

3.0 HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW

This section provides a narrative history of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. The overview addresses significant trends and themes, and buildings associated with the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. The neighborhood's period of significance is identified and examined in this chapter. Dr. Francis Kowsky authored the historical and architectural overview. Martin Wachadlo, architectural historian, conducted the background research.

3.1 Introduction

The Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood is mainly a residential area of Buffalo identified with the Polish-American and, to a lesser extent, the German-American communities who settled in the city in the nineteenth century.¹ These immigrant populations came to Buffalo to work in the factories, slaughterhouses, and other industries that were the basis of the city's thriving economy. Commercial life of the "Polish colony," as contemporaries referred to the neighborhood, centered on the intersection of Fillmore Avenue and Broadway and the nearby Broadway Market, the last surviving public market in Buffalo (Figure 3.1). The New York Central Terminal (1928-1929) is another local landmark. It represented the eminent place the city formerly occupied in the nation's passenger rail system. Since the 1960s, the city's industrial and transportation base has been in decline, a fact mirrored by the economic demise of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. This descent, so poignantly chronicled by Verlyn Klinckenborg in his novel *The Last Fine Time*, was speeded by the departure of earlier residents to new neighborhoods in the eastern suburbs of Buffalo. Many houses and commercial buildings are now abandoned, and empty lots dot former residential streets. However, African-American residents have taken the places of many departing Polish-American families. And most recently the neighborhood has become home to Arab-American and other foreign immigrants.

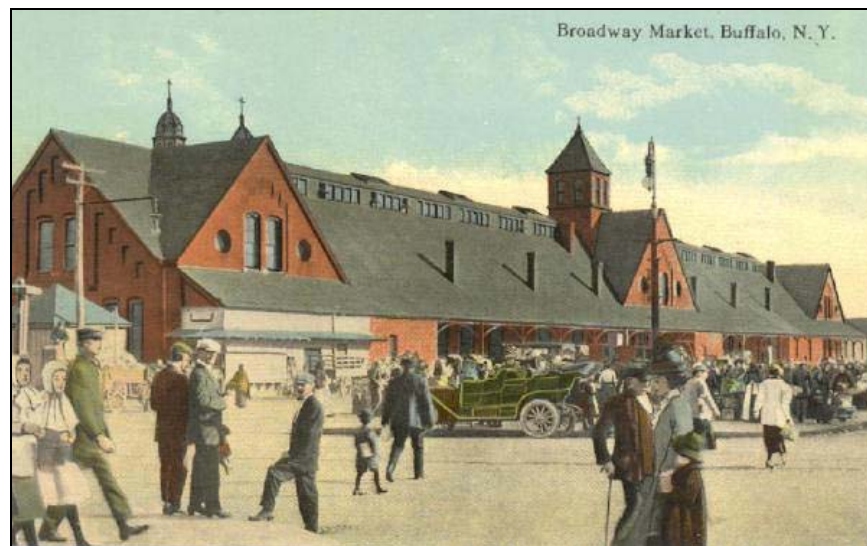


Figure 3.1 Broadway Market (1889; H.H. Little, architect)

¹ Research for this overview statement was conducted primarily by Martin Wachadlo. Thomas Yots furnished additional information.

3.2 Development of the City of Buffalo and the Broadway – Fillmore Neighborhood

The acquisition of former Indian lands by the Holland Land Company was to mark the beginning of the Euro-American settlement period in Western New York. This wealthy corporation of Dutch land speculators was responsible for the establishment of Buffalo, a place that the company called New Amsterdam, and for the settlement of the region. In 1799, the directors employed Joseph Ellicott to survey the future site of the city of Buffalo; five years later, Ellicott mapped streets on the model of Pierre L'Enfant's Washington and began the division of and into building lots.

The city Joseph Ellicott laid out was situated on the southern shore of Lake Erie, near the beginning of the Niagara River, the 25-mile-long straight that connects Lake Erie, the smallest of the five Great Lakes, with Lake Ontario. Ellicott chose a location where the Buffalo River flows into Lake Erie and focused the center of town around Niagara Square. From this point, important streets radiated east and north toward what became the inland sections of the city. About a mile to the south of Niagara Square, along the banks of the Buffalo River, was to rise the city's vast harbor and industrial sector. The Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood occupies slightly elevated land located north of this area. The City of Buffalo annexed the area that includes the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood in 1853.

Due to its location at the eastern most point of navigation of four of the Great Lakes, Buffalo grew in the nineteenth century from a meager village to one of the most important manufacturing and transportation centers in the United States. After the War of 1812, when the British troops burned the original town laid out in 1804 by Joseph Ellicott, local citizens quickly rebuilt with a vision of empire. Seeing the lake as the key to the city's future, early town fathers concentrated on creating a proper lake front harbor.

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 inaugurated the city's prosperity, making it the port through which goods and people traveled eastward from the developing West and westward from the seaboard cities of the East. The storage and transshipment of grain became a major industry, especially after 1842 when Joseph Dart erected the first grain elevator near the mouth of the Buffalo Creek. By the end of the century, the riverway was lined with these giant sheds for the storage of Mid-Western grain. Their early-twentieth-century concrete descendants gave Buffalo the largest grain storage capacity of any city in the world. With the establishment of railroads in the 1840s, Buffalo's position as a transportation hub was consolidated. Heavy industry began to develop here before the middle of the nineteenth century and grew rapidly after the Civil War.

Ore from Michigan and the upper Mid-West and coal from Pennsylvania, transformed Buffalo's lakefront into a booming national center of iron and steel making. Other significant manufacturers that flourished here until the 1950s included those that made rubber, automobiles, chemicals, dyes, and paint. In the 1940s, the city boasted 1400 plants and a work force of 200,000. Changing inland patterns of transportation and the effects of globalization on American industry have conspired since the 1960s to reduce Buffalo's importance as a city. But significant architecture and landscape architecture remains from the 150-year period of growth.

The Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood is home to many buildings that reflect the residential expansion of the city eastward in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 3.2). This buildout of the earlier central city, which was common to many American cities at the time, was here influenced by the construction of new parks and parkways designed by the Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in 1870. Largely completed by 1876, the initial portion of the

park system was the first to be constructed in an American city. The Parade, located in the eastern section of north Buffalo, was to be the park most easily accessible to the residents of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood and, to some degree, would shape its growth and development.

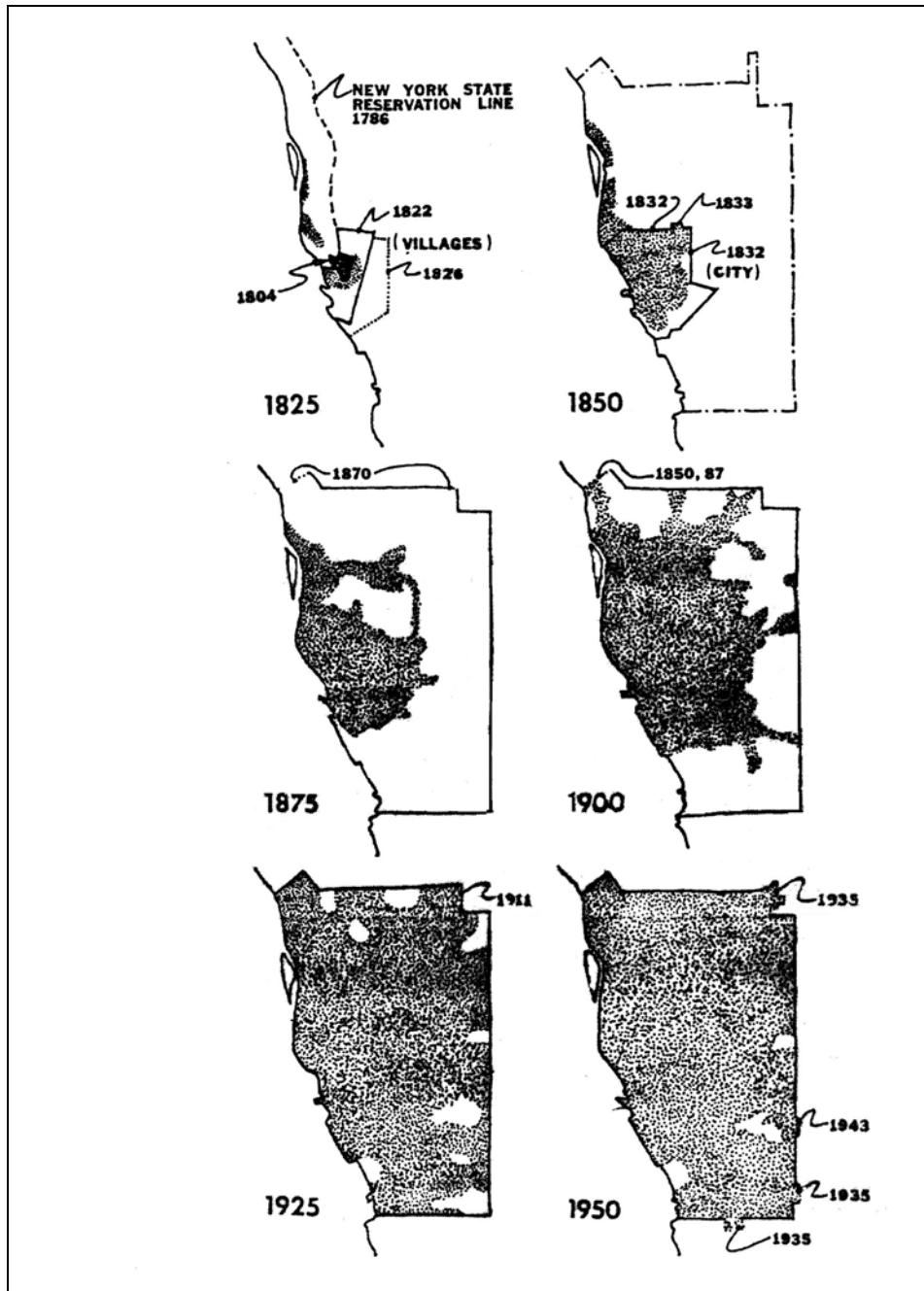


Figure 3.2 Growth of Buffalo's Urban Population
 From: Buffalo City Planning Board, *Buffalo City Plan*, 1977.

3.3 Major Thoroughfares

Four major thoroughfares traverse the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. Among the oldest streets in the city, Broadway, Sycamore, and Genesee streets have carried traffic westward toward downtown and eastward to suburbs and farmland from the earliest days of settlement in Western New York. Since the early 1830s, Fillmore Avenue, the main north-south artery, has connected Amherst on the north with Hamburg on the south. Broadway, which until 1877 was known as Batavia Street, is the main commercial street of the district (Figure 3.3). Laid out in 1821 to the eastern line of the village of Buffalo, it was extended first by the Plank Road Company in 1848 and then paved east of Fillmore by the 1870s. Sycamore Street came into being in the early 1830s and was extended through what is the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood after 1844. In 1821, the Holland Land Company designated Genesee Street as Busti Avenue, but when the road became a public highway in 1826 the name was changed to Genesee Street. Fillmore Avenue was surveyed as a public highway as early as 1831. It was extended through the Broadway-Fillmore area in the late 1840s. When Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux developed their historic park and parkway system for Buffalo in the early 1870s, they upgraded Fillmore Avenue south of Best Street to a parkway. The tree-shaded thoroughfare, a bit of linear greenspace, was to link The Parade (the present Martin Luther King, Jr., Park) with proposed new parkland in South Buffalo.

