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Creating Neighborhood in Postwar Buffalo, New York: Transformations of the West Side, 1950-1980

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CREATING NEIGHBORHOOD IN POSTWAR BUFFALO, NEW YORK:
TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE WEST SIDE, 1950-1980

by

Caitlin Boyle Moriarty

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT
CREATING NEIGHBORHOOD IN POSTWAR BUFFALO, NEW YORK:
TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE WEST SIDE, 1950-1980

by

Caitlin Boyle Moriarty

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014
Under the Supervision of Professors Arijit Sen and Anna Andrzejewski

This project reconsiders post-World War II neighborhood change by examining how various groups in Buffalo, New York conceptualized, experienced and produced the West Side as a cultural and economic artifact between 1950 and 1980. This approach offers an alternative to conceptualizing neighborhoods as bounded, natural entities and it encourages narratives that complicate the prevailing metaphor of decline in rust belt cities by illuminating other components of postwar neighborhood change than population loss and economic disinvestment. This project uses neighborhood retail as a lens through which to examine how city planners, the West Side Business Men's Club, the Federation of Italian American Societies and individual storeowners reproduced the neighborhood at multiple scales through city planning, local marketing, Columbus Day celebrations, and personal decisions. As the logics of those practices changed alongside shifting social and economic contexts in the depopulating, deindustrializing city, these social agents negotiated the West Side as both a tangible place and an abstract imaginary. While the place-based City and businessmen's club promoted the area as a commercial destination, individual storeowners connected West Side stores to businesses networks that extended

across the city. At the same time, the Federation recast the West Side as the “old neighborhood,” and a launching point for Italian American upward mobility in the region.

The first three chapters concentrate on retail patterns at different scales of neighborhood production. The first chapter examines commercial areas of the West Side as sites of city planning intervention, the second chapter considers how the local business organization constructed the Grant-Ferry area as a defined entity through marketing and events, and the third chapter uses the stories of three individual business owners to show how the singular place images of the first two chapters belies personal experience of the same shopping area on the ground. The final chapter shifts to the Federation of Italian American Societies’ production of a regional Italian identity that casted the West Side as a place of the past, echoing the sentiments of former West Siders who identified the Grant-Ferry area as an idealized but bygone center of community. Each chapter of the project highlights the Grant-Ferry area as a critical component of neighborhood identity for groups engaging the West Side’s the past, present, and future as they responded to citywide and regional transformations. Together, these chapters suggest the importance of understanding neighborhood commercial areas as social and economic resources that stakeholders at multiple scales engage and transform simultaneously during periods of neighborhood change.

This project contributes to a growing literature that interrogates the production of neighborhoods as emergent, ongoing processes. Getting beyond the “container” view of neighborhood reconnects postwar neighborhood change to broader urban development processes by illuminating scalar interconnections that remain obscured in those studies. This study interprets conceptualizations and uses of the West Side by examining how the

groups and individuals framed neighborhood identity in planning documents, newspaper reports, maps, city directories, and interviews. Each point of view invoked the neighborhood through different temporal and functional associations, and implicated a different audience of neighborhood identity.

This study suggests that using this approach, scholars of urban history and urban studies can better understand American neighborhoods as products of the same forces and contexts that produced other postwar landscapes rather than as sites or survivors of postwar urban decline. This project is also relevant to contemporary neighborhood revitalization efforts on the West Side of Buffalo because it suggests that the “rediscovery” narrative accompanying new investment is problematic in the same ways as the “decline” narrative commonly used to frame the last three decades; each explanation centers on a limited cast of stakeholders and severs the historical continuity of the processes that define places.

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Dedicated to my parents —
For teaching me to value compassion, curiosity, and critical thinking

And to my teachers —
For encouraging my love of learning

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCE Buffalo Courier Express
BEN Buffalo Evening News
BYP Buffalo's Young Preservationists
FIASWNY Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York
LISC Local Initiatives Support Corporation
WST West Side Times
WSBMA West Side Business Men's Association
WSSCP West Side Sustainable Communities Plan

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Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Urban Neighborhoods in the Postwar City

Perceptions of the West Side: Survivors and the “Container View” of Neighborhood

“We are basically survivors on the West Side...We’re gonna survive. We’re gonna be here.”¹ These words, spoken by Lucy Rosenow, a young woman living on Buffalo’s West Side, close a 1981 article in the *Buffalo Courier Express* entitled, “Change in a Melting Pot Neighborhood.” Rosenow’s powerful statement punctuates a series of voices woven throughout the article that communicate pride in being a West Sider despite negative perceptions of the area. Reporter Rich Scheinin selected individuals that represent the diversity of neighborhood residents, and each of them defends the West Side and claims it as their home: “We feel insulted when [people] talk about the West Side, because we don’t have any more crime here than anywhere else,” says Italian immigrant Josephine Bonda, a West Sider for over sixty years. Ray Spasiano, an Italian American storeowner states, “I’m a West Sider. Absolutely. I’ve lived here, worked here. When I go cabareting, I don’t go to the suburbs.” Puerto Rican immigrant Arcadio Arroyo acknowledges changes since his first years in the area twenty-five years prior when one could “sleep with your windows and doors wide open,” but says, “I still like it down here.” Mary Lea Jamieson, a young white mother married to a Native American man asserts, “you can live here in peace forever,” and Charles Orr, a middle class white man who had recently moved with his wife from suburban Hamburg to the neighborhood

¹ Rich Scheinin, “Change in a Melting Pot Neighborhood,” *Buffalo Courier Express*, April 11, 1981.

declares, “I have never felt threatened, never had any trouble in this neighborhood. I can say that we have no regrets about moving to the West Side.”²

While these individuals challenge prevailing negative images of the neighborhood, they offer a selective perspective. For instance, Jamieson defends the panhandlers that her friends see as deterrents for visiting her on the West Side: “‘Oh, those awful men on Virginia Street,’ they say, ‘How can you live there?’ Well, I’ll tell you, if anything’s wrong in this neighborhood, those ‘awful men’ are the first to spot it.” Though Scheinin allows Jamieson to defend these individuals, he does not include their voices firsthand. Instead, his cast of feisty, proud characters with strong family values constructs a palatable, pleasant image of the neighborhood for his readers. They talk about their families, the former glory of the area, and ambitious visions for a better future. While this sympathetic and human view of the area counters expectations and stereotypes, other elements of the article complicate the myth-busting function of these individuals’ West Side pride.

Most significantly, Scheinin characterizes the neighborhood primarily as a contained place, a geographic entity within which objects and people are located. The interviews speak to the experience of living *in* the West Side, but the area is taken for granted as a pre-determined spatial entity. David Madden terms this the “container view” of neighborhood that stems from late nineteenth and early twentieth century urban sociology, most notably the Chicago School.³ That group saw neighborhoods as “natural

² Scheinin, “Change in a Melting Pot Neighborhood.” These are the categories that he uses to describe people in the article.

³ David J. Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Project: Making the Urban Order on the Downtown Brooklyn Waterfront,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38 (March 2014): 476.

areas” of the city and the legacy of this viewpoint pervades conceptualizations of neighborhoods today. This notion of neighborhoods is problematic because it portrays certain areas of the city as inherently distinct from others. It obscures the social, economic and political interconnections between places, and it fosters a static view of neighborhood identity.⁴ In this framework, neighborhood change is cast as either a decline from better times in the past or registered as a transfer of one body for another. Both models focus only on what is inside of boundaries without interrogating how *a priori* spatial and conceptual boundaries can limit understandings of neighborhood dynamics.

Instead, this project reconsiders the West Side “beyond boundaries,” approaching the neighborhood as an emergent product of overlapping social and economic geographies. The residents that Scheinin includes (and excludes) from his report of the West Side offer more insight to the production of the neighborhood than what they say about it; their backgrounds and the reasons that they live there connect to broader processes that create the neighborhood. They represent subtle and ongoing negotiations that influenced representations and experiences of the West Side. While their statements offer a positive side of the West Side neighborhood that contradicts negative perceptions, their personal stories situate the neighborhood within contexts of immigration, real estate patterns, commercial development, and suburbanization.

In Scheinin’s article, the contemporary West Side is defined by an historic architectural legacy and a succession of ethnic groups. The West Side “is a feast for architectural enthusiasts,” boasting mid-late nineteenth century homes and such

⁴Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 23.

landmarks as Kleinhans Music Hall, a nationally acclaimed concert hall designed by Eero and Eliel Saarinen (1938-40), Front and LaSalle Parks, features of the late-nineteenth century Olmsted Park and Parkway plan, the International Peace Bridge and D'Youville College. In addition to these notable sites, the West Village, "one of the city's oldest neighborhoods...laid out by Joseph Ellicott of the Holland Land Company," is turning around as, "an increasing number of professionals eager to renovate its architecturally distinguished homes," move into the recently designated historic district.⁵ Promoting the area through these highlights makes it seem that the West Side's true identity stems from a perceived historical "peak," the era during which such important buildings were constructed.⁶ Furthermore, the implication that "eager," cultured professionals are re-discovering these architectural gems creates a distinction between newcomers who improve the area and its existing residents, who, presumably, do not.⁷

Scheinin's reference to the influx of gentrifying professionals in the West Village continues a historical narrative focused on in-migrating groups, which reinforces the representation of the neighborhood as a place that people move into, rather than leave. For instance, the article outlines different ethnic groups that have called the West Side home. Buffalo's "aristocrats" lived in the area at the turn of the nineteenth century and Irish laborers working on the Erie Canal arrived in the early decades of the 1800s. Later, in the "great Italian migration to Buffalo," Italian immigrants moved in during the 1880s, "inherit[ing]" churches and commercial strips from their predecessors. Contemporary

⁵ The West Village Historic District was designated a local preservation district 1978 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

⁶ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, 22-23.

⁷ See Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996). This narrative is making a comeback surrounding trends of population increase and community activism in the 2010s.

patterns follow this trend: “Today the whole process seems to be repeating itself,” as the Hispanic community becomes more visible. “Today, Maria Perez and her family are as numerous on Seventh Street as the Bonda clan is on Plymouth...[and] many ex-West Side Italians have moved north to Hertel Avenue and beyond.”⁸ This most recent trend, however, is complicated by “murmurs” that gentrification in the West Village is “push[ing]” the Hispanic community “off part of its turf.” This demographic history propels a “container view” of the West Side by presenting population groups as single, coherent actors that entirely displace one another in a predetermined space. Excepting the last statement, it oversimplifies the dynamics of overlapping populations and interaction, and excludes the context of why and how these inhabitants made the West Side a place to live.

In addition to characterizing the West Side in terms of what and who is there, Scheinin describes what is absent: “More than 40 percent of homes throughout the West Side are owned by absentee landlords. But on the Lower West Side [ie., south of Porter Avenue] the figure is estimated at above 50 percent, a significant cause of housing deterioration.” On Connecticut Street, a “once-thriving commercial strip,” over twenty percent of the storefronts are vacant, and the unemployment rate on the West Side is three times the city average. These symptoms of disinvestment mark the West Side as a site of decline, though Scheinin does not contextualize them with explanations of Buffalo’s postwar economic struggles or residential decentralization.

In all, the article offers a lot of information, but it also presents an incomplete characterization of neighborhood identity by equating the West Side with the people and

⁸ While he uses the term Hispanic, Puerto Rican and Mexican are more accurate.

objects located there, and neighborhood change with who moves in and out across space. In this representation, the West Side has notable architectural works, a diminishing Italian American presence and a growing Latino population. It lacks owner-occupied housing, commercial investment and gainfully employed residents. These features seem to define the area only because of a coincidental geographic relevance, that is, they are located in an area called the West Side. They are presented as essential characteristics of the neighborhood rather than symptoms of broader social and economic shifts in the region.

This project argues for illuminating processes of placemaking in order to move beyond a neighborhood identity determined by objects within pre-existing boundaries, recasting the neighborhood as a product of broad reaching, multi-scalar connections. Without a broader context of how such objects, people, and patterns came to be and change over time, the West Side is static and disconnected from its surroundings. While Scheinin admits that defining neighborhood boundaries “can be a problem,” his narrative reinforces the notion that boundaries define the West Side because he does not connect any of the voices or objects located there to broader processes that define places. Readers do not get the sense that these individuals ever leave the West Side, or that neighborhoods can be defined by other elements such as state actors, real estate patterns and social movements.⁹

⁹ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*; Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Project”; Deborah G. Martin, “Enacting Neighborhood,” *Urban Geography* 24, no. 5 (2003): 361-385; Deanna H. Schmidt, “The Practices and Process of Neighborhood: The (Re)Production of Riverwest, Milwaukee, Wisconsin,” *Urban Geography* 29, no. 5 (2008): 473-495.

Places are not empty containers; they are socially constructed, malleable and multifaceted.¹⁰ They are “perpetual object[s] of social production and contestation.”¹¹

While spatial features are useful orienting tools and often become shared points of reference to neighborhood residents, neighborhoods are not only spatial objects.

Neighborhoods are produced by legal regulations, building technology, and other social, political, and economic factors. They are made by mobile individuals with broad reaching connections outside of the neighborhood. Through these webs of connections, as urban and cultural theorists argue of places generally, neighborhoods are nodes within far reaching networks of ‘flows.’¹² This project contributes to a growing scholarship that interrogates neighborhoods as emergent ideological, social and spatial constructions with a historic case study of a neighborhood in a rust belt city. It illuminates the production of the West Side between 1950 and 1981 through a variety of positions within ideological, monetary and human ‘flows’ that constituted urban development patterns.

By limiting his discussion to population waves, Scheinin only partially succeeds in countering assumptions about the West Side. While the individuals he presents enjoy living in the neighborhood, their voices seem to belong only within its boundaries.

Coupled with the vacancy and unemployment statistics and perceptions of crime, the area and its inhabitants seem to be separate from the rest of the city, both spatially and

¹⁰ Allan Pred, “Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 74 no., 2 (1984): 279–97; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

¹¹ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, 40.

¹² Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 no., 2 (1990): 295-310; Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

culturally. Anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson point to a similar assumption in conceptualizations of global migration; they argue that world maps and ‘ethnographic maps,’ represent space erroneously as “a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organizations are inscribed.”¹³ While visually appealing, such maps naturalize the concept of coterminous geographical and cultural boundaries, for instance, taking for granted that Americans live in America, the French live in France, etc. This framework precludes the complexity of identity formation—e.g. what does it mean to be American?—and it casts international workers, migrants and other outliers as marginalized exceptions to a natural order rather than equal producers of the contemporary world. These seemingly stable units on maps obscure the processes by which space, culture and identities are produced, claimed, resisted and reinforced.

Maps of city neighborhoods can produce the same oversights by objectifying Chinatown, Little Italy, and other areas as natural realities rather than produced places with complex histories of development (**Fig. 1**). Scheinin’s article represents the same conflation of place and identity in postwar neighborhoods by constructing the West Side of Buffalo and its residents as inherently distinct from and different than other city neighborhoods and the suburbs. His article, “cross(es) this spatial divide,” but in doing so, it naturalizes the concept of boundaries as an organizing principle.¹⁴ As noted previously, this limits ability to see interconnections, isolating the neighborhood in space and time.

¹³ Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1994): 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

Despite his effort to recast the West Side, Scheinin misses the opportunity for a more profound illumination of the “Melting Pot Neighborhood,” by seeing the ‘survivors’ on the West Side as products of and participants in the same forces of postwar urban change that created the suburbs rather than remainders from a previous time or deviants in the contemporary city.¹⁵ Shifting the focus towards the production of place identities, specifically through the ongoing relationships between people, groups and places, offers a promising avenue for fostering better understanding of the dynamic relationships that give meaning to the streets, stoops, houses and stores that comprise the physical realm of urban neighborhoods. Each chapter of this project shows how a particular actor produced the West Side conceptually and physically as it engaged topics such as urban development, commercial interests and collective identity. Together, these chapters show that the West Side was part of regional trends—not circumvented by them—and that changes on the West Side were not limited to the influence of people on the ground there. By looking at long-term and relatively even-keeled (but not static) relationships, this project also extends understandings of postwar neighborhood change to include more mundane processes that tend to be overshadowed by inflammatory events of “crisis,” such as race riots, and broad generalizations like “white flight.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid. “But even Pratt retains the notion of ‘the !Kung’ as a preexisting ontological entity—‘survivors,’ *not products (still less producers) of history*,” (emphasis added).

¹⁶ It is important to note that other scholars are complicating these broad trends in other ways. Amanda Seligman complicates the idea of white flight by showing residents of a Chicago neighborhood left only after fruitless appeals to local government for improved services. She shows that frustration with unresponsive government is as critical a component of the trend that has come to be called “white flight” as racism and the unwillingness to live in integrated neighborhoods. See Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Additionally, the shortcoming of the “container view” in “Change in a Melting Pot Neighborhood” results from the article’s singularity of perspective, so including a variety of viewpoints can infuse nuance to the narrative of neighborhood identity and change. Scheinin offers individual voices from an ethnically and socio-economically diverse cast, but does not include other agents that shape spaces and perceptions of the West Side. For instance, he does not speak of organizational efforts in the neighborhood, such as the West Side Business Men’s Association, which ardently promoted the commercial climate of the Grant-Ferry area, the retail spine of the neighborhood’s northern section (**Fig. 2**). Nor does he recognize how urban development initiatives affected the neighborhood and that long-standing plans for a freeway ramp on Virginia Street deterred investment in properties that could be taken by eminent domain at any time. Situating the neighborhood within multiple perspectives and scales ameliorates the “container view” by forcing the recognition of complex, contradictory, co-existing layers of placemaking agency.

This project endeavors to show how such an approach changes the understanding of urban neighborhood identity generally and postwar neighborhood change more specifically. It reconsiders the West Side during the postwar decades as a product of metropolitan scope, both connected to and engrained in spatial and functional shifts at various scales. Doing so reveals multiple strategies by which different groups remade the neighborhood while navigating the deindustrializing, suburbanizing region. As their worlds opened up, so too did the reach of the West Side. The story of the West Side during these years encompasses much more than Italians moving out and Latinos moving in. The West Side was reinforced as a local community, it was promoted as a shopping

destination, and it was a workplace and home to people that traveled daily across the city. It was not a container, and it did not simply “decline”; it was a constantly produced node of shifting ideological, economic and human movements and a resource for various people, groups and institutions in the city. As they used it as a site of and for looking forward, living in the present and remembering the past, people produced the neighborhood through plans, representations and use. Their actions repositioned the West Side within broader ‘flows’ in the region, and fostered neighborhood change through everyday life.

The broader implications of this case study suggest that re-conceptualizing neighborhoods in this way produces more nuanced historical knowledge and can destabilize the decline narrative embedded in politics, preservation, and identity of many rust belt cities to this day.¹⁷ It encourages more careful attention to the implications of the “container view” of neighborhoods and the rethinking of practices in historic preservation, community development and other endeavors that are based on or implicate bounded concepts of place.

Rethinking the Concept of “Neighborhood”

Scheinin’s article offers entree to discussing how the West Side is characterized as a bounded island and the shortcomings of that conceptualization, but this representation is widespread in studies of neighborhood change and neighborhood

¹⁷ Meghan Cope and Frank Latcham. “Narratives of Decline: Race, Poverty, and Youth in the Context of Postindustrial Urban Angst,” *The Professional Geographer* 61, no. 2 (2009): 150-163; Jonathan Cheng, “Visitors to Buffalo, N.Y., Find Beauty in Decay,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 19, 2014; Penelope Green, “Small-scale Developers, Big Dreams,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2013.

identity. Many scholars examine these concepts from a single vantage point or they rely on the “container view” of neighborhood.

Recently, scholars in sociology, historic preservation and city planning have pointed out the limitations of this embedded assumption. Sociologist David Madden criticizes the prevailing authority of the neighborhood effects literature, which investigates the life chances of individuals born in one neighborhood versus another, often using census tracts to approximate neighborhood units: “While this literature can tell us quite a bit about inequality and spatial unevenness,” he argues, “its central concept, the neighborhood, remains under theorized.”¹⁸ Treating neighborhoods as independent variables is problematic because, “neighborhoods are not the clearly bounded, abstract spaces on a city map implied by the mainstream sociological view.”¹⁹ Accordingly, he argues, the applications of this research for policy should be carefully considered until more complex understandings of “neighborhood” develop. Madden’s research seeks to elevate the neighborhood to more critical scholarly inquiry by looking at long term dynamics of power and roles in development, discussed in more detail in the following section.

Katherine Jones points to an ideological “social-spatial split” underlying the view of neighborhoods as bounded, objectified entities in city planning.²⁰ She argues that this is a product of the planning process, which has historically conceptualized urban spaces as “structurable” through descriptions that can perpetuate embedded assumptions, for instance, using terms like “decay” and “aimless” to describe sections of a neighborhood.

¹⁸ Ibid, 477.

¹⁹ Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Project,” 472.

²⁰ Katherine Jones, “Planning, Representation, and the Production of Space in Lexington, Kentucky,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 19 (2000): 382.

She calls for planners and scholars to be attentive to the social and spatial implications of descriptions and plans, suggesting that deconstructing underlying premises can not only “provide new answers, but...[also] pose new questions.”²¹ This awareness can change the way urban space is approached, reversing the “fail[ure] to see the vitality of the city because we are accustomed to looking for clusters and defensible edges.” Looking at urban space differently will produce new insight to connections rather than barriers.

Andrew Hurley strikes the same chord, criticizing traditional historic preservation efforts that tend to freeze neighborhood identities in time. He criticizes the “in-migration model” of neighborhood history for alienating contemporary residents and misrepresenting the “diversity and change” that typify urban places.²² Instead of equating neighborhood change with population change, he suggests that groups develop place-based themes to engage a broader range of residents around common concerns that frame the present as a continuation of the past rather than a break from it. This framework uses public history and historic preservation to empower local communities to harness development for their own purposes. It also uses place as a shared resource that engages diverse stakeholders in processes of proactive neighborhood visioning.

These examples show that the limitations of the “container view” cross disciplinary boundaries. In each case, the criticism of conceptualizing neighborhoods this way stems from the inadequate account of the social construction of place. Space is

²¹ Ibid., 386.

²² Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, 23. Cathy Stanton makes a similar argument in her study of Lowell National Park, where she claims that public history narratives centered on turn of the century immigrant workers exclude contemporary redevelopment issues produced in the postindustrial economy. See *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 2006.

structured not only by physical interventions of planning, but also the mode by which it is studied. That is, the social scientist examining cycles of poverty and the planner creating a plan for intervention both create a particular view of neighborhood. In the process of looking at one thing, they produce another. By oversimplifying and isolating influences, it produces both problematic historical knowledge and contemporary understandings of how neighborhoods work. As the “spatial turn” in humanities and social science continues, the consequences of the implicit “container view,” itself a legacy of historical processes of inquiry, come to the forefront.²³

In response, scholars have started to interrogate the concept of “neighborhood,” applying postmodern understandings of urban space to neighborhoods. Moving beyond boundaries, they shift to questions of who produces neighborhoods and by what means. This includes not only physical determinants and structuring, but also social meaning and imaginative aspects, actions and representations that circulate across and connect realms of urban life, including art, politics and commerce. This can further our understanding of urban history and city dynamics by debunking the myth, implicit in the “container view,” that neighborhoods are “natural zones that seem to be flourishing or failing on their own.”²⁴ Instead, they are physical, conceptual realms of action, imagination, influenced from within and without.

The postwar era is particularly suited to this task of re-conceptualizing urban neighborhoods because their function and form changed drastically within national trends of urban renewal, highway construction, and residential and economic segregation.

²³ Barney Warf and Santa Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁴ Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Project,” 474, 478.

Interconnections across space became increasingly widespread and rapid. Production and consumption networks across the country and increasingly, the world, also reshaped the connections between centers of production and consumption.

Benjamin Looker argues that neighborhood was a cultural concept through which Americans grappled with these broader societal changes, as the New Deal political structure and the primacy of urban industry waned.²⁵ He traces representations and “ideological production” of American neighborhoods through arts, and politics, examining the “cultural work” that sustained and perpetuated particular definitions of neighborhood over time.²⁶ He finds old neighborhoods increasingly represented as confining, troublesome sites of communal thinking through “shifts from a presentation of the neighborhood as microcosm of the nation itself to one of the neighborhood as a place apart.”²⁷

In contrast to Looker’s inquiry of neighborhood “as an idea and an ideal,” Stanger-Ross studies postwar neighborhoods on the ground as sites for community. Looking at two Italian areas of Philadelphia and Toronto, Stanger-Ross claims that “different urban challenges” in each city fostered divergent forms of community life.²⁸ Italian Americans in Philadelphia perceived “the old neighborhood” as something to defend while Italian Canadians in Toronto experienced “Little Italy” as something to return to. He attributes these differences in part to the political and economic context of each city. For instance, Philadelphia’s stagnant postwar economy discouraged selling

²⁵ Benjamin Looker, “A Nation of Neighborhoods: Cities, Communities and Democracy in the American Imagination, 1940-2000,” PhD diss., Yale University, 2010.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁸ Jordan Stanger-Ross, Jordan, *Staying Italian: Urban Change and Ethnic Life in Postwar Toronto and Philadelphia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4-5.

family homes, and instead fostered a heightened social value of place to those that remained. By contrast, Toronto's booming real estate market encouraged selling homes for a profit, but Italian Canadians continued to return to the neighborhood for gatherings and Italian festivals at particular times throughout the year.

While Stanger-Ross places the areas in a historical context of development, he characterizes the neighborhoods themselves as given entities where Italians "created community." His study centers on the role of ethnicity and community without incorporating the dynamics of neighborhoods as socially constructed places. For instance, by looking through the lens of ethnic identity, he detects distinct patterns of community and neighborhood in Toronto and Philadelphia, but this project suggests that these tendencies of reinforcing localism and creating broad networks could coexist in the same space.

Following these efforts to move beyond the "container view," and to understand neighborhoods within the transformations of American society in the latter half of the twentieth century, this project reconsiders neighborhood identity and neighborhood change in postwar Buffalo. Since Buffalo experienced the postwar struggles of deindustrialization, suburbanization, and segregation common to other rust belt cities, it is a good place to study the production of neighborhood in this era. Similar to Looker, this project examines the concept of neighborhood, but it centers on a specific neighborhood in order to present the complex social construction of an actual place. The West Side of Buffalo functioned as a conceptual reference for grappling with ideals and ideologies of neighborhood generally because it was a meaningful physical site to a variety of stakeholders. In contrast to Stanger-Ross's case studies, this study focuses on

place rather than community or ethnicity. It examines the West Side as a “sociospatial imaginary” and a cultural artifact from a series of shifting vantage points.²⁹ City planners, the West Side Business Men’s Club, the Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York and individual storeowners in the Grant-Ferry district shaped the neighborhood at multiple scales through city planning, local marketing, Columbus Day celebrations and personal decisions. As the metropolitan area reconfigured with increased suburbanization and industrial exits, the City undertook efforts to revitalize downtown while neighborhood groups, individuals, and cultural organizations re-evaluated their own roles within the shifting metropolitan area. In doing so, they invoked physical components and symbolic associations of the West Side, thereby employing neighborhood identity as a medium for negotiating the changing city. Looking at the neighborhood in this way produces a very different grasp of how and why the area changed in the postwar years than Scheinin offers in his “Melting Pot” article.

Between 1950 and 1981, as these groups utilized the West Side as a flexible resource, they called upon varying conceptual, physical and functional components of the neighborhood to serve different aims with values and expectations that sometimes converged and other times deviated from one another. While each relationship to the West Side envisioned and used the neighborhood in limited ways, the collection of actions in this study did not directly conflict, but rather coexisted with one another. Rather than a bounded idea or space, the West Side proved to be somewhat boundless, the socio-spatial site of varying experiences, identities and ambitions. Therefore, the neighborhood was not characterized only by loss or gain. As the chapters to follow will

²⁹ Martin, “Enacting Neighborhood,” 372.

show, the West Side was simultaneously mobilized as a unit of commercial competition, reinterpreted with historic significance and promoted as a shopping destination, incorporated into social and economic networks stretching across the metropolitan area, and constructed as an abstraction of itself in order to foster a sense of stability in the face of change. This multidimensional transformation shows that the neighborhood was not the product of a single process, actor, or influence, but a cumulative, ongoing production of multiple uncoordinated efforts to shape the social, political and economic fortunes of the government, organizations and individuals.

While contributing specifically to Buffalo's history, the project also sheds light on other postwar neighborhoods by encouraging narratives beyond the story of rise and decline in other locations. By using case studies that approach real neighborhoods as inseparable conceptual, functional and physical artifacts, and examining change over time in ongoing relationships rather than moments of conflict, this approach encourages scholarship that moves beyond the limitations of the "container view." In addition, while this project centers on a transforming urban neighborhood, rather than a newly built one, the same method is applicable for looking at new neighborhoods as well. Furthermore, this project can be a model for studying neighborhoods in other times and places, addressing the general need for more nuanced ways of talking about the multiplicity of functions and identities that circulate around and through neighborhoods.

Introducing the Case Study: Postwar Buffalo, New York and the West Side

While it may seem contradictory to define the West Side in light of my goal to see the area "beyond boundaries," I offer this introduction to orient readers who are

unfamiliar with Buffalo and the area called the West Side.³⁰ This description is neither absolute nor comprehensive. The overview of postwar Buffalo serves to contextualize the study of neighborhood change within the social and economic restructuring of the city at large during this era.

Buffalo, New York typifies the challenges that industrial cities in the rust belt faced during the postwar era.³¹ For the first time since the Erie Canal opened in 1825, propelling the city into the forefront of American trade networks, the economic and population shifts between 1950 and 1980 signaled a drastic turn of fortunes. As the industrial economy that supported a high quality of life for many Buffalonians disappeared, the structure of the city and function of its neighborhoods shifted to reflect new arrangements. Accordingly, actors at all scales, from the city government to individual residents renegotiated their power and options.

At the close of World War II, Buffalo was the nation's fifteenth largest city, with a population topping 580,000 people by 1950.³² The city grew during the war years from massive federal contracts that expanded its industrial functions and employed hundreds

³⁰ Madden suggests this dilemma as well. He uses the East River and street names to designate his area of study, but explains his goal: "Here I want to describe the spatial projects that shaped this area into a neighborhood called Dumbo." His attention to the subjectivity of spatial boundaries provides a more flexible description than geographers like Martin and Schmidt, who use more traditional language and mapping to describe their study sites. They study the production of neighborhood identity, but do not address the spatial conceptualizations of neighborhood, while Madden is explicit about the goal of seeing the neighborhood beyond the "container view."

³¹ Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*; Robert A Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of US Cities* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³² U.S. Census Bureau.

of thousands of residents.³³ In 1951, *Fortune* magazine heralded Buffalo's diverse industrial economy, which made the city "the third-largest producer of steel, the largest inland port, the second-largest railroad center, and the 'first city in the world' in flour milling."³⁴ According to the Chamber of Commerce in 1955, forty-two percent of the city's workforce was employed in industry, an eighth of which worked in only five steel and iron plants. The same year, the city's workers enjoyed wages a quarter higher than the national average, "creating a genuine sense of optimism and the feeling that things could only get better."³⁵

Over the next three decades, however, the city experienced the challenges of suburbanization, industrial loss and racial tension that characterized many other rust belt cities during this era.³⁶ By 1980, the population of the city had declined to 357,870 within a relatively stable metropolitan area of 1,242,826.³⁷ Manufacturing companies left and by 1980, the manufacturing sector employed only twenty-seven percent of the workforce.³⁸

³³ Mark Goldman, *High Hopes: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo, New York*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 234.

³⁴ Mark Goldman, *City on the Edge: Buffalo, New York*, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), 149. For more detail on the composition of the industrial economy and the economy at large, see Alfred D. Price, "Urban Renewal: The Case of Buffalo, NY," *Review of Black Political Economy* (Winter-Spring 1991): 125-159.

³⁵ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 150.

³⁶ Cope and Latcham "Narratives of Decline," 153; Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Beauregard. *Voices of Decline*.

³⁷ U.S. Census Bureau 1980. For more about city population loss in a relatively stable metropolitan population between 1950-2000, see Chuck Banas, "This is Sprawl," *Urbanophile*, April 27, 2010, <http://www.urbanophile.com/2010/04/27/chuck-banas-this-is-sprawl/>. Accessed July 15, 2014.

³⁸ Neil Kraus, *Race, Neighborhoods, and Community Power: Buffalo Politics 1934-1997*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 37. See also Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*, 213: "Between 1967 and 1977, Buffalonians working in manufacturing decreased 30.4%, from 66,700 to 46,4000 employees."

Unemployment soared at twelve percent in 1975, landing Buffalo on the front page of the *New York Times* as a poster child of “Down and Out America.”³⁹

At the same time that the city lost its industrial base, its population decreased relative to the region as the lure of home ownership and frustration with decreasing city services attracted city dwellers to suburban locales. Between 1940 and 1952, the city gained a mere 6,000 compared with a composite 102,000 in the suburbs of Tonawanda, Amherst, Cheektowaga, Lancaster, West Seneca, Orchard Park and Hamburg (**Fig. 3**).⁴⁰ The trend continued, gaining speed in the following two decades. Rising to meet the demand of these suburban and auto-mobile consumers, new commercial developments sprung up along major thoroughfares; in contrast to neighborhood commercial streets, these options tended to be set back in large parking lots and were increasingly branch locations of city, regional, or national enterprises.⁴¹

Effects reverberated through the city as those in the city dealt with the drastic reversal of the economy and population. Government officials continued the city legacy of progressive city planning, calling upon nationally renowned professionals to guide visioning for a modern Buffalo. Downtown real estate and business interests continued to believe that the central city was the natural heart of the city and would remain so; they promoted demolition and rebuilding for parking and automobile friendly accommodations.⁴²

³⁹ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 293.

⁴⁰ “Articles to Trace Huge Growth of City’s Suburbs,” *Buffalo Courier Express*, October 11, 1952.

⁴¹ Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*.

⁴² Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 172; Isenberg, *Downtown America*. See Goldman, *High Hopes* and *City on the Edge* for more about the history of Buffalo’s progressive city planning. For instance, the city invited several nationally renowned planners in the 1920s.

The city's neighborhoods experienced the effects of these changes differently. East of Main Street, the vast "East Side" typified the national trend of racial turnover. The area's German and Polish populations moved out towards suburban Cheektowaga and African Americans moved in from the Ellicott district, the historical center of African American community since the nineteenth century.⁴³ The Ellicott district, home to three-quarters of Buffalo's African American population in 1950, became overcrowded with the wartime influx of African American migrants and it was an early target for the City's urban renewal campaigns.⁴⁴ This led to Buffalo's place among the most racially and economically segregated cities in the nation.⁴⁵

In the center of the city north of downtown, areas now known as the Elmwood Village and Delaware District experienced population loss and diminished property values, but retained a core of middle and upper class white urban dwellers. By the mid-1960s, the residents of Allentown made that area a site of early neighborhood activism against the urban renewal projects that claimed historic buildings and places in downtown and other neighborhoods. The Allentown Association, incorporated in 1963, secured local historic designation in 1978 and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.⁴⁶

The West Side experienced a range of city-led interventions, including urban renewal and freeway construction, and was also characterized by population loss and an increased minority population. The Niagara Thruway, built over the Erie Canal, severed

⁴³ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 173.

⁴⁴ Price, "Urban Renewal in Buffalo," 140.

⁴⁵ Yi Lin, "Dynamics of Residential Segregation in Buffalo: An Agent-based Simulation," *Urban Studies* 46 no., 13 (2009): 2753.

⁴⁶ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 210-212; "About Allentown," *Allentown Association*, <http://www.allentown.org/about/index.html>. Accessed August 1, 2014.

the West Side from the waterfront, and residents lobbied for easier access for decades.⁴⁷ Perhaps because of the geography of the area, buffered by the Delaware, Elmwood and Allentown areas to the east and the Niagara River to the west, the West Side did not experience the extensive racial and ethnic turnover that characterized the East Side. By Scheinin's 1981 "Melting Pot," exposé, the West Side was home to long-time Italian American residents, Puerto Rican immigrants, and a burgeoning white middle class of gentrifiers returning to the city.

Yet these general descriptions of change do not sufficiently account for multiple forces and dimensions of transformation in the city and its neighborhoods during the postwar decades. The West Side is a good lens through which to examine the process of neighborhood transformation and to get beyond the "container" view of neighborhood. Examining the neighborhood as a sociospatial imaginary and cultural artifact produced by various, uncoordinated efforts to navigate the changing city also contributes to historical narratives of the West Side and of postwar urban neighborhoods generally. The West Side is suited for this goal for four reasons.

First, it is an identifiable area of the city, but there is no consensus on its boundaries. The term, "the West Side" varies in context; its broadest definitions rely on notable landmarks, namely, City Hall to the south, the Niagara River to the west, the H.H. Richardson Buffalo Hospital complex to the north, and Richmond Avenue on the east. Variations to this from city planning and media include extending the northern edge to the Scajaquada Expressway and the eastern edge to Ashland Avenue. Colloquially, the "West Side" is used as shorthand for anything in that general area of the city, but it is also

⁴⁷ See for instance, "Pedestrian Span Urged Near Park," *Buffalo Evening News*, November 17, 1964.

used to denote particular areas with more specific identities. For instance, the University of Buffalo map library, using a City map from 1968, defines the “Lower West Side” south of Porter Avenue and the “West Side” centered on Grant Street above.⁴⁸ The flexibility of the term “West Side” shows that a long history of conceptual and spatial claims to the area have defined it over time.

Second, the West Side is apt for studying the postwar era because by 1980, it exhibited many of the same characteristics as other depressed neighborhoods in the Rust Belt, with significant population loss and above average rates of unemployment, vacancy and absentee landlords. It also experienced the population transition as, long known for its Italian American residents, the area was increasingly Latino.⁴⁹ Due to these factors, the area is steeped in the decline narrative commonly used to explain the negative transformation of urban neighborhoods during this time. While these characteristics mirror the experience of other urban neighborhoods, I do not claim that the West Side is a “typical neighborhood,” and, as Madden claims, “would question the value of any such concept.”⁵⁰ Rather than consider these observations as essential, defining features of the neighborhood, this project seeks to contextualize them within conceptual and functional transformations of the West Side.

Third, and following from the previous two points, there is evidence to support a study of multiple shaping influences of the West Side during the postwar decades. *The*

⁴⁸ City of Buffalo Division of Planning, “Official City Map,” (Buffalo: City of Buffalo Division of Planning, 1968), available in the Buffalo Neighborhoods Map Collection, University at Buffalo Libraries and online at <http://library.buffalo.edu/maps/buffalo-wnymaps/location/buffalo-neighborhoods/>.

⁴⁹ Work Division, Emergency Relief Bureau, “Slum Area Determination Survey,” (Buffalo: Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, 1935); Scheinin, “Change in a Melting Pot Neighborhood.”

⁵⁰ Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Project,” 491.

West Side Times was a weekly publication, and I had access to issues from 1956 and 1976, courtesy of Gallagher Printing. Similarly, coverage of the Federation of Italian American Societies' Columbus Day celebrations in 1952 and 1968 enables a comparison of those years. The storeowners in Chapter 3 were accessible and willing to share their experiences. This practical consideration enables the study of neighborhood identity over time.

Finally, this research is pertinent today because the West Side is currently the fastest growing neighborhood in the city. Property values are rising rapidly and new commercial investment is infusing streetscapes for first time in decades. At the same time, the area is home to a vast refugee population. As the form, function, and composition of the West Side experience new changes, stakeholders negotiate the identity of the neighborhood. Better understanding the history and the process of neighborhood production in the past can inform contemporary efforts. For instance, a narrative of “re-discovery” is emerging as a primary mode of seeing this resurgence, which is problematic because it overlooks previous efforts and obscures connections to the past. By elucidating some the processes that shaped the West Side in the past, this project is a reminder that conditions today are inherently connected to ongoing efforts and that neighborhoods are products of multiple viewpoints, goals, and spheres of action.

Enacting Neighborhood: Approach

Joining scholars in cultural and urban geography, I consider neighborhood to be a type of place that is historically contingent, situated, and emergent.⁵¹ In this view, neighborhood is a flexible concept that is shaped by the actions of people and institutions at multiple scales, within and beyond the neighborhood itself. It is “both a site and a product” of economic processes and social meaning.⁵² In Martin’s term, I am looking at how the West Side was “enacted” through practices, narratives and representations by agents navigating a suburbanizing, de-industrializing city.⁵³

Martin and Schmidt have used this conceptualization to examine instances of neighborhood activism that crystalize ideas about appropriate land use and development in relation to an area’s character. They argue that when neighborhood activist groups employ practices (e.g., having meetings, distributing pamphlets and circulating petitions) and representations (e.g. images and rhetorical comparisons) to combat perceived external threats, they not only reveal neighborhood values, but they actually “enact” neighborhood identity. Similarly, Modan shows that residents of Mt. Pleasant, a Washington, DC neighborhood, “create and contest visions of their neighborhood through discourses of identity,” not only in formal settings, but also in casual

⁵¹ Pred, “Place as Historically Contingent Process,” 279–97; Martin, “Enacting Neighborhood,” 361-385; Schmidt, “The Practices and Process of Neighborhood,” 473-495; Jones, “Planning, Representation, and the Production of Space,” 379-388; Michaela Benson and Emma Jackson, “Place-making and Place Maintenance: Performativity, Place and Belonging Among the Middle Classes,” *Sociology* 47, no. 4 (2013): 793-809.

⁵² Schmidt, “The Practices and Process of Neighborhood,” 473.

⁵³ Martin, “Enacting Neighborhood.” While James Rojas uses the term “enacted environment” in his study of Los Angeles, Martin does not seem to draw her usage of the word from that study. See, James T. Rojas, “The Enacted Environment Of East Los-Angeles,” *Places-A Quarterly Journal Of Environmental Design* 8.3 (1993): 42-53.

conversations and other mundane interactions.⁵⁴ The concept of active production of identity underlying these studies is rooted in social theory that views culture and social life as performative and emergent and sees space as socially constructed and reproduced.⁵⁵

In cases of activism, neighborhood groups promote their particular views of the neighborhood through actions. Martin offers a useful way of conceptualizing selective visions of place by building from Erving Goffman's notion of social life as a series of framed interactions guided by shared expectations.⁵⁶ She employs this principle to look at place-based collective action, claiming that such activism organizes around "place frames," which highlight the foundational, unifying vision of the group and obscure or belittle diverging issues and viewpoints. In cases of activism, battling parties defend conflicting place-frames of the same area. Modan explains a similar process by which Mt. Pleasant residents create moral geographies through "discourses of place" that position their beliefs and people who agree with them as "centralized identities" and those who do not conform or agree as "marginalized identities."⁵⁷ For neighborhood residents and groups, "centralized identities" constitute the "real" neighborhood identity.

⁵⁴ Gabriella Gahlia Modan, *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2007), 6.

⁵⁵ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*; Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). See also, Susan Garfinkel, "Recovering Performance for Vernacular Architecture Studies," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13 no., 2 (2006): 106-114.

