

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

204 City-County Building
Detroit, Michigan 48226

(313) 224-3487

PROPOSED ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH HISTORIC DISTRICT

Final Report

CHARGE: The proposed Zion Lutheran Church Historic District consists of the church building, erected in 1933, and the parsonage, built in 1916. The church complex is located at 4305 Military Avenue in southwest Detroit, east of Livernois and north of Michigan Avenue approximately 3.5 miles from downtown Detroit. Scattered residential buildings surround it, with commercial buildings to its south on Michigan and industrial uses further east along the Pere Marquette rail lines.

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

On the east, the centerline of Military;

On the south, a line drawn 30 feet south of and parallel to the north line of lots 80, 81, and 82 of the Stephen Livernois Estate, (Liber 180, Page 343);

On the west, the centerline of the alley running north-south between Michigan and Buchanan; and

On the north, the boundary line begins on the centerline of Military Avenue and passes through a point on the easterly boundary of Lot 15, said point being 13.17 feet northerly of the southerly boundary of Lot 15, and runs thence to a point on the westerly boundary of the easterly 49 feet of Lot 15, said point being 13.28 feet northerly of the southerly boundary of Lot 15; thence southerly 7.21 feet to a point on the easterly boundary of the westerly 101 feet of Lot 15, that point being 6.07 feet northerly of the southerly boundary of Lot 15; thence westerly to a point on the westerly boundary of Lot 15, said point being 6.31 feet northerly of the southerly boundary of Lot 15; thence extended in a straight line to the intersection with the centerline of the alley running northerly and southerly between Michigan and Buchanan.

HISTORY:

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church was the third Missouri Synod Lutheran church in Detroit. The history of the Missouri Synod Lutheran churches in the City begins with St. Trinity Evangelical

Lutheran Church, organized in 1850 after a rift with St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church. It located on Gratiot in the Eastern Market area just east of downtown Detroit. A daughter congregation, Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Church, was organized in 1865 and located west of downtown at 17th and Pine. Zion is the daughter church of Immanuel.

In 1877, Immanuel Lutheran purchased a house on Wesson Ave. just south of Michigan Avenue and opened a branch school there. The founding of the school in 1877 predates the formal organization of the congregation and makes it the oldest continuously operating, non-Catholic parochial school in the City of Detroit. Under the leadership of Immanuel's first pastor, the Reverend Konrad Moll, worship was also conducted. On May 21, 1882, fifty-one men, including ten members of Immanuel and the rest recent arrivals from West Prussia, met in the Wesson Avenue schoolhouse to discuss the possibility of organizing a new parish, and on June 4, 1882, the Evangelical Lutheran Zion Congregation was organized. Three months later, it purchased four lots on Welch Ave., now Military Avenue, for \$1000 and went about planning for the erection of its church. Immanuel donated the lot and the building.

The area around Michigan Ave. and Livernois where Zion Lutheran Church located in 1882 was then a relatively unsettled part of Springwells Township. The growing number of German-speaking immigrants to that area was evidenced by the presence of buildings of other religious denominations around the turn of the century, such as the Third German Methodist Episcopal Church on Livernois and Edwards and the German Evangelical Immanuel Church and School on Livernois and Morton. The first service in English at Zion Lutheran Church was held on May 10, 1925.

The Rev. C.F. Schatz was called as the first pastor of the new congregation in October, 1882. The school was moved from Wesson to the new location and lengthened by 38 feet, and the Wesson property was sold. On July 8, 1883, the frame Gothic Revival church, constructed at a cost of \$8,000, was dedicated. After a new four room school was dedicated in 1885 and property was purchased to the south of the church, the old school was moved and converted into the first parsonage.

The congregation was constantly renovating its facilities. In 1890 three church bells were acquired for \$1000. Rooms and a basement were added to the school in 1901. The church received permanent foundations and central heating in 1904 and was renovated in 1909 and again in 1925. A new organ was installed in 1913. A permit was issued in 1916 for the razing of the first parsonage and the construction of the present vernacular Prairie style one, at a cost of \$8,000.

In 1928, the congregation decided to replace the old church with a new stone church costing approximately \$100,000, paying for it with funds and work pledged by the congregation. The present

Zion Lutheran Church occupies the site of the former frame structure that had been used for worship for over fifty years. After it was demolished in 1932, services were held in the Men's Club building until the new building was completed. In 1932, the congregation had 1900 baptized members, 1417 communicants, 224 school children, and 159 voting members, making it one of the largest congregations of the Missouri Synod in Michigan. It also had a Men's Club, Choir, Young Ladies' Society, and Junior Society.

The Great Depression held off the erection of the church for a few years. The cornerstone was finally laid on Sept. 11, 1932, and the church was dedicated on Sunday, May 28, 1933 with services in English and German.

