Eden Street Brick Right-of-Way

The historic brick pavement of Eden Street, extending two blocks between McKinley Parkway and Abbott Road in South Buffalo, is a significant surviving example of early twentieth-century municipal street construction and an important physical feature associated with the residential development of the McKinley Parkway neighborhood. Installed in 1928, the brick roadway represents the culmination of a period in American urban development during which vitrified brick became a widely employed material for the construction of durable, permanent public streets. Its survival nearly a century later provides tangible evidence of the materials, workmanship, and engineering practices that accompanied Buffalo's transformation into a modern industrial city.

The Development of Brick-Paved Streets in the United States

During the nineteenth century, the improvement of public streets became an increasingly important responsibility of American municipal governments. Before the widespread introduction of permanent paving, urban streets were frequently composed of compacted earth, gravel, or other relatively impermanent materials. Such surfaces generated considerable dust during dry weather and became muddy, rutted, and difficult to traverse following precipitation. These conditions impeded transportation, complicated commercial activity, and contributed to unsanitary conditions in rapidly growing cities.

The development of permanent street paving was therefore closely associated with the broader modernization of American cities, including the expansion of municipal water and sewer systems, street lighting, public transportation, and other essential infrastructure. During the nineteenth century, municipalities experimented with stone blocks, wood blocks, macadam, and other paving materials, each offering different advantages in cost, durability, and maintenance.

Vitrified brick emerged as an important alternative during the late nineteenth century. Unlike conventional building brick, paving brick was manufactured from selected clays and fired at high temperatures to produce a dense, hard material with relatively low water absorption. Its resistance to abrasion, vehicular loads, and freeze-thaw deterioration made it particularly well suited to urban roadways.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, brick paving had become widespread throughout the United States. Its popularity coincided with the growth of professional municipal engineering, the City Beautiful movement, and an increasing emphasis on permanent public improvements. Brick streets represented substantial investments in transportation infrastructure while contributing to the orderly appearance and physical character of urban neighborhoods.

By the 1920s and 1930s, however, asphalt and concrete increasingly displaced brick as preferred materials for new roadway construction. Changing traffic demands, the proliferation of automobiles, and advances in pavement technology contributed to this transition. Throughout the twentieth century, thousands of brick-paved streets were subsequently covered with asphalt or reconstructed using modern materials. Surviving examples therefore represent an increasingly uncommon form of historic municipal infrastructure.

Brick Streets and the Development of Buffalo

The widespread adoption of permanent street paving coincided with Buffalo's extraordinary industrial, commercial, and residential expansion during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the city grew into a major Great Lakes port, railroad center, and manufacturing metropolis, the improvement of its extensive street network became essential to the movement of people and goods and to the development of new residential neighborhoods.

Brick paving was among the materials employed in Buffalo's municipal street improvement programs. Its durability and resistance to moisture and freezing temperatures made it particularly appropriate for the city's demanding climate. In residential neighborhoods, brick-paved roadways frequently formed part of a coordinated streetscape incorporating sandstone curbs, concrete sidewalks, street trees, and drainage infrastructure.

Although once relatively common, historic brick streets have become increasingly scarce as successive generations of roadway improvements have introduced asphalt and concrete surfaces. Surviving examples remain throughout Buffalo, including along Niagara Falls Boulevard, Eaglewood Avenue, Timon Street, Viola Park, and Ardmore Place.

The City of Buffalo formally recognized the independent historic significance of brick pavement in 1987, when it designated the brick-paved portion of Niagara Falls Boulevard between Main Street and Kenmore Avenue as a local landmark. Originally paved in 1913, that roadway established an important local precedent for the preservation of historic street surfaces as significant works of municipal engineering, independent of the architectural significance of adjoining buildings. More recently, in 2025 the Hamlin Park Historic District was amended to incorporate the neighborhood's surviving brick streets.

Historical Development of Eden Street

Eden Street is located in South Buffalo, an area whose development was closely associated with the expansion of Buffalo's parkway system and the city's early twentieth-century residential growth. McKinley Parkway, originally Southside Parkway, was designed as part of the southern extension of Buffalo's Olmsted park and parkway system during the 1890s. The parkway provided an organizing framework for subsequent residential subdivisions and the development of the surrounding street network.

