

Application for Landmark/Landmark Site

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

Instructions to Applicant:

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

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

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

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

- 1. Address of Site 771 Busti Avenue
- 2. Name of Property (if any) Wilkeson-Storms House

3. Name of Present Owner: Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority
Address 1 Peace Bridge Plaza
Buffalo, NY 14213-2494
Phone 884-1853

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

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

Yes X No

If yes, is owner in favor of landmark designation?

Yes No Unknown X

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

5. Present use of property Residential (vacant)

6. Year of Construction c. 1863

Information Source Buffalo City Directories, atlases

7. Architect Unknown

Information Source N.A.

8. Is property endangered? Yes X No

If yes, explain: Owner has stated intent to demolish and has neglected maintenance for many years.

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

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

11. Name of Applicant City of Buffalo Preservation Board

Organization, (if any)

Address 901 City Hall

City Buffalo Zip 14202

Phone (716) 851-5029

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



Paul McDonnell, Acting Chair, Buffalo Preservation Board
Signature of Applicant

8.13.09
Date

APPENDIX

The Architectural, Historical, and Cultural Significance of 771 Busti Avenue, the Col. Samuel H. Wilkeson House

I. INTRODUCTION

The Col. Samuel H. Wilkeson House, located at 771 Busti Avenue, is a 3-story Tuscan Villa-style structure, built c. 1863, and is part of a row of houses that enfronted the grounds of the former Fort Porter, and later, Frederick Law Olmsted's Front Park.

Built for Charles Storms, a manufacturer of grain elevator buckets, the house is the oldest and one of the most imposing in the Prospect Hill neighborhood. The house is a rare example of the Italianate style in an area that was formerly the Village of Black Rock, and is associated with people and events important to the history and development of Buffalo and the United States.

The house is Buffalo's single physical link to the city's "founding family," the Wilkesons. Col. Samuel H. Wilkeson, who owned the house from 1885 to 1903, was the grandson of Samuel Wilkeson, builder of the city's harbor, early mayor, and judge. Col. Wilkeson was born in 1836, the year the elder Wilkeson was mayor of the fledgling city. Samuel H. Wilkeson, a Civil War hero and later owner and manager of the Wilkeson Elevator, is himself a figure of local and national importance. The house subsequently embodied the aspirations of Italian-Americans, being owned by families that rose to local prominence.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL AND SITE SIGNIFICANCE

The Col. Wilkeson House, 771 Busti Avenue, was built to enfront the green fields of Fort Porter and the head of the Niagara River. The majestic siting was later utilized by Frederick Law Olmsted, who incorporated Fort Porter into Front Park. The park, the river, and Lake Erie were visible through the windows of the house.

The street on which the Wilkeson House is located was originally designated as Lake Avenue and was part of the Village of Black Rock's orthogonal street grid, oriented to the lake. It was renamed Sixth Street in 1865, when Prospect Hill was a place of resort for the burgeoning city of Buffalo, which had absorbed Black Rock and Prospect Hill in 1853.

The city renamed the street Front Avenue in 1884. In 1894, the street was designated a parkway, with authority over its design and reconstruction given to the city's Park Commissioners. The name of Front Avenue was changed again in 1929 to Busti Avenue, after Paul Busti, an Italian national who worked closely with surveyor Joseph Ellicott to lay out Buffalo's street grid in 1803-4. The renaming was consistent with the street's emergence as a residential section for Buffalo's Italian upper middle class in the early 20th century. Anthony Guercio and Alfred J. DeBenedetti owned and lived at the house.

III. ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT/IMPORTANCE

The Col. Samuel Wilkeson House was built circa 1863 (no later than 1864) in the Tuscan Villa style. The Tuscan Villa, and other Italianate styles, as promulgated in the United States by Andrew Jackson Downing and his partner Calvert Vaux, was meant to sit upon the landscape as an adornment, a focal point in a picturesque composition. As it approaches its 150th anniversary, the Wilkeson House stands as an embodiment of the aspirations of Downing for his nation, the builder for himself and his city, and Wilkeson for his legacy.

