

MCDOWALL HOUSE

D R A F T

February 8, 2006

By ordinance dated December 19, 1994 the Royal Oak City Commission established the Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee in accordance with Michigan's Local Historic District's Act, Public Act 169 (1970), as amended.

This proposed historic district is composed of two structures on a single lot located at 402 N. Troy Street in Royal Oak, Michigan.

Boundaries

Property Description:

Lot 24 High School Addition Subdivision. Section 15, Town 1 North, Range 11 East, as recorded in Liber 8 of Plats page 3 of Oakland County Records.

Tax Item No.: 75-25-15-354-004

Percentage of Historic and Non-historic Resources

The percentage for historic resource is 100% to 0% for non-historic resources. There are no other historic or non-historic resources in this proposed historic district. There is one other outbuilding on this property to be included in this count.

Charge of the Study Committee

The Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee is charged with the mission of identifying, researching, and studying potential

historic sites and districts within the city of Royal Oak. The research results are reported to the City and State in compliance with Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act PA 169 of 1970, as amended in 1992.

Members of the Study Committee

Ruth G. Cleaveland

Chair, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Chair, Royal Oak Historic District Commission

Member, Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical
Organizations

Robert R. Duchene

Vice-Chair, Royal Oak Historic District Study
Committee

Teacher, United States History

Wallace A. Szumny

Secretary, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Karen P. Burden

Member, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Trustee, Royal Oak Library Board

James Craft

Member, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Member, Royal Oak Historic District Commission

Owen A. Perkins

Past-president. Past-coordinator of Historical
Research

Member, Royal Oak Historical Society and current Board
of Directors

Past Chairperson, Royal Oak Historical Commission

Historian, Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical
Organizations

Historical Significance

Royal Oak traces its beginnings to the early years of the Republic and the years preceding the opening of the Erie Canal. In 1819 a road was extended from Detroit that followed the Military Road and the Saginaw Indian trail to a point 12 miles north of Detroit coming to a large oak tree previously marked with an "H" by the surveyor Horatio Bell and then westerly until it joined Main Street in Pontiac. The township derived its name from this "royal oak" as referenced by the territorial Governor Cass.

Prior to the area becoming a township in 1832, 80 acres of land was transferred to John Biddle by the United States on February 4, 1823. The village of Royal Oak was laid out in 1836 and formally platted in 1838 by Sherman Stevens. The forty-two blocks laid out had Troy Street as its Eastern border. (Maps #1A and #1B).

In the years following its original purchase the 80 acres was subdivided and sold to various persons and groups. One example is the purchase of 20 acres by the German Evangelical Lutheran Orphan Aid Society for \$2500.00 on June 11, 1873. They failed to use the property and sold it nine years later for \$1400.00. Subsequently, others bought and sold the same twenty acres until 1897 when it became the property of Ralph L. Polk.

It remained in possession of Ralph L. Polk and his wife Amelia until June 28, 1912 when he gave power of attorney to his son Ralph L. Polk, Jr. to execute deeds of conveyance, accept payments, issue receipts to the Village of Royal Oak to establish High School Addition (subdivision) as laid out and platted by George H. Beach and Grace H. Beach. Recorded on

October 12, 1912 in Oakland County Liber 244 of Deeds, page 168 conveyed Troy Avenue, 70 feet wide except that part which had already been deeded to School District #6 of Royal Oak Township on the westerly side. Lots 1 through 27 inclusive of twenty foot wide alleys were platted and recorded by the Beaches on July 12, 1912. This plat is on S. W. ¼ of S. W. ¼ of Section 15: T. 1, N. R. 11 E. (Maps #2A and 2B).

At the time, restrictions were imposed regarding dwelling construction - no building was to cost less than \$2000.00 and was to be set back 25 feet from the front of the lot and only one dwelling could be erected on the lot. This implies that the subdivision would have some sense of uniformity as to price and style in a community which was growing. The subdivision was well located due to its proximity to the new high school, which was built across the street, and to the emerging downtown commercial area.