Horse-drawn streetcars appeared on Genesee Street as early as 1864, on William Street in the 1870s and on Broadway in the mid-1880s. These lines opened the area, which was too far from the center of town for pedestrians to walk to work, to residential development. With the advent of electricity in the late 1890s, larger and more efficient, mechanized cars replaced the horse-drawn vehicles. The large brick streetcar barn that the Buffalo Traction Company erected at 175 Walden Avenue in 1897 is a poignant reminder of this bygone mode of urban travel. The construction of the Belt Line railway in the 1880s somewhat east of the Broadway-Fillmore area also played a role in the neighborhood's development. It was usually considered the boundary of the large East Side Polish community. Another improvement to the city's streets that marked Buffalo as one of the most progressive cities in America was the early adoption of asphalt paving. By the end of the 1880s, each of the four main streets in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood paved with this new bituminous tegument. At the turn of the century, the city had more asphalt-covered streets than any other municipality in the country.

Most of the smaller, north-south streets in the area between Best Street on the north and William Street on the south were laid out as in parallel rows beginning in the 1870s, when residential development of the area commenced. Responsibility for the creation of side streets on former farmland lay with daring entrepreneurs. In 1885, for example, Joseph Bork, a keen land speculator in town, organized a partnership that purchased the land between Broadway, Sycamore, Fillmore, and the Belt Line railway. Within two years, Bork had laid out sidewalked streets along which he built some 1100 houses.² When the New York Central Terminal was constructed in the late 1920s, the city revised the street plan of the southeast section of the Broadway-Fillmore area in order to create an appropriately grand approach to the station. Engineers widened Lovejoy Street east of Fillmore, renaming it Paderewski Drive in honor of the Polish pianist and statesman, and created Memorial Drive, a broad, diagonal avenue leading northeast from William Street to Broadway. At the juncture with Paderewski Drive, the city created a circle from which traffic mounted a broad ramp to the large terraced plaza in front of the terminal.

² John Daniels, "The Poles in Buffalo," *Buffalo Express*, January 23, 1910, p. 3.

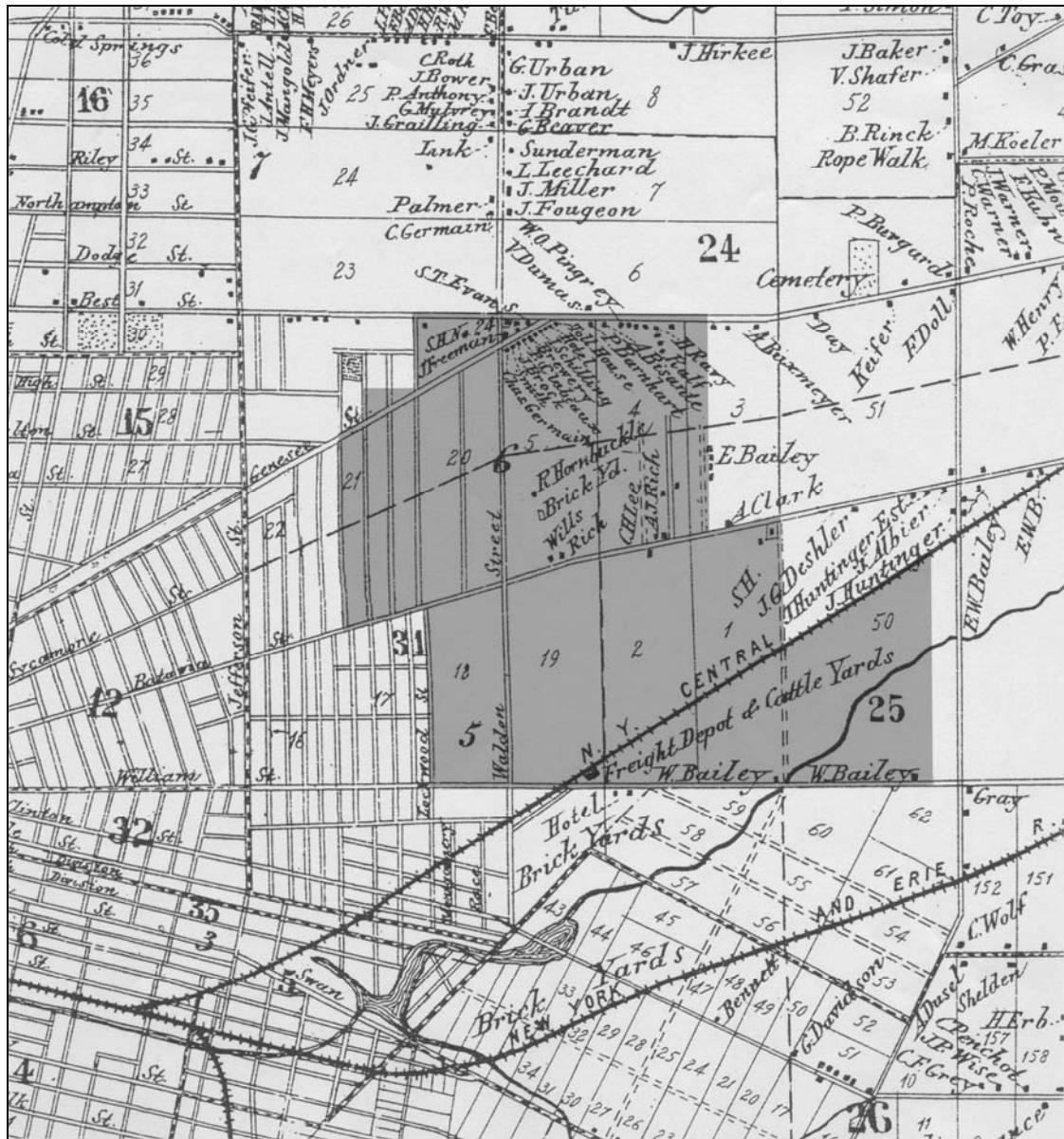


Figure 3.3 The approximate boundaries of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood shaded in gray on the 1866 *Topographical Atlas Map of Erie County* (Philadelphia: Stone & Stewart, Publishers). Note the primary east-west streets of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood radiating from the center of downtown Buffalo. At that time, Broadway was known as Batavia Street. Also note the existing railroad infrastructure.

3.4 Olmsted and Vaux's Buffalo Park and Parkway System: The Parade and Fillmore Avenue

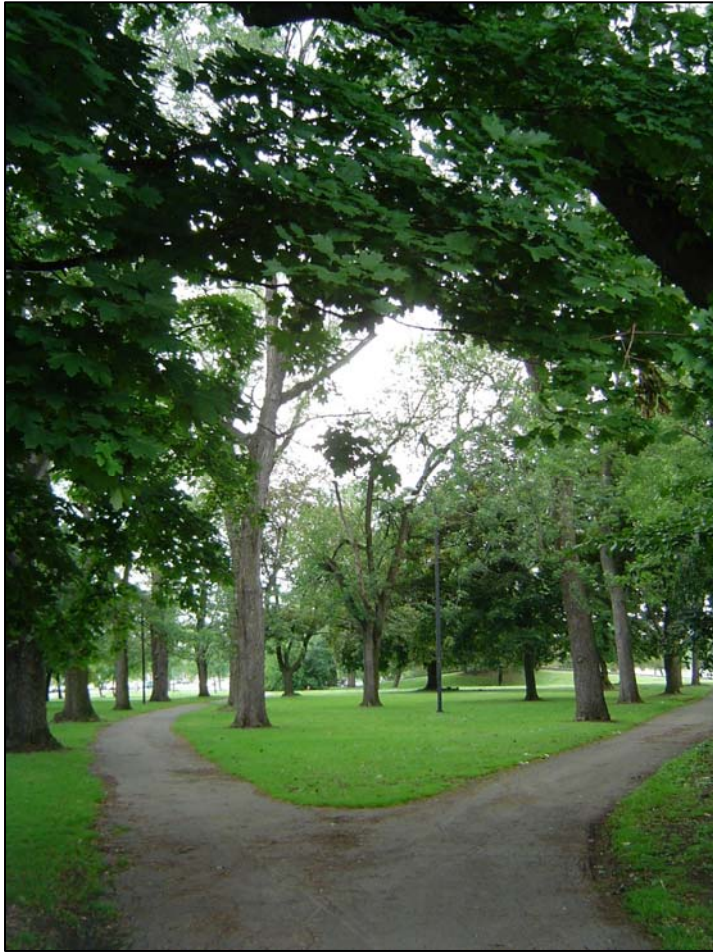


Figure 3.4 A peaceful, tree-lined pathway in the southeastern corner of Martin Luther King, Jr. Park (The Parade), along Fillmore Avenue. The greenhouse stands directly to the north (right).

For over three decades beginning in 1868, Frederick Law Olmsted and his successors were associated with Buffalo in planning its parks and urban development. In Buffalo, Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux first implemented a comprehensive series of parks and parkways that pioneered the concept of the metropolitan recreational system. Initially conceived between 1868 and 1870, it was substantially constructed by 1876, the national centennial year. Olmsted and Vaux's park system thoughtfully developed the city's original plan that had been framed by Joseph Ellicott in 1804. The Buffalo Park and Parkway system is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In August of 1868, at the request of William Dorsheimer, a prominent attorney and politician, Olmsted stopped in Buffalo on his way back to New York from Chicago where he and Vaux were engaged in laying out the suburban community of Riverside. Ten years earlier, he and Vaux had won the competition for the design of Central Park, the first extensive municipal park in America. After looking over Buffalo and its environs, Olmsted convinced Dorsheimer and his park advocate colleagues that Buffalo would be best

served by a series of separate greenspaces, rather than by a single large park. He proposed three parks in the as yet unbuilt northern part of town. In the plan he developed later with Vaux, these were called The Park (the present Delaware Park), The Front (the present Front Park), and The Parade (after 1896 known as Humboldt Park, the present Martin Luther King, Jr., Park.) (Figures 3.4-3.6). Each of these sites, as their names implied, had a different character and purpose within what Olmsted and Vaux considered a citywide park system.

The Park, which was the largest of all, expressed most fully Olmsted and Vaux's concept of nature put to civic use. It consisted of 230 acres of rolling meadowland and a 46-acre lake. Encompassed by a belt of trees and tall shrubs to screen the park landscape from the city beyond—a characteristic of all of Olmsted and Vaux's parks that has largely disappeared in



Figure 3.5 The approximate boundaries of the Broadway-Fillmore Avenue shaded in gray on the 1880 *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Erie County, NY* (New York; F.W. Beers). Note The Parade to the north. Present Fillmore Avenue, on the south side of the park, is identified as “Parkway.” Note the New York Central Railroad to the east. The railroad extended through the eastern edge of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. Note the large parcel to the east, the E. Walden Estate; Walden Avenue begins at Genesee Street.

Buffalo—The Park was to be a place that offered city dwellers the pleasures of passive recreation. Here strolling, picnicking, boating, riding, and relaxing were to be enjoyed in an atmosphere of artfully contrived natural scenery. Olmsted and Vaux believed that the contemplation and passive enjoyment of nature promoted mental and spiritual well being.

