NPS Form 10-900
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

OMB No. 1024-0018

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Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

37

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 Whiffen-Ribyat Building

Other names/site number Isaac Whiffen's Sons Meat and Provisions; Ribyat Brothers Furnishings

Name of related Multiple Property Listing N/A

2. Location

Street & number 327-331 Bleecker Street | n/a | not for publication

City or town Utica | n/a | vicinity

State New York Code NY County Oneida Code 065 Zip code 13501

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 ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria: _x_ A ___ B __ C ___ D

Richard Rippont DSHPO 12/28/15
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:)

for Edson M. Beall 2/23/16
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE: specialty store
COMMERCE: warehouse

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

No style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Stone
walls: Brick
Stucco
roof: Not visible
other: Concrete

x **NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION ON CONTINUATION PAGES**

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.

[ ] 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance on continuation sheets

Areas of Significance

Commerce

Period of Significance

1893-1952

Significant Dates

1930

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Williams, Thomas H. (architect, 1922 additions)

Roberts, Richard (builder, 1922 additions)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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:

_x_State Historic Preservation Office
____Other State agency
____Federal agency
____Local government
____University
____Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .27 acres

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)
_____ NAD 1927 or _____ NAD 1983

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18N	481652E	4772064N	3			
2				4			

Verbal Boundary Description (On continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (On continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Debbie Sheals and Andrea Herries
organization Historic Preservation Consulting date August 17, 2015
street & number 29 South Ninth St. #210 telephone 573-874-3779
city or town Columbia state MO zip code 65201
e-mail debsheals@gmail.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:**
  - A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
  - A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Photographs**
- **Owner Name and Contact Information**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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.

Photo Log:

Name of Property:	Whiffen-Ribyat Building		
City or Vicinity:	Utica		
County:	Oneida	State:	New York
Photographer:	Debbie Sheals		
Date Photographed:	July, 2015		

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 26. Looking north to the façade (south wall).
2 of 26. Looking northeast.
3 of 26. Looking east from Bleecker Street
4 of 26. Looking southeast from Jay Street.
5 of 26. Looking southeast, back of section A.
6 of 26. Looking southeast, north wall of section D.
7 of 26. Looking northwest, south walls of sections C and D.
8 of 26. North wall of Section D.
9 of 26. Looking southwest from Jay Street.
10 of 26. Looking west from Jay Street.
11 of 26. East side wall.
12 of 26. Looking west from Bleecker Street.
13 of 26. Façade detail.
14 of 26. First floor section A, looking south.
15 of 26. First floor section A, looking north.
16 of 26. First floor section C, looking north.
17 of 26. First floor section D, looking northwest.
18 of 26. Second floor section B, looking north.
19 of 26. Second floor section C, looking north.
20 of 26. Second floor section D, looking east.
21 of 26. Third floor section D, looking south.
22 of 26. Second floor section A, looking southwest. Former storefront openings.
23 of 26. Third floor, looking north. Stairs.
24 of 26. Fourth floor, looking northeast.
25 of 26. Fifth floor, looking south.
26 of 26. Sixth floor, looking north.

