THROUGH THESE GATES: BUFFALO'S FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN ARCHITECT, JOHN EDMONSTON BRENT - 1889-1962

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ABSTRACT
THROUGH THESE GATES: Buffalo’s First African American Architect
John Edmonston Brent

The purpose of this research is to reintroduce the architectural and historic cultural contributions that John Edmonston Brent (1889-1962) made to the city of Buffalo, Western New York and beyond. A significant number of renderings, artifacts and photos from Mr. Brent’s forty-seven year architectural career were unearthed. This cache of rediscovered forgotten contributions made by John Brent would align him with other African American architectural pioneers during the mid-20th century.

John Brent was educated by the first class of professionally educated and trained African American architects of the Progressive Era. Brent’s architectural career can be divided into three categories: draftsman, registered architect and landscape architect. Following a brief biographical sketch, the thesis focuses on the second half of Brent’s career from 1926 to a junior landscape architect for the Department of Parks and Buildings in the City of Buffalo until his retirement in 1959. The city’s storage vault revealed renderings of city squares, parks and neighborhood playgrounds from his twenty-four year tenure. The author recommends continued research into his early career as a draftsman, based on the historical record that has been established.

The thesis consolidates more than thirty months of primary and secondary sources, with the assistance from local historians, archivists, academics and librarians, staff from various departments of Buffalo City Hall: Permits & Licenses, Division of Public Works – Department of Buildings & Planning, and the Department of Assessment & Taxation, and the Brent descendants. As a result, Brent’s legacy was manifested in a five-month exhibition at the
Burchfield Penney Art Center, as well as a min-documentary video – both created in partnerships between the author and professionals in the museum and media fields.
DEDICATION

“Through These Gates”

Is

Dedicated to

Dr. Edward O. Smith, Jr.

SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus

Department of History and Social Studies Education

SUNY Buffalo State

And

Dr. Felix L. Armfield

Professor

Department of History and Social Studies Education

SUNY Buffalo State

Due to the untimely passing of Drs. Smith and Armfield, the research, exhibition and mini-documentary are also dedicated to the History Department and the SUNY Buffalo State community, as well as offered as an archived gift to be shared with the Brent family descendants and the residents of the City of Buffalo.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to SUNY Buffalo State’s, Dr. Hal D. Payne, Vice President of Student Affairs, for his encouragement, and to faculty, advisors and staff for their support during my educational journey. To Dean, Dr. Kevin J. Railey of the SUNY Buffalo State Graduate School, and executive assistant Margaret Letzelter, I offer thanks for their tremendous support and guidance during my overall graduate experience, and for the Research Diversity Fellow Program that provided me with scholarships for my graduate studies. The Graduate Student Association has given me the financial assistance in the production of the John Edmonston Brent mini-documentary, “Through These Gates.”

This research would not have been possible without Nancy Weekly, Head of Collections and Charles Cary Rumsey Curator of the Burchfield Penney Art Center and Burchfield Penney instructor of museum studies in the SUNY Buffalo State Graduate Museum Studies Program. My sincere appreciation to the talented and committed team of the Burchfield Penney Art Center, Dr. Anthony Bannon, executive director, and dedicated staff. Together they created the atmosphere for Western New Yorkers to enter the “gates” to be educated and leave inspired by the life of Buffalo’s forgotten architect.

Thank you to the various departments of Buffalo City Hall: Mayor Byron W. Brown and staff; Emerson Barr III, Executive Director of the Buffalo Arts Commission; the Department of Licenses & Permits (Room 301); Division of Public Works, Parks & Streets: Commissioner Steven Stepniak and the Buildings Division; Rishawn Sonubi, Deputy Commissioner; and Brian Swartz, Associate A.I.A. (Room 616), for access into the vault and the time assisting me with Architecture 101.
My Brent research had many partners: Tuskegee University Archives and Alumni Services; the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives; Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Washington, DC; Drexel University Library Archives, Philadelphia, Pa.; the Rakow Research Library of the Corning Museum of Glass; New York State Department Archives; New York State Department of Labor; Congressman Brian Higgins’ Office, The Town of Cheektowaga Assessors Offices, Records Management and the Historical Society; the American Institute of Architects–Washington, DC; American Institute of Architects–New York State; American Institute of Architects Buffalo/WNY Chapter; the Buffalo History Museum; Buffalo & Erie County Public Library–Grosvenor Room; The Frank E. Merriweather Library William Miles Research Center; Western New York Heritage Magazine; Jeff Preval – WGRZ-TV; Will Jones, editor of Black WNY Magazine; The Challenger Community News; and Ms. Sheila Brown, CEO of WUFO AM Radio. In particular, I thank the sister of the late Dr. Felix L. Armfield, Kimberly Armfield of Washington, DC, and Sandy White, television broadcaster and journalist, for their mentoring. Special thanks to Dr. Peggy Brooks-Bertram and Dr. Barbara Seals Nevergold of the Uncrowned Community Builders, Inc., Dr. Lillian Serece Williams and Dr. Sharon Amos for their continued support and guidance. My deepest appreciation goes to the Brent descendants for their important role in sharing their precious memories of Uncle John and their contribution to success of my research. Lastly, I thank my daughter Angelina Marie Castro – she too has become a Brent Scholar.
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Introduction

In 2008, the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission released a copy of the Strategic Management Plan revealing a small description of John Edmonston Brent’s lost architectural contributions made during his tenure with the Buffalo Parks and Buildings Department from 1935 to 1959. The Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission hired architectural historian Everett Fly of San Antonio, Texas to visit Buffalo in 2012 to assist in the research of lost histories of the African American corridor.\(^1\) The focus of the research was primarily on community stakeholders like Reverend J. Edward Nash, Pastor of the Michigan Street Baptist Church; Mrs. Mary Barnett Talbert, community activist and co-founder of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, Buffalo Chapter (1889); and others who were remembered for building a strong foundation in the African American community.

In the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, Buffalo, New York was a bustling port city with new technologies, a robust economy and talented architects. The Queen City of the Great Lakes maintained a radial street and grid system designed by Joseph Ellicott. What would attract young Brent to Buffalo? He had not family nor acquaintances here, nor the promise of employment. Perhaps he was attracted to architectural marvels of his time: Louis H. Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Frederick Law Olmsted.

Born into a middle class family with a strong architectural legacy, young Brent drafted his own legacy. His father, Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent (1854-1899) was the first African American architect in private practice in Washington, DC. It is not clear how or where the senior Brent received his vocational training or education which began with an apprenticeship in 1879;

he was listed as a draftsman and architect for Thomas M. Plowman, an architect, carpenter and builder. Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent became an architect in his own right, starting his own practice in 1875. Many of Brent’s commissions were from African American congregations in the Strivers Section in NW Washington, D.C.: St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, the first independent Episcopal Church for Blacks; Fourth Metropolitan Baptist Church, 13th and R Street; and Mount Jezereel Baptist Church, Fifth and E Streets. Dreck Spurlock Wilson stated: “Brent is known to have designed at least 82 houses, 2 stores and 6 churches, although all but 2 churches and 29 houses have been demolished in the city’s ‘redevelopment’ efforts.” Still standing is a handsome group of 9 row houses, adorned with oriel windows and stone trim, at 4th and E Street, NE, in the Capitol Hill Historic District. Brent designed the houses for African-American developer William A. Stuart in 1889. Brent passed away unexpectedly in 1899 and did not live to see his son John follow in his footsteps.

As this research will reflect, John Brent left his mark in every geographic section of the city of Buffalo. Brent’s architectural career began in 1912 as a draftsman with several private architectural firms: Max G. Beirel, Henry Osgood Holland, Paul Ford Mann, Julius C. Schultz, Robert North & Olaf Sheligren, and Chester Oakley & Albert Schallmo. The second half of Brent’s career from 1926 as a registered architect includes his first and largest commission, the Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A. and a few smaller commissions thereafter, until his retirement in 1959 as a Junior Landscape Architect for the City of Buffalo Parks and Buildings Departments.

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3 Wilson 82.
Fly’s research led him to the contributions of John E. Brent’s renderings of the Entrance Court and many aesthetics within the Buffalo Zoological Gardens. He hosted a public meeting, held interviews with the City of Buffalo Planning Office, Zoo Administrators, civic leaders, residents and Brent family members. He concluded that John E. Brent was Buffalo’s first African American architect and he was responsible for the transformation of the Buffalo Zoo facility into a modern zoo during his tenure with the Parks Department as a Junior Landscape architect. In addition to Fly’s rediscovery, he concluded that Brent was among a small group of African Americans to work as both a landscape architect and a building architect in the 1930s. Brent completed the design for the entrance court in two stages between 1935 and 1938 as part of an overall expansion and redesign of the zoo.\(^5\) Fly filed the nomination with the National Park System (NPS) for Mr. Brent’s design of the Entrance Court, Gates 3 & 4 to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. John Edmonston Brent was posthumously granted the honor by the New York State Historic Preservation Board on March 21, 2013 and the National Register of Historic Places for both Landscape Architecture and Ethnic Heritage, May 22, 2013.\(^6\)

SUNY Buffalo State history professors, Edward O. Smith, Jr., Ph.D. and Felix L. Armfield, Ph.D. (now both deceased), who were members of the Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission, were enlightened by Mr. Fly’s rediscovery. Early in 2013, a team organized by Dr. Smith consisting of Smith, Armfield, Nancy Weekly of the Burchfield Penney Art Center (BPAC) and museum studies, Christopher Root of the Monroe Fordham Regional History Center, located on the campus of SUNY Buffalo State, and others, met with Louis Petrucci, then City of Buffalo Assistant Director of Permit & Inspection Services,


\(^6\) Ibid.
and Senior Architect Burke Glaser to examine the Buffalo Zoo drawings of John E. Brent.\textsuperscript{7}

Copies of the Buffalo Zoo renderings were requested and delivered to Weekly at the BPAC who hoped that this student would be interested in researching John E. Brent to determine if there were additional extant contributions of the pioneering architect and to assess the potential for a future exhibition about him. Not only was sufficient material culture uncovered from which to create an exhibition, but creativity inspired a non-traditional thesis-like project in the form of a biographical documentary video. This paper provides the details that illuminate John E. Brent’s life on paper, in the museums, and on theater screens.

Literature Review

From emancipation to post-World War II, complete biographies of pioneering African American architects who contributed to the skyline and landscapes of our nation’s leading cities are listed in Dreck Spurlock Wilson’s *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (2004). The bibliography also highlights seven leading Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) who contributed to the education of African American architects. The resource provides several multiple-generations of fathers, son, and daughters of African American architects and their catalogue of architectural designs. Importantly, it includes Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent and his son John Edmonson [sic] Brent. Wilson’s biographical dictionary was the first time Brent’s biography was published, providing a brief narrative of his architectural contributions. The listing is best regarded as the Who’s Who of pioneering African American architects.

Dr. Ellen Weiss discusses the major contributions and influences on the new class of Progressive African American architects of an emerging modern Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in “*Robert R. Taylor: an African American Architect Designs for Booker T. Washington.*” Robert Taylor not only designs a modern architectural program for Tuskegee, but an active campus with opportunities for drafting and construction for future African American architects. During John Brent’s enrollment, several structures were designed and built, including the Lincoln Gates which were designed by students. It can be concluded that John Brent was well trained when he arrived at Drexel and his final destination, Buffalo, New York.

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8 Wilson, ix.
Jack Travis is an author, educator, cultural design consultant and registered architect who discusses in his book “African American Architects in Current Practice” (1991), ten contemporary African American architects who were practicing in the United States. Travis focuses on the responsibility that many successful African American architects are required to serve as mentors to black youth in community service, social advocates, and mentors for future inspiring architects: a dual responsibility that requires balance between the profession and community as leaders. He quotes the Bible from Luke 12:36: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” Although John Brent was not included in the book, Travis profiles include Robert Traynham Coles, Buffalo’s second African American architect.

