
Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr.

(1905–1981)



Rochester Museum and Science Center

Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. was born on Christmas Day 1905 in Washington, D.C., the third of four children of Thomas Wilson Boyde Sr., a chauffeur, and Sadie Underwood Boyde.¹ The family lived in the LeDroit Park neighborhood near Howard University.

Boyde graduated from Dunbar High School in 1923. His yearbook describes him as “military, mathematical, and courteous”; an officer in a prize-winning cadet battalion; and president of the Dunbar Officers’ Club.² Although not accepted to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point—his first choice—Boyde was admitted to Brown University to study engineering but stayed only one year. As a sophomore, Boyde attended the University of Minnesota; as a junior, the University of Michigan; and after a senior year at Syracuse University, he graduated with a bachelor of architecture degree in 1928. While in college, Boyde pledged *Omega Psi Phi* fraternity.

In the late 1920s, architecture students at Syracuse University were instructed in the *Beaux Arts* tradition. Boyde studied with Professors Revels, Hallenbeck, Sargent, and Lear, the last an exacting teacher who had trained in Paris. While at Syracuse, Boyde won notice in several student competitions.

After graduation, Boyde worked in New York City and Albany, New York, but little is known about his early professional life. Surviving records indicate that he worked for Schultz & Weaver; VERTNER WOODSON TANDY; Voorhees, Gmelin, & Walker; and the New York State Architect’s Office.

In 1930 Boyde responded to an employment advertisement for an architectural designer. The job was in Rochester, New York, with the firm of Sigmund Firestone, a Romanian-born architect. Unaware that Boyde was African American when he invited him to interview, Firestone polled his staff to see if they would object to working with a man of color before offering Boyde a position working on the \$4 million Monroe County Home and Infirmary.

For the Monroe County Home and Infirmary, Boyde executed Lombard Romanesque-style features that included “elaborate stone carvings (gargoyles, grotesques, and other symbolic motifs) and patterned, polychromatic masonry (alternating bands of red brick, light colored stone, and glazed terra cotta tiles).”³

Funded just as the Great Depression began, the Monroe County Home and Infirmary was attacked as a “palace” for the poor because of its “lavish” expenditures. Boyde responded by portraying the project’s detractors unflatteringly in stone and using symbolic motifs such as Saint George slaying the dragon to depict the political struggle.⁴ Several grand juries investigated the project’s finances but the architects and contractors were cleared each time. After the final investigation, newspaper columnist Paul Benton attacked the “atrocious” architecture and the secrecy of the grand jury process, saying “the longer [the] facts . . . are kept a dark and fearsome secret, the longer the Sovereign Voter is going to simmer in uncertainty.

And . . . the deeper will grow his conviction that the Senegambian he thinks is in the woodpile is very, very black indeed.”⁵ Just three days earlier Ku Klux Klan members had burned a cross nearby, and the night Benton’s column appeared, a suspicious fire almost destroyed the new buildings.

For the remainder of the Great Depression, Boyde worked for Sigmond Firestone, the Works Progress Administration, Frank Quinlan, and others in Rochester. In 1937 he returned briefly to Washington, D.C., at the request of ALBERT IRVIN CASSELL to work as an inspector on HOWARD UNIVERSITY’S Founders Library and prepare drawings for other projects such as Mayfair Gardens. In 1940 Boyde obtained his New York State architect’s license.

During World War II, Boyde worked as an engineer in military aircraft and ordnance plants in the Buffalo area. In 1947 he started his own firm in Rochester. One of his first projects was the Frederick Douglass Homes for the Negro Housing and Planning Council. Drawing on his knowledge of the trendsetting public housing in Washington, D.C., Boyde tried to meet the housing needs of Rochester’s African American population, which had increased from 3,000 in 1930 to 8,000 after the war. The project—which included stores, a social hall, and twenty-three apartments—was never realized.

Boyde’s successes came from the postwar expansion of Rochester’s suburbs. His projects were a mix of houses and tracts, apartment buildings, motels, office buildings, restaurants and franchises, supermarkets, industrial buildings, shopping plazas, and bowling alleys. In 1949 Boyde was invited to join the Rochester Society of Architects. He joined, but was never an active member.

Boyde was proudest of his house designs and continued to do all of the firm’s residential work, even after hiring Martin Rose and William Leitch to help with commercial and industrial projects between 1962 and 1970. An admirer of architect Frank Lloyd Wright, Boyde was an accomplished Modernist known for his solid construction. His buildings had simple, clean lines and often featured overhanging roofs, curved walls that he dubbed “Mae Wests,” and corner windows. Boyde also did numerous projects for nonprofit organizations including several Black churches; the Black women’s Masonic organization the Eastern Star; and a day-care center.

