

HISTORIC BACKGROUND  
January 11, 2011

# THE GIESSER BUILDING

99 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



Prepared by:



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## **The History of the Giesser Building**

The Giesser Building is a rare remaining and largely intact example of early twentieth-century commercial architecture located 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 last building to be constructed amongst a group of buildings which dates from ca. 1840 to the 1910s, the Giesser Building of 1915 is an excellent example of architect-designed, small scale commercial architecture from the early twentieth-century; an architectural era which is becoming increasingly rare in representation in Buffalo. It also represents the final period of development of the Genesee Gateway buildings; following its construction buildings would be modified and altered, yet no others would be built from scratch. Throughout its nearly 100 year history, spanning three generations, the Giesser Building represents a unique surviving example of mixed-use residential and commercial architecture in the City of Buffalo. The Giesser Building is a contributing building to the local Genesee Gateway Historic District based on Criterion C for its architecture. The period of significance for the architecture of the Genesee Gateway Historic District is ca. 1840s- ca. 1930s.

Like the other buildings along this portion of Genesee Street, the Giesser Building was the site of previous pre-1854 development from the earliest phase of commercial growth along Genesee Street. In its earliest stages, this parcel at 99 Genesee Street appears to have been occupied by a small wood-framed building. By 1866 the property was owned by Frank Pfennig and the parcel extended east to include portions of the current 101-103 Genesee Street property (see image 22). Pfennig, a German immigrant from Alsace, was a cigar maker by trade and ran a small cigar and tobacco shop from the two-story wood frame building which dates to ca. 1870s. Around 1880, Pfennig appears to have sold the property at 99 Genesee Street to his neighbor located at 101-103 Genesee Street since the 1870s, Gabriel Giesser. Pfennig remained in the neighborhood, locating his residence and the Frank Pfennig & Sons tobacco shop two doors west to 95 Genesee Street.

Born about 1825 in Württemberg, Germany, Gabriel Giesser and his family would be long-term residents and business owners in this portion of Genesee Street. Relatively little information is available about the family, but the Giesser family would reside and own property in the Genesee Gateway block between the 1870s and the 1930s and were likely prominent and well-known citizens in the local German community. Trained in the repair, sharpening and maintenance of knives and cutlery, Giesser's sons Frederick and Charles also trained in the business. Cutlery was an important business in the nineteenth-century as knives were intended to last for many years, if not for generations, and had to be sharpened and maintained. In a neighborhood adjacent to some of Buffalo's top butchers, grocers and fresh markets, having good eating utensils was a must for any nineteenth-century family. Business must have been successful for Gabriel Giesser, who appears to have increased his

land and property holdings from the small triangular property originally at 101-103 Genesee Street to a much larger expanded parcel. Gabriel operated his cutlery business from the wood framed pre-1854 building located at 99 Genesee Street in the 1890s.

Following his father's death around 1900, Charles Giesser appears to have continued the family cutlery trade in the wood framed building at 99 Genesee Street. Charles Giesser ran his father's cutlery and grinding shop from the property as early as 1890 and even constructed a large brick addition at the rear of the wood framed building in order to modernize and expand his business. In 1900, Charles and his family also resided in the building; another example of business owners who lived literally above their store which was common throughout nineteenth-century shops. By 1910, however, the Charles Giesser family had moved their residence to 432 Oak Street. This is an example of the growing trend in early twentieth-century commercialism, where business owners no longer ran their business from the same building they resided in, although the second floor appears to have served as a small rental apartment during the building's early history.

The Giesser family had an obvious interest in architecture and design and was responsible for two architect-designed commercial buildings along this portion of Genesee Street. In 1895 Frederike Giesser hired prominent local architect Richard A. Waite to design an elaborate mixed-use commercial and residential building with a notable daylight photography studio space at 101-103 Genesee Street, replacing the family's small earlier wood framed building which housed the early cutlery shop.

The Giesser family must have been rather financially successful by the turn of the twentieth-century since they were able to commission two fashionable buildings along one of Buffalo's busiest and most desirable commercial streets. Not to be outdone by his mother, Charles Giesser commissioned local Buffalo architect Edward G. Henrich (information to follow) to design and construct a new commercial building for his business in 1915. Located on his family's parcel at 99 and 101-103 Genesee Street, the Giesser Building was constructed along the western side of the Werner Photography Building. The new brick building was nearly identical in shape and size to the previous wood-framed pre-1854 building which was located at the site, being constructed only slightly wider to connect to the adjacent Werner Photography Building. The new building was constructed during a period when commercial businesses became increasingly conscious that the appearance of their building acted as a sort of advertisement for the business itself; a fashionable, modern building drew attention and often times became synonymous with the shop within. Yet tastes had changed from the extravagant, late-Victorian building his mother commissioned at 101-103 Genesee Street; the design of the Giesser Building reflects the era's appreciation of simplicity, minimal ornamentation and less complex design.

Charles Giesser operated his cutlery business at 99 Genesee Street through the late 1930s, eventually expanding his business into selling barber supplies. Like the other

commercial buildings in the Genesee Gateway group, the building also housed other tenants, briefly including photographers Woodson & Wallace in 1925.<sup>1</sup> The Giesser Building also housed Mrs. Sophie K. Lee who resided in the building as well as selling “hair goods” in 1937.

Charles Giesser ceased operating his cutlery and barber supplies shop on Genesee Street in the early 1940s. The Giesser Building was next occupied by the Swerdloff-Bestry Company tailors by 1946 and continuing into the 1950s, and likely was housed in the upper floor. Around this period, the building was purchased by the H. Seeberg Company who operated their Charlie Baker Clothiers company from the Werner Photography Building at 101-103. The party wall between the neighboring buildings was opened up around 1945 to combine the two retail buildings, and it was during this period that it appears likely the storefront was altered as well.

By the early 1970s, the Giesser Building was vacant, and like the other buildings along Genesee Street suffered a period of decline, neglect and general decay in the 1970s and 80s. Purchased by Willard A. Genrich and PlatinumDome, Inc. around 1980 along with many of the neighboring Genesee Gateway buildings, Genrich had high hopes for the rehabilitation of such a prominent row of rare commercial buildings. In 1986 he started a rehabilitation project which removed the interiors of all the buildings down to the studs and brick. Genrich’s attempts were unfortunately misguided, but fortunately much of the original interior structure remains intact at the Giesser Building. After several years of legal issues between Genrich and the City of Buffalo, who took Genrich to housing court seeking a demolition of the buildings, the future of the Giesser Building appeared bleak. 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 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.

Although modest in scale and decoration, the Giesser Building at 99 Genesee Street is an excellent example of the type of commercial architecture which was being constructed in the early twentieth-century. Designed by a relatively unknown architect, Edward G. Henrich, the unassuming yet composed façade of the building remains in excellent overall condition, given the blight and decay of the area. The final and most recent building to be constructed in the Genesee Gateway building group, the Giesser Building was built at the sunset of the golden age of commercial activity in the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood. Perhaps this spirit is best captured by artist Charles Burchfield whose “Street Scene” painting of 1940-1947 recorded a rather dreary, overcast day along this stretch of Genesee Street. At the center of the work rises the stately Werner Photography Building, whose elegant architecture and unique forms belie the somber color palate or impressionistic

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<sup>1</sup> The Giesser family may have been sympathetic to the photography industry considering that Frederike commissioned the construction of a building dedicated to the photography industry, and Charles Giesser rented space at 99 Genesee Street to a photography studio.

technique. To its right is the smaller Giesser Building, which appears largely the same today as it did in the 1940s. The painting seems to capture the sense that this neighborhood by the 1940s had seen its heyday and was perhaps a little shabby but still an active, vital place with great potential; a feeling which permeates the neighborhood today due to the promise of the new Genesee Gateway project and other adjacent development in recent years.

### **Edward G. Henrich, Architect**

Edward George Henrich, architect of the Giesser Building, was born to William and Anna Maria Henrich in Buffalo on February 7, 1876. William Henrich, a native of Roxheim, Germany, had come to the United States in 1843 as a child, and had become active in politics and business as well as becoming commissioner of public buildings in 1876 and again in 1884 and 1885. William Henrich founded a lumber business in Buffalo in 1866, and in 1886 opened a mill at 193 Spring Street which was regarded as one of the most modern mills in all of Buffalo.

Edward, the seventh of the eight Henrich children, was a graduate of the old Central High School (1851-89, demolished, located at corner of Genesee Street and Niagara Square on the site of what is now the Walter J. Mahoney State Office Building) before he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where the first architectural curriculum in the US had been established in 1868, receiving his degree in architecture in 1899. Following his graduation from MIT, one of the most prestigious American architecture programs of his time as it continues to be to this day, Henrich had an architectural career which took him across the country. He practiced as an architect in Boston for two years before working in Seattle for another two years and Los Angeles for an additional year. Edward G. Henrich eventually returned to Buffalo in 1905 and had some success as an architect. He served as 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the Buffalo Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1916 and 1917, indicating he was engaged in the local architectural community and well known among his peers. No other projects can be attributed to Henrich at this point; further research may uncover other examples of his work in Buffalo. His younger brother, Louis, also attended MIT for his architectural degree and had a great deal of success as the designer of the Lincoln Memorial at Gettysburg and buildings at Wellesley College.

Although highly trained, perhaps Henrich did not attain the architectural success in Buffalo he had hoped for and in 1918 he joined his brothers Frederick and William L. in the William Henrich's Sons lumber company founded by his father. Given that the Giesser Building was constructed around 1915, it may have been his final project as an independent architect. By the 1910s the William Henrich's Sons Company had expanded beyond just its origins as a planing mill and lumber yard and had become a building supply and contracting company, perhaps due to Edward's involvement in the company. The company operated the Henrich Plywood Company (incorporated in May 1923) which made high grade cabinetry and woodwork for numerous buildings, residences, churches and clubs. The company also operated the Bison

Lumber Company (incorporated March 24, 1932). A 1916 advertisement for the company identified the firm as contractors for the Buffalo Weaving and Belting Building (ca. 1916, located at 260 Chandler Street, demolished), the Eureka Coffee Company Building (1912, located at 102-106 Carroll Street, demolished), All Saints Church (unknown which church this was) and the Buffalo Ford Motor Company Building (likely the ca. 1917 former Ford factory now known as the Tri-Main Building located at 2495 Main Street) among others (see image 10). Perhaps the William Henrich's Sons most prestigious project was providing lumber and interior finish work for Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin D. Martin House at 125 Jewett Parkway (1903-05, NR 1975, NHL 1986).<sup>2</sup> Henrich became the company's vice-president and served in this role for nearly fifteen years. Edward G. Henrich died at the age of 53 on January 27, 1930 and was buried in Buffalo's Forest Lawn Cemetery (1850, NR 1990).

### **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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> As noted in Quinan, Jack. *Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House: architecture as portraiture*. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004; appendix.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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 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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup>

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

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<sup>4</sup> Rizzo, Michael. *Through The Mayor's Eyes: The Only Complete History of the Mayors of Buffalo*. Buffalo: People's History Union, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> *Index of Records of Streets*, 286.

