

Response to Mike McCloy's "In Search of Wyandotte's Oldest Cemetery"

It was with great interest that I read Mr. McCloy's paper on the cemetery that once existed at the southeastern corner of Biddle Avenue and Ford Avenue (Northline) in Wyandotte, Michigan. The primary interest was that, I had been told that I had two relatives buried at this site, and their remains were never removed. If this was true, I wanted to explore possible reasons for this. In addition, Mr. McCloy stated, "My main goal of finding precise boundaries for the burial ground in question was a failure". I saw some clues in his 1982 paper that might help pinpoint the cemetery location, along with some personal knowledge I had relayed to me, and backed by other research documents. I wanted to see if ultimately I came to the same conclusions as Mr. McCloy. Furthermore, the Wyandotte Oakwood Cemetery Association (WOCA) group asked me to make my response in written form for their records, and as such, this response is provided. This response is also to serve as information for family members and our heirs for any value they may find in it, therefore please excuse me if I go on a tangent to explain some family history, some of which is indicated in bold brackets, i.e. []. Most of this history is at least indirectly related to the prime goals, and may serve of interest to WOCA. Following the end of this paper, I have provided additional family history which may be of interest to the Wyandotte Historical Society, family members, and our heirs.

The information on my family history is from newspaper articles, family research papers and word of mouth, all of which is subject to error. With that disclaimer, I submit the following:

- George Crassweller was my great grandfather (b. 1/13/1848; d. 4/10/1934).
- Mary Ann (nee Wright) Crassweller was my great grandmother (b. 6/12/1852; d. 4/24/1949).
- George served his apprenticeship in the Camper & Nicholson Yards in Gosport, England.
- George and Mary Ann were married on 8/5/1871 in Buffalo, New York.
- In September of 1871, George at the age of 23 accepted a position at the Wyandotte boat yard. His title or role is not known at this time, however he held the title of Assistant Superintendent in 1896 at the age of 48, and retired as Superintendent in about 1903.
- My great grandparents had 12 children, which included 3 sets of twins [their first child was my grandfather, Harry Crassweller (b. 11/13/1872; d. 3/8/1952). He is buried at Oakwood Cemetery. Next to him on one side is

my grandmother, Lena (nee Engel) Crassweller (b. 5/23/1879; d. 1/25/1927) and on the other side, the remains of my mother Ellen (nee Crassweller) Denny (b. 11/14/1916; d. 3/5/2012) and my father Joseph Denny (b. 4/29/1915; d. 3/3/2010)].

- The first child of my great grandparents to die (my great uncle) was **Allen Crassweller** who was born in 1879 and died that year in infancy. It is believed he died from croup. **He was buried at the "Old City Cemetery"**. His twin sister, Alice Crassweller died in 1896 at the age of 16 of a stroke and is buried at Oakwood Cemetery. Another set of twins was **Winifred Crassweller**, (b. 11/9/1892; d. 1893) and was **buried at the Old City Cemetery**, and her brother Willard, (b. 11/9/1892; d. 8/20/1897) who drowned while visiting his father at the boatyard.
- One other person buried at the Crassweller plot is George Shaw. He was the stepbrother of Mary Ann Crassweller and died of typhoid fever. He lived with the Crasswellers and worked at the boatyard. There is no marker on his grave but was buried at the north most section of the Crassweller plot.

As stated, my grandfather died in 1952 and was buried at Oakwood Cemetery. At the time of his burial, my *great* aunt Elsie (nee Crassweller) Drysdale and sister of my grandfather, told *my* aunt Catherine (nee Crassweller) Stark, that her infant brother Allen and infant sister Winifred were *still* buried at the Old City Cemetery. As they stood at the west carriage road, my great aunt pointed *south* to indicate the location of Allen and Winifred at the Old City Cemetery. My great aunt was 67 years of age at that time, and I presume of sound mind. She happens to be the great grandmother of Todd Drysdale, the current City of Wyandotte Administrator.

The conversation that took place between my aunt and great aunt was relayed to me about a year ago. My aunt Catherine is 91 years of age at this time and of sound mind. She did tell me she never looked upon the gravesites of her aunt and uncle, and just a few years later, the police facility was erected at this location. This building has since been removed and the site is vacant at this time. My aunt Catherine also stated that Mount Carmel Cemetery in Wyandotte has an area dedicated for children's burial only, away from other family members, and perhaps the Old City Cemetery may have also done this.

