

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MAY 15 2015

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property:

Historic name FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO

other names/site number: Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo

2. Location

street & number 695 Elmwood Avenue [ ] not for publication

city or town Buffalo [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county Erie code 029 zip code 14222

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Kenneth Purpant* DSHPO

4/21/15

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register [ ] see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register [ ] see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

date of action

*Edson H. Beall*

6-30-15

**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**

**Erie, New York**

Name of Property

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<b>1</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

\_\_\_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

\_\_\_\_\_ RELIGION/Religious Facility \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ RELIGION/Religious Facility \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

\_\_\_\_\_ Late 19<sup>th</sup> & Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals/ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Late Gothic Revival (English Country Gothic) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

foundation \_\_\_\_\_ stone (Indiana limestone)

walls \_\_\_\_\_ stone \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

roof \_\_\_\_\_ slate \_\_\_\_\_

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**

**Erie, New York**

Name of Property

County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or grave
- D** a cemetery
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by historic American Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance:**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

Architecture

**Period of Significance:**

1906 - 1957

**Significant Dates:**

1906, 1925

**Significant Person:**

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A

**Architect/Builder:**

Edward Austin Kent and William Winthrop Kent

Bley and Lyman (1925 addition)

**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**  
Name of Property

**Erie, New York**  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** 0.82 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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2	<u>1</u> <u> </u> <u>8</u> <u> </u>	<u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u>	<u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u>	4	<u>1</u> <u> </u> <u>8</u> <u> </u>	<u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u>	<u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u> <u>    </u>

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Giorgio Giovinazzo, Rev. Margret O'Neill, Bill Parke and Tom Yots  
[Edited by Jennifer Walkowski, NYSHPO]

organization Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo date January 14, 2015

street & number 695 Elmwood Avenue telephone 716.885.2136

city or town Buffalo state NY zip code 14222

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo

street & number 695 Elmwood Avenue telephone 716.885.2136

city or town Buffalo state NY zip code 14222

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20503

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**National Register of Historic Places  
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**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**

Section 7 Page 1

**Name of Property**

**Erie, New York**

**County and State**

Narrative Description of Property

The First Unitarian Church of Buffalo is located at the northeast corner of Elmwood Avenue and West Ferry Street in the north-central part of the City of Buffalo, Erie County, New York. The church is located in an area of the city known as the Elmwood Village, a mixed-use neighborhood consisting of commercial development along Elmwood Avenue, with many residential houses and apartment buildings on neighboring side streets such as West Ferry Street.

The building faces West Ferry Street to the south and Elmwood Avenue to the west. The site is level and approximately 0.82 acres in size with landscaped gardens and walkways facing both Elmwood and West Ferry. The building is L-shaped and includes the main block, which is the sanctuary, oriented to West Ferry Street and an attached secondary block, known as the annex, facing Elmwood Avenue. The main entrance to the sanctuary faces West Ferry Street with secondary entrances into the annex through the garden and directly off Elmwood Avenue. A service entrance to the kitchen is on the east side of the building. A paved parking lot abuts the northern wall of the annex and is accessed off Elmwood Avenue.

First Unitarian Church, designed in 1904 and completed in 1906, by noted local architects Edward Austin Kent and William Winthrop Kent, is built of Indiana limestone in the English Country Gothic Style. The church building is divided into the sanctuary unit and an attached annex. The church expresses the English Country Gothic Style in its asymmetrical plan and the steep roof with low, overhanging eaves. The crenelated tower is another example of the style, as is the layering of the sanctuary's interior with the heavy dark wood hammer beam trusses of the ceiling dominating the smooth, unadorned stone walls of the lower half of the space. The annex is similar in style and materials to the main church block. Two additions to the annex occurred over time, considerably expanding its space. The additions consist of a 1925 kitchen and meeting room addition, as well as an entry vestibule added in 2001. The sanctuary unit faces south and is 2 stories in height with a cruciform plan and a central, crenelated tower on the main façade. The annex is set perpendicular to the sanctuary and is 2 ½ stories on a raised basement, facing west on Elmwood Avenue. The primary exterior building material for both the sanctuary and annex is large smooth faced Indiana Limestone in an ashlar running bond pattern with buttressing along the east and west elevations of the sanctuary. The windows are of carved stone in the sanctuary and painted wood in the annex. Finials and cupolas are of limestone. Roofing material is slate with copper flashing. Doors are solid oak with cast iron hinges, straps and hardware. In addition to the English Country Gothic style of the exterior, the interior features both Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau influences: the former in the extensive use of carved wood, especially in the hammer beam truss, and the latter in the flowing floral designs in the stained glass windows and the curving iron strap work on the doors.

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FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO

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Name of Property

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Exterior

The church building sits upon a stone foundation and has smooth walls of regularly coursed ashlar stone. Detailing is limited to the window surrounds and sills. A tower containing the church bell and main entrance to the church is at the southernmost end of the building. The east and west elevations of the sanctuary wing have three windows in a similar type of perpendicular style located between the main sanctuary buttressing. The buttressing, consistent with that of the main tower, is simple with a sloped stone cap. The typical sanctuary windows (as well as the windows of the tower) are simplified Gothic style with three windows divided by stone mullions, with one larger central window with a modified trefoil arch and two smaller windows flanking the larger window with a trefoil arch. Above the three windows are four batement lights.

The east-west transept of the sanctuary wing forms large stone gable ends that project above the roof line and each is capped with a stone crocketed cross finial. Within the stone face are large windows in a similar simplified Gothic style. The window is divided into three tiers, the lower band of seven smaller windows with trefoil arches, the middle band of four smaller and three middle larger windows with trefoil arches and the upper band series of fourteen batement lights. This window system is within an overall lancet arch with splayed voussoirs and sides the thickness of the stone. The roof consists of cross gables covering the nave and transept of the sanctuary unit and the rectangular block forming the annex. In the sanctuary unit, the primary gable is over the transept, intersecting with a secondary gable over the nave. The gable ends extend the stone façade above the slate roof line and are capped at the pinnacle with a stone crocketed cross finial on the east and west gables of the transepts.

The south elevation of the sanctuary unit, facing West Ferry Street, contains the main entrance to the church and is defined by a square tower with a corbelled parapet and crenulated stepped stone caps surrounding a flat roof. Around the tower is a base with a stone cap that indicates the top of the thicker foundation wall and the height of the raised floor level. The main door on the south face of the tower is set in an overall acute arch, with the voussoir of the door tapered and stepped with a stone molding that fades into the splayed limestone sides of the main entrance. The large oak doors follow the form of the arch with wrought-iron strap door hinges and wrought-iron decorative ornamentation with a simplified Art Nouveau style, resembling a fleur-de-lis. On the east and west sides of the tower, paired lancet windows are at the main level giving light to the narthex. Above the main entry door is the main window of the tower. The window is formed by the acute arch with splayed voussoirs and sides the thickness of the stone. Three main window sections are defined with stone mullions, with the top of the three arches in a cinquefoil arch. Batement lights are above the three arches to form the overall window. The corners of the tower are defined by stone buttressing at right angles to each other with sloped stone caps. A prominent belt course is just above the buttress caps and the main window, followed by paired vent windows in the form of lancet/acute arches. In each window, a trefoil arch is set within the main lancet/acute arch with splayed voussoir and sides the thickness of the stone. These windows are repeated on

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each side of the tower. Above the arched vent windows is a second beltcourse followed by the crenelated parapet surrounding the tower. The detailing found in the tower is consistent around the building.

The annex unit, facing east and perpendicular to the north end of the sanctuary unit, is in the form of a simple rectangle with the main block forming the primary mass and a small rectangular bump-out located at the southeast corner. The main block of the annex has a gable roof joined by an intersecting gable roof over the bump-out. Stone crocketed cross finials are located on the gable ends and stone cupolas are placed at the east and west gable ends of the annex. Two additions have been completed over the years; the first added a kitchen, with meeting room above, to the west end of the annex in 1925; it is roofed in the same gable fashion. The second addition, completed in the 2001, added a vestibule and garden entrance to the annex and is roofed with a shed style roof.

The west façade of the annex has a gable-end stone elevation consistent with the sanctuary transept and is capped with a stone cupola at the end. At the foundation, the wall steps forward slightly, surmounted by a raked water table, above which the slight elevation off grade of the main floor level is evident. This raised floor is accessed by the two exterior steps and additional interior steps. Windows to the basement are glass block and are located in direct relation to the windows of the ground level above and lie within the lower stone base course. At the ground level two steps lead to a centrally located double door with small diamond shaped windows and wood transom above door. This simple rectangular oak door has wrought iron strapping hinges in a simplified version of the flamboyant style of the sanctuary doors. The central door is flanked by two smaller windows, with splayed sill, squared off header and jambs, wood mullions, dividing the opening into three windows, with a double trefoil arch at the top of each. At the ground level there is an additional third window on the west face of the bump-out with a similar design. The second floor windows consist of a larger rectangular central window, with a splayed sill, square head and jamb, wood mullions with a trefoil arch topping the upper windows. Two flanking smaller windows are present with similar splayed sill, square head and jamb with three mullions and trefoil arch defining the tops of the windows. A small rectangular vent with splayed sides, head and sill is located just below the cupola in the attic space. The east gable end is concealed by the 1925 addition.

The south elevation of the annex is consistent with the ends of the stone gable extending above the roof line. Rectangular windows are located at the second floor level that are similar to the ground floor windows of the west face. Stone crocketed cross finials cap the gable end. The north elevation of the annex has a similar series of windows located at the basement, ground floor and second floor level; generally, all windows are located in relation to each other. The stone gable end of the 1925 addition is similar to the other gable ends, with similar windows and vent.

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The modern vestibule addition was designed by Michael Hamilton of Hamilton Houston and Lownie and constructed in 2001 by contractor BRD Construction of Buffalo. It is consistent with the Kents' design intent as shown on the original conceptual rendering by the architect. Three windows are located above the modern vestibule, at the second floor level, that are similar to the other rectangular windows of the annex.

Interior – Main Sanctuary

The interior spaces of the First Unitarian Church are laid out in an L-shaped plan with the sanctuary, narthex and entrance in the stem of the L and the remaining rooms that make up the annex in the base. The stem is cruciform in plan and the base is an elongated rectangle. The main entrance is within the central projecting tower of the south façade. The sanctuary space includes a massive wooden truss, the pulpit, reredos, windscreen and pews done in quartered oak similar to the truss and a similarly finished choir loft with organ console and exposed organ pipes. The sanctuary space is well lit by numerous large east and west facing stained glass windows, designed to let in sufficient natural light to illuminate the volume of the space.

The church is entered through a compressed space consisting of a small vestibule opening into a larger foyer, or narthex, beneath the choir loft. This narthex, located at the south end of the sanctuary, provides the main entrance to the sanctuary from West Ferry Street. The exterior oak double doors open into the space from outside, and oak double doors, with a slatted oak transom, open into the main sanctuary. These doors are set within an elongated acute arch with splayed voussoir and sides. Flanking the double doors into the sanctuary are two narrow oak doors. Set within a lancet arched doorframe, the easternmost door opens to a spiral concrete stair to the choir loft and attic space; on the western side, a matching door opens to a storage closet. A second door opens to a narrow stone stairway leading to a room in the tower above the vestibule that once housed the minister's office. At the east and west ends of the narthex are two rectangular stained glass windows set within a lancet arch opening with splayed voussoir and sides. The window is in a similar style to the windows of the sanctuary. The interior finishing of the windows mirrors that of the exterior windows as described above.

The walls and floor of the sanctuary are of smooth finished limestone like that of the exterior of the church. The stone floor sits on a concrete slab. One of the most dramatic features of this interior space is the dramatic dark-finished oak hammer beam truss that fills the upper region of the sanctuary. The truss is constructed of a series of short horizontal members attached to the principal rafter in lieu of a tie beam. This hammer beam is further supported by additional horizontal bracing, forming the truss structure. The oak hammer beam and braces forming the ribs of the sanctuary are carved and ornamented with moldings, fluting, and foiled tracery. The crossing of the sanctuary is accentuated by the coming together of the hammer beam ribs, marking at the point of intersection the highest point of the church. This intersection of space is defined by four trusses forming a square, with two diagonal intersecting trusses with a pendant at the base of the short vertical member. The electrolier light fixtures are lanterns of wrought iron, suspended by iron chains from the pendants. They



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originally contained panels of isinglass (a translucent gelatin based sheeting) that have subsequently been replaced by a paper material similar in style and appearance.<sup>1</sup> They accommodate both electric lights and candles.

