Historic Designation Advisory Board

PROPOSED ST. STANISLAUS HISTORIC DISTRICT

Final Report

The proposed St. Stanislaus Historic District contains five buildings which formerly constituted the plant of the now-suppressed Roman Catholic parish of St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr: the church building on the southeast corner of Medbury and Dubois, the elementary school at 2228-38 Medbury, the rectory at 5818 Dubois, the former janitor's house or boiler house abutting the rear of the eastern side of the church, and the high school at 2246 Medbury. Located one block south of the Edsel Ford Freeway (I-94) and the General Motors Poletown plant, the complex was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 17, 1989.

BOUNDARIES: The boundaries of the proposed district are shown on the attached map and are as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of the centerlines of Dubois Street and Medbury Avenue, and proceeding southerly along the centerline of Dubois Street to its intersection with the centerline of Hendrie Avenue; thence eastward along the centerline of Hendrie to its intersection with the centerline of the north-south alley lying west of Lot 30 of Hannan's Sub of Lots 89 through 94 of the west half of P.C. 91 (Plats)(L8 P75); thence northerly along the centerline of said alley to its intersection with the centerline of the eastwest alley lying parallel to and between Medbury and Hendrie Avenues; thence easterly along the centerline of said alley to its intersection with the eastern boundary of Lot 4 of the Braun Subdivision (L11 P40), extended north and south; thence northerly along said lot boundary as extended to its intersection with the centerline of Medbury Avenue; thence westerly along the centerline of Medbury to the point of beginning.

HISTORY: The former St. Stanislaus R.C. Parish has significance as the fifth parish established to serve Detroit's Polish community, which is one of the largest in the nation. The buildings of the parish are also significant as they comprise an excellent example of a Catholic parish complex of the first fifteen years of this century, anchored by the magnificent Baroque church of 1911-13 with its lavish Beaux-Arts interior.

Large waves of Polish immigrants came to America after the Civil War, primarily because of conditions in Poland resulting from the partition, and many settled in Detroit. At first they settled

near the German community in the city because they came from Prussian occupied Poland and understood at least a little German, but soon they had established a viable economic and organized community of their own. Further immigration was caused by the Russification of Russian occupied Poland, famine in Silicia and overpopulation in Galicia. At first, the Poles attended the German church of St. Joseph, but in 1871 the first Polish parish, St. Albertus, was founded. The priorities of the Polish immigrants were education for their children and pew rent for their church, and the new parish grew enormously, requiring several divisions in later years which resulted in the parishes of St. Josaphat and Sweetest Heart of Mary.

St. Stanislaus parish resulted from further increase in the number of Poles in Detroit. At the time the parish was founded the location at the extreme limits of the city was occupied by a number of Protestant families, who worshipped at Bethel Lutheran Church, and scattered households of Poles. It was the latter who petitioned Bishop John S. Foley to have a parish closer to their The long walk for the children over muddy tracks and uneven terrain in all weathers to reach the parochial schools on Canfield Avenue and the same trip to be made on a Sunday to go to church made a neighborhood parish desirable. With the approval of Bishop Foley a church committee headed by the pastor of St. Josaphat's Church purchased the Bethel Church and school at Medbury Avenue and Dubois Street on July 8, 1898 for \$16,000. It was expected that six hundred families, mostly from overcrowded St. Albertus Parish, would comprise the membership. Rev. Francis Gzella was assigned to the parish by the bishop on July 12, 1898, and the renovated church was dedicated on July 31, 1898 and dedicated to St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr.

The school which had been purchased along with the church building soon became inadequate with the constant influx of new Polish immigrants. On December 7, 1900, a permit was issued to Kastler & Hunter, architects, for a brick grade school; the permit listed the cost as \$12,000, but the parish records show \$14,881.37; in 1905 it was enlarged to 18 classrooms and an assembly hall. It is now the oldest building on the site.

By 1905 there were an estimated 700 families in St. Stanislaus parish, doubling by 1910. Therefore, the parishioners had decided by 1907 to build a larger church. The project had to be postponed, however, because of economic conditions. To accommodate the growing congregation a chapel was established on the top floor of the parish school in what had been the assembly hall. The stage was converted into a sanctuary, and pews were brought from Our Lady of the Rosary when that congregation moved into its new church building. The chapel was called St. Stanislaus Chapel, and the church continued by the name of St. Stanislaus Church. An assistant had been assigned to Fr. Gzella so that services could be conducted simultaneously in the two places.

