NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property	
historic name Playter-King-Felthousen House	
other names/site number	
name of related multiple property listing N/A	
Location	
street & number 617 Niagara Street	not for publication
	not for publication
city or town Buffalo	vicinity
state New York code NY county Erie code 029	zip code <u>14201</u>
3. State/Federal Agency Certification	
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,	
I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meet	es the documentation standards
for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the proced	
requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.	- L
In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:	a. I recommend that this
national statewide _x_local	
Signature of certifying official/Title Date	_
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official Date	_
Signature of commenting official Date	
Title	=
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Go	vernment
4. National Park Service Certification	
I hereby certify that this property is:	
entered in the National Register determined eligible for the Na	ational Register
determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National R	egister
other (explain:)	
onto (explain.)	
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action	

Playter-King-Felthousen House Name of Property			Erie County County and Si	y, NY tate
5. Classification				
Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply.)	Category of Property (Check only one box.)	Number of Res (Do not include prev	ources within Pr	coperty in the count.)
X private public - Local public - State public - Federal	X building(s) district site structure object	2 2	Noncontribution	buildings sites structures objects Total
Name of related multiple prop (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a m	erty listing nultiple property listing)	Number of con- listed in the Na	tributing resourd tional Register	es previously
N/A			0	
6. Function or Use				
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.) DOMESTIC/single dwelling		Current Function (Enter categories from DOMESTIC/multiple)	m instructions.)	
7. Description		-		
Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.)		Materials (Enter categories fro	m instructions \	
LATE VICTORIAN/Second Emp	ire	foundation: St	,	
E		walls: Brick		
		roof: Slate other:		

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Playter-King-Felthousen House Erie County, NY
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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Playter-King-Felthousen House at 617 Niagara Street is a three-story multi-family residential building with an associated two-story carriage house located on the east side of Niagara Street between Jersey Street to the south and Porter Street to the north. The house is located on the west side of Buffalo, NY, half a block south of Prospect Park and about a mile and a half northwest of the city center of Niagara Square. The Playter-King-Felthousen House was originally constructed ca. 1854 as a two-story Italianate style residence; its distinctive Second Empire style mansard roof was likely added sometime between 1870 and 1885, reflecting late-nineteenth-century domestic architectural trends in Buffalo. The house's eclectic architectural ornament illustrates various changing architectural fashions of the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

Narrative Description

The Playter-King-Felthousen House is located on a rectangular lot in an urban setting between a single-family house to the north and the D'Youville University campus to the south. The house is set back on its lot about thirty feet from Niagara Street, a three-lane street running northwest-southeast. The house's facade faces west onto Niagara Street. A narrow grass median, concrete sidewalk, and a grass lawn on a slight hill separate the house from the street. A concrete walkway with seven concrete steps connects the sidewalk to the house's entrance. To the north, a long concrete driveway connects the carriage house with the street.

The property sits directly adjacent to the western border of the Fargo Estate Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2016. This district developed as a primarily residential upper- and middle-class neighborhood on Buffalo's west side between 1850 and 1930, with a major wave of development following the construction of William G. Fargo's enormous Second Empire style estate in 1869-1870. The formerly residential block on the east side of Niagara Street between Jersey Street and Porter Avenue (originally York Avenue) has contained multiple institutional and educational buildings since the 1920s. Of the six houses that were once sited on the block, only the houses at 617 and 625 Niagara Street remain. Although the character of the surrounding neighborhood has evolved over the years, the Playter-King-Felthousen House at 617 Niagara Street and its adjacent carriage house retain substantial architectural integrity.

The Playter-King-Felthousen House at 617 Niagara Street is a substantial brick Italianate residence that was modified on the exterior to reflect the Second Empire style. The building exhibits many historic character-defining features of the two styles, including segmental-arched, and pedimented dormer windows, decorative brackets and dentils in the cornice, a central brick tower on the west elevation, a prominent arched doorway, and a mansard roof. The building was constructed as an Italianate single-family house ca. 1854, modified to reflect the Second Empire style sometime between 1870 and 1885, and converted to a multi-family rental property in the 1950s. This evolution of form and use reflects larger trends in Buffalo's architectural history. Today, the house retains sufficient integrity in its form, massing, materials, and ornamental

¹ For more information, see Martin Wachadlo, Francis R. Kowsky, and Christopher N. Brown, *Fargo Estate Historic District*, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 2016.

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details to convey its construction and early use as a single-family residence for prosperous occupants of Buffalo's west side.

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Exterior

The building at 617 Niagara Street is a three-story brick residence with only minimal alteration, most notably in the replacement of the first story porch and the addition of a metal fire escape. The brick building has an asymmetrical, roughly rectangular massing consisting of three stories above a raised stone foundation. The house's primary elevation faces west onto Niagara Street. A ca. 1870 two-story gabled brick wing with a non-historic single story screened-in porch is located on the house's rear, east elevation. A ca. 1889 two-story brick carriage house sits in the northeast corner of the property.

West Elevation

The building's facade faces west onto Niagara Street and features a central tower and asymmetrical massing. It is five bays wide and unevenly recessed, reflecting the house's irregular footprint that is typical of much Victorian domestic architecture. The entrance retains the original pair of glass and wood-paneled doors under a brick segmental arch. The wood front porch, which was at one point three bays wide and covered the south portion of the main facade, has been altered many times and today consists of a modest one-story porch with square posts and asphalt shingles. The first-story bay window on the main elevation retains historic leaded stained glass in the transoms, possibly of Aesthetic Movement inspiration, atop a modern fixed panel and two replacement double-hung sash. Mannerist engaged Ionic colonettes, divided in the middle by a molded ring and with spiral shafts below the ring, flank the windows. Above the windows, horizontal recessed panels contain bullseye rosettes. Asphalt shingles cover the bay window roof.

The remaining first- and second-story windows are nine-over-nine double-hung sash in brick with segmental-arched openings. The pair of ground floor windows on the south side of the facade extend to the floor, possibly implying that here a (possibly triple-sash) window system would originally have allowed access to a more extensive porch. Beneath the slate-shingled mansard roof, the wide crowning cornice is accented with wooden brackets and dentils; the roof also features pedimented dormers with replacement vinyl six-over-six double-hung sash in original wood openings framed by Tuscan pilasters. A red metal fire escape connects the central dormer with ground level at the southwest corner of the house. The roof's slate shingles, two bands of half-octagon shaped ones against a background of rectangular ones, have all been painted black.

North Elevation

The north elevation faces the adjacent residence at 625 Niagara Street. This elevation features two first-story windows (each a replacement one-over-one double-hung sash under a brick segmental arch); a second-story bay window (with three replacement one-over-one double-hung sash framed by decorative wooden casing including a Queen-Anne inspired shaped shingle skirt); and, at the third level, two corbel capped brick chimneys that flank a single pedimented dormer like those found on the main elevation. The ca. 1870 two-story gabled rear ell is constructed of red pressed brick. The north elevation of this addition features five replacement windows of varying sizes and positions; it also features the house's back entrance, a modern single door set under a brick segmental arch.

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South Elevation

The south elevation faces south toward the D'Youville University School of Arts, Science and Education. Its arrangement of windows is like that of the north elevation with a few exceptions. The elevation features a single replacement window at the first level alongside the clear of an earlier window opening that has since been filled in with brick. A second-story bay window matches the detailing and relative position of its twin on the north facade. The third level features a single corbel-capped brick chimney and two pedimented dormers. At the rear of the house, a recent single-story addition to the historic two-story gabled addition extends the building's footprint toward the southeast. The recent addition is clad in gray vinyl siding punctuated by a single door and five one-over-one double-hung sash windows.

