

BLACK ROCK CANAL – BELT LINE – NIAGARA STREET

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

CITY OF BUFFALO

Erie County, New York



Prepared by:
kta preservation specialists
August 2014

NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBLE**BLACK ROCK CANAL – BELT LINE – NIAGARA STREET
INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT**

In June and July 2014 kta preservation specialists conducted an Architectural Reconnaissance Survey of Niagara Street between Forest Avenue to the north and Busti Street to the south with a specific intent of identifying cultural resources for their National Register potential. The Black Rock Canal – Belt Line – Niagara Street Industrial Heritage Historic District was identified as a collection of properties that collectively are a significant cultural landscape and historic resource along Niagara Street, Mason Street and the Belt Line Rail Road. The district is adjacent to the Black Rock Canal, a National Register Eligible resource and part of the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor. The National Register District inventory form documents the significance of the resource and is a preliminary step in the National Register nomination process.



HISTORIC DISTRICT INVENTORY FORM

New York State Education Department Cultural Resources Survey Program Work Scope Specifications, Section I.
(January 1998)

Bernadette Castro
Commissioner

NYS OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION
& HISTORIC PRESERVATION
P.O. BOX 189, WATERFORD, NY 12188
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OFFICE USE ONLY

USN:

IDENTIFICATION

Name of District: BLACK ROCK CANAL – BELT LINE – NIAGARA STREET INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

County: Erie Town/City: Buffalo Village/Hamlet: _____

DESCRIPTION

Describe the location, physical characteristics (boundaries, topography, street pattern, building setback), building/property characteristics (function, dates of construction, styles, materials) and landscape (trees, sidewalks, street lamps, hitching posts, etc.). Identify whether existing street and landscape features reflect historic improvements, based on historic photographs, postcards, views, maps.

The Black Rock Canal – Belt Line – Niagara Street Industrial Heritage Historic District is bounded by Niagara Street to the east, and the Black Rock Canal and Belt Line Rail Road to the west between Breckenridge Street to the south and Lafayette Avenue to the north. Mason Street runs between Breckenridge Street and Auburn Avenue parallel to, and between Niagara Street and the Black Rock Canal/Belt Line corridor. The Black Rock Canal, a National Register Eligible resource and part of the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor. Both the east and west sides of Niagara Street are located within the district between Breckenridge Street and Auburn Avenue, and only the west side of the street is included between Auburn Avenue and Lafayette Avenue. There are sixteen (16) primary buildings and one (1) structure associated with the historic district, all are contributing.

The properties on the west side of Niagara Street have two “faces”. Their west elevations face the Belt Line Rail Road and what was historically the New York Central Rail Road (now CSX and Amtrak), and the Black Rock Canal, while their east elevations face Niagara Street. The properties between Breckenridge Street and Auburn Avenue also face a short alley known as Mason Street. The east and west elevations are therefore equally important in their relationship to the historic transportation corridor that defines the historic district. Breckenridge Street between Niagara Street and the Belt Line retains its historic cobbles. A rail road bridge at the foot of Auburn Street remains extant, recalling the historic relationship among road, rail and water transportation. The Interstate 190 follows the path of the historic Erie Canal to the west of the historic district, a contemporary transportation resource. Across the interstate and Black Rock Canal is Bird Island Pier, a National Register Eligible resource and important historic landscape within the viewshed of the proposed historic district. Also within the viewshed are the Bascule Bridge at the foot of West Ferry Street and the National Register Eligible Peace Bridge between Canada and the United States.

The Black Rock Canal – Belt Line – Niagara Street Industrial Heritage Historic District is a collection of properties that are a significant cultural landscape and historic resource along Niagara Street, Mason Street, the Belt Line Rail Road and Black Rock Canal.

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LIST OF INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

(List and briefly describe each property in the historic district, including approximate date of construction, architectural style, and whether contributing or non-contributing).

Individual Properties:

The Black Rock Canal –Belt Line – Niagara Street Industrial Historic District consists primarily of industrial buildings with some commercial and residential buildings. The buildings in the district are significant for their relationship to a major transportation corridor defined by the Black Rock Canal; the Belt Line and Niagara Street. The Black Rock Canal is part of the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor and together with the Belt Line are a significant cultural landscape in the area of industry and transportation.

The Union Meeting Hall – First Presbyterian Church of Black Rock. 44 Breckenridge Street at Mason; 1827.

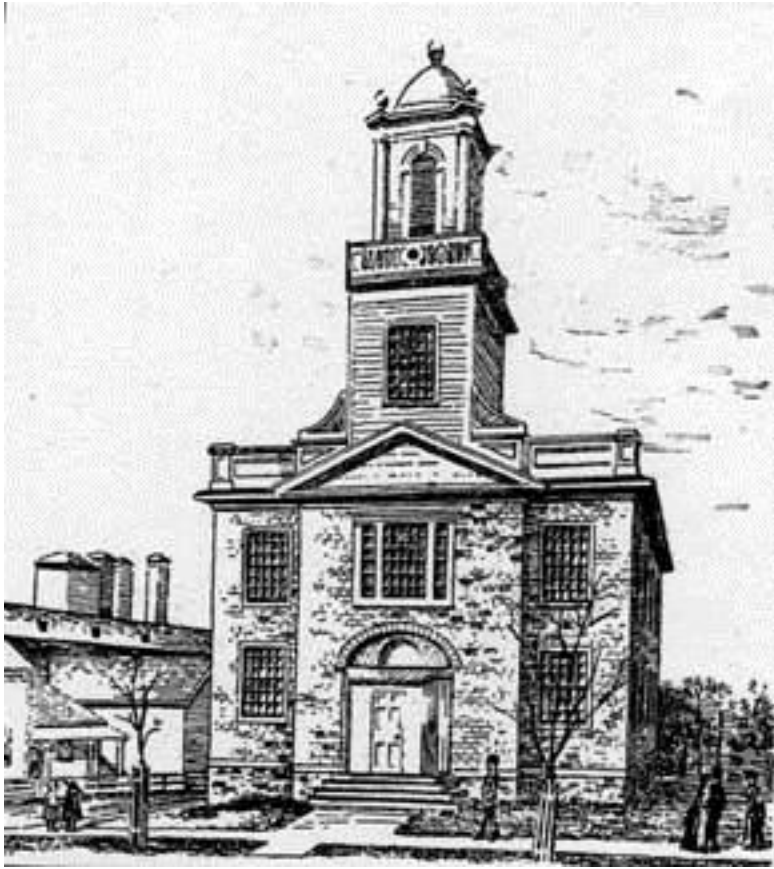
Contributing.

The Union Meeting House was constructed in 1827 on land donated by Major General Peter Porter, who was the first US Congressman from Buffalo. The street that separated the Union Meeting House and Porter's home received its name in honor of the maiden name of Porter's wife, "Breckenridge." The street retains its historic cobblestones. When constructed the area was rural and the church looked out toward the Niagara River and the Erie Canal. As documented on the 1889 Sanborn Map, the surrounding neighborhood consisted of scattered frame residences.

