

# City of Hillsdale



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**United States Department of the Interior National Park Service  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Hillsdale Downtown Historic District  
Hillsdale County, Michigan

## **EARLY SETTLEMENT**

Hillsdale, Hillsdale County, Michigan, was founded in 1834-35 by settlers and investors from New York State. The southern counties of Michigan were opened to settlement in 1827. Hillsdale County was formed in 1829, and was originally part of Lenawee County. The southern part of Michigan was greatly influenced by the Chicago Road (also known as the Chicago Turnpike and the Chicago Military Road), opened in 1828. This was a government road linking Detroit and Chicago, developed on the route of an Indian trail. The Chicago Road passed through Hillsdale County near the current U.S. 12, north of the city of Hillsdale. The road was the impetus for several settlements, for though the road was rough, it was the only means of travel in this early period.

The first settlement in Hillsdale County is generally considered to be Allen Prairie, founded in 1827 by Moses Allen, who had assisted in the Chicago Road survey. Jonesville was founded in 1828 astride the Chicago Road. Hillsdale County settlement was sparse, with only seventy-five residents listed in the 1830 census. The early 1830's saw a land rush in the lately opened southern counties of Michigan, with great competition to settle the best and most valuable land. The fiercest competition lay in town-founding, for towns would be the centers of financial success.

## **LOCATION VITAL FOR SUCCESS**

The growth and success of a town was linked to its proximity to transportation networks and water power, and the selection of a county seat site took this into account. The founders of Hillsdale deliberately chose a central site within the county to improve its chances of county seat selection. They were aware that such central sites were favored for county seats in order to make travel times and distances fair for outlying county residents. Hillsdale also had a good supply of water power for mills and factories, another important factor in a town's success. Baw Beese Lake, named for the Potawatomie leader in the area, and the St. Joseph River provided a steady water and water power supply. Transportation was available to the Hillsdale town site, though the Chicago Road lay some miles north at Jonesville.

## **PLATTING EFFORTS, 1834-1835**

Two different groups of platters and settlers located and purchased property at the Hillsdale town site, near the geographical center of the county. Jeremiah Arnold, a farmer-pioneer, made the earlier of the two Hillsdale settlement efforts in 1834. He sited a dwelling and land south of the current business district, near the current fairgrounds. This effort, joined by Salem T. King and Alanson Budlong, with financial backing by Hiram Greenman from Utica, N. Y., was unsuccessful. Budlong was charged with platting and developing a settlement but failed in this responsibility. Greenman sued Budlong for the property and the settlement plan was abandoned.

The successful later effort was undertaken in 1835 by Adam Howder, who built a log cabin south of the present Hillsdale business district, again, in the fairgrounds vicinity. The Greenman property was sold in 1836 to two men who became important business and community leaders, John P. Cook and Chauncey W. Ferris, businessmen and settlers from Jonesville. Cook and Ferris settled in Hillsdale in 1836, and with the addition of Rockwell Manning, Joel McCollum, William E. Boardman and Charles Gregory, an investment group informally known as the Hillsdale Company was formed. The men did business under that name although no formal legal entity of that name existed. These investors bought land and made a town plat and several additions between 1835 and 1837, centering around the current business district and extending generally to the north, west, and east of the district with the St. Joseph River flowing through the city in a northwest-southeast line. Their plat moved the center of town activity north, closer to a proposed railroad line and the business prosperity promised by the railway.

## **SELECTION OF RAILROAD ROUTE, 1843**

Jonesville, to the north, lay on the Chicago Road (now called U. S. 12), an important stage and wagon route, though little more than a track in the 1830's. Hillsdale was not located on any existing major road system, but benefited from the location of the railroad. The state railroad commission surveyed the area in 1837 seeking a line from Monroe through to New Buffalo. The commission found two routes: one through Adrian, Hillsdale, and Branch, and another through Tecumseh, Jonesville, and Coldwater.

The Hillsdale route was chosen, adding to the town's probabilities of success. The Michigan Southern Railroad reached Hillsdale in 1843. Two significant citizens, Henry Waldron and Charles T. Mitchell, came to Hillsdale to assist with the railroad's construction and settled in the young community. Irish navies (road and railroad construction workers) also came to Hillsdale for the railroad. Many of these stayed, becoming the beginning of Hillsdale's Catholic community.

