



The Wardwell House: A LEGACY OF OLD GROSSE POINTE

by Henry Heatley

The oldest brick structure in Grosse Pointe is the Wardwell House. Located on Jefferson Avenue between Audubon Road and Three Mile Drive, this building's story has long been shrouded in folklore. Following extensive research, Henry Heatley wrote and published this article. Mr. Heatley's research also provided the necessary documentation for the house to be listed on the state register of historic sites, and for the erection of a Michigan historical marker.

THE WARDWELL HOUSE is an exceptional cultural resource worthy of preservation for the benefit of future generations. It is the oldest extant brick house and the third oldest house in the Grosse Pointes.¹ The Wardwell House is one of the few structures that reflects the political, economic, and social forces that transformed Grosse Pointe from a sleepy farming community to a bustling suburb of industrial Detroit. Despite its importance, the house has been the subject of at

least forty-five years of often totally erroneous speculation about its age and builders.

The Wardwell House, located at 16109 East Jefferson, Grosse Pointe Park, was named after Mrs. Helen Wardwell, nee Russel, who in 1912 moved into it as the bride of Mr. Harold Wardwell.² She resided there until her death in 1976. Mr. Wardwell had died in 1962. It is the only early structure on the French ribbon farm originally known as Private Claim 391 (P.C. 391).³

¹ The two older houses, both built of clapboard, are the Cadieux House located at 16939 E. Jefferson, City of Grosse Pointe, and the Provençal House at 376 Kercheval, Grosse Pointe Farms.

² The earliest recorded number, which antedated the 1920/21 city-wide number change was 3931. Address Directory (cross-reference) Listing. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library (hereafter cited BHC).

³ Belden Atlas of Wayne County, Michigan. Gale (Detroit, 1967), p. 7.

Interest in the house began in 1936 with its examination by a commission from the Historic American Buildings Survey. The Survey concluded that it was built “prior to 1860,” and this dating was registered with the Library of Congress.⁴ Dr. Milo Quaife, then head of the Burton Historical Collection, became involved in 1936, but he concluded that the necessary documentary records were unavailable to permit more exact dating. Henry Ford, however, had sufficient confidence in the Survey’s dating that he offered to buy the house and rebuild it in Greenfield Village as a showplace. Harold Wardwell refused to sell.⁵

The confusion in dating resulted from three sources. First, a French coin, dated 1789, was found in a wall cavity; thus, it has been assumed that the wall must have been built about the same period. Second, several major alterations, which, among other things, tripled the size and floor space of the house, suggest that the original structure was quite old. Third, misinterpretation and failure to consult the extant land records have abetted confusion.⁶

A persistent and incorrect folklore has also misled investigators.⁷ One belief is that the house was built in the late 1700s or very early 1800s. Another view holds that the house was formerly a log cabin that was subsequently bricked over. The most popular view is that the bricks to build the house were brought from France in about 1780, as ballast for sailing ships.

Such notions are mere myth. The dating is far too early, as the remainder of this essay will demonstrate. Moreover, the bricks used in the Wardwell House were typical of those purchased in mid-nineteenth century Detroit and available in brick clay deposits near the house.⁸ The same type and

dimension of brick appears in the Moross House which was built between 1845-1850 and is also located on East Jefferson Avenue. These bricks were taken from kilns located at Chene and Canfield Streets. There was a local clay deposit and kiln at the foot of Fisher Road on the Rose Terrace or the Grosse Pointe Memorial Church grounds by about 1835.⁹ It was from this source that Merritt Fisher, a merchant, built his three-story brick hotel on that site about 1850. Moreover, the enormous physical problems and costs associated with portaging bricks from France make it unlikely that the Wardwell House bricks were shipped to Detroit.¹⁰

In order to date the Wardwell House it is essential to understand the geology of the area. The geological make-up of the region effected land reclamation schemes which, in turn, effected the location and timing of home building. The land surface undulates along the Emmet Moraine which follows the Lake St. Clair shoreline. The crest of the Moraine rises 620 feet, near the center of the township, or about 45 feet above lake level. Drainage flows naturally to the southwest by Fox Creek and to the northeast by the Milk River which empties into Lake St. Clair in the vicinity of Gaulker Pointe. Much of the land

close by the site of the Wardwell House was marsh in the last century. Later, however, this area was reclaimed.¹¹

The ribbon farm system planned by the early settlers for the Detroit vicinity is peculiar to southeastern Michigan. This system of land parcelling nicely fitted the geology of the area. It provided ease of approach from the lake and river, easy access to water for transportation, and equitable distribution of the better (and poorer) land, and relative ease of defense. The course of the later roads, private lanes, and

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⁴ Photocopies of correspondence and miscellaneous articles and clippings were kindly provided by Mr. John Wardwell of Midland, Michigan, son of the late senior Wardwells.

⁵ Detroit Free Press, 1 September 1963.

⁶ Deed registry and tract index is land history only in the legal sense; neither directly reflects building construction or other cultural uses of land.

⁷ Detroit Free Press, 27 May, 1978, p. 1B; Grosse Pointe News, 11 Oct. 1979, p. 1, 1 Jan. 1948; The Grosse Pointer, ca. 1965.

⁸ Silas Farmer, History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan. (Detroit, 1890), 2:4, 802.

⁹ Hubbard Atlas of Wayne County, Michigan, 1818-1841, BHC. A date as early as 1818 might be questionable, but records at the Burton Historical Collection state that Bela Hubbard copied this map from Land Office records between 1838 and 1841.

¹⁰ From an unpublished paper by Mrs. Charlotte Giltner of Renaud Rd., Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan, dated 18 Feb. 1978. Mrs. Giltner has been involved with genealogical work and local history. Written from a systematic approach utilizing genealogical and other data, the paper tries to show how unrealistic a late eighteenth or early nineteenth century date for the house is. While it was not her intent to actually document the house, if the author had had access to the extant land records she could have more fully developed and proven her position.

