

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

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Proposed

STE. ANNE'S PARISH COMPLEX HISTORIC DISTRICT

FINAL REPORT

By a resolution dated November 15, 1995, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Ste. Anne's Parish Complex Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.

The proposed Ste. Anne's Parish Complex Historic District consists of the western two-thirds of a block lying just east of the Ambassador Bridge approaches and I-75, and southeast of the intersection of I-75 and I-96. The proposed district contains five major buildings; the church, rectory, school, convent, and hall; all structures within the boundaries contribute to the historical and/or architectural character of the district. The east one-third of the block is mostly vacant, but does contain a distinguished nineteenth-century firehouse by the architect George D. Mason. The proposed district is located within the Hubbard-Richard Citizens District Council area, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

BOUNDARIES: The proposed historic district is bounded on the south by Lafayette Avenue, on the west by Ste. Anne Street, on the north by Howard Street (now closed), and on the east by the north-south alley lying between Ste. Anne and 18th Street

HISTORY: Established in 1701 with the arrival of Cadillac and the founding of Detroit, Ste. Anne's is today the second oldest Catholic parish in the United States and is said to be the oldest continuous institution of European culture between the Alleghenies and the Rockies. Between those ranges, only Native American institutions have a longer existence. This extraordinarily historic institution now occupies its eighth church, built as a result of the sale of the downtown site of the seventh church in the mid-1880's and the division of the French Catholic community into two parishes: an east side church named for the husband of Ste. Anne, St. Joachim; and the continuation of the historic mother church at a new location at Howard Street and Nineteenth, today called Ste. Anne Street. Ironically, it was the parish of St. Joachim which carried the heritage of the French language to our own day; Ste. Anne's slowly evolved in this century into a neighborhood parish, and is today strongly Hispanic. St. Joachim remained the French language "ethnic" parish until its closure in 1989.

The history of Ste. Anne's Parish has been so extensively written about and is so widely known that it is hopeless to digest that history in this document, especially for the period prior to the 1880's which is related to other sites and buildings. It must suffice to note the central role

which the parish played in eighteenth century Detroit, a role which continued into the nineteenth century. The most famous pastor was, of course, Fr. Gabriel Richard (1767-1832), who arrived as assistant in 1798 and became Cure in 1802.

Richard not only tended his French flock, but also ministered to English-speaking Protestants prior to the establishment of the First Protestant Society. Beyond church affairs, his influence was so great that he must be considered Detroit's second founder. He brought the first printing press to Michigan, and the first pipe organ. He was the Michigan Territory's first representative in the U.S. Congress, and, with Rev. John Monteith, founded the University of Michigan. Only an unfortunate local squabble prevented him from being named by Rome as the first bishop of a newly-created Detroit diocese; the creation of the diocese eventually took place only after his death. That death, of cholera, came on September 13, 1832, after Richard had spent weeks ministering during the epidemic; that his end came of a disease contracted while fearlessly working during an epidemic underscores the essentially pastoral character of this extraordinary man.

One of Richard's legacies was the church which he built after the fire of 1805, completed only in 1828. That church, intended for a Cathedral, served as such after Richard's death and until the opening of SS. Peter & Paul in 1848. It was also the site of the first German language Catholic services in Detroit, which led to the founding of St. Mary's in 1842.

During the 1870's, emigration from Montreal greatly increased the French-speaking population of Detroit, especially on the east side. To serve them, the bishop in 1875 established the "Chapel of the Sacred Heart" on East Fort near Chene. That division of services to French-speaking Catholics led to the construction of the present Ste. Anne's complex, for as the downtown parish of Ste. Anne benefited from its real estate holdings, the former members of Ste. Anne's on the east side began to assert that they should benefit from some part of the income deriving from a patrimony that was once partly theirs. The church built by Richard was greatly revered; not only was Richard interred there, but it had served as the first Cathedral of the diocese. Still, by the mid- 1880's the spiraling value of the downtown property -- today part of the site of One Detroit Center -- finally convinced the trustees of Ste. Anne's to sell. The proceeds -- and mementoes of the old church -- were divided between the old parish, which relocated to the west side, and the east side chapel formalized as the parish of St. Joachim. The last service in the old church was a Pontifical High Mass celebrated by Bishop Borgess on June 27, 1886; the building was then demolished.

The cornerstone for a new church had already been laid on April 28, 1886, on property at the southeast corner of Howard and Nineteenth (now Ste. Anne). The parish complex built there, still intact, is a superb example of a late nineteenth century Catholic parish, complete with church, chapel, rectory, convent, school, and parish hall. The first three buildings built were the church, chapel and rectory. The church and chapel was built pursuant to building permit #23, issued January 18, 1886, to A. E. French, a Detroit architect; the permit estimated the cost at \$100,000.00. Later that year, on October 15, 1886, permit #1246 was issued for the rectory. The

chapel was used for services on June 28, 1886, and the church was dedicated on October 30, 1887, by Rev. Edward Joos, Administrator of the diocese. Richard's remains were transferred to lie under the high altar of the new church. It was with the construction of the new parish church that the diocese invited the Basilian fathers to staff the parish, a relationship which still continues.

