



## MEMORANDUM

Planning Department

Meeting Date: 02/10/2009  
211 Williams Street  
P.O. Box 64  
Royal Oak, MI 48067  
Phone: (248) 246-3280  
Fax: (248) 246-3005  
cl.royal-oak.mi.us

DATE: January 20, 2009

TO: Members of the Plan Commission

FROM: Planning Department

SUBJECT: **Local Historic District, Preliminary Study Committee Reports  
- Hilzinger House (211 Knowles St)**

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The Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee is requesting that the George and Anna Hilzinger House, located at 211 Knowles Street, be designated a Local Historic District.

The Local Historic District Act, Public Act 169, 1970 as amended, requires that the Historic District Study Committee (HDSC) transmit a copy of the Preliminary Study Committee Report to the local planning body prior to conducting a public hearing and preparing the final report and ordinance. The Plan Commission shall take historic resources into consideration when reviewing planning issues or development projects that might affect those resources. Attached is a copy of the preliminary report from the HDSC.

Should the Plan Commission support the Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee's recommendation / findings, the following motion has been provided for its consideration:

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Royal Oak Plan Commission supports the designation of the George and Anna Hilzinger House, located at 211 Knowles Street, Royal Oak, Michigan as a Local Historic District.

Cc: T. Thwing, Director of Planning  
D. Gillam, City Attorney

Ruth Cleaveland  
Chair, Historic District Study Committee  
402 N. Troy Street  
Royal Oak, MI 48067-4115

*It is recommended that the petitioner or a representative attend the February 10, 2009 Plan Commission meeting. The meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers on the 3rd floor of City Hall.*

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# GEORGE & ANNA HILZINGER HOUSE

## 211 KNOWLES

### PRELIMINARY REPORT

October 9, 2008

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.

#### Boundaries

Property Description: T1N, R11E, Section 22, Assessor's Plat No. 9, Lot 19, also part of Lots 20 & 29, also Lot 11 of 'Central Park Sub', all described as beginning at point distant S 89-39-00 E 797.28 ft. & S 01-19-00 W 35.99 ft. & S 89-21-00 E 406.32 ft. & S 89-50-00 E 25 ft. & S 00-30-00 W 250 ft. from NW section corner, thence S 89-49-31 E 155.85 ft., thence S 00-30-00 W 50 ft., thence S 00-32-59 W 55.92 ft., thence N 89-49-31 W 189.79 ft., thence N 01-18-16 E 97.95 ft., thence S 89-43-52 E 7.61 ft., thence S 00-30-00 W 42 ft, thence S 89-49-31 E 25 ft., thence N 00-30-00 E 50 ft. to beginning, excluding Lot 19 4-3-00 from 026.

Tax Item No.: 75-25-22-126-029

#### Percentage of Historic and Non-historic Resources

The percentage for historic resource is 67% to 33% 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

Karen P. Burden

Member, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Tammis Donaldson

Registered Architect

Member, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Robert R. Duchene

Vice-Chair, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Teacher, United States History

Robert Guymer

Member, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Dr. Jim Keillor

Psychologist

Member, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

Rob Moore

Secretary, Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee

### **Historical Significance**

The presence of Hilzingers in Royal Oak dates back to the 1870s. William Hilzinger was born August 20, 1854 in Tuttlingen, Wurtenburg in Germany. William migrated to Detroit in 1870 where he lived for two years. He then set up a shoemaking business in Warren but soon decided to travel and visited Iowa as well as Grand Rapids and Benton Harbor, Michigan. William then settled permanently in Royal Oak as a cobbler and soon after established a wholesale milk and butter business at the corner of Main Street and First Street (11 Mile Road) to supply Detroit merchants with these goods.

The dairy products were first transported to Detroit by horse-drawn wagons on the Woodward toll road where tolls were collected at 8 Mile and 5 Mile Roads. Later the milk and butter were transported on the Flint to Detroit Inter-Urban Railway.

On June 19, 1884, William married Mary D. Storz, whose parents also had earlier originated in Tuttlingen, Germany. William and Mary would eventually have nine children.

