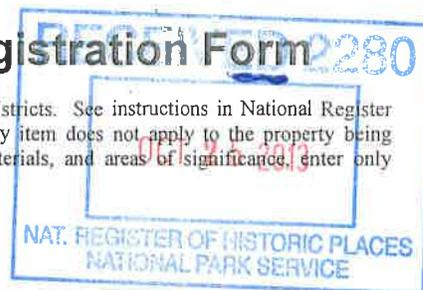


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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form 280

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: Alma Downtown 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: Superior and State Streets  
City or town: Alma State: MI County: Gratiot  
Not For Publication:  Vicinity: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      x B      x C      \_\_\_ D

<u>Brian D. Murray</u>	<u>10/22/13</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>MI SHPO</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.

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**Signature of commenting official:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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**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:)

*Jon Edson H. Beall* \_\_\_\_\_ *12-11-13* \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**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



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### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late Victorian: Italianate, Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, Richardsonian Romanesque  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals: Neo-Classical Revival  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements: Commercial Style  
Modern Movement: Art Moderne, International Style  
Other: Commercial Brick

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, concrete, stone, glass, T-111, sheet metal, vinyl; other: EIFS

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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.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Alma Downtown Historic District is composed of the city's historic downtown area covering all or portions of eleven city blocks in the heart of Alma. The main thoroughfare of the city, East and West Superior Street (Business Route US-127), forms the major spine of the historic district, which includes five full blocks. The cross street of North State Street is the predominant north/south street in the historic district with parts of four city blocks included. The district includes seventy-two buildings which date from 1874 or earlier to the present time, with over eighty percent of the buildings constructed during the period of significance. The buildings range from one to three stories in height, with the greatest number being two stories in height, and from Italianate to Art Moderne and the International Style of the mid-twentieth century. The district's buildings are almost entirely commercial but also include the massive stone Richardsonian Romanesque A. W. Wright House, the 1915 hospital building, the 1902 Alma Public Building/City Hall, and the 1937-38 Post Office Building.

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### Narrative Description

Alma's downtown area was included in the original 1858 plat of Alma beginning on the east end at the Pine River which runs, in this part of town, almost directly to the north. The district is situated on a grid of streets which run either east/west or north/south. The main east/west thoroughfare within the historic district, and the spine of the district, is a portion of Business Route US-127 (Superior Street). The street begins 2.66 miles east of the historic district

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boundary at U. S. 127. The district includes approximately 0.3 mile (or five city blocks) of Superior Street beginning at the Pine River and extending west to Prospect Avenue. The longest north/south section of the historic district extends along North State Street from just south of Center Street to north of the property at 525 North State Street, a distance of approximately 0.28 mile or all or portions of four city blocks. Remaining cross streets in the district include a portion of one block of Gratiot Avenue, portions of two blocks on Woodworth Avenue, and portions of two blocks on Center Avenue. The boundaries are drawn to eliminate areas of modern buildings and large parking lots around the district's edges. The topography within the historic district is generally flat, with only a modest rise as you move west from the Pine River.

The commercial district developed slowly until the 1880s, when it experienced a period of rapid growth. The district retains much of its traditional feeling, with densely placed late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings, traditional storefronts with recessed entries, shade trees, and sidewalks. East and West Superior Street is the main thoroughfare through the commercial district and is wide enough to accommodate parallel street parking at each curb, two travel lanes, and a center turn lane at intersections. North Gratiot Avenue, Woodworth Avenue, and State Street follow this same pattern, while North Prospect Avenue, which forms part of the western historic district boundary, lacks a center turn lane.

Most of the commercial buildings on East and West Superior Street are of brick. There is little to no space between buildings, excepting a regular mid-block alley only missing between North State Street and North Prospect Avenue. Wide sidewalks and locust trees, which rise to a height above the nearby two-story buildings, line the streets. The buildings in the district have walkout access directly to the sidewalks. On the north/south streets, the building scale generally diminishes as one moves away from Superior Street toward the northern and southern edges of the district. The west side of the 300 block of North State Street boasts two-story buildings, while the east side buildings are mainly a single story. Beyond the edges of the district, the space between buildings increases and the size of each building diminishes as land use transitions from commercial to residential, and green space and lawns appear more frequently. The most recently erected buildings within the historic district are clustered along East Superior Street between Gratiot and Pine avenues.

Modern streetscaping helps identify the main portion of the historic district by cuts made in the concrete sidewalks to allow inlay of a linear brick paver pattern. These paver inlays are present on both sides of Superior Street almost the length of the historic district as well as on both sides of North State Street from north of Center Street to the junction with Superior Street. In most places the pavers are placed in narrow bands just two pavers wide, but these expand in areas to create large pads of the orange/red paver material. The bands also are added with some creativity, stepping in and out from the main line to suggest entries to businesses and around the ground at the bases of the locust trees placed regularly down the streets.

Interspersed with the locust trees and placed near the curbs within the entire historic district are several varieties of streetlights. The main type of streetlight used features a simple straight pole topped by a four-sided lantern and capped with a rounded finial. At corners are a more ornate

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light which features an ornamental cast metal base and a pair of arms at the top, each supporting an eight-sided lantern.

The oldest extant buildings within the historic district are clustered along Superior Street, predominantly near the junctions with North State Street and Woodworth Avenue. Key among these resources are the Wright Opera House Block and the Church Block.

The Wright Opera House Block is located at 101-107 East Superior Street. The Wright Opera House Block was constructed in 1879-80 and is a three-story, cream brick Italianate commercial building. The building is divided into five retail bays across the south-facing front and has dimensions of approximately 110 feet in length on Superior and 85 feet in depth along the State Street façade. The exterior is divided into sections by slightly raised piers and capped by an elaborate brick cornice. Among the notable details of the building are: arched opera house window hoods of raised brick each with a prominent keystone detail; windows in the office and residential spaces of the second and third floors that have low segmental-arch and round-arch heads, respectively; and small oval windows situated over large windows in the space once utilized as the opera house hall.

The second major early brick building within the Alma Historic District is the Church Block located at 202-214 East Superior Street, constructed in 1886. A broad-fronted example of Late Victorian commercial architecture, it is divided into six storefronts. The storefronts each include a central recessed entry with flanking display windows. Several of the storefronts retain their street-level ornamental cast-iron framing around the display windows. A portion of the storefronts also retain their ornate transom windows featuring small colored glass margin lights around a larger clear light. Similar work is also present on the second-story windows and transoms, particularly at the dominating central arched window with tracery dividing colored glass panes. Rising above the arched center window, the building façade extends to a peaked parapet which is further ornamented by corbeled brick detailing and a cast-iron cornice.

Another major building in the district is the Pollasky Block, located at 101-109 West Superior Street, at the intersection of Superior and State Streets. Built from 1897 to 1902, this prominent Late Victorian building was designed by Haug and Schuermann, architects, of Saginaw. George S. Young of Alma was the contractor. The brick building is two stories in height and brick piers divide the Superior Street façade into six building bays, with a central three-part oriel window on the second floor. A once conical-topped turret is located in the building's northeast corner. The second story retains a high degree of integrity with its double-hung windows, limestone sills and lintels, and pressed metalwork with wreaths and garlands near the roofline. The turret and oriel windows also retain their rhomboid pane transoms. The building's State Street elevation (east) is simpler. Five small square windows light the first floor and eight double-hung windows with transoms light the second floor. A secondary entrance is located toward the south end of the State Street elevation.

Among the slightly later, but key buildings within the historic district is the two and one-half-story former Alma Public Building (City Hall) located at 225 East Superior Street. Constructed

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in 1902, the former Alma Public Building is a Richardsonian Romanesque influenced two-story red brick structure located on the northwest corner of East Superior Street and North Gratiot Avenue. Rising at the southeast corner of the building is a clock tower, a prominent landmark in the community.

Near the opposite end of the historic district at 110 West Superior Street is the former First Savings Bank building. Erected in 1915, the two-story Neoclassical building carries all the features of stability associated with banks of the era, including a façade containing two-story Tuscan columns that flank a recessed central entry. The columns support a stone entablature which reads "First State Bank" centered on the façade, and a date stone reading "1915" is centered under the front gable peak.

In addition to these key buildings in the district, there are a number of smaller commercial buildings which reflect the continued prosperity of the community. Many of the "newer" buildings (largely dating from the 1930s and 1940s) in the historic district were constructed on the sites of the former J. M. Montigel and Company Foundry, Boiler and Machine Shop located north of East Superior Street and the Alma Roller Mill on the south side of East Superior Street. Both of these companies took advantage of the no-longer extant mill race which was dug from the Pine River and extended through what is today the 400 block of East Superior Street. Finally, like many communities, Alma's downtown continued to grow into the early twentieth century, with a second cluster of typically one-story buildings erected between 1900 and 1930 at the west end of the district.

Unlike most of the historic district, the west side of North State Street north of Superior Street contains relatively few buildings, but they are ones that are very important to the history of Alma. These buildings include the home of A. W. Wright, the Heating Plant for the Wright Opera House Block and a hospital constructed to serve a no-longer extant sanitarium building. Each of these three buildings was linked to Alma businessman and benefactor Ammi W. Wright as either his home or part of one of his numerous enterprises. North of these buildings the street transitions to strictly residential and contains some of Alma's most historic and architecturally distinguished homes.

## Inventory

For each of the following entries, a number of standard references were consulted. These include city directories, Sanborn atlases, and the 1970s Alma Building Survey Committee's Building Structure Inventory Forms. Additional unique sources for each site, where applicable, are cited at the end of each inventory entry; however, the standard sources have not been individually cited. The following entries are placed in order as they appear on each street, with even number addresses placed in numerical order first, followed by odd number addresses. Each of the buildings listed below contributes to the district unless otherwise noted.

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***409. Fire Station / Liberty Professional Building (1918)***

Part of the original Alma Public Building/City Hall. See the entry for 225 East Superior Street for the building description and history.

**State Street, North, East Side**

***302. New Horizons Realty, Inc. (Built between 1948 and 1956); Non-Contributing***

The single-story broad-fronted commercial building is clad with diagonal modern wooden siding below a vertical-board fascia. It has an asymmetrical façade with deeply recessed entry and multi-light paneled door. A second slant-sided recess now contains a vertical fixed-pane window like the others spaced across the façade and may indicate the former presence of a second entry. A south-end section is slightly recessed from the west façade and has a symmetrical south elevation with a central entry and six flanking windows. The rear (east) façade is of concrete block.

As late as 1948 Sanborn maps indicate the site of this building is occupied by a two-story dwelling. City directories continue the story in 1956, when they indicate that the site is occupied by Donald D. Elsea's jewelry/sporting goods store. This store remained at the site until the late 1970s, but in 1980 the site is occupied by the law firm of Sperl, Gustafson and McDonald.

***306. Berg Dental Office / Alma Dental Excellence (Built between 1948 and 1956)***

The single-story three bay white-painted brick commercial building has an asymmetrical façade with a single entry at the left and two horizontal single-light windows to the right. Brick soldier course forms the window sills. A modern awning spans the width of the building. The back (east) and exposed east end of the south side wall are faced in vertical boarding.

The 1948 Sanborn map indicates that the property is part of a large parcel of land with a two-story dwelling and doctor's offices that are not located at this building's site. The 1956 directory lists an additional building in the block, with the address of 306 North State Street, then occupied by Donald W. Berg, dentist. Thus, it appears this building was constructed between 1948 and 1956.

***308. Pine Knot Bar (Built between 1945 and 1948)***

The single-story painted concrete block commercial building has a symmetrical façade featuring a central recessed entry flanked by glass block sidelights inside stacked red brick jambs. Two horizontal single-light windows flank the door above projecting concrete sills. A pair of slightly projecting concrete strips runs most of the way across the façade between the top of the door and

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**State Street, North, East Side (continued)**

the concrete parapet cap. The bar retains its metal neon sign, bearing red letters against a green pine tree, projecting out from the façade directly above the door. The rear façade is of concrete block.

The 1924 Sanborn map illustrates the site of this building as part of a residential property with a one-story house situated north and east of the current building site. No listing for the address appears in either the 1930 or the 1945 city directory; however, by 1948 the Sanborn map indicates that there is a one-story restaurant at the location of the Pine Knot Bar. The 1956 city directory confirms that the business at the site was known as the Pine Knot Bar. An older bar patron reported that "Lib" (presumably Elizabeth) McClure owned the building in the pre-bar 1940s.

***310. Alma Abstract and Title Company (Built between 1948 and 1956); Non-Contributing***

The single-story commercial building has a painted brick front wall plane recessed a few feet from the sidewalk line. The building's asymmetrical façade has a projecting gable-front entry, with a weatherboarded front gable above, at its left end. The projecting entry area is comprised of a side-by-side recessed entry and horizontal window above a tall brick bulkhead. To its right, extending most of the way to the right (south end), a low shake shingle-clad hip-roof canopy, resting on an outward slanting pier at the end, fronts a large multi-section window. A planter area projects beyond the south end of the roofed-over front. A lower concrete block rear section is faced on its back (east) face in vinyl siding and contains a secondary colonial gabled entry.

The 1948 Sanborn map illustrates a one-story dwelling with the same address, but a different building set back farther from the roadway. The 1930 city directory notes that building as housing the Moody Funeral Home. In 1956 the city directory notes that the property at 310 North State Street is vacant, but that 310½ North State Street is occupied by Michael Karajoff, an optometrist.

***312. Jann's Hair Design (Built between 1884 and 1890)***

The two-story commercial building has a symmetrical façade with painted brick piers and bulkheads and a central glazed entry with two flanking storefront windows. The broad display windows have sills formed of rowlock brick. A modern pent roof clad with asphalt shingles spans the façade and wraps around the southwest corner of the building. The upper story of the building front is sheathed in metal siding and wood panels. The exposed right side elevation is faced in wide aluminum siding, suggesting frame construction beneath. There is a one-story concrete block extension at the back.

The 1884 Sanborn map indicates the building at this site is a one and one-half-story dwelling, with the double address building immediately to the north a boarding house. Six years later, the building has been incorporated into the building to the north with the combined structure labeled "Formerly Hotel, Now D(welling)." The new part of the building is also two stories as is the

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**State Street, North, East Side (continued)**

current building. By 1890 the combined building is the Milliken House Hotel and includes a parlor in the front of this building, as well as in the front of the building at 115 North State Street. Offices, dining rooms, and a kitchen occupy the northernmost section of the complex. In the early 1900s the building name changed to Hotel Fern (1902), the New Alma Hotel (1910), and the Alma Hotel (1917-1948). Published records do not reveal a disassociation of this building from the two storefronts to the north until the 1956 city directory, when the building occupant is listed as Denny's Pastry Shop, and 312½ North State Street the residence of Gerald Donley. The building is the home of Knapp's Bakery in 1960; the Jean House clothing store in 1977; vacant in 1980; Merle Norman Cosmetics in 1983; Ballooning Around, a retail balloon outlet, in 1992; Print Tech, a commercial printing house, in 1999; and Jann's Hair Design by 2005.

***314-316. Commercial Building (Built pre-1884; ca. 1961)***

The broad-fronted two-story building displays simple mid-twentieth-century finishes, including rock-face random ashlar storefront piers and bulkheads, horizontal-light upstairs windows, and vertical ribbed metal siding – it looks like Kawneer Zourite aluminum facing – cladding the upper front. The front features a central recessed slant-sided entry containing two doors in its back wall separated by random ashlar stonework. The storefront on either side has large display windows and bulkheads and end piers of random ashlar stone. The far north (left) end of the facade contains a second-story access. The stone or synthetic stone is currently painted a bright purple. A modern bubble canopy now shelters the central part of the ground story. The Zourite-clad upper portion of the building contains six windows, each divided horizontally into four lights and flanked by false shutters. Above the windows the Zourite contains the ghost of large letters spelling out NEEDHAM'S. The exposed portion of the second-story south side facade is also faced in Zourite. The south slope of what is presumably a gable-front roof over the building's southern portion is visible from behind, suggesting this was originally two side-by-side buildings that were long ago combined (the north side's roof is not visible). The rear facade is of concrete block and contains horizontal-light windows like the front's.

Though faced front and back in finishes that appear from the style and from directory entries to date from ca. 1961, the building really pre-dates the first, 1884, Alma Sanborn maps. The 1884 Sanborn map identifies the building as a boarding house. In the 1890 map the building is combined with the building next door south, now 312, into a single building labeled the Milliken House hotel. The 1896 Sanborn labels the combined structure "Formerly Hotel, Now D[welling]." The combined building was called the Hotel Fern in the 1902 map, New Alma Hotel in 1910, and the Alma Hotel in 1917 and 1924. The 1948 Sanborn also lists the Alma Hotel name, but shows the use as "Hatchery," and the 1956 city directory, the first for some years, lists the occupant as the Alma Hatchery, a chicken hatchery. By 1956 the next door building at 312 was apparently no longer combined with this building. The 1960 directory shows 314-16 as vacant.

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**State Street, North, East Side (continued)**

The next, 1962 directory lists the Lindsay Automatic Soft Water Co. in 314, the International House gift shop in 316, and three apartment tenants upstairs at 314 ½ and 316 ½. This new activity after the building being vacant and before that serving as a chicken hatchery suggests a major renovation/rejuvenation. No. 314 contained a Montgomery Ward catalog store for a few years in the mid-1970s, and Needham's Home Center, a flooring and later appliance store, occupied 314 by 1979 and eventually the entire building into the early 2000s.

***318-320. State Street Furniture (1917)***

Two-story red-brown brick commercial building with second-story façade now clad in vertical ribbed metal sheeting below vertical boarding in the cornice and frieze location. It has a symmetrical lower façade divided into two mirroring ca. 1950s storefronts. Both storefronts are accessed by recessed central entries flanked by large windows on very low brick bulkheads that angle inward from the corner piers. The end piers retain the original brick construction atop concrete bases, while the storefront bulkheads are built of newer red brick material. A rectangular-footprint wood-cased pier at the center front of the broad entry recess supports the upper façade. The transom location is clad in vertical metal sheathing carrying signage. The building's two-story front section retains brick side walls. Its rear façade above a concrete block one-story extension is faced in vertical metal siding.

The 1917 Sanborn maps illustrate this building with the note "To Be Post Office (from Plans)." The Post Office remained in the building until approximately 1924. It later housed E. E. Trower and Sons furniture in 1936 and the H. J. Smith Department Store in the 1950s. By 1960 the building was occupied by Gambles Hardware store. In the late 1970s the building had multiple tenants, including a gift shop named Lori's and the Montgomery Ward and Company catalog store.

***322. Family Eye Care (Built between 1960 and 1964)***

The small ca. 1950s-looking one-story brown brick commercial building has an asymmetrical façade with off-center recessed square-plan glazed entry. The pair of flanking aluminum display windows has concrete sills atop low brick bulkheads. There is metal coping at the roofline. The back (east) end is of concrete block.

A building was shown at this site on Sanborn maps as early as 1902; however, this structure was two stories tall, and therefore the predecessor to the current structure. The two-story building was still in place in 1948. Although it is unclear when this tiny building was erected, it appears to have been in the early 1960s. In 1960 the city directory lists the occupant of the building as Bill's Lunch and James Kapellas, suggesting that the property still included two floors. But, in 1964, the listing is for only Bill's Lunch. The property changed hands often, with the Jean Machine blue jean store in place in the mid-1970s; the Body Depot, Inc., a health club, in the space between 1981 and 1983; and a women's clothing store in the building in the mid-1980s.

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**State Street, North, East Side (continued)**

***324. J. J. Newberry Store / State Street Stuff (Built between 1958 and 1960)***

This broad-fronted single-story brick commercial building has a raised orange-red brick front section and plain red brick side walls. It presents a symmetrical façade with display windows on low bulkheads extending, with the broad recessed slant-sided central entry, nearly all the way across the façade beneath an aluminum roller canopy. A shallow flat-top front section, rising well above the rest of the building behind it, is faced in orange-red brick and displays a large sign panel in the center of the upper façade. Above the windows the façade rises, in part to disguise the gable-front roof. The upper façade contains a painted sign with the current occupant's name in script. The plain red brick north side wall contains no windows. The exposed upper part of the south side wall is of concrete block.

The 1948 Sanborn map shows a two-story building at the 322-24 North State Street location. In 1956 the city directory lists two businesses at the site, including 324 as Louie's Bar and 326 as Simi's Restaurant. In 1958 neither address appears in the city directory. In the 1960 directory the J. J. Newberry Company department store is listed at 326, and there is no listing for 324. Newberry's occupied the space until the late 1970s (when the chain itself folded), and the building was vacant between 1980 and 1983. The building is then occupied by Lori's Hallmark Shop from 1984 to at least 1987. By 1992 the building is again vacant. Since then, the building has been the home of Tubs-R-Us, hot tubs and supplies; J & M Tubs; and the current State Street Stuff.

***408. Boiler House Building/Store / (Built before 1902; front added between 1917 and 1924)***

A one-story brick building whose rear section originally served as a boiler house for the Wright Opera House Complex faces west on State Street directly to the rear and across an alley from the Opera House and Lancashire blocks. Today the secondary and rear façades to the north, south, and east have bricked-in segmental-arch windows. The main west façade storefront, until recently sheathed with ca. 1960s stacked white brick, is in the early stages of rehabilitation, with the 1960s brickwork removed and the older brick outer and center piers and upper façade and the old transom areas exposed. Originally (as evidenced from a portion of the building visible in a historic photo) it was a simple, typical early twentieth-century one-story design with rectangular footprint and flat roof with a simple square brick parapet. The large storefront windows were capped with rectangular transoms. The interior retains some intact pressed-metal ceilings.

There is reference to a "steam plant" in a newspaper notice of 1900 and the footprint of the boiler house shows up on the 1902 Sanborn fire insurance map; the 1902 Sanborn shows only the rear portion of the present building well back from State Street. By 1924 a front section was added that then housed the local gas company office. As a heating plant the facility served both the Wright Opera House and the nearby Bahlke Block (at 119-121 East Superior Street). The building later housed a liquor store and Walter McKeen's optometry practice, a dentist, and most recently a tanning parlor. Currently the building is part of the underway rehabilitation of the Wright Opera House Block complex.

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**State Street, North, East Side (continued)**

Source: Jennifer Metz, Wright Opera House Block Complex National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2012. Typescript copy on file with Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, Lansing, Michigan.

**State Street, North, West Side**

***233. United States Post Office (1937-1938); Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the Treasury; James I. Barnes Construction Co., Mount Pleasant, MI***

The post office is a five-bay single-story building with limestone-trimmed buff brick walls. A central stone staircase and modern brick-faced handicapped access ramp give access to the building's central double-door entry, which rests on an elevated foundation. The façade (east elevation) is symmetrical, with the square-head transomed entry capped by a stone lintel reading "Alma - Michigan 48801." Four large eight-over-eight windows, with stone lintels matching the entrance's, are evenly spaced and flank the entrance. The central portion of the upper façade contains raised metal letters forming the words "United States Post Office" and a stone medallion with an eagle carved in relief is centered under the roofline, which is finished with a simple, unadorned cornice. The side elevations contain more of the same windows. The Post Office is located at the southern edge of the Alma Downtown Historic District.

The 1932 *Digest of Appropriations for the Support of the Government of the United States* listed an appropriation for the purchase of land and the construction of a new post office in Alma. The building, actually constructed in 1937-38, was designed in the office of Louis A. Simon, Supervising Architect of the Treasury, and constructed by the James I. Barnes Construction Company of Mount Pleasant, Michigan. It followed one of a number of standard designs that, developed in the 1930s to accommodate post offices handling specified levels of business activity, were used across the nation. In Michigan one other post office, the 1937 building in East Detroit (now Eastpointe), is very similar. When it was new, a mural entitled "Harvest" was created for it and installed in the lobby. The 15'10" long by 5'3" tall mural was a 1939 work by Joe H. Cox, who was a graduate student at the University of Iowa at the time. Cox had previously painted a railroad scene mural for the post office in Garret, Indiana. The mural is still displayed in the lobby.

David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976); United States of America, Department of the Treasury, Division of Central Accounts, *Digest of Appropriations for the Support of the Government of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 1932), 480; United States of America Postal Service, "Historic Architectural & Archaeological Significance Survey Form for Alma Main Post Office," 1983. Typescript copy on file, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, Lansing, Michigan.

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**State Street, North, West Side (continued)**

***301. Masonic Temple / Central National Bank Building (1963)***

Built to house the Central National Bank of Alma in the ground story and Alma's Masonic Temple in a second story, the two-story masonry building reflects the International Style in its clean-cut design. It is a large footprint building with a rectangular form, flat roof, and regularly spaced whitish brick-faced piers separating broad upper façade sections faced in red-brown brick. The second story at the building's southeast corner overlooking the State/Center intersection is cantilevered over a square-plan deeply recessed corner entry for the bank and the building's southwest corner cantilevers over another recessed entry. The whitish brick piers divide the façade (east elevation) and south street elevation into four and five bays, respectively. The first-floor street-facing walls are now faced in white EIFS subdivided into horizontal panels except for the Masonic temple entry, with adjacent transom-level strip window band and a fixed window grouping on the State Street side and two four-light vertical fixed windows in each bay along the south (Center Street) elevation. Second-story fenestration includes a pair of sliding windows and transom topped by an awning and spandrel panel placed at the center of each bay. Awnings are also utilized above each bay on the first story. The northernmost second-story bay cantilevers over parking spaces flanking a central north-side bank entry. The building's Masonic Temple name and 1963 date of construction are carved in a granite cornerstone located on the east front next to the temple's entry.

The date stone on the building indicates it was constructed in 1963. The following year, the city directory indicated that the occupant was the bank, and the 1965 directory indicates that six Masonic organizations were using the hall under the aegis of the Masonic Temple Association. Today the building is the home of the Commercial Bank, CNFC Mortgage Corporation, and the city's Masonic lodges.

***313-315. Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) Hall (1904; expanded between 1910 and 1917), George S. Young, contractor for 1904 building***

A plaque in the building's pediment lists 1904 as the date of construction for this two-story, red brick three-storefront broad building. Brick piers demarcate the front into three sections. The street-level storefronts have been rebuilt but the north storefront retains a recessed side-entry form. On the second floor, brick mullions and rock-face stone sills and window and transom lintels indicate the historic locations of triple double-hung windows, each with a large single-light transom above, in the center of each bay. Newer brick infill has left only the central double-hung window in each bay. Complex corbeled brick detailing accentuates the upper façade below the roofline. Single and paired small panels above the second-story windows in the original part of the building (southern two-thirds) contain white terra-cotta tiles displaying intricately intertwined raised decoration. A small gabled brick pediment straddles the roofline of the two south-end storefront bays. It contains a triangular metal date plaque with "1904" in raised letters. A horizontal metal panel recessed into the brick front just below reads "Odd Fellows Temple." A furniture store, in the building's two south storefront bays, and a café are the current building occupants.

