NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

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Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Schenectady

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 9-13 State Street [N/A] not for publication

city or town Schenectady [N/A] vicinity

state NY code 36 county Schenectady code 093 zip code 12305

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this _X_ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property _X_ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ **national** ___ **statewide** _X_ **local**

Russell Pierpont DSHPO 10/7/15
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:)

Joe Edson Dr. Beall 12.1.15
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Schenectady YMCA Building
Name of Property

Schenectady, NY
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- [x] private
- [ ] public - Local
- [ ] public - State
- [ ] public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

- [x] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	**Total**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL: civic
RECREATION AND CULTURE: sports facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE
walls: BRICK
roof: ASPHALT
other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Schenectady Young Men's Association (YMCA) Building is located at 9-13 State Street in the city of Schenectady, New York. Designed in a mix of early-twentieth century revival styles, the four-story-and-basement, 94,580-SF building is nearly rectangular in plan overall – with E-shaped upper floors – and comprises the original building, constructed in 1926-28, and a square, three-story rear addition completed in 1968. The entire structure is of masonry and steel construction with poured-concrete foundation, red-brick exterior walls, stone and cast-concrete detailing, and intersecting gable roofs. The stately façade features twin main entrances and is dominated by an elevated two-story veranda with substantial wood columns. Window openings are filled with a variety of wood double-hung units. The interior is arranged programmatically, with richly-paneled social spaces in the front half of the first floor, athletic facilities in the rear, and small dormitory rooms on the upper floors. The vacant property is in fair condition, suffering from lack of maintenance after extended heavy use housing a large population of disadvantaged men. Despite this, it retains a high degree of integrity. The exterior is nearly unchanged since original construction, and while some interior areas have been altered and there are replacement finishes throughout, the main programmatic spaces that were essential to carrying out the YMCA's mission are intact.

Narrative Description

SITE

The Schenectady YMCA is prominently located on the north side of State Street, the city's main urban thoroughfare, which extends from the Western Gateway Bridge over the Mohawk River east into downtown proper. Directly across State Street is Liberty Park, a small triangular-shaped public park that holds a miniature, replica Statue of Liberty. To the southwest is the 1925 Hotel Van Curler (now Schenectady County Community College, NR Listed 1985).[1] The building is sited on an irregularly shaped lot bounded by State Street to the south, adjacent properties to the west and east, and, to the north, the Stockade Historic District (NR Listed 1973), a dense neighborhood of seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century buildings.[2] The most massive structure on this mixed-use (commercial and residential) block of State Street, the YMCA building nearly fills the south end of the lot, separated from the public sidewalk along State Street only by steps to its twin entrances and small landscaped areas. It is separated from the neighboring buildings to the west and east by narrow paved driveways. To the rear of the building is a paved surface parking lot.

EXTERIOR

Four stories overall with a raised basement throughout, the original 1926-28 YMCA building is nearly rectangular in plan on the first and second stories. However, the upper stories are E-shaped with a main

[1] See: National Register of Historic Places, *Hotel Van Curler, Schenectady, Schenectady County, New York.*

[2] See: National Register of Historic Places, *Stockade Historic District and Stockade Historic District (Boundary Increase), Schenectady, Schenectady County, New York.*

rectangular section parallel to State Street and three rectangular wings extending perpendicular to the rear – the east wing being longer than the other two. A three-story, square rear addition was constructed in 1968. Designed in a mix of early twentieth century Federal and Georgian Revival styles, the building has a masonry foundation, red brick exterior walls with stone and cast-concrete details, and a variety of double-hung windows.

The main E-shaped intersecting-gable roof, originally standing-seam metal, is now covered with asphalt shingle. A square, louvered lantern topped with a gold-colored finial and weather vane is centered on the main gable. Brick chimneys serving first- and second-floor fireplaces are located in the southeast and southwest corners of the building. Lower flat roofs have built-up roofing with mechanicals and sections of fire escape located on them.

Façade (South Elevation)

The façade features a center seven-bay, side-gable section flanked by three-bay front-gable wings. Basement level is a stone block foundation with stone water table. Here, window openings, originally with 9/9 units, are now filled with glass block or are boarded over. The basement's seventh bay was altered in 1992 with the insertion of an opening filled with a flat metal door for a lift on the interior. Upper-story façade walls are red brick laid in Flemish bond. A stone band under the first-story windows runs the length of the façade. The façade has Georgian characteristics, such as stone quoins marking the corners of the wings and a denticulated, pressed-metal cornice with returns on the gable ends of the wings and along the main roof above the fourth story of the center section.

Reached from the public sidewalk by flights of five concrete steps with curved wrought-iron railings, two identical first-story entrances are situated in the second and sixth bays of the façade's center section. Each opening is framed with highly ornamented stone masonry that features fluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals supporting a denticulated broken pediment with an urn and cornucopias. Non-original signage fills a board under each frieze. Stone quoins further visually emphasize each entrance. The two openings are filled with double-leaf multi-light (boarded over) wood doors with ten-light transoms. The rest of the central section's first story has window openings above stone sills and panels beneath, flat brick arches with stone keystones, and 9/9 wood windows. The story is topped with a stone band that is incised "Young Men's Christian Association" and a simple cornice.

At the second story, the center section features the façade's most prominent element, a recessed two-story veranda. Paneled wood columns support the veranda's shallow shed roof. Wrought-iron railings with a decorative central oval span the space between columns. Historic photographs show that the veranda roof originally had a Chinese Chippendale-style wood balustrade along its edge that was removed prior to 1952 and never replaced. The veranda's interior walls and ceiling are painted stucco, and the floor is covered with terracotta pavers. At the second story, seven bays of door openings filled with wood French doors give access to the veranda from the building interior. The third story has seven bays of 6/6 wood windows. Above the veranda roof, the fourth story of the façade's center section is recessed between the west and east front-gable wings and has seven bays of window openings with 4/4 units.

The west and east three-bay front-gable wings are nearly identical, On the first story, window openings are framed in stone with keystones and visually supported by stone console brackets; the middle bay opening is further ornamented with a triangular pediment supported by a second set of brackets. The west wing has retained the original stone panels beneath each window, while on the east wing, openings were made between the consoles and filled with louvers in 1968. At the second and third stories of each wing, window openings have stone sills, brick flat arches with stone keystones, and affixed louvered metal shutters (some of which are

missing). Window openings are 9/9 on the first story, 6/9 on the second, and 6/6 on the third. At the fourth story, the middle bay of each gable end has a tall arched-top window with a wrought-iron balconet flanked by quarter-round windows.

West Elevation

On the twelve-bay west elevation of the original 1926 building, the refined materials of the façade are continued in a one-bay return (twelfth bay): stone foundation and water table at basement level; red brick laid in Flemish bond; stone band below the first-story windows; and stone quoins. Here, the first-story window opening is framed in stone with keystone, consoles, and lower panel. Similarly, the upper stories of this first bay have window openings with stone stills and brick flat arches with stone keystones. However, the majority of the west elevation is utilitarian with a simple pressed-metal cornice; red brick laid in common bond; basement window openings filled with non-original glass block, brick, and/or louvers; and window openings with cast-concrete sills and soldier-course lintels.

The fenestration reflects the arrangement of the interior spaces. In the first five bays, there is a mismatch between the lower and upper two floors. Where the main gymnasium is located on the lower two stories, paired 6/6 wood windows are set into the brick wall in three two-story arched recesses with cast concrete sills, keystones, and brick-paneled spandrels. Where there are social and program rooms on the lower two stories of the remaining seven bays, openings are filled with single window units – 9/9 and the first story and 6/9 at the second. The exception is at the fifth bay. There, a double-leaf metal slab door on the first floor and window openings above are out of line with the rest of the fenestration owing to the egress stairwell on the interior. The third and fourth stories of the west elevation, housing the majority of the dormitory rooms, have smaller window openings filled with 6/6 units. Electrical conduit, security light fixtures and cameras, vents, and an exhaust fan have been installed along this elevation.

East Elevation

The eighteen-bay east elevation is much like the west, with a one-bay return continuing the characteristic materials and ornamentation of the façade, and the remainder of the elevation in red brick laid in common bond, with window openings above cast-concrete sills and below soldier-course lintels. Basement window openings are filled with non-original glass block, brick, and/or louvers, and electrical conduit, security/spot lighting fixtures and cameras, cables, vents and exhaust fans have been installed throughout.

Here again, the fenestration expresses the arrangement of the interior spaces. Social and programmatic areas, at the second through seventh bays, have first-story window openings filled with 9/9 units and second-story openings filled with 6/9. Alterations in this area date to 1968, when the men's social and billiards rooms were converted into the kitchen and dining areas. Rectangular openings were made in the masonry under many of the first-story windows to install louvers for the new heating units in the dining rooms; one first-story window opening was infilled with brick and a louver to vent the kitchen; and, in the eighth bay, single-leaf metal slab doors were added at the first and second floors opening onto a steel loading/delivery dock at the first story and a covered steel fire escape on the second story. At the location of the Y's smaller, secondary gymnasium, the first and second stories of the ninth to fourteenth bays are treated identically to the west elevation with three two-story arched recesses. At the athletic courts in the fifteenth through eighteenth bays, there are no openings in the first or second stories. As seen on the west elevation, there are typical 6/6 dormitory windows throughout the third and fourth stories.

North (Rear) Elevation & Addition

The rear elevation originally consisted of the three-bay rear gable ends of the west, center, and east wings, between which were lower, two-story sections; the gymnasiums filled much of the lower building. Today, a square, protruding, three-story addition built in 1968 obscures the lower stories of the center wing and portions of those two-story sections between the wings. Where visible, the rear elevations of the original wings are consistent with the east and west elevations: walls of red brick laid in common bond; window openings with cast concrete sills and soldier course headers filled with 6/6 wood units; window openings at basement level infilled with non-original glass block or vents; and a simple pressed-metal cornice with gable-end returns. On the east wing, the first and second stories have no openings, owing to the location of athletic courts, and the third and fourth have three bays of 6/6 dormitory windows. On the center wing, only the fourth story is exposed; it has two 6/6 dormitory windows flanking a single-leaf metal slab door that provides egress to a steel fire escape and access to the flat roofs. On the west wing, there are 6/6 windows at all levels (with the exception of the first story) that flank door openings filled with various types of units that provide egress to a four-story steel fire escape. The two-story section between the east and center wings is inaccessible and obscured by ivy and trees. Although only a portion of the two-story section between the center and west wings was left exposed when the addition was built, it is evident that there had been two-story arched recesses in the brick for paired windows as on the side elevations.

Situated in the ell created by the extended east wing and the center wing, the three-story, flat-roofed addition was built in 1968 to house athletic courts and storage. It has an exposed poured concrete foundation, walls of red brick laid in running bond, and no extant window openings. The north and west elevations are heavily covered with ivy. A first-floor door opening filled with a single-leaf metal door provides egress to the steel fire escape, which also provides egress from the roof. It appears that a second-story window opening above it was filled with brick at some time.

Interior Elevations

The interior elevations of the E-shaped upper stories are the same as the side and rear elevations: walls of red brick laid in common bond and window openings with cast concrete sills and soldier course headers. Openings are generally filled with 6/6 wood units, but there are also a variety of later replacement windows and boarded-over openings. Electrical conduit, security lighting, cables, and vents are found throughout.

INTERIOR (See Additional Documentation at end of nomination for floor plans)

The Schenectady YMCA Building was designed as a very specific, purpose-built “manhood factory” (a term coined by Theodore Roosevelt), and it was an efficient multi-functional facility that supported the mission and carried out the programmatic goals of the organization that constructed it. The building was organized into functional zones dedicated to the various age groups it served and the various programs of the organization. Because the organization originally served both boys and men, separate entrances (boys’ on the west and men’s on the east) were created to lead into separate first-floor spaces intended to target the needs and interests of each age group. In addition, the front (south) portions of the first and second floors were designed primarily for the organization’s social, spiritual, and educational programs, while the rear (north) of the first and second floors, as well as the basement, were for the athletic/physical programs. The third and fourth floors were dormitory housing.

