

City of Detroit

CITY COUNCIL

Historic Designation Advisory Board

PROPOSED CHALFONTE APARTMENT HISTORIC DISTRICT

Final Report

The proposed Chalfonte Apartment Historic District is located three blocks east of the eastern boundary of the West Village Historic District, just east of the Indian Village Historic District, adjacent to Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church, and just across Jefferson Avenue from Memorial Park with spectacular views of the Detroit River. The Chalfonte Apartment is a complex of buildings containing 22 units built in 1911-12; it consists of two adjoining buildings on East Jefferson and a separate building around the corner at 915 Fischer.

BOUNDARIES: The boundaries of the proposed Chalfonte Apartments Historic District are shown on the attached map and are as follows:

On the south, the centerline of East Jefferson Avenue;

On the east, the centerline of Fischer Avenue;

On the north, the centerline of the east-west alley lying between East Jefferson and Agnes; and

On the west, the eastern boundary of the Park Sub of the Cook Farm (L19/P59).

HISTORY: Lot B of Bernhart and Fischer's Subdivision was purchased by John Hart, who quickly sold it to his brother, William, in 1911. The Hart Brothers, realtors, had their offices in the Chamber of Commerce Building in Detroit. On November 18, 1911, they were issued building permit #4448 for the construction of the building at 8643-55 East Jefferson which was to cost an estimated \$30,000 to build, and permit #4449 for 915 Fischer, which was to cost \$12,000 when completed. William Hart had been a realtor in Detroit for 33 years when he won a seat in the State Legislature as a State Representative in 1926 on the Republican ticket.

Early tenants of the building were working people. For example, in 1914, Mark A. Beltaire, Jr., vice president of Crittall Casement Company, and Edward Blivin, an underwriter, resided there. By the 1920s many widows joined the working people at the Chalfonte, probably finding the ample two bedroom apartments with sunrooms more than comfortable. Most residents were able to gain great advantage from a Jefferson Avenue transit line location and visual satisfaction from the unique river views. Among the notable early residents of the Chalfonte Apartments were Mr. William Neer, of William A. Neer & Company, Investment Securities (1914), Mrs. William R. Croul, wife of the late president of Riverside Storage Company (1914-1922), Frank A. Lyon of Lyon Brothers Tailors (1916), and George C. Perry, an attorney and partner in the firm of Canfield, Paddock and Perry (1922). James Symington, son and one of the heirs of Campbell Symington, a partner in the firm of Hudson & Symington, resided in the Chalfonte in the mid-1920s.

By 1918 the Hart Brothers had sold the property and it went through a number of sales until 1927, when it was sold for taxes. In the meantime, Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church was built immediately to its west in 1926. Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church obtained ownership of the Chalfonte in 1969.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: Stylistically, the Chalfonte is a unique combination of Baroque and Arts and Crafts detail. The two in combination are a contradiction, in that the Baroque consists of exuberant decoration and curvacious forms and the Arts and Crafts Movement espoused a straightforwardness in design. Arts and Crafts design, used sparingly on the facade of the Chalfonte Apartments, was in vogue in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The Chalfonte consists of two identical attached section on East Jefferson and a detached building on Fischer. It is three stories tall and constructed of red-brown brick with gray mortar and cast stone ornamentation.

The two basket arched entrance openings of the East Jefferson facade are recessed. Each is surrounded by quoins and voisoirs, interrupted by a keystone with acanthus leaves on its sides. Around the door frame is a repetitious leaf motif emerging from a cornucopia. Three story piers flank the entrance and project from the main plane of the facade forming the corners of the recessed balconies at the second and third stories. Quoins at the first story and Sullivanesque-like terra cotta decoration at the second and third stories make the piers even more pronounced. Wooden framing members of the balconies are Arts and Crafts in flavor. These balconies are flanked by three story three-sided bays containing one double-hung sash window per face. Window openings on the flat surfaces of the front facade contain two double-hung sash windows each. The second and third story windows are joined together vertically by quoins extending from the sills of the second story windows to the lintels of the third story windows, as if to create large frames. The lintels over the third story windows bear stylized cast stone keystones.

