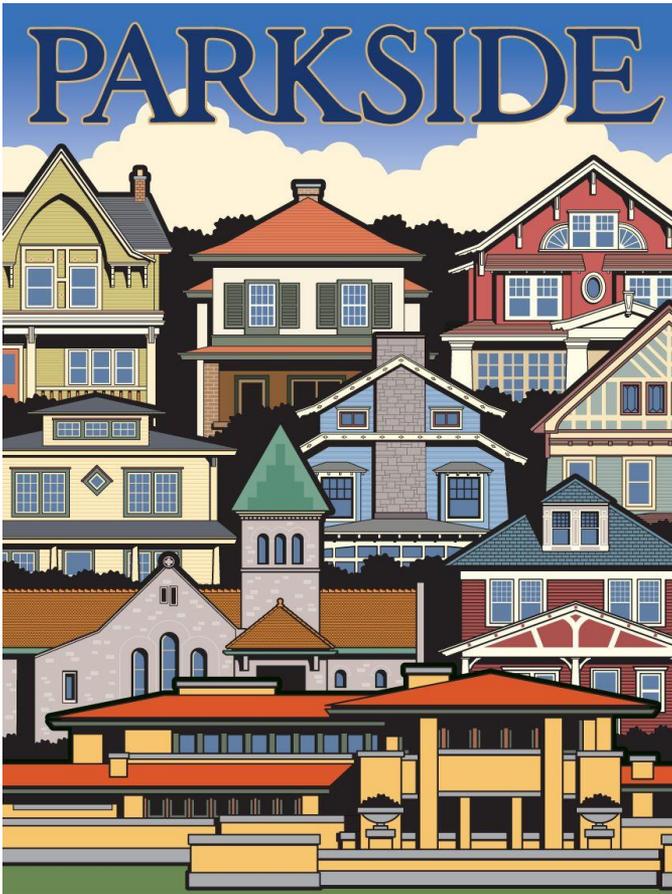


Parkside Community Association: Origins & Institutions

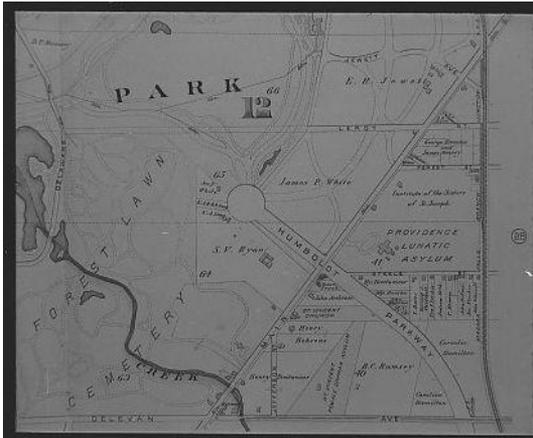


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I. Origins and Development of the PCA

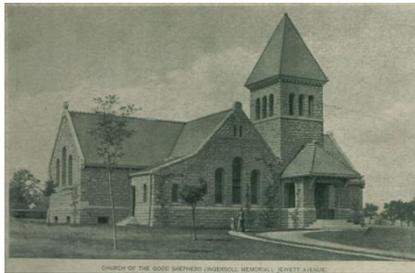
While the Parkside Community has a long and rich history, it has nevertheless had to change and adapt to continue to retain its vitality. Over the last 50 years, the Parkside Community Association (PCA) has played an instrumental role in maintaining the Parkside community as a place that residents want to live in. Parkside thrives due to the relationships the PCA has with the cultural and recreational institutions surrounding the neighborhood. The Buffalo Zoo, the Darwin Martin House, and the Olmsted Conservancy are a few of the institutions that are in Parkside.



The PCA was established by Jack Anthony and Dick Griffin in 1963. Integration was the driving force behind their desire to form a community organization. The primary goal, as Griffin explains, was, “forming a neighborhood organization which will make us have a good neighborhood open to all and serve all aspects of

the neighborhood.”¹ Unlike many others at the time, they viewed integration as making a positive contribution to the community.