The Federal Style meeting house served an Episcopalian, Presbyterian and Methodist congregation before being transferred in 1831 to the Presbyterians who founded the First Presbyterian Church of Black Rock. In 1871 when the property of the church was transferred to the congregation. The congregation sponsored \$2000 in repairs (approx. \$38,000 in 2014), and renamed the church Breckenridge Street Presbyterian Church of Buffalo (Church of the Puritans). In August 1883, the church had 172 communicants and 275 students in Sunday school. In the 20th century, the status of the church steadily declined as ownership was passed on to the government. The Breckenridge Street Presbyterian Church of Buffalo later became the Grace Episcopal Church, then a home for the Odd Fellows, then a detention center for Chinese aliens, a detention home and children's court for juvenile delinquents, and eventually a warehouse for the plumbing supply company, Stritt & Priebe. The building is currently vacant.

The two story brick Federal-style building is raised on a stone basement. The main elevation facing Breckenridge Street, which retains its historic cobblestones, is three bays wide. The pedimented center bay projects slightly beyond the wall plain. The tympanum is covered with asphalt roofing material. Elliptical profiles at the cornice and raking cornice remain extant. The bell tower, documented on a 1912 historic image is no longer extant. The main entrance, with paired doors, is set back within a large brick basket-handle arch. Above the main entrance is a large central window opening, flanked by narrow sash windows. The bay to the west features paired windows, with flat brick arch and stone lintels on the first and second floors, while on the bay to the east the second floor window opening has been infilled to accommodate a door. The elevation facing Mason Avenue is four bays wide with paired windows, similar to those on the Breckenridge Street elevation, on the first and second floor of each bay.

The Union Meeting Hall – First Presbyterian Church of Black Rock has been previously inventoried (USN 02940. 006777) and determined to be National Register Eligible. The building is a local landmark (added 9/29/92).



Source: Severance, *The Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo*. 1912



Looking north toward south elevation of The Union Meeting Hall – First Presbyterian Church of Buffalo.



Looking northeast showing west elevation facing Mason Street and south elevation facing Breckenridge Street. The Union Meeting Hall – First Presbyterian Church of Buffalo. Note cobblestone street along Breckenridge Street.

The Sterling Engine Company, 42 Breckenridge Street & 1246 – 1270 Niagara Street
Contributing

The Sterling Engine Company was a dominant presence on Niagara Street, between Breckenridge and Auburn Avenue for much of the 20th century. The company, which manufactured gas engines, constructed a factory building at 1252-1278 Niagara Street in 1907 (currently 1270 Niagara Street). The “semi-fireproof” building featured steel frame, not covered construction with brick walls and concrete floors and roof, and consisted of stock and locker rooms to the south, an assembling room to the north and drafting rooms, stock rooms, machine shops and a testing building. Neighboring properties on the block between Breckenridge Street and Auburn Avenue, and along Mason Street were residential, with the Buffalo Detention Home & Children’s Court located in the former First Presbyterian Church of Black Rock. To the west were the Black Rock Canal, the Belt Line and the Niagara Falls Branch of the New York Central Rail Road.

By 1925, Sterling Engine’s address had expanded to south to include 1246 Niagara Street. More significantly, by 1925 Sterling Engine had usurped the entire residential area on Mason Street and had constructed a second factory building at 42 Breckenridge Street, which ran the entire length of Mason Street adjacent to the rail way lines. On this block of Niagara Street from 1925 until 1951, only 12 structures stood that were not owned and operated by Sterling Engine. Sometime in the late 1950s Sterling Engine was purchased by Phillips Petroleum Company of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Phillips Petroleum moved Sterling Engine’s production facilities to Paola, Kansas, and left a large gap on Niagara Street.

In a 1946 advertisement, Sterling Engine provides three addresses besides their Buffalo location: 900 Chrysler Building in New York City, 806 Evans Building in Washington, D.C., and 855 Board of Trade Building in Chicago. Sterling Engine was producing in every major city in America, including Buffalo. Sterling Engine

prided itself on modernizing old equipment. As early as 1908, Sterling Engine was utilizing interchangeable parts in its marine engine construction. At that time, Sterling Engine's "only goal" was marine construction, but by 1946, the company was producing engines for ships, airplanes, cars, and trains. Sterling Engine produced engines that powered ships, such as the *83 Footer* and landing craft in World War II. In a 1908 issue of the journal *Motorboat*, Sterling Engine claims, "aggressiveness, individuality, and honest endeavor are the principles under which business is conducted."

The two buildings associated with Sterling Engine in the block between Breckenridge Street and Auburn Avenue remain extant. The older building facing Mason and Niagara Streets is a two story brick masonry building. There are three main blocks to the building. The block to the south features five bays, each defined by a window triplet. The bay to the north has an entrance door. While the steel lintels remain extant the window opening has been reduced and infilled with brick. The middle block was also five bays with large window openings that have also been infilled and divided into two window triplets. A continuous steel lintel suggests that the windows were quite large, likely to provide daylight into the manufacturing space. An overhead door is located at the fourth bay. The block to the north at the intersection of Niagara Street and Auburn Avenue is also five bays with large window openings that have been reduced. The original steel lintels and precast sills remain extant in this block. The bay to the north features the main public entrance to the building, classically detailed with precast Doric pilasters and full entablature. The tripartite entrance has a door to the north, with six light transom above. To the south are two six-over-six double hung wooden sash windows. Above the entrance are three six-over-six double hung sash windows, with embellished precast surround, lintel, sill and mullions. The elevation along Auburn Avenue features similar alterations to the window openings. The steel lintel and precast sills remain extant, however the first floor windows have been infilled with block. Three bays of the elevation to the north are two stories in height, while to the south the building is a single story tall and features a large loading bay. The grade drops along Auburn Avenue and, as a result along Mason Street the building varies between three and four stories in height. The south elevation of the building reveals the sawtooth roof profile and skylights.

The three story, brick masonry second factory building constructed between Mason Street and the Belt Line occupies the entire block between Breckenridge Street and Auburn Avenue. The building retains a high level of integrity with the original steel industrial windows remaining extant on all elevations. At some locations on the first floor the windows have been infilled.



The large and well equipped factory where the Buffalo marine engines are built.

Picture published in "Motor Boating" magazine, January 1913



Advertisement for "Sterling" in *Motor Boating* magazine. November 1933



Looking northwest from Niagara Street toward the Sterling Engine Company.



Looking northeast from Mason Street toward the Sterling Engine Company.



Looking southeast from the Belt Line toward the Sterling Engine Company Building.



Looking southeast from the Belt Line toward the Sterling Engine Company. Note Belt Line and train bridge.



Looking southeast from the Black Rock Canal showing the Sterling Engine Company Buildings.



Looking southeast from the Black Rock Canal toward the Sterling Engine Company building.

1226 Niagara Street
Contributing

1226 Niagara Street is located on the northwest corner of Niagara and Breckenridge Streets. The three story, three bay brick commercial building was constructed ca. 1885 and is noted as a drug store on the 1889 Sanborn map. John C. Prong lived at 1226 Niagara Street and opened a boot and shoe repair shop in the retail space, a business he maintained at this location for thirty-years. The property has a history of long term tenants. In 1961 a bait store, which remains today, occupied the storefront.

The building is simply detailed. The storefront has been infilled with brick, however the corner cast iron column and signboard remain. An oriel bay window on the south elevation is documented on the 1889 map, and the addition to the west appears by 1916. The simple composition is terminated by a scalloped corbeled frieze.



