

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

41.

202 City-County Building
Detroit, Michigan 48226

PROPOSED EAST FREDERICK AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT

Final Report

The proposed East Frederick Avenue Historic District is comprised of two primary structures at 544 and 580 E. Frederick Avenue serving institutional and residential uses. Located approximately two miles north of downtown, the proposed district is east of Detroit's Cultural Center and Wayne State University campus. The proposed district is located on the south side of Frederick between St. Antoine and Beaubien, and is within the Medical Center Rehabilitation project area.

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

On the east, the centerline of St. Antoine;

On the north, the centerline of Frederick Avenue;

On the west, the west line of the east 45' of the south 98.90' of Out Lot 195 of the L. Beaubien Farm, and the west line of the east 45' of the North 21.10' of Out Lot 193 of the L. Beaubien Farm, and

On the south, the south side of the east-west alley between Frederick Avenue and Farnsworth Avenue.

HISTORY: The East Frederick Avenue Historic District is made up of a portion of the Adams Subdivision, and portions of the private plats of Out Lots 195 and 193 of the L. Beaubien Farm. The Adams Subdivision was laid out in 1886 by George S. Adams and his brother, Charles F. Adams, who later purchased Lots 4-6. Charles F. Adams was a physics teacher at Detroit's old Central High School and the author of several standard textbooks on the subject of physics. However, it was George S. Adams, a realtor, who was responsible for the development of Frederick Avenue. In 1887 under George Adams' direction, Frederick Avenue was widened to 60 feet and extended from John R to Mt. Elliott. Later that same year he granted an easement to the City of Detroit which enabled the city to lay sewage lines on his property.

Lots on the south side of Frederick Avenue which lie mostly in Out Lot 195, but also in Out Lot 193 at the rear, were promoted and sold by George Dingwall. Dingwall was a prominent realtor and a partner in the real estate firm of Hubbard and Dingwall. Hubbard and Dingwall founded the town of Hubbard near Flint, Michigan.

The school, opened with the help of Bertha Hansbury's husband, William Hanson Phillips, also served as the first employment agency for blacks in Detroit. That agency, licensed by the state and called the Household Art Guild, pre-dated the first widely used government-supported job agency by more than ten years. It taught blacks and found jobs for them in the domestic trades.

At the onset of the Great Depression, the Hansbury School was forced to close. However, Mrs. Phillips continued to conduct classes out of her home. The Hansbury School was responsible for nurturing thousands of young blacks in music.

By 1917, Detroit's black population had increased to 30,000. However, blacks, patients and doctors alike, were denied equal access to both private and public hospitals in Detroit. The 30 over-worked black physicians could no longer deal with the situation on an individual home care basis and as a result the medical situation for blacks was approaching the crisis stage. It was at this time that the doctors banded together and formed the Allied Medical Society (the forerunner of the present Detroit Medical Society). Its primary objective was to raise funds to establish a hospital to care for the black citizens of Detroit. In 1918 William C. Osby and Charles R. Webb purchased 580 Frederick for the purpose of establishing such a hospital.

In 1919, Detroit's first black hospital was opened. The hospital was named in honor of the Ohio black poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Upon its opening, Dunbar Memorial Hospital's accommodations were limited to 30 beds, with an operating room supplied with the latest surgical apparatus. The hospital was staffed with 17 physicians. Within a few short years, the new hospital had outgrown 580 Frederick; by 1924 the house next door (584 Frederick) was acquired for use as offices, reception rooms, a library and nurses quarters. By this time, Dunbar had a staff of 21 to operate the 37 bed facility and sponsored nurses training classes and an internship program for black graduate students.

In 1928, the converted houses on Frederick Avenue could no longer accommodate the growing hospital and Dunbar moved to a new location at Brush and Illinois where it became known as Parkside Hospital. It remained at this location until it ceased operations in 1960, and was razed as a part of an urban redevelopment project.

The historical significance of 580 Fredrick did not end with the departure of Dunbar Hospital in 1928. The house and its neighbor at 584 were immediately acquired by Charles C. Diggs, Sr. Diggs and his wife, Mayme, and six year old son, Charles Jr., made 580 their home and opened an undertaking business in No. 584 (demolished). Charles Sr. was a successful businessman and community leader when he was elected in 1937 as Michigan's first black Democratic State Senator, although by this time the family had moved from Frederick.

Diggs' son, Charles Jr., enjoyed an equally successful career as a businessman and became Michigan first black member of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1954. Diggs Jr. also served as a Michigan State Senator succeeding his father in 1951.

In 1978 the Detroit Medical Society, the successor of the Allied Medical Society which started Dunbar Hospital acquired the building. Today, Dunbar Hospital is being restored for use as a museum and headquarters facility.

These structures' (544 and 580 Frederick) historical importance to the black community of Detroit was recognized when they were spared demolition as the rest of the neighborhood was cleared for redevelopment.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: The two buildings left standing in the 500 block of Frederick Avenue were undoubtedly built by the same contractor, the Vinton Company. The name of Vinton has had a long and honorable association with Detroit's business interests and it may be said that no single name is more intimately connected with the physical growth of the city during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Founded in 1858 by Warren G. Vinton, the prestige of the Vinton name was established by his son, G. Jay Vinton, a businessman of wide vision and activities. G. Jay Vinton built up a new organization and equipped the company to handle the steel, brick, stone and cement work that had become essential in modern buildings.

