

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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date entered

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Ravenna Commercial Center Multiple Resource Area (Partial Inventory: History/  
Architecture)  
and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number see individual Ohio Historic Inventory forms (attached) not for publication

city, town Ravenna \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state Ohio code 039 county Portage code 133

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Multiple	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
Resource Group <u>N/A</u>		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name see individual Ohio Historic Inventory forms (attached)

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Portage County Administration Building

street & number 449 South Meridian Street

city, town Ravenna \_\_\_\_\_ state Ohio

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Ohio Historic Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date January-March 1984 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records Ohio Historic Preservation Office (and various local sources)

city, town Columbus \_\_\_\_\_ state Ohio 43211

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Etna House, the Phoenix Block and the Riddle Blocks #1, #5, #9 and #11 are landmark buildings of Ravenna's commercial center. Centered about both sides of Main Street between Sycamore and Walnut streets, the business center contains about sixty buildings, 27 of which have been listed on the Ohio Historic Inventory as a result of a comprehensive inventory of historic resources of this area in 1984. Many of the downtown buildings are old structures dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although the majority of these buildings suffer from storefront alterations. New buildings exist in the downtown area as well, some of which are comparable in terms of scale and materials with their neighbors, while others are more disruptive in their impact by virtue of their contemporary design and lack of sensitivity to the pedestrian.

At present enough change has occurred in downtown Ravenna to disqualify the area for National Register historic district status. While the dominant commercial buildings are historic structures, the central building in downtown Ravenna is the county courthouse which is a modern structure dating from 1960. It establishes a competing theme of contemporary design which has been emulated by many downtown structures built or modified after 1960. These six buildings have been selected for nomination to the National Register as the best surviving examples of historic commercial architecture in downtown. These buildings all tend to be larger than their neighbors, more impressive architecturally and survive with a high degree of their exterior architectural features intact. Storefront alteration was a major reason for excluding other downtown buildings from this nomination. However, to some extent, all of these six buildings have storefronts which are modernized, although the Etna House storefronts will be restored in 1985. The difference with these buildings is that the storefront alterations are in most instances not structural and could readily be removed to restore the original appearance. The one exception is the bank storefront on the Riddle Block #1, but here enough of the original ground level character remains (over 50%) to justify its inclusion here; and of course the building is presently listed on the National Register. Several downtown buildings have been truncated by the removal of their top stories. Others have had their upper floor fenestration pattern changed, such as the Riddle Block #2, where projecting bays have been removed and replaced with flush windows. It is possible that in the future some of the downtown buildings excluded from this nomination because of a high degree of alteration might be added to this multiple resource nomination upon restoration of their storefronts and/or upper floor facades.

The Phoenix Block (view 5, 1846) dominates the north side of East Main Street, stretching from Chestnut to Hickory Way. It is a long rectangular three-story brick building and is Greek Revival in style. The ground floor is devoted to storefronts while the upper two floors have identical rectangular windows grouped in a symmetrical pattern. The building is Greek Revival in style but has numerous alterations, the earliest of which have served to enrich the building. Large brackets were added beneath the massive cornice atop the building sometime after the Civil War. The central section was remodeled about 1880 to its present intricate Italianate appearance by the addition of flamboyant metal ornament. The interior of this central section is used as the Odd Fellows Hall and features elaborately frescoed walls and ceilings. The westernmost portion of the block was enlarged in the late nineteenth century, but the third floor was removed about 1950 and other modernizations have been made such that the historic character is jeopardized and this part is excluded.

The Etna House (view 1, 1865-1868) is a three-story brick building which is "L"-shaped in plan and features sandstone trim and wood ornament. Designed by Simeon Porter, the Etna House is transitional in style from Greek Revival to Italianate, featuring simple rectangular

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Ravenna Commercial Center Historic Resources, Ravenna, Portage County, Ohio

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windows and a massive cornice characteristic of the Greek Revival period but also having such features as round-arch windows on the corner section which relate to the Italianate style. The building is crowned by a simple hip roof, which terminates in a gambrel roof on the western end and is high enough to house a partial fourth floor. Originally a wooden cupola rose from the corner section, but was removed years ago; its reconstruction is proposed within the next year. The building has been renovated into senior citizen housing within the past two years and its ground level storefronts are in the process of restoration based on historic photographs and site evidence.

The Riddle Block #5 (view 2, 1870) was originally an industrial structure built to house the Merts and Riddle Coach and Hearse Works. It has a utilitarian skin of soft red brick enlivened at the top by a corbelled brick cornice with arcading and dentils. Its facade features regularly spaced double-hung windows with stone lintels and sills. It is an example of Italianate architecture. To the rear is a later section dating from the 1880's and featuring elaborate round-arched window openings and an abundance of stone trim. It is well integrated to the main building in terms of scale and floor levels, but is surprisingly well-detailed for an industrial building. The aluminum storefront facing onto East Main Street covers but does not fundamentally alter the original materials underneath. The new building owners have expressed an interest in rehabilitating this block, which would include the restoration of the original storefront.