¹¹ W. H. Sherzer, Geological Report on Wayne County. (Lansing, 1913), pp. 295-297.

other access routes were determined in large part by the long axial lines which constituted the borders of the private claims.¹²

In the early eighteenth century, a windmill was reportedly erected on a parcel of land extending into Lake St. Clair at the foot of what is now Lakepointe Avenue. This particular land configuration constituted a pronounced peninsula, and during an early period was often called *Presque Isle*.¹³ The names *Grosse Pointe* and *Windmill Pointe* derived their origins from this land form. The windmill was in operation until about 1800, but at this early date it served a grist mill function only. Since it appears on some of the late maps, it must have been replaced or rebuilt and may well have served a drainage function. By 1870 clay dykes were built and a drainage canal constructed 100 feet from, and parallel to, the lake front. A pumping station was erected to drain the marsh. The station was located at the foot of what is now Audubon Road.¹⁴

In about 1880, William Moran, descendant of the old Detroit Moran lineage, formed a partnership with his cousin, Charles, to promote a real estate venture.¹⁵ The Morans, acting under the name *Windmill Pointe Development Company*, filled in the *Grand Marais* with rubbish from Detroit and with dirt dredged from the river.¹⁶ As a result, the once distinct peninsula was virtually obliterated. Obviously, a two-story “triple brick” house, with a full basement, could not have been built in the 1830s or before on land this close to Lake St. Clair. It was too swampy; the weight of the house would have caused foundation problems and excessive settling.

Wayne County was organized in August of 1796,¹⁷ but *Grosse Pointe Township*, comprised of the *Old Grosse Pointe* and *Grand Marais*, did not become a legal entity until March of 1848. Formerly the area was part of the *District of Hamtramck*, which accounted for most of the land east of Detroit and north to the *Base Line*.

Grosse Pointe during the first-half of the nineteenth century was remote from Detroit. Some areas were not long removed from a true frontier condition, and the dwellings therein were of either round or squared logs, or of studded walls with planked or clapboard siding. They were usually of one level, with a field stone fireplace and chimney at one or both ends, and a subterranean cellar. At that time, no dwelling, except in Detroit, could have been of the magnitude of the *Wardwell House*. The Detroit hinterlands of this period have been described as being an unbroken series of swamps, bogs, and sand barrens unfit for cultivation. Further, Detroit residents seldom, if ever, penetrated more than five miles into the interior.¹⁸ Aside from the old river road, later to become known as the *Grosse Pointe Road* before being renamed *Jefferson Avenue*, the only other routes heading in an easterly or northeasterly direction were the *Ft. Gratiot*

Road and the *Moravian Road*, which was reputedly in use since about 1782.¹⁹ The route of the *Moravian Road* is not known, but it began at the *Conner’s Creek* settlement and apparently traversed the northern parts of *Grosse Pointe Township* on its route to the *Moravian Village* at the settlement on the *River Huron*, today known as the *Clinton River*, outside *Mt. Clemens*.²⁰ Most travel, therefore, was by water. Only gradually did the evolving street network within Detroit extend to other settlements.²¹ The *Plank Road Act* in 1848 permitted the *Grosse Pointe Road* to extend eastward by nine miles from Detroit. It frequently washed out during the spring run-off when the drainage ditches discharged their great volumes of water into the then overflowing *Conner’s* and *Fox creeks*. Nonetheless, the road was a distinct improvement; prior to the 1848 Act a round trip from Detroit to the *Milk River* took a full day to complete. The stage line, which began at the *Steamboat Hotel* in Detroit and skirted around the *Grand Marais*, took at least two days to reach the settlement that is now *Mt. Clemens*. Only with the creation of a township political structure and a direct and improved travel link with Detroit would a building like the *Wardwell House* be likely to be built.

The property abstract accounts of the land on which the *Wardwell House* sits casts further doubts on the early dates assigned to its construction.²² The earliest surviving entry for the land upon which the *Wardwell House* sits reveals that *Isidore Moran* was the owner.

1. NICHOLAS PATENAUDE, and MARIE JOSETTE, his wife, with ISIDORE MORIN, for himself and PIERRE MORIN CHARLES MORIN and LOUIS MORIN his brothers, and GENEVIEVE, his sister, authorized by her husband IGNACE PARRE.

Volume 2 Deeds, page 68.

