

2017



Guest Speaker Presentation Topics

Explore Buffalo Guest Speaker Program

COST: \$75

Includes a one hour presentation, featuring a 45-minute talk followed by 15 minutes for discussion/Q&A.

PLEASE NOTE: Talk availability is subject to the availability of our volunteer docents. We will do our best to accommodate your preferences.

Talk Topics

Abraham Lincoln in Buffalo & Western New York

Buffalo's presidential history is arguably the country's most significant, with exception of Washington D.C. We are well aware that Millard Fillmore and Grover Cleveland were residents and political stalwarts of Buffalo when elected, and that William McKinley was assassinated and Theodore Roosevelt was inaugurated here in September 1901. But what about Abraham Lincoln? Is there a chapter in Western New York's presidential book regarding his presence and legacy? This talk will reveal the answers to these questions as it describes Lincoln's four visits to Buffalo and Western New York.

Art's Up: The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy (BFAA) and its Impact Near and Far

The parent organization of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery is the BFAA which was established in 1862 and for over 150 years has been an ambassador for Buffalo — locally, nationally, and globally. In this talk, we will briefly review BFAA's history, including key events and "firsts" such as being the first major art museum to have a woman director. We'll focus on a selection of people throughout the years who've had significant influence, such as our own "Monuments Men" who helped recover Nazi-looted art during World War II. The fascinating facts you learn may help you in a trivia contest — and even more, offer a better understanding of the BFAA's role yesterday, today, and tomorrow as it sets its goals to continue to serve a diverse community and remain a leading promoter of the Buffalo area.

Before Buffalo: The French, English, & Native Americans

“Before Buffalo” examines the Niagara Frontier during the period of 1600 to 1800, just as the Buffalo Creek settlement was forming. The region was inhabited by Native American tribes who represented a buffer zone between the strong Huron Confederacy to the west and the Iroquois Confederacy to the east. The French, and later British, were the first of the Europeans to enter the region. This lecture will discuss their activities and adventures during this rich and fascinating period of Western New York history.

Buffalo History: 1940 – Present

This talk includes information on Buffalo’s involvement in WWII all the way up to our present-day prominence as a flourishing city.

Buffalo’s Sporting Life

Are you a diehard Buffalo Sabres fan? Do you keep rooting for the Bills year after year? Are you just getting into all that Buffalo sports has to offer? Whether an aficionado or an amateur, this talk is for you! Presented through the eyes of a 60-year-old lifelong Buffalo sports fan, this talk will focus on professional sports in Buffalo through the years, including the history of the Bills, the Bisons, the Braves, the Sabres, and more!

Buffalo Then & Now: What Building was There in 1917?

In this compare-and-contrast presentation, see what the sites of some of your favorite Buffalo buildings looked like one hundred years ago! This presentation will show what various locations around the Queen City looked like in 1917, juxtaposed with their 2017 appearance. You’ll be surprised by how much the city has in some ways changed, and in some ways remained the same!

The Burchfield Penney Art Center: The First “Green” Art Museum in NYS

The BPAC is celebrating 50 years as the Museum for Western New York Arts. In this talk we will briefly review the history of this art center, then discuss the present building design by Gwathmey Siegel and Associates. We’ll illustrate how the architectural structure has distinctive features reflecting artist Charles E. Burchfield’s love of nature. We’ll also explore how the building design serves the BPAC’s diverse programming to provide artists, students, scholars, collectors, and the general public with opportunities to learn and exchange ideas about the cultural legacy of the region.

Christmas Shopping in Buffalo

Do you remember being in downtown Buffalo at Christmastime? This talk will bring back memories of getting dressed up, spending the day shopping in the wonderful stores, looking at the department store window decorations, eating at the AM&A's top floor restaurant and so much more! We'll also talk about all of the great retailers that made Buffalo their home.

The Erie Canal: The Creation of the Empire State

The Erie Canal had a significant impact not only on the growth of Buffalo but the growth of the nation. The talk includes: the initial concept of the Canal, the political fight to make it a reality, the construction of this amazing civil engineering feat, and its effect on the economy of Buffalo as it became one of the largest inland ports in the world.

From Soaps to Riches: Larkin, Hubbard, & Wright

This lecture will tell the story of the Larkin Soap Company founders, John Larkin and Elbert Hubbard, and their relationship with architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright designed not only famous Larkin Company administration building, but also houses for company executives Darwin Martin, Walter Davidson, George Barton, and William Heath.

A Grave Discussion

Death is as inevitable as taxes! For generations, humans have grappled with what to do with our dead. In addition to burying dead on church-owned lands, burial grounds were also formed on state land or land lent by farmers or local merchants. In Buffalo, both public and pauper (potter) burial lands were formed at what appear to be random locations as the city grew. As towns expanded outward, bodies located in (no longer) rural areas were exhumed and reinterred further away from the city proper in beautified cemeteries – a move which characterized the Rural Cemetery Movement that swept the country beginning in the 1830s. This casual presentation focuses on this area's very first burial grounds - former, abandoned, and the oldest cemeteries that exist today - & is sure to be quite a crowd-pleaser!

The Guaranty Building

The Guaranty Building, completed in 1895, is considered one of Louis Sullivan's masterpieces. In the 1890s, the skyscraper was a new and uniquely American building type. Sullivan is one of the most important American architects of the 19th century and is considered the "Father of the Skyscraper." Learn about the history and architect of this landmark building in detail.

History of Buffalo Aviation: People, Places, & Planes

Did you know that Buffalo was once the center of United States Aviation? In a Casey Kasem countdown-style format, this talk will introduce the top five people that influenced Buffalo's aviation history. Come hear about the manufacturing centers existing and long gone that created the industry. Listen to stories and facts about Buffalo built planes that affected the world. Let your knowledge soar to new heights!