Photo Key: Exterior

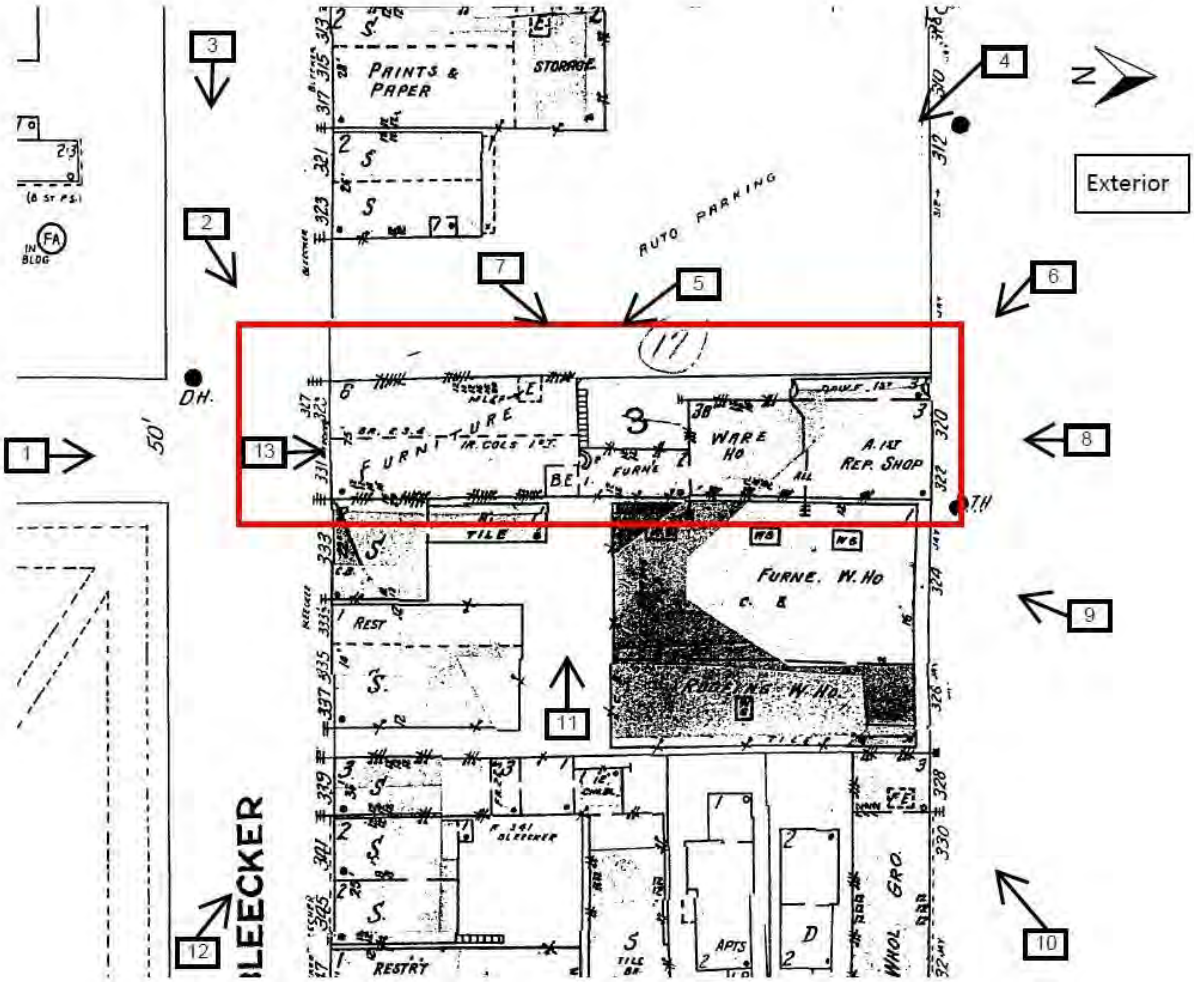


Photo Key: Interior

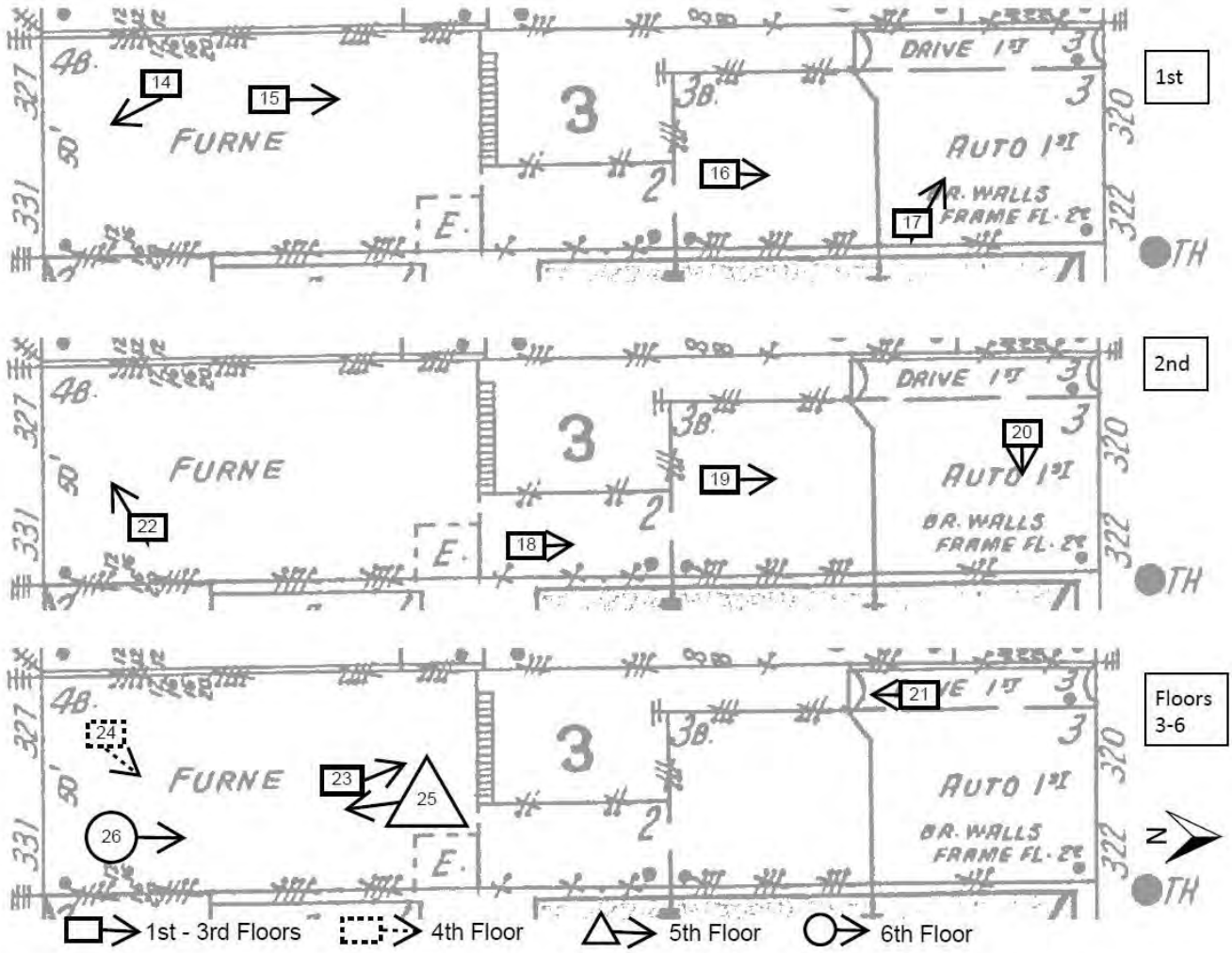


Figure Log:

Include figures on continuation pages at the end of the nomination.

