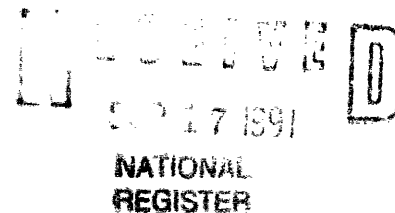


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form



This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic Resources of Plainwell, Michigan

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Exploration & Settlement, 1830-1870

Government in Plainwell, 1833-1940

Architecture in Plainwell, 1850-1940

Commerce in Plainwell, 1850-1940

Industry in Plainwell, 1856-1940

Social Affairs in Plainwell, 1860-1940

C. Geographical Data

Corporate limits of the City of Plainwell, Allegan County, Michigan

See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Ruthann B. McKort

Signature of certifying official
Acting State Historic Preservation Officer

August 12, 1991
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Patrick Andrews
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

11/1/91
Date

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF HISTORIC CONTEXTS

Plainwell is a small (population 3,680 as of 1980) city located in rural southwestern Michigan, thirty-six miles south of Grand Rapids and twelve miles north of Kalamazoo in Allegan County. Early settlers called this area the "Gun Plains" after the Gun River which flows through an area of fertile grassy plains and gently rolling hills. The surrounding countryside is still used extensively for farming and fruit growing. The heart of the 1.81 square mile City of Plainwell is located on an island that was created in 1856 when a mill race was dug across a bend in the Kalamazoo River. The small central business district is situated at the intersection of Main, Bridge and Allegan Streets and extends outward approximately two blocks in all directions. The tree-lined residential sections of the city surround this core commercial area. Allegan Street, which enters the city on a diagonal and is the principal artery connecting it to U. S. 131 to the west, contains a mixture of commercial, industrial and domestic buildings. A second small industrial area is located at the eastern edge of the city at the junction of two railroad lines.

The focus of the nomination and the inventory and research work that preceded it has been on the development of Plainwell from its settlement to the beginning of World War II. The date of 1940 has been selected as the cut-off date for this project. Although other more recent historic and architectural developments have occurred within the last fifty years, they were not assessed as part of this project.

Plainwell's origins can be traced to the construction of two plank roads that connected Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and Allegan through the present downtown area between 1852 and 1854. "The Junction," as it was known at that time, fostered the development of a variety of commercial enterprises catering to the transportation and housing of both passengers and goods. The construction of the mill race in 1856 was a second important factor in the commercial and industrial development of the city; several kinds of mills, including today's Simpson Paper Company original mill, were soon built. The arrival of two intersecting railroad lines in 1868 and 1870 reinforced the city's status as a junction; it also opened up more distant markets for the area's abundant agricultural produce.

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Throughout this era, the expansion of Plainwell's social, humanitarian and civic functions kept pace with the growing population. Plainwell's well-preserved nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial, industrial and domestic architecture reflects the development of the city and the contemporary architectural trends in both the United States and in southwestern Michigan.

Historic Contexts -- 1

Settlement

The earliest settlers to Gun Plain Township, such as William Forbes, Calvin White and Judge John Anderson, were farmers who were attracted to the area in the 1830's because of the availability of land and the rich soil. Forbes, a Scottish immigrant, and White, builder in 1838 of the present Red Brick Tavern (located outside of Plainwell), settled to the north of the present survey boundaries. Judge John Anderson, one of the area's first justices of the peace and local postmaster, built his one story frame Greek Revival home on the east side of the river at what is now 120 N. Sherwood Avenue. His house is the oldest within the survey area. The house also served as the area's post office from 1836 to 1855. In 1837, William Forbes platted a part of his 160 acres north of the present city and called it "Plainfield"; despite his efforts, the hoped-for town never grew.

By 1836, the first road, now Sherwood Avenue, linking the area to Kalamazoo had been constructed along the east side of the river, and in 1839, Bridge Street was built; it connected the east and west sides of the river by a bridge. At this time, only three log cabins were located on the original site of the present city. In 1846, William Woodhams built the first frame house on what is now the island at 323 East Bridge Street. The one story Greek Revival house, moved in 1887 so that Walter H. Woodhams, his son, could build his imposing Queen Anne residence on the East Bridge Street site, still stands at 118 North Woodhams Street.

One of the most important factors influencing the settlement of Plainwell was the building of two plank toll roads through what is now the downtown between 1852 and 1854. One road, the primary highway between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, followed the present Main Street, and a branch road, now Allegan Street, connected

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Allegan to this main one. While the plank roads were being built, Abraham Wellever bought one acre of land at the junction of the roads (the present angle between Allegan and Main Streets) and began building the Plainwell House hotel in 1853. Orson D. Dunham bought the partially completed hotel and the forty acres surrounding it from Wellever in 1854 and opened the hotel that year. Dunham, an early and influential entrepreneur, sold the hotel to Mr. and Mrs. George Mills the following year. The hotel was demolished in 1891.

"The Junction", as it was known at that time, was an important junction for the Patterson, Glynn and Lyons stage coach lines. Horses were changed here, and passengers could disembark, have a meal, and continue to their destinations. By 1860, what is now Plainwell had a population of about 200 people. The plank roads were very busy with a considerable volume of traffic and shipping, especially between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. From 1861 on, the war effort radically increased the traffic on the roads as soldiers and supplies were transported over it. The building of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern railroad in 1868 and the Grand Rapids and Indiana line in 1870 signaled the end of the plank toll roads as major traffic carriers in this area since shipping and traveling by rail were more economical. However, because the two railroad lines intersected on the east side of the village, Plainwell continued to maintain its position as a junction.

A second important factor in the continued growth and development of Plainwell was the formation in 1856 of the Plainwell Water Power Company. Orson D. Dunham, William Woodhams, Giles Sherwood, George C. Mills and John K. Bingham were all officers of the company. The Kalamazoo River flows through Plainwell in a broad arc and falls sixteen feet in one and one half miles. This potential source of water power encouraged the digging of a mill race. The mile-and-one-half long mill race, which followed a natural swale, was hand-dug to a depth of nine to eleven feet between spring and fall, 1856. It made what is now the center part of the city an island and gave the city its nickname "The Island City". The home of one of the water power company's founders-William Woodhams-survives at 118 North Woodhams Street. A saw mill was constructed at the race's outlet in 1857. By 1858, a rake factory was also established. A grist mill was built in 1860 and in 1872 the first paper mill was constructed. The mill race was jointly owned by Plainwell and the various paper companies from 1872 to 1956. A

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source of water for the village, it was enlarged in 1873 for \$20,000. when a pump house was built and new water pipes were installed. Since 1968, the race has not been used by industry, but it remains a scenic asset of the city and is used for recreation.

The village was platted by Ira Chichester, a prominent Allegan businessman, in 1863; the original plat included section 29 west of the river. Largely because of the efforts of state representative E. Figgord, the growing settlement was incorporated as a village on March 26, 1869. The name "Plainfield" was originally chosen but was changed to "Plainwell" because another town near Grand Rapids had the same name. Allegedly, the village was named after the Plainwell House Hotel which had been a landmark at the junction since 1853. A charter election was held on March 29, 1869; 215 men voted and elected Joseph W. Hicks as the first village president.

Historic Contexts -- 2

Government

Plainwell was originally a part of Plainfield Township which was incorporated in 1836; nine years later the name was changed to Gun Plain Township. The first post office in the Plainwell area was established in 1833; Dr. Cyrenius Thompson was the first postmaster and mail arrived three times a week from Grand Rapids. Judge John Anderson operated the post office from his Greek Revival cottage at 120 North Sherwood Avenue between 1837 and 1854. In 1854, Orson D. Dunham took over the duties of postmaster in the Plainwell House at the junction. Between 1899 and 1923, the Plainwell Post Office was located in the Ives block at 128 North Main Street; in 1923, it moved to 145 East Bridge Street where it remained until the present post office at 457 East Bridge Street was opened in 1957.

Schools also preceded the establishment of village government. The present Hicks Park was the site of the first school which was started in 1842. In 1870, the village built a new brick school house for \$ 10,000. The Plainwell High School at Hill and Woodhams Streets was opened in 1873; both it and its successor on Hill Street have been demolished. The only surviving historic school building is the Bridge Street Elementary School at 320 West Bridge Street. The school, which opened in 1910, was converted into apartments in 1984 with little change in the appearance of the exterior.

