

PRELIMINARY HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT  
920 SOUTH BOULEVARD  
ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN

CHARGE OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS STUDY COMMITTEE

The Historic Districts Study Committee was appointed by 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 a preliminary historic district study committee report for a proposed historic district. 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 fifteen years, many of those years as chairperson.

*Peggy Schodowski* has 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.

*Michael Sinclair* is a member of the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission, and resides in a historic home. He undertook the restoration of his ca. 1830 home that had been vacant and neglected for over twenty years, and has extensively researched his property and the beginning settlements of the community.

*Richard Stamps* is 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.

*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, assisted the study committee with their work.

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## INVENTORY

A photographic inventory of the proposed 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. A review of the site by Committee Member Dziurman in August, 2006 included several photographs, copies of which are attached.

Additional “windshield” survey work was conducted in February, 2007, by members of the study committee with assistance from Kristine M. Kidorf to identify additional Colonial Revival style properties within the City of Rochester Hills. Copies of the inventory forms are located at the Rochester Hills Planning Department. Survey forms with updated photographs of properties not in designated historic districts have been included.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

920 South Boulevard is located in the southwest corner Section 34 and consists of a two-story house and a small storage shed on lot that is approximately two and a half acres in size. The property is primarily flat and the house is setback slightly from South Boulevard. There are large deciduous and evergreen trees between the house and the road, and the rear of the lot has a large number of trees. A small storage shed is on the east side of the property and a gravel driveway enters the site between the house and the shed.

The Colonial Revival style, two-story, side gable house with Craftsman details, faces South Boulevard. It has a rectangular footprint, with a one-story wing on the west gable end, and a one-story addition to the east gable end. The house and west wing sit on a raised foundation of decorative concrete block that resembles rusticated stone. The house walls are sided with what appears to be asbestos-cement shingle siding. The symmetrical five bay wide front façade has a center entrance with a single door flanked on each side with a narrow double hung window. The one bay wide gable-roof porch is supported by pillars, has a dentil cornice and cornice returns. The pediment contains raised decorative woodwork in a splay pattern.

All of the symmetrically arranged windows are four-over-one double hung with four vertical panes in the upper sash. Each bay has one window at the first and second floor levels. The tops of the second floor windows touch the eave and the center window above the entrance is shorter than the remaining second floor windows. The asphalt shingle covered gable roof has brick chimneys near both ends. The flat roofed one-story wing on the west end has remnants of a balustrade on the house wall at the second floor. There is a group of three double hung windows in the center of the wing’s front wall.

The west elevation of the wing has a three-sided bay containing windows on all sides, and the main house has a door and one window at the second floor, and two narrow double hung windows in the attic in line with the second floor door and window.

The back of the house has a central door covered with a shed roof porch next to an enclosed gable-roof entry to the cellar door. Double hung windows are located on both sides, and the second floor contains three matching windows spaced equally in the center of the second floor. The west ell has a rectangular shaped window in the center.

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The east end of the house has a one-story, gable roof, sunroom that was previously a porch. It has a brick walls with one-over-one double hung windows surrounding all three sides and a door in the center of the gable end that accesses a set of steps. The second floor of the main house has two windows and there is a single window centered in the attic.

The one-story, gable roof shed is located to the northeast of the house and is rectangular in form with a one-story shed roof addition to the north. The shed has vertical wood siding and an asphalt covered roof. The west gable end has two swing-out doors. The addition on the north side has corrugated metal walls and roof. There is a small window opening on the north side. The shed is in fair to poor condition.

#### RESOURCE LIST:

House – Contributing – A two-story, five bay wide, side gabled house with cementitious siding, and one-story wings at both ends. Other than the siding, a missing balustrade on the roof of the wing, and the smaller front porch, the house does not appear to have changed from its original construction. Unknown construction date, but estimated around 1924.

Shed – Non-contributing - The site currently contains a one-story gable roof storage building. The structure has swing doors and vertical wood siding. The date of construction is unknown but it appears to be post WW II.

