

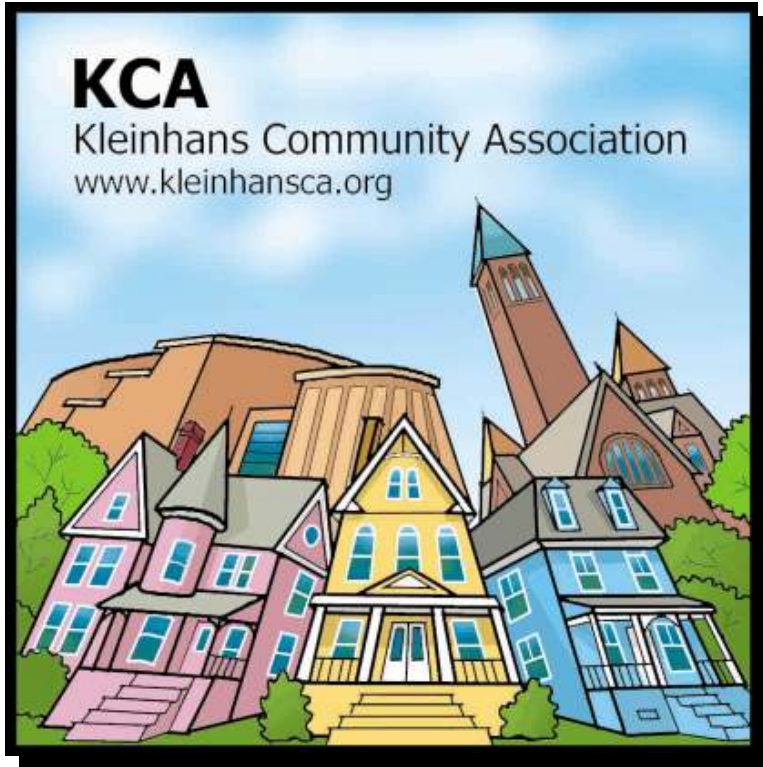
HISTORIC  
PLYMOUTH AVENUE  
IN THE  
KLEINHANS  
NEIGHBORHOOD

*A Survey of the History and Structures  
of Plymouth Avenue  
from Hudson Street to Porter Avenue  
in Buffalo, New York*

**KCA**

Kleinhans Community Association

[www.kleinhansca.org](http://www.kleinhansca.org)



*Logo design by Paul Lachacz.*

# **Historic Plymouth Avenue in the Kleinhans Neighborhood**

## **A Survey of the History and Structures of Plymouth Avenue from Hudson Street to Porter Avenue in Buffalo, New York**

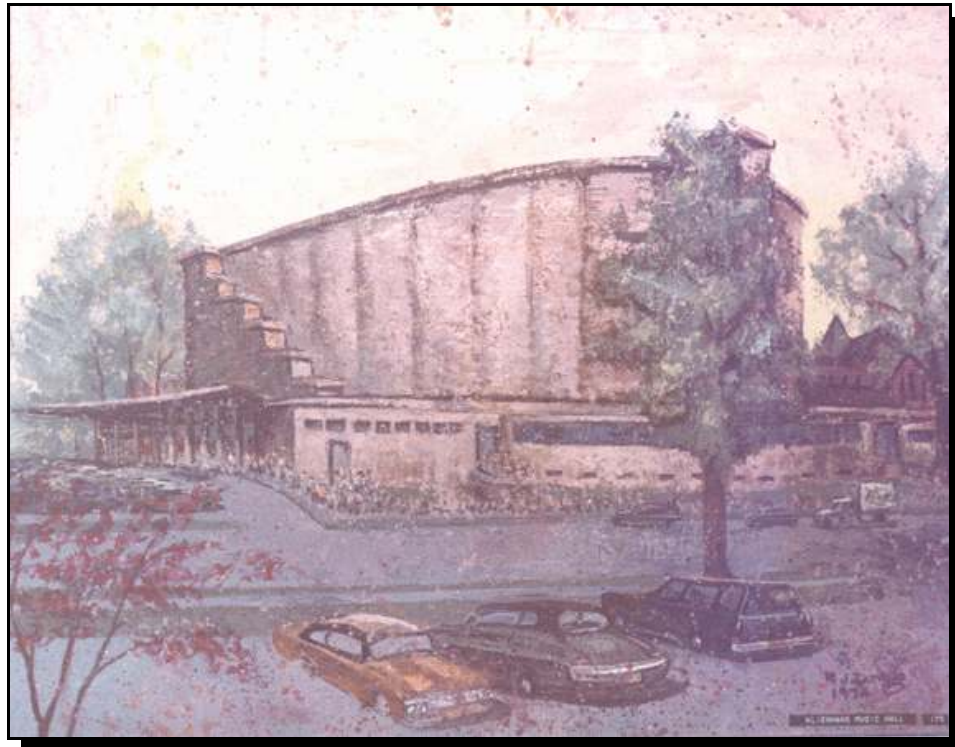
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*The Kleinhans Community Association is the block club that unites the neighborhood around Kleinhans Music Hall in Buffalo, New York. Its mission is to facilitate communication among neighborhood residents and to advocate beautification, crime prevention, home ownership, historic preservation, and other quality of life issues. In addition, members of the Kleinhans Community Association (also known as KCA) work closely with various neighborhood agencies and governmental entities to achieve these goals.*

