
Application for Landmark/Landmark Site

Buffalo Preservation Board
901 City Hall
Buffalo, New York 14202
Telephone: (716) 851-5029
Fax: (716) 851-4388

Instructions to Applicant:

The following information is required, at a minimum, prior to the Buffalo Preservation Board considering an application complete:

- a) Three (3) copies of this application;
- b) One complete set of quality photographs, (Preferably 8" x 10"), of all exterior elevations of the building. Interior photographs may also be submitted;
- c) A site plan, map or survey that indicates in sufficient details what building/properties are being proposed for designation;
- d) Any additional information you can furnish that substantiates that the property is deemed to be of architectural, historical, geographical, cultural or aesthetic significance.

Failure to submit the required information may result in an incomplete application and delay the review process:

****** check in the amount of \$500.00 made out to the City of Buffalo Preservation Board must be submitted at time of application for non-owner occupied structures/sites.**

Please provide the following on the property for which landmark consideration is requested.

1. Address of Site 9 Ohio Street
2. Name of Property (if any) Erie Freight House

3. Name of Present Owner Great Lakes Paper
Address PO Box 663
City Buffalo Zip 14240

Note: If property is in multiple ownership, list the names/addresses of other persons having legal or equitable interest in property:

4. Has the owner, if other than applicant, been contacted?

Yes No

If yes, submit a signed statement/affidavit by owner supporting Designation.

5. Present use of property

Vacant

6. Year of Construction

c.1868

Information Source 1866 Emslie Atlas

7. Architect unknown

8. Is property endangered? Yes No

If yes, explain: Future owner wishes to demolish the structure

9. On separate pages, please describe the architectural, historical, geographical and cultural significance of this landmark and/or landmark site. Please indicate the sources of information.

Please see attached.

10. Please attach any additional material which might be useful in considering the site for landmark designation, i.e.; newspaper clippings, magazine articles, photographs, etc. Please list below, which of these materials you would like returned. If you would like to present additional materials at a meeting of the Preservation Board, please indicate nature of such materials.

11. Name of Applicant

Henry McCartney

Organization, (if any)

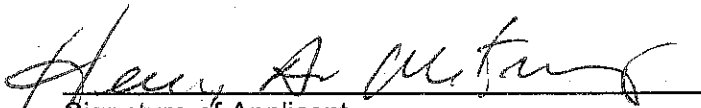
Executive Director, Preservation Buffalo Niagara

Address 617 Main St.

City Buffalo Zip 14203

Phone (716) 852-3300

I hereby certify that the information contained herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.


Signature of Applicant

Nov 18 2011
Date

Erie Freight House Local Landmark Nomination

Authored by Kerry Traynor, KTA Preservation Specialists and University at Buffalo Students Geoff Butler and Michael Zimmerman

Summary Statement of Significance:

The Erie Freight House was constructed ca. 1868¹ at 9 Ohio Street², along the banks of the Buffalo River. The property is significant as the oldest extant freight depot/warehouse building in Buffalo, and for its association with the Erie Canal. It is also the only remaining freight house along the Buffalo River, a building type that once dominated its banks. Freight depots were an essential component of Buffalo's transshipment industry that began with the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. The confluence of water-borne and railroad shipping in the 1840's was responsible for Buffalo's industrial and commercial boom years. Buffalo was positioned with advantages no other city had: it sat at the head of the Great Lakes, at the terminus of the Erie Canal, it had growing rail infrastructure, and was the heart of technological innovations in the grain and goods shipping industries. The Erie Freight House played a pivotal role in this development as it was situated at the confluence of Lake Erie, the Erie Canal, and Erie Railroad's shipping network. The Erie Freight House is also significant for its relationship to major railroad companies in Buffalo. Finally, the Erie Freight House is significant as a substantially intact example of mid-19th century heavy timber construction, which retains its original wood cornice and, though covered with metal siding, its original channel rustic siding. The period of significance for the property ends ca. 1950 when under the ownership of Buffalo Merchandise Warehouses, Inc. it was vacant.³ The opening of the Saint Lawrence Seaway in 1959 ushered in a period of prolonged decline as evident in the lack of significant commercial buildings constructed after this date, and the demolition of those constructed during the boom years.

The Erie Freight House qualifies for five of the "Criteria for Designation"⁴ as defined in *Chapter 337, Preservation Standards, City of Buffalo Charter and Ordinances*. The property has character, interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of Buffalo, New York State and the country (Criterion 1); the property exemplifies the historic, aesthetic, architectural, economic and cultural heritage of Buffalo, New York State and the country (Criterion 3); the property embodies distinguishing characteristics of an industrial architectural style valuable for the study of its method of construction and typology to service function (Criterion 5); the property embodies elements

¹ The property appears on the 1866 *Emslie Atlas* as being owned by the Erie Railway Company. The Erie Railway Company was formed in 1861 after, in 1859, the New York and Erie Railroad went into receivership. In 1861 the Erie Railway expanded by merging in the Buffalo, New York and Erie Railway. In 1878 the Erie Railway was replaced by the New York, Lake Erie and Western Railroad Company.

² Erie County GIS lists the property address as 9 Ohio Street. The address noted by the former owner on the building is 441 Ohio Street.

³ Sanborn Mapping Company *Insurance Maps of Buffalo, New York 1950*.