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The back (west) end of the building's south third extends back all the way to the alley, the west end an extension of the original building. Its south face displays a section faced in rock-face concrete block rather than brick, containing a broad and two small double-hung windows. The rest of this south third displays steel sash windows. The middle section's west end is aligned with the end of the south end prior to the lower rear extension. The north section's two-story main part is much less deep, and a one-story shed-roof rear extension brings the section's back wall out to a point in line with the back end of the middle section.

Constructed in 1904, the building was one of numerous erected by Alma contractor George S. Young. On May 13, 1904, the *Alma Record* reported that the two-story building would house the IOOF hall in the upper story while the ground floor would be rented for business enterprises. The following month, on June 10, 1904, the *Alma Record* noted that the new \$10,000 Odd Fellows Temple cornerstone had been laid. The ceremony and laying of the cornerstone began with a parade, and culminated with the deposit of a time capsule box in the stone. The time capsule contained a copy of the *Detroit Free Press* of June 10, 1904, the *Alma Record* of June 3, 1904, the rosters of members of the Alma IOOF bodies, "a package of coins in present use, a photograph of the Howland Family of nine sons and the program of the exercises of the day." The 1997 directory is the last to list the Odd Fellows' as occupants.

In addition to serving as Alma's IOOF headquarters, this building housed the *Alma Record* and Central Michigan Power and Light offices in the early twentieth century. When Consumer's Power Company bought out Central Michigan, they in turn used this building for their office space until about 1955. The northernmost third of the building was added between 1910 and 1917, and housed the Telegraph Company.

*Alma Record*, "Building Boom is Now on in Alma," 13 May, 1904, 1; *Alma Record*, "Odd Fellows' Temple Corner-Stone Laying," 10 June, 1904, 1.

***317-323. J. C. Penney & Company / Knights of Columbus Building / Terry's Cycle / Academy of Performing Arts (Built between 1917 and 1924)***

The two-story red brick commercial building is divided into three storefront bays by brick piers. The ground story's center bay is recessed and contains the entries for the two businesses, which each occupy half of the main floor. The two outer bays are largely finished with plate glass windows, with the exception of the paneled access door at the south corner of the business front at 317 North State Street. A wide modern wood sign panel extends the width of the building from just above the first floor fenestration to just below a cornice that extends across the front just below the stone sills of the second-floor windows. Each of the three bays of the building's second story features three double-hung windows flanked by false shutters. The brick piers rise to a corbel-supported entablature that, divided into equal-height architrave and frieze bands by a smooth-faced stone beltcourse, is topped by another simple cornice similar to the lower one and by a low brick parapet with stone cap. The present rear façade remains the original red brick one with none of the usual extensions.

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In 1910 the property was the site of the Hotel Edwards, which consisted of several small one- or two-story buildings combined into a single entity. By 1917 the original buildings appear to have been removed. The 1924 map shows the present larger two-story building labeled "Department Store" on the site. An early occupant of the space was a wing of the D. W. Robinson department store. By the mid-1920s the building was the home of the local branch of J. C. Penney and Company with the Knights of Columbus maintaining space on the upper floor. A fire in 1951 caused extensive damage to the building, which was subsequently remodeled and remained the Penney's store location until 1977. Presently it houses a cycling shop and a performing arts school.

***325-327. "Little Daisy" Store and Sharp Shoe Store (1897; ca. 1930)***

This is a two-part one-story commercial building that is comprised of (1) a small store building (historically known as the "Little Daisy") that, built at the same time as the Pollasky Block and matching it in style, was originally separated from it by a narrow open arcade running between it and the block and (2) a second store built in the former alley space about 1930, the two since forming what reads as a single building. The current structure includes two storefronts, number 325 in the historic space and the second, number 327, in the previously open arcade area. The 325 storefront retains a ca. 1920s storefront with its large lights held by the old thin metal frames and with a deeply recessed center entry with square-plan outer section near the sidewalk and narrower slant-sided inner section leading to a wooden door with large plate glass central light. The red brick bulkheads feature a metal grill filling much of the street-facing bulkhead on each side of the entry recess. The narrower 327 storefront has its recessed entry, with a door identical to 325's at the right and a small display window, also with its 1920s-type metal trim, to its left. A metal storefront cornice that historically spanned the open alley/arcade and the 325 storefront to its south remains in place. Vertical T-111 siding clads the upper portions of narrow piers at either end of the façade's ground story, a broader pier between the two storefronts, and the tall former transom location above both stores. Above the historic metal storefront frieze and cornice, T-111 is also used for a now badly deteriorated (and ridiculous-looking!) false second-story pseudo-Victorian front displaying four shuttered blind windows and projecting eaves sporting a regular pattern of small brackets between larger triangular ones. The lower portions of the end piers retain original smooth and rock-faced stonework.

Early occupants of the "Little Daisy" store are unknown, but by 1916 the space was the home of Mike Frentsos' DeLuxe Candy Store or DeLuxe Candy Kitchen. Later it housed the M. S. Beamer Boot Shop (1927); Kroger Store (1928-1929); Gibson Hardware (1929-1949); and Alma Hardware (1949-1975). The once open arcade area was enclosed about 1930 to house Kendall Sharp's shoe repair shop, with subsequent shoe repair facilities located in the space until 1970.

Mildred L. Smith, *Pioneer Family Promotes Progress: the Building of the Pollasky Block* (n.p., 1984).

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***421. House / The Maples (ca. 1900)***

Large, broadly T-shaped asymmetrical hip-roof brick building constructed as a high-end duplex residence, with its primary façades oriented north toward Downie Street and east toward North State Street. The building was originally constructed to be two stories in height, but a hip-roof third story has been added atop much of the building's footprint, leaving the front and side edges of the old main hip roof exposed beyond the addition's north and east side walls. This upper addition is clad in T-111 vertical siding and contains paired and triple double-hung windows, each sash displaying two horizontal lights. The original duplex has a broad and flat T-plan footprint and is constructed of buff brick with red brick accents. One of the two units' main front entries is located in the center of the north front, the other at the south end of the east-facing long side. Red brick quoining is present on all four corners of the building and is also used in broad bands around the window openings and the three round arches in an open porch beneath the upper story at the building's southeast corner. A second porch projects from the north elevation. This single-story porch rests on a raised foundation and is sheltered by a half-hipped roof supported with four wooden posts. A simple wooden balustrade edges the porch. On the west elevation, part of the hipped roof is extended over three balconies accessing each of the three stories. The balconies are constructed of wood and communicate with each other via flights of stairs. The window placement throughout the building consists of regularly spaced single or paired double-hung windows. Oval windows are present in the second story of the north and east elevations. Fixed single-light windows light the basement at ground level. A brick chimney rises from the center of the duplex. The oval windows with their raised brick surrounds and the arched porch give the building just a hint of exotic Spanish styling.

Garage: Associated with the duplex and located just to the southwest of the building's southwest corner is a square-plan double garage building with rear-slanting shed roof and buff brick walls trimmed in red brick like the duplex. The front displays two sets of wood paneled double doors, each with a triple vertical-light window in the upper portion. The square-head door openings and window openings in the side elevation are outlined in broad bands of red brick. The building's front corners also feature red brick quoining and these quoins rise to a five course high corbelled red brick detail below a tile coping.

The 1896 Sanborn map illustrates a house on the lot associated with the current building; however, the illustrated residence is oriented perpendicular to State Street and consists of a two-story section fronting on State Street and a one-story rear ell. A 1900 newspaper article in the *Alma Record* indicates that the house on the lot at the time was moved to front on what was at the time Hulbert Street (now Downie Street). The newspaper also reports that there were plans in place for the construction of a "fine two-story brick residence" that would when completed rival the homes of A. W. Wright and Dr. J. H. Lancashire. Plans for the building noted that the new building would be a double residence, "one part being separate from the other with the exception of the outside walls." Also of note was the plan for the building to be "heated by steam and lighted with electricity throughout."

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By 1902 the new building was in place on the Sanborn maps, although it is not clear that the building was a double residence until the 1910 publication of the Sanborn maps. The 1930 city directory lists three different people residing at 421 North State Street: Fred Youngs, Mrs. Grace B. Sharrar, and Thomas A. Johnston. This suggests that already the building had been divided into more than the double residence planned just thirty years earlier. In 1945 the city directory listing made the further subdivision of the building clear, when it was known as "The Maple Apartments" and included a total of seven different residents. It remained the Maple Apartments into the 1980s, although by 1983 the building was divided even further to include a total of nine apartments. In 1984, for the first time in almost thirty years, the building had a new name, Cooper Apartments, and included nine apartments. In 1995 the building was known as the Lible Apartments, and contained just five separate apartments. Since 2005 there has been no listing in the city directories for the building.

*Alma Record*, "Home and Vicinity," 23 March 1900, 1.

***503. Ammi W. Wright House (1886-1887); Spier and Rohns of Detroit, Architects; George S. Young, Builder***

Massive hip and gable-roof Richardsonian Romanesque house designed by Detroit architects Spier and Rohns. This two and one-half-story building has overall ground dimensions of 67 feet by 36 feet and features an exterior finished in brownish-gray Ionia sandstone over the timber frame and brick infill structure. The house also features a stone foundation, steeply pitched tiled hipped roof, and gabled roof dormers. The plan is roughly rectangular in shape. The primary (east-facing) façade is asymmetrical. The entry is deeply recessed under a heavy stone arcaded porch in the northeast corner. The porch features a flat roof, stout columns, four heavy arches, with keystones, and textured spandrels. A two-story gabled bay is immediately adjacent to the entry porch. Historically, there were six windows on the first floor of this bay, with a segmental-arch window on the second story. Three one-over-one windows light the gable. A semi-round porch is located in the southeast corner and includes three heavy columns supporting a flat roof. Two one-over-one double-hung windows light the second story above this porch. The house's south elevation includes asymmetrically placed double-hung windows and a prominent cutaway bay with a gabled roof. No longer extant is the timber porte cochere which extended from the north elevation near the front entry porch.

Constructed as Ammi Wright's private residence, this house incorporated many new innovations in home construction including hot water heat, wiring for electricity, and indoor hot and cold running water. The house took months to build, with the basement excavated in September 1886, and the extensive interior woodwork requiring the final part of 1886 and part of 1887 to complete. In addition to the house, the property also included a large brick carriage house (gone).

Wright lived in this house with his second wife, Anna Case Wright, and some of their relatives until he died in 1912. His wife and sister-in-law lived in the house until their respective deaths

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in 1925 and 1931. The house was unused for roughly two years until a group of Alma residents discussed establishing a memorial to the then-recently deceased Doctor R. B. Smith. In 1934, his widow purchased the Ammi Wright estate to convert it into a hospital in honor of her late husband. It operated as a hospital until the Gratiot County Hospital opened in 1956. It later housed the Northwood Institute and the Northwood Center for Research and Development in the 1960s. Despite these uses, the interior retains much of its historic residential character.

Sources: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976); David McMacken, *Built on Pines: the Story of Ammi Willard Wright* (Alma, MI: The Alma Public Library, 2003).

### ***525. Masonic Home Hospital Wing / Wilcox Non-Profit Center (1915)***

The two and one-half-story Neo-Classical limestone-trimmed red-brown brick building rests on a raised basement faced in rusticated brickwork. The original building is basically rectangular, narrow-fronted and deep in footprint, with slightly projecting sections at each end of the long side walls. A smooth limestone beltcourse demarcates the division between the raised foundation and the first floor. Its walls present two-story brick piers, with limestone capitals, supporting an entablature with three-part, presumably metal architrave, brick frieze, and massive dentilated cornice. The entablature surrounds the building. Low brick parapets surround the low or flat roof. Windows are single one-over-ones on limestone sills that form continuous sill courses spanning between the piers. What was once a projecting portico of four limestone Ionic columns, standing on tall square-plan stone pedestals, spans the entire front, with a concrete staircase leading to a flat-top one-story Tuscan-column porch in front of the center entry between the two center columns. The portico space was enclosed sometime in the 1930s to 1950s in not-quite-matching red brick and its front now contains upper and lower one-over-one windows, with stone sills and glass block sidelights, on either side and above the central deep slant-sided entry with its glass block sidelights. A small two-story red brick extension, perhaps built at the same time as the portico infill, projects from the north side's east end. The middle of the south side also displays a later one-story salmon brick extension and three-story elevator tower, and there are two other small metal adjunct office buildings nearly on the grounds to the west and southwest. A modern terrace out front features benches and brick walls and planters.

In 1910 a devastating fire destroyed the State Masonic Lodge Old Folks Home in Grand Rapids. This fire coincided with the vacancy of the former Alma Sanitarium (which had fallen out of favor with the passing of the fad for mineral baths). Faced with maintaining the huge and vacant building, Ammi Wright was convinced to offer it for sale to the Masonic Lodge. The initial asking price was \$60,000, but the Masons were cautious in accepting the offer. By the following year, Wright offered the massive building to the Masons for the consideration of one dollar. With acceptance of the offer, the building was rededicated as the Masonic Home on March 29, 1912. Three years later, the large hospital wing was added to the complex, and continued to function in this capacity for a number of years.

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In time the Masons determined that they needed a larger campus and were constricted by the downtown location of the former Sanitarium. As a result, a new complex was established north of town and the Sanitarium building was demolished in the 1930s. The hospital wing remained operational as a private hospital through the mid-1950s. In 1956 the building was listed in the city directory as Wilcox Hospital, presumably under the direction of Dr. Rex A. Wilcox who was also listed at the same address. Today, the former hospital houses a variety of non-profit entities.

The site of the former sanitarium/Masonic home to the immediate south remains undeveloped, and remains essentially a large open lawn. The site is part of the property associated with the former hospital building. The only evidence that there was once another structure on the site is the slight depression where the building once stood.

Sources: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976); McMacken, *Built on Pines: The Story of Ammi Willard Wright* (Alma, MI: Alma Public Library, 2003).

**Superior Street, East, South Side**

***102. Mode-O-Day / LCI, Inc. (1967); Non-Contributing***

The one-story flat-roofed commercial building has fronts facing Superior and State. The exterior of the building is clad with a combination of red brick in sections of wall, vertical broad perforated V-section aluminum sheeting in the upper façades, post-1975 paneling in the tall bulkheads below window strips, and white-painted concrete block in the south rear façade. The Superior front and north half of the State elevation display horizontal window strips above bulkheads, with a recessed central entry on the Superior side. The south half of the State façade is faced in brick except for an off-center section containing an entry and tall windows below a section of raised-pattern sheeting. Horizontal aluminum canopies front the Superior elevation and extend part way around the corner and also shelter the entrance and window area toward the State Street side's south end.

The original occupant, Mode-O-Day, was a women's clothing store. At the time the store was constructed, the front windows were much taller – extending down to a low base and without the spandrel panels.

***104. Pizza Sam Restaurant (1962)***

The narrow-fronted single-story commercial building has an asymmetrical façade with a brick pier at each end and an off-center entry, flanked on either side by a window above a tall blue enameled aluminum panel, in the east half of the front. The right or west half displays a single horizontal window, above a bulkhead faced in small mosaic tilework in blue, gray, and whitish tones. The door fronts a small vestibule with aluminum door and windows behind. The upper

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front is clad in more blue enameled metal panels projecting outward in a shallow zig-zag pattern. Over the metal panels is a modern lighted "Pizza Sam Restaurant" sign. In 1945, the city directory listed the address under the occupant James E. Allen, barber. The barbershop was demolished between 1960 and 1962, when the present building was erected. The current occupant, Pizza Sam's, was in the building as early as 1969.

***106-108. Gaffney's Saloon - Lueth Building (ca. 1900); Non-Contributing***

Two-story commercial building with modernized brick and EIFS or stuccoed front that now displays no historic materials. The ground-floor façade is faced in yellow-orange brick, with a recessed entry at either end and three large plate glass windows filling a pair of openings between the doors, each featuring brick window sills in header bond. The upper story of the building front is now faced in a stucco-like finish and contains no windows, but raised end and center piers, raised outlines of four windows and transom or panel areas above them as well as raised corbelling and frieze suggest what the brick façade looked like before the present finish was installed. The exposed brick west side wall shows evidence of at least one segmental-arch-head window.

This building historically housed Gaffney's Saloon and a cigar shop. It was later occupied by A. A. John Chick's shoe store. Subsequent occupants have included Rodney Burgess's drug store and soda fountain from 1924 to 1931; W. F. Lueth and Son Jewelers; and Ellery Ingersoll's shoe store. The building front was extensively remodeled between 1975 and 1980; the current façade appears in a December 1980 survey photo.

***110. Gold-N-Gems Jewelers (Built between 1975-80); Non-Contributing***

One-story commercial building featuring a dark brown brick pent-roof storefront below a vinyl-sided upper façade. The symmetrical storefront is composed of a central entry and flanking storefront windows projected outward slightly above brick bulkheads. Above the storefront is a projecting half-hipped pent roof sheathed with asphalt shingles. The plain upper façade is clad with narrow horizontal vinyl siding.

The building shown on the 1975 inventory form for this address is a two-story brick structure. A late 1980 survey photograph shows the present structure. The city directory listed the Coney Island restaurant through 1984. Beginning in 1985 the building occupant was the current one, Gold-N-Gems.

***112. Creaser Building / Farm Bureau Insurance (1911)***

The Creaser Building is a three-bay, two-story painted brick Late Victorian commercial building. The building's bays are defined by the storefront and second-story fenestration pattern. The ca. 1950s storefront has a recessed central entry with angled corners leading into a squared-off area near the door. The aluminum-trim windows rest on painted brick bulkheads. A secondary off-

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center entry accesses the second floor. A modern sign panel fills the former transom area from side to side. Three double-hung windows light the second story. The windows appear to be the old wooden ones, with stone slab sills and flat arch brick lintels. A metal cornice with brackets and dentils and an urn topping each end caps the roofline, while a small raised central gabled plaque dates the building to 1911.

This two-story building was constructed in 1911 and historically housed the Gearhart Dry Goods Store (1911-19), two confectioneries between 1919 and 1932, and Simi's Restaurant from 1932 to 1939. The upper story housed offices and apartments. In the late 1930s, the J. J. Newberry Company leased the building for a five-and-ten store, and also removed the firewall between the Creaser Building and the Caple Building to have a double store front.

***114. Caple Building (ca. 1884)***

The Caple Building is a two-story red brick Late Victorian commercial building with a front of smooth and rock-faced stone. The façade has rock-face stone end piers, recessed central entry, and a ca. 1950s recessed-central-entry storefront with windows each side resting on concrete block bulkheads. A signboard fills the former transom location. The upper front presents three broad round-arched double-hung windows with arches formed of alternating rock-face and smooth stone voussoirs. A heavy dentilated and bracketed metal cornice with curvilinear applied decoration in the frieze and ball finials topping each end caps the front roofline, and a much more simple bracketed cornice spans the front end of the east side elevation. Large second-story windows, with rock-face stone caps, in the brick side elevation are now boarded up. The brick rear façade is aligned with the west section of 116-120 East Superior to its immediate east.

Sanborn maps suggest this building was constructed in 1884. The first known occupants were Caple Hardware, who were located in the building between about 1904 and 1919. Between 1919 and 1929 the building was the home to Glass and Hanna Hardware or Glass and Mayes Hardware. In 1930 the city directory indicates that the building occupant was Mayes Hardware. Mayes occupied the store until 1935 when the J. J. Newberry Company moved in. Newberry occupied this storefront expanding in 1939 into the Creaser Building at 112 E. Superior. At this point the firewall between the two buildings was removed to provide a larger open space for the firm. Newberry continued to grow and in 1958 they purchased the Gaffney Building, whose site was subsequently incorporated into their store and thus provided entries on both North State Street and East Superior Street. By 1980 Newberry had gone out of business and the building stood empty until a women's clothing store located in the space in 1984. In the early 1990s the store was once again vacant. Since then, the building has been occupied by a branch of the Farm Bureau Insurance Company and the current occupants, Energy First Home Improvements.

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**Superior Street, East, South Side (continued)**

***116-120. Vermeulen Building (Built between 1890-1896)***

The large brick and stone building was constructed between 1890 and 1896. The stone-trimmed red brick Late Victorian building is divided into three storefronts with a single door present in a narrow fourth bay between the first and middle storefront bays from the east end of the façade. The ground story's storefronts are crowned by a common metal classical entablature and cornice. The two western storefronts also appear to retain many features from a ca. 1910s rebuilding. These include limestone Tuscan pilasters that edge the east (116) storefront and a short extension of it around the west side and that flank the second-story entry. Number 116's low bulkheads, including ones flanking the offset, recessed slant-sided entry, are also of limestone. Number 118's recessed center entry storefront features marble-look bulkheads, probably also dating from 1910s. The eastern storefront (120), rebuilt ca. 1950s, displays an off-center recessed entry and piers and low bulkheads finished in rock-face random-ashlar stone. Transom areas now display signage panels. The second-story entry is topped by a tall prism glass transom. Dividing the first and second story of the building is the projecting metal cornice topped by a rock-face stone beltcourse which also serves as a common sill for the second-story windows. The second story is divided by raised piers into three window wide sections aligned with the storefronts below plus a narrow section above the second-story entry. Each section above a storefront displays three double-hung windows with flat-arch brick heads. Each section presents a second, thinner raised pier just inside the outer one and also a raised central area in which the central window is located. Corbelled brickwork transitions the piers and central areas into the upper façade, with its corbelled brickwork parapet. The narrow upstairs entry bay contains a single boarded-up second-story window. The exposed plain brick west-side elevation features segmental-arch-head window openings, all now boarded up. This west-end (116) section extends south to an alley, while the two eastern sections do not extend as far back. The entire rear is faced in vertical metal sheeting.

The 1890 Sanborn still indicates that the lot where the building was later constructed was occupied by a dwelling, saloon, and millinery/jewelry store. The next published Sanborn map, 1902, shows the present building, which included three storefronts and extended south twice the distance of other buildings on the block. The western storefront was occupied at the time by groceries (116), the center by shoes and men's furnishing (118), and the eastern storefront by dry goods (120). Much of the rear of the building housed clothes, crockery, glassware and like items. It is likely that the entire store was not constructed at the same time. The 1975 downtown survey of Alma notes that the two western storefronts (116 and 118) were constructed first, and then heavily mortgaged to finance the eastern section (120) in 1893. By 1910 the storefront at 120 East Superior housed an "Electric Theatre."

The building went through a variety of owners, with the original owners, Henry and Emma Vermeulen, divorcing in 1898, and the building coming to Mrs. Vermeulen as part of the settlement. About 1900 a store operation went to Lee Mercantile Company, although Mrs.

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Vermeulen continued to own the property for several additional years. The Lee Mercantile Company operated as a consignment location for Marshall Field of Chicago until about 1910, for a portion of that time only from the second story of the building. In October 1910, the Alma State Savings Bank purchased the building. In turn, they leased the center section (118) to Fred Grover who operated the first of a series of drug stores in the space. The bank remodeled the west section of the building (116), constructing a new front and installing vaults and other bank equipment. Beginning in March 1913, the bank operated from this space, staying until their merger with the Bank of Alma in 1956. The section of the building at 120 East Superior Street was leased by Erastus H. Weese in 1912 and purchased by him in 1914. At that time he remodeled the building into an "up-to-date" motion picture theater and vaudeville house. Operating under various names, including Liberty Theatre during World War I, the business was successful until the construction of the Strand Theatre in 1920. Since the closing of the theater, the space has served as a poolroom and recreational facility, the Morris 5¢ and 10¢ to \$1.00 Stores, and later a variety store. A new front was constructed on the building section at 120 East Superior Street in 1959, when Miller's Men's Shop moved to the space from their former home in the Wright Opera House Block.

***122. Helman's Market (Constructed prior to 1900)***

Narrow-fronted one-story commercial building faced in wide exposure horizontal wood weatherboarding. The off-center entry is embellished with Colonial pilasters and a small pediment. Two horizontal fixed-light windows are located east of the entrance. The tall upper façade is clad in vertical wood siding topped by a low pent roof detail, and displays a large signboard across its lower portion.

The building is reputed to be one of the earliest extant frame buildings in Alma. It was reportedly relocated from the site of the Creaser Building about 1911 to its present location. But the 1910 Sanborn shows a much smaller building, identified as "Barber," and the same footprint and use appear again in the 1917 map. The 1924 map is the first to show what is clearly the present larger footprint in place. The 1930 directory lists the occupant as Winget's Market, meats. By 1956 the building is occupied by Helman's meat market, which although ownership has changed, remains the name of the current business.

***122½ . Store (Built between 1890 and 1896)***

This one-story commercial building has a front narrower in width and lower than number 122's to the west. The façade features a large storefront window over a low brick bulkhead at the left and a paneled door in a shallow recess at the right. The upper façade is clad in vertical boarding.

This is one of the smaller commercial buildings in the Alma Downtown Historic District. In 1890 the building at the site appears to have been smaller than the current structure; however, by 1896, Sanborn maps suggest the current building was in place. At the time, the building housed

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a “harness” business. Over the next several decades the building use changed frequently, with it housing a jeweler in 1902, a lunchroom in 1910, and between at least 1917 and 1924, it was a music store. By 1930 the city directory reveals that the tiny building was the home of the City News Stand, which remained to at least the mid-1940s. In 1956 Dawn’s Fashion’s, women’s clothing, was housed in the store, and in 1960 it was the home of Robert’s millinery. After a brief period of vacancy, H & R Block Income Tax occupied the building in the second half of the 1970s. By 1980 it was the location of the *Gratiot County Herald*, and during much of the 1980s the location of a branch office of Farm Bureau Insurance. Following a period of vacancy in the first half of the 1990s, the building was the home of Robert’s Millinery in 1999.

By 2005 the building was held by the same owners as Helman’s Market at 122 East Superior Street and the addresses combined under that number.