First Floor, West (Boys' Rooms)

The Boys' Rooms on the west side of the first floor are made up of three original interior spaces: the lobby, the older boys' social room, and younger boys' social room. Originally all three spaces were open to each other via wood-paneled arches. Glass and wood partitions inserted into those arches, in 1968, now close off the social rooms from the lobby; the two social rooms are still open to each other, however. The rooms are accessed through the west entrance and a small vestibule, with marble steps leading through French doors to the lobby. It is separated from the men's lobby to the east by doors and a short corridor with a stair leading to the basement. The boy's lobby has wood-paneled arched openings, wainscoting, and substantial door trim throughout; original tile flooring with slate base; flat plaster walls; and non-original, suspended acoustical tile ceiling with fluorescent lighting. An L-shaped wood-paneled reception desk, which appears to be original, is built into the arches; behind it are a window and doors to offices in the core of the first floor.

The large L-shaped space to the west contains the older and young boys' social rooms. It was altered in 1968 when the wood-paneled arched openings to the lobby were filled with glass and wood partitions. The south portion of this space, originally the older boys' social room, features a brick fireplace with wood mantel, wood-paneled wainscoting and slate base, and two small closets in the front corners. To the north of it, through three arched openings, the younger boys' room has a stone-faced fireplace flanked by built-in wood benches and, in place of wainscoting, a simple piece of molding at mantel height. The two social rooms have always been open to each other. Both have substantial wood window trim but, otherwise, few finishes are original, including the carpeting, suspended acoustical tile ceiling, box fluorescent light fixtures, and ceiling fans. North of the lobby reception desk, a stair leads down to the basement pool facilities and a corridor continues back to the main gymnasium. To the west are an egress stairwell and a space that was converted to a girls' locker room in 1968; to the east is a small toilet room.

First Floor, East (Men's Rooms)

The Men's Rooms on the east side of the first floor are made up of four original interior spaces: the lobby, the young men's social room (which is now partitioned into offices), the men's social room, and the billiards room. In 1968, the men's room and billiards room were remodeled into dining rooms, and a kitchen was added in an adjacent secondary space. Entering through the east entrance and vestibule, the men's lobby has the same finishes as the boys' lobby: wood-paneled arched openings, wainscoting, and substantial door trim throughout; original tile flooring with slate base; flat plaster walls and textured ceiling; and non-original lighting. The curved wood-paneled reception desk and paneled low partitions that enclose a portion of the lobby date to 1992. To the west, a straight stair with a simple wood balustrade leads up to the second floor; a door marked "Boys Division Office" leads to a corridor that separates the men's and boys' lobbies.

To the west of the vestibule, a pair of wide French doors, topped with a delicately wrought fanlight, lead into what was originally a social room for young men (ages 18-25). Opposite this impressive entry, recessed shelving mirrors the entrance with the same molding and fanlight. This room has been divided and reconfigured as offices several times and now has a drywall partition dividing it into a narrow (one-bay) front room with two doors opening into a larger room to the west. These rooms have been heavily altered and non-original finishes are found throughout. For instance, the wainscoting in the larger of the two rooms does not match the original style found throughout the first-floor programmatic spaces; the north wall appears to have been built out with a stud wall; the brick fireplace is missing its mantel; and the suspended ceiling cuts across the top of the fanlight.

To the east of the vestibule, the former men's social room, which originally mirrored the older boy's social

room on the west side of the first floor, was adapted as a dining room in 1968 and further altered in 1992 to accommodate the lift providing access from the sidewalk on State Street. Today, the room is accessed through the arched opening from the vestibule, as the arched opening from the lobby was filled with glass and wood partition in 1968; an additional opening (from the former billiards rooms) with double doors on the north wall also dates to dining room conversion. In 1992, along with the lift, storage closets and an opening with double-leaf one-light entrance doors further reduced the space. Despite these changes, the original wood-paneled wainscoting and window trim survive, plus a brick fireplace with the same wood mantel as seen in the older boy's social room. However, many other finishes are not original, including carpeting, textured ceiling with modest crown mold, light fixtures, and heating units installed in 1992.

The original billiards room, which mirrored the younger boy's room on the west, is north of the former men's social room. The original tile floor is exposed with original wood window trim and paneled wainscoting (here, taller than in other spaces), along with a non-original acoustic tile ceiling and light fixtures. Originally open to the lobby on the west through the three arched openings, the room was enclosed in 1968 with wood and glass partitions and has doors inserted in the northernmost arch. Four door openings, also made in 1968, lead into the kitchen to the north. It is unclear what that space was originally and how it was configured and finished, but today it is outfitted as a commercial kitchen, with equipment, counters, sinks, and tile throughout. These spaces are heavily water damaged.
North of the reception desk in the lobby, a stair leads down to the basement pool facilities, and a corridor continues back to the main gymnasium. To the west is a small vestibule for the elevator, installed in 1968, that serves all floors of the building; to the east is a kitchen storage room.

First-floor Offices

A suite of former administrative offices is located between the east and west lobbies, in the core of the building and accessible from both sides. This area is entirely utilitarian in character and was reconfigured in 1968 and 1992 into small rooms with a variety of non-original finishes and fixtures.

Athletic Facilities

The north half of the building, below the residential third and fourth floors, houses athletic facilities: the main gymnasium, secondary gymnasium, athletic courts, and swimming pool. Recent water infiltration has severely damaged ceiling tile, plaster ceilings and walls, and hardwood floors in the gymnasiums and athletic courts.

When the building was constructed, the YMCA boasted that the 2-story, 50' x 80', main gymnasium in the west rear of the building did not have columns or radiators to get in the way of activities. Today, the gymnasium remains an unobstructed open space with the original (but severely-damaged) hardwood floor and tawny wall tile, plus non-original acoustical tile ceiling and utility pendant and flush-mount light fixtures. Accessed by a stair in the southeast corner of the space, with a wood handrail and metal balustrade, an oval steel-framed running track with metal-pipe railing rings the perimeter of the room at the second floor level. The room gains natural light through 6/6 windows in openings on the south, west, and north elevations. Paler beige tile marks window openings on the north wall that were filled when the 1968 rear addition was constructed; at the same time, two first-floor door openings were added to the same wall to provide access to new storage rooms in the addition.

A smaller gymnasium is located to the east of the main gym through a double-width door opening. This two-story, 40' x 68' room also has a severely damaged hardwood floor, tawny wall tile, acoustic tile ceiling, utility pendant light fixtures, and paired 6/6 windows in openings on the east wall. Here, pale beige tile on the south

wall marks the location of a former opening from the men's lobby. The same mismatched tile covers much of the west wall from floor to ceiling, suggesting that the two gyms where originally more open to each other than they are now.

Athletic courts, originally intended for squash and handball, are located north of the gymnasiums in the rear of the building, with the 1968 addition on the west and the original set of courts on the east. The courts are greater that one story in height, so upper and lower courts span more than three floors, with interstitial levels providing for player access and spectator areas. At the first floor, low-ceilinged viewing areas look down on three of the four courts accessed by players from the basement level. There are also storage rooms on this interstitial level that are accessible from the main gymnasium. Entrances to the four upper courts and a small toilet room are located on the level above; viewing areas are above that. A stair with wood handrails and metal balustrades serves all levels in the rear of the building.

A decommissioned rectangular concrete swimming pool is the central feature of the YMCA basement. By 1927, a pool was a standard YMCA feature; in this case, the perimeter of the pool is ornamented with a floor mosaic, decorative tile insets around the walls and tiled seating area, all in various shades of tan and brown. The rest of the basement is utilitarian in character. Locker, shower, and toilet rooms serve the pool facility. The original bowling alleys and snack bar have been removed. Other spaces may have been originally used as lecture and club rooms. There are also mechanical rooms and a shop at basement level.

Second Floor

The arrangement of the second floor dates largely to the 1992 alterations. According to accounts from the building's opening, the second floor originally featured an auditorium, smaller rooms for classes or clubs, a reading room, kitchen for catering small events, and only 16 dormitory rooms. Today, it contains about 35 dormitory rooms organized around the perimeter of the building and two large rectangular light wells located to the rear of the main section of the building and between the west and center wings and the center and east wings. Although rooms vary somewhat in size, the typical room is approximately 8' x 13' in size, with a small closet, single window, and cast-iron radiator. Corner rooms have two windows and can be larger. Seven dormitory rooms have wood French doors opening out onto the veranda. Finishes in the rooms and common areas are typically 9" x 9" asbestos tile flooring; a variety of basic baseboard and window trim; plaster or gypsum stud walls; wood paneled or slab doors in metal frames; and fluorescent lighting. Plumbing, cable, wiring, and conduit are exposed throughout.

In the center of the second floor is the main, straight stair from the first floor lobby with a communicating stair for upper floors; in addition, there is a small lobby for the building elevator just to the north. An egress stair is on the west and egress to an exterior fire escape is located on the east. The corridor system that exists is winding but essentially shaped like a 6. Three corridors for the wings run off a main west-east corridor; the center and east wings are also connected via a second narrow hall running perpendicularly between them.

Communal spaces include two non-original kitchens and two non-original ceramic-tiled toilet/shower rooms located on the light wells, and two altered common spaces with brick fireplaces with wood mantels, located in the southwest and southeast corners of this floor. Permit drawings show that, prior to 1992, there had been larger square rooms in these corners of the floor, each with a fireplace flanked by two windows on the side (west or east) elevation and three windows looking out on State Street. During renovation, the walls enclosing each of these rooms were removed and three dormitory rooms were inserted in each space, leaving the fireplace in a reduced common area. Also in 1992, a large, rectangular room originally looking out on the veranda -- with entrances flanking the lobby stair and three pairs of French doors opening to the veranda -- was partitioned into

three dormitory rooms and a section of corridor. Finally, the landing for the lobby stair – previously open to an east-west corridor and the bisecting corridor of the center wing – was enclosed, and the entire east-west corridor shifted to be double-loaded in order to accommodate more small dormitory rooms carved out of the previously larger spaces.

Third and Fourth Floors

The nearly identical third and fourth floors have an E-shape, with double-loaded corridors lined with 82 dormitory rooms each and two non-original communal toilet/shower rooms per floor. Unlike the second floor, the third and fourth floors appear to have retained their original layout. These floors are reached by the central stairwell and elevator, with an egress stair in the west wing, and egress to exterior fire escapes from the ends of the west and central wings. The utilitarian character and non-original finishes of the dormitory and common areas are the same as found on the second floor. Rooms again vary in size but are typically 8’ x 13’ with a small closet, single window and cast-iron radiator. Corner rooms have an additional window and can be larger. Some of the larger rooms appear to have been used most recently as offices rather than dormitory rooms.

Schenectady YMCA Building
Name of Property

Schenectady, NY
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] B removed from its original location.
- [ ] C a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] D a cemetery.
- [ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] F a commemorative property.
- [ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Schenectady YMCA Building
Name of Property

Schenectady, NY
County and State

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1926-1968

Significant Dates

1926-1928 – Construction

1968 – Addition

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Helmle & Corbett

YMCA Building Bureau

Period of Significance (justification): Period of construction (1926-1928) through mid-twentieth century interior remodeling and construction of additional athletic facilities (1968) as the YMCA adjusted its programmatic mission.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Schenectady Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building is locally significant under **Criterion A: Social History** and **Criterion C: Architecture**. Completed in 1928, the Schenectady YMCA is associated with the national YMCA movement that spread throughout the United States during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries with the mission to improve the spiritual, mental, social, and physical condition of young men. Locally, it is directly associated with the tremendous industrial and urban growth in Schenectady at that time. Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, the city experienced a population boom, as workers and their families were attracted to training and jobs in the factories of ALCO, General Electric, and other important industries. With the support of progressive civic and corporate leaders, the local Young Men's Christian Association worked to provide the increasing numbers of boys and young men – many who were new to the city and far from home and family – with a wholesome environment and healthy leisure activities and to mold them into morally upright citizens and employees. As an intact example of a purpose-built YMCA building from the 1920s, the Schenectady building is also associated with the national YMCA's efforts during the early twentieth century to standardize its building practices by merging facility planning at the national level with local architectural expression. With an exterior designed by the New York City firm Helmle and Corbett, the building's interior plan fully embodies the YMCA Building Bureau's standardized arrangement of spaces – lobbies, social rooms, athletic facilities, a swimming pool, and dormitory rooms – devised to function efficiently and programmatically as a "manhood factory." In 1968, the addition of more athletic facilities and the remodeling of some interior spaces also furthered programmatic goals as the Schenectady YMCA responded to the needs of the increasing number of family, as well as male, members. With the exception of a third set of modifications in 1992 (mostly limited to residential services on the second floor of the building), the Schenectady Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Building retains extremely strong integrity within its period of significance, 1926-1968.

