

City of Manistee
Final Report of the Historic District Study
Committee

February 28, 2007



LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT COVER FORM

Historic District Name: Manistee Commercial Historic District

City/Village: City of Manistee

Township:

County: Manistee

Date Transmitted: February 28, 2007 (for filing)

Report Type: __Preliminary _X_Final

Total Number of Resources: Historic: 63 Non-Historic: 33 Percentage: 75% Historic

District is Significant Under the Following Criteria:

Criterion A: Significant Events: The district represents commercial growth and development resulting from booming lumber and shipping activities. Later, salt mines continued to create economic prosperity and growth in the City.

Criterion C: Design/Construction: Reason The district represents Italianate commercial styles, and fine examples of Modernistic, Neo-Classical Revival, Richardsonian Romanesque, and vernacular styles. The value of the architectural resources is enhanced by the unique physical setting of the Manistee central business district created by topography and the bending of the Manistee River.

Legal Boundary Description: See attached for complete description. Generally, the district includes the National and State designated historic district consisting of two major cross streets, each six blocks in length. River Street, running east to west, is the historic "main street", and Maple Street, which is the ceremonial entry to downtown. Maple Street, once it crosses the Manistee River, becomes Washington Street.

Charge of the Committee: The charge of the City of Manistee Historic District Study Committee is to establish a Local Historic District and to create a Historic Overlay Ordinance consistent with PA 169. The City of Manistee Historic District Study Committee was created on September 19, 2005 by resolution of the City of Manistee City Council. Attached please find the minutes of the City Council Meeting of September 19, 2005.

Committee Members: Jon Rose, Manistee Community Development Director; Denise Blakeslee, Administrative Assistant, Community Development; and Steve Harold, Director, Manistee County Historical Museum

Contact Name: Jon Rose

Address: 70 Maple Street, Manistee, MI 49660

Phone: 231.398-2805 **Email:** jrose@ci.manistee.mi.us

**The City of Manistee
Manistee Local Historic Commercial District
FINAL REPORT**

The Manistee City Council appointed the City of Manistee Local Historic District Study Committee on September 19, 2005 charged with creating a Local Historic District encompassing the existing Manistee Commercial Historic District listed to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Charge of the Committee: The City of Manistee Historic District Study Committee, established on September 19, 2005, is charged with establishing a local historic district consistent with PA 169 for the area known as the Manistee Commercial Historic District. The committee is charged with conducting a photographic inventory of resources within the district, conducting basic research of the proposed local historic district, determining the total number of historic and non-historic resources and the significance of those resources, and well as preparing a preliminary and final report per Section 339.203.

Members of the Committee:

Steve Harold - Mr. Harold is the curator of the Manistee County Historical Museum, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, and has been regarded as the primary local historian for the City. Mr. Harold has served on the City's Historic Review for over 30 years, enforcing the City's Historic Overlay Ordinance, and carrying out the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation of Historic Structures. Mr. Harold has provided the history context for five master plans, provides regular historical articles to the local newspaper, and has written six books on local history.

Jon R. Rose - Mr. Rose is the Community Development Director for the City of Manistee. He has been a resident in the community for 15 years, and has served as Community Development Director since 1997. Mr. Rose is a Licensed Builder and assisted the City in the restoration of the Manistee City Hall from 2004 - 2005. Mr. Rose is a member of the Local Historical Society and has an extensive collection of Manistee postcards and memorabilia.

Denise Blakeslee - Ms. Blakeslee is the Administrative Assistant in the Community Development Department. A lifelong resident of Manistee, Ms. Blakeslee has an interest and desire for preserving the heritage and historic character of the City. Ms. Blakeslee has been working with the Historic Overlay Review Committee for the past five years and has first hand knowledge in the review process.

OVERVIEW

The proposed Manistee Local Historic District includes those properties listed to the National and State Registers of Historic Places as the Manistee Commercial Historic District. This district was originally listed to the National Register in 1982. The proposed Manistee Local Historic District represents the commercial core of the City and consists of 96 parcels along two major thoroughfares, River Street and Maple/Washington Streets. Of the 96 parcels within the District, there are 11 non-contributing sites or parcels (including vacant lots and/or parking lots). The remaining 84 lots include buildings and structures, both contributing and non-contributing. The total number of contributing buildings and structures is 63. Therefore, 75% of the total number of buildings and structures within the proposed local historic contribute to the historic significance and character of the district.

Boundaries:

The District is in two sections separated by the Manistee River. The southern section boundary follows the south bank of the Manistee River from Division Street on the East to the Municipal Marina on the West, south along the eastern boundary of the Marina to the centerline of River Street, west along the centerline of River Street to the centerline of Pine Street, south along the centerline of Pine Street, to the centerline of Water Street; east along Water Street to the centerline of Oak Street; south on Oak Street to the south property line of 427 Water Street; east along the south property line to the east property line of 427 Water Street, north along the east property line of 427 Water street across Water Street and north along the west property line of 414 Water Street to the alley ½ block south of River Street; east along the alley to the west property line of 70 Maple Street , south along the property line to the centerline of Water Street, east along Water Street to the centerline of Maple Street, south along Maple Street to the south property line of the Ramsdell Theater, east along that property line to the east property line of the Ramsdell Theater, North along the east property line to the north line of First Street , north along the mid-block line halfway between Maple and Poplar Streets, to the rear line of River Street Buildings, east along the rear of River Street buildings to Greenbush street, north along the Greenbush Street centerline to Filer Street, east along the centerline of Filer Street to the east property line of 341 River Street, north to the south property line of 339 River Street, east along the south property line of 337 River Street to the alley, thence easterly along the south line of the alley to the west property line 50 Filer Street, south along the west property line of 50 Filer Street to the centerline of Filer Street, east along the centerline of Filer Street to the centerline of Division Street and North to the south river bank. The northern section boundary follows the west side of Washington Street, from the north bank of the Manistee River to Second Avenue to a depth of ½ block west of the street centerline, and the east side of Washington Street from the south property line of the properties at 129 - 133 Washington North to Lincoln Street, east to the rear property lines of the buildings fronting on Washington Street. The north and south sections of the district are joined by the Maple Street Bascule Bridge over the Manistee River.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries of the proposed Local Historic District are consistent with the boundaries of the Manistee Commercial Historic District as created in 1982 and as listed to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The boundaries consist of those properties fronting on Washington Street north of the river, on the west side from the Manistee River to Lincoln Street and on the east side from south of Taylor Street to Lincoln Street. The south section roughly consists of the properties fronting on River Street from Division Street on the east to one-half block west of Pine Street on the west, and the properties fronting on the east side of Maple Street from one-half block south of First Street to Clay Street, and on both sides of Maple Street from Clay Street to River Street. The District includes the Maple Street Bridge that spans the Manistee River and connects the north and south sections of the District.