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Plainwell was incorporated as a village in 1869; the village offices were located on the north side of West Bridge Street until 1903 when Hicks Park was projected. At that time a new building containing the village hall was constructed at 115 West Bridge Street; although still in use by the city, it has been substantially altered in recent years. The only intact municipal building surviving from the village period is the old garage-size brick lock-up, built in 1871, which still stands in the alley behind the present fire house.

Plainwell voted to become a fifth class city on May 7, 1934. It is governed by a five member city council with one of the members serving as mayor. The first mayor of Plainwell was Gerald Brown. From 1959 to 1970, the former Walter Woodhams house at 323 East Bridge Street served as the Plainwell City Hall. In 1970, city hall became established in its present location on North Main shortly after the village of Plainwell was incorporated in 1869, the villagers petitioned the village board for fire protection. A "Holly Water Works System" was installed for a total cost of \$2,835. on the mill race at the present Fannie Pell Park. It was used to provide a public water supply as well as water for fire fighting. The first manned fire department was organized in 1871; in 1877, it purchased a horse drawn hook and ladder truck. In the late nineteenth century, competition between area fire departments was a popular pastime. The Plainwell Fire Department achieved a measure of renown for recording the fastest time over a given distance with a hand-drawn fire cart. In 1903, the fire department moved from the present Hicks Park to North Main Street where the city hall now stands. It moved to its present location at 115 West Bridge Street in 1959. The most devastating fire in the city's history occurred in 1932 when the Eesley and the Johnson and Beattie feed mills on North Main Street burned to the ground.

Street improvements also began under village government. In 1869, the streets were graded and sidewalks were installed; by about 1900, cement sidewalks had been installed in the central business district. WPA workers did additional sidewalk construction in 1934.

Hicks Park came about largely because of the generosity of John F. Eesley. In 1903, Eesley 's flour mill stood on the south side of West Bridge Street at what is now 119 West Bridge Street. Ingraham and Travis owned the property on the north side of West Bridge

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Street across from the Eesley mill. Eesley swapped land with Ingraham and Travis who then built the present building on Eesley's old site at 119, and Eesley donated his new acquisition to the Village of Plainwell for a park. Eesley had the mill cut in half, moved out to 717 East Bridge Street, and attached to an existing elevator to form the present feed mill store. The library also moved to the south side of West Bridge Street in order to clear the entire ground in the triangle formed by Allegan and West Bridge Streets for the park. The library at 223 West Bridge Street is now a private residence. The park was named in honor of Joseph Hicks, the first village president. In 1907 the widow of George G. Soule, founder of the first local bank, donated the tile-roofed, cement block Soule Fountain as a memorial to her husband. It originally stood in the center of the intersection of Allegan, Main and Bridge Streets. The fountain, which supplied water for horses, dogs and people, was badly damaged by a police car in 1953 and was rebuilt in somewhat simplified form in 1970 in the park.

Historic Contexts -- 3

Commerce

Plainwell's central business district grew up about the junction of the main north-south road between Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids (now Main Street) and the branch to Allegan (now Allegan Street). In 1854, when these roads were reconstructed as plank roads, stage service was introduced and the road acquired a new importance. The year 1854 also saw the beginning of commercial activity at the junction when the Plainwell House was built in the angle between North Main and Allegan Streets to serve as a hotel and stage stop. In a short time other enterprises, including one or more groceries, a dry-goods store, and blacksmith shop, located nearby.

An 1873 map of Plainwell shows how much the place had grown in less than twenty years. The central business district is shown as occupying nearly as much space then as it does now, with Main Street from Bannister to Chart and Bridge from Park to east of Anderson being virtually lined with commercial buildings. Old photos show that nearly all the early development consisted of frame buildings -- generally narrow-fronted, two-story buildings, some Greek Revival in derivation, but most having false fronts and minimal Italianate detailing. The Plainwell House was a typical early hostelry, with a two-story, side-gable main block fronting on

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North Main and a large rear wing. It survived until about 1890. Another early Greek Revival-inspired, two-story gable-roof hotel, the National Hotel (later the Whitney Tavern) stood at the southeast corner of North Main and Bannister and survived until well into the twentieth century. Only a scant few of these nineteenth-century frame buildings have survived. All are along South Main -- 109 South Main, 114 South Main, 117 South Main, and 138 South Main (moved from across the street in 1927 because of the construction of the Sun Theater).

In old photographs the downtown's few two- and three-story brick, Italianate commercial blocks seem to loom over the more modest frame buildings. Most of them have survived and are now found sandwiched between the district's early twentieth-century buildings. These substantial early brick blocks are Italianate in style with round-head windows and bracketed cornices. The oldest appears to be the three-story block at the southeast corner of Main and Bridge which was standing in 1866. The third story held the Masonic Temple until the new quarters directly across the street were built in the early twentieth century. Old photos show J. D. Wagner's dry goods store as the occupant of the street-level space in the late nineteenth century.

The Ives Block at 124 North Main dates from 1867 and the similar building next door to the south at 120 North Main from 1877. The Ives Block from 1894 until the 1920s held the post office in its first-story space. The Union Block was built in 1891 and replaced the former Plainwell House at 111-119 North Main (the remuddled section at the North Main/Allegan intersection was made over into a bank at the turn of the century and then given its present ominous mansard roof in recent years). The only one of the early brick buildings not located along Main Street is the one-story, former Winegar & Soule or Plainwell Exchange Bank Building at 200 East Bridge. Constructed in 1869, it housed the bank under its various names until the turn of the century. Founded by partners George W. Winegar and George Gary Soule (residence at 19 Hicks Avenue), it soon changed its name to Soule & Hicks when Joseph W. Hicks entered into partnership with Soule upon Winegar's death in 1876. Joseph W. Hicks, a prominent Plainwell businessman and first president of the Village, taught and served on the board of trustees at Kalamazoo College.

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The first Plainwell business directory, published as an adjunct to the 1873 map of the village, lists a surprisingly large number of grocers; dealers in dry goods, boots and shoes, hardware and agricultural implements, building materials, books, and notions; druggists; bakers; blacksmiths/carriage builders; and real estate agents, together with money-lenders, attorneys, and insurance agents. Unfortunately it is almost impossible today to determine the location of any particular business or practice from this early period because the business directory did not give addresses.

Plainwell grew rapidly in the 1870s and 80s. A major factor in the development of the town and its central business district in the late nineteenth century was the construction nearby of two railroad lines in the late 1860s and 1870s. Having good railroad connections encouraged both additional settlement by farmers in the area and the growth of local manufacturing by creating a market for agricultural surpluses and making it easy to ship manufactured goods. The opening of the two lines resulted in a significant boom. New arrivals, visiting businessmen, and drummers who arrived by train and stayed in Plainwell while beating the bushes for trade throughout the area led to a major development of hotels with the construction in 1874 of the relatively opulent Lawrence House on the south side of East Bridge just east of the Winegar & Soule Bank. This massive, three-story, frame, Italianate structure was demolished in 1930. In the 1880s the two-story, brick Whitney House was built just south of the old National Hotel, where the former Marathon gas station now stands.

Numerous photos of downtown Plainwell from the 1890s and the turn of the century survive. A two-story, false front Italianate building at the northeast corner of Main and Bridge advertised groceries and provisions, while a building of similar size and design at the southwest corner of the intersection contained Henry and Frank Buxton's grocery. The first floor of the three-story, brick block at the southeast corner of the same intersection held J. D. Wagner's dry-goods store. The Union Block contained Patterson & Clement, The People's Store, a dry-goods emporium. The corner unit of the building -- the part now obliterated by the enormous mansard roof treatment -- was remodelled and given an elegant terra-cotta front in about 1905 to house the Citizens' Savings Bank, the latest successor to the firm founded as Winegar & Soule.

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Along Main Street in the 1890s and into the twentieth century wooden buildings gradually gave way to brick ones. In fact, most of the central business district was rebuilt in this era. The new brick blocks included some that are key visual landmarks -- such as the big three-story Spencer-Woodard Building at the southwest corner of Main and Bridge, the Crispe Block/Plainwell Variety at 112 North Main, the Pythian Temple/True Value Hardware at 130 North Main, the Ingraham & Travis Farm Implements Store at 119 West Bridge, and the cement block building with its pair of bay window upstairs at 113 South Main -- along with smaller and more unassuming buildings such as the one-story structures along the north side of East Bridge east of North Main.