Developmental history/additional historic context information

CRITERION A: SOCIAL HISTORY

The Young Men's Christian Association Movement

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was founded in 1844 by George Williams (1821-1905), an English store clerk. As Williams himself had done, young men from rural areas were flocking into London – a booming center of industry and commerce – in search of employment. Filled with unhealthy influences and harmful physical, social and spiritual conditions, the city presented a bleak urban environment to these men working long hours for little wages far from their homes. Williams joined with other clerks to establish the Young Men's Christian Association as a refuge promoting Christian values, Bible study, and prayer.[3]

The idea spread quickly to other cities in Great Britain and beyond and, in less than a decade, the Young Men's Christian Association became an international movement. The first group in the United States was established in 1851 when Captain Thomas Valentine Sullivan (1800-1859), a seaman and missionary inspired by the work

[3] The YMCA of the USA, "YMCA in the United States." http://www.ymca.net/history

of the association in London, formed an association in Boston as a "home away from home" for sailors.[4] Modeled directly on the London organization, the Boston Association stated its constitutional mission as being "the improvement of the spiritual and mental condition of young men."[5] Boston would, in turn, serve as the model for subsequent U.S. associations, at least in the short term.

Young Men's Christian Associations proliferated across the United States following economic trends and patterns of development throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They typically met in rented spaces or church facilities until just after the Civil War, when the New York, Chicago, and San Francisco associations all constructed impressive buildings designed specifically to serve their functional needs and objectives. The New York association caused controversy in the more conservative parts of the country with the addition of a physical component to its mission – "The improvement of the spiritual, mental, social and physical condition of young men" – which justified the inclusion of gymnasium and other athletic facilities in its new building.[6] Ultimately, this four-fold mission would be adopted throughout the country and the YMCA today is best known for its athletic facilities and activities.

Construction picked up in earnest during the 1880s in Eastern and Midwestern cities and expanded to cities in the Western U.S. by the turn of the 20th century. In the years between the Civil War and World War I, associations constructed over a thousand buildings across the country. Most urban communities had a YMCA building by the start of the Depression.[7]

This period in the United States was marked by great corporate expansion and a shift from agrarian to industrial society. It was also a time of progressive reform. Fueled by the desire to make American society better and safer, progressives took on the problems associated with industrialization and urbanization and aimed to improve working and living conditions in cities across the country. A common concern was the increase in leisure time resulting from the decrease in standard working hours. More specifically, at issue was *how* boys and young men – often new to city life and living far from home and family – would spend this extra leisure time. To combat such unwholesome influences of the urban environment as drinking, crime, and prostitution, efforts were made to provide healthy spaces and recreational activities that promoted good Christian morals and citizenship.

The issue of leisure time and the need to foster positive moral character and citizenship would be discussed at length at the 1928 dedication ceremony of the Schenectady YMCA. Delivering the primary address, Dr. George B. Cutten, president of Colgate University, stated, "What a person does with his leisure time, particularly the young men, constitutes without a doubt the greatest threat of the present age. Any young man would just as soon be good as bad if we only give him the opportunity." He continued:

> Working conditions are different now than they were a few years ago. There is a tendency to give a person more leisure time. We must find new and improved ways for wasting time … In many places the five-day working week is no longer a prophecy but a reality … The eight hours a man works and the eight hours he sleeps do not cause us any concerns. During those hours his

[4] "Young Men's Christian Association of Greater Boston Records," Northeastern University/University Libraries Archives and Special Collections Finding Aids. http://www.library.neu.edu/archives/collect/findaids/m13find.htm.

[5] Richard Cary Morse, *History of the North American Young Men's Christian Associations* (New York: Association Press, 1913), 15. [Google Books]

[6] Morse, 76.

[7] Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making of Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xv-xvi.

> time is occupied, it is the eight hours of his leisure time that constitutes the problem. He must have some form of reaction [sic] and recreation during that eight hours of leisure time and it is that period in which he will do either good or evil.[8]

The Young Men's Christian Association was part of the larger progressive movement intended to address the needs of a rapidly changing society. Hailed as "manhood factories" by Theodore Roosevelt, association buildings were designed, as explained by architectural historian Paula Lupkin, "to mass-produce properly socialized, practically educated, and morally upright young men for the modern age."[9]

Schenectady Young Men's Christian Association's Early Years

In 1858, the Young Men's Christian Association of Schenectady was initially founded with the mission "to promote Evangelical Religion among the young men of this city and vicinity," as was stated at the association's second organizational meeting.[10] Establishing the association in a fully functioning facility, however, was not realized for more than a half century. Over those difficult decades, it met in various rented facilities and inadequate locations and disbanded and reorganized several times.

Under the leadership of former Union College professor John Newman, the association spent its first years in second-floor rooms in the Clute Building at 202 State Street, the city's main commercial thoroughfare. Providing only a lecture and prayer service, the group abandoned its work in 1863, at the start of the Civil War. Four years later, owing to the renewed interest of a group of civic-minded men, the association was reorganized under a constitution and a charter and opened a reading room and library in Van Horne's Hall at 151 State Street. In the early 1870s, it purchased a lot at the corner of State and Ferry Street and undertook a campaign to raise funds for a new building. Board members, led by President Nicholas Cain, each contributed between $1,000 and $3,000, and construction began on an ornate Second Empire building (no longer extant) in 1873. Funds ran out, however, leaving the association $19,000 in debt, stalling the project, and halting the organization's work until 1877. In that year, local churches came together to complete four furnished rooms for the association on the second floor of the building, including a reading room, library, and refreshments room.[11]

The association moved again in 1921, to 13 State Street, the location of the large residence of attorney James A. Goodrich, who had been the association's president from 1898 to 1902. Although the largest of the group's facilities to date, the house proved inadequate for its needs from the start.[12] Plans to improve the property quickly gave way to a successful building campaign that would ultimately raise the funds needed to construct the current YMCA building on the Goodrich site.

Schenectady Industrialization and Urbanization

The YMCA in Schenectady gathered the resources to construct its building during a time when the city was booming as an important industrial center; the community was home to advancements in engineering and technology and in the application of research to the manufacturing and marketing of innovative modern

[8] "Dr. Cutten Praises New 'Y' in His Speech at Its Dedication," *Schenectady Gazette*, 30 January 1928.
[9] Lupkin, xvi.
[10] "Young Men's Christian Association," *Schenectady Reflector*, 2 July 1858. Found in: YMCA Binder, Poulin Collection, Schenectady County Historical Society.
[11] George Rogers Howell & John H. Munsell, *History, County of Schenectady, NY, From 1662 to 1886* (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., 1886), 114-115. [Google Books]
[12] "Local YMCA is Making Its Centennial Year," *Schenectady Gazette*, 9 January 1958.

products. At the height of its industrial prowess, Schenectady was known as "the city that lights and hauls the world."

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 and the spread of rail lines in the area in the early 19th century connected Schenectady to a wide reaching transportation network that made it an attractive location for manufacturing and commerce. The city flourished in the mid- to late-19th century with the growth of its two most prominent businesses: the American Locomotive Company (ALCO) and the General Electric Company (GE).

ALCO was established as the Schenectady Locomotive Works in 1848 and, through mergers with seven other builders, became the world's largest locomotive manufacturer by 1901. Sometime later, in 1886, famed inventor Thomas Alva Edison chose the city for the new home of the Edison Machine Works. Emerging as GE by the start of the 20th century, the company developed large-scale electrical distribution systems and diversified to become involved with all things related to electrifying the world. By the early 20th century, it had become a global concern that would employ thousands of Schenectady citizens for generations. The local economy reached its peak immediately after World War II, when ALCO had 15,000 employees and GE employed nearly 40,000 workers.[13]

The population of Schenectady swelled as workers and their families were drawn by industrial jobs with these and other employers. The number of residents grew from approximately 4,000 in 1820 to over 31,000 in 1900. By the time the YMCA building opened in 1928, the city's population nearly exceeded 95,000. Among those attracted to the city were great numbers of immigrants, unskilled laborers, and blue-collar workers, as well as young men recruited to train or work in the plants. The population increased; commercial and residential development spread throughout the city; and the character of the urban environment changed – some felt not for the better.

In the progressive, early decades of the 20th century, Schenectady saw an era of civic betterment funded primarily by General Electric and the American Locomotive Company.[14] Among their welfare concerns, civic and business leaders saw a need to cultivate young men – from boyhood to manhood – as morally upright citizens and employees. The Young Men's Christian Association of Schenectady was committed to this cause, and its new building at 13 State Street was designed to embody that commitment and be the factory that produced these men. At the dedication, the building was touted as "evidence of Schenectady's faith, spirit and liberality to develop helpful and useful manhood."[15]

Schenectady YMCA Programs and Facilities

President of the local association Mills Ten Eyck wrote that the services provided in the new building would start with the boy "… guiding him in his leisure hours, directing his energies in clean, wholesome sports and building strong Christian character."[16] H.F. Shepperd, the association's director of boys' work, furthered this thought, that in order to "provide adequately for the social, physical, moral and recreational needs of the youth of a growing city," the YMCA would:

[13] Bill Buell, *Historic Schenectady County: A Bicentennial History* (San Antonio, TX: Historical Publishing Network, 2009), 50.

[14] Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Electric City: General Electric in Schenectady* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 205.

[15] "Dr. Cutten."

[16] Mills Ten Eyck, "'Y' Stands at Gateway to City; Its Doors Open to All Residents," *Schenectady Gazette*, 30 January 1928.

> … help boys develop well rounded Christian character as a basis for a high type of citizenship. To accomplish this end it purposes [sic] to help them build up their bodies, improve their minds, cultivate the spiritual side of their lives and emphasize a spirit of helpfulness and service toward others.[17]

Membership was open to boys "of good character over nine years of age." This included both boys who called Schenectady home and boys who were in the city temporarily because of their fathers' or their own employment. They were grouped by age: juniors, 9-11; intermediates, 12-14; and boys ages 15-17 who were either in high school or employed. With their own social rooms, separate from the men, they could participate in organized programs or enjoy supervised free time activities. Educational and spiritual programs, undertaken in cooperation with schools and churches, included field trips, vocational training, service opportunities, and Christian citizenship and leadership training. Meeting rooms were available for hobby groups and clubs. "Wholesome recreation," such as health and physical education classes, sports leagues, and clubs, was offered in the gymnasium, swimming pool, and athletic courts.[18]

Building on its "boys work," the association also focused on improving conditions for young men in order to "develop and train [them] for the business of life."[19] Membership included those for whom Schenectady was home and those who were living in the city temporarily. The hope was that "… in the building some of these young men might find a home and all of them, if they chose, might find facilities for spending their leisure time in ways that would be profitable and helpful."[20]

As it did for boys, the association saw its building as both a wholesome environment for men as well as a functional "factory" for molding them physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Social rooms, one for younger men aged 18-25, another for older men, provided games, reading materials, and other diversions. In the lobby, small auditoriums, club rooms, and classrooms, the education department offered Bible study classes, discussion groups, vocational training, mentorships, and special programs such as conferences and speakers. The physical department utilized all of the athletic facilities to build character through play, as it was thought that "[h]ealth building through games and exercise is growing to be a more and more important factor in the business and industrial world today."[21]

In addition to its regular member programs, the association rented dormitory rooms to men who needed short-term living quarters during training or apprenticeships or while seeking work in Schenectady. As building plans were taking shape in early 1926, the *Schenectady Gazette* editorialized on the pressing housing need: "It is planned that the new Y will serve as a home for many of the young men who come to this city to obtain experience in the industrial plants here. It is incumbent on the community to see that these young men have good rooms and clean surroundings."[22]

Association with General Electric

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[17] H.F. Shepperd, "Boys' Work Director of 'Y' Tells Needs New Building Will Meet," *Schenectady Gazette,* 30 January 1928.
[18] Shepperd.
[19] Ten Eyck.
[20] E.E. Camp, "Y.M.C.A. To Be Real Home to Over Two Hundred Young Men," *Schenectady Gazette,* 30 January 1928.
[21] Camp.
[22] "Houseclosing Party Held at Y.M.C.A.; New Home, Colonial Type," *Schenectady Gazette*, 23 March 1926.

