

**Architectural Reconnaissance Survey  
00 PR 1166**

**Proposed Reinvestment  
Of the General Motors Powertrain Group  
Tonawanda Engine Plant Expansion,**

**280 and 344 Vulcan Street,  
Tonawanda, New York.**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Methodology	3
Historic Context	4
Architectural Survey	
Results	19
NYS Building Structure Inventory Form for 280 Vulcan Street (Plant 5)	20
NYS Building Structure Inventory Form for 344 Vulcan Street	42
Appendix A: Bibliography	59
Appendix B: Project Maps	61
Project area map with photo angles and numbers	62
Current general map of project area and GM plant	63
General map of GM plant with proposed expansion design plan	64

### List of Figures

Figure 1. 1986 USGS Buffalo, NW 7.5 Minute Quad	2
Figure 2. 1986 USGS Buffalo, NW 7.5 Minute Quad	2
Figure 3. Gifford and Geil Atlas Map of Erie County (1855)	5
Figure 4. Stone and Stewart Topographical Map of Erie County (1866)	6
Figure 5. Beers Illustrated Atlas Map of Erie County (1880)	7
Figure 6. New Century Atlas Map of Erie County (1909)	8
Figure 7. New Century Atlas Map of Erie County (1915)	8
Figure 8. 1939 Works Progress Administration Mapping Project of the Town of Tonawanda	9
Figure 9. 1979 plan of 344 Vulcan Street	45

### Historic Photographs

Historic Photo 1. Bird's-eye view of the original Tonawanda Chevrolet Motor & Axle Plant	10
Historic Photo 2. Main facade of the original GM Chevrolet Motor & Axle Plant office	11
Historic Photo 3. Original south elevation of Tonawanda Chevrolet Motor & Axle Plant	13
Historic Photo 4. 1960 aerial photo of 280 and 344 Vulcan Streets	16
Historic Photo 5. Farrel Birmingham Plant at 344 Vulcan Street	16
Historic Photo 6. Reduction gear produced by Farrel Birmingham	17
Historic Photo 7. Gear generators produced by Farrel Birmingham	17
Historic Photo 8. Former Farrel Birmingham factory, south elevation	46
Historic Photo 9. Former Farrel Birmingham factory, west elevation	46
Historic Photo 10. Former Farrel Birmingham factory, east elevation	47
Historic Photo 11. Former Farrel Birmingham factory, interior	47

List of Photographs

Photo 1. GM Tonawanda Engine Plant, 2995 River Road	11
Photo 2. GM Tonawanda Engine Plant, 2995 River Road	12
Photo 3. South elevation of GM Tonawanda Engine Plant, 2995 River Road	14
Photo 4. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—general view	24
Photo 5. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—south elevation	24
Photo 6. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—south elevation	25
Photo 7. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—south elevation	26
Photo 8. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—west elevation	27
Photo 9. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—west elevation	28
Photo 10. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—west elevation	29
Photo 11. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—west elevation	30
Photo 12. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—west elevation	31
Photo 13. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—north elevation	31
Photo 14. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—north elevation	32
Photo 15. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—east elevation	33
Photo 16. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—north elevation	34
Photo 17. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	35
Photo 18. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	35
Photo 19. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	36
Photo 20. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	36
Photo 21. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	37
Photo 22. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	38
Photo 23. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	39
Photo 24. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	39
Photo 25. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	40
Photo 26. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	41
Photo 27. Plant No. 5, 280 Vulcan Street—viewshed	41
Photo 28. 344 Vulcan Street—general view	48
Photo 29. 344-A Vulcan Street—east elevation	48
Photo 30. 344-A Vulcan Street—west and south elevations	49
Photo 31. 344-A Vulcan Street—north elevation	49
Photo 32. 344-B Vulcan Street—west and south elevations	50
Photo 33. 344-C Vulcan Street—south and east elevations	50
Photo 34. 344-D Vulcan Street—south and east elevations	51
Photo 35. 344A and 344-D Vulcan Street—north elevations	51
Photo 36. 344A and 344-D Vulcan Street	52
Photo 37. 344-E Vulcan Street and northern portion of lot	52
Photo 38. 344 Vulcan Street—viewshed	53
Photo 39. 344 Vulcan Street—viewshed	53
Photo 40. 344 Vulcan Street—viewshed	54
Photo 41. 344 Vulcan Street—viewshed	55
Photo 42. 344 Vulcan Street—viewshed	56
Photo 43. 344 Vulcan Street—viewshed	57

