

HISTORIC BACKGROUND
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THE DENZIGER-SIGWALD BUILDING

91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



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The History of the Denzinger-Sigwald Building

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building is a rare, mostly intact, and remaining example of post-Civil War era commercial architecture in the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood. Once a part of one of Buffalo's most thriving commercial districts, this building is now under threat from neglect, previous failed rehabilitation attempts, modern development along the Route 33 corridor along Oak Street to the immediate east and other factors. The exterior of the building remains an excellent example of Second Empire commercial architecture from the post-Civil War era; an architectural era which is becoming increasingly rare in representation in Buffalo. Throughout its over 120 year history, spanning four generations, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building has served as a vital commercial location and has served a wide variety of purposes. The Denzinger-Sigwald Building should be considered eligible for the State and National Register of Historic Places based on Criterion C, as an embodiment of the Second Empire style, as well as Criterion A as a rare extant building which reflects the growth and prominence of Buffalo's once-thriving Genesee-Ellicott-Oak commercial district.

Constructed ca. 1870, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building at 91-95 Genesee Street was constructed on the site of a previously existing structure which dated to the antebellum period of ca. 1850. Portions of a brick building located at what is now the 95 Genesee Street space may have been incorporated into the new, expanded four-story brick building in the 1870s. The 1860 census records that Louis Webber and his family as well as Jonathan Sigwald and his family occupied houses at these addresses. Webber was noted as being a postal clerk of French descent, but like many of the residents in the Genesee neighborhood, he was from the ethnically-German region of Alsace which was under French control during this time. Similarly, Jonathan Sigwald, whose cutlery shop had been located at this location since at least 1854, was also listed as being of French extraction. Both men appear to have owned small mixed use residential-commercial buildings at the present 91 and 95 Genesee Street addresses in 1866 as well.

Based on the footprints outlined on the 1872 City Atlas, it appears that the present Denzinger-Sigwald Building was constructed at 91-95 Genesee Street around 1870. With the establishment of the quickly growing Washington Market in 1856, the surrounding neighborhood was rapidly developing into a center for commercial activity in the post-Civil War era. The new development of the present Denzinger-Sigwald Building may also have resulted from new ownership at the site, bringing new ideas and new money into the project. The 1870 census identifies Peter Favre, a retired grocer of French origin, and Charles Sigwald, a cutler and the son of previous owner Jonathan Sigwald, as owners of the two adjacent properties. It is likely that as a result of the increased business and the increasing demand for commercial and residential space in the area, both new owners of the 91 and 95 Genesee properties joined forces to create a new larger building. This new building

united both the independently-owned commercial spaces into what appeared from the outside to be one large structure from the north-facing façade.

By 1872, the two halves of the building were owned by William Denzinger, a cutler originally from Württemberg, German and Charles Sigwald. Given that this map is the earliest known description of the extant building, these two men lend the Denzinger-Sigwald Building its present name. It appears that Charles Sigwald did not occupy the 95 Genesee Street portion for very long, moving his family to Atchinson City, Kansas by 1900. William Denzinger would run his cabinetry and furniture making shop from the building for many years throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In 1884, Frank Pfennig relocated to the 95 Genesee Street location, likely following his sale of property at 99 and 101 Genesee Street to Gabriel Giesser. Pfennig relocated his tobacco shop to the Denzinger-Sigwald Building, where he operated it until the late 1890s. By 1889, Charles Sigwald appears to have abandoned his carpentry business for a job as a postal clerk, and while he continued to reside at 91 Genesee Street, it appears that Emil Doerner ran a shoe and boot retail shop from the commercial space, in addition to residing in the building as well.

In 1900 the Denzinger-Sigwald Building appears to have served much the same function it had originally served dating to its origins in the 1870s as a mixed-use commercial and residential building, where shopkeepers both worked and resided with their family. By the turn of the century, the building at 91 Genesee Street housed Gilbert Hitchcock, salesman, and his family and Elizabeth Denzinger (the widow of William Denzinger) and her family. At 95 Genesee Street, was George Swartzenburg, bartender, and his family as well as Mathilda Pfennig, widow of Frank Pfennig. As the 1900s progressed, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building housed a variety of small commercial shops including Hyman Jacobson's pawnbroker shop and the Wilson Brothers wholesale and import jewelry business in the 91 Genesee commercial space, while the 95 Genesee space house businesses such as the Unger-Schalger Optometrists who occupied the space in the 1920s and 30s. By the early twentieth-century, many of the original owners and occupants had died and their families had vacated the properties, leading to the building's use as a boarding house renting "furnished rooms" by 1926. This trend reflects the development of the separation of family living and family businesses, the demise of the small retail shop that was accessed by walking, and a way of life hard to imagine in today's world of automobile accessed malls of corporate chain stores – all leaving downtown spaces to itinerant boarders.

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building continued in use as a commercial building and rooming house throughout the mid-1900s, and was noted as functioning in such a capacity into the 1980s. Since the building provided generic, non-specific spaces for commercial and residential tenants, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building appears to have undergone relatively few structural changes throughout its history until the late twentieth-century. The storefront of the north façade faced some minor alterations, but retains its original cast iron pilasters and even portions of the paneled wood bulkheads. By the 1940s a single fire escape was grafted to the north façade,

servicing the safety of the residential occupants. This single unit was later replaced by the two individual metal fire escapes which adorn the building today. As originally constructed, each portion of the bifurcated building featured wood porches at the south of the building for use by the residential tenants. The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, along with its neighbor the Caulkins Building at 85-87-89 Genesee Street, were largely vacant for nearly three decades in the 1970s-90s and suffered neglect and decay during this period. The first major alteration to the building came in 1987 following a devastating fire, likely resulting from what had previously been cited as faulty electrical work in the building. As a result of structural damage from the fire, owner Bert Simon applied for a building permit to remove the damaged fourth-story mansard roof and replace this with a flat membrane roof. Unfortunately due to years of neglect coupled with the fire damage, the interior floors collapsed into the building in 2000, taking portions of the exterior walls with them. Remarkably, despite such damage, two interior cast iron columns remain intact in the 91 Genesee commercial space towards the south of the building, which once supported the masonry wall above. Equally as impressive is the fact that little damage was caused to the primary north façade of the building during the collapse; with the exception of the well-documented mansard roof, the primary and historically most significant façade of the building remains much as it did in the 1800s.

Due to the fragile condition, both the Denzinger-Sigwald and Caulkins Buildings were twice slated for demolition by the City, including a narrow escape in 2001. In early 2002, local planner Jessie Schnell Fisher formed Triangle Development in order to purchase these structures at the western end of the Genesee block, hoping to use \$50,000 in funds earmarked for their demolition to restore and rehabilitate the buildings. Triangle Development purchased the buildings in October 2002 and began a misguided attempt at rehabilitating the building which included removing remaining historic fabric in order to brace the interior walls, similar to the work Willard A. Genrich had completed in the 1980s at the eastern end of the Genesee Gateway block. Only a month later in November 2002, a strong wind storm caused the collapse of significant portions of the Caulkins Building, taking portions of the adjacent Denzinger-Sigwald Building with it. After removing the debris from the site, the project was largely ignored for several years. In 2007 the building was purchased by Genesee Gateway LLC, with support from the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation. Spearheaded by CityView Construction Management, the Genesee Gateway project is giving the buildings one last opportunity for life, rehabilitating the vacant buildings along Genesee Street between Ellicott and Oak Streets, creating a series of commercial and office spaces that will restore the luster of this once dazzling commercial block for its next 120+ years.

The Second Empire Style

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building at 91-95 Genesee Street is an excellent example of the Second Empire architectural style which was once wildly popular for both residential and commercial projects in the mid-1800s, especially immediately following the Civil War. While the style was popular through the City of Buffalo, many

examples of the commercial variant of the Second Empire style have been lost due to demolition and development which occurred after the 1890s during the heyday of construction projects in Buffalo.

The style originated in France and is named in honor of the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870). During his reign, Napoleon III was responsible for a significant and sweeping building campaign which transformed the physical landscape of Paris. In his efforts to organize and bring a renewed sense of grandeur to the urban capital, vast portions of the older, deteriorating architecture were demolished in order to carve new grand boulevards through the city and to create new monumental signature buildings. As a part of new scheme, the famous Louvre (originally constructed in 1546) was enlarged. The new Louvre alterations include the use of a double-pitched roof with a steep lower slope, and renewed interest in the roof form originally developed by the French Renaissance architect of the seventeenth-century, Francois Mansart. The mansard roof, a variation of a gambrel roof as the form became known, was extremely popular, and with the addition of dormer windows, allowed for an additional story of rentable living space in an otherwise uninhabitable attic level. The mansard roof also helped circumvent a Parisian law which had been in place since 1783, restricting the heights of buildings to 20 meters (65 feet). Since the height of the building was only measured to the cornice line, the mansard roof created an additional living space which was exempt.

The Second Empire style was immensely popular throughout Europe and in the United States. Exhibitions held in Paris in 1855 and 1867 which made the style popular in England helped to transmit the style to America. By the 1860s and 1870s, the style had become the epitome of fashion for both residential and commercial projects throughout the US; the style was used for so many public buildings during the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877), that it is sometimes nicknamed the General Grant style. It was used in residential and commercial construction in the US generally between 1860 and 1880, although both earlier and later examples are not uncommon. In fact, sometimes identification of true Second Empire-constructed buildings is made difficult by the profusion of buildings which received Second Empire makeovers. The style was most popular in the northeastern and Midwestern states. The style was so popular that many earlier buildings received mansard roof additions during this period, updating the outdated and unfashionable older building to the popular new style. Unlike the contemporary Italianate and Gothic Revival styles, which were considered picturesque, romantic historical traditions, the Second Empire was viewed as a modern and urban architectural style. Like so many of the architectural styles of the nineteenth-century, the exuberant Second Empire style faded quickly from popularity by the time the panic of 1873 swept the county, creating an economic depression which created a financial need to limit and restrain the construction of new buildings.

The signature feature of the Second Empire style is the mansard roof. Typically the mansard roof featured dormer windows projecting from the steep lower slope. While variations of the style abound, the style is also typically characterized by a boxy

mass (with or without a tower). The mansard roof can vary in elaboration, from a simple straight slope to a flared, concave, convex, or curved profile. The roof itself was generally clad in slate tiles, but these could be shaped, polychrome, or laid in decorative patterns. While the key feature of the Second Empire style is the mansard roof, below the roof the building itself typically featured many Italianate details including round or segmental arched hooded windows, classical-derived details, beltcourses and elaborate cornices with bracketed eaves.

Many examples of the Second Empire style were constructed in Buffalo during the 1860s to 1880s. Already a city with grand radial boulevards which highlighted strategic intersections and squares, Buffalo was ideally and uniquely suited to the transference of the Parisian urban concepts and architectural vision. Significant examples include Richard A. Waite's German Insurance Building (1874-75, demolished 1957) which was a cast-iron fronted example of the style. The Charles F. Sternberg House located at 414 Delaware Avenue (1869-1870, NRE) is a striking and elaborate example of a residential use of the style, as is the building at 417 Franklin Street (1870, contributing to Allentown Historic District). The building known as the Granite Works at 864 Main Street (1872, contributing to Allentown Historic District) is an example of the style which reflects the use of Italianate details in the Second Empire style. The Fire Engine #2, Hook and Ladder #9 building (1875, Porter and Watkins, architects) at 304-306 Jersey Street is a unique example of the style used for a fire station (contributing to Allentown Historic District).

At the time of its construction in the 1870s, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building would have been the height of modern, urban design. While a more modest commercial variant of the style in comparison to some of the more exuberant residential examples, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building contains all of the features which were typical of the Second Empire style. The building's straight-sloped slate-tiled mansard roof contained six, round-headed, 2/2 wood sash, hooded dormer windows. Some early Sanborn maps refer to the mansard as a "French roof" responding to the origin of the style. The polychrome brick diaper-patterned north façade also reflects the variety and detailing of the theatrical Second Empire style, and the round-headed windows with their classical keystones and bracketed sills also reflect the style. The building also features a cornice at the roofline, another typical feature. The detail of the Corinthian pilasters also reflects this highly ornamental architectural style. Although the building is somewhat altered from its original appearance due to the forced removal of the mansard roof, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building is well documented and is an excellent example of the commercial Second Empire style which was once the height of modernity in Buffalo's urban neighborhoods.

