

# City of Detroit

## CITY COUNCIL

### Historic Designation Advisory Board

#### FINAL REPORT

#### PROPOSED MACKENZIE HOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT

The proposed historic district which has been under study by the Historic Designation Advisory Board consists of a single residence built by Frank H. Blackman and occupied for about 20 years by David Mackenzie. The house is presently owned by Wayne State University and is located at 4735 Cass Avenue between Hancock and West Forest.

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

*Lot 27 of Canfield's subdivision of O.L. 101 of the subdivision of the Cass Farm (P.C. 55) and the south five feet of Lot 1 of block 1 of the Cass Farm Company, Ltd. subdivision of blocks 103, 105, 107 and 109 of the Cass Farm. The attached map shows the proposed district outlined in heavy black lines.*

*HISTORY:* The subject building was built in 1895 by W. H. Hollands and Sons to designs by the Detroit architectural firm of Malcomson & Higginbotham, best known for their long collaboration with the Detroit Public Schools which resulted in numerous school buildings including Central High School (Wayne State's Old Main) in the next block. The original owner was Frank H. Blackman, a banker, who occupied the house until 1904.

In 1906 the house was purchased by David Mackenzie who had recently returned to Detroit, his hometown, to become principal of Central High School. Mackenzie lived in the house until his death in 1926 and Mrs. Mackenzie remained in the house for almost ten years thereafter.

Mackenzie was born in Detroit in 1860, attended Capital High School and graduated from the University of Michigan in 1881, earning both bachelor and masters degrees in arts at the same time. He was one of the first five students to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa when that honorary society was established at the University of Michigan. After graduation he served as principal of Fenton High School and as superintendent of schools in Flint and Muskegon. While at Muskegon he established the Hackley Manual Training School, the first of its kind in Michigan.

When Mackenzie came to Detroit to become principal of Central High, it was considered one of the largest and finest secondary schools in the nation. In 1915 he became aware that some 30 Central graduates who desired a college education could not afford the options then available to them. Mackenzie,

together with other faculty members, proposed a junior college which was begun as a department at Central High School. In 1923 the junior college was raised to full collegiate rank by the state legislature and became the College of the City of Detroit. Mackenzie was named its first dean. By the time of Mackenzie's death in 1926 the enrollment of the college had risen to almost 2,000 students and a School of Pharmacy had been established. As is well known, the institution begun at Central High School developed into Wayne State University eventually.

Mackenzie was also active in organizations intended to better the lot of teachers. He was active in the Detroit Teachers Hospital Association, teachers' mutual aid association and the establishment of a retirement fund.

Today, the Mackenzie House is vacant, having been most recently used as the Campus Treasure Shop, a resale outlet for building materials and oddities. Wayne State University and Preservation Wayne, a student organization, are attempting to resolve issues of the future use and financing of the building, with a view toward preservation.

*PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:* The Blackman-Mackenzie House is an example of a substantial late Victorian dwelling. Built of red brick and two and one-half stories high, it typifies well the houses which once lined this section of Cass Avenue. In style, the house is a brick version of the late Victorian substyle known as "Queen Anne." The most prominent feature of the house is a three-quarter round turret with a conical roof at the southeast corner. Across the front of the house and leading to the front entrance down the north side is a large front porch of wood with classical detail. Above the porch is a bay window and the house is surmounted on the north, east and south with steep overhanging gables containing variations on classical Palladian windows. The basic material is red molded brick. At the entrance and on the turret are special bricks containing decorative moldings. The roof and gable material is slate; the trim is painted wood.

The interior of the Mackenzie house is typical of a house of this date and type, containing a considerable quantity of original woodwork in oak and bird's-eye maple, decorative plaster work, and fittings such as bathtubs, sinks, and the like. In spite of the non-residential use in recent years, the house remains relatively unchanged and in good basic conditions.

*RECOMMENDATION:* The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that the City Council create the Mackenzie House Historic District by ordinance, with the design treatment level of Rehabilitation. A draft ordinance incorporating the elements of design is attached for Council's consideration. This recommendation is based on the board's finding that the subject building meets the criteria of Section 28A-1-2(a)(2) in its association with David Mackenzie.

