

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Ferry Street Historic District

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 527-801 north side of Ferry Street; 514-814 south side of Ferry Street; 701-815 north side of Sycamore; 323 North 5th Street; 308-410 North Sixth Street; 307-402 North Seventh Street; 307-410 North Eighth Street; and 310 North Ninth Street

City or town: Niles State: Michigan County: Berrien

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B C D

	SHPO	December 4, 2024
Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>Michigan State Historic Preservation Office</u>		
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government		

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In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

**State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register
 determined eligible for the National Register
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register
 other (explain): _____

James Gabbert
Signature of the Keeper

1/15/2025

Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

District

Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

36

Noncontributing

12

buildings

2

1

sites

0

0

structures

1

1

objects

39

14

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling
DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling
COMMERCE/TRADE:organizational
COMMERCE/TRADE:business
SOCIAL/meeting hall
SOCIAL/civic
EDUCATION/school
RELIGION/religious facility
LANDSCAPE/park

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling
DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling
RELIGION/religious facility
SOCIAL/civic
LANDSCAPE/park

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Mid-19th Century: Greek Revival
Mid-19th Century: Gothic Revival
Late Victorian: Italianate
Late Victorian: Queen Anne
Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals: Classical Revival
Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals: Late Gothic Revival
Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements: Prairie School
Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements: Bungalow/Craftsman
Modern Movement: International Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Concrete, Stone, Wood: Weatherboard
Asbestos, Metal: Aluminum, Synthetics: Vinyl, Asphalt

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Ferry Street Historic District comprises fifty-three resources located on four blocks of Ferry Street and two blocks of Sycamore Street, both east-west streets of a primarily residential neighborhood a few blocks northeast of downtown Niles, in Berrien County, Michigan. The buildings in the district constitute a significant concentration of community institutions and residences of prominent individuals, connected by their historic associations. The district follows a traditional, urban street grid, with most buildings oriented to face the east-west streets; a few buildings are oriented toward north-south streets. Lot sizes are roughly uniform, with nonresidential buildings scaled to fit within residentially sized lots. The only exception is a large church building (Mount Calvary Baptist Church at 601 Ferry Street), that occupies a larger parcel.

Contributing buildings date from around 1860 at the earliest (with several houses predating the 1867 start date of the period of significance) and reflect a diversity of architectural forms and styles from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most buildings have seen alterations, such as aluminum siding, enclosed porches, and additions, illustrating the continued evolution of the neighborhood during the period of significance. Major construction activity in the district slowed by the mid-twentieth century and ceased in 1971 (the end date of the period of significance) with the completion of a substantial addition to Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Some buildings have been altered in subsequent decades, especially with vinyl windows and siding. The Ferry Street Historic District is bounded by newer, thoroughfare-oriented development to the west and southwest, properties to the north and east that generally include a higher proportion of vacant lots, and, to the south and southeast, properties that lack the strong historical associations of the district.

Certain aspects of integrity, especially of materials and workmanship, have been diminished for some resources within the district due to late-twentieth and twenty-first century alterations to those buildings. Demolitions have also occurred. Despite these changes, the most significant buildings within the district have largely been spared from major alteration. Integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association remain throughout the district.

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Narrative Description

Geographical Context

The Ferry Street Historic District is centrally located within the broader community of Niles, a Berrien County, Michigan, city of 11,988.¹ Niles is part of the present-day Michiana region, comprising several counties in southwest Michigan and northern Indiana, with South Bend, Indiana, as its largest city and economic center. Niles is the most populous Michigan city in Michiana.

Niles is located at a historical crossroads between the Sauk Trail (now Main Street in Niles), a Native American trail that ran east-west across Lower Michigan, and the Saint Joseph River. The river flows through South Bend and Niles before entering Lake Michigan at the twin cities of Benton Harbor and Saint Joseph. A natural ford at the river drew Miami and Anishinaabe people and, later, European missionaries and traders. Fort Saint Joseph was established by the Kingdom of France about a mile south of present-day Ferry Street in 1691. The suitability of Niles for water power led to its permanent settlement in the 1820s.² Nearby oak savannas provided ideal terrain for agriculture.³

The downtown district and older Niles neighborhoods (including the Ferry Street Historic District) are located in an area of elevated terrain above the east bank of the river that, prior to its development, was covered in oak-hickory forest. According to one source, the land north of present-day Sycamore Street was once a marsh;⁴ however, this likely refers to an area immediately north of downtown and closer to the river, as the Ferry Street area itself is at a higher elevation. After permanent settlement in the 1820s and 1830s the arable land was used for farming hay.⁵ The area that is now the Ferry Street neighborhood was subdivided in 1836 in anticipation of future development.⁶

¹ "United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan," 2020, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2020/2020-census-results.html>. A small, sparsely populated panhandle of Niles is in Cass County.

² Franklin Ellis, *A History of Berrien and Van Buren Counties, Michigan* (Philadelphia: D. W. Ensign & Co., 1880), 153.

³ Orville William Coolidge, *A Twentieth Century History of Berrien County, Michigan* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1906), 1-5.

⁴ Edward B. Cowles, *Berrien County Directory and History: Containing Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Villages and Townships within the County, and the Names and Occupations of Persons Residing Therein* (Buchanan, MI: Record Steam Printing House, 1871), 48-49.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 160-61.

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Development of the Ferry Street Historic District

Although H. B. Hoffman's Addition, as originally platted, laid out uniform lot sizes, this did not always neatly correspond with subsequent development. Multiple buildings were sometimes built on the same lot, and over the years, parcel boundaries and building addresses were sometimes shifted and revised to reflect new or expanded buildings. Despite these adjustments, the overall pattern established by Hoffman remains in place. It delineated an urban street grid with regular rectangular lots typically deeper than wide, especially on the east-west streets; on the north-south streets, lots are often shallower and sometimes square.

The land was not developed immediately; rather, individual homes and businesses appeared incrementally, with most being built from the 1860s through the early twentieth century.⁷ An 1860 map shows six buildings within the present-day district; by 1868 and 1873 this number increased to twenty-four.⁸ In many cases, however, the buildings that exist today are the second or third buildings to exist on their respective lots. Extant resources from the 1873 atlas are limited to four houses, at 317 North Sixth Street and 701, 713, and 723 Sycamore Street, that date to between 1860 and 1868 and are likely Greek Revival in original design (subsequent alterations have removed or obscured architectural details). The site of the Ferry Street School at 620 Ferry Street continues to be an important location within the district. The latter resource, once among the most significant buildings in the district, is now classified as a contributing site due to extensive fire damage that occurred in 2023; only a stabilized ruin remains. It was an 1867, one-room school building incorporating Italianate and Greek Revival elements that was expanded in 1903. The historic district contains a number of extant resources that have the potential to hold archaeological deposits that may reveal information about prior occupation and use. These resources have the least potential for the destruction of these deposits given their long periods of occupation and limited disturbance. In particular, the residences may have in-situ evidence of original outbuildings still present on their parcels, and the school parcel is likely to contain archaeological deposits.⁹

The district continued to evolve over the following decades along with the city's growing population. Particularly noteworthy are three religious buildings: Franklin African Methodist Episcopal Church (1888, at 811 Sycamore Street), Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church (1922, at 323 North Seventh Street, later the John W. Moore Lodge No. 42 and Miriam Chapter No. 56), and Mount Cavalry Baptist Church (1951, at 601 Ferry Street). All are single-story, gable-front, hall churches. A few houses continued to be built in each decade until development slowed in the 1920s. The small-scale, Craftsman-style, Niles Pattern Works (c. 1933–1935) at 321 North Eighth Street was the last complete nonresidential building to be built in the district. A Craftsman-style house (c. 1940–1942) at 707 Sycamore Street was the final residential building

⁷ Ibid.; and *Map of the Counties of Cass, Van Buren, and Berrien, Michigan* (Philadelphia: Geil, Harley & Siverd, 1860).

⁸ A. Ruger and Chicago Lithographing Co., *Niles, Berrien County, Michigan* (Chicago: Chicago Lithographing Co., 1868); and D. J. Lake, *Atlas of Berrien Co., Michigan* (Philadelphia: C. O. Titus, 1873).

⁹ Sarah Surface-Evans, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, personal communication with authors.

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to be added. The latest major addition to a building occurred in 1971 when Mount Calvary Baptist Church was expanded with a large, Modern addition; it is now also the largest building in the district.

Present-Day Character

The Ferry Street Historic District consists of, approximately, both sides of Ferry Street between North Fifth Street and North Ninth Street, and the north side of Sycamore Street between North Seventh Street and North Ninth Street.

The core of the district is centered around a roughly one-block area of Ferry Street between North Sixth Street and North Seventh Street, including the Ferry Street School site, the John W. Moore Lodge, and Mount Calvary Baptist Church and its parsonage. The Franklin African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church defines the eastern end of the district. These two areas form the nuclei of the district and, collectively, housed the institutional anchors that drew people to the neighborhood and formed a focus of the surrounding community. Among and surrounding these institutions are approximately forty houses of prominent or representative residents. The western terminus of the district is defined, in part, by the circa 1900, gabled-ell residence at 323 North Fifth Street that was at times occupied by Lottie E. Wilson and her family.

The overall visual character of the built environment is one of detached buildings of similar scale and setback but differing in age, form, massing, architectural style, and use. Though the district has always been mostly residential, a somewhat more mixed-use character persisted into the mid-twentieth century, when the few commercial buildings were converted to single-family homes or demolished. As a contrast to this mostly residential character, the most prominent and significant properties have generally been the institutional and religious buildings. Each building in the district is unique in both original design and later alterations.

Residential buildings, dating from the 1860s through the 1940s, are mostly one-and-one-half-story or two-story houses in architectural styles reflecting the eras in which they were built. Nineteenth century gabled-ell and T-plan houses are common, with a smaller number of twentieth century foursquare houses and bungalows. Sanborn maps show that the footprints of these buildings have typically changed over time with the additions and removals of kitchens, shed-roof dependencies, garages, or other components. Porches have also frequently been reconfigured. Almost all houses show twentieth-century alterations: aluminum siding and enclosed porches dating from the 1960s and 1970s are common; more recent modifications such as vinyl siding and vinyl windows are also present, but less common. Unaltered or minimally altered buildings are rare, but a few exist—most notably, the house at 323 North Fifth Street, which appears to have no alterations other than replacement asphalt roofing shingles.

Of several commercial buildings that formerly existed in the district, only one remains: the Niles Pattern Works office at 321 North Eighth Street. Since-demolished buildings include the Garland Grocery Store at 608 Ferry Street, and another building at 402 North Seventh Street, also originally a grocery but later the office of several labor unions (an ice house was located just

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outside the district at 814 Sycamore Street).¹⁰ Vacant buildings appear to be few in number in and around the district, both historically and in the present day.¹¹

Designed landscape features include paved streets, though these had remained unpaved until well into the twentieth century.¹² Public rights-of-way now include concrete curbs and sidewalks, wood utility poles, and mature street trees of various, commonly planted urban tree species. Trees also occur at property lines, where they are likely to have arisen naturally, or in greater numbers in lots that have been vacant for some time. Landscaping consists of foundation plantings and small gardens surrounding residential buildings. Fences are uncommon and limited to minimally visible areas in back yards. Two houses, 527 Ferry Street and 801 Ferry Street, have low, poured-concrete retaining walls at their street-facing lot lines. A gentle slope rises from the west of the district to its east end, where a water reservoir once stood at 814 Ferry Street. Otherwise, topography is flat, other than the gentle grading of lots from building foundation to street. Seven vacant lots exist within the district. Six of these are vacant due to demolition; one appears never to have been developed. Troost Park, the only designed open space in the district, is a single-lot neighborhood park with several pieces of late-twentieth-century steel and wood playground equipment.

Boundaries and Surrounding Context

The Ferry Street Historic District does not have a rigid or readily visible boundary; rather, it is surrounded by areas of increased numbers of vacant lots or buildings that do not possess integrity, or properties which less clearly embody the themes for which the district is significant.

To the west of the district, businesses on North Fifth Street have a citywide or regional focus and consist of newer buildings or buildings that have been recently remodeled and have lost integrity. Houses on North Fifth Street, other than the house at 323 North Fifth Street, also have lost integrity due to alterations and are excluded from the district boundaries.

Although Cass Street, to the north, is both historically and presently associated with the Ferry Street neighborhood, noteworthy individual buildings on that street have been demolished; also, Cass Street has a noticeably higher ratio of vacant lots to extant buildings than do Ferry Street and Sycamore Street.

Ninth Street, on the east, was formerly the Elkhart, Niles, and Lake Michigan Railroad line (later a branch of the New York Central system) from 1871¹³ to 1993. Lined with a few small-scale industrial buildings, it forms a visual boundary that defines the east edge of the district. By some

¹⁰ *Luedders' Niles Mich. City Directory* (Coldwater, MI: Otto E. Luedders, 1935); *Polk's Niles City Directory* (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1956); and *Polk's Niles City Directory* (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1965). Known as the Britton Ice House.

¹¹ A review of city directories from various dates, combined with a visual survey of present-day properties, seldom finds vacant buildings.

¹² They are shown as unpaved on 1937 Sanborn maps; it is not known when they were paved.

¹³ *The Niles Republican*, March 23, 1871, 3.

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accounts,¹⁴ the Ferry Street neighborhood resumes with a smaller concentration of historically related residences further east in the vicinity of North Tenth Street and North Eleventh Street, but this is disconnected from the historic district by intervening unrelated resources and vacant land.

On the south, whether by deliberate action or by chance, Sycamore Street has continuously served as a demographic boundary (see the Narrative Statement of Significance) between the Ferry Street neighborhood and residential development to the south.

Inventory

Resources in the district were evaluated for significance within one or more of the contexts described below in Section 8: Narrative Statement of Significance. The resources were also evaluated for historic integrity. Resources associated with the themes described in the Statement of Significance and retaining integrity are classified as contributing. Noncontributing resources are those that have either been so altered that they no longer possess integrity. The district contains a number of vacant parcels, many of which once held houses that have since been demolished. These are 321 North Sixth Street, 402 North Seventh Street, 307, 311, and 316 North Eighth Street, and 520 and 608 Ferry Street. Though noted here, vacant parcels are not counted as resources other than 321 North Sixth Street, which is a noncontributing site.

The entries below are arranged by east-west oriented streets, beginning at the western boundary, and working west to east, then by north-south oriented streets, beginning at the southern boundary and working north.

Resource names are intended to denote original, significant, or longtime occupants, as determined through city directories and deeds. As city directories are not available for all years, and deeds indicate ownership, but not occupancy, the result is admittedly imperfect. Names of married or cohabitating residents are presented in the order given in primary sources. For more information on individual residents and property owners during the period of significance, see Vinewood Preservation Planning, "Ferry Street Historic District, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan: Survey Report," 2024.

Ferry Street

Albertina and Rudolph Keyser House, 514 Ferry Street; c. 1860–1873; 2 Contributing Buildings

Originally one-and-one-half-stories, this house was later expanded to two full stories while keeping its original T-shaped footprint. The house is oriented on an east-west axis, with the broad head of the T oriented north-south and on the west side, the leg of the T centered and extending to the east. The head of the T forms shallow projections to the north and south from the leg. The north elevation of the head contains an off-center picture window on the first story and two one-over-one windows on the second story. The north elevation of the leg of the T contains two one-over-one windows on the first story and two similar windows on the second story. A semicircular, Classical Revival pediment remains, though the building has been

¹⁴ Lisa Busby, interview by Timothy Boscarino, August 16, 2023.

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reconfigured with an enclosed, two-story entrance bay. On the west elevation of the leg of the T, a chimney rises from grade and extends slightly beyond the roof. A one-story addition projects from the south side of the leg. The roof of the entire house is covered in asphalt shingles.

A standalone garage is located to the southeast of the house, and accessed by a short, gravel driveway. The gable-front garage was constructed between 1927 and 1937. It is clad in horizontal wood boards and covered with an asphalt roof. An access door is located on the west elevation.

As an early residence dating to the mid-nineteenth century, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. There appears to be relatively little disturbance to the property that would impact archaeological deposits. There may be evidence of outbuildings, such as a privy, well, or barns, still present on the parcel. Future development of the property should assess the potential for archaeological deposits.

Paul and Bertha Trautvetter House, 527 Ferry Street; c. 1892; 1 Contributing Building

This is a cross-gable, vernacular house, and the only building in the district with a coursed ashlar, stone foundation. It has been altered with a late-nineteenth century enclosed porch on the north elevation and, later, vinyl siding. The house is oriented with the longer volume on an east-west axis and the shorter, north-south volume facing south toward Ferry Street. Small, one-story additions have been made to the north elevation: one at the northwest corner of the house that filled in the "L" of the cross, and another that extends from the north elevation of the north-south oriented volume. Entrances are located at the enclosed porch, the east elevation, and at the addition on the north elevation. A short concrete retaining wall lines the parcel edge and abuts concrete sidewalks on the north and east sides of the parcel.

As a residence dating to the late nineteenth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Carrie Porter House/Mount Calvary Baptist Church Parsonage, 528 Ferry Street; c. 1920; 1 Contributing Building

Another circa 1920, foursquare house, this building is located at the southwest corner of Ferry Street and North Sixth Street, diagonally across from Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Its foundation is of rock-face, concrete block. Concrete steps lead to a full-length front porch with hip roof. The upper story of the north (front) facade is symmetrically articulated with paired, mullioned windows; elsewhere, openings are irregularly arranged. Alterations appear to date from the 1960s or 1970s and include an enclosed front porch with projecting, aluminum awning, aluminum door, and aluminum slider windows, along with aluminum siding on the entire building. A pyramidal roof caps the building.

Mount Calvary Baptist Church, 601 Ferry Street; 1951, expanded 1971; 1 Contributing Building

A 1951 building that was significantly expanded in 1971, this is now the largest building in the district. The original building is a gable-roof hall church at the northwest corner of Ferry Street and North Sixth Street. Its primary facade, facing south to Ferry Street, is no longer visible from the street due to the addition, but remains exposed on the building interior. A half-story above

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grade on a raised basement, the building was formerly accessed by nine concrete steps centered on the three-bay facade. Original double doors, no longer extant, were sheltered by a cantilevered, hip-roof overhang. The entrance was flanked by four-over-one wood sash windows; the same windows also filled three openings on the east and west sides of the building, paired and separated by mullions on each. The 1951 building is clad in grayish-pink face brick. A short, cubical tower at the south end of the roof ridge is topped in a pyramidal roof with visible rafter ends.

A much larger addition, begun in 1970 and completed in 1971, includes a flat-roofed, single-loaded entry hallway, accessed by a half-story flight of steps fronting on the North Sixth Street sidewalk, and cutting perpendicularly across the original facade. At the top of the steps, a glazed aluminum window-and-door system provides access to the interior. The hallway continues to the east, connecting the original building to a much larger, single-story, church hall begun in 1970 and completed in 1971. The new hall is a tall, single-story building with a moderately pitched gable roof, reflecting a Contemporary or Modern influence. The entire south (front) facade, comprising both the entry hallway and the front-facing gable of the church hall, is glazed with thirteen bays of rolled steel windows, filled with textured glass panes in varying shades of orange, blue, and green. Above a foundation of light-tan colored brick and topped with a sandstone water table are spandrels clad in corrugated fiberglass, on a lower level, and coarse-aggregate stucco panels on an upper level. Each bay of windows is separated by a thin, sandstone pier, with sandstone quoins at each end of the facade. A cornerstone states that the church was founded in 1849, with the current building dating from 1950 and expanded in 1970.

On the east and west side elevations, windows and details are sparser, with expanses of the same tan-colored brick as the front facade. On the east elevation, steel windows are topped with sharply angled sections. On the west, windows are newer aluminum replacements. The north (rear) lacks intentional architectural detail and includes a brick-paved courtyard filling the space between the building's 1951 and 1971 sections.

To the north of the building is a large asphalt parking lot. This open space formerly contained a two-story, Classical Revival parsonage that was demolished between 1958 and 1965.¹⁵ The 1951 building also replaced an earlier church building at the same location, with similar, though smaller, footprint and massing. It was completed in 1873 and demolished in 1950.

Martha Brown House, 615 Ferry Street; c. 1900–1907; 1 Noncontributing Building

This is a two-story, gabled-ell house with front porch removed and window openings reduced in size or eliminated altogether due to the introduction of vinyl siding and replacement windows. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

¹⁵ "Mount Calvary Baptist Church: Album Directory," 1976, 3.

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Ferry Street School Site, 620 Ferry Street; 1867, expanded 1903, largely demolished 2023; 1Contributing Site, 1 Noncontributing Object

One of the oldest, and formerly one of the most architecturally significant, resources in the district is the Ferry Street School, built in 1867 as a common red-brick, one-room school building. An addition was added in 1903. It is centrally located within the neighborhood, at the southwest corner of Ferry Street and North Seventh Street. In 2023 a fire severely damaged the building, causing the roof to collapse, as well as the side addition's floor to fall into the basement.¹⁶ Most of the building was demolished shortly thereafter, though the north-facing front facade of the 1867 section and a portion of the east wall remain standing.

The remaining portion of the Ferry Street School sits on a coursed, fieldstone foundation, and consists of a single, gable-front-brick masonry wall of common-bond red brick. Centered on the facade, three stone steps lead to a round-arched entrance. The doorway is flanked by tall, narrow window openings with limestone sill and topped by segmental brick arches. The windows and doors are missing. The remaining north facade and portions of the east and west walls demonstrate brick masonry construction and remain stable. The addition, of frame construction with brick veneer, is now entirely missing. Other than the ruins of the Ferry Street School building, the lot consists of a grassy lawn. A Michigan historical marker, placed in 1980, is a noncontributing object.

There are also likely archaeological resources dating to the period of significance on the property. Care should be taken to preserve the site or, if development is planned, to conduct archaeological survey of the property. The archaeology of schools, particularly early one-room schools from the mid-nineteenth century, has yielded significant information about public education and working-class life in America. In addition, the history of the Ferry Street School as a predominately African American school indicates that archaeology here may also provide important details about the lives of African Americans living in Niles.

Prior to the fire, the Ferry Street School was one of the most significant buildings in the district and retained all aspects of integrity from the period of significance. The facade held a double, wood-panel door surmounted by a four-light transom with round-arched fan-light window opening above. These, and all other windows, were wood: four-over-two on the front (north) facade and nine-over-two on the sides.

The 1903 addition closely matched the 1867 massing and style. On a poured concrete foundation, the plane of its facade was set back a few feet from the original, with its gable roof oriented perpendicularly. It matched the original in its red brick and wood sash windows with stone sills and brick arches; these windows were two-over-two. Somewhat wide, visually prominent, wood vergeboards wrapped around the entire building. On the south (rear) of the building was a small, low-sloped hip-roof addition in brick, added in the 1900s or 1910s, later extended further with concrete block. The roof was covered in asphalt shingles.

¹⁶ Jack Springgate, "Fire Destroys Historical Ferry Street Resource Center in Niles," *16 News Now WNDU*, n.d., May 12, 2023, edition, <https://www.wndu.com/2023/05/12/fire-destroys-historical-ferry-street-resource-center-niles/>.

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Though the building was relatively minimal in its architectural detail, the narrow, arched window openings and wide vergeboards demonstrated an Italianate influence while the four-light transom reflected the Greek Revival style.

Until the fire, the building had shown no noticeable alterations from its early twentieth-century appearance. At some point, the brick was painted white, but this paint was removed during a 1976 restoration. That effort largely focused on the interior of the building, recreating the appearance of the 1870s, one-room school building. Despite the loss of most of the building, the ruin—including the materials, location, orientation, and setting—and features of the site continue to evoke the history, use, and significant events that occurred at the school since its original construction, and the site as a whole continues to hold historic and cultural importance to the community. There is a strong potential for community-based archaeology at this site.

Simon and Anna Backman House, 703 Ferry Street; c. 1900; 1 Contributing Building, 1 Noncontributing Building

This house is a one-and-one-half-story, gabled-ell building sitting upon a parged brick foundation. A full-width, shed-roof front porch integrates the gable-front mass of the building with its side ell. An original bay window, located within the porch on the first floor, has been enclosed to create a porch room, likely early in the building's history. The house has since been altered with vinyl siding and the district's only metal roof. A garage associated with this house has been altered with siding and replacement doors and is a noncontributing resource. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Joseph L. Lipp House, 709 Ferry Street; c. 1890–1900; 1 Contributing Building

This gable-front, one-and-one-half-story building sits on a foundation of cut, coursed stone mixed with uncut fieldstone. The south-facing front facade features paired, mullioned windows on the first floor. The entrance is on a side elevation through a west-facing, shed-roof, enclosed porch. The entire building is clad in asbestos-cement siding. A diamond-shaped window atop the front-facing gable is a Queen Anne element; otherwise, original architectural details have been lost. A relatively large deck, extending into the front yard, is a recent addition. As a residence dating to the late-nineteenth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Francis Quinn and Louisa Quinn House/Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 710 Ferry Street; c. 1860–1887, moved 1922; 1 Contributing Building

Facing north onto Ferry Street and immediately east of the John W. Moore Lodge, this one-and-one-half-story house occupies a T-shaped footprint. The building sits upon a rock-face concrete block foundation, a result of its 1922 move from its prior location where the John W. Moore Lodge now stands. A core, three-bay section is oriented with a wall cross-gable facing the street. Its Gothic Revival style suggests a construction date from the 1860s through the 1880s. An irregular fenestration pattern appears to have been greatly altered from its original construction, with an off-center doorway on the western end of this mass and no windows at all on the eastern

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bay. A hip-roof porch shelters the north-facing primary entrance. The porch has a poured concrete deck and steps, potentially dating from the 1922 move, with newer wood posts.

The T-plan shape is completed by a front-gabled section extending forward towards the street, with a low-pitched hip roofed, box gable projecting further forward. One-over-one sash windows on the core section are likely not original; two-over-two windows on the front-gabled section appear to date from the late nineteenth century. A few windows have been replaced with vinyl. Aluminum siding has been added, removing or obscuring any architectural details that likely once existed. The building reached its current appearance by 1968 at the latest, as seen in a photo in the Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church directory from that year.

Merrill and Anna London House, 712 Ferry Street; c. 1900, potentially moved in the early 1950s; 1 Contributing Resource

With a three-bay front facade facing north onto Ferry Street, this gable-front house sits on a cement-parged foundation. Facing the street on the first floor are a large, fixed window with upper transom and an uncovered front door. Above, on the front facade are three evenly spaced windows, with the central window noticeably taller than the flanking windows. Hip-capped cornice returns with Classical entablature, wood door and window surrounds, and a first-floor cottage window are Classical Revival elements.

A seam in the clapboard siding at the second floor, front facade, suggests that a projecting, gabled, center bay once existed. Window and door placements may have been reconfigured after the bay was removed. A porch, if one existed, is missing. More recent alterations include a steel door and treated wood entry stairs and deck.

The house is not shown in census records or Sanborn maps through the mid-twentieth century, and first appears in city directories in 1954. Thus, it is possible that the building was moved to Ferry Street from another location.

William and Rebecca Davis House, 713 Ferry Street; c. 1880–1887; 2 Contributing Buildings¹⁷

This one-and-one-half-story, T-plan (gable with wing) house sits on a cement-parged brick foundation. A shed-roof front porch extends the entire length of the facade, sitting atop a foundation and walls of smooth concrete block. Above the south-facing front entrance, a forward-facing cross gable is a Queen Anne feature, as is a cutaway corner on the building's forward-facing mass. The building is topped with a gable roof. Vinyl siding and windows have eliminated any architectural detailing that likely once existed; otherwise, the form, massing, and fenestration pattern are unaltered. To the rear, a gable-roof garage is a contributing resource. As a residence dating to the late-nineteenth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Arthur White House, 721 Ferry Street, c. 1910–1914; One Contributing Building, 1 Noncontributing Building

¹⁷ The extended Davis family owned multiple properties in and around the district. It is not known with certainty if William and Rebecca lived here; the name reflects their ownership.