In her narrative, “Strangers in the Land of Paradise: The Creation of an African American Community, Buffalo, New York 1900-1940” (1999), Lillian S. Williams, Ph.D. discusses the history of growth, development and successes of the African American community where John E. Brent’s social advocacy is outlined. Brent’s arrival in 1912 Buffalo immediately made him the first African American architect in the city. The social climate in Buffalo was ripe for Brent who was prepared for community leadership during that critical time. Finding a balance between his personal life and his profession, he stood with leaders such as Reverend J. Edward Nash, Jr., pastor of the Michigan Street Baptist Church, and civil rights activist and educator, Mary Burnett Talbert, to improve the conditions of African Americans through education, employment, and social cohesion. Dr. Williams’ narrative provides the history on Brent’s largest commission—the Michigan Avenue Branch Young Men’s Christian Association

building (1928). The Michigan Avenue YMCA served its outreach to local churches as the cultural center for the African American community.

Selden Richardson shares the historiography of pioneering black architects in *Built by Blacks: African American Architecture and Neighborhoods in Richmond*, which details historical accounts of pioneering architects such as Charles Thaddeus Russell (1875-1952), who received his carpentry trade certification at the Hampton Institute in 1889. Mr. Russell became the Supervisor of the Carpentry Division of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1901. He oversaw many of the projects transforming Tuskegee into a modern campus. In 1907, he aspired to become the first African American architect for Richmond, Virginia.

Wallace A. Rayfield (1865-1901) became the first African American architect for the city of Birmingham, Alabama. Allen Durough’s narrative, *The Architectural Legacy of Wallace A. Rayfield: Pioneer Black Architect of Birmingham, Alabama*, details the author’s fascination with a lost treasure of architectural contributions of Birmingham’s forgotten African American architect. Mr. Durough’s inspiring narrative led this thesis author to the discovery of John E. Brent’s instructors at Tuskegee who included: Robert Robinson Taylor, director; Charles Thaddeus Russell, Carpentry Division; and David A. Williston, Landscape Division. The narrative details Mr. Durough’s passion to link the lost architect’s history to the city of Birmingham, Alabama.

The tribal community of the cultural artisan’s roots are found on the continent of Africa states author, Joseph E. Holloway, Ph.D. In his online resource, “African American Architecture: A Hidden Heritage,” he identifies the influences on American architecture through interpretations of cognitive, cultural and symbolic traditions observed in Africa’s past from their tribal

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communities to the esthetics implemented throughout the designs of African American architects today. He shares that the enslaved cultural artisans carried with them to the shores of the New World, the skill set to transform and implement natural materials such as wood, metals, earth and stone into early colonial structures. Over time, the artistry of American architectural designs based on African esthetics has been overshadowed and unrecognized.

A recent study published in the Journal of Architectural Education discusses the undergraduate students of the Architecture and Environmental Design Program at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Author and architect Gabriel Kroiz discusses the work of Melvin Mitchell, FAIA, who discusses the stagnant progress of the African American architect in his book, Crisis of the African-American Architect: Conflicting Cultures of Architecture and (Black) Power (2003). Meanwhile, there has been great progress in the professions of engineering, law, and medicine toward increasing diversification; yet, the percentage of African American architects has remained low, irrespective of the Civil Rights Movement. Mitchell calls attention to the fact that very little has been done to encourage, promote, and mentor the profession; case in point, the 1999 Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African-American Experience consisting of over 2000 pages that did not include a single profile of an African American architect. Mitchell concluded that there is a crisis within the African American establishment and the architectural mainstream.

Katherine Williams, Associate, AIA in her article, “Where Are the Architects Who Look like Me?,” shares her experiences with the lack of diversity of African American men and

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women in the architectural profession. Williams discusses ways mentorship, recruitment and retention among minorities can be achieved throughout the local establishment of American Institute of Architects and other supportive organizations. Williams identified three areas where local organizations lack support: diversity, mentoring, and positive reinforcement. She shares her personal experience from a Girl Scout retreat at Howard University, where she saw no one who looked like her. It was not until she attended college, that she met female architectural students who were experiencing the same problem. To this day, she continues to connect with interns, especially African American future architects and females in her area.

A demographic study of African American architects is the focus of Dennis Alan Mann and Bradford Grant in the *African American Architects and Their Education: A Demographic Study*. The researchers compiled the 2009 study of 1676 architects of color, of which 228 are female. There remain six Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) in the United States. Since no data has been collected, the query of architect in their database gathered information based on four major areas: 1). Overall totals of where (at least one) professional degree was granted. 2). At least one degree (Licensed architect) from a HBCU. 3). Universities with ten or more licensed African American graduates 4). Graduate degrees. There were 222 architects of color (13.2%) who were born outside the United States. The researchers have concluded there is a major push for universities to diversify their student population. The study will continue with long term goals to make public who and where African American architects are found so that young people can aspire to the profession with mentorship.

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Mann and Grant discuss *The Directory of African American Architects* (1991) to profile the professionals in various roles of educators, current levels of practice and ownership. Robert Traynham Coles, FAIA, wrote an editorial entitled “An Endangered Species” that voices his concern for the lack of growth of African American architects. The Directory continues to discuss the heritage of the African American architects from Benjamin Banneker to the recent rediscovery of Julian Abele’s contributions to Duke University.

Benjamin Banneker was self-taught and one of the first African Americans to gain distinction in science. His significant accomplishments include the successful prediction of a solar eclipse, publishing his own almanac, and the surveying of Washington, D.C. Banneker spent most of his life on his family’s 100-acre farm outside Baltimore. Banneker's abilities impressed many people, including Thomas Jefferson, who recommended him for the surveying team that laid out Washington, D.C., making it the monumental capital it is today.  

The growth of African American architects has slowed its pace even among women. The editors conclude by asking if mentorship and role models are needed for those who desire a career in architecture; more importantly, is it necessary for partnerships to be forged between existing schools and firms to provide sustainability for deserving students? Perhaps the answer to these questions can be answered by the emerging generation of future architects.

Historian Susan Altman shares in “Black Architects Have a Rich American History” the direct tradeoff from the plantation system in the United States. From plantation structures to progressive African American architects, she discusses the contributions of the enslaved and the free cultural artisans of the South. Altman outlines the timeline in American history from the antebellum period to the 20th century to illustrate the major influences of the African American architect. Altman includes in her discussion the importance of the Tuskegee Normal and

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Industrial Institute established in 1881 that offered vocational training to free and enslaved persons. Altman fast-forwards to the decline of the African American architect when U. S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush discontinued funding for the construction of public housing, creating a major set-back for African American architects who were major contributors.

During a February 2012 interview “Q&A: Architect David Adjaye on His Vision for the New Museum,” Joseph Stromberg of Smithsonian magazine talks with David Adjaye, native Tanzanian and the architect of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. \(^\text{20}\) Adjaye discussed ways his childhood prepared him for his professional career. In 2016, his largest project to date will be home to 400 years of African American history. The structure defines the African Diaspora by implementing a blend of cultural aesthetics and symbols of progress best described by the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) curator Michelle Joan Wilkinson:

> The museum’s unique design is inspired by the form of the tiered corona found in Nigerian sculpture, the symbolism of uplift, and concept of the porch… “A key element of design across different diasporic communities from West Africa, through Haiti and Louisiana.”\(^\text{21}\)

With the exception of two literature resources—Dreck Spurlock Wilson’s and Lillian S. Williams’ books—Brent was not mentioned in any of the other publications. It was disappointing to find the lack of literary resources on African American architects in the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library system and SUNY Buffalo State’s E. H. Butler Library and Special Collections.

SUNY at Buffalo’s School of Architecture has a specialty library accessible only for their


architectural students, so the author relied heavily on the Inter-Library Loan program at SUNY Buffalo State’s E. H. Butler Library, where resources were obtained from Syracuse University and Cornell University.
Methodology and Findings

My educational background and passion for local history and cultural archives have prepared me for the task of rediscovering John E. Brent, the 20th century pioneering African American architect of Buffalo, New York. Architectural history research was a new horizon; yet the same skills used to navigate history were applied along with old-fashioned detective work. It was necessary to develop an exact timeline of the architect’s employment history to correlate his early career, employers and structures. Once the timeline was confirmed, his career was divided into three classifications: draftsman (1912-1926), [although he was a draftsman his entire career], registered/commissioned architect (1926-1938), and junior landscape architect (1935-1959). Each category required a new set of resources and direct access to archived information.

The initial phase of research required access to the architect’s professional membership profiles. The information was found in the archives of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The Historical Directory of American Architects is a resource guide to finding information about past architects.22 Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the AIA provides digital access to the member’s profile from 1897-1947; membership profiles filed after 1978 are not listed in the online directory. Finding aids to architects' collections in architectural archives normally have a section with biographical information about the architect and firm. Many finding aids are viewable online at the architectural archive's website.23 The online resource is divided into two categories:

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23 Ibid.
- *The Biographical Dictionary* – is sorted alphabetically and contains data about the architect’s education, commissions and types of architectures; it is often abbreviated.

- *The Demographical Dictionary* – is listed by state, providing demographic information listing of all members licensed to practice architecture.\(^\text{24}\)

The AIA archives uploaded a digital copy of the member’s profile with copies of correspondence.\(^\text{25}\) The profile confirmed his education, employment, commissions and structure types.

Office: 362 Pearl Street
Buffalo, New York

9/1912 – 1/1913 Henry Osgood Holland Office
Office: 212 Pearl Street
Buffalo, New York

1/1913 – 4/1913 Paul F. Mann, Architect Office
Office: 110 Pearl St. (The Dun Bldg.)
Buffalo, New York

14/1913 – 9/1920 Julius C. Schultz Office
Office: 1370 Main Street
Buffalo, New York

9/1920 – 10/1923 Robert North & Olaf Shelgren Office
Office: 170 Franklin Street (The Crosby Bldg.)
Buffalo, New York

10/1923 5/1924 Julius C. Schultz Office
Office: 1370 Main St.
Buffalo, New York

5/1924 – 8/1925 Robert North & Olaf Shelgren
Office: 170 Franklin Street (The Crosby Building)
Buffalo, New York

9/1925 – 8/1926 Chester Oakley and Robert Schallmo
Office: 117 W. Tupper Street
Buffalo, New York\(^\text{26}\)

*The American Contractor*, an architectural journal that reported commissions and construction and permit listings, was used jointly with AIA members’ profiles. The journal

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\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Civil Service Record, Civil Service Division, 1001 City Hall, Buffalo, New York, 1935.
published announcements of construction bids, suppliers, and permits issued by municipalities and provided vital information relating to the trades instrumental to Brent in his early career. The *American Contractor* was a quarterly publication, printed from 1910 to 1922; the publication is archived in special collections of the New York Public Library; the Hathi Trust Digital Library provides the online resource.27

The following criteria were developed to confirm whether architectural renderings and landscape designs were those of the pioneering architect, John E. Brent:

- Identify structures constructed during years according to his timeline
- Identify the employer(s) and the architect of record
- Locate original architectural drawings and blueprints
- Review the architect’s stamp or signature on the rendering, if available
- Review building permits to provide identifying and corroborating information
- Confirmation of the structure site
- Confirm if the structure was extant, or demolished and when
- If extant, determine the identity of the current owner/occupant and request a copy of the drawings or documentation about the site

However, conclusions about the architect’s or draftsman’s identity often were undetermined because in most cases the architectural renderings were missing signatures. If the structure was a private commission and not owned by the City of Buffalo or local municipality, copies of original drawings or blueprints were generally not filed; only permits for the structure would be filed. Only city or local municipalities archived their own architectural renderings. There are three departments in Buffalo City Hall that provide construction related information on all structures built in the city: Permits & Licenses (in Room 301), the Department of Planning (in Room 616) and the Tax Assessors (in Room 125).