Since the establishment of the district, and the subsequent creation of the Historic Overlay Zone in the City's Zoning Ordinance, historic structures undergoing rehabilitation have been required to gain approval for any exterior façade improvements by the City's Historic Overlay Review Committee. Because this Committee (which included the Museum Director of the Manistee County Historic Museum) has acted in a similar capacity to a Historic District Commission, it can be assured that the structures within the Historic District are intact and maintain their historic character and significant features.

Additionally, the photographic inventory demonstrates that the integrity of the contributing structures in the historic district remains. While some contributing and non-contributing structures have been demolished since 1982, the Historic District Study Committee feels that maintaining a contiguous district is necessary. And, should infill development occur, the Committee desires that new structures be compatible with the rhythm, massing, height, use and style exhibited within the District. Therefore, the Historic District Study Committee is confident in its recommendation that the Local Historic District boundary remain consistent with the boundary of the National and State Historic District.

History:

The City of Manistee, located on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, was founded in 1841. The City's name, roughly translated, means "Spirit of the Woods." Chippewa and Ottawa Indians have inhabited the dense woodlands of the northwestern lower peninsula of Michigan for several centuries. The City site was an important one for Indian trade and transportation, as the Manistee and Little Manistee Rivers drained an area of approximately 2700 square miles and provided access deep into the rich forest's hunting and fishing grounds.

A review of the physical setting of the city was published in the *Manistee Times* in June of 1873:

"The City is located on both sides of Manistee River, and between Manistee Lake and Lake Michigan. The river between the two lakes flows to the west, and is one mile and a half long, and navigable for vessels and steamers drawn from eight to twelve feet of water. It has a current of three miles an hour, and is never closed by ice, floating or otherwise.

Manistee Lake lies east of the city, extending south and westward nearly five miles; it is about half a mile wide, of pure water, and has high banks of sand and clay, beautifully situated for building purposes. The water is of great depth, and affords almost unlimited harbor and commercial facilities. The country around the city is generally good for farming purposes. Wheat is never winter-killed, and fruit of all kinds does well, especially pears, plums, peaches, and apples, and the mercury seldom touches zero and never goes far below that point. The timber of the county consists largely of beech, maple, ash, pine, hemlock and cedar, growing very large and thrifty.”

Father Marquette visited the site before 1700, but no organized exploration of the area by white men took place until the early 1830's. In 1841, John and Joseph Stronach established a sawmill within the present city limits of Manistee; from that date until the turn of the century, Manistee was a lumber boomtown. The necessary support businesses and housing formed the heart of the new City with the sawmills clustering along the banks of the river and the inland lake. Logs were cut inland, floated down the Manistee or Little Manistee River, milled into a myriad of wood products, and shipped out of the harbor to Chicago, Detroit and other Great Lakes ports. The Manistee River was navigable for about 300 miles through one of the finest pine timber belts in Michigan. The Little Manistee allowed logs to be floated for a distance of 80 miles and provided waterpower at several points near its mouth. The river could be used year round, regardless of cold or drought, because of strong steady currents and a water supply from hundreds of underground springs.

In 1849, the surrounding lands officially were acquired from the Indian tribes. From that point, the City's growth was steady. In 1852, the population of Manistee included 200 people. In 1855, Manistee County was organized with the City as the county seat. By 1861, 1,000 people lived within the future City limits. The emergence of Manistee as a thriving Great Lakes port, however did not take place until the late 1850's. Until 1854, ships had to anchor in Lake Michigan off the river mouth because of the shallow depth of the river. Cargo had to be transferred to rafts and then poled over to the docks. Finally in 1854, the river channel was deepened to allow large craft to dock along the banks or enter Manistee Lake. The final problem of a strong current flowing from the river channel toward the lake was solved when a towpath was constructed along the docks of the north bank to allow oxen or horses to pull vessels up the river.

With the opening of its shipping and lumbering channels, Manistee entered a boom period of growth. Indeed, 300 buildings were constructed in 1869 alone. Because wood was so plentiful, however, few brick buildings were erected and on October 8, 1871, a catastrophic fire destroyed most of the downtown and industrial areas. That season saw many tragic fires in locations throughout the Midwest due to widespread drought and gale-force winds. In Manistee, as elsewhere, the fire resulted in the construction of a new downtown consisting of high-quality brick commercial buildings predominately Italianate in style. Many remain today in testimony of Manistee's early tragedy.

The following account of the lumber industry in Manistee (*Manistee Times*, June 1, 1873), at the height of the lumber boom, documents the industry's importance in Manistee's development and also its constant fire threat:

"There are in the city and vicinity some twenty first-class sawmills, with a capacity of about 100,000 feet of lumber each, and there is actually cut and shipped from Manistee about 159,000,000 feet each year....