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The White House is a one-and-one-half-story bungalow facing south at the northwest corner of Ferry Street and North Eighth Street. The house sits on a half-sized parcel that was split in 1915. A rock-face concrete-block foundation and integrated shed roof tie the full-length front porch to the core mass of the building. A tall, side-gabled roof is punctuated by large, centered, recessed gable dormers on the south (front) and north (rear) elevations. Simplified Classical columns and return cornices on the dormer and side gables place the building within the Classical Revival style. Openings include an oval-glazed wood entry door, a large, wood and metal-came window on the front facade, and symmetrical pairs of windows on each face of the upper half-story. A porch railing with square balusters has since been removed.¹⁸

The building shows several alterations from the late twentieth or early twenty-first centuries. The porch foundation has been replaced with smooth concrete block, extending upward to also replace the original porch railing. Porch columns have been replaced or enclosed. Vinyl siding and soffits have covered the original, wood clapboard siding. Windows have been replaced with vinyl, except for the aforementioned wood window. Poured concrete porch steps are not original. A secondary entrance on the west elevation bears a gable-roof enclosure. A heavily altered, detached garage is a noncontributing resource.

As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. Archaeology at this house may also provide important details about the lives of African Americans living in Niles.

William Davis House, 722 Ferry Street; c. 1892; 1 Contributing Building

Rising from a foundation of rock-face, concrete block, the Davis house exhibits the irregular plan and massing that is a hallmark of the Queen Anne style. With generally an asymmetrical, T-plan form, the building features a full-width north-facing front porch wrapping around the northeast corner of the building and accessed via a cutaway corner sheltered by a cross gable oriented at a 45-degree angle to the facade. Above the second floor, the attic story also features an asymmetrical massing with multiple forward-facing gables. Remaining original details include wood sash windows, a few windows with subdivided, diamond-pane units, flared vergeboards and on the foremost gable on the front facade as well as that of the front porch.

The irregular massing continues to include a single-story, gable-roof extension to the rear that is either original or was added in the first decade or so after the building's construction. A small, east elevation (side) porch is sheltered by an integrated shed-roof overhang. Although roofs on both porches remain intact, the deck and posts of each were replaced in the 2000s with dimensional lumber. Vinyl siding on the building has eliminated any additional detail that may have once existed.

¹⁸ Francis H. Warren, *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress* (Detroit: Secretary of Freedmen's Progress Commission, 1915), 200.

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As a residence dating to the late-nineteenth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. Archaeology at this house may also provide important details about the lives of African Americans living in Niles.

Alexander and Minnie Griffin House, 801 Ferry Street; c. 1905; 1 Contributing Building, 1 Noncontributing Building

The Griffin House is a one-and-one-half-story, gable-front house facing south at the northeast corner of Ferry Street and North Eighth Street. Alexander and Eliza Griffin purchased the lot in December of 1904 and constructed the house soon after.¹⁹ A distinctive feature of this house is its curved porch that wraps around the Ferry and Eighth facades, a Queen Anne or Free Classic element. A rock-face concrete block foundation formerly supported simple Classical wood porch supports,²⁰ though these have been replaced with steel. An asymmetrical massing is created by bay windows on the east bay of the south (front) facade and on west facade as well as by a southwest cutaway corner. The upper half story is symmetrical, with paired windows on the front facade. A red brick wall chimney pierces the eaves at the east elevation. This is one of two buildings in the district with a low, poured concrete retaining wall between the building and the street. Alterations include vinyl windows and vinyl siding, although three original wood and zinc- or leaded-glass windows remain. A brick planter integrated with the porch foundation may also be a later alteration. An aluminum pole building, erected between 2012 and 2023, to the east of the house is a noncontributing resource.

Troost Park, North Eighth Street and Ferry Street; 1967; 1 Contributing Site

The park is enclosed by a chain link fence and contains several pieces of wood and steel playground equipment that appear to date from the late 1960s, shortly after the park was established. Prior to Troost Park, the lot was never developed; it has remained an open space throughout the period of significance into the present day.

Ole Ottison House, 810 Ferry Street; c. 1910; 1 Noncontributing Building

This is a two-story, gabled-ell house. A front porch was removed at an unknown date, and fenestration has been altered from the historical arrangement. Window openings have been reduced in size or eliminated altogether, likely due to the introduction of vinyl siding and replacement windows. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Edwin Buckle House, 814 Ferry Street; c. 1910–1914; 2 Noncontributing Buildings

This house is a pre-1914 bungalow, the form of which has been altered with a reconfigured inset porch and a box-bay window on the north (front) facade; it also features new vinyl siding and windows. Prior to the construction of the house, the lot contained a reservoir of the Fourth Street Water Company. A garage associated with this house has been altered with siding and replacement doors and is also a noncontributing resource.

¹⁹ "Affidavit" (1929), Misc liber 36, 375B, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²⁰ Ibid., 165.

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Sycamore StreetJoel and Emily L. Cross House, 701 Sycamore Street; c. 1863; 3 Contributing Buildings

Rising from a parged, brick foundation, this two-story house faces south onto Sycamore Street. Its gable-front, Greek Revival facade is articulated into three vertical bays, with second floor windows directly above first-floor openings. On the westernmost bay, three stone steps with brick wingwalls lead to the front entrance: a recent steel door flanked by four-pane, wood sidelights, set within an entry portico consisting of engaged, flat pilasters topped by a simple wood cornice topped by a triangular pediment.

The footprint of the house has been altered since its original construction. Initially, a single-story ell with open front porch extended to the west; this appears to have been reconfigured around the 1940s, with the ell replaced by a gable-roof sunroom integrated with a rear, gable-roof addition. The porch was eliminated at this time as well. The building is altered with aluminum siding and vinyl windows.

To the north (rear) of the house, facing North Seventh Street, are a single-bay, hip-roof garage (c. 1910) with wood siding, and a two-bay, hip-roof garage (mid-twentieth century) with aluminum siding; both are contributing resources.

As an early residence dating to the mid-nineteenth century, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. There appears to be relatively little disturbance to the property that would impact archaeological deposits. There may be evidence of outbuildings, such as privies, wells, or barns, still present on the parcel. Future development of the property should assess the potential for archaeological deposits.

Dr. Oscar C. and Edna J. Danielson House, 707 Sycamore Street, c. 1940–1942; 1 Contributing Building, 1 Noncontributing Building

The latest residential building to be built in the district, this is a Craftsman-style, gable front building. A subordinate, gable-front mass projects forward from the primary mass of the facade with a square, casement window at its peak. A single-bay, gable-roof porch continues to project forward. Although the house has been clad in vinyl siding, wood, one-over-one sash windows remain. A garage associated with this house has been altered with siding and replacement doors and is a noncontributing resource.

James Marshall House, 713 Sycamore Street; c. 1860; 1 Contributing Building

The Marshall House is a one-and-one-half-story, front-gabled house built in the early 1860s, expanded in phases by 1927 with three distinct single-story additions. The original section of the building has a symmetrical, two-bay facade (concealed behind a newer enclosed porch); its west elevation shows a pair of Greek Revival frieze-band windows in the upper half story. The foundation is not visible due to siding and additions. A single-story, formerly open porch above the south-facing front entrance faced the street. The three additions sit on rock-face, concrete block foundations and include a three-bay, gable-roof ell extending to the east. The house was further expanded to the north (rear) with a shed-roof addition on a smooth-face concrete block

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foundation. A twentieth-century porch, enclosed with rows of aluminum windows, includes an off-center hip roof and wraps around the east corner of the original facade. A brick wall chimney, likely original to the building, is mostly concealed within the enclosed porch. The building is covered in aluminum siding and has vinyl windows. Other than the replacement windows, the building is unchanged since the 1970s.²¹

As an early residence dating to the mid-nineteenth century, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. There appears to be relatively little disturbance to the property that would impact archaeological deposits. There may be evidence of outbuildings, such as a privy, well, or barns, still present on the parcel. Future development of the property should assess the potential for archaeological deposits.

Patrick Tynan House, 723 Sycamore Street; c. 1860; 1 Contributing Building²²

This is a three-bay, central-passage house, originally Greek Revival in style, though the details from that style have been removed.²³ The primary mass of this building is symmetrical, sitting upon a foundation of mostly panel-face concrete block with a few expanses of brick, and is two stories in height with a side gable roof. A triangular entry portico is likely not original to the building. A large, fieldstone chimney at the east wall is potentially an original feature but appears to have been altered with a patchwork of early twentieth-century Romantic stonework and brick. The whimsical chimney includes, embedded in its stone masonry, what appears to be a cannonball.

The building was expanded with four distinct single-story additions by 1914, as depicted on Sanborn maps, but only one of these remains: a narrow, gable-roof, single-story addition to the north (rear). A later twentieth-century addition is a shed-roof, enclosed, rear porch. The entire building is clad in aluminum siding and the windows have been replaced with vinyl, other than the wood sash windows on the enclosed porch.

As an early residence dating to the mid-nineteenth century, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. There appears to be relatively little disturbance to the property that would impact archaeological deposits. There may be evidence of outbuildings, such as a privy, well, or barns, still present on the parcel. Future development of the property should assess the potential for archaeological deposits.

²¹ Crumlish/Sporleider and Associates, "Niles Historical Survey," 1979.

²² The building is seen on an 1868 bird's-eye map (Ruger and Chicago Lithographing Co., "Niles, Berrien County, Michigan Map"). A building at this location is also seen on the Geil 1860 atlas, though this appears to be a prior building, as the orientation is different (*Map of the Counties of Cass, Van Buren, and Berrien, Michigan*).

²³ Crumlish/Sporleider and Associates, "Niles Historical Survey."

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Franklin African Methodist Episcopal Church, 811 Sycamore Street; 1888, moved and expanded 1945; and Parsonage, 809 Sycamore Street; c. 1914–1925; 2 Contributing Buildings

Franklin African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church is located near the southeastern edge of the district, facing south onto the street in the middle of its short block. Built in 1888, its present exterior appearance largely dates from 1945, when it was moved and altered. The building sits a short distance back from the street on a high, brick foundation capped with a stone water table. It is a tall, single story in height, topped with a steeply pitched gable roof. On the front (south) facade of the building, an off-center, gable roof bay projects forward from the primary mass. This projecting bay sits on brick foundation matching that of the rest of the building, but without the water table. Four poured concrete steps, centered on the facade, lead to a glazed, aluminum double doors. Windows on the building are wood: one-over-one on the front section and two-over-two on the side elevations, the latter a visual indication of the building's 1880s construction date.

The 1945 interventions moved the building back from the street and raised it to accommodate a new, high basement. More recently, vinyl siding covered the building's original clapboard. A brick wall chimney, near the southwest corner of the front facade, also likely dates from the 1945 move; it was truncated at the eave line around 2010. A few windows have been replaced with vinyl but most of the original windows remain.

The church facility also includes a parsonage, located immediately to the west on a shared parcel and, like the church, facing south to the street. Built between 1914 and 1927, sitting on a foundation of rock-face concrete block, its symmetrical, gable-front facade rises one and one-half stories in height. A full-length front porch has been replaced, the present porch is of poured concrete; a projecting aluminum awning shelters the front entrance. The building retains asbestos-cement siding on all elevations except the front, which is clad in vinyl.

Schuyler and Emily Finley House, 815 Sycamore Street; c. 1900–1910; 1 Contributing Building, 1 Noncontributing Building

This one-and-one-half-story, gable-front house sits on a rock-face, concrete-block foundation at the northwest corner of Sycamore Street and North Ninth Street, facing south. An original, hip roof porch wraps from the front around to the east side of the building; this was enclosed in the mid-twentieth century. A cross gable on the east side of the porch is likely an original feature. Simulated masonry (often known by the trade names of Formstone or PermaStone) defines the lower half of the enclosed porch on the front facade. Vinyl siding and windows were added later. A mid-twentieth-century, single-bay, front-gable garage is attached by a connecting hyphen. A garage associated with this house has been altered with siding and replacement doors and is a noncontributing building. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

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Calvin and Henrietta Wilson House/Lottie Wilson and Daniel Moss House, 323 North Fifth Street; c. 1900; 1 Contributing Building

The Wilson House is a one-and-one-half-story, T-plan (gable with wing) house facing east onto North Fifth Street, the major north-south thoroughfare that also serves as the west boundary of the Ferry Street Historic District. It is situated at the corner of Fifth Street and Ferry Street.

Decorative treatment is limited to turned porch supports on a west-facing (front) hip-roof and east-facing (rear) shed-roof porches, and wide vergeboards at the eaves. The building sits on a foundation of rock-face concrete block. Both porches, along with a single-story, hip-roof, east (rear) extension appear to be original to the building, as evidenced by a consistency in foundation materials and their depiction on Sanborn maps. Original components include two multi-light glazed doors, opening onto the front porch, wood one-over-one sash windows and first-floor storm windows, and a red brick chimney with copper flashing.

The Wilson House stands out among houses of the district in that it is largely unaltered from the late 1900s or early 1910s. A 1907 Sanborn map depicts the north-facing wing of the building as a single-story; by the time of a 1914 Sanborn map, this had been extended to its present, two-story height. A newer asphalt shingle roof and late-twentieth-century aluminum storm windows on the second floor are the only clearly visible changes since that early period. The original porch steps appear to be missing, replaced with pressure-treated lumber. The house is extensively screened from Fifth Street by dense shrubbery of various evergreen and deciduous species along the foundation and in the front yard.

As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. Archaeology at this house may also provide important details about the lives of African Americans living in Niles.

North Sixth StreetElla A. Tibbets House, 308 North Sixth Street; c. 1887–1900; 1 Contributing Building

This house is a vernacular, single-story, three-bay, building with asbestos-cement siding on the front elevation and vinyl on the sides. A steeply pitched roof creates a tall, windowless story. A hip-roof, front porch extends nearly the entire width of the front facade. The porch is enclosed and features mid-twentieth-century jalousie windows. As a residence dating to the late nineteenth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Fred G. and Emma G. Sauers House, 314 North Sixth Street; c. 1921–1922; 1 Contributing Building, 1 Noncontributing Building

The Sauers House is a one-and-one-half-story bungalow facing east onto the street. A rock-face concrete-block foundation and integrated shed-roof tie the full-length front porch to the core of the building. A tall, side-gabled roof bears a large, centered, recessed shed dormer. The building has been altered with vinyl siding, vinyl windows, and an enclosed front porch with vinyl siding.

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A few original windows remain. The bungalow form suggests a Craftsman style; however, any details specific to this style have since been removed. A three-bay, hip-roof garage is noncontributing due to alterations.

Sarah E. and Charles Rossman House, 317 North Sixth Street; c. 1860–1868; 1 Contributing Building²⁴

The irregular fenestration pattern of this building suggests a braced-frame construction, central passage house or I-house that was later altered and expanded. On a foundation of parged brick with some areas of concrete block, the symmetrical (other than the window openings), five-bay facade is topped with a side-gable roof. By 1899 a single-story rear addition was added; enlarged with a second full story, topped with a tall cross gable, by 1914. A single-story porch, occupying about one-third of the facade, originally existed on the building; this was eliminated and replaced with a small, projecting pediment, likely in the mid-twentieth century. Simple wood trim and shutters and a north-elevation wall chimney were also removed. By 1979 the house had reached its current form, but with asbestos siding. Vinyl siding and vinyl windows were added later. Some wood sash windows remain on the side elevation.

As an early residence dating to the mid-nineteenth century, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance. There appears to be relatively little disturbance to the property that would impact archaeological deposits. There may be evidence of outbuildings, such as privy, well, or barns, still present on the parcel. Future development of the property should assess the potential for archaeological deposits.

Second Baptist Church Site, 321 North Sixth Street; 1 Noncontributing Site

This lot, now empty, was the location of the Second Baptist Church (now Mount Calvary Baptist Church at 601 Ferry Street), a log building constructed in 1849. No images or more detailed descriptions of the building survive.²⁵ Later, it contained a four-bay, single-story, side-gabled house appearing in 1860 and 1873 atlases, demolished sometime after being photographed in a 1979 survey. It was a four-bay, single-story, side-gabled house with a fenestrated attic, noteworthy in that its front porch directly touched the sidewalk. In a 1979 survey photo, its details are largely hidden behind a circa 1900–1907, full-length front porch, later modified with Craftsman-era battered columns.

²⁴ The west-facing (front) and south-side elevations of the building are clearly visible in an 1899 photo of Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, in which the building's current, offset window pattern can be seen; see Fort St. Joseph Historical Association, *Early Niles Photos* (Niles, MI: Fort St. Joseph Historical Association, 1988). It is also depicted in the 1868 Ruger bird's-eye drawing but without the rear addition shown in the 1899 photo.

²⁵ A map of the Ferry Street area from 1860 shows three buildings on the lot (*Map of the Counties of Cass, Van Buren, and Berrien, Michigan*). In 1873, the year the new church was likely completed, only the two southernmost buildings on the old southeastern corner lot remained; see Lake, *Atlas of Berrien Co., Michigan*, 54–55.

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While an empty lot now, this property may contain archaeological deposits related to the early nineteenth century church building and subsequent mid-nineteenth century residence. Future development of the property should assess the potential for archaeological deposits.

Arthur C. and Rosa E. Lambert House, 410 North Sixth Street; c. 1929–1931; 2 Contributing Buildings

Concrete blocks—panel-face at the foundation and rock-face above—comprise the first floor of this bungalow. Above, gable ends and a shed roof dormer are clad in aluminum. An enclosed porch, with vinyl siding and vinyl windows, appears to date from the late twentieth or early twenty-first century. Vinyl windows have also been added. A single-bay, gable-roof garage, built at the same time as the house, is also contributing. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

North Seventh StreetCleveland D. Hipshier House (Ferry Street Resource Center), 317 North Seventh Street; c. 1914 or earlier; 1 Contributing Building

This Prairie-style, foursquare house is centrally located within the district, facing west onto Seventh Street, across from Ferry Street School to the east and immediately to the south of the John W. Moore Lodge (323 North Seventh Street). It sits on a cement-parged foundation. A full-length front porch includes poured concrete bases for each of its three, evenly spaced, battered columns with square capitals, an original wood balustrade, and a wide frieze board beneath a hip roof. Two bays of fenestration include, on the first floor of the facade, a recent, steel panel door on the south bay, and a large wood window with metal-came upper sash on the north.

The building is clad in asphalt siding dating from the mid-twentieth century. Original wood one-over-one sash windows and other details, including wood window frames and soffits, remain. The building terminates in a hip roof with a forward-facing, hip-roof dormer fenestrated with paired casement windows.

To the rear of the building, a single-story section extends to the east with a shed-roof porch oriented to face south. Its frieze-band attic windows, a Greek Revival element, suggest that this rear section may date from the 1860s or 1870s. As a residence dating to the late nineteenth to early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church/John W. Moore Lodge No. 42 and Miriam Chapter No. 56), 323 North Seventh Street; 1922; 1 Contributing Building, 1 Contributing Object

At the southeast corner of Ferry Street and North Seventh Street, the John W. Moore Lodge sits across the street from the Ferry Street School to the east, facing west towards Seventh Street and the school building. With walls of stretcher-bond, red brick veneer, this gable-front hall church sits on a high, fenestrated basement. Poured concrete steps, descending in both directions

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perpendicular to the facade and behind a stepped wingwall, were added in 1934.²⁶ A gable-roofed, projecting entrance bay shelters a Gothic-arched entry. Wood windows include basement windows, tall, two-over-two sash windows on the west (front) facade and sides of the building, a Gothic window above the front entrance, and a circular window centered in the front gable (other window configurations are not visible as the openings were boarded after the building became vacant in the 1990s). A gable roof is topped by a steeple consisting of a short tower, a louvered belfry, and a short, pyramidal spire. A single-story, shingled, shed-roof addition runs the length of the east (rear) elevation.

Alterations include the removal of the cross from atop the steeple, rebuilding of a front wingwall, formerly brick, in concrete block, and vinyl-clad soffits. Reflecting the building's changed use from a church to a Masonic lodge, an internally illuminated blade sign once projected from the northwest corner but has since been removed; conduit and mounting brackets remain. A cornerstone reads "A.D. 1922" with additional words having been cut away; they likely pertained to Saint Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, the original occupant. By 1996 the building was no longer regularly used, and many windows were boarded.

An additional contributing resource is a small stone marker (1960) consisting of a boulder to the south of the building that formerly held a bronze plaque commemorating the beginnings of Black Masonry in Niles in 1859; this plaque is now mounted on a larger, adjacent, cut stone marker incised with the words "JOHN W. MOORE LODGE #42" and "MIRIAM CHAPTER #56" and Masonic emblems. Together, these elements are classified as one contributing object.

An older, Gothic Revival house at the location was moved directly to the east to make way for the construction of the 1922 building. That building still stands at 710 Ferry Street and is described separately.

North Eighth StreetJanie L. Randall House, 315 North Eighth; c. 1926–1927; 1 Noncontributing Building

This is the only remaining building of what were once a row of three, similar, single-story, gable front houses on the east side of North Eighth Street. The building was expanded at an unknown date with the creation of a second, unfenestrated, full story. Vinyl cladding and windows have obscured any remaining features of the historic building beneath.

Niles Pattern Works, 321 North Eighth Street; c. 1933–1935; 2 Contributing Buildings

This small-scale, three-bay, side-gabled building sits on a foundation of rock-face concrete block. Paired, mullioned windows retain their original, simplified wood surrounds. A projecting, gable-roof, bracketed entry pediment and visible rafter ends are Craftsman details. A wall chimney on the south elevation has been truncated; vinyl windows are the only other noticeable alteration. A single-bay garage, constructed in the 1930s with wood siding and a segmented steel door, is a contributing building.

²⁶ "Strong Growth Is Shown by Lutheran Faith in 16 Years," *Niles Daily Star*, March 24, 1936.

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Maud E. Huss House, 409 North Eighth Street, c. 1920; 1 Contributing Building

This is a foursquare house, altered in the 1960s or 1970s with aluminum siding on the first story and shingles on the second. The house faces west toward Eighth Street. A brick porch with a gabled aluminum overhang is located at the northwest corner and provides shelter at the main entry. An off-center picture window composed of a single-pane square window flanked by narrow one-over-one windows is located on the west elevation of the first story. The second story has two six-over-six windows located at about the one-third and two-thirds points of the elevation. All windows on the west elevation are flanked by louvered shutters. The north elevation has little ornamentation. The first story of the north elevation contains only one small window near the northeast corner. The second story contains two six-over-six windows, one close to the northwest corner and one close to the northeast corner. A shed-style, one-car garage is attached to the south elevation of the house. It is clad in the same horizontal siding as the first story of the house. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Theodore and Bertha Williams House, 410 North Eighth Street; 1914 or 1915; 1 Contributing Building; 1 Noncontributing building

On a smooth concrete-block foundation, the one-and-one-half story Williams House is oriented with its gable end facing east towards the street. A hip-roof, full-width front porch features a Classical cornice in wood, the only remaining original architectural detail remaining on the building, as the house has been clad with vinyl siding on its core mass and aluminum siding on its porch. An uncommon feature are the shed-roof wall dormers on the north and south elevations, lighting the upper half-story. A heavily altered shed roof garage is a noncontributing resource. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

North Ninth StreetPercy and Doris Finley Gay House, 310 North Ninth Street; c. 1914; 1 Contributing Building

The Gay House is a relatively small-scale, single story, three-bay, side-gable house sitting on a foundation of rock-face concrete block. The symmetrical facade features a shed-roof porch over its entrance bay. The front porch, of dimensional lumber with aluminum railings on a poured concrete foundation, is a more recent replacement of an original porch with the same footprint. A small, original, shed-roof porch on the rear has been enclosed, and subsequently, expanded to the south around 2020. The building has been altered with vinyl siding and windows. As a residence dating to the early twentieth century with little modern development, there is the potential for related archaeological deposits dating to the period of significance.

Integrity

A relatively small number of buildings in the district have been noticeably altered from the late twentieth century to the present day. When alterations are substantial enough to result in a loss of integrity, these comprise the four principal noncontributing buildings in the district (the others

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are garages and outbuildings). Far more common, however, are alterations made by homeowners reflecting the development of the neighborhood during the period of significance, such as aluminum siding, enclosed porches, small-scale side or rear additions, and the removal of original, decorative architectural elements.

For the district as a whole, integrity of design remains intact, and continues to exemplify the Social History themes for which the district is significant. Integrity of feeling and association is strongly supported by the several significant social or institutional buildings within the district, maintained in a manner reflecting their visual qualities and associations from the period of significance. Integrity of setting and location remain fully intact. One visually striking change to the district occurred in 2023 when extensive fire damage occurred at the Ferry Street School. Fire destroyed one wall of a 1903 addition and caused the collapse of the roof of the entire building. The damaged areas and compromised walls were subsequently demolished, leaving a deliberately stabilized ruin. The Ferry Street School site contributes to the significance of the district and retains integrity of feeling and historic association; historic materials and architectural details also remain present and clearly visible on the former facade and continue to evoke the important educational and social functions and events that occurred at the school.

In places where above-ground resources lack integrity, archaeological deposits that date from the period of significance may be present.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Social History

Period of Significance

1867-1971

Significant Dates

1867
1888
1945
1951
1959
1971

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Ferry Street Historic District is significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Ethnic History: Black and Social History at the local level of significance. Established in the 1840s, the historic district is significant as the long-time social center of the African American community in Niles. Niles had a relatively large African American population among Michigan cities, even before the Great Migration drew large numbers of Black migrants northward, and the district was a nexus even to those not living in the neighborhood.

After a long history of American Indian, French, and British habitation, in the early 1820s American settlers began to clear land for agricultural use. These pioneers included African Americans who formed a community in the Ferry Street area by 1848, when trustees of the Second Baptist Church purchased land in the district. Related resources include the site of the Ferry Street School (620 Ferry Street, built in 1867, damaged by fire and largely demolished in 2023), which was a rare example of a segregated, one-room school building in Michigan built by and for African Americans.²⁷ Two church buildings, the Franklin African Methodist Episcopal Church (811 Sycamore Street, built in 1888) and Mount Calvary Baptist Church (601 Ferry Street, built in 1951 to replace the 1873 Second Baptist Church) served as anchors of the African American community in Niles and beyond. The neighborhood was also home to prominent African American families in the city.

The significance of the Ferry Street neighborhood extends into the period of housing segregation (1920–1970). The community and its churches continued to serve as an important center for African Americans in Niles as residents confronted segregated institutions on into the 1960s. The first Prince Hall lodge in Michigan, established in Niles in 1857, moved to the district in 1959 (323 North Seventh Street, built in 1922). The period of significance begins with the 1867 construction date of the Ferry Street School and concludes in 1971, with a large-scale expansion of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church building.

²⁷ A database of one-room schoolhouses in Michigan notes only the Ferry Street School as one that was constructed as a segregated school for African American children ("Database of Michigan Schoolhouses," The Michigan One Room Schoolhouse Association, 2023, <https://www.miorsa.org/database>). Another one-room schoolhouse that was built for African Americans, however, is still extant in Ypsilanti; see Matthew Siegfried, "First Ward School," *South Adams Street @ 1900*, June, 2013, <https://southadamstreet1900.wordpress.com/first-ward-school/>.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)**Precolonial and Colonial History of Southwest Michigan**

The area that became the city of Niles has been inhabited for millennia, with indigenous peoples living in and passing through the region. Potawatomi people inhabited the region when Europeans first visited the area. Potawatomi oral traditions differ on their origin: some histories tell that they were always located in the area,²⁸ and other state that they migrated from the Atlantic seaboard with the Ojibwe and Odawa (together, the three related cultural groups are known as the Anishinaabe people).²⁹ Potawatomi people may have moved to the region from the Straits of Mackinac after separating from Ojibwe and Odawa groups, possibly between 1400 and 1600 CE.³⁰ By the early seventeenth century many Potawatomi had left for the Green Bay area of Wisconsin, and in the early 1680s Miami people moved into southwestern Michigan and what is now the Niles area.

