



Final Report for the Proposed
ARBAUGH BUILDING HISTORIC DISTRICT
401 South Washington Avenue

prepared by:
HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE FOR THE
ARBAUGH & MUTUAL BUILDINGS

prepared for:
CITY OF LANSING
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT
316 N. CAPITOL AVENUE, SUITE D1
LANSING, MICHIGAN 48933

March 2005

LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT COVER FORM

Historic District Name: Arbaugh Building Historic District

City/Village: Lansing

Township: Lansing

County: Ingham

Date Transmitted:

Report Type: Preliminary Final

Total Number of Resources: Historic: 1 Non-Historic: Percentage:

District is Significant under the Following National Register Criteria:

Criterion A: Significant Event(s): Frank Arbaugh and Basil Cameron started an enterprise that quickly became successful and gained wide attention for their original merchandising methods. Their store in Lansing was the first to accept employee checks from the newly established Olds Motor Works, a policy that became popular with merchants in succeeding years. It was an innovative idea that contributed to the rapid growth of the company during the 1900's.

Criterion C: Design/Construction: The Arbaugh Building was constructed in 1905 with a unique architectural layout for a department store. It was reputedly the tallest building and largest department store in Lansing at the time. The exterior design exemplifies the classic elements of the regional vernacular commercial style, characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings. Its symmetrical façade featured an intricate cornice detailing which was removed in 1974 to accommodate new glass cladding/sheathing when the exterior was remodeled.

Arbaugh's was Lansing's newest landmark in the early twentieth century. Known as Lansing's first skyscraper, the first story was "so high and all of the upper ones will be of more than the ordinary height, thus lifting the top of the building over even the Hollister Block and the new Prudden office building." Known as the "finest department store in Central Michigan," the Arbaugh Building stands majestically in the business district of Lansing, embracing a total area of 38,000 square feet, with a wealth of large windows, reinforced concrete beams resting upon pillars of red paver bricks, and beams constructed on the famous Kahn system, combining "metropolitan massiveness with the beauty and symmetry of modern architectural skills" of the century.

Legal Boundary Description:

Lots 11 and 12 inclusive and the North 8.68 feet of Lot 10 all in Block 135 of Original Plat, as recorded in Liber 2 of Plats, page 36 of Ingham County Records, parcel number 3301-01-16-451-006.

Charge of the Committee:

This study was undertaken at the request of Richard Karp, owner of the Arbaugh property at 401 S. Washington Avenue in Lansing, Michigan. City Council adopted Resolution #494, on November 1, 2004, to establish a Historic District Study Committee for the ARBAUGH and MUTUALBUILDINGS. The Mayor appointed four members to the study committee, listed below, and Council confirmed their appointments with the adoption of Resolution #495 through #498 on November 1, 2004.

The Study Committee was established pursuant to Chapter 1220 of the Codified Ordinances of Lansing, Michigan. Its duties include the research and preparation of preliminary and final reports regarding local historic district proposals.

Committee Members:

Mary Toshach is a current member of Lansing Historic District Commission with a Masters of Science in Historic Preservation.

Michael D. Sebastian is an owner of MutualBuilding, 208 N. Capitol, Lansing

Phillip Mondro is a member of Lansing Historic District Commission

Richard Karp is the owner/developer of the ArbaughBuilding, 401 S. Washington Avenue, Lansing

Contact Name (City Official): Bill Rieske, Principal Planner

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**FINAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT
ARBAUGHBUILDING HISTORIC DISTRICT
LANSING, MICHIGAN**

Inventory

The Arbaughbuilding has undergone a Part 1 review for Tax Certification by the National Park Service and has been declared eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The data used in this study is part of the Part 1 certification.

Property Description

The Arbaugh building is a masonry bearing wall structure with heavy timber post and built-up beam construction in the north half (1905), and round steel post and steel I-Beam interior construction in the south half (1915). All of the above ground floors, the first level of 17,000 square feet and all upper floors each of 15,600 square feet, totals over 30,000 square feet. The 21,600 square foot basement extends under the west and north sidewalks. The building displays what remains of a three-part façade, characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century commercial buildings. It exemplifies the classic elements of the regional vernacular Commercial style in its symmetry, bold cornice treatment, and simple use of classically derived details. The street level originally consisted of a series of rectangular storefronts along the west (Washington) and north (Kalamazoo) elevations, which were covered with corrugated cement panels with alternating narrow vertical glass panels. In 1974, the building was converted for office use and the upper floors were covered with a reflective glass, supported by an aluminum extrusion system on steel angle bracket standoff. The decorative cornice was removed to accommodate installation of the glass cladding/sheath. These reflective glass cladding was removed in 2004 to expose the original facade. The cornice will be reconstructed in plastic.

