

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

LOCATION

The Town of Amherst lies in northern Erie County, New York. It is bordered by Niagara County to the north, the Erie County towns of Clarence to the east, Cheektowaga to the south, and Tonawanda to the west. The total area of Amherst is approximately 53 square miles.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The natural environmental setting influenced prehistoric and historic settlement patterns in the Town of Amherst. The town lies within the Erie-Ontario Lake Plain physiographic province, described as a nearly level lowland plain with few prominent topographic features. The area is underlain by Onondaga limestone dating to the Late Devonian period. Later glaciations shaped much of the western New York topography, including that of Amherst. One of the most prominent topographic features in the relatively featureless province is the Onondaga Escarpment, an east-west trending hard limestone bedrock formation that lies in the southern portion of the Town of Amherst. The Onondaga Escarpment proved resistant to the effects of glacial scouring and it forms the southern boundary of a large basin once occupied by the shallow glacial Lake Tonawanda. Lake Tonawanda eventually receded leaving behind wetlands and deposits of clay and sand throughout much of northern Amherst (Owens et al. 1986:2).

The most important drainages in the Town of Amherst are Tonawanda Creek, Ransom Creek, and Ellicott Creek. Tonawanda Creek forms the northern boundary between Amherst and Niagara County. It flows in a western direction and drains much of the eastern and Northern portions of Amherst. Portions of Tonawanda Creek are channelized as part of the New York State Barge Canal. Ransom Creek also drains the eastern part of Amherst and is a tributary of Tonawanda Creek. Ellicott Creek is one of the largest creeks in the region, draining much the glacial Lake Tonawanda basin. It crosses over the Onondaga Escarpment in the southern portion of Amherst at Williamsville, flows in a north-western direction through the town, and is a major tributary of Tonawanda Creek.

The last glacial ice sheets retreated from the area about 13,000 years ago. Vegetation returned including large grassy areas, spruce trees, and other tundra species. Spruce-Pine forests dominated the region about 10,000 years ago while tree types like oak, sugar maple, elm, and ash were moving up from the south. The climate in western New York gradually became warmer and from about 10,000 years ago to just prior to European settlement, the natural landscape changed to a Beech-Maple forest that dominated the poorly drained portions of the Lake Tonawanda plain, including much of northern Amherst. Oak, chestnut, ash and pine occurred in greater numbers in well-drained areas such as the escarpment, in southern Amherst (Miller 1973:15).

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the natural environment of Amherst was altered by activities that included logging, agriculture and, later, commercial and residential development. Today, the northern portion of Amherst is typified by suburban development. A few scattered farms still exist near the northern border of the town. The southern portion of Amherst has been largely urbanized and suburbanized, especially since the beginning of the 20th century.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The information for this section was derived from *Reports of the Archaeological Survey* and from the texts of early researchers of the region (Reports of the Archaeological Survey, Beauchamp 1900, Parker 1920, Houghton 1909).

The earliest inhabitants of western New York arrived in the region about 12,000 years ago, shortly after the last glacial ice retreated. Small highly mobile bands of Paleo-Indians hunted big game like mastodon and caribou and utilized the excellent chert found in the Onondaga Escarpment. Archaeological excavations at and near the escarpment have uncovered their stone tools and projectile points. Typical archaeological sites associated with Paleo-Indians include short-term hunting camps and workshops, sites where the prehistoric people manufactured their stone tools. The escarpment and large drainages near the escarpment are particularly sensitive to these site types.

Little is known about the Archaic people who inhabited the region between 10,000 and 3,500 years ago. They probably consisted of small semi-nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers who migrated to western New York from southern areas of the United States. Archaeological evidence suggests that western New York's population density was higher than in the Paleo-Indian phase. The inhabitants became increasingly sedentary in the Late Archaic period. They began occupying year-round camps and may have developed some agricultural practices.

The introduction of pottery in western New York marks the Early Woodland Period, from 3,500 years ago to 2,000 years ago. Archaeological evidence points to continued hunting-gathering and more extensive burial ceremonialism. Settlement size increased and appears to have been more permanent as the Middle Woodland Period began. Pottery became more elaborate. The Late Woodland Period began about 1,000 years ago and is distinguished from earlier periods by evidence of cultivation of corn, beans, and squash. Larger populations resided in semi-permanent villages. The political and social development of the region's Iroquoian tribes occurred during this period. The Contact Period began when the first European explorers arrived in western New York, around 400 years ago, and lasted until the beginning of European settlement in western New York, about 200 years ago. The Contact Period saw indigenous peoples increasingly influenced by European trade goods and culture.

Numerous pre-contact archaeological sites have been recorded in Amherst (Reports of the Archaeological Survey). The known sites provide evidence of archaeological

sensitivity, especially along elevated areas such as Chestnut Ridge, the Onondaga Escarpment, and in well-drained areas adjacent to major drainages like Ellicott Creek, Tonawanda Creek, and Ransom Creek. Most sites were documented by cultural resource investigations while a few were documented by early investigators of the region, local informants like farmers, or as incidental finds during construction projects.

Sites yielding temporally diagnostic information are comparatively few in number. Lithic scatters or workshops are the most common site type found in Amherst, the latter referring to densedebitage deposits associated with the processing of chert resources. A particularly informative site is a large quarry that yielded finds dating from the Early Archaic period and later culture periods. Other previously recorded sites include small quarries, an atypical site type but one that reflects the intensive use of the high quality chert outcrops along the Onondaga Escarpment face.

A few camps are also characterized as workshops, providing further evidence of the use of chert resources. Other camps represent short-term habitation sites while a village sites appears to have been long-term. However, most previously recorded sites appear to have been ephemeral in nature. Several sites are described as stray finds and traces of occupation, lacking detailed information. Some previously recorded prehistoric sites also have historic components. Sites yielded finds dating to the Archaic through the Woodland Periods. Taken together, they indicate a continuous use of the Onondaga Escarpment and its chert resources throughout much of prehistory.

There is a moderate sensitivity for habitation sites such as short-term camps and a low sensitivity for long term occupations such as villages. Most known examples of these site types are located along drainages below the escarpment, generally north of Main Street. Settings south of Main Street and above the escarpment have fewer drainages. Quarries are expected to occur along the escarpment face. Many workshops (i.e. dense lithic scatters) would be expected to occur there as well, but may also occur in areas both above and below the steep slopes of the escarpment, including along Main Street. Pre-contact burials are not expected as most of this site type occurs in association with large habitation sites.

Iroquoian-speaking Wenro, Neutral, and Erie nations occupied western New York in the 17th century, when European missionaries, traders, and soldiers arrived in the Great Lakes region. Widespread epidemics and wars followed the introduction of European diseases and the fur trade. The competition between the English and French fur traders for the privilege of doing business with the various tribes made the trapping of beaver a lucrative occupation for Native Americans (White 1991:23).

The Iroquois Confederacy, a defense league of nations whose combined territory in the early part of the 17th century stretched from the Mohawk River Valley west through the Finger Lakes to the Genesee River in central New York, saw its population diminish due to its proximity to the Europeans and their diseases. They also hunted beaver in their territory to near extinction in order to acquire European goods. The Iroquois then turned their attention to the west and the rich Ohio River Valley (White 1991:1).

The Seneca were the westernmost nation of the Iroquois Confederacy. They attacked and defeated, adopted or drove into exile most of the people in western New York, western Pennsylvania, and the Ohio River Valley by the middle of the 17th century, including the Erie, Wenro, and Neutral nations (White 1991:1). Western New York became the fur-trapping and winter hunting grounds of the Seneca until the end of the 18th Century when other wars and treaties reshaped the region's political and social landscape (Karas 1963:11).

The French were the dominant European power in the Great Lakes region before 1763, the year the French and Indian War began. Political and military power in the region shifted to the British after their victory in that war. The Iroquois generally sided with the English in the struggle for domination of the fur trade in the 17th and 18th centuries. Most of the Confederacy swore allegiance to the British during the American Revolutionary War. Their involvement in several notorious massacres on the frontier resulted in the Sullivan Campaign of 1779. Dozens of Seneca settlements were burned. Many Seneca fled west to the Buffalo area, Fort Niagara, and Canada while others made their way south along the Allegheny River (Congdon 1940:622-623).

The Seneca nation made peace with the new United States of America in 1784, when they signed the Treaty of Fort Stanwix (Laux 1960: 3). New York and Massachusetts settled their claims to preemption rights in western New York with New York gaining legal jurisdiction and Massachusetts gaining the right to purchase from the Seneca. Massachusetts sold that right to Phelps & Gorham. The speculators went bankrupt and sold the rights back to Massachusetts; who in turn sold them to Robert Morris. He soon lost all of his money in land speculation and sold to the Holland Land Company, organized by Dutch bankers in 1797, just before he went off to debtor's prison. In the early republican period it was not uncommon for men like Morris and Phelps & Gorham to become rich and then quickly lose everything in volatile and frenzied land speculations (Bingham 1931:145).

The Senecas gave up title to most of western New York, including the area that would become the Town of Amherst, at the signing of the Big Tree Treaty in 1797. Joseph Ellicott, an agent for the Dutch bankers, began surveying the area in the same year. The Dutch company developed its holdings, planned town sites, and sold the lands on liberal terms directly to settlers (Thompson 1984:1-15). The earliest settlement in the Town of Amherst began in 1799 when the Holland Land Company sold three hundred acres of land to John Thomson and Benjamin Ellicott, brother of Joseph Ellicott. This purchase included mill privileges in what is the present Village of Williamsville (Smith 1884:397).