The other two parks of the system were much smaller than The Park. The Front comprised 35 acres on the high bank overlooking the opening of the Niagara River. From a broad terrace, one could view a panorama of lake and river scenery. In addition, a promenade, music pavilion, ball field, and later in its history, waterfront playgrounds and boating facilities, made The Front a popular spot. It was one of the few places where citizens could have access to the waterfront for recreation.

The Parade was located inland, considerably east of the water. As its name suggested, this greenspace was designed more for active recreation than was The Park. It included a parade ground and an area for children's games. A two-story wooden refectory building—the most elaborate of all the many park structures that Calvert Vaux was to design—was another attraction. On weekends, it accommodated large crowds who from all across the city who came here to socialize and dance. Inspired in part by beer gardens Olmsted had seen in Germany public parks, The Parade House was especially popular with the nearby neighborhood that was home to many German immigrant families. Later in the nineteenth century, Olmsted's successors remodeled the park, cutting Fillmore Avenue through its center from north to south and creating an immense circular wading pool that forms the major surface feature of the park today (Figure 3.6).



Figure 3.6 Wading pool in Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, looking southeast toward Best Street. Note the tower of St. Mary's of Sorrows in the left background.

Little is left in Martin Luther King, Jr., Park from its earliest days. By the 1930s, a casino had been added, a greenhouse had replaced the refectory, and the Museum of Science had been erected in the northwest corner of the park. In the 1980s, the city constructed the Science Magnet School behind the Museum of Science. However, historian Martin Wachadlo believes that he has discovered a remnant structure that may have been designed by Calvert Vaux in conjunction with The Parade House. Located at 1119 Genesee Street is a wooden barn that in its proportions, materials, and design, which features external chamfered bracing, resembles the sort of "Stick Style" structures that Vaux planned for public parks (Figures 3.7-3.8). Wachadlo speculates that the building might have formed a section of a long carriage house that appears on early park maps adjacent to the Parade House. When the Parade House was demolished in the early twentieth century, it is possible that this ancillary structure was sold and moved to its present site from the nearby park.

Of equal importance to the new parks were the parkways and avenues that Olmsted and Vaux planned to connect them to one another. These tributaries of the parks extended in a wide arc across the northern part of the city so that one could travel the six-mile distance from The Front to The Parade under a canopy of green. At 200 feet wide, the major parkways were much broader than the normal streets of the city and provided separate lanes for different types of traffic. Areas of turf planted with rows of overarching elms created park-like thoroughfares that were reserved for residential development along their borders. The residential parkways in Buffalo were among the first to be constructed in an American city.

Olmsted and Vaux anticipated that their park system would be eventually extended to benefit the southern part of the city. Fillmore Avenue (named for Millard Fillmore, who, as a resident of Buffalo after his presidency, aided the park movement) was eventually designated a parkway leading south from The Parade to South Park, the plans for which Olmsted, who had terminated his partnership with Vaux, outlined in 1887. Although not as grand as the earlier parkways such as Lincoln and Chapin, Fillmore Avenue was laid out through the Broadway-Fillmore area with double rows of elms on either side of a wide roadbed (Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.7 A wooden barn at 1119 Genesee Street that resembles the sort of “Stick Style” structures that Calvert Vaux planned for public parks.



Figure 3.8 Calvert Vaux's Boathouse, The Park, Buffalo NY. Note detailed stickwork. The building is no longer extant.



Figure 3.9 Looking north on Fillmore Avenue, from north of Sycamore Street. Note the width of the street and the existing tree canopy.

3.5 Immigration: The German Community

The first important immigrants to settle in Buffalo after the American-born New Englanders who laid the political and social foundations of the city came from Germany. By 1855, nearly half of the 74,000 people living Buffalo were foreign born and nearly half of them (31,000) were German. The early German community took up residence east of Main Street along the streets known as the “Fruit Belt” because the street names there bore names of different fruit trees. The great proportion of these people came to America as skilled tradesmen and they quickly prospered and added to the wealth of the growing city. After the Civil War, the increasing numbers of German immigrants, many of whom were Roman Catholic in opposition to the predominantly Protestant affiliation of the Yankee settlers, began moving eastward along Genesee Street.

The northwest corner of the Broadway-Fillmore district was home to many German families who took up residence along such streets off of Genesee as Rich (named for Gaius B. Rich, founder of the Western Savings Bank), Wilson (named for Guilford Reed Wilson, member of the Buffalo Board of Trade), and Rohr (named for Mathias Rohr, president of the *Volksfreund* German newspaper). One of the chief German developers of the area was Bavarian native, George Roetzer. Editor of the *Volksfreund* newspaper, he lived at Mills and B Street in 1870. At the time, fields of oats stretched westward from his living room window. With a keen eye for

business, Roetzer purchased the farmland he saw and began the process of laying out residential streets. Already by 1870, when Olmsted and Vaux prepared their plan for the city's parks, the area around The Parade was becoming a thoroughly German quarter of town (Figure 3.7). It is even likely that the park was located here to win the German community's support for the municipal park system. It also may be that park planners created the Parade House in response to the desire of nearby German families for a public garden of the sort that was common in German city parks.

The German character of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood near The Parade began to disappear after the First World War. Today this part of Buffalo's Germania is remembered primarily by the former church of St. Mary's of Sorrows (a.k.a. the Church of the Seven Dolors; the present King Urban Life Center) (Figure 3.10).



Figure 3.10 St. Mary of Sorrows Church at 935 Genesee Street (1887-1891; Adolphus Druiding, architect. The building is built of local Buffalo Plains blue limestone. The interior was gutted by a fire in 1947, and was reconstructed the following year to the designs of Schmill, Schmill & Hoffmeyer.

3.6 Immigration: The Polish Community



Figure 3.11 A detail of a mural (date unknown) on the façade of Al Cohen's Bakery (1132 Broadway) juxtaposing the Old World tradition of bread-making in Poland with "Little Poland" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Note the image of Poland in the upper left corner.

From its earliest days as an urban neighborhood, the Broadway-Fillmore area was home to a large community of Polish immigrants. Known in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the "Polish colony," it embraced as many as 100,000 Polish-Americans in the early twentieth century. Buffalo, in fact, had the sixth largest Polish-American community in the United States at the time³ (Figure 3.11-3.12).

The roots of Polish association with Buffalo extend back to the earliest days of the city's history. Jan Stadnicki, after whom the present Broadway was first named, was a member of the board of directors of the Holland Land Company,

the Amsterdam-based investment company that, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, owned the land that now comprises Buffalo. In the 1830s, Henry I. Glawacki, another Pole, settled in Batavia, New York, and continued survey work begun by Joseph Ellicott for the firm that succeeded the Holland Land Company as the developer of the region.

Serious Polish immigration to America began in the 1850s. At the time, there was no formal nation of Poland, for since 1772, Germany, Austria, and Russia had partitioned the country into three areas. Despite attempts by Polish patriots to throw off outside domination in 1830, 1846, 1848, and 1863, Poland did not become an independent nation until 1918. The immigrants of Polish extraction who eventually settled in Buffalo came here as German, Austrian, or Russian citizens. For many the promise of liberty as well as prosperity must have been a driving force behind their desire to live in the New World. The way of life they created here did not exist in the Old World.

³ The Black Rock area of the city held a smaller Polish-American community.

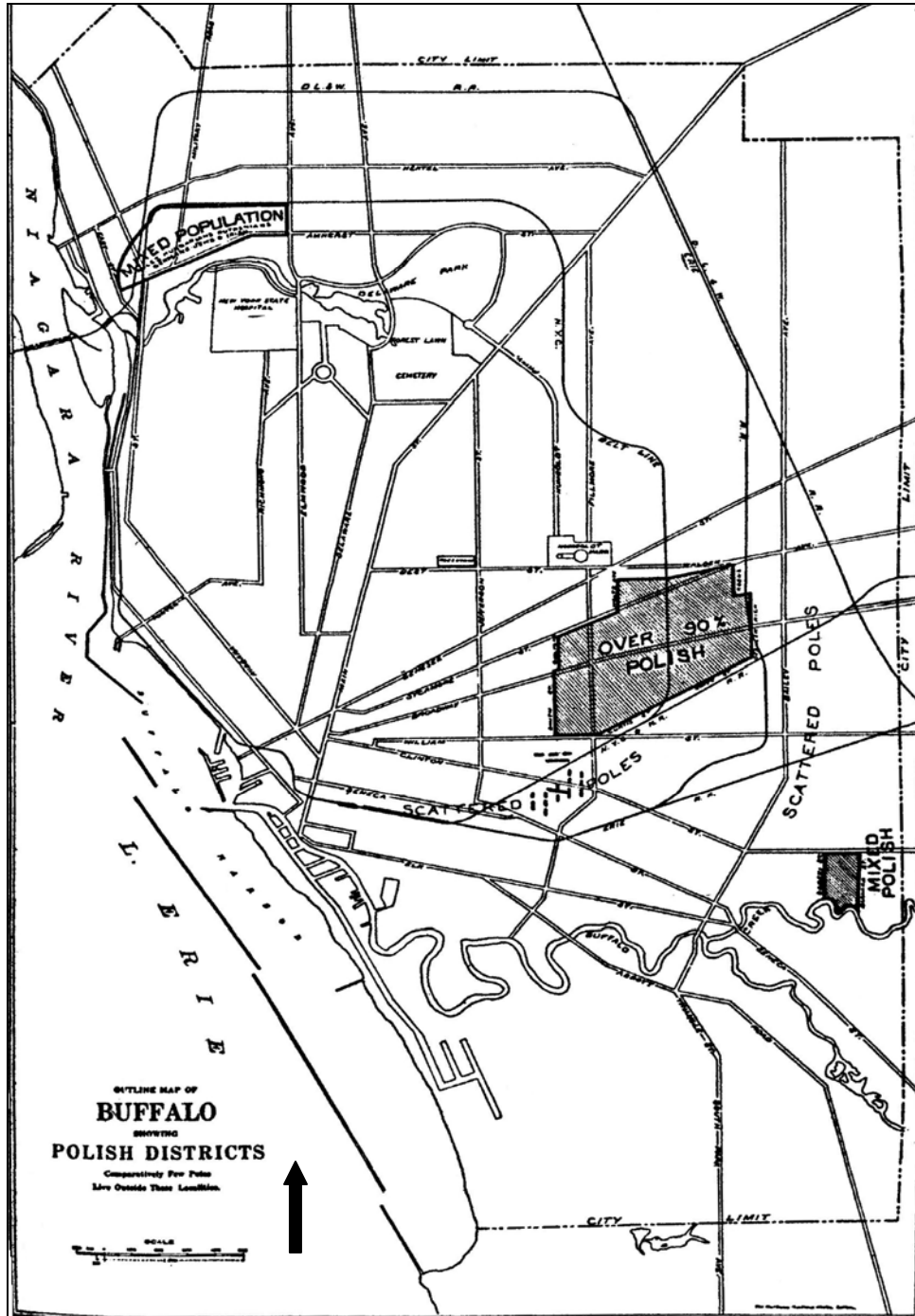


Figure 3.12 Polish Districts in the City of Buffalo (1910). Note the dense population of Poles on the East Side of Buffalo. (From John Daniels, "Americanizing Eighty Thousand Poles." *The Survey XXVI* (June 4, 1910), p.375)

