminary historic district study report for a proposed historic district, and the organization of a public hearing. Assignments of committee members are as follows: Members Achatz, Cedar, Booth, Gorzen and Freehan will provide research documentation for the St. Clair Inn Historical District which will include the application to the National Register of Historic Places, historic and recent photographs. Member Boulier will provide legal descriptions, boundaries and photographs of the proposed district. Members Lockwood and Sturdy will research additional documentation including the significant factors of each resource.

STUDY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Sally Achatz: Lifelong resident; Riverview Plaza Association, Member 10 years; Business owner

William Cedar, Jr: Lifelong resident; City Councilman, 25 years; City of St. Clair Mayor, 15 years; Social Studies/History teacher, 28 years.

Delos Boulier: Lifelong resident; Building Official for the City of St. Clair, 9 years; Planning Commission, 13 years.

Robert Freehan: St. Clair Historical Museum and Research Center, 9 years; St. Clair Historical Commission, 7 years; Author, Children's books on the St. Clair Community; Historical interactive presenter for East China School District

Chrissy Gorzen: St. Clair Historical Museum volunteer, 14 years; book and cover designer for St. Clair, Michigan by Chuck Homberg; interior designer and digitizer at St. Clair Historical Museum; St. Clair Palmer Park Arch Committee 2006-7; St. Clair Sesquicentennial Committee 2008 program.

Dan Lockwood: St. Clair Downtown Development Authority, Chairman; St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission, Vice Chairman; St. Clair County Brownsfield Authority, Member.

Michael Booth: City Superintendent, City of St. Clair

Annette Sturdy: City Clerk, City of St. Clair

THE HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDIED

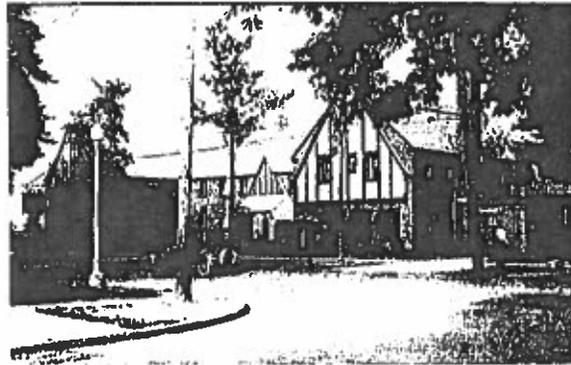
Historical and photographic documentation of the St. Clair Inn, herein referred to as "St. Clair Inn Historical District", began in January of 2014 and was completed July 2015. Copies of the photos are available at City Hall, 547 N. Carney Drive, St. Clair MI 48079. The St. Clair Inn, as part of the St. Clair Historical District, is also listed in National Register of Historic Places. The property is listed as historic reference number 95000074 Michigan.

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTIONS

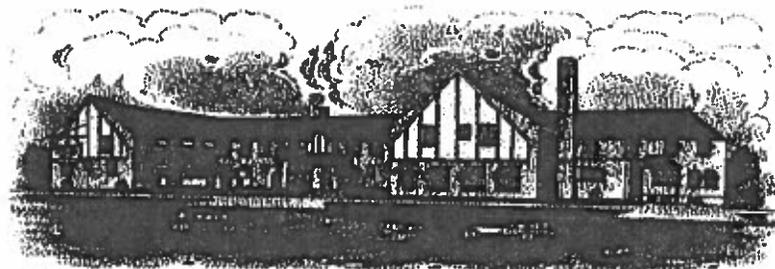
The property consists of parcel numbers: 74-07-049-0353-000, 74-07-049-0354-000, 74-07-049-355-000, 74-07-049-0356-000, 74-07-700-0019-000 and 74-07-053-0169-000 (part of 500 N. Riverside).

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

St. Clair Historical District is bounded by the St. Clair River, the North end of Palmer Park, across M-29, parcels North of Vine Street and East of Second Street, across M-29 back to St. Clair River.



HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY



ST. CLAIR INN
ST. CLAIR, MICH.

St. Clair Inn –The St. Clair Inn has been a popular destination for business and pleasure travelers since it opened in 1926. The inn is the symbolic heart of the community. It is well-known statewide for its charming English country inn architecture. The St. Clair Inn was constructed during an era of successful community commercial ventures. It is vitally important to St. Clair, as the singular image that is most identified with the city.

The St. Clair Inn, when it was constructed in 1926, was positioned to attract that segment of the public who vacationed on Michigan's many waterways. The inn became a popular destination for those who owned pleasure boats and vacationed on Michigan's Lakes and rivers. Resort communities, marinas and boat clubs sprang up all along the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, Lake Huron and the Detroit River which appealed to the elite of southeastern Michigan. The St. Clair Inn was once a popular destination for overnight stays or just for dinner for those who cruised the river and desired the elegance the St. Clair Inn provided. The inn continues to be a river traveler's destination.

The concept for the St. Clair Inn grew out of a Rotary Club meeting in 1925, when five members indicated they considered St. Clair's greatest community need was more adequate and modern hotel accommodations. The Rotary members foresaw the need for an establishment that would be used for civic functions and social activities, as well as providing accommodations for weary travelers, who arrived by automobile or by steamboat. As a result, they formed the St. Clair Community Hotel Corporation, an organization of many of St. Clair's leading businessmen. This citizen board included several bank executives, two insurance agency executives, and thirty local business owners. The board was similar in structure to interlocking directorates, with many serving on the board of the other's company and all of the officers of the St. Clair Chamber of Commerce being active members of the hotel corporation. The chairman of the executive committee of the hotel corporation was Fred W. Moore, manager of the Diamond Crystal Salt Company of St. Clair.

There were four hotels listed in the 1922 Port Huron City and St. Clair County Directory. The only directory held locally for this era. We presume all were still extant in 1925 when the St. Clair Community Hotel Corporation began considering the possibility of a new hotel. It proposed building a sixty-room hotel for approximately \$180,000 including land, building and furnishings. After the initial market research had been completed, the executive committee contacted The Hockenbury System, Inc., nationally known hotel experts in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for advice on financing this hotel venture. The hotel was to be financed by the sale of 6%, fully paid, non-assessable preferred stock valued at one hundred dollars per share, sold in two hundred dollar units. Further, it was decided this was to be a community project and every resident and friend of St. Clair and vicinity would be asked to participate in the purchase of stock.

The proposed financial plan was modelled after successful community hotel campaigns in Michigan City and Bedford Indiana; Effingham and Urbana, Illinois; Henderson, Kentucky; Niles and Ypsilanti, Michigan; Ocean City, New Jersey; and Rock Hill, South Carolina, just to name a few of the more than 100 cities that followed the same plan to get new hotels built in the 1920's. The literature prepared for the committee's sales endeavors included endorsements from many of the cities listed above. This material also provided hints for the interviewing prospects spelling out both the financial as well as the community dividends to be realized from their investment. The corporation went public with its stock offering in July 1925, taking out a full page advertisement in The St. Clair County Press. Fred W. Moore, when interviewed for the inn's opening, reported the campaign for funds exceeded its objectives within 10 days.

The Port Huron Times-Herald in September 1926 listed all stockholders under a headline that read, "Public Spirit is Behind New St. Clair Hotel-Business Principles Rule Organization Made up of Residents." Approximately 5 percent of St. Clair's population responded to the public offering and were named in this newspaper article. In addition, stockholders came from all over southeast Michigan, Lansing and from far away as Buffalo, New York; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Akron, Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; and Madison, Indiana.