### Acknowledgments

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**Kleinhans Music Hall as painted in the 1950s by artist Ross J. Drago from the perspective of his home at 101 Plymouth Avenue. Courtesy of Pat Vine.**

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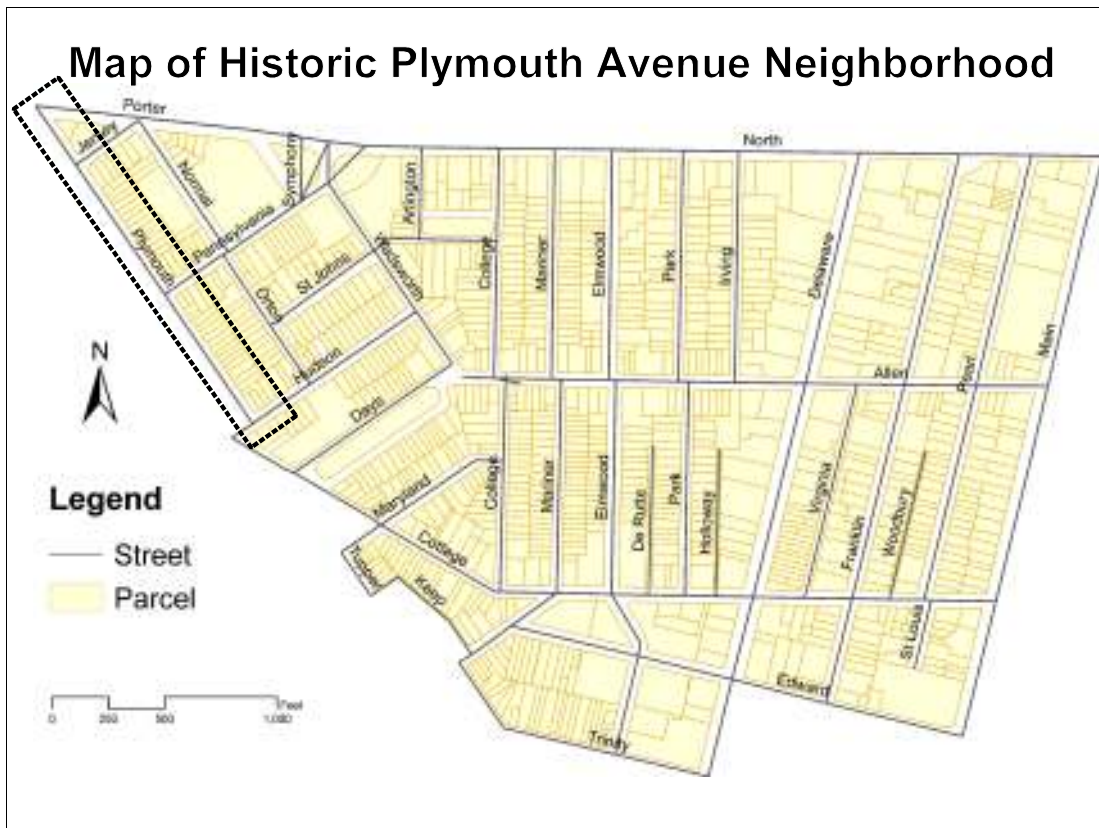
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# HISTORIC PLYMOUTH AVENUE

