



HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY FORM

OFFICE USE ONLY

USN:

IDENTIFICATION

Property Name (if any) Chacona Block

Address or Street Location 411-415 College Ave

County Tompkins Town/City Ithaca Village/Hamlet:

Owner Student Agencies Address 409 College Ave, Ithaca, NY 14850

Original Use mixed-use Current Use mixed-use

Architect/Builder, if known John M. Wilgus Date of Construction, if known 1911-12

DESCRIPTION

Materials ~~are~~ please check those materials that are visible

Exterior Walls: Wood Clapboard Wood Shingle Vertical Boards Plywood
 Stone Brick Poured Concrete Concrete Block
 Vinyl Siding Aluminum Siding Cement Asbestos Other: stucco

Roof: Asphalt, Shingle Asphalt, Roll Wood Shingle Metal Slate

Foundation: Stone Brick Poured Concrete Concrete Block

Other materials and their location:

Alterations, if known: see continuation sheet Date:

Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

Explain:

ATTACHMENTS

Photos

Provide several clear, original photographs of the property proposed for nomination. Submitted views should represent the property as a whole. For buildings or structures, this includes exterior and interior views, general setting, but buildings and landscape features.

Please staple one photograph providing a complete view of the structure or property to the front of this sheet. Additional views should be submitted in a separate envelope stapled to the continuation sheet.

Maps

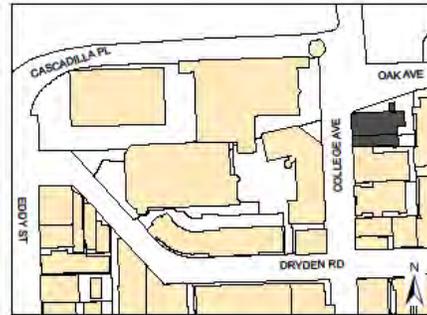
Attach a printed or drawn map indicating the location of the property in relation to streets, intersections or other widely recognized features so that the property can be accurately positioned. Show a north arrow. Include a scale or estimated distances where possible.

Prepared by: L. Truame Address 108 E. Green St., Ithaca, NY 14850

Telephone: (607) 274-6555 Email ltruame@cityofithaca.org Date 8/1/12

(Continued on reverse)

Narrative Description of Property:
Chacona Block, 411-415 College Avenue, Ithaca, NY



The Chacona Block is a 3 ½-story, commercial-style, stucco-clad building constructed in 1911-1912 in the Renaissance Revival Style. Three plaques on the building's façade depict lions' heads and a Greek cross, a reference to builder John N. Chacona's Greek heritage. The building occupies a prominent location in the heart of Collegetown at the edge of the Cornell University campus. It is among the earlier commercial-style buildings constructed in Collegetown to provide both rental apartments and commercial space.

Located at the corner of College and Oak Avenues at a prominent site adjacent to the campus of Cornell University, this representative of the commercial, Renaissance Revival Style is a mixed-use building housing commercial space in its three ground-floor storefronts and residential space in its upper stories. The building anchors the corner of a continuous row of mixed-use, commercial buildings on the southern side of the College Avenue Bridge. The Chacona Block and the Larkin Building, located in the same commercial row, were constructed in the early twentieth century and set the tone for the late-twentieth century buildings that complete the block today. Neighboring wood-frame buildings were replaced by these newer commercial buildings, appropriately-scaled and complimentary to the historic Chacona and Larkin buildings as well as their neighbor across the street, Sheldon Court. The Chacona's location on a trapezoidal-shaped, corner lot allows for a large, outdoor gathering space on its north elevation, currently used as an outdoor dining area for Collegetown Bagels, which occupies the storefront of 415 College Avenue. This space is important to the neighborhood's

character, providing a gathering space for the Cornell University and Collegetown community in a neighborhood with little outdoor public space.