East Elevation

The rear elevation faces east toward the carriage house. This elevation is dominated by two additions: one ca. 1870, and the other more recent. The historic gabled addition features a small wooden milk door and a corbel-capped brick chimney like those found on the main house. The double-wide bay window at ground level at the southeast corner of the house features detailing and wooden casing like those found on the north and south elevation.

Interior

The general plan of the Playter-King-Felthousen House reflects its original function as a single-family residence. Originally constructed ca. 1854 as a single-family residence, the three-story house functioned as a multi-family rental property beginning in the 1950s and, in 1969, the owner performed an interior renovation to convert the building into a five-unit property. The floor plan of each of the three stories was altered to suit the building's new multi-family use; new drywall partitions were added (notably sealing off the central passage under the stair), a few windows and doors were bricked in, and the dumbwaiter was removed. Today the building contains five apartments spread throughout its three floors of living space. Historic corridors, stairwells, common spaces, and major volumes and materials were retained. Despite the change in function and the 1969 renovation, the house's overall plan and many surviving details reflect its historic single-family use and contribute to the historic significance of the building.

In 2024, the house was rehabilitated as five apartment units in the residence and one apartment on the second floor of the carriage house. The plan in the residence was not altered and the apartment units are in the same location. Bathrooms and kitchens were updated. Historic fabric, including decorative plaster at the ceiling, parquet floor, wood floor, windows, window and door wood trim and fireplaces were retained and repaired throughout. The only change to the plan was the removal of a door and the portion of the wall between the bedrooms in Unit 1, where a pocket door was installed. The existing radiators and heating system and hot water heaters were retained in the residence.

Entry, Stairs, Stairwells, and Corridors

The primary entrance on the west elevation leads through a set of historic paired wooden doors with large non-historic plate-glass windows into a small entrance vestibule with a second pair of multi-paneled wooden doors containing smaller windows, also with non-historic glass. The interior doors provide access to the first story corridor and primary staircase. The plan is organized around the original primary staircase, located at the center of the building and visible from the primary entrance. The front staircase runs from east to west and connects the first, second, and third floors. It largely features its original turned wood balusters on all levels, and in the upper flight retains the Italianate period volute cut-outs below the treads. The ground floor newel post, however, takes the form of an Ionic column and likely relates to the last

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phase of Victorian-era renovations, as perhaps do the blocky newel posts on the first landing. On each floor, doors from the central corridor access rooms to the north and south, former parlor rooms that retain their historic volume, layout, and materials that now serve as apartments. The first-floor corridor retains its historic polychromatic parquet wood floor. Greek Revival naiskos door surrounds face onto the corridor. The muscular crown molding and plaster ceiling medallion also relate to Greek Revival taste. A secondary stairwell that runs from north to south and connects the first and second story is located at the center of north side of the house. Newel posts on the back stair relate to later (circa 1880s) renovations to the house. On the first-floor secondary landing, a set of stairs descends to the east, providing access to the basement. To the north and south, the historic wood doors provide access to the living room and bedroom, respectively, of Unit #1.

First Floor

Unit #1 consists of four rooms which retain their historic volume and layout, two updated bathrooms, and an updated kitchen at the east side of the building. The two historic rooms, which were perhaps once a double parlor but now serve as the living room and dining room on the north side of the building, retain many historic details. The Greek Revival style is evident in the wooden baseboards and crown molding, the naiskos door and window surrounds, and the trabeated surrounds between the two chambers and around the projecting bay window. The foliate plaster ceiling medallions are also classically inspired, and though the simpler one in the rear room harmonizes with the Greek Revival trim, the more elaborate front one relates to the Italianate taste. The two marble mantelpieces, featuring arches with volute keystones and paneled spandrels, are firmly Italianate.

The two historic rooms that now serve as bedrooms on the south side retain similar amounts of historic trim. Most of the wooden baseboards, crown molding, and the acanthus leaf plaster ceiling medallion in these rooms relate to the first, midnineteenth-century phase of the house. So does one, sparely treated, door-surround with bullseye rosettes in its upper corners. The comparatively plain ornament on the south side rooms relative to the north side rooms indicates that the north side contained the more prestigious social spaces and these were initially secondary in importance. The front room, perhaps once a dining room, features a mantelpiece with a fluted cavetto header with a central plaque sporting a delicate classical swag and with its end corners adorned by shallowly incised abstracted acanthus leaves. The mantelpiece's jamb contains mannered Ionic engaged columns whose shafts are wider at the top than the bottom. The overall effect is an eccentric combination of Egyptian Revival and Queen Anne influences. The lustrous blue tiles around the hearth and the mantelpiece clearly date from later Victorian (circa 1880s) renovations to the house. The door and window surrounds, besides the door surround previously mentioned, stylistically relate to around the 1870s. They feature flat and broad reeded bases, atop which runs a lighter vertically beaded molding, in turn surmounted by abstracted volutes. These in turn support a cornice on modillions. The taught, mechanical aesthetic of these seems to relate to influences like Frank Furness's Néo-Grec and/or the Aesthetic Movement. Despite alterations, the layout and details of these four rooms have been left relatively unaltered.

The two bathrooms and the kitchen of Unit #1 are in the rear wing. A small vestibule located beneath the primary staircase connects the dining room and bedrooms to a narrow corridor that leads east to the kitchen. A second door in this corridor leads to the secondary staircase on the north side of the house. One bathroom is located between the east bedroom and the kitchen corridor, and the second bathroom is located at the east end of the kitchen. On the kitchen's south wall, a door provides access to a non-historic single-story screened-in porch. Non-historic acoustical tile at the ceiling was removed in 2024 and replaced with a gypsum board ceiling. Kitchen counters and other non-historic finishes were removed at that time as well.

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Second Floor

The second floor, historically upstairs bedrooms, now contains two one-bedroom units organized around a central landing accessed by both the primary staircase and the back staircase. Unit #2 consists of a bedroom and two bathrooms in the east wing and a kitchen and living room on the south side of the house. The living room, located at the house's southwest corner, retains its historic volume and many historic details. A substantial Aesthetic Movement mantelpiece adorns the south wall. It features a beveled glass overmantel mirror flanked by medievalizing colonettes that in turn support a shelf with an arcaded rail and a backing with scrolls on either side of a low crescent adorned with hexagons. Below, two abstracted and ornately ringed Roman Doric engaged columns support plinths with Néo-Grec engraved scrollwork, which in turn support the shelf. The mantel header is adorned with a band of engraved exes alternating with ornamented ovals, and the central plaque contains a carved fan. The amber hearth tiles sport a range of free geometric and foliate motifs in relief. The baseboards, door surrounds, windows surrounds, and the doors adorned with seven horizontal stacked panels, and bay window surround are all historic, albeit at least partially from the Late Victorian alterations to the house. The kitchen, located at the southeast corner, features updated appliances and flooring but retains historic wooden casing around the doors and windows. Nonhistorical vinyl tile was removed from the kitchen and bathroom in 2024 and replaced with ceramic tile. A narrow corridor with two descending steps connects the kitchen with the central landing and the east wing. The second-floor hallway contains the original doors for the non-functioning dumbwaiter.

