



## John E. Brent Garden Dedication Ceremony – Fact Sheet

1. **Significance of the date** | Today – Thursday, Oct 27, 2022 – marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John E. Brent’s death. John E. Brent (1889-1962) was born in Washington, D.C. on August 8, 1889.
2. **Education** | In 1904, at the age of 15, Mr. Brent traveled to Alabama to study in the Mechanical Industries Program at the Tuskegee Institute, and eight years later he graduated from Philadelphia’s Drexel Institute of Art, Science, and Industry, earning degrees in architecture and landscape architecture.
3. **Career** | Upon graduation in 1912, Mr. Brent moved to Buffalo. He earned his official architect certification from New York State in 1926 and was a member of the American Institute of Architects. That same year, he opened his own home office at 219 Glenwood Avenue and began work on his first, largest and most famous commission: the Michigan Avenue Young Mens Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.). On a national scale, Mr. Brent is the second African American architect selected to build a Y.M.C.A. cultural center. It began with a budget of \$175,000 that eventually cost \$285,000, equivalent to approximately \$3.9 million in 2015. It was a cultural hub and home to help foster and give purpose to the black community in Western New York. Many performers and activists would come from all over to visit the building like W.E.B. Du Boris, Count Basie, and Jim Brown. Learn more at <https://www.michiganstreetbuffalo.org/michigan-street-ymca>
4. **Architectural designs in Buffalo** | Among Mr. Brent’s most significant architectural designs are the Michigan Avenue Branch Y.M.C.A. (1928) and projects through the Buffalo Parks Department including design work in Frederick Law Olmsted’s Front and MLK Jr. Parks and the Buffalo Zoological Gardens. From 1931-1934, Mr. Brent was based in Washington, D.C. where he worked for the Department of Interior drawing plans for the Founders Library at Howard University.
5. **About the John E. Brent Garden** | Formerly known as a rose garden, or Cottage Garden. The John E. Brent Garden is one of four special gardens recognized within the Buffalo Olmsted Park System. Designed in 1949, this landscape was originally a large rose garden, where Mr. Brent was charged to design its Memorial Gate and surrounding stone wall. In 1985, due to the construction of the Charles R. Drew Science Magnet School, the garden was reduced in size and became known as the Cottage Garden. In 2018 the garden received a New York State grant of \$100,000 (Senator Tim Kennedy) to upgrade its irrigation, lighting and seating. The garden is cared for by the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy’s Special Gardens Manager (Madeleine McGrady). Additional interpretive garden signage will be installed in 2023 in furthering the story and legacy of Mr. Brent at MLK Jr. Park.
6. **Community Involvement and Leadership** | Mr. Brent was an active community leader, standing with Reverend J. Edward Nash and Mary Burnett Talbert in organizing Buffalo’s first branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and became its first president in 1915. He was a founding member of the Michigan Avenue Colored Young Mens Christian Association, and he helped found the Appomattox Club in 1922 where he served as Chairman of the Board and held many leadership positions.
7. **Recognition** | In 1946, New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey appointed Brent to the Buffalo Division of the State Commission Against Discrimination where he oversaw discrimination cases, and in 1954 he was voted “Man of the Year” by the Negro Business League of Buffalo & Niagara Falls.