

PRELIMINARY REPORT
ROCHESTER HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICTS STUDY COMMITTEE
1631 WEST AVON ROAD – PROPOSED BOUNDARY DECREASE
ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN
Draft June 14, 2012

CHARGE OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS STUDY COMMITTEE

The historic districts study committee was appointed by the Rochester Hills City Council on December 15, 1999, pursuant to the Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances, Chapter 118, as amended in 2009. The study committee is a standing committee charged with conducting the duties and activities of a study committee on a continuing basis. These duties include inventory, research, and preparation of a preliminary study committee report for a proposed historic district. Study committee members serve two year terms. A list of current committee members follows.

Pursuant to Chapter 118, Section 129, the City Council referred a request for a boundary change for the single-resource historic district located at 1631 W. Avon Road to the Historic Districts Study Committee on April 23, 2012. The study committee is to make a recommendation back to Council within fifteen months.

STUDY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Steven Branstner

Suzanne Carlson

Julie Granthen

James Hannick is a long-time Rochester Hills resident with an interest and knowledge of local history.

Sue Thomasson has lived in the community for over 20 years and has resided in two historic homes. She currently resides in the oldest home in Stony Creek Village. She has a love of history and currently works at the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm.

Jason Thompson is chairperson of the Historic Districts Study Committee, and is a member of the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission. He has received a bachelor's degree in history from Oakland University, and a masters of public administration from Oakland University. His academic and work activities include a strong background in research and grant writing.

LaVere Webster is an art and antiques conservator who lives in one of the city's designated local historic districts. He has served on the board of directors of the Rochester-Avon Historical Society for more than six years.

Kristine M. Kidorf, Kidorf Preservation Consulting, assisted the study committee with their work.

INVENTORY

An initial survey was conducted by Avon Township (now Rochester Hills) in 1978, out of which the property at 1631 W. Avon Road was designated a local historic district. In 1993 and 1994, the staff members of the Rochester Hills Museum updated the photo documentation of properties previously designated. A photographic inventory of the district was conducted in 2002 as part of the *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey*. Copies of the inventory forms are located at the Rochester Hills Planning Department, the Rochester Hills Museum, and the State Historic Preservation Office. Additional photographs were taken in May 2012 as part of the preparation of this report.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

The proposed district consists of an approximately .79 acre parcel on the south side of Avon Road on the west side of the intersection with Avon Circle East. The site slopes downward from west to east. There is a gravel driveway and house near the northwest corner of the property where the ground is highest. The site is primarily grass covered with evergreen and deciduous trees planted throughout. An asphalt paved sidewalk runs along the north side of the property next to Avon Road. There is an embankment between the sidewalk and the front yard that is planted with trees and shrubs. There are low shrubs planted around the foundation of the house. There is a one-story metal sided shed located southeast of the house.

The house on the property is a Greek revival style upright and wing farmhouse constructed about 1870. It faces north has a two-story gable-front upright with a one-and-a-half story wing with a hip roof porch. There is a one-and-a-half story rear ell behind the upright and a one-story addition behind the wing. The house is clad in clapboard siding and has an asphalt shingle covered complex gable roof.

The façade consists of a two-bay wide, two-story tall upright with a gable front and a one-and-a-half story side gable wing that is three-bays wide and extends to the east. The upright has two, four-over-four double-hung windows with pedimented window hoods at the first and second floors. There is a wide trim board at the gable but no cornice returns. The wing has a non-original panel door and two double-hung windows. All three openings have wood pedimented hoods. A hip roof porch supported by square columns runs the width of the wing.

The east elevation of the wing has two four-over-four double-hung windows with pedimented window hoods separated by a brick wall chimney at the first and second floors. The rear ell extending to the south has a two level side gable roof. There is a single door accessed by a newer wood deck and railing in the center of the rear ell.

The west elevation has two, four-over-four, double-hung windows with pedimented window hoods at the first floor in the upright section of the house. There are no openings on the second floor. The rear ell wall is recessed and has two double-hung windows on either side of a non-original paneled door accessed by a newer wood deck with railings. The three openings have pedimented hoods. A gable wall dormer has a short double-hung window. A chimney rises above the south wall of the ell.

