

HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT

SMALLEY-BEST/ELLIOT FARMSTEAD
OAKLAND TOWNSHIP, MICHIGAN

February 2013

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CHARGE OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE

The Historic District Study Committee was appointed by the Oakland Township Board of Trustees on March 23, 2010 pursuant to Oakland Township Ordinance 37-A, and Amendment One dated October 22, 2002 and Amendment Two dated February 8, 2005. The study committee is a standing committee charged with conducting the duties and activities for a designated period of time. These duties include inventory, research, and preparation of a preliminary historic district study report for a proposed historic district, and the organization of a public hearing. The Historic District Study Committee shall be comprised of at least five individuals, including at least two individuals who are owners of a historic resource and at least two, but not more than three, who are members of the Historic District Commission.

STUDY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Susan Knudsen, served on the HDC from 2000 to 2003. She was elected to the historic district study committee in 2004 and again in 2010. She has lived in a historic home for twenty-five years.

Jean Kroger, served on the Historic District Commission two terms; 1996-2008. She has owned a historic home ca. 1890 in Clinton, Michigan from 1966-1971 prior to residing in her current designated historic home since 1977. She is a member of the Oakland Township Historical Society, Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

E. Jean Lyons, served from 1976-80 on the Historic District Commission (HDC) and was secretary for the HDC from 2004 to her current position in 2013. Her term as Oakland Township HDC was renewed in May 2011 for three years until 2014 and she continues to serve as HDC secretary. She is a retired English teacher and lives in an 1842 historic home in Oakland Township.

Bruce Parkinson, continues to serve on the HDC as he has for the last five years. He is an electrician by trade working on many historic properties. He lives in a historic rural country home in Oakland Township. He is also a member of the Oakland Township Historical Society.

**Nomination pending: Sue Fox*, Oakland Township Historical Society board member has assisted past projects with deed research and historical timelines. She is also a member of the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society. She has been researching genealogy for ten plus years and her interests are in historical research of people and places.

Barbara A. Barber, HDC administrative assistant directed the study committee in its work. She has been an employee for Oakland Township for over five years working on preservation projects. She has a Master of Science in Historic Preservation from Eastern Michigan University with concentrated studies in Preservation Planning. She graduated Sigma Pi Kappa, a National Historic Preservation Honors Society, and meets the Federal historic preservation professional qualifications 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 61.

The HDSC received assistance with site documentation, research, and committee meetings:

Janine Saputo, Oakland Township Historical Society Co-President and member since 1994 assisted in the research. She has been involved in historic preservation since 1988, working on several successful National Register nominations and Michigan Historical Markers. She is a former HDC chairperson, former Michigan Historic Preservation Network board member, and former Oakland County Historical Commission board member. She is a current member of the Oakland County Pioneer Historical Society and member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. She also currently sits on the Oakland Township Planning Commission.

INVENTORY

A Photo documentation of the Smalley-Best/Elliot Farmstead located at 3340 East Clarkston Road, herein referred to as “the property”, began in the fall of 2012 and was completed January 2013. Copies of the photos are in the Historic District Commission office located at 4480 Orion Road, Rochester, Michigan 48306.

The property is also listed in *Heritage in Oakland Township* by Delta Kelly and Barbara Kandarian, 1976. The property is listed as historic resource number 64 and was awarded an honorary brass plaque designation “Oakland Township Historical Home designated 1976.” It should be noted that this was in full support of the owners of these historic properties.

The property is included in Historic Resources Map 19, *A Community Master Plan* adopted in 2005, updated in 2011 for Oakland Township, Michigan,

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties embody two important goals: 1) the preservation of historic materials and, 2) the preservation of a building’s distinguishing character. Every old building is unique, with its own identify and its own distinctive character. Character refers to all those visual aspects and physical features that comprise the appearance of every historic building. Character-defining elements include the overall shape of the building, its materials, craftsmanship, decorative details, interior spaces and features, as well as the various aspects of its site and environment. (NPS Preservation Briefs 17)

The single district property is located one-half mile west of Adams Road, on East Clarkston Road in Oakland Township, Michigan. The farmstead has been called Pleasant View Farm and Best View Farm over the years. The property contains a main house built in 1848, with multiple additions to the north beginning after ca 1930s. (Records will establish dates of additions). The main house has Greek Revival characteristics, parallel orientation to Clarkston Road, gabled roof with intact cornice returns (except for the southwest corner is missing). At the west end of the building is a centered exterior red brick chimney. The building has four bays, double pile, and is two stories high. The south facing façade has asymmetrical small windows, an octagon window in the center of the second story, and one large bay window flanked by four vertical lights to the east and west. The size of the second story windows indicate they may have been replacements for the original Greek Revival Frieze style windows that are more common characteristics to Greek Revival architecture. There is some loss of character due to the unbalanced fenestration of the windows and their sizes. The main entrance doorway is to the right northern corner of the east gable end and does not have character defining elements due to the coverage of aluminum siding panels. As recent as 2011 all the windows have been replaced with single pane, one-over-one double hung replacements. Because the aluminum siding covers so much of the window trim, it is difficult to see the original fenestration which would supply more detailed information. There are original horizontal wood clapboard siding that has been retained under the white horizontal aluminum siding. The covered wood clapboard is painted white.