The ceiling is finished in wood decking and is supported by wood purlins connected to the hammer beam truss. The truss is supported by limestone corbels. The corbels at the front of the sanctuary are ornamented with lily and pinecone motifs, among others, while the corbels throughout the rest of the sanctuary are simpler limestone blocks.

The sanctuary has a center aisle, ending in a raised pulpit backed by an intricately carved oak reredos that divides the space into symmetrical components with side aisles leading to the expanded transept spaces. The interior trim, pews and furniture feature satin finished quarter sawn oak, with the floor and walls finished in smooth cut limestone. The oak pews fill the nave and the transepts and a moveable pulpit of similar material is centered in the chancel for services. The pulpit was replaced after 1957 to approximately match the original, which was destroyed in a fire that year. The fire, caused by an electrical malfunction, completely destroyed the hand carved wooden pulpit and an adjacent table.<sup>2</sup>

The reredos spans the back of the chancel. It is a multi-panel screen with each panel made up of a raised ogee arch with oak fielded panel. At the top of the panel is an ornamented frieze band of quatrefoil tracery; at the base of the panel are three raised trefoil arches. Each panel is defined by tall crocketed finials at each end, with a lower inverted trefoil arch with crocketed cap. The wood grain, texture and detail of the ornament, carved as raised elements or as part of the fielded panel, are excellent examples of the craftsmanship found throughout the sanctuary. Three panels are on either side of the seven panels that continue around the pulpit and form a semi-circular volume of space behind the altar. These seven panels have an additional level of taller foiled tracery with inverted trefoil tracery and an additional, taller, crocketed finial at the divider and center of each panel. The Hayden Company from Rochester, New York, supplied some of the carved woodwork for the sanctuary.<sup>3</sup> The sanctuary is filled with natural light from large east and west facing windows in both the transept and along the side aisles. This allows the interior to be well lit in spite of the potentially overpowering effect of the deep-stained hammer beam truss and ceiling. There are no windows lighting the sanctuary from the south. The south facing window in the entrance tower lights the former minister's office, now used as a storeroom. The north-facing window at the end of the sanctuary originally received natural light that was blocked when the annex was expanded. It is now backlit. The windows are a variety of types: two transept, one pulpit and six nave

<sup>1</sup> "New Church of Great Beauty," *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo NY), September 4, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> There was heat damage to the finish of the reredos and the stone floor slab beneath the pulpit was cracked by the intense heat but no further damage was done by the fire.

<sup>3</sup> "New Church of Great Beauty," *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo NY), September 4, 1906.

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windows. They are set in deep frames and mullions of carved limestone. They are original to the building and were designed and made by the firm of Harry E. Goodhue of Boston.<sup>4</sup>

The window design of the east transept is of note, as it has as its central figure the Good Shepherd in a form that it is unlike the conventional representation of Christ. "It shows a beardless youth clad in a red tunic, the right hand grasping a staff, and the left shoulder bearing a lamb. This is a reproduction of the earliest known representation of Christ, which was found in the catacombs of Rome. Beneath the figure is the text: 'And goeth into the mountains and seeketh that which is gone astray'."<sup>5</sup>

The west transept window has as its central figure the prophet Isaiah, and the window in back of the pulpit has no marked design. The nave windows all feature viniculture references, with tracery of vine, leaf, and bunches of grapes, and reflect an Art Nouveau influence with their florid style. Each window bears one of the Beatitudes.<sup>6</sup> When interviewed in 1906, E. A. Kent stated that the windows would have few figures and instead would have many quotations.<sup>7</sup> The windows were a gift of Mrs. E.C. Sprague and her sons, Noah P. and E. Carlton Sprague.

The windscreen located at the rear (south end) of the sanctuary is made up of multiple panels. The lower portion of a typical panel is made up of wood slats; the upper portion of the panel is an elongated acute arch with four cinquefoil arches with basement lights above. This configuration is in a similar style to the windows and the tracery found throughout the church. The corners of the panels have quatrefoil tracery. The panel dividers are ornamented wood brackets that support the choir loft above. The choir loft is framed by a hammer beam truss with exposed structural elements. Above the upper tie of the truss to the underside of the principal roof rafter are open multi-foil panels.

The organ, located at the rear of the choir loft, was a gift from the Howard family. Built by the Hutchings-Votey Company in 1906, the organ was rebuilt in 1960 by the Delaware Organ Company. The organ pipes are set within three open multi-foil arch panels. Two smaller multi-foil arch panels that are crowned with crocketed finials, like those throughout the sanctuary and exterior of the church, flank the center and largest panel. One of the panels can be removed to give a secondary access to the former minister's office.

<sup>4</sup> Among the firm's most notable work is the Brown Memorial Window in the Emmanuel Episcopal Church of Newport, R.I. Locally, in addition to all of the windows in the Unitarian Universalist Church, their work appears in North Presbyterian Church, Christ Chapel at Trinity Episcopal Church and in the Hellenic Orthodox Church of the Annunciation.

<sup>5</sup> "New Church of Great Beauty," *Buffalo Courier*, September 4, 1906,

<sup>6</sup> The Unitarian Universalist Church explains that the Beatitudes were presented by Jesus to teach us how to treat other people.

<sup>7</sup> "Memorials," *Buffalo Commercial*, February 3, 1906.

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Name of Property

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Interior - Annex

The annex portion of the building is located to the north of the sanctuary with direct outside access to the parish hall from the garden via the vestibule addition completed in 2001 at the junction of the sanctuary and the annex, and an alternate entry into the parish hall/office area accessed from Elmwood Avenue. The annex unit contains the parish hall, kitchen, offices, meeting rooms, storage space and new elevator, which was part of the alteration completed in 2001. The main floor of the annex is laid out around the parish hall, which is centered in the annex and occupies more than half of its floor space. The entry and stair hall are west of this room; the kitchen and entry to the sanctuary are east of the parish hall, and the garden entrance and office are to the south. The main stair of the annex, located at the west entrance onto Elmwood Avenue, accesses the parish hall, basement level and upper level. Each of these levels is arranged around a central east-west hall with rooms on the north and south sides. The basement hall ends at the boiler room and utilities area and the upper hall ends at the alliance room. Throughout the annex, walls are typically plastered with a painted finish. Floors at the ground level/public level are hardwood; basement level are vinyl composite tile and upper level floors are a combination of hardwood and carpet. Doors consist of oak stiles and rails with oak panels; original doors are of a dark wood finish, with new doors of a lighter oak finish as seen in the vestibule addition.

The main stair, servicing all levels, has a balanced run at the sides of a rectangular space, with a double run of stairs going to the basement; a common stair going up to the Parish Hall; and a double run of stairs going up to the second level, with a common central stair from a common landing. The oak balusters have a square base and top with turned midsection; the lower newel posts are square with a carved floral medallion and turned upper support; the upper newel post is square with a custom detail cap. Stringers are of oak. Flanking the stairways are restrooms and, in the southwest corner, the church office. This room contains a corner fireplace with hood and overmantel of paneled oak. To the east of the parish hall are a commercial kitchen with pantry and a meeting room. A flight of seven broad steps leads from the parish hall to the sanctuary and, at the east end of the annex, a stair runs from the upper level to the basement.

Parish Hall

The parish hall can be accessed from the sanctuary via the aforementioned steps on the east side of the room or by an elevator in the wide passage that connects the annex to the main portion of the building. Four columns are located within the parish hall and are clad with fluted oak trim, a simple oak base and a simple oak capital. An oak chair rail and oak baseboards surround the room. Floors are hardwood and the ceiling is coffered oak paneling with inset light panels that illuminate the center of the room. The room itself receives ample natural light from multiple windows on the north wall and three sets of wide French doors that bring in light from the glazed garden vestibule. Walls are painted plaster. From the parish hall, there is direct access to the kitchen, the

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sanctuary, the Elmwood Avenue vestibule, with access to all floors of the annex, and to the garden via the vestibule built in 2001.

Basement and Second Floor

The floors above and below the main level of the annex are secondary to the main floor but contain spaces that are regularly used by the congregation. Directly under the parish hall and west entry suite are offices, a library and meeting rooms that are used primarily as classrooms for the church's extensive religious education program. Beneath the kitchen and first floor meeting room are the service rooms for the heating and electrical equipment, including a large boiler room. A small passage leads from the basement rooms to the area beneath the sanctuary. This large area is generally unfinished except for a fireproof vault that is below the pulpit area of the sanctuary.

The second floor of the annex has offices flanking the stairway and facing Elmwood Avenue (with the minister's office in the northeast corner). The remainder of this floor is finished as meeting rooms, most of which are used as classrooms except for the large meeting room directly behind the upper level of the sanctuary. This room contains additional finishes, including a stone fireplace and stained glass transom windows. This room is used for receptions and smaller gatherings of the congregation than those occurring in the parish hall or sanctuary. The ceilings on both the basement and second floor levels of the annex have been lowered approximately 1-1 ½ feet using a dropped ceiling grid and moveable panels.

Vestibule (2001 Addition)

The non-historic vestibule, added in 2001, uses contemporary materials and finishes to replicate the finishes of the existing annex and sanctuary. The overall design of the vestibule is in keeping with the original design intent of Kent as shown in historic sketches by the architect. Exterior aluminum doors with glazing are in line with the original openings and windows above. The new doors into the parish hall consist of oak styles with oak bottom and top rail with glass panels and transom. The flooring is tile over a concrete base.

**Summary**

The First Unitarian Church of Buffalo stands as a fine example of turn-of-the-century American architecture showing both American and European stylistic influences. Additions and alterations to the building have been done in a sympathetic manner and are compatible with the original design. The building is maintained in excellent condition by the Unitarian Universalist congregation, respecting the original historic design by the Kent brothers.

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**Statement of Significance:**

The First Unitarian Church of Buffalo (now Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo), located in the Elmwood neighborhood of Buffalo, Erie County, New York, is a locally significant example of an English Country Gothic style church building with an interior influenced by the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau aesthetics. The building was completed in 1906 and designed by prominent local architects Edward Austin Kent and William Winthrop Kent. Edward A. Kent was one of Buffalo's leading architects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and often collaborated with his brother. The church is significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture, as a notable example of ecclesiastic architecture, specifically English Country Gothic Revival. The church has notable characteristics of that style, including a crenelated tower and massive hammer beam ceiling. The sanctuary and attached annex blocks represent the simple form of a country parish church. In addition, in the interior there are elements of the Arts and Crafts in the simple, yet extensive, use of wood and stone and of the Art Nouveau in the stained glass windows designed by Harry E. Goodhue.

The First Unitarian Church is also significant under Criterion A in the area of social history for its prominent role in the spiritual, political, and social lives of the community. The church has hosted and housed activities that have become symbols of liberal action in Western New York. The congregation was a leading player in the liberal religious movement in Western New York in the context of the Unitarian denomination. The church even received national recognition for its mission, found in the words of Reverend Howard Gilman, Superintendent of Universalist Churches across the nation, who in 1954 praised the Buffalo Unitarian congregation for being "one of the bright spots in the liberal movement in this country."<sup>8</sup>

Although the congregation was housed in other buildings in the early years of its existence, it is this building that is most associated with the denomination in the community and is where many locally and nationally prominent liberal religious and social activities occurred and continue to occur. The period of significance begins with the construction of the building in 1906 and closes in 1957 after some minor repairs were made following a small fire. This era includes all notable additions to the building, as well as encompasses the time in which the church was its most prominent in the local community.

**Unitarians in Buffalo and Western New York**

The Unitarian denomination represents a major force in liberal religion in the United States, and the First Unitarian Church in Buffalo served as the home for liberal religious activity throughout Western NY and Buffalo. Many in its congregation were the liberal political and social leaders of their era, and it is this building

<sup>8</sup> "Merger of Churches Hailed as Example For Other Places", *Undisclosed Publication*, Churches File, Buffalo History Museum, September 20, 1954.