The question I ask myself was why would my great grandparents decide to bury their infant son and infant daughter at the Old City Cemetery. Mr. McCloy stated, "Those who used the site were either unknowing or apathetic towards any future problems with respect to ownership. Others foresaw the problem, but because of financial reasons used the site anyhow." At this time, burial plots were available at the Oakwood Cemetery (established in 1869) and Mount Carmel Cemetery (established in 1865). I am going to respond to the burials of Alfred and Winifred as *separate* issues.

In 1879 when Allen died, my great grandfather was 31 years of age with 6 other children to raise at home. It is not clear what the income status of my great grandparents were in 1879 although George Crassweller had an apprenticeship far behind him. The financial situation of the country and job security may have played a factor in the decision to use the Old City Cemetery, since the grounds were free of charge for burials. He had been employed at the boatyard about 8 years by that time, however only one ship was launched in 1879. A few years earlier, Eureka Iron Works was having financial difficulty. Proudly We Record states "*The panic of 1873 had likewise made inroads into the financial stability of the company through dubious currency (period of "greenbacks"). To pay workmen at the mill, "scrip" was issued in values of two, five, ten, and twenty dollars, bearing seven percent interest and dated and signed by "Eber B. Ward" and "S. L. Potter".... Wyandotte merchants and speculators cashed them at a discount of forty per cent.*"

In addition, according to Wikipedia, "*The Panic of 1873 was a financial crisis that triggered a depression in Europe and North America that lasted from 1873 until 1879, and even longer in some countries. In Britain, for example, it started two decades of stagnation known as the "Long Depression" that weakened the country's economic leadership. The Panic was known as the "Great Depression" until the events in the early 1930s took precedence.*"

I think it is reasonable to believe that my great grandparents were initially "unknowing" of "any future problems" at the Old City Cemetery. It does not seem unreasonable, in my mind, that any area that is established as a burial ground would be forever! The question then arises, when the Davis Boat & Oar Company representative ordered the removal of the remains in 1892, why didn't my great grandparents comply?

I can think of some reasons. Mr. McCloy's paper indicated that grave markers may have *not* been permitted. And if they were allowed, the markers could have been moved. It is a reasonable assumption that the proper location of a grave site may be in question. I would assume one would not knowingly want to uncover the remains of the wrong person, particularly if the remains had diseases as mentioned in Mr. McCloy's paper. Of course my great grandparents would have been locating a casket perhaps 2 feet long, unless as mentioned the children were grouped together, then all the caskets would be of smaller size. What is known is that the water table is high in this area with marshlands slightly more east at the river. If this was a wetting/ drying cycle over a period of years, wood caskets and probably bones would deteriorate at a hastened pace. I tend to believe my great grandparents chose to let nature take its course and leave well enough alone, along with some emotional price to pay with that decision.

Now for the most perplexing part of this paper: Explaining how Winifred Crassweller could be buried at the Old City Cemetery. After the first draft of this paper, I ran the contents of it by my aunt Catherine. I had thought Allen Crassweller was the only family member to be buried at the Old City Cemetery. She assure me that her aunt Elsie said that both Allen *and* Winifred were buried at the Old City Cemetery.

This is problematic for a few reasons. I mentioned to my aunt the inscription on the grave marker at Oakwood Cemetery. It says:

TWINS - 1892

WINNIE - 1893

WILLARD - 1897

In spite of the grave marker, my aunt says that Winifred *was* buried at the Old City Cemetery and not the Oakwood Cemetery. This would provide some credence to the statement that grave markers were not permitted to the Old City Cemetery, and when Winifred's twin brother died a few years later, my great grandparents are in a position to note the death of both twins with one marker, even though both were not buried together. [Incidentally, my aunt believes this grave marker has been moved from its original location. Originally, it aligned with the other markers. At this time it is orientated 90⁰ and 6 feet away from the line of the other grave markers at the Crassweller plot].