⁵⁶ Deborah G. Martin, "'Place-framing' as Place-Making: Constituting a Neighborhood for Organizing and Activism," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 3 (2003): 730-750. See also Erving Goffman, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959).

⁵⁷ Modan, *Turf Wars*, 7.

Like Martin's place-frames, these opposing identities form around particular issues, and therefore alliances shift according to the issue at hand.

The concepts of *place frames* and *discourses of place* both refer to residents' constructions of ideal neighborhood identity that index nonconformists as illegitimate or detrimental to the area's wellbeing. While Modan includes a variety of perspectives, from individuals to neighborhood groups with differing stances on particular issues, her focus remains on the rhetorical construction of place and neighborhood. Alternatively, Martin and Schmidt consider practices beyond rhetoric, but they focus on the perspective of a single neighborhood organization.

David Madden offers another useful perspective that bridges these approaches to studying "enacted" neighborhood production. He defines neighborhoods as "products of complex, long-term struggles between groups over land use, ownership, planning, identity and purpose."⁵⁸ Rather than two opposing sides crystalizing neighborhood identity, as in Martin's study, Madden encourages scholars to see neighborhoods as the ongoing product of "spatial projects," which he defines as, "coordinated, continuous, collective campaigns to produce and format space according to identifiable logics and strategic goals, pursued by specific actors utilizing particular techniques."⁵⁹ These projects are similar to place-frames and discourses of place in that they reflect a situated point of view. Madden illuminates the logics of capitalism and social justice in the spatial projects of the state, real estate developers, and community builders in his study of Dumbo, a neighborhood in Brooklyn. In practice, place frames, spatial products, and discourses of place are all tools for defining issues, promoting a common perspective,

⁵⁸ David J. Madden, "Neighborhood as Spatial Product," 472.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 480.

and unifying support. Each of them probes the relationship “between activism based on an idea of neighborhood and the material experiences of that place.”⁶⁰ Each is an organizing framework that, when enacted, practices and perpetuates a neighborhood identity by merging ideological and tangible components of real neighborhoods.

Most importantly, Madden argues that neighborhoods are irreducible to any one particular point of view or temporal moment:

[Spatial projects are] non-mutually exclusive, productive of overlapping spatial formations that are experienced and shaped in a variety of unequal ways by unequally situated actors. They operate at varying temporal scales, shaping both the present and future of space—and, by promoting particular ways of understanding a space’s identity and purpose...they can operate on the past as well.⁶¹

He articulates the temporal component of neighborhood identities, both in the ongoing influence of spatial projects and the timeframe of the projects themselves. For instance, construction projects take longer than rallies to complete, but they result in a permanent physical object. This project shows varying temporal scales at work in the West Side. While city planners in Chapter 1 construct the West Side through forward looking plans, the businessmen’s club and storeowners in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 operate in present opportunities, and, in Chapter 4, the Federation of Italian American Societies reimagines the neighborhood by looking backwards.

While each of these scholars conceives of neighborhoods as inherently contested and focuses on moments of direct conflict to illuminate the production of neighborhood

⁶⁰ Martin, “Place-framing as Place-making,” 733.

⁶¹ Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Product,” 480.

identity, this project develops a case study that shows non-confrontational events offer important evidence of neighborhood production as well. Madden refers to this type of embedded tension as less “legible,” but no less important than more obvious moments of struggle over definitions, representations and uses of place: “Neighborhood formation is always a contested, contingent process – but some neighborhoods are more clearly legible as such, while in others, the collection of relevant actors, strategies and goals may be more complex and difficult to discern.”⁶² While not central to their arguments, Schmidt and Modan also gesture towards less “legible” contestation in their studies. Schmidt shows that a neighborhood organization first created Milwaukee’s Riverwest neighborhood by standing up to city development plans for street widening and redlining in the 1970s. She claims that over the subsequent three decades, however, activism became a central component of “relative continuity and stability in neighborhood identity and practices.”⁶³ Riverwest is (re)produced not only through instances of activism, but by attracting people who share similar lifestyles and value local activism. While Schmidt does not analyze practices and representations that foster ongoing production of an activist neighborhood identity outside of specific events, her study leaves room for that possibility.

In her study of the rhetorical construction of Mt. Pleasant, Modan argues that residents produce neighborhood identity through moral geographies using a series of associations and contrasts that appear across media, in an online neighborhood forum, a

⁶² Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Product,” 491.

⁶³ Schmidt, 474-475. To clarify, Schmidt examines a neighborhood organization that first enacted the Riverwest neighborhood by standing up to city development plans for street widening and redlining in the 1970s. She claims that over the subsequent three decades, activism became a central component of neighborhood identity through a “habitus of place.”

grant application and a play. For instance, residents identify their neighborhood in contrast to the suburbs, and they “[delegitimize] some neighborhood residents’ claims to neighborhood membership by characterizing them as suburban people.”⁶⁴ While the oppositions used to place people within the moral geography are most clearly articulated in moments of conflict, Modan detects them as ongoing, latent producers of neighborhood identity even in the absence of direct conflict.

Despite recognition of submerged conflict as a shaper of neighborhood identity, it remains an undercurrent in most research on the topic. This project examines relatively undramatic productions of the West Side over time to show that there is still change in the absence of direct conflict. Furthermore, such modes of neighborhood change can help to complicate narratives of neighborhood change based in the “container” view, since conflict tends to precipitate boundaries.

Together, these scholars offer an alternative to the “container view” of neighborhood by approaching neighborhoods as emergent socio-physical places. Following their lead, this project considers the West Side of Buffalo an ongoing production of multiple agents at different scales. Like other scholars of “emergent neighborhoods,” this study examines the intersection of ideological constructions of neighborhood and practices of neighborhood. It extends their scholarship with an historical case study of a rust belt city and by centering on long-term, undramatic relationships rather than overt conflict as modes of change.

A case study is best suited for this inquiry because it allows for considering the complexity of one neighborhood through a series of layers. It connects to real places and

⁶⁴ Modan, *Turf Wars*, 28.

illuminates incongruous but coexisting images, uses and tendencies of neighborhood production. Reflecting the reality of actual places, these multiple dimensions of neighborhood are sometimes unresolved.

Each chapter centers on one of the following producers of neighborhood: the City of Buffalo, the West Side Business Men's Club, the Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York, and individual storeowners. The ongoing relationships that these institutions, groups, and individuals have with the West Side of Buffalo are evidenced in planning documents, citywide and neighborhood newspaper reports, city directories, oral histories and the built environment. Each chapter identifies and contextualizes representations, discourses and practices of the West Side through these sources by inquiring how they define the neighborhood—that is, what characteristics, roles and users do they include, exclude, legitimize or criticize.

The first three chapters concentrate on retail patterns at different scales of neighborhood production. The first chapter examines commercial areas of the West Side as sites of city planning intervention, the second chapter considers how the local business organization constructed the Grant-Ferry area as a defined entity through marketing and events, and the third chapter uses the stories of three individual business owners to show how the singular place images of the first two chapters belies personal experience of the same shopping area on the ground. The final chapter shifts to the Federation of Italian American Societies' production of a regional Italian identity that casted the West Side as a place of the past, echoing the sentiments of former West Siders who identified the Grant-Ferry area as an idealized but bygone center of community. Each chapter of the project highlights the Grant-Ferry area as a critical component of neighborhood identity

for groups engaging the West Side's the past, present, and future as they responded to citywide and regional transformations. Together, these chapters suggest the importance of understanding neighborhood commercial areas as social and economic resources that stakeholders at multiple scales engage and transform simultaneously during periods of neighborhood change.

Instead of focusing on moments of political and social unrest in Buffalo and on the West Side, this study is concerned with social change through unremarkable, ongoing relationships. For instance, it does not analyze important events such as the *Canadiana* riot in 1956, the East Side riots in 1967, and activism against the Virginia Street freeway ramp in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁵ Such occasions are critical for understanding postwar Buffalo and contextualize this study of West Side identity during that era. However, this study shows neighborhood change through other, more subtle processes, such as the Federation's repositioning of the West Side within the symbolic geography of the region through the locations of its Columbus Day celebrations in 1952 and 1968. In contrast to conflicts surrounding urban development projects, for instance, which tend to define sides of a controversy, the underlying impetuses to action and change in this study are not always articulated. In order to see the embedded tensions that undergird representations of the West Side (e.g. as a historic, unified shopping district in Chapter 2), this study contextualizes the people-place relationships that produce the neighborhood within regional trends and themes, such as commercial competition in a suburbanizing city. While processes of neighborhood production in this manner are less glamorous than

⁶⁵ Frank P. Besag, *Anatomy of a Riot: Buffalo '67*, (Buffalo: University Press, 1967); Victoria W. Wolcott, "Recreation and Race in the Postwar City: Buffalo's 1956 Crystal Beach Riot," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (2006): 63-90; Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 262-65.

moments of conflict, they are just as important because they are the status quo, shaping everyday life on the West Side.

Looking at subtle transformation requires comparison over an extended period of time, and each chapter examines change of neighborhood identity between 1950 and 1981. More than a comparison of what *happened on* the West Side during these years, this study probes changes in how people and groups produced the West Side functionally and symbolically. They reconceptualized the neighborhood, making it the same object of a visionary future, everyday life, and a collective past. Interpretation of change over time contributes to the goal of getting beyond the “container view” by combatting images of neighborhoods as frozen in time.

Another difference in examining undramatic change rather than moments of conflict is that the layers of neighborhood identity in this project are products of uncoordinated efforts of actors between chapters. In instances of conflict, opposing sides engage one another over the issue at hand and groups share a “side” of the problem. The actors in this project do not fall on sides of divisive issues; instead, they share in common “the West Side.” As they engage in their own negotiations of the changing city, they make claims to, manipulate and use the physical, symbolic and functional components of the neighborhood as resources. Since they do not make contradictory spatial claims, they do not clash directly. However, that does not mean that these actors do not influence one another; instead, they do so through their impact on the West Side.

Place is the common ground, the shared resource that connects people even when they are not intending or even aware of such interaction. It is important to recognize and study this type of neighborhood production because it is more common than instances of

direct conflict. It also suggests an opportunity; perhaps if stakeholders in a neighborhood recognize that they are co-creators of a shared resource, they will respect one another, acknowledge the impact they have on one another, and genuinely work together to build a place that serves the needs of all of its stakeholders.

Project Structure

Each chapter contributes to goal of seeing the West Side as an emerging social, physical, and temporal product by illuminating a relationship that constructed the neighborhood from a particular vantage. The format begins with an overview of the entire West Side through city planning, then moves closer into the Grant-Ferry area with the perspective of the West Side Business Men's Association and individual storeowners before stepping back to see the area in citywide context of Italian American nostalgia through the Federation of Italian American Societies Columbus Day celebrations.

The first chapter follows the conceptualization of city spaces in city planning documents, following changing approaches to shaping Buffalo's future. It shows that the postwar optimism and belief in urban renewal persisted into the late twentieth century, though the rhetoric became more inclusive of popular opinion and focused on smaller scales of intervention. In this wider process of city planning, the West Side became a series of neighborhoods differentiated by perceived problems and solutions. By 1978, as neighborhood commercial revitalization became a new tool for city improvement and regional competition, suggestions for the West Side reflected the area as a cross section of planning history.

Chapter 2 enters one of those neighborhood shopping districts, the Grant-Ferry area, to examine how the West Side Business Men's Association (WSBMA) strategized over this same time. Their marketing reveals reactions to competition of mounting retail competition outside of the city limits. In 1956, it promoted the West Side as an ideal combination of modern retailing and trusted relationships, but changed tack by 1976, promoting the history of the neighborhood and appealing to residential outsiders through special events. Through these marketing frameworks, the WSBMA transformed their idea of the neighborhood from self-sustaining and closed to open and reliant upon a broader network of consumers. As a place-based organization, the group stayed in place and re-made the image of West Side for modern consumers.

By contrast, individual storeowners were not as beholden to the West Side. Chapter 3 considers the experiences and oral histories of three storeowners in the Grant-Ferry area, illuminating their personal mobility as a factor in the production of neighborhood at the individual scale. Unlike the efforts of city planners and the WSBMA, these individuals did not seek to promote a collective image of the West Side but rather pursued personal and business opportunities that connected the neighborhood to other sites in the region. In doing so, each of them transitioned the West Side into more of a "back stage" for their enterprise and used space there for practical business purposes rather than an ideal.

Chapter 4 steps out of the Grant-Ferry area to follow the Columbus Day celebrations of the Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York (FIASWNY). Like the WSBMA, this group relied on membership of collective identity, but the FIASWNY centered on heritage rather than place. Therefore, it proved more

mobile, picking celebration sites that reflected its mission of portraying Italian Americans as successful and upwardly mobile people. As the symbolic geography of the city shifted towards suburban locales, the FIASWNY followed suit by moving out of the city, and through this action, cast the West Side as a site from which Italian Americans moved into mainstream society. This chapter represents a more widespread nostalgic, symbolic remaking of the West Side as people disengaged from contemporary issues there.

Taken together, these chapters show fragmented and overlapping productions of the West Side that reveal that the neighborhood variously was constituted by processes of identity construction that reflected but did not challenge the context of citywide changes. The flexible concept of neighborhood morphed alongside the changing relationship between identity and place through this specific place. The conclusion brings this concept of neighborhood production to bear on contemporary happenings on the West Side. The area is home to most of the city's new immigrants and refugees, and it is also a new site of commercial and residential investment. House prices have more than doubled between 2000 and 2014. While a Community Plan published in 2013 attempts to incorporate many perspectives into a common vision for a better future, I argue that the lack of historical context limits the plan by severing it from its shaping influences. This dissertation suggests that incorporating an historical understanding of neighborhood identity from multiple vantage points fosters a more comprehensive approach to neighborhood building.

Tot. Population	1950	1960*	1970	1980
Total SMSA		1,306,957	1,349,211	1,242,826
Erie Co	899,238	1,064,688	1,113,843	1,015,472
City of Buffalo	580,132	532,759	462,768	357,870
West Side	91,910	85,217	69,991	56,867
Lower (68, 71)*	24,521	20,666	13,240	11,905
Upper	67,389	64551	56,751	44,962
WS % of City	15.84%	15.99%	15.12%	15.89%

Table 1: SMSA, Erie County, City of Buffalo and West Side populations, 1950-1980. Populations based on census data. *Due to changes in census tract boundaries, these figures approximate using half of the population for Tracts 67 and 68 in 1960 and Tracts 63, 65, 66, 67 and 68 in 1950.*

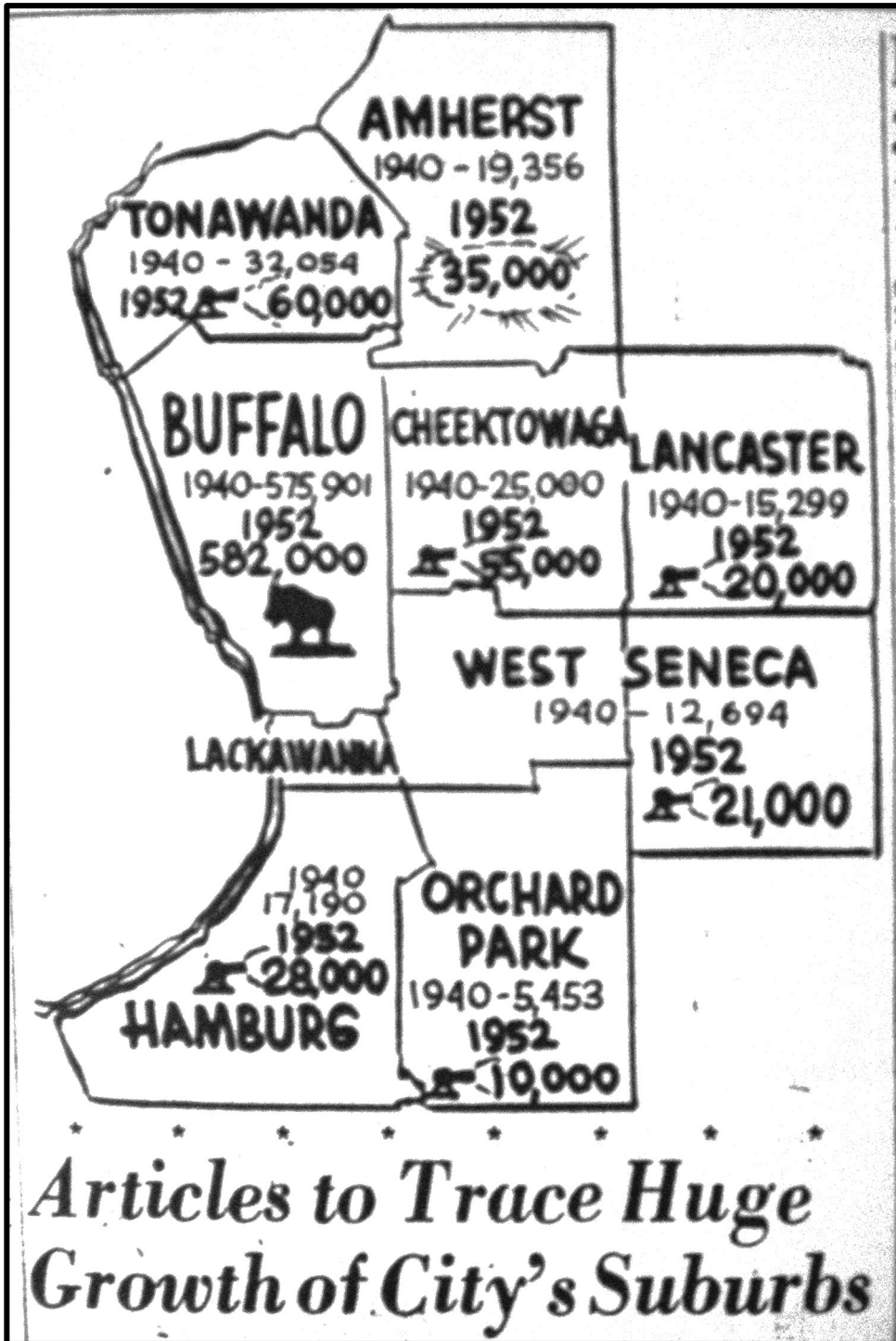


Fig. 2: Population growth of Buffalo's suburbs 1940-1952. *Buffalo Courier Express* October 11, 1952.

Planning the West Side, 1950-1978

After a year of careful study and analysis, Stuart Alexander & Associates presented a land use and neighborhood commercial revitalization strategy to the City of Buffalo in March 1978. The report delivered on its objective of identifying which neighborhood retail districts in the city were most suitable for “an infusion of public development funds.”¹ Buffalo was among ten cities selected to receive federal funding for local economic development initiatives, which spurred the West Buffalo study to guide allocation. City planners had long been aware that Buffalo possessed an abundance of commercially zoned land, a product of the zealous zoning in early automobile era and ambitious visions for the city’s growth well into the twentieth century.² Facing the reality that population numbers continued to decline and were not likely to turn around in the near future, planners and consultants began considering the possibility of contracting commercial activity in order to foster concentrated growth. The West Buffalo study granted to Stuart Alexander & Associates represented the first “in-depth comprehensive neighborhood commercial strategy” for the geographic west side of the city, and “a significant breakthrough in the field of neighborhood business revitalization.”³

Indeed, both neighborhood and commercial planning had been subordinated to the City’s focus on downtown development for most of the Buffalo’s planning history. With the exception of those residential areas closest to downtown, city neighborhoods

¹ Stuart Alexander & Associates, *West Buffalo—Commercial Land Use Analysis: A Neighborhood Business District Strategy*, (Buffalo, New York), 1978, i.

² Paul D. Barrick, *Buffalo Master Plan*, (Buffalo: City Planning Board, 1971).

³ West Buffalo, letter to Commissioner Donohue from Stuart Alexander, preface. Note that the West Buffalo study covered the geographic west side of the city, but my study centers on the West Side, a more limited area. See p.39 Fig. 2.

remained off the planning radar largely until the Model Cities Program of the late 1960s, which bolstered residential and social service assistance in targeted neighborhoods.⁴ The majority of the West Side was excluded from that program, and this newfound interest in neighborhood businesses marked a strategic turn in redevelopment and spurred prolonged attention to areas of the West Side previously excluded from the agenda. As the city mounted efforts to compete within the decentralizing metropolitan area, planners envisioned neighborhoods as units of commercial competition that would capture tax dollars within city boundaries.

The West Buffalo report culminated with recommendations for bolstering four of the eleven neighborhood business districts (NBDs) of consideration. The four areas—Allentown, Elmwood Village, Grant-Ferry, and Riverside—held potential in their existing mix of stores and the socio-economics of the surrounding community, and they were geographically distant enough to limit competition among them (**Fig. 3**). In addition to these core areas, the consultants suggested a small satellite zone at Grant-Amherst and two other NBDs for special consideration. Despite the weak market characteristics of the Connecticut Street and lower Niagara Street NBDs, they identified these areas as worthwhile investments on the basis of “ethnic character and potential quality” and the “opportunity for a unique” facility, respectively.⁵ The consultants’ recommendations for these two areas did not follow the economically oriented focus of the report. Rather than

⁴ See, for instance, Mike Puma, “The History of Hamlin Park Finale: The Legacy of Model Cities and Hamlin Park in the Present,” *Buffalo Rising* January 22, 2014. Hamlin Park was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2014, and its history as a Model Cities neighborhood is part of its historical significance. Additionally, The Monroe Fordham Regional History Center at Buffalo State College holds a collection of papers about Model Cities in Buffalo.

⁵ Stuart Alexander & Associates, *West Buffalo*, 58, 98.

justify them in terms of economic potential, Stuart Alexander & Associates called upon cultural distinction and an obligation to ameliorate the impacts of former “government decisions,” as reasons to invest these areas of the lower West Side.⁶

Interest in these socio-economic outliers and the expression of obligation for historical treatment of these areas signaled a shift in planning philosophy that framed the goals of planning initiatives, the role of planning professionals, and the image of city space itself in new terms. Scholars broadly trace this era as a time when city governments transitioned from managerial to entrepreneurial governance strategies and planning became increasingly couched within government aims at profitability.⁷ At the same time, planners, developers and local organizations reinterpreted cultural and historical resources as valuable assets rather than impediments to progress.⁸ The Connecticut Street and lower Niagara Street business areas represent this changing tide in Buffalo. While city planners had previously disregarded the potential of existing activities and form in favor of redevelopment based in clearance and new construction, they now saw these neighborhood commercial districts in a new light. New city planning goals and approaches, however, were complicated by the reality that planning was never wholly new. Planners engaged with legacies of the past; they relied on and reacted to former plans and they tacitly perpetuated embedded assumptions in maps and other representations of spatial knowledge.

⁶ Ethnicity is not substantiated by an explanation, however, the Italian Festival was held on Connecticut Street from 1978 to 1985, before it moved to Hertel Avenue in North Buffalo.

⁷ David Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska Annaler*. 71, no. 1, (1989): 3-17; Isenberg, *Downtown America*, Chapter 7.

⁸ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, Chapter 1.

This chapter shows how planners constructed the West Side as a series of distinct zones through city planning initiatives that changed with financial incentives, public pressure, and demographic trends between 1950 and 1978. By the time Stuart Alexander & Associates suggested the Grant-Ferry, Connecticut Street and Niagara Street commercial areas as anchors of neighborhood revitalization, city planning initiatives had already naturalized these sections as distinct areas with unique histories, qualities and identities. Rather than a professed goal or even a conscious endeavor, planners' conceptualization of the West Side as a series of three "containers" emerged through a succession of planning strategies that reflected transforming national planning philosophies and local conditions in Buffalo. Between 1950 and 1978, city planners shifted their efforts from downtown-centric plans focused on demolition and rebuilding to localized revitalization around existing resources across the city. They also softened the aggressiveness of government led projects and calls for increased administrative efficiency by recognizing the value of public input from the citizens whose lives planning decisions impacted most directly. Another significant reorientation stemmed from shedding the assumption that the city would continue to grow and acknowledging population loss; coupled with growing emphasis on market-led evaluations, the realization of a shrinking population spurred competitive sentiments towards suburban areas (e.g., planners intended neighborhood business districts to compete with suburban shopping areas). As planners employed new approaches to these aims, they implicitly carried forward assumptions of former studies and planning initiatives such as the benefits of efficient government control, guaranteed city growth, the merits of rebuilding and the negative perception of areas slated for demolition.

The combination of planners' inherited assumptions and new pursuits framed their functional and spatial understandings of the West Side. As they reconceptualized the area from an appendage of downtown, serving city revitalization by supporting downtown development, to a source of city improvement through existing opportunities, they produced studies and plans that defined boundaries and notable features. Over time, this produced a seemingly natural understanding of the West Side as three spatial entities. In the 1950s, still focused on bolstering downtown, planners associated the lower West Side with goals for downtown, using urban renewal and related redevelopment projects to foster the "modern city." In the 1960s, planners continued to identify the lower West Side with downtown while also promoting the specialization of the middle area, surrounding Porter Avenue, as a mixed-use corridor anchoring D'Youville College and the upper West Side, above West Ferry Street, as a commercial center by highlighting the Grant-Ferry shopping area (**Fig. 4**). Plans in the 1970s further defined these three areas through their commercial areas, and reoriented the subject of neighborhood revitalization from residents to consumers.

The discussion of city planning as a producer of the West Side in this chapter contributes to both the objective of viewing the neighborhood as an emergent product of multiple actors acting at varying temporal and spatial scales and the goal of offering new perspectives of postwar neighborhood change. As components of city government, city planners possess considerable authority over city spaces through their ability to direct public funds, invoke eminent domain, and offer incentives to private developers. Additionally, the studies, maps and other documents that planners produce have enduring effects on the way that cities are conceptualized by other planners, political officials, and

the general public. Planners operate in relation to relatively long, forward looking temporal horizons; they consider existing city conditions in order to formulate plans that unfold over years and decades. Planners are also place-based in that they act for and through the city; as the City of Buffalo increasingly perceived economic competition with suburban areas as a threat in the postwar decades, it acted to bolster activity within the political boundaries of the city. By illuminating the role of city planning in the emergent conceptual and spatial production of the West Side, this chapter shows that postwar change consisted not only of people moving in our out of the area, but also of city planners' reconceptualizations of the role and subject of the neighborhood within the city.

The approach in this chapter follows scholars who examine city planning practices and documents as representations of space embedded in the production of space generally and of neighborhoods in particular.⁹ It analyzes the West Side in city plans and planning documents for the way that they construct the area as a “structured and structure-able urban place.”¹⁰ As Jones argues, these materials produce the neighborhood conceptually by offering an authoritative reading of its structure, existing conditions and future through situating it with metaphors and associations. She found that a 1983 neighborhood development plan for the East End of Lexington constructed three areas within the neighborhood using different comparisons and associations. Some of these links referred to “social discourses about race and class (multi-family, solid/broken

⁹ Lucas Adam Griffith, “Structuring Neighborhood Space: An Investigation into the Production of Neighborhood Space as Planned, Practiced and Lived in Post-Industrial Norway,” (PhD diss., University of Stavanger, Norway, 2013); Katherine Jones, “Planning, Representation, and the Production of Space in Lexington, Kentucky,” *Journal of Planning and Education Research* 19 (2000): 379-388; Madden, “Neighborhood as Spatial Project”; Schmidt, “Practices and Process of Neighborhood.”

¹⁰ Jones, “Planning, Representation, and the Production of Space,” 386.

homes) and some...[were] spatial discourses relating to other adjacent neighborhoods that themselves signal race and class, at least for Lexingtonians who are familiar with them.”¹¹ The terms used to describe urban places are embedded in broader cultural “texts,” that resonate with generalizations and local knowledge.

Like Jones, Huxley argues that the construction of neighborhood in city planning is a product of the philosophical context of planning at the time. She offers a similar example by interrogating “problematizations,” that is, probing why and how city planning issues were constructed as problems, or not, in a particular era.¹² Since, according to Foucault, ‘A problematization is always a kind of creation,’ Huxley shows that the process of articulating urban problems also involves constructing neighborhoods as “objects of intervention.”¹³ Theories and ideologies of cities and urban space frame the way that planners identify problems, describe and understand places, and formulate interventions for future development.

The chapter shows the progression of the City’s attempts to shape its identity as a viable city through planning and the repercussions of those efforts on place and neighborhood identity. Planning approaches developed over the postwar decades in response to changing economic and political climates, including a national, globalizing market and citizen outcry against demolition and displacement of urban renewal

¹¹ Ibid. 384.

¹² Margo Huxley, “Historicizing Planning, Problematizing Participation,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 5 (2013): 1529.

¹³ Foucault in Jones, “Planning, Representation and the Production of Space,” 1530. Martin makes a similar argument about scholarship of neighborhoods, stating, “The concept of neighborhood is primarily a social and political product, created through activism, and through research on sociospatial relations,” (emphasis added). “Enacting Neighborhood,” 2003, 261.

projects.¹⁴ In reformulating their own professional goals and role within city growth, planners also redefined urban problems, and in turn, their understanding of urban places like the West Side.

“The Future of Buffalo” – Claiming the Lower West Side

While suburbanization and decentralization were underway by 1950, Buffalo’s planners expected the center city to remain heart of the city. This expectation, common across the country, guided their plans and the view of the West Side.¹⁵ The earliest postwar efforts at comprehensive city planning in Buffalo stemmed from impetus at the federal level. The Housing Act of 1949 provided funds to cities that “had identified urban renewal needs within a comprehensive framework.”¹⁶ Despite talk of a master plan for years, the City of Buffalo had yet to act on it. The following year, in a hurried effort to satisfy federal officials, the City Planning Commission produced the map of a General Plan (**Fig. 5**).¹⁷ The map was primarily land use oriented, representing an envisioned future that did not convey existing conditions. This “referential mode,” was characteristic of many early city plans across the country produced in the early 1950s.¹⁸ The plan represented a downtown centric and optimistic view of the city. The simplicity and visual

¹⁴ Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*; Frank S. Palen, “City Planning in Buffalo, New York: A History of Institutions,” unpublished manuscript, (The School of Law, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1983); Goldman, *City on the Edge*.

¹⁵ Teaford, *Rough Road to Renaissance*.

¹⁶ Frank S. Palen, “City Planning in Buffalo, New York: A History of Institutions,” (unpublished manuscript, The School of Law, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1983), 166.

¹⁷ Ibid. The plan was produced in map form only, without accompanying text or explanation. Palen also notes that this was the first attempt at comprehensive city planning since 1922.

¹⁸ Fuko Akimoto, “The Birth of ‘land use planning’ in American Urban Planning,” *Planning Perspectives* 24, no. 4 (2009): 477.

appeal of the image obscured its call for complete redevelopment (ie., demolition and rebuilding): “As a hopeful statement about a better built Buffalo, it was an arresting vision. As a prediction of the city’s future, it was spectacularly muddle-headed.”¹⁹

Most strikingly, the plan presented freeways around the central city, along the west side and an east-west segment on Virginia Street. The visual simplicity and appeal of the image downplayed the potentially radical implications of these freeway plans. The West Side Arterial, extending on Virginia Street, was part of the 1946 Urban Area Report and provided east-west access across the city. If completed, it would have drastically severed the West Side at that point. The plan for the arterial remained on the city planning agenda for decades as the City focused on construction other elements of the freeway network. The General Plan, however, established Virginia Street as a conceptual boundary; the area south of that street appeared to be subject to the needs and functions of downtown rather than the existing residential context in which it was located. This partial definition of the lower West Side persisted through twentieth century planning in Buffalo.

As urban renewal funds funneled into the city, planners followed prevailing national philosophies of “redeveloping the margins” of downtown, targeting the lowest areas of the West Side for redevelopment.²⁰ The City announced Buffalo’s first two urban renewal projects, the Ellicott District and the Waterfront Renewal Project, in 1955. While formally initiated for the first time, the idea for the Waterfront renewal project had circulated for over a decade, since Walter Berhendt labeled the area a detriment to

¹⁹ Palen, “City Planning in Buffalo,” 166.

²⁰ William M. Rohe, “From Local to Global: One Hundred Years of Neighborhood Planning,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 75, no. 2, (2009): 213.

Buffalo's chances at becoming a modern city.²¹ This project targeted the residential neighborhood behind City Hall, the same predominately Italian American area of the West Side claimed for downtown by the West Side arterial. While demolition did not commence for these projects for another decade, planners implicitly integrated the plans into the next major city planning document in 1958.

Frank Sedita was elected mayor in 1957, intent on “breaking the long dead-lock over urban renewal,” and at the urging of the federal government, the City hired two consultants from Washington to study, diagnose and plan for bettering conditions in the city.²² The 1958 “Future of Buffalo” report implicitly reflected plans for West Side Arterial and the Waterfront renewal project in three maps. First, the report included a map that parsed the city into 61 neighborhood planning units (**Fig 6**). The Niagara district, encompassing most of the west side of the city, consisted of the Lakeview, West Side, Grant and Forest planning units. Areas below Virginia Street, however, were grouped in the Central district, which included the downtown center. Second, planners identified the area south of Porter Avenue for urban renewal; the Recommended Renewal Area Schedule map grouped Lakeview (the southernmost planning unit of the Niagara planning district) with Allen and Johnson Park as a single area (**Fig. 7**). Finally, the Residential Conditions map showed these areas as a ring of deteriorated housing stock surrounding downtown (**Fig. 8**). Grouping these three planning units together and targeting them for renewal continued the primacy of downtown interests during this time, and of viewing the lower areas of the West Side as part of downtown. Alongside these plans, the report called for greater administrative efficiency. Overall, the “appraisal and

²¹ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 123-129.

²² Palen, “City Planning in Buffalo,” 187.

prescriptive modes,” of the plan underscored the governmental authority of city planning and planners’ envisioned growth through remaking the city with big projects.²³

By 1960, city planners had captured the lower West Side as part of downtown. While implementation of the Waterfront Project and the West Side arterial stalled, the plans had tangible effects on the perception of the West Side as a whole. Over the next decade, planners incorporated these projects, and their assumptions, into plans. Subsequent city efforts also shifted their focus to the north, and as planners extended their view beyond downtown, they distinguished and formalized boundaries that promoted conceptualizations of the middle and upper areas of the West Side as unique, separate areas. Plans in 1964 and 1967 reinforced the neighborhood units conceived in 1958 by defining boundaries at Porter Ave and West Ferry Street and promoted key developments within each area, most notably institutional growth on Porter Avenue and the West-Ferry Shopping area in what they started to call the “upper” West Side.

Defining Three Zones: Existing Conditions and Nodes for Growth

Through the 1960s, planners formalized the neighborhood planning units first proposed in 1958 and studied them in increasing detail. Though they generally continued “inspirational” plans, “uninhibited by short-term practical considerations,” (such as population loss), planners added existing conditions to their reports, and they continued to call for greater administrative efficiency.²⁴ One impact of planners’ smaller scale studies was that they conceptualized the entire city through discrete, non-overlapping

²³ Akimoto, “The Birth of ‘land use planning,’” 477.

²⁴ See also Edward J. Kasier and David R. Godschalk, “Twentieth Century Land Use Planning,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 61, no. 3 (1995): 369.

units defined by boundaries and nodes. The implications of this manner of studying the city included fostering an understanding of the West Side as three distinct areas with unique features and functions. Through this spatial interpretation, planners promoted differentiated identities by encouraging the growth of particular sites and uses.

Again responding to federal requirements for funding, the City hired City Planning Associates, an Indiana based firm, to prepare an updated master plan and a long-range community renewal program.²⁵ Published in 1964, the Buffalo Master Plan included existing conditions maps of housing density and structural conditions that represented the West Side as a continuum of decreasing density and improved, though still deficient, conditions moving away from the downtown center. The Structural Conditions map showed a majority of majorly or totally deficient structures below Porter Avenue (**Fig. 9**). Between Porter and West Ferry, there was a checkerboard pattern of minor and major deficiencies throughout, and in the most northern section between West Ferry and Forest Avenue (before Buffalo State College), the fewer major deficiencies are located primarily in the west and northwest areas. The selective street pattern represented on this map—Porter Avenue, West Ferry, Lafayette Avenue, and Forest Avenue as the only east-west thoroughfares—accentuated these general areas, which roughly coincided with the 1958 proposed planning units.

While the content of the Existing Housing Unit Density map represented the West Side primarily as two areas—above Porter Avenue, it is uniformly 30-40 housing units per acre while below Porter Avenue it increases to 40-50 units per acre—the form of the map reinforced West Ferry as an additional boundary line (**Fig. 10**). Unlike the structural

²⁵ Palen, “City Planning in Buffalo,” 19.

conditions map, the density map showed the entire street pattern, and West Ferry is the juncture of two street grids.²⁶ North of West Ferry, the streets run parallel and perpendicular to it, while south of West Ferry, the streets run diagonally, extending from the street pattern radiating from Niagara Square. Visually, the street grid and the housing densities together suggest the structure of the West Side in terms of three zones: south of Porter, Porter to West Ferry, and West Ferry to Forest Avenue.

These suggested areas became more defined through descriptions and plans later in the 1964 Master Plan and in the 1967 Community Study. A series of maps in the 1964 Master Plan showing areas of negative change, positive change, potentially negative change and stability reinforced the conceptualization of these three areas with specific anchor elements (**Fig. 11, 12, 13**).²⁷ The areas of Positive Change reflected the key components around which to foster a unique identity of distinct areas—the Waterfront development project, the expansion of D’Youville College, and the Grant-Ferry shopping district. While positive areas of change provided traction for development, a 1967 community study presented maps of community areas across the city that suggested neighborhood boundaries around them. By devoting a page to each community area, the study represented the areas as distinct areas (i.e. positive developments and boundaries around them) separate from the rest of the city (**Fig. 14**). These maps increasingly suggested the lower, middle, and upper areas of the West Side as unique areas.

²⁶ This reflects the settlements of Black Rock and Buffalo, which were competing settlements until Buffalo annexed Black Rock in 1854. See Mark Goldman, “Buffalo’s Black Rock: Neighborhood Identity and the Metropolitan Relationship,” PhD diss., University of Buffalo, 1973; Austin M. Fox, “Historic Old Black Rock,” *Buffalo Spree* (Fall 1994): 27-29.

²⁷ This echoes Hoyt’s classification system in Chicago. See Akimoto, “The Birth of ‘land use planning,’” 477.

Lower West Side

The lower West Side continued to be defined based on existing projects, starting with the Virginia Street expressway project showed as a southern boundary on the 1967 West Side Community map. The 1964 Existing Structural Conditions map implicitly represented anticipated planning projects; both the Waterfront Redevelopment area and the area slated to become the Virginia Street ramp to the West Side arterial appeared as “totally deficient.” At the same time, the Waterfront Redevelopment Project was labeled an area of positive change: the “federally assisted urban renewal project is in the execution stage. The project represents the most significant renewal undertaking in the city. The success with which it is executed is the key to the entire renewal program in the City of Buffalo.” The 1967 Community plan reiterated the sentiment, “presently in its execution stage, it will replace old residential areas with new residential developments.”²⁸

The Niagara Street shopping area was grouped with nine other commercial areas in the city labeled as susceptible to continued decline.²⁹ Despite this trend, the consultants asserted that business owners should be able to attract patrons by improving retail facilities. Implicitly placing the responsibility, if not blame, on store owners, they reserved public funds for residential projects.

Neither the deficient residential areas nor the deteriorating Niagara Street district was linked to the Waterfront Renewal project and the West Side Arterial plans, which had been on the planning agenda for nearly two decades. Those plans directly and

²⁸ Paul D. Barrick and Robert H. Joerger, *Community Summaries, Buffalo, New York*. (Buffalo: City Planning Board, 1967), 11.

²⁹ City Planning Associates-East, Inc., *Buffalo Master Plan*, (Buffalo: City Planning Associates-East, Inc., 1964), 14.

indirectly displaced residents and discouraged investment in the area since properties could be seized by eminent domain at any time (**Fig. 15**). While new residents of the Waterfront area could potentially support the lower Niagara Street business area, the units were not built. Instead, in what historian Mark Goldman called an example of “planners’ bight,” conditions in this area of the West Side deteriorated in part because of the city’s unfulfilled plans, which lingered over landowners and residents.³⁰ It was not until the 1978 West Buffalo Study that planners acknowledged the mal-effects of planning projects initiated in the early 1950s on their surroundings.

Middle and Upper West Side

Through these same planning documents, the middle and upper sections of the West Side emerged as distinguishable entities. Unlike the Waterfront Renewal project that dominated constructions of the most southern areas of the West Side, planners promoted these northern zones by defining boundaries at Porter Ave and West Ferry Street and by fostering continued growth of key areas within each section.

Porter Avenue was one of few established thoroughfares that extended east-west across the city, likely a reason it was selected as a freeway access, which reinforced its prominence. In 1964, D’Youville College was listed among “Educational, Cultural, and Medical Facilities” whose “public and semi-public uses represent significant forces in creating a unique character for central cities.” D’Youville, like Canisius College on the east side, was “engaged in ambitious building programs,” and planners highlighted the

³⁰ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 261.

need to facilitate their “continued growth.”³¹ In the community survey three years later, planners celebrated the anticipated opening of the “D’Youville College’s Multi-Science Building (4) which [would] consolidate School of Nursing offices and labs... located in the facilities of 10 cooperating agencies scattered throughout the city.”³² It also noted the college’s plans for additional facilities over the next three years.

Despite these positive signs of institutional growth, the 1964 plan identified a large swath of the residential area north of Porter Avenue for monitoring. It joined an “enormity” of areas in the city, which “left alone... would continue to decline.”³³ The plan called for “sizeable amounts of local, state, and federal assistance” for “rehabilitation and revitalization” in these areas. Through these recommendations, the middle section, between Porter and West Ferry, entered the planning radar as a site for institutional growth and publically funded residential improvement.

By contrast, planners identified the residential and commercial areas north of West Ferry Street as relatively stable, self-sufficient and unsuitable for public assistance. The Grant-Ferry commercial area was highlighted among positive areas, and planners named the residential area as the most stable within the center city.³⁴ The consultants did not elaborate on the characterization of the residential area as stable beyond saying that such areas need “preservation and protection.”³⁵

³¹ City Planning Associates-East, Inc., *Buffalo Master Plan (1964)*, 12.

³² Barrick and Joerger, *Community Summaries*, 11.

³³ City Planning Associates-East, Inc., *Buffalo Master Plan (1964)*, 14.

³⁴ The “upper West Side” and area between Richmond and Delaware are represented as one area on the Areas of Stability Map.

³⁵ City Planning Associates-East, Inc., *Buffalo Master Plan (1964)*, 15. While promoting the area, however, the master plan also called for increasing residential density.

