



*Bannochi Summer resort, Pulaski Lake, postcard (MHS)*

# City of Buffalo Historic Context Study

Prepared for the  
City of Buffalo, MN

by  
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June 2011

*We live not alone in the present, but also in the past and future. We can never look out thoughtfully at our own immediate surroundings but a course of reasoning will start up, leading us to inquire into the causes that produced the development around us, and at the same time we are led to conjecture the results to follow causes now in operation. We are thus linked indissolubly with the past and the future.*

*If, then, the past is not simply a stepping-stone to the future, but a part of our very selves, we cannot afford to ignore, or separate it from ourselves as a member might be lopped off from our bodies; for though the body thus maimed, might perform many and perhaps most of its functions, still it could never again be called complete.*

- History of the Minnesota Valley by Charles S. Bryant, North Star Publishing Company, 1882.

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## Acknowledgement

This project has been made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008. Administered by the Minnesota Historical Society. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Minnesota Historical Society, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial projects constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Minnesota Historical Society.

The consultant received valuable information and assistance during the project from Wright County Historical Society staff, Minnesota Historical Society Staff, and City of Buffalo staff. A special thanks goes to Planning Commission Chair, Marcia Paulsen, who provided invaluable historic information throughout this process.



# **Introduction**

## **Brief History of Buffalo**

This historic context study describes the historical and architectural development of Buffalo between 1850 and 1965, with a focus on the period before World War I. The townsite was discovered by French fur-trader, Edmund Brissett, in 1850, and by 1856 the town was platted. However, with no railroad service to transport their crops and products to market, the early settlers struggled just to maintain a subsistent way of life. The village remained small and isolated for a number of years. A number of early settlers left Buffalo in search of work, and many property claims were abandoned from 1858 - 1860. The first commercial center focused around Grey Street. Development increased in 1867 when the County Seat moved from Monticello to Buffalo. A second commercial district developed around court house when it moved to the west side of town in 1878. Significant development did not occur until the Soo Line reached Buffalo in 1887. Around this time, the downtown moved again to its present location. The boom years of the 1900s relied on tourists coming to stay at lake resorts, local farmers (flour mill and creamery), county offices, and rail service. The city has continued to grow as residents and businesses are attracted to its natural environment business-friendly values.

## **Purpose of the Historic Context Study**

A historic context study is a document used in planning for a community's historic resources. It identifies the broad patterns of historic development of the community and identifies historic property types, such as buildings, sites, structures, objects or districts, which may represent these patterns of development. In urban areas, context studies typically focus on themes such as industrial, commercial, residential, and institutional development, local architects, landscape architects, and buildings. In addition, a historic context study provides direction for evaluating and protecting significant historic resources.

As a planning document, the context study is intended to be a dynamic document, evolving as community needs and desires change. The context study is based primarily on historical research and has not involved inventory of buildings, structures, and landscapes. Future inventory and evaluation will assist in determining which properties relate to specific contexts, possess historical significance, and also retain historic integrity.

Context-based planning, as developed by the National Park Service for organizing activities for preserving historic resources, is based on the following principles:

- Significant historic properties are unique and irreplaceable.
- Preservation must often go forward without complete information.
- Planning can be applied at any scale.
- History belongs to everyone.

Information in this document will aid in planning efforts and decision-making with regards to historic resources as the City of Buffalo is faced with future development and expansion.

The contexts developed for Buffalo reflect certain statewide historic contexts developed by the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office. These statewide contexts include:

- Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940
- Urban Centers, 1870-1940
- Minnesota tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945

## Methodology

The study process began by meeting with the City of Buffalo's staff and Marcia Paulsen to identify prominent local resources, sites and priorities. Background research began with reviewing state contexts on file at the State Historic Preservation Office, and researching historic documents at the Wright County Historical Society. Primary sources such as Sanford Fire Insurance maps and city directories were also studied. Immensely helpful was the Buffalo history book, *Buffalo: from trading post to star city*, researched and written by Marcia Paulsen.

Historic photos are from Marcia Paulsen, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), Gary Revier, *A History of Minnesota*, and Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS).

## **Context 1 – Early Archeological, Native American, Early White Settlement Time Span – 1680 to 1867**

### **Geography and Location**

Buffalo is situated between Buffalo Lake to the south and Lake Pulaski to the north. Buffalo is strategically situated in the central part of Wright County and is 60 miles northwest of Minneapolis. This area of Wright County was crossed by glaciers several times, which scoured out depressions that formed the irregular hills and valleys. Many of the valleys filled with water and became the lakes of today.

Buffalo is also part of the “Big Woods”, a 40-mile-wide band of deciduous trees that started 100 miles northwest of the Twin Cities and continued south to Mankato. The forest didn’t begin to thin out until the City of Cokato. Earliest white settlers tell of forests made up of “large hardwoods such as white elm and basswood that touched branches, cutting off the sunlight, and growing so thickly that a traveler could often see only a rod ahead. Mosquitoes were plentiful, for the shallow pools were kept from evaporating by the shading forest, and myriads of insects hatched out daily” (Paulsen p. 1).

The Big Woods was interspersed with numerous lakes and marshes and some natural meadowlands along the Mississippi. The forest provided an abundance of small game animals, and cranberries grew in the marshes and were picked by the Indians to sell in St. Paul, long before the whites settled in the county.

### **Native American Settlement**

When father Hennepin first visited this region in 1680, most of Minnesota and parts of the current states of North Dakota and South Dakota were occupied by the Mdewakanton band of Dakota Indians. The Dakota lived in villages in the summer, and broke up into smaller groups in the winter to follow deer and other animals. For more than 300 years, a band of the Dakota had a summer village between the Lakes of Buffalo and Pulaski, fishing, hunting and gathering cranberries.

Around 1740, the Ojibwa, armed with weapons from the French, pushed across Lake Superior, driving the Dakota from their strategic locations at Mille Lacs and Sandy Lake to the southern half of Minnesota. From then on, the Dakota became a people of the prairie until their expulsion from the state following the Sioux Uprising in 1862. Wright County was the dividing line

between the warring tribes of the Dakota and Ojibwa. In 1772 and 1773, major battles between those two nations were fought at the mouth of the Elk River.

The U.S. Army decided that a buffer was needed between the Ojibwa and the Dakota. The U.S. government signed a treaty with the Winnebago Indians of Iowa in 1846 that moved the Winnebago from Iowa to Minnesota — right between the two warring tribes. A Winnebago village covered the area now occupied by the Buffalo downtown business district. They lived in this area until 1855 when their treaty was revoked, and Chief Winnisheik again had to lead his people to a new territory, this time farther west to the Blue Earth River. The removal of the Winnebagoes opened the path for white settlers to move in, and the history of the town of Buffalo begins (Paulsen p. 1).



*Chief Winnisheik (WHS)*

### **Early White Settlement**

Fashion was one of the main forces driving European expansion into Minnesota in the 1600s. Wealthy Europeans could not get enough of beaver pelt hats, raccoon skin coats and mink stoles from America. The first white man to establish himself in the Buffalo area was Edmund Brissett, a French fur-trader who had a post near Lake Harriet. In 1850, Brissett cut a trail from Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis, through the Big Woods north of Buffalo to Lake Pulaski. There he maintained a post, trading with the Winnebago Indians until 1855.

Brissett's trail was crooked and narrow but it was used extensively and greatly aided traders and the earliest settlers as they moved westward into Wright County during the 1850s. Unlike many of the southern Minnesota counties, where wagons could pass easily on the prairie, the new Wright County settlers had difficulty moving westward through the dense woods. Those that left the trading trail carved out by Brissett had to cut their own way through the "Big Woods."

Many of the pioneers were from foreign countries and all the conditions were new. Some were

farmers from the eastern states, and they too found circumstances absolutely changed. Some were men who had previously been engaged in other occupations, but who saw in the opening of Minnesota as an opportunity to secure a farm. All of them, regardless of their previous circumstances, were able and willing to work; they had industry and courage and they were determined to win.

Most of the early settlers located in the "Big Woods." Through the dense forest or over a winding trail they made their way, fording brooks, passing through swamps, cutting away fallen trees and swimming rivers, until they reached their chosen location. There they lived in their wagons or in a temporary brush lean-to while they felled the trees and erected a cabin. Often times an axe and grub hoe were their only tools. The cabins were usually erected without nails or metal of any kind. Sometimes the windows were covered with paper, sometimes there were no windows. The doors consisted of split poles nailed to a cross strip usually swung on leather hinges. The fire place was in one end, and as the ventilation was not always good. The cabin was often filled with smoke.

The floor was made of trampled earth. Furniture was home made, bunks and tables usually being crude contrivances swung from the walls. A loft overhead was usually provided as a sleeping place for the children. The roofs were usually of brush or shakes, which in heavy storms freely admitted the wind and rain.