***124-128. Perry Building (Built prior to 1884)***

What now reads as a single broad-fronted building because of its common vinyl siding-clad falsefront second story likely was originally three separate buildings. This two-story building is composed of three side-by-side front-gable wooden buildings with three street-level storefronts; the width of each gable-roof section corresponds with the width of each of the storefronts, the narrowest one on the west, the center one much broader, and the east a little wider than the center. The upper front features four equally spaced representations of shuttered round-arch-head windows whose locations presumably bear little relation to any historic window locations. The two-story building’s east side elevation facing Woodworth Avenue is also faced in vinyl siding and features more of the shuttered round-arch windows, while the exposed second story in back and on the west side is faced in vertical metal siding. A one-story concrete block shed-roof rear addition extends across the entire back. The building’s storefronts are of different design but appear to date from the 1950s-1960s and all have red brick piers and bulkheads. The east storefront (128) and the center (126) have recessed center entries. The west storefront (124) is much narrower than the others and has its entry to the left and a single window to the right.

In the earliest published Sanborn map available for Alma, 1884, the three buildings that form this now combined single building are already present, making them among the oldest in the city’s downtown. Over the next forty years the main building footprint remains the same, although the footprints of rear ell structures changed. It is not until 1924 that the Sanborn indicates that the three buildings were combined into a single building with the walls between buildings removed. The earliest known owner of the property was a Mr. Kingsley who purchased the land in 1874; however, it is unclear if he constructed the present buildings. By the late 1920s the property was purchased by Vern and Anna Perry, and the building carried their name until after both their deaths. In 1968 Mildred Herriman purchased the building from Mrs. Perry’s estate.

The buildings housed a variety of small businesses since their construction. In 1884 the buildings housed a jewelry store in 124; a Boot and Shoe store in 126; and a millinery in 128. Between 1890 and 1924, number 124 housed a notions shop, cobbler, tailor, jeweler, and restaurant.

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Meanwhile, number 126 housed a jewelry shop, meat market, millinery and tailor shop. In those same years, 128 housed a millinery, stationery shop, drug store, and general store.

***202-214. Church Block / Gibbs Block / Highland Block (1886), George S. Young, builder***

The Church Block is a key Late Victorian commercial block in Alma's downtown. The two-story stone-trimmed painted brick building is divided into six storefront bays plus two narrow second-story entry bays and occupies most of the west half of the south side frontage of East Superior Street between Woodworth and Gratiot avenues. The building has a rectangular footprint, except for a narrow metal siding-clad shed-roof extension in back at the Woodworth end (perhaps originally a separate building but now lacking any exposed doors or windows), and roofs that slope toward the rear except in the east two-storefront wide section, which has a low gabled roof (not evident looking at the front). The building's mid-section, two storefronts in width, rises slightly above the uniform roofline on either side, and has a central gable. Raised piers divide the front into two storefront bays at either end, then toward the center on each side a narrow bay that contains a second-story entry, and finally the two storefront wide central section (the central section's ground story is divided by a central pier). The storefronts all feature central recessed entries with flanking display windows. The east three storefronts retain most of their original finishes, including square-plan iron columns that, flanking the entry, rise to a metal storefront cornice with small brackets marking the ends of the storefront bays, and large single-light wooden display windows and transom sash – two of the storefronts retaining transoms with colored glass margin lights. These and the other storefronts have had their bulkheads and the piers between storefronts up to transom height faced in thin flagstone-like uncoursed stone. The west three storefronts display aluminum finishes and appear to date primarily from ca. 1950s. The original metal storefront cornice remains visible to the west edge of the central two-storefront bay, and may survive in place beneath an asphalt shingled pent roof that extends west to the building's west to and just around the west corner.

In the second story, the two storefront bays at each end each present three square-head double-hung windows with smooth stone caps, and the adjoining narrow staircase bays each contains a single window. The second story of the center part is treated as a single bay with a broad and tall round-arch window in the center and a square-head double window, with transom, on each side. In each part there is a smooth stone beltcourse located just below window lintel level. Each section displays corbelled brick detailing below a pressed metal cornice featuring large brackets aligned with the piers and a regular pattern of smaller brackets between. Both the brick corbelling and the cornice display more elaborate decorative treatments in the building's center section. The Church Block was further distinguished by a square tower at the corner of Superior Street and Woodworth Avenue, but it has been removed. The building's rear façade displays segmental-arch-head door and window openings.

General Nathan Church of Ithaca, Michigan, hired George S. Young as the contractor for the building. Young was a prominent contractor in Alma, carrying out numerous commissions in the downtown area. Buildings Mr. Young constructed include the Wright House Hotel (1883 – no

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longer extant), Sarvilla Residence (1894), the Pollasky Block (1897), and a number of buildings located on the campus of Alma College.

In 1886 notice of the planned construction of the Church Block appeared in the *Alma Record*. An article of September 17, 1886, noted that there were a number of buildings under construction that fall, including twenty-five new residences and "Church's new block being rushed toward completion." The storefronts were occupied by a variety of businesses over time, including restaurants, bakeries, furniture stores, music stores (including Grinnell Brothers and Sawkin's Music and Furniture), State Sweet Shop, College Book Store, Faeth's Shoe Repair, Converse Jewelry Store and Walter's Plumbing and Heating. The second floor of the space also housed a variety of offices for doctors and lawyers as well as space for the Masonic Temple (until it moved to its location in the Wright Opera Block in 1918), and in the 1950s the American Legion.

Sources: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976); *Alma Record*, "Fall Building Operations," 17 September 1886, 1; Michael Kirk, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Draft), 1995, original on file Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, Lansing, Michigan.

***216. McKee Building (1948); Sullivan Construction Company, Alma, contractors***

Two-story three-bay smooth concrete block commercial building, with two storefronts that mirror each other, with paired center doors set into a slant-sided recess flanked by transomed display windows. An awning spans the façade. The storefront piers and bulkheads are faced in a smooth stucco-like finish. The upper story contains low square-head windows, including a corner one at the left end of the façade. These now contain one-over-one sash windows but in a 1975 survey photo contained twelve-light steel sash windows, with the corner window containing eight lights in each face. The 1975 photo also shows a recessed slant-sided center entry with flanking display windows set into a vertical siding-clad storefront treatment that ran from ground level up to second-story window sill level. The rear (south) end contains a one-story extension, also in concrete block; a vertical joint in the block makes clear this was built later than the rest.

The building was constructed for Frank McKee, whose original bakery burned down in 1945. He operated his bakery in this new building before he began leasing it to Williams Bakery of Ithaca, Michigan. In 1966 he sold it to Sam Ayris, who remodeled the building, adding two rear additions in the late 1960s.

***218. Brewer Meat Market / Braveheart's Pub (ca. 1910)***

The two-story blond and red Commercial Brick building displays narrow vertical and horizontal strips of red brick forming two window bays in the upstairs front – horizontal bands at window sill level and across the top just below the parapet and three vertical strips in the center between the two windows and two more on the outer side of each window. The center and outer one on

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each side extend up to just below the top horizontal one and the inner ones nearer the window several feet lower, each topped with a square concrete block. Strips of blond brick serve as lintels for the window openings, each containing a double-hung window in the partly infilled space. The street level now has a red brick pier at one end and a white brick one at the other. The front entry is recessed under the cantilevered northwest corner of the building. The storefront has been rebuilt largely in unpainted wood since 1975 and now features large fixed windows and smaller transoms. A 1975 survey photo shows a three-part, recessed center-entry storefront outlined in what appears to be enameled metal panels. A large metal sign projecting from the center of the upper façade then showed the word BAR but now reads PUB. The exposed side elevation is of painted brick and displays none of the front's Commercial Brick details. An enclosed wooden staircase leading to a projecting boxed-in second-story vestibule rises along the side.

The building contains a one-story concrete block rear extension. This connects with a gambrel-roof one and one-half-story concrete block building at the back of the lot next to the alley. The gambrel-roof building, arranged with its roof ridge parallel with the rear alley, has two boarded-up windows in the east gable end and three boarded-up windows and a steel door in the west end facing the side alley.

Clement Brewer was the original owner of this building, and operated a meat market here until his death in 1928. At that point, John Luchini purchased the building and operated it as a recreation hall until the 1940s. Since the 1940s, it has continually functioned as tavern, bar, and restaurant under a variety of names and owners.

Source: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976);

***220. Saad Building / Plaid Door (1914)***

The first floor of the two-story red-brown Commercial Brick building is dominated by a storefront with off-center entry, and vertical ribbed metal panel signboard across the façade in the transom location. A second entry, providing access to the upper floor, is located at the east corner of the façade. One side of the ca. 1950s storefront slants gently inward toward the recessed entry, the other has a shorter display window area projecting outward a foot beyond the bulkheads aligned with the front wall plane. The bulkheads are of blond brick. The upper façade displays raised piers running up to a raised parapet supported by corbelled brickwork. The upper story is lit with six closely spaced double-hung windows in segmental-arch openings with stone sills. A short raised pier divides the upper façade space above the windows and below the corbelled brickwork into two sunken panels. The exposed east elevation, where a building has been demolished, is currently sheathed with vertical ribbed metal siding.

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The 1975 survey form indicates that this building was constructed in 1914 for Nicholas Saad, whose family lived upstairs, and originally housed his general store. Subsequent occupants included Winslow's Drug Store beginning in 1917, a barber shop, and a fruit and vegetable shop. Over time, the building was also the home to Dickinson Drugs (1940s); City Drugs was in place by 1948 and operated under different pharmacists until 1968 when it went out of business.

***408-410. Frederickson Motor Sales / Advanced Glass (Built between 1945 and 1948)***

Advanced Glass is a single-story painted brick and concrete block building. The building has a nearly rectangular basic form, but with a rounded corner at the west end of the north-facing front. The front has a central, slightly recessed entry flanked by large fixed windows and corner windows. The front and front ends of the sides are faced in brick, the remaining walls of concrete block. There is a small west-side extension with a flat roof and wide eaves on its north elevation. A portion of the building's west elevation is lit with a wide band of glass block windows.

The building first appears on published maps in 1948 when it was labeled "Auto Sales & Service." The map further notes that the building was constructed with steel frame and trusses and cinder block curtain walls. The building address does not appear in either the 1930 or the 1945 city directories. By 1956 the building was the home of Frederickson Motor Sales. Through the 1960s the property continued as the home of either Frederickson Motor Sales or Mike Pung Motor Sales. In the mid-1970s a portion of the property was occupied by Van American Inc., auto sales, with the remainder the location of Royal American Insurance Agency and Interstate Associates, insurance sales. The insurance businesses continued to be located at 408 East Superior Street until 1984. The side of the property at 410 East Superior Street changed hands several times during this time period. In 1980 and 1981 it housed the Mount Pleasant Sport Shop, then and in 1983 and 1984 it was the home of Car Trend. The space was vacant in 1985. In 1987 the occupants included Gloria's Book Exchange and Merchandise Outlet, which liquidated retail overstock. By the mid-1990s Advance Glass had located in the building and continues there today.

**Superior Street, East, North Side**

***101-107. Wright Opera House Block (1879-1880; 1894; 1897; 1899)***

The Opera House Block is a three-story, cream brick Italianate commercial building with five retail bays across the south-facing front and ground dimensions of approximately 110 feet in length on Superior and 85 feet in depth along State Street.

The exterior is divided into sections by slightly raised piers and capped by an elaborate brick entablature that features a triangle-head "arch" band rising above corbelled brickwork, a strip of brickwork dentils, and a molded brick cornice. The upstairs opera house space at the southwest

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corner is two stories high and can be delineated on the exterior by the larger windows at that end of the building capped by horizontal oval windows. A low gable caps the south end of the front, and a narrow bay near the center of the façade fronting an upper-story staircase is capped by a small segmental arch. A round opening under the cornice at the corner facing Superior once housed a clock.

The upper-story windows were originally of wood, one-over-one, double-hung design. Most are boarded up or missing now due to deterioration and a fire in the former opera house space. The opera house space included massive windows and above them oval accent windows. Today the openings exist, but much of the operable window portions are gone or damaged. The arched opera house window hoods are of raised brick, each with a prominent keystone detail. The second-story windows in the rest of the front display raised ornamental segmental-arch brick hoods, with keystones, the third-story ones round-arch heads simply outlined in brick. The sills are simple stone slabs at the second story of the non-opera house spaces and everywhere else stone sills atop dentil patterns created of cream bricks.

The rear of the Opera House Block facing the alley to the north is much more utilitarian in feel. It is also of cream brick, but with none of the elaborate detailing at the cornice or windows. The windows were originally double-hung wood, but are missing or boarded up today. Double wooden door openings exist at the second and third stories, but some are reduced in size and all are boarded up. Metal fire escapes from the early twentieth century are still in place but in poor condition. The second- and third-floor office and residential spaces east of the opera house area retain clearly demarcated stories and smaller-scale windows.

Overall the exterior brick is in good condition and the decorative cornice and window sill and hood elements appear intact. The building is currently undergoing renovation, and the windows, which are currently in extremely poor to missing condition, will be recreated to closely resemble the original. The storefronts have been altered over the years, but with the rehabilitation will be returned to closer to the appearance and proportions of the original storefronts.

In 1875 Wright and his mercantile business partner James Dawson opened a branch of their Saginaw general store in Alma at the Hulbert House, a hotel on East Superior Street. A fire destroyed the building in 1876 and the store was relocated to another temporary site (the store operated diagonally across the street from the site of the soon-to-be-built Opera House Block). In 1876 Wright and Dawson purchased a large lot at the northeast corner of State and Superior streets where they proposed to build a large building. Ground was broken in July of 1876 for the new store, and it was reported in the *Gratiot Journal* that some of the material from the cellar excavation was used for Alma's new dam on the Pine River. In December 1, 1876, the *Gratiot Journal* reported that as soon as weather permitted in the spring, Wright and Dawson would commence work on their new store and push it to rapid completion. Yet again in February of 1877 it was reported that the partners would put up a brick store in the spring, and by March the

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paper indicated, "a large amount of stone is being drawn upon the ground for Wright and Dawson's new store." Despite these reports, no building took place for several years.

The delays may have resulted from several partnership changes over the next few years. On March 23, 1877, the paper reported that the partnership with Dawson was dissolved and Dawson would move to the South for his health. At this time E. F. Quinn of Alma, E. W. Morey of East Saginaw, and A. W. Wright formed a partnership under the Quinn and Morey name for the general store in Alma. Quinn managed the store with Wright and Morey as investors. The partnership continued until August of 1880 when Quinn and Morey sold out to Wright.

Wright soon brought his brother-in-law, George D. Barton, from Vermont into the store business in April of 1879. In August of that year, Wright came to inspect the business and decided to continue and expand his business interests in Alma. Construction began on the long delayed building that same month. The paper reported in September that the brick building would be much larger than originally planned – to accommodate five stores – and more Superior Street frontage was soon obtained.

By the fall of 1879 the cellar was dug, the stone foundation started, and the foundation for a bank vault in place. Twenty-five men were at work on the building and masons were making progress. The upper stories of the exterior were finished in January of 1880 and the interior work began. By May of 1880 businesses were moving into the new building. The tenants included the Barton and Company general store (in which Wright was a partner), the post office, the Coates and Ely Hardware, and the Turck, Winton and Company Bank (Wright was not a stockholder). In June the post office moved in and on July 5, 1880; there was a grand opening celebration ball in the opera house itself (7-30-1880 *Gratiot Journal*). The building was completed at the cost of \$20,000, an expensive project for what was still a small country town.

The Opera House Block was the second brick building in downtown Alma. The first was the still standing small brick building on Superior to the east of the Lancashire Building built in 1875. The Opera House Block was on a much grander scale, housing stores and the social and entertainment space of the opera house. After the Opera House Block was constructed in 1880, the Wright House hotel across the street to the west followed in 1883 and the Church Block, another very large brick commercial block, in 1886.

In 1882 the general and hardware store was reorganized as Wright, Schneider, and Stutz. George Barton left to run a lumber mill and grain business in Alma. In June of the next year the Opera House Block was lighted by gas, the first time used in Alma. In 1894 the building contained a dry-goods store, two drug stores, a hardware store, and a grocery store. The upper floors contained the opera house and various offices.

The opera house occupied the two upper floors above the corner store and was initially called Barton's Hall. The Opera House itself became an important part of Alma's social life providing room for dramatic performances, political speakers, and other public events. During these early

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years of use there was a "Wright's Opera House Band" that performed there and at local events elsewhere. A handbill for ceremonies related to the 1886 cornerstone laying for the Central Michigan Normal School (now Alma College) listed the band as heading up a procession. The opera house was heavily used for about a decade but then fell into disuse – presumably because some newer hall provided more amenities. The hall was remodeled and reopened by Wright's son-in-law, Henry Lancashire, in 1894.

The block itself was remodeled in 1897, the work including renovations to the ground floor store spaces beneath it at the building's west end. The November 19, 1897, *Alma Record* states:

J. H. Lancashire has let the contract to Saginaw parties to make extensive improvements on the opera house block. The floor of the double store will be lowered to a level with the walk and the front remodeled. This will be separated in two single stores, and the Mercantile will occupy the second from the corner.... The corner is to be torn out and an iron pillar put in, making an entrance to the corner. Electric lights and steam heat will be placed in the third story for the use of the secret societies. Mr. Wright's office will be moved temporarily to the empty room in the Adams block.

This seems to indicate that one or more fraternal lodges either were already housed in the third story or that the owner hoped to entice them. The *State Gazetteer* of 1911 shows Schroeder's School of Music as a tenant of the Opera House Block, likely giving performances in the space as well as lessons in the second story. The Masons leased the opera house space in 1919 (they became established in Alma in 1889) and used it until 1961 when they moved to a building at the corner of State and Center in Alma.

Sources: *Gratiot Journal*, "Building Notes – A fine Residence – The Wheat Market," October 31, 1879, 1; *Gratiot Journal*, "Still in Debt – A Brick Block in Prospect," August 22, 1879, 8; (6-1-1883 *Gratiot Journal*; *Alma Record*, June 1, 1894, p.1; *Alma Record*, November 19, 1897, 1; *Saginaw Courier Herald*, November 25, 1900, 1; McMacken and Davenport, n.p.; Louise Layman Davenport, "Historic Alma and Gratiot County," Local History Room, Alma Public Library; Jennifer Metz, Wright Opera House Block Complex National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2012. Typescript copy on file with Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, Lansing, Michigan.

***111-113. Lancashire Block / Opera House Block Annex (1899); George S. Young, contractor***

The Lancashire Block is a two-story, brick building that, directly abutting the Wright Opera House Block on the east along Superior Street, was considered an extension of the Opera House Block in its early days. At the time of construction the Lancashire Block had a two-story, Late Victorian brick exterior with two store spaces divided symmetrically by a central second-story entry leading to a staircase. At the second floor were three pairs of double-hung, wood

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rectangular windows, each set into a shallow brick recess in the façade. At the roofline was a pressed-metal cornice. The intact original yellow-buff brick side and rear façades retain their segmental-arch-head window openings. The building abutted and connected via a second-story hallway to the original Opera House Block to its west and faced alleys to the north and west. The interior first floor had pressed-metal ceilings, wood floors, and plaster walls.

Today's main façade retains the old massing and footprint, but the present front dates from a reconstruction in 2005. The two storefronts with their brick piers and bulkheads and large aluminum-trim doors and windows still flank the original center entry and staircase to the upper floor and are sheltered by an asphalt-shingled pent roof, with a low gable over the entry to each storefront that spans the entire front. The modern upper façade is of red brick and contains four widely spaced one-over-one windows. The front is to be rebuilt in style much closer to the original as part of the rehabilitation of the Opera House Block being carried out in 2012-13. The interior had been substantially altered in the mid-twentieth century and shows mostly 1950s finishes as it housed Church's Jewelry from the 1950s until the 2000s. Portions of the pressed-metal ceiling exist above dropped ceilings in various conditions from ruinous to fair.

The *Alma Record* reported on March 2, 1899, that, "Workmen have commenced moving the wooden building off the lot east of the opera house block preparatory to the building of the new brick block which Dr. J. H. Lancashire will have erected this spring." In another section of the same edition the paper states:

The excavating for the block to be built by Dr. J. H. Lawrence adjoining the opera house on the east, was commenced on Monday of this week, H. F. Thompson having the contract for this part of the work. The contract for building the block has been let to G. S. Young and it is expected to have it ready for occupancy on or before July 1. The building will be 52 x 86 feet on the ground and two stories high, the lower story divided into two stores and the upper story into offices. A stairway between the two stores will form an entrance to the upper story and a hallway will connect with the one in the opera house block thereby making an entrance from either way. The designs for the block were furnished by a Detroit architect and will represent quite an investment, as well as an addition to the growth of the town."

Dr. Lancashire was Ammi Wright's son-in-law. The building was constructed to house H. J. Lancashire and Company's business around the turn of the century. William A. Bahlke, president of the Alma Realty Company, established a private phone company in the Lancashire Block in the early twentieth century. In 1907 Bahlke and Mark Spinney bought the Union Telephone Company and used the Lancashire Block as their company headquarters. The Union Telephone Company served a large mid-Michigan area until the General Telephone Company of Michigan bought them out in 1957. In addition, the Lancashire Block housed various dry goods and hardware stores. Tenants over the years have included the Alma State Bank, Maier Clothing,

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Church's Jewelers, the Cobbler Shoe Store, and Hansen's Barber Shop. Today the Lancashire houses a church and vacant space formerly occupied by the jewelry store.

The Lancashire Block was part of the Wright Opera House Block National Register nomination approved by the Michigan Historic Preservation Review Board in January 2013. The current owner plans to rehabilitate the building as part of their project for the Wright Opera House Block. This renovation includes reconstruction of the front façade to more closely match its original appearance based upon historic exterior photos.

Sources: Jennifer Metz, Wright Opera House Block Complex National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2012. Typescript copy on file with Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, Lansing, Michigan

***115. Delavan Building (1874)***

This two-story brick commercial building, now with a vinyl-siding-clad upper front above a storefront outlined by beige early twentieth-century brickwork. The building has a glazed storefront with central recessed entry, the windows resting on square tile bulkheads and the front capped by a bubble canopy. The second story is lit by narrow four-over-one windows with false shutters and modern round-arch sunburst-pattern caps. The exposed side elevations are faced in vertical ribbed metal siding and a one-story rear section has concrete block walls with a glass block window. The brick Italianate upper façade with its round-arch second-story windows is still evident in a December 1980 survey photo.

Although there is a modern historical plaque on the building indicating a construction date of 1869, it has been dated to 1874 by local historians David McMacken and Louise Davenport. The building, the first brick building in Alma – if not Gratiot County – was erected by Henry Delavan as a general store. When the building was completed in the fall of 1874, the community held a celebration. Included in the festivities was a band which performed from the roof of the new building.

Delavan and his sons operated the general store in the building until 1914 when it was sold to W. S. Proud. Proud ran his soft goods store in the space until the 1920s when the building was again sold. For a time the building housed Gay's Variety Store, but in 1929 George Maier relocated his clothing store to the space from its location in the Opera House Block. George Maier was likely responsible for the alteration of the storefront to its present configuration. Maier remained in the building until the mid-1960s when he passed away. After standing vacant for a time the building was purchased by Bill Brown who operated his shoe store and repair shop there. The current occupant, the Cobbler Shop Shoes and Pedorthics, continues to sell shoes and carry out shoe repairs.

Source: David McMacken and Louise Davenport. *Down Twelve Decades: A Pictorial History of Alma, Michigan*. Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

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***117. Goggin Building / Main Cafe (Built between 1884 and 1896)***

The café at 117 East Superior Street is a two-story building with a windowless ribbed metal upper façade above a storefront with slant-sided recessed central entry and windows either side above low bulkheads finished in a stucco-like material. A short section of red brick wall at the right end of the façade may mark the former location of a second-story entry. An asphalt shingled pent roof caps the entire ground story front. A 1950s-looking metal sign projecting outward from the façade at right angles contains the MAIN CAFÉ name and the notation, "FOUNTAIN SERVICE." The second-story falsefront has been covered in metal siding, but the building retains its historic form and contributes to the district's feeling and architectural rhythm. From the back a two-story gabled wooden structure with rear clapboarded gable is visible.

Behind the two-story front building is a one-story gable-roof extension clad in vinyl siding and, behind that, a one-story concrete block rear section.

Based on Sanborn maps, the building was likely constructed between 1884 and 1896. The earlier Sanborn illustrates a building at the site; however, it is slightly narrower than the present and has a substantially shorter exterior stairway to the second story. By 1890 the building illustrated on the Sanborn map is much closer to the current building configuration, although the rear portion of the building is narrower than the current structure. It is not until 1896 that the building footprint is almost precisely the same as it is today. The only exception is the lack of the one-story extension on the west side of the rear ell. This addition is present on the building by 1902.

Early Sanborn maps indicate that the building housed first a grocery store (1890) and confectionary (1896). In 1902 the building was the home of a bakery and confectionary and boasted a large oven in the rear ell. The 1975 Alma building survey notes that the building in 1905 was operated by Steve Bennett as a confectionary store. Mr. Bennett sold the store in 1913 to Vern Miner who ran the Sugar Bowl restaurant and confectionary until 1917. At that point the building was sold again and became the European Café for the next dozen years. Between 1930 and 1934 the building housed a shoe store, but in 1935 it was sold back to one of the owners of the European Bakery, William Bourikas, who returned to Alma and with his brother-in-law, George Goutis, purchased the building and operated the Main Café until 1963. Although the ownership has changed, the Main Café continues to operate today.

***119-121. Bahlke Block / Le Zebra Zalon (ca. 1900)***

Two-story red-orange brick Late Victorian building. The ground story includes two modern red brick storefronts with deeply recessed entries. A third entry, centered between the storefronts and positioned at the edge of the sidewalk, accesses the upper story. A modern tall pent roof clad with cedar shingles spans the façade between the first and second stories. The upper façade features broad piers rising to an entablature, above corbelled brickwork, that features a band of

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lozenge-shaped forms formed in raised stretchers in the architrave below brick “dentils” and a seven or eight course tall corbelled brick frieze topped by plain masonry coping. The second-story front features four one-over-one windows topped by transoms. Each window is set in a raised brick surround topped by a brick cornice detail, and the two center windows are grouped closely together. The building does not extend back nearly as far as other buildings around it and has a brick rear façade. In 1975 the lower-story piers and façade above the storefront and below the second-story windows appear to have been faced in a light-colored pigmented structural glass and the storefronts themselves faced in dark-pigmented structural glass.

This building housed J. P. Losey’s jewelry store in the western storefront and a bank in the eastern storefront in 1902. The bank would later become the Alma State Savings Bank. The upper story of the building houses offices. A 1975 photo of the building revealed that it then housed Geller Jewelry and McGills Music.