<sup>6</sup> James, Isabel Vaughan. *Some Outstanding Germans in Buffalo*. Manuscript, BECHS.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

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 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).<sup>8</sup> 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).<sup>9</sup> 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 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 11, 12, 13). 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

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<sup>8</sup> 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 150<sup>th</sup> year with Mass." *Buffalo News*. 29 Sep 2001, A-7.

<sup>9</sup> Refer to the State and National Register of historic Places nomination for School 13 (03NR05199), section 8, page 1.



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 14, 15).<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 16). 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- 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

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<sup>10</sup> "Washington Market to Close July 1, Banas Announces." *Buffalo Evening News*. 11 Jan 1965.

<sup>11</sup> Today, the church has about 200 registered members. Refer to Condren, A-7.

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.<sup>12</sup> 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.

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 Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood reflects a significant period of Buffalo's history, representing the city at the pinnacle of its international prominence. This area 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.

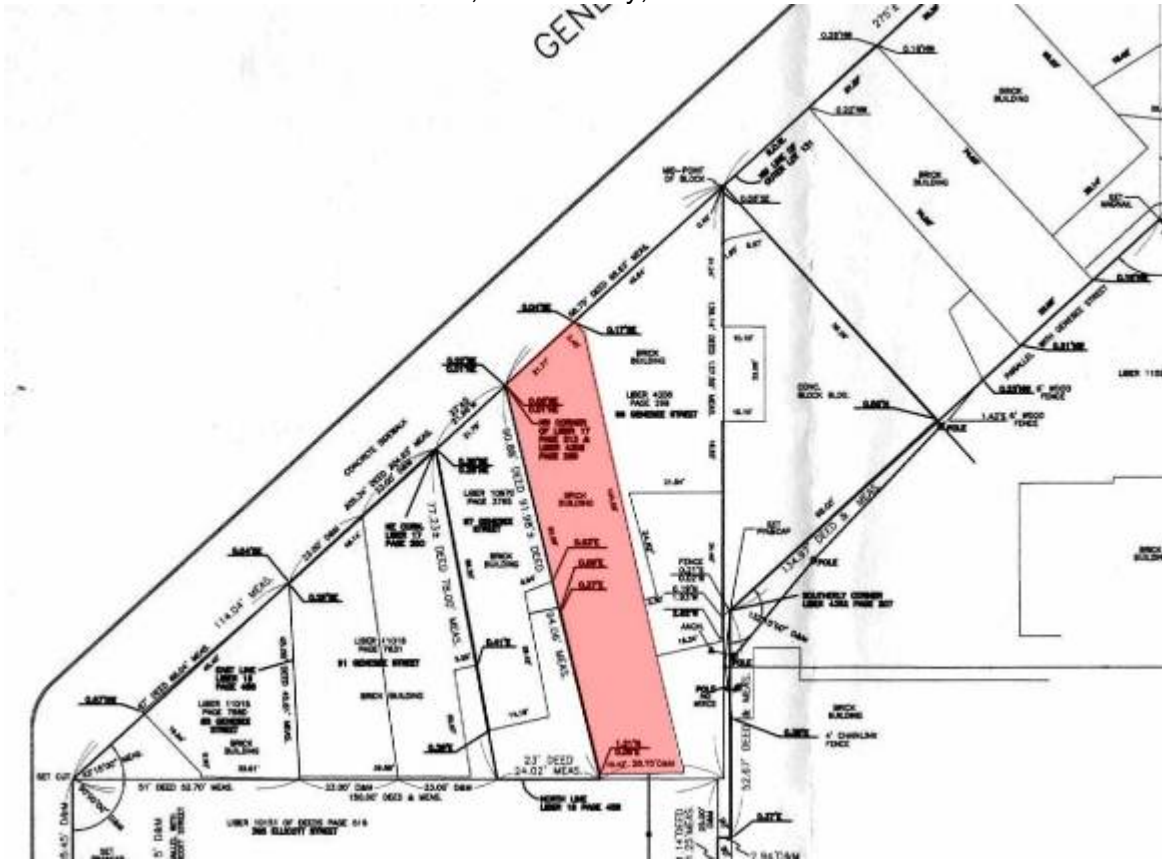
The Giesser Building at 99 Genesee Street is an excellent example of the development of commercial architecture within the Genesee-Ellicott-Oak neighborhood, and it is an increasingly rare example of modestly scaled and ornamented early twentieth-century commercial architecture in the City of Buffalo. The building is significant as a contributing building to the local Genesee Gateway Historic District, based on Criterion C of the National Register of Historic Places Criteria for Evaluation, as an excellent example of architect-designed commercial architecture. The building is also notable as perhaps the sole example the work of MIT-trained architect Edward G. Henrich in Buffalo.

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<sup>12</sup> 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.



(1) Location of the Giesser Building, 99 Genesee Street, Buffalo, Erie County, NY 14203



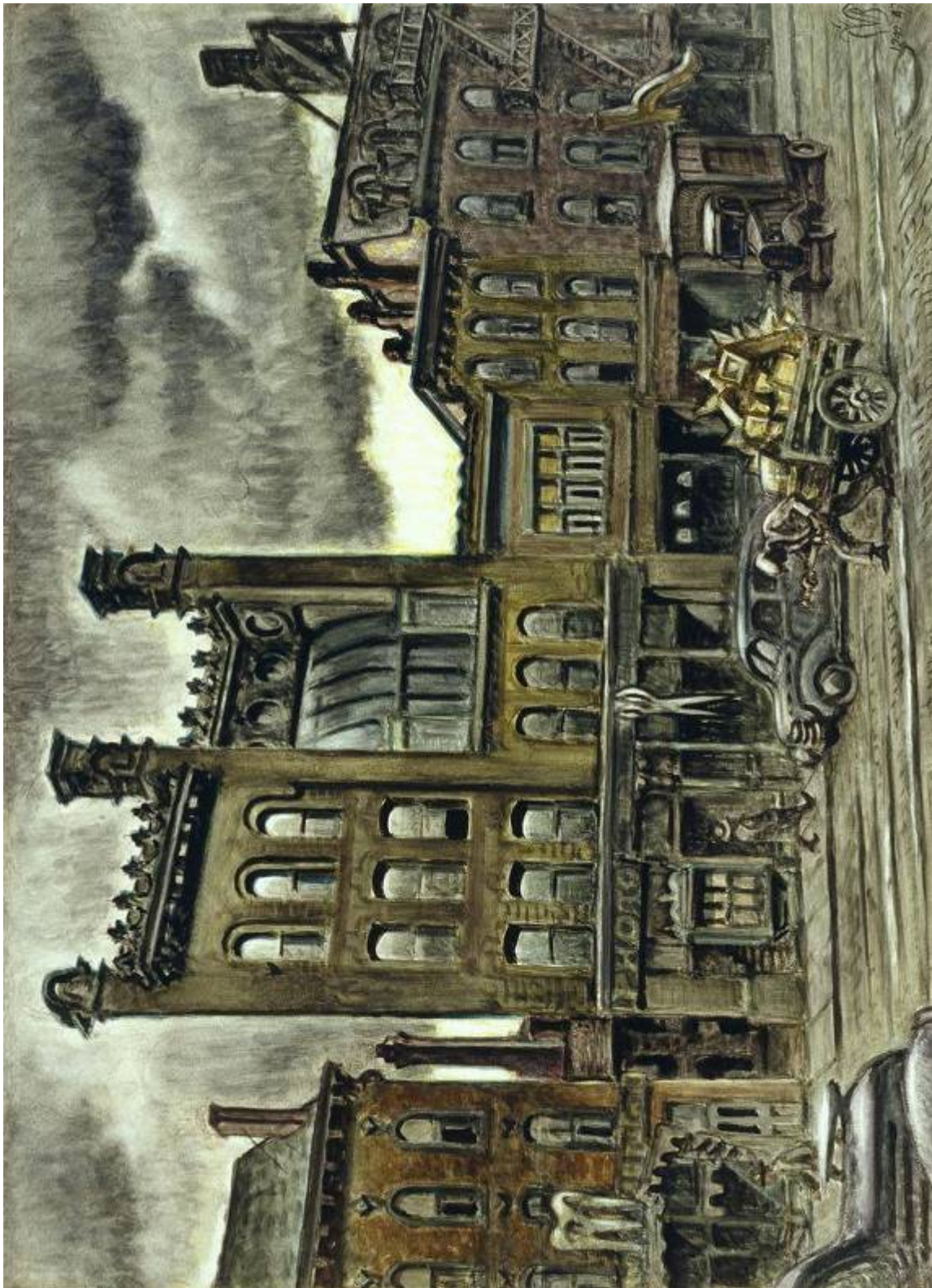
(2) Detail, Survey (2008)  
Showing location and parcel size of The Giesser Building (red)



(3) Aerial View, facing south  
 Note the regular, continuous line of the Genesee Gateway facades along the south side of Genesee Street.

