

Bessert-Ryan House

Name of Property

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

Washtenaw, Michigan

County and State

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Bessert-Ryan House

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

Historic and Architectural Resources of Northfield Township, Washtenaw County,
Michigan, 1824 – 1980

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 7441 Spencer Road

City or town: South Lyon

State: MI

County: Washtenaw

Not For Publication: ☐

Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title:	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
-------------------------	----------------

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Private: | ☒ |
| Public – Local | ☐ |
| Public – State | ☐ |
| Public – Federal | ☐ |

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Building(s) | ☒ |
| District | ☐ |
| Site | ☐ |
| Structure | ☐ |
| Object | ☐ |

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

2

buildings

0

0

sites

0

0

structures

0

0

objects

1

2

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC – single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC – single dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER – Folk Victorian

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: wood, stone, asphalt

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Bessert-Ryan House is located at 7441 Spencer Road in rural Northfield Township, about six miles northeast of Ann Arbor. The Folk Victorian house features a vernacular form common to the township with Queen Anne-style exterior ornamentation. The house is comprised of a c.1871 main block with a two-story front-gable wing and a one-and-one-half-story side wing, and a two-story rear ell completed in 2010. The house is of frame construction, sits on a stone foundation, and retains wood weatherboards and double-hung wood windows. Queen Anne-style detailing includes turned porch posts with delicate sawn brackets; peaked, molded lintels with sawn detailing; and decorative sawn bargeboards wrapping the eaves of the main block. The interior features an irregular floor plan with public spaces oriented toward the front of the house and private family spaces toward the rear and on the second floor. The interior retains original window and door surrounds, plaster walls, and wood floors and baseboards throughout. The house sits on a five-acre parcel with a combination of grassy lawn, mature trees, wooded areas, and open fields. The site also contains a 2010 garage and c.1914 barn, both non-contributing. The property retains high integrity and the extant buildings and landscape convey its historic and architectural significance.

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Narrative Description

Setting

The Bessert-Ryan House is located in northern Washtenaw County, in southeastern Michigan, about six miles northeast of Ann Arbor. The largest city in the county and the county seat, Ann Arbor served as the primary market for farms in the region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The topography and setting are typical of the rural Midwest with rolling hills, small streams, wooded areas, and meadows. Washtenaw County has historically been primarily agricultural and the Bessert-Ryan House setting retains this rural character.

The Bessert-Ryan House is located in Northfield Township, which developed in the early and mid-1800s with newcomers purchasing large tracts of land, usually in increments of 60 or 80 acres, and developing compact farmsteads with domestic and agricultural outbuildings arranged around a modest farmhouse.¹ As Ann Arbor has grown throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the surrounding rural areas have been heavily developed, especially those east and south of the city. Northfield Township, north of Ann Arbor, however, remains remarkably rural. Development in this part of the county has been limited to the subdivision of former farm fields into large single-family residential lots, rather than the relatively dense housing developments commonly built in the county since the mid-twentieth century. Most lots retain impressive mature deciduous and evergreen trees, as well as a combination of wooded areas, grassy lawns, and natural open areas. As a result, this area, including Spencer Road, retains much of its nineteenth-century rural character.

The house is sited on an L-shaped parcel and oriented to face east toward Spencer Road, which runs north-south through the township. Once part of a larger farm complex, the former farm fields are now fallow; most of the property is wooded with the exception of the northeast corner of the parcel where the buildings are located, and open areas are primarily grassy lawn or natural open spaces. A circular dirt driveway extends west from Spencer Road on the north side of the house. A portion of the rear yard has been enclosed with a wrought-iron fence and contains landscaped gardens and a wood pergola. Outbuildings northwest of the house include a 2010 garage and a c.1914 former livestock barn that has been converted to a family room. The nominated property encompasses the current five-acre parcel, including the architecturally significant Bessert-Ryan House, as well as two outbuildings that do not contribute to the significance of the property.

¹ "Map of Washtenaw County, Michigan," (Philadelphia, PA: Bechler, Wenig & Co., 1856), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-002745875/39015091184773_02, UM Clark Library Maps Collection, Stephen S. Clark Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (hereafter Clark Library); "Map of the Counties of Washtenaw and Lenawee, Michigan," (Philadelphia, PA: Bechler, Wenig & Co., 1864), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-002745877/39015091197502>, Clark Library; "M.M. Dickson & Co.'s township and sectional pocket map of Washtenaw County, Michigan," (Ann Arbor, MI: M.M. Dickson & Co., 1896), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-004978843/39015091184815>, Clark Library; "Chadwick's 1911 map and directory of Washtenaw County, Michigan," (Ann Arbor, MI: C.W. Chadwick, 1911), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-000074544/39015095414580_0001, Clark Library.

