

July 2, 2010

Dear Mayor Hieftje and Members of City Council:

We respectfully remind you that numerous property owners south of Packard OPPOSE the Proposed Fourth and Fifth Avenue Historic District unless the boundaries are extended to E. Madison. Our petitions were submitted into the record at the time of the public hearing on May 7, 2010 by the historic district study committee and again at the first reading of the proposed resolution on June 21, 2010. Those who support the demonstrably *arbitrary and capricious* boundaries of the present committee will be denying us *equal protection under the law*. We have every right to the same tax breaks for historic renovation as our neighbors to the north. We agree with Mr. Scott Munzel, who raised the equal protection problem and who stated at the public hearing that there is zero rationale for the proposed boundaries.

The National Register Bulletin 15 establishes the criteria for setting boundaries: "A district must be a definable geographic area that can be distinguished from surrounding properties by changes such as density, scale, type, age, style of site, buildings, structures, and objects, or by documented differences in patterns of historic development or associations (emphasis added)." The law regarding boundaries is further clarified at the following web site:

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal\\_mhc\\_shpo\\_LHDManual\\_05DefiningBoundaries\\_161860\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/hal_mhc_shpo_LHDManual_05DefiningBoundaries_161860_7.pdf)

"Look for visual changes in the character of the area due to different architectural styles, building types, or periods. Example: the distinct change from a concentration of nineteenth century Queen Anne homes to a subdivision of twentieth century brick ranch houses or a change in the type and character of resources due to differentiated patterns of historical development such as commercial, residential or industrial."

"Look for visual changes that are the result of the significant loss of historic materials due to inappropriate alteration or the loss of historic resources through demolition. **When selecting boundaries for historic districts, include the area that contains the highest concentration of intact resources. Exclude the peripheral areas where integrity has been compromised.**"

The above criteria provide no justification for the committee's southern or eastern boundaries. The historic district should have been centered on the 500 block of S. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue since that is the only *intact* block on S. 5<sup>th</sup> and S. 4<sup>th</sup> avenues. East Jefferson is also a consideration, but since it is not in Germantown, I regrettably do not have the authority to comment on it and did not send a petition to the property owners there. Parking lots, for which historic homes were torn down, and the Detroit Edison sub-station compromise the integrity of historic resources north of Packard. Those blocks are not as intact as the 500 block of S. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue which has no house younger than 1915 and has no parking lots, modern apartment buildings, or other intrusions. It is one of the last examples of a 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century *intact* Ann Arbor streetscape that was home to the pioneering, academic, political, and entrepreneurial mix of people who gave given Ann Arbor a mystique that survives to the present day.

The committee report does a poor job of identifying significant persons who gained importance within their profession or group, as required for Criterion B of the National Register Bulletin 15. The committee extols chicken wire north of Packard and finds it "unique" because it is topped with "iron cresting," but nowhere mentions the Raoul Wallenberg home at 308 E. Madison. This is characteristic of the truly

petty and non-visionary nature of the committee's report. The historic district should extend along S. 5<sup>th</sup> to E. Madison and take in the cluster of historic homes of which the Wallenberg house is the salient member. This home is the only surviving house that Wallenberg lived in during his formative years at the University of Michigan and, as he died young, it may be the only surviving home he lived in as an adult worldwide. Wallenberg came from a wealthy and distinguished family but selected a public university over a private Ivy League school; he preferred hitch-hiking as his way to travel this country; and, characteristically, he chose this modest home on E. Madison over an elite fraternity. The house at 308 E. Madison is significant, not only because Wallenberg lived there, but because it embodies his values. The person who went on to save some 100,000 Jews during WWII does not even get a footnote in the Study Committee report on Germantown. This oversight is emblematic of the narrow and distorted perspective of the report.

Another significant person is Jonathan Henry Mann, who was born in 1784 in Ludwigsberg (Württemberg, Germany). Together with Allmendinger, he was brought to Ann Arbor by John Allen, who was one of the two founders of Ann Arbor. Jonathan Henry Mann wrote the letter to Basel to request the first pastor (Frederick Schmid) for what is now called Bethlehem Church on S. 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. The Mann's and the Allmendinger's were the first two German families to settle in Ann Arbor. Jonathan Henry Mann's profession was tanning and he travelled the world setting up tanning factories in the 1810s, including a factory in Mexico City, for example. He also had a tannery in Ann Arbor at 1<sup>st</sup> and Liberty (Blind Pig). Consistent with Criterion B, Mann is one of numerous people who gained importance within his or her profession or group. His grandson, Eugene Mann, built #528 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave in 1893 or 1894. This is the beautiful yellow Queen Anne with a second story balcony. To this day, the Mann family continues to own the beautiful Italianate house, #532 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., that was built in 1860. Erin Mann Garcia recently lived in this house and her son is an 8<sup>th</sup> generation Mann. The continuous association of the Mann's with the 500 block of S. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave going back to the time of the first German settlement of Ann Arbor is notable.

