

4.0 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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4.1 Introduction

The Black Rock Planning Neighborhood is one of the City of Buffalo's earliest settled areas and it contains some of the oldest historic buildings, primarily houses, remaining in Buffalo. The survey area contains what was once an independent community known as Lower Black Rock or "The Rock," which rivaled its neighbor, the village of New Amsterdam (later Buffalo), located further to the south. The survey area contains the lands once known as the Parrish Tract and Bird Farm, which were sectioned off from the Mile Strip Reservation in the early 1800s. Eventually the settlement of Lower Black Rock occurred, beginning in the 1820s and 30s, with the opening of the Erie Canal and the construction of a lock at the foot of Austin Street. This area flourished throughout the early nineteenth-century as a commercial and industrial canal town, and the community retained its character and identity even after being incorporated into the City of Buffalo in 1855.

Today, the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood contains two communities, Black Rock and Grant-Amherst, each with its own character and identity. The western portion of the survey area is known locally as the Black Rock neighborhood and is comprised of the earlier Lower Black Rock community which centered on Niagara, Amherst and Dearborn Streets. To the eastern end of the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood, and divided from the Black Rock neighborhood by rail lines, is the Grant-Amherst neighborhood. This community developed later in the nineteenth-century primarily after the opening of the New York Central Railroad's Belt Line railroad which circumscribed Buffalo beginning in 1883. The Belt Line was responsible for spurring the growth of many neighborhoods throughout Buffalo, and one of the most significant was the Grant-Amherst community. As a stop on this rail line, the western portion of the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood saw the dramatic growth of business and industry, and became a center for Polish, Hungarian and Ukrainian settlement. The Tonawanda-Amherst Street station in the Grant-Amherst neighborhood became one of the busiest stop on the Belt Line and was used by a wide variety of factories and businesses to transport their goods. The Grant-Amherst community was further bolstered in 1901 by its proximity to the busy Pan-American Exposition grounds located on the east side of Elmwood Avenue. While the Exposition likely spurred the growth of businesses like hotels and restaurants in this area in 1901, it also encouraged the increased residential settlement in the northern portions of Buffalo in the early twentieth-century.

¹ Per the terms of CBCA's contract with the City of Buffalo, this section is largely quoted from the 2006 Ambassador Bridge survey project. Italicized text indicates material drawn from this detailed and in-depth study. Additional information added to this history is inserted as non-italicized text. It is important to note that the content of these sections has not been verified for accuracy.

4.2 Historic Period²

The French were the first Europeans to penetrate the valley of the Niagara River and explore the shores of Lake Erie. As early as the 1620s, Jesuit missionaries and French traders were establishing contact with the local Native group. For example, Joseph de la Roche Daillon, a Récollet (Franciscan) missionary, living among the Neutrals for three months in 1626, and Jesuit priests Jean de Brébeauf and Pierre Joseph Marie Chaumonot visited the Neutrals in 1640-1641. However, these visits to the region were infrequent until the 1660s. By this time, the fur trade was central to the Seneca economy and, as the supply of animal skins diminished within their hunting territory, they expanded the range of their hunting and trading efforts into the traditional areas of other Iroquoian groups. During the mid-seventeenth century, the Haudenosaunee became increasingly embroiled in successful conflicts with other Native nations to the south and west as the supply of beaver pelts declined. By the 1650s, large-scale, concerted attacks by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy against their rivals in Western New York had reduced the area to an unsettled hinterland under Seneca control (White 1978a:407-409; Trigger 1978:348-355; Johnson 1876:24-26; Turner 1974 [1850]:69).

For almost all of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries European activities in the area that would become known as the Niagara Frontier involved limited religious, commercial, and military endeavors. In 1678-1679, as part of the general reconnoitering and trade expeditions by the French in the Niagara valley, men under the direction of René-Robert Cavalier de La Salle constructed a ship called Le Griffon along the Niagara River in the vicinity of Cayuga Island, opposite Grand Island. This ship would be the first sail vessel to ply the water of Lake Erie and prosecute the Great Lakes fur trade (Trigger 1978:349-352; Abler and Tooker 1978:506-507; Turner 1974 [1850]:116-119; Smith 1884: I: 35-36).

As the fur trade became an imperial concern for the European powers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the subsequent competition among these nations resulted in the erection of fortified trading posts along the frontier, such as the French Fort Conti in 1679 (later, Fort Niagara), and the British fort near the future village of Geneva twenty years later (Abler and Tooker 1978:505-507; White 1978b:414-416; Turner 1974 [1850]:116-119; Trigger 1978:354-356). From an imperial perspective, the French sought to establish dominion over the interior of the continent, and their Jesuit missionaries provided an obvious tool to acquire influence with the resident Native nations of each region. However, efforts to sow Christianity among the Haudenosaunee generally bore little fruit during this period. The relationship between the French and the Haudenosaunee continually fluctuated between grudging acceptance and outright war. Wrangling between

² The 2006 Ambassador Bridge survey contains additional information regarding the geological and environmental history of this area, as well as ample information on the archeological and anthropological history of the native peoples who lived in this region. For the sake of this survey which focuses on extant architecture, this information has been excluded. It may be referenced in the Appendix, pages 2-1 through 2-13.

the Seneca and the French and their Native American allies for control over the western fur trade erupted in violence when Jacques René de Brisay, Marquis de Denonville, governor of New France (Canada), led an attack against the Seneca in July 1687. The French had great success destroying the ripening corn crop, before retreating to reconstruct the fort at Niagara (renamed Fort Denonville). After a severe winter during which 88 of a 100-soldier detachment died, the French abandoned the isolated fort and the region reverted to Seneca control (Abler and Tooker 1978:506-507; Tooker 1978:432; Turner 1974 [1850]:143-147, 184; Old Fort Niagara 2004).

Despite consistent failures in establishing a permanent trading post along the Niagara River, French strategies continued to accept the idea that asserting control over the Niagara River valley offered strategic advantages within their imperial goals. A trader, interpreter, and former soldier, Louis-Thomas de Joncaire, Sieur de Chabert parlayed his years as a captive and adoptee of the Seneca into permission to erect a series of trading posts along the Niagara River and Lake Ontario, to the north, including one at the Lower Landing in what is now the Village of Lewiston, ca. 1720. Finally, in 1726, with the construction of a permanent fortification along the Niagara River -- Fort Niagara -- the French began to exercise military control of the Niagara valley. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the French had created a string of military and trading installation that extend from Fort Niagara along Lake Ontario, south to Daniel (or Chabert) de Joncaire's temporary trading settlement at Buffalo Creek (referred to as la Riviere aux Chevaux), and along the southern shore of Lake Erie to Presque Isle (present-day Erie, Pennsylvania) into the Ohio valley (Abler and Tooker 1978:506-507; Tooker 1978:431-432; Turner 1974 [1850]:143-147, 184; Kellerman 1960:8-10; Old Fort Niagara 2004; Graham 1967:10).

The ancient rivalry between the British and the French intensified during the course of the eighteenth century, reaching a crescendo during the 1750s, as the two countries again went to war. After a 19-day siege, British troops captured Fort Niagara in July 1759, crippling the French presence in the region, although skirmishing between the Native Americans and the English continued the closing days of the French and Indian War. After the French defeat and their loss of North American colonies, some of the western Seneca, remaining loyal to the French, joined Pontiac's uprising, harrying English-American settlers along the frontier. On September 14, 1763, a party of Haudenosaunee stormed a wagon train and its military escorts near Devil's Hole, a stopping point along the portage between Fort Niagara and Fort Schlosser (erected during the French and Indian War where the giant water intakes for the Niagara Power Project are currently located). Soldiers sent to investigate the site of the initial carnage were attacked by the Seneca, meeting a similar fate. The marauders had killed more than 90 people and tossed their bodies and goods in the gorge. Blood Run Creek, northeast of Devil's Hole, was named as a result of this incident. With the general cessation of hostilities in 1764, the Seneca were compelled to cede a four-mile

swath of land along both sides of the Niagara River to the English (Abler and Tooker 1978:507; Tooker 1978:434; Smith 1884: I: 47).

During the Revolutionary War, both the British and Americans enlisted the aid of individual Haudenosaunee nations in their battles in the frontier, as several of the nations allied with Great Britain and several with the Americans. Warfare initially remained well east of the region, but Britain's efforts to cripple the frontier economy engendered raids by their Haudenosaunee allies against isolated farming communities, notably in the Mohawk valley. In response, Major General John Sullivan led a punitive assault into the heart of the Haudenosaunee country in 1779 to halt the attacks against American settlers. The Continentals, utilizing "scorched earth" tactics, destroyed more than 40 villages and hundreds of acres of crops in an area between the eastern Finger Lakes and the Genesee River. Many Haudenosaunee burned out of their central New York villages, sought refuge at Fort Niagara where they suffered through a difficult winter of hardship and hunger (Abler and Tooker 1978:507-508; Ellis et al. 1967:115-117; Spiegelman 2005). Still controlled by the British, Fort Niagara served as the center for Loyalist activities on the frontier in New York and as the headquarters of Colonel John Butler and his Rangers. Groups of Haudenosaunee, provisioned and armed by the British, periodically attacked colonial settlements until the end of the war, although the Seneca were no longer a major military threat. By 1780, some Haudenosaunee subsequently settled along Buffalo Creek, which would later be incorporated into the Buffalo Creek Reservation (Smith 1884: I: 51-52; Lankes 1964).

The British and their Loyalist allies were expelled from the new United States after the Treaty of Paris (1783) ended the Revolutionary War, and settled on the west bank of the Niagara River in what was then called Upper Canada. The Haudenosaunee, abandoned in the United States by their British allies after the Treaty of Paris, were forced to make peace as separate nations with the Americans. As a result of the Second Fort Stanwix Treaty (1784), the Haudenosaunee relinquished all their land west of the Genesee River, except for several small reservations. The treaty of 1784 was disputed by several groups of Haudenosaunee until 1794, when a treaty was signed at Canandaigua between the United States government and Six Nations. The Pickering or Canandaigua Treaty of 1794 defined the boundaries of Seneca lands and the reservations to the other Haudenosaunee nations (Abler and Tooker 1978:508-509-512; Goldman 1983:27-31; Hutchins 2004).

Native American title to the land in Western New York was largely extinguished with the Treaty of Big Tree (present-day Geneseo, New York) in 1797, although several areas were reserved for the Native Americans to use and live on, including reservations at Buffalo Creek, Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Tonawanda (Figure 4.1). Lying on both sides of Buffalo Creek, the Buffalo reservation consisted of 130 square miles and extended east from Lake Erie. William Street in the Town of Cheektowaga was the reservation's approximate northern

boundary (Lankes 1964; Smith 1884: I: 74-75, 489, 524; Abler and Tooker 1978:509, 512; Goldman 1983:27-29).

Despite the end of hostilities in 1783, the British refused to vacate Fort Niagara until 1796. Nevertheless, with the return of peace, settlers and land speculators again began to trickle westward, exerting pressure to open up land formerly occupied by the Haudenosaunee. However, boundary disputes between New York and Massachusetts, both of which claimed the new territory west of Fort Stanwix, frustrated the actual, legal sale of these lands. Under an agreement signed in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1786, the land once occupied by the Haudenosaunee came under the jurisdiction of New York State, but the Commonwealth of Massachusetts maintained the pre-emption right to the area west of Seneca Lake once the Indian title to it was extinguished, except for a one-mile swath along the east side of the Niagara River, which New York State, reserved for itself (the Mile Reservation or "Mile Strip"). Despite the state's reservation of the parcel, the Seneca maintained they retained title to the Mile Strip, which was affirmed in the Pickering Treaty of 1794 without New York's concurrence (Hutchins 2004:215-217). During the next decade large grants of land in western New York would be sold to private investors who would attempt to open the area to settlement (Ellis et al. 1967:152-156; Abler and Tooker 1978:507-509; Turner 1974 [1850]:326; Quinn 1991:14-15). The current project area on the American side is within the New York Mile Reservation (i.e., Mile Strip).

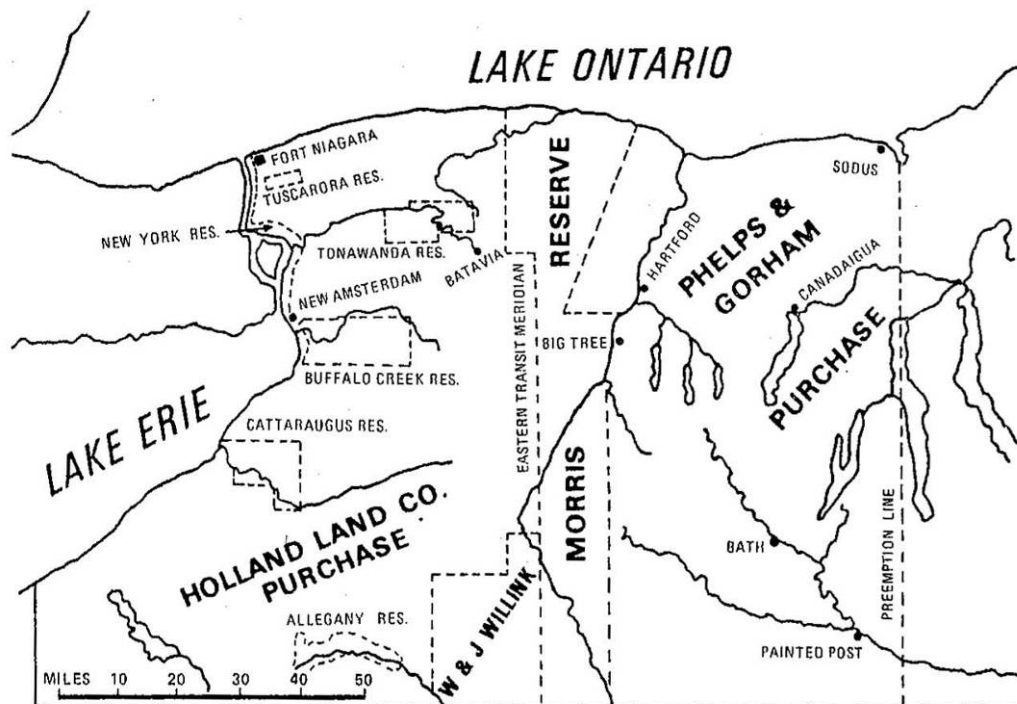


Fig 4.1 Land purchases and reservations in Western NY, ca. 1804

After having problems with the land's initial purchasers, a syndicate of land speculators headed by Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts sold the rights to the unsurveyed portion of the area to Robert Morris in 1791. Reserving a portion of the land for his own purposes, Morris sold the remainder, including the present Erie County except for the area within the Mile Strip and Grand Island, to a consortium of Dutch investors called the Holland Land Company in 1792-1793 (Turner 1974 [1850]:320-403; Ellis et al. 1967:154-156; Smith 1884: I: 75). New York State asserted ownership of the Mile Strip, and the status of Grand Island was unclear.

Augustus Porter, pioneer of Western New York, surveyor, and entrepreneur, reported that in the spring of 1795 "all that part of the state of New York, lying west of 'Phelps and Gorham's Indian Purchase,' was still occupied by the Indians, their title to it not being yet extinguished. There was of course no road leading from Buffalo eastward, except an Indian trail, and no settlement whatever on that trail" (Turner 1974 [1850]:372). However, Porter stated that four people lived in Buffalo at that time: Captain William Johnston, a British Indian interpreter; Martin Middaugh, a Dutch cooper, and his son-in-law, Ezekial Lane; and Cornelius Winne, an Indian trader. All of these people lived well south of Scajaquada Creek. In June 1796, Joseph Landon, at that time a surveyor on his way to Ohio, reported that Middaugh and Lane and his family lived in a log house on the north side of what is now Exchange Street; a Mr. Skinner kept a log tavern on a nearby hill; and Winney and Joseph Hodge, an African-American trader, kept a whisky shop near Little Buffalo Creek south of Exchange Street. The rest of the area was a wilderness (Landon ca. 1863). Little Buffalo Creek no longer exists; its confluence with Big Buffalo Creek (now, Buffalo River) became the Commercial Slip, part of it was channelized as part of the Main and Hamburg canal and later filled, while the rest was filled during the railroad boom in Buffalo at the turn of the nineteenth century.

At the precursor to the settlement of the area, Theophilus Cazenove, Philadelphia-based agent of the Holland Land Company, contracted Joseph Ellicott in July 1797 to survey the company's land in western New York and divide it into townships (fig 4.1). The process began in the spring of the following year. The future City of Buffalo was sited and laid out by Ellicott, who called the village on Buffalo Creek New Amsterdam and named the streets after his Dutch patrons and local Indian nations. However, the increasing number of local residents resisted the Dutch appellations and referred to the village as "Buffaloe" (Smith 1884: II: 26-27, 30-31; White 1898: I: 140). Dealing with the Seneca and Captain Johnston, who had received from the Haudenosaunee in early 1780s a tract measuring two square miles north of what is now the Buffalo River as well as a mill seat on Scajaquada Creek, Ellicott renegotiated the northern boundary of the Buffalo Creek reservation to ensure that New Amsterdam would be located at the foot of Lake Erie along the meandering Buffalo River. "So instead of the north boundary of the Buffalo Creek reservation running due west [following William Street in what is now Cheektowaga in a straight line to the lakeshore] to

the State reservation, it was made to turn just east of what is now East Buffalo, whence it ran southwest to the creek and down the center of the creek to the lake” (Smith 1884: I: 79). Buffalo Creek just north of what is now Childs Street was the Indian reservation’s approximate northwestern boundary. For relinquishing most of his land in New Amsterdam, Johnston kept his mill seat on the Scajaquada and added a square mile of timbered land around it (Johnson 1876:100).