Source: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

***123. Idlehour Theatre / Bob Moore Flowers (ca. 1917); Joseph Nordello, architect/contractor***

Two-story white glazed Commercial Brick building. The 1950s single storefront features an asymmetrical recessed central entry with square-plan left side and right side slanting at 45 degrees, the aluminum-trim windows resting on low grayish-white brick bulkheads. A second entry at the façade’s right end accesses the upper story. The tall second story features a slightly recessed central section, edged with rounded-corner brick, occupying about half the building’s width. Two of the upper front’s four one-over-one windows are located within the recess, with one more on either side of it. Each has a square brickwork panel beneath outlined by a single course of stretcher brick. The windows have concrete sills. The upper façade is capped by two courses of red brick with a concrete slab coping. The rear façade is of brick.

This building was originally constructed to house the Idlehour movie theater. The Idlehour Theatre was likely constructed by Joseph Nordello, a general contractor who resided in Grand Rapids, Michigan, between the 1880s and at least 1920. Original sloping floors were leveled when the building was converted to stores and offices in the 1950s. Subsequent occupants have included Alma dentist Dr. McInnis, a radio repair shop, and a tailor shop. A fire damaged much of the building interior in 1970.

Sources: United States of America Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920 (Washington D. C.: Bureau of the Census, 1920), Electroinc document, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=Joseph+&gsln=Nordella&mawpn\\_\\_ftp=Grand+Rapids%2c+Kent%2c+Michigan%2c+USA&mawpn=44343&mawpn\\_PInfo=8-|0|1652393|0|2|3247|25|0|1587|44343|0|&uidh=llz&pcat=ROOT\\_CATEGORY&h=40326803&](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=Joseph+&gsln=Nordella&mawpn__ftp=Grand+Rapids%2c+Kent%2c+Michigan%2c+USA&mawpn=44343&mawpn_PInfo=8-|0|1652393|0|2|3247|25|0|1587|44343|0|&uidh=llz&pcat=ROOT_CATEGORY&h=40326803&)

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db=1920usfedcen&indiv=1, accessed 19 March 2013; David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

***125. J. A. Bartley Building / Carolyn's Cakes and Candies (1915)***

This is a two-story, two-bay red brick commercial building with white terra cotta trim. Downstairs the bays are defined by the storefront with its central recessed slant-sided entry and brick bulkheads, and a deeply recessed entry to the second story at the right. Two paired windows containing replacement one-over-ones light the second floor. They rest on a continuous terra cotta sill formed of paneled blocks above a *cyma reversa* band formed of molded pieces. A terra cotta cornice of abstract form, with simple brackets and a band of raised circles inside squares as a frieze supporting the projecting box cornice itself, extends nearly across the upper façade below a flat-top brick parapet with terra cotta coping. A plaque formed of several terra cotta pieces and listing the building's date and original owner's name, "J.A. Bartley - 1915," is set in the brick above the cornice. A large awning shelters the storefronts and entries. The building has a brick one-story rear extension. Constructed in 1915, this building historically housed James Bartley's grocery and meat store. In the 1950s, it became a men's clothing store, and later a fabric store.

***127. The Purple Pear (1924)***

One-story commercial building with original red brick side façade with classical cornice and ca. 1950s enameled metal panel front. The front has a single storefront with broad central recessed entry flanked by a display window on each side cantilevered out from low bulkheads beneath. A pent roof canopy at transom level spans the entire front. The piers, bulkheads, and upper façade are all faced in light gray enameled metal paneling, with the upper façade's metal paneling above the pent roof now covered up with vertical metal sheeting. Brick piers denote eight bays on the side elevation, with the one nearest the front apparently rebricked, perhaps closing up a former display window. Six of the bays each contains a low multi-light steel sash window, with brick lintel and concrete sill, positioned at transom level. A simple projecting classical cornice runs the length of the side elevation except for the first bay. A small section of the building's west side that projects north of the adjoining building is faced in buff brick.

Construction on this building began in 1924. It first housed the Martin Stores Corporation, McPhaul Barber Shop, and Edith's Beauty Shop.

***201. Alma Interiors / Laura M. Benitz Law Offices (ca. 1860s; 1962-1965)***

This is a very old two-story commercial building. The front section of the building reflects a major modernization which probably occurred in the early 1960s. The front rises above low bulkheads of rock-face random ashlar stonework that extend a short distance around the exposed west side. There is an off-center recessed entry. The rest of the ground-story façade below a projecting flat-top aluminum canopy is now clad in diagonal wood siding, with widely spaced

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small vertical windows, the siding and canopy wrapping around the west corner of the building. Above the canopy the upper portion of the front and around the corner on the side is now clad in wide exposure aluminum siding and slants outward toward its top on the front and side. The remainder of the west elevation is now faced in concrete block.

From the rear the upper part of a two-story clapboarded gable-roof building, with wide frieze boards and return cornices on the rear (north) gable is evident – these simple Greek Revival finishes, the only ones present in Alma's downtown, suggest this building may be the oldest in the district and in downtown Alma. A two-story flat-roof concrete block extension projects from the back of the building.

The building, one of the oldest frame buildings in Alma, was probably constructed well before 1884 when it appears in the earliest Sanborn map. It historically housed a hardware and tin shop in the late nineteenth century. Subsequent occupants have included a millinery, dress shop, and grocer. The building has been remodeled numerous times. Between 1962 and 1965 it was altered and expanded to accommodate Louis Klein's Alma Interiors, Wallpaper and Paint, which briefly unified numbers 201-207 East Superior Street.

***205. Store (1969; 2012); Non-Contributing***

Entirely refaced during 2012, this one-story commercial building has a center-entry storefront with a single display window each side set in random ashlar stonework that rises to window lintel level, with vinyl siding above. Above a pent roof capping the storefront the vinyl-sided upper front contains three small six-over-six modern windows and is topped by a pseudo-Victorian cornice. Prior to this most recent renovation the front had an asymmetrical fenestration pattern including an off-center glazed entry with two display windows on one side and one on the other. The storefront around the door and windows was faced in vertical board-and-batten siding and the upper façade above a flat-top metal canopy in windowless vertical siding up to a low top section of horizontal vinyl siding. The rear façade is of concrete block.

Survey forms for 201 from the 1975 survey show 205 and today's 207 as a single storefront that was combined with 201, the work having been done in 1969. What is now 205 was apparently built in 1969, while 207 was either built or remodeled at the same time. The entire store, 201-07, then housed Louis Klein's Alma Interiors, Wallpaper and Paint. Until the 2012 renovation, 205 retained the storefront nearly as rebuilt in 1969. The American Red Cross was the most recent occupant, but the building is now vacant.

***207. Arrow Swift Printing of Alma, Inc. (ca. 1883; 1969); Non-Contributing***

The one-story commercial building has an asymmetrical façade. At street level the single storefront has an off-center fully glazed door and flanking display windows. The bulkheads below the windows are sheathed in imitation random ashlar stone. An asphalt shingle-clad pent

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roof extends the width of the building and shades the storefront. Above the pent roof is a vertical board-and-batten siding-clad façade. The building's back is faced in concrete block.

This building, with its front retaining much of the form of the 1969 one and its concrete block rear façade matching 205's, shows no exterior evidence of construction before 1969, when the location became part of Alma Interiors, Wallpaper & Paint along with today's 201 and 205. The storefront appears to retain the basic form of the 1969 one, with a door installed in place of the third from the left of the six windows.

***209. The Nail Corner (1928)***

The one-story Commercial Brick building has a central double entrance with a square-plan display window to the right and broader display window on the left in a front that slants gently inward from the end pier to the entrance. There are low charcoal-painted stacked brick bulkheads and the storefronts between the end piers are sheltered by a flat-top slightly projecting aluminum canopy. The transom area is infilled with vertical metal sheeting. The brick upper façade, slightly recessed between the end piers, rises to a corbelled brick detail below the parapet. The transom area is topped by an ornamental dentil-like brickwork detail. The front appears little changed from what shows in a 1975 survey photo, the changes being different paneling in the transom area and the addition of a cloth awning covering the aluminum canopy.

Among this building's earliest occupants were the Alma City Cleaners and the A-1 Barber Shop in the late 1920s. Subsequent occupants have included a meat market, law offices, and a real estate business.

***211-215. Building (ca. 1915)***

The building is a single-story red Commercial Brick building with a broad front divided into three sections. The center section rises a bit above the broader section on either side and features a segmental-arch top between flat areas above the piers that edge the section and a large blind round arch beneath it that tops a tall transomed entry with flanking windows. The arch is formed of multiple layers of headers on edge, with an exaggerated concrete keystone centered in the façade. To each side of the center section is a broader storefront area with flat-top parapet. Brick piers with segmental arched concrete caps rise above the ends of the roof parapet. The center bay has two large sidelights and three transom windows surrounding the center glazed entry. Immediately above the transoms is a string of nine narrow additional lights. The arch spandrel has been in-filled. The west storefront has a central entry and flanking windows each divided into thirteen small lights surrounding a single center light. Four fluted piers support a flat-top canopy. The east storefront has an off-center door and three large storefront windows. Both sections have brick bulkheads and now infilled transoms. The building's end piers display upper and lower sunken panels and the upper façade horizontal strips of soldier brick. The front displays few changes from what shows in a 1975 photo. The building's east side facing the alley

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is of white-painted brick, the rear façade clad in aluminum siding. The north (rear) façade's western third displays a small shed-roof extension.

The building first appears on the 1917 Sanborn map and historically functioned as an automobile sales and repair shop. Other occupants have included a dry cleaning business, a restaurant, and a realty office.

### ***217-219. Strand Theater (1961-62)***

The one and two-story white brick and vinyl-sided building has an asymmetrical façade. The two-story front section has the theater entrance, capped with a brightly colored marquee, on one side and a commercial space on the other. The store space on the west side of the south façade has a pair of doors near the corner, one of them a second-story entrance, and a large display window to the east of the inner door. The main theater entrance is located in the east half of the façade, with a glass-fronted poster display case to its left. Fluted colonial pilasters flank the entrance, with its five-paneled doors set back slightly from the front.

A lighted broadly V-plan metal marquee in bright red and pale yellow colors projects from the second story over the theater entrance. "STRAND" is spelled out in free-standing letters atop both faces of the triangular marquee. The front section's upper story is clad with wide vinyl siding and pierced by two sixteen-light horizontal steel casement windows with false shutters. The arch-roof broad theater proper extends out behind the two-story front section. It has brick side walls and a mostly concrete block rear façade, with some brick remnants along one edge, as if the wall had to be largely rebuilt – perhaps some of the walls were reused from the previous building.

The Strand Theater occupies the same site as the former Strand Theater, which was destroyed in a fire on November 7, 1960.

Source: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

### ***225. Public Building (Alma Village Hall / Alma City Hall) / now Liberty Professional Building (1902-03) Haug and Scheurmann, Saginaw, architects***

The former Public Building/Village Hall/City Hall is a two-story hip-roof red brick structure located on the northwest corner of East Superior Street and North Gratiot Avenue. The Public Building's many round-arch door and window openings with their massive multi-layer brick caps reflect a Richardsonian Romanesque design influence. The building's front is divided into three sections: the west former fire hall side, east section containing the main village hall entrance, and a clock tower rising at the southeast corner. The building has a rectangular main section but later additions across the rear have given it a T-plan footprint with intersecting hipped roofs and wide overhanging eaves with low corbel brackets. A smooth limestone beltcourse

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extends around the building's front and sides at the second-story window sill level, and continuous smooth limestone beltcourses at lintel level, beneath the transoms, connect each of the groupings of second-story windows in the front and sides of the firehall (west) section and main (east) village hall section. The brick clock tower has an octagonal footprint, with the street-facing sides more than twice the length of the corner faces, and rises to a fourth-story wooden section containing a clock face on each broad side below a low belfry that once displayed an arched opening above each clockface – these now downsized to small louvered lunettes. The tower is topped by an eight-sided hip roof.

The west end of the building's front features two square-head former fire equipment bays, now with recessed windowed fronts above brick bulkheads. Their piers each feature smooth limestone strips at window sill level (now connected by matching window sills) and broader smooth limestone "capitals," topped by cornices, just below the present square-head caps for the former fire bays. A group of four double-hung windows, with arched transoms above the limestone beltcourse, lights the second story above the fire bays. The window transoms are capped by broad brick arches with a repeating pattern of projecting brick ends along their upper edge. The upper front façade in the firehouse section displays paired pilasters supporting stylized capitals that in turn support a plain brick entablature above corbelled brickwork. The second-story windows, with arched transoms; and the beltcourse continue along the south end of the building's west side.

The eastern, village hall section of the building has a slightly lower, intersecting hipped roofline than the western portion. Two heavy brick arch openings dominate the ground floor of this part of the building. One brick arch at the left caps the building's primary entry. Two short round Tuscan columns flank the modern aluminum door. The columns rise from a window sill level beltcourse to another smooth limestone beltcourse, with cornice, from which springs the arch. The columns support a limestone cornice and entablature. The second arch, also springing from an extension of the same corniced beltcourse, spans a broad single-light modern window with wood infill in the arch. The second-story limestone beltcourse serves as a continuous sill for the five rectangular one-over-one windows in this wing. Each window has a square-head single-light transom. A limestone beltcourse separates the windows and transoms.

The building has several additions:

- Firehouse (1918), now using address of 409 Gratiot Ave. Attached to the east end of the Public Building's north side and with its front projecting eastward toward Gratiot, the firehouse is a two-story Commercial Brick building with red brick front and buff brick north and south sides. The front contains three former fire equipment entrances – all infilled with combinations of windows and doors or just windows in vertical boarding – with a pedestrian entrance at the south end. Upstairs are paired double-hung windows above the fire bays and a single window over the pedestrian door. The walls feature bands of vertical headers and stretchers above the first and second-story openings and in the upper façade. The north side contains single and grouped double-hung windows plus a former vehicle door, also now

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infilled, near its west end. A three-story rectangular-plan former hose-drying tower rises back from the north façade.

- West extension (after 1924), west of firehouse and north of Public Building, extending west of west side of Public Building. One-story flat-roof building with red brick front, containing an entry facing Superior and buff brick west and north sides; north side contains two former vehicular entrances now closed in like the firehouse front's facing Gratiot.

At the southeast corner of the property is the Firemen's Monument, dedicated on September 11, 2004. The monument consists of an approximately three-foot tall brick wall placed at an angle to the street corner and divided into three sections. The center section of the wall is recessed from the other two, and the entire brick wall is topped by a concrete ledge. Placed at the center of the middle section of the wall is a stone plaque which commemorates the no-longer extant first firehouse in Alma to house the firefighting equipment for the Volunteer Bucket Brigade. It reads "Fireman's Hall Erected A. D. 1884." Standing atop the concrete ledge at the center of the monument is a bronze statue of a firefighter in full gear and holding a small child in his arms.

On the west panel of the memorial is a small engraved plaque with the Firemen's Prayer and monument dedication. The plaque reads:

A Firemen's Prayer

When I am called to duty, God, wherever flames may rage  
Give me the strength to save some life, whatever be the age.

Help me embrace a little child before it is too late;  
Or save an older person from the horror of that fate.

Enable me to be alert, and hear the weakest shout,  
And quickly and efficiently to put the fire out.

I want to fill my calling and to give the best in me;  
To guard my every neighbor and protect his property.

And if according to your will I have to give my life;  
Please bless with your protecting hand my children and my wife.

By, A. W. "Smokey" Linn

At the base of the sign is the following dedication:

This monument is dedicated  
to all First Responders to Emergencies in Gratiot County.  
They are truly the Life Savers.

When first announced in the newspaper on May 23, 1902, the new "Village Hall" was planned to include:

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The fireman's department on the lower floor for the trucks, apparatus, etc., along with the rooms for stables, firemen's dormitory, firemen's hall, closets, prison, office for fire department communicating with firemen's hall. On the second floor will be the village hall, office or reception room connecting, hay loft and grain storage over stables, council chamber, clerk's offices, president's office, two committee rooms off from council chamber, vaults for records, etc., on both floors. A central hallway on both floors will communicate with all rooms. There will be a hose tower for the purpose of drying hose running from the fire department on lower floor. The corner tower or rotunda will communicate with the firemen's hall on first floor and president's office on second floor.

The newspaper article concluded that "this will truly be a building that the citizens of Alma can view with pride." In September of that same year, the *Alma Record* noted that the cornerstone for the new village hall was laid with appropriate exercises by the Alma Fire Department. On May 1, 1903, the *Alma Record* reported that the Village Hall, which had been erected at a cost of \$12,000, would be dedicated by the State Firemen's Association at their convention in Alma on June 10 and 11 of that year.

Originally intended to house the municipal offices and firehall, the building also contained the Alma Public Library beginning in 1920. It occupied the former firehouse space on the lower story in the building's southwest corner. The required new furniture for the facility, including shelving, was provided by the Civic Improvement League and the City of Alma. Although located in the city's building, the city did not fully operate the library until two years later when it hired Miss Lucy Alverson as their first librarian. That same year the library was opened for the first time to a wider audience following a vote by City Council to allow residents from outside the city to also utilize the library collections. The library operated out of City Hall until 1936, when, after being gifted with a private home, the library moved its collections and operations to the former Pearly Smith residence on West Superior Street.

The City of Alma municipal offices and fire hall remained in the building until 1975, when they moved to their new facilities at 525 East Superior Street, just east of the district. By the time the City moved out of the building, the clock in the tower, installed in 1903, had ceased working. A plaque at the base of the clock tower explains that when the building was purchased by Roy, Tracy, and Nora Roach, the clock was restored to working condition. The clock was rededicated and placed into operation on November 15, 1990, as part of the celebration of "Old Clock Day in the City of Alma."

After the City moved its offices and the fire department to its new location, the building stood at least partially vacant for several years. The first known occupant after the City's departure was

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the Law Central Clinic of Mid-Michigan in 1980. It was not until the mid-1980s that fuller use of the building took place. In 1984 the city directory lists the building occupants as the Alma Tae Kwon Do School, Alma Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Gratiot County, and the Alma Highland Festival, Inc. The building is currently called the Liberty Professional Building and houses an Allstate Insurance office and attorney practice.

Sources: *Alma Record*, "Our Village Hall," May 23, 1902, 1; *Alma Record*, "Corner Stone Laid," September 26, 1902, 1.; City of Alma, "Milestone Events," Electronic document, [http://www.ci.alma.mi.us/1/307/milestone\\_events.asp](http://www.ci.alma.mi.us/1/307/milestone_events.asp) (accessed 2 November 2012).

***301 / 412 Gratiot. Gibson Bros. Building / Epler Building (1904-1905)***

The early twentieth-century commercial building is a two and one-half-story structure constructed of painted smooth-faced concrete block with rock-face block piers, beltcourses, and parapets. Its narrow front faces E. Superior and a long side elevation faces Gratiot. The ca. 1950 first-story Superior storefront is mostly glass and extends across the width of the façade (south elevation) and wraps around the building's southwest corner. The entry is recessed in this corner, and the upper façade's corner supported by a round metal column. The bulkheads are faced in gray enameled metal panels, the piers and transom area in lighter grayish enameled metal panels. A flat-top metal canopy projects outward from the storefront on both Superior and Gratiot. The second-story front is divided into three sections by raised piers. Each side section contains a single double-hung window at the second-story level, while the center section contains a broad glass block central window at the second-story level and a pair of low windows in an attic just below the projecting metal coping. The long side elevation facing Gratiot contains two second-story entrances, one with segmental-arch-head transom set into a gabled concrete frame; a second storefront, inward-slanting to the right, with projecting flat-top aluminum canopy, toward the center; and a broad garage door near the back. Second-story windows are regularly spaced one-over-ones, eleven in all, and there are three more now infilled ones in the ground story. The side walls are marked by rock-face block beltcourses at the first and second-story window sill and lintel levels and at storefront transom-top level, and the parapets below metal copings are also finished in rock-face block.

Historically the building's center bay on the front rose well above the front on either side to a flat parapet flanked by low pyramid-topped square pedestals (there were more at the two front corners and along the side elevation's slightly taller front section). A photo of the building, taken about 1912, shows that the raised central parapet had a smooth center panel surrounded by rock-faced concrete block. This parapet has been removed along with the capstones and replaced by a simple metal cap.

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On December 16, 1904, a brief article in the *Alma Record* noted that the

Gibson Bros. have purchased of Bert Woodward the first six lots fronting on Superior street just east of the city hall and will erect a building on the corner lot next spring. The building will be full two stories and basement 26 × 150 feet, and constructed entirely of cement blocks.

Even as the article was published work had commenced on the basement and gravel for the building blocks was being contracted for from George Fafty.

Later known as the Epler Building, it housed Forquer's garage and machine shop in 1910, and between 1914 and 1917 it housed a bicycle shop and an auto sales and repair shop. In the 1940s, the property was labeled as a "filling station" on published maps. In 1948 the building was occupied by Medler Electric Company, and by the mid-1950s the building was the home of a Singer Sewing Machine store. The business later became the Alma Sewing Center and it remains the occupant currently.

David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976); *Alma Record*. "Their New Building," 16 December 1904, 1.

***307. Building (Built between 1917 and 1924; present front ca. 1980s-90s); Non-contributing***

This broad-fronted two-story commercial building combines two older buildings with a unified modern ca. 1980s-90s storefront and upper façade treatment. The ground floor of the façade features an almost all glass front from a pier at the west end to a projecting open-front square-plan entry located at the beginning of the façade's eastern third. The front's west two-thirds have very low bulkheads and a recessed area containing two store entrances toward its east end. The east third beyond the projecting entry contains another, shorter grouping of display windows, set on taller bulkheads, extending to an east end pier. The entire length of the storefronts is capped by a slanting-roof canopy that extends across the next building's façade to the east as well. The largest part of the upper façade, as well as the end piers and projecting entry, are faced in a stuccoed-over panel treatment and the upper façade formed into twelve vertical panels edged by raised wooden dividers. This is topped by a single frieze strip that, extending across the entire façade, appears to be faced in EIFS. There is an aluminum coping. This façade treatment is continued onto the adjacent façade of 311 E. Superior as well. The back of the building is divided into a western two-thirds with concrete block side and rear walls and an eastern third with two-story main section, with brick rear façade, and one-story concrete block rear extension. Non-contributing because of modern façade.

The 1917 Sanborns do not show buildings at the site of the present structure; however, in 1924, the Sanborn maps illustrate a one-story garage structure with iron columns and wooden floors at 303-05 and a two-story concrete floor auto repair shop building at 307. This is clarified in the

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1930 city directory, when both buildings are occupied by Borton's Garage. By 1945 this building was the home of Holland Furnace Company and the upper level was occupied by Mrs. Ada A. Schneider. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s the building along with the one at 303 East Superior Street was the home of Packard's Furniture, which changed its name to Packard's Interiors by 1969 and back to Packard's Furniture from at least 1977 to 1981. Both 303 and 307 East Superior were occupied by the same business, Van Atten's, Inc. (later Van Atten's Hardware and Sporting Goods), a plumbing, heating, and electrical supplies business that also offered sporting goods, hardware, and gifts, from about 1982 to at least 1997. By 1995 the combined building took on the address 307 (Van Atten's had previously used the 303 East Superior address) and was occupied by Ken's Culligan Water Conditioner and the Scented Serenity gift shop.

***311. Morning Sun Building (ca. 1920; present front ca. 1980s-90s); Non-contributing***

The two-story commercial building has a façade that now complements 207's, with eight more panels of the same form and construction as 307's (but without 307's tall frieze above) above a continuation of 307's slanting storefront canopy that extends its full length. The modern storefront is symmetrical, containing a recessed slant-sided central entry and flanking four-part display windows. The storefront's bulkheads, piers, and upper front above the door and windows are finished in a smooth stucco-like material. An enclosed staircase accessing the second story is located on the east elevation. The exposed east side (except for a small section near the front that once contained signage) and the rear façade are of dark red-brown glazed hollow clay structural tile. Non-contributing because of modern façade.

The building first appears in the 1924 Sanborn, which notes the use as auto sales and repair. The 1948 map shows auto repair use, but the front end serving as a "filling station." At the time the property also had a double address, 309 and 311. In the 1930 city directory the building is occupied by Borton's Garage, which also occupied 307 East Superior Street. In 1945 the space was held by La France Republic Division of Sterling Motors Corporation, auto parts. In 1956 the building was occupied by Van Atten's, a plumbing and heating supplies firm which later expanded into sporting goods, hardware, and gifts as well. Van Atten's remained in the building until the early 1990s. It was not until 1995 that the occupant of the building changed for the first time in decades, with the space occupied by Mainstream Computers. Occupants listed in the directories beginning in 1997 include Central Michigan Newspapers, the *Morning Sun*, the *Alma Reminder* shoppers news publications, and CMI Advertising – perhaps all the same thing.

***315-317. Elks Building / Hair-We-R Salon (ca. 1920)***

Two-story broad-fronted red Commercial Brick building with façade divided into two sections by a raised central and side piers. The tall upper façade above the second-story windows contains two sunken panels framed by the piers and raised corbelled brickwork-supported horizontal brickwork strips, a lower one above the second-story windows and upper forming the parapet. Three recessed entries are located in the center of the building, one of them accessing the upper

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stories. The center slant-sided recess containing them is flanked by storefront windows with brick bulkheads. A tall pent roof spans the façade. The second story is lit by two replacement four-light windows in each half of the façade, resting on a continuous stone window sill. Brick infill above the windows suggests the historic presence of taller windows or now closed-up transoms in the second story. The exposed west elevation contains numerous square-head window openings, some now bricked in, plus several entries and a modern oriel window in the second story. The exposed west side is built of red brick, including the side façade of a one-story concrete block rear extension.

The building first appears in published maps in 1924, when it is labeled "Garage 1<sup>st</sup>, Club Room 2<sup>nd</sup>." The garage floor had the capacity of 30 cars. In 1930, the city directory provides greater clarification on the building occupants, which included Tomlin-Riggle Motor Sales on the main floor and the Elks Hall on the second floor. In 1948, the main floor was occupied by Frederickson Motor Sales and the upper spaces by the Elks, Alma Lodge No 1400. The first known shift away from the historic use is documented in the 1956 city directory, which indicates that 315 East Superior Street is occupied by the restaurant Super Hamburgs and 317 East Superior Street holds the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (liquor store) – which remained into the 1990s. The upper floor of the building continued to be occupied by the Elks Lodge. By the early 1970s the Elks Club is no longer associated with the building. The first floor space of 315 East Superior Street continued under a variety of restaurant names through the 1990s. In 2005, 315 East Superior was listed as housing Peoplelink Staffing Solutions and next door at 317 East Superior was Hair-We-R.