The Holland Land Company realized that the key to increased land sales and settlement was construction and improvement of the primitive transportation system that existed in western New York at the end of the 18th century. Many early settlers in western New York had trouble making their mortgage payments, often because of the high cost of transporting their goods to distant markets on roads in typically very poor condition. Joseph Ellicott allowed farmers to work off a portion of their debts by maintaining and

improving the roads that were so critical to development (Koszuta 1969: 44; White 1898:366).

A pre-contact Native American path called the Great Central Trail or the Great Iroquois Trail existed roughly on the same alignment as the current Main Street (NY Route 5). It was surveyed by the Holland Land Company in 1798 and became known as the Buffalo Road, serving as the principle route between Buffalo, Williamsville, and settlements to the east, including the Holland Land Office at Batavia. To spur settlement of the region, the Holland Land Company granted lots to anyone who would build a tavern along the Buffalo Road. Elias Ransom accepted the offer and, by 1808, built a log tavern near Bailey Avenue, in the southwestern corner of the town. Other private homes had been used off and on as "inns", most notably the first house built in the town around 1799 on the site of the Evans house in Williamsville (Young 1965:9-12).

By the 1810s the Buffalo Road was cleared to a width of eight feet, good enough for ox-carts and wagons. Most of the early settlement of Amherst occurred in the southern portion of the town, especially along Buffalo Road (Koszuta 1969: 44). Main Street was declared a public highway in 1826. The condition of the road improved when the Buffalo and Williamsville Macadam Road Co. was contracted to build a macadam road on Main Street in 1837 (Bureau of Engineering 1896). Transit Road was cleared and partially improved by the early 1800s; it served as an important north-south route for the region (Smith 1884, I: 77).

The Town of Amherst figured prominently in the War of 1812 because of the town's proximity to fighting on the Niagara Frontier and the strategically important Buffalo Road. Garrison Road is named for the soldiers' barracks that were erected in 1812 near Main Street and Garrison Road in Williamsville. The buildings were converted to a hospital in 1813 to care for over one thousand sick and wounded soldiers and prisoners. In 1814, more than 5,000 soldiers were quartered in Williamsville (Young 1965:16-17).

By 1818, the Town of Amherst had sufficient population to break away from the Town of Clarence, which had formed in 1808. The new government consisted of a town supervisor, a town board, and departments of tax assessment, highways, public welfare, peacekeeping, and education. Timothy Hopkins was elected first town supervisor in 1819 (White 1898:495).

Settlement in Amherst expanded rapidly with the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, a portion of which lies within Tonawanda Creek at the northern end of Amherst. The canal brought development and settlers in large numbers to northern Amherst. In the 1830s and 1840s much of the town was cleared and farmed. Many of the earliest settlers in Amherst arrived from New England and Pennsylvania. French and German immigrants arrived to settle in the northern part of the town, especially near the Erie Canal and along Ellicott Creek, between Sweet Home Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard.

Hamlets typically sprang up around crossroads, post offices, mills, and stores and were often named after local prominent landowners or businessmen. Examples in Amherst

included Snyderville, Getzville, Eggertsville, Swormville, and Millersport (formerly Mill Port). Small, one-room schoolhouses and churches were erected anywhere a sufficient concentration of population could support them, usually soon after the first settlers had established themselves. Schoolhouses were typically erected on donated land. More substantial brick schoolhouses were built to replace wood plank or log structures. In the 1850s Roman Catholic, Baptist, Mennonite, Lutheran, and Methodist churches could be found in the town, mostly along Main Street.

By the middle of the nineteenth-century significant developments were occurring in local transportation, agriculture, and in industries like quarrying limestone, cement production, saw milling, and grist milling (Young 1965: 35-36). Main Street was a macadamized toll road by 1840. Daily stagecoaches and large freight wagons passing through Amherst on their way to and from Buffalo often stopped at Williamsville (Young 1965: 39-40). The heavy traffic on Main Street also influenced the growth of hamlets like Snyderville and Eggertsville.

Canal boats, stagecoaches, and trains passed through Amherst from Buffalo to Batavia, Rochester, and points east on Tonawanda Creek, the Erie Canal, and Main Street. The routes that they travelled on were the most important thoroughfares in the region in the 1800s. Tonawanda Creek and the Erie Canal form the northern boundary of Amherst and were channelized and enlarged a number of times to accommodate increasingly heavier boat traffic. The last major upgrade to the canal system took place in the 1910s when the Erie Canal and portions of Tonawanda Creek were enlarged, rerouted, and renamed the New York State Barge Canal. However, the advent of railroading in western New York in the 1850s marked the beginning of the end for the canal. Areas along the canal like Pickard's Bridge began to decline while areas near the new railroads like Getzville began to see increased development.

The railroad arrived in Amherst in 1854 with the completion of the Canandaigua and Niagara Falls Railroad through the center of town. By 1858 it was operated by the New York Central Railroad. The single track line was referred to as the "Peanut Line" because of its narrow gauge tracks but it spurred the development of hamlets like Getzville and Transit Station. The Lehigh Valley Railroad Company built another railroad through the town in 1896. It passed through Williamsville and crossed the town from Depew to Tonawanda. Both railroads are no longer in operation (Young 1965).

Agriculture was an important occupation in all of Amherst in the 1800s. Truck farming and general farming, including the raising of oats and wheat, fruit, and dairying, were practiced (White 1898:494). The 1868 draining of the swampy land in the northern half of the town is attributed to funding from the state and local taxes (Smith 1884, I:411). German immigrants farmed the newly reclaimed loamy soil. Most of the agricultural production of Amherst was marketed in Williamsville, Tonawanda, and Buffalo (Smith 1884, I:400).

The earliest settlers of Amherst recognized that the area around Main Street and Ellicott Creek in Williamsville was an excellent site for water powered mills. By the 1850s,

saw and grist mills lined Ellicott Creek, especially in Williamsville near Main Street, where the creek falls over the Onondaga Escarpment (Young 1965:40). Another early mill site was located on Ellicott Creek near the intersection of Millersport Highway and North Forest Road. A saw mill and a grist mill were in operation there throughout the 19th century. Other mills in Amherst were powered by water springs, gas, or steam engines (Young 1965:170).

Other industrial development in the town in the 1800s included limestone quarrying and cement production, especially wherever the escarpment came close to the surface of the ground. Important quarries and kilns existed near the intersection of Main Street and I-290 Expressway and Youngs Road at Sheridan Drive (White 1898:494). In Williamsville, other industries included a broom factory, tannery, brewery, forge, hub and spoke factory, planning mills, and a gelatin factory (White 1898:496).

In the 1860s, the hamlet of Snyderville was growing at the intersection of Main Street and Harlem Road and Eggertsville was concentrating at the intersection of Main Street and Eggert Road. Snyderville was named for Michael Snyder, a prominent local merchant and postmaster. The hamlet of Eggertsville was named for the Eggert family who were prominent in Erie County (White 1898: 495-496). By the mid-1800s both hamlets had the typical cluster of residences, blacksmith shops, taverns, small schools, general stores, and churches at their main intersections (Young 1965:53-78).

By the 1890s, increases in urban population and improved modes of transportation, including the Buffalo and Williamsville Electric Railway trolley system built along Main Street in 1893, spurred the growth of suburban residential neighborhoods away from the centers of Buffalo and Williamsville and into formerly rural areas (White 1898:498, Young 1965:186-189). The trolley was extended to Transit Road by 1903. By the 1910s population pressures from Buffalo and Williamsville were having an effect on the town, especially along Main Street. Many of the old farmsteads in that area were subdivided for the creation of large estates for wealthy businessmen and a few residential subdivisions for middle class families. New fire companies, schools, and churches followed the population out of urban areas and into the new suburbs.

Before the 1920s The Town of Amherst was primarily an agricultural town, with Buffalo and Williamsville as markets (Burdis 1968:19). The hamlets of Eggertsville and Snyderville were altered early in the twentieth century through fires and development. Auto repair shops and filling stations replaced the nineteenth-century wagon and blacksmith shops. The Country Club of Buffalo, currently Grover Cleveland Golf Course, moved to Amherst from Buffalo in 1903 to serve the wealthier of the new residents. Examples of early suburban neighborhoods that were started before 1920 include Rosedale Park, Amherst Estates, College Hill, and Aurora Park.

By the 1920s the use of electric street cars began to decline and automobiles and buses became the dominant form of transportation on a widened Main Street (Young 1965:189). The rate of suburbanization in Amherst, especially areas adjacent to Main Street, was accelerating as well, due in part to the increasing popularity of the automobile.

Along Main Street, real estate entrepreneurs subdivided most of the remaining farms and the large estates associated with the first phase of suburbanization. To entice buyers, developers repaved Main Street, built several demonstration homes and real estate offices, laid utility lines and sidewalks, and constructed many of the subdivision entrance structures that are found along Main Street today.

Many of the fire companies, schools, churches, and commercial buildings that were constructed during the first phase of suburban development were replaced in the 1920s and 1930s with larger buildings to meet the needs of a new surge in population in the area. The Amherst Central School District was formed in 1930. New and larger schools built on Main Street included Sacred Heart Academy and Amherst Central High School. Most of the 19th century schoolhouses were demolished or moved to the Amherst Museum. Generally, the size of residential building lots and the houses built on them after the 1920s were more modest than in previous years.

By the end of the 1930s, increased consumer demand for single family homes and suburban living drove improvements to and construction of major roads like Main Street, Sheridan Drive, and Millersport Highway. This opened up the formerly rural center of the town to new development (Burdis 1968:10). In the pre-war years, home buyers often dealt with numerous housing agents in order to get their home built, including plumbers, carpenters, landscapers, and electricians. After World War II, most developers acted as the agent for all of the home buyer's needs, overseeing all aspects of construction (Bain 1974:266).

