

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

180

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: WJBK-TV Studios Building

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 7441 Second Avenue

City or town: Detroit State: MI County: Wayne

Not For Publication: Vicinity: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 ___ B X C ___ D

Martha J. Martel-Lay 3/1/16

Signature of certifying official/Title: _____ Date

Michigan SHPO

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: _____ Date

Title : _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

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:)

John Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

4.19.16
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
- Structure
- Object

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY
Communications

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Georgian Revival

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: brick, limestone

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.)

Summary Paragraph

The former WJBK-TV Studios Building sits on the southwest corner of Second Avenue and Bethune Street in Detroit's New Center area. The WJBK-TV Studios Building is a two-story, red brick, Georgian Revival building that features limestone trim and brick quoins. The floor plan is comprised of two sections, a rectangular front office section facing the street and a larger rectangular studio section at the rear. The studio section is set back slightly on the alley side, and set back on the Bethune Street side to accommodate a side entrance. The building abuts the sidewalk on the east and north elevations, an alley runs along the south side, and there is an asphalt paved parking lot at the rear. The front on Second Avenue contains a slightly projecting central section with a limestone-trimmed entry portico with a slender unfluted Ionic column on each side supporting a flat-top entablature with low two-part architrave, tall frieze and classical cornice. Surmounting the center of the building's main facade is a limestone trimmed pediment with an oval window in the center.

Narrative Description

The former WJBK-TV Studios building stands at the southwest corner of Second Avenue and Bethune Street in the New Center area of Detroit which is approximately four miles north of downtown. To the south are the former General Motors headquarters building and the Fisher Building, and across Second Avenue is the Albert Kahn Building, all of which are National Historic Landmarks.

The Second Avenue façade (front façade) and the north and south side of the office section of the building are faced in dark red brick laid in common bond with a course of headers every sixth course. The central five bays of the symmetrical eleven-bay front project slightly, with the central three bays projecting a bit more and topped by a pediment, with an oval classical window in its center. The Second Avenue facade has a central entrance that, with non-original aluminum glass entry doors, is fronted by a limestone portico at the first floor. Two limestone Ionic unfluted columns support a flat-top entablature with a low two-part architrave, tall frieze and classical cornice of limestone. A double-hung window with a stone surround rises above the door

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

at the second floor and a stone trimmed oval window is in the center of the pediment above. Equally spaced aluminum, six-over-six, double-hung windows run across the remainder of the front elevation in the first and second stories. The windows are arranged symmetrically with three bays at the north and south ends, and a single bay on each side of the central bay containing the portico and another window on each side. The second floor is topped with a wide stone frieze and cornice running below a brick parapet wall surrounding the flat roof. A limestone beltcourse runs below the first-floor windows. All of the windows have roll-up metal blinds installed on the exterior of the building. The front door has a roll-up metal blind as well.

The north and south sides of the office section of the building continue the window and wall treatment from the front of the building. There are five bays of double-hung windows on each side façade. The rear end of the Bethune Street side façade's office portion includes two more window bays set under the same stone frieze and brick parapet. The studio section's side walls are set in from the office section's side walls, slightly on the south side but much more on the north facing Bethune. The studio section's exterior does not reflect the Georgian Revival styling of the office section, though it also has red brick walls of the same bond, and on the Bethune side of the building there is a small projecting wood and glass entrance vestibule. A row of double-hung windows that match the remainder of the building are spaced equally along a one-story side section of the north/Bethune elevation in the studio section. The south and west sides of the studio section have few openings with the exception of loading and pedestrian doors. There is a small, one-story garage attached to the rear of the building. The roof of the studio contains a brick elevator penthouse, a number of large satellite dishes, and a tall broadcast antenna tower.

The interior of the building is also divided into two sections: the office/administrative portion and the studio portion. The office section is entered from the Second Avenue portico door and has a long rectangular entrance lobby and adjacent waiting room paneled in book-matched clear cypress wood. A more recent interior aluminum partition with double doors separates the lobby from the interior of the office section. The doors lead to a dramatic monumental dogleg, two-story open staircase, with curbed transition between rungs, in the center of the office building. The stairs and treads are finished in travertine marble. The staircase lobby is paneled in book-matched three-quarter-inch gum plywood. The paneling faces the enclosed straight lower portion of the staircase, forms an approximately two-foot high facing beneath the upper part of the staircase, and covers the wall behind the stairs. The staircase, paneling and decorative wrought-iron balustrade are all original. The stair railing has a thin circular-plan, brass knob-capped newel. The wrought iron railing is formed of open rectangles with curvilinear forms between the upright posts. The original six-sided brass light fixture hangs above the center of the staircase curve. A passenger elevator is located to the south of the monumental staircase.

A main north-south-running corridor accesses the offices in the front of the building and east-west running corridors at both ends. A conference room and an executive suite on the second floor retain their original book-matched clear cypress wood paneled walls. The remainder of the offices and corridors have non-original finishes consisting of carpeting, plaster, drywall, and dropped acoustical tile ceilings. Two service staircase towers are located at opposite sides of the building on the north and south ends. A large freight elevator is located at the western edge of

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

the building, accessed from the parking lot. A side entrance on the Bethune Street/north façade allows for access directly into the large studio. An entrance from the rear façade (western façade) allows for access into the building from the parking lot.