The architectural renderings designed and built by Brent’s former employers during his early career as a draftsman were not included in this research because his name or initials did not appear on any that were examined.

The study continued with Brent’s career as a registered architect (1926-1938). John E. Brent received his architectural license (No. 2977) from the University of the State of New York on March 22, 1926. During his career he received a small number of commissions. Robert Traynham Coles is credited for publishing those commissions in his profile of Brent and the architect’s ‘Building List’ in Dreck Spurlock Wilson’s African American Architects, A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945, in 2004. They included the following:

- The James G. Barclay Building, 1922
  Auto Supply Warehouse
  785 Main Street, Buffalo, New York
  Garage: Second floor addition
  Extant – Catholic Diocese of Buffalo
  Demolished, 1954

  James G. Barclay was a local businessman in the automotive supply industry in Buffalo, New York. In 1921, he purchased the former Weyand Brewery located at 795 Main Street. This was the first commission for Brent prior to receiving his New York State architectural license. The American Contractor’s Journal shows Brent transformed the existing structure with a second floor addition for Barclay’s automotive sales and service garage. The weekly publication was available for professionals in the building trades.

- McGuire Medical Office, c1934
  482 Jefferson Avenue, Buffalo, New York
  2.5 Story, Frame, 2 Family Structure/Office/Garage
  Demolished, 1/2/97

  According to the City of Buffalo Department of Licenses & Permits, the original structure was constructed in July 11, 1893, permit number 2573 as a single story shed. In June 26, 1911, permit license number 34048, the structure was enlarged into a two-story frame dwelling. A third permit was issued on July 17, 1931, permit number 22236 into a tea room. No building permits were issued to John E. Brent on or about the date specified.

31 City of Buffalo. Department of Licenses and Permits. 482 Jefferson Avenue, 301 City Hall.
Michigan Avenue Branch Young Men’s Christian Association, 1926
585 Michigan Avenue, Buffalo, New York
4-Story, red brick Georgian style colonial commercial structure
Demolished, 1977

In 1926, John E. Brent would become the second African American architect to design a Y.M.C.A., his first and largest commission for the east side in Buffalo, New York. A fund-raising campaign initiated by Sears & Roebuck owner and philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald started the campaign with a gift of $25,000 if the balance could be raised. George B. Mathews and his wife Jenny M. pledged their support in the amount of $100,000, known as the Booker T. Washington Foundation. Mathews was president of the J.N. Mathews Co., which published the Buffalo Express and later Buffalo Courier-Express. Residents, community leaders and national leaders assisted in the fund-raising and the first modern structure for the African American community was erected. The cost of the structure was $200,000; the structure exceeded the budget totaling $285,000. If the structure were built today, it would be valued at $2,488,950. The Buffalo Courier-Express reported in “Negro Architect for Y.M.C.A. Branch for Colored Men,” “the structure will contain offices, lobby, a cafeteria, gymnasium, educational rooms and dormitory accommodations for 50 men. It is also expected to serve as a social center for the Negro population of the city said to number about 10,000.” The structure was the premier location for many local, regional, and national meetings and social gatherings. International and national personalities and leaders visited the Y.M.C.A. such as W.E.B. DuBois and Marion Anderson. The estate of George B. Mathews and wife Jenny would contribute an estimate of $500,000 to the Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A.

The Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A. – Wales Hollow Campsite, 1934
Wales Center Road, Wales, New York
George B. Mathews Hall
Reed Hall
44.5 Acres campsite, 2 wooden structures
Demolished, c.1950

The Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A. Wales Hollow Camp was gifted 44.5 acres of wilderness property in Wales, New York exclusively for men and boys by Jenny M. Mathews, wife of Buffalo Courier-Express publisher editor, George Mathews. The property deed transfer proves the transaction of the gift for $1.00 to the Young Men’s Christian Association of Buffalo, N.Y., a domestic membership corporation having its principal office at 45 West Mohawk Street, Buffalo, New York.

Mitchell Miles Residence, c1937
4550 Genesee Street (corner of Sugg Road; now Holtz Road), Cheektowaga, New York
2-Story, white masonry stucco structure, single family residence
Demolished, 1980

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33 “Negro Architect for Y.M.C.A. Branch for Colored Men,” The Courier-Express (March 5, 1926)
34 Erie County Clerk’s Office, Erie County Hall. Buffalo, New York. LIBER2490, 98.
The residence was commissioned by Mitchell Miles, the brother of Marshall Miles, manager of heavyweight champion boxer Joe Lewis. The Miles brothers operated a dairy business from Vine Street; today, part of the Michigan Street Heritage Corridor. The compound was involved in a contested dispute with the War Department of the United States in 1941. The Curtis Wright Aeronautics Corporation was building and testing WWII aircraft. Curtiss Wright required expansion of the airfield and the Miles brothers were asked to sell the compound. Mr. Miles and representatives of the War Department met at Buffalo City Hall to negotiate the sale. The War Department purchased the site in the amount of $100,000. Mr. Miles lived in the home for a short term of four years.

- Cora Cohen Residence, c1928-37
  Wales Center Road, Wales, New York
  Single story framed cottage, wood
  Demolished, c1980s

- Clara Payne Residence, c1928-37
  Wales Center Road, Wales, New York
  Single story framed cottage, wood
  Demolished, c1980s

- John E. Brent Residence, c1928-37
  Wales Center Road, Wales, New York
  Single story framed cottage, wood
  Demolished, c1980s

- Outhouse, c1928-37
  Wales Center Road, Wales, New York
  Wood structure
  Demolished, c1980s

The above four structures were constructed across from the Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A.’s Wales Hollow campsite in Wales, New York. Mrs. Cohen was the owner of land and commissioned John Brent to design and construct two structures and the ‘outhouse’ (bathroom) and for compensation, he built a third cottage for himself and his family; complete with a garden. A small photo capturing the two structures featuring Ms. Clara Payne (date unknown) was published in her biography by Uncrowned Community Builders, Inc. In a telephone interview, the grandson of Clara Cohen shared his memory of spending his entire summers at the cottages.

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38 John Sayres, interview with Christine Parker, December 16, 2014.
• The Appomattox Club House Grounds and Recreational Lodge, 1952
Eagle Street, Bertie, Ontario, Canada
Restoration of a barn with a second floor addition
Destroyed by fire, date unknown

The Appomattox Club searched for a private site for their clubhouse. For ten years John Brent was assigned and committed to finding the ideal location. Two choices were proposed: Grand Island or Canada. A former barn in Bertie, Ontario was purchased in the amount of $1000 according to a copy of the land deed. In Appomattox Club Board Minutes, Brent and a small committee were assigned to the alterations of the structure to include a septic tank, and a second floor. The Appomattox Club House was enjoyed by several generations. Demolition of the structure followed a mysterious fire in the late 1970s.

Unfortunately, research did not yield copies of the architect’s renderings of these structures. Several resources contributed as verifiable cross-references: the City of Buffalo Department of License & Permit, the Town of Cheektowaga Tax & Assessment and Records Management Offices, the 1922 American Contractor Journal, and historiographical resources provided acceptable proof that the above contributions were those of Brent. The architect’s first and largest commission as a registered architect was the Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A. No schematic architectural drawings were found, but family members provided an original drawing of the elevation. In the fall of 2015, a request to explore the former site for brick remnants of the Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A. resulted in several samples of bricks from the structure scattered among a nest of mixed brush of bushes and trees in several piles. The bricks were verified as original by Derrick M. Byrd, Jr., the last executive director of the Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A. Samples were excavated for the preparation of an upcoming exhibition at the Burchfield Penney Art Center in the fall of 2015. Visual documentation of the remaining structures on the “building list,” such as photographs or architectural renderings, were not found.

40 Erie County Property Deed. Appomattox Club, 1951.
41 Appomattox Club, Board of Directors Minutes (February, 1952).
42 Raymond Walton, interview with Christine Parker, January 6, 2015.
at the time this report was published. The remaining structures were demolished and are considered lost.

- 9/1931 – 10/1934
  Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.
  Howard University
  The Founders Library
  2400 Sixth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.
  Status: In Use

  During the Great Depression, Brent was employed by the Department of the Interior from 1931 to 1934, and assigned to Howard University, Washington, D.C. to work alongside a team of skilled architectural professionals to design several structures for the university.

  Founders Library made use of the current technological advancements such as air conditioning and mechanical elevators for moving books. Its high ceilings, long hallways and vast reading rooms were the rival of those of the Ivy League. Its Georgian façade, oak paneled rooms and stately entrance way beckoned students and facility into the tranquil realm of intelligent life.\(^\text{43}\)

  Conservation and Recreation Service for the Department of the Interior identified John E. Brent as one of the architects assigned to the design team of Founders Library, led by Louis E. Fry, Sr.

  At Founders Library, Fry was responsible for the design and for the construction documents. Fry also indicated that the architectural drawings were executed by a group of black architects who, because of the Depression, had been laid off from their work with the school department of New York City. Specifically these men were Cyril Bow, I. D. Fannin, Ralph Vaughn, Clinton Harris, and John Brent (the son of Calvin Brent… (See HABS No. DC-359).\(^\text{44}\)

  The final phase of this research details the architect’s career as a junior landscape architect for the Parks and Buildings Department of the City of Buffalo from 1935 to 1959, where he worked extensively in collaboration with landscape architect Roeder J. Kinkel. Brent began this phase of his career by transforming the Buffalo Zoological Gardens with additions and alterations to modernize the facility funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Everett Fly, an architectural historian

commissioned to do research in Buffalo, was the first to unearth zoo drawings of John Brent during his visit in fall 2012. Upon Mr. Fly’s approach toward a set of zoo gates, he immediately recognized the structure was intact. Following several months of further research by Fly, the nomination to the National Park Services was submitted by Everett Fly for the Entrance Court and Gates 3 & 4 which were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in March 2013. As discussed earlier, a team from SUNY Buffalo State reviewed more drawings that were found. Nancy Weekly made a selection to be copied for further exhibition research.

The Brent project commenced detailing a plan to identify supporting agencies, department heads, and individuals who might identify documents to verify Brent’s employment and projects he was assigned. Research required submission of a Freedom of Information Law form (FOIL) to request materials from the Department of Human Resources—Civil Service Department of the City of Buffalo. A copy of Brent’s service record was received September 18, 2014. This significant document detailed his date of hire, position, department/division, classification and compensation. Frequent visits were made to the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library’s Grosvenor Room to search the archives for newspaper articles, announcements, photographs of playgrounds and neighborhood parks that were funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Some information was gleaned from the scrapbook collection of the Buffalo Parks and neighborhood playgrounds constructed during the WPA era. According to the League of Women Voters of Buffalo (LWVB), a two-part report was published May 3, 1954 that discussed the way Buffalo’s parks and playgrounds compared with those in cities of comparable size, with accepted standards, and to what extent our facilities have increased or decreased over a

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47 City of Buffalo, Civil Service Record, John E. Brent, 1001 City Hall.
period of eight years from 1946 to 1954. The report provided detailed information regarding the waterfront parks, parks and playgrounds in Buffalo that included expansion and reduction plans, pools, softball and hardball diamonds, tennis courts, outdoor swimming pools, and 9-hole and 18-hole golf courses. The report shared the recommended 1946 survey by the National Recreational Association and thanked the staff of the Parks Department and John Brent for their contribution to the report. This document was the primary resource needed to provide major details about Brent’s contributions during this period.

