



City of Ypsilanti

Community and Economic Development

Downtown Walking Tour

Tour Distance: 7 Blocks, 0.7 miles.

Tour Length: 35 minutes

Tour Difficulty: Moderate- One hill at start and end of tour.

Seating Opportunities: Several concrete seating areas on Washington Street, midway through tour.

Starting Point: The tour starts at Michigan Avenue at the Huron River. Street parking is available throughout the downtown, and in public lots. Parking is also available in Riverside Park.

Stop 1. Huron River and Michigan Avenue



Figure 1. Historic Map of Ypsilanti, date unverified, Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

The nucleus of Ypsilanti is positioned at the crossing of Michigan Avenue/U.S.-12 and the Huron River. This road was originally known as the Sauk Trail and traces its origins to the Native Americans. It was a frequented thoroughfare by the Chippewa, Pottawatomie, Ottawa, and Huron tribes. These Native Americans would camp in the Ypsilanti area while traveling on the trail.

Non-native settlement of Ypsilanti began in the early nineteenth century when French trader, Gabriel Godfroy established trading post on the Huron River. In 1823, a small settlement, known as Woodruff's Grove, was established near the location of present-day Grove Street and the Huron River. However, 1825 was a key year in settlement of Ypsilanti as we know it. That year, Godfroy sold his claim to territorial Judge Augustus B. Woodward, who platted the village of Ypsilanti; the Federal Government made improvements to the Sauk Trail establishing it as a military road between Detroit and Chicago; and the Erie Canal opened, affording settlers from New York and New England easy access to the Great Lakes. Many of these Yankee settlers chose to settle in southeast Michigan.

The new settlers propelled Michigan's population growth to reach statehood in 1837. The following year, the Michigan Central Railroad was completed from Detroit to Ypsilanti.

Ypsilanti grew from a pioneer outpost to an industrial hub, fueled by ample river water to power mills, and a reliable transportation network for trade on both the military road and railroads. Ypsilanti's downtown, the principal commercial district, was developed on high ground west of the Huron River.

Proceed west to 2 W Michigan.

Stop 2. 2 W Michigan Avenue- Materials Unlimited



Figure 2. Materials Unlimited Building, ca.1985

The Art Deco-style building was designed by the Ann Arbor architectural firm, Cuthbert & Cuthbert and erected ca.1927 to house Staebler Bros. Autos. The Staebler business included both a gas/service station and an Oakland-Pontiac dealership. Originally a balcony extended along the east side of the building to display used cars. Scarring from the former concrete cantilevers can still be seen from the public stairs down to Riverside Park. New cars were sold from the showroom indoors. A mezzanine office level overlooked the cars below.

During World War II Ypsilanti experienced a massive influx of defense workers and military personnel affiliated with the nearby Willow Run Bomber Plant. The Staebler building became the United Services Organization (USO) hall and hosted entertainment for service members. A dance floor and bandstand were installed in the former auto showroom.

After the war, the building briefly returned to auto-based business before becoming a fraternal lodge for the Loyal Order of the Moose, ca. 1950. The Lodge remained at this in this building until ca. 1980 when it was succeeded by the present occupant, Materials Unlimited, an architectural salvage shop.

Proceed west to 18 W Michigan.

Stop 3. 18 W Michigan, HAAB'S



Figure 3. Haab's, ca. 1960

The property was historically two separate parcels. Its buildings, both erected in 1870, were combined to form Haab's restaurant in 1963. Records indicate that both buildings housed primarily saloons and billiard halls prior to becoming a single restaurant.

Haab's originated in the west half of the building, at 18 W Michigan- where the main entrance is today. The first known use of the building was a saloon owned by James Fulton, established ca. 1870. In 1894 the saloon was acquired by Adam Shaner, who added tobacco sales to the business. Shaner sold the business in 1905 to Charles A. Smith, who renamed the bar "Smitty's Saloon and Riverside Club." The interior was completely remodeled, including an in-vogue tin ceiling and a "modern" bar; both extant today. Smith remained in business through the 1920s, surviving prohibition by selling soft drinks.