In 1912 Thaddeus D. Seeley, in his History of Oakland County, Michigan, described Royal Oak as being primarily a residential community whose population had doubled to reach 1072 by 1910 and which in ten more years was over 6000.

Architectural Description of Structures

House: Is a 30' x 38' domicile built in 1914 with a full basement and three stories above. It is constructed of paving brick on the first level and cedar shake shingles on the second and third levels. It has three third floor dormers. The original roof was covered with cedar shakes but has undergone replacement with asphalt shingles during the intervening years. The original wide rafter tails are exposed on all three levels. (Photos #1 and #2)

West Elevation: The front entry facing west toward Troy Street has a full width enclosed front porch. The enclosure is of twelve full height multi-paned windows done shortly after the construction of the house. The front door is of oak with the original hardware and paneled in beveled glass. Two large windows on either side of the front door have rolled glass on the lower two thirds with transom-style tops of diamond-paned leaded glass. (Photos #3 and #4)

Five poured concrete steps flanked by paving brick balustrades topped with limestone lead to the front porch.

The house is a foursquare style with a hip roof. A twelve inch wide single board belt defines the first and second stories. The second level and porch projections on the East side have cedar shake siding. The original shakes are still intact. (According to legend the shakes were immersed in crank case oil prior to their application.) (Photo #5)

South Elevation: The house has a bay projection supported by a full foundation. The bay extends to the height of the second level and has three double hung windows with the center larger window a facsimile of the two on the west side with the leaded glass at the top.

East Elevation: Has a 5' x 12' two story porch projection with windows on three sides. The first level has a door leading to the outside. Further south on the east wall is a cottage style, side hinged leaded glass window. (Photo #6)

North Elevation: Has one ground level door leading to an interior landing. To the west of that door is another cottage style leaded glass window. A unique feature of all of the window framing on the first level is the six step recessing

which is repeated on the five oversized basement windows as well. (Photo #7)

Interior: The first level consists of the enclosed front porch, foyer, living room, dining room, kitchen, and breakfast room. Most of the flooring is oak throughout the house with the exception of the kitchen and breakfast rooms which are maple. The boards are mitered where walls join. Ceiling height is nine feet throughout the first level. (Photos #8A and #8B)

The steps to the second flooring are also oak featuring slender square spindles. There are four bedrooms, one bathroom and an enclosed porch on the second floor. The four bedrooms have the original picture molding just below the ceiling. The bathroom floor has ceramic tile. All windows, doors, and framing within the house are of oak except the kitchen which is pine.

In the central second floor hallway a door leads to the full finished third floor. This area with its three dormers has been used as a study. There are three enclosed storage areas located on the perimeter of the central study room.

The basement level of the house has a root cellar and one playroom as well as a full bathroom.

Secondary Structure: In the back yard there is a two story barn with mansard style roof built in 1914 at the same time as the house. The barn has its original hay loft door on the second floor. A cupola with a goose weathervane sits atop the metal clad roof. The two front sliding doors have their original roller hinges. A single entry door is at the South end of the barn. There is a stairway inside for access to the second floor. Below the light switch near the side door, the initials of the owner/builder are carved, "E.M.D.". (Photo #9)

SUMMARY:

The McDowall House is the first consistently inhabited single-family residence in Royal Oak to be nominated for this designation. The McDowall House retains considerable historic integrity and meets National Register Criterion C, because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction. It is a well-maintained, classic example of the style of housing common to the earlier quarter of the twentieth century. It meets Criterion A because it reflects a time when quality of materials was considered important. A home, it was felt, should represent permanence and stability for raising a family. It was built as a home for a growing family of four children in direct proximity to the first high school in Royal Oak, constructed the previous year.

