

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

West Vernor Highway Survey Area, Detroit, Michigan

B. Associated Historic Contexts

- Transportation - Development of West Vernor Highway
- Commerce - Development of Commercial Districts Along West Vernor Highway
- Architecture - Commercial Building Styles in Detroit from the 1880s thru the 1920s.
- Ethnic History - The German and Hispanic Population in Southwest Detroit.
- Religion - Holy Redeemer Parish and St. Gabriel Parish

C. Geographical Data

Both sides of West Vernor Highway from Michigan Avenue and the Michigan Central Railroad Station to Dix Road and the border between the cities of Detroit and Dearborn.

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.

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official

10/22/02
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.

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

12/12/2002
Date

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**WEST VERNOR HIGHWAY HISTORIC DISTRICTS, Wayne County, Michigan
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Statement of Historic Contexts

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

The West Vernor Highway Study Area consists of approximately 188 buildings which lie on either side of West Vernor Highway between Twenty-fourth Street on the east and Woodmere Avenue on the west. The area is significant because of its diverse ethnic heritage, its growth and development associated with the automobile industry, and its rich commercial history. Vernor Highway is one of the last remaining viable late 19th and early 20th century commercial thoroughfares that still retains a healthy and continuous concentration of businesses in the city of Detroit. It is the only commercial thoroughfare in the city with existing wood frame commercial buildings dating from the 1890's still in use. A drive down Vernor Highway is an intriguing study of the development of early commercial architecture and the changes effected by the styles and habits of the 20th Century.

EARLY YEARS

Farming and Brickmaking

The settlement of farms in the southwestern section of Detroit was originally known as Springwells Township, named after the numerous natural springs located near the present site of Fort Wayne. On April 12, 1827, the area known as "Spring Hill" officially became Springwells Township by an act of the state legislature. The township stretched from Grand Boulevard in Detroit to what is now known as the City of Dearborn.

During the 1800's Springwells was primarily a farming community, but the land also had an abundance of high grade and pure clay laid down during the glacial period. By the 1870's, brickmaking and tile manufacturing had become one of the area's main industries. There were at least eight brickyards in the southwest Detroit area, many of them located along Dix Road. It was often said that Detroit was built with Springwells clay. The area was also known for its many large nurseries. Many florists were located along Fort Street near the present location of Woodmere Cemetery. The early settlers in this area were mostly of English, Scottish, Irish and German descent. The township was known for its beauty and tranquility as well as its farms for an abundance of crops. In 1881, when Father Clarke of Holy Redeemer Parish took a census, he found 211 families scattered from Twenty-fifth Street to River Rouge, from the Detroit River to the Michigan Central Railroad. As more workers were drawn to the region to work in the new industrial plants that were being built near the Detroit River and the nearby Michigan Central Railroad yards, the farms slowly disappeared. By the 1870's the eastern portion of Springwells

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(between Grand Blvd. and Livernois) began to be divided into real estate subdivisions. The western portion of Springwells began to be subdivided in the late 1880's. The City of Detroit eventually annexed portions of Springwells Township. In 1885, Detroit annexed the area between Grand Boulevard and Livernois Avenue; the area between Livernois Avenue and Woodmere Cemetery was later annexed in 1906.

Industries

Springwells Township's early industrial development centered on the construction of ships. During the Revolutionary War, ships were built by occupying British forces on the inlet of the present day Woodmere Cemetery. The United States Army used the shipyard during the War of 1812. This area later became known as the Shipyard Tract. Because of its proximity to the Detroit River with access to the Great Lakes, and due to the development of the Great Lakes region as a major manufacturing area, Springwells Township soon attracted many of Detroit's early industries.

Industrial growth started during the 1830's with the building of small machine shops and foundries. After the Civil War, the economic conditions were inductive to the growth of new businesses and factories. A wide range of new industrial products were needed for these growing industries, mostly notably: railway cars, shipbuilding, stoves, steam radiators and boilers, brass goods, and chemicals. In addition, subterranean salt beds were found in the area of Springwells known as Delray. Soda ash, refined from salt brine, was instrumental in the production of plate glass. Delray and the surrounding area near the river became ideal locations for the construction of new industrial facilities.

Although a number of small companies located in southwest Detroit, it was the formation of the larger companies (employing 100 workers or more) that drew new laborers and immigrants to the area. During the late 1800's companies such as the Detroit Glass Works, the Detroit Salt Company, the Detroit Soda Products Company, the Pulp and Paper Mill Company, Detroit and Lake Superior Copper Works, the Detroit Steel and Spring Works, the Michigan Car Company, the Michigan Carbon Company and the Solvay Process Company established plants surrounding the study area; to the north along Dix Road near the railway lines and to the south along Fort Street near the Detroit River. These companies became the catalyst for the early residential and commercial development in the area.

The southwest Detroit area also became the railroad hub of the city and home to one of the city's largest railway car factories. The Michigan Car Company was established in 1864. In 1873 the

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company moved to a site at the junction of the Grand Trunk and Michigan Central railroads. The company was one of the most important industries in economic terms to locate in southwest Detroit. By the early 1890's it employed some 6,000 workers and became the largest employer in the city. The location of these many companies devoted to transportation, metalwork and chemicals combined with the many lumber companies and carriage manufacturing shops in the immediate area provided the perfect conditions to attract the new automobile industry to the area.

At the turn of the century existing companies in the area were beginning to become suppliers to the burgeoning automotive industry. The first automobile assembly plant built in southwest Detroit was the EMF Automobile Company. Built in 1908 at Clark Street and Jefferson Avenue, the plant was purchased two years later by the Studebaker Corporation in order to become their Detroit plant.

Henry Ford's decision to build the Ford Motor Company River Rouge Plant in the adjacent City of Dearborn was partially based on the land's proximity to the river, the major railways and the automotive suppliers in the area. The first factory in the River Rouge complex opened in 1917 and was used to build submarine chasers, called Eagle boats, for the U.S. Navy during World War I. The Rouge Plant quickly became Ford's primary industrial complex. He subsequently built about two dozen major structures along the Rouge River from 1917 to 1925, including a foundry, glass plant, tire plant, assembly building, cement plant, powerhouse and pressed steel building. At its peak, more than 75,000 people worked at the complex. The huge Rouge complex continues to be a dominant presence on Detroit's southwest side.