Anthony and Griffin held the first PCA meeting on June 6, 1963, in the Anthony household, located at 135 Summit Avenue. Fifteen residents attended the first meeting. Afterward, word quickly spread about the new community organization and by the second meeting they had almost tripled in size, demonstrating that the Parkside residents had a great interest in forming a community organization. They were clearly not alone in their journey; Griffin and Anthony wanted to welcome integration into the neighborhood. This was unique in 1963, as many whites in Buffalo at the time feared integration.²



Downtown Buffalo, for example, saw a huge decrease in the amount of white families living there. Many of these white families left the downtown area for the suburbs,

¹ Interview of Richard Griffin, October 8th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

² PCA Board Reports 1963-2000, Parkside Community Association Archives.

what many call “white flight”. White residents were leaving the downtown area both because of the fear of living among different races, and because of the deteriorating conditions in downtown. There was “overcrowding, high rents, and neighborhood blight” which was only worsened during the course of the 1950’s.³ In this context, Anthony and Griffin wanted to welcome various ethnic groups into their neighborhood. They felt that everyone should have the right to live where they want to, and that by openly welcoming integration, it would help them to have a community that was open to all. The PCA was one of the only organizations at the time that openly welcomed the concept of integration and it was both a new and a refreshing concept.⁴

Due to the fact that PCA was one of the only organizations that openly welcomed integration, it was often perceived as a civil rights group. The founders, however, felt it important to not be perceived as a civil rights group. They wanted to be seen as a group that was working to improve their community, and to make it a place that people of all kinds could live. If they were perceived as being a civil rights group, then the community members could view them in a different way which was not what the PCA wanted to happen.⁵

³ Goldman, Mark. *City on the Edge*: (Buffalo, New York. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, Pg. 173-177, 2007).

⁴ Interview of Richard Griffin, October 8th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

⁵ Interview of Richard Griffin, October 8th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

Although Griffin and Anthony knew that they wanted to have a racially diverse community, there were many critics along the way. Some blacks looked at the PCA with suspicion because of a lack of trust towards the white community, especially since there were very few whites who were welcoming integration into neighborhoods. Despite these concerns, founding members were, “truly committed to making this a successful racially diverse community,” and “stood up to a lot of controversy.” Their determination for a safe, welcoming family centered community was their driving force that led them to overcome those that questioned their motives.⁶

From the very beginning, PCA leaders focused on the goal of improving the community and making it a safer place for all. This was evident in the first board report from July 1, 1963. The Board Report explains a key goal of the PCA, to create a diverse neighborhood: “More persons of a minority race will no doubt purchase homes in the near future. This is their right as it should be any person’s right to reside where he chooses.” To enable this to happen, members of the board emphasized some keywords that would be emblematic of their association; “Positive Action, Unity, and Welcome.” These keywords would provide the foundation for creating a well-rounded community that benefits all of its members.⁷

⁶ Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain.

⁷ PCA Board Reports 1963-2000, Parkside Community Association Archives.

The success of the integration in Parkside did not go unnoticed, but rather was heavily noticed by other neighborhoods in Buffalo. As historian Mark Goldman explains, “By the end of the decade, a time when so many other neighborhoods succumbed to the frightening cycle of events that caused blight and decline, Parkside not only survived but thrived as a racially mixed, inspiringly beautiful middle-class neighborhood in the heart of the city.”⁸



The PCA became an organization that the Parkside community could trust. The Housing Committee emerged as one example of this. Organized in 1967 by the PCA, the Housing Committee was formed in order to help address the houses that were in great need of repair. Ruth Lampe, who later served four terms as PCA president, served as the housing specialist on the Housing Committee. This role suited her since, as Steve Cichon has stated, she was, “a stickler for housing and building code compliance.”⁹ Concerned about the

⁸ Goldman, Mark. *City on the Edge*: (Buffalo, New York. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, Pg. 173-177, 2007).

⁹ Cichon, Steve. *The Complete History of Parkside, Buffalo, NY*. Buffalo, NY.: Staffannouncer.com, Pg. 130, 2009.

appearance that neglected houses can have, she felt that if there is one neglected house in the neighborhood, then it can negatively affect the entire neighborhood.

