

Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

February 2, 2023
Michigan History Center
Morris Learning Center

Commissioners in attendance: Laura Ashlee, Timothy Chester, Brian James Egen, Eric Hemenway (via Zoom), Robin Terry (via Zoom), Tom Truscott, and Larry Wagenaar

Excused Absence: Joe Calvaruso and Delia Fernandez

Staff: Sandra Clark, Michelle Davis, Noah Levinson and Andrew Oswald

Public: Diana Paiz, East Lansing, member of the public (via Zoom)

At 10:05 a.m. President Egen called the meeting to order.

Approval of Agenda: Wagenaar moved to approve the agenda as presented; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chester moved to approve the November 3, 2022, meeting minutes; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously adopted.

Discussion of Grant House Report Options

Prior to the meeting, Clark shared the “Future Development of the Julia and Ulysses S. Grant House in Detroit” report prepared by Maud Lyon in December 2022. The report presents four options for the future use of the Grant House. Clark asked for commissioner input on what makes sense for a viable site that is useful to the community of Detroit as well as all of Michigan, may work best for the center, and is most suitable for attracting potential supporters.

Chester stated that no one option appears to be a clear stand-alone solution. It may be worth considering some type of hybrid version of the plan. He noted it seems to go against the center’s current direction to consider making the Grant House part of the center’s historic site system considering the recent move of the Iron Industry Museum to the parks system. He noted that the center needs to make sure it has a presence in any decisions that are made for the site but does not necessarily need to provide day-to-day operations. The Detroit Historical Society (DHS) may be the most logical partner since it already has well-established, successful collaborations and offers an on-site management/operational support presence that is needed. Chester also noted that using the house in conjunction with a school is a great idea. It is innovative in the sense that it allows the students to help create the plan, and it is appealing for fundraising efforts. It will be up to the center to mold any coalition chosen and to make it firm. That will require constant close communication with Eastern Market and any other established partnerships. This house will connect Grant to Michigan and will celebrate Grant, but it will not be a house museum about Grant. It is a conduit to nurture and advance the connections in Detroit.

Wagenaar stated that he was also drawn to the DHS partnership. It would provide the stability and experience needed for the collaboration. However, that doesn’t mean it has to exclude the other options. Wagenaar agreed that the center needs a presence but would not encourage having the center manage the site. He noted that the Black Bottom aspect brings diversity into the project.

Ashlee stated that she likes the school option the best. Prior to forming a partnership with DHS, the center should consider whether or not DHS stands on a solid foundation. Chester and Wagenaar stated that DHS appears to be on pretty solid ground with well-established partnerships.

Clark asked Terry about the Black Bottom group and the potential of pursuing the option of leasing office space to them. Terry believes it is worth pursuing this aspect. She has a few contacts that are very involved with the group and would be happy to reach out if needed. Clark is impressed with the school option but wants to make sure the center has a presence in this project as well as in Detroit.

Ashlee noted that Amy Arnold might have connections from the Civil Rights project. Egen stated that the Grant Historical Advisory group that was created many years ago helped weigh in on this project and provided valuable feedback.

Strategic Planning for Historical Marker Program

- **Information on the Ohio Historical Marker Program** – In early January 2023, Davis talked with Laura Russell from the Ohio History Connection to discuss the Ohio marker program. Davis shared notes from that conversation with commissioners prior to the meeting. Clark noted that she is not in favor of having sponsors submit text, but liked the concept of having a maintenance agreement letter that outlines those responsibilities to current and future property owners. She is also intrigued by the idea of having application deadlines each year and is interested in the possibility of having two deadlines each year. Clark stated that she is working on a grant application to the Pomeroy Foundation that could fund some of the Detroit project markers. Clark and Davis will continue to work on updating the internal processes and will provide recommendations at a future meeting.
- **Update on Detroit Marker Review Project**
Clark stated that a group of seven individuals with different expertise and interest in Detroit history worked on preparing a well-rounded list of 15 proposed new markers (Appendix A). The goal is to have as many of the proposed markers as possible to a point of finalized text this summer. The volunteers will fill out the application, but synopses were done with the idea that this topic will not need to be brought to the commission for approval.