The primary tenant access is on Washington Avenue through double entry doors recessed at the south end of this building elevation. The Kalamazoo elevation reveals a practical fire egress door for the northeast corner stairwell. All of the lower storefront facades that were added in 1974 have been removed at these two elevations. The east facade at the service drive displays a newer protruded entry with a small atrium. At the second, third, and fourth floor levels, on the two primary facades, fenestration and masonry are nicely intact. Openings are defined exclusively by large rectangular windows, three per bay, whose wood double hung sashes have been replaced with aluminum single-pane units. The fifth floor level facade bays contain taller rectangular window groups topped with partial arches, each grouping of three forming one complete arch.

The brick facades of the street frontage elevations are embellished with masonry piers defining each bay, continuous concrete sill below each window group, and a recessed brick pan above each window exist at stories below the fifth. A continuous limestone belt course lies just above the fifth floor window, with prominent detail supporting the wrapping of each pier.

The east elevation overlooks an adjacent lot where a recently erected transportation center sits. This north (1905) half of this elevation has random fenestration, also covered with the aluminum and glass panel system from the 1974 conversion. The southern half of the east elevation (1915) remains a sheer masonry facade with six newer window openings and a simple, clay tile parapet cap. Similarly, the south elevation overlooking a now vacant lot, present us with eight newer, fixed-pane, aluminum sash openings on an otherwise blank wall, the lowest of which reveals evidence of an attached structure that has since been demolished. This section of building along the south was added in 1974 to facilitate the installations of eight escalators and a newer stairwell at the southwest corner.

The entire interior of the structure has experienced complete plan alteration and remodeling, save the northwest stairwell. No interior doors or partition walls remain. Multiple suspended ceilings have been hung below existing wood lath and plaster. Glass block exterior windows appear at the west face of each landing in the southwest stairwell.

By contrast, the upper, more open floor plans reveal the regular column spacing necessary for a flexible department store layout. After the escalators were closed off during the conversion for office use, elevators were installed immediately to the north providing access to all floors including the basement. Terrazzo floors remain in the lower levels of the northeast stair and the north end of the east entryway, but no interior woodwork or trim (including interior window castings) exists.

Boundary Description

The proposed Arbaugh Building Historic District is located at 401 S. Washington Avenue, Lansing, Michigan. It comprises 23,212 square feet or 0.53 acres of land.

Legal description:

Lots 11 and 12 inclusive and the North 8.68 feet of Lot 10 all in Block 135 of Original Plat, as recorded in Liber 2 of Plats, page 36 of Ingham County Records, parcel number 3301-01-16-451-006.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the property occupied by the building previously occupied by the Arbaugh's Department Store.

History of the District

Located centrally in the lower part of the state, Lansing was named after the town of Lansing in Tomkins County, New York, in 1841 by Joseph H. North, a native from there who moved to Michigan. Both places were named to commemorate Revolutionary War hero and legal author, John Lansing. In Michigan's Ingham County, Lansing exists, in large part, as a result of a compromise between upstate and downstate legislators to site the State Capitol in a more central location in 1847. Even with the designation as the capital of Michigan, the city wasn't incorporated until 1859, with 3,085 inhabitants. The current Capitol was dedicated twenty years later in 1879.¹

Lansing boasted two downtowns in 1897: the original city center near the mills in North Lansing, now known as the OldTown, and a more traditional and identifiable Central Business District (CBD) established close to the Capitol on Washington (the downtown "main street") and Michigan Avenues. Ground floor street fronts offered stoves, furniture, clothing and groceries to city-dwellers and farm families. Upstairs offices housed real estate and insurance agents, milliners and doctors.