Although the Schenectady YMCA enjoyed the support of many industrial, commercial and civic leaders in the city – approximately 7,200 citizens contributed to the capital campaign – there was a particularly close connection to General Electric (GE). According to the plaque recognizing contributions of $5,000 or more to the building fund, seven of the eleven biggest donors were associated with GE:

- The General Electric Company itself, which made a substantial donation – $92,000,likely the lead gift – and encouraged executives and managers to provide volunteer leadership to the organization. [23]

- Charles A. Coffin (1844-1926), the first president of GE, from its formation in 1892 until 1912; he later served as chair from 1913 to 1922.

- E.W. Rice, Jr. (1862-1935), Coffin's successor at GE, who served as president and chief engineer from 1913 to 1922.

- Francis C. Pratt, vice president for manufacturing and engineering at GE.

- Charles E. Patterson, vice president for accounting at GE.

- Samuel Insull (1859-1938) who had risen from Thomas Edison's personal secretary to second vice president of GE. (After being passed over as president, he moved to Chicago in 1892 to head Chicago Edison Company and is credited with the invention of the modern power grid.)[24]

- The Maqua Printing Company, which had started as a division within GE but spun off from the company in 1907 to become a wholly owned subsidiary, provided printing and distribution services to GE and others in the electrical industry.[25]

Other major donors included: American Locomotive Company, which made the second largest contribution; H.S. Barney Company department store, located on State Street just two blocks east of the YMCA building, which was founded in 1858 and quickly became the city's largest and most important commercial establishment; Willis T. Hanson, a prominent business leader in the city and head of a pharmaceutical company located at 195 State Street; and James A. Goodrich, Schenectady native, attorney, and former president of the association, who owned the property on which the new YMCA building would be built. [26] Another interesting contributor was Henry Herman Westinghouse, the son of George Westinghouse, Sr. (who invented a revolutionary threshing machine and established a farm machine works on the Erie Canal in 1856) and the brother of George Westinghouse, Jr. (famed inventor of the air brake among many other patents, who moved his company to Pittsburgh in 1896). Herman himself invented the high-speed steam engine upon which he founded Westinghouse Machine, a GE competitor. When his brother died in 1916, Herman also took over Westinghouse

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[23] Bill Buell, "Schenectady YMCA's Quirky Quarters," *Daily Gazette*, 31 January 2010.

[24] For more information on Insull, see: John F. Wasik, *The Merchant of Power: Sam Insull, Thomas Edison, and the Creation of the Modern Metropolis* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[25] For more information on the Maqua Printing Company, see: "Do You Know Maqua? Printing Concern Here $6,000,000 Business," *Schenectady Gazette*, 9 October 1962. "Maqua Appoints New Manufacturing Chief, 4 New Managers," *Schenectady Gazette*, 5 September 1968.

[26] National Register of Historic Places, *H.S. Barney Building, Schenectady, Schenectady County, New York*. National Register # 84002965.

Air Brake Company.[27] Although located in Pittsburgh during this time, Herman had been raised in a rowhouse that had been across the street from the YMCA site.[28]

To keep up with expansion and diversification, GE was constantly bringing in new, young white-collar trainees, expanding its ranks of blue-collar and unskilled workers, and moving its most promising employees up the ranks. In line with the YMCA's mission to mold boys and young men into upright citizens, GE aimed to cultivate its new hires and stressed the importance of the "rounded development of American young men."[29] The company's training programs, run in-house at the Schenectady plant, instilled company loyalty in employees at every level and promoted healthful recreational activity and wholesome social pursuits.

GE saw its apprenticeship system as a passage from boyhood to manhood. The program was designed to identify school-age boys, recent high school graduates, and low-level factory workers who demonstrated ability and discipline and to transform them into craftsmen or other sorts of skilled workers. At the same time, it aimed to pull these workers into the corporate culture in order to reinforce company loyalty and to retain them as employees.[30]

GE also ran a required test program for recent college graduates who had been recruited by the company for engineering positions. This grueling, two-year training program introduced these young "Test Men" to all aspects of the company, teaching them the myriad corporate procedures, requiring them to do physical labor, and giving them hands-on experience with consumer products in development. More than just a technical course, it created strong bonds among the engineers – merging work and life – and reinforced the bond between the engineers and the company. In socializing these new employees, the company promoted healthy living, athletic and recreational activity, appropriate social interaction, and stable family life, while closely supervising the young men's behavior.[31]

The association's goals dovetailed with GE corporate culture. When the new YMCA building opened, it was not only proximate to, but in view of, the GE plant. In addition to its large donation for the construction of the YMCA building, GE supported the association with smaller annual contributions and advertised the YMCA's recreational facilities, educational programs, social services, and inexpensive dormitory rooms to its workers.[32]

CRITERION C: ARCHITECTURE

Schenectady YMCA Building

The construction of the Schenectady YMCA Building was part of a local building boom – and a nationwide effort to expand YMCA resources – fueled by the robust economy of the 1920s. In addition, the Schenectady building exemplifies the post-1920 model developed and propagated by the National YMCA's Building Bureau. This model utilized spatial planning by the Building Bureau (based on standardized functions and programmatic division of spaces) inserted into an aesthetically advanced building envelope designed by local architects. The bureau's goal was to create a modern YMCA facility for the central city.

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[27] Buell, *Historic Schenectady County*, 48.
[28] Susan Rosenthal, *Schenectady* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 38.
[29] Blackwelder, 47.
[30] Blackwelder, 119-125.
[31] Blackwelder, 97-105
[32] Blackwelder, 203-204.

The project shifted from fundraising to design in 1925 when Neil McMillan, founder and chief architect of the Y's Building Bureau, visited Schenectady that June to study the site on State Street; he submitted preliminary reports to the local association, which subsequently contracted with the bureau in November to move ahead with the project. At the beginning of 1926, the bureau presented local association officials with two plans. The one that was recommended was a six-story building with an elevator. The other option presented was a four-story building, without an elevator, that required the purchase of additional land. The association chose the four-story plan, believing an elevator to be dangerous and expensive. It also deemed the athletic facilities insufficient and requested that the building be extended to include two handball courts and two squash courts; this explains why the east wing is longer than the west and center wings. Although the association estimated that the building as designed would cost $50,000 more than the nearly $645,000 funds available, it unanimously agreed to construct this larger building, stating that it "would render a greater service to the various groups of young men in the City and would net a sufficiently larger return in membership."[33] With a building plan in place, the association contracted with the New York City architecture firm of Helmle & Corbett in March of 1926 to execute the exterior of the building. The bureau also provided specifications for furnishings and equipment, as it did for all new YMCA buildings. By the end of 1927, the building was largely completed. Furniture had been installed; association staff had moved into offices; and dormitory rooms were open for occupancy. When the building was dedicated on the 29th of January, the pool was full, bowling alleys ready for use, and gymnasium equipment installed.[34]

A contemporary account of the YMCA Building indicates that the national YMCA's goal to provide a home-like environment had been realized. The interior organization followed the standard Building Bureau drawings from this period, showing a programmatic arrangement of social rooms, athletic facilities, and typical dormitory room sizes. The front half of the first floor was designed for social and leisure activity, with separate entrances and spaces for men and boys. Through the men's entrance, the large lobby opened to social rooms – one for younger men aged 18 to 25 and another for men over 25 – both of which featured working fireplaces, were furnished with easy chairs, sofas and reading tables, and were well-stocked with reading materials and games. A billiards room, with four pool tables, was also available. The YMCA offered similar amenities on the boys' side, with social rooms for younger and older boys.[35] The rear of the building housed the athletic facilities, including the large main gymnasium, a smaller gym, and handball and squash courts. The basement featured the tiled swimming pool with locker and shower rooms, as well as bowling alleys and a snack bar.[36] The second floor originally had additional programmatic rooms, including a small auditorium, club/reading rooms with fireplaces, and a kitchen, and only sixteen dormitory rooms. The third and fourth floors were reserved for the majority of the dormitory rooms.

In the first month of operation, membership totaled 1,650, and 165 of the rooms had been rented. President of the Schenectady association Mills Ten Eyck praised the architects for departing from the "stereotype institutional style" in favor of a design that gives "an impression of beauty and strength by its simple dignity and correct proportions" and creates "an atmosphere of good, wholesome comradeship."[37]

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[33] Letter from William Dalton, Chairman of the Building Committee, to The Contributors to the Building Fund, 15 October 1926. YMCA Binder, Poulin Collection, Schenectady County Historical Society.

[34] "YMCA Building Schedule" two-page summary. YMCA Binder, Poulin Collection, Schenectady County Historical Society.

[35] "New YMCA Building Result of Careful Research & Planning," *Schenectady Gazette*, 30 January 1928.

[36] "New YMCA Building Result."

[37] Ten Eyck.

YMCA Building Bureau[38]

Before 1915, the YMCA International Committee had allowed local branches to contract the design of facilities to architects of their own choosing, with little planning oversight. YMCA employee Erskine Uhl began collecting exemplary local branch designs for publication in *Association Men* and published several in the 1900s.[39] Uhl's work demonstrated an evolution from the Victorian YMCA buildings, which seemed like gymnastic clubhouses, to service facilities that were more like hotels or fraternal club buildings.[40] This shift showed that YMCA building programs had grown more complicated and required a more demanding standard to ensure the quality of the YMCA brand.[41]

Led by architect Neil McMillan, the national YMCA Building Bureau opened in 1915, initially to create standards and offer technical assistance to local organizations trying to develop new YMCA facilities. McMillan was not pleased with either the efforts of general practice architects in planning new YMCA buildings or with specialist architects in design.[42] McMillan endeavored to create standards to which local buildings would be designed that would be inclusive of plan, design, materials and sanitation. McMillan's leadership transformed the Building Bureau into a full-service internal design firm that could coordinate the dozens of YMCA building projects around the country so that there was a consistent, branded YMCA building type.[43]

McMillan was also concerned with the "cold, institutional character" of YMCA buildings, which he felt thwarted efforts to promote the desirability of the social setting inside.[44] In place of sterile interiors he promoted the idea of the "homelike" space – well-furnished, tastefully-decorated spaces conducive to conversation, educational meetings, recreational activities like billiards and other activities that would keep men away from the abundant iniquities that the YMCA sought to combat.[45] McMillan led the Building Bureau to push national standards of decorating to foster better interiors. Even color selection was part of the program; McMillan wrote in 1919 that "in consultation with an experienced decorator the colors and tones for all the parts should be selected so that the window hangings, pictures, furniture and floor coverings all blend into a harmonious whole."[46]

McMillan's vision for the Building Bureau essentially cut against emergent modernism in his insistence on the division of the functional and aesthetic programs of YMCA buildings. Still, his drive to establishing central planning to lower cost and create uniform quality mirrored the contemporary architectural practices of religious denominations and even some corporations. McMillan saw the inside of the YMCA as precisely-organized, functionally-driven "factory" in plan and the outside as an art work, and rather than integrate the two created a mechanism to keep each separate and responsive to different considerations. This approach gained support within the international YMCA structure quickly.

