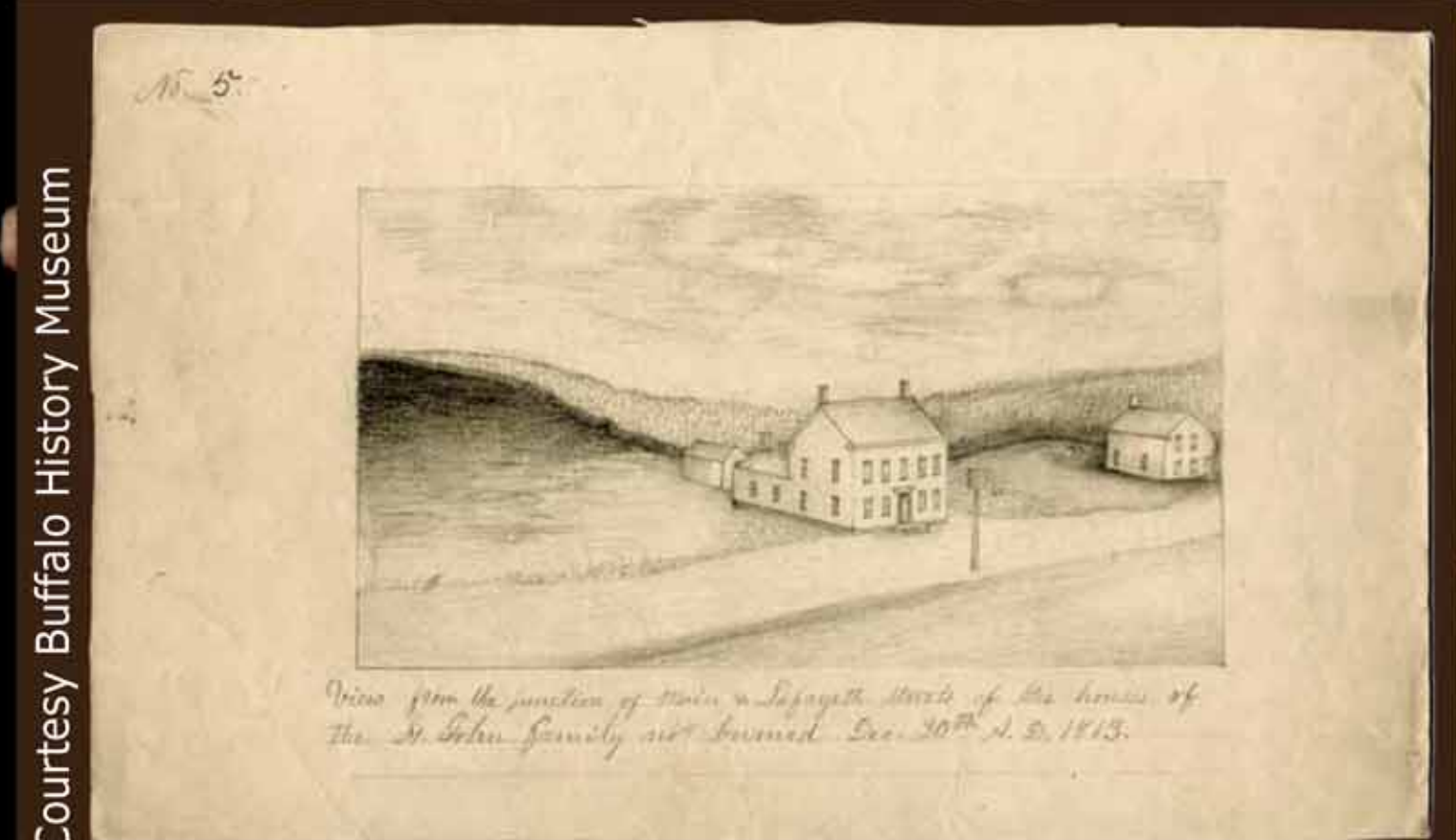
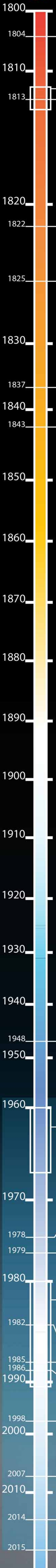