In 1891, while attending the State Teacher's college at Indiana, Pennsylvania, Frank N. Arbaugh had a young man named Basil C. Cameron, as a roommate. In the same year Cameron's uncle, J. M. Cameron, arrived in Lansing to start a department store, erecting a one-story building near the corner of South Washington Avenue and Kalamazoo Street. Although headquartered in a building only 22 x 80 feet, the enterprise quickly attained fair success even before B. C. Cameron arrived to help his uncle.²

Five years later, Frank Arbaugh also left Pennsylvania for Lansing. The elder Mr. Cameron became ill, and the nephew hired Frank. Together with one clerk, the two young men operated the store. Early in 1897 the ailing uncle offered to sell Frank Arbaugh his half interest for \$1,500. He accepted, and the name of the firm was changed to Cameron and Arbaugh. During their first year as owners, the youthful entrepreneurs pushed sales up to \$17,000, a significant increase from the previous high of \$12,000.³ Each year the "thriving merchants" saw their business grow and by

¹"Capital City of Michigan a Booming Industrial Center." The Lansing Journal (Industrial Edition). 11 October 1905.

²Castro, Manuel. "Lansing's Merchant Prince - Frank Arbaugh's Triumph." Lansing Metropolitan Magazine, Spring 1992

³ibid.

1902 they purchased the neighboring Octagon house built in 1857 by one Col. Whitney Jones,⁴ who had served as Lansing's first postmaster and had represented Ingham and Eaton Counties in the state legislature.

At the same time, the partners gained wide attention for their original merchandising methods. Cameron and Arbaugh's became the first store in Lansing to accept employees' paychecks from the newly established Olds Motor Works. The policy became so popular that the merchants began cashing paychecks from "any established business organization."⁵ In succeeding years, Frank Arbaugh credited the innovation as one of the most important factors in the rapid growth of the company during the 1900's. By later standards the sums of money were small, as the merchant observed in 1934. "In those days, the average check for two weeks' hard work was \$17.50," he commented. "I used to cash the checks personally - I know."⁶ But regardless of the sums involved, the result was a substantial increase in the company's share of Lansing's retail trade.

By 1904, both Cameron and Arbaugh agreed the store, although enlarged, was of insufficient size to keep up with increasing business. Planning to erect "Lansing's first skyscraper,"⁷ they chose to locate on the site of the Octagon house and relocated the solid brick structure to the east end of the lot. Ground was broken in the early spring of 1905. Originally planned as a four-story building, the building was given a fifth floor when the Lansing Business University requested space in the structure (the business school remained on the fifth floor until 1910).

Lansing residents watched with great interest as the city's newest landmark began to take shape. The front page headline of the May 1, 1905 Lansing Journal noted, "The Cameron and Arbaugh Building is to be the tallest in the City," and further, "Work is being rushed on the new store on Washington Avenue south, the first story being already of a height to show its fine proportions. The first story is so high and all of the upper ones will be of more than the ordinary height, thus lifting the top of the building over even the Hollister Block and the new Prudden office building."

The architect who designed the building is unknown at this time. However, Albert Kahn, who was a self-taught architect and underwent rigorous ten-hour day training on the drafting boards in pursuit of the title "architect," contributed his significant concrete construction method to allow remarkably strong structure with volumes of space

⁴"Forerunner of Arbaugh Store Began Operations in Shop with 22 Feet Frontage." LSJ, 30 April 1934.

⁵Castro, Manuel. "Lansing's Merchant Prince - Frank Arbaugh's Triumph." p. 18

⁶"Forerunner of Arbaugh Store Began Operations in Shop with 22 Feet Frontage." LSJ, 30 April 1934.

⁷ *Ibid.*

unobstructed by interfering columns for this building.