First as the entrance of the harbor is found the mill of John Canfield. This is on the site of the oldest mill in the place, and is sheathed with iron from smoke-stack to foundation, and has a capacity of about 100,000 feet each eleven hours. Three mills have been burnt down on this site, which is just at the delta of the river; hence the efforts to make this as near fire-proof as possible.

Tyson & Sweet's new mill is located...on the little lake, and... has a capacity of 150,000 feet. Then comes the other mill of Tyson & Sweet, which is a first-class mill, and has a capacity of 100,000. Across the river...is the mill of messrs. Cushman, Calkins & Co., built on the ashes of the one burned in the great fire. Capacity, 100,000 feet.

Green & Milmo's new mill, at the north end of Manistee Lake, was built in the stead of their mill burned down in the City. It has a capacity of 100,000 feet each eleven hours.

Magill & Canfield's, on the east side of the little lake, has a capacity of 90,000. This is a new mill, built on the site of the one destroyed by the great fire.

Shrigley & Canfield's mill has a capacity of 50,000 feet.

Louis Sand's new mill has a capacity of 100,000 feet....it is estimated that nearly 200,000,000 feet of lumber will be shipped from this port during the season."

In 1878, the one-industry character of Manistee was altered by the discovery of rock salt in large quantities. To give an understanding of the impact that the discovery of salt has had on the City of Manistee excerpts from the *May 1899 Anniversary Number of the Manistee Daily News* read as follows:

"In 1879 leading mill owners joined with Chas. Reitz & Bros. (who had been drilling for oil), in putting down an experimental salt well, on the Reitz mill property, and in 1881, after drilling into the earth to a depth of 2,000 feet, a strata of rock-salt 25 feet in thickness was found, which gave assurance that salt could be produced in paying quantities, and added a new business enterprise to the City of Manistee.

Twenty-four salt wells, with the ceaseless motion of their pumps, have brought from a opening 6 inches in diameter, and extending down into the earth, 2000 feet, brine from which has been made 1,850,000 barrels of salt, 80,000 barrels of which were manufactured exclusively for dairy and table use.

We will perhaps better understand the magnitude of our salt industry, if we can realize that the salt made here during the past year, if placed with the barrels end to end, would make a continuous line 935 miles in length."

Eleven lumber companies added salt mining operations. The reason that it was profitable was that more than 90% of the manufacturing cost for salt was for energy evaporation. The lumber companies had free energy in waste wood for their operations; therefore salt was 95% profit. With this new impetus for growth, the City continued to expand and, by the turn of the century, was a prosperous, thriving community of 22,700 people. Over 1,000 commercial vessels entered the harbor every year and left again carrying wood products and salt produced by fifteen sawmills and twenty-four salt wells. The ships also carried iron and leather goods, fruit, fish, and other local products. During its heyday, Manistee was the largest shipping port on Lake Michigan except for Chicago and Milwaukee. When the Flint and Pere Marquette Railroad reached Manistee in 1881, it provided the first real competition for the otherwise unchallenged shipping lines.

As the forests were destroyed by the timbering methods of the day, the lumber industry died out (in spite of early local reforestation efforts) and the City's population declined to its present day level of close to 6,500 people. The sawmills have disappeared from the banks of the Manistee River, but the salt and mineral industries continue to thrive. The throng of commercial vessels has been replaced by pleasure boats and an occasional Great Lakes freighter docking at one of the several factories on Lake Manistee.

The forests, the river, and the two lakes created the city, its architecture, and its history. The removal of the forest wealth ended the boom but the architectural and natural features of the Manistee Historic Commercial District remain to remind the resident and visitor of the exciting history of Manistee. The lack of boom property over the last sixty years has been a benefit because few buildings have been demolished and alterations above the storefront levels have been minimal. The following architectural and historical summaries of several pivotal buildings within the District illustrate the variety, quality, and importance of the District's architectural resources.

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The Ramsdell Theater and Hall - 101 Maple Street, Built 1903



Thomas J. Ramsdell was Manistee's first attorney and prominent developer and civic leader. In private life, Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell married an early Manistee school teacher, Nettie Stanton, and had nine children, several of whom became famous in their own right. Ramsdell enjoyed almost twenty years of retirement before he passed away at his home on April 22, 1917. Several tributes were published accounting his early trials, his public interests, and his numerous attainments and endowments being mentioned, but perhaps the final statement of the News Advocate editor said it best, "A simple (funeral) ceremony, but fraught with the deepest significance, was this in which 'Finis' was written to the career of Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell, pioneer, patriarch, and distinguished citizen." Having amassed a considerable fortune in the City, he determined to improve the welfare and culture of its citizens by erecting a theater for the presentation of legitimate stage productions and concerts and to provide space for public meetings and lectures.

A Chicago architect, Solon S. Beman, was hired to prepare plans for the theater and hall. Construction at the prominent corner of Maple and First Streets located on a hill overlooking downtown Manistee and on the edge of the City's finest residential neighborhood began in 1902 and was completed the following year. Mr. Beman was famous for his model industrial towns of Pullman, Illinois (1880-1895) and Ivorydale, Ohio (1883-1888). He contributed substantially to the first-generation achievement of the Chicago School of Architecture.

Included in Mr. Beman's credits is the design of the Mines and Mining and Merchant Tailors pavilions for the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893.

Afterwards he abandoned his former playful eclecticism and took on the sobriety and unity of the Renaissance and classical styles, which is reminiscent of the Ramsdell Theater's architectural style.

The theater and hall were built of a deep red brick in an interesting vernacular mixture of Classical and Italianate design elements. The simple stage house was built of Chicago common brick. Ramsdell intended the building to be a work of art and an example of the latest and best in theater design. The formal front entrance features a Doric portico while the face behind it is topped by a boxed pedimented cornice. The remaining detailing, including a three story tower visually joining the theater and hall, is Italianate in style.