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Inventory

The following inventory includes all resources located within the nominated boundary. Construction dates and historical information were obtained from genealogical records, historic plat maps, aerial photographs, and property records. Each resource is given a number designation that corresponds to the attached map.

1. Bessert-Ryan House – c.1871, c.1998, 2010

1 Contributing Building

The folk Victorian house is made up of two distinct sections: a c.1871 gable-front-and-wing main block and a 2010 gabled rear ell. The main block of the house retains a gable-front-and-wing form with a hip-roof porch and Queen Anne-style detailing. The house retains its original exterior fenestration, materials, and ornamentation, including weatherboard siding, two-over-two wood windows with wood shutters, and a stone foundation. Characteristic Queen Anne-style detailing includes molded and peaked window and door surrounds, turned and sawn porch detailing, and delicate sawn trim in the gables and along the eaves of the main block. A later two-story ell is located on the west elevation of the building and largely obscured from Spencer Road. The interior of the house retains much of the original floor plan, wood floors and baseboards, plaster walls and ceilings, and wood window and door surrounds.

Exterior

The house is comprised of a two-story front-gable north wing and a one-and-one-half-story side-gable south wing. The south wing is three bays wide at each story. A one-story, hip-roof porch supported by turned posts with sawn brackets spans the east elevation of the south wing. The center bay at the first story contains a wood, four-light French door flanked by two-over-two windows, all set in plain wood surrounds due to the height of the porch. A matching four-light French door is located at the north end of the porch and leads to the north wing. At the upper story there are two-light wood frieze windows set in peaked surrounds. The windows flank a center gable containing a window also set in a peaked surround. The south elevation of this wing contains two wood windows at the first story, while the upper story contains a window on the east end and a one-light-over-two-panel wood door (likely added later) on the west end. The stacks of two interior chimneys were removed in the late 1990s.

The east (front) elevation of the north wing is two bays wide at the first and second stories, each bay containing an original two-over-two wood window with peaked surrounds. The north elevation is also two bays wide at each story. The first story contains a four-light replacement door in the west bay; the door is set in a plain surround and sheltered by a one-story, single-bay, flat-roof porch with square posts and balustrade. This opening was originally a window and was converted to a door in 2010. The remaining bays on this elevation retain two-over-two wood windows set in peaked surrounds. The west elevation of

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both the gable and wing are partly obscured by a two-story rear ell, with original windows visible north and south of the ell.

The two-story rear ell, constructed in 2010, replaced an earlier one-story ell with a similarly sized footprint. The ell is centered on the west elevation of the main block with similar form and scale to the main block, but finished with modern materials, including two-over-two aluminum-clad windows, fiber cement siding, and a concrete foundation. The north elevation of the ell features a pair of windows at the west bay and a door in the east bay. A two-story, shed-roofed bay projects from the northeast corner of the ell, adjacent to the main block, and features an inset porch at the first story and a small room with a two-over-two window at the second story. The two-bay west elevation contains a pair of windows in the north bay and a smaller pair of windows in the south bay. The second story contains one pair of windows at the south end. The south elevation of the ell contains two four-light windows at the first story and two two-over-two windows at the second story.

Interior

The interior of the house largely retains the original c.1871 floor plan and historic finishes including wood floors and baseboards; plaster walls and ceilings; and molded door and window surrounds, though most original doors have been removed. The first floor features a dining room and office in the south wing and a living room and hallway in the north wing, with the staircase near the center of the house. The front entrance opens into the dining room, which spans the full depth of the south wing. A wide, arched opening in the east end of the north wall, likely added around 1930, leads to the living room in the north wing. An enclosed staircase with a square balustrade and newel post, reconstructed in 2010, is located west of the arch and leads to the second floor. A doorway on the west end of the north wall leads to a hallway in the north wing. An opening in the west wall of the dining room opens into the kitchen of the adjacent rear ell, which is accessed by a short hallway from the dining room. A fifteen-light French door in the south wall leads to a small office, which features a dropped ceiling and a closet on the west end of the room, accessed by an original five-panel wood door in the west wall. Fireplaces on the west wall of the living room and north wall of the office have been covered with plaster.

