

WELLER'S DRY CLEANING (#36-86-1)

8237 FENTON STREET, SILVER SPRING, MD 20910

LOCATIONAL ATLAS & INDEX OF HISTORIC SITES

DESIGNATION FORM

SEPTEMBER 2022



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Maryland – National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Montgomery County Department of Planning
Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites Designation Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Weller's Dry Cleaning
Current Name: Weller's Dry Cleaning
Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties: #36-86-1

2. LOCATION OF PROPERTY

Address Number and Street: 8237 Fenton Street
County, State, Zip: Silver Spring, Montgomery County, Maryland, 20910

3. ZONING OF PROPERTY

CR-3.0: The property has a zoning of CR-3.0 C-2.0 R-2.75 H-60 T. CR zones are designed to encourage mixed-use development in town and urban centers near transit and a variety of housing, services, and amenities. Parcels zoned CR are given an overall FAR, and then that is broken down into maximum commercial density allowed (C) and maximum residential development allowed (R) followed by the maximum allowable height.

4. TYPE OF PROPERTY

A. Ownership of Property: Private

B. Category of Property: Private

C. Number of Resources within the Property

Contributing		Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	Buildings	___	Buildings
___	Structures	___	Structures
<u>1</u>	Objects	___	Objects
___	Archaeological	___	Archaeological
<u>2</u>	Total	___	Total

D. Listing in the National Register of Historic Places: The building has not been reviewed by the Maryland Historical Trust, but EHT Tracerics, Inc. submitted an evaluation form to Montgomery Planning that recommended listing the building as locally significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A (Architecture).

5. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic Function(s): COMMERCE/TRADE, Specialty Store, Dry Cleaner

Current Function(s): COMMERCE/TRADE, Vacant Commercial

6. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY (See Appendix Five —Exterior Photographs)

Site Description:

The Weller's Dry Cleaning building and sign are located in Fenton Village in downtown Silver Spring at the southeast corner of the intersection of Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue (App. 3, Fig. 2). Benjamin and Charles Weller (property owners) and Ted Englehardt (architect) constructed the building in 1961 on the northwest corner of a rectangular 9,376 square-foot lot and oriented the façade towards Fenton Street. Automobiles access the property via a paved asphalt parking lot in the southern portion of the lot. A driveway extends from the parking lot and wraps the rear of the building to provide egress to Thayer Avenue. A combination of brick and concrete sidewalks along the primary elevations on Thayer Avenue and Fenton Street allows pedestrian access to the site. There is no landscaping outside of a narrow grassy area to the north of the building, adjacent to a sidewalk on Thayer Avenue.

A mix of residential, commercial, and office buildings are near the dry cleaners. The remainder of the intersection at Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue consists of: 1) the Fenton, a mixed-use, six-story apartment building at the southwest corner; 2) a Safeway grocery store and associated parking garage at the northwest corner; and 3) an Exxon gas station and the Silver Spring Towers, a fifteen-story apartment building, at the northeast corner. A two-story office building (built ca. 1963) and a two-story vacant commercial building (built ca. 1961) comprise the adjacent lots to the east and south, respectively.

Sign Description:

The Weller's Dry Cleaning site features an original, distinctive, double-sided sign oriented to travelers on Fenton Street that harmonizes with the design of the building and attracts attention (App. 5, Fig. 7-8). The colorful sign consists of three distinctly shaped and illuminated metal-framed sign boxes stacked on two metal poles anchored in the sidewalk.¹ The shapes (rectangle, triangle, and circle) are offset from one another and slightly separated. This whimsical design suggests that these elements float in defiance of gravity. The lower component features a rectangular box with a black sign face embellished with a floral emblem and capitalized text that reads "one hour dry-cleaning."² The edge of the sign face is outlined with a bright yellow border. The central component consists of an inverted triangular box offset towards Fenton Street. The pale-yellow sign face includes lowercase text that reads "weller's." The upper component of the sign includes a circular operational clock inspired by the works of George Nelson. The clock features a white face, black clock hands, and rectangular, multi-colored rectangles in place of numerals.

Architectural Description:

In 1961, Benjamin and Charles Weller hired architect Ted Englehardt to construct Weller's Dry Cleaning. Englehardt designed a Googie-styled building that consisted of two distinct parts: a setback main rectangular block and a shorter, projecting, rectangular section on the facade. The main block, clad in alternating red and pink porcelain enamel panels, served as the anchor of the building and the shorter projecting section with its metal-frame, plate glass windows, shed roof, and cantilevered awning provided the iconic characteristics (App. 5, Fig. 1-6).

¹ The metal support poles are protected by a non-historic wood planter.

² The owners spray painted over the words "one hour" after stopping that service.

The main block (approximately 45'x52') primarily held the dry-cleaning operations. This section rested on a concrete slab foundation. The frame supported a flat roof concealed behind a parapet. The front (west) and side (north and south) elevations visible from Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue were clad primarily with porcelain enamel panels set within a stainless-steel frame. Englehardt capitalized on the wide range of colors available in porcelain enamel and alternated between red and pink to create a candy-cane/striped effect. The bold use of color created visual interest to this otherwise utilitarian section of the building. The projecting section covered the majority of the main block's west elevation, but Englehardt continued the stripe effect of the porcelain panels visible above the shed roof. The fully exposed main block's side elevations (north and south) consisted of eleven bays that Englehardt divided into three parts. The lower part of each bay consisted of a red or pink porcelain enamel panel. The central part featured three stacked metal-frame awning windows that created a ribbon effect across the elevations. The upper part consisted of a porcelain enamel panel that alternated with the color of the lower panel. Small variations between the elevations included single, metal-framed, awning windows or metal ventilation grills at the base of several lower panels. The less visible rear (east) elevation consisted of a running-bond brick veneer and five metal-framed awning windows, three jalousie metal louvered vents, and a double-leaf metal service door accessed by a set of concrete steps.

The projecting shorter section (approximately 17'x48') held the customer service area and counter. This section is constructed from a concrete block and metal-framed structural system that rests on a concrete slab and supports a shed roof with a cantilevered awning. The concrete block section on the northern end of the massing is clad in a natural uncoursed, ashlar-cut, stone veneer that extended beyond the shed roof to create a parapet. The stone is pierced by a paired, metal-frame awning window on the façade (west elevation). The heaviness of this material contrasted the transparent full-height, metal-frame, plate glass window walls and two single-leaf metal doors with transoms on the remainder of the west and south elevations. The glass extends to the sidewalk so that the interior seems like an extension of the exterior space. The cantilevered awning sheltered the window walls, doors, and sidewalk, and extended beyond the face of the porcelain enameled main block. All of these features turned the building into its own billboard as it allowed drivers and pedestrians to see the counter and inner operations.

In the late 1960s, the property owners altered Englehardt's original design. The full-width, 13' addition to the southern end of the main block interrupted the continual wrapping of the porcelain enamel on the primary elevations of the main block. On the façade (west elevation), the addition featured a brick veneer wall pierced by a single paired metal-window and a large metal louvered vent. The architect of the addition likely repeated the design scheme of the original south elevation as it matches the north elevation. It is unknown if the existing metal-frame window awning with a vertical pattern and alternating stripes dates to the original building or the addition. Furthermore, the addition diminishes the prominence of the cantilevered shed roof. In the original design, the roof extended beyond the face of the main block allowing it to float seamlessly in the air. The addition, however, anchors the cantilevered roof to the building thereby minimizing the desired effect. For a comparison see the original model, Appendix 6, Figures 1-7.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- A. Applicable Designation Criteria as described in §24A: Historic Resources Preservation, §24A-3, Montgomery County Code:** Weller's Dry Cleaners meets two of the Designation Criteria listed in §24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code. See Section J for the complete evaluation.

B. Statement of Significance:

The Weller's Dry Cleaning Historic Site consists of a Googie-styled commercial store and sign. The Googie style is a popular, but relatively rare, mid-twentieth century roadside commercial architecture that is a subset of the Modern Movement of architecture. Architects popularized the style in California where the intention was to attract motorists traveling at 35 miles per hour or more to stop and patronize roadside businesses. The design of the Weller's Dry Cleaning building and sign engaged the everyday consumer with a modern and popular architecture in lieu of the high-style austerity of the International, Brutalist, and Expressionist styles. As a result, the site is a visual landmark for residents and visitors within the Thayer Avenue commercial area and greater Downtown Silver Spring. Very few examples of this architectural style remain intact in the county or region.

C. Period of Significance: 1961

D. Significant Dates: 1961, 2022

E. Significant Persons: Charles Weller (1914-2016) and Benjamin Weller (1912-1993)

F. Areas of Significance: Commerce

G. Architect/Builder: Ted Englehardt

H. Narrative:

History of Dry Cleaners

In the United States, commercial dry-cleaning operations started in the mid-1800s. The industry shifted from the use of volatile dry to liquid solvents as compared to laundries that used water to process garments. The earliest solvents consisted of either turpentine, benzol, benzine, gasoline. The use of gasoline continued for years despite the fire hazard it posed to the operator and public. In addition, tradesman cleaned each garment by hand resulting in a slow and expensive process. These factors led to drycleaners to be located in manufacturing and industrial areas. Press shops and tailors closer to residential areas sent garments to wholesale cleaning plants before completing the service (App.8, Fig. 1).³

In the 1920s, the industry shifted to petroleum-solvent, known as the Stoddard solvent. This product provided satisfactory cleaning ability at a lower cost, reduced the risks of fires, and dominated the industry. In the 1940s, companies such as One Hour Martinizing introduced and shifted to nonflammable synthetic solvents (perchloroethylene, trichloroethylene, and carbon tetrachloride) that allowed for quicker service.⁴ The development of machinery, advancements in solvents, and efficiency of plant layouts all led to the diversification of the industry.⁵ By the 1960s, there were four major categories: 1) traditional tailor or presser shops (which subcontracted with wholesale dry

³ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Establishing and Operating a Dry Cleaning Business* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 1-4.

⁴ Drycleaners using synthetic solvents increased from 27.2 percent in 1954 to 50.8 percent in 1963. U.S. Department of Commerce, *The Laundry & Drycleaning Industry: A Study of Problems and Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 37.

⁵ Ibid, 36-37.

cleaners to rough clean garments); 2) wholesale dry cleaners; 3) chain dry cleaners (a business with a central plant with retail stores for pick-up and distribution); and 4) the drive-in dry cleaner. Drive-in dry cleaners achieved popularity before World War II and quickly expanded. All the cleaning occurred at the site on a well-traveled road or avenue where customers dropped off and picked up clothing (App. 8, Fig. 1).⁶

Martinizing Dry Cleaning started in 1949 when chemist Henry Martin propagated the concept of quick on-premise dry cleaning service and use of perchloroethylene (synthetic-based) solvents that became an industry standard.⁷ One Hour Martinizing, along with Sanitone and One Hour Valet, changed the dry-cleaning business model with its relationship between the franchise and individual owner. The organizations offered small businesses the advantages of training, equipment, selection, layout, process research, accounting, market research, advertising, and financing while retaining their traditional independence.⁸ Slogans for One Hour Martinizing included “The Most in Dry Cleaning” that was apparent on a sign in front of the Weller’s Dry Cleaners during its construction (App. 8, Fig. 3).