The Crispe Block/Plainwell Variety at 112 North Main is one of the more substantial new commercial buildings dating from this period. Constructed in 1904 for local businessman John Crispe, the block has a facade of elegant and costly Roman brick, with massive, splayed brick caps over the windows. It has always housed a drug store in one of its two storefronts. Originally the south storefront was Mesik's Drugs and then from 1928 to 1981 it was Nooney's Drug store. When Plainwell Variety opened its business in 1981, it took over both storefronts and removed the dividing wall. The Knights of Pythias/True Value Hardware Building at 130 North Main dates from 1948 when it was completely rebuilt after a fire. The hardware business is in its second twenty-year lease at this site. Its imaginative upper frieze and window surround detailing are all done in brick. No. 113 South Main appears to date from about the turn of the century. The two-story, cement block building with its second-story bay windows contained A. J. Smith's jewelry shop in 1904. The three-story, two-storefront wide Spencer-Woodard Building dates from 1910 and is the downtown's largest commercial block. Its third story contained the Masonic Temple, and one of the first-floor storefronts has housed Campbell's Drugs for nearly fifty years.

The Spencer-Woodard is the famous Plainwell building with the elephant-in-the-basement tale. It seems that when the circus came to town the elephants wouldn't cross the swaying bridge on East Bridge Street. The decision was made to let the elephants wade across the river. Unfortunately the elephants scattered in different directions and one of them nosed its way into the bakery and had to be detoured. The building next door, the new Masonic Temple Building (Spencer-Woodard), was under construction. With

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only the subflooring of the building in place to bear the weight of the elephant, the floor collapsed. In order to rescue the elephant, railroad ties were lowered into the basement and the elephant walked up the ramp. The circus went on at the race track (now the site of the Comfort Inn) as scheduled but the elephants "on the loose" stole the show's thunder.

The large cement-block-front building at 119 West Bridge has housed a farm-implements business since its construction at about the turn of the century. E. H. Ingraham and F. D. Travis ran the business until 1916, when Mr. Travis retired and became the owner of a Maxwell and Studebaker dealership. Ingraham sold the store to A. H. Warnement in 1936 and Warnement's son, B. J. Warnement, continues to operate it today.

Vital to the downtown was the building of the Sun Theater which carried on the tradition of entertainment that had been established by its predecessors, no longer extant, the Eureka Opera House (southeast corner of Main and Chart) and the Nickelodeon (120 South Main). Built in 1927 and still owned by the Kortess family, the theater opened with the silent picture, "Sweet Rosie O'Grady." The Moderne front was installed in 1940 and completed in time for the showing of "Gone With the Wind."

In the years since World War II new commercial development near the Kalamazoo River off North Main Street has somewhat expanded the downtown. This development includes a shopping center, supermarket, and auto dealership, as well as other smaller businesses. During the 1970s, a campaign to give downtown Plainwell an Early American character resulted in the renovation of a number of buildings -- but, fortunately, few of them important buildings in the downtown's historic core. In recent years renovations have not followed any single theme. Plainwell's leaders are now looking long-range toward restoration of the downtown's historic buildings as part of an overall program of downtown revitalization.

Historic Contexts -- 4

Industry

Plainwell's industrial development was triggered by the construction of the mill race across a bend in the Kalamazoo River

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in 1856. The Plainwell Water Power Company, whose officers included some of the area's original settlers and entrepreneurs, oversaw the digging of the mill race and the opening of a sawmill at its lower end in 1857 to supply lumber for the nascent settlement at the junction of the plank toll roads. The following year, Orson D. Dunham and George C. Force opened a rake factory, and in 1860 Dunham and Walter Pierson opened a planing mill. The same year, Henry J. Cushman opened the first grist mill; this event was celebrated by a ceremony on horseback in which Lizzie Cowlan, Cushman's niece, carried a bag of cornmeal from the mill to the Plainwell House where Mrs. George C. Mills baked johnny cakes for celebrants from the area.

In 1864, Dunham and Coburn opened the first flour mill; it burned, but Bartley and Company built another one the same year. The mills were located at the foot of the mill race and used the water power to grind wheat to flour. Merrill and McCourtie bought the Bartley mill in 1866 and operated it until 1900 when it was sold to John F. Eesley. The buildings and homes associated with these early industries and entrepreneurs disappeared long ago.

The next major stimulus to the economic growth of the area occurred with the completion of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern railroad in 1868, and the opening of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad in 1870. Goods and produce that had previously been shipped to their destinations over the plank roads by wagon thereafter took advantage of the less expensive rail transport. The junction of the two lines at Plainwell gave the village good rail connections to points in all four directions. Until fairly recently, the railroads were a major factor that contributed to the continued growth of area industry.

John F. Eesley, an influential local entrepreneur and industrialist, first came to Plainwell from Birmingham, Michigan in 1881 and settled here in 1887. Eesley's home at 211 West Bridge Street is extant. He bought the Merrill and McCourtie flour mill located on North Main Street on the site of the present Pell Park. For many years this was the only steam powered flour mill in the area; it burned to the ground in a disastrous fire in 1932, two years after Eesley's death. The original part of Eesley's second mill, the Sunshine mill, was built about 1869 as a roller rink. Eesley bought the building in 1887 and converted it into a mill. Originally located at 119 West Bridge Street, it was divided into

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two sections and moved to 717 East Bridge Street in 1903 and combined with an existing elevator. At one time, this mill was reputed to be the second largest producer of buckwheat flour in the United States; it had an output of 600 barrels of flour per day that was marketed in the east under the name of Sunshine Brand flour. Missing some of its historic equipment, the former Eesley mill has survived and now does some grinding of feeds and also houses a feed store.

John Eesley also owned the Eesley Power and Light Company which he established in 1904 in the Brownell mill, just north of the Merrill and McCourtie enterprise. A flume ran from the race under Main Street and emptied into the river; the generator was located in the mill and supplied electricity to the village. In 1912, Eesley installed a device that regulated the voltage and prevented burnouts from voltage changes. In 1927, Consumer's Power Company built a 40,000 volt circuit connecting the Plainwell system to the Lower Peninsula Power company.

Paper manufacturing is now Plainwell's largest industry. The industry began in 1872 with the opening of the Lyon and Page paper mill adjacent to the mill race. The mill produced two tons of paper per day in 1873. The Michigan Paper Company (200 Allegan Street) was incorporated in January, 1886 by twenty-five prominent local businessmen including Willard E. Gilkey, George G. Soule, C. O. Gilkey, Hale W. Page and Joseph W. Hicks. Plainwell was seen as a good location for the mill because of the presence of the mill race as a source of cheap power and the town's proximity to markets in as well as sources of material from Chicago and Detroit. The firm recycled waste paper into quality paper products. In 1887 when production began, the plant generated eight tons of paper per day. The first director was Hale W. Page; J. W. Hicks, C. O. Gilkey and William Thomas were on the board of directors. In 1889, steam power was introduced. The same year, the Lyon Paper company was sold at a chancery auction in Allegan; two years later, Michigan Paper Company bought their building for \$ 6,000. George N. Anderson was president of the company during these years. The Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad built a spur line into the plant in 1905. In 1906, seven new buildings were built to accommodate a major increase in production brought about by the purchase of a second paper machine; the combined output of the two machines boosted the output of paper to fifteen tons per day. By 1910, four more buildings had been added to the original complex, two more

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paper machines had been acquired and the company was producing about fifty tons of paper per day. In 1910, John Gilkey, the principal stockholder, became president of the company; he was succeeded by his son, George W. Gilkey, who was president of the company between 1918 and 1935. In 1927, the company purchased the Bedford Paper Mill Company, a coating mill located in Kalamazoo. By 1946, the Michigan Paper Company was producing ninety tons of paper per day. In 1947, the company's outstanding stock was purchased by the Booth Newspaper Company and the Evening News Association, publishers of two Detroit newspapers who intended to use the plant for the production of newsprint; this effort was not successful.

In February, 1954, W. C. Hamilton and Sons purchased all the outstanding stock in the company and the Michigan Paper Company became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hamilton. In 1956 the Michigan Paper Company was dissolved as a corporation and became the Michigan Division of Hamilton Paper Company. In 1961, the Weyerhaeuser Company acquired the Hamilton Paper Company. Phillip Morris purchased the company in 1970 and renamed it the Plainwell Paper Company. They sold it to Chesapeake Paper Company in 1985. In 1987, the present owners, the Simpson Paper Company bought the facility.