The living room spans the full width of the north wing and most of the depth of the house, accessed via the arched opening from the dining room. An exterior door in the south wall leads to the front porch. On the west wall, an opening at the north end leads to a narrow hallway and the north entrance. Within the hall, paneled doors lead to the basement staircase on the east side of the hallway and a mudroom and bathroom, both with modern finishes, on the west side. This northwest corner of the house, including the hallways, mudroom, and bathroom, was originally a single room subdivided in the 1960s to install a bathroom and reconfigured into the present arrangement in 2010.

The first floor of the rear ell is accessed by a narrow hallway that extends from the dining room. A built-in pantry is located on the north side of the hallway. The kitchen, south and

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west of the hall, features modern finishes, including wood cabinetry, stainless steel appliances, and pine floors.

An enclosed, straight staircase with beadboard wainscot rises north from the dining room to the second floor, where the balustrade and newel match those on the first floor. This floor is generally arranged around a narrow hall at the west end of the north wing. This level retains wood floors, plaster walls and ceilings, and simple molded door and window surrounds. The north bedroom is accessed from the east side of the hall, the door located just south of a small closet built into the northeast corner of the hall in 2010. Also in 2010, a narrow closet was added to the west wall of this bedroom and the chimney was covered with beaded board. A door to the south bedroom is located at the south end of the hall. A door in the south wall of this bedroom leads to a narrow hallway with built-in cabinets on the west side, an exterior one-light-over-two-panel wood door with a stained-glass window on the south wall, and a doorway to a bathroom with modern finishes on the east wall. Chimneys on the south wall of the bedroom and north wall of the bathroom has been covered with plaster. An original bedroom in the northwest corner of the house, which adjoins the west wall of the hall, was reconfigured in 2010 to create the hall and a laundry room with modern finishes.

An inset bay west of the south bedroom leads to the rear ell bedroom and bathroom. Three doors on the north wall of the bedroom, west to east, lead to a closet, a bathroom, and the hall in the main block. The rear ell features similar to the main block, including wood floors with wood baseboards, sheetrock walls and ceilings, molded door and window surrounds, and molded crown molding. The bathroom has modern finishes, including tile floors, wood cabinets and doors, and beaded board wainscot.

The basement is accessed via the first-floor hallway by an enclosed staircase located beneath the main stair. The staircase descends southward to a small landing. Doorways south and east from the landing lead to the basement beneath the main block of the house, which contains unfinished space with concrete floors, exposed stone foundation walls, no finished ceiling, and two-light wood windows at the top of the walls. A doorway leading west of the landing leads to the rear ell basement, which contains an exercise room with a bamboo wood floor, sheetrock walls with built-in shelving, no finished ceiling, and four-light windows at the top of the walls, some fixed and some operable.

2. Garage – 2010

1 Non-Contributing Building

A frame, one-story, side-gable, two-and-one-half-car garage is located northwest of the house and features vertical wood sheathing, a concrete foundation, and an asphalt roof. The east elevation contains a nine-light pedestrian door and two twelve-light metal overhead doors with detailing similar to carriage house doors. The south elevation contains two four-light awning windows, and the west and north elevations are blind. This building is non-contributing due to age.

3. Barn – c.1914, 2016

1 Non-Contributing Building

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A frame, front-gable barn with a shed-roof east wing is located northwest of the house. The barn was renovated as a family room in 2016 and features vertical wood sheathing, sliding glass doors on the south (front) and north elevations and four-light gable windows in the gables. The east wing contains a sliding batten door with two six-light fixed wood windows on the south elevation, a four-light wood window on the east elevation, and a pair of sliding batten doors on the north elevation. A corn crib originally comprised the west wing of the barn but was removed in 2016; this elevation of the barn is blind. This building has been substantially altered and does not contribute to the architectural significance of the property.

Integrity Statement

The Bessert-Ryan House retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The c.1871 house remains in its original location and retains most of the form, massing, plan, and fenestration present at the time of construction. The exterior is particularly notable, retaining original weatherboard siding, two-over-two wood windows with decorative peaked wood lintels, turned wood porch posts, and delicate sawn porch brackets and cornice trim.