## **PLAT AND STREET LAYOUT**

The village plat plus the first addition included the area bounded by North Street, South Street, West Street, Short Street, and Broad Street. Intermediate streets were named for members of the investment group, prominent residents and settlers such as Henry Waldron and William Howell.

The plats laid out streets in a standard compass-oriented grid format, with two diagonal streets (Broad and Short) breaking the grid. The diagonal streets seem to have been a response to the river/millrace topography which runs roughly northwest from Baw Beese Lake and the millpond to the south of the present business district. The strong diagonal line of the riverbank was a natural path of travel north to Jonesville and the Chicago Road and thus it seems that Broad Street was created to follow that line. There is no record to illustrate any other rationale for the deviation from the grid. Some other towns platted during this period with rivers or roads creating strong diagonal lines used those lines as their grid baseline. Hillsdale, however, incorporated the diagonal into the grid, creating triangular blocks.

The railroad's proposed line through the town site also created a strong diagonal line. The railroad crossing above the downtown area acts as a boundary to the commercial area and a spine of historical warehouse and manufacturing activity. Between the railroad, river, and established pathways, the Hillsdale plat is unusual for a newly platted town for incorporating pre-existing conditions.

### **COUNTY SEAT SELECTION, 1843**

The county seat selection for Hillsdale County, as in most Michigan counties, was a matter of great importance to the communities seeking selection and resulted in intense competition. Before 1835, Hillsdale County's records were kept and business transacted in Lenawee County. In 1835, Jonesville served as the county seat for Hillsdale County. Hillsdale's founders intended the village to be the county seat and sited the town so as to improve the chances of selection, in the center of the county. Between 1839 and 1843, Jonesville and Hillsdale fought for the nomination, nearly losing the choice to dark-horse Osseo, a smaller village nearby. Osseo was started on paper by a group of Jonesville residents, expressly to confuse the county seat battle, and actually held the seat location for three years, although there were no county buildings. When the State Legislature found that no efforts had been made to accommodate County business, they awarded the seat in 1843 to Hillsdale.

### **ETHNIC AND STATE ORIGINS**

Several of the early settler families came from New York State. Adam Howder and Joel McCollum came from Lockport, New York, and Hiram Greenman was also from New York. A summary of the 1850 Census stated that of the 1,028 inhabitants of Hillsdale, 456 were born in New York. Michigan-born residents were next in numbers with 249. Other states represented in 1850 were Ohio, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Connecticut, Maine, and Indiana, in descending order by number of residents. Foreign immigrants also settled in Hillsdale. Thirty-nine of the residents listed in the 1850 Census were German-born, with other immigrants from Ireland, England, Scotland, and Canada, again, in descending order by number of immigrants. Three African-Americans were listed in the 1850 Census.

## **COMMERCIAL BEGINNINGS 1836-1843**

The village, like many other wilderness settlements, grew with mercantile and milling businesses forming the framework for development. Chauncy Ferris and John Cook built a grist mill in 1838, which, as F. W. Stock Mills, remained a flour milling operation until 2003. This first mill was located just east of the Stock Mills office building between Cook, Bacon, Ferris and Short streets. The present-day Stock Mills are located immediately east of the National Historic district. A sawmill was in operation by 1838, providing lumber for early frame buildings and houses. Both early mills drew power from races supplied by Baw Beese Lake and a dammed millpond. Stores were started by Ferris & Cook, Frederick and Henry Fowler, John L. Coming, and J. S. Brown. They built wood-framed store buildings in 1838 and 1839, all of which have since been demolished.

## **TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT AND COMMERCIAL EXPANSION, 1843-1855**

Transportation improved somewhat with the construction of the Western Road, a plank road that linked Hillsdale with Reading, another small settlement. The plank road entered Hillsdale's downtown roughly at Bacon Street. The Western and Northern stage line stopped at the Hillsdale House hotel and had a route to Chicago. Thus, Hillsdale was in contact with the larger outside world. In 1839, Hillsdale acquired its own post office. The mills provided a great business draw, bringing county farmers into town for business and trading. The town's physical development included several frame buildings as well as the mills. Adam Howder, the first settler, had a tavern which acted as the community hall for entertainment and meetings. He changed the location of the tavern in 1841, building a new hotel and tavern, the Hillsdale House, at the southwest corner of Howell and North streets, closer to the mill locations than his earlier tavern. The growth of Hillsdale even attracted some businesses away from Jonesville.

