

Bring Buffalo to you!

Book our docents to bring the stories of Buffalo's fascinating history to your facility!

BOOKING INFORMATION

All presentations are available to be given in-person. Selected presentations are also available virtually, using Zoom technology. These are denoted with (V).

All bookings include a one-hour presentation (45 minute presentation, 15 minute discussion or Q&A).

All talks include a PowerPoint presentation.

Bookings cost \$80. An additional \$40 fee applies if Explore Buffalo is to provide technology (laptop, projector, screen.)



Book your Guest Speaker today!

Contact Suzanne Ernst,
Program Director, at
suzanne@explorebuffalo.org
or call 716-245-3032 ext. 205

Presentation Topics

Please note: Talk availability is subject to the availability of our docents.

200 Years on the Erie Canal

The first Erie Canal, which opened in 1825, gave way to an Enlarged Erie Canal through the 1800s. In the 1900s, the Erie Canal gave way to the Barge Canal, today's Erie Canal. This presentation provides an overview of these three major iterations of the Erie Canal.

Abraham Lincoln in Buffalo & WNY

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) & Its Impact Near & 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.

Assassination! How a US President Came to Buffalo & Lost His Life (V)

William McKinley was a decent, honorable man who rose to become a very popular U.S. President. When his 1901 trip to the Pan-American Exposition was delayed, due to his wife's illness, he unwittingly gave an assassin time to hatch a murderous plot.

Banking in Buffalo (V)

Buffalo has a rich history in banking. Although there were numerous banks created over the last two hundred years, only one of them is still in Buffalo under its original name! This talk will include a discussion of the individuals who forged Buffalo's economy and created banking institutions that helped make Buffalo prosperous and inventive. There were also key players on the national scene of financing that hailed from Buffalo. As important as the history of banking are the buildings constructed to house them. Buffalo's beautiful bank buildings are part of our architectural assets and admired around the world.

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Black Rock

One of the earliest villages established on the Niagara Frontier, Black Rock has a history all its own including the War of 1812, the competition to be the terminus of the Erie Canal, site of one of the first railroad lines and spring-fed public water systems, and home to a variety of immigrant groups.

Buffalo: From Outpost to Gateway via The Erie Canal (V)

Perhaps the most important thing in Buffalo's early growth was the selection of the then village as the terminus of the Erie Canal. Learn about the canal's construction and how it would change Buffalo forever.

Buffalo's Boom Times: From 1825-1900 (V)

The Erie Canal helped put Buffalo on the map, but the period between 1825-1900 was when Buffalo began to really boom. Learn about the various industries and services that called Buffalo home during this time period.

Buffalo's Murals (V)

In the last several years, there has been an explosion of murals in Buffalo. They come in all shapes and sizes and are all over the region. Explore Buffalo has several tours by bicycle and on foot that explore some of these. This talk is designed to give you an overview of the locations, artists, and wide variety of murals around town.

Buffalo's Power Couples (V)

Meet Buffalo's diverse power couples of the early twentieth century. From the author and the actor (turned carpenter), to the journalist and the impresario, to the restaurateurs, these influential couples brought world-class entertainment and recognition to Buffalo in the early 1900s.

Buffalo's Sporting Life (V)

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 100 years ago?

(Available June - September) 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 1918, juxtaposed with their 2018 appearance. You'll be surprised by how much the city has in some ways changed, and in some ways remained the same!

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

The BPAC for over 50 years has been known as the Museum for Western New York Arts. In this talk we will briefly review the history of this art center, then discuss the 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.

Celebrating Buffalo & Beyond: The Artistic Legacy of Józef Sławiński

Accomplished artist Józef Sławiński came from Poland to Buffalo in the 1960s and made the Niagara Frontier his home until his death in 1983. In those two decades Sławiński created artwork both reflecting and helping to inspire the civic, historical, architectural, religious, natural, and cultural heritage of the WNY community. In this talk we will consider both Sławiński's artistic vision as well as his versatility and skill in using varied materials and labor-intensive processes, such as hammered copper portraits or layered cement murals known as sgraffito which was his favorite medium. Although Sławiński's work is found elsewhere, "his richest body of work is in the Buffalo Niagara region." Join us for a virtual tour of his art, so that his work - as the artist hoped - would be "open for everyone's enjoyment" and "create a lasting tribute to the idea of peace."