The interior featured a spacious lobby and lounge decorated with painted pastoral Grecian scenes. The auditorium was elaborately decorated with gilt and lights; a large, light-encircled dome in which Ramsdell's son, Frederic, painted a water-color mural of Venus, was the auditorium's key decorative feature. The theater was technically advanced for its time and could accommodate any touring show. It opened in 1903 and was used for stage shows until 1920 when it became a silent movie house. The City purchased the building in 1943, using the hall as a youth center but not immediately employing the theater. Since 1951, the theater has been used once again for stage productions by the Manistee Civic Theater and other groups. The Ramsdell Theater is the most intact of the four theaters Mr. Beman designed and the only theater with some blue prints remaining.

The Vogue Theater - 381 River Street, Built 1938



Although there were several small independent theaters in Manistee by the 1930's, the Butterfield Michigan Theater Company determined that there was a void to be filled in

the City's entertainment market. The company purchased a prime corner lot on River Street at Greenbush on which to erect a quality feature film theater. Architects Pereira and Pereira of Chicago filled the entire 45 feet by 176 feet lot with a Northern Michigan variation on the Art Deco theme. The *Manistee News Advocate* of January 10, 1938, proudly described the building as "Ultra modern in every respect, it is the last word in architectural design, luxuriously fitted with every modern convenience, and equipped with the finest projection and sound systems available."

The exterior of the building presented a dramatic contrast to its Victorian neighbors with its strong horizontal and vertical lines and its general simplicity. Walls of reinforced concrete were faced with cement plaster and a two-color brick veneer. The River Street façade featured a large canopy with a freestanding sign and another large sign running vertically up the right side of the façade. There was no marquee. The deeply recessed entry led to a modernistic lobby with resilient rubber flooring, indirect lighting, a mirrored ceiling, and walls of figured wood depicting scenes in honor of Manistee's heritage. To the left of the theater entrance, at the street corner, stood a twenty-two feet by forty-five feet retail shop with a single corner door and a large show window in each of the two street facades. Two industrial -type metal windows above the canopy allowed light into the theater offices and served as the only fenestration above the first floor level.

The previously cited newspaper account stated that the theater auditorium possessed "no unnecessary or distracting ornaments or embellishments in keeping with the modern trend." On the sloping theater floor, 935 seats of blue and coral leather and velour were provided. The walls and ceilings used the same colors, accented with blonde maple, chrome, and aluminum trim. Multi-colored indirect lighting was used throughout. The theater was equipped with an automatic stoker-fed steam heating system and an air-conditioning system with utilized 50-degree water supplied by a well under the theater to chill circulated air.

The Vogue Theater retains its original exterior appearance today. The interior has been altered but retains much of its original character.

The Manistee County Savings Bank - 375 River Street, Built 1906-1907



The Manistee County Savings Bank was built to serve as the headquarters for a prospering financial institution. The bank had outgrown its original quarters in the Ramsdell Building and acquired a prominent lot at the corner of River and Poplar Streets on which to construct a suitable banking house. In 1906 architects were invited to submit designs for the new bank. Of five schemes, that submitted by Albert E. Colcord of Chicago was chosen for the banks' new structure. Construction commenced on October 30, 1906; the grand opening took place on November 22, 1907.

The three-story building was constructed of Bedford limestone. Its frontage on River Street was divided roughly in half at the first floor, the east half containing two stores, and the west half containing the main banking room and support facilities; a stairway separated the two sides. The second floor housed twenty-two offices, each with gas and electric lighting as well as water and telephone connections. The third floor originally served as the lodge room, billiard room, and dining room of the Knights of Pythias. With all interior walls constructed of masonry and all floors and ceilings built of concrete, the building was as fireproof as possible for the time. The upper floors were finished with oak woodwork and trim.

The original main banking room was grandly furnished and decorated. A vestibule of white ceramic tile and marble opened through wrought iron and glass grille doors onto a large central banking room. Mahogany, marble, and burlap in shades of brown and orange covered the walls. Banking counters had marble bases and marble counters accented with bronze grilles. Ionic columns of marble supported a coffered, ornamental plaster ceiling painted an ivory color. Elaborate lighting fixtures of copper completed the décor. To the sides of the vestibule was a director's room complete with a long mahogany table and a large Tiffany lamp, a men's waiting room, a women's banking room, and offices. At the rear of the main room were more offices and the vaults. The

main vault for cash and safety deposit boxes weighed 52,000 pounds and had walls created by various layers of steel and concrete totaling over two feet in thickness. *The Manistee Daily News* of November 22, 1907, noted at the opening "A description of the vault should be in detail, as it is a wonderful contrivance bringing to the aid of the banker the latest wizardry of the scientist and machination to enable him to safeguard the property of which he is the custodian."

The exterior of the Saving Bank was designed in the style of the Second Renaissance Revival. The bank side of the building features engaged rusticated stone columns at its ends, at the corner and between the bays, and engaged columns of the Ionic order standing two stories in height in between. The main bank floor is lit with large, fixed square windows originally topped with clear glass lunettes, flanked by the columns, and anchored with plain stone bulkheads. The second floor windows are double-hung square units, again separated by the columns. A simple stone cornice sits atop the columns, serving as the base for the third story. Third floor windows are the same as the second floor but present plain stonework between them and no decorative sills or heads. Only the square corner columns of the lower two floors are echoed at this level. A stone parapet with balustrade rests atop a denticulated cornice and a plain frieze.

The storefront half of the building is very simple in treatment compared to the bank portion. A rectangular pilaster of rusticated stone extends the full height of the building to frame the east end. The first floor opening was originally filled with large glass and metal storefronts. The second floor windows are similar to those of the bank portion and are separated from the street level by a plain stone fascia. The third floor windows are rectangular units capped by lunettes, the two parts separated by a stone mullion. The lunettes are framed by fluted stone spandrels and keystones above and by stone pilasters at the sides. The balustrade cornice line of the bank section continues across the top of this simple portion of the building.