1. Aerial photo map from Google Earth, with coordinates.
2. Aerial photo map of the area, from Google Earth.
3. Tax Map, with boundaries.
4. 1950 Sanborn Map of the property, with added notes about construction dates.
5. Floorplans, by Buxton Kubic Dodd Creative.
6. Photo taken shortly after the 4th and 5th floors were added. (Image from the 1930 *Utica City Directory*, courtesy of the Oneida County Historical Society.)
7. 1925 Sanborn Map.
8. Map of Utica, 1825. From *Utica: A City Worth Saving*. Utica, New York: Mohawk Community College, n.d. (ca. 1970s.) 33.
9. Map of Utica, about 1835, from, Daniel E. Wager. *Our County and Its People: a Descriptive Work on Oneida County, New York*, (Boston: The Boston History Co., 1896) 379.
10. Plat filed by the family of Rutger Bleecker in 1810, with the location of the nominated property. (On file in the Oneida County Assessor's Office, Utica, NY.)
11. Photo of the building taken soon after it was built. (From an 1899 City Directory ad for the Isaac Whiffen's Sons Meat Company on file at the Oneida County Historical Society, Utica, NY.)
12. 1899 Sanborn Map of the Block.
13. Drawing made for remodeling project of 1922. This was probably drawn by architect Thomas H. Williams. (*Utica Daily Tribune* 2 Feb. 1922. fultonhisory.com, accessed July 2015.)
14. Early 20th century postcard of Genesee Street. (Perkins, Laura. "Bleecker Street." *Postcards of Old Utica*. ca. early 20th century.) The view is looking southeast towards St. John's Church, with Chancellor Square just beyond that. The Whiffen Ribyat Building is a block beyond the church towers, out of view to the left.
15. Photo of the façade, taken ca. 1960. (From the collections of the Oneida County Historical Society.)

Summary:

The Whiffen-Ribyat Building, at 327-331 Bleecker Street in Utica, Oneida County, New York is a rambling commercial building with red brick walls and minimal architectural detailing. It is located on the eastern edge of downtown Utica, on the north side of Chancellor Square. (Figures 1 and 2.) There are four sections to the building, all of which have brick walls and flat roofs. (Figure 4.) The six-story front block (Section A) occupies the entire front half of the lot. It was built as a four-story building in 1893, and the top two floors were added in 1930. A narrow two-story ell (Section B) connects the front block to a pair of warehouses located at the back of the lot. The ell was also built in 1893, as a one-story engine house; the engine was removed and the ell was expanded to two stories between 1899 and 1925. Warehouse #1, (Section C) which is closest to the ell, is the oldest warehouse; it was built at the same time as the front block, in 1893. Warehouse #2 (Section D), which occupies the north end of the property, was added ca. 1922; it is three stories, with large garage door openings on the lower north wall, facing Jay Street. The narrow six-story front wall, which faces generally south to the intersection of Bleecker and Academy Streets, is the only part of the building with any architectural detailing of note. The front wall is divided into three sections. The top two floors, which were added in 1930, have red brick walls and smooth stone or cast concrete accents. A simple projecting cornice at the roofline bears a centered nameplate which reads “RIBYAT.” The third and fourth floors, which date to 1893, are also of red brick, and they feature terra cotta date stones which read “1843” and “1893.” The lower two floors of the front wall, which were remodeled numerous times during the period of significance, are covered with modern stucco, and an open storefront spans the first floor. The upper floors of the front wall are filled with evenly spaced window openings, many of which retain early or original wood window sash. The side and rear walls have a mix of wood and streel framed windows that were installed between 1893 and 1930. Interior spaces are highly intact. The six-story front section has wood floors, early or original pressed metal ceilings, and original wood posts. The back sections feature typical warehouse finishes, with exposed structural members, brick walls, and wood flooring. This is the only resource on the property, and there have been no additions or other changes to its form or footprint since 1930. Overall, the building is highly intact; the modern stucco on the lower front constitutes the

only notable modern change. It is in good physical condition and immediately recognizable to its period of significance.

Site and Setting:

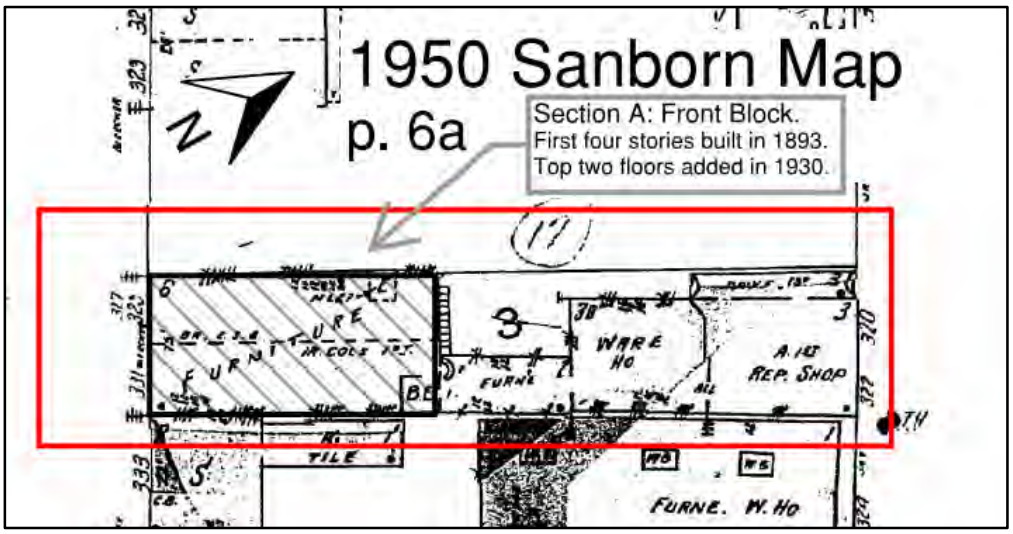
The building occupies a narrow urban lot on the east edge of downtown Utica. It is two and one-half blocks east of Genesee Street and south of Oriskany Street, the two primary commercial arteries in downtown Utica. Genesee runs generally north and south and Oriskany runs east and west, along the historic path of the Erie Canal. Across Bleecker Street to the south is Chancellor Square, one of the city's oldest public parks. It is a large open space with mature trees and modern tennis courts and playground equipment. The Whiffen-Ribyat building is the tallest building on Chancellor Square and one of the oldest. Most other buildings in the area are two to three stories tall and built after the turn of the 20th century. The only building on the square that appears to be older is the three-story Utica Free Academy, which is located just south of this property, facing east to Academy Street. The academy was built before 1884.

