



CITY OF CHARLEVOIX  
210 STATE ST. CHARLEVOIX, MICH. 49720

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## **REPORT ON 108 PARK AVENUE - January 2010**

The research included in this report covers the history of 108 Park Ave. – both the structure (commonly referred to as the “Ingalls House”) and the lot itself (known as the “DeWitt Lot”). The purpose of this report is to present information concerning this issue for the benefit general public, the DDA, and City Council for an informed decision. The end of this report shows four potential options for the future of this property.

### **Structure History**

According to a letter from the Charlevoix County Land Conservancy to the Charlevoix City Manager, the Ingalls House was built in 1868, with an addition added in 1884.<sup>1</sup> This conflicts with the 1987 assessor’s card, which indicates that the home was built in 1870.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the case, a photograph obtained from the Charlevoix Historical Society shows the Ingalls House with the old school building in the background<sup>3</sup>, which, according to Dave Miles, burned in 1878. This proves that the house at 108 Park Ave. was constructed sometime before that year.

The first Sanborn Fire Map of 1884 shows the earliest known shape and form of the structure. Further maps show that the structure received an addition between 1890 and 1896, and one further addition between 1896 and 1901. The latter addition was removed between 1907 and 1927, and during the same time period, the front porch was expanded. Additional maps show that the structure remained unchanged from 1927 until 1985.<sup>4</sup> The last significant change to the structure was in the mid-1990s, when part of the rear of the house was demolished to make way for the DeWitt parking lot.

### **Past Ownership / Occupancy**

According to the PRS/Environmental report, which cited the records from the Charlevoix County Register of Deeds, the property at 108 Park Ave. was acquired by Lennie Ingalls in 1869 from John and Phoebe Dixon. The Ingalls owned the house until 1925 when it was deeded to the DeWitt family.<sup>5</sup> The DeWitt family owned the house until May 1995, at which time it was sold to the Downtown Development Authority.<sup>6</sup> In 1999, the structure

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Charlevoix City Manager from Charlevoix County Land Conservancy on improvements to 108 Park Ave., and attached Ingalls family history (January 14, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Residential Assessment Record (September 3, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Photograph of Park Ave. (Main St.) and State St. intersection (pre-1878).

<sup>4</sup> Charlevoix, Michigan: A Century of Development, Victor Hogg (1980s).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Uniform Buy and Sell Agreement for 108 Park Ave. (May 31, 1995)

was leased to the Charlevoix County Land Conservancy (CCLC). In their January 14, 1999 letter to the Charlevoix City Manager, the CCLC stated that within five years of leasing the property – according to the terms of the lease – they would have made a number of improvements to the structure, including installing plumbing and heating systems, upgrading the electric, putting on a new roof, and repairing doors and windows.<sup>7</sup> After the CCLC vacated the structure in 2009, the Performance Engineers report showed that even after ten years of occupying the building, the CCLC had completed none of these upgrades. The CCLC stated they have replaced the roof, although no written proof has been provided.

### **Potential Parking Lot / Historic Preservation**

The principal question over 108 Park is whether or not the structure should be removed to make way for a parking lot. This is not the first time this debate has been held. The City first looked to build a parking lot on the DeWitt site in 1996. In May of that year, the City held a public hearing to determine whether or not the entire structure, or at least part of the structure, should be demolished order to make way for a parking lot. The Planning Department produced a document which presented both sides of the issue. In terms of the need for parking, the planner noted an increasing demand for downtown parking spaces. Mid-summer user counts showed demand for parking often exceeded availability, especially during festivals and other events. Further, the planner report anticipated an increased demand for parking in the future.<sup>8</sup>

The debate over the parking issue continues today. When the City conducted the Charlevoix Community Survey in winter 2009, 65% (164) of respondents indicated that there were areas in the City of Charlevoix where parking was inadequate. Of those respondents, 140 stated in the written response section that downtown lacked sufficient parking.<sup>9</sup> However, a number of survey responses also echoed what the Planning Department stated in 1996:

*“It is extremely difficult to quantify the extent of the parking problem as it is directly related to the level of convenience expected by the user. Even during the height of summer festivals, all of the people who wish to visit the CBD can find a parking space and come. They may have to park several blocks away and walk, however, they will still find a parking space and attend the event.”<sup>10</sup>*

Additionally, while the 2007 Hyett Palma Downtown Blueprint for the City of Charlevoix recommended that downtown Charlevoix have more parking, the report encouraged the development of parking ramps rather than lots in order to minimize the amount of

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<sup>7</sup> Letter to Charlevoix City Manager from Charlevoix County Land Conservancy on improvements to 108 Park Ave., and attached Ingalls family history (January 14, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> DeWitt Property Parking Study, City of Charlevoix Planning Dept. (May 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt, City of Charlevoix Community Survey Draft Results Report (July 2009)