Several weeks followed before access was gained to the documents listed in the LWVB report, following several calls to the various departments listed. On May 18, 2015 John Caputo in the Planning Department permitted a visit to the Planning Office, Room 616 to search the vault that contained the architectural drawings of the Buffalo Zoo; unfortunately, nothing new was found. A second call placed the researcher with Peter Klemann, who made a referral to City of Buffalo architect, Brian Swartz, who facilitated many visits to the Department of Planning that resulted in a search of the flat files in the sixth floor vault; an assessment yielded a collection of architectural drawings that were signed by John E. Brent with his initials “J.E.B.”:

- The Buffalo Zoological Gardens 28 Drawings
- Buffalo Parks & Playgrounds 21 Drawings
- City Squares 5 Drawings
- Fencing, Sewers & Street Work 9 Drawings

More than 3,500 hours of research have resulted in the evidence to provide the rediscovery of Buffalo’s first African American architect, John Edmonston Brent. Brent’s contributions to Buffalo are revealed in this cache of sixty-three (63) drawings of every type of design from fencing and plumbing lines to structures and plantings, including his long-term project, The Buffalo Zoological

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Gardens, that were completed during his twenty-four year tenure with the City of Buffalo Department of Parks.
The Legacy of John Edmonston Brent

Post-Emancipation, a small but vigorous class of black landowners developed. The landowners had come to depend on the Black craftsman for their construction needs. During this period opportunities for a new class of architects emerged. Schools in the South were established and began offering vocational and industrial training for African Americans. The urgency to educate the freed and enslaved persons promoted the establishment of African American schools and vocational training in the South to begin to ease the inequality of the black craftsman.

Several types of schools in the South emerged to provide programs for anyone to learn a skill in the building trades: Howard University (1867, Washington, DC), Hampton Industrial Institute (1861, Hampton, Virginia), and Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (1881, Tuskegee, Alabama) offered classes and certifications in the building trades. Only two schools offered architectural degrees: Cornell University (1865, Ithaca, New York) and Massachusetts Institute and Technology (1861, Boston, Mass). Architecture was becoming more of a profession just as the economic choices for blacks diminished. The first four recognized African American students graduated from the aforementioned Southern schools. Booker Taliaferro Washington (1856-1915), received his secondary education at the Hampton Normal Agricultural Institute in Hampton, Virginia. Washington founded the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1881 where he remained the head until his death in 1915. Tuskegee adopted the Hampton Normal Agricultural Institute model, modifying its program by adding mechanical arts. Washington

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sought the brightest instructors for Tuskegee to educate their students in the various programs, providing education and a trade with skills. Several instructors would make their mark as the first architects in their communities. The following Tuskegee educators were among John E. Brent’s teachers during his enrollment from 1904 to 1909.

Robert Robinson Taylor designed for Booker T. Washington from 1901 to 1935. Taylor was the director of the Mechanical Arts program.\(^{51}\) It was Taylor who transformed Tuskegee into a working and active campus for the architectural students, providing students with a true experience drafting, crafting and constructing buildings for Tuskegee. Key philanthropists pledged their support to the growth and development of Tuskegee with sizeable donations, including: industrialist James Carnegie (1835-1919), Sears and Roebuck owner Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932), and Caroline (1854-1909) and Olivia (1847-1927) Egleston Phelps Stokes of New York, who were America’s first women philanthropists who sought to support worthy causes.\(^{52}\) Plans were initiated to design a set of ornamental iron gates for Tuskegee that would ultimately include student participation. From May 1901 until the spring of 1904, five drafted sets were submitted by Taylor; but Caroline Stokes then took up her pen as she had done for the bathhouses, re-drawing the upper ironwork curves to make them steeper, more emphatic. Taylor keep this modification.\(^{53}\) Mechanical Arts students did the drawing, brickwork, and ironwork and they helped cut the limestone finials.\(^{54}\) The Lincoln Gates would be John E. Brent’s first-hand experience in designing gates; as it was his class who designed the side gates

\(^{53}\) Weiss, 2001, 204.
\(^{54}\) Weiss, 2001, 205.
for pedestrians that were eight feet wide, contributing to the main entrance court of the Tuskegee campus.\textsuperscript{55}

David A. Williston (1868-1962) was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina to a middle class family. He graduated from Cornell University in 1898 with a Bachelor of Science in agriculture.\textsuperscript{56} Williston was the first African American graduate of Cornell to receive a degree in agriculture, making him the first educated and trained landscape architect. He was an instructor in the Landscape Division 1905 to 1906 and taught at Tuskegee for more than twenty years. Williston was the first African American landscape architect to establish his own professional office in the United States. Williston spent the majority of his career as a landscape architect and horticulturist at Howard University in Washington, DC, where he undertook the major expansion of the campus after WWI with Cornell-trained African American architect Albert Cassell.\textsuperscript{57} Williston was featured in a juried exhibit with his Tuskegee student John E. Brent at Howard University in 1934 while Brent was on assignment with the Department of the Interior (1931-1934).\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{55} Weiss, 2001, 205.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Howard University Archives, The Juried Exhibit (1931).
Charles Thaddeus Russell (1875-1952) received his carpentry trade certification at the Hampton Institute in 1889. Mr. Russell was the Supervisor of the Carpentry Division of Tuskegee in 1901. He oversaw many of the projects transforming Tuskegee into a modern campus; collaborating with campus architects on many projects, creating a teachable campus for his mechanical arts students.\(^5^9\) Mr. Russell was Brent’s instructor in carpentry. In 1907, he became the first African American architect for Richmond, Virginia. Like Brent’s, many of Russell’s contributions have been razed.\(^6^0\)

Wallace A. Rayfield (1873-1941) was born in Macon, Georgia and became a graduate of Columbia University in New York City. He was recruited by Booker T. Washington to teach mechanical arts.\(^6^1\) Several of his famous students were William Sidney Pittman (son-in-law of Booker T. Washington), Vertner Woodson Tandy and John Edmonston Brent. Rayfield would become the first African American architect for the city of Birmingham, Alabama.

The Tuskegee architectural instructors provided opportunities for their students to design, draft and implement their ideas on the campus. The Mechanical Arts curriculum prepared the students for careers as professional and skilled artisans. Brent’s education continued at Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although much is not known about Brent’s life while he attended Drexel and lived in Philadelphia, a diploma

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\(^6^0\) Ibid.

documents his completion of the architectural program. He graduated with a degree in architecture on June 6, 1912.

Another pioneering African American architect was recently recognized for his contributions on the campus of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Julian Francis Abele (1881-1950), a native of Philadelphia, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1902 with a Bachelor of Art in architecture. John Brent and Julian Abele’s professional lives have parallels as pioneering architects, yet all of their architectural contributions have not yet been sufficiently recognized. Abele was the first African American graduate of the Graduate School of Fine Arts and the president of the student’s Architectural Society. Following his graduation from the University of Pennsylvania, he was employed by architect Horace Trumbauer who assisted Abele with his tuition at the l’Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Once he received a Diplome d’Architecte in 1905, he joined Trumbauer’s firm in 1906. Abele’s contributions include over 400 structures, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1928) and the Free Library of Philadelphia (1917-27). His designs include the mansions of Newport and New York and English Gothic and Georgian structures on the campus of Duke University. From 1909 to 1938, Abele was the chief designer following Traumbauer’s death in 1935. In 1986, Susan Cook, the great grand-niece of Abele wrote a letter to The Chronicle describing Abele’s contributions to Duke University which had not been acknowledged before. The Chronicle is the university’s independent student newspaper, now also an on-line publication operated by the Campus Communications Offices. Julian Abele was also a member of the American Institute of

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
Architects until 1942. Abele’s son, nephew and grandchildren have continued the Abele name as architects.65

It is important to reconnect the “forgotten” architects to their contributions and share the rich architectural history of the cultural artisan. Brent and Abele are part of the second generation of progressive architects of the early 20th century; many forgotten African American architects must also have their stories told. Their contributions must be preserved. There are many extant structures in urban centers that have a story to tell about the skilled artisans who designed them. Unless one makes a concerted effort to look, African American contributions to the art of architecture go unnoticed, as mentioned in Joseph E. Holloway in *The Slave Rebellion*: the willingness to transmit the old to the new via their African heritage and culture.66 He continues to share the significance of the cultural artisan of the past to the professional architect of today, noting: “As a direct result of this struggle by African Americans to tell their story through architecture, America has been greatly enriched by the African experience in American architecture – the hidden heritage.”67

Holloway’s article comes at an important time in African American architectural history. The long-awaited National Museum of African American of History and Culture (NMAAHC) is the prime example of the cultural artisan implementing elements of heritage in his work. Principal David Adjaye, a native born Ghanaian-British architect, won the commission to design the NMAAHC in Washington, DC. Educated in cosmopolitan schools in London, he attended the Middlesex University in North London. Adjaye earned his master’s degree at the Royal College of Art in

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65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
1993. His commission of the NMAAHC was first introduced through a special design project of capital libraries. Adjaye feels responsible for carrying 400 years of history in the overall design of the monumental structure from the Middle Passage, Civil Rights until now. When asked by Joseph Stromberg, “You said, the primary spirit behind your plan for the museum is one of ‘praise.’ What elements did you use to convey this emotion?” Adjaye replied:

… The form of the building suggests a very upward mobility. It’s a ziggurat that moves upward into the sky, rather than downward into the ground….And when you look at the way the circulation works, everything lifts you up into the light. This is not a story about past trauma. For me, the story is one that’s extremely uplifting, as a kind of world story.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture is scheduled to open September 2016.

To contextualize John E. Brent, it was important to share the contributions of the first generation of progressive architects and recognize their achievements as pioneers in the profession. Although many of them have been forgotten, their legacies can educate, inspire and empower young architects, engineers and urban planners.

The north point of a compass or map legend was not only a term used in the profession; but for the African American architect, it was symbolic of the quest for freedom to design, draft and construct. Research proved that each phase of Brent’s life prepared him for success. His father, Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent, the first African American architect of Washington, DC, and his instructors at Tuskegee and Drexel, prepared him with the tools of the trade to mark his point. Architectural lines and shadows define structures as the brick and mortar give strength and

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
endurance. The rediscovery of Buffalo’s pioneering African American architect may not have resulted in finding extant structures, for many of them have been razed. Brent’s contribution to Buffalo can now include his buildings and miles of landscape through neighborhood playgrounds, parks, city squares and the Buffalo Zoological Gardens. As the principal researcher of his oeuvre, I report my findings and share the story of this forgotten architect; however, the John Edmonston Brent research is an ongoing project. There is no timeline for when the remaining archives will be exhausted and complete. An exhibition, *Western New York Heritage Magazine* article, tours, and a mini-documentary are the first steps in bringing John E. Brent to the public – and more is yet to come.

Included are three categories of appendices to illustrate the John Edmonston Brent research, exhibition and mini-documentary:

Appendix 1 details John E. Brents’s architecture and landscape architecture contributions listed chronologically beginning with his commissions from 1922-1952. The catalog includes the name of the commission, location, brief description of the structures and dates. The second section includes his employment with the Department of the Interior at Howard University in Washington, DC from 1931-1934. Lastly, the catalog provides the most comprehensive list of Brent’s landscape architecture projects while he was employed by the City of Buffalo Parks and Buildings Department from 1935-1959. The listing also includes project numbers, location, dates and department and supervisory staff.