To the north of the Chacona Block, the historic stone arch College Avenue bridge across Cascadilla Creek connects the Collegetown neighborhood to the Cornell University campus. To the immediate east is St. Luke Lutheran Church at 109 Oak Avenue, constructed in 1923-24. Further along Oak Avenue are late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century homes, most converted for student or fraternity housing, and the Cascadilla School on the corner of Oak and Summit Avenues. Across College Avenue to the west are Sheldon Court and Cornell's Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, with Cascadilla Hall further west. To the south along the 300 block of College Avenue are more commercial buildings, most of them dating from the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries; along the 100 and 200 blocks of College Avenue are formerly single-family homes converted to student apartments, except for the Grand View House at 209 College Avenue, the last surviving of Collegetown's great boardinghouses.

The Chacona Block is constructed of hollow clay tile and brick with a steel frame. The building's three-bay, four-story principal façade (west) contains three storefronts in the first story, with a simple cornice dividing the first story from the upper stories of the building. Each bay of the second and third stories contains a group of three 6/1 windows, with the center window being slightly wider than the two flanking it. In the fourth story, the center windows of the north and south bays are replaced with a round lion's-head plaque. In place of the center bay's center window is a round plaque depicting a shield emblazoned with a Greek cross. The flanking windows on the fourth story are 4/1 and shorter than the windows of the stories below. The west façade is capped by a wide cornice and stepped parapet. Upper floor windows throughout the building lack moldings or ornament, with the exception of simple sills clad in the same pebble-dash stucco as the walls.

The northernmost storefront, designated as 415 College Avenue, consists of a central expanse of plate glass topped with several fixed sash each containing many small lights in a grid pattern of 9 units in width, 7 in height. This glazing pattern appears to be original to the building, and continues into the angled, sheltered storefront entrance shared by the entrance to the northern apartments' stair hall as well as the entrance to the center storefront, designated as 413 College Avenue. The ceiling of the sheltered entrance is finished with pressed metal panels, likely original to the building. Surmounting the plate glass windows of the center storefront is an art-glass transom window, likely original to the building, partially visible behind a modern sign.

The southernmost storefront, at 411 College Avenue, departs in appearance from the northern two and was extensively altered sometime after 1975¹. Where it once had a sheltered entrance similar to the one shared by 413 and 415, it now has a vaguely Gothic-Revival style appearance, including windows with pointed-arch mullions, a round-arched entry door, and heavy wood paneling and moldings.

Brick pilasters mark the north and south corners of the west façade and delineate the 411 and 413 storefronts. In a 1975 photograph, these appear to be stuccoed and/or painted to match the exterior wall treatment of the upper stories.²

The north façade of the Chacona Block consists of six bays, with single 6/1 windows on the second and third stories centered over first-story bays of large plate-glass windows each topped with two transom sash containing 6 lights. The exception to the pattern is in the second bay from the east, which contains paired 6/1 windows on the second and third stories over a glass greenhouse-type structure (added after 1975³) within the first story bay which provides a second entrance to the commercial space. There are no fourth-story windows on the north façade. The brick wall and pilasters dividing the bays of the first story appears to have been originally stuccoed to match the upper stories. The wall terminates in a parapet which steps down towards the rear (east) of the building, disguising what is likely a low-slope shed roof. A palimpsest suggests that the height of the building was increased at some point prior to 1954.⁴

At the rear (east) façade, a three-story partially-enclosed addition (at one time open porches) includes a fire escape. At the south, the single-story storefront of 409 College Avenue forms a continuous streetwall at the ground level. The upper floors of the south façade are similar to the north façade, except for the elevator shaft of 409 College Avenue which adjoins the Chacona Block about midway along the south façade, providing elevator access to both 409 and 411-415.

Narrative Description of Significance:

Chacona Block, 411-415 College Avenue, Ithaca, NY

The Chacona Block is significant for its close association with the growth and development of Cornell University, as an example of the early-twentieth century response to the changing housing needs and preferences of those seeking to reside in

¹ New York State Building-Structure Inventory Form photograph, 1975, Historic Ithaca, Inc., Ithaca, NY.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Tompkins County Department of Assessment, Tompkins County Tax Assessment photograph, 1954, Historic Ithaca, Inc., Ithaca, NY.

proximity to the campus, and for its role in the development of Collegetown as an urban neighborhood separate from downtown Ithaca and with its own distinct character. Built in 1911-12 as a mixed-use, fireproof, commercial-style building replacing an earlier wood boardinghouse, the construction of the Chacona Block on a site adjacent to the campus of Cornell University established it as one of Collegetown's most prominent and recognizable buildings. It has architectural significance as a good example of the early-twentieth century Renaissance Revival style. The Chacona Block has additional local significance for its association with John N. Chacona, the owner of a successful chain of confectionery and ice cream shops in Ithaca, as well as with the larger Greek business community in Ithaca.