Wild game and fish from Lakes Buffalo and Pulaski were the principal food, corn was made into meal in a coffee-grinder, pork and bacon were luxuries, coffee was almost unknown, and flour was obtained only with the greatest difficulty. Often the pioneers walked to St. Anthony or St. Paul, and brought provisions home on their backs.

Once the cabin was erected, the next task was to clear the land. Trees were cut down and burned, while the stumps were left to decay. Crops were planted among the stumps. Those who had no oxen had a difficult time clearing away the logs (Curtiss-Wedge p.250).

### **Early Townsite Development**

The village of Buffalo was platted on December 27, 1856 by Amasa Ackley, George A. J. Overton, Moses A. Calkins, and William J. Feuseca. Almost all of the first settlers had a street named after them: Taylor, Dudley, Overton, Grey, Calkins, Ackley, Morgan, Blakeley, Stevens, Odell, Keeler. The north and south streets were named for trees: Cedar, Hackberry, Butternut,

Ash, Elm, Maple.

The city was platted in a grid-like design, like most towns in Minnesota. The gridiron scheme generally ignored the specific features like Buffalo's hills and valleys. However, the original plat was laid out so that Buffalo Lake's shores were to be enjoyed by the public. In fact, TH 25's name in the original plat was "Lake Promenade," indicating that the founding fathers' intentions were for this road to be used for enjoyment of Buffalo Lake, not as a fast moving thoroughfare.

The grid scheme was advantageous in many ways. It could be easily laid out by anyone who could work survey equipment, and since land was a major commodity, the grid pattern was also useful in that it facilitated the sale and resale of it and the preparation of the necessary legal descriptions.

With no railroad service to transport their crops and products to market, the early settlers struggled just to maintain a subsistent way of life. The village remained small and isolated for a number of years. A number of early settlers left Buffalo in search of work, and many property claims were abandoned from 1858 - 1860. However, in 1859, Robert Blain came to this region to buy the roots of an herb called ginseng, which grew wild in this area. The Chinese used this herb for medical purposes. In a short time, everyone was searching the woods for this small root. A day's labor could bring up to five dollars, which in those days was a considerable sum. With the much needed money, the settlers were able to pay old debts, clear up mortgages, and pay for their land (Curtiss-Wedge p. 217). In Buffalo the ginseng drying sheds were located on the shores of Buffalo Lake, almost exactly where the Sturges house now stands (Paulsen p. 4).

Jackson Taylor, Buffalo's County Commissioner, is more responsible than anyone else in moving the county seat from Monticello to Buffalo. In 1861 Jackson Taylor lobbied his fellow county commissioners to put the location of the county seat up to a popular vote. The vote, however, was defeated that fall. In 1867, the state legislature passed a bill ordering that the question once again be put before the people in the fall election. This time the residents of Wright County approved the move. It has been noted that three factors were the primary reason for moving the County Seat to Buffalo. First, the population was more generally distributed in the county than it was earlier when most residents lived in the eastern portion the county, closer to Monticello. Second, Jackson Taylor personally canvassed the county, visiting nearly every voter. Finally, Clearwater and Monticello were in competition for a county bridge across the Mississippi River. Jackson Taylor,



as Buffalo's County Commissioner, promised the residents of Clearwater that he would vote for the bridge to be constructed in their town in exchange for their vote on the county seat.

Becoming the county seat spurred the growth of the village. Numerous new businesses and homes were built. Twenty years later, in 1887, the village was incorporated, and its official history began (Paulsen p.5).

## **Context 2 -Farmsteads and Agricultural Life**

### **Time Span – 1860s - 1967**

Besides having to clear the “Big Woods,” Wright County was an ideal place for settlers to farm. The County was generously endowed by nature with a rich top soil and a clay subsoil, which maintains the soil’s durability. It is well watered by rivers and creeks: the Mississippi River, the Clearwater River and the Crow River. In fact, as advertised in 1915, Wright County was acknowledged as being among the best and most prosperous stock-raising and agricultural counties in Minnesota (Curtiss-Wedge p. 246).

The agricultural industry has had a significant impact on the physical and economical development of Buffalo, some of which are still evident today from farm buildings to local roads. During the town’s infancy (1860-1900), agriculture was the leading export industry, bringing the most money into the community. The local businesses like blacksmiths, general stores, saloons, harness shops, hardware stores, banks and bakeries all initially relied on the success of the local farmers. The farmers and community made significant investments in mills, creameries and their individual farms that have shaped the landscape of Buffalo and the surrounding country side.

### **Early Farming**

In the 1850’s, when agriculture was undertaken in earnest, farmers ignored the rich prairies and instead chose areas like Buffalo with wooded valleys and hills. Clearing the “Big Woods” to farm was time consuming work, but early farmers were wary of land where trees did not grow, where water was obtainable only by digging deep wells, and where cyclones and prairie fires were a periodic menace (WPA 69).



*Early Plows (Revier)*

Most farms began on a subsistence basis. Early farmers were short on cash but long on labor. They cut and grubbed out the trees and prepared the soil for farming, dug ditches around their fields to demarcate their farms, and constructed cabins from the timber provided by the “Big Woods.” They planted vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, onions and cabbage and hunted in the “Big Woods” and fished in Buffalo Lake and Lake Pulaski.

## **Bread Basket of the Country**

Wheat was the first crop grown commercially on a large scale in Minnesota. It was considered a frontier crop because it is dependent on abundant and inexpensive land. It had arrived in Minnesota in 1859 after moving westward along the U.S. frontier. Buffalo farmers were soon planting most of their land in wheat. Wheat was “the premier lazy man’s crop, taking relatively little labor (and little expertise) to produce,” according to historian David Danborn (Danborn p. 147). The first settlers in Wright County engaged in wheat raising almost exclusively since it was easy to plant the seed among the stumps from the “Big Woods” (Curtiss-Wedge p.648).

Not only was wheat easy to grow but it was also easily stored, transported and grinded so as to become an article of trade earlier and for longer distances than more bulky and more perishable products. Grain could also be converted into money the same year it was grown (Larson p. 26).

When railroads expanded throughout the state in the 1860’s and 1870’s, linking the southern and western prairies with a world-wide market, wheat came to be measured in millions of bushels. Minnesota led the Nation in flour production and was popularly known as the “bread basket” of the country.

Terminal elevators to store the grain and flour mills to process the wheat sprang up like weeds. They were typically spaced along railroads so that every farmer would be able to reach one and return to their farms within a day. To serve the local farmers in Buffalo, Thomas Hellier built Buffalo’s first flour mill in 1885 north of the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie railroad tracks. Mr. Hellier’s flour was very prized, some of his “White Cross” flour was even exported to England. The mill burned down in 1891. It was critical enough for the community and the local farmers to have an active mill that the city paid money and gave land to John Henry Johnson to build a new mill. In 1895, Mr. Johnson constructed a three-story mill that was the largest in the county. That mill produced “White Lily” flour until it burnt down in 1924 (Paulsen p. 78-80).

By that time, years of exclusive wheat culture eventually caught up with Minnesota farmers. Deteriorating soil quality, diseases and invasive weeds depressed yields and farm income. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, experts were urging famers to diversify and Minnesota agriculture entered a new era, and another mill in Buffalo was not needed (Historic Context Study of MN Farms p. 3.21).

## **Diversification**

In the 1870's, economic forces and exhausted soil from 20 years of raising only wheat compelled Minnesota farmers to move from pioneer wheat farming to a more diverse set of crops and livestock. Regions east of Minnesota had followed a similar pattern in the mid-1800s. As land became more valuable, it had to be used for livestock production and dairying rather than solely raising wheat.

Diversification was also advanced by railroad interests like James J. Hill. Mr. Hill knew that farmers' reliance on a "one crop system" was not in their, nor more importantly, his long term interest. Experience demonstrated that unless farmers practiced crop rotation and adopted diversified farming systems, even the most fertile land would eventually 'give out.' But the railroad had made enormous capital investments; it was here to stay. Hill could not afford to have the soil 'give out" (Dickman p. 68). Hill delivered countless speeches, insisting farmers diversify their operations. His railroad company visited town after town and constructed demonstration farms.

Diversification was beneficial to the farmers. It protected farmers from being completely wiped out by the failure of a single crop. Farmers could earn regular "egg money" and a "milk check" instead of relying on a single payment for the grain harvest in the fall. Livestock and poultry made better use of the family's total labor pool, including children, and spread farm labor more evenly throughout the year. Diversification also made good use of farm by-products. Livestock could eat crop residue missed during harvest, and excess milk could be fed to young pigs and calves. Fields could be naturally fertilized with manure, and untillable land could be used for pasture (Historic Context of MN Farms p. 3.29).

Corn acreage pushed into first place at the turn of the century surpassing wheat. New varieties of corn were being introduced into the State, and an influx of Iowa farmers with experience in corn raising started the swing away from cash to feed crops (WPA p. 70).

Silos - air tight structures that preserved green fodder for the winter months – allowed farms to feed dairy cows nutritious green material year-round, which encouraged more milking through the winter. A silo alone could increase the livestock-carrying capacity of a farm by more than one-fourth. The state's first silos were built in the late 1880s, and by WWI they were becoming

standard everywhere (Wayne p. 30-37).

