

The rag man was also a colorful character to be found on Plymouth Avenue during the 1940s. He too had a cart drawn by a horse. He yelled out “R-a-a-a-gs!!” and Plymouth Avenue residents came out from their homes to sell rags to him. *Illustration by Ross G. Drago, 2006.*

The house at **103 Plymouth Avenue** was built speculatively for a resale in 1881. The house was offered for sale by C.J. Hastings and described as “2 story, frame, mod. imp. lot 28 x 136, \$5,000.”⁶⁰ Its first occupant was Charles Turner who ran a meat market on Ohio Street. In 1925, **103 Plymouth Avenue** was converted to a rooming house. At some point, the house was expanded or an additional structure moved to the site so that it had a front and a rear section. The home’s association with meat continued during the mid-1950s when the Rizzo family lived at **103 Plymouth Avenue** in the front (Mr. Samuel M. Rizzo was a butcher and operated the store at **321 Pennsylvania Street** at Plymouth Avenue), and Dominic A. Santella and his family (including his son, Jim Santella, now a broadcaster at WBFO-FM, 88.7) lived at **103 Plymouth Avenue** in the rear apartment.

Jim Santella is a Western New York radio veteran who has a long association with WBFO. He hosts the blues show on weekends and was inducted into the Buffalo Broadcasting Hall of Fame on September 27, 2005. He also teams up with Anthony Chase for *Theater Talk*, during the Friday presentation of NPR’s *Morning Edition*. He shares his memories of growing up at **103 Plymouth Avenue**: “When I lived at 103 Plymouth Avenue, it was predominantly an Italian neighborhood with plenty of young kids, like myself, playing stickball in the street between Mr. Battaglia’s grocery store on Plymouth Avenue and Jersey Street and Mr. Rizzo’s grocery store on Pennsylvania Street and Plymouth Avenue.”

“The that two-block stretch of Plymouth Avenue between Pennsylvania Street and Porter Avenue was our playground. We could never hit a ball very far because the trees formed a canopy over the street. It wasn’t unusual for one of us ‘fielders’ to catch a ball after it bounced around a tree limb or two.”

“My favorite two-person stick and ball game went something like this: one of us (the pitcher), would stand on the sidewalk across Plymouth between Jersey and Porter where the fire station was located. On the opposite sidewalk ‘the batter’ would stand in front of the firehouse wall and try to hit the ball. Three strikes and you changed sides.”

“My most vivid memory of this game found me switch hitting ala Mickey Mantle and poking one over the fence in front of the Methodist church that soared past the trees and through one of the stained glass windows. We ran away immediately. I don’t know why we did ‘the right thing’ but my friend Jerry Bellissimo and I went to the minister and told him what we did. It was my first lesson in ‘honesty being the right thing.’ We didn’t have to pay for the damage. But we didn’t play stickball against the firehouse wall for a long time, either.”

“One short recollection about Kleinhans Music Hall: when I was a kid, the reflecting pool had water in it and we loved to play around the ‘moat.’ We’d also hang around the Normal Avenue stage door and watch the musicians

enter with their instruments. The music would seep through the walls of Kleinhans, and out onto Pennsylvania Street, Porter and Normal Avenues.”

“It wasn't strange to me to hear disembodied music. It would be years before I would go to Kleinhans Music Hall as an adult to see jazz and hear musicians like Oscar Peterson, Gerry Mulligan and Dave Brubeck.”

“Plymouth Avenue and Kleinhans Music Hall were never extra-ordinary to me as a child. They were just the parameters of my playground. It wasn't until I grew to be an adult that I realized how special those memories would become. I'd tell you about the sandlot baseball games we played at Holy Angels or the basketball games in Donnie Angelo's driveway (**312 Pennsylvania Street**) but I'm afraid I'd start sounding like Tom Sawyer bragging about his exploits.”

The lovely two-story wooden house with hipped roof at **107 Plymouth Ave.** was built in 1882 for Rev. Henry W. Crabbe, pastor of the Old United Presbyterian Church from 1872 until 1884. Crabbe moved to his new “uptown” house at **107 Plymouth Ave.** from his previous residence at 112 Prospect Avenue. When Crabbe built his home at **107 Plymouth Ave.**, his church was located on Washington St. near the corner of Eagle Street. No. **107 Plymouth Avenue** was available for sale and advertised in the November 1884 edition of the *Real Estate and Builder's Monthly*; it was described as having a “fine location.” The asking price was \$7,200, which would have been considered an expensive house in its day. Later in the 1880s Mr. Crabbe was not found in Buffalo and **107 Plymouth Ave.** became home to Caroline Mensch, the widow of William Mensch and their eight children. The Mensch family lived in the home for a number of years, with Caroline's daughter, Emma C. Atkins, staying with Caroline after her other children had moved out. In 1927, **107 Plymouth Avenue** was converted to a rooming house.



107 Plymouth Avenue, built in 1882. Illustration by Don Mayer.

The home at **109 Plymouth Ave.** was built in 1882. The house was constructed on one of the several Plymouth Avenue lots owned by real estate man Charles Hastings and it was the only house that he constructed himself for speculative resale. He sold it soon after it was completed to Mrs. Mary Adams. She only lived there a short time and soon afterwards it became the home of Dr. George B. Snow of the Buffalo Dental Manufacturing Company. Snow, along with his partners Theodore G. Lewis and John E. Robie, ran one of the largest manufacturers of dental supplies in the U.S. The business was started in 1867 and by the 1880s its markets included not only the entire U.S., but also Europe, South America, and Japan.

