

3.0 HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW

This section provides a narrative history of the City of Buffalo with specific emphasis on the West Side, Grant-Ferry-Forest neighborhood. The overview addresses significant trends and themes associated with the city's historic context. The Grant-Ferry-Forest neighborhood's period of significance is identified and examined in this chapter, in conjunction with prominent architectural movement and styles.

3.1 The Early Settlement Period to 1854

3.1.1 The Porter and Ellicott Plans for the Adjacent Settlements of Black Rock and Buffalo

Most of the Grant-Ferry-Forest neighborhood (the area west of Richmond Avenue) was originally part of the lower village of Black Rock, a settlement laid out in 1802. The Black Rock settlement centered on a small but good harbor on the Niagara River about two miles from Lake Erie, a place where a large dark rock protruded into the water from the eastern shore. The village was the creation of Peter Buell Porter. After the Revolution, Porter, a lawyer who had come to the area from his native Connecticut, purchased a mile-wide strip of land along the Niagara River from the State of New York, which a short time before had acquired it from the Seneca Nation. (Before Porter's acquisition, this land was known as the New York Reservation.) First as Clerk of Ontario County (which originally encompassed all of Western New York) and then as a state assemblyman, Porter promoted the fortunes of Black Rock.

The waterside community of Black Rock predated Joseph Ellicott's plan for the city of Buffalo, some two miles south. Originally called New Amsterdam by its developers, the Holland Land Company, Buffalo was situated at the point where the Buffalo Creek flowed into Lake Erie, not far from the rapids at the beginning of the Niagara River. Despite his rivalry with Porter, Ellicott—who had unsuccessfully urged his Dutch employers to purchase the land on which Black Rock would develop—foresaw the eventual merger of the two towns.¹ He took pains with his 1804 plan for Buffalo to align its streets, which radiated from the central point of the present Niagara Square, with the mile-wide, awkwardly angled grid of Black Rock. In the words of architectural historian Reyner Banham, Porter's bent grid of streets paralleling the river "made sense for the original riverside community, but for that very reason was turned almost at 45 degrees to the cardinal north-south/east-west orientation that made better sense for the lands behind the riparian strip."² The two street patterns met along the present line of North Street and Porter Avenue, roughly the southern border of Black Rock.

In upper Black Rock, which centered around Niagara and Breckenridge Streets and is in the area included in the Grant-Ferry-Forest neighborhood, a series of numbered streets ran inland

¹ In May, 1802, Ellicott wrote: "The State, last session of the Legislature, passed a law for the purchasing of the natives' rights of land, the pre-emption right of which, was in the State (on our map, called the New York Reservation), the southern part of which lands reach near to New Amsterdam, and there is a situation on said lands intended to be purchased, equally or more advantageous for a town, than New Amsterdam; so that if the State shall make the intended purchase this summer, and offer this spot for sale before New Amsterdam gets in operation, the 'nick of time' will be lost to the future prosperity of that place." Quoted in William Ketchum, *History of Buffalo*, Buffalo: Rockwell, Baker & Hill, 1865, II, 152.

² Reyner Banham, "Introduction," in F. Kowsky, et. al., *Buffalo Architecture: A Guide* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 3.

back from the waterfront. The alternate streets paralleling the river bore names of presidents. Following a route along a bluff above the river's edge was the through street known as Broadway. Already laid out in 1809, it connected Buffalo with Niagara Falls. This major thoroughfare in the survey area later became known as Niagara Street. The entrance to the Black Rock harbor was roughly opposite the foot of York Street, the present Porter Avenue, in lower Black Rock. It was sheltered from the river rapids by a portion of the long State Pier that began at Bird Island and ended at Squaw Island. Most of the harbor's docking facilities were located at upper Black Rock, behind Squaw Island. It was this snug harbor town that became the focus of military action during the War of 1812.

As a member of the United States Congress, Peter Porter had voted for the declaration of war against Britain. He immediately returned home to the Niagara Frontier where, according to William Ketchum, one of Buffalo's first chroniclers, Porter "entered into the war as a volunteer with great spirit."³ Black Rock itself was to figure in at least three important engagements. In July 1813, British forces crossed the Niagara and landed on Squaw Island, intending to take Black Rock. After the British briefly gained control of the village, Porter and his forces, which included several Seneca Indians, repulsed the invaders and drove them back across the river. That day, the British suffered heavy losses. The story was different, however, late in December of the same year. This time superior British forces crossed the Niagara by cover of darkness and completely routed the Americans. "The adult male population of the village [of Buffalo] had gone down to Black Rock, early in the morning," recounted Ketchum, "leaving the women and children, under a strong belief that the enemy would be repulsed as he had been upon a former occasion, and when the alarm was given that the British and Indians were advancing in full force to Buffalo, a universal panic seized every breast, and self preservation, the first law of our nature, became the ruling motive of action."⁴ Following the route laid open to them by recently constructed Niagara Street, the invaders marched unobstructed to Buffalo where they destroyed the settlement. Finally, in the summer of 1814, as part of their strategy to retake Fort Erie, Ontario, British forces once again attempted to take Black Rock. The battle of this action was a part of what proved to be the last engagement of the War of 1812. Recovery from the conflict came quickly. By 1816, wrote nineteenth-century historian Perry Smith, "Black Rock was then the great salt and commercial exchange, where Pittsburgh traders, shippers and boat captains met to talk over their prospects and transact business."⁵

3.1.2 Construction of the Erie Canal, 1810-1825

The rivalry between Black Rock and Buffalo took on greater intensity during the years when the Erie Canal was being debated and constructed. As early as 1810, when the state first authorized the Canal Commission to study the feasibility of linking the Atlantic seaboard with the Great Lakes region via a canal, the Porter and Ellicott interests were at loggerheads. Porter, a powerful state and national politician, wished the new waterway to be a system of two canals, one bridging the Hudson River with Lake Ontario and a second connecting Lake Ontario with Lake Erie around Niagara Falls. Ellicott and De Witt Clinton, an influential statesman, believed that the best route was a single east-west canal from the Hudson River at Albany to Lake Erie. The replacement of Porter by Ellicott as the Western New York representative on the Canal Commission in 1816 and the election of Clinton as governor settled the issue in favor of the east-west route.

³ Ketchum, *op. cit.*, 291.