According to the McKinley Parkway Historic District National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Eden Street was developed in separate stages. The western portion, extending toward South Park Avenue and formerly known as Marconi Street, had been laid out by 1901. It was subsequently developed as part of the Eden Acres subdivision during the 1920s and had been paved with asphalt by 1921.

The eastern portion of Eden Street, between McKinley Parkway and Abbott Road, followed a different development history. This section was laid out in 1926 as part of a small residential subdivision undertaken by developer Christ Forbach, a German-born master builder and contractor

who established his own construction business in Buffalo in 1897. In 1928, the roadway was paved with brick. The National Register documentation identifies concrete sidewalks, sandstone curbing, and a mixture of maple, oak, and ash street trees as characteristic features of Eden Street.

The installation of brick paving in 1928 is particularly noteworthy because it occurred during the transitional period when asphalt and concrete were increasingly replacing brick in American roadway construction. Indeed, the contrasting pavement histories of the eastern and western portions of Eden Street illustrate the coexistence of different street construction technologies during South Buffalo's residential expansion in the 1920s.

Eden Street's brick pavement also reflects the broader pattern of neighborhood improvement in the McKinley Parkway area. Nearby Eaglewood Avenue, for example, was laid out in 1891 and paved with brick in 1917, demonstrating the continued use of this construction material in the neighborhood during the early twentieth century. Together, these surviving historic roadways document the evolution of municipal infrastructure accompanying South Buffalo's transformation from peripheral land into an established residential community.

Historic Significance and Integrity

The brick pavement of Eden Street possesses historical significance both as an example of early twentieth-century municipal engineering and as an integral component of the planned residential development of the McKinley Parkway area. Its construction in 1928 reflects the provision of permanent public infrastructure during an important period of Buffalo's urban expansion, while its distinctive paving material embodies a method of street construction that has largely disappeared from contemporary municipal practice.

The roadway's historic character derives principally from its brick paving, its original street alignment and configuration, and its relationship to associated streetscape features, including sandstone curbing and concrete sidewalks. These elements collectively illustrate the materials, design, and workmanship characteristic of residential street improvements during the early twentieth century. The continued visibility and use of the brick surface preserve an important aspect of the street's historic appearance and function.

Unlike the adjoining residential buildings, which derive their significance principally from their architectural character and association with neighborhood development, the brick roadway constitutes a distinct historic resource. Its significance rests on its construction technology, association with municipal infrastructure improvements, and contribution to the physical development and historic character of South Buffalo.

The proposed designation would encompass the historic public roadway between McKinley Parkway and Abbott Road, recognizing the brick pavement and associated historic streetscape features as a unified work of municipal infrastructure. The designation would not extend to the privately owned residential properties adjoining the street.

Criteria for Designation

The Eden Street Brick Right-of-Way, McKinley Parkway to Abbott Road, meets the following criteria for local landmark status pursuant to Chapter 337, Preservation Standards, of the City Code:

Criterion 1: It has character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, state, or nation.

The historic brick pavement of Eden Street is associated with the residential development and modernization of South Buffalo during the early twentieth century. Laid out in 1926 and paved in 1928, this section of Eden Street reflects the provision of permanent public infrastructure accompanying the expansion of the McKinley Parkway neighborhood. Its construction illustrates the substantial municipal and private investment in street improvements that characterized Buffalo's growth during this period. The surviving brick roadway represents an important physical remnant of this development and of a once-common street construction practice that has largely disappeared from the city's transportation network.

Criterion 3: It exemplifies the historic, aesthetic, architectural, archaeological, educational, economic, or cultural heritage of the City, state, or nation.

Eden Street exemplifies Buffalo's historic municipal engineering and public works heritage. Brick paving was widely employed in American cities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as municipalities sought durable, permanent street surfaces to accommodate expanding transportation needs. Eden Street's 1928 paving is a comparatively late example of this technology, constructed during a period when asphalt and concrete were increasingly replacing brick as preferred roadway materials. Its survival provides tangible evidence of the evolution of street construction practices and the development of modern urban infrastructure in Buffalo.

Criterion 5: It embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style valuable for the study of a period, type, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials.