Seneca claim to the area within the Mile Strip reservation from Buffalo to Stedman’s farm (i.e., Fort Schlosser/Niagara Falls) including Black Rock was extinguished by a treaty signed in Albany in August 1802 and ratified by the U.S. Senate that December. Little settlement had apparently occurred within the Mile Strip south of Stedman’s farm by this time – only two Seneca families lived there year-round, but others fished and used the forest along the shore (Hutchins 2004:338). The impetus for the treaty was the initiation of construction of a fort near Black Rock (Fort Tompkins) by the U.S. Army in 1801.

As part of the 1802 treaty, the New York legislature confirmed Seneca grants of two tracts of one square mile each north of Scajaquada Creek to Horatio Jones and Jasper Parrish. Former captives of the Haudenosaunee, Jones and Parrish had served as interpreters during the negotiations among the Haudenosaunee, the federal government and the representatives of Robert Morris, which led to the Treaty of Big Tree, as well as for other treaties (Hutchins 2004:340; Allen ca. 1868; Smith 1884:II:53n). Subsequently referred to on area maps as the Jones tract and Parrish tract, these areas comprised

“two square miles of land, lying on the outlet of Lake Erie, about three miles below Black Rock, beginning at the mouth of the creek known by the name of Scoy-gu-quoy-des [sometimes referred to as Conjockey, now Scajaquada] Creek, running one mile from the River Niagara up said creek, then northerly as the river runs two miles, thence westerly one mile to the river, thence up the river as the river runs two miles, to the place of beginning, so as to contain two square miles” [Hill 1923:66-67, quoting speech of Farmer’s Brother].

Located within the Mile Strip, the so-called Jones and Parrish tracts were laid out in 1803 and constitute the northwestern corner of the city. The Parrish tract was the southern one bordering Scajaquada Creek. Parrish sold 172 acres along the northern section of his tract to William A. Bird in 1824, which subsequently acquired the name Bird Farm [fig 4.2]. The [proposed Ambassador Bridge] project area north of Scajaquada Creek and east of the Niagara River is contained within the Parrish Tract.

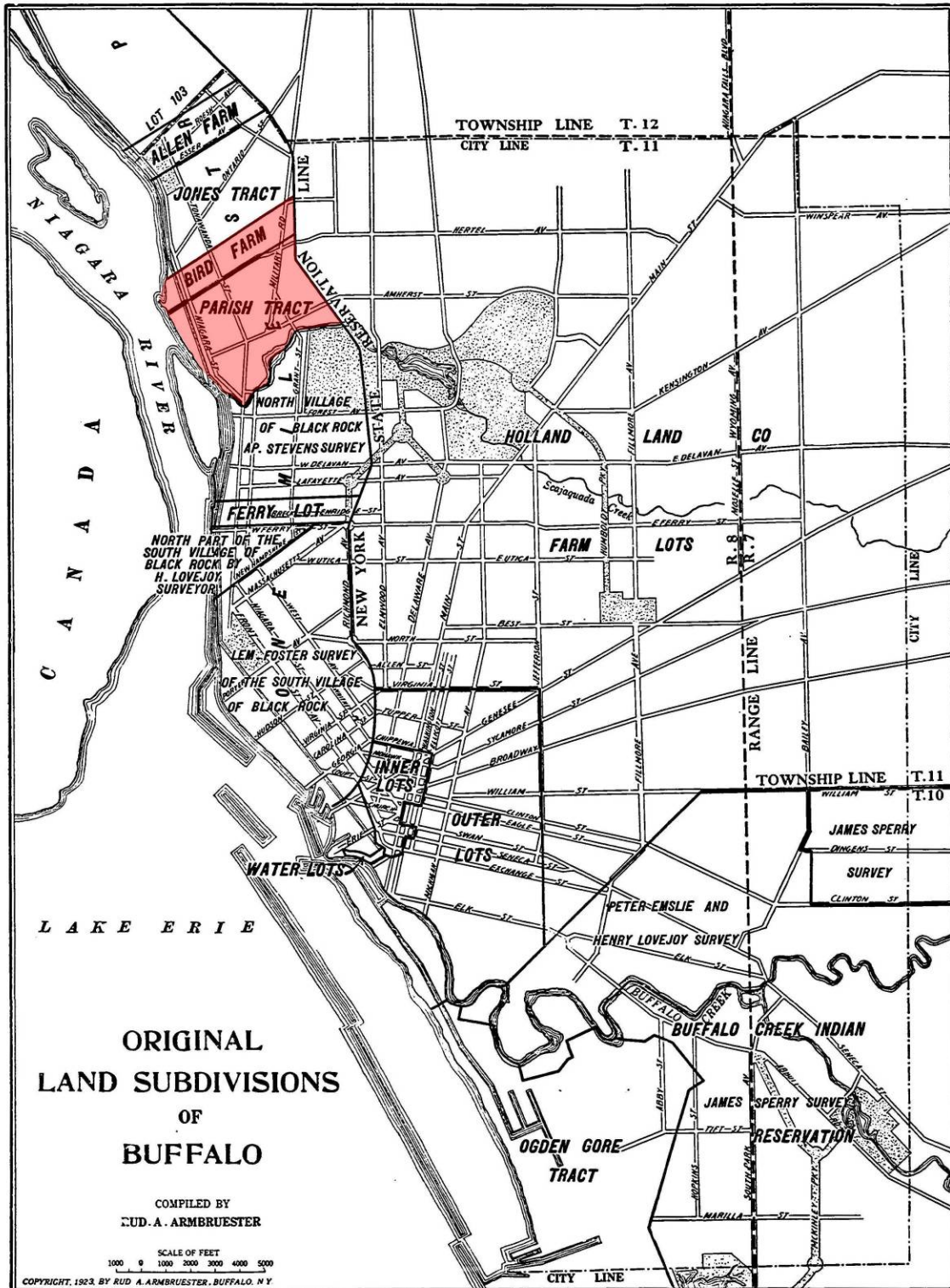


Fig 4.2 Detail, Map Showing Original Land Sub-Divisions of Buffalo of 1802 (1923 Map)
 Note the area highlighted in red indicates the Parish Tract and Bird Farm, located within the boundaries of the Mile Strip Reservation. Today this area comprises the Lower Black Rock community and a portion of the present Black Rock Planning Neighborhood.

In 1802 all land west of the Genesee River was incorporated into Genesee County, and all land west of Ellicott's east transit, including the project area, was subsumed under the Town of Batavia. Two years later, the Town of Batavia was divided into the Towns of Batavia, Willink, Erie, and Chautauqua. Separated by Ellicott's west transit (present-day Transit Road), the Towns of Erie and Willink stretched from Lake Ontario to the Pennsylvania border. The project area was within the Town of Erie, which contained all land in Ranges VII, VIII, and IX, while the Town of Willink comprised all land in Ranges IV, V, and VI (Beers 1880:7-8).

Once townships had been surveyed and roads in the area cut, lots were sold to prospective pioneers. These early settlers were predominantly New Englanders (especially Vermonters) and Pennsylvanians, who entered the territory during the early 1800s. "Outside the village [of New Amsterdam] limits, but within the present city [of Buffalo], Rowland Cotton bought a hundred and forty-three acres at what is now Main and Amherst streets, for \$3.50 an acre" (Johnson 1876:126). Settlement and growth followed quickly. By 1806, sixteen dwellings were located in the village as well as two stores, a drug store, several taverns, and two blacksmith shops (Ketchum 1970 [1864]: II: 183-184; Landon ca. 1863; Smith 1884: II: 182). Although the settlement at Buffalo Creek had been made a point-of-entry in 1805, little had been done about creating a more accessible harbor at the mouth of the creek. "[A]t almost all seasons of the year, there was a continuous, broad beach of sand along the lakeshore – scarcely broken by the discharge of the waters of Buffalo creek into the lake" (Ketchum 1970 [1864]: II: 246-247).

Seth Pease surveyed the curving Mile Line in 1798 for the Holland Company. Once the treaty with the Seneca was ratified, Joseph Annin, Deputy State Surveyor, surveyed the Mile Reserve into lots beginning in 1803. The goal was to create lots containing 160 acres, but because of the curved nature of the Niagara River many lots were larger. A total of 111 lots were laid out within the Mile Strip, in addition to several exceptions to the survey. These were the Jones and Parrish tracts, each of which covers 640 acres, the federal tract on which Fort Niagara is located (716 acres) and Stedman's farm lot which contains 680 acres. In addition, one square mile was set aside at the southern end for the Village of Black Rock; each of these was 640 acres (Quinn 1991). As noted, the project area north of the Scajaquada Creek is located in the Parrish Tract, and the area south of the creek is located in Lot 104. Lot 104 covered 232 acres and was purchased by John McDonald, Archibald McIntyre, Benjamin Barber, Birdsey Norton, and Peter B. Porter on February 26, 1805. These five also purchased Lots 105, 106 and 107, comprising all the land within the Mile Strip between the Black Rock lot and Scajaquada. These four lots were referred to as Lower Black Rock to distinguish them from the state organized village (e.g., Upper Black Rock). What is now Scajaquada Creek and the Village of Black Rock was to be reserved for military purposes (Smith 1884: II: 53; Quinn 1991).

Since inland roads, especially in the western part of the state, were generally poor and difficult to navigate, the use of water during any part of the trip increased efficiency and lowered costs. As a result, the Niagara corridor between the lakes was utilized heavily by the portage industry. Peter B. and Augustus Porter with Benjamin Barton (with Joseph Annin) formed a successful Great Lakes trading company (Porter, Barton and Company), and obtained a monopoly of this trade around Niagara Falls from Lewiston to Peter Porter's trading community at Black Rock, south of what became known as Squaw Island. Although formed in 1805, Porter, Barton & Company did not actively engage in the transfer business over the Niagara portage until 1807. While Joseph Ellicott and Paul Busti, the Holland Land Company's Philadelphia-based, American agent, endeavored to create a viable village at Buffalo Creek where the harbor was said to be "safe and commodious" (Grande 1982:2; Whittemore 1976; Smith 1884:II:55). Bird Island at the head of the Niagara River on the American side served as a small refuge from storms for small vessels to unload cargo on the nearby shore. In 1807, Black Rock contained the Porter, Barton and Company warehouses, Nathaniel Sill's house, and a log hut (Norton 2004 [1863]).

Beginning ca. 1809, Porter attempted to relocate the customs houses (or ports of entry) in Western New York from Buffalo Creek and Fort Niagara to Black Rock and Lewiston, two locations where Porter, Barton and Company were erecting trading facilities. U.S. Customs Collector Erastus Granger objected to the relocation of the facility to Black Rock, and defended Buffalo and its harbor. An annoyed Granger remarked that Black Rock "consisted of no more than one white and two black families, a temporary ferry-house and tavern" (Powell 2001). However, President James Madison decided in March 1811 that the port of entry would be located at Black Rock "from the first day of April to the first day of December in every year" and at Buffalo "for the residue of each and every...year." The action must have been a disappointment to Granger and the leaders of Buffalo. Madison had in effect placed the customs house above the falls at Black Rock during the shipping season and moved it to Buffalo only during the winter months" (Grande 1982:6; Smith 1884:II:56).

In 1808, the new County of Niagara (consisting of what are now Erie and Niagara Counties) was formed from Genesee County, with New Amsterdam/Buffalo as the county seat. Niagara County contained three townships: Cambria, Clarence, and Willink; the last two were extended to the middle of the Buffalo Creek reservation, although they had only nominal jurisdiction over those lands. Two years later the Town of "Buffaloe" was created. By 1813 New Amsterdam was incorporated as a village (Beers 1880:20; White 1898: I: 14-15; Smith 1884: I: 113-114, 116). Prior to the War of 1812, Buffalo was a growing community that supported several blacksmiths and carpenters, a mason, a wagon-maker, and a cabinet-maker, as well as other tradesmen and retail stores. With a population of less than 500 people, the village contained less than 100 dwellings, but accommodated three taverns and three merchants. At that time, the harbor

mouth of Buffalo Creek was obstructed by a recurring sandbar (Smith 1884: II::47; Ketchum 1970 [1864]: II: 419).

In 1809, the community of Black Rock comprised the Porter, Barton & Company store near the Black Rock from which the area derived its name, Frederick Miller's house "under the bank, where a ferry-house and tavern are kept," one white family and two black families (Johnson 1876:178). Niagara Street had been laid out and cut between 1807 and 1809, but not extensively used until after the war (Severance 1912:265; see also Norton 2004 [1863]). By 1812 Black Rock village clustered around Niagara and Ferry Streets and its natural harbor was better than the one at Buffalo Creek, which was blocked by a sandbar and meandered (fig 4.3).

4.3 War of 1812

The region's growth was stunted by the War of 1812 as the Niagara River valley served as one of the primary theaters of the conflict and areas near the border with Upper Canada (the current Province of Ontario) were ravaged by attacks and counterattacks. Defenses in proximity to Black Rock included Sailor's Battery, consisting of three long 32-pounder cannons on the south side near the mouth of Scajaquada Creek; a battery of three guns on Niagara Street near what would be William A. Bird's post-war residence (#16 on fig 4.3); Fort Tompkins (where the Niagara Street railroad stables were located in the 1880s (#12 on fig 4.3); a mortar battery with one 8-inch mortar, near the site of the water works in the 1860s, at the bottom of a ravine (#3 on fig 4.3); a 24-pounder on the north corner of what would become the grounds of Fort Porter (near what is now the American Plaza of the Peace Bridge); and a breastwork on the Terrace in the City of Buffalo. All of these defenses, with the exception of Sailor's Battery, focused on the river and the Canadian shore, and were vulnerable by attacks from the north (Dorsheimer 1993[1863]:187; Smith 1884: II: 57; Babcock 205[1927]:20-21).

In early October 1812, two British vessels lying at anchor at Fort Erie, HMS Detroit (formerly an American ship, the Adams) and HMS Caledonia and their cargoes, were captured by forces under the direction of Lieutenant Jesse D. Elliott, who was stationed at the Black Rock Navy yard. The yard was located along the south bank of the creek west of the Military Road Bridge then across the creek. The Detroit ran aground on the west side of Squaw Island during an exchange of cannon fire and was burned by the Americans, and the Caledonia was brought to Black Rock. The village endured a heavy shelling of cannon fire from the Canadian side, resulting in damage deemed "substantial" (Smith 1884: I: 129-130, II: 57-58; Johnson 1876:213-215; Hickey 1989:131; Babcock 2005[1927]:39-42; Grande 1982:8-9). During the winter of 1812-1813, at least five ships were outfitted for military service at Black Rock's Scajaquada Creek

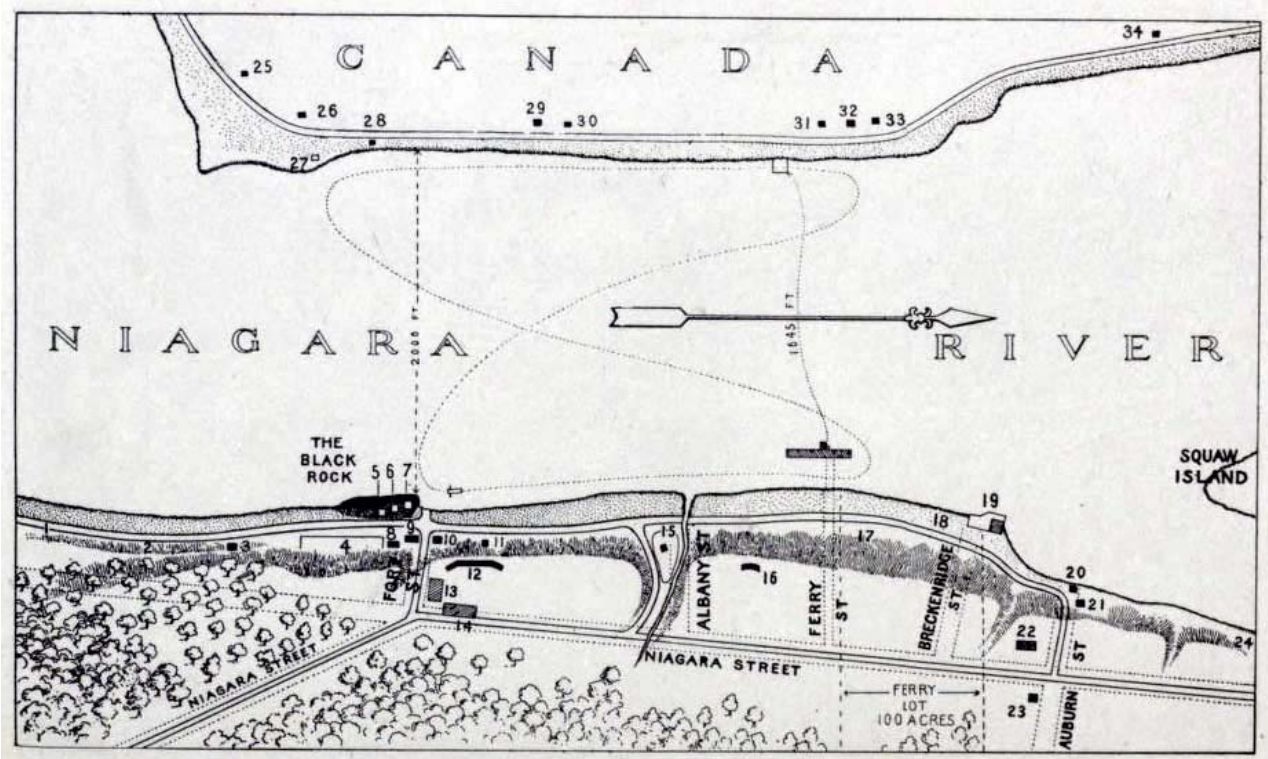


Fig 4.3 Black Rock, ca. 1810 from a sketch made in 1863 (Upper Black Rock, south of Black Rock Planning Neighborhood survey area)

