

The Buffalo/Western New York Chapter
of the American Institute of Architects



Celebrates
100 Years of Architecture
1886 – 1986

and pays tribute to the first professional woman
architect in the United States who played a major
role in organizing the Architects Association
in Buffalo in 1886



LOUISE BETHUNE, FAIA
(1856 - 1913)

Researched and compiled
by Adriana Barbasch, AIA
Buffalo, New York 1986

Born Jennie Louise Blanchard in Waterloo, New York, she graduated from the Buffalo High School in 1874 and studied for the architectural course at Cornell University. In 1876 she decided instead to enter the architectural profession in a more traditional way, by working as a draftsman in the architectural firm of Richard A. Waite in Buffalo.

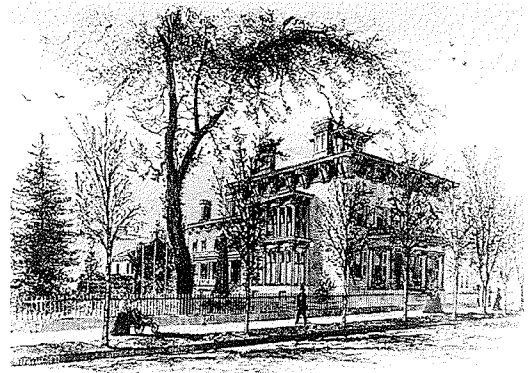
After five years of apprenticeship in this office and part-time work in F.W. Caulkins' office, mastering technical drafting, construction detailing and also the art of architectural design, she decided to open her own professional office.

The announcement coincided with the Convention of the Woman's Congress held in Buffalo in October 1881, showing the determination of this 25-years-young woman to share with other architects equal opportunity in work and pay.

Starting her career during the most progressive times in Buffalo's history, she lived to see the city triple its population between 1870 and 1900 after the railroads gained entry into Buffalo. Real estate boomed, construction flourished, shipping and industry developed rapidly; some of the greatest American architects of that era had offices in Buffalo, New York.

She was joined the same year by Robert Armour Bethune, a former colleague from R.A. Waite's office whom she later married. Their office, known as *Bethune & Bethune*, received numerous commissions in the city and the suburbs. Their contribution to Buffalo's architecture lists schools, manufactories, warehouses, mills, offices, stores, police stations, grandstands, stables, and dwellings.

Her strong dislike for single residence architecture is well known from her speeches and her practice. Most of the residences designed by Bethune & Bethune were for clients who had commissioned commercial or industrial projects — professional obligation, most likely.



Louise Bethune is described as a short lady with easy, graceful manners and at the same time with force, always concise and to the point.

She combined her architectural career at the drafting board and on construction sites with motherhood (they had one son who pursued a distinguished medical career) and social activities in support of her beliefs.

Admitted to the Western Association of Architects in 1885, she played a major role in organizing the Architects Association in Buffalo in 1886, later called the Buffalo Society of Architects which merged into the New York State Association of Architects and finally became the Buffalo Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1888.

Enthusiastically admitted as a member to the American Institute of Architects as the first woman architect in 1888, she became the first woman Fellow in 1889, at the age of 30.

She was an active AIA member and officer throughout her entire professional career.

Louise Bethune consistently supported the Architect's Licensing Bill which took 25 years of debate before becoming a "law to enforce rigid preliminary examinations" that would structure the practice of architecture.

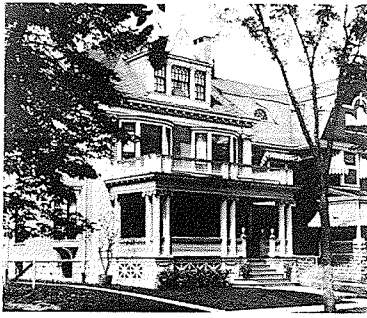
Strongly opposed to architectural competitions, Louise Bethune firmly believed in "equal pay for equal work" and maintained high professional standards.

William L. Fuchs, a draftsman in their office since 1884, became a partner in 1890 when the office became Bethune, Bethune and Fuchs.

Her professional involvement in the office work diminished around 1905 and her name was deleted from the partnership in 1912.

Louise Bethune died in December 1913 at the age of 57 and is buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery.