The house is alone in Prospect Hill as the only one of its type. The siting of the house and its imposing massing has made it a familiar feature on the street, the neighborhood, and the city since it was built. It is one of the city's finest houses of its type.

The house stands with three surviving later houses in a row enfronting Busti Avenue, forming a handsome street wall. Its planar, cubic volume surmounted by a low pitched, hip roof with wide eaves is designed to mark both the land and the social standing of its occupants.

Downing (1815-1852), in perhaps the 19th century's most influential architectural work, *Cottage Residences* (1842, with many subsequent editions), offered the Italianate style as a building type America could call its own: "Indeed, we think a very ingenious architect might produce an American cottage style by carefully studying the capabilities of this mode, so abounding in picturesqueness and so easily executed." Vaux, recruited by Downing to form a design partnership, published *Villas and Cottages* (1857) five years after Downing's death in 1852. In it, he reiterated, in text and illustration, the role of architectural style: "The great charm in the forms of natural landscape lies in its well-balanced irregularity. This is also the secret of success in every picturesque village, and in every picturesque garden, country-house, or cottage." Although its designer is unknown, the Wilkeson House admirably fulfills the prescriptions of Downing and Vaux.

The house consists of a three-story main block with a two-story el stepping back and extending south. A characteristic low-pitched roof with wide eaves surmounts the structure, terminating in the base of a cupola, now missing. The el has a hip roof, the ridge of which meets the rear wall of the main block; the front eaves terminate precisely on axis with the eastern edge of the missing cupola, giving clear views to tower from the full frontage and providing for a "well-balanced irregularity." Even without its crown, the house reigns over its domain in benevolent fashion.

A two-story gable-roofed wing completes the original house, extending from the rear of the main block. This wing typically would have contained the kitchen on the first floor and servants' quarters on the second. The shallow pitch with wide eaves supported by modillion blocks provides a proper Italianate silhouette.

The rear wing has two brick additions, a one-story shed-roofed extension in the rear, and a two-story shed-roofed extension to the northern property line. Neither is tied into the original structure. The eaves of the one-story addition are deteriorated, and the southeast corner has been repaired with reinforced concrete.

The entire structure and additions are of orange-red brick. The brick, laid in running bond with narrow mortar joints, was washed or painted off-white. The house rests on a foundation of quarry-faced limestone blocks with a dressed limestone water table on the

west and south facades.

The house exhibits the balanced composition for which the style is known. The front elevation of the main block is divided into three equal bays, while the front elevation of the el has two bays: each is symmetrical on its own, together, the entry is the center of a five-bay composition.

The main block attic windows, unusually tall for the style, are rectangular with stone sills. The second floor windows are tall, semi-circular arched windows with two-pane sash. The arches are composed of headers which merge seamlessly with Dutch corners. Brick patterns suggest the original first floor windows were identical, but they have been replaced by a single tri-partite window. Indeed, all fenestration retains its integrity save for these windows. Wooden frames with infill panels to accommodate rectilinear aluminum storm windows are set within the molding in front of the north and west facing arched windows. The infill obscures the arched sections of the upper sash from all but the most acute angles. The single south-facing window on the main block is unobscured.

The entry door is flanked by two sidelights and surmounted by a lunette, presently hidden behind a plywood panel. The entry arch is composed of stretchers elegantly merging with Dutch corners. Concrete steps lead to a concrete patio. Uneven weathering indicates a missing full-width covered porch; the brickwork indicates this porch was not tied into the main structure, but was structurally independent.

The main block eaves are supported by scrolled single brackets. They are rather demure and refined compared to those in earlier iterations of the type in Buffalo. The brackets flank the attic windows and mark the corners on the frieze of the main block; elsewhere the brackets are evenly spaced. The frieze and brackets continue on the el.