Unit #3 consists of a living room and dining room at the northwest corner of the house with a small kitchen and bathroom to the east and a single bedroom to the south above the main entrance. Originally, these were three rooms. The small room that sits over the front entrance is intact to the first period of the house, with its original footprint, elaborate crown molding, baseboards, and Greek Revival door and window surrounds. The living room and dining room of the current apartment were once one large chamber and were partitioned after the period of significance. The front (living) room contains an original arched marble mantelpiece with an escutcheon-like keystone. All the door surrounds except those in the new wall separating the living and dining room are Greek Revival. The bay window in the dining room retains a historic paneled base. Vinyl tile was removed from the kitchen in 2024 and replaced with ceramic tile.

Third Floor

The third floor contains two one-bedroom units organized around a central landing. The third floor is accessible only by the primary staircase. Both Unit #4 and Unit #5 consist of a bedroom, living room, kitchen, and bathroom; Unit #4 runs along the north wall of the house and Unit #5 runs along the south wall. Both units retain some historic wooden casing around the doors and windows, and a few historic doors, but these were always plain in comparison to the lower floors. The window frames break inward at the top, reflecting the double pitch of the mansard roof. The kitchens and bathrooms of both units were updated in 2024.

Basement

The basement is accessible by a set of stairs located on the north wall of the first floor. The house's thick whitewashed stone foundation walls are visible in the basement. Additional stone walls and beaded-board wooden partitions separate the basement into three main rooms to the east, north, and south. The north and south rooms are separated by a narrow central storage room. One room features a floor to ceiling built-in Victorian period storage (perhaps canning) cupboard. At the west end of the north room, a wooden partition wall cordons off the boiler equipment.

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Carriage House

The two-story brick carriage house is located at the northeast corner of the property. A long asphalt driveway running along the north edge of the property connects the carriage house to Niagara Street The carriage house was built ca 1889 in the Second Empire style to complement the main house The carriage house is roughly L-shaped. Its primary volume is oriented east-west, while a smaller wing projects to the south. A vinyl garage door is located on the west wall and a modern single door is located on the south wall. Two stories tall and built of pressed red brick, the carriage is topped with an asphalt-shingled mansard roof with decorative gabled dormers. The bricks are covered on all sides with peeling grayblue paint. The carriage house retains several of its historic wooden double-hung sash windows, as well as the decorative wooden casing that surrounds the dormers. Entry points include a non-historic vinyl garage door (2024) under a segmental brick arch and a modern single door, both located on the northwest portion of the carriage house.

On the first floor, the interior consists of a single large volume uninterrupted by any interior walls. It has concrete floors, brick walls and exposed ceiling joists. The exterior brick walls are punctuated by several window openings which have been infilled with brick, concrete block, or plywood. A single historic wood sash window remains on the south wall.

On the second floor, the brick walls rise only a few feet before the wooden mansard roof begins. The distinctive steep pitch of the mansard roof forms the upper part of the walls. The walls are punctuated by dormer windows with historic decorative wood casing. A new heating system and hot water heater was installed in the carriage house in 2024. Venting occurs through the flat roof.

In 2024, the second floor was rehabilitated as an apartment. It is accessed via an existing door opening to the south and a corridor leading to the stairs. The apartment is open with a kitchen and bathroom to the east and living space to the west. The bedroom is located to the southeast. New gypsum walls and ceilings were installed in 2024. New wide plank hardwood floors were installed. The second floor consists of a combination of new stud walls and plank walls.

Integrity

Both the residence and the carriage house at 617 Niagara Street retain substantial architectural integrity to convey the significance of the building as a brick residence containing an array of fine architectural details from a variety of styles. Both buildings each retain their original form, massing, fenestration patterns, and Second Empire mansard roof. The house's character-defining features include the mansard roof, with square and polygonal slate shingles, as well as dentils and brackets under the crowning cornice. Although most of the original sash windows have been replaced, the original segmental arched window openings remain intact, leaving the general organization of the primary elevation unaltered. The first- and second-story wooden bay windows, the third-story pedimented wooden window surrounds, and the wooden front door are all historic. The first-story bay window on the front elevation retains its original leaded transoms. The exterior of the carriage house retains several of its original one- over-one double-hung windows, and the second story features original gabled wooden window surrounds with decorative brackets and molding. The high artistic quality of these intact design elements communicates the property's historic construction and function as a residence for several of Buffalo's prosperous families over time.

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8. Stat	ement of Significance	
	cable National Register Criteria "in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property	Areas of Significance
	onal Register listing.)	(Enter categories from instructions.)
A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.	Architecture
В	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.	
XC	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.	Period of Significance 1854-1889
D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.	Significant Dates 1854, ca. 1870, 1889
	a Considerations " in all the boxes that apply.)	
Proper	ty is:	Significant Person (Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)
A	Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.	(Complete only if Chterion B is marked above.)
В	removed from its original location.	Cultural Affiliation
c	a birthplace or grave.	
D	a cemetery.	
E	a reconstructed building, object, or structure.	Architect/Builder
F	a commemorative property.	Unknown
G	less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.	

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for this building begins ca. 1854, when the house is believed to have been completed. The period of significance ends ca. 1889, when the carriage house at the rear of the property is believed to have been constructed and all major historically significant changes to the buildings had been made

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Playter-King-Felthousen House at 617 Niagara Street in Buffalo, New York is significant under Criterion C in Architecture as a single-family residence exhibiting a high degree of craftsmanship that was built and modified by three different owners in the second half of the nineteenth century to conform to successive waves of architectural taste. Originally constructed as a two-story Italianate-style single-family residence for the Charles G. Playter family, the house was later transformed into a three-story Second Empire residence when a resident added a mansard roof sometime between 1870 and 1885. Finely fashioned interior and exterior features exhibit elements of Greek Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Aesthetic Movement, and Queen Anne stylistic influence. The carriage house at the rear of the property was built ca. 1889 and remains relatively unchanged. The residence housed several prosperous Buffalo families between the 1850s and the 1940s before being converted to a multi-family rental property in the 1950s. The evolution of form and use reflects larger trends in Buffalo's architectural and demographic history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The residence represents a substantial contribution to the overall architectural character and social history of the west side of Buffalo, NY. Today, the house retains sufficient integrity in its form, massing, materials, and ornamental details to convey its construction and early use as an upper-middle-class single-family residence.

Narrative Statement of Significance

History of 617 Niagara Street, ca.1854-1889

The house at 617 Niagara Street was built in ca. 1854 for Charles G. Playter, a prosperous bookkeeper for Pratt & Co., an iron and hardware dealing company. Previously a resident of Buffalo's east side, "as were all our best citizens living," Playter decided to construct a house on the still-rural west side in the 1850s.² At the time of its construction, the Playters' house was one of four houses on the block. It was two stories in height and roughly square shaped with a small outbuilding located at the rear.

Charles G. Playter lived at 617 Niagara Street with his wife, Charlotte Ann, and their two children, Fannie Olivia and Charles Whitfield, from 1855 until his death in 1861.³ Upon Playter's death in 1861, his widow inherited the property and in 1863 she sold it to Daniel Brown, a commission merchant, who lived there with his wife, Catherine, and their five children.

Descriptions of the house from the 1860s illustrate several features of the house prior to its conversion to the Second Empire style with the later addition of a mansard roof. Brown listed the house for sale in 1867, giving a lengthy description of the property's features:

The desirable residence of Daniel Brown, Esq., formerly known as that of Mr. Playter, situated on Niagara street, east side, near York Street; being Two Story Brick with a wing on the side, built within a few years in the most substantial manner and modern style, with all the modern improvements, gas, hot and cold water, above and below, bath, stationary furnace, marble mantles [sic] and grates, cornice and centres; and finely painted and papered throughout, and in the best order. Lot 68x132, with 25 feet through 264 to Ninth street; with an

² "Buffalo of the Olden Time," Buffalo Times, October 30, 1910.