(My City Smells Like) Cheerios - The History of Cereal

On a warm, breezy summer day, that sweet aroma wafting over the city will tell you they're making Cheerios. But why here in Buffalo? And how did breakfast become a thing, what is the connection to health sanitariums? Hear the story of how Cheerios came to be made in Buffalo and how dry, ready to eat cereal right out of the box began in central New York, and even cereal's connection to Mar-a-Lago!

Christmas Shopping in Buffalo (V)

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.

City of Lockport

The city of Lockport took its name from the flight of five locks built for the Erie Canal to rise up and descend the Niagara Escarpment. But its history began long before that with the Native Americans who lived here. In this talk, you will hear about the rapid growth in the population of the area following the construction and opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. This talk includes the development of churches, industry, inventors, banking and the magnificent homes built by families of wealth who benefited from their location on the Erie Canal. Although the city has gone through economic decline, it is poised for a renaissance, embracing its history as a major part of the Erie Canal and the creation of the Empire State that is New York

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Donkeys and Elephants: Enduring Political Mascots

How in the world did donkeys and elephants evolve into mascots of the Democratic and Republican parties? Can you guess where they first appeared? Buffalo Presidential Center Trustee Bren Price, Sr. will trace that evolution from the mid-1800s to present day, picturing an array of comic illustrations and funky artifacts used to support or denigrate political candidates.

The Erie Canal: The Creation of the Empire State (V)

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.

The Erie Canal, Silo City and Flour Milling in Buffalo

Buffalo's population grew tremendously with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Quite surprisingly, because a few years before did not even have a harbor, and 2 private citizens, including one early Mayor, Samuel Wilkeson, had to risk his own capital to convince the NYS Legislature to extend the Canal past the Village of Black Rock. This talk will discuss the activities with the early Canal, and the development of Buffalo, for a time, as the number one grain handling port and flour milling capital of the World. The talk will also cover ongoing redevelopment efforts in the area now known as Silo City.

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.

German Immigrants in Buffalo & WNY (V)

Buffalo's history is a story of immigrants. Among the first immigrants were people from the German "states". In fact, individuals of German heritage comprise the largest immigrant group to settle in the United States as a whole. The nation of Germany as we know it was not established until the completion of the Franco-Prussian war around 1870. The talk covers early immigration prior to this period through the early part of the 20th century. It will also include information about the speaker's family that came from what is now the Alsace region of France.

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A Grave Discussion (V)

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.

Half a Century of Working Women (V)

From Irish immigrants arriving on "coffin" ships to Rosie the Riveter building war planes, women have helped shape our city and beyond. Whether managing the world's largest box company or running a nightclub on Michigan Avenue, Buffalo women have not shied away from hard work and entrepreneurship. We'll look at the period from 1900 to 1950 to meet some of these amazing women.

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 (V)

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, Eiel 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.

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Larkland: The Larkin Family Estate (V)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, one of Buffalo's leading families purchased an entire city block on Lincoln Parkway, bordering Delaware Park, to create an estate for themselves. John D. Larkin, owner of the immensely successful Larkin Soap Company, built homes for himself and four of his children. Enclosed by a low stone wall that is still seen today, the place was called "Larkland." Learn about the family and their soap business, their connections to Frank Lloyd Wright, and their legacy to the City of Buffalo.

The Library in Erie County: A Short History & Overview of the Current Library System

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System as we now know it is an institution with an equal focus on education, preservation, and community engagement. However, the library system has gone through many changes, and in Buffalo there are a number of libraries that no longer exist or that have become adapted to new purposes, like the Brighton Place Library. In this talk we will learn about the evolution of Buffalo's library system as well as some of the jewels of Buffalo libraries today, including those found at local colleges and institutions.

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. 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.