Development of Vernor Highway

The current Vernor Highway in southwest Detroit was originally known by two separate road names:

Dix Road (aka Dix Highway) - The section from Twenty-fourth Street to Waterman Avenue was known as Dix Road. Named after John Dix, one of the earliest settlers in Wayne county, the original Dix Road ran from Detroit out to Dearborn and may have been part of an early road to Toledo. Today, Dix Highway still exists from Waterman Avenue to the city of Melvindale where it becomes Dix-Toledo Road. Dix-Toledo Road was part of an important highway linking Detroit and Toledo that opened in the late 1920's.

Ferndale Avenue - The section from Waterman to Dix Road was originally known as Toledo Road. During the early 1900's it became known as Ferndale Avenue.

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Dix Road was originally a dirt road that accommodated the many farms located in Springwells Township. As residential neighborhoods began to develop, more specialized businesses began to appear along Dix Road: meat and grocery stores, clothing stores, bakeries, tailors, theaters, and real estate offices. The earliest commercial buildings begin to appear in the 1870's between Twenty-fourth Street and Lovers' Lane (now Junction) with the development of the Michigan Central Railroad. A major commercial district quickly began to grow just west of the intersection of Lovers' Lane and Dix Road with the establishment of Holy Redeemer Church on the southwest corner in 1880. Businesses included druggists, groceries, dry goods, hardware stores, barbers, meat markets, carriage makers, and saloons. It is in this area on Vernor Highway (between Junction and Twenty-fourth) that some of the city's oldest wood frame and brick commercial structures are located and still in use.

The area at the intersections of Vernor Highway, Central Avenue and Springwells Avenue began to develop in the 1900's and 1910's. During the 1890's the road was known as Toledo Road, but was renamed Ferndale Avenue shortly after the turn of the century. The explosive growth of the automobile industry drew even more workers into southwest Detroit. The commercial area on Ferndale Avenue at Lawndale developed in the 1920's with the growth of the Ford Rouge Plant. In 1919, the Detroit City Council and the City Planning Commission proposed a new crosstown highway to help ease traffic congestion in downtown Detroit and to make the flow of traffic comfortable, easy and convenient between the east and west sides. The proposed new highway was twelve miles long and was implemented as the Dix-High-Waterloo project. In 1920, the City Council passed two resolutions presented by Mayor James Couzens which called for the necessary widening, opening and extending of Dix Avenue from Fourteenth Street to Ferndale Avenue and the opening and widening of High Street from Fourteenth to Gratiot Avenue; the opening and widening of Cleveland Street from Gratiot to Bellevue Avenues, and the opening and widening of Waterloo Street from Bellevue to Hurlbut Avenue. The project immediately became controversial with opponents criticizing the high cost of the project and residents protesting the condemnation of their property. Work on the new highway did not proceed until three years later and only after the largest condemnation case ever tried in the city at that time which involved three hundred and eighty four parcels of land.

In 1925, the Dix-High-Waterloo thoroughfare was renamed Vernor Highway in honor of James Vernor, a former member of the City Council and well-known Detroit businessman. As a young man, Vernor opened a pharmacy at Woodward Avenue and Clifford Street where he developed a formula for ginger ale. The ginger ale was so popular that the business grew into the Vernor Ginger Ale Company which became a famous Detroit trademark. At the age of 46, after the success of his company had made him a fortune, Vernor became involved in the growth of the

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city and turned to public office. He was a member of the City Council for twenty-five years and was known for his devotion to the city. He was instrumental in establishing public ownership of the street railways and was one of the supporters of the Dix-High-Waterloo project. At the time of his death in 1927, he was mourned as one of Detroit's great civic leaders.

Vernor Highway became a major crosstown thoroughfare and one of the most important routes leading to the Ford River Rouge Complex until the construction of the freeway system in Detroit in the 1950's-1960's. Construction of I-75 thru downtown destroyed the section of Vernor Highway from Michigan Avenue to St. Aubin.

Baker Street Line

The first streetcar lines in Detroit were built in the early 1860's. These used horse-drawn cars on tracks and were located in the downtown area. By the 1870's, Detroit's population was doubling every ten years. Transportation needs escalated with the growth of new neighborhoods and private companies were soon obtaining franchises to build new lines. Railway lines to the west side were soon laid down Michigan Avenue and Fort Street. In 1873, a crosstown line running from Mt. Elliott and Congress via Congress, Joseph Campau, Larned, Randolph, Seventh, Baker (Bagley), Twenty-fourth, and Dix to the western city limits was established. This line was known as the Detroit and Grand Trunk Junction Street Railway. This was the beginning of the well-traveled Baker Street line that ran down what is now known as Vernor Highway. In 1875, it was renamed the Congress and Baker Street Railway and, in 1879, the operation of the line was taken over by the Detroit City Railway.

By the late 1880's, horse-drawn streetcars could not keep up with the growth of new neighborhoods throughout the city. Real estate developers were generally the promoters and often the investors in the new railway companies. During this time the railway lines began to convert to electricity: a faster, cleaner and more efficient source of power. The first electric railway line in Detroit was on Dix Avenue, built in 1886 by the Detroit Electric Railway. The line ran from Twenty-fourth Street to the city limits, which were then at Livernois, then out to Woodmere Cemetery in Springwells Township. However, in 1889 the City Council revoked the franchise due to complaints of noise. As a result, the line was switched back to horsepower. The line was eventually taken over by the newly formed Detroit United Railway and converted back to electricity in 1895.