## INTRODUCTION

General Motors (GM) Chevrolet Tonawanda Engine Plant is located at 2995 River Road in the Town of Tonawanda (MCD 02923), Erie County New York (Figure 1). The GM plant is situated in a heavily industrial section of the Niagara River corridor. The sprawling plant complex occupies a 165-acre site, which was constructed on Lot 103 of the original Mile Strip Reserve. Bordering the northern city limits of Buffalo, in the southwestern portion of Tonawanda, the plant property is bound by River Road to the west and Kenmore Road to the east. The Dupont-Yerkes Plant lies immediate north of the GM plant complex. Edgar Avenue runs along the southern edge of the plant, from River Road east to Irene Street; it terminates at the northwestern corner of the proposed project area. The neighboring parcel to the east at 280 Vulcan Street is the site of GM Plant No. 5.

The proposed project involves the expansion of the GM Tonawanda Engine Plant facility (Identified as SHPO project review number OO PR 1166). GM will construct a new engine plant factory building on three parcels fronting Vulcan Street. This new structure will require the demolition of GM Plant No. 5 at 280 Vulcan Street as well as the razing of three structures located on the 344 Vulcan Street parcel. Presently, GM owns 280 Vulcan Street and its neighboring 17-acre parcel to the west. The latter once served as a parking lot for the former foundry located on the main GM Tonawanda Engine Plant Complex to the north. Appendix B contains a general overview map of the existing GM plant in addition to a map of detailing the proposed construction of the new engine plant facility.

To complete the proposed expansion, GM will acquire the adjacent lot to the east at 344 Vulcan Street, the former Farrel-Birmingham plant. The adjoining parcel is a commercial complex consisting of five structures. Three structures remain from the original Farrel-Birmingham manufacturing complex. They include a two-story office building, a former personnel office and a three-bay garage. Identified in this report as 344 A-C Vulcan Street respectively. Two modern garage and storage buildings (344 D-E Vulcan Street) are located directly north of the office building (344 A Vulcan Street). Each of the aforementioned structures will be razed except for the circa 1920 building in the southeast corner of the lot. This former commercial office is currently the residence of the present owner, Mr. Paul Nichter. The property will be excluded from the GM acquisition of 344 Vulcan Street (Appendix B: Project Area Map). Figure 2 shows the Farrell-Birmingham property prior to the 1983 fire.