Design of Dry Cleaners after World War II

Advancements in the dry-cleaning industry and the spread of drive-in dry cleaners that focused on the automobile led to changes in the design of stores. Manuals such as *Modern Dry Cleaning Plants* (1945) highlighted the advantages of the Modern Movement of architecture to create forward-looking, streamlined, designs with wide canopies that would engage the public. The architects who authored the document recognized that the new stores should serve as the primary advertisement for the business with brilliant colors and floor to ceiling plate glass windows inviting customers to view modern equipment and cleaning process. The manual stated that “Walls are windows that say to customers ‘Here is a fine place to do business,’” an essential idea as the industry shifted to on-premises retail cleaners.⁹ Other key elements included the elimination of unneeded ornamentation, clean building lines, and wide canopies. The architects emphasized further the importance of large, bold signage to attract customers during the day and illuminated signs for the night. As stated in the manual, “Bright lights sell the suburbs” and signs that cantilevered over the sidewalk increased visibility (App. 8, Fig. 2).¹⁰ A focus on these building elements allowed for Googie architecture, a subset of the Modern Movement, to be used in the design of these stores as the style gained in popularity.

Googie Architectural Style

Googie architecture developed years before the field named or classified it as a distinct style. In 1952, Douglas Haskell, architectural editor for *House and Home*, wrote an article titled “This is Googie Architecture.” Haskell derived the name “Googie” from Googie’s Restaurant in Los Angeles, a building he believed exemplified the burgeoning aesthetic for roadside architecture spreading from

⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Establishing and Operating a Dry Cleaning Business* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 6-7.

⁷ Robert Gottlieb, *Environmentalism Unbound: Exploring New Pathways for Change* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), 321.

⁸ U.S. Department of Commerce, *The Laundry & Drycleaning Industry: A Study of Problems and Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 42.

⁹ SEC Cleaning Systems, *Modern Dry Cleaning Plants: Manual of Design, Layout and Operations* (Bloomfield, NJ: Star Equipment Corporation, 1945), 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

California across America.¹¹ The public had embraced this style for coffee houses, diners, drive-ins, motels, bowling alleys, arcades, and dry cleaners.

In the 1950s, Googie thrived as architects readily experimented with new designs, materials, and forms. The style captured the national obsession with atomic energy, space travel, plastics, automobiles, television, and other forms of burgeoning technology. All these sectors spurred the design of Googie-styled buildings where architects manipulated glass, stainless steel, concrete, porcelain enamel (which use grew rapidly after the war), and other innovative materials to convey progress, optimism, and experimentation (App. 7, Fig. 1-2).

Googie-styled buildings were designed with bold and dynamic features to create a strong curb appeal to capture the attention of motorists traveling at 35 miles per hour on major roadways.¹² The designs featured dramatic acute angles, boomerang and amoeba shapes, upswept cantilevered roofs, exposed steel, several materials on the same elevation, and prominent use of glazing. Natural materials (such as ashlar cut stone) often contrasted with modern components. Architects accentuated these forms and materials with bright colors and neon lighting. Floor-to-ceiling windows served as an advertisement by allowing pedestrians and passing vehicles to catch a glimpse of the commercial activities within the business. In addition, bold commercial signage, either attached or detached from the building, attracted consumers with its physical presence in the built environment. Parking lots accompanied almost all Googie-styled buildings to facilitate customer access or delivery operations.¹³

Ben and Charles Weller's First Dry-Cleaning Stores

Benjamin (1912-1993) and Charles Weller (1914-2016) were the sons of Max and Minnie Weller who immigrated from Kounas, Lithuania, to the United States in 1903.¹⁴ Between 1900 and 1914, 1.5 million Eastern European Jews fled en masse due to pogroms (organized massacres) and ill-treatment of the community by Russian czars. In 1920, Max and Minnie had settled in Pennsylvania and operated a general store. The census listed six children: Hymen (14), Samuel (13), Mollie (10), Lena (8), Benjamin (7), and Charlie (5).¹⁵

Benjamin Weller married Jeanette R. [family name unknown] and lived in York, Pennsylvania, where he worked in a shoe store in 1939. The following year, he joined the U.S. Hoffman Machinery Corporation, one of the oldest manufacturers of dry-cleaning and pressing machines, as an executive assistant. Weller then became one of the founders and field engineer for the Martin Equipment Company of Buffalo, New York.¹⁶ Benjamin and Jeanette Weller then moved to the Washington, D.C. region and purchased property in the Carroll Knolls subdivision of Montgomery County (north of Forest Glen).¹⁷ In 1950, Weller opened and owned a One Hour Martinizing Dry Cleaning franchise at 948 Wayne Avenue, Silver Spring, in addition to his duties as field engineer for the company.¹⁸

¹¹ Alan Hess, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004), 68-69.

¹² *Ibid*, 3.

¹³ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁴ "Max Weller," 1930 *United States Federal Census* (Altoona, PA), Ancestry.

¹⁵ "Max Weller," 1920 *United States Federal Census* (Reade, PA), Ancestry.

¹⁶ "New Type Dry Cleaning Plant Will Be Constructed in City," *Rocky Mount Telegram*, August 23, 1954, Newspapers.com.

¹⁷ Montgomery County Circuit Court, "James B. Evans, Nathan Levin, and Nathaniel J. Taube to Benjamin Weller and Jeanette R. Weller," December 20, 1949, Liber CKW 1334, Folio 350.

¹⁸ Advertisements in the *Evening Star* noted employment opportunities for an experienced presser to work in a new modern plant at 948 Wayne Avenue in 1950. Classified advertisements noted storerooms for rent at 948 Wayne

The success of the business led to the opening of additional stores throughout the south. Weller's obituary stated that he opened at least 28 dry cleaner stores throughout Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas.¹⁹

Charles Weller remained in Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania, and lived with his parents. During World War II, he was drafted in the United States Army and deployed overseas between 1944 and 1945.²⁰ He returned home and gained employment as a truck driver for a furniture store. Weller married Edith Segal and moved to Montgomery County by 1953 where he worked for his brother's burgeoning One Hour Martinizing dry-cleaning stores.²¹

In 1953, Benjamin and Charles Weller entered a lease to open another One Hour Martinizing store in a neighborhood shopping center at 6 North Washington Street in Rockville.²² The lease agreement for the Rockville store and county directories recorded Benjamin as the president of the company and Charles as the secretary or manager.²³

In the 1950s, de jure and de facto segregation limited access of Silver Spring residential communities and commercial businesses to nearby Black residents or visitors. In 1951, classified advertisements for a clerk position recorded hiring discrimination at the One Hour Martinizing in Silver Spring. The advertisement stated:

CLERK, white, for modern dry cleaning plant; pleasant working conditions. Call SH, 1669. 948 Wayne ave., Silver Spring, Md.²⁴

Research did not uncover analogous advertisements for the Weller's Dry Cleaning Store at 8237 Fenton Street. Neither the businesses nor the owners were listed in the available case summaries for the Human Relations Commission that oversaw complaints of violations to the County's Public Accommodation Ordinance.²⁵

Avenue in 1961 and directed interested parties to contact Mr. Weller. This coincided with the opening of the subject dry cleaners. "Presser," *Evening Star*, October 3, 1950, Newsbank.

¹⁹ Newspaper article stated that he opened 10 stores in Europe as well. For example, Ben Weller owned a store with Isadore Charles Weller (likely a relative who was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania) in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in 1955. "Benjamin Weller, Dry-Cleaning Innovator," *Washington Post*, October 30, 1993 Proquest. "New Martinizing, Koretizing Plant to Open Here Tuesday," *Rocky Mount Telegram*, February 21, 1953, Newspapers.com.

²⁰ "Charles Weller," *Pennsylvania, U.S. Veteran Compensation Applications Files, WWII, 1950-1966*, Ancestry.

²¹ The couple had four children: Louis (Ziggy) Chelec, Marc Weller, Robin Melnick, and Lisa Weller. Land Records 1943/7; "Edith Segal Weller," *Washington Post*, March 26, 2020, Proquest; "Charles Weller," *Washington Post*, June 14, 2016, Proquest.

²² By 1961, advertisements listed the business as "Glazer's One-Hour Martinizing" which suggests new ownership for the business. Montgomery County Circuit Court, "George P. Kimmel, trustee for N. Richard Kimmel to One Hour Martinizing," March 30, 1953, Liber CKW 1806, Folio 588-598; "Glazer's One Hour Martinizing," *Montgomery County Sentinel*, October 12, 1961, Chronicling America.

²³ Directories.

²⁴ "Clerk," *Evening Star*, September 5, 1951, Chronicling America.

²⁵ In 1966, at the Weller's Dry Cleaners owned by Ben Weller and I.C. Weller Isadore Charles Weller (likely a relative who was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania) in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, the Ku Klux Klan picketed the business because the Black employees refused to clean their robes. I.C. Weller responded by subcontracting the work. *Jet* noted, "They [KKK] carried placard claiming unfair treatment....Weller said he was not able to persuade Negro employees to clean the robes and had been forced to sublet the work. The KKK thought it a dirty deal and threw up a picket line." "KKK Picket For Clean Robes, Negroes Refuse," *Jet* (August 4, 1966): 9.

The Opening of Weller's Dry Cleaning at 8237 Fenton Street

In 1960, Benjamin and Charles Weller purchased the property at 8237 Fenton Street.²⁶ Benjamin and Charles served as the president and secretary-treasurer, respectively.²⁷ The brothers hired local architect Ted Englehardt to design the purpose-built dry cleaners which opened in 1961. The company received a \$66,500 mortgage on the property that likely financed the construction of the building and acquisition of equipment.²⁸

Historic photographs taken during the construction of the building documented a sign that reads "Weller's One Hour Martinizing" with the standard One Hour Martinizing franchise slogan "The Most in Dry Cleaning" (App. 4, Fig. 1-2).²⁹ Reference to the franchise, however, is not indicated in later photographs or the current signage, and is no longer present on the building. It is unknown when the Weller brothers severed their relationship with One Hour Martinizing. The success of Weller's Dry Cleaning led the brothers to construct an addition on the south elevation of the main block by 1970.³⁰

The ownership structure of Weller's Dry Cleaning varied over the first 17 years. Benjamin and Charles conveyed the property to Welbro, Inc. in 1961 with Benjamin as the president of the company.³¹ In December 1978, Benjamin divested his financial interests at 8237 Fenton Street. Welbro, Inc., sold the southern portion of the property to Ben Weller Associates, Inc., but retained possession of the store.³² The conveyance, however, included a restrictive covenant that forbid Ben Weller Associates from operating a competing dry-cleaning establishment at this property for a period of 20 years. The following year, Charles Weller renamed Welbro, Inc., to Charles W., Inc. as the sole proprietor. Between 1979 and 2012, Charles and Edith Weller transferred the property under five different incorporations or trusts.³³ Charles Weller operated the dry cleaner business for over 55 years and died at home in Silver Spring, Maryland, in 2016 (App. 4, Fig. 3).³⁴

Architect Ted Englehardt

Julian Theodore Englehardt, better known as Ted Englehardt, was one of the founders and early president of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the AIA.³⁵ Born in 1898, Englehardt first worked and

²⁶ Montgomery County Circuit Court, "Harry Malasky and Dora L. Malasky, et. al to Ben Weller and Charles Weller," May 15, 1960, Liber CKW 2735, Folio 139.