The side elevations are monumental upright slabs, dead plumb after 150 years. Fenestration is pulled to the rear, which thrusts the front facade powerfully forward. The north side has paired arched windows with stone sills on the first and second floors, the left side with an attic window with stone sill matching those of the front facade. A smaller attic window, added later, is above the right-hand windows; two matched chimneys rise above the roof. The south wall of the main block is pierced by only two windows; an arched second floor window with stone sill aligned with the missing cupola, and an attic window with stone sill aligned with the roof of the el. This window was provided with an exterior metal fire escape, now disused and truncated at the second floor landing. The south wall of the el is similarly a flat plane. Ample light and air to the narrow wing is provided by front and rear windows.

IV. THE STORMS FAMILY.

The house was built no later than 1864 by Charles Storms. Storms was a founder of the firm Storms & Dorer, manufacturers of copper, tin, and sheet iron. The firm specialized in grain elevator buckets. Their elevator bucket manufactory was founded at 22 Lloyd Street, on the Commercial Slip and adjacent to Prime Street in Buffalo's Canal District. The company later moved to larger quarters at 31-33 Lloyd Street.

Important figures in early grain elevator development and engineering, Storms & Dorer patented early elevator bucket designs. A Buffalo Courier article of Sept. 19, 1871,

notes their products prominently displayed at the Manufacturing Building at Buffalo's Second Industrial Exhibition in 1871: "The display was...very large and fine, comprising a great many ingenious, valuable and finely wrought samples of manufacture," including "the collection of malleable iron elevator and clay buckets shown by Storms & Dorer." The Storms, including James, Frank W. and Hiram, lived at 771 Busti Avenue (Sixth Street) until at least 1882.

V. COL. SAMUEL H. WILKESON

Col. Samuel H. Wilkeson called 771 Busti Avenue (then Front Avenue) home from 1885 to 1903. The grandson of Samuel Wilkeson, the "Father of Buffalo," Samuel H. Wilkeson owned perhaps, with Gen. Bidwell, Buffalo's most interesting Civil War narrative. He was also a waterfront businessman of wide repute, being the proprietor of one of the city's earliest grain elevators, the Wilkeson Elevator, built in 1858 (destroyed by fire in 1911), at the foot of Washington Street on the Buffalo River.

The History of the Niagara Frontier summarizes Col. Wilkeson's importance: "Colonel Samuel H. Wilkeson, whose title was won by distinguished service in the Civil War, long occupied a prominent place in business circles of Buffalo by reason of his ability and enterprise, and in his career he manifested the sterling traits of an old and honored family whose representatives were leading actors in events which shaped the early history of this city."

Col. Wilkeson, better known as "Col. Sam," answered Abraham Lincoln's call in May 1861, enlisting as first lieutenant in Company H, 21st New York Volunteer Regiment, at the age of 24. These were the first troops raised at Buffalo to quell the Southern rebellion. Twelve of Samuel Wilkeson's grandchildren, in fact, answered the call and saw action in the Civil War. Two were killed, including Samuel H.'s brother, John Wilkeson, Jr., and his cousin, Bayard.

The Buffalo detachment joined others at Elmira and were mustered into the service. After eight months, he was mustered out with his regiment by order of the war department, but on February 22, 1862, Wilkeson re-enlisted as a captain of Company C, Scott's 900, officially listed as the Eleventh New York Cavalry.

On June 24, 1862, Capt. Wilkeson was promoted to the rank of major and on Dec. 24, for gallant action in several raids and actions at Harper's Ferry, and in the Blue Ridge campaign, he was raised to the rank of lieutenant colonel. It was during that time that he did outpost work at Washington and each day named the officers who would escort President Abraham Lincoln around the city.

