

FINAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT
CHARLES PARKER HOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT
1207 NORTH LIVERNOIS ROAD
ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN

INTRODUCTION

In 2002 the city of Rochester Hills engaged Jane C. Busch, LLC, in collaboration with Hamilton Anderson Associates, Inc., to complete the *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey*. The survey was designed to augment and update information about the city's designated and potential local historic districts. The recommendations of the survey included eliminating three existing local historic districts, one of which is the Charles Parker House at 1207 North Livernois Road.

CHARGE OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS STUDY COMMITTEE

The historic districts study committee was established by the Rochester Hills City Council on December 15, 1999, pursuant to the Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances, Chapter 118, as amended in 1999. 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 historic district study committee reports to establish or eliminate historic districts. Study committee members serve two year terms. A list of current committee members follows.

STUDY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

John Dziurman, a registered architect with a practice focused on historic preservation, meets the federal professional qualification standards for historic architect. He has served on the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission for over fifteen years, many of those years as chairperson.

Peggy Schodowski has a strong background in research and analysis, and is currently employed part-time as a Marketing Director/Research Analyst for a locally owned company. She has recently provided research assistance to a local private school regarding the historic background of their school building, and has also assisted several local communities with research about historic buildings.

Richard Stamps is an associate professor of anthropology at Oakland University. A professional archaeologist with a strong interest in history, he is also a member of the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission.

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.

Gerard Verschueren has been involved with many of the City's Boards and Commissions over the last 15 years. Originally from the Netherlands, he owned a European company specializing in the repair and restoration of churches and castles that were hundreds of years old. He was the past historical building advisor and consultant for the State of Ohio, and a past consultant for the Detroit Roofing Consulting Service regarding historical buildings.

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.

Pamela Whateley is a minister and healing counselor interested in the city's building and development. She served for two years on the subcommittee for the city's Earl Borden Historic Preservation Award.

Kristine M. Kidorf, Kidorf Preservation Consulting, and *Jane C. Busch*, Jane C. Busch LLC, assisted the study committee with their work.

INVENTORY

An initial survey was conducted by Avon Township (now Rochester Hills) in 1978 out of which Charles Parker House at 1207 North Livernois 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 2007 as part of the preparation of this report.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

The Charles Parker House is a two-story side-gabled frame house with a two-story rear addition. Located on the west side of Livernois Road, the house sits on a sloping site, with dense evergreen trees along the road. An asphalt paved driveway runs up the center of the property toward the detached garage located south of the house. The property is surrounded by a board on board wood fence.

Built in 1826 the house is six bays wide and has an off-center entrance. The replacement double-hung vinyl windows are aligned with each other at the first and second floors, with three to the south of the door, and two to the north. The house is clad in vinyl siding with aluminum trim around the windows. The front door has been replaced but retains its wood federal style surround and has a non-original brick stair and stoop. Wood corner pilasters are located at each end, and the original wide wood fascia runs under the eaves. A brick chimney is located in the rear slope of the asphalt shingle roof.

A newer detached three car garage is located slightly southwest of the corner of the house, it has three single paneled garage doors and a side-gable roof.

COUNT OF HISTORIC AND NON-HISTORIC RESOURCES

The Charles Parker House Historic District contains no historic resources and two non-historic resources.

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Charles Parker House Historic District, 1207 North Livernois Road, consists of parcel number 15-04-427-008 and is further described as follows:

T3N, R11E, SEC 4 ROCHESTER HILLS LOT 11

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The district consists of the parcel that has contained the Charles Parker House since it was moved to this location in 1976. It is surrounded by newer houses constructed along Livernois Road.

HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT

This two-story side-gabled frame house was built in 1826 by farmer Charles Parker. Reportedly the first frame house constructed in Oakland County, the house was constructed at the corner of Crooks and Big Beaver roads in Troy. It remained in its original location until 1976 when it was moved to the present site in Rochester Hills and remodeled. In 1987 a two-story rear addition was added to the house.

CRITERIA FOR DISTRICT ELIMINATION

Pursuant to Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances, Chapter 118, as amended in 1999, and PA 169 of 1970 as amended, if considering elimination of a historic district, the study committee shall follow the procedures set forth in this division for issuing a preliminary report, holding a public hearing and issuing a final report, but with the intent of showing one or more of the following:

- 1) Lost physical characteristics. The historic district has lost those physical characteristics that enabled establishment of the district;
- 2) Insignificance. The historic district was not significant in a way previously defined; or
- 3) Defective procedure. The historic district was established pursuant to defective procedures. (Section 118-34, Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances)

Lost Physical Characteristics

The house was moved to its present location in 1976, and remodeled at that time. In 1987 a two-story rear ell was added to the building. A detached three car garage has been constructed just to the southwest of the house. The windows have been replaced, and the exterior of the house has been covered in vinyl siding.

The only nineteenth century details remaining are the classical doorway surround, corner pilasters, and wood fascia.

According to National Register Bulletin 15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*: “A property that is significant for its historic association has integrity if it retains the essential physical features that made up its character or appearance during the period of its association with the important event, historical pattern, or person(s). A property important for illustrating a particular architectural style or construction technique must retain most of the physical features that constitute that style or technique. A property that has lost some historic materials or details can be eligible *if* it retains the majority of the features that illustrate its style in terms of the massing, spatial relationships, proportion, pattern of windows and doors, texture of materials, and ornamentation. The property is not eligible, however, if it retains some basic features conveying massing but has lost the majority of the features that once characterized its style.”¹ With vinyl siding and replacement windows, the Charles Parker House no longer retains the majority of its historic features.

Insignificance

In 1978, when the Avon Township Historic District Study Committee conducted their investigation of potential historic districts in the township they had relatively little guidance. Michigan’s Local Historic Districts Act, PA 169 of 1970, instructed study committees to conduct studies and research and make a written report on the cultural, social, economic, political, architectural, or historical significance of the property under consideration. The law did not specify how to go about this study, what the report should include, or what criteria should be used to evaluate historical significance. Furthermore, in the 1970s methods to identify and evaluate historic properties were less sophisticated than they are today.

A primary purpose of the 2002 Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey was to reevaluate all of the properties that were designated in 1978. This was because the practice of historic preservation has progressed greatly since then and techniques for identifying and evaluating historic properties have advanced notably. Michigan’s Local Historic Districts Act has been amended extensively. The 1992 amendments specify requirements for study committee reports in some detail and require study committees to be guided by the evaluation criteria for the National Register of Historic Places.

¹ National Park Service, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Register Bulletin 15 (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, n.d.), p. 46.

Rochester Hills' historic preservation ordinance has also undergone substantive amendment, in large part to follow state law. The original ordinance limited the local historic district to one hundred feet from the primary structure. This was amended in 1995 to include the entire parcel in the local historic district. Thus, it became necessary to evaluate all of the resources on the property. Finally, the former Avon Township had grown and changed tremendously since 1978. It was necessary to evaluate the historic districts within the context of the Rochester Hills of 2002.

As stated above, the amended Local Historic Districts Act requires that study committees be guided by the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. National Register Criteria A and C and Criteria Consideration B are relevant to the designation of the Charles Parker House. Evaluation of the property according to these criteria leads to the conclusion that the property is not historically 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:

A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

Agriculture is the central theme in the city's history and is its most significant pattern of events. Note that the events referred to in National Register Criterion A are not necessarily single events. As explained in *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*: "Criterion A recognizes properties associated with single events, such as the founding of a town, or with a pattern of events, repeated activities, or historic trends, such as the gradual rise of a port city's prominence in trade and commerce."²

The original study committee determined that the property contributed to the pattern of settlement and agriculture as the house was constructed in 1826, during the first years of settlement of Oakland County, and it was constructed by a farmer, Charles Parker. However, the house was built in Troy, and does not relate to the agricultural development or settlement history of Rochester Hills.

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.

Residential architecture dominates Rochester Hills, and most of the houses that have been designated are single family houses, usually former farmhouses, some with associated

² National Park Service, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Register Bulletin 15 (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, n.d.), 12.

outbuildings. The first frame houses were built in the city in the 1820s. Houses built in this era drew from construction techniques in New England and were typically two-stories with a central chimney, of frame construction, a pitched roof, and a massed plan. The houses usually had simple details, including possible federal-style door surrounds and wide corner board trim. The windows were wood, double-hung windows with multiple panes of glass. Doors were solid wood paneled doors, typically without glass.

The Charles Parker House was constructed in 1826. It is reportedly the first frame house constructed in Oakland County, according to the 1993 survey. It retains some classical details, but the original wood siding has been covered in vinyl, the front door and windows have been replaced, and the massing of the house has been compromised by the addition of the rear ell (Figure 1). Without the key character-defining features of wood siding and original wood windows with divided lights, the house cannot be considered significant for its architecture.



Figure 1 Charles Parker House, note rear addition. Photograph by Burke Jenkins, 2002, *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey*.

National Register Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)

B. A building or structure removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event.

Properties that have been moved from their original locations are not eligible for listing in the National Register, except in the circumstances described in Consideration B above. These circumstances do not apply to the Charles Parker House.

The Charles Parker House has been moved from its original location. Its architectural integrity has been lost due to alterations such as the window replacement, vinyl siding installation, and rear addition. It cannot be considered significant for its architecture. Since the house was moved from another municipality the structure has no historical connections with Rochester Hills, and it is not the surviving structure associated with a person or event significant to the history of Rochester Hills.

In summary the Charles Parker House is not significant in the way the original study committee thought. It is not significant with events or persons significant in the history of Rochester Hills. It no longer retains enough of its historic character to be considered significant for its architecture.

Defective Procedure

The procedures followed in establishing the Charles Parker House Historic District were not defective. When the property was designated in 1978, the Avon Township Board and Avon Township Study Committee correctly followed the procedures prescribed by state law at that time. The study committee adopted evaluation criteria, conducted an inventory, prepared inventory sheets on each property, prepared a preliminary and a final report, drafted an ordinance, and undertook the required transmittals and public hearing. Of the several hundred properties that the study committee inventoried, sixty-five were recommended for local historic district designation. The Avon Township Board designated thirty-one of these as non-contiguous historic districts each containing one building, and the remainder as part of the Stoney Creek and Winkler Mill Pond Historic Districts.

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.³

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study committee finds that the Charles Parker House at 1207 North Livernois should no longer be designated as a local historic district. The original study committee did not have the benefit of the National Register criteria or exceptions to evaluate a moved property and its significance to the history of Rochester Hills. The house does not possess the historic integrity needed for it to be considered significant for

³ Rochester Hills Historic Districts Study Committee. "Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report, Demay-Potere Farm Historic District, Rochester Hills, Michigan" no date, p. 13.

its architecture. Neither is it associated with a person or event significant to the history of Rochester Hills.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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

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

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

PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 2 - 1207 N. Livernois, view from the east, May, 2007



Figure 3 - 1207 Livernois, front facade, May, 2007