

SCA Presents



Tour of the Detroit Area

6 November 1988

Society for Commercial Archeology
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Room 5010
The Smithsonian Institution
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Photos by Charles Hyde unless otherwise noted.

November, 1988

THE SOCIETY FOR COMMERCIAL ARCHEOLOGY

presents

MOTOWN REVIEW

A Brief Bus Tour of Detroit and Vicinity.

November 6, 1988

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We then head east on the Ford toward Detroit. On the right, you see the sprawling Ford River Rouge Complex. We exit onto Michigan Avenue, one of Detroit's six major arterial streetcar routes and later, a major surface streets (see centerfold map). We will follow Michigan Avenue into downtown Detroit. Here, and the other major arterial streets, we will see two common commercial buildings from the 1920s and beyond, the Coney Island hot dog outlet and the branch bank. The latter sprouted during Detroit's explosive growth in the 1910's and 1920's, when Michigan law allowed branch banking. Today, scores of them survive, although few are still used for banking. Instead, they serve as ice cream parlors, porno movie houses, and churches, among other uses. Many occupy corner lots and most resemble Greek temples.

Along the route, note the Telway Hamburgers outlet (ca. 1952), the Senate Theater (1926), and the Senate Coney Island.



Telway Hamburgers (ca. 1952), 6820 Michigan Ave.



Senate Theater (1926), 6424 Michigan Avenue.

Continuing our trek to downtown Detroit, we pass the vacant Cadillac Motor Company plant (1921-), 2860 Clark Street, and the Michigan Central RR Station (1913), 2405 West Vernor Highway, with its sixteen story office tower, also vacant. Warren and Wetmore, of New York's Grand Central Station fame, designed this one as well. We will make a brief photo stop at venerable Tiger Stadium, a.k.a. Navin Field and Briggs Stadium, at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. The oldest segments date from 1912, with major additions in 1924, 1936, and 1938. The exterior surfaces of coated steel siding and glazed concrete block date from 1983. It was placed on the National Register in October, 1988.



Aerial view of stadium in 1945.

Our next stop is Paul's Automatic Car Wash, 541 West Fort. When Paul Maraian opened this facility in August, 1946, he was the first to use overhead sprayers combined with an endless chain conveyor which pulled the car through the wash. A blow-dryer partially dried the cars, and about six men did the rest. Paul's had a capacity of about 750 cars a day.



We then proceed to Woodward Avenue, Detroit's main south-north commercial spine, which divides the city into East and West sides. The J.L. Hudson Company Department Store, Woodward and Gratiot Avenue (1891-1949), was the premier department store in Detroit and was Hudson's only store until 1954, when the firm built its first suburban outlet in the Northland Shopping Center. Hudson's closed their downtown store in 1978 and the building remains vacant.

On our trip up Woodward Avenue, we will pass the Elwood Bar (1937), 2100 Woodward Avenue. One of the few surviving examples in Detroit of an enamel-paneled Art Deco/Modern design, the Elwood is undergoing restoration as a restaurant.



Photo J. Menlove

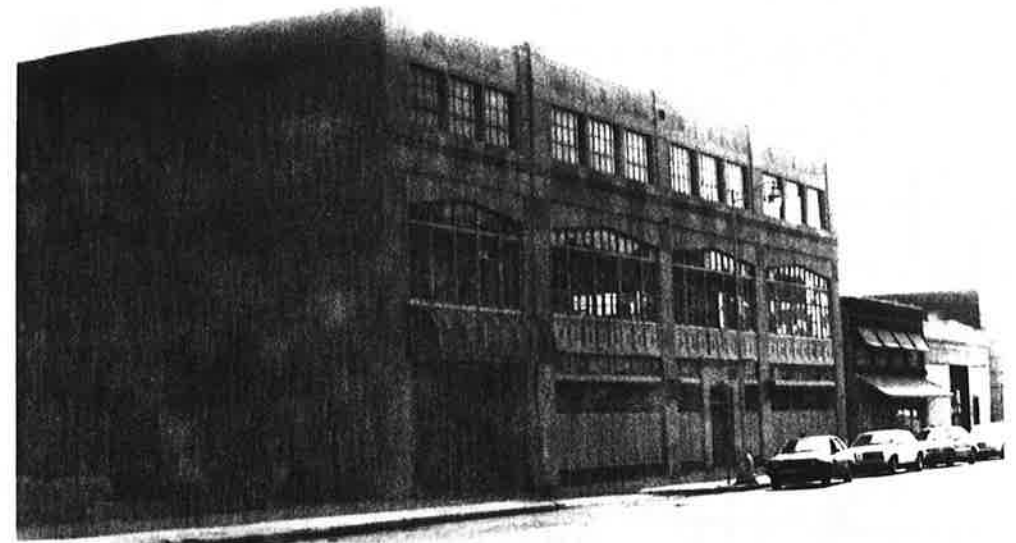
The tour continues up Woodward into Detroit's University/Cultural Center area and shift over the Cass Avenue, which runs parallel to Woodward. A segment of Cass extending between Palmer and Amsterdam emerged in the mid-1920s as a center for auto dealerships, repair shops, and parts suppliers. It includes six multi-story dealerships (see sketch map), with ramps connecting the floors.