Appendix 2 features the development and creation of the mini-documentary video, *Through These Gates*. This section includes the project synopsis, budget, and staff requirements of the SUNY Buffalo State Graduate Student Association funding request. The section includes the list of participants, film scheduling and locations, and a copy of the script.
Appendix 3 – Photo-documentation creates a timeline of the John E. Brent research divided into three major sections beginning with active research conducted at Buffalo City Hall archives, opening night of the exhibition *Through These Gates: Buffalo’s First African American Architect, John Edmonston Brent 1889-1962*, and the production of the mini-documentary with cast and production crew.
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University of Pennsylvania Records and Archives Center. "Julian Francis Abele 1881-


Walton, Raymond. Interview with Christine Parker, January 6, 2015.


APPENDICES
JOHN EDMONSTON BRENT
CATALOG OF
ARCHITECTURAL & ARCHITECTURAL LANDSCAPE

Architectural Structures – 12
Landscape Architecture Drawings – 77

Commissions 1922 – 1952
The James G. Barclay Building, 1922
785 Main Street Buffalo, New York
2nd floor altered for the Barclay automotive supply business. Demolished, 1954

Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A., 1926
585 Michigan Avenue Buffalo, New York
Demolished, 1977

Mitchell Miles Residence, 1928
4550 Genesee Street, Cheektowaga, New York
Demolished, 1980

Three Summer Cottages & Outdoor Restroom, ca.1928-1937
Center Road, Wales Center, New York
For clients Cora Cohen, Clara Payne; in exchange for his service he was able to build a cottage for himself
Destroyed by fires, ca.1980s

Wales Hollow Y.M.C.A. Camp, 1934
Center Road, Wales Center, New York
Mathews Hall
Reid Hall
Demolished, ca.1950

Medical office & residence, ca.1934
Myron McGuire, D.D.S.
482 Jefferson Avenue, Buffalo, New York
Brent altered the existing building to convert it into a dental office.

The Appomattox Club House, 1952
Eagle Street, Bertie, Ontario
Brent alters former barn, adding a second floor
Demolished, date unknown

Department of the Interior, 1931-1934
Howard University
The Founders Library
2400 Sixth Street, N.W. Washington, DC

Note: This was not a commission. Brent was hired as a draftsman to be part of a team working with other architects who were the designers.
The City of Buffalo
Parks & Buildings Department, 1935-1959
Drawings by John E. Brent

1935

C-4-1
Working drawing of Llama & Moose Exhibit
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, New York
Prepared by the Parks Department
Frank A. Coons – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
William L. O’Day – Engineer
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date: September 25, 1935

C-4-2
Entrance Court & Gateways, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner of Parks
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
William L. O’Day – Engineer
Traced by J.E.B.
Drawn by J.E.B. #L-14
Date: October 20, 1935

1936

C-A-6
American swamp, North American Plains and Goat Hill
New Zoological Gardens - Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape architect/Approved
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date: 1-2-36

C-4-17
Alternate Plan of Roof Construction Pergolas in Entrance Court
Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner of Parks
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
William L. O’Day – Engineer
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
June 15, 1936
C-?-? (Project number illegible and missing)
Detail of Moat Wall – Monkey Island
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape architect/Approved
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
August 27, 1936

C-4-24
Working Drawing Pheasantry
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Parks department
Frank A. coon – commissioner of Parks
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
L-35
Drawn by: J.E.B.
Traced by: J.E.B.
9-15-36

C-4-7
Working Drawing – Eagle, Hawk, Vulture, Owl Cages
New Zoological Gardens – Delaware Park Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape architect
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date: 10-23, 1936

C-4-15
Working Drawing – Steps in Walks & Fence around Moats
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape architect/Approved
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
June 11, 1936

CA-1-5
Lanigan Park – Enlarged Wading Pool
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape architect
Drawing: L-37
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date: 9-21-36
Appendices

D-8-323
Details Recreation Area, Masten Park Playgrounds #6, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-41
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 9-30-36

C-4-? (Project number illegible & page torn)
Detail of Skylight on Pheasantry
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
October 1, 1936

C-4-27
Details Goat Hill, New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-43
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 10-23-36

C-4-30 (#51)
Working Drawing
Plan and Upper Level Sleeping Dens
Construction Details for Bear Pits
New Zoological Gardens, Department of Parks, Buffalo, New York
Frank A. Coon, Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
L-48
Drawn by: J.E.B.
Traced by: J.E.B.
12-24-36
1937
C-4-32
Working Drawing, Barnyard Exhibit
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-50
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date February 18, 1937
Approved by RJK
Rev. 7-12-40 Seed Bins, Drains, Water Troughs
Pencil on tracing paper, 23 7/8x36 inches

C-4-41
Section thru Bear Dens
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-56
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 4-29-37

C-4-42
Protective screen Around Seal Pool
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-57
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 5-4-37

C-4-47
Rock & Earth Hills in Goat Exhibit
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-63
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date September 21, 1937
1938
A-9-2-6B  
Bleachers & Enclosing Fence, Mungovan Park, Buffalo, NY  
Prepared by Department of Parks  
Andrew S. Butler – Commissioner  
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect  
Drawing #L-68  
Drawn by J.E.B.  
Approved RJK  
Date March 22, 1938  
Pencil on tracing paper, 28-1/4x42 inches

9-B-1-15  
Tool House, Riverside, Mungovan Park, Buffalo, NY  
Prepared by Department of Parks  
Andrew S. Butler, Commissioner  
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect  
Drawing #L-69  
Drawn by J.E.B.  
Date: March 25, 1938  
Blueprint, 24x30-1/2 inches

C-3-2-7  
Alteration of Triangle S.W. Corner Main & Genesee Streets, Buffalo, NY  
Prepared by Department of Parks  
Andrew S. Butler – Commissioner  
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect  
Approved RJK  
Drawing #L-74  
Drawn by J.E.B.  
Date: April 29, 1938  
Pencil on tracing paper, 13 3/8x24-1/2 inches

C-4-22  
Water Drainage Lines about Bear Pits  
New Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY  
Prepared by Department of Parks  
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner  
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect  
Drawing #L-33  
Drawn by J.E.B.  
Date 8-31-36  
Revised 12-31-36  
Additional notations 11-10-38 [Tears and losses along bottom edge and corner]
D-8-31
Masten Park Athletic Field Fencing, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Frank A. Coon – Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel – Landscape Architect
Drawing #D-11F
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 10-10-38

A-4-1-2
Proposed Conversion of Present Comfort Station to Picnic Shelter House, Front Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
James F. Hanlon, Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date

1939

1940
C-4-84
Metal Plant Containers at Window in Mammals Building, Lion and Tiger Buildings
Zoological Gardens, Buffalo, NY
Department of Parks
Edward Zeller, Commissioner
L. Hardwig, Commissioner of Public Works
G. J. Chambers, Commissioner
Drawing # illegible
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 6-12-40

C-4-82
Foster Label Frames, New Zoological Gardens, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Edward F. Zeller, Commissioner
Drawing # illegible
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 4-6-40

C-4-99
New Entrance Gateways – Colvin at Amherst Streets and Jewett at Parkside Avenue
Zoological Gardens, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Park
Drawing # illegible
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 5-8-40
1941
C-4-55
Working Drawing, Plastered Moat Walls – Bear Pits
New Zoological Gardens
Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Public Works
Louis N. Harding, Commissioner
Drawing #L-123
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 1-18-41

C-4-74
Grain Bins New Barn
Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Edward G. Zeller, Commissioner of Public Works
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape architect
Frederick K. Wing, Acting Commissioner of Public Works
Drawing #L-124
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 3-31-41

C-4-80
New Light Standards
Zoological Gardens, Delaware Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Edward G. Zeller, Commissioner of Public Works
Frederick K. Wing, Acting Commissioner of Public Works
Drawing #L-127
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 6-23-41

C-3-2-17
New Curb at Intersection of Davidson & Bickford Avenues, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-130
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 6-6-41
L-136
New Sewer Line on South Park Avenue (Botanical Gardens)
Department of Public Works
Buffalo, New York
Edward G. Zeller, commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape architect
B-7-1-5
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 9-24-41

D-8-32-6D
Improvements at Masten Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-138
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 11-5-41

1942

A-9-1-6D
Improvements at Houghton Park Playground, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-156
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 5-21-42

D-8-13
Improvements at Lincoln Playground, Buffalo, NY (Como Park?)
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-163
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 6-23-42

A-9-1-6A
New Ramp, Shelter House, Houghton Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing L-168
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 7-24-42

1943
1944
A-9-1-7
Planting Plan for Service Board, Department of Parks
Houghton Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-202
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 9-8-44

1945
C-4-78
Revision of Guard Rail & Outside Keepers Walk, Administration Building
New Zoological Gardens, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #D-20N
Revised by J.E.B.
Date 7-3-45

A-9-1-2
Landscape Development Plan for Addition to Houghton Park
Department of Parks, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
John A. Uliniski, Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-Z
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 1-8-45
Colored pencil on tracing paper, 27 7/8 x 26 7/8 inches in brown paper covers, with title page

1946
C-3-2-17
Sidewalk Markings in Triangle at SW Corner Main & Genesee Streets, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-242
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 8-3-46

1947
D-6-27
New Sewer Lines at Tennis Courts, Shoshone Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-431
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 8-13-47
1948
A-6-2-60
New Fence & Repaired Fence
Centennial Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-276
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 8-3-48

C-3-2-46
Proposed Development, Nottingham Terrace & Amherst Street, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Edward A. Rath, Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-275
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 7-7-48
Pencil on tracing paper, 20 5/8 x 33 1/4 inches

C-3-2-46
Proposed Development, Nottingham Terrace & Amherst Street Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Edward A. Rath, Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-277
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 8-24-48
Pencil on tracing paper, 20-1/2 x 33-1/8 inches

1949

1950

B-1-1-5
New Drainage Line McMillian Park Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Public Works
James Hanlon, Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape architect
Drawing #L-304
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 1-9-50

A-1-23
Alterations - 2nd floor Casino, Cazenovia Park Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 2-8-50
A-9-1-6E
New Concrete Walks about Pools, Houghton Park Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawing #L-311
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 3-2-50

D-8-32-6E
New Bituminous Paving and Other Work
Location not provided
Department of Parks, Buffalo, New York
James T. Hanlon, Commissioner
L-315
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 3-16-50
Revised 6-12-52

A-10-1-6-D
New Fence about Swimming Pool, Schiller Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by Department of Parks
Drawing #L-322
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 6-2-50

D-8-32-6-D
New Fence about Swimming Pools
Masten Civic Playground, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawing #L-325
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 6-16-50

Project number illegible
Water Sprinkling Lines & Drainage, LaSalle Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawing #L-339
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 12-20-50

A-9-1-6E
New Concrete Work about Pools, Houghton Park, Buffalo, New York
Department of Parks
James T. Hanlon, Commissioner
Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape architect
Ralph Mines, Unknown
L-311
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 3-20-50
1951
New Work at Humboldt Wading Pool, Humboldt Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawing #L-348
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 1-31-51
Blueprint, 19 ¼ x 29 ¾ inches

C-4-89
Improvements, Buffalo Zoological Gardens, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
James F. Hanlon, Commissioner of Parks
Initialed by Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
Louis N. Harding, Commissioner of Public Works
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 2-19-51

A-9-1-5
Sewer Lines
Houghton Park
Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawing #L-364
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 10-10-51

1952
A-5-1-3
Location Plan-Softball Diamonds, LaSalle Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawing #L-382
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 4-22-52

D-8-326E
New Bituminous Paving & Other
Prepared by the Department of Public Works
Drawing #L-315
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 3-16-50
Revised 6-12-52

C-3-2-39
Location of Columbus Statue, Niagara-Eagle Streets, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department Parks
Drawing by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 6-20-52
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 5/8 x 33 7/8 inches