The interior retains most of the original floor plan and room volumes; wood floors and baseboards; plaster walls and ceilings; and wood door and window surrounds. Alterations to the house include the addition of beaded board wainscot in the dining room and an arched opening between the dining and living rooms, though the dates of these changes are not clear. In the late 1990s, modest bathrooms and closets were installed, mantels and exterior chimney stacks were removed, and fireboxes were covered with drywall, though the chimneys remain intact within the walls. In 2010 the main staircase was reconstructed, retaining its overall form but reducing the pitch. Additional changes at that time include the reconfiguration of the northwest corner of the north wing on the first and second floors, addition of crown molding in the living and dining rooms, and construction of the present rear ell.

Though the agricultural outbuildings have been demolished or substantially altered, the house remains its rural setting, surrounded by grassy lawns, mature trees, and wooded areas, while the broader landscape remains rural farmland, similar to the nineteenth century setting. Exterior changes are minimal and primarily include the construction of the rear ell and addition of a side entrance and porch. These changes are compatible in size, scale, and materials to the historic building and located on secondary elevations with limited visibility from the public right-of-way. Interior changes are concentrated in private and secondary spaces and do not detract from the historic feeling of the house. Therefore, these changes do not adversely affect the overall integrity of the building.

Statement of Archaeological Potential

The Bessert-Ryan House is closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. The property historically was a working farm with a full complement of domestic and agricultural outbuildings. A large, frame livestock barn has been demolished and other outbuildings likely to have existed on the property include smokehouse, corn cribs, chicken houses, equipment sheds,

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and other barns or sheds. No archaeological assessment has been conducted at the property, however, additional archival research or archaeological investigation may reveal additional resources. Archaeological deposits from remnant landscape features such as paths, fence lines, orchards, and gardens; infrastructural remains such as filled-in privies, wells, or middens; structural remains of buildings; and evidence of Indigenous cultures can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the property. Information concerning the spatial organization of buildings and infrastructure in relationship to natural and cultural elements of the landscape can be obtained from the investigation of these features.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

c.1871

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Bessert-Ryan House is significant at the local level under Criterion C for Architecture as the most intact and decorative example of Folk Victorian residential architecture in rural Northfield Township, Michigan. The house represents the transition from the primarily vernacular architecture of the mid-nineteenth century to more decorative stylistic detailing made available by mass production and expanding railroad transportation in the late nineteenth century. Built c.1871, the house retains a gable-front-and-wing form, a vernacular form relatively common to mid-to-late nineteenth-century residential buildings throughout the township. The house also retains Queen Anne-style exterior detailing, including turned porch posts with sawn brackets, delicate sawn bargeboards that wrap the front and side elevations, molded and peaked window surrounds with sawn detailing, and a center gable on the side wing. The period of significance is c.1871 when the main block of the house was completed.

Historic context for the Bessert-Ryan House is provided in the related Multiple Property Documentation Form "Historic and Architectural Resources of Northfield Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan, 1824 – 1980," including "Early Northfield Township: An Agricultural Landscape (1824-1880)" on context pages E5-17, "Changes to Rural Life (1880-1945)" on pages E24-28, and "The Post-War Era (1945-1980)" on pages E28-33. The property falls under the property type "Residential Buildings" on pages F34-35, including registration requirements, period of significance, and integrity assessment. Specifically, the Bessert-Ryan House represents an intact example of Folk Victorian architecture uncommon to early Northfield Township.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Architecture Context

The Bessert-Ryan House is significant within the context of late nineteenth century rural architecture of Northfield Township, and Washtenaw County more broadly. The Bessert-Ryan House represents the shift from clean lines and Classical detailing of early and mid-nineteenth century architecture, including the Greek Revival style, to the complex forms and elaborate ornamentation of late nineteenth century Romantic or Victorian styles, including the Queen Anne, Italianate, and Gothic Revival styles. Constructed c.1871, the Bessert-Ryan House utilizes a gable-front-and-wing form with a two-story front-gable wing and a one-and-one-half-story side-gable wing featuring frieze band windows, the form common among mid-nineteenth century Greek Revival-style homes. This form persisted into the late nineteenth century with the addition of turned and sawn porch woodwork or decorative window and door surrounds, demonstrating the growing popularity of the elaborate ornamentation common to the Queen Anne, Italianate, and Gothic Revival styles and made readily available by the arrival of the railroad in Washtenaw County. The center gable on the side wing of the Bessert-Ryan House also demonstrates the shift

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from the low-pitched gables of earlier styles to the steeply pitched, multi-gabled, complex rooflines of the later styles.