The firm of Maul & Lentz was the architect of Zion Lutheran Church. That firm was the successor firm of MacFarlane, Maul & Lentz (1912-25). Maul & Lentz were also the architects of the R. Hirt Warehouse (1926); Epiphany Lutheran Church (1928), Concordia Lutheran Church (1914); and the Evangelical Lutheran Institute for the Deaf (chapel and Education Building, 1939). Walter C.F. Maul was the principle designer on the Zion project. A native Detroiter, he was a Lutheran of German descent who served on the board of the Lutheran Institute of the Deaf. His funeral service was held at Concordia Lutheran Church after his death at age sixty-six in 1951.

Maul and Lentz originally prepared drawings for the construction of a brick building, but an economical source of Indiana Bedford limestone became available prior to construction. Huge blocks of stone from the old post office downtown had been hauled to the yard of Batchelder-Wasmund Co., stone contractors, at 2300 W. Jefferson Avenue after the Federal Building had been demolished in 1932. That company had bought the stone and offered it for purchase to Zion Lutheran Church.

Some of the unemployed men of the parish helped construct the building. Contractors working on various phases of the church construction under the direction of Maul & Lentz were Martens Co., mason work and carpentry, Batchelder-Wasmund Co., cut stone work; Frank Stratton, lathing and plastering; Oswald Leitert, a German native who came to Detroit at age nineteen who was the painting contractor; Detroit Stained Glass Works, art glass; and Jordanoff Studios, decorators of the chancel walls.

The \$6,000 debt on the church was paid off in 1947, and the church was redecorated in 1954. In 1955 the parsonage was converted to a two-family teachers residence. In 1963, the parish began collecting pledges for a new school and activities center, which was consecrated upon its completion on June 14, 1964. It was designed by the architect, Earl Confer, and cost approximately \$340,000. It contained a nursery, reception room, lounge, kitchen, college-sized gymnasium that doubles as an auditorium, in addition to the classrooms. This building is

symbolic of the churches commitment to serve the neighborhood, no matter what its makeup. Zion Lutheran admitted its first black member in 1962 and actively sought membership from the community it was a part of.

That the church had only four pastors in its lifetime to date has contributed to its sense of continuity and purpose. The Rev. Christian F. Schatz, the first pastor, served from 1882 to 1914; the Rev. Walter E. Lussky, the second pastor who presided over the construction of the present church, served from 1915 to 1939. He was followed by the Rev. Kenneth E. Runge, who was pastor from 1938 to 1974; and he was followed by the Rev. Gene Evans, the present pastor, in 1975.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Zion Lutheran Church is a cross-gabled, Neo-Gothic ecclesiastical steel framed structure faced with beige limestone salvaged from the old Federal Building in downtown Detroit. A large crenelated tower, rising sixty-five feet at the northeast corner of the church, terminates with a louvered belfry. Over the molded and carved central doorway is a stone cross. In the tower doorway are stairs to the balcony and basement. Both entrances are equally prominent and contain wooden paneled double doors.

The side elevations are divided into three bays forward of the transept arms, separated by wall buttresses. The walls of the side aisles are pierced with pointed-arched windows with molded stone mullions and molded stone tracery; the stained glass window corresponding to the narthex is square. The gabled roof is covered with variegated colored slate of different sizes, and the metal work is copper. Three bells from the demolished church, which were cast in 1892, were relocated to the belfry in the new tower.

On the inside, the narthex is divided from the nave with a wood paneled partition containing doors opening to the main and side aisles. Stone columns and arched openings separate the nave from the side aisles. The nave opens into a crossing having transepts at each side. The Baptistry opens into the nave on the south side. The floors of the narthex, aisles and chancel are of hand cut slate. Woodwork throughout the church is all hand carved in a Gothic style.

Across the rear (east) of the Nave is the balcony, which is occupied by the organ encased with oak woodwork. The organ was rebuilt by the Votteler-Holtkamp-Sparling Organ Company of Cleveland, Ohio, after it was moved into the new church in 1933, and augmented with many new ranks of pipes and echo chamber. The tracker action was replaced with electric.

The chancel, the main focus of the sanctuary, is outfitted with the altar, the reredos, the credence, the communion rail, the lectern, the pulpit and the clergy seats. The three sections of

the reredos represent the Holy Trinity; over the top slab of the altar is a carved grouping representing "The Last Supper." Peacock symbol represents the Resurrection and Immortality. The pulpit panels bear the symbols of the four Evangelists; the face of the lectern bears St. John the Baptist. The walls are paneled in wood while the plastered surfaces above are beautifully decorated in color. All woodwork is oak. The altar table is of marble; the chancel ceiling displays decorated panels and exposed beams. Ends of the truss brackets in the nave have carved shields symbolizing various saints.

Stained glass windows throughout the Narthex, nave and chancel are the work of the Detroit Stained Glass Works. The chancel window contains the figure of the "Ascending Lord Jesus Christ" flanked by two angels.

The narthex, aisles, baptistry and chancel has been floored with variegated colored slate in random pattern. The pew ends have dull colored panels that relate to colors elsewhere in the church. The original seating capacity of the nave was 520; the balcony could hold eighty-five more.

The basement was originally planned and equipped with an assembly room, kitchen, and adjoining rooms.