## *Time Line of Significant Events Affecting Plymouth Avenue Neighborhood*

- 1834 Benjamin Rathbun builds “Sidway Mansion” for Mayor Pierre Barker (circa)  
1837 Plymouth Ave. (Twelfth St.) opens from Hudson St. to Porter Ave. (North St.)  
1843 Sidway family moves into Sidway mansion, Hudson St. at Plymouth Ave. (circa)  
1847 Residents begin to build on corner of Plymouth Ave. and Pennsylvania St.  
1850 Beginnings of Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) Methodist mission, south of Hudson St.  
1855 Father Ketchum’s Church opens on Porter Ave. (North St.) & Normal Ave. (Thirteenth St.)  
1859 Prospect Ave. (Ninth St.) church structure moves to 425 Porter Ave.  
1861 Civil War begins  
1865 Civil War ends  
1868 Jersey St. M. E. Church is built at 310 Jersey St. (site of Firehouse #2) at Plymouth Ave.  
F. L. Olmsted & C. Vaux begin to design Buffalo’s park and parkway system  
Fargo mansion construction begins on Jersey St. between Fargo Ave. and West Ave.  
1869 Jersey St. M. E. Church dedicated  
1871 Normal School opens (site of Grover Cleveland High School)  
Olmsted & Vaux prepares detailed plan for Front Park (foot of Porter Avenue)  
1872 Builder John Cook, Jr. develops east side of first block Plymouth Ave. with homes  
1873 Jersey St. M. E. Church burns to the ground in suspected arson fire  
Plymouth M. E. Church cornerstone laid on triangular lot at Porter, Plymouth, Jersey Sts.  
1874 Symphony Circle is created  
1875 Firehouse #2, 310 Jersey St. at Plymouth Ave., is built on site of former burned church  
1876 Centennial Exposition Philadelphia, PA (Buffalo park system design featured)  
Twelfth Street is renamed Plymouth Avenue  
Circus lot begins to be used on current site of Orton Pl., east of Plymouth Ave. first block  
1877 Plymouth M. E. Church is completed and dedicated  
1878 East side of 2<sup>nd</sup> block of Plymouth Ave. begins to be developed with housing  
1879 Symphony Circle ornate gas lamp is installed in center island  
1880 Crosstown streetcar line opens; street tracks laid on Plymouth Ave.  
1881 William G. Fargo passes away  
1884 St. Johns Place/Orton Place is created from circus lot  
West Ave. streetcar line opens  
1887 Lamphier house is demolished; four homes built on the NE corner of Plymouth Ave. at Hudson St.  
West side of second block of Plymouth Ave. sold for building lots by estate of Wm. G. Fargo  
1889 First Presbyterian Church construction begins  
Plymouth M. E. Church receives major remodeling; parsonage built  
Franklin & Charlotte Sidway build manse at 30 Plymouth Ave.  
1891 Jonathan & Parnell Sidway Mansion is demolished  
1892 Avery Mansion is built on site of current Kleinhans Music Hall  
1897 First Presbyterian Church tower completed  
1900 Fargo Mansion demolished  
1901 Pan-Am Exposition, Buffalo  
1911 Plymouth M. E. Church (1873-1889 built structure) razed  
Extant Plymouth M. E. Church (former) structure construction begins  
1912 Extant Plymouth M. E. Church (former) dedicated  
1913 Extant State Normal School built (present Grover Cleveland High School)  
1920s Kleinhans neighborhood homes begin to be converted to rooming houses  
1927 Peace Bridge opens  
1931 State Normal School (now Buffalo State College) moves to present Elmwood Ave. site  
1934 Mr. & Mrs. Edward L. Kleinhans pass away

- 1938 Avery mansion is demolished  
Symphony Circle inner circle and light standard removed
- 1939 Kleinhans Music Hall construction begins
- 1940 Kleinhans Music Hall completed and dedicated
- 1958 "The Circle" is renamed Symphony Circle
- 1950s Houses are demolished on Normal Ave. for Kleinhans Music Hall parking
- 1968 Plymouth M. E. Church closes
- 1970 Shaw Memorial African M. E. Zion Church occupies Plymouth M. E. Church (former)
- 1978 Allentown neighborhood designated city of Buffalo Historic Preservation District
- 1980 Allentown Historic District listed on National Register of Historic Places
- 1982 Buffalo Olmsted park system, including Porter Avenue & Symphony Circle, on National Register  
Shaw Memorial African M. E. Zion Church closes (former Plymouth M. E. Church)
- 1984 Kleinhans Community Association forms
- 1985 Buffalo Olmsted park & parkway system designated city of Buffalo Preservation District
- 1989 Plymouth M. E. Church (former) designated city of Buffalo Historic Landmark  
Kleinhans Music Hall designated National Historic Landmark
- 1995 David Karpeles purchases Plymouth M. E. Church (former) for museum use
- 1997 Firehouse Engine #2 on Jersey St. at Plymouth Ave. closes
- 1998 Firehouse Engine #2 (former) designated city of Buffalo Historic Landmark
- 1999 Kleinhans neighborhood begins to be included in Annual GardenWalk event
- 2001 Kleinhans Music Hall renovation completed and exterior reflecting pool restored
- 2002 Symphony Circle inner circle and light standard restored
- 2003 11 Plymouth Ave. designated city of Buffalo historic landmark
- 2004 42 Plymouth Avenue restored and dedicated as home of Heart of the City Neighborhoods, Inc.
- 2006 Historic Plymouth Avenue documentation is completed; two long-abandoned houses on the first block of Plymouth Avenue renovation begins
- 2008 Job Hoisington, Buffalo's War of 1812 Hero, commemorated with historic marker at 453 Porter Ave.



## ***Introduction***

The neighborhoods of Buffalo, New York are filled with untold stories hidden in thick wooden planks and old-fashioned arched windows, built into the bricks and mortar of its past. Plymouth Avenue, located on Buffalo's west side at the western edge of the Allentown Historic Preservation District and immediately southwest of the world-renowned Kleinhans Music Hall, has a wealth of stories just waiting to be told. Today, after decades of adaptive changes, many of Plymouth Avenue's existing nineteenth century structures conceal their rich architectural and historical legacy. Yet at dusk, when the setting sun casts its spell, the wide bracketed eaves, oxblood-colored bricks and carefully crafted wooden clapboards of the street's old Victorian buildings proclaim their sturdy and venerable construction amidst the fading light and growing shadows.