The Riddle Block #1 (view 4, 1889) was individually listed on the National Register in 1976 and is the most elegant of the Riddle Blocks. It occupies a commanding location at the southeast corner of Main and Chestnut in the center of town. The building has four floors, the fenestration of which reflects Romanesque arcading on the second and fourth floors. It has corner towers with pyramidal roofs, steeply pitched mansard roofs with dormers and a polychromatic brick and stone skin with multiple bays. The ground level storefronts are largely intact along Chestnut but have been altered along Main. The second floor has office space while the upper floors contain apartments. At the south end of the building on the top floor is a large hall, no longer used, which once housed a ballroom.

The Riddle Block #9 (view 3, 1911) dominates the northwest corner of Main and Chestnut. Its upper three floors are faced with large pilasters supporting a massive entablature. The interior has a large light court with open stairways and balconies. The building is used for shops on the ground floor, offices on the second floor and apartments on the upper two floors. This Neoclassical style structure is sheathed in hard yellow brick and its rectangular windows are grouped together vertically by panelled spandrels.

The Riddle Block #11 (view 6, 1914) features a central pediment and a parapet with stone coping atop a simple stone cornice. This square building, which stands at the northwest corner of Main and Prospect, has three bays on each facade which each contain a pair of windows on each of the upper floors. The windows feature flared stone voussoirs with keystones. Although they are modernized, the storefronts of this building are structurally intact. Stylistically the building displays Neo-Georgian influence.

The survey which identified these six buildings as potentially eligible for the National Register was conducted by the City of Ravenna in the spring of 1984 with assistance provided by a grant administered by the Ohio Historic Preservation Office. Active in this survey was the Ravenna Heritage Association, whose members performed hours of valuable research on these downtown buildings. Their names are listed on the inventory forms.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1846-1914      **Builder/Architect** P.L. Frank (some structures)  
 Simeon Porter      Criteria A,B & C

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

This nomination comprises the eligible historic commercial resources of downtown Ravenna. The buildings selected embody the distinctive characteristics of mid-to-late nineteenth century and early twentieth century architecture and are representative examples of the major architectural styles of the period: Greek Revival, Italianate, Richardsonian Romanesque and Neoclassical. They reflect the fashions of American commercial architecture on a scale and of a degree of embellishment appropriate for this northeast Ohio community. Several buildings are significant for their associations with H.W. Riddle, a local entrepreneur who greatly influenced the economic development and the appearance of turn of the century Ravenna. The historic buildings included in this nomination reflect the historical growth of the city of Ravenna. The earliest building, the Phoenix Block, dates from the period when the downtown served an agrarian economy composed of prosperous farmers from the surrounding countryside and a limited number of townspeople who were largely occupied in professions which catered to these farmers. The Italianate buildings erected after the Civil War date from an era of growing industrialization, a time when the town grew rapidly. These include the Etna House and the Riddle Block #5. The later years of the century saw the construction of downtown buildings which specifically catered to the town's new immigrant laborers who worked in the Riddle factory and other local industries. These buildings, which include the Riddle Blocks #1, #9 and #11, had commercial establishments on the ground floor and apartments above. They provided much-needed new housing to immigrant laborers until they were able to become assimilated enough to afford single-family housing like the rest of Ravennans.

Henry Warner Riddle was a woodworker from Allegheny, Pennsylvania who came to Ravenna in 1860 to work in the Clark Carriage Works. He bought the company in partnership with his brother-in-law Charles Mertz a year later. By 1875 the company had become a specialist in the manufacture of hearses and produced some of the finest and most elegantly finished hearses in the United States. Presidents Lincoln, Hayes, Garfield and McKinley were "carried to their resting places" in Riddle hearses. The hearses were produced in Riddle Block #5, an attractive Italianate style commercial building dating from 1870. Riddle channeled some of the income from his nationally successful business into local real estate ventures. Begun as a safer means of investing than placing his money in banks, Riddle's real estate ventures began to blossom into a downtown building boom by the end of the century. By the time of his death in 1920, Riddle was the largest landowner in town and his numerous blocks dominated the downtown. Few Ohio communities have downtowns which were largely shaped by a single individual. While the Riddle Blocks are not unified by a single architectural style, most were designed by P.L. Frank, a prominent local builder.