Looking northwest toward 1226 Niagara Street. Breckenridge Street, with the Union Meeting Hall – First Presbyterian Church and Sterling Engine Company are visible to the west.



Looking northwest toward 1226 Niagara Street.

19 Mason Street
Contributing

The frame residence located at 19 Mason Street is noted on the 1889 Sanborn map and the first resident documented by the city directories was Fred Ledor, a maltster who lived in the house in 1889. The residents in the house did not tend to stay long. In 1900 Sylvester Meyers, a maltster, Robert McComb, a scooper and Philip Hontz a maltster and sidewalk finisher lived in the house. The residents were working class with laborers, carpenters, motor drivers and plasterers listed among inhabitants over the years.

The two story side gable building is three bays wide with center entrance. The residence has been altered with replacement siding and windows, however it is a rare surviving example of the domestic architecture that was located on both sides of Mason Street before the block became the home of Sterling Engine in the early twentieth century.



Looking east toward the residence at 19 Mason Street.

Buffalo Gasoline Motor Company: 20 Auburn Avenue & 1280 Niagara Street (formerly 1280 – 1290 Niagara Street)
Contributing

The manufacturing buildings constructed located at 20 Auburn Avenue and 1280 Niagara Street were constructed by the Buffalo Gasoline Motor Company in two building campaigns. The building at the corner of Niagara Street and Auburn Street was constructed ca. 1903, the year the company is first listed at the Niagara Street address. By 1916 the building to the west facing Auburn Street and the Belt Line was constructed. The company manufactured marine engines.

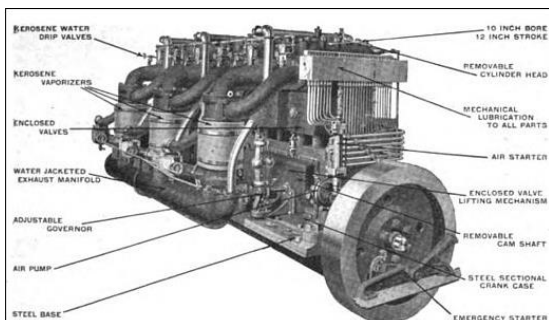
Fedders-Quigan Corporation ran their unit air conditioner division out of the property by 1947. Fedders, which began as a metalworking shop in Buffalo in 1896, making milk cans, kerosene cans for Standard Oil Co. and bread pans for National Biscuit Company. The company converted their metalworking shop over to

radiators in response to the automobile industry. After World War II Fedders merge with Frank J. Quigan to form Fedders-Quigan Corporation. By 1947 the company moved aggressively into room air conditions and electric water coolers. In 1957 the company began making year-round central air conditions for five- and six-room ranch-style houses. At this time the company peaked in sales at \$70.7 million. Sales began to stagnate in the mid-1960s, although the company was still the largest producer of room air conditions. Despite periods of loss and prosperity over the next decades, the company continues to manufacture room air conditioners among other products. <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/fedders-corp-history/>

The red-brick masonry building constructed ca. 1903 is three-stories tall and eight bays wide raised on a rough-faced limestone foundation. The fenestration on the first floor shows no regular pattern. The windows in the four bays to the south all have segmental headers, however the one over one sash units vary in width and height. The main entrance is at the fifth bay from the south. The pedimented entrance is simply detailed. North of the entrance are paired, one over one double hung sash units in each of the three bays. The fenestration on the second and third floors is organized with a window triplet in the four bays to the south and paired windows in the four bays to the north. The bays to the north, which have a different window configuration were added after 1916 as indicated on 1916 Sanborn map that shows the lot to the north as a sewer pipe yard for the Seneca Clay Company. The windows on the second and third floor are all headed with an iron lintel. The windows throughout have Medina sandstone sills. While the windows are all older wooden sash units, one pair at the outer bay to the north on the second floor features twelve-over-twelve lights. This is likely the original sash configuration. It is also likely that

The elevation facing Auburn Avenue is six-bays wide. The first floor features a variety of windows with segmental heads and iron lintels on the first floor. There is also a loading dock in the fourth bay from the east. There are paired and triplet units on the second and third floors. The windows at the sixth bay from the east on the first and second floors retain the original multi-light double hung sash. Although only visible along the alley separating 1280 Niagara Street from 20 Auburn Avenue, the window units on the west elevation retain the original multi-light double hung sash.

20 Auburn Street was constructed by 1916 and was historically connected by fireproof passages to the north and south on the second floor. The two story brick masonry building has eight bays along Auburn Street and six bays along the Belt Line. The bays are defined by engaged masonry pilasters. Although the windows have been infilled, construction drawings indicate that the sash were all twelve-over-twelve double hung units. The sash at the second floor, second bay from the east have been restored.



A Word to Manufacturers and Gas Engine Users

TO THE MAN who needs a single engine for his tractor, auto truck or spraying machine we have nothing to sell.

Never the less we have begun an advertising campaign which will cost thousands of dollars, and its sole object is to reach this man.

For we believe we can help him, and in helping him we will benefit ourselves.

We hope to help him by making him "engine wise"—to make him demand real quality in the power plant of his gas-driven machinery. We will profit by building the engine others sell him.

We have been in the gasoline engine business 14 years. Marine engines are the only kind we market directly. We have made them the world's standard, and they will continue so.

We have never sold any but marine engines direct to the user and we do not intend to do so now.

We want a chance to explain why every engine built at the "Buffalo" plant—no matter what kind of work it is designed for,—excels in reliability and economy.

To the Gas Engine User—

Insist that your tractor, plow, ditching machine, or any gas powered machine is powered with a "Buffalo" engine.

You will get it if you insist. At least one manufacturer in each of the lines named makes them part of their regular equipment, and we will gladly tell you who they are.

Here is a contract with you:

If you will insist on having a "Buffalo" engine with the outfit you buy, we will see that you get it, and that you get it at a fair price.

Furthermore, we add our guarantee to that of the man who sells it to you.

To Manufacturer—

We have just completed an addition to our plant which makes it possible for us to supply gasoline and kerosene engines in large or small lots.

We are already supplying engines for tractors, excavators, ditching machines, fire engines, spraying machines, auto trucks and railway cars. Our engines can be adapted to almost any line.

"Buffalo" engines are all of the four-stroke-cycle type—slow speed, medium speed and high speed—3 to 160 h. p.

Let us send you blueprints and specifications.

Contract Department

Buffalo Gasoline Motor Co.

Niagara St. and Auburn Ave. Buffalo, N. Y.

Advertisement from *Gas Power* January 1913

MOST POWERFUL ROOM AIR CONDITIONER



The 1934 **Fidelity** is beautiful outside — powerful inside, proved to be more powerful than many other room air conditioning units! **Fidelity** can handle 7-cup refrigerators give you 23% more cooling area... greater reserve capacity for hot, muggy days. Double filtering and air cleaning area. And you get greater dehumidifying power, too. Be sure you look "under the hood" when you buy a room air conditioner. Look at powerful **Fidelity**!