The Genesee-Ellicott-Oak Neighborhood

The Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood has its origins as a rural area which was located on the north-eastern fringe of the Buffalo settlement areas. The first landowner in the area was Major Andre Andrews. Born in Cornwall, Connecticut on July 8, 1792 and trained as a lawyer, Major Andrews relocated to Buffalo in 1820 at

a time when the city was rapidly growing, where his likely business was investing and dealing in real estate. His arrival was well timed; Major Andrews arrived in Buffalo only about 16 years after Joseph Ellicott formally laid out the city streets. He arrived at a time when Buffalo was quickly emerging as both a commercial and economic powerhouse following the heated battle and ultimate victory over the neighboring community of Black Rock for the western terminus of the Erie Canal, and the subsequent construction of the canal between 1817 and 1825. Major Andrews' first known land purchases were lots 202 and 203 from the Holland Land Company at the intersection of Genesee and Huron Streets (site of the current General Electric Tower) made in 1821, where he constructed his residence. He also purchased lots 120 to 132 totaling 79 acres at the edge of the growing village of Buffalo, including lots 131 and 132, in the area known as the "Outer Lots," which would develop into the site of the Genesee Gateway buildings (image 17). While Genesee Street was a primary road leading east at the time, the lack of any other notable intersecting roads indicates that this area was largely unsettled field and farmland during the early 1820s.¹ Andrews likely realized the potential for dividing and selling this land in the future, as the growth of Buffalo pushed into this area. Major Andrews became a significant figure in early Buffalo history and was active as a lawyer in addition to his real estate dealings. In 1824 he served as a Presidential elector (one of the popularly elected representatives, or electors, who formally elect the President and Vice President of the United States), and in 1826 began his term as a Trustee for the Village of Buffalo. In 1833, Major Andrews was elected as Buffalo's second mayor, serving a one year term in office. Major Andre Andrews died in Buffalo on August 18, 1834 after a bout of cholera, and is thought to be buried in Forrest Lawn Cemetery.²

As the settlement in Buffalo continued to increase and expand in the wake of the burning of Buffalo in 1813 during the War of 1812, the developing Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood began to be settled by primarily German immigrants. While initial German settlers came to Buffalo via Pennsylvania, by the 1820s many Germans became arriving directly from Germany and German regions of France in greater numbers. Aided and encouraged by the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, by 1828 the wide-spread settlement of Germans in Buffalo began. On June 19, 1826 Genesee Street was declared a public highway, marking increasing settlement and growth along this corridor.³ As a major route in and out of the village, Genesee Street would have been a natural location for commercial development to occur as it was more highly traveled and visible. It was a midway point between the rural farmland further east and the rapidly growing Buffalo population and this area became a natural location for the transfer of farm produced goods to the growing

¹ On August 18, 1821 Genesee Street (or Busti Avenue at the time) was recorded as being 99 feet wide to Oak Street at the edge of the current Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood, then narrowing to 66 feet to the village line which was at about Locust Street to the east. This change in street width is a good indication of where the settled village area ended and the rural, unpopulated areas began. Bureau of Engineering. *Index of Records of Streets, Public Grounds, Waterways, Railroads, Gas Companies, Waterworks etc. of the City of Buffalo from 1814-1896*. Buffalo: Wenborne Sumner Company, 1896: 285.

² Rizzo, Michael. *Through The Mayor's Eyes: The Only Complete History of the Mayors of Buffalo*. Buffalo: People's History Union, 2001.

³ *Index of Records of Streets*, 286.

consumer base. An 1828 map of the Village of Buffalo reflects that the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood, while still being located on the north-east fringe of Buffalo, had notable settlement (image 18). Early settlement of Germans was located primarily along Broadway and on Genesee Street, occupying these peripheral regions. In the 1830s and 1840s, nearly one-third of Buffalo's population was German, becoming a politically, culturally and socially significant group.⁴

By the 1850s, people of German ancestry numbered about 15,000 of the approximately 42,000 total residents in the City of Buffalo. During this period, there began to emerge from the uniformly working-class German population in Buffalo a rising group of merchants who had seemingly become successful and wealthy rather suddenly. This rising class of German businessmen had largely remained in their homeland until they had received an education and had learned a trade, arriving in Buffalo as highly skilled and intelligent workers. Many German immigrants brought their skills as butchers, bakers, millers, brewers, blacksmiths, tanners and grocers to the growing city and were able to forge successful and profitable businesses located in the heart of their ethnic neighborhoods, including along Genesee Street.⁵

It is in this climate that the growth and character of the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood developed by the 1840s into a self-sufficient commercial and residential center for many German immigrants. Spurred by the multitude of skilled tradesmen, retailers and producers coupled with the increasing needs of local residents, this neighborhood was a logical location for a public market. In 1856 the Washington Market (also referred to as the Chippewa Market) was established, located on the city block between Ellicott and Washington Streets at Chippewa Street just south of St. Michael's Church (original 1851, present building 1867).⁶ The market cleared what had been a sparsely-settled block which had contained a few assorted frame structures as well as the one-story Greek Revival-style Public School 13 (1838), which was subsequently relocated about a block south on Oak Street (1891-1915, NR 2005).⁷ This neighborhood over the span of two decades transformed from Major Andrews' greenfields to the pre-Civil War era "suburb" of lightly populated settlement into a post-Civil War commercial center for the

⁴ James, Isabel Vaughan. Some Outstanding Germans in Buffalo. Manuscript, BECHS.

⁵ German families in the buildings at 113-125 Genesee Street include the Urbans, the Datts, the Wagner family, and the Korn family, who were all among the early founders of businesses in this neighborhood. Goldman, Mark. *High hopes: the rise and decline of Buffalo*, New York. Albany: State University of New York, 1983: 76-77.

⁶ St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church was founded in 1851 following a schism in the nearby St. Louis RC Church. Rev. Lucas Caveg and 19 other German-speaking families splintered from that church to form St. Michael's, constructing a small wood-frame church on the church's present site on Washington Street near Chippewa Street. Soon after, the parish founded a grammar school to educate the children of the local German community. Records indicate that the present church building was constructed in 1867, and in 1870 the parish established Canisius College, a Jesuit institution, to the north of the church. The college would relocate to its present location on Main Street in 1910. Following a devastating fire resulting from being struck by a lightning bolt in 1962, the parish rebuilt the building utilizing the remaining exterior shell, reconstructing the church's signature domed tower. Refer to Condren, Dave. "St. Michael's Church, Jesuits' original base in area, to mark 150th year with Mass." *Buffalo News*. 29 Sep 2001, A-7.

⁷ Refer to the State and National Register of historic Places nomination for School 13 (03NR05199), section 8, page 1.

expanding metropolitan zone of Buffalo. The large market, which covered over 2.5 acres was known as the largest market west of the Hudson River.

The Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood became a more thriving commercial district based largely on its proximity to the Washington Market. The market was a significant center for life in Buffalo. Owned and operated by the City, it featured hundreds of vendors, selling a wide variety of produce, meats, cheeses, flowers and other products, most produced by the skilled local German community (image 10, 11, 12). The centerpiece of the market was a large brick Romanesque Revival market building which housed the stalls for dozens of Buffalo's finest butchers. Against the exterior walls of the building were housed stalls for poultry, butter, cheese, fruits and vegetable vendors, and stalls for merchants of crockery, tins, knit products, and other assorted products were arranged around the block. Overall, the market was a center of activity, noise and socializing, especially on the primary market days of Tuesdays, Thursdays and especially Saturdays, when the market was so crowded that moving around the more than 400 stalls was especially difficult.

Because of the significance of the Washington Market as a center for trade, commerce and business, buildings in close proximity to the retail area also reflect the commercial character of the market. A majority of the buildings constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries adjacent to the Washington Market along Ellicott, Genesee and Washington Streets were commercial buildings. One of the most notable buildings in this area is the Market Arcade Building (1892 by E.B. Green) which is a Beaux-Arts Classical style arcaded indoor commercial building which connected Main Street to the west with Washington Street and the Washington Market to the East. This neighborhood also featured streets which were lined by commercial buildings dating from the 1850s to the early twentieth-century, typically featuring additional commercial vendors. Businesses in the immediate Washington Market area include the McClure Bloesser & Eggert Boot and Shoe Factory, P. Messner's Chair Factory, and several saloons and boarding houses on Ellicott Street. In the same area were also located George Urban, Jr.'s Urban Roller Mills (founded in 1881) and his father's retail flour shop on Oak Street. Genesee Street was also lined with commercial buildings and included businesses such as Frank Pfennig, retailer of tobacco products at 95 Genesee Street, cutler Gabriel Giesser at 99 Genesee Street and Henry Urban who ran a successful grocery store located at 123 Genesee Street for many decades. Because of the attraction of the Washington Market, this neighborhood around Genesee, Ellicott and Oak Streets was one of Buffalo's thriving commercial and retail centers throughout the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries.

By the late nineteenth-century, the stretch of Genesee Street between Ellicott and Oak Streets became one of the most recognizable centers for photography in Buffalo. While Main Street had served as Buffalo's earliest hub of photography studios, and remained as such throughout the nineteenth-century, by the late nineteenth-century new buildings constructed along Genesee Street, with primary north-facing facades, were ideally situated for photography studios. The Caulkins

Building at 85-87-89 Genesee Street was the earliest constructed in 1886 by master architect, F.W. Caulkins. Combining both utility and function with artistic design, the Caulkins Building's most identifiable feature was the convex "waterfall" skylight at the center of the building which brought additional north light into the upper studio spaces. In 1895 Mrs. Frederike Giesser commissioned Richard A. Waite, one of Buffalo's preeminent architects, to design the elegant Werner Photography Building at 101-103 Genesee Street. Like the Caulkins Building, the Werner Building's signature feature is its expansive curving skylight. No other buildings like these are known to have been constructed elsewhere in Buffalo, and these buildings are the only known currently existing examples of specialized, high-style photography studio in the City of Buffalo. Not only was the neighborhood associated with the thriving market and commercial activity of the day, but it also can be identified as Buffalo's most elegant and sophisticated centers of late-nineteenth-century photography.

Over the past few decades, this neighborhood has declined due to several factors. When the New York State Thruway opened in 1959, many traditional commercial neighborhoods in Buffalo saw the migration of stores and retailers following the population growth to the suburban regions. The opening of the Kensington Expressway (Route 33) in the 1960s which connected downtown Buffalo to the eastern suburbs also served to channel both residents and businesses out of the crowded urban core. The Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood suffered greatly both economically and culturally as a result of these new highways and with the opening of the Elm-Oak arterial of the Kensington Expressway in 1967/68. The neighborhood saw a dramatic loss of commercial tenants as a result of this trend, and the Washington Market itself closed in 1965, after several failed attempts to boost business and the construction of new, modern market buildings, as business dwindled (image 13, 14).⁸ It was also generally an age which saw the transformation of commercialism, with the separation of manufacturing, sales and corporate headquarters to separate facilities. St. Michael's RC Church, one of the centerpoints of the traditionally German community, blames the "death" of the church directly on the construction of the neighboring Elm-Oak arterial, charging it with the removal of hundreds of houses, and therefore parishioners, from the church neighborhood.⁹ During the 1960s and 1970s, this area faced the Urban Renewal wrecking ball, and numerous historic buildings were demolished to make way for "shovel-ready" parking lots which dot this area of the city. The Washington Market itself was razed in 1965 shortly after it closed and now is a large parking area (image 15). As a result of demolitions and the construction of the Elm-Oak arterial, the blocks along the east of the neighborhood at Oak Street have been cleared of all historic fabric, with either vacant lots or new sterile, modern development being constructed. The downturn of commerce in the area as well as the increased vehicular traffic from the Kensington Expressway have also contributed to the general neglect and decay of the architecture of the neighborhood. The buildings along Genesee Street between Ellicott and Oak Streets, along with several key buildings along Ellicott and Oak just to the north on this block, constitute one of Buffalo's last remaining intact nineteenth-

⁸ "Washington Market to Close July 1, Banas Announces." *Buffalo Evening News*. 11 Jan 1965.

⁹ Today, the church has about 200 registered members. Refer to Condren, A-7.

and early-twentieth century commercial streetscapes reflecting downtown's prominence when Buffalo was a major American city. Today, this contiguous row of historic commercial buildings marks the point at which the suburban fringe of the city accessed via the highway transforms into Buffalo's Downtown, a region quickly blossoming with new rehabilitation and development. In this capacity, they act as a "gateway" welcoming suburban travelers into Downtown.

In the face of the decline of the neighborhood, the promise of the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood envisioned for the past two decades is now taking shape. Despite a somewhat shabby exterior, the buildings along the south side of Genesee Street between Ellicott and Oak Streets have been considered for rehabilitation projects dating back to the 1980s. Willard A. Genrich purchased the collection of buildings, hoping to transform them into "The Next Great Place" as part of a campaign to locate a new convention center in the neighborhood. In a failed attempt to save and transform the buildings at the eastern end of the block, Genrich replaced the existing structural systems with steel framing, attempting to stabilize and reuse the building and to bring their fire resistance to modern standards which unfortunately did not take the "first, do no harm" stance of current rehabilitation practices. Genrich posed concepts of turning the buildings into housing, offices and restaurants, with no success. Jessie Schnell Fisher of Triangle Development purchased the buildings at the western end of the block at 85-87-89 and 91-95 Genesee Street in an attempt to secure the buildings for a misguided attempt at rehabilitation. However before plans could develop and begin, the buildings were damaged in a November 2002 windstorm, halting any work. At that time, Genrich-owned buildings at the eastern end fared no better, ending up in Buffalo Housing Court in 2006 where he was found guilty of three building code violations and fined after the City of Buffalo threatened to take the buildings by eminent domain in 2004 to demolish them.¹⁰ The vacant buildings stood as reminders of Buffalo's once-great commercial heritage as well as symbols of the unsuccessful attempts at rehabilitation; the only potential future for these dead buildings appeared to be demolition, creating more vacant lots or stark, modern low-rise office buildings in the neighborhood.