While Poles settled first and in greater numbers in Chicago, Buffalo, through which immigrants passed on their way West, saw a steady rise in the number of Polish residents beginning in the 1870s. In the early 1870s there were some thirty Polish families living in the area of Broadway and Pine Streets. Slowed by the economic slump that followed the Panic of 1873, immigration to Buffalo began to pick up again by the late 1870s. During the 1880s a wave of Polish settlers arrived in the city, and the area around Broadway and Fillmore Avenue became firmly established as the main Polish quarter.⁴ “Most of the men were working as street laborers, and many of them were employed in sewing for dealers in ready made clothing,” observed John Daniels, a local physician who took a serious interest in Buffalo’s Polish community.⁵ Daniels was a man sympathetic to the devotedly Catholic Slavic men and women who inhabited the colorful East Side “foreign” enclave that had grown up in the city founded and governed mainly by white, Anglo-Saxon businessmen. Daniels was of the opinion that “more Poles came to Buffalo between 1884 and 1888 than in any four-year period” and that by 1891 there were about 50,000 of them living in Buffalo⁶. Immigration slowed to a trickle after the recession of 1893, with some arrivals even returning to Poland. Immigration picked up again in the late 1890s and again in the first decade of the new century.⁷ Daniels reported that before 1890 most of the Polish immigrants came from German Poland. After that year, more began to arrive from Galicia, the Austrian controlled portion of the country, and then from the Russian sector. By 1910, Daniels counted about fifty per cent of Buffalo’s Poles had come from German Poland, about thirty per cent from Austrian Poland, and about twenty per cent from Russian Poland. While the majority of those who had come had left behind a peasant existence, Daniels noticed that those from German Poland possessed the equivalent of an American fifth or sixth grade education. “But in native capacity,” he observed, “there is little difference between the immigrants from these three parts of Poland.”⁸ He clearly saw these industrious, hard working people as a welcome addition to the growing city of Buffalo.

While many immigrants came with a small nest egg and were soon able to fend for themselves in their adopted city, others entered the town with little or nothing to their name. During the high tide of immigration in the 1880s, many who came were in dire need of public assistance. The city erected a wooden shelter to receive these people on Fillmore Avenue just north of Broadway. A local newspaper reporter who visited the so-called Polish Barracks during the winter of 1887 wrote that “the tide of immigration from Poland was rolling into Buffalo with a rush then, and to accommodate the new arrivals a square of shanties, stables—what you will—was thrown up with the open side to the avenue. Destitution and dirt went hand in hand, and over all scarlet fever hovered. In rooms six by six lived four or five people.”⁹ The same writer was happy to report that within a few years economic conditions in the neighborhood had improved and that the makeshift shelters had been demolished. In their place stood comfortable two-story dwellings. Immigration was slowed by the First World War but continued apace after that until the passage of the Johnson immigration law of 1924. Setting low quotas on the number of

⁴ A good discussion of the early days of Polish-American immigration in Buffalo is John Daniels, “The Poles in Buffalo,” *Buffalo Express*, January 23, 1910, p 3; 10. Much of the factual information in this discussion is drawn from this source.

⁵ Daniels came to Buffalo from his native New Jersey in 1892. He devoted much of his time as a physician to philanthropic work. See “Prominent Physician Dies Following Stroke,” *News*, February 13, 1920, in *Local Biographies* scrapbook, vol. 8, p. 233, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

⁶ “Our Little Poland,” *Buffalo Express*, June 28, 1891, in *Foreign* scrapbook, vol. 2, p. 95, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ “Our Little Poland,” *op. cit.*

people who could enter the United States seeking citizenship, the law was especially harsh on Eastern Europe populations.

3.7 Land Speculation

The transformation from rural to urban landscape took place in the Broadway-Fillmore area as a result of a few individuals and corporations. First among these was Joseph Bork, a real estate developer and former treasurer of the City of Buffalo. Bork, who was a principal in the firm of Lyon, Bork & Co., was credited with initiating the development of the neighborhood as a place for Polish immigrants.¹⁰ In 1873, realizing that Polish communities usually centered around a church, Bork deeded a piece of property he owned on Peckham Street between Townsend and Wilson streets to the Catholic diocese for the establishment of St. Stanislaus parish. The church and school that were soon erected there were under the care of Father Jan Pitass, a young Polish priest from Silsia who came to be known as the godfather of the Polish colony in Buffalo. The founding of the Church of Saint Stanislaus, noted John Daniels, “was undoubtedly the principal cause of the great increase in the number of Polish immigrants which soon followed” in this part of town.¹¹ Bork, who owned the land lying between Smith Street east to the Belt Line Railway and from Howard Street north to Broadway, immediately set out to stock the area with single-story frame houses. In a three-month period, he is said to have built some 400 dwellings in the area between Smith Street, William Street, and Fillmore Avenue. These he sold for a modest down payment of \$25 to \$50. “Thanks to Mr. Bork’s policy of never renting a house, and to a natural Polish thrift,” observed Daniels, “a very large proportion of the families were rapidly acquiring the ownership of newly built little homes.”¹²

In the early 1880s, when the local economy picked up after a slump, Bork repeated this success. He even sold advanced contracts for houses to residents of the infamous Polish barracks. Now Bork turned to erecting two-story frame dwellings, telling his clients that they could help pay for the dwelling by renting part of it out. [Many new homeowners took in boarders to pay off the mortgage] “There were very few families who bought houses from him in the early 1880s,” Bork told Daniels, “that had not paid for them in two years.”¹³ Seeing the strong desire for home ownership in the Polish community that Bork’s success had confirmed, other speculators built houses on the area’s long straight side streets. In the 1890s Charles A. Sweet and Henry Box were second only to Bork in their development of the neighborhood’s housing stock. In 1890, a local newspaper reported that Box “is doing considerable building at East Buffalo. He is erecting 30 dwellings, five on Sweet Avenue, twelve on Warren Avenue, six on Arlington Avenue, five on Geneva Street, and two on Dover Street.”¹⁴

In addition to individual entrepreneurs, land associations, composed largely of Polish immigrant shareholders, operated in the area. The Home Land Association, the Queen City and Sobieski Land Company and the Pulaski Land Association¹⁵ were among a number of these progressive financial institutions that came into being in the city in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ “Why has

¹⁰ “Joseph Bork, Aged Ninety,” *Times*, May 15, 1929, in *Local Biographies* scrapbook, vol. 4, p. 53, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

¹¹ Daniels, “The Poles in Buffalo”

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “Houses and Land,” *Buffalo Express*, March 9, 1890, p. 7.

¹⁵ “Our Little Poland,” 95.

¹⁶ Others that probably operated in the neighborhood were the Broadway Improvement Company and the Fillmore Avenue Land Association.

the formation of land companies gone on so steadily for the past few years?" asked the *Buffalo Express* in 1890. The answer it received from an experienced investor was

Because they have given men with a limited amount of capital a chance to participate in the profits to be made by the subdivision and sale of large tracts. Men of moderate means who do not want to be bothered with the work of running a land syndicate, but who want their surplus where it will pay a good return, put it into lots. Others who wish to make more out of the same amount put it into a syndicate and take the profit on the sale of lots at retail. I know of one instance where a tract was bought four years ago, the shares costing \$250 each down and a few assessments afterwards, which ran them up to \$350 a share. This sold at such a good profit when cut up into building lots that each man who held a share that cost him \$350 netted him about \$2600. There are many instances where the profit has been 150, 200 and 250 per cent on shares in land companies, taking somewhere from one to two years to accomplish it. There are hundreds of companies that have been formed here, sold their land, and divided their profits. Many of those tracts are built up with houses. The bulk of the company's lots have been sold and their shareholders will realize handsomely. It requires some time and trouble to get the company running smoothly, but where care is taken about the title, and a fair degree of diligence used, the profits are sure to be good.¹⁷

A number of early Polish-American residents of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood profited significantly from land speculation. "There are many wealthy Poles, quite a number, by dealing in real estate and mortgages, having accumulated \$50,000 and \$60,000," observed a local newspaper in 1891. The paper went on to enumerate some of the most prosperous of the group:

The richest is Father Pitass, without a doubt, for his possessions are reckoned at nearly half a million. Then there is Jacob Johnson, a Pole with an English name, who lives on Peckham Street; F. Gorski, who has a fine brick house on Townsend Street; A. Kakwaszki who lives also on Peckham Street . . . and M. Makowski, who lives on Broadway.¹⁸

3.8 Religious Institutions

The construction of Roman Catholic churches was an integral part of the history of the growth and development of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. Here church life was synonymous with homelife. "As for the principal Polish district," remarked John Daniels in 1910, "its growth up to the present, in respect both to geographical extension and numbers, has been roughly marked by the erection of the churches."¹⁹ Architecturally, these sacred buildings, several of which were designed by the Buffalo architectural firm of Schmill & Gould, as a group are the most imposing structures in the neighborhood. Their tall spires punctuate the local urban landscape, imparting special character to the neighborhood much as the elegant spires of Sir Christopher Wren's parish churches do to central London. Monumental in scale, these rough-hewn stone edifices in harsh Medieval styles speak of durability and permanence amidst the sea of modest frame dwellings that surround them (Figure 3.13-3.14). But more and more these once proud outposts of urbanization are becoming unloved and forgotten, the victims of suburban flight that in the last forty years has turned many area houses to abandoned property.

¹⁷ "Houses and Land," *Buffalo Express*, February 23, 1890, p. 8.

¹⁸ "Our Little Poland," *Buffalo Express*, June 28, 1891, in *Foreign* scrapbook, vol. 2, pp. 95-96, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library.

¹⁹ Daniels, "The Poles in Buffalo."



Figure 3.13 (left)
Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church at 161 Clark Street towers above the neighboring workers' cottages.

Figure 3.14 (below)
A view of the church photographed from the concourse of the former New York Central Terminal.



By all accounts, the church of Saint Stanislaus at 348 Peckham Street was the mother church of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. As mentioned above, the original wooden church building went up in 1873 under the supervision of the energetic pastor, Father Pitass. This simple building with a central bell tower and two levels of round headed windows lighting the auditorium (ironically, the building called to mind another settlement period church, the seventeenth-century St. Luke's Parish Church in Smithfield County, Virginia) served the parish until 1886 when the present flint and limestone edifice in the Romanesque style was built to the designs of T. O. Sullivan. (The twin towers, rising nearly two hundred feet above the street, were added in 1908 by architects Schmill & Gould.) The church is still regarded by many as the central house of worship for Polish-American Catholics in Buffalo (Figure 3. 15-16).