Advertisement from *Life* magazine, May 10, 1954



Looking northeast toward the Buffalo Gasoline Motor Company from the corner of Auburn Avenue and Niagara Street. The Buffalo Gasoline Motor Company is in the viewshed to the south. 1294 Niagara Street



Looking northeast toward 20 Auburn Avenue and 1280 Niagara Street from Auburn Avenue – Buffalo Gasoline Motor Company.



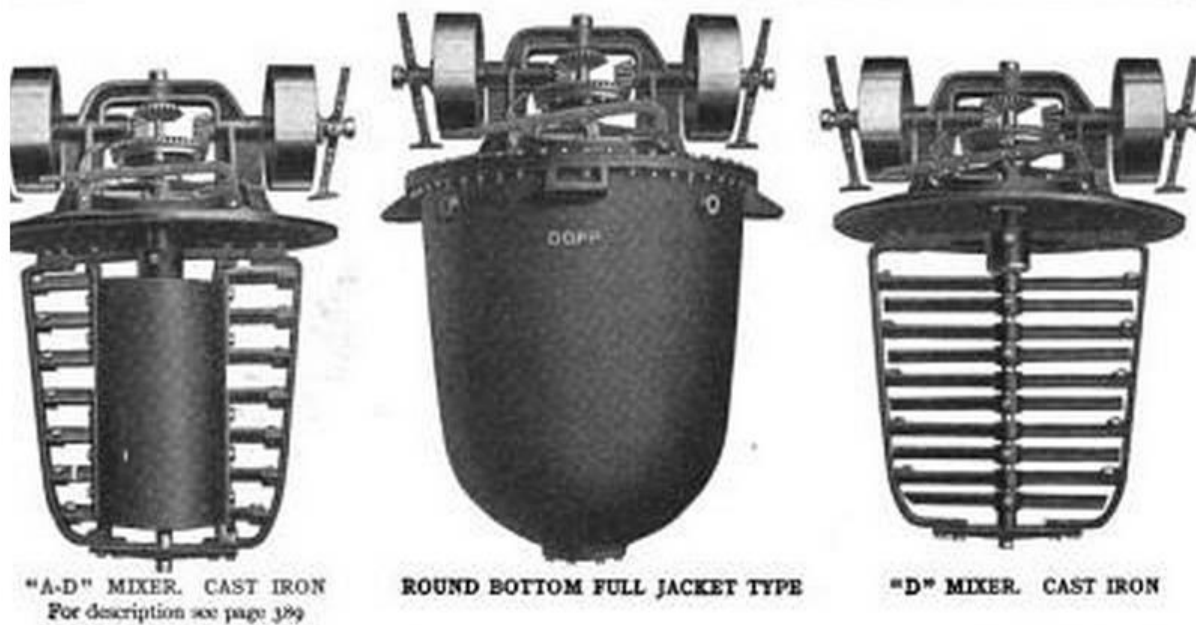
Looking east from the Barge Canal toward the Buffalo Gasoline Engine Company.

Sowers Manufacturing Company: 1294 Niagara Street (1298 – 1310 Niagara Street)
Contributing.

The factory for Sowers Manufacturing Company was constructed in 1914 as documented on the 1916 Sanborn Map. In 1916 the lot to the south was owner by Seneca Clay Company and used as a sewer pipe yard. It is likely that before construction was completed the sewer pipe yard was purchased and the building expanded south given the seamless appearance of the east elevation.

Sowers Manufacturing made “DOPP” equipment for heating – cooling – mixing, including seamless jacketed and single shell kettles, mixers, soap crutchers, vacuum and pressure apparatus and noted in a ca. 1930 product publication. Dopp kettles and pans were constructed out of cast iron and used in the chemical industry. The company remained at the factory located on Niagara Street until 1942 when the property was sold. The 1950 Sanborn map notes the factory building with various occupancies.

The two story, fourteen bay brick masonry building is simply detailed with brick masonry piers that extend beyond the parapet defining each bay. A loading bay is located in the sixth bay from the south with pedestrian entrances in the flanking bays. A second loading bay is located at the northwest corner of the building. The nine bays to the north have cast sills and iron lintels whereas at the five bays to the south the lintel is faced with brick. This detailing is consistent with the 1916 Sanborn map that shows the lot to the south as a storage yard for the Seneca Clay Company. The raised rusticated limestone foundation, medina sandstone watertable, engaged pilasters and corbelled, scallop frieze are consistent across the entire façade. There are no windows on the north elevation. The west elevation has been faced with a stucco material.

SOWERS MANUFACTURING COMPANY

Published merchandise from Sowers Manufacturing Company in *Chemical Engineering Catalog, Volume 2*. 1917.



Looking southwest toward the Sowers Manufacturing Company, 1294 Niagara Street.



Looking west toward the Sowers Manufacturing Company, 1294 Niagara Street showing a partial east elevation.



Looking southwest toward the Sowers Manufacturing Company, 1294 Niagara Street.



Looking southeast toward 1294 Niagara Street from Belt Line.



Looking northeast from 1294 Niagara Street from Belt Line.



Looking east toward 1294 Niagara Street and 20 Auburn Avenue from the Black Rock Canal.

1225 Niagara Street
Contributing

The three-story Italianate commercial storefront located at the southeast corner of Breckenridge and Niagara Streets was constructed ca. 1877. John Bowers is noted in the city directory as having a grocery and meat market in the retail space and living in one of the apartments above. In 1905 Emory I Smith had taken over the business that he maintained until 1914 when Edward E. Boylan opened his own grocery store at 1225 Niagara Street. By 1950 the storefront was a restaurant.

The three-bay, three-story brick building features classical Italianate detailing. The storefront retains its original parts defined by cast iron columns and pilasters. The windows at the second floor feature masonry arches with keystone, while a segmental arch heads the windows on the third floor. The original one-over-one double hung sash windows remain extant on the third floor. The broad overhanging eaves, detailed with brackets, turn the corner from Niagara Street to Breckenridge Street. A projecting rectangular bay window is located on the second floor at the second bay in from Niagara Street. The windows, with segmental heads, are functionally located, relative to plan. There are no windows on the north elevation since a building was historically located in the adjacent lot.



Looking northeast toward 1225 Niagara Street.

1233 Niagara Street
Contributing

The property located at 1233 Niagara Street is documented on the 1889 Sanborn map as 1233, 1235 and 1237. The two story storefronts at 1233 and 1235 Niagara Street featured cast iron columns and a central stair accessing living space above. 1237 Niagara Street, also a frame building is noted on the map as being two-and-one-half stories tall, with a front porch. Various enterprises were located in the storefronts including William Logan's plumbing business and Holsa Smith's Bakery. The businesses serviced the residential neighborhood located to the east.

The properties, specifically 1233 and 1235 have been altered with non-historic siding on the elevations and replacement windows. The original storefront parts remain extant, defined by cast iron columns. The two-and-one-half story frame building to the north has similarly been altered with non-historic siding and replacement windows, however the original parts remain extant, including the cast iron at the storefront. The properties are significant to the district as rare surviving examples of retail properties in the industrial neighborhood that would have provided everyday necessities for the working class community.



Looking northeast toward 1233 Niagara Street.