²⁷ Montgomery County Circuit Court, "Welbro, Inc. indebted to Home Beneficial Life Insurance Company," July 15, 1963, Liber CKW 3108, Folio 58-60.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Photographs courtesy of the Englehardt family.

³⁰ Sanborn fire insurance maps and aerial photographs record the construction of the addition between 1964 and 1970. The exact date of construction is unknown.

³¹ Montgomery County Circuit Court, "Ben Weller and Charles Weller to Welbro, Inc.," March 30, 1961, Liber CKW 2893, Folio 247.

³² Montgomery County Circuit Court, "Welbro, Inc., to Ben Weller Associates, Inc.," December 8, 1978, Liber HMS 5256, Folio 387; Montgomery County Circuit Court, "Welbro, Inc., to Ben Weller Associates, Inc.," December 8, 1978, Liber HMS 5711, Folio 810.

³³ EHT Traceries, "Weller's Dry Cleaning Building," Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form, M:36-86-1 (2021).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Secondary sources incorrectly listed Englehardt as the first president of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the AIA. In the "History: Events Leading to the Chartering of the Potomac Valley Chapter," the author listed Dana B. Johannes as the first president and Roland S. Senseman as the second president. Englehardt first served on the board

apprenticed in an architect office in his home state of Tennessee at 15 years old. He continued his hands-on education as draftsman for different firms and agencies and supplemented his architectural design skills with physical construction labor for builders on concrete and steel projects. In 1927, he entered the drafting, design, and inspection period of his career in Tennessee where he worked for architecture firms, the U.S. Army of Engineers, and the City of Chattanooga. The depression, however, closed the city planning office and insufficient work led him to the Office of the Supervising Architect in Washington, D.C. in 1934. Englehardt worked for various offices of the federal government over the next 13 years where he assisted with the design of National Airport, developed plans for defense housing projects, and negotiated contracts with prefabricated housing manufactures. Unsatisfied with this work, he returned to private practice in 1947. He joined Proctor and Englehardt, Architects, at 8616 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, and then assumed control of the practice as Ted Englehardt, Architect, when Proctor retired in 1951.³⁶ He designed primarily homes, commercial, and educational buildings. Notable works included various buildings at the University of Maryland, the Asphalt Institute (1956), Denton Hall (1962), and Elkton Hall (1965), and laboratories at the National Institute of Health.³⁷ In Silver Spring, Englehardt was the architect of the Operations Research Institute at 1400 Spring Street (1963), an International Style office building with turquoise spandrel panels of porcelain enamel.³⁸ Englehardt retired in 1977 and passed away in 1980, at the age of 82.³⁹

I. Designation Criteria:

The Weller's Dry Cleaning Historic Site meets two Designation Criteria as listed in §24A-3 of the Montgomery County Code.

2.A Architectural and design significance. The historic resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.

The Weller's Dry Cleaning building represents the characteristics of Googie design, a subset of the Modern Movement of architecture. The humorous and playful space-age architecture appealed to the broader public and captured the sense of technological optimism permeating the country. Purveyors of the style designed dramatic forms, celebrated new materials, contrasted natural and textured forms with glass openings, and accentuated these elements with bold colors to use architecture as advertisement. Architect Ted Englehardt relied on these elements to create a landmark building in downtown Silver Spring. He successfully contrasted the solid, red and pink striped porcelain enamel box with a stone veneer and lighter, projecting section featuring expansive windows and a cantilevered awning that floated in the air. The roof form permitted greater visibility as the floor-to-ceiling windows allowed motorists and pedestrians to view operations of the business. All of these features combined to create a

as Treasurer. The AIA chapter elected Englehardt as its third president in June 1957 and he remained in the position for a one year term. V.T.H. Bien, "History: Events Leading to the Chartering of the Potomac Valley Chapter," *Potomac Valley Architect* 1, no. 1 (October 1956): 2-3; "Potomac Valley Chapter of Maryland," *Potomac Valley Architect* 2, no. 1 (September 1957): 2.

³⁶ American Institute of Architects, "Application for Membership: Julian Theodore "Ted" Englehardt," (1953).

³⁷ John F. Gane, ed., *American Architects Directory*, 3rd ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1970), 255.

³⁸ Architectural historian Clare Lise Kelly noted that Englehardt embedded a brick with his signature on the walls of his buildings. Both Weller's Dry Cleaning and the Operations Research Institute featured the trademark brick. "Operations Research Institute (1963), 1400 Spring Street." *The Third Place: A Montgomery Planning Department Blog* (October 17, 2012).

³⁹ "Ted Englehardt, Owned Own Firm of Architecture." *The Washington Post*. January 4, 1980.

playful and quirky building that engaged the everyday consumer with a modern and popular architecture in lieu of the high-style austerity of the International, Brutalist, and Expressionist styles.

The Weller's Dry Cleaning business featured a distinctive Googie-styled sign that embodied commercial architecture in the mid-twentieth century. The original, double-sided sign-oriented travelers on Fenton Street and harmonized with the design of the building. The sign served as a visual landmark with a scale and composition that attracted motorists and pedestrians to the store. The colorful design consists of three distinctly shaped and illuminated metal-framed sign boxes stacked on two metal poles anchored in the sidewalk. The shapes (rectangle, triangle, and circle) are offset from one another and slightly separated which creates a whimsical appearance and suggestion that these elements float in defiance of gravity. The upper component of the sign includes a circular operational clock inspired by the works of George Nelson and offset towards the property. The clock features a white face, black clock hands, and rectangular, multi-colored rectangles in place of numerals.

2.E Architectural and design significance. The historic resource represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape.

The Weller's Dry Cleaning is a rare example of Googie commercial architecture in Montgomery County. Many of these architectural resources have been lost to demolition throughout the country. *Montgomery Modern* (2015), a chronicle of mid-century modern architecture in Montgomery County, documented three commercial Googie-styled buildings.

The Weller's Dry Cleaning building and sign represent the continued suburban development of Silver Spring and the area's importance as a vital transportation route in the mid-twentieth century. Googie-styled buildings relied on nearby high-volume traffic to attract motorists with futuristic design. Weller's Dry Cleaning addressed the car-orientated populace and remained successful at the pedestrian scale. The illuminated sign overhanging the sidewalk anchored the building at the intersection and beckoned customers to return with its physical presence on the street. The roadside architecture serves as a tangible link between the community and its past, providing a sense of continuity, orientation, and place.

J. Conclusion:

The Weller's Dry Cleaning site retains integrity to express its period of significance. The building and sign have integrity of location and setting. Both resources remain in their original prominent location at the intersection of Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue in Downtown Silver Spring. The building and sign retain integrity of design, workmanship, and materials as they continue to reflect the Googie style, a subset of the modern movement of architecture. The design of the building, however, is diminished by the construction of an addition that impacts the character defining form, massing, and materials. On the façade, the brick-veneered addition interrupts the continuity and pattern established by the red and pink porcelain enameled panels. Furthermore, the addition anchors the upswept cantilevered roof canopy to the building instead of the original design where it floated beyond the southern elevation. Nevertheless, these alterations do not negate the building's architectural value as it continues to express the core

components of the Googie style. In addition, the Weller's Dry Cleaning site has integrity of association and feeling. The building and sign continue to evoke their period of construction and commercial use. Therefore, Historic Preservation staff recommends finding that the Weller's Dry Cleaning Historic Site satisfies two designation criteria.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING/GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Property Land Area: 9,376 SF

Account Number(s): 01047605

District: 13

Environmental Setting Description: The Weller's Dry Cleaning Site is located at 8237 Fenton Street, Silver Spring, Montgomery County, Maryland. The proposed site to be listed in the *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites* consists of the building, sign, and its associated 9,376 square-foot lot identified as Account Number 01047605, District 13, and shown on the accompanying map (App. 1, Fig. 1). Presently, the sign is located within the public right-of-way, but is planned to be moved to the property in the near future. The environmental setting shall include a piece of the right-of-way until the relocation of the sign.

Environmental Justification Description: The environmental setting incorporates the entire parcel associated with the dry cleaning business and the sign historically located in the public right-of-way.

9. PROPERTY OWNERS

Lakew LLC
1608 White Oak Vista Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20904

10. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: John Liebertz, Cultural Resource Planner III, Historic Preservation Office
Date: September 2022

11. MAJOR SOURCES CONSULTED

AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, <http://www.aiahistoricaldirectory.atlassian.net>.

Ancestry.com [numerous].

Evening Star [numerous].

Hess, Alan. *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004.

Montgomery County Land Records, <http://www.landrec.net>.

Rocky Mount Telegram [numerous].

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

SEC Cleaning Systems. *Modern Dry Cleaning Plants: Manual of Design, Layout and Operations*. Bloomfield, NJ: Star Equipment Corporation, 1945.

U.S. Department of Commerce. *Establishing and Operating a Dry Cleaning Business*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946.

U.S. Department of Commerce. *The Laundry & Drycleaning Industry: A Study of Problems and Prospects*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.

Washington Post [numerous].

APPENDIX ONE:
ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Environmental Setting
Weller's Dry Cleaning
8237 Fenton Street, Silver Spring, MD

