



**Black Rock**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Black Rock  
Riverside  
Grant Amherst  
West Hertel**

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## Whats been happening at BRHS

by Doreen DeBoth, Chair

We are proud to report that our attendance dramatically increased this quarter. Groups included student teachers from Buffalo State College, school groups and most recently, regional teachers taking the Waterfront History Course. As 2017 marks the 200th anniversary of the first shovel in the ground



Sponsored by the Buffalo Teachers Center, they were led by Social Studies teacher Richard Pyszczek

to dig the Erie Canal, we commemorated this important event during the month of June with exhibits and a debate. Both were fun, entertaining and educational. Discover Amherst Street #20 included our Erie Canal exhibit, parade, and coloring for all ages using our new Erie Canal Coloring book.

**Buffalo VS Black Rock**, a debate over who should get the western terminus of the Erie Canal was held at the Buffalo History Museum. Samuel Wilkeson, mayor, judge, and builder of Buffalo



Canal-dressed marchers in parade.

Harbor was portrayed by David A. Franczyk, Fillmore District Councilmember and Peter Buell Porter, congressman, soldier and statesman was portrayed by Joseph Golombek Jr., North District Councilmember, DeWitt Clinton, Governor of New York State, portrayed by Mark J.F. Schroeder, City Comptroller moderated the event. Erie County Historian, Douglas Kohler introduced the historical figures and tradition-

al canal music was supplied by Rush the Growler.



(left to right) Dave Franczyk, Mark Schroeder, Joseph Golombek Jr. and Doug Kohler

**On July 4, 1817, New York Governor DeWitt Clinton broke ground to begin the construction of the Erie Canal in Rome, New York. Initially,**

**two burgeoning villages competed to be the western terminus of the canal - Black Rock and Buffalo.**

Samuel Wilkeson, a founding member of the Buffalo Harbor Company, led the effort to widen and deepen Buffalo Creek to make it navigable and to create a harbor at its mouth. Buffalo was out of the range of British cannons on the Canadian Shore (which was important given the recent War with Great Britain) and higher water levels meant the canal would feed better in Buffalo.

Peter Buell Porter, a member of the Erie Canal Commission, proposed that Black Rock would be better as it had a large, natural harbor which would be easy to expand and for years it had been the center of east-west trade that was used even by the merchants in Buffalo. Black Rock also provided an escape from the turbulent winds and swells coming across Lake Erie. It also would shorten the canal a few miles, lowering construction costs.

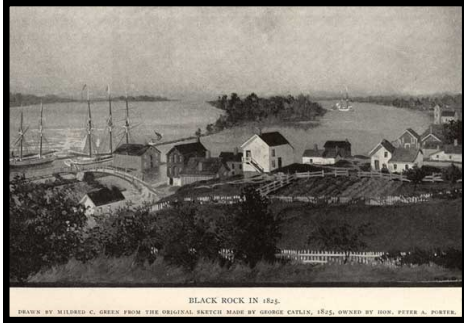
**In the end, Buffalo won over Black Rock and grew into the "Queen City of the Great Lakes."**



## Was There Really A Black Rock?

By Warren Glover

This is the question that is most frequently asked at the museum and elsewhere. The answer is yes!



The Black Rock section in north-western Buffalo, New York was named after an actual natural rock outgrowth on the eastern shore of the

Niagara River. It is part of a rocky ledge that protruded about 200 feet into the Niagara River by about 100 feet wide and stood 5 feet above the waterline. The rock is composed of chert, a micro-crystalline quartz limestone of a black/gray color and was part of a vast dolomite limestone ridge along the Niagara escarpment. The rock was unalterably changed when large northernmost pieces were blasted away by black powder dynamite as part of the construction of the western terminus of the Erie Canal which had reached this area in 1823.

All this rock had to be removed by hand mainly by Irish laborers using pick and shovel to lay the bed of the Erie Canal in 1823.

Then, the excavation of the canal bed produced broken rock used

for filling in the uneven shoreline and some quarries inland as well as in fence and exterior wall building construction.