The parsonage to the south of the church was constructed in 1916 (permit #4260, June 12, 1916). It is two and one-half story vernacular Prairie style residential structure with a shallow bay window on the first floor of the front facade to the left of a single entrance door. The second floor consists of paired double hung sash windows. The hip-roof dormer protrudes from the front face of the main hip roof of the building. The building is typical of buildings of its style and period in its simplicity absence of exterior detail.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board finds that the proposed Zion Lutheran Church Historic District meets one of the criteria for historic designation, that is its unique association with the cultural, social, and spiritual history of the community. The Board therefore recommends that the City Council establish the Zion Lutheran Church Historic District, with the design treatment level of rehabilitation. A draft ordinance for the establishment of the district is attached for consideration by City Council.

Bibliography

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Detroit News, July 9, 1932.

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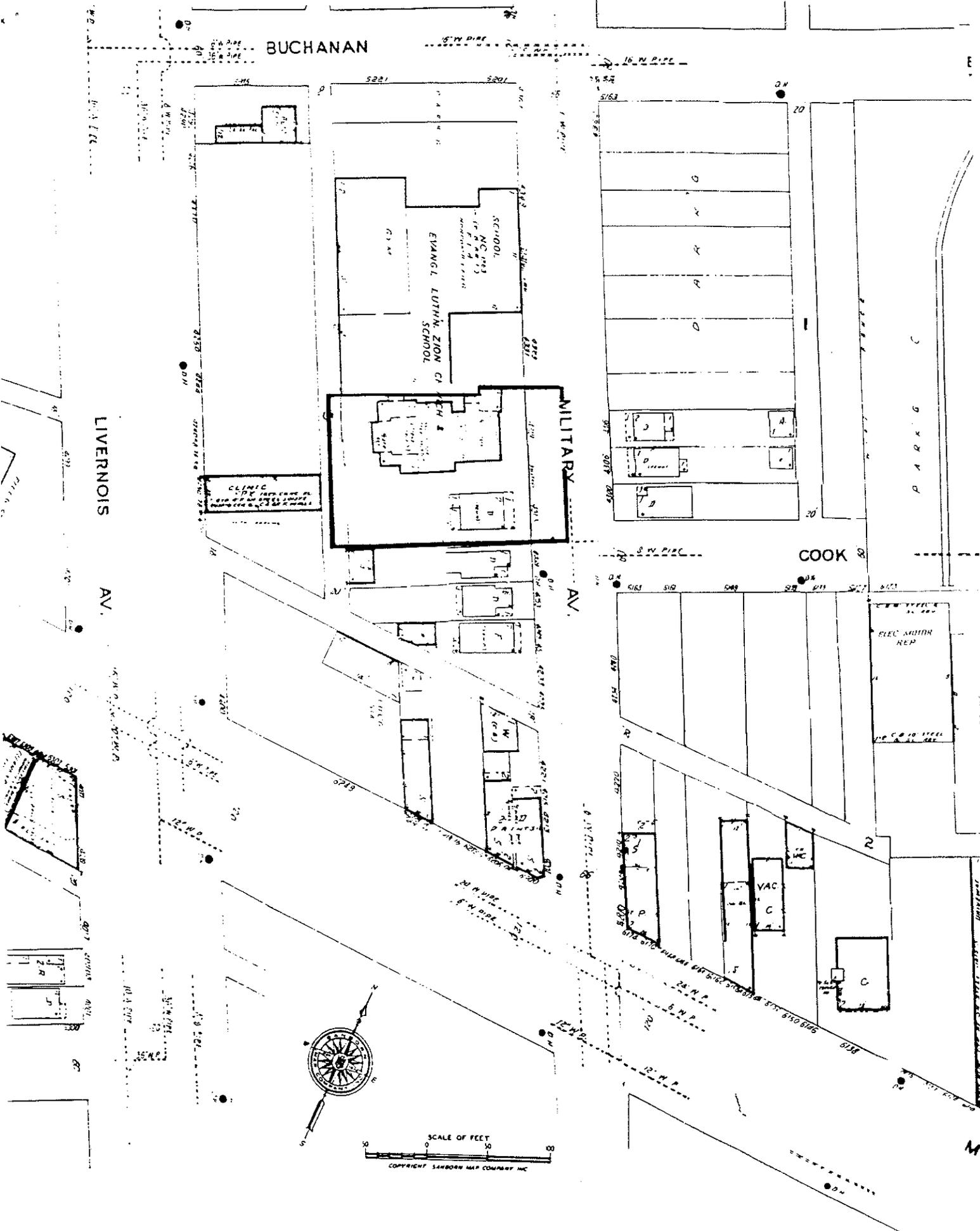
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"Post Office Stone Used in Building New Zion Church," Detroit News, May 27, 1933.

"Program of the Dedication of Zion Ev. Lutheran Church, Detroit, Michigan," Sunday, May 28th, 1933.

"Zion Lutheran School and Activities Center," June 14, 1964 (booklet).



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 (Boundary outlined in heavy black)