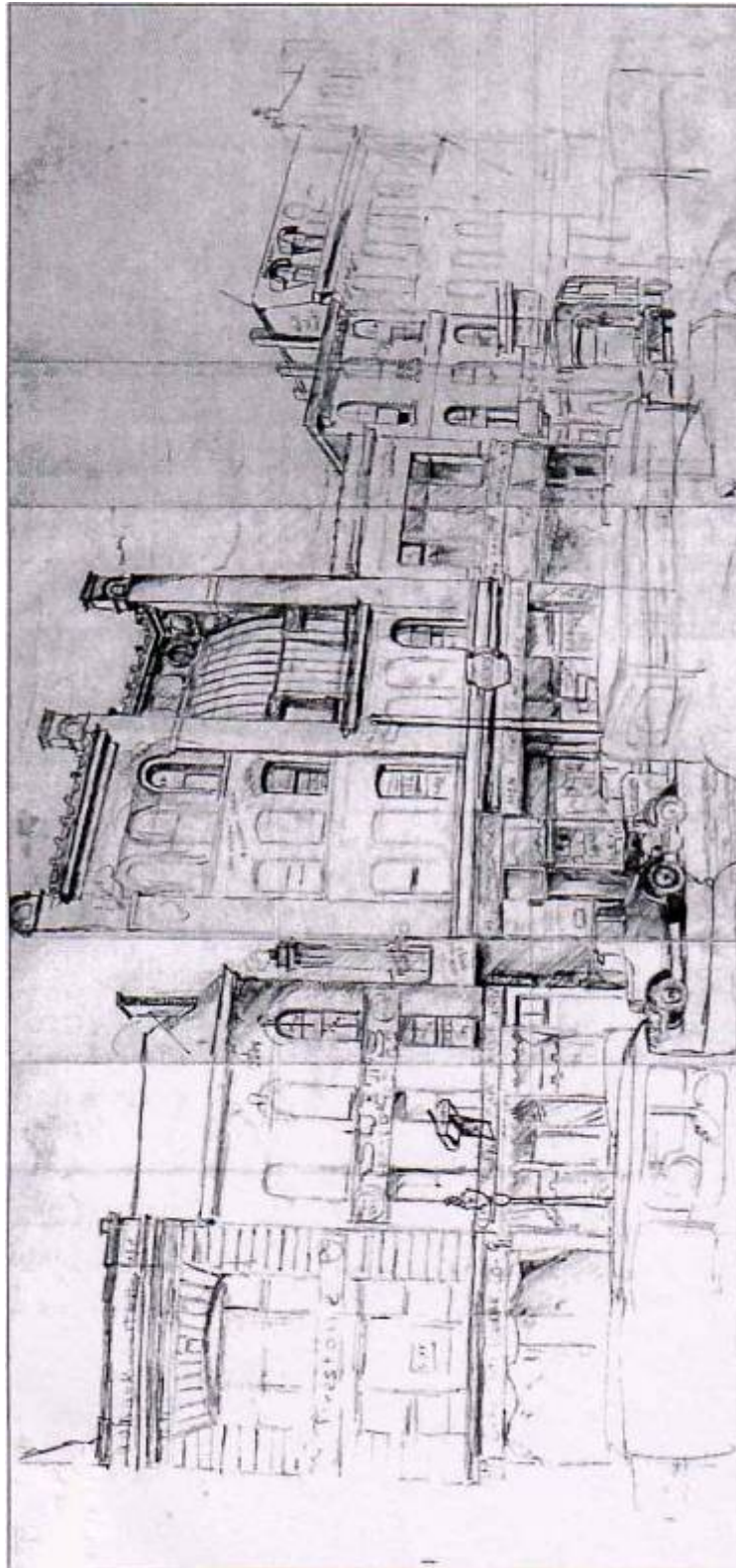


(4) Aerial view, facing north



(5) "Street Scene" by Charles Burchfield, 1940-1947 (Watercolor on paper)  
The earliest located image of the Giesser Building, this painting illustrates that the façade of the building appeared much the same in the 1940s as it does presently.





(6) "Study for Street Scene" pencil sketch by Charles Burchfield, 1940  
The Giesser Building is located just to the right of center, adjacent to the large Werner Photography Building at center.



(7) The Giesser Building, ca. 1920 (Karl Josker, photographer)  
Photographed with the adjacent Werner Photography Building (large building at left), the Giesser Building is diminutive in size and modest in ornamentation, yet an excellent example of early twentieth-century, architect-designed commercial architecture.



(8) The Giesser Building (at right), ca. 1986

Although suffering from the same general neglect and blight which was common throughout Buffalo's urban center in the 1970s and 80s, the Giesser Building retains its original character and much of its architectural integrity when compared to the 1940s painting.



(9) The Genesee Gateway Buildings, ca. 1986

Note the presence of the Caulkins Building and the mansarded Denzinger-Sigwalt Buildings towards the image foreground, which were lost in 2002. The Giesser Building is located towards center.

# WILLIAM HENRICH'S SONS CO.

## *Contractors and Builders*

Dealers in Lumber

Planing Mill

Interior Finish



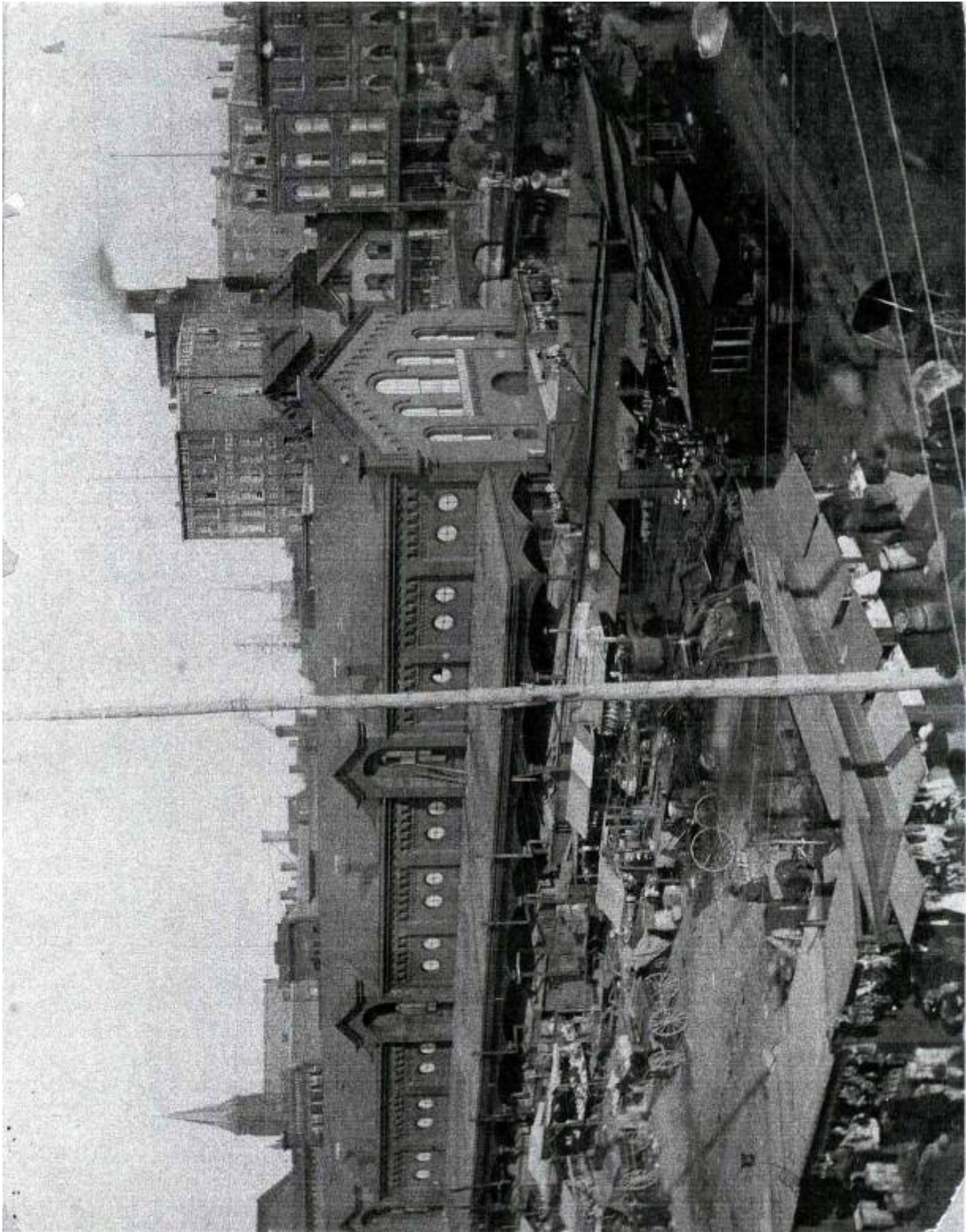
**BUFFALO WEAVING & BELTING CO., BUFFALO, N. Y.**  
**G. MORTON WOLFE, Architect**

Carpenter Contractors on the above building, also the following Buffalo buildings: Eureka Coffee Co., Henkel, E. G. S. P. C. A., Plastergon Wall Board Co., Ward & Ward Bakery, Ford Motor Co., All Saints Church, and many other churches, Factories, Stores, Public Buildings and fine residences.

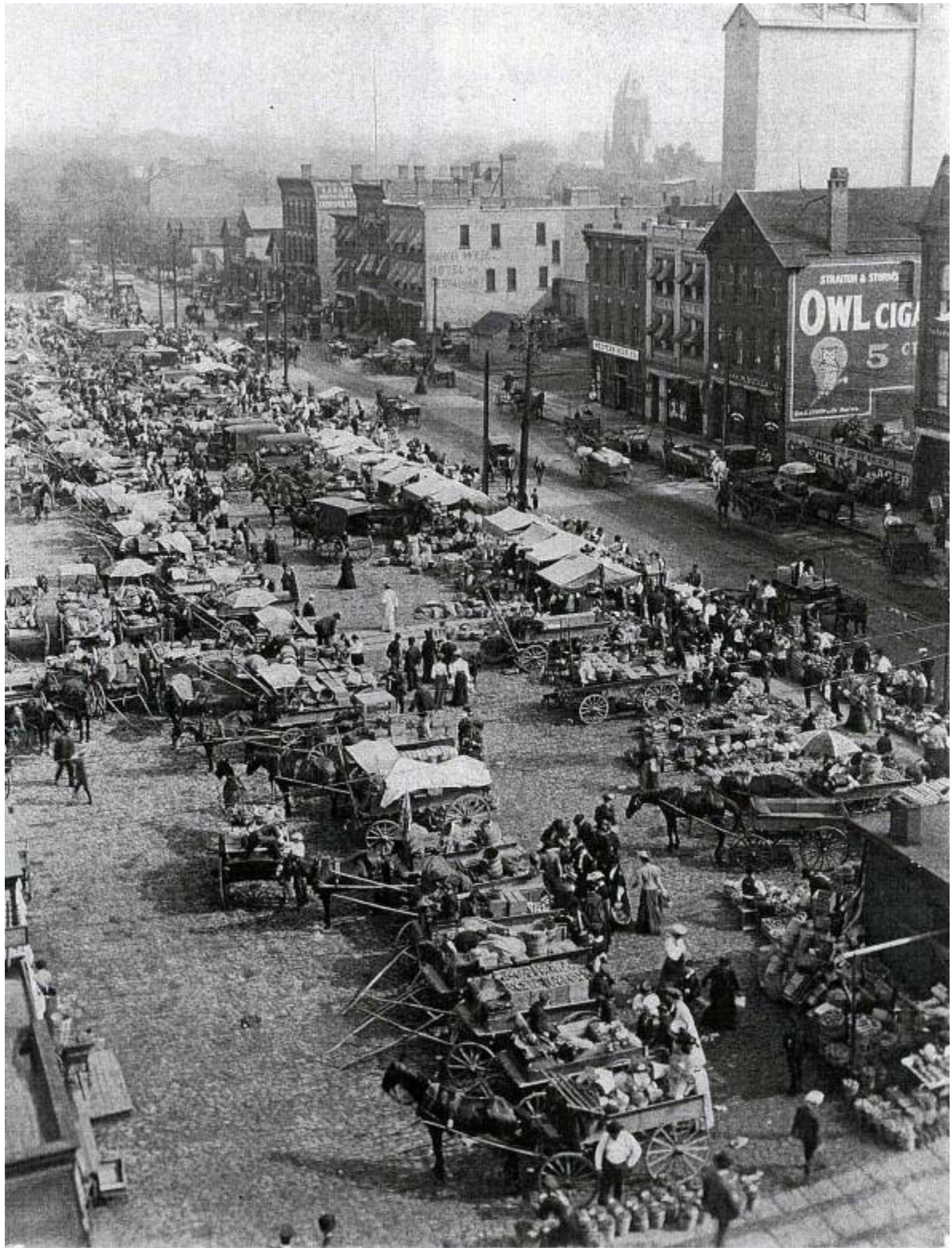
**193 SPRING ST.,**

**BUFFALO, N. Y.**

- (10) William Henrich's Sons Co. Advertisement, Ohio Architect, Engineer and Builder (1916)  
 Although no advertising for Edward G. Henrich's solo architectural practice has been located, this advertisement was published shortly before Henrich completed the Giesser Building and joined his family's contracting company as vice-president. The William Henrich's Sons Company was responsible for several notable projects in Buffalo, including work at the Darwin D. Martin House.