Plymouth Avenue contains a mixture of large mansions and small cottages inhabited by people of diverse ethnicity and economy. Its roots go back to the 1830s and 1840s when several Buffalo families initially shaped the street including Buffalo mayors Pierre Barker and William Fargo; prolific Buffalo builder Benjamin Rathbun and the intermarriage of the St. John, Sidway and Spaulding families, among Buffalo's most prominent. Alongside the stories of Buffalo's rich and famous are the equally intriguing stories of Buffalo's ordinary folk.

Plymouth Avenue, within the Kleinhans Community Association's boundaries, is defined by Hudson Street on the south and Porter Avenue on the north. Over its long history, it is a street that has impacted many people; residents of Plymouth Avenue have not only formed the character of a single street, but also have made significant contributions to the entire region. Hundreds of families have been anchored by the street and it has been called home by more than six generations of Western New Yorkers. Each year, thousands of people traverse Plymouth Avenue when they attend events at Kleinhans Music Hall. Thousands more visit the street each summer during the annual GardenWalk and the Allentown Art Festival. Every day, hundreds of people peer out bus windows as they ride down the street, utilizing a heavily traveled public transportation route that has been in continuous operation since the 1880s. For all the people whose lives it has touched, Plymouth Avenue has tales to tell.

## ***History of Plymouth Avenue from Hudson Street to Pennsylvania Street***

The first block of Plymouth Avenue is identified as block 75 (even addresses on west side of the street) and block 74 (odd addresses on east side of the street). One of Buffalo's early neighborhoods to be developed outside of the harbor and canal district, it was a virgin forest until the nineteenth century began. The history of the site can be traced back to 1620 when James the First, King of Great Britain, granted the Plymouth Colony all of New England, including what would become New York State. In 1663, due to decrees by Charles the Second, both the State of New York and Commonwealth of Massachusetts laid claim to the area that is now Western New York.

In 1786 a commission was set up in Hartford, Connecticut and as a result, Massachusetts granted New York State a one-mile strip of land on the eastern bank of the Niagara River stretching from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. The land was reserved to secure travel and for commercial development. Known as the "One Mile Strip" or State Reservation Line, it was exempted from the famous Holland Land Company purchase of Western New York in 1793. Although New York State had rights to the One Mile Strip, it was recognized that it had to be purchased from the Native Americans. In 1802, the New York State legislature authorized the purchase of the land. The portion of the One Mile Strip immediately northwest of Buffalo became the village of Black Rock and its streets were laid out in a grid-like pattern. Streets named for the first fourteen United States were plotted easterly from the Niagara River to the State Reservation Line. Numbered streets, from First Street to Ninth Street, intersected the state streets southeasterly; Tenth through Twentieth Streets were added later to fill out the grid pattern. Plymouth Ave., part of Black Rock, was originally called "Upper Twelfth St.," to distinguish it from "Lower Twelfth St.," (now Tupper St.).

In 1832 the city of Buffalo was incorporated and annexed the southern portion of the village of Black Rock. Both blocks (74 and 75) were sold initially by New York State to Ebenezer Walden, who purchased large tracts of land in the area by 1833. Many of Black Rock's streets were renamed as they became part of Buffalo. One of Black Rock's state streets was called Delaware St., but it was renamed to Hudson St., since Buffalo already had Delaware Avenue. While most of the surrounding neighborhood did not become settled until after the Civil War, the first block of Plymouth Ave. has a special, early history. Plymouth Avenue, 66 feet wide, was laid out by 1836 and the section of the street between Hudson Street and Porter Avenue was opened by 1837.

### **1835-1870 Period**

#### ***Barker and Sidway Families***

The pioneer of the first block of Plymouth Avenue was Mayor Pierre Augustus Barker (1790-1870). In 1834,



Barker hired master builder Benjamin Rathbun (1790-1873) to construct a mansion in the country, and the site chosen was **290 Hudson St.** between Plymouth Ave. and West Avenue. The Barker estate included most of block 75 bounded by Hudson St., Plymouth Ave., Pennsylvania St. and West Ave. Within the block, the estate included all the land to approximately 100 feet south of Pennsylvania St., and all of the land along West Ave. from Hudson St. to Pennsylvania St. The only land on the block that did not belong to Barker's estate was the frontage on Pennsylvania St. and about 316 feet of Plymouth Ave. near Pennsylvania St.