The repair of the facade of the church and reconstruction of the front steps in 1973 were part of the 75th anniversary celebration of the parish. With the advent of a new pastor in September, 1977 there was a resurgence of activities, the monies from some of which went toward the restoration of the church. During this period, parishioners had a strong sense of being good neighbors to all the people who live within the parish boundaries, as well as part of the greater Polonia of Detroit. In mid-1989, the parish was suppressed as a part of the Detroit Archdiocesan Reorganization Plan, and the parish ceased to exist. In August, 1990, the property was sold to Samuel Koontz, a pipe organ builder, who resides in the rectory and intends to convert the church to organbuilding uses and a recital hall, and to pursue adaptive reuse of the schools.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The buildings of the former St. Stanislaus parish center on the Neo-Baroque church located at the southeast corner of Dubois and Medbury. The church has its contemporary rectory attached at the rear along Dubois, while the school buildings lie on Medbury east of the church. The ensemble typifies a Catholic parish plant of the period, and dominates the neighborhood; it is also a landmark for passing traffic on the Ford Freeway (I-94), which lies a short distance north. From the freeway, the view is of the church and schools rising above the smaller scale residential buildings around them.

The oldest building on the site is the school building of 1900, built of dark red brick on a stone foundation and with stone trim in a generally Northern Renaissance manner. Built under permit #953, issued December 7, 1900, the building was designed by Detroit architects Kastler & Hunter, who were designing St. Josaphat's Church (NR) for another Polish parish at almost exactly the same time. The three-story building is detailed only on its street facade, which is divided vertically into three bays. In the center, the arched entrance at ground level is under a pediment displaying the date "1900", the whole flanked by small windows. Above, a two-story oriel window is cantilevered from the wall, which rises to a gable above the roof line of the flanking facades; the building is covered with a gable roof running from side to side. There is a double window in the gable, lighting the attic. The facades flanking the central bay are set back slightly, and contain three windows on each level, those at first and second floor segmentally arched, those on the third round arched. Centered on the roof is a small domed cupola ventilator.

The church and rectory were built under sequential permits issued August 26, 1911, that for the rectory # 3188, that for the church #3189. Both were issued to the contractor, Jozef Nowakowski. The two buildings are, in one sense, a unit, as the rectory connects to the church sacristies.

Designed by Harry J. Rill, the church's exterior is in the Neo-Baroque style, reflecting in its facade the commonplace facade treatment of many churches in southern and eastern Europe in the Baroque period. A two story central element with pediment is flanked by one story bays with inverted consoles atop them; these three bays are flanked by the towers. No specific model can be identified, but such churches as the Theatinerkirche in Munich come immediately to mind; in fact, St. Anna's church in Krakow, Poland, the burial place of St. Stanislaus, is of the general type, though not very similar to St. Stanislaus. St. Stanislaus, however, differs from these European precedents in its lack of a dome at the crossing and completely departs from them in interior arrangement. The yellow brick and cast stone of the church also departs from European precedent, although the coloring might almost suggest painted stucco.

On the facade, the main door is a round-arched opening within columns and pediment. Above the door is a large arched window, and flanking the door and window two stories of engaged columns backed by pilasters on the wall form units of almost "buttress" character. These once supported cornice and pediment elements at the top, but these cast stone elements were removed because of deterioration some years ago. In the flanking one story facade bays are subsidiary entrances in round arched openings, and above the doors, pedimented niches which formerly contained statues of saints. The inverted consoles are above the cornice of the first The first level of the towers is very simple; floor level. pilasters in brick at the corners frame simple rectangular centered windows with segmentally arched pediments. Each tower continues above the first floor cornice to provide a base for two masonry stages with arched openings and a terminating copper stage, circular with arched openings and a dome. Cast stone cornices, engaged columns, and pinnacles in the form of obelisks have been removed from the towers, also because of deterioration of cast stone. Crosses top the towers and the central pediment.

The body of the church is extremely simple in yellow brick with minimal detail. The bays of the nave are articulated with brick pilasters and Lombard arcading at the top, and a simple arched window is centered in each bay. The transepts have wheel windows high on the wall, beneath Lombard arcades decorating parapet walls, and two arched windows below on either side. Side entrances are in the corners of nave and transept on the geographical north side of the transepts. At the rear, three apses are visible above the simple brick volumes of the sacristies, placed against the rear wall which, like the transepts, rises to a parapet wall decorated with Lombard arcading. On the slated roof at the crossing in the "dome" position is a cupola virtually identical to the uppermost stages of the towers; placed here it looks like nothing so much as a neo-classical garden pavilion which has lost its way.

Attached to the church on the southeast is the boiler house, a simple yellow brick rectangular volume with a smokestack. This provides heating services for the entire complex.

Inside, the church is one large cruciform volume under segmental barrel vaults. A narthex underlies the organ gallery, and leads to the main space, which has a floor sloped toward the altar. The bays are articulated by engaged columns at the walls which support a cornice and ribs across the ceiling. An arched window is centered in each bay; the windows appear to be contemporary with the building, and are carried out in opalescent glass; figures of saints or biblical scenes are framed by classical motifs, all carried out in bright colors. No maker has been identified for the glass.

