

## ***Experts doubt Perrysburg is home to Pan-Am Expo dome***

### ***Several reasons to doubt link to Pan-Am Exposition***

By Anne Neville

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

As far back as they can recall, the people of Perrysburg in Cattaraugus County have been certain that they have an important relic of the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in their town.

The large stained-glass dome over the dining hall of the now-abandoned J.N. Adam Memorial Hospital in Perrysburg is widely believed to be from the Temple of Music, where President William McKinley was assassinated on Sept. 6, 1901.

“I’m certain that it is the dome from the Temple of Music,” said Jody Shaw, who has been Town of Perrysburg historian since 1998. “It’s always just been an accepted part of life.”

Myra Johnston said she recalled hearing the story about the dome when she began working at the hospital in 1967.

“Everybody seemed to know about it,” she said.

By the mid-1990s, the link was so accepted that it was included without attribution in newspaper articles. Even today, the claim is made on the “Historic Path of Cattaraugus County” See **Dome** on Page [A9](#)



**Cynthia Van Ness, left, and Melissa Brown have investigated the dome story.** John Hickey/Buffalo News

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**DOMES** • from A1 website.

But there are several reasons to doubt the link to the Pan-Am Exposition:

- Published reports from the time the hospital was opened in 1912, and from its 25th anniversary in 1937, make no such claim;
- An architect’s drawing of the dome suggests that it was built in place rather than transported there; and

- Extensive research into historical documents, including architectural sketches and a watercolor of the interior of the Temple of Music, show no such dome.

Three local experts on the Pan-Am groan when they hear the persistent report about the dome.

“It does come up all the time,” said Melissa Brown, executive director of the Buffalo History Museum, who did extensive research on the Pan-American Exposition for its 2001 centennial. Brown, Cynthia Van Ness, director of Library and Archives at the Buffalo History Museum, and Susan Eck, a Pan-American Exposition specialist and researcher, have all investigated the claims. Each says, independently, that they have found no evidence that the J.N. Adam dome came from the Temple of Music – and they found plenty of indications that it didn’t.

### **Shedding light**

A clear photo of the ceiling of the Temple of Music would settle the debate. Unfortunately, the few photos of the building’s interior do not include a direct view of the apex of the ornate, rounded ceiling. But drawings and descriptions of the building do not mention a stained glass dome.

On Nov. 18, 1900, the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle wrote a story about the buildings that were under construction, saying that below the ornate plaster ceiling of the Temple of Music, “Star-shaped windows in the drum of the dome admit abundant light to the large auditorium.” These eight large windows along the side walls are the only glass mentioned. Photos taken inside the Temple of Music during daylight also show light streaming in from upper side windows, and no light source directly above.

The Buffalo architectural firm of Esenwein & Johnson, which built the Temple of Music, made detailed drawings and a watercolor that showed the ceiling, both of which are in the Buffalo History Museum collection. The crisp, detailed drawings show that the apex of the rounded ceiling is filled by an ornate plaster design.

One drawing highlights the medallion at the very center of the ceiling, which is lettered “Solid center.” Below it, a design containing stylized lions’ heads is surrounded by lines, and the words “ventilator open work, cross-hatched” indicate that the plaster work is pierced to allow air flow from the ceiling to the ventilator shaft that ran through the ornate exterior dome. The Esenwein & Johnson drawings show nothing resembling the round, solid glass J.N. Adam dome.

The J.N. Adam dome contains 16 tapered segments, each containing 40 blocks of translucent white and pale gold glass. The segments meet in a large circular center glass panel, which contains the design of a Star of David surrounded by semicircles, with a flower in its center. The edge of the dome is done in angular Celtic-style knotwork. The glass dome has no opening for the ventilator work that is drawn in the dome of the Temple of Music.

### **Fresh air and beauty**

The J.N. Adam dome, although an unusual feature for a hospital, fit with the treatment concepts of the time.

James Noble Adam, a Scottish immigrant who was mayor of Buffalo from 1906 to 1909, made a fortune with his department store, which amiably competed with that of his brother Robert Borthwick Adam, a founder of Adam, Meldrum and Anderson’s – better known as AM& As.