<sup>10</sup> DeWitt Property Parking Study, City of Charlevoix Planning Dept. (May 1996).

blacktopped space in the downtown area.<sup>11</sup>

While there is focus on the apparent need for additional parking, there is also debate over whether the Ingalls House should be historically preserved. According to the Planning Department report of 1996,

*“Historically, much of the CBD located westwardly from the rear of the Bridge St. buildings was occupied by residential structures which gave the district much of its traditional character. The few residential structures which remain, approximately eight in number, are important to maintaining the small town, mixed use, and traditional feel to the CBD. Once these structures are gone, no amount of brick sidewalk treatment, nostalgic light fixtures, reused bridge railings, and street trees with grates will replace the historic ambiance which has existed for over a century.”<sup>12</sup>*

As of December 14, 2009, direct community support for historic preservation of 108 Park Ave. has amounted to one letter to the editor of the Charlevoix Courier, one letter sent to the Downtown Development Authority, and one e-mail sent to DDA Executive Director Keith Carey. Another letter was submitted by John Logie on December 9, 2009. George Haggard sent a letter to the City Council on December 15, 2009

However, any discussion of historic preservation must take into account the viability of rehabilitating the structure, and must consider relevant data, especially as it relates to structure safety:

- Property and Building records from 1953 classify 108 Park Avenue as a class “D” structure and state its condition as “F-”.<sup>13</sup> The assessing card from 1987 states that “[the] owner only lives in ½ of the house; the upstairs and other ½ are completely shut off. The roof is in very poor condition, water is leaking all over the interior of the house.”<sup>14</sup> According to the current Charlevoix City Assessor, the house – apart from two rooms in the rear addition – lacks nearly all utilities, including heat and plumbing. There is some electric, but most is run on the outside of the walls and is in poor condition. The assessor also stated that the rearmost facing wall of the house is “practically unfinished on the interior”, and that “the entire rear portion of the house is built on piers,” rather than on a solid foundation.
- A 2009 report by Performance Engineers further the 1987 card and the assessor’s statements. The report states that “sufficient resources” would be needed to bring it to marketable condition. Specifically, the report states that

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<sup>11</sup> *Charlevoix Downtown Blueprint, Hyett Palma, 2007*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Charlevoix County Equalization Director stated on December 11, 2009 that the classification of “D” is a below-average grade (the average being “C”). A structure’s classification typically does not change over time; building materials and other factors give a home a permanent classification. A “D” is a common classification of most homes of the era in which the Ingalls House was built. The director also stated that the grade of “F-” signifies that at the time of the assessment, the structure was in “less than fair condition.”

<sup>14</sup> *Residential Assessment Record (September 3, 1987).*

there is no plumbing or toilet, nor is there an adequate heating system or electrical hookup. However, the report cites the lack of adequate foundation as the structure's primary deficiency. The home's construction on stone rubble masonry and cedar log post foundations has led to settling and decay of the home's structural underpinnings. This sort of settling and decay is evident in the vertical and lateral displacement of the porch, as well as the fact that the home's floors are now sloped. Performance Engineers also states that the chimney is crumbling and presents a safety hazard.<sup>15</sup>

- Before the southern part of the property was acquired for what is now the DeWitt parking lot, the City contracted with PRS/Environmental, a local environmental consulting group, to perform an environmental study on the property and the structure. The report produced by PRS showed the presence of lead after four separate paint tests, as well as the presence of Tetrachloroethylene (PCE) Trichloroethylene (TCE) contamination in the groundwater below the property (although the report states that neither the property nor the structure was the source of this contamination).<sup>16</sup>

The DDA asked the Historic District Study Committee for advice on what should be done with 108 Park Ave. At their October 7, 2009, meeting, the Committee referred to the recommendations of Hyett Palma's 2007 "Downtown Blueprint," which stated the need for more buildings in the downtown area, as well as the preservation of historic downtown buildings. The Committee recommended that 108 Park Ave. should be "placed back on the tax roll, and if the building could not be restored, it be replaced by a building appropriate for the area."<sup>17</sup> Taking the Historic District's recommendations into consideration, but citing the high cost of rehabilitating the structure and the perceived need for additional downtown parking, the DDA unanimously recommended to City Council (at their October 26, 2009 meeting) that the structure at 108 Park Ave. be demolished, and that the City proceed with plans to develop a parking lot.<sup>18</sup> At their November 2, 2009 meeting, City Council moved to further investigate the demolition and removal of the structure, and the expansion of the DeWitt parking lot.<sup>19</sup> Raechel Wright, who is a Charlevoix resident active in historic preservation, has submitted a preliminary questionnaire to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to seek an opinion as to whether the structure would qualify for either national or state recognition as a historic site. The review of this application by SHPO has not been completed yet. SHPO will evaluate the structure against national standards to offer an opinion as to whether or not it would qualify.