Benjamin Rathbun built Barker a massive brick home that was thought to be originally designed in the Greek Revival style but the modifications made in later years might be described as Italianate. Rathbun was the most prolific of Buffalo's builders during the 1830s. He had constructed a majority of Buffalo's most important buildings of the era, including public buildings such as the Buffalo jail. Yet by the late 1830s, Rathbun was in financial ruin. A scandal arose involving the forging of banknotes from wealthy Buffalonians. Benjamin Rathbun was implicated and sent to Auburn prison for a time. A financial panic seized Buffalo along with the rest of the nation in 1837 and Benjamin Rathbun never regained his prominent financial stature. Of the many buildings he built in Buffalo during the 1830s, very few remain today. One of them is the former Unitarian Church located on the northwest corner of Franklin Street and Eagle Street, presently owned by Erie County and used for government purposes. The building is notable for being the last remaining structure in Buffalo that was visited by President Lincoln.



**Benjamin Rathbun, builder of Barker/Sidway mansion.**

Today it is difficult to fathom the house that Rathbun built for Barker on Hudson Street being in pastoral surroundings, but at the time it was noted that “anyone who went into the country to live as did Pierre A. Barker had horses and carriages, buggies, wagons and sleighs in abundance, and plenty of employees in the house and grounds,” and that the house was a “monument to the energy of Benjamin Rathbun and was erected by him... in 1834.”<sup>1</sup>

About 1836 Barker moved into his new Benjamin Rathbun-built mansion with his wife Annache G. Livingston and their eight children. The next year he became Buffalo's sixth mayor and presided over the city from 1837-1838. Among other notable accomplishments, Barker was one of the men that drafted the city charter in 1832. After Barker's term as mayor, he left soon thereafter for Mississippi, first settling in boomtown Holly Springs. When that city was under siege during the Civil War, Barker moved to Natchez, Mississippi. He died on January 4, 1870 at the home of his son and is buried in Warsaw, Illinois. Mayor Barker is so obscure today that no image of him is known to exist. He is one of the few mayors without an official portrait displayed in the city of Buffalo's mayoral portrait collection. Some of his children remained in Buffalo including his daughter, Eugenia Marie, who married Philander Hodge, one of Buffalo's most prominent citizens. Although Barker's stay at the Hudson Street mansion was brief, it was memorable enough to be recognized by Buffalo socialite Martha Fitch Poole when she recalled the city's finest mansions of the 1830s. Poole said that Barker “entertained munificently” and that the “grounds, which extended far back from Hudson street, were superb, with the many fine trees which surrounded the entire place.”<sup>2</sup> After Barker left **290 Hudson Street**, Jonathan Sidway and his family moved there in 1843 or 1844 and purchased the property from Barker in 1845. The Sidway family lived in the house for many years and it was thereafter known as the “Sidway Mansion.”

#### *A Family Legend*

Jonathan Sidway (4/1/1784 - 1/21/1847) moved to Buffalo with his father, James, early in the nineteenth century and amassed a great fortune with investments in real estate and shipping. Jonathan married Parnell Cornelia St. John (6/6 or 6/12/1801 - 4/22/1879) on January 21, 1826. A few years later in 1832, the same year that the city of Buffalo was incorporated, he built the Sidway business block at Main Street and the Terrace. The Sidway Block is believed to be the first brick block on west Main Street south of Seneca Street.

In addition to real estate holdings, Jonathan Sidway's financial interests included Buffalo's first gas company (of



**1911 Photograph of the Sidway Block.**  
*Buffalonian.com.*



which he was a founder) and the Farmers and Mechanics National Bank in which he served in an executive capacity.

Sidway's wife, Parnell St. John Sidway, was the daughter of Margaret Kinsman Marsh St. John (7/15/1768 - 4/29/1847), a legendary Buffalonian who successfully defended her home against the British invasion of Buffalo during the War of 1812. Her family's house was the only one in Buffalo that was not destroyed in December 1813 during the burning of Buffalo by Mohawk Native Americans from Canada, allies of the British, who were burning and looting properties in the village throughout the siege.

Margaret's courage and tenacity have inspired awe for nearly two centuries. On December 30, 1813, an alarm gun sounded warning that the British invasion had begun and most Buffalonians fled the village for safety. The St. John family planned to leave the village in two trips. Asaph Bemis, husband of Margaret's second eldest daughter Aurelia, would accompany his wife and six of her younger brothers and sisters. Asaph was then to return for Margaret and the other eldest daughters, Maria (b. 3/13/1791) and Sarah (b. 2/27/1797), but Asaph was unable to return.

With the village being destroyed and Asaph not returning, Margaret sought out and appealed to a Native American commander, seeking protection from those who were burning the village of Buffalo. The commander, under the authority of the British General Phineas Riall, granted Margaret's request and posted a dwarf interpreter to guard her small Main Street home, saving it from destruction by fire. Even with the interpreter, Margaret and her two daughters had to ward off constant threats to her home.