⁴ Ketchum, *op.cit.*, 303.

⁵ .Perry H. Smith, *History of the City of Buffalo and Erie County*, Syracuse: Mason & Co., 1884, II, 183.

When the legislature voted to construct the single canal, Porter and Ellicott shifted their efforts to having their towns named its western terminus. Eventually, Buffalo won the designation. Instead of ending their labors at Black Rock, where in 1825 as part of the canal project the rock that gave the town its name was blasted away, engineers extended it down to Buffalo. For nearly half of the distance, the canal followed the shoreline behind the long stone breakwater. Near the end of the breakwater wall, another channel was dug to carry traffic to the lakeside terminus at Buffalo. This section of the canal from the river to Buffalo followed the line that would have been Black Rock's Third Street. At the point where the river and the new channel met, the United States Army established Fort Porter. Erected in 1843 on the bluff overlooking the rapids, at the present site of the Peace Bridge toll plaza, Fort Porter honored the memory of the man who had led the citizens of Black Rock against the British invasion of his community and had in many other ways devoted his energies to promoting the fledgling town's fortunes.

In 1836, the laying of the tracks for the Buffalo and Black Rock Railroad alongside the canal augmented the Third Street corridor. A second early railroad running through the survey neighborhood had been begun in 1835 to connect Buffalo to Niagara Falls. It followed the line of Sixth Street, later Front Avenue and the present Busti Avenue, then proceeded northward parallel to the river along Broadway, presently Niagara Street.

3.1.3 The Absorption of Black Rock into the Survey Area

The final episode in the Black Rock-Buffalo rivalry occurred in 1853. In that year, the developing city of Buffalo annexed the village of Black Rock. Since its incorporation as a city in 1832, Buffalo had been expanding northward and eastward from Niagara Square. The wedding of Black Rock and Buffalo streets that Ellicott's plan had foreseen now became a reality. The area of lower Black Rock would be transformed into a residential and, later, an industrial area of Buffalo. Nevertheless, when Eli Cook took up his post as the first mayor of the new city, whose population stood at 30,000, Black Rock was still mostly empty land.

3.1.4 Early Architecture in the Survey Area : Niagara Street as a Residential Street of Fine Houses

During this early period, the survey area was sparsely populated. Despite Porter's hope that Black Rock would become a thriving metropolis, few buildings went up before the 1830s. Immediately after the War of 1812 concluded, however, a number of residents erected fine dwellings along Niagara Street, the route the invading British had taken to burn Buffalo. From Niagara Square in Buffalo through Black Rock, Niagara Street had, by the 1830s and 1840s, become a street of fine homes—Buffalo's first Delaware Avenue. In 1816, General Porter, as he apparently liked to be called, erected his own new house on Niagara Street looking out across the river from the high bank near Ferry Street, a major east-west corridor that led to the international crossing on the Niagara River. The best records of the appearance of this historic structure are the photograph, drawing, and written description in antiquarian Frank Severance's invaluable 1912 book, *Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo*.⁶ An ample, five-bay Federal style stone dwelling surrounded by lawns, gardens, and an orchard, the Peter Porter house stood until the year before Severance published his account of it. The house was probably designed by J. H. - Merrill, perhaps the first architect in Buffalo, about whom little is known other than that he

⁶ Frank H. Severance, *Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo*, vol 16 of the Buffalo Historical Society Publications, Buffalo: By the Society, 1912, 256; 260. The house pictured had been substantially altered from its original appearance. Porter's brother Augustus lived in a house that still stands near the corner of Amherst and East Streets, outside of the survey area.

advertised his services in local newspapers. “No dwelling in Buffalo, at any time, or on the Niagara frontier, has surpassed the Porter house in historic association,” wrote Severance.⁷ Among the famous guests that Porter entertained there were Lafayette, John Quincy Adams, De Witt Clinton, and the artist George Catlin who, in 1825, painted a view of Black Rock harbor from the Porter house. Others came not by invitation. In 1820, Porter’s wife, a Southerner neé Breckenridge, took advantage of a provision in the 1818 New York State law abolishing slavery and brought five African-American slaves to work on the property.⁸ In 1836, Porter sold the house and moved to Niagara Falls where he promoted the fortunes of that budding community. He died there in 1844. The house in Black Rock became the home of Lewis F. Allen, another prominent Buffalo citizen and the uncle of Grover Cleveland. During Allen’s day, the railroad tracks that had originally run along Niagara Street were relocated parallel to the Erie Canal, compromising the property’s riverside frontage, which already in 1825 had been cut through by the construction of the canal.

Other prominent local families also began to erect substantial Federal style residences along Niagara Street in the survey area after the War of 1812.⁹ Similar in appearance to the Porter House was the dwelling erected nearby in 1819 by William A. Bird. Peter Porter’s nephew, Bird had come to the area to serve as a surveyor with the Boundary Commission that was formed in 1816 with Porter as its head to establish the border between the United States and Canada.¹⁰ Another five-bay, center-entrance dwelling was the Rough-Robie House (1820) at 1266 Niagara Street near Auburn.¹¹ The original owner, Captain James Rough, had acquired the property from Peter Porter whose first dwelling had stood there. Porter’s house had suffered serious damage during the war and Rough had to completely rebuild, using only the foundations of the former residence. Other, fine Niagara Street dwellings now vanished included the Orin Stickney House (1819), near Breckenridge, the Hull Thompson House, at Ferry Street, the Walter Norton House (ca. 1820), north of Breckenridge Street, and the Daniel Sill House (1822), at Auburn. All of these dwellings, which Severance recorded, came down in the early twentieth century, as industry replaced home life along Niagara Street. But in 1820, the combined population of Buffalo and Black Rock was only 2100 souls.¹²

The most well known architectural reminder of the earlier residential character of the Niagara Street neighborhood is the Breckenridge Street Presbyterian Church (1831; Figure 3-1). Erected in 1831 on land donated by Peter Porter, the brick church was known to Porter and other initial worshippers as the Union Meeting House. In former days, the Federal style structure stood amidst orchards, and its tower (now gone) could be seen from barges on the canal and boats on the river. The church served various congregations until 1888.¹³ Since then its survival has been due to adaptive reuse as a factory and storage building. Today, this empty and sadly

⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁸ According to the law, slaves could be brought to New York if the owners signed an affidavit agreeing to free male slaves at age 28 and female slaves at 25. The Porter’s signed such affidavits. See Smith, *op. cit.*, 78-79.