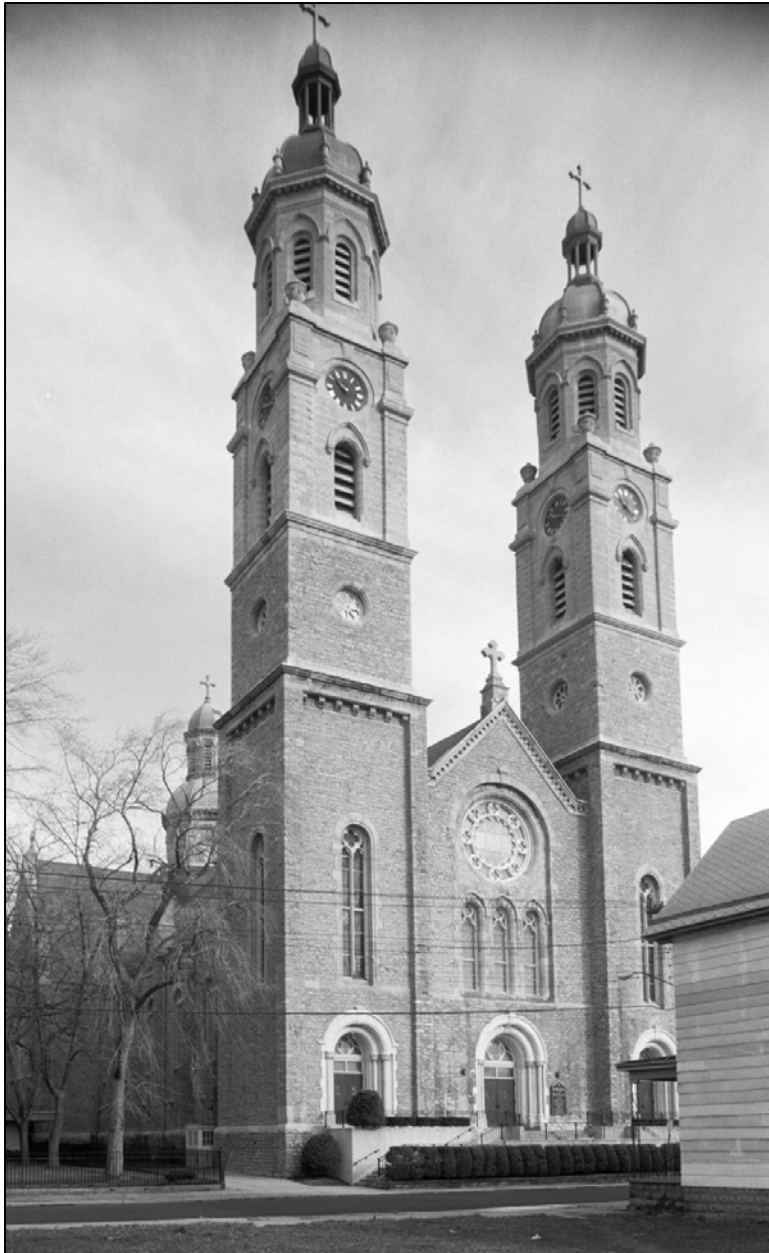


Figure 3.15 (left)
St. Stanislaus at 348
Peckham Street (1886; T.O
Sullivan, architect)

Figure 3.16 (right)
Towers (1908) designed by
Schmill & Gould, architects

The second church to go up in the neighborhood was Saint Adalbert's Basilica at 208 Stanislaus Street. The first house of worship at the site—a farmer's cornfield at the time—was a small frame structure erected by the parishioners in 1886. Four years later, Raymond Huber designed the present red brick Romanesque style building with majestic twin towers and a dome over the crossing (Figure 3.17). Schmill & Gould built the large H-shaped parochial school (1906) around the corner on Rohrer Street as well as the Neo-Classical rectory (1901) next door. The enterprising Buffalo businessman Joseph Bork seized the opportunity that the erection of the new church afforded and built some 300 houses before the first church opened its doors to worshippers; within a year he had added another 800 dwellings to the parish neighborhood. The parish flourished, and in 1907 Pope Pius X elevated it to the status of Basilica, granting the church spiritual rights that St. Peter's Basilica in Rome possesses. Sadly, today, while the church building is well maintained, the parish is one of the poorest in Buffalo.

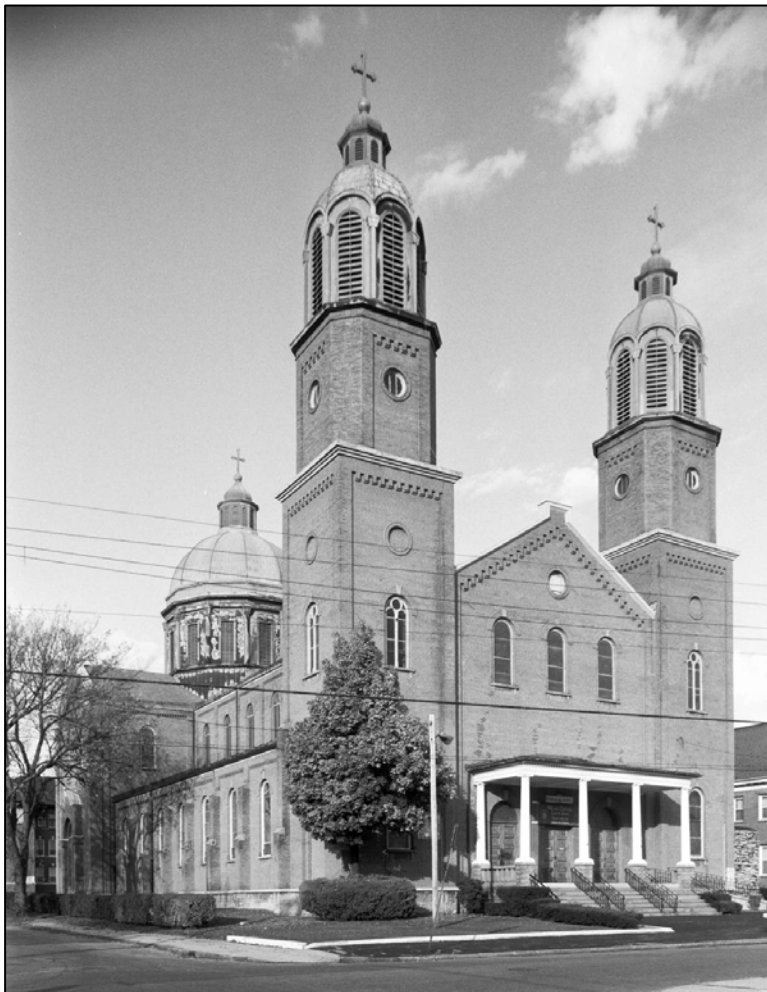


Figure 3.17 Saint Adalbert's Basilica at 208 Stanislaus Street (1890-1891; Raymond Huber, architect).

St. John Kanty church, while outside of the Broadway-Fillmore district, opened in 1890 on the corner of Brownell Street and Broadway to serve residential development south of Broadway. In 1893, the diocese erected the Church of the Transfiguration on Stanislaus and Mills Streets to serve the growing number of communicants in the already developed section of the neighborhood (Figure 3.18). It was the only church erected by the Austrian Poles from Galicia. Designed by local architect Carl Schmill in the German Gothic style, the red brick and local Medina sandstone church is classified as a landmark by the City of Buffalo. Adjacent to the church, which unfortunately is no longer used for services, are parish buildings including a school, convent, and rectory, a grouping that was typical of nineteenth-century urban church complexes.



Figure 3.18 Church of the Transfiguration at 929 Sycamore Street (1893, Carl Schmill, architect). This was the only major Polish church in the city designed in the Gothic style, all the others being done in Romanesque or Renaissance styles. The church closed in 1991, and has since stood vacant and deteriorating.

A later Roman Catholic parish established in the area was Corpus Christi Church, dedicated in 1909 at 161 Clark Street (Figure 3.13). Schmill & Gould's Romanesque style design for the church has impressive twin-towers on the façade and sheer, cliff-like walls of red Medina sandstone. The dwindling congregation recently received a reprieve when the Pauline Fathers, headquartered in Czestowchowa, Poland assumed pastoral responsibilities for the church in January 2004.

When the congregation of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Church (Figure 3.19) required a new building in 1916, they turned to Wladyslaw H. Zawadzki, an architect who designed many buildings in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood where he was a resident. Although the congregation never erected an independent church, they did build a combined church and school building. Two other Catholic churches were erected in the early twentieth century outside of the Broadway-Fillmore district but were intended to serve families that lived within its boundaries. In 1908, the diocese built St. Luke's on the corner of Sycamore Street and Miller Avenue. Unfortunately, the church was closed in 1993. Saints Peter and Paul, at the corner of Smith and William Streets, was opened in 1910 to accept parishioners from the new residential area south of Broadway.



Figure 3.19 Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Church at 1040 Sycamore Street (1916; Wladyslaw H. Zawadzki, architect).

Together with these Polish Catholic congregations, German Catholics, who lived in the northern part of the Broadway-Fillmore district, worshipped at St. Mary of Sorrows Church on Genesee at Rich Street (Figure 3.10). Built in 1887 in the Rhenish Romanesque style to the designs of German-born Chicago architect Adolphus Druiding, it served the ethnic German families that until the mid twentieth century lived along the quiet streets north of Genesee Street. Closed by the diocese in the mid-1980s, the church was restored and reopened in the following decade as the King Urban Life Center. This imposing limestone edifice is a local landmark, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places,

Although the religious character of the area remained predominately Roman Catholic throughout its history as the Polish colony, some Poles belonged to different denominations. Among the largest churches to be erected by non-Roman Catholic Polish immigrants was Sidney Woodruff's Holy Mother of the Rosary National Catholic Cathedral (Figure 3.20). (The National Catholics did not want to be under control of the German and Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy.) Erected in 1894 on Sobieski Street at Sycamore, this impressive twin towered Gothic building constructed of rusticated Medina sandstone ceased to function as a Christian church in the 1980s. Polish Baptists commissioned John H. Coxhead in 1906 to design their small, brick church at 821 Fillmore (Figure 3.21). Coxhead, a Buffalo architect who would achieve a national reputation, designed the First Polish Baptist Church (a.k.a. Church of Our Savior) in a simple round-arched style.

The German community in the northern part of the Broadway-Fillmore district was home to several Protestant congregations. In 1915, German Evangelicals hired Edward Moeller to design a Gothic style, cruciform church that still stands 623 Best Street, a conspicuous location near the southwest corner of Olmsted and Vaux's Parade (At the time, the park was known as Humboldt Park, a name that honored the German-American community by paying tribute to Alexander von Humboldt, the famous nineteenth-century German geographer. The church is presently known as the Young Tabernacle Holiness Church). Its squat, spireless tower in the English Gothic style was perhaps intended to signal that the Evangelical congregation preferred to worship in the language of its adopted country rather than in German. The congregation of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church chose another prominent location for their church at Broadway and Fox Street and did not give up the use of German in its services until the 1960s. Unfortunately, the church was destroyed by fire in 1999. The remaining parish hall, a large red brick and stone building in the Perpendicular Gothic style, remains at the site, but is now abandoned. Other members of the German-American community resident in the Broadway-Fillmore district erected Salem Evangelical Reformed Church at 413 Sherman Street in 1907 (Figure 3.22). Limited to a tight lot on a side street, the architect, Jacob Oberkirker, scaled his yellow brick, single-towered design to its residential streetscape.

The Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood and the areas to the west and north were in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century home to an immigrant Jewish community. Many of these were Russian and Polish Jews, who, in the words of historian Mark Goldman, had "far more in common with the Italians and Poles than with the German Jews on the West Side who had, through success in business and the professions, become some of the wealthier residents of Buffalo."²⁰ Perhaps out of a desire to upstage the West Side Jewish community, when the Achavas Achim congregation in 1912 contemplated building a synagogue at 833 Fillmore Avenue they turned to the Buffalo society architect Henry Osgood Holland for an up-to-date design (Figure 3.23). The congregation continued to use the modern styled building until the

²⁰ Mark Goldman, *High Hope: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo, New York* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), p. 212.

middle of the twentieth century, by which time most of the East Side Jewish population had moved to the North Park area of the city.