The shape of the main house is rectangular running thirty-four feet parallel to the road and twenty-five feet wide. The foundation walls are uncut coursed stone except near the lower doorway opening there are some cut stone added later. The roof is grey asphalt shingles and in poor condition. The basement has expansive thirty-five foot timbers for structural floor support with the bark on many of the logs. Hand hewn vertical support beams are located in the basement and as sill plates. The timbers are impressive in their size and mass and in excellent condition. The first floors were made of tongue-and-groove wood (determined oak?). Interior flooring is mostly 12"x12" square tiles overlaying the wood floors. The tiles are in good condition. (Why so much tiled floors? What is the connection here?)

There is a unique double doorway opening through the south west corner foundation to allow larger equipment or vehicles into the basement. Soil disturbance aerial maps from DTE 1949 show the time frame of this opening. The large wooden doors with cane window detail, glide on a metal track towards the south wall of the foundation. The track and history of its origin (will need more time to research this fully). This door has very unique architectural qualities and craftsmanship.

The shed outbuilding used for garage and storage has a pyramid framed hip roof with asphalt shingles. The square building measures 20.6 feet on all four sides. Original wood horizontal clapboard siding is in fairly good condition in need of paint. The foundation is poor with the north east corner of the structure set on a ceramic jug.

The west wall made from large rough cut stone and uncut stone, no courses, was likely the result of excess stone from the southwest foundation being opened. The wall also serves to keep the higher elevated soil from eroding into the access driveway into the lower level. Research needed to tie the masonry craftsmanship to other exception local masonry structures.

A similar masonry stone fireplace, with inlaid metal plate *Hancock Outdoor Fireplace, Pontiac, Mich* is located up the hill from the stone wall. The stone masonry craftsmanship matches construction technique with a concrete top built into the design on both.

The setting for the property and landscape has breathtaking views. The site layout was conducive to southern exposure for optimum interior temperatures, as many historic properties attribute their site orientation to absorb sunlight.

RESOURCE LIST

3340 East Clarkston Road property. Single family home on five acres.

COUNT OF HISTORIC AND NON-HISTORIC RESOURCES

The property contains the main house, small garage shed, cut stone fireplace, attached cut stone wall, situated on five acres.

1. Stone Fireplace; Contributing.
2. Stone wall fence; Contributing.
3. Landscape; Contributing (More research needed, views and vistas.)
4. Main house constructed ca1848; Contributing, yet later additions are non-contributing.
5. Small Garage Shed; Contributing. (But very poor condition.)

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property consists of parcel number N-10-07-400-003.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The south border is East Clarkston Road. The east and partial northeast is bordered by Oakland Township Marsh View Park.

The property is a single district and includes five acres adjacent to ninety acres of the original 160 acre farmstead, with an eighty acre parcel purchased in 1831 and another eighty acres purchased in 1835, both by Daniel Hunt of New Jersey. Daniel Hunt purchased the land from the Government. (Oakland County Deeds). December 14, 1841, Daniel Hunt sold the land to his son-in-law Robert Smalley. The main house was built, during Smalley's ownership, in a high point area, setback about 30 feet (? confirm) from East Clarkston Road. A garage shed was built later behind the main house to the north. A cut stone fireplace is situated to the west of the main house. The views of the surrounding landscape are magnificent from the high points of the property. The remaining rear acreage was used for farm land and also included in the property boundaries due to the agricultural history of the site. There are mature trees South and West of the main house.

The legal description is T4N, R11E, Section 7, Part of SE ¼, Township of Oakland, Oakland County, Michigan, described as: Commencing at the Southwest corner of the Southwest ¼, Section 7 Towns 4 North, Range 11 East; thence along the Section line East 766.05 feet to the point of beginning; thence along the Section line East 430 feet; then North 506.51 feet; thence West 430 feet; thence South 506.51 feet to the point of beginning.

HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

Local historic context represents a first settler farmstead and establishment of a farming operation double the customary eighty acre parcel. It supported the business growth of the Smalley family enterprise into commercial activity in nearby Village of Lake Orion, incorporated in 1859. The original 160 farm land remained contiguous for 123 years.

In 1818 Congress authorized the first sale of public lands in the Northwest Territory. The method used was called the “credit system.” The land was to be sold for \$2 an acre to be paid within a reasonable amount of time. In 1820 an amendment changed the price to \$1.25 an acre to be paid in advance. Many of the first settlers who came to Michigan to purchase land came from the state of New Jersey. Amongst them was **Daniel Hunt** (born 1786 in New Jersey – died 1854) who was living in Oakland County at the time he purchased 80 acres in Section 7 on 12/30/1831 and another adjacent 80 acres on 6/16/1836. Daniel Hunt owned the 160 acres for 10 years before selling on 12/14/1841 to his son-in-law, Robert Smalley.