Mary's father, Philip John Storz, had himself been a cobbler and had practiced his trade in Royal Oak. Before his death in 1894 Philip Storz had purchased the entire block from First to Second Street between Center Street and Washington Avenue (where the U.S. Post Office is located today). Philip Storz was able to assist his son-in-law by providing a site at the southwest corner of Main and First for the dairy business William had established.

On this location, William became intrigued with the possibilities of the emerging electrical power business and opened a gas-powered electrical plant in 1900 near the location of the milk depot in the basement of what would later become known as the historic Hilzinger Block Building.

The energetic Hilzinger drilled for natural gas at the dairy site hoping to tap a power source for his electric facility. That prospect was short-lived as the gas was hard to control, but his electrical business was successful enough to eventually provide power for sixteen streetlights, five homes, three businesses and a hotel. Power was provided until 11:55 p.m. at which time lights would blink as a five minute warning that the electricity would cease at midnight. The thrifty city fathers of the time chose to dispense entirely with electrical power on moonlit nights. The uncertainties of providing electrical power with competition from other gas lighting companies eventually drove Mr. Hilzinger to sell off his electrical business after five years of operation.

One of Hilzinger's drilling operations had struck an underground mineral spring. Ever the entrepreneur, William sold the water in bottles to Detroiters as "Tuttlingen Health Water." The water was tested by a Professor of Chemistry at the Detroit College of Medicine who declared the water to be "exceptionally pure and palatable."

During his lifespan, William Hilzinger served his fellow citizens as a mail carrier, a postal clerk, a manufacturer of masonry blocks, a real estate agent, and as vice-president of the 1<sup>st</sup> State Bank and of the State Savings Bank. Hilzinger also served several terms on the local school board.

At the end of his life, Hilzinger was still advising his sons Albert and Carl on their 1925 establishment of a hardware and paint business which was built on the land left by Philip Storz. The siting of the new hardware store, accompanied by the opening of the adjacent Romeyn Drug Store by Carla (Hilzinger) Romeyn and her husband, meant that this part of Main Street would lose its residential character and would become the commercial district now known as Downtown Royal Oak. Mr. Hilzinger's advice to his sons was apparently worthwhile as the Hilzinger Hardware business endured well until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

William Hilzinger's restless spirit was instrumental in providing turn-of-the-century Royal Oak with energy of more than one kind. Besides establishing Royal Oak's first electrical power facility, William Hilzinger devoted his life to providing his fellow citizens with everything from their ABC's, to their water, to their banking services. This remarkable immigrant illustrates the vitality of the Progressive Era and his contributions, both material and philosophical, serve as his legacy to Royal Oak today.

## House

### Architectural Description

The form of the house is a gable-front-and-wing house. The house was built during the Civil War years, c. 1864. The original owners were the Wood family from Great Britain. The house was located on E. Third Street between Williams and S. Troy Streets in Royal Oak, Michigan. One of William's sons, George J. Hilzinger, married Anna C. Neilsen in 1921. She had lived with her uncle, Peter Backer, on the west side of Rochester Road north of Thirteen Mile Road. George and Anna lived at 126 Phillips before moving to 211 Knowles Street. When it was scheduled to be demolished for the construction of the Daily Tribune building (the local newspaper company), George Hilzinger purchased the Wood house and moved the structure to its present location at

211 Knowles. Building permit #291 was pulled July 26, 1946 for the house move. The basement was dug and the house moved on to the new concrete block foundation. The house was modified when it was moved including moving the stairway to allow for a larger kitchen and dining room. The interior was completely replastered after the move.

A contemporary Royal Oak obituary noted that "Anna was the embodiment of a Royal Oak citizen, endeared to the Historical Society....many Society meetings were held in her home on Knowles Street." Mrs. Hilzinger gave presentations about Royal Oak history to the Girl Scouts and other organizations. The Royal Oak Library has a video presentation of her giving recollections of history in Royal Oak. She had been a grand marshal in the Royal Oak Memorial Day parade. She authored a chapter titled "Foot Paths that Widened" in the Golden Jubilee book "Royal Oak, Michigan - The Early Years".

From the book "Common Houses in America's Small Towns": "The upright and wing house was the first of the irregularly massed forms to evolve. Its place of origin was Upstate New York and from there it spread westward across the Upper Middle West. The upright and wing derives from the combining of traditional double pile forms: the New England Classic Cottage or double-pile cottage and either the two-story gable-front house of the one-and-a-half-story gable-front-cottage."