The number of building erected in Detroit by this company is enormous and it would not be an easy task to give a list of them. However, a partial list of buildings for which they contracted include the Detroit Athletic Club, Michigan Stove Works, Detroit Opera House, Detroit Boat Club, First Congregational Church, St. Andrew's Church, and the St. Francis Home for Boys. Many residential structures were also built by the Vinton Company, amongst them the J. Harrington Walker Estate and the John B. Ford residence in Detroit and the George G. Booth residence at Cranbrook.

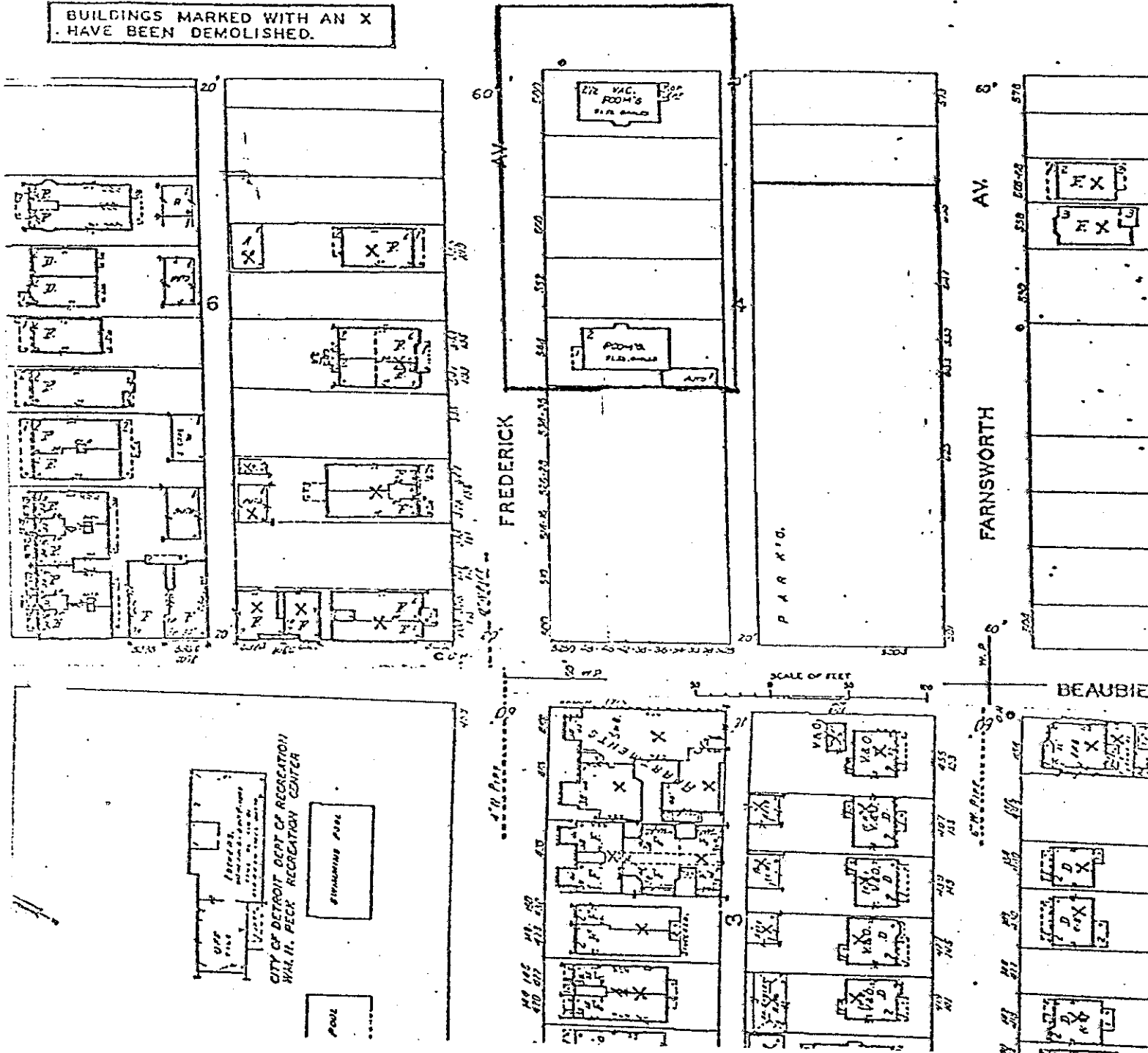
The homes at 544 and 580 Frederick Avenue are, of course, on a more modest scale. Both are similar in massing, roof forms, design vocabulary and layout, but notably different in architectural style. And both houses express the eclectic nature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

544 Frederick Ave. - John Owen, Jr. House-Hansbury School of Music, 1890

John Owen, Jr., prominent Detroit realtor and land developer, was the first resident at 544 Frederick. He had the house built in 1890 at an estimated cost of \$5,000. Son of John Owen, a well-established Detroit businessman and investor, Owen, Jr. obtained his initial business experience at the Detroit Dry Dock Company, which his father helped to organize. Three years later Owen, Jr. took over the management of the John Owen estate, which included valuable real estate holdings. After thoroughly acquainting himself with real estate values and carefully systematizing the business interest, Owen, Jr. was able to increase the value of his father's estate through judicious investment and wise care. Owen, Jr. also served as secretary-treasurer of the Cook Farm Company, which was responsible for the subdivision of historic Indian Village.

In 1895, Frank C. Andrews, a realtor with Homer Warren and Company, moved into 544 Frederick.

BUILDINGS MARKED WITH AN X HAVE BEEN DEMOLISHED.



PROPOSED EAST FREDERICK AVENUE HISTORIC DISTRICT
(Boundaries outlined in heavy black)