³ "The Funeral of Mr. Playter," *Buffalo Courier*, September 23, 1861.

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abundance of fruit, grapes and shrubbery, some of which is very choice and rare. The location is well known to be one of the finest in the city, will be sold on reasonable terms. Reason, the owner is about to leave the city.⁴

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The persuasive tone and lengthy list of amenities in this real estate listing confirms that, in 1867, the Playter-King-Felthousen House was apparently two stories in height with no third story or attic. A mansard roof was not mentioned, and it would have been a key feature if it existed. Two years later, another shorter advertisement would describe the house in similar terms: "Two story brick, Niagara Street, near York Street—modern. Lots 68x132 and 25 feet running to Ninth St., very desirable." As mansard roofs were very cutting-edge fashion at this time, it is very likely that this feature would have been mentioned in at least one of these descriptions. Since they were not mentioned, nor do maps from the era indicate a mansard roof, it has been concluded that the roof was added later, likely ca. 1870. It is very possible that this is evident in the brickwork inside the third floor, but since it is covered with plaster in this finished floor, it is not visible for inspection.

The Playter-King-Felthousen House's mansard roof was added on top of the original two-story house at an unknown date after 1869, perhaps in the early 1870s. mansard roofs – also known as "French roofs" or "crib roofs" – began appearing in Buffalo as early as 1868 and became increasingly popular for both newly constructed and remodeled homes in the 1870s. These dual-pitched roofs are the principal identifying feature of what is now known as the Second Empire style. The style originated in France and was little known in America when the Playter-King-Felthousen House was originally constructed in the 1850s.

The sporadic real estate listings in the late 1860s proved unsuccessful in securing a buyer and the Brown family retained ownership of the house until 1872 when it was sold to William King Jr., a druggist. The King family consisted of William, his wife, Harriet, and Harriet's daughter from a previous marriage, Caroline Gifford, and they also employed a servant named Rose McPadden.⁶ In 1881, after nine years of residence in the house on Niagara Street, William King Jr. died of Bright's disease after complications from a severe cold.⁷ His widow, Harriet, stepdaughter, Caroline, and Caroline's husband, real estate man Edward G. Felthousen, remained in the house for the next decade.

Sometime during the King and Felthousen family's occupancy, a mansard roof was added to the house, increasing the number of floors to three and giving the home a new, modern appearance. Also, during the period of this family's occupancy, a two-story carriage house was constructed on the rear portion of the property, by 1889. In 1891, Felthousen sold the house to George Bork, who shortly thereafter sold it to Joseph Warner.⁸

A Compendium of Ornament

The Playter-King-Felthousen House featured stylistically eclectic features from its inception. It may be inferred that its original exterior form was a compact Italianate villa with a diminutive tower such as can still be seen in Buffalo at 172 Summer Street (Elmwood Historic District East, NR 2016). Such houses had their origins in the early nineteenth century English picturesque reimagining of the rural farmhouses of the rambling Italian Campagna (influenced by earlier painters

⁵ Buffalo Commercial, February 6, 1869.

⁶ 1880 United States Census 7-296, p.16.

⁷ "Death of William King, Jr.," Buffalo Courier Express, April 6, 1881.

⁸ Buffalo Courier Express, August 14, 1891; "Desirable Residence For Sale," Buffalo Courier, April 11, 1867.

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such as Claude Lorraine) by eclecticist architects such as John Nash. This was filtered into American tastes, most prominently by Alexander Jackson Downing's publications such as *Cottage Residences* (1842). Meant to conjure a bucolic vision of pastoral harmony, the style was fitting for the initially quite suburban location of the Playter-King-Felton House.

Some ornament from the first period relates to the Italianate style, including, most prominently, the arched marble mantelpieces in rooms on the north side, but also the stair balusters and, on the upper stair flight, floral volute cut-outs beneath the risers. The naiskos door surrounds in the passage in the north side rooms, as well as many of the baseboards and ceiling moldings, and most of the ceiling medallions, however, relate to the older and more restrained Greek Revival style, which by the 1850s had begun to fade from favor. This suggests that from the beginning, homeowners at 617 Niagara were more concerned with the quality of the ornament rather than the specific stylistic references that it made. As the house changed owners, the most dramatic alteration came as a result the probable removal of a tower and adoption of a Second Empire-style mansard roof.

The Second Empire Style originated in France during the reign of Napoleon III, the man who served as both the first president of France (1848-1852) and the last Emperor of France (1852-1870). During his reign, Napoleon III commissioned a grand plan to reconstruct the city of Paris according to the plans of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann. Haussmann's reconstruction replaced the narrow medieval alleys and buildings of Paris with a unified system of wide boulevards and monumental apartment buildings, all sharing the same general plan and many stylistic elements. The architecture of the Second Empire featured rich ornamentation, wide bays or pavilions, and tall windows with arched pediments. Most of the new buildings were topped with the most recognizable feature of the Second Empire style: the mansard roof.

The mansard roof is traditionally characterized by its dual-pitched profile, with the slope of the lower portion being significantly steeper than that of the upper portion. The steepness of the roofline allows for an additional story of habitable space beneath the roof. The mansard roof was popularized by sixteenth-century French Renaissance architect François Mansart (1598-1666), although the form has been used since at least the fifteenth century. The mansard roof re-emerged as a popular feature two hundred years later when Haussmann mandated mansard roofs in his reconstruction of Paris, and it became a hallmark of the French Second Empire style as it was imported to other countries. The Second Empire style became a dominant style for both public and private architecture in the United States from 1855-1885. Residential pattern books contributed to its proliferation beginning in the late 1850s. Americans viewed the imported French style as modern and tasteful, and citizens throughout the country were eager to commission new houses in the style or to "modernize" their existing houses by adding a mansard roof. The style's nationwide popularity peaked in the 1870s and then faded as quickly as it had appeared, becoming relatively rare in most parts of the country by the 1880s.

In Buffalo, New York, the Second Empire style began to catch on in the late 1860s, quickly replacing the Italianate and Eclectic styles that had previously dominated residential architecture in the city. According to one newspaper columnist writing in 1867, the mansard roof was rapidly becoming a common sight in Buffalo:

⁹ See particularly Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), Design VI.

¹⁰ George L Hersey, "Godey's Choice," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1959).

¹¹ Michael Bridgeman, "Raising the Roof," Madison Trust for Historic Preservation, 2021. https://www.madisonpreservation.org/blog/2021/12/31/raising-the-roof

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Ten years ago, the ideas of architecture prevalent amongst us never went beyond the occasional variation from an oblong box, with a ridge-raised summit, to a bigger box, flat-covered and square. At this time, they have happily expanded so far as to absorb the comprehension of the Mansard [sic] roof and to take in two or three suggestions of variety in the arrangement of doors, windows, chimneys and verandas. Indeed, the Mansard [sic] conceit has taken such total possession of the Buffalo mind of late that we are every day expecting to see gable-pointed windows sprouting from the roofs of our back stables and kitchens.¹²

Beginning in 1869, Buffalo saw the construction of a few prominent Second Empire style public buildings and mansions, only some of which remain standing today. Perhaps the best-known of the remaining Second Empire homes is Henry Hobson Richardson's William Dorsheimer House (NR-listed 1980) on Delaware Avenue, which was constructed between 1869 and 1871. Other grand Second Empire mansions remain standing elsewhere on Delaware Avenue, and many smaller middle- and working-class Second Empire style homes remain scattered throughout the city.