Key to Map:

- 1.) Shore road between Black Rock ferry and Buffalo
- 2.) Sand ridge along shore
- 3.) Site of 1863 water works
- 4.) Lester Brace's garden
- 5.) Log house of Orange Dean, later used by E.D. Effner to furnish clothing to Swift's regiment
- 6.) Clark's grocery and boarding house
- 7.) Porter & Barton store, also served as tavern operated by Orange Dean.
- 8.) Lester Brace's barn
- 9.) Frederick Miller's log house, used as the ferry house and a tavern. Also occupied by Holden Allen. After the war, it was rebuilt by Lester Brace as a ferry house and tavern. Note: the dotted figure "8" in the Niagara River illustrates the path of the ferry boat with respect to the current.
- 10.) Lorrin Hodge's grocery after the war
- 11.) Log house of widow O'Neil
- 12.) A battery called Ford Adams (also referred to as Fort Tompkins)
- 13.) Barracks, burned by enemy, October 12, 1812
- 14.) Barracks, burned by enemy July 1813
- 15.) Log house of widow Sidney, later Mrs. Zenas Barker
- 16.) Battery during War of 1812; later part of Col. Bird's garden
- 17.) Location where Capt. Saunders was shot in July 1813
- 18.) Location where Col. Hugh Cuyler was killed during the taking of bridges Caledonia and Adams in 1812; near foot of Breckenridge Street.
- 19.) Porter & Barton's dock and warehouse; also dock where Walk-in-the-Water was launched
- 20.) A contractor's store, near foot of Auburn Avenue
- 21.) Nathaniel Sill's store
- 22.) General Porter's house, later owned by Capt. James Rough, and later still by Rev. John E. Robie
- 23.) Field's tavern near present-day Auburn Avenue; area of principle fighting during the Battle of Black Rock
- 24.) "Just beyond the margin of the map is the site of the old shipyard, where the Walk-in-the-Water was built."
- 25-34.) Sites in Fort Erie, Canada; most occupied prior to 1795

shipyard, while American forces encamped at Flint Hill, Erastus Granger's farm near that is now Delaware Park. Poor provisions and sanitation, disease, starvation, and a harsh winter conspired in the deaths of approximately 300 American soldiers that winter. The dead were buried near Granger's farm at that time (Johnson 1876:226; Rapp nd; Dorsheimer 1993[1863]:192-193; Norton 2004[1863]; Babcock 2005[1927]:21; Napora 1995).

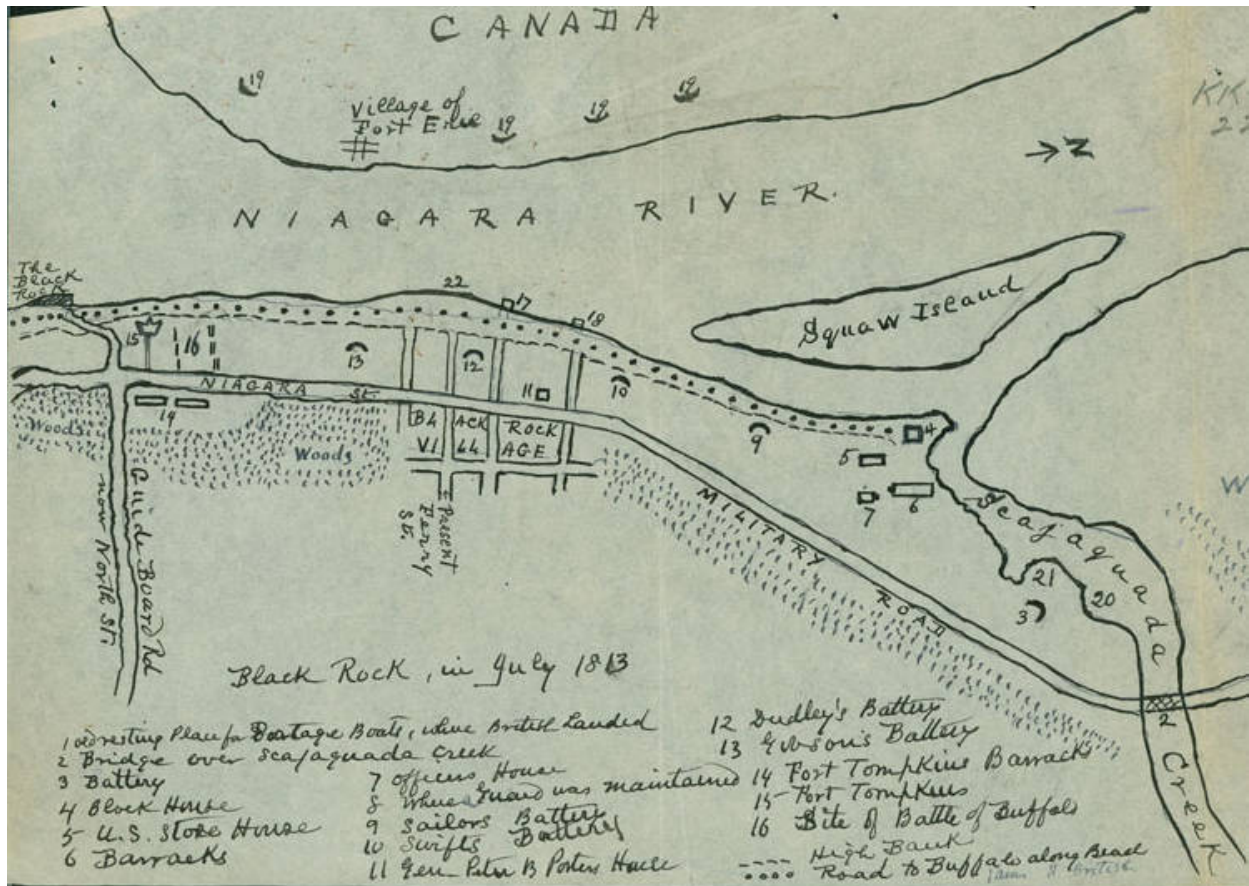


Fig 4.4 Map of Black Rock in July 1813 (Upper Black Rock, south of survey area)

Key to Map:

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|--|---|
| 1.) (Resting?) place for Portage boats, where British landed | 14.) Fort Tompkins Barrack |
| 2.) Bridge over Scajaquada Creek | 15.) Fort Tompkins |
| 3.) Battery | 16.) Site of Battle of Buffalo |
| 4.) Block House | 17.) Porter Barton & Co. |
| 5.) U.S. Store House | 18.) Store House |
| 6.) Barrack | 19.) Batteries, former British held by U.S. |
| 7.) Officer's House | 20.) Where Perry's vessels were handed up to Lake Erie |
| 8.) Where guard was maintained | 21.) U.S. Navy Yard where those board vessels were made over into [?] boats Winter 1812-13. |
| 9.) Sailor's battery | 22.) Where the defeated British ships embarked in escape. |
| 10.) Swift's battery | --- High Bank |
| 11.) Gen. Peter B. Porter's House | ... Road to Buffalo along Bank |
| 12.) Dudley's battery | |
| 13.) Gibson's battery | |

In early summer 1813, Major General Henry Dearborn, commander of American forces on the Niagara Frontier at that time, withdrew all the regular soldiers from Black Rock and Buffalo to serve on the St. Lawrence front. Recognizing that the repositioning of the soldiers left the Niagara Valley exposed to attack, he ordered a small contingent of militia and a few artillery specialists to Black Rock to protect the public stores housed there. On July 11, 1813, a British raiding party comprising approximately 250 soldiers crossed the Niagara below Squaw Island and occupied and burned the Navy yard at Scajaquada Creek. At the time, a small collection of structures – a blockhouse, storehouse, battery, and barracks – were located along the south bank of the creek near its confluence with the river. Moving south, the British dispersed the militia maintaining the three pieces of artillery at the Fort Tompkins blockhouse, and burned it and the associated barracks before plundering the public stores. Despite the flight of American forces from Black Rock, other militia gathered at Buffalo and drove the invaders back to the creek. While most of the British raiders escaped into Canada, a number in the last boat to launch from the American side were captured and killed as they tried to flee. Before this raid, the ships outfitted at the Scajaquada Creek naval yard had left to join the command of Oliver Hazard Perry at Erie, Pennsylvania (Johnson 1876:231-238; Grande 1982:8-9; Rapp nd; Dorsheimer 1993[1863]:192-193; Norton 2004[1863]; Smith 1884: I: 140-145; Napora 1995; Cook 1961; Babcock 2005[1927]:105-107).

American forces had occupied Fort George on the west side of the Niagara River since May 1813 but, by the beginning of December, the American position had become untenable. Brigadier General George McClure of the New York militia, commander of the post, decided to evacuate the fort. As part of the evacuation on December 10, he ordered his troops to burn the adjacent village of Newark (present-day Niagara-on-the-Lake) to the ground, evicting more than 400 people into zero-degree weather. In retaliation for such callous treatment, British forces captured and occupied Fort Niagara (killing 80, mostly by bayonet, and taking 350 prisoners) on December 19. Beginning at the same time, a detachment of British soldiers with their Native American allies savagely attacked and burned Lewiston, the Tuscarora village near the Niagara River, and Manchester (also known as Schlosser; present-day Niagara Falls). After a respite, on the night of December 30, a British force comprising more than 1,000 troops and perhaps 400 Native Americans led by Major General Phineas Riall attacked the approximately 2,000 militia defending Buffalo and Black Rock. As planned by Lieutenant General Gordon Drummond, British forces landed north of Scajaquada Creek near what is now Amherst Street and after a skirmish crossed the wooden bridge over the creek and captured Sailor's Battery, before advancing south to Black Rock. The battery of three guns at the location of Bird's future house and the six heavy guns at Fort Tompkins were quickly overrun as the British torched the small community. The invaders then marched down Niagara Street to Buffalo, destroying ships and supplies. The devastation was substantial (Smith 1884: I: 147-159, II: 58-74; Johnson 1876:242-262; Bowler 1976; Goldman 1983:21-24; Hickey 1989:140-143).

After a subsequent British raid ended on January 1, 1814, only three structures remained in the village of Buffalo—David Reese’s blacksmith shop on Seneca Street, Mrs. Gamaliel St. John’s house on Washington Street, and a small, stone jail on Washington Street near Eagle Street (Bowler 1976). Meanwhile, along the Niagara River at Black Rock, only one structure escaped the conflagration: a log house where women and children had taken refuge. “The Ariel, Little Belt, Chippewa, and Trippe, vessels that performed service in the battle on Lake Erie a little more than a hundred days before, were committed to the flames” (Lossing 2003 [1869]). Governor Daniel Tompkins remarked that “The whole frontier from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie is depopulated & the buildings & improvements, with a few exceptions, destroyed” (Hickey 1989:143).

As expected, residents began to trickle back soon after the diminishment of hostilities. However, the area remained an active part of the Niagara theater, with a detachment of soldiers was stationed in Buffalo, as well as a staging area for later actions for the remainder of the year. “Twice during the winter small squads of the enemy crossed the river, but were driven back by the soldiers and citizens without much fighting” (Johnson 1876:264).

By the summer of 1814 the Niagara Frontier was again the scene of heavy fighting as the Americans invaded Upper Canada, capturing Fort Erie on July 3 and using it as a staging area for the subsequent battles of Chippawa (sometimes Chippewa) and Lundy’s Lane. After these engagements the Americans withdrew to Fort Erie, which the British under General Drummond put to siege. During the siege Drummond sent Lt. Colonel John Tucker and between 500 and 1000 soldiers across the Niagara River to raid the stores of supplies and ordnance at Black Rock. These troops crossed below Squaw Island during the early morning hours of August 3 and advanced to the bridge over Scajaquada Creek, only to find the planking of the bridge had been removed. The bridge and adjacent creek were guarded by approximately 250 riflemen under the command of Major Lodowick Morgan. The battalion offered withering fire to keep the British on the north bank, despite their repeated attempts to cross. Tucker then sent a detachment farther east in an attempt to ford the creek, but this move also ended in failure. Morgan had anticipated the flanking maneuver by positioning militia in that area. After two to three hours, the skirmish ended with Tucker’s riflemen enfilading the American position to cover the British withdrawal to Upper Canada (Smith 1884: I: 168-169; Johnson 1876:281-282; Babcock 2005 [1927]:184-186; Dorsheimer 1993 [1863]:201-202; Hickey 1989:185-189). Because of the variety of spellings and pronunciations of “Scajaquada,” this skirmish has been called the battle of Conjockey or Conjocta Creek with Morgan regarded as the “hero of Conjockey Creek.” He was later killed during another skirmish as part of the siege of Fort Erie, which lasted until September 21, when the British began to withdraw to positions near Chippawa. The fort was evacuated and blown up by the Americans on November 5, 1814

During the winter of 1814-1815, the American army remained in cantonment at so-called "Sandy Town," the area "below the bluff at the Front, and between a range of high sand dunes which then bordered the lake and the present line of the Erie Canal" (Ball 1993 [1825]:140). This area is near what is now the foot of Porter Street and LaSalle Park. The site of Fort Tompkins, also referred to as Fort Adams (item #12 in fig 4.3), the largest and most important fortification on the American shore in or near Buffalo, during the War of 1812, was located along the Niagara River in the vicinity of where Niagara Street turns north between Hampshire and School Streets. The stables of the Niagara Street Railway Company occupied this area at the end of the nineteenth century (Babcock 2005 [1927]; American Atlas Co. 1894).

4.4 Post-War Development of Black Rock

The Town of Buffalo was established in February 1810, and contained all land west of the west transit (Transit Road) between Tonawanda Creek on the north and the middle of the Buffalo Creek reservation on the south, although the town had no control over reservation lands. As noted, three years later the American settlement at Buffalo Creek was incorporated as the Village of Buffalo (eight months after that it and Black Rock were burned to the ground). As pioneers filled the Niagara Frontier after the end of the War of 1812, the Town of Amherst, which included the present-day Town of Cheektowaga, was removed from the Town of Buffalo in April 1818, three years before Erie County's formation in 1821 (Johnson 1876:308-309).

The Village of Black Rock was founded in 1813 comprising an area from what is now School Street, north of the current location of the Peace Bridge, on the south to what is now Austin Street, north of Scajaquada Creek on the north between the river and the eastern boundary of the Mile Strip Reservation. Scajaquada Creek served as the colloquial division between Lower Black Rock, north of the creek, and Upper Black Rock, south of the creek (LaChiusa ndb). The Porter, Barton Company of Black Rock resumed their portage business after the war, exercising the portage lease it received from the state that gave the company a monopoly of the carrying trade. In 1815 the company's rebuilt warehouse was operated by the Sill, Thompson Company as a branch of Porter, Barton. "Sill, Thompson Company consisted of Nathaniel Sill, Sheldon Thompson, and James L. Barton. Barton was the son of Benjamin Barton, the Barton in Porter, Barton. Thompson was James L. Barton's son-in-law. The Sill, Thompson Company later became known as Coit, Kimberly and Company, still later as Kimberly, Pease and Company, and finally, Pease and Trowbridge" (Rapp nd).

