

When Business Was Booming

Commercial Main Street: 1900s - 1970s

In the late 1800s, powerful commercial activity that dominated Main Street to the south reached into the fashionable residential area of the 600 and 700 blocks. The generation of early residents who built the great homes passed away and their descendants chose to reside elsewhere in the city. For a time some of the mansions became upscale boarding houses, but around 1900 this portion of Main Street would be reinvented as a retail, dining and entertainment center - the character it has retained for over a century.

Multi-story commercial buildings replaced mansions and manicured lawns, and shops offered everything from daily necessities to high-end luxury goods. Customers purchased jewelry at the Dickinson Building (620 Main) and furniture at the Laurens & Enos Co. (621-623 Main) and Select Furniture at the corner of Main and Chippewa Streets. The internationally famous Wurlitzer Company (674-676 Main) sold fine musical instruments including pianos, organs and jukeboxes.

Throughout much of the 20th century, the area thrived as a bustling center for shopping and entertainment. However, by the 1970s, the golden era of downtown retailing and commerce had largely faded. By then, many retailers had been forced to close their doors or relocate to the prosperous suburbs. Most of the theaters that had generated so much vitality also took final bows.

The area would rise again, inspired, in large measure, by the community effort to save Shea's Buffalo Theatre, the City-sponsored Entertainment District Plan of 1978 and the establishment of the Theatre Historic Preservation District in the early 1980s.

For much more information scan the QR Code to the right or go to www.buffaloplace.com/history/theatre#businessbooming

Check the QR Site for more details!



WURLITZER

SERVICE INSTRUCTIONS PARIS GALALOC MODEL 7013

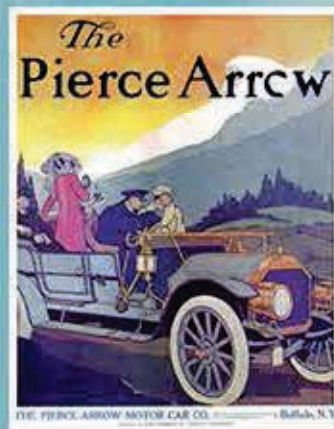
LAUREN & ENOS CO. FURNITURE

POPPEBERG MOTOR CAR CO.

On The Move

The District responded to evolving transportation modes from pedestrians and carriages in the 1800s, to bicycles and streetcars around the turn of the century, to automobiles and busses in the 20th century. Customers could buy bicycles from George Poppenberg in the Otto Building (636-644 Main) or an Indian motorcycle from Neal, Clark & Neal Co. (643-645 Main.) The latest model automobiles were on display at Roe Automobile Company (634 Main), John A. Carmer Company (602 Main), William P. Eigner Company (649 Main), and the Ripper Motor Carriage Company (616 Main.)

Buffalo's most prominent automobile dealer was the Pierce Arrow Motor Car Company with its showroom at 752-756 Main Street. The tie to transportation was further tightened when the W. S. Arrasmith designed, Art Moderne style Greyhound Bus Depot (672 Main) was completed in 1941.



Model of Pierce Arrow Motor Car Co. (674-676 Main) sold fine musical instruments including pianos, organs and jukeboxes.

Get Your Pills, Tonics, And Elixirs!

The intrepid Dr. Ray Vaughan Pierce established a medical office and medicine manufacturing company in 1867 to make "Doctor Pierce's Favorite Prescription" out of a building dubbed "the World's Dispensary" at 664 Washington Street. After his elaborate Pierce's Palace Hotel and Hospital on Porter Avenue burned in 1881, he built the Invalids' Hotel and Surgical Institute (663 Main). Billed as "the largest, most complete establishment of its kind..." patients flocked to the hospital from all over North America seeking relief from a wide array of ailments. Rumor has it that even the outlaw Sundance Kid was treated there. His two sons continued the business after Pierce's death in 1914; in 1921, their Pierce Realty Company constructed the Pierce Building on the site of the former family home at 653 Main Street. The company closed



Dr. Ray Vaughan Pierce, Courtesy of Buffalo History Museum.



Postcard Image

in the 1930s and the 2-story commercial building is the only lasting legacy of the once world-famous medical empire.