**Jonathan Sidway. Used with permission of the family.**



**Parnell St. John-Sidway. Used with permission of the family.**

A large tavern owned and built by the St. John family (lot 53, now **456-466 Main St.**) immediately to the south of their home (lot 54, now **468-476 Main St.**) survived the initial burning on December 30, but was torched and burned to the ground on January 1, 1814 along with the rest of the small village's approximately 100 structures

when the British returned to complete the destruction of Buffalo. Margaret St. John's small house was the only residential structure left standing in Buffalo after those three fateful days in which the village was obliterated. With the exception of the stone walls of the jail, the frame of a barn and David Rees' blacksmith shop, every other structure in Buffalo was burned. About 20 of the villagers who stayed behind were killed or captured.

When Buffalonians began to return to the burned village, Margaret St. John was able to offer many of them food and shelter, thereby preserving many lives from the chill of Buffalo's harsh winter of 1813-1814. For the remainder of the season, many Buffalonians put roofs over their cellars and lived underground to survive the winter. The St. John house that survived the burning of Buffalo was located at **476 Main Street** near Mohawk Street, but was demolished in 1871.

In a period of just over one year, Margaret lost her husband, her two eldest sons, the family's income-producing tavern and all their personal property, even their clothes. While many others in such circumstances would have been lost to despair, Margaret had a family to raise (her youngest son was only three and a half years old at the time) and put aside her personal tragedies. Her courage inspired her entire family to pull together to survive. While the family had nothing but their small dwelling left, the women in the family performed needlework for the villagers who came back to Buffalo and by their industry, the family was once again raised to independence and prosperity. As time went by, the St. John family became increasingly well known despite their setbacks.<sup>3</sup>

Several of Margaret's daughters grew to lead extraordinary lives. For example, Maria St. John married Abram J. Fisk and their daughter, Calista Maria Fisk, married Orson Phelps, a prominent Buffalonian. Maria St. John-Fisk is buried in Buffalo's Forest Lawn cemetery beneath the Phelps family monument created by the famous sculptor, Nicola Cantalamessa-Papotti, in Rome in 1876. The magnificent marble monument, one of the cemetery's finest, comprises four carved allegorical figures: Faith, Hope, Charity and Fortitude. On top, the majestic angel Gabriel, holds a horn.

Sarah St. John, who had stayed with her mother Margaret and fended off the British and the Native Americans during the burning of Buffalo, was by all accounts an exceptional young lady. At just 16 years of age, she was the youngest of the St. John family to endure the three-day ordeal. During that time she had to: put out fires started by the Native Americans; sneak out at night to forage for food (she became quite skilled in her nightly ventures to catch chickens and pigs in the dark); bring water to the house from a well; move the dead body of Mrs. Lovejoy (her Main St. neighbor who was killed during the burning); and even had to face the enemy directly.

Early in the morning of January 1, 1814, the Native Americans returned to Buffalo and broke into the St. John house. In a panic, Sarah ran out of the house with several others who had sought refuge there. A Native American chased Sarah and raised his tomahawk, getting ready to bury it in her skull. Sarah turned around and faced her would-be killer and in a moment of bravery fueled by pure adrenalin, reacted by bursting out with laughter and held out both her hands towards her attacker. Her actions confused and disarmed him. He did not kill her, but instead he shook hands with her, painted her face and motioned for her to return home.<sup>4</sup> Before she could get back inside, Sarah crossed paths with a British officer who asked her why she had her face painted like a Native American and instructed her to wash her face. Sarah protested, concerned that she might be killed if the Native American came back and saw that the face paint he had applied to Sarah was removed. Nonetheless, the British officer ensured that Sarah would be safe, so she removed the face paint. During those three days Sarah displayed extraordinary courage and resourcefulness for any 16-year old!

Sarah might well have faded into obscurity after the burning of Buffalo, but instead she became well-known once again after she became the second wife of Mayor, Judge and builder of the Buffalo harbor, Hon. Samuel Wilkeson. His first wife and mother of Wilkeson's six children, Jane Orem (3/17/1784 - 4/6/1819), passed away and Sarah married Wilkeson, probably soon after Jane's death. Sarah was remembered as a woman of uncommon intellect and character who had a "heart alive to the calls of humanity" and devoted both her time and money to contribute to the relief of Buffalo's poor.<sup>5</sup> Adding to Sarah's already notable achievements, she excavated the first shovelful of earth that was dug to commence the construction of the Erie Canal in Buffalo on August 9, 1823.<sup>6</sup> In 1834, Sarah was interviewed by the famous British philosopher, journalist, political economist, abolitionist and feminist Harriet Martineau (6/12/1802 - 6/27/1876). Martineau was a friend of Charles Darwin and worked for him just prior to her visit to the United States during the summer of 1834. Somehow Sarah and Harriet had connected that summer and Harriet's interview of Sarah was published in Harriet's three-volume work *Retrospect of Western Travel* in 1838. Sadly, Sarah's life was cut short when she died on April 21, 1836.<sup>7</sup> Sarah was so beloved by Buffalonians, however, that her body was buried in the old Franklin Street cemetery, fitting for the Mayor's wife, even though the cemetery had been previously closed to burials due to cholera fears. Although Sarah lived in the famous Wilkeson mansion on Niagara Square built in 1825 (currently the site of city hall), she has a connection with

the Historic Plymouth Avenue neighborhood. Sarah's grandson by marriage, Tellico Johnson, was one of the real estate developers of Orton and St. Johns Places, and lived at 22 Orton Place.