Figure 3.20 (left)

Holy Mother of the Rosary Polish National Cathedral at 170 Sobieski (1903; Sidney Woodruff, architect).

Figure 3.21 (below)

First Polish Baptist Church 821 Fillmore Avenue (1906-1907; John H. Coxhead, architect).





Figure 3.22 Salem Evangelical Reformed Church at 413 Sherman Street (1907; Jacob Oberkirker, architect).



Figure 3.23 Achavas Achim, synagogue at 833 Fillmore Avenue (1912; Henry Osgood Holland).

3.9 Residential Architecture

The building type that predominates in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood is the house. Most of these are modest frame structures of one or two stories. Many of these are double flats and most have extension additions at the rear. More imposing dwellings are located chiefly along Fillmore Avenue. The house types fall into the following categories: one-story dwellings, often with telescoping additions stretching to the rear of the lot; two story dwellings, also often having rear additions; two-story dwellings; and two story doubles with self-contained flats on each level. Unlike the neighborhood's religious and commercial buildings, the vast majority of the housing stock in the Broadway-Fillmore area would have been erected to plans available to builders in books or by mail. Professionals designed few dwellings here. "Very few architects ever hear of these buildings," bemoaned a local architectural draftsman in 1889, "on account of arrangements made with the planning-mills and contractors for the drawing of plans for nothing. Of course, they have the contract to build."²¹ And at the time of their construction, most of these buildings housed more than a single family, for by the turn of the twentieth century, the area was terribly overcrowded. An investigation undertaken by John Daniels in 1910 found that in

twenty-six per cent of the houses, containing thirty-six per cent of the entire number of people, there are two or more persons to a room. . . . And of course there are a great number of cases in which the overcrowding is far in excess of the average. In twenty-seven houses visited with the tenement inspector, there were sixteen families living between three and four to a room, and three families living four or more to a room.²²

The most inexpensive type of dwelling in the area is the single-story house with telescoping rear additions. (In 1891 a house of this sort cost \$885 to build and might rent for \$9 or \$10 per month.²³) In 1910, John Daniels described this common sort of basementless house

as set back about ten feet in from the side-walk, 22 feet wide in front, running back at that width for 30 to 32 feet, then narrowing to eighteen feet and extending back another 30 feet—making the dwelling proper 60 to 62 feet in depth. Joined on behind is an unplastered summer kitchen, so-called, about twelve by twelve feet in dimensions, then two water-closets, about three feet wide, and two, three or four woodsheds about four feet in width, making the entire structure 86 to 92 feet long and bringing it back close to the rear lot line.

A number of examples survive in the smaller streets of the neighborhood, such as those at 135 Coit Street (ca. 1880), 422 Wilson Street (ca. 1890), and 279 Strauss Street (ca. 1885; having well-preserved exterior decorative elements [Figure 3.24]). Other quite early ones are at 343 Sherman Street (ca. 1888, with original Eastlake style window and door surrounds on the front [Figure 3.25]), 400 Sherman Street (ca. 1875, with Italianate windows), and 512 Sherman Street (ca. 1870, a fine brick cottage erected for a German laborer (Figure 3.26). Daniels described these types of houses—the first to go up in the neighborhood—as comprising of eight rooms and an attic. "As a rule," he reported, "the four bedrooms are seven by seven in dimensions, and the larger rooms fifteen by fifteen. Three families usually occupy a house of this style, one family having the two rooms at the front, another the two rooms behind these, and the owner the four rooms in the rear."²⁴

²¹ H. S. Pickett, "Buffalo," *Architectural Era*, 3(September 1889), p. 195.

²² John Daniels, "Americanizing Eighty Thousand Poles," *The Survey*, 24(June 4, 1910), pp. 380-381.

²³ "Building Notes," *Real Estate and Building News*, 2(June 1891), p. 6.

²⁴ Daniels, "Americanizing Eight Thousand Poles," p. 380.



Figure 3.24
279 Strauss Street
(ca. 1885)



Figure 3.25
343 Sherman Street
(ca. 1888)



Figure 3.26
512 Sherman Street
(ca. 1870)

A second type of dwelling that Daniels surveyed was the two-story house with eight rooms on each floor. “As most of these buildings have been constructed since the passage of the tenement house law of 1901,” noted Daniels, “the bedrooms in them are a little larger [than those in single story houses], as a rule seven by ten feet, but the other rooms are the same.” A number of houses of this type, which Daniels said generally accommodated six families, survive in good condition in the district. Undoubtedly, some of these dwellings were built for single family occupancy, especially those on the more prominent streets. The American Four Square style dwellings at 673 Best Street (1915) (Figure 3.27), 818 Fillmore Avenue (1913), and the gable-fronted house at 960 Sycamore Street (1907-1908) are representative of the type.

Daniels identified a third type of dwelling as intermediary between these two. He described it as having two stories at the front and a single story at the rear and usually sheltering four or five families. One assumes that the simple saddleback roofed, clapboard buildings at 51 B Street (ca. 1890), 127 Lathrop (ca. 1890), 312 Loepere Street ca. 1890) (Figure 3.28), and 320 Sherman Street came under Daniels scrutiny. They are very good surviving examples of the type he described.

While builders using standardized plans were responsible for most of the houses in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood, local architects often designed residences for more well-to-do residents of the district. Most of these larger, more expensive single-family dwellings follow architectural styles popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Most are located along the major neighborhood thoroughfares, Fillmore Avenue, Best Street, and Genesee Street. “Fillmore Avenue, north of Broadway,” observed a local newspaper reporter in the early twentieth century, “is to the Polish district what Delaware Avenue is to the West Side.”²⁵ The Charles Egloff (1913-1914) house at 761 Best Street by Geroge J. Dietel, who together with his partner, John Wade, designed Buffalo’s city hall, is a good example of the so-called Four Square style. In 1915, architect Stephen Clergy, about whom little is known, built a well-preserved Craftsman bungalow for Peter German at 669 Best Street. The remaining architectural evidence indicates that Fillmore Avenue was the most prestigious address in the Polish-American community on the East Side. The Mansard-roofed carriage house (ca. 1892) at 537A Fillmore is perhaps the oldest surviving evidence of large residences on the street (Figure 3.29). (The house to which it was a dependency is now heavily altered.) The simple but ample dwelling that Polish-American architect Wladyslaw H. Zawadzki designed in 1910 for real estate agent Stanislaus S. Nowicki at 615 Fillmore as well as the similar house that builder John Waszewski erected in 1911 for Michael Frost at 812 Fillmore stand today as reminders of the street’s former prominence as a residential address that formed part of Olmsted’s parkway system. One of the areas most prominent members, Dr. Francis E. Fronczak, Buffalo’s respected health commissioner, lived for many years at 806 Fillmore Avenue in a house originally erected ca. 1895 for Dr. Irving Potter (Figure 3.30).

Like other dwellings in the area and along other once-important city thoroughfares turned commercial streets, the Potter-Fronczak house exists today behind a store front addition. In 1941, architect Joseph Fronczak designed the two-story brick wing that occupies the former front yard of the dwelling in the Colonial Revival style that was still popular then among traditionalist architects. A similar remodeling changed the substantial dwelling that Sidney H. Woodruff designed in 1905 at 801 Fillmore for attorney Leon J. Nowak from residential to commercial use in the late 1940s. The large frame dwelling erected at 798 Fillmore (Figure 3.31) in 1895 for Charles Belzer, a principal in the Broadway Brewing and Malting Company, was later occupied by the prominent East Side architect Zawadzki. Resident here until his

²⁵ “Progress of the Poles,” *Buffalo Express*, February 6, 1910, p. 7.

death in 1926, Zawadzki died before the pleasing two-story brick and tile store was added to the front of the structure in 1936.



Figure 3.27
673 Best Street (1915)



Figure 3.28
312 Loepere (ca. 1890)



Figure 3.29
537A Fillmore Avenue
(ca. 1892)



Figure 3.30
Potter - Fronczak House
at 806 Fillmore Avenue
(ca. 1895; Colonial
Revival brick veneer office
and dwelling was built in
1941, Joseph Fronczak,
architect)



Figure 3.31
Zawadzki residence and
office at 798 Fillmore
Avenue (1895; storefront
addition, 1936)

3.10 Commercial Buildings

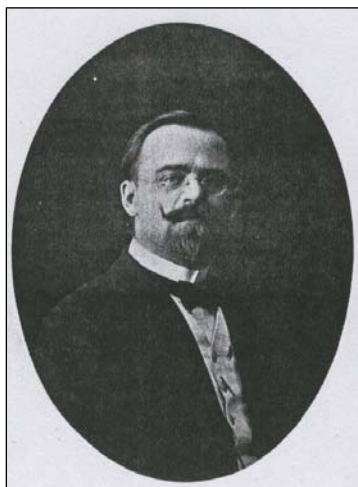


Figure 3.32
Władysław H. Zawadzki

If Fillmore Avenue was the major residential address in the Broadway-Fillmore district, Broadway assumed the role of the most important commercial thoroughfare. The widest street in the city, Broadway, at the turn of the twentieth century, was an extended avenue of commercial activity; the area around the intersection with Fillmore Avenue was one of its busiest sections. Nearby, architect W. H. Zawadzki, the most important Polish-American architect in Buffalo, designed a number of buildings that as a group constitute his best work (Figure 3.31). Born in Poznan in 1872, Zawadzki immigrated to Buffalo as a young man. Before opening his own practice in the neighborhood, he worked for the American Bridge Company and the Lackawanna Steel Company. Among his buildings on Broadway are the former Polonia Hotel (1906; later remodeled as a bank) at 1067 Broadway, diminutive Romanesque style Hodkiewicz-Cohen Bakery (1906) at 1132 Broadway, and the Renaissance style Lipowicz's wholesale grocery store (1912; an earlier section by an unknown architect was built ca. 1900) at 1201 Broadway.

Several other individuals in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood advertised themselves as architects. Among them were men of German extraction, such as Charles A. Wettstein, William G. Reimann, and Joseph Giegand (the latter designed a number of buildings associated with the German-American community of Buffalo, including St. Mary of Sorrows rectory at 333 Guilford Street). Others were Polish-Americans, such as Anthony Cwiklinski, Stanley Urbanowicz, and Joseph Zakrzewski (who designed several ecclesiastic and commercial buildings in the city).

Metropolitan Buffalo architects also got commissions to design commercial buildings on Broadway in the Polish section of town. Notable examples are Esenwein & Johnson's elegant Adamesque style People's Bank of Buffalo (1925) (Figure 3.33) at 904 Broadway, Robert North's monumental Neo-Classical Union Stockyards Bank (1909-1910) at 949 Broadway, and Bley & Lyman's temple-form M&T Bank (1923-1924) at 1036 Broadway. All of these buildings gave Broadway an air of architectural distinction and urbanism in an area otherwise comprised primarily of modest residential buildings.