The goal of the Housing Committee was to fix problem properties in the community. One of their victories included fighting to, “get the derelict house at Parkside and Florence demolished.”¹⁰ Following its successes with the Housing Committee, the PCA negotiated with the Department of Community Development for the purpose of creating the Concentrated Code Enforcement Program (CCE), a city run program that focused on improving and restoring houses in different communities.¹¹ Together, the Housing Committee and the CCE worked to improve the community. The Housing Committee oversaw the CCE, playing a vital role in directing the program.



The CCE provided the funding to ensure every single house in Parkside was inspected. The Parkside area was assigned a building inspector, and each house had their

¹⁰ Email from Ruth Lampe to Shannon Mulrain, October 26th, 2013, PCA.

¹¹ PCA Board Reports 1963-2000, Parkside Community Association Archives.

exterior inspected. Ruth Lampe explained that inspecting every house was meant to ensure a “sense of fairness.” Nevertheless, it became “horribly controversial,” because homeowners did not want someone telling them that their house was run down, or that they needed to fix their house.¹²

The effectiveness of the CCE rested on the fact that it offered incentives for the home owners, minimizing the financial burden of homeowners having to pay out of pocket expenses. In many cases, a homeowner would be reluctant to fix up their home because it was just too expensive. The availability of the incentives, however, helped to sway some of the homeowners. Some of these incentives included low income loans, grants, and a paint program that would offer discounted or free paint.¹³

In order to stand the test of time, change is required. The PCA added programs such as the Housing Committee, to prevent the neighborhood from deteriorating, and transforming it into a model of integration. The PCA also formed relationships with institutions within Parkside like the Darwin Martin House, the Buffalo Zoo, and the Olmsted Conservancy. All of these relationships have been crucial to the development of Parkside.

¹² Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

¹³ Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

2. The Buffalo Zoo

The Buffalo Zoo, located on Parkside Avenue on the Southeastern section of Delaware Park, has been an important part of the Parkside community. Since the PCA was founded in 1963, the history between the Zoo and the PCA is complex and full of controversy, conflict, as well as improvements.

As the Zoo is located in Delaware Park, it has limited parking. For much of the mid-20th century the Zoo struggled with this issue. In 1979, zoo authorities wanted to increase the parking for the Zoo by building a parking lot in “The Meadow” in Delaware Park. The PCA expressed concern with this proposal because of the importance of Delaware Park to the Parkside community. A new parking lot would have destroyed valuable green space that could be used for recreation, especially for children. With so many concerned residents, the PCA made the parking lot issue a main priority at its meetings. The PCA also sent a representative to act as a panelist during a community discussion held at the Church of the Good Shepard. Demonstrating how important this issue was for Parkside residents, 200 people attended the discussion.

The Zoo responded to the community backlash, as expressed by the PCA, by dropping the plans. The PCA became an organization that the residents of Parkside could go to when they had an issue. The PCA

experienced yet another success when dealing with the issue of the parking lot.¹⁴

Conflict arose again in 1991 when the Zoo began remodeling some of its animal exhibits. The elephant exhibit became controversial because the proposal suggested a very high wall be built which would be visible from the road. Some residents did not like this idea because the wall was so big that it blocked other parts of the Zoo and would ruin the view that some of the residents had from their homes. Again, the PCA intervened, addressing the issue of the wall by making the views of community members known to the Zoo. The Zoo responded by lowering the wall. The PCA again expressed the concerns of the Parkside residents and fought to help have the issue addressed.¹⁵



Due to the space limitations that the Zoo faced, in 1997 Zoo leaders explored moving the Zoo out of Parkside. This was a very controversial issue for the Parkside

¹⁴ Newspaper Clipping, November 2nd, 1979, Buffalo History Museum Library, Buffalo Zoo 1971-1979.