⁹ The only other street in the area at this time was West Avenue,. It was laid out parallel east of Niagara Street in the 1830s, when it was known as Washington Street.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 262. In the mid-nineteenth century, the house became the property of the Reverend John E. Robie, editor of the Buffalo *Christian Advocate*.

¹² Smith, *op. cit.*, 79

¹³ The church was designated a local landmark by the City of Buffalo in 1992.

dilapidated relic of the survey area's earliest days bears the distinction of being Buffalo's oldest building erected for religious purposes.¹⁴

The area close by the historic church building is also associated with the Underground Railroad. It is ironic that the locale of Breckenridge Street, a thoroughfare named after a slave-holding resident, would also be associated with the flight of many nineteenth-century blacks from slavery in America to liberty in Canada. The foot of West Ferry Street (one block south of Breckenridge Street) was the site of the former ferryboat pier from which many valiant escapees embarked on the last leg of their arduous journey to freedom. As early as 1835, before there was any bridge spanning the Niagara River, abolitionists transported expectant fugitives across the mid-river border here.¹⁵ In 1996, the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society and Harriet Tubman 300's Club fittingly commemorated the old ferry site (located in diminutive Broderick Park on the southern tip of Squaw Island) with a bronze marker. Its terse inscription reads: "This was a frequent point of passage for freedom seekers."



Figure 3-1. Breckenridge Street Presbyterian Church (1831) at 44 Breckenridge Street.

¹⁴ In the early twentieth century, the building immigration authorities used the building to house illegal Chinese immigrants before deportation. The bars on the second floor windows date from this time.

¹⁵ In that year, black abolitionist William Wells Brown and his white supporters were beaten by local constables in their unsuccessful attempt to waylay fugitives whom Wells and his friends had put on board the ferry. See Ted Pelton, "Search for the Underground Railroad," *Buffalo Spree*, at www.motherlandconnections.com; "Road to Freedom: An Underground Railroad Tour" on the Buffalo-Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau web site, www.buffalocvb.org; and Monroe Fordham, *Road to Freedom: Preserving Black History in Western New York*, video documentary, Buffalo: LIN Television Corporation, 2000.

3.2 1855-1900

3.2.1 Residential Development of the Western Portion of the Survey Area after the Civil War

“An indifferent horse car line was in operation on Niagara Street previous to 1860,” notes an early historian of Buffalo, “but it was not until that year that a fairly good line was established to Black Rock.”¹⁶ By 1884, Guy Salisbury, a local writer, could state that “Now we have eleven miles of well built double track street railways, through our most important avenues, running sixty elegant passenger cars, not surpassed in any city, that make regular trips every five and ten minutes, greatly facilitating the travel and intercourse between the distant sections of the city, rendering a suburban residence a cheap, accessible and desirable home.”¹⁷ As was so often the case in Buffalo and other American cities, the coming of the streetcar, and to a lesser extent the Belt Line Railroad, was the catalyst for widespread residential development in the survey neighborhood. An evocative reminder of the determining importance of the streetcar in earlier days in the survey neighborhood is the Buffalo Street Railway Company building, the present Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society (ca.1892), at 451 Forest Avenue (Figure 3-2). Comfortable, if not elegant, residential development came quickly to the survey area, especially the western portion, which became home to many working class families. These new residents were among the many who found employment in Buffalo’s rapidly expanding manufacturing and transportation economy. “The recent growth of the city has been marvelous,” proclaimed the magazine *Greater Buffalo*. Noting that prior to 1880, Buffalo was primarily a commercial city, the magazine proudly observed that

“with the development of manufacturing it went forward by leaps and bounds. In the decade ending in 1890 the increase in population was 65 per cent! Only Chicago exceeded this rate, and Chicago’s great growth was achieved through the aid of annexation. Buffalo increased three times as fast as New York, Boston or Philadelphia. The present population of the city is chasing the 400,000 point.”¹⁸



Figure 3-2. Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society (ca.1892) at 451 Forest Avenue. Originally the Buffalo Street Railway Company building.

¹⁶ *Twentieth-Century Buffalo*, Buffalo, 1903, 77.

¹⁷ Guy Salisbury, *History of Buffalo*, Buffalo, 1884, II, 124.

¹⁸ “The Great City of Buffalo. Its Marvelous Growth in the Last Ten Years—The City’s manifest Destiny,” *Greater Buffalo*, 1(April 15, 1897), 6. The *Buffalo Real Estate News* reported in 1890 that Buffalo’s growth between 1860 and 1870 had been 45 per cent; between 1870 and 1880 had been 31 per cent. See “Looking Backward,” *Buffalo Real Estate News*, 1(August 15, 1890), 5.

Already by the time Salisbury had made his observation in 1884, civil engineers had laid out most of the present day streets in the survey area, though the initial names of many of these streets differ from their present designations. Salisbury would have known that in 1872 virtually no buildings were standing in the survey area east of Herkimer Street, then called North Jefferson Street, while north of Bird Avenue dwellings had only been erected to the west side of Grant Street. By the end of the following decade, construction of middle class housing was preceding rapidly. "Last week over one hundred applications were made to build frame residences" in the area, reported H. S. Pickett, an observer of the local architectural scene.¹⁹ One of the prominent builders of these houses was Fred W. Hudson who established his contracting business in 1889 and erected dwellings ranging in cost from \$12,000 to \$25,000. Another entrepreneur operating in the area was James Mooney & Brother. In 1891, a local newspaper reported the Mooneys had bought a parcel of land bounded by Hoyt Street, Clinton Avenue, and Bird Avenue and intended to build a number of houses there.²⁰ "A good field for investors," noted the *Buffalo Express* in 1890, "is in the erection of small dwelling houses at Black Rock . . . Houses can be rented . . . as fast as they can be put up. Large additions are being made daily to Buffalo's laboring population and houses are needed to accommodate them."²¹ An early resident of Hoyt Street, Henry Allen, likewise noted in his diary that the pace of improvements was speedy. He rejoiced when the main that provided gas lights for houses was completed in 1886; a year later, he expressed his pleasure at news that the first water main had been finished. Happily, residents could now abandon their dependency on wells.²² Historical maps from the time, show the rapid changes the swiftly built up neighborhood was undergoing (Figure 3-3,4,5).