"The upright and wing originated as a middle class and gentry form in Upstate New York after 1800. A logical purveyor of the Greek Revival decoration, the form filtered to lower classes with little or no ornamentation."

The house is a contributing historical resource.

Past and present use of building; residential occupancy.

### **West (Front) Elevation**

The gable-front-and-wing house has the gable upright end facing west toward Knowles Street. The wing portion of the house is perpendicular to the upright structure creating a "T". The wing includes a covered porch facing Knowles Street. The gable front portion of

the house is two stories with four windows; two on the first floor and two on the second floor, they are placed symmetrically. The first floor gable-front windows are double hung, four over four and the second floor windows are double hung, six over six. The first floor windows are taller than the second floor windows. The wing portion of the house is one floor plus a second partial second floor with a shed dormer encompassing about half of the wing. The front door is at the wing portion of the house and is entered through the porch. There are two first floor windows at the wing and they are four over four, double hung windows facing the street. The house siding is wood clapboard at about 4.5" exposure. The house is painted entirely white with a green architectural asphalt shingle roof. The windows are true divided lite double hung windows painted white with wood storm windows painted green. The trim around the windows is also painted green.

The four over four double hung windows are unusual; the vertical muntins are considerably thicker (1") than the horizontal muntins (1/4"). Many of the panes are of wavy glass.

### **North (Side) Elevation**

The north elevation repeats the gable-front elevations, except this is the eave side. The first floor has two windows with a four over four double hung windows. There is one second floor window; it is a six over six double hung window.

### **East (Rear) Elevation**

The gable end has six over six sash double hung windows both on the first floor and second floor. The wing portion of the building has a bump out for a breakfast nook that was constructed during the move.

### **South (Side) Elevation**

Single story gable wing with shed dormer facing the street beyond.

**Structure**

The foundation is built from concrete block. The block foundation is raised off the grade by 2.5 blocks. The basement has rough sawn floor joists, with circulating saw marks, which is common in structures of 1840 and after. The only remaining observable framing structure is in the basement.

**Interior Layout**

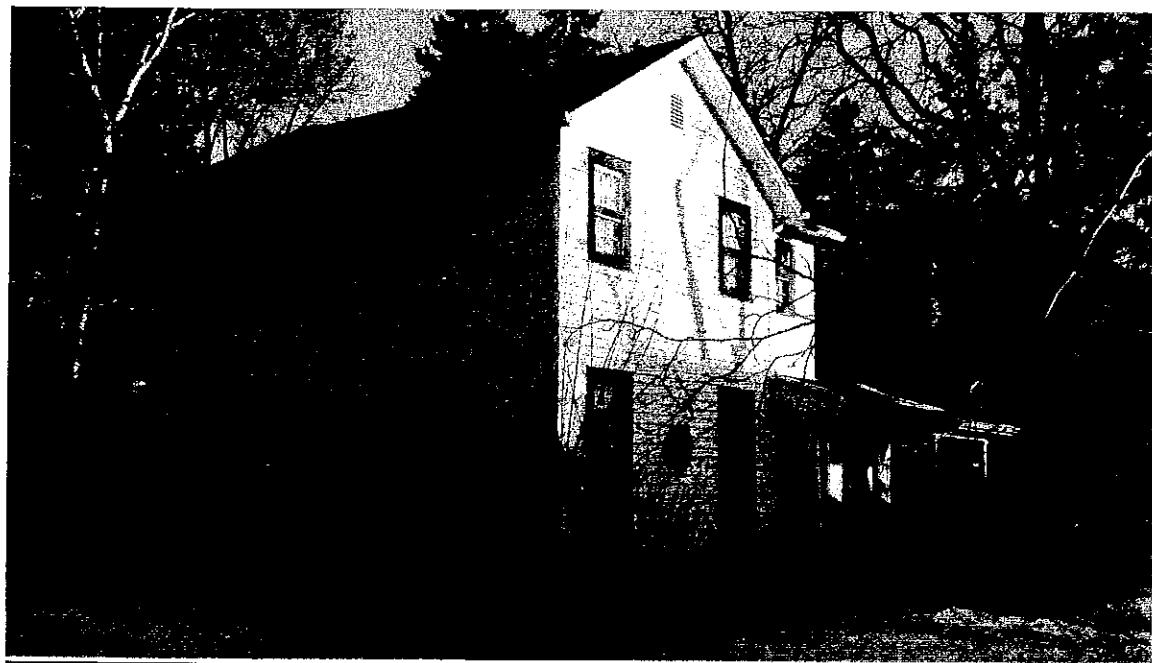
The first floor wing is two rooms deep including the living room facing the street, the front door entry and a stair to the second floor. The dining room and kitchen face the back yard at the wing portion of the house. The first floor upright part of the house is also two rooms deep. The front room was a bedroom currently used as a study and the back room was a small bedroom currently used as a music room. There is a full bathroom adjacent to the music room. The second floor wing has a bedroom in a dormer facing the street. The upright portion of the house has a bedroom also facing the street and a small bedroom and full bathroom facing the back yard.