The Riddle Block #1, located in the center of town and dating from 1889, is the downtown's tallest building and is perhaps its most visible landmark with its tall corner tower. It is the town's largest and most prominent example of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture. The Riddle Block #9 is located diagonally opposite Block #1 at the main intersection in town. It was built shortly after a fire in 1911 destroyed a row of frame buildings on the site. It is an unusually tall and large structure for a town of this size. The Etna House, dating from 1865-1868, is a rare surviving example of Civil War-era hotel architecture. Designed by the well-known Western Reserve architect Simeon Porter, this building features unusually fine and sophisticated detailing. The Phoenix Block is an unusually long row of Greek

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Holm, James B., ed., Portage Heritage. Portage Co. Historical Society, Ravenna, 1957.  
 Reeb, Mary, "The Riddle Commercial Buildings of Ravenna", National Register nom., April 1983.  
 Sanborn Map Company, Maps of Ravenna, Ohio: 1884, 1889, 1893, 1904, 1911, 1922 (KSU Library)  
 Warner, Beers and Co., History of Portage County, Ohio, Warner, Beers and Co., Chicago, 1885.  
 Siddall, K.T., ed., Ravenna Beautiful. Hinman & Stidsen, Ravenna, 1909. 1874, 1896 Atlases.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property each parcel is less than one acre

Quadrangle name Ravenna, Ohio

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References (see attached individual O.H.I. forms)

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

This nomination consists of six separate parcels, each of which consists of less than one acre of land. The attached Ohio Historic Inventory forms contain the lot numbers for each property. In each instance, more than 50% of the lots are occupied by historic buildings.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
<u>N/A</u>			

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Steven McQuillin, Independent Preservation Consultant

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date July 1984

street & number 3515 Archwood Avenue telephone (216) 749-3515

city or town Cleveland state Ohio 44109

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

W. Ray

title SHPO

date Jan 17, 1985

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

See Continuation Sheet for details date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Revival commercial buildings and is perhaps one of the largest surviving commercial buildings of its era in the region. It is historically significant as Ravenna's first large-scale brick commercial building, replacing earlier wood frame buildings on the site. It is likely that this is the downtown's oldest building, as it dates from 1846.

Ravenna was established in 1799 by Benjamin Tappan and was named for Ravenna, Italy, a town that had been visited by Tappan's fiancée. Tappan laid out the new community in a fairly conventional gridiron; land sales were brisk and the community flourished. In 1808 the town became the county seat of newly-established Portage County and soon thereafter became one of the principal communities of the Western Reserve. The town was incorporated in 1853 but its industrial growth did not get firmly established until after the Civil War. By the end of the century Ravenna had four rail lines passing through the city and several flourishing industries. The downtown was by this time a regional trading center. By 1920 all the major downtown landmarks (except those of the Postwar era) had been constructed and there was little construction from this time until the end of the Second World War. In the Postwar era Ravenna's downtown has undergone a steady erosion of its role as the region's leading trading center as newer strip shopping centers became established. However, it remains as the most visible and active commercial center in Portage County.