The Whiffen-Ribyat building covers most of its long narrow rectangular lot. The lot is bordered by Bleecker Street on the south, Jay Street on the north, and other commercial properties on the east and west. Jay Street runs alongside Oriskany (the old Erie Canal) in this location. The lot slopes down to the north, and Jay Street is several feet lower than Bleecker Street. The adjacent properties along the north side of Bleecker Street contain a mix of older and newer buildings. There are two buildings on the west end of the block; both are modern. (Photos 2 and 3.) A narrow paved driveway separates the Whiffen-Ribyat building from a low one-story building on the property immediately to the west. To the east is a small row of late 19th or early 20th century commercial buildings (Photo 12). That row includes a small two-story commercial building which adjoins part of the east side wall of the Whiffen-Ribyat building, 333 Bleecker Street. The two-story building and its lot are now part of the current legal parcel associated with 327-331, but not part of the nominated property because the two buildings were not linked during the period of significance. In addition, the building at 333 has burned, is in very poor condition, and is likely to be demolished soon. The north end of the lot,

near Jay Street, is flanked by a modern metal-sided building on the east and paved parking to the west. (Photo 10.)

The four connected sections of the building at 227-331 Bleecker Street have each been assigned a letter, and each is described separately below. The largest and most prominent part of the building is located on the south end of the lot, facing Bleecker Street; behind it, the support spaces extend north to Jay Street. (Figures 4 and 5.)

Section A: Front Block (Photos 1-5, 11-15, 22-26.)



The front block (Section A) is six stories, with red brick walls, a rectangular footprint, and a flat roof. It is approximately 60 feet wide and 100 feet deep, and is the largest and the most formally detailed section of the building. As noted, this section was four stories when it was built in 1893, and the top two stories were added in 1930. The added stories are of very similar materials and composition; the walls are constructed of comparable brick, and the top floors have window openings which match those of the lower floors.

Exterior: The six-story façade is topped by a simple molded cornice and a wide flat painted metal frieze. Centered in the frieze band are raised letters that read, “RIBYAT.” The top four floors each have four large window openings; the masonry openings are all fully intact. Plywood covers all the windows of the top two floors and two of those on the fourth floor; at least six retain early or original 1/1 sashes. Most of the early sashes from the covered window

openings are still in place behind the plywood, or sitting loose on the floors next to the openings. (A few sash are visible next to the window openings in Photo 25.)

The top four floors of the façade are faced with red brick. Historic photos show that those walls were painted white when the building was remodeled in 1930. That white paint has since been removed from floors 5 and 6, and floors 3 and 4 have been painted that same color as the red brick on the top two floors. The two upper sections have slightly different architectural detailing. The top floors have flat stone string courses at the lines of the window sills, while the windows of the third and fourth floors are trimmed with ornamental brickwork and rock-faced stone sills. (Photos 1, 2, 13.) The fourth floor also contains a pair of terra cotta date stones; one reads 1843 and the other 1893. (The building was built to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Whiffen Meats.)

The first and second floors were also remodeled in 1930; this project included the addition of an open first-floor storefront, large second-floor display windows, and pale terra cotta tile wall cladding. (Figure 6.) Although the lower two floors of the façade have since been covered with modern stucco, the historic pattern of fenestration is evident. The early second-floor display window openings are in place behind the modern exterior coverings (Photo 22), and there is still an open first-floor storefront. (Photos 1 and 14.)

The back and sides of the building have simple flat walls that have little to no added architectural detailing. The walls are built of rough brownish brick, and there is little difference between the masonry of the top two floors and that of the older sections. Each side wall has a large painted wall sign on the upper front corner which reads, “Jeffery Hardware.” (Jeffrey Hardware occupied the property from 1973 into the 21st century.) The brick walls below the painted signs have been painted brick red to match the paint on the façade.

The secondary elevations include a fire escape and the penthouses for two elevators. There is an open metal fire escape on the west side of the back wall which runs from the second floor to the sixth, and a large freight elevator and penthouse are at the northeast corner of this section. A smaller penthouse on the west side wall marks the location of a small passenger elevator that was added around 1930.

Almost all original fenestration remains. There are loading doors at the first floor of the back wall, and the upper back and side walls are lined with tall narrow window openings. The back wall has windows on floors 2-6, and the side walls have windows on floors 3-6. The only notable differences are the shapes of the windows; those of the upper floors have flat tops, and those on the lower floors have segmental arched tops. Most have flat stone or concrete sills. Almost all of the window openings have multi-light steel-framed sash or 6/6 double-hung wood sash. The wood windows appear to date to the early 1890s or early 1900s and are in fair to very poor condition. Most of the steel sash, which were probably installed in the 1930s or later, are in fair condition. Some of the steel sash do not quite fit the openings, and it has been assumed that they replaced older wood windows.