The interior of the building shows little evidence of its original appearance today; the exterior however, has changed little. The lunettes and spandrels of the Poplar Street elevation have been covered with simple contemporary stone and porcelain panels. The storefronts of both halves have been modernized with opalescent glass panels and aluminum and glass display window systems. The original bronze lamps at the main doors were removed at some point in the past. Otherwise, the building is in nearly original condition and has been well maintained.

The Ramsdell Building – 399 River Street, Built 1891



Prominent Manistee attorney T. J. Ramsdell began construction of a new business block in late 1890 or early 1891. The lot at the prominent corner of Maple and River Streets had been the location of several businesses prior to that date. The stylish masonry structure was Manistee's tallest building at that time. The Manistee County Savings Bank leased the second, or main, floor immediately upon completion. This surprised the community because Mr. Ramsdell was president of the City's other major bank, the first National Bank, located across the street. The new bank's offices were described as being up to date in every respect, secure from burglars, and nearly fireproof. Mr. Ramsdell and two other attorneys occupied the upper floors and, like all the other tenants, took occupancy on January 1, 1892. The ground floor was the location of the City Drug Store that remained there until 1975 when it relocated across the street. The bank remained in the Ramsdell Building until 1907 when it relocated to the present Manistee County Savings Bank Building at 375 River Street. The building currently houses a retail store at the ground floor level, while the balance of the building has been converted to luxury Victorian Style Hotel Rooms.

The Ramsdell building represents a small city's rendition of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. All of the elements of that style are present in an awkward but exuberant composition. The building is four stories high at the River Street entry and three stories high at the Maple Street entry. The lower stories are built of randomly coursed rock face granite with rounded-arch window and door openings along Maple and trabeated openings along River Street. A large circular arch shelters a recessed doorway at the main Maple Street entry. The main River Street door to the second floor is framed by a massive stone, pediment two stories high. The third story of a dark red brick is accented by lighter brick and stone trim. The River Street elevation features a group of four double hung one over one windows capped by a spandrel of floral relief terra cotta over a continuous red sandstone bandcourse. Similar sash on the Maple

Street façade are capped with trabeated arches of brick; red sandstone drip rails rest above the windows and lug sills stand below. The fourth floor is built of a lighter red brick. Double hung rounded arch windows with arched red sandstone drip rails are grouped in twos and threes. The Maple Street façade features a false gable flanked by a parapet; the gable end displays three rounded arch windows separated by colonnettes. Bandcourses, trim of red sandstone, and a brick parapet above a simple cornice further ornament the building.

The most unique architectural feature of the Ramsdell Building is its corner turret. Rising from the second or main floor up to the fourth floor, the turret rests on a single massive column, which bisects the stairway leading to the ground floor interior. Each level of the turret continues the materials and decoration of the adjoining floor level described above.

The Ramsdell Building is in its original condition. Its recent owners have carefully restored the exterior including the turret conical roof and it stands as the single most impressive architectural reminder of downtown Manistee's most prosperous era.

Haley Block - 419 - 423 River Street, Built 1883



Ellen, Eliza, and Kate Haley moved from Grand Haven to Manistee prior to 1871 and constructed a small frame building to house the Haley Sister's Millinery Shop. The shop was destroyed in the great fire of 1871. They rebuilt soon after but, within the next twelve years, were burned out four additional times. In early 1883, the shop at 419 River Street was destroyed by fire for the last time. Fortunately, the building retained its façade through the blaze and the sisters were able to rebuild the store at it originally had been, an elaborate wood frame and brick veneer structure. They also began construction of a similarly designed double business block directly to the west of their main store. Wisely, the new portion of the store at 421 -423 River Street was constructed with walls

of brick to lessen the impact of future fires. The sisters contracted with a Milwaukee firm to provide one ornate galvanized iron cornice for all three Italianate storefronts. The cornice line was, and today remains, Manistee's most elaborate.

The building was owned by the Haley family until the 1930's. The Haley's business was housed at 419 River Street. The initial tenant of 421 River Street was William Nungesser, an undertaker and furniture dealer. The 423 River Street segment initially was a grocery store operated by A.S. Haines. Numerous tenants subsequently occupied the three shops including a grocery store, a drug store, a florist, the Railway Express Company, the Salvation Army headquarters, a restaurant, and a State Liquor Store.

The Haley Block is a fine example of High Victorian Italianate styling applied to a small town commercial building. The two story brick building, measuring about sixty feet in width, is divided into three storefront bays, each with three double hung, one over one sash balanced at the second floor level. The elaborate metal cornice over fine decorative brick corbelling presents a small name pediment at its center. Below the cornice of each bay is a narrow, raised wood decorative spandrel. The second story windows feature decorative carved stone hoodmolds. Beneath the windows rests a secondary cornice with decorative end blocks coinciding with the first floors support piers. The storefronts are defined by these masonry piers and with Manistee-fabricated cast iron columns, which frame each storefront door. A door leading to the upper story separates the west and center storefronts. The building is in excellent condition. The replacement of doors, the installation of new sign panels and attached lighting are the only alterations. It would be a simple task to return the building to its original state.

The Pacific House- 143 Washington Street, Built 1880-1887



In late 1881, the Flint and Pere Marquette Railroad announced plans to build a passenger station on Washington Street near the Manistee River. Joseph Baur, a

resident of the City since 1852 and a prosperous business person and real estate investor, saw the need for a hotel located on the north side of the river to serve traveling sales people and visitors coming into the City by rail. In 1880, he had built two stores on the southwest corner of Washington and Lincoln Streets. As the railroad business grew, he added three more stores and finally a second story level that spanned the entire block and contained hotel rooms. Named the Pacific House, the hotel opened in late 1884.