To the southeast of the house is a c. 1980 one-story gambrel roof shed with vertical metal siding and metal roof. The shed does not contribute to the historic district.

COUNT OF HISTORIC AND NON-HISTORIC RESOURCES

There is one historic and one non-historic resource in the district. The single house in the district is historic and a newer metal shed is non-historic.

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Parcel ID 70-15-21-126-037, commonly known as 1631 W. Avon Road.

Further described as:

T3N, R11E, SEC 21 EYSTER'S AVON ESTATES PART OF LOT 7 BEG AT NE LOT COR, TH S 10-57-58 E 85.69 FT, TH S 68-02-22 W 71.43 FT, TH S 52-50-36 W 207.81 FT, TH N 00-44-57 E 241.90 FT, TH S 88-29-00 E 212.48 FT TO BEG 2-20-04 FR 034

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary of the district is proposed to be reduced to the .79 acre parcel that contains the historic house commonly known as 1631 W. Avon Road. Approximately .75 acres of the west half of the original district was split off in 2004 to create a separate parcel (1651 W. Avon Road). A new house was constructed on the parcel.

To the north, south, east and west of the district are newer housing subdivisions. To the northeast across Avon Road is a separate individually designated historic district, 1568 Avon Road.

HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT

The upright and wing Greek Revival farmhouse was probably constructed in the 1870s. The 1872 atlas shows a ninety-seven acre parcel owned by Hubbell and Brother, but it is not clear whether a house is located on the property. By the time of the 1896 atlas the ninety-six acre parcel is owned by Abram Miller and the footprint of the house is shown. The 1908 atlas calls the property Crystal Brook Farm owned by S. A. Potter and wife and has a photo of them in the illustrations section of the atlas.



Photo of Mr. and Mrs. S. A. Potter, 1908 *Standard Atlas of Oakland County, Michigan* published by George Ogle, page 95.

The 1938 Rural Property Inventory shows the property being owned by Homer Welch, 6521 Second Boulevard, Detroit. The form says the house was being remodeled at that time, but did not give a date of construction. A 54 by 16 foot garage/tool shed with a concrete floor is noted as being constructed in 1922. The total acreage of the property was 170 acres and all but 20 acres was used for class A agricultural crops.

Homer J. Welch, his wife and three sons moved into the house in 1940. Mr. Welch was Vice President of T. H. Welch Company, a real estate and insurance firm located in the Fisher Building at 6521 Second Avenue. He was in business with his father, Thomas H. Welch. Thomas H. Welch began buying and selling real estate after his arrival in Detroit in 1881, first with his brother John Welch, and then in 1915 with two of his sons, Leonard and Homer. Thomas Welch appeared to be prominent in Detroit real estate; he was a charter member of the Detroit Real Estate Board. In addition to assisting in the development of Washington Boulevard and Broadway in downtown Detroit, Welch purchased farms and estates in the surrounding suburbs. Homer Welch followed in his father's footsteps until his death in March 1944, just before his fortieth birthday.

In November 1946 the next owners of the property, Elmer W. and Maude E. Eyster and Thomas and A. Lillian Hitchman, platted the subdivision Eyster's Avon Estates. It was approved by the Avon Township Board on January 8, 1947. This subdivision created the East and West Avon Circle and the surrounding subdivision. Elmer Eyster was a Royal Oak real estate dealer.

The property was designated as a historic district in 1978. The historic districts ordinance that Avon Township adopted in 1978 limited a non-contiguous district to the designated structure on the property and the area within one hundred feet from that structure (or to the property line if that was less than one hundred feet away). In 1995, the city of Rochester Hills amended their ordinance to include the entire parcel with all of its historic and non-historic resources.¹ This was done to comply with the changes in state law.

A new garage was constructed on the property in 1987. It is unknown when the barn that existed on the property at that time was demolished. In 2004 the property was subdivided into two parcels and a new house was constructed on the western parcel now known as 1651 W. Avon Road. The new house was reviewed and approved by the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission as a compatible addition to the historic district. However, since the western parcel only contains the new house it makes sense to remove that parcel from the historic district.