Conclusion And Recommendation

The McDowall House is the first single-family consistently inhabited house to be nominated for this designation. The owners of this property have provided the Historic District Study Committee a classic example of the type of housing which became popular at the beginning of the First World War. As the city evolves and changes, this type of dwelling is rapidly being demolished in favor of larger, less identifiable styles of housing. This house can help to preserve and identify the city's past.

The proximity of the McDowall House to the then, first high school in Royal Oak demonstrates the emerging future importance of higher education to the village's families.

This site needs to be protected. We see all State requirements for historic designation as being fulfilled. Moreover, designating this site will set a precedent for other residential building owners to follow suit. This would preserve the diversity of the city, mixing the old with the new.

Therefore, the Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee requests the McDowall House Site be designated an Historic District. This designation protects its significance to our community, demonstrates the benefits of historic preservation, and illustrates a continuity of a style of living. The committee further requests the establishment by ordinance of a historic district entitled **MCDOWALL HOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT.**

Photograph Listing, Photographs are property of Ruth G. Cleaveland



Photo #1
McDowall House
View: 402 N. Troy Street

Photo 2
View: Original wide
rafter tales are exposed
on all three levels.



Photo 3
View: Multi-paned
windows were added
shortly after
construction to enclose
the front porch.



Photo #4

View: Front door is of oak with original hardware and is paneled in beveled glass.

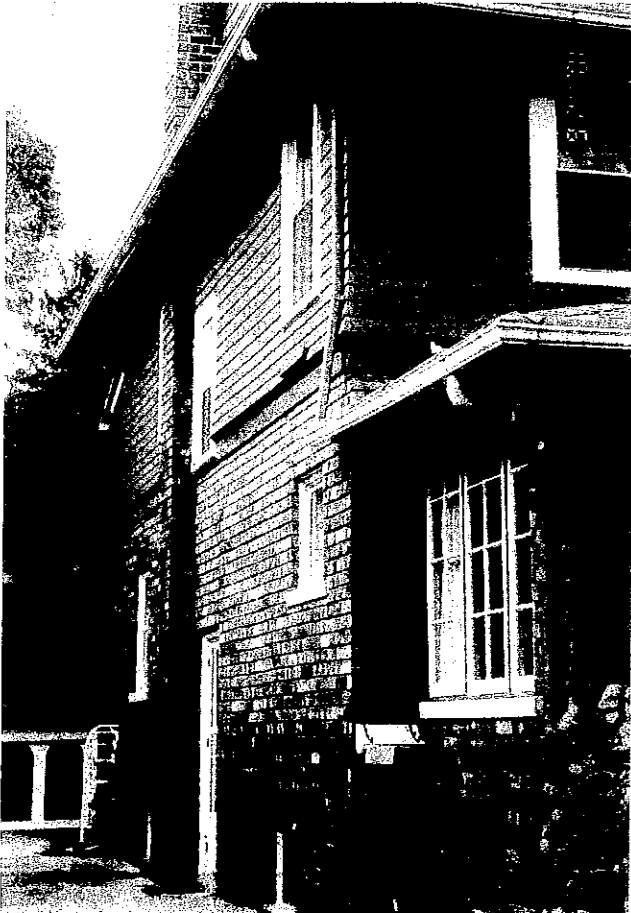


Photo #5

View: A twelve inch wide single board belt separates the cedar shake siding on second story from the brick first story.