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that became the holder of the legacy of Unitarian social and religious activity in Buffalo. A sampling of the members of the church in the years around its 1906 construction includes many significant community members. Architect Edward Austin Kent and other members of the Kent family belonged to the congregation at the time the building was erected. Francis Almy, purchasing agent for the Pan-American Exposition, was a member in these early years, along with Humphrey Birge, president of Birge Wallpaper. Well-known liberal theologian and professor the Reverend Dr. Richard Wilson Boynton, author of *Beyond Mythology*, a controversial treatise on naturalism in religion was also a member. Dr. Lucien Howe, founder and first director of the Howe Laboratory of Ophthalmology at Harvard, was a member when the church was built, as were several members of the prominent Sprague family who held notable positions in the fields of law, religion and manufacturing in Buffalo. Samuel P. Capen, first chancellor of the University of Buffalo, was also a member. Later leaders of the church, including the Reverend Dr. Paul Carnes, were notable players in the civil rights movement, as well as women's rights and gay and lesbian rights in the region. Carnes received national recognition as one of the leaders in the unification of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations and went from the Buffalo Church to serve as head of the nationwide Unitarian Universalist Association. The church also gained notice as the site for significant anti-war protest activities during the Vietnam War period.

Early History

The founding of the First Unitarian Society of the Village of Buffalo in the early 1800s was accomplished by a group of men, recent arrivals from New England who wished to hear preaching more consistent with their non-orthodox Unitarian views than the sermons of the orthodox revivalists then so popular in upstate New York. In 1831 the Rev. John Pierpont of Boston, a Unitarian minister, had stopped at the Eagle Tavern on his way to Niagara Falls. Noah Sprague of Buffalo then traveled to Niagara Falls and, acquainting the Rev. Pierpont with the situation in Buffalo, obtained a promise that an effort would be made to introduce Unitarian preaching into Buffalo. Shortly thereafter, on December 2, 1831, five men, Ira A. Blossom, James McKay, Elijah Efner, John Beals and Samuel Callender met with Mr. Sprague to meet the legal requirements of six members for a board of trustees for a church, and "The First Unitarian Society of Buffalo" was organized. Preachers passing through Buffalo delivered several sermons in summer 1832. In fall of 1832, the services of the Reverend William S. Brown, an English clergyman of learning and ability, were obtained, and he arrived in October 1832 to assume his ministerial duties. Despite disappointing growth in the congregation and partly because of difficulties in renting meeting space, the trustees resolved to erect a church building. For two thousand dollars a lot was purchased on Franklin Street at Eagle Street and construction of the building was contracted to early Buffalo builder Benjamin Rathbun for six thousand dollars.<sup>9</sup> The cornerstone for the first church was laid in summer,

<sup>9</sup> Charles P. Jamieson, "Heritage of Heresy", Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 1982, p.15.

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1833, and it was dedicated in late fall of that same year with the Rev. Pierpont preaching. In 1845, an addition to the lot was purchased, and the western end of the church was extended.<sup>10</sup>

In 1832, New York State law held that no person was qualified to be a witness in court unless he swore to a belief in God and the hereafter. A young politician from Buffalo, Millard Fillmore, introduced in the State Legislature a bill to remove this religious requirement in the courts. The same year he became a charter member of the Unitarian Society of Buffalo. He served eight years in Congress, starting in 1833, and became vice president of the United States on the Whig ticket headed by Zachary Taylor in 1848. He subsequently became president upon the death of President Taylor and served from July 10, 1850, to March 3, 1853. From 1836-1866, the Reverend Dr. Hosmer served the church as minister and held contrasting political views to his famous congregant, Mr. Fillmore, in the years leading up to the Civil War, but they remained on friendly terms, an early reflection of the depth of thought that is a hallmark of the faith.

In 1878 Noah Sprague began the process to raise funds for a new Unitarian church. The building of the new Church of Our Father on the west side of Delaware Avenue between Mohawk and Huron Streets was completed in 1880, and the Rev. Hosmer (Sprague had died in 1879) dedicated the building that year. The congregation continued its involvement in liberal social issues by supporting women's rights. The Reverend Cutter delivered a series of lectures in 1881 to capacity crowds, noting "Very slowly women's natural rights are being recognized. That she has a right to think, to inquire, investigate, to express her thoughts in writing, and to speak and act according to the dictates of reason and conscience, is admitted by a very small portion of the civilized world."<sup>11</sup> In 1894 the church assisted in the formation of the Parkside Alliance of Liberal Christian Women, and soon after the Parkside Unitarian Society was formed and a church was built on Amherst and Fairfield Streets.<sup>12</sup>

*Twentieth Century History*

The early years of the twentieth century saw rapid growth in the city and the congregation. In 1904 the Church of Our Father was sold to the Buffalo Consistory and work began on the current church building on a site purchased from John Albright on Elmwood Avenue and West Ferry Streets at the west end of the Albright Estate that ran from West Ferry to Cleveland Avenue.

<sup>10</sup> The first Unitarian Church still remains standing today, although it was significantly altered in the 1880s and no longer bears much resemblance to its original 1833 appearance. Now used as an Erie County Government Facility, the building is notable as the sole remaining example by prominent early builder and scandalous businessman Benjamin Rathbun. Although it bears little trace of being a church, it is occasionally regarded as one of the oldest buildings in Buffalo.

<sup>11</sup> Jamieson, "Heritage of Heresy", Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 1982, pp. 9-12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.31.

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Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the congregation and its members continued their involvement in the community and the liberal causes of the time. This liberal religious movement grew in what was primarily a conservative Christian and particularly Roman Catholic region of New York State.<sup>13</sup>

A church layman and future trustee, Dr. Samuel P. Capen was named chancellor of the University of Buffalo in 1922 with the proviso that "complete academic freedom was to be preserved." At the end of his tenure in 1950 Capen delivered his last baccalaureate address, where he defended academic freedom, stating "In the present state of public hysteria about the Communist conspiracy and Communist infiltration into all kinds of organizations, the universities are going to be the objects of more rather than less suspicion."<sup>14</sup> One of the major players in the leadership of the Unitarian Church in Buffalo was the Reverend Dr. Richard W. Boynton. Dr. Boynton's long tenure in the Buffalo church included two periods, the first from 1908-1926 and a second term from 1937-1942. In 1923 Dr. Boynton presented a series of sermons on the Theory of Evolution that represented a liberal view of the relationship of evolution to religion. The sermons were advertised in local newspapers and some were printed in full for the readers. Later in 1951, Dr. Boynton, who was then a professor of philosophy at the University of Buffalo, again created turmoil among local churches by publishing *Beyond Mythology*.<sup>15</sup> A conservative churchman referred to the book as "the epitome of the blind and stupid humanism that so many are floundering in today" in his Easter sermon.<sup>16</sup> A *Courier Express* article of that time period quoted a Canisius College professor who stated that parts of Boynton's book were "...an insult to every Catholic, Protestant and Jew in the City of Buffalo, or anywhere..."<sup>18</sup> Promotion of the liberal religious agenda continued within the congregation, and in 1952 The First Unitarian Church withdrew from the Council of Churches of Buffalo and Erie County because that organization adopted a resolution insisting on the deity of Jesus. The church continued as a voluntary member without voting privileges.

The First Unitarian Church congregation worked for social reform in the city and one of its most notable efforts was the founding and support of Neighborhood House. Neighborhood House began in 1894 when Elizabeth Williams, a member of the Unitarian Church of Our Father, predecessor to First Unitarian Church, established a small library in the home of a poor German family on Goodell Street in downtown Buffalo. The library served as a meeting place for a club consisting of the children in the neighborhood and with the direct support of the Unitarian congregation, grew into Neighborhood House, housed in a series of larger facilities in the Goodell

<sup>13</sup> A study done by the Committee of Cooperative Field Research for the Council of Churches of Buffalo and Erie County showed that in 1946 there were twice as many enrolled Roman Catholics in Buffalo than in the total of all of the other congregations, Christian and Jewish, together. It further noted that the number of Roman Catholic parishes had peaked some 20 years earlier than the date of the study (*The Churches of Buffalo & Vicinity* by H. Paul Douglas, 1947).

<sup>14</sup> Jamieson, "Heritage of Heresy", Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 1982, p.32.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Boynton had founded the Department of Philosophy at the University of Buffalo and served in the department from 1937 to 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Jamieson, "Heritage of Heresy", Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 1982, pp. 9-12.

<sup>18</sup> "Boynton Book Called Insult to All Creeds", *Buffalo Courier Express*, March 17, 1951.



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Street area. Neighborhood House offered education, recreation and preventative health services to the youth of the area and from its beginning in 1894 until it became part of the Joint Charities Committee 30 years later it was financed and supervised as a social activity of the First Unitarian Church. Neighborhood House continues its activities today as part of the Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers. The Unitarian congregation also participated in the early twentieth century in the Buffalo Plan that saw the city divided into 150 districts that were offered to local churches as sites of social reform activity. Congregations such as Westminster Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church joined the First Unitarian Church in this citywide effort. The Unitarian congregation accepted a district bounded by Michigan, Genesee, Jefferson and Virginia Streets that was populated primarily by German Immigrants.<sup>19</sup>

The First Unitarian Church was active in the community through various committees within the congregation. The Women's Alliance did war work during World War I, and worked locally on the social reform through the Red Cross, the Buffalo Council of World Affairs and through participation in the People's Section of the United Nations. The organization continues today as the Women's Society and its membership is open to both women and men. The church also held membership in the Buffalo Urban League founded in 1927 to promote "social service and inter-racial understanding" in the city of Buffalo.<sup>20</sup> In the 1940s, the Unitarian Church minister Rev. Henry Chamberlain Meserve was active with the Industrial Relations Committee of the Urban League, advocating for the rights of African American workers. Again representing the church in the movement for employee rights in the 1940s, Rev. Meserve served as chair of the Buffalo Council for Fair Employment Practices. These activities continue today through the Social Justice Task Force of the church.

In 1947 the church established the Cooperative Nursery School in the church building to provide to the community "pre-school education at a reasonable cost" and it served older children by sponsoring both Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops.<sup>22</sup> The church also established at that time the Community Club for young people in the community that aimed at developing an interdenominational understanding of the current events of the time. Today the "20s and 30s Group" continues these activities for young adults.

In 1980 the church formed a Refugee Committee to sponsor a Cambodian tribal Family by bringing them to the U.S. from Thailand and housing them in Buffalo until they found a permanent home in Oregon. The committee then sponsored a Vietnamese family.<sup>23</sup> Presently the church participates in the Family Promise program that provides housing and meals in the church building for a week for a homeless family in the community.

<sup>19</sup> "Raising the Plane of Human Life: the First Thirty Years of Neighborhood House", pp. 3-4, Frances Manly, Buffalo NY, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> "Handbook, First Unitarian Church of Buffalo", Unitarian Universalist Church Archives, Buffalo, NY, 1951.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jamieson, "Heritage of Heresy", Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 1982, 35.

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The church promoted participation in national social issues by early support of the World Federalist Movement and by providing meeting space for the Marxist-Lenin Party and the socialist New American Movement. In 1948 the First Unitarian Church of Buffalo was the first church in Buffalo to receive the United Nations Flag. This was in recognition for its work in establishing United Nations Day.

At the national level, the Unitarian and Universalist churches, recognizing their common themes of liberal religion and social justice, began cooperative activities in the 1950s, and in 1961 merged to form the Unitarian Universalist denomination. A local Universalist congregation existed in Buffalo and shared in the liberal religious movement along with the Unitarian Church. The Universalist congregation began in Buffalo in the same year (1831) as the Unitarian congregation and, although smaller in number than the Unitarians, for over 100 years the Universalists worshiped in churches built within the same general areas of the city as the Unitarian Churches. In Buffalo the unification of the denominations occurred earlier (1953) than the national union, when the two denominations joined together to form the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Buffalo. Services were consolidated in the Elmwood and West Ferry church and a new suburban church was planned.<sup>24</sup> The First Unitarian Church of Buffalo and the subsequent Unitarian Universalist Congregation received national recognition within the Unitarian Universalist denomination for its work in establishing the merged Unitarian and Universalist Churches. The Buffalo congregation was the one of first in the nation to formally merge and worked to spread that movement throughout the country.