After the needed funds were raised, the committee hired Walter H. Wyeth, a Port Huron architect, to design the structure and supervise construction. The St. Clair Inn was Wyeth's first major work and appears to have launched his career. He is credited for his farsightedness for designing a structure with the durability of brick and concrete, which has long outlived the many frame hotels constructed during the same period. Due to its brick and poured concrete walls and floors, the St. Clair inn was also certified as being virtually fireproof. Further, it was claimed at the time that the construction of the Inn saw the beginning of central air conditioning for hotels in the United States as the Carrier Company installed the first unit of its kind in St. Clair. Walter Wyeth went on to design several notable public and private building including the Edsel L. Ford residence, Wingford, Port Huron; and the St. Clair County-Port Huron Civic Center Buildings, during his long and distinguished career. Construction on the St. Clair Inn was completed in time for the Inn's two-day opening celebration, September 21-22, 1926.

The two-day event included an open house the afternoon of September 21, 1926, with the stockholders and their friends invited to inspect the new inn. The St. Clair Inn officially opened its doors on September 22, 1926, with an evening banquet and dance. The banquet program speakers included J. Kennard Johnson, secretary of the Bay City Chamber of Commerce whose speech was titled "How the Modern Hotel Benefits a Community"; and, Louis A. Weil of Port Huron, who spoke about "The Future of the City along the World's Greatest Waterway." The Port Huron Times-Herald reported in its final edition on September 23, 1926, that telegrams of congratulations were read from executives of The Hockenbury System. In addition, congratulations were extended by a representative of the East Michigan Tourist Association, and John Anderson of the Harrington Hotel in Port Huron and president of the Michigan Hotel Association, both of whom extolled the benefits of the new inn to the community. Johnson indicated the Inn's "advertising and service will travel afar and many will come for pleasure as well as on business." After the banquet and speeches, music for dancing was provided by Jules Klein, entertainers from Detroit, until 1:00am.

Room rates at the St. Clair Inn for business and tourist travelers were said to be comparable to other hotels in its class, and special, attractive rates were offered to those who wished to make the hotel a permanent residence and to those who wished to be guests for a month or longer. The Port Huron Times-Herald indicated in its final edition on September 17, 1926, that "Pierce McLouth, owner of the shipyard here [Marine City] has sold his residence on Main Street...[and] will live at the new St. Clair Inn." This would suggest Mr. McLouth was the Inn's first permanent resident.

The predictions of the opening day speakers, of a great prosperity for the Inn and the community, were not immediately realized. The depression and its far-reaching effects had a severe impact on St. Clair and the St. Clair inn. The Inn went into receivership in 1932 and changed hands several times over the next ten years. It was not until 1943 that Fred Moore and his St. Clair Hotel Corporation were able to reclaim control and ownership of the St. Clair inn. The hotel regained some of its former stature and began a trend of expansion and growth due in large measure to Moore's leadership. Moore sought to hire Creighton W. Holden, owner of the Holden Drive Inn, believed to be the first restaurant chain in the Detroit area to manage the St. Clair Inn. Purchase of 51 percent of the hotel stock was the condition Holden stipulated in his agreement with Moore to manage the hotel. This marked the end of community ownership of the Inn and beginning of private ownership with Holden's sons purchasing the remaining 49 percent in 1948. The Inn was to remain a family tradition until 1975. It was not until 1986 that the Inn's stock was again offered to the public.

Part of the Inn's expansion included the acquisition of former Great Lakes pilot "Cap" Pringle's house, located on the south side of the Inn separated from the historic structure by a parking lot. Captain Pringle's house was constructed prior to the Inn. A few years later, c. 1950, suites and the Redwood Room, a meeting facility, were added to the Captain's house. Adjoining the Captain's House is the River Station Building. This structure was a depot on the Port Huron and Detroit Interurban Railway constructed in the early 1900s. It was converted to hotel accommodations by the Holden in the mid-1950s.

Thomas Edison Inns, Inc., the present owner, currently has plans to demolish both the Captain's House and the River Station building and to construct a new building which meets the Americans with Disability Act requirements and provides nonsmoking, Jacuzzi suites. The engineers and architects they have consulted have indicated it is not economically feasible to save either of these structures.