After World War II major transportation projects spurred the transformation of a once-rural town into a largely suburban one. The widening of formerly two-lane roads like Maple Road, and the construction of highways like I-290 in 1963 and I-990 in the 1980s made it easier to access the northern half of the town, and opened up these areas to residential and commercial development.

Following national trends after World War II, housing construction was resurgent starting in the southern half of the town but eventually moving north. The Eggertsville-Snyder-Williamsville corridor underwent new changes with the commercialization of major intersections. The Williamsville Central School District was formed in 1948 and the Sweet Home Central School District was formed in 1950 to meet the needs of a growing population (Youngs 1965:108). Between 1930 and 1950, the population of Amherst outside of Williamsville had increased dramatically from about 10,000 to about 72,000 (Burdis 1968:9). This growth led to new thinking in housing. The town board approved the first apartment complex for Amherst in 1941 over the opposition of many of the neighboring property owners. The 3901 Main Street Corporation included local investors who wanted to cash in on the popularity that Amherst had gained as a residential community (Bain 1974:266).

The population of Amherst grew by 30,000 in the 1950s (Bain 1974:265). Regional population growth, high savings rates, federal mortgage help, and access to the automobile drove the upward trend toward the suburbs (Bain 1974:267). As a result, there was a

growing need for additional housing, commercial buildings, and infrastructure. Amherst evolved into primarily a bedroom community of Buffalo; most residents worked elsewhere in the region but shopped and lived in Amherst. Along with residential neighborhoods, Amherst became the home of University Plaza in the late 1940s and the Northtown and Sheridan-Harlem plazas in the late 1950s (Burdis 1968:19-21).

The construction of the University at Buffalo's North Campus was a major development in the late 1960s that reshaped the central portion of the town from a rural to a suburban landscape. Only a few farms remain in the highly-suburbanized town and they are restricted almost entirely to the northern half of Amherst. The types of industry that shaped Amherst in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries has given way to residential development, light industry, research and education (Young 1965:179).

HISTORIC MAP ANALYSIS

A number of historic maps show water and landscape features, buildings, property boundaries, road alignments, and development trends in the town. Maps generated between 1804 and 1965 were consulted for this study, including the 1804 Ellicott *Map of Morris' Purchase or West Genesee in the State of New York* (Figure 1), 1829 Burr *Map of the County Erie* (Figure 2), 1854 Geil *Map of Erie County* (Figure 3), 1866 Stone and Stewart *New Topographical Atlas of Erie County* (Figures 4a and 4b), the 1893 Hopkins *Atlas of the Vicinities of the Cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda and Buffalo, New York* (Figure 5), 1901-1905 United States Geological Survey 15 Minute Quadrangles (Figure 6), 1909 New Century *Atlas Map of Erie County* (Figures 7a and 7b), the 1915 Century *Atlas The New Century Atlas of Buffalo*, Vol. 3 (Figures 8a, 8b, and 8c), 1948 United States Geological Survey 15 Minute Quadrangles (Figure 9), and 1965 United States Geological Survey 7.5 Minute Quadrangles (Figure 10). The 1923, 1932 and 1932 revised to 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for the towns of Eggertsville-Snyder were also consulted, as was the 1972 *Community Development Plan* for Amherst, NY.

The 1804 Ellicott *Map of Morris' Purchase or West Genesee in the State of New York* was produced shortly after the Holland Land Company purchased Robert Morris' tracts in western New York (Figure 1). The region was sparsely settled but several developments in the Town of Amherst were important enough to be described on the map. The current Main Street (NY Route 5) was called Buffalo Road in the early 1800s and it was the most important thoroughfare in the region at the time. It lies in the southern section of Amherst. Development is noted at the intersection of Ellicott Creek with Main Street, at Williamsville. An "Indian Trail" is shown running from the Williamsville area into Buffalo, south of Main Street. Apparently, this path was not improved for a road because it is not depicted on later maps. Transit Road is the only other developed road depicted on the map.

The 1829 Burr *Map of the County Erie* was created a few years after the Erie Canal was opened (Figure 2). This map is more detailed and shows the Holland Land Company's original lots and several roads. The southern section of the town has smaller lots, suggesting a higher degree of development and interest in that area. The central portion of the town and much of the northern section is depicted as being covered with swamps,

which would have deterred heavy development of those sections. The swamps existed until the late 1860s when state funding was made available to drain them for agriculture.

Besides the roads mentioned in the discussion of the 1804 map, roads that were built or improved before 1829 include Tonawanda Creek Road, North Forest Road, the part of Millersport Road between Getzville Road and Ellicott Creek, Getzville Road, Indian Trail Road, Dodge Road between Transit Road and Ransom Creek, and North Ellicott Creek Road. Other minor roads probably existed in the town but the areas near the roads depicted were almost certainly being settled more densely than areas in the town without depicted roads.

Settlements are shown on the 1829 map at the current locations of Williamsville and an area just south of Pendleton and Tonawanda Creek that was referred to on the map as "Niagara". Later maps show that "Niagara" did not develop into a substantial settlement. Saw mills and flour mills were located at the intersection of Getzville Road and Main Street. Ellicott Creek was used to power mills near where the creek intersects with the current Millersport Highway, Main Street, and near Indian Trail Road.

The 1854 Geil *Map of Erie County* is the first map available to show individual properties and property owner names (Figure 3). In the mid-1800s, hamlets sprang up where major roads intersected with other major roads, where bridges spanned the Erie Canal or large streams, and where the railroad intersected with roads. Eggertsville, Snyder, Williamsville, Getzville, and Pickard's Bridge are examples. By 1854, the settlement density associated with the town's agricultural, pre-suburban era was fairly established and developed at a modest pace. The network of roads during this era was fairly established as well with only about ten new roads laid out between the 1850s and 1890s (Figure 2-5).

The 1893 *Atlas of the Vicinities of the Cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda and Buffalo, New York* is the first map to show the beginnings of suburban development in the town, especially along Main Street near the Buffalo-Amherst boundary (Figure 5). The early twentieth-century historic maps show an Amherst that was shifting away from its agricultural past to a new role as a bedroom community of Buffalo (Figures 6, 7a,b and 8a,b,c). Many of the large farm lots in the southern part of the town are shown to be broken up into smaller residential lots. Farm buildings and fields disappeared as developers created a new suburban context. At the same time, the northern and central parts of Amherst remained virtually unchanged.

The post-World War II population explosion in Amherst is illustrated well on the 1948 and 1965 USGS maps (Figure 8 and 9), the 1950 Sanborn Map and the 1972 *Community Development Plan*. The general trend of development is shown to have been moving north between the 1940s and 1960s. Major road projects like the improvement of Millersport Highway and Sheridan Drive and the construction of I-90 and I-290 brought residential development into the interior of the town and foreshadowed the coming residential development of the few remaining rural areas in the northern part of the town.

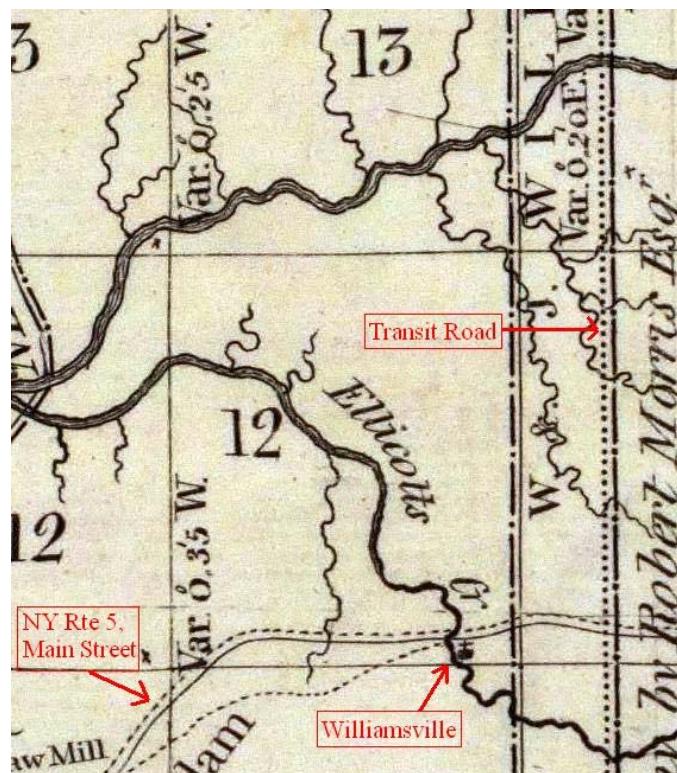


Figure 1. The Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1804 *Map of Morris' Purchase or West Genesee in the State of New York* (Ellicott 1804).