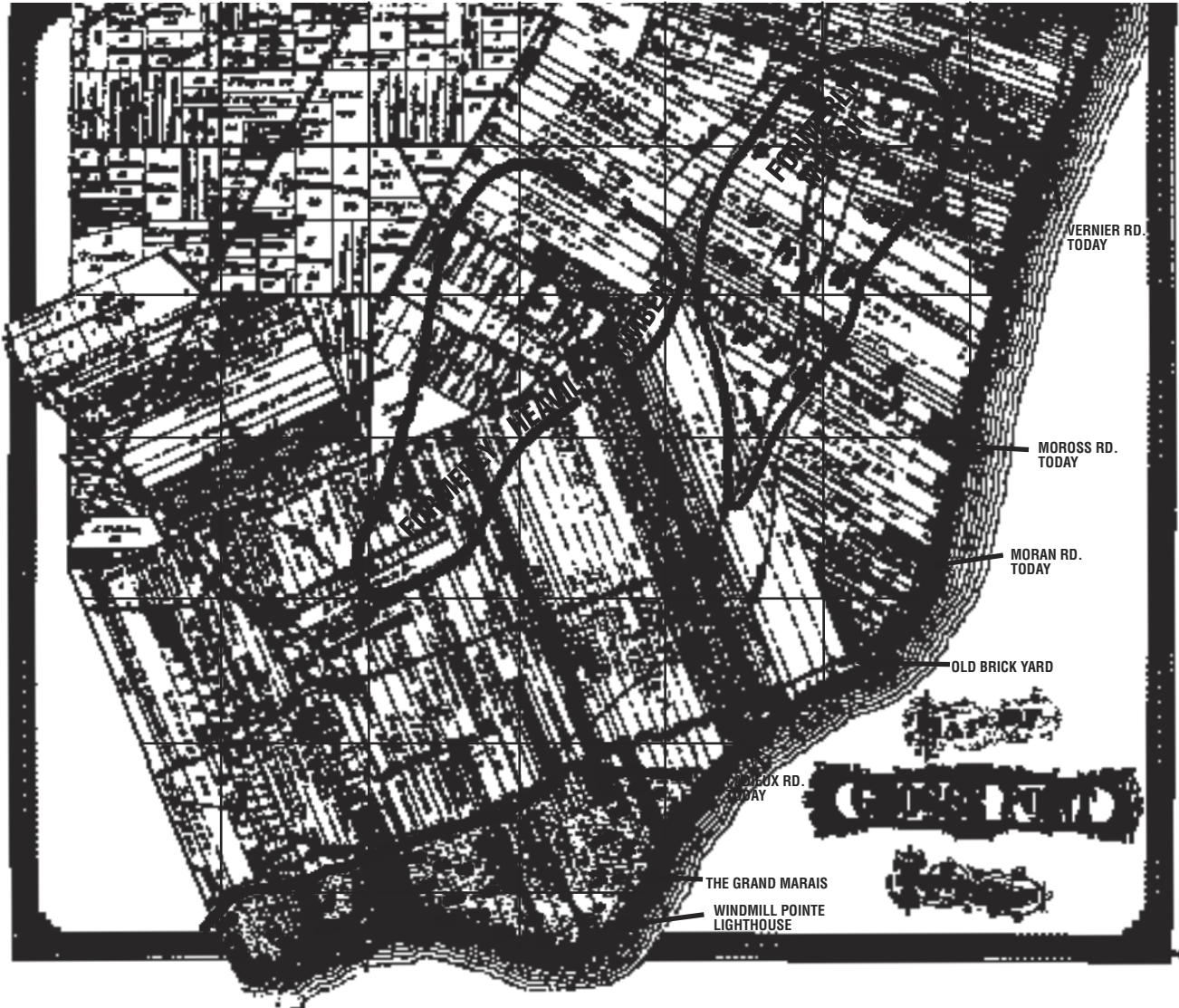
Agreement

Dated October 22nd, 1803

Consideration 20 bushel of grain per year during the life of Marie Josette Patenaude, except the 1st year.

Conveys a farm or plantation in the *District of Hamtramck*, *County of Wayne*, and *Territory of Indiana*, consisting of 3 arpents in front, and 40 in depth, bounded on the upper end by *Petit Marsac*, and on the lower end by *Joseph Tremble*, which farm or plantation formerly belonged to *J. Bte. Bodin dit Benoit*, first husband of said *Marie Josette*, and said *Marie Josette* by her marriage contract with the late *Isidore Morin*, her second husband, dated *January 11th, 1772*, by mutual consent, gave him said land if he outlived her without living children, or to the children then living, if any after his decease, and in pursuance of said contract the said *Isidore Morin*, his brother and sister, are now heirs to 1/2 of said land on account of the death of their father, said *Marie Josette* was married a third time to *Nicholas Patenaude* without having made any inventory and without accounting to said *Isidore Morin*, his brothers and sister, for the real and personal property in existence at the time of decease of said *Isidore Morin*, their father. These presents are made to avoid any and all dif-

THE WARDWELL HOUSE



An 1876 map of Grosse Pointe Township. The hatched areas indicate former marsh or swamp.

¹² Belden Atlas, pp. 7, 50-51.

¹³ Ibid. P. McNiff, Plan of the Settlement at Detroit, 1796; Hubbard Atlas, BHC; Hancock Atlas of Wayne County, Michigan (Detroit, 1854).

¹⁴ Grosse Pointe Guide (n.p., n.d.) This work is a more or less informal profile of the Grosse Pointe of some years ago. It consists of a compilation from several sources and authors, and outlines some of the social, political, and economic structures and mechanisms which were extant in the area. It also contains some historical data, some of which is very informative, some of these data consist of oral histories from informants who have since died. It is especially useful for historical data on roads, road houses, and transport.

The Guide is not especially well indexed, some of the page number are in error as they relate to the index, and many of the pages have more than one number inscribed on them, indicating the material was taken from another source, which is not always cited. The Guide is repositied in the Grosse Pointe Library, 10 Kercheval, Grosse Pointe Farms.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 284.

¹⁶ Detroit Saturday Night, n.d.

¹⁷ Farmer, History of Detroit, 2: chp. 20.

¹⁸ Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, 5:533.

¹⁹ McNiff map, BHC.

²⁰ Farmer, History of Detroit, 2:550-51.

²¹ Ibid, Chp. 87.

²² Abstract of title to the described premises situated in the City of Detroit, County of Wayne, State of Michigan to wit; Lot 766 of Henry Russel's Three Mile Drive Subdivision #1. In possession of the author.

faculties in regard to said estate.

Said grantees to protect grantors against all claims.

Acknowledged October 22nd, 1803.

Recorded October 29th, 1803.

The seemingly unusual system of property transfer, whereby a married couple owned all property in common, was in fact quite common under old French custom. At the death of one, therefore, the surviving spouse automatically acquired full control of any and all assets.²³ In this instance, there were four children, including a junior Isidore, presumably the first born, who were heirs to half of the property. It is unclear, subsequent to their mother's third marriage, what the "without accounting" clause means and what other understandings were agreed upon.

