

FINAL REPORT

TRINITY DELIVERANCE CHURCH/CHURCH OF THE COVENANT



By resolution dated February 28, 2007, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Trinity Deliverance Church/Presbyterian Church of the Covenant Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic District Act.

The proposed Trinity Deliverance Church/Presbyterian Church of the Covenant Historic District consists of three individual buildings: the church located at 740 East Grand Boulevard (1907) and the rectory with a garage located at 728 East Grand Boulevard (1914). The church complex is approximately three miles east of downtown Detroit north of Belle Isle and the MacArthur Bridge, at the southeast corner of East Grand Boulevard and Preston Street and lies within the boundaries of the East Grand Boulevard National Register Historic District (NR1999). The National Register district encompasses both sides of East Grand Boulevard from East Jefferson Avenue to Mack Avenue, and therefore, consists of only a portion of the whole boulevard, which runs in a horseshoe encompassing parts of the east and west sides of the city.

The East Grand Boulevard Historic District is historically and architecturally significant as an elite residential area on one of the first planned boulevards in the City of Detroit. During the construction of the Grand Boulevard, routed around the city between 1881 and 1913, this east-side stretch became the home of many men and women who left their individual impressions upon various aspects of

Detroit life. They include George Stroh, son of Eleanor and Bernhard Stroh; Frederick Kahl, founder of Frederick Kahl Iron Foundry; and Richard E. Raseman, prominent architect whose commissions include Trumbull Avenue Presbyterian Church and the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Building.

As the city population moved eastward several religious structures were built on the Boulevard. Located within a few blocks of Trinity Deliverance Church are two additional ecclesiastical structures. The English Gothic Revival building known as the Church of the Messiah, Episcopal, at the corner of East Lafayette and East Grand Boulevard and the Neo-Classical Second Church of Christ, Scientist building located in the middle of the block between East Jefferson Avenue and East Lafayette Avenue.

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

on the south, the south line of Lot 1, extended east & west, of Vincent Fields
Sub L27 P87 W C R;

on the west, the centerline of East Grand Boulevard;

on the north, the centerline of Preston Street;

on the east, the centerline of the north-south alley running between Preston Street and Goethe Avenue.

History:

The two congregations which have occupied the church complex located at 740 East Grand Boulevard are the original congregation, Church of the Covenant (Presbyterian) and the present congregation, Trinity Deliverance Church. Together these congregations represent over one hundred years of Detroit history. Both congregations have been dedicated to preserving the church complex.

The original Church of the Covenant (Presbyterian) began as a Mission Sunday School established by Zebulon R. Brockway, John S. Newberry, and Senator James McMillan in 1863. Brockway, superintendent of Detroit's House of Correction, felt that many of Detroit's youth were lacking in spiritual guidance so he established the Brockway Mission which originally met in the Bishop Union School located on the corner of Prospect and Hastings Streets. On March 20, 1864, the Mission School acquired its first property, a small frame chapel at the northwest corner of Napoleon and Russell Streets. Five years later, the Mission School had grown and larger quarters were needed. With the support of Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church, a substantial cash donation was received from Dwight L. Moody, a noted Evangelist who had spoken at the mission school the previous year. Adjoining lots were purchased and the frame chapel was replaced with a larger brick building. On January 31, 1869, the church was dedicated under its new name, Church of the Covenant.

In 1874, Church of the Covenant became a mission church under the control of the Presbyterian Alliance of Detroit. Covenant Church was then organized with the name Union Presbyterian Church.

A year later, Rev. A.E. Hastings was appointed pastor of Union Presbyterian where he served for the next fifteen years, until his retirement. In February, 1889, Rev. Louis R. Fox was appointed the new pastor of Union Presbyterian. Under his stewardship the church changed its name to The Presbyterian Church of the Covenant, and he oversaw the renovation and expansion of the church building, as the membership continued to increase. By 1900, Church of the Covenant found itself entrenched in a neighborhood that was rapidly becoming more commercial. The Eastern Market was well established on Russell Street and the neighborhood was becoming less residential, thus, making the need for a move of primary concern for the church members. Church of the Covenant purchased several lots on East Grand Boulevard for a new church building. The property on Russell Street was sold in 1906, and services were held in a storefront on Mack Avenue.

The Church of the Covenant built its new building in 1907 at the corner of East Grand Boulevard and Preston Street. Erected by masonry contractors William H. Stokes and George F. Whittingham, its estimated cost of construction was \$35,000. By 1923, the membership had outgrown the building, so that the church was substantially enlarged at a cost of \$150,000, increasing the seating capacity from 600 to 1,100. A rear section was added with seven classrooms, pastor's study, and women's parlor. That same year the church purchased the house next to the church to be used as the rectory.

By 1959, the neighborhood demographics were changing and the new residents were not as prosperous as the former ones. The dwindling congregation had to decide whether to integrate or relocate. After much debate the Church of the Covenant reached out into the community and became one of Detroit's first racially integrated Presbyterian churches. In 1981, it merged with Woodward Avenue Presbyterian Church and became Woodward Avenue Presbyterian Church of the Covenant. The church of 740 East Grand Boulevard vacated and was subsequently sold to Trinity Deliverance Church.