***319. Young's Health Club / Young's Antiques and Sports (ca. 1920)***

Two-story commercial building with ca. 1950s-60s painted brick front and concrete block exposed east side wall. The front contains a recessed square-sided central entry flanked by large display windows on either side. An entry at the east end of the façade accesses the upper story. A flat-topped aluminum canopy shelters the entire front. The upper story is lit with six horizontal-light windows. A one-story rear extension that occupies more than half the building's depth is of concrete block.

The building first appears in published maps in 1924. The 1930 city directory indicates that the space is occupied by Montigels Hardware. By the time the Sanborn maps were updated in 1948, the building was labeled "Auto Sales" in the front section and "Auto Repair" in the rear portion, and openings had been created in the dividing walls between this building and the one to the west at 315-317 East Superior Street. A city directory from just a few years earlier noted that the space was occupied by Rays Automobile Supply Company in the front and Super Service Garage in the rear. Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, the building housed Joynt Automotive Inc., auto parts. By 1980 the building was occupied by Tartan House of Furniture. It was vacant for a short time in the mid-1980s, and in the early 1990s was known as Furniture Plus. During the 2000s the building has been owned by Mike Young and held various businesses including the current Jane's Barber Shop, Young's Antiques, and Young's Health Club.

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***321. Hi-Speed Service Station / Curves (Built between 1924 and 1948); Non-Contributing***

Single-story building, set back from the sidewalk line behind small landscaped terrace, with most of the west part of the front angled at 45 degrees to the sidewalk line, and east part parallel with the sidewalk. Finished in a smooth, stucco-like material, the building displays triple openings, one now infilled, in the front of the angled section, and a broad entry, with bubble canopy, in the shorter front of the right-hand "parallel" section. This part contains three more broad windows in its right-hand (east) façade on Pine. The narrow west end of the front is only wide enough to contain a single door. The building's north (rear) façade is of concrete block. Non-contributing because no historic finishes are visible in the primary facades.

The current building first appears on the Sanborn map which was updated to 1948. A building with a simpler rectilinear footprint was on the site in 1924, suggesting the current structure was erected in the intervening years. In 1930, the city directory noted that the property was vacant, and in 1945, the building was known as Hi-Speed Filling Station. A decade later, the property was part of Joynt Automotive Inc, and in 1958, was listed as Dolloff Pure Serve gas station. The gas station appears to have changed owners frequently over the next few years, with it being called John's Pure Serve in 1960, O & D Pure Serve in 1964, C & D Pure Serve in 1969, C & D Union Seventy Six Service in 1977, and by 1980, no longer was associated with automobile sales or service instead becoming the warehouse for Tartan House of Furniture. The building was occupied as a warehouse into the mid-1990s when it was known as the Pantry Tree, a health foods retail establishment. Curves was the occupant by 2009, but the building is currently vacant.

***401. Downtown Total Service Gas Station / B & B Market (Built between 1969 and 1977); Non-Contributing***

This nearly square-plan convenience store is a single-story building with its two street-facing façades clad in vertical wood siding, with red brick bulkheads below the broad strip display windows flanking the center entry on the main west-side front. The south side contains a second, but off-center, double-door entry and another display window strip, with vertical windows forming a rounded corner at the east end. The building is currently clad in shingle and vertical wood siding on its two (south and west) street-facing sides. The building has an overhanging mansard or pent roof on the south and west sides, but the rear or north side shows the roof over that part slanting backward. Vertical panels rising above the centered largest part of the east and west façades may screen the ends of a broad gable or three or four-slope roof. The east one is of concrete block, the west faced in asphalt shingles. The north or rear façade and part of the east are of concrete block, and blocks infill four window openings in back.

A building is first indicated in the 1924 Sanborn maps, labeled "Auto Sales & Service." The property also contained three pumps near the southwest corner of the building and the note "Fill'g Stn" (filling station). The address first appears in the 1945 published city directory, when it was the Clayton J. Swarthout Filling Station; in 1956 the building is listed as Leonard's Super

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Serve Station. In 1969 the building is listed at Dick's Leonard Service Gas Station and by 1977 the building is Downtown Total Service Gas Station. Although it is impossible to tell from the city directories, it is likely that the present building was constructed at or near the transition of the property to the corporate station associated with Total gas. This would indicate the current building was erected between 1969 and 1977.

**Superior Street, West, North Side**

***102. W. T. Grant Store / Alma True Value Hardware (1956)***

The one-story commercial building has an L-shaped footprint with a primary front facing south on Superior, a long east side facing State Street, and a large rear wing extending west behind the bank building that stands next door to the west. The building has yellow brick walls with stacked tan brick front piers and bulkheads and side entry portal. The front facing Superior at the corner of State features glass display windows extending nearly from side to side. A shallow recess across the center of the front contains three sets of double doors. The upper portion of the façade, and extending back a short distance on the side elevations, rises above the rest of the building. Originally faced in horizontal ceramic tile, it displayed in large raised letters the name of the first occupant, W. T. GRANT CO. The tile is now covered in a smooth stucco-like material and features the name of the current store, ALMA TRUE VALUE HARDWARE. The east elevation facing State Street presents a short extension of the front, with raised parapet and display windows, but that side is faced in yellow brick except for a former, now closed in, entry placed mid-way down the length of the building under a raised portal of stacked tan brick. The broad concrete block north façade contains its own central entry facing a parking lot.

This building sits on the site of the former elaborate Wright Hotel, which was constructed in 1883 and razed in 1956. The present building originally housed the W. T. Grant Company variety store, which went out of business in 1975. Alma True Value has occupied the building since 1976. There have been some changes to the building since 1975, including the application of a smooth finish over the stacked block or tile of the upper façade.

Source: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

***110. First State Bank / Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce (1915); Williamson & Crow, Grand Rapids, architects (?)***

The former First State Bank Building is a two-story, front-gabled Neoclassical blond brick and limestone building. It rests on a raised stone foundation. The three-bay façade is symmetrical, with a shallow recessed portico of limestone Tuscan columns, one at either end flanking a central entry, between the projecting front on either side. The central portico and façade on either side each occupy about one-third of the building's front. The portico and rest of the front supports a

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broad entablature with plain architrave topped by a frieze that displays the FIRST NATIONAL BANK name incised into the limestone. Each end bay contains a large single-light square-head window below a horizontal rectangular sunken panel in the brick front. Above the cornice, a limestone-topped brick parapet rises in two steps to a central raised limestone panel containing the date of construction, 1915, in its center. The front now rises to a gable faced in blond brick similar to the rest of the façade, but the gable roof dates from after a 1975 survey photo, which shows only the stepped parapet. The building's sides are faced in blond brick and retain the entablature, but a simple raised limestone band replaces the front's cornice.

W. S. Turck and W. E. Winton founded the predecessor of the First State Bank as a private bank in 1880. In 1883, when Ammi Wright became a partner in the bank, it was reorganized as Turck, Winton and Company. The bank was incorporated as the First State Bank in 1901, with Wright and Turck serving as President and Vice President, respectively. The bank was housed in the Opera House Block until it moved into the building at 110 West Superior Street in 1916. In 1956 the First State Bank and the Alma State Savings Bank consolidated as the Bank of Alma, shortly moving to a new building at 311-15 Woodworth. In the late 1960s and 70s, the Delta Beauty College used the building, and it currently houses the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce. A 7/15/1915 *Grand Rapids Herald* story cites Williamson & Crow as architects.

***116. Heritage Town Square (Built between 1977 and 1980); Non-Contributing***

The dark brown brick commercial building is one story high. The upper portion of the building is dominated by a tall metal mansard roof with flared eaves. The asymmetrical lower portion of the façade features a recessed, off-center entry. The east angled wall of the entry recess is pierced by a pair of single-light windows with a string of similar windows on the façade east of the recess. A second narrow, slant-sided recess from the front plane of the façade is situated between two additional window banks to the west, each consisting of a string of three single-light windows across the front and a single window in each angled wall of the recess. The building's rear façade is of red brick.

Prior to the current building, the site was occupied by a Sears, Roebuck & Company catalog store. By 1980 the city directory listing for the property noted that it was Heritage Town Square, and included six stores, including a book store, needlepoint shop, hair salon, and several clothing stores. Over time the number of stores has been reduced, and replaced by business offices. In 2009 this included nurse practitioners, a social worker, home care company, insurance agents, and doctors' offices.

***120-122. Building (ca. 1940)***

The single-story white-painted red brick building has a slant-sided central recessed entry containing entrances to each of the two storefronts. Flanking the angled recessed entry are large display windows above low brick bulkheads. Rising above the windows is a pent roof, with

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asphalt shingles, in the transom location. The upper façade is clad with vertical wood boards. The rear façade is constructed of concrete block.

In 1924 the property is occupied by two different buildings, one a one-story structure and the second part of a two-story building. The city directory for 1930 also suggests that the two properties are not connected in any way; however, by 1945 the city directory provides a single address for the property (120-122) which is occupied by Modern Cleaners and Dryers. By 1956 the dry cleaner was limited to the 122 address, and Cook's Children Shop (later the Village Tot Shop and the Children's Boutique) occupied the other store front. It was not until 1983 that the children's shop was replaced by Lady Jennifer although the cleaners remained next door. By 1987 the store at 120 West Superior was known as Lads and Lassies Children's Clothing with the dry cleaner occupying the rear of the building and PJ's House of Uniforms at 122 West Superior. In 2005 the only city directory listing for the entire property was for EZTech, a computers sales and service business. At the end of that decade, the Alma Police Athletic Club shared the space with EZTech and there was an employment agency in 122 West Superior.

***124. Building (ca. 1930)***

The one-story commercial building features a recessed slant-sided center entrance to the single storefront. The storefront trim appears to date to the 1920s or 30s but the display windows are outlined by piers and bulkheads faced in a modern stucco-like material. The red-brown brick upper façade has a pair of beltcourses just above an asphalt-shingled pent roof capping the storefront and a concrete cap. The beltcourses, at least, appear to be made of the same modern material as the piers and bulkheads. The back of the building has a gable-roof vertical-board extension.

This property has been occupied by a building since the late nineteenth century, although historically the building was two stories high. It is unclear if this building was newly constructed in the 1930s or if the upper story was removed. By 1948 the building was the home of a furniture store.

***126-130. Building (Early 1930s)***

The one-story double storefront has a red Commercial Brick façade which rises to a limestone or concrete capped parapet with slightly raised center section over each store. Each end of the 130 front displays a slightly projecting brick pier (there's none at the east end of 126). The tall brick upper façades display a broad horizontal panel above each storefront formed by basketweave brick bands across the top of each storefront and up to the parapet cap and a row of soldier bricks across the top. Square and rectangular concrete or limestone blocks mark the corners and subdivide the top and bottom bands. The storefronts each have a centrally placed recessed slant-sided entry featuring two doors even though each contains only a single tenant. No. 126's storefront has mottled whitish-gray brick bulkheads, while 130's are of red brick. No. 130's has an asphalt shingled pent roof while 126's has an awning. The building at 126 West Superior has

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much less depth than 130. No. 130 has a one-story concrete block rear extension with a glass block window and synthetic siding on its rear façade.

The building first is illustrated in the 1948 map, but was likely constructed in the 1930s. There is no listing for the addresses in the 1930 city directory, but by 1945 there is a listing for William R. Updike's restaurant at 126, the Varsity Shop, book and sporting goods, at 128, and L. P. Schneider and Son, carpets, at 130-32. The Varsity Shop and carpet store remained in the building through the 1960s. While the carpet store (later known as Abbey Carpets) continues in the building through the 1990s, by 1977 the second storefront is occupied by Davison Office Machines. In 2005 the only occupant in the building is Ashlin Portraits, who remained in 2009 along with H & R Block located at 126 West Superior.

***134 (also 412-14 Prospect Ave.); Building (ca. 2000); Non-Contributing***

The one-story building has a shed roof, with its peak above the east (right) side wall, but features a boomtown façade that raises the front's apparent height and conceals the roofline from the front. The full façade and lower portion of the west side wall on Prospect has a red-brown brick veneer. The upper façade has a projecting pseudo-Victorian wood cornice with brackets. The storefront features a center recessed entry flanked by two large windows divided into four fixed lights. It is capped by a low pent roof. The west side wall is faced in vinyl siding above the brick lower portion and contains separate 412 and 414 Prospect commercial spaces, with doors flanked by slider and fixed windows, toward its north (back) end.

**Superior Street, West, South Side**

***101-109. Pollasky Block (1897-1902), Haug and Scheurmann, Saginaw, architects; George S. Young of Alma, Contractor; Anson Hobson, Masonry; J. O. Albright, Iron Work***

The two-story five-storefront long Pollasky Block is an Ionia sandstone-trimmed brick Late Victorian block that contains features reminiscent of Richardsonian Romanesque. The front is divided into six bays defined by two storefronts at the west end and three at the east, with a second-story entry between them, in the street level, and, upstairs, two triple-window bays at the west and three at the east plus an oriel window bay, the triple window bays aligned with the storefronts and the oriel with the upstairs entry bay below. A semi-round multi-windowed turret rises in the second story above the building's northeast corner, but it has now lost an open round upper story, with conical roof, that rose above the building's roofline. The storefronts and second-story entry are separated from one another by piers. Those at the building's east end have been rebuilt but the upstairs entry piers and those flanking the west stores retain their original forms, with rock-face stone lower portions and brick shafts with smooth stone capitals (the upstairs entry has a rock-face stone lintel and square prism glass transom). The north two storefronts now house one store, with appropriate though apparently non-original wood-trimmed storefront that includes paneled bulkheads, recessed central entry, and transoms. The eastern three storefronts appear to date from the 1950s or 60s and have nearly all glass fronts, with two

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of them slanting inward from one end to the other. The east-end storefront has a deeply recessed slanting front, with a freestanding metal column supporting the upper front at the corner. Despite the modernized storefronts, the original metal storefront cornice remains in place across the entire front and along the entire east side facing State Street.

The building's second floor features a slanting, three-sided oriel window in the front that defines the fourth bay from the northeast corner above the second-story entry. The second-floor windows on the façade are one-over-ones, grouped in sets of three to each bay. A rock-face stone stringcourse runs the entire length of the façade and east elevation, acting as a window sill for the triple windows. An additional rock-face stringcourse runs across the façade atop these double-hung windows, serving as a lintel for them and also as a base for the square-head transom windows above. Each triple window is then crowned by a taller rock-face stone lintel, with delicate metal cornice cap. The brick upper façade rises to a broad metal cornice, with wide frieze beneath displaying alternating garlands and tasseled wreaths, the cornice extending across the entire front and east side beneath a brick parapet. The oriel, with its three double-hung windows each topped by a rectangular lozenge-light transom and then a sunken square-panel wooden frieze, rises to a flat top below the main cornice. Four small round columns, with a small round window between each pair, rise between the top of the oriel and the cornice's base. Flanking the oriel's upper half and rising past the cornice and above to face a raised area of parapet is a pair of engaged columns. Rising from rounded bases projecting from the wall, these columns have fluted lower sections below the main cornice and smooth-faced surfaces from there up to round finials just above the parapet level. The east side facing State Street displays a more simplified treatment with low square-head windows at transom level in the ground story and single double-hung windows, with transoms, in the second story.

Michael Pollasky built the two-story Late Victorian commercial building between 1897 and 1902. The building replaced his earlier wooden store building, which had been destroyed by fire in 1893. The cornerstone was laid during a ceremony on July 24, 1897, in which Michael Pollasky included a time capsule containing a history of the Pollasky Block to that date, local and Detroit newspapers, Alma College catalog, the catalog of the Sanitarium, Gratiot County directory, a copy of the 1894 Gratiot County census, and photographs of the Pollasky family and the original Pollasky Block, a good luck horseshoe, a flag, old coins, and a few other things (reportedly this time capsule was lost when the building front was changed in the 1960s).

When it was constructed, the building was described as having been built from the "best grade of brick, and the facings and copings were Ionia sandstone, the best of its day for durability and beauty" (Smith, 1984). The walls were thick, and included gas and electric lights in each of the one double and three single stores included in the space.

One of the earliest permanent tenants in the space was the drug store operated by Bivins and Rhodes, who relocated from the Wright Opera House Block to the corner store of the new Pollasky Block. Among the wide variety of businesses housed in the block since its construction

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at the end of the nineteenth century were Messenger's Man Store (the Messenger family were related to the Pollaskys by marriage), shoe stores, and dry goods stores. The second floor of the building over 107-109 West Superior Street was occupied by a variety of offices, predominantly medical.

Sources: Mildred L. Smith, *Pioneer Family Promotes Progress: the Building of the Pollasky Block* (n.p., 1984); David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

***111-113. Merchants Building / Treasures (ca. late 1880s)***

Two-story Late Victorian brick building divided into seven fenestration bays on the upper story. The first story of the building features a ca. 1950s-60s storefront with two recessed square-plan storefront entries and flanking display windows with low brick bulkheads. End piers and the upper front below the second-story windows are faced in enameled metal panels, and a metal sign panel that extends across the front in the transom location contains the present store's name, Treasures.

The upper story of the building is divided into seven window bays, with the masonry fronts of the center bay and the central bay at either (three-bay) end aligned with the frieze above and the alternating bays recessed slightly and capped by corbelled brickwork below the frieze. The seven windows which pierce the second story feature one-over-one sash below twelve-light rectangular transoms. The windows in the projecting second, fourth, and sixth bays are each topped by a half-moon sunburst panel beneath an arch with rock-face sandstone voussoirs and keystones. The remaining four windows feature more simple rock-face and stone slab lintels. Two parallel sandstone beltcourses span the upper story at window lintel level and just below the transom lintels. The west elevation is also visible from the street and features segmental-arch-head window openings, several currently boarded. There is a one-story brick extension across the back.

This building first appears on the Sanborn maps in 1890, and housed a furniture store and a business college. It is believed that the building was constructed for Michael Pollasky given it was known as the Pollasky Block at the time. The building name was subsequently given to the large block immediately to the east. Later occupants have included a dry goods store (1896), the *Alma Journal* (1910), G. V. Wright, furniture dealer and undertaker (1926), and the A & P Food Store (1926-1957) and Western Auto. It is likely that the storefront was altered by Western Auto in the late 1950s.

Sources: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

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**Superior Street, West, South Side (continued)**

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***117. Store / Scripture Palace (pre-1884)***

Heavily altered two-story frame commercial building, currently clad in vinyl siding. A glazed front door is situated at the center of the first-floor façade. Large display windows flank the door and rise to the height of the transom window over the doorway. Directly above the store entry is a modern tripartite oriel window with false shutters. The exposed east elevation of the building is clad with a combination of T-111 on the ground level and vinyl siding at the second story. The elevation is pierced by two doorways and includes a triple modern window near the front façade. Three sets of closed shutters at the second-story height suggest additional fenestration. A one-story shed-roof extension, clad in vinyl siding, is attached to the south end.

This building was originally located on State Street, immediately south of the former Pollasky Block on the southwest corner of State Street and Superior Street. When the Pollasky Block burned in 1893, this small frame building narrowly escaped the fire and was moved to its present location at 117 West Superior Street. This reported change is substantiated by the replacement of the tiny one-story building present in the 1890 Sanborn with the two-story larger building with the one-story rear ell by 1896. In 1896 the building was labeled "Printing" and included a small area noted as "Express Office." This remained the case on the 1902 Sanborn map but by 1910 the "Express Office" is no longer noted. Between 1936 and 1958, this building housed the Stovall Studio and Camera Shop, the *Alma Record*, and the Star Restaurant.

Source: David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

***119. Gittleman's / Central Michigan Apparel Building (Built between 1924 and 1945); Non-Contributing***

The one-story commercial/now professional building now displays a modern concrete and stucco-trimmed red brick front of simple Colonial/Neoclassical inspiration. A deeply recessed off-center entry portal is accented with post and lintel sheathed in a smooth Dryvit-like finish. The front contains two paired double-hung-look windows to the east of the entry and three to the west. The windows are topped by flat brick arches, with concrete keystones, and rest on a base of square-plan concrete blocks that extends across the front. The base of the wall is sheathed in concrete panels. Two parallel concrete block stringcourses embellish the façade above the windows. The same Dryvit material used around the front entry is applied to a very broad paneled pier at each end of the façade. The exposed west side wall is constructed of concrete block. Extending entirely across the building's south end is a narrow slightly taller two-story concrete block section, presumably once the office area for the store that occupied the building, containing a large steel sash window near the west end. The two-story section's south (rear) side is faced in vertical wood siding above a one-story shed-roof extension along the whole rear.

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**Superior Street, West, South Side (continued)**

The building first appears on Sanborn maps in 1948. Before this time the Sanborns illustrate several one-story buildings on the same site. In 1948 the larger building is one story in front, with a two-story wing at the rear, matching the current structure; however, it is clear that the façade has been recently reconstructed. In 1945 the building was the home of Gittleman's Style Shops, women's furnishings. The name of the business changed to Central Michigan Apparel Inc., by 1956, but remained a women's clothing store. Two years later, in addition to Central Michigan Apparel the space was occupied by Cook's Children Shop. By the mid-1960s, the city directory reveals that Gittleman's Inc. (a division of Central Michigan Apparel) occupied the space along with the Hair Fashion Center. The space was held by Gittleman's through the 1980s, but in 1995, the city directory revealed that it was then Martin's women's clothing store along with the Family Alteration Shop and Martin's Hair Studio. By 2005 only Martin's Hair Studio remained from the earlier occupants, joined instead by Celebrate Ministries and the fabric store Common Threads. It is likely sometime since 2009 when the current law office moved into the building and the façade was altered. **Non-contributing because the front retains no historic features.**

**Woodworth Avenue, East Side**

***312. House / Look Insurance Agencies (ca. 1890)***

Two-story cross-gable and hip-roof frame Late Victorian house that, now clad in asbestos or composition shingling, has been partly converted to commercial use. In its west-facing front the building has a full two-story front-gabled section, with cutaway corners below the gable, on the south and a slightly lower side-gable left-hand (north) section. On the north side, behind the front side-gable section is a second one of slightly lower height. A central hip roof caps the junction of these gable roofs, and there is a small single-story addition on the rear (east). A single-story hip-roof porch fronts the side-gable front section. It rests on a low foundation and has three Tuscan columns supporting its roof. The main entry is located off the porch and it is adjacent to a tall, narrow one-over-one window. The house displays a variety of single and double (and one triple) modern replacement windows. A small three-part casement window is located on the second story immediately above the porch. One-over-one windows light the cutaway corners on the first and second stories. On the north elevation, pairs of one-over-one windows light the first and second stories; a three-part bay window with one-over-one windows is located on the first story of the north elevation. There are two additional entrances on the north elevation: one in the northeast gabled bay and one in the single-story addition.

The property first appears on published maps of Alma in 1890 as a dwelling. The 1948 Sanborn shows the property as still a residence, but by 1945 the city directory shows it also occupied by Ellis A. Terrell and Myrtle Faul, florists. Mrs. Faul's business would have had a perfect location since nearby at 319 Woodworth was the Wright Funeral Home. Partial commercial use of the building continued in the 1950s, when the city directory included an entry for the same address, but rear, for the E. L. Faul Dental Laboratory. In 2012 the property houses an insurance agency as well, apparently, as living quarters.

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**Woodworth Avenue, East Side (continued)**

***318. House / Gratiot Chiropractic Clinic (Built between 1890 and 1896)***

This two-story painted brick former house has a hip roof. The front section is nearly square, but several additions to the rear and one side have expanded the size. The building is simply detailed, with brick-capped segmental-arch-head window openings, now mostly boarded up. The first-floor front, faced in vertical boarding and containing two doors at its left-hand end, is fronted by a modern full-width shed-roof porch with plain wooden posts and lintel. The house has a one and one-half-story gable-roof rear extension, and various other one and two-story shed, gable, and hip-roof extensions have been made along either side and to the back.

Originally constructed as a house, the building first appears on published maps in 1890. By 1948 the building featured its current footprint, but remained a residence. It was not until 1969 that the city directory reveals that the former residence was used in part for commercial purposes. At that time, the building occupants were listed as Ward F. Leonard, Chiropractor, with Mrs. Mary L. Marston and Robert Hillenbrand each residing in second-floor apartments. By the late 1970s the entire building was dedicated to the Gratiot Chiropractic Clinic and chiropractors L. J. Berryo and Kathryn I. Berryo.

***408-410. Suydam Building (1907); James Chase, contractor***

The office building is a two-story smooth and rock-faced concrete block building of rectangular massing, with its broad front facing the street. Beltcourses at first and second-story window sill and lintel level and below the parapet and quoins and midsections of façade above the second-story windows display rock-face blocks, while the rest of the front is constructed of smooth blocks with angled edges. Fenestration defines the three-bay width and two-bay depth of the building. The symmetrical three-bay façade has a central entry and stepped parapet. The entry, originally containing two side-by-side doors but with one now infilled, is slightly recessed in the center bay and flanked by a triple modern fixed window in each side bay. A pair of single-light fixed windows, separated by a narrow concrete block pier, lights the center of the second story with additional broad single-light windows in each of the side bays. False shutters ornament each set of windows. The narrow north end elevation is lit with four single one-over-one windows. A narrow-fronted two-story block extension containing a single door has been added to the south end of the front, and a single-story addition with an unglazed door is present on the east corner of the north elevation. A large sign panel fills most of the space between the first and second-story windows.

The building was constructed for Alma doctor John Franklin Suydam, who practiced from roughly 1881 to 1920. When first announced in the *Alma Press*, it was reported that the:

new office will be of cement blocks and erected on the doctor's property.... The Plans call for a building 41 × 22 feet and it will

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**Woodworth Avenue, East Side (continued)**

be both graceful and modern. Not only will the office be attractive from the exterior, but the fine new office fixtures will welcome all visiting patients.

The building was also used as an office for a justice of the peace in the early twentieth century, as well as a bicycle, lawn mower, and appliance shop. In the late 1930s and 1940s, Dr. John Rottschafer used the building to store his furniture and medical equipment. The Franklin Finance Company and Lodewyk and Nesen Insurance Agency leased the building in the 1950s, and the Lodewyk and Nesen Insurance Company presently occupies the building.

Sources: Sanborn Map, *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1910); *Alma Record*, "New Office Building," 13 February 1907, 1; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma's Public Building (City Hall); Alma, Michigan.