In 1917, the Ford Motor Company opened a shipyard at the site of the River Rouge complex in order to build ships for the World War I effort. To accommodate the heavy flow of new

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workers to the Ford Plant the Detroit United Railway (D.U.R.) extended the Baker line on Dix Road and Ferndale Avenue (now Vernor) from Springwells Avenue to Woodmere Avenue, where it swung onto a private right-of-way along the south side of the road. The railway continued on to Eagle Avenue, where it terminated in an open field at what became known as the Eagle Loop. By 1920, Henry Ford began construction of the Rouge Plant on the site of the old Eagle Shipbuilding Plant. The transfer of workers from the Highland Park Plant to the new Rouge site drew thousands of workers down the Baker line to the Eagle Loop. In 1922, the D.U.R. was taken over by Detroit's Department of Street Railways (D.S.R.) and became a municipal operation. By 1925, traffic to the Eagle Loop had grown so heavy that the D.S.R. and the Ford Motor Company entered into an agreement to make an extension of the streetcar tracks westward from Eagle Loop to two new terminals on Ford Rouge property.

The Baker line became a heavily traveled route. The line ran from the Ford Rouge Plant, through downtown and then on to Hamtramck, past the Dodge Main Plant. The line also passed behind the Michigan Central Depot. Thousands of people rode this line daily until it was discontinued in the early 1950's. The existence of this major streetcar route down Vernor Highway stimulated the growth of commercial development. Businesses along Vernor flourished with the flow of pedestrian traffic. (Although the name of Baker Street was changed to Bagley Avenue in the early 1900's the streetcar line retained the same name until the end. The Baker Streetcar Bar is still in existence on Joseph Campau in Hamtramck today.)

Theme: TRANSPORTATION
Region: West Vernor Highway, Southwest Detroit
Period: 1870-1950

During the mid-1800's, West Vernor Highway consisted of a dirt road leading from the City of Detroit through farmland and an area southwest of the City known as Springwells Township. The road was known as Dix Road and may have been an early road to Toledo, Ohio. The Detroit atlas of 1876 shows the road starting in the vicinity of West Grand Boulevard, which at that time was the city limits. Dix Road was located between two other major roads that existed in southwest Detroit: Fort Street on the south, which followed a trail along the Detroit River, and Michigan Avenue, which was part of the road between Detroit and Chicago.

The eastern section of Dix Road developed as a commercial thoroughfare in the 1870's with the building of the Michigan Central Railroad Yards and the location of new industries nearby. Southwest Detroit was rapidly becoming an important region for industrial development because

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it offered easy access to the three major transportation systems: railroads, lake shipping, and roads. Workers were quickly attracted to the area seeking housing and goods. Farmland was parceled into subdivisions as Detroit began to annex portions of Springwells Township. Traffic on Dix Road increased as working class neighborhoods began to develop in southwest Detroit.

Horse-drawn streetcar railway lines were first laid in Detroit in the early 1860's. By the 1870's railway lines were laid in southwest Detroit to accommodate the growing manufacturing industry and the housing boom. In 1873, the Baker Street Line was established as a crosstown line extending from Mt. Elliott on the east side to the city limits on the west side. By the 1880's electric railways were developed as a faster, cleaner alternative to the horse-drawn trolley. In 1886, the first electric railway line in Detroit was constructed on Dix Avenue. This line was eventually taken over by the newly formed Detroit United Railway and connected to the already popular Baker Street Line.

In the early 1900's, Detroit became the leading automobile manufacturer in the world. The development of Henry Ford's assembly line provided jobs for thousands of workers and allowed cars to be made at an affordable price that workers themselves could pay. Streets throughout the City of Detroit were paved to handle the traffic caused by the popularity of the automobile. The increase of pedestrian and vehicular activity generated by the surrounding neighborhoods caused the construction of commercial buildings to escalate. Dix Road had become a major thoroughfare linking the city with its new southwest neighborhoods.

The construction of the Ford Motor Company Rouge Complex after World War I meant the addition of thousands of commuting workers to the well-traveled Baker Street Railway Line. The heavy use of the Baker Street Line resulted in the extension of the route from Hamtramck, through downtown, and then west to the Rouge Plant in Dearborn. The line was widely used by members of many immigrant groups including the Poles, Italians, and Germans who traveled the line to reach both the Ford Rouge Plant in Dearborn and Dodge Main in Hamtramck.

The popularity of the automobile was so intense that traffic congestion was a serious problem in industrial areas within the city. Planning and road improvements were major concerns for city leaders seeking ways to offer relief to the traffic problems. Detroit had grown so large that remedies were needed to improve the flow of automobile traffic between the east and west sides of the city. In the early 1920's the Detroit City Council passed resolutions calling for the construction of a crosstown highway. The new Dix-High-Waterloo Project was completed by 1925 and the whole renamed Vernor Highway. It was twelve miles long and offered the motorist a faster route across the city from the Grosse Pointe city limits on the east to the Dearborn city

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limits on the west.

Vernor Highway also has important ties to railroad transportation. Southwest Detroit was the primary location for most railroad lines coming into the city. The yards of the Michigan Central Railroad, one of the first and most lucrative railroads in the state, were located just west of Dix Road. Other railroads that ran into and out of Southwest Detroit between 1860 and 1930 included the Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad, Michigan Southern, Grand Trunk, Detroit & Toledo, Detroit & Milwaukee, and the Wabash Railroad. In 1915 the majestic Michigan Central Station was constructed near Michigan Avenue and Fourteenth Street. In 1925, Vernor Highway was built past the train station, making the highway the most viable automobile route to the station.

Vernor Highway remained one of the most important transportation routes in the city until the construction of the freeway system in the 1950's-1960's. Although the highway is no longer a popular crosstown route, it is still an integral part of the transportation system in southwest Detroit.

Theme: COMMERCE
Region: West Vernor Highway, Southwest Detroit
Period: 1880-1950

Commercial establishments may have existed on West Vernor Highway (then known as Dix Road) as early as the 1860's. It was one of the few roads that existed in the farming community of Springwells Township. General stores and saloons dotted the roadside to serve the farms and brickyards that were located in the township. In the 1870's, these commercial buildings stood individually up and down Dix Road. But as the area developed, the scattered buildings began to coalesce into small commercial districts. The extension of the Baker Street Railway Line down Dix Road in the 1880's and the development of neighboring subdivisions brought more pedestrian traffic and customers for the local businesses.