Steady expansion in the 1840's resulted from the opening in 1843 of the railroad and the designation of Hillsdale as the county seat. Formal village government was established in 1847. Warehousing and freight forwarding businesses were added to the milling and mercantile businesses. County residents and travelers alike traded at Hillsdale, which became a "jumping-off point" for settlers of Michigan and western states, until the railroad was extended west in 1855. The railroads provided transport and the warehouses provided supplies. John Cook and Henry Waldron started a major warehousing business, as did Mitchell & Co., and others.

After the railroad's arrival, growth accelerated, with many new residents and businesses. In 1855, the railroad was completed through to Chicago and the railroad stopped using private warehousing. After a fire that year destroyed most of Hillsdale's warehouses, they were not rebuilt.

## **COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING, 1843-1855**

The railroad, warehouses, and mills also shaped the physical evolution of Hillsdale, drawing commercial development north to the present business district, closer to the mills, railroad yard

and stations. The area of original settlement became a residential area, with part dedicated to the Hillsdale County Fairgrounds. According to early settlers interviewed in the 1930's about Hillsdale's development in the 1840's and 1850's, business buildings clustered around Railroad Square and extended down Howell and Broad Streets. Railroad Square was originally considered to be the area from the railroad to the "point," the flatiron block between Howell and Broad at North Street. Most of the early buildings were of frame construction, although fires and improvement led to more brick building, and larger and more imposing buildings.

In 1843, the first Underwood Block, the first business block in Hillsdale, was built by Dr. George W. Underwood. This was located on the site of the current Englehardt Block, on the northwest corner of North Street and North Broad Street. The three-story block held Underwood's drug store, two other businesses, second floor offices, and a meeting hall on the third floor. This building burned in 1881.

### **COMMUNITY, RELIGIOUS, AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS 1836-1860**

Community and civic activities and organizations were started and grew in this early period of Hillsdale's history as well. The first school was organized in 1841 and occupied a frame building on East Bacon Street; before then, children were educated at home or in informal schools, such as the one held in a log schoolhouse built in 1838. Fraternal organizations included Odd Fellows and Freemasons. A volunteer fire company, called the Neptune Fire-Engine Company No. One was organized in 1847.

Religion was an integral part of Hillsdale's society, although before 1840, services were informal and ministers and priests were those who might be traveling through the region. In 1839, Episcopal services were held at Howder's Tavern by the rector of Jonesville's Grace Episcopal Church. He held sporadic Hillsdale services until St. Peter's Episcopal Church was organized in 1844.

The first formally organized congregation was the Methodist Episcopal Church, which used the schoolhouse for services beginning in 1842. The First Presbyterian Church followed in 1843, and included many of the most influential Hillsdale citizens. St. Anthony's Roman Catholic parish was organized in 1853, and included many Irish and German members. Two Baptist congregations were organized in 1848 and 1855. German Lutherans established a church in 1849. Thus, most major Christian denominations were represented in Hillsdale before 1850. Smaller denominations such as Seventh-Day Adventists, Universalists, and Free Methodists were also organized and built churches but were less prominent and held less regular services.

Several of these churches remain and are focal points within the proposed historic district. St. Anthony's Roman Catholic and St. Peter's Episcopal, close neighbors on Broad Street near the court house, are prominent downtown landmarks. St. Anthony's parish was founded to serve an Irish Catholic population that was established by Irish railroad navies. The church used a wood-frame church originally built by the Presbyterian congregation on its present site, until 1883-84, when the current brick Gothic Revival church was built. The stone for the church's foundation was brought by a parish family, the Rileys, and it was built by a local contractor, W. H. Myers,

who also built the Keefer House hotel and the county jail. No mention was found of the architect in newspaper accounts of the church construction or in other entries on the Catholic Church.