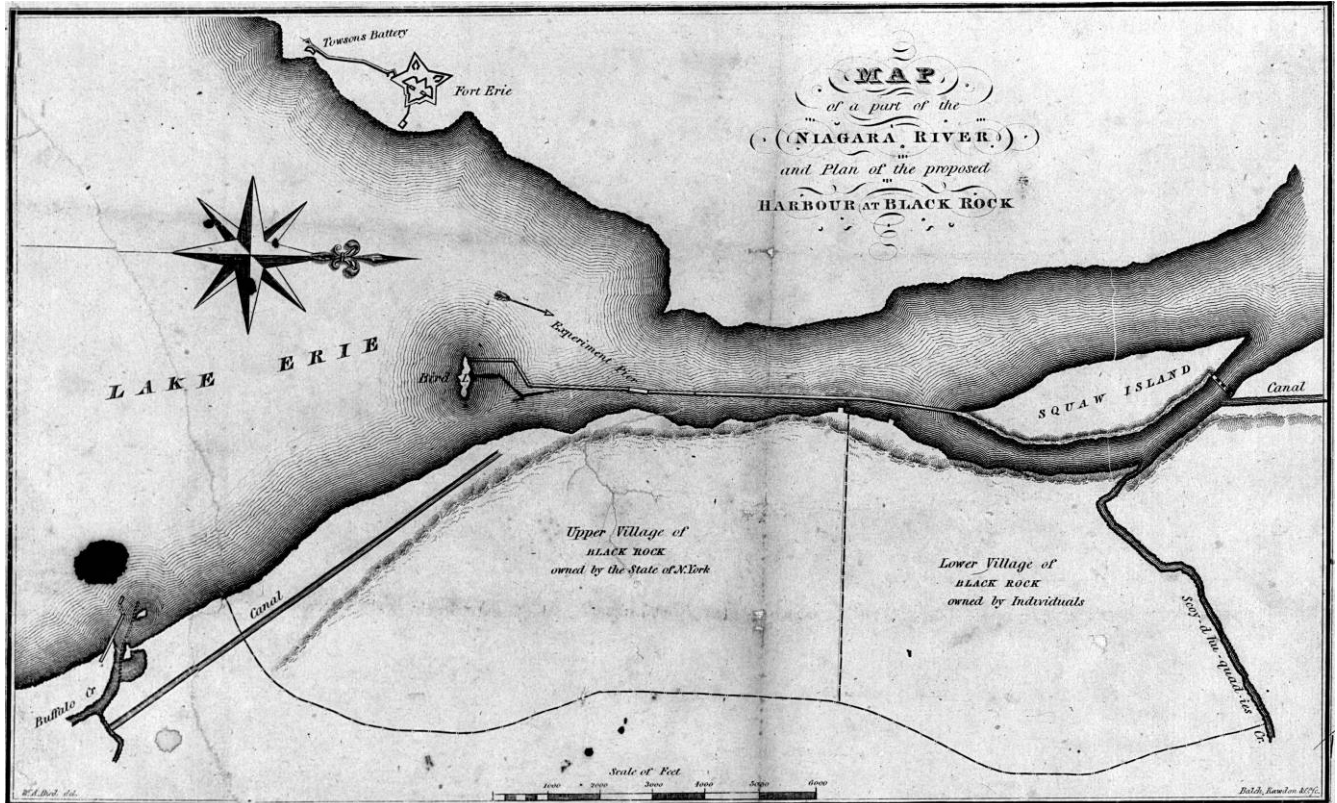


Fig 4.5 Map of a part of the Niagara River and Plan of the proposed Harbor at Black Rock, 1829

Note the presence of two Black Rocks in the era following the War of 1812. Upper Black Rock was then defined as the area closest to the Village of Buffalo (at left, or to the south) which was owned by New York State. Lower Black Rock was the area owned by individuals and located further north along the Scajaquada Creek (at right). The identity of “Lower Black Rock” eventually migrated further north beyond the Creek to encompass the area adjacent to the Erie Canal.

Black Rock was well suited for shipbuilding. Scajaquada Creek below Black Rock “was ideal and it was comparatively easy to bring material to Black Rock from the east. In 1812 and 1813 the Federal Government made it a temporary United States naval station where a number of fighting vessels were built...After the war shipbuilding for private purposes began once more. Captain Asa Stanard, of Black Rock, had established a shipyard on Scajaquada Creek in 1812. His apprentice, Benjamin Bidwell, fell heir to the business when Stanard died and the new company was called Bidwell and Davidson, later Bidwell and Carrick, and finally Bidwell and Banta” (Rapp nd). At some point, the company evolved into Bidwell and Banta and relocated to Buffalo along Buffalo Creek near Ohio Street.

One of the highlights of Black Rock’s shipbuilding history was the construction of Walk-in-the-Water, the first steamer to navigate the Great Lakes above Niagara Falls. This ship carried passengers and freight regularly between Black Rock and Detroit, with stops in Cleveland and Erie, Pennsylvania. Named for the Wyandotte chief, the ship was constructed in the Black Rock shipyards near Scajaquada Creek and initially launched from Black Rock in 1818. Its engines,

however, were no match for the current of the Niagara River and it had to be towed by oxen to enter the lake for its first successful run in August of that year. (The strength of the current near Black Rock was one of a number of the criticisms leveled at its harbor in the age of sail craft, which led to the siting of the western terminus of the Erie Canal at Buffalo.)

The region received a tremendous economic boost when it was determined that the western terminus of the Erie Canal would be located somewhere along Lake Erie. Construction of the Erie Canal, which would link the Hudson River and Lake Erie, began in 1817 near what is now Rome, New York, although the location for the western terminus was still undetermined. The Villages of Buffalo and Black Rock engaged in a vigorous five-year battle to be the site of the canal terminus, with each village completing extensive harbor improvements to entice the commissioners. Buffalo's harbor improvements centered on the connection between the Little Buffalo Creek, Big Buffalo Creek (now Buffalo River) and Lake Erie, including extensive work at the harbor mouth (Symons and Quintus 1902). Improvements in Black Rock included improving the connection between Scajaquada Creek and the Niagara River and creating a pier between Squaw Island and Bird Island).

In an effort to influence the canal commissioners to site the western terminus of the canal at Buffalo, Samuel Wilkeson organized the Buffalo Harbor Company in 1819 to improve harbor conditions. Wilkeson directed the construction of Buffalo harbor, which began in the spring of 1820 and continued through 1822 (Whittemore 1976; Powell 2001: part II; Symons and Quintus 1902). In that year the canal commissioners were swayed to locate the western terminus of the canal at Buffalo. The construction plan as enunciated in early 1822 by David Thomas, new principal engineer of the western section, "was to continue the canal excavation 'from a point above the lower end of Squaw Island, up the shore of the river, by Black Rock, in the rear of the storehouses, to a point above that village; and then extend it on a right line, through the Buffalo Swamp, in the rear of the sand bank, into Buffalo Creek'" (Powell 2001:part II). This report also reiterated the deficiencies of the harbor at Black Rock, which was described "as too vulnerable to British attack, too exposed to ice damage, and too expensive to develop" (Grande 1982:19). Unsatisfied, Porter returned to Albany to campaign for his village, informing the legislators of any occurring flood damage to Buffalo harbor or dangers engendered by the recurring sandbars.

Although favoring Buffalo, the commissioners expressed reservations about both harbors and, after fruitful lobbying by Porter, the legislature appropriated \$12,000 for construction of a harbor and piers at Black Rock in April (Grande 1982:19; Powell 2001: Part III; Shaw 1990:150). These improvements would include the partial damming of the Niagara River by the construction of a pier connecting Squaw Island to Bird Island to create more useful channel (Hodge 1909:388). A pier to link Squaw Island with the mainland was also planned.

The pier was to be 16 feet in height and 18 feet in width. They were also to construct 260 rods of embankment along the eastern shore of Squaw Island, which was to be 30 feet broad at the base and six feet at the top. They were also to construct a towpath two miles and 27 chains in length on the easterly side of the harbor and a lock between the harbor and the river. The contract price for this work was \$83,819, which included the Black Rock appropriation of \$12,000. As the pier was constructed there was some apprehension that it would be carried away by the storms of Lake Erie, or by the fields of floating ice in the springtime [Powell 2001: Part III; see also Symons and Quintus 1902].



Fig 4.6 The Bird Island Pier, Niagara River foot of Albany Street, 1898

The Bird Island Pier was damaged on several occasions because of ice and weather, but subsequently repaired and was incorporated into the outer pier of the improved Black Rock harbor constructed by the federal government during the first decade of the twentieth century (Powell 2001:part III).

At some point during the bitter debate, the issue of which village would be selected as the canal terminus was separated from the selection of which village would be the primary transshipment harbor. With the success of the initial efforts of Black Rock's harbor construction, in June 1823, construction of the Buffalo segment of the canal was temporarily suspended and the commissioners contracted with Peter Porter and Sheldon Thompson to complete the improvements to Black Rock's harbor for \$80,000. Buffalo was to be the terminus and one of three harbors in Western New York, but Black Rock was slated to be the major harbor and transshipment point. The harbor at Buffalo Creek would be the smallest of the three. The entire Niagara River would

comprise the third harbor with a plan to lock boats into the river at Tonawanda Creek (Shaw 1990:157-159); Grande 1982:20). Construction of the portion of the canal from Little Buffalo Creek to halfway to Sandytown began in August 1823. One casualty of the construction of the Erie Canal through Black Rock was the black rock from which the community derived its name. Irish workers digging the canal blasted the rock into memory (Powell 2001: Part III; Johnson 1876:353; Hodge 1909:388; Napora 1995).

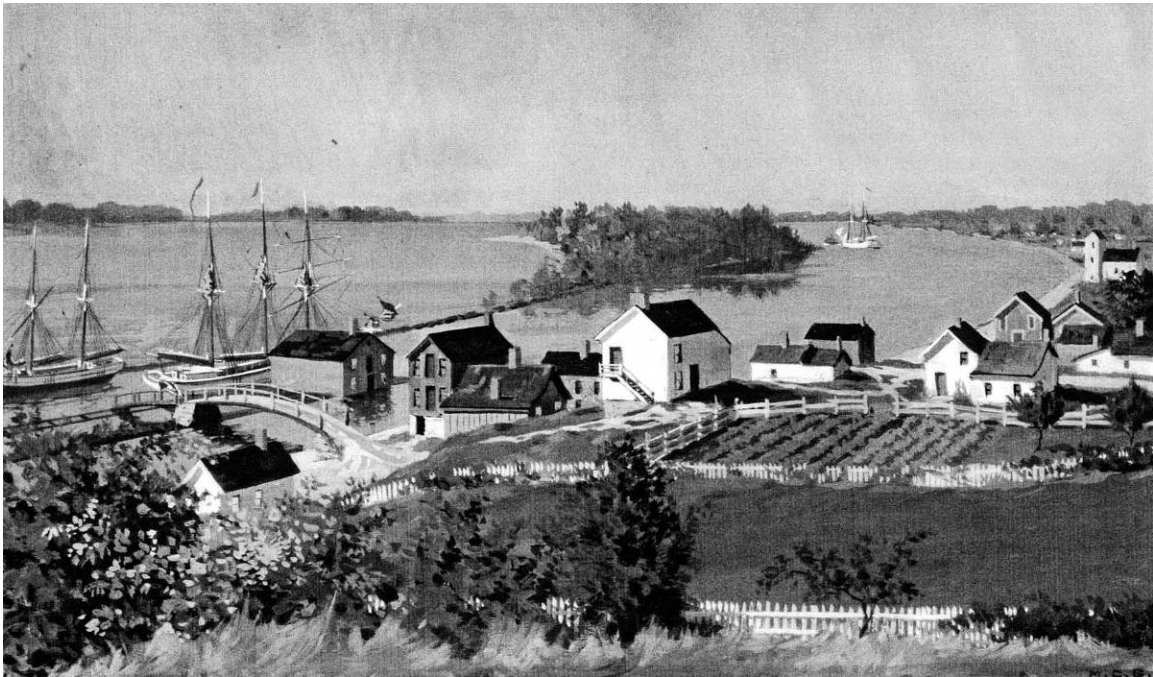


Fig 4.7 Black Rock in 1825 (Drawn by Mildred C. Green from the original sketch made by George Catlin, 1825.) Owned by Hon. Peter A. Porter

The climax of this rivalry ended quietly in early 1825. A compromise was reached on an independent canal that allowed for its construction, if needed. The compromise was propelled by Albany merchants and shippers who voiced fears about the new harbor's safety after a harsh winter damaged new construction at Black Rock. Damages to the harbor at Black Rock closed it in 1826 and a storm in the spring of 1827 destroyed the pier. The remaining shippers and business moved to Buffalo (Shaw 1990:161-162). As a result, Black Rock harbor began to lose shipping commerce and Buffalo continued to gain commerce. The location of the terminus at Buffalo guaranteed its victory in its rivalry with Black Rock, and after it opened on October 26, 1825, Buffalo became the transshipment point for goods moving between the Midwest through the lakes to New York and ocean trade. The canal was a major gateway to the West, bringing hundreds of thousands of settlers through Buffalo and a time of economic prosperity (Shaw 1990:5-6, 181-187; Vogel et al. 1993:16-17 see Schieppati et al. 2004). In 1825, the population of Black Rock was 1,039 (Grande 1982:22).

Peter Porter, despite his unsuccessful efforts with the canal, continued to advance the prospects of Black Rock. Founded by Porter and William Bird, his nephew, the Buffalo & Black Rock Railroad was the first railroad in Buffalo in 1834. A horse-propelled line, the Buffalo & Black Rock Railroad ran on 2.5 miles of track along Niagara Street from approximately School Street to Main Street. In 1836 the line was converted to steam engines and was extended across the Scajaquada into what would become the Town of Tonawanda and all the way to Niagara Falls, becoming the Buffalo & Niagara Falls Railroad. By 1847 it ran two trains a day in both directions (Dunn 2000:10-11; Emslie and Kirk 1850). It was consolidated into the New York Central Railroad in 1853.

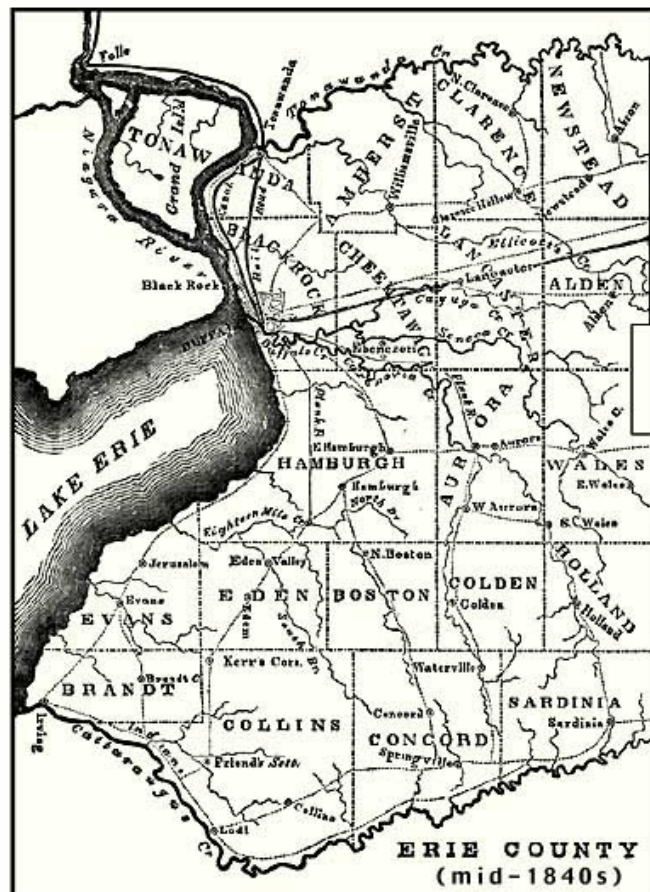


Fig 4.8 Erie County, New York in the mid-1840s

Note that the newly incorporated City of Buffalo (1832) is located within the Town of Black Rock.

The economic success of the Erie Canal and the arrival of immigrants into Western New York dramatically increased the area's population. As a result, new cities, towns, and villages, were created. In 1832, the City of Buffalo was incorporated; its boundaries were North Street on the north, Jefferson Street on the east, and the Buffalo Creek reservation on the south. Upper Black Rock, the area south of Squaw Island, was just over the northern border of the growing city and with trolley service established began to be closely linked to the city. In

1836, the Town of Tonawanda, including Grand Island, was created from the Town of Buffalo. In April 1837 the Village of Black Rock was incorporated. In February 1839 the Town of Black Rock was organized from what remained of the Town of Buffalo outside the city, as well as nominally the area south of the city to the center of the Buffalo Creek reservation (fig 4.7). By 1850, Erie County had a population of more than 100,000 with Buffalo having 42,261 residents (Smith 1884: I: 116), 182, 212, 221; Johnson 1876:424, 429; Van Ness 2001; Napora 1995). In 1853, the City of Buffalo extended its boundaries, annexing all of the Town of Black Rock and receiving a new city charter (Smith 1884: I: 230). The [Ambassador Bridge] project area was now another section of the City of Buffalo.

Upper Black Rock failed in its competition with Buffalo to be a terminus for the canal and was slowly absorbed into the growing west side of the City of Buffalo. Lower Black Rock, north of Scajaquada Creek, received a lock at the foot of Austin Street in 1883. The lock was a boon to the economic development in this area, which soon was referred to as Black Rock Dam, for it enhance the water power generated by the river and, after South Buffalo, Black Rock became the most heavily industrialized section of the city by the middle of the nineteenth century. Mills had been located along the Niagara River and Scajaquada Creek since the 1830s, and included Frontier Mills (reputedly erected in 1832 by Stephen W. Howells), Globe Mills (ca. 1935), and Enos's flour mill, all of which were still extant in 1884. William Bird, Peter Porter, and Robert McPherson reputedly erected a flour mill at Lower Black Rock ca. 1831. Other mills included the Erie Mills and the Queen City Mills (both erected ca. 1838), the Clinton mills and the North Buffalo mills (1857). Most of these mills were located south of Bird Avenue and along the pier extending south from Squaw Island. In 1866, Globe Mills, Niagara Mills, and Erie Mills were situated along the river near Amherst Street. Frontier Mills, Clinton Mills, Queen City Mills, and Marine Flour Mills were extant in 1894, but most of the mills had burned down or were torn down by the 1920s (Smith 1884:II:251-252; Stone and Stewart 1866; American Atlas Co. 1894; Hill 1923:738-740). Mills and factories soon attracted German and Irish immigrants to live in the area. The lock, until its closure in 1913, served as bridge to Squaw Island. The present lock was completed between 1908 and 1914 (Smith 1884: II: 251-252; Napora 1995; Kowsky et al. 1981; Goldman n.d.).

