

BLACK ROCK HISTORIC PHOTO PROJECT

The catalyst for this project was generated by a lack of photographic historical documentation of Black Rock's vitality at the Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society library or the Central Library downtown. The importance of Black Rock as the earliest settled section of the city of Buffalo and its significance in the War of 1812 prompted a necessity to create an archive to preserve the area's historic past.

In 2004 a 'call for old photos' was printed in our local paper and an exhibition of what we felt were important photos that reflected the life and activity of the area was held. This spurred many viewers to submit their own personal photo collections of the area. We subsequently have scanned photos and photographed artifacts brought to us by past and present residents and business owners and religious and financial institutions. Images include peoples, businesses, factories, architecture, firemen, police, scenes along the Erie Canal, churches, schools, etc.

In order to generate and stimulate more interest a set of five postcards were produced in 2009. That same year we collaborated with the Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society and a slide presentation was held there on June 20th to coincide with our 12th annual Rediscover Amherst Street Festival. Our neighborhood historian and photographer presented a PowerPoint show and discussion of the historic photos we had collected. Their presentation was so well received that they were invited back to repeat it for students of Buffalo State College. That was held on October 19, 2009.

On March 14, 2010 another presentation was held for the general public at BECHS. The event was so well attended that approximately 60 people had to be turned away due to museum limitations. This was unprecedented as they had to close the doors. We were then invited back to do another presentation. This took place on May 23, 2010 to another packed audience. These presentations generated much audience interaction and inspired more people to open their hearts and collections. Because of the amazing interest and excitement, new stories have been told and a video documentary is in the works. We have so far videotaped eleven people relating their memories and experiences.

The project was featured in Buffalo Spree resulting in an influx of new photos and another exhibition had to be held. The project team has been invited to appear on three television programs this year and speak to a photographic group.

Photos from the project's archive have assisted in County projects (2008), city projects (2009) and the NYS Scajaquada Creek Summit (2010) and are currently on display at Wegmans supermarket. The committee has also consulted other groups so they can begin documenting their neighborhoods.

In November of 2010 BECHS bestowed the project with their prestigious Niederlander award for outstanding programming by a local heritage organization. A future exhibition at BECHS is in the works for 2012 which will become part of their permanent collection. Presently the project consists of approximately 1800 images that have been submitted by close to one hundred individuals. The committee is presently working on a comprehensive pictorial history of Black Rock. The project has spurred revitalization efforts in the Black Rock area and has generated great civic pride.