The positive assessment of the Grant-Ferry area represented a new planning focus on commercial revitalization as a key to neighborhood improvement. Planners extolled “a variety of new commercial uses” in the shopping area, most likely referring to the West Side Plaza, constructed in 1962 at West Ferry and Grant Street. The development replaced a dozen residential buildings on West Ferry and Arkansas Streets and represented a modern shopping plaza in the area (**Fig. 16**).³⁶ The Community Study in 1967 lauded the same area in terms of the “consolidation of commercial uses.”³⁷ Further encouraging revitalization through commercial consolidation and specialization, the 1964 Master Plan suggested bolstering the area into a community commercial center, larger than a neighborhood but smaller than a regional center.

While the planners interpreted the “revitalization of this older shopping area,” and as a cornerstone to the area’s future, they also foresaw a need to accommodate automobiles and believed storeowners were responsible for such improvements. They declared that the causes of commercial decline across the city, “obsolete retailing facilities, inadequate access and off-street parking, and mixed residential and retail uses,” could be ameliorated with a “minimum amount of programmed financial assistance.”³⁸ While planners said that the Grant-Ferry area needed “better access and additional off-

³⁶ A shopping guide published in 1962 listed the West Side Plaza, at Grant Street at West Ferry, under construction with 7 stores and 75,000 sq. feet. See “Buffalo City and Suburban Shopping Centers and Plazas,” *Buffalo Evening News*, 1962, pamphlet and map.

³⁷ Barrick and Joerger, *Community Summaries*, 11.

³⁸ City Planning Associates-East, Inc., *Buffalo Master Plan (1964)*, 14. The Grant-Auburn and lower Niagara Street shopping areas accompanied Hertel Avenue, Baily-Kensington, Genesee-Moselle, Lower Seneca Street, Jefferson Street, Lovejoy Street and Broadway-Fillmore as commercial areas of potential change.

street parking and the eventual elimination of marginal uses,” they did not offer public funds for these improvements.

Commercial competition across the metropolitan area provided one impetus to planners’ prescriptions for improved circulation and store renovations in neighborhood commercial areas. While the Grant-Ferry area appeared to be faring better than other commercial areas in the city, it still required improvement to attract consumers. Planners employed a supply-oriented perspective of rebuilding shopping areas in order to compete; they seemed to think that providing ample new shopping facilities would automatically attract patrons: “Much of the existing commercial space (buildings and areas) must be rebuilt in order to make it more accessible, attractive, efficient, and competitive with modern retail shopping plazas within and adjacent to the city.”³⁹ Through these plans for commercial development, the upper West Side entered the planning radar, but it was largely left to its own devices.

Through the studies and plans of the 1960s, planners fostered the spatial conceptualization of the West Side as a series of three independent zones. The lower area remained part of downtown development and a combination of positive institutional growth and red-flagged residential decline characterized the middle zone. The Grant-Ferry commercial district and stable surrounding residential area led optimism for growth in this area. Through the focus on the Grant-Ferry area, local commercial redevelopment entered the planning radar as key to future development and growth, but planners did not consider it suitable for public funding until the late 1970s. Planners’ mounting sense of competition with commercial options beyond city lines, together with the 1964 claim that

³⁹ City Planning Associates-East, Inc., *Buffalo Master Plan (1964)*, 59.

D'Youville College could provide a “unique character” to its surrounding, evidenced a burgeoning strategy of competing in a regional market by promoting city neighborhoods through special identities.

Revitalization through Commercial Consolidation and Differentiation

Neighborhood commercial areas became more central to city planning efforts through the 1970s, as planners envisioned neighborhoods as tools for the city to compete in the region. In the early years of the decade, planners recognized Buffalo's population decline and called for contracting commercial options, while leaving the onus of improvement on business owners. By the late 1970s, planners encouraged neighborhood shopping areas on the West Side to emulate the controlled atmosphere of malls while distinguishing them from the homogeneity of malls and plazas with unique identities. This strategy made consumers the subject of neighborhood revitalization and, as planners' recognized their impact on the social context of places, dovetailed with altruistic goals to ameliorate legacies of past planning projects. The West Buffalo Study plans for reviving the Connecticut and Niagara Street areas represented a new form of serving the public good; it envisioned the use of public funds to improve struggling neighborhood commercial areas, catering to local residents by appealing to them as modern consumers. At the same time, the plan's focus on automobile access suggested the secondary goal of opening these local shopping areas to outside consumers as well, and the plan expressed tension in shifting ideologies from government control towards incorporating public opinion.

The 1971 Master Plan relied upon data collected for the 1964 plan and recycled the format of the 1967 reports, but the 1971 Master Plan Objectives map represented a critical change in perspective from those previous endeavors.⁴⁰ The image shows the city within the surrounding metropolitan area, and from the start, the report urged planners to recognize that Buffalo comprised only one third of the urban area (**Fig. 17**). Therefore, the “Planning Board must consider factors involving the entire metropolitan area,” even while it could only act within the city itself.⁴¹ Planners’ formal recognition of the city’s place within the metropolitan area coincided with their sobering acknowledgement of the city’s declining population.⁴² Reversing the assumption, carried from the 1950 through the 1964 plans, that Buffalo’s population would increase, the 1971 master plan called for contracting and concentrating commercial activity in the city.

Between 1964 and 1970, the city lost 44,000 residents but experienced a net increase of commercially zoned land.⁴³ The 1971 report estimated that about a third of the commercial land in Buffalo was in surplus to what the city required based on its population. In order to “promote efficiency” and to limit the “visually unpleasant” effects of surplus such as “vacant stores and...blighting effects,” the report emphasized “consolidation of uses and the distinguishing of uses.”⁴⁴ While calling for fewer commercial centers than previous plans, the problems facing city shopping areas were

⁴⁰ Paul D Barrick, *Buffalo Master Plan* (Buffalo: City Planning Board, 1971), VII-13

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I-9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, IV-15, fig. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, VI-16, VI-12, IV-17.

still conceived in terms of outdated facilities and limited parking, and the burden of improvement left to the “initiation and imagination of [the] business community.”⁴⁵

The 1971 focus on neighborhood commercial areas continued the 1964 plan’s positive assessment of the Grant-Ferry area and furthered the sentiment that local retail was an important factor in city planning. The report cast the city’s planning challenges in economic terms: “The inability of central cities to adapt to normal market forces has placed them at a disadvantage in dealing with the metropolitan marketplace.”⁴⁶ Later in the 1970s, planners used this conceptualization of the city in terms of market forces to rethink neighborhoods, primarily through their commercial areas, as competitors in the “metropolitan marketplace.”

Another significant development in the 1971 Master Plan was the recognition of public opinion and the social context of planning processes.⁴⁷ Alongside more traditional modes of implementing the plan, such as zoning, capital improvement programs, and urban renewal, the report called for more coordination among government agencies and sensitivity to public acceptance and participation.⁴⁸ The plan represented a radical departure from former planning approaches and repositioned the practice of city planning away from an all-knowing scientific process to more of facilitating the public good with citizen input: “It must be recognized that physical and social problems are interrelated”

⁴⁵ Ibid., IV-17, VI-4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., I-5.

⁴⁷ Rohe, “100 Years of Neighborhood Planning,” 222; Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Blackwell, 1988); Seán Damer and Cliff Hague, “Public Participation in Planning,” *The Town Planning Review* 42 no., 3 (1971): 218.

⁴⁸ Barrick, *Buffalo Master Plan (1971)*, III-6.

and “racial and ethnic implications [of planning suggestions] should be evaluated.”⁴⁹

These perspectives coincided with reconsidering the appropriate scale for studies and planning; residential and recreational plans emphasized “neighborhoods and communities in terms of planning to establish a better planning scale.”⁵⁰ The combination of planners’ recognition of serving the public and smaller scales of study merged with their view of neighborhoods as economic units in the late 1970s. However, incorporating sensitivity to social context was not simple, and recommendations in the West Buffalo Study evidenced tension as planners negotiated their limits of control while trying to decentralize planning efforts.

The 1978 West Buffalo Study offered a new brand of neighborhood commercial revitalization that reflected these transitions in city planning philosophy along with planners’ perceptions, emergent since the 1950s, of the West Side of Buffalo as three distinct areas. In the report, Stuart Alexander & Associates promoted the specialization and unique identity of a retail zone in each area. While planners had recognized commercial areas on the West Side in the 1964 and 1971 planning maps, the late 1970s federal Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization program led Buffalo planners to prioritize these areas for public funds for the first time. The consultants based their suggestions on “technical analysis of economic and physical conditions; social and cultural sensitivity...and a strong flavor of reality.”⁵¹ They believed that Buffalo’s neighborhood shopping areas could become nodes of revitalization through a combination of retail compatibility, identity and design, and management structure,

⁴⁹ Ibid., III-1, III-2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., II-3.

⁵¹ Stuart Alexander & Associates, *West Buffalo Analysis*, iv.

though they emphasized, “structural preservation and design solutions” are only useful after economic analysis.⁵² Though the Grant-Ferry area represented a fiscally viable shopping district in its own right, recommendations for Connecticut Street and Niagara Street—areas of subpar market characteristics—contradicted this tenet. Instead, their inclusion in the West Buffalo recommendations gestured to the philosophic goal of public service, albeit through consumption-oriented means.

Like the 1971 plan, the authors of the 1978 West Buffalo study noted a surplus of commercial land and competition with suburban areas as detriments to commercial vitality. They estimated that almost two-thirds of the 266 commercial acres in the study area were unnecessary. Based on the population and the “standard” formula of one acre per 1000 people, the West Buffalo area only needed 102 commercial acres.⁵³ As they explained, this over-supply fostered “repeated commercial failures principally at the ‘tail ends’ of neighborhood commercial strips.”⁵⁴

In addition to the combination of scientific approaches to retail location strategy and ideal physical features, planners asserted that NBDs should have unique identities in order to be competitive. Indeed, they noted that some merchants had already begun to target new consumers with various techniques such as promoting, “ethnic and historical sympathies, provid[ing] economic reward...and capitaliz[ing] on national concerns such as energy conservation.”⁵⁵ The planners felt that a strong merchant association or management was also necessary to coordinate NBD efforts and to “provide the market

⁵² Ibid., 10, 28.

⁵³ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.

area which they serve with advantages similar to those which are offered by malls.”⁵⁶

This sentiment signaled the basis of their recommendations in attracting modern consumers by remaking neighborhood areas into destinations in the image of malls.

The West Buffalo Study constructed a new role for neighborhood retail areas, remaking them physically and conceptually to attract consumers beyond walking distance. The recommendations for the Niagara Street, Connecticut Street, and Grant-Ferry areas drew upon existing resources and historical associations of each area while molding a modern consumer experience. In doing so, planners defined the path to revitalization through local consumption and they articulated consumers as the audience of city planning and the hope for Buffalo’s improvement. However, the plans did not fully consider the implications of local business owners, who controlled their own stores and held valuable insight to the dynamics of the local shopping area.

Of the three areas planners recommended for development on the West Side, the Grant-Ferry area appeared to be the most straightforward project. It was an established, functional commercial area with the most stable market characteristics. While they described it as a “formerly successful shopping area now in the early stages of transition,” they believed that a few tweaks would bring it back to its full operating potential.⁵⁷ Even for this NBD, which they perceived to be fairly stable, however, the simple ideas that they set forth included major efforts at remaking the majority of the area. Additionally, their evaluations overlooked indications that the area might not remain stable for long.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 63.

The plan catered to modern consumers by constructing an easily navigable, clearly marked shopping area.⁵⁸ Planners focused on the problematic lack of an identifiable “core” caused by the “overextended” form of the two commercial streets and confined traffic and parking conditions. To remedy these deficits, the report promoted contracting the retail area to four blocks stemming from the Grant-Ferry intersection. Signage at either end of the target area identified the district as an entity and designated its boundaries, while off-street parking, traffic rerouting and parking restrictions tamed traffic congestion (**Fig. 18**).

The majority of circulation suggestions reinforced the new four-block configuration by focusing on the perimeter of the contracted shopping area and defining pathways through it. The existing combination of narrow streets, parallel parking, and double-parked delivery trucks made for poor circulation. To ease the situation and facilitate easier automobile access in the area, the plan called for designated parking lots, converting two-way traffic on Auchinvole to one way traffic leading away from Grant Street, and opening two way traffic on Breckenridge to feed into parking lots behind stores. Within this new framework for the commercial district, planners offered a complete overhaul of public spaces with landscaping features, repaved streets and sidewalks, and storefront renovations.

In addition to these physical changes, the consultants called for collective management to unify the area and emulate malls through a reliable, uniform shopping atmosphere. They obliged the existing business organization to undertake that role, and

⁵⁸ Cohe, *A Consumer's Republic*; Kent A. Robertson, "Downtown Retail Revitalization: A Review of American Development Strategies," *Planning Perspectives* 12, no. 4 (1997): 383-401.

while the report did not mention it by name, the West Side Business Men's Association was active in the area.⁵⁹ Specifically, they charged the group to establish uniform store hours, group advertising, cooperative efforts to reduce second floor vacancies, and joint maintenance of stores and parking areas.

Planners felt these measures seemed feasible if properly funded, however, they did not fully recognize the role of local business owners. The plan describes recommendations as simple measures of cleaning up and reorganizing the existing streetscape, but the additional charge of promoting the ideal mix of stores represented just how much their plans re-envisioned the area. If the selection of businesses did not develop on its own, the plan suggested the "relocation of stores" as a backup strategy.⁶⁰ The suggestion of forcing storeowners to move signals a drastic intervention and suggests that the consultants operated from a stance of total control, unrelenting to deviation. This echoes the logic of urban renewal on a smaller scale, and contradicts the report's professed goal of being sensitive to public opinion.

Additionally, in their pursuit of a new image and model for the Grant-Ferry NBD, the planners let its legacy of stability overshadow evidence that the area might not support the commercial district they envisioned. First, they shrugged off the fact that Grant-Ferry had negative turnover rate; while more stores were leaving than opening in the area, the report considered it negligible because of the "small magnitude" of the statistic.⁶¹ Next, they noted, "many stores are stocking a lower quality of goods," but did

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2 for more about WSBMA.

⁶⁰ Stuart Alexander & Associates, *West Buffalo Analysis*, 66.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

not relate this observation to a potential decline in consumer demand.⁶² Like this comment, they implicitly blamed storeowners for the subpar conditions, noting, “businesses are poorly maintained.”⁶³ The planners could have read this as an indication of declining sales potential, that owners—who were most familiar with the area and sales—did not deem it feasible or worthwhile to invest in their stores. Instead, they implied that fixing up stores would bring consumers, without suggesting that local storeowners might have insight to the functioning of the commercial area.

The NBD projects on Connecticut Street and Niagara Streets represented the same trend towards emulating the controlled atmospheres of malls that planners envisioned for the Grant-Ferry area, but these two special areas signaled another fundamental shift in city planners’ conceptualizations of urban neighborhoods. Rather than adhering to the economic focus of the study, planners suggested that the City be compelled to invest in these two areas of the West Side because of detrimental repercussions of former government action there. Both locations were atypical market areas in the city, with higher than average percentages of renters and unemployed persons. The commercial vacancy rates were high compared to other areas in the West Buffalo study and negative turnover rates indicated that more businesses were closing than opening. Existing structures were in “very poor” condition and the areas were generally “unkempt and unattractive.”⁶⁴ While these indicators suggested that the areas did not have strong market potential, planners sought to address social concerns through the NBD planning agenda, and they offered festive and themed plans for the shopping areas.

⁶² Ibid., 63.

⁶³ Ibid.,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 93.

Despite indications of commercial decline in the Connecticut Street area, the consultants believed that the “strong ethnicity of the market area,” provided a basis for revitalizing a “successful and unique” neighborhood business district.⁶⁵ While the planners never specify what group identity they call upon, those familiar with Buffalo would know of the Italian heritage of the entire West Side.⁶⁶ Planners’ suggestion that consumers would respond to ethnic or historically themed areas resonates with the festival marketplace idea of the time, which merged shopping, entertainment, novelty, and leisure as a redevelopment strategy.⁶⁷

Plans for modernizing Connecticut Street involved creating a consumable past, remaking the street for modern consumers while aiming for a historic feel. In particular, the plan called for improving the mix of stores in the area, infilling the existing streetscape with recreational spaces, and establishing a merchants’ association. It also suggested an open-air market at Connecticut and Normal Streets, to define a gateway to the district, and special features such as a fountain (**Fig. 19**). It was particularly important to planners that the Connecticut Street area display a consistent image, with uniform design, group advertising, and periodical “cultural or ethnic events.”⁶⁸ While the consultants promoted the benefits of collective management and storefront improvement in other NBDs, it specifically asserted that “major refurbishing” in this area should follow an ‘old world’ theme to “retain a traditional or ethnic treatment as opposed to a

⁶⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁶ Schenin, “Melting Pot.” In fact, the Italian Festival started on Connecticut Street in 1976, where it was held until the early 1980s, when it moved to Hertel Avenue in North Buffalo. See Karen Brady, “West Side Preparing for Italian Festival,” *Buffalo Evening News*, August 4, 1976, 33.

⁶⁷ Robertson, “Downtown Retail Revitalization,” 390-91.

⁶⁸ Stuart Alexander & Associates, *West Buffalo Analysis*, 97.

contemporary image.”⁶⁹ Planners saw this image as an opportunity to foster a competitive edge by differentiating the Connecticut Street area from other shopping options in the city and region.

While planners identified a unique historical and ethnic theme for the Connecticut Street area, they promoted a small mixed-use project on Niagara Street to ameliorate the “planners blight” of the surrounding area. The market area ranked last on the socio-economic indicators that the planners used to identify solid investments, however, the consultants felt that the City had “a moral public responsibility to an ethnic community that has been impacted by prior government actions.”⁷⁰ Specifically, they explained, the Virginia Street commercial strip was a “shadow of its former vitality,” due to the West Side Arterial plan, “a cloud which ‘hung’ over this strip for nearly twenty plus years, [and] resulted in no re-investment and a gradual erosion of the commercial base.”⁷¹ Additionally, the consultants argued that City should cater to the “substantial Spanish population” in the area, which did not have a commercial district “to reflect their ethnicity or buying habits.” In addition to this historical context, the report identified the potential of the recently opened Shoreline Apartments (on the site of the Waterfront Urban Renewal project) and the proximity of a “major Thruway entrance and exit to downtown Buffalo,” as positive characteristics for a commercial area.

While the consultants determined that the Virginia Street commercial district was unsuitable for NBD redevelopment, they identified a block on Niagara Street that could serve the local population and take advantage of the unique location next to downtown.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 93, 94.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 98.

⁷¹ Ibid.

They offered a plan to develop two existing structures on the east side of Niagara Street in between Carolina and Virginia into a mixed-use complex of commercial space, a movie theater and disco nightclub (**Fig. 20**). They attended to parking requirements with an at-grade lot that could be used as an outdoor market in the summer months. While the consultants promoted a moral obligation for the city to assist this neighborhood, they also continued the legacy of defining the area as a gateway to downtown. Envisioning the commercial development project to serve dual purpose of serving a disadvantaged local population and catering to downtown goers suggests their confidence that the market was an equalizer—at least for those who participated.

The recommendations in the West Buffalo Study reoriented the subject of city planning to consumers and neighborhood commerce. Responding to competition in the region, planners commercialized existing city space, and used modernization of the streetscape to overcome the limitations of the historic form of the shopping area. Each project centered on a unique identity, open accessibility for automobiles, and creating a uniform, legible area that precluded the need for local knowledge; these features suggested that planners not only believed local residents would benefit from improved facilities, but shoppers from elsewhere would frequent NBDs as well. This redevelopment strategy produced the West Side as a series of three commercial areas that offered consumers modern amenities and shopping experiences to compete with commercial options beyond the city limits.

Conclusion

Between 1950 and 1981, city planners produced the West Side conceptually and physically through a series of changing planning tactics. They undertook multiple efforts and rationales to revitalize the city of Buffalo as it faced the challenges of population loss, commercial competition and a deindustrializing national economy. From the vantage of city hall, Buffalo consisted of disparate neighborhood entities that served the city as a whole, and planners engaged city neighborhoods as tools in an increasingly economically focused strategies.

Pursuing the image of a modern city first through downtown oriented architectural projects like the Waterfront Urban Renewal project in the 1950s, planners shifted focus by the 1970s to neighborhood commercial renovations. By working with the assumptions and unfinished plans of earlier planning efforts, city planners naturalized three zones of the West Side into areas with distinct identities. Capitalizing on the distinctions between these areas, planners reoriented the subject of city-led neighborhood projects to consumers by envisioning neighborhood business revitalization as a key to lifting the economy of the entire city.

Their efforts engaged the future of the West Side by constructing an ideal vision of the aesthetic and function of the Grant-Ferry, Connecticut, and Niagara Street shopping areas. They sought to stabilize a distinct image of each area to serve the city's need for capturing tax dollars lost to shopping plazas beyond city lines. While planners gestured to the need for public involvement and support, they maintained an authority of top-down planning in their plans for the West Side.

This discussion of city planning efforts foregrounds the complexity of placemaking enacted by other groups and individuals during the same time period. The next chapter centers on the actions of the West Side Business Men's Club and the *West Side Times*, who promoted commercial activity in the Grant-Ferry area before city planners recognized it as a potential avenue for city (à la neighborhood) revitalization. In contrast to city planners' formulaic approaches of ideal store mixtures, the West Side Business Men's Association (WSBMA) privileged personal connections, homegrown history and tangible links to the past through long-term businesses. While the neighborhood-based WSBMA's strategy for commercial marketing differed from city planners' suggestions for the Grant-Ferry NBD, the tactics of the two groups converged in harnessing a singular image of the area to compete in the metropolitan marketplace and in opening the West Side to consumers living elsewhere across the region.

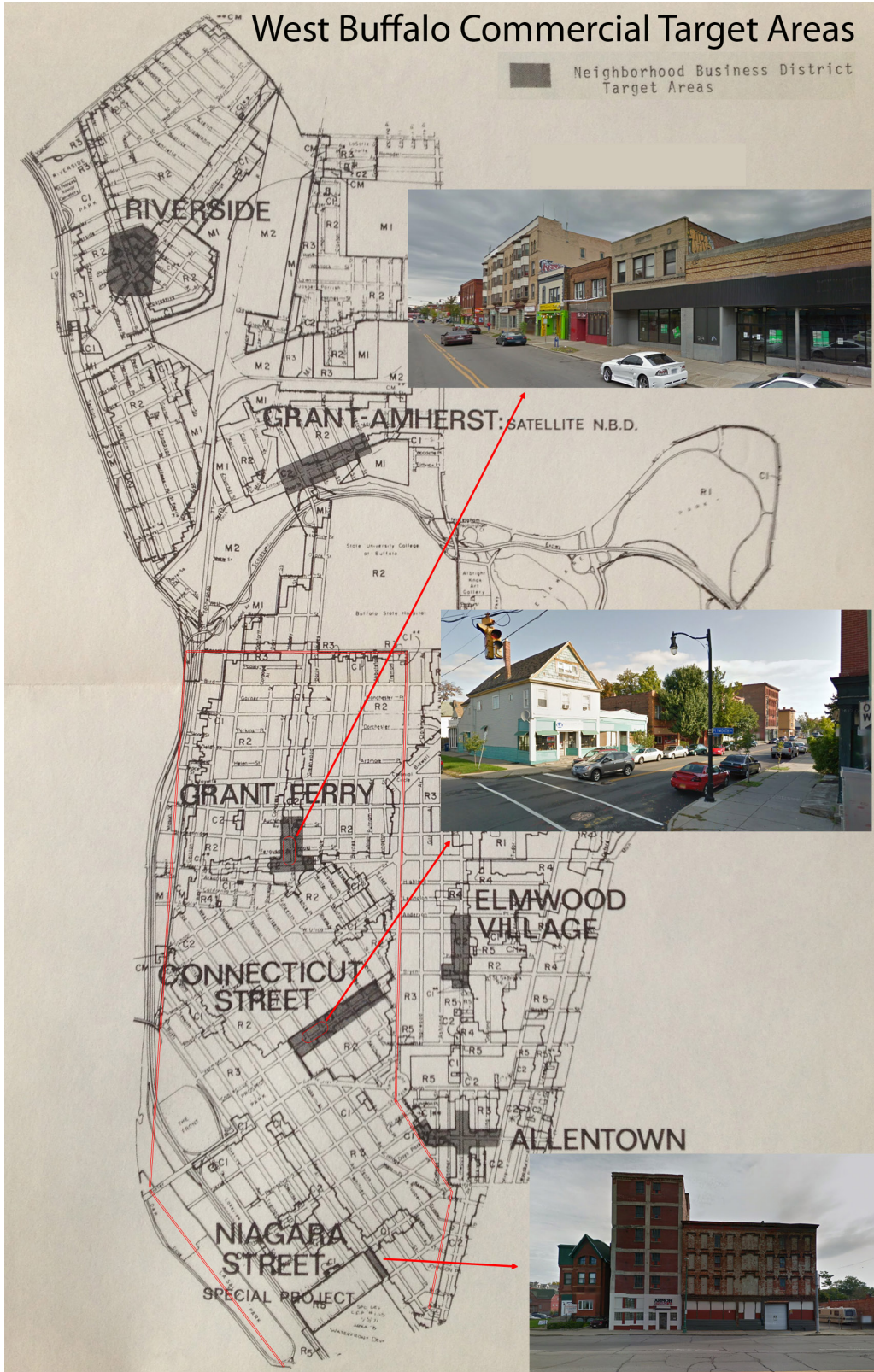


Fig. 3: Proposed Neighborhood Business Districts and Streetscapes of the Grant-Ferry, Connecticut Street and Niagara Street commercial areas. Adapted from the *West Buffalo Study*.

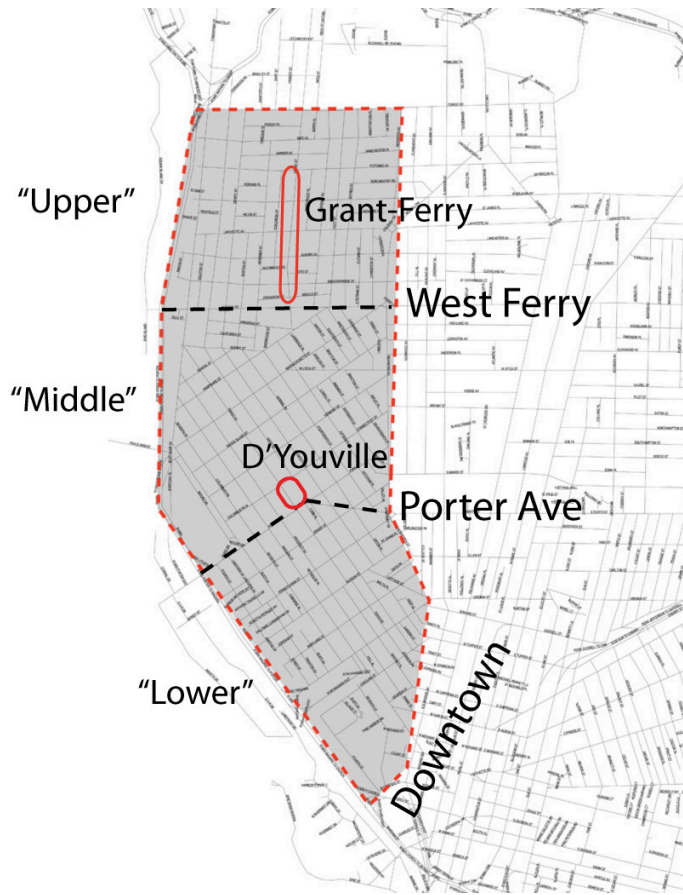


Fig. 4: Zones and features of the West Side.

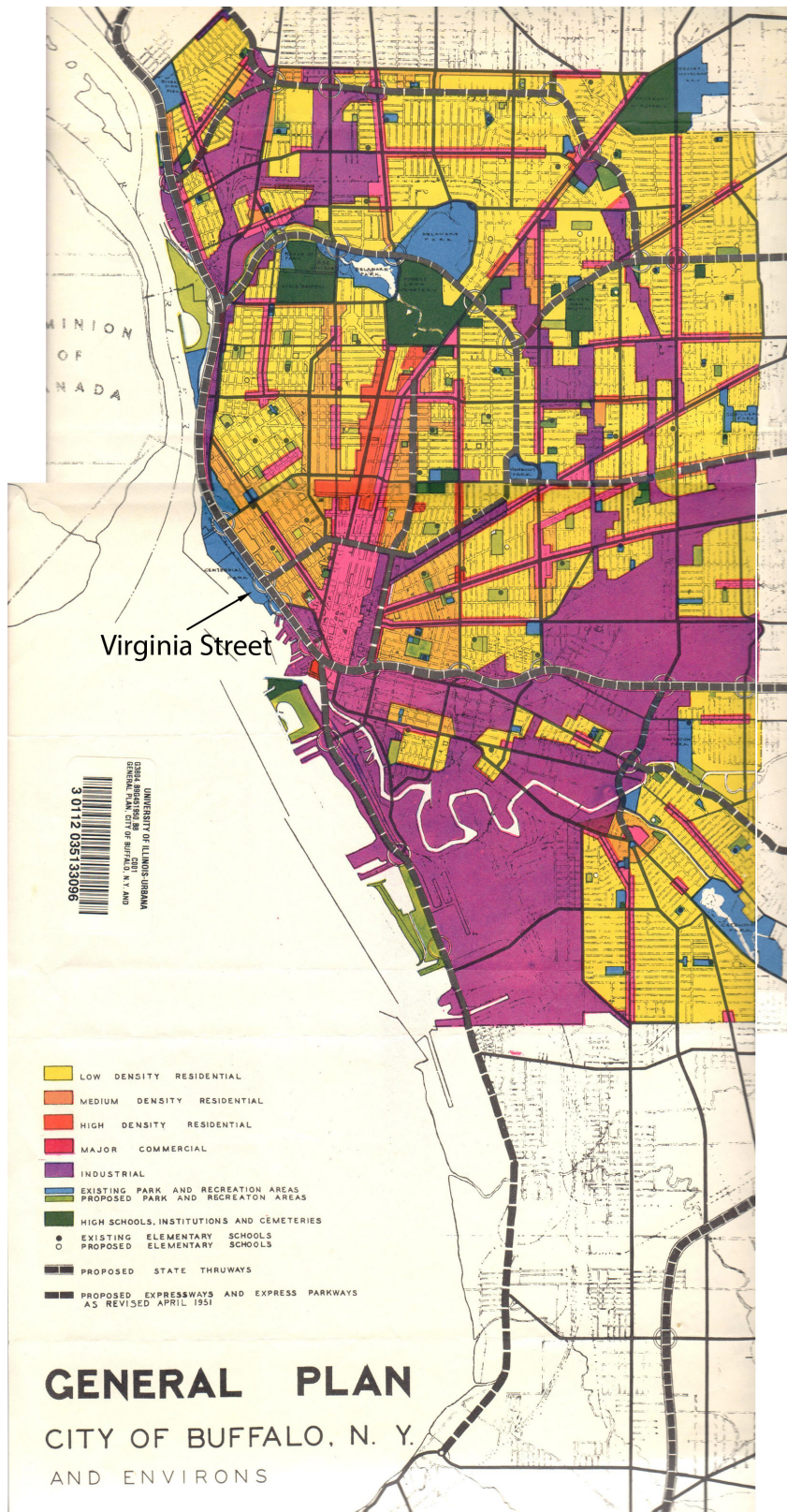


Fig. 5: 1950 General Plan. Courtesy of the Map Library at the University of Illinois-Champaign.

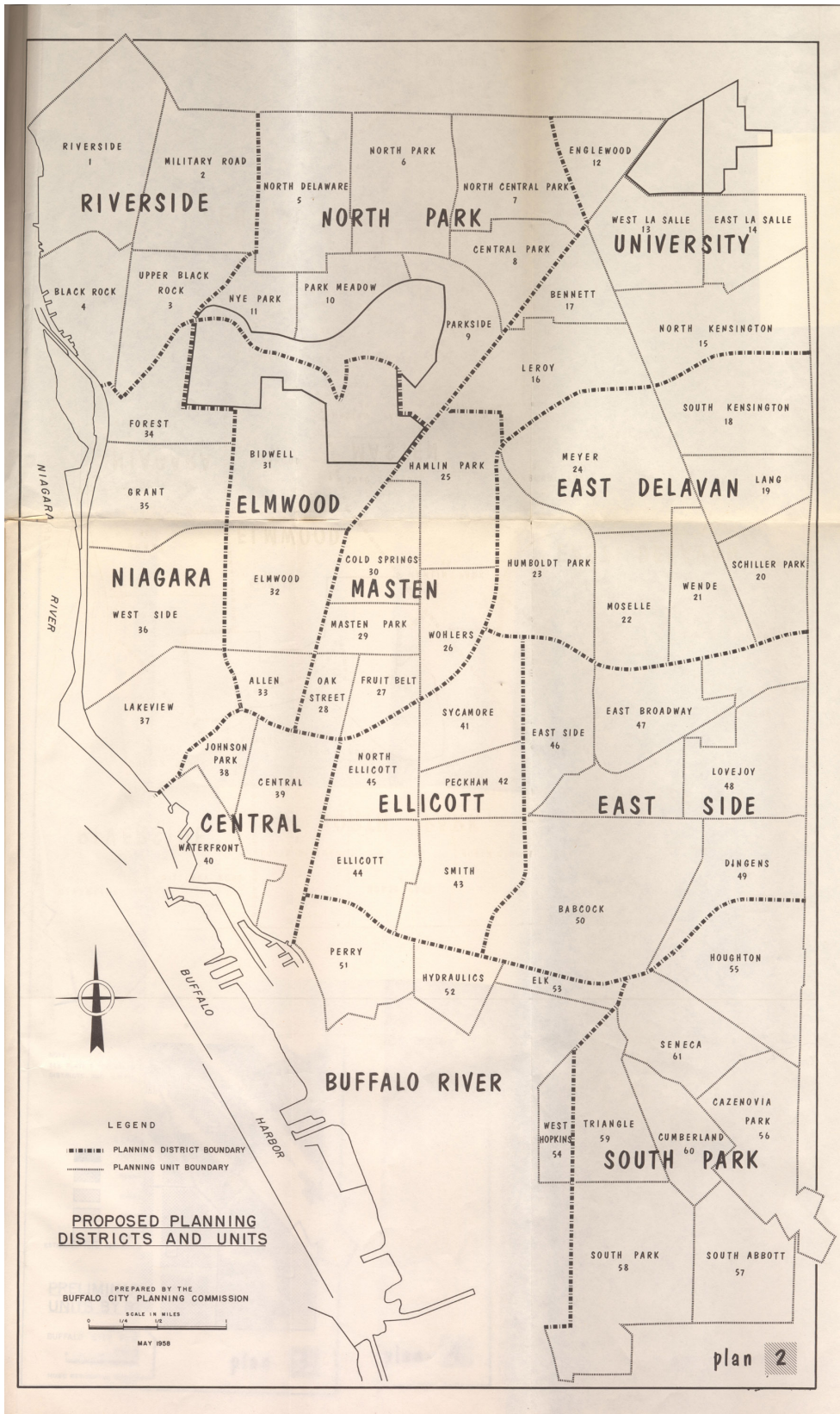


Fig. 6: Proposed arrangement of 61 neighborhood planning units. "Future of Buffalo," 1958.

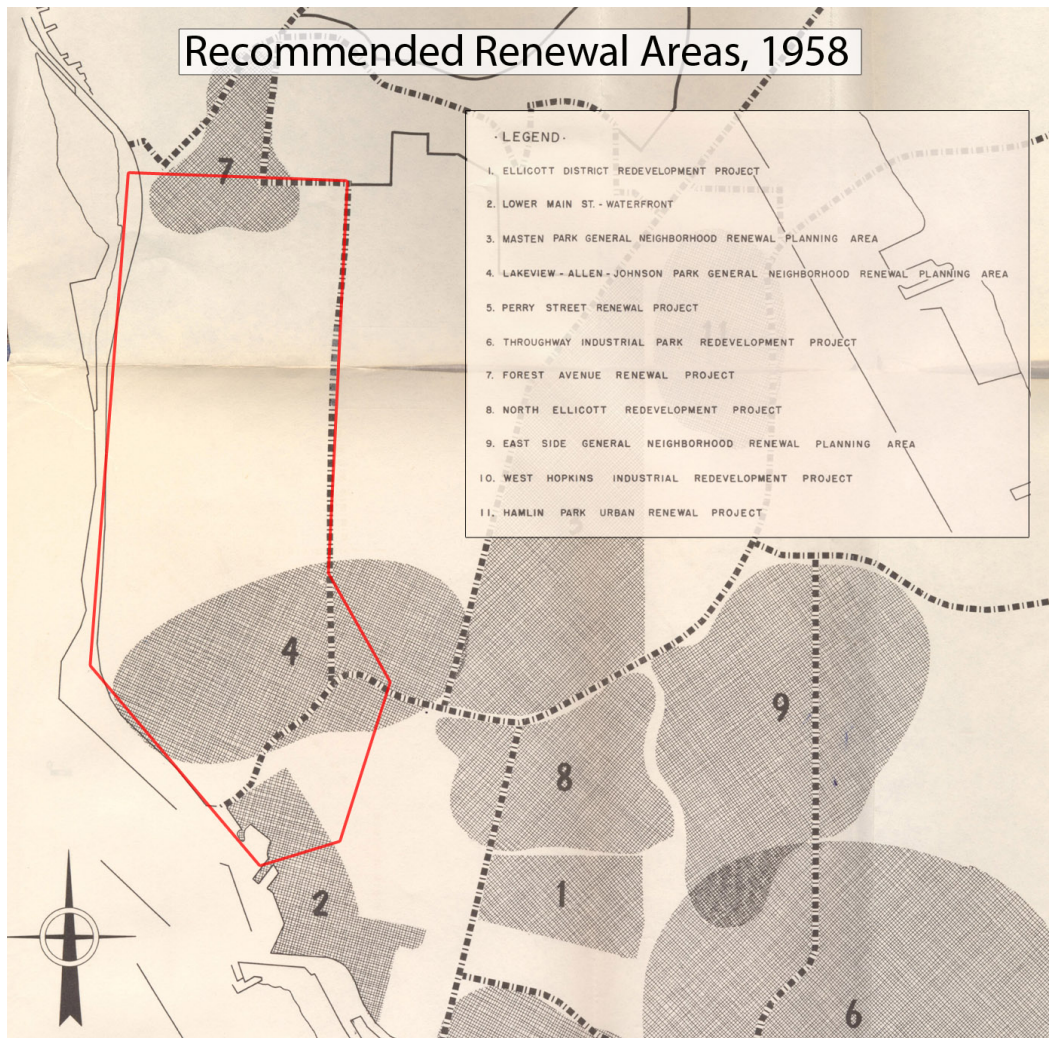


Fig. 7: Recommended Renewal. "Future of Buffalo," 1958. *Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*

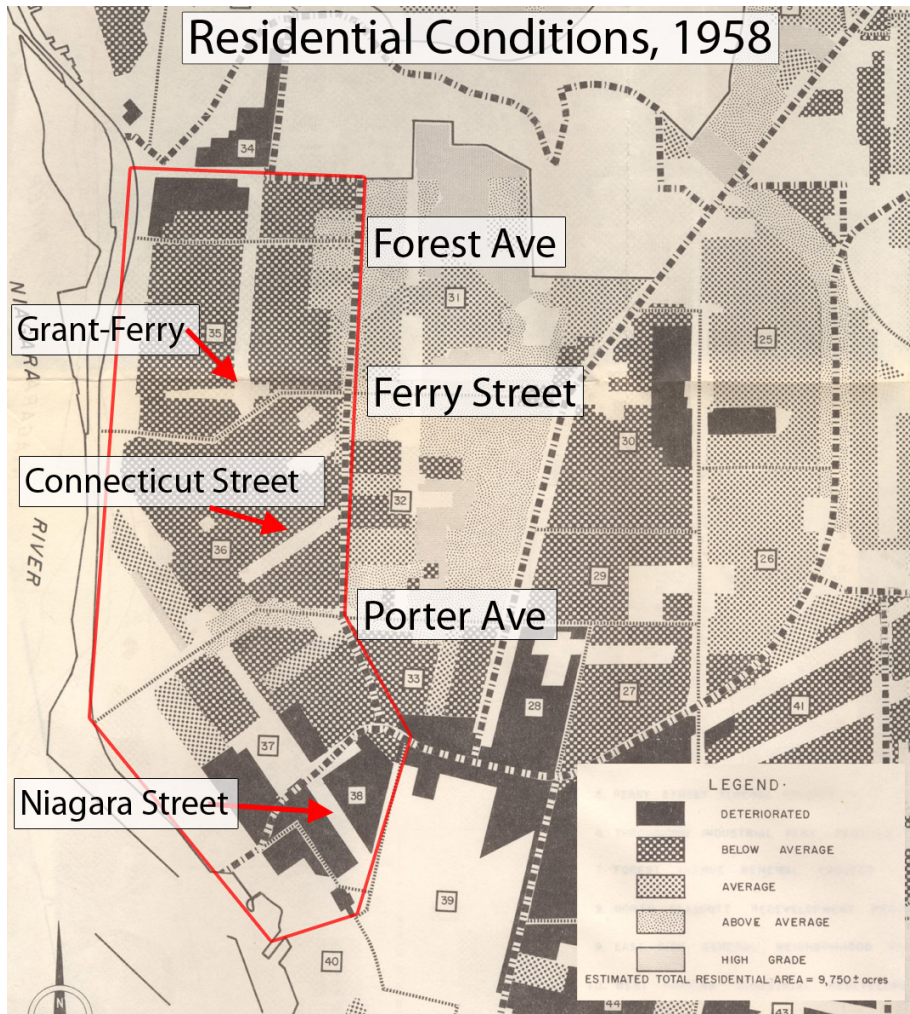


Fig. 8: Residential conditions. Adapted from “Future of Buffalo,” 1958. *Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*