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<sup>15</sup> *House Assessment Report by Performance Engineers (September 4, 2009).*

<sup>16</sup> *Environmental Assessment for 108 Park Ave., PRS/Environmental (April 15, 1996).*

<sup>17</sup> *Minutes, Historic District Study Committee and Historic District Commission Joint Meeting (December 2, 2009).*

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes, Downtown Development Authority (October 26, 2009).*

<sup>19</sup> *Minutes, Charlevoix City Council (November 2, 2009).*

Performance Engineers has submitted plans for the possible expansion of the DeWitt lot showing both two different concepts. Ken Polakowski, Landscape Architect, submitted three plans for the site. One plan included keeping the structure and there were two other designs without the home. The parking designs would attempt to maximize the number of spaces, while paying attention to environmental concerns and extensive landscaping. The lot could be designed with brick pavers, green space and significant plantings to shield the lot looking south from Park Avenue.

The DDA, Historic District Study Committee, Historic District Commission, Planning Commission, and the City Council have all discussed 108 Park Ave. over the past couple of months.

City Staff researched the possibility of having a very experienced historic architect from Petoskey evaluate the structure and provide a cost estimate for restoring the building. The cost of this evaluation would be \$2,500. Staff also sought an appraisal of the property, which would cost \$1,500. Due to budgetary constraints at this point Staff has not been authorized to have these reports completed.

It is important for everyone to understand that there is roughly \$130,000 in the City Parking Fund, which can only be used for parking lot improvements, purchase of more land for lots, and similar expenditures related to parking. These funds cannot be used for any other purpose and have accumulated over time when developers have had to pay into the fund. When new developments cannot provide enough on-site parking spaces, they may pay into this parking fund as another option. Any improvements made at 108 Park Avenue would not be funded by the general tax base. These funds result from a onetime fee paid for by developers who cannot provide their own parking spaces.

The Downtown Development Authority and City Council must now determine what should be done with 108 Park Ave. The decision must take into consideration all facts in the case, including the need for additional downtown parking, the potential value of historic preservation, and the 2007 Hyett Palma recommendations on the need for retaining the stock of buildings in the downtown area. Further, when considering the fate of the structure, its future potential must be weighed against both cost and feasibility. The DDA and City Council may consider the following options:

***Option 1.***

Demolish the Ingalls House and expand the parking lot area over that footprint.

***Option 2.***

Demolish the Ingalls House at 108 Park Ave., but preserve that front portion of the lot for future development. The lot could be subdivided in the future and sold to a private

interest, or that space could be incorporated into the rear lot to add additional spaces.

***Option 3.***

Upgrade the existing lot, do not demolish the structure and seek potential historic restoration for rent, lease or sale.

***Option 4.***

Postpone the decision for one year.

**Attachments (Chronological Order)**

- Photograph of Park Ave. (Main St.) and State St. intersection (pre-1880s).
- Building Record and Property Record cards (October 8, 1953).
- Quit Claim Deed from Erma DeWitt to Magdalene Vanderslice (August 26, 1974).
- Residential Assessment Record (August 11, 1978).
- Charlevoix, Michigan: A Century of Development, Victor Hogg (1980s).
- Residential Assessment Record (September 3, 1987).
- Uniform Buy and Sell Agreement for 108 Park Ave. (May 31, 1995)
- Excerpt, Environmental Assessment for 108 Park Ave., PRS/Environmental (April 15, 1996).
- DeWitt Property Parking Study, City of Charlevoix Planning Dept. (May 1996).
- Letter to Charlevoix City Manager from Charlevoix County Land Conservancy on improvements to 108 Park Ave., and attached Ingalls family history (January 14, 1999).
- Park Avenue Prowl brochure, Alcove Café and Pine River Books (2008).
- Excerpts, City of Charlevoix Community Survey Draft Results Report (July 2009)
- House Assessment Report by Performance Engineers (September 4, 2009).
- Minutes, Downtown Development Authority (October 26, 2009).
- Minutes, Charlevoix City Council (November 2, 2009).
- Letter to the Editor, Charlevoix Courier (November 10, 2009).
- Richard Neumann letter and CV (November 23, 2009).
- Agenda, Historic District Study Committee and Historic District Commission Joint Meeting, (December 2, 2009).
- Editorial, Charlevoix Courier (December 9, 2009)
- Letter from John H. Logie to the DDA and Keith Carey (December 9, 2009)
- E-mail from Raechel Wright to Keith Carey (December 10, 2009).
- DeWitt Parking Lot Concepts, Performance Engineers (2009).
- Appraisal Record Card (undated).
- Haggard Letter to Council Dated (December 21, 2009)