By the beginning of the 1840s "the canal towpath in Black Rock—at the foot of Amherst, Austin and Hertel—had become a significant manufacturing center with several flour mills, cooperages (barrel factories), and lumber mills" (Goldman n.d.). In addition to the canal, the tracks of the Buffalo & Niagara Falls Railroad ran just east of the intersection of Amherst and Tonawanda streets. With industry and community development the population of Black Rock rose from approximately 1,400 in 1855 to 2,200 in 1875. The area north of what is now Hertel Avenue comprised mostly farms until the late nineteenth century. William A. Bird owned a large farm lot in this area (Goldman n.d.; American Atlas Co. 1894).

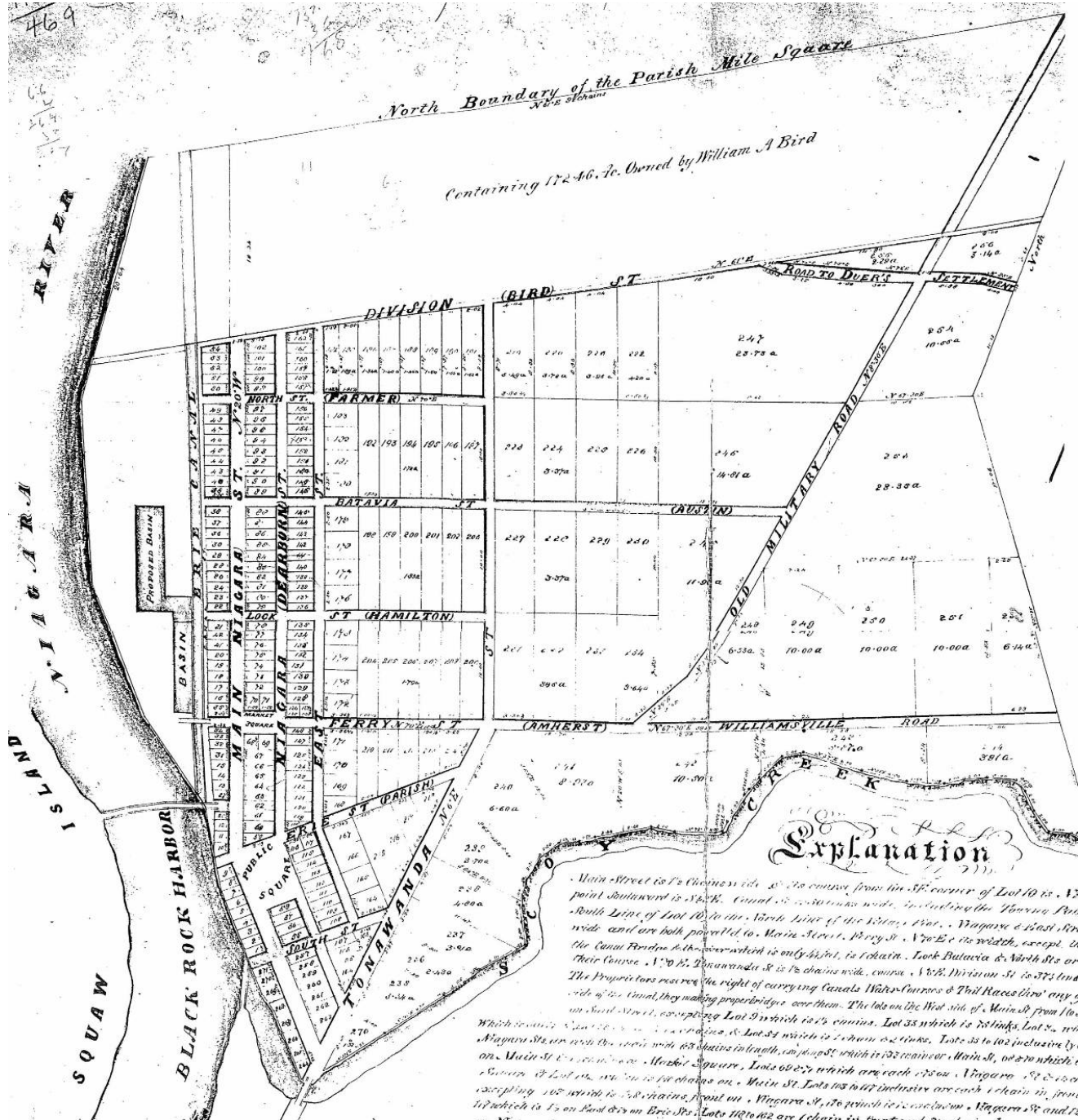


Fig 4.9 Map of the Parish Mile Square as Surveyed in the Year 1830, R. Chapin, Esq.
 The earliest map located which illustrates the layout and street patterns in Lower Black Rock. Note that this map indicates that Niagara Street was once known as Main Street, Dearborn was Niagara and Amherst Street was once Ferry Street ca. 1830. Note the so-called “Bird Farm” parcel to the top (north) of the map was largely undeveloped. Settlement occurred primarily along the western portion of the Parish tract, along the spine of the Erie Canal. Areas to the east of Tonawanda Street to the present Elmwood Avenue remained largely vacant farmland.

Although Gibson, Johnson and Ehle operated a foundry and machine shop in Black Rock in 1826 and Mr. Justin built a forge at Black Rock Dam in 1838, it wasn't until the middle of nineteenth century that heavy industry took root north of Scajaquada Creek (Wilkeson 2005 [1864]). Founded in 1846, Buffalo Iron and

Nail Works was the first rolling mill (e.g., produced metal rolled in bars or sheets) and one of the largest iron works in the city. It was located near the mouth of Scajaquada Creek in Black Rock, and was owned by Pratt and Company from approximately 1857 through 1880. It manufactured bar iron, hoop and band iron, rod and nail plate, "and has connected with it a manufactory for wrought railroad and boat spikes" (Thomas 2003 [1886]). Pratt and Company was formed in 1832 by Samuel Fletcher Pratt, Pascal Paoli Pratt (his brother), and Edward P. Beals. Housed on the Terrace in Buffalo, the company was a dealer in hardware, bar iron, sheet iron, tools, contractors' and railroad supplies, and coach and saddlery ware (Smith 1884: II: 256; Holder 1960:14).

Circa 1850, Pratt and Company organized a separate firm to deal exclusively with the carriage and saddle aspect of the business. To this end the Pratt brothers partnered with William Pryor Letchworth from Auburn, New York, to form Pratt & Letchworth. Pratt & Company continuing in its old line (Dunn 2003; Smith 1884: II: 256; Holder 1960:14). Pratt & Company subsequently became renowned for saddlery hardware. Headquartered on the Terrace in Buffalo, Pratt & Letchworth established the Buffalo Malleable Iron Works on Tonawanda Street in 1860, probably near or subsuming the Iron and Nail Works. The factory contained 50 nail making machines, while the mill had 16 puddling and 5 heating furnaces and five trains of rolls. An additional building, measuring 200 ft by 80 ft was completed by 1866, which added four heating furnaces and two trains of rolls to the factory's capabilities. At that time, the company put into operation "the Fletcher Furnace," one-half mile from the factory on 12 acres "with an extended river and canal front. A canal basin at right angles to the canal, three hundred feet long by sixty feet wide and seven feet deep, has been excavated, which is connected by a slip with the Erie Canal. On the Niagara River, two hundred feet of substantial dock has been built; alongside of which is twelve feet of water" (Thomas 2003 [1866]; Stone and Stewart 1866;). In 1872, Pratt & Letchworth occupied 38 acres between the New York Central and Scajaquada Creek, which emptied into the Erie Canal adjacent to the Black Rock depot. The company manufactured "saddlery hardware, rings, buckles, trees, hames, & c." (Cook & Breslin nd [1872]).

Perhaps motivated by altruism as well as practicality, Pratt & Letchworth erected for the workers "a goodly number of neat and convenient cottages, situated near the Works. In the immediate neighborhood there are two large, free public school buildings, where the children of the men employed have the most favorable advantages for educating their children" (Thomas 2003 [1866]). The workers had the opportunity to purchase the house and lot. Moreover, the proprietors appear to have attempted to provide the workers a natural outlet to



Fig 4.10 Detail, Untitled Map of Black Rock, 1856

Created over 20 years after the previous 1830 map (fig 4.9), the Lower Black Rock area has continued to grow and develop. Note significant growth along the left side (western) of the map and also along Military Road at the right. Industrial growth including the Buffalo Malleable Iron Works of Pratt & Letchworth has occurred along Tonawanda Street near the Scajaquada Creek.

escape the dirt, noise and grime of factory work as “part of the unoccupied land has been planted and converted into a succession of flower gardens, that part nearest the water having, in Summer time, the appearance of a small park; and, lastly, a cozy little reading-room, well warmed, well lighted, and well supplied with

newspapers has been opened for their use. A library will shortly be added to it. It would be a good thing if more large employers of labor were as thoughtful" (Cook & Breslin nd [1872]). Interestingly, Pratt & Letchworth also used prison labor at the nearby penitentiary to produce some articles under contract (Smith 1884: II: 256).

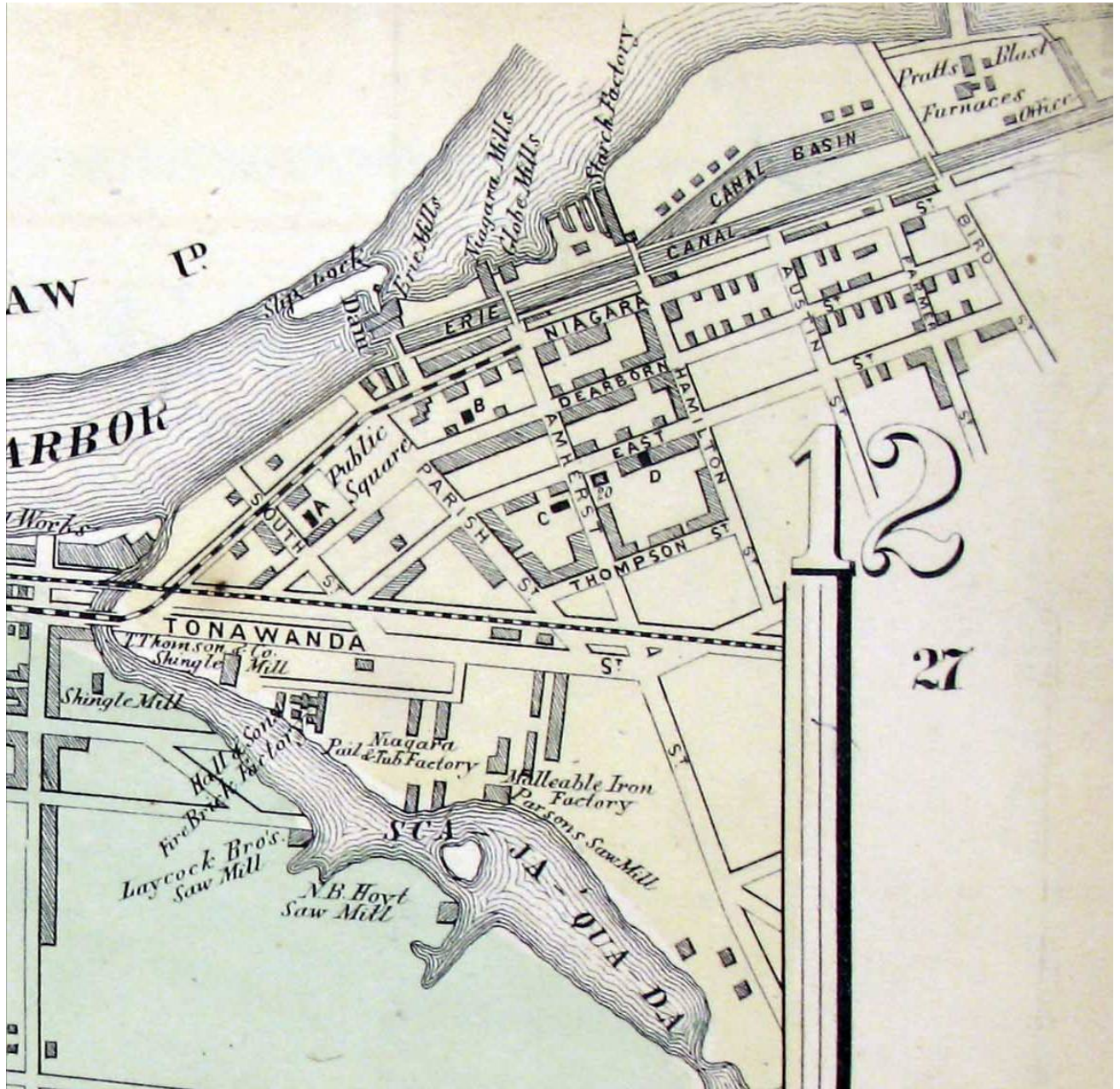


Fig 4.11 Detail, Lower Black Rock at the end of the Civil War, 1866

Note the proliferation of various industries and factories along the Scajaquada Creek, Erie Canal and Black Rock Harbor in the period immediately following the Civil War. Businesses noted about include Parsons Saw Mill, Malleable Iron Factory, Niagara Pail & Tub Factory, T. Thompson & Co. Shingle Mill, and a variety of Mills located along the canal.

In 1873, William P. Letchworth sold his interest in the company to his brother, Josiah, who was running the company with George Letchworth in 1884. With railroad dominance of shipping and transportation at the turn of nineteenth century, the expanding iron works manufactured the driving wheels and frames of some of the largest American and foreign locomotives (Holder 1960:14; Smith 1884: II: 88 bio; Hill 1923:811). Pratt and Letchworth was the first to use the open –hearth steel process in Buffalo and produced steel castings by 1888 (Holder 1960:14; Smith 1884: II: 256; Hill 1923:811). After 1880, other companies operated the blast furnace, while the rolling mill was converted to other industrial uses. Pratt & Letchworth employed between 500 and 800 workers and served as the impetus to settle the area (Smith 1884: II: 241). In the 1920s, the Tonawanda Street plant covered 20 acres, with its power derived from Niagara Falls (Hill 1923:811).

4.5 Railroad and Post-Civil War Development

Figure 4.10 illustrates some of the industrial and commercial development that characterized Lower Black Rock after the conclusion of the Civil War. Flour mills were located along the Niagara River near the canal lock and Pratt's blast furnace was farther north near the canal basin. At the time, numerous industrial operations were situated along both sides of Scajaquada Creek, including saw mills of Laycock Brothers and N.H. Hoyt, and a shingle mill on the creek's south side, and Parsons saw mill, the Malleable Iron Factory, Niagara Pail and Tub Factory, Ball and Son Fire Brick Factory, and a shingle factory on the north side. Pratt's Iron Works were located along the river south of the creek.

Iron ore smelting began in Buffalo around 1860, as economical lake transportation of ore to Buffalo enabled the city's commerce-based economy to gradually shift to a manufacturing economy (Holder 1960:14, 16). The Civil War stimulated the iron and steel industry and, by 1864, 24 foundries and machine shops were located in Buffalo. The trend toward heavier industry intensified after the Civil War and, in 1869, the city held an industrial exposition that featured the inventiveness of mechanization and production and advanced the idea of industry as craft (Goldman 1983:126). The introduction of the iron industry at the exposition provided a stage for the initiation, and subsequent development, of a new era of industrialization. Soon after, iron and steel manufacturing would become the backbone industry of the City of Buffalo and the railroads were vital for the importation of iron and coal from the mines of Pennsylvania.

