

City of Detroit

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Proposed Hook and Ladder House No. 5 / Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop Historic District FINAL REPORT

By a resolution dated May 5, 2004, the Detroit City Council charged the Historic Designation Advisory Board, a study committee, with the official study of the proposed Hook and Ladder House No. 5 / Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop Historic District in accordance with Chapter 25 of the 1984 Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act.



The proposed Hook and Ladder House No. 5 / Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop Historic District is composed of the two contributing resources at 3400 and 3434 Russell, Detroit, Michigan, connected together with an addition. (There are zero non-contributing resources within the proposed district). Located at the northeast corner of Russell Street and Erskine at the northern end of Eastern Market east of

downtown Detroit, the proposed district is physically distinct from the bulk of the Eastern Market area with vacant space and newer construction between.

BOUNDARIES: The boundaries of the proposed Hook and Ladder House No. 5 / Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop Historic District, which encompass the real property containing the contributing resources, are outlined in heavy black on the attached map, and are as follows:

On the west, the centerline of Russell;

on the north, the centerline of Benton (vacated);

on the east, the centerline of the north-south alley between Russell and Riopelle; and,

on the south, the centerline of Erskine Avenue.

Boundary Justification: All that property historically associated with Hook and Ladder Company No. 5 and the Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop on the east side of Russell north of Erskine. (Section 10 Geographical data Pt. Of Guoin Farm N. Of Gratiot (City Records), Lot S 265 N. Erskine St., Liber 9 Page 83.) This includes the same property listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.

History

The block-large Detroit Fire Department site occupied by Hook and Ladder House No. 5 and the Fire Department Repair Shop are inextricably associated with the development of Detroit's professional fire department. The property's first fire department improvements, built immediately following the city's turning the vacated cemetery property over to the fire department in 1888, included the surviving fire station building and horse supply and training stables and hospital serving the entire department that occupied the bulk of the site. Hook and Ladder House No. 5 is now the second oldest standing fire station in the city of Detroit. The construction in 1917 of the Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop on the site of the horse training track reflected the department's transition from horse-drawn to motorized vehicles which began in 1908 and was completed in 1922. Both the fire station and repair shop served the Detroit Fire Department until the mid-1950s.

Detroit's firefighting history is a colorful one. Its fire department began in 1825, the year in which the city passed a fire ordinance that allowed for the establishment of volunteer fire companies and a new fire engine arrived by schooner. The city took its first steps toward creating a professional paid fire department in the 1858-60 period when it began looking at steam-powered apparatus which could throw a more powerful steam a greater distance than the hand-pumpers. In 1867 the city, with authorization from the state legislature, established the Detroit Fire Department as a professional force headed by a board of fire commissioners. The city's fire alarm telegraph system was also established in that year.

Detroit's Common Council turned over the tract on which the fire house and stables were subsequently built to the Detroit Fire Department in 1888. Located just north of the Eastern Market Historic District (NR, 1974), Hook and Ladder House No. 5 was built to serve the soon to be expanding farmers' market and the surrounding ethnic residential community. The city's use of the property dates back to 1827, when a potter's field, or City Cemetery, had occupied the site. The market was established for the sale of hay and wood in 1870; by 1885 a hay market and scales had been located on the northeast corner of Division and Russell streets. The property upon which Hook and Ladder House No. 5 was built was unused at that time, according to the Robinson Atlas of 1885. The station's construction was contemporary with that of Market Hall at High and Winder Streets (since demolished) and with the oldest extant buildings in the market today, such as Ciaramitaro Brothers Wholesale Produce Commission House, 2506 Market Street (1885-88, built as saloon with sleeping rooms), Hirt Building, 2468 Market St. (1893) and Meyfarth Hall, 2460 Market St. (store, dwellings and hall, 1892). However, it predates the oldest standing shed in Eastern Market (1898).

An 1889 Sanborn map shows the subject property was occupied by a "Hook and Ladder House" on the southwest corner and the "Fire Department Supply Stables" at the southeast corner. The one-story supply stables building was connected to a two story building housing a hay loft, sleeping rooms, and a small office. Erskine Street was formerly Calhoun Street, and the original address of the firehouse was 570 Russell Street. On adjacent property to the north were located a horse training track and horse hospital. By 1897, a horse hospital extended along the rear property line from the supply stables to Benton Avenue, and a horse training track ran along the perimeter.

