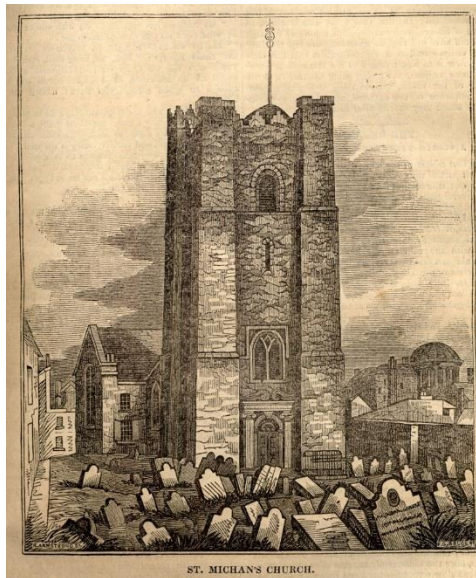


Buffalo Autumn Excursions: Nine European-Inspired Towers and Tales of Terror

The COVID-19 pandemic continues, but one silver lining has been the opportunity to spend more time outdoors. As summer turns to autumn, September and October are glorious months to experience the outdoors with cooler temperatures, gentle breezes, and leaves that change from green to brilliant shades of pumpkin orange and crimson red. It's also a traditional time of year to experience the harvest and associated cross-cultural phenomenon of mysterious folk tales. I've curated nine towered architectural sites in Buffalo that can be enjoyed individually or linked together on a walk or bike ride. Each has green space nearby, a pleasant place to read or listen to spooky literary tales written to inspire shivers! This is a self-guided tour. You can visit each site on your own, or with a small group of (socially distanced) friends. Read to yourself, read aloud, or make it high-tech and listen to a LibriVox audio recording. Most of all, enjoy Buffalo's beautiful weather, scenery, and architectural wonders.



St. Michan's Church tower in Dublin inspired Dracula's castle.

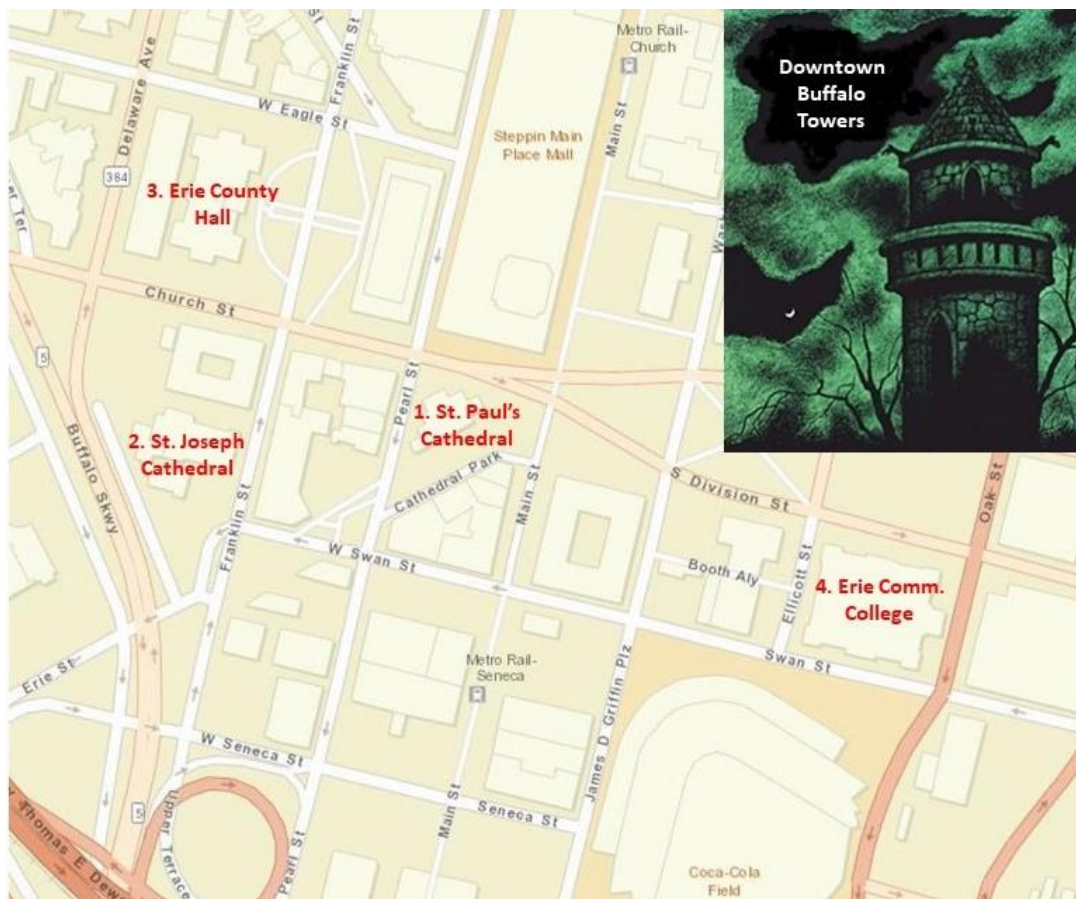
Towers. The mention of them conjures images of European medieval castles and battlements. The tallest structures in a town, they provided protection from potential threats by allowing townsmen to survey the surrounding grounds. But they had a darker, sinister aspect too. Because they are high off the ground, they could also be prisons. Even in fairy tales, Rapunzel was imprisoned in a tower by an evil witch. In Genesis, the builders of the Tower of Babel who sought to reach heaven were punished for their attempt. Perhaps Europe's most famous tower, London Tower, during the era of Henry VIII gained notoriety because of its famous prisoners, some of whom were executed: Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth I, Lady Jane Grey, Catherine Howard, and Thomas More.