Prohibition ended in the early 1930s and the saloon was purchased by brothers, Oscar and Otto Haab. The Haabs shifted the saloon from an entirely alcohol-based business to a restaurant that served beer and wine with meals. Reputedly, it was the one of the first fully-realized restaurants in Washtenaw County to emphasize food over alcohol. During the mid-twentieth century, increased automotive travel on US-12 was a boon to business and enabled the brothers to expand the restaurant into the neighboring building; which they did in 1963. The interior was subsequently remodeled with family heirlooms and hand-hewn beams to create a pioneer-era feel. The Haab brothers sold the business in 1976 to Mike Kabat and Harvey Glaze. In 2011 the sign over Haab's main entrance was recognized as a historic sign and became an exception to the city's zoning code.

Proceed west to the corner of Huron and Michigan

Stop 4. 1 S Huron- Ypsilanti City Hall



Figure 4. Original Appearance of 1 S Huron



Figure 5. 1 S Huron ca. 1982, Showing the "Modernization" of the Exterior

The Romanesque style building that houses City Hall was erected in 1887. It designed by the Detroit-based architectural firm, Mason and Rice to house the Ypsilanti Savings Bank, along with several professional offices and the Knights of Pythias lodge room. The large building was originally surmounted by an ornate slate roof, which it was lost to fire ca.1947. In 1966-67 the bank chose to modernize the building with marble cladding on the first story and an aluminum screen on the upper three stories. The building became City Hall in 1977. The exterior was restored in 1994. Solar panels were installed on the rear elevation in 2010.

City Hall houses most of Ypsilanti's municipal departments, including: the City Clerk; Treasurer; the Building Department, Planning and Economic Development; Assessor, and office of the City Manager. City Council and commissions meet in the Council Chambers on the first and third Tuesday of the month. Residents can register to vote and purchase a parking permit at the Clerk's office.

Proceed to west to the opposite corner.

Stop 5. 100 and 101 W Michigan

This tour stop highlights two cornerstone downtown buildings that are part of recent major rehabilitation projects.

100 W Michigan



Figure 6. Worden Block, ca.1890, Photo Courtesy Ypsilanti Historical Society



Figure 7. Worden Block, ca. 1980

At your right, kitty-corner to City Hall, is a ca. 1850 building known as the Worden Block. Historically the building looked similar to the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau building next-door; a three-story Italianate with ornate arched window hoods. Among the earliest known uses of the building was a cobbler and dry goods store on the first floor with a barber shop in the basement. The third floor included a paint shop and a social hall for an African American fraternal origination. Preliminary research did not identify which organization met here.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the ground floor had been converted to one large shop, known as Davis & Kishlar. The building’s third floor housed a “moccasin factory” in the former lodge room.

The building did not substantially change its appearance for the first half of the twentieth century. The metal cladding that covered over the windows and brickwork was an effort to modernize the prominent corner in the mid-century. In 1959 the building was purchased by Max and Ceil Pear for their clothing store, after their former building on S. Huron was demolished for a city parking lot. They remodeled the Worden Block and reopened Pears’ [Men’s] Clothing on the ground floor. Around this time the exterior was remodeled as well. Metal cladding was installed, covering walls and windows, and a flat awning with a screen signboard were installed on the facade. Photos indicate that the façade (Michigan elevation) was covered first, and later followed by the east (Huron Street) elevation. Max and Ceil Pear sold their business to relatives in 1980, who kept the Pear name. The business continued until 1997 when it closed. Currently (2020) the building is under redevelopment with the goal of returning the exterior to something historically appropriate. The metal cladding was removed to reveal historic signage and building features.



Figure 8. 101 W Michigan, Showing the Facade Pre-rehabilitation, October 2018

101 W Michigan

On the opposite corner, 101 W Michigan was erected in 1858 as to house the King Store. The King Store was one of Ypsilanti's first grocery stores, established by George King in 1838. Reputedly, King was the first grocer in Ypsilanti to offer cash transactions over the traditional method of buying on credit. The King family operated the store for over a century, changing names to reflect the various partners; G. & E. King, King & Son, Charles King & Co, and G. Lamb & Son. The store remained in business until July 1942- after four generations and 104 years of operation.

The building's storefront has changed multiple times during its 162-year history. The nineteenth-century storefront was remodeled in the early 1920s to make better use of display windows. In the mid-century, blue metal panels were added to the storefront; presumably after the King Store closed in 1942. From 2018-2020 the building was under rehabilitation as a Historic Tax Credit project and Downtown Development Authority façade grant. The storefront is being restored similar to its nineteenth century appearance.