There are two studio spaces and a control room in the building's studio portion. The largest is a two-story studio space at the rear (western end) of the building. The large studio has painted concrete-block walls and an open ceiling exposing the steel truss roof system and duct work. A metal fly loft support system hangs from the roof structure and creates a grid that runs in both directions across the large studio space to hold lighting and other equipment as requirements determined. The studio was a functional space intended to be divided up as needed for different sets to be constructed in the studio at one time. The large studio space has a glass viewing area so a separate audience or related event could be held in the adjacent studio. A number of unfinished storage spaces surround the studio areas. A full basement runs under the entire building. The basement contained mechanical rooms and small rooms for storage of files, video tapes and props.

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.

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture
Communications

Period of Significance

1956-1967

Significant Dates

1956
1967

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

John L. Volk

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 former WJBK-TV Studios Building meets national register criteria A and C for its role in Detroit television and for its architecture. The WJBK-TV Studios Building meets criterion A for housing pioneering Detroit television station WJBK when it was constructed in 1956 by the Storer Broadcasting Company. The Storer Broadcasting Company was an early national television network based in Toledo, Ohio. The building meets criterion C under Architecture as Detroit's only building designed by John L. Volk, a noted architect from Palm Beach, Florida, who planned over 2,000 buildings in his career. The WJBK-TV studio building the only intact example of a 1950s television studio left in the city.

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

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

The former WJBK-TV Studios Building was constructed in 1956 by the Storer Broadcasting Company, an early national television network based in Toledo, Ohio. Television began in Detroit with the first station in Michigan “signing on” on March 4, 1947. This was WWJ, Channel 4, owned by the Evening News Association (parent company of the *Detroit News*). The second phase of Detroit television began when WXYZ-TV debuted on October 9, 1948. WXYZ was owned by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and specialized in sports programming with initial broadcasts including the World Series baseball game between the Cleveland Indians and Boston Braves, part of a football game between the University of Michigan and Notre Dame, and a Detroit Lions football game, live from Briggs Stadium in Detroit. WJBK began as an AM radio station in Detroit. On October 24, 1948, when WJBK-TV began broadcasting as Channel 2 television in Detroit, it was Detroit’s third station to go on the air and was an affiliate of the DuMont Network and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS); it was owned by George B. Storer’s Storer Broadcasting.

George B. Storer began his business career in the steel and gas industries. He had been a student at Cornell University when he inherited his father’s job as president of the Standard Steel and Tube Company in Toledo, Ohio. Storer later branched into the gasoline business, founding Fort Industry Oil Company, whose “purpose was to save money on distribution costs by putting gas stations next to railroad sidings so gas could be sold more cheaply.”¹ The cornerstone of what would become the Storer Broadcasting group of stations was set with Toledo’s WTOL-AM. Storer Broadcasting began in 1927 when George Storer purchased the Toledo AM radio station WTOL for \$3,500 with profits from his gasoline service stations. He soon discovered that radio was an effective advertising medium. He purchased two Detroit radio stations in the 1920s and 1930s, WGHP-AM and CKLW-AM, but sold CKLW one year later. Storer went on to purchase radio stations in Wheeling, West Virginia; Fairmont, Ohio; Lima, Ohio; Zanesville, Ohio; and Miami, Florida.² Storer was chairman of the National Association of Broadcasters in the 1950s and 60s and was instrumental in developing the Television Code.

Storer already had something of a reputation as a well-connected operator by the time he purchased WJBK-TV in 1947. When Storer purchased WJBK-TV’s license from businessmen James F. Hopkins and Richard A. Connell for \$550,000, he also obtained television licenses for Miami and Toledo. Building television stations in Detroit, Toledo and Miami simultaneously was considered a gamble, given the untried nature of the new medium.³

Through buying, selling and trading stations, by 1961 Storer Broadcasting was the sixth-largest network in the United States, eventually owning eleven television and nine radio stations around

¹ Kiska, Tim, *A Newscast for the Masses*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI 2009, p. 21.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

WJBK-TV Studios Building

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Name of Property

the country. Storer Broadcasting acquired Northeast Airlines from Howard Hughes in 1965. In the early 1970s, Storer passed control of his broadcast operations to his sons, George B. Storer

Jr. and Peter Storer. Between 1978 and 1980, the younger Storers sold all of the company's radio properties in order to expand holdings in cable TV.⁴ Storer Broadcasting reorganized as Storer Communications in 1983. By this time it held franchises to provide cable television to over 500 communities in eighteen states and had over 4,800 employees. The company was dissolved after a hostile leveraged buyout in 1987 and the company's cable television assets were sold to Comcast Corporation.

