

# Grandville Avenue: A Changing Commercial Landscape

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## Introduction

During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century many Dutch immigrants settled in west Michigan. In 1910 \_\_\_ of the \_\_\_ foreign born residents living in Grand Rapids were born in the Netherlands. After World War II, many cities experienced what is commonly known as the white flight, where white residents left city neighborhoods for suburbia. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the largest number of immigrants arriving in west Michigan were of Hispanic origin. Within the city of Grand Rapids, what is now known as the Roosevelt Park neighborhood was a major Dutch immigrant receiving area, today the neighborhood is home to a primarily Hispanic population. The commercial landscape of a neighborhood usually reflects the needs of the residents living near it. In the Roosevelt Park neighborhood there are two commercial clusters along Grandville Avenue, one directly south of Franklin Street and one just south of High Street. It seems likely that the commercial function has changed as a result of the ethnic shift in this neighborhood.



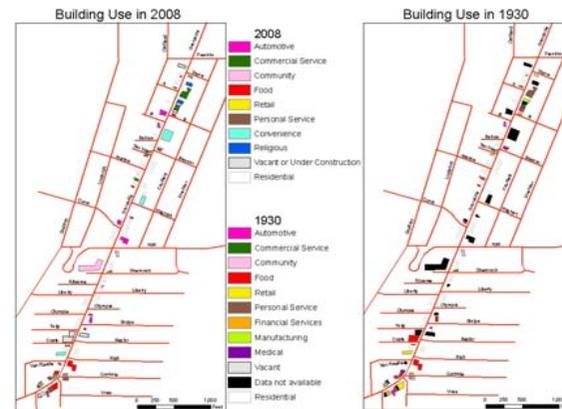
The Rumsey Building, built in 1909, was housed the Grand Rapids Savings Bank and the Daane and Westrate Insurance Co. in 1930. Today the building has been refurbished and houses Café Aromas and Rumsey Lofts. It is located at the corner of Grandville Avenue and Beacon Street.



In 1930 this building, located at the corner of Grandville Avenue and Cordelia Street, was another branch of the Grand Rapids Savings Bank. In 2008 the building was vacant, but rooftop sign is a tell tale sign that the building recently housed Ruthy's Salon, now located in a new development across the street.

## Method

In order to compare the business landscape of Grandville Avenue under Dutch occupation to that of Hispanic occupation, the years 1930 and 2008 were examined. A base map, showing the location of buildings currently present along Grandville Avenue, was created using Sanborn Fire Insurance maps published in 1912. The names of current businesses were collected during several visits to the area and Polk City Directories were used to determine businesses that existed in 1930. Once this data was collected the businesses were classified based on business type. The buildings in the base map were then color coded to represent the business types present in 1930 and 2008. The map below shows this classification.



## Results

When the business types from 1930 and 2008 are compared there are some obvious differences in building usage. In 1930 there were three banks and two drug stores located along Grandville Avenue, today these buildings are used by other businesses. Automotive and food business types were present in both years. The retailing in 2008 focused entirely on clothing, but in 1930 the retailing included jewelry, furniture, shoes, clothing, as well as a department store. In 1930 there were no churches directly located on Grandville Avenue, but in 2008 there were two churches located directly on the street. Finally, in 2008 three travel agencies were in business and in 1930 there were none.

## Conclusions

If businesses do reflect the needs of the surrounding neighborhood, then it can be concluded that the basic needs of the Dutch and Hispanic immigrants living in Roosevelt Park have much been same, given that in both years there were similar numbers of automotive and food based businesses. However, there are indications that business types change as immigrants become more acclimated to life in a new country. In 1930 there were several higher order business types including banks, insurance companies, jewelers, furniture stores, and department stores. Most of these business types were not found on Grandville Avenue in 2008. It appears that higher order businesses were found on Grandville Avenue in 1930 as Dutch immigration slowed and the immigrants living in the neighborhood became acclimated to life in a new place and accumulated wealth. When Hispanic immigration to the Roosevelt Park neighborhood slows and immigrants acclimate to life in Grand Rapids, higher end businesses will likely return to Grandville Avenue.



Located on the corner of Grandville Avenue and Curve Street, La Chispa Tire and Auto is one of several automotive businesses located on Grandville Avenue.

## References

Polk's Grand Rapids (MI) Directory. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids Directory Co., Publishers, 1930.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.