

= Depot Town =

Depot Town is a commercial area , with some residences above storefronts , in Ypsilanti , Michigan 's historic district . Depot Town proper consists of East Cross Street from the Huron River to North River Street , and a small area on the 300 @-@ block of North River Street . However , several blocks in the surrounding area are also commonly referred to as part of Depot Town . These areas include Riverside Park , Frog Island Park ( both of which are on the Huron River ) , and River Street extending north and south for several blocks . First established in the late 1830s , most of the buildings standing today were constructed between 1850 and 1880 . Over the years , Depot Town has included hotels , an Underground Railroad station , an American Civil War barracks , and a building that has housed a bar and restaurant continuously for more than 150 years , switching to soft drinks during Prohibition . Today the area is dominated by restaurants and stores . Depot Town also hosts several large summer festivals each year , as well as weekly bike nights and cruise nights .

= = History = =

Depot Town was created after the Ypsilanti Train Depot was opened in 1838 . As the railroad connected Ypsilanti , MI with Detroit , the area surrounding the depot grew . The commercial community known as Depot Town was built over the thirty years following the arrival of the railroad , and most of the buildings standing today were built from 1850 to 1880 . In the early years , Depot Town included a flour mill , a large farmers ' store , an iron foundry , a fire department , a clothing store , and paved streets . Ypsilanti 's original city hall and jail were built just across the Huron River from Depot Town on West Cross Street . As the depot was built one mile north of the Chicago Road ( now Michigan Avenue ) , the community of Ypsilanti was split between competing locations .

One of the earliest developments of note in Depot Town was the Western Hotel , built by Mark Norris . Opening in May 1839 , the Western Hotel stood on a triangular plot west of River Street and north of the railroad track . Around 1860 , the Michigan Central Railroad bought the land to replace the old wood plank depot with a newer , more modern brick depot . Norris demolished his hotel and carried the bricks across River Street , where he built a three @-@ story Italianate structure , which became known as the Norris Block .

In early 1860 , Depot Town experienced a large fire , which spread sparks so far that a barn one @-@ third of a mile away was destroyed .

Tunnels , originally built for water drainage , passed beneath the railroad and ran between the Thompson Block and the businesses on Cross Street , and were used as hiding places by escaped slaves , who hid by day and then rode boats down the Huron River by night . Leonard Chase , a known abolitionist , also operated a station on the Underground Railroad from 1841 to 1860 , hiding escaped slaves in his home near the depot . Also during the American Civil War , the Norris Block was used as a barracks by two regiments : the Fourteenth Michigan Infantry Regiment in early 1862 , and the Twenty @-@ Seventh Michigan Infantry Regiment in 1863 . Oliver E. Thompson bought the building in 1869 , and as it passed down through several generations of the Thompson family , it eventually became known as the Thompson Block .

The Michigan Central Depot was widely known for the gardens which surrounded it . The longtime gardener , John Laidlaw , built enormous arrangements that evoked Niagara Falls , the battleship Maine , and well @-@ known landscapes .

By the 1950s , railroad traffic declined and parts of Depot Town began to fall into disrepair . The Thompson Block was put up for sale in 1950 , standing vacant for more than a year . A series of businesses opened and closed in the building , with none finding lasting success . In the late 1960s , landlord David Kircher bought the building , using it as a warehouse . From 1996 until 2005 , the building was tied up in legal disputes . Kircher was found guilty of demolition by neglect , and first Barnes and Barnes and then Beal Properties were named receivers . In May 2006 , Stewart Beal purchased the building outright .

Amtrak passenger trains continued to stop in Depot Town until the early 1980s , ending round trip

stops in 1982 , with the eastbound train , the Michigan Executive , making its last Ypsilanti stop in 1984 .

Depot Town is expected to be a stop on a proposed Ann Arbor to Detroit SEMCOG Commuter Rail line . However , there is no boarding platform , and it is not clear which side of the tracks a platform would be built on .

= = Structures = =

The original Michigan Central Depot , from which the area took its name , no longer stands , but it was between the northeast side of the tracks and the west side of River Street , directly across from the freighthouse , since replaced by a parking lot . The freighthouse , built in 1878 , does still stand , and the area immediately around the freighthouse is home to the Depot Town Farmers ' Market , one of two farmers ' markets in Ypsilanti . Also in the freighthouse courtyard , a caboose sits parallel to Rice Street .