#### COUNT OF HISTORIC AND NON-HISTORIC RESOURCES:

The proposed 920 South Boulevard Historic District contains one historic (contributing) and one non-historic (non-contributing) resource.

#### BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The proposed 920 South Boulevard Historic District consists of the following parcel:

15-34-352-012

Further described as: Town 3 North, Range 11 East, Section 34, Part of the southwest one-quarter of the southwest one-quarter; Beginning at a point on the South section line East 331.28 feet; from the southwest section corner; thence North 88-35-00 East 325 feet; on section line; thence North 04-48-00 West 337.99 feet; thence South 88-35-00 West 325 feet; thence South 04-48-00 East 337.99 feet; to the Point of Beginning; 2.52 acres

#### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The proposed 920 South Boulevard Historic District, located in Section 34, consists of one parcel containing the land historically associated with the property. The area to the north is residentially developed; the property to the south (across South Boulevard) is in the City of Troy and contains a senior health care facility; the property immediately adjacent to the east is residential, and the parcel immediately adjacent to the west is a vacant parcel zoned residential. The age of the surrounding properties is significantly newer than the house at 920 South Boulevard, primarily being constructed in the 1970s and later.

## HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT

The two and a half acres currently comprising 920 South Boulevard were part of a larger property originally deeded from the United States Government to M. Olmstead in 1819. The parcel was split between Avon and Troy Townships. The 1872 atlas shows a house at approximately the same location as the existing house as part of a fifty seven acre parcel belonging to J.C. Runyan who had acquired the property in 1866 and owned it until 1897. Runyan also owned 52 acres directly across the road in Troy Township. The entire parcel in both townships was purchased in 1923 Walter W. Smith.

In 1924 Smith sold the three and a half acres containing 920 South Boulevard to Louis and Francis Wardowski. The lot size was 500 feet by 337.99 feet. Louis Wardowski was involved with real estate and owned orange and grapefruit groves in Texas.<sup>1</sup>

In 1924 Walter W. Smith, Arthur Bassett, and Levi L. Barbour, mortgagee, platted the Bassett & Smith Flowing Spring Acres No. 1 subdivision on the property surrounding, but not including 920 South Boulevard and across the road in Troy Township. It was accepted by the Avon Township Board in March of 1924, and recorded in the Oakland County Register of Deed's Office in May, 1925. It does not appear that the subdivision was ever developed. Bassett & Smith was a large real estate firm out of Detroit. Walter Smith founded the firm of Bassett & Smith with Arthur Bassett in 1910. The firm was a pioneer in subdividing land between Detroit and Royal Oak, and subdivided a large amount of land near Pontiac and Dearborn. In 1919 Walter Smith was elected president of the Detroit Real Estate Board.<sup>2</sup>

The house on the property is listed in the city assessor's records as being built in 1910. A report prepared for a potential owner by Gerald Yurk and Associates states that the house on the property burned down in 1920, and was replaced with the current structure. No documentation was provided to verify this information. Descendents from the Wardowski family state that there was a fire at the house in which a baby perished.

A March 24, 1929 article in *The Detroit News* discusses the family and the antiques collected by Wardowski. A picture with the article shows the house at 920 South Boulevard with a larger front porch, narrower siding, and the enclosed room on the east end. Louis and Francis Wardowski lived at the house with their nine children until 1935 when the property was sold.

From 1935 the property was owned by three different owners until 1953 when it was sold to the current owners. A sale of the property in 1946 reduced the parcel by about an acre to two and half acres.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISTRICT

The 920 South Boulevard Historic District is significant under National Register Criterion C, for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of an architectural style. The area of significance is architecture. The district's period of significance is the 1920s, when the house was built.

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<sup>1</sup> William Ottaway, "\$100,000 Art in Farmhouse." *The Detroit News*, March 24, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Clarence Burton, *History of the City of Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan*, vol. 3, *Walter M. Smith* (Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1930), 905.

### **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.**

The Colonial Revival style has been diverse and enduring in twentieth century America and Avon Township followed suit. Surveyed houses, dating from the late 1910s to the late 1940s, include Cape Cod cottages, gambrel roof Dutch Colonials, and two story side gabled houses derived from the New England Large. At the high end of the spectrum is Lawnridge Hall, 1385 S. Adams Road, designed for prominent lumberman and insurance broker Donald C. Wilson by architect J. Ivan Dyce. Completed ca. 1930, this large, picturesque house has a central projecting pedimented pavilion and details such as dormer and multi-pane windows, large brick chimneys, and a recessed side entry with arches.

The Colonial Revival style encompasses remodeling as well as new construction. A good example of this is the mill house historically associated with Winkler Mill, built ca. 1835–40 as a simple New England 1 ½ cottage with frieze windows. Colonial Revival style living room and dining room additions made during the 1920s and 1930s include a large living room fireplace, stairway with curved railing and turned newel post, and arched glass fronted china cabinets. The city's premier example of a Colonial Revival style remodeling is undoubtedly the Van Hoosen Farm House, remodeled by Sarah Van Hoosen Jones with her mother Alice and aunt Bertha Van Hoosen in 1926 and 1927. The Nathaniel Millerd House, the house that Sarah built for farm manager Morris Place in 1936, and their farm store, At the Sign of the Black and White Cow, are all examples of existing Colonial Revival style houses in the city.<sup>3</sup>

The property at 920 South Boulevard appears to be one of the most intact vernacular Colonial Revival style houses in the City of Rochester Hills. The wood siding has been covered with a cementitious shingle siding, and the front porch has been reduced in size, but the original form, trim and windows remain on the house. The house is also somewhat unusual architecturally because of the Craftsman style windows.

The house at 1171 East Auburn Road, built ca. 1927, is similar in its massing and foundation material. It is a two-story, side-gabled frame house with a flat-roof, one story wing on the west gable end. The windows are six over one, but have identical trim. The columns and detailing on the front porch are different, and the door sidelights are not made of double hung windows.

In addition to the 2002 survey effort, a windshield survey was conducted by members of the study committee to identify other Colonial Revival style houses in the City of Rochester Hills. These two surveys identified a total of twenty five Colonial Revival style houses, ten of which were built since 1965, and seven of which were built from about 1920 through 1950. The remaining eight houses have estimated construction dates between 1840 and 1920, the earlier houses were remodeled in the Colonial Revival style.

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Busch, *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey*, 2002, pgs. 30-31.

Out of the 22,415 residential structures currently existing in the City of Rochester Hills, there are only fifteen Colonial Revival style houses that predate 1965. Although Colonial Revival was a prevalent architectural style throughout the country in the 1920s and 1930s, Rochester Hills has relatively few examples, and only three other houses have a similar form. The other examples are one story, have different detailing, or have different massing.

It is also significant that this house is one of the three houses originally built on South Boulevard, the main road between the City of Pontiac to the west and the City of Utica to the east. All three of those houses still exist today.

The house appears to meet criterion C as a good example of a vernacular Colonial Revival style house with Craftsman details. The house retains its architectural integrity and is one of only a few examples in City of Rochester Hills that represents a popular historic architectural style in the United States.

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**Figure 1 - View of front from southeast. J. Dzuirman, 2006.**



**Figure 2 - View from southwest. K. Kidorf, February, 2007.**

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**Figure 3 - View of rear from northwest. J. Dzuirman, 2006.**



**Figure 4 - View of shed from west, J. Dzuirman, 2006**

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Figure 5 - View of shed from north, J. Dzuirman, 2006.



Figure 6 - Detail of front porch, K. Kidorf, February, 2007.

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**Figure 7 - View of entire property from southeast, K. Kidorf, February, 2007.**



**Figure 8 - North side of South Blvd. to east of 920, K. Kidorf, February, 2007.**

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