Ashlee asked if the mound is still at the site of the proposed marker for the Fort Wayne Burial Mound. She mentioned that archaeological sites normally are not marked with a historical marker. Clark stated that the mound is still there and secured with a fence. She noted that the marker will be about the people who were there when the French arrived and not just about the burial ground. There may be an alternative name for the site to avoid focusing on this as an archaeological/burial site.

Clark stated that the proposed marker for Dr. Lucille Gajec will need an exception to the commission's policy regarding not having a marker about an individual until 20 years after their death. Dr. Gajec passed away in 2008. She was a Latino woman who ran an art and cultural museum for the Latinx children of Detroit. Her historical significance can be determined despite the fact that 20 years have not passed.

Chester noted that the same exception will need to be granted for the marker regarding Grace Lee Boggs, who passed away in 2015.

Truscott moved to allow an exception to the commission's policy to allow historical markers about Dr. Lucille Gajec and Grace Lee Boggs even though the individuals have not been deceased for 20 or more years; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously accepted.

Local Historic District Committee Report

- **Kalamazoo City Hall, Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo County**
- **1-21 Kercheval, Grosse Pointe Farms, Wayne County**

Truscott moved to forward the comments provided by Ashlee to the State Historic Preservation Office; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously accepted.

Marker Program

- **Marker Text Terminology Concerns**

Replacement of Van Buren County Poorhouse Marker – Local Site No. 430

At the meeting held on November 3, 2022, Diana Paiz addressed the commission regarding the terminology used on the Van Buren County Poorhouse marker. The marker refers to people with disabilities as “mentally retarded.” Clark stated that she spoke with Sandy Merchant, President of the Van Buren Historical Society, in January 2023, regarding the text concern. Merchant agreed to take down the marker and to work with the center on revising the text. Clark noted that Merchant mentioned requesting artifact status for the marker in order to include it as part of an exhibit in the building about how language has changed over time. Egen stated that since this is a small, local historical society that is currently dealing with storm damage repair expenses, it would be good to use undesignated marker funds to cover the replacement cost of the marker. Wagenaar moved to use undesignated marker funds for a replacement marker with revised text; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

Text Concern with Hamtramck Stadium – State Site No. 731

At the meeting held on November 3, 2022, Diana Paiz also addressed the commission regarding the terminology “midget car races” used on the Hamtramck Stadium marker. “Midget” is not an acceptable term for “little people.” Clark stated that the marker text identifies a specific category of car racing, not the race car drivers. It has a specific meaning that is not conveyed by sharing a broad term of racing.

Ashlee asked if there is an organization that could be consulted about the term. She mentioned that the Monuments Lab conducted a National Monument Audit, and it may be looking into its process. Clark agreed to check into this further and will provide a recommendation at a future meeting.

- **Approval of Marker Applications** – Written background information was provided for three new marker applications. (Appendix B)
 - ◆ **Jackson Poor Farm Cemetery, Jackson, Jackson County**
 - ◆ **Saginaw News Building, Saginaw, Saginaw County**
 - ◆ **Kappa Kastle, Detroit, Wayne County**

Wagenaar moved to approve the Jackson Poor Farm Cemetery application; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved.

Truscott moved to approve the Saginaw News Building marker application; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Kappa Kastle application; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved.

- **Approval of Marker Text** – Draft Marker texts were provided for:
 - ◆ **Raymond and Annie Mae Smith/99 Pine Street, Manistee, Manistee County**
 - ◆ **South Salem Stone School/Dickerson Barn, Plymouth, Washtenaw County**
 - ◆ **Mexican Detroit/Tejano Music, Detroit, Wayne County**
 - ◆ **New Bethel Baptist Church, Detroit, Wayne County**

Chester moved to approve the Raymond and Annie Mae Smith/99 Pine Street marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

Chester moved to approve South Salem Stone School/Dickerson Barn marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Mexican Detroit/Tejano Music marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved.

