

822 Niagara Street, Johnnie Ryan Co. Bottling

Prepared by Niagara Falls Historic Preservation Commission in conjunction with the City of Niagara Falls Planning Office and City Historian, Elaine Timm. Date: 22 March 2019



I. Background Information

822 Niagara Street, known as the original Johnnie Ryan Co. Bottling Plant, was constructed c.1946 and is an excellent example of Art Moderne commercial architecture. Located on the northwest corner of Niagara and 9th Streets, the one-story bottling plant is built of buff glazed brick and concrete blocks with a flat roof. The main entrance, which faces Niagara Street is located within a one-and-one-half-story central entrance bay accented with glass-block windows and framed by vertical projections. The building's streamlined façade is further accented by horizontal bands of red glazed brick, and a curved northeast corner.

On April 26 1946, Johnnie Ryan Co. received approval to “erect and operate a bottling plant and sales room on Lots 41 and 43 on the north side of Niagara Street between Eighth and Ninth Streets”. Over the next forty years, the Johnnie Ryan Co. continued to use 822 Niagara Street as their sales and manufacturing headquarters. Most notably in 1961, they installed a new bottle washing machine “rated at 160 [bottles] a minute”, which was part of a new plant expansion and new equipment program.¹ In the early 1980s, Johnnie Ryan Co. outgrew their operations at 822 Niagara Street and relocated to 3084 Niagara Street, a former 7-UP bottling plant.

In 2008, 822 Niagara Street Holdings sold the property to Brown Bark ILP. In 2013, it was purchased by John P. Bartolomei, who in 2014 sold the property to Tumen Khishigten. In November 2015 822 Niagara Street was purchased by the current owner, MATC Inc. of Buffalo NY.

The Niagara Falls based “soda pop company”, Johnnie Ryan Co. was founded by John Janik, a Polish immigrant, along with his sons, John, Stephen, and Walter in 1934 under the name of Keystone Water Company. Soon thereafter it was changed to Extra Bottling Company and then as early as 1938 the Janiks were manufacturing their beverages under the name of Johnnie Ryan Company.² In an 1954 interview with the trade journal *American Bottler*, Walter Janik said they changed the name to Johnnie Ryan because “it sounded sporty and catchy.”³

A hometown favorite, Johnnie Ryan has produced over 20 different flavors, including the ever popular “The Original Jonnie Ryan” a lemon-lime beverage, and the “Ryan’s Old Falls Street Ginger Ale”.⁴ Along with a variety of soda pop flavors over the years, including cola, cherry, cream soda, ginger ale, orange and root beer.

¹ “Bottling Firm Installs Machine”, Niagara Falls Gazette, 1961.

² “Business Names”, Buffalo Evening News, June 17, 1938.

³ “Cornering Corner Markets”, Buffalo News, August 18, 2003.; “Johnny Ryan Dubbed Because Name Sounded Sporty, Maker Reports”, Niagara Falls Gazette, August 21, 1954.

⁴ “Cornering Corner Markets”.

Walter Janik was a prominent member of Niagara Falls society and within his industry. In the 1940s Walter served as director of the Niagara Frontier Association of Bottlers of Carbonated Beverages.⁵ In the late 1950s he served as a boxing matchmaker for the Niagara Frontier Athletic Club. In 1959 he was appointed to the Niagara Falls Advisory Board of Industrial and Convention Activities.⁶ And in 1962 Walter became Postmaster of Niagara Falls.⁷

Physical Description

822 Niagara Street, known as the Johnnie Ryan Co. Bottling Plant, was constructed c.1946 and is an excellent example of Art Moderne commercial architecture.

Located on the northwest corner of Niagara and 9th Streets, the one-story bottling plant is square in plan and constructed of concrete block with a flat roof. The primary (south) elevation as well as the east and west elevations are faced with a glazed buff brick. The main entrance is located within a one-and-one-half story central entrance bay accented with large glass-block window above the entrance, and a vertical band of glass-block windows, trimmed in red brick, on each of the vertical projects framing the entrance bay. The streamlined façade is further accented by a ribbon of fixed windows on either side of the central entrance bay, horizontal bands of red glazed brick, and a curved northeast corner. The west elevation features three square, glass-block windows with metal security grates, and an overhead garage door at the rear. The east elevation features an additional ribbon of fixed windows adjacent to the curved northeast corner, two square glass block windows with metal security grates, a side entrance way, and an overhead garage door at the rear. The north elevation, which is concrete, has three additional window openings which are currently boarded over.