Margaret St. John's other well-known daughter was Parnell. With her husband Jonathan Sidway, Parnell had a total of nine children, but only four of them grew to adulthood: Katharine, Jonathan, Franklin and James (who died tragically while still in his twenties).

The late 1840s were difficult years for the Sidway family. Jonathan Sidway passed away in January 1847, leaving widow Parnell Sidway with young children. Then her mother died in April that same year. In 1849, Parnell's adolescent daughter, also named Parnell, died. Despite the trials found in these significant life changes, Parnell must have loved her Hudson Street home very much because she stayed there more than 35 years until her death in 1879.

After her husband died, Parnell's bachelor brother Le Grand St. John (3/10/1808 - 10/6/1870) moved into the Sidway mansion to help Parnell raise her family. Prior to moving into the Sidway mansion, Le Grand lived with his mother at their home on Seneca Street. Like Parnell, Le Grand remained in the house throughout the remainder of his life and died there. Le Grand was a talented engineer, inventor and artist. He received a patent from New York State in 1851 for a steam heater and, in 1858, received a U.S. patent for an improved propeller for boats, just as the technology was first developing. Le Grand St. John's cinematic drawings of early Buffalo, including images of the War of 1812 (both Le Grand and Parnell were eyewitnesses to the burning of Buffalo), were returned to Buffalo in 2005 and are in the collection of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1850s, normalcy had returned to the Sidway Mansion. According to family memoirs, Parnell was fond of entertaining and the parties on the grounds of the house were famous throughout Buffalo. At one of her parties given in the late 1850s, Parnell had a soda water fountain installed on the grounds, one of the first soda-water fountains ever seen in Buffalo.

The Sidway mansion parties were well remembered by Buffalo's social set. In the twentieth century, Julia Miller-Snow recalled a party held at the home in her youth, "I'd tell you of my first party in the Sidway house on Hudson Street, the old Barker house (quite a grand one), and how I wore a new white frock and blue ribbons, and it being a distance, and the guests small, the carriage was sent for us. After I was grown up, I went to other parties in that house, but, of course, they could not compare with this one."<sup>9</sup>



**Sidway Mansion at 290 Hudson Street, built about 1834 and demolished about 1891. The houses on the east side of Plymouth Avenue can be seen to the right of this photograph. Courtesy of Sidway Family.**

The Sidway mansion stood exactly in the middle of the Hudson Street lot and the grounds were laid out in large circles. There was one directly in front of the house, another between the side door and Plymouth Avenue, and another between the drawing rooms and West Avenue. This last circle was terraced as the ground sloped away from the house in all directions except toward the rear. The trees in the front yard were of various kinds with maples predominating. There were also a great many horse-chestnuts. Originally there were four weeping willow trees in the front yard. In back of the house there were a great many fruit trees.

Inside, the mansion was a center of culture and Parnell's grandson, Frank St. John Sidway, recorded a detailed description of it. On the side of the house towards West Avenue, there were three formal drawing rooms on the ground floor. They were furnished with carved rosewood furniture made by Cutler and upholstered in satin damask. The two end drawing rooms had very elaborately carved white marble mantels and there was a large, gilt mirror over each mantel. The mansion's ceilings were very high, and there were heavy gilt cornices over all of the doors and windows. The walls were covered with expensive paper that had blue cornflowers on a dark red background. The drawing rooms were carpeted with dark red velvet carpets and there was a great deal of handsome plaster work on the walls and ceilings. A large part of the cornice of the room was gilded with gold leaf. The general style of the room was described as French in the period of Louis XV.

On the other side of the main hall was the less formal sitting room. It had a large fireplace with a black marble mantel. There was a cross hall, which ran from the main hall, behind the sitting room. The hall ran across the main part of the house, but the part between the two large drawing rooms was cut off by a glass partition, and formed the middle drawing room. At one time there was an entrance at the end of this hall between the two drawing rooms.

The main staircase of the house began with the junction of the cross hall and the main hall and was in the form of an ellipse. The stairs wound around a little more than half way before they reached the landing on the second floor. The stairs from the second floor to the attic were directly over the stairs from the first floor to the second floor. There was quite a large well-hole running from the roof to the ground floor. Originally there was a skylight over the well-hole, but as the skylight always leaked, Jonathan or Parnell Sidway built a cupola on the top of the house, leaving the skylight in place.

The dining-room was in the wing on the side of the house toward Plymouth Avenue. There was a glass enclosed piazza in front of it called the conservatory, although the Sidways never used it for plants.