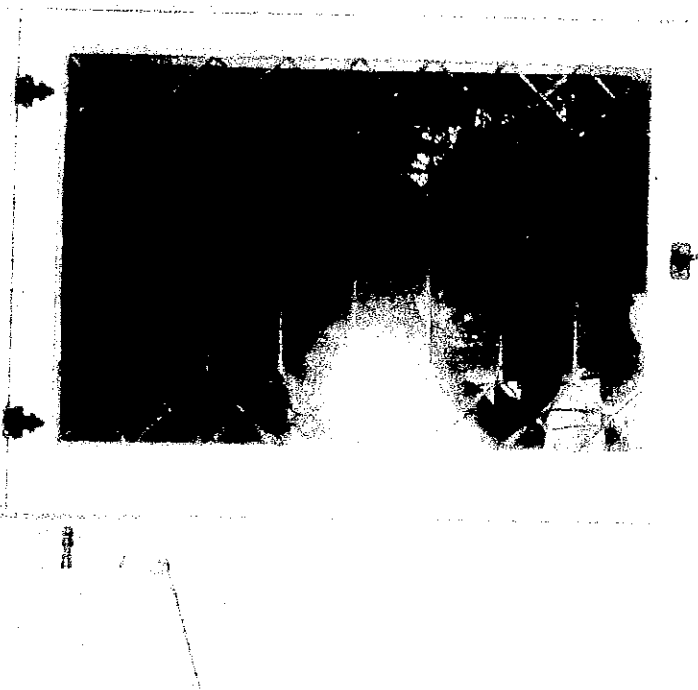
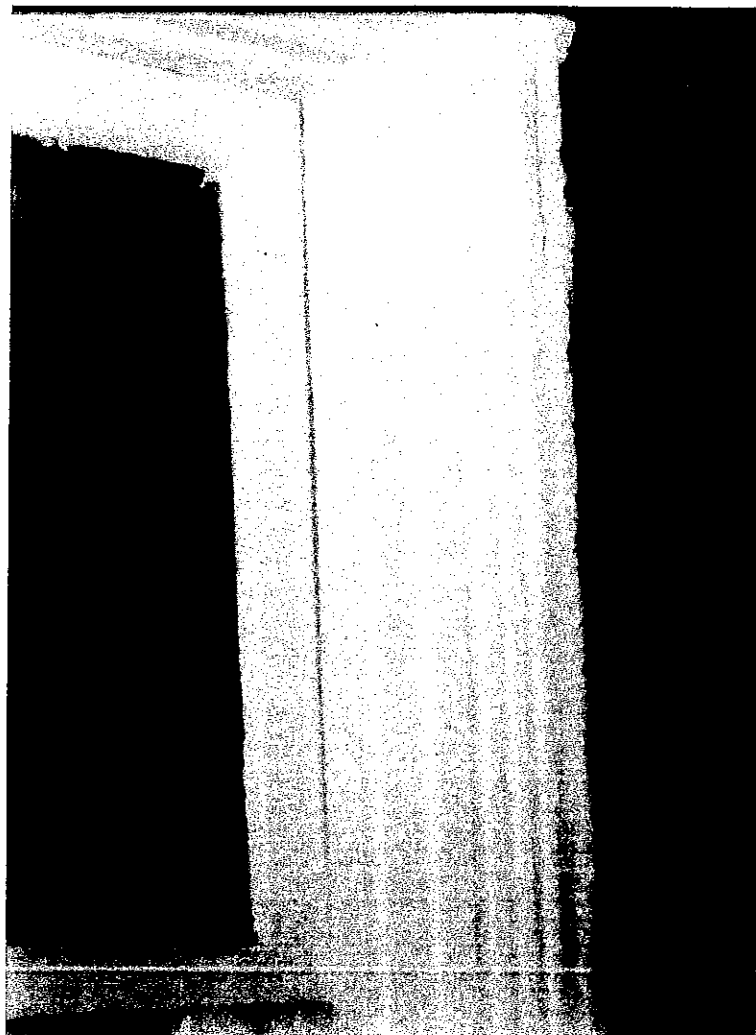


Photo #6
View: Cottage style
side hinged leaded
glass window on east
side of house.

Photo #7
View: Window frames
on first level all
have six step
recessing, which is
repeated on the five
oversized basement
windows.





Photos #8A and #8B

View: Wood flooring is mitered where walls join.