At the end of his single term as mayor, James Adam bought 293 acres of land on a hillside a half-mile from

the Town of Perrysburg and donated it to the city for the construction of a tuberculosis hospital. At the J.N. Adam Memorial Hospital, people with the contagious disease were treated with fresh air, good food and sunlight in beautiful surroundings. Patient rooms opened onto wide balconies and their beds were rolled outside, even in the winter.

Beautiful surroundings, both natural and man-made, were believed to help patients recover. In a 1920 booklet about the hospital, a photo of part of the dining room boasts, “One of the most beautiful dining rooms in the country seats 200 patients.” A second photo, showing the outside of the ventilator-capped building, says only, “Main Dining Room – Exterior.”

Neither newspaper coverage at the time the hospital was dedicated in 1912 nor a booklet published in 1937 to mark the facility’s 25th anniversary mention the Temple of Music connection.

“If it were true, why wouldn’t they say that?” asked Brown.

It’s unknown exactly when or how the first claim was made that the J.N. Adam dome was from the Temple of Music. But in 1985, a report written to nominate the J.N. Adam Memorial Hospital for the National Register of Historic Places addresses the belief.

“The round, dome-covered dining room was planned as the hospital’s grandest interior space,” says the report, whose author is unknown. “According to hospital tradition, the glass in the oculus was a gift of Mayor Adam, and came from the dome of the Temple of Music ... However, no documentary evidence is currently available to substantiate this claim. Newspaper accounts of the hospital’s dedication on November 12, 1912, fail to mention the oculus, and (architect John Hopper) Coxhead’s original drawings, which may have indicated the dome’s provenance, are missing.”

It is unclear whether the application for national historic status for the hospital was ever filed. In any case, it is not on the state nor national historic registers.

Coxhead’s original drawings were not lost. They are in the possession of the City of Buffalo, which has always owned the now almost 700-acre Perrysburg campus but leases it to the State of New York. The architectural drawings clearly show the dome on the dining room, which is described as “Leaded glass dome light built of L’s + T’s + channels.”

The “L’s and T’s” are iron frame pieces in those shapes that support the glass panels, said Kevin V. Connors, an engineer, architect and principal with eco\_logic STUDIO Architecture and Engineering in Buffalo, who looked at photos of the drawings of both the Temple of Music and the J.N. Adam dome.

The Temple of Music, he wrote, “included an octagonal vault with plaster detail,” while the J.N. Adam dome is round, made of “likely flat” stained glass. He concluded, “As far as I can tell – no relation between these.”

The construction drawings “tell the contractor what to build it out of,” Connors said. “There’s no indication that the contractor is to reuse another dome. If the drawings were more legible, it might be clear that they are not the same size – we already know they are different shapes, and one is a skylight and the other plaster.”

## State study

In addition to the interest in the dome that was revived by a Sept. 6 story in The News about the 115th anniversary of McKinley’s assassination, New York State has been conducting its own investigation into the historic and cultural significance of the deteriorating hospital buildings.

Last year, State Sen. Catherine Young, R-Olean, and Assemblyman Joseph Giglio, R-Gowanda, sponsored legislation calling for a study of the best uses for the property, which was leased to the state in 1948 for use as a residential and treatment center for people with developmental disabilities. The 44 buildings on the campus were built between 1912 and 1951, and contain asbestos and lead. Most of the buildings have been abandoned since the early 1990s, although the state has several group homes on about 16 acres.

The state budget included \$235,000 to study the property. Young said the Office of General Services has received a draft report from the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation on the historical and cultural significance of the site. No comment will be made about the report because it is still a draft, said Dan Keefe, deputy public information officer for the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

“It’s going to be studied further, but the work is underway, which is the great news,” said Young, who expects the report to be completed soon and action to follow. “These buildings falling down have actually become quite a hazard.”

The high fence around the property is regularly breached by thieves, vandals, ghost hunters and those who wish to photograph the eerie state of the once-majestic buildings.