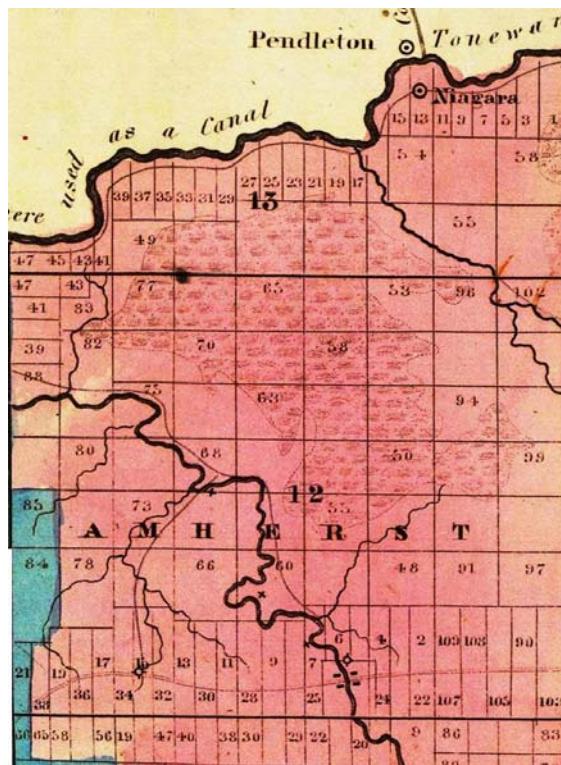


Figure 2. The Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1829 *Map of the County of Erie County* (Burr 1829)

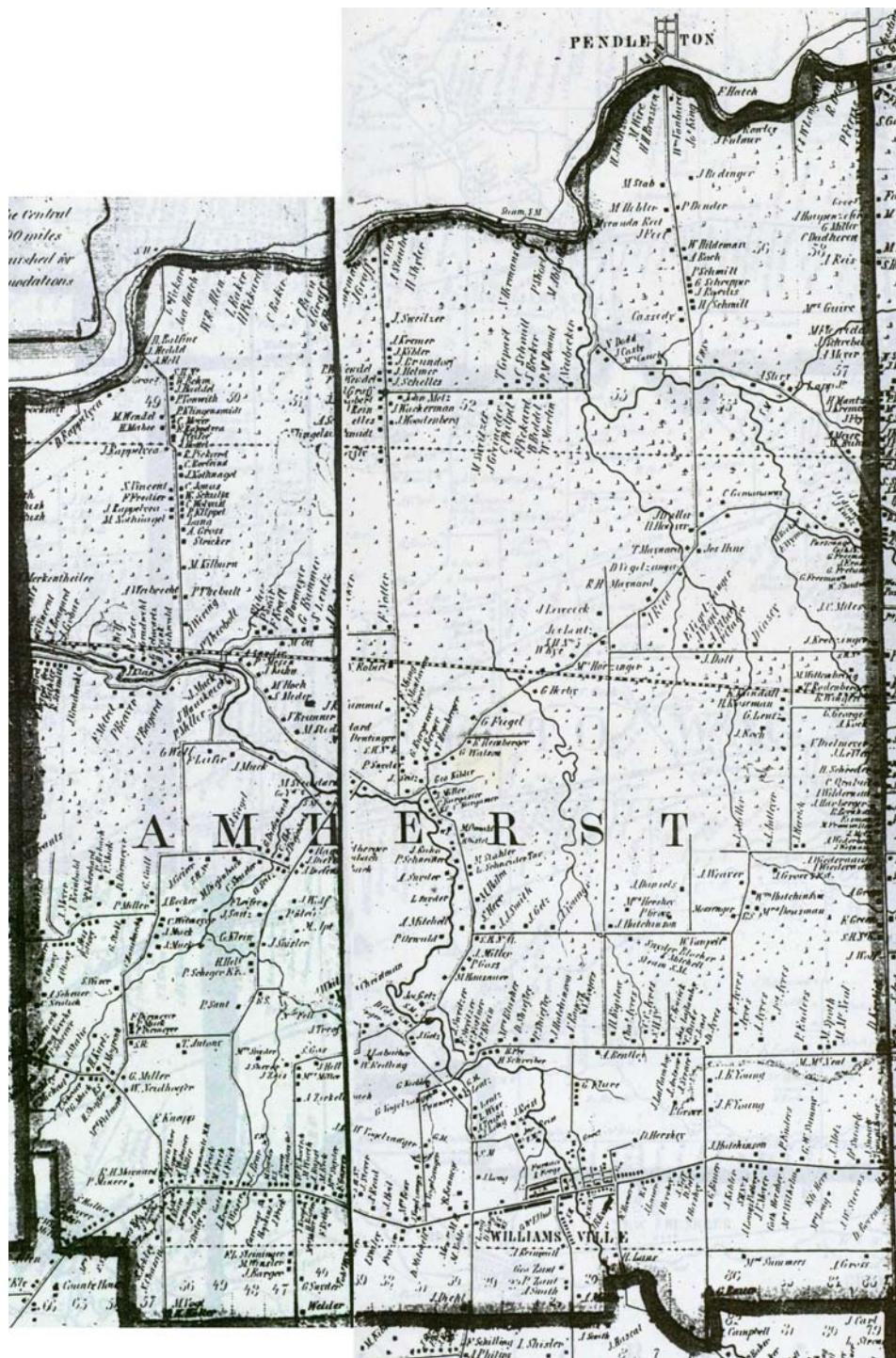


Figure 3. The Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1854 *Map of Erie County* (Geil 1854).

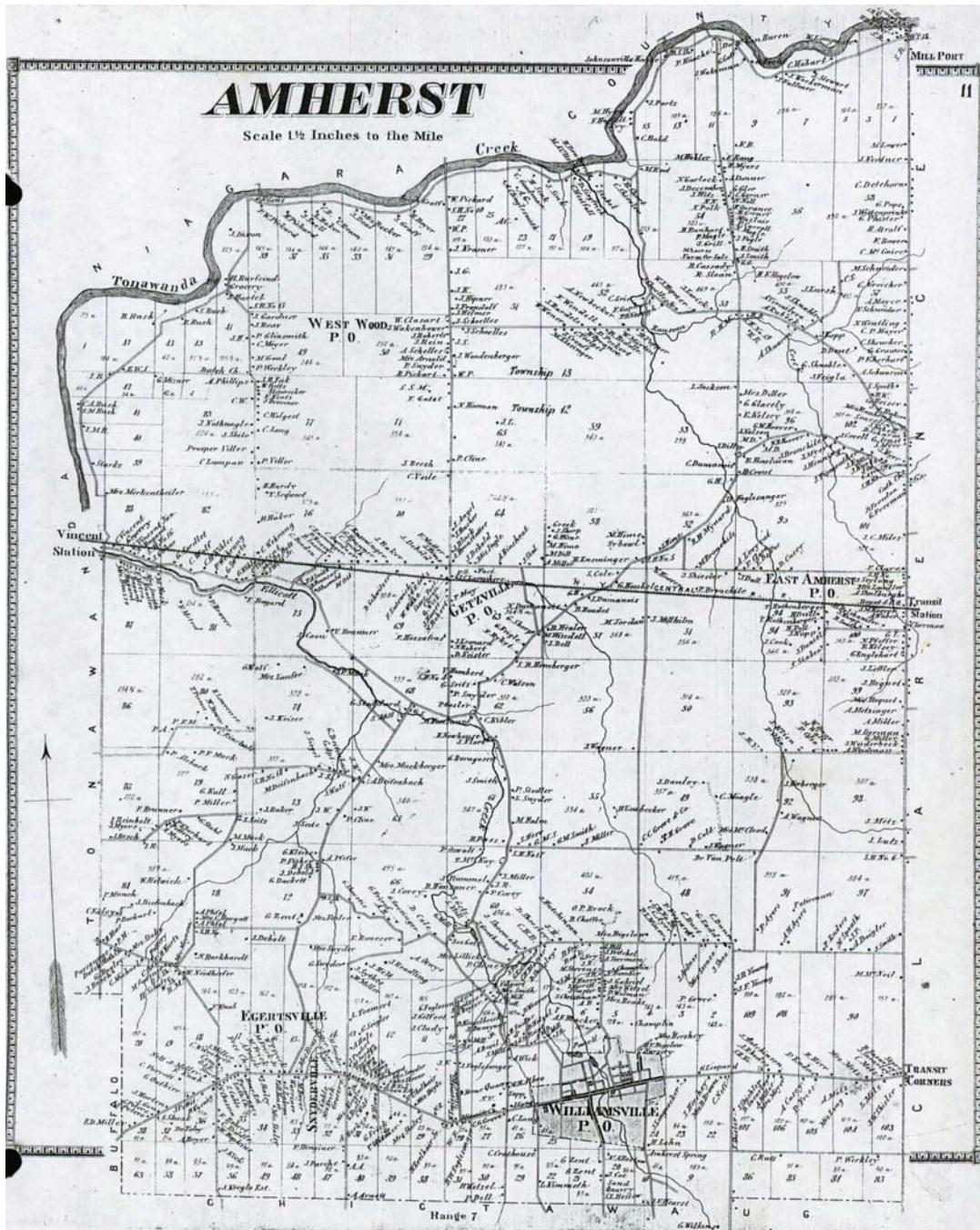


Figure 4a. The Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1866 *New Topographical Atlas of Erie County* (Stone and Stewart 1866).