A grand opening on the evening of Tuesday, October 3, 1905 presented the attendant crowds with “the Glass Block, so styled, because of the wealth of glass, with which its construction abounds, is capable of characterization, as the finest department store building in Central Michigan, and without a peer in the entire state.”⁸

Towering majestically in the business district of the city, the structure comprised five stories and a basement, and embraced a total area of 38,000 square feet. Reinforced concrete beams rested upon pillars of red paver brick, of which both “fronts” of the building were composed, support the upper stories. The beams were constructed “on the famous Kahn system and are reinforced by several rods passing through them.”⁹ Both in interior arrangement and finish and exterior adornment, “it combines metropolitan massiveness with the beauty and symmetry of modern architectural skill.”¹⁰

Material and labor was furnished largely by local firms and included heating by the “Central System,” installed by Shields and Leadly, and the mains connected with the plant of Piatt Brothers. Plumber John Toolan provided every floor with closets and lavatories, and a public drinking fountain on the first floor near the elevator. Out-of-state equipment and material included the electric elevator, costing \$2,500, installed by H. J. Reedy & Co., of Cincinnati, Ohio. The Sampson pneumatic tube system (by which cash was carried from every department on every floor to the main office in the balcony, where change was made and returned in a few seconds) was installed by the Thompson Consolidated Store Service Co., of Boston, for the contract price of \$2,500, stonework of Ohio sandstone, and both interior and window lighting from 150 Wernst lights (their first use in Lansing).¹¹

In 1906, the partners decided to incorporate their enterprise with a capital stock offering of \$100,000. In 1909, after the younger Cameron’s attraction to retailing seemed to diminish, he sold his share to Mr. Arbaugh and the store then became the F. N. Arbaugh Company. In 1915, after continued success and increased share of the retail trade, Arbaugh razed the original buildings that stood to the south and constructed seamless addition to the 1905 structure, which increased square footage to almost 100,000 and gave the building 132 feet of frontage on Washington Avenue.

In spite of the dark depression, the company continued to be an economic bright light in

⁸ “Capital City of Michigan a Booming Industrial Center.” LSJ (Industrial Edition), 11 October 1905, p. 4.

⁹ “Cameron and Arbaugh’s Handsome New Building, Now Being Erected.” The State Republican, 8 June 1905

¹⁰ “Capital City of Michigan a Booming Industrial Center.” LSJ Industrial Edition, 11 October 1905.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Lansing throughout the 1930's. Its payroll climbed to over 250 employees, while other firms were laying off workers. In 1953, general manager George Arbaugh (Frank's son) announced that "a sizeable interest"¹² in the company had been sold to the Sperry and Hutchinson Company of New York. The green stamp company, which also owned the Wurzburg department store chain, placed two representatives on Arbaugh's board, and although Frank Arbaugh remained as chairman of the board, it soon became obvious that control was passing from local hands.

Six months later, Clarence R. Knapp replaced George Arbaugh as president. The new general manager, on the job only three weeks, proclaimed an ambitious "remodeling of the store." The \$300,000 renovation, announced jointly with Frank Arbaugh, called for a five-story addition to the south, including installation of escalators and the construction of "... a two-story, light-colored front - from the first to second floor - along both Washington Avenue and Kalamazoo Street." In one of his last major public statements, the elder Arbaugh showed a flash of his old enthusiasm. "Our plans for the future call for making Arbaugh's the most modernly equipped, customer convenient and attractive store in central Michigan,"¹³ he told reporters. Unfortunately, in addition to removal of the original storefronts, this included removal of the original cornice on both the west and north facades.

Sperry and Hutchinson continued to operate under the Arbaugh name until 1969 when Jack Butler of Detroit "purchased the Wurzburg chain, which included the local store." Butler dropped the Arbaugh designation and renamed the store to Wurzburg's. The store went into decline as shoppers abandoned the downtown area in favor of the new malls that were springing up around Lansing. Finally, in April 1972, Butler threw in the towel and closed the store "...ending 89 consecutive years of department store retailing" at the site.¹⁴

With the demise of the retailing giant, the Arbaugh family again took over the building and property and placed them on the market. The building remained vacant until 1974 when automobile dealer Karl Story purchased the structure and renovated it entirely for office use, at a reported cost of \$1.2 million, adding the glass skin that clad the façade until 2004. The structure was occupied for the next couple of decades largely by State of Michigan offices.

Recently vacant for almost two years, the building will be rehabilitated for multi-use as market-rate loft apartments and first floor office and retail, with the basement converted to underground parking accessible by the surface parking lot immediately adjacent to

¹² Castro, Manuel. "Lansing's Merchant Prince - Frank Arbaugh's Triumph." Lansing Metropolitan Magazine, Spring 1992

¹³ "Arbaugh's to Remodel." LansingState Journal, 9 August 1953.