Windows on the lower sections of the side walls have been bricked-in. In particular, the second and third-floor window openings on the west wall have all been enclosed. This was probably done when a theater was built on the adjacent lot in 1910; that theater was demolished before 1950. Historic photos show that the east wall also had windows at the second floor, but many of those were covered when the two-story building to the east was built, sometime before 1925.[1]

Interior: The interior spaces in of the front block have seen remarkably few changes. There have been very few plan changes, and all levels feature original exposed support posts and beams. Most also have early or original wood flooring and ornamental pressed-metal ceilings. The front part of the first floor contains a small open display room which has early posts and beams and ornamental pressed-metal ceilings, along with some newer gypboard walls and tile flooring. (Photo 14.) The rest of the first floor is largely open, with a thick brick wall along the center of the building and even rows of original wood support posts along either side. (Photo 15.) The back rooms also have early or original pressed-metal ceilings. A freight elevator is in a brick shaft at the northeast corner of the back room, and a passenger elevator is on the west wall, near the back. A narrow stairway near the center of the back wall accesses the unfinished basement, as well as the upper floors.

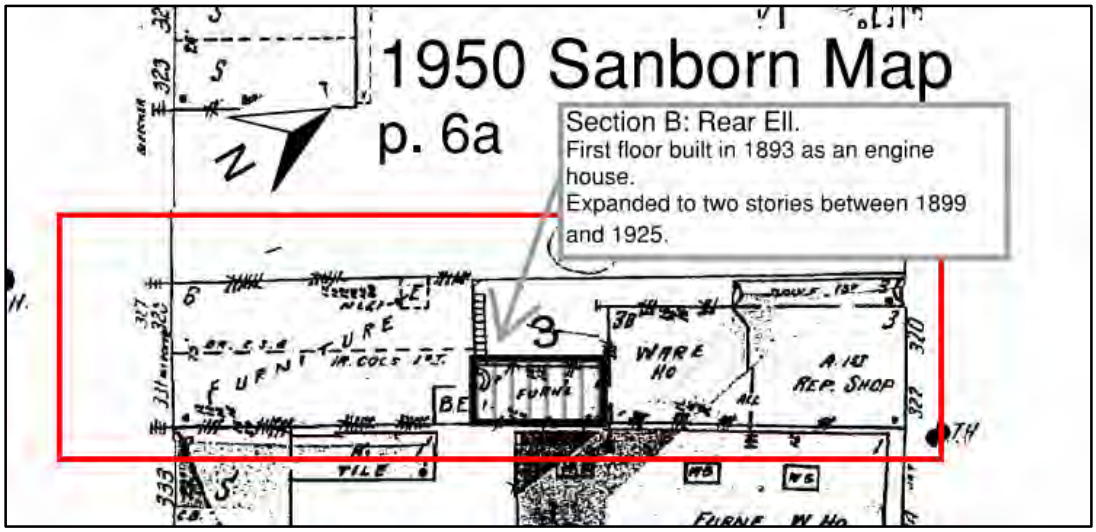
[1] Construction dates for adjacent properties are based upon city directory listings and Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps.

The upper floors all have very similar plans and finishes. The elevators and stairs serve each floor, and floors two through four have the same type of center brick wall and posts and beams found on the first floor. (All of the brick dividing walls have numerous wide doorways.) The top two floors are more open, with an extra row of posts and beams instead of the brick divider walls.

There are few interior partitions on any of the floors of the front block. The second floor contains a small pair of restrooms that appear to date to the early 20th century, and the fourth floor has four small office spaces that were created by adding a low mezzanine between structural bays. (Visible in the background of photo 24.) The offices are not original, but may be fairly early. The spaces beneath the mezzanines appear to have been used for furniture displays.

Interior finishes are largely early or original throughout this part of the building. Most rooms have painted brick walls, and early or original wood flooring. The second floor has early painted plank ceilings, and the third floor has newer flat ceiling cladding. The top three floors have early or original pressed metal ceiling panels, and a few rooms also still have early 20th century ceiling fixtures. Some of the upper rooms show signs of water damage, but in general the interior finishes are in fair condition.

Section B: Rear Ell (Photos 5, 7, 9, 10, 18.)



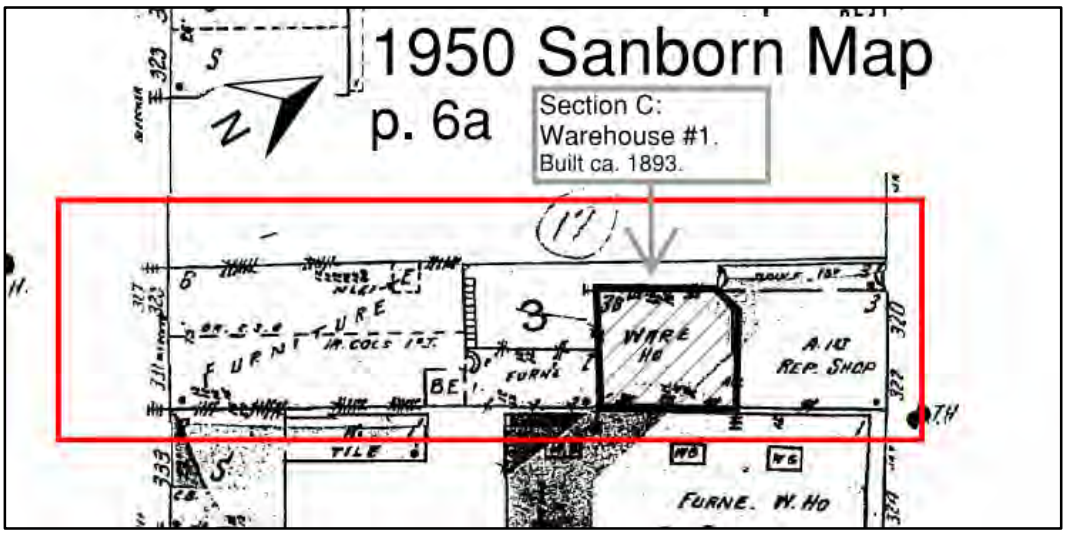
The small rear ell (Section B) has plain brick walls, a flat roof, and no architectural embellishments. It is the smallest section, measuring