Towers were incorporated into beautiful European medieval churches to which were added a distinctive and frightening architectural element, the gargoyle. In the 7th century, St. Romanus, The Bishop of Rouen, France saved the town from Gargouille, a fire-breathing dragon with bat-like wings. After slaying Gargouille, St. Romanus mounted its head on the walls of a newly built church to ward off evil spirits.

It is inevitable these and other historic towers would inspire tales of terror. Once on a trip to Dublin, I had the privilege visiting Trinity College library. Mostly known now for being the inspiration for a *Harry Potter* set, it was also the place of learning and inspiration for some of the greatest 19th century horror authors, including Joseph Sheridan LeFanu, Oscar Wilde, and Bram Stoker. Being in the physical place of the hallowed hall of learning, I could feel their presence as they too were once in Trinity College's library, albeit many years before.

Of these Dublin authors, LeFanu is best known as a writer of ghost stories. Among my favorites are two stories attributed to LeFanu, "The Spirit's Whisper," and "Dr. Feversham's Story," published in *A Stable for Nightmares*, the 1868 Christmas annual of *Tinsely's Magazine*. Wilde's enduring contribution to the genre is *The Canterville Ghost*, published in 1887. Dublin's most influential horror genre author was Bram Stoker, whose 1897 vampire novel *Dracula* continues to be popular and has inspired countless motion picture and television adaptations.

Stoker found inspiration for Dracula's castle in Dublin, not from Dublin Castle, but from St. Michan's church, a 17th century towered edifice. The limestone vaults of St. Michan's contain mummified remains, including the 400-year-old body of a nun. While Bran Castle in Romania, billed as "Dracula's Castle," is an outstanding example of a medieval fortress, it did not influence Dracula's castle as imagined by Stoker.



Downtown Buffalo, New York

While over 3,000 miles from Europe and separated by hundreds of years, Buffalo treasures its towers. Let's see!