When the property was sold in 1808, Isidore apparently acquired all other interests to the land. There was no reference to Bodin, Benoit, Morin, or Patenaude as possessing property in the vicinity of P.C. 391; nor is there a "Bodin dit Benoit" listed in Detroit French genealogies.²⁴ Apparently, under French law registration of a change in land ownership was not necessary.²⁵ It was not uncommon for property to remain in the hands of several generations with no official record of the transfer rights and will provisions. In the last third of the eighteenth century Joseph Lionard Tremble owned a parcel of land in which P.C. 391 was situated.²⁶ Isidore Morin's later purchase of the property is handwritten in French, displaying the legal terminology of the period, but it is nearly illegible and therefore difficult to translate. The agreement, however, was signed as follows:

Peter Audrain	Nicholas X Patenaude (L.S.)
J.P.D.D.	Marie Josette X Patenaude (L.S.)
	Isidore X Moran (L.S.) ²⁷

Peter (Pierre) Audrain, as the letters under his name signify, was a Judge of Probate in the District of Detroit. As a notary public he played a prominent part in the later re-registration of lands after the great fire of 1805. He was a judge by 1797 and died in 1820. The "X" in the names of the parties concerned do not necessarily signify that they were illiterate (although they might well have been), as the entry "his (her) mark" usually accompanies the X if the person is illiterate. The X can also mean the surname by which the person is known. This would make the mark some-

what akin to the French "dit," meaning "also known as." The spelling of Moran in the earlier entry was "Morin." It is unusual that Audrain, who was French-born, would have put an Anglicized, or even "Irish-ized," spelling to a French name. Genealogists assert that "Moran" and "Morin" are two distinct lineages, both French, which can be contrasted with the Irish "Moran" line of a slightly later Detroit period. Nevertheless, the connected letters "in" are pronounced in French as "an;" therefore, "Moran" could be the French pronunciation of "Morin." The "L.S." after the "surnames" probably stands for "legal signature."

In 1807 these lands were transferred to Charles Gouin who proceeded to seek a verification for the title to P.C. 391 from the United States government. Aaron Greeley, the surveyor for Wayne County was a prominent figure in affairs involving private claims.²⁸ Gouin went to great pains to prove title to the land, undoubtedly because of the chaos produced in land records as a result of complications and ambiguities created by the fire of 1805, which destroyed most of Detroit and extant land records, and the French custom of not always registering land transfers. The system by which lands began to emerge as distinct entities consisted of land court hearings to establish clear title for legal possession. Greeley played an important role in these proceedings. All claimants were to have actually possessed and improved their properties by July 1, 1796, the official date on which the Michigan Territory passed from British to American control. By an act of 1807, all lands were to be surveyed under direction of the surveyor-general, and the certificates issued were to be entered at the land office at Detroit.

P.C. 391 was the second farm owned by Charles Gouin. His other holdings were P.C.s 12 and 13 located in Detroit, which measured 1½ x 80 arpents (an arpent is roughly equivalent to an English acre) upon which was situated one house, and presumably out-buildings. His other personal property included 2 slaves, 2 oxen, 2 cows, and 1 horse.²⁹

It was not uncommon for the French to maintain summer farms outside Detroit. Because of the amount of time involved in travelling between the two locations, the "out farm" was usually worked on a limited scale. Land clearance was a problem anywhere, so this endeavor was always undertaken on the basis of a few acres each year with settlement achieved only after enough land had been cleared

²³ Giltner, unpublished manuscript.

²⁴ McNiff map; Bouquet Chart, 1796; Rev. Fr. Christian Denissen, *Genealogy of the French Families of the Detroit River Region, 1701-1911*, BHC.

²⁵ Giltner, unpublished manuscript.

²⁶ Land Office Records, Liber 2 p. 68. Wayne County Archives microfilm. BHC.

²⁷ American State Papers, Documents. Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States commencing 3 March, 1789, and ending 3 March, 1815. (Washington, D.C., 1832), 1:427. These papers are especially useful for research because they contain abstracts of the hearings to validate the Private Claims.

²⁸ Aaron Greeley's map of the land claims can be seen in the American State Papers, 5:428.

²⁹ Farmer, *History of Detroit*, 2: chp. 4; Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, 8:535. VIII: 535, 347.

to enable the production of an adequate food supply. The census report of 1810 shows a Charles Gouin as residing in the Grand Marais, which at that period was distinct from "Grosse Pointe."³⁰ In all probability the census takers made their rounds of the rural areas during the warmer seasons; hence the person recording the population for Grosse Pointe would most likely have found M. Gouin working his second farm, upon which most likely stood a dwelling place of some sort.

Charles Gouin sold P.C. 391 to a Henry Hudson in February of 1815, with the mortgage being satisfied in June 1816. The mortgage, or consideration, consisted of \$200 and two notes totalling \$500.³¹

Hudson was a colorful character. He apparently built the wharf at the foot of Bates Street, but most of his exploits seem to have fallen somewhat short of social acceptability.³² In a biographical sketch, C. M. Burton writes:

Henry Hudson married Mary Watson; and their son, Alexander, was born September 23, 1806 and was buried May 2, 1808. No record has been found of Hudson's birth or the date of his arrival in Detroit. It is probable that he was not a property owner in the old town at the time of the fire of 1805, because his name does not appear among those eligible for a donation lot. In September of that year he was indicted for stealing 212 lbs. of coffee from Charles Curry on June 11.

