

74-78 Monroe Avenue (Commercial Building)
Detroit
Wayne County
Michigan

HABS No. MI-329

HABS
MICH
88-DETRO
53-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

74-78 MONROE AVENUE (Commercial Building)

HABS No. MI-329

Location: 74-78 Monroe Avenue
Detroit
Wayne County
Michigan

U.S.G.S. Detroit, Michigan Quadrangle
UTM: 17.331480.4688580

Present

Owner: Community and Economic
Development Department
City of Detroit
150 Michigan Avenue
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Present

Occupant: None

Present Use: None

Significance: The building at 74-78 Monroe contributes to the
last intact pre-Civil War commercial block
remaining in Detroit.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: circa 1852, alteration circa 1870. Stylistically, this building was virtually identical to the adjoining commercial buildings at 54 through 72 Monroe Avenue (1852), including the cast-iron window sills and lintels with urn and scroll motifs, still intact on the Farmer Street facade of 74-78 Monroe. The approximate date of the substantial alteration to the Monroe Avenue facade is taken from the Monroe Avenue Historic District Nomination and was based on stylistic changes to the Monroe Avenue facade.

2. Architect: Not known.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Clerk's Office of the County of Wayne, Michigan.

1860 Assignment, December 4, 1860, recorded in Liber 86, p. 152.
Henry Doty to George Doty.

1864 Quit Claim Deed, August 10, 1864, recorded in Liber 101, p. 640.
George Doty to Alexander H. Adams.

1871 Quit Claim Deed, April 3, 1871, recorded in Liber 142, p. 570.
Alexander H. Adams to Rachel L. Doty.

1871 Quit Claim Deed, October 6, 1871, recorded in Liber 165, p. 448.
Alexander H. Adams to Henry Doty.

1896 Warranty Deed, April 14, 1896, recorded in Liber 475, p. 330. Alexander H Doty et al to Robert V. Chamberlain, Trustee.

1974 Warranty Deed, January 22, 1974, recorded in Liber 18710, p. 23. Anna Mae Feist and Mary Lou Mossner to the City of Detroit.

4. Builders, suppliers:

a. Builder: Not known.

A. Physical History (continued):

5. Original plans and construction: The building was originally virtually identical to the adjoining commercial building at 70-72 Monroe Avenue, with cast iron sills and lintels on both the Monroe Avenue and Farmer Street facades. The building at 74-78 Monroe was, however, set back another four feet from Monroe.
6. Alterations and additions: In the early 1870s, the building was extended forward about four feet to achieve the same setback as the adjoining buildings and the present Monroe Avenue facade was constructed. Information concerning this change is from the Monroe Avenue Historic District Nomination form. Nearly a dozen alterations to the storefronts and first floor interiors are chronicled in City of Detroit Building Permits from 1912 to 1970. The cornice on the Farmer Street facade was removed in 1953 (City of Detroit Building Permit No. 21650, November 24, 1953).