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[38] Building Bureau description is taken verbatim from: National Register of Historic Places, *Downtown YMCA Building, St. Louis (independent city), Missouri*, National Register # 14000379. Michael R. Allen, Director, Preservation Research Office (primary author), with Laura G. Jablonski, Intern.
[39] Lupkin, 160.
[40] Lupkin, 135.
[41] Lupkin, 160
[42] Lupkin, 160.
[43] Lupkin, 160-161,
[44] Neil McMillan, "The Friendly Building," *Physical Training* 17.5 (March 1920) 213.
[45] McMillan, 214.
[46] McMillan, 216.

In its first phase, the Building Bureau served as a consulting entity, while in its second phase after 1917, it became a paid architectural advisory service. After 1919, however, McMillan found support to convert the Building Bureau into a complete design service for local YMCAs.

McMillan introduced a new structure in 1920 that minimized the role of the outside architect and gave more authority to efficiency planners and engineers within his Bureau.[47] The Bureau had control over selection of site, recommendations on architect selection, the building program, specifications, interior design (supervised by a Furnishings Service) and the architect's contract. The local architect would handle working drawings, interior plan (within constraints), construction supervision and exterior design.[48]

After World War I, the YMCA rejected its earlier "factory-style" approach to facilities, seeking instead to build facilities that possessed a cultural atmosphere promoting art and individualism. The Building Bureau's drive toward a standardized approach to design contrasted with a new concern for the aesthetics of the buildings, especially their interiors. Building Bureau employee Sherman Dean wrote that the YMCA architectural agenda was "turning from prohibitory mandate to the silent, subtle, preachment of atmosphere, surroundings and example."[49] The relationship between the Building Bureau and YMCA organizational philosophy became very close. Architectural historian Paula Lupkin notes that the Building Bureau gained considerable importance within the national YMCA cultural: "[b]y the early 1920s, the Building Bureau had a strong impact on both the structure of the organization and its philosophy."[50]

By the 1920s, McMillan's Building Bureau standards for new buildings were obvious:

- Modern, fireproof construction in masonry;
- Exterior design contracted to local architects, whose artistic freedom was encouraged;
- Interior design either supplied or directed by Building Bureau architects;
- Interiors arranged around a formal hotel-like lobby, with social, dining and meeting spaces on separate floors from athletic facilities and sleeping rooms;
- Abandonment of the older YMCA "panopticon" arrangement where the manager's desk provided views into all recreational and athletic facilities on a first floor in favor of functions segregated on different levels;
- Interiors furnished and decorated artistically, with a "home like" effect emphasizing comfort;
- Separate entrances for men and boys monitored by a common front desk or counter.[51]

Despite aggressive centralization of planning and assumption of program elements previously left to local architects, the bureau made it clear that it was not trying to usurp or restrain architects working for the YMCA. A bureau article stated that the bureau "desires rather to provide a co-operating source of accumulated and authoritative knowledge, upon which the architect can draw his own immediate benefit, and ultimately to that of the organization and its membership."[52] Still, the bureau ruffled the feathers of the profession. In addition to reducing the architect's authority, the bureau took 2 percent of the building costs as its fee, reducing the

[47] Lupkin, 165.
[48] Lupkin, 165.
[49] Sherman Dean, "The Advancing Wave of Color," *Association Men* 54.1 (January 1929): 216.
[50] Lupkin, 167.
[51] Lupkin, 169-174
[52] Charles C. May, "A Post-War Construction Program: The Building Bureau of the International Committee of the YMCA," *Architectural Record* 45 (March and April, 1919), 223.

architect's standard fee from 6 to 4 percent.

Helmle & Corbett, Architects

Although the Building Bureau planned and arranged the interior of the Schenectady YMCA Building, the local association hired prominent New York City architectural firm Helmle & Corbett to design its exterior. The circumstances leading to that decision are unknown. The commission is a curious one, given that Corbett a great advocate for the skyscraper and modern buildings that eschewed borrowing from past styles. Corbett is quoted as describing modernism in architecture as a "freeing of the shackles of style that for years have forced architects to erect duplicates of Grecian temples for bank buildings, regardless of modern requirements for light, air, and utility."[53] Yet, the Schenectady YMCA heavily borrows from Georgian Revival and Neo-Classical styles.

Frank J. Helmle [54]

The firm's senior partner, Frank J. Helmle (1869-1939), was born in Marietta, Ohio in 1869. He moved to New York for his architectural training, studying at Cooper Union and the School of Fine Arts of the Brooklyn Museum. In 1890, he joined the firm of McKim, Mead & White and stayed for a year before opening his own office.[55] Prior to entering into a partnership with Harvey Wiley Corbett in 1912, he had created a firm with Ulrich Huberty and designed several bank buildings in Brooklyn. The firm also designed the Italian Renaissance Revival Boathouse (1905) and the Tennis House (1910) in Prospect Park, Brooklyn.[56] Helmle's versatility as a designer extended to designs for modern, fireproof, multistory buildings having simplified decoration. For example, in 1910 he designed the Bien Building, a loft located on Thirty-Eighth Street on Manhattan.[57]

In 1912, Helmle partnered with Harvey Wiley Corbett and the firm took on larger projects both in the United States and abroad. In 1916, the firm designed the functionally innovative Bush Tower on 42nd Street in Midtown Manhattan, New York, for the owners of Brooklyn's vast Bush Terminal. Three years later, Irving T. Bush hired Helmle & Corbett to design a trade center, known as Bush House, in London. Helmle & Corbett was asked to propose a design for the George Washington Masonic National Memorial in 1921. While designed by Corbett, the building showed Helmle's influence through its fireproof reinforced concrete structure.

In his final years at the firm, Helmle worked on the Henry Stambaugh Memorial Auditorium in Youngstown, Ohio (1926) and the Horace Bushnell Memorial Auditorium in Hartford, Connecticut (1929-30; now the Bushnell Center for Performing Arts). He retired in 1928 and took up amateur golfing. He died on July 15, 1939.[58]

Harvey Wiley Corbett

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[53] "Harvey Corbett, Architect, Dead," *New York Times,* 22 August 1954, 29

[54] Biographies of Helmle and Corbett are taken verbatim from: Historic American Building Survey, *George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria (independent city), Virginia*, HABS #VA-1431.

[55] "F.J. Helmle Dead: Retired Architect," *New York Times* 16 July 1939: 32.

[56] Francis Morrone, *An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith Publishing, 2001), 416.

[57] "Thirty-Eighth Street Loft," *New York Times* 6 November 1910, Sec. RE: 1.

[58] "F.J. Helmle Dead"

Harvey Wiley Corbett (1873-1954), the son of physicians Elizabeth Wiley Corbett and Samuel James Corbett, was born in San Francisco, California in 1873. He attended the University of California-Berkeley and, in 1895, graduated with a degree in engineering. Corbett entered the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1896 where he studied under Jean-Louis Pascal and immersed himself in a design process based on mastery of past architectural styles. In 1900, he received his diploma from the École and was awarded medals for ability in architecture, mathematics, modeling, and freehand drawing. In the same year, Corbett designed and oversaw the construction of the administration building for the Compagnie des Tramways Électriques in Geneva, Switzerland. Following travels in France, Italy, and England, Corbett returned to the United States and worked as a draftsman for Cass Gilbert through 1903.[59]

In 1903, Corbett formed a partnership in New York with F. Livingston Pell during which he made his presence known as a designer. The first two major commissions received by Corbett & Pell were the Maryland Institute (College of Art) in Baltimore, Maryland (1905-08) and the Springfield (Massachusetts) Municipal Group (1908-13); both commissions were winning entries in architectural competitions.[60] The Municipal Group, which paired neoclassical temple fronted buildings with a tall Italian Renaissance tower, reflected Corbett's background in Beaux-Arts design and planning.

While working on these two projects, the firm also entered another competition sponsored by the Brooklyn Masonic Guild. The competition required the architects to design a Masonic Temple for a site at the corner of Clermont and Lafayette Avenues in Brooklyn to house local Masonic lodges and York Rite bodies including the Knights Templar. Fourteen New York area firms entered the competition, and Pell & Corbett, in association with Lord & Hewlett, won the commission.[61] They created a 100'-square building, utilizing neoclassical elements and polychrome terracotta in an inventive manner. The creativeness of the design brought national attention to the building and its architects.

After this period of early, notable commissions, Corbett ended his partnership with Pell and entered one in 1912 with Frank J. Helmle, which would last until Helmle's retirement in 1928. During their partnership, Corbett's architectural expression further developed and blossomed. He did not work in any one particular stylistic mode as none dominated in the United States in the early-twentieth century. As with many of his contemporaries, he also thought deeply about modernism in American architecture and shared these insights, not just through his designs, but through lecturing and writing as well. By the time of his partnership with Helmle, he was already teaching design at the New York School of Applied Design for Women and at Columbia University's School of Architecture. His approach to modern architecture focused on the potential of the skyscraper, but also incorporated elements of zoning and accommodated various modes of transportation, automobiles, airplanes, and even zeppelins.

In time, Corbett became known, in particular, as the architect-champion of the skyscraper. Helmle & Corbett received a number of commissions for multistoried commercial buildings. In 1916, the firm was hired to design the thirty-story Bush Tower for a site on 42nd Street in Midtown Manhattan for the owners of Brooklyn's vast Bush Terminal. This building debuted Corbett as an influential skyscraper designer and theorist. From this point

[59] Corbett's biography developed from: "Resume of Harvey Wiley Corbett, Associate Architect for Brooklyn College," City University of New York-Brooklyn College. http://dspace.nitle.org/bidstream/handle/10090/9277/ and Carl Willis, Carol. "Corbett, Harvey Wiley." In Adolf K. Placzek, Ed., *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*. Vol.1. (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1982), 451.

[60] Willis, 451.

[61] William D. Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 134.

onward, Helmle & Corbett designed many skyscrapers and multistoried structures in America and abroad.[62] Corbett also started to write articles emphasizing the modern needs of industrialized America. For Corbett, the potential of steel construction did not just allow taller buildings, but ones that also emphasized verticality. It was his opinion that the vertical was "more attractive than the horizontal," and America was "a new country, unhampered by tradition, free to move in almost any direction dictated by commerce or social innovations;" based on these ideas, Corbett saw skyscrapers as the logical American architectural expression.[63]

Corbett whole heartedly (sic) supported New York's 1916 zoning law, which called for skyscrapers with set-backs to allow for more light at street level; the building silhouette would become an iconic image of the 1920s. In August 1923, he wrote an article for *Pencil Points*, an architectural drafting periodical, that explained how the zoning legislation required architects to be more creative with their designs to suit both the regulations and the demands of the owner. He saw the legislation as a call for American ingenuity and his own designs provided a viable model for application. Corbett's writings, coupled with Hugh Ferriss's illustrations, helped to quell the controversy over skyscraper designs by advocating set-back skyscrapers as the way of the future.

After Helmle's retirement in 1928, Corbett was associated with various architects on two notable skyscraper developments. He and D. Everett Waid designed the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company North Building in 1928 on a site immediately adjacent to the insurance company's iconic Met Life Tower (1909; National Historic Landmark, 1978), which was the tallest building in the world until 1913. As planned, the North Building would rise 100 stories and reclaim the record, but the Great Depression intervened and only the base of thirty stories was ever completed. Corbett was also senior partner in a firm with Wallace K. Harrison and William MacMurray, which lasted until 1935 when Harrison departed.[64] Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray was one of three architectural firms initially involved in the development of Rockefeller Center (National Historic Landmark, 1987).

Given Corbett's interest in modern American architecture, it is not surprising that he became involved in two World's Fairs having a particular emphasis on technology. He was the chairman of the Architectural Commission for Chicago's "A Century of Progress International Exposition (1933-34) and also chaired the Advisory Committee of Architects, which formulated the theme for the New York World's Fair (1939-40). Corbett's fascination with projects having a massive scale extended to several large civic projects. He and Charles B. Meyers provided the design for Manhattan's Criminal Courts Building (1938-41). After World War II, Corbett was the chief architect for the design and construction of Amsterdam Houses (1947-48), thirteen apartment buildings intended to provide up-to-date accommodation for low-income citizens and, notably, was one of New York's pioneering integrated public housing initiatives.[65]

Corbett was active in New York's architecture scene through his death on April 21, 1954. He was an accomplished practitioner and was recognized during his lifetime with numerous honors and awards. Just a month before his death, Corbett received one from the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

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[62] Willis, 451.