Ashlee moved to approve the New Bethel Baptist Church marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved. This motion approved text for two large wall-mounted markers with different text on each marker.

- **Reports**
 - ◆ **Voigt-Kreit House/Voigt on Public Education, Site No. L923** - Chester notified the center about a Facebook post regarding the Voigt-Kreit House/Voigt on Public Education historical marker. The individual referenced the following marker text as being inaccurate, “William Voigt, Jr., is thought to have designed the house....” After further investigation, Davis verified that Mildner and Eisen were the architects for the house. Davis is trying to contact the current property owner to discuss proper removal of the marker.
 - ◆ The Marker Status report was distributed prior to the meeting.
 - ◆ The Marker Fund report was distributed prior to the meeting.
- **Public Comment on marker topics** – Diana Paiz thanked the commission and others involved in the thoughtful conversation and investigation regarding the marker text concerns she raised at the commission meeting held on November 3, 2022. Paiz suggested reaching out to the Little People of America regarding the Hamtramck Stadium word usage concern and ask for their input. She also noted what a joy it is to hear marker text being approved for one Latino marker as well as approval for another potential Latino marker. Paiz commented on the policy regarding an individual must be deceased for at least 20 years before they can be named on a marker and how it penalizes those who are long-lived. She noted that in November she asked the commission to consider adding disability history to its endeavors of sharing broader history on markers. For

example, two Michigan legislatures who were blind. Since Robert Mahoney died in 2017, the commission's policy would mean he would not be eligible for quite some time. Egen thanked Paiz for bringing these items to the commission. He mentioned that the 20-year policy is used as a first filter to allow perspective over time. However, it does not mean exceptions are not considered and granted.

Ashlee stated that it is important to remember that individuals with disabilities should be included on committees that are formed to review old and new marker texts.

Director's Report – The report was distributed prior to the meeting. Clark noted that the center hosted the governor's New Year's Eve party of more than 800 people. It was a wonderful event that gave the center a great deal of exposure.

Business Updates

- Awards Committee – Wagenaar stated that the Awards Committee meet via Zoom to review two Swainson Award nominees and two Milliken, Adams, Austin, Kelley (MAAK) Award nominees. The committee recommends that the MAAK award be given to Matthew Switlik of Monroe, Michigan. Switlik worked for the Monroe County Historical Museum as its Director from 1969 to May 2004. He is a nationally recognized expert in early artillery. His work in Monroe and beyond is an example of exceptional leadership and vision in support of Michigan's historic resources, programs, and institutions. The commission unanimously approved Matthew Switlik for the MAAK Award with Egen abstaining.

After reviewing the Swainson Award nominations, the committee determined that neither nomination met the criteria. Therefore, a Swainson Award will not be given for 2023.

Public Comment – No public comments were given.

Commissioner Comments:

- Wagenaar stated that the Local History Conference is scheduled for March 24-25, 2023, in Novi, Michigan. He shared the brochure with commissioners and encouraged them to register.

August 24, 2023, is the date for the commission meeting on Mackinac Island. The June meeting is now scheduled for June 15, 2023, and will be held in Lansing. Clark shared that the April 13, 2023, meeting will partially consist of a joint meeting between the commission and the Michigan History Foundation. Commissioners were asked to mark the dates on their calendars and plan to attend in person if at all possible.

Wagenaar moved to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Truscott and the meeting adjourned at 12:18 p.m.



Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

Proposed Markers List of 15

Note: These are not in a ranked order

1. Blackburn Riots
2. Gotham Hotel/Sugarhill District
3. North End Neighborhood/Delores Bennett Park
4. Rosa Parks in Detroit
5. Fort Wayne Burial Mound
6. Indigenous Trail System
7. North American Indian Association of Detroit /Thurman Bluejacket Bear
8. Old Mexican Business District/Mexicantown restaurants
9. Clark Park
10. Grace Lee Boggs/Boggs Center
11. Vincent Chin
12. Ruth Ellis
13. Green Book Sites/Carlton Hotel
14. Dr. Lucy Gajec
15. Chaldeantown

Blackburn Riots/Thornton and Lucie Blackburn

The Blackburn riots occurred during the summer of 1833 in Detroit, Michigan. They were the first race riots in the history of the city. The riots were spurred by the imprisonment of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, an African American couple that had escaped slavery in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1831.

Recommended Location: 121 Gratiot, Detroit Public Library Skillman Branch
Property Owner: City of Detroit / Detroit Public Libraries Municipal Property
Marker Style: Freestanding, double sided

Gotham Hotel/Sugarhill District

The hotel was founded to provide a social and business center for local black professionals and a place of accommodation for visiting dignitaries who were unwelcome in downtown hotels.

Recommended Location: John R Street, one block north of Mack Avenue (Site of original location)
Property Owner: Midtown Detroit, Inc. www.midtowntetroitinc.org Contact Sue Mosey
Marker Style: Double sided, free standing.

Detroit's North End/Delores Bennett Park

The North End was originally part of Hamtramck Township but was annexed by the City of Detroit in 1891. It received its name due to it being the "north end" of Paradise Valley.

Recommended Location: Bennett Park, 444 Smith St at Beaubien St

Property Owner: City of Detroit

Marker Style: Two-sided free standing

Rosa Parks in Detroit

Detailing Rosa Parks' life and activities in Detroit where she spent the majority of her life.

Recommended Location: 3201 Virginia Park, lived here 1966-88

Property Owner: TBD, residence

Marker Style: TBD, Jamon

Fort Wayne Burial Mound

Earliest evidence of human civilization in Detroit predating Europeans by nearly 400 years

Recommended Location: at mound site

Property Owner: TBD, City of Detroit / Detroit Historical Society

Marker Style: Freestanding, Indigenous Land acknowledgment or translation on verso?

Indigenous Trail System

Describing the early trail system (e.g. Great Sauk Trail, Chicago Road, Saginaw Trail, Port Huron Road) as the progenitors of today's roads, avenues, and interstates

Recommended Location: TBD

Property Owner: TBD

Marker Style: TBD, David

North American Indian Association Detroit/Thurman Bluejacket Bear

NAIA is the first Native American organization in Detroit (1940), still active and prominent in the community today, *David is a member and would serve as liaison*. Bluejacket Bear was a pivotal indigenous activist, youth counselor, and radio host among many civic activities. Died 20 years ago but "People talk about him like he's still alive" - David

Recommended Location: TBD, NAIA HQ?

Property Owner: TBD

Marker Style: Double sided, Freestanding

Original Mexican Business District/Mexicantown Restaurants

The old business district (Bagley from 3rd St to 24th St.) was the center of Mexican life in Detroit, was torn into two by Lodge and 75 expressways. The Mexicantown designation has been in use since the early 1980s following the success of the Greektown neighborhood.

Recommended Location: Bagley and 24th

Property Owner: TBD, figure out which corner of intersection

Marker Style: Freestanding, two sided

Clark Park

Clark Park is the spiritual home for all metro Detroit Latinx - Ozzie

Clark Park has consistently been one of the most utilized and kept up parks in the city with an expansive history of festivals, events, and political activism.

Recommended Location: Clark Park, TBD

Property Owner: City of Detroit

Marker Style: TBD

Grace Lee Boggs/Boggs Center

The life, writing, political and community activism of GLB, backed with the community efforts of the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to encourage community activism for several generations now.