⁴ The "Criteria for Designation" are located in *Chapter 337 of the City of Buffalo Charter and Ordinances*. The charter can be located at the city's website, url, <http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/>

of industrial design and materials that renders it architecturally significant (Criterion 7); and the property is unique in its contextual environment, possessing singular physical characteristics, a result of its function, and as the oldest remaining transshipment freight building and the last example of a typology that once lined the bank of the Buffalo River along Ohio Street (Criterion 9). The proposed building is a local landmark because of the vitally important role freight houses along the Buffalo River played in the handling and shipping goods, and the economic growth and prosperity that followed. The *City Charter* requires that a proposed historic landmark meet one (1) or more of the criteria. The Erie Freight House meets five of the "Criteria for Designation".

Description:

Map Analysis

The Erie Freight House is located at 9 Ohio Street, in the City of Buffalo, Erie County, New York. The property is situated along the shoreline of the Buffalo River on Ohio Street between Louisiana and South Streets. At the time of its construction, as indicated on the historic maps, the banks of the Buffalo River along Ohio Street were dominated by freight houses and grain elevators. The landscape at the water's edge was defined by the long, low-lying horizontal freight houses with their gable roofs and horizontal clapboard siding juxtaposed against the vertically soaring grain elevators. The Erie Freight House was one of those structures. The 1866 *Emslie Deed Atlas* notes the owner of the property as the Erie Railway Company, and the 1868 Sanborn map shows a two-story heavy timber frame structure measuring approximately 110-feet wide by 550-feet long on the site, with a 20-foot wide wharf running the length of the structure adjacent to the Buffalo River. Railway lines run along the west elevation of the property. The 1889 Sanborn maps notes the owner of the freight depot (flour house) as the New York, Lake Erie and Western Railroad Company.⁵ This map also shows the Erie Elevator located immediately to the south. The 1899 Sanborn map still indicates that the building functioned as a flour warehouse. The only change to the structure depicted on the 1889 Sanborn map is the addition of an engine room at the center of the west elevation. By 1925 the Erie Elevator no longer existed to the south, and the freight house is described as the Erie Railroad Exchange – Lake and Transfer Building. By this time the engine room had been extended beyond the walls of the main structure into the loading wharf. The 1950 Sanborn map notes that "W. Ho. No 6", owned by the "Buffalo Merchandise Warehouses, Inc." is vacant, with the exception of one-fifth of the structure to the south, which is occupied by "Fred G. Harding 2^D Bakery Feed Meal". The structure at this time is described as being composed of steel beams, wood posts and wood trusses. By 1959, the wharf that connected to freight house to the harbor had been removed. The property was later acquired by Great Lakes Paper who utilized the depot's rail and truck connections to handle shipment of their product. Today the building sits vacant.

Existing Conditions:

⁵ The Erie Railway Company was replaced on April 26, 1878 by the New York, Lake Erie and Western Railroad Company.

The Erie Freight House measures approximately 110-feet wide by 550-feet running north-south along the Buffalo River. Historically a 20-foot wharf ran the length of the west elevation along the Buffalo River. The wharf was removed by 1959. The two-story heavy timber frame structure is a classical basilica form with a full-story gable end, and single-story shed roof "aisles". Though the original fabric has been covered in metal siding, it is likely that clerestory windows providing light into the building. The original channel rustic siding is visible beneath the metal siding. Shadow lines at the channels of the siding would have reinforced the strong horizontality characteristic of freight house buildings. The original wood cornice, which remains intact, marks the edge of the roof wall junction along each elevation. The west elevation faces the Buffalo River. Historically this elevation would have had bays to move goods into and out of the structure. The bays along this elevation are currently obscured by the metal siding. The foundation at this location is primarily random coursed stone with some brick and tile at various locations. The foundation extends into the river. Damage is noted at some locations along the foundation. The wharf along the west elevation no longer exists, marked only by a few wooden piers in the water. A portion of the engine room remains as a ruin at the water's edge. An opening along this elevation reveals the heavy timber framing, wood trusses, steel beams and areas where the roof is missing. Despite failure at the roof, the remaining members remain essentially intact. The east elevation would also have been defined by the rhythm of loading bays breaking the surface of the horizontal plane. Some of the bays still exist along this elevation, as does a portion of the railway tracks at grade. The foundation along this elevation is brick, which may sit upon a stone foundation.⁶ The south elevation is defined by its gable form and one-and-one-half story shed roof side aisles. The north elevation is also defined by its gable form, however the side aisles have been reduced to a single story. Loading bays are located at the north and south elevations. The foundation at the north and south elevations is also brick, possibly on top of a stone foundation.

Despite deterioration and failure at a portion of the roof, and a loss of wood siding along the west elevation, a substantial portion of the original fabric of the Erie Freight House remains intact. The building retains significant integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association in its contribution to Buffalo's transshipment history.

Significance:

The Erie Freight House represents a critical piece of history in the development of Buffalo, New York State, and the Great Lakes region of the United States. It stands as a monument to a period in American history when waterborne commerce transformed a sparsely populated, vast frontier into a dynamic and diverse region that would lead the way for America's rise to global prominence. It was during this time that commerce resulting from the Erie Canal created a trade route between east and west. This led to the rapid growth of Buffalo attracting thousands of people from North America and Europe. Buffalo's transition from frontier outpost to bustling international port would enable development of the entire Great Lakes Region, New York State, and the Eastern Seaboard. Moreover, Buffalo's rise to prominence was a microcosm for a similar transformation occurring throughout the rest of the nation.

⁶ Inspection of the interior would be necessary to determine the exact composition of the foundation materials.