[63] Harvey Wiley Corbett, "New Heights in American Architecture," *Yale Review* 17 (July 1928): 691-92. The vision of America as a "new country" had been established for over a century, but was still current. Corbett, who had spent four years in Europe studying architecture, felt that American architecture was young and, therefore, unrestricted by tradition.

[64] Corbett remained senior partner in a firm with MacMurray. In 1941, the firm's name was changed from "Corbett & MacMurray" to "Harvey Wiley Corbett Associates." Willis, 451.

[65] "Harvey Corbett, Architect, Dead."

Schenectady YMCA Later Alterations

In 1968, the association constructed an addition at the rear of the building to provide another four athletic courts and storage for the gymnasium. At the same time, it removed the basement bowling alleys in favor of an activity room for teenagers; renovated the kitchen and dining room in what had originally been the billiards room; added a girls' locker room adjacent to the main gym; infilled the arched openings in both lobbies; reconfigured the first-floor administrative offices; and finally installed the elevator that had been thought to be too expensive and dangerous when the building was constructed. By this time, the young men's social room had already been partitioned for additional offices.

With 8,000 members, a number of the organization's programmatic goals had changed. Membership now included women and girls. There was more focus on younger people, with 800 boys enrolled in a Buddy Club. Finally, the association had more partnerships with local organizations like the Boy Scouts and various social, civic, and church organizations. The Schenectady YMCA still provided lodging for 180-200 occupants each day, but the character of the residents had shifted – fewer aspiring managers from GE and local industries, more people without other living options.[66]

The association made additional upgrades to the building in 1992. On the first floor, it installed a lift for access from the front sidewalk; replaced the reception desk and created a seating area in the men's lobby (now, the residents' entrance); and again modified office spaces. On the second floor, it extensively altered the layout, inserting dormitory rooms into the former reading/club rooms and auditorium; expanding the toilet/shower rooms and kitchens; and reconfiguring the corridor layout. Although membership had grown to over 25,000 and there remained a focus on programs for families, the association was clearly making room for older residents and more of the chronically poor.

In 2010, the association built a new fitness facility in central downtown Schenectady and shifted all of its membership activities and services to that new facility. It continued to use the old building to house a large population of disadvantaged men until late 2014 when it moved the over 150 residents to the rehabilitated Micanite Works Building on Broadway.[67] The Schenectady YMCA Building has been vacant since then.

[66] "YMCA Making first Big Change Since '28," *Schenectady Gazette,* 12 January 1968.

[67] National Register of Historic Places, Mica Insulator Company, Schenectady, Schenectady County, New York, National Register # 11001007.

CONCLUSION

The substantially intact Schenectady YMCA Building typifies the design brand promulgated by the national organization's Building Bureau beginning in 1913, when it aggressively began to institute programmatic-driven "association architecture." The building's unaltered basement pool, formal first-floor social rooms, gym, athletic courts, and dormitories – common elements of all YMCA architecture -- convey a strong sense of place, as does the building's original setting among nineteenth-century buildings and a contemporary, Neoclassical former hotel (Hotel Van Curler, 1925; now Schenectady County Community College).

The exterior of the building was designed by Helmle and Corbett, a preeminent New York City firm. The programmatic spaces reflect the YMCA's early mission to impart Christian-based, middle-class values to men and boys by using athletics, educational and religious programs, and safe housing as springboards. The YMCA particularly catered to new GE engineers and apprentices, as well as other young men engaged in all forms of industrial work. It long catered as well to the needs of boys.

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Additional Information

Schenectady County Historical Society, Poulin Collection, YMCA Binders.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
____previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

____State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
____Local government
____University
_X_Other
Name of repository: Schenectady County Historical Society, Poulin Collection, YMCA Binders.

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .99 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18N	585976E	4740894N	3			
2				4			

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Boundaries correspond to Parcel 39.63-3-32.1 (9-13 State Street) on the current tax map for the City of Schenectady. The Schenectady YMCA Building fronts on State Street and is bounded on three sides with other properties (on Washington Avenue, Lower Union Street, and South Church Street). A driveway from the rear parking lot exits onto Lower Union Street in the Stockade Historic District but is not included in the tax parcel.

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

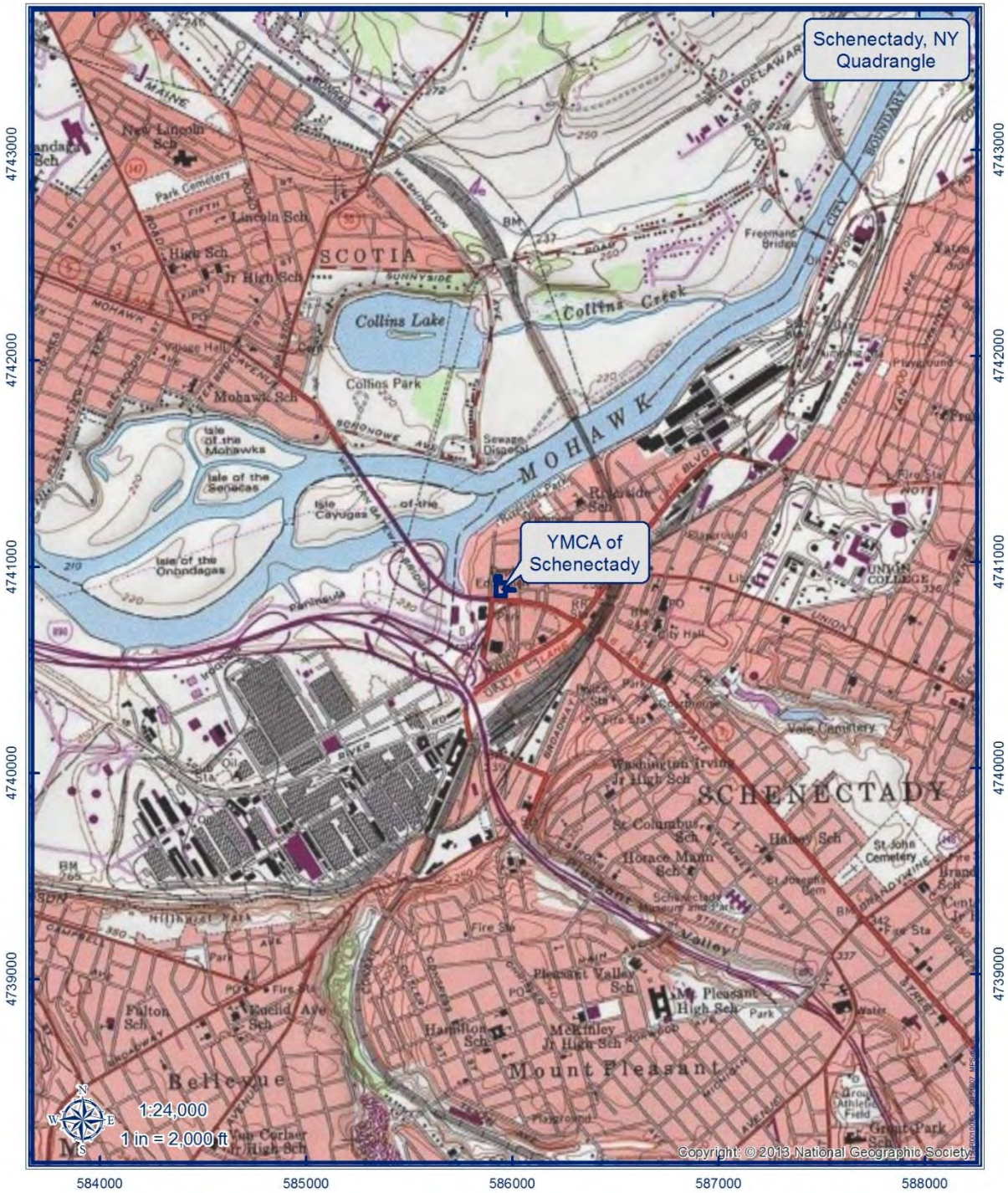
The boundaries are those historically associated with the Schenectady YMCA Building and serve as its current site.

Schenectady YMCA Building
Name of Property

Schenectady, NY
County and State

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Schenectady
City of Schenectady, Schenectady Co., NY

9-13 State Street
Schenectady, NY 12305



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Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

Feet
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YMCA

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Schenectady YMCA Building
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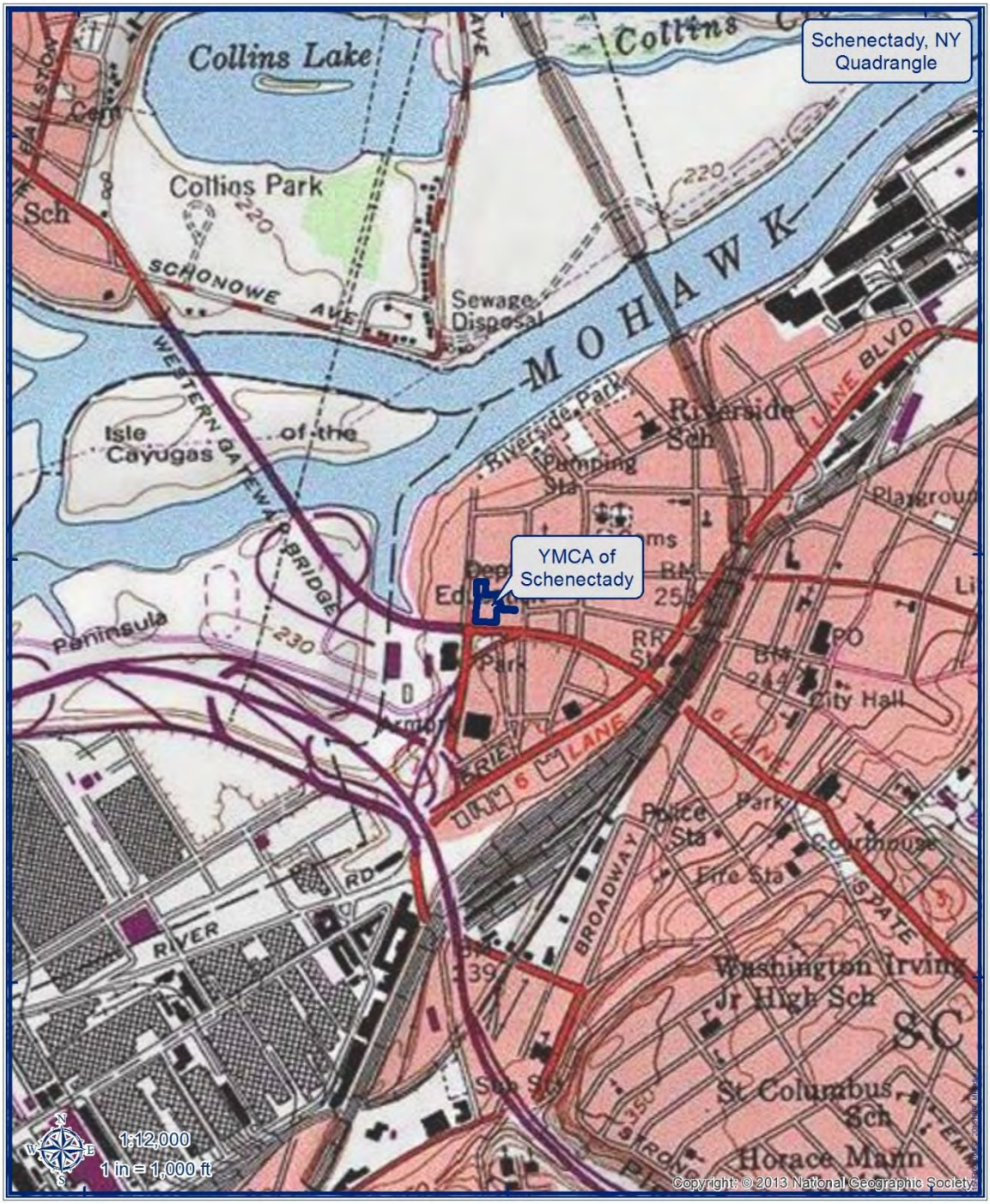
Schenectady, NY
County and State

