

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

37.

Historic Designation Advisory Board

PROPOSED FRANK H. BEARD SCHOOL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Final Report

The proposed Frank H. Beard School Historic District consists of one building at 840 Waterman in southwest Detroit. Built in 1896, it serves as the neighborhood elementary school for a residential community now divided by the Fisher Freeway (I-75).

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

On the north, the centerline of West Lafayette;

On the east, the centerline of an alley running north-south between Rademacher and Waterman from Lafayette to the Fisher Service Drive;

On the south, the centerline of Fisher Service Drive; and

On the west, the centerline of Waterman Avenue.

HISTORY: Frank H. Beard School is one of the last late nineteenth century public schools in Detroit and one of the least altered. It is historically significant to the community it served and continues to serve.

Previous to 1885, much of southwest Detroit was part of Springwells Township and many of the children residing there attended either the Amos or Bellefontaine schools. In 1885 part of Springwells was annexed to Detroit, this section including the Amos and Bellefontaine schools. This necessitated the building of another elementary school in Springwells Township. On August 21, 1886, the School District No. 1 of the Township of Springwells accepted the James F. and May B. Joy's price of \$2,000 for the future site of Beard School. Pupils in the present school district attended classes in a store on Fort Street until September 1886, when a four-room school was built on the present site at Waterman near Fort Street. This first school was called Garfield in honor of President Garfield. Mr. Gillespie was the first principal. He was followed by Mr. Frederick Cockran, Mr. Lumley, and Mr. McClelland.

In 1895, the four-room building became so overcrowded that it was declared unsafe. In the spring of 1896 while Mr. George Berkaw was principal, the original building was torn down and replaced with

a twelve room, two-story, brick building in the fall. During the period of construction classes were held in a hotel at Fort Street and Rademacher.

The architectural partnership of Malcolmson and Higginbotham, formed in 1890, designed this building. Malcolmson and Higginbotham had been retained by the Detroit Board of Education on an annual basis since 1891 and were associated with the Detroit School Board for 30 years. The Preston School (1894), McMillan School (1895), and Beard School (1896) were all designed by the partnership one year apart from each other.

An addition was built in 1900 making 14 rooms in all with a capacity of 670 students, at a total cost of \$46,000.

Detroit annexed the rest of Springwells Township in 1906. The Detroit Board of Education then found that there were two Garfield Schools. Because of Frank H. Beard's involvement with the school and contribution to education in Springwells Township, the name was changed from Garfield School to "Frank H. Beard School" in 1906.

Frank Herbert Beard was born in Detroit on December 29, 1862. He was the son of parents from Great Britain. He married Jennie Shiel in 1890 and they had three children, Jean, Sidney and Herbert. At age 14, Frank Beard entered his father's produce business; they sold their vegetables at Detroit Market on Cadillac Square where they kept a store. They lived on a small farm four miles from Detroit's City Hall, on Fort Street in the Township of Springwells. Later the Beards drifted into growing flowers and became florists, which continued to be Frank's occupation until the time of his death on March 20, 1905.

A resident of the Village of Woodmere since childhood, Frank H. Beard took active interest in the affairs of the village. His father was director of the school board. Upon his father's death, Frank was elected to his place. He was instrumental in the building of Garfield School. He hired teachers and followed the progress of area schools as a member of the Springwells School Board for 17 years until the time of his death at the young age of 42. His younger brother, Edmund, was then elected to the office and acted until Detroit annexed Springwells Township. Frank H. Beard also served as a member of the First Council of Woodmere.

The Beard family was always interested in education. Frank's mother used to say, "Improve your mind--read a good book." Frank himself attended a little one-room schoolhouse, later a four-room school (Bellefontaine), and then he attended the old Detroit Capital High School, which stood on what is now Capital Park.