The freighthouse was closed in 2004 due to safety concerns . In early 2009 , the city of Ypsilanti and the Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse received more than \$ 600 @, @ 000 for repairs to make the freighthouse usable again .

At the northeast corner of Cross and River Streets stands the Thompson Block , a historic building which was used as barracks in the Civil War . The Thompson Block suffered a bad fire early in the morning on September 23 , 2009 , and the temporary supports reaching into adjacent streets , installed shortly after the fire to stabilize the structure , blocked westbound traffic on Cross Street for more than three months and have resulted in legal tussles between the city and the property owner .

At the southwest corner of the same intersection , the building housing Sidetrack Bar & Grill ? which has held a bar and restaurant continuously since at least 1850 ? has an unusual shape resulting from a 1929 train derailment . On an early January morning , the twelfth car , laden with lumber , of an 85 @-@ car freight train came off the tracks and crashed into the corner of the building . The owner of the building , who lived just above the section that was hit , was uninjured , but had most of her personnel effects scattered into the street . There were only a few people near the railroad crossing when it derailed including an 18 @-@ year @-@ old female who was knocked unconscious and a man who was sitting in his car , but was able to get away unharmed . When the current owners went to build a patio on the spot , they found some of the debris had been piled up underneath , which made it more difficult to dig post holes . In 1931 , the entrance to the building was moved from the east side to its current position on the north side to accommodate a post @-@ prohibition law requiring bar entrances to be at least 500 feet from any church . The back patio was constructed after the nearby church burned down . According to Sidetrack owner Linda French , the first @-@ floor walls are three bricks deep , with the oldest remaining bricks dating to the 1850s .

At the southeast corner of Cross and River Streets , the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum is housed in the last Hudson Motor Car Company dealership . In 1927 the business opened as " Hudson Sales & Service " , becoming " Miller Motors " in 1955 . After the discontinuance of the Hudson brand in 1958 , Miller Motors continued as a service and parts supplier for Hudson collectors .

On the east side of River Street , south from the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum across the railroad tracks , the Mill Works Building , originally a foundry , contains the Ypsilanti Food Co @-@ op and the River Street Bakery , owned by the co @-@ op . On the roof of the Mill Works Building , Solar Ypsi installed 12 solar panels for the co @-@ op in April 2009 , followed by 30 panels for the bakery in 2010 , producing a total of 8 @.@ 3 kilowatts during peak sunlight . Data from the meters can be viewed at the Solar Ypsi website , allowing anyone to compare generation from different sites .

Most of the buildings in Depot Town are two or three stories . At the east end , the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum building is a single story . East of Rice Street , the building facing Cross Street from the north is four stories , while the freighthouse behind it is a single tall story . Toward the west end of Depot Town , on both sides of Cross Street , there are several one @-@

story structures , which are of more @-@ recent construction than the taller buildings .

= = Vicinity = =

Depot Town is immediately northeast of downtown Ypsilanti . Frog Island and Riverside Parks , both on the Huron River , are immediately to the west of Depot Town , and are often informally considered part of the district . A three @-@ way bridge , known as the " tridge " , links the two parks and Depot Town over the Huron River . Just beyond Riverside Park , the Michigan Firehouse Museum is at the corner of Cross Street and Huron Street . Prospect Park , the oldest park in Ypsilanti , is one block west of Depot Town on Cross Street . The Corner Brewery , just north of Depot Town , is also commonly associated with the district , and Highland Cemetery is a half @-@ mile north of Depot Town on River Street .

Depot Town is also a half @-@ mile southeast of the campus of Eastern Michigan University . During " New Student Orientation " , Eastern provides students with gift certificates called " Ypsibucks " , which can be used at many restaurants in Depot Town and downtown Ypsilanti . Students use the day , known as " Ypsifest " , to walk around the city and become acquainted with Ypsilanti .

