

PRELIMINARY HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT
WILLIAM S. ADAMS HOUSE
ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN
2009

INTRODUCTION

In 2002 the city of Rochester Hills engaged Jane C. Busch, LLC, in collaboration with Hamilton Anderson Associates, Inc., to undertake a survey of local historic districts. The survey was designed to augment and update information about the city's designated and potential local historic districts. The survey identified the William S. Adams House at 2040 S. Livernois Road as a potential local historic district. Pursuant to Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act (PA 169 of 1970, as amended) and Chapter 118 of the Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances, the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Study Committee has prepared this report on the William S. Adams House.

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 proposed 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 more than twenty years, many of those years as chairperson.

David Kibby

K'Yhel King is an avocational preservationist and environmentalist who has worked in the entertainment industry for twenty years. He is managing partner of Paradise Valley Media Group, which is investigating the acquisition and rehabilitation of historic properties in Michigan.

Peggy Schodowski has a strong background in research and analysis and is currently employed part-time as Marketing Director/Research Analyst for a locally-owned company. She provided research assistance to a local private school regarding the history of its 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 a bachelor's degree in history from Oakland University and a master's degree in 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.

Jane C. Busch, historic preservation consultant, assisted the study committee in its work.

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. Additional photographs were taken in November 2008 as part of the preparation of this report.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

The proposed William S. Adams House historic district is a 1.56 acre lot at 2040 S. Livernois Road, a short distance south of W. Hamlin Road. The 1 ½ story, side-gabled frame house is a Greek Revival style New England one-and-a-half cottage. The house has a granite fieldstone foundation, clapboard siding, and asphalt shingle roof. Early twentieth-century wall dormers in front are compatible with the design of the original house. On the south end is an early one-story wing addition. On the north end, an attached breezeway and garage is set back and clearly distinguished from the original house. The house needs painting, but there are no obvious structural problems visible from the sidewalk.

The main portion of the house was built ca. 1835–50. The front is five bays with two windows on each side of a central doorway. Brick and concrete front steps have wrought iron railings on the sides. The doorway has reeded pilasters on the sides and a pulvinated frieze and dentillated cornice above. According to owner Michael Sinclair, paint layering indicates that this door surround was added later. The 1938 rural property inventory shows a partial-width front porch, which is no longer extant. The windows flanking the doorway have 6/6 sash, used on most of the windows. At the roofline there is a wide band of trim, or frieze, and a three-part cornice. The three wall dormers, which break the cornice line, have exposed rafter tails; the design is early twentieth century. The house

has beaded corner boards. In the gable ends of the house are frieze and cornice with cornice returns. On the rear, a shed roof porch addition was later enclosed. There are three dormer windows on the rear.¹

The side-gabled one-story wing on the south end appears to be an early addition. It is set back from the front of the main house and has an exterior brick chimney on the end. Two narrow doorways into the front of the wing now have multi-paned window sash in them; the steps are missing. On the rear of the wing, an extension about two-feet deep has exposed rafter tails, suggesting an early twentieth-century date. We did not have access to the interior of the house. According to the tax record, there are four rooms on the first floor and three rooms on the second floor, with three bedrooms and two bathrooms. The main house has a cellar. The side-gabled breezeway attached to the north rear corner of the house has large multi-pane windows covering most of the wall surface and a walk-in door. It connects to a side-gabled, three-car frame garage with clapboard siding. The garage doors are vertical planks and there is a cupola on top. The breezeway and garage appear to date from the mid-twentieth century.

The house retains its character as a modest Greek Revival house, distinguished by the New England one-and-a-half form, frieze, cornice and cornice returns, and beaded corner boards. Although the original front door surround may have been simpler, the present door surround is compatible and unobtrusive. The dormer windows and south wing have gained significance in their own right, showing how the small house was enlarged and made more livable in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These additions do not obscure the original Greek Revival character of the house. The breezeway and garage are barely attached to the original house and are readily evident as later additions. They are compatible in materials and design.