Although not active in politics, Boyde, along with a small group of Black professionals who were close friends, made several mostly unsuccessful attempts in the 1960s and early 1970s to address the growing need for diverse housing in Rochester. Hired by the



Detail from Monroe County Home and Infirmary, Rochester Museum & Science Center

Rochester Housing Authority to design the city’s first federally funded housing projects, Boyde was replaced midway through the project because officials wanted a denser occupancy, which meant more apartments. In 1968 Boyde’s design for a *Kindergarten–3* school with low- and moderate-income housing, sponsored by the Urban League, was abandoned when negotiations to purchase the property fell through. The group then incorporated as Applied Urban Research Associates and applied for federal Model Cities funds, but contracts were awarded instead to F.I.G.H.T., an activist organization that worked with the urban poor and whose leaders were Black ministers.

Boyde married Jennie Jones on July 19, 1930, and they had three children. Boyde’s family and friends describe him as highly intelligent, a storyteller with a playful sense of humor, absorbed in his work, a trusting person who made deals with handshakes instead of contracts, and more fond of the art of architecture than the business of it. A friend and contemporary

noted with admiration that although Boyde faced prejudice in his career, he worked continuously in his chosen field from graduation on, practicing the profession that he loved.⁵ It is all the more remarkable that he did so in Rochester, a city that at mid-century had a small Black population and no appreciable Black middle-class.

Boyde suffered from multiple sclerosis during the last years of his life and his practice dropped off in the mid-1970s. He died on September 12, 1981.

Notes

1. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Schedule No. 1—Population," District of Columbia, S.D. 1, E.D. 127, Sheet 7.
2. Dunbar High School, *Liber Anni: Historical Sketch and Review of the Class of 1923* (D.C.: Dunbar High School, 1923), n.p.
3. Bero Associates, "Monroe Community Hospital Masonry Survey" unpublished, Rochester, New York n.d.

5. Louis Regner, "Grand Jury Says Hospital Costs May Need Probe," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 11 April 1933, p. 13; Paul Benton, "Frankly Speaking," *Rochester Times Union*, 6 June 1933, p. 6; "\$4,000,000 County Home Threatened When Blaze Breaks Out in Basement," *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, 7 June 1933, p. 15.

6. Interview with Dr. William Knox, Newton, Massachusetts, 5 July 1994.

Bibliography

- "Thomas Wilson Boyde Jr. Papers," Schuyler Towson Research Library. Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, New York
- Schmidt, Carl Frederick. *Architecture and Architects of Rochester*. Rochester: Rochester Society of Architects, 1959.

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BUILDING LIST

Name	Address	City	State	Year	Comments
Aero Industries	1140 Brooks Ave.	Gates	—	1953	Demolished
Aprilano, Frank	286 Ashbourne Rd.	Brighton	NY	1955	
Arieno, Charles J.	281 Pardee Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1951	
Aronson, Victor	3409 W. Lake Rd.	Canandaigua	NY	1953	
Axelrod, Milton P.	56 Varinna Dr.	Brighton	NY	1952	
Baird Sanitarium	301 Lake Ave.		NY		
Balonek, Frank	857 Main St.	Mumford	NY	1952	
Bay View Hotel		Irondequoit	NY	c1951	
Betsy & Betty Beauty Salon	42 East Ave.	Rochester	NY	1948	Interior design only
Blue Label Foods Plant	460 Buffalo Rd.	Rochester	NY	1936	Sigmund Firestone Assoc. architect
Brodsky, Maurice	411 Rawlinson Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1950	
Camellaci, Raymond	242 Oakridge Dr.	Irondequoit	NY	c1955	
Carver House	192 Ormond St.	Rochester	NY	1943	
Cellura, Alfred	75 Deerfield Dr.	Irondequoit	NY	1952	
Collins, Lawrence	4425 Douglas St., NE	Washington	DC	1939	
Connors, Joseph S.	569 Hurstbourne Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1949	
Daltin Restaurant	72 Franklin St.	Rochester	NY	1950	
Dattilo, Atty. Philip B., Sr.	1920 Culver Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1948	
Davis, Harry I.	2627 English Rd.	Greece	NY	1951	
DeRyke Dairy	1985 Ridge Rd. East	Irondequoit	NY	1947	
Dinner Bell Restaurant	476 Monroe Ave.	Rochester	NY	1947	
Dorschel, John	3833 East Ave.	Pittsford	NY	1952	
Dorschel Motors	67 Ridge Rd. West at Lake Ave.	Greece	NY	1948	
Duffy's Hotel	102 Clinton Ave. North	Rochester	NY	1954	Demolished
Eastman Hotel Rainbow Lounge & Coffee Shop	215 Chestnut St.	Rochester	NY	1947	
Eisenstat, William P.	150 Thackery Rd.	Brighton	NY	1952	
Empire Parkway Restaurant	2235 Empire Blvd.	Webster	NY	1950	
Ernie's Place Restaurant	4653 Lake Ave.	Rochester	NY	1954	
Famous Brand Shoes	405 Main St. East	Rochester	NY	1953	
Fasino, Joseph	597 Van Voorhis Ave.	Irondequoit	NY	1955	
Ferris, Newell A.	772 Penfield Rd.	Brighton	NY	1948	