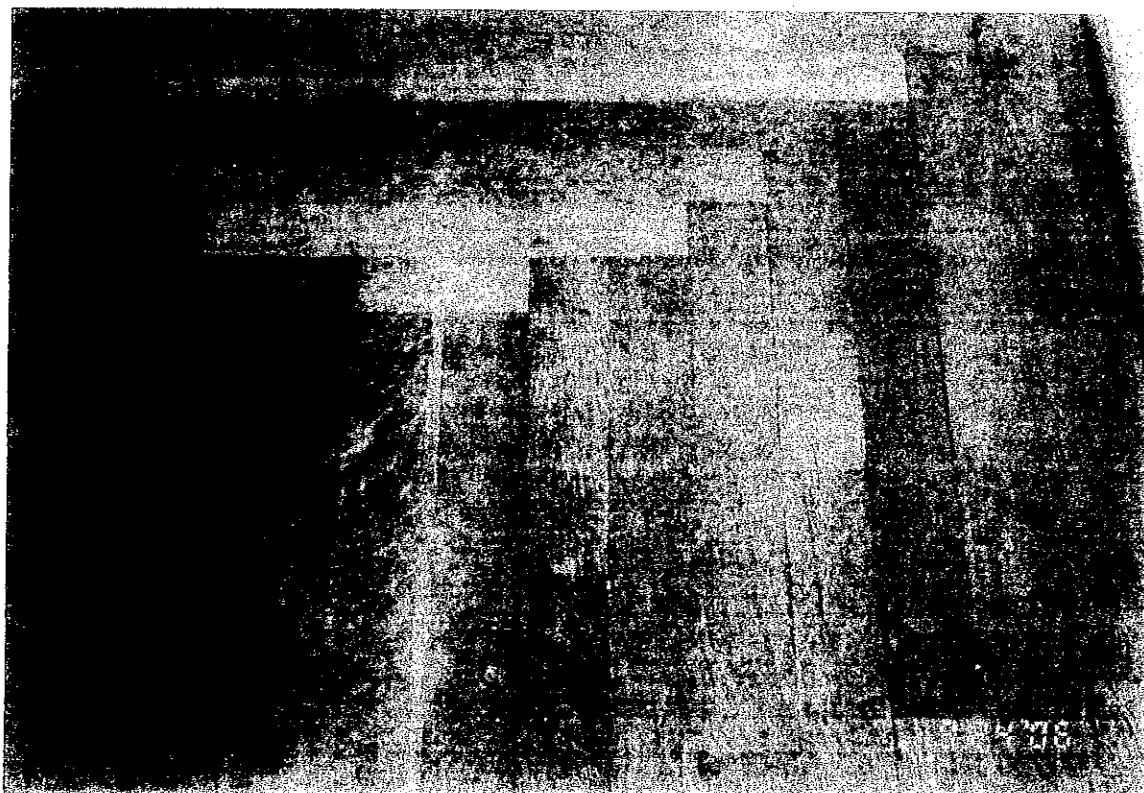