The firm made goods not only for dentists, but also a line of gas-heating apparatus for the use of chemists, jewelers and assayers. The patterns for these devices came from the celebrated works of Thomas Fletcher & Co. of Warrington, England. The company also made a line of gas stoves and other heating apparatus for culinary and household uses.

The firm occupied several sites in Buffalo as they grew. In 1881 they moved from the corner of Main and

South Division Sts. to the corner of Court and Pearl Sts. where they occupied a five-story building with the exception of the two stores on the ground floor. At their peak, they had about 30 employees.⁶¹ Snow lived at **109 Plymouth Avenue** for only a few years; by the late 1880s, he moved to Fargo Avenue near Jersey Street. After changing hands a few more times, **109 Plymouth Avenue** became the longtime home of Louis E. Bush and his family. Bush was a patrolman for the Precinct No. 1, as was his neighbor, John Taylor, a detective who lived at **117 Plymouth Avenue**.

At **113 Plymouth Avenue** is a charming Victorian wood-frame home built in 1881 by Allen P. Bartlett. The 31 year-old man only lived in the house a short time as he passed away unexpectedly in the house on September 18, 1881. A searching clerk in the Erie County Clerk's office, Allen Bartlett was the son of Marcus Bartlett, Esquire. He was remembered as having an exemplary character and being genial, accommodating, faithful and clear-headed. Bartlett had a wife, Edith and a small son, Allen P. Jr. Bartlett's funeral was held in the house on Sept. 20, 1881 at 3 PM.⁶² After Allen's death, the Bartlett family continued to own **113 Plymouth Avenue**, but rented it out. In 1883 Rev. Frederick W. Brauns lived in the house, but moved to a new home two blocks away at 5 St. Johns Place in 1885. Brauns was a clergyman of unusual ability and was remembered for having a warm and generous heart. He was associated with the Olivet Mission of the North Church.⁶³ By 1887 **113 Plymouth Avenue** was the home of Miss S. N. Becker and Mr. Anson S. Pierce who moved to the home from 20 North Pearl Street. Pierce was a clerk with E&B Holmes. By 1901, Bartlett's son, Allen P. Bartlett, Jr., was living at **113 Plymouth Avenue**.

No. **115 Plymouth Avenue** is a "L" shaped wood-frame Italianate style home designed with a side entrance, the only one of its type found on the second block of Plymouth Avenue, while the style is commonly found on the first block. The house is one of the first constructed on the block, built in 1880 by commercial traveling merchant Thomas J. Batterson. Batterson lived at the home with his wife Martha and their ten children for over two decades. One son, John P., became an optician, but the Batterson's most acclaimed child was George Wilder Batterson, who was born at **115 Plymouth Avenue** on Oct. 3, 1882. Known as "Dim," he was a football athlete and coach. About 1905, he played with the All-Buffalos, one of Buffalo's early semi-professional football teams. Dim later became a coach at Masten Park High School and won everlasting local renown when the Masten football team won successive Harvard Cups (Buffalo City high school championships) in 1918, 1919 and 1920 with the famous quarterback Wally Koppisch, whom Batterson coached. After his days coaching at Masten, Dim was a coach at the University of Buffalo and was the coach of the Buffalo Bisons football team in 1927. Batterson was elected to the Harvard Cup Hall of Fame in 2002.⁶⁴



Late 1920s Halloween greeting for Mary Elizabeth Moore (born 1921), who lived at 117 Plymouth Ave. *Courtesy of Scott Dunkle.*

No. **117 Plymouth Avenue** is a very substantial Victorian-era wood-frame gabled house with projecting north wing built in 1883. When originally constructed, **117 Plymouth Avenue** probably closely resembled **89 Plymouth Avenue**, which is much closer to its original facade design. While the exterior of **117 Plymouth Avenue** may be typical for an early 1880s Buffalo home, it is nonetheless distinguished by its early occupants. The first

residents were H. M. Dake/W. E. Wing, but **117 Plymouth Avenue** was sold a few years after it was built and became home to Lucian Hawley (1818-1918), a centenarian. Hawley was an attorney who trained with President Millard Fillmore and was admitted to the bar in 1844. From 1865 until 1876 he lived in New York City and in 1873 President U. S. Grant appointed him supervisor of internal revenue for New York State with headquarters in New York City. He returned to Buffalo in 1876 and soon thereafter, moved to **117 Plymouth Avenue** with his third wife, Lida Williams Jennings of Lockport.⁶⁵

The home had another famous occupant, John Henry Taylor, Sr. (1851-1939), who owned and lived at **117 Plymouth Avenue** for two decades, from 1905-1924. He became a policeman in 1879 and was promoted to detective of Precinct Number 1 in 1885. From there, Taylor rose to become Chief of Detectives (1905-1914) and built up a national reputation for crime prevention and detection. He was a local hero and known as a “terror to evil doers and lawbreakers.”