Buffalo's harbor began a period of tremendous growth in the early 19th century. It was then that the prospect of a Buffalo terminus for the proposed Erie Canal attracted speculators seeking to profit from acquiring land in what would soon become a busy inland port. Joseph Ellicott and The Holland Land Company surveyed and purchased much of the land in Western New York, and then quickly sold parcels to investors as the canal proposal drove prices upward. This attracted a group of wealthy investors to the region seeking to profit from the commercial activity resulting from the opening of the new trade route. This group of elite newcomers became an influential force that would prove to be the deciding factor in locating the canal terminus in Buffalo instead of upriver in the Village of Black Rock.

Once the Canal was completed, Buffalo became situated on a new trade route linking the Great Lakes and the Eastern Seaboard. Lake vessels would haul their cargo eastward to Buffalo where it would be transferred to canal barges and shipped across the state to New York City. Initially, the dominant product shipped through Buffalo was Midwestern grain, however others commodities were later shipped through Buffalo as merchants sought to diversify their operation beyond the often volatile grain market. The seemingly endless demand for wharf space prompted the city to enlarge the harbor area with construction of a series of canals feeding off the Buffalo River. As demand continued to rise and lake vessels grew larger, additional canals and a series of breakwaters were constructed on the city's lakefront. In addition, Buffalo's population grew and diversified as thousands of immigrants from Ireland, the German States, and the rest of the United States came to Buffalo to seek employment and business opportunities on the waterfront. Moreover, technological innovations, such as the grain elevator⁷, developed as a way to improve the efficiency and profitability of commercial activity.

As the Erie Canal became congested from the steady growth of traffic, a vast railroad network was constructed further expanding Buffalo's transshipment capacity. Several railroad companies, including Delaware Lackawanna and Western, Erie, and New York Central, established passenger and freight rail hubs in close proximity to Buffalo's waterfront. The rail system dramatically increased Buffalo's capacity to handle cargo by providing a more efficient mode of transit. Moreover, the rail lines were able to continue service throughout the year while the canal had to be closed during the winter months. The added capacity brought about by the railroads enabled Buffalo's harbor front to emerge as both a center for shipping and manufacturing. Raw materials could now be shipped into Buffalo during all four seasons, become processed by local manufacturers into finished products, and then be shipped to locations across the country. The Erie Freight House was built between 1866 and 1868 (Emslie Atlas 1866 and Sanborn Mapping Company Atlas 1868) and would have been a typical lake to rail transshipment structure for this period.

Manufacturing and rail storage and transfer facilities of various sizes and uses began to emerge among the numerous grain elevators. The earlier of these buildings were typically one or two stories, were wood-framed, and located where water access was possible. As land on the waterfront became more expensive and new rail lines made interior property accessible to shipping, these companies began

⁷ National Register of Historic Places multiple property documentation. *Historic and Architectural Resources of the Buffalo Grain and Materials Elevator Multiple Property Submission*

to locate away from the water. Elevators, warehouses and factories could now be built along rail lines, and rail yards to handle their shipping needs. These properties were typically constructed of reinforced concrete or steel framing with brick and tile curtain walls. These improvements coupled with the increased availability of land allowed these structures to be built on a much larger scale as some were upwards of ten stories tall and occupied entire city blocks. The companies that dealt with large scale bulk transshipments, which were still more efficiently shipped by lake, remained on the waterfront but utilized the rail network to supplement lake transit.

Industry and commerce thrived on the waterfront until a series of events following World War II would lead to the region's decline. The Erie Canal was enlarged at the turn of the century but underwent a period of benign neglect for decades afterward and became functionally obsolete. The Interstate Highway Act of 1956 resulted in a national network of superhighways including roads that serviced the harbor. This new publicly funded transportation network gave shippers a less expensive alternative to ship their goods but it undermined Buffalo's privately owned rail network. In addition, construction of the St Lawrence Seaway in 1959 allowed lake vessels to sail directly between the Great Lakes and Atlantic Ocean without having to stop in Buffalo. The vast network of lake vessels, canal barges, and railroads that once made Buffalo a hub for east-west shipping was now largely redundant. As a result, many of the businesses in the harbor that relied on these modes of transit closed or relocated.

The loss of historic structures in the Harbor area from economic decline indicates the need to preserve what remains of Buffalo's once bustling port. The Erie Freight House serves as monuments to a time when our city and nation transitioned from an isolated agrarian society to a dynamic center of industry and commerce. It is a rare example of commercial architecture that was once abundant along the Buffalo River in the mid-nineteenth century. This is an important chapter in our history and the basis for the proposed local landmark designation.

The Holland Land Company

At the time of the Declaration of Independence, the confluence of Buffalo Creek, Lake Erie, and the Niagara River was a desolate frontier outpost. It was inhabited by those willing to make a living amid the harsh conditions along the eastern shores of Lake Erie. This hearty group was made up of a few nomadic Indians, runaway slaves, as well as a few white fur traders and trappers. Several taverns cropped up along this confluence to cater to these early Western New York inhabitants. These were some of the earliest centers of commerce as deals were often made between traders and tavern keepers who would provide food, drink, and shelter in exchange for goods acquired in travel (Murphy p7). This early settlement was along a bluff called "The Terrace" that provided protection against the floods that would plague the lower lying land between The Terrace and the river (Grasso p3).