One of the Modernistic styles, Art Moderne combines the sleek modernity of the International style with Art Deco style ornament. Often called streamlined modern, Art Moderne was not only inspired by the previous modernistic forms, but also found inspiration from the beginning of the streamlined industrial design for ships, airplanes, and automobiles that was developing in the early 1930s. The incorporation of smooth surfaces, curved corners, and horizontal emphasis suggest that “air streams” would move smoothly over Art Moderne styled buildings.

The Modernist styles were nationally popular from about 1920-1940 with Art Moderne succeeding as the predominate modernistic form by the 1930s. While nationally the frequency of the style ebbed by the 1940s, locally there continued to be examples of and influenced by these styles. That was in part due to the fact of Niagara Falls’ continued residential and industrial developments. The 1920s saw the beginning development of the DeVeaux neighborhood and the annexation of the LaSalle neighborhood into the city limits. A continued prosperity and expansion that extended through the 1940s and 1950s, especially in regard to industry and manufacturing as the economy benefited from the

⁵ “Bottlers Here”, The Niagara Falls Gazette, May 16, 1946.

⁶ “Janik Fills Board Post”, Niagara Falls Gazette, April 14, 1959.

⁷ “Walter J. Janik New Postmaster at Niagara Falls”, Union-Sun & Journal, February 6, 1962.

lifting of the restrictive measures on the amount of water diverted from Upper Niagara during WWII.

While there are several examples of neighborhood commercial structures which drew inspiration from streamlined modern elements, including the one-story commercial structure of c.1950 at 820 Cedar Avenue and the former Board of Education Administration Annex of 1937 at 606 Sixth Street, ***there only two Art Moderne style buildings in Niagara Falls: the former Niagara Milk Cooperative c.1948 at 8450 Buffalo Avenue, and the former Johnnie Ryan Co. Bottling Plant of c.1946 at 822 Niagara Street.***

Legal Description

SBL# 159.30-3-46.1

All That Tract of Parcel of Land, situate in the City of Niagara Falls, County of Niagara and State of New York, bounded and described as follows:

Beginning at a point which is the intersection of the north line of Niagara Street (66 feet wide) with the west line of Ninth Street (66 feet wide), said point being marked by a drill hole; thence westerly, along the north line of Niagara Street, 132 feet to the southeast corner of a 16.5 foot wide unnamed alley; thence (1) northerly along the east line of said alley, 165 feet to a point; thence (2) easterly a distance of 132 feet to the westerly line of Ninth Street; thence (3) southerly along the west line of Ninth Street, a distance of 165 to the point and place of beginning.⁸ⁱ

Existing Conditions

Per Matthew P. Moscait, AIA, OAA, NCARB, LEED AP, CBCP

“The building is a masonry building with a steel joist roof structure. The interior finishes are substantially removed with only plaster walls and ceiling remaining in about 30% of the square footage. The limited windows are in the front facade and are either glass block or single pane mix of glass and plastic. Over the decades water has rusted the steel roof structure and the plaster is failing in many locations. All utilities to the building have been cut and capped. The roof is substantially compromised with water actively entering the building, created by the abatement procedure. There are non code compliant single occupant lavatories. The building is substantially non compliant with the current energy code as it has little to no insulation. There is no heating or cooling system. The electrical distribution system is non code compliant and minimal for security purposes only. To summarize it needs a new mechanical system, electrical system, and plumbing system. The envelope of the building would need to be substantially repaired and improved to make it weather tight, and the envelope would have to be redesigned and reconstructed to add the requisite insulation, vapor barrier and air barrier to be brought to current standards.

⁸ Niagara Co., NY Deed 2015-21024, Tumen Khishigsten LLC to MATC, Inc, 30 November 2015

The building is sited with the main front door facing south out to a sidewalk and street with no on street parking. The primary entrance is non handicap accessible and the existing first floor interior has multiple elevations of which only one is handicap accessible. Parking is to the north side which is the rear of the building with no entrance until one circulates to the side. The north side of the building houses an unfinished warehouse space. The south side houses an entrance foyer and entrance reception space with a room flanking the center entrance to the east and to the west.

The building has a small second floor which is non handicap accessible as the building has no interior ramps nor elevator.”⁹

Zoning

The property is situated, per Schedule 8: Official Zoning Map, in a D1-B Downtown Zoning District. Located in the Core City, the City Comprehensive Plan supports the development of the Niagara Street Precinct into a vibrant, mixed-use commercial and residential “main street” with significant food and beverage uses to attract residents and visitors throughout the year.

Ownership and Occupancy

The property is owned by owned by MATC INC and is currently vacant.