Homeless Jesus at St. Paul's by sculptor Timothy Schmalz

1.) *St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral & Shelton Square, 139 Pearl Street*

[The Cold Embrace](#) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon (Project Gutenberg full text)

[The Cold Embrace](#) (LibriVox audio recording ~23 minutes)



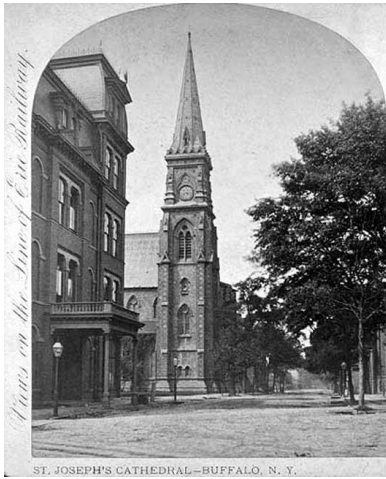
In the late 1840s, English-born NYC architect Richard Upjohn designed Buffalo's finest Gothic Revival church, St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral. With its soaring spire at 275', it is Buffalo's tallest. The church was constructed between 1849-51, although its spired tower wasn't built until 1870-71. St. Paul's design was inspired by the rural churches of 13th century England. Upjohn considered this church his masterwork, and it is thus recognized as a National Historic Landmark. Many notable events have taken place at St. Paul's, including President Millard Fillmore's funeral in 1874. Lovely Shelton Square, adjacent on the south, has shady trees and benches. The outdoor sculpture, "Homeless Jesus," is a haunting and contemplative work.

This location is a perfect spot for the 1860 classic short ghostly tale "The Cold Embrace" (1860) written by Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915), the most popular English author of the 19th century. It is a cautionary tale written at the height of the ghost story genre: if a young man jilted his lover, justice didn't end with death.

2.) *St. Joseph Roman Catholic Cathedral & Cathedral Green, 50 Franklin Street*

[The Adventure of the German Student](#) by Washington Irving (Project Gutenberg full text)

[The Adventure of the German Student](#) (LibriVox audio recording ~15 minutes)



The venerable St. Joseph’s Cathedral was constructed 1851-55. The seat of Roman Catholicism has endured, its solid construction surviving the so-called “New Cathedral.” It was built at the direction of Buffalo’s first Bishop, John Timon. The church was designed by NYC architect Patrick C. Keely in the Continental Gothic style with rough-faced polychromatic limestone. The imposing clock tower on the south corner was completed in 1862. Several of Buffalo’s bishops, including Bishop Timon, are buried in a crypt under the Cathedral.

As this church’s architecture is inspired by German and French precedents (being compared to the German Freiburg Cathedral) it’s a perfect backdrop for America’s first great author, Washington Irving’s (1783-1859) ghost story, “The Adventure of the German Student” (1824).

3.) *Erie County Hall, 100 Franklin Street*

[*The Black Cat* by Edgar Allen Poe \(Project Gutenberg full text\)](#)

[*The Black Cat* \(LibriVox audio recording ~27 minutes\)](#)



While Buffalo’s early Episcopal and Catholic churches contained some of the city’s earliest European-inspired towers, the mid-1870s saw the construction of a building with one that continues to be among Buffalo’s most imposing. Erie County Hall, constructed between 1871-1876, is a granite building marked by its central soaring tower. The site itself has a macabre history, constructed on the

former Franklin Square, a graveyard, which contained the remains of soldiers who died during the War of 1812 (since relocated to Forest Lawn Cemetery). On December 30, 1813, it was also here that Col. Cyrenius Chapin surrendered the village of Buffalo to the British, who subsequently burned the village to the ground.

The building’s designer was Rochester architect Andrew J. Warner, who designed it in Victorian High Gothic style, Buffalo’s only example. The building’s architectural focus is its central, 270’ tower, the four corners of which bear colossal figures of Justice, Mechanical Arts, Agriculture and Commerce, sculpted by Giovanni F. Sala. The site’s association with death was reprised in 1901 when President Theodore Roosevelt greeted 150,000 mourners who paid their respects to President Wm. McKinley who laid in state, assassinated by Leon Czolgosz at the Pan American Exposition. Czolgosz’ trial was held in an upstairs courtroom, and he was soon thereafter executed in the electric chair. A lovely green graces the entrance, originally designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, with numerous benches nearby and across the street.