By the 1880's, small commercial districts existed on Dix Road between Hubbard and Scotten, between Clark and McKinstry, and between Morrell and Junction. The businesses included grocers, hardware stores, drugs stores, barbers, saloons, meat markets, dry goods and a carriage manufacturer. German immigrants were moving into the surrounding neighborhoods to work at the nearby brickyards and burgeoning manufacturing industries. Most of the businesses located along Dix Road at this time were owned by Germans, although there were also businesses owned

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by Irish and English descendants. These early commercial buildings were generally two story wood frame buildings with the business located on the first floor and the owner's residence located on the second floor. A few brick buildings began to appear on Dix by the 1890's. Many of these late 19th century commercial buildings are still standing and in use today. In particular, the section of Vernor Highway between Grand Boulevard and Clark and the section between Clark and Junction contain some of oldest remaining neighborhood commercial structures in the city.

The success of the automobile industry at the turn of the century drew more workers and residents to southwest Detroit, which in turn created an even greater demand for goods and services. Commercial buildings were built at a faster rate and filled in the vacant lots between the districts, now connecting them to form a continuous commercial thoroughfare. The building of more stores along Dix Road, particularly in the Vernor/Clark District and the Vernor/Junction District, was not the only sign of a prosperous economy. Another sign was the appearance of new types of businesses. Confectioneries, bakeries and stores specializing in clothing, notions, furniture, and cigars were now locating along the road. The emergence of real estate offices in particular was an indicator of the growing economic climate. The commercial districts also saw an increase in Jewish owned businesses during this time period.

Although a few wood structures were built in the early 1900's, the majority of commercial buildings were now constructed of brick. The buildings at 4737-4739 W. Vernor, 5626-5628 W. Vernor and 5614-5616 W. Vernor are good examples of single storefront, owner occupied brick buildings. It was during this time that many owners were now not only building to house their own businesses but were erecting structures with two to three storefronts to provide additional space for commercial rental. Owners were still using the second floor for their own residences but were also adding additional residential apartments for added income. Some building owners were also beginning to offer second floor office space more frequently for the use of physicians and dentists. The buildings at 5696-5698 W. Vernor, 5676-5678 W. Vernor and 5882-5888 W. Vernor are examples of brick multi-storefront buildings built during this time period. It was also during this time that buildings were erected strictly for investment purposes with owners renting out both the storefront and residential space.

Some businesses were becoming virtual small industries. John Peters' meat market built in 1901 at 5456-5460 W. Vernor grew to become the Peters Sausage Company with a large industrial addition at the rear of the original two story brick store. Many an owner whose building had two storefronts was expanding his business into the second storefront, taking over the entire first floor of the building. Many an owner acquired the building adjacent to his and connected the

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two buildings together.

The Vernor/Junction District became so popular, particularly because of its close proximity to Holy Redeemer Church, that all the lots in the commercial area were filled. There was no more land for new businesses to be established in the 1920's with the influx of traffic to the new Ford Motor Company Rouge Plant. Many new businesses established themselves in the newly developing Vernor/Central and Vernor/Lawndale Districts.

The Vernor/Central District developed in the late 1910's where the Baker Street Line made a turn south on Springwells Avenue. But when the line was extended in the 1920's toward the Ford Rouge Plant, commercial development exploded. Drug stores, banks, bakeries, groceries, confectioneries, clothing stores, etc. opened in this district with its two main intersections of Vernor/Central and Vernor/Springwells. The majority of commercial buildings built here were brick, two-story with multiple storefronts. However, with the abundance of available real estate lots, business owners were now commonly constructing buildings with three or more storefronts. Although a few business owners were still occupying the second floor, a building was more likely to have second floor office space available. It was also during this period of time that small commercial buildings began to be occupied by chain grocery stores such as the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Co., the Kroger Company and the C.F. Smith Company.

The 1920's also saw the development of three story commercial apartment buildings on Ferndale Avenue (later Vernor Highway). These buildings had multiple storefronts on the first floor and numerous residential units on the second and third floors. The largest apartment building was the Ferndale Apartments at 8715-8741 W. Vernor in the Vernor/Lawndale District with eight storefronts and thirty-two apartments.

Vernor Highway continued to thrive as a commercial thoroughfare until the late 1960's. After the Detroit riots of the late 1960's many white residents fled the city relocating both homes and businesses to the suburbs. Vernor Highway has been in a steady economic decline since that period but has managed to hold on to its importance as a center for commercial activity in southwest Detroit. The city has recently seen a resurgence in city living which has given an economic boost to Vernor Highway. Mexicantown, located on Bagley east of Twenty-fourth Street, has been a successful restaurant district since the 1940's. The success of Mexicantown has now spilled over to Vernor Highway. Hispanic businesses have spread to all of Vernor Highway's commercial districts helping to stabilize the area and adding momentum to its revitalization.

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Theme: COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE
Region: West Vernor Highway, Southwest Detroit
Period: 1880-1950

The earliest buildings built along this route were scattered farmhouses belonging to the early farms of Springwells Township. On early maps of the area commercial buildings began to appear on Dix Road in the 1860's and may have existed earlier if it was indeed a road to Toledo. Photographs of similar commercial structures of this period indicate that these early buildings were simple wood frame structures, one to two stories tall depending on whether there were residential quarters above the business. As the road developed and traffic increased, commercial buildings tended to cluster together, usually at the intersection of two roads.

By the 1880's the street's wood frame commercial buildings had began to exhibit decorative elements of the Late Victorian period. The Vernor/Clark District and the Vernor/Junction District have a number of wood frame commercial buildings from the 1890's and possibly from the 1880's. Building permits from this time period are incomplete and sometimes confusing. It is possible that some of the older buildings, whose building permits could not be located, may be from the 1880's. The wooden commercial buildings along Vernor Highway form Detroit's largest concentration of these structures, which have mostly disappeared elsewhere. Most of these buildings have had some type of siding added to the front façade but the original wood cladding is often still visible on the side and rear elevations. Unfortunately, decorative trimwork has been removed or covered over by siding. There are many buildings that still have some visible decorative elements such as bay windows, decorative pediments or wood shingles, like the building at 5446-5448 W. Vernor.