For many years, Ste. Anne's Church has been identified with the French-American Detroit architect Leon Coquard. As noted above, the permit was issued to Albert E. French, and French's role as architect of Ste. Anne's is reportedly confirmed by documents in the parish archives. Coquard was listed in the 1887 City Directory as an employee of French, and Coquard apparently was a member of Ste. Anne's. It seems likely that Coquard was the connection which won French the Ste. Anne commission, and it is by no means unlikely that Coquard did much or all of the design, which he claimed in later advertisements. Still, Albert E. French was the architect of Ste. Anne's church. It is fair to assume that the later buildings are by Coquard after his entry into his own practice. Indeed, the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library contains a copy of a rendering for the hall; the design shown is different from, but strongly related to, the hall as built. The rendering bears Coquard's name.

Born c. 1841 at Prince Edward Island, Canada, Albert E. French moved to Pittsburgh as a child, and there he later became an architect. He moved to Detroit about 1872, and worked for Mortimer Smith & Co. and Malcolmson & Higginbotham before going on his own. He died November 1, 1927 at his home at 4841 Iroquois. In addition to Ste. Anne's Church and rectory, he designed court houses in Cheboygan, Hastings, and Howell; the reformatory in Ionia; and an Odd Fellows Temple at Bethune & Brush. He was a member of the Detroit Yacht Club, Damon Lodge of the Knights of Pythias, and the Michigan Society of Architects.

Leon Coquard is listed in the City Directories from 1893 to 1921-22 as an independent architect. His history and career are obscure, and only one other Detroit building by him is presently known, a house at 1023 Iroquois in the Indian Village Historic District. His masterwork is considered to be the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Covington, Kentucky.

The Ste. Anne parish plant was further expanded when permit #1496 was issued on October 20, 1887, to John Brennan & Co. for a two-story school located east of the church on Howard, with an estimated cost of \$16,000.00. (It is curious that the 1887 City Directory lists John Brennan & Co. as boiler makers.) Brennan is listed again when, on July 23, 1889, permit #1092 was issued for the convent, located on Lafayette. The final building was the hall, located on Lafayette between the rectory and the convent, built under permit # 743 issued August 26, 1898 to Henwood & Brown; Henwood was presumably Milton Henwood, listed in the City Directory as a contractor. By the turn of the century, then, the Ste. Anne's parish plant was complete.

In the twentieth century, the parish witnessed the slow death of the French community, which was too small to sustain itself in the chaotic growth of the automobile boom years. Before the turn of the century, French pioneer families might well speak French at home even after almost

two centuries, and, as noted above, the French community was bolstered by immigration from French Canada. But Ste. Anne's slowly lost its French character as the west-side French community declined and immigration slowed, and in the second and third quarters of the twentieth century, the parish began an important ministry to the Hispanic community. An early Spanish-speaking parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe, had been unable to sustain itself, and services for Latinos -- at that date largely Mexicans -- were thereafter provided by established parishes, notably Most Holy Trinity and Ste. Anne's. The origins of Spanish-language services at Ste. Anne's seem a little obscure, but the Rev. James Barrett was using the chapel as a "Spanish-speaking church" by 1944. Indeed, in its service to the Latino population and in its involvement with the Hubbard-Richard neighborhood, the parish continues its best traditions of service. Today, the parish has begun an extensive restoration program, especially for the church, in preparation for the 300th anniversary of the founding of both the parish and the city which it has served with such distinction.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: The church is clearly the dominant building of the complex. It faces a plaza on the right of way of Howard Street at the corner of Ste. Anne; the chapel is connected at the rear with its facade facing Ste. Anne, and the chapel connects in turn with the rectory at the corner of Ste. Anne and Lafayette.

In some respects, Ste. Anne's is clearly inspired -- as one would expect -- by the example of French Gothic. In plan and interior elevation it is the only 19th century church in Detroit so derived. But its exterior departs from the French model in important ways. First, there is the use of Detroit common brick; brick is almost unknown as a material for French Gothic churches. In addition, the designer has provided the classic twin towers and spires of the French model, but altered the pattern by bringing the towers out further to the side. In the classic French Gothic church, the side doors are in the towers, which terminate the side aisles. At Ste. Anne's, the side aisles terminate at side doors which lie between the main nave and the towers; the base of the east tower was originally a baptistery and the west a stairwell to the gallery. On the exterior, this creates an open space above the side portal between the gabled facade of the central nave and the tower; this is filled with a flying buttress.