The present Simpson Paper Company plant contains the original brick mill building dating back to 1887, the 1900 brick boiler room building, the seven brick buildings added in 1906 and the four 1910 brick additions as well as an assortment of later additions. All are being used for an assortment of functions. The company has renovated the original 1887 structure and a portion of the 1906 complex to house the company's offices. Along with portions of the plant, the homes of paper manufacturing pioneers George G. Soule and C. O. Gilkey survive, at 19 Hicks Avenue and 519 West Bridge Street, respectively.

Other industries of which less evidence has survived include shoes and office and school furniture. John Crispe, who arrived in Plainwell from Cleveland about 1850 and was the first local man to enlist for the Civil War, opened the Plainwell Shoe Company in 1906. Utilizing the former Opera House building which stood on the now vacant lot south of the Sun Theater, he produced boys and womens shoes. In 1907, the company was manufacturing 200 pairs of

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shoes per day. The company and all of its assets were sold shortly before Crispe's death in 1910.

Charles and Anna Pipp founded the Angle Steel Company in Otsego in 1910. In 1922, they moved the company to Plainwell and built two new buildings on Acorn Street. The company produced office and school furniture until its plant was destroyed by fire in 1967.

The various flour and grist mills were not the only local enterprises to make use of local agricultural produce. In the 1890's, F. A. Harwood and Company, wholesale fruit and produce shippers, was located at what is now 798 East Bridge Street; the company also sold coal. Shortly before World War I, the company began processing and canning fruits and vegetables under the Harbro label; at the same time, the company opened a bean elevator across the street at 729 East Bridge Street. The original cannery building was at 770 East Bridge Street, south of the original Harwood Company building. When the cannery was sold in 1925 to W. R. Pell and M. Hare, it became the Plainwell Canning Company. In 1927, R. L. Gilkey was brought in as a partner and the original facilities were expanded; two subsequent additions were constructed in 1935 and again in 1942. In the summer of 1940, the company canned 250 tons of cherries and 10 tons of berries. All holdings in the company were purchased by the Pell family about 1945. Although the bean elevator and cannery are extant, the original F. A. Harwood and Company building has disappeared.

Historic Contexts --5

Social Affairs

Kalamazoo's Ladies Library Association, considered one of the nation's earliest women's clubs, was founded in 1852 largely at the inspiration of Lucinda Hinsdale Stone, later a prominent figure in the women's rights movement. In Plainwell, only a short distance away, the Plainwell Ladies Library Association was formed in 1868. Mrs. Joseph W. Hicks was the first president. Like many women's clubs of this era, the association's goals were altruistic: they were interested in promoting cultural activities in the village. Their activities also provided a social outlet for the members. Mrs. Mary Gilkey, president of the group in 1888, stated: "Our library ranks as one of the most praiseworthy and attractive features to newcomers and visitors." After moving to several

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different locations in the village including the Plainwell Exchange Bank at 200 East Bridge Street (1878), they purchased a site for \$1.00 from the village in what is now Hicks Park. An architect from Grand Rapids drew up plans for the 24 foot by 26 foot building for \$25. Ground was broken on October 16, 1888 and the building was completed for a total cost of \$792.80. When Hicks Park was established in 1903, the library was moved across the street to 223 West Bridge Street. It is now a private residence.

When Mrs. Charles Ransom died in 1918, she willed her house, "Willowbank," to the village to be used as a library. The house, located at 335 East Bridge Street, was built in 1881 by Jules Ives and sold to Charles and Amanda Ransom in 1890. The Ladies Library became the Charles A. Ransom Public Library. In 1951, a bequest by Cleo Tomlinson Jackson was used for the addition of a reading room. In 1973 the new Ransom Public Library at 180 South Sherwood opened.

The citizens of Plainwell also enjoyed a variety of other cultural events and organizations over the years. The local newspaper heralded the arrival of the North circus in 1869. The Southwestern Michigan Trotting Association sponsored horse races at the Plainwell fairgrounds from 1886 until recently. This was also the site of the annual Union Cultural Society fairs which began in 1875 and were a popular yearly event into the twentieth century. There were many marching bands, orchestras and an opera house on South Main Street. Eureka Hall, the opera house, was built in 1869 for \$ 9,000. by Mrs. Lydia Drake; located at the corner of Main and Chart Streets, it was destroyed by fire in 1885 and later rebuilt. It has since been demolished. Travelling theater groups regularly appeared and the Ladies Library Association sponsored many lectures. In 1868, Plainwell Masonic Lodge #235 and the I.O.O.F. Gun Plain Lodge #120 were formed; the Masons first met on the third floor of the then new block at 101 South Main Street. In 1910 they occupied the third floor of the then new building across the street at 102-106 South Main Street. The Knights of Pythias occupied the second floor of the extant building at 130 North Main Street. The Plainwell G.A.R. was organized in 1886; six years later, the Maccabees were formed and in 1899, the Plainwell Current Events Club, a literary society, made its appearance. This group held its meetings at "The Oaks," at 403 North Main Street. The Plainwell Community Orchestra was formed in 1925.

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The Sun Theater, which was started in 1927 by the Kortés family of Plainwell, has provided movies for area residents from its inception to the present. The theater was altered in 1940 to increase the capacity from 250 to 400 seats, shortly before the screening of Gone With The Wind. Located at 131 South Main Street, it is still owned by the same family.

The Dr. Frederick E. Woolsey house, originally located in Hicks Park and later moved to 408 South Main Street, served as Plainwell's first hospital and nursing home. When Katherine Crispe Havens died in 1926, she willed her home at 203 West Bridge Street, some furnishings and \$8,000 for remodelling the house so that it could be used by the village as either a hospital or a community house. The William Crispe estate also set up a trust fund to be used to operate the facility. The village board voted to accept the gift of a hospital, but decided to move the Havens house and to build a new facility on the site. The Havens house was moved to 223 West Front Street where it still stands. The William Crispe Memorial Hospital, run by the Plainwell Board of Health, opened in early 1927. The original facility had a ten bed capacity. In 1938, the hospital received a grant from the Kellogg Foundation which was used to build new labs. Two years later, it received another grant of \$ 60,000 from the same group for the purchase of additional property adjoining the original facility. The enlargement and modernization of the original facility was completed in 1941. When the Pipp Community Hospital at 345 Naomi Street opened in 1961, the old facility at 203 West Bridge Street became the William Crispe Community House.

"The Oaks," a familiar Plainwell landmark at 403 North Main Street, was built about 1859 by A. C. Roberts. Silas Stafford purchased the original house in 1865 and sold it about 1885 to Mrs. J. D. Peters. Mrs. Peters moved this house to the rear of the property and moved another house from the Arnold farm on Riverview Drive down the frozen Kalamazoo River about 1885 to the Peters property. The two houses were combined to make one large home. J. E. Botsford of Kalamazoo bought the property in 1898 and christened it "the Oaks". It was a popular setting for numerous social events for local residents. After Mrs. Botsford died in 1921, it became the James White Memorial Home, a senior citizens' home run by the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Later known as the Plainwell Sanitarium, it is now the Plainwell Residential Care Facility, a half-way house for the state hospital at Kalamazoo.

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Historic Contexts -- 6

Architecture

Plainwell's historic architecture centers on the historic central business district and on nearby parts of West Bridge and Main Streets and on Allegan Street near the paper mill. Plainwell's earliest buildings were largely Greek Revival in style and of frame construction. About seven Greek Revival homes have survived. The Anderson House (120 North Sherwood) is the oldest building in Plainwell but is now heavily altered. It began as a typical five-bay, center-entrance, side-gable Greek Revival building. Four early upright-and-wing-houses -- at 227 East Bridge, 610 East Bridge, 304 East Chart, and 441 West Chart -- are present and display wide, plain friezes, pierced by low windows, and cornices with returns. The house at 147 South Sherwood is a full two stories with a one-story gabled addition.

Of Plainwell's early surviving homes, the most unique from a plan standpoint is the 1846 Woodhams House (118 North Woodhams Street). This otherwise typical side-gable, five-bay, center-entrance house has a portico with six square piers across the entire front under the main roof. It is similar to a house in nearby Otsego and to a house in Marengo, Illinois depicted in Talbot Hamlin's Greek Revival Architecture in America that Hamlin says is based on a design in Rural Architecture, an 1830s pattern book published by Edward Shaw of Boston. The house was originally located at 323 East Bridge Street and was moved to its present location in 1886 to make room for the Walter W. Woodhams house.

