

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

Historic Designation Advisory Board

FINAL REPORT

PROPOSED CAMPBELL SYMINGTON HOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The proposed historic district under study by the Historic Designation Advisory Board consists of a single residence designed by the architects Donaldson & Meier for Detroit businessman Campbell Symington. The house is presently privately owned and is located at 3977 Second Avenue at the southwest corner of Second and Alexandrine.

BOUNDARIES: The boundaries of the proposed district are the same as those of the building lot on which the house stands, which is as follows:

*The south 40 ft. of the north 80 ft. of Lots 15 and 16,
Block 94, Cass Farm subdivision.*

The attached map shows the proposed district outlined in heavy black lines.

HISTORY: On October 6, 1882, the Detroit architects Donaldson & Meier took out Permit No. 1065 for a two story brick and stone dwelling located at the corner of Second Avenue and Alexandrine. The architects' client, Campbell Symington, was then employed by the C.R. Mabley Company as office manager. Mr. Symington had been born in Scotland March 9, 1848, the son of a clergyman and the descendant of a family whose lands were conferred upon them by Robert the Bruce in the 14th century. Educated in Scotland, Mr. Symington came to Detroit at the age of 20 with a letter of recommendation to Mr. George B. Hill of the Michigan Bolt & Nut Works. After a number of years employment with that concern, he became office manager for Mabley's, a department store. It was during his employment at Mabley's that he met J. L. Hudson and also during this time that he built his home on Second Avenue.

In 1884, Mr. Symington and Mr. Hudson formed a partnership, purchased the carpet business of Abbott and Ketcham, and formed the firm of Hudson & Symington at Woodward Avenue and Campus Martius on the site presently occupied by the First Federal Building. The firm was later moved to other quarters and was eventually housed in the present Hudson complex on Woodward Avenue. The partnership was dissolved following the death of J. L. Hudson.

A member of the Church of Scotland during his youth, Mr. Symington was a member of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, which he served as a trustee, and later attended First Presbyterian Church.

Campbell Symington died in his house on Second Avenue on June 27, 1928. His wife, Adelaide M., remained in the house and died there in December, 1941. In September of 1944, the Symington daughters sold the house to the Dry Cleaning Institute, ending a period of family ownership of over 60 years.

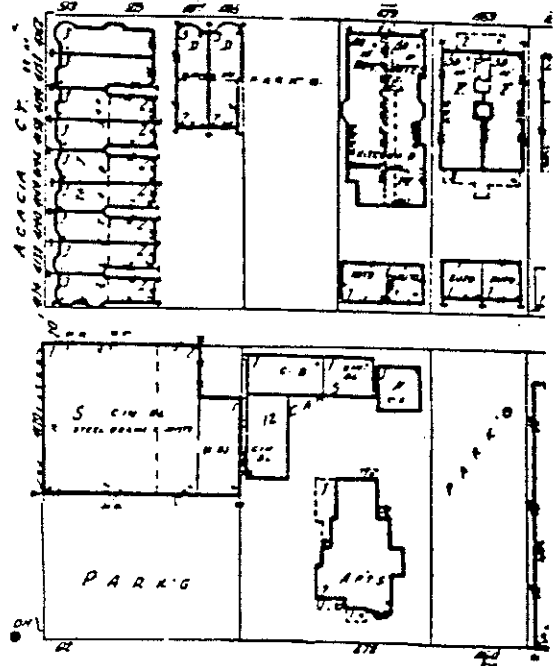
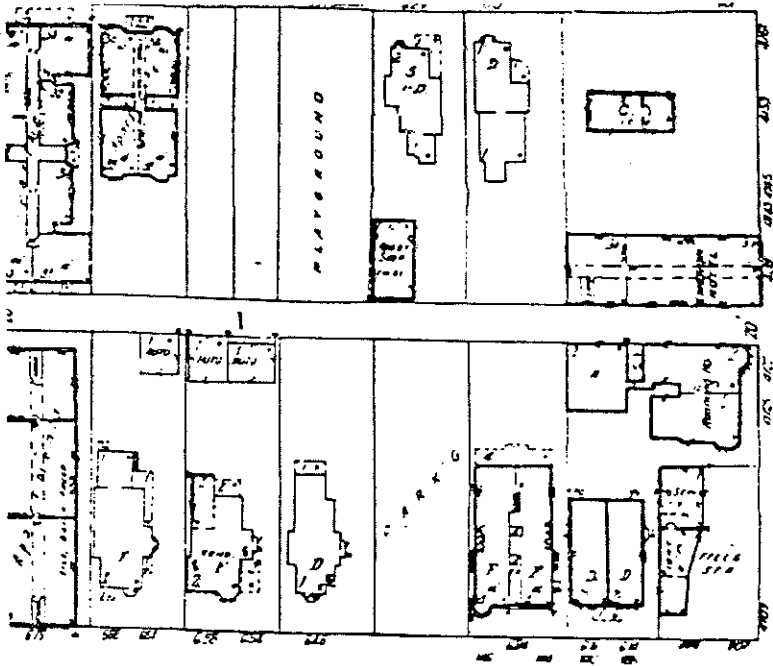
The Dry Cleaning Institute used the building as offices until December 1976, when the property was sold to Wayne State University. Less than a year later, in October 1977, the house was sold to its present private owners who are using it as a residence.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: The Campbell Symington house represents well a very substantial dwelling of the early 1880's; particularly noteworthy is the use of red-vein sandstone for the exterior walls, an expense not ordinary for a house of this size. Two and one-half stories high, the building is covered with a hip roof with dormers and a subsidiary gable over the left side of the facade. The windows on the first floor of the house are rectangular with carved trim above; on the second floor most of the windows have semi-circular arched tops, again with trim carved into the stonework. The main facade is divided into three sections. Two bays, one on either side flank a shallow recess in the center; the left bay extends further towards the street than the right. The main entrance is located in the shallow center bay and is reached by means of a large front porch of wood. The right-hand bay has paired windows at the first and second floor and the roof above this bay contains a dormer with a pair of double hung windows echoing the pairs of windows below. A smaller dormer with a single window is placed above the recessed center of the facade. On the left, a bay window is surmounted by the gable which is supported on very large, curved brackets at the second floor level. The gable contains a pair of double hung windows. The side of the house facing Alexandrine is characterized by similar wall surfaces and window treatments to those on the front of the house. About half way down the length of the house a rectangular bay extends slightly from the side and is surmounted by a dormer. There is a handsome cornice dividing the second story and roof levels.