The lot is relatively level. Much of it is grass, with numerous trees in the rear yard and brushy areas on the sides and in the rear. There are some foundation plantings in front of the house. There is an asphalt sidewalk in front and an asphalt driveway leading to the garage. An area southwest of the house is enclosed with woven wire fence and contains remnants of what may have been a garden. A barn foundation toward the rear of the lot has standing basement walls.² The 1.56 acre lot remains from what was an 80 acre farm when the house was built. The parcels immediately north and across Livernois Road from the house are vacant, covered with grass, trees, and brush. There is a large new house on the parcel to the south, but it is set well back from the road and separated from the district by a wide brushy area. The rural appearance of the district and adjacent parcels contributes to the district's integrity.

COUNT OF HISTORIC AND NON-HISTORIC RESOURCES

The William S. Adams House historic district contains one historic (contributing) resource.

¹ We did not have access to the property in 2008. Descriptions of features in the rear are from the 2002 survey.

² The barn was demolished ca. 1973 according to Avon Township building permits.

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The William S. Adams House historic district consists of parcel 70-15-28-226-026 at 2040 S. Livernois Road. The parcel is described as follows:

T3N, R11E, SEC 28 PART OF NE 1/4 BEG AT PT DIST S 237.50 FT FROM NE SEC COR, TH S 205 FT, TH W 330 FT, TH N 205.50 FT, TH E 330 FT TO BEG 1.56 A6-13-96 FR 004.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the historic district are those of the parcel that contains the William S. Adams House. There are no other historic properties in the vicinity of this parcel. Vacant lots adjoin the district on the west and north and on the east across Livernois Road. Farther north, on the northwest corner of Livernois and Hamlin Roads, is an industrial park built in the 1980s. Immediately south of the district, the house at 2084 S. Livernois was built ca. 2005. South of this on both sides of Livernois is residential development dating primarily from the 1950s to 1990s.

HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT

In 1824 James Brown of Upper Canada purchased from the U.S. government the east half of the northeast quarter of section 28 in Township 3 North of Range 11 East. The eighty-acre parcel was located in what was then Oakland Township.³ In 1825 James Brown sold this parcel to Benjamin Horton, also of Upper Canada.⁴ In 1827 William S. Adams purchased the parcel from Horton. By then both Adams and Horton were residing in Oakland Township.⁵ William S. Adams was born in Vermont in 1801. His wife, Harriet C.—also known as Caroline—was born in New York in 1807. Before Harriet died in 1856, they had ten children: Alfred, Sarah P., Charles S., William, John Q., Caroline H., Oscar H., Ellen, Franklin S. (also known as Solon), and Charles H.⁶ It is likely that William Adams first built a log house on his land as was customary and expedient. For example, in 1823 John Frank built a log house on his land nearby in section 26 and did not build a frame house until about 1840. The Greek Revival style used in the Adams house came to Michigan in the 1830s and was built in rural areas into the 1860s. Most of the Greek Revival style one-and-a-half cottages in southern Michigan were built between 1835 and 1860. It seems likely that Adams constructed the house by 1850, when the household consisted of William, Caroline, and nine children.⁷

³ Avon Township would be separated from Oakland Township in 1835.

⁴ Oakland County Register of Deeds, Liber 1 p. 330.

⁵ Oakland County Register of Deeds, Liber 3 p. 149–50.

⁶ Information from U.S. population census 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880 and family headstone in Mt. Avon cemetery.

⁷ The 2002 survey sheet for the house suggested that a large increase in property value between 1850 and 1855 may have indicated that the house was constructed during that interval. Further research, however, showed that this was a general tax increase reflected in all area property values.