Local Planning Issues

Located in the Core City, the City Comprehensive Plan supports the development the Niagara Street Precinct into a vibrant, mixed-use commercial and residential “main street” with significant food and beverage uses to attract residents and visitors throughout the year. These development goals are not speculative. Already, the Montante Group is redeveloping 25,000 sq ft at the corner of 7th and Niagara Streets into 17 market-rate apartments and ground floor commercial use at the cost of over 5 million dollars. Savarvino Group is redeveloping three buildings at 324 Niagara Street into restaurant operations for Community Beer Works in addition to residential units.

Within ten years, the City generally, and the South End specifically, will be dramatically changed through the successful execution of seven ‘Big Moves’ by the City and the State—the reconfiguration of the Robert Moses Parkway; extensive public realm investments in the Central Tourist District; the establishment of new mixed-use attractions in the Cultural District; and the repositioning of Niagara Street as a high-value mixed-use shopping area; the creation of a new neighborhood adjacent John B. Daly Boulevard (North); and the introduction of a series of innovative heritage preservation and neighborhood housing renewal programs.

⁹ Matthew P. Moscati, personal communication, 30 March 2019

As it stands now, the South End is struggling to hang on due to many interrelated legacy circumstances. High among them and somewhat unique to emerging urban centers, is the lack of residential options for those working in and around Downtown. It is a neighborhood that exhibits high levels of extreme-affordability due to an over-supply of low-quality, blighted housing, which has created a cultural and housing mismatch between those people who choose to work here but can't choose to live here. Worker housing does not exist in sufficient supply, and those that live here can't afford to live somewhere else.

Despite successful business development efforts, substantial economic development projects and a growing number of employment opportunities, it is still a place that is suffering from its past social and economic misfortunes. The future vision must put people first. Envisioning more people choosing to work, to recreate, and also to live—in this downtown neighborhood—is where the vision of a transformed place begins—and it is a vision that is already taken hold and is being worked slowly and incrementally, but the effort at transforming this place can be much more robust. It should be dynamic if it is to be transformational for the City and for the prospect of transforming other core city neighborhoods to the east and to the north.

II. Significance of the Property

Historical / Architectural Significance

The Johnnie Ryan Co. Bottling building is representative of the Art Moderne architecture. Art Moderne combines the sleek modernity of the International style with Art Deco style ornament. This is one of just two Art Moderne buildings within the municipal boundaries of Niagara Falls.

Relationship of Property to Criteria

The Johnnie Ryan Co Bottling plan appears to meet a number of the criteria of the enabling ordinance and is therefore eligible for landmark designation:

| Criteria For Landmark Designation | Relevance to Application |
|---|--|
| <i>Is associated with the life of an individual, or a group of people, or events significant in the national, state or local history</i> | Associated with the Johnnie Ryan Soda founded by John Janik in 1934 |
| <i>Embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural style, a period, or a method of construction</i> | Art Moderne style: one of two left in Niagara Falls |
| <i>Represents the work of an acclaimed builder, architect, designer, or landscape architect</i> | N/A |
| <i>Represents a significant or distinguished entity but whose physical components may otherwise lack individual or special distinction</i> | N/A |
| <i>Because of unique location or singular physical characteristic, represent an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood</i> | Represents established and familiar feature as the gateway of the Downtown Business District |
| <i>Site contains a significant historical or cultural association, such as a settlement, battlefield, cemetery, church, birthplace, or former transportation facility</i> | N/A |
| <i>Site may yield information important to area history or provide scientific value due to an archaeological, paleontological, botanical or geological resource</i> | N/A |

III. Recommendations

A local landmark designation would help protect the structure by requiring the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness or Economic Hardship by the Historic Preservation Commission for any alteration to those parts of the building which have been designated.

As a private apartment building the interior of the building is not eligible for a landmark designation. However, efforts should be made to preserve the interior lobby.

A local landmark designation would further facilitate the building obtaining a National Register listing, and potentially obtaining historic preservation tax credits.

This report recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission forward a recommendation to City Council that the building exterior be designated as a landmark.

IV. Certificate of Appropriateness Review Standards

The following standards shall apply:

1. Exterior features/elements of the landmark shall be preserved.
2. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged. Ordinary maintenance and repair of any architectural feature which does not involve a change in design, material, color or outward appearance shall not require a Certificate of Appropriateness.
3. Surface cleaning of a landmark shall be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
4. Additions shall not destroy significant exterior architectural features and shall not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment. Additions should be done in a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark should be unimpaired.