The "American Woman's Illustrated World" volume of October 7, 1893 lists the biographical sketches of artists, executive and professional women living in Buffalo at that time. The article, titled *Some Distinguished Women of Buffalo*, describes Louise Bethune and her work:

"Mrs. Louise Bethune, an architect of the firm 'Bethune, Bethune and Fuchs,' has been in business sixteen years. Before her marriage she was in business for herself. After she married, the firm to which she belongs was formed. Mrs. Bethune has for some years taken entire charge of the office work, and complete superintendence of one-third of the outside work. She has been the architect of many pretty dwellings, but gives her attention now to public buildings. She prepared the plans for the 74th Regiment Armory, a number of the Police Stations, and the Niagara Storage House. Several of the public schools are her designs. School houses are Mrs. Bethune's favorite line of work, due possibly to her being one of a family of teachers."

While any architectural project of larger size is mostly teamwork and single authorship is debatable, the documentation for AIA admission submitted by Louise Bethune in 1888 lists the following projects as proof of her professional capability:

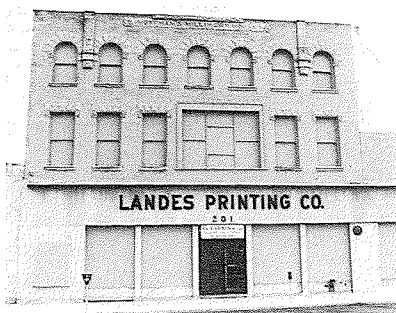
Peter Hoffman's Millinery House (197 - 201 Genesee Street)

Public School No. 4 (Elk Street & Abbott Road)

Police Station No. 2 (405 Seneca, corner of Louisiana)

Residences for William Mitchell, Spencer Kellog, H.G. Brooks, A.J. Meyer and George Waterman

At the Western Association of Architects meeting of November 1885 when Louise Bethune applied for membership, the Board of Directors decided favorably upon "the principle of admitting women as members of this Association" as a general precedent. "If the lady is practicing architecture and is in good standing, there is no reason why she should not be one of us"; and, after the general motion was approved, Louise Bethune's application was voted as follows: "She has done work by herself and been very successful. She is unanimously elected a member."



In the articles and biographical data published during her professional career and in her obituary of January 1914, Louise Bethune is credited with major contributions to the most notable commissions executed by her firm. Building permits filed with the City of Buffalo are recorded since 1892 but architect's name and descriptive building data appear after 1896. The information furnished by archival material cross-referenced with the Buffalo City Directories, the Superintendent of Schools' Reports, historical photographs and verifications of sites have permitted the identification of the following projects:

The Woman's Prison, at the Erie County Penitentiary
Pennsylvania Avenue at Fifth Street.

Police Station Precinct No. 2
405 Seneca Street and Louisiana.

The Willman Estate, four-story multiple-dwelling and stores
586 - 590 Washington and Chippewa Streets.

Buffalo Baseball Association, grandstand and additions
East Ferry and Michigan (Offerman Stadium)

Bank Building, (possibly Bank of Buffalo)
Main Street near Genesee Street

East Buffalo Livestock Exchange Building
William Street, corner Depot.

74th Regiment Armory, later Elmwood Music Hall
Virginia Street, corner Fremont Place.

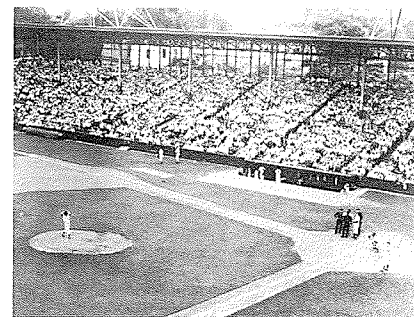
Industrial Buildings

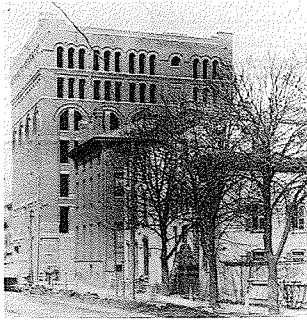
Morris Guske, merchant tailor manufactory
192 - 196 Seneca Street.

Cataract Power & Conduit Company, transformer building
2280 - 2286 Niagara Street.

Bickford & Francis Building, leather belting and hose
53 - 55 Exchange Street.

Iroquois Door Plant Company
659 Exchange Street, corner Larkin.



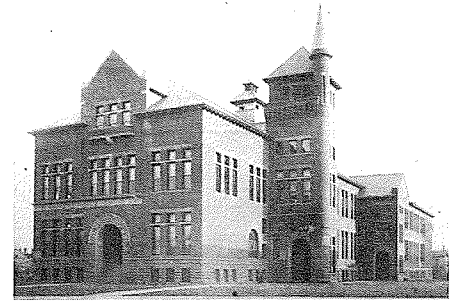


O.H.P. Champlin, manufacturing
Ellicott Street, corner Carroll.