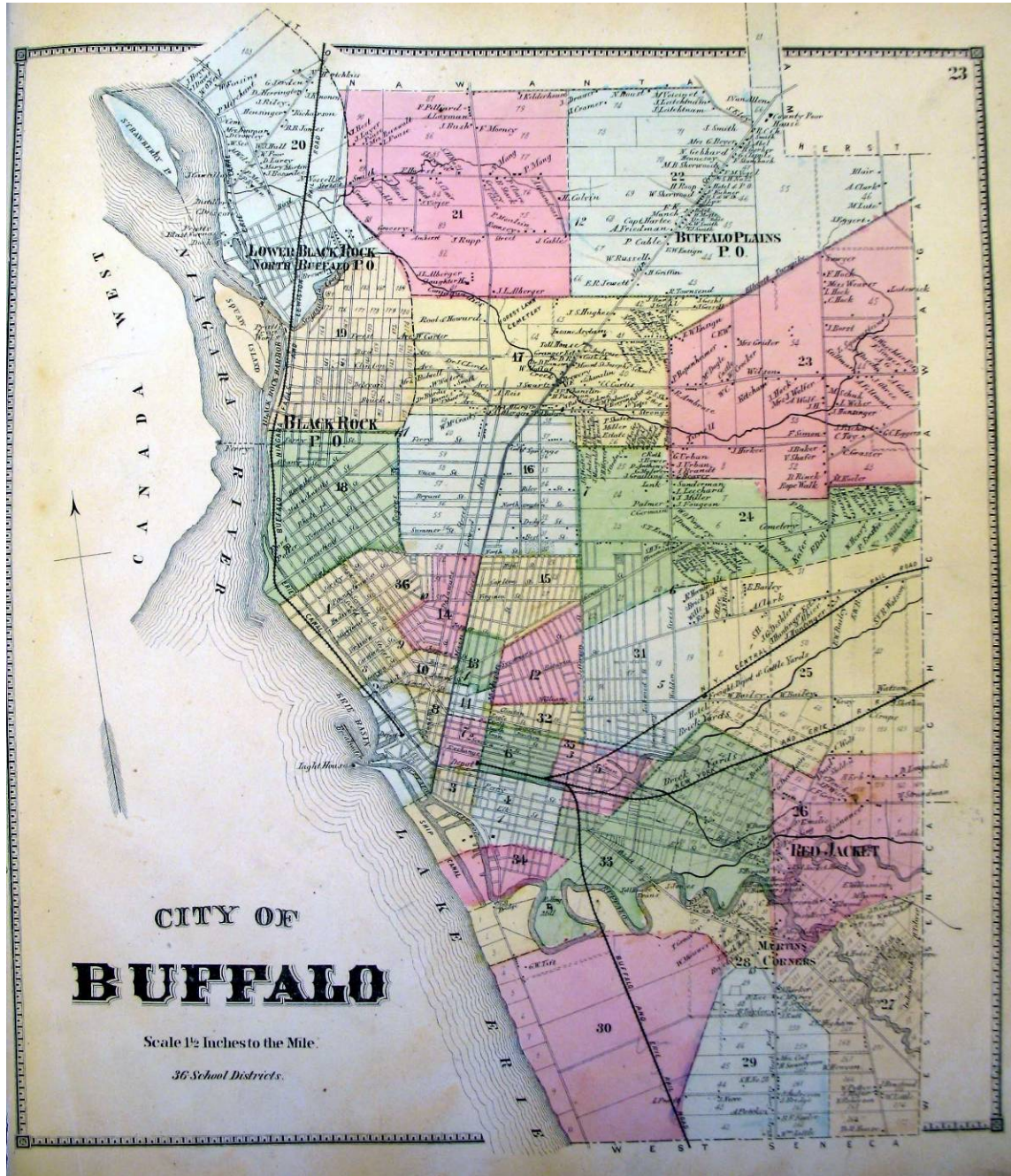


Fig 4.12 Map of the City of Buffalo, from the 1866 Stone & Stewart Atlas

Note that by the Civil War-era, the term “Lower Black Rock” had migrated northward to become associated with the western portion of the present Black Rock Planning Neighborhood area. The portion located within the historic Mile Strip Reservation is the most developed at this time, with the eastern areas of the survey area still rural and undeveloped.

The arrival of the railroads during the mid-nineteenth century fostered the continued economic diversification of Buffalo and Black Rock into a more densely populated, more heavily industrialized area. As noted, the Buffalo & Niagara Falls Railroad ran two trains a day in both directions by 1847 and was

incorporated into the New York Central Railroad system in 1853 (Dunn 2000:10-11; Emslie and Kirk 1850; Geil 1855). In 1869, the New York Central merged with Cornelius Vanderbilt's Hudson River Railroad, becoming the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad (New York Central for short).



Fig 4.13 Niagara Street near Amherst Street, ca. 1870s

In the early 1870s, a flurry of construction emanated from several railroad lines that were expanding into or through western New York. In Canada, the Grand Trunk Railway's long gestating project of erecting a bridge over the Niagara River finally came to fruition as an international bridge was completed in 1873. The engineering firm of Sir Casimir S. Gzowski and D.L. MacPherson constructed a single-track iron railway bridge with a pedestrian walkway from North Buffalo to Fort Erie. This bridge was second railroad bridge to span the river (the first was the Suspension Bridge below Niagara Falls) and the only one at that time with piers in the river.

The site selected for the crossing was located 3.5 miles north of Buffalo harbour [sic], where advantage could be taken of Squaw Island, situated close to the American side, to cross both the River and the Erie Canal. The piers had to be constructed in the swift current and several coffer dams were swept away before they were anchored by heavy stone. The crossing, which consisted of a bridge across the main river channel, an embankment across Squaw Island, and a swing span across the Erie Canal, was opened for single track traffic in November, 1873, and its success was immediate [Dunn 2000:52, quoting Jackson & Burtiak 1978].

The American end of the bridge connected with the tracks of the New York Central at Lower Black Rock. These tracks were formerly part of the Buffalo & Niagara Falls Railroad (Dunn 2000:52; Niagara Falls Thunder Alley ca. 1998). The bridge was renovated in 1900 with the pedestrian walkway removed to accommodate a second rail bed. It comprises three sections: 1) from Canada across the river to Squaw Island; 2) across Squaw Island; and 3) across the Black Rock Canal (Niagara Falls Thunder Alley ca. 1998). A total of 264 trains crossed the bridge during one 24-hour period (July 10, 1916), while in 1998 between 10 and 15 trains across the bridge per day (Niagara Falls Thunder Alley ca. 1998). Operated into the twentieth century by the International Railroad Bridge Company, the International Bridge is also referred to as the International Railroad Bridge.

At the same time, the New York Central was constructing a line to provide a direct connection for freight traffic to the International Bridge. Prosaically named the Junction Railroad, this line ran from east Buffalo generally north to just north of Main Street where it turned west and paralleled Amherst Street through sparsely settled northern Buffalo to the former Buffalo & Niagara Falls Railroad tracks. It was completed in 1872 (Dunn 2000:52-53).

Not to be outdone, the Erie Railroad endeavored to expand its line into Canada accessing the International Bridge. Incorporated in 1872, the Erie International Railroad when completed ran from the International Bridge at Black Rock across northern Buffalo to connect with the Suspension Bridge & Erie Junction Railroad at Main Street. Completed in 1871, the Suspension Bridge and Erie Junction Railroad left the Erie mainline near the intersection of William Street and Williamsville Road (now Bailey Avenue) and crossed Main Street near Hertel Avenue (Dunn 2000:52).

By 1879, the New York Central had three principal passenger stations within the City of Buffalo: one in east Buffalo that was utilized by the New York Central and the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern line; one on Exchange Street (built 1855-1856) and one on Erie Street (west of Main) that [was] used by the Grand Trunk Railway as well as Buffalo, Niagara Falls & Lockport Railroad. To simplify its operation, the New York Central linked the Buffalo & Niagara Falls line (the tracks of which runs [sic] through the [proposed Ambassador Bridge] project area) with the Exchange Street station, which resulted in the termination of the Erie Street station and the creation of a local passenger station on the Terrace by 1880 (Beers 1880; Dunn 2000:98-99).

This new link in downtown Buffalo was a key component in the creation of the infrastructure for “a belt line passenger service all the way around” the city. Beginning operation in July 1883, the so-called Belt Line used the tracks of the Junction Railroad on the eastern side, which had been completed to the International Bridge by 1872, and the tracks of the former Buffalo & Niagara Falls

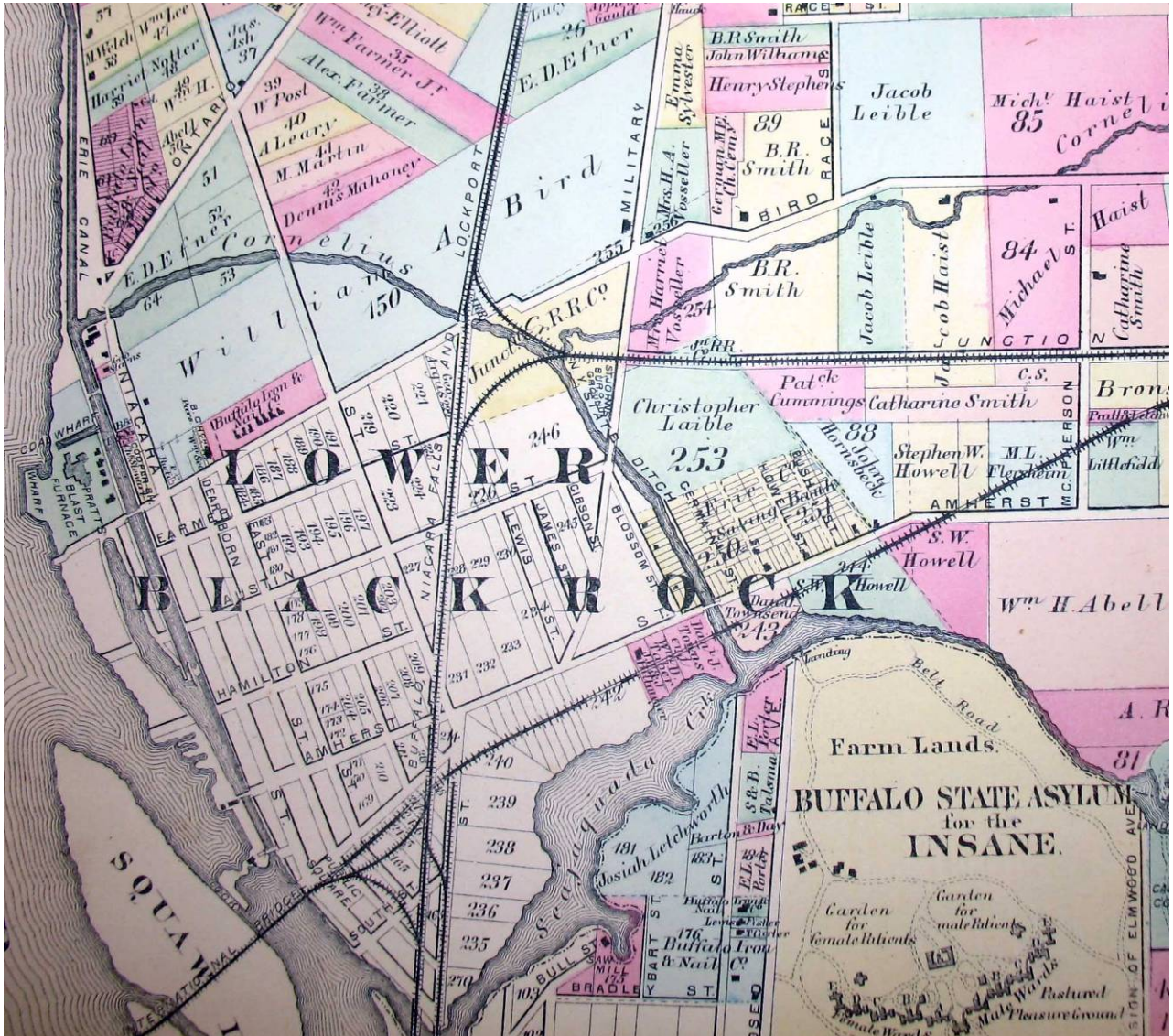


Fig 4.14 Lower Black Rock, 1872

Note the expansion of rail lines throughout Lower Black Rock by the 1870s including the International Bridge spanning to Squaw Island. Also notice the so-called “New York State Ditch” waterway which connected the Scajaquada Creek to the Cornelius Creek and Erie Canal and circumscribed the densely settled area of Lower Black Rock. William A. Bird’s large “farm” towards the top of the map is also still largely intact in the 1870s.

Railroad on the western side. A total of 2,100 passengers were served in the first week (Dunn 2000:99).

In its years, stations on the Belt Line counterclockwise from Exchange Street were located at the Terrace, Georgia Street, Water Works, Ferry Street, Clifton Avenue, Black Rock, (West) Amherst Street, Austin Street, Cross Cut Junction, Delaware Park, Villa Park, (East) Amherst Street, Main Street, Driving Park, Genesee, Broadway, William Street, and Seneca Street. In 1885

twelve trains ran counter-clockwise from Exchange Street beginning at 5:55 A.M., and thirteen clockwise ending at 7:45 P.M. In those halcyon days one could circle the city for a nickel [Dunn 2000:99].

The extension of the Belt Line past and parallel to Amherst Street fostered industrial and residential development in the sparsely settled areas in the city's northern limits. Industries were liberated by the railroads from the necessity of locating near the waterfront or the canal to transport their goods. The advent of hydroelectric power at the turn of the nineteenth century also facilitated this transition. "Factories began to spring up along the tracks of the Belt Line. In Black Rock an industrial strip developed along the tracks that used the Tonawanda-Amherst Street station to transport their goods" (Zornick 2002; Goldman 1983:178-180; American Atlas Company 1894; USGS 1901). For example, Pratt & Letchworth expanded their operations in the 1880s and were joined in Black Rock by a variety of other industrialists in "the new urban-industrial frontier in Black Rock" (Zornick 2002, quoting Kowsky et al. 1981).

Located at Niagara Street and Forest Avenue, the Niagara Bridge Works was regarded as one of Buffalo's most important establishments in connection with the iron industry in the 1880s. The company was founded at that Black Rock location in 1873 by G.C. Bell and S.J. Field and employed between 100 and 300 workers in the early 1880s (Smith 1884:II:88 Bio; Hill 1923:810). The International Starch Works opened in Black Rock in 1877 and employed 50 workers, with a capacity of 400 bushels of corn per day. It also operated a barrel-heading factory at its location (Smith 1884: II: 259). Buffalo Structural Steel Company erected a plant on Letchworth Street near Grant Street (south of Scajaquada Creek) in 1895, which was still in operation in the 1920s (Hill 1923:806). Buffalo Cooperative Stove Company operated a large plant at Amherst and Tonawanda Streets. It produced the "well-known" Amherst stoves, ranges, and furnaces (Hill 1923:807).

In 1883, Thomas F. Griffin & Sons began manufacturing car wheels in a 600-x-70-ft building on Forest Avenue near Niagara Street, and the Shepard Hardware Company relocated their foundry to three-and-one-half acres in this area from Chicago Street. Founded by John D. Shepard, a long-time Buffalo ironmonger, the Shepard Hardware Company occupied the entire area north of Forest Avenue and south of Scajaquada Creek between the Erie Canal and the New York Central tracks in 1889, but this area was completely vacant in 1894 and occupied by the Buffalo Gas Light Company in 1900. In 1894 the New York Car Wheel Works and Griffin Machine Works flanked the tracks of the New York Central south of Forrest Avenue between the Erie Canal and Niagara Street (Smith 1884: II: 257-258; Sanborn Map Company 1889, 1900; American Atlas Co. 1894). On the south side of the creek, the Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company and Buffalo Structural Steel Company occupied the northwest side of

the intersection of Bradley and Dart Streets in 1900. This area only had a sawmill in 1894 (Sanborn Map Company 1900; American Atlas Company 1894).

Between Tonawanda Street and Scajaquada Creek were the United States Electric Light & Power Company, Thompson's shingle mill, Pratt & Letchworth's Buffalo Malleable Iron Works, Laycock Brother's Company sawmill, Glor & Gridley's Barrel Factory, Hall and Sons Fire Brick Works, and the Buffalo Sewer Pipe Company. The latter two operations appear to have collected clay from the banks of the creek for use in their operations. An extensive and growing collection of railroad tracks (and a variety of freight houses) were situated west of Tonawanda Street, covering the area to just northwest of Parish Street, and included the operations of the Grand Trunk Railway, the New York Central, the Michigan Central Railway, the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, and the New York, Lake Erie & Western Railroad. In addition, Buffalo Co-operative Stove Company and A. Cutler and Son furniture factory were in this area, near Amherst and Churchill streets (Sanborn Map Company 1889, 1900; American Atlas Company 1894).

Workers at that time when transportation was irregular or nonexistent [sic], tended to live near the places they were employed. This practice continued into the early decades of twentieth century when transportation was improving. As industry became ensconced in sparsely settled Black Rock area and along

Scajaquada Creek, workers, too, followed the Belt Line. Germans were the dominant ethnic group in this area in the early 1880s, but many of the new arrivals seeking employment in industries sprouting up in Black Rock were Eastern Europeans, particularly Polish immigrants, who had initially settled in Buffalo's East Side. What would become Assumption Parish was one example of this process of residential development complementing industrial development.

At first a simple stop on the Belt Line, the area quickly became a major node of immigrant settlement and industrial development. Because of its excellent connection with the rest of the city's railroad system, factories quickly located here. Settlers came too, primarily young Poles eager to move out and away from the older Polish section on the city's East Side. Now they had the opportunity, and beginning in 1883 hundreds and eventually thousands of Poles abandoned their old neighborhood. In 1888 Assumption parish, as a result of the combined forces of immigration, transportation and industrialization, had become the second largest Polish neighborhood in Buffalo [Goldman 1983:179].

