

FOR THE RECORD

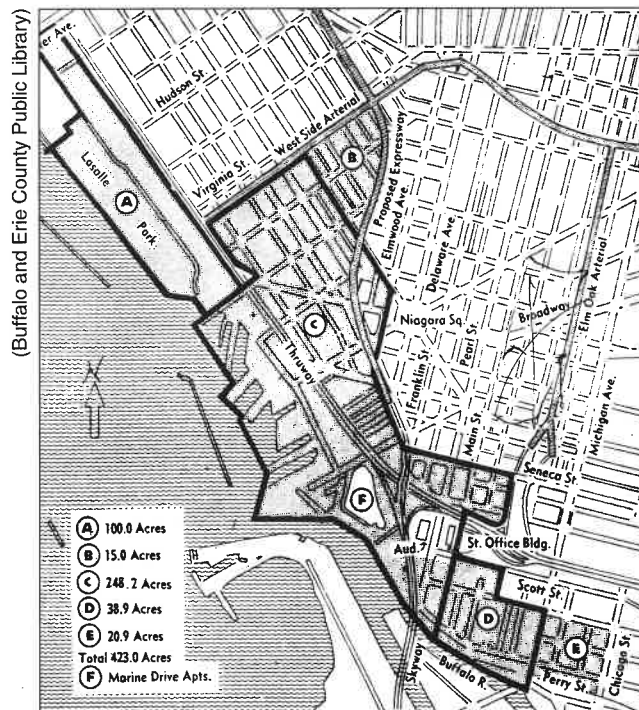
By Douglas L. Turner

In a recent article for *HERITAGE*, writer Linda Levine revisited the late 1960s decision by the State University Board of Trustees to build a new campus in Amherst, instead of in downtown Buffalo. There were some errors and false impressions created by that article. I hope to set the record straight. Whether the site decision was wise or not, the action still reverberates to this day on such questions as the completion of the light rail system, the university's commitment to urban minorities, and its participation in civic affairs. So this is more than spilt milk. The accusation that most surprised me was Levine's charge that the morning and Sunday newspaper of this day, the *Courier-Express*, dropped the ball. As former city editor, and later executive editor of the paper, I can assure you that there would have been no serious or protracted discussion of the site issue were it not for the many articles the paper published about the drawbacks of the Amherst site, the potentials of downtown Buffalo, the opinions of state legislators of that day, and a series written by Dale C. English about urban campuses in the U.S. and Canada that worked. They were done at my direction and under the patronage of Publisher William J. Conners III, a one-time member of the U.B. Council. *The Buffalo News*, my present employer, took a bum rap in Levine's cited reasons for its opposition to the downtown campus site. Levine had this mixed up with reasons the *News* opposed a downtown domed stadium. The controversial Fago Brothers contracting family had zero interest in the Amherst land taken by SUNY. WASP developers controlled most of the land. The Fagos were involved in a controversial swap deal on the Kensington Expressway project. The roles of several participants in the dispute were mislabeled, but they are now merrily in Heaven, and the only purpose served by the mention of such small errors is as an index of the general accuracy of the article.

Omitted from the piece was a conflict between two other gentlemen who have since departed, Seymour H. Knox, chairman of the U.B. Council, and Max B. E. Clarkson, who headed the firm that was later called Graphic Controls. Clarkson represented new money and new cultural patronage.

He wanted a downtown campus. Knox, whose heart belonged to his alma mater, Yale, represented the *ancien regime* that refused to brook new players and smothered their ideas. At his expense, Clarkson commissioned a model of the downtown campus idea with the thought it would be displayed at the Albright Knox Art Gallery. In a crude gesture, whose type is repeated in Buffalo to this day, to its detriment, Knox, who also chaired the gallery board, blocked display of the model there. Clarkson's model was shown instead at the base of the main stairwell at the Buffalo Public Library. The unanswered insult sent a strong message to anyone who might harbor modern ideas for Buffalo. As a consequence, the rest of the political and social establishment was cowed into silence. I believe Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller wanted to build downtown; but when he knocked, nobody was home. Our troubles were, and are, not in our geography but in ourselves. ■

(A veteran journalist, Mr. Turner is currently Washington Bureau Chief of the *Buffalo News*.)



Map of the site proposed for a new downtown waterfront campus, 1966.