B. Historical Context:

This building was the location of a wide variety of businesses, on both the Monroe and Farmer frontage. The Monroe frontage had two tenants, typically a saloon and a restaurant between 1888 and 1918. These apparently occupied the entire ground floor, because Detroit City Directories list no separate businesses on the Farmer side of the building until 1915. The Monroe Avenue frontage had two tenants, a tailor and the United Cigar Store from 1918 to 1939, followed by a series of shoe stores and restaurants into the late 1970s. The Farmer Street shops included a barber shop which operated continuously from 1915 until the late 1970s. Finally, a hat cleaning business, operating under several names, occupied the first floor on Farmer from 1931 until the late 1970s. The second story housed a dentist from 1921 until the late 1970s, when the building was vacated. Between 1929 and 1932, it was the home of "Dr. Park, Painless Method Dentist." William J. Zieve then carried out his dental practice there from 1933 until 1978. The tenants on the third and fourth stories are unknown, because the Detroit City Directories did not identify them.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The structure at 74-78 Monroe is significant as part of the last intact pre-Civil War commercial block remaining in Detroit. The facade on Monroe Avenue was constructed in the 1870s, while the facade along Farmer Street was part of the original construction of the building in the early 1850s. Both facades have tall narrow windows and a combination of segmental- and full- arch window tops. The Farmer Street elevation is similar to the facades on the structures at 54 through 72 Monroe, including the use of cast-iron window sills and lintels with urn and scroll motifs.
2. Condition of fabric: While the upper floors retain much of their original character, the fourth story as well as the rear walls have suffered water damage because of a leaking roof, and the ground level storefronts are substantially altered.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The structure is four stories tall, plus basement, and is rectangular in layout. It measures 30' wide and 100' deep.
2. Foundations: Basement walls are made of brick masonry.
3. Wall construction: Exterior walls are masonry load-bearing and are made of red-colored common brick. On the Monroe Avenue facade, there are four rectangular windows per story above the first floor. Projecting brick is used decoratively around the windows to create full arches on the fourth story and segmental arches on the second and third stories. A small white-colored keystone appears in the middle of each arch. Stone window sills are connected to form courses across the second, third, and fourth stories. On the Farmer Street facade, cast-iron sills and lintels with urn and scroll motifs appear at each window, of which there are eight per story above the first floor. A doorway on the Farmer facade still retains its classical-style, cast-iron, entablature which features scrolled brackets and a broken pediment with an urn in the middle.

B. Description of Exterior (continued):

4. Structural system: Wooden floor joists and roof rafters bear on interior cast-iron beams which, in turn, are supported by cast-iron columns and masonry load-bearing exterior walls.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are four existing main entrances, one on Monroe, one at the corner of Monroe and Farmer, and two along Farmer. The doorway on Farmer toward the front of the building consists of a pair of doors surmounted by a transom light. There are two service doors at the rear of the building.
 - b. Windows: Double-hung one-over-one sash appear on the Monroe and Farmer elevations.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape: The building has a flat roof, with a parapet, and is moderately pitched to the rear.
 - b. Cornice: The cornices on the both the Monroe and Farmer facades have been removed, along with all cornice-level ornamentation.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: See sketch plans.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The building has plaster walls and ceilings throughout, except on the second story, which contained a large dental office, including waiting rooms, a reception desk, a laboratory, and ten cubicals containing dentist chairs and related equipment. This space is subdivided with floor-to-ceiling partitions of wood construction on the lower third, with frosted glass panels in the middle, and with wooden segments then extending to the ceiling. The lower two-thirds of the remaining walls consist of white and green ceramic tiles arranged in square and rectangular patterns, with multi-colored floral-pattern tiles in the middle. There are more than a dozen mirrors incorporated into the walls.

C. Description of Interior (continued):

9. Original furnishings: A large dentists' office on the second story, dating from the 1920s, is largely intact, with dentist chairs, drills, light fixtures, and other equipment in place, although in poor condition.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The structure faces northwest, but because it stands on the southwest corner of the intersection of Monroe Avenue and Farmer, the building has storefronts on both major streets.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings: None have been located.

B. Historic Views: The best views are found in the collections of Manning Brothers, Commercial Photographers, 26761 John R, Madison Heights, MI 48071. These include a view shot in 1930. The Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library has overall views of Monroe Avenue.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Detroit. City of. Building Permits. Department of Building and Safety Engineering, City-County Building, Detroit, Michigan 48226.

Wayne County, Register of Deeds. Land Tract Index. International Center Building, Suite 400, 400 Monroe Avenue, Detroit, Michigan 48226.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Burton, Clarence M. The City of Detroit, Michigan, 1701-1922. 5 Volumes. Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922.

Farmer, Silas. History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan. Detroit: Silas Farmer & Co., 1890.

2. Secondary and published sources (continued):

Monroe Avenue Historic District, Nomination Form,
National Register of Historic Places, November 7,
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June, 1906.