2008 Photo of House



2008 Photo of House



2008 Photo of House

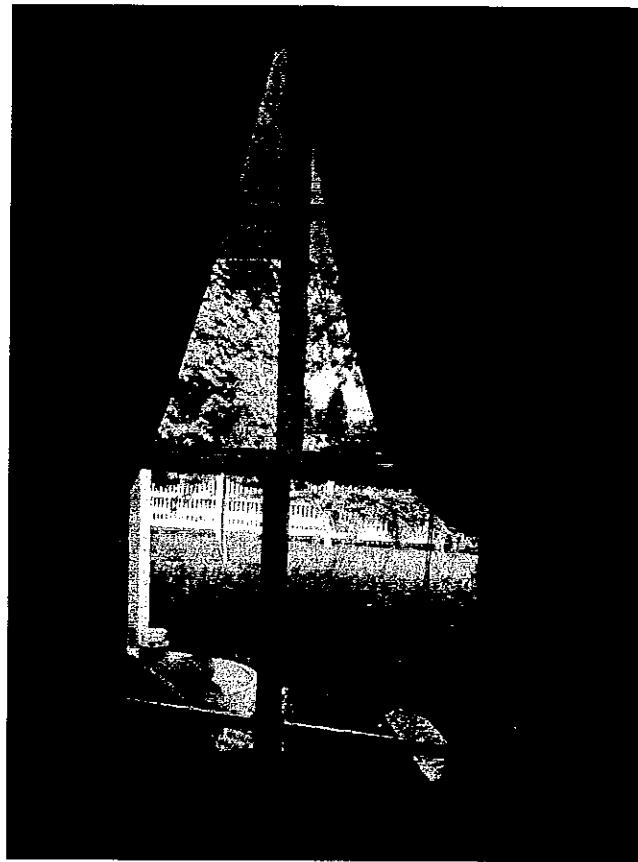


Photo of Window Detail (first floor, 4 over 4 double hung)