Notable structures include the Cass Motor Sales Building (1928) at 5800 Cass, which was a Marmon dealership at first, then a Chrysler dealership, now Dalglish Cadillac; Wayne State University's Administration Services Building, 5980 Cass, formerly an auto service station (1920); Firestone Tire Service (5919 Cass), now Ellis Tire Service; Cadillac Sales and Service offices and showroom, 6001 Cass, now WSU's Criminal Justice Building (1927) - note the Cadillac Crest at the cornice line; a wheel and brake repair station, 6050 Cass, now Unisys

Federal Credit Union; Buick Service Station (1927), 6800 Cass, now Dalglish Cadillac; and finally, the Cadillac Motor Car Company factory (1905), 450 Amsterdam, now Westcott Paper Products. This was Cadillac's main plant from 1905 until 1921, when the Clark Street plant opened.



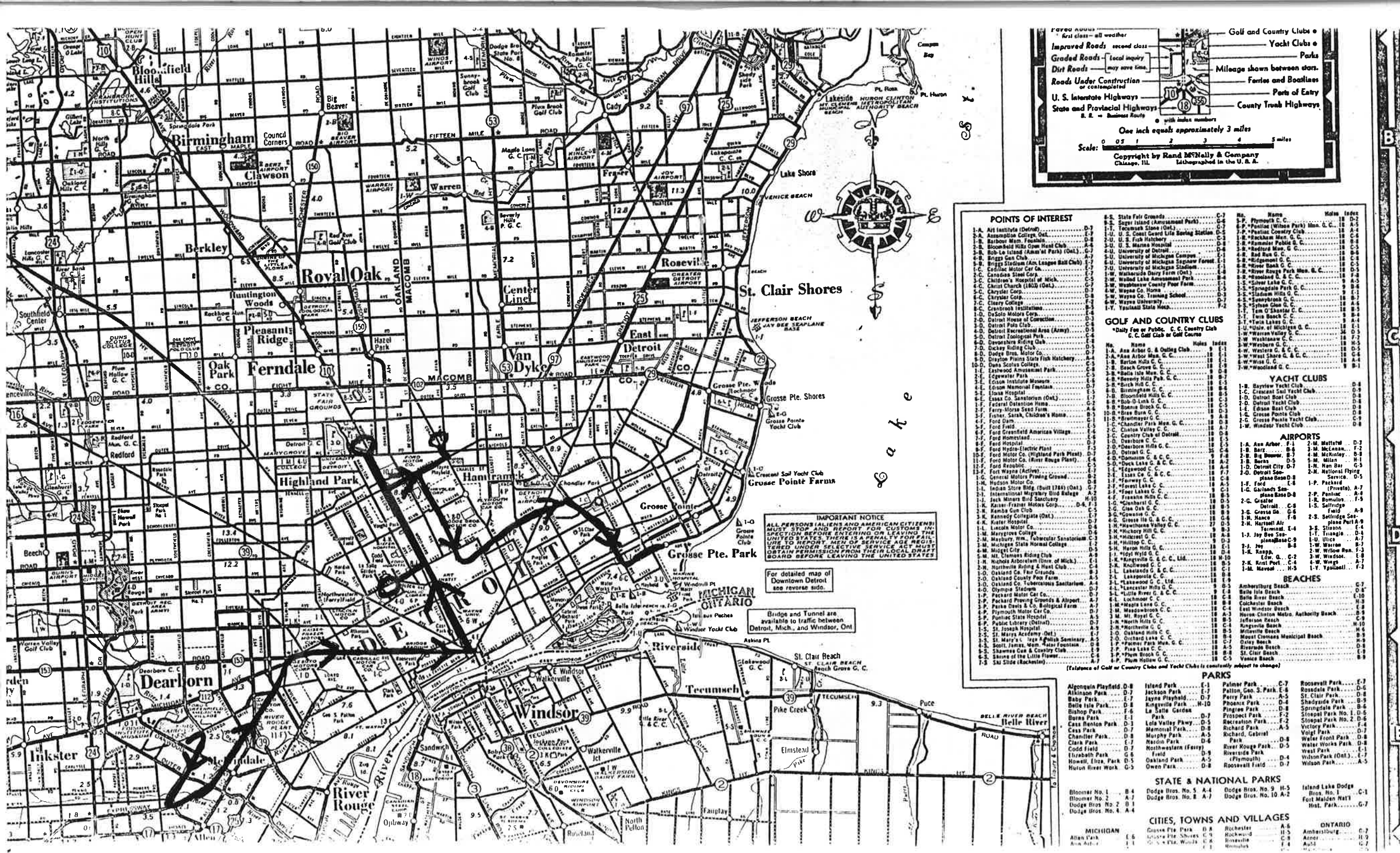
Cadillac Sales and Service, 6001 Cass



Cass Motor Sales, 5800 Cass Avenue

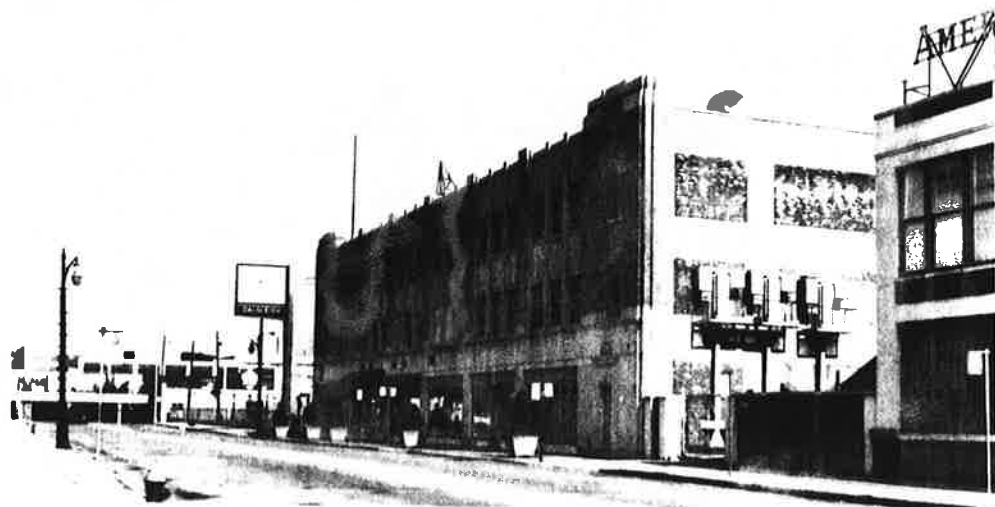


Auto Service Station, 5980 Cass

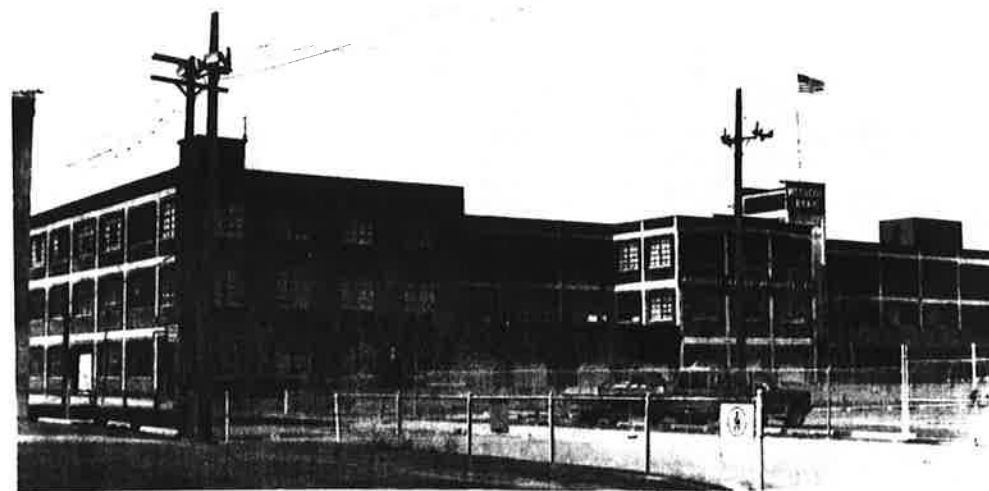




Wheel and Brake Repair Station, 6050 Cass

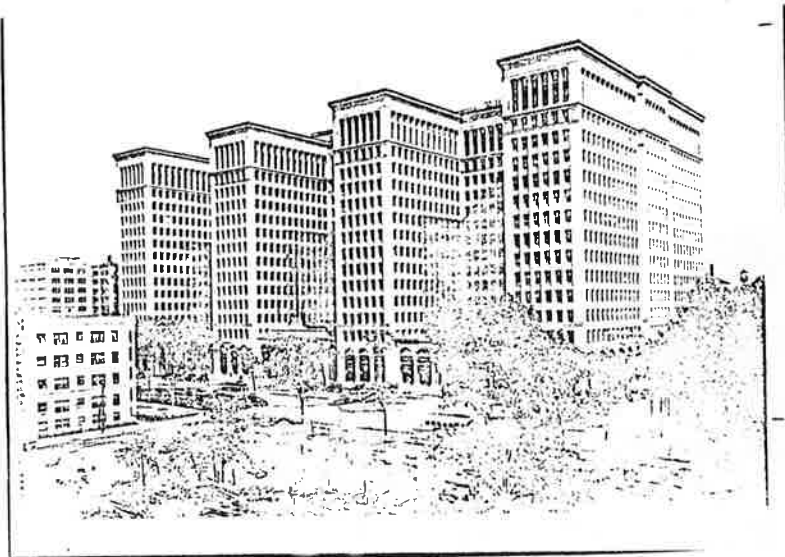