In 1956 Storer moved the WJBK operations from the Detroit Masonic Temple to the new studio building built for the station on Second Avenue in Detroit's New Center. While at this location WJBK's news broadcasts were rated number one among the Detroit stations. Television news originally was patterned after radio news and was just fifteen minutes long with weather and sports being separate shows. However, in the 1950s television news began to expand their broadcast schedule and WJBK did something unusual for the time in hiring two "intellectuals" for their news department. Dr. Everett Phelps, a meteorologist, worked at the station from 1951 to 1958, and Dr. John Dempsey, a political analyst, was hired in 1956 and oversaw the news department until 1962. Jac LeGoff was hired in 1953 and was a popular anchor. He was fired in 1959, but was brought back in 1962, because of guidance from consultant firm McHugh and Hoffman, Inc.

But something else was going on in Detroit that would eventually change the course of television news across the country: Storer Broadcasting began employing the services of a research consultant, McHugh and Hoffman, Inc. The firm would eventually become the biggest and most influential company in the field, divining attitudes for more than a hundred television stations in markets big and small across the United States.⁵

McHugh and Hoffman's first report showed that competing station WWJ-TV was the dominant station in Detroit, and guided WJBK-TV in creating a team "that would later be described as "the New York Yankees of local television news."⁶ McHugh and Hoffman recommended a formula of presenting the news in a palatable way that was easy to comprehend, trustworthy, in a relaxed manner, unbiased, and that made folks feel a part of the community.⁷ Using this approach, WJBK moved to the top of the Detroit market, and in 1965 they hired John Kelly to anchor the news with Jac LeGoff and Jerry Hodak for the weather. An innovation of this WJBK-TV news team was the invention of "Happy Talk" in 1965 when Jerry Hodak joined the team. Although also encouraged by McHugh and Hoffman, station executives encouraged LeGoff and Kelly to joke with newcomer Hodak to calm his nerves. The bantering between newscasters on the air was a success, over 400 callers expressing their approval to the station within an hour of the broadcast.⁸

⁴ Sterling, Christopher H., editor, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of American Radio*, Routledge, New York, NY, 2011, p. 367.

⁵ Kiska, Tim, *A Newscast for the Masses*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI 2009, p. 49.

⁶ Ibid, p. 54.

⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

⁸ Ibid, p. 82.

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

WJBK-TV news was still the dominant newscast in the market when the 1967 Detroit riots broke out, and the location of the studio in Detroit's New Center put the studio in the middle of the action. "Reporters and camera crews from all over the world used our station as a base, including John Hart and John Lawrence of CBS News as well as media people from England, Japan, West Germany and the Netherlands. I stood on the roof of WJBK and watched people smash windows and loot Saks Fifth Avenue and the S&H green stamp redemption center. On one occasion, bullets penetrated our building."⁹ According to a visitor at the station, Marilyn Barnett, "The intention was for them – the folks who were rioting – to take over the TV station."¹⁰

In addition to the news, two locally popular shows – *Sagebrush Shorty* and *Sir Graves Ghastly* – were produced in the studios. In 1956, just after the new studio was constructed, George Storer brought in a new station manager, Bill Michaels, who eventually became the chairman of the board of Storer. Sagebrush Shorty (Ted Lloyd) was brought to Detroit in 1957 from Storer's station in San Antonio, Texas, by Michaels. Sagebrush Shorty was a ventriloquist and had the dummy Billy Bob Buttons as his sidekick. The children's weekday morning show on-air work consisted of shtick before commercial breaks and introducing cartoons, but the Saturday show included magic tricks and a live audience. The *Sagebrush Shorty* show was replaced by WJBK-TV with *B'Wana Don* about 1963. Lloyd's wife was working with her husband on the *Sagebrush Shorty* show, and sued the station after being bitten by a chimpanzee on the set. That ended the *Sagebrush Shorty* show, and Ted Lloyd and his wife moved to Los Angeles.

Sir Graves Ghastly (Lawson Deming) began at WJBK-TV in 1967 and hosted a Saturday horror movie program until 1982. The *Sir Graves Ghastly* show became so popular that the station edited the movies to fit around Deming's antics. In addition to playing a vampire to go in and out of commercials, Deming created other characters that he also played. So that the different characters played by one person could interact with each other, special effects were used. It was said, "No other Detroit TV show utilized as many special effects as *Sir Graves Ghastly* presents."¹¹ Deming made many public appearances because of his love of children, and he wore his costume out in public. "When WJBK was still on Second Avenue in Detroit, across the street on Second Avenue and Bethune was Momo's Bar. There was a brief period when the show first started when we ran it on Friday nights. After Lawson did the opening, there was about twenty minutes of downtime. He came into the bar in full costume...and the guy who owned the bar would never acknowledge him either. He would sit at the end of the bar and we'd hear people saying, 'Get a load of the guy at the end of the bar' as they were pretending not to look. And of course Lawson picked up on what was going on. So when he walked toward the door to exit he'd let the *Sir Graves* laugh go and then leave."¹²

According to a 1971 *Detroit Free Press* article about WJBK-TV moving out of the building, the studio housed the first color TV transmitting equipment in Detroit. By that year, WJBK had outgrown the space and completed the process for its move to a new location. Storer

⁹ Kelly, John, and Marilyn Turner, *Good Morning Detroit*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1986, p. 57-58.