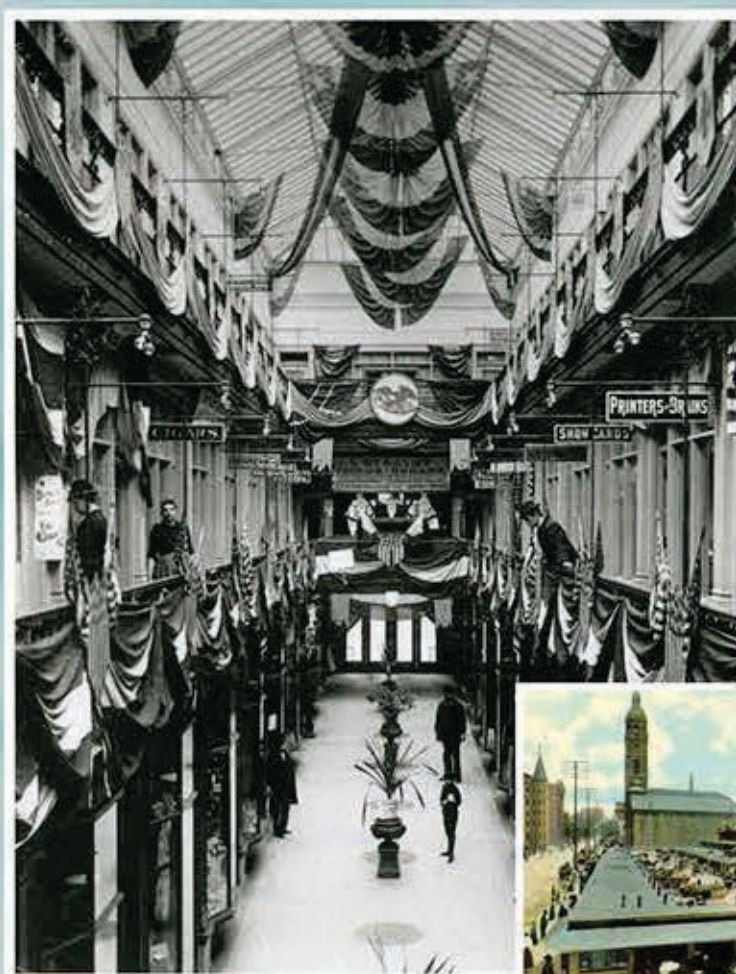


Pierce Building, Courtesy of Buffalo History Museum.

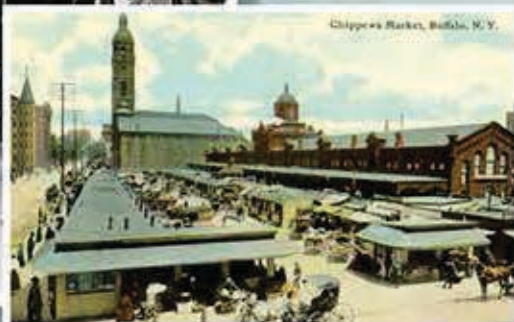
Making Business Connections

Designed by prominent local architects E. B. Green and William Wicks, the 1892 Market Arcade is Buffalo's original shopping mall.

Originally known as the Palace Arcade, the elegant Neoclassical building, with dual facades with large arches and terra cotta buffalo heads, was designed to house numerous small shops and offices and connects two of the city's busiest shopping areas: Main Street and the nearby Washington Market. When the Washington Market closed in the 1960s and pedestrian traffic declined on Main Street, the Arcade steadily lost tenants and closed in the 1970s. Then in 1979, the City of Buffalo stepped in to rehabilitate the structure, which re-opened in 1995. Today, the Market Arcade houses a mix of shops, offices, cultural and business tenants, much as it did in the late 1800s.



Market Arcade interior, 1892. Courtesy of Buffalo History Museum.



Post Card Image of the Washington Market, St. Michael's Church in the background.



View from Chippewa and Elliott Streets, February 6, 1965. The Washington Market was sold at auction by the City of Buffalo following operating losses, to Buffalo Savings Bank for use as parking, a drive up teller window, and future development potential. SUNY Buffalo State Archives & Special Collections, Courier Express Collection

The Joint Was Jumpin'

Main Street wasn't all business. Opened in December 1945 by Harry Altman and Harry Wallens, the Town Casino (681 Main) instantly became one of the nation's leading nightclubs. Heralding itself as "the largest nightclub between Chicago and New York City," the Town Casino offered floor shows with emcees, dinner, dancing, and big-name entertainers such as Sammy Davis, Jr., Milton Berle, Dorothy Dandridge, Perry Como, and Frank Sinatra. The club attracted notable jazz musicians and its mythology even contends that gangster Al Capone once owned a piece of the action.

Portrait of Frank Sinatra, 1947. William P. Gottlieb Collection, Library of Congress, with assistance of Jerry's Photo Lab & Studio.



The Town Casino continued as a premier hot spot until the early 1960s when it finally closed its doors. From 1964 to 1978, the converted building was the first home to Buffalo's regional professional theater company Studio Arena Theatre. It then served a number of years as an artistic outlet for the University at Buffalo Department of Theatre and Dance. In 2005, it reclaimed some of its original style by opening as downtown's most active concert venue, the Town Ballroom.



Town Casino, Courtesy of Buffalo History Museum.



Town Casino, 1954. Courtesy of Buffalo History Museum.

Light The Lights

In addition to shopping and dining on Main Street, the 600 and 700 blocks emerged as an entertainment center. This area featured the impressive Buffalo Music Hall at Main and Edward Streets which later became the Teck Theater. Built as a "cathedral" of entertainment by theater mogul Michael Shea, Shea's Buffalo Theater (now Shea's Performing Arts Center) is Buffalo's grand surviving theater. The 600 block was also home to the Cinema Theater movie house (645 Main), and the 3,000 seat Great Lakes Theater (renamed Paramount Theater) built by William Fox (612 Main) in 1927.

Dining With The Swells

This area boasted several popular restaurants during the 20th century including the Como Restaurant (675 Main), Mac-Doel's Restaurant (600 Main), The Rotisserie Restaurant (635 Main) and Laube's Old Spain (660 Main) which attracted such celebrities as Bob Hope, the Marx Brothers, Milton Berle, and Mary Pickford. None of those longstanding restaurants have survived, but they have been replaced by a number of fine modern eateries.



Background: Postcard Image