Taylor was the chief detective in Buffalo's "The Hooks," in the canal district, a three-block stretch so called because dead bodies were routinely pulled from the canal, like fish, using large hooks. It was considered the third worst and toughest street in the world after London's Limehouse district and the Bowery in New York City. Taylor was involved in many barroom floor fights where he earned a reputation for taking his prisoners “licked and bleeding” after he was done with them. He was even shot twice. Taylor was the detective who arrested and locked up Leon Czolgosz after he shot President McKinley. Taylor kept a detailed scrapbook of his adventures and it was said that his real-life experiences surpassed the wildest dreams of detective fiction writers.

For example, one of Taylor's duties was to patrol the waterfront and wharves of Buffalo's harbor by rowing a boat twelve hours a day. On one occasion, Taylor caught four men stealing a tow line from the stern of a steamer docked at the Evans grain elevator. The four men jumped in the water and Taylor and his partner jumped in after them. They had a fight in the water and Taylor, along with his partner, managed to arrest two of the thieves.

Taylor appears to have been the *Batman* of his era. He narrated a story that sounds like something right out of a 1960s *Batman* television script. Taylor and his partner Kief were patrolling The Barrel, a notorious bar in the canal district, when two men got thrown out of the bar. They were arrested for being drunk and fighting. While Taylor and Kief were trying to subdue the prisoners, a fish peddler came into sight pushing a two-wheel cart. "Anchor right here," said Taylor to the fisherman as he got a stranglehold on one of the prisoners. "We have a couple of fresh water fish right here that must go into cold storage." The two drunks were tossed into the fish peddler's cart, tied up with ropes and wheeled to the station house. According to Taylor, this is how the Buffalo Police got its first patrol cars.

Taylor also wrote a series of articles for the *Buffalo Evening News* Sunday editions on crime and crime prevention. He retired in 1914 and started a private detective agency. While he lived at **117 Plymouth Avenue**, the house had two units. His son, John H. Taylor, Jr., lived in one apartment while John H. Taylor, Sr. lived in the other with his wife Florence “Floss” and their son William A., “Buster”.⁶⁶

After the Taylors left **117 Plymouth Avenue**, the house was lived in by Theodore E. Moore, Sr., a contractor who helped construct the Buffalo Savings Bank, several buildings at the Buffalo Zoo and the Grand Island Bridge.

The Second Empire style cottage at the corner of Plymouth Avenue and Jersey Street that has the address of **315 Jersey St.** was built in 1880 by Francis (Frank) T. Coppins (1850-1925) as his home. Coppins was a skilled artist, a painter and decorator who operated his own business. Coppins decorated and performed fresco painting for some of the most beautiful structures in Western NY. He employed between 150-200 men when his firm was at its peak. The business was started by his father John and in 1871 Frank was included in the business and it was renamed J. Coppins & Son. The scope of the business included general painting and frescoing, house and sign painting, interior decorating, dealers in paints, oils, putty, varnishes, imported and American polished plate glass, graining, glazing, kalsomining and wall tinting. In 1883, the business was moved to 340 Niagara Street near Virginia Street.



Frank (Francis) Coppins who lived at 315 Jersey Street at Plymouth Avenue. His family was very involved in the building of the Plymouth Methodist Church

Frank Coppins also had an important political career. In 1902 he was appointed by Governor Odell as Sheriff of Erie County. In 1903 he was elected Alderman from the 24th ward as a successor to J. N. Adam.⁶⁷ Coppins, along with his parents Mary and John Coppins, were longtime members of the Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church. John and Frank Coppins painted the interior of the first church (1873) built on the church's present site. In later years, Francis Coppins was a founding member of the Richmond Ave. M. E. Church.

After Coppins left **315 Jersey Street** the building was occupied by Clayton M. Daniels, a physician, as both his home and office. After 1900 Linus J. McAdam, also a physician, worked from the site as well. In the twentieth century the house was modified with the addition of a storefront.

The red brick former Plymouth Methodist Church parsonage at **443 Porter Avenue** at Plymouth Avenue was built in 1889. The Plymouth Methodist Church has had a presence on this site since 1873. While a church had been constructed on the site in 1873, the parsonage continued to exist on Jersey Street. One of the earliest parsonages was at **294 Jersey Street**; but by 1879, Rev. Fisher (pastor of Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church from 1879-1881) had built a new house at **335 Jersey Street**.

The congregation needed to enlarge the church in the 1880s, at which the time it was decided to build a parsonage. In 1889 the church was enlarged and the parsonage constructed. The original and remodeled church was demolished to build its 1911 successor, but the parsonage from 1889 remains.

The following narrative details the story of the construction of the parsonage and enlargement of the church: "The peculiar form of the beautiful church rendered enlargement difficult. The work was of such magnitude that nothing could be done in haste. At the close of the first year Dr. Wentworth, the presiding elder, in his report to the Conference says: 'In 1888 Plymouth, under the pastorate of J. E. Williams, is alive with energy and looking forward with enthusiasm to the erection of a more elegant and commodious church edifice to be commenced in the spring, \$32,000 already being subscribed for this purpose. Twenty-one probationers have been received.'"

"Not only was a large room demanded for the congregation, but a parsonage was also needed, and it was decided to undertake both of these enterprises together. A plan was finally adopted to enlarge the building. The consummation of the whole work is thus stated in Dr. Wentworth's report to the next Conference: "'Plymouth, 1890. - This has been the most notable year in the history of this church. Dr. J. E. Williams is the pastor. The expense of \$15,000 which was fully provided for at the rededication. An elegant parsonage - the finest in the Conference has been erected and furnished. The congregation at Plymouth were never so large as now.'"