The new joined congregation continued the social advocacy and community participation of the past. In 1958 the congregation chose a new minister, the Reverend Dr. Paul Carnes. Prior to his years in Buffalo, the Rev. Carnes worked on racial integration in Ohio and Tennessee. In Buffalo, Carnes would lead the congregation in continuing its social reform activity through involvement in civil rights, women's rights, anti-war activity, urban awareness and avant garde theater, all movements against the grain of the socially and politically conservative Western New York community that existed at that time. In 1968 the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo offered sanctuary to several young men, led by Bruce Beyer, resisting military service in the Vietnam War. The sanctuary lasted for several days, during which mediation between the protestors and the police was attempted. Eventually state police stormed the main doors of the church and arrested eight of the protestors (a ninth arrest would occur later.)<sup>25</sup> The incident, referred to as "The Buffalo Nine," received national coverage, as did the subsequent trial that resulted in jail sentences for some of those arrested. Several people were injured in the resulting scuffle and the Rev. Carnes, who was abroad at the time, decried the use of violence during the demonstration.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Goldman, *High Hopes: The Rise and Fall of Buffalo, New York*, p. 257.

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The outcome of the sanctuary incident in 1968 caused much dispute and discussion within the congregation concerning the effects of this level of social action. However, the congregation continued to become involved in social issues of national and regional import over the next decades. The on-going years through 2015 saw the congregation focusing on both its relationships in the community and the continued stewardship of the church building. Following in the liberal religious traditions of the past, the congregation provided services for the poor, women in the community through advocacy of women's rights, Gay, Lesbian and Transgendered members of the population, and, in 1984, in response to the national debate on nuclear weapons, the church declared itself a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. In another example of liberal social action, Music Minister Barbara Wagner collaborated with composer Edgar David Grana to present, on March 13, 1988, the world premiere of his composition "Stones, Time & Elements: a humanist requiem" at the church. The piece was written to words composed by author Kurt Vonnegut, who appeared at the premiere and spoke before a packed audience in the sanctuary before the performance.

In 2005 the church celebrated "100 Years on Elmwood" recognizing the long-standing relationship and commitment of the congregation to the neighborhood and to the larger community.

**Architectural History of the First Unitarian Church**

In the beginning years of the twentieth century, when the Reverend Frederick C. Brown argued for the need of a new church building, he recommended that it be built in a location further uptown, where it would be more convenient for the members of the congregation. It was a decision made by several congregations in Buffalo during the early twentieth century, as downtown residents moved northwards into the rapidly developing streetcar suburbs. One area, known as the Elmwood district, was emerging at that time along Elmwood Avenue near Delaware Park, and the neighboring side streets were being quickly developed into residential enclaves. Wealthy industrialist and noted philanthropist John J. Albright lived in an expansive estate bordering the Elmwood district to the east. The estate covered nearly 15 acres extending from Elmwood Avenue east to Delaware Avenue and from West Ferry Street north to Cleveland Avenue. Albright engaged the Olmsted Brothers to design a park adjacent to his home in the middle of the estate, extending west to Elmwood Avenue, but he was concerned about the development occurring at the southwest corner of the estate. Thus he offered at a bargain price the lot on the corner of West Ferry Street and Elmwood Avenue that became the site of the First Unitarian Church.<sup>26</sup> This was appealing to the congregation because it would allow the church to exist in a park-like setting and be closer to the developing residential neighborhood where many of its parishioners were moving. Albright retained the right to approve the design of the new church, and the architect Edward Austin Kent was chosen as the architect. Kent's family and ancestors were long-time members and leaders of the church and Kent himself was then a member of the congregation. Kent's brother, William, was also an

<sup>26</sup> The land was valued at \$40,000 and Albright sold it to the church for \$15,500.

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architect and he collaborated with his brother on the design. Church records show both Kent brothers names on the plans and related documents; however, it is not known to what extent William participated in the collaboration. At the time the church was designed and constructed, E.A. Kent's office was in Buffalo and W.W. Kent had an office in New York City as a partner in the firm of Jardine Kent and Jardine. The church was built by Joseph J. Churchyard.<sup>27</sup> At the time of its construction the church building included the current narthex and sanctuary spaces, with the attached annex in a smaller form than that of the current building. As built, the annex consisted primarily of the parish hall on the first floor with offices and meeting rooms above. The kitchen and boiler were located in the basement.

The newly renamed First Unitarian Church was opened in 1906 on the site. Even before its construction the press was enthusiastic. The *Buffalo Courier* stated that "It is to be of a beautiful buff Indiana limestone, both outside and inside, and like the parish churches of Europe will have also a stone floor, making it at once monumental and fireproof."<sup>28</sup> When it opened it received notable accolades from the local press, including the *Buffalo Express*, which enthused that "Of the many beautiful churches in the city there is not one more beautiful, more artistic and original in design, than the recently built First Unitarian Church..."<sup>29</sup> The *Buffalo Commercial* observed that "The new church is one of the handsomest in the city."<sup>30</sup> In 1925 the Parkside Unitarian Church of Buffalo merged with First Unitarian Church and sold its building to the city for use as a branch library. After much discussion within the congregation, it was decided to use this money to enlarge the annex. The women of the congregation had been asking that the kitchen, then in the basement, be made more convenient to the parish hall on the main floor, and there was a growing need for classroom and meeting space as families continued to join the congregation. In 1925, the firm of Bley and Lyman was engaged to enlarge the annex, providing room for the kitchen and boiler and a meeting room on the first floor directly east of the parish hall and the Alliance Room in the space above on the second floor.<sup>31</sup> Beyond the alliance room was a community space with a stage. The new construction obscured the natural light that previously lit the stained-glass window at the northern end of the sanctuary, and the window was backlit to provide illumination in the sanctuary.

The praise given to the church upon its construction for being "at once monumental and fireproof" proved to be noteworthy when, three days before Easter in 1957, there was a serious fire in the wiring of the carved oak pulpit.<sup>32</sup> The fire destroyed the pulpit and created sufficient heat to crack the solid granite floor beneath it. The

<sup>27</sup> William Parke, "Builders and Craftspeople," *Archives, Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo*, Buffalo NY.

<sup>28</sup> *With Walls and Floor of Stone*, *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo NY), July 14, 1905.

<sup>29</sup> "New Church of Great Beauty," *Buffalo Express* (Buffalo, NY), September 4, 1906.

<sup>30</sup> "Opening Service," *Buffalo Commercial*, (Buffalo, NY), September 8, 1906.

<sup>31</sup> Bley and Lyman designed many notable buildings in Buffalo including, in 1929, near the church, the apartment building at 800 West Ferry Street.

<sup>32</sup> "With Walls and Floor of Stone," *Buffalo Courier* (Buffalo, NY), July 14, 1905.

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stone construction of the building helped contain the fire and damage was limited to the pulpit and floor along with smoke and heat damage within the sanctuary. As a result, some of the Easter services were moved to the parish hall while the church was cleaned. The sanctuary was back in use within a few days for the Easter Sunday service, and a replacement pulpit was created based on the original.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Capital Funds drives allowed for the addition of extensive landscaping on the southwest corner of the church property in the garden formed by the building's "L" shape. Funds were also raised to renovate spaces in the basement for classroom and meeting use. Vandalism in the 1990s damaged some of the stained-glass windows on the Elmwood Avenue elevation of the church. After considerable study and discussion, a Lexan covering was installed to protect the windows.

In 2001, the last notable alteration to the exterior of the church took place. Architect Michael Hamilton, of Buffalo architectural firm Hamilton, Houston and Lownie, designed an atrium that was built on the south elevation of the annex, in the crux of the L plan between the sanctuary and the annex. This provided a more formal entrance into the parish hall as well as handicap accessibility to the church. Hamilton's design followed closely a rendering that had been prepared by Edward Austin Kent as a possible feature in his original plans of 1904.

**The Elmwood District Neighborhood**

The First Unitarian Church is located at the intersection of West Ferry Street and Elmwood Avenue in what has become to be known as the Elmwood district. The residential character of the neighborhood developed in the late nineteenth century as the forest land, farms and nurseries of the early nineteenth century were divided into lots for grand residences and estates. The extension of the streetcar lines in the latter years of the nineteenth century fed this residential development, and neighborhoods grew rapidly along the Elmwood Avenue spine. On West Ferry Street large homes of notable architectural design were built on the south side of West Ferry facing the estate of financier John Albright. Elmwood Avenue itself was originally residential but with its connection to downtown expanded in the early twentieth century, Elmwood Avenue became a commercial strip of note.

As the twentieth century progressed and the stock market crash and the Great Depression took their toll on the families who lived in the blocks adjacent to the church, noticeable changes occurred in the immediate area. The Albright Mansion was demolished in 1935 and the estate land was divided into residential lots. Although substantial homes were built there, by mid-century even these were seeing institutional use or had been divided into apartments. In the surrounding area, the large homes first saw boarding house use and then they too became apartments. Large apartment buildings, such as the Windsor Apartments on West Ferry Street, were also built.

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Elmwood Avenue's conversion to strictly commercial use followed a pattern where the original residences were adapted by the addition of storefronts where porches and front lawns originally appeared. This adaption was widespread and many of the original homes, with architectural detailing such as patterned shingles, balconies and turrets intact, can still be seen behind the later storefront additions. The street was widened as commercial use became more prevalent with the removal of the large trees that shaded the original residences and the First Unitarian congregation would see its annex entrance stand within a few feet of the street, itself.

Today the neighborhood remains a vibrant district, both commercial in nature along Elmwood Avenue and residential and institutional along the east-west side streets. In 2007, the American Planning Association selected it as one of 10 great neighborhoods in the US. One portion of this large neighborhood, the Elmwood Historic District (West), was listed in the National Register in 2012.

**Edward Austin Kent**

Edward Austin Kent was born in Bangor, Maine, in 1854. Following the Civil War, Kent and his parents came to Buffalo, where his father, Henry Mellen Kent, went into business with W. B. Flint, forming the Flint and Kent department store. Edward Austin Kent remained in Buffalo until attending Yale University, where he earned a civil engineering degree from the Sheffield Scientific School in 1875. Kent pursued his architecture studies at the famed Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and returned to the United States in 1877. He apprenticed in the office of Joseph Lyman Silsbee and later formed a partnership with Silsbee in Chicago under the name of Silsbee and Kent. Kent's influences would have come from both European and American sources. During his years of education and practice architectural philosophies were developing that would define American Architecture and Modern Architecture. These philosophies developed through the writing of Europeans such as John Ruskin, Viollet de-le-Duc and William Morris and American practitioners and writers such as Joseph Silsbee, Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1884 Kent returned to Buffalo, where he developed his own practice and was responsible for a number of notable buildings that reflected his Beaux Arts training. A variety of historical precedents influenced his work resulting in the varied appearance of his buildings, from the Byzantine Temple Beth Zion to the English Country Gothic First Unitarian Church to many residences in the Shingle Style. Kent's brother, William, was also an architect and, in addition to the First Unitarian Church and Temple Beth Zion, they collaborated on several projects, including the acclaimed mosaic tile floor of the Ellicott Square Building in downtown Buffalo. The firm designed many notable Buffalo buildings, including Chemical #5 Firehouse on the former Albright Estate and the S. Douglas Cornell house on Delaware Avenue in the National Register-listed Allentown Historic District. Edward Kent was a founder of the Buffalo Society of Architects, which later became a part of the American Institute of Architects. He would go on to serve as the president of the Buffalo chapter of the AIA in 1892, 1893 and 1901.

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Noted Buffalo architectural historian Austin M. Fox wrote: "[Edward] Kent's *chef d'oeuvre* may be this Unitarian Church, which forms a perfect small entity." Fox also referred to the interior as "one of the most intriguing Arts and Crafts interiors in the city."<sup>33</sup>

Edward Austin Kent lost his life in 1912 in the sinking of the Titanic. Kent was cited with several acts of bravery during the disaster. After Kent's death, the Kent family continued to have a presence in the church. Edward Austin Kent is remembered in a plaque by the West Ferry Street entrance erected by the Buffalo Chapter of the AIA and after his death, the names and dates of birth and death of Kent's parents were etched into the stone corbels that support the great hammer beams at the front of the church.