*Hopelessly light fingered, Hudson at one time faced 10 indictments. He owned property in Grosse Pointe, which he sold to Merrit Fisher, after whom Fisher Road was named. Hudson died in 1852.*³³

What Burton said about the property was not entirely accurate. Hudson did in fact own the property, and Judge James May in 1823 stated that Hudson House was standing in 1778, but the eventual outcome was different than Burton states.³⁴

Just this side of the country club lived Henry Hudson, "Old Hudson" everyone called him. He and his family were considered an unsavory lot for some reason and were known far and wide through this section of the country. Besides Hudson there was his wife and three or four boys who were stalwarts all, and when the sheriff or any of his deputies had occasion to visit their premises in their line of duty, they went prepared,

*for they were fully aware they might meet with trouble. On one occasion, Sheriff Wilson had a warrant for Hudson for some alleged misdeed. He went up to the house to serve it. Mrs. Hudson saw him coming and divining his mission, she at once provided herself with a large basin of scalding water and stationed herself behind the open front door so she could give it to him good and plenty. The sheriff fortunately discovered the enemy and her means of defense through the crack of the door and struck the basin from her hands with the heavy butt of his riding whip, spilling its scalding contents over her bare feet. Mrs. Hudson was a masculine looking woman, marked with smallpox. She wore a broad brimmed straw hat, winter and summer and out of doors, when the weather demanded it, a sailor's heavy sea jacket. . . . A Mr. Fisher succeeded them. I think he bought the Hudson property. He opened a road house there.*³⁵

If the Hudson property was "just this side of the country club," the site was on what is now known as Rose Terrace, (the former Dodge Estate) where Fisher discovered the brick clay deposit. Fisher was, in the 1830s, a grocery merchant on lower Woodward Avenue.³⁶ He married a daughter of Conrad Ten Eyck, then sheriff of Wayne County. After his marriage, he disposed of his grocery business in the city and moved to Grosse Pointe, where he built the hotel. Fisher purchased the old Hudson property, then known as the Ten Eyck Farm. Conrad Ten Eyck was subsequently owner of the Wardwell property. In a letter dated January 26, 1821, Henry Hudson stated (aside from being a tavern keeper in Detroit prior to moving to Grosse Pointe) that he owned four farms in Grosse Pointe.³⁷ These farms either had a lien against them or were simply lost to pay a debt. Money was lent to Hudson by Oliver Miller in 1819, which he apparently could not repay. A sum of \$820 was also involved with Robert Smart, and Conrad Ten Eyck. In sum, Hudson signed off his four farms, one of which must have been P.C. 391. Thus, it seems likely Hudson did not sell to Fisher. Rather, Fisher bought the farm from his father-in-law, Conrad Ten Eyck, who acquired P.C. 241, probably with P.C. 391 and two other farms, by a default on the part of Henry Hudson. A hand written letter exists in a quasi-legal style that described and transferred the Hudson farms on September 30, 1820.

Thus Messrs. Oliver Miller, Robert Smart, and Conrad

³⁰ Joseph Watson's Census Report for Grosse Pointe and the Grand Marais, of 1810, Witherell Papers, BHC.

³¹ Burton Abstract and Title Co., BHC. All of the following land transactions in the text were taken from this abstract.

³² Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, 8:237, The Grosse Pointe Guide p. 214.

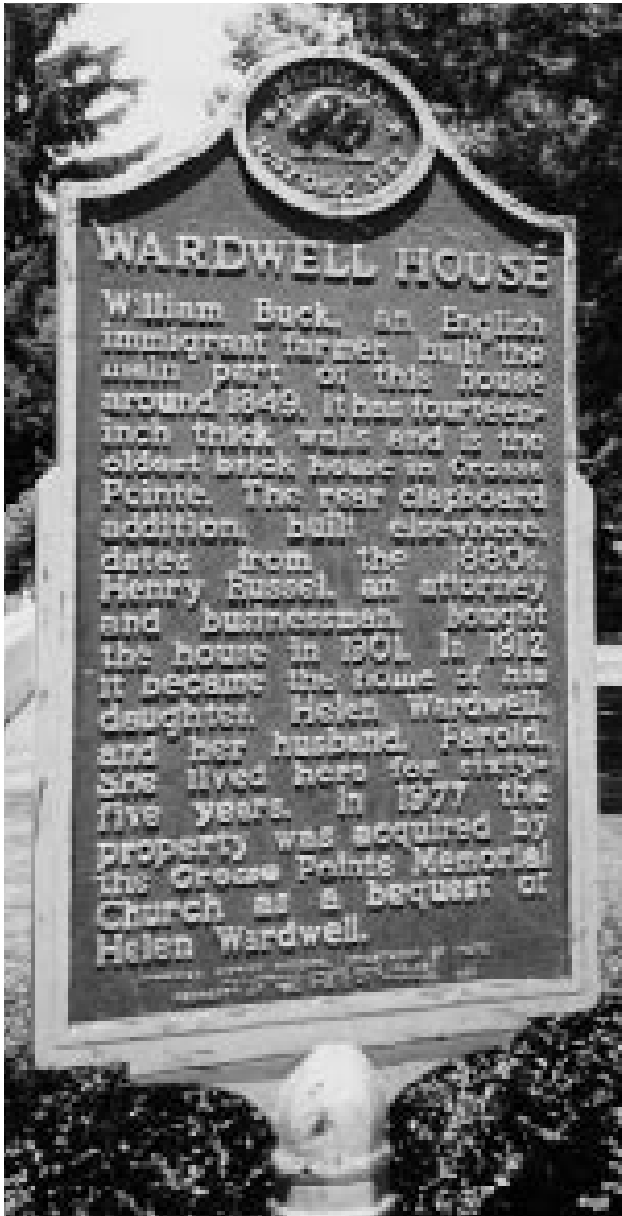
³³ Clarence M. Burton, "Hudson Henry." Biographical Index, BHC.

³⁴ Belden Atlas, p. 66.