The designer of the church and parsonage was Cyrus Kinne Porter, one of the most well known and prolific Buffalonian architects during the Victorian era. The parsonage is notable for its integration with the design of the church and its adaptation to the corner of the triangular plot. The facade of **443 Porter Avenue** appears deceptively simple but really is a quite complicated form.

The parsonage is built of red brick with sandstone trim for the windows. It consists of a main section, a rectangular building parallel with Plymouth Avenue, and two wings which connect it to the church. The main section has a simple gabled roof, at half pitch, its narrow eaves fitted with a cornice which includes simple ornamental brackets and quarter-round moldings. The walls of the gables at either end are of wood, covered with shingles cut in an octagonal pattern.

The complex form of this apparently simple structure becomes visible in the third gable facing Plymouth Avenue, adjacent to the one facing Porter Avenue. The character of this one is entirely different from that of the Porter Avenue gable, yet it has as much or perhaps more decoration; viewed frontally from Plymouth Avenue it seems to be the main gable of the house, as though the rest of the house to the right of it along Plymouth Avenue were a mere extension of it. The face of the gable is brick. On the second floor level a narrow chimney corbels itself out from the wall in a shallow projection and continues up to the peak.

The Porter Avenue end of the main section of the house is at an angle to the street. On the right is an arc-shaped bay containing three splendidly curved double-hung windows. Telltale lines in the masonry suggest that there was once a decorative porch or balcony above the bay. The corner of the facade which is toward the church is cut at an angle toward the two wings which are positioned so that they form two setbacks. On the first floor there is a door in each wing, the one to the left is an entrance to the pastor's study, the one on the right the front door of the house.

A porch, which like the bay window, is in the shape of an arc, stretches from the door to the pastor's study around the first wing to the wall of the main section of the house. The porch is decorated. There is a cornice exactly like that on the rest of the house and there are delicately turned spindles in the railing. The parsonage is a fine example of the late Queen Ann style of domestic architecture.

Plymouth Methodist Church

The former Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church, at **453 Porter Avenue**, has been a landmark on the corner of Porter Ave. at Plymouth Ave. for well over a century. The last structure in the C. K. Porter-designed trilogy of the firehouse, parsonage and church, it is one of the most strikingly beautiful structures along Porter Ave. near Symphony Circle – on a street filled with noteworthy landmark architecture.

The church building that is presently on the triangular lot bounded by Plymouth Ave., Porter Ave. and Jersey St. has a fascinating history that can trace its origins to about 1850. The unusual 45 degree angle formed by the intersection of Porter Ave. and Plymouth Ave. is another remnant of the meeting of the old Black Rock “One Mile Strip” grid street pattern with Buffalo’s radial street pattern when Porter Ave. (formerly York St.) was connected to North Street. While the city of Buffalo now enjoys the legacy of the grand and elegant church structure on the historic site, the building’s story evolved from much more humble origins. What started out as a congregation of 10 grew, at its height, to have 1,500 members and was the largest Methodist congregation in the city of Buffalo.

History

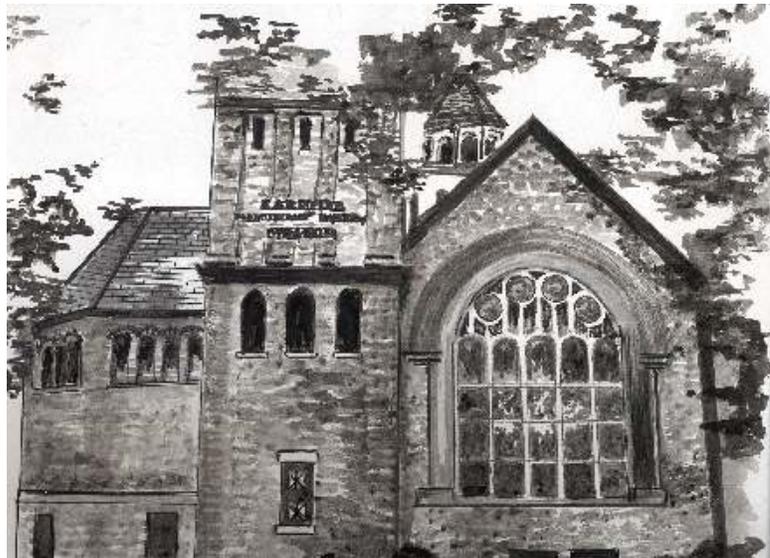
In the 1850s, two Methodist missions coalesced to form the Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church. About 1850, William Day, a New York City resident related to Thomas Day, donor of Days Park, offered a lot on Prospect Avenue, at the time called “Ninth Street,” to any religious society that would erect a suitable chapel on the site. The lot, located on the east side of Prospect Ave. 250 feet north of Maryland St., had 90 feet frontage on Prospect Ave. and was 100 feet deep.

Members of the Niagara Street Methodist Episcopal Church, the “mother of Methodism in Buffalo,” located at 41-45 Niagara Street (63 feet southeast of Franklin Street; the present site of Erie County Family Court Building near the Fernbach parking garage), decided to take up Mr. Day on his offer and build a mission on the site.