= = Businesses = =

In addition to antique stores , a Michigan artisan market ( The Eyrie ) , tattoo parlor , record shop , fly fishing store , one of Ypsilanti 's two farmers ' markets & a variety of services including massage therapy , Russian ballet instruction , and motorcycle / auto repair ; Depot Town is home to several well @-@ known restaurants . Depot Town 's newest restaurant MAIZ Mexican Cantina opened June 2014 serving fresh from scratch Mexican fare complimenting the other institutions on Cross St. Sidetrack Bar & Grill has occupied the southwest corner of the River Street @-@ Cross Street intersection since 1980 , while Aubree 's Saloon is in the last building on the north side of Cross Street . The Ypsilanti Food Co @-@ op , established in 1975 , moved into the Mill Works Building in the 1980s and in addition to groceries , sells sandwiches , salads , soups , and fresh bread from the bakery next door .

The River Street Bakery , also in the Mill Works Building and now owned by the Co @-@ op , claims to have the only wood @-@ fired brick oven in commercial use in Washtenaw County . Originally called the Depot Town Sourdough Bakery , the bakery was founded by Tom Kinney as an independent cooperative non @-@ profit with a \$ 20 @,@ 000 loan from the Cooperative Whole Grain Education Association and pledges from prospective customers . To stretch the limited funds , the brick oven was built by hand in 1989 . From the beginning , the Ypsilanti Food Co @-@ op retailed the bread .

The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum is housed in the world 's last surviving Hudson Motor Car Company dealership , across the street from the Thompson Block .

The Depot Town Farmers ' Market , one of Ypsilanti 's two farmers ' markets , began near downtown in 1919 , moving several times before settling in the freighthouse in the late 1970s . Inside the freighthouse , the market operated year @-@ round , and included a coffee shop and frequent live music . Since the 2004 closure of the freighthouse due to structural concerns , the farmers ' market has operated seasonally only , in the courtyard just outside the freighthouse .

= = Events = =

Due to Michigan 's cold winter , the majority of Depot Towns events are held from late March to early October . There are many events that take place in and around Depot Town such as the Michigan Brewers Guild Summer Beer Festival , Michigan ElvisFest , the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival , Tuesday " bike " night , and Thursday " cruise nights " . Depot Town is also home to vintage car shows , concert band , jazz band , orchestra concerts , and an annual dog parade .

### === Summer Beer Festival ===

The Michigan Brewers Guild Summer Beer Festival , established in 1997 , is held in Riverside Park on the fourth Saturday ( and the Friday evening before ) of July . Beginning in 2008 , the Brewers Guild set a goal to operate its beer festivals as " zero @-@ waste " events . They work closely with local recycling and composting companies , such as Recycle Ann Arbor , to manage the removal of any plastic , aluminum , paper , and food waste to ensure that as much of it as possible is recycled , composted , or used as animal feed . This has been achieved by requiring vendors to biodegradable plates and flatware . Also , unlike many such events , the festival is self @-@ supporting without any outside sponsors .

In 2010 , the festival drew about 9 @,@ 000 attendees , despite " sweltering heat , torrential downpours , an overflowing Huron River , power blackouts and the possibility of tornadoes " . Fifty @-@ four Michigan breweries served around 350 different beers that year .

### === Michigan ElvisFest ===

Founded in 1999 , the Michigan ElvisFest is an annual two @-@ day festival held in July in Riverside Park and Depot Town . Established to replace the previous Ypsilanti @-@ based music festival , the Bob Marley Festival , ElvisFest has grown to be the largest Elvis festival in North America , attended by approximately 10 @,@ 000 fans each year . In addition to Elvis impersonators , ElvisFest also often includes performances by Tom Jones and Roy Orbison impersonators .

### === Ypsilanti Heritage Festival ===

Held each year on the last weekend of August , the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival sprawls across Frog Island Park , Riverside Park , Depot Town , and downtown Ypsilanti . The festival includes events such as vintage base ball , a bed race , a hot dog eating contest , a rubber duck race , and the " Nightmare Cruise " ( a spoof of the Woodward Dream Cruise from Pontiac to Detroit ) .

### === Orphan Car Show ===

Each summer since 1997 , Riverside Park hosts the Orphan Car Show . The show includes a parade and presentations by automotive historians about defunct car brands . Discontinued models of ongoing brands are accepted if they were made in Ypsilanti , and foreign vehicles are allowed if they are no longer sold in the United States .