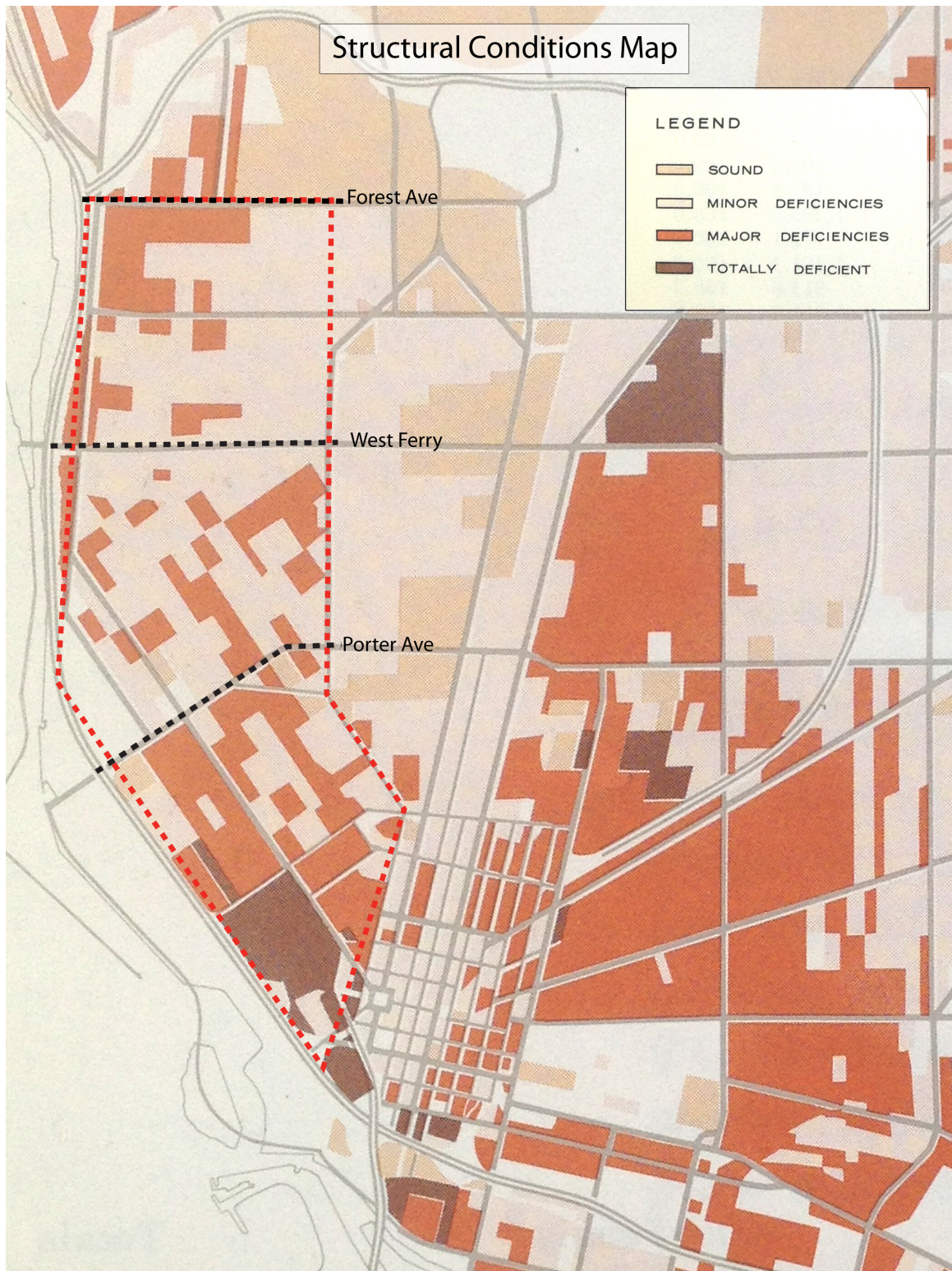


Fig. 9: Buffalo Master Plan 1964 Structural Conditions. *Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*



Fig. 10: Buffalo Master Plan 1964 Housing Density. *Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*

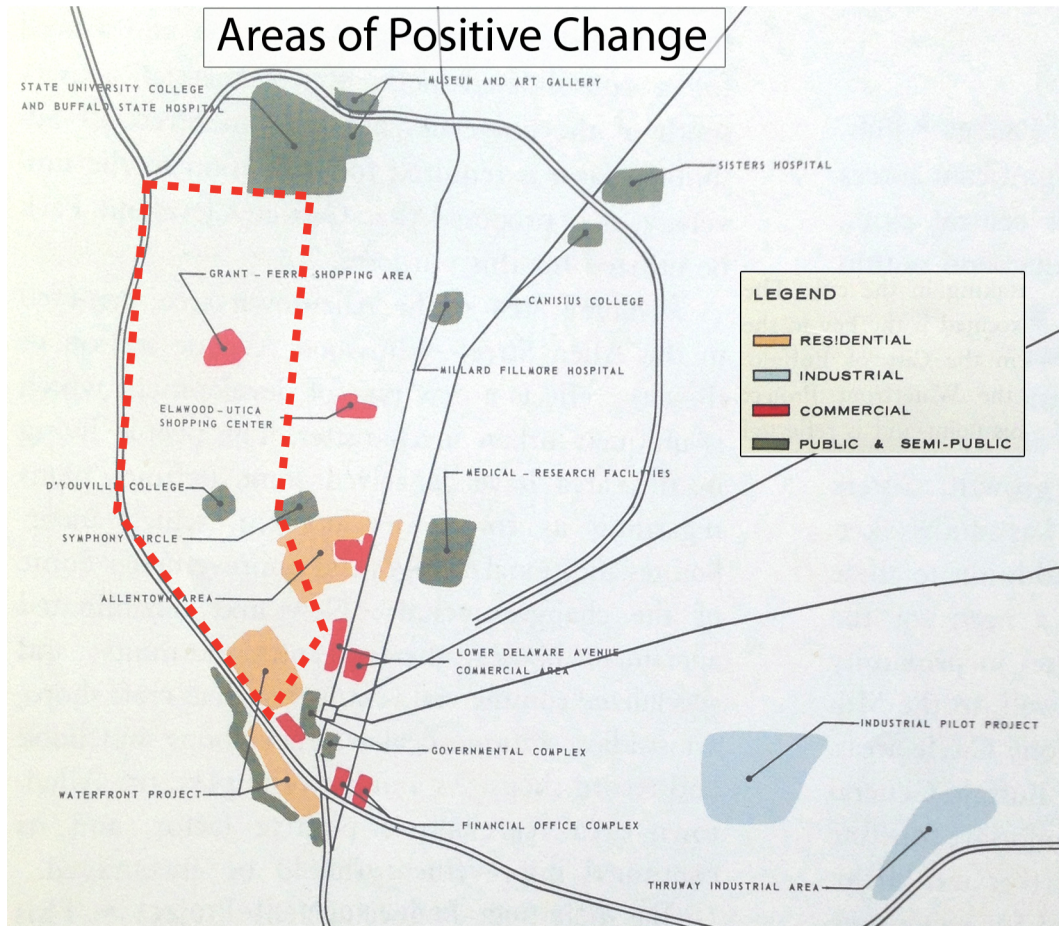


Fig. 11: Buffalo Master Plan 1964 Areas of Positive Change. *Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*

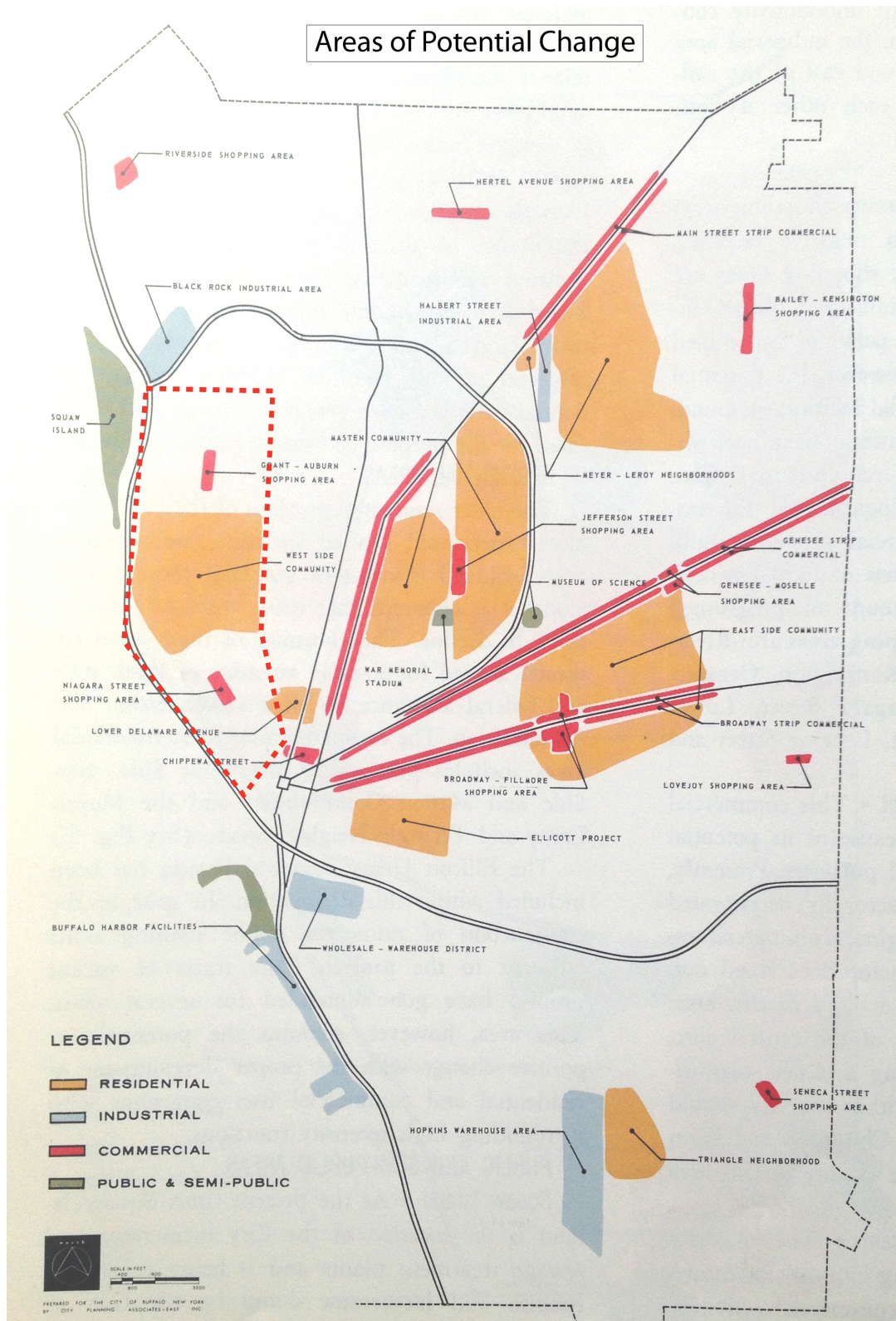


Fig. 12: Buffalo Master Plan 1964 Areas of Potential Change. *Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*

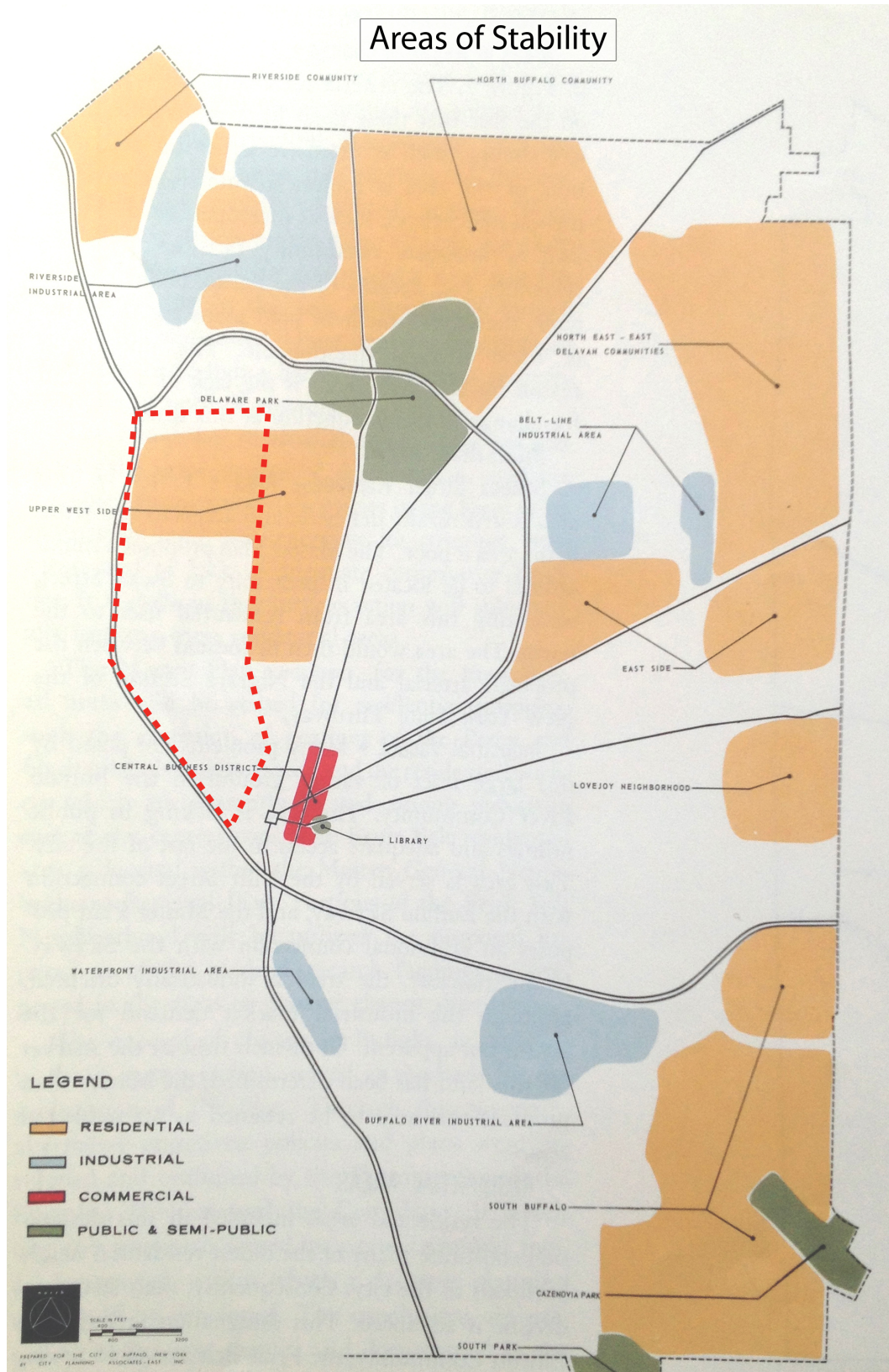


Fig. 13: Buffalo Master Plan 1964 Areas of Stability. *Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*



Fig. 14: 1967 Community Summary. This is the first time the “community” scale was presented in planning documents.



June 12, 1966



October 31, 1978

Fig. 15: Before and after demolition for the Waterfront Urban Renewal Project showing the Virginia Street freeway ramp. *Aerial photographs courtesy of the University at Buffalo Map Library.*



Fig. 16: 1951 West Ferry Sanborn and 1966 Aerial showing construction of the West Side Plaza. *Aerial photograph courtesy of the University at Buffalo Map Library.*



Fig. 17: 1971 Master Plan showing the City of Buffalo within the surrounding region. The West Side is highlighted in white.

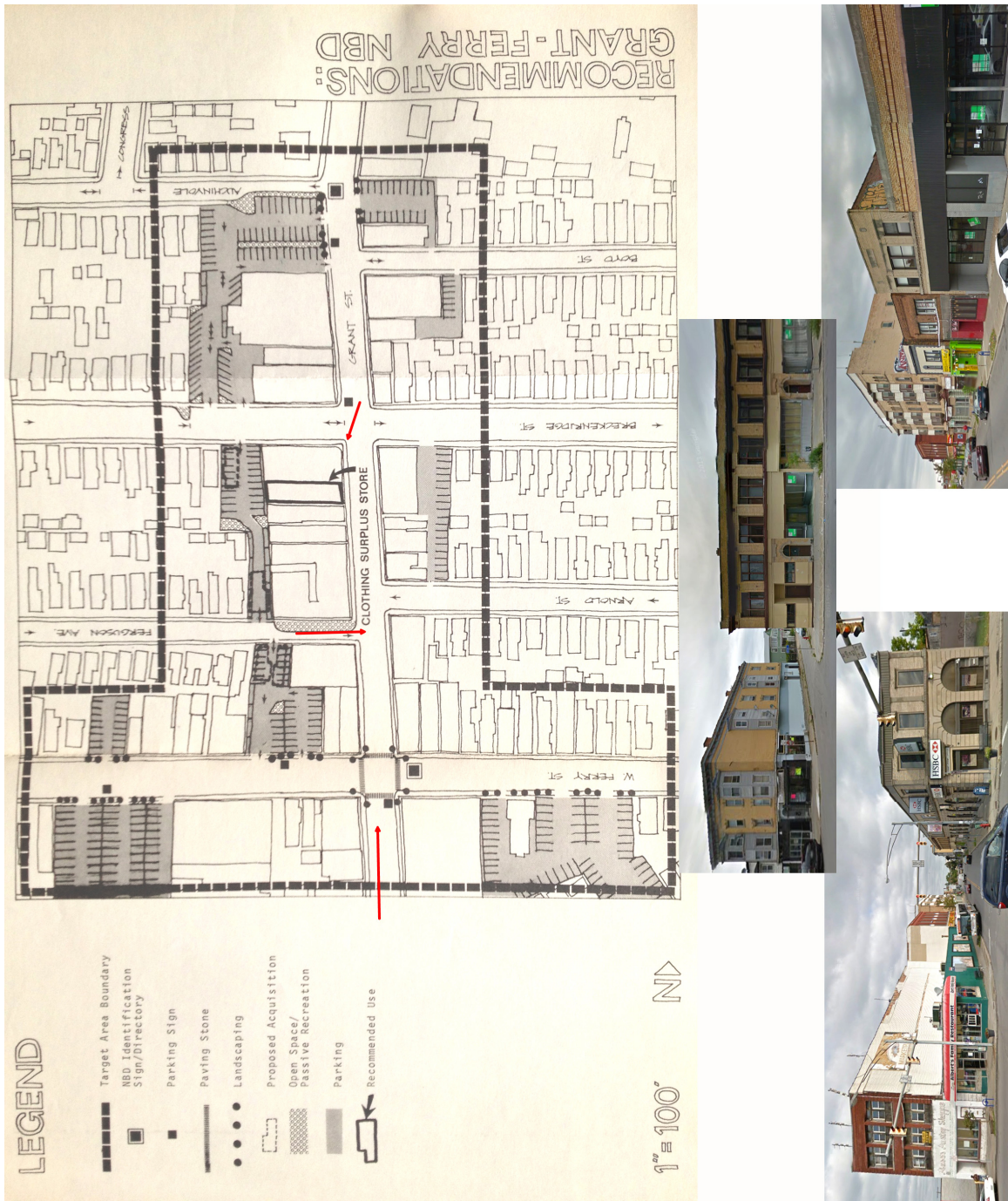


Fig. 18: Recommendations for the Grant-Ferry NBD. Adapted from the *West Buffalo Study*.



Fig. 19: Recommendations for the Connecticut Street NBD. Adapted from the *West Buffalo Study*.



Fig. 20: Recommendations for a “special project” in the lower Niagara Street NBD. Adapted from the *West Buffalo Study*.

Keeping the West Side the Best Side: A Continued Effort by the West Side Business Men's Association and the *West Side Times*, 1956 & 1976

While city planners hesitated to target neighborhood commercial activity as part of city revitalization before the 1970s, businessmen in the Grant-Ferry area grappled directly with the decentralizing commercial climate of the region in the 1950s. Invested in their place-bound stores and businesses, businessmen used marketing tactics to promote the benefits of shopping the Grant-Ferry area rather than driving to outlying plazas. Their appeals to consumers combined local knowledge and economic reasoning but evidenced a continued tension surrounding the viability of the neighborhood shopping arena.

“This is a great community... There will always be a West Side community, and the Grant-Ferry area has great potential for future business.”¹ The words of Edward T. Jetter, president of West Side Business Men's Association (WSBMA) and publisher of the *West Side Times* (*WST*), appeared in that newspaper on Thursday October 11, 1956. His comment followed complaints about the city's subpar street cleaning schedule on Grant Street. The WSBMA was frustrated that its neighborhood commercial streets did not receive the same attention given to downtown thoroughfares. Jetter's words conveyed a determination to carry the neighborhood forward into the future but also carried the weight of growing challenges to commercial activity in the city neighborhood as shopping plazas opened in outlying areas and city resources diminished alongside population losses.

¹ “WSBMA Deplores Street Conditions,” *WST*, October 11, 1976.

Twenty years later, WSBMA president Michael Pinelli echoed his predecessor: “the West Side is the Best Side and is still the greatest shopping community in Western New York.”² His boosterish claim reflected an optimistic perspective on the area, as both commercial activity and residential population on the West Side declined during the preceding two decades.³ The number of stores operating in the Grant-Ferry area decreased steadily since 1950, and more storefronts were vacant than ever before (**Table 2**). Yet, Pinelli, like Jetter before him, confirmed that despite challenges to neighborhood retail amidst regional commercial growth, the West Side remained in business.

In each of these years, the *WST* and the WSBMA enacted the neighborhood as a modern commercial area by promoting the retail and service function of the area, particularly along the Grant and Ferry Street corridors, as defining features of the neighborhood.⁴ As plazas and malls opened across the region, commercial activity within city suffered. The decrease in city sales began decades earlier; between 1930 and 1940, downtown sales dropped from fifty-two to twenty-five percent of metropolitan area, and the trend continued during the postwar years.⁵ Within this context, stakeholders on the West Side strategically promoted their neighborhood shopping district to counter the mounting competition and competitive edge of newer, bigger centers.

In doing so, they constructed visions of the area that emulated new commercial trends while highlighting unique characteristics of the West Side. In 1956, numerous storeowners remodeled their stores and promoted modernity to neighborhood customers

² “Grant Street Merchants Assist City Employees in Herculean Blitz Street Clean-Up Effort,” *WST*, June 10, 1976, 8.

³ U.S. Census Bureau (see Introduction chart).

⁴ Gallagher Printing keeps the *WST* in private holding. They gave me access to every issue in 1956 and 1976.

⁵ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 142.

while also reinforcing their existing relationships. By 1976, the WSBMA promoted the history of the area as a distinguishing characteristic and invited residential outsiders to come to events on the West Side. In that year, the WSBMA led a collective effort on behalf of the entire area, acting as centralized management that facilitated shopping experiences for visitors.

Together, the neighborhood-based *WST* and WSBMA remade the image of the area in keeping with the changing tides of commercial development in the city. Like neighborhood groups in other cities, the *WST* and WSBMA engaged neighborhood identity, promoting values that they wanted to see define the area.⁶ Rather than taking up arms against specific development projects or population turnover, however, they situated themselves within the changing commercial climate of the city. They articulated a desired neighborhood identity through themes that framed the appeal of shopping area in terms of affect, logic, and experience.

First, in contrast to the merchant-consumer relationship at plazas and malls, the *WST* and WSBMA promoted West Side businesses as part of the local community and merchants as neighbors. In addition to the familiar faces and shared interests of community merchants, the groups also reminded consumers that they would save travel time and gas money by shopping locally. It was in consumers' best interest to shop in the neighborhood because they had personal connections to local merchants and because they saved money doing so.⁷

⁶ Martin, "Enacted Neighborhood"; Schmidt, "(Re)Producing Riverwest"; Seligman, *Block by Block*.

⁷ Lizabeth Cohen, uses the term "*purchaser as citizen*" to describe the sentiment in post-World War II America that "the consumer satisfying personal material wants actually

More than these appeals to personal obligation to ones checkbook and neighbors, West Side promoters highlighted to potential consumers that the area provided an enjoyable shopping experience. Contemporary consumers would not compromise on the desirable aspects of shopping plazas and malls elsewhere, because the West Side offered its own quality consumer experience. Employing contemporary trends of commercial development in each year, West Side merchants first emulated modern aesthetics of new commercial spaces, remaking their stores with the same materials, layouts and displays. Then, in the mid-1970s, they joined growing differentiation and theming within the market, defining themselves in contrast to malls and plazas by highlighting the area's history.

Scholars identify these strategies of consumer appeal in projects led by real estate developers and planners that increasingly merged shopping, entertainment and education to create unique consumer experiences.⁸ These studies trace marketing tactics that blurred boundaries and fostered the “consumption of space” in themed settings.⁹ They have also shown that over the second half of the twentieth century, city retailers endeavored to compete with suburban malls by emulating them and then by differentiating from them. Historical theming in particular offered a mode of reclaiming a sense of authenticity lost in development led by relentless demolition. This chapter shows the use of similar approaches for promoting a faltering neighborhood commercial area. Most studies of this period focus on downtown or suburbs, and cases of larger scale theming and

served the national interest” (8). See *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

⁸ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*; John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 255-311.

⁹ Hannigan, *Fantasy City*.

“shopertainment” typically hail from later dates; however, this example of a neighborhood commercial area in 1956 and 1976 suggests that these strategies surfaced in the context of struggling neighborhood shopping areas re-positioning themselves within regional competition.

This chapter continues the goal of seeing the West Side as an emergent socio-physical concept and place produced at multiple scales by offering an additional perspective to the previous chapter on city planning. While planners operated over long-term, forward looking horizons with their authority over city funds and land use planning, the neighborhood groups in this chapter acted on the ground, marketing existing resources and relationships to promote commercial activity on the West Side. By the 1970s, the commercial focus of planners and the interests of local business owners in the Grant-Ferry area converged, but did not conflate; as WSBMA promoted the area’s history, the city encouraged development of the area into a quintessential modern shopping district, using an historical theme for Connecticut Street instead. This chapter reveals that histories of postwar neighborhood change on the West Side should attend to the shifting perspectives of local organizations, who repositioned the identity of the area within the commercial landscape of the metropolitan region, reconstructing neighborhood identity from inward and local to an open arena supported by visitors by promoting personal connections and the commitment of local storeowners to the area.

1956 – “Living Better Where You Are Now”: Modernizing for Local Residents

In the opening weeks of 1956, the *West Side Times* reported several newly remodeled stores in the area. Among them were Carmen’s Superette and Niagara Market:

January 5th: **New Owner Now Operating Store** Carmen's Superette located at 400 Breckenridge St., is now open under new management. The entire store has been renovated and redecorated and new refrigeration equipment installed. Owned and operated by Mrs. Mary Laratonda, the store will feature a complete line of foods including meat and frozen foods as well as school supplies for the convenience of youngsters in the area...

January 26th: **Niagara Market Opens Next Week** The New Niagara Market, 1361 Niagara at Penfield will have its grand opening next week with some of the most sensational savings offered in this area. The New Niagara Market is one the largest one-stop food markets on the West Side and has been completely remodeled and fully equipped with the very latest and finest in counters and refrigerators...

The emphasis on new interiors and local convenience represented the West Side commercial area as an ideal consumer arena. Throughout the year, the *WST* promoted an image of the neighborhood centered on modernized stores and established relationships between local residents and storeowners. This characterization reflected both a reaction to the growing commercial options beyond the center city and a perceived stability of the West Side shopping area. Business owners invested in their stores, remaking them as modern shopping sites to show residents that they had the best of modern retailing in their neighborhood. They promoted their status as established merchants whom shoppers

already knew and trusted. The combination of modern facilities and reliable merchants provided consumers with the best of both worlds. In the face of growing retail options, West Siders need not leave their own neighborhood to have the best shopping experience in the city.

This characterization constructed an image of the West Side as a modern retailing place with personal touch. It reflected the same belief that downtown merchants held, that established retail centers would remain the best areas given appropriate attention to keep up with the times.¹⁰ West Side merchants envisioned the West Side as self-sufficient neighborhood that supported its shopping area.

Between 1945 and 1956, thirteen commercial plazas opened in the Buffalo-Niagara region (**Fig. 24**). The vast majority of these developments were located outside of Buffalo, in the growing suburbs of Tonawanda, Cheektowaga, Amherst, and Hamburg. Buffalo's three plazas were the oldest of the group, and they were located closer to the city boundary line than its center. University Plaza on the Amherst border opened in 1940, Cleveland Hill Plaza opened in 1946 in the northeast part of the city, and Delaware Park Plaza opened in 1947, north of Delaware Park in North Buffalo.

A common occurrence in many rust belt cities, this rapid decentralization of commercial options completely changed the retail landscape within Buffalo, affecting neighborhood shopping districts like the Grant-Ferry area. New centers generally consisted of more stores and sales space, and managers promoted them as regional plazas

¹⁰ Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Chapter 4; Gabrielle Esperdy, *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

and community plazas rather than neighborhood scale.¹¹ They catered to suburban residents with conveniences including a variety of stores, community amenities, such as laundrettes and meeting rooms, and auto-oriented locations and parking.¹²

The aesthetic of these plazas starkly contrasted with downtown's early twentieth century commercial structures. For instance, Thruway Plaza opened to great fanfare in 1952. It was a strip-style, open-air plaza of single story structures and massive parking lot of 3,000 spaces (**Fig. 25**).¹³ Even branch locations of downtown department stores fit the image with simplified, horizontal designs. For instance, local department store Adam, Meldrum & Anderson's (AM&A) erected its flagship store, a five story Italianate building, downtown on Main Street in 1911. The company opened branch locations at Sheridan Plaza (1949), Airport Plaza (1949), Southgate Plaza (1961) and others.¹⁴ Each branch reflected the modern aesthetic of plaza design with low height, clean lines, and unornamented masses (**Fig. 26**).

In this context, the 1956 theme of modernized stores on the West Side represents an effort to keep up with the changing commercial landscape of the city. By co-opting new aesthetics for their neighborhood shopping area, West Side merchants showed local

¹¹ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*; Lizabeth Cohen "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996): 1050-1081; Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*. (MIT Press, 1997).

¹² Stephanie Dyer, "Designing 'Community' in the Cherry Hill Mall: The Social Production of a Consumer Space," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9, *Constructing Image, Identity, and Place* (2003): 263-275.

¹³ "The Thruway Plaza: Western New York's Pioneer Suburban Shopping Plaza," Western New York Heritage Press, accessed June 1, 2012, http://wnyheritagepress.org/photos_week_2006/thruway_plaza/thruway_plaza.htm.

¹⁴ *AM & A's: Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Co.: 100 Years. 1867-1967*, (Buffalo: AM&A's, 1967).

residents that they did not need to shop at a plaza to experience modern retailing.

Throughout the year, reports and advertisements in the *WST* highlighted brand new features, store interiors, and technologies in updated establishments. The two advertisements above promoted businesses under new ownership. Mrs. Mary Laratonda “renovated and redecorated” the Carmen’s Superette, in addition to installing new refrigeration equipment.¹⁵ Niagara Market also “completely remodeled and fully equipped with the very latest and finest in counters and refrigerators.”¹⁶

Despite these examples of new enterprises, the majority of the modernized stores publicized in the *WST* featured re-openings of existing businesses. In September, the West Side branch of a well-known women’s store, Gutman’s, revealed its “completely remodeled and redecorated shop,” with “new fixtures and air conditioning.”¹⁷ The front-page image of the new “effective window displays” emphasized the permeable storefront of large pane glass windows (**Fig. 27**).¹⁸ The store appeared to glow in the nighttime image, its interior lighting contrasting the darkness outside. The Gutman’s sign, lighted above the storefront, framed the first floor. Taken together, these effects and the cropping of the image make the storefront appear as though it could be located in any new shopping area.

Other established merchants also brought new designs to Grant Street. Smith’s Pharmacy at the corner of West Ferry & Grant Street and Varco’s Market on Forest Avenue both boasted renovations. Joe Mascari’s modernized grocery store, Brady’s Red

¹⁵ “New Owner Now Operating Store,” *WST*, January 5, 1956: 1.

¹⁶ “Niagara Market,” *WST*, January 16, 1956.

¹⁷ “Gutman’s Opens Enlarged Store,” *WST*, September 13, 1956: 1.

¹⁸ Bryan Westwood, and Norman Westwood, *The Modern Shop* (London: The Architectural Press, 1952).

& White offered a “completely rejuvenated interior, gleamily painted, [with] brighter lights, [and] all new stock and fixtures,” and The Office Bar and Grill featured a color TV as part of its improvements.¹⁹

Beyond merely superficial aesthetics, these design changes aimed to improve consumers’ shopping experience. Niagara Market promoted “easier shopping [with] roomy aisles” in its post-remodeling advertisement.²⁰ The *WST* echoed this sentiment: “It’s really a pleasure to shop in these places.”²¹ These modernization efforts appealed to local consumers with the novelty of modern shopping spaces.

Grand Opening celebrations marked new beginnings for these updated businesses. These festive occasions included special deals, giveaways, and raffles. Niagara Market offered “balloons, suckers and ice cream for children accompanied by adults.”²² These events celebrated the modern store and invited patrons to experience it for themselves amidst the comradery of storeowners who were there to show it off and interact with patrons. Advertisements for the events had headings such as “Here’s Your Invitation to Attend” and “Everybody’s invited to our Grand Opening,” evoking a host welcoming friends to a house party.²³ Similarly, the new owners of the Parke Pharmacy Grand Opening, were “anxious to get acquainted with the people in this area.”²⁴ The fanfare of these re-openings not only mimicked grand opening events of retail plazas, they also

¹⁹ “Smiths Pharmacy Grand Opening,” *WST*, October 25, 1956; “John C. Fiorella Now With Varco’s,” *WST*, March 8, 1956; “Mascari Opens Enlarged Store,” *WST*, September 27, 1956; “West Side Notes,” September 13, 1956. “Office Bar and Grill Installs Cover TV,” *WST*, August 2, 1956.

²⁰ “Niagara Market Grand Opening,” *WST*, February 16, 1956.

²¹ “West Side Notes,” *WST*, September 13, 1956.

²² “Niagara Market Grand Opening,” *WST*.

²³ *Ibid.*; “Flynn’s Economy Mkt.,” *WST*, September 20, 1956, advertisement.

²⁴ “Parke Pharmacy Grand Opening,” *WST*, September 6, 1956.

reinforced that local business owners renovated their stores for local residents, their existing clientele.²⁵

The *WST* consistently highlighted existing relationships between consumers and merchants, and merchants' backgrounds in the West Side. This was a foundation for promoting the shopping area, establishing trust as a launching point and competitive advantage for distinguishing West Side businesses from shopping plazas. The Merlette's, who purchased Flynn's Market, "formerly operated Marion's Delicatessen, Grant at Auburn," making them familiar with the area and its patrons.²⁶ Reporting other new ventures, the *WST* explained that Joseph Bonafante, the new owner of the Superette (400 Breckenridge at Hoyt) was, "a lifelong resident of the West Side," and James B. Smith, who opened the Office Bar and Grill (formerly the West Ferry Grill) had been "a resident of the West Side for many years, [and] now lives on Breckenridge."²⁷ John Cassata, the new owner of the Texaco Service Station (403 Vermont, corner 17th), "attended McKinley Vocational High School," and the Mazerbo brothers "all well-known athletes when they attended Grover Cleveland High School [on the West Side]," took over the service station at Elmwood and Hodge.²⁸

In other instances, the connection more clearly articulated local merchants as neighbors and stores as part of the local community. Gutman's, a local chain store, promoted its West Side employees, "your neighbors, from whom you can buy with

²⁵ For instance, the *Buffalo Courier Express* reported the "carnival atmosphere" of the Thruway Plaza opening, which featured celebrity Cisco Kid and animal acts by Gengler Brothers Circus. *BCE* October 17, 1952.

²⁶ "Merlettes Buy Flynn's Market," *WST* September 20, 1956: 1.

²⁷ "Bonafante Is New Superette Owner," *WST*, May 31, 1956: 1; "Office, Bar, Grill Grand Opening," *WST*, June 7, 1956: 1.

²⁸ "John Cassata New Owner of Vermont Station," *WST*, July 5, 1956: 1; "Mazerbo Bros. Acquire [sic.] Station," *WST*, 7 June 1956: 1.

confidence.”²⁹ The Merlette’s, new owners of Flynn’s Economy Market, conveyed the same principle in the advertisement of their Grand Opening: “Chain Store Prices, or Lower – With Friendlier Service By Your Neighbor!”³⁰ These comments created a connection between consumers and merchants based on common membership in a West Side community. Business owners’ qualifications were not always promoted in terms of business experience but, rather, in neighborhood experience. This call to familiarity based on shared places and experiences distinguished the West Side from other shopping areas.

Within this context of neighbor-merchants, the store renovations took on additional meaning beyond catering to consumer experience. When storeowners put money into their enterprises, they invested in the neighborhood as a whole; each modernized store was an “expression of confidence in West Side community business.”³¹ As the grand openings attested, these renovations heralded a new era of business on the West Side in the modern city.

West Siders’ optimism and faith in continued commercial viability was not unfounded. Despite competition from growing suburban commercial development, the Grant-Ferry area fared well. From 1950 to 1955, it maintained almost ninety-eight percent of its retail outlets, from 181 to 177 places.³² This figure suggested that, “Many, many residents do not care to take a long drive to Plazas or other shopping areas, they prefer to shop in their own community, where they become personally acquainted with our merchants and their employees, and may buy with greater confidence.”³³

²⁹ “Gutman’s Opens Completely Remodeled Women’s Shop,” September 13, 1956.

³⁰ “Flynn’s Economy Mkt.,” *WST*, September 20, 1956, advertisement.

³¹ “West Side Notes,” *WST*, 13 September 1956: 1.

³² *Buffalo City Directory*, (Buffalo: Polk-Clement Directory Co.), 1950, 1955.

³³ “Deplores Street Conditions,” *WST*, October 11, 1956, 2.

While appealing to residents to stay local, however, several active members of the WSBMA lived in outer area of the city or in suburbs and traveled into the West Side for work (**Fig. 28**). A number of active members lived beyond Delaware Park and several lived in the city but east of Richmond Avenue. Three lived and worked in the same location. And, all, except a downtown lawyer, worked within the Ferry to Auburn section of the Grant-Ferry area. This snapshot suggests the same belief that many held in downtown, that these existing areas would continue even as people moved to the suburbs.

Yet tension about the changing commercial landscape surfaced alongside this expressed optimism in neighborhood retail. In October, the WSBMA complained to the city about its subpar street cleaning in the area and it sought to initiate restrictions on street parking. James B. Stamey, the local proprietor of Stamey Food Market, noted that conditions were particularly bad in the southernmost block of Grant Street, between W. Ferry and Arkansas Streets. Another business owner, Harris Bowden, operated a Food Market within the block, at 16 Grant Street, and claimed that in “the past two years, this block received less attention by street cleaners than any time in his fifty years here.”³⁴ The WSBA perceived part of the problem to be parked cars on the street that impeded cleaning vehicles, which prompted the call for parking regulations.

Additionally, WSBMA member Broderick implied that the city’s neglect of the area set a bad example for local business owners: “Perhaps if the city took a greater interest in the streets in this community, some of the merchants would then take steps to improve store fronts, modernize, and otherwise improve their business properties.”³⁵ The WSBMA urged the city and local owners to be proactive in keeping the West Side

³⁴ Ibid., 1.

³⁵ Ibid., 2.

shopping area clean and modern. While the neighborhood appeared to have fared well in the first postwar decade, the group did not want it to be left behind as competition mounted across the region.

Through the year, the WSBMA and *WST* projected an image of the neighborhood as a local place—created for and maintained by neighborhood merchants and consumers with shared interests. However, problems facing the city and neighborhood retailers continued to mount, and the optimism of West Side retail, though never extinguished, changed form. As the *WST* and WSBMA attuned their strategies to the changing city, they also altered the concept of neighborhood within the region, opening it to consumers from across the region.

1976 – “The Third Generation of West Side Pioneer Merchants”: Luring Consumers with History and Events

Despite the efforts of local business owners to counteract growing commercial competition, they could not stymie continued development of commercial venues elsewhere. Between 1957 and 1975, seventeen additional shopping malls and plazas opened in the Buffalo area, bringing the tally to thirty-one “major plazas” within a fifteen-mile radius of Niagara Square (**Fig. 29**).³⁶ In addition, existing plazas expanded, increasing the amount of commercial space in those plazas by fourteen percent. Northtown Plaza alone, which opened in 1952 in the Town of Amherst, expanded its square footage almost thirty-nine percent, from 288,000 square feet in 1962 to 400,000

³⁶ Buffalo Courier Express, *Buffalo & Suburbs, Major Shopping Areas* (Buffalo: Buffalo Courier Express, 1975), map.

square feet in 1975. Main Place Mall, Victor Gruen's centerpiece to the downtown redevelopment project, was the only venue opened in the city of Buffalo after 1957.³⁷

The commercial climate of the West Side suffered within this decentralization. In 1975, the number of stores on Grant and West Ferry streets was sixty percent of the 1955 total, and only fifty-four percent including services.³⁸ Vacancies, parking lots, and storage spaces became more common along the street as business density decreased. The 1975 city directory reported fifty-five vacant units on West Ferry and Grant streets, up from one in 1950, nine in 1960 and twenty-seven in 1970. The same year, Rudolph's Shoes (180 Grant Street) used neighboring 178 Grant Street for storage, the Yellow Basket (379 Grant Street) used 385 for additional space, and The Office Bar & Grill (244 W. Ferry Street) used 246 W. Ferry for storage and 240 W. Ferry for additional space. Each of these addresses was formerly occupied by a different business, showing a deflated demand for commercial space in the area.

Despite these indications of a challenging commercial climate, the Grant-Ferry area retained a notable portion of long-term tenants. For instance, from 1955 to 1975, the total number of businesses between W. Ferry and Breckenridge declined from thirty-four to sixteen and the number of services from fifteen to seven. However, the West Side Times (61 Grant Street), Thomas McAn's Shoe Store (71 Grant Street), Shriff's Shoe Store (94 Grant), Liberty Shoe Store (88 Grant Street), Carden's Tax Service (61/63 Grant Street) and George Bond's restaurant (89 Grant) all remained in the same locations since at least 1950. Aaron, and later, Marvin Feuerstein operated a dentist office at 91

³⁷ Buffalo Evening News, *Guide to Shopping Malls* (Buffalo: Buffalo Evening News, 1962), map; Buffalo Courier Express, *Buffalo & Suburbs, Major Shopping Areas*.

³⁸ *Buffalo City Directory*, 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975.

Grant Street over this time, and Crown Hosiery had a branch at 74 Grant since around 1955 (**Table 3**).

Drawing upon this stable element of the Grant-Ferry shopping area, the WSBMA formulated a different marketing campaign than it had in the 1950s. Focusing on the continuity of commercial options rather than modernizing stores, WSBMA president Pinelli declared in June, “Residents are indeed fortunate in having such a great shopping center with many stores now operated by the third generation of West Side pioneer merchants and businessmen.”³⁹ This new tack on promoting the Grant-Ferry shopping area differentiated the neighborhood from suburban malls and plazas by promoting pride and collective identity based in historical appreciation.

The WSBMA highlighted long-term business owners’ commitment to the neighborhood, casting them as a core of stewards and leaders of stability in the area. Their tenure of operations, and generations of family connection, composed a homegrown history that infused shopping in the Grant-Ferry area with deeper meaning. Using this mode of persuasion, the organization appealed to consumers’ ethos and pathos, both establishing the credibility of local experience and urging shoppers to care about and participate in the tradition. At a moment when the staying power of the past was tenuous, the WSBMA frame of neighborhood identity illuminated the presence of the past, asserted its continued value, and reminded consumers that it was as an active production requiring their buy-in.