Business was so good that Baur constructed a large addition in 1887 containing forty additional rooms. The building then stood 65 feet by 120 feet in size and offered a center light and service court. All partitions were brick and the protection of guests in the event of fire was given great consideration. The building renamed the Cleveland House, contained a bar, billiard room, office, dining room, kitchen, ladies' parlor, and ladies' reception room in addition to its guest rooms. Several large apartments were provided for families. The ground floor shops were occupied by various commercial tenants over the years.

The 120 foot long Washington Street façade of the two-story brick Italianate building is divided into five storefront bays, each with three windows at the second story level. A simple but elegant corbelled brick cornice tops the building. Second floor windows are double-hung, one over one unit with rounded arch stone hoodmolds and stone lug sills. The first floor storefronts are defined by brick piers at their edges and by Manistee-fabricated cast iron columns to either side of their centered entry doors. A door between the southern most storefront and its neighbor to the north leads to the upper floor. The building has been altered by the application of a wood shingled mansard canopy above the storefronts, the replacement of a storefront door and window openings with panels of various types, and the painting of the exterior brick. The first two alterations can be rectified because all of the original material remains or easily can be replaced. The building is currently vacant and awaiting restoration.

The Winkler Block, 310 - 314 River Street, Build 1894-1895



This distinctive commercial building stands today at the main entrance to downtown Manistee, its large turret highly visible from the intersection of River Street and U.S. Route 31. The structure was built by Robert Winkler for speculative purposes. As a marine engineer working during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Winkler was second in command on steam ships servicing the Great Lakes and undoubtedly had money to invest in such enterprises. Because there was no family business, however, the entire building was rented. The original tenants were a liquor store and two retail establishments on the ground floor and the Elk's Lodge at the second floor level.

The masonry building has approximately seventy-five feet of frontage on River Street and consists of three bays defined by masonry piers. A simple cornice above decorated brick corbelling tops the building. Stone lintels and sills frame each of the rounded arch double-hung windows placed in sets of three in the left and right bays. In the center bay, a group of windows composed of two small double-hung sash flanking a large fixed center window and transom is framed by a single rounded arch lintel. The most distinctive decorative element of the building is the turret at the southeast corner. Made of sheet metal, the turret has five faces, each with a double hung window. A bell shaped hip roof completed with finial sits atop a simple cornice. The roof currently is covered with wood singles, although the original roof probably was metal. An unusual molding with a rolling wave motif adorns the area directly above the windows and perhaps, serves as Robert Winkler's signature for his commercial building.

Recently the building has been restored and reconstructed. It now functions as an upscale restaurant with banquet facilities. The River Street façade has been reconstructed as three vernacular Victorian Storefronts, Painting highlights all the Victorian features. A typical Victorian Porch has been added on the main floor overlooking the river.

Other Local Prominent Persons

When listing the founding fathers of Manistee, we usually think of the lumbermen with their large fortunes and commanding residence. Yet the one man who probably had a greater interest in the development of the community than any other is frequently omitted because he was not a lumberman.

Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell

Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell, for over fifty years, maintained a strong interest in and always worked for the improvement of Manistee. The list of offices he held is extensive as is the public corporations with whom he was associated and the numerous buildings which he constructed. The theater which bears his name is a fitting reminder of this man who did so much for betterment of his community.

Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell was born on a farm near Plymouth, Michigan on July 29, 1833 to a family of Scottish descent which had already been in the United States for almost 200 years. As a boy, he divided his time between working on the farm and attending school. As a teenager, Ramsdell attended Plymouth Seminary in between terms of teaching school. However, his real interest was in the legal profession and spent a year "Reading Law" with the famous J.W. Longyear. From this introduction, he went on to law school in New York State where he was graduated in 1858. After his acceptance by the bar he was appointed clerk of the Michigan Supreme Court, and it was here that he met Chief Justice Martin who suggested the lumbering town of Manistee as one of the best places in the state for an aspiring young lawyer. With a legal library, suggest by Martin, Ramsdell set out with a horse and cutter in the winter of 1860 for the remote community. There was no road north of Muskegon and it took him a week to make the journey to Manistee.

History has left us with many stories detailing the need of the wild frontier logging town for the young lawyer. There are accounts of men walking to Traverse City to get a document which would release them from the Manistee County jail. Other stories tell of the lumbermen writing their own contracts with numerous legal problems developing from omitted items. Because of these problems, the young lawyer was welcomed by the entire community and treated with great respect. In 1867 Ramsdell joined in partnership with E.E. Benedict, an association with continued until the retirement of both parties from active practice in 1897.

During the 1860's Ramsdell had time to pursue many other projects in addition to his law practice. In 1861 he was elected to the State House of Representatives. Besides serving as County Treasurer and several terms as Prosecuting Attorney, Ramsdell was a member of the school board for eighteen years.

Until 1866, there was no bridge across the river, making it necessary for anyone who wanted to cross to secure a boat. Ramsdell, along with several of the lumbermen formed a private corporation which built a wooden turn bridge at the Maple Street crossing and tolls were charged, allowing the investors a return on their money. The bridge was however of wooden construction and was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1871. Ramsdell also opened the first hardware store in Manistee, was instrumental in the establishment of the first newspaper, helped to found the First National Bank, and established the Manistee Water Works.

Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell reportedly made his first investment in real estate by trading his horse and cutter to Delos L. Filer for forty acres in the south west part of the city. Ramsdell was the contractor for the original school house on the corner of Oak and First Street. About 1880, Ramsdell began investing in "Business blocks" and eight years later, he commenced construction of the large building on the south east corner of River and Maple Street.

Over the years many public places in Manistee were used for large entertainments, but in 1883 the Scandinavian Society built a large building on the corner of First and Greenbush Streets that met the theater needs of Manistee until it burned on December 17, 1900. The Manistee Daily News for November 22, of the following year spoke of the need by the community for a good theater pointing out the lack of entertainment in the previous year, and suggested temporary arrangements until a subscription plan could be developed to build a new theater. Eleven days later, Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell announced that he would build a new opera house on the corner of First and Maple Streets. In the following two years, the Ramsdell Theater was built and serves today as a lasting monument to one of the Manistee most public spirited pioneers.