The parish was established in 1888 along Amherst Street near the Belt Line. The present Romanesque Church of the Assumption was completed in 1914 at

435 Amherst Street and catered to the area's Polish immigrants and factory workers.

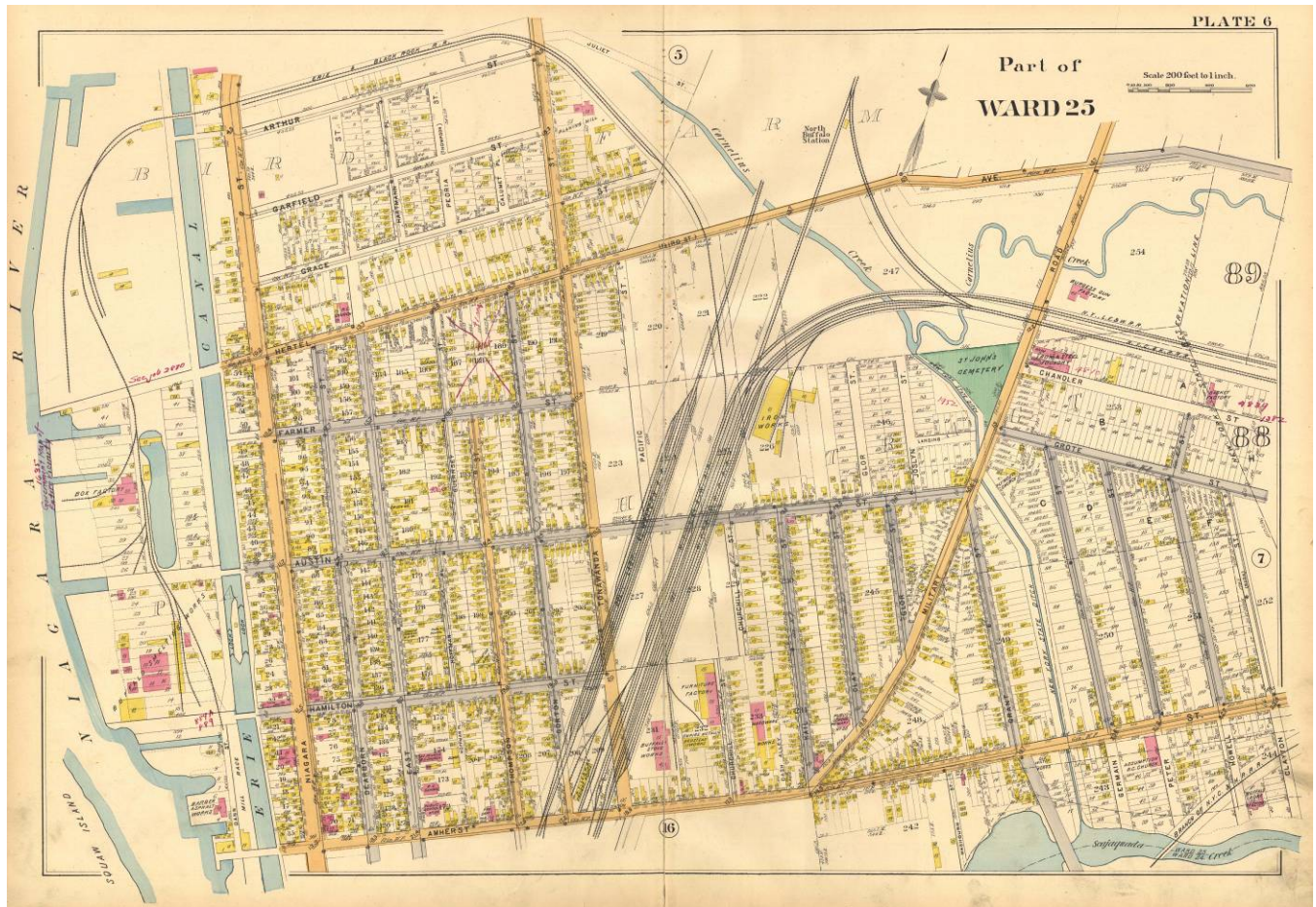


Fig 4.15 Black Rock and Grant-Amherst neighborhoods, 1894

Note that by the end of the 1800s, two distinct neighborhoods had formed in the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood; Lower Black Rock to the west of the numerous rail lines of the New York Central Belt line Railroad and Grant-Amherst was beginning to take shape to the east. Divided by the rail lines, these two communities developed largely independently from each other.

4.6 Growth of the Grant-Amherst Neighborhood

While maps indicate that the western portions of the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood were already well settled along Niagara, Dearborn and Amherst Streets by the mid- nineteenth-century, the eastern areas of the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood remained largely open farmland. This area located between approximately Tonawanda Street to the west and Elmwood Avenue to the east remained generally an unsettled fringe area, typical of the areas surrounding the City of Buffalo in the 1850s and 1860s.

This area would change dramatically following the creation of Buffalo's Belt Line Railroad. Constructed by the New York Central Railroad in 1883, the Belt Line

was a series of rail lines which circumscribed the City of Buffalo, connecting new fringe areas outside of the city's downtown with the New York Central's vast rail lines, linking the still relatively diminutive City of Buffalo to cities across the East Coast. The Belt Line had a tremendous impact on the growth of industrial, commercial and residential development throughout adjacent areas of Buffalo, but perhaps had the greatest influence on the development of the Grant-Amherst neighborhood. In the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood, the Belt Line formed the area's northern boundary just north of Chandler Street, before it bent southward cutting across Tonawanda Street on its way south to Buffalo. Proximity to the Belt Line and the easy access it provided to markets in Buffalo and in cities across the country encouraged the growth of a variety of industrial and manufacturing plants along the line. In the Grant-Amherst neighborhood, Buffalo Cooperative Stove, McKinnon Dash, Acme Steel, Hard Manufacturing and Standard Plaster were among the earliest industrial works which located in the area following the completion of the Belt Line. Larger industries such as Kittinger Furniture, Pierce Arrow Automobiles (located on the east side of Elmwood Avenue), and Fedders followed around the turn of the twentieth-century.³

By 1875, thirteen Poles had settled in the Grant-Amherst neighborhood. At the south-west corner of this intersection, the Black Rock Farmers' Market was located. Behind this market was an area apparently nicknamed "Hell Town" by the residents, as the area quickly became a densely crowded community of newly-arrived Polish immigrants who sought employment in the area's numerous factories and plants.⁴ While it is unclear what exactly prompted this nickname, it was likely a result of typical nineteenth-century conditions in similar densely settled communities such as overcrowding, poor sanitation and poverty.

Initially, the Grant-Amherst area was settled by Poles from the German regions of Poland, giving these bilingual settlers the ability to quickly adapt to Buffalo's German and Polish heritage. Later arrivals to the neighborhood were largely from Russian or Austrian-occupied Poland, and this second wave of Polish immigrants displaced many of the earlier settlers, raising negative opinions of these newcomers in the local papers.⁵ While the Grant-Amherst neighborhood also contained a small but significant Hungarian population which founded St. Elizabeth's Hungarian Church on Grant Street in 1907, the Grant-Amherst neighborhood was effectively a Polish ghetto with the Assumption parish serving as the community's physical and spiritual nucleus.⁶

³ Goldman, Mark. "First There Was Black Rock." *Buffalo Architecture and History*. Web. 01 July 2010. <<http://www.buffaloah.com/h/br/brgold/index.html>>. Also Napora, James. ---. "History of Grant / Amherst Area." *Buffalo Architecture and History*. Web. 01 July 2010. <<http://www.buffaloah.com/h/grant.html>>.

⁴ Cook, Dorothy. "Lesser Polonias." *Polish Genealogical Society of Western New York*: 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Many of those earlier German-Polish residents who left the Grant-Amherst neighborhood relocated in the Riverside neighborhood to the north of Black Rock centering around Ontario and Tonawanda Streets. Goldman, "First There Was Black Rock."

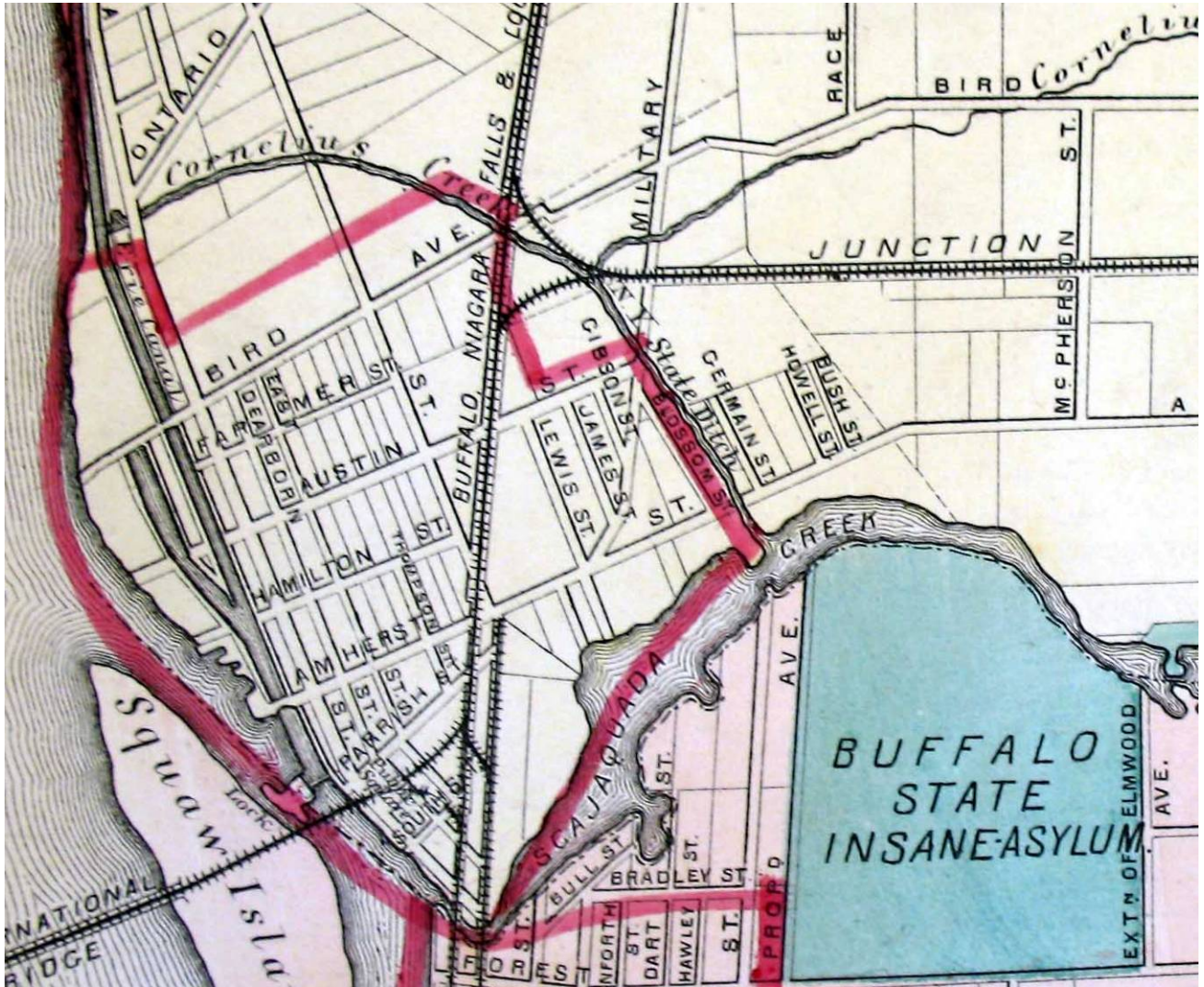


Fig 4.16 Detail, Black Rock- Grant Amherst areas, 1872

While the Lower Black Rock neighborhood was well settled by the 1870s, note that the area east of Military Road remained largely unsettled. Elmwood Avenue, which forms the survey's easternmost boundary, was not yet extended northward by the 1870s indicating the rural quality of what would become the Grant-Amherst neighborhood in the 1880s and 90s.

Northwest of the tracks and Parrish Street and beginning along Amherst Street extended a growing neighborhood of one, one-and-one-half, and two-and-a-half story residential structures. Called "the working man's cottage," these two-story buildings contained three bedrooms and one bath [and] were the right size for a small family. Further, the two-family flat was another popular housing choice since it allowed a working-class family the opportunity to own a home by renting out the apartment to help with the mortgage (Napora 1995). The railroads created new neighborhoods and, since they traveled along street rights-of-way at grade level, also separated sections of the city. "Black Rock and Assumption Parish, for example, although immediately adjacent to each other [on the opposite side of Tonawanda Street], were completely isolated and divided from

each other by a fortress like conglomeration of street-level railroad crossings” (Goldman 1983:179). Eminent Victorian Buffalonians relocated to areas around Delaware Park, created by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux beginning in 1865, which combined with the so-called “Buffalo State Hospital for the Insane” to the west (where H.H. Richardson would design several buildings) and Forest Lawn Cemetery, to the east, provided an extensive green space on both sides of Scajaquada Creek east of Black Rock (east of Rees Street and the tracks of the New York Central’s Junction Railroad) (Beers 1880; American Atlas Company 1894). The western end of this area in the vicinity of Elmwood Avenue would be the site of the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, which would be subdivided for residences upon completion of the event.

The Grant-Amherst neighborhood developed largely between the 1880s and 1920s as a mixed industrial, commercial and residential area. While industry was located primarily adjacent to the Belt Line rail lines, commercial growth in the neighborhood occurred primarily along Amherst Street near the intersection with Grant Street, giving this community its name. The neighborhood which developed during these years was largely self-sufficient, as the dense web of rail lines near Tonawanda Street effectively bisected the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood area between the established Black Rock neighborhood and the growing Grant-Amherst community. While Amherst Street appeared on maps as a continuous link between the two adjacent communities, in reality the dense and congested rail lines which ran at-grade proved to create a barrier to communication. This was not remedied until the 1930s when the rail lines were relocated to a raised viaduct system, and an east-west bus route along Amherst Street connected these otherwise separate areas.⁷

4.7 Other Growth and Development in the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood

Another technological achievement was the development of the electric street railway or interurban. In 1895, the 35 cars of the Buffalo & Niagara Falls Electric Railway used the tracks of Buffalo Railway along Niagara, Tonawanda and Amherst Streets through Black Rock. It served 662,445 patrons during its first year, running cars at a minimum of every 15 minutes from each terminal. By 1900, 25 streetcar lines paralleled city roads (along with 87 miles of track) connecting downtown Buffalo with outlying neighborhoods in all corners of the city. In 1902 the electric railway was consolidated with other streetcar lines to form the International Railway Company (Dunn 2000:182-184; Goldman 1983:1986). The success of the electric railways undermined the profitability of the Belt Line, which stopped passenger service during World War I. The electric railways would, in turn, be undermined during the 1920s and 1930s by the success of the automobile and buses.

⁷ *Ibid.*

By the end of the nineteenth century, Buffalo was the second leading railroad terminus in the United States (after Chicago), which had reduced the economic impact of the Erie Canal to near irrelevance (Goldman 1983:129-130; Smith 1884: I: 320). As a result, New York State and canal interests believed another expansion of the old canal was necessary for it to compete with the railroads. By the last years of the nineteenth century, however, cost overruns and charges of incompetence caused the movement to improve the canal to be subsumed into the movement to re-conceive the canal in terms of the technological changes then-occurring: bigger, faster, motorized boats (McFee 1998:10-14, 39-42). While other portions of the state, including Niagara County, dramatically widened and deepened a new canal channel, the Buffalo electorate rejected a 1917 referendum to widen the Erie Canal in the city. Soon the source of Buffalo's nineteenth-century economic success would be filled with trash and buried. The Erie Barge Canal, as the new Erie Canal was called, terminated in the Town of Tonawanda, but canal traffic near Buffalo utilized the Black Rock channel and the Niagara River to reach Lake Erie or the Buffalo River (McFee 1998:74).

Challenged by the streetcars and resurgent canal interests, the railroads were still the dominant method of transporting freight. Railroad companies, notably the New York Central and the Erie, established classification yards in Black Rock northwest of Tonawanda Street by the early twentieth century. The New York Central's Black Rock yards held seven miles of track and were northeast of the corner of Amherst and Tonawanda Streets, and along approaches to the international bridge (Dunn 2000:218). The Erie Railroad maintained a smaller classification yard in Black Rock that could service 325 cars with 12 switch engines (Dunn 2000:223). Beginning during the late nineteenth century, a movement to abolish railroad grade crossing slowly percolated through the city. The plethora of railroad lines and extensive trackage, as noted, separated communities and were dangerous. This movement spread, as the Belt Line opened up new areas to settlement and development and as neighborhoods grew during the early twentieth century. In general, streets were lowered to below grade and bridges erected over them to carry the trains (Zornick 2002).