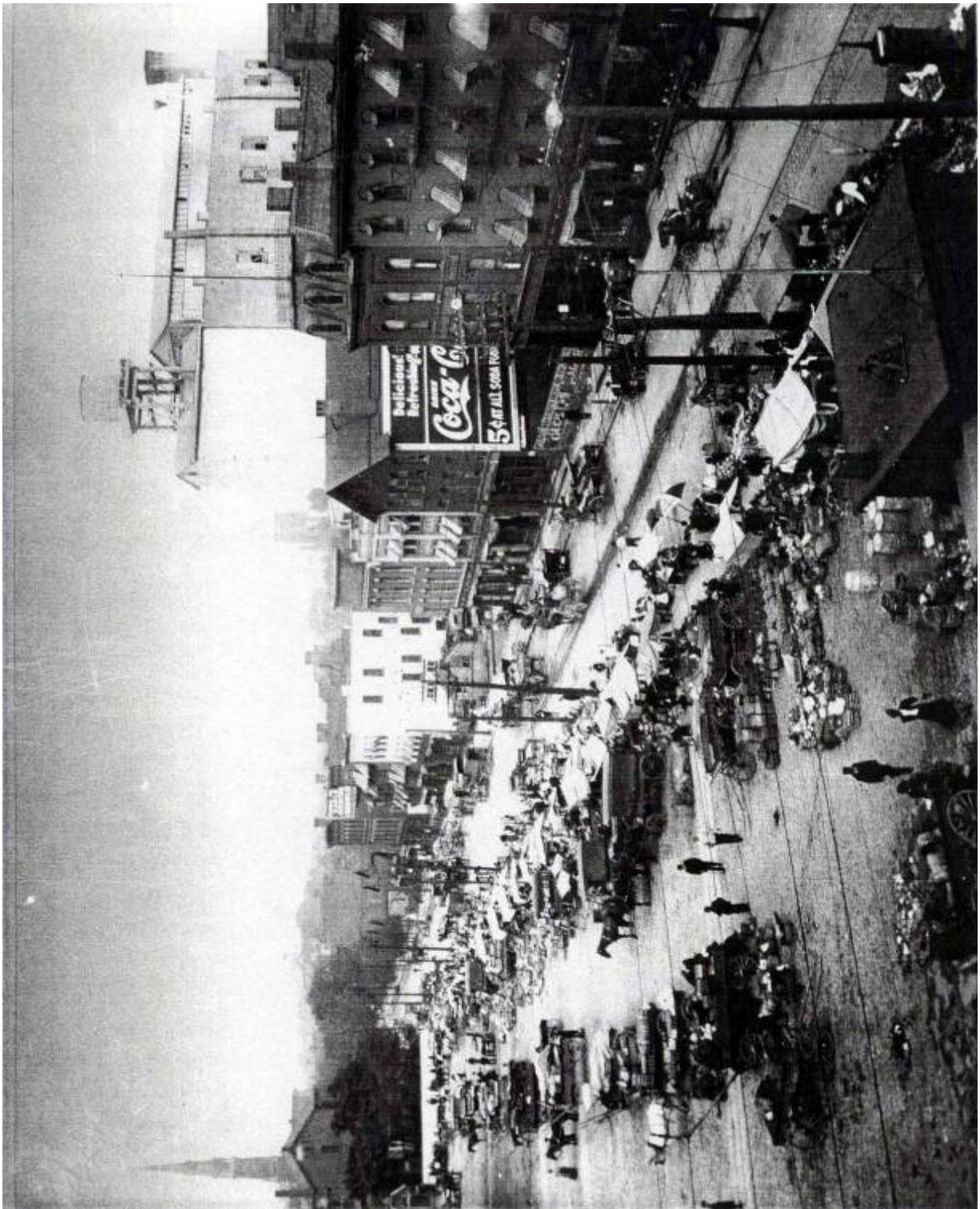


(11) The Washington Market looking east towards Ellicott Street, 1890  
Note the growth of other commercial buildings along Ellicott Street which developed as a relationship to the bustling market. The tall structure in the right background behind the market building is the Urban Roller Mills milling building in its original appearance.



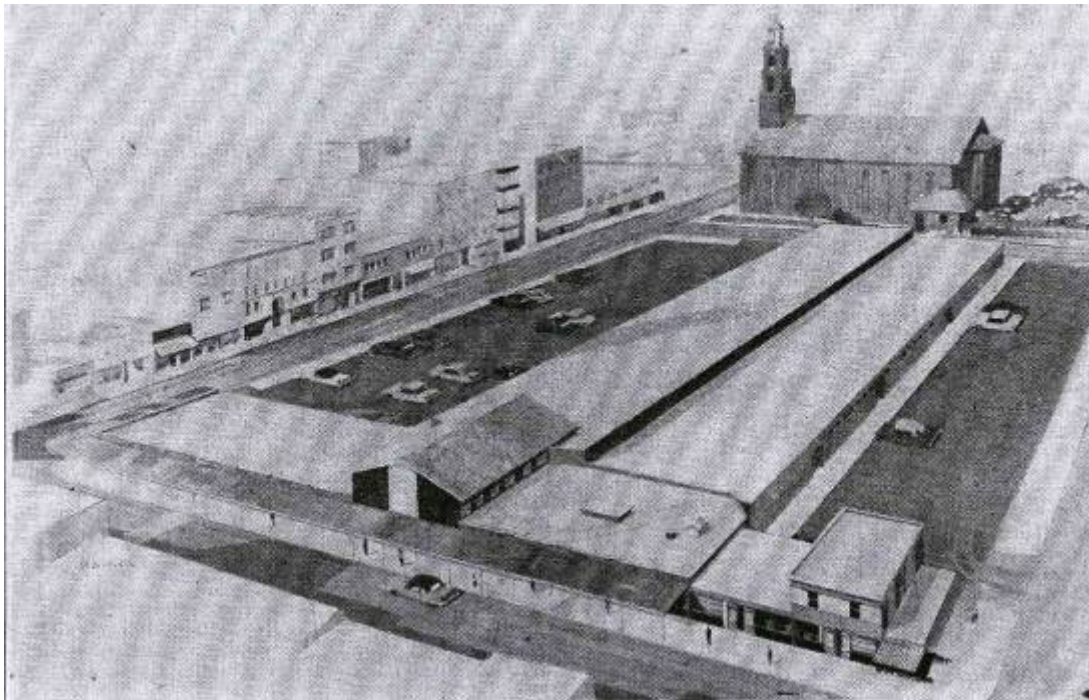
(12) The Washington Market looking north-east along Ellicott Street, 1905

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.



(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.

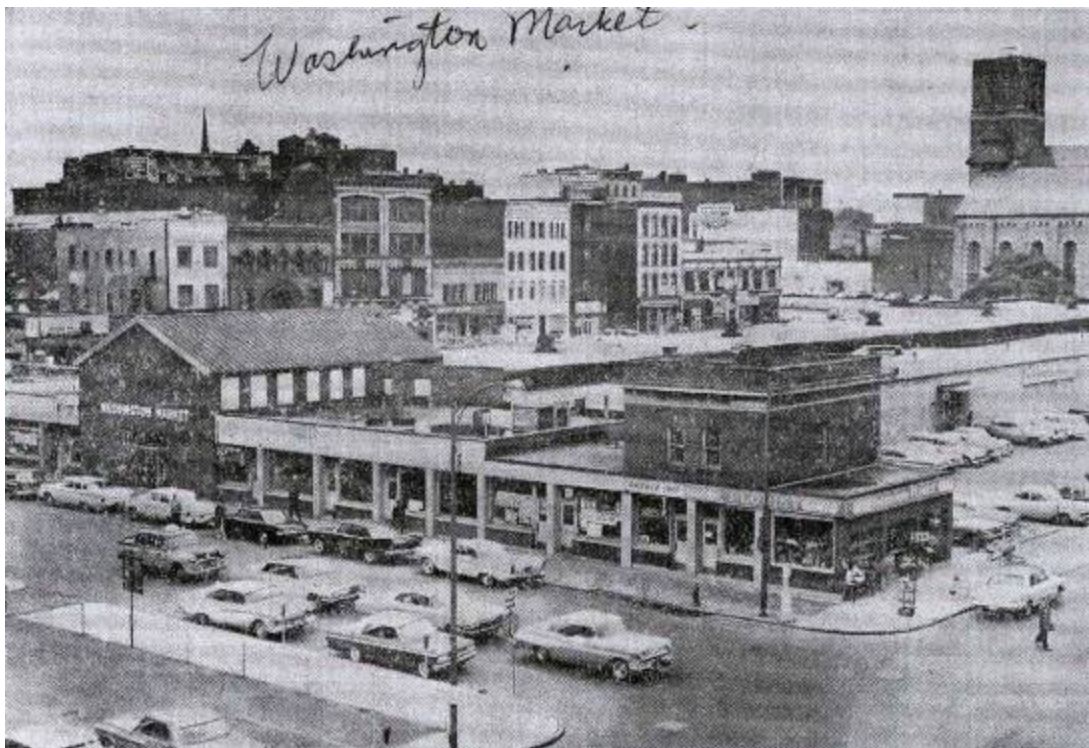




(14) "Architects Sketch of New \$400,000 Washington Market"

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.