In 1691, the French government established what became known as Fort Saint Joseph³¹ near what the southern boundary of present-day Niles along the Saint-Joseph River.³² Located near a strategic portage linking the Great Lakes Basin and the Mississippi watershed, the settlement served as trading post, military center, and mission.³³ By 1695, Potawatomi groups returned to

²⁸ "Neshnabé Bmadzéwen," Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, <https://www.pokagonband-nsn.gov/our-culture/>.

²⁹ Ibid.; and John Low, "Keepers of the Fire: The Pokagon Potawatomi Nation" (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indian Nation and the Museum at Southwestern Michigan College, 2006),

<https://www.kankakeevalleyhistoricalsociety.org/Kankakee%20River%20History/Books%20and%20papers/Pokagon%20history.pdf>.

³⁰ Michael S. Nassaney, William M. Cremin, and Lisamarie Malischke, "Native American-French Interactions in Eighteenth-Century Southwest Michigan: The View from Fort St. Joseph," in *Contested Territories Native Americans and Non-Natives in the Lower Great Lakes, 1700-1850*, ed. Charles Beatty Medina and Melissa Rinehart (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 58-59.

³¹ The location was initially called "among the Miamis," then named after Saint Joseph, patron saint of New France. See José António Brandão and Michael S. Nassaney, "The Historical and Cultural Context of Fort St. Joseph," in *Fort St. Joseph Revealed: The Historical Archaeology of a Fur Trading Post*, ed. Michael S. Nassaney (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2019), 23.

³² The fort's exact location and description is often incorrectly described in even modern sources (ibid., 26-28). The Saint Joseph River was called the River of the Miamis by early French Settlers.

³³ Ibid., 23-24.

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the area.³⁴ French traders lived there alongside Potawatomi, Miami, and Illinois Kaskaskias people.³⁵

After the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), France ceded its territory east of the Mississippi River to Great Britain. Some French and American Indian people remained, and the area that is now Niles continued as a meeting place for traders. In 1781 the area was raided and occupied for a day by a force mostly consisting of Spanish and French militia, and Native allies (possibly Sioux, Odawa, and Potawatomi) in the name of Spain.³⁶ After the American Revolution, the territory Britain ceded to the United States included the area that became Michigan in the Treaty of Paris of 1783. This is the reason Niles was given the moniker of the City of Four Flags.³⁷

African Americans in the Colonial Era and Early United States Settlement

During French and British rule, African Americans lived in the territory that became Michigan. Some were held by French forces and their American Indian allies, captured in raids on the eastern colonies, and later by British military officers and traders.³⁸ In 1793 the United States established the Territory Northwest of the River Ohio (more commonly known as the Northwest Territory), which included all of Michigan, along with Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and parts of Minnesota. In 1796, about three hundred African Americans lived in Detroit.³⁹ It is not known if any free or enslaved African Americans lived in the area around Fort Saint Joseph. While records are sparse, most residents of the area were described as French, American Indian, British, or a mix of those, as inter-cultural marriages were frequent during French rule.⁴⁰

The Michigan Territory, established in 1805, included the Lower Peninsula and just the eastern portion of the Upper Peninsula, and had 4,762 residents by 1810 (American Indians were not counted by any census).⁴¹ The number of free African Americans in the territory is not wholly known, though in 1810 forty-three free Black people lived in Detroit, along with four who were enslaved.⁴² Slavery in the territory was only completely abolished in Michigan when a constitutional convention met in 1835, two years before Michigan's statehood. At that time there

³⁴ Ibid., 16; Nassaney, Cremin, and Malischke, "The View from Fort St. Joseph," 59–60.

³⁵ Brandão and Nassaney, "Fort St. Joseph," 17 and 30–34.

³⁶ Ibid., 26; and Stanley M. Max, "A Re-Evaluation of the Spanish Raid on Fort St. Joseph, Michigan, in 1781," *The Great Lakes Review* 11, no. 1 (1985): 13.

³⁷ For more on the early history of the area surrounding Niles, see Vinewood Preservation Planning, "Ferry Street Historic District Survey Report."

³⁸ Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straights* (New York: The New Press, 2017), 17–18.

³⁹ David M. Katzman, "Black Slavery in Michigan," *American Studies* 11, no. 2 (1970): 56 and 61.

⁴⁰ Brandão and Nassaney, "Fort St. Joseph," 24 and 33–34.

⁴¹ Richard L. Forstall, *Population of States and Counties of the United States: 1790–1990* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 81.

⁴² Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, 210. For more on free African Americans in the Northwest Territory in general, see Reginald R. Larrie, *Makin' Free: African-Americans in the Northwest Territory* (Detroit: B. Ethridge Books, 1981).

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were two or three individuals known to be still enslaved.⁴³ When Michigan became a state in 1837, 379 African Americans resided there.⁴⁴

Anishinaabe Removal from Southwest Michigan

Potawatomi people continued to live in significant numbers in the Niles area well into the 1830s before being forcibly removed by United States military forces. As White settlement of the area increased, the federal government pursued a policy of Indian Removal, pushing the Tribal nations to cede land and move west.⁴⁵ Anishinaabe groups in southwest Michigan, namely the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi tribes, agreed to the Treaty of Chicago in 1821, which ceded land east of the Saint Joseph River, including what was to become the eastern part of Niles. In 1828 the Carey Mission Treaty ceded much of the land west of the Saint Joseph River, all the way to Lake Michigan.⁴⁶

An area west of the river from Niles and north just past the present-day city of Buchanan, then south to the Indiana border, remained under Potawatomi control. Chief Topinabee had a village southwest of Niles, south of Topinabee Lake,⁴⁷ while Chief Weesaw lived in a village either just west or northwest of the new town. Another Potawatomi settlement, known as Moccasin village, was located along the river near Buchanan.⁴⁸ In 1833 that final portion of land was ceded by the Potawatomi in the second Treaty of Chicago.⁴⁹ Some refused to leave, however, and in the early 1840s United States troops forced many of those remaining to move west.⁵⁰ After 1843 only Leopold Pokagon's Band (in Silver Lake Township in Cass County) and a few who severed tribal ties to become United States citizens remained in the area.⁵¹ Potawatomi still live in the region, including the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi in nearby Dowagiac.

⁴³ Katzman, "Black Slavery in Michigan," 61-62; and Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, 228.

⁴⁴ Robert Hayden, "History of the Negro in Michigan," 1936-1938, 12-13.

⁴⁵ Charles E. Cleland, *Rites of Conquest: The History and Culture of Michigan's Native Americans* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 198-201.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 208. The land to the south in Indiana from Lake Michigan to Ohio had been ceded in 1826.

⁴⁷ For more on Topinabee, including problematic narrations of his life in nineteenth and early twentieth century histories, see John Low, "Chief Topinabee: Using Tribal Memories to Better Understand American (Indian) History—Nwi Yathmomen—We Will Tell Our Story," *Ethnohistory* 70, no. 4 (2023): 421-45.

⁴⁸ Ralph Ballard, *Tales of Early Niles* (Niles, MI: R. Ballard, 1948), 57-58; and Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 15-16.

⁴⁹ Willis F. Dunbar and George S. May, *Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 146-52. For a map of the cessions, see *ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁰ Cleland, *Rites of Conquest*, 223; and Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 16.

⁵¹ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 16-17. For more on Anishinaabe Removal from Southwest Michigan see Vinewood Preservation Planning, "Ferry Street Historic District Survey Report."

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The Founding of Niles

Reverend Isaac McCoy, a Baptist missionary, established the Carey Mission to the west of the current city limits, in 1822.⁵² White settlers arrived in 1823, choosing the area in part due to the proximity to the Carey Mission.⁵³ The natural communities in the Niles area included oak openings, large areas of wooded land with little undergrowth, and prairies. The combination of easily cleared land with fertile soil, along with access to wood for building, made these ecosystems attractive to settlers.⁵⁴ The town was originally called Pogwatigue and located at a ford in the Saint Joseph River used by American Indians, very near where the present-day Main Street bridge stands.⁵⁵ Early settlers included Obed P. Lacey, Samuel Walling, and William Justus, who together in 1829 platted the village and changed the name to Niles. It was named after Hezekiah Niles, the editor of the *Niles' Weekly Register* newspaper in Baltimore who used the paper to call for slavery's abolition.⁵⁶

Niles and the surrounding communities grew rapidly. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 and the public land survey, begun in 1827, spurred the arrival of White settlers.⁵⁷ A road connecting Chicago to Detroit was started in 1825 and completed in 1837.⁵⁸ New roads often followed trails used by Native Americans, including much of the road connecting Detroit and Chicago that largely followed the Sauk Trail that ran from Detroit to Indiana.⁵⁹ The Michigan Central Railroad line reached Niles from Detroit in 1848, then continued on to Chicago in 1852.⁶⁰ Berrien County was formed in 1831, split off from a larger Cass County, and in 1832 it was divided into Berrien, Niles, and Saint Joseph Townships.⁶¹ The settlement at Niles was formally incorporated as a village in 1835, and as a city in 1859.⁶²

⁵² Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 17-18; and Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 193-95. McCoy was a proponent of Potawatomi removal, hoping to establish a religious colony in the west (Cleland, *Rites of Conquest*, 221-22).

⁵³ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 22; Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 168; and Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 153-55.

⁵⁴ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 1-5; and Ballard, *Tales of Early Niles*, 76.

⁵⁵ Ballard, *Tales of Early Niles*, 76.

⁵⁶ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 141-42; Walter Romig, *Michigan Place Names: The History of the Founding and Naming of More than Five Thousand Past and Present Michigan Communities* (1973; repr., Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 389-99; and D. Wayne Stiles and Nancy Watts-Stiles, *Niles, Michigan: A Pictorial History* (Saint Louis: G. Bradley, 1991), 31.

⁵⁷ Brandão and Nassaney, "Fort St. Joseph," 26.

⁵⁸ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 37; and Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 231.

⁵⁹ Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 48.

⁶⁰ Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 266-67, and 371. For a comprehensive look at railroads in Niles, see William Taylor, *An American Colossus: A Small Town, a River and a Railroad Yard* (Niles, MI: Niles Railroad Historical Association, 1995).

⁶¹ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 24-25.

⁶² Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 161; and Romig, *Michigan Place Names*, 399.

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John Marks, First African American in Niles

John Marks was the first African American recorded to live in Niles, having moved there in 1827 or 1828.⁶³ He was a tanner, and lived about a half mile south of Main Street on the right bank of the Saint Joseph River. In the spring of 1830, he began to work with Morgan Wilson, another tanner who had moved to Niles the previous year and lived on the riverbank just below Main Street. Together they built a tannery next to where Marks lived, consisting of ten or twelve vats. They worked together for at least six to eight years, and after Wilson retired Marks continued his business to at least 1841.⁶⁴ Marks later left Niles for Valparaiso, Indiana.⁶⁵ Marks and Wilson's business is notable as a joint venture between a Black and a White man, though no additional details as to their relationship are described. Nothing else is known about Marks, though he was probably a free man before coming to Niles.⁶⁶

Abolitionists and Black Communities in Southwest Michigan

African Americans created new communities as they moved to Niles and nearby areas as migration to Michigan increased beginning in the 1830s.⁶⁷ Abolitionist groups could aid in the formation of these communities. In 1832, Elizabeth Chandler, aided by Laura Smith Haviland and others, formed the Logan Anti-Slavery Society, the first such society in Michigan (it was located in Adrian, originally called Logan). Other groups followed, with the Michigan Anti-Slavery Society being formed in Ann Arbor in 1836.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 155. The description of John Marks is only told in relation to Morgan Wilson's biography. When Wilson moved to Niles in 1829, Marks had already lived there for "a year or two." Wilson is also noted by Coolidge, but he makes no mention of Marks (*History of Berrien County*, 142).

⁶⁴ Ellis states that Marks left after six or eight years, and that Wilson then retired in 1843 (Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 142). This is likely incorrect, however, as Marks continued to advertise his tannery in Niles until at least 1841, noting that he occupies the "old tannery of Morgan Wilson," implying that after Wilson retired Marks continued the business ("Hides and Tanning," *Niles Intelligencer*, March 10, 1841, 3).

⁶⁵ Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 142.

⁶⁶ In 1827 the Michigan Territorial Legislative Council passed a law "to regulate Blacks and Mulattoes, and to Punish the Kidnappers of such Persons." Black people entering Michigan Territory had to show certification that they were in fact free and register with a county clerk. See Arthur Raymond Kooker, "The Antislavery Movement in Michigan, 1796-1840: A Study in Humanitarianism on an American Frontier" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1941), 55-69; and Carole E. Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010), 27. These requirements were not, however, universally adhered to (Hayden, "History of the Negro in Michigan," 12-13).

⁶⁷ Mull, *Underground Railroad*, 18-19. For a more thorough investigation of abolitionists and the Underground Railroad in Niles and Southwest Michigan, see Vinewood Preservation Planning, "Ferry Street Historic District Survey Report."

⁶⁸ Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 303. For more on anti-slavery societies in Michigan, see Mull, *Underground Railroad*, chap. 2.

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The Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers, were an important part of the abolitionist movement and settled in significant numbers in southern Michigan.⁶⁹ A large concentration established themselves in Cass County, just east of Berrien County where the city of Niles is located. The Quakers' presence provided a base of support for newcomers.⁷⁰ Abolitionist Quakers also moved to Niles: one example were members of the Bonine family, who had helped establish a community of freedom seekers on their Cass County land.⁷¹ Elsewhere in Berrien County White emigrants with anti-slavery sentiments formed communities, including a group of Mennonites who emigrated to Bertrand Township just south of Niles in 1844.⁷²

Calvin Township in Cass County became an important destination for African Americans, with the first arriving in 1836.⁷³ By the 1840s many African Americans who settled there were free people who had emigrated north, some due to Black Codes, laws designed to restrict the freedom of African Americans, imposed in places like North Carolina.⁷⁴ African Americans established their own institutions: Chain Lake Baptist Church in Calvin Township was perhaps the earliest, founded in 1838.⁷⁵ Other churches, such as Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and Bethel AME, followed.

Abolitionists and the Underground Railroad in Niles

Freedom-seeking African Americans did stay and live in southern Michigan, but many continued on to Canada supported by the Underground Railroad. The origins of the Underground Railroad are unknown, but by the nineteenth century Black and White abolitionists in Michigan, including anti-slavery societies and religious groups like the Quakers, developed networks to give freedom seekers from the South safe passage and protection along their journey.⁷⁶ African American communities throughout southern Michigan played key roles in the process of moving people

⁶⁹ George K. Hesslink, *Black Neighbors: Negroes in a Northern Rural Community*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), 32-33; and Mull, *Underground Railroad*, 21. In the late eighteenth century Quakers began to develop abolitionist beliefs.

⁷⁰ Lewis Walker, Benjamin Wilson, and Linwood H. Cousins, *African Americans in Michigan* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 47-49.

⁷¹ One of the family, Evan J. Bonine, became mayor of Niles in 1868 and again in 1888. See Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 700-701; Hesslink, *Black Neighbors*, 43; Mathews, *History of Cass County*, 250-51; and Helen Hibberd Windle, *The Underground Railroad in Northern Indiana, Based on Personal Narratives & Famous Incidents* (South Bend, 1939), 14.

⁷² Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 210-11.

⁷³ Hesslink, *Black Neighbors*, 40-46.

⁷⁴ Alfred Mathews, *History of Cass County* (Chicago: Waterman, Watkins, and Co., 1882), 386-87; Hesslink, *Black Neighbors*, 37-42; Walker, Wilson, and Cousins, *African Americans in Michigan*, 29; and Benjamin C. Wilson, *The Rural Black Heritage between Chicago and Detroit, 1850-1929* (Kalamazoo: New Issues Press, 1985), 25.

⁷⁵ Wilson, *Rural Black Heritage*, 93-95.

⁷⁶ Mull, *Underground Railroad*, 1-3.

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from more southerly states and on to Canada.⁷⁷ American Indians, including Potawatomi, also provided aid through their territory.⁷⁸

There were several established routes that ran through Indiana and Illinois to southwest Michigan. Routes were not as straightforward as their depiction as lines on a map: the Underground Railroad was a network of people who helped freedom seekers move from one location to another when it was safe.⁷⁹ The Niles Line mostly helped those coming up from Indiana to reach Cass County to the west.⁸⁰ Agents led freedom seekers from Niles to the Quaker communities in Calvin Township in Cass County and then onto Schoolcraft, Kalamazoo, and Battle Creek where the line diverged, with final stops being Detroit or Port Huron before crossing over to Canada.⁸¹

Abolitionists and Underground Railroad supporters began organizing in Niles soon after its foundation. In October 1836, an anti-slavery society was formed with twenty-five members at the First Presbyterian Church of Niles, established in 1834.⁸² In 1845, Jane Van Vliet, an abolitionist living in Niles, briefly published the *Star of Freedom*, an abolitionist newspaper.⁸³ Although some Underground Railroad organizers lived in the city and served as an important

⁷⁷ Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, "Introduction," in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, ed. Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, Great Lakes Books (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 11-12. For a modern historiographical overview of the Underground Railroad, see Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *The Geography of Resistance: Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 1-15. The importance of Black communities and free African Americans in the Underground Railroad has until recently been little studied. See for example the early and popular work Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Macmillan, 1898). For an influential reexamination, see Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*, 2nd ed. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁷⁸ Tiya Miles, "Native Americans and the Underground Railroad," National Park Service, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/native-americans-and-the-underground-railroad.htm>.

⁷⁹ Mull, *Underground Railroad*, 58-59.

⁸⁰ Nathan Macy Thomas to A. S. Dyckman, "Letter Detailing Operation of the Underground Railroad," 1882, 4-5, Arthur R. Kooker Papers, 1850-1882, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor.

⁸¹ Walker, Wilson, and Cousins, *African Americans in Michigan*, 8-9.

⁸² Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 52; Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 162; and American Anti-Slavery Society, *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society by the Executive Committee* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1837), 140. Although founded by members of the First Presbyterian Church, we did not find any discussion of the Society in local church histories (Niles, Churches, First Presbyterian Church, Niles District Library).

⁸³ Debra Haight, "Magical Tour: Niles Students Learn History of Their City," *The Herald-Palladium*, June 13, 2000, https://www.heraldpalladium.com/magical-tour-niles-students-learn-history-of-their-city/article_087348d5-a904-5858-8073-d978d499c02f.html.

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link to surrounding communities, freedom seekers often avoided staying in the denser areas of Niles itself due to pro-slavery sentiment in the city.⁸⁴

Underground Railroad agents in Niles included Ebenezer McIlvain, a judge known for ruling in a prominent case against a group of slave hunters from Kentucky.⁸⁵ McIlvain acted as the first station agent in Michigan's Underground Railroad, in contact with the network that included Dr. Nathan M. Thomas, an operator who lived in Schoolcraft and helped those arriving from Cass County.⁸⁶ W. S. Elliot, the first secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society in Niles,⁸⁷ helped to convey people to McIlvain's safe house.⁸⁸ Lorenzo P. Alexander, a carpenter and joiner based in Buchanan, was another agent: Elliot would bring people from Alexander's care over to the Quaker settlements in Cass County.⁸⁹ Elliot wrote to Thomas in 1841 about aiding a freedom seeker in a postscript of one of his letters: "the fugitive spoken of in the *Signal of Liberty*'s first inst[allment] passed through my hands. I carried him 20 miles on his way to the grateful shadow of queen Victoria's throne."⁹⁰ (*The Signal of Liberty* was an abolitionist newspaper published in Ann Arbor.)

There were also other people in Niles that were either sympathetic to the cause or helped directly, such as John Orr and William P. Reese, who helped free Samuel Bowles, an African American that had been kidnapped (see below on Bowles' case). Amable LaPierre, another Underground Railroad supporter from Niles, helped buy transportation for people seeking to move to Canada.⁹¹ Pasquel LaRue Finley and his wife Sarah, who purchased land to the northeast of Niles in 1850, were also likely part of the network.⁹² (Sarah was African American, while Pasquel has been described as both Black and White by differing sources but was called "colored" and "mulatto" by United States Census enumerators.⁹³) Family oral history recounts

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Rural Black Heritage*, 14n14.

⁸⁵ Known as the Kentucky Raid of 1847, a group of slave hunters kidnapped nine people in nearby Cass County; McIlvain let the freedom-seekers free and abolitionists helped them escape to Canada. For a detailed account, see Mull, *Underground Railroad*, 112-15.

⁸⁶ Thomas to Dyckman, "Operation of the Underground Railroad," 1882, 5-6.

⁸⁷ American Anti-Slavery Society, *Fourth Annual Report*, 140.

⁸⁸ Mull, *Underground Railroad*, 63.

⁸⁹ Mathews, *History of Cass County*, 109-10.

⁹⁰ Nathan Macy Thomas, "Nathan M. Thomas Papers, 1818-1889" (Mixed Material, 1889), correspondence part 5, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor.

⁹¹ Claire Harvey, "The South Bend Fugitive Slave Case: How Varying Attitudes Towards Slavery Affected the Outcome," *Hanover Historical Review* 12 (2017), <https://history.hanover.edu/hhr/17/HHR2017-harvey.html>; and Esse Bissell Dakin, "The Underground Railroad," *South Bend Daily Tribune*, April 25, 1899.

⁹² Bruce Von Deylen, "Niles Was Stop on the Underground Railroad," *Niles Daily Star*, July 3, 1987, B2-8; and Jully Keys, "Black Family Here 131 Years," *Niles Daily Star*, March 25, 1981.

⁹³ United States census records from 1840 when Pasquel lived in Ohio list him as "colored," while 1850 records from when he lived in Cass County, Michigan, as "mulatto" ("United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan," 1840, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>; and "United States Census, Berrien County, Michigan," 1850, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>). Twentieth-century newspaper articles variously describe him as Black

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that Pasquel and Sarah settled in the area after aiding freedom seekers in Ohio, and continued to do so in their new home. Finally, John Wesley Harrison, founder of the Prince Hall Masonic lodge in Niles in 1857, the first in Michigan (see discussion below), was “an engineer” of the Underground Railroad.⁹⁴

Support for abolition was strong enough in Niles that in 1848 an Emancipation Day event was held there.⁹⁵ In the 1830s, African American leaders in the anti-slavery movement instituted a public celebration known as Emancipation Day (also known as Liberty Day). Conceived to publicly call attention to the cause of freedom for Black people, it celebrated the emancipation of enslaved people in the West Indies by Denmark and Great Britain in July 1834 following a rebellion.⁹⁶ Yet abolitionist sentiment was not universal in Niles. A resident, Louise Reddick, wrote a letter describing life in early Niles that she witnessed a mob that attempted to find an enslaved person being sheltered by a Dr. Meade.⁹⁷

African American Settlement Patterns in Niles

Black Southern migrants moved to Niles as the city grew and industrialized.⁹⁸ Some African Americans moved to the area from the South soon after the Civil War, and the Black population of the city increased from 128 in 1860 to 164 in 1870.⁹⁹ African Americans did not live only within the Ferry Street neighborhood, nor were African Americans its sole inhabitants. The area was not strictly segregated, as segregation was a rarity in pre-Great-Migration neighborhoods in

or White. Alice Finley Brown, who researched her family's history, noted that his heritage was obscure, but that it was possible that Pasquel's father was a landowner of French descent and that his mother was either an enslaved Black woman or a White woman ("Finley Family Files" [1980], Niles History Center, Niles, MI). Harold Finley, another descendant, also noted the uncertainty of Pasquel's heritage Harold Finley, Niles History Center: Profiles and Portraits Interviews, interview by Molly Watson, December 9, 2016. Regardless, Pasquel and Sarah's descendants were considered as Black and became a prominent local family.

⁹⁴ John W. Harrison, Obituary, *Berrien County Record*, June 16, 1892, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/173821437/john-wesley-harrison#view-photo=245956014>.

⁹⁵ Patrick Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 64.

⁹⁶ William B. Gravely, "The Dialectic of Double-Consciousness in Black American Freedom Celebrations, 1808–1863," *The Journal of Negro History* 67, no. 4 (1982): 303–5.

⁹⁷ Likely Dr. Andrew J. Mead, a physician who lived in Niles. Friends of Silverbrook Cemetery, "Dr. John Finley: 'A Just Man Made Perfect,'" Leader Publications, June 15, 2010, <https://www.leaderpub.com/2010/06/15/silverbrook-legacies-dr-john-finley-a-just-man-made-perfect/>; and Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 156.

⁹⁸ Walker, Wilson, and Cousins, *African Americans in Michigan*, 15.

⁹⁹ "United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan," 1860, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>; and "United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan," 1870, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>.

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Michigan.¹⁰⁰ Records are sparse from the 1840s through the 1860s, as there were no city directories, and United States census data from the period is not precise.¹⁰¹

The first available public directory of the city dates from 1874 to 1875: it noted which residents were “colored,” showing African Americans living in the neighborhood on Ferry Street (see fig. 1).¹⁰² One was the Rev. Henry Wilson, pastor of Second Baptist Church, at 13 Ferry (an unknown address, but likely in the district).¹⁰³ The directory, however, does not consistently list all African Americans as “colored.” John Battles, for instance, who lived at the southwest corner of Cass and Seventh Streets (just north of the district),¹⁰⁴ is not noted as such despite his being listed as “mulatto” on 1880 United States Census records and his children attending the African American school. This was also the case with Calvin F. Wilson, an African American barber and notable resident discussed below.

By 1874–1875, besides the Ferry Street neighborhood, African Americans lived in the south of the city, around South Fifth Street between Hickory Street and Superior Street. While some African Americans continued to live in this southern agglomeration throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were fewer in number than those in the Ferry Street area. The location of the southern group also shifted, as it centered around South Eleventh Street by 1930. A few people also lived north of the railroad tracks in the nineteenth century.

From 1870 to 1920 the influx of new African American arrivals to the city was fairly small. The African American population of Niles dropped from 157 in 1880 to 135 in 1900, before going up to 150 in 1910 and 1920.¹⁰⁵ During the First Great Migration, migrants to Michigan preferred to move to larger cities like Detroit.¹⁰⁶ By 1910, data from the United States Census shows the continued presence of African Americans in the Ferry Street neighborhood and in the south of Niles (see fig. 2).¹⁰⁷ More people lived north of the tracks, and a cluster of people lived in the

¹⁰⁰ Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 93–94.

¹⁰¹ For an analysis of United States Census data concerning Niles from 1840 to 1950, see Vinewood Preservation Planning, “Ferry Street Historic District Survey Report,” appendix A.

¹⁰² *Niles City Directory 1874*.

¹⁰³ In the 1870s Ferry Street began in the west at North Fourth Street. The address system of Niles at that time was inconsistent, see Vinewood Preservation Planning, “Ferry Street Historic District Survey Report.”

¹⁰⁴ Many houses in Niles did not yet have numerical addresses.

¹⁰⁵ “United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan,” 1880, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>; “United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan,” 1900, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>; “United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan,” 1910, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>; and “United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan,” 1920, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, chap. 1.

¹⁰⁷ There are caveats to United States Census data from the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century: besides full addresses for residences in Niles only being noted beginning in 1900 (and a consistent

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city's downtown along Main Street. There were also a few scattered residences in other areas of the city, such as three families living on the left bank of the Saint Joseph River on Grant and Emmons Streets.