Much of the city's surviving housing stock exemplifies traditional American house forms such as the I-house, leanto or saltbox, and hall-and-parlor house along with other nineteenth-century types imported from the eastern United States. Plainwell's I houses are all three rather than five bays in length. One of them, 233 Cushman, seems to preserve something like the length associated with a five-bay building despite its three-bay front, but all the other Plainwell examples seem to have narrower, three-bay fronts. Good examples are 403 Brigham, 514 South Anderson, 303 South Sherwood, 208, 209, and 224 East Chart, 220 Morrell, 321 South Woodhams, and 229 Union.

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At 323 Allegan, 118 West Brighton, 211 West Grant and 119 West Hill are leanto or saltbox houses. All are one and one-half or two stories in height and have three-bay fronts. Judging from the break in the clapboarding on its side wall, the leanto at 323 Allegan may be an addition. These saltbox houses are reminiscent of early New England houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, the leanto was commonly an addition on seventeenth-century houses, but more often part of the original construction in the eighteenth. There are saltbox houses in some early copper range towns of Houghton and Keweenaw Counties, among other places, dating from the 1860s and possibly earlier.

Many nineteenth-century houses exemplify the upright-and-wing form that evolved during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Like the early Greek Revival examples in town, the later ones for the most part have narrow, two bay wide uprights and the main entrance in the front of the wing. Many others exemplify the gabled-ell house form that is a variant of the upright and wing. Of the sixty-five upright-and-wing examples, 433 West Bridge seems the most intact and good examples are at 227 and 903 East Bridge, 116 East Brighton, 162 West First, 221 East Grant, 113 and 204 East Hill, 116 Orchard, 224 Union and 619 South Woodhams. The gabled-ell form accounts for sixty-one houses in the survey area with the best preserved example at 183 Allegan and other good examples at: 304 East Bridge, 563 West Bridge, 427 West Chart, 120 Hicks, 508 South Main, and 325 South Sherwood.

The survey area contains many two-story, hip-roof houses, some with and some without Italianate detailing, that are three-bay wide, two-bay deep, center-entrance structures. Examples include 215 East Plainwell, 218 South Sherwood, 418 North Main, 421 North Main, 229 Cushman, 220 Cushman, and 127 West Chart. This "cubical" three-bay, center-entrance form seems to date from the nineteenth century, and may have originated with some of architect Henry Austin's houses in the New Haven, Connecticut area built in the 1830s and 40s. A more local source for Plainwell, however, is the Charles Stuart House (Charles Stuart was a United States senator from 1852 to 1858) at 427 Stuart Avenue in Kalamazoo, built 1854-58. The Stuart House has a three-bay wide, center-entrance front, three bays on the side, and a belvedere in the center of the roof. This is surely the oldest house of its type in Kalamazoo. It may have been a pacesetter for the region.

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Plainwell examples of the cubic Italianates crowned with a square belvedere stand at 530 West Bridge and 320 South Main. Built in 1866, the L. W. Woodhams house (530 West Bridge) has a low pitched hip roof with an exaggerated eave overhang supported by massive paired brackets. The classic porch and shutters are of a later date. The house at 320 South Main was built around 1870 and appears on the 1873 plat map. Unlike 530 West Bridge, 320 South Main has a four-bay first story with an off-center entrance and a three-bay second story. No. 503 South Main and 225 East Hill are hip-roof houses with four bays in both stories of the front facade. No. 503 South Main has a slightly off-center front entrance, while in the brick house at 225 East Hill the entrance is pushed to one end of the facade.

Several Italianate houses in Plainwell have side wings. One prominent example, the simply detailed two-story brick house with a one-story side wing at 671 West Bridge Street, was built in two stages. The one-story section was built in 1857 by John Lasher and John Pierson built the two-story addition in 1865. Other examples are located at 405, 527, and 602 West Bridge Street and 228 Cushman Street.

Plainwell has no Gothic Revival houses, but a few houses in the city do possess steep-sided roofs at least suggestive of a Gothic influence. No. 503 West Bridge is an unusual T-shaped building with very high street- and side-facing gables. An entrance porch fills the angle between the gabled wings at one end of the front, while a block of the same size fills the angle at the other front corner. More common are gabled-ell houses such as 339 West Bridge, 427 West Chart, and 120 Hicks having steeply pitched roofs and a subsidiary gable in the front of the ell. In many Michigan examples, the gable ends and subsidiary front gable would display pointed-head windows.

Plainwell has several notable Eastlake houses built in the 1880s. Three of the four most fully developed stand along East Bridge Street just west of the river. The Crispe house at 404 East Bridge was built in 1882 for John Crispe, Plainwell postmaster, and was owned by the Crispe family until 1958. The two-story, cross-gable and hip-roof, clapboard-sheathed house has vertical and horizontal stickwork aligned with the window sills, lintels, and sides on the front and side walls; decorative sunburst stick designs in the front gable; and an Eastlake gabled doorporch.

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The Walter W. Woodhams house (323 East Bridge Street), built in 1887, is similar in form to the Crispe House. Its walls have horizontal stickwork bands aligned with the window sills and lintels and horizontal bands of stickwork panelling below the first- and attic-story windows.

Nearby to the west is the Ives House built in 1881 (335 East Bridge Street). The house was home to C. A. Ransom from 1890 to 1917 and then, willed to the city, served as the public library from 1918 until 1973 when it reverted to residential use. This two-story asymmetrical clapboard-sheathed house displays a minimal amount of horizontal and vertical stickwork below the top of the second story, but uses panelling and patterned shingling in the jerkinhead front and side gables. An Eastlake doorporch and a porte cochere have turned column supports. A simpler version of this house stands at 241 Allegan Street. It displays horizontal and some vertical stickwork on the clapboard siding and has a delicate Eastlake porch. The front-gable DeLeFebvre house built in 1893 at 115 West Chart Street is even more simple with its lack of stickwork, but displays a delicate porch recessed into one end of the first floor front; a shingled front gable and second-story apron; and, a plain vergeboard punctuated at intervals by paired lozenge panels.

There is little to show much building activity in Plainwell in the 1890s. Examples of the Queen Anne style characteristic of the 1890s are very much absent here. Plainwell's only Queen Anne landmark is the Eesley House at 211 West Bridge Street built in 1902. The two-story asymmetrical, clapboarded house has a cross-gable roof and conical roofed corner turret. A massive stone wrap-around-front porch enhances the house. The Dr. Woolsey House at 408 South Main Street (relocated here from what is now Hicks Park on Bridge Street) has the rambling, irregular form and high roofs associated with the Queen Anne style, but a more austere colonial/classical decorative scheme.

The Queen Anne utilized some colonial detailing on an often highly irregular house form. By the turn of the century the use of early American forms became more prevalent and the houses themselves became more regular in plan and form and capped by simple gable, gambrel, or hip roofs. No. 333 West Bridge, 302 South Anderson, and 406 Union are good examples -- all have front gables with Tuscan columns and classical cornices with returns. These are

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transition houses that reflect the simplification of the visually diverse Queen Anne and the introduction of classical detailing that reflects the Colonial Revival style that was gaining popularity at the close of the century.

Two examples of the Colonial Revival style with a side-facing gambrel roof, indicative of the form built from about 1895 to 1915, are at 121 West Grant and 129 West Plainwell. These Dutch Colonials have a shed-roofed dormer and an enclosed porch but no detailing or trim. A later example at 210 South Anderson Street with a side-gable gambrel roof and a full shed dormer displays typical colonial features in the round-arched portico with classic columns and window shutters. Two fully-developed Colonial Revivals with side-gabled roofs at 550 West Bridge and 414 North Sherwood are symmetrical with gabled-roof dormers. Colonial features -- window shutters and porticos with classic columns-- complete the stately houses.

Plainwell has a number of one-story Colonial Revival cottages that are based on the two-story prototype. They usually are rectangular in form with either side or front gable roofs with Georgian- or Adam-inspired doorways. The best example is 211 East Chart with a side-gabled roof and a prominent portico with paired classical columns. Other good examples are at 201 Colfax, 327 West Bridge, 122 Gilkey, and 220 Park Street.