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

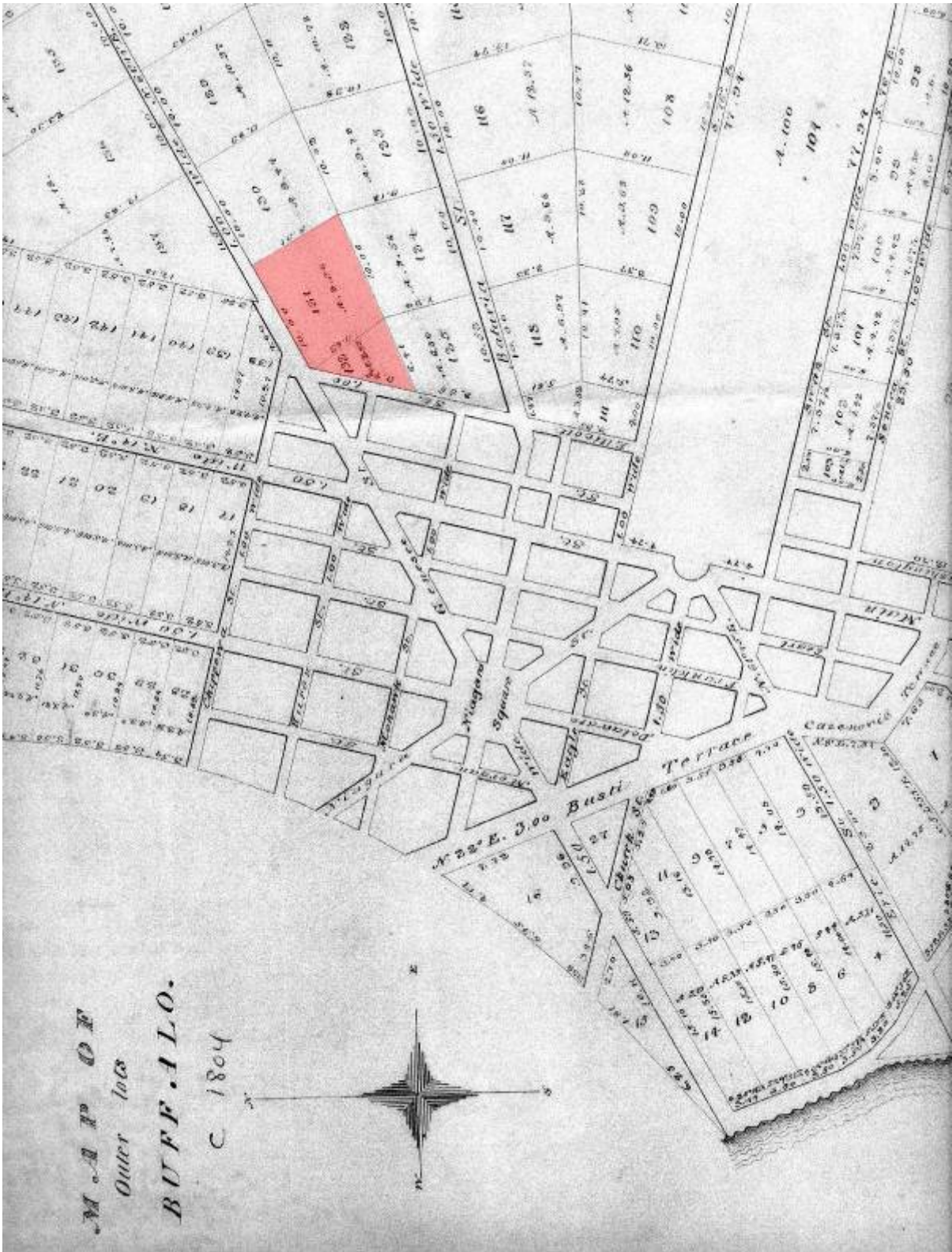
With the neighborhood in decline, and dubbed "a losing proposition with no bright hopes in sight," this 1963 image reflects the appearance of the market during its final days.

Buffalo Courier Express, 22 Sep 1963:1.



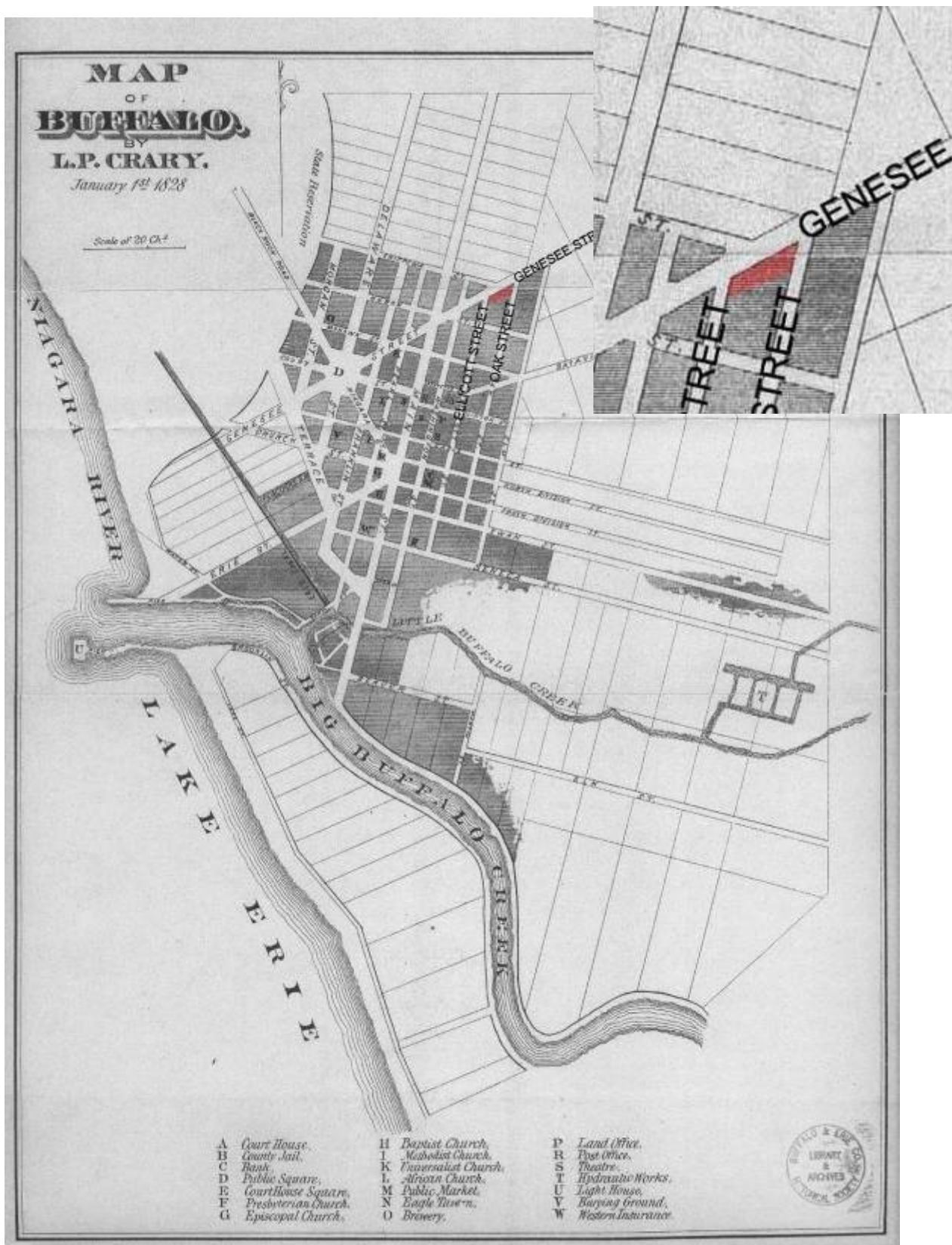
(16) "A New Downtown Parking Lot Opened Today."

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.



(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.