The Second Empire style was particularly popular on Buffalo's west side in the vicinity of the Playter-King-Felthousen House at 617 Niagara Street, although many of the largest and most prominent Second Empire buildings in this area are no longer standing. The Fargo Estate Historic District (NR-listed 2016) is named for the prominent Second Empire style mansion built for wealthy banking tycoon and former Buffalo mayor William G. Fargo. Constructed between 1868 and 1870, the Fargo Estate was the largest home in Buffalo and a contender for the earliest home built in the imported French style. Other houses soon rose in the vicinity, many of them built in the Second Empire style of the Fargo Estate. ¹³ Although the Fargo Estate eventually fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1900, it left a stylistic mark on the west side of Buffalo, evident at 617 Niagara Street.

The popularity of the Second Empire style for large mansions and institutional buildings on Buffalo's west side soon spread to the smaller residences constructed for middle- and even working-class residents of the area. Despite the destruction of the most prominent Second Empire buildings on the west side, the Second Empire style remains a visible presence on the west side with over a dozen modest Second Empire homes from the 1870s and 1880s still standing in the Fargo Estate Historic District today. ¹⁴ The Playter-King-Felthousen House at 617 Niagara Street is an unusual example of a residence that was constructed early in the west side's development and later converted to the Second Empire style as architectural tastes in Buffalo changed.

When the Second Empire style became increasingly popular in the 1870s and 1880s, wealthy fashion-forward homeowners throughout the country replaced their existing roofs with mansard roofs in an effort to keep up with the trends of the day. An article in the magazine *American Artisan* that was reprinted in Buffalo in 1868 reported that "in leading cities of this country ... the "Mansard" roof is gaining ground. New houses are very generally supplied with this roof, and the roofs of old buildings are being demolished to be replaced by it." Replacing an existing flat roof with a mansard roof had the practical benefit of increasing the home's usable living space by an entire floor. Italianate homes were particularly favorable for Second Empire renovations because the two styles shared many features in common: boxy massing, tall, narrow windows in arched openings, and decorative brackets beneath elaborate cornices. Despite their similarities, the Italianate style and the Second Empire style had very different connotations. The Italianate style was "part of a picturesque movement which looked to the romantic past for inspiration. In contrast, the Second Empire style was

¹² "Buffalo Architecture," Buffalo Courier Express, August 2, 1867.

¹³ For more information, see Martin Wachadlo, Francis R. Kowsky, and Christopher N. Brown, *Fargo Estate Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 2016.

¹⁴ Wachadlo, et al., Fargo Estate Historic District.

¹⁵ "The 'Mansard' Roof," Buffalo Courier, December 23, 1868.

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considered very modern, for it imitated the latest French building fashions."¹⁶ In a late-nineteenth century cultural climate that was enamored with all things French, adding a mansard roof to one's existing house was a way to demonstrate both good taste and good fortune.

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The King and Felthousen occupancy also witnessed other stylistic movements of the late nineteenth century. By the 1870s and 1880s, design began to disregard stylistic purity, even within individual architectural elements, in search of modernity and novelty. The Néo-Grec, the Aesthetic Movement, and the Queen Anne modes were all eclectic in their very origins, and in their American expressions are sometimes difficult to separate. The Néo-Grec was a movement with its origin in French architectural theory that sought a modernized classicism, adapting motifs from ancient architecture and design for an age of machine production. In the hands of American designers such as Frank Furness, the Néo-Grec could also draw on medieval or even Islamic antecedents as well as mechanical forms for its inspiration. The Aesthetic Movement, with its dictum of "Art for art's sake," engaged many sources ranging from medieval design to East Asian art to forms drawn from the natural world in its embrace of a profusion of ornamental detail. The Queen Anne style, inspired in Britain loosely by the country's "transitional" seventeenth century, freely mixed elements from post-medieval vernacular architecture and Renaissance design. In the United States, these influences were further blended with popularly available mass-produced millwork of no particular historic inspiration.

Within the Playter-King-Felthousen House, elements inspired by these eclectic stylistic movements can be picked out, but it is entirely unclear if these alterations occurred gradually or were contemporaneous with each other (and with the addition of the mansard roof). Of the diverse later-period elements of the interior, the door surrounds of the southern first floor rooms most harmonize with the mansard roof. Their fluted bases, abstracted beading, and modillions derive from the Néo-Grec, which was one of the options for the classicism typically incorporated into Second Empire design. The mantelpiece in the south room is a bit of a puzzle. Here, the abstracted and incised acanthuses at the end of the header are Néo-Grec inspired, but the peculiar Ionic jamb columns and the central header panel, with its neoclassical swag, relate to the Queen Anne, and the reeded cavetto that makes up the bulk of the header seems Egyptian Revival in inspiration.

The elaborate upstairs mantelpiece in the south room that must once have been the most important bedroom also intermingles some Néo-Grec details (the jamb columns and the plinths they support) with a profusion of Aesthetic Movement motifs, including the central fan or sunburst plaque, the medieval-inspired overmantel colonettes, the overmantel shelves, and, most particularly, the floral hearth tiles. The front bay window, with its Mannerist colonettes and panels with incised floral motifs also comfortably fit within the realm of Aesthetic Movement fantasy. Queen Anne elements include the Ionic newel post of the front stair, the shingles under the upper story side bay windows, and the jigsaw work in the coach house dormer gables.

Ultimately, regardless of the origins of the diverse architectural motifs found throughout the Playter-King-Felthousen House, it is remarkable as a collection of fine ornament, both machined and hand-fashioned, within a relatively compact house. Remembering that the inhabitants of the house were essentially bourgeoise and not of Buffalo's highest economic echelons, the quality of craftsmanship and design of the individual elements here is exceptional. Other houses of similar size and design do exist in the city, but few retain this level of elaboration.

¹⁶ Virginia McAlester, and Lee, "Second Empire," in A Field Guide to America Houses (New York: Knopf, 2000).

United States Department of the Interior	
National Park Service / National Register	of Historic Places Registration Form
NPS Form 10-900	OMB No. 1024-0018

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After the Period of Significance, 1889-2023

From 1891 until his death in 1894, prominent clothier Joseph Warner lived in the house with his wife and four children. Thereafter, the house passed from new owner to new owner in quick succession; one of these brief owners was Norman E. Mack, proprietor of the *Buffalo Times*, who purchased the house for \$25,000 in 1895. In 1896 and 1897, the house was occupied by Lucian Barnes, a successful amateur pole vaulter, and his wife. From 1897 until 1901, newspaper advertisements frequently listed the house as available for sale or rent.

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In 1902, after a period of likely vacancy, the house was sold to George Hornung, a wholesale produce merchant and founding member of the Elk Street Market, who resided there with his wife, Lisette, and six sons until his death in 1932.²⁰ His sons inherited both his house and his business and, though their numbers dwindled as they got married and moved out, the house remained in the Hornung family until 1945, when it was sold to Rocco Bonadonna. By 1950 the three-story house had been split up into apartment units. At the time of the 1950 United States Census, five separate families lived in the house.²¹ The building has remained in use as apartments ever since. Unsigned architectural drawings dated November 1969 show that work was completed on behalf of Rocco Bonadonna to convert the building into a five-family residence.