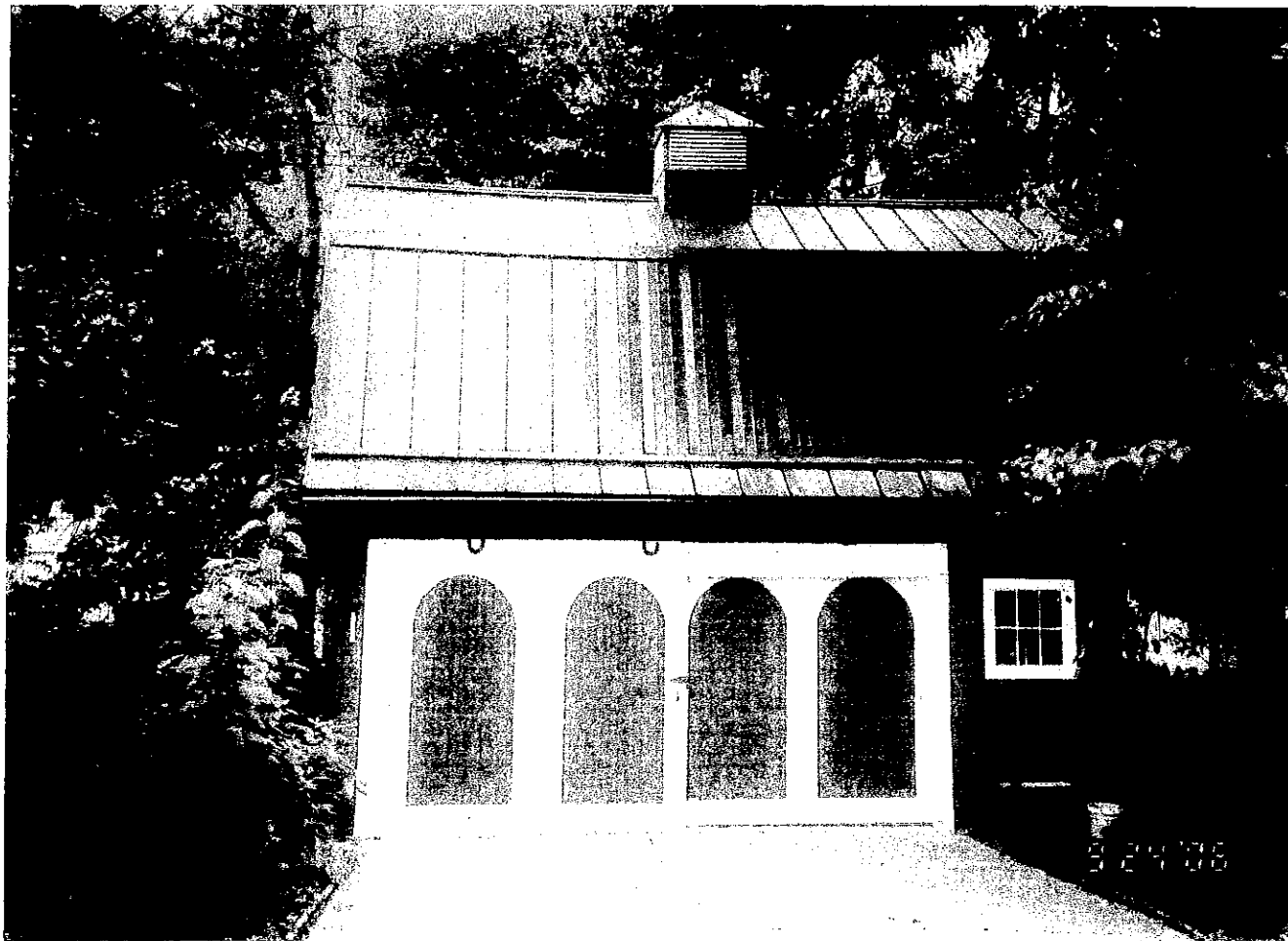
