

November 30, 2015

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Mr. Ed Anzek, and the Historic Districts Commission
1000 Rochester Hills Drive
Rochester Hills, MI 48309

Greetings Mr. Ed Anzek, and Historic Districts Commission,

I wanted to bring to your attention a historic property that is likely in danger of demolition: the property at 820 E Auburn Road in Rochester Hills. After contacting the property's realtor, Mr. Kevin G Baird, I learned that the house has been sold for \$250,000 and is currently zoned as mix-use commercial. The house is likely going to be demolished; the land, repurposed and used as retail space.

Surrendering another of our landmark buildings to the whims of commercial development threatens to further erase the unique history in both the Brooklands neighborhood and in the Rochester Hills community. The identity, integrity, and character of a city relies heavily on the survival of its original and historic structures. Without them we are limited to a grid of streets redundantly lined with Starbucks and McDonalds. A development of this nature does not benefit the city's residents or home owners. In fact, it makes the area look more and more like our nearby suburbs of Warren and Hazel Park, where almost no pre-WWII architecture or original farm structures remain. For the sake of land value, and this property's significance to the individuality of the Brooklands neighborhood, let us consider taking the steps to protect, rehabilitate, and repurpose this 115-year-old farm house.

The history of 820 E Auburn Road is simple. Julian Siess (1850-1907) and Bertha Siess (-1926) built the house in 1901 to raise their family of 7.¹ (The house was a likely replacement of a previous farmhouse that was built on or near the same foundation. The land is marked as "Oak Grove Farm, T.S. Tibbals" in an 1872 map.) Julian was a Russian immigrant who worked as a dairy farmer in the 1880s and 1890s on the southeast corner of Oakland Avenue and Caniff Road in Detroit. Bertha (Wrack) was a Detroit Native. Julian passed away at age 57 due to heart

¹ The 1908 map of Avon Township included as Figure 1 includes the family's property at the southwest corner of Auburn Road and John R Road. The majority of the farmhouses in the area have been demolished. 820 E Auburn Rd. is shown in the top right corner of plot 35.

failure shortly after one of his sons, Edward (1889-1907), died at age 17 from a gunshot wound. Both Bertha and Julian are buried at Woodmere Cemetery in Detroit.



Figure 1. 1908 map of Avon Township, courtesy of the Rochester-Avon Archives. Photo taken by Devin Sykes.

The community surrounding 820 E Auburn Road has seen a resurgence in land value in recent years. Several historic homes along Auburn Road have been repainted and repaired, including a large farm house on the north side of Auburn Road, west of the fire station; a large farm house on the south side of Auburn Road at Frankson Road; and a commercial property in the small dining district between Longview and Harrison. In addition, both Johnny Black's Public House and Chad's Bistro are extremely popular restaurants in the area, and draw many people – residence and visitors alike – to the neighborhood.² Further, Brooklands neighborhood hosts a variety of delightful and interesting architectural nuances dating as far back as the 1920s, and features homes styled from bungalows to post-war ranches. Regrettably, though, too many of the original, pre-1920s farm houses specific to the Rochester Hills area were lost to suburbanization.

Unfortunately, the city of Rochester Hills does not currently have a good reputation for protecting these and other kinds of homes, which are integral to the area's history.³ After scouring maps in the archives, reading through stories posted by residents on the Rochester-Avon Historical Society website, and reviewing comments in the *Remembering Rochester* blog, it is apparent that the city could do more to honor its unique history. In "A Eulogy for our

² Chad's Bistro boasts a 5-star rating on Yelp.com, and has been review by 228 patrons.

³ Take, for example, the 2011 demolition of the Eddy House, a Queen Anne-style farm house built in 1900 (<http://patch.com/michigan/rochester/111-year-old-farmhouse-coming-down-on-rochester-road>).

Neighborhoods,” posted to the *Remembering Rochester* blog on December 20, 2014, blogger Deborah Larsen poignantly states that

2014 has been the most destructive in the history of Rochester. When future historians examine the record of this year looking for the cause of the devastation, they will . . . find that in 2014, when Rochester's landscape was riddled with the pock-marks of demolished vintage houses, the damage was wholly self-inflicted.⁴

The threat of demolition of the vintage farm house at 820 E Auburn Road is especially troubling when you consider that the house is, overall, in sound condition. I visited the house when the most recent inheritor gained control of the property, and although I wasn't able to survey the whole house, the areas I saw were only in need of minor to moderate repairs: the floors need to be leveled, the paint needs refreshing, and the roof may need to be recovered. Of course, the property would need to be examined further by a certified inspector, but it is clear that the home is far from unrecoverable.