Resurfacing & Present Walks at Old Bear Pits, Zoological Gardens, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 8-18-52

1953
D-8-31
Proposed Parking Area, Fosdick Masten High School, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Public Works
Drawing #L-401
Drawn by J.E.B.
Date 1-29-53

A-2-1-2
Waterfront LaSalle Park to Tift Street, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Approved by Roeder J. Kinkel, Landscape Architect
Drawing #L-411
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 5-25-53
Pencil on tracing paper, 14 3/8 x 63 inches

B-7-1-6B
New Stone Gate and Walls, South Buffalo Botanical Gardens
Drawing Number: L-415
Drawn by: J.E.B.
Traced By: J.E.B.
Date: 8-31-53

B-7-1-6B
New Stone Gate and Walls, South Park Botanical Gardens
South Park Avenue, Buffalo, New York
L-415
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 8-31-53

1954
Project number illegible
Chain-link Fence, Shoshone Playground, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Department of Parks
Drawing # L-259
Drawn by JEB
Date 7-7-54
1955

1956

1957
Project number illegible
New Play Area at Houghton Park, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawing #L-463
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 1-2-57
Approved by Vincent McNamara
Pencil on tracing paper, 12 1/8 x 30 inches

C-4-123
Planting about the Elephant Yard
Zoological Gardens, Buffalo, NY
Prepared by the Department of Parks
Drawn by J.E.B.
Traced by J.E.B.
Date 8-15-57

1958

1959
THROUGH THESE GATES

Buffalo’s First African American Architect
John Edmonston Brent, 1889-1962

AN INTRODUCTION DOCUMENTARY

By Christine A. Parker, Executive Producer & Co-Writer and Sandy White, Producer & Co-Writer
PROJECT SYNOPSIS

The period is 1890 at the home of Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent (1854-1899), NW Washington, D.C. Senior Brent is working at his drafting table, his youngest son John is present. Calvin Brent was Washington, D.C.’s first African American architect.

John E. Brent was the youngest of seven children of Calvin and Albertine Jones Brent and the only child who would follow in his father's footsteps as an architect. His older siblings were educators and a physician.

Both parents passed away before John reached ten years old and was raised by his older siblings. John completed his elementary education at the Charles Sumner School and at the age of 15 years old he attended the Tuskegee Normal School (1904) in Tuskegee, Alabama where he studied carpentry and drafting. John Brent graduated in 1907.

In the fall of 1909, Brent received a full scholarship in the name of James A. MacAlister, president of the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry in Philadelphia, PA. He completed the architectural program, graduating in June 1912. Shortly thereafter he arrives in Buffalo, NY to begin his architectural career; during the first fourteen years of his career he was employed by seven private firms as a draftsman. During the Great Depression, he and other architects were hired by the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. to design for Howard University. Brent would contribute to the Founders Library. Shortly after Brent’s return, he was hired by the City of Buffalo Division of Public Works in the Department of Parks and Buildings. Brent was assigned to transform the Buffalo Zoological Gardens into a modern facility. The Zoo would become his long-term project as well as neighborhood parks, playgrounds and city squares. He retired in 1959.

What was the attraction for Mr. Brent to settle in Buffalo to develop his architectural career? Buffalo was an exciting city, with new technologies and the modern architects during this time: Frank Lloyd Wright, H. H. Richardson, Louis Sullivan and Louise Blanchard Bethune as well as the renowned Frederick Law Olmsted who designed the Buffalo Parks System. A young Brent was determined to begin his career like any other inspiring architectural professional. Beyond the silent whispers of inequality coupled with the lack of work, his conscience would commit him to a life of service through civic leadership and social advocacy.

In 1915, John Brent was elected as the first president of the Buffalo Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) at the age of 26 years old. He was elected to serve as the Chairman of the Board of the Appomattox Club, Inc.—an organization for African American men who were denied membership into the unions of their employers. He was appointed by Governor Thomas E. Dewey (1902-1971) to serve on the New York State Commission Against Discrimination in 1947.

Local historians, community leaders, actors and historical landmarks take us on a timeless journey of African Americans in Buffalo during the 1900s-1940s. Through These Gates was produced by a team of talented and professional film-makers from Buffalo with a running time of approximately twenty minutes.
FUTURE ENDEAVORS

My deepest appreciation and gratitude go to the John E. Brent Descendants for their contribution and commitment to the John E. Brent research and exhibition with artifacts, photographs, manuscripts and sharing their personal stories of “Uncle John.” Without Janessa, Jennifer and Brent sharing their Uncle John’s personal story, love, and commitment to family, we would have presented a one-sided story of Buffalo’s First African American Architect. They have presented the opportunity for others to walk Through These Gates and share with Buffalo and beyond.

I wish to say thank you to my advisor Nancy Weekly, Head of Collections and the Charles Cary Rumsey Curator, for her guidance and the opportunity to share the untold story of John E. Brent. I am grateful for the two SUNY Buffalo State History and Social Studies Education professors, Dr. E.O. Smith, Jr. (SUNY Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus) and Dr. Felix L. Armfield (Professor and mentor) for their vision to share Brent’s story with Buffalo and Western New York. Following their untimely passing during the spring 2014 semester – it was decided at that time the Brent exhibition would be dedicated to their memory.

Passion has been the driver for the Brent research and there’s much more to discover about him. Sharing with our community his contributions has begun to fuel my long-term project to educate and research Buffalo’s enriched African American history

Thank you to SUNY Buffalo State for the critical role you have played in my educational journey.

Sincerely,

Christine Ann Parker
PRODUCTION BUDGET

THROUGH THESE GATES:
Buffalo’s First African American Architect, John Edmonston Brent, 1889-1962

Run time: Less than 10 minutes with credits and citations

Cost: $8,092.50 – Awarded 20% of the budget; net $6,474.00

Executive Producer: Christine Ann Parker
Producer: Sandy White, Mustard Seed World Consulting/Productions

- Photographers/cameramen: $2,500.00
- Editors & editing process: $2,000.00
- Narrator: $200.00
- Costume Rental 10@$75.00 (vintage dress): $750.00
- (3) Digital copies of the final product & copy of the raw footage @$25.00: $675.00
- Location filming:
  - Durham AME Zion Church
  - The Buffalo Zoo (Entrance Court)
  - Amtrak – Exchange Street Railway Station
  - Buffalo City Hall
  - The Colored Musicians Club
  - The Inn Off Elmwood

- Participants –
  - The Honorable Mayor Byron W. Brown – Mayor of the City of Buffalo
  - Barbara Seals Nevergold, Ph.D. – Co-Founder of the Uncrowned Queens, Kings and Community Builders, Inc. and Member of the Buffalo Board of Education
  - Lillian Serece Williams, Ph.D. – Professor of Transnational Studies of SUNY at University of Buffalo
  - Christine A. Parker – SUNY Buffalo State Graduate Diversity Research Fellow and Executive Producer of THROUGH THESE GATES: The John Edmonston Brent Story.
ACTORS - Volunteers

- Mr. Derrick M. Byrd, Jr. John H. Brent - Grandfather
- Mrs. Eva M. Doyle Elizabeth Edmonston Brent – Grandmother
- Carl Bailey Calvin T.S. Brent – John’s father
- Jaylen Hearon Young John E. Brent – 10 years old
- Aaron Moss John E. Brent – 20-30 year old
- Kenneth Parker, Jr. John E. Brent – Aged
- Reverend Diann Holt Community Activist
- Allita Lee Community Activist
- Sandy White Community Activist
- Clifford Bell Community Activist
- Brent Rollins Community Activist

VOICES

- Reverend Pedro A. Castro, Jr. Narrator
- Charles H. Campbell Voice of Senior John E. Brent

PRODUCTION CREW

- David Burns
- Larry Frazier
- TVRE Productions, Inc.
THROUGH THESE GATES
THE JOHN EDMONSTON BRENT MINI-DOCUMENTARY
1889-1962
Architect, Master Builder, Landscape Architect, Civil Rights Leader

Presented By:
Christine A. Parker
Executive Producer
SUNY Buffalo State
Master’s Project
May 2016
THROUGH THESE GATES - DEVELOPMENT

John Edmonston Brent left plenty of evidence of his skills and passion as an architect and a drum major for justice; he truly lived with a defined purpose fully reflecting the scripture; too much is given, much is required. In order to fully understand and interpret him and his contributions, the producers of this mini documentary chose to understand and learn more about his central core. We were curious as to what motivated him and what was going on in the world that moved him toward civil rights advocacy. We wanted to clearly see the moral foundation upon which John Brent stood.

In the conceptual development of this video our research took us back in time to the Brent family tree; there we found a rich family heritage rooted in freedom

Christine A. Parker, Executive Producer & Co-Writer
Sandy White, Producer & Co-Writer
THROUGH THESE CAST AND CREW

**Actors:**

Mr. Derrick M. Byrd, Jr.  
Mr. John H. Brent – Grandfather

Mrs. Eva M. Doyle  
Elizabeth Edmonston Brent - Grandmother

Mr. Carl Bailey  
Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent

Master Jaylen Hearon  
Child John Brent

Mr. Aaron Moss  
Youngman John Brent

Mr. Kenneth Parker, Jr.  
Senior Brent

**Community Activists (As themselves):**

Mr. Clifford Bell

Mr. Brent Rollins

Reverend Diann Holt

Ms. Allita Lee

Ms. Sandy White

**Historians (As themselves):**

Dr. Barbara Seals Nevergold  
Co-Founder of the Uncrowned Community Builders, Inc.

Dr. Lillian Serece Williams  
Associate Professor, SUNY at Buffalo, Department of Transnational Studies

**Special Guest:**

The Honorable Mayor Byron W. Brown

City of Buffalo, New York

**Narrators:**

Reverend Pedro A. Castro, Jr.  
Presiding Elder of the Buffalo-Albany/First District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Chaplain of the Historic Hendricks Chapel of Syracuse University

Mr. Charles H. Campbell  
SUNY Erie Community College, Associate Professor, Retired
ON-SITE FILMING/RECORDING LOCATIONS: TTG 2015/2016

Site: John H. Brent (grandfather) and Mrs. Elizabeth Edmonston Brent
Founding pastor and first lady of the John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Church, Washington, D.C.
Durham Memorial African Episcopal Church
174 Eagle Street Buffalo, New York

Site: John Edmonston arrives in Buffalo, New York
Buffalo-Amtrak Exchange Street Station
75 Exchange Street, Buffalo, New York

Site: Community Activists meeting
The Colored Musicians Club of Buffalo NY, Inc.
145 Broadway, Buffalo, New York

Site: Offices of the Department of Planning and Buildings, Room 616
Buffalo City Hall
One Niagara Square
Buffalo, New York

Site: LaSalle (Front Park) – Child John E. Brent
LaSalle Park, Buffalo, New York

Site: Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent and young John Brent in fathers study
Inn Buffalo off Elmwood
619 Lafayette Avenue Buffalo, New York

Site: Taping of Christine Parker, Dr. Lillian S. Williams, and Dr. Barbara S. Neverygold
Burchfield Penney Art Center - Margaret L. Wendt Gallery
1300 Elmwood Avenue Buffalo, New York

Site: TVRE Studios, Inc. Voice recording sessions – Rev. Pedro Castro/Narrator and Charles
Reverend Pedro A. Castro, Jr. /Narrator
TVRE Productions, Inc.
1413 Hertel Avenue Buffalo, New York