The only major addition to the St. Clair Inn was the construction of the north wing in 1978. This, the most ambitious project undertaken by the Inn, added forty modern guest rooms, three meeting rooms, a 230-capacity banquet room, an indoor pool and Jacuzzi. Together with the original 1926 Inn, the expanded St. Clair inn continues its tradition of providing rest and relaxation for the weary traveler in an atmosphere of old English charm and the scenic beauty of the St. Clair River.

*Reprinted in entirety from the application submitted to the National Register of Historic Places

Multiple owners between the years of 1996 to present, legal ownership disputes and boundary questions have led to the current vacancy of the beloved St. Clair Inn. To date, recent court documents have solved the legality questions and there have been multiple interested parties on the property. Residents and those who have visited here in the past, retain hope for the grandeur of the Inn to once again be one of the vibrant attractions to the City of St. Clair.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Clair Historical District The St. Clair Inn Historical District is significant under National Register Criterion A for its origins as a "community" hotel, and for the role it played as a destination for personal pleasure craft owners as well as automobile tourists and for Criterion C for its example of Tudor Revival architecture. The St. Clair Inn is a two-story, gable-roof, Neo-Tudor building with half-timbered plaster and English brick walls situated on North Riverside on the St. Clair River in Downtown St. Clair, Michigan. It has a broad U-shaped form, the arms flanking a shallow courtyard area on the building's street side which contains the main entrance, with an additional short wing extending at a forty-five degree angle toward the river at the south end. According to accounts in the St. Clair County Press and The Port Huron Times-Herald, when the Inn opened in 1926, the English brick of the walls was over burned with some culls laid irregularly into the walls to achieve a rough appearance and other bricks the original asbestos shingle roof. In the center of the roof on the river side of the Inn are three eyebrow windows that provide ventilation for the attic. The landscaped grounds and well-tended gardens, the pier and boardwalk contribute to the character and feeling of the site, and make the St. Clair Inn as impressive from the street as it is from the river. While the plantings have changed and the pier and boardwalk have been replaced, they retain their historic setting. The present hotel complex comprises the original 1926 portion to which a new wing was attached at the north wall with a banquet room, three conference rooms, forty additional guest rooms and an indoor pool in 1978. The 1926 building exterior remains intact

with minor changes to the entrance of the building where the Coach Room was expanded in 1961. In 1970, a cocktail lounge was added on the river side. To the left of the gabled main entrance is a round tower, part of the original design, which adds a bit of whimsy to the front of the structure. In addition, the windows on the angled gabled end were three-part arched windows with diamond-shaped stained glass over three double casement windows. The casement windows have been replaced, however, the stained glass in the arch remains intact. Most of the original casement windows throughout have been replaced. The only windows remaining intact are those in the dining room which were retained when the dining porch was enclosed.

The interior of the original Inn also remains intact featuring a central lobby with a brick floor and a heavily beamed ceiling with rough hewn timbers protruding from the plaster. A grayed oak staircase ascends from the lobby to the second floor. The great lounge has a Tudor fireplace at either end, one of English brick with an oak mantel and the other of limestone with medieval relief insets between the fireplace opening and the mantel. The main dining room now extends out onto what was an open-air dining porch in 1926. There are sixty guest rooms in the 1926 Inn which although remodeled several times, still retain their original woodwork and spatial arrangement. The Inn's physical plant, linen rooms, laundry, and bakery are all located in the basement.

LIST OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

500 N. Riverside Avenue
503 N. Riverside Avenue
507 N. Riverside Avenue
511 N. Riverside Avenue

*Contributory
non Contributory
NHP*

ST CLAIR INN HISTORICAL DISTRICT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- "Inn Idea Born in Rotary Meeting One Year Ago." *The Port Huron Times-Herald*, September 22, 1926, p. 11.
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