St. Peter's Episcopal Church was built in 1858. The original church carpenter was William Carrol, the masons were men named Hawks and Dow but the original architect is unknown. It is not known if these were local men. Alterations and minor additions were almost constantly made to the church building and included various decorative and functional projects such as memorial windows vestries, and furnishings. A planned new church was designed in 1877 by the firm of Lloyd and Pearce from Detroit; however, this church was never built and the existing building was remodeled. The church received major alterations in 1881, giving it its current form with an added narthex. The architect for the remodeling was the firm of Tolon and Son from Fort Wayne, Indiana and the builder a local man named G. N. Troy. The church retains a great deal of character and grace. A parish house and dining hall addition was made in 1927.

The Methodist and Presbyterian churches, more incorporated into the residential parts of town, are also architecturally significant, though less prominently sited; they are on side streets away from downtown activities. The First United Methodist Church, at 45 Manning Street, was built in 1865 after an 1863 fire destroyed their wooden structure that stood closer to Howell Street. As the newspaper article at the time stated, "Within an hour and a half from the time the fire was discovered, the buildings were one mass of smoldering ruins." Only the organ and some church fixtures were saved (Methodist Church History, 6). This graceful brick structure in the Romanesque style lost its steeple to an 1881 fire and has had several alterations by various Michigan architects.

The neighboring First United Presbyterian Church was organized in the early 1840's and met in the wood-framed community courthouse/church building at the Courthouse Square. The church then built another wood-framed church at the site of the current St. Anthony's Catholic Church, which that church took over when a brick Presbyterian Church was built at the corner of Manning and North. This church burned in 1899, leading to the construction of the present limestone Tudor/Gothic Revival building in 1900.

## **FRATERNAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS, 1840-1940**

Fraternal organizations, an integral part of American life in the 19th and early 20th centuries, were well represented in Hillsdale. The Free-Masons established a lodge in Hillsdale in 1847; their Masonic Temple is now located above 50-56 North Howell Street, formerly the quarters for the women's membership of the Masons, the Order of the Eastern Star. The two groups maintained separate quarters for some period of time. The Temple is reached through an Art Modern entrance located at 45 McCollum Street. The Knights of Pythias, a group founded in the mid-1800's as a patriotic organization, maintained a hall above 28 N. Howell. The Odd-Fellows Hall occupies an upper floor at 38-42 N. Howell. The Brotherhood of Woodmen were listed at 45 N. Broad in 1915, but may have disbanded, as no further listing for them was found. The Benevolent Protective Order of Elks has been located in the converted Henry Waldron residence at 60 North Manning Street since 1930.

## **COUNTY COURTHOUSE CONSTRUCTION, 1843**

When Hillsdale was named the county seat in 1843, the town erected a small wood-framed courthouse on the present courthouse square. This building was apparently intended ultimately to be a dwelling for courthouse employees. This courthouse was built quickly, to avoid allegations that Hillsdale, like Osseo, had not accommodated the county business.

This first courthouse was so inadequate that a second frame building was built near the current St. Anthony's Catholic Church, and served as a combination courthouse, meeting hall, and church. The courthouse burned in 1849, and a larger, stone Greek revival temple-fronted building was built in the courthouse square. This building, facing McCollum Street, was completed in 1851. A jail building was also built in the courthouse square in 1849-1850. The Hillsdale County Fair first was held on the courthouse square in the same year. The courthouse square functioned as a public park and was referred to in the 1851 account of the courthouse's construction as the "public grounds."

## **NEWSPAPERS**

Hillsdale County had a newspaper, *The Hillsdale County Gazette*, in 1839. This paper was originally printed in Jonesville, but when the county seat was relocated to Hillsdale, the paper followed. Other papers, both weekly and daily, were published in the 1860's and 1870's. The current local paper, *The Hillsdale Daily News*, is a direct descendant of the *Gazette* by way of several intermediate publications. The newspapers occupied several downtown buildings before the construction in the 1930's of an office and plant on McCollum Street.

## **BUSINESS DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT AND ORIENTATION**

The village of Hillsdale grew and developed a thriving business district centered on the court house and the railroad. The business district developed primarily on Howell Street, although Broad Street was the wider street. The pre-eminence of Howell Street may have occurred because the mills, located closer to Broad Street, may have created too industrial an atmosphere. The history of St. Anthony's Catholic Church remarks that Broad Street was known in the pre-Civil War period as "Whiskey Row" and contained many saloons. Firewood, animals, hay and other farm merchandise was sold by farmers from their wagons on the street, contributing to its rough atmosphere. Billiard halls are noted in directories at 45 and 47 N. Broad in 1915. Broad Street may also have had "back-street" feeling because the buildings in the flatiron block between McCollum and North Streets faced Howell Street, not Broad. North Broad Street contains several buildings built for twentieth-century uses, such as auto sales and auto repair, as do some of the western blocks of McCollum and Manning.