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Schenectady
City of Schenectady, Schenectady Co., NY

9-13 State Street
Schenectady, NY 12305



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YMCA

NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Schenectady YMCA Building
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Schenectady, NY
County and State

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Schenectady
City of Schenectady, Schenectady Co., NY

9-13 State Street
Schenectady, NY 12305

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

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YMCA

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Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter

0 70 140 280 Feet

YMCA

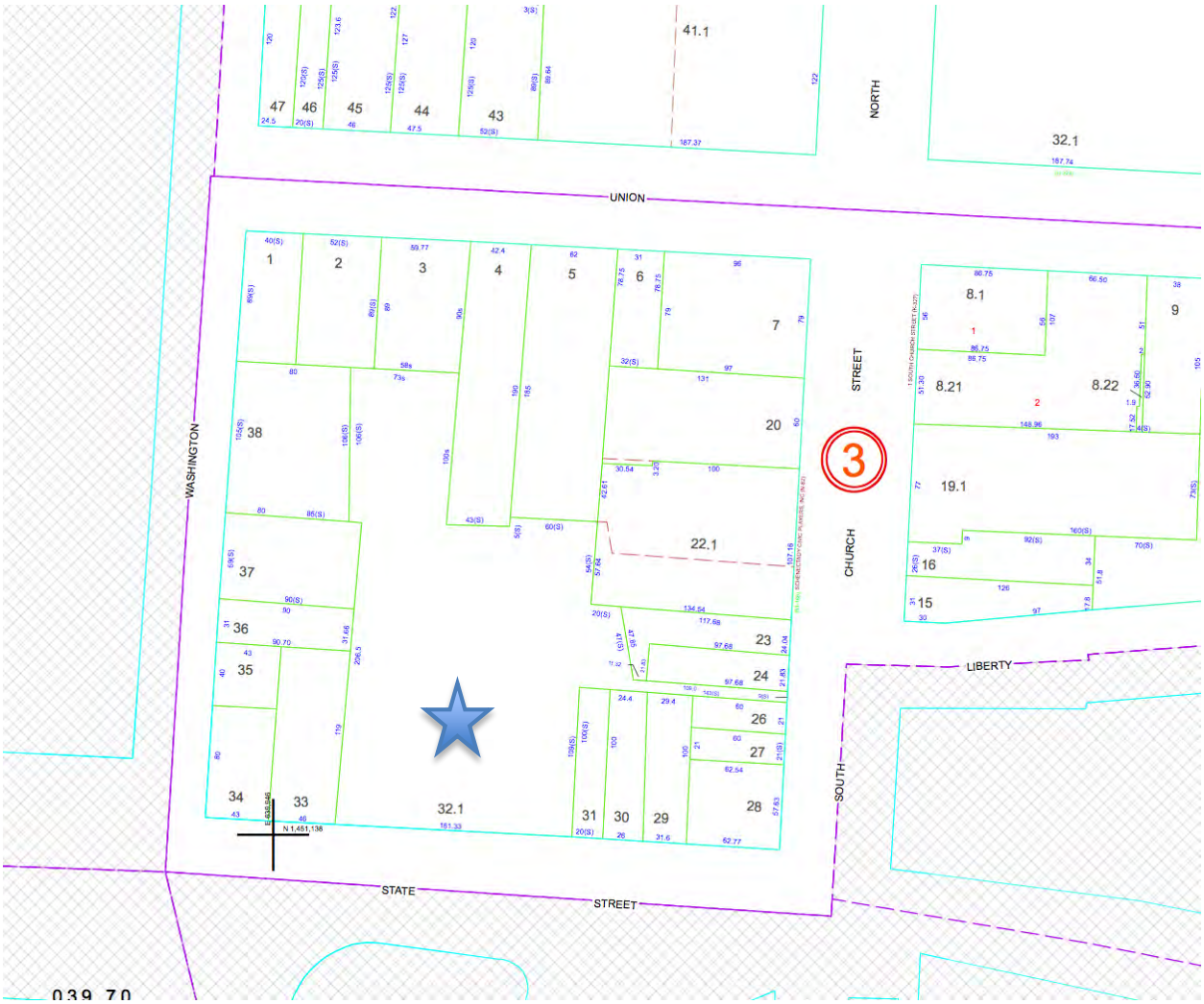
NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Aerial View of Schenectady YMCA Building, 9-13 State Street, Schenectady, NY [Google Maps]

Tax Map for Schenectady YMCA Building (39.63-3-32.1), 9-13 State Street, Schenectady, NY

Schenectady YMCA Building
Name of Property

Schenectady, NY
County and State



11. Form Prepared By

name/title Patricia Connolly Altman, Principal

organization PACA Preservation, LLC date 5 August 2015

street & number P.O. Box 649 telephone

city or town Kinderhook state NY zip code 12106

e-mail paltman@paca-preservation.com

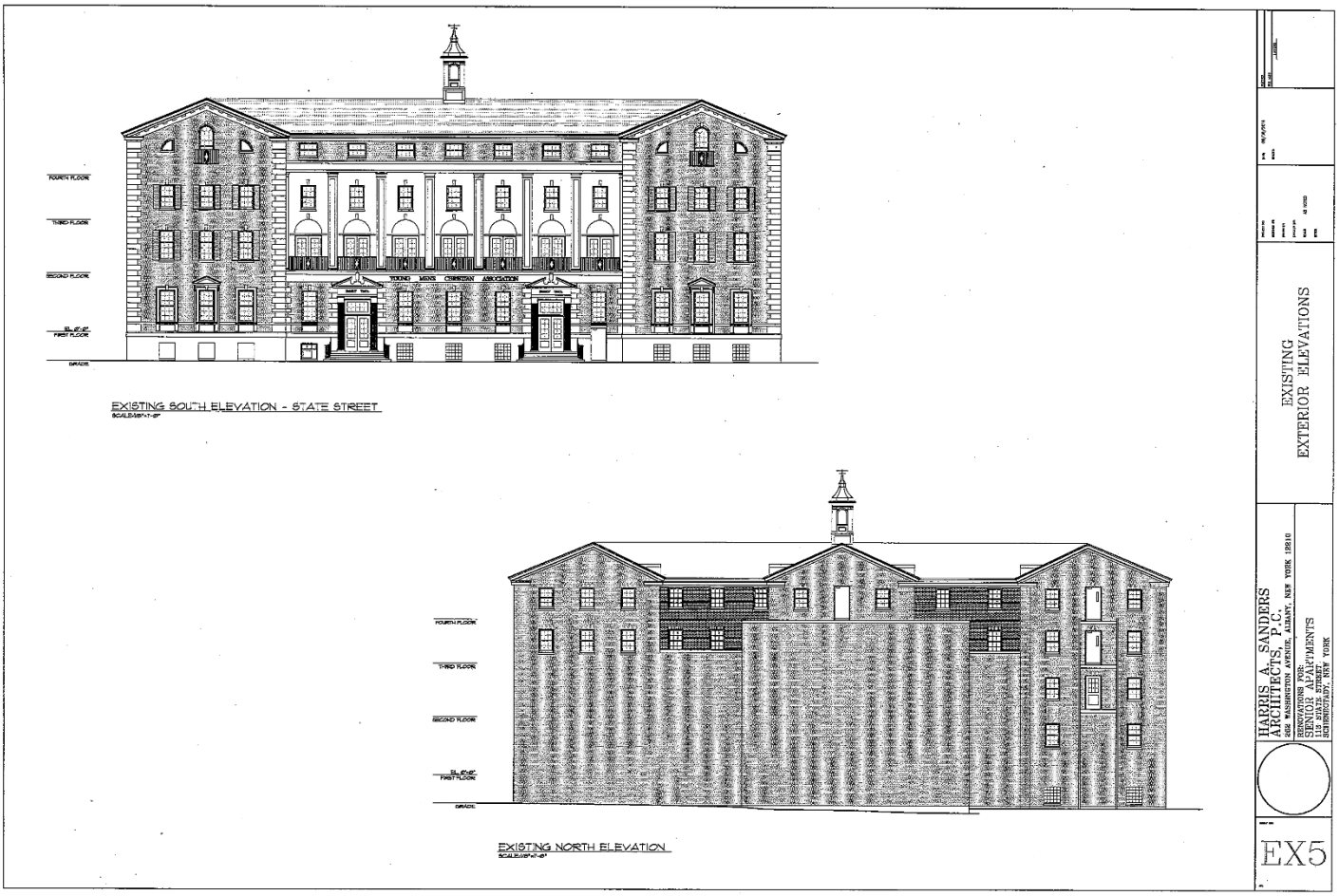
Schenectady YMCA Building
Name of Property

Schenectady, NY
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Floor Plans (Existing Conditions)