While T.J. Ramsdell was instrumental in the development of buildings within the Historic District there were 16 lumbermen and many others that founded the community we know as the City of Manistee. Two of these lumbermen are noted for their development of subdivisions within the City as well as their investment in the community.

John Canfield

John Canfield arrived in Manistee in 1848 when his father Roswell Canfield had taken ill while erecting a saw mill at the mouth of the Manistee River. John stayed for a short time only to return later when his father again was taken sick. He took up residence in Manistee at that time.

Mr. Canfield was involved in several different lumber mills in Manistee. The firm of Canfield & Wheeler was one of the first lumber firms to enter into the manufacture of salt in connection with the lumber business. The waste of the mill was turned to account in the generation of steam for the evaporation of the brine and the debris which had formerly cost money to remove, was now made into barrels for packing the salt.

Delos F. Filer

Delos L. Filer was the founder of D.L. Filer & Sons. During his life he was one of the most remarkable business men in Manistee. Mr. Filer came to Manistee in 1853 as an employee of the Canfields who owned a lumber mill. He was a poor man, well towards middle life. Soon after coming here the natural business ability and energy of the man began to grasp hold of the opportunities here afforded for making money. He began making plans for future execution, and laid the foundation of his subsequent enterprise and fortune by purchasing pine and lands as he had opportunity.

About 1858 or 1859, in company with the L.G. Smith, he bought the Bachelor mill, and in 1861 or 1862 bought the McVickar estate, which with his previous purchase covered nearly two-thirds of the present City of Manistee. Many Plats within the City of Manistee bear the Filer name.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Physical Description:

The Manistee Commercial Historic District in Manistee, Michigan, generally consists of two major cross streets, each six blocks in length. River Street, running east to west, is the historic "Main Street" of Manistee and is lined with continuous walls of brick Victorian commercial buildings dating from 1870 to 1910. Maple Street is the ceremonial entrance to the downtown, highlighted by public buildings to the south of the Manistee River. At the river, Maple Street ends and Washington Street begins. Washington Street is the primary thoroughfare of a secondary business area north of the river.

Significance:

Founded in 1841, Manistee stood where the Manistee River emptied into Lake Michigan. Because the river drained over 2,700 square miles of rich pine forests, Manistee became a booming lumbering center and shipping port. Other industrial and commercial ventures such as leather goods production, metal fabrication, and salt manufacture added to Manistee's prosperity. The City's only setback occurred in 1871 when most of its buildings were destroyed by fire. Fortunately, this tragedy resulted in the careful rebuilding of the downtown with substantial, high-quality brick commercial structures, many of which remain to form the basis of the Manistee Commercial Historic District. The District, as defined, represents the downtown as it peaked with the City's maximum population of 15,000 people. The end of the lumber boom resulted in a decline of Manistee's population to 6,500 citizens and left the historical commercial area somewhat deteriorated but still intact. While Italianate commercial styles dominate, fine examples of Modernistic, Neo-Classical, Revival, Richardsonian Romanesque, and vernacular commercial styles contribute to the character of the District. The value of the architectural resources is enhanced by the unique physical setting of Manistee's central business area created by the bending Manistee River and topography dotted by hills.

Architectural Significance:

The Manistee Commercial Historic District in Manistee, Michigan consists of the buildings, which surround the City's two major cross streets. River Street, running east to west, is the historical "main street" and is lined for five and one half blocks with continuous walls of primarily brick Victorian commercial buildings dating from 1870 to 1910. The street, its winding course determined by the bends of the Manistee River which it parallels, creates a unique urban character, a continuously changing stage set for viewing a "canyon" of finely detailed two and three story brick buildings. Maple Street is the ceremonial entrance to the downtown. First it runs north from a hilltop down three blocks to the river and is lined with several large public buildings. The street then crosses the river to become Washington Street and proceeds for four blocks through a secondary business area of one and two story buildings north of the river.

River Street began as a rude trail following the south river bank, connecting the settlement at the mouth of the Manistee River with the sawmills along the riverbanks and on Manistee Lake. As commercial enterprises developed to serve the mills and their employees and families, these

businesses located along the river's south bank and River Street formed the City's main commercial street. Sawmills and docks lined the riverbank and commercial buildings, fronting on the docks and on the street, soon were scattered throughout the area. The south side of the street was completely developed with retail and office buildings because of the lack of direct river access. The railroad depot was built at the west end of the business district on River Street while the Manistee Iron Works, a major industry, anchored the east end of the street.

Maple Street became the main north-south street by virtue of being the only route across the river via a bridge. To the north of the river, along what is now Washington Street, Maple was a commercial and industrial street for several blocks. To the south, up a steep hill, Maple Street was the address for several civic structures for the first three blocks, and then became the major artery for the finest residential area of Manistee. Washington Street today represents the results of the City's decline in population with its vacant areas and deteriorating buildings, but also reflects the boom days with some large significant commercial buildings and a well-preserved hotel. A bascule bridge joins Maple and Washington Streets over the Manistee River.

Views of the river, its commerce, and the grand residences on the hill rising above the downtown to the south are offered by Manistee's two major commercial thoroughfares and provide a rich setting for experiencing the Manistee Commercial Historic District.