The historic brick pavement of Eden Street embodies the distinguishing characteristics of early twentieth-century vitrified brick street construction. Its individual paving units, historic roadway configuration, and associated sandstone curbing illustrate a distinctive method of constructing permanent urban thoroughfares before the widespread adoption of modern asphalt and concrete surfaces. The roadway is representative of the materials and construction practices employed during the final decades of widespread brick street paving in the United States and provides an opportunity to study an increasingly uncommon type of historic municipal infrastructure.

Criterion 7: It embodies elements of design, detailing, materials, or craftsmanship that render it architecturally significant.

Eden Street retains the distinctive material character and workmanship associated with historic brick-paved roadways. The use of individual paving bricks, laid to create a durable and relatively uniform roadway surface, reflects the specialized materials and construction techniques employed in early twentieth-century street improvements. The relationship between the brick pavement, historic street alignment, and associated sandstone curbing contributes to the roadway's historic design and character. These features distinguish Eden Street from modern asphalt-paved streets and demonstrate the craftsmanship and attention to material durability characteristic of historic municipal paving projects.

Criterion 9: It is a unique location or contains singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature within the City.

The historic brick pavement gives Eden Street a distinctive visual identity within the surrounding residential neighborhood. Its exposed brick surface, characteristic color and texture, and relationship to the established streetscape distinguish it from the predominantly asphalt-paved streets of contemporary Buffalo. The continuity of the brick roadway over two blocks reinforces its visual prominence and contributes to its recognition as a distinctive feature of the McKinley Parkway neighborhood. Its survival as a visible historic street surface makes it an identifiable element of South Buffalo's historic built environment.

Integrity

The historic brick pavement of Eden Street retains its original location, historic street alignment, and distinctive character as a brick-paved residential roadway. Its continued use as a public thoroughfare preserves the historic function for which it was constructed in 1928. The visible brick surface and its relationship to the surrounding residential streetscape convey the roadway's historic design and association with early twentieth-century municipal street improvements. While some original paving material has been lost, damaged, or obscured as a result of haphazard repairs, the resource appears to retain sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to convey its historical significance and warrant preservation under § 337-15(B) of the City of Buffalo Code.

Bibliography

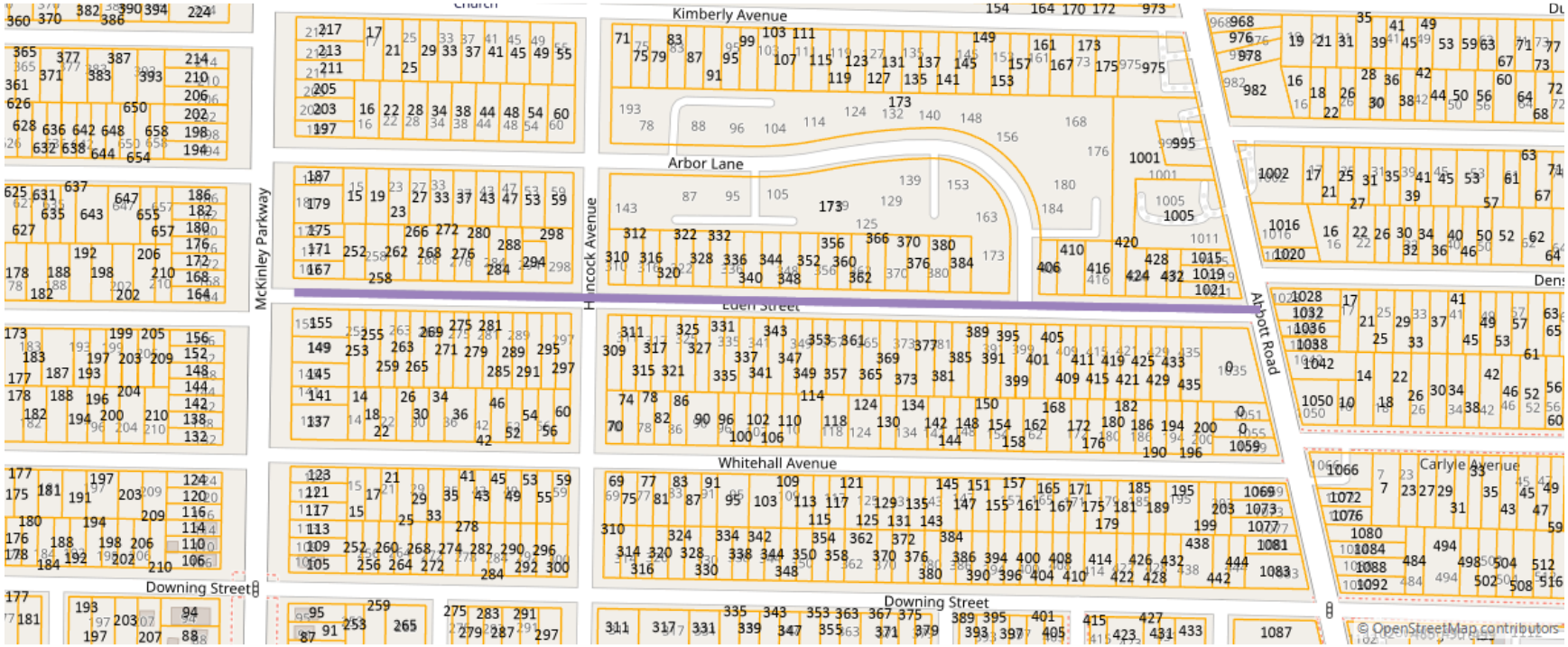
Brick Streets. "Buffalo." Accessed October 22, 2026. https://www.brickstreets.org/buffalo/