Electric streetcars and the Belt Line contributed to attract businesses to the Black Rock area in the early twentieth century. Established in 1896, the Fedders Manufacturing Company (later Fedco) relocated to Tonawanda Street from Genesee Street in 1910. The company manufactured radiators for automobiles, trucks, tractors, and airplanes and was the largest automobile radiator maker at the beginning of World War I. By 1925, Fedders-Quigan Corp occupied a complex of several buildings on both sides of West Avenue in the area between Scajaquada Creek and Tonawanda Street. The area north of West Avenue had been site of Hall & Sons Fire Brick Company until about 1910 (Hill 1923:810; Sanborn Map Company 1900, 1925). The Pratt & Lambert Company established a plant in Buffalo in 1903. The company was founded in Buffalo in 1849, developing a product that dried linseed-oil paint, and was one of the largest manufacturers of varnish. In 1908, it opened an industrial research laboratory

that was dedicated to developing new products and ensuring quality control. By the twentieth century, Pratt & Lambert had constructed an extensive facility east of Tonawanda Street north of Fedders-Quigan Corp property. This area was partly occupied by the Buffalo Sewer Pipe Company, which was no longer running in 1900. Pratt & Lambert produced high quality varnish and oil and latex paints. Pratt & Lambert also had a small lacquer paint production factory on the south side of the creek (Hill 1923:788; Pratt & Lambert 2005; Sanborn Map Company 1900, 1925). The west side of Tonawanda Street in 1925 contained the New York Central's Black Rock passenger station and its freight station (used by Fedders-Quigan) and the freight house used by the Canadian National Railway, the Grand Trunk Railway, and the Wabash Railroad.

North of the Pratt & Lambert facilities on the east side of Tonawanda Street were Hard Manufacturing Company and Ushco Manufacturing Co. Inc. along Watts Road, and, north of them, Pratt & Letchworth Co. Inc.'s complex for steel and malleable iron casting, as well as rail sidings and a branch of the New York Central that crossed a trestle over Scajaquada Creek. In 1924, Pratt & Letchworth was purchased by Dayton Malleable Inc. (Sanborn Map Company 1916, 1925; Brown and Watson 1981:309). Hard Manufacturing Company was established in 1876 and moved to Buffalo by 1895, where it manufactured hospital beds. Ushco Manufacturing Co. Inc. was originally U.S. Hame Company, a subsidiary of Pratt & Letchworth that manufactured hames (the metal part of a horse's harness that goes around its body through which the leather harness leads run) and carriage accessories.



Fig 4.17 Aerial view, Black Rock Planning Neighborhood, 1927

Despite the slow death of the canal movement in the city prior to World War I, canal improvements affected the Black Rock lock opposite the north end of Squaw Island. These improvements were undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers between 1908 and 1914, and resulted in the completion of a larger and more modern lock and the birth of the Black Rock Ship Canal. The old lock had provided a source of water power for nearby businesses, including the Erie Flour Mill on Amherst Street. In addition, the old lock served as a bridge to Squaw Island, which was utilized for recreation. Numerous ramshackle “cottages,” fishing huts and squatter residences had been constructed along the shore of Squaw Island, beginning in the late nineteenth century (Leary and Sholes 1997: 76-84). A 1916 Sanborn Map depicted several single-story dwellings clustered along the shore north of the International Bridge, but the entire island was not shown. Further, the Erie Canal was still wide open at that time. North of the International Bridge, a 1927 aerial photograph showed both the Erie Canal in use and small structures along the eastern shore of Squaw Island (Sanborn Map Company 1916; Erie County Public Works nd, fig 4.16).

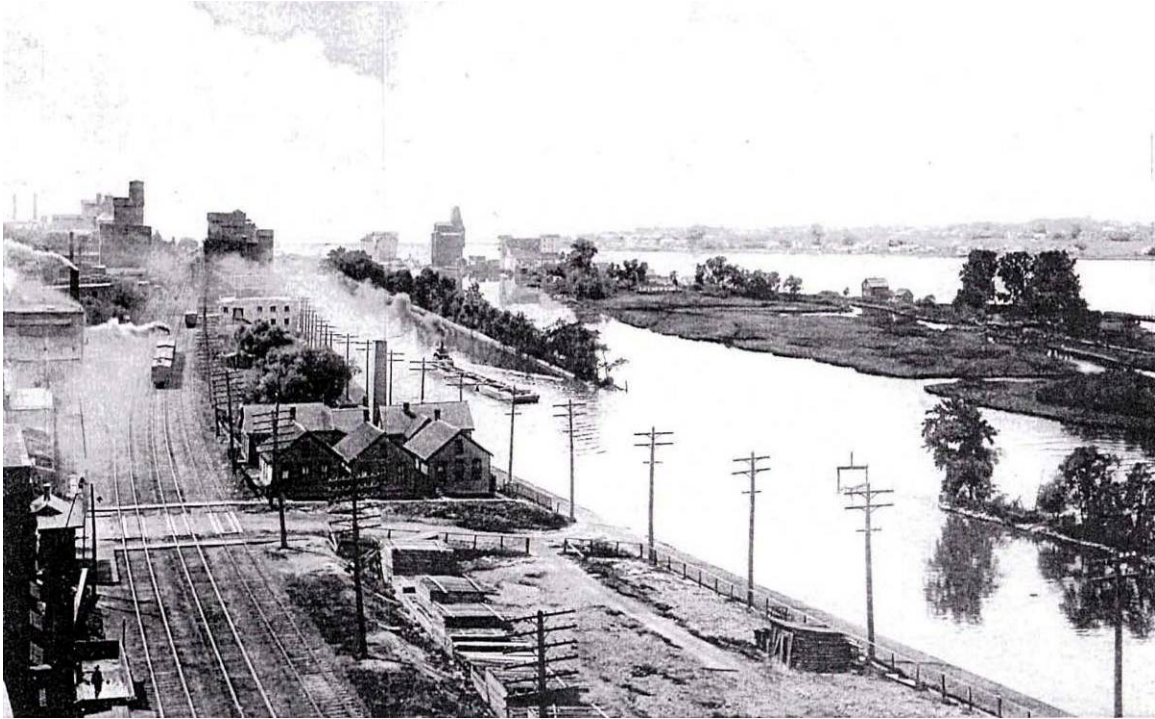


Fig 4.18 Black Rock Harbor showing Niagara River and Erie Canal (1914)

Looking south along the Canal from roughly Austin Street. Note the structures on Squaw Island.

In the 1920s in general, Buffalo's vibrant industrial economy drew other manufacturing concerns, such as the Curtiss-Wright Aeroplane Company (which employed more than 2,000 people in the 1920s), the burgeoning automotive industry employed more than 15,000 workers, various machine shops and foundries employed 13,000, meat-packing industries employed 3,000 workers as did the soap-making industries. The city had a population of 506,775 in 1920 (Goldman 1983:216-217; Graham 1967:97, 102; Van Ness 2001). The present-day Peace Bridge, south of the International Bridge between Buffalo and Fort Erie, was completed in 1927. The site of the American plaza was formerly the location of Fort Porter (demolished in 1925), which was erected by 1848 on high ground overlooking the confluence of the Erie Canal and the Niagara River. Tracks of the Buffalo & Niagara Falls Railroad ran east of the fort (Emslie & Kirk 1850; USGS 1948; Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority 2002; Rote 1990).

In addition, the Erie Canal was filled, usually with garbage and debris in a piecemeal fashion between the late 1920s and the late 1930s. A 1938 aerial photograph documented numerous small structures clustered along the northeastern end of Squaw Island and the Erie Canal in the process of being filled, although still partially open. By 1942 the canal had been filled. A 1950 map and 1951 aerial photograph illustrated a bit of water in the old canal bed north of the International Bridge to approximately Bridge Street, just east of the offices of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District; Erie Canal had

been filled north of this area [sic]. These aerial photographs and Sanborn maps detail the area east of Tonawanda Street and west of Scajaquada Creek filled with industrial structures related to Fedders Manufacturing Inc., Pratt & Lambert, Hard Manufacturing Co., and Pratt & Letchworth among others (Ryskiewicz and Gorton 2003; Sanborn Map Company 1950; Erie County Public Works nd). Several structures of Buffalo Structural Steel were located on the east bank on the creek on both sides of the New York Central's tracks, as well as several large tanks.

Despite a seemingly vibrant, diversified economy in the 1940s, a long economic decline was underway by the end of World War II. Beginning in the mid-1950s, a general boom in large-scale public construction projects impacted Buffalo and Erie County, and included the Skyway (the elevated portion of Route 5), which was completed in the mid-1950s (ca. 1955). In addition, construction for the Niagara section of the New York State Thruway (Interstate-190) began in the mid-1950s, which when completed extended across the far western portion of the Town of Tonawanda through the northern part of the city and Black Rock into downtown Buffalo. North of Black Rock, I-190 was laid in the former right-of-way (ROW) of the Erie Canal. A 1958 aerial photograph documents the completion of portions of I-190 in former canal ROW, mostly north of International Bridge. Further, the Scajaquada Creek Expressway (New York State 198) was under construction at this time, although there was no construction south of tracks of the New York Central that extended eastward across the creek from Pratt & Letchworth/Pratt & Lambert properties (Graham 1967; Leary and Sholes 1997:92-94; Ryskiewicz and Gorton 2003). Construction for these routes and their circuitous intersection had not extended into the current project area at this time. Completion of I-190 through the Black Rock and Riverside sections of the city severed the area's historical access to the river and destroyed the small water-based communities that lived there (Goldman nd).

Improved transportation routes sparked the development of towns surrounding the city facilitating "suburban sprawl" as people began to relocate from older neighborhoods into residential subdivisions away from the urban core. Businesses also relocated away from the developed city since they had room to expand. The city's population fell from 580,132 in 1950 to 532,132 in 1960, as Erie County experienced increased suburbanization (the county's population exceeded one million in 1960) (Graham 1967:119; Goldman 1983:268-273). By 1965, the Scajaquada Creek Expressway (NY 198) had been completed through Black Rock and Delaware Park and the Niagara Thruway (I-190) had been completed along the river to Buffalo (USGS 1965).



Fig 4.19 Looking south down Niagara Street at Amherst Street, June 23, 1961

The historic two and three-story commercial buildings at this intersection, which now serves as the exit from the I-190 Thruway, have since been demolished.

The change in the modes of transportation during the mid-1900s in the Black Rock community shifted the way in which people related to the landscape and environment of the area. What was once a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented community where one could walk down a street, watch a barge drift by on the canal, or drive a slow-paced horse and carriage was transformed into a tangle of elevated highways and ramps which were lifted above the area, filled with high-speed cars which whizzed past the neighborhood above the rooftops. This shift from a ground-plane, walkable, human-scale streetscape which promoted neighborhood interaction to the fast-paced, automobile-oriented traffic patterns of the highway systems put transportation at such a dramatically different speed and scale, it effectively removed the vitality and energy from the neighborhood. This shift also aided in the decline of the commercial activity in this area as business saw the decline in their customer base as residents were encouraged by the highway system to leave the neighborhood.

In the mid-1960s, numerous structures were located long the northwestern and northeastern shores of Squaw Island, while sewage disposal operations were conducted in the southern part of the island. These structures were gone by 1986 (USGS 1965; NYSDOT 1986). In 1972 the City of Buffalo purchased land on Squaw Island for a secondary sewage treatment plant, called the Buffalo Sewer Authority's Bird Island Wastewater Treatment Plant. In 2004, the City of Buffalo established Squaw Island Park north of the railroad tracks. The businesses within the [proposed Ambassador Bridge] project area suffered dramatic declines after the 1980s. The Fedders Manufacturing Inc. (also called Fedco) was purchase by Transpro and later closed in 2005. Pratt & Lambert was bought and closed by Sherwin-Williams in 1996 with all of the plant's buildings

demolished. Hard Manufacturing Co. closed ca. 1991. The Pratt & Letchworth plant closed by the end of 1981, with seventeen buildings on the complex demolished after 1990. In 1997, a golf course/driving range opened on the subsequent brownfields site, but later closed. In 2000, Buffalo's population had fallen to 292,648, its lowest level since 1890, and Erie County had a population of 950,255 (Ryskiewicz and Gorton 2003; Rey 2001).

4.8 A Renaissance in the Black Rock Planning Neighborhood

Although both the Black Rock and Grant-Amherst neighborhoods continue to be generally modest-income areas in the City of Buffalo, the past decade has seen the beginnings of a rebirth for these communities. New business development along important corridors such as Niagara and Amherst Streets coupled with the efforts of a strong and vocal local community organization are paving the way for the increased redevelopment, preservation and revitalization of Black Rock and Grant-Amherst.

Like many communities throughout Buffalo, Black Rock and Grant-Amherst faced difficult times in the later half of the twentieth-century. As the City's significance as a major port and trade center waned following the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway on April 25, 1959 which effectively rendered the Erie Canal and the City's rail lines obsolete, Buffalo faced a severe economic downturn in the 1970s and 80s. During this period, the City of Buffalo faced the loss of much of its traditional industrial and manufacturing base, including its steel industry, eliminating thousands of jobs. Communities with strong industrial bases such as Black Rock and Grant-Amherst were especially hard hit. Many of the factories and businesses which had once drawn residents to the area in the nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries were closed, leaving many people unemployed. Because of this, many of the City's traditional residential and commercial neighborhoods declined, causing the neglect, decay and demolition of many of the area's historic buildings.

These conditions are still prevalent in the Black Rock and Grant-Amherst communities, although both have made positive strides aimed at revitalization. The origins of the rebirth of the area partly stems from the construction of a Wegmans grocery store at 601 Amherst Street in 1997 which increased the traffic in the community. This increased traffic has led to the growth of a variety of new commercial projects in the area. The Amherst Street corridor between Grant Street and Elmwood Avenue, which is located in close proximity to the City's museum district, the Buffalo State College, Delaware Park and the Scajaquada Expressway, coupled with relatively lower commercial rental space on the street, has led to the growth of several new small "life style" businesses. Businesses such as Doreen DeBoth's Artsphere Studio and Gallery at 447 Amherst Street, the 464 Gallery at 464 Amherst Street, and Dog Days of Buffalo dog day care and grooming center at 632 Amherst Street have brought new life and vitality to the Grant-Amherst community. The Grant Amherst Business Association,

originally founded in 1886, has also aided the rebirth of the community by promoting a street festival, a Scajaquada Creek cleanup and aiding in streetscaping with new trash receptacles, bike racks, banners and holiday lighting. The creation of the Scajaquada Bike Trail along the bank of the Scajaquada Creek in the area, which reclaimed portions of contaminated land along the creek, has also increased recreation and activity in the neighborhood. In the Black Rock neighborhood, Niagara Street continues to serve as the area's commercial hub. Easily accessible to the New York State I-190 Thruway, Niagara Street contains several retailers, restaurants and other businesses.⁸

Today, Black Rock and Grant-Amherst are neighborhoods which have stabilized after decades of decline, and appear to be on the rebound. While this area had experienced significant population loss and demolitions in the last half of the twentieth-century, this trend appears to be slowly reversing. Like other similar neighborhoods in Buffalo which relied on industry and manufacturing so heavily for their growth and settlement, such as areas in the East Side, demolitions do occur, primarily to neglected vacant properties and emergency demolitions. As previously noted, CBCA has identified several properties which were demolished between the 2006 Ambassador Bridge survey and the new 2010 field work for this survey; 6 properties in just a five year span, with many others also likely lost. While it does not appear that there is notable new residential or commercial development in the area, many existing buildings have been renovated to accommodate new small businesses, especially along Amherst Street and on Niagara Street which remain vital commercial corridors. Traces of the area's industrial past remain highly visible parts of the landscape, with several factory and industrial buildings remaining in use in the area. Unlike other areas of the City of Buffalo, the ethnic background of the community has remained fairly similar to its historic make-up, serving as the home to a large Polish community with many residents of German and African-American descent as well. This community is active in celebrating their heritage in the Black Rock and Grant-Amherst neighborhoods, reclaiming a pride of place and history in this area.

The Black Rock and Grant-Amherst communities have also become more active in organizing and planning for the future rebirth and growth of the area. In 2000, the Mayor of Buffalo created a neighborhood planning process which incorporated participatory neighborhood planning practices called the Good Neighbor Planning Alliance as a component of the Buffalo Comprehensive Plan. This resulted in the creation of the Black Rock-Riverside Good Neighbors Planning Alliance (Black Rock- Riverside GNPA) as one of the 10 planning alliance areas established in the City of Buffalo. The Black Rock-Riverside GNPA has been perhaps the most active and vocal of the planning alliances and in 2007 began the process of creating a neighborhood plan. The active Dearborn Block Club was also involved in the process. In 2008 the finalized *Historic Black Rock: War of 1812 Bicentennial* document was produced, creating a

⁸ Watson, Stephen T. "Amherst Street on the Rise." *The Buffalo News* 25 Jan. 2010: A1-A2. Print.

comprehensive plan for the planning and redevelopment of the community.⁹ This present survey project is an outgrowth of this plan. This comprehensive planning document will help to guide and shape the future development and revitalization of the Historic Black Rock neighborhood, which will inevitably help to elevate the surrounding communities, including Grant-Amherst, as well.

⁹ Black Rock Riverside Good Neighbors Planning Alliance. *Historic Black Rock: War of 1812 Bicentennial Community Plan*. Rep. Buffalo: City of Buffalo, 2008. *Historic Black Rock: War of 1812 Bicentennial Community Plan*. City of Buffalo. Web. 1 July 2010; 1.
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