These early wood frame commercial buildings were usually two stories with a single storefront on the lower level and residential space on the second floor, in most cases the second floor being the residence of the owner of the business. Often, a building may have an attached garage or barn, especially if it was located on a corner, such as the building at 4856-4858 W. Vernor. Many business owners or their widows continued to reside on the second floor of the building long after their business closed and the space was rented out.

A few of the commercial buildings built on Dix Road in the 1890's were of brick. The buildings at 5426-5428 W. Vernor and 5413-5417 W. Vernor were both erected in 1891 and may be among the oldest brick neighborhood commercial buildings existing in the city of Detroit. These brick buildings were handsome edifices with decorative brickwork on the cornice and second floor.

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As time progressed, brick replaced wood in the construction of buildings along Dix Road. By the 1900's, the majority of buildings constructed were two-story, brick, commercial block consisting of storefront space on the lower level and residential space on the upper level. Many of the buildings were simply designed with minor decorative features. They exhibited a classical sense of order but did not reflect traditional historic styles. The accessibility of brick, now in various colors and textures, allowed buildings to differ in appearance and shape. Several buildings, such as 5626-5628 W. Vernor, were handsomely designed with bay windows and decorative cornices. A number of these brick commercial buildings have had their front facades rebuilt or altered as early as the 1930's, particularly the first floor storefront entrances and windows.

More intensive development in the early 20th century resulted in larger brick buildings allowing for more available commercial and residential space. Many brick commercial buildings consisted of two to four storefronts on the first floor and multiple residential units or office space on the second floor. The buildings at 5696-5698 W. Vernor and 5893-5901 W. Vernor are good examples of multiple storefront commercial buildings of the early 1900's.

The 1910's saw the introduction of the two story commercial building constructed for the use of a single business such as the Marentette Furniture Store at 5656-5658 W. Vernor. It was larger than the average commercial building with showroom space on the first floor and storage, office or additional showroom space on the second floor. Another good example is the Schneider Furniture Building at 4857 W. Vernor. The design of these larger commercial buildings had a tendency to make the particular business stand out on the street. It also allowed the store to display more merchandise to the passing motorist and streetcar passenger. The success of these stores led to the development of commercial buildings that were designed purposely to give the store a separate identity. The early supermarket built for the Kroger Grocery and Baking Company at 5700-5708 W. Vernor is an excellent example of a new commercial style that identified the building with the grocery chain.

Bank buildings and theaters also had their own style popular to the period in which they were built and a distinct separate identity from other commercial buildings. Banks were often built with facades that resembled Greek or Roman temples in the early 1900's. This temple front design gave the banking establishment a distinguished and prominent presence that stood out from the average commercial building. The People's State Bank buildings at 8710 W. Vernor and at 6061 W. Vernor are fine examples of commercial bank buildings of this period. The brick commercial building at 7900-7904 W. Vernor was altered in the 1920's when it became the Bank of Detroit. The bank added a new cement façade in an attempt to give the building an

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institutional appearance.

West Vernor Highway also had many theaters located along its route. The Clark Park at 4418 W. Vernor, the Courtesy at 6041 W. Vernor, the Ferndale at 7915 W. Vernor, and the Dix at 4035 W. Vernor have since been demolished. Only the two largest theaters remain: the Stratford at 4651 W. Vernor (now Metropolitan World Outreach church) and the Rio at 7714 W. Vernor (now Target Furniture). The Stratford Theatre was a beautiful 1100 seat theatre built in the Beaux Arts style. In the 1930's a paneled Art Moderne façade, the popular style of the period, was added to the building. The Rio Theatre was a 1400 seat theatre whose original façade has been covered with a new stucco front. The basic form of the theater interior remains in place.

The 1920's saw a proliferation of larger two-story commercial block buildings. It was now common for a building to have four to six storefronts. The building at 7626-7640 W. Vernor has four storefronts while its neighbor, 7600-7620 W. Vernor has six storefronts. These buildings often have decorative detailing that accentuated the horizontal aspect of the building such as the stone stringcourses at 7746-7760 W. Vernor.

The 1920's also saw an increase in the construction of apartment buildings, now a respectable housing alternative, to meet the demands of a growing population in southwest Detroit. Vernor Highway was an excellent location for apartment living because of the easy access to transportation and commercial services. These buildings were not located in the heart of the busy commercial districts but rather on the outskirts or in the nearby neighborhoods. The apartment buildings of the 1920's usually consisted of more than ten units and displayed a wide array of architectural styles. The Cole Apartments at 3615 W. Vernor had twenty-five apartments and was designed in the Spanish Mission Revival style. The Vernor Highway Apartments at 7121 W. Vernor had nineteen units and was designed in the Tudor Revival style.

The Vernor/Lawndale District was a different type of commercial district on West Vernor Highway in that it developed with a high concentration of three-story brick commercial buildings with storefront space on the first floor and apartment units on the second and third floors. The buildings were clustered around the intersection of West Vernor and Lawndale and formed a commercial pocket with the OddFellows Hall as a community anchor to the district.

West Vernor Highway is a remarkable example of the development of early neighborhood commercial architecture from the 1880's through the 1930's. It is remarkable that many of the late 19th century wood frame commercial buildings not only still exist in southwest Detroit, but

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are still in viable use today. There is no other commercial avenue in the city of Detroit that displays such a collection of early wood frame commercial buildings of this era.

West Vernor Highway also has a good representative collection of buildings typical of 20th century commercial architecture in Detroit. Although a number of commercial structures of this period can still be found along other main corridors of the city such as Jefferson, Fort, Gratiot and Grand River, these streets have lost most of their commercial activity. Businesses along these corridors can be found only in isolated pockets of individual buildings. Many of the commercial buildings along these avenues are abandoned and deteriorating.

West Vernor Highway has retained its commercial vitality, perhaps because unlike the other wider corridors, the highway was never widened and remains a two lane main street through southwest Detroit. The collections of storefront buildings along West Vernor still exhibit the compactness, pedestrian accessibility and consumer popularity that continue to make it the main street of the surrounding neighborhood, much as it was when it was first developed. Although the streetcars have disappeared, West Vernor remains a bustling commercial thoroughfare of bakeries, grocers, restaurants and merchants. This "main street" setting has long since disappeared from other Detroit neighborhoods of the same period.