I am dedicated to protecting this area's unique, plentiful history. I will take whatever steps necessary to increase public awareness about, interest in, and support of this specific property, for as Jane Powell aptly notes,

“American culture, and advertising in particular, has done an excellent job of convincing consumers that they are the center of the universe, and that their needs and desires should be more important than anything else. This has led to a huge sense of entitlement, including the idea that one's time is so valuable that it couldn't possibly be spent maintaining the house. . . .”⁵

Therefore, I would readily and humbly volunteer myself to speak at city hall meetings, develop and distribute a local petition, and help clear overgrown vegetation and enhance the curb appeal of the site.⁶ Again, Deborah Larsen:

These houses are witnesses, if only we would take the time to listen to their testimony. They all have stories to tell about the families they have sheltered over the decades, and the people in those families were the ones who built this community and left something behind for the citizens of today. Author and home restoration specialist Jane Powell once spoke quite eloquently on this issue; she said, in part:

“. . . A house comes with responsibilities, and a historic house comes with more responsibilities. We are only the caretakers of these houses, which were here before we owned them and which will be here after we are gone. They contain the wood from the

⁴ <http://rochesteravonhistory.blogspot.com/2014/12/a-eulogy-for-our-neighborhoods.html>

⁵ Cited in Deborah Larsen's "A Eulogy for our Neighborhoods."

⁶ According to the Rochester Hills City website, the property has been issued a few citations for "blight."

old-growth forests, they are monuments to the skill of those who labored to build them, they represent our cultural heritage. To destroy them, or allow them to be destroyed by neglect, to remove their original fabric in the pointless pursuit of "no maintenance" is profoundly disrespectful both to the trees that gave their lives and to the labor and skill of those who built the houses - with hand tools, I might add."

Please let me know if there is anything I can do, or anything I can work on alongside the Historic Districts Commission, to help save this historic home.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Devin J.R. Sykes

Julius Siess and Bertha Siess Historical Documents

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STATE OF MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF STATE - DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS
 TRANSCRIPT OF CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

PLACE OF DEATH: _____
 County of _____
 Township of _____
 or
 Village of _____
 or
 City of _____ (Ward) _____

Registered No. 4786
 [(If death occurred in a Hospital or Institution, give the NAME instead of street and number. If away from usual residence, give "Special Information" below.)]

FULL NAME Julius Siess

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS				MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		
SEX <u>m</u>	COLOR <u>w</u>	DATE OF BIRTH (Month) _____ (Day) _____ (Year) <u>1850</u>	AGE <u>57</u> YEARS _____ MONTHS _____ DAYS	DATE OF DEATH (Month) <u>Aug</u> (Day) <u>13</u> (Year) <u>1907</u>	I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from _____ 1907, to _____ 1907, that I saw h _____ alive on _____ 1907, and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at _____ M.	
SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED <u>m</u>				The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows: <u>Heart Disease</u>		
AGE AT MARRIAGE, NUMBER OF CHILDREN If married, age at (first) marriage <u>27</u> years Parent of <u>7</u> children, of whom <u>6</u> are living				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
BIRTHPLACE (State or country) <u>Russia</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
NAME OF FATHER <u>Alexander Siess</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) <u>Russia</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER <u>Rosie</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) <u>Russia</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
OCCUPATION <u>Farmer</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
THE ABOVE STATED PERSONAL PARTICULARS ARE TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
(Informant) <u>Bertha Siess</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
(Address) <u>Rochester Mich.</u>				Contributory _____ (DURATION) _____ DAYS		
				SPECIAL INFORMATION only for Hospitals, Institutions, Transients or Recent Residents: Where or usual residence? <u>Haven Mich.</u> How long at place of death? _____ Days Where was disease contracted? _____ If not at place of death? _____		
				PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL <u>Woodmere</u> DATE OF BURIAL <u>8/16</u> 1907		
				UNDERTAKER <u>Ed. H. Patterson</u> ADDRESS <u>308 - 4 Ave</u>		
				Filed <u>8/15</u> 1907 A TRUE COPY Registrar		

Figure 2. Wayne County death records – Julius Siess

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STATE OF MICHIGAN
Department of State - Division of Vital Statistics

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH *1907*

PLACE OF DEATH
County of Wayne
Township of Avon
or
Village of _____
City of _____ No. _____ St. _____ Ward _____

Registered No. 7
MAR 5 1907

FULL NAME Edward Siess

(If death occurred in a Hospital or Institution, give the NAME instead of street and number. If away from usual residence, give "Special Institution" below.)