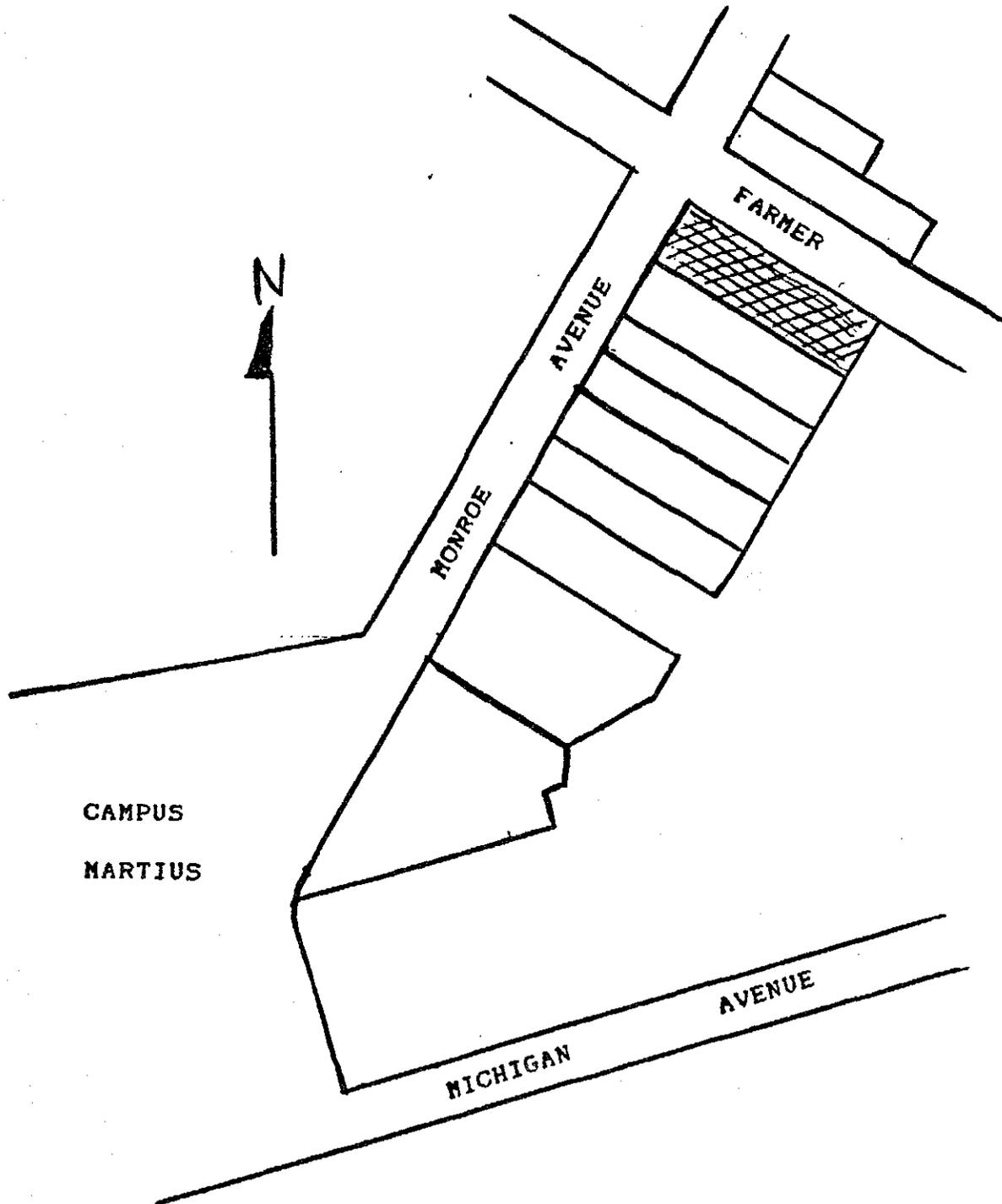
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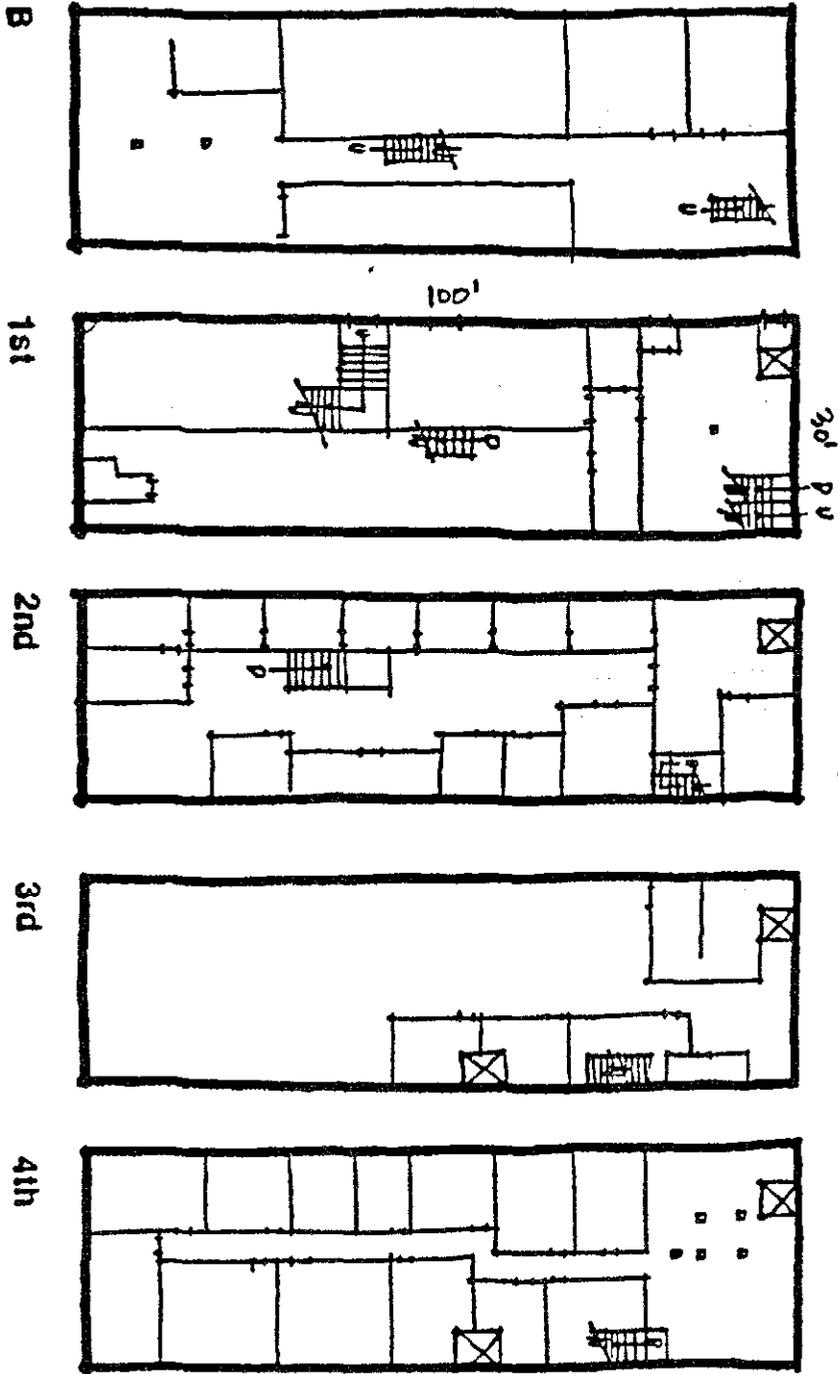
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Prepared by: Charles K. Hyde
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Date: July-August 1989

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EXISTING FLOOR PLANS