This conversion reflected a trend toward middle-class apartment-style living in the surrounding neighborhood, which by this period had become identified as a predominantly middle-class Italian American neighborhood. In the nearby Fargo Estate Historic District, many large historic houses were converted from single family homes to multi-family dwellings between the 1920s and the 1950s.²²

The property was rehabilitated according to Secretary of the Interior's Standards in 2024 as part of a historic tax credit project.

Summary

The Playter-King-Felthousen House at 617 Niagara Street is an exceptional example of Buffalo's mid-to-late nineteenth century architectural taste recorded within an upper-middle class house. Originally constructed as a two-story brick residence for the family of prosperous bookkeeper Charles G. Playter, the Italianate style house was transformed into a two-and-a-half story Second Empire house by a later resident. The building's design and use during its period of significance represents the changing and eclectic architectural preferences of stylish Buffalo residents in the late nineteenth century. The single-family house was converted into a multi-family rental property in the 1950s, reflecting further trends in the development patterns of Buffalo's west side. Despite the building's conversion to multi-family housing after the period of significance, the house retains many character-defining elements of high aesthetic value.

¹⁷ "Joseph Warner," Buffalo News, May 7, 1894.

¹⁸ "Newspaper Man Buys a Home," Buffalo Courier, April 25, 1895.

¹⁹ "Thief in the Attic," Buffalo News, August 10, 1897.

²⁰ "Wholesaler Dead: One of Elk Street Market Founders Succumbs," *Buffalo Courier Express*, April 25, 1932.

²¹ 1950 United States Census, 65-825, 8.

²² Wachadlo, et. al., Fargo Estate Historic District.

Playter-King-Felthousen House Name of Property

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Map of the City of Buffalo, N.Y. Buell, Moore, and Quackenboss, 1856.

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(Expires 5/31/2012)

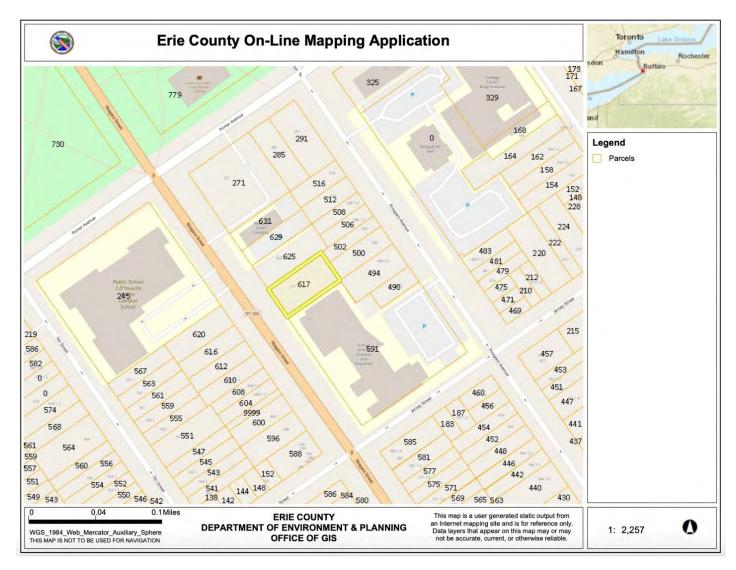
Playter-King-Felthousen House Name of Property	_	Erie County, NY County and State
Sloan, Samuel. "The Two Mansarts and the Ma (1869): 81-84.	nsard Roof." <i>Slo</i>	an's Architectural Review and Builders' Journal. Vol. 1
"The Funeral of Mr. Playter." Buffalo Courier,	September 23, 1	861.
"The 'Mansard' Roof." Buffalo Courier, Decen	nber 23, 1868.	
"Thief in the Attic." Buffalo News, August 10,	1897.	
Wachadlo, Martin, Francis R. Kowsky and Chr Historic Places Nomination Form, 201	-	n. Fargo Estate Historic District National Register of
Volk, Albert. New Century Atlas of Greater Bu	ffalo. Philadelph	ia: Century Atlas Co, 1915.
"Wholesaler Dead: One of Elk Street market fo	unders succumbs	s." Buffalo Courier Express, April 25, 1932.
Previous documentation on file (NPS): X preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR requested) previously listed in the National Register previously determined eligible by the National Registe designated a National Historic Landmark recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	r	Primary location of additional data: State Historic Preservation Office Other State agency Federal agency Local government University Other Name of repository:
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):		
10. Geographical Data		
Acreage of Property (Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)	_	
Latitude/Longitude Coordinates		
Datum if other than WGS84:(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)		
1. Latitude:	Longitude:	
2. Latitude:	Longitude:	
3. Latitude:	Longitude:	
4. Latitude:	Longitude:	

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy yellow line on the enclosed map with scale. It corresponds to the historic and current boundaries of the parcel historically affiliated with the Playter-King-Felthousen House.



Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary has been drawn to contain the building and property historically constructed, owned, and occupied at 617 Niagara Street.

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Name of Property		County and State		
11. Form Prepared By				
name/title	Mira Koster, M.S.; Annie Schentag, Ph.D.; Kerry Traynor, M.S., M.Arch			
	[edited and with additions by Johnathan Farris, NYSHPO]			
organization	kta preservation specialists	date	May 2	2025
street & number 422 Parker Ave		teleph	one	716.864.0628
city or town	Buffalo	state	NY	zip code 14216
e-mail	aschentag@kta-preservation.com; ktraynor@kta-preserva	tion.con	n	

Additional Documentation

Playter-King-Felthousen House

Submit the following items with the completed form:

• Maps: A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

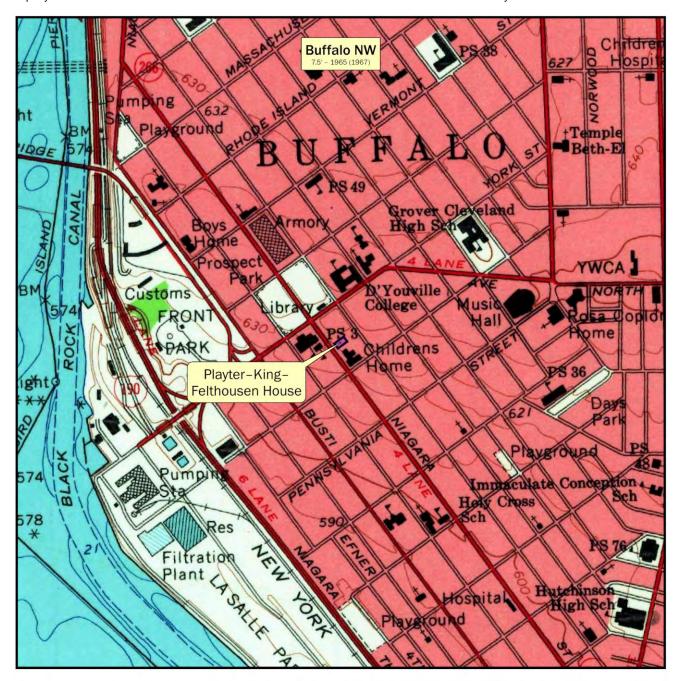
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

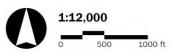
- Continuation Sheets
- Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 17N

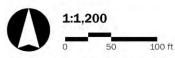
Mapped 05/07/2025 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

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Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 17N

Nomination Boundary (0.21 ac)