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS				MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH			
SEX	<u>Male</u>	COLOR	<u>White</u>	DATE OF DEATH	(Month) <u>Feb</u>	(Day) <u>27</u>	(Year) <u>1907</u>
DATE OF BIRTH	(Month) <u>Aug</u>	(Day) <u>7</u>	(Year) <u>1889</u>	I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <u>Feb 27th, 1907, to Feb 27, 1907,</u>			
AGE	<u>17</u> years, <u>7</u> months, <u>20</u> days			that I last saw him alive on <u>Feb 27, 1907,</u>			
SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED	<u>Single</u>			and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at <u>11:10 A.M.</u>			
AGE AT MARRIAGE, NUMBER OF CHILDREN	(If married, age of first marriage _____ years Parent of _____ children, of whom _____ are living)			The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows: <u>one to gunshot wound</u>			
BIRTHPLACE (State or country)	<u>Detroit, Mich.</u>			<u>in the abdomen in median line about 3 inches above the umbilicus.</u>			
NAME OF FATHER	<u>Julius Siess</u>			Contributory _____			
BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country)	<u>Russia</u>			Signed: <u>Archibald J. Cooney,</u>			
MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER	<u>Bertha Gack</u>			<u>Feb 27 1907 (address) Utica, Mich.</u>			
BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country)	<u>Detroit, Mich.</u>			NEEDS INFORMATION only for Hospital, Institution, Transient or Local Register:			
OCCUPATION	<u>Farmer</u>			Form or card omitted _____ See log at place of death? _____			
THE ABOVE STATED PERSONAL PARTICULARS ARE TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF				PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL			
(Informant)	<u>Julius Siess</u>			<u>Woodruff Cemetery</u>			
(Signature)	<u>Rochester, Mich.</u>			<u>Utica, Mich.</u>			
(Date)	<u>Feb 28, 1907</u>			<u>Feb 28, 1907</u>			

Figure 3. Wayne County death records – Edward Siess

RINGS WEDDING RINGS A SPECIALTY. Also Rings for Ladies, Gents and Babies, at **TRAUB BROS.** 118 Woodward Ave. The most central Jewelry House in Detroit. **RINGS**

SIE DETROIT CITY DIRECTORY. SIL 1247

Sierakowski Anna (wid John), bds 333 Willis av e.
 Siering, see also Searing and Seyring.
 " Alfred, plasterer, bds 263 Columbia e.
 " Wilhelmina (wid Alois), h 263 Columbia east.
 Siess Annie, domestic 256 Morrell.
 " August C, wagonmkr, h 14 Hale.
 " Frederick, wagonmkr, h 310 Campbell avenue.
 " Henry, tmstr, h 112 Highland av.
 " Joseph, mach, h 1045 Willis av e.
 " Julius, dairy, h s e cor Oakland and Caniff avs.
 " Leopold, mach, bds 14 Hale.
 " Mary, domestic 34 Farnsworth av.
 " Matthias, lab, h e s Gilbert 4 n of Southern av.
 " Matthias jr, lab, bds e s Gilbert 4 n of Southern av.
 Siev Alexander M, pdlr, bds 230 Elizabeth e.
 Sievers Albert, fireman, bds 1125 Russell.
 " Mrs Dora, bds 776 17th.
 " Gustav, bkbnr, h 776 17th.
 " Henry (Sievers & Erdman), h 182 Jos Campau av.
 " Henry J, carpet weaver, h 36 Grant.
 " Herman, baker, bds 36 Grant.
Sievers & Erdman (Henry Sievers, Charles Erdman), Mnfrs Fine Carriages, 294-298 Jefferson av. Tel 983.
 Sievert, see also Seifert, Seyfert, Siebert, Siefert and Siford.
 " August, saloon, 706 Scotten av, h 94 Brandon av.
 " Frederick, gardener, h n w cor Artillery and Regular avs.
 " Frederick jr, carp, bds n w cor Artillery and Regular avs.
 " Freida, domestic 43 Winder.
 " Herman, lab, h 315 Waterloo.
 " Herman J, shoes, 1174 Fort w, h same.
 " Joseph, lab, bds 120 Brevoort pl.
 " Louis, lab, h 115 Sullivan av.
 " Mattie, bds 40 Division.
 " Otto H, signmkr, bds 1174 Fort w.
 " Paul, carp, bds n w cor Artillery and Regular avs.
 " Paul L (aged 23), died October, 1894.
 Sievewright George, sailmkr, h 279 12th.
 " James L, sec American Eagle Tobacco Co, res Sandwich, Ont.
 Siewers Arthur, bkbnr Winn & Hammond, bds 76 Hamlin av.
 " Christian J, engineer, h 76 Hamlin av.
 Siewert, see also Seiwert.
 " Albert H, printer Detroit Free Press Co, bds 264 Brush.
 " Charlotte (wid Ernest), h 264 Brush.
 " Edward O, draper, h 170 Adams av e.
 " Ernest L, tinner, h 111 Napoleon.
 " Herman, bksmith, h 171 Humboldt av.
 " Louis, h 596 Jos Campau av.
 " Wm F, timekpr, bds 264 Brush.
 Sifferath Nicholas, mach, h 506 23d.
 Siford, see also Seifert, Seyfert, Siebert, Siefert and Sievert.
 " L Reed, barber, h 372 Lansing av.
 Sigel, see also Siegel.
 " Tobias M, phys, 21 Macomb, h same. Tel 2504.
 Siggelko Charles, lab, bds 654 Scotten av.
 " Christina (wid Frederick), h 654 Scotten av.
 " Ernest, inspr, h 577 Baker.
 " Frederick (aged 70), died January 27, 1895.
 " Wm T, springmkr, bds 654 Scotten av.