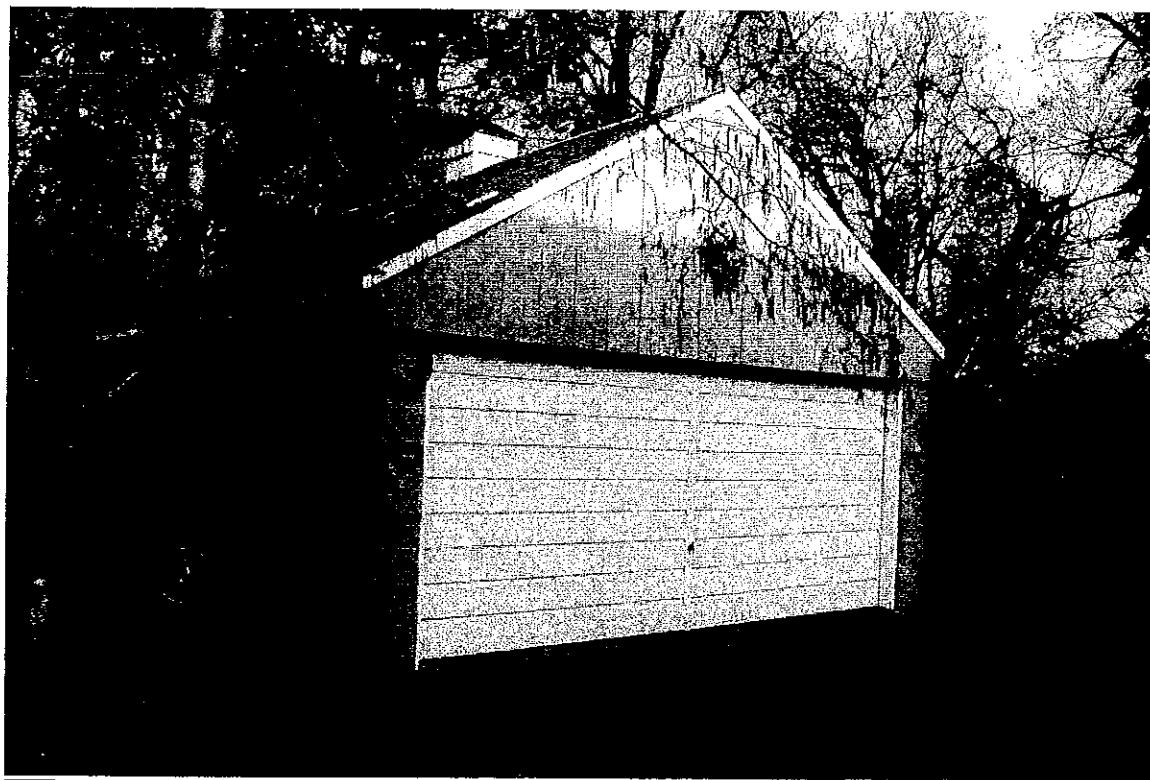
## SECONDARY BUILDINGS

### Two-Car Garage – Construction date unknown (possibly when house was moved)

#### Architectural Description

The garage has a simple rectangular plan and a gable roof facing Knowles Street (West). The walls are concrete block, the gable roof end is vertical wooden boards, the roof has asphalt shingles, and the garage overhead doors are aluminum. There is no driveway connecting the garage and Knowles Street. A small birdhouse cupola sits atop the roof ridge.

The two-car garage is a contributing resource.



2008 Photo of Two-Car Garage

**One-Car Garage (Currently a Storage Shed)****Architectural Description**

The one-car garage was moved from 126 Phillips at the previous home of the Hilzinger's and relocated to the 211 Knowles site.

The gable roof shed has a rectangular plan, lap siding with 2.5" exposure, fixed sash windows with four divided lites on the north, east, and west elevations. The muntin size and shape in the sash match the main house front (west) and side (north) elevations; however they are single sash fixed units unlike the house which are double hung. There is a pair of swinging wood doors facing the street on the west side. The doors are made up of vertical tongue and groove boards with a bead and 3.25" exposure. The steep pitch roof is new cedar shingles.

The one-car garage is a contributing resource.