BUILDING LIST (continued)

Name	Address	City	State	Year	Comments
Fountainbleau Restaurant & Bar	75 Clinton Ave. North	Rochester	NY	1952	Storefront & interior
Franklin House Restaurant	72 Franklin St.	Rochester	NY	c1960	
Frati, Mario J.	304 Greeley St.	Rochester	NY	1953	
Friederich, Adam G.	442 Edgemere Dr.	Greece	NY	1955	
Friedman, Jules	321 Council Rock Ave.	Brighton	NY	1953	
Frijhy, Frank S.	2086 Norton St.	Rochester	NY	1950	
Gargano, Frank A.	158 Orland Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1949	
Genesee Steel Co.	1460 Lyell Ave. (rear)	Rochester	NY	1949	
Genesee Valley Trust Bldg.	45 Exchange St.	Rochester	NY	1929	Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker Assoc. architects
Gianforti, Bert C.	2153 Baird Rd.	Penfield	NY	1954	
Gibbin, Dr. Clifford L.	4048 East Ave.	Pittsford	NY	1946	
Ginghamtown Restaurant & Motel	409 Lake Shore Dr.	Canandaigua	NY	1953	
Giordano, Joseph J.	3883 St. Paul Blvd.	Irondequoit	NY	1947	Address changed when street was extended
Goldstein, David G.	6 San Rafael Dr.	Pittsford	NY	1954	
Green, Harry, Jr.	307 Greeley St.	Rochester	NY	1948	
Grossman, Milton	401 Pelham Rd.	Brighton	NY	1954	
Guzetta, Matthew	80 Woodman Park	Rochester	NY	1946	
H & E Sandwich Shop	280 Alexander St.	Rochester	NY	1950	Berkley Hotel
Hedges Grill	955 Joseph Ave.	Rochester	NY	1951	Birch Room addition
Heicklen, Morris	70 Varinna Dr.	Brighton	NY	1950	
Hicks, George T.	99 Norman Rd.	Brighton	NY	1951	
Hoffman, Harry L.	222 Pelham Rd.	Brighton	NY	1950	
Huntington, Harry B.	3280 East Ave.	Brighton	NY	1947	
Interlichia, Philip C.	172 Hillcrest St.	Rochester	NY	1953	
Jon-Jose Beauty Salon	839 Clinton Ave. South	Rochester	NY	c1952	
Kapp, Sam	225 Lake Front	Irondequoit	NY	1955	
Kasdins, Jacob	259 Ashbourne Rd.	Brighton	NY	1953	
Kroll's Great Expectations Shop	645 Clinton Ave. North	Rochester	NY	1949	
Lanzatella, Philip J.	160 Wisner Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1951	
Leonardo, Henry F.	245 Edgemere Dr.	Greece	NY	1949	
Leonardo, Richard A.	2500 St. Paul Blvd.	Irondequoit	NY	1950	
Levy, Bennett	256 Rhinecliff Dr.	Brighton	NY	1948	
Lipson Furniture Co.	681 Fillmore Ave.	Buffalo	NY	1952	
Lipson, Avrome Y.	34 Louvaine Dr.	Tonawanda	NY	1950	
Litwin, Emil	20 Varinna Dr.	Brighton	NY	1952	
LoCurcio, Ralph D.	226 Thomas Ave.	Irondequoit	NY	1948	
Lopatin, Harold H.	345 Pelham Rd.	Brighton	NY	1954	
Low-income housing	8 Prince St.	Rochester	NY	c1968	Plans only
Mammano, Joseph T.	125 Tottenham Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1954	
Mangurian, Harry T.	666 Corwin Rd.	Brighton	NY	1955	
Masonic Temple	68 Perine	Dansville	NY	1953	Addition
Matteson, Harlan J.	50 Lattimore Rd.	Rochester	NY	1947	
Mercurio, Frank	304 Simpson Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1948	
Miracle Diner	755 Hudson Ave.	Rochester	NY	1954	
Monroe County Home and Infirmary	435 East Henrietta Rd.	Rochester	NY	1933	Now Monroe Hospital; Sigmund Firestone assoc. architect
Morris, Atty. Ira H.	55 Esplanade Dr.	Brighton	NY	1955	
Murray Shoe Store	643 Clinton Ave. North	Rochester	NY	c1950	
Nazareth College of Rochester Admn. Bldg.	Campus	Rochester	NY	1941	Frank Quinlan Assoc. architect
Nazareth College of Rochester Auditorium	Campus	Rochester	NY	1941	Frank Quinlan Assoc. architect
Nazareth College of Rochester Classroom Bldg.	Campus	Rochester	NY	1941	Frank Quinlan Assoc. architect