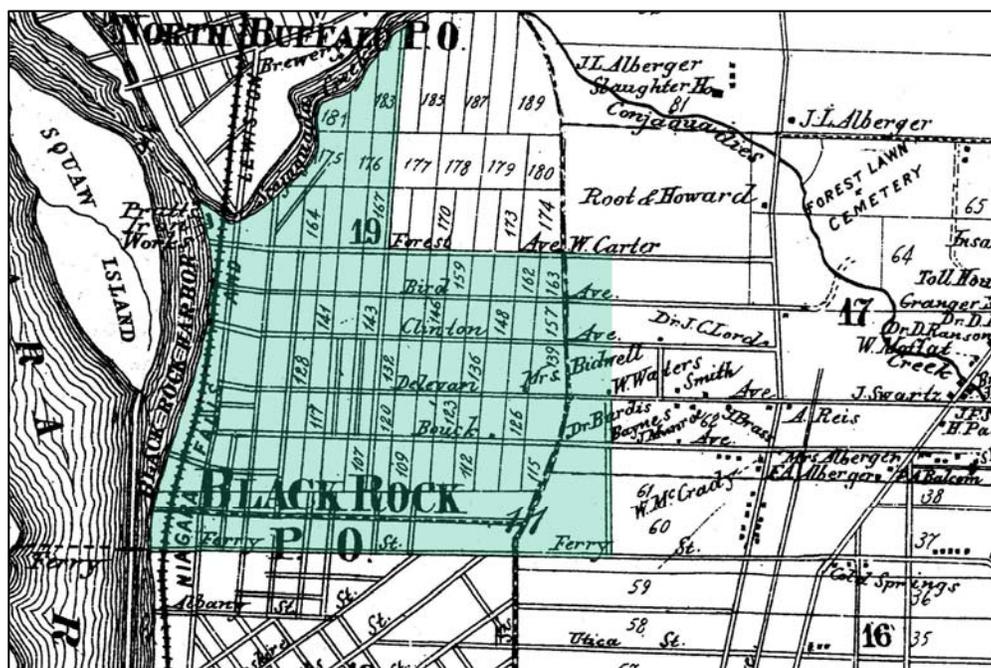


Figure 3-3. 1866 map of Buffalo, Co. Atlas

¹⁹ H. S. Pickett, "Buffalo," *Architectural Era*, 3(September 1889), 195.

²⁰ Buffalo is Booming," *Buffalo Courier*, March 14, 1891, 6.

²¹ Houses and Land," *Buffalo Express*, March 2, 1890, 3.

²² "School 45, Half Century Old, First to Boast Gas Lights," *Buffalo News*, November 18, 1938, in *Schools scrapbook*, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, vol. 5, 49.



Figure 3-4. 1880 map of Buffalo, Co. Atlas



Figure 3-5. 1887 map of Buffalo

Almost none of the houses that went up in the last decades of the nineteenth century in the western portion of the survey area had architects names attached to them. “Very few architects ever hear of these buildings,” observed Pickett, “on account of arrangements made with the planning mills and contractors for the drawing of plans for nothing.”²³ The survey area preserves a number of good examples of vernacular domestic architecture of this type. The simplest type of dwelling is the one-story, saddle-back roofed single family suburban wooden cottage. Characteristic examples of this most modest type of home can be found at 1029 West Avenue (ca. 1860; Figure 3-6), 143 Bird Avenue (ca. 1870), and 233 Barton Street (ca. 1895).

²³ Pickett, *loc. cit.*

Two-story suburban cottages survive in good condition at 123 Auburn Avenue (ca. 1870), 44 Barton Street (ca. 1875), 151 Breckenridge Street (ca. 1875), and 16 Arkansas Street (ca. 1890; Figure 3-7). Two-family dwellings took one of two forms: either the duplex, also known as the side-by-side house, or double flats consisting of two units, one above the other. The former is represented by good examples at 98 Breckenridge Street (ca. 1885), 106 Breckenridge Street (ca. 1885), and 49 Potomac Avenue (ca. 1888). Buildings like this tended to take the place of row or terrace housing that was common in Eastern Seaboard cities. “The prosperous classes in Buffalo were suspicious of continuous urban housing,” noted the late architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, “and regarded it as too proletarian.” The double house, however, Hitchcock maintained,

“like the English suburban ‘semi-detached villa,’ could have respectability as appropriately as the single house . . . The mass of the two houses vies with that of nearby mansions and the richer detail might well appeal to the less traveled . As in the smaller eastern cities, such as Hartford, the double house seems a natural middle-class compromise of this period, like the more European brown-stone rows in the great seaboard cities.”²⁴

Typical instances of the one-above-the-other double flat, commonly called a “double,” which became especially popular in Buffalo after the turn of the century, are at 264 Baynes Street (ca. 1890) and 439 Breckenridge Street (ca. 1890).



Figure 3-6.
1029 West Avenue
(ca. 1860)

²⁴ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., *Buffalo Architecture, 1816-1940*, exh. cat., Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1940, 20.

Figure 3-7.
16 Arkansas Street
(ca. 1890)



A few buildings in the western portion of the survey area reflect nineteenth-century high style architectural trends, notably the Second Empire style dwellings at 15 Barton Street (ca. 1870; Figure 3-8) and 239 Lafayette Avenue (ca. 1880). These modest private houses may have been influenced by the nearby example of the palatial Second Empire style mansion of William G. Fargo, , co-founder of the American Express Company and the Wells Fargo Company. Designed by the Rose Brothers of England in 1868, the Fargo house, which was outside of the survey area, is now demolished. Two Italianate style dwellings at 65 Potomac Avenue (ca. 1874; Figure 3-9) and 182 Forest Avenue (ca. 1875) are among the oldest buildings in the survey area. And while the popular Queen Anne style appears mostly in the eastern part of the survey area, good examples in the west are the store and flats at 412 Auburn Avenue (1891) and commercial block at 212 Grant Street (ca. 1895). The monumental Neoclassical style, which rose to popularity for public buildings in America after the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892, made its appearance in the survey neighborhood with R. A. Wallace's Public School 19 at 1143 West Avenue (ca. 1899).