Recommended Location: Boggs Center, 3061 Field Street

Property Owner: Boggs Center

Marker Style: Freestanding, two sided to describe the person and the organization

Vincent Chin

Murdered on the eve of his wedding in a hate crime, Vincent Chin's murder and the response of his mother, friends, and the local Chinese community galvanized the Asian American community nationally and forced a landmark civil rights case.

Recommended Location: Highland Park

Property Owner: TBD

Marker Style: TBD

Ruth Ellis

Legendary LGBT activist, civil rights activist, proprietor of first female owned print shop in MI

Recommended Location: Ruth Ellis Center (which location?)

Property Owner: Ruth Ellis Center

Marker Style: TBD, Lily

The (Negro Motorist's) Green Book / Carlton Hotel

From 1938-1967, a total of 96 black-owned businesses appeared in the Green Book for Detroit. These included directories of hotels, camps, roadhouses, and restaurants which would serve African American travelers.

Recommended Location: The original site of the Carlton Hotel 2915 John R St in Brush Park
Property Owner: Carlton Lofts Detroit – Condominiums
Marker Style: Wall mounted

Dr. Lucy Gajec

Prominent southwest Detroit citizen and historian of the Mexican and Latinx community in Detroit, kept a Mexican and Indigenous history museum in the neighborhood and wrote a column for El Central

Recommended Location: Vernor and Hubbard
Property Owner: Southwest Detroit Business Association
Marker Style: TBD

Chaldeantown

Historic neighborhood for Detroit's Chaldean community, primarily from 1920s-70s and also served as the intake area for new immigrants to Detroit.

Recommended Location: 7 Mile between Woodward and John R
Property Owner: TBD
Marker Style: Wall mounted?

Michigan Historical Marker Application Synopses
Michigan Historical Commission
February 2, 2023

Jackson Poor Farm Cemetery

Applicant: Linda Hass, Pete Jancek

Location Address: 3690 County Farm Road, Jackson, MI 49203

Historic Resources: Historic Site. Cemetery

Requested Marker Type: Large Marker, unspecified text preference

Historical Summary:

It became clear in the early days of Michigan's statehood that special provisions would have to be made at the county level to care for the state's poor population. Leaders of Jackson County appointed a "Board of Superintendents of the Poor" on January 10, 1839, less than two years after Michigan gained statehood. In May of 1839 the newly appointed board was authorized to purchase a tract of land and "erect one or more suitable buildings" for the housing and accommodation of the county's poor. While the exact date of construction for the first "poor house" is unknown, the structure was insured for \$300 by the Jackson Mutual Fire Insurance Company on January 4, 1841. It is likely that the structure was completed before this date.

The *1849 Journal of the Michigan Senate* included a summary of the Jackson County Poor Farm's facilities, which featured a 180-acre farm. The U.S. Census for 1860 showed that 24 individuals lived at the farm with ages ranging from 5 to 92 years old, and lists Horace Eldred (1815-1905) as the caretaker and operator of the house.

An October 20, 1868, article from the *Jackson Citizen* details that there had been three deaths and burials at the poor farm that year. The U.S. Census for 1870 showed that 42 individuals lived at the farm with ages ranging from 5 to 75 years old, and lists Aaron Taylor as the caretaker and operator of the house. An October 20, 1872, article from the *Jackson Citizen* details how the poor house's cemetery had been nearly filled at this point and was in need of expansion.

A *Jackson Citizen* article from May 4, 1880, further highlights the facilities of the county's poor farm. The site included 160 acres of farmland of which 130 acres were currently being cultivated. The structures consisted of the main house, which was brick with a wooden addition for the "insane," and a separate stone structure for men.

A fire broke out on January 25, 1886. It destroyed the original structure and claimed the lives of five residents who were "cremated" in the disaster. A new structure was erected the following year and was described as "handsome" and "expensive."

The Jackson County Medical Care Facility on Lansing Avenue replaced the older structure in 1963. The property was devastated by a 1967 fire that leveled the structure, leaving only the cemetery as evidence of the site.