Buick Service Station, 6800 Cass

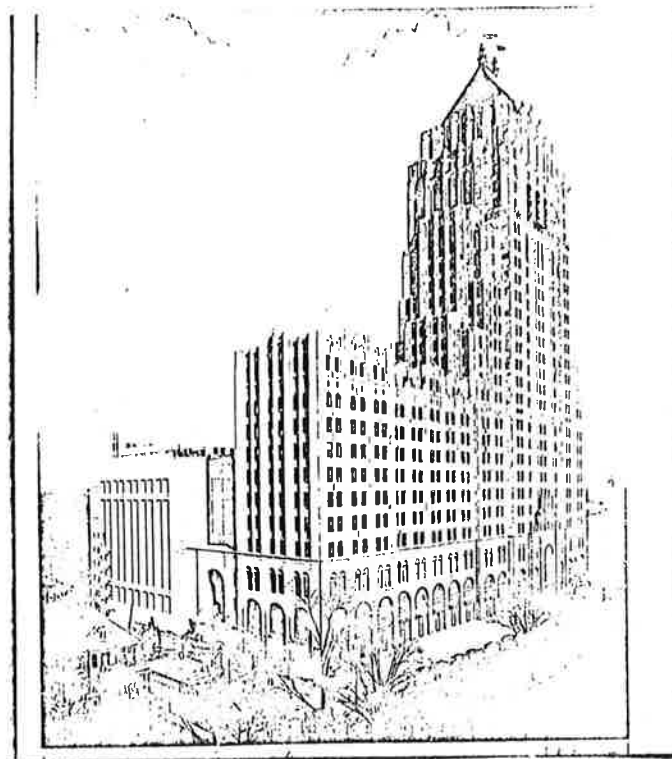


Cadillac Motor Car Company Plant, 450 Amsterdam

From "auto row," we head north to Detroit's New Center, developed in the 1920s to relieve congestion in Detroit's CBD. The two dominating structures are the General Motors' Building (1922), designed by Albert Kahn and reputedly the world's largest office building when it opened. Across the street is another Kahn gem, the Fisher Building (1928). We will also visit the original home of Motown Records, located nearby at 2648 West Grand Boulevard.