One of the largest commercial buildings in the neighborhood was Bley & Lyman's John C. Eckhardt department store (1940) at the northwest corner of Broadway and Fillmore Avenue (Figure 3.34). (Eckhardt, who was known as "the East Buffalo merchant prince," had had a business at the northwest corner of Broadway and Fillmore Avenue since the 1880s.²⁶) Later known as Kobacher's and then Sears, the sleek cubic building with ribbon windows is one of the best examples of early modern architectural design to survive in the city. The same firm also made local architectural history in 1940 when it designed the first drive-in bank in the city. The single-story, brick and stone Art Deco Buffalo Industrial Bank building still stands at 690 Fillmore Avenue (Figure 3.35), although it has gone through many adaptive reuses since its first days as a bank. "The drive-in service," reported a local newspaper when the bank opened, ". . . is the primary feature of the new bank [and] consists of an auto-teller window built into the side of the

²⁶ "Building News," *Real Estate and Building News*, 2(April 1891), p. 2.

building facing a driveway which runs between Fillmore Avenue and Wilson Street. . . . All kinds of business . . . can be made at the new special automobile service window.”²⁷ Another distinguished small bank building in the neighborhood is Dietel & Wade’s Art Deco Liberty Bank (ca. 1930), which now stands vacant at 892 Genesee Street.



Figure 3.33. Esenwein & Johnson’s elegant Adamesque style People’s Bank of Buffalo (1925) at 904 Broadway.



Figure 3.34 Bley & Lyman’s John C. Eckhardt department store (1940) at the northwest corner of Broadway and Fillmore Avenue (950 Broadway). It one of the most significant early Modern buildings surviving in Buffalo.

²⁷ “Industrial Bank Opens Fillmore Drive-In Branch,” *Courier-Express*, June 3, 1941, in *Banks* scrapbook, vol. 2, p. 10, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library.

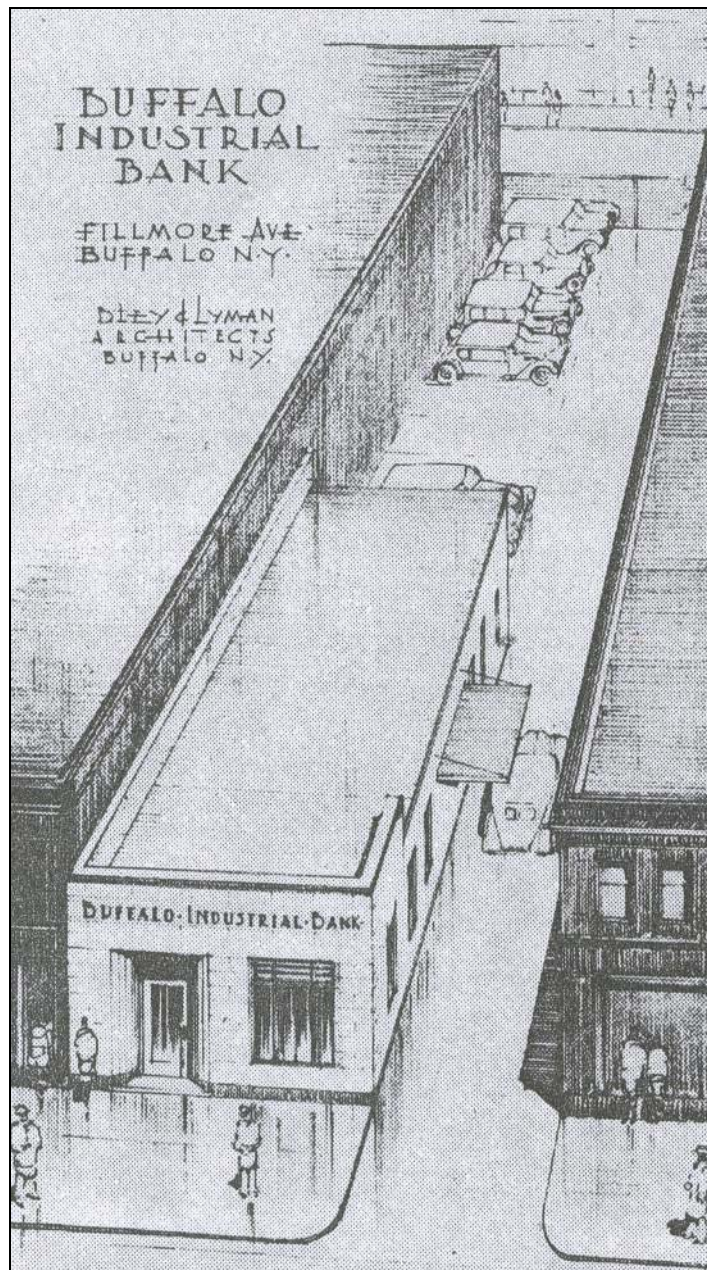


Figure 3.35 An architect's drawing of the Buffalo Industrial Bank Building at 690 Fillmore Avenue (1941; Bley & Lyman, architects). The bank was the first in Buffalo, and only the second in the eastern part of the country, to feature a drive-in teller window. (From Courier Express 12-14-1940)

3.11 Schools, Public Buildings, and Social Welfare Organizations

The city erected two public schools in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1901, architect Charles D. Swan designed the handsome three-story red brick PS 24 (later PS 59) near The Parade at 769 Best Street. In 1914, city erected PS 57, designed in a simple Neo-Classical style by the city architect, Howard Beck, at 243 Sears Street. It was the first elementary school in the city to have a swimming pool. But the Catholic Church built most of the schools in the district. Most of these were economically and substantially constructed, if they were reticent in architectural expression. The present St. Stanislaus School (1955; architect unknown) began life as Bishop Colton High School for Girls; Corpus Christi School was designed in 1928 by architect Carl Schmill, who designed a number of Catholic churches in the city; St. Mary's of Sorrows School at 30 Rich Street went up in 1955 to designs by Scmill and Hoffmeyer; the severely simple Richardsonian Holy Mother of the Rosary School (present Darul-Uloom Al-Madania, Inc. School) at 150 Sobieski Street went up in 1895-1896 to designs by John H. Coxhead; Transfiguration School at 34 Stanislaus Street went up in 1915 at 34 Stanislaus Street to designs by Władysław H. Zawadzki, who imparted a certain Classical appearance to the building. The most architecturally interesting example of this type of building is Carl Schmill's St. Adalbert School (1906) at 208 Stanislaus Street (Figure 3.36). The large, three-story structure, now converted to residences, has a boldly projecting roof that gives the building a pleasing, Italian Renaissance appearance.



Figure 3.36 Carl Schmill's St. Adalbert School (1906) at 208 Stanislaus Street.

Related to the religious educational buildings were a number of rectories and convents that the church erected in conjunction with them to house the staff needed to maintain parish operations. As a group, these rectories form a distinct building type that helped define the architectural character of the neighborhood. Joseph Giegand's St Mary of Sorrows rectory (1922) at 333 Guilford Street (now used for residences), with its broad hipped roof hovering over the three story brick structure on paired brackets, is perhaps the finest of the group (Figure 3.37). Giegand also designed the parish convent at 20 Rich Street in a similar style. Most of these structures stood out from their neighboring dwellings by their scale and architectural detailing. When Carl Schmill designed the St. Stanislaus rectory (1912-1914) at 348 Peckham Street, he employed costly ashlar limestone for the walls and developed a two-story bay window into a third-level stone dormer. For St. Stanislaus convent (1917) at 562 Fillmore Avenue, W.H. Zawadzki modified the Georgian Revival style to give an air of comfortable domesticity to the large multiple dwelling. Carl Schmill decorated St. Adalbert's rectory (1901) at 208 Stanislaus Street with quoins and a pedimented entrance. His Corpus Christi rectory (1900) at 199 Clark Street has a tall Mansard roof above a continuous cornice and a Palladian window in the main gable. Schmill repeated these features on his nearby Corpus Christi convent (1906).



Figure 3.37 Joseph Giegand's St Mary of Sorrows rectory (1922) at 333 Guilford Street

In addition to schoolhouses, Buffalo municipal government was represented architecturally in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood by two firehouses, a police station, and a large public market. While in no way different from such facilities elsewhere in town, these buildings, all of which have been disaffected, contributed to the urban fabric of the area. Erected in 1886 to designs by Hugh MacDiarmid, the simple, flat-roofed Engine Company No 18 station at 1032 Fillmore Avenue is one of the oldest buildings in the neighborhood. More studied are the plans that Howard L. Beck, the city architect, drew plans for both the gable-fronted Hook and Ladder Company No. 11 building at 636 Fillmore Avenue and Police Station No. 8 (1915) at 647 Fillmore Avenue. And the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood preserves Buffalo's last public market. The Broadway Market at 981 Broadway is a two-level, concrete structure with the market on the ground floor and a parking deck above. Erected in 1956 to designs by the Buffalo firm of James, Meadows and Howard, the uncompromisingly functional structure replaced an earlier market that the city erected on the site in 1889.

In addition to designing important commercial buildings in the area, W. H. Zawadzki drew plans for the three most important Polish-American neighborhood social and cultural centers: the Renaissance style Dom Polski Building (1905-1906, an institution modeled on the YMCA) at 1081 Broadway, the Polish Singing Circle Building (1907) at 1170 Broadway, and impressive, three-story Polish Union Hall (1914) at 761 Fillmore Avenue (Figure 3.38).



Figure 3.38 W. H. Zawadzki 's Polish Union Hall (1914) at 761 Fillmore Avenue. Built as the brick and glazed terra cotta home of the Polish Union of America (Una Polska), a national mutual benefit organization that was headquartered here.

3.12 Industrial and Transportation Buildings

Most of the residents of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood earned their living in the many industries that had made Buffalo one of the leading manufacturing centers of the country in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some of these businesses were located within the boundaries of the district. All were housed in flat-roofed, multi-windowed brick structures typical of industrial architecture of the period. The large A. Schreiber Brewing Company at 662 Fillmore Avenue (presently converted to commercial use) consisted of a series of simple brick units erected at various times between 1904 and 1954. The central section, distinguished by a pediment, was designed by W.H. Zawadzki in 1909 to house the company offices and the bottling works. The largest Polish-American business in Buffalo, the brewery was one of the most successful of numerous local breweries. From 1905 to 1915, Esenwein & Johnson, one of the leading Buffalo architectural firms, planned the large, three-story factories for the Duffy Silk Company building (later Guilford Manufacturing Company) at 207 Guilford Street (Figure 3.39). and at 1270 Broadway. Other industrial complexes that are now vacant are the two-story C. F. Ernst's Sons Iron Works (1900-1919) at 53 Lathrop Street and the sprawling single-story workshops of the Lumen Bearing Company brass foundry (ca. 1900-1919) at 197 Lathrop Street (Figure 3.40). Nearby, the three concrete coal silos of the United Fuel and Supply Company (1938) (Figure 3.41), also stand vacant, as do many of their more monumental cousins the great grain elevators along the Buffalo River.

Also empty and evocative of better times is the grandest structure in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood, the New York Central Terminal at the eastern end of Paderewski Drive. Designed by Alfred Felheimer & Steward Wagner of New York, the limestone and brick Art Deco station, which opened in 1929, was the first important commission of this firm that would design many passenger railroad stations around the country (Figures 3.42-3.43). The complex they designed consists of grand vaulted spaces comprising entrance lobbies, waiting room, restaurant, and track passages. At the northwest corner of the site, they erected a 17-story skyscraper tower built to house railway offices. The limestone and brick skyscraper with setbacks bid to outdo in modernity Buffalo's new City Hall of nearly the same date on Niagara Square. One of the busiest passenger railway terminals in the country—ancillary buildings sheltered the functions of a great railroad center—the station, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is also a National Historic Landmark.