Continue west to center of 100 Block of W Michigan

Stop 6. 100 Block of W Michigan



Figure 9. North side of 100 Block of W Michigan ca.1880, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

The 100 Block of W Michigan illustrates the evolution of commercial facades in downtown Ypsilanti. The block is largely comprised of mid to late nineteenth century buildings that have been “modernized,” rehabilitated, and “restored” over time to reflect a diverse array of architectural styles and commerce experiences in the downtown. For many buildings, the upper stories reveal the original/historic construction design while the storefronts have changed more frequently. The upper levels of these buildings are typically Italianate in style, featuring brick cladding with decorative arched window hoods, and corbeled cornices.



Figure 10. Photo showing North Side of 100 Block of W Michigan, ca.1975, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

During the second and third quarters of the twentieth century, the facades and storefronts of downtown were “modernized” with metal panels over the upper floors and new storefronts with sweeping vestibules that were designed to draw pedestrians in with their elaborate window displays. A fully realized mid-century renovation is found at Terry Bakery, at 119 W Michigan. Notice the metal façade, angled storefront wall with a built-in planter box, and a distinctive neon-sign.

Not all mid-century renovations are architecturally or historically significant. Many of them have been reversed to improve the functionality of the buildings and reveal historic character. For instance, the Unicorn Feed & Supply, at 114 W Michigan, has a restored nineteenth-century upper floor, but a modernized storefront with a deeply recessed entry vestibule.

Another remarkable renovation occurred at 116-118 W Michigan during 1990s. Cladding was removed to reveal a Greek Revival façade at 116 W Michigan and unique Gothic Revival façade at 118 W Michigan. A second rehabilitation provided much-needed structural stability to the buildings in 2018-2020.

Continue West on West Michigan to the corner of Washington and Michigan.

Stop 7. 128-130 W Michigan/133 W Michigan/200 W Michigan/201 W Michigan



Figure 11. 128-130 W Michigan, ca. 1935, Photo Courtesy Ypsilanti Historical Society

128-130 W Michigan

Michigan and Washington is the central four corners of downtown. Moving clockwise around the intersection, the building at the northeast corner, 128-130 W Michigan, was erected ca.1860 for Walter Hewitt's boot/shoe factory and store. Civically-minded, Hewitt opened a public auditorium on the third floor, known as Hewitt Hall. The hall hosted many community concerts, public speakers, and performances. Notably, famed abolitionist Frederic Douglass spoke here in 1866 on one of his three visits to Ypsilanti. Hewitt Hall eventually became a roller skating rink before suffering a major fire in 1914. After the fire, the third floor continued to deteriorate before its complete removal in 1937.

133 W Michigan



Figure 12. Undated Historical Photo of 133 W Michigan, Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society



Figure 13. 133 W Michigan after 1963 Renovations, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

The southeast corner of Washington and Michigan, 133 W Michigan, is another example of a historic façade restored. The ca. 1907 Neoclassical-style building was erected to house the First National Bank of Ypsilanti, which remained in the building in some iteration until the early 2000s. In 1963 the bank exterior was modernized with a marbled first story and “cheese grater” screened second story. The original facade was revealed in 1985, with restoration funds coming from a Downtown Façade Improvement Grant.

201 W Michigan

Across Washington Street from the former bank, at 201 W Michigan, is a three-story Italianate commercial building erected ca. 1880. For over a century, this building has served as a downtown gathering place for Ypsilantians. Historically, a combination saloon and billiards hall was on the first floor, with a lodge hall for fraternal organizations on the third floor. The corner unit, with its distinctive streamline Moderne storefront, opened as the Tap Room in 1941. It has remained a mainstay downtown since its opening. The sign is recognized as historic, distinctive for the neon bubbles flashing in the martini glass.