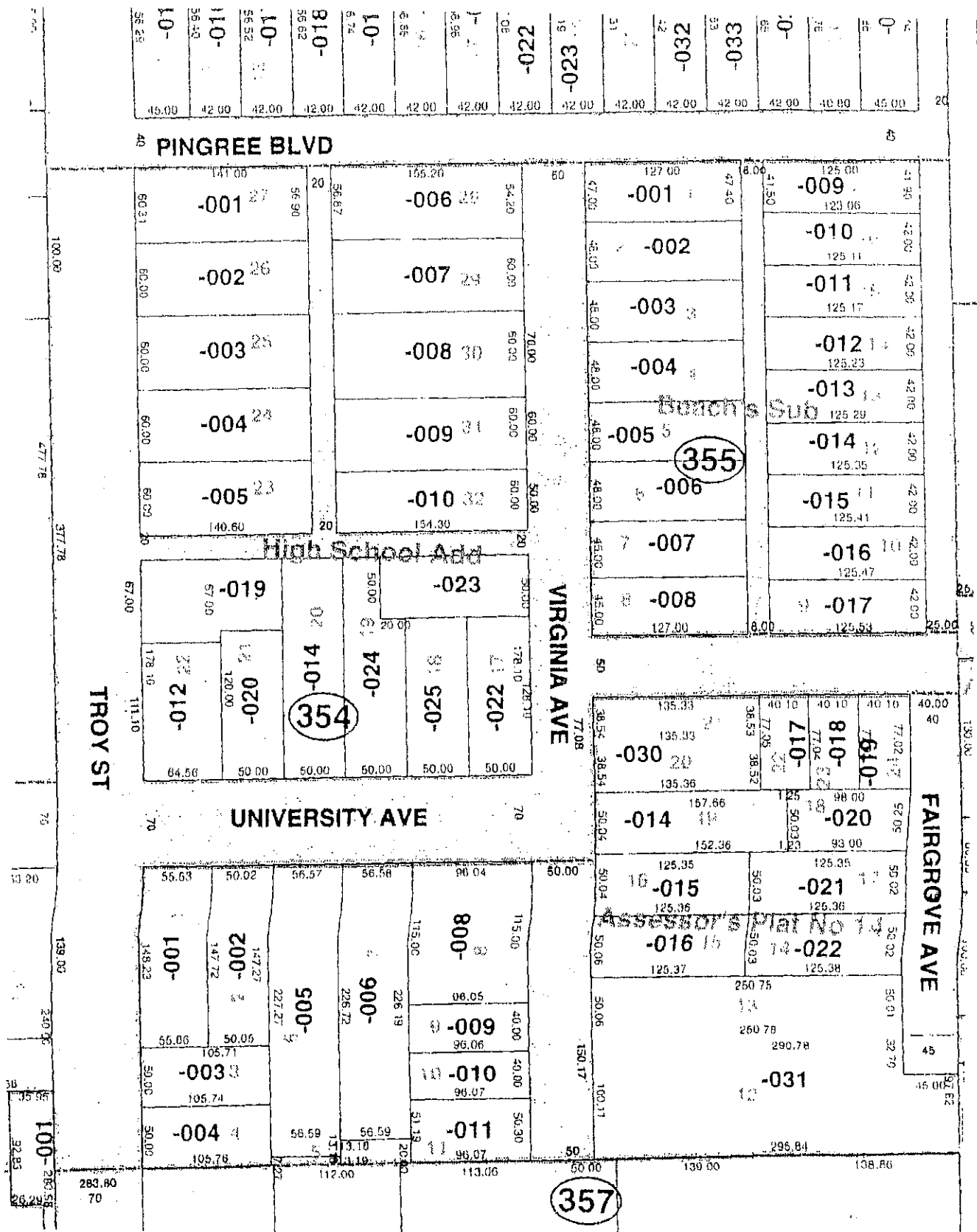