New house forms, simple and viewed at the time as being designed for modern living, came into being in the early twentieth century. One such was the bungalow, the other, the "foursquare." The bungalow is a low structure. To purists the true bungalow can have no more than a single story. In any event, it is a one-story building or one that appears to be of single-story height. The roof pitch is usually low and a porch or veranda (sometimes glassed-in) extends across the front.

Plainwell's bungalows, which number about thirty-eight, include examples of both standard gable-front and side-gable types. Four one-story hipped-roof bungalows, a minority subtype, with front hipped-roofed dormers are at 412 Brigham, 419 West Chart, 414 North Main, and 514 North Sherwood.

The side-gabled bungalows (one- and two-story examples) with a centered shed or gable dormer accounts for twenty of the houses in

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the survey area. The most fully developed example is at 440 West Bridge. Built in 1940, the stuccoed one-and-a-half story Craftsman-type bungalow displays half-timbering on the front and side gables and brackets on the extended eaves over the front porch that are supported by square columns. Another stuccoed example at 418 West Chart has an open porch that is anchored by broad piers supported on a brick base. The clapboarded house at 321 West Bridge displays the exposed rafter ends that are typical of the style. No. 412 West Chart contains a good example of porch piers that appear firmly anchored in the earth. The lower story has a stucco finish while the gables are shingled. Other typical side-gabled examples are found at: 624 South Main, 516 West Bridge, 512 Allegan, 118 West Brighton, 218 Jersey, 217 South Woodhams, 337 North Sherwood, and 219 Cushman.

There are only about nine front-gable bungalows in the survey area. The stucco one-story example 312 West First has the typical full front porch supported by piers on brick bases. The one-story bungalow at 182 West First is a clapboarded example with a gable-roof porch. Other typical examples stand at 502 West Bridge, 323 Brigham, and 206 Gilkey.

Plainwell's examples of the American Foursquare include both clapboarded and stuccoed examples. This style is identified by its square floor plan, hip roof, and two full stories. Other typical features include roof dormers and a front porch, either open or enclosed. An outstanding example at 308 South Main, built by Plainwell builder Julius Johnson in 1912, reflects the Spanish Revival influence with its stuccoed second-story walls and tile hipped roof. Two full stories in height with hip-roofed dormers, this house also has a full front porch with square brick columns. The house directly south at 314 South Main, also built by Julius Johnson, has stuccoed first- and second-story walls, hip-roofed dormers and porch. No. 509 South Main, 220 South Woodhams, and 214 East Hill are other stucco examples. Exposed second-story eaves on the clapboarded Foursquare with roof dormers at 233 Gilkey show a Craftsman influence. Other examples of clapboarded ones without roof dormers are at 215 East Hill and 114 Jersey.

In Plainwell, as in other Michigan towns, many older houses were modernized in the early twentieth century. One common early twentieth-century modernization is the application of a stucco or cement coating over the exterior, as in 183 Allegan Street, 209

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East Bridge Street, and 401 South Woodhams Street. In the house at 425 West Bridge, the stuccoing appears to have been part of a much broader renovation that included the addition of a large verandah with stuccoed piers and arches. A second typical renovation is the addition of a large front verandah or replacement of an older, out-of-date verandah with a modern one. For example, the frame, hip-roof, upright-and-wing-form house at 534 Allegan Street was given a porch with massive wood piers more typically found in the bungalows being built in this period. The cubical Italianate at 527 West Bridge and the upright-and-wing house at 215 East Bridge both have early twentieth-century porches with underpinnings constructed of massive, round and squared-off boulders.

The Depression brought an abrupt end to housing construction and it wasn't until the end of World War II that a recovered economy and another great demand for housing created the right conditions for another spurt of new house-building. Affordable houses such as the one-story Colonials or Cape Cod Colonials - 211 East Chart with its dominant portico entry; 112 East Chart, a brick version with a smaller portico built in 1944; 121 Court, a Cape Cod with a massive chimney similar to work of Royal Barry Wills in the Northeast; and 221 South Main with its 6/6 pane shuttered windows and entry - are interspersed throughout the city.

The ranch house, almost a modern-day bungalow -- free from historic styles, all on one floor, neat and compact -- was the most prolific modern style house built in Plainwell. The house at 527 North Main is almost a prototype -- not like the earlier standard bungalows. The low rambling ranch at 130 Court with steel-sash windows, the stucco hip-roofed cottage at 680 Melrose with windows at the corner, and the contemporary English cottage at 520 West Bridge with a high roof but with a smooth wall finish and a big "picture" window are all early examples of the ranch style. Two timber California-style ranches with sloping roofs are at 132 Court and 662 Melrose.

The survey area west of Walnut Wood Court including North and South Sunset Streets, Benhoy Street, Melrose Street, and Naomi Street are lined almost exclusively with ranch-style houses with both frame and brick exteriors. Later additions to the housing stock include split-level houses and a number of revivals of previous styles.

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Two historic church buildings survive in Plainwell, the United Methodist and Presbyterian. The First (now United) Methodist Church at 200 Park Street (corner of Chart and Park) is a rectangular, red brick, Romanesque Revival building constructed in 1869. Pyramid-roofed towers are positioned at both corners of the facade with the north-end tower being larger in scale. Detailed brickwork at the cornice line and a tripartite round-arched window and a round-circle window enhance the facade. The round-arched windows on the sides are separated by raised brick piers that emphasize the verticality of the building. Round-arched wooden entry doors are located in each tower. The original church building which excludes the present altar section has no basement. The church's interior is simple yet elegant. Wood panelling extends up to plate-rail height, and the wall above and coved-edge ceiling are finished in plaster. All of these surfaces are painted a soft green and the carpet is a deeper shade of green. The rows of modern wooden pews are divided by a center isle. The Church cost \$6,500 to build and seated 300 people. The Ladies Aid Society purchased the church furnishings. In 1878 a vestry, known as the chapel, and a kitchen were added at a cost of \$550. This was a frame addition directly west of the sanctuary. New church windows including the large front one of Italian cathedral glass were purchased in the 1920s. Ground was broken in 1950 for a two-story educational building. The year 1967 marked the completion of the remodeling of the sanctuary and a new Sunday School unit built at the cost of \$930,000. The free-standing bell tower was added in 1976.

The First Presbyterian Church of Plainwell (303 East Bridge, at the corner of East Bridge and North Woodhams) is a clapboarded, Romanesque-inspired building constructed in 1872 at the cost of \$4,000. It seated about 400 people. The gable-roofed, rectangular building with a bell tower in the southwest corner is accented by wood-detailed trim along the cornice line of the entire church and tower. The octagonal bell tower, complete with spire, was a gift of Mrs. Mary Forbes. A basement was excavated under the building in 1913, and in 1916 a kitchen and "sanitary closet" were added. In 1960 a complete remodeling was done. A new Woodhams Street entrance was created and the old main entrance from Bridge Street was closed. At that time the church interior was reconstructed with the orientation reversed. Despite these alterations, the church's exterior has been comparatively little altered.

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Plainwell's oldest commercial buildings are located near the junction of Bridge Street, Main Street, and Allegan Street where the city's first businesses were established. The earliest commercial structures have been replaced but some buildings dating from as early as the 1860s have survived. Having established itself as a major junction, the downtown expanded with the construction of more substantial commercial buildings to reflect this flourishing economy. Only a few of the early wooden structures remain -- 109 South Main, a two-story, rectangular wood structure built on a stone foundation; 114 South Main, a two-story, rectangular wood structure covered with fake brick and asphalt siding built on a concrete and stone foundation; 117 South Main, a two-story wood structure covered with aluminum siding built on a stone foundation; and 138 South Main, a one-story wood frame building covered with stucco and built on a concrete foundation (moved from across the street in 1926 to make room for the Sun Theater).

Among the oldest brick blocks is the two story J. C. and C. Ives Block at 124 North Main Street, built in 1867. It and the two-story building contiguous to the south at 120 North Main Street built ten years later exemplify the Italianate style popular at the time. No. 120 North Main retains its original bracketed cornice and its round-arch windows with carved caps. The three-story Italianate at the southeast corner of South Main Street and East Bridge Street built in the late 1860s is one of the two tallest commercial buildings downtown. Another building dating from the 1860s is the former Exchange Bank Building at 200 East Bridge Street. Built in 1869, this one-story brick structure with an enframed window and side entry is currently undergoing restoration.