¹⁰ Kiska, p. 67.

¹¹ Castelnero, Gordon, *TV Land Detroit*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2006, p. 109.

¹² *Ibid*, 212.

WJBK-TV Studios Building

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Name of Property

Broadcasting moved both the television and radio station to the newly created "Storer Place" studio located between Greenfield and Southfield roads on Nine Mile Road in the suburb of Southfield, Michigan, near the Northland Center Mall. The new studio was a much larger, state-of-the-art studio with acreage for transmitters and room for expansion. WJBK-TV remains in that location today.

WJBK sold their 7441 Second Avenue building to Detroit's public television station WTVS, Channel 56, for \$750,000 in 1971. WTVS financed the purchase through a \$350,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation and a \$400,000 loan from the Ford Foundation. The move enabled WTVS to broadcast in color – which it had not been able to do previously. Additionally, a Kresge Foundation grant of \$153,000 provided for the purchase of new technical equipment including a color television camera. Channel 56 first went on the air in October, 1955, as Detroit's first UHF station. It was the third educational television station to go on the air nationally. With the advent of cable television, in the late 1990s WTVS changed its call letters to DPTV. WTVS/DPTV constructed a new studio building in the suburb of Wixom and sold the building to Mosaic Youth Theater for use as a youth theater company and its offices in 2009. Mosaic Youth Theater sold the building in 2014 to a development firm which has plans to convert the building to residential units.

Architecture

The building meets criterion C under Architecture because it was designed by John L. Volk, a noted architect from Palm Beach, Florida, who planned over 2,000 buildings in his career. This building is Volk's only Detroit project and complements the other traditional Georgian Revival designs in his portfolio of work. The WJBK-TV studio building the only intact example of a 1950s television studio left in the city: no others exist.

Volk's architecture both reflected and played an important role in the ongoing development of what was considered a "Palm Beach style." The architectural character of Palm Beach, Florida, began to develop almost with the town's founding by Henry Flagler, a wealthy northern industrialist, in the early 1880s. Flagler envisioned Palm Beach as a playground for wealthy northerners during the cold winter months. He constructed two large hotels, the Royal Poinciana Hotel (1894-1913) and The Breakers (1896-1925), on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. The town of Palm Beach became an important winter retreat for Americans with new money during the 1920s. The large homes built by the wealthy were often inspired by the Mediterranean villas of European nobility, and the first architect to design the opulent residences was Addison Mizner (1872-1933). Mizner's client list included some of the nation's top socialites such as Vanderbilts, the Wanamakers and Singers. Mizner's high-style massive Spanish Mediterranean homes featured rough stucco walls, hand-made barrel-tile roofs, and archways and loggias that opened up to the sea. In all, Mizner would design sixty-seven structures in Palm Beach, five in West Palm Beach and over thirty others in nearby Florida towns.

Four other architects – Howard Major, Marion Sims Wyeth, Maurice Fatio and John Volk – constituted the next generation of Palm Beach architects who came into their own as the Florida

WJBK-TV Studios Building

Wayne, Michigan

Name of Property

County and State

boom times of the mid-1920s crashed in the Depression years of the 1930s leaving fewer and typically less well-heeled clients looking to build comfortable but less opulent-looking homes.

These architects filled the void created by Mizner's increasing interest in designing resorts, and later by his death. The elegant architect Maurice Fatio (1897-1943) became Addison Mizner's successor as Palm Beach's favorite society architect. He designed in many styles, including Mediterranean, Georgian and modern, and his public work includes the First National Bank and the Society of Four Arts Library. As Palm Beach's "American Riviera" of the roaring twenties grew, Fatio (pronounced Faah-see-o) designed homes for the wealthy and socialized with the Astors, vacationed with the Mellons, dined with the Prince of Wales and created designs for the Rockefellers and the son of Theodore Roosevelt. Fatio's style became more modern encompassing a Georgian-inspired classicism, symmetry and simplicity of forms in keeping with the new modern aesthetic.¹³

Another architect who had a significant influence on Palm Beach's character was Marion Sims Wyeth (1889-1982). Wyeth came to Palm Beach from New York in 1919 and established a partnership with two other architects. Their office designed the Good Samaritan Hospital, the Norton Gallery of Art, and more than one hundred houses in Palm Beach between 1920 and 1973 ranging in style from Mediterranean Revival to classical Georgian, French and Colonial. Wyeth designed Mar-a-Lago in 1923-27 with Joseph Urban, for Mrs. Marjorie Merriweather Post, heiress to her father's Post cereal fortune (Mar-a-Lago is now owned by Donald Trump), and in 1935 he designed Doris Duke's unique Shangri La in Hawaii, reflecting her interest in Islamic art and architecture. In 1957 he designed the Florida Governor's mansion in Tallahassee. Wyeth renovated homes by other locally important architects including those by Fatio and Mizner. Wyeth was known as a service-oriented architect who designed in many different styles and made significant contributions to the Palm Beach "style."