SURVIVING CRISIS

The Burning of Buffalo



Courtesy Buffalo History Museum

New York Militia Brigadier General George McClure ended his unfortunate command of the Niagara area by burning the village of Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake) on December 10th, 1813, turning 400 unprepared residents out into the snow. The incensed British soon retaliated, first at Fort Niagara, then Lewiston, the neighboring Tuscarora village and the villages near Niagara Falls. After command was transferred to Major General Amos Hall, McClure left for Batavia with much of the ammunition and most of the experienced troops. On December 29th, the British attacked the village of Black Rock. The 2,000 raw militiamen held out for a few hours, but saw little hope and began to flee to warn their families.



Courtesy Buffalo History Museum

Home and tavern constructed by Gamliel and Margaret St. John, as drawn by their son, LeGrand St. John, from his childhood memories of the burning of Buffalo. The St. Johns moved from a Williamsville farm in 1810 to Lot 53 in the village of Buffalo, now the middle of the west side of Main Street between Court and Mohawk Streets. Gamliel and son Elijah drowned June 6, 1813 while ferrying supplies to American troops stationed across the Niagara River, leaving Margaret to raise the nine surviving children alone.



Burning of Newark Video
Canisius College Video Institute



General McClure Biography Video
Canisius College Video Institute



Local militiamen Seth Grosvenor and Cyrenius Chapin at Main and Niagara Streets unsuccessfully attempting to halt the British advance on Buffalo.

Fleeing villagers at the Lake Erie shore, south of Buffalo, with piles of baggage left behind as they lightened their loads to cross over the lake ice.



After New Year's Day, the villagers began to return to the destroyed village, finding only the St. John home, stone jail, and Rees Blacksmith Shop still standing. All that remained of the other buildings were chimneys reaching out of stone basements. Having no other option, many spent the rest of the cold winter living in their basements, with only temporary roofs to keep out the weather. With the spring, however, a new Buffalo began to emerge as rebuilding commenced, encouraged by entrepreneurs like Seth Grosvenor - setting the stage for future opportunities including development of the Erie Canal a few years later.