Frank J. Licht,
 Tel. 1780.
THE NOBBY TAILOR
 175
 Michigan Ave.
 FINE TAILORING at LOWEST PRICES.

Siggins Wm N, grocer, 341 Trumbull av, h 191 Locust.
 Sigler, see also Sickler, Siegler and Ziegler.
 " Octavia E (wid Theodore), phys, 144 Elizabeth e, h same.
 Sigman Alfred H, city fireman, bds 953 Scotten av.
 Sigmann Jonn P, contr, 76 Hazel, h same.
 " Wm, mason, bds Cass Av Hotel.
 Signs John Q K, casemkr, bds 59 W Park place.
 Sigrist, see also Siegrist.
 " Louis, tailor, 350 Elliot, h same.
 Sigsworth George W, painter, bds 120 Cleveland.
 Sihler Augusta M (wid Charles), h 156 Antietam.
 " Charles (aged 53), died Ferbruary 9, 1895.
 " George B (Sihler & Holst), h 369 Chene
 " Wm, helper, bds 156 Antietam.
 " & Holst (George B Sihler, Rudolph H Holst), laundry, 40 Miami av.
 Sihloff, see Saaloff, Seeloff, Sielaff and Siehoff.
 Sikora Adam, lab, h 687 Hancock av e.
 " Andrew, lab, bds 687 Hancock av e.
 " Anton, painter, h 807 St Aubin av.
 " Frank, painter, h 625 Hancock av e.
 " John, lab, h 576 Alexandrine av e.
 " Joseph, lab, h 803 St Aubin av.
 " Joseph, lab, h 807 St Aubin av.
 " Joseph, painter, bds 625 Hancock av e.
 " Stephen, ins agt, h 28 B.
 Sikorski, see also Chikolski.
 " Anthony, mason, bds 957 Riopelle.
 " Dorothea (wid Michael), bds 981 Riopelle.
 " Frank, carp, h 411 Forest av e.
 " Frank, lab, bds 560 Alexandrine av e.
 " Frank, lab, h 516 Leland.
 " Hans A, lab, bds 253 Alexandrine av e.
 " Ignatius, lab, h 827 Chene.
 " Ignatz, carp, h 691 Hendrie av.
 " John, baker, bds 411 Forest av e.
 " John, lab, bds 581 Frederick av.
 " John, lab, h 957 Riopelle.
 " John, lab, h 179 32d.
 " Joseph, lab, h 979 Riopelle.
 " Joseph, molder, h 840 Russell.
 " Julius, lab, h 986 Riopelle.
 " Leo, baker, 1084 Dubois, h same.
 " Lorenz, lab, bds 841 Russell.
 " Michael, lab, h 253 Alexandrine av e.
 " Michael, lab, bds 669 Hancock av e.
 " Michael, lab, h 858 Riopelle.
 " Stanislaus, machhd, h 931 Riopelle.
 " Stephen, lab, h 369 Wesson av.
 Silber, see also Silver.
 " Bernhard, tailor, h 216 Sherman.
 " Bernhard jr, pressman J A Topping, bds 216 Sherman.
 " Charles R, tailor, bds 216 Sherman.
 " Joseph, tinner, bds 216 Sherman.

The Washington Life Ins. Co. OF NEW YORK Stands at the TOP as the MODEL COMPANY. INSURE IN THE WASHINGTON.

Figure 5. Detroit directory circa 1880s