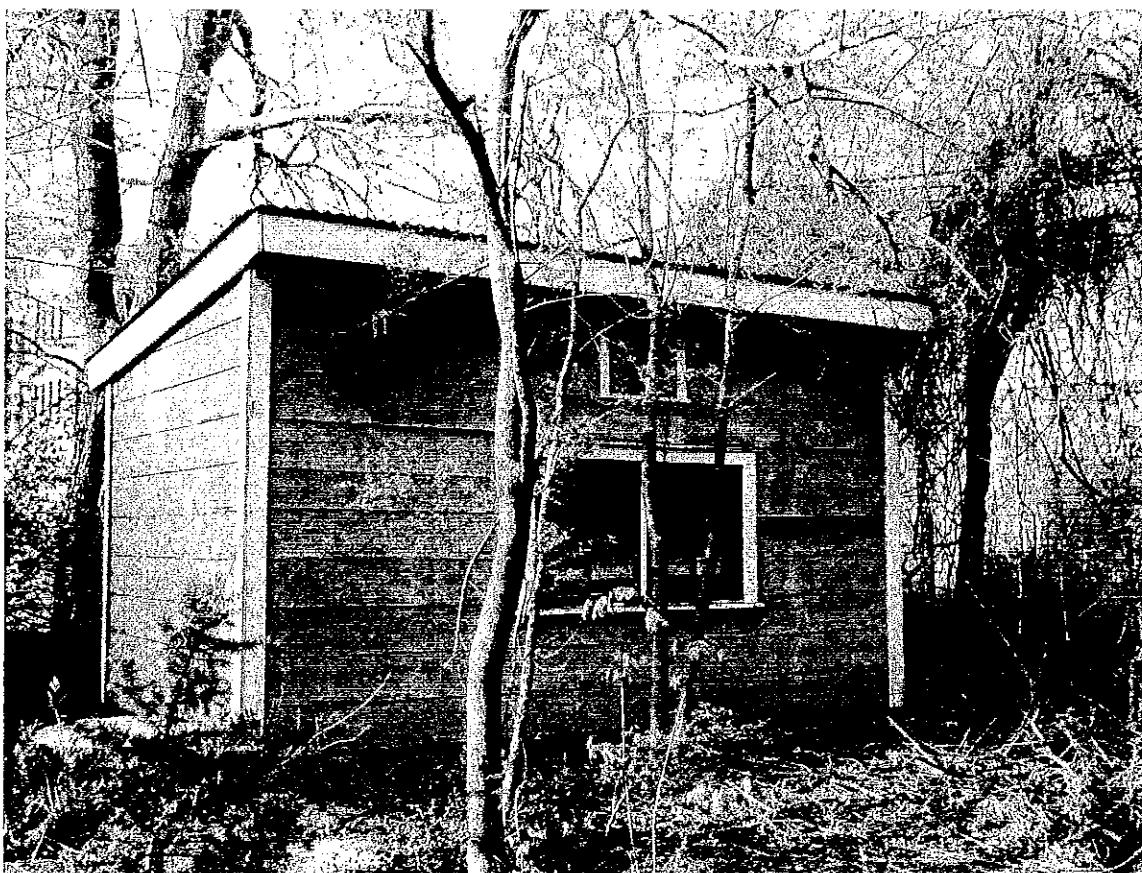
2008 Photo of One-Car Garage

**Chicken Coop** (Currently a Storage Shed)Architectural Description

The original chicken coop was built by George Hilzinger and his sons.

The chicken coop is rectangular in plan. The door is on the east side and there are fixed sash windows on both the south and north side. The windows on the south side consist of a pair of 4 lite sash windows that match the one-car garage. The window to the north is an 18 lite fixed sash window. There are no windows or doors on the west elevation. The siding is square edge, wooden boards with 9" exposure. The shallow pitched shed roof is corrugated steel.

The chicken coop is a contributing resource.