¹⁵ Cichon, Steve. *The Complete History of Parkside, Buffalo, NY*. Buffalo, NY.: Staffannouncer.com, Pg. 154-157 2009.

community. Some residents felt that the Zoo should stay because it was such an important part of the community while other residents felt that it should move because the Zoo had been a problem to the community in the past, such as causing an increase in traffic that was brought on by the Zoo.¹⁶ Understanding that residents were divided, the PCA decided to remain neutral on the issue. PCA leaders knew that each side had valid ideas.



Some residents wanted the Zoo to stay because if they moved, then Parkside would have to try to make use of their old location which sits on twenty seven acres of land. This would have been a huge undertaking for the Parkside community and some residents did not feel that it was one that Parkside was ready for. Other community members felt that by losing the Zoo, they would be losing an important part of their community.¹⁷ So, despite the PCA's neutral position, a group of

¹⁶ Cichon, Steve. *The Complete History of Parkside, Buffalo, NY*. Buffalo, NY.: Staffannouncer.com, Pg. 154-157 2009.

¹⁷ Interview of Kathy Peterson, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

Parkside residents formed a “Save the Zoo” campaign. The group packed a meeting one night, and then brought a motion to the floor to oppose the move. In response, the PCA changed its position, and opposed the move. The change in the PCA position became controversial, however, as several members were so upset about the change in position that they ended up leaving the PCA. The stance of the community and of the PCA, nevertheless, did play a role in swaying the Zoo, which in the end decided to remain in Parkside.¹⁸

Despite the controversies over the last 50 years, at present the relationship between the Zoo and the PCA is very constructive. Parkside residents feel that the current Zoo Director, Donna Fernandes, is a “gem” and that, “her passion is for the animals.”¹⁹ Residents feel very strongly that the Zoo wants to make contributions to the Parkside community, something which residents did not always feel in the past.

¹⁸ Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

¹⁹ Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

3. Delaware Park

On the Northwest end of Parkside is Delaware Park, a beautiful place where people from all over the Buffalo area come to spend time running, playing on playgrounds, and playing sports such as basketball and golf. The Olmsted Conservancy, founded in 2003, helped revitalize the Park, and the vision of Frederick Law Olmsted. A famous landscape architect, after designing Central Park in New York City, Olmsted designed the Buffalo Park system in the 1870's. "The Park," as Delaware Park was formerly called, was the largest park in the system. Olmsted really wanted to include nature into all of his parks, because, as Francis Kowsky claims, he felt, "that the contemplation and passive enjoyment of nature promoted mental and spiritual well-being." The Park had meadowlands, a lake, thousands of trees, and was made up of 230 acres; this is why he chose this area for The Park because he wanted space. "The Park" became a cherished and loved jewel in the city.²⁰

Over time, though, The Park began to fall into a state of neglect and disrepair. By the middle of the 20th century, Delaware Park was not well cared for. The PCA sought to change that. In 1963, there were very few crosswalks

²⁰ Kowsky, Francis. "Municipal Parks and City Planning: Frederick Law Olmsted's Buffalo Park and Parkway System." *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 46. No. 1. (March 1987) Pg. 49-64.

for pedestrians to take to get into Delaware Park.

Pedestrians had to cross Parkside Avenue which was very busy with traffic and unsafe to try to cross. In an attempt to make a point, Parkside residents carried a coffin back and forth across Parkside Avenue to dramatically illustrate that someone could get hurt or killed because of how dangerous it was. Another way that the PCA fought to have a crosswalk put in was by adding a playground, the Tot-Lot, in 1976. The PCA used \$23,000 of Block Grant money to help build the playground. With the installation of the playground, the city installed a traffic signal so residents could safely get to the park. The PCA again demonstrated that they were there to fight to improve the community, and to make it a safer place for its residents.²¹



But other problems remained. During the 1980's and 1990's, cars were able drive around the circle of

²¹ Email from Ruth Lampe to Shannon Mulrain, November 5th, 2013.