While there are other small apartment buildings on the east side of the same scale, the Jefferson Avenue buildings of the Chalfonte complex are exceptional for their design with their large windows and balconies obviously designed to capture the magnificent view of the Detroit River, Belle Isle and Memorial Park which has always been open space with a clear view of the river.

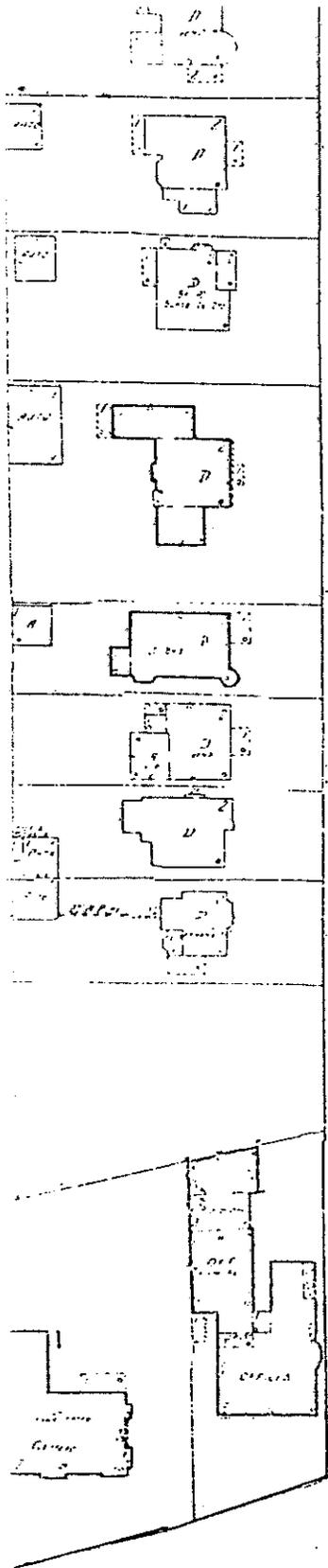
A brick belt course divides the first story from the second, and the first story is separated from the basement by a continuous stone belt course that doubles as a sill to the first story windows. Cast stone caps the parapet wall.

More stylized Baroque cast stone ornamentation is located near the top of the building. At the apex of each of the four projecting bays is a small gable containing a cartouche flanked by a floral motif. Beneath each cartouche is a carved head of a man. In the center of the top of the building between two volute buttresses is a cast stone panel bearing the name "Chalfonte" with a small shell motif over it.

The "Annex" at 915 Fischer is simpler in appearance. It does not have balconies and the entrance is only slightly recessed. There is a three-sided bay to either side of the entryway and the entrance is detailed in the same manner as its counterparts on East Jefferson, although without the piers. At the parapet wall is a panel containing the name "Annex," and near the top of the three-sided bays is a stone diamond inset on each face.