**William Winthrop Kent**

William Winthrop Kent was born in Bangor Maine in 1860, and was the younger brother of Edward Austin Kent. W.W. Kent was educated at Harvard and apprenticed at the office of Henry Hobson Richardson. While in the Richardson office he worked on the Henry Adams house in Washington.<sup>34</sup> He later went to New York City where 1892 he became a partner in the firm of Jardine, Kent & Jardine. Kent is also attributed with contributing to the design of New York City's Cathedral of St. John the Devine as well as a number of public and commercial buildings in New York City and many country homes for prominent U.S. citizens in the North East.<sup>35</sup> In addition to his work on the Unitarian Church, he also collaborated with his brother E. A. Kent on Buffalo's original Temple Beth Zion on Delaware Avenue (destroyed by fire in 1961) and the design of the elaborate floor of the Ellicott Square Building in downtown Buffalo. W. W. Kent was a published author, and, along with books on hooked rugs, he published a study of architectural hardware that included designs similar in style to those of the door hardware on the Buffalo Unitarian Church.<sup>36</sup> William Winthrop Kent died in Hyannis, Massachusetts at the age of 95.

**English Country Gothic**

The English Country Gothic was derived in England from the traditions handed down by adherence to Gothic principles dating back centuries. Spiro Kostof states that it "...was the national style as far back as anyone cared to remember....'Gothic' as it was called inclusively...the English were said to be 'Gothic' people and their laws and government 'Gothic' in origin."<sup>37</sup> Further, in England it was thought to be the "right style" for churches, not only as a national style, but as a Christian style. This was especially appropriate for the country

<sup>33</sup> Bill Parke, "Edward Austin Kent in Buffalo", Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> William Winthrop Kent obituary. *New York Times*, November 7, 1955.

<sup>35</sup> William Winthrop Kent obituary. *Buffalo Evening News*, November 9, 1955.

<sup>36</sup> William Winthrop Kent, *Architectural Wrought-Iron, Ancient and Modern*, (New York: Wm. T. Comstock, 1888), pl.XIX.

<sup>37</sup> Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 549.

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church where function was an important consideration since the buildings served as the social center of small villages. The irregular plans of the Gothic style fit well with this need for functionality. This would be later echoed by William Morris, the leader of England's Arts and Crafts movement who, when referring to the low flat roof lines of the classical style, stated that "...unless the building is infected with Gothic common sense, you must pretend that you are living in a hot country which needs nothing but an awning and that it never rains or snows..."<sup>38</sup>

These ideals of functionality and common sense were appealing to the Unitarian congregations, who were true "Congregationalists," determining their own courses of action based on everyday living and not adhering to a prescribed doctrine. The First Unitarian Church was designed by Edward Austin Kent and William Winthrop Kent. Edward Austin Kent was a member of the First Unitarian congregation and well aware of the feelings among those who were his fellow church members. Thus, the church design is a simple and elegant use of materials that are consistent with Gothic ideals. The building reflects many stylistic elements from the English Country Gothic including buttresses, Gothic arches, crenellation and lancet windows. The central tower, cruciform plan and reredos also reflect the style. The very high-end materials used throughout are done in a simple style consistent with both Gothic and Arts and Crafts principles. Indiana Limestone makes up the walls and primary structure and massing of the building. This material is strong and stable and is the ideal material for the purpose it serves. Window openings throughout the sanctuary and annex building are as would be expected, consistent with the structural forces and Gothic style. It is said that the English Gothic avoided the high flight of the French Gothic, which was characterized by soaring arches with immense, tall windows. Instead, the windows are more moderate in height and subordinate to the massive beam structure above. Similarly the oak door portals and cast iron hardware in the building are representative and introduce the style, craftsmanship and organic ornament that are evident in the Sanctuary. The Sanctuary balances the ideas and attitudes of the Arts and Crafts with traditions of the Gothic ideal in the hammer beam truss, the craftsmanship of the interior finishes and built in fixtures and furnishings. The color and flamboyance of the Art Nouveau is seen in the stained glass windows and cast iron door hardware and the elements of nature found in the details throughout: carved in the stone corbels, medallions in the wood panels, raised elements in the pulpit and moldings and in the pinnacles of the reredos.

**Summary**

The First Unitarian Church is significant as a good locally significant example of English Country Gothic architecture, and remains today in excellent, nearly original condition. The building's exterior has become a visual landmark at the heart of Buffalo's Elmwood neighborhood, and the Arts and Crafts interior is both lauded

<sup>38</sup> Peter Davey, *Arts and Crafts Architecture*, (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1995) p. 10.



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and respected by area residents. The architecture of the building is much recognized in the community, noting that “the interior of this church is considered one of the best Arts and Crafts spaces in the city.”<sup>39</sup> The building also represents the long legacy of liberal social and religious activity in the Western New York community. The current congregation members continue these traditions and serve as excellent stewards of this historic landmark building.

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<sup>39</sup> Andy Olenick and Richard O. Reisem, *Classic Buffalo: A Heritage of Distinguished Architecture*, Canisius College Press (Buffalo, NY), 1999. P.110.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Refer to attached map with scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass all the land historically and currently associated with the First Unitarian Church of Buffalo.

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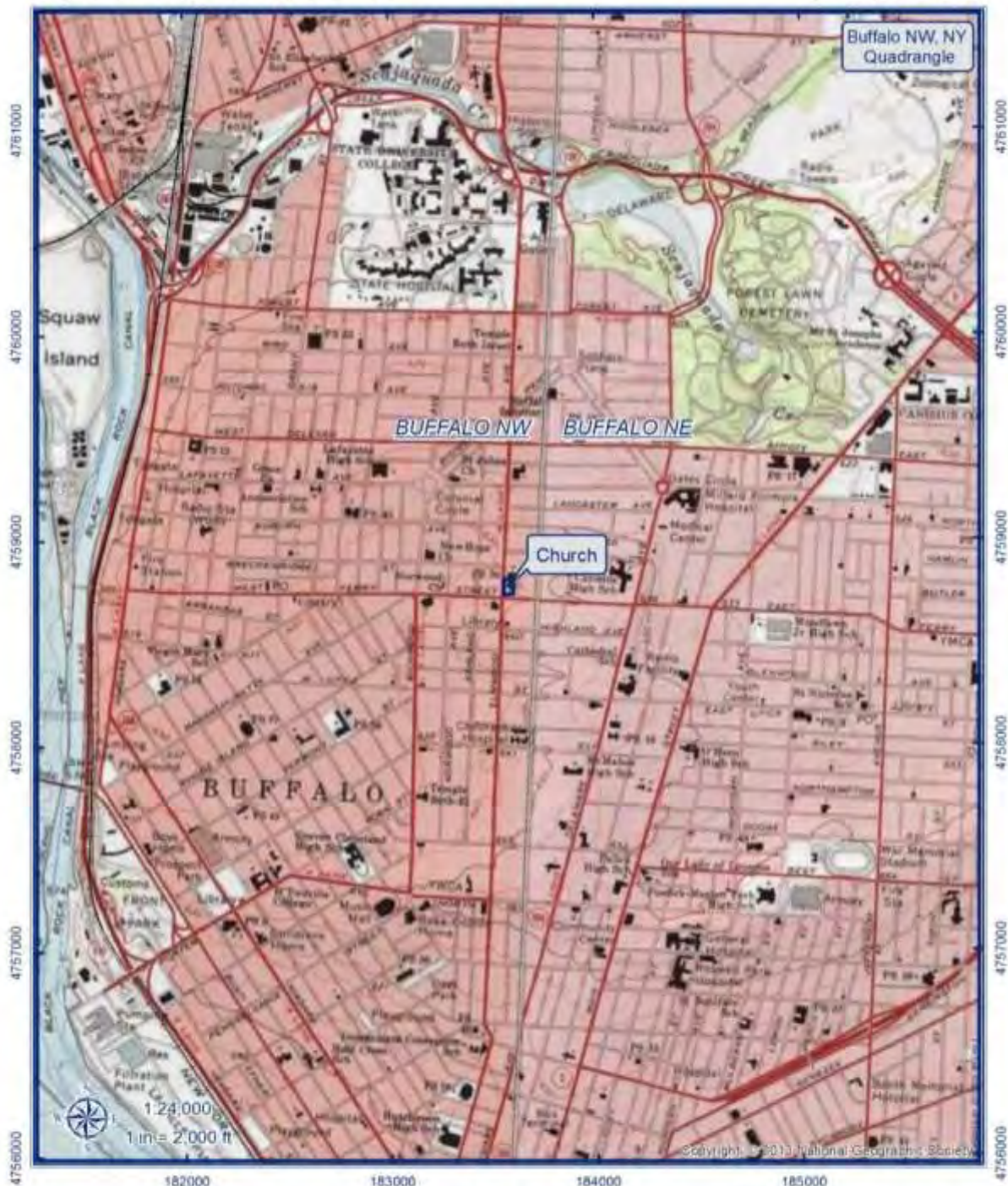
Erie, New York

County and State

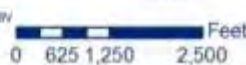
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First Unitarian Church of Buffalo (Unitarian Universalist Church)  
City of Buffalo, Erie Co., New York

695 Elmwood Avenue  
Buffalo, NY 14222



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



Legend: First Unitarian Church

NEW YORK STATE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation



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Name of Property

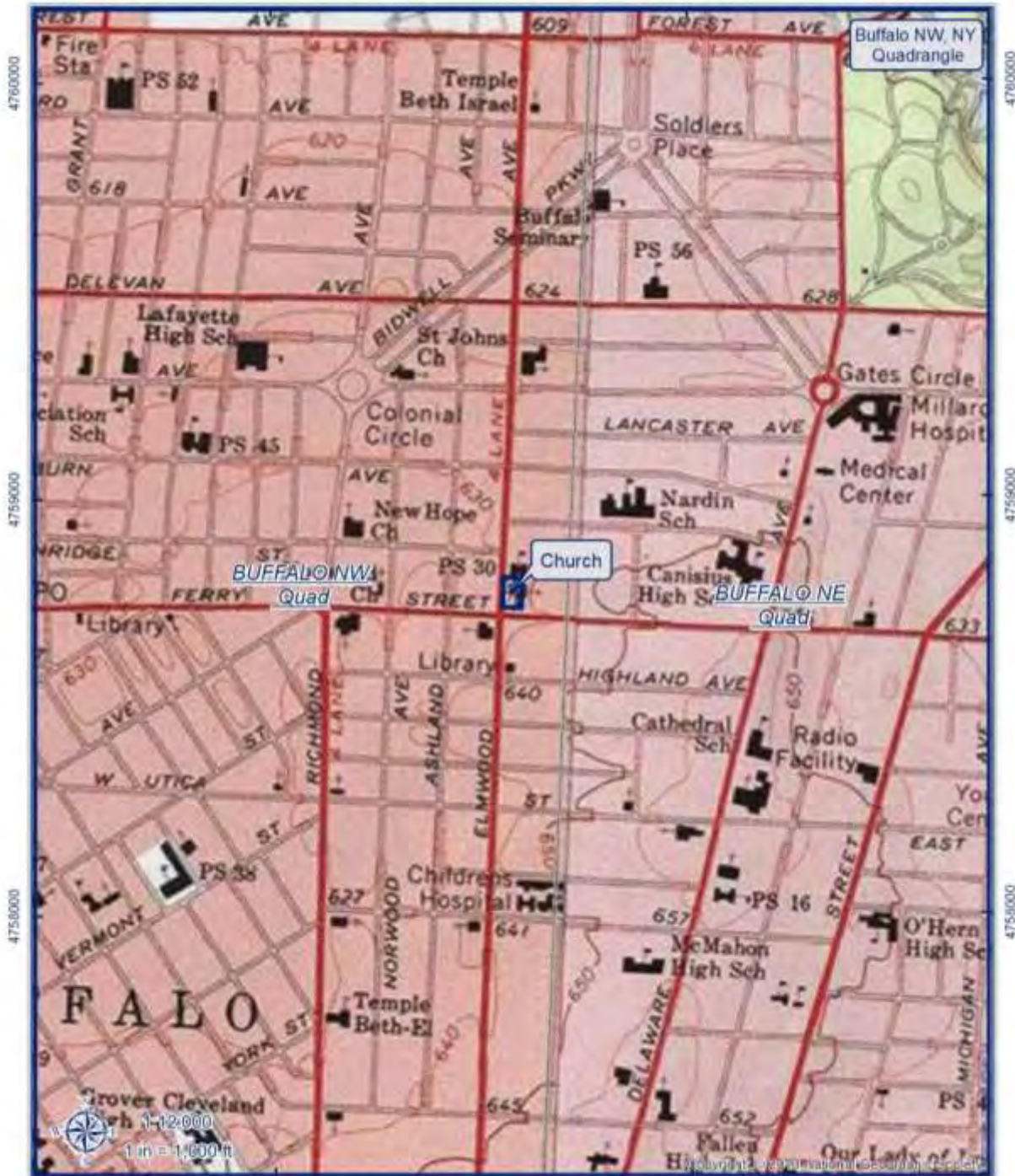
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County and State