³⁵ Friend Palmer, Early Days in Detroit, (Detroit, 1906) p. 657; Grosse Pointe Guide, p. 217.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Henry Hudson to William, January 26, 1821, Woodbridge Papers, BHC.



The Michigan historical marker on the grounds of the Wardwell House. Mrs. Helen Wardwell lived there for 65 years, bequeathing it to Grosse Pointe Memorial Church on her death in 1976. The house was subsequently sold, most recently to Dr. and Mrs. Douglas L. Ross, who still live there.

Ten Eyck became owners of P.C. 391 by a warranty deed dated March 1817. The consideration was \$6,000, which surely reflected other interest or transactions between the parties. Of course the 1817 date is totally inconsistent with the foregoing; there is always the possibility of error in transcription. Hudson might have had to sign the later letter for some other reason. It is doubtful that the actual land record is in error. Since all the other pieces of the puzzle fit together, it is unlikely that the transfer of P.C. 391 was a fifth and earlier land transaction.

Little is known of the new owners, except that none of them resided in Grosse Pointe.³⁸ Oliver Miller was active in Detroit government and civic affairs. Conrad Ten Eyck, aside from holding the position of sheriff, was a goods merchant, county commissioner, and Treasurer of Detroit at various times.³⁹ Robert Smart was a Scottish immigrant who was in Detroit by 1806. He was involved in real estate dealings, had a sawmill on the Black River, and built Smart's Block of stores on the northeast corner of Jefferson and Woodward Avenues.⁴⁰

In 1818, the property was sold to Edward Brooks, a former colonel in the American army. He was a resident of Detroit from 1822 to 1852, when he moved to Washington, D.C.⁴¹ Prior to his departure, he was a salesman and land agent, an auctioneer for Wayne County and commander of Brady's Guards, a volunteer militia unit that served in the Blackhawk War.⁴²

Late in 1818, Edward Brooks sold the farm to a David Gwynne and John Biddle as joint owners. By 1823, Biddle had purchased Gwynne's half of the property. A retired major of the American army, John Biddle was a well known person in Detroit. He was a prominent hotelier (he operated the Biddle House, located at Jefferson and Randolph), and was active in real estate and other business and civic functions. Also in 1818, Biddle purchased 2,200 acres in the area of what is now Wyandotte, after Indian title had been "extinguished" by the federal government. He built a homestead on this property in 1835, and moved his family from Detroit.⁴³ The consideration to Gwynne and Biddle was \$1,400. John Biddle expanded the size of the farm to 210 acres by acquiring a back concession of 90 acres. The inclusion of the back concession brought the northern boundary of P.C. 391 to its final line.⁴⁴ The road that was later cut through, which was built on a line of farm boundaries, was called the DeRasse Road, and later renamed Harper Avenue.

In 1834, John Biddle sold P.C. 391 to a Loan Hills, and his wife, Esther. They did not reside in Wayne County as of 1840.⁴⁵

In 1835, and almost concurrent with the discharge of their own mortgage, the Hills sold the property to Michael Cadieux, who at the time had his own farm, P.C. 506, in the vicinity of what later became Cadieux Road. With this pur-

³⁸ "Michigan Territorial Census for Wayne County, Witherell Report of Census of 1820," Witherell Papers, BHC.

³⁹ Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections, 1:258, 441; 10:85.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 2:13. Farmer, History of Detroit, p. 457.

⁴¹ Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections, 2:178.

⁴² Ibid. 2:178, 574; 4:106; 8:574.

⁴³ Ibid, 13:319-20.

⁴⁴ Belden Atlas, BHC.

chase, Cadieux tripled his acreage for farming. He might also have wanted the property for the lumber it contained on the north end or simply for speculation. In 1837, 28 acres of the back concession were sold to a George LaForge.

In 1845, Cadieux, and his wife, Archange, sold the farm (excepting LaForge's 28 acres) to a Philip Martz. Martz does not seem to have been a farmer either. In a later period, he was a Water Commissioner in Detroit and probably owned the Martz Brewery.⁴⁶ In 1850 no Philip Martz was residing in Wayne County.⁴⁷

In October of the same year, Martz sold the farm to a Charles Moran. This was Charles Moran Junior (who died in 1876, aged 79 years), whose father's name appeared earlier but with the French spelling "Morin." The junior Moran was apparently the father of William Moran who reclaimed part of the Grand Marais. The consideration was only \$200; obviously, this transaction involved other commitments. Moran's mortgage apparently fell through, since in October 1845 Martz also sold P.C. 391 to a William Buck. In 1847, William Buck acquired from George LaForge, for a consideration of \$160, the 28 acres LaForge bought in 1837; thus, Buck had all 210 acres of P.C. 391.

Up to this point only two of the owners were known to be farmers. They were Charles Gouin and Michael Cadieux. All of the other owners had other livelihoods, and all but Gouin and Cadieux had their residences, at locations other than Grosse Pointe. These early purchases and sales of the property point to the incipient land speculation schemes which peaked in the Detroit area during 1834-1841. It is most likely that the other previous owners of P.C. 391 were involved in land and homestead promotion schemes. They would hire someone to homestead for them, while paying all their expenses, and then sell (they sometimes advanced an initial down payment to the homesteaders) the improved property, as the price escalated. Their most likely prospects for this exploitable labor would naturally have been the landless laborers, especially immigrants. The first buildings were

normally the land clearer's cabins, and were usually not the clear title holder's dwellings. Most likely P.C. 391 was a working tenant farm. There was little probability that any one of the property owners would have erected a brick dwelling of the proportions of the Wardwell House.⁴⁸

The evidence is conclusive that the Wardwell House was a mid-nineteenth century structure. It was standing by 1854. The architecture displays strong elements of Greek Revival with returning boxed cornices which wrap around the sides of the house at the eave line, and which follow the gabled roof configuration. The fireplace mantle is also indicative of the same period, as is the corbelled brick form of support beneath the fireplace. The Greek Revival style is usually associated with the decade of the 1850s, but was present beginning during the late 1830s or 1840s in midwestern America and Canada. Thus, architectural style alone cannot be used to date the house.