Erie County Parcel Year: 2024



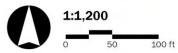
Mapped 05/07/2025 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

Playter-King-Felthousen House

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Nomination Boundary (0.21 ac)



Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 17N New Y

New York State Orthoimagery Year: 2020

Mapped 05/07/2025 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

Playter-King-Felthousen House
Name of Property

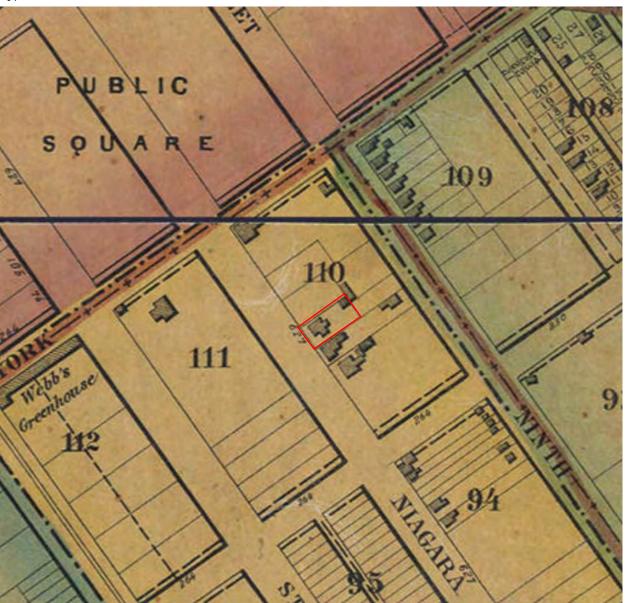
Erie County, NY
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Historic Maps

1856 Buell, Moore, and Quackenboss Map of the City of Buffalo, N.Y.

This is the first map on which the Playter-King-Felthousen House appears. Note the presence of a small outbuilding in the northeast corner which will no longer be present in the 1872 map.

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Playter-King-Felthousen House

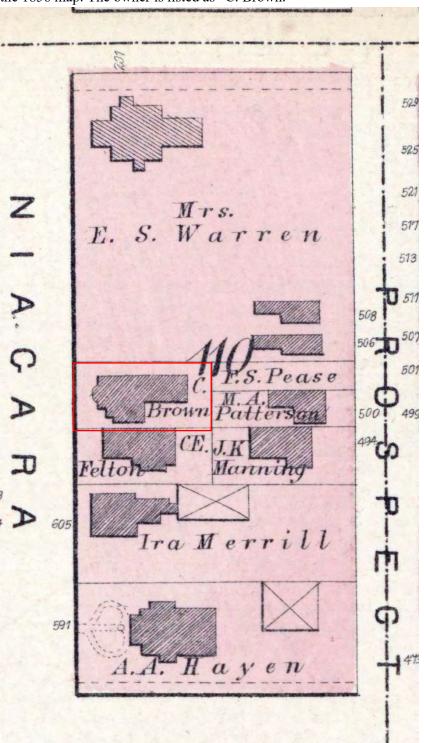
Name of Property

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1872 G.M. Hopkins Atlas of Erie County, New York

^N

This is the first map on which the two-story east wing appears. Note the absence of the small outbuilding that appeared on the 1856 map. The owner is listed as "C. Brown."



Erie County, NY

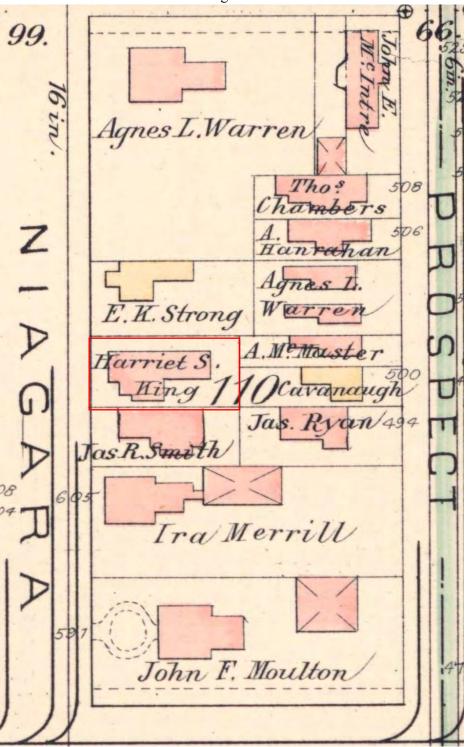
County and State

Playter-King-Felthousen House

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1884 G.M. Hopkins Atlas of Erie County, New York N

The owner is listed as "Harriet S. King."



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1889 Sanborn Map Company's Fire Insurance Map of Buffalo, New York $^{\wedge}\mathrm{N}$

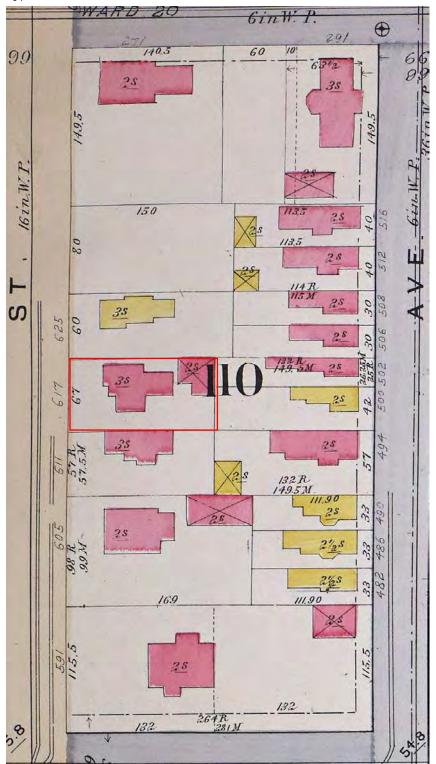
This is the first map on which the two-story brick carriage house appears. The house is shown to be two stories tall with a

French roof, a three-story tower, a one-story porch, and a two-story rear wing. 199 ,66 PROSP m 0 0

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Playter-King-Felthousen House Name of Property

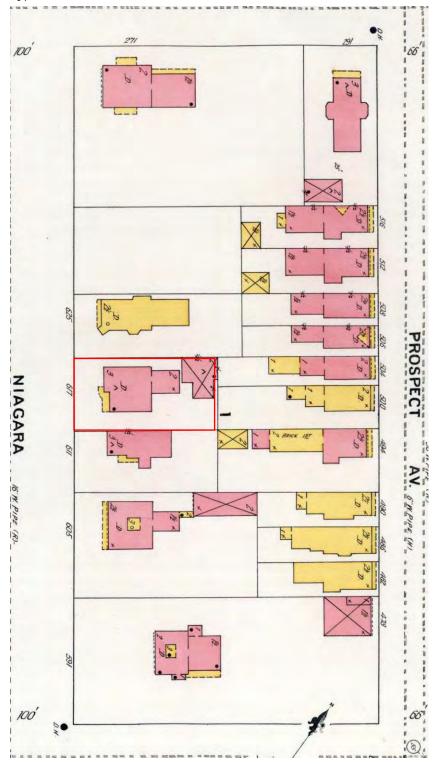
1894 American Atlas Company's Atlas of the City of Buffalo, Volume 2 N



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Playter-King-Felthousen House Name of Property