***418. House / Mid-Pointe Appraising (Built before 1884)***

The two-story front-gabled house sits on a concrete parged foundation. The exterior of the house is clad with vinyl siding and presents little detailing. The asymmetrical fenestration pattern of the façade includes a door situated at the north corner under a gable roofed open entry stoop. A large single-light window flanked by false shutters is the only fenestration on the façade's first floor. The upper floor of the façade has two one-over-one windows, with false shutters, under the gable. The south and north side elevations are lit with four one-over-one windows with false shutters in varying sizes. A two-story modern deck has been added to the east (rear) elevation of the building.

The building, then a residence, shows on the first, 1884, Sanborn map. It remained a residence at least through 1948; however, as early as 1930, the city directory notes that the associated rear garage (420) is the home of Alma Tire Service and the Alma Radiator Service. At that time, the house was still used as a residence for Arthur W. Brannan. By the mid-1960s the house was occupied by Multi-Business Inc., window cleaners, along with Central Accounting, and the garage occupied by both Alma Radiator Service and Claude W. Hallock auto repair. By the end of the 1960s the house appears to have reverted entirely to use as a dwelling, occupied by Ernest D. Russell. This change was reversed by the mid-1970s when the house was occupied by the Head Shoppe, a beauty shop, and the garage by Alma Wholesale, distributor of roofing metals. In 1981 the beauty shop was known as Taylor's Twirl and Curl and the garage was converted into a warehouse for the Tartan House of Furniture. In 1992 both the house and garage are noted as vacant in the city directory, but Area-Wide Accounting Service and Robert J. Meinhardt were listed in the house from 1995 to 2005. There was no entry for the garage in those same years.

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**Woodworth Avenue, East Side (continued)**

***420. Garage Building (Built between 1924 and 1930)***

This single-story long and narrow gable-roof garage structure stands directly behind the house at 418 and is constructed with concrete block side and east end walls and a red brick west front. The front of the building features an overhead door at the south corner, a broad double window in the center and a pedestrian door at the north corner below a stepped parapet. The eastern third of the building was apparently added later, as shown by a joint in the concrete block and a larger size block used for the eastern section. Its east end contains a garage door and pedestrian entrance below a gable now clad in aluminum siding.

In 1924 the rear portion of the lot behind the house at 418 Woodworth included a small garage. By 1948 this had been replaced by the larger structure currently present, including both the original section and addition. At that time the building was labeled as "auto repair." The 1930 city directory lists both the Alma Tire Service and Alma Radiator Service along with the house at 418 Woodworth. By the mid-1960s the garage was occupied by both Alma Radiator Service and Claude W. Hallock, auto repair. The rear building seems to have housed auto repair businesses until the mid-1970s, when its occupant was listed in the city directory as Alma Wholesale, distributor of roofing metals. By 1981 the garage was serving as a warehouse for the Tartan House of Furniture. Since 1992 the garage building has not been listed in the city directory, suggesting it has remained vacant.

**Woodworth Avenue, West Side**

***311-315. Bank of Alma Building (ca. 1957)***

Broad-fronted flat-roof one-story International Style bank/office building with red brick walls and extensive aluminum-trimmed glass curtain walls with dark enameled aluminum bulkheads. The building has an L-shaped footprint with a taller and much larger rectangular bank structure that is set back from Woodworth, and a lower and smaller structure that, fronting it along the north end of its east, Woodworth side, extends closer to the street and contains the offices of a law firm. The main bank entrance, located near the center of the taller part's broad front, stands in the angle next to the lower section's south wall beneath a shallow canopy. A glass curtain wall, with dark enameled aluminum panel bulkheads, that fronts the taller bank part on the Woodworth side also presents a continuous window band that rises above the back of the lower law office area. Facing Woodworth the building's red brick walls are confined to an area at the south end of the bank's east façade and the front and side walls of the law office building. This contains no windows except those flanking a double-door glassed-in vestibule toward the north end of that part's front, which is about half the overall length of the building. The taller building's narrow north and south facades are also curtain walls above dark enameled metal panel bulkheads, the south one recessed between extensions of the brick east and west walls. The exposed rear wall is also of red brick. White enameled aluminum fascias outline the roof in both parts of the building. A two-story extension has been added alongside half the length of the rear façade. It is constructed with walls of brick closely matching the original. Lawns fringe the

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**Woodworth Avenue, West Side (continued)**

original building on the east and south (street-facing) sides, and there is an eagle-capped metal flagpole in the open space between the two building wings.

Several residences are listed at 311 and 315 Woodworth Avenue in 1956, but by 1958 the 311-15 Woodworth location is occupied by this large building containing both the Bank of Alma and the law offices of Goggin and Baker and Niles Insurance Agency. The shared use as bank and office space continues to the present, with the building now housing Firstbank of Alma and the Law Offices of William and Christopher Coggin, along with an investment firm.

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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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**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 Alma Downtown Historic District is significant at the local level under National Register criteria A, B, and C for its association with Alma's political, social, entertainment, and commercial history; Ammi Willard Wright; and architecture. The downtown district was historically (and remains today) the center of Alma's commercial activity, and the downtown commercial buildings continue to provide goods and services to Alma's and the region's residents. The district contains the Public Building, which housed village and then city government, including the police and fire station, for nearly seventy-five years. The Alma Downtown Historic District provided residents and visitors with entertainment and performing arts venues in the form of movie and vaudeville theaters and an opera house, all located in surviving buildings. Fraternal organizations like the Masons and Odd Fellows gathered in the upper rooms of commercial buildings downtown and some built their own meeting halls in the district. Despite Alma's modest size, the city has a rich history of fraternal organizations, and evidence of this social activity is still present in the Masonic and Odd Fellows halls in the downtown historic district, and in other standing buildings that contained halls used by these groups. Alma experienced a period of immense growth in the second half of the nineteenth century much of it due to leading businessman and citizen Ammi Willard Wright, and his importance is still evident in several major buildings within the historic district. For this reason, the Alma Downtown Historic District is also significant under National Register Criterion B. Finally, the district is significant under Criterion C for architecture, as the district contains Alma's most distinguished historic commercial, civic, and other buildings.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

In 1853 General Ralph Ely purchased land along the banks of the Pine River. Before the end of that winter he had cleared two acres of land and erected a log cabin, roughly twelve by fourteen feet in size. By 1854, and now accompanied by his wife, son, and three daughters (the first settlers of Arcada Township), Mr. Ely erected a mill at the location known as "Elyton" or "Ely's Mills."<sup>1</sup> Following the full organization of Gratiot County in February of 1855,<sup>2</sup> the pace of settlement within Gratiot County quickened, and three rival villages (Elyton, Ithaca, and St. Louis) were platted, each establishing mills and businesses and hoping to secure the county seat.<sup>3</sup> Despite Mr. Ely's best efforts (which included providing early settlers with transportation into

<sup>1</sup> Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan, *Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan Together with Reports of County, Town, and District Pioneer Societies*. Vol. 2, Second Edition, (Lansing: Robert Smith Printing Company, 1901), 265.

Willard D. Tucker, *Gratiot County, Michigan: Historical, Biographical, Statistical*, (Saginaw, Michigan: Press of Seeman and Peters, 1913), 595-596.

<sup>2</sup> John H. Long (Ed.), *Michigan Atlas of Historical County Boundaries*. Compiled by Peggy Tuck Sinko (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1997), 104.

<sup>3</sup> Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan, *Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan*, 266.

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the region, furnishing provisions, and bringing about the demise of a dam built in St. Louis that was effectively preventing river traffic to Elyton), the county seat was awarded to Ithaca in 1856.<sup>4</sup> The Village of Elyton was surveyed in 1856 by S. S. Hastings. Then two years later James Gargett platted a larger nearby area and named it "Alma." The unusual name is likely a reference to the Battle of Alma, fought during the Crimean War (1854-1856).<sup>5</sup> Alma experienced greater growth; before long the villages were combined under the Alma name.

Alma's growth and prosperity in the second half of the nineteenth century was largely the result of lumbering and agricultural activities in the surrounding region, the opening of railroads serving the community, and Ammi Wright's investments and entrepreneurial activities. Lumbering in the region north of Alma spurred growth in the second half of the nineteenth century. It led to the establishment of lumber-based industries in Alma and, like agriculture, provided a market for Alma merchants. The first sawmill was established in 1856 by Mr. Ely, followed by an additional sawmill erected by Pierce and Ward in 1868. A shingle mill was established as well, sometime between 1881 and 1894; it ran in conjunction with an excelsior factory between 1888 and 1891. Lumber products such as sashes, doors, blinds, and barrel hoops were manufactured in the village up until the early 1890s. Several attempts to establish furniture factories within the city all failed, and lumbering ceased to be a major industry in this part of Michigan by the 1890s.<sup>6</sup>

Another of Alma's early economic pursuits was agriculture, particularly wheat and corn production and stock-raising.<sup>7</sup> Early settlers struggled to cultivate the land around Alma, due to the swampiness of the ground and frequent fall and spring frosts. But with improved farming methods and land drainage, settlers were soon able to plant and harvest crops, turning the area around Alma into a prosperous agricultural region. Competition from farmers in the west resulted in Alma farmers turning to specialized crops, and to focusing on stock-raising. Around the turn of the century, Wright introduced local farmers to the cultivation of sugar beets and started the Alma Sugar Company, a beet sugar refinery.<sup>8</sup> Sugar beets, beans, sheep, and dairying became important agricultural mainstays in the Alma area by the turn of the century.<sup>9</sup>

The prosperity of the agricultural region around Alma in turn helped the small village of Alma to grow and flourish. The first grist and flour mills were erected in 1857, followed by additional flour and grist mills in the decades that followed. The mills were located along a millrace that, dug early in Alma's history, split from the generally northeast-flowing Pine River just above State Street south of the downtown, where a dam created a pond, and ran northeasterly and then north along what is now Pine Street between Center and E. Superior and then back into the river a few hundred feet northeast. James Gargett erected a woolen mill in 1869; this burned in 1880,

<sup>4</sup> Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan, *Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan*, 267-269.

<sup>5</sup> Parm Mayer, *Centennial Souvenir Program, City of Alma* (Alma, MI: Alma Centennial Corporation, 1956), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Tucker, *Gratiot County, Michigan*, 595.

Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Martin Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Libraries, 1935), 4.

<sup>8</sup> McMacken, *Alma: Images of America*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 4.

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along with a flour mill and grist mill. In 1881 A. W. Wright and W. S. Turck purchased the site of Gargett's flour mill on the south side of Superior Street, on the west bank of the millrace just west of the site of the present Advanced Glass building (408-410 East Superior Street).<sup>10</sup> The Turck and Wright Flour Mills (later Alma Roller Mills) was constructed on the site of the former Gargett's flour mill and opened for business in February 1882.<sup>11</sup> It was three stories tall and housed eleven rollers to crush the grain.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the Alma Roller Mills was one of the first mills in the state to use the new roller milling technology.<sup>13</sup> The woolen mill was rebuilt, but again burned down in 1884. A flax mill was erected in 1889.<sup>14</sup> Well after Alma's industry no longer required water power to operate, the millrace remained a feature of central Alma.<sup>15</sup> In 1928 the race was filled in through a gift by Sarah Wright Lancashire to the City of Alma as part of the construction of a new bridge over the Pine River. Mrs. Lancashire specified that the new bridge be named in honor of her late father, Ammi W. Wright.<sup>16</sup>

Early manufacturing establishments in Alma included a foundry and machine shop, the Alma Foundry, that was established in 1871. Originally built to produce plows and stoves, in later years the foundry also produced carriages, wagons, and bobsleds. A number of blacksmiths, shoemakers, harness makers, and saddle makers also set up shop in Alma around this time; however, manufacturing was not a major industry in Alma until after the turn of the century, well after lumbering ceased to be a leading economic driver.<sup>17</sup>

In 1872 a Village of Alma was established. The settlement had seventy residents by 1860, 404 by 1870, 467 by 1880, 1,665 by 1890 and 2,047 by 1900.<sup>18</sup> By 1880 the Village of Alma was growing more rapidly than neighboring towns, due in large part to improved transportation. Up until 1868-69, when a plank road to Saginaw was constructed, the only way in and out of Alma was via the Pine River or one of several primitive dirt roads. The plank road was followed by the construction of the Chicago, Saginaw & Canada Railroad in 1875 and the Saginaw Valley & St. Louis Railroad in 1879.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 58; Although the original construction of the mill race is unknown, it was likely in place by the 1860s. In 1880, Sanborn maps reveal that the race begins near the junction of South State and Mechanic Streets moving generally northeast until it rejoins the Pine River between East Superior and Downie Streets and west of Pine Street. The mill race was operational until 1924 when the Alma Roller Mills renovated their power system and switched to electric motors from water power.

<sup>11</sup> Sanborn-Perris Map, *Alma, Michigan* (New York, NY: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co., Limited, 1884).

<sup>12</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous, *Alma Sesquicentennial Program* (n.p., 2006), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Tucker, *Gratiot County, Michigan*, 599.

Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Sanborn-Perris Map, *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, NY: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, Limited, 1884); Sanborn Map, *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1924).

<sup>16</sup> McMacken, *Alma: Images of America*, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Graydon M. Meints, *Michigan Railroads & Railroad Companies* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992); Tucker, *Gratiot County, Michigan*, 598; Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 7-8.

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The Chicago, Saginaw & Canada Railroad Company was established in 1872 in St. Louis, Michigan. In 1875 the line opened between St. Louis and Riverdale, about ten miles west of Alma, providing Alma with its first railroad connection, but the company then went into receivership. In 1883 it came under the control of the Detroit, Lansing & Northern.<sup>20</sup> The line passed through Alma's southeast industrial core near the intersection of Woodworth Avenue and Mechanic Street. The 1884 Sanborn indicates the line ran in a southwesterly to northeasterly direction through the city.

The Saginaw Valley & St. Louis Railroad was incorporated on May 16, 1871, and originally ran between East Saginaw and St. Louis, Michigan, a few miles northeast of Alma. The railroad was reincorporated as the Saginaw & Grand Rapids in 1878. It reached Alma in 1879, providing the city with connections to St. Louis, Grand Rapids, Mt. Pleasant, and Ithaca, Michigan, and with the Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad. The line ran in a northwesterly to southeasterly direction through Alma, running roughly south near the western section of the commercial district before turning east to the industrial sector near the Pine River and millrace. A passenger depot was located on the east side of Prospect Avenue, north of West Mechanic Street.<sup>21</sup>

The city's third railroad was the Toledo, Ann Arbor & Mt. Pleasant Railway, which was built north from Ithaca in 1884. Initially the line was to pass through nearby St. Louis, bypassing Alma. Recognizing that the economic prosperity of small cities was directly tied to their access to good rail connections, Wright and his business partners did not want Alma to be cut off from the Toledo, Ann Arbor & Mt. Pleasant. Alma interests including Ammi Wright therefore countered St. Louis by building their own Lansing, Alma, & Mt. Pleasant (or LAMP) in 1885.

The LAMP was located near the northern line of expansion of the Toledo, Ann Arbor & Mt. Pleasant and would run parallel to it, potentially siphoning off much of its business and resulting in ruinous competition. The Ashley family, primary investors in the Toledo, Ann Arbor & Mt. Pleasant, realized it would be folly to complete their parallel line. In the end the Ashleys and Wright agreed that the Ann Arbor line, rather than passing directly through St. Louis, would make a bend just south of St. Louis and run to Alma, from there connecting with the LAMP road.<sup>22</sup> The rerouting of the Toledo, Ann Arbor & Mt. Pleasant Railway effectively resulted in the main line passing through Alma and cutting off St. Louis in 1886. The two railroads merged in November of that year, forming the Toledo, Ann Arbor, and Northern Michigan Railway Company.<sup>23</sup> Both the Saginaw Valley and St. Louis Railroad Company and the Saginaw & Western Railroad Company were merged with the Detroit, Grand Rapids & Western in 1897. The line was sold again to the Pere Marquette Railroad two years later, in 1899.<sup>24</sup> The construction and amalgamation of the railroads played an important role in Alma's prosperity in

<sup>20</sup> Meints, *Michigan Railroads & Railroad Companies*.

<sup>21</sup> *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1917).

<sup>22</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines: The Story of Ammi Willard Wright, Michigan Lumberman, Capitalist, and Philanthropist* (Alma Public Library: Alma, MI, 2003), 76.

<sup>23</sup> Meints, *Michigan Railroads & Railroad Companies*; Tucker, *Gratiot County, Michigan*, 598.

Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> <sup>24</sup> Meints, *Michigan Railroads & Railroad Companies*, 184-185.

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the early twentieth century, expanding its markets and turning Alma into the primary marketing and distribution center in the county.

A number of improvements made to local roadways and the increasing availability of automobiles further helped to expand the population and economic base of Alma in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1905, the same year in which Alma was incorporated as a city, a law providing state aid to local governments for the purposes of building and improving roads was passed, stimulating gravel road construction leading to the city. Road construction was further stimulated by the Federal Aid Act of 1916 which provided for the creation of trunk line highways. By 1929 Alma was linked to all main cities by high grade cement highways. While these improved roads stimulated market activity within Alma, they also forced local merchants into competition with those in surrounding cities, diminishing the importance of local wholesaling. The new roadways also encouraged a proliferation of chain stores, which also had impacts upon local merchants.<sup>25</sup>

Like so many other enterprises in Alma, the very first commercial building was established by Mr. Ely in the late 1850s. The first post office was kept in this store, with Mr. Ely serving as the first postmaster, a position to which he was appointed on July 7, 1857.<sup>26</sup> By 1884 the downtown commercial district extended along Superior Street from just east of Woodworth to a point midway between State Street and Church Street (now Prospect Avenue). Additional commercial development was located on State Street from a point midway between Center and Superior to midway between Superior and Park (now Downie) streets. Until 1880, when the Wright Opera House Block was built, nearly all buildings were wood frame. Following construction of Ammi Wright's two large brick buildings, the Opera House Block and the Wright House hotel, more brick buildings began to appear, including the massive Church Block in 1886.<sup>27</sup> By 1890 the pace of development was picking up, with more buildings being constructed, particularly on the south side of Superior Street between State and Water streets (now Gratiot Avenue). Though the district still did not expand far beyond Woodworth or State, its building density had increased, as did the number of brick buildings.<sup>28</sup> Six years later, in 1896, the Sanborn maps indicate the district still retained its general dimensions, except for a few undeveloped lots on State Street between Superior and Center, and on Superior Street between Woodworth and Water/Gratiot.<sup>29</sup>

By 1902 brick and stone buildings had replaced more frame structures on Superior Street between State Street and Water/Gratiot. Most notable additions are the Village Hall and the new Pollasky Block, which stood at the southwest corner of the prime Superior/State intersection.<sup>30</sup> By 1910, Water Street had been renamed Gratiot Avenue and Church Street had been renamed Prospect Avenue. By 1917 Prospect Avenue had been extended north of Superior to Downie Street and both sides of Superior had been completely built up between State and Gratiot. The

<sup>25</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 16-17.

<sup>26</sup> Mayer, *Centennial Souvenir Program, City of Alma*, 12.

Tucker, *Gratiot County, Michigan*, 599.

<sup>27</sup> Sanborn-Perris Map, *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, NY: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, Limited, 1884).

<sup>28</sup> Sanborn-Perris Map, *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, NY: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, Limited, 1890).

<sup>29</sup> Sanborn-Perris Map, *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, NY: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, Limited, 1896).

<sup>30</sup> Sanborn Map, *Alma, Gratiot County, Michigan* (New York, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1902).

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commercial district had expanded westward from State nearly to the intersection of Prospect, although some residential uses were still mixed in.<sup>31</sup> Sanborn maps from 1924 illustrate that State Street had also become significantly more built up between Superior and Center. By this time, the commercial district had assumed most of its present dimensions.<sup>32</sup> Further development consisted primarily of building up Superior between Prospect and Pine avenues, and extending commercial development on State Street between Superior and Center streets. Residential use has historically bordered the downtown area to the north, south, and west.

The population of Alma grew rapidly in the first two decades of the twentieth century. By 1910 it had reached 2,757 and by 1920 7,542, nearly tripling the previous figure. Part of the community's growth stemmed from agriculture-based industries. This was accomplished by a series of expansions and acquisitions beginning with the establishment in 1886 of the Wright, Schneider, and Stuttz Creamery. This firm was reorganized as the Central Michigan Produce Company in 1903. Five years later, the company was acquired by Swift and Company, which continued to expand business greatly and served as a major employer within Alma. Other food-related industries include the Alma Sugar Company, whose beet sugar plant opened in 1899, and the Libby, McNeill, and Libby pickle canning plant in 1913.<sup>33</sup> This period of prosperity is also reflected in Alma's financial and real estate history, when the Alma Building and Loan Association attained its highest volume of loans in 1921. In that year, it saw the construction of more than \$40,000 worth of buildings and improvements in the community.<sup>34</sup> By this time, Alma was home to two banking institutions. The First State Bank of Alma (formerly W. S. Turck and Company) was worth \$1.5 million in 1920, while the Alma State Savings Bank was worth \$700,000. At the same time, the total assessed value of real estate in Alma was estimated to rise from \$707,000 in 1900 to \$7.9 million in 1921.<sup>35</sup>

Alma experienced especially rapid growth between the years of 1915 and 1920. This growth resulted from the growth of industry, particularly industries supporting the war effort during World War I. A primary factor in the city's growth then was the Republic Truck Company. The firm was a major truck manufacturer during World War I and the single most important industry in Alma at the time. It has been argued that the Republic Truck Company was responsible for driving Alma's economic advances between 1915 and 1920.<sup>36</sup> The company was organized in 1913 by a group of local men. They leased the former Alma Manufacturing Company plant, which in 1903 had been set up to produce gasoline engines. By 1914 the new company had produced 127 trucks. Production increased dramatically in the next three years, and by 1917 the company has sold over 12,000 trucks. The volume of the company's business peaked in 1919 at \$16,513,000.

<sup>31</sup> *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1917).

<sup>32</sup> Sanborn Map, *Alma, Gratiot County, Michigan* (New York, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1924).

<sup>33</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 11-12; Arthur Martin Weimer, "Factors Determining the Economic Development of a Michigan 'Country Town'" *The Journal of Political Economy* XLIII, no. 2 (April 1935): 218.

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Unfortunately for the Republic Truck Company, the end of World War I caused a cessation in the demand for trucks, as old army trucks were converted for civilian use, causing production to decrease dramatically. The company went into receivership in 1923. Reorganized, it remained in business for several more years. In 1931 the plant was sold to the Sterling Manufacturing Company of Milwaukee.<sup>37</sup> The rapid rise of the Republic Truck Company had dramatic positive effects upon the economic development of Alma, as it drew workers into town, increasing the overall economic activity and allowing for the creation of additional businesses, both industrial and retail.

Population growth was checked by a period of decline in the 1920s. This decline was blamed in part on the diminishing importance of the Republic Truck Company and on changes that were being made to railroads that serviced the community.<sup>38</sup> The population of Alma, as reported by the United States Census, had dropped to 6,734 by 1930.<sup>39</sup>

But the impact of the demise of the Republic Truck Company was softened by the rise of the oil refining industry which came to Alma in the 1930s in the form of two major companies: Leonard Petroleum (later Leonard Refineries, Inc., which eventually became Total Petroleum) and Mid-West Refining Division. The oil industry served as a major economic force within the city up until 2000.<sup>40</sup> The success of the oil industry and the former truck company paved the way for a number of other manufacturing industries to take root in Alma. Polk's 1956 city directory lists the major manufacturing firms at that time as Leonard Refineries, Inc. and Mid-West Refining Division,<sup>41</sup> the Lobdell-Emery Manufacturing Company, the Alma Piston Company, the Alma Trailer Company, and Crippen Manufacturing Company (makers of farm machinery).

Of particular note among Alma based manufacturers is New Moon Homes, Inc. The firm was established almost by accident when founders Harold and William Redman, along with their engineer friend Allen Hathaway, built a house on wheels as a hunting trailer.<sup>42</sup> When other men in town also wanted one of their trailers the Alma Trailer Company was born. The firm occupied a portion of the vacant Republic Truck Company complex and manufactured Silvermoon House Trailers. It is unclear when James Ryan, an investor in the original company, purchased fifty-one percent of the business and reorganized the firm, but when this happened the Redmans started a new firm. The new company, known sometimes as Redman Trailer Co., had huge success manufacturing its New Moon Trailers. So great was this success that by 1948 it was called one of the "biggest of the country's 200-odd trailer manufacturers."<sup>43</sup> The company

<sup>37</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 13-14.

<sup>38</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 11-12; Arthur Martin Weimer, "Factors Determining the Economic Development of a Michigan 'Country Town'" *The Journal of Political Economy* XLIII, no. 2 (April 1935): 209.

<sup>39</sup> Weimer, "Factors Determining the Economic Development of a Michigan 'Country Town'" *The Journal of Political Economy* XLIII, no. 2 (April 1935): 209.

<sup>40</sup> "About Alma," accessed November 26, 2012, [http://www.ci.alma.mi.us/1/307/about\\_alma.asp](http://www.ci.alma.mi.us/1/307/about_alma.asp)

Polk, *Polk's Alma, St. Louis, Ithaca (Gratiot County, Michigan) City Directory, 1956*, (Detroit, Michigan: R. L. Polk and Company, 1957), 12.

<sup>41</sup> Polk, *Alma City Directory, 1956*, 12.

<sup>42</sup> McMacken, *Alma: Images of America*, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Kobler, John. "People in Trailers," in *Life*, December 13, 1948, 18-29.