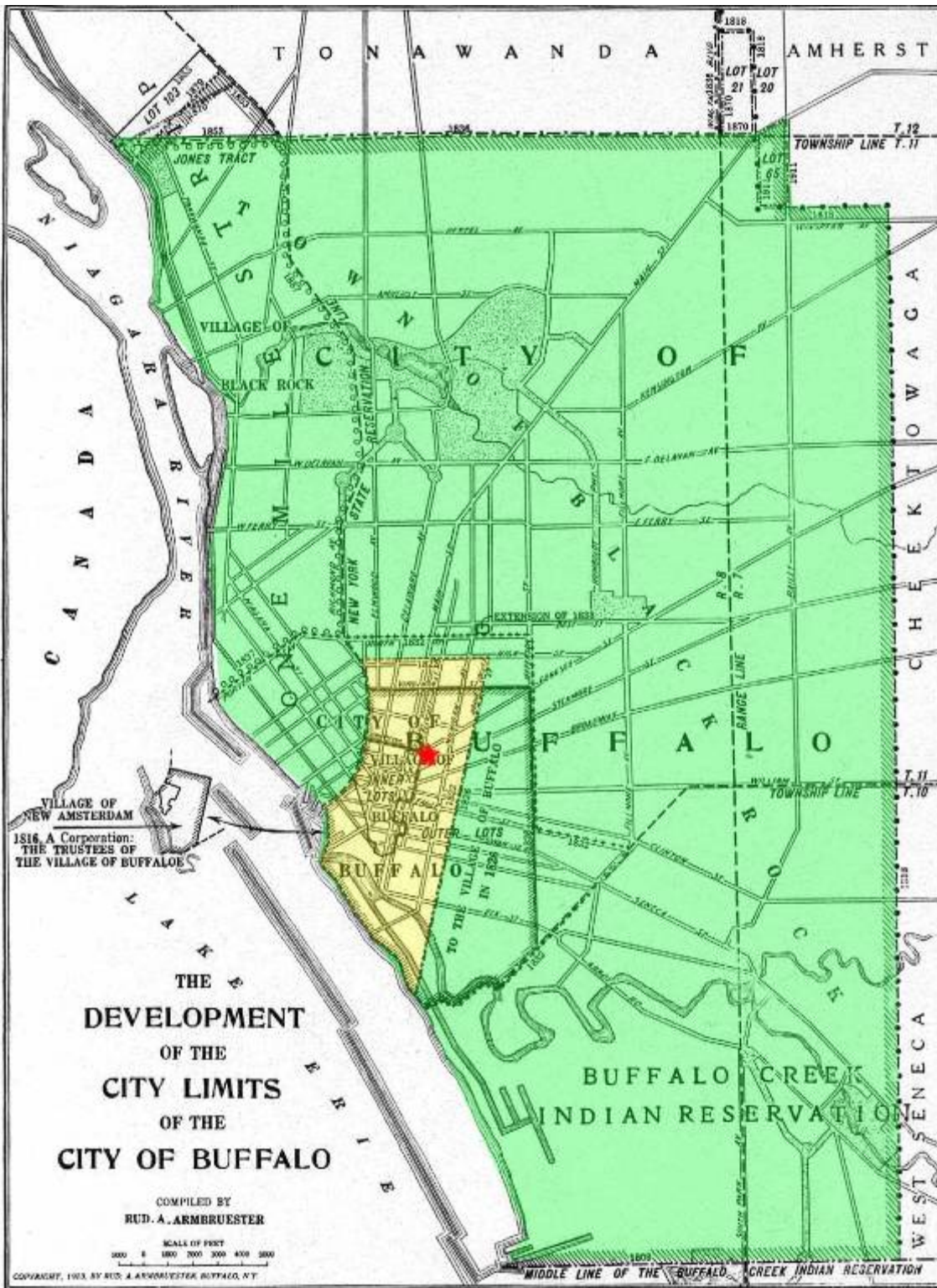
(18) 1828 Map, Village of Buffalo

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



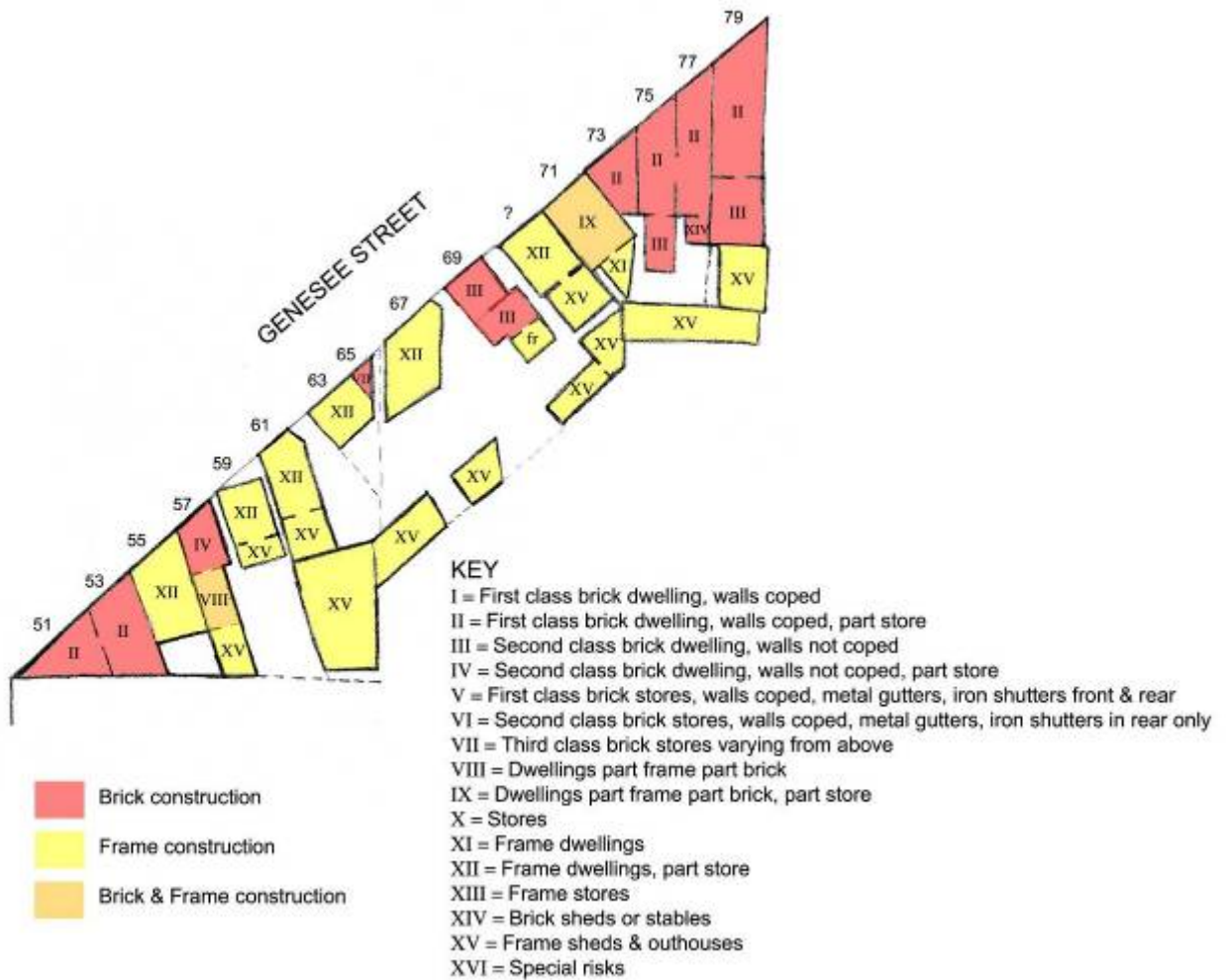
(19) Pocket Map of the City of Buffalo, 1847

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



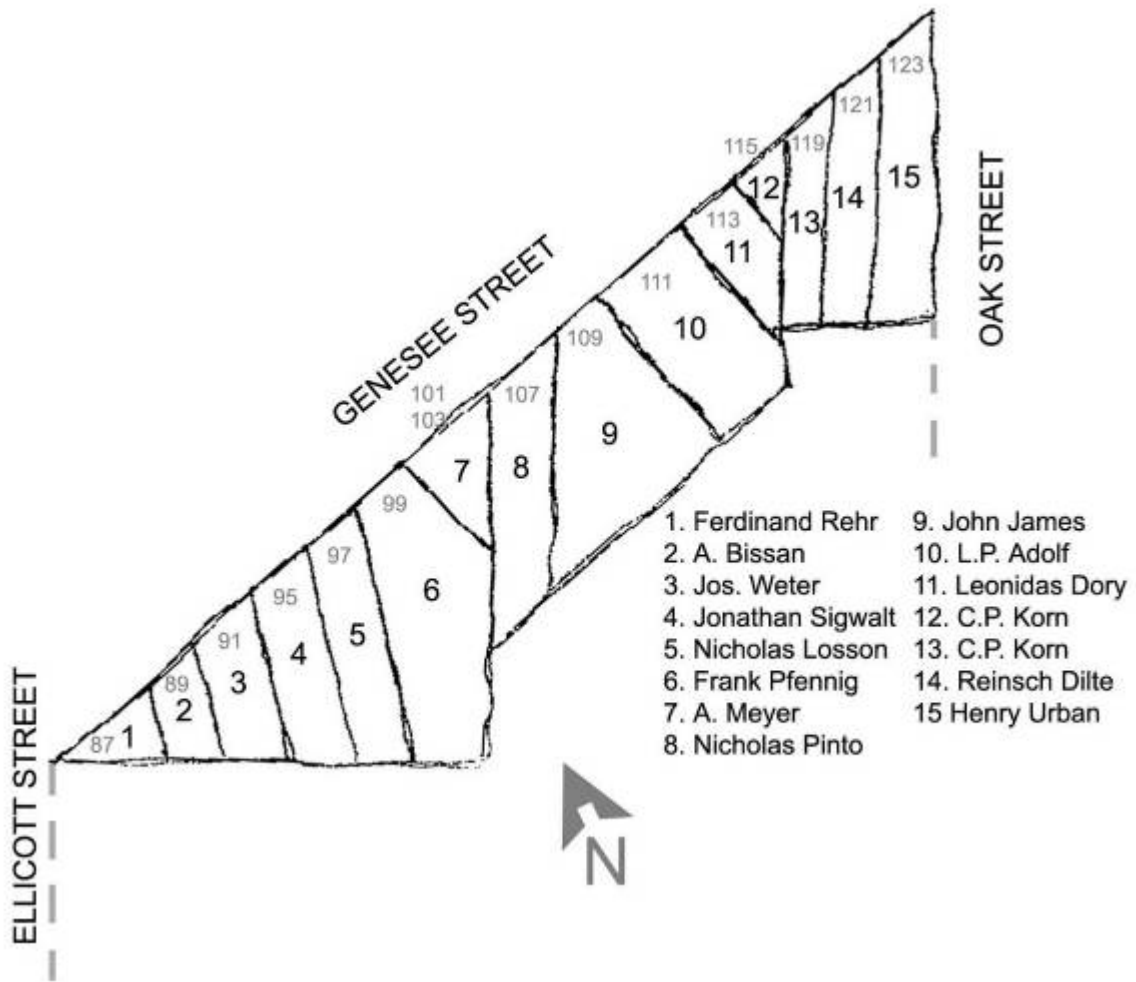
(20) The Development of the City Limits of the City of Buffalo (1923)

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.



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

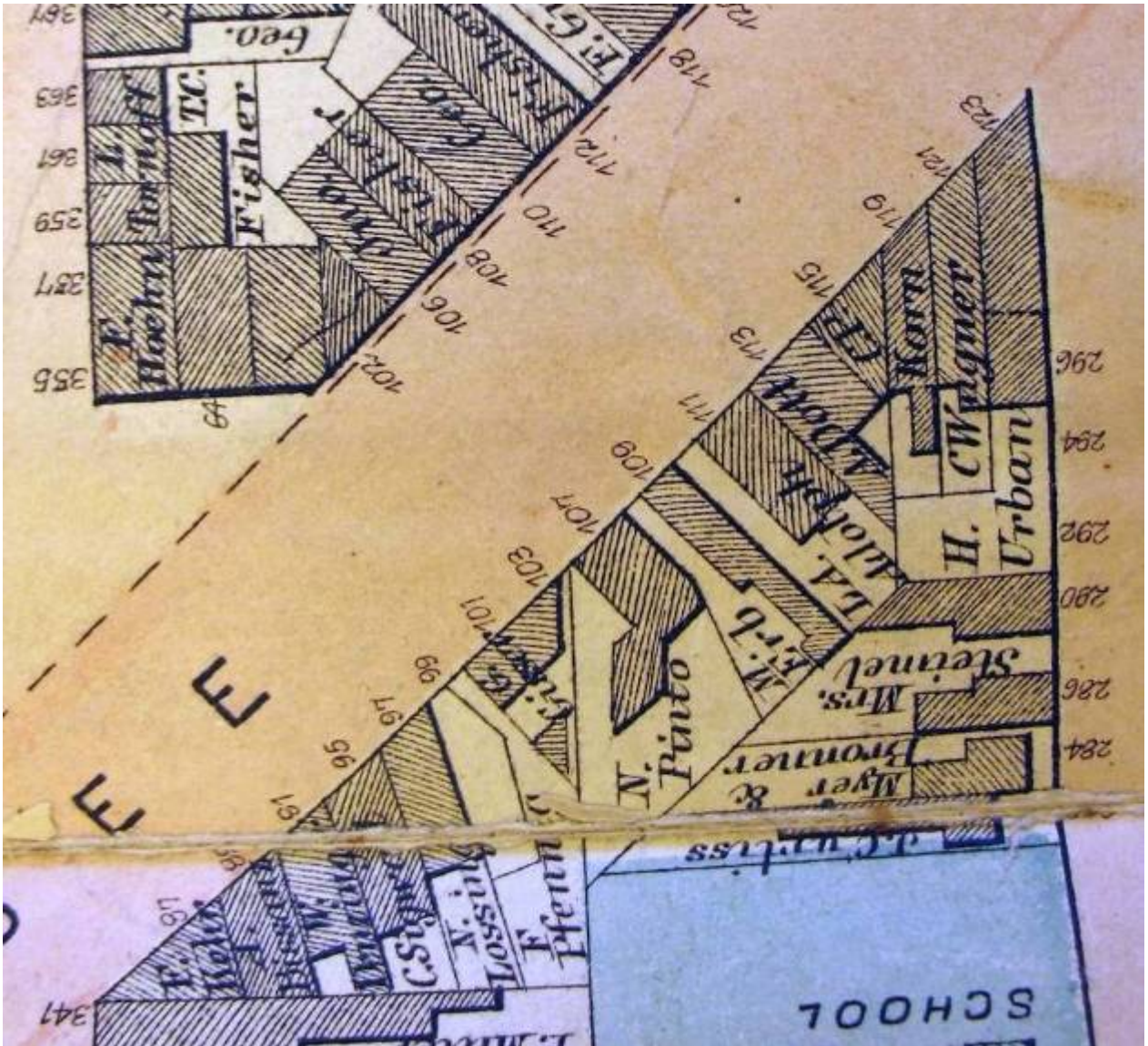
This map represents the earliest record of buildings along Genesee Street. Note that brick construction was used at both corners of the block, but a majority of the building fabric was of frame construction. 99 Genesee Street is approximately labeled as 61 Genesee Street on this map; note the presence of a wood framed house/store at this location which remained until ca. 1915.