While these styles are found in abundance in the cities of Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, as well as within the smaller towns of Chelsea, Dexter, and Saline, most rural examples are vernacular interpretations.² Many homes constructed in the county throughout the nineteenth-century share common forms with pared down stylistic detailing. The gable-front-and-wing form is common in the county, characterized by a two-story front-gable wing with a one-story, one-and-one-half-story, or two-story side-gable wing. These buildings may have Classically inspired Greek Revival-style details, including small porches or frieze band windows; pared-down Queen Anne or Italianate-style ornamentation, including elaborate turned and sawn woodwork; or lack distinctive stylistic detailing.

The Bessert-Ryan House is the most intact and decorative example of Folk Victorian residential architecture in rural Northfield Township. Folk Victorian architecture became popular in the late nineteenth century as the growth of the railroads facilitated the movement of machinery and raw materials needed for mass production. Local builders simply applied the new, readily available trim to the vernacular forms they were accustomed to building.³ Applied to vernacular house forms, including front-gabled, gable-front-and-wing, side-gabled, or pyramidal forms, folk Victorian architecture mimicked high style houses with pared-down Queen Anne or Italianate-style detailing, including turned porch posts and balustrades, square chamfered porch posts, sawn woodwork and brackets, center gables, and peaked window or door surrounds. While Folk Victorian homes utilized Queen Anne-style detailing, they generally lack the textured walls and asymmetrical character of the style.

The Bessert-Ryan House is illustrative of the Folk Victorian style. It is significant for the retention of its original form and fenestration, as well as exterior materials and stylistic detailing. The vernacular form is comprised of two-story front-gable wing with a one-and-one-half-story side-gable wing adorned with Queen Anne-style detailing including turned porch posts with sawn brackets, delicate sawn bargeboards that wrap the front and side elevations, and two-over-two wood windows set in molded and peaked surrounds with sawn detailing. The side wing also features a center gable, a rare feature among gable-front-and-wing homes in the county and the only known example in the township.

Among late-nineteenth century homes in the township, gable-front-and-wing forms are common, however most extant examples have been altered with the application of replacement materials, the removal of historic fabric, the construction of additions, and alterations to porches. The c.1870 Wooster-Donovan House at 7951 Earhart Road features a two-story front-gable wing

² Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 247-302, 317-330, 345-370, 387-405; Susan Wineberg and Patrick McCauley, *Historic Ann Arbor* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Historical Foundation, 2019), 2-9; Szcodronski, "Architectural Survey of Northfield Township"; Washtenaw County, "HistWeb Historic Resource Database," <https://www.washtenaw.org/649/Historic-Resource-Database>.

³ McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 396-405.

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with a one-and-one-half-story side-gable wing, four-over-four wood windows, and frieze band windows. Like the Bessert-Ryan House, the Wooster-Donovan House retains pared down woodwork including sawn porch posts, sawn brackets, and molded and peaked window surrounds; however, the house has been altered with the application of asbestos siding. The c.1870 Martin Ryan Farm at 7650 Nollar Road is a two-story gable-front-and-wing house with a one-story porch featuring turned posts and sawn brackets, but otherwise lacking ornamentation and altered with the installation of vinyl siding and windows.

Other late nineteenth century gable-front-and-wing homes in the township, though intact, are not comparable to the Bessert-Ryan House in stylistic detailing. The c.1870 Kalmbach House at 385 Joy Road is an intact Italianate-style house with a two-story gable-front-and-wing form, one-story porch with sawn woodwork, two-over-two wood windows with brick hoods, and sawn brackets under wide eaves. The 1894 O'Brien House is an intact two-story, gable-front-and-wing example of vernacular architecture in the township, retaining weatherboard siding, two-over-two wood windows, and turned porch posts and balustrade, and lacking any stylistic detailing.

The interior of the Bessert-Ryan House lacks high-style Queen Anne detailing, instead incorporating simple molded surrounds and baseboards. The interior of the house also reflects changing preferences in architecture throughout the twentieth century, including open floor plans that join public spaces with wide openings, secondary rooms oriented around narrow hallways, the removal or covering of fireplaces as modern heating systems became commonplace, and the installation or updating of bathrooms and kitchens to utilize modern plumbing, fixtures, and appliances.