In 1835, at the first township meeting after Avon was separated from Oakland Township, William Adams was elected as one of twenty-one highway overseers. He was a charter member of the Stoney Creek Lodge of Freemasons. Some of the children moved away after 1850, but the household remained a large one. In 1860 it consisted of William with three daughters and three sons. By 1870 grown sons Charles S. and John Q. had returned home, joining their father and siblings Franklin, Caroline, and Ellen. The farm was typical of farms in the area. Fifty-five of the eighty acres were improved. They raised wheat, corn, oats, barley, and potatoes and kept three milk cows and a pig. After William S. Adams died in 1878, John became head of the household, which also included Franklin, Caroline, and Ellen. John and Franklin continued running the farm much as before. They remained on the farm until about 1897, when John, Caroline, and Ellen moved to Amy (now Auburn Hills), and Franklin moved to Rochester.⁸

In 1908, John, Caroline, and Ellen Adams deeded the eighty-acre property to William and Mary Arft.⁹ The Arfts were already living on the property as tenants.¹⁰ In June 1925 William and Mary Arft sold the north half of the east half of the northeast quarter of section 28—forty-four acres that included the house—to Harold Wheaton and Arthur Worrall. In November 1925 Wheaton and Worrall sold the same parcel to LaRay W. and Gertrude E. Davis.¹¹ Their son, Ray, was born in the house. He recalls that they lived there for about five years before moving to a house in Highland, near Milford. According to Ray, his father was in real estate and he divided the property into five-acre parcels for sale.¹² The 1938 rural property inventory shows L.W. Davis, with a Milford mailing address, as owner of what by then was a 25.79 acre parcel bounded by Hamlin Road on the north and Livernois Road on the east. The property included the house, a barn, and two henhouses. According to the inventory record, the buildings were constructed in 1926, which is feasible for the barn and henhouses. South of the farmstead, a narrow, rectangular inholding of 3.21 acres was owned by William F. Mattice and wife. There was no dwelling on the Mattice parcel, but it was planted in crops. According to research conducted by Michael Sinclair, the Mattice family lived in the former Adams house.¹³

By 1947 the LaRay Davis property had been divided into 3 to 5 acre parcels. M. J. Davis owned the 3.9 acre parcel at the corner of Hamlin and Livernois that included the house and farm buildings. Immediately south of this was the 3.21 acre William F. Mattice parcel, and south of the Mattice parcel was another 3.9 acre parcel owned by M. Davis. Martin J. Davis and his wife Jean still owned the Adams house property in the 1970s.

⁸ In addition to the population and agriculture census, information comes from a July 1909 obituary for John Q. Adams, source unknown, in documentation compiled by Michael Sinclair; copy at the Rochester Hills Planning Department.

⁹ Oakland County Register of Deeds, Liber 223 p. 218.

¹⁰ The deed refers to the Arfts as tenants. In addition, the register of electors shows William Arft residing on the property in 1902. A copy of the register of electors is in documentation compiled by Michael Sinclair; copy at the Rochester Hills Planning Department.

¹¹ Oakland County Register of Deeds, Liber 452 p. 402 and Liber 478 p. 234.

¹² Ray Davis, telephone conversation with Jane Busch, November 17, 2008.

¹³ Michael Sinclair, conversation with Jane Busch, April 9, 2002. According to Ray Davis, his family was not related to the Mattice family.

According to Ray Davis, Martin and Jean Davis were not related to his family.¹⁴ In 1986 Douglas and Shirley Metzler purchased the parcel containing the Adams house from the estate of Jean Davis.¹⁵ In 1997 Michael Sinclair purchased the property from the Metzlers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISTRICT

Michigan's *Local Historic Districts Act*, PA 169 of 1970, as amended, requires local historic district study committees to be guided by the evaluation criteria for the National Register of Historic Places in evaluating the significance of historic resources. The act also requires study committees to be guided by any criteria established or approved by the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries (Section 3(1)(c)). Shortly after the 1992 amendments to the *Local Historic Districts Act*, the Michigan Historic Preservation Network issued a guide to the amendments that explained how the National Register criteria should be used: "While communities must be 'guided' by the National Register criteria, they are not bound by them; communities are free to establish criteria which are guided by the national criteria but relate to local conditions, history, and character."¹⁶ In 2002, the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries issued criteria that elaborate on historic district boundary determinations and single resource districts. These criteria are designed to ensure that a single resource district is individually significant and is not merely contributing to a larger historic district. Chapter 118, "Historic Districts," of the Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances reiterates the requirement for study committees to be guided by the National Register criteria and any criteria established or approved by the Department of History, Arts and Libraries (Section 118-130(3)).