Later, on detached duty, the lieutenant colonel was ordered south, serving with distinction in Mississippi, Louisiana and West Tennessee. He acted as the inspector general in the Sweet Potato raid (Davidson's raid) from November 27 to December 13, a daring adventure in the enemy's country.

Another noted raid of the time was the Ripley expedition, which Col. Wilkeson commanded. The Scott's 900 executed a 600-mile jaunt over two weeks, devastating the countryside and crippling Confederate supply lines.

Wilkeson also distinguished himself at Gettysburg, where his command wielded swords to prevent Confederate forces under Gen. Stuart from linking up with Robert E. Lee.

Constant harrying by Col. Wilkeson's command in company with a Michigan regiment of cavalry kept Stuart from turning to Lee's support. In failing to do so, Lee partly accred- its his defeat at Gettysburg.

Raised to the rank of colonel, Wilkeson was in Memphis, Tenn., when peace came. He returned to Buffalo and joined his father John Wilkeson in the management of the Wilkeson Elevator. John Wilkeson occupied the Niagara Square mansion built by Judge Samuel Wilkeson, the family patriarch, in 1822. After the father's death in 1894 Col. Wilkeson succeeded to the business, instituting well-devised plans for the continued expansion and success of the enterprise. He was long an influential figure in the local grain trade. Col. Wilkeson's younger sister, Maria Louise, moved into the niagara Square manse.

The spectacular burning of the Wilkeson Elevator in 1911, several years after its sale by Wilkeson to the Lackawanna Railroad, immediately figured into rebuilding plans for the foot of Main and Washington streets. The Buffalo Express reporting the next day, Aug. 25, "What the flame and water did not do on Wednesday night in the way of bringing down the Wilkeson elevator, a locomotive and cable did yesterday. The ruins still smol- dered and fire engines were pumping water on them last night. The site of the elevator is included in the plans of the Lackawanna for a new station, so the burning may, in a way, figure in a notable improvement in railroad terminals."

In retirement, Col. Wilkeson was an active in the G. A. R. Bidwell-Wilkeson Post, named partly in his honor, the Buffalo Historical Society, and in the charitable work of his church, St. Mary's on the Hill. In 1903, his sister died. Col. Wilkeson moved into the family mansion and resided there until his death in 1915. That manse was ignobly torn down and replaced by a gas station, making the stately house at 771 Busti Avenue the only remaining tangible link to the Wilkeson family in Buffalo.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Col. Samuel Wilkeson House qualifies as a City of Buffalo landmark under the fol- lowing criteria, as numbered in the City Code:

1. The Wilkeson House has interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of the City of Buffalo and the nation.
3. The Wilkeson House exemplifies the historic, architectural, and cultural heritage of Buffalo and the nation.
4. The Wilkeson House is identified with the Charles Storms family and Col. Samuel Wilkeson, who significantly contributed to the development of the City of Buffalo, and with the emergent Italian-American upper-middle class of the 20th century.
5. The Wilkeson House embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Tuscan Villa style, valuable for the study of its period, type, and use of indigenous materials.
7. The Wilkeson House embodies elements of design and detailing that render it archi- tecturally significant.
9. The unique location of the Wilkeson House and the characteristics of Tuscan Villa ar-

chitecture combine to make it an established or familiar visual feature within the city.

SOURCES:

"\$500,000 estate: Will of Miss Maria Louise Wilkeson has been admitted to probate: Much to her brother: He gets life use of most of her estate - His children inherit after his death." Buffalo Commercial Advertiser 6 April 1903.

"A real soldier of fortune, whose record parallels any of the heroes made famous by Richard Harding Davis." Buffalo Times 15 Dec. 1907.

Augspurger, Owen B. "A Buffalo Lawyer Takes Greely's Advice." Paper printed by the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

Buffalo City Directories of 1864, 1865, 1866, 1868, 1873, 1874, 1878, 1879, 1882, 1883, 1886, 1887, 1888; 1889, 1890, 1892, 1897, 1904, 1929, 1940, 1950, 1955, 1960, and 1970

"Buffalo elevator burned." Oswego Daily Times 25 Aug. 1911: 1.