The Fire Department Horse Bureau was established in 1886, with Allan H. Armstrong as superintendent of horses, and the stables complex was built in 1888-89. In 1892, over one hundred horses were in service. Each engine or truck house generally held two horses. All new horses were selected by the superintendent and trained under his direction before being assigned to the station house. An animal found unfit for duty by the superintendent was sent to the training stables at the corner of Calhoun and Russell Streets and another horse was then substituted in its place. Mr. Armstrong, though not a veterinary surgeon himself, was well respected in his position. He was followed by Battalion Chief William J. Gowan.

The training stable to the rear, or east, of Ladder Co. No. 5 was a brick building containing a box and open stalls for twenty-one horses. It was built as a model institution of its kind and the only one in the United States, according to an 1892 article in *The Detroit Critic*. The building consisted of a training room for breaking in new horses that was fitted up similar to an engine house where the horses were taught the tactics they were expected to perform once assigned to the fire stations. The horses, placed in stalls, were trained to run to the harnesses to be hitched up once their stall gates flew open when the alarm sounded. When a horse was being trained for its work, the doors to the station house were thrown open and the team was started out on a fourteen foot wide cinder track about 700' in length, with the goal of increasing speed. In this way, the horses were well trained, so that in Detroit one would not see clanging engines being pulled by horses running helter skelter down the street as was the case in other American cities. The average life of a horse engaged in active service was about four years, but many an old timer was in service longer in Detroit due to quality care and treatment. Horses were given names and were much loved by drivers and firemen.

Ladder Company (Truck Company) No. 5, commanded by Captain Shae and Lt. Hoeninghausen in 1892, was stationed at the corner of Russell and Calhoun on the front of the same property as the training stable. Tom, a handsome brown horse with eight years of service, and Captain, a bright bay, pulled the three-ton truck housed in the station.

In 1917, the fire department built the main part of a central repair shop for its growing motorized fleet on the site of the training stables' track. The first automobile company of the Detroit Fire Department was organized on October, 1908 as Engine Company No. 30. The steam fire engine era came to an end in 1922 when, on April 10th, the last engine to be run by horses was retired. 50,000 Detroiters gathered along Woodward Avenue to cheer the final run of the horse-drawn steamers. The 1921 Sanborn map shows the stable buildings still standing, but they were demolished by 1950 as the repair complex expanded.

Ladder Company No. 5 continued to provide fire fighting services to the citizens of Detroit from its Late Victorian building at 3400 Russell until it was vacated when its function was moved to a new facility on Russell south of Erskine in the mid-1950's. The repair shop continued in city service as a repair shop and garage for the Department of Public Works until the early 1990s. Ladder Company No. 5 finally went out of service on March 29, 1976, but the apparatus division of the Detroit Fire Department and Ladder Company No. 10 remain in the building at 3050 Russell.

The architects of Detroit's historic fire stations were notable local architects who also designed houses, school buildings, factories, and other types of structures. Each was commissioned on a job-by job basis by the Fire Commission, although the Commission tended to stick with the same architect over extended periods of time. Functional necessities determined the basic form and layout of all of the firehouses but individual architects put their signatures on the buildings they designed through differences in detail and style.

Engine House No. 11, the oldest standing firehouse in Detroit, was designed by William Scott & Company and built in 1883 on Gratiot at Grandy. Hook and Ladder House No. 5, erected in 1888, is the second oldest extant station today. Malcomson & Higginbotham received the commission from the Fire Commission for its construction. William Malcomson (1858-1923) and William Higginbotham (1853-1937) began their architectural partnership in 1890. That firm, best known for its long association with the Detroit School Board, built several of Detroit's early firehouses, first in Late Victorian styles but later in the more classical modes popular at the turn of the century. Hook and Ladder House No. 5 is the oldest extant fire station by Malcomson and Higginbotham, although they also designed Engine House No. 15 on Hubbard Avenue near Fort Street in the same year, which was later demolished for the construction of the Fisher Freeway.