The *Manual of Freedmen's Progress*, a book outlining the accomplishments of African Americans in Michigan that was written in 1915 in celebration of fifty years of emancipation, notes African American property owners; these are generally in the same areas as shown in the 1910 Census.¹⁰⁸ Some were located in the Ferry Street neighborhood, including the area to the north on Cass Street and east just past Tenth Street, while others are in the south of the city, north past the train tracks, and in the southeast of the city between South Sixteenth and South Seventeenth Street. The book does not note the residences of African Americans living in the downtown area centered around Main Street, however, so those that did were likely renters.

By 1930, Niles' Black population increased to 255, a 70 percent increase from previous decades.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the largest demographic change was the growth of the neighborhood north of the railroad tracks between 1920 and 1930, when the number of households with African American members increased from eight to nineteen (see fig. 3). This group was centered on North Eighth Street and North Ninth Street south of Lake Street. African Americans living in the south of the city lived on Superior Street and near South Eleventh Street, and others also lived in other residences scattered around the city, including a few in the downtown area.

Census data from 1940 shows a very similar picture to 1930, but in 1950 a group of African Americans resided in the far southeastern part of the city, along South Seventeenth Street between Cherry Street and Miller Street (see fig. 4). By then over 380 African Americans lived in Niles, including thirty who lived within the Ferry Street district and approximately eighty more who lived on nearby streets (e.g., Cass to the north and further east along Ferry Street).¹¹⁰ Other neighborhoods where African Americans lived remained similar, with Ferry Street in the core of the city, as well as numerous residents in the northern neighborhood south of Lake Street and a few along Superior Street in the south.

No census data after 1950 is publicly available as of 2024, the time of this form's preparation. Directories from the Mount Cavalry Baptist Church from the later twentieth century, however, present a partial image of the city's African American residences.¹¹¹ In 1976 the majority of church members lived in the same neighborhoods seen in the 1950 United States Census (see fig.

street address system in Niles was not implemented until 1925), the arbitrary nature of racial classification and other inaccuracies mean maps derived from that data are incomplete representations. For more on the census data and its problems, see Vinewood Preservation Planning, "Ferry Street Historic District Survey Report," appendix A.

¹⁰⁸ Warren, *Freedmen's Progress*.

¹⁰⁹ "United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan," 1930, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>.

¹¹⁰ "United States Census, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan," 1950, <https://1950census.archives.gov/>.

¹¹¹ "Mount Calvary Baptist Church: Album Directory," 1976; and "1987 Directory of Mount Calvary Baptist Church," 1987.

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5). A large group lived in the Ferry Street neighborhood, while others in the neighborhood north of the railroad tracks (although more spread out to the west compared to the 1950 Census), as well as a few around Superior Street in the south of the city and some along South Seventeenth Street in the east.

Locations of Black-owned businesses are more difficult to ascertain, even when their existence is known. For instance, John Marks, the first known African American resident of Niles, ran a tannery near the waterfront, but its exact location is unknown. There was no consolidated Black business district in the nineteenth century; some Black-owned businesses were interspersed with White-owned ones in areas like the city's downtown (as evidenced by Calvin F. Wilson's barber shop, located in 1896 at what is now 227 East Main Street).

In the early twentieth-century, a few Black-owned businesses were grouped near the waterfront along Front Street between Main Street and Broadway Street. The businesses included a few barber shops,¹¹² as well as the Riverview Inn, a tavern also known as "Buster's Place."¹¹³ The Riverview Inn was owned by Acklee "Buster" King, who opened it in 1939 at 24 Front Street, and was one of two Black-owned taverns on the street by 1967.¹¹⁴ In the early 1970s, however, the Riverside Inn, along with other buildings along Front Street south of Main were demolished as part of an urban renewal program. Front Street itself was razed and no longer extends south of Main Street. King moved his business, then known as Buster's Bar and Grill, to 21 East Main Street, where it remained until it closed in 1977. In addition to Black-owned businesses were others nearby that served the Black community. This included the Riviera Theater, which did not segregate its patrons like the Ready Theater. Located on the west side of Second Street, one block east of Front Street, between Main and Cedar Streets, the theater was demolished in the 1980s.

Segregation and Discrimination

Communal and institutional support to African Americans in Niles was important and often necessary in the face of social and political discrimination. Indeed, before the Civil War even African Americans who had been born free could face extreme threats to their continued freedom. An example of such dangers was the kidnapping of Samuel Bowles. A resident of Niles, Bowles was taken by a slave hunter with the help of local authorities on November 5, 1845.¹¹⁵ Bowles was born free near Brownsville, Pennsylvania, and later worked as a cook on the steamer Algoma that ran between Niles and Saint Joseph. There, a slave hunter named Samuel Gunn found him and persuaded the Berrien County sheriff to arrest him by means of a questionable warrant from a Justice of the Peace. Bowles was jailed for one night, then released

¹¹² Martin Hodges and Saundria Hodges Wilson, Niles History Center: Profiles and Portraits Interviews, interview by Jose Magana, December 14, 2016.

¹¹³ "Riverview Inn," Niles History Center, Niles, MI.

¹¹⁴ Everett Miller Claspy, *The Negro in Southwestern Michigan: Negroes in the North in a Rural Environment* (Dowagiac, MI: Braun-Brumfield, 1967), 76.

¹¹⁵ J. L. Alexander, "Kidnapping a Free Colored Man: Great Outrage," *Signal of Liberty*, December 8, 1845, 129; and "Kidnapping," *The Niles Republican*, November 8, 1845, 2. Bowles' story is also related by Mull, who however confuses a few details on his trial (*Underground Railroad*, 87).

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to Gunn who claimed he would take Bowles to authorities in Saint Joseph, the county seat. Instead, he kidnapped Bowles and headed to Indiana. A man in Saint Louis, Missouri, Samuel Black, had claimed Bowles as his slave and had hired Gunn as his agent.

Upon news of Bowles' arrest reaching Niles, a judge ordered Gunn arrested and an officer was dispatched to Saint Joseph. When it was learned that Bowles had been kidnapped, two sympathetic abolitionists who lived in Niles, John Orr and William P. Reese, left to intercept Gunn. They met on the way to Indiana, and on November 8 managed to find Gunn and Bowles near Laporte, Indiana.¹¹⁶ Despite some pro-slavery sympathies in the city, Orr was able to take Bowles back to Niles on November 8. A local constable received the warrant for Gunn, who instead absconded. A few days later the sheriff and justice who had issued the original warrant for Bowles, along with a teamster who had helped Gunn transport Bowles, were all brought before Judge Ebenezer McIlvain in Niles. Bowles himself testified, but in the end the defendants were all released as McIlvain saw no evidence of criminal intent on their part.¹¹⁷

This incident, one of the few documented narratives involving an African American living in Niles before the Civil War, illustrates the importance of living in and near a protective community. Certain facts of the case are not known, as no original legal documentation could be located and the narrative is based on newspaper articles (for instance, one pro-slavery article claimed Bowles was legally enslaved¹¹⁸). Bowles had lived in Saint Louis for a period, so some personal dispute with Samuel Black is possible. What is clear, however, is Bowles had lived in the area for several years and was forcibly abducted and might have been enslaved had it not been for the help of abolitionists in Niles. Even free Black Americans faced constant danger of losing their freedom if they did not live in a supportive community. It also shows the limits of that freedom, as those responsible for Bowles' kidnapping faced no repercussions.

In the early nineteenth century, African Americans in Niles and its environs did not just fear being kidnapped and enslaved. There were many other policies and social practices that limited their freedom. Abolitionist sentiments were not universal, and in some cases abolitionists

¹¹⁶ Alexander, "Kidnapping a Free Colored Man," 129.

¹¹⁷ J. L. Alexander, "The Case of Kidnapping in Berrien County," *Signal of Liberty*, January 5, 1846, 141; and "The Kidnapping Case," *The Niles Republican*, November 15, 1845, 2. While such a ruling by a White judge might not seem odd, McIlvain was an abolitionist who even helped freedom seekers, as described above. It is possible that political realities made it difficult for him to find against other local law enforcement and judicial officials, and securing Bowles' freedom without serious repercussions (to McIlvain or Bowles) was of paramount importance.

¹¹⁸ "An Abolition Movement," *Signal of Liberty*, January 5, 1846, 142. Although appearing the abolitionist *Signal*, this was a reprint of an article from *The Missouri Republican*, December 5, 1845, which decried abolitionists as people who trampled upon the United States Constitution. It is likely Bowles was indeed free, as the matter went before local courts which also tried to arrest Gunn: if evidence had been presented that Bowles had not been free, the proceedings might have followed a different course.

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themselves could suffer.¹¹⁹ Statewide anti-African-American laws included making immigration difficult by requiring reporting and posting a bond, a lack of suffrage, and a limitation on marrying White people.¹²⁰ In 1850 some citizens of Berrien County wanted to limit the migration of formerly enslaved people to Michigan, and only supported suffrage for White people.¹²¹ Local sentiments in southwestern Michigan, as seen in newspaper articles, demonstrated prejudice and often casually racist language.¹²² In 1852, for instance, the *Niles Republican* complained about Black migrants moving to the area. One article threatened: “we advise our colored population to mind their own business, be honest, industrious, quiet and sober, and all will be well. Otherwise there is trouble ahead, which they know little of at present.”¹²³

Segregated facilities such as restaurants existed in Niles, and although some African Americans protested, such affairs were generally accepted by the White population. A newspaper report from 1859 noted that a group of African Americans from Cass County were insulted that they were forced to sit separately from other guests for a meal at a hotel in Niles, the Bond House (located on the northeast corner of Second and Sycamore Streets).¹²⁴ The paper’s editors dismissed the men’s concern and declared them to be unreasonable since the proprietor claimed to be serving them the same quality food as his other guests.

In the twentieth century, African Americans in Niles continued to face discrimination and segregation. The Ku Klux Klan was active in neighboring Cass County at its height in the 1920s, with parades held in Dowagiac.¹²⁵ Its direct and indirect effects on residents in Niles are not known. Various forms of discrimination were common. One Black family was Episcopalian, but the Episcopalian church in Niles did not allow them to worship there, so the family traveled by car to a church in Buchanan until a near-crash on the road caused them to transfer to the Franklin AME Church in the Ferry Street neighborhood.¹²⁶

African American residents were often heavily reliant on the few Black institutions in the city, such as the churches in the Ferry Street neighborhood, since there were few Black-owned

¹¹⁹ For instance, abolitionists could lose business if word of their beliefs became known, and newspaper articles attacked abolitionists and Quakers (Wilson, *Rural Black Heritage*, 80-81). Anti-abolition articles in local newspapers were common as well; see, for example “An Awful Fright,” *The Niles Republican*, November 8, 1856.

¹²⁰ Wilson, *Rural Black Heritage*, 73-74.

¹²¹ *Report of the Proceedings and Debates in the Convention to Revise the Constitution of the State of Michigan* (Lansing: R. W. Ingals, 1850), 240-44.

¹²² For instance, a racist joke in *The Niles Republican*, April 12, 1835. See also Wilson, *Rural Black Heritage*, 80-82.

¹²³ *The Niles Republican*, July 3, 1852.

¹²⁴ *The Niles Republican*, September 10, 1859.

¹²⁵ Hesslink, *Black Neighbors*, 63-64.

¹²⁶ Rebecca R. Singer Mitchell, Niles History Center: Profiles and Portraits Interviews, interview by Kimberly West, 2016. The family’s ties to Franklin AME became strong, and Rev. Rebecca Singer Mitchell later became pastor of the church.

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businesses in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹²⁷ Bars and taverns were often segregated, and African Americans frequented two on Front Street by 1967.¹²⁸ A few other Black-owned businesses, including barber shops, were located near the waterfront, but were demolished by downtown redevelopment projects in the 1970s and 1980s.¹²⁹ There were also no Black members of the police and fire departments at that time.¹³⁰ Some local White businesses did not allow Black people to patronize them at all, while others had various policies of segregation up through the 1960s. These might not be explicit, but as Rebecca Singer Mitchell, former Franklin AME pastor who was born and raised in Niles, stated: “you knew where you could go and couldn’t.”¹³¹ Black people who went to the Ready Theater, located in downtown Niles, had to watch movies from the balcony to keep them separate from White patrons in the 1940s.¹³² The skating rink only allowed African Americans in on certain nights.¹³³

After World War II, African Americans who moved to Niles often found it difficult to find housing in the core areas of the city and often first lived on its outskirts in established communities like Hatcherville to the east of the city.¹³⁴ Loans to purchase a home or a car were difficult for African Americans to obtain due to discriminatory practices in federal lending. Black renters also faced a restricted market, as some White owners refused to rent to them.¹³⁵ While in the nineteenth century some African Americans had lived in Niles on the left bank of the Saint Joseph River, in the mid-twentieth century they were generally “not welcome,” as one resident recalled, on the west side of town.¹³⁶ Even houses near the Ferry Street neighborhood were difficult to purchase due to discrimination. One African American individual was only able to purchase a house on North Tenth Street between Ferry and Cass Streets after a White friend first purchased it from the owners who refused to sell to Black people.¹³⁷

African Americans seeking housing in Niles did not just come up against informal and personal discrimination, but also legal forms, namely racially restrictive covenants. Racially restrictive covenants in the United States originated in the late nineteenth century, originally directed at Chinese immigrants in California, and forbade anyone who was not White from living in a given

¹²⁷ Carlton Dungey, Sr., Niles History Center: Profiles and Portraits Interviews, interview by Tyler Davis, 2016.

¹²⁸ Claspy, *The Negro in Southwestern Michigan*, 76.

¹²⁹ Martin Hodges and Saundria Hodges Wilson, Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

¹³⁰ Dungey, Sr., Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

¹³¹ Singer Mitchell, Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

¹³² Finley, Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

¹³³ Georgia Boggs, Niles History Center: Profiles and Portraits Interviews, interview by Sarah Shepherd, December 7, 2016; Finley, Profiles and Portraits Interviews; and Evelyn E. Davis Fleming, Niles History Center: Profiles and Portraits Interviews, interview by Maria Gutierrez, 2016.

¹³⁴ Boggs, Profiles and Portraits Interviews; and Claspy, *The Negro in Southwestern Michigan*, 76.

¹³⁵ Mary Skinner, Niles History Center: Profiles and Portraits Interviews, interview by Simon Constable, January 18, 2017

¹³⁶ Finley, Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

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place (some went further, such as banning Jews or non-Protestant Christians).¹³⁸ Racially restrictive covenants became more common after the creation of the Federal Housing Administration in 1934, which promoted such covenants by granting higher investment ratings to areas covered by them.¹³⁹ Real estate agents and developers also adopted explicitly racial segregationist policies.¹⁴⁰ The two most common forms of these covenants were developers incorporating racial restrictions into all the deeds of the properties they were developing, and voluntary petitions signed by White homeowners of properties that tried to restrict any purchases by non-White people in neighborhoods that were already inhabited.¹⁴¹

In the 1940s several neighborhoods in Niles adopted racially restrictive covenants that affected all or some of their properties (see fig. 6). The developers of the Parker's Addition to Niles, a subdivision to the east of the Ferry Street neighborhood, may have been the first to do so in the city. While originally platted in 1927, in 1940 the developers adopted a racially based covenant clause affecting all the lots north of Regent Street up to Eagle Street between North Fifteenth and North Seventeenth Streets, along with several further to the south.¹⁴² Among miscellaneous restrictions such as the types of buildings that could be built on the lots (e.g., "one detached, single family dwelling, not to exceed two stories in height, and a private garage for not more than two cars"), was restriction number six: "no person who is not a Caucasian shall use or occupy any building or any lot, except that this covenant shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants who are not Caucasians domiciled with the owner or tenant."

Other covenants followed. Two new subdivisions developed in the 1940s incorporated racially restricted covenants into their deeds in the terms of their initial platting: William's Subdivision in the southeast of Niles and the Arrowhead Subdivision in the southwest of Niles, both platted in June, 1941.¹⁴³ In each case the racially restrictive covenant covered the entire neighborhood, and both used language similar to Parker's Addition: only people of the "Caucasian race" could live

¹³⁸ Richard R. W. Brooks and Carol M. Rose, *Saving the Neighborhood: Racially Restrictive Covenants, Law, and Social Norms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 51; and Michael Jones-Correa, "The Origins and Diffusion of Racial Restrictive Covenants," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 4 (2000-2001): 544-48.

¹³⁹ David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 118-20; and Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017), 74-75.

¹⁴⁰ Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 60-62.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 69-74; and Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, 78-79.

¹⁴² "Conditions, Reservations, and Restrictions" (1940), Misc liber 73, 236-39, Berrien County Register of Deeds. The covenant also affected all but one lot on the south side of Regent Street, as well as two lots on Cedar Street. The 1927 plat of the subdivision extended further south to Oak Street.

¹⁴³ "Reservations and Restrictions to Arrowhead Addition, City of Niles, Berrien County, Michigan" (1941), Misc liber 76, 300-3, Berrien County Register of Deeds; and "Conditions, Reservations, and Restrictions" (1941), Misc liber 76, 284-87, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

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there, with the exception of domestic servants. A year later a covenant was enacted in Woodward's Second Addition.¹⁴⁴ This covenant was enacted not by the developers of the subdivision, which had been platted in 1919, but rather signed by over two hundred residents who pledged to only sell, convey, lease, or rent to their homes to White people (and here with no allowance for non-White domestic servants). A few homes in that neighborhood were known to be inhabited by African Americans by 1950, though they were not ones included in the list of signers of the covenant.¹⁴⁵ Covenants were also common in new subdivisions being constructed just outside the city in Niles Township: Oak Manor Subdivision (1941), Brandywine Park (1941), Thorn Acres (1942), Mission Hills (1947), Brandywine Shores (1949), and Parker's East (1949), among others, had some or all of their lots covered by racially restrictive covenants.

In 1948, racially based covenants were declared unenforceable by the United States Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, a case involving two African American families, one from Saint Louis, Missouri, and one from Detroit.¹⁴⁶ Despite this, covenants continued to be written. In 1952, for instance, a racially based restriction was noted in a sale of four lots in the small New Niles Addition in the west of the city.¹⁴⁷ Housing restrictions continued to be a problem. In 1961, J. Chester Allen, president of the local NAACP chapter, pushed Niles' Common Council to create a community Human Relations Council and decried discrimination affecting public and private employment, as well as in housing.¹⁴⁸ Two years later the NAACP complained at the slow progress.¹⁴⁹

Starting in the late 1960s, organizations within the city became more integrated and African Americans began to serve in Niles' governing institutions. Carlton Dungey, Sr., who lived outside the district, had been concerned with the lack of Black representation in schools and growing protests in Niles, including a protest blocking a road downtown in 1968.¹⁵⁰ After gaining support through outreach to Niles' Black churches, namely Mount Calvary Baptist Church and Franklin AME, he was elected to the Niles School Board that same year, becoming the first African American board member. He pushed for more African Americans joining the local education system as teachers and better treatment for Black students. Osceola Skinner, who lived outside the district, was the first Black person to sit on Niles' city council, elected in 1985.¹⁵¹ Others, like Georgia Boggs, served later (in her case as the council member from Niles'

¹⁴⁴ "Restrictions Pertaining to Woodward's Second Addition to the City of Niles, Michigan" (1945), Misc liber 93, 194-295, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁴⁵ "1950 United States Census."

¹⁴⁶ For more on the cases and the efforts to dismantle such discriminatory practices, see Jeffrey D. Gonda, *Unjust Deeds: The Restrictive Covenant Cases and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

¹⁴⁷ "Warranty Deed" (1952), Deed liber 516, 105, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁴⁸ "Excerpts from the Minutes of the Common Council of Niles, Michigan," 1961, Niles, Clubs, N.A.A.C.P. file, Niles District Library.

¹⁴⁹ "Excerpts from the Minutes of the Common Council of Niles, Michigan," 1963, Niles, Clubs, N.A.A.C.P. file, Niles District Library.

¹⁵⁰ Dungey, Sr., *Profiles and Portraits Interviews*.

¹⁵¹ Skinner, *Profiles and Portraits Interviews*.

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First Ward, which includes the Ferry Street neighborhood).¹⁵² Families that had not been able to live in the city proper when they first moved to the area after World War II were later able to purchase more centrally located property.¹⁵³

Ethnicity and the Ferry Street Neighborhood

The Ferry Street neighborhood provided some manner of respite from discrimination to its African American residents. It remained a mixed neighborhood with both White and Black residents on into the late twentieth century. Within the neighborhood there were few racial tensions and residents helped each other by providing what others lacked. Harold Finley, who is African American, lived at 908 Ferry Street (still extant, but located east of the district) as a child. He purchased a home on North Tenth Street between Ferry and Cass Streets in 1948 where he continued to live into the twenty-first century. He commented that residents of the area were not just neighborly and got along, but supported one another:

One thing about it, you've got to understand, like I said it [the Ferry Street neighborhood] was mixed. But you didn't know that because you didn't have no racial problems. And if Joe here got sick or got hurt everybody came, everybody—everybody around there had gardens, they even had chickens, and you know if you had a lot of beans, hey, we got too many beans. They just got along really good. And like I said, at that time we were getting along good and you couldn't go across the river.¹⁵⁴

That strong sense of community was supported by both Black and White residents, but the neighborhood provided African American residents of the district something that they could not find elsewhere in the city. Ferry Street stood in stark contrast to neighborhoods, like those to the west of the Saint Joseph River, that excluded Black people.

This sense of community was confirmed by William Hassinger, a White resident who forged a lifelong friendship with Harold Finley.¹⁵⁵ Hassinger lived at 709 Ferry Street (within the district) from 1936 to 1951 with his parents, save for when he served in the United States Army from 1944 to 1946. He maintained ties to the neighborhood after he left, as his mother lived in the house until the 1970s. As a child he often played basketball with Black children and was close to the Cannady family who lived nearby at 411 North Tenth Street (no longer extant). Hassinger observed that while relationships between Black and White families in the Ferry Street neighborhood were good, this was not the case for other areas in Niles where White residents sought to keep African Americans out of their neighborhoods.

¹⁵² Boggs, Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Harold Finley, Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

¹⁵⁵ William Hassinger, interview by Michael F. Webb, August 10, 2023.

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Prominent Ferry Street Residents from the Late Nineteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century

Despite discrimination and other hardships, the African American community in Niles greatly contributed to the economic and social development of not just that community but the city as a whole. The 1915 *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress* notes numerous accomplishments of residents from Niles and, more specifically, the Ferry Street neighborhood. Especially when weighted for population, Niles is heavily represented in the *Manual of Freedmen's Progress*, suggesting the city was an important center of the African American population in Michigan as a whole. Several residents had recently showed their crafts, wares, and art at an exhibition; the book contains a list of property owners in the city, and notes the contributions of veterans.¹⁵⁶ The book includes photographs of two houses within the district, both still extant: the home of Arthur White at 721 Ferry Street, and that of Alexander Griffin, the proprietor of the City Bottling Works (and later owner of a cigar store¹⁵⁷), across the street at 801 Ferry. Griffin, who built the house around 1904, lived in Niles until 1924.¹⁵⁸ Two other people listed in the book lived within the neighborhood in houses that are still standing, Theodore Williams at 410 North Eighth Street, and Thomas Davis at 722 Ferry Street. Three people also lived just north on Cass Street (609, 704, and 708 Cass), just outside the district, but these buildings are no longer extant.

The Davis family owned several properties in the Ferry Street neighborhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. William and Rebecca Davis, who in the 1880s lived on Cass Street,¹⁵⁹ bought several properties, including the lots that make up 712 and 722 Ferry Street in 1866, 713 Ferry in 1876, 810 Ferry in 1889, and 814 Ferry in 1891, all within the district.¹⁶⁰ William Davis likely built or oversaw the construction of houses at 713 and 722 Ferry Street, both still extant. His son Thomas and his wife Florence May, known as Flora, lived at 713 Ferry Street, but also owned property on Cass Street to the north.¹⁶¹ William died in 1899;¹⁶² Thomas inherited his property and moved with Flora across the street to 722 after selling their old home in 1907.¹⁶³ Thomas was a proprietor of a drayage company.¹⁶⁴ The Davis family

¹⁵⁶ Warren, *Freedmen's Progress*, 37-38, 147-200, and 223.

¹⁵⁷ The 1920 Census lists Griffin as the proprietor of a cigar store.

¹⁵⁸ "Affidavit" (1929), Misc liber 36, 375B, Berrien County Register of Deeds. This affidavit was made by from a merchant, Abner Kugler, who did business with Griffin. Kugler noted that Griffin began building a house on the property very soon after purchasing it. The affidavit was filed after the Griffin and his wife Minnie had moved away from Niles in 1924, although they owned the property until 1928.

¹⁵⁹ "1880 United States Census." William was listed as Black and Rebecca as White; neither had an occupation listed.

¹⁶⁰ "Deed" (1866), Deed liber 25, 250, Berrien County Register of Deeds; "Warranty Deed" (1876), Deed liber 50, 356, Berrien County Register of Deeds; "Warranty Deed" (1889), Deed liber 102, 264, Berrien County Register of Deeds; and "Quit Claim Deeds" (1891), Deed liber 102, 264-65, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁶¹ "Warranty Deed" (1894), Deed liber 115, 409, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁶² "Affidavit" (1943), Misc liber 85, 525, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁶³ "Warranty Deed" (1907), Deed liber 166, 176, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁶⁴ "1910 United States Census."

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moved out of the house at 722 Ferry Street between 1925 and 1927,¹⁶⁵ but only sold the property in 1943, after Thomas' death.¹⁶⁶

The earliest prominent family with ties to Niles and the Ferry Street neighborhood were Pasquel LaRue and his wife Sarah Finley. Pasquel Finley, noted above for his involvement in the Underground Railroad, purchased land to the northeast of Niles in 1850 in Howard Township, Cass County.¹⁶⁷ They, however, conducted business in Niles and attended the Second Baptist Church on Ferry Street. Three of their daughters, Mary, Ophelia, and Permelia, all attended the Colored School in the 1866–1867 school year and likely the Ferry Street School the next year, while two of their sons, Edward and Richard, volunteered during the Civil War, serving in Michigan First Colored Infantry Regiment.

Other Finley family members had close ties to the neighborhood. For instance, Sarah Finley Purcell lived on nearby Regent Street. When she passed away in 1895, her funeral was held at Franklin AME church.¹⁶⁸ Members of the Finley family also contributed to the purchase of property for a resort at the west end of Eagle Lake, located between Paw Paw and Decatur to the north of the city.¹⁶⁹ The resort, developed in the 1920s and 1930s, became a summer retreat that welcomed African Americans, and had a large pavilion known as The Trails End.¹⁷⁰

Their descendants continued to have close ties to the Ferry Street neighborhood, with some living nearby and some within the district. Schuyler Finley and his family lived at 815 Sycamore Street from the 1920s to at least 1950.¹⁷¹ Schuyler and his wife Emily also bought and sold other property in the district, including 310 North Ninth Street in 1913 and 317 North Sixth Street in 1940.¹⁷² Those two properties were sold to Schuyler and Emily's daughter Doris Finley Gay and her husband Percy in 1936 and 1943, respectively.¹⁷³ Emily Finley was also president of the Second Baptist Choir in the 1923.¹⁷⁴ One of his sons, Harold Finley, was born in 1926 and raised there, later lived in Niles for several decades. Harold also served as a Junior Warden at the

¹⁶⁵ *Luedders' Niles Mich. City Directory* (Coldwater, MI: Otto E. Luedders, 1925); and *Luedders' Niles Mich. City Directory* (Coldwater, MI: Otto E. Luedders, 1927).

¹⁶⁶ "Warranty Deed" (1943), Deed liber 383, 496, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁶⁷ "Finley Family Files."

¹⁶⁸ *The Niles Republican*, October 17, 1895.