Figure 3-8.
15 Barton Street
(ca. 1870)



Figure 3-9. 65 Potomac Avenue (ca. 1874)

From the 1890s to the 1920s, Grant Street grew into the chief commercial street in the western part of the survey area. Ground floor shops with apartments above—so-called “mom and pop” stores—set the pattern for early commercial development along Grant Street. 212 Grant (ca. 1895), 83 Grant (ca. 1896), 91 Grant (designed in 1922 by Louis Greenstein with shop front modernization in 1951), 242 Grant (1914), and 285 Grant (1923) are all in use today for their same purpose that gave them life decades ago.²⁵ Together with Elmwood Avenue on the eastern side of the survey area, Grant Street continues to be one of the liveliest neighborhood commercial streets left in Buffalo.

3.2.2 Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux’s Buffalo Park and Parkway System, 1868-1876.

In 1868, Frederick Law Olmsted visited Buffalo to discuss with civic leaders the creation of public parkland. His visit eventually resulted in the ambitious proposal that he and his partner, Calvert Vaux, submitted to the city in October 1870. Their plan called for the creation of a system of parks that consisted of one large pastoral park, the present Delaware Park, in the northern part of town and two smaller parks, one on the east side of town and the other on the waterfront overlooking the beginning of the Niagara River adjacent to Fort Porter. This park became known as The Front, presently Front Park. These parks were to be connected by wide, tree-lined streets that the designers referred to as parkways. “There had before seemed to be no boundary line of the city,” stated the *Buffalo Express* in 1888 about the effects of the new parks on city property values, “but the lines of the park sharply defined the city limits, and from

²⁵ The largest residential-commercial building along Grant Street in the survey area, 185 Grant, was originally the Oscar Goldhagen warehouse.

the time the parks were laid out real estate took a new start.”²⁶ Olmsted and Vaux’s entire Buffalo park and parkway system is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In tandem with the construction of the parks and parkways, Olmsted and Vaux laid out the grounds of the new Buffalo State Hospital, the present Buffalo Psychiatric Center, at Forest and Elmwood Avenues. Although located just outside of the survey area, the hospital affected the neighborhood by limiting growth northward at that point. Created by an act of the legislature in 1869, the hospital building was designed by Henry Hobson Richardson. Long listed as a National Historic Landmark, the picturesque Richardsonian Romanesque building is the premier neighborhood architectural landmark. Its dominating presence is reflected in the design of three churches within the survey area: the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church at 598 Lafayette Avenue (ca. 1895) and the Richmond Avenue Methodist Church at 467 Richmond Avenue (ca. 1895; Figure 3-10).

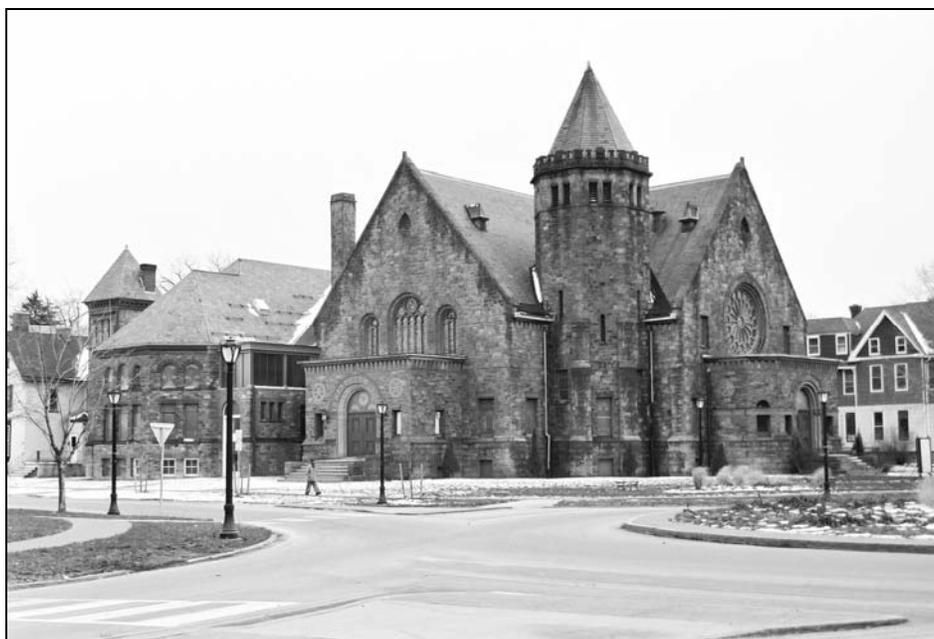


Figure 3-10. Richmond Avenue Methodist Church (ca. 1895) at 467 Richmond Avenue.

3.2.3 Residential Development of the Eastern Portion of the Survey Area

Together with improved urban transport, the construction of the Olmsted and Vaux park and parkway system (which was in place on the ground by the centennial year, 1876) stimulated residential development of the survey neighborhood. Portions of the parkway system lie in the eastern section of the survey area. Bidwell Parkway and Richmond Avenue (renamed from Rogers Avenue in 1879 to honor prominent local citizen Jewett M. Richmond), together with Colonial Circle (former Bidwell Place) and Ferry Circle, were the most prestigious addresses in the survey area—indeed, among the most prominent within the city—in the late nineteenth and

²⁶ “Real Estate,” *Buffalo Express, Extra Number*, (September 1888), 16.

early twentieth centuries. These thoroughfares and nearby streets became the location of many fine individual houses. With the opening of Elmwood Avenue as far north as Forest Avenue in the 1890s, this wide, straight street, which forms the eastern border of the survey neighborhood, also assumed the rank of an address of note.²⁷ By the 1890s, real estate developers were referring to this part of the survey area as the Elmwood District. “The parent thoroughfare has been well filled with handsome houses and the adjacent streets are growing apace,” observed a local newspaper reporter in the late summer of 1894. “Over 250 houses are said to be in the course of construction in the Elmwood district,” he wrote, “and many of the dwellings are big and costly ones, equal to the best on other fashionable residence streets, such as Delaware, North, and Summer.”²⁸ At the turn of the twentieth century, the neighborhood, reported a local magazine, was “well filled up” with homes of the well-to-do.²⁹