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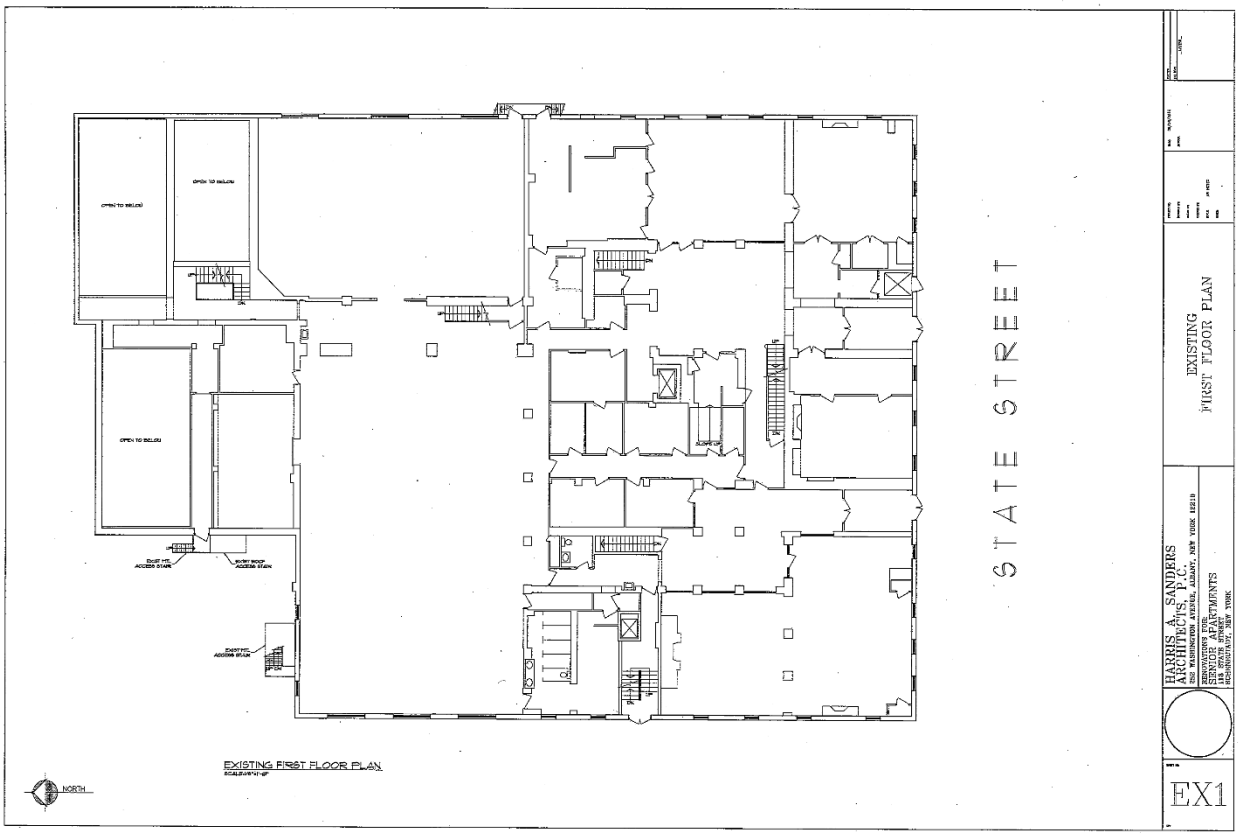
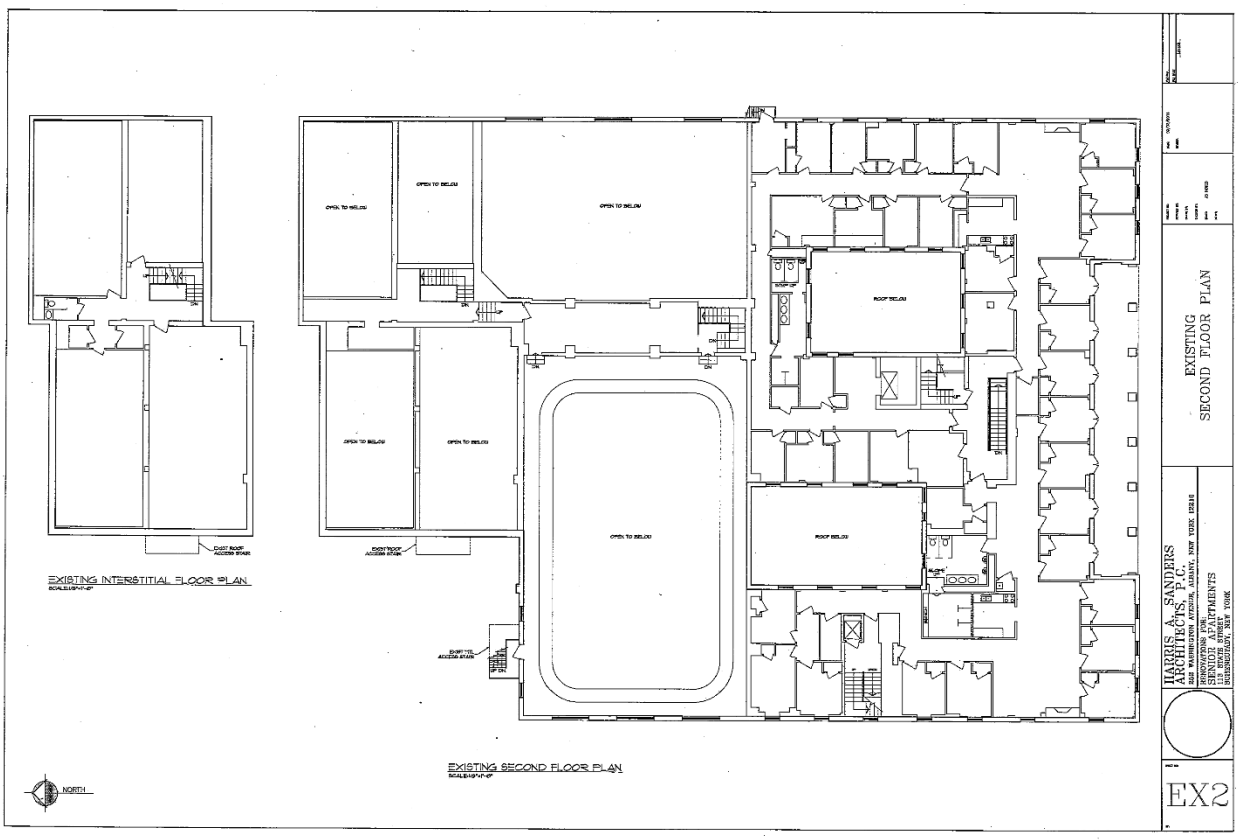
County and State





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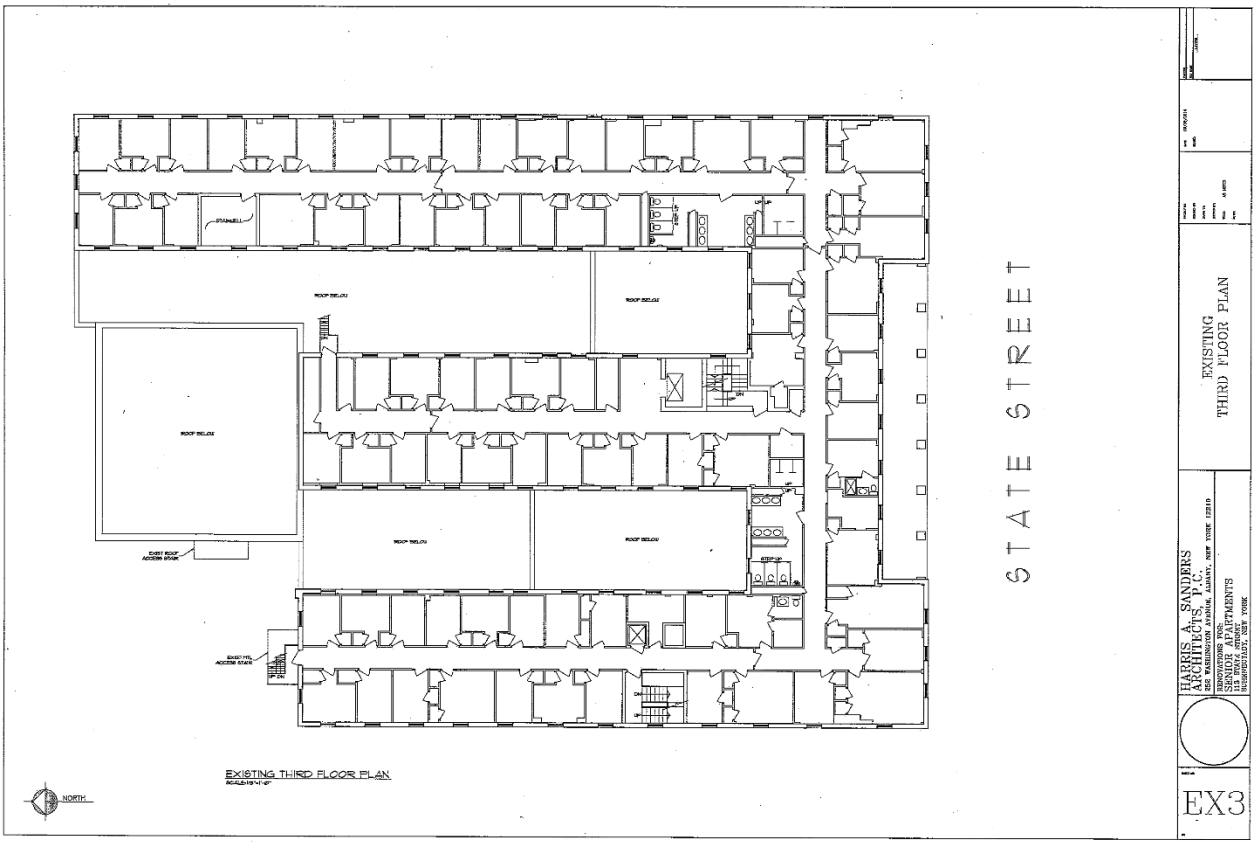

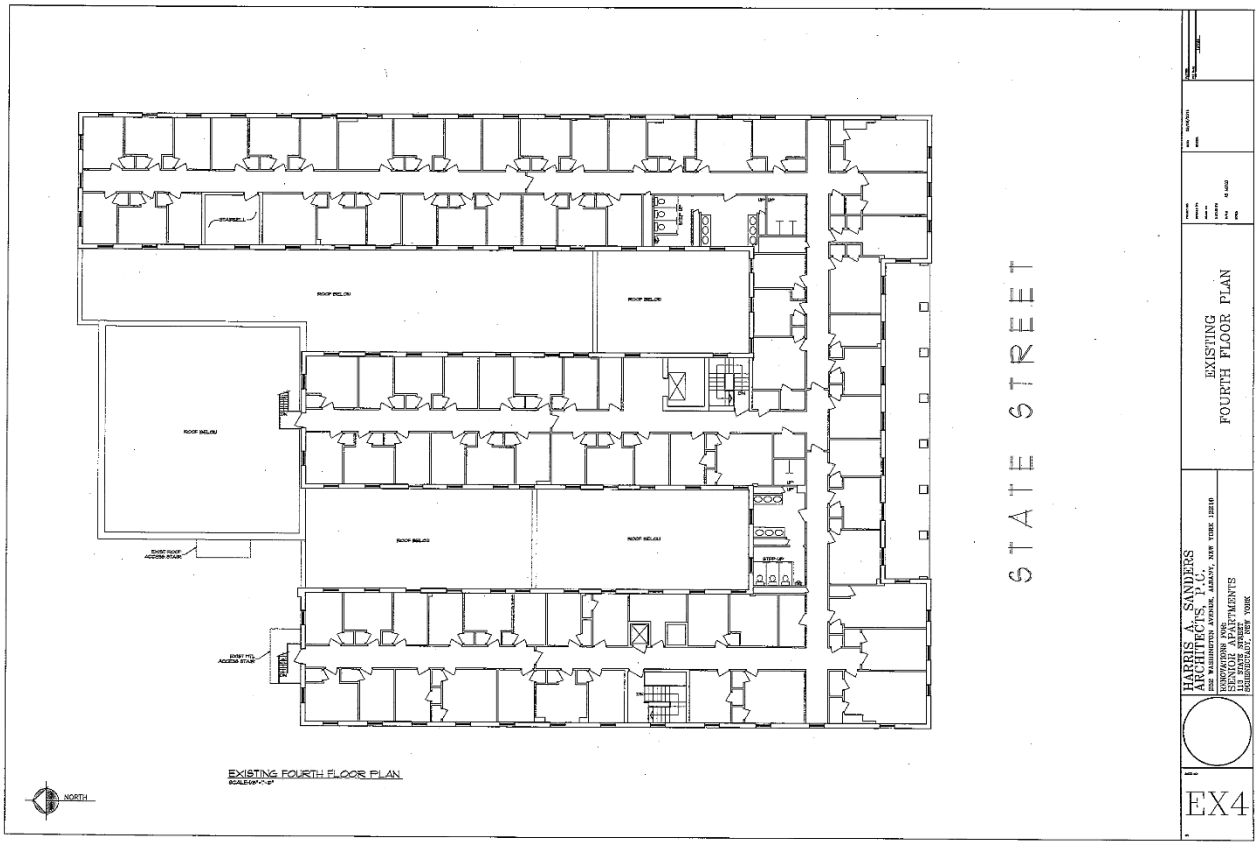

Schenectady YMCA Building
Name of Property

Schenectady, NY
County and State

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Schenectady YMCA Building (9-13 State Street)

City or Vicinity: Schenectady

County: Schenectady State: NY

Photographer: PACA Preservation, LLC

Date Photographed: 6/2015

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0001	Exterior: Façade (south elevation), looking north
NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0002	Exterior: West elevation, looking southeast
NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0003	Exterior: North (rear) elevation, looking south
NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0004	Exterior: East elevation, looking northwest
NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0005	Interior: West (boys') first-floor lobby, looking northeast
NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0006	Interior: Boys' first-floor social room, looking northwest
NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0007	Interior: Main gymnasium, looking northwest
NY_Schenectady County_Young Mens Christian Association of Schenectady_0008	Interior: Basement swimming pool, looking west

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Capital District YMCA

street & number 465 New Karner Road telephone 518.869.3500

city or town Albany state NY zip code 12205

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

ASSOCIATION
FAMILY YMCA

PARKING LOT
FOR YMCA
ONLY

POOL ENTRY-WOMEN
LOCKER ROOM
SWIMMING POOL
RIGHT TO KNOW CENTER
MATERIAL SAFETY DATA SHEETS FOR HAZARDOUS MATERIALS USED IN THIS AREA
WARNING
VISITOR'S BATHROOM
NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LOST OR STOLEN ITEMS. PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE VALUABLES IN LOCKER.

NAUTILUS CENTER POLICY
NO BAGS,
COATS
OR BOOTS
ALLOWED

POOL RULES
DIVING