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First Unitarian Church of Buffalo (Unitarian Universalist Church)  
City of Buffalo, Erie Co., New York

695 Elmwood Avenue  
Buffalo, NY 14222



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



First Unitarian Church



Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation



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**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**

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First Unitarian Church of Buffalo (Unitarian Universalist Church)  
City of Buffalo, Erie Co., New York

695 Elmwood Avenue  
Buffalo, NY 14222



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



First Unitarian Church



Parks, Recreation  
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**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**

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**Additional Information**

**Photo Log:**

Name of Property:	First Unitarian Church of Buffalo
City of Vicinity:	Buffalo
County:	Erie
State:	New York
Name of Photographer:	Jennifer Walkowski, NYSHPO
Date of Photograph:	April 14, 2015
Location of Original Digital Files:	NYS OPRHP, PO Box 189, Waterford, NY 12088
Number of Photographs:	09

**Photo # 1** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0001)

Primary south elevation along West Ferry St, looking north

**Photo # 2** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0002)

Primary south elevation showing main entrance and tower, looking north

**Photo # 3** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0003)

West elevation, showing parish house and church transept, looking northeast from Elmwood Ave.

**Photo # 4** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0004)

Rear north elevation of parish house and kitchen addition, looking south east

**Photo # 5** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0005)

Interior, parish house

**Photo # 6** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0006)

Interior, main sanctuary, looking north to pulpit

**Photo # 7** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0007)

Interior, main sanctuary, looking south to choir loft

**Photo # 8** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0008)

Interior, main sanctuary, detail of reredos

**Photo # 9** (NY\_Erie County\_First Unitarian Church of Buffalo\_0009)

Interior, looking north in foyer into main sanctuary

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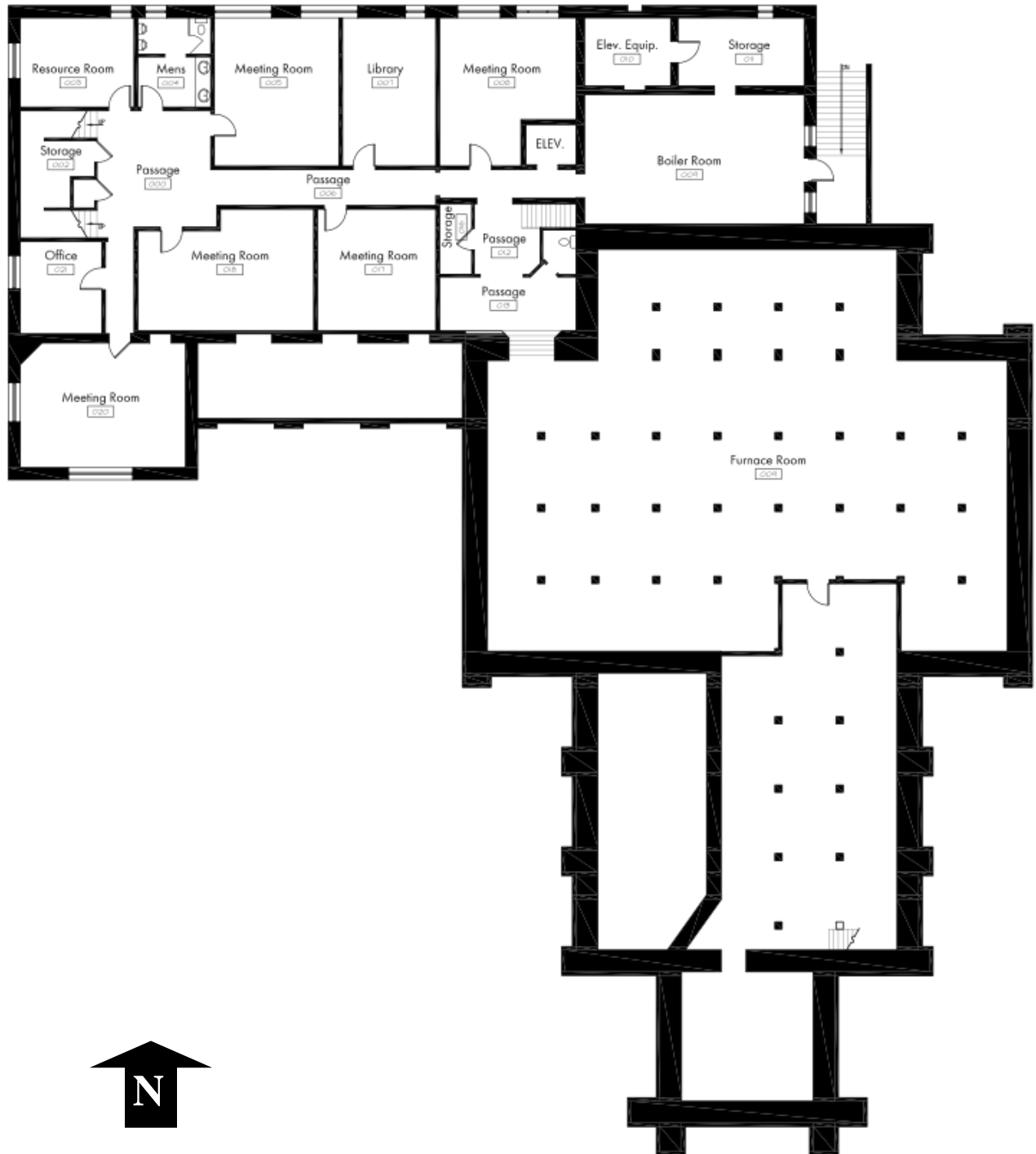
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First Unitarian Church, Basement Plan  
*Not to scale*

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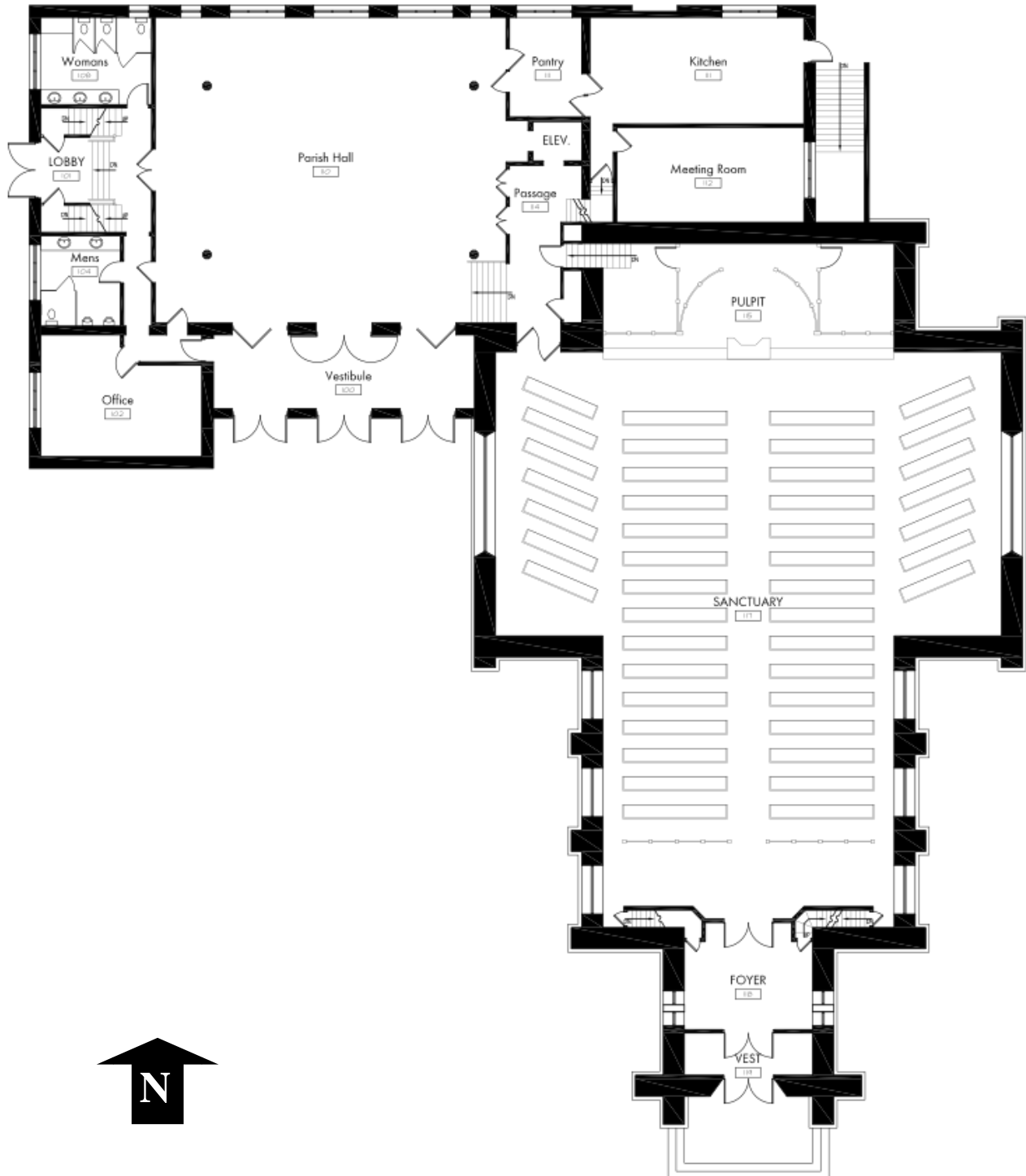
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First Unitarian Church, First Floor Plan  
*Not to scale*