The spacious, elm-lined parkways and the comfortable, mostly single-family housing that grew up surrounding them attracted more affluent homeowners than did the streets in the western portion of the survey area. One of the chief real estate firms to deal in property here was that run by George L. Thorne and Byron P. Angell. Both men were also among the first residents of the eastern portion of the survey area. In 1890, Thorne & Angell advertised for sale “a number of very desirable investments on . . . Richmond, Elmwood, Bouck [Lafayette] and Plymouth Avenues, and Bidwell Parkway [and] Ferry.”³⁰ Among the builders who erected expensive speculative houses in this rapidly growing area were H. H. Lanctot, Walter D. Putnam, F. Stephen Grist, and John W. Gibbs.³¹

Along the streets of the eastern sector of the survey area, one finds excellent examples of late nineteenth-century residential architecture. (Because of the greater coast of land, Bidwell Parkway and Richmond Avenue were among the last streets to attract residents. Hence, most of the houses along them date from the early twentieth century.) The picturesque Queen Anne style is particularly well represented. Notable examples are at 40 Bidwell Parkway (1885; Figure 3-11), 465 Ashland Avenue (designed by Buffalo architects Roberts & Balsam, 1890), 471 Ashland Avenue (ca. 1890), 551 Richmond Avenue (ca. 1890), 601 West Ferry Avenue (ca. 1893), 19 Claremont Avenue (ca. 1895), and 537 Ashland Avenue (1897). The popular Shingle Style is also encountered along these gracious streets. Good examples are at 47 Bidwell Parkway (ca. 1890), 65 Bidwell Parkway (ca. 1892), 6 Claremont Avenue (ca. 1894), 1089 Elmwood Avenue (ca. 1895), and 558 West Ferry Avenue (ca. 1895; Figure 3-12). And the house erected for the Turner family at 490 Ashland Avenue in 1887 epitomizes the taste for so-called Stick Style design that was popular for suburban houses in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

²⁷ “About a dozen years ago,” noted a local reporter in 1894, “lower Elmwood Avenue was known as North William Street and soon thereafter was rechristened Fremont Place. With the opening of Elmwood Avenue—practically an extension of Fremont Place—the street extended in a straight northerly line from Virginia to Forest Avenue. With the completion of the bridge over Scajaquada Creek, Elmwood Avenue will be extended to North Elmwood Avenue near the Country Club property. Elmwood Avenue divides the State Hospital yard [the present Buffalo Psychiatric Center] and the North Park [the present Delaware Park] and is one of the straightest, as well as one of the finest streets of Buffalo.” The writer defined the entire Elmwood district as the area bounded by Virginia Street, Delaware, Richmond and Forest Avenues. “Where Houses grow,” *Buffalo Courier*, September 9, 1894.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ “The New Elmwood District,” *Greater Buffalo*, 5(October 1902), 8.

³⁰ George M. Bailey, *Illustrated Buffalo: The Queen City of the Lakes*, New York: Acme Publishing, 1890, 160.

³¹ For a list of these men’s activities, see “The New Elmwood District,” *loc. cit.*, 19-20.



Figure 3-11. 40 Bidwell Parkway (1885)



Figure 3-12. 558 West Ferry Avenue (ca. 1895)

3.2.4 Early Industrial Development in the Western Portion of the Survey Area

Spurred by the construction of the Erie Canal and the coming of the railroad, industrial development of the survey area began before the middle of the nineteenth century. It was later encouraged by the construction of the International Railroad Bridge across the Niagara River at Squaw Island in 1873 and the transmission of electrical power from Niagara Falls to Buffalo in 1896. The earliest manufacturing businesses took advantage of the abundant waterpower provide by the swift flowing Niagara River. Water power became a source of energy for businesses at Black Rock at the time of the completion of the Erie Canal. Buffalo's milling industry actually began at Black Rock in the 1830s. A considerable stretch of the canal served as a mill race, drawing water from the Niagara River. Pioneering establishments also included flour mills on the Niagara River break wall near Ferry Street, where bridges crossed the Erie Canal and the Black Rock Harbor (Figure 3-13). "Black Rock has already, by aid of her inexhaustible water power, become the great flour market of the lakes and is hereafter to be the principal wheat market of the West," stated the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* in 1839.³² It was here at Black Rock that Robert Dunbar, the Scottish-born engineer who became known as the "father of the great grain elevator system,"³³ got his start designing mill facilities with machinery for unloading grain from lake vessels. Other sorts of early industrial commerce here were an icehouse that stood at the foot of Bird Avenue and the Hodgkins Iron Foundry that, by 1854, occupied a site at the mouth of the Scajaquada Creek. This area—partially outside of the survey neighborhood-- is now the site of the elevated ramps that form the juncture of the New York State Thruway and the Scajaquada Expressway. By 1872, the company had become the Buffalo Iron & Nail Company; by the following decade the name had changed to the Pratt Iron Works and the facilities had been much enlarged.

The transformation of Niagara Street from residential to industrial began in the 1880s and 1890s. Among the remaining industrial buildings from this era are the Weisbauer Manufacturing building at 17 Gull Street (ca. 1885), the King Spring Company building at 1400 Niagara Street (ca. 1886), the Aldrich & Ray Manufacturing Company building at 1491 Niagara Street (ca. 1887), and the Curtiss Malting Company building at 1100 Niagara Street (ca. 1875).

³² *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, April 12, 1839, 2, quoted in Paul Emmet Sweeney, *Locational Economics and the Grain Trade and Flour Milling Industry of Buffalo* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Economics, university of Buffalo, 1942), 73.

³³ "Famous Inventor: The Death of Mr. Robert Dunbar," *Buffalo Commercial*, September 18, 1890, 6.

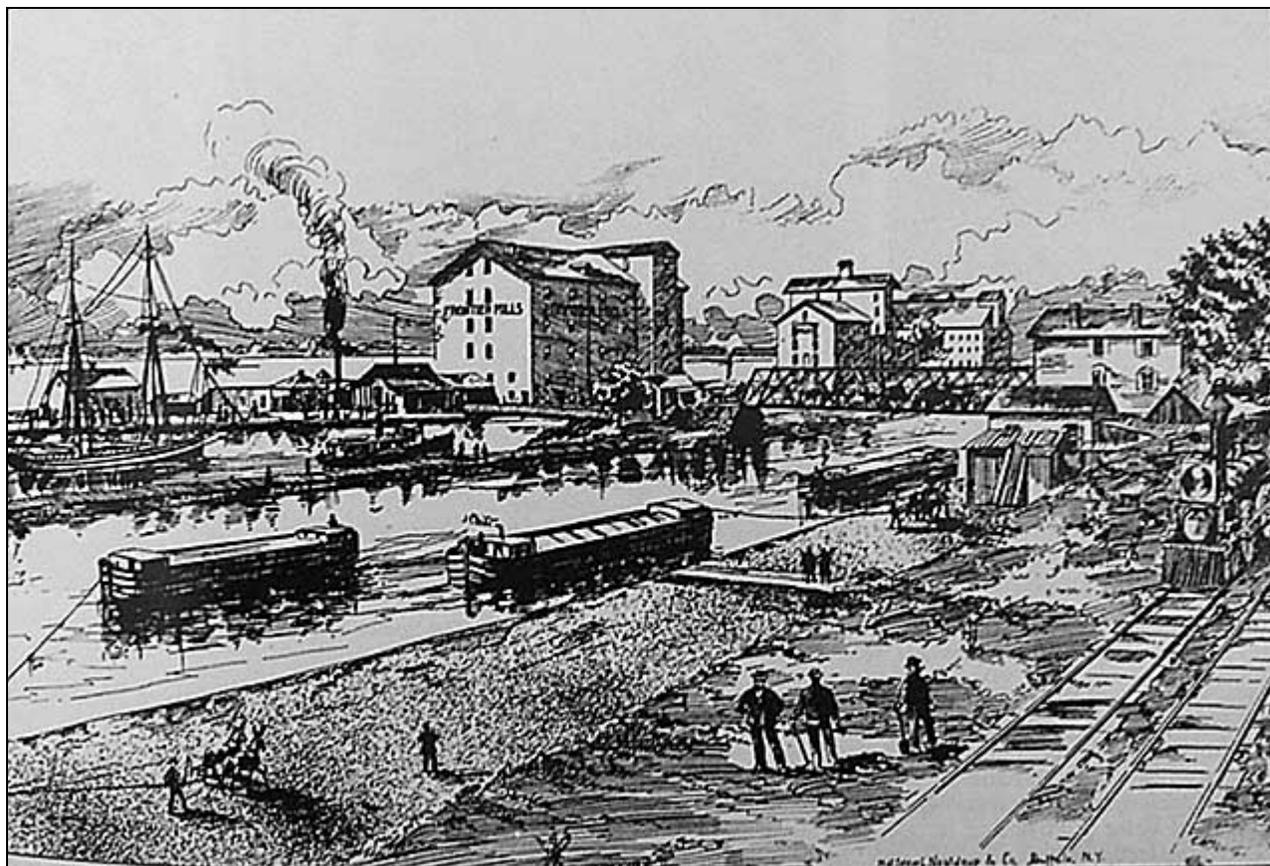


Figure 3-13. An old print showing mills at Black Rock and a towpath with mules drawing barges, circa 1888.

3.3 1900-1950

3.3.1 The Persistence of Residential Development

During the first half of the twentieth century, the patterns of residential development that were established in the previous century continued to give form to the streets of the survey area. Most construction dates from the early decades of the century, after which the Great Depression slowed down Buffalo's economy. After World War II, the lure of the suburbs made in-town home life seem less attractive to many middle class families, and the survey area settled into a period of stability, and even decline in certain areas, rather than growth. A potent local symbol of the post-war migration to the suburbs and the concurrent embracing of the automobile as the favored means of transportation was the conversion of the Erie Canal along the west side of Buffalo into a section of the New York State Thruway. Throughout these years and down to the present, most of the western portion of the survey area was home to families of more modest means than were the streets of the eastern portion. The so-called Elmwood district justly enjoyed a reputation for its attractive, tree-lined residential streets furnished with fine homes. The culmination of this development was the creation in the early years of the twentieth century of Dorchester Road. "A great advance over anything in the city will be made

when the street is finished, for there is nothing here now that can approach ‘Dorchester Road’ in location, beauty, or protection of property,” proclaimed a reporter at the time that the street was being laid out between Bidwell Parkway and Baynes Street. The “new and elegant street” was a model of domestic wellbeing articulated by median grass plots, fountains, and shade trees. Elmwood Avenue, the major north-south through street in the area eventually became the most important neighborhood commercial street on the west side of Buffalo. Nonetheless, even today throughout its length, many houses still alternate with or are home to small businesses. Finally, in the first part of the twentieth century, Niagara Street continued to evolve into one of the important industrial districts of Buffalo.

Many double flats continued to be erected throughout the survey area. Typical, well-preserved examples are at 151, 164, and 168 Claremont Avenue, erected in 1922, 1914, and 1915, respectively. Duplexes appeared even on the more important streets, although those at 130 Bidwell Parkway (1902) and 21 Bidwell Parkway (1905) are on a large scale that is in keeping with such a location. Rare in the survey area are apartment buildings. The Neoclassical style apartment houses at 116 Bidwell Parkway (1916) and at 12 Colonial Circle (ca. 1902) are the most notable instance of the type in the survey area.

The majority of buildings that went up in the survey area at this time were individual houses. Early twentieth-century domestic architecture in the survey area demonstrates the variety of styles of architecture that were popular with middle class homeowners during that time. The American Four Square house, with its evocation of the proportions and orderliness of traditional Georgian architecture, is well represented in the survey area by such houses as those at 63 Ardmore Place (1908; Figure 3-14), 90 Ardmore Place (1908), 27 Bidwell Parkway (ca. 1910) and 185 Auburn Avenue (1914). Pure Colonial Revival designs also abound in the survey area. Among the most accomplished are W. L. Schmolle’s 587 Ashland Avenue (1904), 96 Bidwell Parkway (1905), 56 Colonial Circle (1909), 770 Ashland Avenue (ca. 1910), 56 Bidwell Parkway (ca. 1910), and 24 Colonial Circle (ca. 1910). The finest example of this style is F. A. Spangenberg’s Lafayette Baptist Church at 286 Lafayette Avenue (1922; Figure 3-15). It is one of the most distinguished Colonial Revival designs anywhere in the region.