approximately 17 feet by 42 feet. The section links the large front block to the original back warehouse. Built as a one-story engine room, it was later expanded to two stories. That change appears to have been made when the Ribyat Brothers bought the property in 1921.

Exterior: The flat west wall of this narrow section overlooks a small open courtyard and loading area. It has three tall, flat-topped window openings on the second floor; the brick openings are intact, but all have been filled with modern concrete block. The first floor contains a similar infilled window opening that has a segmental arched top, plus two small windows which measure less than 3 feet square. The small windows both have early or original wood frames, and one has an early six-light sash. (Photos 5 and 7.) The east wall, which is just a few feet from a neighboring building, has two small arched windows openings that have concrete masonry unit (CMU) infill and rock-faced stone sills.

Interior: This part of the building serves as a transition point between the front block and the warehouses, which are set several feet lower than the front section. The first floor has a ramp that leads down to the first floor of Warehouse #1 (Section C) and the second floor has two sets of ramps, one up to the top floor of the warehouse and one down to the second floor. (Photo 18.) The interior of this section is unfinished, with rough wood floors, bare brick walls and exposed ceiling joists.

Section C: Warehouse #1. (Photos 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 16, 19.)



Warehouse #1 is the original warehouse for the complex; it appears to have been built at the same time as the front section, in 1893. Like the rear ell, it has rough brick walls, a nearly flat roof, and no architectural embellishments. It has a nearly square plan that measures roughly 41 feet wide and 42 feet deep, with a short angled wall at the northwest corner. The first floor of that angled wall, which is now covered by Warehouse #2, contains a wide doorway. Directory listings indicate that the first floor may have served as a stable in the late 1800s and early 1900s.[2] The large sliding wood door in the angled wall is large enough to have served as a loading door and possibly as a carriage entrance. (Photo 16.) The second floor of the angled wall has a single window, and the third floor has another door. (Photo 21.) A tall brick chimney is located near the center of the north wall.

Exterior: The three-story west wall of the warehouse has tall arch-topped window openings on the first and third floors and very small square windows on the second. Several of the openings on the third floor, and a few of those on the second floor, are intact but infilled with concrete blocks. The others have early wood frames and a few also have early or original wood sash, all of which are in poor condition. There are also two intact window openings on the south wall, both of which have early frames and plywood infill. Several sections of that wall appear to have been rebuilt over the years, and there are two wider arches on the south that may have once covered some type of loading doors. (Photo 7.)

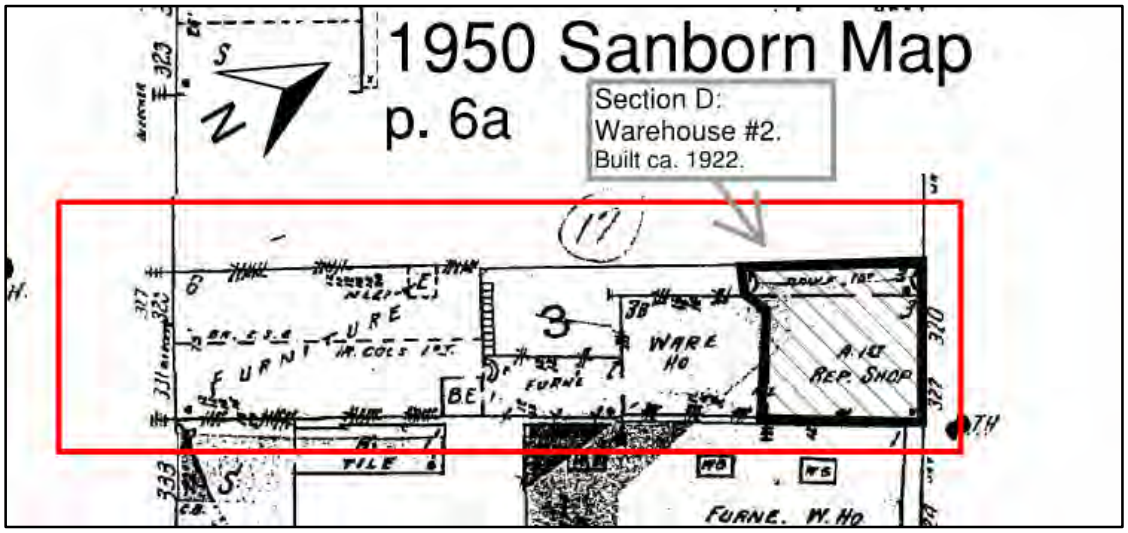
The east wall has five window or door openings per floor; most are windows. Those openings all have segmental arched tops and rock-faced stone sills. There is one doorway at the first floor that is still open, all other openings have modern concrete block infill. The doorway once led to another large warehouse that was located east of this section. Sanborn maps show that warehouse was demolished sometime after 1950. The doorway is covered by an early fire door. (Visible to the right in Photo 16.)