At the rear, the gallery opens into the body of the church through a large arched opening flanked by two smaller ones; the large central arch frames the facade of the original pipe organ, a tubular-pneumatic instrument by the Votteler-Hettche Co. of Cleveland, Ohio.

At the front, a similar division into three arches articulates the chancel wall. The two small flanking arches are the apses of the side altars; in the center, a large arch gives way to walls placed diagonally in which are placed pedimented doorways surmounted by niches containing statues; these diagonal walls suggest piers for the non-existent dome and create a recess to another, smaller arch, which frames the semicircular apse. Within the apse is the marble main altar and the reredos with engaged columns and a broken pediment surrounding a statue of the patron St. Stanislaus. Above are three arched stained glass windows.

The church is rich in furnishings, statues, and painted decoration, reflecting the devotional practices of the Polish immigrant community. The impression of richness is emphasized by the use of crystal chandeliers for the major lighting fixtures, a rarity in American Catholic churches. Some statues and other religious objects, and the bells, have been removed from the church since the suppression of the parish.

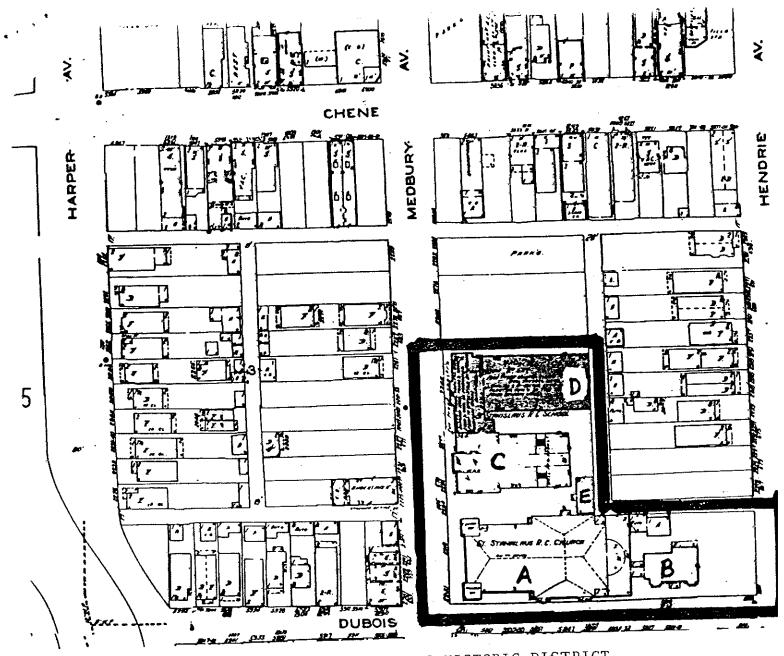
Taken as a whole, the interior reflects very clearly the Beaux-Arts tendencies of the time. The expansive space has much more to do with the typical Beaux-Arts railroad station concourse than it does with spacial complexity of the Baroque churches which the facade emulates.

The rectory behind the church likewise seems a small exercise in the Beaux-Arts. Its rather broad facade has two-story bays placed against facade sections brought forward on either side, and a rectangular entrance porch centered on the flat central facade. The porch has columns in antis between brick piers and is topped with a balustrade; above is a segmentally arched window. Three

dormers with pediments decorate the roof, which is hipped and has intersecting hips above the side pavilions. There is a slate roof.

The newest building now in the complex is the high school, built under permit #40520, issued February 24, 1928. The architect is not presently known. The building represents a sort of architectural compromise between the church and the older school, using the yellow brick and light colored trim of the church, while observing generally the form of the 1900 school. the earlier school, an entrance bay is brought forward from the facade and rises to a gable facing the street. Again following the precedent next door, an arched entry has a two-story oriel window above; on this building the gable contains a pair of small windows flanking a canopied niche. The connection between the two buildings is strengthened by the fact that they abut at the high school's western wall; the continuous foundation and water table shared by both, and the almost identical roof slopes and general forms. Stylistically, the high school shows the influence of the "Collegiate Gothic" then popular for educational buildings, with its trim carried out in light terra-cotta instead of the cast stone of the church. Terra-cotta is used to frame the entrance and for the entire oriel, where a multi-color panel of terra-cotta is inserted in the spandrel between second and third floors. It is also used for the windows and niche in the gable, and to frame the windows of the flanking sections of the facade. These are arranged as triple windows flanked by single windows, all framed in terra-cotta; the first and second floor windows are framed as a unit with terra-cotta spandrels, while the third floor windows are separated from the facade below by a string course at sill level.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that the City Council estalish the St. Stanislaus Bishop & Martyr Complex Historic, with the design treatment level of conservation. A Draft ordinance for the establishment of the district is attached for consideration by City Council.



PROPOSED ST. STANISLAUS HISTORIC DISTRICT (Boundaries shown in heavy black line.)