Today, there is one last opportunity for the rehabilitation and revitalization of the once vibrant Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood. Purchased in 2007 by Genesee Gateway LLC, the collection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century commercial buildings is being developed into a multi-million dollar commercial and office complex which promises to bring new activity and business to the neglected neighborhood. Unlike previous attempts, the new design based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards gracefully respects the form, footprints and design of the original historic fabric, while once again transforming the buildings into viable new space which functions for today's commercial and spatial needs.

Recently, Governor David A. Paterson signed into law expanded New York State tax credit legislation which offers new opportunities for building such as the Genesee

¹⁰ Linstedt, Sharon. "Historic but vacant Genesee St. strip for sale." *Buffalo News*. 7 July 2006; D-7. Also Linstedt, Sharon. "Purchase of 99 Genesee confirmed." *Buffalo News*. 15 Aug 2007; B-2.

Gateway. This new tax credit legislation offers up to 20% in credits for the certified rehabilitation of residential buildings, and also 20% in credits for commercial properties in addition to the 20% available in Federal tax credits. Co-sponsored by Senator David Valesky and Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, this new legislation is aimed at making new and larger rehabilitation projects financially feasible. This legislation which took effect on January 1, 2010, is intended for projects just like the Genesee Gateway; a project with a significant impact on the local community by rehabilitating buildings which face certain demise, but whose restoration can bring new life and vitality to a neglected neighborhood.

Support for the project has come from the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation, one of Western New York's and the nation's preeminent foundations with an active interest and proven track-record in assisting significant historic preservation projects. The foundation was among the first in this area to seek out projects with great potential impact on the well-being of the community, rather than simply respond to pleas for assistance. The Wendt Foundation has supported several notable Buffalo-area projects including the Roycroft Campus (NR 1974, NHL 1986) revitalization in East Aurora, NY for which it received an award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, as well as the King Urban Life Center (NR 1980). In 2005, the Wendt Foundation was recognized by the Preservation League of New York State with its Excellence in Historic Preservation Award for Organizational Excellence. In the same year, Wendt Foundation Trustee Robert J. Kresse was presented the Lifetime Achievement Award by Commissioner Bernadette Castro of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for his role in preserving and renewing some of the region's most significant historic properties.

The Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood along Genesee Street and running north on Oak and Ellicott Streets retains numerous significant examples of commercial architecture from a period which spans over 120 years. While this neighborhood features a wide variety of architectural styles from simple, builder-designed utilitarian Italianate examples to elegant architect-designed, highly styled Beaux-Arts examples, the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak area has a period of architectural significance which spans between ca. 1850s and the early 1930s. This period of history for the City of Buffalo reflects dramatic changes in commercial trade and commercial architecture, shifting from small owner-occupied shops built for simple functionality, to larger shops which created ample glitzy showrooms. Several of the buildings, including the Schwinn-Mandel Building and the H. Seeberg Building at 113-125 Genesee Street, also combined manufacturing with the retail shop. The proposed Genesee-Ellicott-Oak Commercial Historic District reflects a significant period of Buffalo's history, representing the city at the pinnacle of its international prominence. This district reflects a largely intact and contiguous collection of rare, remaining and highly threatened small-scale commercial buildings; buildings which are disappearing rapidly from Buffalo's urban center.

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building at 91-95 Genesee Street is an excellent representative of the development of commercial architecture within the Genesee-

Ellicott-Oak neighborhood, and it is an increasingly rare example of post-Civil War era architecture in the City of Buffalo. The building retains sufficient integrity to merit listing as a part of the proposed Genesee-Ellicott-Oak Commercial Historic District which is a superb collection of diverse but thematically related commercial buildings reflecting Buffalo at the height of the city's international prominence. The building is significant under Criteria C of the National Register of Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation, as an excellent example of commercial architecture of the Second Empire style. The Denzinger-Sigwald Building is also significant under Criteria A for its role in the early pattern of commercial development of the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood and in the City of Buffalo. The building is a rare survivor of the once prominent commercial Second Empire style, which although widely used, has now become increasingly rare due to later demolition and new construction. Because of its architectural integrity and its associations with the commercial heritage of the City of Buffalo, the Denzinger-Sigwald Building should be considered eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places as well as for the Historic Preservation Tax Credit.

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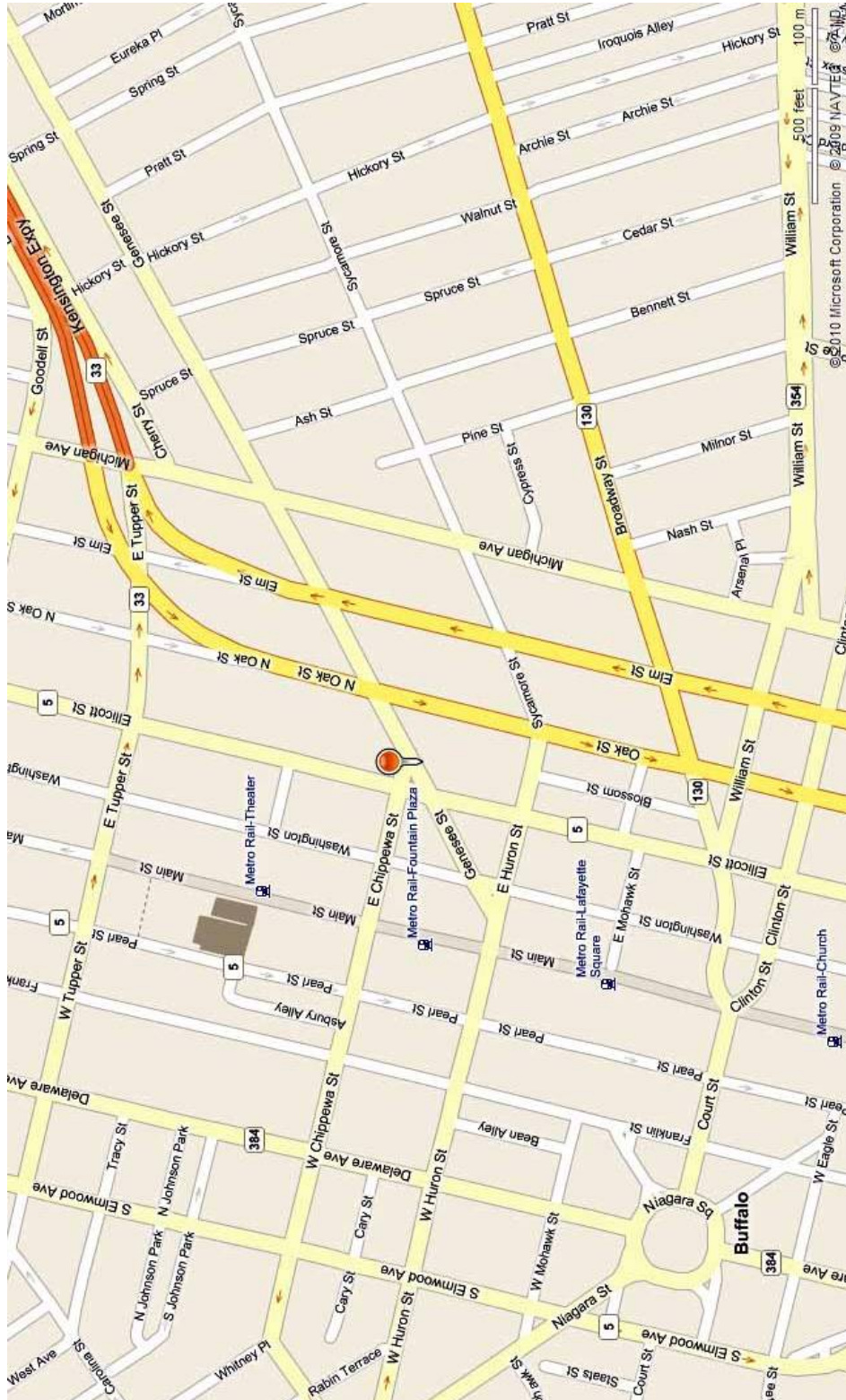
"Washington Market to Close July 1, Banas Announces." *Buffalo Evening News*. 11 Jan 1965.

Also:

- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps- 1854, 1884, 1881-1889, 1889-1916, 1925, 1925-1951
- Buffalo City Atlases including- 1868, 1872, 1894, 1915
- Census Records for- 1860, 1880, 1900
- Buffalo City Directories
- Building Permit records, Buffalo City Hall Permits Office
- Ancestry.com records for "William Denzinger," "Charles Sigwald" and others
- The photographic files of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society
- Buffalo and Erie County Public Library Vertical Files- Architecture, Preservation
- Scrapbook Collection at the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Grosvenor Room
- Building-Structure Inventory Forms, February 1980, June 1988

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

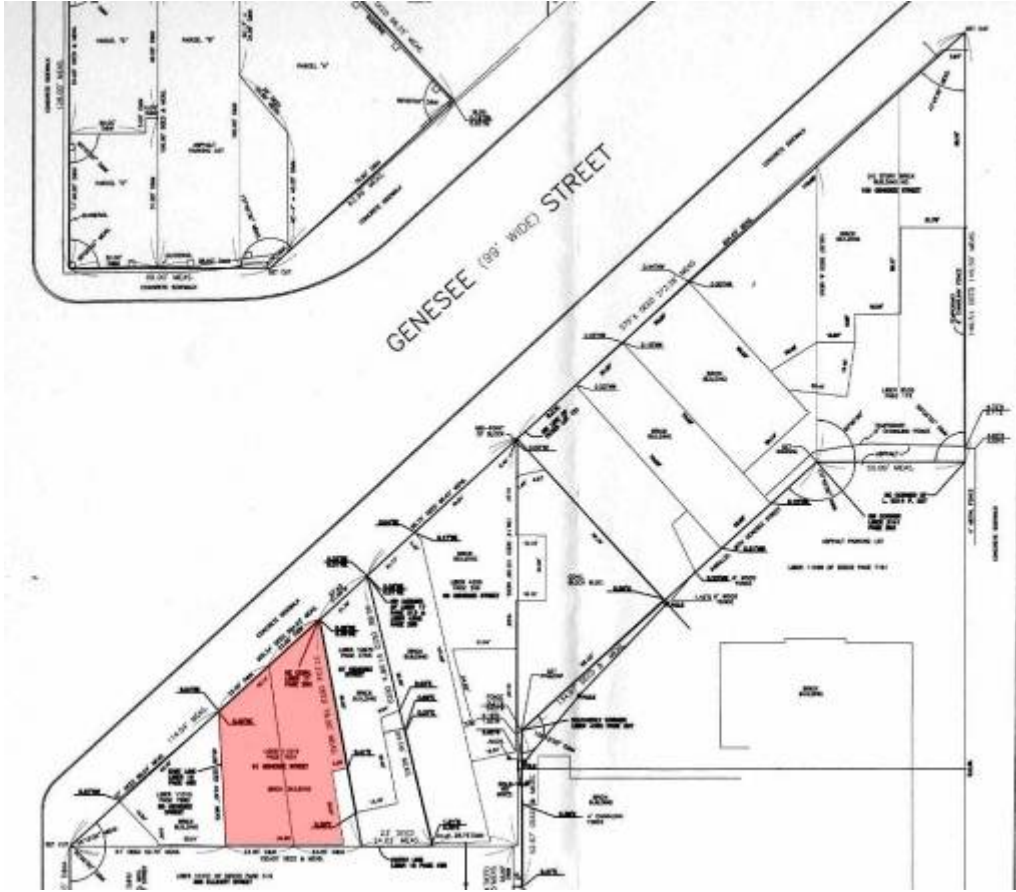
The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(1) Location of the Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(2) Detail, Survey (2008)
Showing location and parcel size of the Denzinger-Sigwald Building (red)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

