



From Fighter Planes to Southern Fried Chicken

The Curtiss-Wright plane factory was formerly located at 2050 Elmwood Avenue, where Home Depot and Popeye's stand today. In 1929 it was the largest plane manufacturer in the world, producing more than 10,000 planes during the First World War and nearly 30,000 during the Second World War. Employing close to 20,000 people in the Buffalo area, the Curtiss-Wright Corporation

contributed greatly to technological advancements made in the aerospace industry. The development and production of the J-5C Whirlwind engine in the early 1920s solved issues that had hindered the ability to conduct long distance flights. These strides made by Curtiss-Wright made trans-oceanic flights possible, and opened the door for the birth of an American hero. In May 1927, Charles Lindbergh and his plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, made the 3,600 mile, 33 hour trip across the Atlantic Ocean.



Charles Lindbergh working on his C-15 Whirlwind Engine mounted on the famous Spirit of St. Louis.

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Fall 2015 Historical Speaker Series

The Black Rock Historical Society has organized a fall speaker series that will begin on October 1st and run through the end of November. Including approximately five speakers, topics will all be centered on subjects that are deeply tied to the Northwest Buffalo area. Drawing upon the rich history of the region, the speaker series will be a bi-monthly occurrence and will include topics such as the history of beer brewing in



the area, the story of a documented Snake Oil Salesman, whose story and life in the area will be told through a living descendent. We will have Joan Miller in attendance one night to discuss the history of St. Francis Xavier Cemetery located in Riverside Park and how it stands as an incredible time capsule for the region's birth and development. Another topic will explore the early years of gunsmithing in the Black Rock area. Alt-

hough this may seem obscure, at one time Black Rock was home to Andrew Burgess and the Burgess Gun Company. Credited with nearly 900 patents, Burgess is often forgotten, but his contributions to the firearm industry were paramount. To close our fall speaker series, we plan to hold a Veterans Day Celebration to honor those who have served in our armed forces. If there are any veterans in the area who would wish to share stories about their service or how wartime industry changed the area we would love to hear from you.

The Black Rock Canal Then and Now.

Although there has been a lock in Black Rock since the construction of the Erie Canal in 1823, it was only in use until the canal was diverted to Tonawanda. Following the move of the Erie Canal from downtown Buffalo, the necessity to still move goods and people through it to and from Buffalo became an item of focus. The Black Rock Canal was the answer to these problems. Since its completion in 1914 the Canal, and its single lock, located between the International Bridge and Austin Street, have served as a powerful influence in the assistance of trans-

“In 1957, over 4.6 million tons of freight passed through the Black Rock Lock on its way to and from Buffalo.”

portation and trade in the Western New York area. Its operation with only one lock makes the Black Rock Canal unique. Instead of being used to traverse differences in elevation, as is customarily the purpose of a lock, it is used to protect the interior of the canal and shoreline from the damaging effects of water erosion. In addition to the canal standing out because of the number of locks it has, the Black Rock



This colored photo from 1992 illustrates the capacity of the canal to support large, ocean worthy vessels.

Canal is distinctive because unlike most canals it does not connect two separate bodies of water. Instead, the canal returns to the same waterway that it diverged from. The reason for this is because this section of the Niagara River is particularly tricky to traverse. The combined effects of the river bottle necking, the presence of underwater reefs, and fast flowing waters, made moving freight or recreational vessels through the river dangerous.

Although it played little brother to the much larger Erie Canal, the Black Rock Canal and Black Rock Lock were very active in the early to mid-20th Century.

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The drawing above is the proposed plan for the construction of the Black Rock Canal in the early 20th Century and illustrates very well the bottle neck formation at the mouth of Lake Erie that made the river so dangerous to travel.

Fighter Planes continued:

Powered by a Curtiss-Wright J-C5 Whirlwind engine, Lindbergh and his plane completed the first trans-Atlantic trip from New York City to Paris.

Electing to operate out of the new factories they had constructed in Tonawanda and on Genesee Street, Curtiss-Wright closed their 2050 Elmwood Ave location in 1931 as a result of financial hardships in the wake



The black and white photo above is the Curtiss-Wright plane factory located on Genesee Street. These planes in the photo were destined for the Atlantic or European theaters to fight the Axis powers during World War Two.