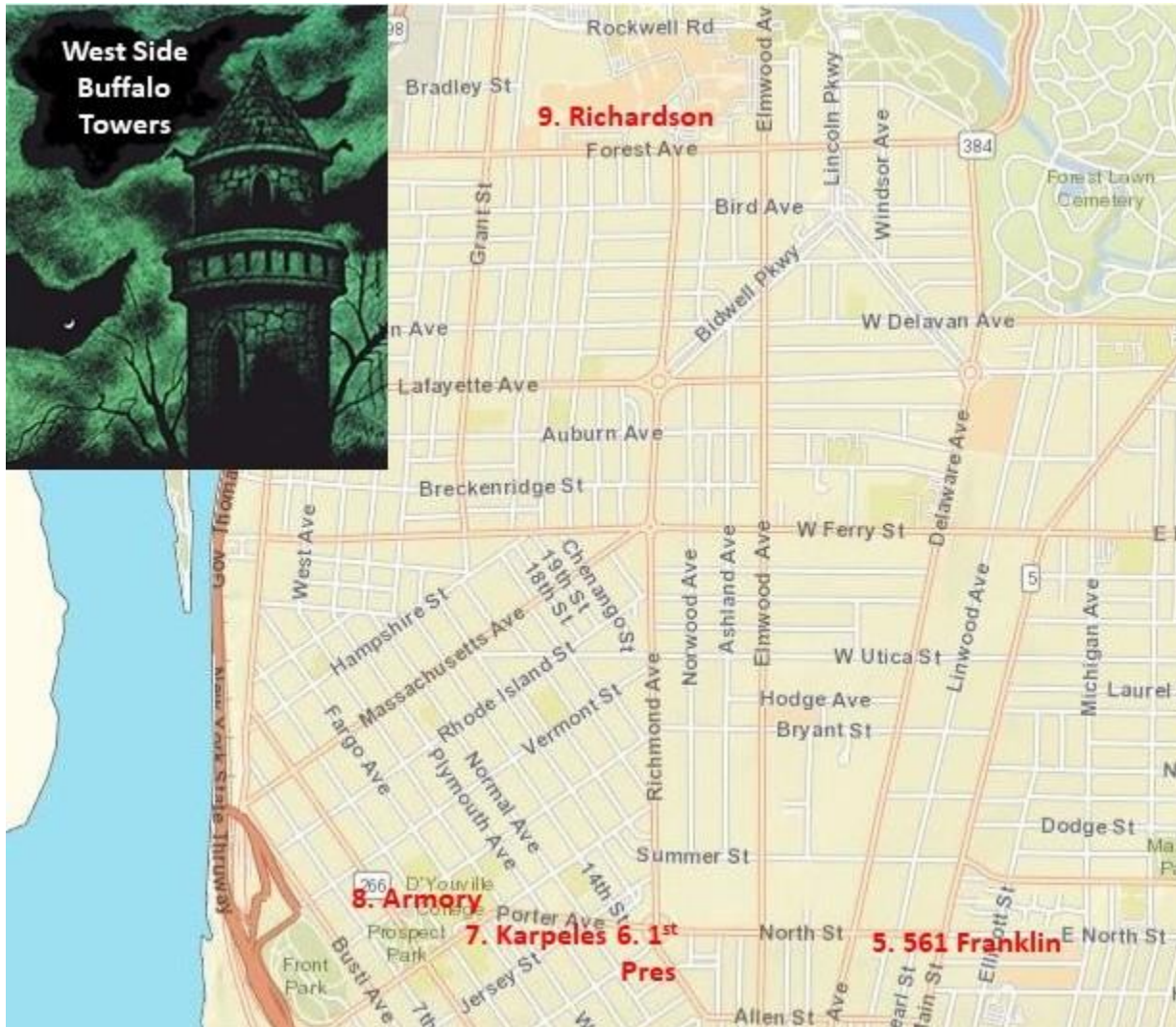
Because Erie County Hall is associated with justice, American horror author Edgar Allen Poe’s (1809-49) classic “The Black Cat” (1843) is a perfect story for this location. Oh kitty, kitty!