200 W Michigan



Figure 14. 200 W Michigan ca. 1955, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

Across the street, at 200 W Michigan is a large Italianate-style building that was erected in 1879, known as the Union Block. The building extends for seven storefronts and has held a diverse variety of retail and services throughout its history; including an International Order of the Odd Fellows hall on the second floor. The corner two storefronts housed anchors for downtown shopping; including: dry goods, grocery stores, shoe, and drug stores, before becoming Kressge's ca. 1921. Kressge's was a staple in downtown shopping. Some Ypsilantians believe that its closure in the mid-1960s led to the decline of downtown. Much of the building was vacant during the late twentieth century before being purchased and rehabilitated by Eric and Karen Maurer in 2002. Today, Bobcat Bonnie's Restaurant, Frank's Drugs, Ziggy's Bar, Ypsi Studio and Bowerbird Mongo occupy the ground floor with loft apartments on the upper floors.

Continue west to 214 W Michigan.

Stop 8. 211 W Michigan SPARK East/214-218 W Michigan-Hawkins Building

211-215 W Michigan



Figure 15. Photo showing 211-215 W Michigan ca. 1980

Across the street at 211-215 W Michigan is a building that has undergone numerous exterior changes. The site includes two mid-nineteenth century buildings (211 and 213-215 W Michigan) that overtime were connected by the same business; historically Mack and Mack furniture, one of the longest-running businesses in Washtenaw County, and now the SPARK Innovation Center.

Mack and Mack Furniture originated as the business of Scottish cabinet maker, William McAndrew. He and his wife, Dr. Elizabeth McAndrew, (Washtenaw County's first female physician) immigrated to southeast Michigan ca. 1850. They moved to Ypsilanti shortly thereafter and Mr. McAndrew opened his cabinet-making/furniture business on Michigan Avenue. He and his partner, William Clarke, retired in 1876 after facing steep competition from machine-made furniture. Their sons, Thomas McAndrew and George McEchleran, continued the business and rebranded as Mack and Mack. Mack and Mack thrived well into the twentieth century. Around 1940, the facades were remodeled with enameled panels and a neon sign. However, by the 1980s Mack and Mack struggled to compete in the local economy and closed down in 1985. The building was rehabilitated in ca. 1987 and the façade restored. Today it houses the SPARK East Innovation Center, a small business incubator.



Figure 16. Hawkins House Hotel, ca. 1880, Photo Courtesy Ypsilanti Historical Society

The building you're standing in front of, at 214-218 W Michigan, was erected in 1879 as the Hawkins House Hotel. The one-story brick addition on the façade that currently houses Blackstone Books replaced a former verandah.

Continue west to corner of W Michigan and Adams.

Stop 9. 229 W Michigan –Ypsilanti District Library- Downtown Branch



Figure 17. Ypsilanti Post Office, now Library, ca. 1935. Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

The Neo Classical-style building was erected in 1915 to house the Ypsilanti Post Office. In the mid-twentieth century, a new post office was erected on S Adams Street. The building eventually became the headquarters of the Ypsilanti District Library. Today it serves as the downtown branch with the headquarters located in Ypsilanti Township. The interior has many features that were sensitively rehabilitated.

Turn around, head east on W Michigan back to N Washington. Turn left (north) on N Washington and stop at 10 N Washington.

Stop 10. 10s N Washington



Figure 18. N Washington in the late 1970s, Prior to Promenade

The first block of N Washington has a diverse selection of commercial buildings dating from the 1860s to 1920s; some with remodeled mid-twentieth century facades. In the 1970s the city received a federal grant to create a “promenade” block; featuring widened sidewalks, lampposts, benches, and planters to make it easier to close off for downtown festivals and events. The block is closed to vehicular traffic several times a year and the street for such events as: Ypsi Pride, the Festival of the Honey Bee, and Ypsi Glow.

Proceed north to corner of N Washington and Pearl.

Stop 11. 33 N Washington, Martha Washington Theater/DeJaVu and 124 Pearl Street, Huron Hotel/Centennial Center



Figure 19. Martha Washington Theater, ca. 1937, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

33 N Washington

The corner building with the large marquee was erected as the Martha Washington Theater in 1915. The Prairie-style exterior features ribbons of windows on the second floor with decorative tile work. The theater sat over 1,000 guests and operated with a single screen, until 1971. The theater was later converted to a two-screen movie house, and subsequently to a nightclub.