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

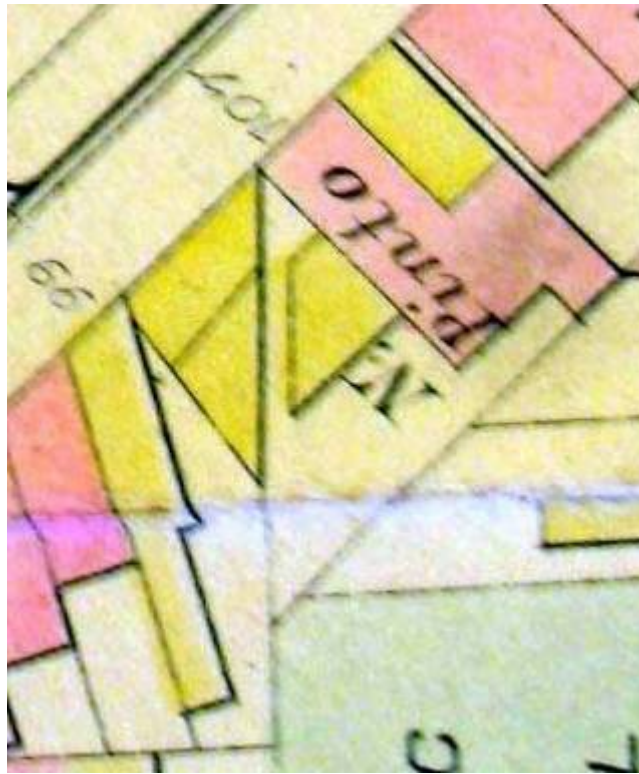
While this map does not indicate buildings or structures which were constructed, it does list the owners of the various Genesee Gateway parcels. Note that the present 99 Genesee Street property (owned by Frank Pfennig) correlates with a portion of the property designated as #6 above. Both parcels 6 and 7 were combined in ownership by Gabriel Giesser in the 1880s and then divided between the buildings at 101-103 and 99 Genesee Street.





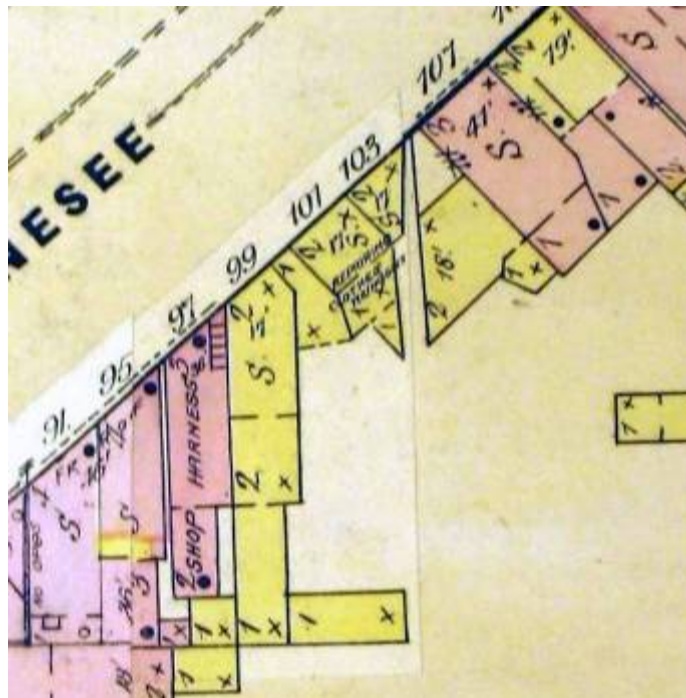
(23) Detail, 1872 City Atlas

In the early 1870s it appears that some sort of small, likely wood-framed building was constructed along the western portion of the property at 99 Genesee, owned by Frank Pfennig. The shape of this building would partially dictate the later forms of the Werner Photography Building at 101-103 Genesee Street (1895) which was constructed around this pre-existing structure. In turn, the angle of the Werner Building would influence the form of the Giesser Building which was constructed to fit into space of this previous 1850s-era building and next to the pre-existing Werner Building.



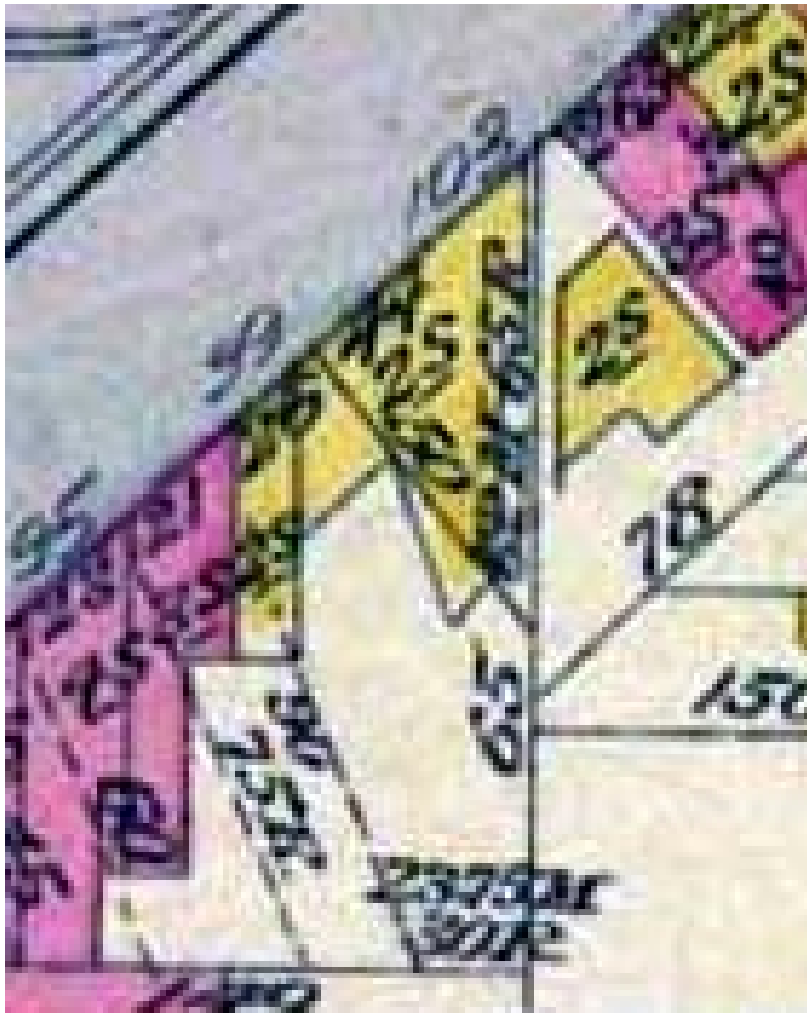
(24) Detail, 1884 City Atlas

Note the existence of a long, narrow wood-framed building at 99 Genesee Street.



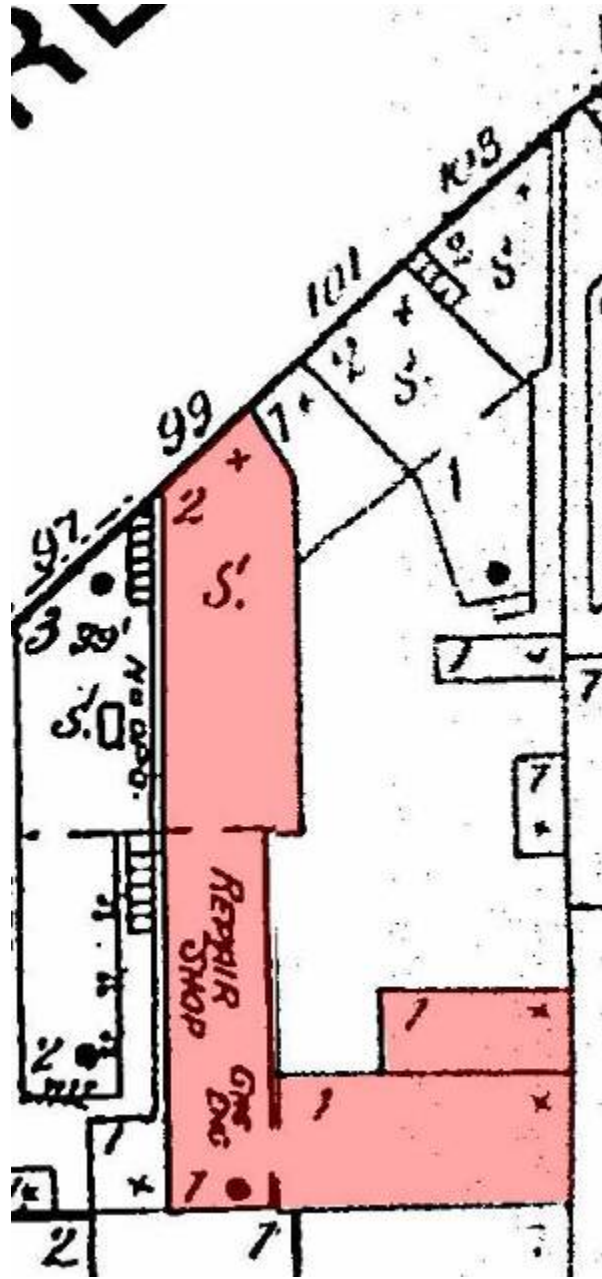
(25) Detail, 1881 updated 1888 Sanborn Map

A better view of the wood-framed building at 99 Genesee Street and its angled north elevation. While buildings appear to be at a more acute angle from Genesee Street (top of image), they were actually closer to perpendicular to the street as seen in the 1872 and 1884 atlases. This error would be corrected, due to additional survey work most likely, in the 1899 maps.