The Mann's were not only significant as pioneers; they were also salient as businessmen who owned Mann's Brothers Druggists on Main Street. Another stately Queen Anne house that they owned is #526, which is immediately south of the Study Committee's arbitrary boundary. The Committee report claims the Mann family for the area to the north of Packard and neglects to mention that this family has a strong connection to the area south of Packard. Mann's lived both north and south of Packard and the social boundary that the committee purports to have existed simply was not there. Unfortunately, this is one of many examples of a pattern of pervasive truth-bending statements and omissions that, taken in totality, make it unlikely that this report will be unable to withstand legal challenge.

I am striving to keep this letter short, so I will not attempt to be comprehensive in regard to my objections to the Committee's report. I would, however, like to draw your attention to the manner in which the committee members conducted business. They kept their meetings secret and they kept the public hearing secret—a total failure of the Open Meetings Act. I learned about the hearing with only two days advance notice and quickly alerted my neighbors. They negotiated with each other outside the public venue and were able to vote on matters immediately when opening a meeting because they had already decided things by telephone. They staged a “mock-up” committee meeting on the last day and

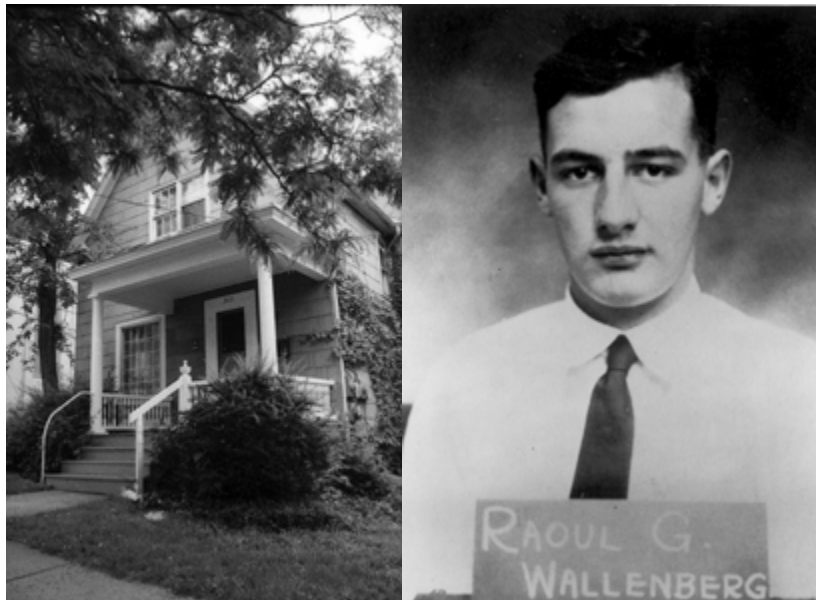
showed themselves to be very poor actors, indeed. They never solicited information from the persons who lived or owned property outside their proposed boundaries and were quite hostile and rude when we attempted to speak to them. Pat McCauley personally painted my house, so why did it get reported on the survey card as have vinyl siding? The committee went about their job in a prejudiced fashion that was injurious to those of us who own houses outside the area that they selected for political rather than historical reasons.

I respectfully request that you table your vote because you do not have in hand a satisfactory committee report. Please convene a new historic district study committee and give that body the charge to study a larger area. The citizens of Ann Arbor have often spoken at public hearings in support of a Germantown Historic District to preserve the history and quality of life in Ann Arbor. S. 5<sup>th</sup> and S. 4<sup>th</sup> avenues are the showcase streetscapes of Ann Arbor, but they must be preserved in a way that is fair and that can withstand legal challenge. It would be a waste of taxpayer time and resources to give an affirmative vote to the proposal that is now before you.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Have a wonderful 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday!

Best regards,

Beverly I. Strassmann  
545 S. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. No 2



308 E. Madison

Raoul Wallenberg's U-M freshman class photo

Source: [www.wallenberg.umich.edu/college.html](http://www.wallenberg.umich.edu/college.html).