1239 Niagara Street
Undetermined

The building located at 1239 Niagara Street is first noted in the city directory in 1868 as the home of Daniel C. Conger, a carpenter with Frank & Company. While it is possible that the building could be a contributing property to the district the loss of integrity as a result of additions to the exterior masks the historic heavy timber frame residence. More research, specifically investigation of the existing material fabric and history of the property, would be necessary to determine if the extent to which the historic residence remains.



Looking northeast toward 1239 Niagara Street.

1245 Niagara Street
Contributing

1245 Niagara Street was constructed ca. 1910 and the 1911 city directory notes Phelps Auto Top and Trimming as occupying the space. New Method Laundry is listed as a tenant in 1915 and in 1916 Reed Chocolate Company Candy Factory occupies the space. By 1922 Orgasco Inc., manufacturers of Dodge gas burners occupied the space. In 1950 a fire protection equipment warehouse occupied the space.

The commercial/factory brick building is two stories tall and two bays wide. Engaged pilasters and a corbeled frieze define the bays on all elevations. The first floor storefront appears to have been altered as the brick masonry appears to be a slightly darker red tone in locations. In each bay at the second floor are two paired sash windows with precast surround, header and sill. The first two bays on the north and south elevations have windows similar to those on the Niagara Street elevation. The window openings in the bays to the east on the north and south elevations have been infilled. Small, non-historic window openings are located in some of the infilled bays.



Looking southeast toward 1245 Niagara Street.

The American Body Co., Manufacturers of Auto Bodies: 1255 Niagara Street (formerly 1255 – 1267 Niagara Street)
Contributing

The American Body Company produced Model L bodies and other medium-priced auto bodies in aluminum steel and wood. The company's main office was at 1200 Niagara Street, with factories at 1088, 1095, 1200 and 1255 Niagara Street. The company first appears listed at 1255 Niagara Street address in 1911. The company produced bodies for Lincoln and continued that contract until late 1926. The company's experimentation drew the attention of the U.S. Aluminum Company (ALCOA) in the hopes of producing cost-effective stamped aluminum automobile body and, in 1927 American was renamed U.S. Aluminum Co.; Fabrication Division. At this time volume automobile body production ceases and the company focused on producing experimental aluminum bodies in the Buffalo factories through the 1950s. By 1950 the factory at 1255 Niagara Street was no longer manufacturing aluminum auto bodies and lists the various uses in the building as storage on the second floor, used car storage, auto repair and a pattern shop.

The factory constructed for the American Body Company consists of a three story block to the south and a two story block to the north. The three story block is nine rank with no definition of individual bays. Historically offices and a stock room were located on the first floor and assembly space on the second and third floors. The block to the north is eight bay long, with each bay defined by paired windows at the second floor and paired windows of loading docks on the first floor. The windows at the first floor and in the five bays from the south on the second floor are all four over four double hung sash units. The second story windows in the three bays to the north are industrial steel unit. The change in window type might be a reflection of function. In the three bays to the north metal work was performed while in the bays to the south woodworking was done on the first floor and assembling on the second floor. Although the windows in the three story block have been replaced on the first and second floor and infilled on the third the building retains a high level of integrity. The original stone sills remain extant throughout.



Designs by American Body Corporation. Source: "CoachBuilt" www.coachbuilt.com



Looking northeast toward 1255 Niagara Street, American Body Company.

1273 Niagara Street – Residence **Contributing**

The residence located at 1273 Niagara Street first appears on the 1900 Sanborn Map. The Queen Anne style building with gambrel roof is not typical of this section of Niagara Street, which tended to be more industrial in the late 19th century. James Burgess, a real estate agent and his wife Martha lived in the house between 1899 and 1911 when James died. Martha continued to live in the house until 1917. The history of residency in the house after the Burgess' leave is consistent with the working class neighborhood. In 1918 Henry Pyle, a carpenter, lived in the house, followed by John forgetter, a machinist in 1920. The Troglauer family occupied the residence next. Theresa, the mother lived with her three sons, a woodworker, metalworker and machinist, and two daughters who were both clerks. By 1950 the residence has been converted into apartments.

The Queen Anne style residence at 1273 Niagara Street retains a high level of integrity. The fish scale shingle and Palladian window in the gambrel remain extant as does the brackets at the eaves. The original siding remains extant as does the Eastlake detailing at the porch frieze. The posts and rails have been removed. The windows have been covered with plywood, but remain extant in a number of locations. The massing features full and partial story bay windows on the side elevations.



Looking northeast toward the residences at 1273 and 1277 Niagara Street.

1277 Niagara Street
Contributing

The residence at 1277 Niagara Street first appears on the 1889 Sanborn Map. The Stick style building is not typical of this section of Niagara Street, which tended to be more industrial in the late 19th century. Frederick Ogden, who worked at the Banner Milling Company lived in the residence in 1888. Douglas Joyce, a dentist, and his wife Jessie moved into the house in 1894 where they lived until they moved to 142 Englewood Avenue in 1915. The city directory lists a number of occupants in the house in 1917 including John Dedona, a lab worker; Alexander Scott, a molder and Marie Misconde, a widow. In 1920 the residents remain unchanged, however John Dedona's occupation is listed as a grocer with the business located at 1277 Niagara Street. His sons, a soldier, artist, mechanic and trainsman also live in the house. By 1922 the Dedona's had moved out and Thomas Barth, a grocer moved his business and family into the residence. An addition was added to the front of the building and a restaurant opened by 1950.

Despite the later addition to accommodate a restaurant, sufficient historic fabric remains extant to convey the Stick style detailing. The turned posts and frieze at the port remains extant as does the detailing of at the open pediment of the front facing gable dwelling. The clapboard and original windows remain extant.



Looking southeast toward the residences at 1273 and 1277 Niagara Street.

SIGNIFICANCE

Discuss how the historic district meets the National Register eligibility criteria. How does the district fit within the historic context and reflect historic events of the city/Village/town (**Criterion A**). Does the district have association with people important to the history of the city/Village/town (**Criterion B**). Are properties typical or outstanding examples of architecture/design for their respective era, and how do landscape features contribute (**Criterion C**).



View of Black Rock Canal – Belt Line – Niagara Street Industrial Heritage District from Black Rock Canal.

The proposed Black Rock Canal – Belt Line – Niagara Street Industrial Heritage Historic District embodies the relationship between industry and transportation networks on water and land that defines the history of the Village of Black Rock, specifically Upper Black Rock. Transportation related commerce and industry were defining factors in the history of the area. The historic district conveys the industrial history of Upper Black Rock by water, rail and truck along the Black Rock Canal, Belt Line Rail Road and Niagara Street. The industries in the district were directly related to transportation with Sterling Engine, Buffalo Gasoline Motor Company and American Body Company occupying the major factory buildings in the district. The properties in the historic district are primarily industrial/manufacturing, although a house at 19 Mason Street, constructed ca. 1889 and the Union Meeting Hall, First Presbyterian Church of Black Rock, constructed in 1827 at 44 Breckenridge Street, remain extant on the west side of Niagara Street. The properties on the east side of Niagara Street reflect the diversity of functions required in a working class neighborhood. The property at 1225 Niagara Street, constructed ca. 1877 functioned as a grocery and meat market with boarding rooms above. A plumber and baker occupied the storefront at 1233. Two residences dating to the late nineteenth century remain extant on the northeast corner of Auburn Avenue and Niagara Street. The proposed historic district meets Criterion C in the area of architecture and Criterion A for its association with the transportation and industrial history of Upper Black Rock.