Residential areas developed to the south and west while the mill complexes and railroad occupied land to the east and north. A small block of residences on Ferris Street, now gone, separated the mills from the businesses on Broad Street. Another residential neighborhood grew between the railroad tracks and Hillsdale College. Residences now replaced with commercial

structures filled the southern third of the South Howell Street block between Bacon and Waldron at the end of the business district.

### **COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE, 1850-1880**

The majority of the brick business blocks built in Hillsdale in the mid-to-late nineteenth century were built in the Commercial Italianate style, with bracketed cornices, hooded windows, and large glass storefronts made possible by improvements in technology. Parapets were sometimes shaped, particularly towards the late nineteenth century, as architectural taste became less restrained and economic prosperity and business competition fostered a mildly ostentatious attitude. The block at 4-10 S. Howell Street and its neighbor at 2 S. Howell Street are both attractive Commercial Italianate, with differing stylistic details but a similar underlying theme. The small building at 41 N. Broad is an interesting example for its shaped parapet and oculus. This building also has been a shoe store and shoe repair shop continuously since ca. 1925.

### **HILLSDALE COLLEGE ARRIVAL, 1854**

The arrival of Hillsdale College in 1854 was another major element in the village's growth and success. Michigan Central College, in nearby Spring Arbor, needed to expand and Hillsdale was chosen as the new site for a larger school. A Baptist school, the College built its campus north of the railroad and business district, and pioneered women's college education in Michigan. Although a major fire destroyed many college buildings in 1874, the campus largely was rebuilt by 1877. Hillsdale College provided a steady flow of consumers for the local businesses and also added to the town's prestige. Several hotels and rooming houses served the travelers and students, as did confectioneries and ice-cream parlors like De Rose Arbor (116 N. Broad), and the Palace of Sweets (38 N. Howell). The Palace of Sweets, now known as the Palace Cafe, contains interesting and original murals and retains a historical interior with a pressed-metal ceiling, soda fountain and booths.

### **BANKS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

Banks were started in Hillsdale in the 1860's, as local businessmen found themselves with sufficient capital. The First National Bank was founded in 1863 by William Waldron, James Baldy, Chauncey Ferris, and others. Most of the early bank buildings have been replaced or remodeled. One remaining historic bank building, the present Courthouse Annex (55 N. Howell), is the former Hillsdale State Bank building. Built in the early 1920's, it displays the Classical Revival, detailing used for its solidity and tradition, but opens up the mass with large plate windows in a more modern interpretation of the style.

The flatiron block created by the intersection of Howell and Broad Streets was the focus of litigation in 1864 when Joel McCollum, one of the original platters of the village, claimed that he still held title to the land between McCollum, Broad, and Howell streets. The suit was judged against McCollum and Henry Waldron bought the tract with a clear title. He offered to sell the property to the village, but was refused; he then built the three-story Waldron Block (63-67 N.



Howell Street). Waldron, together with John Cook and Charles Mitchell, started the First National Bank as a private bank in 1855; after reorganization in 1864, it was named the Second National Bank. Waldron's residency at 60 Manning, now the Elks Club, is included in this historic district.

### **COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND PHYSICAL ALTERATIONS, 1870-1900**

The village obtained a city charter in 1869. An 1870-71 directory of businesses showed a complete range of manufacturers and service providers, with a cheese factory, two flour mills, two planting mills, and numerous shops and stores. Other industries included three foundries and a table factory, established in 1873. A second railroad, the Detroit, Hillsdale, and Indiana (Detroit, Hillsdale, and Southern) entered the city in 1871.

The late 1870's and early 1880's were marked by a series of fires which destroyed several commercial and civic buildings. In 1877, the jail burned, allowing one prisoner to escape. A new jail was built by 1881 and was located where the current courthouse parking lot stands. The Waldron Block suffered a big explosion (probably gas) and devastating fire in 1879. The explosion was said to have blown the entire front of the building off, and indeed, the rear facade (facing Broad Street) displays older stylistic elements and different materials than does the front facade.