National Register Criterion C is relevant to the designation of 1631 W. Avon Road. Evaluation of the property according to these criteria leads to the conclusion that the property is architecturally significant.

The National Register Criteria

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

¹ Rochester Hills Historic Districts Study Committee. "Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report, Demay-Potere Farm Historic District, Rochester Hills, Michigan" no date, p. 13.

The 2002 survey report states, “residential architecture dominates Rochester Hills, and most of the houses that have been designated are single-family houses, usually former farmhouses, some with associated outbuildings.”² Evaluation standards for architecture include properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, form, or style. Buildings that are significant for their architecture must possess a high level of integrity of design. However requirements for integrity must also consider whether that type, form, or style is rare or common.³

The construction date of 1631 W. Avon Road is about 1870 and the upright and wing house is common for early farmhouses in Rochester Hills. The 2002 survey sheet for the property sums up the significance of the property, “A good example of the L-plan farmhouse so popular in nineteenth century Avon Township and Oakland County.” The house has good integrity and is an associated property in the architecture context for Rochester Hills.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study committee finds that the district boundary should be revised to only include the parcel currently associated with the historic house at 1631 W. Avon Road. The house is associated with an architectural house type significant to the history of Rochester Hills.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beers, F. W. *Atlas of Oakland County, Michigan*. New York: F. W. Beers & Co., 1872.

Burton, Clarence, ed. *The City of Detroit Michigan, 1710-1922*. Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922.

Burton, Clarence, and M. Agnes Burton, eds. *History of Wayne County and the City of Detroit, Michigan*. Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1930.

Busch, Jane C. “Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey.” City of Rochester Hills, Rochester Hills, MI., 2002. Photocopy and compact disc.

“City of Rochester Hills Designated Historic Site Survey.” 1993. Historic Home Information, Rochester Hills Museum Archives, Rochester Hills, Michigan.

“Elmer W. Eyster” *Detroit Free Press*, obituary, January 21, 1946. Burton Historical Collection Biography files.

“Homer J. Welch,” *Detroit Free Press*. Obituary, March 4, 1944. Burton Historical Collection Biography files.

“Inventory of Historic Properties, Avon Township.” 1978. Historic Home Information, Rochester Hills Museum Archives, Rochester Hills, Michigan.

Kace Publishing Co. *Illustrated Atlas of Oakland County*. Racine, Wis.: Kace Publishing Co., 1896.

² Jane Busch, *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey*, 27.

³ *Ibid.*, 34.

McAlpine Map Co., W.W. *McAlpines Atlas of Oakland County Michigan*. Birmingham, MI: W. S. McAlpine Map Co., 1930.

McAlpine Map Co., W.W. *McAlpines Atlas of Oakland County Michigan*. Birmingham, MI: W. S. McAlpine Map Co., 1947.

Michigan State Tax Commission and Works Progress Administration. "Rural Property Inventory, Oakland County, Avon Township." 1938. Record group 72-76, inventory no. 21G. State Archives of Michigan, Michigan Historical Center, Lansing, Michigan.

Ogle & Co., Geo. A. *Standard Atlas of Oakland County, Michigan*. Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1908.

Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1937. Detroit: R. L. Polk, 1937.

Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1938. Detroit: R. L. Polk, 1938.

Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1939. Detroit: R. L. Polk, 1939.

Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1940. Detroit: R. L. Polk, 1940.