Pinelli’s words, like Jetter’s in 1956, expressed more than a single concern. He also viewed commercial viability as embedded within a broader image of the

³⁹ “Merchants Assist in Blitz Clean-Up,” *WST*.

neighborhood, and in March informed *WST* readers, “the organization is making great plans to stimulate business in the West Side Community which, in spite of competition from other business areas, remains the greatest ‘walk-in’ shopping area in the Niagara Frontier.”⁴⁰ To promote the attractiveness of the shopping area to consumers in 1976, the WSBMA sponsored cleanup campaigns to bring order to the streetscape and festive events to lure visitors from other city neighborhoods and from Canada. Its shift in audience reconceptualized the neighborhood; no longer self-sufficient, it relied upon outsiders to sustain its commercial district. Catering to consumers in a competitive and increasingly homogeneous commercial landscape, the WSBMA enticed them with unique, authentic, shopping experience.⁴¹

Ralph Dibble penned an article, “Our Sprawling Malls,” for the *Buffalo Evening News* in 1972 questioning the ramped commercial growth of the city.

[J]ust a decade and a half ago...the area around the Main St-Transit Rd intersection was open country...Today, Transit Rd. transverses a virtual “Golden Strip” of more than a mile and a half of modern retailing outlets that provide more goods and services than the business districts of many over-100,000 population cities.⁴²

Disillusionment with plazas also mounted around controversy surrounding zoning (from “suburbanites who thought they were escaping to the countryside”), problems of water and sewer supply to plazas, and increasing traffic congestion near and within plazas. His

⁴⁰ “Businessmen’s Association to Meet Wednesday, March 17 to Discuss Ambitious Plans,” *WST*, March 11, 1976, 1.

⁴¹ Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴² Ralph Dibble, “Our Sprawling Malls,” *BEN* January 8, 1972, C6.

skepticism towards the rapid expansion of commercial development represented a more widespread consciousness gaining clout against unquestioned development patterns of the previous decades. Others in the city began to question the destruction of historic buildings to make way for redevelopment in the city. Neighborhood groups like the Allentown neighborhood association defended their historic neighborhood and historic preservation efforts emerged to save threatened buildings across the city.⁴³

Within this context, the WSBMA rallied around its own assets, contrasting the Grant-Ferry area to the “sprawling malls” gobbling up open land in the region. It used holidays as opportunities to showcase this identity by sponsoring events around the Fourth of July and Christmas that represented its image of the neighborhood as historic, festive and a destination for shoppers in the region. The events also exemplified the WSBMA shift towards emulating the collective management of contemporary malls by using big events and a unified image.

In June 1976, the WSBMA led a cleanup effort on Grant Street (**Fig. 30**). The next month, it hosted Flag Day and Bicentennial activities around the Fourth of July and then organized a sidewalk sale later in the month. In December, the organization highlighted coordinated store hours and the importance of local holiday shopping, in addition to hosting a Santa Claus Parade on Grant Street. The promotion and marketing of these events intertwined themes of history, shopping experience and enjoyment, and reaching out to consumers in the region.

First, they promoted the area itself as historic resource. Encouraging involvement in the June cleanup, WSBMA member Mackiewicz emphasized the collective pride that

⁴³ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 260.

West Siders should share about their neighborhood: “everyone will want to make a little extra effort which will result in everyone, merchants and shoppers alike, being more proud of the great historic West Side community.”⁴⁴ Likewise, the longevity of the shopping area added a dimension to the sidewalk sale in July. It was “conducted by various businesses along the old, established Grant and Ferry shopping lanes.”⁴⁵ In this event, visitors participated in a tradition of consumption.

The Fourth of July and Bicentennial anniversary of American Independence were particularly ripe for merging local history with national celebrations and infusing a commercial component into patriotic activities. The *WST* started highlighting planning efforts months earlier. In April, it reported that the planning committee was already working hard on the event, which served the “dual purpose” of reminding residents of “the Bicentennial, its meaning, and the great history of this country, in which the great Upper West Side Community is an important segment.”⁴⁶ As part of the Bicentennial Fair and Exposition, the WSBMA undertook an initiative to get every business to fly an American flag.

[M]erchants will be displaying the Stars and Stripes, which now has several more stripes than were on the flags flown by some merchants whose business was founded 50 or 75 years ago, such as Dibble Hardware; Ernie’s Restaurant; Blue Bird and Colonial Bakery; Smiths

⁴⁴ “Big Clean-up Blitz Set for Tuesday Morning, June 1st,” *WST*, May 27, 1976, 1.

⁴⁵ “WS Merchants Plan 3-Day Sidewalk Sale,” *WST*, July 1, 1976, 3.

⁴⁶ “Giving of His Time and Talent,” *WST*, 8 April 1976, 1.

Pharmacy... and other enterprises... Yes there were less stars on our flag, than [*sic*]. But the area has survived and grown.⁴⁷

In naming long-standing businesses as representatives of the history of the area, the *WST* attributed the long-term stability of the neighborhood to businesses' commitment to place. By association, shoppers participated in this continuing history.

The WSBMA merged this historic value into events that constructed a broader image of neighborhood as a festive place. The Sidewalk sale featured entertainment acts that made "shopping...an even greater pleasure."⁴⁸ A series of interesting sites enlivened Grant Street during the weekend. In addition to temporary display cases and counters set up for the sidewalk sale, the street was filled with music and dancing from the Star Spangled Players—a show band from Niagara Falls, a dance competition, and Big Daddy's Traveling Disco Show. Other "shopper stoppers" included a white horse tied to a parking meter in front of Mack's Frontier Discount Liquor and retired dairyman James Campanella's collection of old milk bottles. Local radio personality Shane dressed in western regalia and hosted a "quick draw" contest. The organizers arranged for complimentary parking at street meters, helping to free visitors from time constraints.⁴⁹

The Santa Claus Parade filled the streets again on the last Saturday of November. At 10 o'clock in the morning, sixty units including clowns, school groups, bands, veterans groups and retailers departed southbound on Grant Street from the intersection at

⁴⁷ "WS Merchants Plan 3-Day Sidewalk Sale," *WST*.

⁴⁸ "Sidewalk Sale to Feature Bargains, Exhibits, Art Show, Radio's Shane, Music, Dancing," *WST*, July 15, 1976, 1.

⁴⁹ "Sidewalk Sale Brings New Life, New Ideas, Customers to West Side Shopping Area," *WST*, July 22, 1976, 1.

Letchworth.⁵⁰ The parade route extended a long stretch of Grant Street, ending at Hampshire. It started at Grant Street's residential northern section and ended in the commercial southern end. More formal participants included 'Miss Hope,' sponsored by the American Cancer Society, while more playful participants included a Buffalo Bills float shaped like a football. While Mrs. Claus, Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer, and Santa's elves did not arrive via helicopter, "by special arrangements with Air Force I," as the *WST* predicted they would, they made appearances on other floats in the parade.⁵¹ After the parade, children could visit Santa at the Civic Center on W. Ferry Street.⁵² The pomp and circumstance of the Sidewalk Sale and the Santa Claus Parade exemplify the festive atmosphere that the WSBMA sought to create in the historic West Side neighborhood.

Through these events, the WSBMA hoped to turn the neighborhood into a regional destination by attracting visiting consumers from other areas of Western New York and Canada. In contrast to 1950s, when the area catered to local residents, the WSBMA promoted a coherent identity, coordinated experiences using a new temporal pattern of events, and focused on common outdoor space. The organization sought to make the area appealing and educate people about its diverse offerings, showing it was not only festive and unique but also a practical place to shop. The cleanup event was an initial effort to "present the shopping area at its best," in order to welcome shoppers.⁵³ In particular, the WSBMA sought to gain patronage from beyond the immediate area: "The

⁵⁰ "Santa Claus Parade Exceeds Expectations," *WST*, December 2, 1976, 1.

⁵¹ "Spectacular Santa Claus Parade to Attract Throngs to West Side Shopping Areas," *WST*, November 11, 1976, 1.

⁵² "2nd Annual Santa Claus Parade," *WST*, November 23, 1976, 6, advertisement.

⁵³ Lori Kaufman, "Merchants Urged, Start Clean-Up," *WST*, May 12, 1976, 1.

net result of this clean up effort, is to improve the appearance of the West Side, to make a more pleasant experience for shoppers to come from Canada as well as from other outside communities.”⁵⁴

The organization restated this goal in promoting the Bicentennial and the Santa Claus parade. Calling for volunteers to help coordinate the parade, the WSBMA urged “it will certainly again bring thousands of residents of other communities to the West Side to shop.”⁵⁵ It also cast the sidewalk sale as an act of thanks to loyal Canadian customers:

The West Side Community has been the mecca of many Canadian citizens who select the community as their favorite shopping place, rather than the long trip to the malls.... [The Sidewalk Sale] will in fact be an expression of gratitude... to the third and fourth generation of shoppers, whose continued patronage has maintained the reputation of the greater West Side business community.⁵⁶

The events aimed both to sustain existing clientele and expand to new customers as well.

These events provided a reason to come to the West Side, and merchants hoped that consumers would see for themselves that the West Side offered a diverse range of offerings. As one spectator noted, “You have practically every type of business from the small delicatessen with concerned owners to the Nationally known chain stores.”⁵⁷ Like a shopping plaza or mall, the West Side could be a one-stop-shop for consumers’ needs:

“You can buy practically everything within a few blocks from the hub of the great

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “Merchants Planning Mammoth Santa Claus Parade,” *WST*, November 27, 1976.

⁵⁶ “Merchants and Residents to Map Exciting Plans With Bicentennial Theme,” *WST*, March 25, 1976, 1.

⁵⁷ Kaufman, “Merchants Urged, Start Clean-Up.”

community – Grant and Ferry Streets.”⁵⁸ Attracted by festivities, visitors would realize how convenient the area was as well.

According to WST follow-ups, WSBMA efforts seemed to be successful, at least in attracting people to the events. After the Sidewalk Sale, the paper reported, “Most merchants displayed great interest in taking care of the customers and practically every store enjoyed greater customer activity than [sic] they had seen in a long time”⁵⁹ Likewise, the Santa Claus Parade was “not only spectacular but a great success,” attracting an estimated 30,000 people of all ages. Mayor Stanley Makowski, who attended the event with his wife and entire family, further bolstered its impact, remarking “this was a great occasion for the West Side Community to become better known throughout the entire city.”⁶⁰

The WSBMA asserted its “symbolic ownership,” acting as stewards of the area through planning and sponsoring these events.⁶¹ Defining itself as the leadership of the neighborhood and consumer arena, it promoted a unified image of the area as a single “West Side community.” In doing so, it drew upon an abstracted, general history and focused on exterior, shared spaces in the neighborhood. The street cleanup endeavored to eliminate disorder from any section of the street, making it a single orderly stretch. The repetition of the American flag on storefronts for Flag Day created visual cohesion that reinforced the singular identity of the area. The sidewalk sale lined the street with

⁵⁸ “Sidewalk Sale, Exhibits, To Emphasize Advantage of Shopping in West Side Area,” *WST*, July 8, 1976, 1.

⁵⁹ “Sidewalk Sale Brings New Life,” *WST*.

⁶⁰ “Santa Claus Parade Exceeds Expectations,” *WST*, 1.

⁶¹ Andrew Deener, “Commerce as the Structure and Symbol of Neighborhood Life: Reshaping the Meaning of Community in Venice, California,” *City & Community* 6, no. 4 (2007): 291-314.

vendors and filled the street with people without the boundaries of interior walls, and the Santa Claus Parade infused the street with unbroken stream of marchers, floats, and spectators.

Beyond these events, the WSBMA organized common store hours in the area, particularly during the Christmas season. To make up for several days “when the community was practically snowbound,” the organization arranged for stores to open the Sunday before Christmas from noon to 5pm and for shoppers to have access to three bank parking lots in the area.⁶² It facilitated shopping convenience for residents and visitors in order to compete with other commercial options.

These events benefited the entire area, in part by emulating the centralized management that provided cohesion to shopping centers. Yet WSBMA membership was voluntary, a fundamental difference that led to tension over the efforts that it exerted for members and nonmembers alike. The “great dedication” that its members showed to improving and publicizing the area deserved special recognition.⁶³ The *WST* consistently highlighted the efforts of individual members. Bill Mack, general chairman of the Sidewalk Sale, and his assistants, “spent much time and effort over the past months” planning and implementing the event. Reports included each person’s name and place of business: “Vincent Croglio, manager of Norbans; Paul Murphy, manager of G & L Wallpaper and Paint Company...now catering to the third generation of West Side residents. And another workhorse, Robert Hellerer, [owner of] the Capri Jewelers,” actively contributed to WSBMA efforts.⁶⁴ Calling out individuals and their contributions

⁶² “Area Stores to be Open,” *WST*, December 16, 1976, 1.

⁶³ “Merchants and Residents to Map Exciting Plans,” *WST*.

⁶⁴ “WS Merchants Plan 3-Day Sidewalk Sale,” *WST*.

behind-the-scenes in addition to promoting the events made these businessmen stand out as leaders of the community. It also contributed to the sense that the commitment of the business owners in the area carried forward neighborhood identity.

The organization also urged consumers to distinguish between members and nonmembers. In a holiday shopping ad, it encouraged shoppers to patronize stores displaying the WSBMA membership card in the window: “These merchants and professional men and women are always interested in the welfare and progress of their customers...as well as in the welfare and progress of your community.”⁶⁵ WSBMA President Pinelli appealed for more merchant participation, “These projects are designed to help the community in general and particularly the business community and it behooves every merchant to attend,” WSBMA meetings.⁶⁶

As the tone of these appeals suggests, anxiety over the area’s wellbeing bubbled below the surface of optimistic marketing. The WSBMA aired frustration after a July meeting; “Oh yes, it was a night of justifiable complaints,” Pinelli said.⁶⁷ Less than a month after the Blitz Cleanup on Grant Street, association members sympathized with local residents who showed up to voice concern at the meeting. Their three primary grievances related to the cleanliness and accessibility of the street and sidewalk, particularly near the Grant and Breckenridge intersection. For these residents, the improper use of the trash receptacles, illegal parking by patrons of Off Track Betting, and dog owners’ disregard for picking up reflected poorly on the whole area. Concerns for the continued viability of the neighborhood stemmed not only from external commercial

⁶⁵ “Shop Where You See The Membership Card Displayed,” *WST*, December 21, 1976, 8, advertisement.

⁶⁶ “WSBMA To Meet September 15 at Civic Center,” *WST*, September 9, 1976.

⁶⁷ “Litter—Not Garbage Says Linder,” *WST*, July 22, 1976, 8.

competition, but also from making sure that local residents respected the area by keeping it clean.

The WSBMA also appealed to local residents to support neighborhood retailers. The extra store hours in December 1976 gave “busy housewives and other Christmas shoppers additional hours to shop conveniently in their own neighborhood, eliminating necessity of time consuming trips to outlying plazas and, of course, save gas.” In addition to the convenience of saving time and money, the report promoted the opportunity to shop in “with long established merchants, some of whom have been in business in this area for three generations.” The final comment, however, conveyed a paternal tone: “Remember, it’s good to shop in your own community. Merchants support the community and it is but fitting and proper that residents support community merchants.” This added instruction and obligation to the “community-minded businessmen” urged readers to become community-minded consumers.⁶⁸

Throughout 1976, the WSBMA oscillated between boosterism and appeals, continually vying for patronage from both local residents and visitors to the neighborhood. Speaking after the June cleanup, Pinelli said, “merchants do care and this is just the beginning of what is anticipated to be a continued effort to keep the shopping community neat and clean, to attract even more customers not only from the community, but other sections of the city and also our Canadian neighbors.”⁶⁹ The WSBMA worked year round to promote shopping in the area with festive events. Each effort created a wave of activity, but the staying power of that momentum was more elusive.

⁶⁸ “WS Merchants Plan 3-Day Sidewalk Sale,” *WST*.

⁶⁹ “Merchants Assist in Blitz Clean-Up,” *WST*.

Conclusion

Between 1956 and 1976, the WSBMA produced the Grant-Ferry area as a distinct consumer arena within the region as it employed different strategies for differentiating the area from shopping plazas. The organization abstracted the area's identity from the business resources located there—emphasizing modern and then historic appeal. As they shifted from marketing to local residents to visiting shoppers, the businessmen also orchestrated events that moved from store interiors (e.g. grand openings) to public space (e.g. parades and sidewalk sale). In facilitating the image of the Grant-Ferry area as a regional destination, the WSBMA assumed a paternalistic leadership role, reflecting a new relationship between storeowner and consumer from an implicit trust that, “people want to shop locally,” to skepticism and needing to remind residents, “it’s good to shop in your own community.” This attitude reflected the ongoing tension and efforts of the organization, and constructed the idea of neighborhood from self-sustaining to open and reliant upon a broader network of consumers.

While city planners produced the West Side as a shopping destination in the late 1970s through plans for retail revitalization, the WSBMA enacted the Grant-Ferry area as a consumer arena that balanced the old and the new through its marketing and events in 1956 and 1976. Both groups sought to emulate the collective management and singular identity of malls to appeal to modern shoppers. While city planners identified the Grant-Ferry area as a positive area throughout their postwar planning studies, particularly in 1964, this chapter reveals tension on the ground during that time. Additionally, as planners blamed storeowners for poor maintenance of their stores in the 1960s and 1970s, the WSBMA complained about city neglect of the area, particularly of street cleaning.

While Chapters 1 and 2 show converging trends in city planning and the neighborhood business association that recast the West Side with a commercially oriented, contained neighborhood identity, the next chapter complicates this pattern by examining the individual mobility of storeowners in the Grant-Ferry area. While they also relied upon consumers, these individuals related to the neighborhood through strategic, functional nodes rather than a unified image. Examining the West Side through individual perspectives shows the production of the neighborhood through more practical, mundane operations than the future-oriented planning of city planners and the collective marketing images of the WSBMA.

Furthermore, the historic theming of the area as a consumer attraction in this chapter differs from the historic meaning of the West Side in Chapter 4 constructed by Italian Americans as people and organizations moved out of the neighborhood. Italian Americans produced the concept of the “old neighborhood” as a shared reference to foster collective identity as people disengaged with contemporary issues on the West Side. By contrast, the WSBMA used historic appeal to address the contemporary commercial climate, perpetuating the presence of a place-based history (albeit for commercial means) in the neighborhood.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1		1950	1950 service	1955	1955 service	1960	1960 service	1965	1965 service	1970	1970 service	1975	1975 service
2	Grant Street												
	Hampshire to West												
3	Ferry	15	6	14	7	13	4	10	4	13	4	11	3
4	W Ferry to Ferguson	8	6	8	7	8	2	5	3	3	3	2	2
5	Ferguson to Arnold	3	0	3	0	3	0	2	1	3	1	3	0
	Arnold to												
6	Breckenridge	18	4	23	8	13	4	11	3	11	3	11	5
7	Breckenridge to Boyd	16	1	13	1	14	1	14	1	11	2	9	2
8	Boyd to Auchinvole	6	0	5	0	5	0	4	0	3	0	1	0
	Auchinvole to Auburn												
9	Auchinvole to Auburn	9	1	9	1	10	1	3	0	4	0	2	0
10	Auburn to Lafayette	20	6	19	5	6	0	3	0	3	2	13	5
11	Lafayette to Delavan	25	5	22	10	34	12	28	12	23	7	15	2
12	Delavan to Potomac	17	3	14	3	11	5	8	4	7	3	6	3
13	Potomac to Garner	8	4	11	0	10	3	7	2	6	3	6	0
14	West Ferry Street												
15	Herkimer to Grant	18	9	20	8	16	3	18	3	19	3	17	1
16	Grant to Parkdale	18	13	16	13	15	9	14	5	12	3	11	0
17		36		36		31		32		31		28	
18	Total	181	58	177	63	158	44	127	38	118	34	107	23
19													
20													
21	% of previous record			0.97790055		0.89265537		0.80379747		0.92913386		0.90677966	
22	% of 1950					0.87292818		0.70165746		0.6519337		0.59116022	
23													

Table 2: Number of commercial enterprises on Grant and West Ferry Streets, by block, 1950-1975. *Buffalo City Directories.*

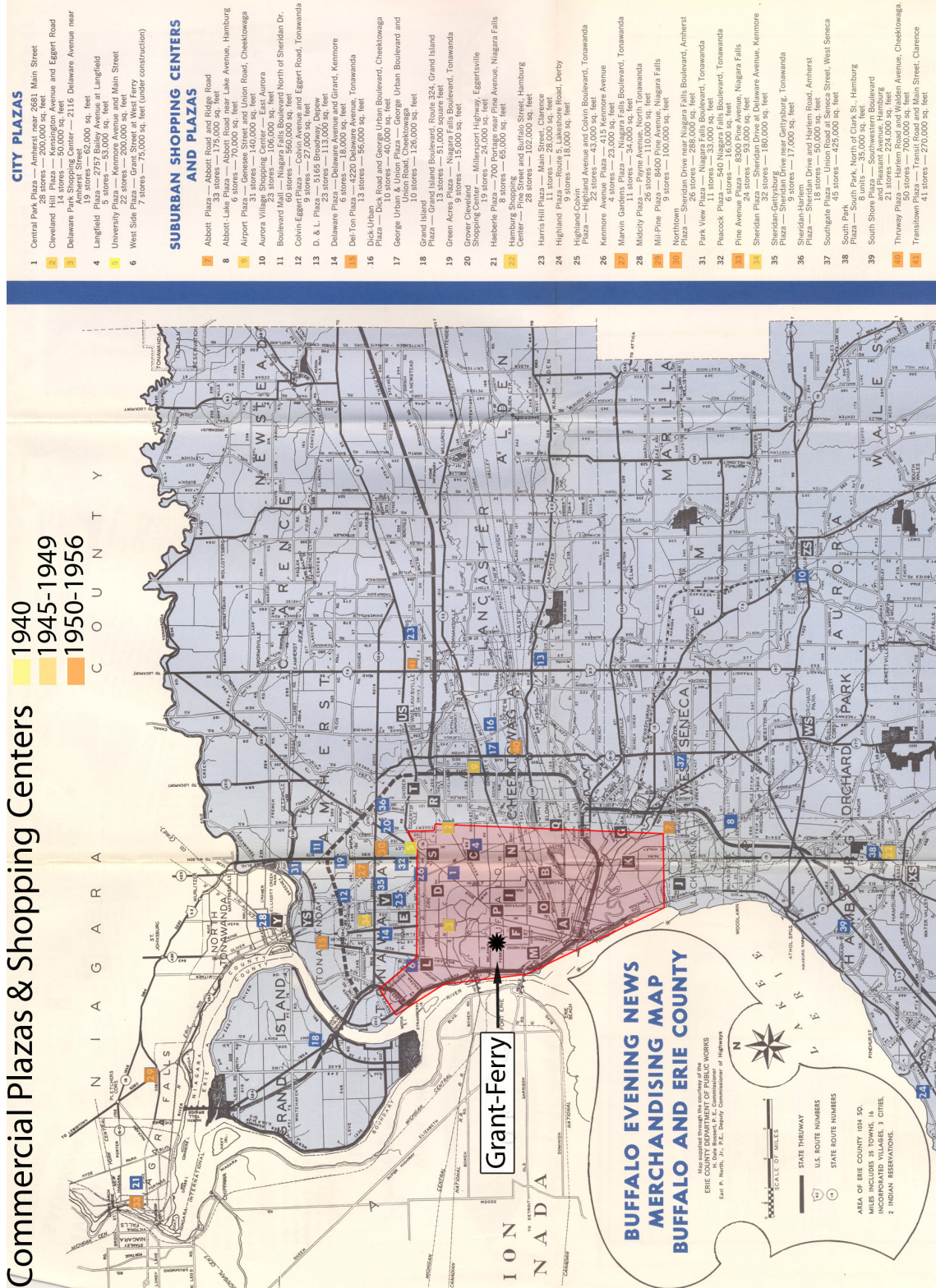


Fig. 21: Commercial Plazas and Shopping Centers opened 1940-1956. Adapted from *Merchandising Map* (Buffalo: Buffalo Evening News, 1962). *Reproduced with permission of the Buffalo News.*



Fig. 22: Thruway Plaza. *Courtesy of Buffalo History Museum, used by permission.*

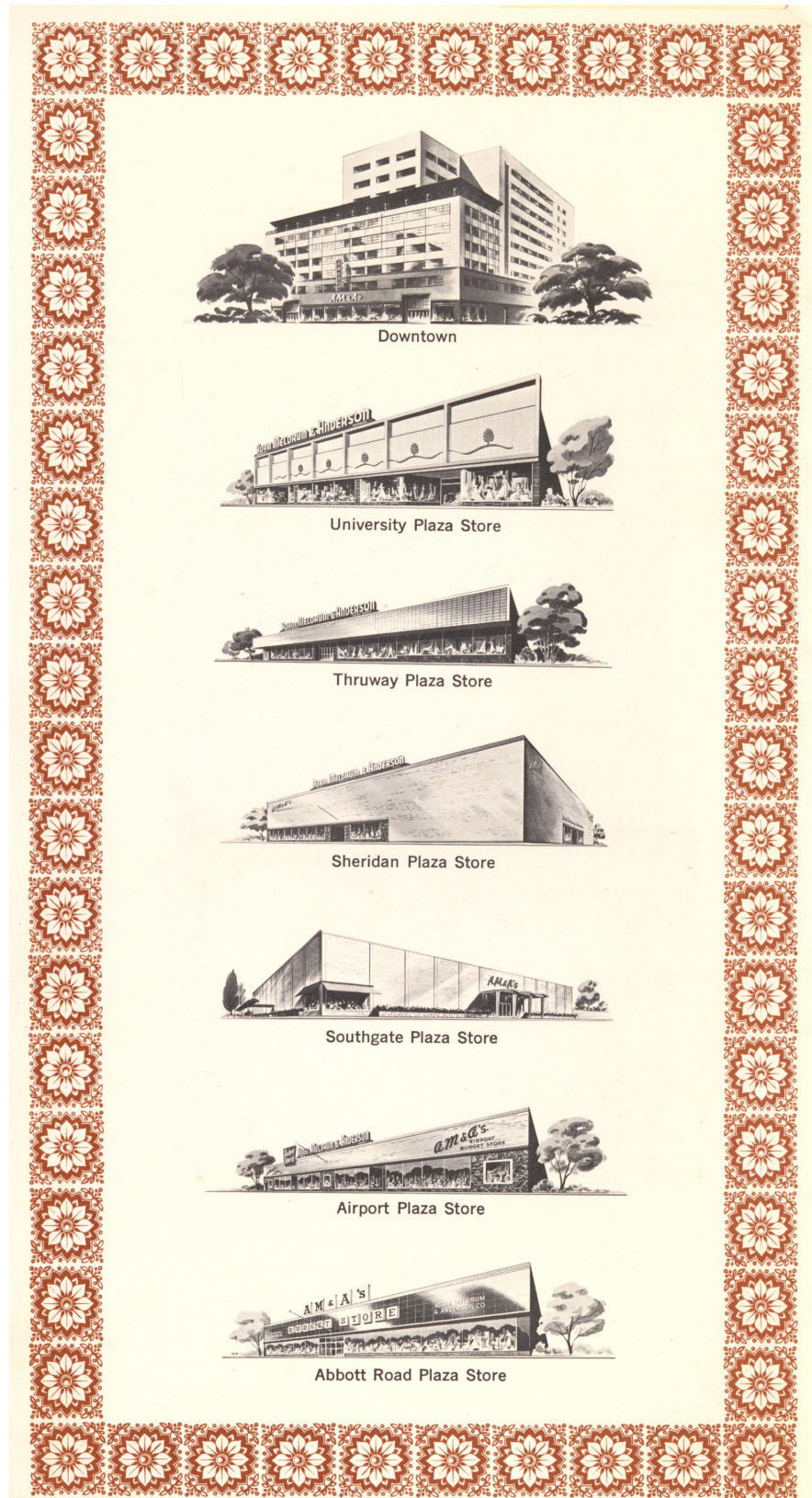


Fig. 23: AM&A's branch locations. From *AM&A's 100 Years* (Buffalo: AM&A, 1967).
Courtesy of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

formed on the developments as soon as issued.

...kind of admits there isn't much about himself worth talking about.

GUTMAN'S OPENS COMPLETELY REMODELED WOMEN'S SHOP



Gutman's, 91-93 Grant St., has now opened its completely remodeled and redecorated shop for fashion-conscious women with a tremendous selection of smart fall and winter fashions. Gutman's has doubled its floor space, installed new fixtures and air-conditioning and added many new lines to increase the selection in every department. This picture shows the front of the store, remodeled to present more effective window displays. The sales personnel are all West Side residents, your neighbors from whom you can buy with confidence.

... of the 1956 annual awards County Sav...ial Scholar...er will enter...urse at the... this month...enberg, 74...la, winner of...p. plans to...gineering at...
...4 in observ...0th anniver...vides finan...deserving...and Erie...pursue their...nstitutes of...
**Church
nlist**
...uel Baptist...eception at...evening in...Wilson, or...or 25 years...dfring, Jr.,...he program...ter Darrow...ment com...
...old "Joe...a bundle...grocery...all deta...this sho...to shop...
...Talki...you ev...relative...operat...address...week...believe...and...week...and th...nice...sell p...
...You...centh...at H...swea... (Gas)...
...M...180...the...ter...of...Mr...wed...

Fig. 24: Gutman's new "effective window displays." *West Side Times*, September 13, 1956. *Courtesy of Gallagher Printing.*

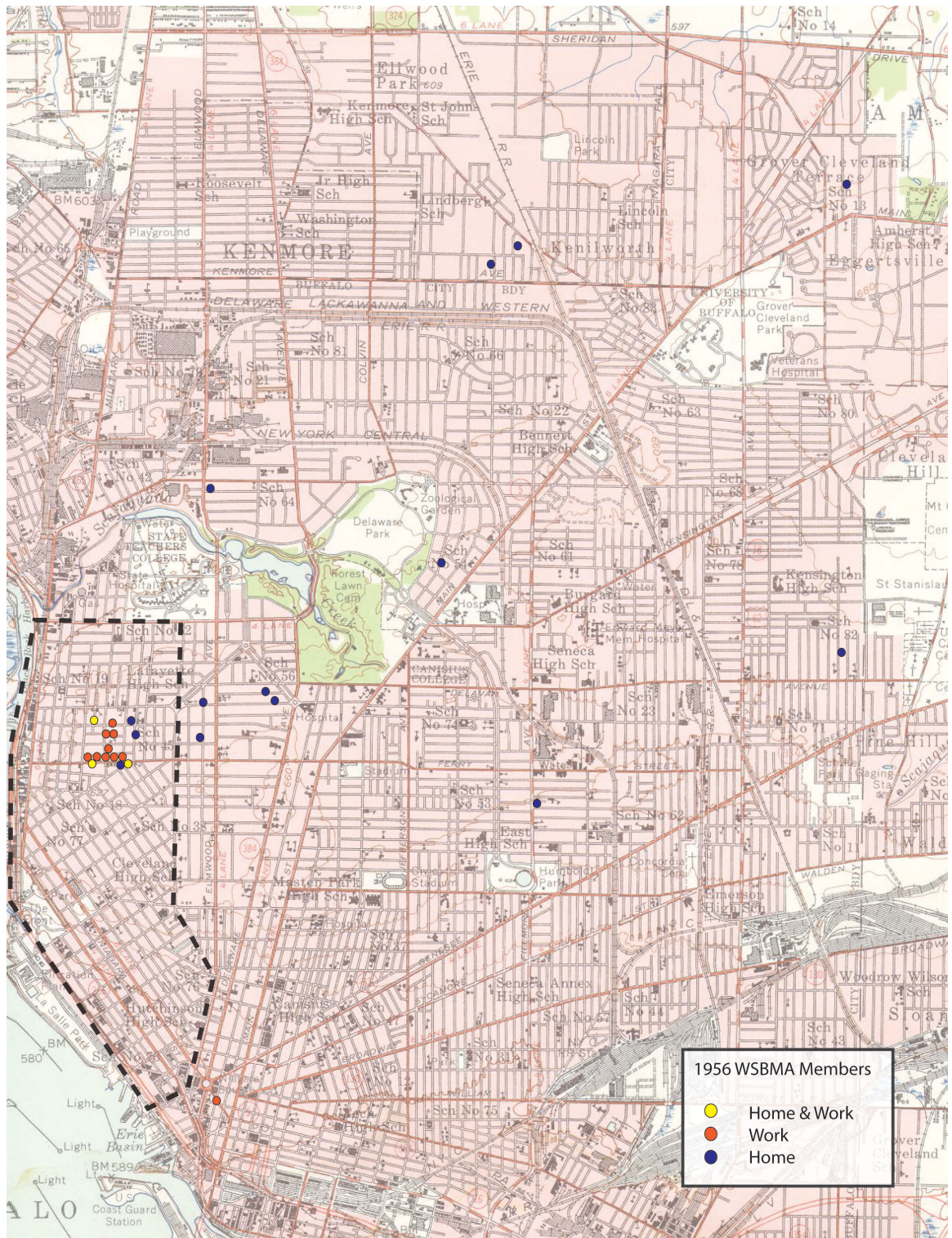


Fig. 25: Home and workplace locations of active 1956 West Side Business Men's Association members.

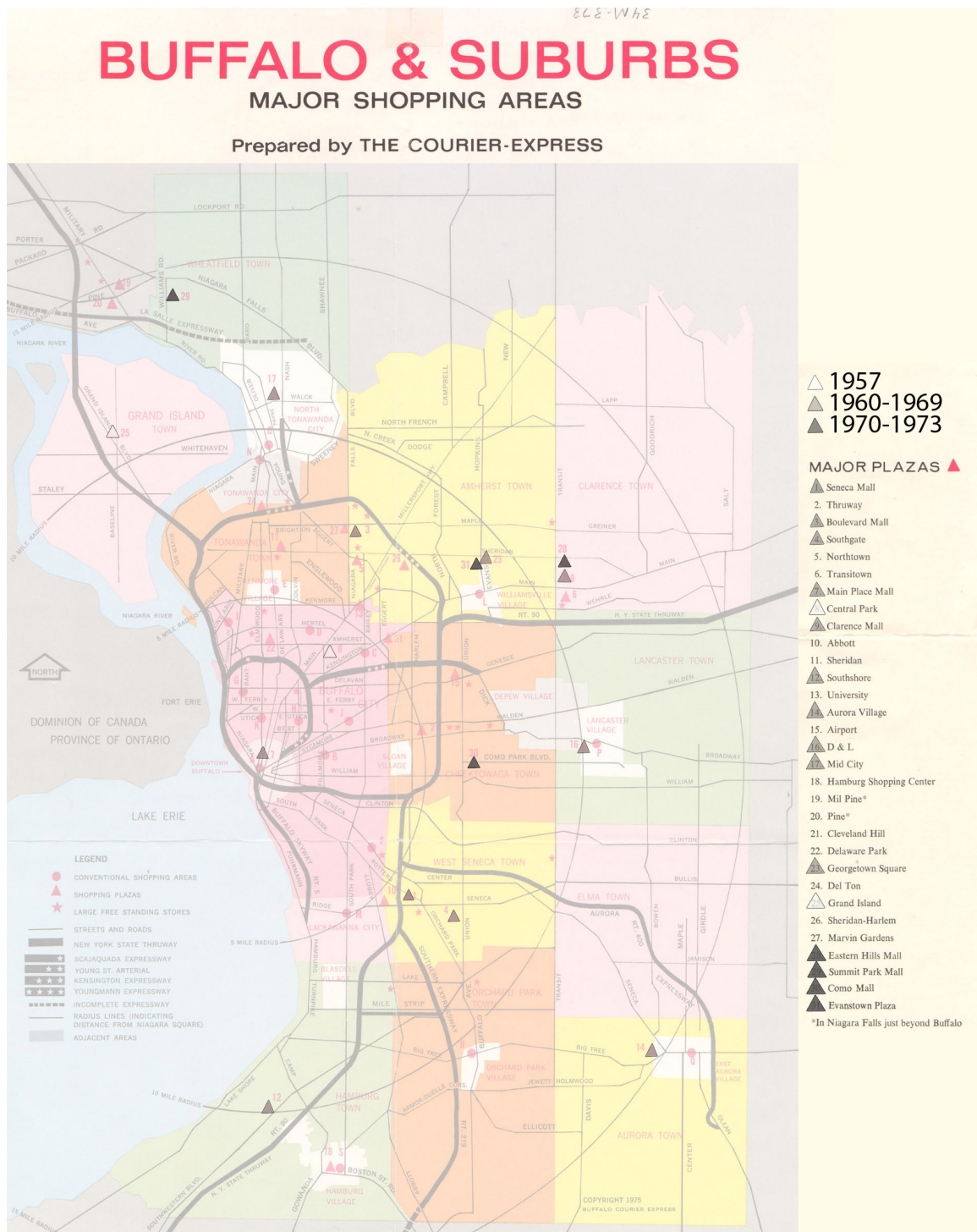


Fig. 26: New commercial plazas in the region, 1957-1975. Adapted from the *Buffalo & Suburbs Map* (Buffalo: Buffalo Courier Express, 1975).



Fig. 27: Members of the West Side Business and Taxpayers Association participate in a Blitz Cleanup. "Cleanup in the Rain," *Buffalo Evening News*, June 1, 1976. *Photographer Robert M. Metz. Reproduced with permission of the Buffalo News.*

FERRY	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975
60 not listed						
61-63 Greey's Pharmacy Carden's Tax Service accta West Side Times Royal Hair Shop hair drs McClure Bruce G dentist Stella Cosimo J barber Hubbard J Edw dentist Local No 55 UAW-CIO	61-63 Greey's Pharmacy Bellotti Joe D dentist Carden's Tax Service accta National Collection Bur West Side Times Grant Stamp Co marketing devices Royal Hair Shop hair drs McClure Bruce G dentist United Auto Workers of Am Local No 33 (CIO) Griffasi Jeanette P Mrs draperies	not listed Willower Jogn E drugs Bellotti Joseph D dentist West Side Times Royal Hair Shop beauty shop McClure Bruce G dentist	Vacant Bellotti Jos D dentist West Side Times Royal Hair Beauty Shop McClure Bruce G dentist	Vacant Bellotti Joseph D dentist McClure Bruce G dentist West Side Times weekly	not listed vacant West Side Times	
62 Harvey & Carey (br) side entrance Communications Workers of Am Equip Workers Bldg Div 63 (CIO) Brennan Dental Co dental laby not listed	Brennan Dental Co dental laby		Griffasi Drapery Shop	Vacant	Vacant	not listed
63 LaReau & Caul Shoes	LaReau & Caul Shoes Kordella Mary		Carden Tax System bkpg serv	Carden Thos acct Income Tax Training Center Inc LaReau & Caul shoes Winfield June Mrs	Income Tax Training Center Carden's Tax Service Public Acct Kane Card & Gift Shop	Carden's Tax Service acct Sew & Tell vacant
65 LaReau & Caul Shoes			LaReau & Caul Shoes Winfield June Mrs	Norban's self serv dept stores Weeks El C (not listed) Stearns Helen Mrs	D&K Stores Inc Discount Vacant	D & K Stores inc discount not listed
66 Norban Dress Shops (br)	Norban Dress Shops (br)	Norban's Self Serv Dept Stores	Norton Alf R			
67 Stevenson Jas D Jnr Prefontaine Florence Mrs	Swank Speaker Service radio repis Swank Geo					
69 San Cnrs Inc (br)	Lora Lee Shop women's clo	Lora Lee Shop women's clo	Lora Lee Specialty Shop clo		Lora Lee Specialty Shop women's apparel	Fashion Outlet clo shop
71 McAn Thom Inc (br) shoes	McAn Thom Inc (br) shoes	McAn Thom Inc (br) shoes	McAn Thom Shoe Stores (br)		Mc An Thom Shoe Stores	Mc An Thom Shoe Store (br) not listed
73 LaReau Arth J real est Ross Alex dentist Ross Wm E	LaReau Arth J real est Ross Alex dentist Ross Wm E		Bremer Chas J		Vacant	
(Fergu son)	(Fergu son)	(Fergu son)	Hendel Franklin H			
74 on) Fanny Farmer Candy Shops Inc	Crown Hosliery Shops	Crown Hosliery Shops	Crown Hosliery Shops (br)		Crown Hosliery Shops women's clo	Crown Hosliery Shops women's clos
75 not listed	not listed	not listed	McClure Anna Mrs	Stefano Sebastian J	Jackson Andrew	not listed
76 Apartments (lists 3)	not listed	not listed	Hughes Albert	Hughes Albert	Hughes Albert	Greenbaum Leslie M vacant
76			Hoffman Jacob	Hoffman Jacob	Hoffman Jacob	
78 Simon Eda S Mrs men's clo	Simon Eda S Mrs men's clo	Jaine's Youth Center clo	Jaine's Youth Center Inc clo	Root Ivan C artist Jaine's Youth Center Inc clo	Root Ivan C artist Jaine's Youth Center Inc childrens clo	vacant
79 Berlow Curtain Store	Berlow Curtain Store	Berlow Curtain Store	Berlow Curtain Store	Berlow Curtain Store	Berlow Curtain Store	Grab Bag The
ARNOLD						
80-86 Glenda 80 le Apts Glendale Apts (lists 6)	80-86 Glend ale Apts Glendale Apts (lists 6)	80- 86 Glen dale Aparr ment s Glendale Apts (lists 6)	Glendale Apts (lists all 6 tenants)	Glendale Apts (lists 6)	Glendale Apartments side entrance (lists all 6 tenants) Serv-All Health & Beauty Aids Inc genl hose	Glendale Apartments 1 Vacant (6 Apts 1-6)
81 Century Auto Supply	Century Auto Supply	Century Auto Supply	Century Auto Supply	Serv-All genl mds		Prescriptions Drugs
82-84 Wise Dress Shops 82 (br)	82-84 Wise Dress Shops (br)	Wise Dress Shops (br) Handgris Anthony confr Park Jas J jr Parkhurst Mayne Dickson Edw C Braun Carl	Simon's Men's & Boys Shop Inc Grant Confr Park Jas J Dickson Eliz	Simon's Men's Boys' Shop Inc Apartments	Jonathan Scott Simons Ltd men & boy shop Apartments	Merchandise Outlet Inc Apartments 1 Guercio Joseph J 2 Park Janet I Mrs 3 Peterson Jeffrey 4 Gauthier Ann S Mrs
85 Svenson SB & Son jwirs Apartments (lists 6)	Svenson SB & Son jwirs Apartments (lists 6)	Svenson SB & Son jwirs Apartments (lists 6)	Svenson SB & Son jwirs Apartments (lists 6)	Grant Conf Svenson SB & Son jwirs Apartments (lists all 6 tenants)	Grant the Confectionery Svenson SB & Son jwirs Apartments (lists all 6 tenants) J E A Variety Shop children & women's apparel Price John C	Dons Sandwich Hut & Restaurant Capri Jewelers Apartments 1 Vacant (6 Apts 1-6)
87 Rosenthal Macey mlnr Broden Peter Liberty Shoe Stores Inc (br) Bond Geo W restr	Rosenthal Macey corsetiere Broden Peter Liberty Shoe Stores Inc (br) Bond Geo W restr	Rovell's women's clo	Liberty Shoe Stores Inc (br) Bond Geo FW restr	Debbie's Infant of Prague ch gds Liberty Shoe Stores Inc (br) Bond Geo F restr	Price John C Liberty Shoe Stores Inc Bond's Tavern restr	Martin's Roofing & Siding Co Price John E Liberty Shoe Stores Inc Bond's Tavern restr
88 Father & Son Show Stores Inc (br)	Lieberman Frank podiatrist Gutman's women's clo Feuerstein Aaron I dentist	Lieberman Frank podiatrist Gutman's (br) women's clo Feuerstein Marvin E dentist	Lieberman Frank podiatrist Gutman's (br) women's clo Feuerstein Marvin E dentist	Gutman's (br) clo Feuerstein Marvin E dentist	Beneficial Finance Co of New York loans Gutman's Ltd women's clo Feuerstein Marvin E dentist	Vacant Gutman's Ltd women's clo Feuerstein Marvin E dentist
89 Tait Ralph L masseur Grant Beauty Shoppe Nigro Bart A phys	Ralabute Jos M lwyr Rizzo Chas A acct Dion Francis P Inc ofc sups Nikki-Mills alterations					
92 Bash David Inc women's furings Goldfarb Leo	Bash David Inc women's furings Caterina Eleanor Delinsky Josef	Bash Ladies & Children's Wear Inc Dolinks Jos	Bash Ladies & Children's Wear Inc Dolinks Jos	Dawson Edith W Bash Ladies & Children's Wear	York ladies apparel	York ladies apparel Vacant
93 Ken's Jewelers (br)	Ken's Jewelers (br)					
94 Schiff's Shoe Store	Schiff's Shoe Store	Schiff's Shoe Store	Schiff's Shoe Store	Schiff's Shoe Store (br)	Schiff's Shoe Store	Schiff's Shoe Store
95 Deibel Mervyn E hdw	Deibel Mervyn E hdw			(not listed)	(not listed)	Holly Discount Store
96 Mohican Markets Inc (br) gros	Mohican Markets Inc (br) gros					
97 Dion Francis P Inc ofc equip	Paige Pants Store Inc (br)					
98 Paige Pants Stores Inc (br) not listed	not listed			(not listed)	(not listed)	Jaine's Discount Outlet Western Regional Off-Track Betting Corp (Br)
100 Kresge SS Co 5c to \$1 Store	Kresge SS Co (br)	Kresge SS Co (br)	Kresge SS Co (br)	Kresge SS Co 5 & 10 Cent Store	Kresge SS Co 5 & 10 Cent Store	Erie County Savings Bank
101 Mayfair Store The women's clo	Erie County Savings Bank (br)	Erie County Savings Bank (br)	Rizzo Chas A public acct McIntire Demolition Inc bldg wreckers	Erie County Savings Bank (br) Rizzo Charles A acct	Erie County Savings Bank Rizzo Charles A acct	Erie County Savings Bank Sarles Sherwood podiatrist
BRECKENRI DGE					Sarles Sherwood podiatrist	

Table 2: Grant Street business continuity and turnover between West Ferry Street and Breckenridge, 1950-1975.