Other observed features in the Wardwell House fit with the 1850s although some of these features appeared in buildings erected in subsequent decades. The windows of the house are of wood, in the Colonial double-hung style, with the crossbars thinner than were used in later periods. The mitered joints of the windows are secured with wooden pegs, rather than with nails. The transoms are original and are pegged at their corners. The window panes that have not been replaced are somewhat bubbled. More significantly, some window casings contain a segmental arch capped by keystone brick, which came into use during the 1840s. The exterior window sills are fashioned from solid pieces of wood. The brick is typical of the period for Detroit. The lime mortar is of the same consistency back to the rear portions of the brick, thus indicating a durable grade to which some natural cement was added during construction. This cement occurred in downriver areas. The basement walls and presumably foundation are constructed of what is commonly called Trenton limestone, which was readily available from downriver commercially-operated quarries.⁴⁹

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*Wardwell House
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⁴⁵ U.S. Bureau of Census, Index to the Sixth Census of the United States, Michigan. BHC.

⁴⁶ Farmer, History of Detroit, 2:499.

⁴⁷ U.S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States, Michigan. Microfilm No. 189, Reel No. 21, visit/entry no. 54, BHC.

⁴⁸ Documentation of the house is on two levels, that of architectural analysis and research into the written record. To be able to provide architectural data, a note of thanks must go to the Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, and to Mr. Gust Jahnke, Administrator, for providing access to the house and grounds. A second note of thanks is due Mr. James Conway of the Detroit Historical Museum for providing information regarding architecture, construction techniques, and building materials.

THE WARDWELL HOUSE

The columned and enclosed porch attached to the front of the house, and the two-storied porch seen on the west side are early twentieth century additions and consequently of no particular historic value. The lower west-end porch houses a sitting room window upon which is mounted what seems to be an original shutter, with original hinges and latching assembly. The original floor beneath the overlying hardwood floor is of ship-lap construction that pre-dated the familiar tongue-and-groove hardwood flooring.

Across the short axis of the house from front to rear through the center, traverses the main supporting beam. It is of a hand-hewn hard wood, probably oak. The floor joists were sawed, and not hand-hewn. The vertical saw marks on the attic ceiling joists indicated they were pitsawed. Attachment to the lateral oak beam is by a mortice and tenon joint. These features were typical of mid-nineteenth century.

At mid-century William Buck owned the property. He held it from 1845 until his death in 1873. In the 1850 census Buck appeared as a resident and owner of P.C. 391. The complete entry follows.

Name	Age	Race/Sex	Occupation	Birthplace
William Buck	45	White male	Farmer	England
Elizabeth Buck	38	White female		England
John Buck	12	White male		Michigan
Helen Spavin	16	White female		Michigan
William Thorndyke	17	White male		New York

If William and Elizabeth Buck had a son who was born in Michigan, the couple must have lived somewhere else in the state before buying P.C. 391, although no William Buck appears in the earlier censuses. Probably John Buck was a nephew whose surname was Gott. The fact that the Bucks were English immigrants would explain the difficulty in locating them; they simply were not here before buying the farm in 1845. Helen Spavin and William Thorndyke were most likely a servant-housekeeper and farmhand, respectively. The census taken in 1850 valued Buck's real property at \$2,000.

The value of the property as assessed by the Township tax collector for 1853 was \$1,700, which is almost triple the 1852 assessment of \$685.⁵⁰ An increase of this magnitude usually implies a major property improvement, often in the form of a building. While this indication was by no means conclusive, it seemed that 1852-53 was the date of construction of the house. However, it appears that all farms experienced a significant assessment rise; some doubled, some tripled, and

at least one of the largest holdings actually quadrupled in assessed valuation. Obviously, there was a Township-wide re-evaluation of all properties, which would mask an 1852 date of construction for the house. The 1850 census data includes the property value estimate of \$2,000, which is almost double the 1850 township assessment of \$1,121. The township property assessment for 1849 was just \$719; in other words, the assessment increased in 1850 by a full one-third over that of 1849. The 1848 assessment totalled \$634, just \$85 less than the amount in 1849.

These data suggest the Wardwell House was constructed between 1847 and 1850, probably in 1849. William Buck bought the property in 1845 and probably discharged the mortgage in 1846. If he had recently emigrated to America, he was one of the relative few to have done so with sufficient assets to purchase a farm with clear title within a year. He apparently also had enough money to finance the construction of a brick dwelling. There was an essentially nominal assessment rise of \$85 between 1848 and 1849 to a total of \$719. The rate for 1850 increased by \$402 to \$1,121. This amount becomes significant when placed in the light of the census estimate for 1850 of \$2,000. The usual practice was to assess property at one-half of the market value. Therefore, the market value of P.C. 391 actually increased by some \$900 in 1850. This increase undoubtedly reflected the construction of a brick dwelling. The cost of the brick portion of the house would have been approximately \$1,000. The projected date of 1849 is therefore based on the increase in the market value of approximately \$900, which, when added to the consideration of \$1,225 (which was a reasonably accurate entry, though probably not exact) gives a total of \$2,125 for the real property. This amount is consistent with the presumably unbiased estimate of \$2,000 placed on the property by the census taker.

The assessment rise reflected in 1853 continued throughout the extant tax rolls on an incremental basis. This trend likely reflected the effects of the political restructuring of Grosse Pointe on the Township level, and of the increased social, political, and economic ties which resulted from the improved road networks connecting Grosse Pointe with Detroit and adjacent areas.