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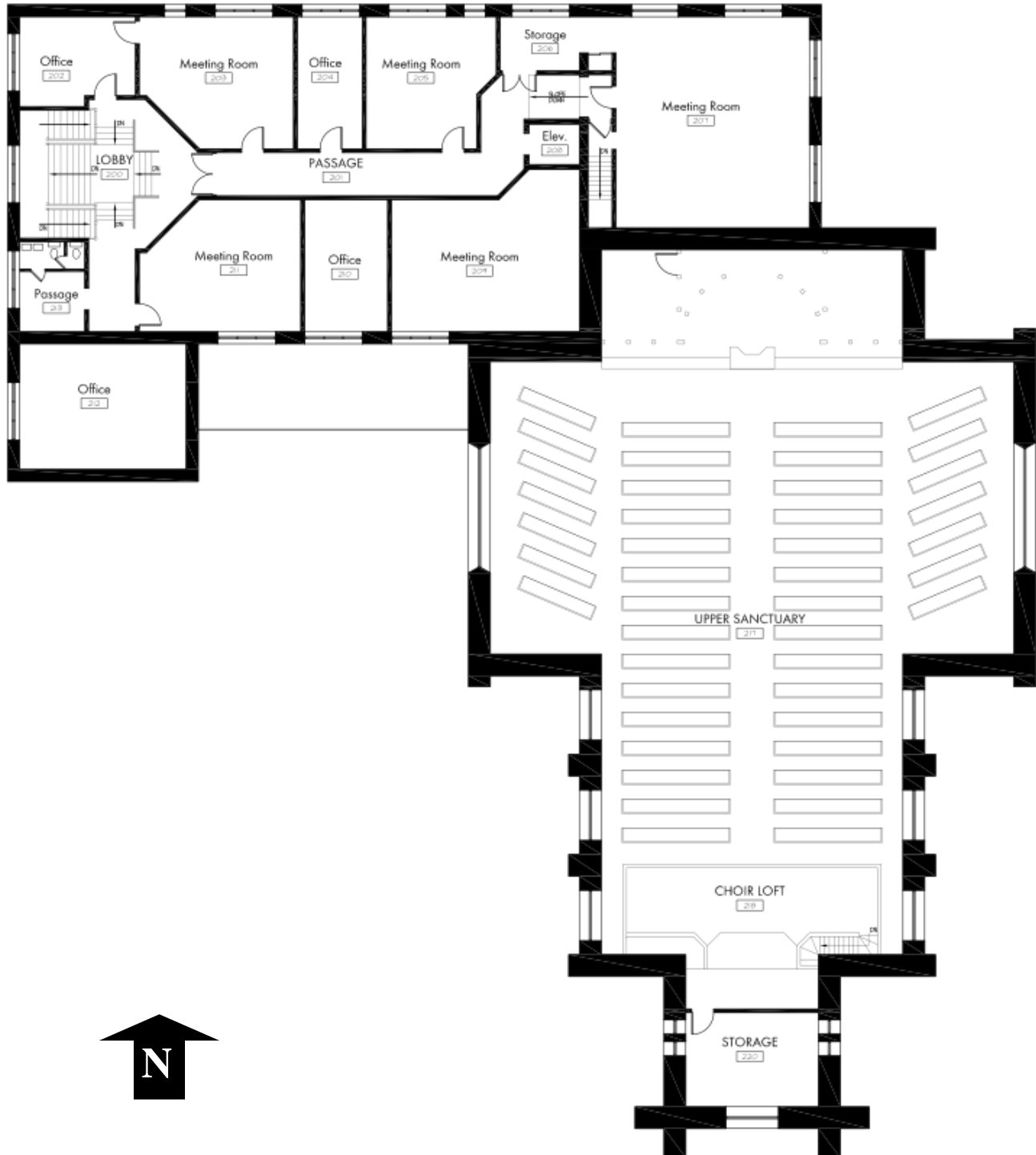
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First Unitarian Church, Second Floor Plan  
*Not to scale*

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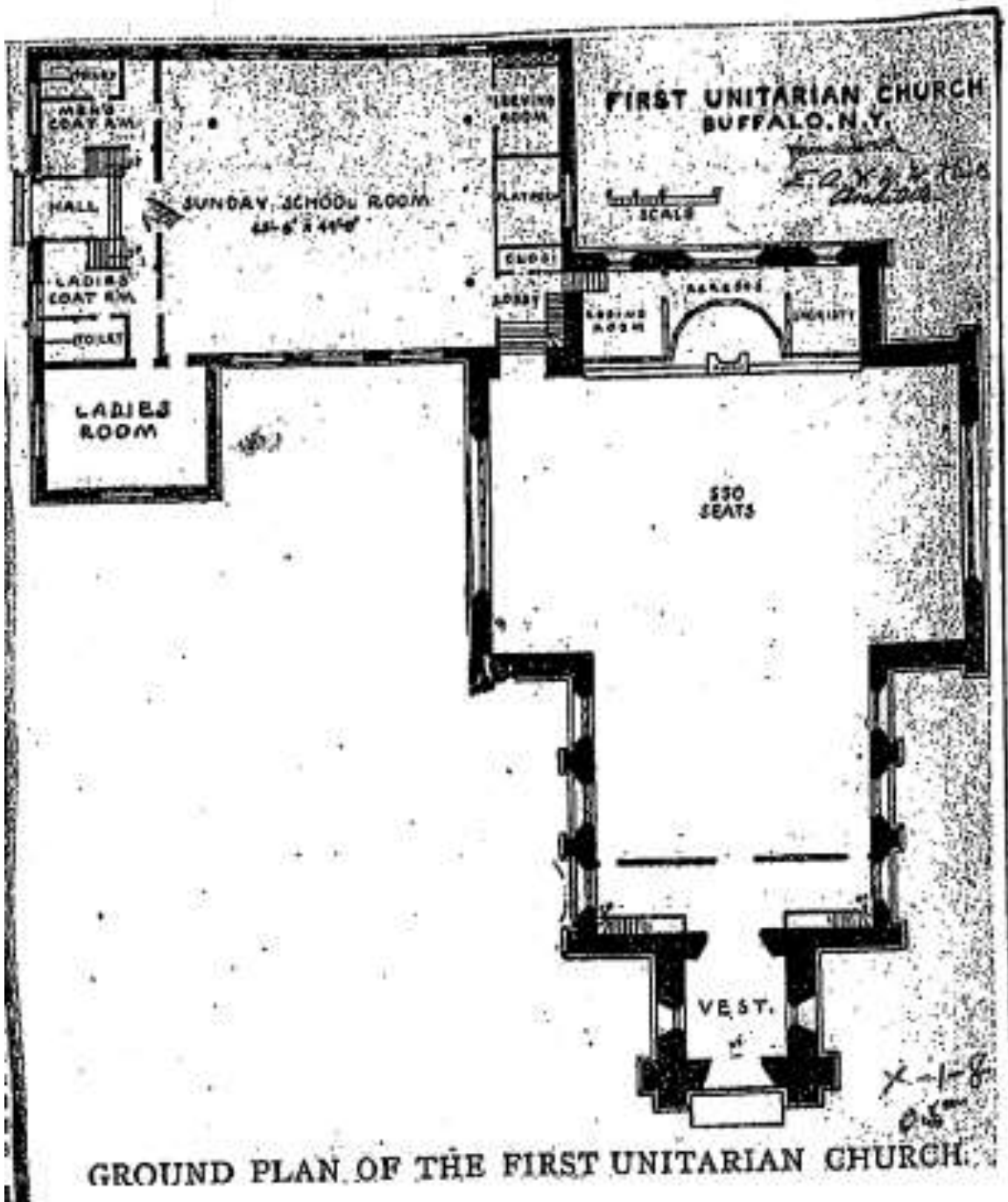
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Floor Plan, First Unitarian Church (January 8, 1905)  
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**One of Four Design Concepts by Edward A. and William Winthrop Kent (1904)**

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**One of Four Design Concepts by Edward A. and William Winthrop Kent (1904)**

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**One of Four Design Concepts by Edward A. and William Winthrop Kent (1904)**



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**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**

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**One of Four Design Concepts by Edward A. and William Winthrop Kent (1904)**

This concept is closest to the design of the church as it was constructed. Note the small one-story projection at the left – the modest vestibule that was constructed in 2000 was based on this original proposed design.

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**First Unitarian Church (ca. 1906)**

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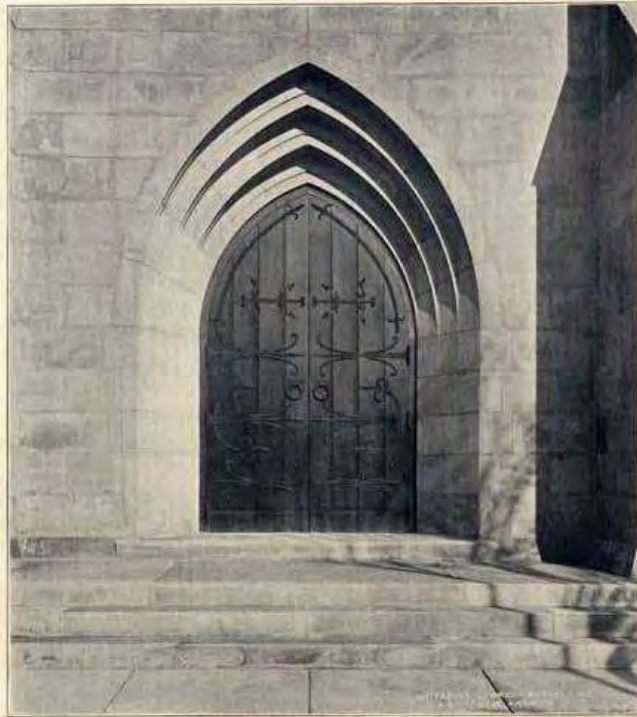
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**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO**

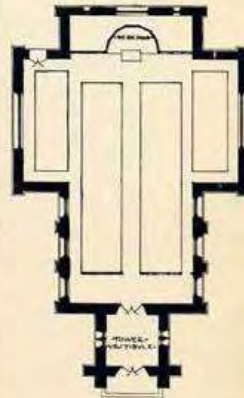
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The Portal



FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH, BUFFALO, N. Y.  
Edward A. Kent & William W. Kent, Architects

THE INLAND ARCHITECT  
AND NEWS RECORD  
DECEMBER, 1906

**First Unitarian Church, Buffalo N.Y. (ca. 1906)**  
As published in *The Inland Architect and News Record*, December 1906



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INTERIOR VIEWS, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH, BUFFALO, N. Y.  
Edward A. Keat & William W. Keat, Architects

THE INLAND ARCHITECT  
AND NEWS RECORD  
DECEMBER, 1906

**Interior views, First Unitarian Church, Buffalo N.Y. (ca. 1906)**

As published in *The Inland Architect and News Record*, December 1906

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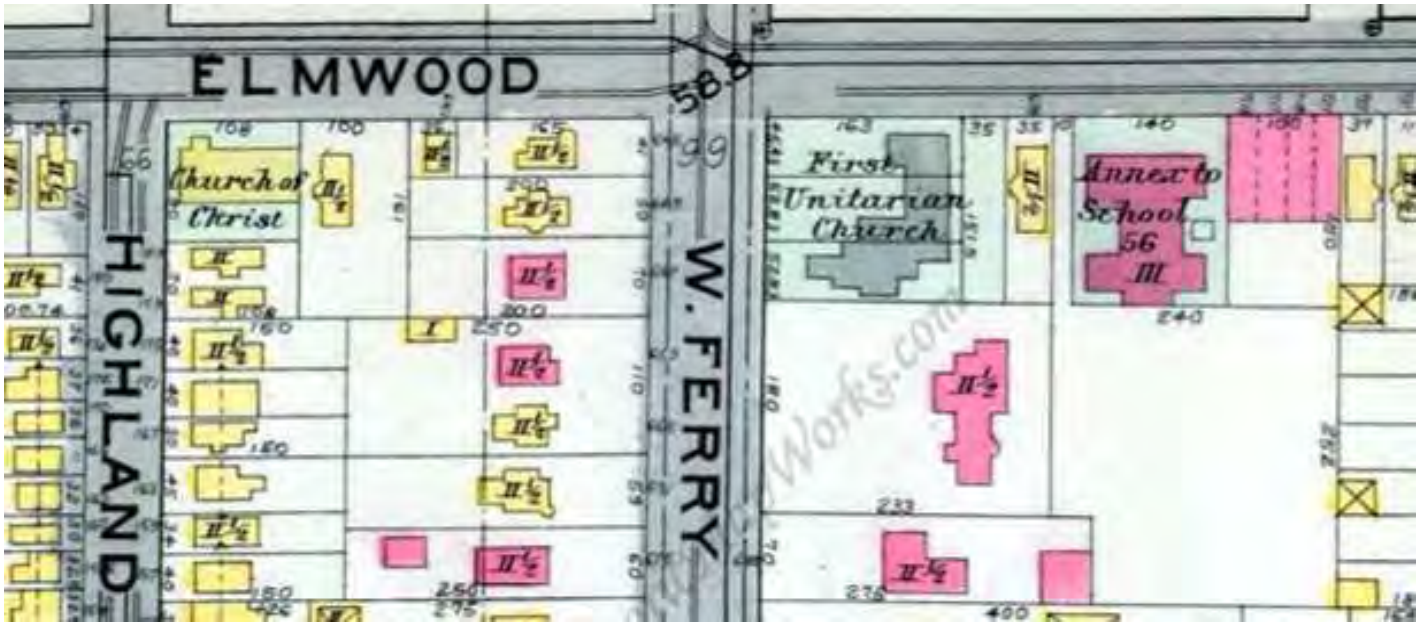
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Detail, Atlas of the City of Buffalo (1915)