The two-story brick Union Block Building at 115-119 North Main Street built in the Italianate style with segmental-arch-head windows and decorative brickwork window caps and cornice and frieze dates from 1891.

In 1904 the two-story brick building at 112 North Main Street was built for owner John Crispe. The building's brickwork is of long and thin Roman bricks and it has a pressed metal, Classical cornice and parapet coping. The two-story brick building just south at 108 North Main Street has a detailed, corbelled brick cornice treatment and similar window detailing. It retains its original front doors.

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About the same time, the building at 113 South Main with its twin three-bay oriel windows that dominate the second story was constructed. The two-story concrete block building is built on a brick and concrete foundation with no basement. Across the street at 102-106 South Main (on the southwest corner of South Main and West Bridge) the brick Spencer-Woodard building, constructed in 1916, is the other three-story commercial building downtown. Its third floor was built to accommodate the Masonic Temple. Bricks laid on end formed the outlines of long, narrow panels between the second and third stories and below the parapet. Buildings using this type of brickwork from the early twentieth-century are now sometimes labelled "Commercial Brick" in style.

The Ingraham and Travis Building at 119 West Bridge was built between 1904 and 1918. The two-story eight-bay symmetrical storefront is constructed of cement block with a row of eight evenly spaced single-pane double-sash windows below a metal cornice.

The Plainwell Post Office building at 145 East Bridge Street was built in 1923. This utilitarian one-story Commercial Brick building with a stepped parapet and cement trim serves today as a barber shop. The new Plainwell Post Office, built in 1957, is located at 457 East Bridge Street.

The Sun Theater at 131 South Main Street, built in 1927, had an interior remodeling in 1937 to increase the seating capacity from 250 to 400. An exterior renovation in 1940 provided the current Moderne front. Other interior changes made in 1965 widened the aisles and reduced the seating capacity to 300.

The Knights of Pythias/True Value Hardware Building at 130 North Main is a two-story brick building with two large enframed second-story windows. Built in 1948, this building replaces one that was destroyed by fire.

The only historic industrial buildings in Plainwell that possess importance in architectural terms are the early buildings of the Michigan Paper Company. The firm, established in 1886, built its first building in 1887. The primary part of the complex consists of seven additional buildings constructed in 1906. These older buildings are two- and three-story, brick-wall buildings with timber floor and roof construction and low, gable roofs. The early

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buildings all exemplify the slow-burning mill construction techniques widely promoted at the time by engineers and insurance underwriters. Framing was designed to be so substantial that major framing members would continue to support the structure with up to a third of their section burned or charred. The flooring was also to be built of heavy planks and to be so tight that water from fire-fighting on one floor would not penetrate to the floors below and cause damage. The framing was to be left exposed and hidden places such as partitions or ceiling spaces where fires could burn unseen or where getting at a fire would be difficult were to be eliminated. The Plainwell mills have solid brick exterior walls and the undersides of the roof and floor systems with their massive timbers are exposed. Daniel J. Albertson (1865-1931), a mill designer and builder from nearby Kalamazoo who specialized in paper-mill work, is known to have designed and built the 1887 structure, and may have built the other early buildings as well. The Plainwell buildings are similar to the other turn-of-the-century paper mill buildings in the Kalamazoo area -- some of them known to be Albertson's work and others not -- which was and to some extent remains a paper-manufacturing center. The Plainwell buildings are basically intact and still in use and are among the best preserved and cared-for in the entire Kalamazoo area. The original 1887 building has been sensitively renovated inside, while retaining the bare brick exterior walls and exposed roof structure, and now houses the corporate offices. Other early buildings are still used for manufacturing purposes.

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Associated Property Types -- 1

I. Agricultural processing facilities.

II. Plainwell contains one historic flour mill/elevator complex, the J. F. Eesley Mill (now the Plainwell Elevator Company), at 717 East Bridge Street on the eastern edge of the city and adjacent to the junction of two railroad lines. The mill portion of the building was built in 1869 at 119 West Bridge Street; it was divided into two sections and moved to its present location in 1903 by John F. Eesley. The mill was reassembled and combined with an existing elevator at the new location. This four-and-one-half story structure is framed with massive wooden timbers and sheet metal siding now covers its wood sheathing. Although some of the mill's historic equipment is either not in use or missing, the building still houses a feed store and is used to grind some feeds. Although the original F. A. Harwood fruit and produce building has been demolished, the company's bean elevator and canning complex which were opened shortly before World War I are still located on East Bridge Street near the Eesley mill and the railroad lines. The two-and-one-half-story bean mill and the original two-story cannery building are wood frame structures sheathed with sheet metal. Later additions to the cannery include a 1927 one-story cement block warehouse and loading dock, a 1935 one-story brick warehouse and a 1942 office building. The original two-story building still contains some of the historic canning equipment.

III. As explained more fully in the context statements, the building of the mill race in 1856 was responsible for the subsequent development of several industrial enterprises, including feed, rake, lumber, grain, grist and paper mills. Although the Eesley flour mill was not the first to be built, it is the sole surviving one in the area and was at one time reputed to be the second largest producer of buckwheat flour in the United States. The cannery and the mill reflect the growth of agricultural products-processing industries in Plainwell that took place after the opening of the railroad lines. The railroads gave these companies a market for their flour, buckwheat, beans, canned fruit and other products.

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IV. The Eesley mill and the Harwood Brothers cannery complex are the only surviving examples of once-thriving important local industries. Except for the removal of some equipment, these buildings are fully intact. The bean mill survives but is unused and boarded up; since access to the facility could not be attained, it was impossible to determine the building's physical integrity.

Associated Property Types -- 2

I. Paper mill

II. The Simpson Paper Company (formerly the Michigan Paper Company) is a historic paper mill complex located at 200 Allegan Street adjacent to the mill race and the Kalamazoo River on the northwest side of Plainwell's commercial district. The original mill building, which now serves as the main entrance and part of the office complex, was built in 1887. The present mill complex also includes the 1900 boiler room, seven buildings added in 1906, four 1910 additions as well as an assortment of later additions. All except the most recent additions have timber frames and brick walls.

III. The Michigan Paper Company has been one of Plainwell's largest industries since its founding in the late nineteenth century and its plant is the largest historic industrial plant surviving in Plainwell. In architectural terms the complex's late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings are very important among the much larger body of early paper-mill buildings in the Kalamazoo area because of their good state of preservation. These buildings also possess importance for exemplifying the "slow-burning" method of mill construction promoted by engineers and insurance companies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

IV. The Simpson Paper Company complex is the only surviving paper mill in Plainwell. All of its original brick mill buildings are extant and have been well maintained.

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Associated Property Types -- 3

I. Churches

II. The brick Romanesque Revival United Methodist Church on Park Street was built in 1869. The clapboarded Romanesque-inspired First Presbyterian Church was built three years later on East Bridge Street in the proposed Island Historic District. Extensive interior and exterior alterations have been made to both churches over the years.

III. The Methodist and Presbyterian Churches are the only two remaining historic churches in Plainwell and are architecturally significant as examples of small town nineteenth-century Romanesque-inspired churches.

IV. The Methodist Church is one of two historic church buildings in Plainwell, the other being within the Island Historic District. The two churches date from approximately the same time, and both are interesting examples of Romanesque-inspired design. Both have been heavily modernized inside, but the Presbyterian Church now has synthetic siding over its clapboarding and its front entrance has been closed up and the orientation of the interior reversed. While the exterior and interior orientation of the Methodist Church remains intact, it has also suffered a significant loss of physical integrity in the reconstruction of the interior, the addition of a large chancel area, and the addition of a large Sunday school/parish house building in comparison to other similar churches in southern Michigan.

Associated Property Types -- 4

I. Libraries

II. The diminutive one-story brick Ladies Library Association Building (1888) was moved from its original location in the present Hicks Park across the street to 223 West Bridge Street. It served as Plainwell's library until 1918 when the library moved to more spacious headquarters in the two-story frame Eastlake-style C. A. Ransom house on East Bridge Street. Both libraries are now private residences.

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III. The Ladies Library Association Building and the C. A. Ransom Library are both former homes of Plainwell's oldest cultural institution, the library. The C. A. Ransom residence is also a significant local example of Eastlake-inspired architecture.