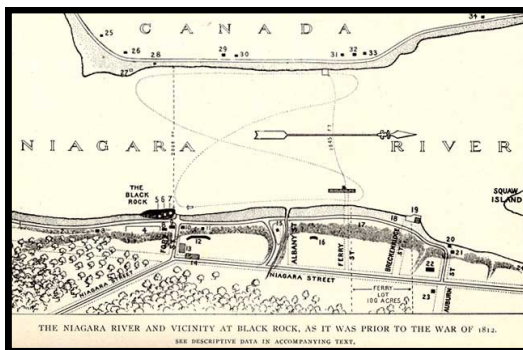
The rock on the inner bend of the river formed a natural eddy, where boats could anchor in the early nineteenth century to ride out storm winds. It had also been a fishing ground for the Seneca and their predecessors, a commercial center and

ercial center, and dock of the Black Rock Ferry that took passengers to and from Canada. The region downstream of the rock, protected by its mass from the swift 25-knot current flowing south to north, served as a naturally protected harbor.

The first mention of the Black Rock in recorded history existed as the marked site on a calfskin map drawn by one of the later Haudenosaunee nations settling on the Niagara Frontier in the sixteenth century to demarcate one of their settlement boundaries on the eastern shore of the lower Niagara River. It was also mentioned on survey maps as part of early land plots settled by squatters in self-built log cabins along the same shore in the later eighteenth century. The Black Rock was also noted as part of shoreline land plots surveyed by Joseph Ellicott in the early nineteenth century, when land in this area had been bought in bulk and was being subdivided into smaller Buffalo village plots for sale to early white settlers in this section on a rectangular street grid. The radiating street pattern existed only in the downtown area.

When the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, the wedding of the waters took place. New York Governor DeWitt Clinton rode a ceremonial packet boat, the *Seneca Chief* down the entire length of the newly finished waterway from the Buffalo harbor to Albany, then down the Hudson River to New York City.

The Niagara section of the NYS Thruway (Interstate 190) was installed in 1959, replacing the Erie Canal along its shoreline path while using the same bed as the excavated canal.



Black Rock residual wall along the I-190

photo by Mark Kubiniec

Today remaining strata can be seen along the I-190 going north. Pass under the Peace Bridge, and about 100 yards past the Massachusetts Pumping Station, you will see it on the right.

Early photos: <http://www.buffaloah.com/h/br/sev/index.html>  
<http://www.buffaloah.com/h/br/sev/index.html>

## Shotguns Along the Beltline: The Burgess Gun Co.

By Doreen DeBoth

A lot of activity is presently taking place along Chandler Street, an industrial corridor that housed many large factories including Buffalo



Weaving & Belting and Linde Aire. One not so well known enterprise is the Burgess Gun Company that was located at Military and Chandler at the Beltline from 1894 to 1899.



Andrew Burgess is perhaps the most prolific firearm inventors the world has ever known, with 894 Burgess patents. His most famous firearm was the folding shot-

gun, the first shotgun specifically designed to be a fighting weapon instead of a sporting arm. Patented in January of 1893, it first appeared on the market in 1894. It featured a 20" barrel, 6-round tube magazine under the barrel, and un-

loaded weight of just over 6 pounds (2.7kg). This compact configuration was specifically intended for use by messengers, bank guards, police, cavalry troops, and others who could exploit the handiness of a compact shotgun. The size was complemented by the gun's folding mechanism.



During this time Burgess made both folding shotguns and a non-folding takedown sporting version

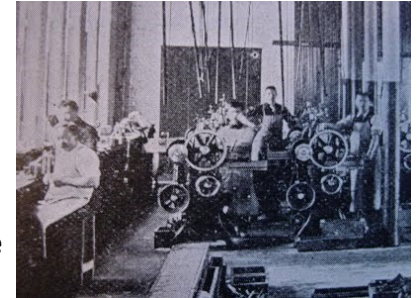


of the gun with 28" and 30" barrels. In addition, a very small number of pump-action rifles using the same mechanism (although not

folding) were made in .30-30 and .45-70 calibers. The shotguns are fairly rare today, with folding models particularly hard to find – and the rifles are extremely scarce.