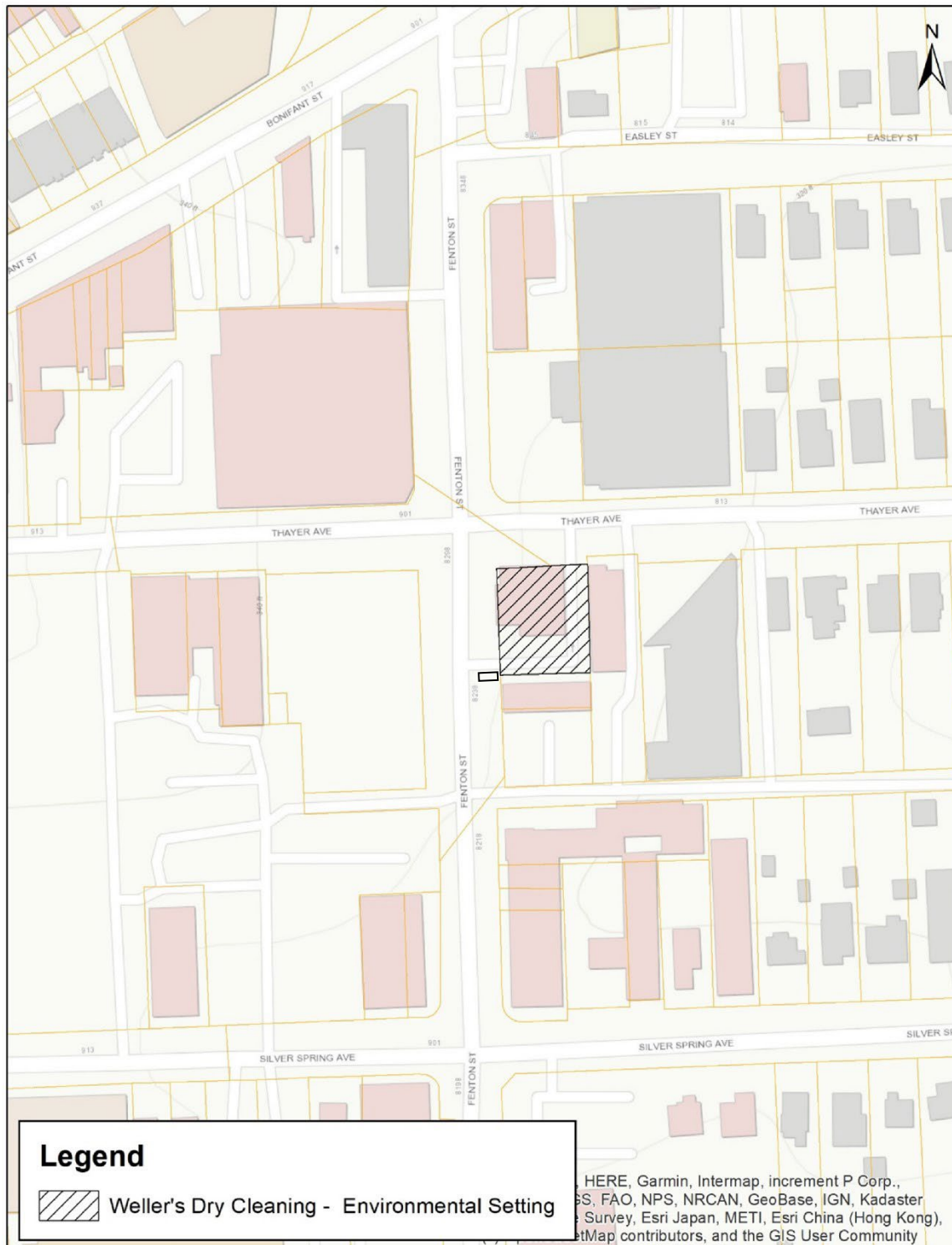


Figure 1: The environmental setting includes the subject property and the sign located in the public right-of-way.

APPENDIX TWO:
SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAPS

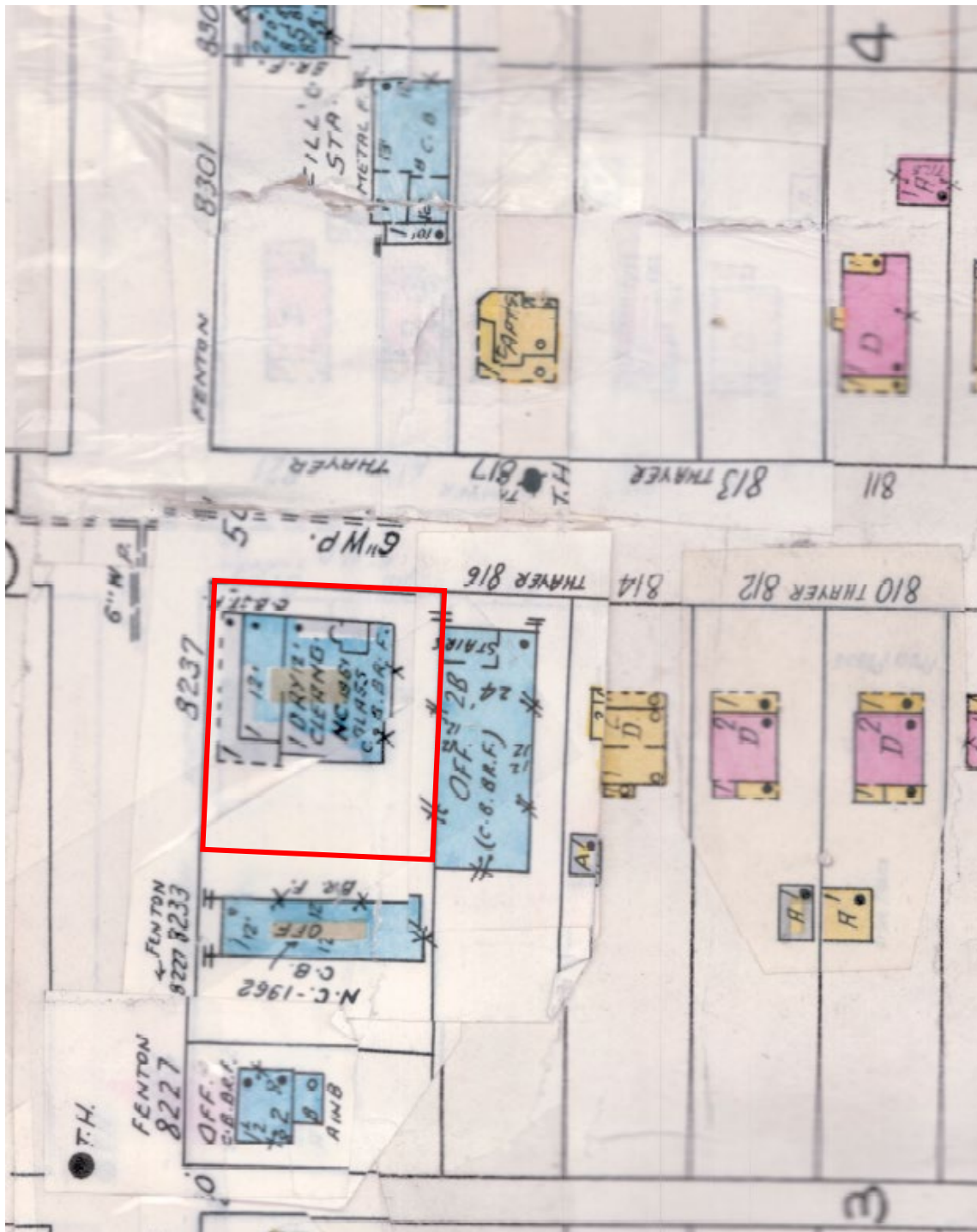


Figure 1: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1927-1963. The map recorded the construction of the building in 1961. The drawing showed the original footprint with the canopy extending beyond the face of the main block of the building.

APPENDIX THREE:
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1: Aerial photograph of Weller's Dry Cleaning, 1963. The red arrow points to the porcelain enamel-clad main block of the building prior to the construction of the southern addition.
Source: Netronline, <http://www.historicaerials.com>



Figure 2: Aerial photograph of Weller's Dry Cleaning, 2021.
Source: Montgomery Planning.

APPENDIX FOUR:
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1: View of the Weller's Dry Cleaning under construction, ca. 1961. Note the sign that reads "Weller's One Hour Martinizing." The concrete block wall on the rear elevation and the stone veneer on the front elevation are visible.

Source: Courtesy of Rose Jean Weller/Silver Spring Historical Society.



Figure 2: View of the Weller's Dry Cleaning under construction, ca. 1961. Note the sign that reads "Weller's One Hour Martinizing The Most in Dry Cleaning. " The framing for the glazed projecting section and the concrete block wall on the rear elevation are visible.
Source: Courtesy of Rose Jean Weller/Silver Spring Historical Society.



Figure 3: Charles Weller inside Weller's Dry Cleaners, date unknown.
Source: Courtesy of Rose Jean Weller/Silver Spring Historical Society.

APPENDIX FIVE:
EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 1: View of the façade (west elevation), 2022.
Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.



Figure 2: View of the façade and south elevation, 2022. Note the brick veneered addition on the south elevation.

Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.



Figure 3: View of the south elevation, 2022.
Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.



Figure 4: View of the south and east (rear) elevations, 2022.
Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.



Figure 5: View of the east (rear) and north elevations, 2022.
Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.



Figure 6: View of the north elevation, 2022.
Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.



Figure 7: View of the Weller's Dry Cleaning sign looking south from the store, 2022.
Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.



Figure 8: View of the Weller's Dry Cleaning sign north on Fenton Avenue, 2022.
Source: Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery Planning.

APPENDIX SIX:

MODEL OF THE ORIGINAL BUILDING

(This model was created in SketchUp by Historic Preservation Staff in an attempt to show the original building condition prior to the southern addition that was constructed in the 1960s. The model is based on aerial imagery, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, and an evaluation of the building.)



Figure 1: View of the west (front) elevation.

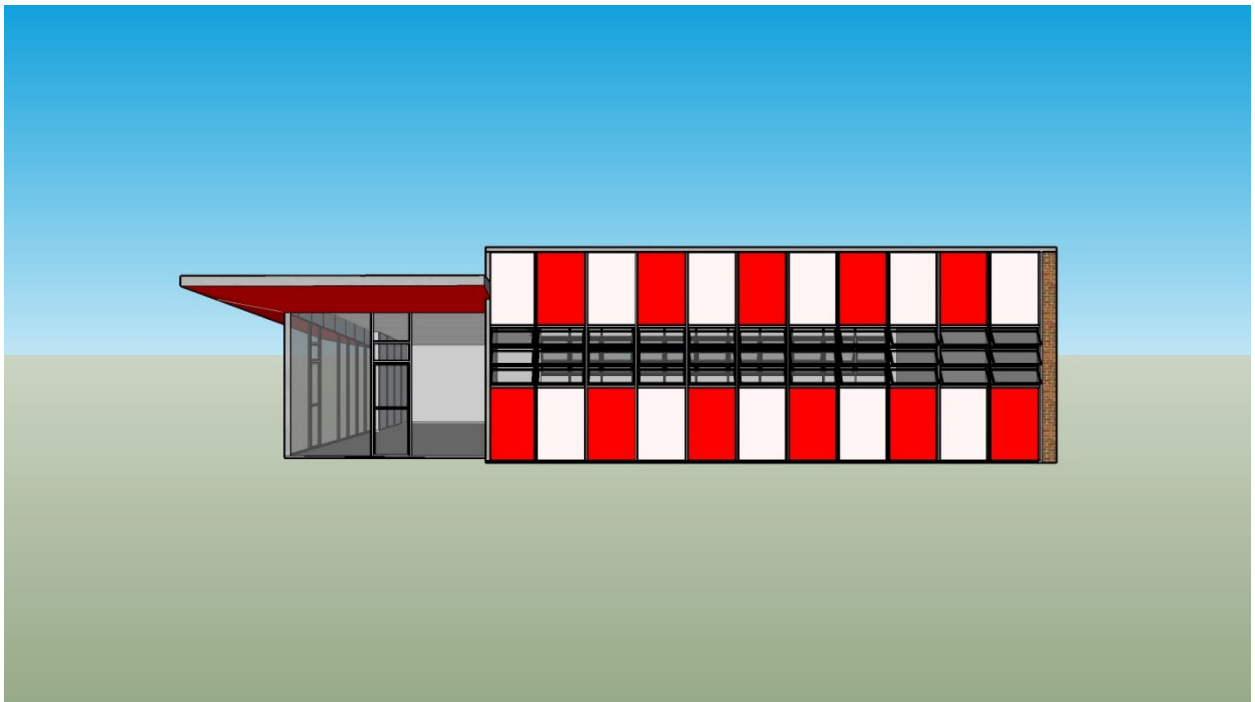


Figure 2: View of the south elevation.



Figure 3: View of the south and west (front) elevations.