IV. Both library buildings are located in the proposed Island Historic District.

Associated Property Types -- 5

I. Hospitals

II. The two-story Dr. Frederick Woolsey house on South Main Street, an amalgam of Queen Anne and colonial/classical styles, served as Plainwell's first hospital at the turn of the century. It is now a private residence. The one-story vitrified clay tile William Crispe Memorial Hospital on West Bridge Street opened in 1927; when the new Pipp Community Hospital was built in 1961, it became the William Crispe Community House.

III. Like the libraries, the Dr. Frederick Woolsey and William Crispe Memorial hospitals are significant because they are extant reminders of the civic-minded efforts of local citizens to improve the quality of health care in their community.

IV. Both hospitals are located in the proposed Island Historic District.

Associated Property Types -- 6

I. Schools

II. The one-and-one-half-story, hip-roof, vaguely Mission Revival, brick Bridge Street Elementary School which opened in 1910 on West Bridge Street is the city's only historical school building. It has been converted into an apartment building. The exterior is unchanged.

III. The West Bridge Street Elementary School is the sole surviving historic school building in Plainwell.

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IV. The West Bridge Street school building was converted into an apartment building in 1984; despite the interior renovations, the exterior, which sports the original windows, is intact. It is located in the proposed West Bridge Street Historic District.

Associated Property Types -- 7

I. Public Buildings (fire house, jail, post office)

II. The former Village Hall (now the fire station) on West Bridge Street is a two-story, cement block, five-bay wide building. It was extensively remodeled in 1975. The simple one-story brick garage-size "lock-up" or jail was built in 1871 and still stands in the alley behind the fire house. The one-story brick Plainwell Post Office was built in 1923. It served as the city's post office until 1957 and now houses a barber shop.

III. The significance of these buildings relates to the government context. Of the three, only the jail and the post office have remained relatively intact.

IV. While the fire house and the jail are located in the proposed Island Historic District, the fire house, because of extensive alterations to its exterior, has been listed as noncontributing. The former post office is in a part of the downtown not included in this district. The building retains most of its historic exterior appearance, but, a rented commercial building rather than a substantial federally-owned one designed by the treasury architects, is modest and undistinguished in architectural terms among the city's historic commercial buildings.

Associated Property Types -- 8

I. Commercial Buildings

II. Plainwell's historic commercial buildings are all located within two blocks of the junction of North and South Main Streets, East and West Bridge Streets and Allegan Street. This small central business district contains an assortment of one- to three-story brick and frame late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century structures. In general, these early buildings are narrow fronted

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and deep with flat roofs. The oldest commercial buildings date the 1860's. The downtown buildings exemplify Italianate, turn-of-the-century Classical and Commercial Brick design. The Sun Theater (1927) at 131 South Main Street sports a Moderne front, installed in 1940, that adds variety to the streetscape. While early frame buildings have survived, the facades have been extensively altered.

III. Plainwell's historic commercial buildings relate to the commerce and architecture contexts. The former Exchange Bank at 200 East Bridge Street had been extensively altered, but is presently undergoing restoration. The Spencer-Woodard Building (1910) and the Sun Theater buildings on South Main Street are two other buildings that sport largely unaltered facades. Most of the other commercial buildings, typical of many small Michigan towns, have altered ground-floor facades but retain traditional unaltered stylistic features on the second floor facades. All the historic commercial buildings serve as visual reminders of the economic growth of this community from its earliest days as "the Junction" to its importance as a regional economic center.

IV. As indicated in the context statement, the J. C. and C. Ives Block, the building at 120 North Main Street, the Exchange Bank, the Crispe Block, the Spencer-Woodard Building and the Sun Theater are all examples of aspects of Plainwell's commercial and architectural development. Despite some alterations, all retain a high degree of historic and architectural integrity. The Sun Theater is Plainwell's only remaining historic theater building.

Associated Property Types -- 9

I. Housing

II. Plainwell's historic housing stock consists almost exclusively of single-family houses built between about 1850 and 1940. The housing stock consists primarily of frame buildings, but a few brick ones are present. The houses exemplify typical historic Midwestern and American house forms and types such as the I-house, upright-and-wing, gabled-ell, leanto or saltbox, and bungalow and foursquare and a diverse range of architectural styles including Greek Revival, Italianate, Eastlake, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Tudor. Most of the key houses from an architectural standpoint

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are located along East and West Bridge and South Main Streets and are Italianate, Eastlake, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival in style.

Plainwell's principal concentration of historic housing stock, including not only the great majority of the key buildings but also the major concentration of typical examples, is found within the area encompassed by the Island and West Bridge Street Historic Districts. Other parts of the city -- the rest of the island area; Allegan Street, West Bridge Street west of the district, and the triangular area between Allegan and West Bridge bounded by Prince Street on the west; First and Second Streets north of the river; and parts of North and South Sherwood Street -- also contain some historic housing, but (1) there are no major concentrations in these areas, (2) the older houses have in general suffered far more substantial alterations, and (3) many less-than-fifty-years old houses are present. The areas farther out from the center of the city toward the boundaries contain few older houses of any type. Post World War II subdivisions occupy most of the western edge of the city west of Prince Street toward the US-131 expressway and south of West Bridge Street.

III. As described more fully in the architecture context, Plainwell's housing stock is significant because of its quality and variety for a town of its size. Some of these homes also possess significance within the contexts of settlement, commerce, industry, government and social affairs because they housed civic, commercial, industrial and social leaders of the community. Only five houses located outside of the boundaries of the two districts were identified that appear to possess significance in architectural terms. Each is considered one of the prime examples of its style in the Plainwell context. They are:

- 241 Allegan Street. One of the five key examples of Eastlake in the city.
- 671 West Bridge Street. One of the five key examples of Italianate in the city.
- 414 N. Sherwood Street. One of the two key examples of Colonial Revival in the city.
- 147 S. Sherwood Avenue. One of the two best preserved Greek Revival houses in the city.

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115 W. Chart Street. One of the five key examples of the Eastlake style in the city.

IV. Two of the five houses identified above as being significant in architectural terms and located outside of the districts have been substantially and inappropriately modernized on the interior, while a third is clad in aluminum siding. The owner of a fourth could not be contacted despite numerous attempts, so that the interior could not be viewed. We have chosen to omit this fourth house from consideration until such time as an interior inspection can be set up. The final house, at 115 West Chart Street, has been very little altered, inside or out.

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency

- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

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This project was produced under a National Register subgrant awarded to the City of Plainwell and administered by the Bureau of History. Following receipt of the city's application, the proposed survey boundaries were reviewed by Robert O. Christensen, the Bureau's National Register Coordinator, through a site inspection. The proposed boundaries, which did not include the entire area of the city but did include all parts of the city which contained historic resources, were found acceptable by the Bureau.

The city originally applied for funding to assist in carrying out a reconnaissance-level survey, but the Bureau recommended a more large-scale project involving an initial reconnaissance-level survey with research and the preparation of historic context statements. This would be followed by an initial assessment of the data by the Bureau. Then, additional building-specific research would be performed to complete the database. Finally, a multiple property nomination would be prepared.

The city contracted this project to HISTORIC PRESERVATION, a private consultant firm, who carried out the project during 1990. The contractors carried out a photo inventory of the 870 properties in the survey area and researched and prepared context narratives during the spring of 1990. The survey and context narrative work was carried out in accordance with Bureau of History standards and was reviewed by the National Register and Survey coordinators.

In June, 1990, the National Register and Survey coordinators met in Plainwell with the consultants to review the consultants' proposed National Register properties. The Bureau approved general boundaries for the two historic districts and made tentative decisions to accept a number of individual properties as National Register candidates. Final decisions concerning the district boundaries and the individual sites to be included were made by the National Register coordinator in September through review of the data. The National Register coordinator was the primary reviewer of the National Register nomination.

In view of the size of the City of Plainwell and the diversity of its enterprises, the typology of significant property types has been based on historic function and association with the growth and development of the city. The nine property types identified are associated with at least one or more of the six contexts that trace

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the historic and architectural development of Plainwell from its settlement to 1940.

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photos, etc.

Interviews:

Joan Whitney	5-17-90, 8-20-90.
Rachel Payne	5-17-90.
Dory Gerritsen	5-17-90.
Blair Bates	5-17-90.
Joel Lefever	5-17-90, 8-23-90.
Lucille Kortess	6-6-90, 8-20-90.
Barbara Bradley	6-6-90, 8-23-90.
Ronald Pell	8-23-90.

Plainwell Historical Society meeting, question and answer
session, 9-21-90.