The mansion was filled with beautiful art. Thomas LeClear (1818-1882), the famous portrait artist, is believed to have painted portraits of Jonathan and Parnell Sidway in the 1840s which hung in the mansion for many years and are still in the possession of the Sidway family. Years later, shortly after the death of James Sidway in 1865, Franklin Sidway and his wife Charlotte Spaulding commissioned LeClear to paint a portrait now known as "Interior with Portraits" of siblings Parnell (4/29/1836 - 12/9/1849) and James, both whom were deceased at the time the painting was commissioned. LeClear's



**A Sidway Mansion drawing room.**  
*Picture Book of Earlier Buffalo.*

The mansion's side door also faced Plymouth Avenue.



**"Interior with Portraits," T. LeClear, c. 1865. A portrait of Parnell and James Sidway, the painting hung in the Sidway mansion for many years.**



last studio in Buffalo was at 8 Erie Street at the corner of Main Street in which he worked from 1858-1863, after which time he moved to New York City.

While the portraits of parents Parnell and Jonathan remain in the family's private collection, the Portrait Collection of the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. now owns LeClear's "Interior with Portraits." Although the painting hung in the various Sidway homes through the years, it can now be viewed by the public. "Interior with Portraits" is very famous because of the way LeClear showed how the technology of photography was challenging painting as an art. After daguerreotypes were introduced in 1839, the technology competed with traditional painting that had been practiced for thousands of years. James Sidway, the boy in the painting, had just died before the painting was commissioned, yet he was about 20 years older than the small child that LeClear depicted. His sister Parnell, also shown in the painting, had died when she was thirteen years old, more than fifteen years before the picture was made. James, the little boy in the picture, looks definitely dead, even stuffed.

LeClear may have used a daguerreotype of Parnell and James for accuracy. If so, he must have known he was entering a highly charged arena of controversy. Painters everywhere were threatened by the new technology. They vowed never to use photos as aids. Instead, they were celebrating the very special qualities that made paintings so superior. LeClear obviously decided he would engage the issue. The photographer shown in the painting is portrayed from the rear with his face concealed. Landscape painting is used merely a background foil for photography. This must have been a rude jibe at all the heroic Hudson River and western landscapes that were dominating the public exhibition rooms when "Interior with Portraits" was painted. An old patriarch in an altar-like frame presides disapprovingly over the scene. All the paraphernalia of the professional artist is arrayed in the studio, which was in a famous artists' building, the 51 West Tenth Street Studio Building in New York City, although some historians believe that the background may have been influenced by LeClear's last Buffalo-based studio at 8 Erie Street.<sup>10</sup> In either case, an ideal bust, animal sculptures, prints and copies after the old masters show that those that artists who used to inhabit the space were students of the ancient triumphs, like the Borghese gladiator and the Venus de Milo, but all things old must now make way for an insolent photographer who has only learned to manipulate machines and chemicals. This marvelous and well-loved painting hung in the Sidway mansion for many years.<sup>11</sup>



Sidway mansion barn, 32 Plymouth Ave., built circa 1845. *Illustration by Don Mayer.*



In the back of the Sidway mansion was built a large brick barn. The barn, which still stands, was built in stages and the back section appears to be its oldest part. The fingerprints of the brick's makers are still visible on their surface. According to Sidway family oral history, the barn was inhabited by a cow given by Mrs. Margaret St. John to provide milk for the family. This seems to indicate that the barn was built between 1843-1846 or earlier and may have been enlarged several times. It is certainly the last remaining structure extant in Buffalo associated with Parnell St. John-Sidway and Jonathan Sidway.



**Sidway barn “carriage vaults” on west side of barn, where carriages were stored. John Gulick.**

*Impact of Streetcars on Area Development*

The first street railway was opened in Buffalo in 1834, on Niagara Street from downtown to Ferry St. However, it was not until 1860 that permanent metal tracks were laid down on Main Street and Niagara Street and the two primary lines were operated.

In 1880 streetcar tracks were laid on Plymouth Avenue, for it was that year that the Buffalo Street Railroad Company with its horse-driven streetcars expanded in the Allentown neighborhood. The tracks on Plymouth Avenue were part of a line opened in 1880 that connected Niagara Street to Main Street. The new cross-town streetcar line started at Niagara and Connecticut Streets. The track proceeded up Connecticut Street to 14<sup>th</sup> Street, then down 14<sup>th</sup> Street to Pennsylvania Street, then up Pennsylvania Street to Wadsworth Street to Allen Street, then up Allen Street to Elmwood Avenue, then down Elmwood Avenue to Virginia Street and from Virginia Street to Main Street.

On the return, the crosstown line ran from Virginia and Main Streets, down Vir-



**On Niagara Street at the intersection of Main Street, a horse-drawn streetcar leaves downtown and heads to Plymouth Avenue. Above the window is a sign that reads “Niagara, Carolina, York, 14<sup>th</sup> & School.” At the bottom, a sign says “Plymouth Avenue & Hudson Street.” The last horse-drawn streetcar was seen in Buffalo in 1894; they were replaced with electric cars. BECHS Collection.**