

Our Museum in Action

Grant News

Paul + Helen Ellis Charitable Trust

Landmark Status for 436 Amherst Street

BSC Partnership

Erie County Bicentennial

308 Crowley Street

Wood + Brooks Building

On September ____, Michael Wopperer of _____ invited BRHS Preservation Committee members Mary Ann Kedron, Doreen DeBoth and Joe Kedron to tour the Wood & Brooks Building at _____ Kenmore Avenue. _____ is currently proposing a mixed use redevelopment of the property that would include residential, commercial and light industrial incubator space. Built in 1911, the building formerly housed

Outreach (National Night Out, D District, Niagara Celtic Festival)

Museum Grand Opening

Annual Fundraiser

New Acquisitions

Pan American Exposition Poster

Exile McBride Sign

Calling All History Detectives!

ARTICLES

Cornelius Creek and Our First Diverse Neighborhood

by Mary Ann Kedron, Ph.D.

Many people do not realize there was another tributary to the Niagara River in northwest Buffalo. Cornelius Creek meandered along Hertel Avenue (once called Bird Street) and emptied into the Niagara River at today's Towpath Park. An Indian village site was formerly situated along the banks of the Niagara opposite Strawberry Island. As evidenced by pottery fragments and pipes, a smaller occupation site was identified at the mouth of Cornelius Creek.

The creek was a major drainage basin for north Buffalo. In 1901, it also received wastewater runoff directly from the American Radiator Company plant on Elmwood Avenue. Today not much visible evidence of the creek remains, except at its mouth, where it empties into the river as a combined sewer overflow outlet. Nonetheless, during the mid-1700's the mouth of the creek would have likely been an ideal spot along the trade route of the early French voyageurs.

The Dutch brought a large number of slaves to New York to work the farms and mills of the Hudson Valley until the State abolished slavery in 1799. According to the 1790 U.S. Census, New York had 21,193 slaves, which ranked it first in the number of slaves reported from the northern states. Approximately 14 percent of New York families owned slaves, only slightly less than in Kentucky. Records show that Black Rock's Peter Porter's wife, Letitia, brought slaves with her from Kentucky which then became the property of her husband. In addition to those who would have escaped slavery earlier, with abolition the newly "freedmen" also moved west to find a better life on the Niagara Frontier.

In 1791, a Colonel Thomas Proctor reported that the only two non-Indian settlers living in what is now called the Buffalo area were a white trader, Cornelius Winne, and his partner, Joseph Hodge. Proctor said Hodge had lived among the Seneca Indians since 1771 for many (perhaps fifteen) years before Winne came to the area, "spoke their language fluently, and had an Indian family." Hodge, sometimes called "Black Joe" or referred to as a "Son of Africa", was an escaped slave who operated a trading post with his Indian wife.

One African-American man, known as "Sunfish", was known to have lived at the mouth of Cornelius Creek with his brother. During the Sullivan campaign in 1779, he was reportedly "in command" of a Seneca village at Conesus in Livingston County. It is not likely that Sunfish and Hodges would have been in Buffalo prior to 1780 which was when the Senecas and others moved from the destroyed Seneca villages in the Genesee Valley to Buffalo Creek (there had been earlier camps there, but no major villages) and temporary refugee settlements around Fort Niagara.

Although it is unlikely we will ever have definitive proof, it is intriguing to believe that our community was always a place of diversity and acceptance well before the underground railroad and any subsequent immigration into our neighborhoods.

[SOURCES: The Circle Association's *African American History of Western New York State, 1770 to 1830*; R. W. Bingham, *The Cradle of the Queen City*]

Founding 500

We welcome Mark Peszko as the newest member of our Founding 500!

Please consider joining our team of special donors by contributing to the Founding 500 fund. In recognition of your donation of \$100, you will receive a commemorative Founding 500 ceramic plaque along with our gratitude and knowledge that you are fostering historic preservation and education in our community. We thank the following Founding 500 businesses, organizations, and individuals for their generous support:

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