The first level of the facade is stone, with the portals in deep recesses. Above the central portal a gallery of blind arcading suggests the "gallery of kings" of a French cathedral. The circular, or rose, window above inscribes a star of David. The gable above is partially of stone in a diaper pattern above a triple blind window, while Victorian pepper pots substitute for the pinnacles at the corners of the gable. Above the side portals are blank bricks walls surmounted by small-scale blind arcading supporting a parapet; the flying buttresses cross the spaces above. The towers follow the usual pattern of a heavily buttressed square base with single windows at the second story and double windows at the third; pinnacles then mask a transition to an octagonal stage with louvered bell openings on each side; this is in turn surmounted by a spire, now somewhat simplified from the original design.

The body of the church is an excellent example of Victorian brickwork, including attached

buttresses, window hoodmoulds, and blind arcading corbeled out at the eave. It has the typical shed-like side aisles with the nave clerestory above; transepts with large pointed arch windows above triple lancets below; and a segmental apse with a single lancet set high in each side. The liturgical east of the transepts and the apse are surrounded by one-story chapels and sacristy spaces, which also connect to the chapel. The church has a slate roof with a decorative "castellated" ridge decoration, and a small *fleche* with conical roof/spire at the crossing. Inside, the church clearly reflects its French precedents. It has the typical cruciform plan, and the typical nave elevation of arcade, triforium, and clerestory. Although the apse is not surrounded by an ambulatory, it does have the first bays of such on either side, housing side altars. The interior is rich in furnishings both of the date and from the earlier church, including the communion railing from Richard's church and several stained glass windows also transferred from the earlier building; the figures in the chancel windows are from windows in the old building, but transferred to new backgrounds for the new location. There is extensive stained glass, including the earlier glass, windows contemporary with the building, and glass of the twentieth century. A fine carved pulpit stands at the viewer's left on a wineglass base with an acoustical shell above; nearby an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been installed on one of the Victorian side altars to indicate the devotion of many of the current congregation. Like many old church interiors, Ste. Anne's represents a collection of items of many dates, which nevertheless achieve unity; the most recent element would be the decorative paint scheme, which is rather Art Deco in character.

The chapel, lying directly behind the church, is a simple rectangle; its street facade displays triple lancets below a gable with a single lancet and stone diaper at the top. An entrance in the "link" element between church and chapel provides entry to the sacristy to the left and the chapel to the right. Inside, it contains the altar from Richard's church, and his white marble tomb. Between the chapel and the rectory is a two-car garage of tapestry brick with stone trim.

The rectory faces Ste. Anne at the corner of Lafayette. Its Victorian character is somewhat diluted by the later addition of a large-scale porch enclosing both the Ste. Anne and Lafayette sides of the building. The original design might have been a mild version of the Queen Anne; the porch is vaguely Renaissance, and adds considerable weight and a horizontal emphasis to a building whose height and mansard roof must once have looked quite vertical. The left front corner of the building is brought forward slightly, and terminates in a tower element with a very large forward-facing dormer. The main entrance, a Tudor arch, is in the center of the facade. The side of the porch facing Lafayette has been closed in with windows in the upper half of each opening, and siding below.

The convent, located on the southeast corner of the property on Lafayette, is a symmetrical composition in the Romanesque Revival manner. Its entrance, recessed behind a round arch, is echoed by a recessed porch above, itself behind an arch and fronted by a heavy rail of brickwork. To either side on both floors are double windows of double-hung sash, above which are heavy wall dormers with triple windows and hipped roofs. The whole is surmounted by a steep gabled roof between parapet gables. This building of great simplicity once again

demonstrates the effective use of brickwork.

The hall, located between the rectory and convent on Lafayette, demonstrates its later date in the use of the "Second Renaissance Revival" manner. The building is basically a low rectangle beneath a high pitched hip roof. On the front, however, the first floor porch supports a second story with three round arches supported on classical columns, surmounted by a classical pediment.

The school, located east of the church on Howard, has been greatly altered since its first construction. A third story was added in 1915; there is also an addition to the rear. The original design was Gothic Revival to accord with the church adjoining; the building is of common brick with a stone foundation and trim. A central entrance is sheltered in a recess with a pointed arch; above, this central bay rises above the roof and is topped with a steep gable, forming a tower-like element. The first floor windows have typical pointed arches of a Gothic Revival type, the second floor has low segmental arches of a standard Victorian character; the third floor openings have Tudor arches of a more rounded sort than those below, and appear to represent their later date. The building's basic "T" shape is topped by a hipped roof; there is a cupola at the intersection of the roof ridges.

Recommendation: The history and architecture of the Ste. Anne's complex establish that it meets at least two of the criteria for designation, namely criteria one (1) and three (3) as contained in Section 25-2-2 of the 1984 City Code. The Historic Designation Advisory Board therefore recommends that City Council adopt an ordinance of designation for the proposed historic district, and transmits to the City Council a draft ordinance herewith.