Although Western New York was situated between the agricultural regions of the Midwest, and the emerging markets and ports on the East Coast, obstacles to transportation limited the commercial potential of the mouth of Buffalo Creek. Although it sat on the doorstep of the navigable Great Lakes, a

great rise in elevation between Lakes Erie and Ontario forming Niagara Falls, prevented waterborne commerce between the Midwest and East.

Joseph Ellicott was one of the few to recognize the potential of Western New York as a center of transshipment beyond frontier trade. Through the Holland Land Company (HLC), he acquired a large portion of land in Upstate New York between the Genesee River and Lake Erie. This included an area just north of the junction of Buffalo Creek and Lake Erie, which he would call New Amsterdam. Ellicott subdivided this property into individual lots and drew a radial street plan centered on what is now known as Niagara Square. As settlers moved in, they changed the name of the Village to Buffalo, and replaced the Dutch names of streets in Ellicott's plan to names that would reflect the village's American frontier character. Streets such as Vanstaphorst and Vollenhoven became Main and Erie respectively (Grasso p4). The name changes offended Ellicott to the point where he relocated his company's offices from Buffalo to Batavia (Gerber p4). The tiny village would grow to a few hundred residents before being burned to the ground by the British during the War of 1812.

In 1810 New York State formed the Erie Canal Commission to explore the possibility of constructing a canal connecting the East Coast with the shores of Lake Erie. Two years prior, New York's Surveyor General Simeon DeWitt enlisted the assistance of Ellicott to determine the best route possible for this trans-state waterway (HLC p3). Of particular concern was whether or not to construct the portion of the canal west of the Genesee River inland or along the shores of Lake Ontario. Ellicott lobbied on behalf of the former, claiming that clay soils, water, and abundance of timber and limestone for construction gave the inland route an advantage over Lake Ontario (HLC p.6).

The decision of where to locate the canal's western terminus was a source of controversy that would not be resolved as easily. Ellicott initially called for the terminus to be located in Buffalo due to the presence of lake water for use in the canal, ability of lake vessels to transfer cargo easily, and the profit Holland Land Company would generate from the sale of their considerable real estate holdings in Buffalo (HLC p43). However he expressed doubt that the modifications required to make Buffalo's harbor navigable would be worth the considerable cost (HLC p 44). The Buffalo terminus was hindered by a 15-20 foot deep sand bar across the entrance of Buffalo Creek and a lakeshore exposed to the harsh currents and storm surges of a "violent" Lake Erie (HLC p 100).

In spite of his reservations, Ellicott felt the sheltered waters of Buffalo Creek offered the best location for a "safe and commodious harbor" along the Lake Erie shoreline (HLC p100). He boasted the advantages of the Buffalo terminus, which attracted investors to his numerous HLC properties. Parcels were sold at inflated prices to meet the demand in anticipation of the economic boom that would result from the canal terminus (HLC p162). As a result, a large portion of the village population now had a vested interest in both the construction of the canal and its terminus in Buffalo. People such as Samuel Wilkenson, William Peacock, and Ebenezer Johnson became powerful advocates of harbor construction in Buffalo out of the desire to maximize their investment in Buffalo.

The desire of Buffalo property owners to protect their investment proved to be the deciding factor in locating the canal terminus in Buffalo. While the canal and Buffalo Harbor were under

construction, a group from the nearby village of Black Rock led by Peter Porter made improvements to their harbor along the Niagara River and began a campaign to locate the canal terminus there. They claimed Black Rock was a superior location to Buffalo, citing a superior natural harbor that would not require costly modification. A fierce lobbying battle ensued with each side claiming to be the superior location of the canal terminus. Allegations were made about each other's town, including a claim by Buffalo booster David Evans that harbor improvements in Buffalo modified lake currents resulting in significant sand deposits in Black Rock's harbor (HLC p180). The Buffalo delegation went as far as to demand Holland Land Company return the money they invested in Buffalo property if the terminus was moved to Black Rock (HLC p162).

On July 16th 1824, Ellicott wrote a letter to the state arguing in favor of the Buffalo location over Black Rock. In addition to advantages mentioned earlier, Ellicott cited the fact that westbound lake vessels may not be able to catch wind in their sails as easily in Black Rock as they would in Buffalo. The efforts of prominent Buffalonians lobbying the Erie Canal Commission and the Holland Land Company ultimately led to the terminus being built in Buffalo. By 1825 the improvements of the harbor were completed highlighted by a limestone-timber pier constructed at the mouth of Buffalo Creek that replaced an earlier pier that fell into the lake during a flood (HLC p173). This sheltered the waterway from the lake and prevented sand from accumulating at the harbor's entrance. This pier remains in place today, still serving its original purpose.

Buffalo's Transition to a Pluralist Metropolis

The Holland Land Company's involvement in the early development of Buffalo is significant because it demonstrates how the mere prospect of commercial activity initiated a period where Buffalo would transform from a frontier outpost to a bustling center of growth. Thanks to the work of Joseph Ellicott and his associates, Buffalo now possessed the necessary infrastructure for port activity and, perhaps more importantly, was home to an emerging, politically active, elite leadership class. These two ingredients would be necessary in order for Buffalo to achieve the rapid growth that would follow the opening of the Erie Canal.