Additional historic context about architecture of early Northfield Township may be found in the associated Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Historic Resources of Northfield Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan, 1824-1980," context pages E16-17, E23-24, and E28-29.

Historical Background and Genealogy

The Ludwig Bessert-Ryan House is located in northern Washtenaw County, in southeastern Michigan, about seven miles northeast of Ann Arbor. Prior to European settlement, the area was occupied by Potawatomi and other Indigenous peoples who established seasonal settlements on the waterways. European settlement of what became Washtenaw County began in the early nineteenth century, with primarily New Englanders seeking cheaper land and better soils, especially following the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Within decades, Indigenous tribes had left the Michigan Territory, many removed by force beyond the Mississippi River.⁴

Among those who moved westward to the Michigan Territory in the early nineteenth century was John Ryan. Born in Ireland in 1818, Ryan came to the United States in 1830 with his

⁴ Wyan Stevens, ed., *Northfield Harvest: A Pictorial History of Northfield Township and the Whitmore Lake Area* (Whitmore Lake: Northfield Township Historical Society, 1999), 25-78.

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parents, Thomas and Johanna Ryan. The family first settled in Vermont, then relocated to Ann Arbor in 1834, then to Northfield Township in 1836.⁵ John Ryan purchased two forty acre lots in central Northfield Township in 1844, followed by additional adjacent lots in 1849 and 1856.⁶ The Bessert-Ryan House was later built on this 160-acre farm.

Ryan never married and lived with his unmarried sister, Catherine, with whom he operated a prosperous farm. Their parents and their brother, Martin, also owned farms nearby, and it is likely they assisted one another with farm operations.⁷ In the 1860 agriculture census, Ryan reported sixty acres of the 160-acre farm in production, with livestock including a horse and working oxen, three milk cows, 100 sheep, and nine hogs; crops harvested including 190 bushels of wheat, 30 bushels of Indian corn, 20 tons of hay, 50 pounds of Irish potatoes, and orchard products, likely apples; and 190 pounds of wool and 100 pounds of butter produced.⁸ In 1870, Ryan reported increased production with ninety improved acres. The farm produced 400 bushels of wheat, 50 bushels of Indian corn, 320 bushels of oats, 24 bushels of buckwheat, 30 tons of hay, 75 bushels of Irish potatoes, and fifty bushels of orchard products, and livestock included two horses, two milk cows producing 300 pounds of butter, 84 sheep producing 330 pounds of wool, and five hogs.⁹ The Ryan farm was typical of Northfield Township farms during the late nineteenth century, and farm products were likely taken to Ann Arbor-area markets by wagon and later by train.¹⁰ In addition to farming, Ryan participated in local government, serving as Northfield Township Clerk in 1864 and a Northfield Township Supervisor in 1866.¹¹

In 1871, John Ryan sold the farm to Ludwig “Louis” Bessert, a German immigrant born in the Jewish settlement of Schneidemühl, Germany (in present-day Poland), in 1841.¹² Bessert came to the United States in 1867, apparently settling first in New York, while his parents, Franz

⁵ *History of Washtenaw County* (Chicago, IL: Charles C. Chapman & Co., 1881), 664-665; “U.S. Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current,” Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60525/>.

⁶ “State of Michigan to John Ryan,” April 4, 1844, Deed Book G, Page 156, Washtenaw County Register of Deeds (hereafter referred to as WCRD); “State of Michigan to John Ryan,” March 3, 1849, Deed Book 28, Page 362-363, WCRD; “Map of Washtenaw County, Michigan,” (Philadelphia, PA: Bechler, Wenig & Co., 1856), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-002745875/39015091184773_02, UM Clark Library Maps Collection, Stephen S. Clark Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (hereafter Clark Library); “John Earl by adm. To John Ryan,” March 3, 1854, Deed Book 41, Page 646, WCRD; “Bridget Earl to John Ryan,” March 3, 1854, Deed Book 41, Page 647, WCRD; “Map of the Counties of Washtenaw and Lenawee, Michigan,” (Philadelphia, PA: Bechler, Wenig & Co., 1864), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-002745877/39015091197502>, Clark Library.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7667/>; U.S. Census Bureau, *1870 United States Federal Census*, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7163/>.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census – Schedule 4 – Production in Agriculture*, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *1870 United States Federal Census – Schedule 3 – Production in Agriculture*, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

¹⁰ Stevens, *Northfield Harvest*, 97-104; Cheri LaFlamme Szcodronski, “Architectural Survey of Northfield Township, Washtenaw County,” 2021, 25, 33, 36.