The effect of diversification on the built environment on farms surrounding Buffalo was profound. Livestock farming, and especially dairying, required farmers to make significant capital investments for new buildings and equipment. Two-story barns (usually housing animals below and feed such as hay above) and silos became a significant part of Buffalo's rural landscape. Diversified farming dominated Minnesota agriculture until the late 1950s (Historic Context of MN Farms 3.29).



### **“The Butter State”**

Dairy farming was a natural choice for Minnesota farmers, many of whom immigrated from places like Scandinavia where dairying was important. Minnesota's climate was good for growing grass and hay, and hilly regions that could not be cultivated made good pasture. Just as important, “the (national) butter market had not been captured by another region,” unlike the cheese market which Wisconsin already led (Keillor p. 101-102). These factors led many Minnesota farmers to move to dairy products as their main cash crop (Jarchow p. 185-215).

However, Minnesota's dairy farming industry could not have developed without a processing and marketing system. Butter and cheese making were home enterprises and the butter was of poor quality during the settlement period because facilities to store milk and cream were primitive. The churning of butter and milking cows was an irksome task on almost every Wright County farmer (Curtiss-Wedge p. 649). Everybody, even young children, helped milk twice a day and do other chores. Wayne explained, “the size of the herd was often determined by the number of people available to milk cows by hand - the bigger the family the larger the herd” (Wayne p. 11).

In the late 1870s, the state's first butter factories -also called creameries- were established. Most early creameries were privately owned, and farmers brought milk to the creamery daily. The need to haul milk to the local creamery every day was one of the factors that led Minnesota farmers to

become advocates of the “good roads” movement at the turn of the century. Transportation historian Larsen explained, “the influence of the creamery as a factor in bringing about good roads can scarcely be overestimated. Many a farmer, after he arrived at the creamery and found his cream churned to butter by the bumpy, rutty roads, learned to curse such roads fluently....there can be no staying home until the road dries” (Larsen p. 367).

Cooperative creameries were essential for Minnesota’s dairy industry because the financial risk of bringing expensive butter processing equipment to an area was spread amongst the farmers. In most cooperative operations, member farmers shared the profits based on how much butterfat they contributed. By 1898, MN had 557 cooperative creameries (84% of all creameries). Twenty years later, Minnesota had 671 cooperatives creameries. This total was just under half of all creameries in the nation (Historic Context of MN Farms p. 3.35).

The Buffalo Farmers’ Cooperative Creamery was organized in 1895, and the creamery building was constructed on the shores of Buffalo Lake adjacent to town. Buffalo’s creamery was very successful. In fact, the Creamery was larger than any other creamery in Wright County and ranked among the best in butter



*Farmers' Cooperative Creamery Postcard (MHS)*

production. The business expanded several times during its 73 year existence in Buffalo, making it one of the longest running businesses in the City’s history. Buffalo’s Creamery was finally consolidated with a creamery in Monticello, and the buildings were razed in 1968 (Paulsen p. 61-62 and Curtiss-Wedge p. 671).

The success of the dairy industry for Wright County farmers is still physically evident today as the small houses or log huts of the settlers have given way to spacious farm houses (Curtiss-Wedge p. 651).

### Context 3– Commerce and Industry

#### Time Span 1872-1935

Buffalo has many natural historical features that have contributed to its success over the years. In 1915, Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, in his book, *History of Wright County*, described Buffalo as,

*One of the most substantial and picturesque of its size in the state. It is a good business point, a popular summer resort, and the mecca of many hunters and fisherman. Situated on the banks of Buffalo Lake, on a sloping plateau and terrace, shaded by many trees, liberally supplied with good walks, and beautified by many sightly homes, it has advantages which have assured the comfort of the citizens and won the commendation of visitors (Curtiss-Wedge p.682).*

#### Commercial Development

Most towns in Minnesota either grew up around a planned railroad (Springfield) or a navigable river (New Ulm on the Minnesota River), and for those that preceded the railroad, the expanded railroad placed a stop near the established downtown (Chaska). Buffalo is unique in that this scenario did not occur here. Unlike many towns in Minnesota, Buffalo was established prior to the expansion of the railway system, but when the railway did reach Buffalo, it placed the depot several blocks from the downtown.



*Downtown Buffalo with Park House and American Hotels in foreground (MHS)*

This resulted in Buffalo having four different downtown business districts throughout its early years. The first business center was on Grey Street, around the original court house. The court house was a two-story frame building, built in 1868 and measured 24' x 36'. The first store built in Buffalo, in 1856, was constructed by Moses Calkins. It was located on the south side of Grey Street (Curtiss-Wedge p.686).

In 1868, Fred Young and W.H. Lord moved their drug and grocery store to a building on the south side of Grey Street, opposite what was then the court house. In April 1874, C. E. Oakley and E.J. Cutts bought the building and started their store named Cutts & Oakley. Three years later, in 1877, Mr. Oakley bought the old court house building, moved it across the street and joined it to his former commercial building and continued in business for many years,



*200 2<sup>nd</sup> St S. (1890)*

using the second story as a public hall. Oakley's General Store building at 200 2<sup>nd</sup> St S. is the only commercial building remaining from the original commercial district (the right section of the building is the old court house and is now a residence) (Paulsen and Curtiss-Wedge p. 686)

Gradually the business center shifted westward. For a short period the downtown centered around the site of the Buffalo State Bank, with a few scattering business between that and the courthouse on Grey Street.



When the courthouse changed locations and moved west of town in 1878, hotels (Buffalo and American), the post office and other stores were opened on and around the court house square, and for a time it seemed like that location would become the downtown. The much remodeled American Hotel and the two-story brick building located at 15 2<sup>nd</sup> St NW (pictured) are the only commercial buildings remaining from this historic business district.



*15 2<sup>nd</sup> St NW*

When the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railway reached Buffalo in 1886 (30 years after the City was first platted) stores were erected near the station, and for a while it looked as though the settlement on the lake was going to shift a third time toward the station. Gradually, however, the downtown assumed its present position. After the turn of the century, many of the impressive buildings were constructed in the present downtown, and the permanency and attractiveness of those buildings is probably the main reason the downtown has stayed where it is located today.

By 1894, Buffalo was growing into a prosperous town. At that time they had:

5 hotels – Windsor, American, Buffalo, Farmers' Home, Minnesota	4 saloons
1 bank – C.E. Oakley, cashier	2 meat makers
1 sash and door factory	2 jewelers
1 elevator	1 furniture store
2 blacksmiths	1 harness maker
5 general stores	1 millinery store
2 grocery stores 1 drug store	2 dress makers
2 physicians	5 lawyers
2 shoe stores	1 lumber yard
2 hardware stores	



*Looking east on Ackley Street*

While a number of historic buildings have been lost (i.e. the Dudley Opera Hall), downtown Buffalo has retained a significant collection of historic buildings that chronicles the story of its celebrated history. Although a few of the buildings like the Huber Hotel are associated with a particular business, most of the historic buildings in Buffalo have served a variety of businesses over their 100 plus life span. This versatility and longevity demonstrates the importance of these historic buildings to the downtown area.

## **Commerce**

### ***Banking***

The Oakley National Bank was founded in December, 1886 by C. E. Oakley. The first building was located in a building on the courthouse square from 1886 to 1892, when it moved to the Dudley's Opera House on the northeast corner of Butternut and Ackley Streets (now Central and Division). After a fire destroyed the building in 1922, they built a new building on Ackley Street. The new building was one-story in the front and two stories in the rear. The exterior was of pink Kasota stone and deep cherry red rough texture brick. The entrance was highlighted with two



*Oakley National Bank (Paulsen)*

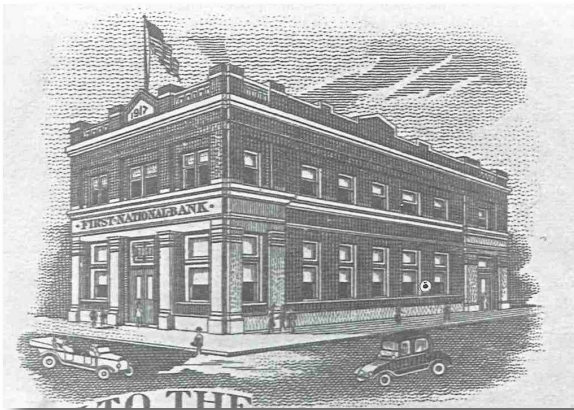
Doric columns. The interior walls were of Tennessee Tanvernelle marble, and the lobby floor was made of mosaic tiles (Paulsen p. 46).

The State Bank of Buffalo was organized in Buffalo by H.S. Swanberg in 1900. The first location was a one-story, brick building built for the bank just to the east of the Masonic building on Bacon Street. The Board purchased the Minneapolis Brewing Co.'s building on the northwest corner of Lake Promenade and Butternut Street. After improvements were made, the bank was moved to that location in 1914.