Site: TVRE Studios, Inc. Voice recording sessions – Rev. Pedro Castro/Narrator and Charles
Campbell/Voice of Senior John E. Brent
TVRE Productions, Inc.
1413 Hertel Avenue Buffalo, New York
**FILMING AND RECORDING SCHEDULE:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Call Time</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LaSalle Park, Buffalo</td>
<td>3:30 pm</td>
<td>Jaylen Hearon (child Brent)</td>
<td>August 4, 2015</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Call Time</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inn Buffalo off Elmwood – Brent residence</td>
<td>2:30 – 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Carl Bailey (Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent) Jaylen Hearon (child – John Brent)</td>
<td>Friday, September 28, 2015</td>
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Call Time</th>
<th>Actor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo Zoo at the Entrance Court – Gates 3&amp;4 Delaware Park, Buffalo, New York</td>
<td>11:00 am</td>
<td>Kenneth Parker, Jr. (Senior Brent)</td>
<td>Saturday, December 12, 2015</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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<th>Actor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo-Amtrak Exchange Street Station 75 Exchange Street, Buffalo, New York</td>
<td>1:00 pm</td>
<td>Aaron Moss, Jr. (Young John E. Brent)</td>
<td>Saturday, December 12, 2015</td>
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<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Colored Musicians Club of Buffalo NY, Inc. 145 Broadway, Buffalo, New York</td>
<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Clifford Bell, Reverend Diann Holt, Brent Rollins, Allita Lee and Sandy White</td>
<td>Saturday, December 19, 2015</td>
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<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo City Hall, outdoor shoot, interior film shoot-Department of Planning, Room 616 One Niagara Square Station, Buffalo New York</td>
<td>4:30 PM</td>
<td>Aaron Moss, Jr. (Young Brent)</td>
<td>Saturday, December 19, 2015</td>
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<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Call Time</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burchfield Penney Art Center – Margaret L. Wendt Galley 1300 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, New York</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Christine A. Parker (Intro and sound bites as needed)</td>
<td>Monday, January 25, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<th>Call Time</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:00 pm</td>
<td>Dr. Lillian S. Williams</td>
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<tr>
<th>Call Time</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:00 pm</td>
<td>Dr. Barbara S. Nevergold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Location:** TVRE Production Studio  
1413 Hertel Avenue Buffalo, New York  
Call Time: 10:00 am  
Cast Member: Charles H. Campbell – Voice of Senior John Brent  
Date: Friday, January 8, 2016

**Location:** TVRE Production Studio  
1413 Hertel Avenue Buffalo, New York  
Call Time: 12 Noon – 4:00 pm  
Cast Member: Reverend Pedro Castro – Narrator  
Date: Tuesday, January 26, 2016

**Location:** Buffalo City Hall  
Mayor Brown’s Office, 2nd floor  
Call Time: 2:00 – 3:30 pm  
Cast Member: Mayor Brown W. Brown  
Date: Wednesday, February 10, 2016

**SOUNDRACK:**

“Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen”  
Chor Leoni, Vancouver, British Columbia

“Hold On”  
D.E.M. of Silver Springs, Maryland

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”  
Negro National Anthem

“Dream Rag”  
Eubie Blake

*Permission of Use statements for Chor Leoni and D.E.M. are attached*

**POST PRODUCTION SCHEDULE:**

TVRE Production Studio, Inc.  
1413 Hertel Avenue Buffalo, New York

Photography: Thomas Vetter  
Graphics: Joseph Giovenco

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday, January 8, 2016</td>
<td>10:00 -12 Noon</td>
<td>Charles Campbell/Voice-over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, January 26, 2016</td>
<td>12 Noon – 4:00 pm</td>
<td>Rev. Castro/Narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 4, 2016</td>
<td>10:30 am – 3:30 pm</td>
<td>Production meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 15, 2016</td>
<td>12 Noon</td>
<td>Rev. Castro/Narrator/Edits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday, March 14, 2016</td>
<td>1:30 – 2:30 pm</td>
<td>Final edits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, March 17, 2016</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Product pick-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THROUGH THESE GATES - CREDITS

Christine A. Parker               Executive Producer/Writer
Sandy White                       Director/Producer/Writer
Thomas Vetter -                   Photographer/TVRE Productions, Inc.
Joseph Giovenco                   Graphic Design/TVRE Productions, Inc.
Reverend Pedro A. Castro, Jr.     Narrator
AllitaLee.com                     Costume Director
M. Edyreys Wajed                  Costumes
Jody @ DC Theatricks              Costumes
Apple’s Haberdashery              Wardrobe Creations

CAST

Jaylen Hearon                     John E. Brent (youth)
Aaron Moss                        John E. Brent (adult)
Kenneth Parker, Jr.               John E. Brent (Senior)
Carl Bailey                       Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent
Derrick M. Byrd, Jr.              John H. Brent (Brent Grandfather)
Eva M. Doyle                      Elizabeth Edmonston Brent (Brent’s grandmother)
Charles H. Campbell               Voice of Senior John Brent

Community Activists

Reverend Diann Holt
Clifford Bell
Brent Rollins
Allita Stewart
Sandy White
Appendices

Second Unit Photography
Daniel Burns
Karl Marler
Sandy White
Larry Frazier
Angelina M. Castro

Production Assistants
Angelina M. Castro
Lindsay Frazier

Hair & Makeup
Angelina M. Castro

MUSICAL SOUNDTRACK
“Hold On” – D.E.M. Silver Springs, MD
“Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” – Chor Leoni, Vancouver, British Columbia
“Lift Every Voice and Sing”
“Dream Rag” – Eubie Blake

SPECIAL THANKS
SUNY Buffalo State - Equity and Campus Diversity Program Grant
Peter and Ilene Fleishmann

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT
Brent Family Descendants
Fred and Marie Houston
Theodore L. and Olga Lownie
And Anonymous Individuals
Appendices

SUNY Buffalo State

President, Dr. Katherine S. Conway-Turner
Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Hal D. Payne
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The Department of History and Social Studies Education
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Director of Museum Studies
Dr. Cynthia A. Conides

The John Edmonston Brent Descendants

Janessa Robinson
Jennifer McGriff
Brent Rollins
The Late Robert Millner

Robert Traynham Coles, AIA & Sylvia Coles

Watts Engineering & Architecture
Edward O. Watts, Jr. AIA

Burchfield Penney Art Center

Dr. Anthony Bannon
Nancy Weekly
Donald A. Metz
Patrick Robideau
Robert Cutrona
Kathleen M. Heyworth
Renata Toney
Mary Kozub
Executive Director
Head of Collections/the Charles Cary Rumsey Curator
Associate Director of Public Programs
Senior Preparator
Registrar
Director of Marketing and Public Relations
Public Relations Strategist
Curator of Educational Programs and Tour Manager
Uncrowned Community Builders, Inc.
Dr. Peggy Brooks Bertram
Dr. Barbara Seals Nevergold

SUNY at Buffalo – Department of Transnational Studies
Dr. Lillian Serece Williams, Associate Professor

The Michigan Street African American Heritage Commission
Karen Stanley Fleming, Chair

The Colored Musicians Club
George Scott, President

The Buffalo Nash House Museum
Sharon Holley
George K. Arthur

The Michigan Street Baptist Church
Durham AME Zion Church
St. Phillips Episcopal Church

City of Buffalo
Mayor Byron W. Brown

The Buffalo Arts Commission
Emerson Barr III, Director

The Buffalo Common Council
President, Reverend Darius Pridgen

Department of Public Works, Parks and Streets
Steven J. Stepniak, Commissioner
Rishawn Sonubi, Architect/M.U.P., Deputy Commissioner
Division of Buildings
Brian Swartz, AIA, Associate

The Buffalo History Museum
Cynthia Van Ness

SUNY at Buffalo Library Archives
Buffalo Branch of the N.A.A.C.P.

Buffalo Urban League, Inc.

The Buffalo Zoological Gardens
Dr. Donna Fernandes, CEO and Executive Directive

The Inn off Elmwood
Joseph and Ellen Lettieri

Mustard Seed World
Sandra White
THROUGH THESE GATES
The John Edmonston Brent Story
SCRIPT

by
Christine A. Parker
and Sandra White
Mayor Byron W. Brown

As Mayor of Buffalo, we continue to build a city of opportunity where every city resident and business owner benefits from Buffalo’s significant economic transformation.

Our city has long been a destination for talented individuals with great knowledge, skill and ambition.

This video is a fine example of how John E. Brent contributed to our community

As Mayor, and behalf of the citizens of Buffalo, we’re fortunate that John Brent left his mark on our city.

It is my hope that during this time of economic renaissance and job creation that others will come through ‘OUR GATES’ and leave their mark… in Buffalo.

Christine A. Parker

Hello, my name is Christine Parker. As a historian and researcher in graduate studies at SUNY Buffalo State. I have been on a journey to rediscover the contributions about one of the nation’s few African American architects --- John Edmonston Brent, a native of Washington D.C. who practiced in the early to mid-20th century in Buffalo, New York.

Throughout Brent's early career as a draftsman, he contributed to the designs of buildings and churches throughout Western New York. As a landscape architect for the City of Buffalo, he has designed parks, playgrounds and city squares.

Join me as we share with new generations the story of John Edmonston Brent, an accomplished architect who drafted a career leaving his mark in history.
(00 Music Sound up)

MUSIC: “Nobody Knowsthe Trouble I’veseen…”

Narration: Reverend Castro

Let’s step back in time…Our research and inspirational story starts with John H. Brent. Who chopped so much wood he was able to purchase his freedom and that of his wife Elizabeth from slavery for $700.00. To raise his family-- he was a laborer for the War Department and laid railroad tracks into the South for 20 years.

(Rev. Brent praying)

A man of faith and courage… in his later years John H. Brent became the founding pastor of the John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, in Washington, DC.

Lillian Williams Interview -1:07:38- 1:07:52 /Soundbite (:14)

“The independent church provided a place for Black people to meet and address those social issues, political issues and indeed those economic issues they faced during the 19th century.”

Brent was an active member of one the nations many benevolent societies dedicated to helping fellow freemen. His youngest son Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent who grew up in his father’s church, later became Washington D.C’s first successful African American architect. His work still stands today.

Calvin Brent named his son after his courageous father—John Edmonston Brent, the subject of our research and study.

Music Under

Narration: (Voice of a Young John Brent) JJ

“My name is John Edmonson Brent, I’m ten years old live and I live in Washington DC. My Dad is a successful architect and One day I would like to be just like him. I'm in the 4th grade and I attend the Charles Sumner School… named after the lawmaker who fought against slavery and for civil rights. I come from a very hard working family which has overcome many hard times as our country struggled through the Civil War and the ending of slavery (1865). Although the future looks bright for a young man like me I don’t understand why people want to deny my rights as an American.

Music

In 1899, John Brent’s life is changed forever…his father dies suddenly at the age of 10.
(Music)

Young John Brent

“I really miss my Dad, but I must be strong and not lose faith.”

(Sad Music)

John’s eldest siblings decided he would attend Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Brent’s classes included carpentry, architecture and landscape architecture. The campus becomes a living classroom, providing opportunities for mechanical arts students to design, draft and construct buildings for a new emerging Tuskegee campus founded by educator, orator and advisor to Presidents---Booker T. Washington.

Music Bridge

Brent graduates in 1907 and two years later attends Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry on a prestigious James MacAlister Scholarship graduating in 1912 with a degree in architecture.

Narrator:

In the 20th Century, Buffalo, New York, was named the Queen City of the Great Lakes -- the city was aglow with electricity, architecture, inventors, business growth, new roads, railway traffic, .... a vibrant Port...a growing population and a robust economy!

MUSIC: (Dream Rag by Eubie Blake)

In sharp contrast the turn of the 20th century bought profound changes to African American families living segregation. A Separate but equal law and a glutted labor market relegated them to 2nd class citizenship preventing families from attaining the better life they sought.