¹¹ *History of Washtenaw County*, 653-654.

¹² “John Ryan to Ludwig Bessert,” November 13, 1871, Deed Book 74, Page 162, WCRD; “Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934,” Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1068/?redirectFor=db.aspx>.

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Ludwig Bessert and Friederike Neumann Bessert, remained in Germany.¹³ He likely constructed the current house upon purchasing the farm, as plat maps show that between 1864 and 1874, two existing houses on the farm in 1864 were demolished and the current house was constructed.¹⁴ In 1873, Bessert married Emelie “Amelia” Janke, a recent immigrant from Germany (present-day Poland). The details of their brief ownership of the farm are unclear, as they sold the farm back to John Ryan in 1874 and relocated to nearby Livingston County.¹⁵

John Ryan and Catherine Ryan returned to the farm in 1874, though it is unclear where they lived during the three-year Bessert ownership. The 1880 agriculture census indicates their success in farming continued; Ryan reported production very similar to that of 1870 with 90 improved acres, crops including 280 bushels of wheat, 500 bushels of oats, 300 bushels of Indian corn, 20 tons of hay, 50 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 20 bushels of apples, and livestock including 6 horses, 2 milk cows producing 200 pounds of butter, 84 sheep producing 592 pounds of wool, six hogs, and sixty chickens producing 300 eggs.¹⁶

John Ryan died in 1890,¹⁷ leaving Catherine Ryan a life estate on the property, which would next pass to their sisters Ellen Loughlin and Johanna Croarkin. In 1908, two years before her death, Catherine Ryan entered a land contract with Henry Eddy, which was recorded in 1916 by Mary Loughlin, Ellen Loughlin’s daughter and executor. At that time, Andrew J. Brown purchased the property from the Eddy estate and immediately conveyed it to Thomas and Rosetta Spencer.¹⁸ The Spencers continued to farm until Thomas Spencer’s death in 1939, and in 1945 Rosetta Spencer sold the property to Gerald and Alice Taggart.¹⁹ The Taggarts sold off most of the farmland by 1960, resulting in the current five-acre parcel.²⁰ In 1996, the Taggart family entered into a land contract to sell the property to David and Kimberly Ost, who appear to have not fully purchased the property as two years later the Taggart family sold the property to Mark Walters

¹³ “John Ryan to Ludwig Bessert,” November 13, 1871, Deed Book 74, Page 162, WCRD; “Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934,” Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1068/?redirectFor=db.aspx>.

¹⁴ “M.M. Dickson & Co.’s township and sectional pocket map of Washtenaw County, Michigan,” (Ann Arbor, MI: M.M. Dickson & Co., 1896), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-004978843/39015091184815>, Clark Library; “Chadwick’s 1911 map and directory of Washtenaw County, Michigan,” (Ann Arbor, MI: C.W. Chadwick, 1911), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clark1ic/x-000074544/39015095414580_0001, Clark Library.

¹⁵ “Michigan, U.S., Marriage Records, 1867-1952,” Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9093/>; “Real Estate Transactions,” *Michigan Argus*, November 13, 1874, Ann Arbor District Library, https://aadl.org/sites/default/files/michigan_argus/michigan_argus_18741113-p03-04.jpg.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *1880 United States Federal Census – Schedule 2 – Production in Agriculture*, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

¹⁷ “Michigan, U.S., Death Records, 1867-1952,” Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60872/>.

¹⁸ “John Ryan to Catherine Ryan et al.,” January 21, 1911, Deed Book 168, Page 510-512, WCRD; “Henry Eddy by Adm. To Andrew J. Brown,” April 6, 1916, Deed Book 201, Page 457, WCRD; “Andrew J. Brown & wife to Thomas Spencer and Wife,” April 6, 1916, Deed Book 202, Page 182, WCRD.

¹⁹ “Michigan, U.S., Death Records, 1867-1952,” Ancestry.com; “Rosetta Spencer, a widow, to Gerald E. Taggart and Alice Taggart, husband and wife,” November 1, 1945, Deed Book 404, Page 599-600, WCRD.

²⁰ Washtenaw County, *MapWashtenaw*, Aerial Imagery, <https://www.washtenaw.org/1197/MapWashtenaw>.