Architect Howard Major (1883-1974) was a Pratt Institute graduate who had apprenticed with the Pittsburgh architect Henry Hornbostel and then began independent practice in New York City. Major came to Palm Beach in 1925, and became most known for a complex of small buildings he called "Major Alley" where he introduced the tropical Georgian classicism design that became the preferred form. According to one author, Mizner's fantastic Spanish Mediterranean architecture seemed symbolic of the commercial wealth of the 1920s that ended in the Depression. About this time, a sudden weariness with the Mediterranean styles appeared, and Palm Beach clients began to build in other, less ostentatious warm-weather styles such as Bermudian or Louisiana Creole or the Georgian Revival architecture that was then popular in the suburbs of the north. Architect Howard Major questioned Mizner's Spanish Mediterranean approach. He stated, "Today Florida is the melting pot of the union, the cosmopolitan state. Should not a cosmopolitan public exhibit a strong nationalism?" Major cleared new aesthetic ground on which to establish his firm's independent reputation. Major found the Georgian architecture of the British West Indies better suited to Florida than Mizner's Spanish-Moorish, Mediterranean, and Adriatic blend. He argued his point on social as well as aesthetic grounds, catering to the snobbish Anglophilia that pervaded American High Society in the 1920s and

¹³ *Our Century, Featuring the Palm Beach Post 100: People Who Changed the Way We Live*, The Palm Beach Post, Florida, 2000.

WJBK-TV Studios Building

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Name of Property

1930s.¹⁴ Fatio, Howard, and the others who came on the scene in 1920s Palm Beach, including John Volk, would design in these newer Florida styles.

John Latham Volk (1901-1984) was born in Graz, Austria, and came to the United States in 1909. He attended Columbia University's school of architecture, apprenticed with several firms in New York, and began practicing architecture in Palm Beach, Florida, in 1925 when he established a land development company with Frank D. Craig and John S. Stevens. In 1926 he set up his architectural firm, partnering with Gustav Maass until 1935. Volk became one of the architects (along with Mizner, Fatio and Howard and Wyeth) contributing to the Palm Beach area's signature style. Volk's early projects were designed in the Mediterranean Revival style, but he was more reserved in his use of ornamentation. Volk went on to design projects in the West Indian British Colonial style and the Bermudan style and he became known for his Georgian Revival designs.

During World War II Volk was asked by the United States government to direct wartime construction projects including nine army and navy airports, two housing projects, and several distribution and medical centers. In association with the war Volk's organization converted over forty hotels to use as hospitals and dorms for the Women's Army Corps. Following the war, Volk returned to his private practice. He designed the St. Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts, the Town Hall and the Royal Poinciana Plaza and Playhouse in Palm Beach. His most innovative development projects included resorts and communities on Andros Island in the Bahamas, and "Ocean Club," a fifty-two-room hotel resort on Paradise Island in the Bahamas. Volk designed over 2,000 buildings during his sixty-year career¹⁵ and his work can be found throughout Florida, across nineteen states and on many islands of the Caribbean.

The Volk residential designs had an architectural elegance that became his hallmark and defined the mid-20th century Palm Beach home. John Volk sought to satisfy his clients' needs with a refined esthetic he called "elegant simplicity."¹⁶ "I continued to design homes and planned for elegant living, more and more limited in size and cost."¹⁷ Huge dining rooms seating twenty-five guests with large staff attending were eliminated. "It was a challenge for me. So I began designing British colonial houses that could be built for forty-five cents a square foot. The Spanish mansions...cost about two dollars per square foot."¹⁸

Residential properties in John Volk's portfolio included large homes for the Vanderbilt, DuPont, Ford, Dodge and Pulitzer families. One significant element of Volk's work was the use of many windows and large doors to bring gardens and the outdoors inside the homes. Also very important to Volk were graceful stairways. In 1930 Volk introduced the white tile roof, together with green shutters and balconies, to Palm Beach, Florida. His first in this style was a house named "The Plantation" and it became a symbol for the carefree, relaxed elegant lifestyle that was synonymous with Palm Beach. Its British Colonial style also had derivations that

¹⁴ Schezen, Roberto, *Palm Beach Houses*, New York, NY, Rizzoli International Publications, 1991, pg. 19.

¹⁵ Volk, Lillian Jane, et al., *John L. Volk*, Palm Beach, Florida, 2001, p. 6.

¹⁶ Divoll, Leslie, *John Latham Volk, Architect, 1901-1984*, 1993.

¹⁷ "Palm Beach Aristocrat," *Architectural Digest*, November-December, 1972.

¹⁸ Ibid.

WJBK-TV Studios Building

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Name of Property

represented Jamaica, the Bahamas, the West Indies, the Far East and other British colonies. In 1935 Volk built his own home in a Bermudan form of the British Colonial style in Palm Beach.