Construction of the Canal had created a spike in demand for labor along the entire system, resulting in a massive wave of immigration. Upon its completion, the activity generated at the Buffalo terminus sustained and expanded the demand for labor, resulting in a surge in population. From 1810 to 1860, Buffalo went from a sleepy frontier village of about 1,500 people, to a bustling, densely populated port city of over 81,000 people. The new arrivals were a diverse group of people from different classes and ethnic backgrounds and were attracted to Buffalo by the push from their homeland and the pull of opportunity from commerce. Irish immigrants fled persecution and famine in their native country, Germans escaped a similar famine as well as instability in a politically fragmented Germany⁸, and native born Americans fled declining economic opportunity, mostly in the New England

⁸ For centuries, the German speaking states were a confederacy of small independent nations bound by German language and culture. These nations would not unify into Germany until 1871. The "German" immigrants came to Buffalo from former Holy Roman Empire states of Bavaria, Prussia, and Bohemia as well as German speaking regions of France, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, and The Netherlands. (Gerber p172)

countryside. These people ranged from penniless peasants looking for a better life to wealthy landowning aristocrats seeking out new investment opportunities. The combination of these groups created a melting pot of different cultures and norms. Much of Buffalo's present day cultural identity, economic activity, architecture, as well as the spatial development of the city have their roots in the social development that occurred as a result of the rise of commerce in the 19th century.

The Rise of Buffalo's Bourgeois

Buffalo's earliest leaders were attracted by the prospect of making a fortune off purchasing land in the vicinity of the future canal terminus in Buffalo. This represented an early divide between the commoners and elites that would intensify as Buffalo grew as a center for commerce. After the successful completion of the canal, additional wealthy investors flocked to Buffalo in the hopes of capitalizing on the booming transshipment industry and the subsequent real estate boom. The elite newcomers tended to live in the high ground north and east of The Terrace in Ellicott's original street plan, leaving the low lying waterfront to the Irish and the East Side to the Germans. The radial street plan intensified spatial segregation between ethnic and class groups by creating definable boundaries in an otherwise uniform landscape (Gerber p 21). Although they were not separated by a great distance, the emerging bourgeois lived in much better conditions than those living in the rest of the city, which was plagued by floods, disease, and lawlessness.

Because Buffalo was now a vital link between grain production in the Midwest, and markets on the East Coast, grain storage and transshipment became the dominant industry at the canal terminus. Since Buffalo lacked natural sources of hydro-power for milling, the local economy became dependent on the grain storage and transfer business. This meant Buffalo was prone to seasonal fluctuation of canal traffic as well as the rise and fall of global grain trade. During the growing and shipping season there was plenty of work for everybody but in the winter months the region would suffer from the stoppage of commerce from an iced over canal and lake. This created an enjoyable lifestyle for the bourgeois who would work during shipping season, and fall back on their wealth to take long vacations during the winter months (Gerber p 72). This combination of economic prosperity and free time gave Buffalo's elite little incentive to seek to diversify the economy beyond the profitable and growing grain transshipment industry.

Similar to pre-canal speculation, the boom in grain trade drove property prices up along the harbor, resulting in an escalating speculative real estate boom. This fueled a land rush that saw prices skyrocket while workers' wages remained stagnant due to the abundance of immigrant labor. The introduction of a crude credit system from local banks intensified this boom by allowing people to spend above their means. Those who could afford to purchase waterfront property, and who had access to credit, were rewarded handsomely while the rest of the population saw their lifestyle deteriorate. There was no reason for the bourgeois to invest in improving their operation or diversifying beyond their core business due to the seemingly endless profits from transshipment and real estate. The earliest days of canal operation was a period of hyper-capitalism where the elite enjoyed an increasingly enjoyable and profitable lifestyle while the rest of the population lived in increasingly poor and miserable conditions.

The lack of economic diversification and shortsightedness would ultimately cost the bourgeois by the late 1830s. A national depression led to slowed commercial activity in the port, idling local wharf workers and artisans. This, combined with a growing distrust of American lending institutions, resulted in banks demanding repayment of loans and depositors demanding their money from the bank (Gerber p36). Since both borrowers and lenders had their money tied up in real estate that was now declining in value, there was no way to pay back debts incurred during the economic boom. As a result, the national

and local economies went into deep decline, resulting in massive joblessness, lost fortunes, and the collapse of the local banking system (Gerber p 38). Nobody personified this riches to rags tale more than local businessman Benjamin Rathburn. At one point, Rathburn employed one third of Buffalo's citizens through his numerous companies and holdings. By 1836 he found himself penniless from his lost fortune and in jail on charges of investor fraud (Gerber p 38).

The economic collapse of the late 1830s brought about the end of the overindulgent hyper-capitalist thinking of the local bourgeois. Lessons learned from this depression fostered a new mindset amongst the elite to establish a "moral basis" for a new capitalist economy (Gerber p 47). This paradigm was rooted in Protestant ideals of temperance, moderation, and observation of the Sabbath, which was in sharp contrast to the largely secular capitalist mindset from years past. From this point of view, the bourgeois felt it was their responsibility to build an economy that valued long term investment over short term profit and a more balanced allocation of resources and opportunity over economic disparity and exploitation.

As a result, taxes were raised to create free public schools for children of all social classes and economic backgrounds. Prior to this, formal education was only affordable for the affluent. In response to the collapse of the local banking industry, a new credit reporting system was put into place that tracked transactions of individuals and companies to determine creditworthiness. Instead of pocketing short-term profits, public resources were dedicated to expanding the wharfing space through construction of the City Ship Canal, the Main-Hamburg Canal and the Ohio Basin (Gerber p55). In addition, shippers began to diversify commodities handled in the port, which led to the rise of Buffalo's meat processing industry. Companies shipping a diverse selection of cargo were better protected in the event of a slowdown in grain traffic.

