



# City of Ypsilanti

---

## Community and Economic Development

### **West Cross Walking Tour**

**Tour Distance:** 16 Blocks, 1.2 miles.

**Tour Length:** 1 Hour

**Tour Difficulty:** Moderate- steady incline and decline.

**Seating Opportunities:** 3- two public benches and one bus stop bench.

**Parking:** Street parking is available throughout the tour area. Parking is also available at Riverside Park, near the tour starting and ending point.

**Introduction:** We start the tour here at West Cross Street and the Huron River, which is essentially the heart of Ypsilanti. It is located directly between downtown, Depot Town, and Eastern Michigan University. Ypsilanti exists primarily because water from the Huron River powered factories and mills, and reliable transportation networks, such as the Military Road (today's US 12/Michigan Avenue) and the Michigan Central Railroad made it possible to get these goods to markets.

The first inhabitants of this region included the Chippewa, Pottawatomie, Ottawa, and Huron tribes. In the early nineteenth century, French trader, Gabriel Godfroy became the first permanent European settler when he established his trading post on the Huron River. A small settlement farther south on the Huron River developed in 1823, known as Woodruff's Grove. Ypsilanti, as we know it today, was platted in 1825 along the new Military Road, today US 12. The Depot Town area developed in the following decades after the Michigan Central Railroad was completed to Ypsilanti, in 1837. Ypsilanti became a city in 1858.

## Stop 1. 6 W Cross



*Figure 1. 6 W. Cross ca. 1955. Courtesy Ypsilanti Historical Society*

This small building behind us served as Ypsilanti's first City Hall, reputedly erected ca. 1859 following the city's incorporation. The building was strategically erected between the city's two main commercial centers, Downtown and Depot Town.

From the street, the building appears to be a small structure, but it is actually a two-story building, constructed into the hillside, making the primary entrance on the second floor. The original structure is the west (left) half of the building. It was built to house City Hall, jail, and a residence for the City's jailer.

From 1873 through 1912, the Deputy Sherriff/jailer on site was George Jackson. Jackson was a Civil War veteran who begrudgingly took the job as resident jailer to support his invalid wife, daughter, and granddaughter. Reputedly, Sherriff Jackson was known for helping Civil War Veterans. In the years following the Civil War, veterans would occasionally show up in Ypsilanti searching for their family connections. Jackson would offer them a free place to stay in City Hall and provide what information he could to reconnect them.

The building functioned as the center of municipal activity until 1914 when City Hall moved across the street to the Second Empire-style Quirk Mansion at 300 N Huron. The subject building remained in-use as the City jail until 1918. After use as a jail, City directories list the building as a "contagious disease hospital," from 1920-1922. This may have been in response to the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918, but further research is needed to verify that theory.

The City began renting the building to commercial entities in the mid-1920s. It became a poultry-market in 1934 and was sold out of the city's hands in 1936. The market was owned by Frederick E. Leighton, who made modifications to the building, including the east half addition ca. 1941. The building remained a poultry market until 1968- changing hands twice during that time. The building was sold to artist/art professor, John Pappas in 1973, who retains the building for his art studio to the present day.

**Stop 2.** Firehouse Museum, 100-110 W Cross.



*Figure 2. 110 W Cross ca.1900 Courtesy Ypsilanti Historical Society*

The Ypsilanti Fire House was erected in 1898 and served as a city fire station until 1975. The original building was designed by Ypsilanti architect, E. P. Rorison and it was built by the Henry Carey & Co. of Detroit. Originally, the two ground-floor garage bays housed steam powered water pumps that were pulled on carts by teams of horses. Hay to feed the horses was stored upstairs. The second floor also housed sleeping quarters and a kitchen for the firefighters. The third floor contained a recreation room with a billiard table and small gymnasium. The tower was used for draining fire hoses after use.

Motorized fire trucks were not implemented until 1916. In 1939 the two garage bays were combined to one large bay to accommodate bigger equipment and a rolling door was added for faster egress. The Fire Department moved to its current location on Michigan Avenue 1975 and the old firehouse was purchased by Tom Conway for his antique automobile museum and offices. In 1999 it was purchased by Howard and Norma Weaver with the vision of creating a museum dedicated to the preservation of fire equipment, firefighting heritage, and education of fire safety. The building was subsequently expanded with a large addition, after razing a house on the corner of Cross and Huron, and the original exterior of the old firehouse was restored. The museum opened in 2002 and remains an Ypsilanti heritage attraction to the present day.