Summary of Integrity:

There is no evidence of the original structures on the site. The cemetery consists entirely of unmarked graves with a single cross-shaped marker memorializing the site. A detailed list of those interred at the cemetery is available via the Jackson County Michigan Historical Society.

Recommendation: Approval

Proposed Marker Location: Southeast entrance near the parking lot.





Saginaw News Building

Applicant: Dean Emerson

Location Address: 203 S. Washington Avenue, Saginaw, Saginaw County

Historic Resources: Historic building or site

Requested Marker Type: Large marker with the same text on each side

Historical Summary:

The *Saginaw News* began in 1859 as *The East Saginaw Courier* under the control of George F. Lewis. The paper was joined by the *Saginaw Evening News* in 1881. In 1918, a group of Saginaw area investors, including Ralph H. Booth, George Booth, Charles M. Greenway, and two others, consolidated the *Saginaw Evening News* and *Courier-Herald* into the *Saginaw News Courier*. The newspaper was renamed the *Saginaw Daily News* in 1927 and then the *Saginaw News* on July 24, 1936.

By the mid-1950s, the *Saginaw News* had outgrown its building at the corner of Federal Avenue and South Washington Avenue. The decision was made to construct a new building adjacent to the old one that would allow the *Saginaw News* to house the latest in printing presses and related equipment. For the design they turned to the Saginaw-based architectural firm Frantz & Spence.

Robert B. Frantz (1894-1971) and James A. Spence, Sr. (1899-1970) both attended the University of Michigan and studied under Emil Lorch. Frantz & Spence were initially inspired by the American Colonial style, but they embraced Modernism following World War II.

The Saginaw News Building, one of the last structures designed by the firm, was built in the International Style embracing clean lines and heavy usage of glass, enameled metal, marble, and granite. Ground was broken for the structure on August 19, 1958, and the building was occupied by May 1960. At the time of its completion the adjacent original building was demolished. The *Saginaw News* occupied this site until 2010. The building is currently owned by SVRC Industries and is used as a farmers' market.

Summary of Integrity:

The Saginaw News Building retains most of its original features and retains its integrity of location and association. Several features have been removed including exterior signage and the enamel cases where papers could be purchased in the lobby. All of the printing equipment has also been removed.

Recommendation: Approval.