Trinity Deliverance Church was organized on November 22, 1970 under the pastorate of the Apostle, Pastor Vernell Benjamin Washington. Initial services were held on the second floor of a commercial building located at 8430 Grand River, with a membership of only five adults. Within three short years the church's membership had grown to over fifty families. With continued growth it soon became apparent that the Trinity Deliverance congregation needed its own building. On May 6, 1973 Trinity Deliverance purchased its first building, located at 9270 Wyoming Avenue, fulfilling a promise Pastor Washington had made to his members. The congregation worshiped at this location for the next nine years.

By 1981 the congregation of Trinity Deliverance had once again outgrown its building and was in search of a larger, more permanent edifice. Resolving that the next move would be into the church of their dream, the members acquired the church complex from Church of the Covenant Presbyterian located at 740 East Grand Boulevard. On December 25, 1982 the congregation of Trinity Deliverance held their first service in their new building under the leadership of Pastor V.B. Washington.

The history of Trinity Deliverance Church continues to be a testament to the tenacity of the congregation's commitment to saving an important part of Detroit's built environment as they continue to grow.

Architectural Description:

Trinity Deliverance Church is located on the east side of East Grand Boulevard in the block south of the site of the former Eastern High School, now a large vacant parcel of land. It is on the northern edge of the East Grand Boulevard Historic District (NR).

Trinity Deliverance Church is housed in a large Neo-Gothic ecclesiastical building of orange-brown brick with stone elements and trim. Its original plan was a Latin cross, a cross with three short arms and a long arm. The long, western arm, or nave, is lit by clerestory windows. Sitting on a high basement separated by a stone watertable, the building is sheltered by a gable roof. A substantial addition for the Sunday school and church hall were added to the rear, or east, end of the building in 1923.

The church building is anchored to its site at its northwest corner by a multi-staged, buttressed stair tower that culminates in an octagonal spire with a cross at its apex. The three lancet windows in the multi-faceted lower stage of the north elevation of the tower spiral up towards the crenellated parapet wall atop the first stage. On the tower's west, or front, facade is the entrance to the church, accessed up several steps through a recessed ogee arch and a set of double doors with decorative metal hinges. Above the watertable to the north side of the entrance is a cornerstone which reads, "Church of the Covenant" in stylized text. A single, elongated, lancet window sits above the gabled entrance and below the upper stage of the tower, the belfry level, which consists of a wide, louver-vented, arched tracery window beneath the crenellated parapet wall.

Continuing with the west (front) façade south of the entrance tower is a projecting gable end with a monumental Tudor arched opening framed by label moldings containing a huge stained glass window.

Facing Preston, the secondary (north) elevation features buttressed corners, groupings of windows, and a projecting three-sided stone entrance vestibule at ground level. Like the first stage of the main tower, the top of the entrance vestibule is crenellated. The transept to its east features a large stained glass, tracery arched window divided vertically into six sections and horizontally by a band of decorative wooden tracery. The gable end culminates with a cross. The wall surface to its west, part of the later addition, has a grouping of five narrow, arched windows with tracery, on each of its two levels above the grouping of five rectangular windows at basement level.

Corner buttresses provide the transition between wall surfaces. At the corners of the transept at parapet level are stone blank heraldic crests. Set back between the tower of the front entrance and the transept arm is the four-bay nave. Aisle and sanctuary arched windows with tracery are in groupings of three, with two square basement windows per bay below. The articulation of the nave on the south elevation is similar to that of the north, but instead of the tower, it is set between the gabled end wall of the narthex and the projecting south arm of the church building, which, judging from its fenestration, was designed for a more utilitarian function.

Finally, the east (rear) elevation of the building along the alley consists of two stories of five groupings of triple double-hung sash windows in horizontally rectangular openings, including the basement, between the outer chimney bays.

The dwelling at 728 East Grand Boulevard served as a rectory to the church for at least the last thirty years, although it was not associated with the church when it was built. It is a simple two-story brick, four-square with a hip roof carrying a front-facing dormer composed of a grouping of three double-hung sash windows.

Criteria: The proposed historic district meets criterion C as provided in the Michigan Local Historic District Act and in local ordinance. The criterion refers to resources that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

Composition of the Historic Designation Advisory Board: The Historic Designation Advisory Board has nine appointed members and (three) ex-officio members, all residents of the Detroit. The appointed members are: Russell L. Baltimore, Melanie a. Bazil, Robert Cosgrove, DeWitt Dykes, Edward Francis, Zene▲Fogel-Gibson, Calvin Jackson, Harriet Johnson, and Doris Rhea. The ex-officio members, who may be represented by members of their staff are: the Director of the Historical Department, the Director of the City Planning Commission, and the Director of the Planning and Development Department.

Recommendation: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that the Detroit City Council adopt an ordinance of designation for the proposed Trinity Deliverance Church/Church of the Covenant Historic District. A draft ordinance is attached for City Council▲s consideration.

Bibliography:

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