Volk's architecture helped create and define Palm Beach, and it was stated that his work can be found on nearly every street of the city. Many of his buildings are locally landmarked and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Volk was married twice and had a son, John K. Volk. In addition to his practice, he served in many civic capacities including the board of directors for the Graham Eckes School in Palm Beach, as a charter member of the Landmarks Preservation Commission in Palm Beach and as a founder of the Palm Beach Civic Association as well as numerous social and arts organizations. After Volk's death, a foundation was created in his honor, and a large monograph of his work was published.

WJBK-TV Studio

Volk and George B. Storer (1899-1975) were friends and Storer was a long-time client. Volk's first of a long list of commissions from entrepreneur Storer was his home and guest house in Miami, Florida (1947), and then the Storer's other homes in Saratoga, Wyoming (1953), and Lyford Cay, the Bahamas (1971 and 1974). These commissions led Volk to do several Storer commercial projects including "Old Baldy," a golf and vacation club in Saratoga, Wyoming, and several office buildings for Storer Enterprises. Through Storer's position as chairman of the board of the Miami Heart Institute, Volk received the commission to design the Arthur F. Adams Research Building there in 1969. Volk designed television studios for Storer in Miami and New York in addition to the Detroit studio. The WGBS Radio building on Brickell Avenue in Miami, designed for Storer Broadcasting, is similar in style to the WJBK-TV Studios Building in Detroit as it has a brick façade, pediment over the second story and classically detailed central entrance. The Storer Broadcasting Building in Miami is a three-story white building with a pediment at the attic story and a center entrance, using some of the same design language as the WJBK-TV Studio Building. Another part of Volk's career work was a number of radio broadcasting stations in West Virginia for the Greer family's chain of fifteen radio stations.¹⁹

The WJBK-TV Studio is the only work of Volk's in Detroit (Volk commission numbers: #1110, #1152). The WJBK-TV Studio building complements and aligns with the other traditional work in which Volk specialized in its Georgian Revival design, and it included his signature elements: the Ionic portico, limestone details and a monumental curving staircase and paneling.

The site of the WJBK building contained two single-family houses until 1937 when the Fisher Building Company constructed a surface parking lot and guard shelter on the site. When the studio building was designed it took the surrounding buildings into account by using an architectural style and scale that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood and reflected the Neo-Classical style favored by the architect.

¹⁹ "John R. Raese," <http://memoriallink.com/volkfoundation/volknewsletter/johnrraese.htm>

WJBK-TV Studios Building

Wayne, Michigan

Name of Property

County and State

Although the exterior of the building was designed to fit with the neighborhood, the interior spaces mirrored television studio design thinking at the time. According to an article in *TV Guide*, the WJBK-TV Studio was constructed with “two huge television studios and the business offices of the station” on the ground level, and “One of the television studios will be so large that passenger cars and trucks can enter one side of the building, drive into the studio and leave by the Bethune side of the building.” The new studios, Studio A and Studio B, had a special client’s viewing room that overlooked the director’s control rooms and both studios. One of the new studios could seat 150 persons, and was available for business meetings with closed circuit TV presentations. This was undoubtedly marketed to General Motors for shareholder meetings and similar business meetings. Executive offices and a radio studio were located on the upper level front half of the building. The basement housed a film laboratory.

The *TV Guide* article stated that WJBK “had strong encouragement from a national network with relation to the possibility of national network-originated programs from Detroit.”²⁰ The plan was for Detroit-produced national network shows to originate from the WJBK studio. This plan was possible in Detroit because of the automotive companies’ potential sponsorships in the multi-millions of dollars that were available to back such a production. It is not known that any one-time national broadcast shows originated from the WJBK studio, but it is known that no regular national programs were produced there.

The *TV Guide* article, undated, included the architect’s drawing of the proposed studio building with a third story, never constructed. The article also stated that an underground passageway would connect the WJBK-TV Studio with the New Center Building (across Second Avenue) and thus connect underground to the Fisher and General Motors Buildings. This underground tunnel was also never built.

The September, 1953, issue of *Progressive Architecture* was dedicated to television stations, highlighting them as a new building type and giving guidance on building placement, studio, office and lighting design, as well as the installation of transmission antennas. The newly constructed WWJ-TV Studio in downtown Detroit, designed by Giffels & Vallet, Inc., and Louis Rossetti, was featured in that issue. The photograph shows a very modern looking building; however, the building no longer retains this appearance today. The WWJ-TV Studio was dramatically altered after the 1967 riots to increase security. This makes the former WJBK-TV Studio Building the only intact example of a 1950s television studio left in the city; no others exist.

²⁰ Ibid.

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

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WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

- Schezen, Roberto, *Palm Beach Houses*, New York, NY, Rizzoli, 1991.
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- Volk, Lillian Jane, (widow of John L. Volk) telephone conversations with Kristine Kidorf,
preservation consultant, May 11 and 19, 2009.
- Volk, Lillian Jane, et al., *John L. Volk*, Palm Beach, Florida, 2001.
- “WTVS Ready to Buy Channel 2 Building,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 8, 1971, pg. 8A.