Burning of Buffalo Video
Canisius College Video Institute

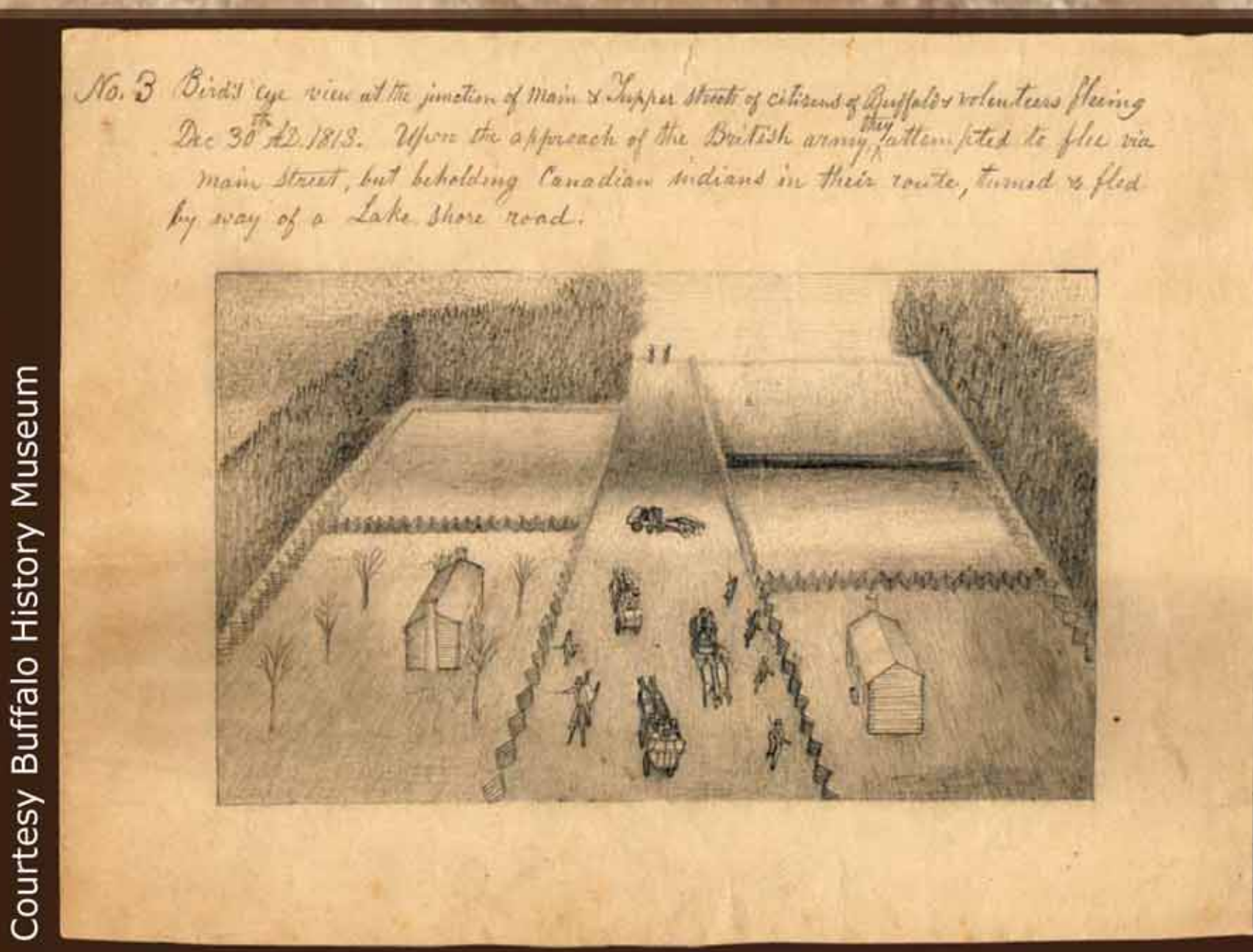


Margaret St. John
Courtesy Buffalo History Museum

After hearing fighting through the night, people gathered their possessions on December 30th and ran for their lives.