¹⁶⁹ Wilson, *Rural Black Heritage*, 153.

¹⁷⁰ We could not find, however, the name of the resort itself.

¹⁷¹ According to United States Census data from 1930 and 1950. Schuyler Finley also purchased a nearby home at 603 Cass Street, renting it out to other African Americans; see "Finley Family Files."

¹⁷² "Land Contract" (1913), LAC liber 1, 150, Berrien County Register of Deeds; and "Deed" (1940), Deed liber 348, 187, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁷³ "Warranty Deed," 1936, Deed liber 315, 72A; and "Warranty Deed," 1943, Deed liber 380, 638.

¹⁷⁴ Mrs. S. Finely hosted a "Donkey Social" in their house for members of the choir; see "News from Niles," *South Bend Forum*, May 26, 1923.

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Prince Hall lodge and was one of its members that agreed to the purchase of the property within district at 323 North Seventh Street from Saint Paul's Lutheran Church.¹⁷⁵

After Doris Finley married Percy Gay, they lived at 1101 Ferry Street;¹⁷⁶ by 1936 they lived in the Ferry Street neighborhood at 310 Ninth Street in the home purchased from Schuyler and Emily Finley.¹⁷⁷ Percy Gay had moved from Missouri to Niles in search of better economic opportunities in 1923.¹⁷⁸ He became the head custodian at the Buchanan-based Clark Equipment Company, which was one of the larger businesses in the region that employed African Americans.¹⁷⁹ He was also chairman of the board of trustees at Mount Calvary Baptist Church. His wife, Doris Finley Gay, was a trustee of the Franklin AME Church.¹⁸⁰ The Gay family also purchased another house in the district from the Finley family: 317 North Sixth Street, in 1943. The house remained in the Gay family until 1997.¹⁸¹

Members of the Finley family who lived outside the Ferry Street neighborhood maintained ties there to its churches and to the Prince Hall Masons.¹⁸² The family's roots to Niles became widely known and celebrated, with local newspapers noting their history and describing their reunions held at places like the Franklin AME Church.¹⁸³ In 2017 they were recognized as the family with members who lived continuously in Niles probably longer than any other, and the Niles city council proclaimed September 10, 2017, as Finley Family Day in their honor.¹⁸⁴

The Wilsons were another prominent African American family in Niles. Calvin F. Wilson worked as a barber in at least two locations in the city. Born in Virginia, he moved to Niles in 1846 after living in Ohio.¹⁸⁵ He married Henrietta Hill in 1853 and moved to California that same year but returned to Niles in 1855. In 1874 his barber shop was located at 81 Second Street, just north of Main Street.¹⁸⁶ By around 1896 he had relocated to the basement of a building at

¹⁷⁵ "Deed," 1959, Deed liber 605, 579.

¹⁷⁶ "1930 United States Census."

¹⁷⁷ "Warranty Deed" (1936), Liber Deed 315, 72A, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁷⁸ Skinner, *Profiles and Portraits Interviews*.

¹⁷⁹ Claspy, *The Negro in Southwestern Michigan*, 77.

¹⁸⁰ "Warranty Deed" (1945), Deed liber 415, 611, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁸¹ "Warranty Deed" (1943), Deed liber 380, 638, Berrien County Register of Deeds; and "Land Contract" (1997), RE liber 1803, 712, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

¹⁸² Geraldine Romaine Finely, who died in 2011, lived elsewhere in Niles but was a member of Mount Calvary Baptist Church and a Worthy Matron of Miriam Chapter No. 56 ("Finley Family Files").

¹⁸³ Louis Mumford, "Their Roots Run Deep," *South Bend Tribune*, [1980?]; Keys, "Black Family Here 131 Years"; and "Seems Like Yesterday: Finley Family Has Long Local History," *Niles Daily Star*, [1987?].

¹⁸⁴ Kelsey Hammon, "Finley Family Day Established to Honor Oldest Family in Niles History," *Leader Publications*, August 31, 2017, <https://www.leaderpub.com/2017/08/31/finley-family-day-established-to-honor-oldest-family-in-niles-history-standalone/>.

¹⁸⁵ "C. F. Wilson Dead," *The Niles Republican*, January 1, 1903, 5.

¹⁸⁶ *Niles City Directory* 1874.

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Main Street and Third Street.¹⁸⁷ The building was a post office in the late 1890s and is now a Masonic Hall located at 227 East Main Street. His barber shop served Black and White customers, and he was respected in both the Black and White communities, as noted by the attendance of his daughter Lottie's marriage celebration in 1872.¹⁸⁸ He was dedicated to his craft (he invented a shampoo¹⁸⁹), but also the African American community as a whole, as demonstrated in 1867 when he advocated for the construction of the Ferry Street School as chairman of the Colored Citizens of Niles.¹⁹⁰ He was also the secretary of the Prince Hall Masons Harrison Lodge in the city.¹⁹¹ In 1880 he was nominated by the Republican Party as their candidate for coroner of Niles and was elected to the position; he was likely the first African American in Berrien County to hold that office.¹⁹² He lived with his wife Henrietta at 323 North Fifth Street in 1874, then on North Sixth Street by 1880 before moving back to 323 North Fifth Street by 1900, a house that is still extant and located within the district. He died on December 25, 1902.¹⁹³

The most notable person who resided in the district was Charlotte "Lottie" Wilson, daughter of Calvin and Henrietta Wilson, born on January 9, 1854.¹⁹⁴ She was born in either Niles or adjacent Howard Township, and lived in Niles as a child with her parents.¹⁹⁵ Despite sociopolitical hurdles faced by African Americans and women in general, she became an accomplished artist, an advocate for Women's suffrage, and a Civil Rights activist. In the early 1870s she became the first Black person to attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

¹⁸⁷ In 1982 a Niles Township resident named Adolph Knott stated that he had received his first haircut from Calvin Wilson around 1896 in the building on Main Street. Knott owned property on Pucker Street adjacent to Daniel Moss, who later married Lottie Wilson; see "Adolph Knott Note," July 27, 1982, *Biography, Lottie Wilson*, Niles District Library.

¹⁸⁸ *The Niles Republican*, October 31, 1872, 2.

¹⁸⁹ *The Niles Republican*, February 26, 1874, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Calvin F. Wilson and Isaac Burdine, "Meeting of the Colored Citizens," *Niles Weekly Times*, 1867.

¹⁹¹ "Niles, Mich.," *Detroit Plaindealer*, December 16, 1892, 2; and "Resolutions of Respect," 6.

¹⁹² *The Niles Republican*, July 31, 1880, 3; and *The Niles Republican*, January 18, 1883, 1.

¹⁹³ *Niles City Directory 1874*; "1880 United States Census," 1880; "1900 United States Census"; and "Old Resident Dead," *Niles Daily Star*, December 26, 1902, 3.

¹⁹⁴ State of Michigan, Department of State, "Certificate of Death: Lottie Moss," January 16, 1914; and Michaelle Sibilla et al., *Biographical Sketch of Charlotte (Lottie) Wilson Jackson*, ed. Rebecca Jo Plant et al. (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street, 2016),

https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C3292112.

¹⁹⁵ While most contemporary and secondary sources state she was born in Niles (e.g., the certificate of her second marriage and an obituary *Niles Daily Sun*, January 16, 1914, 1), her first marriage certificate gives it as Howard Township, as does another obituary (*Niles Daily Star*, January 16, 1914, 1).

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before embarking on her successful career.¹⁹⁶ (Wilson's last name is sometimes given as Huggart, Jackson, or Moss due to her three marriages, but she went professionally by Lottie E. Wilson in later newspaper advertisements for her art studios in both Washington, DC, and Niles.¹⁹⁷)

By 1872 Wilson had returned to Niles from her education in Chicago and on October 30 married James M. Huggart, a farmer from Piqua, Ohio, who lived in South Bend, Indiana.¹⁹⁸ The couple likely had three children while living in South Bend.¹⁹⁹ By 1880 James worked as a laborer and they resided at 9 Keasey Street (no longer extant) in South Bend.²⁰⁰ Between 1881 and 1885 the family lived in both Niles and Indianapolis.²⁰¹ James Huggart passed away around this time.²⁰²

On June 9, 1885, Wilson married John B. Jackson in Niles.²⁰³ By that time Wilson may have already been living in Bay City (along Saginaw Bay in Michigan), where Jackson also lived. Wilson had briefly lived at 918 Fraser Street (in a house that is no longer extant) under her

¹⁹⁶ "150 Years of Making History: SAIC's First African American Student," SAIC School of the Art Institute of Chicago, n.d., <http://www.saic.edu/150/saic%20%99s-first-african-american-student>.

¹⁹⁷ "Here and There," *Colored American Magazine*, November 1902, 47; and "Lottie E. Wilson: Fine Art Studio," *Colored American*, June 14, 1902, 16. Generally her first name is given in sources as Lottie, though occasionally her first name is given as Charlotte. We did not find evidence as to what the "E" of her middle name stood for. The 1870 United States Census lists her name as "Lottie J. Wilson."

¹⁹⁸ Berrien County Record of Marriages, "Return of Marriage," 1872, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939J-H499-NS>.

¹⁹⁹ Caletta D. was born on December 18, 1874 ("United States Census, South Bend, St. Joseph County, Indiana," 1880, <https://records-myheritagelibraryedition-com/>), and died on September 17, 1885, of a respiratory ailment (State of Michigan, Department Vital Records, "Michigan Deaths, 1867-1897, Berrien County," 1885, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:N3XQ-D36>). A second daughter named Henrietta may have been born soon after Caletta ("1880 United States Census," 1880). We could not find Henrietta elsewhere in the historical record, unlike Caletta. The 1910 Census, however, records Wilson as having had three children, none of whom were still alive ("1910 United States Census"). Dennis Daisy, born July 22, 1876, died of unknown causes on September 1 of that same year (Friends of Silverbrook Cemetery, Flickr, 2020, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/157919153@N05/50411505657/>).

²⁰⁰ "1880 United States Census." Keasey Street was a short street one block south of Ohio Street between South Michigan and Carroll Streets, now the location of the Saint Joseph County Probate Court complex.

²⁰¹ Although there are no entries in Indianapolis city directories for James or Lottie Huggart, nor any for Lottie Wilson from 1872 to 1886, newspapers note that Lottie Huggart lived in the city in the 1880s. See "City News," *The Indianapolis Leader*, January 7, 1882, 4; and "Mrs. Lottie Wilson Moss Critically Ill," *The Freeman*, December 6, 1913, 1.

²⁰² We could not find the date of his death nor the cause.

²⁰³ Berrien County Marriage Certificates, "Return of Marriage," 1885, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939J-H39P-X4?i=1241>.

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maiden name.²⁰⁴ After her marriage she moved to her husband's residence at 232 Adams Street (extant). Jackson had been born in Ohio and had a barber shop at 200 Fifth Avenue in Bay City.

Wilson had long been politically active while pursuing her artistic career and pushed for women's suffrage and Civil Rights. She was an active member of the National Association of Colored Women, the Afro-American Council, and a trustee for the Phillis Wheatley Home for Elderly Colored Women in Detroit.²⁰⁵ She attended a woman's national convention in 1896,²⁰⁶ and in 1899 was a speaker at a meeting in Bay City discussing lynchings and mob violence in the South.²⁰⁷ She was also a member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and spoke at their 1899 national convention held in Grand Rapids, Michigan. There she proposed that "colored women ought not be compelled to ride in smoking cars, and that suitable accommodations should be provided for them." The inclusion of Black women in the suffragist movement had long been opposed by many White suffragists, however, and the resolution was rejected as being outside the scope of the convention.²⁰⁸

As Wilson lived in Bay City and involved herself in political causes, her artistic ability grew as well, as she continued to learn new techniques. She traveled to Detroit study painting,²⁰⁹ and was first listed as an artist in a Bay City directory in 1897.²¹⁰ That same year she advertised that she had opened a business in her home, giving art lessons and cleaning and restoring old paintings.²¹¹ Her art was displayed at Richardson's Bookstore at 208 Center Avenue in Bay City.²¹²

By the time of Wilson's move to Washington, DC, after she divorced Jackson, she was a well known portrait artist.²¹³ On March 12, 1901, she opened a studio at 806 M Street NW (no longer extant) where she worked and taught art classes.²¹⁴ A 1901 article from the *Colored American* newspaper described a showing of her pastel, oil, and miniature work in Grand Rapids, Michigan.²¹⁵ A 1902 article in the *Colored American Magazine* included her among famous

²⁰⁴ Lottie Wilson was listed as "Charlotte Wilson" and the widow of "James" in a Bay City directory at 918 Fraser in 1886, see *R. L. Polk & Co.'s Bay City Directory, 1886-1887* (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1886). That information was probably slightly outdated, as she married Jackson in 1885 and changed her last name to Jackson. Wilson was not listed in the directory again until 1887, this time at the same residence as her husband.

²⁰⁵ Sibilla et al., *Charlotte (Lottie) Wilson Jackson*.

²⁰⁶ "Here and There," *Bay City Times*, July 6, 1896, 6. The name of the convention is not named in the newspaper. However, it was likely the First Annual Convention of the National Federation of Afro-American Women was held in Washington, DC, in July of 1896.

²⁰⁷ "Lynchings and Mobs," *Bay City Times*, May 31, 1899, 1.

²⁰⁸ Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage: 1883-1900* (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1902), 4:343.

²⁰⁹ "In Society," *Bay City Times*, September 30, 1894, 9.

²¹⁰ *Bay City Directory*, 1897 (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1897).

²¹¹ *Bay City Times*, October 16, 1897.

²¹² "Fine Art Display," *Bay City Times*, November 18, 1897.

²¹³ "Jackson Case Settled," *Bay City Times*, February 19, 1901, 3.

²¹⁴ "Jottings," *Colored American*, March 16, 1901, 7; and "Lottie E. Wilson: Fine Art Studio," *Colored American*, November 9, 1901, 5.

²¹⁵ "A Noted Postel Artist," *Colored American*, July 13, 1901, 6.

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African American women.²¹⁶ She had made a career in portraiture, and her work was recommended by judges on the Michigan Supreme Court, representatives, and senators.

Wilson's art and politics were intertwined, and she helped to organize exhibitions and donated her own work to further causes dear to her. In 1901 she oversaw an exhibit of not just her own work, but other African American artists for the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. She painted portraits of United States Senator and Abolitionist Charles Sumner and Booker T. Washington.²¹⁷ She also painted Sojourner Truth's 1864 meeting with Abraham Lincoln,²¹⁸ which she presented to President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House on May 24, 1902.²¹⁹ (The painting remained in Washington until 1981 and is now displayed at the Niles District Library.²²⁰) In a contemporary biographical article, she was described as someone who "in every possible way tries with her art to stimulate interest in the history of her race."²²¹

Even while living elsewhere, Wilson remained close to her family in Niles. In 1901 she held an exhibition of her paintings at her family's home at 323 North Fifth Street in the Ferry Street neighborhood.²²² Wilson came to Niles just before her father's death on December 25, 1902,²²³ but returned to Washington the next year and reopened her studio on M Street NW by February 1903.²²⁴ In 1906 Wilson married Daniel Moss, a farmer, and moved to his farm (no longer extant) in Niles Township, on what is now Pucker Street south of Stafford Road,²²⁵ where she lived for six years.²²⁶ Around this time Wilson also continued her education in Chicago, returning for further classes in the 1902–1903 educational year and again in the 1907–1908 year.²²⁷

²¹⁶ Pauline E. Hopkins, "Famous Women of the Negro Race," *Colored American Magazine*, September 1902, 363.

²¹⁷ "Mrs Wilson and the President," *Colored American*, May 24, 1902, 7. The two paintings were donated to Provident Hospital in Chicago, and the Tuskegee Institute, respectively.

²¹⁸ Victoria Ortiz, *Sojourner Truth: Self Made Woman* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974), 146. It is a copy of an earlier work painted by Frank C. Courter in 1892 that had been destroyed in a fire at the Battle Creek Sanitarium.

²¹⁹ Wilson, "Mrs Wilson and the President," 7. She also gave Roosevelt a medallion she made depicting Phillis Wheatley, the African American author and poet.

²²⁰ Robin S. Peebles, "Lottie Wilson: Michigan's Forgotten Black Artist," *Michigan History* 68, no. 5 (1984): 17.

²²¹ "Here and There," November 1902, 47.

²²² "Valuable Paintings," *The Niles Republican*, July 18, 1901, 1. At the time the address was 299 North Fifth Street.

²²³ *Colored American*, January 17, 1903, 15; and "Old Resident Dead," 3.

²²⁴ "The Popular Studio of Lottie E. Wilson," *Colored American*, February 7, 1903, 16; and "The Popular Studio of Lottie E. Wilson," *Colored American*, March 7, 1903, 13. Note that the February 7 advertisement incorrectly gives the address as "U Street," which was rectified in later versions.

²²⁵ "Adolph Knott Note." She and her husband appear in the 1910 United States Census, but the enumerator of Niles Township (coincidentally, Adolph Knott) did not list addresses.

²²⁶ "Well Known Artist Died Last Night," *Niles Daily Star*, January 14, 1914, 1.

²²⁷ Peebles, "Lottie Wilson: Michigan's Forgotten Black Artist," 16.

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The Fifth Street home was rented out around 1910,²²⁸ though around 1911 Wilson moved back to the house. During this time (or while she still lived in Niles Township) she worked in Niles at her father's old house at 323 North Fifth Street in the Ferry Street neighborhood. She advertised her studio there, where she did portraiture work and also taught lessons in oil painting, pastels, ceramic painting, and freehand drawing.²²⁹ Her health declined in 1912 and she died of colon cancer in her home on January 16, 1914, at the age of 59.²³⁰

The house at 323 North Fifth Street may be the best example nationwide of a place associated with Lottie E. Wilson's productive life. It not only served as her residence and place of death, but also housed her studio where she displayed her work and taught art classes. It is the only building that connects Wilson with her hometown and her father (himself a notable figure in Niles' community). The earlier residences of the Wilsons from her childhood are not known to have survived and would not represent her productive life. Her residence in South Bend is no longer extant, and her residence in Indianapolis is not known and would also largely predate her productive life. Her studio in Washington, DC, also no longer exists (now where the Walter E. Washington Convention Center is situated). Her Niles Township home is also no longer extant.²³¹ The only other extant building associated with her productive life is her earlier home and studio at 232 Adams Street in Bay City. Both that house and her Niles house retain integrity, though the Bay City house has non-historic vinyl siding and windows. Neither the Niles house nor the Bay City location have been evaluated on the interior.

The Ferry Street neighborhood was not exclusively African American; many noteworthy White households existed there as well. One such family was that of Patrick Tynan, a cooper, who lived at 723 Sycamore from 1861; they remained there through multiple generations until at least 1937 or later.²³² Thomas Tynan, Patrick's son, was born at the house and as an adult moved to Colorado where he served as state prison warden and was known as a Progressive reformer.²³³ He ran for governor in 1918, but lost in the Democratic primary. Another example, Sarah E. Rossman, an early settler of Niles, lived at 317 North Sixth Street (before it was owned by the Finleys) until her death in 1927;²³⁴ her husband Charles lived there until sometime between 1931

²²⁸ Harlan and Irene Tolbert lived there as renters with their daughter Sarah in 1910 ("1910 United States Census").

²²⁹ "Lottie E. Wilson Artist," 1982, Biography, Lottie Wilson, Niles District Library.

²³⁰ State of Michigan, Department of State, "Certificate of Death: Lottie Moss"; and "Well Known Artist Died Last Night," 1.

²³¹ The address for the house on Pucker Street is not known, but it was "just north" of 2580 Pucker according to a neighbor who had lived next door ("Adolph Knott Note"). No buildings built before 1900 remain in that vicinity.

²³² "1910 United States Census"; "1920 United States Census"; *Niles City Directory 1935*, 1935; and *Luedders' Niles Mich. City Directory* (Coldwater, MI: Otto E. Luedders, 1938).

²³³ Alexander Finklestein, "Colorado Honor Convicts: Roads, Reform, and Region in the Progressive Era," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 20, no. 1 (2021): 24-43.

²³⁴ "Niles Pioneer Dead," *Benton Harbor News-Palladium*, March 17, 1927, 1.

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and 1933.²³⁵ Though he did not reside in the district, Joseph P. Troost, who ran the Niles-based Troost Bros. furniture manufacturing and retailing business, owned the parcel that became Troost Park from 1930. The family never developed the property, and Troost's daughter Marguerite Hull donated it to the city in 1967 to be used as a park.²³⁶

Although the builders of individual buildings are usually not known, most were likely built by their original residents or occupants after the land was purchased from an investor. For one example, the house at 527 Ferry Street was completed by Paul Trautvetter, a German immigrant and stonemason, in 1892.²³⁷ Of note, the Trautvetter House bears the only example in the district of a coursed, stone ashlar foundation, expressing the trade of its builder.

Trautvetter had purchased the land from Joseph Larimore the previous year. Larimore was a White settler who came to Niles in 1834.²³⁸ He operated a dry goods store and drug store, and later served as a director of several businesses, including the Niles Gas-Light Company and the First National Bank of Niles. He was also an Elder of the Niles Presbyterian Church for twenty-five years. He lived on Fourth Street and owned many properties around town.²³⁹ Larimore also sold one of the lots for the Ferry Street School (to the Niles School District Number One in 1867) as well as the property for the Franklin AME Church (sold to the church in 1886). Although the Niles Anti-Slavery Society had been formed at Larimore's church in 1836, the extent to which Larimore, himself, was a supporter of the African American community in Niles is not known. As for the Ferry Street School and Franklin AME properties, deed records show that Larimore had sold the lots at a substantial profit, suggesting that his role in those transactions was merely that of an investor.²⁴⁰

The Ferry Street Neighborhood: The Mid-Twentieth Century to Today

Immediately after World War II, the economic and industrial base of Niles remained largely the same as before the war. Beginning in the mid-1950s, however, the city experienced a deindustrialization process that paralleled many cities in the Midwest.²⁴¹ In that decade railroad

²³⁵ "1900 United States Census"; *Luedders' Niles Mich. City Directory* (Coldwater, MI: Otto E. Luedders, 1931); and *Luedders' Niles Mich. City Directory* (Coldwater, MI: Otto E. Luedders, 1933). In 1933 the address is listed as vacant.

²³⁶ "Warranty Deed" (1967), RE liber 809, 549, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²³⁷ Trautvetter died in a target shooting accident a few months after completing the building (*Niles Daily Star*, July 26, 1892, 3).

²³⁸ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 146-51; and Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 162-69.

²³⁹ *Niles City Directory* 1874.

²⁴⁰ Larimore had purchased both lots, together with several others, in 1857 for \$200 total; see "Deed" (1857), Deed liber 2, 709, Berrien County Register of Deeds. He sold the Ferry Street School parcel for \$250 in 1867 and the Franklin AME parcel for \$1,000 in 1886; see "Deed" (1867), deed liber 29, 442, Berrien County Register of Deeds; and "Warranty Deed" (1886), deed liber 91, 45, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²⁴¹ Stiles and Watts-Stiles, *Niles, Michigan*, 177.

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maintenance facilities, once a major employer, were moved from Niles to Elkhart, Indiana. In the 1960s and 1970s some of the large industrial companies moved away from the city. Kawneer, for instance, moved their headquarters to the South, and by the mid-1980s their buildings were donated to the city of Niles to avoid tax payments. Other employers like the Simplicity Pattern Company remained until the twenty-first century, but downsized their operations. In the late twentieth century some areas in the city diversified: in the downtown area, for instance, new specialty shops opened starting in the late 1980s.²⁴²

The Ferry Street neighborhood was not far from large factories to the north along and near Lake Street, where the railroad tracks on North Ninth Street met the main line. A few buildings within the neighborhood also expressed the city's industrial character. At 321 Eighth Street was the Niles Pattern Works from at least 1935 to 1965.²⁴³ Other commercial or office buildings in the district are no longer extant. These included 402 Seventh Street, a grocery in 1935 but later an office of the Allied Industrial Workers Union Local No. 816, Niles Central Labor Union, and Brotherhood of Railway Carmen from around 1956 to 1965;²⁴⁴ and in 1956, a construction company at 623 Sycamore.²⁴⁵ An ice house was also located at 814 Sycamore Street from circa 1931 to 1945 (the latter two locations are adjacent to the district but excluded from its boundaries due to demolition).²⁴⁶

From the 1940s through the 1970s, the Ferry Street neighborhood continued to have a mix of Black and White residents.²⁴⁷ In 1950 many residents of the neighborhood and surrounding areas worked in various industries, including the railroad, Simplicity Pattern Company, and automotive parts suppliers.²⁴⁸ Willie M. Stewart worked at a local foundry; he lived at 721 Ferry Street, a house within the district that was the former residence of Alexander Griffin (noted above). John Jones, who lived with his wife and son at 313 North Ninth Street (now within the district), worked in automotive assembly.

Though largely consisting of owner-occupied homes, the Ferry Street neighborhood had a substantial number of houses occupied by tenants. For example, after the death of Lottie Wilson, her husband, Daniel Moss, sold the house at 323 North Fifth Street to Charles Linsenmier, whose

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ *Niles City Directory* 1935, 1935; and *Niles City Directory* 1965. The business was listed as the "Niles Pattern Company" in 1935 and as the "Niles Pattern Works" in subsequent editions.

²⁴⁴ *Niles City Directory* 1935, 1935; *Niles City Directory* 1956; and *Niles City Directory* 1965.

²⁴⁵ *Niles City Directory* 1956.

²⁴⁶ *Niles City Directory* 1935, 1935; and *Luedders' Niles Mich. City Directory* (Coldwater, MI: Otto E. Luedders, 1945). Known as the Britton Ice Station and the Britton Ice House.

²⁴⁷ Finley, Profiles and Portraits Interviews.

²⁴⁸ It is unclear which automotive companies were the employers, as they were simply listed as "automotive manufacturing," "automotive parts manufacturing," or "automotive supplier." These were distinct categories from automotive sales and repair garages.

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 White family continued to own the property for fifty-eight years from 1918 to 1976.²⁴⁹ Various tenants lived at the property until members of the family moved in around 1948.²⁵⁰

The term “Central Side” came to be used, from the 1960 into the 1980s, by African American residents to refer to distinct community bounded by Main Street and Regent Street on the south, Fifth Street on the west, Wayne Street on the north, and Thirteenth Street on the east.²⁵¹ It stood in contrast to the North Side, in the vicinity of the Michigan Central railroad tracks, where another concentration of African American households was located, and the South Side, a term used to describe the smaller population of African American residents further south in Niles. The Central Side was sometimes abbreviated as C Side.

By the late twentieth century more African American residents moved to the Ferry Street neighborhood as White residents left. According to Reverend Bryant Bacon, by the early 2000s approximately 90 percent of its residents were Black, a change from the mid-twentieth century and before.²⁵² Several buildings that once housed industrial and commercial companies were converted to residential use. More recently, however, demographics have once again changed, with many White families moving into the neighborhood.

Ferry Street as Social Center

From the 1850s on through the twenty-first century, the Ferry Street neighborhood was an important center for social activity for African Americans in Niles. Even those that lived in other parts of the city maintained ties to the Ferry Street neighborhood. The Methodist Society, for instance, which had built a church in the southern part of the city, began to hold meetings at the Ferry Street School, and in 1869 attempted to purchase a lot at Ferry and Eighth to build a permanent building.²⁵³ Sojourner Truth came to Niles in 1873 and gave a talk at the Ferry Street School.²⁵⁴ It was not until 1888 when Methodist Society members constructed their church, later called Franklin AME, in the neighborhood, but clearly for two decades prior they had hoped to do so in the Ferry Street area. The continued reach of the Ferry Street institutions certainly went beyond the neighborhood: Mount Calvary Baptist Church directories from 1976 and 1987 show that its members lived in many of the same locations all around the city as seen in earlier data from United States censuses, city directories, and the *Manual of Freedmen's Progress*.²⁵⁵

An example of how the neighborhood was such an important location even for those who did not live there can be seen in the lives of two people: Julius Caesar and Geraldine Romaine Finley. Caesar had been born enslaved in Virginia and later sold to a slaveholder in Kentucky. He later

²⁴⁹ As apparent from several obituary photos; see for example <https://www.halbritterwickens.com/obituaries/Allene-Felden>; “Warranty Deed” (1918), Deed liber 201, 535, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²⁵⁰ See Luedders' and Polk's Niles City directories, various dates.