Life on the Erie Canal (V)

When the Erie Canal opened in 1825 many who had worked digging the canal went on to work on canals around the country during the "canal craze." But many stayed in the area, bought small farms and settled into farm life. Others took jobs in the many factories springing up along the canal, but many others hired on to canal boats or bought their own canal boats, married, had families, and became life-long canalers. Hear what their everyday life was like, as well as those who came to experience this engineering marvel by taking a short cruise along the Erie Canal.

Merry Christmas from Buffalo, NY (V)

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.

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The Pan-American Exposition: Stepping Back in Time (V)

Landing the Pan-American Exposition was a crowning achievement for the City of Buffalo that showed off new innovations such as electric light. However, it is most remembered as the site of the assassination of President William McKinley. Learn about how the Exposition came to be in Buffalo, as well as its triumphs and failures.

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.

Presidents in Buffalo: Unusual and Untold Stories: Parts 1 and 2

Do you know how many Presidents have come to Buffalo either before, during or after their presidency? Who are the Presidents that have had a significant impact? Considering Buffalo's rich and perhaps unique Presidential history, you will be surprised at how many unusual, unknown, and even weird stories abound. Some may be controversial; others "believe it or not." Bring your own stories to share if you have any.

Spiritualism in WNY

Many Buffalonians are familiar with Lily Dale, but fewer of us know that spiritualism actually has a long and rich history in Western New York. Join us for this interesting talk which will introduce the concept of spiritualism and its development in the United States before delving into its history here in WNY. You'll learn about famous locals such as the Fox sisters and the Davenport brothers, along with others who influenced the practice of spiritualism in this area. The talk will include information about Lily Dale and its place as the center of spiritualism in the United States, as well as various other local places where spiritualist events have occurred. Finally, we'll discuss where spiritualism fits in with today's social fabric.

Sporting Women of WNY & Beyond (& Some Who Were Just Passing Through!) (V)

Look back at sporting women from the late 1800s to current day, including a few specific women and sporting women in general. Which forms of exercise and sports were considered acceptable for women, and how did sports and exercise affect fashion?

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Swift Flowing Water: HiSTORIES of North Tonawanda

Water frames and colors the history of North Tonawanda -- flowing from the name of the place, to the power passing through it, to the people who came to it, and to the products made there and then sent out to the world. The strategic location provided a gateway to the Erie Canal and a transfer point for both electricity and travelers going between Buffalo and Niagara Falls or Lockport. This talk will introduce a few of the influential individuals, as well a selection of the major industries and businesses in N.T.'s history, sometimes having interesting connections with other people and places in or beyond Western New York.

They Worked Hard for their Money! Working Women at the Turn of the Century (V)

The influx of Irish immigrants and the Industrial Revolution changed the lives of women, especially single women, between 1870 and 1920. Although it was the Gilded Age in Buffalo, not everyone was a millionaire living on Delaware Avenue. What kind of work were women doing and where were they doing it? From domestic servants to ground-breaking professionals, hear the stories of Buffalo's working women - their struggles and their successes.

The Vanishing Ditch

A close look at how the first Erie Canal, which opened in 1825, came into existence. Find out where you can see surviving remnants of that canal in New York State.

World War II: Buffalo Women on the Homefront (V)

During World War II, Buffalo focused its industry and manufacturing on helping with the war effort, and women played an especially important role. Learn about the services and jobs women performed on the Homefront to help the Allies secure victory.

Top 10 Architectural Features

(Available June - September)

One reason that Buffalo's architecture is so appealing is that it loaded with ornamentation -- especially Classical ornamentation derived from Greece and Rome. Join us for this talk where you'll learn the top ten most frequently used decorations. Once you know these, no matter where you travel in the Western world you'll be an architecture "expert." This talk features many examples derived from the Illustrated Dictionary on the website *Buffalo Architecture and History* (BuffaloAH.com).

What's in a Name?

Did you ever wonder how certain Buffalo streets got their name? This talk will go over the origins of street names on ten Explore Buffalo Tours Including: Allentown, Black Rock, Columbus Parkway, Albright Estate, Bungalows, Hamlin Park, Tonawanda and Hidden Gems of the Delaware District.