**Stop 3.** 210 W Cross, Cross Street Village, former Ypsilanti Central School.

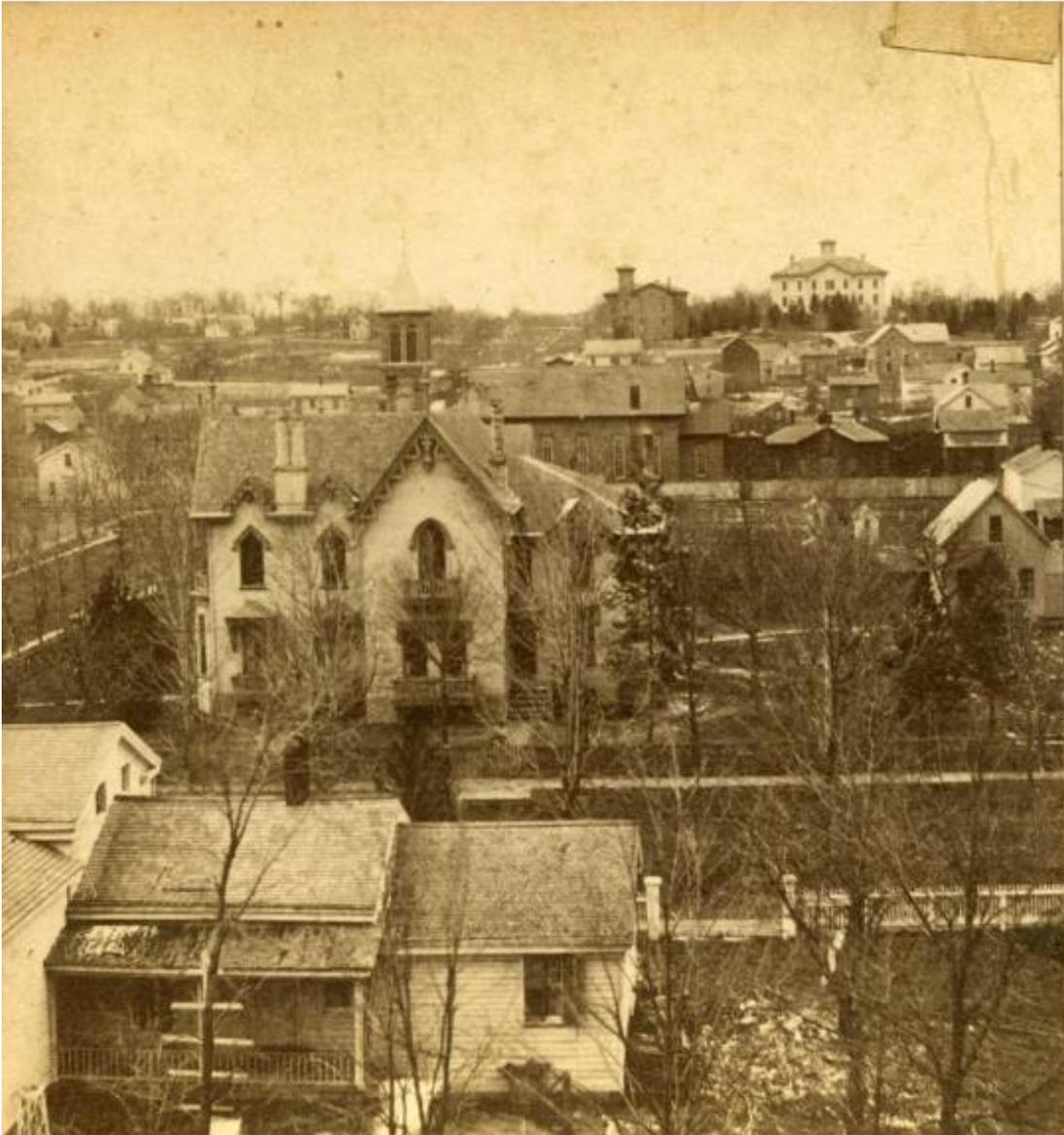


*Figure 3. 210 W Cross, ca.1936 Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society*