Perhaps the most significant development of the "moral basis" of the bourgeois was the rise in technological innovation related to commercial shipping. Prior to the 1830s depression, grain traders used primitive methods for the storage and transfer of grain. The Great Lakes fleet consisted of sail-powered schooners and side-paddle steam ships, both of which had limited cargo capacity. On the wharfs, grain was unloaded using the time-consuming process of manual labor. There was little incentive for shippers to invest in new technologies since the old methods of transshipment were cheap and profitable. However, with a renewed focus on long-term growth over short-term profit, business owners became more willing to invest in technologies that would lead to sustained prosperity. As a result, shippers began to replace their obsolete sail and paddle vessels with screw propeller driven steamships. This improved efficiency of shipping by allowing construction of larger vessels that could handle more cargo. The next innovation to be embraced by grain shippers was the locally invented grain elevator. This revolutionary structure greatly increased efficiency both by providing a method of storing grain vertically as well as reducing the time and labor required to unload vessels.

The desire of Buffalo's bourgeois to divert short term profits into long term investments in both human and physical capital improved the overall productivity of the city of Buffalo. Harbor improvements and technological innovation increased the handling capacity of the port, improving long-term economic production. This prosperity was shared by a more educated and empowered workforce

made up of ethnic German, Irish and native born whites. These developments would be necessary for Buffalo's commercial viability and eventual industrialization.

Multimodal Transshipment:

While grain elevators emerged as the dominant architectural form on Buffalo's waterfront, several other transshipment structures emerged in the area to handle commodities that were not efficiently stored vertically. This included cargo shipped in crates and barrels as well as livestock and finished goods. The earliest of these structures were constructed of wood siding and heavy timber framing and were concentrated on the waterfront to take advantage of lake and canal commerce. These structures were limited as their wood construction made them prone to fire. The Erie Freight House is an intact example of a typical early to mid-19th century warehouse.

When the Erie Canal reached Buffalo in 1825 it opened America's Midwestern frontier to new settlement. As people flowed west a supply of goods, primarily grain, poured back east with Buffalo in prime position to transfer these goods from Great Lakes vessels to canal barges. The Erie Canal allowed freight to be shipped at one tenth the cost of prior overland shipment (Dunn, p.2) and within a few short years another transportation revolution would land in Buffalo. The railroad, an invention primarily responsible for the industrialization of the United States, has a history intertwined with that of grain shipment through Buffalo. Oliver Evans, the man whose flour mill conveyor was the inspiration for the first grain elevator, was also an innovator in the field of steam locomotive engines. Secondly, the first railroad line to reach Buffalo did so in 1842, the same year that Joseph Dart erected the world's first grain elevator in Buffalo's harbor. In that one year, Buffalonians were introduced to two of the most influential features of the city's history, truly cornerstones of Buffalo's growth and development. Most importantly, many grain elevators were directly owned and operated by some of America's largest rail companies.

The early rail lines to reach Buffalo placed their stations and depots near the busiest section of town, the canal and harbor district. The Erie Freight House stands as an intact example of a typical lake to rail depot from this period. Initially the rail lines focused on passenger rail, since New York State placed restrictions on freight service out of fear the railroads would compete with the Erie Canal. In 1851 those restrictions were lifted and rail traffic expanded. The first two lines were constructed by 1850. The Buffalo-Niagara Falls Railroad ran from Niagara Falls, along the Niagara River, to the junction of the Commercial Slip and Erie Canal. The Attica-Buffalo Railroad stretched from Attica, NY to Buffalo with the mainline ending at the Main-Hamburg Canal with a spur running south to the Buffalo River (Buffstate.edu/1850).

By 1866, the New York-Erie line, connecting New York City and Buffalo, was completed (New Topographical Atlas of Erie County 1866). The Buffalo-Erie line spanned from Chicago to Buffalo terminating with the other lines along the Main-Hamburg canal (New Topographical Atlas of Erie County 1866). By the end of the century, branches were added to the Buffalo-Erie Railroad, later known as the Erie Railroad, to connect Buffalo with coal producing regions in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. These lines put Buffalo's harbor at the center of a continental shipping network of Lake, Rail, and Canal transit extending in all directions. The Erie Freight House was located at a prominent point in Erie's system at a

junction of The Buffalo River, the newly constructed Ohio Basin, and Erie's tracks. This made it a focal point for Erie's shipping, where traffic from all directions would be transferred between lake vessel, canal boat, and rail car. The new shipping activity from Erie, and other rail depots, made it easier to ship coal from the south, and iron ore shipped over the lakes. This, in addition to the later advent of hydro-electricity from Niagara Falls, enabled steel producers to locate factories in the Buffalo area. The railroad infrastructure and electricity also enabled other manufacturers, such as producers of food, automobiles, chemicals, and other finished goods, to do business in the region.

With rail lines spread along Buffalo's waterfront and the harbor, grain elevators, and other transshipment facilities, saw unprecedented success from the access to new markets. These facilities could now transfer raw materials and finished products to multiple modes of transit. All the elevators along Buffalo's harbor were soon flanked by rail lines and had the ability to import and export grain via lake vessel, canal barge, and rail car. Railroad companies, witnessing the rapid growth of the grain transport industry, began to purchase or lease grain elevators and consolidate their operations. Buffalo's oldest extant elevator, the Great Northern, was built and operated by the Great Northern Railway. Erie Railroad would later build construct a smaller grain elevator on the south end of the Erie Freight House, adding to the versatility of their Buffalo River complex.