The building's designer, John M. Wilgus, was locally well-known in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the architect of several Collegetown-area mercantile-residential buildings, including the McAllister Block at the corner of Eddy and Williams Streets (1907-08), the John J. Gainey Block (demolished) at the corner of College Avenue and Dryden Road (1899), and another Gainey Block at 315-317 College Avenue (1908), as well as the Chacona Block. Wilgus also designed the brick commercial building at 114-118 South Cayuga Street and several downtown residences, many of which are located within National Register districts. Wilgus's father John B. Wilgus and uncle Henry L. Wilgus were successful merchants who erected the Wilgus Block at the corner of State and Tioga Streets.

Along with the rest of Collegetown and much of the present-day city of Ithaca, the Chacona Block property was part of the extensive holdings amassed by Simeon DeWitt following the allotment of lands within the Military Tract. The area now called Collegetown was settled relatively early due to the abundant water power provided by Cascadilla Creek. In 1827 Otis Eddy, for whom Eddy Street is named, established his cotton mill on the current site of Cascadilla Hall. Eddy had already constructed a dam in Cascadilla Gorge to direct water to his mill pond. Called Willow Pond, it endured until the 1890s, crossed by Huestis Street immediately north of the present-day sites of the Chacona Block and Sheldon Court.

Much of the land on East Hill was farmed or grazed during the early 19th century, and in 1857 the DeWitt farm north of Cascadilla Creek was purchased by Ezra Cornell, who would go on to donate 200 acres for the campus of his namesake university. To the south of the creek, much of present-day Collegetown was part of the 21-acre John and Samuel Giles estate. Possibly anticipating commercial and residential development after the opening of Cornell University in 1868, the Giles heirs divided the estate into urban-

size parcels and sold them in the 1870s. The lot that would become 411-415 College Avenue was identified as Lot #4 of the John and Samuel Giles estate; the lot that would become 409 College Avenue was Lot #3.⁵

The shortage of student housing that continues to plague Cornell today began as soon as the University opened in 1868, when the only lodging offered by the school was in Cascadilla Hall, a repurposed building designed (but never used) as a water-cure sanitarium located on the rim of the gorge across Cascadilla Creek from the campus. Morrill Hall, the first campus building, included both residential and instructional space, but many who did not lodge on campus rented rooms in homes downtown and endured multiple daily treks up East Hill before omnibus service began in 1876.

It appears that the first structure on the site of the Chacona Block was the boarding house constructed for Ellen M. Murphy in 1884 to cater to Cornell University students living off-campus in proximity to the student-oriented services beginning to flourish at the edge of campus. The house appears in an undated photograph prior to 1904 as a 2-story frame gable-and-ell structure with several projections and additions probably intended to maximize the number of rentable rooms.⁶ It was one of four large, wood frame, residential style buildings on the South side of the block. During the planning of the Chacona Block in 1911, it was noted that Mr. Chacona had not yet decided whether the existing building would be torn down or relocated.⁷

The heyday of the Collegetown boardinghouses lasted from around 1880 to 1915. During this time, they provided meals to many who lodged elsewhere – downtown or within fraternity houses that lacked dining facilities. The advent of on-campus cafeterias sounded the death-knell for the boardinghouses, already losing business to the newer rooming-houses and apartment buildings appearing in Collegetown. By 1919 only one of the four early boarding houses remained on the 400 block of College Avenue.

John N. Chacona purchased 411 and 413-415 College Avenue from Ellen Murphy on June 30, 1911. The Chacona Block was constructed to reflect the existence of the two parcels, with a masonry wall dividing the ground floor along the property line. For many years following Chacona's ownership, the two parcels were held by different owners.