*State Bank of Buffalo - 1 E Division St (1900)*

In 1917, First National Bank of Buffalo was organized by B.J. Simonitch and A. E. Morton of Minneapolis, and M. J. Carleton of Iowa Falls, Iowa. They built a two-story brick building on the



*First National Bank (Paulsen)*



*First National Bank - 2011*

northeast corner of Ash and Ackley Streets.

In 1924 the First National Bank and the State Bank of Buffalo were consolidated. Just a year after consolidation, the bank's doors were closed by the order of the Board of Directors. In 1926, H.H. Sievers, former vice-president of First National Bank, was found guilty of fraud, and the First National Bank building and the former State Bank buildings were sold. Peterson Feed & Implement bought the former State Bank building, and Buffalo National Bank purchased the former First National Bank building in 1927.

### ***Dudley Opera Hall***

The Dudley Opera Hall was constructed by O. L. Dudley by at least 1886 on the northeast corner of Ackley and Butternut Streets. The building was two-stories high in one section and three-stories high in the other. The first level originally housed Mr. Dudley's general store (until 1892), a barbershop run by his son Dick, and the Oakley National Bank. An opera hall was located on the second floor. An addition built in 1889 expanded the hall to a capacity of 500 people.

The Opera Hall had a significant social impact on the residents of Buffalo. It hosted various traveling entertainments, dances, recreation events, and meetings until the building was torn down in 1922. Even the school athletic events were held here until 1910 when the gymnasium was built in the new school.

### ***Construction***

Some of the premier historic buildings in Buffalo were built by Swan Bratt (also constructed a number of houses that is discussed in the Residential Context Chapter). These buildings include Nelson Hardware, Sternberg General Store, Rettke Confectionery, Ellis Hardware, Fryberg General Store, Burkland Store, Schmidt Drug Store, and the Purity Dairy building. Much of Buffalo's long-standing buildings can be credited to Mr. Bratt.



*22 Division Street*



*32 Central Ave.*



### ***Department Stores***

The building at #2 East Division housed a department store for 42 years. The Wright County Cooperative Company, or Farmers Store, occupied the building from 1908 though 1921. The co-operative was successful, with stores in Buffalo, Waverly and Monticello. The business, however, went bankrupt in 1921. J. K. Edelman leased half of the building in 1923, and the next year expanded to take over the entire building.

Edelman's "Leader" general store was in business until 1950 (Paulsen p. 66).



*2 E. Division Street (1888)*

### ***Drug Stores***

John H. Beutner started his Owl Drug Store in 1907 in the Weekley building. In 1913, a new two-story brick building was built just north of the Dudley Opera House on Butternut Street. The long soda fountain was a wonderful feature of the store. Mr. Beutner adapted to the market, even adding an automobile gas pump to the services of the drug store in 1916. Beutner's son, Harry, took over the business in 1934 and continued operating until 1981. Beutner Drug had been in business in Buffalo for 74 years, making it one of the oldest family-run businesses in the city.



*12 Central Ave.*

### ***Hotels***

As the county seat, one of Buffalo's first and most profitable businesses were hotels. At one point, Buffalo had five hotels in the downtown.

Buffalo's first business was Taylor's Tavern and Hotel. Jackson Taylor, one of Buffalo's first settlers, built a large frame house at the foot of Grey Street. He regularly rented rooms to guests,

and his place began to be considered a regular hotel. For many years it was the center of Buffalo's business activity. It was removed to make way for the Lakeview Motors building.

#### *American Hotel*

The Sturges House was erected in 1867 on Morgan Street, west of the courthouse square. In May, 1879, Lewis Sturges sold to Charles Harvey, who repaired it and changed its name to the American House. In 1892, the building had to be moved because the City was relocating streets. The front became the back, and a three-story addition covered the entire new front of the building. Major remodeling has occurred over the years and the hotel is now known as "Lakeview Apartments" (Paulsen p. 95).

#### *Windsor*

The Windsor House was erected in 1874 overlooking Buffalo Lake (3 W Division), west of the old State Bank of Buffalo building. In 1889, it was advertised as "being close to the banks of Buffalo Lake, convenient for fisherman" (Paulsen p. 97). In May 1895 it burned down.

#### *Occidental House*

The Occidental House was located on the east side of Court House Square. The building was partially burned down in 1890, and in 1892 the remnants were moved and became a portion of the rebuilt Buffalo House hotel.

#### *Buffalo House*

The Buffalo House hotel was located on the courthouse square, west of the courthouse. It was in business by at least 1886. In 1892 the hotel burned down, but the owner, John Elsentpeter, had the old, partially burned Occidental Hotel moved to the site of the old Buffalo House hotel. Mr. Elsentpeter constructed an addition on the front of the old Occidental Hotel and brick veneered the entire structure. It was 2 stories in height and had 22 rooms. After a series of fires and vacancies, John Muller razed the old hotel and built a home on the site.

### *Park House Hotel*

The Park House Hotel was built in 1895 on the southwest corner of Butternut and Morgan Streets. The hotel was three stories tall and the first one to be constructed out of brick, which was significant to Buffalo considering the number of fires that had destroyed former hotels. The September 4, 1895 Buffalo Journal gives the following description of the new hotel: “This new



*27 Central (1895)*

and elegant hotel is now open for the accommodation of guests and the traveling public. It is a three story, solid brick building, with a composition gravel roof, steam heat and complete in every particular, and Buffalo can now boast the finest hotel in the state west of the cities. It is by all odds the finest and most substantial building ever erected in this village by private enterprise.”

After numerous ownership changes during its first 35 years, Frank Huber purchased the building in 1920, and the name changed again, this time to the “Huber Hotel.” The Hubers ran the hotel for 25 years, giving it a period of stability and prosperity. It became “The” meeting place for Buffalo residents and businessmen. In 1929, the Hubers redecorated the hotel from lobby to roof. It had 24 rooms at that time.

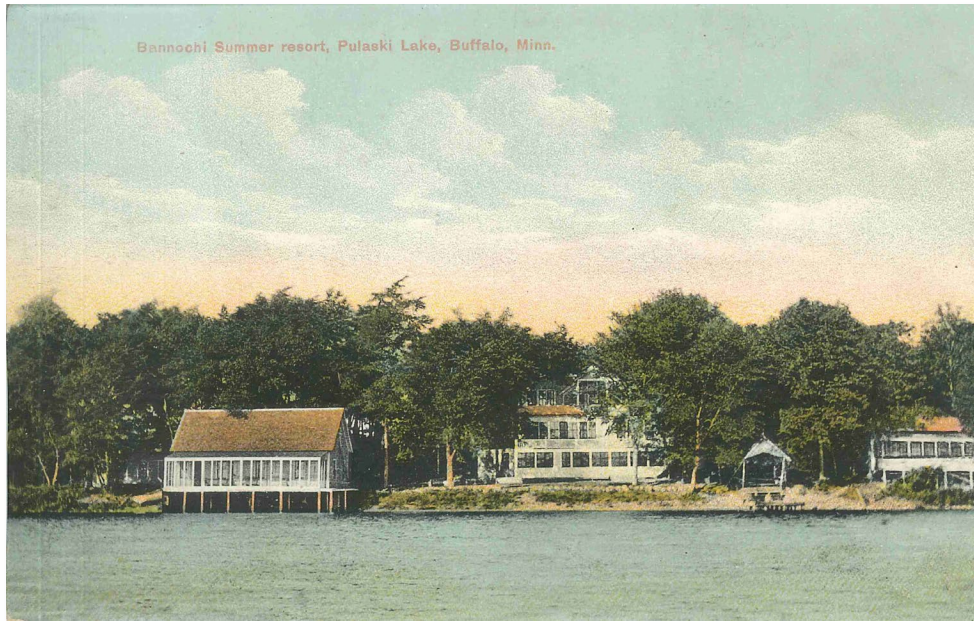
### **Resorts**

The beautiful natural settings of Buffalo Lake and Lake Pulaski attracted visitors to Buffalo during its formidable years. For over 20 years (1890s-1920s), Buffalo was a well-known resort town. Each summer the population nearly doubled, as visitors would come from the cities to stay at the resorts on lakes Buffalo and Pulaski, which were famous for their beaches and fishing. Often families would stay the whole summer.

Lake Pulaski featured over 10 resorts during their zenith, from campgrounds; Mineral Springs bath houses; small, one-building resorts; to Bannochie’s “Pulaski House.”

In 1900 Frank Bannochie built a first class summer hotel that was the grandest resort on Lake

Pulaski. There were 30 rooms in the main lodge and at least 7 cabins. Popularity of the Pulaski's House was extraordinary as reservations would have to be made a year in advance. In 1908, a 30' x 50' hall was built, with a large old-fashioned fireplace and dancing floor. The Bannochie family would often play musical instruments and sing for their guests.