Architectural Heritage and Multi-Modal Landscape

The impact of grain transshipment on Buffalo is well documented. The binding factor between the grain elevators and the shipping warehouses and freight houses is their collective relationship to the features of the industrial shipping landscape. The grain elevators were long structures with a pronounced verticality, specifically designed to efficiently handle goods from one transport form, at first on water, to another, generally rail. Freight houses share a similar relationship to their environment. Like the elevators, the early freight houses were constructed of traditional heavy timber framing, as is the Erie Freight House. While most of the original transfer buildings no longer exist, the Erie Freight House is an example of a structure positioned to maximize the water-to-rail transfer capability of the Buffalo harbor area, much like the oldest grain elevators.

Eventually, the emphasis on water shipping decreased and the dominant shipping transfer relationship became that of rail-to-truck. This transition can be seen in both the later grain elevators and the majority of the extant warehouses. The Erie Freight House was modified to handle truck trailers while it's river wharfs were removed in the 1950s.⁹ While the majority of Buffalo's grain elevators are examples of water-dependent facilities, the rail-to-truck relationship is prominent among the area's freight houses and warehouses. The riverfront location of the Erie Freight House distinguishes it from other remaining depots which are located inland. It is the last remaining structure of its type located between the river and rail.

⁹ Comparison of 1950 Sanborn map with 1959 NETR Aerial.

Decline 1959-Present:

The canal-lake, and later, railroad-lake transshipment hub flourished in Buffalo from the early 19th until the mid-20th century. At that time a variety of factors would conspire to undermine Buffalo's role as a center for transshipment. Upon the onset of The Great Depression, many Buffalo based shipping companies were acquired by national corporations who had less loyalty to the region. These new managers were not impressed with New York's higher taxes and unionized workforce which made the cost of doing business in Buffalo higher than elsewhere in the country. However, at this time, Buffalo's transportation related advantages of a superior railroad network and its position on the Great Lakes were enough to outweigh higher costs (Cargill Superior HAER).

In 1956, the federal government passed the Interstate Highway Act, which resulted in the construction of a far-reaching highway network across the nation. Highways constructed in the vicinity of Buffalo's harbor front gave shippers a third mode of transit to ship their products, but the greater network diminished the importance of Buffalo's rail infrastructure and lake access. By the end of the decade, the United States and Canada would open the St. Lawrence Seaway creating a direct waterway between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. Instead of vessels shipping their cargo to storage and transfer facilities in Buffalo, they could sail through the Welland Canal and St Lawrence River to reach ports across the world. The effect of this on Buffalo was similar to impact of the interstate; local companies now had the option of shipping to ocean ports but the presence of a new transportation route that diverted traffic away from the region diminished the role of storage and transfer operations in Buffalo. In addition, between 1963 and 1966, the Interstate Commerce Commission discontinued their policy of maintaining preferential rates for companies shipping by rail between Buffalo and the East Coast further diminishing Buffalo's importance as a center for commerce.

The higher cost labor and taxes combined with the creation of more efficient transportation networks not centered on the region proved to be disastrous for Buffalo's transshipment industry. As a result, several of Buffalo's storage and transfer grain elevators closed soon after the Seaway opened¹⁰. Many of them were bought by speculators who would store grain in the closed facilities in anticipation of rising prices, but this proved to be only a temporary method of reuse. When grain prices fell, the elevators were abandoned again and were left exposed to the elements, vandals, and scavengers. Today, all except four of Buffalo's grain elevators are vacant, most of which in a state of ruin. In addition, many of the smaller forwarding companies and manufacturers were undermined by higher costs and new transportation routes elsewhere. There are a handful of commercial and industrial companies that still operate in the city's harbor region but very few of them rely on lake or rail transportation. The once complex network of railroad tracks in the area has been reduced to a handful of lines, which appear to receive little or no service. The flood of immigration that commerce attracted to Buffalo has been reversed as the region suffers from long-term population decline.

¹⁰ The decline of Buffalo's grain storage and transshipment business was hastened when Cargill pursued their "Rent A Train" (RAT) strategy. This involved renting out entire railroad rights of way to store surplus grain in idle rail cars. This eliminated the need for storage in Buffalo and led Cargill to vacate, and eventually abandon, its three Buffalo elevators.

These events had a negative effect on the Erie Freight House, but it was particularly hurt by the demise of the Erie Canal, and growth in size of cargo ships. The diminished role of the Canal undermined the Ohio Basin, which became fallow without canal traffic. The waterway was filled in during the 1950s with the exception of a short inlet between the Buffalo River and Ohio Street. This, in turn, reduced the significance of the Erie Freight House, as it was no longer on a busy canal junction. The depot was still accessible by lake, but the growing size of freighters necessitated the need for larger transshipment facilities. Without lake or canal traffic, the Erie Freight House was no longer the focal point of a multi-modal transfer system. The facility remains serviced by truck, but that activity has been limited to paper recycling by the building's most recent occupant. The Erie Freight House was vacated by the Erie Railroad sometime between 1925 and 1951. (Sanborn 1925 and 1951). By 1951, the feed mill to the north and grain elevator to the south were demolished, leaving the freight depot as the sole remaining piece of Erie's once bustling hub. By 1959, the wharf that connected the depot to the harbor had been removed. It was later acquired by Great Lakes Paper who utilized the depot's rail and truck connections to handle shipments of their products. Today, it sits vacant with a partially collapsed roof and western façade.