Figure 3-14.
63 Ardmore Street
(1908)



Figure 3-15. Lafayette Baptist Church at 286 Lafayette Avenue.
Designed by F. A. Spangenberg (1922).

The Craftsman style had significant associations with Western New York in the presence here of Charles Rolfs in Buffalo, Gustav Stickley in Syracuse and Elbert Hubbard and the Roycrofters in East Aurora. Two fine Craftsman style dwellings in the survey area are at 78 Bidwell Parkway (1909) and 58 Dorchester Road (1909). Moreover, the example of major houses in Buffalo by Frank Lloyd Wright, who was sympathetic to the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, for Darwin Martin and other executives of the Larkin Soap Company, seems to have inspired several Prairie style dwellings in the survey area. They are at 37 Bidwell Parkway (1909), 116 Lafayette Avenue (1919; Figure 3-16), and 120 Lafayette Avenue (1919).

Figure 3-16.
116 Lafayette Avenue
(1919)



The Tudor Revival style appears to be the most popular traditional style for larger dwellings in the survey area. Several of these were designed by important local architects, notably Green and Wick's 20 Dorchester Road (1904), W. L. Schmolle's 607 Ashland Avenue (1904), and Lansing and Oakley's Annunciation Church Rectory (1921) at 248 Lafayette Avenue (Figure 3-17). Other fine examples by unknown designers are at 28 Colonial Circle (1906) and 39 Bidwell Parkway (1909). The house of Charles D. Arnold, an important figure for the history of photography in Buffalo, at 123 Bidwell Parkway (1895) displays an interesting mixture of Tudor and Richardsonian Romanesque elements.



Figure 3-17. Church of the Annunciation Rectory at 248 Lafayette Avenue. Designed by Lansing and Oakley (1921).

The Gothic and Neoclassical styles are confined to religious, public and commercial buildings in the survey area. Two well-designed Gothic churches by local architect Albert A. Post are Annunciation Church at 248 Lafayette Avenue (1900) and the Church of the Nativity at 210 Albany Street (1903; Figure 3-18) the Unitarian Church at 695 Elmwood Avenue (ca. 1910) is one of the finest works by Edward Austin Kent, an important local architect who met his death on the Titanic. And St. John's Episcopal Church at 13 Bidwell Parkway (ca. 1910) is a late but distinguished small ecclesiastical design in the so-called Modern Gothic style by the New York City firm of Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue Associates.

The Neoclassical style associated with the City Beautiful Movement contributed several outstanding neighborhood buildings. Prominent Buffalo architects Esenwein & Johnson were more inspired by Flemish Renaissance example than by the glories of ancient Greece and Rome when they designed Lafayette High School (1901), the largest school building in the district and a beloved city landmark. The Church of the Nativity School at 228 Albany Street

(1911) is a less inspired and more typical example of Neoclassical school architecture. Another prominent local firm, Bley & Lyman, planned the handsome, temple-fronted M&T Bank building at 133 Grant Street (1923). The two-story brick building fronting Elmwood Avenue at 141 Bidwell Parkway (ca. 1915) is a good example of Classical principles of design applied to a modest neighborhood commercial block.



Figure 3-18.
Church of the Nativity
at 210 Albany Street
Designed by Albert A.
Post (1903).

Separate from the residential development that characterized most construction in the survey area during the early twentieth century, Niagara Street continued its transformation from a street of homes to a street of manufactories. By the time of the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression, Niagara Street, a narrow, sparsely populated road when British soldiers followed it on their way to burn the nascent community at Buffalo, was a major urban industrial corridor. The most well known industry that early-twentieth-century people outside of Buffalo would have known was the Thomas Motor Company. The assembly plant (designed by local architect Sidney H. Woodruff) for this celebrated early automobile still stands at 1200 Niagara Street (1901, with rear additions from 1905-1909). From here flashy Thomas Flyers were shipped to buyers all around the country, indeed, around the globe, for the auto enjoyed a reputation for quality among buyers of expensive vehicles. In 1908, the Buffalo-built Flyer captured the world's attention when one of its production models won the momentous international auto race that began in New York City and ended in Paris. Other businesses along Niagara Street in the survey area whose straightforward factory structures have long survived

their ledgers are the Liberty Brass Foundry building at 1095 Niagara Street (1905), the Sowers' Manufacturing Company building at 1300 Niagara Street (1910), and the unassuming Art Deco Oliver Gear & Machine Company building at 1114 Niagara Street (1931), designed by Edward B. Green, the "dean" of Buffalo architects at the time.

3.4 1950-2005

The story of architectural development in the survey area virtually was concluded by the middle of the twentieth century. The only significant new building to go up in the area was M. J. Murphy's Gothic style Coronation Church at 348 DeWitt Street (1955). Since the 1930s, the residential areas of the Grant-Ferry-Forest neighborhood have changed little, as have the boundaries of commercial, residential, and industrial sectors. The most significant change to take place within the survey area occurred in the 1950s when engineers filled in the channel of the historic Erie Canal to create the roadbed of the Niagara Extension of the New York State Thruway.³⁴ Today, virtually nothing remains in the survey area as an obvious reminder of its canal days. Nonetheless, the Niagara Extension is designated part of the Seaway Trail. Established in 1978, the Seaway Trail, Inc, exists, states its publicity, "to serve its members and local governments in communities trail wide by promoting and advancing the wise and sustained use of the inland corridor as a scenic byway."³⁵

The stability of the Grant-Ferry-Forest neighborhood and the high quality of the architecture along its residential streets has in recent decades attracted more and more middle class and upper middle class residents to the area. Moreover, the "Elmwood Strip"—the string of shops and restaurants along Elmwood Avenue south of Forest Avenue--is currently one of the most vibrant commercial districts within the city. Yet it retains the casual flavor and unpretentious scale that it always had of a neighborhood-shopping district. Most of the Grant-Ferry-Forest survey area has survived into the twenty-first century as a congenial city neighborhood, one that present-day residents appreciate for its traditional architecture and the comfortable urban way-of- life it embodies.

³⁴ The Niagara Extension, I190, of the Thruway was authorized in 1957 and completed in 1960. See "Historic Overview," New York State Thruway web site, www.nycroads.com/roads/thruway.

³⁵ *Seaway Trail: New York States' Scenic Byway*, web site, www.seawaytrail.com