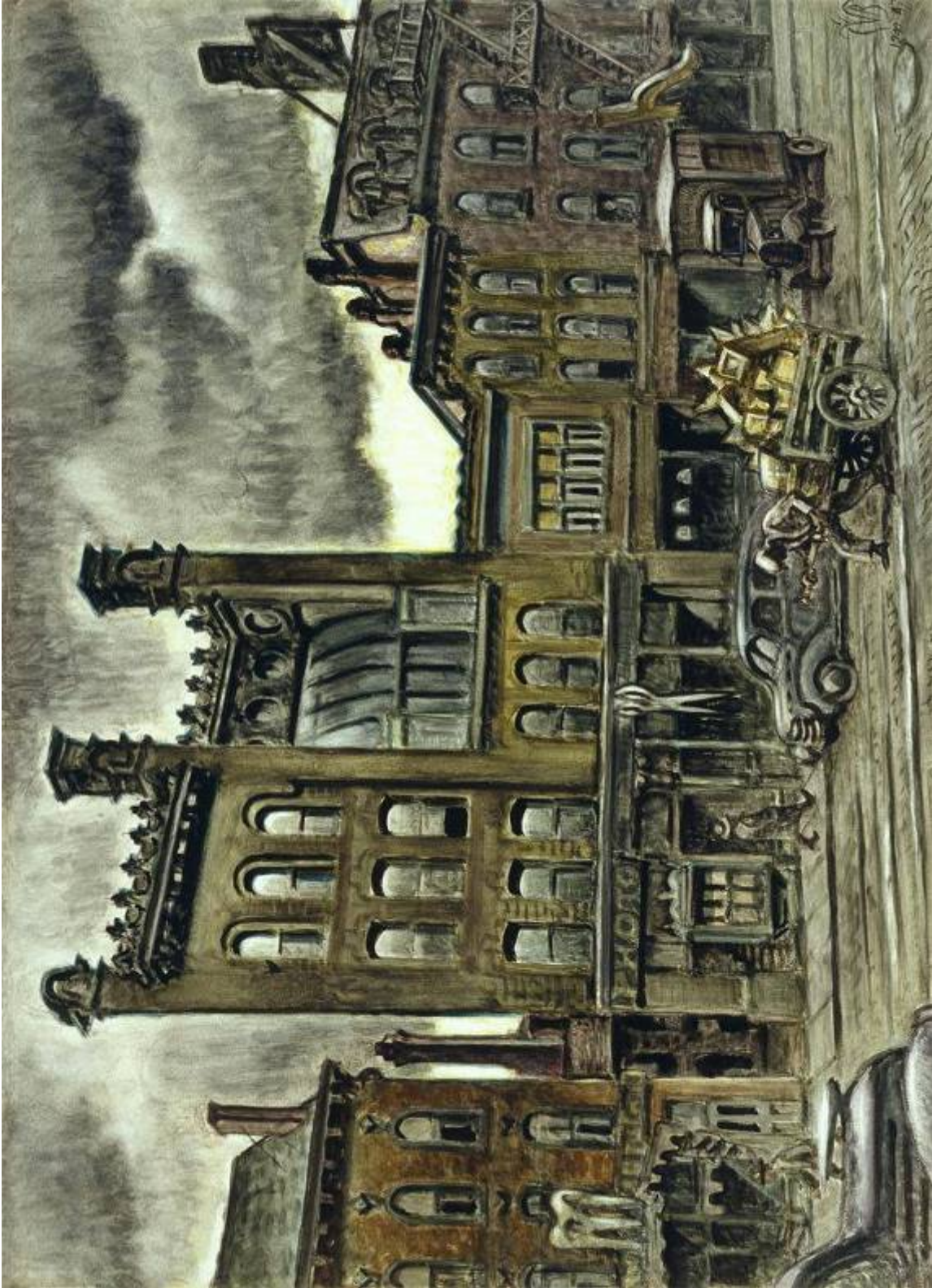
The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(4) Aerial view, facing north

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(5) "Street Scene" by Charles Burchfield, 1940-1947 (Watercolor on paper)
The earliest located image of the Denzinger-Sigwald Building, this painting depicts a portion of the building including the mansard roof, the shared fire escape, and a large roof-mounted metal billboard.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

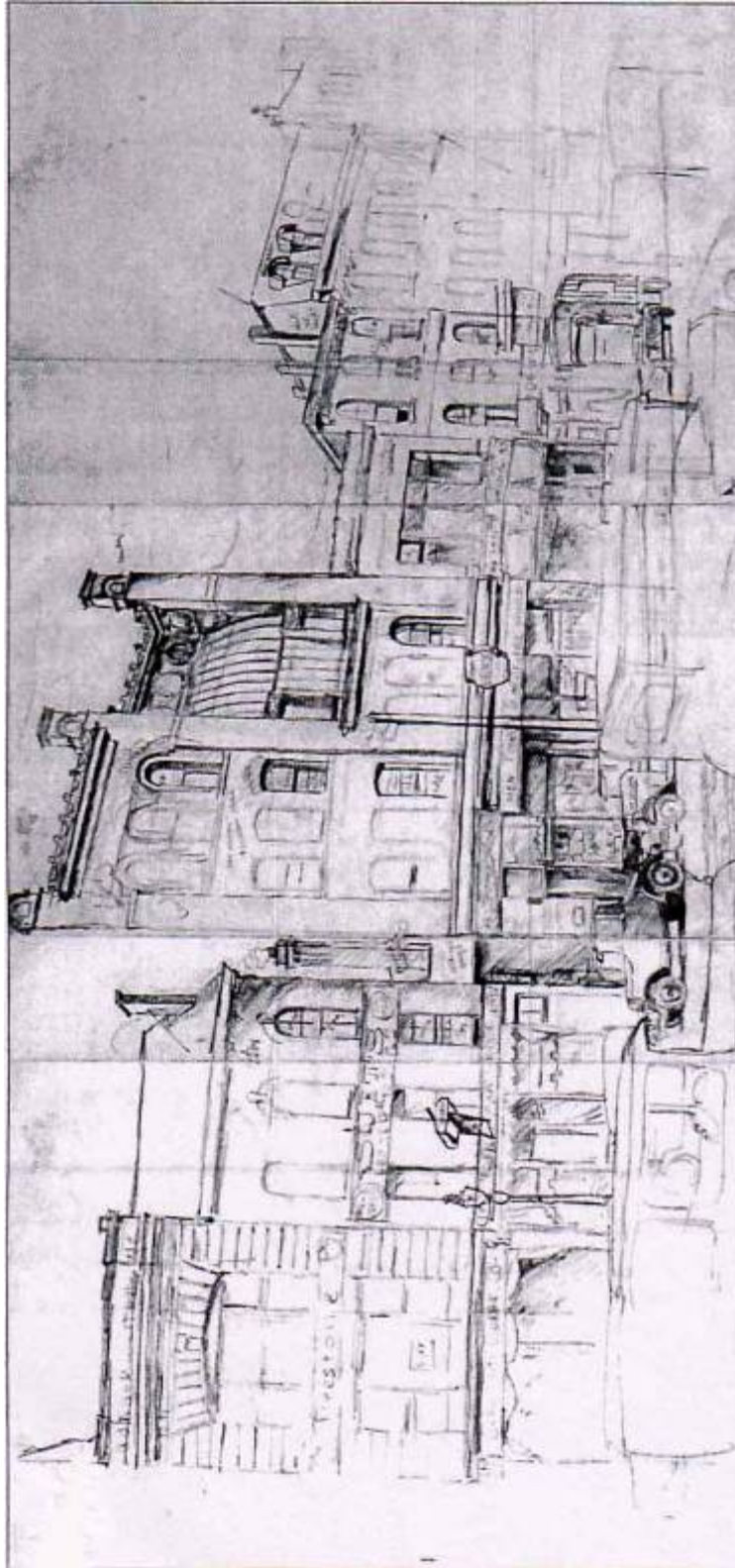
The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(6) Detail, "Street Scene"
Close-up view of Denzinger-Sigwald Building

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(7) "Study for Street Scene" pencil sketch by Charles Burchfield, 1940
The Denzinger-Sigwald Building is located at the far right of the drawing (BECPL, Buffalo Spree)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(8) The Genesee Gateway Buildings, ca. 1986

Note the presence of the Caulkins Building and the mansarded Denzinger-Sigwald Buildings towards the image foreground, which were subsequently damaged. The Werner Photography Building is located towards center.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

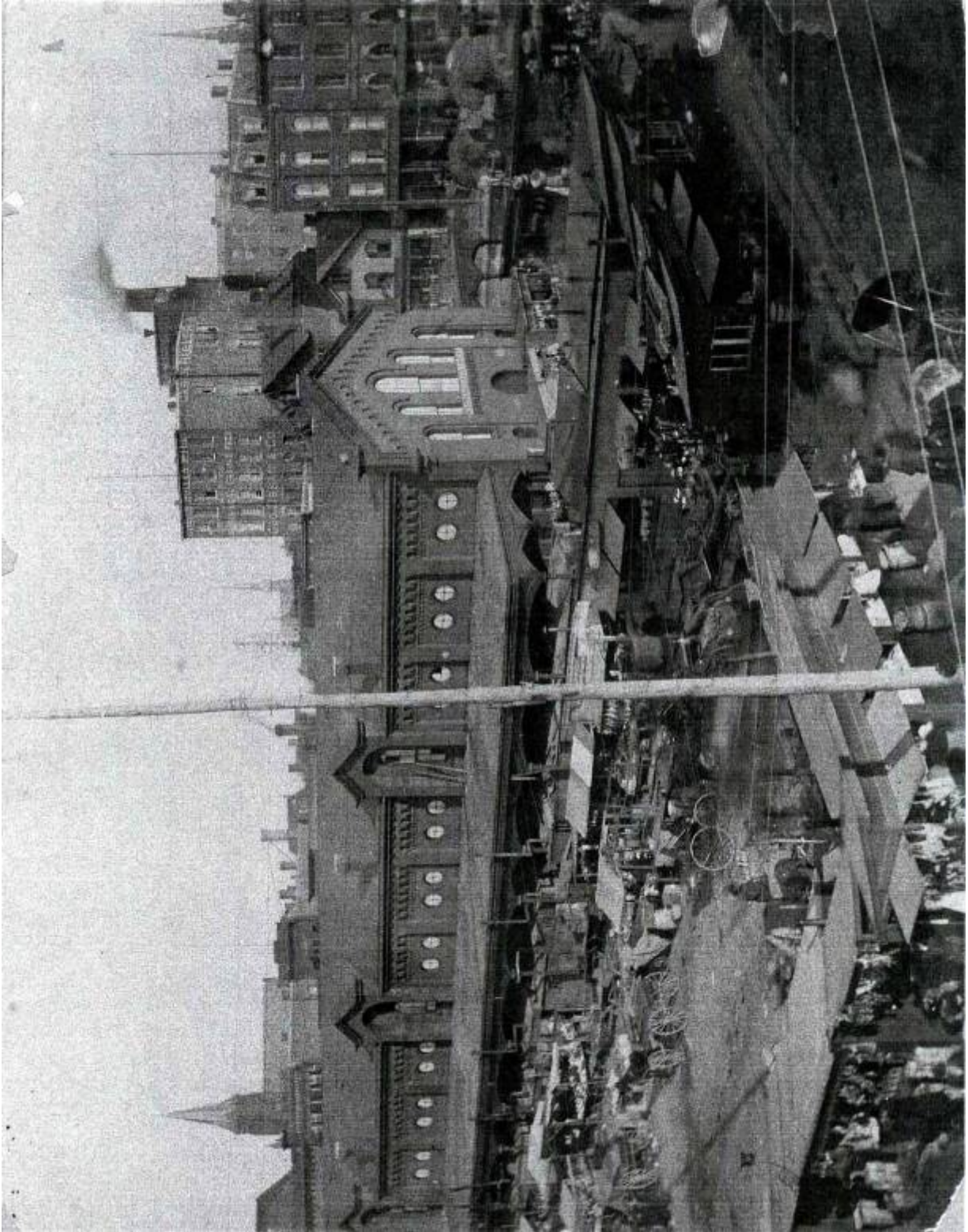
The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(9) Denzinger-Sigwald Building and the Caulkins Building, ca. 1986
Note the presence of the mansard roof prior to the 1987 fire and subsequent removal.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

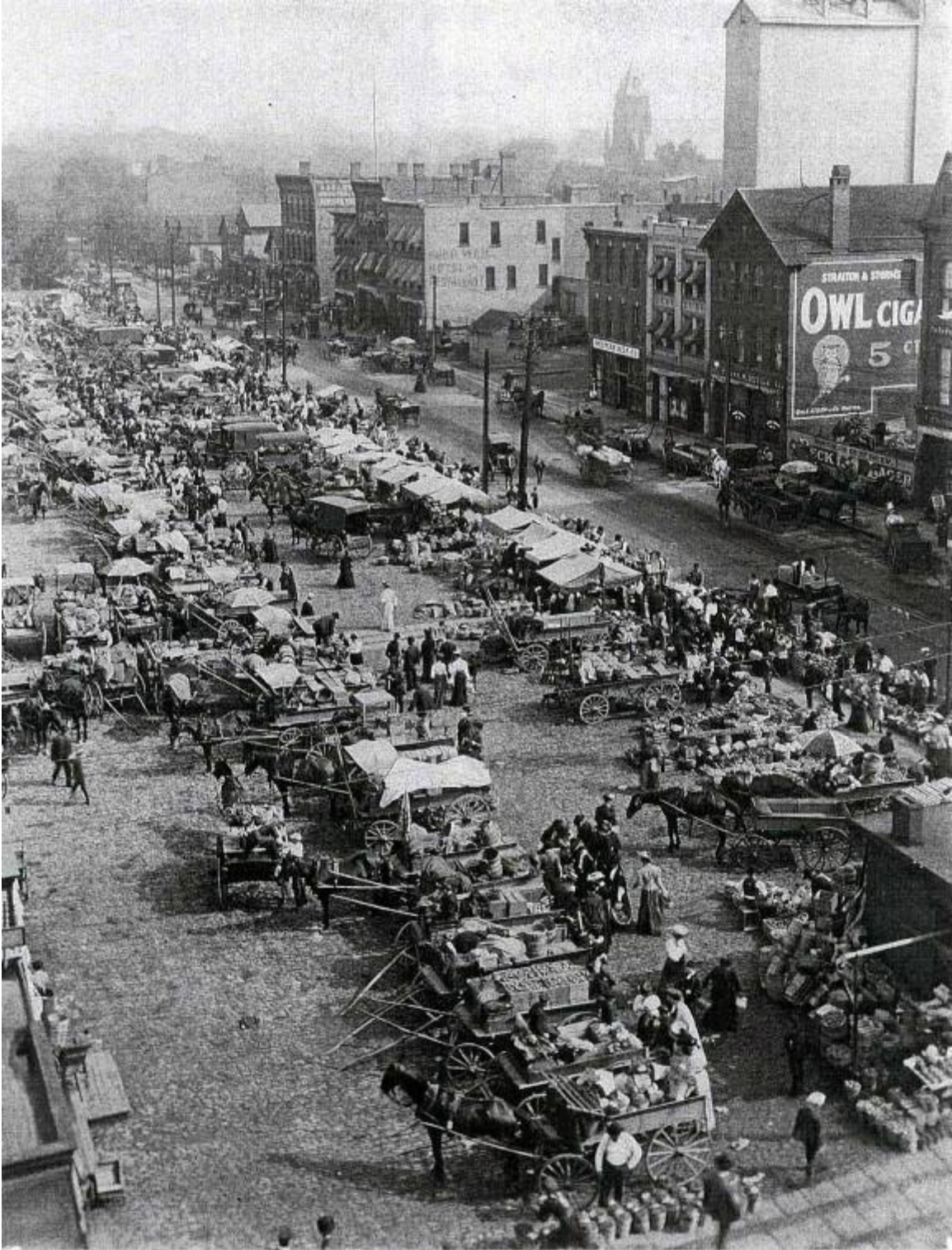


(10) The Washington Market looking east towards Ellicott Street, 1890

Note the growth of other commercial buildings along Ellicott Street which developed as a relationship to the bustling market. The tall structure in the right background behind the market building is the Urban Roller Mills milling building in its original appearance. (BECHS)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