²⁵¹ Busby, interview.

²⁵² Bryant Bacon, interview by Michael F. Webb, June 27, 2023.

²⁵³ “Excerpts from the Minutes of the Common Council of Niles, Michigan,” 1869, Niles, Churches, Franklin A.M.E. Church file, Niles District Library.

²⁵⁴ *The Niles Republican*, October 9, 1873, 3.

²⁵⁵ “Mount Calvary 1976 Directory”; and “1987 Directory of Mount Calvary.”

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freed himself and lived in Niles, working as a plasterer and broom maker. He enlisted in the 8th United States Colored Infantry Regiment during the Civil War and was present at the Appomattox Court House when Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant.²⁵⁶ It was he who had petitioned Niles' Common Council for the Methodist Church to acquire a lot in the neighborhood in 1869, and he lived nearby at 898 Regent Street (no longer extant). When he died in 1907, his funeral was held at Second Baptist Church.

Geraldine Romaine Finley was born Geraldine Edmondson in 1928 in Chicago but lived most of her life in Niles and resided on Bluff Street when she died in 2011.²⁵⁷ In 1948 she married Harold Finley. She worked at the Simplicity Pattern Company²⁵⁸ for thirty-six years. She was a longtime member of Mount Calvary Baptist Church, and a Worthy Matron of Miriam Chapter No. 56, which shared its lodge with the Prince Hall Masons at 323 North Seventh Street. Even though both Caesar and Finely were not residents of the Ferry Street district, their social lives were intertwined with the institutions there.

The importance of the institutions in the Ferry Street neighborhood therefore continued to be a focus of peoples' lives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In numerous interviews conducted under the Niles History Center's *Profiles and Portraits* project in 2016 and 2017, African Americans who lived in and around the city noted ties to the neighborhood. During the early and mid-twentieth century, activities organized by the Ferry Street neighborhood churches were an essential and safe way to for Black people to socialize when businesses and services elsewhere in the city were segregated.²⁵⁹ Whether they lived in Hatcherville to the east or nearby in the city itself, they were members of the Mount Calvary Baptist Church,²⁶⁰ Franklin AME Church,²⁶¹ and the Prince Hall Masons.²⁶² Families often had some members who attended Franklin AME and others Mount Calvary; despite belonging to different Christian denominations they were linked socially.²⁶³ An example were Percy and Doris Gay: Percy was chairman of the board of trustees at Mount Calvary Baptist Church, while Doris was a trustee of the Franklin AME Church, a testament to the close relations of the two churches.²⁶⁴ The Ferry Street School had long since ceased to be a segregated institution (see text that follows) or, by the 1970s, a school at all. Yet it continued to be an important building to the community, with community members serving the Ferry Street Resource Center in various capacities.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁶ "Death of Julius Caesar," *Niles Daily Star*, 1907.

²⁵⁷ "Finley Family Files."

²⁵⁸ The Simplicity Pattern Company's factory was located north of the district, just south of the train tracks between Ninth and Eleventh Streets. According to 1950 United States Census data, many African Americans in Niles worked at the company.

²⁵⁹ Fleming, *Profiles and Portraits* Interviews.

²⁶⁰ E.g., Skinner, *Profiles and Portraits* Interviews.

²⁶¹ E.g., Singer Mitchell, *Profiles and Portraits* Interviews.

²⁶² E.g., Thurman Hoover, Niles History Center: *Profiles and Portraits* Interviews, interview by Olen Simmons, 2016.

²⁶³ Bacon, interview.

²⁶⁴ "Warranty Deed" (1945), Deed liber 415, 611, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²⁶⁵ E.g., Fleming, *Profiles and Portraits* Interviews.

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Ferry Street institutions like Mount Calvary Baptist Church, the institution with the longest history in the neighborhood, had connections not just to the neighborhood's residents and other institutions, but also to those around Niles and beyond the city. The church long had ties to Chain Lake Baptist Church in Calvin Township, Cass County, and to Second Baptist Church in Dowagiac. It was therefore a church with regional connections. Today parishioners of Mount Calvary now live not just in the Ferry Street neighborhood, not just in Niles, but in Benton Harbor, Cassopolis, and South Bend, Indiana.²⁶⁶

Mount Calvary Baptist Church continues to be a social center, and its current pastor, Reverend Bryant Bacon, recognized the important role of the church by noting: "I think the church, our church being there, has kind of been a stabilizer." Reverend Bacon added "one of the things we wanted to do, I guess keep in step with what the people before me had done. I knew that the church was a kind of a stabilizer, an anchor in the area, and I wanted to kind of push it, elevate what we were doing a little bit more to maybe change how people viewed the neighborhood."²⁶⁷

Religious and social causes were frequently united in these institutions and their activities. One way of addressing the neighborhood's needs was the development of the Ferry Street Resource Center. The Center helps provide residents access to educational and social programs, offering a variety of services, including housing and utility assistance, a job interview program, referrals to government agencies, and printing services. When Reverend Bacon first arrived as pastor the Ferry Street School building was little used, and he pushed for new ways to use that building to help the neighborhood.²⁶⁸ This eventually led to the building being rehabilitated and repurposed in 2004 (see below); Reverend Bacon now sits on the board of the Ferry Street Resource Center.

Reverend Bacon also noted that when he became pastor of Mount Calvary in 2002, the Ferry Street neighborhood was often thought of negatively by people in Niles, as drug use was visible in public areas like Troost Park. Though problems remain,²⁶⁹ Bacon led efforts to change this perception by ameliorating conditions and working directly with residents. The Ferry Street Resource Center, located in the Ferry Street School building until May 2023, and now across the street at 317 North Seventh Street, also provides support for residents.

Religious and Fraternal Organizations

The first known African American institution established in the Ferry Street neighborhood was the Second Baptist Church, known today as Mount Calvary Baptist Church. Alfred Jenkins, Henry G. Nelson, and Albert Cousins, trustees of the Second Baptist Church of Niles, purchased the site for their first church, on the southeast corner of North Sixth and Ferry Streets, on

²⁶⁶ Bacon, interview.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Several shootings, likely connected to one another, took place in and near the neighborhood in August and September of 2022 ("Teens Killed in Niles Shooting Identified," 16 News Now WNDU, September 21, 2022, <https://www.wndu.com/2022/09/21/two-teens-killed-niles-shooting/>).

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September 20, 1848.²⁷⁰ They bought the land from Thomas J. Shores and Eliza Shores for twenty-five dollars. Second Baptist may have officially separated from Niles' First Baptist Church, a largely White church, under the Anti-Slavery Baptist Association in 1851.²⁷¹ That association, also known as the Michigan Regular Anti-Slavery Baptist Association, had been founded at the Chain Lake Baptist Church in Cass County and had initially included members from Niles.²⁷² That Second Baptist already had trustees in 1848 conducting a land transaction, however, suggests that the separation from First Baptist may have occurred earlier.

The first pastors of Second Baptist were Reverend J. W. Hackley and Reverend David Lett, the founder of the Chain Lake Baptist Church, and an additional ten members formed the initial congregation.²⁷³ Two of them, D. Moss and Thomas Wilson, were elected deacons. Its first church was a log building, constructed by Jonathan Moss, and may have been completed in 1849.²⁷⁴ No known images or more detailed descriptions of the structure survive, but the small building shared a lot with two other buildings just to its south.²⁷⁵ In 1852 the Chain Lake Association was formed to provide administrative services to the Black Baptist churches in Michigan and South Bend, Indiana, and included Second Baptist in Niles.²⁷⁶ A large revival was held at Second Baptist in 1863, where twenty people were baptized.

In 1872 Second Baptist began construction of a church across the street on the northeast corner of North Sixth and Ferry Streets.²⁷⁷ Plans to do so may have been in place for a while, since the original church's lot was sold ten years previously, to James F. Crop on September 10, 1863 for seventy-five dollars.²⁷⁸ The Niles City Council approved the new construction on May 15,

²⁷⁰ "Deed" (1850), Deed liber S, 468, Berrien County Register of Deeds. The 1848 deed was recorded on January 18, 1850.

²⁷¹ Ellis states that the organization of the church was "perfected at the First Baptist church in 1851, with 10 members, under the Anti-Slavery Baptist Association," but no further details are given (*Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 164). It is unclear if most members were first part of First Baptist, and indeed one of its pastors, Rev. David Lett, was the head of Chain Lake Baptist Church in Cass County and likely was not a member. No other sources we could find give more details on the process followed and people involved.

²⁷² Wilson, *Rural Black Heritage*, 93.

²⁷³ Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 164.

²⁷⁴ A church history states Jonathan Moss was both the builder of the church and donor of the land it was on; since it was purchased from the Shores, however, he may have instead funded the purchase ("Mount Calvary Baptist Church: One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Anniversary," 1974, 3).

²⁷⁵ *Map of the Counties of Cass, Van Buren, and Berrien, Michigan*.

²⁷⁶ Mary E. D. Trowbridge, *History of Baptists in Michigan* (Michigan Baptist State Convention, 1909), 177 and 326.

²⁷⁷ No reasons are given for the move, but the congregation was growing: at least thirteen people had been baptized during revival at the church a few months earlier (*The Niles Republican*, January 11, 1872, 3; and *The Niles Republican*, January 18, 1872, 3).

²⁷⁸ "Deed" (1863), Deed liber 14, 609, Berrien County Register of Deeds. Ellis states that the lots of the old and new churches were "exchanged," but that does not seem to be the case, see below (*Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 164).

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1872,²⁷⁹ and newspaper articles note the construction of a new church, with the cornerstone put down on June 20.²⁸⁰ A fair and festival was held at the old church on February 27, 1873, in order to raise more funds for the building of the new church.²⁸¹ Construction faced delays, but resumed in the autumn of 1873.²⁸² The fate of the old church building is unknown.²⁸³ At least one photograph of the newer church remains, and it depicts a white frame building consistent with building methods of the 1870s.²⁸⁴ The land upon which the second church was built was purchased by Second Baptist on December 2, 1864 from Rodney C. Paine for fifty dollars.²⁸⁵ Later, on September 4, 1872, Paine signed a quit claim deed on the property to Second Baptist Church Trustees Jacob Neal, Gamaliel Hill, and William Hackley for one dollar.²⁸⁶

The white-painted, wood frame church housed the congregation until 1950, when that building was demolished, and construction of a brick church building was begun at the cost of \$22,000.²⁸⁷ Dedicated on March 4, 1951, the congregation was renamed Mount Calvary Baptist Church.²⁸⁷ Work began on a large expansion of the church's facilities in 1970 to better serve its growing membership and make more room for Sunday School classes and social gatherings.²⁸⁸ This included a new sanctuary and a connecting hallway on the front of the 1951 structure. Despite difficulties with a contractor who did not complete the work and left with money that had been owed to subcontractors,²⁸⁹ the addition was dedicated on February 28, 1971.²⁹⁰ A new pastor,

²⁷⁹ "Excerpts from the Minutes of the Common Council of Niles, Michigan," 1872, Niles, Churches, Second Baptist Church file, Niles District Library.

²⁸⁰ *The Niles Republican*, June 13, 1872, 3.

²⁸¹ *The Niles Republican*, February 20, 1873, 3.

²⁸² A notice states that work had resumed on the new church and would likely be completed soon (*The Niles Republican*, September 4, 1873, 3).

²⁸³ Ellis also stated that the old church was moved to the new lot, and a short history of Mount Calvary Church states that the old log building was later destroyed by a fire, but neither of these seem to be the case since the old church was in use while the new one was being constructed (Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 164; and "Mount Calvary Anniversary," 3). Local newspapers normally note any fires, and we could find none reported at the site from 1870 through 1873. An atlas published in 1873 shows the new church building on the northeastern corner and only two buildings at the old church's lot, as opposed to three (Lake, *Atlas of Berrien Co., Michigan*, 54-55).

²⁸⁴ "Mount Calvary Anniversary," rear cover.

²⁸⁵ "Deed" (1878), Deed liber 61, 209, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²⁸⁶ "Quit Claim Deed" (1872), Deed liber 44, 252, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²⁸⁷ "Mount Calvary Anniversary," 3. It is unknown why the name was changed. The current pastor of Mount Calvary, Rev. Bryant Bacon, speculated that it was because several other churches were also named Second Baptist (Bacon, interview).

²⁸⁸ Jim Nice, "Here & There," *Niles Daily Star*, February 22, 1982.

²⁸⁹ Jim Nice, "Here & There," *Niles Daily Star*, February 24, 1983. A contractor named "L. Haley" is listed on a building inspection record from 1970, but it is not known if this was the contractor who absconded with the church's funds or a later contractor who came in to complete the work (Niles Building Safety Division, "Inspection Record: Footing; 601 Ferry," June 16, 1970).

²⁹⁰ "Mount Calvary Anniversary," 3.

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Reverend W. L. Daniels, assumed leadership of the church on March 7 of that same year. He was replaced by the current pastor, Reverend Bryant Bacon, on August 11, 2002.²⁹¹

The other extant Black church in the district is Franklin AME Church on Sycamore between Eight and Ninth Streets. The Black Methodist Society established the church in 1888 as the African Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁹² (The African Methodist Episcopal movement began in the early nineteenth century in response to discrimination in predominately White Methodist Episcopal congregations.) The Methodist Society had been formed in Niles decades before, however, probably during the 1840s (despite most secondary sources dating its founding to the 1860s²⁹³), and the group originally gathered in a small building on Maple Street.²⁹⁴

On June 23, 1848, George W. Smith and Thomas Stafford, both identified as trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, purchased property from Jacob Beeson for one dollar.²⁹⁵ The land is now the lots on the north side of Maple Street running east from 927 Maple Street to a portion of the land now at 204 South Eleventh Street, all south of the Ferry Street neighborhood. The deed not only specifies that the land is to be used for the construction of a church, but it also gives details as to how the trustees should continue to elect new members (e.g., they must be twenty-one years old and affiliated with the Church for at least one year previously) and how the members had to follow the “rules and discipline” of the AME Church. Beeson reserved the right for himself and successors, however, to repurchase the land for one dollar if a lien was placed on the property.

George W. Smith and Thomas Stafford were both African Americans. Smith lived in Niles in 1840, while Stafford lived somewhere in Berrien County, perhaps Niles, in 1850 and was originally from Tennessee.²⁹⁶ Jacob Beeson was a White businessman and developer, who lived in Niles from 1832 to 1859.²⁹⁷ He platted several sections of Niles (although this sale did not involve his own additions to the then-village, but rather H. B. and G. W. Hoffman and C. K. Green’s Addition), was owner of a warehouse with his brother, and became a county supervisor.

²⁹¹ Scott Novak, “Young, New Pastor Hopes to Make Niles Church a Community Presence,” *Niles Daily Star*, February 24, 2003, 2.

²⁹² “A.M.E. CHURCH 1888” is inscribed on the original cornerstone of the church. Coolidge calls the church the “Second Methodist Church,” but is the only source to do so and may have merely used that name to distinguish it from Niles’ first Methodist church (*History of Berrien County*, 158).

²⁹³ See, for example, Pearl Jeffries, “History of Franklin A.M.E. Church; 1860-1963,” [1963?], Niles, Churches, Franklin A.M.E. Church file, Niles District Library; “106th Anniversary,” *The Herald-Palladium*, April 26, 1986; and Dawn Locniskar, “Community Cornerstone: Franklin A.M.E. Celebrates 116th Anniversary,” *Niles Daily Star*, May 11, 1996.

²⁹⁴ Called Maple Street in various sources, the modern Maple Street was then called Maple Lane. The original Maple Street is now Thirteenth Street.

²⁹⁵ “Deed” (1848), Deed liber Q, 453, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

²⁹⁶ “1840 United States Census”; and “1850 United States Census.”

²⁹⁷ Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 133 and 156.

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The church on Maple Street burned down in 1866 or 1867.²⁹⁸ In 1870 the Methodist Society began meeting in a rented room at the Democratic Party Hall on the southeastern corner of Front Street and Main Street.²⁹⁹ At that time the society maintained links to the White Methodist church there.³⁰⁰ There is some confusion as to the church's affiliation with the national AME organization during this period, partially due to the destruction of church records in the fire. A church history written by Pearl Jeffries, one of its members, notes that it was only around 1870 that Bishop John Paul Quinn came to Niles and formed the Methodist Society into a branch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.³⁰¹ Since the group from Niles that purchased the land on Maple Street was already called AME in 1848, circa 1870 may have been when the group formally joined the organization. The group had also been served in 1865 by the African Methodist Episcopal pastor at the Mount Zion Church in Calvin Township, Reverend Williams J. Anderson.³⁰²

The Methodist Society already had connections to the Ferry Street neighborhood before the building of a permanent church in 1888. The Society's Sunday school was held in the Ferry Street School building, probably from the late 1860s up to the construction of the church in 1888.³⁰³ On February 15, 1869, Julius Caesar, a resident of the city,³⁰⁴ petitioned the city's Common Council to sell a lot in the neighborhood at the corner of Ferry and Eighth Street in order to build a church there.³⁰⁵ The lot, now Troost Park and 321 North Eighth Street, was then owned by the city. The Council did not, however, sell the property then: it did so only in 1882 to Rufus W. Landon, who was unaffiliated with the church.

²⁹⁸ Jeffries, "History of Franklin A.M.E. Church," 1.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ In 1873, the A. M. E. Bishop Alexander Wayman came to Niles and gave a talk at the Methodist Church; see Alexander Wayman, "Notes by the Way," *The Christian Recorder*, November 6, 1873; and *The Niles Republican*, October 23, 1873, 3.

³⁰¹ Jeffries, "History of Franklin A.M.E. Church," 1. Coolidge gives 1871 as the date that the church became an A. M. E. organization (*History of Berrien County*, 186); 1880 is given in another source (Locniskar, "Community Cornerstone"). The petition to purchase property in the Ferry Street neighborhood in 1869 already calls the organization the "African Methodist Church" ("Minutes of the Common Council of Niles," 1869).

³⁰² Alexander Brown, William Scott, and Joseph Allen, "An Appeal to the Friends of Humanity," *The Christian Recorder*, December 23, 1865. This appeal by Mount Zion members for help building a church and a school is somewhat ambiguous, as it is not clear where they are looking to do so, especially since Anderson worked the "Niles Circuit," but it is likely for their own Calvin Township church.

³⁰³ Jeffries, "History of Franklin A.M.E. Church," 1.

³⁰⁴ Julius Caesar lived at 898 Regent Street at the corner of North Ninth (outside of the district and no longer extant) by 1874-1875, and worked as a whitewasher, plasterer, and broom maker; see Cowles, *Berrien County Directory and History*, 80; *Niles City Directory* 1874; and *Niles City Directory*, 1904 (Niles, MI: Corell & Sturtevant, 1904).

³⁰⁵ "Minutes of the Common Council of Niles," 1869. Caesar hoped that lot 241 of H. B. Hoffman's subdivision would be sold; no building seems present at that lot in 1873 (*Lake, Atlas of Berrien Co., Michigan*, 54-55).

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In 1888 the Methodist Society constructed a permanent church building on Sycamore Street, then called the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The land had been purchased from Joseph C. Larimore on November 15, 1886, for \$1,000.³⁰⁶ Mrs. A. Franklin brought the first wheelbarrow of brick and mortar to the construction site.³⁰⁷ Besides Franklin, its first members were Mrs. D. Purcell, Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. J. Powers, Mrs. Julius Caesar, and Mrs. J. Cousins, and its first pastor was Reverend Cyrus Hill. Reverend William Collins followed as pastor, and then Reverend S. T. Byrd. It was under Reverend Byrd's tenure that, in 1908, Bishop A. Handy visited and dedicated the church in honor of Franklin; thereafter the church was known as Franklin AME.³⁰⁸

By 1940 its pastor, Reverend F. D. Byrd, lived next door at 809 Sycamore.³⁰⁹ Extensive work to the church building was undertaken in 1945: the building was raised, moved back, and then set upon a new basement, and a kitchen and community hall were added.³¹⁰ In 1945, R. W. Gully, Genevieve Poston, Doris Finley Gay, Russell Webster, G. S. Coates, Arneal Shepard, and Myrtle Brandford were trustees.³¹¹ The interior was remodeled and an organ installed between 1956 and 1958.³¹² The church continued to hold an important place to residents, hosting various functions for the community there and organizing others, including tag days in the 1930s and parades in the 1960s.³¹³ Prominent Civil Rights figure Rosa Parks also spoke at the church twice, visiting in 1983 and 1992.³¹⁴

In 1857 the first Prince Hall Masonic lodge in Michigan was established in Niles under John Wesley Harrison, an African American harness maker who lived in Cass County.³¹⁵ Harrison was born free in Kentucky, the son of an African American engineer. He joined the Prince Hall Masons in 1848 while living in Philadelphia and later served as the Deputy Grand Master for

³⁰⁶ "Warranty Deed," 1886, Deed liber 91, 45. One restriction was attached to the sale: a "privy or water closet" could only be built on the property's "extreme west-side."

³⁰⁷ Jeffries, "History of Franklin A.M.E. Church," 1.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 2.

³⁰⁹ Historical Records Survey Program, *Inventory of Church Archives in Michigan: African Methodist Episcopal Church Michigan Conference* (Detroit: Michigan Historical Records Survey Project, 1940), 12.

³¹⁰ Jeffries, "History of Franklin A.M.E. Church," 2.

³¹¹ "Warranty Deed," 1945, liber 415, 611. This deed formally transferred the church property from an organization under the old name (African Methodist Episcopal Church) to the new name (Franklin AME).

³¹² Jeffries, "History of Franklin A.M.E. Church," 3.

³¹³ "Excerpts from the Minutes of the Common Council of Niles, Michigan," 1933, Niles, Churches, Franklin A.M.E. Church file, Niles District Library; "Excerpts from the Minutes of the Common Council of Niles, Michigan," 1939, Niles, Churches, Franklin A.M.E. Church file, Niles District Library; and "Excerpts from the Minutes of the Common Council of Niles, Michigan," 1963, Niles, Churches, Franklin A.M.E. Church file, Niles District Library.

³¹⁴ Christie Bleck, "For Rosa Parks, 'It Was Matter of Protesting Being Treated Wrong,'" *Niles Daily Star*, June 27, 1983; and Jan Griffey, "Rosa Parks Returns to Niles," *Niles Daily Star*, October 19, 1992.

³¹⁵ "The Michigan Voice of Prince Hall," October 1973, Niles, Masons, Prince Hall Lodge file, Niles District Library.

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Prince Hall lodges in the state of Indiana. An obituary noted that Harrison was considered “one of the engineers on the famous ‘underground railroad,’ in charge of the line between the villages of Niles and Edwardsburg.”³¹⁶ Harrison was known as “the father of masonry among colored people of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois”³¹⁷ and worked to expand the organization to the western territories.

In March 1775, Prince Hall, an abolitionist and activist in Boston, Massachusetts, was initiated as a freemason along with fourteen other free Black men.³¹⁸ In July of that year they formed the first African American freemason society called African Lodge No. 1 in Boston. The group was chartered under the Grand Lodge of England in 1784 and was renamed African American Lodge No. 459.³¹⁹ Later renamed after Prince Hall, the lodge broke with the Grand Lodge in 1820 and began expanding from New England into the Midwest.³²⁰ Prince Hall lodges became a place for Black men to support each other in the pursuit for full citizenship for Black people in America and to follow the masonic traditions of mutual aid and charity.³²¹ Prince Hall lodges have worked to end Jim Crow laws, pushed for anti-lynching legislation,³²² and continue to support Civil Rights causes.³²³

The Niles Prince Hall lodge was initially part of the Indiana Lodge (as Harrison Lodge No. 6) and received a formal charter in 1859. Indicative of the prominence of the early Black community in Niles, a convention of the then-four lodges in the state (the others being based in Ypsilanti, Battle Creek, and Williamsville³²⁴) was held in Niles on April 25, 1865. There they formed a group of Michigan Lodges, and the Niles lodge became Harrison Lodge No. 1.³²⁵ The

³¹⁶ Obituary, *Berrien County Record*.

³¹⁷ John W. Harrison, Obituary, *Jackson City Patriot*. June 17, 1892, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/173821437/john-wesley-harrison#view-photo=245956014>.

³¹⁸ Peter P. Hinks and Stephen Kantrowitz, “Introduction: The Revolution in Freemasonry,” in *All Men Free and Brethren: Essays on the History of African American Freemasonry*, ed. Peter P. Hinks and Stephen Kantrowitz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 1-7; and LaRoche, *Geography of Resistance*, 151-54.

³¹⁹ Sibyl E. Moses, “Prince Hall Freemasonry: A Resource Guide,” Library of Congress, September 24, 2019, <https://guides.loc.gov/prince-hall-freemasonry/introduction>.

³²⁰ Theda Skocpol and Jennifer Lynn Oser, “Organization despite Adversity: The Origins and Development of African American Fraternal Associations,” *Social Science History* 28, no. 3 (2004): 384-85.

³²¹ Cécile Révauger, *Black Freemasonry: From Prince Hall to the Giants of Jazz*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2016), 78.

³²² Hinks and Kantrowitz, “Introduction: The Revolution in Freemasonry,” 17-19.

³²³ See, for instance, Ariane Liazos and Ganz Marshall, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 174-213.

³²⁴ The Williamsville noted here is an unincorporated community in Porter Township in Cass County, about 20 miles to the east of Niles. Another Williamsville, also an unincorporated community, is located in Unadilla Township, Livingston County, about 117 miles northeast of Niles.

³²⁵ Elmer L. Wallace, “A Condensed History of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Michigan,” *Most Worshipful Prince*

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Michigan Lodges formed the Unity Grand Lodge in 1872 and petitioned other masonic organizations for recognition in 1873. Members of the Niles lodge were frequently members of Black religious institutions in the Ferry Street neighborhood, like Second Baptist Church.³²⁶ They continually attended statewide meetings of the Michigan lodges, but also hosted conventions, such as one in 1903.³²⁷ While the original lodge location is unknown, in 1904 it was located at 209 Main Street.³²⁸

By 1957 the Niles Prince Hall Masons were located at 1205 North Tenth Street, just north of the railroad tracks.³²⁹ That building, no longer extant, was owned by Russell Webster, the treasurer of the organization, and may have also been his personal residence (he purchased it in 1942 and sold it in 1972).³³⁰ By that time the organization was known as the John W. Moore Lodge No. 42. The organization purchased land just north of Niles (1515 Old US-31) but sold it in 1960 after the organization moved to the Ferry Street neighborhood.

In 1959 the Prince Hall Masons moved to 323 North Seventh Street, a building within the Ferry Street district that had been erected in 1922 as Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. The predominately White Saint Paul's Lutheran Church was founded in 1919, though at that time services were held in the basement of the Niles Public Library.³³¹ A Gothic Revival house at 323 North Seventh Street was purchased as a home for the congregation and the first service was held there on November 9, 1919.³³² On February 5, 1922 the congregation decided to build a new church on the site and had the house moved to the back of the lot; that house is now located next door at 710 Ferry Street.³³³ In 1955 work began on a new church at 1340 Sycamore Street in Niles east of the Ferry Street neighborhood; it was completed in 1958 and the congregation moved shortly thereafter.