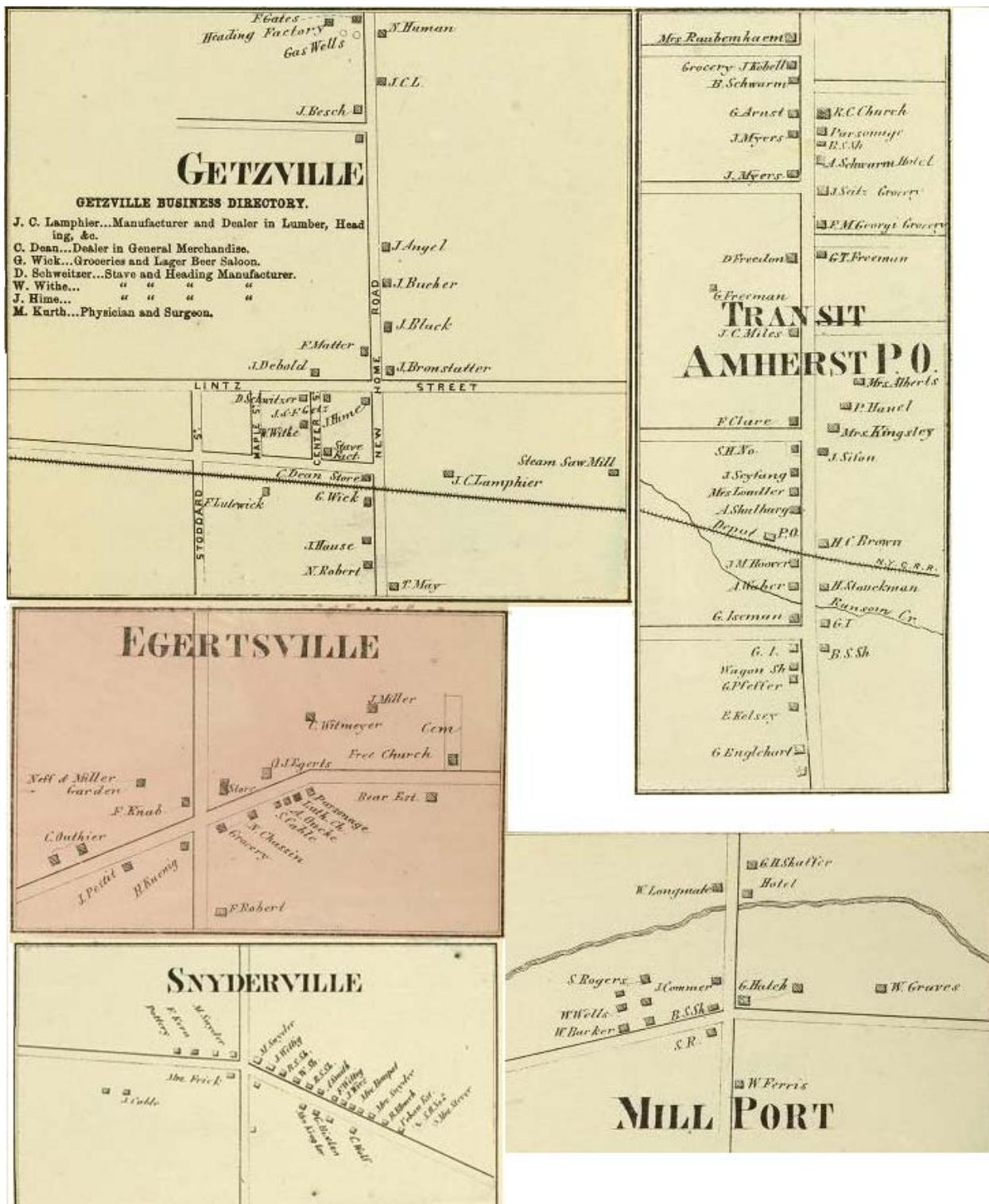


Figure 4b. The major hamlets of Amherst as depicted on the 1866 *New Topographical Atlas of Erie County* (Stone and Stewart 1866).

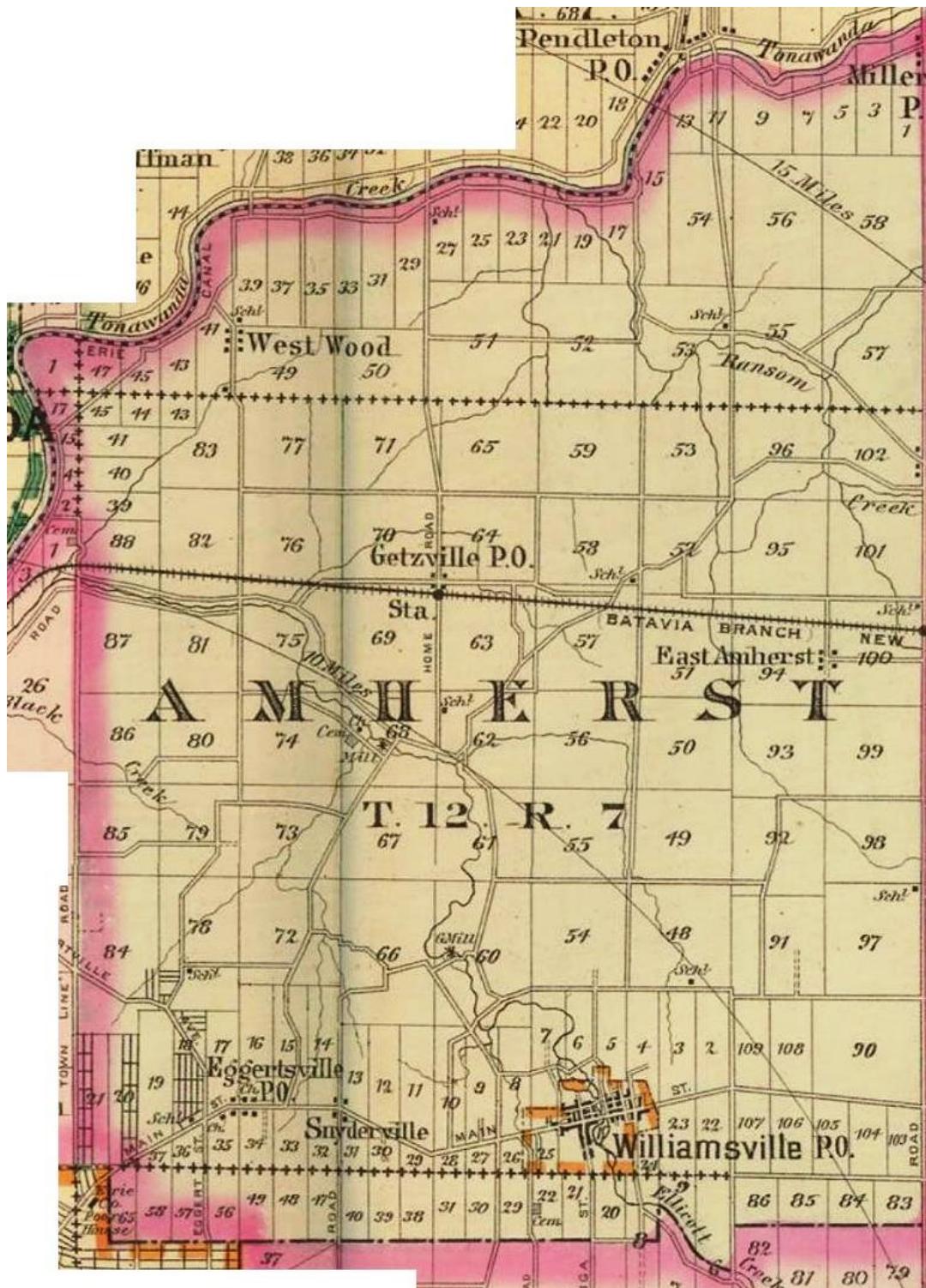


Figure 5. The Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1893 *Atlas of the Vicinities of the Cities of Niagara Falls, North Tonawanda and Buffalo, New York* (Hopkins 1893).

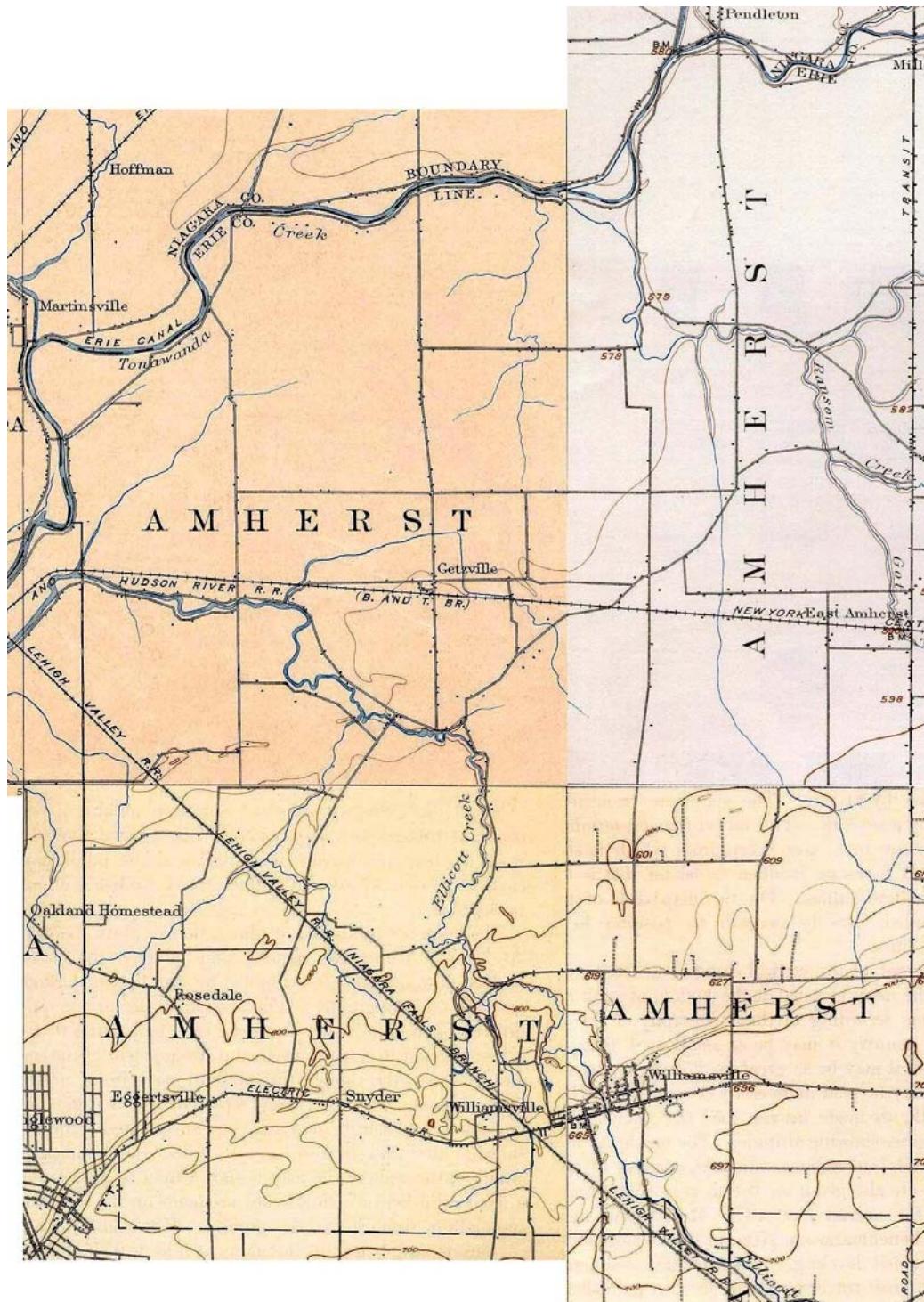


Figure 6. The Town of Amherst as depicted on 1901-1905 United States Geological Survey 15 Minute Quadrangles (USGS).