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and Deborah Merta. They in turn sold it to the current owners, Jennifer DeLisle and William Casey in 2004.²¹

Additional historic context about Indigenous peoples, European settlement, and agriculture in Northfield Township may be found in the associated Multiple Property Documentation Form, “Historic Resources of Northfield Township, Washtenaw County, Michigan, 1824-1980,” context pages E6-16, E24-26, and E31-33.

²¹ “Mitchell Gerald Taggart and Kathleen Vansickle, joint tenants to Kimberly Sauter-Ost and David H. Ost,” September 30, 1996, Deed Book 3325, Page 252, WCRD; “Mitchell Gerald Taggart and Kathleen Vansickle, joint tenants, to Marck Walters and Deborah L. Merta,” April 7, 1998, Deed Book 3626, Page 355, WCRD; “Mark Walters and Deborah L. Merta to William T. Casey and Jennifer DeLisle,” January 20, 2004, Deed Book 4355, Page 529-531, WCRD.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 5.00

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 42.391137 Longitude: -83.723559

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary follows the current tax parcel lines for parcel Washtenaw County tax parcel B-02-16-400-008: starting at the northwest corner of the property at latitude 42.3915, longitude -83.7253, then approximately 590 feet east to Spencer Road to latitude 42.3914, longitude -83.7231, then approximately 200 feet south along Spencer Road to latitude 42.3909, longitude -83.7231, then west approximately 270 feet to latitude 42.3909, longitude -83.7241, then south approximately 280 feet to latitude 42.3901, longitude -83.7241, then west approximately 316 feet to latitude 42.3901, longitude -83.7252, then north approximately 520 feet to the beginning.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary selected reflects historic and current ownership. Though the Bessert and Ryan families owned a much larger parcel when the house was constructed, most of the acreage has been subsequently sold and no longer retains integrity to the period of significance. The boundary selected represents land historically associated with the house and provides an appropriate setting for the historic buildings.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Cheri LaFlamme Szcodronski, Owner & Architectural Historian
organization: Firefly Preservation Consulting, LLC
street & number: 58 Fox Hill Court
city or town: Chelsea state: MI zip code: 48118
e-mail: cheri@fireflypreservation.com
telephone: 615-604-5618
date: December 2024

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Bessert-Ryan House
City or Vicinity: South Lyon
County: Washtenaw State: Michigan
Photographer: Cheri LaFlamme Szcodronski
Date Photographed: March 2021, August 2022, October 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo #0001: East Elevation
1 of 27

Photo #0002: East Elevation – Porch Detail
2 of 27

Photo #0003: East Elevation – Window Detail
3 of 27

Photo #0004: East Elevation – Center Gable Detail
4 of 27

Photo #0005: Northeast Elevation
5 of 27

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Photo #0006: North Elevation

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Photo #0007: Northwest Elevation

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Photo #0008: West Elevation

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Photo #0009: First Floor – Dining Room – Facing Northwest

9 of 27

Photo #0010: First Floor – Dining Room – Facing Southeast

10 of 27

Photo #0011: First Floor – Office – Facing Southwest

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Photo #0012: First Floor – Living Room – Facing Northwest

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Photo #0013: First Floor – Living Room – Facing Southeast

13 of 27

Photo #0014: First Floor – Kitchen – Facing Southwest

14 of 27

Photo #0015: First Floor – Kitchen – Facing Northeast

15 of 27

Photo #0016: First Floor – Staircase – Facing Northeast

16 of 27

Photo #0017: Second Floor – Hall – Facing Southwest

17 of 27

Photo #0018: Second Floor – North Bedroom – Facing Southeast

18 of 27

Photo #0019: Second Floor – Hall – Facing North

19 of 27

Photo #0020: Second Floor – South Bedroom – Facing Southwest

20 of 27

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Photo #0021: Second Floor – South Bedroom – Facing North

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Photo #0022: Second Floor – South Bathroom – Facing Southeast

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Photo #0023: Rear Ell – Bedroom – Facing Southwest

23 of 27

Photo #0024: Rear Ell – Bedroom – Facing Northeast

24 of 27

Photo #0025: Rear Ell – Bathroom – Facing North

25 of 27

Photo #0026: Garage – Southeast Elevation

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Photo #0027: Barn – Southwest Elevation

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.