¹⁴ Castro, Manuel. "Lansing's Merchant Prince - Frank Arbaugh's Triumph." Lansing Metropolitan Magazine, Spring 1992

the south. Once the southern commercial anchor of the central business district, the Arbaugh's department store structure stands as one of the few remaining "landmark" buildings, and is poised to regain its stature.

Significance of the District

The Arbaugh Department Store building is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with this progressive period of twentieth-century commercial history in Lansing and under Criterion C for its architectural significance, as a locally notable example of commercial building design of the early 1900's.

- A. That are associated with event that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history:

Frank Arbaugh and Basil Cameron started an enterprise that quickly became successful and gained wide attention for their original merchandising methods. Their store in Lansing was the first to accept employee's paycheck from the newly established Olds Motor Works, a policy that became so popular to merchants in succeeding years. It was an innovative idea that contributed to the rapid growth of the company during the 1900's.

- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction

Arbaugh Building was constructed in 1905 with unique architectural layout for a department store, which was reputedly the tallest building and largest department store in Lansing. The exterior design provided an intricate cornice detailing, displaying a facade characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings and exemplified the classic elements of the regional vernacular commercial style in its symmetry.

Arbaugh Building was Lansing's landmark taking place in early nineteenth century. Known as Lansing's first skyscraper, the first story was "so high and all of the upper ones will be of more than the ordinary height, thus lifting the top of the building over even the Hollister Block and the new Prudden office building." Based on the city's Assessor's Office record, the Arbaugh remained the Lansing's tallest building until 1923 when the Olds Plaza Hotel was completed at 11 stories high.

Known as the "finest department store in Central Michigan," the Arbaugh's building stands majestically in the business district of Lansing, embracing a total area of 38,000 square feet, with a wealth of glass windows, reinforced concrete beams resting upon pillars of red paver bricks, and beams constructed on the

famous Kahn system.” It combined “metropolitan massiveness with the beauty and symmetry of modern architectural skills” of the century.

The Arbaugh’s building was among the first in Lansing to use the Kahn system conceived by Albert Kahn. The reinforced concrete system revolutionized factory design and Albert Kahn went on to build many others including Packard Motors Plant in Detroit, Michigan.

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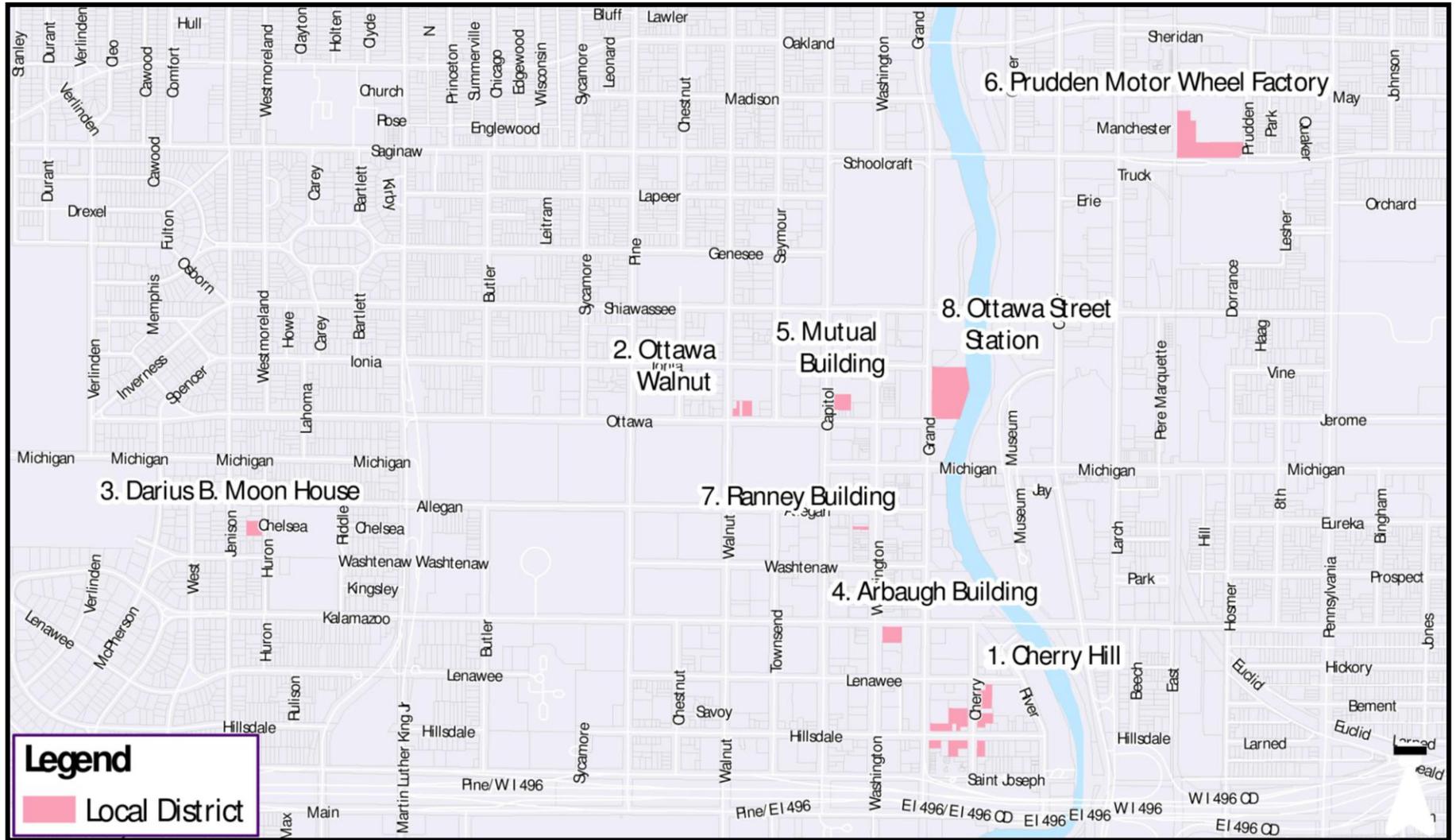
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Figure 1 Map Showing the Arbaugh Building District



PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 2 East & South facade of the building (old)



Figure 3 Side Detail of the Building



Figure 4 East & South facade of the building



Figure 5 Window Detail



Figure 6 Building Facade



Figure 7 Window Detail



Appendix:

ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND INCENTIVES:

In 1998, five statewide analyses of the economic benefits of historic preservation were completed in Virginia, Indiana, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Kentucky. Every one identified and quantified substantial benefits of historic preservation which included:

- The greatest attractions for economic growth in small to middle size communities are the quality of life, natural environment, historic legacy and cultural context, historic preservation is an important part of the quality-of-life equation.
- Cities that protect their historic resources and districts are more livable places and more desirable locations for businesses. Preserving the city's urban character is vital to the city's economic competitive edge over surrounding areas.
- Historic buildings are "pedestrian-friendly" - crucial to vibrant active public places
- Rehabilitation of historic buildings for new commercial, industrial and residential uses provides a diversity of spaces and rent level - excellent for incubator businesses which generate the majority of new, permanent jobs.
- Historic preservation is beneficial to controlling urban sprawl by using existing buildings and sites already in place - utilizing existing infrastructure already supported by tax dollars.
- Properly maintained public buildings save public dollars.
- Historic preservation rehabilitation projects provide/increase jobs at the local level - has a greater impact on local labor demand and supply.
- Historic preservation is a cost-competitive alternative to new construction.
- Historic preservation stabilizes neighborhoods - historic districts, like increasing home owner's associations in new developments, preserve neighborhood character and property values.
- Historic districts promote increased level of home ownership.
- Buyers who choose historic districts often have wider choices and get more house area, dollar for dollar for their money.
- Property values of historic buildings significantly out-perform the appreciation rate of non-historic properties.
- Heritage tourism visitors stay longer, visit twice as many places, and spend, on average more than 2-1/2 times more money than do other visitors (The Washington Post reported that 65.9 million US adult travelers based their trips on historic or cultural interests in 1997).

As a conclusion, historic preservation can be a catalyst for economic development, when accomplished hand in hand with downtown revitalization efforts. The City of Lansing had commissioned a Virginia-based expert (Hyett-Palma Consulting) who helped Lansing with its downtown revitalization plan and

recommended a mixed use development including housing, retail commercial and office spaces in order to boost downtown's vibrancy.