A humble one-story wood-frame chapel was built on the site sometime between 1850 and 1854. One account has the chapel being constructed during 1850-1851⁶⁹ while another account states the building was constructed in 1854.⁷⁰ The first recorded pastor of the mission chapel was Rev. Rufus Cooley in 1852. The building was about 25 feet wide and about 45 feet deep. It was sheathed with boards nailed perpendicularly and battened over the cracks with two-inch strips. Today, three houses at **283, 287 and 293 Prospect Ave.** are sited on the lot where the Ninth St. mission church was located, but according to tradition, the building was specifically erected on what is now **293 Prospect Ave.**⁷¹

The fledgling mission came into its own on September 4, 1854 when it was incorporated as the Ninth Street Methodist Episcopal Church. On October 10, 1854, William Day deeded the property to the trustees of the Ninth Street Methodist Episcopal Church: John A. Campbell, George Benson, Lucius S. Church, Edward W. Palmer, Thomas Phillips, Mahlen Bennel and Merritt Nichols.⁷² At the time of this writing, at least one of the original trustees’ homes is still extant: the home of Merritt Nichols at **319 Prospect Ave.** on the southeast corner of Hudson Street. Nichols (d. June 18, 1915) was in the paper hanging and band box business.

The Ninth Street Methodist Episcopal Church had only 10 members in 1854, although it had a healthy Sunday School with 21 teachers/officers and 124 students. The name of the church changed frequently through the next few years: in 1855 it was called the Ninth Street and City Mission and in 1856 it was called Ninth Street and Cold Springs. Most people couldn’t keep up with these name changes and simply called it the “Little Brown Church.”⁷³ By 1856, the membership had grown to 18. In 1857 the mission was associated with the Niagara St. Methodist Episcopal Church and was under the pastorate of Dr. A. P. Ripley (who would in later years be associated with the Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church and lived on Fargo Ave. just north of Jersey St.). Ripley was the pastor of the Niagara St. Methodist Episcopal Church from 1855-1858. In 1857-1858, Ripley remodeled the Niagara St. Methodist Episcopal Church and it was completed in November 1858. While the Niagara St. Methodist Episcopal



Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum, former Plymouth M. E. Church. Illustration by S. Lauren Heardt.

Church was being remodeled, its members worshiped in the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church.

Simultaneous to the formation of Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) mission was another religious gathering on the grounds of what is today Grover Cleveland High School. Jesse Ketchum (1782-1867), is probably best remembered today for his Jesse Ketchum school medals for academic achievement in the Buffalo Public Schools and for Ketchum Place, the street named in his honor (formerly 15th Street). In the nineteenth century, he was well known for his philanthropy in the fields of religion and education. Ketchum, a wealthy and prominent Buffalonian and Canadian citizen, maintained a large home and estate on the north side of North Street just west of Elmwood Avenue. Among his land holdings, Ketchum owned the entire block (about 5½ acres) bounded by Jersey Street, York Street, Normal Avenue and 14th Street. Ketchum was a member of the First Presbyterian Church and was instrumental in the formation of the Westminster Presbyterian Church on Delaware Avenue, close to his home on North Street.

“Father” Ketchum, as he was known, constructed a brick building on Normal Avenue (at the time known as 13th Street) at Porter Avenue. While the exact date that Ketchum built what was called “Father Ketchum’s Church,” is not known, it is believed to have been constructed about 1855.⁷⁴ Ketchum invited any religious institution that loved and served God to worship in the building. When not being used as a Sunday School or chapel, it was used as a reading room and gymnasium. As a young boy, Ketchum was denied the opportunity to go to school and wanted to make sure that children had ample educational opportunities in the two cities he loved with his whole heart: Toronto and Buffalo.⁷⁵

Ketchum was friendly with two well-known Methodists who lived nearby: Edward Cox and William Snell. Cox was a very wealthy man who owned nearly the entire block bounded by Jersey Street, Ketchum Place, York Street and Richmond Avenue. His palatial home was located at 414 Jersey Street, just west of Richmond Avenue (demolished). Because Cox was physically closer to Father Ketchum’s Church than Ketchum himself, Cox was entrusted with the keys to the building and supervised its use. Several Christian denominations used the church and Cox thought that a Methodist mission should be started at Father Ketchum’s Church. He enlisted the help of his friend and neighbor, Mr. William Snell who lived at **398 Jersey Street** (extant).

Through the efforts of these two men, a Sunday School class was established by Asbury Church pastor Dr. Rev. E. E. Chambers in 1857. Through the work of the Rev. John Caudell (uncle of architect/builder Richard Caudell), who lived nearby on Pennsylvania Street close to Normal Avenue (current site of Kleinhans Music Hall), the Sunday School and Methodist chapel based at Father Ketchum’s Church grew quickly. Caudell held revival meetings during the winter of 1857-1858 and converted many Buffalonians to Christianity and Methodism. Other members of the Niagara St. Church and Asbury Church also supported the mission. In 1858, the chapel was referred to as “13th Street,” in official Buffalo Methodist records.