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): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property About 1 1/2 acres

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 42.370904 | Longitude: -83.077977 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

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

Parcel 1: Lots 81 through 85, inclusive, and the easterly 33.33 feet of lot 80, Lothrop & Duffield's subdivision, part of 1/4 sections 55 and 56, 10,000 acre tract, city of Detroit, Wayne County, according to the recorded plat thereof, as recorded in Liber 17 of plats, page 22, Wayne County records.

Parcel 2: The west 16.67 feet of lot 80 and the east 16.67 feet of lot 79, Lothrop & Duffield's subdivision, part of 1/4 sections 55 and 56, 10,000 acre tract, city of Detroit, Wayne County, according to the recorded plat thereof, as recorded in Liber 17 of plats, page 22, Wayne County records.

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Includes entire property associated with the building, including rear parking lot.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kristine Kidorf and Rebecca Binno Savage
organization: Kraemer Design Group
street & number: 1420 Broadway
city or town: Detroit state: MI zip code: 48226
e-mail rebecca.savage@thekraemeredge.com
telephone: 313-965-3399 x 218
date: _____

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.)

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

Wayne, Michigan
County and State

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

Name of Property: WJBK-TV Studios Building

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: MI

Photographer: Rebecca Binno Savage

Date Photographed: Various

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

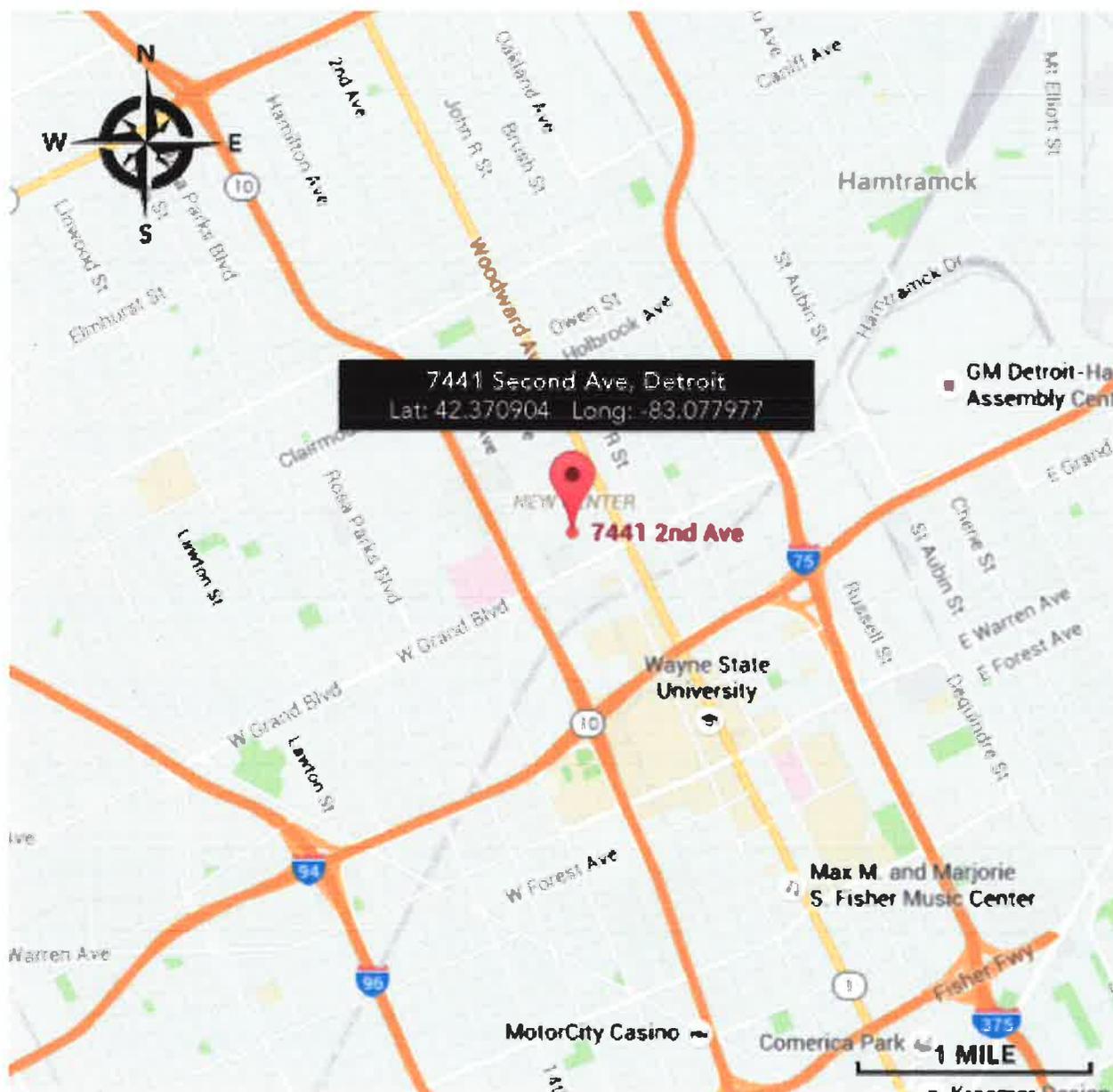
- 1 of 11: East (front) façade. Nov. 13, 2014
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0001
- 2 of 11: North (side) and west (rear) facades. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0002
- 3 of 11: West (rear) façade. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0003
- 4 of 11: East (front) and north (side) facades. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0004
- 5 of 11: Central front entrance, east façade. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0005
- 6 of 11: Front lobby and staircase. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0006
- 7 of 11: Front lobby and staircase. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0007
- 8 of 11: Primary studio space. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0008
- 9 of 11: Primary studio space. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0009
- 10 of 11: Executive office suite, 2nd floor. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0010
- 11 of 11: Storage space adjacent to studio spaces. Dec. 2, 2015
MI_Wayne County_WJBK-TV Studios_0011