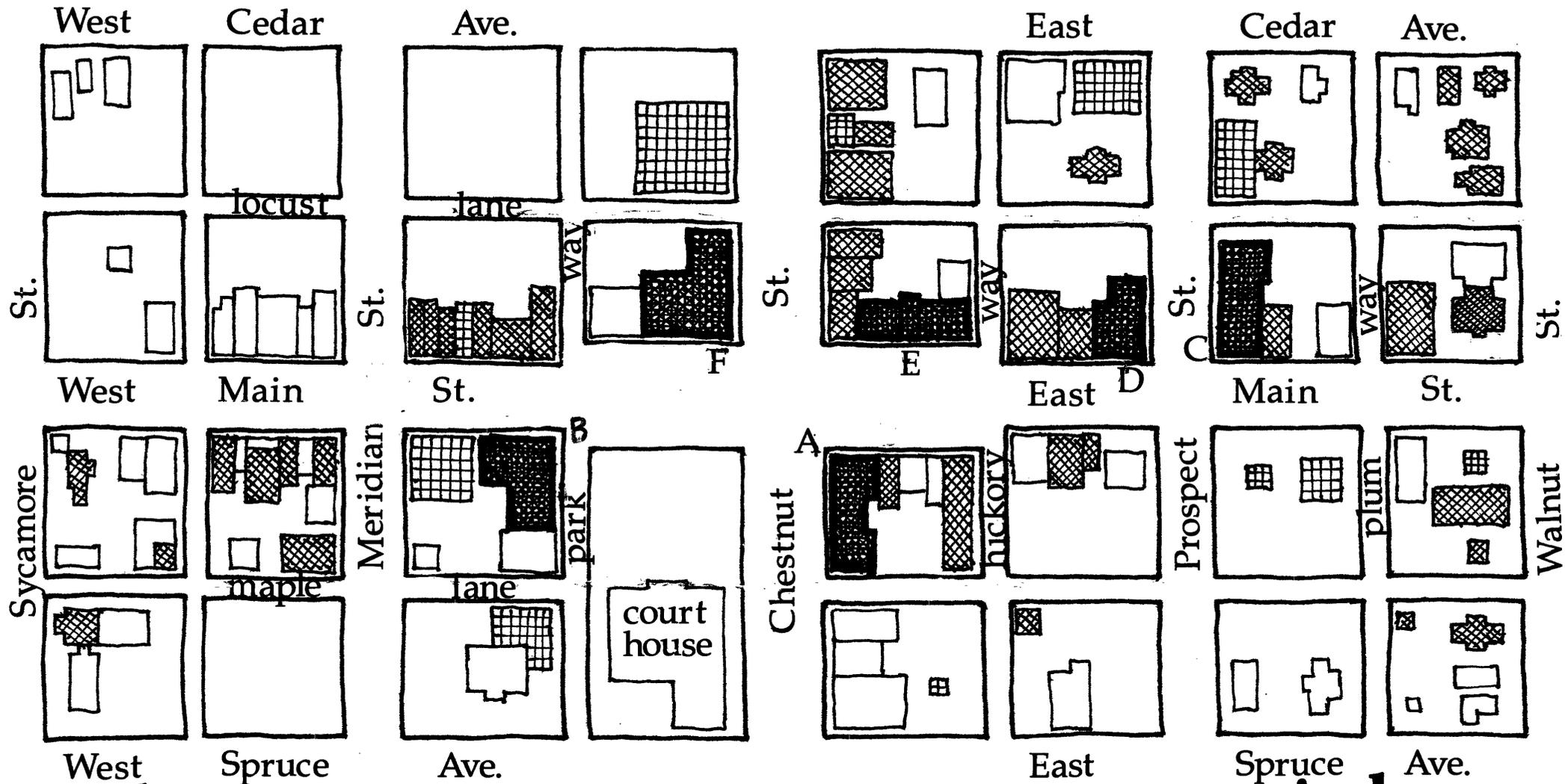
This nomination highlights downtown Ravenna because of this area's central role in the growth and development of the community. It contains the original platted village and therefore some of the oldest buildings in the city. The downtown area is also the sole location of historic commercial resources in Ravenna, although historic residences and churches can be found in other parts of the community. This area also enjoys an identification with Ravenna unique in comparison with other parts of the community because of its status as the commercial center for the community and surrounding countryside, a destination for retail and business activity. The downtown has also been a focus in recent years for revitalization efforts. The city has commissioned this nomination of eligible commercial resources in the hope that it may encourage renovation of significant downtown buildings and help to stimulate a greater awareness of and appreciation for the downtown area on the part of local citizens.

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The <sup>u</sup>survey was initially defined as an assessment of the commercial center, and the survey area is marked on the USGS map, running along both sides of Main Street between Sycamore and Walnut. This is the area identified by the city as the historic commercial center for planning purposes. As is common in 19th century communities, residential uses are found immediately adjacent to this commercial area. Although modern commercial properties have begun to "infringe" upon the historic residential area to the east on Main Street, it can generally be said that this survey focused on the commercial area of the city and that the remainder of the community is residential.

# Ravenna Commercial Center

NATIONAL REGISTER  
HISTORIC RESOURCES NOMINATION



## key

-  - nominated properties
-  - inventoried buildings
-  - background buildings
-  - intrusions



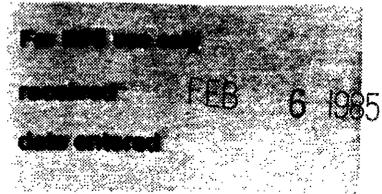
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- A. Riddle Block #1
- B. Etna House
- C. Riddle Block #5
- D. Riddle Block #11
- E. Phoenix Block
- F. Riddle Block #9

Prepared for the City of Ravenna, Ohio  
under a grant from the Ohio Historic  
Preservation Office; drawn by  
Steven McQuillin, Preservation Consult.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
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Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Ravenna Commercial Center Multiple Resource Area

State Portage County, OHIO

*Cover* accept Patrick Andrews 3/18/85

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Etna House

*Submitted for Review*

*9/1* Keeper Patrick Andrews 7/25/85

Attest

2. Phoenix Block

*Entered in the National Register*

Keeper Delores Byers 3/18/85

Attest

3. Riddle Block #5

*Entered in the National Register*

*for* Keeper Delores Byers 7/25/85

Attest

4. Riddle Block #9

*Entered in the National Register*

Keeper Delores Byers 3/18/85

Attest

5. Riddle Block #11

*Entered in the National Register*

Keeper Delores Byers 3/18/85

Attest

6. Riddle Block #1  
(already listed 3/17/76)

Keeper

Attest

7.

Keeper

Attest

8.

Keeper

Attest

9.

Keeper

Attest

10.

Keeper

Attest