BUILDING LIST (continued)

Name	Address	City	State	Year	Comments
Nazareth College of Rochester Dormitory	Campus	Rochester	NY	1941	Frank Quinlan Assoc. architect
Noah's Ark Auto Accessories	836 Goodman St. North	Rochester	NY	c1958	
Noah's Ark Auto Accessories		Syracuse	NY	1955	Westvale Shopping Plaza
Palermo, Biagio	92 Oaklawn Dr.	Irondequoit	NY	1946	
Papa, Frank C.	100 Shaftsbury Rd.	Brighton	NY	1951	
Papa, Samuel R.	261 Orchard Park Blvd.	Irondequoit	NY	1948	
Parks, Joseph F.	175 Winona Blvd.	Irondequoit	NY	1948	
Passero, Anthony P.	22 Grantham	Irondequoit	NY	1953	
Passero, Joseph D.	2190 Culver Rd.	Rochester	NY	1952	
Pierleoni, Ennius	1293 Jay St.	Rochester	NY	1951	
Piscitello, Frances	125 Woodman Park	Rochester	NY	1954	
Pluto, Andrew	97 Simpson Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1953	
Prager, Sol L.	333 Council Rock Ave.	Brighton	NY	1952	
Prato, Samuel	41 Woodman Pk.	Rochester	NY	1946	
Queen's Colony Subdivision	Various addresses	Brighton	NY	1954	48 houses
Raffelson, Jacob	80 Wilshire Rd.	Brighton	NY	1948	
Rause, Arthur A.	271 Council Rock Ave.	Brighton	NY	1951	
Reagan, Edward B.	20 Coleridge Rd.	Rochester	NY	1951	
Ring, Dr. Ellis	45 Torrington Dr.	Brighton	NY	c1943	
Ritts, Donald B.	440 Claybourne Rd.	Brighton	NY	1950	
Rochester Bakery	1252 Goodman St. North	Rochester	NY	1948	
Rogacs, Joseph	179 Haviland Park	Greece	NY	1950	
Romack, Paul	2330 W. Henrietta Rd.	Brighton	NY	1951	
Romeo, Frank J.	588 Rocket St.	Rochester	NY	1949	
Romeo, Philip	134 Laurelton Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1950	
Rowe, Vincent	2200 Culver Rd.	Rochester	NY	1951	
Russi, Arthur M.	28 Tottenham Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1947	
Rutner Iron Company	11 Nester St.	Rochester	NY	1951	
Santa, Sam R.	41 Esplanade Dr.	Brighton	NY	1955	
Scardino, Samuel P.	295 Orchard Park Blvd.	Irondequoit	NY	1951	
Schifano, Benedict F.	163 Wyndham Rd.	Irondequoit	NY	1954	
Segal, Morris	306 Pelham Rd.	Brighton	NY	1953	
Shannon, Harry D.	116 Westview Terr.	Rochester	NY	1948	
Sherman, Barney R.	55 Rhinecliffe Dr.	Brighton	NY	1948	
Sleepy Hollow Motel	2631 Monroe Ave.	Brighton	NY	1954	
Storrer, Herman L.		Henderson Harbor	NY	1954	Summer cottage
Sutphen, George T.	76 Baycrest Dr.	Irondequoit	NY	1953	
Thurston, Lewis M.	505 Penfield Rd.	Brighton	NY	1949	
Times Square Hotel & Club	45 Exchange St.	Rochester	NY	1950	Alterations
Walters, Adelaide	90 Cloverdale St.	Rochester	NY	1953	
Ward, Clarence A.	212 Baycrest Dr.	Irondequoit	NY	1952	
Ward, John C.	1703 Creek St.	Penfield	NY	1941	
Weis, Linus R.	60 Penfield Rd.	Brighton	NY	1950	Demolished
Wilinsky, Dr. Isadore J.	198 San Gabriel Dr.	Rochester	NY	1947	
Wolk, Paul	69 Torrington Dr.	Brighton	NY	c1943	
Your Flower Shop	165 Clinton Ave. North	Rochester	NY		

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