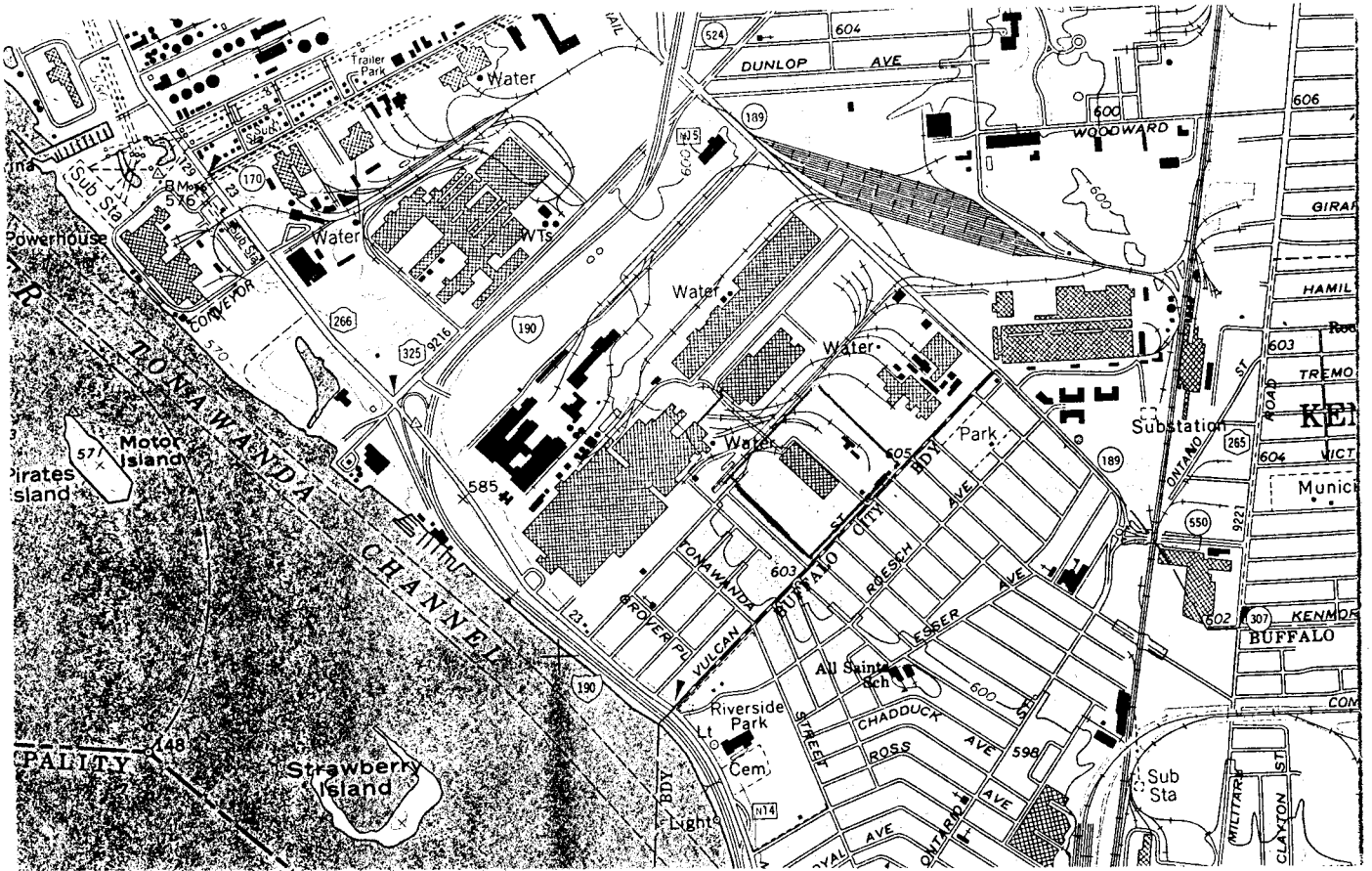


Figure 1. The General Motors Chevrolet Tonawanda Engine expansion project area as depicted on the 1986 USGS Buffalo, NY NW 7.5 Quadrangle.