### **J.N. Adam’s gift**

Historians know that local legends often contain a kernel of truth. For example, most of the Pan-Am buildings were temporary, made of a plaster-and-fiber material called “staff” that was molded to resemble stone. So a small chip taken as a souvenir from a Pan-Am building that is kept on the mantel becomes, over the generations, a belief that the mantel itself was from a Pan-Am building.

In this case, there is such a kernel. J.N. Adam bought the magnificent \$18,000 organ from the Temple of Music soon after the exposition closed, and announced his intention to donate it to the people of Buffalo. “Our New Organ Wins Praise From Everyone,” crowed The Buffalo Evening News on Nov. 20, 1901.

After much politically motivated wrangling, all documented in the newspapers of the day, the organ was installed in the Elmwood Music Hall, a former armory built in 1885 at Elmwood Avenue and Virginia Street. The organ was marked with a plaque labeling it the “Pan-American Organ, presented to the City of Buffalo by James N. Adam November 2, 1901.” It was used in many concerts until 1938, when the building was demolished. There was a push to salvage the organ and move it to Kleinhans Music Hall, but it was last mentioned as being in city barns, where it might have been sold for scrap during World War II, Brown said. In any case, she said, “It just stops being mentioned.”

Unlike the organ, the dome is not marked with a plaque or other citation. “People might argue that he kept it secret because he didn’t want to make it something morbid and audacious,” said Brown. But, she said, “The organ was a big piece of the Temple of Music, and there was no shame or secrecy over what happened to that.”

“The organ was installed with a plaque, so it would be unusual then that there is no marking on the dome,” said Eck, who created and maintains the historical websites WNYhistory.com and [panam1901.org](http://panam1901.org). “I think the conflation occurred with J.N. Adam donating the land and buying the organ from the Temple of Music, and that got mixed up as time went by.”

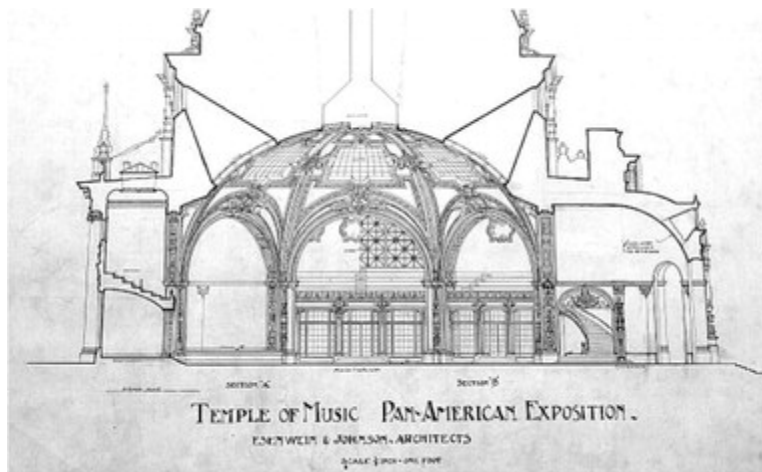
### **Time takes its toll**

In her search to prove the provenance of the dome, Perrysburg historian Shaw found a brochure, issued

before the hospital was built, describing the property and the influence a hospital would have on the area. The dining room is described as “round, 2 ½ stories high, with dome,” and nothing further. “If it was a rescued dome, that would be noted in this brochure,” Shaw said. Yet she is unconvinced that local lore is wrong, and continues to dig into the records to find the origin of the story. For now, Van Ness said, “Based on the information at hand, until new evidence comes up, the evidence we have shows that this dome could not have occupied the same place as the ventilation shaft” in the ceiling of the Temple of Music.

Although the hospital dome, which was covered by a protective glass cap when it was built, remains remarkably well preserved, the building below it is crumbling, with paint and plaster filling the once-grand dining room. Johnston, who worked at J.N. Adam, pointed out that if the buildings continue to deteriorate the way they have since it closed, the dome may not survive much longer.

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**Wax linen prints of the Temple of Music at the Pan-American Exposition clearly show a dome, but not much detail of its construction.**