WJBK-TV Studios Building
Name of Property

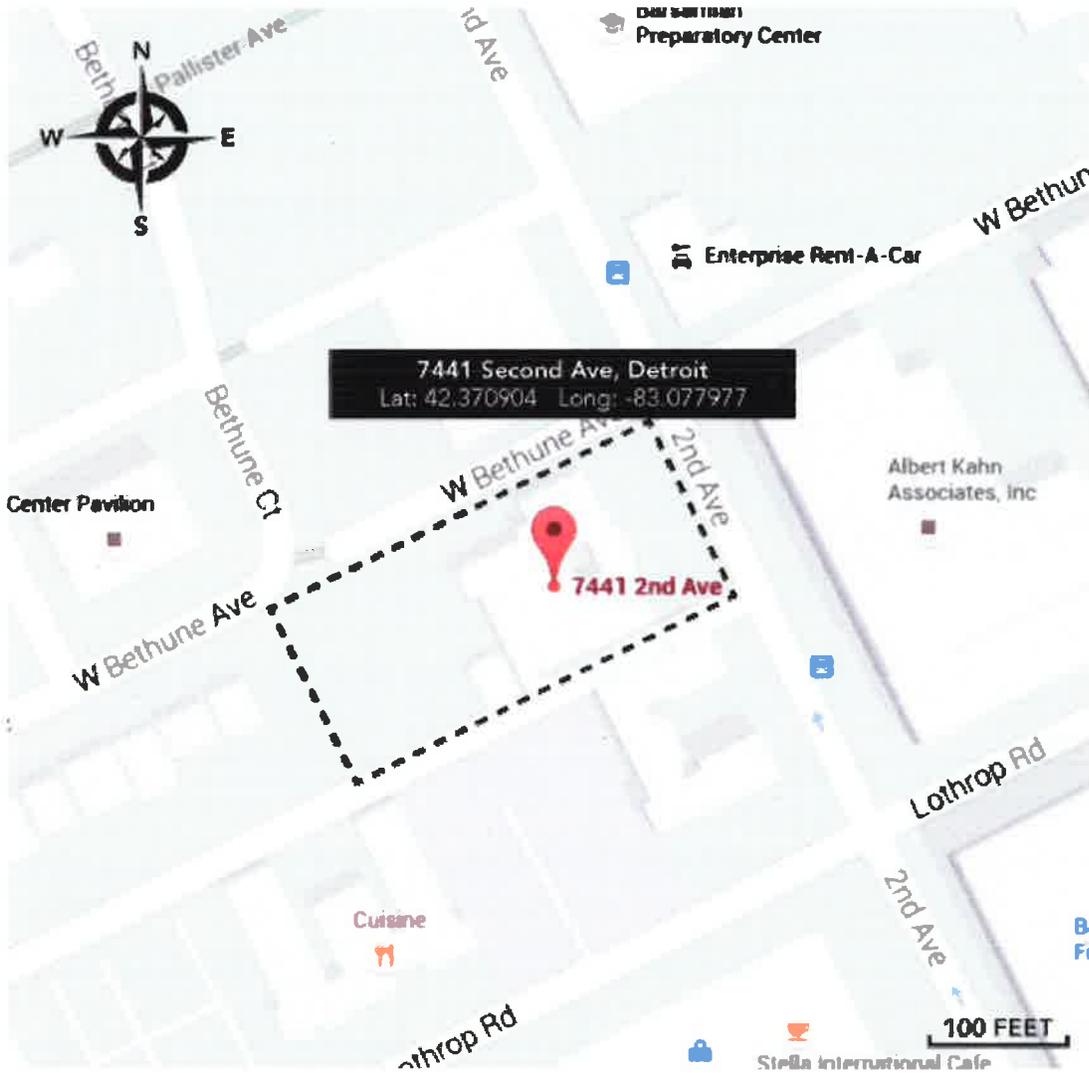
Wayne, Michigan
County and State

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.



WJBK-TV Studios Building
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan



WJBK-TV Studios Building
Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan

----- District boundary



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EXIT
VIA ALLEY

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Detroit Public Television