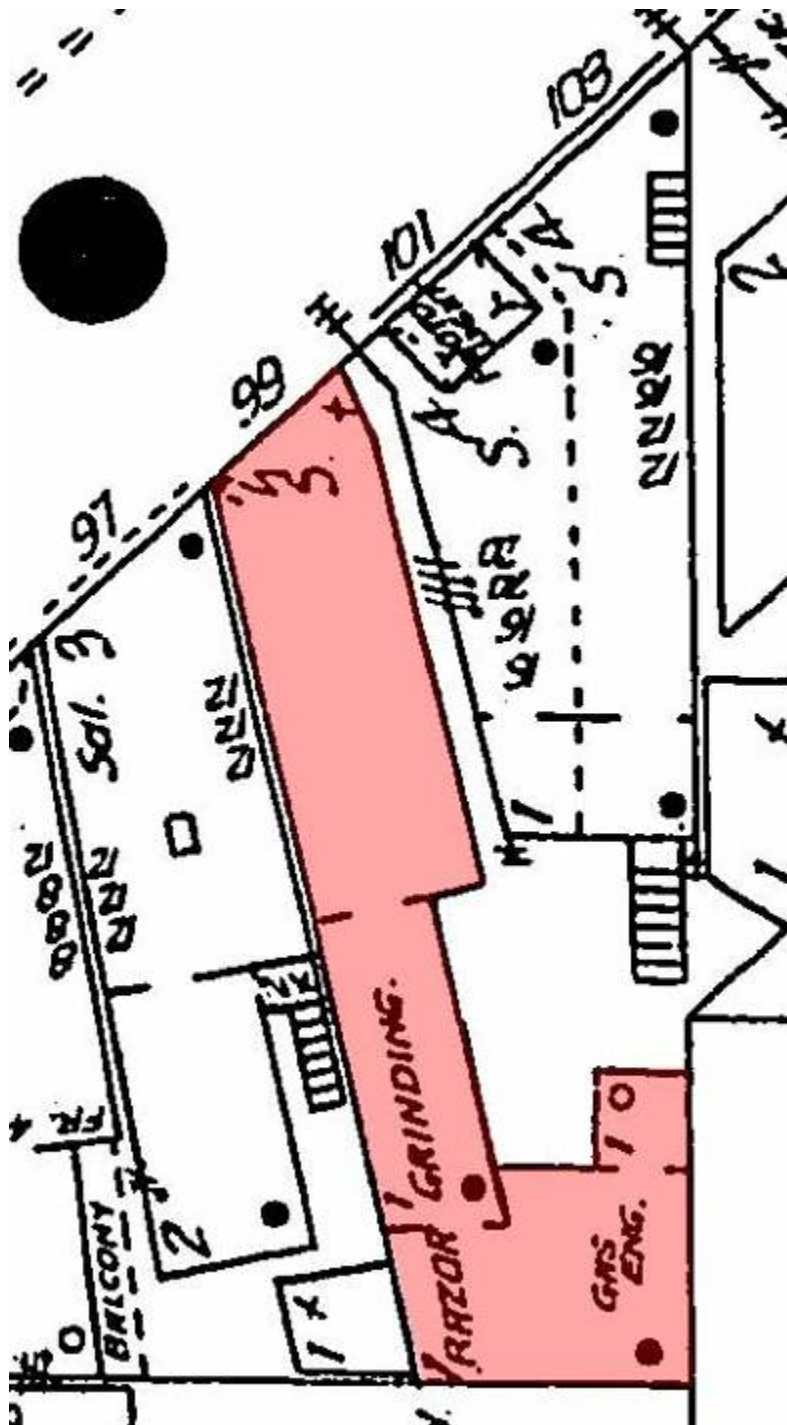
(26) Detail, 1894 City Atlas

The wood-framed building at 99 Genessee Street is rather modest in size, with none of the rear additions present in other maps. Also note the dashed lines which may indicate revisions in property surveying and mapping which were taking place during this period.



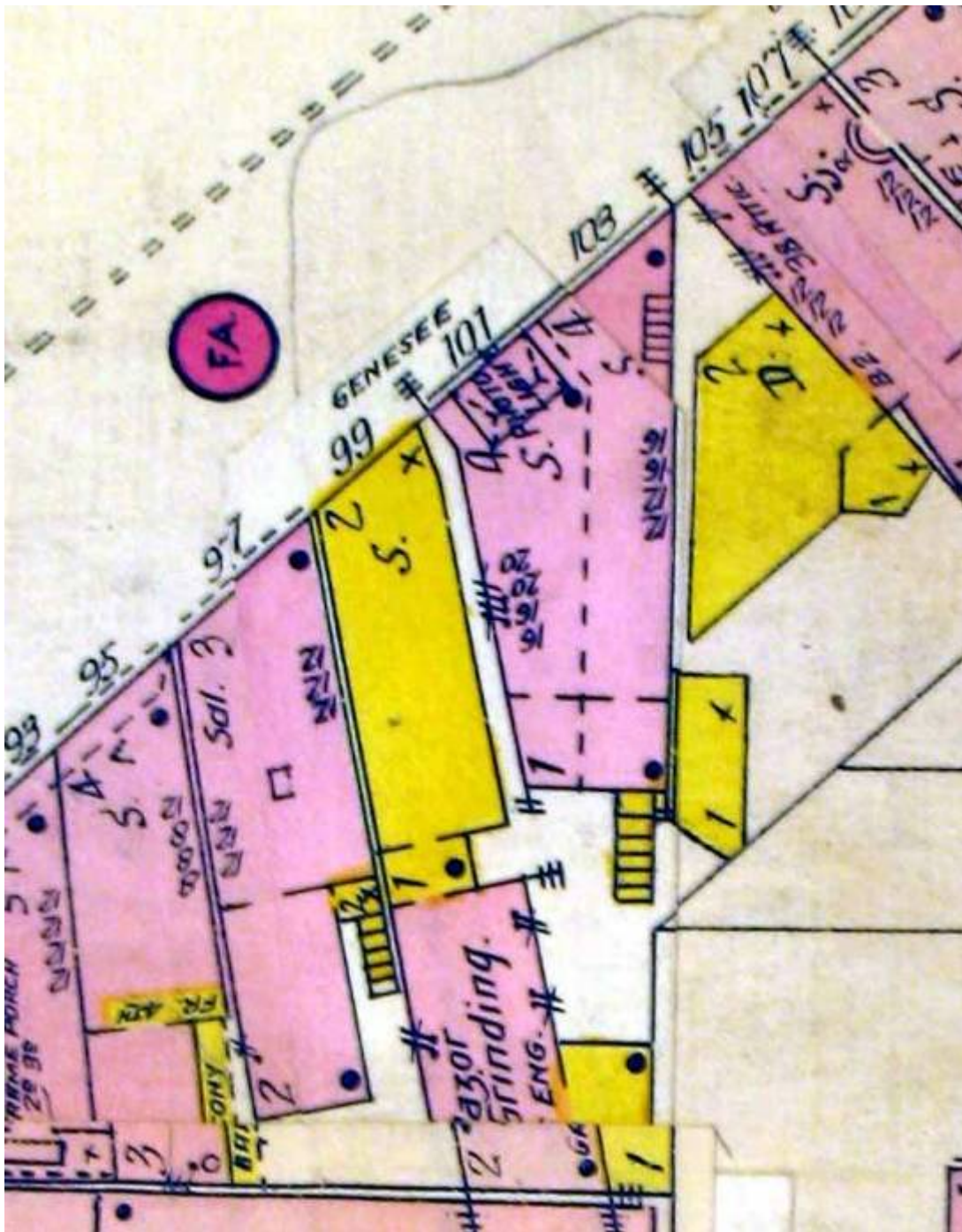
(27) Detail, 1899 Sanborn Map

Note the multiple rear buildings used as "repair shop" for Charles Giesser's cutlery business.



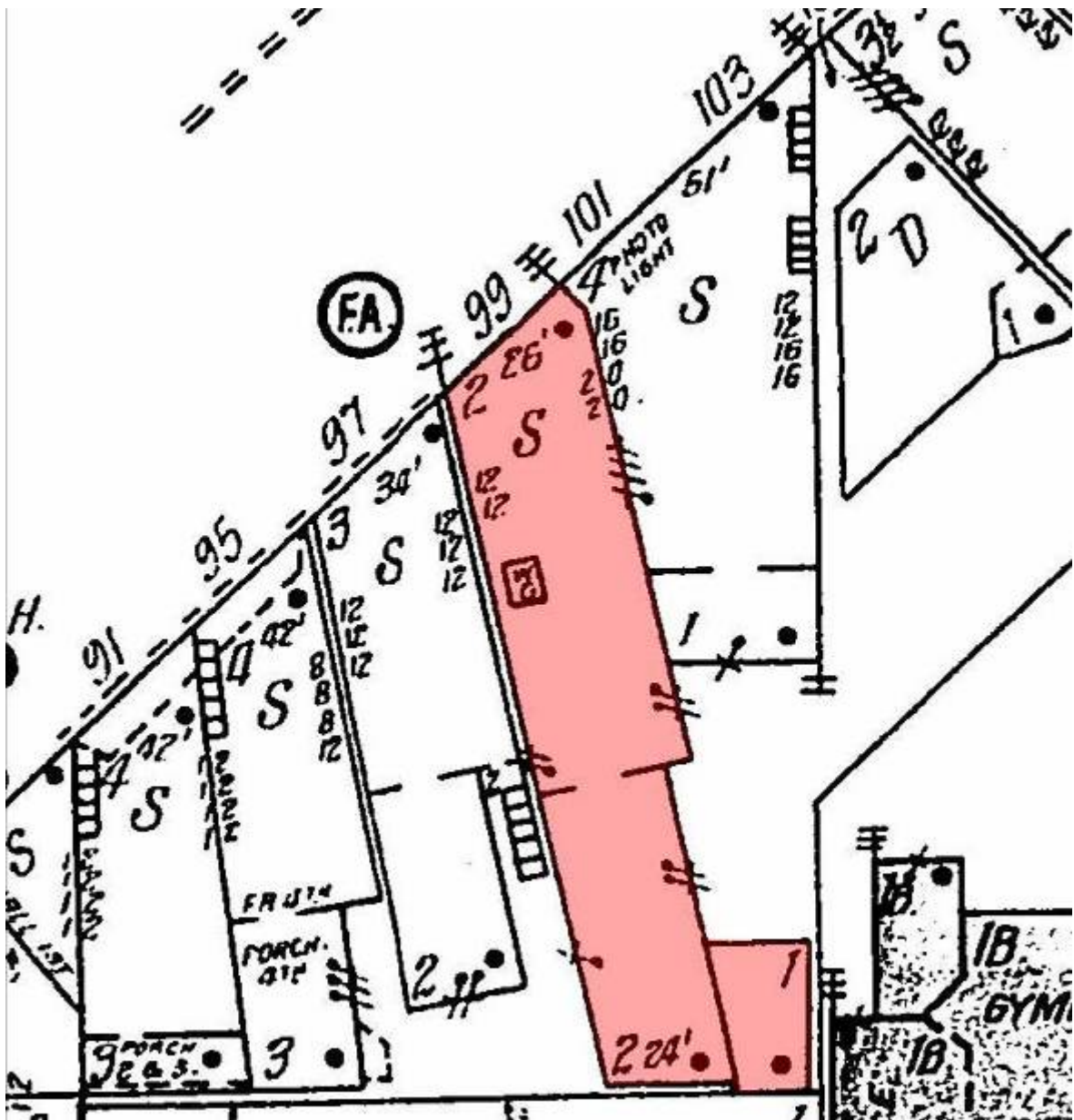
(28) Detail. 1899 Sanborn Map

Note that the essential shape and location of buildings in this area has remained constant, but it appears that the area has been resurveyed and the position of buildings along this portion of Genessee Street has been revised, orienting the buildings closer to perpendicular to the street.



(29) Detail, 1899 Updated to 1916 Sanborn Map

Note that this map indicates the northern building at 99 Genesee Street was still a wood-frame structure, with a new two-story brick rear addition. The Giesser Building, a slightly larger brick building, was perhaps under construction during the update of this map.



(30) Detail, 1925 Sanborn Map

Note that the Giesser Building has been constructed to fit into the space of the previous wood-framed structure, but has been expanded slightly to share a party wall with 101-103 Genesee, maximizing valuable property. The southern two-story brick building, formerly used for "razor grinding" appears to have been preserved and utilized as a rear portion of the new Giesser Building.