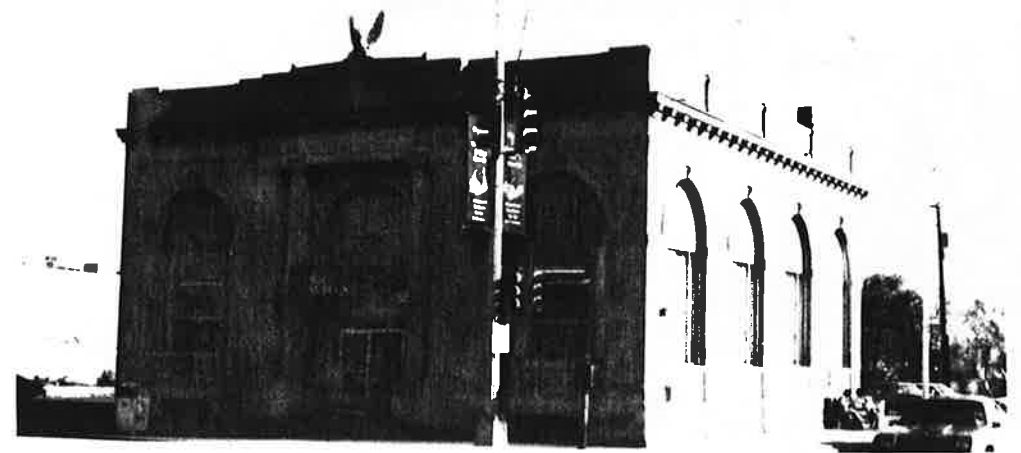


General Motors Building (1922)

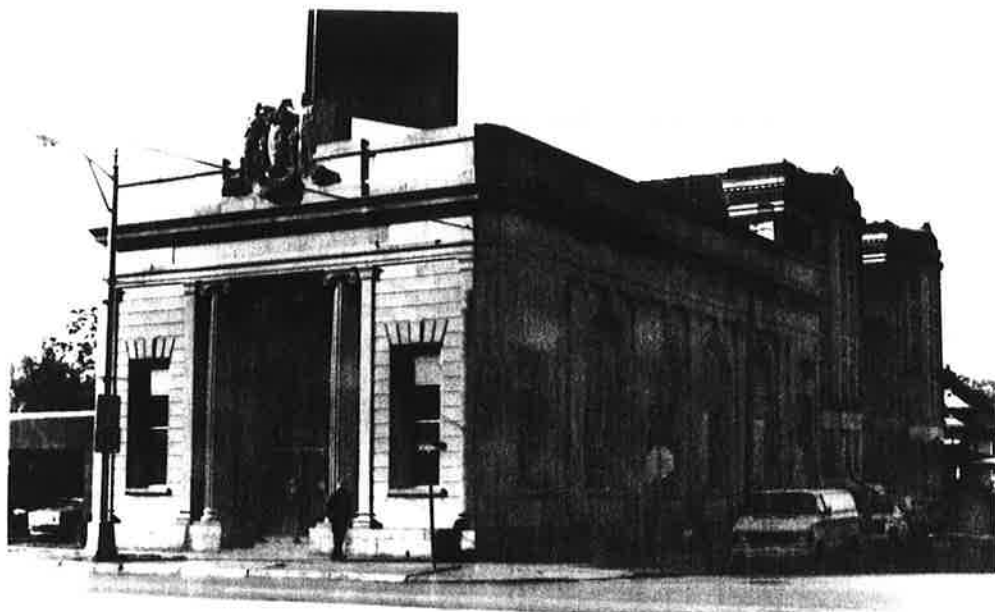


Fisher Building (1928)