Living the West Side: Individual Mobility and Commercial Networks

In 1973, the second branch of Ricci Electronics opened at 1488 Hertel Avenue in North Buffalo. The store expanded the Ricci brothers' business from its Grant Street location, in operation since 1954. Explaining the decision to expand on Hertel Avenue, Tony Ricci shrugs and explains nonchalantly, "we followed the people."¹ Local understandings of the West Side often include references to the population shift that Ricci calls the "Italian migration." While the city of Buffalo at large experienced dramatic suburbanization before and immediately following World War II, the "decline" of the West Side is most associated with the exit of long time Italian American residents in the 1960s and 1970s.² Many Italian Americans moved to North Buffalo, a city neighborhood located three miles northeast of the Grant-Ferry area that boasted larger houses and larger lots, and wider streets. While they had a loyal clientele at the Grant Street store, the Ricci brothers viewed Hertel Avenue as an opportunity for future growth (**Fig. 33**).

Their experience offers different insight to the production of the West Side during the 1950s-1970s than the previous chapter. In contrast to the collective effort of the West Side Business Men's Association, which sought to attract mobile consumers to the West Side shopping area, individual business owners, like the Ricci brothers, dealt with the changing business climate through different means, utilizing their own mobility to take advantage of opportunities in other areas of the city. In doing so, they connected the West

¹ Tony Ricci, in conversation with author, 2012, Buffalo, New York.

² "Articles to Trace Huge Growth of City's Suburbs," *Buffalo Courier Express*, October 11, 1952, 15; Scheinin, "Melting Pot Neighborhood"; Felix, "Old West Side Had Flavor All Its Own"; Larter, "More Pleasant Memories."

Side to areas of commercial expansion, incorporating it into new networks across the metropolitan area.

This chapter focuses on three business owners who expanded their business footprints through store locations and customer base while retaining connections to the West Side. Like Ricci, Minnie Rotundo—who operated a laundrette on West Ferry Street—opened a new location in North Buffalo, while Paul Murphy—continuing his grandfather’s wallpaper and paint business on Grant Street—shifted to flooring and wholesale in order to diversify his sales base. Additionally, each of these storeowners maintained familial connections to the West Side, and those relationships intertwined commercial interests with broader life decisions and experiences. On the ground, each storeowner engaged different sections of the Grant-Ferry area, and their accounts of postwar change in the neighborhood reflect the context of the blocks surrounding their stores.

Examining the experiences and narratives of these three storeowners, this chapter shows that each person had more complicated relationships to the West Side than either staying or leaving and their individual productions of the neighborhood reflected these multifaceted relationships. Minnie, Tony, and Paul did not seek to remake the image of the entire area like the WSBMA or city planners but instead acted on behalf of their individual interests through practical decisions that intertwined with forces beyond their control. They used and conceptualized the West Side as part of their contemporary businesses, a site of family connections, an idealized past, and a victim of postwar decentralization and a globalizing economy. Rather than contest the forces that shaped

these contexts, they navigated within the coexisting realities to capitalize on opportunities.³

This chapter is more concerned with how Minnie, Paul and Tony produce the West Side through their actions and understandings of history and place than with the precision of dates and facts in their narratives.⁴ Their construction and use of the “socio-physical imaginary” of the West Side reflects the subjectivity of personal experience. For each person, the West Side consisted of a different combination of interests and discrete spaces. At times, Tony, Minnie and Paul’s images of the West Side are similar, but they also maintain unique explanations, rationales, and uses of the area.

This chapter shows that these individuals reinterpreted the neighborhood not only as the area itself changed but as their personal experience of and relationship to it changed as well. Through their lives, and various roles as business owners and residents, among others, they invoked different qualities and functions of the West Side. Borrowing Yi-Fu Tuan’s words, the West Side is a place, “a center of meaning constructed by experience.”⁵ Examining the individual production of neighborhood and the impact of mobility on neighborhood experience, this chapter shows that it was not only a place to and from which they traveled, but it was a conceptual reference point and part of their identity. They referred to and used it over time according to their changing needs and opportunities.

³ In Michel de Certeau’s distinction between strategy and tactic, individuals use tactics, “poaching” opportunities to maneuver within systems.

⁴ Ronald J. Grele, “Listen to Their Voices: Two Case Studies in the Interpretation of Oral History Interviews,” in *Envelopes of Sound: the Art of Oral History*, edited by Ronald J. Grele. (New York: Praeger, 1991), 212-241.

⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, “Place: An Experiential Perspective,” *Geographical Review* 65(2): 1975, 152.

One way to see the individual production of the West Side is by examining the business owners' rhetorical constructions of neighborhood identity. The way these storeowners talk about the neighborhood reflects their understanding of its dynamics and reproduces the idea of the West Side as an entity.⁶ Other scholars show the power of words to shape place identities, and linguistic anthropologist Gabriella Gahlia Modan argues that residents of Mt. Pleasant, a neighborhood in Washington, DC, construct neighborhood identity through informal conversations and public discourse. She shows that linguistic structure and themes in conversations, an online neighborhood forum, a grant application and a play frame the neighborhood through a series of associations and contrasts. For instance, residents identify their neighborhood in contrast to the suburbs, and "construct a moral geography that disparages the suburbs and delegitimizes some neighborhood residents' claims to neighborhood membership by characterizing them as suburban people."⁷ Minnie, Tony and Paul consistently contrast the West Side to other areas of the city through their associations and experiences.

As their routines changed over time, Minnie, Tony and Paul encountered and enacted the West Side through different daily life patterns and they required different functions of the neighborhood. Their experiences suggest, as others have found, that "the daily mobility practices associated with contemporary everyday life alter the social meaning of the neighborhood."⁸ While words articulate and reveal ideas about

⁶ Martin, "'Place-framing' as Place-Making"; Yi-Fu Tuan, "Language and the Making of Place: A Narrative-Descriptive Approach," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 81 (4), 1991: 684-696.

⁷ Modan, *Turf Wars*, 28.

⁸ Lucas Adam Griffith, "Structuring Neighborhood Space: An Investigation into the Production of Neighborhood Space as Planned, Practiced and Lived in Post-Industrial Norway," (PhD diss., University of Stavanger, Norway, 2013), 9.

neighborhoods, they are only one manner in which people understand places; other scholars have used the concept of mental mapping to understand how residents envision and make sense of their neighborhoods.⁹ They find that daily routines and personal characteristics such as age, gender and socio-economic status impact residents' sense of scale and the features they use to describe the neighborhood; in summary, "Individuals experience their neighborhoods based both on their position in the life course (by virtue of age, marital status, and family composition) and their position in the larger society (by virtue of income, education, employment, and ethnicity)."¹⁰ Griffith also found that residents with longer commutes to and from privileged the residential function of neighborhood and Jennings, Chan, and Coulton found that residents in higher density, mixed-use areas perceived smaller neighborhood areas. These studies suggest that experience and mobility shape perceptions of neighborhood function and scale.

The storeowners in this chapter enacted different values and developed different meaning from their experiences, showing that being a West Sider did not mean one thing. They also show that the West Side came to be used in the postwar decades by business owners in a variety of ways. Each person developed unique relationships to people and places in the neighborhood and negotiated influences within and outside of their control.

⁹ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960); Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Robert J. Chaskin "Perspectives on Neighborhood and Community: A Review of the Literature," *Social Service Review* 71, no. 4 (1997): 521-547; Zane M. Jennings, Tsui Chain, Claudia J. Coulton, "How Big Is My Neighborhood? Individual and Contextual Effects on Perception of Neighborhood Scale," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51 (1): 2013, 140-150; Nicole Nicotera, "Children and Their Neighborhoods: A Mixed Methods Approach to Understanding the Neighborhood Construct," (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2002).

¹⁰ Chaskin, "Perspectives on Neighborhood and Community," 539.

Their experiences complicate the question, “what is the West Side?” They show that it was not a singular, stable entity, and it functioned differently as they altered their relationships to the people and places therein. They used it as a primary front and backstage for business, a nostalgic remembrance of their lives, a familial place, and a site of investments, and they defined its meaning through these complex relationships while on the move.

This chapter evidences that the production of the neighborhood occurred not only on the streets and in the stores along Grant and West Ferry Streets, nor from City Hall looking down, but also as individuals moved across the city with reference to it, spatially and conceptually. It challenges the problematic conceptualization of neighborhood boundaries by showing that the West Side was not separate from other areas of the city. Through these mobile individuals, the West Side was part of commercial development patterns and personal networks across the city. It reminds us that in addition to collective campaigns for neighborhood identity, neighborhoods are also made by individuals with navigating broader structures through widespread social and economic connections.

The first two chapters illuminated productions of the West Side by city planners and the West Side Business Men’s Association, two place-based entities that reconceptualized the neighborhood by orienting it towards consumers and vying for a share of the metropolitan market. These efforts both reinforced a “contained” identity and invoked historic themes for future oriented plans. This chapter contributes to the goal of seeing the West Side as a product of multiple scales by contrasting the perspective of the previous two chapters through the consideration of individuals who operated with a more practical, functional, and in the moment mindset.

Becoming West Siders & Storeowners

While this chapter is primarily concerned with how these storeowners negotiated neighborhood change in the 1960s and 1970s, their earlier connections to the West Side offer broader perspectives of the complex relationships they had to the area. While Paul and Tony were born West Siders, Minnie moved there as an adult, and each of them experienced the neighborhood as more than a site for enterprise. Each person's business decisions are part of a broader life story and reflect how the West Side is part of each individual's identity.

Minnie, in her mid-90s when interviewed in 2012, recalls her surprise and excitement upon seeing the West Side for the first time. Raised in Hershey, Pennsylvania, she and her husband, Ben, moved to Buffalo during World War II for his job at General Motors. In 1946, while they lived in workers housing near the intersection of Delavan Avenue and Eggert Road, Minnie's sister called from Boston and told her to open a laundrette. Minnie liked the idea and set out to find a location to start her business. She knew she found her place when she walked through the West Side for the first time; "I'd never been to the West Side before ... Oh my gosh. Everyone said it was so horrible; it had a bad reputation. But when I got over there I loved it!"¹¹ Standing on a sidewalk lined with a dense streetscape of early twentieth century mixed-use buildings, she soaked in the vitality of people moving around, running errands, entering and exiting the doors of shops, offices and residences. Minnie fed off of the energy of that scene and elected to join the bustle: "I told my husband—the West Side—and he said, 'well, do what you

¹¹ Minnie Rotundo, interview by the author, April 24, 2012, Buffalo, New York.

want to do.’ That’s how it started.” They moved into the apartment above the storefront at 332 West Ferry Street, where she opened her laundrette, and they became West Siders **(Fig. 32)**.

Unlike this experience of choosing to move to the West Side as an adult, Tony and Paul were both born in the area. They grew up as “insiders” to the neighborhood and inherited family businesses there. Rather than such a distinct first experience of coming to the West Side, Tony and Paul place themselves within the neighborhood using family history and childhood experiences. Yet, they frame their experiences differently, situating the West Side within personal narratives of progress and commitment that frame their broader life stories.

Tony sketches a social geography of the West Side and relays his family’s move northward in the neighborhood as progress. He centers his youth in the house on Richmond Avenue, which evidenced his family’s achievement: “We lived on Massachusetts a long, long time ago and we moved to Richmond – Richmond is a long, long distance from there.”¹² His characterization of the distance between these areas is more symbolic than physical; it is less than half a mile between them, but the bigger lots and houses on Richmond conveyed the higher social status of residents there **(Fig. 34)**. Additionally, West Siders remember trick or treating on Richmond, where the “rich folks” lived.¹³ Tony’s framing of upward mobility continues through his discussions of the family business.

Paul also speaks of his connection to the West Side in terms of family history and geography, but in contrast to Tony’s emphasis on a social geography of upward mobility,

¹² Ricci, interview, 48:26.

¹³ Nick Bonafacio, interview by author, Buffalo, New York.

he casts the neighborhood as a stable center of his extended family. He traces that mooring to his grandfather, who immigrated from Italy at the age of nine or ten. After living on Baynes Street and Manchester Street, Paul's grandfather resided in South Buffalo for a short time, but returned to the West Side because "all of the family was here." Paul speaks about his aunts, uncles, and cousins on the West Side, and he further anchors his connection through vignettes of childhood experiences on the streets and in stores of the Grant-Ferry area. Joseph Cagiano, his maternal great grandfather, ran a bar called Joe's Grill located in a two-story building at West Ferry and Barton Streets, with the bar in front and two apartments above (**Fig. 35**). Paul's three great uncles worked there, and Paul remembers the bar as an early orientation to the neighborhood. Though they sold the building when he was 7 or 8, it still remained active in his family geography, as his cousins lived there for almost another decade.

Another childhood memory connects him to running errands on Grant Street. His maternal grandfather, who started the business that Paul now runs, gave him quarters to buy cigarettes from the machine at the Laundromat next door to G & L's original location at 250 Grant Street. At the time, cigarettes were 23 cents a pack, and the machine dispensed packs with two pennies taped to them. As a reward for his help, Paul took the extra pennies down the street to Jack's candy store for a couple pieces of candy.

These glimpses of personal connection to the West Side before operating businesses foreground the complexity of how these individuals experienced subsequent neighborhood change. Minnie, Tony and Paul were never just business owners on the West Side; the area was part of their identities through family history, memory, and

imagination. The business decisions that each person undertook in later decades are part of the same story that includes these other dimensions of their West Side attachments.

Additionally, the personal frames that emerge in these accounts of early connections to the West Side continue through the business histories and decision-making and perspectives of the neighborhood generally. Minnie lived and worked in same building, and that strong connection between her store and home persists. Tony operated as a mobile capitalist looking for growth and betterment. Paul remained rooted in place. As they responded to neighborhood, city and commercial changes, they incorporated new business connections within these frameworks of place making. They show that the West Side has tangible elements but is a flexible concept that they positioned relative to the rest of their experiences.

Business Histories

In addition to their varied and layered early connections to the West Side, the history of the established family businesses that Paul and Tony took over contextualizes how they navigated the enterprises once they were in charge. They both frame the history of their businesses in the same terms as they spoke about their childhoods. Tony describes his father making a series of advances to establish the business that Tony and his brothers later took over, while Paul explains his grandfather's business as serving the local community.

Tony explains the roots of the Ricci family business in his father's career change into the electronics business. Echoing the social and geographic mobility of his childhood homes, he details Phil's efforts as a progressive series of steps towards a legitimate,

prosperous business in a good area. He worked in a factory but “always tinkered” in the basement on radios and other appliances. Becoming more proficient, he started a business from his front porch fixing his neighbors’ appliances. Eventually, around 1941, he formalized the operation in a storefront at 323 Connecticut Street. Upon Phil’s death at the age of 48, his wife and sons carried on the business. In 1954, they opened a storefront in a prominent four-story building at the corner of Grant and Potomac Streets. Through this narrative, Tony sets the precedent of the business as moving and growing; and the West Side as the arena for this forward progress.

Paul took over a business started by his maternal grandfather, and he emphasizes the rootedness of the business. Marty Cagiano started G & L Wallpaper and Paint at 250 Grant Street in 1943.¹⁴ Thirteen years later, when a fire spread from the back house on the lot to the main commercial building, he decided to rebuild down the street rather than repair. He built a one-story concrete block building with large storefront windows, and Paul still operates from that location today. Paul started working there regularly during college in the early 1970s because his mother ran the store alone after his grandfather died in 1966 and his father died in 1970. Marty’s decision to keep the business on Grant Street set the precedent of local loyalty and contributing to the area.

In recounting these business histories, Tony and Paul convey the same themes as they did in their overviews of growing up on the West Side. While perhaps not entirely surprising, as these business histories are part of their childhood experiences, it reinforces the importance of business context to the decisions that each person made when the neighborhood commercial climate weakened. These same themes continue through

¹⁴ Paul Murphy, in discussion with the author, March 27, 2012, Buffalo, New York.

explanations of their own business decisions, setting the business history and precedent beyond Tony and Paul's own actions.

Change in the Grant-Ferry Area & Creating Business Networks

Minnie, Tony and Paul each talk about a prosperous business and bustling commercial area of the 1950s followed by a decline in commercial activity coincidental to the exit of long time residents starting in the late 1960s. While city planners were optimistic about the future of the Grant-Ferry shopping area, particularly in the 1964 plan, the area was not immune to the impacts of suburbanization and commercial competition. Like stakeholders in shopping districts around the city, and parallel to the experience of neighborhood shopping areas in many rust belt cities, owners in the Grant-Ferry area faced the reality that the changing city poised challenges to maintaining the prosperous status quo. The number of stores on Grant and Ferry Streets declined in each five-year interval between 1950 and 1975 (**Table 2**). In 1964, city planners flagged vast expanses of commercial corridors along major streets—such as Main Street, Genesee Street and Broadway—and in neighborhoods like Jefferson, Baily-Kensington and Lovejoy for monitoring, suggesting that they would decline without proactive measures.¹⁵ This survey included part of Grant Street, at Auburn, in this “potential change” category and identified the areas at Grant and Ferry Streets for “positive change,” namely, the construction of the West Side Plaza. Over a decade later, authors of the 1978 West Buffalo Plan continued the optimism, called the Grant-Ferry area one of the most

¹⁵ See map of “Potential Change” in Chapter 1 (**Fig. 13**).

promising areas for commercial revitalization in the city.¹⁶ Yet, they also observed that the quality of the store offerings and maintenance had declined. The density of stores in the area also decreased over these decades.

Minnie, Tony and Paul operated stores in different zones of the Grant-Ferry area, and they experienced the broad trends of neighborhood change through the unique context of their stores. The varied experience of demolished sites, vacant buildings, and varying commercial turnover contrasts the WSBMA and city planning images of a common image or statistic for entire area.

Ricci's, at the southwest corner of Grant and Potomac, was on the northern edge of the commercial area on Grant Street. A few commercial buildings clustered around the intersection, but the majority of the nearby Grant Street blocks was residential. The struggle to maintain a viable business there may have exemplified the failed "tail end" argument asserted in the West Buffalo Study, which claimed that the isolated ends of a commercial area were more susceptible to commercial decline.¹⁷ However, Chi-Chi's Hardware, kitty-corner from Ricci's, remains in business today.¹⁸ It expanded into neighboring storefronts and is one of the longest standing businesses on Grant Street. As one of the few commercial buildings, Ricci's influenced the whole intersections. Tony asserts the "we were stability...when we left, it fell apart...Go ask Ch-Chi."

Murphy is located between Lafayette and Auburn, a block lined with commercial buildings. This section of the street did not see much demolition, and much of its physical

¹⁶ Stuart Alexander and Associates, *West Buffalo Analysis*, 1978. See Chapter 1 for more discussion. Note that the suggestions included limiting the Grant-Ferry area to Auchinvole, which is south of Auburn.

¹⁷ Stuart Alexander and Associates, *West Buffalo Analysis*, 1978, 8.

¹⁸ Sam "Chi-Chi" died in 2013, but the business is still open during the completion of this project in September 2014.

fabric remains intact. Paul talks about the turnover of neighboring businesses using the buildings as a guide. Facing north outside of his store:

At the very corner...it was a restaurant called the Grant-ette. Then it closed and Russ' Bakery was in there for a number of years. See that archway next to it? That used to be a marquee and that was an entrance. If you look on Lafayette there's a church; that was one of the entrances to the church...and then for a while it was a little factory or something and they made these really cool model airplanes and rockets...

He turns to the south and continues, recalling what each storefront once was:

That's been a barbershop forever. There was a beauty shop there...[that] was Irv's Inn [a tavern], and next to it was the Grace Marie Shop (they had really nice high end children's clothes). Next to it two buildings [that were]...Cala's Television [and] Rich insurance company. I think they are still in business on Niagara Falls Boulevard...

After several more buildings, he concludes, "That's it for this block." This reflects his position of staying in place and watching change around him. He also holds residents accountable for neglecting to maintain the area: "people blame absentee landlords, but absentee landlords don't break the windows, the absentee landlords don't throw garbage on the sidewalk."

Rotundo's Laundry on West Ferry Street is across from the two blocks that saw most demolition between 1950 and 1980. Dozens of commercial and residential buildings were replaced by the West Side Plaza and other single story commercial buildings set back in vast parking lots. Minnie conveys this sense of loss when talking about the West

Side: “Across the street [there was] the library, the theater, then we had a candy store. We had so many stores... Now it’s a big vacant lot.”

The storeowners’ perspectives show that the immediate context of their stores shaped their view of neighborhood change. Their stores and the proximate blocks were the experience of the “West Side,” and these nodes are not generalizable to the entire Grant-Ferry or West Side areas. In subsequent years, when these storeowners created broader networks through their business, their stores—these discrete spaces—facilitated connections to the neighborhood. The expanded businesses, however, did not directly transform the larger West Side.

Business Decisions

Responding to perceptions of neighborhood change, market conditions and commercial development trends, each storeowner expanded the reach of their business and connected the West Side to new networks across the city. However, this common outcome resulted from individual action, not a coordinated effort. Unlike the WSBMA, they did not set out to promote a specific view of the West Side; each person acted according to the particularities of their business type and personality. Minnie’s connection between her Main Street store and the West Ferry location remained less visible and informal, while the Ricci’s operated three branches of the same enterprise, and Paul extended his business by seeking broader patronage rather than occupying a permanent presence beyond the West Side. In addition, the relationships and interests that they maintained beyond their enterprises embedded their business decisions within more complicated attachments to the West Side.

As the sole proprietor, Minnie had the freedom to make decisions for herself. When the owner of a laundrette on Main Street decided to leave his business around 1960, Minnie took the opportunity to take over that location while her son, Gary, took over her West Ferry store. Initially, she continued to reside on West Ferry Street and she assisted Gary there while she operated on Main Street. In 1965, the owner of the Main Street building wanted to sell, but Minnie preferred to buy a corner building down the street, at 3218 Main Street, where she continues to run the College Laundry Shop today, in 2014. When she purchased the building, it was a grocery store, but she liked the “better view” compared to the other laundrette. She moved her equipment, renovated the space to accommodate women entering and exiting with carts, and told her husband, “no more moving!” When Gary transitioned from a laundrette to a dry-cleaning service, Minnie and Ben could no longer reside there, and in 1986 they bought a house at 24 Merrimac Street, three houses down from the Main Street laundrette. Taking advantage of Gary’s new service, Minnie began to use her store as an intake for dry-cleaning, and the arrangement continues to this day.

The West Ferry store became an invisible part of the Main Street business that still functions today. This shift in function also increased the scope of her patronage. While her laundrette business relied upon proximity, catering to renters in the area, the dry cleaning extended her patronage by offering a service that homeowners do not have either. The West Ferry store also benefits from this factor; Minnie notes that her son Gary does “very well,” and most of his customers live in the Elmwood Village. The connection between the stores remains informal, as they are independently owned businesses rather than branches.

Like Minnie, Tony Ricci and his brothers expanded the footprint of their businesses. They opened two additional stores beyond Grant Street, creating a network of three locations. The partnership among the brothers enabled them to branch out while retaining control of the enterprise. Each of them specialized in a different area of the business such as marketing, buying, and customer service. After opening the Hertel location, the Riccis opened a third store location at 926 Niagara Falls Boulevard in the late 1970s. Niagara Falls Boulevard and Transit Road, which Tony calls “the big ones,” developed into major commercial thoroughfares as chain stores and big box enterprises such as Best Buy located there.¹⁹

When he and his brothers operated three store locations simultaneously, each store had a specific role. Tony talks about the interactions between them as a network of symbiotic nodes, which allowed the family to keep up with trends in commercial development. “We worked together,” he recalls, explaining that the Boulevard location would take in repairs but that Grant Street had the service station. The company had a delivery service, and the delivery crew was based on Hertel. This formalized connection of branch locations was the most efficient use of resources.

Their connection between locations was similar to Minnie’s, but their product was more vulnerable to consumer habits and a globalizing marketplace. The stores offered consumer goods and an extensive service and repair department. In a market of increasingly mass produced “throw away” products, service became obsolete because people bought replacements rather than fixing what they already owned. While this could benefit a seller, Tony explains that increased competition from large chain businesses left

¹⁹ See also Chapter 2 map of commercial development (**Figs 24, 29**) and Dibble, “Our Sprawling Malls.”

Ricci's at a disadvantage for two primary reasons. First, big companies offered lower prices because of they bought in large quantities, and second, they could afford to "lose money" at one store location if it was offset by another one. Both practices left Ricci's at a disadvantage. Additionally, as consumer habits shifted towards comparison shopping for low prices and the customer loyalty diminished, the "generational thing" left Ricci's struggling to compete. While they had the mobility to establish new store locations in the growing commercial areas of the city, location was not everything; the Ricci brothers could not compete with national chain stores. The brothers closed their Grant Street location in 1981. Tony rented it and then boarded it up in the early 2000s. By 2012, they had closed all of their stores and sold all of the buildings.

In contrast to both Minnie and Tony, Paul remained exclusively in his Grant Street store and responded to changing market conditions in place. As wallpaper became a do-it-yourself job with innovations such as self-adhesive backing and perforated edges, he grew the flooring portion of the business into his enterprise's primary function.²⁰ Additionally, as the market area of the business changed, and he could no longer rely solely on the surrounding blocks to support the enterprise, he began wholesale projects such as apartment buildings rather than relying solely on individual homeowners. By remaining in the same store, Paul did not incur the cost of maintaining another store location, moving to a different neighborhood, or hiring additional workers. Paul worked with the WSBMA in the 1970s, but the organization did not dictate his business strategy.

²⁰ It appears that the flooring section of the business began in 1956: "G&L Wallpaper and Paint Co., announced the opening of its new floor covering annex..." See "G&L Wallpaper Opens New Store At 248 Grant St.," *WST*, April 26, 1956, 1.

Like Tony, he took over a family business, but more akin to Minnie, he was its sole operator. In addition, his industry operated vastly differently than electronics or laundry services. Home improvement projects are large investments and occur less frequently than buying a radio or washings one's clothes. "My business was probably one of the last to feel the effect because—how often do you wallpaper or repaint or put a new floor in?" His business also differed from the other two because it centered on installation and service in customers' homes or properties. The store provided a meeting place and showroom for selection, but the majority of the property was used for storage. As a result of these factors, Paul stayed on Grant Street, where the building was likely almost paid off.²¹

In using their mobility to promote business, these storeowners created and activated networks that extended the West Side beyond the Grant-Ferry area. Unlike the WSBMA, who constructed an image of the West Side as a unified place in order to attract visiting consumers, these storeowners enacted the connections themselves, opening the West Side into the city through their own actions. As a result, the West Side functioned within ongoing networks across the city. For instance, the Ricci's network of stores inscribed their Grant Street location into the forefront of commercial development in the city as it coordinated with Hertel Avenue and Niagara Falls Boulevard sites. Consumers played a critical role in sustaining all three businesses, and thereby the connections to the West Side, but not exclusively by shopping on the ground in the Grant-Ferry area. The storeowners' actions not only changed their business structure but also implicated the West Side as a product of metropolitan networks.

²¹ Paul did not say this, but the building was constructed in 1956. If the building was paid off, he only needed to cover taxes.

In addition to creating spatial connections between West Side locations and other areas, these business decisions also required different functions of the West Side. While Grant Street remained Paul's primary store, it became more of a destination for customers looking for a good deal rather than the convenience of proximity. Before cars predominated, "You made your living in a couple of square blocks."

For Minnie and Tony, the West Side became a back-stage area, unseen to most patrons. Minnie's dry cleaning customers may not know that their clothes are driven across town to West Ferry Street, but they take advantage of her notoriously low prices. For Tony, the West Side location allowed a differentiated customer base, as it primarily served longtime customers who returned because of their familiarity with the store, and it provided space for a crew of six full time workers in the service center. Appliances dropped off for repair at any of the store locations came to Grant Street. By 1980, however, as the customer base and service needs deteriorated, it was no longer profitable to operate in this manner.

These individual business decisions created networks across the city and implicated West Side in different ways, showing that the neighborhood was not contained by boundaries, but participated in networks across the city. Their actions show that West Side was not simply "left behind" by commercial development, but was part of the growing commercial landscape.

Other Networks

While these businesses compose a critical component of each person's life, the West Side held more than commercial interest to them and other arenas of their lives

extended beyond both the West Side and the city of Buffalo. In addition to family ties on the West Side, each person talks about strong social connections. Minnie's son, Tony's aunt and mother, and Paul's extended family live in the area. Minnie raised her children there, and she enjoyed getting to know other storeowners. She laments the decrease in independent stores: "You had more of a relationship with the owners because they were there. You got to know the man at the drug store, the bakery, the dress shop. You got to know everyone." Tony and Paul knew other West Siders from growing up there. They had friends from school, family connections and other acquaintances. They also knew many storeowners from their long-term experiences.

Minnie and Tony also had real estate interests beyond their stores. Minnie had rental properties on the West Side that she continued to rent even after she moved to North Buffalo. She sold them because of the upkeep they required and she felt that tenants did not care for them: "when the landlord's away..." Tony acquired two apartment buildings on Bidwell Parkway, the first in 1968, in one of the most desirable areas of Elmwood Village. He still operates these and he credits them with supplementing his Ricci's Electronics income: "they saved me." After trying to live in Amherst for a short time—"I couldn't live there, I hated it... You go out there and what do you do?"—he returned to the city and still lives on Bidwell.

In addition to these layered connections to the West Side, each person created broad frames of reference through links beyond the neighborhood and the city of Buffalo. Minnie and Ben bought a vacation home in Angola, where she enjoys her summer weekends, "that's my prize." Tony attended Michigan State for two years, owned a hotel in Ohio and had a house in Florida for thirty years.

Extended family geographies, in particular, composed broad networks of experience for each of these storeowners. Minnie and Ben took their children to visit her parents in Hershey, Pennsylvania, where she grew up. Her parents immigrated from Italy, her husband grew up several hours away, past Watertown, in upstate New York, and both of her sisters lived in Boston. Tony's mom is from Akron, Ohio, and he visited his grandparents, aunts and uncles there each summer. He also had uncles in Las Vegas and Detroit, and his brothers lived in Eggerton, Tonawanda and Amherst. Paul's mother moved to Buffalo from Ohio, and his uncle's family relocated to Cleveland when the assembly plant where he worked moved there from Buffalo. He also had cousins in Lancaster, which he describes as "very antiseptic, very white," and Lackawanna, where his cousin and her Spanish husband ran a poultry store with live chickens.

These connections show that Minnie, Tony and Paul's understandings of the West Side were never circumscribed to the neighborhood alone. They situated the neighborhood in the context of these other relationships and spatial awareness. Moving into and around other areas of the city was not a radical break in their experiences because they were always mobile beings, West Siders even while they visited family in Pennsylvania and Ohio or worked in North Buffalo.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that the West Side was not only re-made by place-based groups that reified the image of the neighborhood as a singular entity; it was also incorporated into networks across the city by mobile individuals with broad reaching connections. These storeowners represent the micro-scale construction and use of the

neighborhood and they enacted a multiplicity of neighborhood identities according to their own experiences and values. Unlike the WSBMA, they did not act on behalf of a collective or an obligation to place, nor did they attempt to galvanize a singular image of the West Side. While their actions unfolded at the same time as the city planning and WSBMA initiatives, these storeowners did not conform to or contest those efforts. Thus the attempts of the WSBMA to market the West Side as a unified shopping district in Chapter 2 do not fully capture the way that the Grant-Ferry area was incorporated into the metropolitan marketplace during the postwar decades. The neighborhood was not only fortified conceptually as a competitive unit set in contrast to commercial development outside of the city, but it was also part of that decentralization process as individuals grew their West Side based businesses with outlying locations.

Additionally, this chapter reminds us that the neighborhood consisted of more than only commercial interests. To Minnie, Tony, and Paul, the West Side held meaning beyond their enterprises, and their familial ties in particular were a source of personal identity. The next chapter further illuminates the social significance of the West Side by examining the collective imaginary of the neighborhood as a center of Italian American community in the city. Yet the function of the neighborhood's social meaning differed. The business owners in this chapter grappled with multiple, coexisting identities of the West Side in their daily lives; Tony, Minnie, and Paul did not leave the neighborhood, but rather continued to use it in new ways, layering identities and keeping the past present through the continuity of personal experience. By contrast, the Italian American production of an abstract, past-oriented "old neighborhood" in the following chapter

mediated the tension of population dispersal by allowing Italian Americans to disengage with contemporary “decline” while preserving the myth of a sacred, collective past.

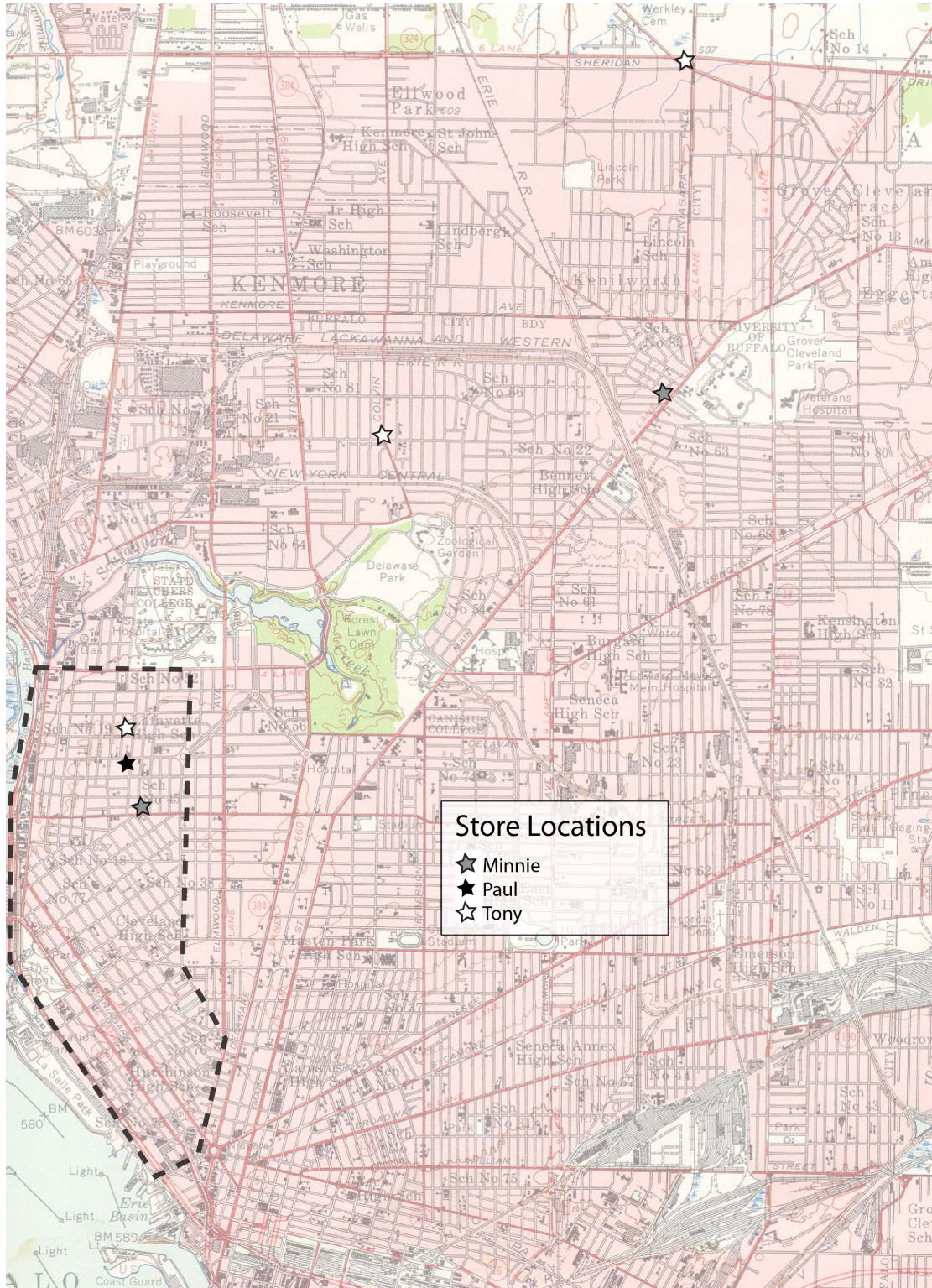


Fig. 28: Minnie, Paul, and Tony’s store locations.



Fig. 29: Minnie's store locations and home.



Fig. 30: Ricci's Electronics locations.



Fig. 31: Tony Ricci's references on the West Side.



Fig. 32: Paul Murphy store locations and West Side references.

Leaving the West Side: Imagining the Old Neighborhood to Preserve the Past, 1952-1975

The experiences of the storeowners in Chapter 3 illuminate the production of the West Side through personal networks that extended across the city. This chapter takes up the theme of mobility that Minnie, Paul and Tony represented on an individual scale and extends it to the widespread mobility of Italian Americans in the region. Additionally, it further departs from the commercial themes of first three chapters to show that the West Side was also a cultural artifact that continued to be salient for Italian American collective identity even after the center of Italian American community shifted beyond the city.

As people moved from the West Side, they grappled with personal connections to the neighborhood and perceptions of its decline by using nostalgia as a framework for preserving the past from contemporary change. Former residents evidence this nostalgic production of the neighborhood in the 1960s through newspaper editorials, and the Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York (FIASWNY) performed a similar narrative in its Columbus Day celebrations. The FIASWNY event locations in 1952 and 1969 used the symbolic geography of the city to promote its goals of collective identity, but as Italian Americans moved out of the West Side and the neighborhood became associated with urban challenges such as vacant and boarded up properties, it was less suitable for their purposes. Instead, the organization moved events to an historic church downtown and a suburban banquet hall, promoting a more general Italian American collective identity based on upward mobility and implicating the West Side as an abstract reference point for how far Italian Americans had come. This generalized,

nostalgic image of the West Side created and preserved the “old neighborhood” and perpetuated it as a center of collective identity as the Federation disengaged from the physical place and its contemporary issues.

The West Side – A Shared Point of Italian American Collective Memory

Former West Side resident Jean Felix penned articles in 1964 and 1967 in which she recalled fond memories of her childhood in the neighborhood. She offers specific people and places as glimpses into her experiences, for instance the shoemaker she passed on the walk to school, the traveling fish man who pushed his cart by her house on Friday nights and her Italian-speaking grandparents—“they were the true West Side.”¹ Felix frames these discrete depictions of the neighborhood with a more abstract notion of place identity by using memory to transcend her distance from them:

The West Side is not really a place—it’s a feeling, an atmosphere that goes beyond time and image. The people of the West Side may become integrated, lose their unique Italian flavor, but, for me, the West Side will always be an integral part of my life.²

Felix maintained a sentimental relationship to the West Side after she moved away and nostalgia preserved her view of the neighborhood. Her latter article more explicitly described the loss that she associated with the contemporary West Side in contrast to her memory of an ideal neighborhood:

¹ Jean Felix, “Childhood Memories of the West Side,” *Buffalo Evening News*, February 15, 1964.

² *Ibid.*

The modern West Side is different now and the old houses have lost their ageless character, many have been destroyed by progress...In the boarded up houses with broken windows I see the remnants of a time, an era and a tinge of sadness hangs over the streets as if they can't quite believe that they are no more, that they are the leftover of a way of life, a phase of history that marks the passing of the Italian immigrants who came over here...³

In the face of change on the streets of the West Side, an imagined geography of nostalgia offered a mode of holding onto the past: "I know that it is different, and yet, in my mind, it stays the same."⁴ Claire Hill Larter echoed this stabilizing force of memory in a response to Felix's first article: "There never was a street like Grant St. How I loved to go there to the coffee store...I can still smell the wonderful aroma... The West Side was truly a splendid place for many, a long time ago!"⁵ Each of these women constructed the West Side of the past as a separate entity than the contemporary neighborhood. They defined and upheld the bygone era of Italian families and traditions as the "true" West Side. Distinguishing between a real past and a present in which "leftover" traces survive juxtaposed the imagined production of the neighborhood, its social significance, with its physical existence.