Photo #9
Secondary Structure

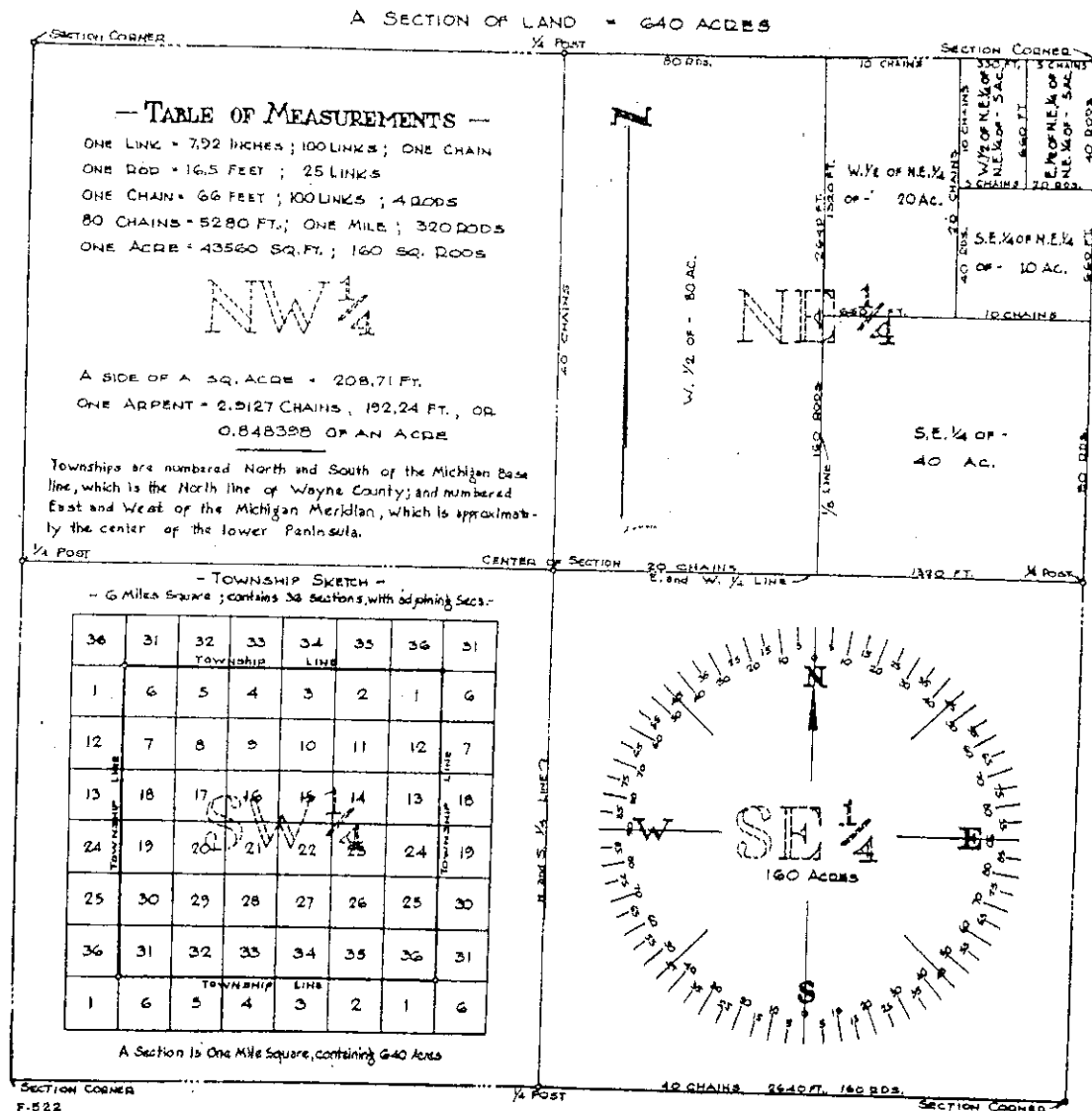


View: In the back yard is a two story barn with mansard style, metal clad roof with cupola, and two sliding doors with original roller hinges.



Map #1B: Location of McDowall House on N. Troy Street in High School Addition subdivision.

Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation



Detroit-Pontiac-Mt. Clemens
Ann Arbor-Midland
Michigan

A B S T R A C T O F T I T L E .

DESCRIPTION:- Part of S. W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of S. W. $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 15, Town 1 N. Range 11 E., being the township of Royal Oak, Oakland County, Michigan, described in transfers as 20 acres of land. Bounded N. by lands of Ferguson & Cook, E. by land of Watts, S. by lands of Erb & Russell, W. by highway.

Map #2B: Legal description of McDowall House property location from Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation.