

The Buffam Street site's mundane appearance belies its rich, layered history. Two distinct Native American groups have called it home, with a prehistoric Wenro village and burial ground on site as well as a former Seneca burial ground once at the heart of the Buffalo Creek Reservation. Written sources indicate the site was likely occupied as early as 1615, paralleling Neutral settlements first acknowledged at that time elsewhere in Western New York, and it was reoccupied in 1779 by the Senecas. Prehistorically, while some Western New York campsites go back as far as 10,000 years, artifacts indicate Buffam Street was a campsite only as early as the mid-Archaic period, and became a village during the Mid to Late Woodland period. Native Americans lived at or near the site until at least the 1850s. Both prehistoric and post-contact groups left their impression on the site through physical artifacts, written history, and much myth and hearsay.

Setting:

The Buffam Street Site is in the South Buffalo neighborhood of the City of Buffalo, bounded by Buffam Street to the north, Fields Avenue to the east, and residences to the south and west. The site is a city-run public park, 200 feet by 350 feet, easily accessible from Seneca Street, a major north-south roadway. It is approximately 4.3 miles from downtown Buffalo due southeast, and roughly 3.6 miles east of the Lake Erie shoreline (map 1).

The site itself sits on a hilltop overlooking lower swamp areas to the north and east, sloping downward toward the Buffalo River. It sits on the larger Erie Plain, the relatively flat expanse of land paralleling the Lake Erie shoreline a few miles inland between the Onondaga and Portage escarpments.¹ The park is bisected from east to west by a slight ridge about three feet high that seems to extend beyond the site at least on the eastern end. The land slopes more gently downward to the southern edge of the site into adjoining residential properties. This ridge is likely a natural occurrence, but reviewing maps drawn for past archaeological digs indicates that the ridge was incorporated into early earthworks at the site (maps 4 and 5, images 1 and 2).

The site contains several large trees and is fairly well maintained (images 2-4). There are three monuments in the park (images 5, 6), one dedicated to the area's former Seneca residents (image 7), another to two American girls held captive there by the Seneca (image 9), and a third marking where Seneca remains removed from the Mount Morris dam area were reburied in 1952 (image 8). There are a variety of houses nearby, ranging from newer ranch and Cape Cod homes along the eastern edge (image 11), to conventional turn of the century doubles on narrow lots (image 12, most of the neighborhood), to older homes set on larger lots (image 10, on the north side of Buffam Street). With the exception of the site itself and some swampland a few hundred yards away, the vicinity is completely developed.

Document Research:

Buffam Street could be associated with the Neutral Indians. The Neutrals, taken together with the Wenroes and the Eries, represent three barely distinct Iroquoian groups of Western New York. Some scholars associate Buffam Street

with the Wenro Indians, but precise attributions are almost impossible, even today. The Neutral story starts well south of Buffam Street. The Neutral, Huron, and other Iroquoian groups probably have a common ancestor, but it is disputed whether they traveled north from Ohio and Kentucky, or west from the St. Lawrence River before breaking up into smaller groups. The Neutrals stopped in Southern Ontario, while the Hurons settled farther north, and still other descendants ended up in central New York.² Either way, by the early 1600s the Neutrals had settled all across Southern Ontario, many of their 40 villages and population of 12,000 clustered between present day Brantford and Hamilton, but with some Neutral villages extending east of the Niagara River into Western New York.³

The date of this migration is unknown, but the first mention of “la nation neuter” south of the Hurons occurs in Samuel de Champlain’s writings of 1615, which coincides with Brule’s journey south from Huron territory to represent French interests among various Native American groups, including the Neutrals.⁴ Much of the Neutral story is told by French sources, including Dallion (1627), Brebeauf, and Chaumonot (both 1640), Jesuit missionaries traveling through the Neutral territory in Southern Ontario and Western New York in the early-mid 1600s.⁵ Nothing is written about the Wenroes. Dallion may have been the only westerner ever to encounter Wenro Indians, possibly meeting a group trading at a Neutral village about one day’s travel from their own. Dallion found the liaison somewhat unpleasant:

Ten men...called Ouarororonon [Wenro]...invited me to come and see them in their village. I promised to do so. [Later on] they came back after me and abruptly began a quarrel without provocation. One knocked me down with a blow of his fist, another took an axe and tried to split my head...the blow fell on a bar near me.⁶

The Neutrals were not necessarily neutral. Sandwiched between the warring Hurons and Iroquois, the Neutrals enjoyed a tenuous peace with both strong tribes, and were allied with smaller groups including the Wenroes. The Neutrals were frequently on the offensive against other lesser tribes to the west.⁷ Nevertheless, an Iroquois attack against the Neutrals was inevitable. The Iroquois were gradually growing stronger, incorporating several separate tribes into a central government. Also, they pushed westward seeking new sources for their lucrative beaver pelt trade with the Dutch in Albany, which earned the Iroquois European weapons. While an alliance between the Neutrals and Hurons would have outnumbered the Iroquois, their isolated, loosely confederated villages would have been no match against the Iroquois.⁸

In 1638, the Iroquois attacked the Wenroes in Western New York, leading them to abandon their string of settlements along Buffalo and Cazenovia Creeks and flee to Huron territory. Over the next ten years, several Neutral villages were attacked and destroyed, and by 1651 the Neutrals had vacated any lands east of the Niagara River.⁹

¹ White 15-16

² Wright 2

³ Wright 4-7

⁴ White 25; Wright 21

⁵ Wright 21-7

⁶ Wright 25

⁷ Wright 10

⁸ Wright 43-5

⁹ Wright 46-56

Supposedly, the ashes of Indians slain in the Iroquois invasion were buried in a mound near the later location of the Indian Church just south of Buffam Street.¹⁰

At this point Buffam Street became a province of the Seneca Nation, but the Senecas established few if any permanent settlements here until much later. The Senecas of the Iroquois may have chased the Wenroes out of Buffam Street, but in 1779 it was the Seneca who were on the run. After the American army defeated most of the British forces in the Revolutionary War, the British used the Iroquois to ransack budding American settlements in New York State. The Americans sent General John Sullivan to burn Iroquois towns and villages to the ground and destroy their food stores, also aiming to drive the British out of Fort Niagara. This drove the Seneca from their large towns along the Genesee River into Western New York, where they sought refuge at Fort Niagara. The British did their best to take care of the 4,000-5,000 refugees, but by winter their food stores were running low.¹¹ The British encouraged the Seneca to settle permanently at Buffalo Creek, where up until then they had only temporary settlements for hunting and fishing.¹² That way they could sustain themselves with their own crops.

Little is known about these first permanent Seneca settlements at Buffalo Creek. By the 1780s, however, they were already under assault by land purchase attempts. Massachusetts and New York colonies disputed who owned a long strip of land encompassing much of upstate New York, the dispute traceable to ambiguities in the colonies' charters.¹³ New York wanted the land, and claimed the Iroquois as "conquered dependents" in line with the sovereignty status the United States granted native tribes. This, they said, enabled New York to negotiate and approve any and all land transfers from the Iroquois to American buyers.

The Fort Stanwix Treaty of 1784 was the first step in demarcating the Iroquois territory so it could eventually be sold, marking the confederacy's farthest western border.¹⁴ Then came other agreements, such as one in 1786 granting New York State jurisdiction in the disputed territory provided Massachusetts could appoint individuals to sell off the land and realize the profits.¹⁵ Massachusetts appointed Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham to buy out native land claims and resell them on the state's behalf. In 1788 Phelps sent the Reverend Samuel Kirkland to discuss potential land sales with the Seneca at Buffalo Creek, the heart of Seneca territory. Kirkland convinced the Seneca to sell off some of their easternmost lands along the Genesee.¹⁶

Phelps and Gorham could not pay Massachusetts what they owed, however. Massachusetts took back their preemption rights, selling them to Robert Morris of Philadelphia in 1791 for \$225,000. Morris still had to buy out the Seneca, however, and they were reluctant to sell. At this time, a Seneca named Otetiani ('Always Ready,' or more commonly known as Red Jacket) was rising to prominence. Red Jacket (image 13), a prominent and well-spoken Seneca diplomat who lived at Buffalo Creek during the middle and later years of his life, was among the most ardent of Seneca

¹⁰ *ibid* 15

¹¹ Severance 58-61

¹² *ibid* 71

¹³ *ibid* 80

¹⁴ *ibid* 82

¹⁵ *ibid* 85

¹⁶ *ibid* 86-7

traditionalists.¹⁷ His conservatism showed in his skepticism of Christian missionaries and land sales to speculators such as Morris. He was involved in most of the land deals during the 1790s, as well as the delicate negotiations with U.S. emissaries interested in securing the Seneca's neutrality at a time when Indian parties were ravaging American settlers in the Ohio Valley. Red Jacket's peace advocacy earned him a medal from president George Washington in 1792, and the Seneca remained neutral during the settlement of Western New York.

In 1793, the Holland Land Company purchased 3.6 million acres of Western New York from Morris, provided that he successfully extinguish Seneca ownership. Despite Red Jacket's objections, by 1797 the Seneca assented to the sale of their Western New York lands, retaining three reservation tracts for themselves. During other meetings at Buffalo Creek throughout the early 1800s, Red Jacket had to fend off attempts to purchase large portions of the Western New York reservations.¹⁸ The Buffalo Creek reservation, laid out in 1798 by Holland Land Company surveyor Joseph Ellicott, was the largest of the three.¹⁹

Several clustered log cabin villages existed throughout the reservation, sometimes near prehistoric village sites that White located on her map of Western New York sites (map 6). Houghton describes the one surrounding the Buffam Street site below:

Of these clusters of houses, villages, so called, the most prominent seems to have been that which surrounded the home of Red Jacket. This group straggled along the paths which are now Seneca Street and Indian Church Road, mainly centered around the present Seneca Indian Park.²⁰

Red Jacket's cabin (Image 14) was near the Buffam Street site. So was the Seneca council house, roughly one mile to the Northeast near the intersection of Bailey Ave. and Seneca St. today.²¹ It was a shingled, timber-frame structure 42 by 18 feet with a brick chimney, not the stereotypical longhouse. In fact, all the Seneca dwellings were reportedly single-family homes built of logs or cut lumber.²²

This new construction method marked a cultural change at Buffalo Creek. As the Seneca abandoned their traditional communal structures in favor of that American standard, detached single-family residential, many became more tolerant of Christianity as well. Missionaries had always been a nagging reality for the Seneca, but as their traditional religion eroded in the early to mid 1800s, the pull of Christianity became stronger than Red Jacket's conservative orations. After several failed attempts by others, the latest missionary, Rev. Thompson Harris, gained permission in 1828 to establish a church at the heart of Buffalo Creek, just a few yards south of the Buffam Street site, in present day Indian Church Road.²³ The Seneca built it themselves at a cost of \$1700, a one-story, white clapboard structure, 41 by 51 feet and holding 400 people (image 15). A mission house on the north side of Buffam Street followed in 1833 (image 16). Run by Mr. and Mrs. Asher Wright, it housed the first Seneca language printing press.²⁴

¹⁷ Red Jacket Exhibit, BECHS

¹⁸ Severance 164

¹⁹ *ibid* 105-9

²⁰ *ibid* 115

²¹ *ibid* 181

²² *ibid* 118

²³ *ibid* 149

²⁴ Buffalo Historical Society (1912) 479-85

Red Jacket died in 1830. His last wishes, as related by Seneca Sachem Ely S. Parker, were to "...lie buried and undisturbed in the burial-place of his fathers," rather than have "...white men dig his grave."²⁵ He was buried in the Buffam Street site, where he spent the later years of his life. Mary Jemison, the White Woman of the Genesee, was also buried there.²⁶ The Seneca lost the Buffalo Creek Reservation in an 1842 treaty, after which most of the Seneca relocated to the Allegany and Cattaraugus Reservations. Only a handful of Seneca remained on the land after 1842, tilling their fields and tending to small orchards.²⁷ Today all that remains of their 83,000-acre reservation is the postage-stamp Buffam Street site.

The mission church there, erected in 1828, blew down in a storm less than 30 years later. The mission house was demolished in 1920. It is clear that what meaningful history exists at the Buffam Street site belongs to the Seneca. Humphrey Tolliver had some understanding of that. A runaway slave who married an Irish woman before moving near Buffalo in 1814, Tolliver built a house directly across from the Buffam Street site some time before 1840 (image 17). He and his wife raised 13 children there. It was said that Tolliver and his wife prepared a meal for the signatories of the botched 1838 Buffalo Creek Treaty. Tolliver took it upon himself to maintain the Seneca's burial plot, while letting his fishing nets dry on the wrought iron fence surrounding it, of course. He would still receive the occasional Seneca visitor until his death in 1881. His house was demolished in 1940.²⁸

Despite Tolliver's caretaking and Red Jacket's explicit wishes, his grave and Mary Jemison's were disturbed, their remains removed in the 1850s.²⁹ W. Clifford Shongo, a descendant of Red Jacket, inherited the story of Red Jacket's remains. As it goes, Red Jacket was dug up by white men who "...wanted to measure his brain in millimeters...because he was such a smart Indian." Perhaps after extensive scientific study, his remains were confined to Shongo's grandfather's sister's attic, from whence they traveled to Buffalo Savings Bank before finally being grandiosely reinterred at Forest Lawn in 1884.³⁰

At the turn of the century, Buffalo Creek had begun developing into South Buffalo and West Seneca. Indian Church Road, passing through the former church's site, was surveyed in 1850 and completed in 1858. Buffam Street was surveyed in 1847 and built in 1868.³¹ In the next 30 to 40 years, more streets were built, lots subdivided, and homes eventually built (map 3). The Buffam Street site became surrounded by conventional residential neighborhoods. Were it not for John Larkin, the entire site would have been subsumed by development.

John D. Larkin saw what Tolliver saw in the Buffam Street site. The local mail order magnate's mother-in-law had taught at the mission house across the street.³² He likely never would have heard the end of it if he hadn't stepped in to preserve the site. Larkin purchased the burial grounds in 1909 from developer Allen Strickler. He donated the land to

²⁵ Buffalo Historical Society (1885) 43

²⁶ Conlin 34

²⁷ Severance 167-180

²⁸ McCausland 1940

²⁹ Conlin 35

³⁰ Fess 1952

³¹ Bureau 104; 825

³² Conlin 36

the city of Buffalo on the condition that it would be a public park dedicated to the Seneca in perpetuity.³³ Larkin is responsible for keeping the Seneca in touch with the last sliver of their Buffalo Creek past.

Clifford W. Shongo saw the site's significance as well. In 1952, a Seneca burial ground on the banks of the Genesee River was to be inundated by the Mount Morris Dam project upriver, as if Morris's ghost returned to haunt the remains of those who he dispossessed of ancestral lands. Shongo recovered the remains and reburied them at Buffam Street that June. Of note is that, according to Shongo, the Buffam Street burial site was once five acres, but is now only represented by a much smaller plot.³⁴

In the late 1980s Allan Jamieson, descendant of Mary Jemison, worked to restore the Buffam Street site. In 1992, a rededication ceremony at the site installed a new plaque, a replica of the first that had been stolen. In attendance were "several members of the Seneca Indian Nation," as well as Norma Poodry, relative of a Seneca chief who attended the first dedication 80 years earlier.³⁵

Archaeology:

Artifacts abound throughout the former Buffalo Creek Reservation, but Buffam Street is one of a few particularly concentrated archaeological sites within its boundaries. Of seven concentrated archaeological sites lying along Cazenovia and Buffalo Creeks in the former reservation, only two (Fenton Street, Buffalo; Hart Farm, West Seneca) contain European trade goods.³⁶ The other five sites (one in West Seneca, three in East Elma, and Buffam Street) probably never saw western visitors prior to Seneca occupation, and are culturally and archaeologically similar. These sites are all former village sites likely attributable to stone age Iroquoian peoples.

Three writers who researched Buffam Street also discussed the site relative to these and other local archaeological sites; some on the former Buffalo Creek Reservation and some across Western New York. Frederick Houghton excavated at Buffam Street around 1900. He describes his findings in Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, vol 24. While his main focus is on the culture and artifacts at Buffam Street, Houghton also discusses other local excavations being conducted at the time on Buffalo Creek Reservation sites archaeologically similar to Buffam. Imogene C. Robertson conducted a dig at Buffam Street some time after Houghton. She too acknowledges that several sites exist nearby that closely parallel what she found at Buffam Street. In 1961, Marian E. White included Buffam Street in a series of Western New York sites she attempted to place in chronological order based on artifact typologies. White mentions some sites Houghton did not, but her research is more concerned with establishing a chronology and identifying antecedents to the Iroquois culture type than it is with the nature of any one site. She does, however, describe the artifacts from all three Buffam collections and from the other sites, making several detailed comparisons.

While all three scholars draw implicit connections between various Western New York sites, only Houghton and Robertson dare to attribute any of the sites to a group of people. Houghton adamantly matches seven Western New York

³³ Palazzetti 1992

³⁴ Fess 1952

³⁵ Conlin 36

³⁶ Severance 16

sites to the Wenro Indians: Oakfield (Genesee County), Shelby (Orleans County), Buffam Street, Eaton (West Seneca, Erie County), and three sites in Elma (Erie County). He takes particular interest in the Elma sites, because the Buffalo Museum of Science was conducting digs on two of them as Houghton was excavating at Buffam Street. The Elma artifacts share many characteristics with Buffam, and the sites are only a short distance to the East along Buffalo Creek.³⁷ Robertson attributes Buffam Street to the Wenroes, also connecting it to the Elma sites, perhaps just echoing Houghton's previous scholarship.³⁸

White includes Oakfield, Shelby, Buffam, and Eaton in her chronological study, also introducing two historic sites at Goodyear (Elma, Erie County) and Green Lake (Orchard Park, Erie County), and the Kienuka site (Lewiston, Niagara County). After examining artifacts from these seven sites, she is able to group them according to two overlapping chronological schemes: Transitional Iroquois and Iroquois culture types, and Early, Intermediate, and Historic periods. These schemes fall under the larger Late Woodland period. White places Oakfield first, the only site in the Early period, representing the Transitional Iroquois culture type. She then includes Kienuka, Shelby, Buffam, and Eaton (in that order, following Oakfield) in the Intermediate period, the first few sites representing the Iroquois culture type. Finally, Goodyear and Green Lake fall under the Historic period, also of the Iroquois culture type. White estimates the dates of occupation at these two sites only, 1550-1600 at Goodyear and 1575-1625 at Green Lake, which means Buffam Street was likely occupied sometime before 1550.³⁹

White's chronology makes a case for relating Buffam Street to other prehistoric Western New York sites. The other three sites White places in the Intermediate period have similar numbers of artifacts with certain decorative motifs, and certain types of ceramic rim profiles that change in frequency over time at all seven of her sites.⁴⁰ That change is the basis for her period and culture type groupings. While there are some discrepancies, White's findings indicate a potential relationship between several sites. Buffam could have been part of a single settlement cluster at one or more times in history.

Houghton already indicated that several Elma sites are virtually identical to Buffam Street, and because of their location in the Buffalo Creek area, they warrant further study as well. White states that the Buffam and Eaton sites are so similar that they are interchangeable in her chronology.⁴¹ Houghton found strong similarities among Eaton, Buffam, and the three Elma sites.⁴² According to Houghton, one of the three Elma sites remained unexplored at least to his writing.⁴³ That site should be located and excavated to firm up possible connections among these sites, and artifacts from the other sites and Buffam should be reexamined using more scientific methods.

³⁷ Severance 21

³⁸ Robertson 24

³⁹ White 133

⁴⁰ *ibid* 73; 80

⁴¹ *ibid* 105

⁴² Severance 17

⁴³ *ibid* 16

According to site maps, the Buffam village site extended just beyond the current park. Graves have been found within the Seneca Indian Park at Buffam Street, but other burial sites have been found outside the current park.⁴⁴ All known remains were removed by New York State order in 1893.⁴⁵ The earthen palisade mapped by E.G. Squier in 1849 had been leveled by cultivation by the time Houghton excavated. Robertson summarized the locations of kitchen middens excavated over the years at Buffam Street. Of five middens, three were excavated, each yielding one of the three Buffam artifact collections. Houghton's Buffalo Museum of Science dig focused on a midden on a slope near the site's eastern end. It contained charred corn, beans and nuts, as well as animal bones and various artifacts. Benedict dug on the slope running through the middle of the site, immediately across from the park's entrance. Robertson dug somewhere behind the slope, probably behind Benedict's midden, what she called "perhaps the center of the village."⁴⁶

At village sites such as Buffam Street, most artifacts are recovered from deep veins of black, ashy soil, what Houghton called "... the refuse or garbage heaps of the primitive village." He further describes such sites:

These beds in all cases are strewn...over the face of...the village site. In some cases these black beds seem to mark the position of the cabins of the village.

This accumulation was composed of all the animal refuse of the village combined with the ashes of its fires. Into it was swept or thrown practically everything that was in use in the village.⁴⁷

These piles, named "kitchen middens" by Robertson, contained mostly animal bones, but also projectile points, "...stone axes and chisels, potsherds and pipes, awls and fishhooks made of bone, chisels, gouges and hoes made of antler, and occasional ornaments of limited variety..." found at a depth of two to four feet.⁴⁸ Houghton found over 100 arrowpoints, many made of Onondaga Chert shaped into small, precise triangles in the Madison tradition from approximately 900 C.E.⁴⁹ None were large enough for spears and none were notched. There were fragments of large and small clay pottery vessels tempered with silica or chert powder. Most of the pottery was round bottomed, with a decorative pattern of "...repeated triangles filled in with parallel lines." The same midden also yielded plain clay pipes and some mussel-shell beads.⁵⁰ Digging a separate midden, Robertson found many of the same items, especially animal bones, a similar range of pottery sizes with unique incised decorations, and tools made of bone. There are pictures from the Robertson collection in this submission (images 18-22).

White performed the most comprehensive analysis of all three collections of Buffam Street artifacts. Of the 104 potsherds she examined, all had incised decorations in vertical or diagonal patterns on the rim.⁵¹ There were no potsherds decorated using a cord-wrapped stick or interrupted linear method, both common before incised decorations, which helped White place Buffam in her chronology. Decoration was also confined to the rims, with no neck decoration evident.⁵²

⁴⁴ *ibid* 15

⁴⁵ Conlin 36

⁴⁶ Robertson 24-5

⁴⁷ Severance 14

⁴⁸ *ibid* 14

⁴⁹ Gadayani (2011)

⁵⁰ Severance 19

⁵¹ White 73

⁵² *ibid* 71

Pipes from Buffam Street are mostly plain, rimless trumpet pipes typical of pre-contact, intermediate period sites. There are also some square bowl pipes and two effigy pipes.⁵³

The bulk of artifacts from Buffam Street appear to come from the Woodland Period. In Western New York, Early Woodland cultures were the first to produce pottery and pipes. By the Late Woodland period, pottery was decorated using the incising method (dominant at Buffam Street), moving away from the cord-wrapped method more common in the Early Woodland period.⁵⁴ Also typical of Late Woodland sites are effigy pipes depicting bear or human figures on the bowl. Two such pipes exist in the Buffam artifact collections.⁵⁵ Late Woodland villages also introduced earthen palisades providing a base for log walls. According to more recent work by Herter (2001), the earthen palisade at Buffam Street could have enclosed a village holding 850 people during the early 1500s.⁵⁶

Though Buffam Street's most prominent associations are the Seneca occupation and the Late Woodland village, there are older prehistoric campsite antecedents at the site.⁵⁷ There are artifacts from the Lamoka culture in the Archaic Period (2500 B.C.E.), notched blade points from 3000-2000 B.C.E., Meadowood points from 800-500 B.C.E., and several artifacts falling into the 900-1500 C.E. range.⁵⁸ The oldest artifacts are a smaller part of the collection, but articulate the site's significance for natives over thousands of years.

Significance

Summary Paragraph

Buffam Street has local significance as a Late Woodland prehistoric village, burial site and anchor for a later Seneca village, and as a commemorative park with enduring importance for the Seneca Nation of Indians. It is the only remaining site on the former Buffalo Creek Reservation that can remotely bear so many associations, as any sites more directly associated with these people or events have been lost. The Buffam Street site qualifies for Criterion 1, Criterion 3, Criterion 4 and Criterion 9 of the "Criteria for Designation" as defined in Chapter 337, Preservation Standards, City of Buffalo Charter and Ordinances.⁵⁹ The site has character, interest and values as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of Buffalo, New York State and the country (Criterion 1); the site exemplifies the archaeological heritage of the City (Criterion 3); the site is identified with persons who significantly contributed to the development of Buffalo, New York State and the country (Criterion 4) and the site contains physical characteristics and monuments that make it an established and familiar visual feature within the city (Criterion 9). The City Charter requires that a landmark site meet one (1) or more of the criteria. The Buffam Street site four (4) of the criteria.

⁵³ White 97-101

⁵⁴ McCarthy 5-7

⁵⁵ ibid 10

⁵⁶ Herter 278

⁵⁷ Perrelli (2011)

⁵⁸ Gadayani (2011)

⁵⁹ The "Criteria for Designation" are located in Chapter 337 of the City of Buffalo Charter and Ordinances. The charter can be located at the city's website, url, <http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/>

The Buffam Street site is significant for its association with Native American migration and settlement, having been a prehistoric (possibly Wenro) village until 1638 and a Seneca village from 1780-1842, as well as the treaties and land sales negotiated with the Seneca Indians that allowed American settlement in Western New York. The site may also hold traditional cultural value for the Seneca Nation of Indians today. It meets criterion 4 for its association with Red Jacket, prominent Seneca diplomat and traditionalist who lived and participated in important council meetings near Buffam Street and was later buried there. Finally, the site meets criterion 3 as a prehistoric village location having yielded, and likely to yield, information and artifacts important in studies of local prehistory.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Seneca Settlement and Land Deals:

After seeking temporary refuge from General Sullivan at the British Fort Niagara, the Seneca established new villages along Buffalo and Cazenovia Creeks and their tributary streams. They established a council house near the village at the Buffam Street site. It was here that the Seneca leaders received many American emissaries, some hoping to secure a lasting peace, others wishing to establish Christianity at Buffalo Creek, but many more as agents to negotiate treaties and land sales. The Seneca would agree to light a council fire and discuss only the needs of those visitors whose purpose was deemed important. Thus, every visitor to the Seneca south of Buffalo hoped his stated business would warrant a council meeting. The village at Buffam Street was the political gatekeeper for the local Seneca villages, receiving visitors and determining who would have an audience at the council house, which was one mile removed from the village itself.

Samuel Kirkland, well respected among Indians in central New York, was among the first men to argue his case before the Seneca here. Acting on behalf of Phelps and Gorham, Kirkland convinced the Seneca at Buffalo Creek to sell some of their land near the Genesee River, the first in a series of deals that would diminish Seneca territory in a death by a thousand cuts. One of the largest deals partly negotiated at Buffalo Creek was the sale of 3.6 million acres to the Holland Land Company by Robert Morris in 1793, opening up Western New York to new settlement while consigning the Seneca to three reservations. Morris had to extinguish Seneca title to the land by negotiating with them at Buffalo Creek. Had Morris failed, the Holland Land Company could not have legally bought and subdivided Western New York for new settlement, and the region would have developed much differently. Two treaties in 1838 and 1842 were negotiated near the Buffam Street village that dissolved the Buffalo Creek Reservation altogether. The establishment of a mission church in 1832 across from the Buffam Street site contributes to this story of cultural decline among the Seneca and replacement by new white settlements.

Traditional Cultural Value:

The Seneca Indians keep coming back to Buffam Street. Even after the Seneca vacated their villages in the Buffalo Creek Reservation, they frequently returned to fish in Buffalo and Cazenovia Creeks. They would also visit

graves at other nearby village sites.⁶⁰ Members of the Seneca Nation attended the initial dedication of the Seneca Indian Park in 1909, and the rededication of a replacement plaque in 1992. In 1952, Seneca remains were interred there after removal from a Genesee River site. That the site was considered an appropriate alternative burial place for culturally sensitive remains, even after its surroundings had been altered by dense development, says much about how important Buffam Street still is to the Seneca.

Life and Times of Red Jacket:

Red Jacket was among the most important and influential Seneca leaders of the late 1700s-early 1800s. The village at Buffam Street had two important foci: the prehistoric village site and Red Jacket's cabin. He lived middle and later years of his life in this village, walking the woods along Buffalo and Cazenovia Creeks, conducting business at the council house a short walk away, even receiving the occasional curious white visitor. Red Jacket was adamant that he never wanted to leave the village—not even upon his death. He was buried accordingly, beneath a large walnut tree at the West end of the current Seneca Indian Park.⁶¹ Red Jacket's former burial site is thus far more significant because it is more closely associated with his life and final wishes—indeed his cultural beliefs—than his current resting place in Forest Lawn Cemetery or any other site in Western New York.

Buffam Street is significant because it was Red Jacket's chosen and original burial location. This simple choice articulates the site's significance even though Red Jacket's body is no longer buried there. Red Jacket is a person of outstanding importance in Seneca history, the most ardent and recognizable protector of Seneca culture during his lifetime. The Buffam Street site is the last surviving property associated with him in an area strongly associated with his life and times. By choosing to be buried there, Red Jacket affirmed not just the site's significance to him, but also its cultural value as part of the traditions he struggled his whole life to uphold. That his body no longer resides at Buffam Street does not diminish the power and meaning behind his choice; rather it augments the site's ability to tell the story of Seneca culture and decline. Red Jacket's relocation to Forest Lawn Cemetery by Buffalo elites in the early 1900s contributes an ironic note to this story instead of negating Buffam's significance as his former burial location.

The exact location of Red Jacket's cabin is not known. There is one artistic rendering of it that places it next to the Mission House, but no written source confirms that location. It was certainly close to the Buffam Street site, however. The cabin's true location is lost to history, as homes in the current neighborhood likely took its place. The site of Red Jacket's place of business—the Seneca council house—is devoid of integrity as well. According to Houghton, the council house was “about a hundred yards north of the corner of Littel and Archer Streets...” near the current intersection of Bailey Ave. and Seneca St.⁶² A large electrical substation, surrounded by industrial and some residential development, currently occupies that location.

Today the Buffam Street site's primary purpose is commemorative. It has been called the Seneca Indian Park since its creation over a century ago, paying homage to its past role as the heart of a Seneca village. Three monuments

⁶⁰ Severance 180

⁶¹ Buffalo Historical Society (1885) 85.

⁶² Severance 181

convey information related to this former culture's occupation of the site. The land is a city park, but there are no benches, playgrounds, or ballfields. The site is clearly commemorative. Two monuments carry a special significance. One, a granite boulder bearing a bronze plaque inscribed with the park's name and a description of its history, was established in 1909, when the surrounding neighborhood was still growing. The boulder has been a neighborhood fixture ever since, though the plaque was stolen and replaced in 1992.

One could argue that to the uninitiated observer, the park's primary significance is its commemorative function, especially because the monuments are the only indicator of the site's rich history. Two of the monuments—the boulder and a tomb marking reinterred Seneca remains—may even bear cultural significance for the Seneca Nation of Indians. Members of the Seneca Nation attended the boulder's original dedication, and a Cayuga named Allan Jamieson (related to Mary Jemison, formerly buried at Buffam Street) spearheaded the restoration of the bronze plaque in the late 1980s. The second monument identifies the final resting place of Seneca remains removed from the Mt. Morris dam project on the Genesee River, ceremonially reburied at Buffam Street in 1952 by members of the Seneca Nation.

Archaeological Information Potential:

At least two studies of Buffam artifacts have already contributed to an understanding of Western New York prehistory. The artifact record indicates varying levels of human activity at the site, including fishing, farming, and hunting, stretching back thousands of years to the Mid to Late Archaic period.⁶³ Much of the artifact record comes from the Late Woodland period. Reviewing these artifacts, Houghton (n.d.) felt comfortable attributing the site to the Wenro Indians, a late prehistoric culture he thought was common throughout the former Buffalo Creek Reservation. Several of these sites are in Elma, and one, the Eaton Site in West Seneca, is on the National Register of Historic Places. His accounts of the Buffam artifacts reveal several cultural details captured from digging through one of the prehistoric village's waste middens. There is no direct historical account of the Wenro Indians, though the end of their presence in Western New York overlaps by 15-20 years the presence of French emissaries in the area. The French, however, only encountered the Neutral Indians to the north.

White (1961) used Buffam as part of a novel approach to local Iroquois archaeological study. Iroquois villages often lack "superposition of archaeological layers," making it difficult to establish precise dates of occupation. Also, there are few intact sites, making data sets small and cobbled together from scattered, inconsistent artifact collections often from private collectors. By aiming to establish smaller chronologies of a few local sites through "refined techniques of analysis," or comparing artifact typologies and tracking how they change from site to site, White argued that larger parts of the cultural chronology would gradually fall into place. Limiting study to small, geographic areas minimizes the statistical significance of more confusing variations among the small site samples.⁶⁴ White's scientific study gives a precise account of the general culture-and chronology-defining characteristics of the Buffam artifacts, while situating them in a sample regional chronology.

⁶³ Perrelli, personal communications 2011

White's research demonstrates Buffam's continuing information potential. Buffam can contribute to any grouping of sites designed to determine other local chronologies. It should be studied in conjunction with other sites in the Buffalo Creek Reservation, specifically the Eaton Site and the various Elma sites that Houghton identified, among others. One note by White indicates Buffam's particular significance in the Buffalo Creek context:

A future approach to the problem of dating sites stems from the fact that Iroquois villages generally followed an orderly pattern of movement for a distance of several miles along the course of a stream. It would be possible, for example, to investigate the number of villages intervening along the course of Buffalo Creek which might connect the Buffam Street site with the Goodyear site. Such a procedure would allow statements on the total number of villages included in the timespan and more reliable estimates of the time involved...⁶⁵

This notion of using Buffam Street as an end point (it is the furthest to the west of any Buffalo Creek villages on White's map (see: map 6) makes its study important to understanding an entire network of settlements along Buffalo Creek and its tributaries.

Work along those lines has been scarce since the 1960s, but as recently as 2001 White's method was revisited as the basis for an expansive study of Niagara Frontier Iroquois development undertaken by doctoral candidate Nancy Herter. Herter used Buffam Street as one of 12 local sites forming a backbone chronology, established by comparing artifact typologies. Her research indicated that a separate Iroquoian group, a "Buffalo site cluster" including Buffam Street, might have developed indigenous to the Buffalo Creek Reservation area during the Late Woodland Period, opposite a Seneca culture cluster in west-central New York that appeared more closely related to the Oakfield ancestral site.⁶⁶ Herter paints a picture of a distinct culture occupying Buffalo Creek from the Late Woodland Period to just before the historic period.⁶⁷ Buffam Street is an integral part of that picture. Herter is careful to point out that the question is not settled, especially because no antecedent sites for the Buffalo area cluster have been found, meaning there is potential for future research at Buffam and Buffalo Creek.⁶⁸

Site Integrity:

The Buffam Street site retains integrity of location, setting and association. As a fixed site, Buffam Street has not moved at all. It still retains its critical proximity to Buffalo and Cazenovia Creeks that made it a feasible location for Native American settlement in prehistoric and historic times. The underlying topography of the site and its surroundings is fundamentally unchanged. The two creeks still flow through the area, the hill atop which the site sits is still a high point in the neighborhood, the ridge running through the center of the site is still present, and the land slopes gently downward from the site to the north where it meets Buffalo Creek. These features and proximities remain despite the area's extensive urban development. There are no standing structures associated with the period of significance, which is

⁶⁴ White iii-iv

⁶⁵ White 107-8

⁶⁶ Herter 310, 311-12

⁶⁷ *ibid* 264-6

⁶⁸ *ibid* 243

common for Native American sites, especially in developed areas. Red Jacket and his contemporaries may not instantly recognize the site today, but the topography would aid their recollection of its significance.

The site retains a high degree of archaeological integrity in terms of information potential. The site is likely to yield additional artifacts and subsurface features. After a basic review of the site's history, Perrelli believes there is a significant chance that subsurface features including fire pits, post molds from longhouses or sweat lodges, and even parts of the palisade base may still exist under the topsoil.⁶⁹ The part of the former village site within the Seneca Indian Park today has never been developed, and agricultural activity at or near the site would not have destroyed these possible features. Herter acknowledges that many Buffalo site cluster sites have likely been lost to development.⁷⁰ A partially preserved site such as Buffam where subsurface features have never been mapped is therefore a rare find. According to White, collections from two of the three middens have slowly deteriorated and diminished due to improper care. The Robertson collection is in good condition, as it resides in the Marian E. White Museum collection at the University at Buffalo. Buffam Street retains integrity because of the information potential of already excavated artifacts and the features that still could exist at the site.

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⁶⁹ Perrelli (2011).

⁷⁰ Herter 311

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