124 Pearl

At the northeast corner of N Washington and Pearl sits an imposing six-story structure, historically known as the Huron Hotel. In the early 1920s, Ypsilanti was lacking in a high-quality modern hotel. The Ypsilanti Board of Commerce set a goal erect one that would benefit the whole city. They secured \$200,000 in capital from 650 Ypsilantians, selling them on an investment in civic pride. The building opened New Year's Day 1923, featuring hotel rooms, banquet facilities, a coffee shop, and barber shop. Stylistically, the building features Period Revival elements such as the Tudor Arch recessed entry, and decorative brick and stonework. The building was originally only four floors, and was expanded to six in

1926. The hotel enjoyed particular success in the years immediately following World War II, with patronage from the passengers and flight crews at Willow Run Airport. As the Detroit Metro Airport developed in the 1950s, the hotel's popularity waned and the building fell into disrepair. It was purchased and revitalized in 1963 by Bill Anhut, who according to the *Ypsilanti Press* "saved the community hotel for the city." The building remained a hotel until 1978 when it was converted to offices and renamed the Centennial Center. Professional offices remain on the upper floors to the present day, with restaurants and retail on the first floor.

Continue East on Pearl Street

Stop 12. 100 Block of Pearl Street

The 100 block of Pearl Street has a diverse array of historic architecture and businesses. One of the most notable features is the contrast between one of downtown's largest buildings, the six-story Huron Hotel/Centennial Center, next to one of the smallest buildings, a one-story Tudor Revival-style shop at 120 Pearl.



Figure 20. 111 Pearl, ca. 1970 Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

111 Pearl

Down the block, at 111 Pearl, is Congdon's Ace Hardware, located in a distinctive 1890s Romanesque-style building. The façade is stone-clad with convex mortar joints and features decorative details such as stone patterns, and a dentilated cornice. The building, along with the adjoining brick neighbor, was constructed to house a large commercial printing facility; known as the Scharf Tag, Label, and Box Company. Congdon's moved into the building in 1959 from a location across the street, where they had been housed since 1913.



Figure 21. South Side of Pearl Street, ca. 1925

110 Pearl

Across the street at 110 Pearl is the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) building. The building was erected ca. 1873 as a mixed-use residential/commercial facility. By 1914 the building had been converted to the meeting hall for the Grand Army of the Republic organization; a social club for Union Civil War veterans. By 1920 the building had been dubbed the Sherman and Leetch Memorial Hall (later shortened to Sherman Memorial Hall) and the Women's Relief Corps (WRC) were also meeting there. In the 1930s the hall shared space with several other fraternal organizations, including the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, Modern Woodmen of America, Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Fraternal Order of Eagles, and the Queen City Hive Ladies of the Maccabees. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) began meeting in the building in the 1940s. In the 1950s, organizations included the Royal Neighbors of America, Navy Mothers, Townsend Club, Veterans of World War I Auxiliary, and the United Brethren Church. The last new club to enter the building was the Michigan Practical Nurses Association in 1961.

Of these many organizations, the longest to utilize the space was the GAR, WRC, Maccabees, and VFW- which remained in the building until the late 1970s. Today the building houses professional offices.

Proceed east to corner of N Huron and Pearl.