Robert Smalley (born 1812 – died 1900) came from England in 1836 and purchased 44 acres in Section 5 on 9/4/1838. His property was northeast of Hunts on the north border of Oakland Township. During the same time, Robert met and married Sarah Hunt, daughter of Daniel Hunt, and they purchased Hunt’s 160 acres in Section 7 for \$270.98. Daniel Hunt had become a widower before 1840 and remained in residence with Robert and Sarah until his death in 1854.

The main house was built in 1848 for the extended Smalley family as listed in the (cite). The Smalley’s were known to call their 160 acre farm on Clarkston Road, *Pleasant View*, due to the commanding view of the surrounding land from their farmhouse windows. (cite)

R. Smalley invested in over 200 acres in Oakland Township of which he farmed. His crops contained wheat, potatoes, beans, corn, oats, and hay. His farming operation grew so he could rent 2/3 of his land to others for 1/3 of the sale of crops.

R. Smalley financed building the Park Hotel and later became the owner of the hotel and all of its furnishings. He also built the commercial building known as Smalley Block and funded many village projects in the last half of the 1800s. *The Lake Orion Review* newspaper, established in 1881, (date of paper) records Smalley’s contributions to the development in the Village of Lake Orion.

Robert and Sarah Smalley had two known children (possibly four). Both Robert and Sarah and one daughter are buried in Paint Creek Cemetery on Orion Road (State Register of Historic Sites, no. xx). When R. Smalley passed away Probate Court listed the deeds he owned of several properties; Rudd’s Mill (State Register of Historic Sites, no. x), Spears cider mill in Orion Township, the Park Hotel and hotel barn in the Village of Lake Orion, several brick construction store buildings, Stoney Creek Woolen mill, and real estate parcels in town. R. Smalley was a man that freely gave loans to people who needed them. His gravestone reads today, ‘He will be remembered by a great many for his honesty and cheated by a great many more.’ *Pleasant View Farm* was his stepping stone to the families’ successful farming enterprise and beyond to community development.

John Smalley, (1848 – 1942) son of Robert and Sarah Smalley, continued the farming operations of Pleasant View Farm and was well known for his wheat crop selling for up to \$3.50 a bushel. J. Smalley also owned a threshing operation and traveled the area harvesting the land for local farmers. Among his other endeavors, he also owned a portable saw mill and purchased one of the first Ford motorcars sold in the Village of Lake Orion. (cite for these)

From 1927 to 1942 the property changed ownership, yet still retained its full farming operations. The main house had an addition to the north. A square shed, was constructed thirty feet to the north of the house.

In 1942 **Paul L. Best** (born 1902 in Illinois – died 1954 in Detroit) bought the 160 acre *Pleasant View Farm*. He and his wife Bertha E. renamed it *Best View Farm*. Paul was Ferndale Board of Education Superintendent and his wife Bertha was a teacher. Bertha also participated in the local PTA organization as reported by *The Lake Orion Review*. They had four children.

P. Best cut a wall through the stone foundation of the west wall of the main house basement. He used the removed stone and cut stone to build a retaining wall to keep the soil from blocking his entrance into the lower level basement of the main house. Tractors or farm equipment may have been stored in the lower level. A nearby cut stone fireplace, with inlaid metal plate *Hancock Outdoor Fireplace, Pontiac, Mich* is located up the hill from the stone wall as an outdoor fireplace and bar-be-que. The cut stone masonry craftsmanship matches construction technique with a course concrete top built into the design on both.

When P. Best died Feb 21, 1954, his wife Bertha began to sell off portions of the farms acreage until the 1960s, when the farm contained five acres. Prior to Bertha's death in (date?) 2001, she willed the five acre property to her daughter, **Anita Denise Best Elliot**. Anita Elliot sold the property on June 1, 2012 to the **Oakland Township Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC)**. The PRC intent to add the acreage to the eastern adjacent township owned ninety acre Marsh View Park, which was the original *Pleasant View Farm*.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The *National Register of Historic Places Criteria A*: The property is associated with a pattern of events that made a significant contribution to the development of a community. No event is more significant than the founding of the Nation.

The earliest settlers in the State of Michigan came to a wilderness to start a new life and to establish the foundation of settlement which included agriculture and commerce.

The Smalley Best/Elliot property is located on East Clarkston Road, an original gravel roadway dating back to 1831 which connected Oakland Township to the Village of Orion and Village of Clarkston.

Robert Smalley, with wife Sarah Hunt Smalley, with their generation of families, established a successful farming operation on 160 acres which remained intact and income producing from ca

1830s until ca 1950s - over a century of prosperous production. The primary Greek Revival residence built in 1848 still stands today.

And also the *National Register of Historic Places Criteria C*: That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of constructions, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The property is an excellent example of craftsmanship in examples of masonry and the use of the landscape.

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Attachments: Photos, maps, deeds, and site plan.

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http://www.clas.wayne.edu/photos/part1/low_res/aerial_photos/oakland/1967/4583-1871.pdf

Keep photos in separate file so you can send electronically.

Include a site map.