Interior: The interior of this section is also unfinished. It has wood floors, brick walls and exposed heavy framing members. There are arched doorways on the north walls of each floor which leads to Warehouse #2. The first-floor doorway has an early metal fire door. The north wall of the second floor shows marks of

[2] The 1916 City Directory lists the Jay Street address for this property as the "Whiffen Stables."

an early staircase, and the north ceiling beams and joists of the second and third floors bear old fire scars. (Photo 19.) The fire scars were probably the result of a warehouse fire that took place in 1932.[3]

Section D: Warehouse #2. (Photos 4, 5-10, 17, 20, 21.)



Warehouse #2 (Section D) is the newest section of the complex. It was built soon after the Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company bought the property in 1922. It is slightly larger than Warehouse #1 (Section C), measuring approximately 50 feet wide and 52 feet deep. It has a nearly square footprint with a small extension that covers the angled corner of Section C. (See plan, Figure 4.) The warehouse has a cubic form, with flat masonry walls and a flat roof. The walls are constructed of ceramic block faced with brick to match the other sections of the building. (Photos 9 and 20.)

Exterior: The north wall of this section serves as a second façade, overlooking Jay Street. It has three vehicle doors on the first floor and four large window openings on each of the upper floors. The westernmost vehicle door accesses an open passage that leads to the interior of the lot. When this addition was constructed in the early 1920s, the theater to the west filled its whole lot. As a result, the drive-through was the only access to the loading area at the back of

[3]"$20,000 Loss Estimated in Fire at Warehouse of Ribyat Furniture Store," Utica Observer Dispatch 18 Aug 1932: n.p,. Fulton History Online, 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.

the front block.[4] (See Figure 7.) There is a track for a sliding door above the drive-through entrance, but the door is no longer extant. The center garage entranceway, which leads to the first-floor interior, has a newer rolling door, and the east door, which is now fixed in place, contains an early paneled wood garage door. All of the window openings on the north wall contain multi-paned metal sash that appear to be original.

The north wall also contains the remains of a wide painted wall sign, that runs the width of the wall, between the second and third floors. The original white lettering on the black sign was painted over at some point, but much of it is still legible. It reads, "RIBYAT BROS FURNITURE," in large letters at the center, plus, "WAREHOUSE. No. 2," to the left. The lettering to the right is less legible, but it appears to include the Bleecker Street address.

The side walls of this section both lack openings. (Photo 6 and 9.) The east wall is brick, with several window openings that have been infilled, plus a large modern wall-mounted billboard. The west side wall, which originally adjoined the theater next door, is now covered with tan stucco, which was presumably added after the other building was demolished. It also has a newer wall-mounted billboard. Only a small stretch of south wall is exposed for this section. (Photo 7.) It is open to the drive-through at the first floor and has a large steel-framed window at each of the upper floors.

Interior: The interior of this section is also unfinished. It has terra cotta block and brick walls and exposed framing members. There is one large room per floor. The south walls of each of the rooms were originally the north exterior wall of Warehouse #1 (Section C). They are all of dark brick, and there is a small painted wall sign at the top of the first floor and bottom of the second which appear to have been painted before Section D was constructed. It reads, "This Site to Let. Inquire at Whiffen's Sons Co. 327 Bleecker St."

The first-floor room, which has extra tall ceilings, has a concrete floor, exposed steel structural members, and a mezzanine storage level around three sides of the building. (Photo 17.) The second and third-floor rooms both have heavy wood structural members, and rough wood flooring. Each of those rooms also has a large trap door in the floor near the southwest corner, above the first-

[4] Sanborn Maps show that the other building, a theater, was demolished between 1925 and 1950.

floor drive-through. (The door is just visible in the flooring in Photo 21.) The trap doors are aligned, and there is a ceiling-mounted pulley above the third-floor opening, which would have allowed workers to hoist materials directly from trucks parked in the drive-through to the upper floors of the warehouse.

Integrity:

This is a highly intact resource, inside and out. There have been no changes to the form or footprint of the building since Warehouse #2 was completed in the 1920s, and almost all original finishes and fenestration are intact. The interior of the building exhibits a particularly high level of integrity, with almost no changes since the 1930s. Exterior alterations have been limited to the loss of some window openings and the addition of modern cladding on the lower two stories of the façade. The stucco constitutes an admittedly notable change, but it is offset by the high level of integrity of the rest of the complex. The building is in fair to good condition, and it continues to reflect its long history of commercial use.

Summary of Significance:

The Whiffen-Ribyat Building, at 327-331 Bleecker Street in Utica, Oneida County, New York, is **locally significant** under National Register **Criterion A in the area of Commerce**. The building was built and occupied by two prominent longtime local business. It was constructed in 1893 for one of the oldest retail and wholesale meat companies in Utica, Isaac Whiffen's Sons Meat Company. The roots of the Whiffen company stretch back to 1843, when English immigrant Isaac Whiffen opened a small meat market in Utica. His sons later joined him in the operation of the company, and carried on after the elder Whiffen's death in 1889. George I. and Allen B. Whiffen became leading businessmen in their own right, and it was under their management that the building on Bleecker Street was constructed. The Whiffen Company operated there into the mid-1910s. After a short stint as an automotive showroom, the building became home to the Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company, operated by Hyman and Samuel Ribyat. The Ribyat Brothers Company bought the building in 1921 and it was under their ownership that it was enlarged to its current form. They added a warehouse to the back of the lot soon after purchasing the property, and expanded the front block to its current height of six stories in 1930. By 1941, the Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company claimed to be Utica's largest and oldest furniture store. Samuel and Hyman Ribyat remained active in the business until 1952, when they retired and the company was dissolved. The building continued to house a furniture store for many more years, serving as home to Ribyat's Fine Furnishings until 1965, and then to the Ribyat and Garfinkle Furniture Store. The period of significance for the property begins with the initial construction by the Isaac Whiffen's Sons Meat Company in 1893 and ends with the dissolution of Ribyat Brothers Furniture in 1952. The building today provides an intact, significant link with Utica's commercial history.