Theme: ETHNIC HISTORY
Region: West Vernor Highway, Southwest Detroit
Period: 1600-1950

History

The early farming community in Springwells Township consisted mainly of English, Irish, Scotch and German families. There were large concentrations of Irish in the nearby working-class district of Corktown and in neighborhoods along Michigan Avenue to the north of the study area. As the area along West Vernor Highway developed it attracted more immigrants and second generation households.

GERMAN - The largest group that located in the area in the late nineteenth century was of German descent. For many years, the Germans had the largest population in the City of Detroit. In 1880, 37% of Detroit's households were of German ancestry. The most noted and well-known German area was on Detroit's near east side along Gratiot Avenue. From 1880 to 1900, Germans moved to some of the newer neighborhoods that were being established on the

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southwest side. Most were recent immigrants who came from West Prussia. Many of them worked in the brickyards that were located a little further west. This German heritage can be traced through the history of the churches located in the Vernor Highway area, many of them still in existence.

The southwest side had a number of Lutheran churches organized in the 1880's and 1890's as a result of the inflow of German families into the area. Bethlehem Lutheran Church (1886), St. Matthew Lutheran Church (1903) and St. Stephen Lutheran Church (1889) are among the many that were built at the end of the 19th century.

The Roman Catholic Holy Redeemer Parish (1880) and St. Gabriel's Parish (1916) are located on Vernor Highway. Although the churches were organized to accommodate communities that included Irish and English residents, the early parishioners of both parishes were primarily German.

The German population can also be traced in the many businesses located along Vernor Highway that were owned by Germans. City directories during the 1880's list the names of Rohde, Wittenberg, Schwap, Grunert, Nitz, Wolff, Moeller and others residing or owning businesses on Dix Road between Hubbard and Junction. In the 1920's, businesses along the Vernor corridor included Burgherdt's Grocery, Rebert's Bakery, Kansler Plumbing, Peters Sausage Company and Schneider's Furniture Store. Although the Germans were at one time the largest ethnic group located in the city, their identity began to diminish as a result of World War I and II. Many Germans did not want to be associated with the old country and no longer promoted their German heritage. While second and third generations moved out of the old neighborhood, new ethnic groups (Hispanic and African-American) began to move in, diminishing the German presence.

HISPANIC - Mexicans began arriving in Detroit after World War I, and their numbers increased quickly in the 1920's, generally a time of economic expansion. The Mexican population of the city in 1920 was reported to be approximately 2500, and by 1928 it was between 10,000 and 15,000, although the U.S. census of 1930 officially reported only 5,615. This discrepancy is a result of the fact that Hispanics may not have been reported as such or illegals may have reported their origins as Texas. The major reason they migrated to Detroit was for economic opportunity in the face of instability that came with the revolutionary conditions in their homeland.

Old Saint Mary's Church on Monroe and St. Antoine (Greektown) was the first Catholic Church

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attended by many of the Mexicans settling in Detroit. Gradually, the Mexicans moved from the area around Greektown to an area west of downtown along Michigan Avenue. They were of the lowest income levels when they arrived in Detroit, so they tended to occupy the houses of older ethnic groups that achieved a level of economic mobility, allowing them to move out of older established neighborhoods to newer ones, for example, the Irish of Corktown.

In the 1930's, conditions for the Hispanic population worsened as a result of the Great Depression. Foreign populations became scapegoats because of the scarcity of jobs for American workers. The United States Department of Labor, through the use of social workers, began a program of repatriation, some forced and some voluntary, of Mexicans and Mexican Americans back to Mexico. The Mexican government welcomed those who returned because they were needed on the land. Concern about their impoverished conditions as well as the forced deportations to Mexico led to the organization of the Liga de Obrero U Campasinos Mexicanos (League of Mexican Peasants and Workers). The League helped those who wished to return to Mexico as well as those who wished to stay. In cooperation with the Mexican Consul in Detroit and the U.S. Department of Immigration, Diego Rivera, an active League member, assisted thousands of *repatriados* with money to set up cooperatives in Mexico. He gave most of the money he earned from painting the *Detroit Industry* murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts to that cause, but never imagined the extent of the deportations or the hardship it worked on those returning. The money for the programs largely ran out before people had been able to start anew in Mexico.

As a result, the Mexican population plummeted, so that by 1936, U.S. Immigration Services estimated only 1200 Mexicans living in Detroit. By 1937, as economic conditions improved, Mexicans were again drawn to the city, so that by 1940, there were 6000-8000 Mexicans in Detroit. Bagley Avenue replaced Michigan Avenue as what could be considered the "Main Street" of the Mexican community with the movement to southwest Detroit in the 1940's. The stretch of Bagley between 15th and 25th Streets was filled with Mexican grocery stores, bakeries, restaurants, bars and one theater. The Hispanic community was then centered around Most Holy Trinity Church in Corktown and beginning to congregate at Ste. Anne's Church at Howard and 19th.

During the 1940's, the growing Mexican community began to shift toward the west down Vernor Highway. The Lithuanian Hall at Vernor and 25th became the Hispanos Unidos Hall. Mexican restaurants and businesses slowly began to appear along the Vernor Highway corridor. In the 1950's, new freeways displaced a large part of the Hispanic community forcing many to relocate further west toward Vernor and Junction. Holy Redeemer Parish began to draw the new

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Hispanic residents, the majority being devout Roman Catholics. By the mid-1950's, approximately 20% of the student body at Holy Redeemer Schools were of Mexican descent. By 1969, Holy Redeemer had a special Spanish-only Mass on Sundays. Today, the parish is at the heart of the Hispanic community and the center for many activities. The intersection at Vernor Highway and Junction is now a thriving Hispanic commercial area with Hispanic restaurants, bakeries, merchants and supermarkets. Although the largest percentage of the Hispanic community is Mexican, there is an increasing population coming from Cuba and South America.