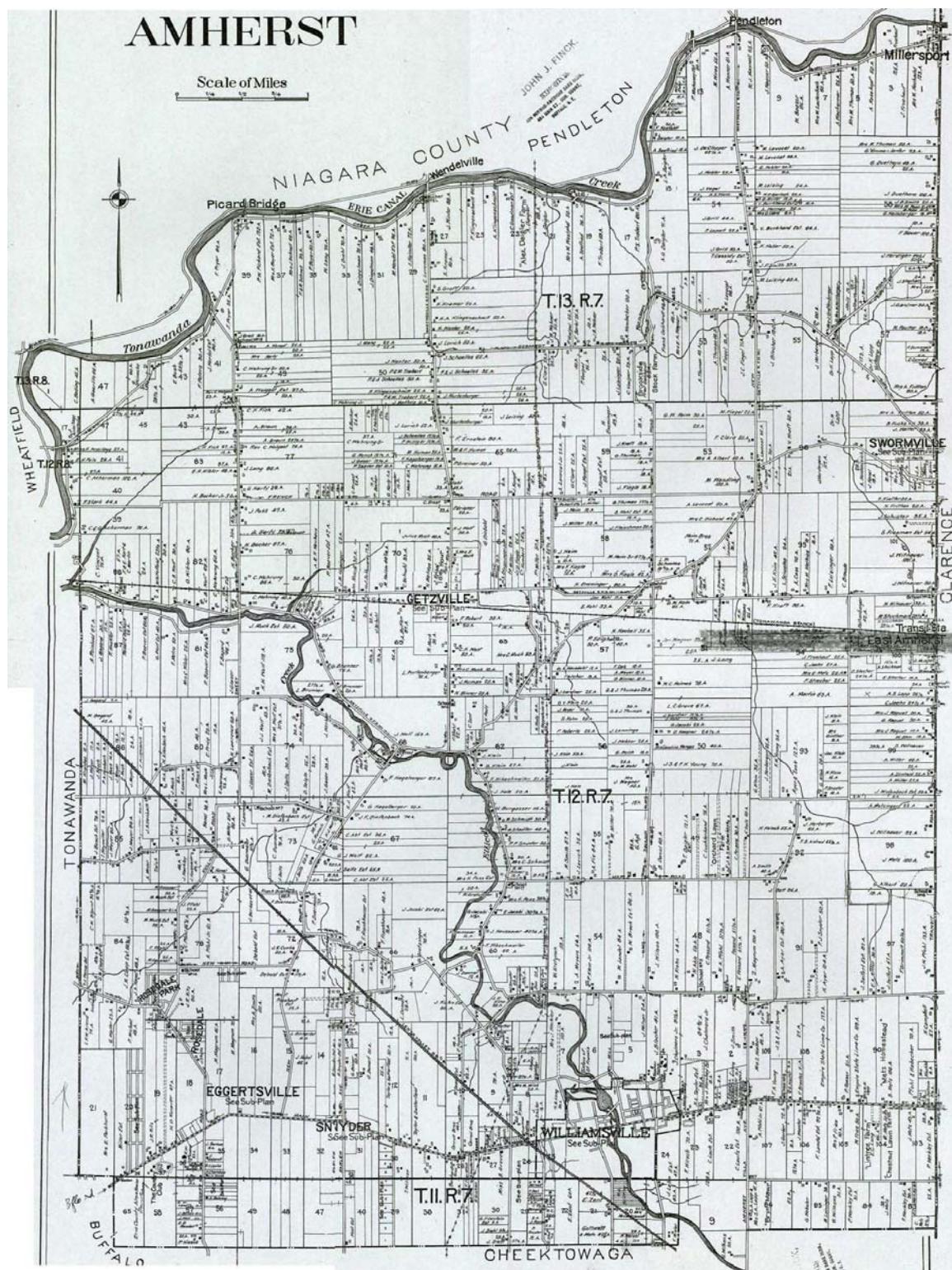


Figure 7a. The Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1909 New Century Atlas, Erie County, New York (Century Map Company & Ogden, L. J. G.).

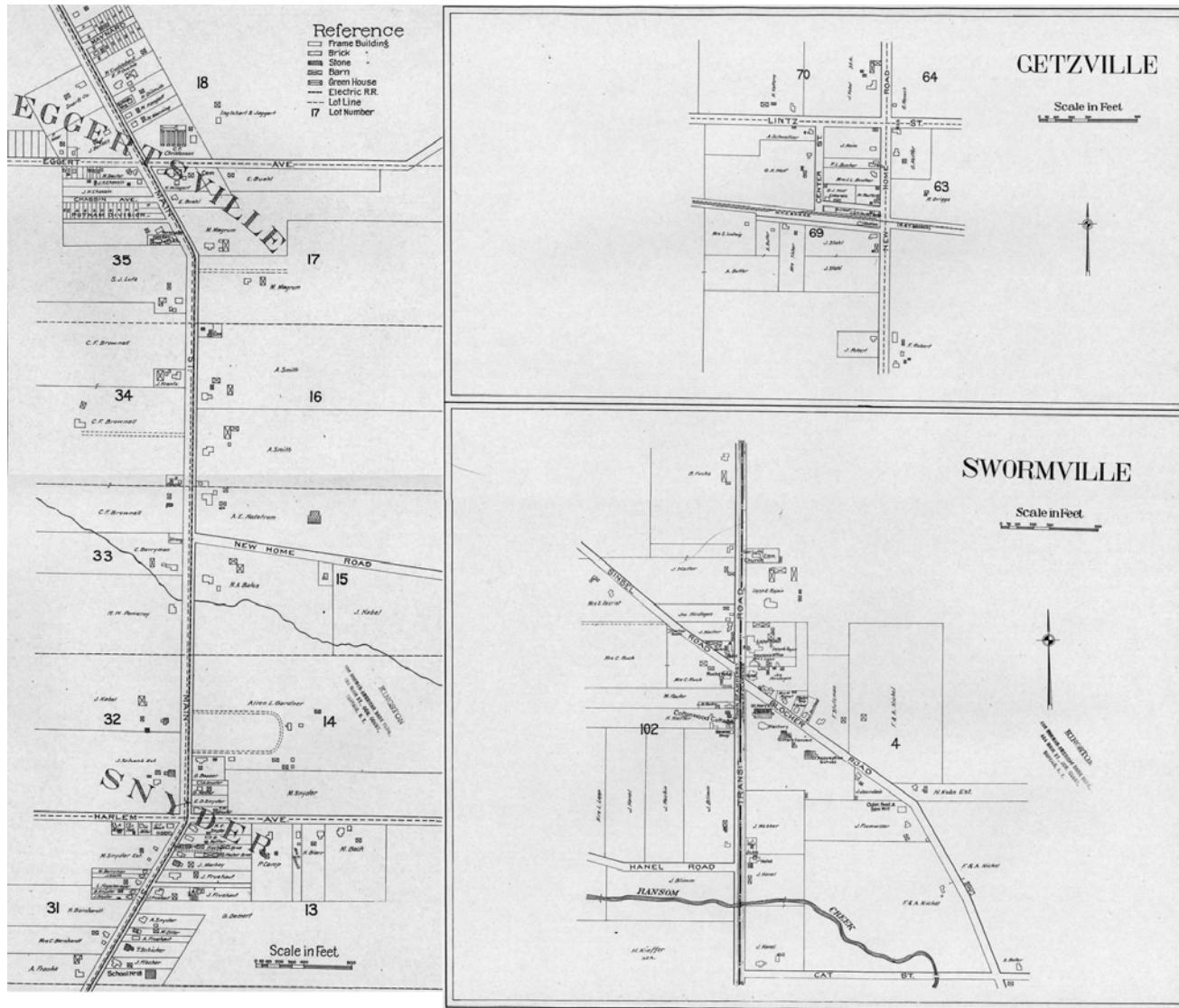


Figure 7b. The major hamlets of Amherst as depicted on the 1909 New Century Atlas, Erie County, New York (Century Map Company & Osgood, L. J. G.).