An event that would rock the foundations of Methodism in the United States impacted both the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) and 13th St. missions and had its roots at the Niagara St. Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1852, Rev. Benjamin Titus Roberts (1823-1893) was the pastor of the prominent Niagara St. Methodist Episcopal Church. A charismatic young man, he raised eyebrows in the church when he expressed his concern that the Methodists had become too wealthy and had lost the pure roots of their faith. He was also concerned about pew rentals and wanted to establish a Free Methodist Church, one where pews were open to all as opposed to the earlier “stock churches,” where one had to pay in order to get a good seat. While in Buffalo, he sowed the seeds of discontent by writing an article in the *Buffalo Christian Advocate* newspaper (edited by Dr. A. P. Ripley) that asked “is there any good reason for renting pews in churches? It tends to debase the poor... it exalts the rich.”⁷⁶ During the period that Roberts was pastor of the Niagara St. M. E. Church, he lived with his wife Ellen Lois Stowe Roberts and family at 17 Palmer Street (extant, now known as **93 Whitney Place**).

In 1857, Roberts published an article in the newly founded Methodist reform paper, the *Northern Independent* called “New School Methodism.” The paper outraged the elders of the Genesee Methodist Conference and he was arraigned before the Conference that same year. Roberts was convicted, condemned and reprimanded by the bishop. In 1858 he repeated the offence and was expelled from the Conference. Still, he had many followers and his supporters were known as Nazarites. Roberts started a secession from the Methodist Church and took on the name of Free Methodists.⁷⁷ The new church was officially organized in August 1860 in Pekin, N.Y. (near Lockport), claiming that it was created to preach the gospel to the poor. The early Free Methodists were also abolitionists.

In 1858, Roberts’ Buffalo band of Free Methodists tried to take over the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) church and a skirmish ensued that was described as “quite a little speck of war.”⁷⁸ The Buffalo Police had to be called in to preserve order. So that the church would not be taken over by the Free Methodists, the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church obtained the services of William Madison, a Methodist layman to stay in the building and guard it throughout the night. Madison was described as a “man that few men cared to grapple with.” He was about six feet six inches

in height, well proportioned and attracted attention by his gigantic size wherever he went. The strategy worked; the Free Methodists did not succeed in taking over the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church.

While the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church was not taken over by the Free Methodists, the Methodists who worshiped at Father Ketchum’s Church on Porter Avenue at Normal Avenue lost their church to the Free Methodists. The Free Methodist movement came between Mr. Cox and Mr. Snell of Jersey Street. Cox, the supervisor of Father Ketchum’s Church, sympathized with Roberts’ followers (the Free Methodist Nazarites) and allowed them to worship in the church.

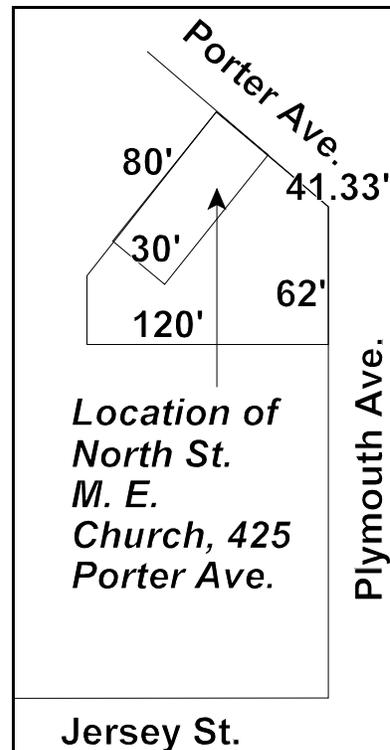
The Free Methodists could not have stayed long at Father’s Ketchum’s Church because change was coming swiftly to the area. In 1860 Roberts opened Buffalo’s First Free Methodist Church in the former Colosseum theater at 199-201 Pearl Street (demolished) between Eagle Street and Court Street.⁷⁹ From 1862 until 1864, Roberts lived in Buffalo at 173 Ninth Street (extant, now known as **173 Prospect Avenue**). By 1869, the Free Methodists had constructed a new building at **254 Virginia Street** at the northeast corner of 10th Street (extant - presently home to Hispanics United of Buffalo).⁸⁰ Father Ketchum’s Church was lost in the late 1860s; in 1867 the New York State Legislature approved the purchase of the site from the estate of Jesse Ketchum for \$4,500 to build a State Normal School. The city of Buffalo and the county of Erie agreed to erect the school building at their joint expense, each issuing bonds in the amount of \$45,000 for that purpose. A three-story French Renaissance style structure designed by John H. Selkirk was constructed in 1869 and the school opened in September 1871. The Normal School eventually became Buffalo State College and moved to its present Elmwood Avenue location.

Mr. Snell kept his alliances with the original Methodist church and the Methodist followers who lived near Plymouth Avenue and Porter Avenue had to find a new place to worship; the closest church was the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church. In 1858, Dr. Ripley, the pastor of both the Niagara St. Methodist Episcopal Church and the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church, welcomed the traditional Episcopal Methodist worshipers who were exiled from Father Ketchum’s Church to the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church. While well-intentioned, the location was not practical because it was too far from the families who lived close to the Porter Avenue-based Father Ketchum’s Church.

Some members of the newly merged congregation asked if the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) church building could be moved and consent was given if a lot could be found. A lot was leased at **425 Porter Ave.** having 30 foot frontage and a depth of 80 feet; it was located 41.33 feet west of the intersection of Plymouth Ave. (presently the site of a large apartment building, “The Porter,” built in 1899). The church, placed on rollers, was moved from Prospect Ave. to Porter Ave. about July 1859.⁸¹ The church was then renamed the North Street Methodist Episcopal Church (Porter Avenue’s name at the time).