Truly a Domestic Product

The Domestic sewing machine on display in our museum is Domestic no. 4 and was produced somewhere between 1887 and 1891. Established in Norwalk, Ohio, in 1869, The Domestic Sewing Machine Company operated out of multiple cities in the Northeast. Here in Buffalo the factory was located at Rano and Isabella Streets and opened in 1906. Through the use of

of the Great Depression. They continued to build planes in the Buffalo area until 1946. This company, and the 2050

Elmwood Ave factory in particular, had a significant impact on the capacity of the United States Air Force during World War II. Many of the residents of the surrounding neighbor-

hoods of Black Rock, West

Hertel, and Riverside ended up being our own "Rosie the Riveter".

If you know of someone who meets that description we would love

to have their stories at the BRHS. Please feel free to contact us.



The illustration above is what the 2050 Elmwood Avenue Curtiss-Wright plane factory looked like while still operational in the early 20th Century.

Many of the residents of the surrounding neighborhood of Black Rock, West Hertel, and Riverside ended up becoming our own "Rosie the Riveter".



This Domestic no. 4 located in our show room is an original production and is still in functioning order.

a treadle mechanism, power is generated for the machine by pushing on a foot pedal. By pushing down on the foot pedal the gears within the machine are activated and begin to spin. This then causes the needle to move up and down, pushing and pulling thread through fabric. Although they never truly rivaled Singer in terms of sales, Domestic was

known as one of the top machines in terms of its overall quality. Remaining an independent company until 1924, Domestic was bought out by White Sewing Machine Company, which retained the Domestic name and continued to produce machines well into the second half of the 20th century.



Black rock Historical Society

1902 Niagara Street Buffalo, New York, 14207

Showroom Hours of Operation

Thursday 3:00pm-7:00pm
Friday 12:00pm-4:00pm
Saturday 10:00am-2:00pm

For any inquiries please contact us at

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Fall 2015 Speaker Series

October 1st
Buffalo Schools Past and Present.

October 15th
German Heritage and St. Francis Xavier Cemetery

October 29th
Timothy Madigan and his Great Grandfather the Snake Oil King

November 12th
Veterans Day Celebration.
See our Facebook page for additional information or volunteer opportunities.

November 19th
Ethan Cox— President of Community Beer Works presents a signing of his text *Buffalo Beer: The History of Brewing in the Nickel City.*

Most easily identified as the current neighborhoods of Black Rock and Grant Amherst the heritage and culture of these communities has been tied together from the beginning, before the City of Buffalo when it was the Village of Black Rock. Telling this story is the culmination of many years of work to define and recognize these long forgotten neighborhoods.

The Blizzard of 1977 is so famous in the Buffalo area that it is now the measuring stick for all other winter storms in our area. For those who remember it, we at the Black Rock Historical Society would love to hear your story. We are featuring the Blizzard of '77 in our next news article and are interested in photocopying any news clippings, or photos you may have and would like to share with us. If you could contact us with any inquires into this offer we would greatly appreciate it

Black Rock Canal continued:

In 1957, over 4.6 million tons of freight passed through the Black Rock Lock on its way to and from Buffalo. By allowing ships a more navigable route from the Western terminus of the Erie Canal to the city of Buffalo, the Black Rock Canal helped the booming steel industry of Buffalo grow. Originally constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, today the lock and canal are still operated and maintained by the same men and women. Over the course of the past



People rowing crew and kayaking toward the southern of the Black Rock Canal. The Ferry Street Bridge and Broderick Park are seen centered in the forefront of the photo.

century the canal and lock have undergone multiple rehabilitation projects led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The most recent of these rehabilitation projects occurred in the 1990s, which saw the refurbishing of the lock houses, installation of safety railings and fences, as well as the widening of the lock walls. In recent years the traffic through the Black Rock lock has decreased, but even after celebrating the 100th anniversary of its opening two years ago, it is still operational and sees daily traffic, from both freight and recreational vessels.