"Growing section in South Buffalo: New St. Martin's Parish thriving community." *Buffalo Times*, February 13, 1927: 36.

Kimberly, Alison, ed. “Niagara Falls Boulevard: Local Landmark Nomination.” Designated September 29, 1987.

“McKinley Parkway Historic District.” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. Buffalo, Erie County, New York. National Park Service.

Peirce, Vernon M., and Charles H. Moorefield. *Vitrified Brick as a Paving Material for Country Roads*. Bulletin No. 23. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Public Roads, 1913.


Kimberly Avenue
Arbor Lane
Eden Street
Whitehall Avenue
Downing Street
McKinley Parkway
Lincock Avenue
Abbott Road
Carlyle Avenue
© OpenStreetMap contributors

GROWING SECTION IN SOUTH BUFFALO

New St. Martin's Parish Thriving Community

The new St. Martin's paris in South Bupffalo, rapidly is becoming a thriving, well settled community. Practically all of the recent real estate activity, building of new homes, development of nev. streets and so forth, has been in that section, particularly in Eden Ave., between McKinlye Pkwy. and Abbott Rd. In this street, Christ Forbach, South Buffalo builder, is constructing an entire block of attractive one floor plan homes.

These homes have every modern convenience and were designed by Frank M. Schurman, the architect, with teh object of meeting the requirements of the average family. Raych & Thomas, 299 Triangle, exclusive selling agents, report a brisk demand for this tvpe of residence, which on account of its step saving feature and convenient layout, is becoming more popular each year.

South Buffalo in the past few years has seen considerable activity, manv new churches and schools have been erected. A new Masonic Temple has been dedicated within the past year. A branch Y. M. C. A. building and the new Mt. Mercy hospital are nearing completion. South Buffalo's new municipal market is to be opened to the public early this April. These together with other improvements completed and under way are causing South Buffalo real estate values to take an upward trend.

Through the activities of the Citizens' and Businessmens' association of South Buffalo and with the cooperation of the City Planning commission and kindred organizations, many additional improvements are contemplated for South Buffalo, including a proper approach in and out of South Buffalo. Several arteries are being considered and a solution to this problem is not far off.

Buffalo Times, February 13, 1927.



BRICK PAVEMENT

—the sign of a

Modern, Thrifty Community

TRIM lawns, substantial homes, fertile fields, progressive business districts—these and brick-surfaced pavements go together in thousands of fine American Communities.

Brick surfaced streets keep complimenting the property owners on their original choice. Louder than words, brick streets tell strangers that here are painstaking people who appreciate good things because they *are* good and because they cost less in the end.

Proof against big repair bills, modern brick pavements stay even; smooth-riding; safe. Because tough, dense, thoroughly weatherproof, brick is the longest-wearing pavement man makes. Neither weather nor anything on wheels can damage it. For further information address National Paving Brick Manufacturers Association, National Press Building, Washington, D. C.

VITRIFIED

BRICK PAVEMENTS

FACE THE FUTURE • PAVE WITH BRICK

Buffalo Evening News, October 19, 1928.