What is more difficult to explain, is that Winifred died in 1893. The controversy for the removal of bodies was in full swing in 1892, which was the year Winifred was born. It seems inconceivable that my great grandparents would want to bury their daughter, nor would Davis Boat & Oar Company permit, the burial of any more deceased in 1893. I can only conclude that my great aunt may have been mistaken when she stated that Winifred was buried at the Old City Cemetery.

[I do not know the precise year my great grandparents purchased a plot at the Oakwood Cemetery. I would guess it would have happened with the death of Alice Crassweller in 1896. A family member has the deed, but is having trouble locating it, and Yvonne Latta, the former chairperson of WOCA, was provided a copy several back. I found it a little unusual that my great grandparents were not buried at Oakwood Cemetery, since they purchased the plot. They were buried at Ferndale Cemetery (along with my great aunt Elsie and her husband) in Riverview, Michigan, that was established in 1914 and is now 100 years old. There should have been space at Oakwood (although I do not know that they took the care back then, as they do today in laying out concrete vaults in precise locations). I assume the reason is, my grandmother Lena Crassweller died in 1927, and my great grandparents left a burial space for my grandfather next to his wife at some future date, which occurred in 1952. By providing a space for my grandfather, there would not be enough space for *both* my great grandparents to be buried side by side.]

Mr. McCloy was not able to find the 3 acre designated site of the Old City Cemetery. If one were to look at the 1876 "Map of Ecorse Township" or the 1876 Wayne County Atlas , a portion of which is attached, it is plain to see the J.P. Clark parcel. Oakwood Cemetery is the southwestern portion of this site. South of this parcel is the Eureka Iron Company parcel. Note that both parcels have a "cross" designation on the west portion of the site. The eastern portion has a symbol, which I presume to be marshland due to its proximity to the Detroit River, and marshland had been mentioned in Mr. McCloy's research. (See attachment no. 1)

The parcel of Eureka Iron Company is situated between Ford Avenue (Northline Road) and Mulberry Street to the south. There is no length of the parcel provided, but across the street, that length can be calculated. I went to the Wyandotte City Hall and requested to look at their tax maps. I tallied the width of each of the indi-

vidual lots between Ford Avenue, Spruce, Cedar, and Mulberry Streets, and included the right of ways between each street. This overall length calculated to be 1216.76 feet. Using an engineer's scale on the Wayne County atlas Map, I was able to determine that 1 inch represented approximately 800 feet, or 1/8 inch equals approximately 100 feet. (See attachment no. 2)