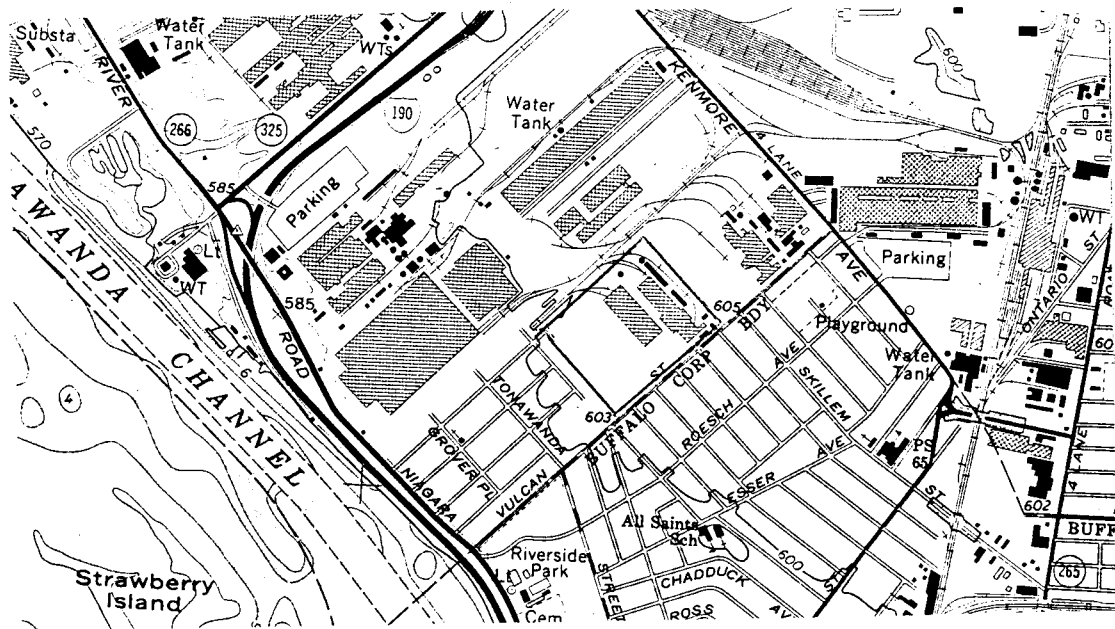


Figure 2. The 1965 USGS Buffalo, NY NW 7.5 Quadrangle shows the original layout of the Farrel Birmingham Complex.

## METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 800 and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation of 1966 and, in response to consultation with SHPO, an Architectural Reconnaissance Survey was conducted for the GM Tonawanda Engine Plant Expansion. Christine Longiaru, a 36 CFR 61 qualified consultant, conducted the survey of 280 and 344 Vulcan Streets. A tour of the GM Tonawanda Engine Plant facility and an on-site inspection of the survey area were completed in April 2000. Each property within the expansion project area was photographed, documented, researched and evaluated according to basic standards and guidelines set forth by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The following National Park Service, National Register Bulletins were consulted: *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis For Preservation Planning* (No. 24); *Researching a Historic Property* (No. 39); and *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (No. 15). The architectural reconnaissance level survey was limited to above ground historic resources.

The architectural significance and integrity of each property was evaluated in the field. Basic data gathered during field inspection included the documentation of architectural details, materials and noticeable modifications. Photographic documentation and visual inspection were limited to the exteriors of the buildings. Landscape features and general views of adjacent properties were also photographed. Selected photographs are sited on a project area map (Appendix B). An OPRHP Building/Structure Inventory Form was completed for 280 and 344 Vulcan Streets. Note the former personnel office, currently a residence, was inventoried as part of 344 Vulcan Street.

To help establish historic significance, an intensive archival background investigation of 280 and 344 Vulcan Streets was conducted. Appropriate primary and secondary sources on local and regional history were consulted. Historic maps of the project area were examined to document the development and the history of ownership of the project area. The history section of the report begins with a general contextual history of the Town of Tonawanda, including the early history of the Niagara frontier. The town's industrial development is also examined. A brief history of the GM Plant and a discussion of the industrial architecture of Albert Kahn, the architect of the GM Motor Plant No. 1 is provided for context.

The next topic of the history section examines the former Farrel-Birmingham Company plant. Historic photographs of the former manufacturing plant, along with its products, supplement the text. Both GM and Farrel-Birmingham had government contracts during World War II, the factories played a significant role in the manufacture of war supplies. Their contributions during the war are also discussed. This section concludes with a discussion of events of the second half of the twentieth century as related to the project area.