“For most black people they were regulated to basically low income low wage positions when the city was thriving. So segregation was the order of the day and for too many entrepreneurs’ people were placed in stereotyped positions and they hired based upon that.”

Long before John Brent arrived in Buffalo, New York it was widely known to have an anti-slavery stance. The national Abolitionist network guided countless men and women to Buffalo, New York and freedom in nearby Canada. Historians have documented that there were many that settled at the historic Michigan Street Baptist.

Music

At the turn of the century—while student John Brent was finishing his education-influential local and national and international leaders like Rev. J. Edward Nash and Oberlin graduate, Mary Talbert of the Michigan Street Baptist Church were networking nationally with African American leaders and educators like Booker T. Washington, church leaders and businessmen. In 1905 a secret meeting with W.E.B. Dubois, national Black educators, businessmen and intellectuals took place at Talbert’s home. The group believed in pressing for civil rights with no compromise—that group later assembled in Canada to form what is known as the Niagara Movement—the predecessor of the NAACP.
Lift Every Voice/Music

In 1910—Booker T. Washington, the most influential African America of the century traveled to Buffalo, NY. An advocate for education in the trades, he was a regular visitor to Buffalo. Hosted by Rev. J. Edward Nash he speaks to the Citizens of Buffalo at the Michigan Street Baptist Church.

2 Years later…the graduate of Tuskegee arrives in Buffalo to start his future.

Christine A. Parker: 34:29- 34:44 (:15)

“I really believe it was Booker T. Washington… he comes to Buffalo several times and in 1910 and says…I have a student…I think he could find a place here…Buffalo is now on the threshold some great and marvelous things—here we’re ten years into the progressive era—architects are flying into Buffalo—making their contribution to the Skyline…and I believe John set his compass North to do just that!

FULL SCREEN—1912

(Music-TVRE supplied

Narrator:

In 1912 John Brent arrives in Buffalo New York—following in his father’s footsteps in the field of architecture. He is confident and ready to launch his career.

Narrator: It was not long before Mr. Brent would find his first job. He was employed by many architectural firms as a draftsman from 1912 – 1926:

Max George Beirel
Henry Osgood Holland
Paul Ford Mann
Julius Charles Schultz
Robert North & Olaf Shelgren
Chester Oakley & Robert Schallmo

Narrator:

As a young architect John Brent used his skills and worked on exciting new projects throughout the city, he also became engaged in the African American community. He was elected as the first president and founding member of the Buffalo branch of the NAACP at the age of 26.

Lillian Williams 1:17:52- 1:18:11 Soundbite (:19)

“He came here…he became active in his church--he became active in his community that’s what I expected from someone with a socio-economic background to do.

Shortly following his election in 1916 as part of a NAACP national protest, he wrote an editorial in response to a Buffalo Express reporters comments on the release of the controversial film “Birth of a Nation”
Appendices

FULL SCREEN CHYRON/Voice of John Brent/Actor

“...it presumed nothing was too foul or defamatory to be practiced upon the Negro race.”

John Brent did not have to get involved in the call for justice—he could have easily turned his dead. But he like many African Americans were guided by the following Christian scripture—to much is given—much is required.

Rev. J. Edward Nash understood this and was active in the community/advocacy organizations of his day, including being a founding member of the Buffalo chapters of the NAACP and the Urban League.

Lillian Williams-1:12:20-1:12:30 (:10) “They believed they could make a difference that was significant—they believed they could make a difference.”

On Oct. 4, 1922 Nash wrote to the Central YMCA requesting a YMCA for African Americans, “A special branch—he said, would be just of great value to the men and boys and a great support to the churches.”

FULL SCREEN
“A special branch would be of great value to the men and boys and great support to the churches.” – (Nash Quote)

Narrator At first the this idea was resisted but, eventually Nash got his way; soon after Buffalo, New York became the home of one of 22 YMCA community centers in the US for blacks during the segregated era. It was a part of a 2nd wave of YMCA’s funded in part by philanthropist Julius Rosenwald owner the Sears & Roebuck Corporation, a friend of the late Booker T. Washington. Rosenwald donated $25-thousand, Buffalo citizens followed suit George and Jenny Mathews of the Buffalo News and the African American Community together went over their goal raising $200,000.

Narrator Young Architect John Brent would receive his first and largest commission in 1926 becoming the second African American architect to design a Y.M.C.A.

Christine-46:12-46:40-( :28) “Mr. Rosenwald come to Buffalo and seated on the stage he now stands to give his remarks and he actually asked for John Brent to come up on the podium and by doing
So… He shook his hand and congratulated JB for such a beautiful strong structure for the African American Community here in Buffalo.”

Narrator The Michigan YMCA would become the cultural center of the African American community for fifty years.

Lillian Williams (1:18:12-1:18:42) (:30)“He was able to help create with the Board of Managers a vision for education for Black children-participate in community adult based education we can see exemplified in the YMCA…J. Edward Nash and Mary Talbert and others helped shape that program for that institution.
In 1931—the department designated a team of African American Architects to design and build new structures for Howard University, Washington, D.C.

Music UP-TVRE supplied

(*Brent walking up City Hall Steps*)

**Narrator:**

John Brent returned to Buffalo in 1934; continuing with smaller commissions. In 1935 John would begin his career as a junior landscape architect for the City of Buffalo.

As a city employee--he contributed to many designs and alterations of city playgrounds & neighborhood parks…

(*Video from City Hall discoveries*) **Video Sandy Shot.**

,,the waterfront extending from Tift Farm to LaSalle Park, Masten Park, Roosevelt Square, Houghton Park and the Buffalo Zoo.

**Narrator:**

As a parks department employee, John Brent was responsible for developing the Buffalo zoo from an outline—into a living zoo--by designing, planning and implementing construction of more than sixteen facilities and exhibits from 1935 until his retirement in 1959.

On March 21, 2013, his design of the “Entrance Court at the Buffalo Zoo” was placed on National Register of Historic Places.

**Barbara Nevergold Soundbite: 59:27:00-1:00:00 (.33)**

“ So often we talk about Black History as if it is separate history…as a part of American history… it really is American History, we need to weave it in better more into American history.” “I think as a role model Mr. Brent can definitely provide examples of how young people can persevere, overcome constraints of society—constraints of their own limitations.”

Colored Musicians Club Meeting/Shot by Tommy V.

**Narrator:**

In addition to his civic obligations, he was committed to social change to combat discrimination in the workplace, education and sought opportunities for African Americans in Buffalo.

Colored Musicians Club Meeting/Shot by Tommy V.

**Narrator:**

John Brent was an active member of the Appomattox Club organized by Buffalo US Postal workers and others who were denied membership to the unions in Buffalo. He also received *meritorious award for his Christians Service at St. Phillips AME Zion church.*
John Edmonson Brent passed away on October 20, 1962 after a distinguished life of service to his community.

Mayor Brown here

“The city of Buffalo is so honored to have the history of John Brent for all to see.”

Christine 52: 05:16- 52:35:00 (:16)
John Brent was very humbled man, not pretentious, he went to work every day…regardless of the racial undertones in his workplace and he grabbed a pencil and drafted his legacy.

Walking to Gates
(John Brent’s Voice) – Voice Over
Charles Campbell

“I have worked quietly as a draftsman, registered architect, landscape architect, and entrepreneur. It is through my lines and shadows you will find my signature … Look towards the North Points.”

###
THROUGH THESE GATES
The John Edmonston Brent Story

CHRISTINE A. PARKER
SUNY BUFFALO STATE
MASTER’S PROJECT

THE BRENT RESEARCH PHOTO ALBUM

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THROUGH THESE GATES
Buffalo’s First African American Architect,
John Edmonston Brent
1889-1962

Photo Left:
Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry Photo, 1910

Photo Right:
Walking the grounds of the home of his grandniece
Drexel Institute of Arts, Science & Industry
Architectural Degree, Class of 1912

University of the State of New York
Registered Architect’s Certificate
No. of License 2977, Issued August 4, 1926
The Charter and
The Constitution and By-Laws
of the Buffalo Branch of
The National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People
Charter, January 5, 1915
The Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A.
585 Michigan Avenue
Buffalo, New York
John Edmonston Brent, Architect of Record
1926-1971
The Center of African American Culture
Buffalo, New York
Buffalo City Hall
Division of Buildings
The Department of Public Works
Room 616 – The Vault
City of Buffalo Architect, Brian Swartz
With Christine A. Parker
John Edmonston Brent
Sample Architectural Renderings
City of Buffalo
Department of Parks

Houghton Park, 1942
Humboldt Park, 1951
Nottingham Terrace at Amherst Street (proposed), 1938
A Lost Contribution

The Michigan Avenue Branch
Y.M.C.A.
585 Michigan Avenue
Buffalo, New York
Demolished, 1977

Recovered bricks, August
On the former site –
Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A.
1926-1971
John Edmonston Brent
Drafting Tools and case
Conservation of century-old documents

Brent Rollins – Great nephew (right)
Jennifer McGriff – Great niece (seated)
Nancy Weekly – Burchfield Penney Art Center,
Head of Collections and the Charles Cary Rumsey
Curator (left)
Robert Cutrona, Registrar (rear)

City Hall, Buffalo, New York
Division of Buildings, Room 616
Department of Public Works

Examination of Brent Drawings
Nancy Weekly, (foreground)
Patrick Robideau, Senior Preparator
Robert Cutrona, Registrar
Through These Gates: Buffalo’s First African American Architect, John Edmonston Brent, 1889-1962
Opening Night of the Exhibition
Burchfield Penney Art Center
Friday, October 9, 2015

With Christine A. Parker

Special Guests:
Ms. Kimberly Armfield,
Sister of the late Dr. Felix L. Armfield
Ms. Cookie – Family Friend
Nancy Weekly (left)
Jeff Preval, Reporter, WGRZ Channel 2
Christine A. Parker (right)

Through These Gates – The Mini-Documentary
On Location: Inn Buffalo Off Elmwood, Buffalo, New York

Master Jaylen Hearon,
Child Brent Actor
Carl Bailey, Actor  
As Calvin Thomas Stowe Brent

On Location:  
Durham African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Buffalo, New York

Mr. Derrick M. Byrd, Jr. as John H. Brent (grandfather)  
Mrs. Eva M. Doyle, as Elizabeth Edmonston Brent  
(grandmother)
On Location
Buffalo Zoological Gardens
Kenneth Parker, Jr. as Senior John E. Brent
Sandy White, Kenneth Parker, Jr. Christine A. Parker and Thomas Vetter

On Location:
The Exchange Street Amtrak Station
Buffalo, New York

Aaron Moss
SUNY Buffalo State
Associate Professor Theatre Department

With
Brent Rollins (at right)
Clifford Bell (below right, with Rollins)
Christine Parker (below)
On Location:
City Hall, Buffalo New York
ON LOCATION:
THROUGH THESE GATES – The John Edmonston Brent Story
Burchfield Penney Art Center
Margaret L. Wendt Gallery

Upper right: Christine A. Parker –
SUNY Buffalo State
Graduate Student, Museum Studies

Left: Dr. Barbara Seals Nevergold
Co-Founder Uncrowned Community
Builders, Inc.

Right: Dr. Lillian Serece Williams
SUNY at Buffalo
Associate Professor
Transnational Studies
On Location:

Buffalo City Hall
The Mayor’s Office
The Honorable Mayor Byron W. Brown
The Voices:

Top Left:
Reverend Pedro A. Castro, Jr.
Narrator

Below:
Charles H. Campbell
Voice of Senior Brent
TVRE PRODUCTIONS, INC.

Thomas Vetter – Videographer, Editor
Joseph Giovenco – Graphic Designer