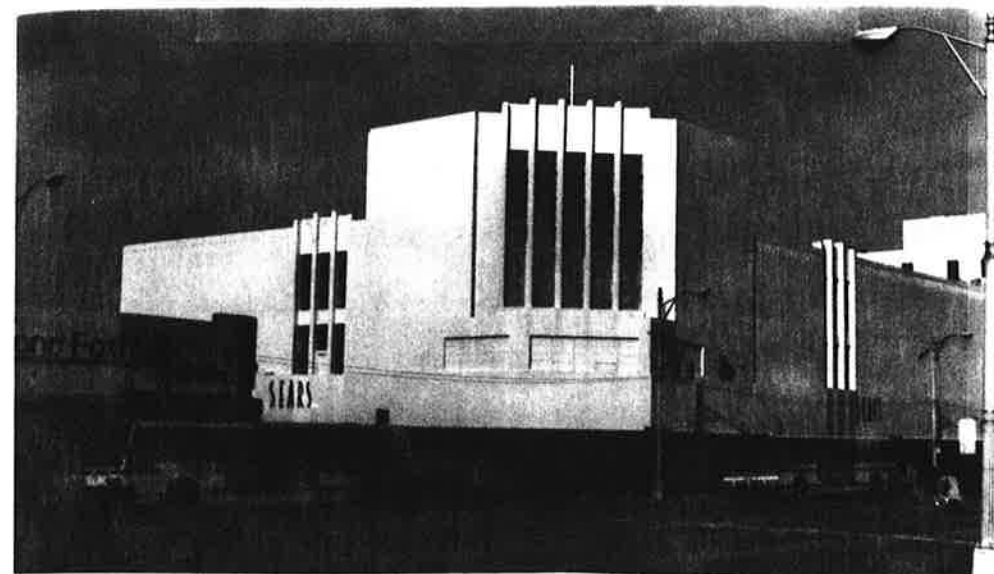
We continue up Woodward Avenue to Highland Park, home of Henry Ford's manufacturing plant (1910-), where he perfected the moving assembly line and mass production of the Model T Ford. About half of Ford's plant remains, including one of two office buildings. The Sears Store at 15001 Woodward (1938) is still prospering. Highland Park also has five excellent examples of branch banks, with two of these, at 13504 Woodward and 14048 Woodward, still used for banking. The Highland Park State Bank (ca. 1925), at 16585 Woodward, is now the Wood-Six Twin Theatre, which features pornographic films.



First of America Bank (1924), 13504 Woodward Ave.



Generic Branch Bank (1916), 13253 Woodward Avenue



Sears Highland Park Store (1938)



H. Park State Bank (ca. 1925), 16585 Woodward

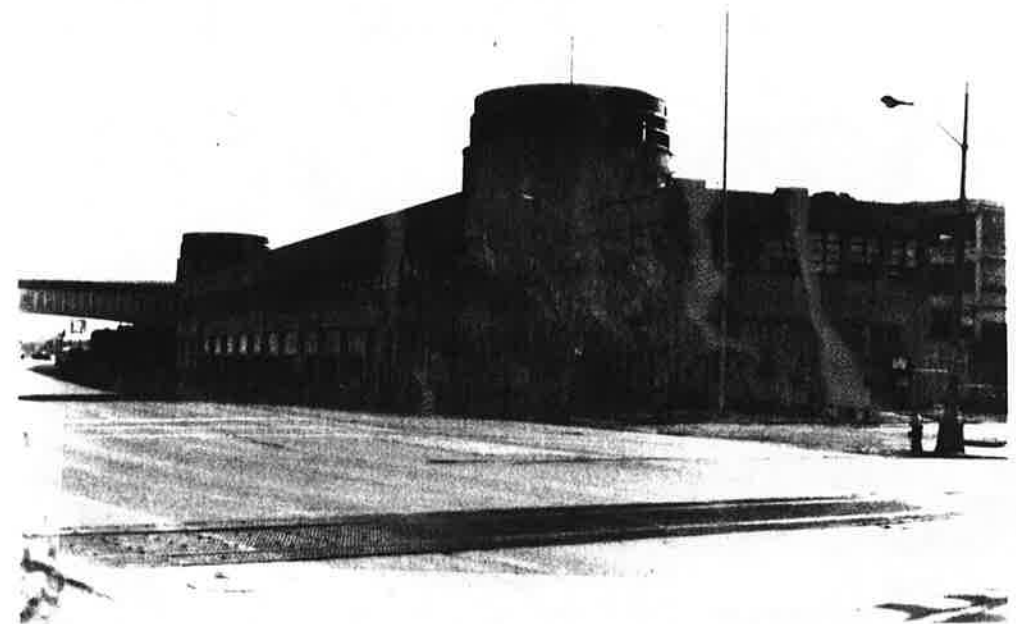


Ford Highland Park Plant (1910-)

On to lunch! We go via the Service Drive of the Davison Expressway (1941), built to relieve congestion around the Ford plant. The Davison was the first expressway in Detroit proper and is largely unchanged from 1941. Buddy's Rendezvous Bar and Pizzeria, 17125 Conant, is our lunch stop. This business began as a "blind pig" in 1936, but became a legitimate tavern in 1945. According to legend, an old Sicilian cook approached Buddy's owners, Joe Bonacorsi and Mrs. Kathryn Valente, sometime after the Second World War and offered to prepare pizza for the tavern customers. Buddy's began serving Sicilian-style deep-dish square pizza in 1946, the first in the Detroit area to do so.