In 1881, a fire destroyed most of the buildings on the southwest corner of Howell and North Streets, including the Hillsdale House, the Methodist Church, and the Hammond Block. The buildings were replaced; the Hillsdale House with the Keefer House hotel, the Methodist Church with a new brick church, and the Hammond Block with new brick commercial blocks. Fires resulted in new construction in the styles current at the time.

### **COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE, 1880-1900**

Several late nineteenth century business buildings in Hillsdale exemplify a commercial interpretation of the Picturesque Eclectic styles popular for residential construction; the City Bakery building at 70-72 N. Howell Street shows textural interest and lively ornament in masonry. The H. J. Gelzer & Son building at 92-94 N. Howell is somewhat quieter with its incised stone ornament and corbelled brick cornice and window heads. The Keefer Hotel (100-104 N. Howell) is an exceptional example of the exuberant architectural expression of the Picturesque Eclectic. It also was a social center for Hillsdale and many public and private functions were held there. Since Hillsdale was a major railroad stop, many travelers counted on the hotel for hospitality. Several well-known persons used the Keefer House; among them are Annie Oakley, John Ringling, and "Buffalo Bill" Cody. The Keefer House continued as a hotel until 1965 and a rooming house until the early 2000's.

## **MUNICIPAL MODERNIZATION, 1870-1900**

As in most other American cities and villages, the prosperous late nineteenth century was a period of growth and modernization. A gas system was in place in 1872. Telephone service started in the 1880's and connected Hillsdale with other county villages and towns. A waterworks system pumping from Baw Beese Lake was completed in Hillsdale in 1885; an earlier attempt to drill an artesian well was unsuccessful. Several merchants and the Stock Mills had private electric plants by 1887. The city purchased the Stock electric plant in 1893 and electrified the rest of the city. Brick paving was installed starting in 1900, with concrete sidewalks proceeding at around that same time.

Hillsdale entered the twentieth century in a manner similar to many other Michigan towns; an automobile drove through town in 1899. Hillsdale adapted its business base to this newest industry; by 1908, a small automobile manufacturing business was in operation in town, and other auto and machine-related industries started up in the early years of the century. The Alamo Engine and Farm Light Company was a major employer, manufacturing generators and small engines. By 1911, an airplane had been built in Hillsdale and Hillsdale became something of a flight center, with the first known aerial development occurring there in 1912.

Another great fire destroyed many warehouses and lumberyards in 1913, and other fires damaged or destroyed several downtown buildings through the early years of the century. A pair of arsonists was convicted of arson and murder in 1905 after a series of fires in industrial buildings and warehouses in 1903. Stores on both Broad and Howell Streets burned in 1900, 1910, 1914, and 1915. The Waldron Block suffered another fire in 1915, when the "point" building at 73-77 N. Howell burned. The building was rebuilt but is missing some of its original detail due to the fire.

## **GOVERNMENT AND CIVIC CONSTRUCTION, 1900-1920**

The years preceding World War I saw a consolidation and formalization of civic functions. The old stone courthouse was replaced by a large sandstone building in 1898-99, reflecting the growth of the county and its government. This building is on the National Register; the work of prominent Michigan architect Claire Allen, it is a regional landmark.

The Mitchell Library, gift of Charles Mitchell, Cadillac lumber and hardwood magnate, was dedicated after his family's residence was altered, in 1908. In 1911, a new City Hall was built on Railroad Square. Before its construction, the city government occupied rented quarters in various buildings around town. The construction of the City Hall caused some dissent in the town, as some citizens begrudged the expense. The city went to Lansing architect Edwyn A. Boyd for the plans, and went further afield (as seems to be normal for government projects) to Saginaw for the contractors Frederick and John Trier. Boyd was active in Mid-Michigan from about 1900 to 1925.

Federal business also was accommodated in a new building when the new Post Office was opened in 1912. Located near the City Hall, the Post Office building was part of a Federal effort

to regularize postal operations. It is also listed on the National Register, as it is the finest and oldest representative of its type in Michigan. Its public interior spaces are nearly unchanged and feature magnificent paneling and moldings with original signage and service windows. The governmental buildings (city, county, and federal) provide a prominent civic core to the business district and visually anchor the streetscapes with their triangular arrangement and prominent towers and cupolas.