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gained even greater fame when, in 1953, a New Moon trailer was selected as a "featured player" in the movie *The Long, Long Trailer*, starring Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz as honeymooners. A publication by the firm from 1953 noted that the company's trailer that figured so prominently in the film's success obtained the role in competition with over 200 other models, with the New Moon determined to be the "best-looking, best-made and best-known in the entire country."<sup>44</sup> A few years later company advertising revealed that the firm had expanded their inventory to include "The Malibu," a three bedroom house with an all-metal kitchen, carport, and full basement which could be manufactured, erected, and occupied within thirty days.<sup>45</sup>

The development of an expanded industrial base, including New Moon Homes, caused the population of Alma to once again trend upward. By 1950 the city's population had reached 8,341, and by 1960 it had reached 8,978. By 1970 the population had reached 9,611, accounting for roughly one-quarter of the entire population of Gratiot County, which at that time numbered 39,246 (Forstall 1995).<sup>46</sup>

The commercial district underwent a significant evolution in the post-World War II period through the early 1960s. The changes included some demolition of older structures and new construction, but consisted primarily in very extensive building and storefront modernizations. The physical area of the district itself did not expand greatly. Much of the new construction is located on North State Street south of Superior, and East Superior Street. New construction included the four buildings at the south end of the 300 block on N. State Street's east side (302-310), all built in the 1945-56 period, plus 322 N. State, built in the early 1960s. The McKee Building, 216 E. Superior, was built in 1948; the former Frederickson's Motor Sales, 408-10 E. Superior, ca. 1945-48; and Pizza Sam's, 104 E. Superior, with its Mid-century Modern enameled metal panel front, dates from 1962. The largest of the new buildings were two chain department store buildings, the 1956 W. T. Grant store at 102 W. Superior and the ca. 1959 J. J. Newberry store at 324 N. State, and two large "combination" buildings that each combined two distinct functions: the ca. 1957 Bank of Alma Building, 311-15 Woodworth, which has a visually separate office building component built to house the Goggin & Baker law firm, and the 1963 Central National Bank/Masonic Temple Building, 301 North State Street, which has the banking quarters in the ground story and Masonic Temple upstairs. The Strand Theater at 317-319 East Superior was also a new structure from this time period, built in 1961-62, though replacing a previous theater that burned in 1960. But even more numerous than the new buildings were the older ones that were modernized during this period with new ground-floor storefronts or entire facades. Two of the district's older commercial buildings, 314-16 N. State and 319 E. Superior, retain street facades rebuilt during this period, albeit with some modernizations since then, and at least eleven others retain ground-story storefront remodeling done during the 1950s or early 1960s, including the Pollasky Block's three eastern storefronts.

<sup>44</sup> New Moon Homes, Inc. *Planning Guide for Mobile Living*, (Alma, MI: New Moon Homes, Inc., 1953).

<sup>45</sup> Alma Centennial Corporation, *Centennial Souvenir Program, City of Alma, 1856-1956* (Alma, MI: Alma Centennial Corporation, 1956).

<sup>46</sup> "About Alma," accessed November 26, 2012, [http://www.ci.alma.mi.us/1/307/about\\_alma.asp](http://www.ci.alma.mi.us/1/307/about_alma.asp)

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## Commerce

Alma's economic prosperity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is reflected in a large number of commercial buildings standing in the district, not the least among them being the Wright Opera House Block (101 East Superior Street), the Church Block (now called the Highland Block, at 202-214 East Superior Street), the Vermeulen Block (116-120 East Superior Street), and the Pollasky Block (101-109 West Superior Street). General Nathan Church of Ithaca built the Church Block in 1886.<sup>47</sup> George S. Young of Alma was the contractor, and served as the contractor for the construction of several other buildings in the district, including the Ammi Wright House and the Pollasky Block. The large two-story Church Block includes six storefronts which have housed a variety of businesses since its construction. Several grocers occupied the storefront at the corner of East Superior and Woodworth, including the Miller Brothers, Eichenberg's, Niles and Son, Byerly's, and Fowler's. Several restaurants and bakeries were also located in the Church Block, in addition to a wide variety of other small businesses such as meat, shoe, furniture and music stores, the J. E. Fuller Harness Shop, confectioners, bookstores, general stores, and Forquer's Bicycle Shop. The post office was also located here in the early years of the twentieth century. The upper story housed doctors' and lawyers' offices and was used as meeting space by the Masons and American Legion in the early twentieth century and 1950s, respectively.<sup>48</sup>

The Vermeulen Block, sometimes known as the Lee Mercantile Building, was constructed between 1891 and 1893.<sup>49</sup> Henry J. Vermeulen purchased the lot from William Bahlke in 1890. The building originally housed Vermeulen's General Store. In 1893 Vermeulen mortgaged the building with W. S. Turck and Company in order to build the eastern addition, which soon housed some of Alma's early theaters. These include the Fishbeck Theatre, the Alma Vaudette, the Genesta Theatre and the Liberty Theatre.<sup>50</sup> The Lee Mercantile Company took over the department store operations in 1900 and operated on consignment from Marshall Field of Chicago, but went out of business in 1910.<sup>51</sup> That same year, the Alma State Savings Bank purchased the building, remodeling number 116 for its use in 1913.<sup>52</sup> The bank remained in the Vermeulen Block until it merged with the First State Bank in 1956 to become the Bank of

<sup>47</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>48</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*. Anonymous, *Alma Sesquicentennial Program* (n.p., 2006), 19; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>49</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>50</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>51</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>52</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

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Alma.<sup>53</sup> Other occupants of the Vermeulen Block included the Fred Grover Drug Store, Look-Patterson Drug Store, grocers, realtors, barbers, and dealers in general merchandise. When the Liberty Theatre went out of business in the 1920s, Alma businessman John Luchini leased the building for a recreational facility, installing a bowling alley on the second floor.<sup>54</sup>

The Pollasky Block was designed by Haug and Scheurmann of Saginaw and constructed in 1897.<sup>55</sup> It was built to replace Michael Pollasky's original 1871 general store, which burned in 1893.<sup>56</sup> The original frame building faced North State Street, which had been the primary thoroughfare through Alma; however, after the fire, the large Late Victorian building was constructed to front West Superior Street, which had replaced State Street as the primary commercial street. The present Late Victorian brick and stone Pollasky Block is far more elaborate than the original wood frame building. The new building housed a corner drug store, Messenger's men's store, and the D. W. Robinson department store. Various other department, clothing, and shoe stores also occupied the building, and the upper floor was used for office space.<sup>57</sup>

The Opera House, Church, Vermeulen, and Pollasky blocks are the most prominent commercial buildings in the Alma Downtown Historic District, but the numerous small buildings also provided important commercial services in the downtown commercial core. For example, the Creaser Building, located at 112 East Superior Street, was built in 1911 and housed a dry goods store, offices, and a confectioner's shop.<sup>58</sup> The neighboring Caple Building at 114 East Superior Street was constructed at the turn of the century and housed a variety of hardware businesses.<sup>59</sup> In the mid-twentieth century, the side wall between the Creaser Building and the Caple Building was removed in order to join the two buildings.<sup>60</sup>

The Bahlke Block at 119 East Superior Street was built around the turn of the century and housed offices, Geller's Jewelry Store, and what would become the Alma State Savings Bank.<sup>61</sup> William A. Bahlke was an Alma attorney who was also active in establishing the Alma Sugar Company in 1898, the Alma State Savings Bank in 1901 and the Alma Manufacturing Company

<sup>53</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>54</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>55</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>56</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>57</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>58</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>59</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>60</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>61</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

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in 1903. He also served as village president in 1901, and was a long-time president of the Alma Board of Trade and the Alma Realty Company.<sup>62</sup> In 1907 Bahlke and Mark Spinney purchased the Union Telephone Company and located their headquarters in the Lancashire Block (now the Wright Opera House Block Annex). The telephone company operated in the Lancashire Block until the General Telephone Company of Michigan bought the company in 1957.<sup>63</sup>

Henry James Lancashire, Wright's son-in-law and a member of the Alma Realty Company, built the Lancashire Block next to the Wright Opera House Block at the turn of the century. The building housed the H. J. Lancashire and Company business and a variety of other commercial enterprises.

The J. A. Bartley Building, located at 125 East Superior Street, was built in 1915 and served as a grocery and meat store before it became a men's clothing store. Housing is present on the second story.<sup>64</sup> The Perry Building at 126-128 East Superior Street is a two-story building with three storefronts that have been used variously as a dry goods store, grocery, café, Sears catalog office, dress shop, shoe store, finance company, Home Credit Company and Loans, and a photo lab.<sup>65</sup> Braveheart's Pub, located at 218 East Superior Street, is a two-story brick building constructed in 1910. It originally served as Clement Brewer's Meat Market, but John Luchini later converted it to a recreational hall. The building has steadily functioned as a variety of different taverns since 1947.<sup>66</sup> The Spinney Building, located at 211-215 East Superior Street, was constructed ca. 1917 and historically operated as an automobile sales and repair shop.<sup>67</sup> It has also housed a wagon shop, garage, dry cleaners, optometry, and realty offices.<sup>68</sup> The Merchants Building at 111 West Superior Street was built in the 1890s and housed various businesses such as G. V. Wright, furniture and undertaker, a dry goods store, and Western Auto.<sup>69</sup> Shortly after 1900, the *Alma Journal* (originally the *Alma Argus* and later the *Alma Record*) occupied one half of the building.<sup>70</sup>

The buildings discussed above are some of the more prominent commercial buildings in the Alma Downtown Historic District. It is important to note, however, that there are several older commercial buildings in the district that appear on the earliest, 1884 Sanborn maps. These buildings (115 East Superior, 117 East Superior, 201 East Superior, and 124-128 East Superior)

<sup>62</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>63</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>64</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous, *Alma Sesquicentennial Program* (n.p., 2006), 19.

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, *Alma Sesquicentennial Program* (n.p., 2006), 19.

<sup>67</sup> *Alma, Michigan*, (New York, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1917)

<sup>68</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>69</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>70</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

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are some of the oldest brick and frame buildings in the district. Although the façades and storefronts have been rebuilt, the buildings are a testament to the early commercial activity in Alma.

As Alma's commercial activity increased, its banking institutions provided important support and services to the community's residents and businesses. Alma's first bank was founded in 1880 by W. S. Turck and W. E. Winton as Turck, Winton and Company, and reorganized in 1883 when Ammi Wright became a partner. It was reorganized under the name W. S. Turck and Company Bank, with offices located in the Opera House Block. The bank became a corporation, the First State Bank, in 1901, with Wright and Turck serving as president and vice-president, respectively. The State Savings Bank, established in 1901, had been located in the Vermeulen Block and the Bahlke Block. The First State Bank Building, located at 101 West Superior Street, was built in 1916.<sup>71</sup> When the Neoclassical building was completed, First State Bank moved there from its previous location in the Opera House Block. In 1956 these two banking institutions consolidated to form the Bank of Alma, building a new building at 311 Woodworth.<sup>72</sup>

As Alma transitioned into the mid- and late twentieth century, its downtown began to include more chain stores and businesses and auto-related services. A & P Food Store and Western Auto occupied storefronts on West Superior Street by the 1920s. J. C. Penney, J. J. Newberry, and Montgomery Ward all had stores in the 300 block of State Street by 1940 and through various periods of time from the 1940s to the 1970s, and W. T. Grant built a store at the northwest corner of State and West Superior in 1956.

Auto-related businesses began to appear in Alma's downtown in the 1920s and soon came to dominate the 300 block of East Superior. Forquer's garage and machine shop was located in the Gibson Brothers Building / Epler Building at 301 East Superior. Between 1914 and 1917 the building housed an auto sales and repair shop. In the 1940s it held a repair shop plus a filling station. The building at 311 East Superior originally functioned as an auto repair shop and filling station when it opened in the 1920s. Barton's Garage and La France Republic Division of Sterling Motors Corps, auto parts, occupied the building in the 1930s and 1940s respectively. Likewise, the buildings at 315-317, 319, and 408-10 East Superior housed businesses such as Tomlin-Riggle Motor Sales, Frederickson Motor Sales, Rays Automotive Supply Company, Super Service Garage, and Joynt Automotive Inc., auto parts. The building at 321 East Superior Street was originally a service station, and the current service station at 401 East Superior replaced a similar building which was originally built in the 1920s. An additional automotive-related property in the Alma Downtown Historic District is the one-time auto repair and tire shop garage building at 420 Woodworth Avenue.

<sup>71</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at the Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>72</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

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**Ammi Wright**

The Alma Downtown Historic District is also significant for the direct associations two of its buildings possess with Ammi Willard Wright, a lumberman and entrepreneur from Saginaw who became one of the most influential residents in Alma's history.<sup>73</sup> Wright's investments in Alma beginning in 1875 heralded a long period of economic and industrial prosperity in the town.<sup>74</sup> One biographer wrote of Wright's contributions to Alma in 1906 that he was "the citizen to whom that place is indebted for the greater number of its attractions, material and otherwise."<sup>75</sup> Early settlers did not have large amounts of capital available to invest in agriculture, the community, its transportation and marketing, or its economic development. As a result, Alma's early growth was slow. But Ammi Wright was able and willing to use his means and influence to promote Alma, resulting in a long period of economic growth and prosperity.<sup>76</sup>

Ammi (pronounced Ammy – like Sammy), was a lumberman, entrepreneur, and philanthropist. Born in Grafton, Vermont, in 1822, he moved to Detroit for a year in 1850. While there he dedicated himself to learning about the new businesses flourishing in the state. The following year, working in the lumber industry, Wright moved to Saginaw. His timing was perfect since the area was about to enter its most prosperous period. For the next approximately fifty years Wright was either a partner in or the primary owner of several different lumber companies. The last, the A. W. Wright Lumber Company, was established on January 1, 1883, with a capitalization of \$1.5 million.<sup>77</sup>

Even while maintaining an active role in his Saginaw-based lumber business, Wright made his Alma start in 1875 when he and his business partner James Dawson opened an Alma branch of their successful Saginaw general merchandise store, People's Dry Good Emporium and Temple of Arts.<sup>78</sup> The Alma branch was initially located on the ground floor of the Hulbert House hotel on East Superior Street. Rising to three stories, it was the largest commercial building in Alma until it burned in 1876.<sup>79</sup> After the fire, Wright and Dawson temporarily moved their business to the original Pollasky Block and purchased a large lot on the northeast corner of State Street and Superior Street for the purpose of constructing another store building. Ground-breaking took place on July 25, 1877, but construction was stalled for two years leaving an open hole at the site. It was not until 1879-80 that the building was finally erected.<sup>80</sup> In part the delay was due to changes in the business partnership. When Dawson withdrew from the partnership to move

<sup>73</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>74</sup> David McMacken, *Built On Pines: The Story of Ammi Willard Wright, Michigan Lumberman, Capitalist, and Philanthropist* (Alma Public Library: Alma, MI, 2003), 55.

<sup>75</sup> J. H. Beers, *Biographical Memoirs of Gratiot County, Michigan* (Chicago, IL: J. H. Beers and Company, 1906), 24.

<sup>76</sup> Weimer, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*, 11-12; Arthur Martin Weimer, "Factors Determining the Economic Development of a Michigan 'Country Town'" *The Journal of Political Economy* XLIII, no. 2 (April 1935): 215.

<sup>77</sup> J. H. Beers, *Biographical Memoirs of Gratiot County, Michigan* (Chicago, IL: J. H. Beers and Company, 1906), 27.

<sup>78</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 55.

<sup>79</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 55.

<sup>80</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 56.

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south, Wright went into business with his own brother-in-law, George D. Barton. The new building would contain five storefronts, the post office and a bank. The bank, operated by Alma businessman W. S. Turck, a son-in-law of Alma founder Ralph Ely, provided an important service to Alma's businessmen. The west end of the building above the corner stores housed an auditorium space, originally known as Barton and Company's Hall. Over time, the building became known as the Wright Opera House Block; it was completed in 1880.<sup>81</sup>

In the summer of 1882 Barton sold his interest in the company to Wright, though Barton and Company continued to deal in lumber and grain. Wright in turn took in partners Schneider and Stutz to form Wright, Schneider and Stutz, dealers in general merchandise and hardware goods.<sup>82</sup> The new company eventually occupied all five storefronts of the Wright Opera House Block.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to his contributions via the Wright Opera House Block, Ammi Wright was an influential leader in Alma's industrial and commercial history. Between 1875 and the first years of the 1880s, Ammi Wright helped establish three different Alma business firms: Barton and Company; Wright, Schneider and Company; and Turck and Wright.<sup>84</sup> He was also the primary force behind establishing the Alma Sugar Company, the Alma Roller Mills, the Alma Manufacturing Company and the Central Michigan Produce Company. These companies were among the last of Wright's major investments in Alma, and all were influential in promoting the community's development and prosperity.<sup>85</sup>

During most of his early association with Alma, Wright lived in temporary quarters. Although he started investing in farmland near Alma as early as 1879, he and his family (wife Harriett, daughter Sarah, and son George – the eldest son Ammi had died at the age of 21 in 1870) had a home in Saginaw.<sup>86</sup> But his frequent travels relating to business may have persuaded Wright to the need for a better hotel in Alma. In 1882 Wright announced plans to construct a brick hotel in Alma.<sup>87</sup> The Wright House held its grand opening on October 17, 1883.<sup>88</sup>

After years of illness, Harriet Wright died in 1884.<sup>89</sup> The following year, Ammi was married to a second wife, Anna Case, Harriet's former seamstress. The new couple did a large amount of entertaining out of the Wright House, and resided there for a few months while their new home was under construction. The large home, located at the northwest corner of North State Street

<sup>81</sup> McMacken, *Alma: Images of America*, 27.

<sup>82</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 59.

<sup>83</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 59.

<sup>84</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 59.

<sup>85</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>86</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 29, 60.

<sup>87</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 61.

<sup>88</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 61-63.

<sup>89</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 97.

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and Hulbert (now Downie), was designed by Detroit architects Spier and Rohms and constructed by Alma contractor George S. Young. The building was constructed beginning in June 1886 and completed the following year.<sup>90</sup>

Ammi Wright was also closely associated with the history of health care in the community. He was responsible for building the Alma Sanitarium, a mineral bath spa on State Street that was intended to compete with the nearby St. Louis, Michigan, whose Magnetic Mineral Springs made it a thriving spa in the years after the Civil War.<sup>91</sup> Located near the northwest corner of State Street and Downie Street, the sanitarium was known variously as the Alma Medical and Surgical Sanitarium, the Alma Springs Sanitarium, the Alma Hot Springs Sanitarium, the Alma Springs Hotel, and simply The Alma.<sup>92</sup> It operated between 1886 and the early 1900s, serving patients from across the Midwest who sought treatment in the mineral springs. Patients and visitors could also enjoy quiet recreational activities in the resort-like setting, including the adjacent Wright Park which featured pools, fountains, seats, swings, hammocks and shaded walkways.<sup>93</sup> The sanitarium closed in the early twentieth century as mineral baths faded in popularity.

After the original Michigan Masonic Home in Grand Rapids was destroyed by fire in 1910, Wright offered the former sanitarium building to the Masons as a replacement home.<sup>94</sup> The Michigan Masonic Home in Alma opened in 1912, and in 1915 a hospital was built next door. The original sanitarium buildings were deemed fire hazards and razed in 1934.<sup>95</sup> A new Michigan Masonic Home well north of the downtown was constructed in the 1930s, but the 1915 hospital remains in use today as the Wilcox Non-Profit Center and houses such services as the Gratiot County branches of the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, United Way, and child advocacy, community mental health and substance abuse agencies.

Along with the Wright Opera House Block, another building in the district with direct associations with Ammi Wright is his own home, at 503 State Street. Wright himself lived here until his death in 1912, his wife and sister-in-law until their deaths in 1925 and 1931, respectively. After that the house functioned as the R. B. Smith Memorial Hospital, established in 1934 by Alma resident Betsy Smith in memory of her husband, a popular Alma physician.<sup>96</sup> The Ammi Wright house functioned as Smith Memorial Hospital until overcrowding led to the construction of the Gratiot County Hospital in 1955.<sup>97</sup> Despite years of service as a hospital, the house survived remarkably intact, inside as well as out, and is now being rehabilitated by the same owners as the Wright Opera House Block.

<sup>90</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 98.

<sup>91</sup> McMacken, *Built On Pines*, 65.

<sup>92</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>93</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>94</sup> McMacken, *Images of America: Alma*, 8, 97.

<sup>95</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>96</sup> McMacken, *Images of America: Alma*, 98.

<sup>97</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

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## Politics and Government

In addition to its association with Ammi Wright and Alma's numerous businesses and commercial enterprises, the Alma Downtown Historic District is also significant in regards to the city's political history. Alma's Public Building (City Hall), located at 225 East Superior Street, replaced the former, outgrown village hall which was located on Woodworth Avenue. The Michigan Fireman's Association dedicated the building on June 10 and 11, 1903.<sup>98</sup> The west side of the building housed Alma's fire equipment while the east side served as the village hall with meeting and office space. After the city government was established on March 1, 1905, they added a police station and jail to the building. In 1918 a new fire station was added to the building facing Gratiot Street.<sup>99</sup> When the City of Alma assumed management of the library it, too, was moved into the new building into the former fire department space.<sup>100</sup> The original library, like the firehouse, had been located on Woodworth Avenue. When the library moved into the building, it effectively shifted the city's civic center to the downtown area, as the city offices, fire station, police, and library were concentrated in a single building.

## Social History

One of the city's oldest fraternal organizations continues to occupy quarters in the Alma Downtown Historic District. Masonry in Alma dates back to 1869.<sup>101</sup> Alma Lodge No. 244, F & AM, was chartered in 1869; the Order of the Eastern Star chapter in 1887; and Alma Chapter No. 123, Royal Arch Masons, established in 1889. Alma's Masons occupied a second-story hall in the east end of the Church Block, 202-14 E. Superior, following that building's construction in 1886. From 1918 or 19 to the early 1960s they occupied quarters in the Wright Opera House Block that included the former opera house space, which they renovated for their use. In 1963 the city's Masonic organizations under a Masonic Temple Association built a new Masonic Temple or Masonic Center as the second story of a building constructed in combination with a bank at 301 North State Street. The 1965 directory lists six organizations using the temple.<sup>102</sup>

Alma's Odd Fellows long occupied their Odd Fellows Hall or Temple at 313 N. State constructed in 1904. The Odd Fellows or International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) beginnings in Alma date back to 1886, when the *Alma Record* noted that, "for the past two or three months a few old resident Odd Fellow of this village have been favorably impressed with the fact that Alma should have a subordinate lodge of the I.O.O.F. and have been quietly but steadily laboring with that end in view."<sup>103</sup> The efforts of the local members paid off when on Friday, July 23, 1886, Alma Lodge No. 238 was instituted with a membership of twenty-five. The former International Order of Good Templars (I.O.G.T.) hall in the Adams Block was leased by the

<sup>98</sup> Davenport, *Historic Alma and Gratiot County*.

<sup>99</sup> Davenport, *Historic Alma and Gratiot County*.

<sup>100</sup> Davenport, *Historic Alma and Gratiot County*.

<sup>101</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>102</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>103</sup> *Alma Record*, "Odd Fellows of this Village," 30 July 1886, p. 1;

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newly formed lodge. A Superior Rebekah Lodge No. 101 was established in 1887. In 1904 Alma's IOOF lodges constructed the lodge building which still stands today at 313 N. State. In May 1904, when the new building was ready to receive its cornerstone, a parade drew members from across the region to celebrate. The *Alma Record* reported:

The line of the parade was formed in front of the K. of P. [Knights of Pythias] hall at one o'clock p.m. with the Ithaca band in the lead and followed by the Canton from Ithaca, I.O.O.F. and Rebekah members. The line of march consisted from the K. of P. hall to Woodworth-ave., from there to Center-st., and then to State-st., to site of the building.<sup>104</sup>

On May 13, 1904, the *Alma Record* reported that the two-story building would contain the lodge quarters in the second story while the ground floor would be rented for business enterprises.<sup>105</sup> The following month, on June 10, 1904, the *Alma Record* noted that the new \$10,000 Odd Fellows Temple cornerstone had been laid. The ceremony and laying of the cornerstone culminated with the deposit of a time capsule box in the stone. The time capsule contained a copy of the "Detroit Free Press of June 10, 1904, the *Alma Record* of June 3, 1904, the roster of the Alma encampment, the Rebekah lodge, I.O.O.F. lodge, a package of coins in present use, a photograph of the Howland Family of nine sons and the program of the exercises of the day."<sup>106</sup> City directories list IOOF Lodge No. 238 and Superior Rebekah Lodge No. 101 at 313 ½ N. State through the 1997 edition.

Although the City of Alma is not a large community, the importance of fraternal organizations is evident. In addition to the Masons and Odd Fellows a number of other fraternal organizations had local lodges in Alma that had meeting places in downtown buildings, including the local Grand Army of the Republic tent, established in 1883; the Maccabees, 1891; the Knights of Pythias, 1891; and the Modern Woodmen of America, established in 1900.<sup>107</sup>

### Entertainment/Recreation

The Alma Downtown Historic District has historically been home to several movie and performing arts theaters, and the two-block area between North State Street and Woodworth Avenue long served as the center of entertainment and performing arts venues in Alma. Due to the brevity of movie reels in the early years of the twentieth century, many theaters, including Alma's early ones, used vaudeville and other acts as supplementary material.

A succession of early movie theaters or vaudettes occupied the east storefront of the Vermuelen Block, 116-20 E. Superior, in the early twentieth century. These included the Fishbeck Theatre,

<sup>104</sup> *Alma Record*, "Building Boom is Now on in Alma," 13 May, 1904, p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

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Alma Vaudette, Genesta Theatre, and Liberty Theatre. The Alma was described as Alma's first fully equipped movie/vaudeville venue, with a stage, pit, terraced seats, and projection booth. The Vaudette and Gilbert Raison de la Genesta's Genesta reportedly relied heavily on vaudeville and other entertainment to supplement the moving picture fare. Genesta, an Alma resident, was himself a successful performer and entertainer. A respected hypnotist and illusionist, he had been a member of Houdini's troupe for a time and had performed in theaters across the country.<sup>108</sup>

The Wright Opera House Block, with its "opera house" auditorium with stage on the west end, hosted numerous touring theater groups, including those on the Detroit to Grand Rapids circuit and some well-known companies from further east. In the building's early years in the late nineteenth century a band, known as the Wrights' Opera House Band, was a frequent entertainer in the Opera House and on the streets of Alma. They were organized in 1885 and offered concerts in the park, met celebrities at the depot, and traveled to other communities to give concerts.<sup>109</sup> In the early twentieth century, the opera house hosted smaller companies and local talent. Wright guaranteed the cost of all performances. The house seated 600 people, and had a thirty-foot-deep stage.<sup>110</sup> The last performance in the theater was a production of "The Man from Home" in 1917.<sup>111</sup> In 1918 or 19 the Masons leased the hall and remodeled it for use as the Masonic Temple.<sup>112</sup>

The white glazed brick building at 123 East Superior was originally constructed to house the Idlehour Theatre ca. 1917 and operated as a movie theater until the 1950s when it closed and was remodeled into a retail establishment.<sup>113</sup>

The downtown's largest movie theater was the original Strand Theatre, which opened in May of 1920. The building was destroyed by fire in 1960, and the present Strand was built at the same site at 217 East Superior in 1961-62.<sup>114</sup> The Gratiot County Players today uses the building for theatrical productions.