Kleinhans Music Hall

Anyone who has spent time in Buffalo has no doubt heard that the acoustics of Kleinhans Music Hall are amongst the finest in the world. Dating from 1940, Kleinhans was designed by an architect of international reputation, Eliel Saarinen, who worked closely with an acoustical consultant throughout the design process. Based on original research in the Kleinhans Music Hall archives, this talk will explore the history of acoustical design of the main auditorium – including the intriguing story of dual consultants – and the ultimate acoustic results which perhaps surprisingly, fell short of what they had desired to achieve. Elements of acoustical planning and recent changes to the design of Kleinhans Music Hall will be discussed.

Learning, Caring, & Curing: Medical History in Buffalo

Since the mid-1800s, Buffalo has seen the development of quality clinical care, education, and medical research facilities. The opening of the new *John R. Oishei Children's Hospital* and the *UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences* in 2017 only continue this tradition. With the expansion of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus driving the city's resurgence, this presentation takes a look back at the evolution and development of the medical school, hospitals, and research facilities within the city. This talk will showcase some of the highlights of Buffalo's history of medical excellence, innovations, and inventions, as well as many photographs of buildings and sites that were once home to hospitals and schools.

Life in the Original Larkinville

Today, Larkinville is a revitalized neighborhood that boasts of successful businesses, a vibrant arts scene and, of course, food truck Tuesdays. The area has arisen from the neglect of the late 20th Century and in many ways represents the re-birth of 21st Century Buffalo. Many people, however, know very little about the namesake Larkin Soap Company, which was one of Buffalo's major employers 100 years ago. When one thinks of large corporations in the early 20th Century, images of over-worked and under-paid women and children working in dangerous sweat-shops comes to mind. While this period became known as the Progressive Era in American history, most large businesses were very slow to improve the working conditions for the average worker. The Larkin Soap Company was a leader in changing the work place environment by placing an emphasis on the overall well-being of their employees. They created an environment where all of the "Larkinites," which included not only the employees but also management and their customers, were treated with respect creating a very dedicated and loyal organization. This talk will look at the policies and benefits that were instituted by the Larkin Soap Company that not only improved the lives of their employees but also the lives of the citizens of Buffalo.

Merry Christmas from Buffalo, NY

Despite modern-day commercialism, Christmas here in Buffalo and throughout this nation was first a religious celebration whose roots date back to the Romans and to ancient pagan rites. While it eventually evolved into a general celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, Christmas was deeply rooted in the specific ethnic origins and traditions of the families celebrating it. Buffalo, with its diverse ethnic population, had an abundance of Christmas traditions that influenced the various ways this holiday was celebrated. Join us to learn how these early Buffalonians brought their unique ethnic and religious traditions to help define a Buffalo Christmas!

A Night Out on the Town

This talk revives the exciting history of the entertainment community in Buffalo. Are you a movie buff? We will talk about the variety of theatres that would have shown everyone from Charlie Chaplin to Cary Grant to the original Star Wars. Is music more your speed? We will help you imagine where you would have sat to listen to the likes of Sinatra, Elvis, the Stones, and the Goo Goo Dolls. From vaudeville to live stage productions, Buffalo has been home to wondrous theatres and other venues which are no longer physically with us but, through this talk, can once again be part of our collective memory.

Presidents in Buffalo: Which Ones & When?

Every time a United States President visits Buffalo, the question arises: How many Presidents have come to Buffalo (or the region), either before, during or after their presidency? The answer may not be definitive yet, as researchers continue to discover new information. However, with assistance from the Buffalo History Museum and several other individuals, Bren T. Price, Sr. has compiled a (nearly) comprehensive list to answer this question. Aside from our two resident presidents, you may be surprised to learn who came first, the most, or not at all.

Saloon to Speakeasy: Prohibition in Buffalo

Buffalo has always been a drinking town and the passage of the 18th Amendment certainly didn't stop that. The prohibition of the sale of alcohol lasted for thirteen long, dark years, and Buffalo's answer was to elect a brewer to be Mayor, build the Peace Bridge to facilitate a quicker and safer trip to Canada (where alcohol was still legal), and play host to some 8,000 "soft drink" establishments otherwise known as speakeasies where illegal hooch ran freely. During this talk, we will trace the history of Prohibition and the effect this failed "Noble Experiment" had on manufacturing, politics, gender roles, and organized crime in the Queen City.

Snake Oil Salesmen of WNY

A pill to make your life more pleasant, one to make you smart, and a concoction to cure anything else that ails you? Who wouldn't want to buy that? Before the FDA, anyone could call themselves "doctor", bottle up some herbs, add a little alcohol and sell these cure-alls to an unsuspecting public. This entertaining talk reviews the unbelievable advertising, unsubstantiated label claims, and unscrupulous business practices of three of Western New York's most famous patent medicine peddlers. Included in this lecture are Dr. Ray Vaughn Pierce of Pierce's Invalid and Tourist Hotel and World Dispensary, George Merchant of Merchant's Gargling Oil, and Fletcher Sutherland of 7 Sutherland Sister's Hair Tonic.

Trains Yesterday, Today, & Tomorrow

Although Buffalo was always known to be an important Great Lakes shipping port, it is less well known that Buffalo became the 2nd largest railroad hub in America. The story of the importance of railroads to Buffalo and the great railroad stations built here to serve them is a fascinating one. The story may yet have another interesting chapter as we will also examine the very topical issue of the future of rail travel in Buffalo. All aboard!