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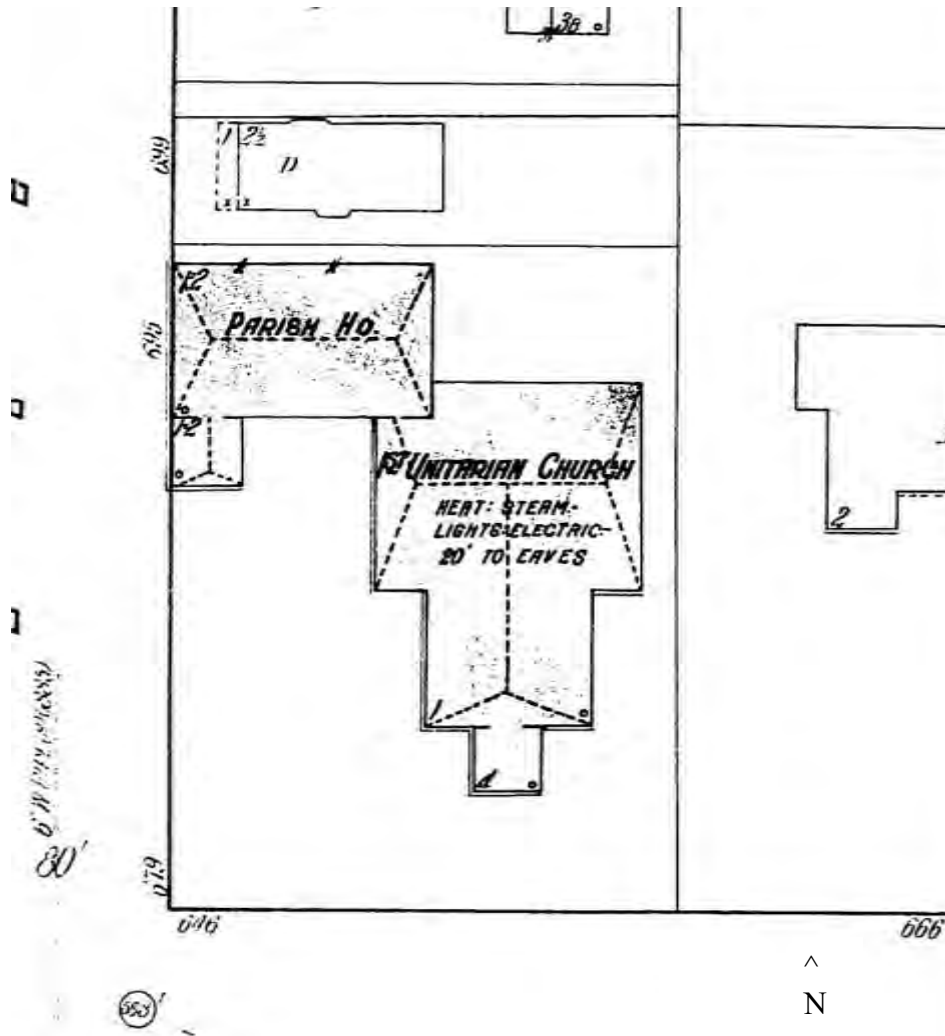
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Detail, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (1916)

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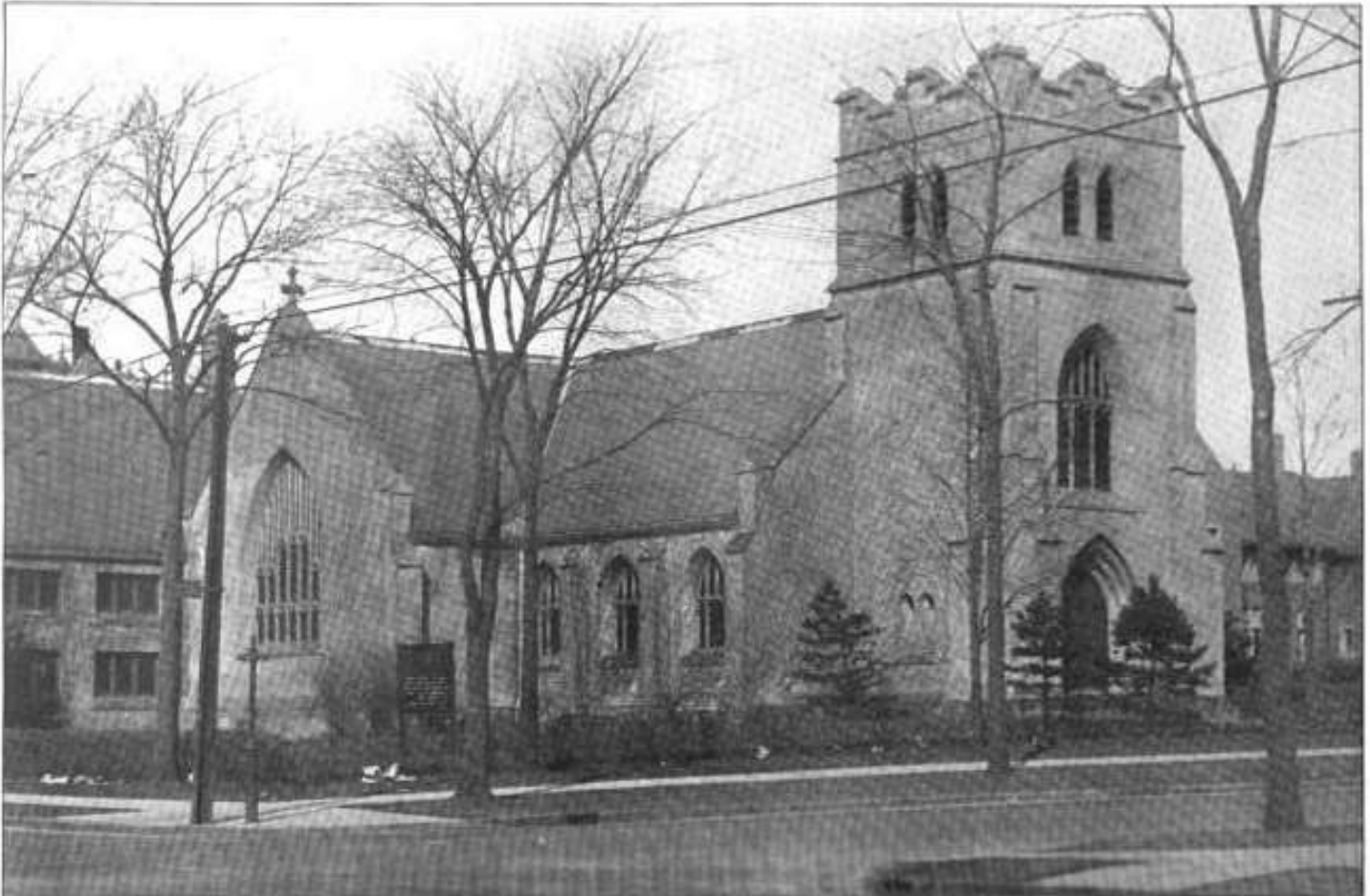
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**FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF BUFFALO, N.Y.**

**First Unitarian Church of Buffalo N.Y. (ca. 1922)**

As published in the *Christian Register*, December 26, 1922

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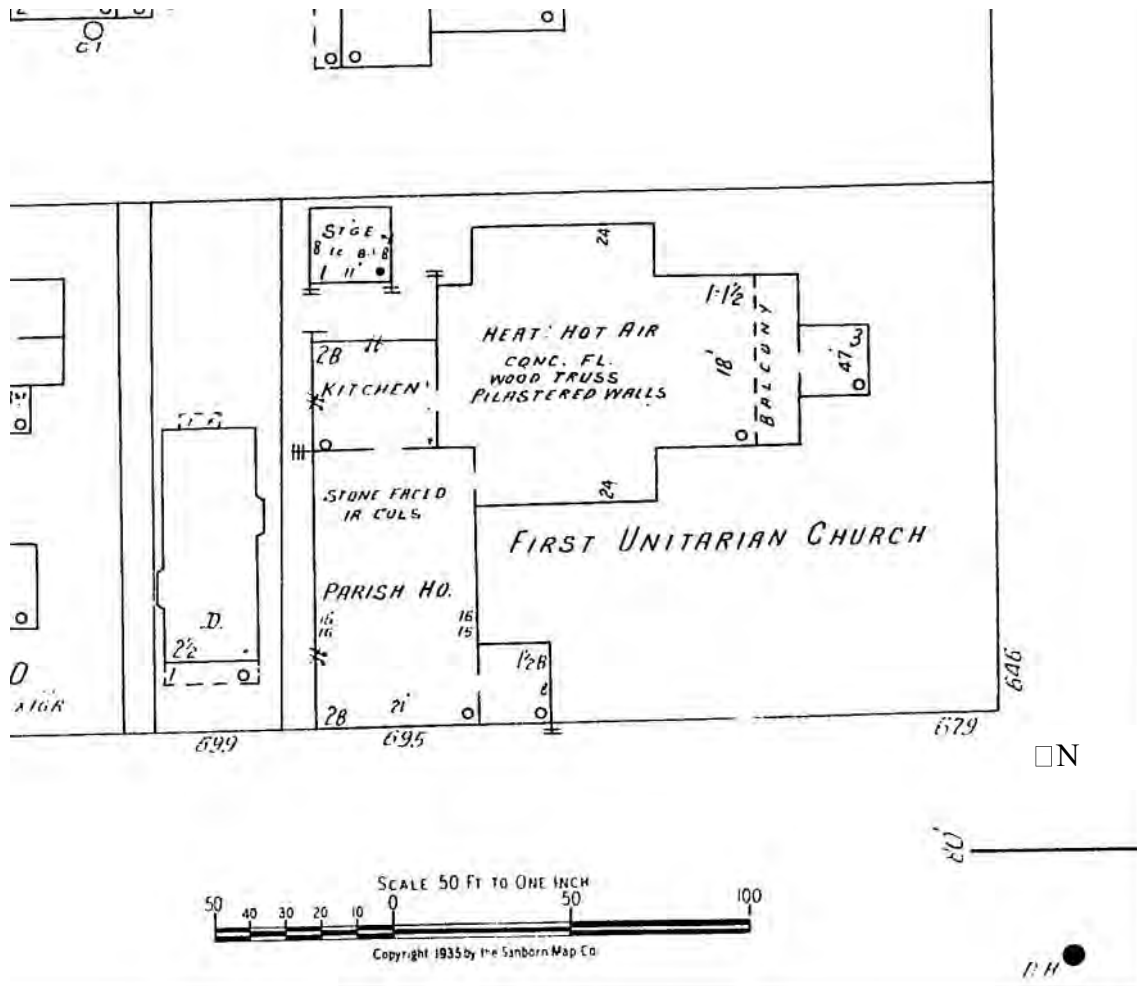
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**Detail, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (1935)**

Sanborn shows the small kitchen addition to the building, located between the Parish House/Annex wing and the main sanctuary building, completed by Bley and Lyman in 1925.









NO PARKING  
EXCEPT ON  
SUNDAY

NO PARKING  
ON OR  
NEAR  
CROSSING

ST. JOHN'S  
LUTHERAN CHURCH  
ALLIANCE

CORONA









← Labyrinth →





LU  
WOMEN'S  
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY First Unitarian Church of Buffalo  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Erie

DATE RECEIVED: 5/15/15 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 6/09/15  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/24/15 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 6/30/15  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000367

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 6-30-15 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.





**New York State Office of Parks,  
Recreation and Historic Preservation**

Division for Historic Preservation  
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189  
518-237-8643

RECEIVED 2280

MAY 15 2015

Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
Rose Harvey  
Commissioner

30 April 2015

Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following four nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

First Unitarian Church of Buffalo, Erie County  
Inglewood & Thurston Historic District, Monroe County  
Christine Hess House and Shoemaker's Shop, Schoharie County  
Alligerville Historic District, Ulster County.

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office