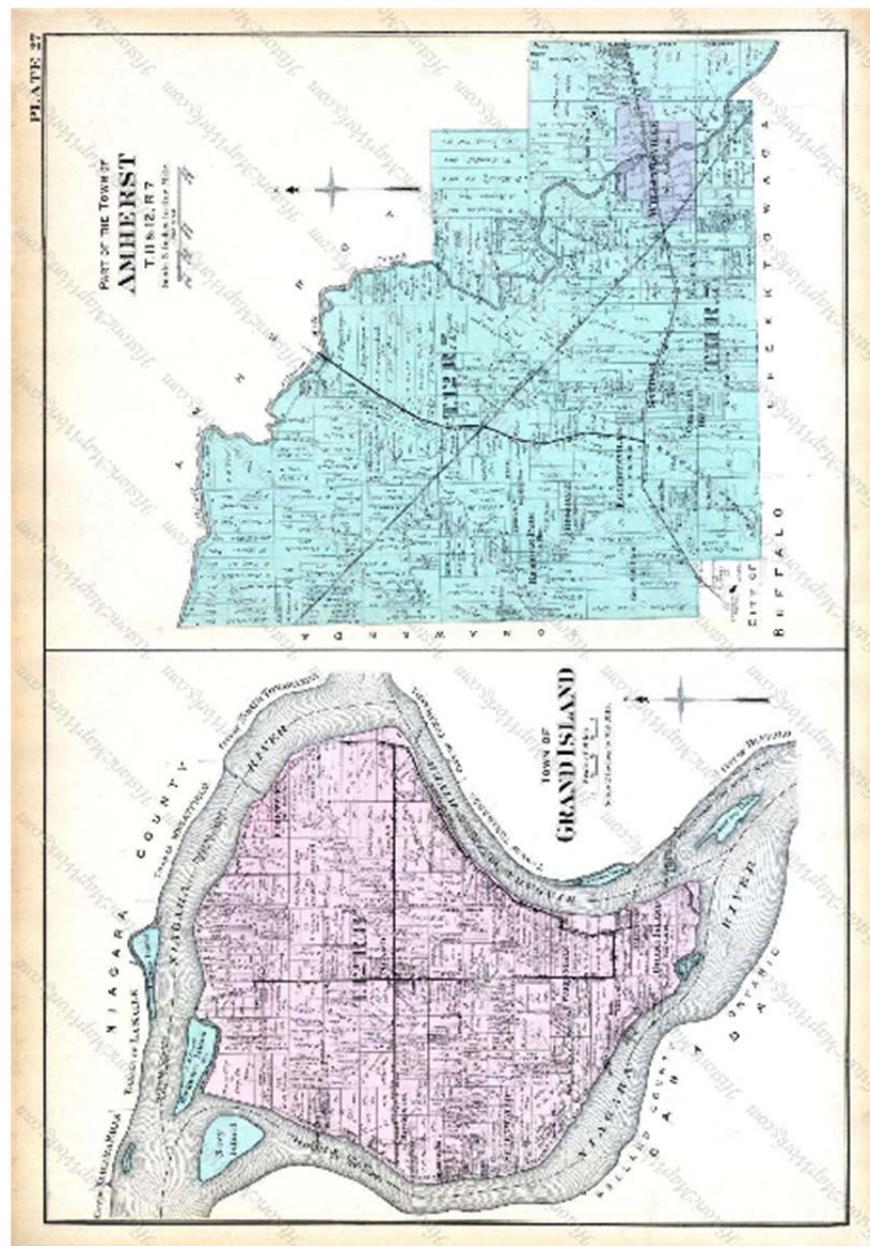


Figure 8a. The Town of Amherst & Part of the Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1915 New Century Atlas of Greater Buffalo, Vol. 3 (Century Map Company & Ogden, L. J. G. Reproduced with permission from Historic Map Works).

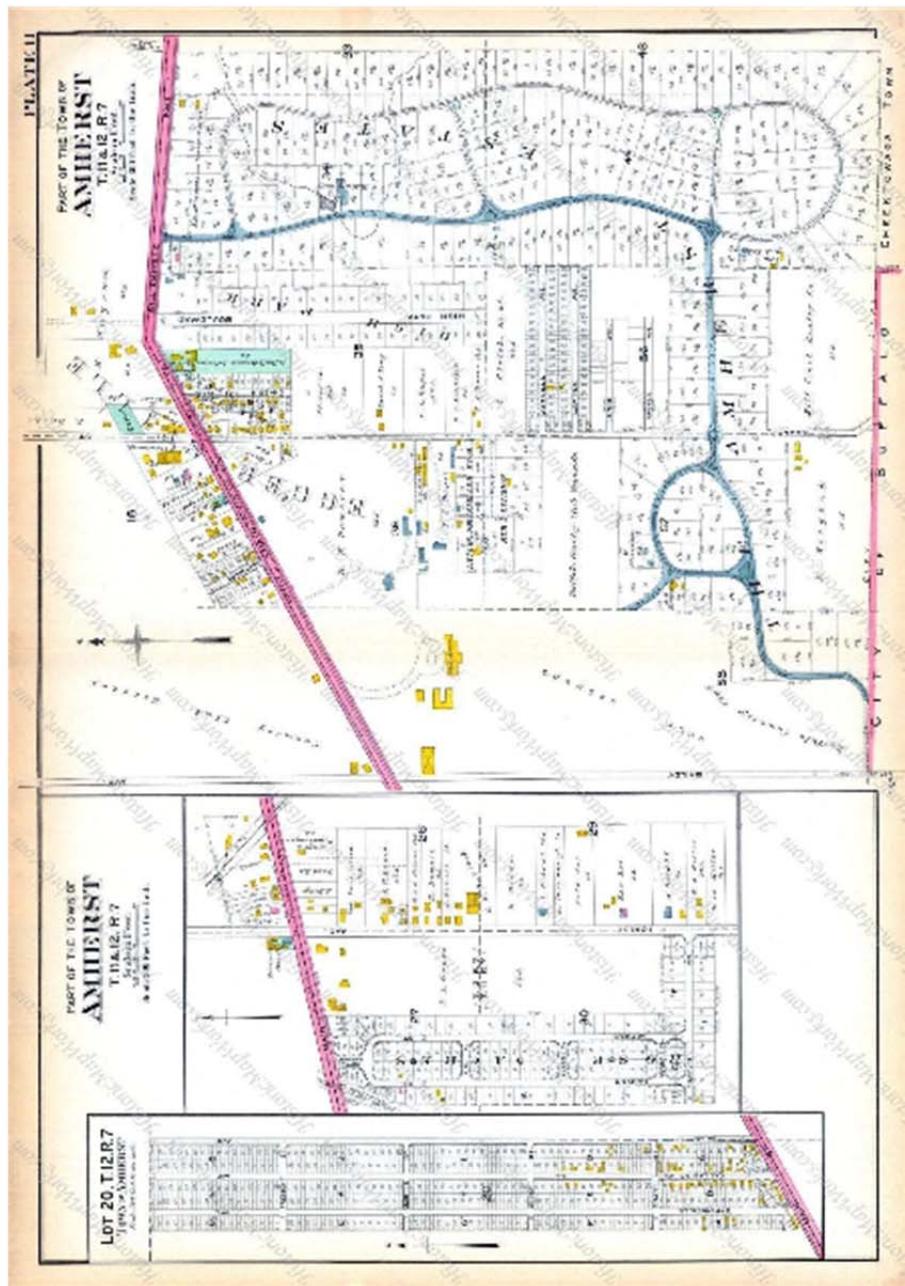


Figure 8b. Part of the Town of Amherst as depicted on the 1915 New Century Atlas of Greater Buffalo, Vol. 3 (Century Map Company & Ogden, L. J. G. Reproduced with permission from Historic Map Works).