Delaware Park. This was unsafe for the people using the Park, especially children. One PCA leader described how Delaware Park “was a scary place.”²² The topic over whether the circle (Ring Road) should be closed to traffic was debated amongst the public for much of the 1980’s. Some felt that it should stay open; while others thought it was too dangerous and should be closed to make Delaware Park a safer place. The PCA supported closing the circle, and involved itself in the Delaware Park Steering Committee which fought to have a portion of the circle closed. In seeking to close the circle, the PCA’s priority was to make the Park a safe place for the families and members of the community to come. Stan Buczkowski, Acting Parks Commissioner at the time, responded by partially closing the circle. This increased the safety of the Park.²³



Since 2003, the relationship between the PCA and the

²² Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

²³ Cichon, Steve. *The Complete History of Parkside, Buffalo, NY*. Buffalo, NY.: Staffannouncer.com, Pg. 158-159, 2009.

Olmsted Conservancy has been very positive. The Olmsted Conservancy helps to maintain and preserve the Parks in Buffalo. They work in partnership alongside the City of Buffalo as well as the PCA.²⁴ Both the Conservancy and the PCA have an interest in maintaining this relationship to ensure that there can be future success for the Park.



Today, Parkside residents love living near Delaware Park. Indeed, it is an important factor when people want to buy a house in the Parkside community. Dick Griffin, founder of the PCA, feels that “Delaware Park is one of the greatest assets to the City of Buffalo.”²⁵ Ruth Lampe agrees, “It’s just a joy to be in the Park now.”²⁶ The Park was originally designed by Olmsted to, “furnish much needed relief from the tedium of life in a modern industrial city.”²⁷ Today, with the constructive relationship between the PCA and the Olmsted

²⁴“Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy: The Conservancy.” Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy: The Conservancy. Web. 1 Nov. 2013.

²⁵ Interview of Richard Griffin, October 8th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

²⁶ Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

²⁷ Kowsky, Francis. Municipal Parks and City Planning: Frederick Law Olmsted’s Buffalo Park and Parkway System. *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Vol. 46. No. 1. (March 1987), Pg. 49-64.

Conservancy, Delaware Park is again fulfilling Olmsted's original vision.

4. The Darwin Martin House

The Darwin Martin House is a true Cinderella story. It went from a neglected house that was un-noticed by all, to an iconic house that is known by people all over the world. It has been an important aspect to the Parkside community, and has been something that the PCA has been invested for years.

The Darwin Martin House was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright between 1903 and 1905. Wright is a world renowned architect who is best known for Prairie style houses. His houses were not like any others at the time and in the Darwin Martin House he specifically tried to incorporate different aspects of the outdoors into his designs. The Darwin Martin House demonstrates his Prairie style houses by showing, “strong horizontal lines and planes, deeply overhanging eaves, a central hearth, prominent foundation, and a sheltering, cantilevered roof.” This design made the house like no other in the area at the time. Unfortunately, the original beauty of the Darwin Martin House was lost over time, and the house fell into disrepair.²⁸

Much like many of the other houses in the neighborhood in the 1960’s, the Darwin Martin House was in great disrepair. This was a symbol of the times, if such a historic place could fall into shambles, then the

²⁸ "Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House Complex: Learn: The Story." *Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House Complex: Learn: The Story*. Web. 10 Nov. 2013.

neighborhood must not have been too far behind. Slowly but surely, the neighborhood started to come around and be rebuilt. This is when the Martin House got the attention it so desperately needed. The Darwin Martin House was purchased by the University at Buffalo in 1967 to be used as the President's residence. The house was used by the University at Buffalo for 13 years until it no longer suited the school, and talks began of the school selling the house to the state. This is when the PCA became concerned and made their opinions known.²⁹



The PCA wanted to have a voice in what would happen to the Martin House because they felt that it was a vital part to the community. In 1980, as plans were developing to preserve the Darwin Martin House, the PCA made a concentrated effort to improve it. Members of the PCA wanted a “voice” in the process. The PCA wanted to “protect its historical value” and to “keep the house as a public and historical resource in

²⁹ Cichon, Steve. *The Complete History of Parkside, Buffalo, NY*. Buffalo, NY.: Staffannouncer.com, Pg. 160-164, 2009.

the community.”³⁰ The PCA knew the importance of the Darwin Martin House both as a historical landmark, and as an important aspect to the community.³¹