On May 22, 1959, members of the John W. Moore Lodge No. 42 purchased the building at 323 Seventh Street from Saint Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Niles for one dollar.³³⁴ Irvin Adams, Worshipful Master, John Jones, Senior Warden, Harold Finley, Jr., Junior Warden,

Hall Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons Jurisdiction of Michigan, n.d., <https://www.mwphglmi.org/history>. Also called in later newspaper sources "Harrison Lodge No. 9." The reason for the numeral change is unknown.

³²⁶ "Resolutions of Respect," *Detroit Plaindealer*, March 24, 1893.

³²⁷ "Colored Masons," *Detroit Free Press*, January 27, 1903, 2. Events included a banquet was held at the Metropolitan Hotel in Niles.

³²⁸ *Niles City Directory* 1904, 21. This building is no longer extant.

³²⁹ "Deed" (1957), Deed liber 577, 141, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

³³⁰ "Deed" (1942), Deed liber 363, 768, Berrien County Register of Deeds; and "Deed" (1972), RE liber 938, 832, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

³³¹ *St. Paul's Lutheran Church 1977 Directory*, 1977. The directory opens with a brief history of the church.

³³² In 1900 an African American woman, Eliza Powers, and her family had lived in the home ("1900 United States Census").

³³³ "Gratefully Reviewing 50 Years of the Lord's Blessings," [1968?], Niles, Churches, St. Paul's Church file, Niles District Library. A photograph included in a short history of Saint Paul's confirms that the current 710 Ferry Street was moved from 323 North Seventh.

³³⁴ "Deed" (1959), Deed liber 605, 579, Berrien County Register of Deeds.

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Loren Anderson, Secretary, Russell Webster, Treasurer and Trustee, Eugene Mills, Trustee, and Andrew Bradford, Trustee, signed the deed in trust for John W. Moore Lodge No. 42. On July 10, 1960 a large gathering of Prince Hall masons from Michigan met at their new home.³³⁵ At the event a plaque affixed to a boulder just south of the building that commemorated the lodge's formal founding in 1859 was dedicated.³³⁶ In 1973 a large gathering of 1,000 members of the Prince Hall masons and the Sisters of the Order of the Eastern Star met at the lodge on Seventh Street. The Order of the Eastern Star was a Prince Hall affiliated group led by women, first organized in 1874.³³⁷ By that time the Michigan Prince Hall masons were under the responsibility of the Ohio Prince Hall lodges, representatives of which renewed the permission for the "continued practice of the ancient art, by the 'water wonderland' builders."³³⁸

The lodge continued to host and organize gatherings for its members. In 1981 an anniversary celebration was held at the Franklin AME church.³³⁹ By 1982 the lodge was also the home of Miriam Chapter No. 56 of the Sisters of the Order of the Eastern Star. That year one of the members of the Miriam Chapter, Ruth Vassar, was elected Grand Matron of Michigan.³⁴⁰ The Chapter hosted a large gathering of Michigan members that spanned several locations in the city. At a later date in the 1980s or early 1990s, the commemorative plaque by the building was removed and placed in the bottom of a stone stele near the old boulder with the names of both John W. Moore Lodge and the Miriam Chapter. By 1995 or 1996 the building was no longer serving as a regular meeting place and many of its windows were boarded up.³⁴¹ Since 2002 it has seen only sporadic use.³⁴²

Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Franklin AME Church, and the Prince Hall Masonic lodge supported the local Black community.³⁴³ They continued to do so in the late twentieth century and, in the case of the two churches, the twenty-first. Types of events included purely recreational social events, such as a block party hosted by Mount Calvary, and events honoring

³³⁵ "P. H. A. Masons on Pilgrimage to Niles Lodge," *The State Journal*, July 10, 1960, 19.

³³⁶ The date on the plaque is A. L. 5960. This "anno lucis" date, commonly used in masonic circles, is 4,000 added to the Gregorian calendar year.

³³⁷ Brittney C. Cooper, "'They Are Nevertheless Our Brethren:' The Order of the Eastern Star and the Battle for Women's Leadership, 1874-1927," in *All Men Free and Brethren: Essays on the History of African American Freemasonry*, ed. Peter P. Hinks and Stephen Kantrowitz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 114-16.

³³⁸ "The Michigan Voice of Prince Hall."

³³⁹ "Joining in Celebration," *Niles Daily Star*, April 22, 1981.

³⁴⁰ Jim Nice, "Daily Star Snaps," *Niles Daily Star*, April 5, 1982.

³⁴¹ Debra Haight, "Celebration Is Nearly Over," *The Herald-Palladium*, December 16, 1995. The article speaks of the building's use as the John W. Moore lodge in the past tense. See also "Volunteers Team Up for Northside Clean Up Today," *Niles Daily Star*, April 6, 1996.

³⁴² Bacon, interview.

³⁴³ Hodges and Wilson, *Profiles and Portraits Interviews*; Singer Mitchell, *Profiles and Portraits Interviews*; and Dungey, Sr., *Profiles and Portraits Interviews*.

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important community members at Franklin AME and the Moore Lodge.³⁴⁴ These organizations also organized educational gatherings, such as the talks given by Rosa Parks at Franklin AME and a Black History Month Program at Mount Calvary.³⁴⁵ Various programs at the churches provided support for community members, and the Ferry Street Resource Center continues its work even after the fire at the Ferry Street School, relocating its operations across the street.³⁴⁶

The Ferry Street School

Segregated facilities, in addition to those mentioned above, also extended to schools. The first school in Niles, besides those attached to missions like the Carey Mission, opened in 1830.³⁴⁷ Other small schools followed in the later 1830s, with a one-room schoolhouse being built in 1833 at Third and Sycamore Streets.³⁴⁸ This building was replaced by a brick school house on the same ground in 1846.³⁴⁹ More followed as Niles' population grew, and the schools had over 1,000 students by 1849 and over 1,400 by 1856.³⁵⁰

Initially these schools seem to have been integrated, but on April 1, 1850, legislation entitled "An act to organize a school district for colored children in the village of Niles" passed and allowed school inspectors to set up a separate district for all African American students, segregating them from White students.³⁵¹ The district was authorized at a meeting held at the Second Baptist Church in the Ferry Street neighborhood on July 1, 1850. Enacting a plan established in 1854, Niles' neighborhood schools were merged into a single large Union School building by 1856, but the Black children remained segregated.³⁵² African American students moved back to an old school building on Third and Sycamore, likely once White students moved to the Union School.

³⁴⁴ Kate Sheridan, "Mount Calvary Church Brings Neighborhood Together for a Fun Day," *South Bend Tribune*, August 22, 2008, E1-E2; Debra Haight, "Black Community Honors Huffman," *The Herald-Palladium*, May 31, 2001; and Nice, "Daily Star Snaps."

³⁴⁵ Bleck, "For Rosa Parks, 'It Was Matter of Protesting Being Treated Wrong'"; Griffey, "Rosa Parks Returns to Niles"; and "Black History Month Program," *Niles Daily Star*, February 26, 1992.

³⁴⁶ "Food Distributed," *Niles Daily Star*, December 23, 1985; and Sherry Van Arsdall, "Church Gives Help for People in Community," *South Bend Tribune*, June 14, 2009.

³⁴⁷ Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 159.

³⁴⁸ Stiles and Watts-Stiles, *Niles, Michigan*, 92-93.

³⁴⁹ Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 268. The old school was moved to Sixth and Sycamore to be used as a private residence (the building is no longer extant).

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 269.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Coolidge, *History of Berrien County*, 159; and Stiles and Watts-Stiles, *Niles, Michigan*, 92-93. Union School districts, approved by Michigan's legislature in 1843, allowed municipalities to combine their district schools into one (Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 286-87).

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In 1867, a group of African American citizens, in an open letter in the *Niles Weekly Times*, highlighted poor conditions at the old school.³⁵³ They decried that, despite state legislation that all children have equal access to public schools, their children were left in a building “unfit for school purposes.” Some Black families had planned to send their children to the Union School after this law had passed, but White parents warned them not to.³⁵⁴ The legislation in question is unnamed, but likely a reference to an act amendatory of the primary school law passed in 1867, which stated: “all residents of any district shall have an equal right to attend any school therein.”³⁵⁵ The school had no playground, nor any other “necessary conveniences.” They also solicited Niles’ school board to build a new brick schoolhouse for African American children and to provide it with good teachers.³⁵⁶ This effort by Niles’ Black community was the genesis to the building of the Ferry Street School.

In the fall of 1867, the Ferry Street School was built on the southeast corner of Ferry and Sixth Streets at a cost of \$2,726.28.³⁵⁷ It opened as the “Colored School” in January 1868 with forty-nine students. Isaac Burdine, one of the people who petitioned for its construction, was possibly a teacher (Burdine was an educator who helped pioneer a school in Ypsilanti).³⁵⁸ In 1871 Alice Robbins taught there,³⁵⁹ and that same year the school became known as the “Ferry Street School.” The school closed in 1872 after the segregated school system was abolished statewide.³⁶⁰ While the Michigan legislature had banned racial segregation in public education in 1867, it took several years and court battles to settle its applicability to city-run schools, even after an 1869 case, *Joseph Workman v. The Board of Education of Detroit* (18 Mich. 400), where the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that the 1867 law indeed applied to Detroit’s public school system.³⁶¹ Segregation in education remained in various places around the state until Civil Rights reforms in the mid-twentieth century.³⁶²

³⁵³ Wilson and Burdine, “Meeting of the Colored Citizens.”

³⁵⁴ “Negroes in the Public Schools,” *The Niles Republican*, March 16, 1867, 2.

³⁵⁵ Paul Moreno, “The Workman Case: Racial Equality in Nineteenth-Century Michigan,” *Michigan Bar Journal* 87, no. S12 (2008): S10.

³⁵⁶ Wilson and Burdine, “Meeting of the Colored Citizens.” They also addressed a fear voiced by some White residents, namely that Black students would “rush to the central Union School House,” stating that the belief was false.

³⁵⁷ “Annual Report,” *The Niles Republican*, July 14, 1868. Ellis reports that the schoolhouse was to be constructed on the corner of Cass and Fifth Streets (Ellis, *Berrien and Van Buren Counties*, 268); this is either an error or there was an initial plan to build it there before settling on the corner of Ferry and Sixth.

³⁵⁸ Carol Bainbridge and Darlene Jackson, “Step Back in Time to 1875: Experience History at Ferry Street School,” n.d., 3; and Warren, *Freedmen’s Progress*, 298.

³⁵⁹ Cowles, *Berrien County Directory and History*, 68.

³⁶⁰ Bainbridge and Jackson, “Ferry Street School,” 3.

³⁶¹ Moreno, “The Workman Case: Racial Equality in Nineteenth-Century Michigan,” S8-12.

³⁶² Sidney Fine, *Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights: Michigan, 1948-1968* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 11.

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The Ferry Street School building continued to be used by the community, however, as Sojourner Truth gave a talk to the “Baptist Society” there in 1873.³⁶³ Her speech concerned the well-being of African Americans who had been emancipated after the Civil War: she proposed that the United States government make land in the west available to them to help them become self-supporting.³⁶⁴ In 1875 it reopened as an integrated grade school and continued to be used until June, 1951.³⁶⁵ In 1903 an additional room was added to the side of the building (the addition also had a full basement, which the original building did not, that contained a furnace and restrooms). After the school’s closure, it reopened in 1956 as the School for Exceptional Children and remained in use until 1975.

After its final closure as a school, the building continued to be used for educational purposes. In 1976 efforts were made to restore the original school room to its 1870s appearance and it was used as a teaching experience for local school children. Between 1985 and 2001 the Adult Literacy Council used the 1903 addition.³⁶⁶ In 2004 the building was sold by Niles’ school district to the Greater Niles Development Corporation for one dollar.³⁶⁷ The group refurbished both the original school house and the addition and basement, adding a new forced-air heating system and indoor plumbing, in addition to repairing water damage from the roof and a basement drain that may have been connected to a dry well.³⁶⁸ Later the side room was used by the Ferry Street Resource Center to provide a variety of neighborhood programs for low- and middle-income residents.³⁶⁹

On May 12, 2023, a fire severely damaged the building, causing the roof to collapse.³⁷⁰ The building was largely demolished later that year, leaving a stabilized remnant of the front facade as the only extant reminder of the building. As of November 2024, all that remains of the former building is part of the facade of the 1867 portion and parts of each of the east and west elevations of the 1867 building. Despite the loss, the remnant of the Ferry Street School continues to be held as an important site within the community, and the site evokes the long and important history of the school and the neighborhood.

³⁶³ *Niles Democrat*, October 11, 1873; and October 9, 1873, 3; the building was referred to as “the Colored School House.”

³⁶⁴ “Sojourner Truth and Her Mission,” *The Niles Republican*, October 16, 1873, 1.

³⁶⁵ Bainbridge and Jackson, “Ferry Street School,” 3-4; and Stiles and Watts-Stiles, *Niles, Michigan*, 96.

³⁶⁶ Bainbridge and Jackson, “Ferry Street School,” 4.

³⁶⁷ James Collins, “Niles Schools ‘Sell’ Historic Building to City,” *Niles Daily Star*, July 7, 2004.

³⁶⁸ Randi K. Pickley, “Rain Led to Flooding at Ferry Street School,” *Niles Daily Star*, April 12, 2005.

³⁶⁹ Lou Mumford, “Fast Start for Niles Center,” *South Bend Tribune*, February 12, 2006; and Lou Mumford, “New Start in an Old Setting,” *South Bend Tribune*, September 30, 2012.

³⁷⁰ Springgate, “Fire Destroys Historical Ferry Street Resource Center in Niles.”

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The Ferry Street neighborhood was and remains an important nexus for African American social and religious life in Niles. Its placement provided a geographical center for a Black population that lived not just in the district and its immediate surroundings, but for those who lived elsewhere, from across the railroad tracks in the north of the city to the residential neighborhoods in the very south and southeast. Its institutions provided a social life for African Americans who were confronted with discrimination and segregation, be it predominately White churches that excluded them or businesses that physically separated them. The Ferry Street School may have been built as a segregated schoolhouse, but it was a project supported by the Black community in the 1860s as a way to improve the education of their children who had been previously required to learn in an old and dilapidated building. The Prince Hall Masons, who were not originally located in the neighborhood, moved there in the mid-twentieth century, and its members were long connected with the neighborhoods' churches. Mount Calvary Baptist Church and Franklin AME continually provided for not just spiritual life, but a social one.

The desire to improve the community endures to this day. Although in May of 2023 a fire severely damaged the Ferry Street School building, then the Ferry Street Resource Center, discussions immediately began on the possibility of preserving portions of its walls to integrate into a memorial. The archaeological potential of the school site may also be a source of community empowerment and education. After being temporarily displaced, the Center returned to the neighborhood, moving its operations across the street to 317 North Seventh Street, a renewed source of strength for the community.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): SHPO24-003

Ferry Street Historic District

Berrien County, MI County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 9.9

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 41.832291	Longitude: -86.253893
2. Latitude: 41.830895	Longitude: -86.253933
3. Latitude: 41.830837	Longitude: -86.249153
4. Latitude: 41.832242	Longitude: -86.249136

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:

Ferry Street Historic District

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Beginning at the northwest corner of Lot 123 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence east to the northeast corner of Lot 121 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence north to the northwest corner of Lot 119 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence east to the northeast corner of Lot 242 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence south to the northeast corner of Lot 241 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence east to the northeast corner of Lot 239 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence south to the southeast corner of Lot 238 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence west to the southwest corner of Lot 208 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence north to the northwest corner of Lot 208 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence west to the northeast corner of Lot 129 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence south 62 feet along the east lot line of Lot 129 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence west to the west lot line of Lot 128 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence north to the northwest corner of Lot 128 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence west to the southwest corner of Lot 122 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence north to the southeast corner of Lot 123 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence west to the southwest corner of Lot 123 of H. B. Hoffman's Addition to Niles; thence north to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The selected boundaries include a concentration of resources that embody the importance of the historic district in the African American experience in Niles. Within the district are four extant residences identified in the Manual of Freedmen's Progress along with the four institutions most significant to the historical African American community in Niles: the site of the Ferry Street School, the John W. Moore Lodge, and two churches. While the historical ownership of individual houses in the vicinity is not always known, additional contributing residential buildings included within the district provide important context in that their form and character—including the mid-twentieth-century alterations that commonly occurred—represent the continued development of the district during the period of significance. A smaller number of noncontributing resources are also included as a result of their location, interspersed with the significant buildings mentioned above. Resources located beyond the concentration identified in the Manual are excluded.

11. Form Prepared Byname/title: Michael F. Webb and Timothy Boscarinoorganization: Vinewood Preservation Planningstreet & number: 1068 Vinewood Streetcity or town: Detroit state: Michigan zip code: 48216e-mail: michael@vinewoodplanning.comtelephone: 313-915-0264date: September 2024

Ferry Street Historic District
Name of Property

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Ferry Street Historic District

City or Vicinity: Niles

County: Berrien

State: Michigan

Photographer: Timothy Boscarino

Date Photographed: See individual entries.

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 29. Northeast corner of the Ferry Street School site, 620 Ferry Street, November 2, 2023.

MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0001.tif

2 of 29. Southeast corner of the Ferry Street School site, 620 Ferry Street, with Mount Calvary Baptist Church, 601 Ferry Street, in the background, November 2, 2023.

MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0002.tif

3 of 29. South facades of 809 Sycamore and Franklin AME Church, 811 Sycamore Street, November 2, 2023.

MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0003.tif

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4 of 29. South facade of Mount Calvary Baptist Church, 601 Ferry Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0004.tif

5 of 29. West facade of Mount Calvary Baptist Church, 601 Ferry Street, May 15, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0005.tif

6 of 29. Northwest corner of 528 Ferry Street, May 15, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0006.tif

7 of 29. Western facade of John W. Moore Lodge No. 42 and Miriam Chapter No. 56, 323 North Seventh Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0007.tif

8 of 29. Western facade of Lottie E. Wilson House, 323 North Fifth Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0008.tif

9 of 29. Eastern elevation of Lottie E. Wilson House, 323 North Fifth Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0009.tif

10 of 29. Southern facade of 713 Sycamore Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0010.tif

11 of 29. Southeast corner of 723 Sycamore Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0011.tif

12 of 29. West facade of 317 North Sixth Street, June 3, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0012.tif

13 of 29. Southwest corner of 701 Sycamore Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0013.tif

14 of 29. Northern facade of 710 Ferry Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0014.tif

15 of 29. Northern facade of 514 Ferry Street, May 15, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0015.tif

16 of 29. Southern facade of 527 Ferry Street, May 15, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0016.tif

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17 of 29. Northeastern corner of 722 Ferry Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0017.tif

18 of 29. Southern facade of 801 Ferry Street, May 15, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0018.tif

19 of 29. Southern facade of 721 Ferry Street, May 15, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0019.tif

20 of 29. Southwest corner of Ferry Street Resource Center, 317 North Seventh Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0020.tif

21 of 29. Eastern facade of 310 North Ninth Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0021.tif

22 of 29. Southwestern corner of 707 Sycamore Street, May 15, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0022.tif

23 of 29. Western facade of 321 North Eighth Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0023.tif

24 of 29. Troost Park, southeast corner of North Eighth Street and Ferry Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0024.tif

25 of 29. Ferry Street School site, 620 Ferry Street, looking southeast with John W. Moore Lodge No. 42 and Miriam Chapter No. 56, 323 North Seventh, and the Ferry Street Resource Center, 317 North Seventh Street, in the background, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0025.tif

26 of 29. Ferry Street, looking northeast at 709, 713, and 721 Ferry, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0026.tif

27 of 29. Southeastern corner of Ferry Street and North Eighth Street, looking northwest towards 703, 709, 713, and 721 Ferry and 410 North Eighth Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0027.tif

28 of 29. Sycamore Street, looking northeast towards 701, 707, and 713 Sycamore Street, November 2, 2023.
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0028.tif

Ferry Street Historic District

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29 of 29. Ferry Street looking west by northwest at 722, 713, 721, and 801 Ferry Street,
November 2, 2023.

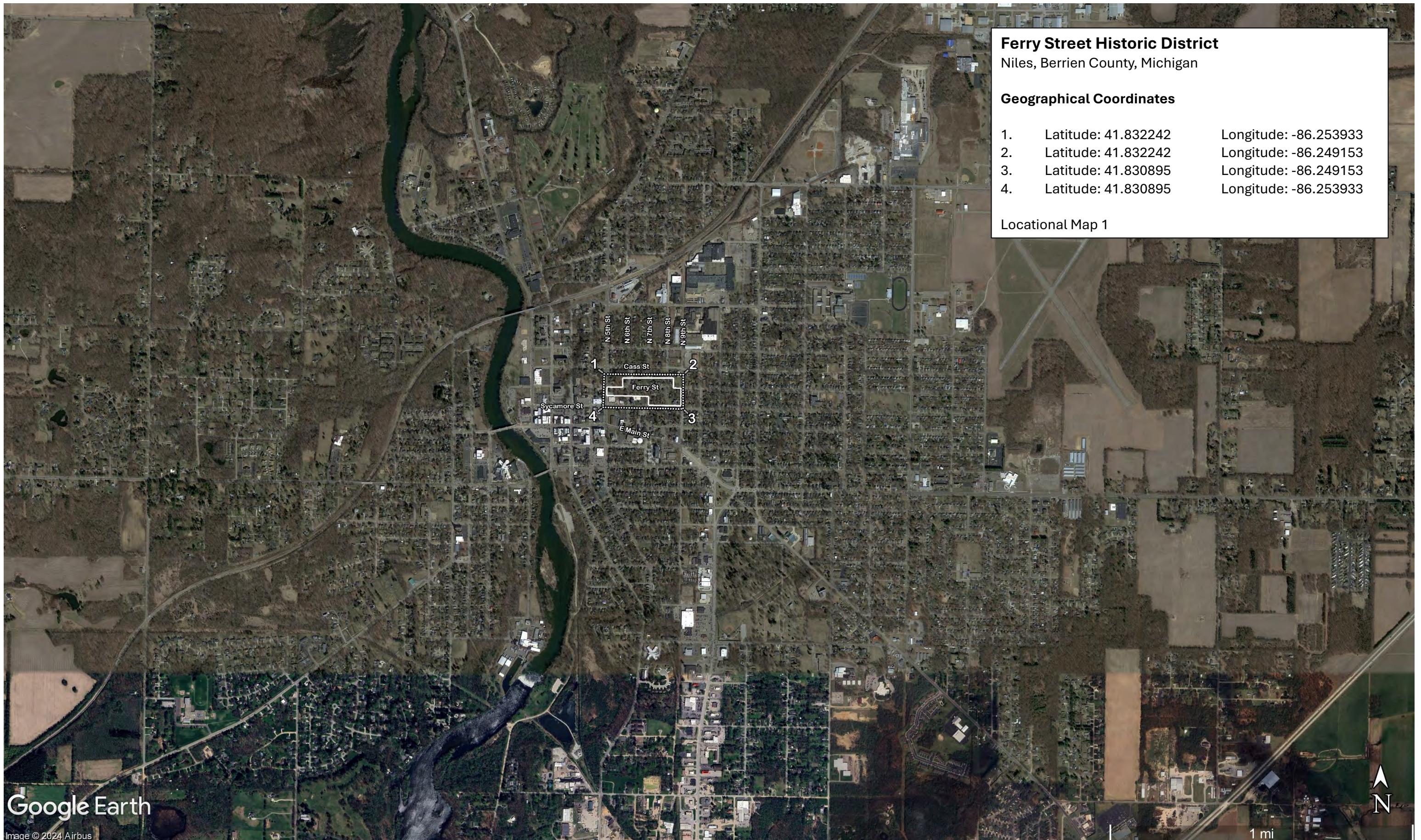
MI_Berrien_Ferry Street Historic District_0029.tif

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.