*Bannochie Resort on Lake Pulaski (Paulsen)*

Arthur Appleby purchased the resort in 1922. The following year, the main lodge was destroyed by fire. Mr. Appleby started working on remodeling the pavilion/dining room and building a new main hotel. After two more ownership changes and another fire, the lodge was disbanded in the late 1940's and sold as individual private summer cabins (Paulsen p. 123).

Considered the less swimmable of the two lakes, Buffalo Lake had about half as many resorts as Lake Pulaski during Buffalo's resort era. "Olson Point Resort" was the most popular resort on Buffalo Lake. J. N. Olson built his resort on the south side of Buffalo Lake in 1910. The resort included a lodge and two cottages. The resort, however, closed in 1927.

The resort business began to decline in the 1920s with the arrival of the automobile, making it easier for vacationers to travel to lakes that were not accessible by the railway system. In addition, the railways were expanding service up north, creating resorts opportunities in areas such as Brainerd and Mille Lacs (Paulsen p. 119).



The last remaining buildings from the Resort period are a few cabins from the Cedar Lake Lodge on Buffalo Lake.



## Context 4 – Transportation

### Time Span – 1860s – 1920s

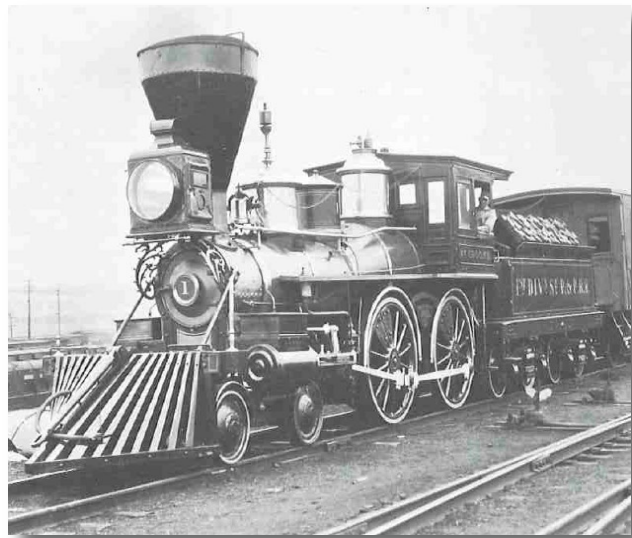
Edmund Brissett, a French fur-trader, cut a trail from his trading post on Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis, through the Big Woods north of Buffalo to Lake Pulaski in 1850. Brissett's trail was crooked and narrow but it was used extensively and greatly aided traders and the earliest settlers as they moved westward into Wright County during the 1850s. Unlike many of the southern Minnesota counties, where wagons could pass easily on the prairie, the new Wright County settlers had difficulty moving westward through the dense woods. Those that left Brissett's trading trail, had to cut their own way through the "Big Woods."

Because Buffalo is not accessible by a navigable river, Brissett's trail was the only avenue to reach the new town until the coming of the railroad.

Construction of the railway network was retarded first by the financial panic of 1857, then the State foreclosing on all railroad properties in 1860, and finally by the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. But once underway the railway system developed at a lively speed. The first tracks to be laid in Minnesota were between St. Paul and St. Anthony in 1862. Just three years later trains were operating on over 200 miles of tracks in the state. With the end of the Civil War, construction of the railroads began in earnest. By 1866, trains from the cities reached St. Cloud. By 1871 trains from Minneapolis reached the Red River Valley. By the end of the decade the railroad mileage had increased to more than 3000, and by the end of the century that figure had more than doubled. Steamboat traffic, which reached its peak in 1880, had by 1910 dwindled to a negligible factor in transportation.

The Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railway Company, eventually becoming known as the "Soo Line," was chartered in 1884 and made its first run between Sault Ste. Marie, MI and

Minneapolis. The Soo reached Buffalo in January, 1887, on its way to North Dakota. The City of



*Early Locomotive (Folwell)*

Buffalo was finally connected to the rest of the Union.

The railroad was undoubtedly the most important factor in the development of Buffalo. Now lumber could be hauled cheaply, along with all the other supplies necessary for the growing settlement. Farmers could also transport their products (mostly wheat at that time) to distant markets, which were now as close as the nearest railway station. The town's population significantly increased with the arrival of the railroad. Prior to the railroad, it took 8 years for the town's population to double from 100 to 225 people. After the coming of the railroad, population almost increased three-fold in just 4 years from 225 to 600 residents.

Marketing by the railroad companies also undoubtedly increased Buffalo's rate of development. Railroad companies typically established land development corporations that would aggressively market the new towns of Minnesota to people on the east coast and even European countries, sell land, distribute seed for fields, extend credit on favorable terms, build hotels and reception houses (also called immigrant houses) near depots, and sell pre-built homes to settlers who could not afford them.

The Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railway Company placed Buffalo's railroad stop on the north side of town, known as "SooTown". Typically railroad companies located the railroads on the edges of towns to eliminate railroad crossings and placed depots on the town side of the tracks for the safety of passengers. The City of Buffalo has benefited from the railroad company's decision to locate the tracks on the north edge of town rather than the south side, which would have created a significant barrier between downtown and Buffalo Lake, much like what happened to the City of Howard Lake, MN.

The first depot burnt down in 1891. In 1907, the second depot also burned down. A third depot was constructed in 1907 and burnt down in 1953 when a railway car derailed and crashed into the depot. The current depot is made of brick (Paulsen p. 118).

The end of WWI saw the beginnings of a



*1907 Soo Depot*

new cycle of transportation. Before the war the automobile was largely a rich man's luxury, but after 1918 the ordinary citizen could buy cars for his pleasure and his business. Inevitably he became an advocate of good roads. In 1920 a State highway system of 6700 miles was authorized.

The railroads were arguably the single most important factor in the development of Buffalo. Not only did railroads bring tourists and materials for a growing community and ship products like grain to market, but they transported the new workers and settlers to the growing towns and were very influential on how the towns were laid out and developed. In fact, many of the older hamlets left without benefit of railway were either moved to new locations or gradually abandoned altogether.

## **Context 5 – Religion**

### **Time Span 1875-1950s**

Religious institutions played a significant role in the lives of Buffalo's early settlers. Not only did churches fulfill a spiritual need, but they also provided a social environment for the early settlers, as churches were popular places for meetings and other social events. The Church's role was so important that they made establishing churches a priority. "So eager were the people who settled in the 'Big Woods' of Wright County to teach their children spiritual things that they did not wait for the erection of a church building before they started a Sunday school, a prayer meeting or a 'preaching point'" (Curtiss-Wedge p. 818).

The churches were very influential in the social and moral fabric of Buffalo. The ministers and church members were united in their stance against alcohol, and twice encouraged the community to vote to prohibit saloons in the city.

#### ***Presbyterian Church***

The Presbyterian Church is the oldest organized church in Buffalo and was the first church building to be built in the small village. The first service was held in 1875 at the village school house. In 1877, a new church building was constructed on Ash Avenue, between Swede and Bacon Streets. The building was added onto in 1892 and 1923. The building has been razed (Paulsen p. 140).



*Presbyterian Church – 1877 (Paulsen)*

### ***Buffalo Swedish Christian Mission Church***

The Buffalo Swedish Christian Mission Church started gathering in each of the five original members' homes back in 1881. The congregation in 1885 purchased the old one room schoolhouse that served Buffalo for a number of years. Later that same year the church was formally organized. Four years latter, in 1889, the congregation built a church with brick from C. Zimmerman's brick factory in Chatham Township. The church was located on the northeast corner of Ash St. and Swede Ave. Between 1900 and 1938, the church started transitioning from Swedish to English, which was a difficult process for the church at that time. As part of this transition, the church's name was changed to Evangelical Covenant Church of Buffalo. A new edifice was constructed in 1972 on Hwy. 25, and the original church was eventually razed.



*Swedish Christian Mission Church – 1889  
(MHS)*

### ***St. Francis Catholic Church***



*St. Francis – 1912 (Paulsen)*

In 1888, there were about eight Catholic families living in Buffalo, and they held mass at Dudley's Hall. A year later they moved into a small wood frame church that was built on Court House Avenue. In 1912, the parish had grown to 150 families, and Father Joseph Heinz oversaw the construction of a new Italian Renaissance style church on the northeast corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> St NW and Court House Avenue (Paulsen p. 142). The edifice is one of Buffalo's most impressive buildings and has been very well preserved over the years.

The fact that Buffalo has only one Catholic Church can be traced back to Archbishop John Ireland, who was a dominant figure during the formative years of Minnesota. While many religious groups were



establishing churches in the 1880s-1890s, they usually separated by ethnicity. Immigrants tended to associate with people from their original country and service was usually spoken in the parishioners' native language. This is why many towns have more than one Lutheran church. Buffalo had Lutheran churches for Germans and Swedes. Archbishop John Ireland insisted that the Catholic Church not separate into various ethnic groups. Thus, Buffalo's Catholic Church consisted of parishioners from all ethnic backgrounds.