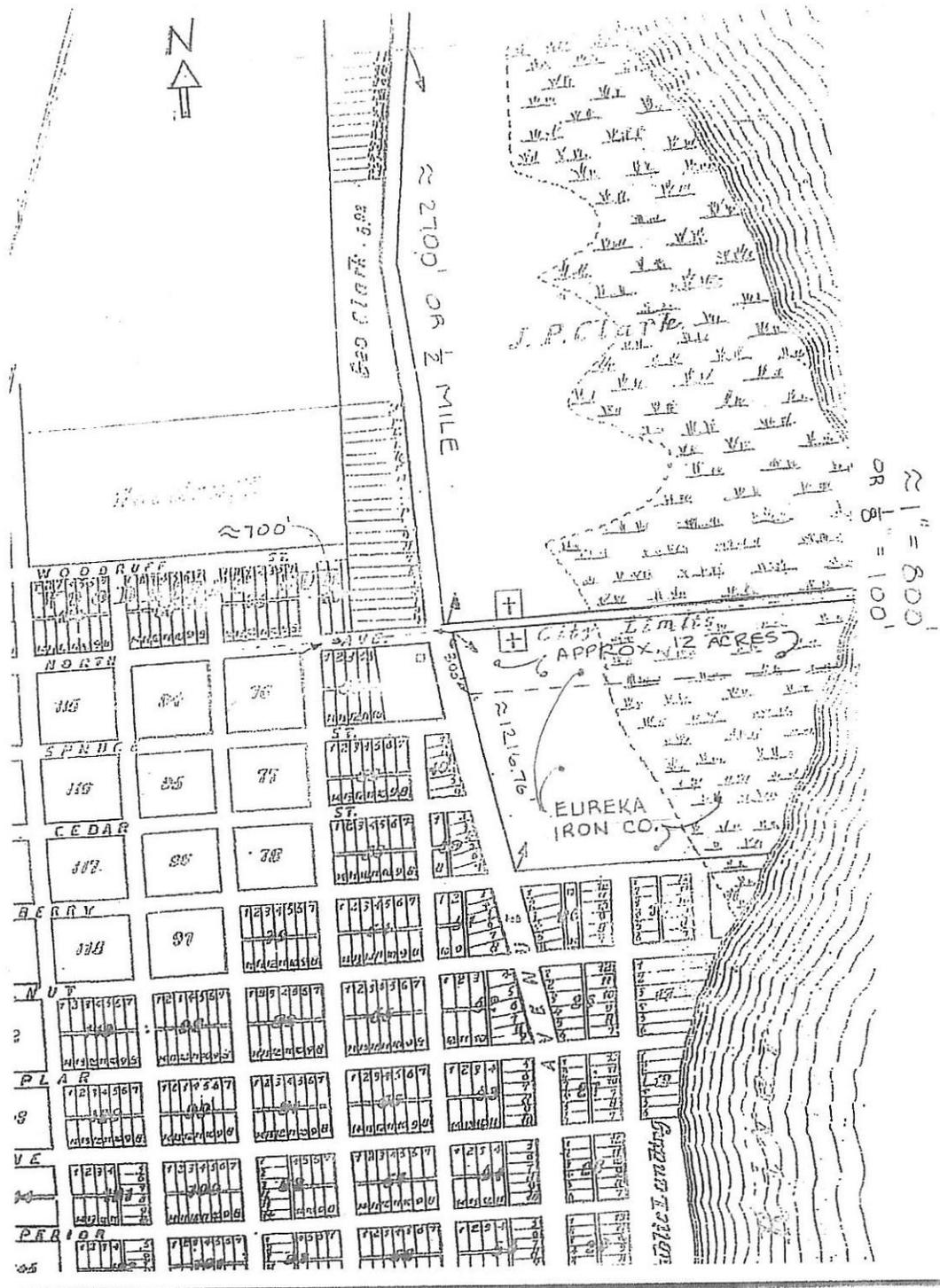
In the legal description of the parcel that Eureka Iron & Steel Works sold to Davis Boat & Oar Company, the key dimension provided was from Ford Avenue south 300 feet along Biddle Avenue to the north line of a parcel sold to Burrell Hoop and Stave Company representatives in 1885.

It would be a reasonable assumption that the east-west property line would align parallel with Ford Avenue and Mulberry Street, which would be due east. The last two sides of the parcel would be the river, then the centerline of Ford Avenue. Scaling the length of the parcel, it has an average length of approximately 1750 feet with a width given as 300 feet, for an overall area of 525,000 square feet, or approximately 12 acres. The 3 acres of the burial ground Mr. McCloy referred to would occupy the west quarter of the site. The 1896 bird's eye view of Wyandotte (attachment no. 3) seems to substantiate my detective work. One can note that the Davis Boat & Oar Company building occupies the east most portion of the 300 feet wide lot, and the west most portion of the lot is basically cleared of any grave markings, while Oakwood Cemetery to the North has discernable grave markings.

I would have to concur with Mr. McCloy, in that not all remains have been removed from the Old City Cemetery. I would also have to conclude that my relative's remains were not intentionally removed and may exist there to this day. It is possible that any remains became dust with time and high moisture levels. It is further possible that the remains became excavated when the police station facility was built. I do not believe we will ever have the full answer.