The fire station as a building type holds a special place in the minds and hearts of most Americans. It conjures up images of loud vehicles racing through the streets, sirens, comradery, heroic actions, and Dalmatians. Hook and Ladder House No. 5 will continue to maintain its identity as a historic firehouse even after it is converted to retail and residential use by virtue of the restoration of its exterior and the retention of significant interior features.

The architect of the repair shop has not been uncovered through normal research efforts. A building permit does not appear to exist. The future use of the repair shop, now sharing private ownership with the fire station, will be loft housing.

Description

The Detroit Fire Department Hook and Ladder House No. 5 and Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop complex (NR, 1997) consists of the Late Victorian fire station located at the southeast corner of Russell and Erskine Streets, the large repair shop built in 1917, the annex connecting the two, and several other more utilitarian additions occupying the center of the block behind the Russell Street buildings. Russell Street is the major artery running north-south between Gratiot and Mack avenues through the Eastern Market area; Hook and Ladder House No. 5 and the

Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop are located north of the existing Eastern Market Historic District (NR, 1974).

Hook and Ladder House No. 5 is a Late Victorian two story rectangular building of common brick and stone with a full story within the roof. The steeply pitched hip roof has projecting shingled dormers. Original wood swing doors, characteristic of firehouses in Detroit and elsewhere, are on the front facade (west elevation). They are bordered by red sandstone quoins and banding. The building sits on a rockfaced limestone foundation. The annex, the small building built as an addition to the fire station about 1911, and the 1917 repair shop building resemble each other in style and materials; both are two story flat-roofed brick buildings trimmed in terra cotta. By virtue of its size and its zero setback, the repair shop dominates the Russell street scape and firmly identifies itself as a major facility of the Detroit Fire Department. Yet, it was clearly designed to relate to the late-nineteenth century fire station by the positioning of its southwest corner entrance at an angle meeting the setback of the fire station and annex.

The front facade of the firehouse is arranged symmetrically with one pair of swing doors flanked by a window. At second story level are two pairs of sash windows with transoms above divided by lintels of limestone. A continuous stone sill extends the width of the front facade and extends to the north 1911 addition. The third floor asphalt shingled dormer, with its rounded corners and pitched roof, juts out from the steeply sloped main hipped roof. It contains three double hung sash wooden windows with eight over two lights. The hip roof has a two foot wide tongue and groove overhang with wooden brackets and metal semi-circular gutters. Mounted to the face of the dormer is a twenty-two foot high flag pole with two scrolled metal mounting brackets. Centered on the limestone frieze beneath the overhanging cornice is an inscription of the year of the building's construction, 1888; in stone blocks above the first floor windows adjacent to the main swing doors is the firehouse identification in letters and number formerly bronze, *No.* and 5.

The south elevation of the firehouse is fenestrated by an uneven placement of double-hung sash windows per floor. Where the fenestration after the first two openings ends there was originally a chimney wall; the tall chimney that once projected from the roof has since been demolished. Two wood shingled dormers now clad in asphalt shingles, one containing two double-hung sash windows and the narrower dormer only one, have steeply pitched roofs. On the rear (east) elevation the one story, ten foot deep section, while sharing similarly laid limestone foundations, appears to be a slightly later addition to the 1888 structure. The window opening in the rear wall of the fire station, above the shallow hip roof of the addition, appears to have been altered. A wide pair of multi-paned windows in the squat roof dormer light the tall attic of this rear (east) elevation.

The rectangular footprint of Hook and Ladder House No. 5 as built in 1888 measures approximately thirty feet across the front by seventy feet in depth. On the interior, the first floors's most prominent feature is the original stained and shellacked beaded ceiling. The original wood windows and casings are still intact. A narrow staircase along the north wall leads to the second story. A glass and steel enclosure in the rear of the fire station provides a second means of egress from the second and third floors.

The second floor has a plaster ceiling with a dark stained wood crown molding and plaster walls with a beaded wood wainscot. The second floor has been altered by the addition of acoustical ceiling tiles, wood and acoustical wall coverings, and vinyl floor coverings. The second floor also contains the original marble walled bathroom, which features a marble toilet stall and terrazzo floor. There are paneled doors with brass handles that are cast with the Detroit Fire Department initials, DFD. The third floor is an unfinished attic space, featuring a high peaked ceiling and Verandeel truss structure which supports the third floor and second floor ceiling. Although a watch tower may have existed above the roof, no evidence now exists of its presence.