### ***German and Swedish Lutheran Churches***

In 1883, the Carlslund congregation united with the Swedesburg congregation to form one Swedish Lutheran parish. In 1900 the congregation constructed a white, wood-clad church on the southeast corner of Maple Ave. and Blakely St. In 1945 the church's name changed to Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, and in 1951 they constructed a church on Hwy 25. The original church was razed (Paulsen p. 152).



*German Lutheran Church – 1906 and Swedish Lutheran Church – 1900 (MHS)*

The German Lutherans organized a congregation in 1887, and in 1906 constructed a white, wood-clad church, very similar to the Swedish Lutheran church, on the northeast corner of Bacon and Maple Streets (on the same block as the Swedish Lutheran Church). The new church had a seating capacity of 170 members. The congregation grew in size, and in 1940 a new church was constructed. The original church was moved to Lions Park and used for services while the new church was being built. In 1957, the German Lutheran church constructed a third church on the southeast corner of Bacon St. and Elm Ave. (Paulsen p. 148-149).

### ***Methodist Church***

A Methodist Society was founded in Buffalo in 1886 with 26 members. In 1890, they constructed a wood-clad church on the northeast corner of Court House Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street NW. The congregation moved to the old St. John's Lutheran Church in 1959, and the original Methodist church has continued to be used as a residence (Paulsen p. 146).

Buffalo's six main congregations all constructed their original churches close to the downtown, near the population center of the city. As Buffalo's population grew and expanded from the downtown, the churches followed with newer and larger buildings. All of the original church buildings have been razed, with one exception, St. Francis Church. It is ironic that religion played such an important role in Buffalo's early development, but there is only one of the original six churches remaining as a reminder of the city's religious history.



*Methodist Church – 1890 (MHS)*



## **Context 6 – Civic Services**

### **Time Span – 1860s-1960s**

#### **County Court House**

The first County Seat was in Monticello since it was the largest city at the time. However, as the population spread south and west from Monticello, its location became more and more remote for most county citizens. In 1867, the residents of Wright County approved the move of the County Seat from Monticello to Buffalo. The following year the first County Court House was constructed on Grey Street. It was a two-story frame building, 24' x 36' in size. However, shortly thereafter, the building was deemed to be inadequate in size, and in 1872 the state legislature authorized the County to issue court house bonds. The measure, though, was defeated by local residences that spring. Three years later, in 1875, the state legislature passed an act authorizing the board of county commissioners to issue the necessary bonds without requiring approval of the County's residents.

The second court house was completed in 1878. A portion of the stone used in the foundation was obtained from Buffalo Lake, the remaining being brought from Minneapolis. The bricks used to build the new courthouse were manufactured locally at a brickyard two miles northeast of town. "The final result was a building and grounds of which the citizens of Wright County were justly proud for many years" (Paulsen p. 25-27).



*Wright County Court House – 1878 (Paulsen)*

Making Buffalo the County Seat significantly assisted in the growth and prosperity of the City over the years, as hotels and businesses developed around the Court House Square. Farmers would patronize these businesses while in town completing their legal tasks, whilst visiting lawyers and businessmen would stay at Buffalo's hotels and eat at the local restaurants. As Buffalo's largest employers, the County offices continue to have a positive impact on the downtown. The old Court House was demolished in 1958 to make way for the existing Court House to be built that same year.

### **Public Utilities**

In 1883, 24 gasoline street lights were installed, primarily in the downtown. In 1910, the City constructed a municipal electric light plant located north of the Odd Fellows Hall. The new building would also have room for the fire engine. In 1915 the council signed a contract with the St. Cloud Light and Power Company, for 24-hour service, first time for Buffalo (Paulsen p. 14).

Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, in his 1915 book, *Wright County History*, said the following about water and sewer in Buffalo: "Various efforts have been made to establish water works and a sewer system, but thus far these efforts have not succeeded, due to a large extent to the fact that the village covers so wide an area of ground. There are many private artesian wells, however, and sanitation is well provided for by private cesspools" (Curtiss-wedge p. 684).

A number of public infrastructure improvements over the next 40 years enabled the city to grow and prosper. In May 1919, the village voted for a city waterworks system. It was installed in 1920 and a water tower was constructed on "Tower Hill." A federal grant (WPA) covered a portion of the expenses for the installation of the Municipal Sewage Disposal plant in 1939. Finally, a referendum in 1954 approved the sale of bonds to install a water treatment plant and to remodel and add to the village hall and maintenance building (Paulsen p. 13).

In 1954, the City changed all the old street names as recommended by the Lions Club, who claimed a new system of numbered streets would be far less confusing for visitors and new residents.

## Post Office

Like many small towns, the post office changed location quite frequently in the early days. Quite often, whenever political power in Washington DC changed, the local postmaster would change and he would move the post office. In the first 100 years (1856-1953), the post office changed locations 8 times. The longest being at 32 Butternut Ave., opposite the Huber Hotel. For many years the telephone offices were located on the second floor of the post office building. This building served as Buffalo's post office for 26 years (1902-1928).



## Schools

Buffalo residents have always been proud of their public schools and have historically always supported them. Educating children started with the early settlers in 1857, first in houses and then one-room small buildings. As Buffalo slowly grew, however, it was deemed necessary to build a school large enough for all of the students living in and around Buffalo. In 1885, the City built a wood-framed, two-story building on Maple Street, between Stevenson and Bacon Avenues. The school building consisted of four classrooms. Only two were finished at first; the other two rooms were to be finished as enrollment increased.



*1885 School Building (Paulsen)*

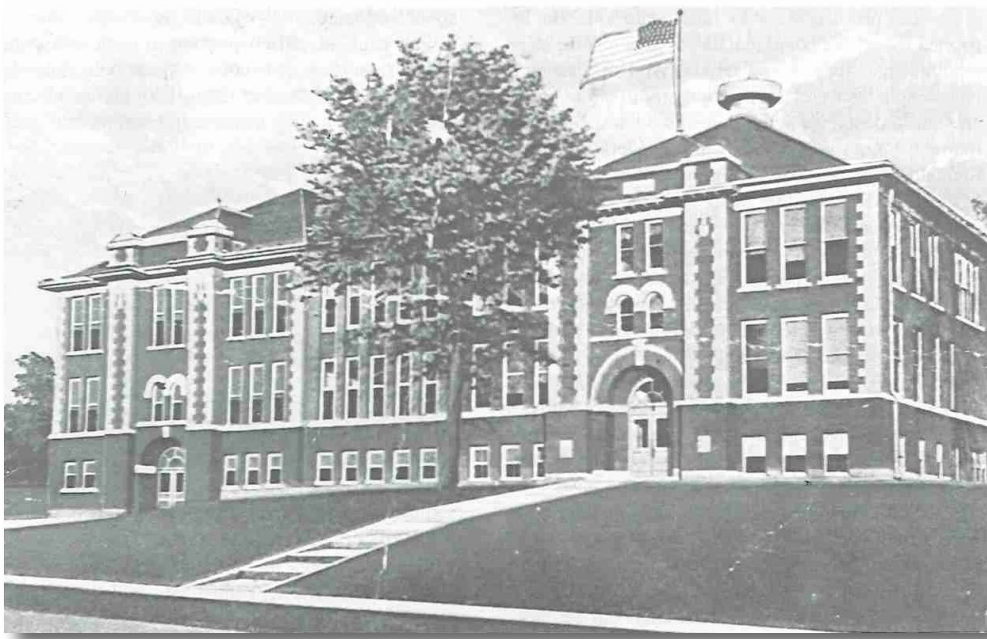
In 1908, Buffalo residents approved the construction of a brick high school to be located next to the elementary school. The 2 ½ - story structure had 2 reception rooms, 2 classrooms, an

assembly room for 240 students, a laboratory, office and a gymnasium in the basement, the first high school in the area with a gymnasium.



*1908 School building on left, 1885 School building on right (Paulsen)*

Enrollment increased so rapidly, that voters approved a significant addition to the high school just seven years after the new high school opened. The new addition more than doubled the size of the original building. The remodeled high school included a new library, new larger classrooms, a large new gymnasium and showers. “It was very impressive” (Paulsen p. 172).



*1908 School building with 1915 building addition (Paulsen)*



Again, the voters overwhelmingly approved a second major remodel/addition to the high school in 1935. “Modern to the ‘nth’ degree,” this Federal Works Project increased the size of the school building to enable the inclusion of the elementary grades into the new high school. The 1885 elementary school was razed. Another new high school was constructed in 1971, and the old high school has been used for elementary grades.