The District encompasses approximately twenty-three acres and contains a total of eighty-four structures. The majority of these buildings date from 1871 or later; 1871 was the year of a disastrous fire that leveled the downtown. Subsequent commercial buildings are brick and designed in the High Victorian Italianate commercial style of the day, displaying rounded arch and repeated window openings, decorative window heads, elaborate secondary and upper cornices and brackets, and a wide variety of decorative brick forms and patterns. Some examples of more elaborate decoration, such as bay windows, turrets, arcading, and rusticated pilasters, are present. Many buildings feature cast iron columns, fabricated locally, which frame the show windows and store entries. Several examples of other metal storefront components exist, as do beveled and stained glass windows and transoms. Several late nineteenth century and early twentieth century commercial buildings display Italianate detailing but with much more restraint and larger glass areas.

While Italianate styles predominate in the downtown area, several other styles are represented. For example, one landmark building is a highly exuberant if somewhat awkward rendition of the Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style with massive rock faced stone base, arched entryways, and a corner turret resting on a single free-standing column, and an elaborately detailed top floor and cornice. Twentieth century commercial styles are represented by buildings of modernistic and Neo-Classical Revival design. The public and fraternal buildings of the district are designed in the Neo-Classical Revival style with the exception of a theater/meeting hall, which exemplifies the District's more popular Italianate style.

The Manistee River divides the District's buildings into two groups. The River Street section is very cohesive with visually strong streetscapes infrequently interrupted by vacant lots or parking areas. The Washington Street section to the north of the river offers a sparser concentration of

structures with several large open spaces separating the contributing buildings. Seventy-four buildings in the District are commercial; nine stand to the north of the river, and sixty-five stand to the south. The remaining buildings include two residences, seven public buildings, and one fraternal lodge. The district includes twenty-three - non-contributing buildings representing 27 percent of the total. Fortunately, most of these non-contributing buildings are simple, modern one-story commercial structures, which have no serious effect on the overall appearance of the District. Almost all of the contributing buildings have been altered to some extent, particularly at the street level; only one, however, is considered irreparably altered. In all, the central blocks of the Manistee Commercial Historic District portray a vivid picture of a late nineteenth century streetscape made even more interesting by the ever-changing vistas created by the bends in the Manistee River.

The District boundaries, as defined, enclosed the core of Manistee's central business district and visually separate the commercial area from its surrounding neighborhoods. The section of the District south of the river is bounded by residential neighborhoods. To the west of Maple Street is the finest older residential neighborhood in the City complete with tree lined streets and large Victorian homes of many styles. To the east of Maple Street is a neighborhood of more modest working class homes, interspersed with newer commercial and governmental buildings. The eastern end of River Street is bordered by a working class residential neighborhood that is diluted with newer commercial strip development around the intersection of River Street and U.S. 31 Highway 31. The section of the District along Washington Street across the river is surrounded to the west, north and east by a residential neighborhood of small, turn of the century houses; at the southeast corner of the District, a 1950's and 1960's commercial development dominated by parking lots and a municipal parking lot/green space forms the eastern boundary. The Maple Street bascule bridge joins the two sections of the District.

National Register Criteria:

The Manistee Commercial Historic District was listed to the State and National Register of Historic Places in 1982. Principally, the Manistee Commercial Historic District meets Criterion A and Criterion C of the Secretary of the Interior criteria for National Register Evaluation with the district's fine examples of turn of the century Italianate styles. Examples of Richardsonian Romanesque and Neo-classical are other prominent architectural styles within the district. The collection of diverse and exemplary architectural styles warrant the local historic district designation.

Public Hearing:

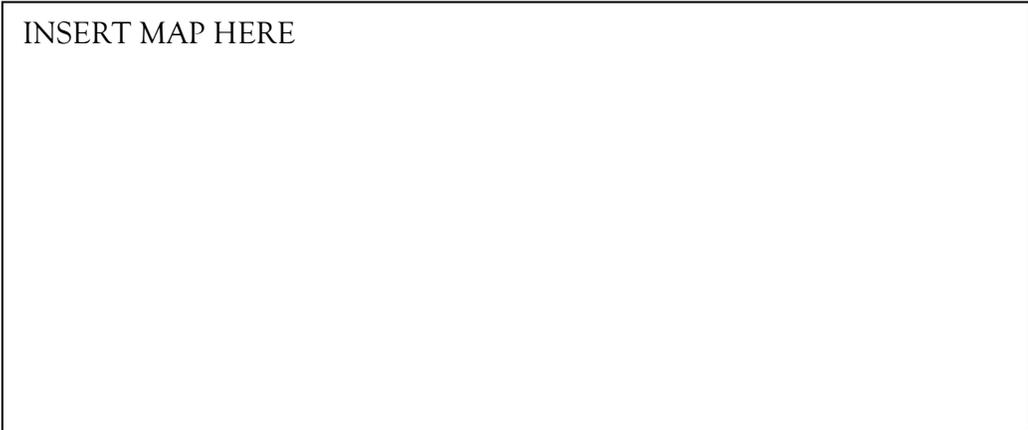
A public hearing for the creation of the Local Historic District occurred on May 17, 2006.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After a thorough review of the proposed local historic district and a comparison of the existing resources with those included in the 1982 National Register Nomination, the committee has concluded the following:

1. The buildings and structures within the Local Historic District exemplify the cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history of the City of Manistee and the State of Michigan.
2. The buildings and structures are identified with important events in the City and State, being rise of the commercialization of lumber and its trade locally and nationally.
3. The buildings and structures embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural specimen, inherently valuable as a representation of a period or style, most notably the Ramsdell Theater and Hall, the Vogue Theater, The Manistee County Savings Bank, and the Ramsdell Building.

INSERT MAP HERE



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collins, Malcolm L. "National Register Nomination for Manistee Commercial Historic District," 21 March 1981.

Harold, Steve. Looking Back. J.B. Publications, 1980.

Manistee Civic Players, 75th Anniversary Program, 1978.

Manistee Civic Players, 90th Anniversary Program, 1993.

www.archinfo.net for information on Solon S. Beman

Russell, Curran N. and Donna D. Baer. The Lumberman's Legacy. Manistee: Manistee County Historical Society, 1954.