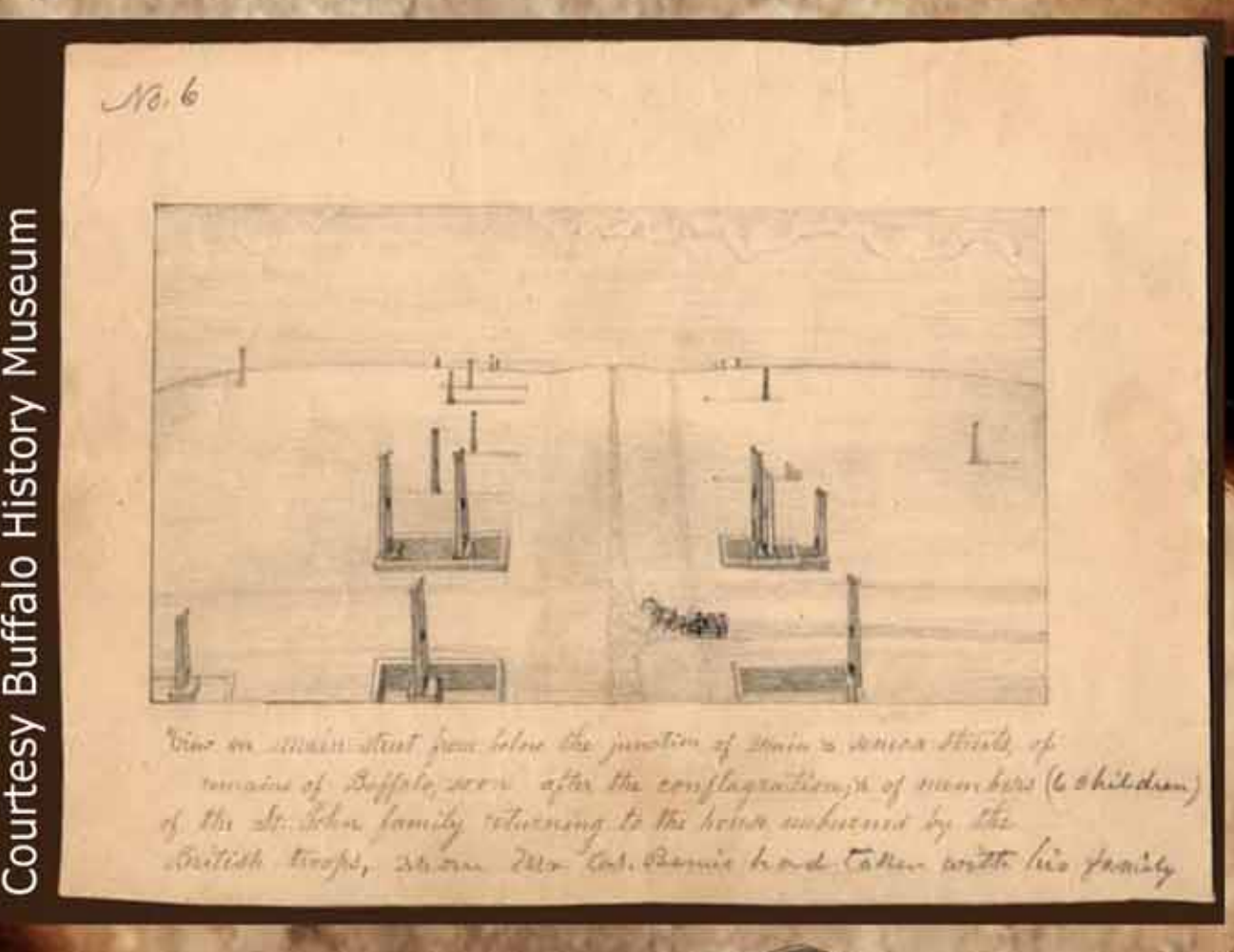


Lieutenant Colonel Chapin Biography Video
Canisius College Video Institute



Courtesy Buffalo History Museum

LeGrand St. John illustrated his brother-in-law Asaph Bemis's wild ride out of Buffalo. Bemis and wife Aurelia, LeGrand's oldest sister, packed their wagon with six St. John siblings. Heading north towards Williamsville, they left Margaret