The interior of the house is reportedly in fine condition with much original woodwork still in place, although the woodwork has been painted. The use of the building for offices for over 30 years did not substantially damage its residential character on the interior and the present owners have had no difficulty in resuming residential use.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends to the City Council the designation as an historic district of the Campbell Symington House, with a design treatment level of rehabilitation. The board finds that the house is worthy of designation for its association with the mercantile history of Detroit, and as an outstanding example of a substantial dwelling of the mid-1880's.

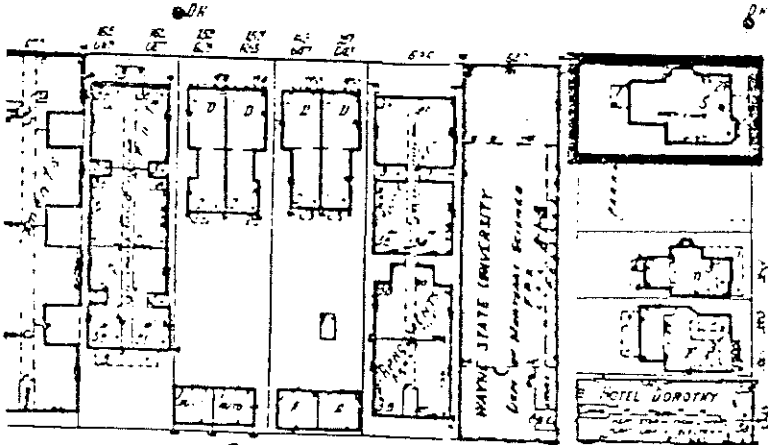
COMMENTS RECEIVED: The minutes of the Historic Designation Advisory Board's public hearing on this proposed designation are attached, and contain the names of those who offered comment, and whether they were in favor or opposed. It should be noted that the owner spoke in favor of designation.



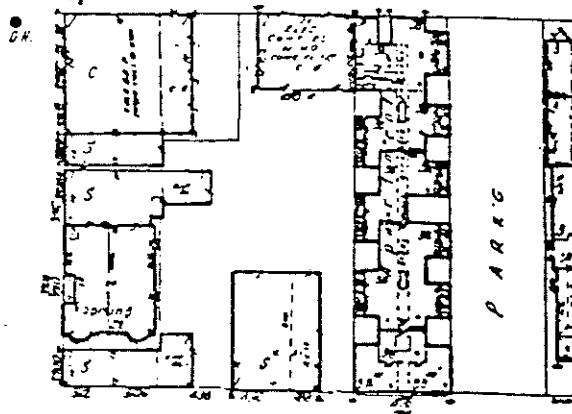
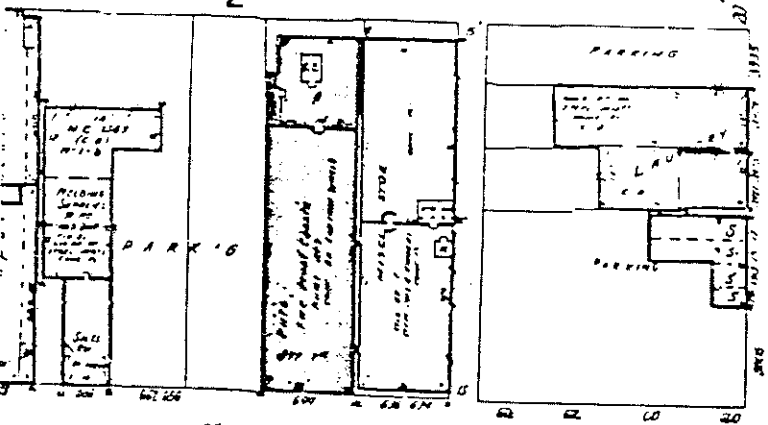
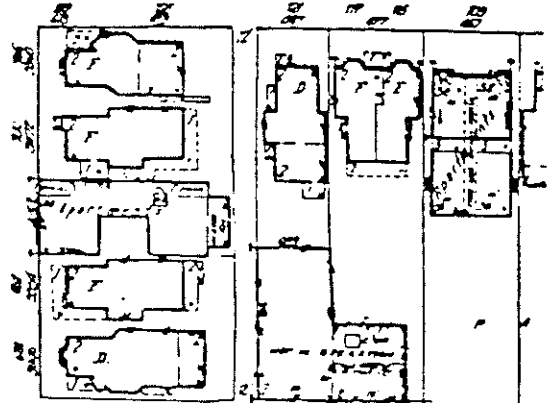
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Proposed Campbell Symington House Historic District
 (Proposed district outlined in heavy black)