In 1860, membership grew to 24. In 1861, the North St. society was formally organized into a church by presiding elder of the district, R. L. Waite, with the following trustees: John Coppins, William Coombs, Charles Bailey, Robert E. Andrews and George Lovejoy.⁸²

After the “Little Brown Church,” or the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) church was moved, several members purchased portions of the old Prospect Ave. mission site and built or moved homes on it (three houses today fill the former church lot at 293, 287 and 283 Prospect Ave.). The first to put a house on the site was attorney Edward W. Palmer, one of the original 1854 trustees of the Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Church. In 1862, Charlotte Palmer, Edward’s wife, built a home at **293 Prospect Ave.** (extant), the site that tradition holds was where the Little Brown Church actually stood.⁸³ Palmer apparently built 293 Prospect Ave. for income; he resided at **143 Cottage St.** In 1870, **293 Prospect Ave.** was rented to James Davison and his family. The next home to be placed on the old church site was by undertaken by Robert E. Andrews, an optometrist whose family included some of the earliest members of the church. In 1865, Robert E. Andrews moved a house from 7th Street to **287 Prospect Ave.**⁸⁴ (demolished, presently the site of a HUD Hope VI home built in 2005). Prior to moving to **287 Prospect Ave.**, Roberts lived at the home of his father, Robert F. Andrews (d. 1868), who was also an optometrist at **529 Prospect Ave.** (demolished). The last home built on the site of the old church was owned and lived in by Lucius Hancock and his family at **283 Prospect Ave.**



The old Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Chapel was moved to 425 Porter Ave. in 1859.

The Civil War-era period of 1863-1865 was a difficult time for the church that was moved to Porter Avenue (North Street). The building was taken over by Rev. McGonegal, a man with a sensational character who had no connection with Methodism. The church would have closed if it were not for the diligent work of Rev. William Caudell, brother of Rev. John Caudell and father of Richard Caudell. Caudell and a few others held weekly prayer meetings in their homes and ran a small Sunday School in the church.⁸⁵ In 1866, Rev. William Magavern, a well-respected Methodist minister, took control of the church, reinvigorated it and the membership grew to 37.

In 1867, Rev. R. E. Thomas was assigned to the North Street Methodist Episcopal Church. The membership grew so that soon the congregation was too large for its small building. The Rev. William Caudell met with committees from various church congregations to determine if there was support to build a new church building. After he determined that there was widespread support to build a new structure, a fundraiser festival was held that raised about \$1,300. The proceeds were sufficient enough to purchase a lot on Jersey Street at Plymouth Avenue (**310 Jersey Street**, where the former Firehouse Engine #2 stands) on Feb. 7, 1868. A wooden church designed in the Gothic style of architecture that cost about \$8,000 was constructed. The new church was about 35 feet wide and about 70 feet deep. It was built by two carpenters who were steadfast members of the congregation: George Lovejoy, of **74 Park Street** and James Swain, of 10th Street. The new building was called the Jersey Street Methodist Episcopal Church and was dedicated in November 1869. The old Prospect Avenue (Ninth Street) chapel that was built in the early 1850s and moved in 1859 to **425 Porter Avenue** was moved yet again to the rear of the new Jersey Street church with a connecting passageway that was four feet wide and six feet long. The former chapel was then used as a Sunday School and for social events.

In 1869, the Jersey Street Methodist Episcopal Church had 84 members and by 1872 the church had grown to 130 members. The growing church suffered a huge setback on Sat. Jan. 25, 1873. About six o'clock in the morning, a fire was discovered in the passageway linking the old chapel and the new church facing Jersey Street. While the fire was discovered very early, firemen at the scene had a problem getting the water turned on to extinguish the flames and by the time water was available, the entire church complex was lost, although several pews, two melodeons and other furniture were saved. It was believed that the cause of the fire was arson.⁸⁶

Immediately after the fire, the church members decided to rebuild, but also to move across the street. The church purchased the triangular lot bounded by approximately 219 feet on Plymouth Avenue, 320 feet on Porter Avenue and 233 feet on Jersey Street for about \$6,000. Nearly everyone in Buffalo thought that the site was "one of the finest in the city for church purposes."⁸⁷ The site of the burned Jersey Street Methodist Episcopal Church was sold to the city of Buffalo to be used as a site, ironically, for the construction of a new firehouse.

Within the next six months the congregation commenced building a new red brick church on the triangular site; cornerstone-laying ceremonies were held on Saturday July 12, 1873 at 6:45 P.M. Many dignitaries and representatives from various religious denominations presided at the ceremony with about 1,500 in attendance.⁸⁸ At that time the congregation, by unanimous vote, changed its name to Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church in commemoration of the faith and courage which the Pilgrim Fathers had shown in the face of adversity in 1620 at Plymouth Rock. During the time of construction, the congregation worshiped at the Normal School Chapel and at the upper floor of School 36 (located at the corner of Cottage St. and Days Park).

Because of the church's prominence on Porter Avenue and its significance in the community, it quickly became the namesake for Twelfth Street, whose name was changed to Plymouth



Rev. William Caudell.
Courtesy of Janet Morgan.