## **RAILROAD CONSOLIDATION, 1914**

The New York Central acquired the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern line and improved operations of facilities in 1914. The Lake Shore and Michigan Southern was the consolidation of three lines that served Hillsdale: the Michigan Southern, the Detroit, Hillsdale, and Indiana, and the Fort Wayne and Jackson lines. At the peak period of service, twenty-five trains a day stopped at Hillsdale.

Such heavy traffic, coupled with the draw of the county seat business and the local manufacturers assured the prosperity of the city. The railroad dispatched all traffic from its facilities in Hillsdale. The depot buildings, on the north side of the tracks from the business district, were originally sited within a formal landscaped park known variously as the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Depot Park and Hirsch Gardens (after its primary gardener, Carl Hirsch). Two primary railroad-related buildings remain in the historic district; these are the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern station at 38 Monroe Street, a jewel-like Italianate brick station unfortunately altered by an insensitive addition, and the New York Central's facility nearby at 50 Monroe. The New York Central built this residentially-scaled Prairie Style headquarters after their consolidation in 1914.

## **STABILITY OF COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES**

Hillsdale continued through the early twentieth century as a manufacturing center and the shopping destination for the county. The business district housed many retail and service businesses, many of which were long-established local firms. Examinations of directory records from the late 1890' through the present (few are available for earlier years) indicate that it was common for businesses to remain at one location for ten years and longer. Some businesses grew and changed with the addition of partners; one such example is the drugstore once located at 50 N. Howell Street. Established in 1887, Goodrich & Co. Drugstore changed its name and partnership to Goodrich & Hallock and Goodrich and McSherry between 1894 and 1937. By 1946, the store was known as McSherry's but was still a drugstore.

One other long-lived business was the DeRose Arbor (116 N. Broad). This ice cream parlor and candy store opened in 1920 at this address and remained there until the mid 1970's. Its location was ideal as it was located near the Dawn Movie Theater and within walking distance of Hillsdale College. The O'Meara family has operated a series of paint and decorating stores along North Howell Street since 1890. It was the oldest O'Brien paint dealer in the United States, and the oldest continuously operating business in Hillsdale.

The Gelzer family also operates a very long-lived business in Hillsdale. From 1919, when the Gelzer family moved to Hillsdale from Ohio, they have operated a varied retail business, starting with groceries and progressing through dry goods and hardware to the present businesses of furniture, hardware, and sporting goods. They ran stores in various locations on North Howell Street, but have been located at 92-94 N. Howell Street since the mid-1930's.

Drug and variety stores have also been long-lived in Hillsdale. The Nash Drugstore at 30-32 N. Howell Street has been operated as a drug store since 1926, when Herbert Hennessey relocated his drug store there from a nearby location.

Since Hillsdale was the county seat, many attorneys maintained offices in the upper floors of downtown buildings, a practice common since the institution of the county seat. Physicians and dentists were also common tenants of the upper stories. New one and two-story buildings appeared in the Hillsdale downtown in the early years of the twentieth century. Many of these were built for auto-related businesses.

## **TWENTIETH CENTURY COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE, 1900-1945**

Many of these new buildings were built in the Commercial Brick style, a simple modern style using brick patterning, shaped and stepped parapets, and medallion ornament to create attractive, modern, and inexpensive commercial buildings. Thus, Hillsdale displays a thorough progression of commercial architectural styles from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Hillsdale's prosperity was somewhat dampened in the economic collapse of the Great Depression. Government relief agencies moved into quarters in the business district to assist the citizens of the county. Nevertheless, the city celebrated its centennial in 1934 with pageants, parades, and historical displays in the business district storefronts. Business and manufacturing returned to activity with the improvement in the economy in the late 1930's and 1940's. World War II took many local men and women into service and war work.

After war's end, Hillsdale returned to a peacetime economy. However, the move towards an automobile-based transportation system and suburbanization diffused the population from the relatively compact town into the surrounding countryside. Many of the small groceries, dry good stores and other retailers that had filled the business district moved into larger and more modern quarters on the outskirts and newer suburban areas. In 1956, the New York Central ended passenger service to Hillsdale. The downtown area has continued as a busy and established commerce center, with courthouse and college business continuing to support the economy, as it had historically. The district is visually and historically cohesive with few intrusions.