Google Earth

Locational Map 2

Ferry Street Historic District

Niles, Berrien County, Michigan

Resource Map

KEY

Boundary

Contributing

123 Address

Noncontributing

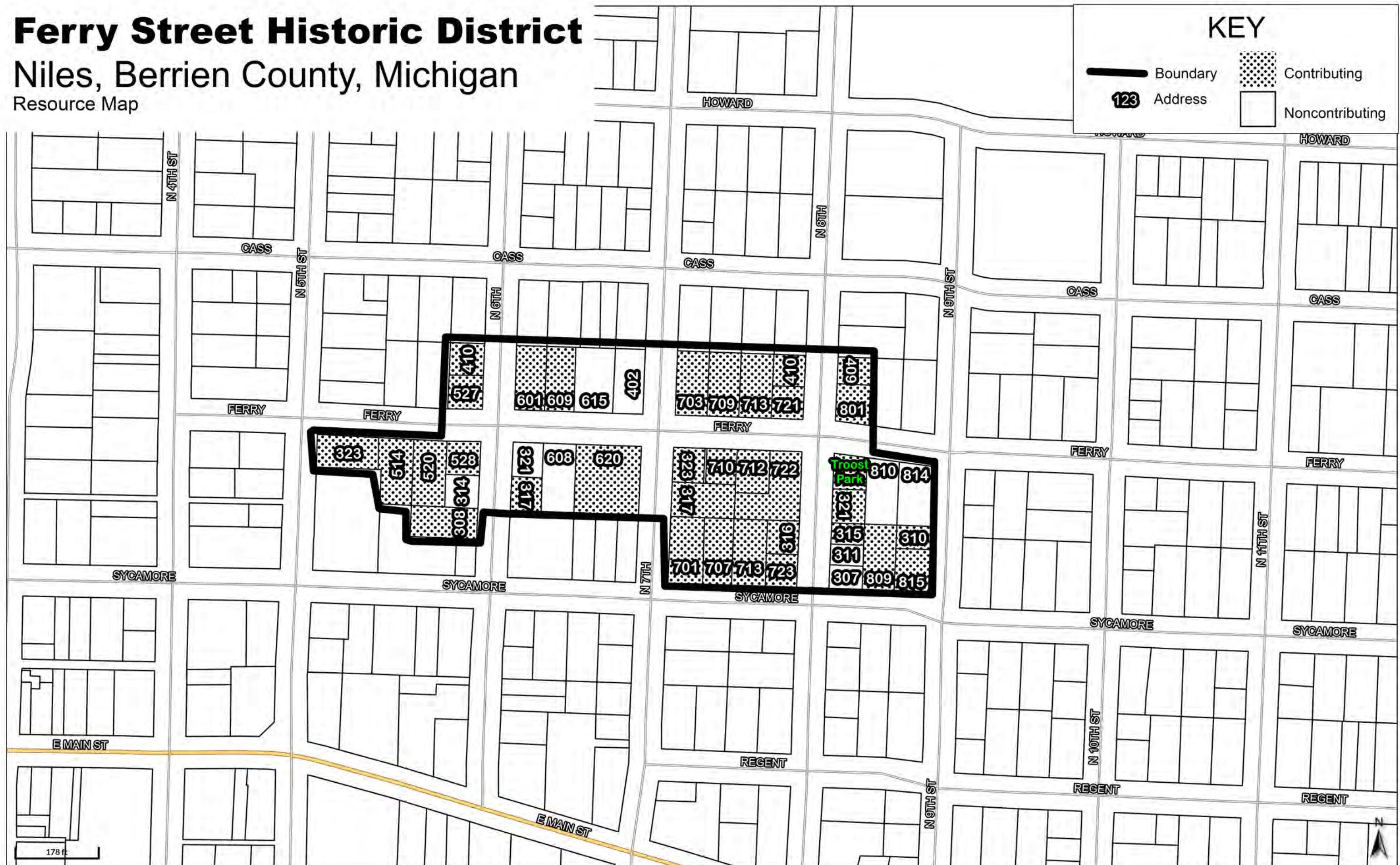
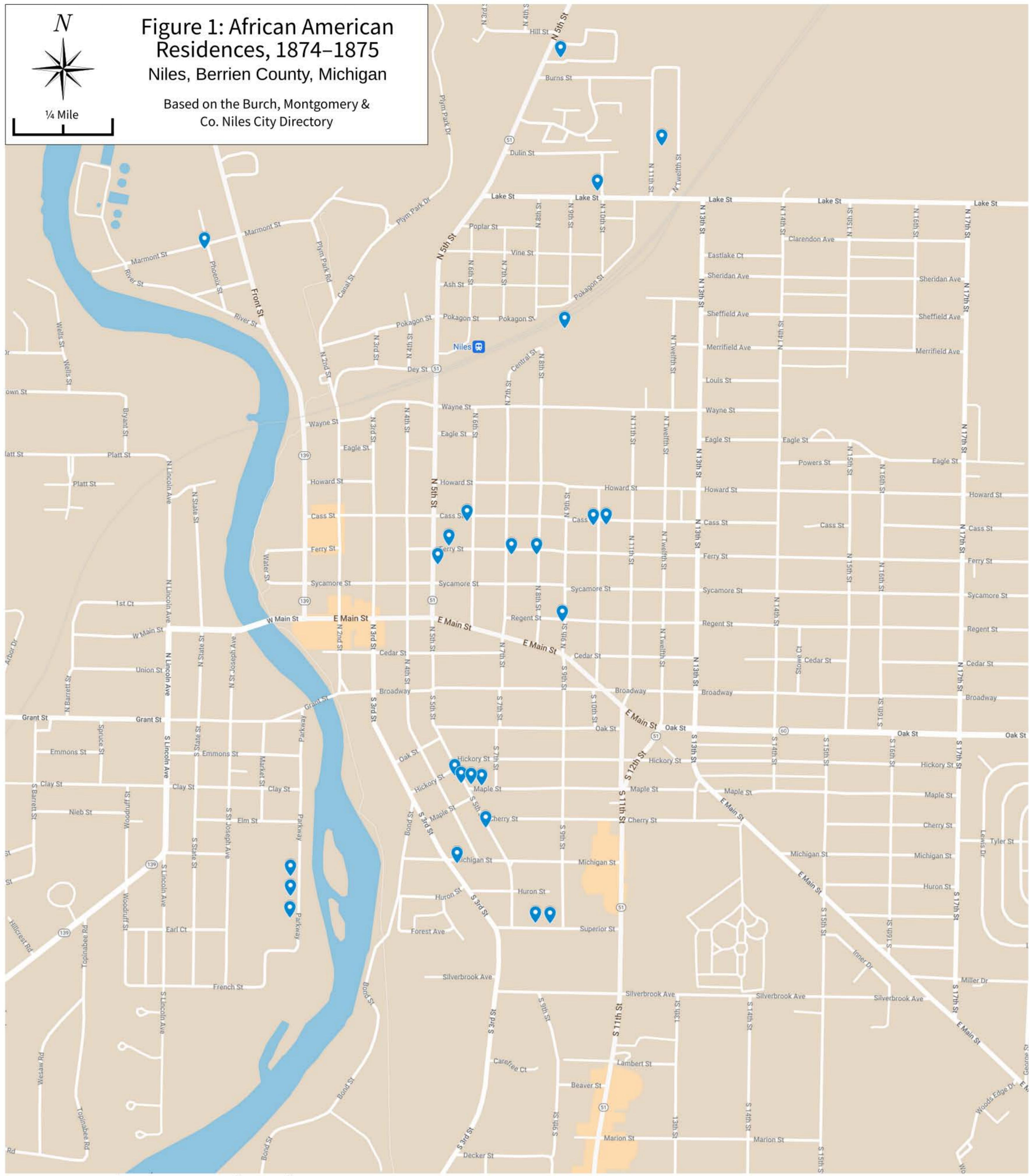


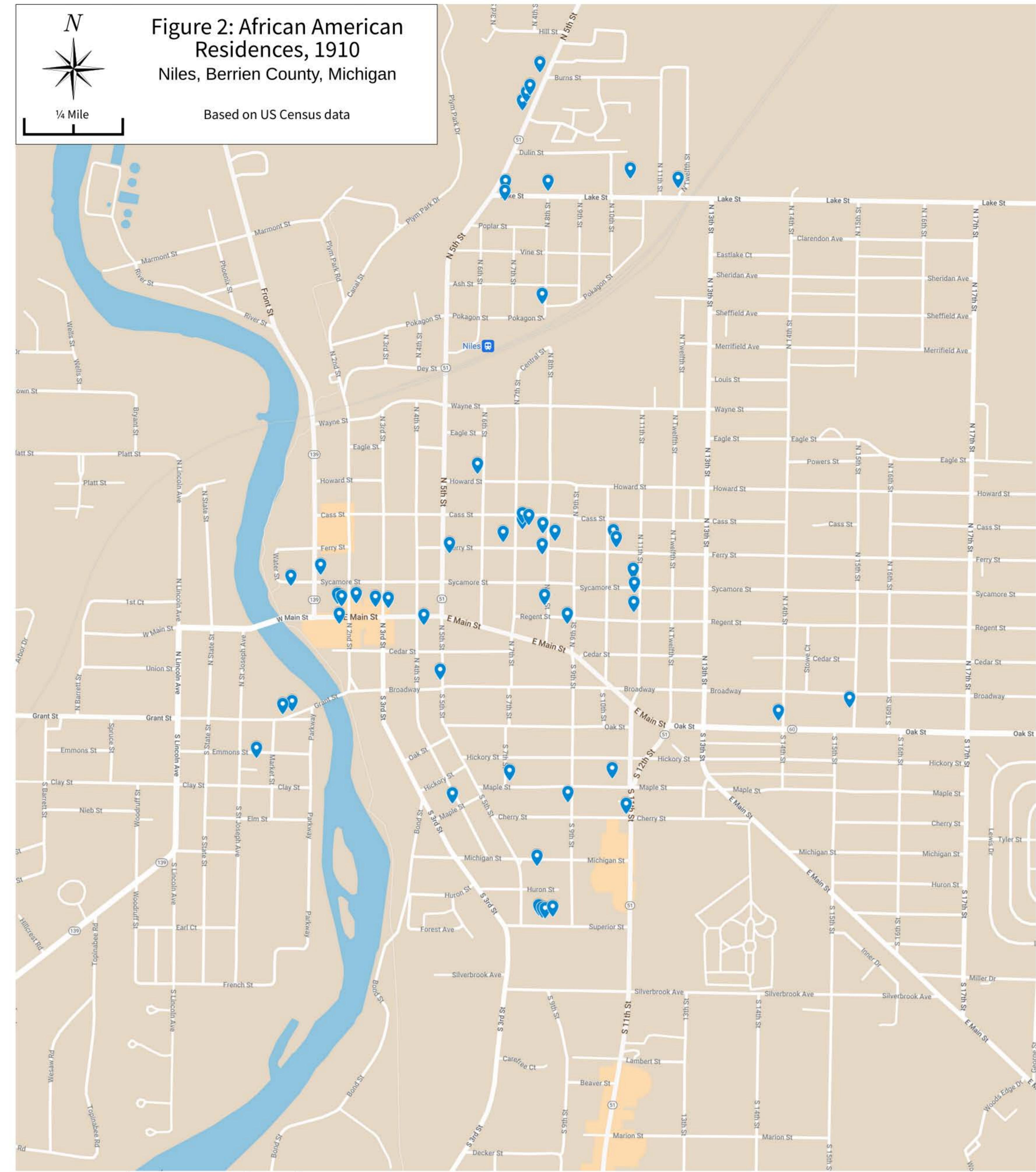


Figure 1: African American Residences, 1874–1875
Niles, Berrien County, Michigan

Based on the Burch, Montgomery & Co. Niles City Directory



N. B. Streets are based on 2024 Google Maps data.

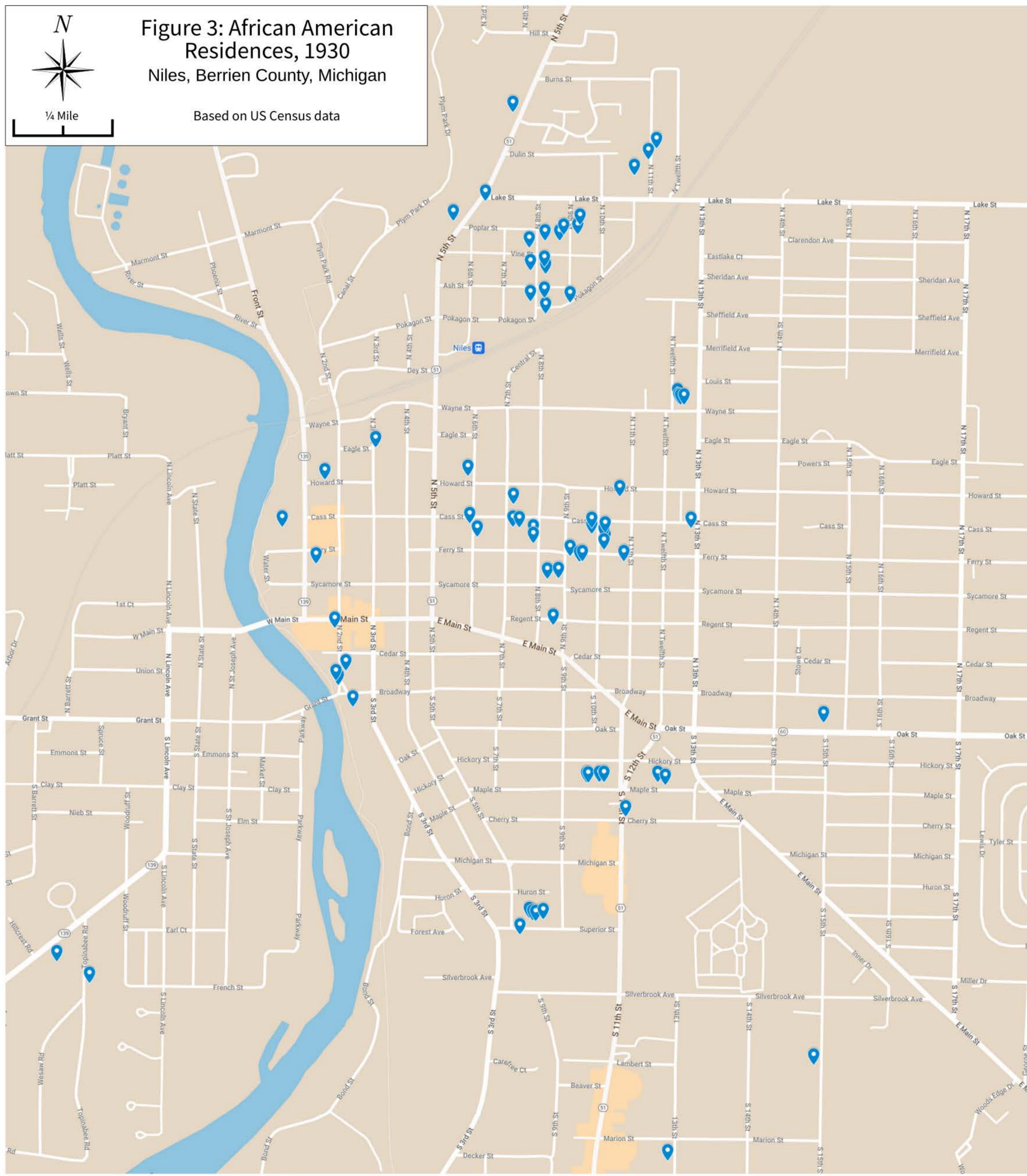


N. B. Streets are based on 2024 Google Maps data.



Figure 3: African American Residences, 1930
Niles, Berrien County, Michigan

Based on US Census data

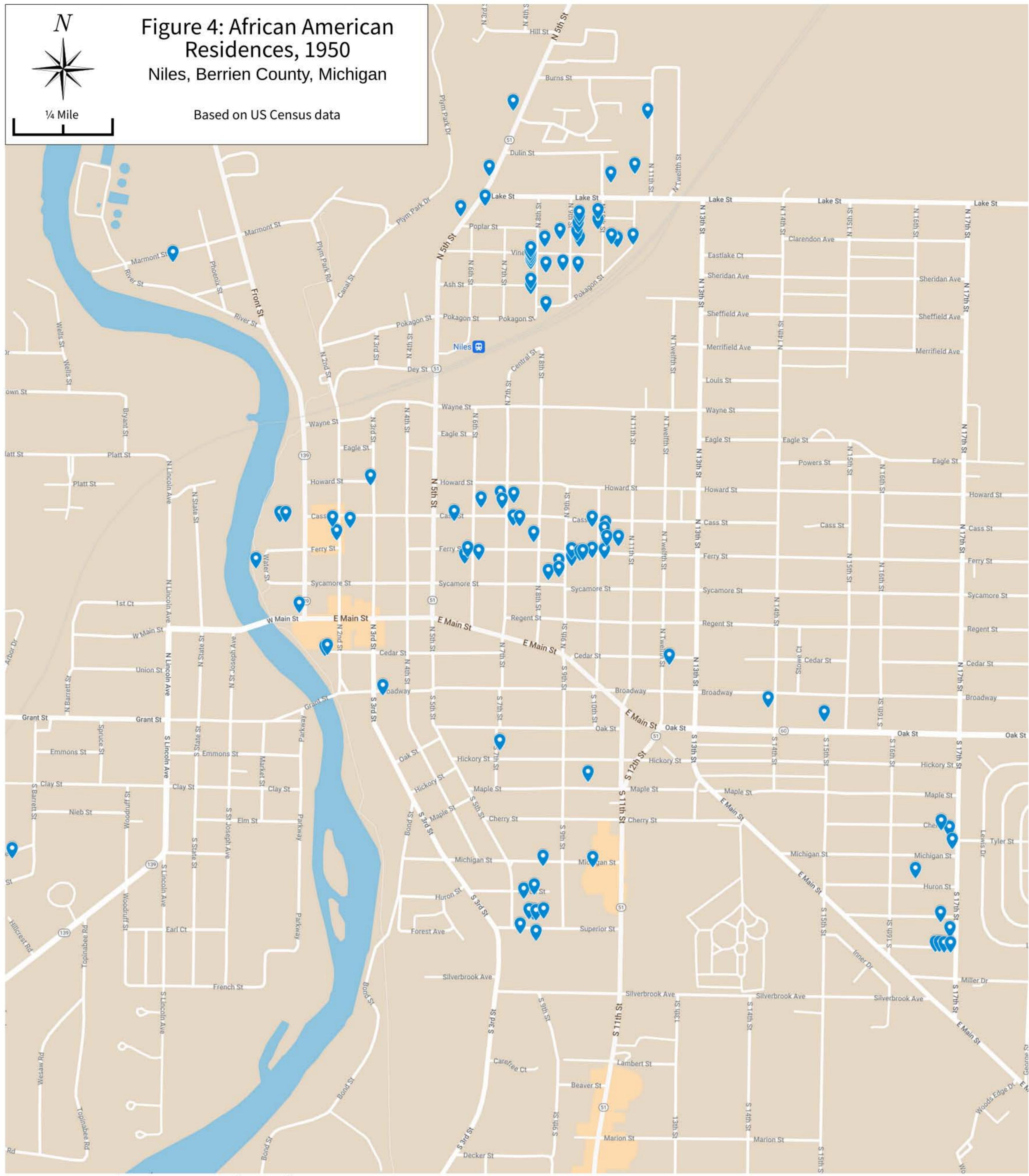


N. B. Streets are based on 2024 Google Maps data.



Figure 4: African American Residences, 1950
Niles, Berrien County, Michigan

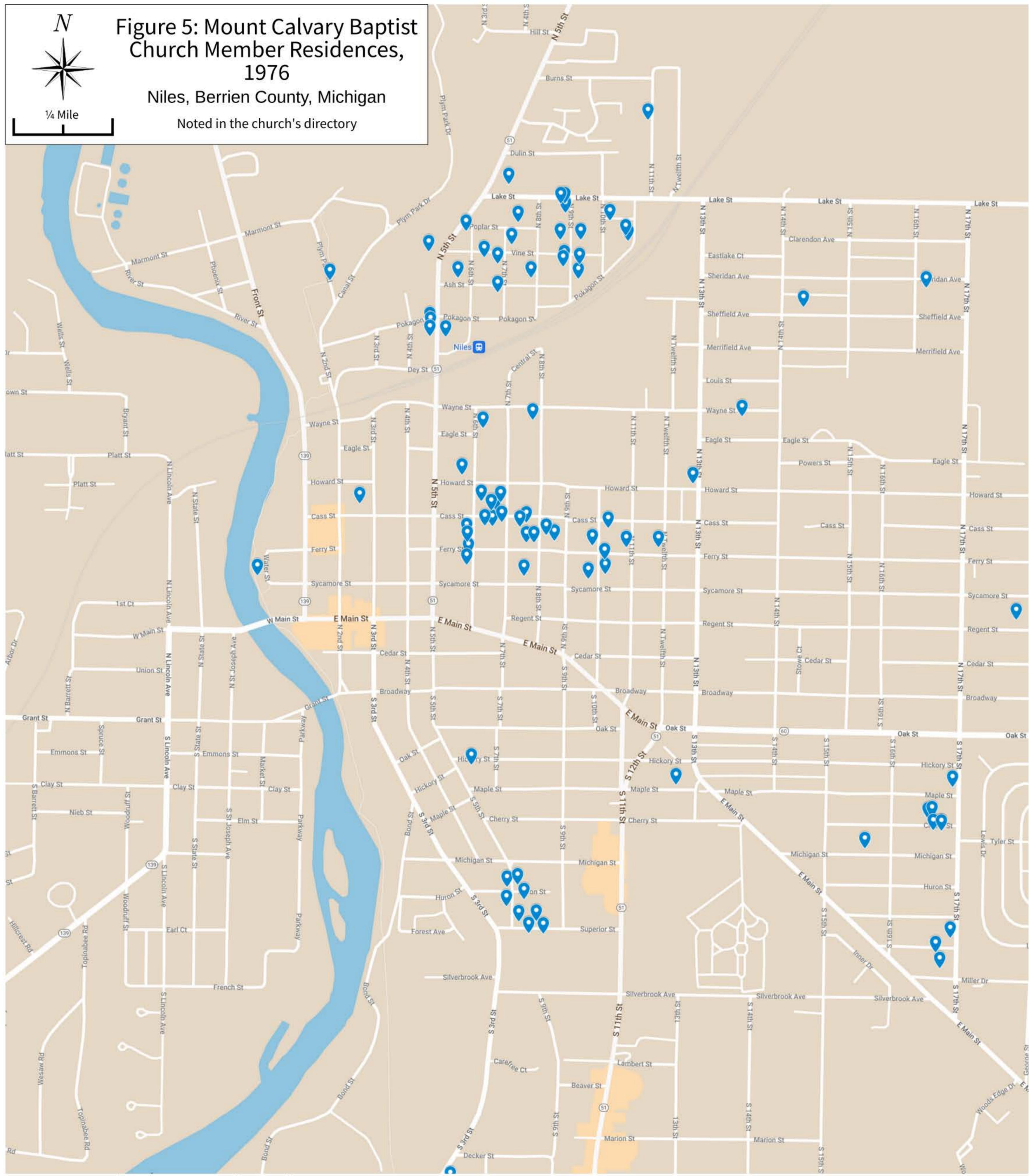
Based on US Census data



N. B. Streets are based on 2024 Google Maps data.



Figure 5: Mount Calvary Baptist
Church Member Residences,
1976
Niles, Berrien County, Michigan
Noted in the church's directory

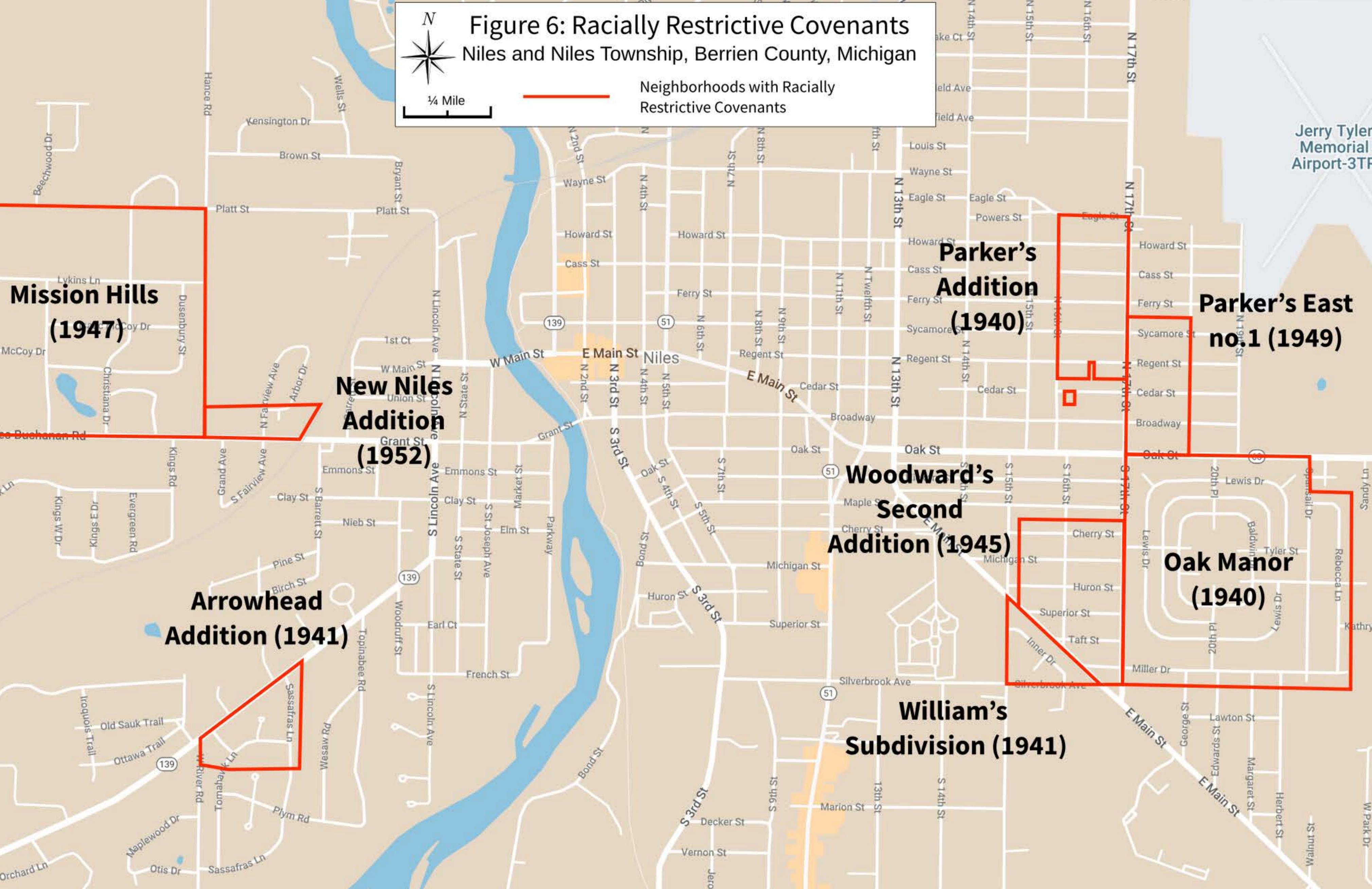


N. B. Streets are based on 2024 Google Maps data.

Figure 6: Racially Restrictive Covenants
Niles and Niles Township, Berrien County, Michigan



Neighborhoods with Racially
Restrictive Covenants





**MICHIGAN
HISTORIC SITE**

FERRY STREET SCHOOL

Constructed in 1867 at a cost of nearly \$3,000, the Ferry Street School opened in January, 1868, as Niles's school for "colored children." In 1870 the Niles school system was integrated, and this facility closed. It reopened as an integrated school in 1873. The west wing was added in 1903. From 1956 to 1975 the School for Exceptional Children was located here. In 1975 concerned citizens began restoring the original building to its nineteenth century style. Nineteenth century one-room schools in this community typically contained a woodburning stove, woodbox, water bench, coat pegs, wooden blackboards and long rows of desks. One teacher often taught two grades. Lessons were in reading, writing, spelling, numbers, declamation and geography or all with a moral. This school provides link to schools of yesteryear.





FRANKLIN A.M.E. CHURCH





LORD JESUS
I AM A SINNER
PLEASE FORGIVE ME!

SUNDAY SCHOOL 9 AM
WORSHIP 10 AM
BIBLE STUDY 6:00 PM

ROBERT L. BROWN
CHURCH OF CHRIST

1936

WELCOME

396

ROBERT L.
BROWN
CHURCH
OF CHRIST



MOUNT CALVARY
BAPTIST CHURCH

Helping Hands Ministry

MATTHEW 25:40























722





Lower
Twenty
One





310





PRIVATE PROPERTY
NO TRESPASSING

NO PARKING

1321

1321

1321

NO

TRESPASSING

NO

TRESPASSING

TROOST PARK

PARK
HOURS
7AM
10PM







FERRY
ST





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Ferry Street Historic District

Multiple Name:

State & County: MICHIGAN, Berrien

Date Received: 12/9/2024 Date of Pending List: 12/26/2024 Date of 16th Day: 1/10/2025 Date of 45th Day: 1/23/2025 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100011316

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 1/15/2025 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: Locally significant district comprising a neighborhood that served as a center for the African American community of Niles. Never wholly segregated, the neighborhood nonetheless serves as a center for the community due to the historic presence of institutions - churches, the segregated school, and later the Prince Hall lodge that are concentrated in the area. Significance in Ethnic Heritage and Social History, POS 1867-1971.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept / Criterion A

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN STRATEGIC FUND
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

QUENTIN L. MESSER, JR.
PRESIDENT

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

Ms. Joy Beasley, Keeper
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed files contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for **Ferry Street Historic District, Niles, Berrien County, Michigan**. This property is being nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This nomination is a New Submission Resubmission Additional Documentation Removal.

- 1 Signed National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
- 2 Locational maps (incl. with nomination file)
- 7 Sketch map(s) / figures(s) / exhibits(s)
- 1 Pieces of correspondence (incl. with correspondence file)
- 29 Digital photographs
- Other (incl. with nomination file): _____

State Historic Preservation Review Board

The Michigan State Historic Preservation Review Board reviewed the nomination materials at its meeting on Friday, September 20, 2024. The Review Board voted 9 to 0 to approve the nomination under National Register Criterion/Criteria A and recommended the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination.

Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits

- X This property is not utilizing the Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits
- This property is being rehabilitated using the Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits. A preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Notifications

Notification of the nomination was sent to the property owner(s) and chief elected official(s) on: August 16, 2024

No objections to the nomination were submitted during the public comment period.

One or more objections to the nomination were received during the public comment period.

One or more letters of support to the nomination were received during the public comment period.

Certified Local Government

The nominated property is not located in a Certified Local Government community.

The nominated property is located in a Certified Local Government community. A copy of the local commission's review was was not received within 60 days, and is is not included with the correspondence file.

NPS Grant-Funded Submissions

Not funded with an NPS grant

Underrepresented Communities Grant

African American Civil Rights Grant

History of Equal Rights Grant

Tribal Heritage Grant

Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Grant

Disaster Recovery Grant

Questions concerning this nomination should be addressed to Todd A. Walsh, National Register Coordinator, at (517) 331-8917 or WalshT@michigan.gov.

Sincerely yours,



Ryan M. Schumaker
State Historic Preservation Officer