- 4.) *Erie Community College & Fireman’s Park, 121 Ellicott Street*
[The Monkey’s Paw](#) by W.W. Jacobs (Project Gutenberg full text)
[The Monkey’s Paw](#) (LibriVox audio recording ~25 minutes)



The final towered building in the downtown tower tour is one that fills a gap of a major missing element from European medieval architecture in Buffalo – the gargoyle! The former Federal Building, better known as the old U.S. Post Office, was designed by James Knox Taylor and constructed between 1897-1901. The highly ornamented Flemish Gothic Revival style four-story building is built of Maine granite and features a 244’ tower over its central entrance with gargoyles at each corner. Today, the impressive building is home to Erie Community College’s city campus. Across from the building is Fireman’s Park, and there are benches to rest alongside the building.

This site is perfect for English author William Wymark Jacobs’ (1863-1943) classic horror story, *The Monkey’s Paw*, published in 1902, soon after this building was complete. It is still a frightening tale, and this LibriVox recording is outstanding!



Buffalo's West Side

5.) 561 Franklin Street & Sisti Park

[The Romance of Certain Old Clothes](#) by Henry James (full text)

[The Romance of Certain Old Clothes](#) (LibriVox audio recording ~45 minutes)



The only example of a tower being utilized for a residential home on this self-guided tour, no. 561 Franklin Street at corner of North Street, is a fine example of an Italian villa farmhouse from the Campagna region as adapted for America. Built in 1851-1853, the brick house with its deeply-set eaves, scrolled brackets, and rounded windows is a familiar style in the Allentown neighborhood. What makes this house unique, however, is its four-story square tower that gives it a commanding, haunting appearance. The picturesque Italian villa style was promoted by 19th century American tastemaker Andrew Jackson Downing. The small park immediately to the north side of this house is called Sisti Park, named for artist Tony Sisti, who helped brand Allentown as a bohemian arts community during the 1950s. The park was once part of the ample grounds surrounding this house.

A short Victorian ghost story perfect for this house is “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes” (1868), written by American and British author Henry James (1843-1916), set in an American house. I imagine the climax of the story takes place in an attic tower room, like that at 561 Franklin Street!

6.) First Presbyterian Church & Symphony Circle, One Symphony Circle

[The Canterville Ghost](#) by Oscar Wilde, (Project Gutenberg full text)

[The Canterville Ghost](#) (LibriVox audio recording, 3 chapters, ~30 minutes each)



The handsome First Presbyterian Church, rising prominently on lovely Symphony Circle, is the oldest religious organization in Buffalo, founded in 1812. The church moved from downtown to its present site in the late 1880s when church member Mrs. Trueman Avery, who lived in a palatial mansion where Kleinhans Music Hall now stands, purchased and donated the vacant lot for the new First Presbyterian Church.

Designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style by Buffalo architects Green & Wicks, it is constructed of chocolate-brown rusticated Medina sandstone. The main sanctuary was completed in 1891. Its slender 164' tower was completed in 1897, inspired by the 12th century St. Philibert's church in Tournus, France. Green & Wicks intended the tower to echo the twin

towers of the Richardson Olmsted complex at the opposite end of Richmond Avenue, designed by architectural master H. H. Richardson.

Across from the First Presbyterian Church is Symphony Circle, designed by Olmsted & Vaux, and Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Landmark. The small picturesque park is one of Buffalo's most elegant. Unlike downtown, Buffalo's west side is primarily residential and a perfect backdrop for *The Canterville Ghost* (1887) by Irish author Oscar Wilde (1854-1900). Many of the historic Allentown neighborhood's grand Victorian homes feature turrets (a mini-tower) that might even have a ghost in them, like the one encountered by the Otis family in this amusing story. *The Canterville Ghost* was one of Wilde's first stories to be published and is full of his trademark wit and humor. Wilde had visited Buffalo and Niagara Falls just a few years earlier in February 1882. It is notable that this story was written and published just as Wilde had begun his first serious gay relationship with Robbie Ross. After Wilde's untimely death, Ross remained devoted to him and spent the rest of his life protecting Wilde's literary legacy.