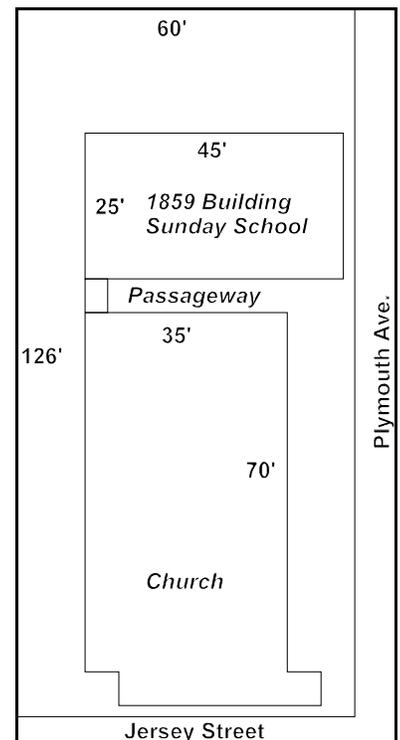


Diagram of Jersey St. M. E. Church at 310 Jersey St. (current site of former Firehouse #2).

Avenue in 1876.

By March 1, 1874, the new red brick church was enclosed and the chapel room was completed. However, ensuing financial problems, overcome only with the help of the well-known Buffalo philanthropist Francis H. Root, prevented the completion of the church until more than three years later. The new church cost about \$26,500 to build. Dedication ceremonies were held on June 10, 1877.

The architect of the Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church was Cyrus K. Porter. The church was designed in the Norman style of architecture with sandstone trim. The church was shaped octagonally and its dimensions were 51 by 51 feet, with three transepts 12 by 23 feet. On the south side there was a tower 16 feet square with a spire that was 134 feet high. The walls of the church were 25 feet high. The church could seat about 500 people.⁸⁹

On the interior of the new church, the pews were made of ash wood with black walnut trim. The walls were tinted and the ceiling was frescoed. Stained glass windows were provided by Booth & Reister and the carpentry work was performed by J. W. Atwood. The mason work was provided by Smith Brothers. Many members of the congregation donated their time, money and talents to finish the interior of the church. John Coppins, owner of a large painting company and one of the trustees of the church who lived on Vermont St. near 10th St., painted all the walls and provided finishing, etc. with his son Frank. Frank Coppins, a few years later, built and lived at **315 Jersey Street** across the street from the church.

By 1886 there were already discussions taking place about building a new church. Cyrus K. Porter designed a red stone church that year that was to cost about \$50,000, but the church was never built.⁹⁰ While the red stone church was never built, the congregation undertook renovations to the existing structure in Oct. 1889. The congregation remodeled and enlarged the church and added the brick parsonage (**443 Porter Avenue**). Porter was again the architect for these enlargements as well as the design of the parsonage, at a cost of \$15,000.⁹¹ As part of the 1889 improvement project, a new organ was purchased for the church, built by the Hook & Hastings Co. of Boston, Massachusetts. Recognized as one of the finest of all organs in the area, the organ was sold in 1911 and is presently installed at St. Anthony's Roman Catholic church. It was rededicated there on August 6, 1911. The Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church currently on the site was installed with a three manual M. B. Moler organ containing a set of organ chambers.

By 1911 the church continued to grow and the Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church Board of Trustees decided that it was necessary to replace the church with a larger one. The church structure that is presently on the triangular plot was the congregation's final construction project and took place 1911-1912. It was officially designed by the firm Porter and Sons, but Cyrus K. Porter died in 1910, a year before the church was built. It was up to Porter's sons, Jesse and Cyrus K. Jr. to design and build the church. It is not known how much of the design was attributable to Cyrus, Jesse or Cyrus K. Porter, Jr. On June 22, 1911, a ceremony was held for the removal of the 1873 cornerstone before demolition began. For the next 18 months church services were held across the street at the State Normal School (now Grover Cleveland High School).

The George H. Kellogg Structural Steel Company was responsible for the fabrication of the roof trusses which were erected during the winter of 1911-12. The building committee chose the Haskins Art Glass Company of Rochester to execute the two pictorial windows and two ceiling skylights for \$1,750. One of the other bidders for the contract was Tiffany. The Booth Art Glass Company of Buffalo was responsible for the remaining windows for the sum of \$1,250.

On Sunday, November 10, 1912 a week of dedication events began with the formal dedication scheduled for November 17. Preceding the dedication, an article in the *Buffalo Evening News* described the church as: "...of Romanesque style architecture, built of gray limestone with red tile roof, marble hallways, and quartered oak finishings. A ventilating system, which changes the air every eight minutes, and an indirect lighting system, insuring both cleanliness and comfort, are features. It also has a vacuum cleaning system."

"The auditorium can be expanded to seat 2,000 people. The assembly rooms when thrown open will accommodate 1,200 people. Two large art glass windows in the auditorium are among the finest in Western New York. The building contains the following rooms: auditorium, pastor's study, reception room, music room, nursery, welcome room, business office, junior room, parlor, 17 classrooms, primary room, reading room, dining room, kitchen, serving room, assembly room, gymnasium, sexton's room, and boiler room."⁹²

The total cost of the new church was \$109,469.39, including interest on the loan. Aggressive fund-raising efforts were begun during dedication week and the debt was paid off in seven years.

At the time of the completion of the new church building, membership totaled 1,050. Membership in the Sunday school classes was 1,200. At the time it was built, Plymouth Methodist was easily accessible to its congregants by three trolley lines: the Grant, Hoyt, and Connecticut, which all passed by the church doors.