Only tangentially related to the history of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood—it was located here, said a contemporary, because “the only satisfactory solution to the problem [of situating a new metropolitan station] was to be found in the location of a station at some point along the main line, this giving Buffalo the service and advantage of the high-class through trains which could not make use of a station at any of the locations which had previously been considered”²⁸—the mammoth structure defines the neighborhood in the minds of most Western New Yorkers. And for many, in its potential for adaptive reuse resides the renewal of the once vibrant neighborhood that it overshadows.

²⁸ Garnet R. Cousins, “Beacon at Mile 435.9-1: A Station too Late, too Far,” *Trains* (September 1985), p. 25. To accommodate the new station, the city laid out Memorial Drive (formerly Lindbergh Drive) to run diagonally northeast between William Street and Broadway and widened Lovejoy Street, which was renamed Paderewski Drive, from Johnson Street, near Broadway, directly east to the station.



Figure 3.39 Esenwein and Johnson' three-story Duffy Silk Company building at 207 Guilford Street.

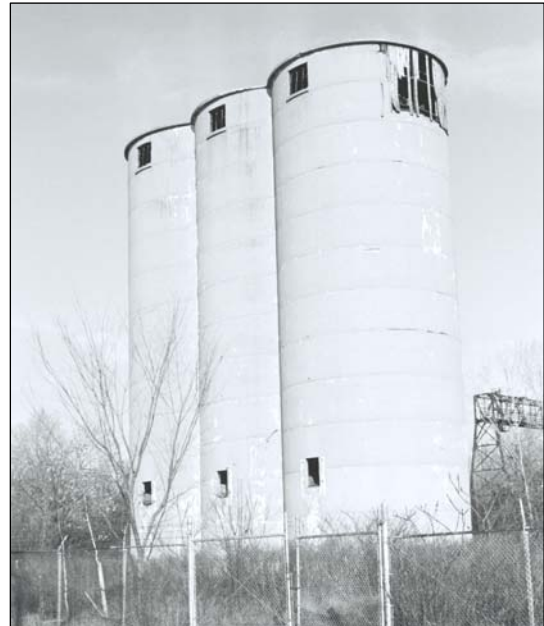


Figure 3.41 Three concrete coal silos of the United Fuel and Supply Company (1938) on Lathrop St. north of Sycamore St.

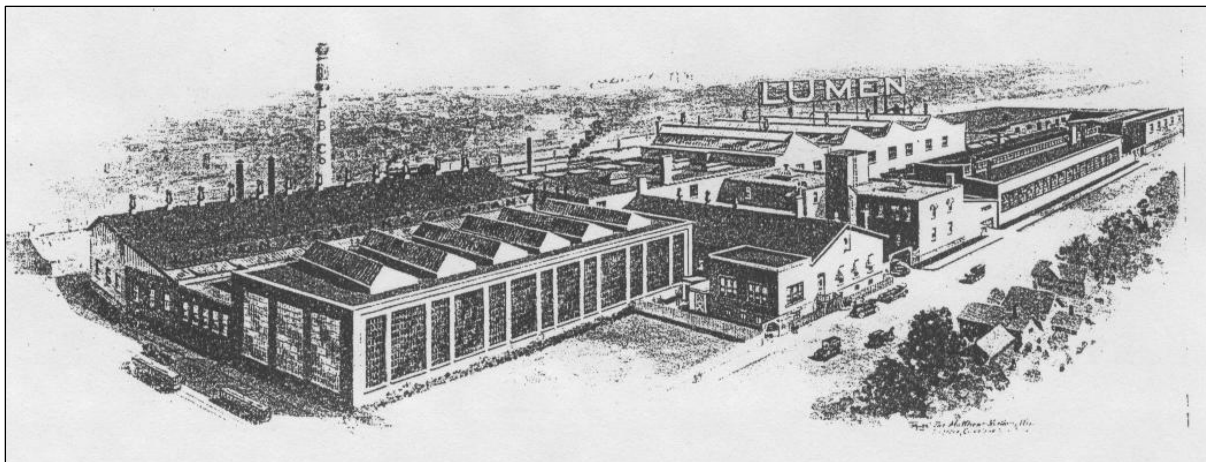


Figure 3.40 Lumen Bearing Company brass foundry (ca. 1900-1919) at 197 Lathrop Street



Figure 3.42 A current photograph of Alfred Felheimer and Steward Wagner's limestone and brick, Art Deco New York Central Terminal, which opened in 1929.



Figure 3.43 The interior of New York Central Terminal on its 75th Anniversary celebration on June 26, 2004. Note the impressive barrel-vaulted ceiling.

3.13 The Evolving Ethnic Makeup of the Broadway-Fillmore Neighborhood

Since the 1950s, the ethnic composition of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood has been changing. As many Polish-American families moved to the suburbs, their place was taken first by African-Americans and, more recently, by Arab-American and other immigrant groups. In the early twenty-first century, the African-American community predominates in the Broadway-Fillmore area. Many of its people occupy the modest homes that once sheltered immigrants from Austria, Russia, and Germany, although not in the numbers that produced the severe overcrowding that John Daniels observed a century ago. Acknowledging the modern ethnic makeup of the neighborhood, the city changed the name of Olmsted and Vaux's Parade, from Humboldt Park to Martin Luther King, Jr., Park and assisted the local community with the creation there of a memorial to the slain civil rights leader (Figure 3.44).



Figure 3.44 Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, Martin Luther King Jr. Park, with C.D. Swan's P.S. No. 24 (1901) in the background (769 Best Street).

Like their predecessors, the latter-day residents of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood place a high value on church life. "On every block, on every corner, you'll pretty much find a church," notes a local minister.²⁹ A number of new congregations have come into being in the area to serve this new population, although none have erected new church buildings. Among them are the Open Praise Baptist Church which since the mid-1990s has occupied the former Polish Union building at 761 Fillmore Avenue (Figure 3.38), One in Christ Church which is housed in a former commercial building adjacent to the empty Eckhardt's department store building on

²⁹ Jay Tokasz, "A Spectrum of Faith on the East Side, Beautiful Churches Find New Uses and Return to Some Traditional Ones," *Buffalo News*, April 11, 2004, p. A1.

Broadway, the Faith Chapel which occupies the former Waldorf Cafeteria building at 935 Broadway, the True Church of God in Christ at 1015 Fillmore Avenue, and the Revelation Missionary Baptist Church which for more than thirty years has used the synagogue that Henry Osgood Holland designed in 1912 for the Ahavas Achim congregation at 833 Fillmore Avenue (Figure 3.23). None of these adaptive reuse facilities rival the magnificence of the older Catholic churches erected by an earlier generation; but as Buffalo art critic Richard Huntington has remarked, “modesty and sincerity of purpose are apparent in so many of these structures.”³⁰ The continued presence of these congregations, some of which draw their membership from other areas of the city, has preserved neighborhood buildings that might otherwise have been abandoned or demolished.

Older secular institutions have also adapted to the changed makeup of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood, which, as in the past, is comprised primarily of low-income residents. In the 1970s, the Dom Polski settlement house became the Polish Community Center. While preserving the memory of the area’s Polish heritage, the center became the advocate for social well being and improvement within the new, multiracial community. “The majority of the 1500 senior citizens who use the center and its satellite offices still are Polish-American,” reported the *Buffalo News* in 1994, but “65 percent of the 1000 children and teens who visit the center’s youth recreation and educational programs are minorities. Of the 900 adults who used the center’s housing programs, 85 percent are minority.”³¹ Since 2000, the organization has been known as the Lt. Col. Matt Urban Human Services Center of Western New York. It is named in honor of Matt Urban, one of America’s most decorated heroes of World War II and perhaps the most illustrious resident of the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood. Matt Urban (1919-1995) grew up at 1153 Broadway and attended Public School 57. The high-minded organization that bears his name today promotes homeownership and other social programs as a means of fighting the crime and other ills that beset Buffalo’s East Side. Additional social welfare organizations that have set up shop within the Broadway-Fillmore are Paradise House, a drug rehabilitation center for women in the former Church of the Transfiguration rectory, and Friends of Casanova Manor, an alcohol rehabilitation agency that occupies the former Transfiguration convent.

In addition to African-American residents, the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood has become home in recent years to a variety of immigrant groups from beyond the borders of the United States. Attracted to the area by both the low cost of real estate and the friendly reception they receive from many older local inhabitants, these émigrés are helping to stabilize the troubled district. Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda are among the several places in the world from which people have immigrated to Buffalo’s East Side. One can note their presence in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood by the presence there of religious institutions that cater to their backgrounds. A Vietnamese Buddhist community has acquired the former Police Station No. 8 at 647 Fillmore Avenue and spent over \$100,000 to convert the building into a temple. On Stanislaus Street across from St. Adalbert’s Basilica, a former two-story dwelling serves as an Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The most significant new immigrant group to move into the Broadway-Fillmore area in recent years has come from the Middle East. “Ten years ago when we first moved here, it wasn’t that

³⁰ Richard Huntington, “Architecture out of the Blue: East Side Churches Show How Buildings Change with People’s Needs,” *Buffalo News*, November 1, 1996, pp. 20ff.

³¹ Kevin Collison, “Polish Center Adapts to Help Serve Needs of Multiracial Area; Reflects Changes on the City’s East Side,” *Buffalo News*, October 30, 1994, p. 5. For the adverse effects on health caused by crime and abandoned properties in the area, see Emma D. Sapong, “East Side Ailments Targeted by Study,” *Buffalo News*, May 22, 2001, p. B1.

easy to be walking around this neighborhood” observes Dr. Mohammed Memon, the imam from Saudi Arabia who in the early 1990s purchased the former Holy Mother of the Rosary Polish National Catholic church on Sobieski Street (Figure 3.20) and converted it for use as a mosque.³² Having spent over \$200,000 on renovations to the old church, the Darul-Uloom Al-Madania religious community now worships in the interior resplendent with marble and ceramic walls and crystal chandeliers. A number of Arab-American families have taken up residence in the area near the mosque. Together with the old church, the Muslim organization has purchased the former parochial school building at 150 Sobieski Street and converted it to use as an educational center. The Islamic community continued to grow at this location, and in 1994 the group purchased the nearby Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Church from the Catholic diocese for use as an additional school. In 1996, Dr. Memon’s organization also purchased from the Catholic diocese the former Transfiguration School at 144 Mills Street and gave it renewed life as a third area school for Islamic pupils.

Intrigued by picturesque immigrants from many lands who were making their presence felt in Buffalo, a reporter for the *Buffalo News* wrote in 1997: “Thousands of these people live in Western New York. You see them shopping in supermarkets or riding the bus, men with turbans on their heads or women wearing sandals, Muslim headdresses and flowing gowns that look unsuitable for the Buffalo weather.” Many from these current ranks of the internationally uprooted are seeking to make a better life for themselves in the Broadway-Fillmore neighborhood where a century ago refugees from Germany and a dismembered Poland sought to fulfill the same desire. “People who come here,” noted the *News* of the new immigrant class, “are hoping that America is a place where they can enjoy freedom and prosperity.”³³

Francis R. Kowsky
May 2004

³² J. Tokasz, *loc. cit.*

³³ Dan Herbeck, “Second Chance: Danger and Opportunity for the New Immigrants,” *Buffalo News*, November 2, 1997, p. 6M.