

MEMORANDUM

To: Ann Arbor City Council
From: Jill Thacher, City Planner/Historic Preservation Coordinator
Date: June 14, 2021
Re: Robert Hayden House History and Significance

Robert Hayden made extraordinary contributions to American history, culture and poetry while residing at 1201 Gardner Avenue in the City of Ann Arbor. Designating his home as a single-resource historic district based on these contributions would further his legacy and raise awareness of his life and works.

Robert Hayden was born in Detroit in 1913. After a traumatic childhood, he attended Detroit City College, then enrolled in the University of Michigan in 1941 where he won a prestigious Hopwood Award for aspiring writers. After finishing his degree in 1942, Hayden taught at UofM for several years and was the first Black faculty member in Michigan's English department. Hayden taught at Fisk University for over 20 years, but he and Erma returned to Ann Arbor, to 1201 Gardener Street, in 1969 where he taught at UofM until his death in 1980.

During the tumultuous '60s, Hayden was criticized for refusing to call himself a "black poet" (he called himself an "American poet"), though he wrote some of the most powerful black history poems in the English language. In 1976 Hayden was offered and accepted the position of Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress (later called the Poet Laureate) – the first Black American to hold this position. He accepted and was reappointed in 1978.

After his death, Hayden's wife Erma and daughter Maia (Hayden) Patillo continued to reside at Gardner Street in Ann Arbor. Maia's husband Patrick Patillo now requests that the Ann Arbor City Council designate Robert Hayden's house at 1201 Gardner Avenue a local historic district. This is based on the property's association with one of the most important Black American poets in American history, and to honor his late wife's father, Robert Hayden -- Ann Arbor's Poet Laureate.



Robert Hayden, courtesy Wikipedia