Theme: RELIGION
Region: West Vernor Highway, Southwest Detroit
Period: 1880-1950

West Vernor Highway has three churches located along its route, all of which played an important role in the development of the areas surrounding them. Holy Redeemer Parish, St. Gabriel's Parish and St. Anthony Lithuanian Parish are all Roman Catholic churches built by immigrants that had moved to southwest Detroit seeking job opportunities at the new industries located in the area. The Roman Catholic Church had a long standing presence in the City of Detroit since the founding of Ste. Anne's Church in 1701. As immigrant groups settled throughout the city, they established churches in their neighborhoods as places to worship and gather with relatives and fellow immigrants. These churches were the strongholds of their neighborhoods, offering faith and assistance to the many newcomers to the area.

Holy Redeemer Parish

In 1880, Father Aegidius Smulders arrived in Detroit upon the invitation of Bishop Borgess and was given the task of organizing the scattered Irish and German Catholics living in the area of Springwells Township. Father Smulders was a former chaplain with the Confederate army during the Civil War and a member of the Redemptorist Order. Patrick Ratigan, who ran a general store on what is now West Jefferson Avenue opposite Historic Fort Wayne, permitted the use of his business for Sunday services and as a residence for Father Smulders. In his search for a new church, Smulders rented a two-story building that had formerly been Paddy McMahan's Saloon for services on the first floor and a monastery on the second floor. In 1880, he purchased four acres on the southwest corner of Dix Road and Lovers' Lane (now Junction) for the site of the new church. The sandy land proved to be too unstable to build upon, but the sand was removed by volunteers and the 75 X 40 foot church was referred to for many years as "the little church on the sand hill." By 1881, Holy Redeemer accommodated 211 families from 25th Street

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on the east to River Rouge on the west, and from the Detroit River on the south to the Michigan Central Railroad line on the north. The first parish elementary school, staffed by Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters, was opened in 1882.

A new twin-spire Gothic church was erected in 1897 and a new school constructed in 1902 for a student body numbering over 1,000. In 1904, Father Daniel Mullane became pastor and oversaw the construction of a new rectory and convent. By 1910, the number of registered families was 1,100 and by 1914, the church was holding nine Sunday Masses for its congregation. In 1916, a boys high school was built.

Although plans were made for a yet larger church under the pastorship of Father Nicholas Franzen, they were delayed until after the end of World War I. The new basilica was designed by the Detroit architectural firm of Donaldson & Meier and dedicated in 1923. The church is a magnificent example of Romanesque architecture with Pewabic tiles and stained glass windows produced by the Detroit Stained Glass Company. A campanile was built adjacent to the church as a memorial to the young men of the parish who had given their lives during the First World War.

In 1928, a new school and gymnasium was built making the Holy Redeemer Parish complex one of the largest in the state of Michigan. In 1945, an auxiliary chapel was opened on the corner of West Jefferson and Cavalry Street (believed to be the site of Patrick Ratigan's general store) to handle the spillover crowds from the main church. The chapel held five Masses and served the military personnel stationed at nearby Fort Wayne.

The increase in the Mexican population in southwest Detroit began in the early 1940s. Mexican families moved from the Corktown area west to neighborhoods along West Vernor Highway and to the parish of Holy Redeemer. Father James Barrett, a priest who had worked in the Redemptorist Missions in Texas, was appointed director of the Mexican Apostolate. Father Barrett served Mexicans at both Ste. Anne's and Holy Redeemer. By the 1960's, students of Mexican descent represented 20% of the student body of 1,200 students at Holy Redeemer Schools. Spanish language Masses were established in the 1960's along with regular devotions to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The Redemptorist Fathers, who had administered Holy Redeemer Parish since its founding, withdrew their ministry in 1999 from the Detroit Archdiocese because of declining ranks within the order. The administration of the church was transferred to the Diocese of Detroit. Although Holy Redeemer Parish is not as large, in numbers, as it once was, it continues to be a strong

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parish with a large supportive congregation. It is an important center for the Hispanic community and together with Ste. Anne's Parish celebrates the ethnic and cultural diversity of its current parishioners.

St. Gabriel's Parish

St. Gabriel's Parish was the fiftieth Catholic church to be established in the City of Detroit. It was established in 1916 by Father Peter Esper who was sent out by Bishop John Foley to build a church to accommodate the growing number of Catholics living west of Holy Redeemer Parish. Father Esper rode the Baker Trolley Line almost due west until it turned south on Springwells Avenue. Two blocks beyond the corner of Ferndale and Springwells where Father Esper debarked lay the corner where he would build his church. A temporary "garage church" was constructed of cement blocks. A rectory was built in 1917 and a new church designed in the Romanesque style by C. Gottesleben erected in 1918.

Over the years the parish continued to grow and in 1953, Father Lawrence Dorr erected a new church in the Modern style popular at the time. The old church was converted into classroom space and a nearby building purchased for a gymnasium. Today, the parish has a culturally diverse congregation with the majority of parishioners being Hispanic.

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F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type Neighborhood Commercial District

II. Description

Neighborhood commercial districts are located along West Vernor Highway at the major intersections that cross its path as it travels from Michigan Avenue and the Michigan Central Railroad Station on the east to the Detroit city limits at Dix Road on the west. Along this route West Vernor Highway is a busy two-lane thoroughfare with parking lanes on both sides of the street to accommodate business patrons. The commercial buildings are located on both the north and south sides of the highway and are uniformly set back from the street. The majority of the buildings sit side by side and directly on the sidewalk line.

These districts contain basically two types of property uses, Commercial and Residential.

Commercial - The commercial buildings mainly consist of two-story wood frame or brick buildings with one or more storefronts on the first floor and residential/office space on the second floor. These buildings were originally built for use as meat markets, groceries, bakeries, barbers, hardware stores, confectioneries and other businesses. They were designed to accommodate both neighborhood residents and workers who commuted by way of Vernor Highway to the Ford Rouge Plant and other industrial sites. The storefront space had large display windows that store owners used to advertise their goods to the potential consumers who passed by. The majority of commercial buildings along West Vernor are these two-story commercial block buildings. Other types of commercial buildings found in the districts are banks and theaters. Banks developed their own institutional style imitating temples in the Greek Revival style. The former bank building at 8710 W. Vernor in the West Vernor/Lawndale district is an excellent example of a temple-front bank. West Vernor Highway also had a number of theaters located along its route. Unfortunately, only two of these theater buildings have survived, the Rio Theatre (now the Target Furniture Store) at 7700-7720 West Vernor and the Stratford Theatre (now the Metropolitan World Outreach Church) at 4751- 4755 W. Vernor.