In accordance with these legal documents and guidelines, the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Study Committee has determined that the William S. Adams House Historic District is significant under National Register Criterion C, for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type and style of architecture. The area of significance is architecture. The period of significance is ca. 1835–50, when the house was built. As part of Section 106 review of the proposed widening and reconstruction of Hamlin Road, the State Historic Preservation Office determined that the William S. Adams House appeared to meet the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The National Register Criteria

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and

¹⁴ According to Michael Sinclair, Jean Davis was the aunt of a Mattice. Michael Sinclair, conversation with Jane Busch, April 9, 2002.

¹⁵ Oakland County Register of Deeds, Liber 09556 p. 97. This memo of a land contract does not give the acreage.

¹⁶ Michigan Historic Preservation Network, "A Guide to Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act" (Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Lansing, Mi., n.d., photocopy), 3. The Michigan Historic Preservation Network was one of the primary authors of the amendments to the Local Historic Districts Act.

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.

From the 1830s to the 1850s, Greek Revival was the predominant architectural style in the United States. The settlers who came to southern Michigan during these years came primarily from New England and upstate New York. William and Harriet Adams, born in Vermont and New York respectively, were typical. These settlers brought a Greek Revival style that was flourishing in New England and New York. The 2002 survey identified eleven Greek Revival style houses in Rochester Hills.¹⁷ Seven of these houses are of the upright-and-wing type. The Levi Cole House on Winkler Mill Road is a basilica type, and the brick Albert Terry House has an unusual design with two uprights flanking a recessed porch. Eight of these nine houses are locally designated, either individually or as part of the Stoney Creek or Winkler Mill Pond historic districts.¹⁸

The Adams house is one of two Greek Revival style New England one-and-a-half cottages in Rochester Hills. The other example is at 1740 Washington Road and contributes to the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District. Both houses have five bays with a central doorway, a wide frieze band, and cornice with cornice returns. The house at 1740 Washington Road has frieze windows, corner pilasters (where the Adams house has beaded corner boards), and appears to have its original classical door surround. A wing was added to the house relatively recently, but it is set back and easily distinguished from the original house. Two other New England one-and-a-half cottages in Rochester Hills are contemporary with these two houses. The house at 6425 Winkler Mill Road retains its frieze windows, but its Greek Revival characteristics have largely been obscured by Colonial Revival additions built in the 1920s and 1930s. It contributes to the Winkler Mill Pond Historic District. The house at 1005 Runyon Road is non-contributing to the Stoney Creek Historic District because of extensive alterations. According to Marshall McLennan, who conducted an extensive survey of buildings in rural Washtenaw County, by 1860 the Greek Revival one-and-a-half cottage may have been the most common farmhouse type in southern Michigan. Because of their small size, these cottages were generally enlarged at a later date. Often a wing was added, as on the Adams house. Frequently, the cottage became part of a larger house, for example, serving as the wing of an upright-and-wing house.

The William S. Adams House is significant as one of a small number of Greek Revival houses that survive to represent the settlement and early growth of Avon Township. It is one of only two houses that represent the Greek Revival style New England one-and-a-half cottage. The early wing addition is typical of this house type, and the early

¹⁷ Avon Township incorporated as the city of Rochester Hills in 1984.

¹⁸ The ninth house, at 6542 Orion Road, was identified as a potential local historic district in the 2002 survey. Its Greek Revival characteristics are partially obscured by aluminum siding.

twentieth-century wall dormers have gained significance in their own right. They add historical and architectural interest to the house without obscuring its distinctive Greek Revival characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The Greek Revival houses of Rochester Hills are important tangible reminders of Avon Township's settlement and early growth. The William S. Adams House, on its small patch of open space, is a compelling presence among the mostly late twentieth-century houses in that area. The Rochester Hills Historic Districts Study Committee recommends that the house be designated as a local historic district.

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Photo 1. William S. Adams House, looking northwest



Photo 2. Williams S. Adams House, looking southwest



Photo 3. Looking northwest toward house



Photo 4. Vacant lot north of house, looking northwest



Photo 5. Vacant lots across the street from house, looking northeast.

All photographs taken by Jane Busch, November 2008.