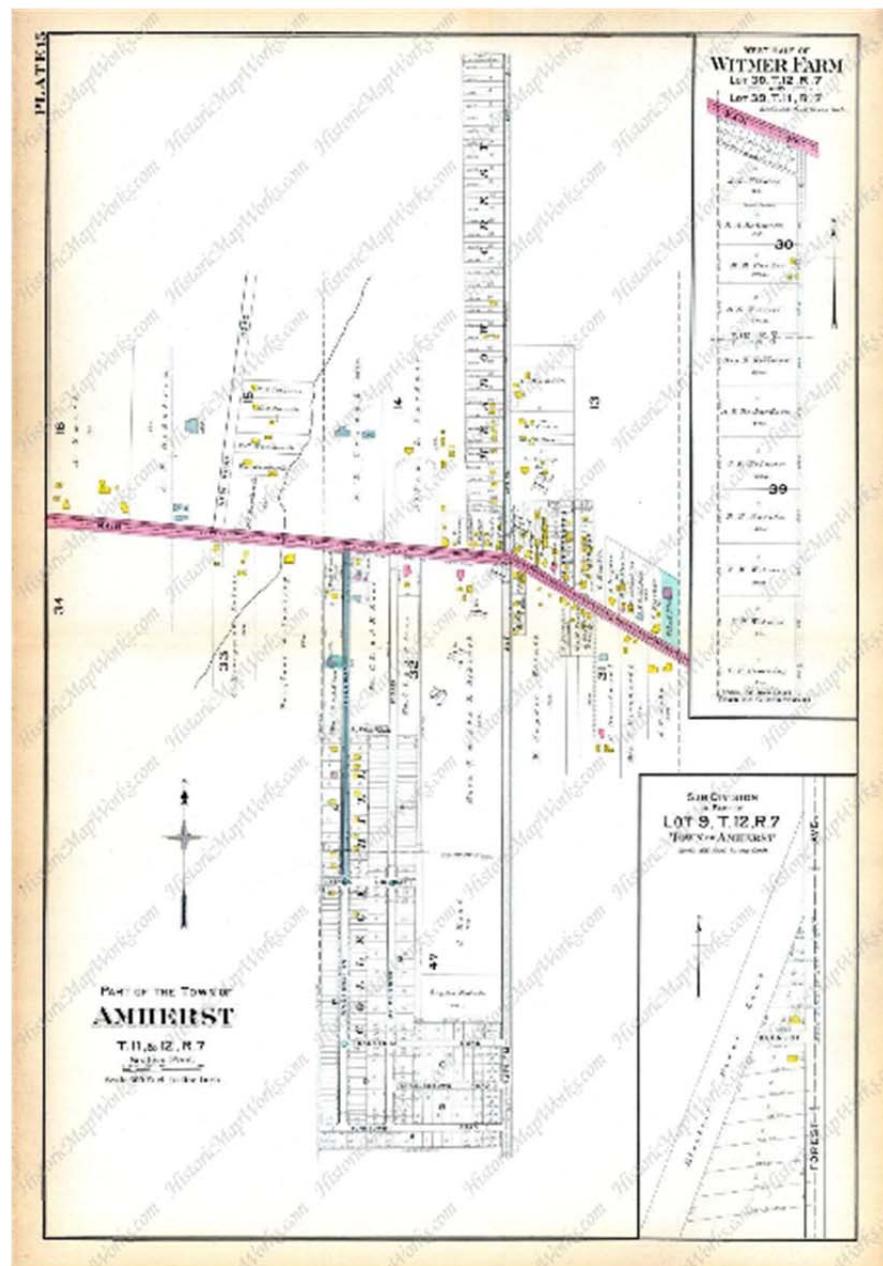


Figure 8c. Part of the Town of Amherst & the West Half of Witmer Farm as depicted on the 1915 New Century Atlas of Greater Buffalo, Vol. 3 (Century Map Company & Ogden, L. J. G. Reproduced with permission from Historic Map Works).

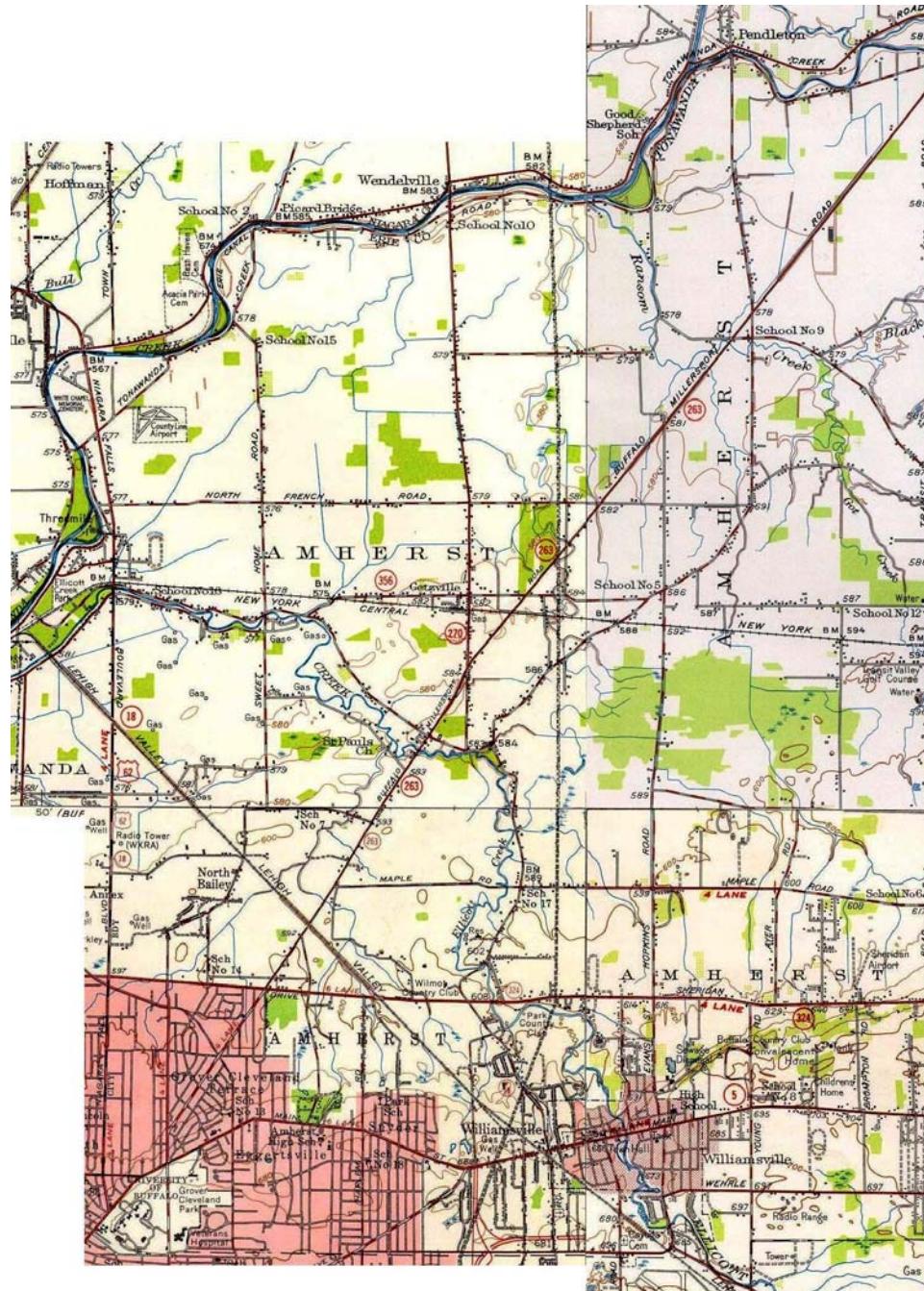


Figure 9. The Town of Amherst as depicted on 1948 United States Geological Survey 15 Minute Quadrangles (USGS).

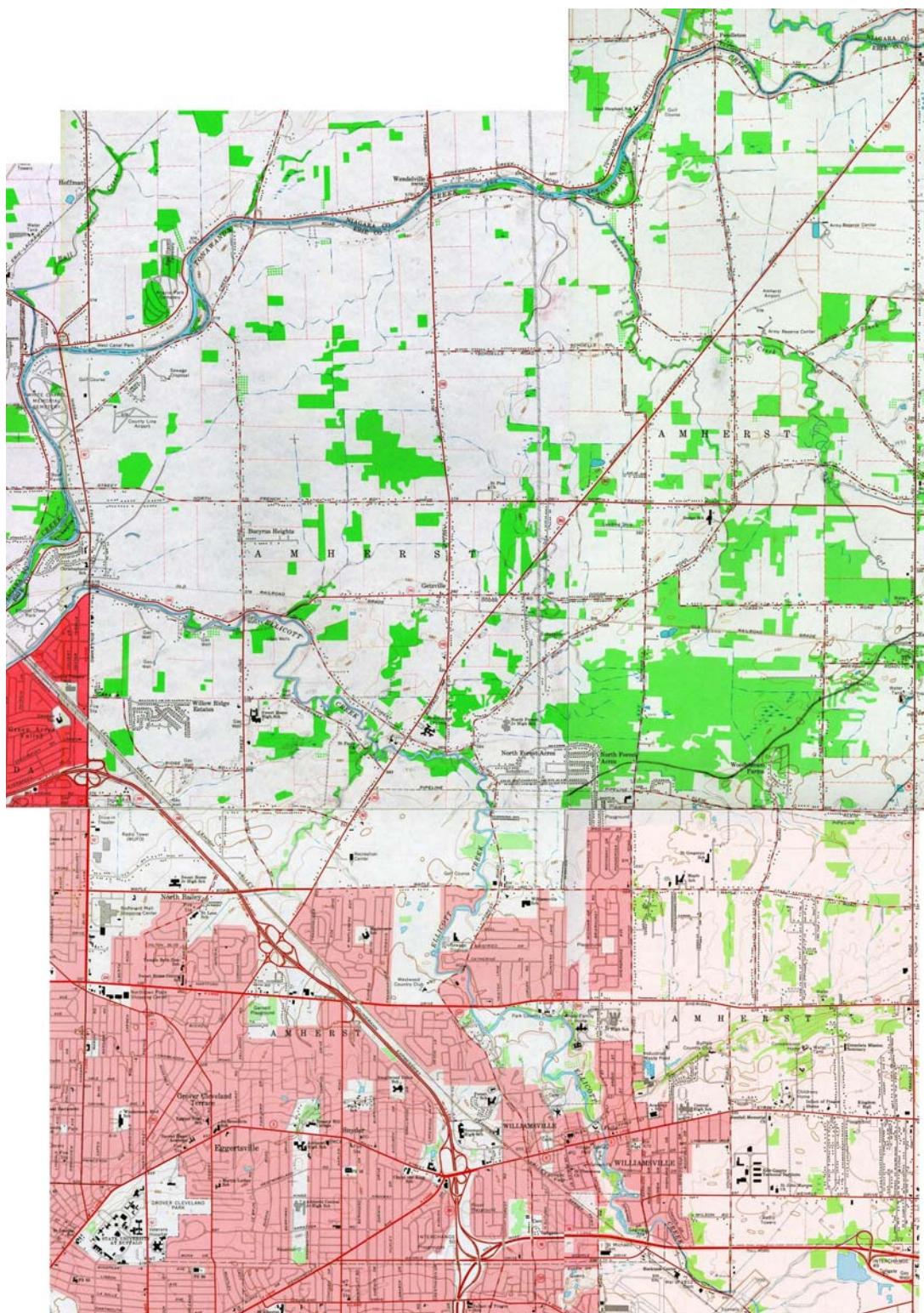


Figure 10. The Town of Amherst depicted on 1965 United States Geological Survey 7.5 Minute Quadrangles (USGS).