Banks and theaters were among the few buildings on West Vernor Highway designed specifically for one use and, as such, easily identified as that particular institution.

Residential - Residential property types found in the West Vernor commercial districts

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consisted of two types: second-story flats above storefronts and apartment buildings. Most of the small commercial buildings with one or two storefronts constructed from the 1880s thru the 1920s typically had residential space on the second floor. Small business owners generally lived above their business. Directories from this time period offer a glimpse of the commercial neighborhood with owners listed twice, first with their business address and then with their residential address, in a long progression down the block. Apartment buildings appear only in the West Vernor/Lawndale district. These three-story brick commercial buildings developed in the 1920s with the influx of workers into the area.

III. Significance

The historic districts along West Vernor Highway are unique examples of the development of early commercial architecture from the 1880s through the 1930s in Detroit. Many brick commercial buildings of this period still exist along such avenues as Grand River, Gratiot and Michigan, but these roads are four to six lane transportation corridors that have isolated sections of commercial activity. West Vernor Highway was never widened like those other major avenues. The districts are also surrounded by neighborhoods having a strong, cultural community focus. As a result, the West Vernor historic districts are still in viable use today and retain an atmosphere of a small town main street. Although Detroit had other similar business avenues from this early time period such as Mack and Chene Avenues, most are no longer viable commercial districts. Few other business districts in the Detroit area that compare to the West Vernor districts in configuration, visuality, integrity and commercial activity. A primary example is the main street section of Joseph Campau Avenue in Hamtramck, which still exhibits a similar vitality.

The West Vernor/Junction district is also significant because it contains several wooden two-story commercial buildings dating from the 1880s and 1890. Few early wood commercial buildings survive in Detroit. Most of these structures were demolished due to explosive early twentieth-century growth and late twentieth-century economic problems. No other commercial avenue in Detroit displays such a collection of early wood frame commercial buildings of this era.

IV. Registration Requirements

The West Vernor Highway Survey concentrated only on the commercial development located

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Description (continued)

along West Vernor Highway. The surrounding residential neighborhood and nearby industrial sites were not studied as part of the project. Future research work may reveal larger districts which meet national register criteria. The West Vernor districts were established based on the following characteristics:

1. The individual districts were determined National Register eligible within the defined boundaries based on the district's primary concentration of buildings which date from the area's period of growth and development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which reflect the historic themes developed in the historic context narratives for the study area.
2. The district's historic building stock overall retains its general character and appearance from the period of significance. The state of integrity of the district's building stock equals or exceeds that of other neighborhood commercial districts in the city of Detroit.

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G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

The Multiple Property Documentation Form was based on the West Vernor Highway Intensive Level Survey completed in July 2001. The objective of the West Vernor Survey was to conduct an intensive level architectural/historical survey of every property within the defined boundaries to evaluate eligibility of individual properties and districts for the National Register of Historic Places. The overall project area extended from the eastern section of West Vernor Highway at Michigan Avenue and the Michigan Central Railroad Station to the western section at Dix Road bordering the Ford Motor Company River Rouge Plant and the city of Dearborn. One hundred eighty-eight (188) buildings were studied as part of the survey.

Since no prior architectural/historical survey existed on the selected area, the Project Team carried out historical research on the neighborhood and city. Following discussions with the SHPO staff, historic or context narratives were prepared for themes which appeared to be of primary importance.

All archival research, field work and National Register eligibility evaluation followed the SHPO's survey standards. The Project Team also performed all work in accordance with the "Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation," following the "Guidelines for Identification-Performing Identification" and "Guidelines for Evaluation-The Evaluation Process."

The Project Team utilized primary and secondary historical sources. Primary sources include Detroit Building Permits located in the Building & Safety Engineering Department on the fourth floor of the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center and the Tract Index, located at the Wayne County Register of Deeds, 6th Floor, 400 Monroe, Detroit. Other information sources were Detroit city directories from various years, local history files, newspaper articles and obituaries located at the Burton Historical Collection at the main branch of the Detroit Public Library. Additional sources included Detroit histories, maps and atlases available in the Burton Historical Collection. Along with the above mentioned sources, the Project Team also interviewed various individuals about the project area.

Intensive level survey forms with photographs documenting each property within the four districts were prepared using the State Historic Preservation Office's computer database program, "Ruskin."

The survey results and district recommendations were reviewed by Robert Christensen, the

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SHPO's national register coordinator, who carried out three visits to the survey area in the course of the project.

The survey was conducted by Cornerstone Building Company, LLC. for the Southwest Housing Corporation. The project manager for the survey was Marilyn Florek. Marilyn is a graduate of Wayne State University with a bachelor's degree in American Studies. Her past work experience includes the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. She has spent the last six years working on the rehabilitation of buildings eligible for historic tax credits. As a consultant for Cornerstone Building Company she has worked on a survey of Twenty-Three Mile Road in Macomb County and is currently working on the South Cass Corridor Survey in Detroit. She has completed seven National Register of Historic Places Nominations and five Tax Credit Applications.

Marilyn was assisted on the survey by Christine LoPorto. Christine is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University's Historic Preservation program. She has previously worked as a survey assistant for the City of Detroit's Historic Designation Advisory Board.

The Multiple Property Documentation Form for the Historic Districts of West Vernor Highway was prepared by Marilyn Florek, assisted by Marleen Tulas. Marleen is also a graduate of Eastern Michigan University's Historic Preservation Program. She has previously worked as an architectural survey technician for Midwest Environmental Consultants, Inc. Her past experience includes a reconnaissance level survey of Jackson, Michigan and a National Register Nomination for Goodison Historic District in Goodison, Michigan. She is currently working on the South Cass Corridor Survey in Detroit.

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I. Form Prepared By

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HISTORIC WEST VERNOR

MAP LAYERS

- HIGHWAY
- INTERSTATE HIGHWAY
- STREETS
- WATER AREA

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MILES

PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICTS