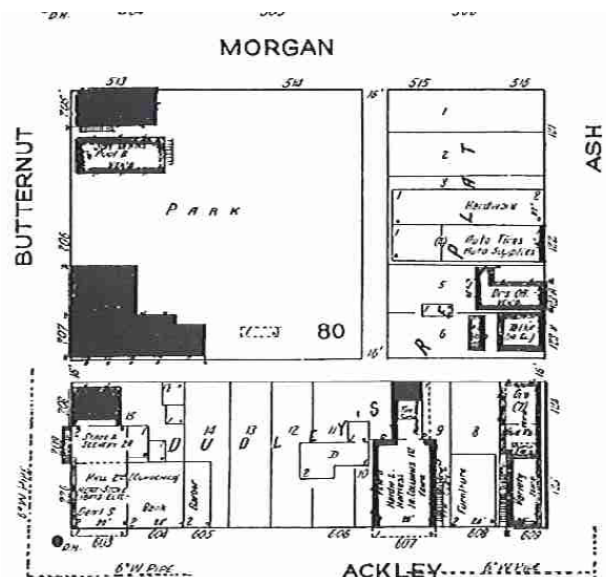
## Hospital

The City of Buffalo purchased the Violet house, located just east of the village, for its first hospital in 1902. The house was new and contained seven rooms. While there was no immediate use for the hospital, the city fathers thought it was wise to prepare for an emergency. Smallpox was spreading rapidly throughout the County, and a place was needed for containing any contagious diseases by confining the patients in this hospital (Paulsen p. 22).

Buffalo residents approved the construction of a new city hospital in 1946 to be located on Tower Hill Park. Four years later, construction of the new hospital was completed. The hospital had space for 28 beds and employed 25 people. Residents approved two major additions in 1957 and 1967.

## Parks

The first park located in Buffalo was a privately-owned park behind O. L. Dudley’s store on Ackley Street. The north 2/3 of that block was a swamp and O. L. Dudley developed it as a park, filling it with gravel and dirt, planting trees, building a bandstand, and installing a running track around the park, foot-races being a popular sport at that time. In 1900 Mr. Dudley tried to sell the “park” to the village. The council put the



question to a vote of the people, and it was turned down. In 1901, Mr. Dudley began dividing up the area into lots which he sold for various businesses (Paulsen p. 9).

In 1919 the village purchased a number of old businesses that were along the lake shore – Radtke’s blacksmith shop, Frank McKnight’s old building, B. D. Ahlm’s garage, etc. – in order to clear the lake shore and provide an unobstructed view of the lake (Paulsen p. 9).

The Griffing Park on the banks of Lake Pulaski is a popular park in Buffalo. The two-acre park was donated to the City in 1905 by Mrs. Henry B. Griffing in accordance with the wishes of her late husband, Mr. F. Nehrestedt, of Milwaukee. The City has made a number of improvements over the years, including new benches, tables, and a pavilion with dressing rooms, refreshments and restroom (Paulsen p. 11).

In 1901, ten men purchased a five acre tract of land on the east side of town believing the town needed a park. Twice that year the voters rejected purchasing the land from the men for a park. The parcel sat vacant for the next 20 years. In 1923 another group of men again requested the city to purchase the property for a park. When the village council refused, the five men purchased the five-acre plot of land. Buffalo residents donated their time and money to improve the park. The village council decided to take over the park that same year.

In August 1947, the City entered into contract with the Lions Club, allowing them to operate the field for three years in exchange for the concessions. The Lions installed lights for the field. In October, 1956 the City Ball Park officially became the “Lions Park” since they did so much to help maintain the park. In March, 1959 a new grandstand was built at the park (Paulsen p. 12).

### **Buffalo Lakes**

“Buffalo owes its existence to the two lakes, Buffalo and Pulaski. They drew the earliest settlers, provided food, ice, and recreation for the past 130 years, drew tourists in our resort days, and still today contribute greatly to our quality-of-life, pride and even ‘notoriety’ as a community (Paulsen p. 5).

The two lakes have very different personalities. Buffalo Lake is a shallow lake (20 feet deep), mud bottom, and fed by two creeks. Lake Pulaski, on the other hand, is a deep lake (75-80 feet),

cold water, spring fed, and is great for swimming.

At one time Buffalo Lake was a major natural resource for some local businessmen. Fish were harvested and sent by the ton to Minneapolis. In June, 1890 the “Buffalo Journal” reported shipments of 200 to 500 pounds of fresh fish each day from Buffalo.

But most importantly, from about 1890 to 1920, the resorts on both Pulaski and Buffalo Lakes brought hundreds of tourists to Buffalo each summer, nearly doubling the size of the town. The rising popularity of the automobile and expanding train service to resort lakes farther west and north, however, shifted the location of popular summer resorts, and Buffalo’s resorts were forgotten.



*Lake Pulaski Postcard (MHS)*



## Context 7 – Residential Time Span 1856 – 1940s

### Buffalo's Residential History

Located near the Twin Cities, Buffalo is a rapidly developing community, growing 42% since 2000 to a population of 14,400 in 2009. The newer residential development surrounds historic Buffalo on all three sides. However, the area bounded by 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW, 8<sup>th</sup> Street to the north, and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave NE contain the bulk of historic residences in Buffalo.

Buffalo's topography is typical to the topography of Wright County: irregular hills and valleys. The location of the first two court houses and early residences were situated on the hills of the town. The oldest homes were located around the original court house near 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Streets South, and near Court House Square when the court house moved in 1878.

Buffalo was platted in 1856. The village, however, remained a small, isolated place for a number of years. Growth didn't occur until the residents of Wright County voted to make Buffalo the county seat in 1867. Soon new businesses and homes were built. In 1878 the village had a population of 100 people. The most significant development of the town occurred between 1885-1910, after the arrival of the railroad in 1886. From 1885 to 1910, Buffalo's population quintupled from 225 residents to 1227 residents.



*City of Buffalo - 1881(MHS)*

Buffalo's finest collection of homes is along 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW and Division Street. Both of these streets are lined with American Foursquare and Craftsman style homes, which were very popular designs during the 1910's when most of these homes were constructed.

### **Local Contractor**

Swan Bratt was a prosperous contractor and carpenter during Buffalo's infancy. Bratt learned his construction trade from his father in Sweden, then immigrated to Buffalo in 1886 at the young age of 24. Buffalo was fortunate that Bratt chose the city to live in for he constructed some of the best commercial and residential buildings in Buffalo.

Bratt constructed over 25 residential homes in Buffalo. Although Buffalo has a wide variety of history housing types, the American Four-Square is the most prevalent of all housing styles in Buffalo. Prominent city leaders became attached to this architectural style from 1907-1915, and Bratt constructed many of these homes (Paulsen 237-238). On several of his homes, Bratt installed his signature horizontal oval detail between the two second story windows on the front façade. Pictured here are three examples of Buffalo homes constructed by Bratt.



*408 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW (1907)*



*502 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW (1910)*



*401 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NW (1915)*

## Housing Styles

It is important to know and appreciate the different styles of architecture in order to determine the best historic preservation practices to use. To that end, the following pages of the Residential Context chapter provide a description of the various styles of vernacular architecture in general and examples of the architectural types found in Buffalo, in particular.

### *Greek Revival*

#### *Predominant period 1850s to 1860s*

The Greek Revival Style began with public buildings in Philadelphia in 1820, and quickly became popular for residences. The style mimicked Greek temples -- and was thought by Americans at the time to embody the concept of Democracy. From 1830 to 1850 nearly every new public or private building incorporated some Greek Revival elements.

During the second half of the 19th century, Gothic Revival and Italianate styles captured the American imagination. Grecian ideas faded from popularity. However, front-gable design - a trademark of the Greek Revival style - continued to influence the shape of American houses well into the 20th century. You will notice the classic front-gable design in simple "National Style" farm houses throughout the United States.



Defining characteristics:

- Gabled, low-pitched roof
- Cornice lines emphasized
- Symmetrical plan
- A window in the pediment
- Entry porch with columns

*This is a good example of a Greek Revival house located at 207 2<sup>nd</sup> Street S (1910)*

## ***Italianate***

***Predominate period 1840s to late 1880s***

Inspired by paintings of rural villas of Italy, Italianate was one of the most popular styles for housing and commercial buildings from the mid- to late-1800s. This style is particularly popular in towns and cities in the Midwest. There are fewer Italianate buildings in the southern states because the style reached its peak during the Civil War, a time when the south was economically devastated.



*This house at 400 Central Avenue illustrates the Italianate style (1898)*

Defining characteristics:

- Two or three stories (rarely one)
- Single or paired decorative brackets under wide cornices
- Balanced, symmetrical rectangular shape
- Tall, narrow windows, commonly arched or curved above
- Projecting door and window crowns

## ***Second empire***

***Predominate period 1855 to 1885***

Second Empire buildings with tall mansard roofs were modeled after the opulent architecture of Paris during the reign of Napoleon III, France's Second Empire, from which the style takes its name. French architects used the term *horror vacui* - the fear of unadorned surfaces - to describe the highly ornamented Second Empire style. Second Empire buildings were also practical: their height allowed for additional living space on narrow city lots.

Both Italianate and Second Empire houses tend to be square in shape, and both can have U-shaped window crowns, decorative brackets, and single story porches. But, Italianate houses have much wider eaves and they do not have the distinctive mansard roof characteristic of the Second Empire style.





*One of the oldest residential structures in Buffalo, this house at 203 Second Street S is an example of the Second Empire style (1880)*

Defining characteristics:

- Mansard (dual-pitched roof, with dormer windows on steep lower slope)
- Rounded cornices at top and base of roof
- Brackets beneath the eaves, balconies, and bay windows

Another example in Buffalo is at 206 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW

### ***Folk Victorian***

#### ***Predominant period 1870-1910***

Before the age of railroads, built no-fuss, square or L-shaped houses in the Greek Revival National or Greek Revival style. But the rise of industrialization made it easier and more affordable to add decorative details to otherwise simple homes. Decorative architectural trim could be mass produced. As the railroads expanded, factory-made building parts could be sent to far corners of the continent.

Many Folk Victorian houses were adorned with flat, jigsaw cut trim in a variety of patterns. Others had spindles, gingerbread and details borrowed from the Gothic Revival style. With their spindles and porches, some Folk Victorian homes may suggest Queen Anne architecture. But unlike Queen Annes, Folk Victorian houses are orderly and symmetrical houses. They do not have towers, bay windows, or elaborate moldings.

Defining characteristics:

- Porches with spindle work detailing
- Symmetrical façade (except gable-front-and-wing subtype)
- Brackets under eaves were common



*Folk Victorian elements are found on this house at 221 Cass Avenue (1900)*

### ***Queen Anne***

***Predominant period 1880 – 1910***

The elaborate style known as Queen Anne became an architectural fashion during the 1880s and 1890s, when the industrial revolution enabled ornate spindle work to be mass produced and the expanded railway network made precut decorative trim easily available throughout the country.

Defining characteristics:

- Steep roof with a front-facing gable
- Complicated, asymmetrical shape with round or square towers
- One-story porch that extends across one or two sides of the house
- Wall surfaces textured with decorative shingles, patterned masonry, or bay windows
- Ornamental spindles and brackets



*Queen Anne elements are depicted on this house at 604 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NW (1910)*

## ***Colonial Revival***

### ***Predominant period 1880-1955***

As a clear reaction against excessively elaborate Queen Anne architecture, the Colonial Revival became a popular American house style from 1880 to 1955. The Colonial Revival refers to the return of interest in the Federal and Georgian house styles found on the east coast. Reflecting American patriotism and a desire for simplicity, the Colonial Revival house style was the most popular historic revival style in between World War I and II.



*This house located at 9 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE exemplifies Colonial Revival architecture (1936)*

#### Defining characteristics:

- Symmetrical façade with central entrance
- Temple-like entrance, porticos topped by pediment
- Multi-pane, double hung windows frequently in adjacent pairs and with shutters

## ***Spanish Revival***

### ***Predominant period 1915-1940***

The romantic Spanish Revival style was influenced by Spanish Colonial architecture of earlier centuries. Unlike its immediate predecessor, Mission, Spanish Revival was more ornate with stylistic detail apparent in both large features and small, such as intricately patterned tile work and wrought iron hardware. This style's infancy started in 1915 after an exposition by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue in San Diego.



Defining characteristics:

- Low pitched roof with little or no overhang
- Typically asymmetrical
- Red tile roof
- Half round arches, doors and windows
- Stucco surface
- Ornate wrought iron hardware



*405 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE is a good example of a Spanish Revival House (1921)*

### ***American Foursquare***

#### ***Predominant period 1890-1930***

The American Foursquare, or the “Prairie Box”, was a post-Victorian style that shared many features with the Prairie style architecture pioneered by Frank Lloyd Wright. The style was widely popular because the boxy foursquare shape provided roomy interiors for homes on small city lots, and the simple, square shape made the Foursquare style especially practical for mail order house kits from Sears and other catalog companies.

Like a plain vanilla cake, the American Foursquare took decorative detailing very well. Creative builders often dressed up the basic foursquare form with features borrowed from any of these styles:

- Queen Anne- bay windows, small towers, or "gingerbread" trim
- Mission- stucco siding and roof parapets
- Colonial Revival- pediments or porticos
- Craftsman - exposed roof rafters, beamed ceilings, built-in cabinetry, and carefully crafted woodwork



*This house at 507 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW embodies the Foursquare style (1910)*

Defining characteristics:

- Most notably, square shape
- 2 ½ stories high
- Hipped roofs that come to a peak in the center
- Front porches that span the width of the house
- Central, hipped dormer that matched the roof line

Other fine examples in Buffalo include:

300 Lake Shore Drive

209 3<sup>rd</sup> Street NW

511 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW

308 Division

309 Division

307 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE

### ***Craftsman***

***Predominant period 1905-1930***

The Craftsman style was developed by California architects and brothers Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene. The Greene's were influenced by the English Arts and Crafts movement, oriental wooded architecture, and manual arts. This style was popularized by extensive promotion in many magazines such as *Good House Keeping*, *House Beautiful*, and *Ladies Home Journal*. Its popularity resulted in a plethora of pattern books being published, some even offering pre-cut lumber.

What most distinguished the Craftsman home was its philosophical foundation that was predicated on a more functional aesthetic, natural materials and a greater degree of craftsmanship, which Art & Crafts proponents believed to be missing from the more ornate or traditional styles of the period.

Defining characteristics:

- Low-pitched gabled roof
- Deep eaves with exposed rafters
- Decorative beams or braces under gables
- 1 – 1 ½ stories
- Large, covered front porches, supported by massive, battered columns

Examples in Buffalo include:

201 Division

303 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW



*Fine Craftsman details are found on this house at 301 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW*

## Preservation Planning Recommendations

Over the past 100 years, the City of Buffalo has lost a number of significant historic resources. However, a fair number of historic residential and commercial buildings remain that physically tell the story of the celebrated development of Buffalo. In addition, these historic buildings have demonstrated their importance to the City, in general, and the downtown, in particular, with their adaptability and durability over the past 100 years. Finally, historic preservation has proven to have a positive economic impact on communities that undertake preservation efforts. Buffalo should explore ways of preserving these valuable resources.

Currently, the City of Buffalo does not have any historic preservation efforts in place. The City, however, has demonstrated its commitment to the downtown by funding and supporting the creation of a downtown development plan in 2007, titled *Downtown Buffalo Vision*. In fact, the City is currently improving a walkway to Lake Buffalo as the first step in implementing the recommendations of the 2007 Plan.



THE CROSSROADS CONCEPT

The primary purpose of historic contexts is developing an understanding of Buffalo's historic development in order to evaluate its historic resources and to determine which preservation efforts the City may want to evaluate further. Below are the various Preservation activities that Buffalo may want to explore implementing in the future.

- **Historic Preservation Plan** – is usually the first step in a city's preservation efforts. A historic preservation plan reviews all the preservation tools in more detail, provides a public forum to decide which preservation efforts should be used, explains historic preservation's terminology, outlines the legal basis for historic preservation, and prioritizes the preservation actions to be taken.
- **Survey**- examines in more detail all residential, commercial and industrial buildings to determine their historic significance.
- **Historic Preservation Ordinance** – Preservation ordinances should be tailored to the needs and desires of the particular community. They cover the spectrum from being lenient (providing only recommendations) to being stringent (determining paint colors).

Just like any planning effort, the city determines where on the spectrum they would like to be. Preservation ordinances also establish nomination standards and procedures.

- ***Nomination to National Register*** – The National Register of Historic Places honors buildings and places that have a national historic significance. Buildings listed on the National Register are able to receive a Federal and State tax-credit for major improvements. The Huber Hotel and St. Francis Church may be good candidates for the National Register. The Huber Hotel is the only remaining resource from Buffalo’s hotel era that has not been significantly altered. Likewise, St. Francis is the only remaining resource from Buffalo’s religious history that has not been significantly altered.
- ***Local Historic Register*** – Resources that are of local importance should be listed on a Local Historic Register. Historic Preservation Ordinances only effect buildings on a Local Register, not the National Register. Most of the historic commercial buildings should be on a Local Register, but special consideration given to the following buildings: all of the buildings that Swan Bratt designed and constructed because of his importance to Buffalo, the Beutner’s Drug Store because of the families long associated history with Buffalo, and the Masonic Lodge and the State Bank of Buffalo for their architectural integrity.
- ***Design guidelines*** – Prepared by historic preservation architects, design guidelines give city officials and building owners ideas on the best preservation practices for building improvements.
- ***Certified Local Government*** – The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has established a Certified Local Government (CLG) program for cities that meet established requirements. Being a CLG provides many benefits to a community, such as preservation grants, technical resources, and networking opportunities. However, one of the requirements is that a separate Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) be established. There may not be enough preservation activities for a separate HPC in Buffalo to remain engaged, but a good first step may be expanding the responsibilities City’s Planning Commission and change its name to the Preservation and Planning Commission.
- ***Education*** – The City should use the Historic Context Study as an educational resource for all Planning Commission members

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