One (1) property in the district has been previously inventoried and determined to be National Register eligible: 44 Breckenridge Street, First Presbyterian Church of Black Rock USN 02490.006777. This property is also a local landmark (added 9/29/92). One property in the district has been previously inventoried and no determination made: 42 Breckenridge, USN 02940.019528.

Background:

The Village of Black Rock derived its name from an irregular triangle of black limestone approximately, 100-feet wide and 300-feet long with a level surface that rose approximately 4-feet above the water level of the Niagara River. The rock was located just west of the present intersection of Niagara and Hampshire Streets. The black limestone outcropping created a small natural harbor an eddy, and was a favorite fishing spot of the Indians. The natural harbor, with its relatively calm water provided a port for docking, loading and unloading vessels. The rock was also used as a slip for a ferry that traveled to Canada from as early as the Revolutionary War until its demolition in 1825 when the Erie Canal was constructed (Norton 1879:98, 112; 1912:250 and 255). The rock is no longer extant and is located below what is now Interstate 190.

Written histories suggest that Niagara Street, Black Rock Harbor and the Rail Road have long been important for transportation, communication, commerce, and other uses. Before Europeans arrived in North America, Native Americans had constructed trails in the area, many of which became early Euro-American settler trails and roads. Europeans recognized the importance of the Niagara River for transportation, control of the fur trade, and communication with outposts in the Great Lakes region. The river's importance was amplified by the lack of decent roads in the region. The first Europeans to set foot in the area were probably the men associated with the construction and launching of the Griffon, a small French sailing ship financed by LaSalle in 1679. It was probably anchored for a short period of time in the section of the Niagara River lying in close proximity to the historic district. One source claims that it was protected by the "Black Rock" to the south of the district, but another source describe it at anchor at Squaw Island, to the north.¹ The British began building sailing vessels on the Niagara River about one hundred years later, foreshadowing one of the important early industries in the area.² The neighborhood was the scene of a skirmish between British soldiers and French-allied Seneca warriors in 1763, during the French and Indian War. Between 1784 and 1797 a number of treaties were signed by the Seneca and the United States that removed the Senecas from most of Western New York. This was also the period of time when a ferry was established at the black rock to transport people and goods across the river.³

By the end of the first decade of the 19th century the New York State Reservation, a one-mile wide strip of land along the entire length of the Niagara River, formerly held for the Senecas, was surveyed into lots and sold to settlers and speculators by the State. The project area lies within this former reservation.⁴ Niagara Street was only 40 feet wide when it was laid out from the Village of New Amsterdam (later Buffalo) to as far as Scajaquada Creek between 1803 and 1806.⁵ It was not much used until after the War of 1812.⁶

The ferry, and a warehouse owned by Porter, Barton & Co., a few houses, and a tavern formed the nucleus of the Village that was officially incorporated in 1813 (Bingham 1931: 211). This Village would later compete with Buffalo for the terminus of the Erie Canal. Although the Village of Black Rock lost its struggle with Buffalo to be chosen as the terminus of the Erie Canal, the northern part of the Village, below Scajaquada Creek, did get a canal lock at the foot of Austin Street. The power generated by that lock attracted factories and flour mills.

The area between the Village of Buffalo and Scajaquada Creek was known locally as Upper Black

¹ Robert W. Bingham, *Cradle of the Queen City: A history of Buffalo to the incorporation of the city*, (Buffalo, New York: Buffalo Historical Society, 1931). A.W. Spear, *The Peace Bridge: 1927-1977 and Reflections of the Past*, (Buffalo, New York: Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, 1977), 9.

² Spear, *The Peace Bridge*, 9.

³ Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-2-4.

⁴ William Ketchum, *History of Buffalo* (Buffalo: Rockwell Baker and Hill, 1865).

⁵ Lockwood R. Doty (ed.), *History of the Genesee Country* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1925).

⁶ Smith, *History of the City of Buffalo*.

Rock while the area north of Scajaquada Creek was known as Lower Black Rock. The historic district lies within the Upper Black Rock area. Ship building was an important industry at Scajaquada Creek and Upper Black Rock developed quickly into a trading and transportation hub for the region. The area's initial development occurred because the Black Rock Ferry was a busy transportation link between the eastern and western shores of the Niagara River.⁷

Fort Street led down the embankment from the current intersection of Hampshire Street and Niagara Street to the ferry at the black rock. Other paths or roads from Niagara Street to the river included a path just south of a stream on the alignment of Albany Street and a path on the alignment of Auburn Avenue. All of the streets emanating from Niagara Street were connected by a path or road on the beach along the river. That early road, which began at Buffalo, was cleared along the sandy beach at the base of the bluff and roughly followed the future alignment of the Erie Canal.⁸ By the 1810s the neighborhood contained several taverns and boarding houses, the ferry station, warehouses and docks, general and grocery stores, military barracks, and several log houses.⁹

During the War of 1812 development in the area was halted except for the construction of small fortifications. Over the course of the war, British and American artillery exchanged fire across the river and battles were fought in the area because the black rock was strategically important for loading and unloading boats. Most of the buildings near the black rock were destroyed during the war.¹⁰

The Village of Black Rock initially recovered faster than Buffalo after the War of 1812 because of its natural harbor at the black rock. The Bird Island Pier was constructed in 1822, connecting Squaw Island to the Bird Island Reef farther south. The pier calmed the waters of the Niagara River and made the Black Rock Harbor more navigable.¹¹ However, when Buffalo was chosen for the terminus of the Erie Canal, Black Rock's fate was fairly sealed.¹² In 1825 the black rock was removed during the construction of the Erie Canal, the ferry operation was moved north to the present foot of Ferry Street in the next year, and the Village's development slowed as canal boats were towed past the area to be unloaded at Buffalo. Some important businesses in Upper Black Rock moved south to Buffalo while others moved north to take advantage of the water power generated by a lock just north of Scajaquada Creek.¹³

Financial problems associated with the construction of the Erie Canal led to the incorporation of part of Black Rock Harbor in its natural state into a section of the canal. Erie Canal traffic passed through the historic district and consisted of hundreds of thousands of settlers bound for the expanding western frontier of the United States and millions of tons of freight heading in both directions.

Buffalo was incorporated as a city in 1832 and grew at a phenomenal rate because of the canal terminus and the construction of major railroads through the city. The Village of Black Rock became the Town of Black Rock in the same year and developed slowly as business and commerce gravitated to the south at Buffalo and to the north at the Lower Black Rock canal lock and Scajaquada Creek area. Black Rock was absorbed into the City of Buffalo in 1853.¹⁴

Upper Black Rock was mainly rural farmland in the first half of the 19th century. Most of the improvements at that time were transportation-related: Niagara Street was declared a public highway in 1826, the Black Rock ferry was moved and improved, the Erie Canal was enlarged, and the area saw the

⁷ Severance, *The Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo*, 251-261. Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-4.

⁸ Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-7.

⁹ Severance, *The Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo*, 251-261.

¹⁰ Severance, *The Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo*, 251-261. Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-12, 13.