We will conclude our Detroit tour with a brief run on part of East Jefferson Avenue, another streetcar artery which later became a major surface street. The first stop is the Chrysler Corporation Sales and Service Building (1934), an Albert Kahn design. The show windows on the ground floor date from 1953.



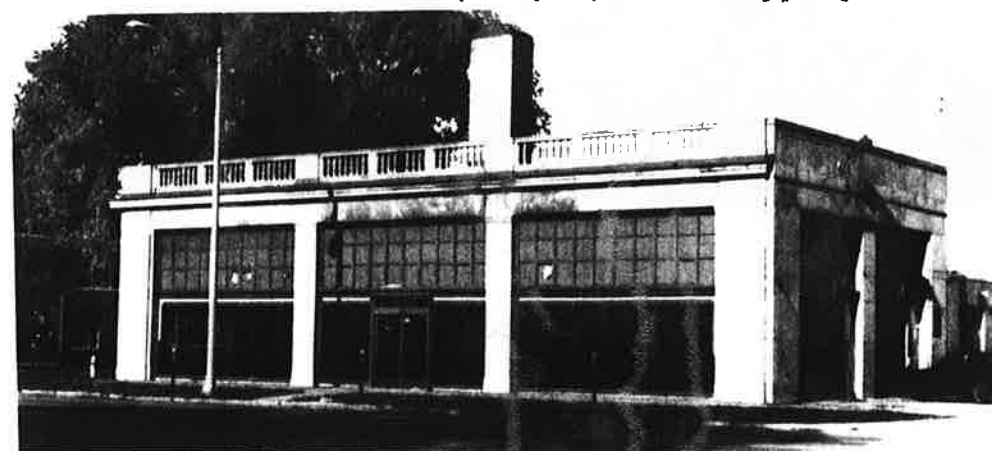
Chrysler Sales and Service Building (1934)

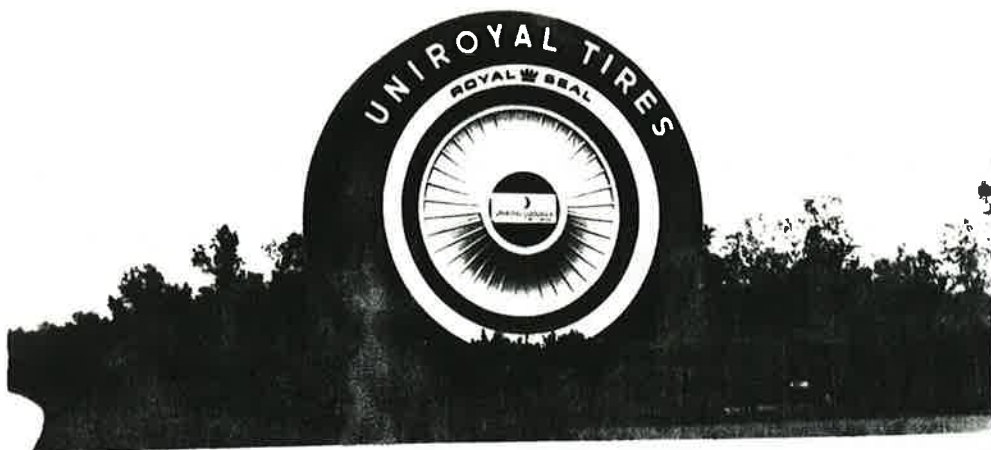
The Vanity Ballroom (1929), 1024 Newport, is the last remaining intact ballroom from the era of grand dance halls in Detroit served by the big bands of the 1920s and 1930s. This is an outstanding Art Deco styled building with Aztec/Mayan themes apparent in the detailing. The second story features a 5,000 square foot "floating" maple dance floor built on springs. The Vanity could accommodate 1,000 couples.



Further east on Jefferson, in Grosse Point Park, we will make our final stop. The Packard Dealership (1929) at 15205 East Jefferson

included a service area with a capacity of 100 cars. The nearby Esquire Theater (1940) at 15315 East Jefferson is a largely-intact Art Deco survivor threatened by a proposed shopping mall.





NOTES