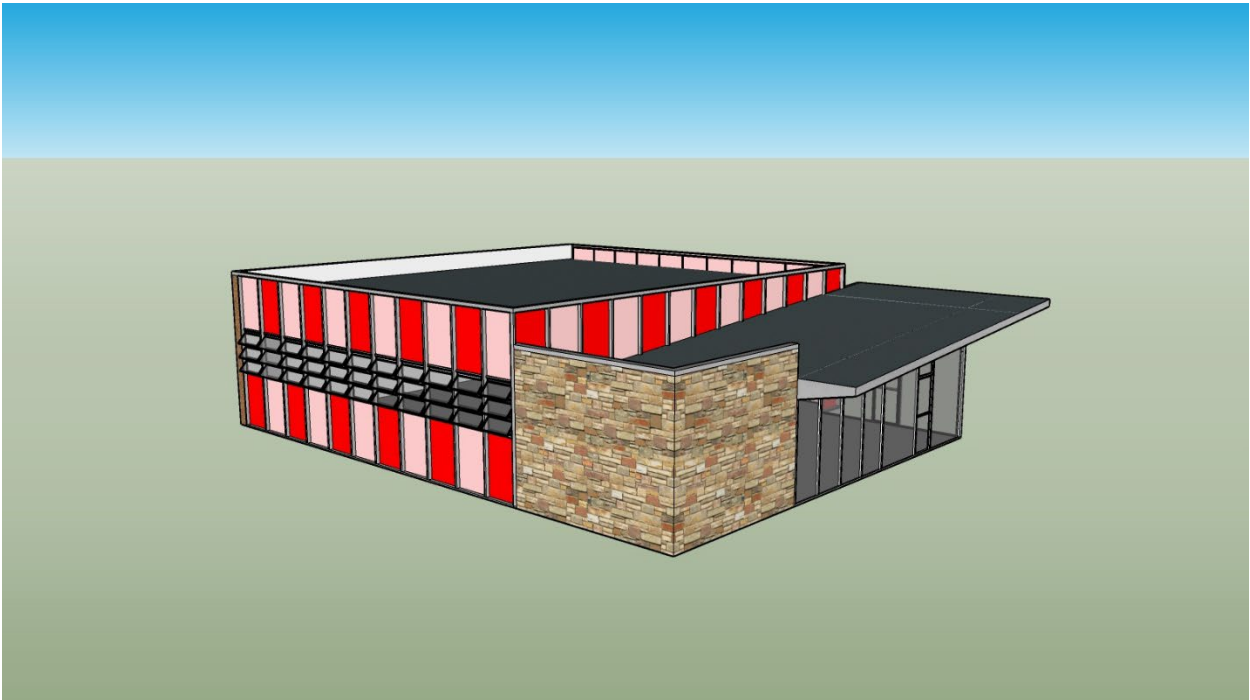


Figure 4: View of the north and west (front) elevations.



Figure 5: View of the Weller's Dry Cleaners when traveling north on Fenton Street.



Figure 6: View of the Weller's Dry Cleaners when traveling south on Fenton Street.



Figure 7: View of the Weller's Dry Cleaners when traveling east on Thayer Avenue.

APPENDIX SEVEN:
GOOGIE ARCHITECTURE



Figure 1: Norms La Cienaga, Los Angeles, California.

Source: Kansas Sebastian, "Norm's Restaurant – Façade (E)," <http://www.flickr.com>.



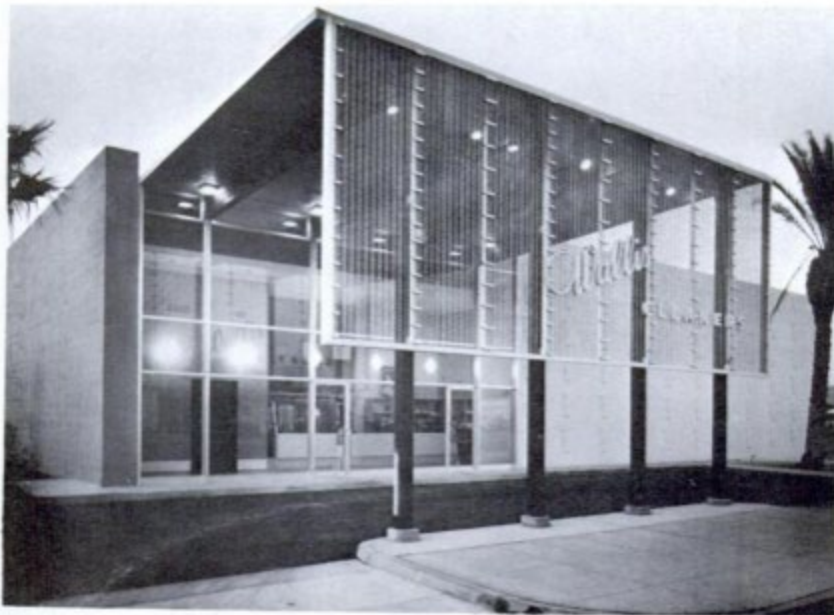
Figure 2: Harvey's Broiler, Southern California.

Source: Bob's Big Boy Broiler, <http://www.bobsbigboybroiler.com>.



Figure 3: Prestige Exceptional Fabricare, 9420 Georgia Avenue, Montgomery County, Maryland, 2012.
Source: EHT Traceries, Inc.

APPENDIX EIGHT:
DRY CLEANER PLANTS CONTEXT



The contrast between the old "dyeing and scouring" establishment above and the modern cleaning plant below shows the increasing emphasis on business appearance, in an effort to attract more customers in an increasingly competitive business.

Figure 1: Note the contrast between the two dry cleaning establishments from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. *The Laundry & Drycleaning Industry: A Study of Problems and Prospects*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.

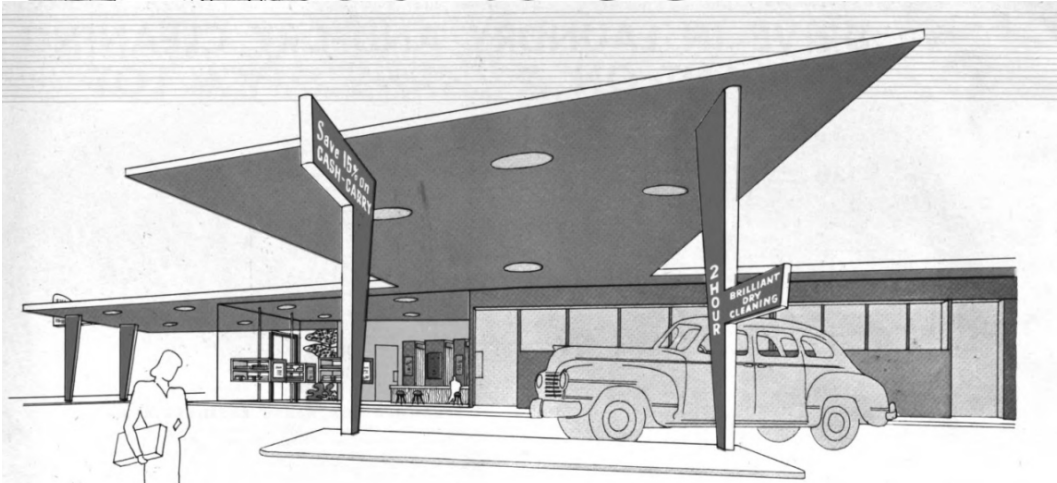
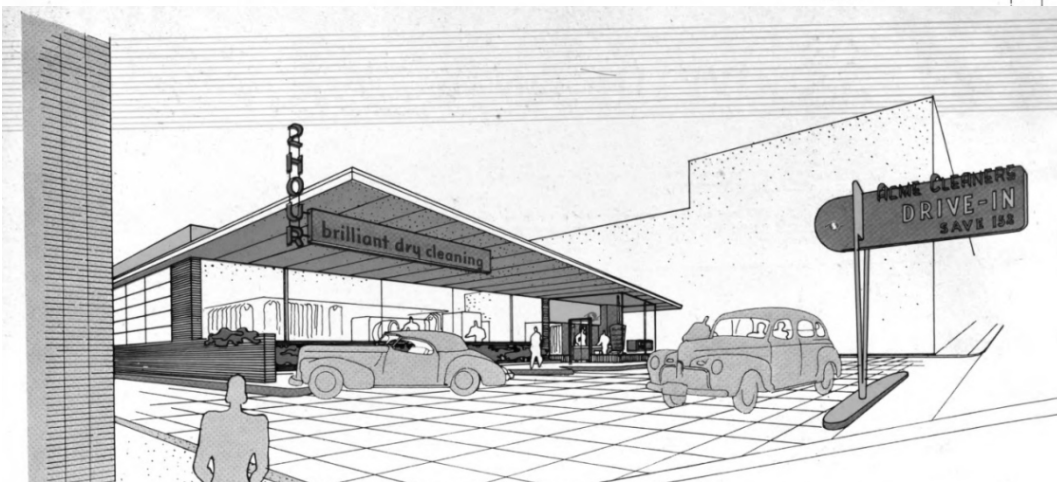


Figure 2: Illustrations for the design of modern dry cleaning stores, 1945.
 Source: Star Equipment Corporation. *Modern Dry Cleaning Plants: Manual of Design, Layout and Operation*. Bloomfield, NJ: SEC Cleaning Systems, 1945.



Figure 3: An example of a One Hour Martinizing Dry Cleaners, ca. 1963.
Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. *The Laundry & Drycleaning Industry: A Study of Problems and Prospects*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966.

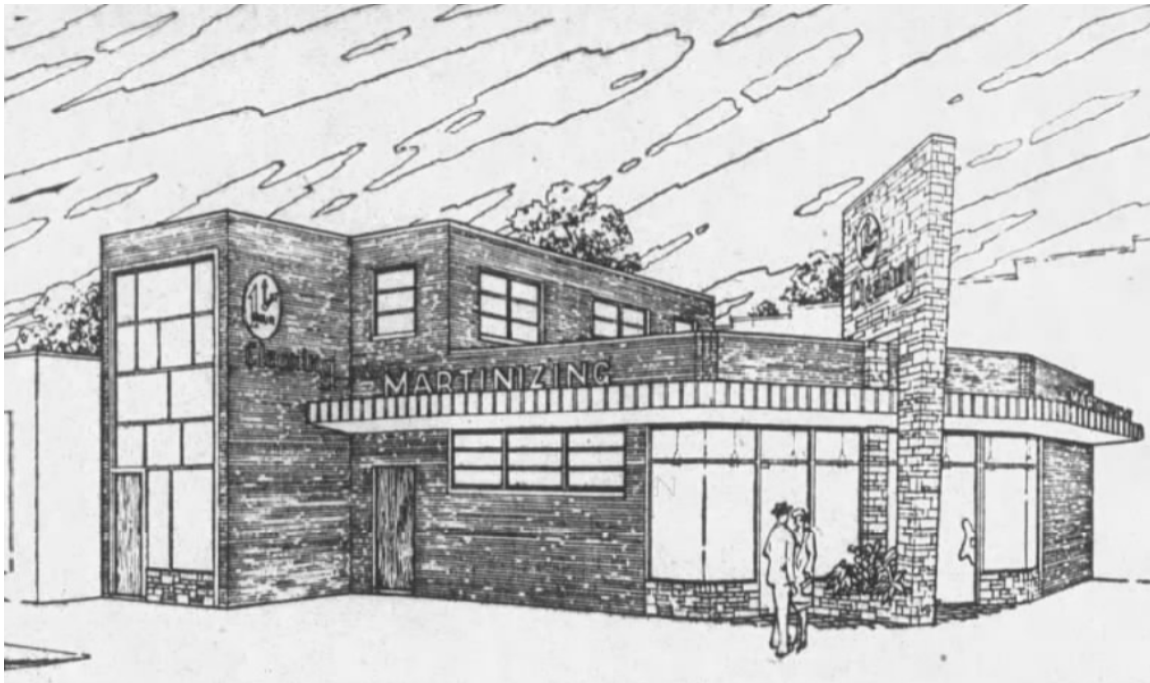


Figure 4: Architect's sketch of Ben Weller's One Hour Martinizing Dry Cleaners in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, 1954.
Source: *Rocky Mountain Telegram*.