*COMMENTS:* In the opinion issued by the Law Department on February 27, 1978, that department stated that the enforcement provisions of the Historic District Ordinance are unenforceable when a structure is owned by the state. Thereafter,

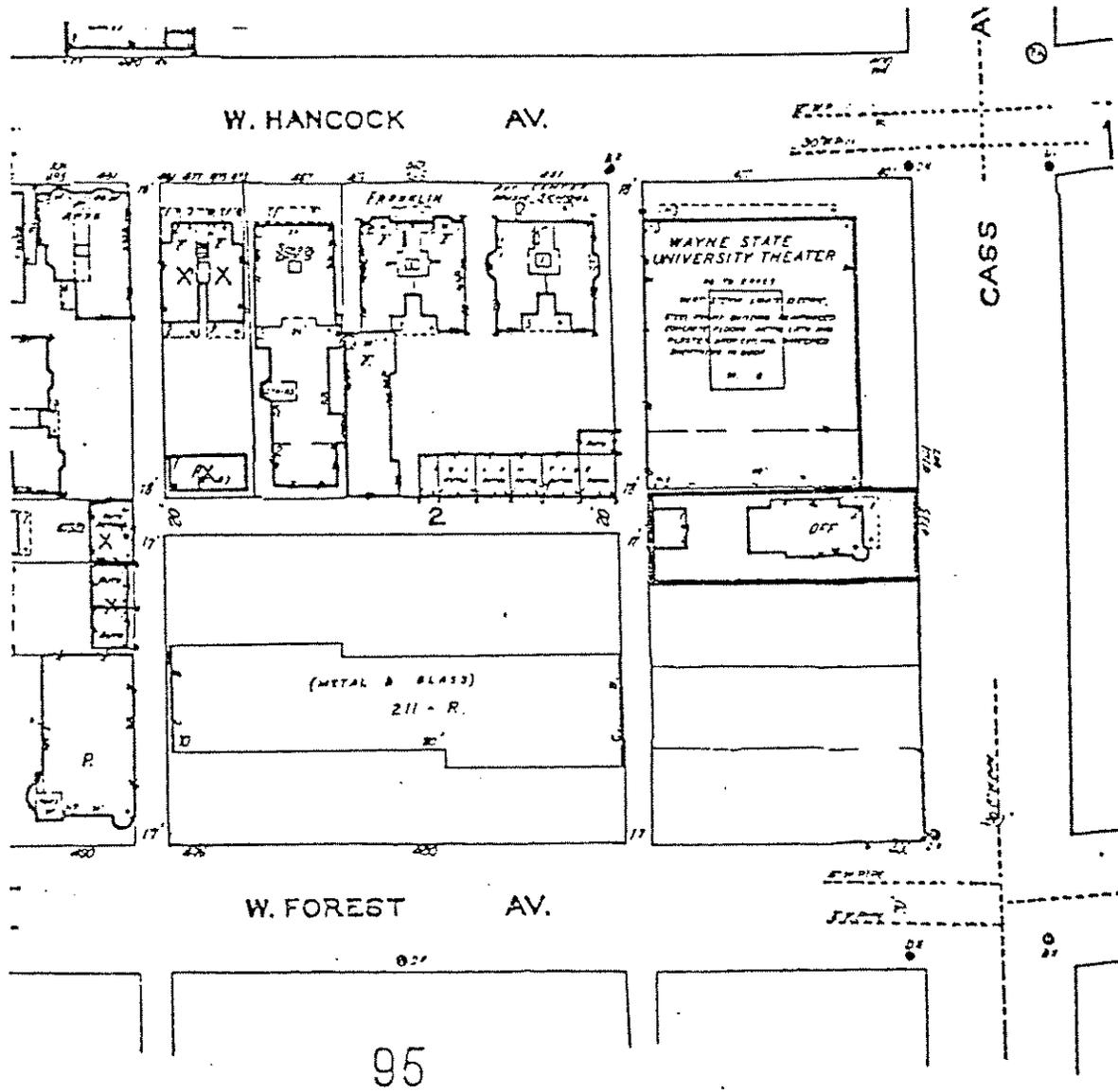
should Wayne State University choose to sell the Mackenzie House, a purchaser would find the ordinance in full effect.

Therefore, if the house is designated, and Wayne State subsequently chooses to sell the building to someone other than another exempt agency, the permit provisions of the ordinance would then become enforceable.

*OPINIONS RECEIVED:* The President of Wayne State University, Dr. George Gullen, has sent a letter to the board accompanied by an extract from the minutes of the Wayne State University Board of Governors. The Historic Designation Advisory Board has been advised by Dr. Benjamin Jordan, ad hoc member representing Wayne State, that this letter and extract (copies attached) are the only statement Wayne State expects to make at this time.

Representatives of Preservation Wayne, a student group at the university, appeared at the public hearing held before the advisory Board on this matter and expressed strong support for the designation of the Mackenzie House.

No other formal opinions have been received.



PROPOSED BLACKMAN - MACKENZIE HOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT  
 (Proposed district outlined in heavy black)