"Col. Wilkeson passes away: Won honors for bravery in Civil War and did much for Buffalo: Result of a fall: Confined to family home in Niagara Square since accident on Dec. 21st: A distinguished family: Buffalo's first harbor built by his grandfather, who made this city a great port." Buffalo Express 13 Jan. 1915.

"Gone before: Death deprives Buffalo of an honored citizen: John Wilkeson's career: Sketch of the life of a man who was for many years closely identified with the life and growth of the city." Buffalo Express 5 Apr. 1894.

"How Samuel Wilkeson built the city: Family were fighters - Fought in Revolution, Civil and World wars." Buffalo Times 5 Dec. 1926.

Miss Wilkeson left estate of over \$500,000: Bulk of her property left to her brother, Samuel Wilkeson, in trust. Buffalo Times April 6, 1903: 10-3.

"Obituary: Samuel Wilkeson." New York Times 3 Dec. 1889.

"Old Wilkeson home being torn down: Recalls early social days of Buffalo: Mansion built in 1822 has stood as monument with Fillmore House to that section's prominence in days of Lang Syne - Plans for future." Buffalo Courier 26 Mar. 1915.

"Still directing attention to the right..." Buffalo Courier 19 Sept. 1871.

Wall, Carl B. "The Wilkeson House stood for race of fighting men, charming women: Great structure built soon after British burned Buffalo by judge who has famous inscription on tombstone." Buffalo Times 8 Jan. 1937.

"What the flame and water did not do..." Buffalo Express 25 Aug. 1911: 1.

"Wilkesons of Buffalo: Sketches of a family that has lived in this city from the earliest days - First of them planned and built the harbor: Old homestead on Niagara Square." Buffalo Express 17 Oct. 1902.

Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences* (New York, 1873). Reprinted as *Victorian Cottage Residences* (New York, 1981).

Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages* (New York, 1864). Reprinted (New York, 1970)

Century Atlas Company, *Atlas of Greater Buffalo*, 1915 (Philadelphia, 1915)

G. M. Hopkins Company, *Atlas of the City of Buffalo*, 1891. (Philadelphia, 1891)

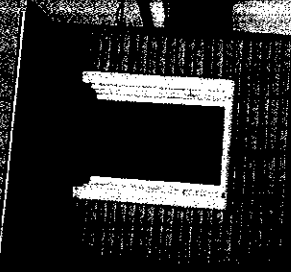
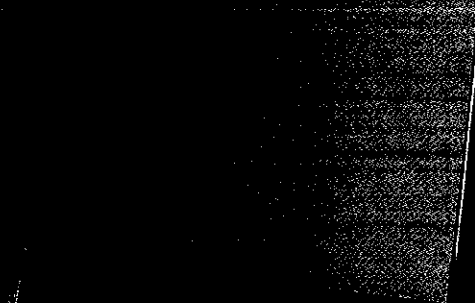
G. M. Hopkins Company, *Atlas of the City of Buffalo*, 1884. (Philadelphia, 1884)