APPENDIX NINE:
MARYLAND INVENTORY OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES (MIHP) FORM

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic Weller Dry Cleaning Building

other _____

2. Location

street and number 8237 Fenton Street not for publication ☐

city, town Silver Spring, MD, 20910 vicinity _____

county Montgomery County

3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Weller Charles Investments LLC

street and number 11223 Potomac Crest Drive telephone _____

city, town Potomac state MD zip code 20854

4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse liber 44279 folio 00133

city, town Rockville tax map JN33 tax parcel 0000 tax ID number 01047605

5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ Contributing Resource in National Register District
☐ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District
☐ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
☐ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register
☐ Recorded by HABS/HAER
☐ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT
☐ Other: _____

6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function	Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown	<input type="checkbox"/> Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use	Number of Contributing Resources
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other	previously listed in the
				Inventory

7. Description

Inventory No. M:36-86-1

Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

SUMMARY:

The Weller's Dry Cleaning Building is located on the east side of Fenton Street, on Lot P15 of Block G, Subdivision 22. The property is located in downtown Silver Spring, at the southeast corner of the Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue intersection. A Safeway grocery store is located diagonally across the intersection, and high-rise residential buildings are located west and north of the property. An Exxon gas station is also located directly north of the property. Two-story commercial buildings frame the east and south property boundaries. The rectilinear 9,376 square foot lot is precisely oriented with the cardinal directions. The building is sited at the northwest corner of its lot and is oriented west towards Fenton Street. A customer parking lot comprises the south portion of the lot, and an exit driveway extends along the east property line. A narrow grassy area is located directly north of the building, adjacent to the Thayer Avenue public sidewalk. The lot is otherwise entirely paved with asphalt, with portions of brick and concrete sidewalks along the north and west elevations. A commercial sign is located southwest of the building. The metal sign features a clock motif above an upturned triangular volume reading "weller's" atop rectangular volume with a star and text that reads "dry cleaning." The three shapes sit atop two support poles, anchored in a wood-clad base that appears contemporary.

DESCRIPTION:

The one-story Google-style commercial building was built in 1960 to accommodate Weller's Dry Cleaning. It consists of a rectangular main block with a shorter projecting rectangular volume. The projecting volume sits on a concrete slab foundation and is clad in glass and stone veneer. The projecting rectangular volume is slightly lower in height than the main block and features both a parapeted flat-roof portion and a pitched and cantilevered awning that extends over the sidewalk and slopes downward to the north. The awning features a painted concrete underside, aluminum coping, and a tar and gravel roof. The southwest corner of the projecting volume features customer entry doors set within steel-frame, full-height plate glass window wall surrounds. The building's main block, situated west of the projecting volume, sits on a concrete slab foundation and is clad in brick and porcelain enamel panels with stainless steel mullions. The main block is capped with a flat roof concealed behind a parapet. A number of HVAC rooftop units provide ventilation for the building. Both the projecting volume and main block feature steel-frame, horizontally oriented awning windows.

The west (front) elevation fronts Fenton Avenue and is largely comprised of the projecting volume. The far north flat-roofed portion of the projecting volume is clad in uncoursed, ashlar-cut stone veneer. A west-facing, horizontally oriented window opening centered within the stone cladding contains paired, one-over-one metal-frame awning windows. The remainder of the projecting volume (south of the stone-clad portion) is fully glazed with full-height, metal-frame, plate glass fixed windows. The projecting volume features two separate single leaf, fully glazed, metal-frame customer entry doors, grouped near the southwest corner of the building: one facing west, fronting the Fenton Avenue sidewalk and the other facing south looking onto the parking lot. Each of the doors are topped with a transom. The one-story projecting volume conceals the main block along the entire west elevation, with the exception of a two-bay portion of the main block at the south end of the building partially clad in stretcher bond brick veneer. This two-bay west-facing portion of the main block features a single-leaf, metal-frame, glazed entry door with glazing above, a window opening containing four metal-frame awning lights, and a metal ventilation grille.

The building's south elevation is largely comprised of the main block.¹ The foundation slightly slopes downward to the east due to a subtle grade change. A sliver of brick cladding is visible at ground level at the east portion of the south elevation, to accommodate the grade change. The elevation is otherwise clad in vertically oriented porcelain enamel panels with aluminum mullions. Each enamel panel contains three adjacent metal-frame awning windows, located mid-elevation to produce a ribbon window effect. An aluminum-frame exterior window awning with a vertical pattern and alternating stripes is affixed above the windows. Additionally, a single awning window is located at the base of eight of the eleven enamel panels.

¹ The west portion of the south elevation is comprised of the projecting volume, described above with the west elevation.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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Weller Dry Cleaning Building
Continuation Sheet

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The east (rear) elevation is fully comprised of the main block. It is clad in stretcher bond brick and features three large metal ventilation grilles. Five asymmetrically placed single awning windows sit atop concrete sills. Metal jalousie louvers are located directly behind each awning window. A double-leaf metal service door is located near the north portion of the elevation, elevated atop a concrete landing accessed via concrete steps. Two metal downspouts are affixed to the rear elevation.

Similar to the south elevation, the north elevation is largely comprised of the main block, which is clad in enamel panels with a mid-elevation span of ribbon windows (three grouped awning windows per vertical panel). Ventilation grilles are located at the base of some of the panels. Due to the grade change, the east portion of the north elevation features brick cladding at the ground level. The far west portion of the north elevation is comprised of the projecting volume. This slightly shorter volume is fully clad in uncoursed, ashlar-cut stone veneer and is topped with a flat parapeted roof. The north elevation is unfenestrated.

The building interior is partially visible from the public right of way. Windows at the north elevation, which fronts Thayer Avenue, provide visibility into the dry-cleaning clothes storage area and some of the mechanical equipment for processing laundry. At the east (front) elevation, full height windows expose a lobby and service counter, with clothes storage behind.

INTEGRITY

The building at 8237 Fenton Street retains physical integrity. Observation indicates the potential replacement of a fixed plate glass window at the east (front) elevation, but otherwise the building appears remarkably intact. Integrity of design, workmanship, and materials remain, as evidenced by the stone veneer, porcelain enamel panels, glazing, brick, and awnings. The building retains integrity of feeling and association as a midcentury Googie-style commercial building, and additionally retains integrity of location, as it has not been moved from its original position on Lot P15 of Block G. Although integrity of setting has been altered by the new construction in the immediate vicinity, this does not substantially detract from the building's historic nature and does not impact its overall integrity. The building's integrity is also bolstered by the retention of the Googie-style "Weller's Dry Cleaning" signage, which attracts attention from both pedestrian passerby and vehicular traffic.

8. Significance

Inventory No. M:36-86-1

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history	
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/	<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____	

Specific dates 1961 **Architect/Builder** Ted Englehardt

Construction dates 1961

Evaluation for:

☒ National Register

☐ Maryland Register

☐ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

SUMMARY:

The Weller's Dry Cleaning Building is associated with the post war Modern Movement as an example of Googie style commercial architecture. The Googie style became popular for roadside commercial architecture of the 1950s, particularly in California where the intention was to get drivers to stop and patronize roadside businesses. Most examples have been lost to redevelopment. The Weller's Dry Cleaning Building is a rare example of such late 1950s commercial architecture having survived into the twenty-first century with a great degree of physical integrity.² As such the property is locally significant under National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Criterion C (Architecture). The building is not known to be associated with any events or individuals important to history that it would meet Criteria A (Events) or B (Persons) and was not evaluated under Criterion D (Archeology). Because the significance of the building relates to its original design, the period of significance is 1960, the year of the building's construction.

DISCUSSION:

Weller's Dry Cleaning was constructed in 1961 in its present location at the Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue intersection. The building's Googie architectural style is considered a subset of the Modern Movement, quite popular with roadside buildings including diners, drive-ins, motels, bowling alleys, and dry cleaners. Googie architecture typically featured vibrant colors, a myriad of materials, daring shapes, and over-the-top signage and was considered optimistic, experimental and exciting.

The building was originally owned by Charles Weller, and is presently owned by "Charles Weller Investments."³ The Silver Spring Central Business District survey identified the building as a candidate for further evaluation, identifying it as a "Streamline style business with unique features of colored porcelain clad panels and original streamline marquee and signage that may be eligible for the National Register upon reaching fifty years of age. It is a rare example of such late 1950s commercial architecture having survived into the 21st century with a great degree of physical integrity."⁴

The Weller's Dry Cleaning Building at 8237 Fenton Street was constructed in 1961 at its present location at the Fenton Street and Thayer Avenue intersection. Ben Weller and Charles Weller purchased the property in May of 1960 from several members of the Malasky family: Harry and his wife, Dora; Jerome and his wife, Theresa; Maurice and his wife, Celia; and Sadie Malasky.⁵ At the

² Potomac Hudson Engineering, "Silver Spring Central Business District Survey." Despite the "late 1950s" descriptor, research has confirmed 1960 as the construction date for Weller's Dry Cleaning.

³ Potomac Hudson Engineering, "Silver Spring Central Business District Survey" (December 2002), p.22; SDAT: Real Property Search.

⁴ Potomac Hudson Engineering, "Silver Spring Central Business District Survey."