7.) *Karpeles Document Manuscript Porter Hall Museum & Life Memorial Park, 453 Porter Avenue*

[*The Room in the Tower*](#), by Edward Frederic Benson ([Project Gutenberg full text](#))

[*The Room in the Tower*](#) ([LibriVox audio recording ~31 minutes](#))



This structure worth visiting because its square, squatty rusticated grey limestone tower vaguely resembles St. Michan's Church in Dublin. And of course, because the top of the tower is haunted by a wooden sculpture of "Hunchback"

Quasimodo! The building, originally the Plymouth Methodist Episcopal Church, was designed by Buffalo architects Cyrus K. Porter and Sons and built 1911-12.

The building is on the site of one of Buffalo's most colorful episodes that occurred during its participation in the War of 1812. On December 30, 1813, as British soldiers marched up Guide Board Road (now Porter Avenue and North Street), 51-year-old Job Hoisington, a carpenter and volunteer militiaman, single-handedly held back the enemy at what is now the intersection of Porter and Plymouth Avenues. Hoisington allowed his comrades to escape and gave time for hundreds of women and children to escape the conflagration that was to consume Buffalo. Sadly, Hoisington was killed at this location during the battle. Across the street is Life Memorial Park, a meditative spot dedicated to those in Buffalo who lost their life to AIDS.

"The Room in the Tower" (1912) by Edward Frederic Benson (1867-1940) is a perfect short horror story for this location. A vampire story, the tower at Karpeles is similar to that which inspired Bram Stoker when he wrote *Dracula*. Benson was a British gay author, and much has been written about *Dracula's* homoerotic subtext and debate about Stoker's sexuality - whether he was a repressed gay man. However, unlike *Dracula*, "The Room in the Tower's" vampire is a woman.

8.) *Connecticut Street Armory & Prospect Park, 184 Connecticut Street*

[Dracula](#) by Bram Stoker (Project Gutenberg full text)

[Dracula](#) (LibriVox audio recording)



By the end of the 19th century, Buffalo had an impressive collection of towered structures, but not its own castle. No one can argue that the New York State 74th Regimental Armory, at Connecticut and Niagara Streets, doesn't fit the bill. The massive castle-like structure was built in 1899 of Medina sandstone and

was designed by NYS architect Isaac G. Perry in collaboration with Buffalo architects Lansing and Beirl. The building features four-to-six story circular towers surrounding the building, and a 6½ story square tower at its center entrance. If Count Dracula came to Buffalo, he would feel right at home here. Prospect Park, a charming green and one of Buffalo's oldest parks, is across the street. It's a perfect place to read (or listen to) a few chapters of Bram Stoker's (1847-1912) *Dracula* (1897).

9.) *Richardson Olmsted Complex (Hotel Henry) 444 Forest Avenue*

[The Spirit's Whisper](#) by Joseph Sheridan LeFanu (Project Gutenberg full text)



Nearly the same time as Erie County Hall was being constructed, a few miles to the north, the New York State Hospital for the Insane at Buffalo's administration building was also being constructed with not one, but two towers, designed by one of America's most famous 19th century architects, H. H. Richardson. This building relates to Paris, much in the way that French author Victor Hugo had hoped to inspire a love of its old buildings

with his *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831). Richardson had fallen in love with the rugged masonry and massive proportions of 12th century medieval architecture while studying in Paris

during the Civil War years after receiving his initial college education at Harvard. In 1865, he returned to the U.S. and set up practice in New York City, where he lived until 1874 when he moved to Boston.

From drawings preserved at Harvard University's Houghton Library, it is evident Richardson's ideas for the exterior of the majestic administration building changed several times before the board approved the final design in 1872. In the earliest drawings, the central building is a low, chapel-like structure with a tall spire. This design reflected asylums Richardson had seen in France. In the final version, two great towers rise from the massive roof of the four-story structure. The enormous complex was constructed between 1872-1880, but visually, the site is dominated by the twin copper-topped rusticated sandstone towers of the administration building. They are not among Buffalo's tallest, at 161', but what these towers lack in height, they more than make up in girth.

"The Spirit's Whisper" is an enjoyable short story to read on the ample lawns surrounding the building, as designed by Olmsted & Vaux. A classic Victorian-era ghost story, at the end, the narrator wonders - is he sane or mad?

Unpleasant tower touring!

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September 2020