## Architecture

Alma's downtown contains commercial buildings dating from the 1860s and 70s to the 1960s that include individual buildings of architectural distinction ranging up to six storefronts in length and that together represent and illustrate a broad variety of Michigan and American commercial building design of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two non-commercial buildings, the former Village/City Hall and the Ammi W. Wright House, also contribute strongly to the district's architectural significance through their distinctive design qualities. The buildings

<sup>108</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>109</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>110</sup> Louise Layman Davenport, *Historic Alma and Gratiot County*,

<sup>111</sup> Davenport, *Historic Alma and Gratiot County*.

<sup>112</sup> Davenport, *Historic Alma and Gratiot County*.

<sup>113</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>114</sup> McMacken, *Images of America: Alma*, 35, 111; Anonymous, *Alma Sesquicentennial Program* (n.p., 2006), 18.

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of the Alma Downtown Historic District are significant for their architecture, both in displaying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, and as examples of buildings by a prominent builder.

A key landmark in Alma's downtown is the six-storefront long Wright Opera House Block, constructed in 1879-80. The building was one of the downtown's first brick buildings, by far the downtown's largest commercial block to that time, and also a unique example of the Italianate commercial architecture of the time in its distinctive, highly ornamental window cap and roofline brickwork.

The downtown contains two other late nineteenth-century Late Victorian commercial blocks of similar massive scale to the Wright Opera House Block, the Church Block at 202-14 E. Superior and Pollasky Block at 101-09 W. Superior. The Church Block was constructed in 1886 and is an outstanding example of Late Victorian commercial architecture. Several of the storefronts retain their street-level ornamental ironwork and trim and some also retain their ornate transom windows featuring small colored glass margin lights flanking a larger clear light. Similar ornate details are also present on the second-story windows and transoms, particularly at the dominating central arched window with muntins outlining stained glass lights. Rising above the arched center window, the building façade extends to a peaked parapet which is further ornamented by corbeled brick detailing and a metal cornice.

The slightly later Pollasky Block, constructed between 1897 and 1902, displays an eclectic Late Victorian design that includes some Richardsonian Romanesque influences. The two-story, six-bay brick building has its bays defined by the storefronts as well as the window pattern on the second story. Like many commercial buildings of its time, the building features a (once conical capped) turret which rises from the second story at the northeast corner. At the northeast corner of the building the second story cantilevers over the cut-away corner on the first story. An oriel window also projects from the second story of the façade. Further ornament includes stone stringcourses, stone lintels, transom windows with wooden cornices, a stepped parapet roof line, metal cornice and frieze displaying garlands and wreath forms.<sup>115</sup>

Among the early twentieth-century key buildings within the historic district is the two and one-half-story former Public Building (Village/City Hall) located at 225 East Superior Street. Constructed in 1902-03, the red brick and stone building also makes a nod to the Richardsonian Romanesque in its rounded arches at the entry and over many of the windows. Adding to the distinction of the building is a clock tower rising above the southeast corner and described by one source as "German in character."<sup>116</sup> The architecture combined with its prominent location on a city corner and its former role as the seat of government has resulted in the building serving as the iconic image of the district and the city as a whole.

<sup>115</sup> Mildred L. Smith, *Pioneer Family Promotes Progress: the Building of the Pollasky Block* (n.p., 1984); David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976).

<sup>116</sup> Kathryn Bishop Eckert, *Buildings of Michigan*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 372.

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The First State Savings Bank Building was erected in 1915 to serve as a new home for the growing local bank. The building, like a majority of bank buildings constructed across the country in the early twentieth century, is Neo-Classical in style – designed to look solid and substantial and impart an air of stability to the community and potential customers – with a recessed portico of massy tall Tuscan columns below a broad stone entablature. This building had a low stepped parapet topping the front, but a gabled roof has been added in recent years.

Located at 233 North State Street, the United States Post Office in Alma was erected in 1937-38. The building was constructed as part of the massive federal public buildings programs of the 1930s carried out with federal funding or assistance as Depression-relief projects. During the 1930s the federal government built a great number of post office buildings after a hiatus that lasted for years. New buildings were planned to be freestanding and built of fireproof materials. Post offices typically moved into them from rented quarters in existing buildings, which were viewed as much less safe from the hazard of fires. The new buildings, some, like Alma's, designed in the office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury, others by architects hired for specific jobs, were built on budgets that corresponded with each office's business. Small city buildings such as Alma's were typically designed with simplified Colonial or Art Deco styling – Alma's offers a suggestion of Art Deco in the instepping brickwork flanking the door and windows. As many of the buildings constructed during the time, the Alma Post Office includes a mural in its lobby. The mural, entitled "Harvest," is 15'10" long by 5'3" tall and painted in 1939 by Joe H. Cox, who was a graduate student at the University of Iowa at the time. Cox had previously painted a railroad scene mural for the post office in Garret, Indiana.

Like the post office, most of the buildings constructed in the historic district at the same time rely more heavily on simple forms than applied ornament. Materials tend to be more modest, often simply brick. This group of buildings includes the former auto sales and service building constructed ca. 1940s at 408-410 East Superior Street. While the ornament is almost absent the rounded corners and the sleek smooth finish of the brick walls suggest the sleekness of design of the automobiles sold there.<sup>117</sup>

Construction materials play an important role in other buildings in the district, no matter when they were erected. The contrasting smooth and rock-face stone arches and decorative details of the Late Victorian Caple Building constructed ca. 1884 are certainly illustrative of this point. The two-story building located at 114 East Superior Street features a trio of arches across the second story and a heavily dentilated and bracketed cornice with scrollwork and urn finials. The finishes would not be as eye-catching if constructed in a single color or material.

Likewise, one of the most distinctive features of the ca. 1917 former Idlehour Movie Theatre at 123 East Superior Street is its gleaming white glazed brick façade.<sup>118</sup> The glazed white brick

<sup>117</sup> Sanborn Map, *Alma Michigan*, (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1948).

<sup>118</sup> David McMacken and Louise Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades* (Alma, MI: Alma Bicentennial Committee, 1976); Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

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was no doubt intended as a way to set the building apart from its neighbors and draw attention, through its new and slightly exotic finish, to the new and often exotic entertainment that went on inside.

In contrast to the sleek finish of the Idlehour Movie Theatre are two concrete block buildings constructed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Gibson Bros. Building/Epler Building at 301 East Superior Street was constructed between 1904 and 1905, the Suydam Building at 408-10 Woodworth in 1907. Concrete was still a new and different material in the first decade of the twentieth century. Its low cost and ease of construction brought about greatly increased use in the early twentieth century, but plain block was typically deemed too plain for building fronts, though often used on side and rear facades. These two downtown Alma buildings use block to great decorative advantage, 301 E. Superior using contrasting rock-face block for beltcourses and quoining and 408-10 Woodworth for beltcourses and quoins plus in panels above the second-story windows. The rock-face block flourishes add fun to otherwise no-nonsense building facades. These are particularly noteworthy examples of early twentieth-century concrete block commercial buildings. It is known that the Suydam Building was constructed by contractor James Chase, but 301's builder is unfortunately unknown.<sup>119</sup>

In some buildings the construction material may have been ordinary, but its use elevated the appearance of the final building. This is the case for the early twentieth-century buildings at 126-30 W. Superior and 218 E. Superior. In both cases, the brickwork becomes the building's primary ornament. For 126-130 West Superior Street, the brickwork includes simple basketweave and rectangular panel patterns that fill the façade parapet. In contrast, 218 E. Superior, built 1910, uses a simple design that employs brick in two hues, a lighter yellow-buff type forming the main body of the upper façade, and red brick in vertical and horizontal strips as decorative accents. Commercial Brick construction, in which the brick itself becomes the decoration, is particularly characteristic of the early twentieth-century years, 1900-1930.

Design is important, but a number of the district's commercial buildings are also important because they were built by a local contractor who made a name for himself in Alma. An Alma builder/contractor whose name appears again and again is George S. Young. Young was born in 1856 in New York and made his way to Alma by about 1880.<sup>120</sup> During the next thirty years Young was credited with the construction of the following who's who of major building projects which are located in the Downtown Historic District: the Wright House hotel (1883; demolished), the Church Block (1886), Ammi Wright House (1886-1887), the Pollasky Block (1897), the Lancashire Block (1899), the Odd Fellows Hall (1904), and the Public Building (Village/City Hall). He was also credited with the construction of numerous buildings on the campus of Alma College, the Union School, Ward School, the Roller Mills, and buildings for Swift and Company, the Alma Manufacturing Company, Alma Motor Truck Company, Little

<sup>119</sup> *Alma Record*, "New Office Building," 13 February 1907, p. 1; Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan.

<sup>120</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1900), Electronic document, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7602&iid=004120224\\_00492&fn=George&ln=Young&st=r&ssrc=&pid=64421122](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7602&iid=004120224_00492&fn=George&ln=Young&st=r&ssrc=&pid=64421122), accessed 13 February 2013; McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

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Giant Hay Press Company, auxiliary buildings of the Alma Sugar Factory, the Alma Congregational Church at State and Hastings streets, the Lancashire Home ("Saraville"), and numerous other houses in Alma.<sup>121</sup>

While numerous architects were likely to have worked in the historic district, only two have been identified. The first is the firm of Spier and Rohns. This firm was responsible for the design of the Ammi Wright House at 503 North State Street constructed in 1886. Spier and Rohns, comprised of Frederick H. Spier (1855-1931) and William C. Rohns (1856-1951), had a thriving practice in the City of Detroit during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among their numerous commissions are: the Ann Arbor Depot of the Michigan Central Railroad/Gandy Dancer Restaurant (1886); the Thomas L. Cronin House, Marshall (1886); the Niles Station of the Michigan Central Railroad/Niles Amtrak Station (1890-1892); Saint Thomas the Apostle Church, Ann Arbor (1896-1899); Tappan Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1894); West Medical Building/Natural Resources Building, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1904); Durand Depot of the Grand Trunk Western Railroad (1905); and the Masonic Temple/Rose Street Market, Kalamazoo (1913-1915).

The other known architectural firm credited with buildings in the historic district is the firm of Haug and Scheurmann. Based in Saginaw from the late nineteenth century through the first decade of the twentieth century, the firm designed the new Pollasky Block constructed at 101-109 East Superior Street in 1897 and very likely were the designers of the associated Little Daisy – Pollasky Block building erected about the same time at 325-327 North State Street.<sup>122</sup> In 1904 the firm was also credited as the designers of Alma's Public Building (the old Village/City Hall) at 225 East Superior Street.<sup>123</sup> The firm, which was comprised of Charles H. Haug and Fred T. Scheureman, was first listed in the 1897 *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory*. Published records prior to this time included no reference to either Haug or Scheureman, and by 1905 Charles Haug is no longer mentioned at all in the Saginaw City Directory. In 1905-06, the City Directory indicates that Fred T. Scheurmann (now spelled with a double "n"), was partner in the firm of Scheurmann and Merriam, architects, with Roy J. Merriam. Scheurmann is also listed as the treasurer of Scheurman Lumber Company, manufacturers and wholesale dealers in hardwood lumber. A few years later, in 1907-08, Scheurmann is listed in the *City Directory* as an architect, although without a partner, and as the treasurer of the lumber firm. This status changed again in 1911-12, when the City Directory listing notes only the role Scheurman plays as part of the lumber firm.

<sup>121</sup> McMacken and Davenport, ed., *Down Twelve Decades*.

<sup>122</sup> Alma Building Survey Committee, Building Structure Inventory Forms, 1975, manuscript available at Alma City Hall, Alma, Michigan; Mildred L. Smith, *Pioneer Family Promotes Progress: the Building of the Pollasky Block* (n.p., 1984).

<sup>123</sup> Kathryn Bishop Eckert, *Buildings of Michigan*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 372.

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Electronic document, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=Joseph+&gsln=Nordella&mawpn\\_\\_ftp=Grand+Rapids%2c+Kent%2c+Michigan%2c+USA&mawpn=44343&mawpn\\_PInfo=8-](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=Joseph+&gsln=Nordella&mawpn__ftp=Grand+Rapids%2c+Kent%2c+Michigan%2c+USA&mawpn=44343&mawpn_PInfo=8-|0|1652393|0|2|3247|25|0|1587|44343|0|&uidh=llz&pcat=ROOT_CATEGORY&h=40326803&db=1920usfedcen&indiv=1)

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[&db=1920usfedcen&indiv=1](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=Joseph+&gsln=Nordella&mawpn__ftp=Grand+Rapids%2c+Kent%2c+Michigan%2c+USA&mawpn=44343&mawpn_PInfo=8-|0|1652393|0|2|3247|25|0|1587|44343|0|&uidh=llz&pcat=ROOT_CATEGORY&h=40326803&db=1920usfedcen&indiv=1), accessed 19 March 2013.

United States of America, Department of the Treasury, Division of Central Accounts. *Digest of Appropriations for the Support of the Government of the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Treasury, 1932.

United States of America Postal Service, Historic. "Architectural & Archaeological Significance Survey Form for Alma Main Post Office, 1983." Typescript copy on file, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, Lansing, Michigan.

Alma Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

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County and State

Vermeulen Block inventory form from 1975 survey. Early theater/Genesta history.

Weimer, Arthur Martin, *An Economic History of Alma, Michigan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Libraries, 1935.

Weimer, Arthur Martin, "Factors Determining the Economic Development of a Michigan "Country Town," *The Journal of Political Economy* XLIII, no. 2 (April 1935): 208-225.

**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):** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 23.4

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Alma Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Gratiot, Michigan  
County and State

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

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

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |             |                   |                     |
|-------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Zone: 16 | Easting: 689266.6 | Northing: 4805804.4 |
| 2. Zone: 16 | Easting: 689888.0 | Northing: 4805824.2 |
| 3. Zone: 16 | Easting: 689904.2 | Northing: 4805356.7 |
| 4. Zone: 16 | Easting: 689282.0 | Northing: 4805341.6 |

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

The Alma Downtown Historic District boundary begins at a point in line with the center of the alley N of the 300 block on the N side of E Superior St on the W bank of Pine River. From here, the boundary extends west aligned with centerline of said (sd) alley, crossing Pine Ave and running W in center of sd alley to a point (pt) aligned with E lot line of 420 Woodworth (W edge of alley); thence (th) N along sd E line of sd 420 Woodworth extended to NE cr sd 420 Woodworth; th W along N line of 420 and 418 Woodworth and in same direction to centerline of Woodworth Ave; thence S along Woodworth centerline to a point aligned with N lot line of 127 E Superior St; th W along N (rear) lot lines of 127, 125, 123, 119-121, 117, 115, and 111-113 E Superior St and N line of 408 N State St and in same course to centerline of N State St; th N along N. State centerline to a point aligned with N line of property at 525 N State St; th W, S, W, S, E, S and E along boundary of sd 525 N State property to NW cr 503 N State St property; th S along W line of sd 503 N State property and in same course to centerline of W Downie St; th E along centerline of W Downie to pt aligned with W line of 421 N State St; th S, W and S along W side of sd 421 N State property (including the W jog containing the garage) to NW cr parking lot property N

Alma Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

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of 102 W Superior St; th SSW'1 along edge of parking lot property to NR cr of 116 W Superior St; th W along N (rear) lot lines of 120-122, 124, 126-130 and 134 W Superior St and same course to centerline of Prospect Ave; th S along sd centerline to centerline of W Superior St; th E along W Superior centerline to pt aligned with NW cr of 119 W Superior St property; th S along W lot line of 119 W Superior St and generally E along S line of sd 119 W Superior and crossing the alley to W lot line of 317-323 N State St; th S along W lot lines of 317-323 through 301 N State St and, crossing W Center St, along W lot line of 233 N State St to SW cr of sd 233 N State property; th E along S line of 233 N State property and in same course to centerline of N. State St; th N along sd N State St centerline to centerline of Center St; th E along centerline of E Center St to centerline of Woodworth Ave; th N along centerline of Woodworth to pt in line with S lot line of 312 Woodworth Ave; th E along S line of sd 312 Woodworth to SE cr of property; th N along E lot lines of 312 and 318 Woodworth Ave and in same course across alley to SE cr of property at 216 E Superior St; th E across alley aligned with N edge of alley behind (S of) 218 and 220 E Superior St and along S lot lines of 218 and 220 E Superior St to SE cr of 220 E Superior; th N along E lot line of 220 E Superior St and in same course to centerline of E Superior St; th E along centerline of E Superior St to centerline of Pine Ave; th S along sd Pine Ave centerline to pt in line with S lot line of 408-410 E Superior St; th E along S line of sd 408-10 E Superior St to Pine River; th N along W bank of Pine River to POB at NE cr of 401 E Superior St property.

**Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)**

The Alma Downtown Historic District boundary was drawn to encompass the historic commercial core area while excluding adjacent modern commercial development and parking lots. Several buildings along N. State Street that are not "commercial" are included because they are associated with leading businessman A. W. Wright, who was influential in development of the business district and city. To the immediate north of the buildings along Superior's north side is a strip of city parking lots, and north of that older residential development plus a mix of other buildings. N. State Street from Downie north for several blocks contains Alma's finest collection of historic homes. W. Superior west of the district contains newer commercial development plus some older homes that relate to the old residential neighborhood that edges the downtown district. The part of E. Superior's south side near the district's east end not included in the district contains a mixture of modern commercial development and parking lots that doesn't contribute. The area farther west is adjoined on the south by old residential development. To the district's immediate east is the Pine River, which forms the east edge of the old downtown area; development to the east is generally newer.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Elaine H. Robinson, Senior Architectural Historian, and Shelley Greene,  
Architectural Historian  
organization: Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group, Inc.

Alma Downtown Historic District

Gratiot, Michigan  
County and State

Name of Property

street & number: 2530 Spring Arbor Road

city or town: Jackson state: Michigan zip code: 49203

e-mail ehrobinson@ccrginc.com

telephone: 517-788-3550 x 23

date: April 24, 2013

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Alma Downtown Historic District  
Name of Property

Gratiot, Michigan  
County and State

### 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

*See Alma Downtown Historic District, Photograph Directions, Alma, Gratiot County, Michigan for a map of the historic district which includes photo numbers and direction arrows.*

**Name of Property:** Alma Downtown Historic District

**City or Vicinity:** Alma

**County:** Gratiot

**Photographer:** Shelley Greene, unless otherwise noted

**Date Photographed:** August 2012

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

The photographs were printed using Hewlett-Packard Viverra Inks (95 tri-color cartridge) on HP Premium Plus Photo Paper (high gloss).

- 1 of 21: Auto Sales and Service Building, 408-410 E. Superior, looking southeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0001.tif
- 2 of 21: Gibson Bros. / Epler Building (301 E. Superior), looking northeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0002.tif

Alma Downtown Historic District

Gratiot, Michigan  
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Name of Property

- 3 of 21: Alma's Public Building, 225 E. Superior Street, looking northwest  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0003.tif
- 4 of 21: Streetscape, North Side 200 Block E. Superior; 209 E. Superior (left) to 211-215 E. Superior (right), looking east  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0004.tif
- 5 of 21: Streetscape 200 Block E. Superior; Church Block (202-214 E. Superior, right) to Brewer Meat Market/Braveheart's Pub (218 E. Superior, left), looking east  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0005.tif
- 6 of 21: Church Block, 202-214 E. Superior, looking southwest  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0006.tif
- 7 of 21: Streetscape, North Side 200 Block E. Superior; Alma Interiors/Law Offices (201 E. Superior, left) to the Strand Theater (217-219 E. Superior, right), looking northeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0007.tif
- 8 of 21: Suydam Building, 408-410 Woodworth, looking southeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0008.tif
- 9 of 21: Streetscape E. Superior Street; Delavan Building (115 E. Superior, left) to Church Block (202-214 E. Superior, right), looking east  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0009.tif
- 10 of 21: Building, 116-120 E. Superior, looking southeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0010.tif
- 11 of 21: Streetscape South Side 100 Block E. Superior; 106 E. Superior (right) to 116-120 E. Superior (left), looking southeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0011.tif
- 12 of 21: Wright Opera House Block (101-107 E. Superior), looking northeast  
(Rehab then well along, now – Oct. 2013 – nearly complete)  
Photographed by Robert O. Christensen  
March 2013  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0012.tif
- 13 of 21: Pollasky Block, 101 W. Superior, on left, 111-119 W. Superior, on right, looking southwest  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0013.tif
- 14 of 21: Streetscape North Side 100 Block W. Superior; 102 W. Superior (right) to 126-130 W. Superior (left), looking northwest

Alma Downtown Historic District

Gratiot, Michigan  
County and State

Name of Property

MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0014.tif

15 of 21: First State Bank, 110 W. Superior, looking northeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0015.tif

16 of 21: Streetscape North Side 100 Block W. Superior; 134 W. Superior (left) to 120-122  
W. Superior (right), looking northeast  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0016.tif

17 of 21: Ammi Wright House, 503 N. Superior, looking northwest (not derelict but  
undergoing rehab by same developer as Wright Opera House Block)  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0017.tif

18 of 21: West side of N. State. Little Daisy/Pollasky Block (325-327 N. State), right, J. C.  
Penney (317-323 N. State), middle, 233 (Post Office) and 301 (Masonic  
Temple/Bank), at left, looking southwest  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0018.tif

19 of 21: Streetscape East Side 300 Block N. State; 125 E. Superior (left edge) to 308 N.  
State (right), looking south  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0019.tif

20 of 21: J. C. Penney Building, 317-323 N. State, looking northwest  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0020.tif

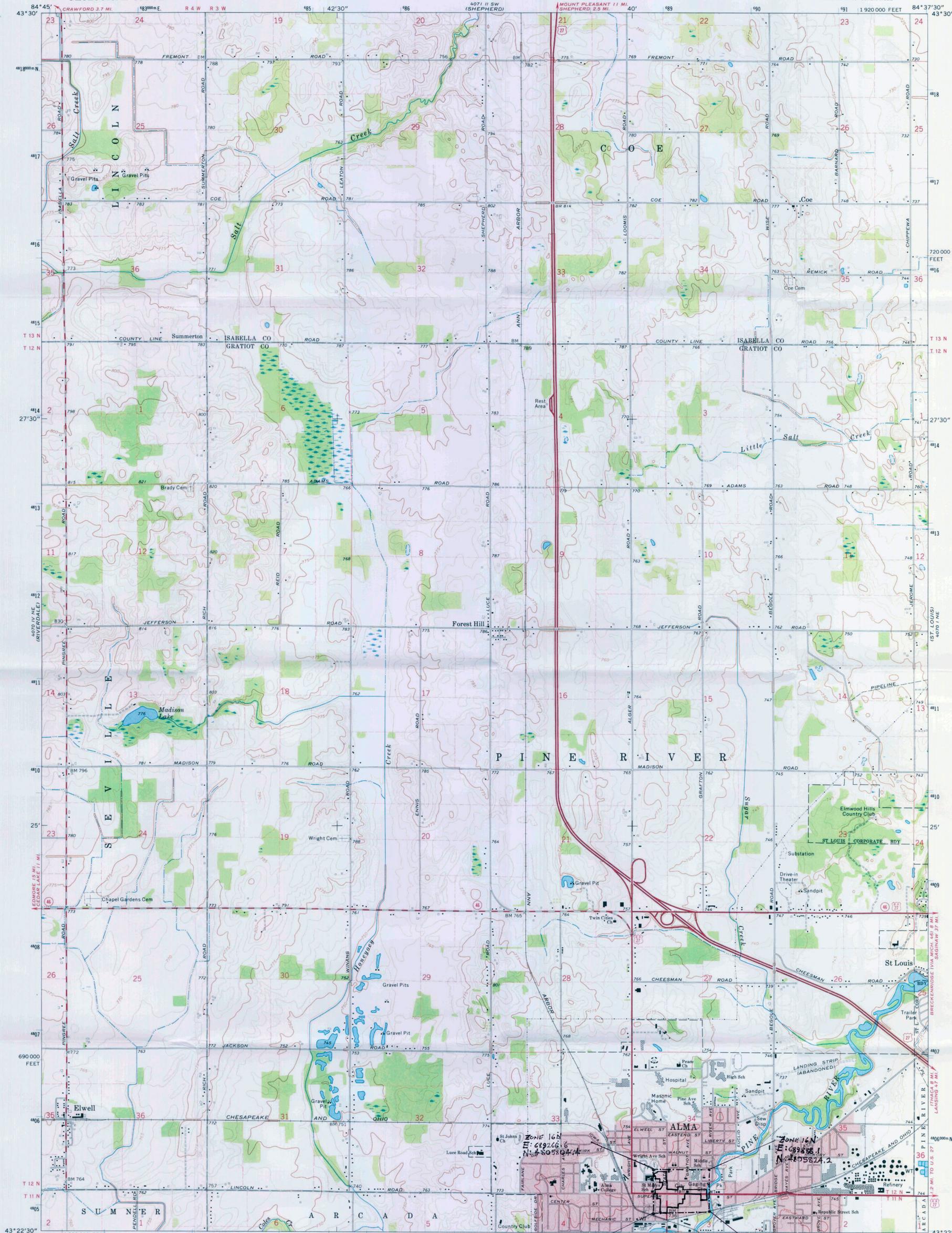
21 of 21: U. S. Post Office, 233 N. State, looking southwest  
MI\_Gratiot\_Alma Downtown HD\_0021.tif

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications 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.).

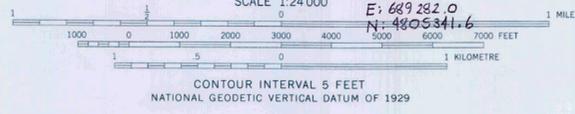
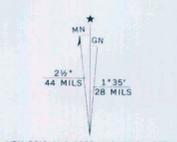
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



National Register Boundary: Alma Downtown Historic District, Alma, Gratiot County, Michigan



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial  
photographs taken 1972. Field checked 1973.  
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Michigan coordinate  
system, south zone (Lambert conformal conic)  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 16, shown in blue. 1927 North American datum  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked



ZONE 16N ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
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A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

USGS  
Historical File  
Topographic Division

ALMA NORTH, MICH.  
NW 4 ALMA 15' QUADRANGLE  
N4322.5-W8437.5/7.5  
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Alma Down to HD  
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Festival  
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SUPERSTORE  
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2023

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Small Biz

Grattot Area  
Chamber of Commerce

ALMA  
HIGHLAND  
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SCHEDULE

Chamber of  
Commerce

2024



1915

STATE BANK

Chamber of Commerce

  
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United Way

Gratiot Area  
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