⁵ Deed conveying 413-415 College Avenue to Student Agencies Properties, Inc. from Lynn Breedlove and Gary Gut, May 19, 1977, Office of the Tompkins County Clerk, book 557, page 467, Ithaca, NY. Deed conveying 411 College Avenue to John E. Van Natta from the Giles heirs, April 8, 1876, Office of the Tompkins County Clerk, book 9, page 325, Ithaca, NY.

⁶ Carol U. Sisler, Margaret Hobbie, and Jane Marsh Dieckmann, eds., *Ithaca's Neighborhoods*, (Ithaca, NY: DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, 1988), 168. The photograph also shows the Otis Eddy Mill Pond, which had disappeared by the time of the publication of the 1904 Sanborn Maps company fire insurance map of Ithaca.

⁷*Ithaca Chronicle and Democrat*, August 17, 1911, page 5.

The plans for the new building were made public August 3, 1911⁸ and newspaper coverage followed the project until its completion in 1912. The cost of the building was estimated at \$30,000-\$40,000. It contained space on the ground floor for three shops, and three six-room flats on each of the second and third floors, all “strictly up-to-date with all modern conveniences,” including a vacuum cleaning system, steam heat, and electric light.⁹ The attic was designated for storage. The northern two apartments on each floor were accessible from a common, skylit stairway and hall, while the southern apartments were reached from a separate entrance and stair hall, lit by windows opening to a narrow light well between the southern and central units. The building’s distinctive lion’s head and Greek cross decorative plaques at the fourth floor bore witness to its owner’s native land.

The Chacona Block apartments were representative of flat-style apartment units, an urban housing mode that contained kitchen, bathroom, and living areas in one private unit. This type of apartment became popular in Ithaca during the first two decades of the twentieth century, particularly in Collegetown.

At the time, fires were a concern, compounded by the lack of running water in some buildings, the continued use of kerosene and gas lighting, and the lack of organized fire protection for Collegetown. A 1907 fire damaged several Eddy Street buildings, including the locations of the John A. Chacona Candy Company store, the Student Agencies laundry, and a men’s clothing shop, possibly the Toggery Shops which moved to the new Chacona Block along with the candy store in 1912. The modern rooming houses and apartment buildings constructed in the early 1900s – Sheldon Court, the Chacona Block, the Larking Building and others – were constructed of fire-resistant materials, heated with steam, and illuminated with electric lights to reduce the danger of fire.

One of the three retail establishments in the Chacona Block was to be an additional location for John Chacona’s confectionery shop, specializing in candy, ice cream, and ices. Other businesses occupying the remaining storefronts in the second and third decades of the 20th century included The Toggery Shops, a billiards establishment, A & B Stores selling student supplies, the Orchard Tea Shop, and Pop’s Place, the confectionery shop and, later, restaurant operated by John G. Papayanakos which replaced the Chacona Brothers shop in the corner space at 415 College Avenue. During this time, at least two physicians rented flats for use as offices, while they resided elsewhere. Several Chacona family members, including John N. Chacona, also lived in the building. Although it was in a prime location for attracting student renters, the

⁸ *Ithaca Weekly Journal*, August 3, 1911, page 6.

⁹ *Ithaca Chronicle and Democrat*, August 17, 1911, page 5. *Ithaca Daily Journal*, July 13, 1912, page 9.

building's other early occupants were widows and professionals, including the principal of the Cascadilla School, suggesting that the six-room flats were beyond the means of most students at the time.¹⁰

The Chacona family, Greek immigrants from a small mountain village east of Sparta, were proprietors of a chain of successful confectionery and ice cream shops in Ithaca and beyond in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Chaconas who immigrated in the late 1800s were reportedly close relatives – brothers and first cousins – who settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Erie and Sayre, Pennsylvania; and Ithaca and Syracuse, New York.¹¹ The Ithaca Daily News reported in March of 1900 that John Chacona had “returned from a trip to his several branch stores throughout the state.”¹² In 1910 John P. Chacona (known locally as “Big John”) managed candy stores at 104, 208 and 217 East State Street and 102-104 West State Street, while John N. “Little John” Chacona operated stores at 114 East State Street, 400 Stewart Avenue, and 416 Eddy Street.¹³ He moved the Eddy Street shop to the Chacona Block upon its completion.