St. John and two daughters for a second trip. Native warriors came out of the woods at Main and Tupper, so Bemis turned the wagon and rushed past the St. John house, yelling to Margaret that he would take the Lake Shore Road and be back soon to get them.



Courtesy Buffalo History Museum

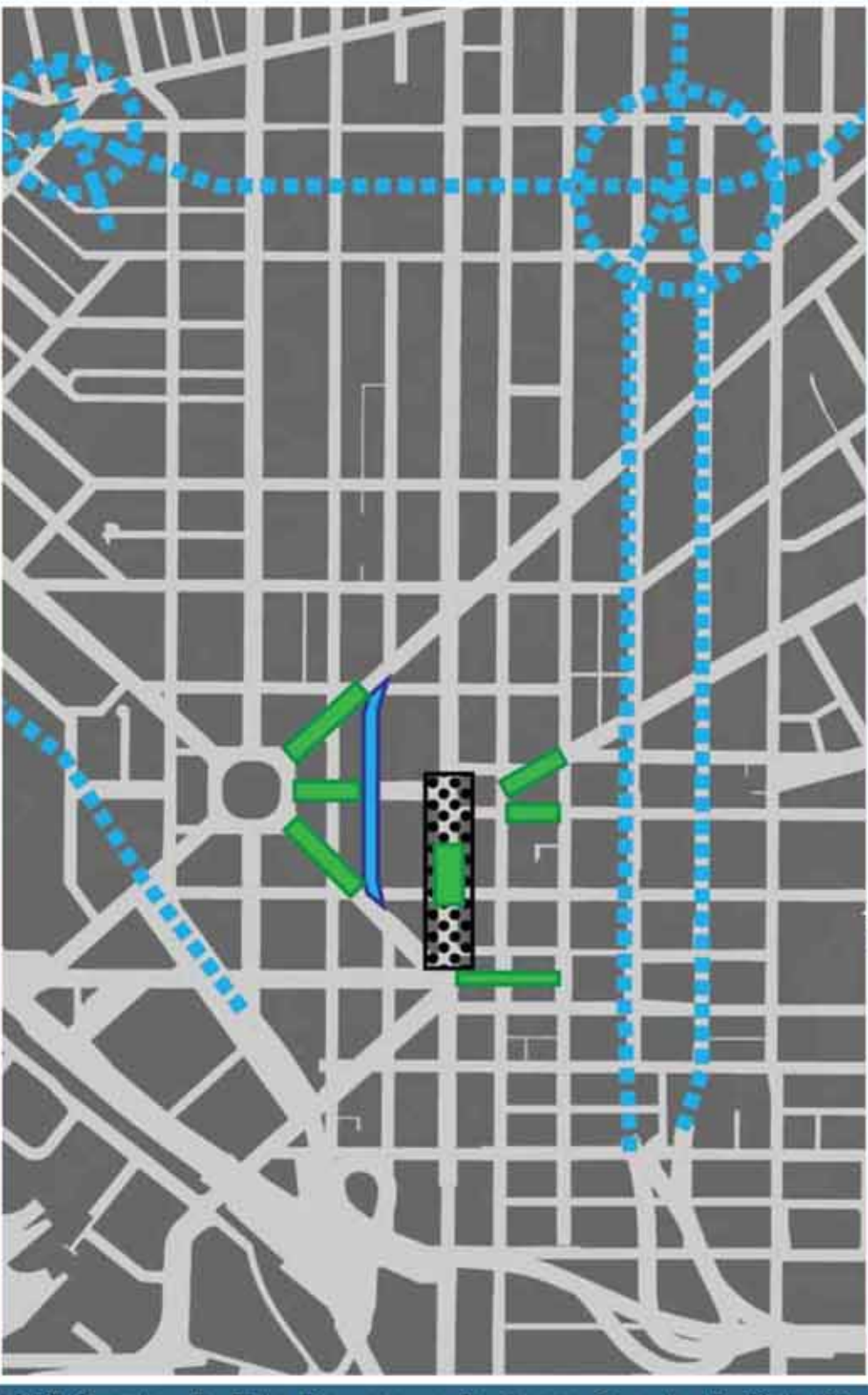
SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