Proposed Marker Location: Front of the building - Northeast corner

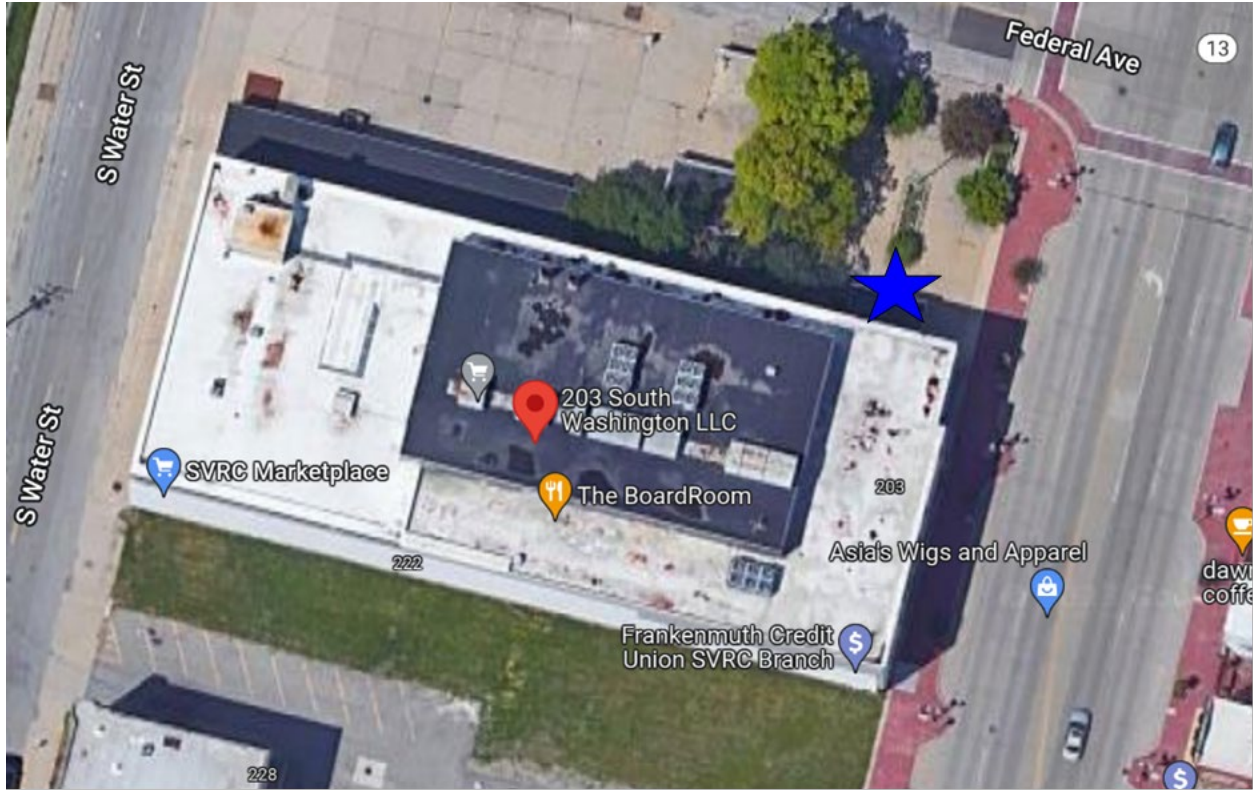




Figure 3. Current state of the main lobby

Kappa Kastle

Applicant: Daniel A. Baxter

Location Address: 269 Erskine Street, Detroit, MI, 48201

Historic Resources: Historic Site

Requested Marker Type: Large Marker, different text on each side

Historical Summary:

Kappa Alpha Psi (originally Kappa Alpha Nu) was founded by a group of Black students on the campus of Indiana University on January 5, 1911. Kappa Alpha Phi is the 2nd oldest existing collegiate historically Black Greek Letter Fraternity and the 1st intercollegiate fraternity incorporated as a national body. Two of the founding charter members, Elder Watson Diggs and Byron Kenneth Armstrong, had previously attended Howard University, which is home to Alpha Phi Alpha, the first chapter of the first Black Greek Letter Fraternity located on an HBCU campus.

The Detroit Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi was chartered on April 3, 1920, with McKinley Carey as its first Polemarch. The fraternity provided support to African Americans who had moved to the area following World War I. One of the chapter's earliest members was Ossian H. Sweet, who received national attention after being tried for murder for defending his Detroit home from white attackers.

The Detroit Alumni Chapter purchased the 1906 home at 269 Erskine Street, designed by Lemay Nohelan, between 1944 and 1945 with "Kappa Kastle's" dedication taking place on Easter Sunday, April 15, 1945. A week of festivities followed that included Sorority Night Monday and Citizens Night Tuesday.

This organization of alumni has since hosted numerous events and receptions at the site and has continuously contributed to city and state's civil rights movements and social development. On February 7, 1947, a reception was held for Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a distinguished Black author, editor, publisher, and historian, after his lecture at Carter Metropolitan Church. Woodson is recognized for his role in establishing Black History Month.

Kappa Alpha Psi honored Rosa Parks with its "distinguished citizen award" on August 2, 1982. The award was presented by the mayor of Tuskegee, Alabama, Johnny Ford.

Notable alumni of the organization include Congressman John Conyers and Richard H. Austin (the first Black Michigan Secretary of State).

Summary of Integrity:

The exterior is largely unchanged from its period of significance. The front porch was remodeled in 1997.

Recommendation: Approval

Proposed Marker Location: Western portion of the home's front lawn