⁵ Montgomery Deed Book CKW 2735, p.319.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. M:36-86-1

Weller Dry Cleaning Building Continuation Sheet

Number 8 Page 1

time of this transaction, the property was comprised of the northerly 150 feet of Lots 1 and 2 in Block G of "R. Holt Easley's Subdivision of Silver Spring" as shown on a 1904 plat.⁶ Shortly after the sale, the property within Lots 1 and 2 was re-subdivided into a single lot, Lot 14.⁷ In March of 1961, Ben and Charles Weller conveyed the property to Welbro, Inc., of which Ben Weller was the president.⁸ Later in the year, Lot 14 was re-subdivided into Lots 15 and 16.⁹ The northern three-quarters of Lot 14 became Lot 15 and the remaining one-quarter of Lot 14 became Lot 16. In December of 1978, Welbro, Inc. sold all of Lot 16 and part of Lot 15 to Ben Weller Associates, Inc., leaving the majority of Lot 15 in the possession of Welbro, Inc.¹⁰ Included in this transaction was a covenant stating that Ben Weller Associates, Inc. and its successors will not "operate a dry cleaning establishment or otherwise compete with Welbro, Inc. and/or One Hour Martinizing, Inc." at 8233 Fenton Street for a period of twenty years. Between 1979 and 2012, the property at 8237 Fenton Street, Weller's Dry Cleaning, was transferred five times among Charles W., Inc. (previously known as Welbro, Inc.), Charles Weller, Edith Weller, the Charles Weller Trust, and the Edith Weller Trust, and is now owned by Charles Weller Investments, LLC.^{11 12 13}

Charles Weller (1914-2016), original and long-time owner of Weller's Dry Cleaners, was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania and served in the US Army during World War II. Weller was married to Edith Segal Weller, with whom he had four children: Lois (Ziggy) Chelec, Marc Weller, Robin Melnick, and Lisa Weller. He died in 2016 at the age of 101, after owning and operating Weller's Dry Cleaners for over fifty-five years.¹⁴

The architect of the Weller's Dry Cleaning building was Ted Englehardt, founder and first president of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the AIA.¹⁵ Englehardt practiced in his home state of Tennessee prior to 1934, when he moved to Washington, DC to work in the Office of the Supervising Architect in the Treasury Department. While working for the government, Englehardt assisted with the design of the terminal of the National Airport. In 1949, Englehardt left the Treasury Department and started his own architectural firm, Englehardt & Associates, where he designed of a number of buildings for the University of Maryland, including the Denton Hall complex of dormitories.¹⁶ He was also the architect of Silver Spring's Operations Research Institute at 1400 Spring Street (1963), an International Style office building with turquoise spandrel panels of porcelain enamel.¹⁷ Englehardt retired in 1977 and passed away in 1980, at the age of 82.¹⁸

⁶ Montgomery Plat Book 1, Plat 54.

⁷ Montgomery Plat Book 67, Plat 6077.

⁸ Montgomery Deed Book CKW 2893, p.247.

⁹ Montgomery Plat Book 70, Plat 6575.

¹⁰ Montgomery Deed Book HMS 5256, p.387; re-recorded in HMS 5711, p.810.

¹¹ Montgomery Deed Books HMS 8572, p.791; BAS 9217, p.782; LEK 36444, p.324; LEK 43885, p.226; and LEK 44279, p.133.

¹² Potomac Hudson Engineering, "Silver Spring Central Business District Survey" (December 2002), p.22.

¹³ SDAT: Real Property Search.

¹⁴ "Charles Weller Obituary." *The Washington Post*. June 14-15, 2016. Note the obituary claims Weller operated the cleaners business for over 60 years, but research reveals 55 is the appropriate number.

¹⁵ Clare Lise Kelly. *Montgomery Modern: Modern Architecture in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1930-1979*. North Carolina: Lulu Press, Inc. 2016.

¹⁶ "Ted Englehardt, Owned Own Firm of Architecture." *The Washington Post*. January 4, 1980.

¹⁷ Clare Lise Kelly, "Operations Research Institute (1963), 1400 Spring Street." *The Third Place: A Montgomery Planning Department Blog* (October 17, 2012). Kelly notes that Englehardt was known to leave a trademark signature brick with his name, imbedded in the brick walls of his buildings. Both Weller's Dry Cleaning and the Operations Research Institute feature the trademark brick.

¹⁸ "Ted Englehardt, Owned Own Firm of Architecture." *The Washington Post*. January 4, 1980.

Maryland Historical Trust

Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. M:36-86-1

Weller Dry Cleaning Building Continuation Sheet

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Richard Longstreth, esteemed architectural historian and preservationist, was quoted in a 2013 *Washington Post* article claiming: "For Montgomery County, the late 1940s, 1950s and into the 1960s was one of the most important periods of its development and its history."¹⁹ Longstreth's comment refers to the County's population growth, which increased from 83,912 to 340,928 residents between 1940 and 1960.²⁰ The population growth was largely due to an increase in the amount of federally-employed individuals, returning military veterans, a nation-wide post-war construction boom, and the trend of suburbanization.²¹ Weller's Dry Cleaning is a product and extant physical example of this era of growth in Montgomery County and Silver Spring history.

The building communicates its midcentury identity and character through its unique Googie architectural style. Googie is considered a stylistic subset of the Midcentury Modern Movement, which largely arose after the end of World War II, as architects readily experimented with new designs and new materials. The wartime era had largely stifled domestic architecture endeavors, and Googie architecture was the product of renewed post-war energy and opportunity. Materials such as glass, stainless steel, concrete, ashlar-cut stone, and ceramic panels became more widely available to architects and builders and were commonly incorporated into Midcentury buildings – often all within one building. The Googie style developed years before it was ever named and classified as a distinct style. In the late 1940s, California coffee shops were being built in an exaggerated Modern architectural style inspired by the American post-war sense of futurism and optimism.²² It wasn't until 1952 that Douglas Haskell, architectural editor for *House and Home*, wrote an article titled "This is Googie Architecture." Haskell had pulled the name "Googie" from Googie's Restaurant in Los Angeles, a building he believed exemplified the burgeoning aesthetic.²³

The style continued to rise in popularity throughout the 1950s and 1960s, spreading from California across the American landscape.²⁴ Googie was embraced as the appropriate style for roadside buildings including diners, drive-ins, motels, bowling alleys, arcades, and dry cleaners. The 1950s, in particular, saw an American interest in atomic energy, space travel, automobiles, plastics, television, and other forms of new technology – all of which spurred the design of Googie-styled buildings.²⁵ Because of their roadside locations, often at busy intersections or on main roadways, Googie buildings were designed with strong curb appeal. Bold, dynamic features were intended to capture the attention of passing motor vehicles, typically traveling at speeds of up to 35 miles per hour.²⁶ Typical Googie building features include dramatic acute angles, boomerang and amoeba shapes, upswept cantilevered roofs and architectural elements, exposed steel, and prominent use of glazing, which allowed pedestrians and passing vehicles to catch a glimpse of the commercial activities within. Buildings regularly featured a range of structural and cladding materials, oftentimes with multiple materials used within one elevation. Use of bright colors and neon was common. Googie buildings were nearly universally accompanied by parking lots to facilitate ease of customer and staff parking, as well as delivery operations.²⁷ Bold commercial

¹⁹ Katherine Shaver, "Montgomery's 'Mad Men' modern buildings — are they worth protecting?" *The Washington Post*. February 28, 2013.

²⁰ Richard L. Forstall, "Maryland Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990," United States Census Bureau.

²¹ John Liebertz for EHT Tracerics, Inc. "Maryland Historical Trust Determination of Eligibility Form: Prestige Exceptional Fabricare." (March 7, 2013, reviewed by MHT June 6, 2013), p.3.

²² John Liebertz for EHT Tracerics, Inc. "Maryland Historical Trust Determination of Eligibility Form: Prestige Exceptional Fabricare." (March 7, 2013, reviewed by MHT June 6, 2013).

²³ Alan Hess, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004), 68-69.

²⁴ Gordon Arnold, *The Rise and Fall of the Future: America's Changing Vision of Tomorrow, 1939-1986* (North Carolina: McFarland Publishing, 2020), p.114.

²⁵ John Liebertz for EHT Tracerics, Inc. "Maryland Historical Trust Determination of Eligibility Form: Prestige Exceptional Fabricare." (March 7, 2013, reviewed by MHT June 6, 2013), p.3.

²⁶ Ibid, 3.

²⁷ Ibid, 3.

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signage, which could be either attached or detached from the building, attracted the attention of passing vehicles. In a blog post for The Third Place, titled "Roadside Montgomery," Clare Lise Kelly writes about Googie roadside signage. She writes:

"The exuberant mid-century modern design of commercial signs captures the entrepreneurial spirit of mom and pop shops that thrived during the post-World War population boom of Montgomery County. With loud colors and catchy shapes, the quirky signs howled for the attention of passing motorists...The space age sign for Wellers Dry Cleaning, 8327 Fenton St, lets Fenton Street passersby know that it's time to get your clothes dry cleaned."²⁸

Weller's space age sign, detached from the building (now situated in the pedestrian walkway, southwest of the building), is one of the property's character-defining features.

Weller's Dry Cleaning was not the first Googie-style dry cleaners in Silver Spring. It was preceded by Prestige Exceptional Fabricare at 9420 Georgia Avenue, constructed in 1958. The Prestige building is also a good representative of Googie architecture, due to its large expanses of glass windows set in stainless steel sashes, ashlar-cut stone veneer, stretcher-bond brick and cantilevered shed roof. Ted Englehardt, the architect of Weller's Dry Cleaning, was likely influenced by this local predecessor, choosing similarly exaggerated forms and eye-catching elements for his Weller's commission. Both buildings feature a cantilevered roofline, to serve as a dramatic architectural feature but also a practical one as well, as having an overhanging roof meant that customers could enter and exit the store with their clothing and be protected from the elements. As described by Clare Lise Kelly in *Montgomery Modern: Modern Architecture in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1930-1979*, "the space-age design of the 1960 Weller's Dry Cleaning building serves as a gateway to a Fenton Street shopping district of curtain-wall buildings with jewel-tone panel sheathing."²⁹ Kelly goes on to say: "A well-preserved example of Googie architecture in Montgomery County is Weller's Dry Cleaning in Silver Spring. Built in 1960, this modernist structure exhibits defining features such as a canted roofline and brightly colored porcelain panels- and a space-age sign that looks right out of a scene of 'The Jetsons' TV show."³⁰

²⁸ Clare Lise Kelly, "Roadside Montgomery." The Third Place: A Montgomery Planning Department Blog. July 29, 2015.

²⁹ Clare Lise Kelly, *Montgomery Modern: Modern Architecture in Montgomery County, Maryland, 1930-1979*. North Carolina: Lulu Press, Inc. 2016.

³⁰ Ibid.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property	<u>.086</u>	
Acreage of historical setting	<u>.086</u>	
Quadrangle name	<u>Washington West</u>	Quadrangle scale: <u>7.5 Minute Series</u>

Verbal boundary description and justification

National Register boundaries include all of present lot boundary, Lots 15 and 16 of Block G in subdivision 22 of Plat 6575. The current property corresponds to the original property bought by the Weller Family in 1960.