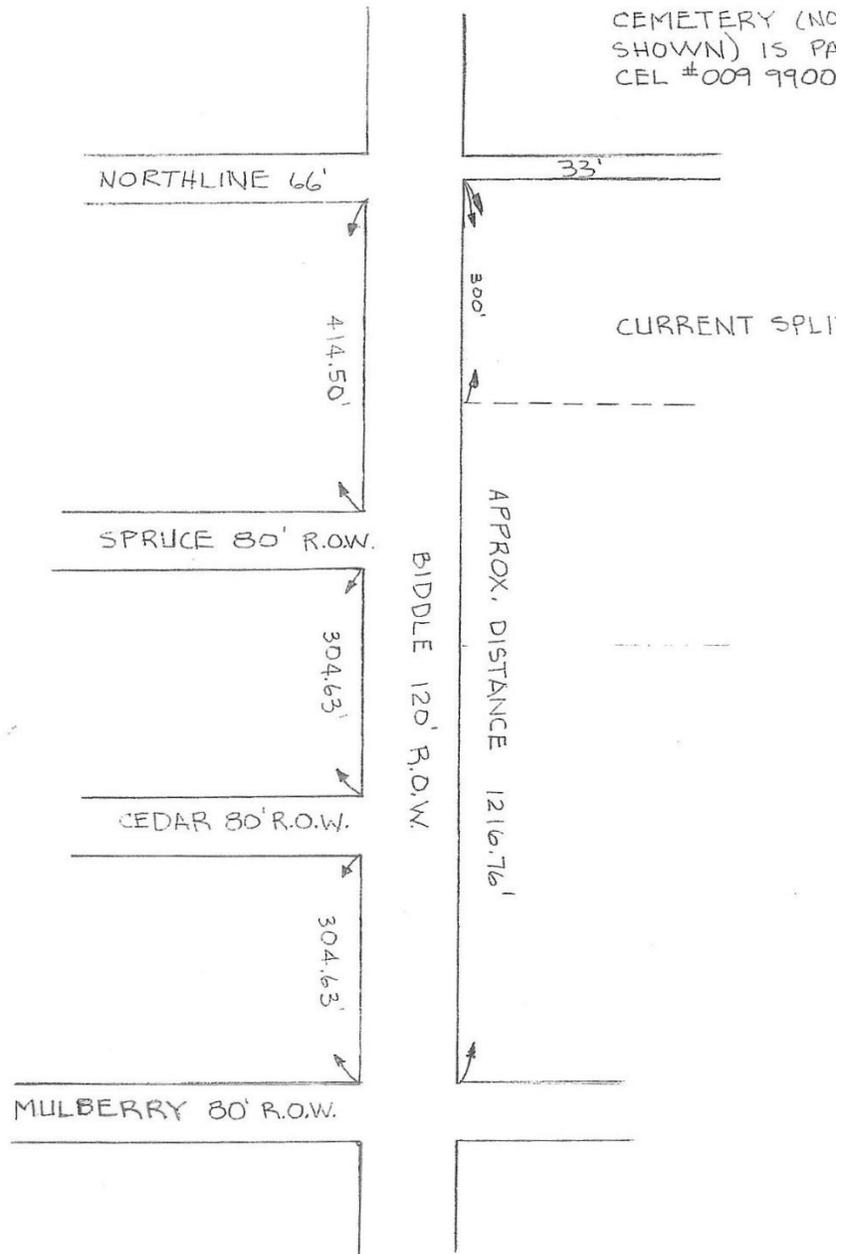
By piecing the information provided in the sale of the property of Eureka Iron company to Davis Boat & Oar company, I have concluded that the site is 300 feet wide with approximately 12 acres, with the boat machine shop occupying the east portion of the site. The western portion of the site of "three acres" must have been the burial area where "only Northline Road divided the two cemeteries", and as my great aunt has indicated. I believe Mr. McCloy's goal of finding "precise boundaries" has been reasonably determined.

