

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

GRANDE BALLROOM, Wayne County, Michigan

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Description

The Grande Ballroom is a two-story reinforced concrete-frame commercial building of eclectic Spanish/Mediterranean design. The building is rectangular in plan, the first floor containing store spaces while the second contains the ballroom. The first-floor storefronts have been much altered, but the second story remains intact, with yellow-buff brick walls pierced by round-arch windows and with limestone friezes, with repeating arch patterns in their lower edges, below low tiled pent roofs that cap the two street-facing facades of the flat-roof building. The ballroom's three street-facing corners each displays a low, slightly projecting "tower" feature, with quoined corners below a low octagonal cap. A star feature of two squares superimposed at a forty-five-degree angle and containing an urn design occupies the center on each face. Each tower is topped by a low tiled hip roof with flagpole rising from its peak. An entrance located at the rear end of the side street façade leads up to the second-story ballroom with its dance floor and stage and ornamental plasterwork largely intact despite years of disuse.

The ballroom building stands at the north corner of Grand River Avenue, a seven-lane wide roadway that runs northwest from downtown Detroit to the suburbs and beyond, and Beverly Court, a two-lane side street lined with early twentieth-century residential development. Like other smaller adjoining commercial buildings, it stands on the sidewalk line. The commercial area along Grand River Avenue in which the building stands has suffered for decades from disinvestment, with many buildings empty and many gaps in the streetscape where buildings have been demolished.

The building's street level contained large display windows in the commercial spaces along the Grand River façade and at least the first two bays in from Grand River on Beverly. A broad limestone frieze on the Beverly façade and in the first two bays around the corner on Grand River, as well as a short segment of gray granite bulkhead at the northeast end of the Beverly façade, are all that is now visible of the original storefront design. A photograph from 1944 shows that the storefronts had already been redone by then. Remnants of enameled metal panels from two of the stores in a former signage band below the second-story windows survive in the northwest four bays along Grand River Avenue. There are remnants visible of later alterations as well, but some of the storefronts have been infilled with concrete block and much of the storefront area is now covered in plywood.

The building's second story is faced with yellow-buff brick laid in a running bond pattern. The towers, their corners faced in limestone quoins, with decorative corbels above, are sheathed in a smooth cement finish. Between the two towers on the second floor of the Grand River façade are five round arch windows. One of the windows contains an original carved limestone tympanum in the arch – that feature is now missing in the others. The tympanum features opposing winged griffins between a crowned shield.

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Beneath the windows in each of the corner towers of the Grande, a limestone plaque contains four script initials. The letters, "CDSW," specified on the original 1928 blueprints, represent the first and last initials of Harry Weitzman's three children: Clement, Dorothy and Seymour Weitzman (as reported by one of the grandchildren of Harry Weitzman).

The tower at the Grand River/Beverly Court intersection is finished in a manner similar to the others. However, the Grand River façade of the tower still retains two large projecting metal brackets that once held a large vertical sign reading "Ballroom" with a horizontal sign at its base reading "Grande." The sign was later replaced with a different neon sign reading "Grande" and "Dancing" that then hung in place for many years. There are five windows between the towers along the Beverly Court façade. The tower at the building's east corner facing Beverly Court is similar to the other two, but contains the entrance door to the ballroom. Above the ballroom doors, two round metal brackets that originally held an overhanging marquee still remain.

Adjacent to the ballroom entrance doors on the Beverly Court façade is a window that historically was used as an external ticket sales window. The yellow-buff brick of the Beverly Court façade wraps around to the alley façade for a length of about three feet. The remainder of the alley façade is faced in red common brick set in a running bond pattern. The alley contains windows on both the first and second floors. One of the second-floor alley windows retains the original divided leaded glass windows. The original fire escape remains in place on the alley elevation.

The interior of the Grande Ballroom is reached via the entrance in the tower on the southeast facade at the east corner on Beverly. The staircase led the patron up to a large dance floor and stage. The dance floor area was accessed through round arch entrances embellished with pilasters in an eclectic Spanish/Mediterranean style. An outer promenade surrounding the dance floor allowed for circulation to the restrooms, coat check room and refreshment areas. The ladies' and men's restrooms were located along the northwest wall of the ballroom, and the large coat and hat check was at the southeast end. There were separate men's and women's waiting rooms adjacent to the coat check. One step down from the promenade level was the dance floor level. The Grande's dance floor covers 5,000 square feet. Its ceiling contains a plaster plaque of elaborate classical design in the center. Several other plaques were centered over other areas of the ballroom floor. The stage is located at the northwest end of the dance floor. Its proscenium arch is outlined in plasterwork with a double twisted rope pattern. Original decorative paint between the two ropes has become visible where layers of white overpainting have flaked off. The walls of the ballroom are finished in horsehair plaster.