Conclusion:

The rise of the region's commercial harbor is an important period of history in the development of Buffalo, New York State, and The United States. The Erie Freight House stands as the lone example of mid-nineteenth century architecture typical of the transshipment buildings that were once commonplace in Buffalo. The evaporation of these structures, resulting from the decline in economic fortunes, has created a need to preserve this last remaining multi-modal depot of its kind. The Erie Freight House serves as a monument to the period in history where Buffalo's harbor was an economic power, and is an important landmark for its contribution to the city's history.

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Property Location Map and Photographic Documentation:

- Figure 1: Erie Freight House – 9 Ohio Street
- Photo 1: South elevation looking north. (Photo Bruce Jackson)
- Photo 2: East elevation looking south. Note railway tracks. (Photo Bruce Jackson)
- Photo 3: East elevation looking north. (Photo Bruce Jackson)
- Photo 4: Detail of intact wood siding beneath corrugated metal siding. (Photo Bruce Jackson)
- Photo 5: West elevation looking north. (Photo Annie Schentag)
- Photo 6: West elevation looking south. Note detail of machine room collapse. (Photo Annie Schentag)
- Photo 7: View into building showing wood trusses and wood posts. Note original wood siding. (Photo Annie Schentag)

- Photo 8: View into building at west elevation showing wood truss, wood posts, and steel beam. (Photo Annie Schentag)
- Photo 9: North elevation looking south. (Photo Kerry Traynor)
- Photo 10: Detail of wood cornice. (Photo Annie Schentag)
- Photo 11: Historic view (c. 1950 note Ohio Basin intact) of Erie Freight House in context. (Courtesy Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society)

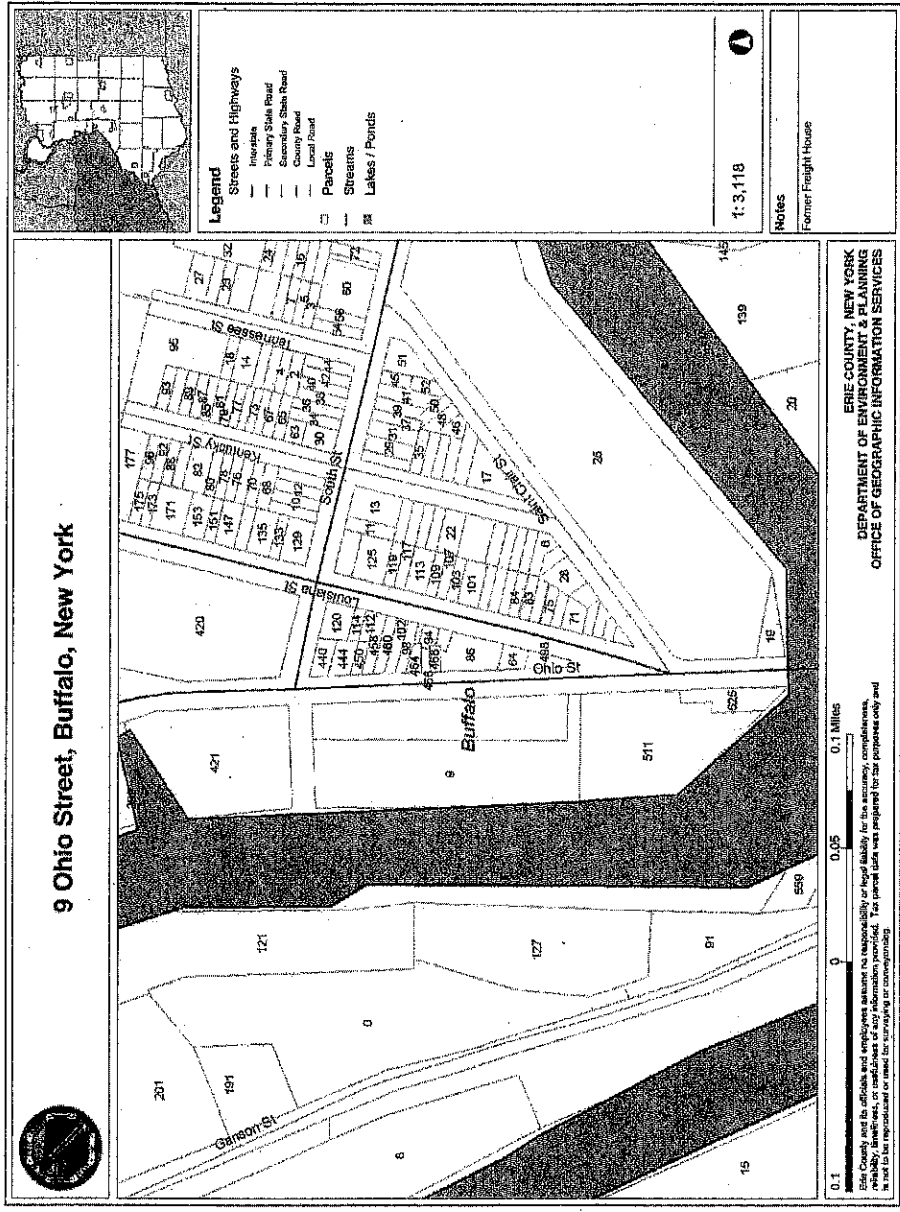


Figure 1: Erie Freight House - 9 OHIO STREET