While the physical remnants of the past remained in place, the West Side of memory was transferable and shared. The West Side of memory offered solace to former

³ Jean Felix, "Buffalo's Old West Side Had Flavor All Its Own," *Buffalo Evening News*, December 2, 1967.

⁴ Felix, "Childhood Memories of the West Side."

⁵ Claire Hill Larter, "More Pleasant Memories of Buffalo's West Side," *Buffalo Evening News*, February 15, 1964.

West Siders as they grappled with transitions of upward mobility and moving out of the old neighborhood while maintaining strong affections for the past. The imagined “old neighborhood” became a shared idea through which this uncertainty was mollified by both preserving the sacredness of the past and recognizing the necessity of leaving it behind. Felix further illuminated the remembered West Side as a mediator of these sentiments:

We move away now, we young ones and we intermarry...we are not ashamed of our heritage, just moving away from it, submerging it in hot dogs and hamburgers instead of spaghetti... And, sometimes, late at night, as I sit quietly, I can still see the lilacs in my grandmother’s small garden or hear the strains of the tarantella and it is then that I know that the West Side will always be there, no matter what.

Felix and Larter were not alone in conjuring an image of the old West Side as a way of dealing with their growing distance from it. It became a shared site for remembering as other people and organizations moved to other areas of the city.⁶ Through the collective image and memory of the West Side of the past, the neighborhood remained a center and producer of Italian American community even after people moved away.

Seven years after Felix and Larter’s first editorials, a reporter for the *Buffalo Evening News* reiterated their observations of rupture between the West Side and its former residents. He declared the “Italian-American colony” a place of the past: “Buffalo’s once visible Italian-American colony lives today mainly in the hearts and memories of its members. It has no teeming neighborhood. It has no business district. It

⁶ For instance, the Romulus Club, an organization started on the West Side in the 1930s, moved to Kenmore in 1969.

has no mother church.”⁷ The statement implies an Italian American community associated with the West Side, and suggests that as the community dispersed spatially, its communal sense of identity lost its tangible place in the city. Remembering, and in doing so, constructing, the West Side as the “old neighborhood” provided a new means of forging collective identity.

By 1975, however, the West Side reappeared as an origin of Italian American community in the city. A special edition of *Ethos*, a University of Buffalo publication, presented the neighborhood as a quintessential site for illuminating the Italian American experience in Buffalo. Guercio’s Market, located at 250 Grant Street, graced its cover, exemplifying selective sites that portrayed the past:

‘Little Italy’ is not very evident to the casual observer; indeed much of its physical presence had disappeared with old age, ‘progress,’ and further migration. But the spirit of the thousands of immigrants...who lived there is still very much with us in the 1970s.⁸

While not tangible in the same way as firsthand experiences in the past, the idea of the West Side as the “old neighborhood” was real, and it provided a common ground for collective identity. It also served as an intermediary, connecting progress and loss in the same narrative.

As they transitioned to new lifestyles in a transforming city and saw changes on the West Side, former residents and their offspring produced an Italian imaginary of the West Side as the “old neighborhood” that preserved an abstracted version of the past

⁷ Lee Coppola, “The Italian Community—Part II,” *Buffalo Evening News*, Saturday February 12, 1972, B6.

⁸ Editor, “Room for Comment,” in “The Italian-Americans in Buffalo,” special issue, *Ethos* 9, no. 3 (1975): 4.

while accommodating the positive associations of assimilation. The Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York enacted this past-centered construction of the neighborhood through its Columbus Day celebrations in 1952 and 1969. In each year, it used the symbolic geography of the city to align itself with “power stations,” promoting itself and the Italian American community for which it stood as a reputable group.⁹ In 1952, when Italians in Buffalo still faced discrimination, it demanded access to mainstream society by moving from the West Side into the civic heart of the city. Then, in 1969, after political and economic achievements placed it within the mainstream, it reinforced its ascension into mainstream society by selecting downtown and suburban sites. The West Side became a place of the past as this practice of a holiday merging Italian and American myths left the neighborhood for sites that catered to its suburban members. The West Side as the “old neighborhood” balanced the FIASWNY goal of promoting Italian Americans in the region and encouraging upward mobility with recognizing the past.¹⁰

The construction of the “old neighborhood” as separate from the contemporary West Side kept the past alive, but not for the sake of reliving it. Similar to second generation Jewish immigrants in New York City, who reinvented the Lower East Side as

⁹ Joseph Sciorra, “‘We Go Where The Italians Live’: Religious Processions as Ethnic and Territorial Markers in a Multi-ethnic Brooklyn Neighborhood,” in *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape*, edited by Robert Orsi, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, 328.

¹⁰ This resonates with the Lila Corwin Berman’s argument that Jews in Detroit dealt with the ambiguity of leaving the city by shifting from localized efforts towards “more geographically remote legislative and policy-oriented” activism. This pattern of abstracted, “remote urbanism,” resonates with the abstraction of the West Side as the “old neighborhood,” which mediated historical significance with the FIAS desire to distance from contemporary issues. See “Jewish Urban Politics in the City and Beyond,” *Journal of American History* 99 no., 2 (2012): 492-519.

a cultural construct that “reflected the extent of Jewish progress,” Italian Americans in Buffalo constructed the West Side as an imagined geography that respected the past not because they “longed for a return to the immigrant world but because they were moving beyond it.”¹¹ Rather than defend the neighborhood from new residents on the ground, they left it while also carrying it with them, reproducing the West Side as an imagined place that fostered a continued imagined community.

Columbus Day, 1952 & 1969 – The West Side Becomes the Old Neighborhood

“Prominent Buffalonians of Italian descent took part in a wreath-laying ceremony at the statue of Christopher Columbus today in observance of Columbus Day.”¹² This caption appeared in the *Buffalo Evening News* on October 12, 1968 below the image of three white haired men standing in front of the Columbus statue and beside a large wreath supported on a stand (**Fig. 36**). The figure of Columbus rises behind the men, his feet above their heads, mounted atop a granite base. The “prominent” men— Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York (FIASWNY) honorary chairman James F. Angello, Buffalo Mayor Frank Sedita, and, City Judge Earnest L. Colucci—frame the inscription of Columbus’ name behind them.

The image is cropped to the figures of the men and the statue, eluding contextual cues to indicate the location of the site two blocks from City Hall, in a triangle formed by the Niagara, Franklin and West Eagle Streets. The FIASWNY gifted the statue to the City

¹¹ Beth Wenger, “Memory as Identity,” *American Jewish History* 85, no. 1 (1997): 4.

¹² “Buffalo to Move Statue of Columbus to City Hall,” *Buffalo Evening News*, October 12, 1968, Local News A3.

at this location in 1952. During the 1968 ceremony, Mayor Sedita informed the crowd that the statue was slated for relocation in order to accommodate city development plans downtown. “And I think we’ll put it across from Johnny Green’s,” he said, using an Anglicized reference to the statue of Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi located next to City Hall. Redirecting his comments to the celebration at hand, Sedita continued, “Thank God [Columbus] decided to come here... And thank God our fathers decided to take the banana boat here.” His playful delivery of the relocation news and acknowledgment of immigrant forefathers communicated more than his genial personality. As the city’s first Italian American mayor, Sedita was “Erie County’s most well-known man of Italy,” and he embodied the pinnacle of Italian American ascension into Buffalo’s social, political and economic mainstream after decades of discrimination.¹³ His words reflected mobility on two fronts: the cultural assimilation of generations associated with social mobility and his authority over the physical landscape of the city, in which the monument of the Italian figure impeded visions for progress.

The Columbus Day celebrations in 1952 were more solemn. At that time, Italian Americans in Buffalo were still forging a place in mainstream society and the FIASWNY reflected that goal in its Columbus Day celebrations. The celebrations brought Italian Americans from the West Side into the civic heart of city, enacting a claim to the public sphere. In 1968 and 1969, event locations composed a more abstracted, symbolic and pan-Italian-Buffalonian identity, reaching from center of the city out to suburban Cheektowaga. In both years, the Columbus Day celebrations fostered more than a collective identity among Italian Americans in the city, they also aligned the FIASWNY

¹³ Coppola, “The Italian Community—Part II.”

with “power stations” of the city as a means for asserting Italian American parity in the region’s political and economic arenas.¹⁴

This shifting relationship to urban space emerged from an identity-based group without binding ties to particular sites in the city. Rather, the FIASWNY moved locations as needed to construct the image most suited to its goals of promoting Italian American identity in the region. In doing so, the celebrations implicate the West Side in different narratives of a broader story of Italian Americans in Western New York. In 1952, the West Side was actively connected to downtown and the symbolic rise of Italian Americans, but in 1969 it became abstracted into the place that Italians left behind in order to become mainstream Buffalonians. In each year, the rhetoric of the events highlights Christopher Columbus as a role model for all Americans, but the FIAS actions, through the event locations, provide another source of evidence for interpreting the function of the festivities. Their performance of the celebrations enacted a conceptual framework of the West Side as they distanced themselves from it.

The rest of this chapter centers on the production of the West Side as the “old neighborhood,” contributing a fourth layer of West Side identity between 1950 and 1980 to this study of the neighborhood as a site of overlapping social and spatial geographies. The social meaning and the myth produced by the characters in this chapter as they distanced themselves from the contemporary events on the West Side exhibits the mobility of the storeowners in the previous chapter while also acting with the collective authority of the West Side Business Men’s Association in Chapter 2. The shared concept of the “old neighborhood” created a past in order to go forward. Understandings of

¹⁴ Sciorra, “We Go Where The Italians Live,” 328.

postwar neighborhood change should recognize the powerful productions of collective memory that connected individuals and organizations across the city in reference to a common place.

The analysis of the Columbus Day celebrations in Buffalo, sponsored by the Federation of Italian American Societies of Western New York, joins an extensive scholarship of festivals and celebrations as social action. Bénédicte Deschamps argues that Italian American leaders in the late nineteenth century promoted celebrations of Columbus to foster respect of Italian immigrants and a collective Italian identity after Unification.¹⁵ Columbus, as the “founding father” of America, suited these purposes by allowing Italians to celebrate their heritage and their American patriotism. Considered within the historical context of American skepticism toward Italian immigrants, “the fight for the recognition of Columbus Day as a legal holiday led by the Italian-American leaders was above all a fight for legitimating the Italian presence in the United States.”¹⁶ Likewise, other scholars of ethnic celebrations argue that events both fostered a collective identity among participants and communicated to the dominant culture, typically in attempts to showcase model behavior and vie for recognition in American society.¹⁷

¹⁵ Bénédicte Deschamps, “Italian Americans and Columbus Day: A Quest For Consensus Between National and Group Identities, 1840-1910,” in *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive Culture From the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Jürgen Heideking, Geneviève Fabre and Kai Dreisbach (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 124-139.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁷ For instance, see Sallie A. Marston, “Public Rituals and Community Power: St. Patrick’s Day Parades in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1841-1874,” *Political Geography Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1989): 255-269; Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth-Century German America on Parade,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 44-76.

More specifically, Marston in particular, argues that rather than reaching for an abstract acceptance into American society, immigrants and ethnic leadership sought access to local power structures. They combatted the discrimination and limited citizenship experienced on the ground in their own locales. I extend this concept to post-World War II Buffalo in arguing that the FIASWNY Columbus Day celebrations enacted a claim to “full participation” in the city’s power structures.¹⁸ In turn, the performance of socioeconomic and political mobility incorporated the West Side into a broader narrative of the Italian American experience in Buffalo.

The exclusion that Italian Americans experienced in mid-twentieth century Buffalo differed from the nativism faced by early Italian immigrants of the late-nineteenth century, but even in 1940 Italian Americans in the city were characterized as a special group. In November of that year, the *Buffalo Courier-Express* lauded Italian American assimilation in the city, showcasing Michael Valente as the image of a “typical...successful struggle by Buffalo’s Italian families.”¹⁹ The report extolled Valente, and by extension, other Italians’, hard work, thrift and determination, which was commanding “a constantly growing respect from their fellow citizen.” Valente’s sons, a priest, a dentist, and a city elected official, exemplified success and social mobility. This display of congratulations shows that mainstream Buffalonians did not regard Italian Americans as social peers. Descriptions of the “Italian colonies” in the city reinforced otherness with spatial bounds.²⁰ The 1952 Columbus Day celebrations reflect this

¹⁸ Marston, “Public Rituals and Community Power,” 256.

¹⁹ Lucian C. Warren, “Thrift, Labor Mark Italians’ Rise Here: Latins Successfully Struggle to Better Lot of Children,” *Buffalo Courier-Express*, November 17, 1940.

²⁰ Ibid.

context, in which Italians were still reaching for “whiteness,” while the 1968 and 1969 events reinforced the belonging they had achieved by that point.²¹

This interpretation hinges upon “thick descriptions” of the event locations.²² As Marston underscores, “adaptation assumed unique forms based on local conditions as they existed and changed.”²³ This chapter extends her categories of “localized social knowledge” to include the landscape of power embedded in the built environment of the city.²⁴ It also extends beyond parades and considers the mass and dinner locations part of the celebratory performance. The chapter examines how the “local conditions” changed with city development, as the landscapes of power shifted between 1950 and 1970. At the same time, Italian Americans’ place within society also changed. In 1952 they were still “working toward whiteness” but in 1969 they were maintaining their role in mainstream society, balancing ethnic identity with patriotism and American concerns.

These shifting landscapes of Italian American social status and symbolic power in the city underpin the Columbus Day events. In turn, the Columbus Day events implicate the West Side of Buffalo, first as an intact Italian American neighborhood connected to the achievements of Italian Americans in the region. Over time, as Italians spread out and the West Side became increasingly poor and Puerto Rican, the FIASWNY appeal to

²¹ David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

²² Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

²³ Marston, “Public Rituals and Community Power,” 261. She explains that the Yankee power structure dominated and the Irish negotiated the status quo using adaptive behaviors, akin to Michel de Certeau’s concept of tactics.

²⁴ Marston “Public Rituals and Community Power,” 261: “*localized social knowledge* of existing institutions like the corporations and the press, and the daily face-to-face relationships like the one between various Irish and Yankee groups and individuals *formed the basis of the specific kinds of expressions that accommodative behaviors affected*,” (emphasis added).

Italian identity becomes more symbolic and widespread across the city. The literal move in 1952 from the West Side into downtown becomes unhinged and abstracted in 1969, recast as exit from the old neighborhood as a necessary step for social mobility.

1952—Breakthrough: Entering Niagara Square

As members of the congregation passed through the brick arch of Holy Cross Church and descended the stairs to the sidewalk of Maryland Street in the early afternoon of October 12, 1952, they faced south, towards downtown. Their immediate surroundings consisted of various building types and uses, including the Birge Wallpaper Company complex, and residential homes and apartments. Turning east, they would see Niagara Street, a commercial thoroughfare running the length of the west side from City Hall to Black Rock. This neighborhood parish was similar to others around the West Side, a mixed-use area with light industrial and manufacturing integrated with schools, churches and corner stores.²⁵

On this morning, churchgoers attended mass in celebration of Columbus Day. The mass was the first event of day sponsored and coordinated by the FIASWNY, and upon exiting the Holy Cross Church, attendees stood one mile from the intersection of Allen Street and Delaware Avenue, the starting point of the Columbus Day parade, the next event on the itinerary (**Figs. 37, 38**). That short distance encompassed the transition into another space of the city. The intersection of Allen and Delaware was the crossroads of “Mansion Row” and a short commercial street connecting two thoroughfares, Richmond Avenue and Main Street. It was a fitting location to begin a parade in honor of such a

²⁵ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, *Buffalo, New York* (Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, 1951), vol. 1A, maps 142 and 147.

figure as Christopher Columbus, and it brought the parade and its purpose onto the most public civic stage in the city.

The parade route, lined with some 35,000 spectators, extended down Delaware Avenue into Niagara Square, the heart of the city, and disbanded at Pearl and Church Streets.²⁶ Walking south on Delaware, participants passed impressive architecture and powerful institutions, and while each block featured a mixed variety of functions, the route generally moved from residential to commercial areas before culminating in the city and county governmental node. The built fabric expressed these uses, beginning with mansions, continuing into dense street front of commercial storefronts, and ending amidst the large civic buildings surrounding Niagara Square. This imbued the parade and its purpose with heightened symbolic authority, and performed a FIASWNY-led claim to the public sphere.

The gathering site at Allen and Delaware placed the parade start amidst some of the most beautiful and ornate residential architecture in the city. In the late nineteenth century, when Buffalo's economy generated the most millionaires per capita in the United States, the city's wealthy adorned Delaware Avenue with mansions.²⁷ Many of these impressive structures were extant in 1952, though they were increasingly converted for use as offices and rooming houses. The first half of the FIASWNY Columbus Day parade featured a number of these buildings, which although not in their original function as single-family homes, continued to express powerful stature on the landscape.

²⁶ "Columbus Day Speakers Urge Easing of Immigration Laws," *Buffalo Evening News*, October 13, 1952.

²⁷ National Register of Historic Places, Delaware Avenue Historic District, Buffalo, Erie County, New York, National Register # 74001232. Listed 1974.

The first two blocks of the parade, between Allen and Edward, were characterized predominately by nineteenth century residential architecture. Over a dozen such buildings, set back in lawns, lined this initial stretch of the parade. Several mansions were converted into offices (537, 531, 438) and rooming houses (523, 519), while the Midtown Hotel (430) and Johnson & Wilkins mortuary (448) occupied others. The renowned Midway Row Houses (471-499 Delaware Ave) created a harder street edge and more urban streetscape at the east side near Virginia street intersection, while the art deco commercial building (441-443, constructed 1930) with six storefronts on the next block signaled a transition into more commercial zone of the street.²⁸ The University Club (546), KC Club House (506), and Daly Post American Legion Club House (452) engendered the institutional foothold of this area. From here, the McKinley statue and City Hall were visible from the street. This visual access provided a guiding point and reinforced the symbolic power of the procession.

In the next section of the parade, between Edward and Tracy, marchers came into a more constricted space, as religious architecture and commercial buildings hugged the sidewalks. The Buffalo Club, an exception to this pattern, sat in a large parking lot, which reinforced the social exclusion and prestige of its membership. Trinity Episcopal Church (c.1884) and Asbury-Delaware Methodist (c.1875), both Gothic structures of Medina sandstone contrasted the nearby commercial architecture and reflected the historical social stature of these parishes. Three commercial art deco buildings near the Tupper Street intersection, the Wickwire Building (1924), the Vars Building (1929, 344-352), and the building at 372-378 (1926) represented the investments of businessmen in the

²⁸ “The Midway Row Houses,” Buffalo as an Architectural Museum, accessed July 18, 2014, <http://buffaloah.com/a/del/midway/index.html>.

Roaring Twenties, joining the construction of Buffalo's City Hall (1929) in the optimism of the city's future. Next, the procession passed two of the newest buildings along the parade route. The National Gypsum Office Building (1941) and the Children's Aid & Society For Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1947) faced one another on the north side of Tracy Street.

In the next blocks south towards Niagara Square, the parade route was almost exclusively commercial at ground level. Between Tracy and Huron, a fine-grained pattern of commercial storefronts lined the street, and the density of the street edge was reinforced on the east side of the street by having only one intersection, the major commercial node at Chippewa Street. In addition, the Hotel Tourine (1901, addition 1923) and Delaware Court (1917) reflect the early development of this area as a commercial hub surrounding downtown.

From the intersection of Huron Street, Niagara Square was clearly visible. Vast parking lots on the block between Huron and Mohawk afforded clear views of City Hall. In addition to two gas stations flanking Delaware Avenue at Huron, this stretch of the parade route included only three buildings: a residential building used as a restaurant, an elementary school, and a large building on the east corner of Mohawk featuring the Niagara Street garage and series of storefronts. The parking lots, perhaps a product of the city's effort to increase parking spaces downtown by 50,000 starting in 1950, signaled a transition from the commercial street to the civic downtown center.²⁹

The short block between Mohawk Street and Niagara Square consisted of the Statler Hotel on the east and the Playhouse Theater and Spencer Kellogg & Sons

²⁹ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 147.

laboratory on the west. The Statler Hotel, a 20-story structure, adorned Niagara Square since 1921 and represented the best accommodations the city. Once parade marchers passed the Playhouse lobby, City Hall rose above them.

Entering Niagara Square, the route opened from the linear street to a monumental traffic circle that marked the origin of the city street grid. Passing the McKinley monument, an obelisk honoring the president who received his fatal gunshot wound at the Buffalo World's Fair in 1901, the processional turned west, towards a viewing stand in front of City Hall.³⁰ The U.S. Court House and New York State Office Building defined the east side of the square, and the parade continued past the Erie County Hall, the Erie County Jail, and the Police Headquarters, among other governmental agencies, while continuing on Delaware Avenue to Church Street.

In the final two blocks on Church Street, the parade faced Shelton Square, a major public center of the city, and disbanded at Pearl Street, surrounded by some of the city's finest skyscrapers. The New York Telephone Company, the Iroquois Gas Building and the Prudential Building punctuated the parade route with commercial grandeur.

From start to finish, the Columbus Day parade was lined with some of the city's finest architecture and most prominent symbolic associations. The parade route is even more interesting in light of the direct route down Niagara Street from Holy Cross Church to City Hall. This would have provided unbroken procession from the neighborhood parish into the heart of the city. Niagara Street was a bustling commercial thoroughfare, and it would have approached City Hall from behind rather than in front. The procession

³⁰ This is my estimate based on the newspaper report of the route.

down Delaware Avenue, however, captured the symbolic power of the street that was unparalleled on Niagara Street.

This performance brought performers and audience into the civic space of the city. In doing so, it claimed civic legitimacy for the cause. In addition to bolstering the weight of this support to Columbus, it was also a ritual of togetherness for the participants. While on the surface, the celebration established the importance of the homeland in order to engender widespread awareness and sympathy, the principal objective was to assert both community solidarity and the potential economic and political force of the collective as a means for gaining access to the power structures of the city.³¹ The remaining events of the FIAS sponsored Columbus Day celebrations reinforced this, prolonging the celebration and use of downtown space for an increasingly selective crowd. Estimates suggested that as many as 35,000 people lined the parade route, 6,000 people witnessed the statue unveiling and 500 attended the Statler dinner.³²

After disbanding at the intersection of Church and Pearl Street, parade marchers and viewers gathered at a small triangle in the intersection of Franklin, Niagara and West Eagle Streets for the unveiling of the Columbus statue. The intersection, formed by the radial extension of Niagara Street from Niagara Square and the grid, was poised within the mix of civic and political activity. This site continued the momentum achieved through the parade route, with views of City Hall a block away, the Erie County Hall across the Street, and various other functions nearby.

³¹ Marston, "Public Rituals and Community Power," 267.

³² "Columbus Day Speakers Urge Easing of Immigration Laws," *Buffalo Evening News* October 13, 1952, Local News, 31; "Priest Flays Immigration Law in Columbus Day Talk," *Buffalo Courier Express* October 13, 1952, 15.

After Rt. Rev. Joseph Gambino, PA, pastor of Holy Cross Church, gave the invocation, John C. Montana, the general chairman of the monument fund drive, and FIASWNY president Peter F. DiStefano unveiled the statue, a 7-foot bronze figure of Columbus atop a 9-foot Barre granite base. DiStefano then presented the statue to Mayor Joseph Mruk, who accepted it on behalf of the city. In addition to Mayor Mruk, Msgr. Paschal J. Tronolone of St. Joseph's Church in Niagara Falls, the executive committee chairman and the treasurer of the FIASWNY spoke at the ceremony. To close, Reverend Joseph A. Burke, Bishop of the Catholic diocese of Buffalo, offered the benediction.

The ceremonial gifting of the statue by the FIASWNY to the City of Buffalo not only recognized Christopher Columbus as a historical figure, but it also enacted a mutual relationship between the FIAS and the City of Buffalo.³³ The City presented the plot of land to the FIAS during a groundbreaking ceremony in June, and this gift of the statue to the City reciprocated that exchange. In anthropological terms, the gift exchanges symbolized a binding tie between the parties, and were steeped in mutual recognition of the authority to give and receive. The participation of local religious, civic and government leadership merged these spheres and heightened the symbolic importance of the event.

The significance of the statue to Italian Americans in Buffalo and Western New York was further heightened by the many years it had taken the FIASWNY to execute the plan. The *BEN* reported that the monument, “culminated a 40 year effort of Buffalo's

³³ “Site Readied for Memorial to Columbus,” *Buffalo Evening News* June 5, 1952,12. For anthropological studies of gift giving, see Mauss.

Italian population to erect a fitting tribute to America's discoverer.”³⁴ The emphasis on the four decades leading up to the dedication ceremony cast it as a much-anticipated event, the culmination of efforts to have Columbus, and Italian Americans by extension, recognized by the City.

The final and most intimate event of the 1952 FIASWNY celebration was a dinner at the Hotel Statler. The hotel, opened in 1923, was the “crowning jewel” of Niagara Square and the most prestigious hotel in the city.³⁵ The FIASWNY converged upon this landmark as the culmination of the day’s events, affording attendees the stature of frequenting such a well-known site. At the event, the FIASWNY honored Judge Juvenal Marchisio of the Domestic Relations Court in New York and the national chairman of the American Migration Committee as the Man of the Year. In addition to Judge Marchisio, Mayor Mruk and Peter F. DiStefano, Federation president, spoke at the event.

Despite the number of speakers at the statue unveiling and the FIAS dinner, newspaper coverage of the event centered on denunciation of the recently passed McCarran-Walter act. Both Msgr. Tronolone, at the unveiling, and Judge Marchisio, at the dinner, spoke against the legislation, which capped the number of Italian immigrants to the United States at 5,600 per year.³⁶ Both men foregrounded their criticism by highlighting Columbus as a role model. Judge Marchisio pointed to Columbus’ sacrifices as “a call for every citizen to sacrifice his comforts for all mankind.” He called the act, “a

³⁴ “Columbus Day Speakers Urge Easing,” *BEN*. See also, “Buffalo’s New Monument,” *Buffalo Evening News* October 13, 1952, Editorial, 22.

³⁵ Susan Eck, “Ellsworth Statler in Buffalo Part 5 – Statler’s Most Elegant Hotel,” Western New York Heritage Press, accessed September 9, 2014, http://wnyheritagepress.org/photos_week_2007/statler/hotel_2/hotel_2.htm.

³⁶ “Columbus Day Speakers Urge Easing,” *BEN*.

law of racial discrimination,” asserting, “We are the custodians of that valued treasury of goodwill to men... We must give surplus populations of the world a place to migrate.”³⁷

Msgr. Tronolone made a similar statement, but the *BCE* reporter of his comments emphasized the impromptu delivery of his opinion:

A parade was held, a monument was dedicated and a *stirring attack* upon the McCarran–Walter Immigration Law was delivered yesterday during a Columbus Day exercise... The last—*and most unexpected*—item on the program came during a speech by the Rt. Rev. Paschal J. Tronolone, VF, pastor of St. Joseph's Church, Niagara Falls... Msgr. Tronolone's blast of the McCarran-Walter measure was *delivered spontaneously after he had completed a prepared address* (emphasis added).³⁸

That Tronolone's comments were inappropriate, according to this reporter, suggests the tenuous footing of Italian Americans and the symbolic power of the Columbus Day events. While the FIASWNY had access to the public space of the city, Tronolone's off the cuff political statement abused that forum. The anticipated celebration of Columbus was socially and politically acceptable, but the unanticipated criticism of national policy reached beyond the realm of acceptable decorum for the event.

The literal movement from the West Side into downtown in the 1952 Columbus Day events symbolized the rise of Italian Americans in the region. Through the day, the FIAS claimed space in the center of the city, enacting a claim to the power structures that

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Priest Flays Immigration Law,” *BCE*.

downtown space represented. Taken together, these actions construct a performance of entering and using prime public space in a claim to the highest echelons of the civic sphere in Buffalo. The performance also produced the West Side as an anchor of Italian American community engrained in daily life. In the coming decades, however, a more abstract reference to the West Side in the Columbus Day celebrations displaced this tangible connection and recast the neighborhood within the Italian American narrative of progress. As they distanced themselves from the contemporary West Side, the construction of the “old neighborhood” preserved the image of the past.

1969—Maintaining Status: From Center to Periphery

While the 1952 Columbus Day events moved from the West Side into downtown, the FIASWNY itinerary in 1968 and 1969 constructed a different pattern, moving from the city center to suburban Cheektowaga.³⁹ Following a wreath-laying at the Columbus statue, participants celebrated mass at St. Anthony of Padua Church and attended a dinner banquet at the Executive Ramada Inn in Cheektowaga. These sites represented an abstracted community identity that mirrored the decentralization of Italian Americans in the city. Like Conzen found in the case of German American festive ethnicity in the nineteenth century, over time, “ever increasing diversity within the community encouraged by economic mobility [and] generational change,” paralleled a “more

³⁹ From here, the analysis centers on the 1969 events because it received more newspaper coverage. In 1968, the wreath-laying at the Columbus Statue occurred the day before the mass at St. Anthony and the dinner at the Cheektowaga Executive Inn. See “Buffalo to Move Statue of Columbus to City Hall,” *BEN*.

inclusive symbolism,” in celebratory events.⁴⁰ As assimilation, spurred by “shifts in housing patterns and marriages” to non-Italians “accelerated after World War II,” FIASWNY celebrations accommodated variations within its target Italian American community by using a more abstract basis of common identity.⁴¹ Primarily, it highlighted common Italian heritage balanced with American identity. Additionally, the FIASWNY fostered a collective identity based on a narrative of upward mobility, highlighting achievements of Italian Americans who exemplified political and economic success.

The FIASWNY Columbus Day event locations reflect these tenets. Just as Italian American identity and place within Buffalo’s society shifted over time, the appropriate sites for conveying organizational identity and goals changed as well. FIASWNY leaders operated within city development patterns to align event sites with their organizational goal of promoting Italian American stature in the region. By 1968, the 1952 sites, Holy Cross Church and the Hotel Statler, no longer served this function. Instead, the FIAS used St. Anthony of Padua Church and the Executive Inn for its Columbus Day events in 1968 and 1969. St. Anthony of Padua, a historic Italian church located downtown became a center of the widespread Italian community without propinquity.⁴² The Executive Inn, a modern hotel beyond the city line in Cheektowaga, displayed cultural cachet of newness and suburban locale. Using St. Anthony and the Executive Inn represented both respect

⁴⁰ Conzen, “Ethnicity as Festive Culture,” 63, 66. For Italian American intermarriage in Buffalo, see B.R. Bugelski, “Assimilation Through Intermarriage,” *Social Forces* 40 no. 2 (1961): 148-153.

⁴¹ Coppola, “The Italian Community—Part II.”

⁴² Melvin M. Webber, “Order in Diversity: Community without Propinquity,” in *Cities and Space: The Future use of Urban Land*, ed. Lowdon Wingo (Baltimore: Published for Resources for the Future by the Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), 23-54. Also, Stanger-Ross characterizes St. Agnes/St. Francis church in Toronto similarly as a gathering site for Italian Canadians in the region, “host to a geographically elastic Italian ethnicity” (50).

for Italian past in Buffalo and the contemporary status of Italian Americans among mainstream, respected professionals.

These sites also implicated the West Side in a different light. In 1952, the neighborhood was integrated into the Columbus Day events, linked to the Italian American parade into downtown. In 1969, however, the West Side was abstracted as a place from which Italians in the city emerged into mainstream society more generally. While many Italian Americans still lived on the West Side, it was no longer where most of the county's Italian Americans resided.⁴³ This decentralization of Italian Americans in the region paralleled their achievement of greater representation among the political and economic elite, reinforcing the idea that moving out of the old neighborhood was a step of social mobility.

On the morning of Sunday October 12, 1969, the FIASWNY initiated its Columbus Day events with a wreath-laying ceremony at the Columbus statue. It was the last time that participants would gather at the downtown site to recognize the figure. The common council announced only a few days prior that it approved funds for the relocation.⁴⁴ Departing from Mayor Sedita's suggestion the previous year, the committee selected a site in Prospect Park rather than near City Hall. For the time being, however, participants repeated the annual wreath laying at the original location and then made their way a quarter-mile northwest to St. Anthony of Padua Church for Mass.

St. Anthony of Padua, a brick Romanesque structure with sandstone details, is located at Court and Elmwood Streets behind City Hall. It opened in 1891 as the mother

⁴³ Coppola, "The Italian Community—Part II."

⁴⁴ "\$1,500 Bid For Moving Statue OK'd," *Buffalo Courier Express* October 8, 1969, 38.

church of Italians in Buffalo.⁴⁵ Italians immigrated to Buffalo in large numbers beginning in the 1880s and many settled on the lower West Side. The Scalabrinian Fathers, a group of priests concerned for Italian immigrants across the globe, arrived in Buffalo and assisted the campaign for an Italian church, where immigrants could celebrate in their native language.⁴⁶ Italian societies and leaders of the community contributed to church, including its stained glass windows and a bell tower.⁴⁷ The parish retained a congregation for decades, but after World War II, the surrounding neighborhoods lost residents to suburbanization and urban renewal. By 1969 it acquired a symbolic role for Italian Americans across the city.

Italian Americans moved from the lower West Side and other initial settlements areas into a broader pattern across the region.⁴⁸ By 1930, Italian Americans expanded from the lower West Side across the entire west side of the city and maintained other pockets.⁴⁹ Increasingly over the next decades, they spread out more into North Buffalo and suburbs like Tonawanda, Kenmore, and Cheektowaga, while also retaining a notable presence on the West Side. After World War II, the lower West Side experienced more turnover, as Puerto Rican and African American families move in starting in the late 1950s. Within this shifting population context, St. Anthony functioned less as a neighborhood parish though it continued to serve Italian Americans who returned for

⁴⁵ James Napora, "Houses of Worship: A Guide to the Religious Architecture of Buffalo, New York," master's thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1995.

⁴⁶ Martin Ederer, *An Italian Immigrant Community and the Scalabrinian Fathers: St. Anthony of Padua Church in Buffalo, New York* (Bari, Italy: Arti Grafiche Favia, 2011).

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Anne McIlhenney Matthews, "Don Alfonso Era Recalled," *Buffalo Courier Express*, July 14, 1968.

⁴⁸ Warren; Goldman.

⁴⁹ Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, *Maps and Charts Prepared by Work Division, Emergency Relief Bureau on the Slum Area Determination Survey*, 1934.

mass there. It was more suited to the pan-Italian identity of the region because of its historical significance for Italians in the city.⁵⁰ The parish offered an Italian language mass and catered to visiting parishioners with plenty of parking and freeway access.

The Waterfront Renewal Project was one cause of the decreased residential context of the church. The area was slated for urban renewal since 1958 and the Common Council announced plans for its demolition in 1963, though demolition did not commence until 1966.⁵¹ The Italian American neighborhood behind City Hall had been subject to criticism by visiting urban planners who argued that it detracted from the goal of a prosperous central business district.⁵² As local historians have argued, the city's designation of the area as "blighted" was more a political maneuver for redevelopment than an accurate portrayal of neighborhood conditions.⁵³ It was an "attractive, lively, and interesting neighborhood," of wood frame and brick Italianate structures from the 1850s and 1860s.⁵⁴ The project not only displaced residents, it also isolated St. Anthony church and the Niagara Street commercial district. Italian Americans, for whom the church held historical significance, reintegrated it with a different function, as a destination rather than a neighborhood parish.⁵⁵

Similarly, highway development near Holy Cross Church changed that area between Columbus Day in 1952 and 1969. While the church remained intact, the

⁵⁰ Ederer, *An Italian Immigrant Community*. Also, St. Anthony is located within the Joseph Ellicott Historic Preservation District, established by the Buffalo Preservation Board in 1982; see district map at <http://buffaloah.com/a/landmks/ell2.jpg>.

⁵¹ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 202.

⁵² See Chapter 1 for more about this.

⁵³ Tim Tielman, "Italian Colony," unpublished paper, 2011; Goldman, *City on the Edge* 203-206; *Per Niente*; Also Joe di Leo, *Terra Promessa*.

⁵⁴ Goldman, *City on the Edge*, 205.

⁵⁵ In 2013, the church opened a history museum.

surrounding blocks fell within the area confiscated under eminent domain for the construction of a freeway ramp at Virginia Street. Between the years of the announcement in the early 1950s and the actual action, the streets changed drastically. Hesitant to waste money, homeowners deferred costly maintenance such as new roofs and painting. Increasingly, they moved to a new home and rented out their houses to poorer Puerto Rican families.⁵⁶ Thus, it became a “slum” in the public imagination—a combination of the physical deterioration and population turnover. Holy Cross parish reflected this changing population, serving more Puerto Rican families. Demolition began in 1966, clearing blocks of housing close to the church (**Fig. 39**).⁵⁷ The following year, Jean Felix captured the demographic turnover and the geographic spread of former West Siders across the city: “[Holy Cross pastor] Msgr. Gambino, in his 80’s, is known all over the city and while Negroes and Puerto Ricans live in the district, the hard core Italians still cling to Holy Cross Church.”⁵⁸ While “hard core” Italian Americans remained on the West Side, they were not the Federation’s target audience.

Within this context, the shift from Columbus Day mass at Holy Cross Church to St. Anthony of Padua’s represents a broader transition in Italian American identity and urban development in the city. Holy Cross was no longer the same kind of neighborhood parish that it had been, due to both its physical context and its increasingly diverse and poor parishioners.⁵⁹ The FIAS did not have a commitment to a particular parish but held to its goal of providing leadership and exemplifying upward mobility. While St. Anthony

⁵⁶ Karima Bondi, whose grandparents lived on Seventh Street, recalls them moving and renting to a Puerto Rican family. Interview with the author, January 20, 2014, Buffalo, New York.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1 for more about the freeway ramp and demolition.

⁵⁸ Felix, “Buffalo’s Old West Side Had Flavor All Its Own.”

⁵⁹ Goldman, *City on the Edge*.

was no longer a neighborhood parish either, its historical foundations in the Italian American community lent it to the FIAS mission. Using St. Anthony, the FIAS both harkened back to a point of origin for Italian Americans in Buffalo and reached out to a city-wide Italian American community who could easily access the church via the freeway. Together, these factors poised St. Anthony's as a unifying point to the decentralizing Italian community.

The symbolic coming together of Italians at St. Anthony was counterbalanced by a new location for the annual FIASWNY dinner. Held downtown at the Statler in 1952, it convened at the Ramada Executive Inn in Cheektowaga in 1969. The hotel, located nine miles northeast of Niagara Square on Genesee Street, opened in the 1960s directly across from the Buffalo airport. Genesee Street was one of four diagonal streets radiating from Niagara Square in the 1804 street grid, but by 1969, freeway construction provided more common access to Cheektowaga via the Kensington Expressway (NY-33). The hotel was located a quarter mile from the point where the Expressway fed into Genesee Street, a six-lane highway at that point. The location was accessible only by private automobile. The two-story building was distinctly modern. It sat back in a parking lot and was faced in orange brick with metal-sashed ribbon windows that emphasized its horizontal lines (**Fig. 40**). The majority of its perimeter faced the street, with a narrow width back on the site.

This was a stark contrast to the Hotel Statler, the nineteen-story downtown hotel that, while a landmark of its time, did not communicate the modernity of the Executive Inn. The Statler was renovated in October 1968, when the *BEN* published an image of its

new chandeliers and décor. While evidence of investment, these renovations also reflect a perceived need to update the venue. It had also been criticized for a lack of automobile compatibility.⁶⁰

The Executive Inn was a newer facility with easy freeway access and ample parking. Using this as a site for its dinner, the FIAS enlarged the footprint of its Columbus Day events beyond city lines and catered to an auto-mobile community. This move away from the center city paralleled the decentralization of city residents, including many Italian American families. After World War II, “Italians flocked in droves from the West Side,” to North Buffalo, Kenmore, Tonawanda, Angola, Cheektowaga and other suburbs.⁶¹ The FIAS choice of a suburban location was not the only one: the president of the Romulus Club, an organization started on the West Side in the 1930s, cited a “suburbanitis problem,” in explaining its move to Kenmore in 1969.⁶² Like the Romulus Club, the FIAS catered to the shifting geography of its target community.

Whereas the FIAS dinner at the Statler Hotel in 1952 was part of its claim to civic participation in the most recognized places of the city, the 1969 dinner at the Executive Inn reinforced achieved status. John J. Nasca, first Italian-American elected president of the Buffalo Area Chamber of Commerce, told *Buffalo Evening News* reporter Lee Coppola in 1972, “Italians have climbed the ethnic ladder to a rung that reads: ‘No area of activity where Italians do not play leadership roles. Not just participants, leaders.’”⁶³ As Conzen claimed of German-Americans over time, “no longer were they proclaiming

⁶⁰ *Buffalo Evening News*, October 10, 1968, 60.

⁶¹ Coppola, “The Italian Community—Part II.”

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

cultural potential; they were celebrating achieved contribution.”⁶⁴ This was true both in reinforcing famous Italian figures such as Christopher Columbus but also recognizing local Italian Americans, who had increasingly entered the white-collar workforce and positions of power.

Coppola penned the center article in a report on Italian Americans in Buffalo, lauding their assimilation into professional jobs, political and economic achievements. It pictured lawyers, priests, politicians and other high-ranking figures as representations of Italian Americans’ group progress from their immigrant generations. The reporter explained that Italian Americans’ eagerness to blend into mainstream American culture was the source of their upward mobility. The Italian-American community, he explained, “has literally been absorbed into Erie County’s mainstream by the desire of its people to blend as quickly as possible into the American way of life.” He continued, connecting part of that assimilation to generational turnover and moving out of historic Italian neighborhoods: “Generally, the first and second generation Italians raised in non-Italian neighborhoods have stories of discrimination to tell. But by the third generation, it appears discrimination, especially in the suburbs, all but vanished.”⁶⁵ Italian Americans found that one drawback of assimilation, however, was the loss of tradition, and by the early 1970s, Coppola reported, there was an increasing pride in heritage inspired in part by “black is beautiful” campaigns.⁶⁶

Columbus Day provided an opportune moment for merging Italian heritage with achievement in American society. Celebrating Columbus as the discoverer of American

⁶⁴ Conzen, “Ethnicity as Festive Culture,” 68.

⁶⁵ Coppola, “The Italian Community—Part II.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

continent linked Italian and American lineage. This ambition was part of the earliest Columbus celebrations in the United States and part of using Columbus for purposes of achieving acceptance as true Americans.⁶⁷ Italian Americans continued to have a stake in this perception even after they achieved greater acceptance in society. While President Lyndon Johnson made Columbus Day a federal holiday in 1968, Italian Americans contended with public controversy over whether Columbus was the first to reach the continent and ethical questions regarding his treatment of native Americans.