The 1860 census reveals no John Buck.⁵¹

Name	Age	Race/Sex	Occupation	Birthplace
William Buck	55	White male	Farmer	England
Elizabeth Buck	50	White female	Housewife	England
Augustus Jacques	23	White male	Farmhand	Belgium

⁴⁹ Farmer, *History of Detroit*, 2:802.

⁵⁰ Township of Grosse Pointe, Wayne County Tax Assessment, 1848-1873, BHC.

⁵¹ U.S. Bureau of Census, Eighth Census of the United States, Michigan. National Archives Series No. M-653, Roll No. 564, p. 16, BHC.

THE WARDWELL HOUSE



The Wardwell House, 1996.

George Cordy	21	White male	Farmhand	Canada
Sarah Cordy	23	White female	Housewife	Michigan
Charles Cordy	2	White male		Michigan

Two farmhands, one with family, indicates an expanded farming operation requiring additional help. The 1876 Belden Atlas shows a structure situated on the Buck Farm, further north on the Mack Road. If this was extant in the 1850s, it was probably a dwelling for the hired help. The census taker placed a real estate value of \$8,400 on the property, plus a \$1,000 personal estate. The assessed values for 1854–1860, in contrast ranged between \$1,870 and \$2,640 inclusive. When these values were doubled for an approximate market value, the maximum was just \$5,280, which is significantly less than \$8,400. If the census person was totally objective in his estimations, the Buck Farm was intentionally or unintentionally undervalued on the assessment rolls by the tax assessors throughout at least this decade. On the tax roles, Buck's personal estate averages \$200 each year for the decade, while the census person in 1860 estimated it at

\$1,000. Given the size of Buck's inventory, the latter figure seems more accurate.

William Buck died in December 1873, supposedly intestate, leaving no children or lineal descendants. However, a nephew by the name of John Gott did present himself. While hard evidence is lacking, John Gott just might be the John Buck listed in the 1850 census record, since Gott seems to have come from out of nowhere.

In 1874, Elizabeth Buck was appointed administratrix of the estate of William Buck by direction of the Probate Court. In 1875, Mrs. Buck married another farmer, Charles Turner, who at the time owned P.C. 394, a 337 acre tract in Conner's Creek. Elizabeth Turner inherited her first husband's estate just prior to her marriage to Turner. A will dated November 1878 and admitted to probate in April 1880 named Charles Turner the heir to his wife's estate, which included P.C. 391. Elizabeth Turner had died in March 1880, aged 80 years, and Charles was appointed executor of her estate.

Shortly after William Buck's death, John Gott initiated

what turned out to be a 12-year legal battle over ownership of P.C. 391. Gott may well have been a nephew (although no proof is present in the abstract). He might have gone by the surname Buck for some reason; for example, protection afforded him by William Buck if John was an orphan. Possibly William Buck had intentions of legal adoption.

In 1875, John Gott claimed that he was the sole heir of William Buck, and was therefore entitled to any real estate. He claimed to be the sole surviving child of Mary Buck, formerly Mary Gott, who died about 1845, and was the only sister of William Buck. Thus, it seems plausible that John Gott as a nephew might well have been listed on the 1850 census as John Buck, a son of William and Elizabeth Buck. In October of the same year, an order was entered in the Probate Records stating the John Gott, or the sole heir of William Buck, was entitled to inherit his real estate.

The legal difficulties begin in 1880, when Sarah Buck Rickabus filed for a probate of will, stating that when she was eight years of age in 1843 she came to live with the Buck family for seventeen years. She indicated that William Buck had stated that she would inherit a share of his estate when he died. This petition was denied and later in the same year appealed. The data in the censuses of 1850 and 1860 suggest Sarah fabricated this claim in an attempt to gain control of part or all of P.C. 391. In April 1881, a trial jury found that William Buck made a last will and testament about the year 1862 that devised all his property to his wife excepting 40 acres, which he devised to Sarah Buck Rickabus. After another appeal, a jury concluded in 1882 that William Buck did not leave a last will and testament, but died intestate. A verdict in 1885 reversed this decision and reaffirmed the 1881 decision. Motions for a new trial were denied.

Following Elizabeth's death in 1880 Charles Turner became executor and heir (excepting the above-mentioned 40 acres) of the Buck Farm. Also in 1880, John Gott coerced Turner, under threat of commencement of proceedings to dispossess him, into signing an agreement that gave Gott possession of the remainder of the farm. Gott's claim of title was challenged in the Circuit Court for Wayne County by Turner and Sarah Rickabus. In 1888 the bill of complaint was dismissed. The matter was referred to the Michigan Supreme Court, but before that court rendered a decision on the validity of William Buck's will, the parties reached a compromise. John Gott received as his share of the property \$10,000 in cash, and his attorneys received \$2,000. Costs against the complainants were dismissed in favor of the defendant Gott. For a consideration of \$1 and "other valuable considerations," Charles Turner conveyed the Buck Farm to Sarah Rickabus by a quit claim deed in 1880.

Following the death of Elizabeth Turner the house was not regularly occupied until 1901 when the farm was acquired by

Henry Russel and Henry Potter. The occupants of the house were tenants paying rent or tenant farmers on the land who lived elsewhere. For at least a brief period in the 1890s the house was used for grain storage. Even after Henry Russel purchased the property, he and his wife, Helen, never lived on it; instead, they resided in Detroit. Henry's daughter, Helen Russel Wardwell, moved into the home in 1912 following her marriage.

The Wardwell House was built much later than has been supposed by either residents or by previous investigators. It was erected in 1849 by a prosperous English emigrant who had included in its construction most of the building features typical of mid-nineteenth century architecture in Michigan. The evidence strongly suggests that the folklore surrounding the house has misled several generations of residents about the history of this oldest of brick houses in Grosse Pointe.



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