¹¹ H.W. Hill. *Municipality of Buffalo, New York – A History: 1720-1923* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1923), 263.

¹² Whitford, Noble E., and Minnie M. Beal. *History of the canal system of the state of New York, together with brief histories of the canals of the United States and Canada*, (Albany: Brandow printing Company, 1906).

¹³ Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-13, 17, 22.

¹⁴ Spear, *The Peace Bridge*, 12-21.

construction of the first railroads in Buffalo.¹⁵

The Buffalo and Black Rock Railroad was constructed along the beach between Buffalo and the Black Rock ferry station at the foot of the current Ferry Street. It began operating in 1834. A horse-drawn railcar was pulled along a three mile long railroad consisting of four-inch thick wood rails covered with a thin strip of iron.¹⁶ The railroad was running regular trains through the area and the historic district past Scajaquada Creek on the current alignment of Niagara Street by 1836. It was the first railroad in the area to use steam locomotives. By 1853, it was part of the New York Central Railroad system and the tracks were moved off Niagara Street closer to the river and canal.¹⁷ In 1883 New York Central Railroad constructed a railroad that encircled the City of Buffalo and connected to the main railroad network. The Belt Line, as it was called, was a 15-mile loop that transported people and goods around the city, and provided connections to the larger railroad system that connected Buffalo to the rest of the country. Industry and neighborhoods developed along the loop. Black Rock saw the growth of factories and working class neighborhoods, while neighborhoods such as Parkside provided a suburban living environment for its upper middle class inhabitants. The Belt Line was in operation for approximately thirty-years, gradually fading out of existence due to competition from trolley lines and automobiles.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw Buffalo continue to grow out toward its city limits. The Buffalo Street Railway Company was formed in 1860 and Niagara Street was one of the first streets in Buffalo to acquire tracks. The first cars were small and were drawn by horses. The rails were cast iron and were laid with tie rods between them to prevent the tracks from spreading apart. By the end of the 1860s, the streetcar lines were reaching the sparsely settled areas of the city. A car house, stables, and office were built near the intersection of Niagara and Albany Streets in 1862.¹⁸

Improvements and expansions of utilities like sewers, corduroy and otherwise paved streets, gas lines, and the introduction of streetcar lines allowed citizens to move farther away from the city center. Residences, commercial buildings, and industry followed the construction of parks, streetcar lines, and utilities. Notable industries included a number of milling companies located on Bird Island Pier at Squaw Island.¹⁹

Most of the large properties along Niagara Street were subdivided and built upon. Urbanization took hold along Niagara Street. This took the form of a growing and much denser stock of residences, with shops and other commercial buildings erected to serve the increasing population. A few small and large manufacturers moved in among the mostly-residential area to the south of the historic district.²⁰

The neighborhood stretching from about Ferry Street to Scajaquada Creek was more industrial than the southern half with several large companies predominating among scattered dwellings. Much of the area was devoted to transportation structures and facilities like the Black Rock Harbor, Black Rock Ferry, Erie Canal, and numerous railroads. Generally, the eastern side of Niagara Street was more residential and the western side was more industrial and transportation-oriented.²¹

A Niagara Street power plant for the streetcars was built in 1891. It was fueled by coal until 1896

¹⁵ Bureau of Engineering. *Index to Records of Streets, Public Grounds, Waterways, Railroads, Gas Companies, Water Works, etc. of the City of Buffalo from 1814 to 1896* (Buffalo: The Wenborne Sumner Company, 1897). Hopkins, Griffith Morgan. *Atlas of the City of Buffalo, Erie Co., New York: from actual surveys & official records*, (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins, 1872).

¹⁶ Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-19.

¹⁷ Pierce, *Stage 1A Cultural Resource Investigation*, 5-25.

¹⁸ William Reed Gordon, *90 Years of Buffalo Railways, 1860-1950, International Railway Company*, (Buffalo, New York: Ms. on File. Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, 1990), 68-72, 99.

¹⁹ Smith, *History of the City of Buffalo*, 251-252.

²⁰ Hopkins, *Atlas of the City of Buffalo*.

²¹ Sanborn Map Company, *Fire Insurance Map of Buffalo, New York*, (Pelham, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1889-1951).

when hydroelectric power started coming from Niagara Falls.²² The International Railway Company took possession of the local streetcar companies in 1902 and by 1908 the cars were longer and heavier and required better rails. New and stronger rails were laid and were supported by steel ties embedded in concrete.²³

At the beginning of the 20th century the smaller single-family homes and smaller businesses were giving way to large industry and apartment buildings. The neighborhoods character was shifting from a fairly even mix of residential, commercial, and industrial development to more industry, including heavy industry. West of Niagara Street, the industrial character was shifting from light and medium industry to more medium and heavy industry. The eastern side of Niagara Street was moving from residential and commercial to more industry and larger buildings mired in with single-family dwellings.²⁴ With the rise of improved public transportation, especially the automobile, it was no longer necessary for workers to live close to their place of employment; after the 1900s, places of business or industry were not always surrounded by worker cottages or apartments.

Transportation elements were undergoing change as well. Between 1905 and 1924 the federal government made improvements to Black Rock Harbor and Bird Island Pier. The work created the Black Rock Canal and Lock, a channel between Buffalo and Tonawanda for deep-draft vessels.²⁵ The section of canal in Buffalo was abandoned by 1918 upon completion of the Erie Barge Canal, which terminates in Tonawanda.²⁶

Massive bridges across the Niagara River are prominent features in the viewshed. The International Railroad Bridge was opened in 1873 with one set of tracks and a pedestrian walk. It is located just north of the historic district. The Peace Bridge was built for automobile traffic between 1925 and 1927. The Peace Bridge is located to the south.²⁷

Buses took over the electric streetcar routes between the 1930s and 1950s. Rails were gradually taken up and the streets were repaved by the International Railway Company. The company was dissolved in 1950 and the removal of tracks and poles was completed in the 1960s.²⁸ Most of the remaining residential buildings on Niagara Street were being converted for commercial purposes like restaurants and shops. The Buffalo Sewer Authority dominated Squaw Island, displacing dozens of shacks and boat houses.

Two transportation features that lie in the project area include the I-190 (Niagara Thruway) and I-198 (Scajaquada Expressway). The I-190 was built in the early 1960s over the former bed and towpath of the Erie Canal in parts of the project area. It runs north-south between the Black Rock Harbor and Niagara Street. The I-198 was built later in the 1960s and connects with the I-190 via a series of ramps that extend over the northern end of the project area.²⁹

Buffalo's population peaked in the 1950s and began a steady decline as large companies started leaving the area. War industries scaled back or closed altogether. Small local companies could not compete with national corporations and the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway allowed shipping to bypass Buffalo. The construction of the interstate highway system and inexpensive Federal new-home loans sparked an exodus from the city. All of these factors accelerated the general loss in industry and population in the second half of the 20th century.³⁰

²² Gordon, *90 Years of Buffalo Railways*, 68-72, 99.

²³ Gordon, *90 Years of Buffalo Railways*, 39.

²⁴ Sanborn Map Company, *Fire Insurance Map of Buffalo*.

²⁵ Hill, *Municipality of Buffalo, New York – A History*, 264.

²⁶ Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-20, 21.