11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Eric Griffiths, Project Manager, and Katherine Wallace, Senior Architectural Historian		
organization	EHT Traceries, Inc.	date	September 2020
street & number	440 Massachusetts Avenue, NW	telephone	(202) 393-1199
city or town	Washington	state	DC

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Highsmith, Carol M. 2015 photograph titled "Weller's Dry Cleaning store, built in 1960 in Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb adjacent to Washington DC." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Part of Carol M. Highsmith's America Project in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018697966/>

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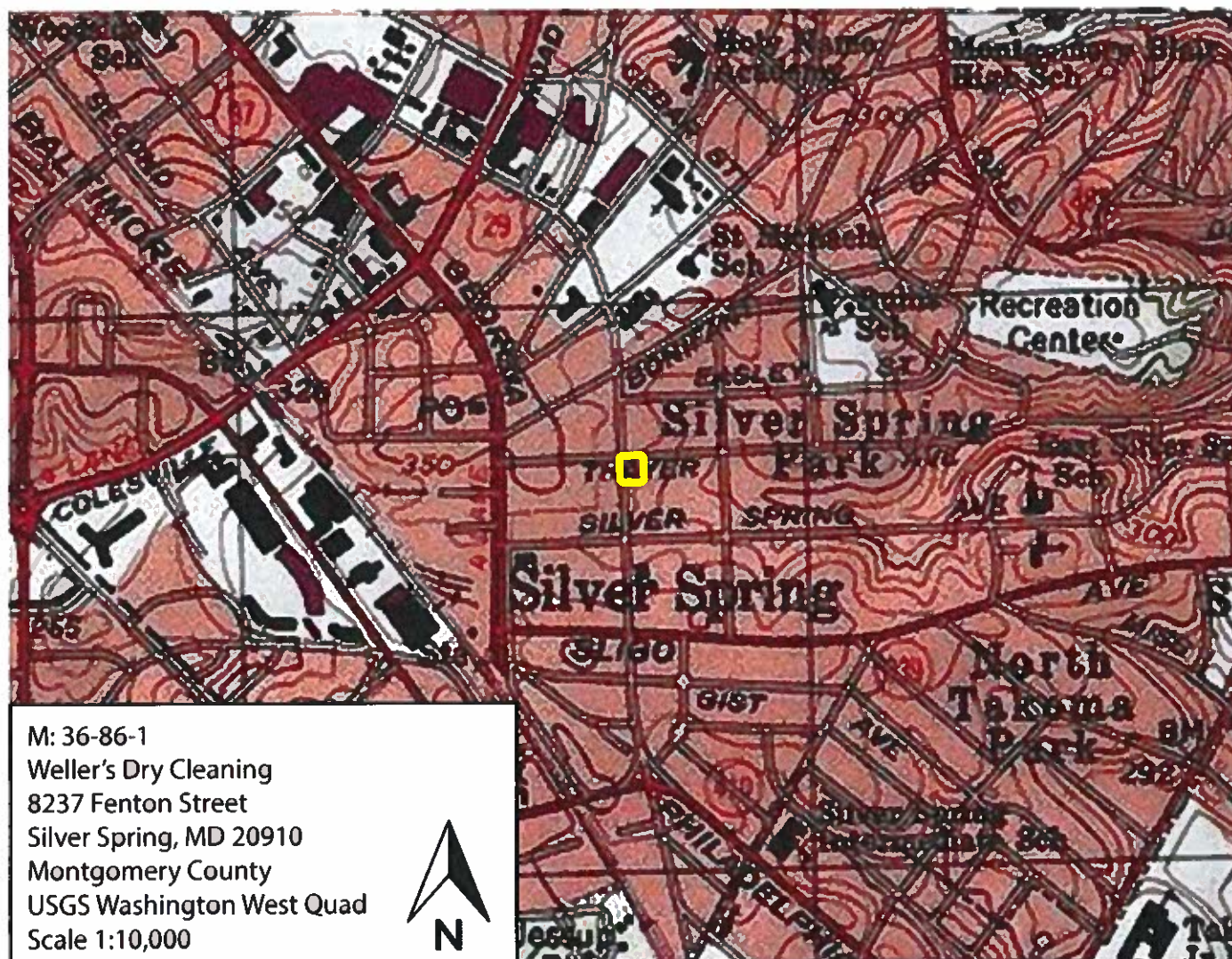


Figure 1: USGS Washington West quadrangle, detail view showing the location of Weller's Dry Cleaning.

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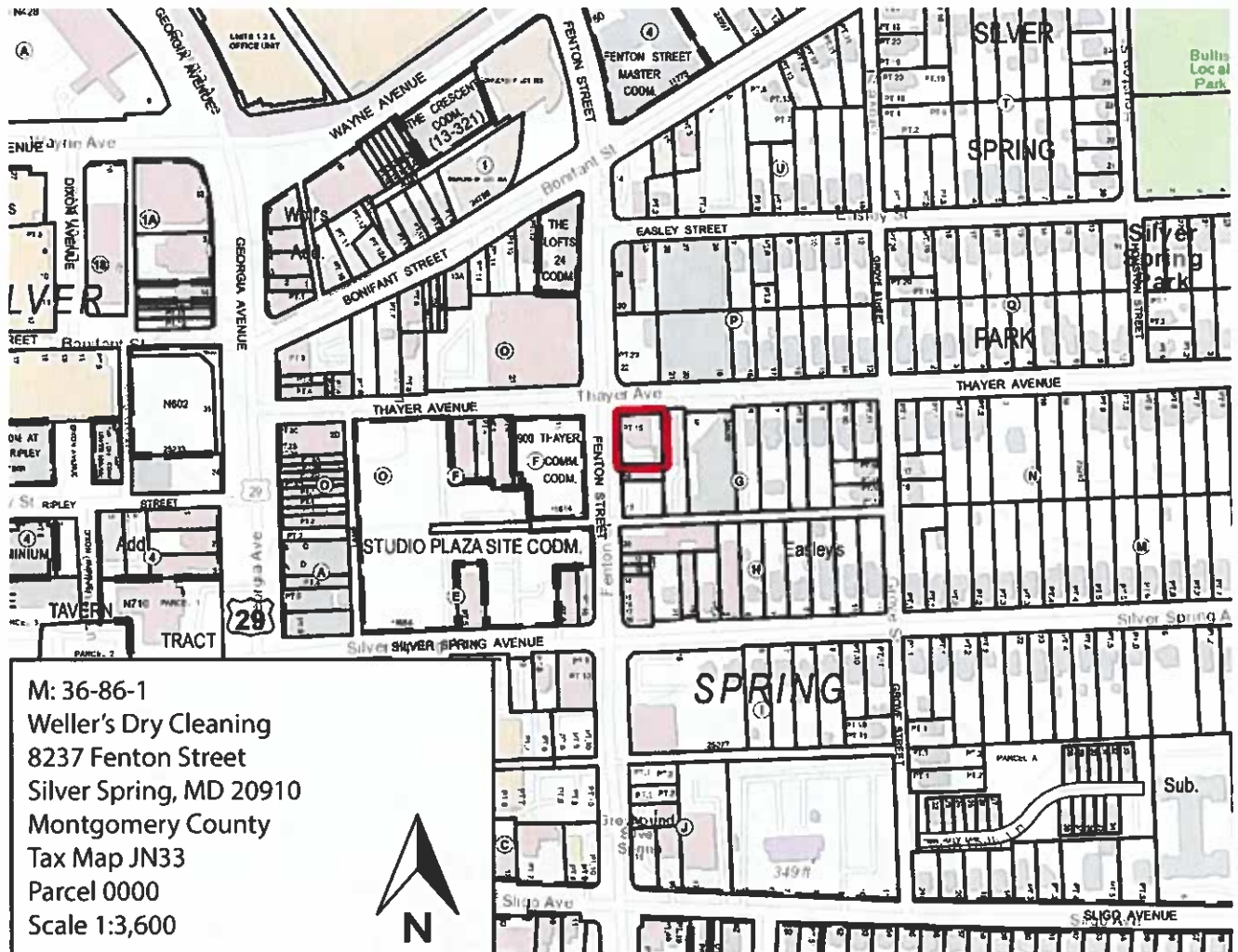


Figure 2: Detail from tax map JN33, with parcel annotated.

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Photo 1 of 8: Weller's Dry Cleaning, looking Southeast



Photo 2 of 8: West (front) elevation, looking southeast.

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Photo 3 of 8: Detail of primary entrance, looking northeast.



Photo 4 of 8: South elevation, looking northeast.

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Photo 5 of 8: East elevation, looking northwest.



Photo 3 of 8: North elevation (image left) and partial view of the west elevation (image right), looking southeast.

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Photo 7 of 8: Detail of awning windows at north elevation.

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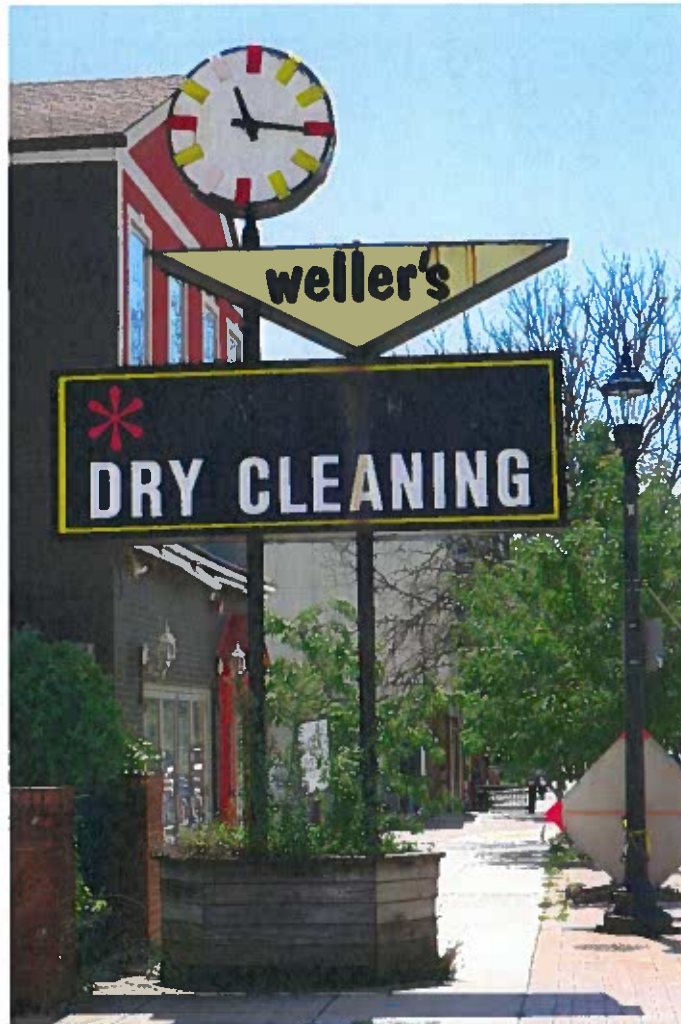


Photo 8 of 8: Commercial signage for Weller's Dry Cleaning located southwest of the building, looking south.

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Continuation Sheet

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PHOTO LOG

Name of Photographer: Katherine Wallace

Date of Photograph: August 5, 2020

Location of Original Digital File: MD SHPO

Photographs Inserted on Continuation Sheet

Photo 1 of 8:

Weller's Dry Cleaning, looking Southeast

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Photo 2 of 8:

West (front) elevation, looking southeast

M; 36-86-1_2020-08-05_02.tif

Photo 3 of 8:

Detail of primary entrance, looking northeast

M; 36-86-1_2020-08-05_03.tif

Photo 4 of 8:

South elevation, looking northeast

M; 36-86-1_2020-08-05_04.tif

Photo 5 of 8:

East elevation, looking northwest

M; 36-86-1_2020-08-05_05.tif

Photo 6 of 8:

North elevation (image left) and partial view of the west elevation (image right), looking southeast

M; 36-86-1_2020-08-05_06.tif

Photo 7 of 8:

Detail of awning windows at north elevation, looking southwest

M; 36-86-1_2020-08-05_07.tif

Photo 8 of 8:

Commercial signage for Weller's Dry Cleaning located southwest of the building, looking south

M; 36-86-1_2020-08-05_08.tif