Stop 13. 64-76 N Huron- RAC

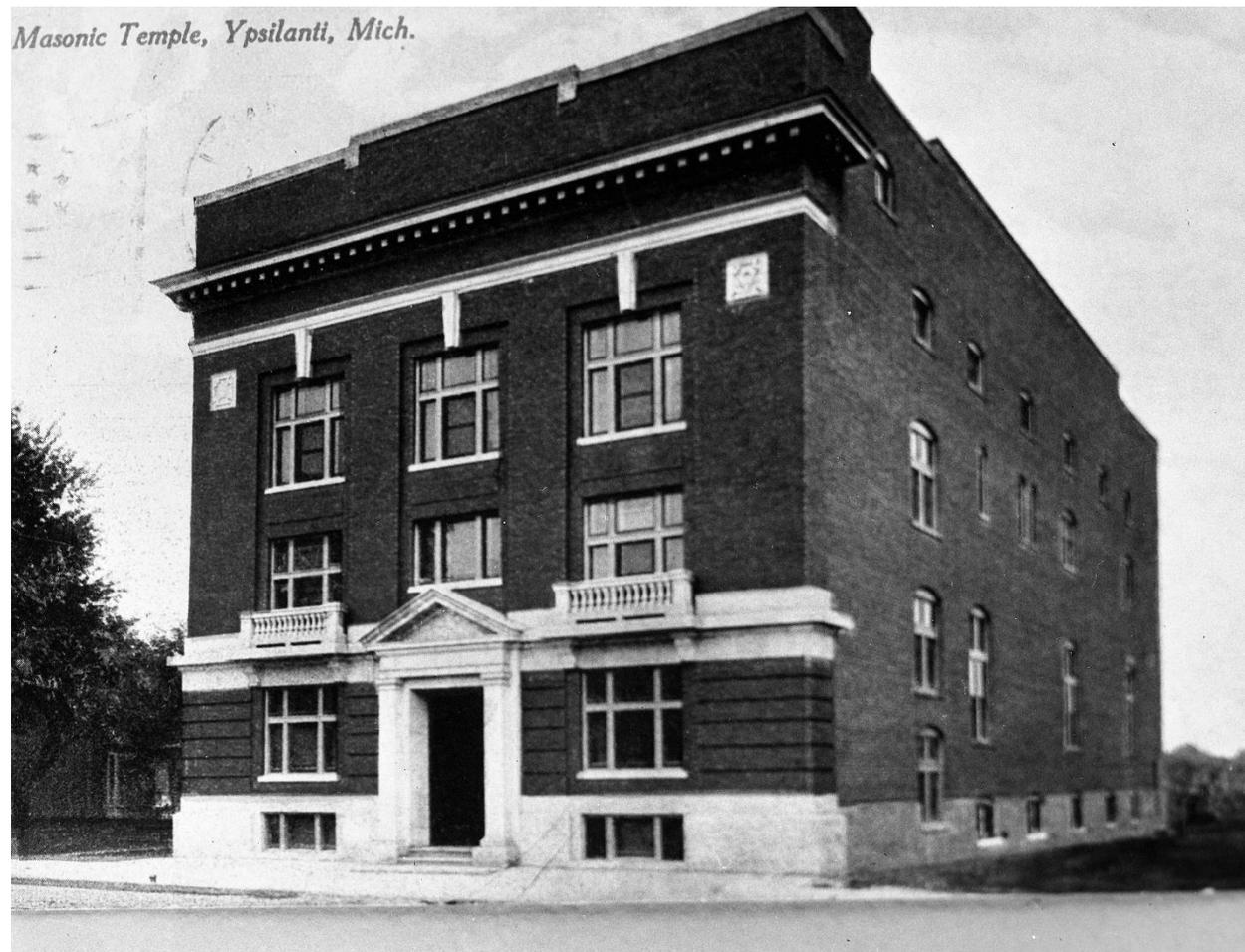


Figure 22. Ypsilanti Masonic Temple, ca. 1910, Photo Courtesy Ypsilanti Historical Society

The Riverside Art Center is comprised of two early twentieth-century buildings that are connected by a twenty-first-century glazed hyphen. The southern building, at 64 N Huron, is the former Detroit Edison building, and the northern building, at 76 N Huron, is the former Masonic Temple.

The Masonic Temple was erected in 1909 to serve as the social hall and meeting place for the fraternal Masonic organization. The building served both organizational ceremonies and entertainment, featuring a bowling alley in the basement. The building was designed by Grand Rapids architects, Osgood and Osgood, featuring an exterior with decorative brickwork and stone features. The Masonic organization remained in the building until 1987. Since 1994, the building has housed the Riverside Arts Center, a performing and visual arts facility.

The Detroit Edison building was constructed in 1915 to house the local offices of the Detroit Edison power company. The building had “fire proof” construction, with reinforced concrete floors and roof. Detroit Edison remained in the building as late as the 1990s. In 2005 the Riverside Art Center acquired the building, and renamed it the “Off Center.”

Stop 14. 10s Block of N Huron



Figure 23. 10s Block of N Huron, ca. 1925, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society

The first block of N Huron has had a diverse development history. The east side of the street once housed the Occidental Hotel and Mineral Baths, a 19th century health resort. Over time the hotel and its associated buildings were removed and remodeled; replaced by a series of two-story Colonial Revival commercial blocks that are extant today. The buildings were erected in the 1910s and 1920s and share commonalities, but are not identical. Each features brick facades, decorative limestone, and a prominent cornice.

Head south on N Huron, and east on W Michigan to return to the tour starting point.