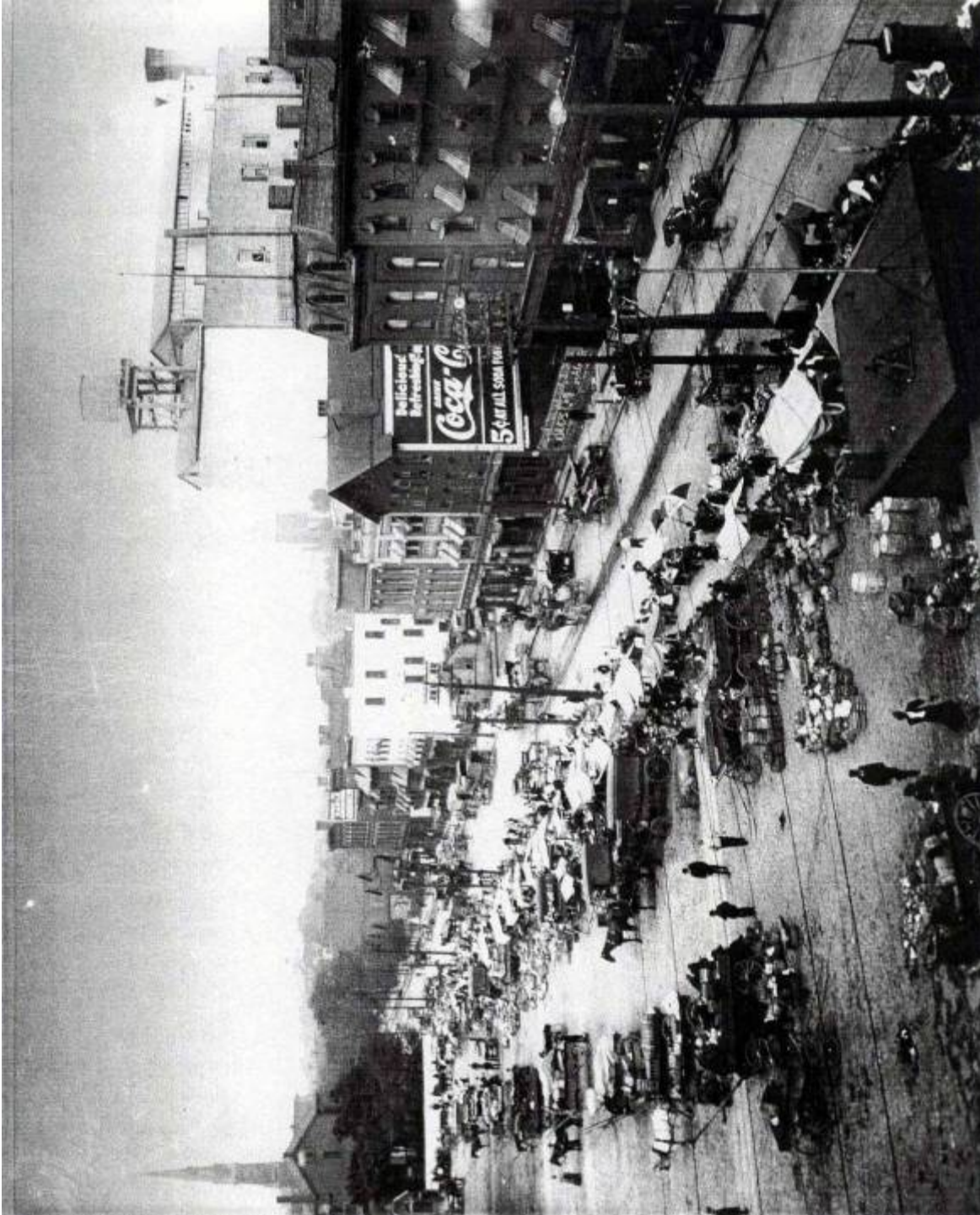


(12) The Washington Market looking north-east along Ellicott Street, 1905

This view on a crowded market day shows the type of commercial neighborhood which had grown up around the Washington Market by the turn of the twentieth-century. The tall structure just visible in the upper right corner of the image is the Urban Roller Mills milling building. (BECHS)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

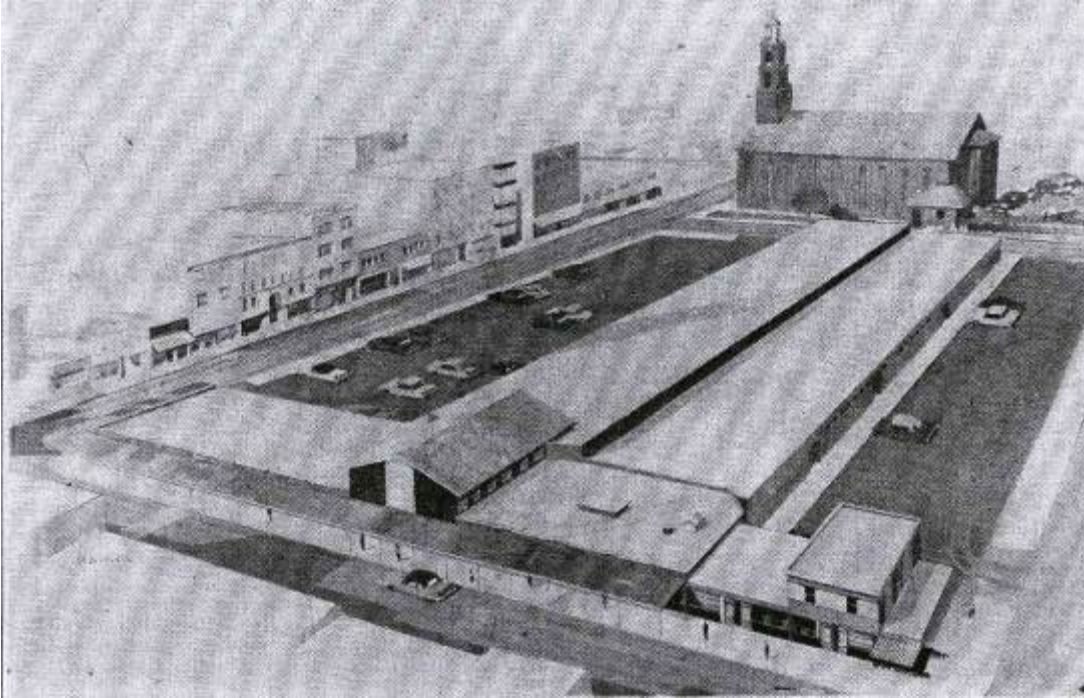
The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(13) The Washington Market looking north-east along Ellicott Street, 1912
A view of the fine collection of nineteenth- and early-twentieth century commercial architecture which characterized the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood at this period. (BECHS)

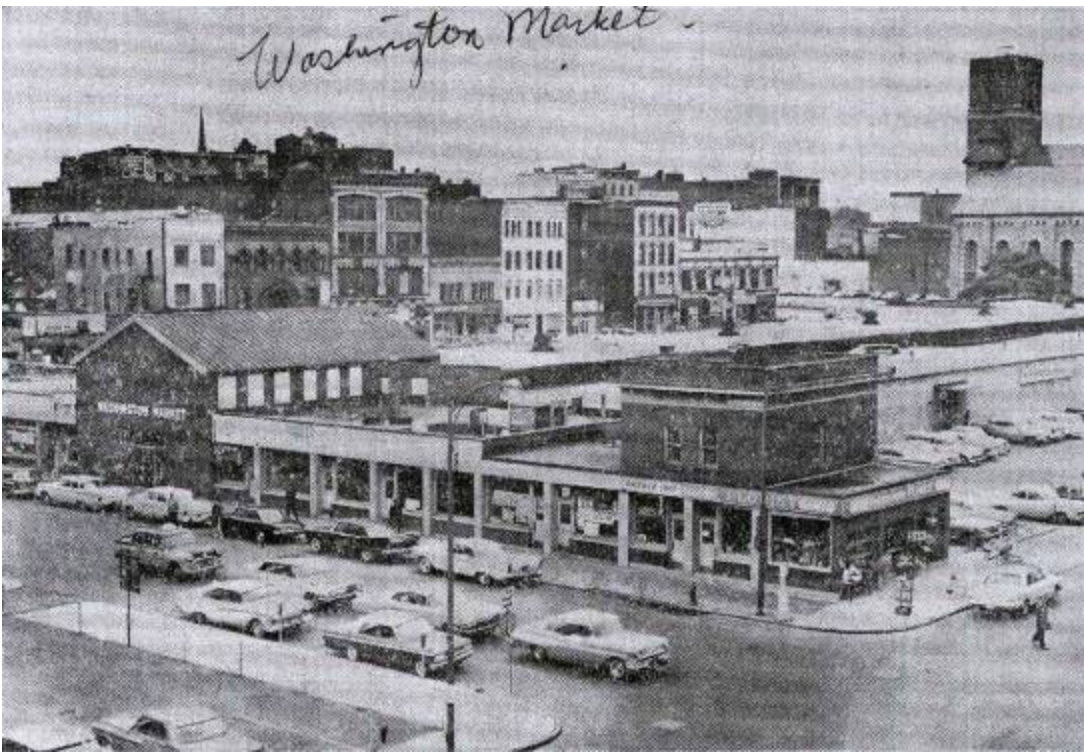
HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(14) "Architects Sketch of New \$400,000 Washington Market"

This 1955 drawing done by the architecture firm of Backus, Crane and Love shows the new design for a modern, concrete block market which replaced the brick Romanesque market building.
Buffalo Evening News 4 Feb 1955. (BECHS)



(15) The Washington Market in view from Ellicott and Chippewa Streets

With the neighborhood in decline, and dubbed "a losing proposition with no bright hopes in sight," this 1963 image reflects the appearance of the market during its final days. (BECHS)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

Buffalo Courier Express, 22 Sep 1963:1. (BECHS)

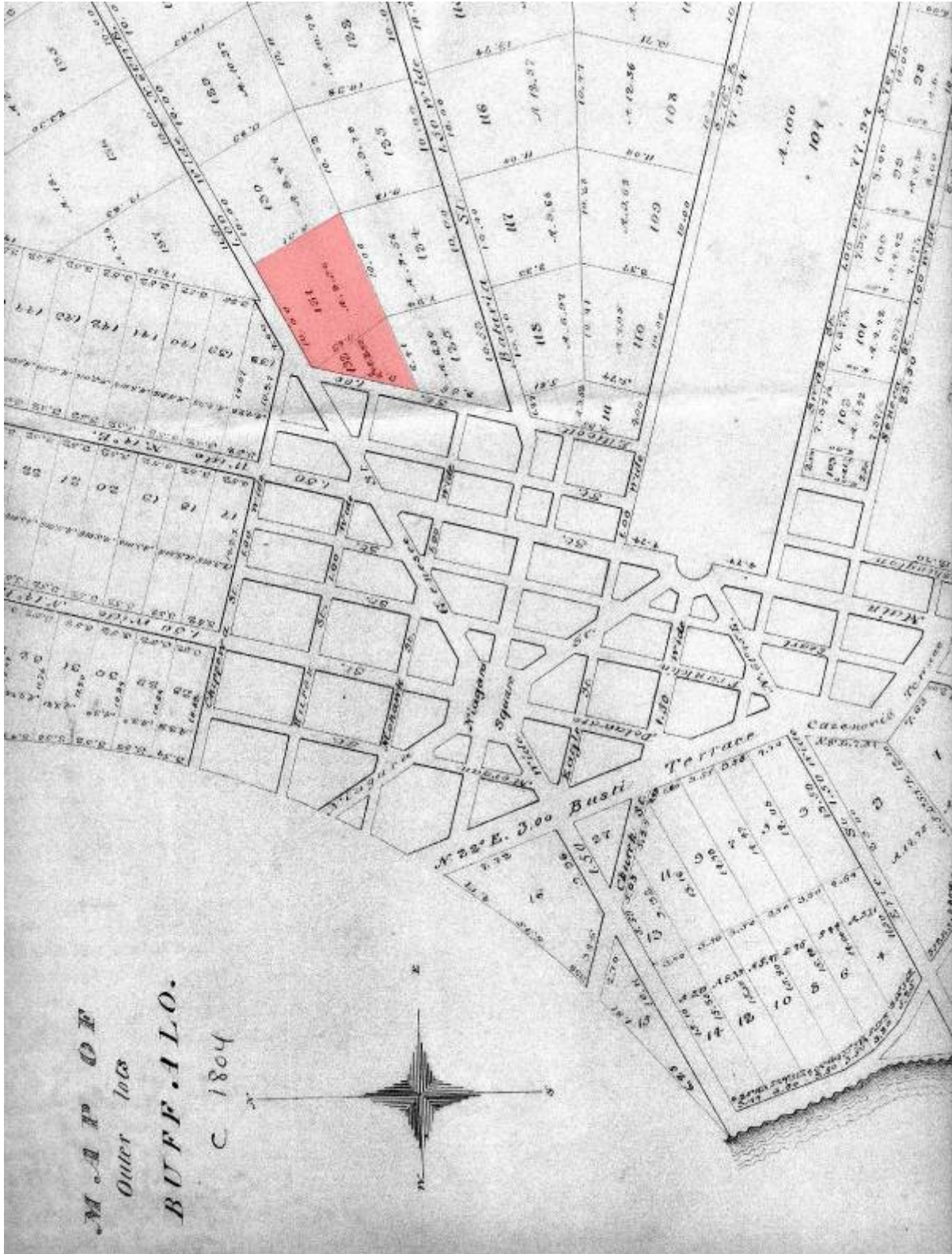


(16) "A New Downtown Parking Lot Opened Today."