While the PCA did have some influence during the 1980's and 1990's, its real impact was felt beginning in 2000. The PCA was concerned with the amount of people that the Darwin Martin House brought into the community. With such large numbers of people coming into the area, the issue of where the Visitors' Center should be built was an important one to the PCA. Some wanted the Visitors' Center to be built off-site because of the increase in people that it would bring to the neighborhood. Members advocated for “off-site parking” to avoid the neighborhood being constantly congested with traffic.³² A letter was sent on May 5, 2000 to the President of the Martin House Restoration Corporation by the President of the PCA at the time, George Stock. In the letter, Stock expressed PCA views, “Our needs have been clear from the start. We look for off-site arrival, parking ticket sales and an aesthetically pleasing method of transfer of visitors to the site.”³³

Despite the PCA's best efforts, the center was built on site next to the Darwin Martin House. Although the

³⁰ PCA Board Reports 1963-2000, Parkside Community Association Archives.

³¹ PCA Board Reports 1963-2000, Parkside Community Association Archives.

³² Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

³³ PCA Board Reports 1963-2000, Parkside Community Association Archives.

PCA was unsuccessful in its fight to have the center built off-site, community members believe that it has “worked out well.”³⁴ The Darwin Martin House understands that it is part of a community, and that by being part of a community, there are things that it can do to try to make it work for the entire community. For example, tour busses that bring people in to view the house do not idle for more than five minutes; this is done to try to minimize congestion, and to respect the neighborhood.³⁵ Community members feel that the Darwin Martin House, “brings such positive attention to the neighborhood”³⁶ which is what the PCA had wanted from the start.

³⁴ Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

³⁵ Interview of Kathy Peterson, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

³⁶ Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon Mulrain, PCA.

5. Conclusion

The PCA has always been the driving force behind the Parkside community since it was founded in 1963. The main concern of the PCA has been to benefit the community in any way possible including fighting for them when needed. Since its founding, the PCA has grown not only in numbers, but in strength as a community organization.

Parkside is more than just a place to live—it is a place made up of many different organizations that all work together. The PCA works hard to maintain relationships with these organizations to ensure that the community is a place people want to live in. In this respect, the PCA plays an instrumental role in making Parkside a unique residential community, one that is a very desirable place to live in Buffalo.

About the PCA

The Parkside Community Association (PCA), a 501c3 not-for-profit, is the largest membership-based community association in the City of Buffalo. Founded in 1963 to fight then-prevalent racist tactics of redlining and blockbusting, it has over the years successfully implemented programs that have contributed to the security and stability of the neighborhood. The PCA prides itself on the economic and ethnic diversity of the residents.



About this Booklet

This booklet was produced as an independent study project by Shannon Mulrain, senior at Medaille College, under the guidance of Dr. Daniel Kotzin, throughout the Fall 2013 semester. We wish to thank all of the PCA members and founders who so graciously offered their time for interviews.

All photos were provided with permission by the Parkside Community Association.

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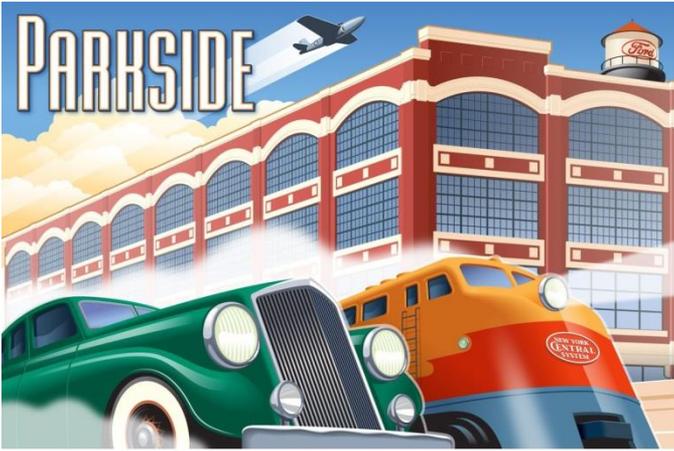
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Interviews

Interview of Richard Griffin, October 8th, 2013 by Shannon
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Interview of Ruth Lampe, October 15th, 2013 by Shannon
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