Buffalo was booming in the post-WWI period. The population hit 500,000 in 1930 and increased to 580,132 at the 1950 peak. As WWII veterans returned home to start careers and families, Buffalo's growth began to wane and suburban development took off. Downtown leaders noticed the downturn and called for action to save the downtown core. In 1958 the Greater Buffalo Business Core Sub-Committee of the Buffalo City Planning

Commission released a report documenting "several well known facts":

- "the trend...toward the suburbs is draining the life blood of the city..."
- "the suburbs with its shopping plazas are creating a dire threat to the highest real estate values within the city, namely the downtown business and shopping area".

The City and the business community, represented by the Greater Buffalo Development Foundation (GBDF), launched several planning efforts over the next decades to recommend solutions they thought would improve shopping and office opportunities



1958-61
Remake Downtown in the style of a shopping plaza.

- An expressway loop
- Parking facilities in perimeter areas
- Multi-block development parcels
- Auto-free pedestrian zones



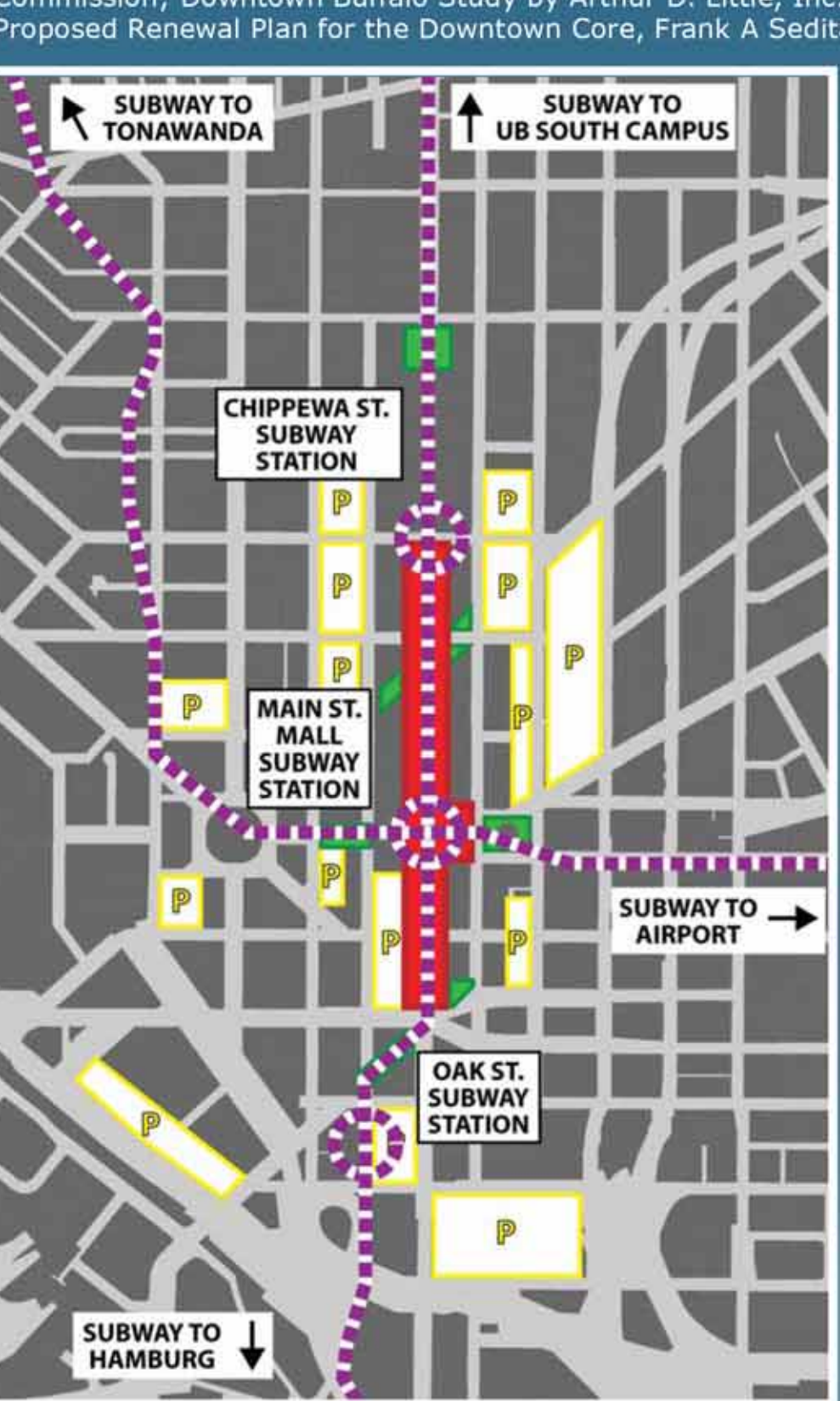
1960-71
New Neighborhood

Following the previous year's call to action, the City, County, State, GBDF, and private businesses cooperated to acquire properties, and create multi-block development parcels. Over this decade the Church to Court Streets section of downtown was completely recreated. Priorities then turned to the shabbiness and vacancy on the north side of downtown.