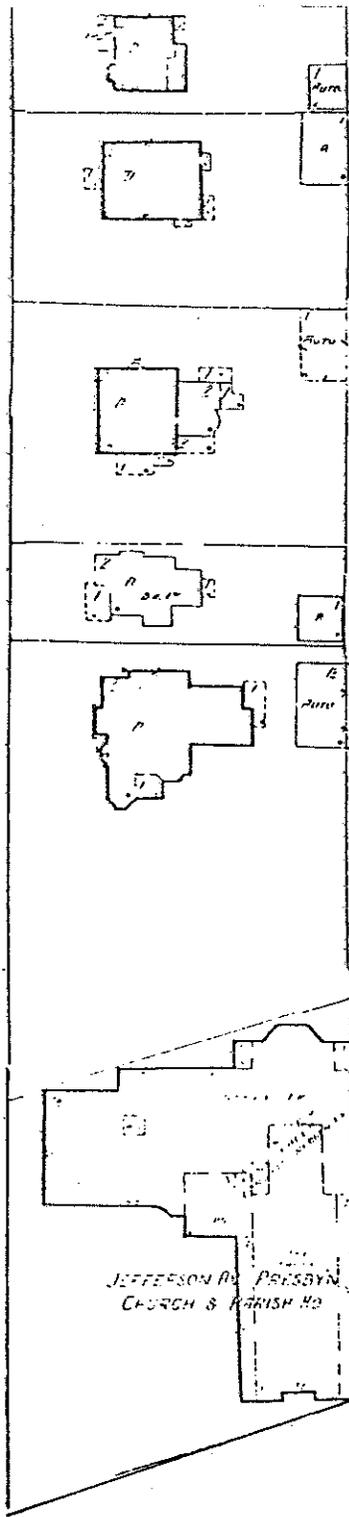
The Chalfonte provides a unique example of an early twentieth century apartment building of the type that abounds in the West Village-East Jefferson area.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that the City Council establish the Chalfonte Apartments Historic District with the design treatment level of conservation. A draft ordinance for the establishment of the district is attached for the consideration of City Council.



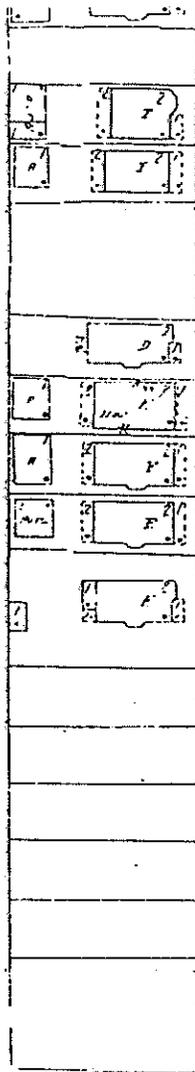
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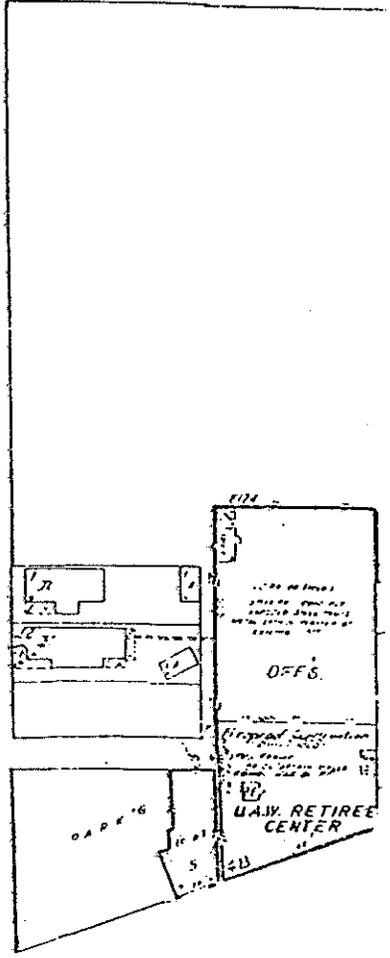
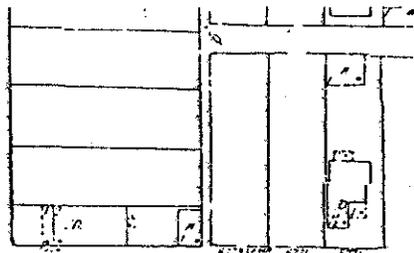


JEFFERSON AV. PRESBYT. CHURCH & PARISH HQ.

AV. E.



FISCHER AVENUE



OFFS.

UNIV. RETIREE CENTER

GARDEN

JEFFERSON

MEMORIAL PARK

PROPOSED CHALFONTE APARTMENTS HISTORIC DISTRICT

(Bondaries outlined in heavy black)