An annex containing a truck bay downstairs and the chief's quarters upstairs was added in 1911 to the fire station's north side fronting on Russell Street. This "annex" is fourteen feet wide along Russell and thirty feet deep, with a pair of wooden swing doors with their original opening mechanisms on the first floor, two second story windows, and a terra cotta cap. The annex internally connects the space between the fire station and the neighboring building to the north.

The building to the north, occupying the rest of the Russell Street frontage north to Benton Street (vacated), was built in 1917 by the Detroit Fire Department to house the department's central repair shop. The repair shop dominates the street scape by virtue of its length. Its rectangular dimensions are 170 feet long by 65 feet deep by 32 feet high. Because the repair shop was built without a setback from the public sidewalk, its southwestern corner was designed at an angle to meet the setback of the annex and fire station. Its southern garage-type entrance, located in this angled section, is composed of a wide opening with four tall and narrow swing doors fenestrated with three rows of two panes in each section. Pilasters of brick with terra cotta ornamentation at the tops flank the opening, a smaller version of which divide the window openings at second story level. The crest of the Detroit Fire Department is centered above the terra cotta plate bearing the building's date of construction, "1917," at the coping. The long stretch of the building along Russell is characterized by eight such bay arrangements. In the first, or southernmost, bay is a terra cotta ornamented pedestrian entrance into the building. The last, or northernmost, bay has the same swing doors and detail as the angled corner.

The north elevation of the repair shop is more utilitarian in nature, fenestrated with square industrial type windows. Its other elevations either abut buildings or are obscured by additions. An eighteen foot high one story section extending eastward from the north elevation of the main building was built at approximately the same time as the repair shop to house an auto wash room. A paint shop and boiler room were added adjacent to the south wall of the auto wash room prior to 1921. Constructed with steel frames and reinforced concrete floors, the additions are faced in brick and are highly fenestrated with industrial sash.

Several more additions occupy the interior of the property behind the Russell Street facades. On October 17, 1922, a permit was issued for a brick addition to the existing "garage," or repair shop. The new section lengthened the east end of the north wing. A 9,480 square foot one-story brick and steel repair shop addition extending east from the southern end of the rear elevation of the repair shop was built in 1934.

The 1921 Sanborn map shows that the block-large complex than contained, in addition to the fire house and the 1917 repair shop buildings that still stand, a wagon shed, obsolete equipment storage building, and older supply stables and horse hospital buildings that were no longer present in 1950. A steel training tower that stood directly west of the fire station was removed under a permit issued on August 8, 1951.

A fire station located just south on Russell across Erskine replaced the 1888 Hook and Ladder House No. 5's functions in 1956. The 1888 station is presently (1997) being restored on the outside and converted for retail and residential loft use on the inside by its present owner. The Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop continued in use as the Department of Public Works maintenance yard and contained a carpenter shop, electrical shop, and other functions necessary to service city-owned buildings through the early 1990s. It was then vacated by the Department of Public Works and sold to a private developer.

Criteria: The proposed historic district meets National Register Criteria A: [Resources] That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and C: [Resources] That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

Composition of the Historic Designation Advisory Board: The Historic Designation Advisory Board has nine appointed members and three ex-officio members, all residents of Detroit. The appointed members are: Russell L. Baltimore, Melanie A. Bazil, Robert Cosgrove, De Witt Dykes, Edward Francis, Lucile Cruz Gajec, Marie M. Gardner, Calvin Jackson and Harriet Johnson. The ex-officio members, who may be represented by members of their staffs, are: the Director of the Historical Department, the Director of the City Planning Commission, and the Director of the Planning and Development Department.

RECOMMENDATION: The Historic Designation Advisory Board recommends that City Council adopt an ordinance of designation for the proposed historic district. A draft ordinance is attached for City Council's consideration.

Bibliography

NOTE: This report is substantially derived from the National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the Hook and Ladder House No. 5 / Detroit Fire Department Repair Shop, prepared by Deborah Goldstein, Historic Designation Advisory Board, City of Detroit.