When Columbus' honor came under question in the mid-1960s, Buffalonians defended the "perfect hero...not only to identify with but *to be* identified with."⁶⁸ Drawing upon Columbus' and their own status in-between Italian and American societies, they asserted authority as common descendants to both claim ownership of Columbus and offer him as a unifying figure for all Americans. In 1968, a *BEN* editorialist lamented, "Columbus Day seems to have become the occasion for an annual controversy," but reaffirmed Columbus "is the one from whom 'all American history stems.'"⁶⁹ In his remarks at the Columbus statue the same year, Mayor Sedita said, "These days, some people claim he was not of Italian origin. They claim him as their own...But we all know he was Italian. Still Columbus belongs to all of America."⁷⁰

This balancing act of positioning Italian Americans as an ideal in-between group was important for maintaining status in Buffalo and American society. Speakers at the 1969 Columbus Day dinner evoked this sentiment as well. Mayor Sedita, "outlined the

⁶⁷ Deschamps 2001.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126, emphasis in original.

⁶⁹ "Columbus Is the One," *Buffalo Evening News*, October 11, 1968, Editorial, 32.

⁷⁰ "Buffalo to Move Statue of Columbus to City Hall," *BEN* 12 October 1968, A3, Local News.

contributions of several Italian-Americans to all aspects of society in the United States,” while County Court Judge Ernest L. Colucci, honored as the Federation of Italian-American societies man of the year, emphasized the interconnectedness of all Americans, regardless of heritage. While expressing pride in his Italian background, Colucci said, “no one segment of society has a monopoly on good citizenship...No one segment can say we did it alone.”⁷¹

FIAS representative Eugene C. D’Angelo also conjured a sense of American togetherness, while highlighting Italian values to mend the “tragic division” between young and old in the country.”⁷² He promoted “the value of our [Italian] heritage,” to ameliorate this division, pointing to a “strong sense of family and a deep and abiding faith in the Almighty” as central tenets of Italian American culture. Relating contemporary issues to Columbus’ time, he said, “just as the world was reaching its lowest ebb then, America was discovered.” Just as Columbus’ journey was a momentous turning point that provided hope and freedom on a new frontier, D’Angelo presented Italian American culture as a beacon of light for American society. This focus on the future and Italian American participation in a collective society provided the context in which the “old neighborhood” emerged to incorporate the past into a forward-looking, upwardly mobile FIAS consciousness.

The 1969 FIAS events reflected Italian American identity in Buffalo as both unique and part of the whole region. The mass at St. Anthony provided a site for collective identity based in a shared heritage and local history, while the Executive Inn displayed keeping up with mainstream trends. The absence of the West Side in the 1969

⁷¹ “Religion, Family Needs Cited,” *Buffalo Courier-Express*, October 13, 1969, 7.

⁷² *Ibid.*

activities speaks to the same theme of upward mobility from the area as the literal movement out of it in 1952. As city development and the exit of Italian Americans situated the area differently within the city, the FIAS events created an abstracted identity of the area that relegated it to the Italian American past.

Conclusion

The FIASWNY Columbus Day events in these years express the organization's use of the shifting metropolitan landscape to promote Italian American identity and status in the region. The group enacted the same narrative of the "old neighborhood" that surfaced in editorials and cultural works as people moved out of the West Side yet continued to identify with it. The abstract, shared sense of the "old neighborhood" preserved the core of collective identity and place-based memories while allowing former residents to dissociate "their West Side" from contemporary images of decline.

By producing a neighborhood identity separated from on-the-ground contexts and composed of imaginative, historical content, the FIASWNY precluded the need to defend territorial boundaries. Neither Columbus Day events exercised the type of neighborhood "boundary-making" that scholars have identify with parish festivals and parades conducted in other city neighborhoods.⁷³ Instead, the FIASWNY performed an Italian American claim to Western New York's social and economic mainstream, a narrative of socioeconomic progress that was compatible with the image of the "old neighborhood." Yet it also left behind those Italian Americans that remained on the West Side, relegated to what the Federation saw as a place of the past rather than the future.

⁷³ Stanger-Ross; Sciorra; Orsi.

This past-oriented production of the neighborhood contrasted the efforts of city planners and the WSBMA to shape the future of the West Side. While those groups called upon historical associations of the neighborhood, they did so in order to keep the past alive *in situ* as a marketing tool. The Federation and Italian Americans stabilized an image of the past in order to take it with them as they moved beyond the neighborhood, creating a West Side for conceptual mobility. The production of neighborhood identity by mobile social actors resonates with the experiences of the business owners whose life stories provided the basis of analyzing individual productions of the West Side in the previous chapter. Minnie, Tony, and Paul engaged the neighborhood as a conceptual reference that merged their personal experiences across the city with broader historical explanations of local commercial development and the expansion of globalized corporate capitalism. However, unlike the FIASWNY, those individuals continued to use the West Side on the ground and took changes in stride, and instead of abstracting neighborhood identity to promote collective identity, they lived it through discrete, functional nodes.



Fig. 33: Wreath laying at the Columbus Statue in downtown Buffalo. *Buffalo Evening News*, October 12, 1968, A3, Local News. *Reproduced with permission of the Buffalo News.*

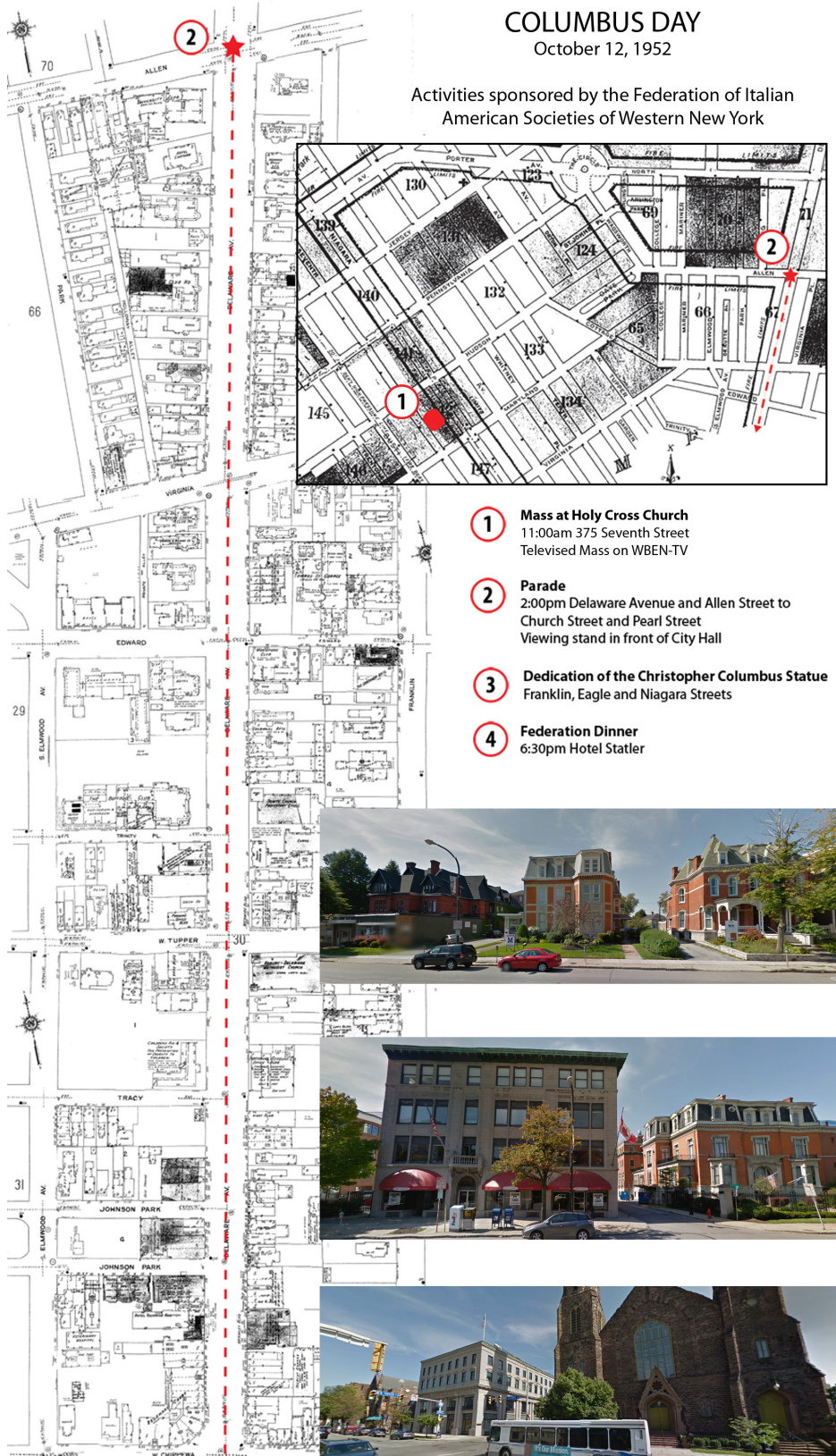


Fig. 34: 1952 Columbus Day Parade Route (part 1), modified from 1951 Sanborn Map.

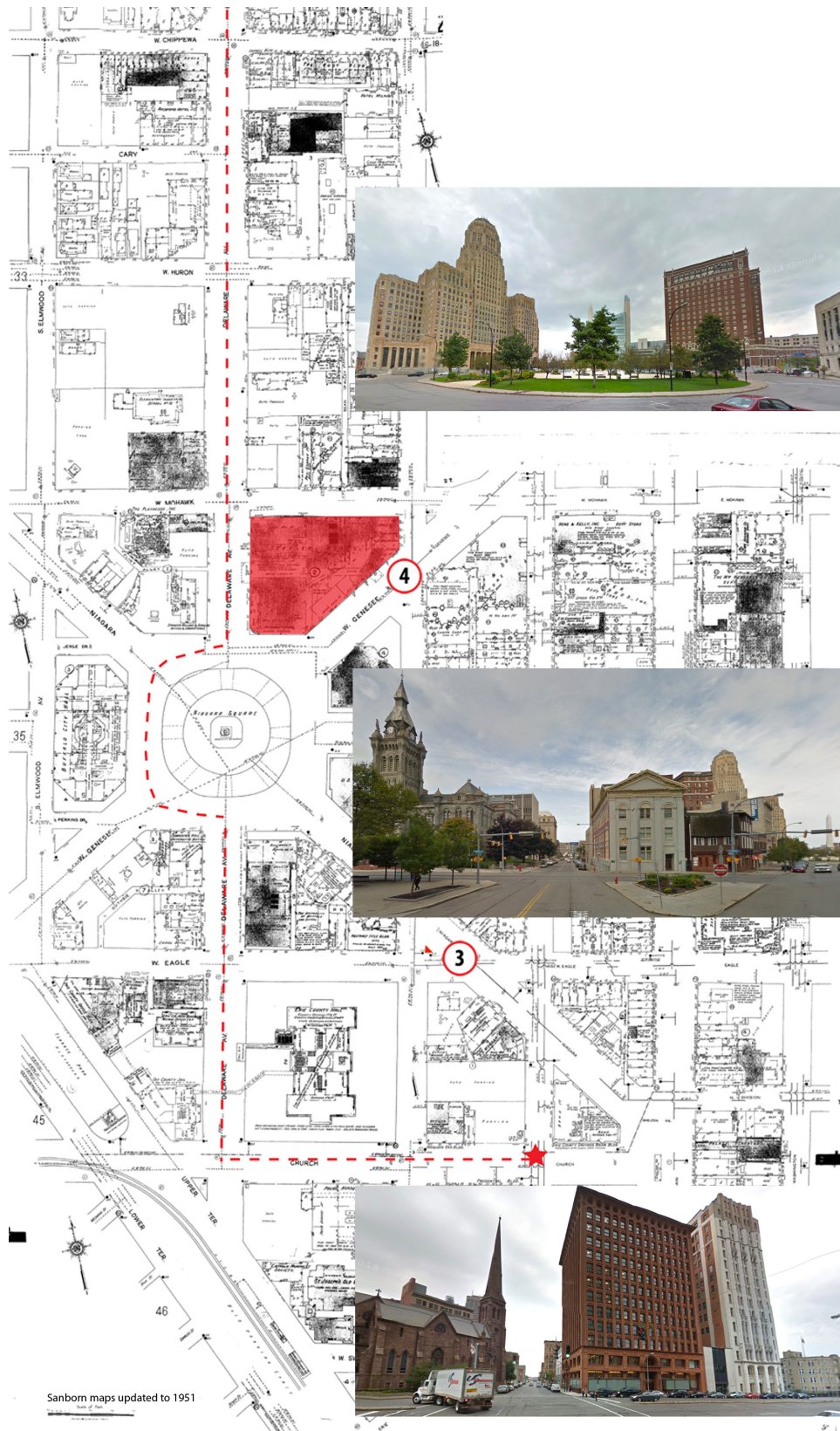


Fig. 35: 1952 Columbus Day Parade Route (part 2), modified from 1951 Sanborn Map.



June 12, 1966



October 31, 1978

Fig. 36: Context of Holy Cross and St. Anthony of Padua Churches before and after demolition for the Waterfront Urban Renewal Project. *Aerial photographs courtesy of the University at Buffalo Map Library.*



St. Anthony of Padua Church

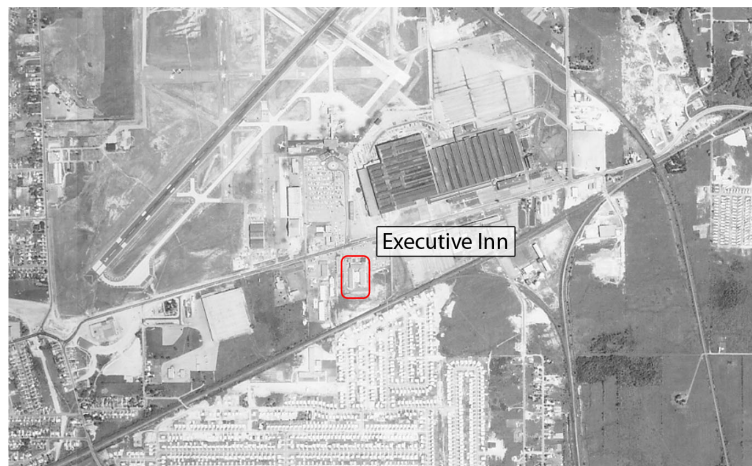


Fig. 37: Sites of the 1969 Columbus Day celebrations. *Aerial photograph courtesy of the University at Buffalo Map Library.*

Re-Placing the West Side in Historical Context and Contemporary Efforts

The preceding chapters illuminate the West Side of Buffalo as the product of multiple efforts at negotiating the shifting metropolitan region in the post-World War II decades. City planners, the West Side Business Men's Association, individual storeowners and the Federation of Italian American Societies engaged in the physical, functional and conceptual making of the neighborhood as they re-identified themselves vis-à-vis the changing city. In doing so, they enacted the West Side as a series of overlapping socio-spatial imaginaries. Beyond saying that each group experienced the neighborhood differently, this view of the neighborhood emphasizes the ongoing social construction of place and recognizes the agency of each actor to contribute to the physical and social realms of the neighborhood.

While the City undertook planning as a tool for imagining and implementing national trends for how to revive and improve industrial cities, the neighborhood business organization catered to consumers across the city through marketing and events. Both of these increasingly represented the West Side as a discrete, contained place for consumers and reoriented the subject of the neighborhood from residents to shoppers. It also forged a singular face for the neighborhood that transcended the diversity within and implied that what was good for business was good for everyone.

In contrast to these place-based groups, individual storeowners and the Federation of Italian American Societies remade the West Side through their mobility in the region. As individuals created networks across the city, they connected nodes on the West Side to other commercial areas. Their experiences of specific, functional places contrasts the

abstracted neighborhood identity that the FIAS created as it recast the West Side as a site from which Italian Buffalonians emerged into mainstream society, following the urban development trends of the postwar years. Its non-material transformation of the West Side as a reference point to a collective identity resonates with the singular image of the first two chapters, but unlike those campaigns to revive the area on the ground, the FIAS engaged the symbolic realm of collective historical significance as it disengaged from the contemporary West Side.

Together, these overlapping geographies repositioned the West Side within the city of Buffalo and the metropolitan region. However, each element was only partial. Even as the WSBMA produced representations of a unified West Side shopping area, the individual storeowners used it functionally through nodes. As the city grappled with how to improve the West Side's future, the Federation elevated the importance of the neighborhood's past. Despite these instances in which efforts did not directly engage one another, there are important interactions between these dimensions of neighborhood identity. For instance, the Waterfront urban renewal project and partially constructed Virginia Street freeway ramp directly altered the physical context of St. Anthony and Holy Cross Churches and nearby commercial areas.

This project contributes to a growing scholarship that interrogates city neighborhoods as emergent productions of multiple actors and viewpoints. It shows that neighborhoods are "neither bounded nor radically open," that they are not empty containers but dynamic, fragmented collections of spatial and social meaning.¹ This case study extends this way of looking temporally, with an historic topic, and in scale, by

¹ Schmidt, "Practices and Process of Neighborhood," 473.

examining multiple layers of neighborhood identity. It shows that the “container view” is insufficient for explaining why and how the West Side changed over this time. By using place—in this project the West Side neighborhood—as a central concept, these disparate strands come together to shed light on historical processes that can be overlooked when centered on community or on instances of direct conflict. It suggests that postwar “change” should include functional and symbolic re-conceptualizations of the West Side and the relationship between visions of its past, present and future.

These lessons are valuable for historic research, suggesting that multi-scalar, practice based studies of place can create better understandings of neighborhood change by providing dimension and nuance to broad trends used to describe transformations. Places of the past are just as complex as contemporary ones, and practices of research and historic preservation that bound neighborhoods spatially misrepresent the dynamics of placemaking in the past.

This approach also offers insight that can benefit contemporary neighborhood efforts, and the West Side of Buffalo today is fertile for this reconsideration for two reasons. First, the same forces that comprise this study of the West Side in decades past continue to shape the neighborhood today, and second, the West Side is currently attracting investment and population increases unseen since the early twentieth century. Amidst this rapid change, diverse efforts at community building, commercial development and residential rehabilitation have emerged to serve different stakeholders in the neighborhood. While it is tempting to embrace proclamations of progress, development and shedding the “rust” that accompany this investment and activity on the West Side, and in Buffalo generally, this project cautions against overlooking other

ongoing productions of place. The narrative of rediscovery is as incomplete as the decline narrative; they are both limited by the “container view” of neighborhood and overlook the multitude of actors and agency at many scales that shape places. This dissertation suggests that integrating a wider perspective of neighborhood as an ongoing product of shared, overlapping geographies will foster more sustainable social and economic outcomes.

A burgeoning wellspring of activity on the West Side over the past decade has made it a hotspot of public awareness, investment and cultural cachet in the city. It is the affordable, interesting place to be in Buffalo today. A diverse mix of immigrants and refugees and young people are moving into areas previously known more for their crime and undesirability than their potential.² They add to a population of long-term residents, including Italian Americans and Latinos that represent former demographic waves in the city. The West Side is now the most diverse area in the city, with almost a third of the population speaking a language other than English at home, and Lafayette High School serving pupils with over forty native languages.³

Alongside this influx of residents, developers, investors and individuals have created a booming real estate market where house prices have more than doubled in the past ten years.⁴ The frontier of middle class families and young professionals started on

² Neighborhood Housing Services, “History and Service Area,” <http://www.wsnhs.org/history-service-area/>; Jay Tokasz, “A New Demographic is Revitalizing Buffalo Neighborhoods,” *Buffalo News*, October 20, 2014.

³ Neighborhood Housing Services, “History and Service Area,”; Green Development Zone, “The Neighborhood,” <http://greendevopmentzone.org/introduction/the-neighborhood/>.

⁴ “Buffalo’s West Side: Beyond Just Believing,” *Buffalo Rising*, October 31, 2011, <http://buffalorising.com/2011/10/bnar-beyond-just-believing/>; Jonathan D. Epstein,

the fringe of the Elmwood Village, has crossed Richmond Avenue and continues to move westward into the West Side. This comes as organizations like PUSH Buffalo have spent nearly a decade endeavoring to provide quality affordable housing for West Siders.

Efforts at revitalization and social justice signal a new era of neighborhood “change.” While contemporary issues such as immigrant transitioning and a growing population pose different challenges than a declining population and disinvestment, the postwar era offers translatable lessons about processes that shape neighborhoods. The West Side today is a product of the same actors and forces that each chapter in this study illuminated, and the neighborhood today cannot be separated from the physical and symbolic transformations of the past. Contemporary efforts deal with the same physical infrastructure—e.g. structures, streetscapes, open spaces—of the past, re-evaluating and envisioning them within new contexts of economic upswing and cultural desirability.

City planners and community-based planning efforts are re-visioning the West Side. The City of Buffalo is undertaking a major overhaul of its sixty year old zoning plan with the Green Code, a form based land use code that draws heavily upon place-based planning strategies, such as those promoted by the Congress for New Urbanism. The plan endeavors to make Buffalo’s neighborhoods, including the West Side, more walkable and bikeable. The Green Code also proposes terminating dozens of open urban renewal plans dating from the 1960s through the 2000s.

In addition, community-based planning efforts include the West Side Sustainable Community Plan (WSSCP) published in by Buffalo’s Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) in 2014. The document stems from the collaboration of residents,

“Bidding Wars and Big Prices: Buffalo Real Estate is Red Hot,” *Buffalo News*, June 14, 2014, City & Region.

business owners, not-for-profit organizations, social service agencies and community members. A LISC national strategy, the Sustainable Community Initiative, promotes places “that are the embodiment of both ‘community’ and ‘development’ – places where human opportunity and social and economic vitality combine with a continuous process of growth, adaptation, and improvement.”⁵ The plan outlines existing conditions, identifies area needs and suggests a series of programs to promote local objectives such as improving environmental quality of life, increasing safety, creating meaningful jobs, increasing literacy rates and restoring existing housing stock as “affordable, energy efficient, high quality structures.”⁶

While the WSSCP represents an inclusive effort, drawing from over 400 participants, it merges them into a single voice and lacks historical context that would moor it to the processes that have led to the contemporary West Side. Its discussion and vision is also limited to looking inwards at the neighborhood without recognizing the interconnections and context of the area within the city, region, and other scales. As a result, the narrative presents itself as a revolutionary effort, not quite a panacea but an origin for regeneration rather than the next step in an ongoing production of the West Side. While this engrained sense of discovery shores up momentum for the cause, offering a powerful marketing and coalition building tactic, it also constrains the purview of contemporary revitalization and neighborhood identity.

In addition to planning efforts, the Grant-Ferry shopping area remains a center of activity and identity on the West Side. In late June 2014, Grant Street between Lafayette and Auburn Street was closed off for the Taste of Diversity Fest, a street festival

⁵ West Side Sustainable Communities Plan, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

featuring entertainment from a variety of musicians and food offerings from such vendors as Abyssinia Ethiopian Cuisine, Jewel of India, Pure Peru, Taste of Africa, Taste of Puerto Rico and Freddy J's BBQ.⁷ The vast menu reflected organizers' goals of showcasing the "diversity that is so great about the West Side," and enabling "local businesses to make themselves known outside of Grant-Ferry" by attracting attendees from other parts of the city.⁸ The West Side Business and Taxpayer's Association (WSBTA, formerly the WSBMA) ran a Community Tent showcasing the West Side Historic Picture Project and a variety of "West Side Buffalo," t-shirts. The Picture Project collected images through Facebook posts and other calls to display images "of our beloved" neighborhood. The project and the branding of the West Side in t-shirts resonates with the WSBMA efforts in the 1970s to employ both historic appeal and a unified vision of the area to make it an attractive consumer arena.

Alongside these collective efforts, individual business owners continue to produce the West Side as part of commercial networks. Paul Murphy operates his flooring business on Grant Street and Minnie Rotundo continues to coordinate dry-cleaning services with her son on West Ferry Street. Other longtime businesses such as Guercio's and Lorigo's operate storefronts on Grant Street while doing most of their business in wholesale across the city.

In addition to these established enterprises, new businesses and store rehabilitations on Grant Street, Connecticut Street, and other areas illustrate West Side growth. Nodes like Five Points Bakery are spotlights that put their surrounding areas on

⁷ "12th Annual Taste of Diversity Festival Line-Up," *Buffalo Rising*, June 27, 2014, <http://buffalorising.com/2014/06/buffalos-12th-annual-taste-of-diversity-festival/>.

⁸ Ibid. Jennifer Silverman and Esther Pica quoted in above.

the map of city dwellers who now venture beyond Elmwood Avenue to get toast and coffee. Prish Moran, proprietor of Sweetness_7 Café at the corner of Grant Street and Lafayette and supporter of a “jump-in” attitude is a local figure credited as among the first to embody the West Side comeback.⁹ On Connecticut Street, Horsefeathers Market & Residences, a historic rehabilitation to the national standards, opened with a signature farm to table restaurant, and retail vendors, below high-end apartments with indoor parking and free utilities (on account of roof-top solar panels). In these examples, the West Side is where existing entrepreneurs are choosing to expand.

Alongside this wave, there is another boost of commercial activity by immigrants opening small businesses, assisted by organizations like Westminster Economic Development Initiative (WEDI), a nonprofit whose mission is to “support entrepreneurs and small business development, training, and education on the West Side of Buffalo.”¹⁰ Through microloan programs and The West Side Bazaar business incubator, WEDI has assisted over a dozen businesses in its “target area.” The West Side Bazaar opened in 2011 with six “newly minted business owners,” from Rwanda, South Sudan, Peru, Indonesia and the United States. Taken together, this commercial growth is transforming streets that became dotted with vacancies, cash checking services and second hand stores. The next few years will show whether these commercial operations are compatible or if they will develop into a segmented commercial geography.

⁹ Queenseyes, “Seventh Heaven on Grant Street,” *Buffalo Rising*, December 6, 2008, <http://buffalorising.com/2008/12/seventh-heaven-on-grant-street/>; “Prish’s Dish – Meet Sweetness 7’s Prish Moran,” *The Good Neighborhood*, January 13, 2012, <http://www.thegoodneighborhood.com/2012/01/13/prishs-dish-meet-sweetness-7s-prish-moran/>.

¹⁰ “About WEDI,” Westminster Economic Development Initiative, <http://www.wedibuffalo.org>.

Finally, the Italian American imaginary of the West Side remains a salient component of neighborhood identity. The Per Niente Club, an Italian American group, holds events and fundraisers throughout the year. They also produce a quarterly publication “of memorable stories and photos submitted by our subscribers that depict our Italian heritage and bring to life the experience of closely knit families, friends and neighborhood.”¹¹ While Swan Street and Lovejoy, other neighborhoods known for their Italian heritage, receive some attention, stories and images of the West Side dominate the magazine pages. Furthermore, the WSBTA had a stand at the Italian Festival in North Buffalo in July 2014, evidencing the continued connection between the West Side and Buffalo’s Italian Americans. At the Buffalo History Lecture Series later that month, Per Niente leader and screenwriter Joe Giambra gave a lecture with colleague Angelo Coniglio entitled, “Why the history of the Italian-American Community the ‘Hooks’ Matters.”¹² The lecture series, held at Canalside, a massive redevelopment project transforming the waterfront into an Erie Canal themed destination, is on the site of the historic Hooks neighborhood. As redevelopment continues across the West Side, the ongoing relationship of Buffalo’s Italian American interests will continue to shape the neighborhood.

In addition to these elements of neighborhood production and identity there are other organizations and efforts playing a part in the West Side, including a widespread consciousness of historic preservation as an impetus to economic and community development. Despite the talk of historic preservation, current efforts lack the “explicit

¹¹ Per Niente, “About Us,” available online: <http://www.perniente.org/about.htm>

¹² “Buffalo History Lecture Series,” Canalside Buffalo, <http://www.canalsidebuffalo.com/print-events/?type=month&date=2014-08&filter=story-of-buffalo>.

dialog between past and present” that gives history the “unusual capacity to build mutual respect among diverse populations that [share] particular fragments of urban space.”¹³

This project offers a starting point for conceptualizing the West Side beyond boundaries and reconsidering the production of history through placemaking; in turn, this opens possibilities for groups to effectively use historical assets on the West Side to “acquire the capacity to stabilize social relations, articulate community values, and plan more intelligently for the future.”¹⁴

One strand of a citywide heightened awareness of historic preservation in Buffalo consists of vocal groups espousing the benefits of historic preservation in terms of neighborhood character and building fabric, structural quality, and environmental responsibility. Buffalo’s Young Preservationists is a growing organization of active citizens that opposes demolitions, supports rehabilitation and reuse, and has led campaigns to save buildings like the Trico factory, the birthplace of modern windshield wipers. On the West Side, BYP plants “heart bombs” on homes slated for city demolition to raise awareness and promote investment.¹⁵ Two founding members of BYP, Jason Wilson and Bernice Radle, also formed Buffalove Development, a small scale redevelopment company that began with three residential buildings and two vacant lots they bought at city auction in 2012.¹⁶ These projects represent the small scale and

¹³ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, 44, 178.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁵ Jason Clement, “‘Heart Bombs’ and Love Stories: How Buffalo’s Preservation Power Couple Celebrates Valentine’s Day,” PreservationNation Blog, February 14, 2012, <http://blog.preservationnation.org/2012/02/14/heart-bombs-and-love-stories-how-buffalos-preservation-power-couple-celebrates-valentines-day/#.VCgHnhaWTwI>.

¹⁶ Penelope Green, “Small-scale Developers, Big Dreams,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2013.

individual rehabilitation efforts that invoke historic appeal alongside economic investment in the West Side.

Another wave of preservation centers on the economic benefits of tax credits, which facilitate development projects unlikely to proceed otherwise.¹⁷ Local developers such as Karl Frizlen, Jake Schneider, Rocco Termini and Paul Iskalo employ tax credits in rehabilitations projects across the city. On the West Side, Horsefeathers, the Livery Apartments and Annunciation School reflect this trend. In 2014, Schneider announced plans to use historic tax credits in renovating the two buildings on Niagara Street that the *West Buffalo Study* identified for the special NBD project in 1978. These developers use historic preservation as an economic tool but the historical research undergirding the tax credit process is often treated as a logistical hurdle rather than an integral part of the development process or an opportunity for public education.

The burgeoning historic awareness in real estate development and community development holds more potential for connecting stakeholders in the West Side than is currently realized in narrowly conceived and object-oriented preservation status quo. Andrew Hurley offers examples of collaborative projects between Community History Research and Design Services (a unit based at the University of Missouri-St. Louis) and neighborhood organizations in St. Louis, showing how they used public history and archaeology to promote neighborhood community and grass-roots activism. He attributes the success of these projects to the illuminating intergenerational connections by valuing recent history and empowering local engagement through defining community issues. Part of this goal involved developing a “set of historical narratives that would correspond

¹⁷ For more about tax credits in WNY, see for example, Jason Yots, “Historic Rehab Industry Sails Into Tax Credit Safe Harbor,” <http://preservationexchange.blogspot.com>.

to specific neighborhood objectives” and in particular, “moving away from model of immigrating populations” which runs the danger of “alienating the contemporary population from much of the neighborhood’s past.”¹⁸ Drawing from June Manning Thomas, who incorporated oral histories and discussions with former neighborhood activists into neighborhood planning, Hurley advocates including historical inquiry into neighborhood planning and strategizing.¹⁹ One of the benefits of this perspective is learning from community initiatives of the past—what was attempted, succeeded or failed. Each of these elements shows his belief that a multiplicity of viewpoints is at the heart of community building.

His ideas hold potential for fostering appreciation for and connections to people and places; yet, I would add that they become more powerful when merged with the concept of enacted neighborhoods. This expands the view of historical value and utility by interrogating the concept of neighborhood itself and produces a different kind of historical knowledge and insight by seeing past neighborhood as container towards viewing it as an ongoing process. In turn, this extends his goal of promoting mutual respect among stakeholders to include understanding differing relationships to place and the strategies that sustain them.

Reconnecting understandings of the contemporary West Side to historical processes holds the potential to overcome the insular view of the neighborhood. For instance, the WSSCP plan includes a single paragraph summarizing the nineteenth century history of the West Side as a streetcar suburb, and a subsequent section that outlines Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. and Calvert Vaux’s vision of Buffalo’s park and

¹⁸ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, 70, 80-81.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

parkway system in 1870.²⁰ This is the extent of history presented in the entire plan. The deteriorated housing stock is not connected to the population loss of the postwar era, and there is no mention of West Side Business Men's Association attempts to maintain commercial viability. This lack of historical connection to the present day reinforces the sense of the neighborhood as separate from the past, "thereby isolating present-day inhabitants from history's flow."²¹

Ultimately, this dissertation gestures towards blurring boundaries that define place and history to move beyond the conceptualization of neighborhoods as insular containers and the "past-ness of the past." Considering the West Side as a myriad of social constructions during the decades between 1950 and 1980 offers an example of how to do this. This reconceptualization also pushes scholars and contemporary planners and activists to rethink the relationship between neighborhoods of the past and today, starting with the conceptualization of neighborhoods as emergent socio-spatial artifacts composed by the overlapping imaginaries of multiple producers.

Buffalo historian and entrepreneur Mark Goldman and the Friends of the Buffalo Story recently announced plans for a local history project with promising potential to exemplify how place-based histories can foster community development. For eight months in 2014 and 2015, participants in the Ferry Street Corridor Project will collect stories and histories of residents and places along Ferry Street, an east-west thoroughfare that extends four and a half miles from Niagara Street to Bailey Avenue. Main Street, which intersects at the approximate mid-point, marks the transition from West Ferry to East Ferry and embodies the "symbolic divide between Buffalo's segregated east and

²⁰ West Side Sustainable Communities Plan, 9.

²¹ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, 74.

west sides,” between, “struggling and vibrant, black and white.”²² The project seeks to engage community members, local high school students, and artists to build histories from the ground up. When people learn about social, cultural, and political influences that have shaped places they experience on a regular basis and they encounter other people’s perspectives of those places, they reconsider their own understandings of and belonging to a broader whole: “You start thinking differently about where you live...and all of a sudden the street that you’re walking on takes on a different meaning.”²³ Goldman hopes that this project, which will culminate with public displays, public art projects, a theater camp, and other products, will foster heightened awareness of and attachment to Ferry Street in order to build relationships in the area and promote engaged citizenship. The vision for harnessing the Ferry Street Corridor for these aims taps the unique ability for stories of place to relate past and present, to illuminate connections between disparate locations, and to empower individuals to recognize their contribution to an ongoing, shared locale.

Putting place at the center of inquiry, the Ferry Street Corridor Project, like this study of the West Side in postwar Buffalo, redirects history making to interrogate the simultaneous complexity and ordinariness of city spaces. Seeing neighborhoods as historical artifacts and constantly negotiated social and physical entities can renew expectations for and evaluations of the way that people and groups represent and impact place identity. Such historical studies of placemaking offer a mode of encouraging more accountable stewardship of the places that we inherit, reproduce, and leave for others.

²² Colin Dabkowski, “Project Aims At Crossing Great Divide,” *Buffalo News*, October 24, 2014: A6, A1.

²³ Goldman, quoted in *Ibid.*, A6.

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Yots, Jason. "Historic Rehab Industry Sails Into Tax Credit Safe Harbor." Preservation Exchange, <http://preservationexchange.blogspot.com>.

Unpublished & Informally Published Material

Goldman, Mark. "Buffalo's Black Rock: Neighborhood Identity and the Metropolitan Relationship." PhD diss., University of Buffalo, 1973.

Griffith, Lucas Adam. "Structuring Neighborhood Space: An Investigation into the Production of Neighborhood Space as Planned, Practiced and Lived in Post-Industrial Norway." PhD diss., University of Stavanger, Norway, 2013.

Looker, Benjamin. "A Nation of Neighborhoods: Cities, Communities and Democracy in the American Imagination, 1940-2000." PhD diss., Yale University, 2010.

Napora, James. "Houses of Worship: A Guide to the Religious Architecture of Buffalo, New York." Master's thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1995.

Nicotera, Nicole. "Children and Their Neighborhoods: A Mixed Methods Approach to Understanding the Construct Neighborhood." PhD diss., University of Washington, 2002.

Palen, Frank S. "City Planning in Buffalo, New York: A History of Institutions." Unpublished manuscript, The School of Law, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1983.

Caitlin Boyle Moriarty

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Architecture, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007-2014 (expected)

Major: Consumption in Post World War II American Cities

Minors: Material Culture and Public History

Dissertation: "Creating Neighborhood in Postwar Buffalo, New York: Transformations of the West Side, 1950-1980"

B.A. Urban Studies, Brown University, June 2007

Shape of Two Cities Program, Urban Studies, Columbia University, 2006-2007

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

American cities and urban history, vernacular architecture and cultural landscapes, architectural history, urban development, collective memory, public history, place and identity.

FELLOWSHIPS

Dissertation Fellow, UW-Milwaukee, 2011-2012

Graduate Student Fellow, UW-Milwaukee, 2010-2011

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Project Manager, Chautauqua County Planning Department, Jamestown, New York, 2014-present. Liaison between the county, the New York Department of State, the project consultant, and ten municipalities participating in the Northern Chautauqua County Local Waterfront Revitalization Program.

Vice President of Architectural History and Architectural Historian, Preservation Studios, LLC. Buffalo, New York, 2011-2013. Oversaw and conducted research and writing of National Register nominations and other projects while in communication with the State Historic Preservation Office. Handled client interaction.

Project Assistant to Dr. Arijit Sen, UW-Milwaukee Department of Architecture, 2009-2010. Conducted archival research, edited and formatted journal articles and studio project books. Assisted website design, content and development for the Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures initiative for the study of architectural history and cultural landscapes, www.blcprogram.org.

Project Assistant to Dr. Brian Schermer, UW-Milwaukee Department of Architecture, 2007-2009. Conducted interviews, edited and formatted reports, preliminary design schematics and a design guidebook for non-profit organizations.

PUBLICATIONS

Review of Andrew Shanken, *194X: Architecture, Planning, and Consumer Culture on the American Home Front*, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2009) in *Material Culture* 44, no. 2 (2012): 75-77.

Encyclopedia entry, "Frederick Law Olmsted," in the *Encyclopedia of Populism in America*. Edited by Alexandra Kindell and Elizabeth Demers. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2014.

SELECTED NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATIONS

With Preservation Studios, National Register of Historic Places, Hamlin Park Historic District, Buffalo, Erie County, New York, National Register #13000462. Listed 7/3/2013.

With Preservation Studios, National Register of Historic Places, E.M. Hager & Sons Co. Building, Buffalo, Erie County, New York, National Register #13000306. Listed 5/22/2013.

With Preservation Studios, National Register of Historic Places, F.N. Burt Company Factory, Buffalo, Erie County, New York, National Register #13000053. Listed 3/6/2013.

With Preservation Studios, National Register of Historic Places, The Dick Block, North Tonawanda, Niagara County, New York, National Register #12000957. Listed 11/21/2012.

With Preservation Studios, National Register of Historic Places, Holy Rosary Church Complex, Rochester, Monroe County, New York, National Register #12000597. Listed 9/4/2012.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS & PROCEEDINGS

"The West Side Times: Glimpses of a Neighborhood in 1956," *Per Niente Magazine* 10, no. 1 (2014): 6-8. Quarterly publication of the Per Niente Club, an Italian American organization in Buffalo, New York. See perniente.org.

"Meanings of Place: the Neighborhood Store," *Calibrations* 3 (2009): 178. Annual publication of the UW-Milwaukee School of Architecture and Urban Planning featuring student design and research.

With Brian Schermer, Emi Kiyota, Matt Jaroz and Newton D'Souza, "Designing For Addiction Recovery: Reflections from an Architectural Case," Published in the Proceedings of the 39th Environmental Design Research Association Annual Conference, May 28-June 1, 2008, Boca del Rio, Veracruz, Mexico.

PRESENTATIONS

"The Via Romano and a Blitz Clean-Up: Re-Visioning the Street in Postwar Buffalo's Little Italy," paper presentation and panel organizer at the Urban History Association Bi-Annual Conference, New York City, NY, October 2012.

“The Shifting Center of Buffalo’s Postwar Little Italy,” presentation at the Urban Image Research Group, University of Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, April 2012.

Guest lecturer in Cultural Landscapes for Introduction to Historic Preservation course at Daemon College, Buffalo, NY, October 2011.

Dissertation Workshop, participant, Society of America City and Regional Planning History, Baltimore, MD, September 2011.

““Things Have Changed Since Then”: Relocating the Kosciuszko Monument in Post World War II Milwaukee,” paper presentation at the UW-Milwaukee Urban Studies Program Forum, Milwaukee, WI, April 2011.

“Monroe Street on the Move: Negotiating Modernity on a Neighborhood Shopping Street,” paper presentation at the Mid-Atlantic Popular/American Culture Association Conference, Alexandria, VA, October 2010.

“Making History: Ethnicity, Locality and Business in an Italian Specialty Store,” paper presentation at the Minnesota Society of Architectural Historians Student Symposium, St. Paul, MN, September 2009.

“Partially Conscious: Contradictions of the Lyman Mission Home,” paper presentation at the Vernacular Architecture Forum Annual Conference, Butte, MT, June 2009.

“Locating Main Street,” paper presentation at the UW-Milwaukee Urban Studies Program Forum, Milwaukee, WI, April 2009.

“Material Remains Producing Multiple Identities: The Spatial Structure of an Italian Grocery in Milwaukee,” paper presentation at the UW-Milwaukee Urban Studies Program Forum, Milwaukee, WI, April 2008.

With Jonathan Villines, “The Re-Creation of Front de Seine: Integrating the Real and Programmed Uses of Urban Space,” paper presentation at the 38th Environmental Design Research Association Conference, Sacramento, CA, June 2007.

COMMITTEES

Co-Chair of the Buffalo Seminar/Historic Preservation Day, Local Planning Committee for the Society of Architectural Historians 66th Annual Conference, Buffalo, NY, 2011-2013.

Member of Steering Committee, Programming Committee, and Marketing Committee, Urban Land Institute of Western New York, 2011-present.

Member of the Planning Committee for the Embodied Placemaking in Urban Public Spaces Conference, Center for 21st Century Studies, Milwaukee, WI, 2009-2010.

Member of the Planning Committee for the Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference, Milwaukee, WI, 2009-2011.

AWARDS

UW-Milwaukee Chancellor's Graduate Student Award, Architecture, 2007, 2009

Vernacular Architecture Forum Presenter's Award, 2009

UW-Milwaukee Graduate School Student Travel Award, 2009

UW-Milwaukee Ph.D. Architecture Committee Travel Award, 2008, 2009

Vernacular Architecture Forum Ambassador's Award, 2008

Brown University Research (RAB) Grant, 2007

MEMBERSHIPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

American Studies Association

Society of Architectural Historians

Society of City and Regional Planning History

Urban History Association

Vernacular Architecture Forum

Urban Land Institute of Western New York

Urban Image Research Workshop at SUNY-Buffalo