Buffalo Weaving Company, weaving mill
234 Chandler Street.

J.A. Oaks, caterers - factory
Grote Street & Central Switch.

Hall & Sons, fire and common brick factory
69 Tonawanda Street in Black Rock.



M.J. Byrne, of Byrne & Bannister, contractors
394 Fargo Avenue.

Michael Newell, the Buffalo Medina Stone Paving Company

Andrew Wieman, hats and caps store
7 East Genesee Street.

Commercial Buildings

Lafayette Hotel, intended for the Pan-American Exhibition
391 - 405 Washington, corner Clinton Street.

Bricka and Enos Building, house furnishers
558 - 560 Genesee Street.

Denton & Cottier, music store
Court Street, corner of Franklin Street.

Peter Hoffman's, Millinery House
197 - 201 Genesee Street.

Wilson Building, stores
695 - 705 Main, corner of Tupper Street.

Fred Jehle, grocery store and dwelling
309 Bryant Street, corner Ashland Avenue.

William H. Granger, grocery wholesale
166 - 178 Michigan Avenue, corner 151 - 159 Scott Street.

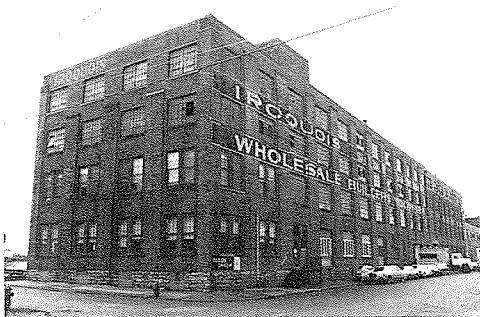
Stoddart Brothers, druggists and surgical supplies
86 - 88 Seneca, corner Carroll Street.

Jacob Dold, wholesale meat packing
145 East Swan Street (and other successive addresses).

Henry Bald, meat market and dwelling
1762 Main Street.

Niagara Storage House
224 - 226 Niagara Street.

Wile & Wile Brothers Company, wholesale clothing stores
37 - 39 Pearl Street.



Women and Architecture*

by Louise Bethune

"Women have entered the architectural profession at a much earlier stage of its existence even before it has received legislative recognition. They meet no serious opposition from the profession nor the public. Neither are they warmly welcomed. They minister to no special needs of women, and receive no special favors from them."

* * *

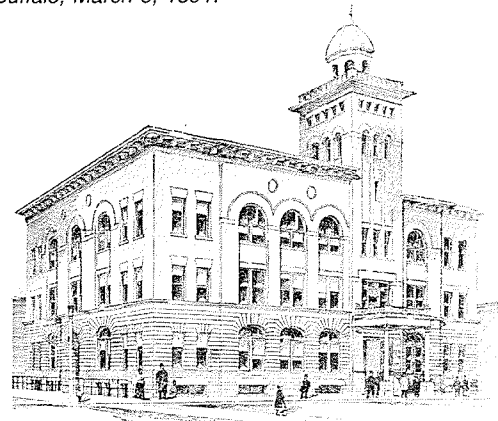
"The objects of the businesswoman are quite distinct from those of the professional agitator. Her aims are conservative rather than aggressive, her strength lies in adaptability, not in reform and her desire is to conciliate rather than to antagonize. The future of woman in the architectural profession is what she herself sees fit to make it."

* * *

"The open sesame to the favor of our compeers and the respect of the public is 'Equal Remuneration for Equal Service,' and a strict observance of all the honorable traditions of our profession and its amenities of practice."

* * *

**Portions of a talk before the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Buffalo, March 6, 1891.*



Credits

Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society
The Archives of the American Institute of Architects
Joseph Stallone, Photographer



Schools

Between 1881 and 1904, the approximate time of Louise Bethune's architectural activity, the City of Buffalo commissioned 54 new school buildings and 12 major additions to existing schools. Louise Bethune's biographies credit her with the design of 18 schools in Buffalo and suburbs. Some of these Public Schools in Buffalo were:

School #4	Elk and Abbott Streets
School #9	2060 Bailey Avenue
School #23	891 East Delavan
School #30	South & Louisiana Sts.
School #39	487 High St. at Johnson
School #48	124 Edna Place
School #44	Miller Street & Broadway
School #52	Bird Ave. corner Grant

Among the schools she designed for other localities:

- Lockport Union High School
- Springville High School (old Griffith Institute, addition)
- Hamburg High School (designed but not built)