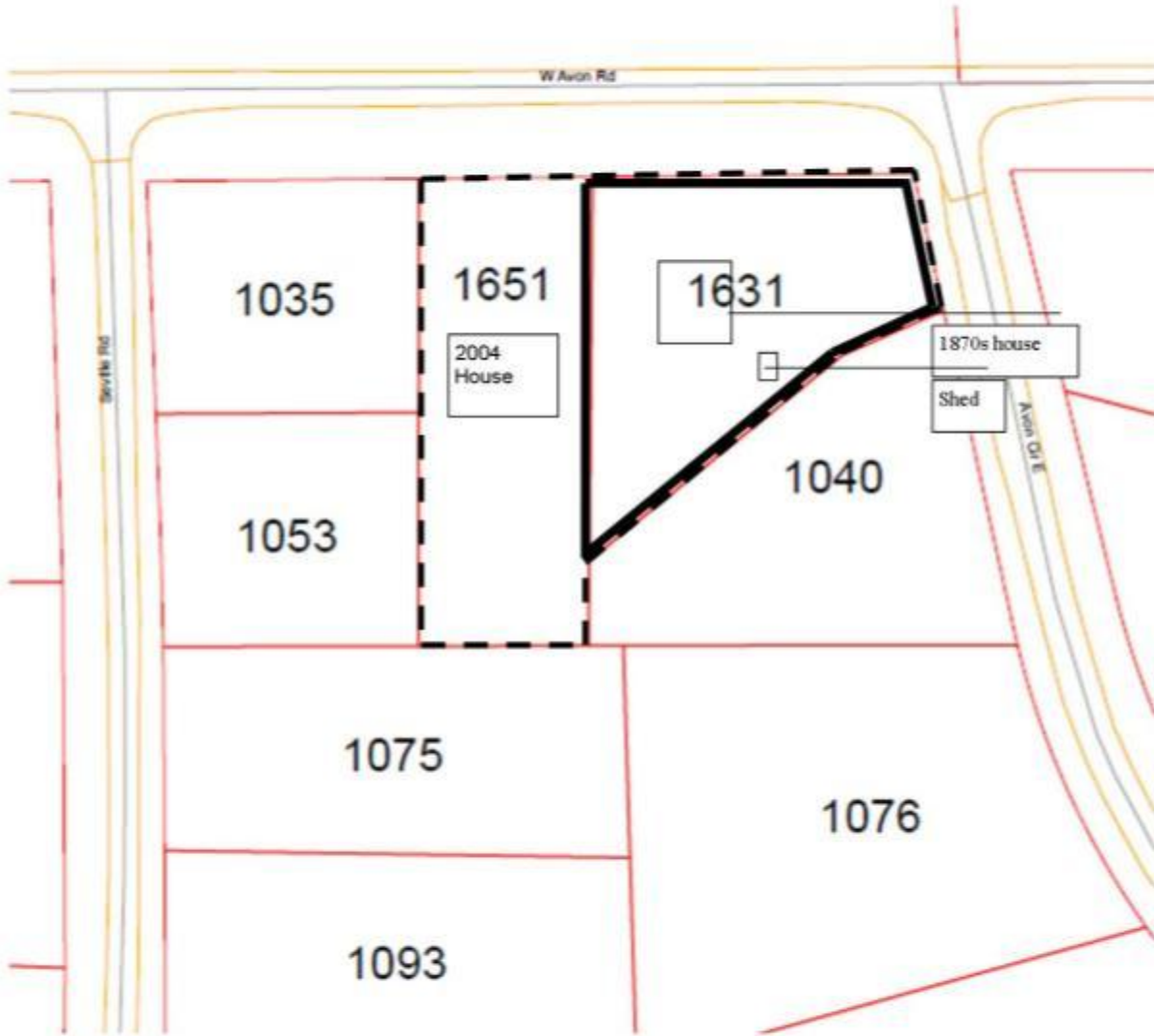
Polk's Detroit City Directory, 1941. Detroit: R. L. Polk, 1941.

Pray, Eula. *History of Avon Township, 1820-1940*. Ann Arbor: Nonce Press, 1986.

Rochester Hills Historic Districts Study Committee. "Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report, Demay-Potere Farm Historic District, Rochester Hills, Michigan" no date.

DISTRICT MAP

1631 West Avon Road Historic District
Proposed Boundary Revision
June 2012



- - - Existing district boundary
- Proposed district boundary

PHOTOGRAPHS



Looking southwest at 1631 W. Avon Road, May 2012



Looking west at 1631 W. Avon Road, non-historic shed to left, May 2012



Looking east at 1631 W. Avon Road, May 2012



Looking south at 1651 W. Avon Road, constructed 2004, May 2012



Looking east at 1651 and 1631 W. Avon Road, May 2012



Houses to the southwest of 1631 W. Avon Road, May 2012