Duane Denny, July 22, 2014



PARTIAL MAP - WAYNE COUNTY
 ATLAS OF 1876
 ATTACHMENT NO. 1

CEMETERY (NO SHOWN) IS PA CEL #009 9900



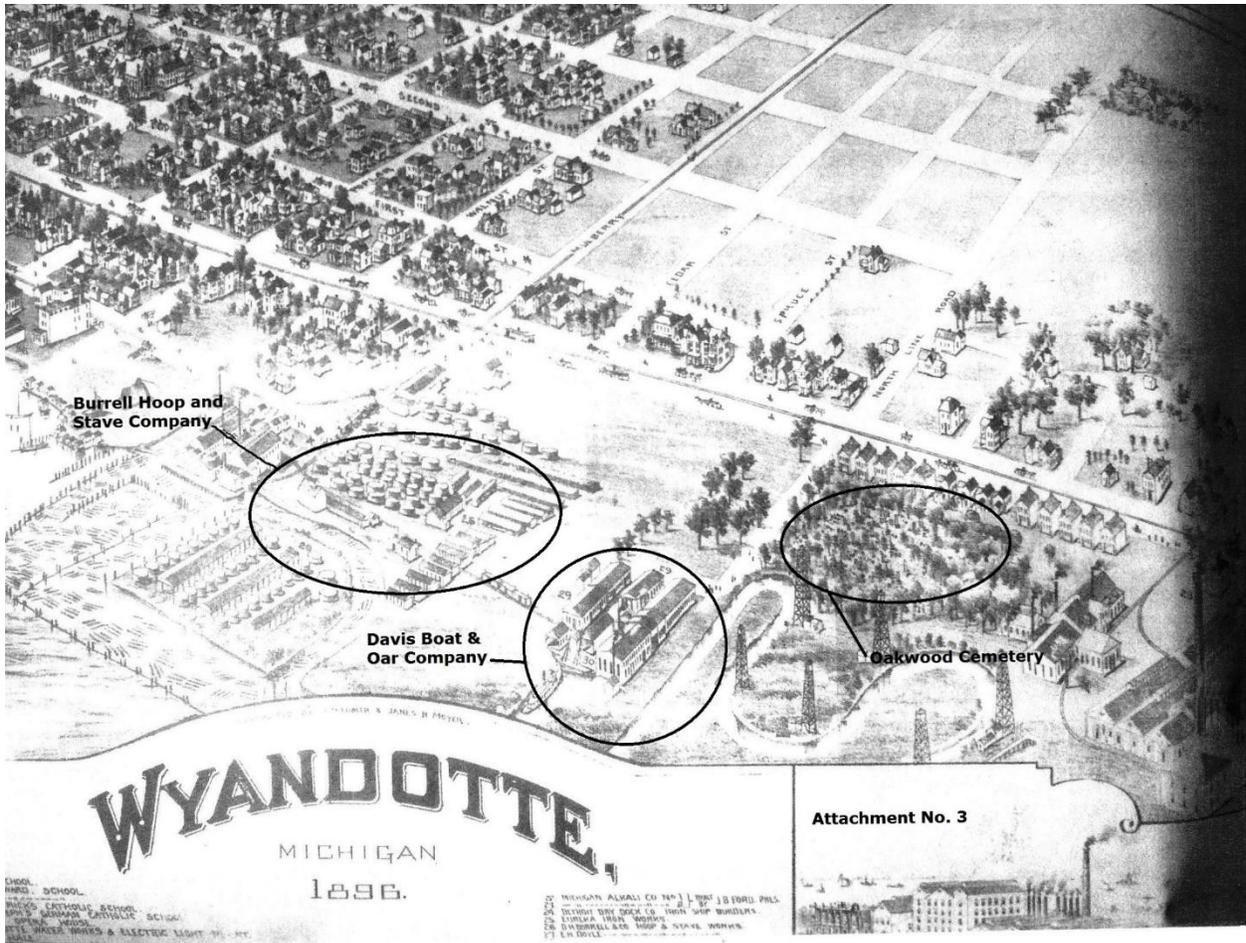
(DISTANCES FROM CITY TAX MAPS)

33.00
414.50
80.00
304.63
80.00
304.63

1,216.76

ATTACHMENT NO. 2

D.D 4-7-2014
SCALE: 1"=200.0'



Burrell Hoop and Stave Company

Davis Boat & Oar Company

Oakwood Cemetery

WYANDOTTE,

MICHIGAN
1896.

Attachment No. 3

CHURCH SCHOOL
 PUBLIC CATHOLIC SCHOOL
 MISS MARIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL
 ST. MARY'S
 BELL BROS. WARE & ELECTRIC LIGHT CO.

27 WYANDOTTE ALUMINUM CO. BLDG. 111 W. 13th ST. FORD, MICH.
 28 WYANDOTTE STEEL CO. BLDG. 111 W. 13th ST. FORD, MICH.
 29 WYANDOTTE STEEL CO. BLDG. 111 W. 13th ST. FORD, MICH.
 30 WYANDOTTE STEEL CO. BLDG. 111 W. 13th ST. FORD, MICH.
 31 WYANDOTTE STEEL CO. BLDG. 111 W. 13th ST. FORD, MICH.
 32 WYANDOTTE STEEL CO. BLDG. 111 W. 13th ST. FORD, MICH.
 33 WYANDOTTE STEEL CO. BLDG. 111 W. 13th ST. FORD, MICH.