The move was part of a larger shift in student-oriented businesses from Eddy Street to College Avenue in the early decades of the twentieth century. Other businesses that moved from Eddy Street to College Avenue at this time were L.C. Bement’s Toggery Shops, relocating to the Chacona Block, and the Taylor & Co. Book Shop, relocating to ground floor of Sheldon Court. While the nineteenth century saw student-oriented development both downtown and at the edge of campus with a concentration along Eddy Street, in the early twentieth century, the construction of large, commercial-style mixed-use buildings firmly established the 400 block of College Avenue as the heart of Collegetown. The construction of the Chacona Block was a key part of the area’s transformation from an extension of downtown housing and services to a vibrant neighborhood with a distinct identity.

In 1920 John N. Chacona sold the Chacona Block to James P. and John G. Papayanakos, immigrants or their descendants hailing from the same Greek village as the Chaconas. In fact, the ownership of the building and proprietorship of tenant businesses at 413-415 College Avenue through much of the twentieth century appears to have been by

¹⁰ Ithaca city directories, 1864-1981, Historic Ithaca, Inc., Ithaca, NY.

¹¹ Directory of the Tsintzinian Heritage Society of America, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://www.tsintzinasociety.com/PDF/Directory.pdf>. The original spelling of Chacona is reported as “Tsakonias”.

¹² *Ithaca Daily News*, Tuesday Evening, March 20, 1900.

¹³ M.P. Goodhue, compiler, *Norton & Goodhue’s Ithaca City Directory for 1909, 1909-1910*, Historic Ithaca, Inc., Ithaca, NY.

immigrants and/or their descendants from the same village.¹⁴ The close business associations of these families were part of the national pattern of cultural and family ties maintained by Greek and other immigrant groups.

The southern portion of the Chacona Block, 411 College Avenue, came under different ownership in 1925 when it was sold to George F. Doll, the proprietor of a men's clothing shop occupying the storefront of 411. In 1954 he sold the property to Emmet M. and Mabel Doane (Mabel operated the Hill Beauty Shoppe out of the storefront of 411), who in turn sold to Student Agencies Properties, Inc. in 1972. The owners of 413-415 College Avenue at that time, Lynn Breedlove and Gary Gut, sold the northern portion of the Chacona Block to Student Agencies in 1977, once again consolidating the two parcels' ownership.

Student Agencies Properties, Inc. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Student Agencies, Inc., the oldest independent student-run company in the United States. It was founded in 1894, providing laundry and other profitable services to the student population. For several years the company was sold from board to board, as students graduated and moved on, before it was finally incorporated in 1910. With over \$2 million in annual revenues, Student Agencies is the second-largest employer of students after Cornell, and its services include shipping and storage, moving, campus promotions, note-taking, housing, and publication of the *Cornellian Yearbook*.¹⁵

Student Agencies had made improvements and modifications to the Chacona Block over the last 30 years, including the installation of a sprinkler system. In the 1990s 411 and 413-415, which already shared a single fire escape, were consolidated into a single parcel.

Today, the tenants of the Chacona Block's storefronts – two eateries and a store selling t-shirts and other Cornell-logo gear – reflect changes to the character of Collegetown and the orientation of its businesses in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The variety of businesses catering to students and other residents once included bookstores, salons and barbershops, eateries, and clothing and shoe stores. Today, dining and entertainment are by far the largest proportion of business types in

¹⁴ Directory of the Tsintzinian Heritage Society of America. Owners of 413-415 College Avenue included James P. and John G. Papayanakos (likely two of three brothers who settled in Ithaca in the mid-1920s), George P. Nickles (original name Nikolaidis), Peter J. Poulos (a John J. Poulos reportedly came to Ithaca before 1913), and Constantine J. Manos (original name Voulomanos). Long-term leases on the candy shop were given to Constantine J. Manos and George Conomikes (originally Economikis).

¹⁵ "Our Company," Student Agencies, Inc., accessed June 29, 2012, www.studentagencies.com/info.php?page=our_company.

the neighborhood. The residential units within the Chacona block, reorganized to offer 1-bedroom to 5-bedroom apartments, remain highly desirable as student rentals.