1899 Sanborn Map Company's Fire Insurance Map of Buffalo, New York N

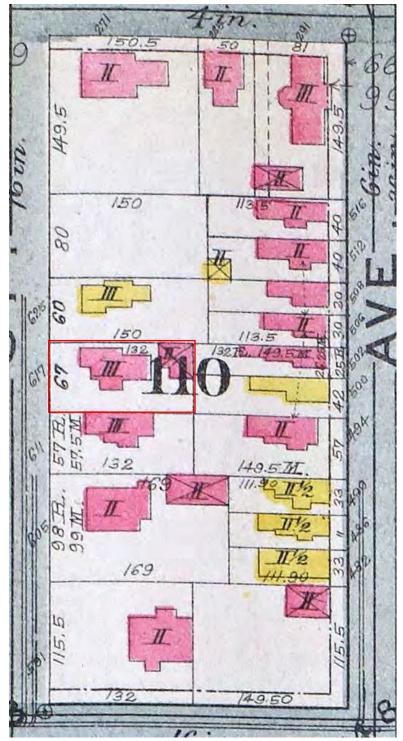


Erie County, NY County and State

Playter-King-Felthousen House Name of Property

1915 New Century Atlas of Greater Buffalo

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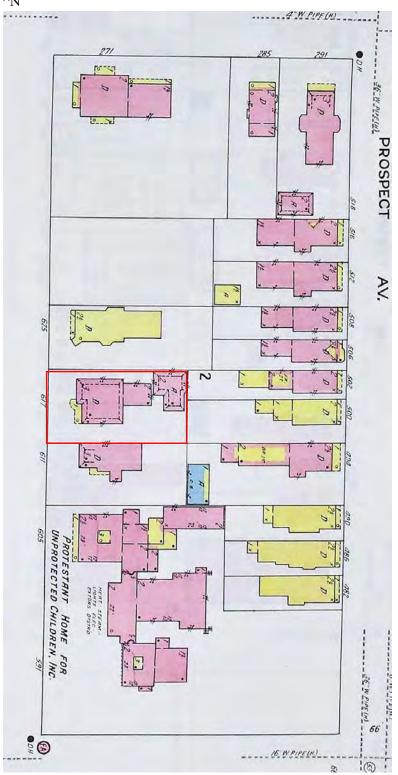


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Playter-King-Felthousen House

Name of Property

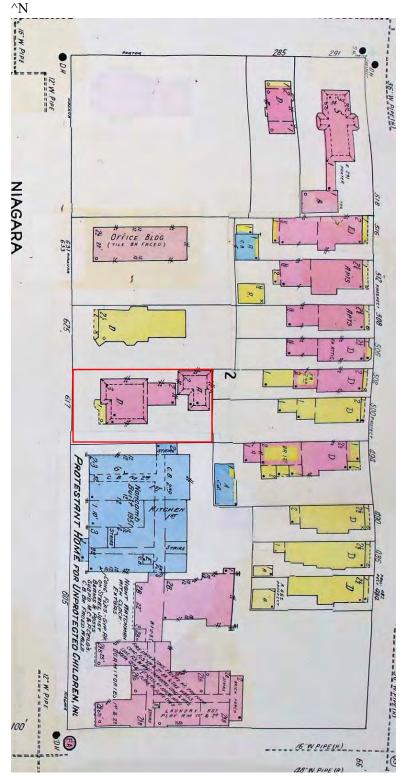
1925 Sanborn Map Company's Fire Insurance Map of Buffalo, New York



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Playter-King-Felthousen House Name of Property

1950 Sanborn Map Company's Fire Insurance Map of Buffalo, New York



Playter-King-Felthousen House

Name of Property

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Historic Images



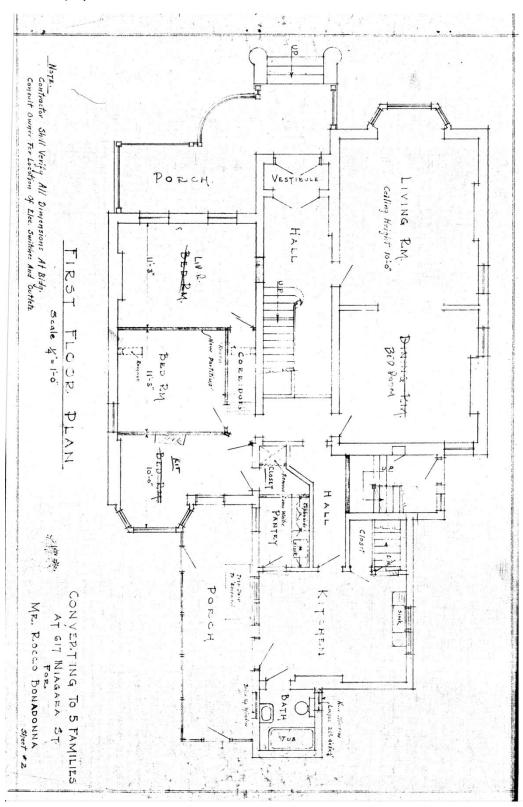
Real estate card c.1960

Note porch at front story and iron cresting on top of porch, bay window, and roof.

Playter-King-Felthousen House

Name of Property

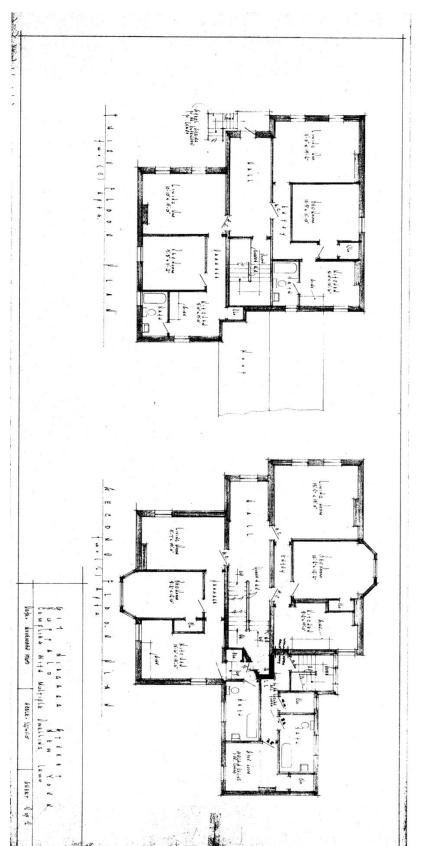
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1969 architectural drawings for conversion to five-family residence, first floor.

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1969 architectural drawings for conversion to five-family residence, second floor.

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Playter-King-Felthousen House

City: Buffalo County: Erie County New York State:

Photographer: kta preservation specialists; Johnathan Farris (0001)

Date Photographed: November 13, 2024; April 29, 2035

of Photographs:

Photo:

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0001 Looking east at primary, west elevation.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0002 Looking southwest showing north elevation.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0003 Looking west showing east elevation.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0004 Looking northeast showing partial south elevation of carriage house.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0005 View looking west, Unit 1, first floor.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0006 View looking southeast Unit 2, second floor.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0007 View looking northwest into front parlor, Unit 3, second floor.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0008 View looking west, Unit 4, third floor.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0009 View looking west, Unit 5, third floor.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0010

View looking down primary stair from landing between the first and second floors towards entrance. Note newel post and stairs heading up towards second floor.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0011 View from landing between the second and third floors towards third floor.

NY Erie County Playter-King-Felthousen House 0012

View looking west showing entrance door to the south and stairs leading to the second floor of the carriage house.

(Expires 5/31/2012)

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NY_Erie County_Playter-King-Felthousen House _0013 View looking east, carriage house apartment.

