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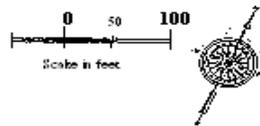
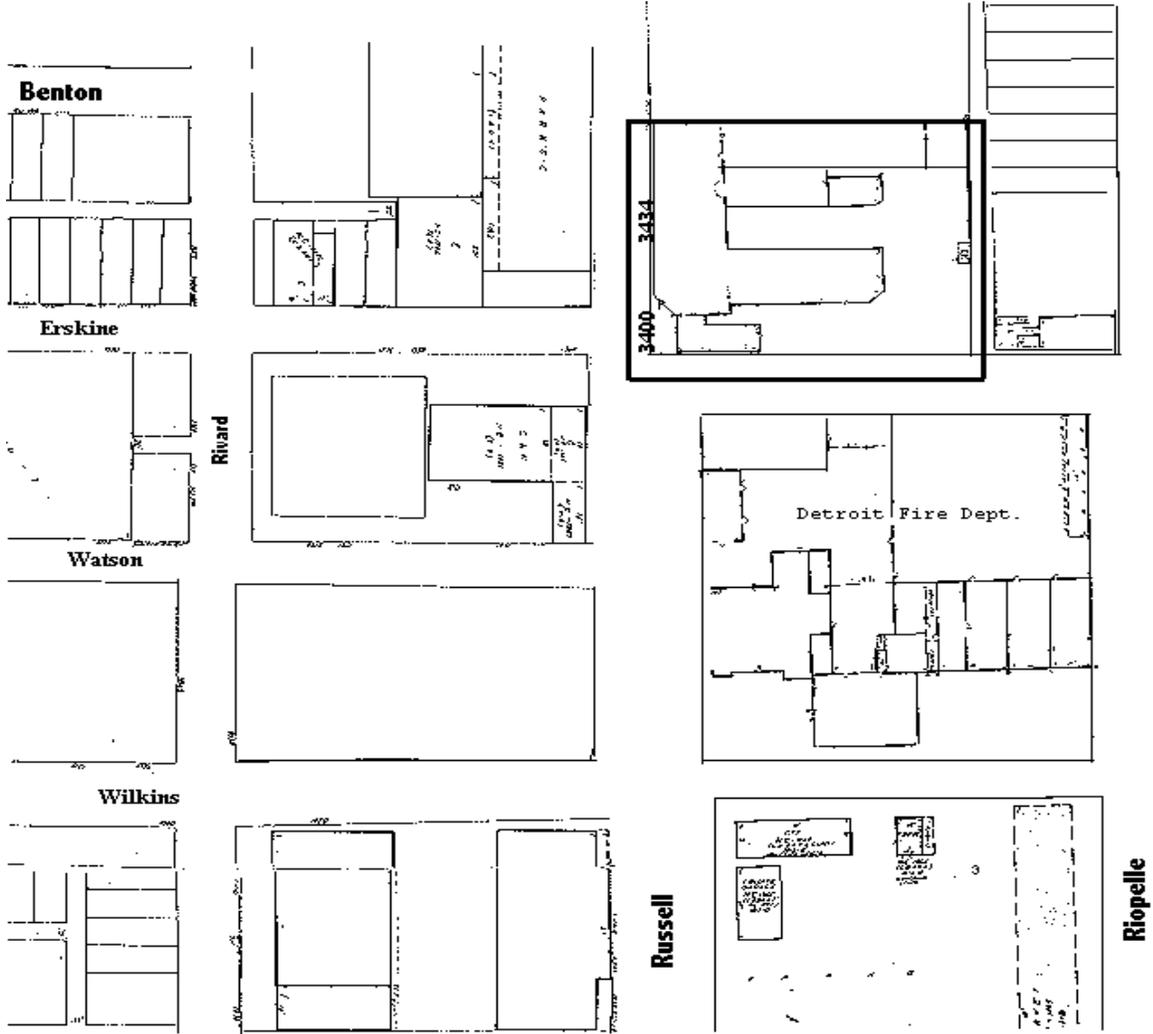
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