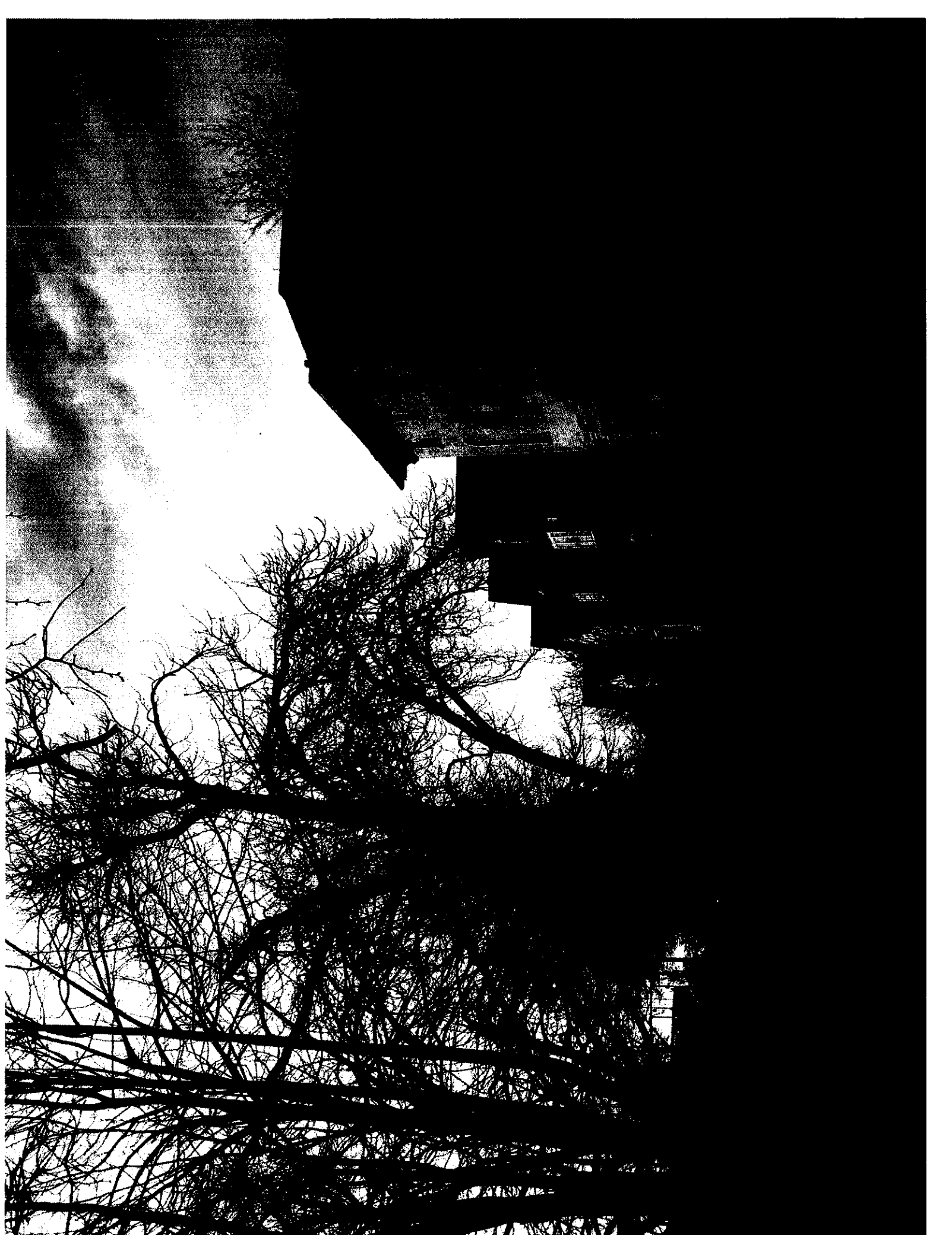
G. M. Hopkins Company, *Atlas of the City of Buffalo*, 1872. (Philadelphia, 1872)



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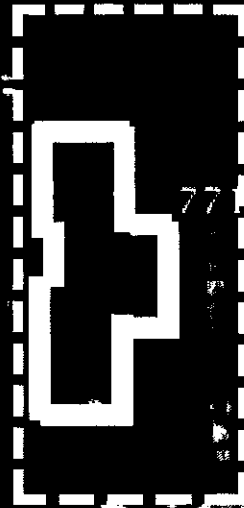




COLUMBUS PKWY. (7TH ST.)

RHODE ISLAND ST.

Rhode Island St



77 Busti Ave, Buffalo, N

BUSTI-AVE.