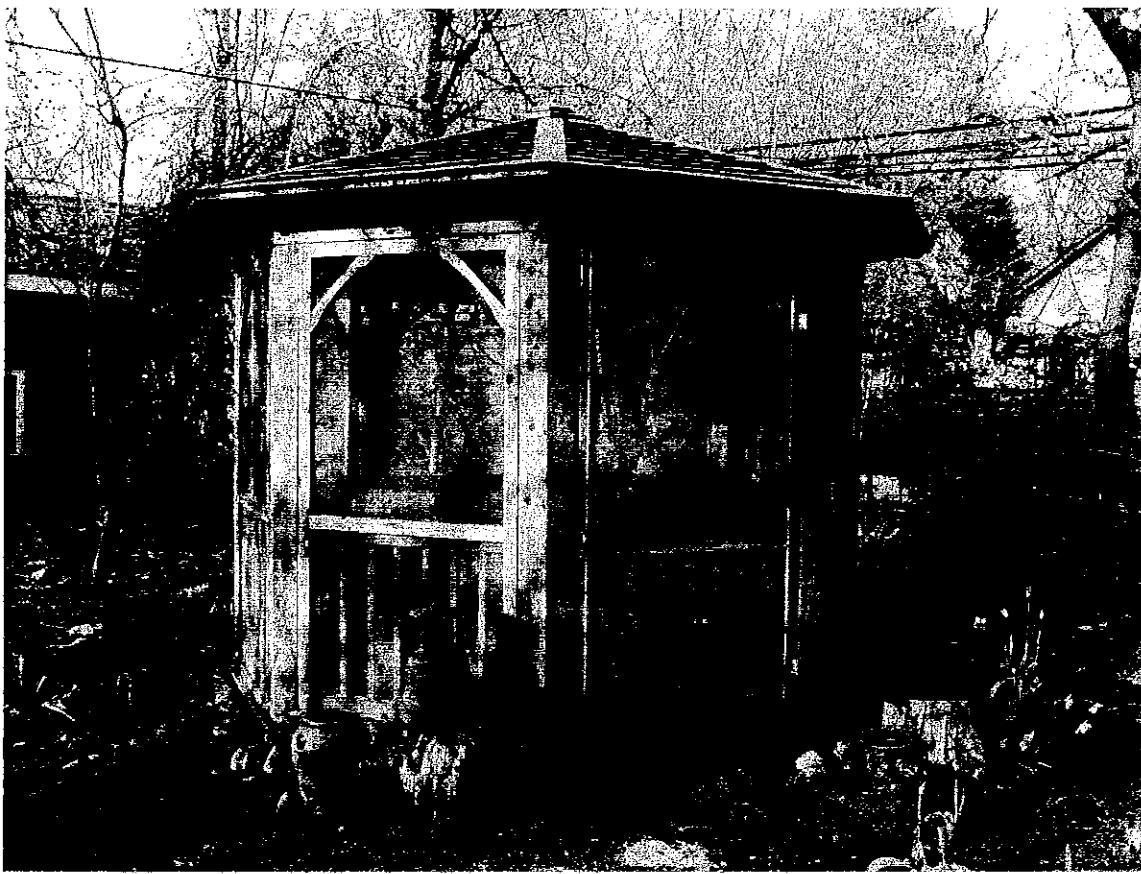
2008 Photo of Chicken Coop

## **Gazebo**

### Architectural Description

The gazebo has an octagon plan. The structure is constructed of cedar and is screened in, and has a cedar shingle roof.

The gazebo is a non-contributing resource.



2008 Photo of Gazebo

## **Professional Office**

### Architectural Description

The office building is a two-story building with a covered front entry porch built in 1994 facing Knowles Street. In constructing the building every attempt was made to simulate the nearby house's architecture. Materials and scale were selected to achieve this goal.

The professional office building is a non-contributing resource.



2008 Photo of Professional Office Building

**Summary (Statement of Significance)**

One of the main significances of the George & Anna Hilzinger House built in 1864 is that it represents a simple gable front and wing house located in the City of Royal Oak. At a point in time the house was a country house and because of the growth of the suburbs around Detroit it has become a farmhouse in the city. The physical integrity of the original house is intact. The George & Anna Hilzinger House retains considerable historic integrity and meets National Register criterion C, because the building (house) embodies the distinctive characteristics of type, period and method of construction. It is one of the early remaining houses in Royal Oak. In addition, the house meets criterion B, George & Anna Hilzinger were persons of significance to the City of Royal Oak's historical past.

**Bibliography**

Royal Oak Images, *Yesterday's Charm, Today's Treasures*, 2006.  
Perkins, Owen. *Royal Oak, Michigan-The Early years*, 1971.  
Penney, David G. & Lance, Lois A. *Royal Oak Twigs and Acorns*, 1996.  
Mc Alester, Virginia & Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 1984.  
Jakle, John A., *Common Houses in America's Small Towns*, 1989.  
Howard, Hugh, *How Old Is This House?*, 1989.  
Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970, through the Royal Oak Public Library.  
Sanborn Map 1926  
Sanborn Map 1931-1950

**Interview**

Interview with William (Bill) Hilzinger, son of George and Anna Hilzinger on 06-18-2008  
by Dr. Jim Keillor

WILLIAMS ST

THIS NEW

TROY;

*on Page 6590*

### Lot Lines

Tax Parcel Line

### Subdivision Line

The information provided herewith has been compiled from recorded deeds, plats, tax maps, surveys and other public records. It is not a legally recorded map or survey and is not intended to be used as one. Users should consult the information sources mentioned above when conducting title work.



**L Brooks Patterson**  
**Oakland County Executive**

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(248) 658-0720





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**Oakland County**  
**Michigan**  
L. Brooks Patterson  
Oakland County Executive

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Lot Line d on Page 6590

Tax Parcel Line

Subdivision Line

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