This location on West Cross Street has been home to a school building since the 1840s. During the pioneer-era, a building known as the Tecumseh Hotel was erected at this location by the Detroit Land Company, which had planned a railroad between Ypsilanti and Tecumseh. The railroad was never built and the hotel never officially opened. In 1844, Charles Woodruff opened a private school in the building, known as the Academical [sic.] School. Four years later the building was purchased by Baptist minister, Rev. L. H. Moore for a parochial school, known as the Ypsilanti Seminary. The seminary was short-lived; within months of opening, the Ypsilanti School District purchased the building from Moore for use as a public school. Renovations were made and the building reopened in 1849 as the first graded school in Michigan, known as the Model School. Later, it became known as Union School. This building was destroyed by fire in 1858 and reconstructed. The new building suffered several more fires before a bond was adopted to replace it in 1914.

Construction began on the new Central School building in February 1915 and it was completed in 1916. The old school remained on-site until it was demolished in 1929 when the east wing was added. The 1929 addition was designed by Ypsilanti architect, R. S. Gerganoff. A main entrance with a clock tower was added, providing the building with symmetry between the two halves. In 1951 an addition was made along North Adams Street for the Arts and Crafts wing. The building remained part of the Ypsilanti Community School District until 1995 when it was put up for sale. In 1998 it was purchased by a development firm to convert the building to senior citizen housing, known as Cross Street Village. The rehabilitated school opened in May 2001. In 2013 the requirement for senior housing ended and the apartments were open to the general public.

**Stop 4. 302 W Cross**



*Figure 4. Facing West down W Cross Street, 302 W Cross at Center. Courtesy of the Archives of Michigan*

The Gothic Revival House at 302 E. Cross is believed to have been built during the 1850s by Erastus Samson. Mr. Samson also owned a drug store downtown at 118 W Michigan, where Ypsi Cycle formerly was and Herbal Solutions is soon to be. The store is also Gothic Revival, leading to the conclusion that Mr. Samson favored that type of architecture. Gothic Revival features are expressed in the pointed windows and gable peaks. Historically, the house had ornate woodwork in the eaves.

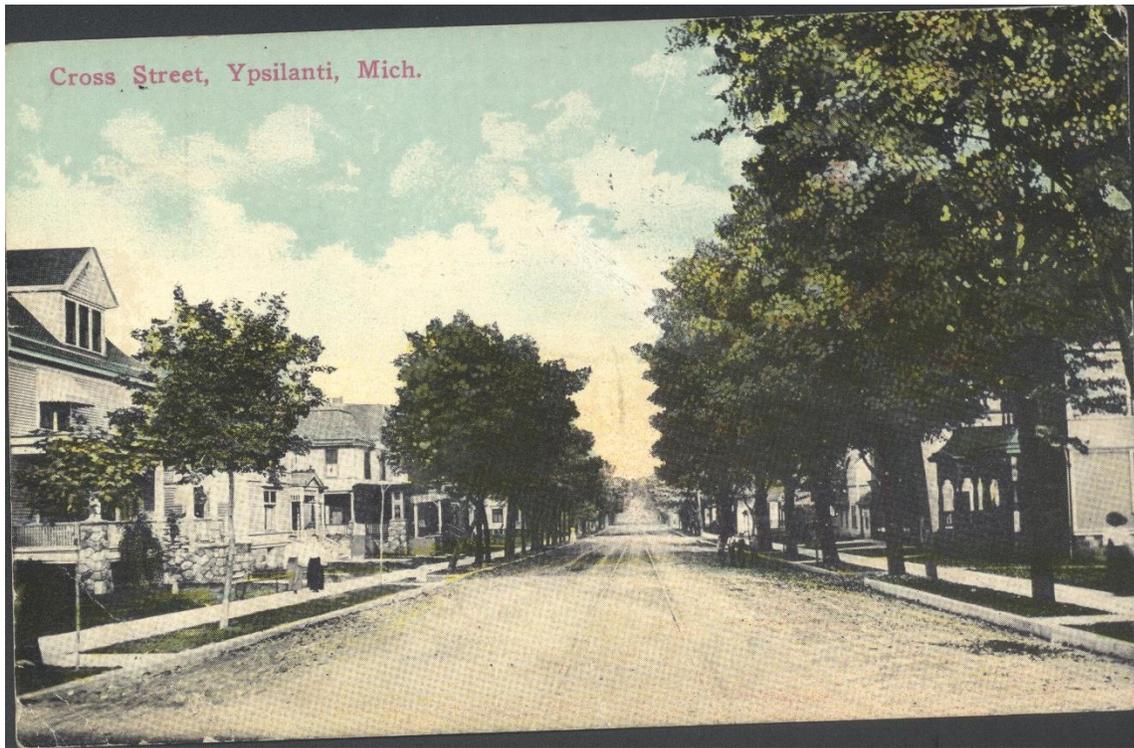
**Stop 5. St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 402 W Cross**



*Figure 5. 402 W Cross, St. John the Baptist, ca.1926*

St. John the Baptist Parish was established in 1844, but Catholics had been worshipping in Ypsilanti since the colonial era. Many of the parish's original members were Irish immigrants. The first building was erected in 1844 and then replaced in 1858. The 1858 building was continually expanded over the next two decades before completion in 1880. Church membership continued to expand, particularly during the 1910s and 1920s. The second and third decades of the twentieth century was a prosperous time for Ypsilanti and the Normal School (now Eastern Michigan University). As church membership increased, so did programming for Catholic students that was facilitated by St. John's. Church leadership felt a new building was necessary to accommodate this growth. Construction began in 1923 on the edifice seen today, and was not completed until 1932. The original design of the Spanish Revival-style building was intended to be a cultural statement in the heart of an academic city; described by the *Ypsilanti Press* "a building reminding students coming from all parts of Michigan that the Church has not ceased to foster true art." It was designed by the Detroit firm, Van Leyen, Schilling, Keough, and Reynolds. Construction took so long because a church school and convent were under construction at the same time. With the onset of the Great Depression and mounting debt from the construction projects, the church plans were modified for a simpler appearance. The modern school addition was completed in 1955 as a response to the Ypsilanti's growing population during World War II and the post-war baby boom.

**Stop 6. North side of the 500 Block of West Cross Street**



*Figure 6. Cross Street Post Card, 1912, Courtesy Ypsilanti Historical Society*

These houses were erected during the nineteenth century and are excellent examples of the Queen Anne style. Queen Anne, so-named for nostalgia of the craftsmanship during the Queen Anne era in England. The name is misleading, as early architects of the style took more inspiration from Medieval fairy-tale- like castles and cottages. The style is hallmarked by its irregular shapes, broad porches or verandas, and decorative wood embellishments. These now apartment buildings were once private homes whose families would often lease rooms to students of the Normal School, now Eastern Michigan University.

*-Continue to corner of W Cross and Ballard.*



*Figure 7. North Side of 500 Block of W Cross, April 1988, 506 W Cross at Left, Photo Courtesy of National Archives*

Students typically rented rooms from local families. The first true apartment buildings were not erected until the turn of the twentieth century, when enrollment began increasing. The building at 506 W Cross, with its two-story veranda, is believed to be one of the first apartment building in the city, erected ca.1906.

**Stop 7.** Eastern Michigan University.



*Figure 8. Photo Showing some of the Non-extant 19th Century Buildings of Eastern Michigan University*

In 1849, Michigan became the third state to establish a college specifically for training teachers in creation of the Michigan State Normal School; today known as Eastern Michigan University. Ypsilanti was chosen for the site of the Normal School by a competitive process. The City beat out other locations after offering \$13,500 in cash for the construction of the first building, offering space for temporary classrooms, and offering to pay the principal's salary for the first five years. The first building of the normal school was completed in 1852 and the first graduating class marched in 1854.

In Eastern's formative years, its programming was considered controversial as it offered many Liberal Arts classes that were not specific to teaching. However, this staunchly-held philosophy in a well-rounded education being critical for teachers formed the basis of its future programming. In 1897 the institution became the second normal school in the county to adopt a four-year college program. Two years later, the name was changed from Normal School to Michigan State Normal College. Following this change, the college experienced a rapid increase in enrollment, expansion of curriculum, and enlargement of facilities. Other regional teaching colleges developed across the state, and the Michigan State Normal College eventually changed to Eastern Michigan College, before becoming Eastern Michigan University in 1959.

**Stop 8.** Ypsilanti Water Tower.



*Figure 9. Ypsilanti Water Tower, ca.1900, Photo from the Detroit Publishing Company, Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

The Ypsilanti Water Tower is possibly the city's most iconic structure. It has been featured on post cards, publications, and at one-time, the City logo. The water tower, placed at the highest elevation in the city, was designed and completed for a waterworks project in 1890. The impressive structure is constructed

from Joliet [Illinois] limestone. It stands with an 85' base at 147' tall, holding a 250,000-gallon water tank to supply the city with water. It was the only water system to provide the city water until 1956. In 1975 it was designated an American Water Landmark by the American Water Works Association and restored the following year.

Construction of the water tower was overseen by engineer William R. Coats. He oversaw implementation of Ypsilanti's municipal waterworks program, which was initiated in 1888 and culminated with the completion of the water tower two years later.

The tower is well known not just for its size and position, but also its unique shape. As early as 1913, a proposal was made to alternate the roofline in replacement of the "ill-proportioned wooden dome." The renowned landscape design firm of the Olmsted Brothers suggested changing the domed roof to a pointed spire, which would resemble a romantic Rapunzel Tower-like appearance. Their proposal was never adopted.

**Stop 9. Overview of West Cross Commercial District.**



*Figure 10. South Side of 700 Block of W Cross, April 1988, 506 W Cross at Left, Photo Courtesy of National Archives*

West Cross Street between Summit and Ballard developed into a mixed use area with a strong relationship to Eastern Michigan University. One time, dubbed the Main Street of “University Village,” the neighborhood has experienced many changes and fortunately has retained historic resources from multiple periods. The neighborhood originated with stately homes that often functioned as rooming houses for the Normal College students, as no dormitories were erected on campus until the mid-twentieth century. In the 1910s and 1920s some houses were replaced by blocks of commercial buildings as the university’s enrollment expanded.

**Stop 10. 729-731 W Cross**



*Figure 11. 729-731 W Cross, 1982*

The brick commercial building was erected 1927 and rehabilitated in 2011. Over its near-century of existence the building has housed several long-term tenants. Most notable, was Campus Drugs, located here from the mid-1930s until 2010. Among other early tenants were the Goldman Cleaners, from 1928 to 1934; two women's clothing stores from 1938 to 1943; and the McClure photo studio. The McClure photo studio was owned by Harley H. McClure, who was born in 1889 in Earlton, Kansas and came to Ypsilanti in 1936 to work for Camp Publishing Co., at 54 E Cross. In 1954 he opened McClure Photography in this building, which operated here for 20 years. On a humorous note, a short-lived restaurant known as the Vitem Inn- owned by Richard Lathers, was located here in the early 1940s. A later long-standing business was Art Attack, an art supply store opened in 1981 by EMU alum Lori Brandt. She ran a successful business until its closure in 2008.

**Stop 11.** The Lathers Building- 717-721 W Cross.



*Figure 12. The Lathers Building, 1982*

This building perfectly illustrates the how West Cross Street has changed overtime. At its core is a 19<sup>th</sup> century residence, converted to apartments, with two storefront additions. The two storefronts were added to the building ca. 1927. The two storefronts have managed to retain a number of long-term tenants over the years. At right, early tenants of 721 W Cross has had a variety of tenants, but is most known for housing Walter Moore Watch Repair, which opened in 1950. Moore was a World War I veteran, who managed a Ford Defense plant during World War II. He was an active member of the American Legion and coached Legion Baseball teams for over 30 years. He was an avid cyclist and once rode his bicycle all the way to Atlantic City, New Jersey. Moore remained in business until his death in 1970. Not long after that, the space became a hair salon under various names- which it has remained to the present day.

The left storefront at 717 W Cross started out as the Campus Barber Shop in the 1920s and remained a barber shop or hair salon for much of its history until the late 1980s when the space was incorporated into the building next-door.

The original house portion of the building was historically known as the Lathers Building, so named for Richard Lathers, who converted it to apartments ca.1930. Lathers was a carpenter who came to Ypsilanti from Montcalm County in 1907. He began investing in West Cross street buildings in the 1920s, and remained a figure in the area until his death in 1943.

**Stop 12. Stanley Building 707-711 W Cross.**



*Figure 13. Stanley Building, 1982.*

These buildings appear to be fraternal twins -both erected in the 1910s to house bookstores. At right, 709 W Cross was home to Clarence Dudley's College Supply store that opened in ca.1917. Not long thereafter, the Stanley Book Store was opened next-door AT 707 W Cross in the building with the nameplate "Stanley." Eventually Clarence Dudley's store was replaced by the National Educational Bureau Offices.

Stanley's Book Store was established by an Armenian immigrant, Yawcob Denistanlian, who fled the military in his home country to immigrate to the United States. Reputedly, he began selling second-hand in Kalamazoo before coming to Ypsilanti. He Anglicized his name, from Yawcob to Jacob, to James, to simply Jim; and Denistanlian was shortened to Stanley. In 1918 he opened Stanley's Book Store on Cross Street in Ypsilanti.

Another prominent bookstore was located diagonally across the street, at the northeast corner of Ballard and W Cross. Known as the College Book Store, the business was opened J. George Zwergel in 1896. His store sold school supplies and ice cream and was a stop on the Interurban railroad, making it a popular destination. In 1915, his daughter, Mary Zwergel took over the businesses following his death and expanded with several other enterprises on the 600 block of W Cross.

Stanley's Book Store and Zwergel's College Book Store two stores carried similar supplies. Zwergel and Stanley relied on direct communication from the college's department heads to know which books to supply. They both carried lines of typewriters, art supplies, papers, chalk, and crepe paper for decorating classrooms.

Mary Zwergel retained the business until her death in 1944. Eventually the building was acquired by Eastern Michigan University and demolished.

Stanley's Book Store remained in business through the 1950s. In the 1960s both the Stanley building and neighboring building various retail businesses before returning to a bookstore in 1969 when they became home Ned's Bookstore, operated by brothers Ned and Fred Shure. Ned's remained under Shure ownership until 1999 when it was sold to the Nebraska Book Co. Nebraska kept the name Ned's and remained in operation until the late 2010s.

**Stop 13.** 533-537 W Cross/304-314 Perrin



*Figure 14. Streetscape of 500 Block of W Cross, 1982*

The two buildings at this corner were erected during in 1924. The the building on Perrin appears to have been at a disadvantage, possibly because it does not front on the main thoroughfare. Research did not reveal a single tenant remaining in this location for more than a decade, and at the height of the great Depression, all the storefronts were vacant. Some noteworthy tenants for the building on Perrin include: Kroger Grocery during the late 1920s, A Jehovah Witness hall in the 1940s, Wilbanks Sporting Goods in the mid-1960s to early 1970s, the Ypsilanti Food Co-op in the 1980s, and Liquid Swordz, in the early 2000s.

The building at 533 to 537 W Cross is known as the Hand Building. With three ground-level storefronts on West Cross, it has had more long-term occupants than its neighbor. The corner unit, where Jimmy Johns is today, housed the College Pharmacy from the 1920s through the mid-1970s. Following the pharmacy, it became a liquor store, which it remained until Jimmy Johns moved in around 2010. The center storefront, which is now part of Jimmy Johns, was originally Goodrich Gift Shop and Sanders Printing. It housed Kroger Grocery in the 1930s and 1940s, and a self-service laundry facility during the 1950s. The end unit where Vego-rama is now, started out as the Betsy Ross Restaurant in the 1920s, followed by various beauty shops, a Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, before becoming Hon's

Flowers in the 1950s, which it remained until the mid-1970s. From the 1970s to the early 2010s it was a Coney Island restaurant.

**Stop 14. 531 W Cross**

The slender building adjacent to the Hand Building was erected in 1927. Typical of the era, the façade is relatively simplistic, but has decorative brick bonding patterns to add ornamentation. Among the building's tenants have been: Eureka Cleaners, followed by the Eugene Beauty Shop, and Read's Five and Dime. In the 1950s, Snidecor Hardware moved into the building. The business was established by Courtland and Carrie Snidecor in 1924- research did not reveal where it was located prior to this building. The Snidecors retained the business until retiring in 1966. The couple was married for over 75 years and very active in the community.

**Stop 15. 523-529 W Cross**



*Figure 15. 523-529 W Cross, 1982*

This is an excellent example of commercial mid-century Modernism on West Cross. The building retains the traditional form with storefronts on the ground floor and offices or apartments above, but it is modernized with ribbons of windows and metal paneled walls. The building was erected in 1956 to house offices of several doctors and dentists. Medical professionals used the building until the early 1970s when the ground floor became retail and the second floor became apartments.

**Stop 16. 517 W Cross- Spring Building**



*Figure 16. Mellencamp's University Shop Storefront, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society*

Known as the Spring Building, this two-story commercial block was erected ca. 1914. Historically, it appeared similar to others on this block, with two storefronts on the ground floor and three apartments on the second floor. By the mid-twentieth century, the storefront had been remodeled for Mellencamp's University Shop- which sold clothing targeted at college students.

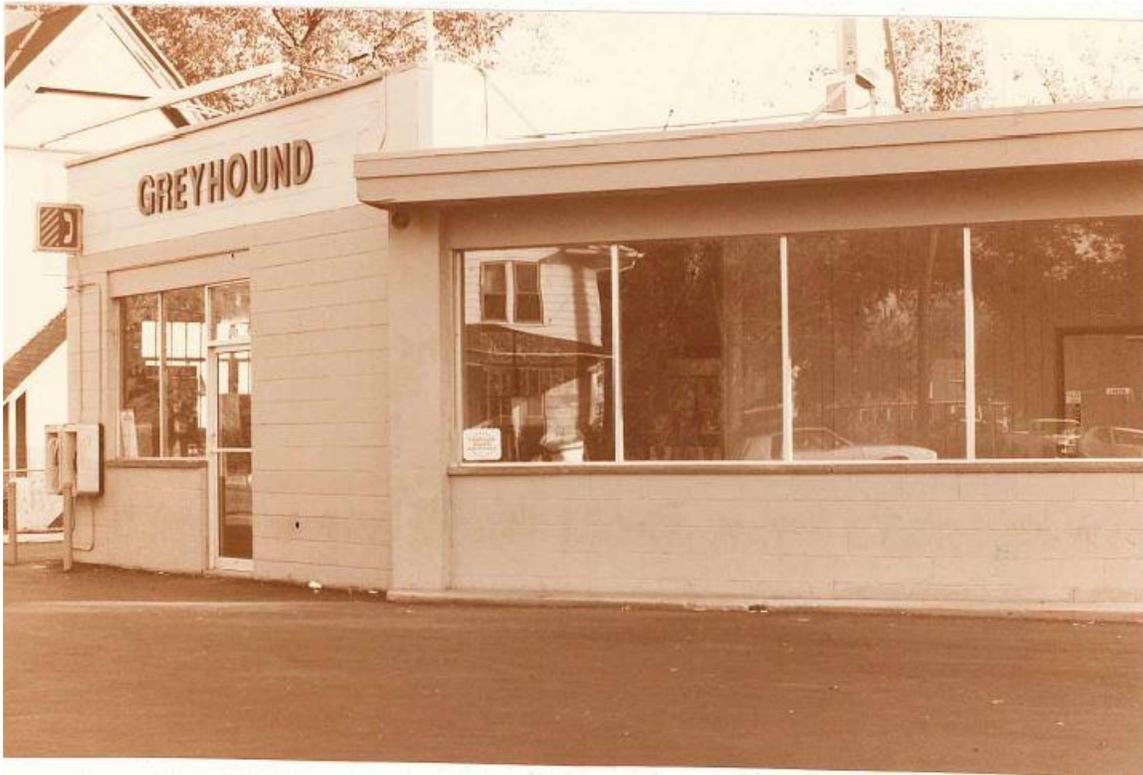
**Stop 17.** 411 W Cross, Standard Printing



*Figure 17. 411 W Cross, 1982*

This building was erected in 1928 to house a commercial off-set print shop, which it has functioned as since that time. Deed research indicates it was built for George Handy, the long-time editor of the *Ypsilanti Daily Press*, and his son, Frank Handy. It was occupied by Ypsilanti Printing from 1928-1935, followed by Evans-Starr Printing from 1936-1945, and finally, City Printing Company, Inc. of Ypsilanti from 1948 to present. The building was designed by local architect, R. S. Gerganoff, who also built George Handy's personal residence. The Arts and Crafts-style building features a distinctive frieze with decorative brickwork across the façade.

**Stop 18.** Cross Street Coffee, 317 W Cross



*Figure 18. 317 W Cross, 1982*

This building illustrates the adaptability of old buildings. It started out as a small gas and service station in the early 1930s. It remained as such until 1970 when it became the city bus terminal, and functioned as such until 1995. The building sat vacant for a year before becoming a coffee house, which it has remained to the present day.

**Stop 19. 301 W Cross**



*Figure 19. 301 W Cross, 1982.*

This location was once the site of George Handy's house. Sometime between 1945 and 1955 a brick storefront was added to the former Handy residence, housing the Crandall House Oriental goods. This was succeeded by College Art Flowers. Sometime in the mid-century, the house portion of the building was lost to fire, but the storefront remained. In 1963 it became Dominick's Pizzeria. You may be familiar with the Dominick's in Ann Arbor. This pizza restaurant was related. In 1960 Tom Monaghan and his younger brother purchased the Ypsilanti location of Dominick's- then located at 507 W Cross Street. Monaghan knew nothing of the pizza businesses and only had a half-hour lesson from the original owner before the keys were handed over. The business became a success as Monaghan implemented cost cutting measures and students caught on that pizzas made good alternative meals; particularly on Sundays when residence halls did not offer meals. In 1965 the name was changed to Dominos, at the request of the original Dominick. The three dots on the logo represented the location in Ypsilanti and two new locations in Ann Arbor. A 1968 fire destroyed the store on West Cross Street. The business was uninsured, but was able to rebound and remain in business at this location until the 1980s- making this, the first Dominos.

**Stop 20. Janowiak Funeral Home- 320 N Washington**



*Figure 20. Ypsilanti First Baptist Church, Photo Courtesy of Ypsilanti Historical Society*

The southeast corner of N Washington and W Cross was historically the location of Ypsilanti First Baptist Church. The former Baptist church was a Gothic Revival building, erected in 1884 burned down on February 19, 1937. A new church was erected in the Normal Park area and Worden E. Geer built a funeral home at this location in 1939. The building is in the Colonial Revival style, a style that never truly goes away. It is expressed through the multi-light windows, symmetry, and entry portico with a fanlight over the door.

By the 1930s, the funeral home had become standard facilities for mourning the dead. This is due to a rise in the practice of embalming in the early twentieth century. Prior to then, funerals were often held in private homes, and the dead buried as quickly as possible ahead of decomposition.

Mr. Geer retired in 1979, selling to James A. Logan, Jr., who died in 1983. His wife, Sandra Rogers Logan continued to operate the business. In 1985, Sandra was introduced to funeral director Christopher S. Janowiak. The two formed a partnership, and two years later were married.

### ***Selected Bibliography***

“A Profile of Ypsilanti Properties” Eastern Michigan University, Historic Preservation Program, 2005. [On file at Ypsilanti City Hall.]

National Register of Historic Places files and Site File, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, Lansing, Michigan.

Polk, R. L. and Co., *Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti City Directories*, Detroit: R. L. Polk and Co., [Multiple Years].

*Ypsilanti Gleanings*- Ypsilanti Historical Society. [Multiple Issues].

Ypsilanti Historical Society, Property Files. Ypsilanti, Michigan.

—. Historic Home Tour files. Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Contact Preservation Planner, Scott Slagor for a full bibliography. [sslagor@cityofypsilanti.com](mailto:sslagor@cityofypsilanti.com).