This 1965 photograph reflects the ultimate fate that has plagued much of the historic architecture in the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood. Here a new surface parking area is opened on the site of the then-recently demolished Washington Market site, marking the end of an era for Buffalo's commercial history. Today this is still a parking lot, and there are no reminders of the once-great market which was once located on this plot. St. Michael's RC Church stands in the center background. (BECHS)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

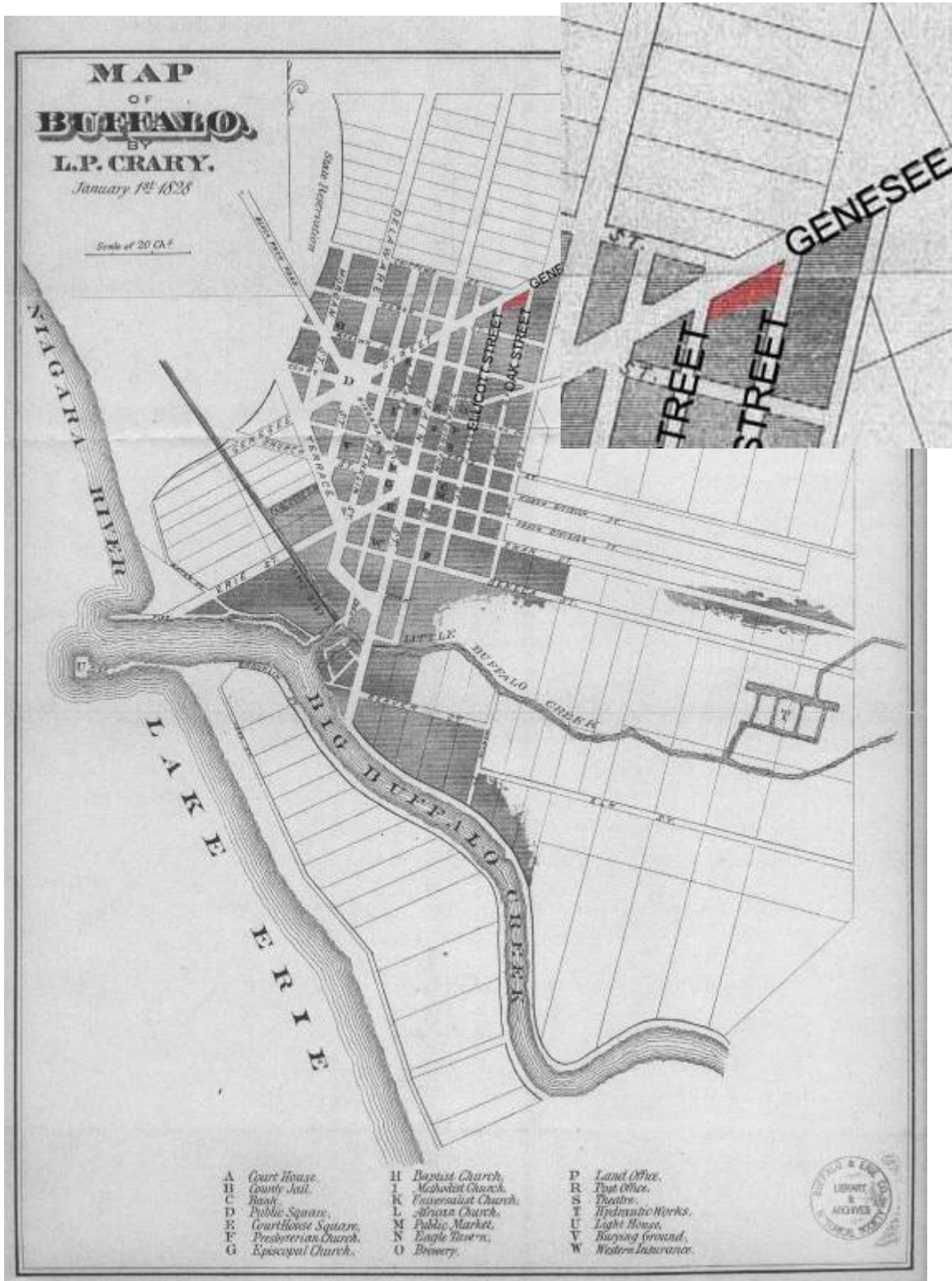


(17) Detail, Map of Buffalo Outer Lots, 1804/05

The red highlight indicates plots 131 and 132, purchased by Major Andre Andrews circa 1821 at the outer edge of Buffalo at the time, and current location of Genesee Gateway buildings. Notice how the road narrows just past the corner of Ellicott and Genesee Street. (BECHS)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(18) 1828 Map, Village of Buffalo

Inset shows location of Genesee Gateway buildings highlighted in red. Note that buildings developed at the junction of developed areas and the rural fringe. (BECHS)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



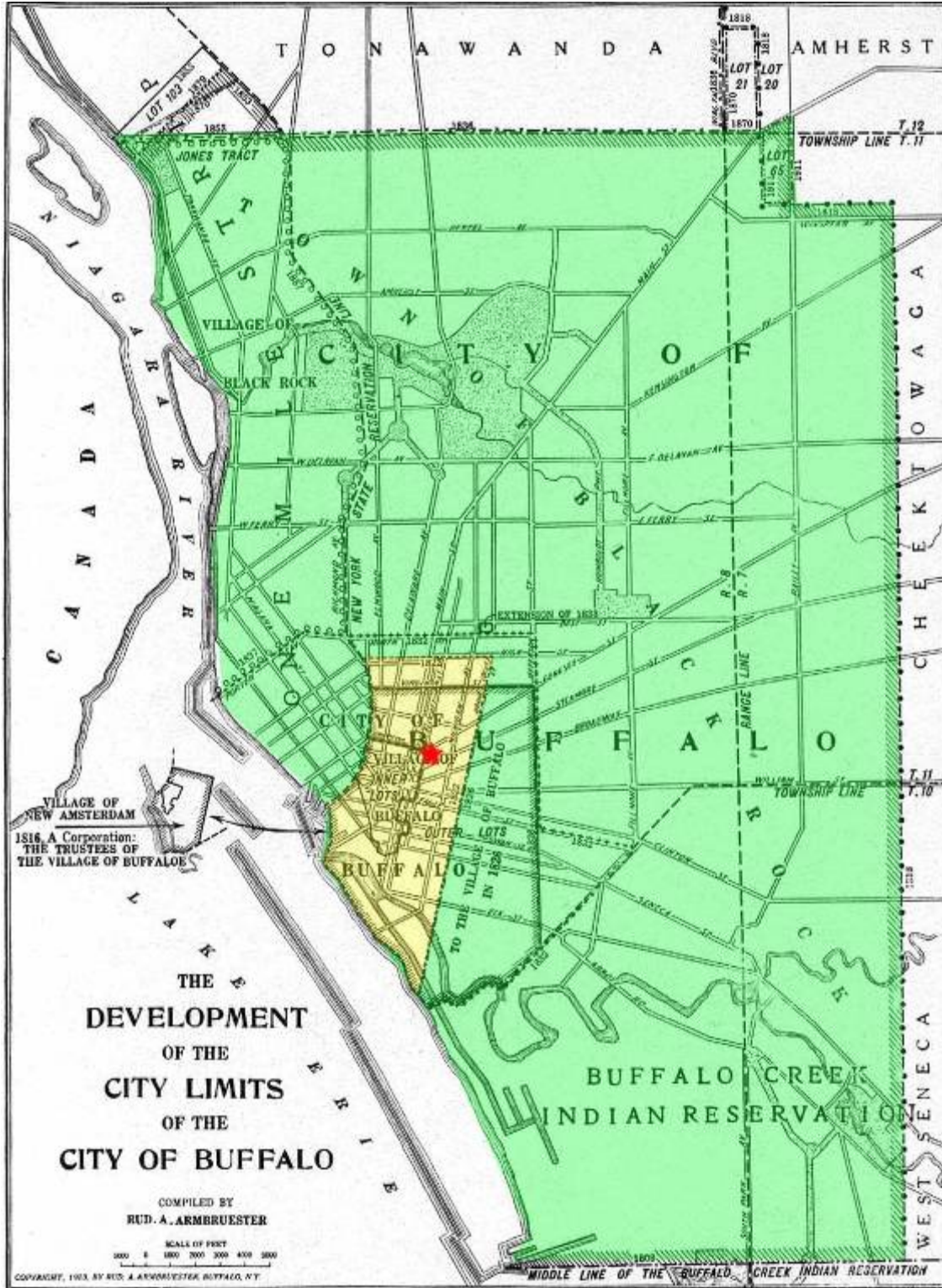
(19) Pocket Map of the City of Buffalo, 1847

Enlarged map detail highlights the Genesee Gateway area as it appeared in the late 1840s. Note what appears to be a small street, called Blossom Street, which bisects the block north to south, possibly the reason why brick buildings aligned in continuous blocks or rows were constructed at the corners of the block and an assortment of oddly shaped frame buildings filled in the center, possibly as later urban development taking over the former right-of-way of the street. This configuration may also account for the configuration of individual lots on this block.

(BECHS)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

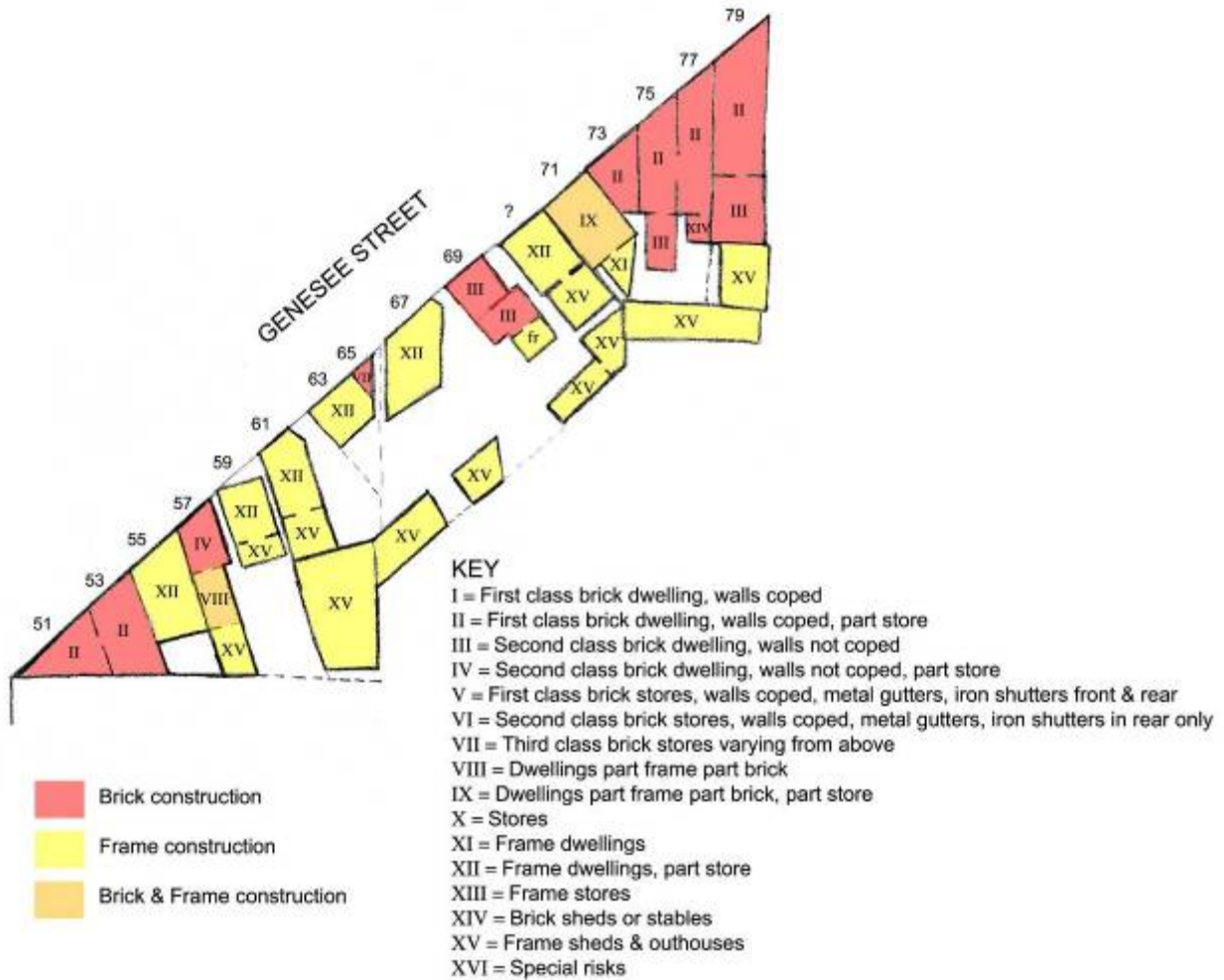


(20) The Development of the City Limits of the City of Buffalo (1923) (BECHS)