Colt purchased the patent for a lever-action rifle from an inventor named R.L. Brewer, but more importantly, it obtained the patents and enlisted the talents of Burgess, who was relatively an obscure firearms inventor at that time.

The Colt rifle was not the first lever action Burgess created. In 1878 he had joined forces with Eli Whitney Jr. of the Whitney Arms Company to produce the short-lived Burgess Repeating Rifle, a lever action that was plagued by feeding problems. But this may have been the Burgess gun that got the attention of the Colt Patent Firearms Company.



The rifle that Burgess subsequently designed and licensed to Colt appeared similar to the Winchester 1873 with its tubular magazine, exposed hammer, and stock and fore-end configurations. But the Burgess had a more graceful, smooth-sided receiver without side plates and utilized a different lever and toggle-link locking system. By virtue of its solid, one-piece construction, the Burgess receiver, although slightly shorter than the Model '73, was stronger.



**Black Rock**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Find us online!

www.blackrockhistoricalsociety.com



## The BRHS Seeks Volunteers

Your expertise, interest and/or love of history are good reasons to volunteer.

Students, seniors and everyone in-between are welcome to volunteer in various areas of interest: office/computer, education, outreach, maintenance, etc.

You can strengthen your community, learn about preservation, and meet new people. Every volunteer can make a difference.

To volunteer, contact us via email on our website or call 716-510-4007.

## Artifact Donations

If you think you may have items or photos that tell the story of our area, you can bring them to the museum, or we will gladly pick them up (call 716-510-4007).

Andrew Burgess was multi-dimensional and divided his career between photography and firearms.

He was a skilled photographer whose family-owned farm in Dresden, New York, bordered the homestead of famed Civil War photographer Mathew Brady. Burgess ended up working with Brady and photographically documented Reconstruction in the post-Civil War South—as well as, it is rumored, documenting the execution of the French-installed Emperor Ferdinand Maximilian in Mexico. Later, Burgess photographed the Franco-Prussian War before returning to the United States in 1871. Prophetically, that year Burgess was granted a patent for an improvement on the Peabody rifle.



Andrew Burgess

In 1871, he married Eudora Tiffany, heiress to the Tiffany jewelry empire, whose father subsequently financed many of Burgess's firearms inventions. In that year, Burgess established a gun manufacturing factory in Owego, New York, near the Susquehanna River, where he put many of his ideas to work.

In the early 1880's, there was plenty of competition between gun manufacturers with cost-cutting, backstabbing and maneuvering that went on. By 1883, Winchester realized it had better do something to curtail sales of the Burgess, and probably wasn't happy when it learned that Buffalo Bill Cody had been presented with an elaborate gold- and silver-plated Burgess rifle engraved with his name and "with Compliments of Colt's Co."

In 1899, Burgess decided to retire, and sold his company and factory to the Winchester company. They promptly repurposed what tooling and machinery they could, scrapped the rest, and shut down the factory. However, he continued patenting inventions until 1906, even though he was in failing health. He died in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1908.

[.http://buffaloah.com/a/archs/ebg/bldgsList.html](http://buffaloah.com/a/archs/ebg/bldgsList.html)

Forgotten Weapons.com

<http://texashideout.tripod.com/burgess>

[/iroquoisarmscollectors.org/iroquoisarmscollectors/home/burgess-gun-co](http://iroquoisarmscollectors.org/iroquoisarmscollectors/home/burgess-gun-co)

### Current Exhibit

Stop in and see the **Erie Canal Exhibit** with a special collection of musical instruments of that era.

### Next On The Calendar

Thursday August 31 2017  
4-6:30pm Hoyt Lake- Delaware Park,  
Buffalo Police Department Delta with exhibits, coloring and games for kids  
**Fall Speakers Series** to be announced