²⁷ Spear, A.W. *The Peace Bridge: 1927-1977 and Reflections of the Past*, (Buffalo, New York: Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority, 1977).

²⁸ Gordon, *90 Years of Buffalo Railways*, 39.

²⁹ Clinton Brown Company, 2010. Accessed online, August 3, 2014: <http://buffaloah.com/surveys/br/Hist.pdf>.

³⁰ Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-39.

Black Rock Canal, part of the Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor, is located to the west of the historic. The properties in the historic district are within the view shed of the Canal. Between 1905 and 1924 the federal government made improvements to Black Rock Harbor and Bird Island Pier. This work created the Black Rock Canal and Lock, a channel between Buffalo and Tonawanda for deep-draft vessels³¹ This section of the canal in Buffalo was abandoned by 1918 upon completion of the Erie Barge Canal, which terminates in Buffalo.³²

Although beyond the scope of this survey and report, the Belt Line is a significant resource and cultural landscape in the city of Buffalo. The Belt Line and Black Rock Canal embody the historic relationship among rail and water transportation and the associated industries.

PHOTOS

Provide clear, original color photographs of each property within the historic district. Submitted views should represent each property as a whole and its relationship to the street. Include general setting, outbuildings and landscape features.

MAPS

Provide a quadrangle map or tax map showing the historic district location and boundaries. Project maps included in the survey report will more specifically indicate the locations of individual properties in relationship to streets, intersections or other widely recognized features. Photo angles will be shown on these maps.

SOURCES Typical sources include county and town histories, historic maps and images, historian interviews, previous Cultural Resource Survey Reports and Building Structure Inventories, architecture guide books and census records.

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1894 American Atlas Company, *Atlas of the City of Buffalo*

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³¹ Hill. *Municipality of Buffalo, New York – A History*, 264.

³² Shmookler et al., *Appendix E*, 5-20, 21.

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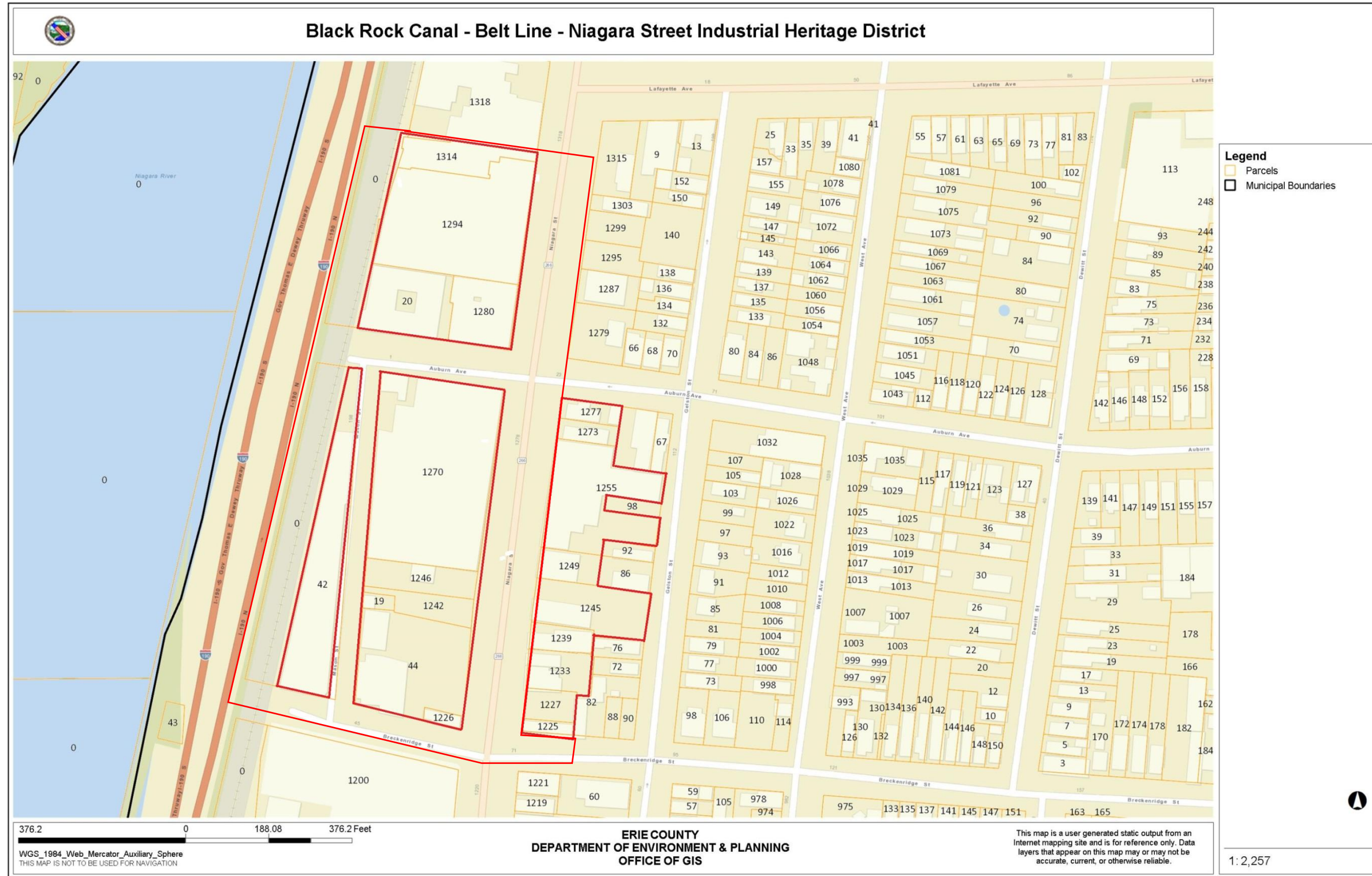
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Proposed Upper Blackrock Preservation District List of Properties

ADDRESS	Owner	SBL
Niagara Street - East		
1277	Hawkins, Theodore	99.26-10-19
1273	Breaser Real Estate	99-26-10-18
1255 American Body Company	Breaser Real Estate	99-26-10-17
1245	Breaser Real Estate	99-26-10-15
1239	Dawkhin, Mar Wai	99-26-10-14
1233	Dawkhin, Mar Wai	99-26-10-13
1225	BB Properties of WNY LLC	99.26-10-11
Niagara Street – West Side		
1294 Sowers Manufacturing Company	Erie Niagara Benefit	88.81-1-11
1280 Buffalo Gasoline Motor Company	Starks Associates Inc.	99.25-1-2.2
1270 Sterling Engine Company	Breaser Real Estate	99-25-1-3
1226	Russ Tackle Shop Inc.	99-25-1-7
Auburn Avenue		
20	Mugabco Inc.	99.25-1-2.1
Breckenridge		
42	Syed Family LLC	99.25-1-9
44 First Presbyterian Church of Black Rock	Jersey Buffalo, Inc	99.25-1-6
Mason Street		
19	Stephen Wilson	99.25-1-8
0 BELT LINE RAILROAD	CSX Transportation Inc. 500 Water Street Jacksonville, FL 32202	99.25-1-10



Map Showing Proposed Black Rock Canal – Belt Line – Niagara Street Industrial Heritage District.. Properties outlined are all contributing buildings in the historic district.