1966
Downtown North plan

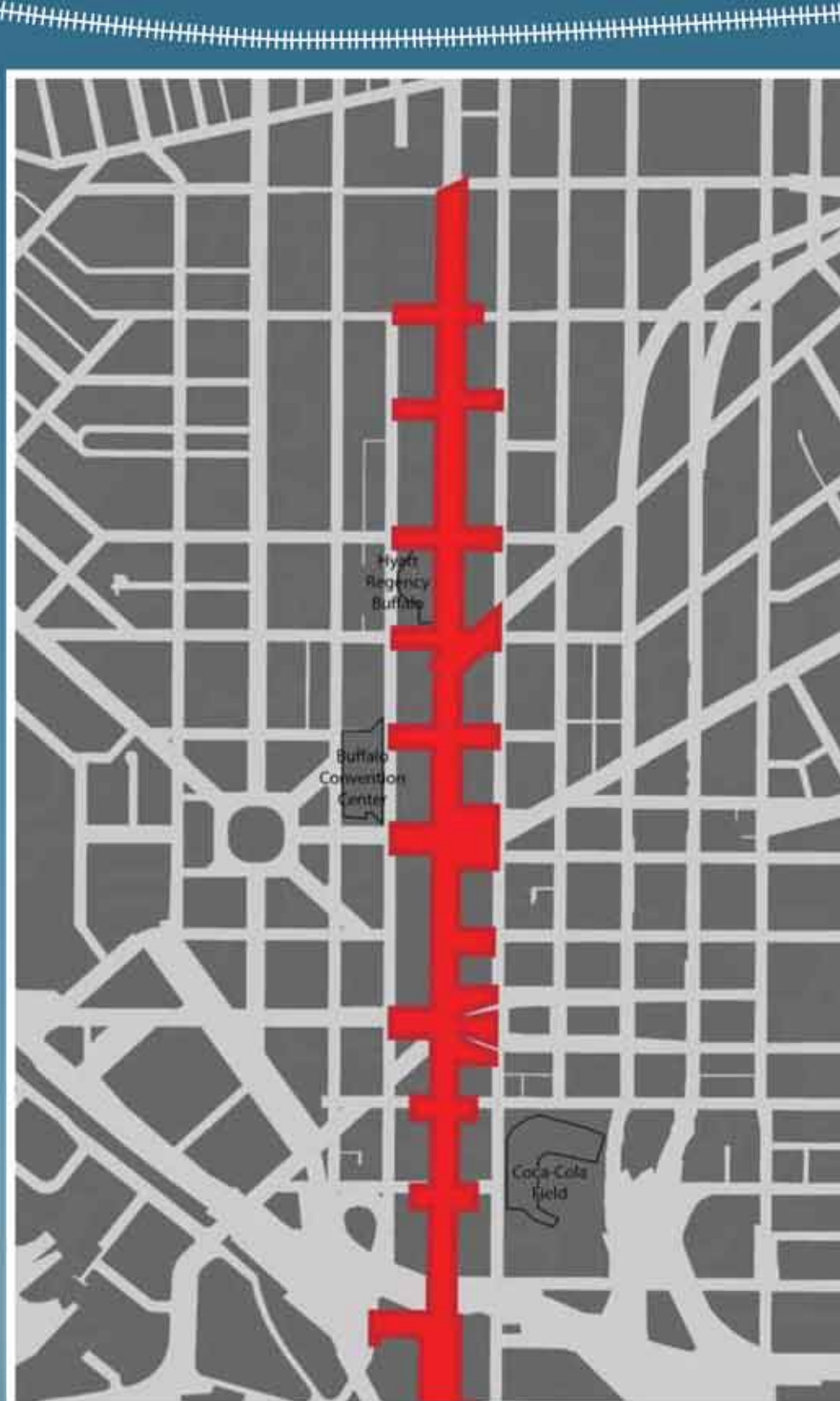
A mixed-use shopping mall bordered by Delaware Avenue, Huron Street, Main Street and Johnson Park was proposed, but never built. A parkway would cut across downtown; Chippewa Street would be demolished. Pearl and Franklin would tunnel under the development. Main Street was recommended as a pedestrian mall.



1971
Regional Center Plan

- Buffalo/Amherst high speed transit line
- Roof Main Street between Chippewa and Church Streets
- Increase parking ramps, add 1,000 spaces per year

Project canceled due to operating costs.



1978-86
Pedestrian Transit Mall

WNY sought subway system funding but secured less expensive light rail rapid transit. Main Street between Tupper and Scott Streets became a pedestrian-transit mall, with subway to the University of Buffalo South Campus. MetroRail opened in 1985 and the Buffalo Place pedestrian-transit mall was completed in 1986.

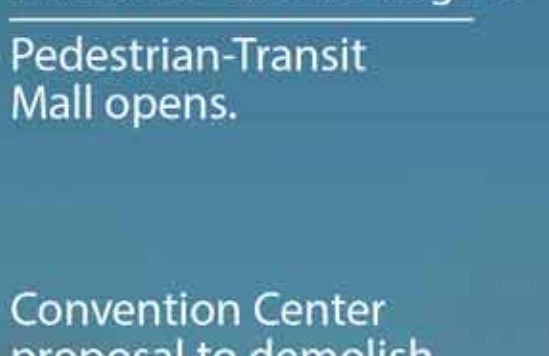


1990-2015

One by one, local stores went out of business. Lack of traffic on Main Street was a factor in storefronts remaining vacant. The City, NFTA and Buffalo Place started working on a solution to return automobile traffic to Main Street. The Theatre District reopened to traffic in 2014 and Fountain Plaza and the 500 Block opened in 2015.



More Detail on Downtown Strategies



More Detail on Downtown Strategies