Yellow indicates the boundaries of the then Village of Buffalo in 1822 around the time the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood was founded. The red star indicates the location of the Genesee Gateway buildings in relation to the overall size of the city at the time; compare to the green 1923 boundaries of the city.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

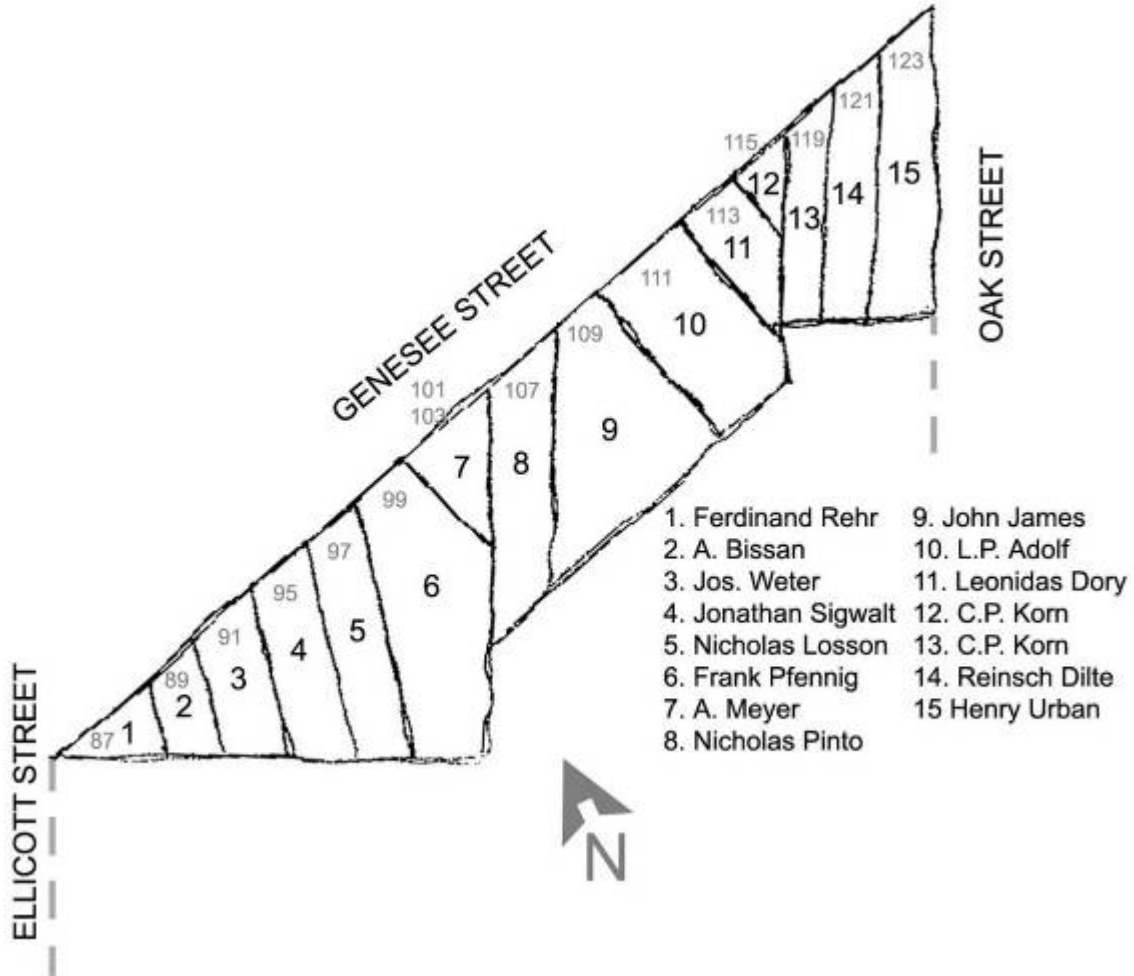


(21) Sketch detail, 1854 Fire Insurance Map of the City of Buffalo

This map represents the earliest record of buildings along Genesee Street. Note that brick construction was used at both corners of the block, but a majority of the building fabric was of frame construction. 91-95 Genesee Street is approximately labeled as 55 and 57 Genesee Street on this map; note the presence of a wood framed house/store and brick dwelling/ store at this location.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

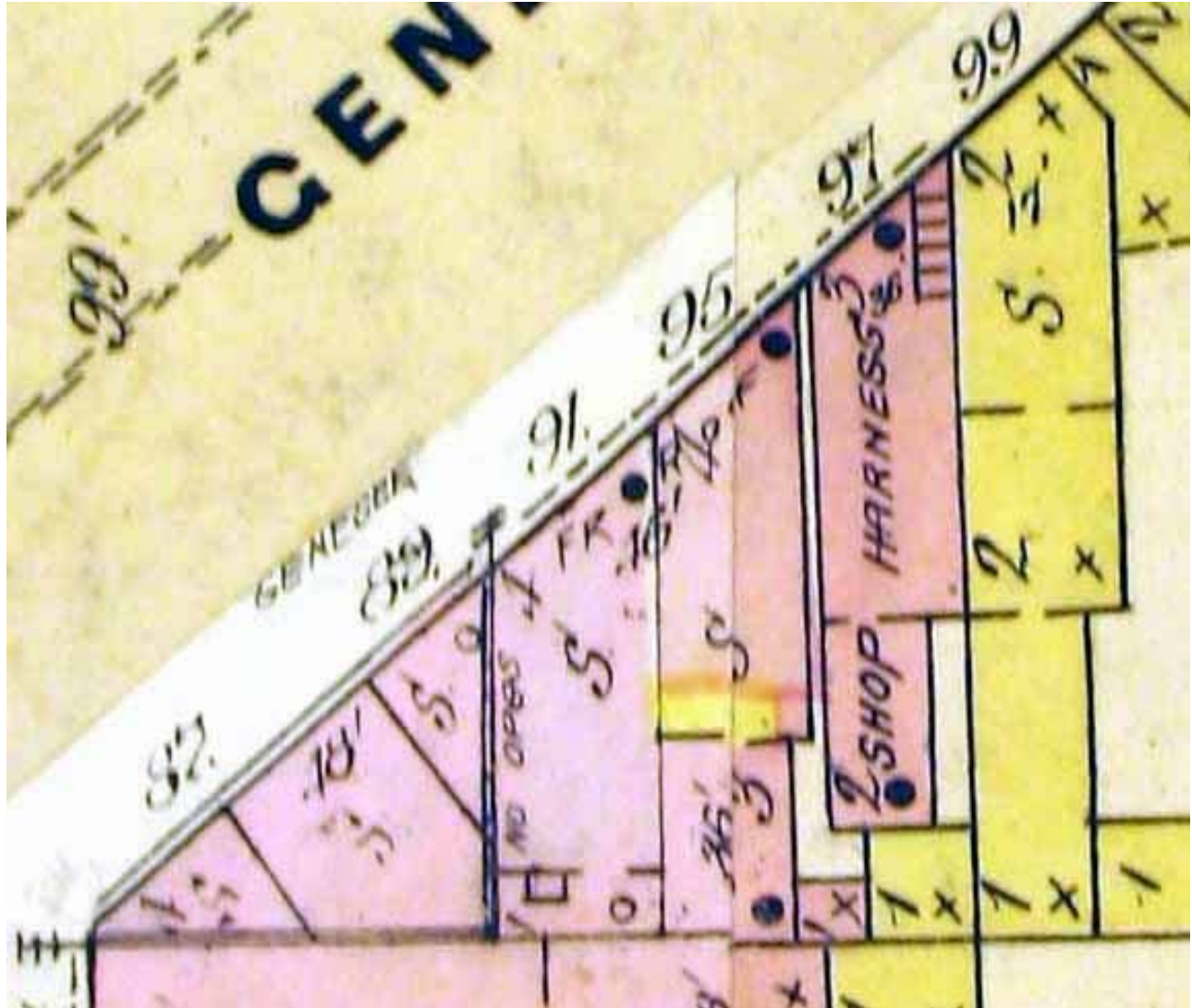


(22) Sketch detail, 1866 Deed Atlas of the City of Buffalo

While this map does not indicate buildings or structures which were constructed, it does list the owners of the various Genesee Gateway parcels. Note that the present 91-95 Genesee Street properties were owned by Joseph Weter (possibly Weber) and Jonathan Sigwald.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

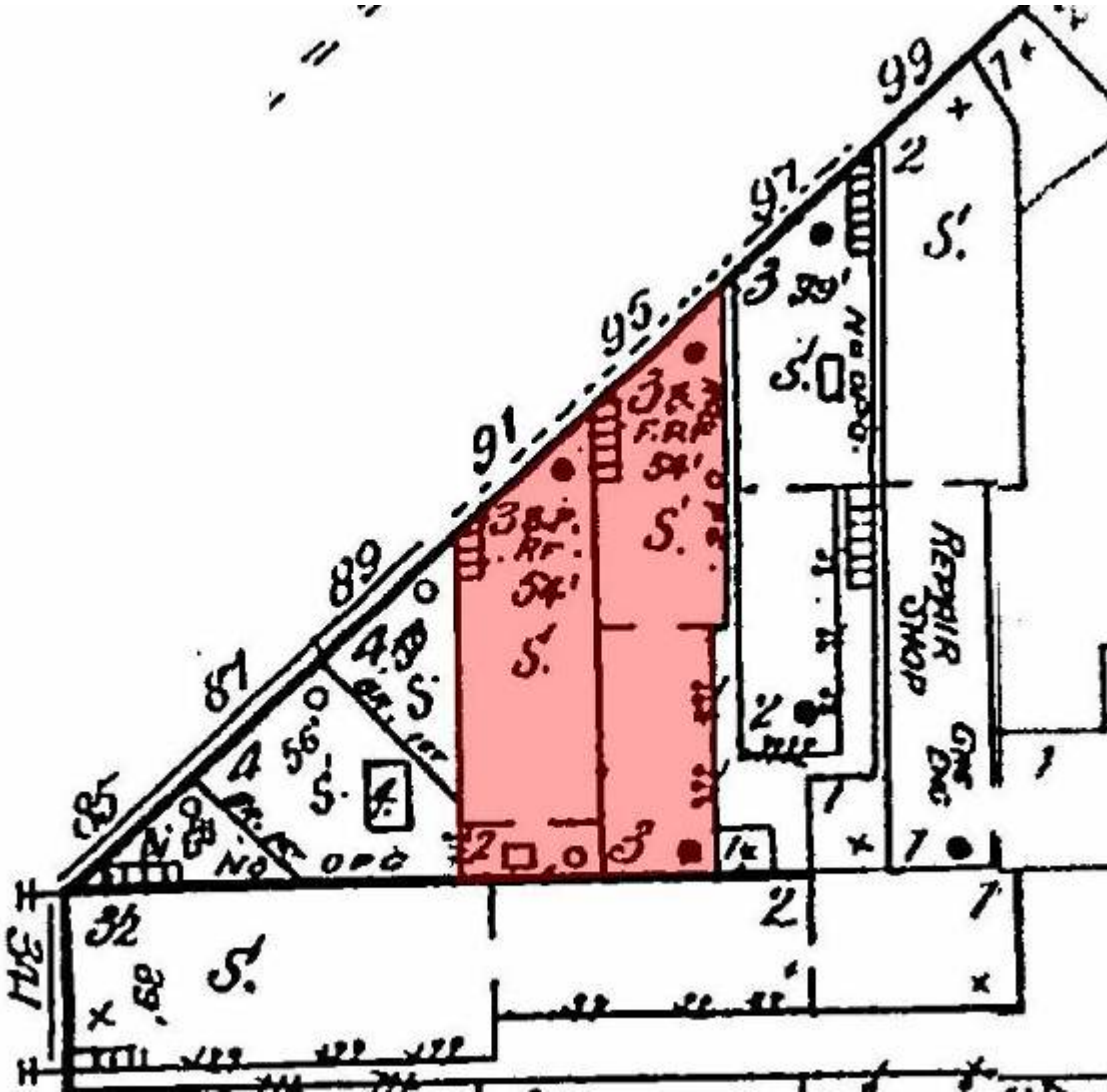


(24) Detail, 1881 updated 1888 Sanborn Map

Note that the Denzinger-Sigwald Building appears to retain the original building footprint which dates prior to the 1880s. The mansard roof is here called a "French Roof" and the rear of the 91 space features a first-floor small addition at the rear, with the upper wall recessed back. The extant cast iron columns in this space were likely necessitated to support the upper three levels of wall, and appear to correlate to the interior partition indicated towards the south of the 91 commercial space. The 95 commercial building features a 3-story rear addition. (BECPL)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

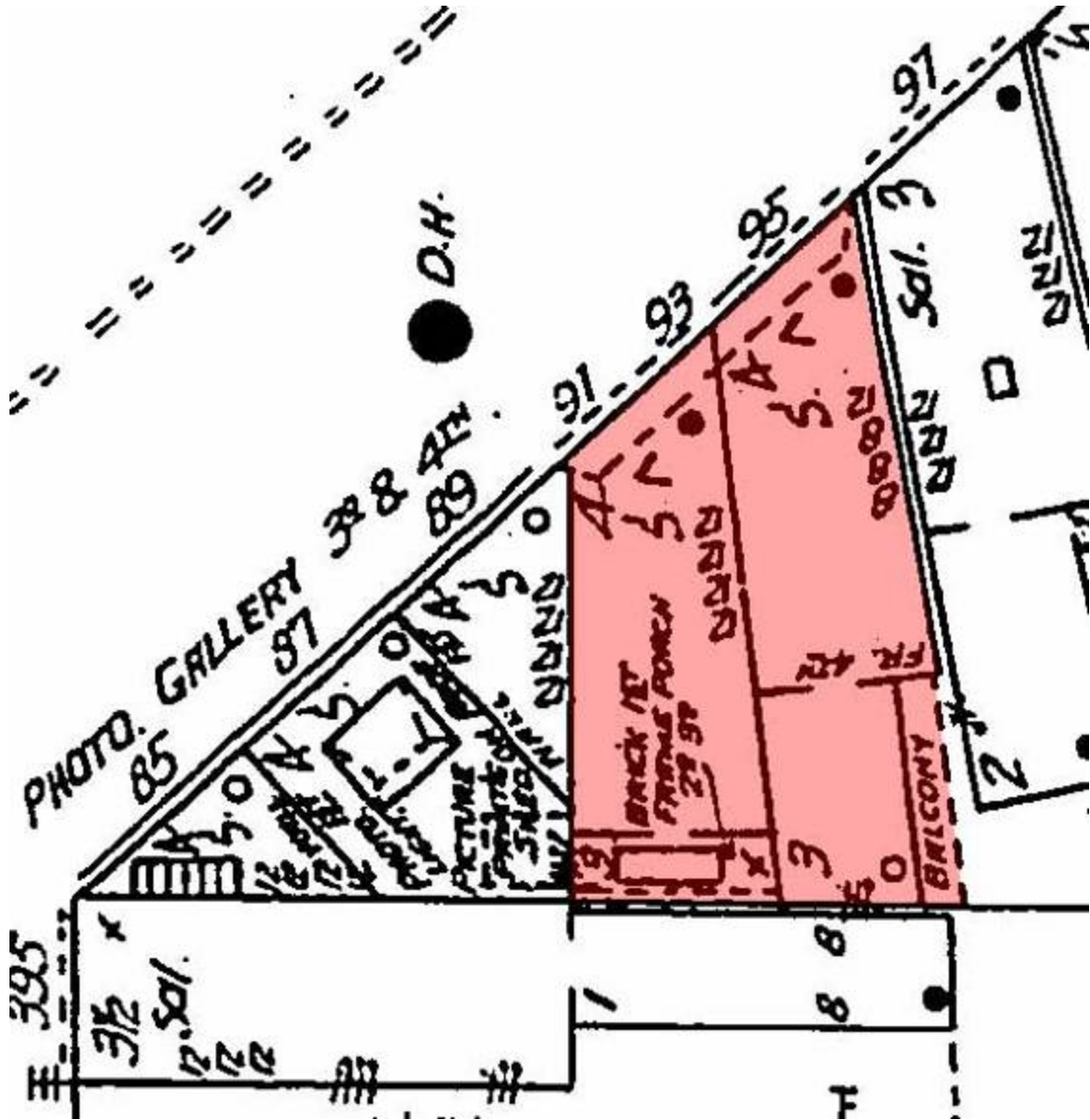


(25) Detail, 1889 Sanborn Map

Note the presence of matching western stairs at each commercial space. Note that the building is referred to as being three-stories high with a French roof, or mansard, which technically added an additional floor level.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

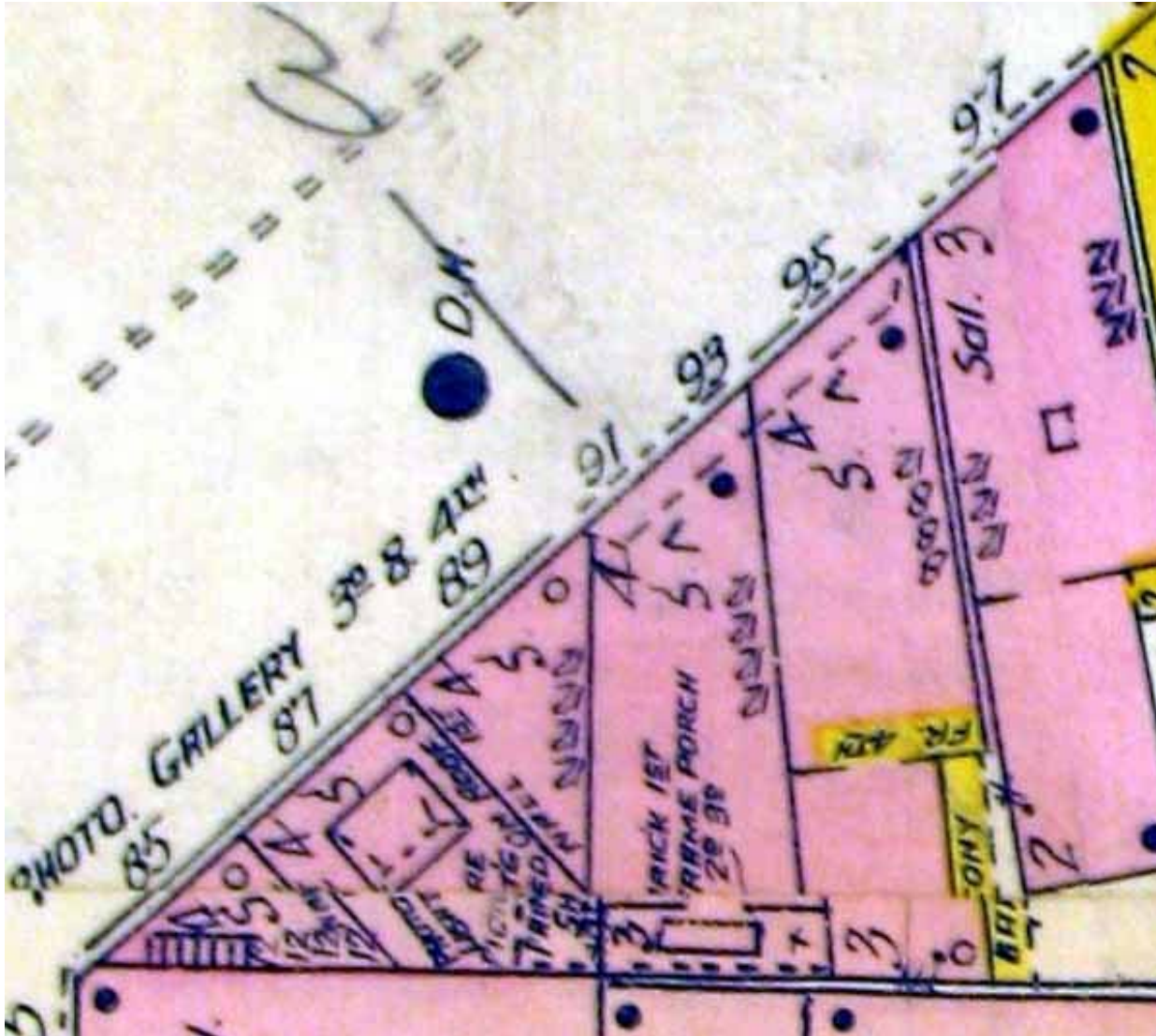


(26) Detail, 1899 Sanborn Map

Note the corrected survey of this map indicates the buildings were not as square as previously depicted. The 91 commercial half features a two-story wood frame porch above a projecting brick first story. The 95 commercial space accommodates residential use with a balcony which connects to the eastern side of the rear addition.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203

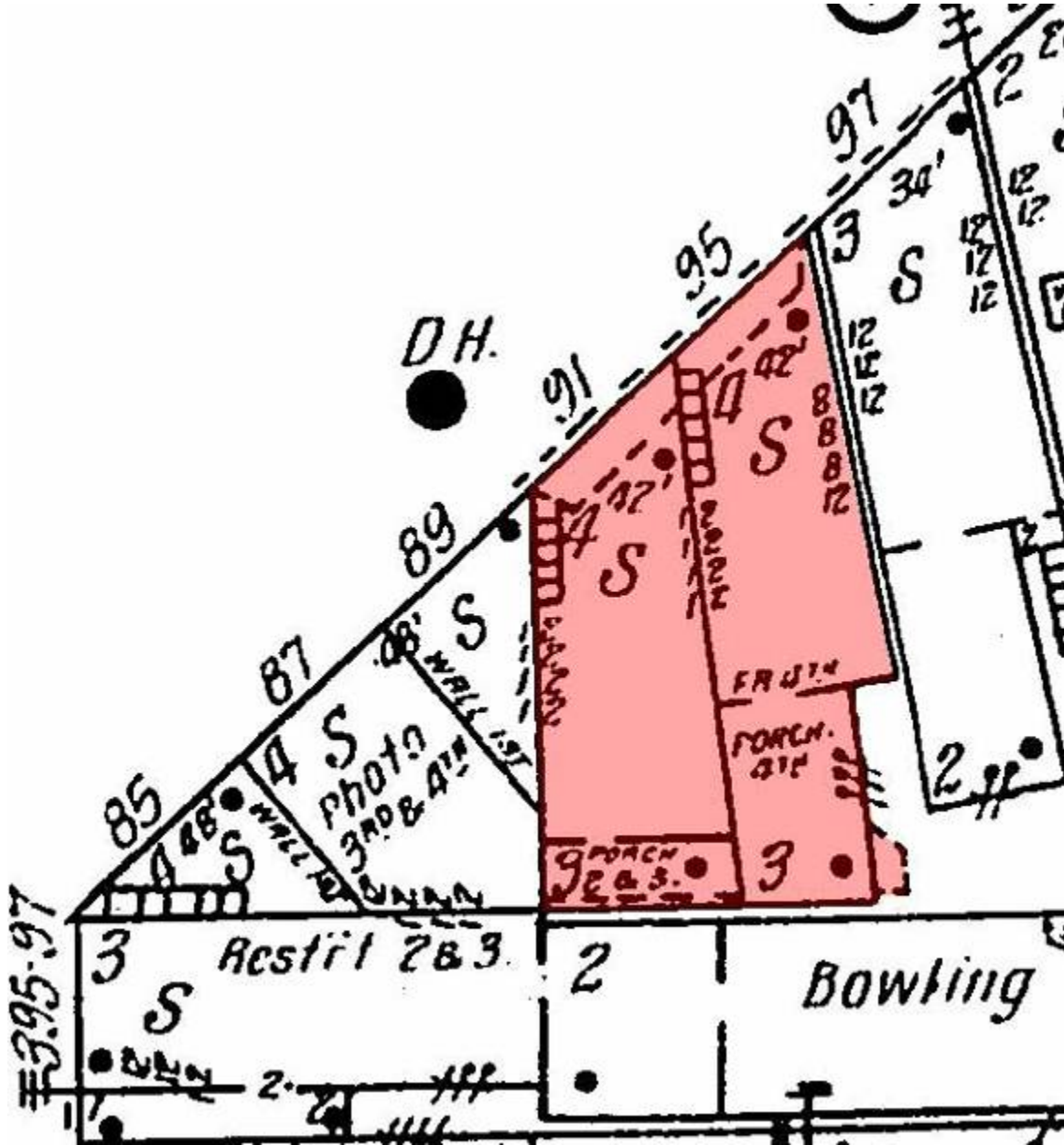


(27) Detail, 1899 Updated to 1916 Sanborn Map

Note that the 95 commercial space may have featured some wood framing at the fourth floor, or this notation may indicate the wood construction of the mansard fourth-floor itself. (BECPL)

HISTORIC BACKGROUND

The Denzinger-Sigwald Building, 91-95 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



(28) Detail, 1925 Sanborn Map

Note the mansard roof recess is dotted in at the north façade of the building. 91 Genesee Street retains its two-story wood frame porches above a one-story base. 95 Genesee Street appears to have removed the rear balcony and replaced with a larger fourth-story porch above the three-story brick southern addition.