Early Development of Utica

The City of Utica, centrally located within the Oneida County, New York, was established along the banks of the Mohawk River in the first half of the 18th century. The low, flat stretch of land that Utica occupies was first granted to Governor William Crosby in 1734, who received 22,000 acres from King George

II of England that became known as Crosby's Manor. In 1772, following Crosby's death, the land was purchased by four men and eventually subdivided.[5] That land included the site of Fort Schuyler, which had been established in 1758, near what is now the intersection of Second and Main Streets in Utica.[6]

One of the most influential of the early investors was Rutger Bleecker, a wealthy property owner from Albany, New York. In 1758, Bleecker's son, John R. Bleecker, surveyed all of Crosby's Manor and divided the land into 106 great lots, located north and south of the river. The lots were distributed among the four original investors and their families, and many of the great lots later became part of the city of Utica.[7] Most of those plots were held by the families, and for the most part leased to early settlers who were entering the area and traveling and trading both east and west throughout the open Mohawk Valley and natural riverways.[8]

Oneida County was created in 1798, and on April 3 of that same year, Fort Schuyler was incorporated as the Village of Utica.[9] The center of the new village, Bagg's Square, was located just south of the Mohawk River, where Genesee Street intersects with Whitesboro and Main Streets.[10] Utica experienced tremendous growth over the next half century, aided by the ongoing development of transportation and shipping systems.

Early 19th century transportation systems in the area included overland as well as river travel. In 1794, stagecoach lines began to utilize overland paths originally established by the Haudenosaunee and by military actions; in 1830, twenty stages left Utica daily to points as far away as Buffalo and Niagara Falls.[11] Some of the important roads which developed into and through Utica

[5] T. Wood Clarke, *Utica for a Century and a Half*, (Utica, New York: The Widtman Press, 1952) 10.
[6] Frank E. Przybycien, *Utica: A City Worth Saving* (Utica, New York: n.p., ca. 1970s) 25.
[7] Clarke 11.
[8] Clarke 17.
[9] Clarke 22.
[10] New Century Club of Utica New York, *Outline History of Utica and Vicinity*, (Utica: L.C. Childs and Son, 1900), 10. 11 Aug, 2015 Google Books https://books.google.com/books/about/Outline_History_of_Utica_and_Vicinity.html.Outline
[11] Przybycien 38-39.

are known today as Route 5, Route 20, Genesee Street, and the Seneca Turnpike. This last was built as an improvement to the early rough roads that led from the east, through Utica to the west. The Seneca Turnpike is credited with serving as the "first important factor in the growth and development of Utica," and because the road passed through Utica, ten miles south of Rome, New York, Utica surpassed Rome in commercial importance.[12]

Waterways continued to be favored, however, until the rough roads were improved, the Mohawk River was still a preferred choice for travel or shipping from the late 1700s through the early 1800s.[13] The river had served the Haudenosaunee, trappers, and military before the development of Utica, and it continued to play a major role in transportation after the village was established. Once the Erie Canal came through Utica in 1819, local waterways became even more important. The Erie Canal was designed to span the state, connecting Lake Erie on the west with the Hudson River to the east, but construction began in the middle of the state, with a 13-mile route that linked Utica to Rome.[14] The new waterway, which averaged just four-feet deep by 40-feet wide, ran parallel to the river a short distance south of Bagg's Square. (The filled-in canal is now the site of Oriskany Street.) (Figure 8.)

The Erie Canal facilitated shipping of a wide range of materials, ranging from agricultural products to manufactured goods and supplies. The full route was completed October 26, 1825, and by 1845 it had become the largest employer in the state.[15] Other branches were added, including the north-south Chenango Canal in 1836, which linked to the Erie Canal in Utica (west of Genesee Street) to the Susquehanna River at Binghamton.[16] When complete, the Chenango Canal spurred industrial development in Utica by supplying a shipping route for coal from Pennsylvania. The coal allowed local factories to use steam engines instead of water power, which greatly boosted industrial

[12] Przybycien 38.
[13] Oneida County Historical Society, "The History of Travel in Oneida County," 12 July 2015 http://www.oneidacountyhistory.org/Transportation/FeaturedArticleTransportation.asp.
[14] Finch, Roy G., Story of the New York State Canals: Historical and Commercial Information, (State of New York, 1925) 11; Przybycien 40.
[15] Przybycien 41.
[16] Przybycien 42.

output in the community. Most of those early factories were located near the Chenango Canal.

Utica gained rail service in 1837, and the railroad quickly became the predominant method of transportation for freight and passengers. That dominance continued into the 20th century. Many of the new rail lines were located on the south side of the river, which further concentrated commercial development in the area.

By 1840, Utica had been upgraded from a village to a city. It had a population of nearly 13,000, and its city limits encompassed several square blocks on the south side of the river.[17] (Figure 9.) General patterns of development established by that time persisted into the next century, and many are still in evidence today. Genesee Street became the civic and retail center of the community, with businesses lining the street for several blocks south of Bagg's Square. The area between the river and the Erie Canal was favored for commercial and light industrial businesses that needed access to shipping outlets. Several of the larger industrial concerns, including a number of textile mills, were located west of Genesee Street, near the Chenango Canal. Houses were scattered around the commercial and industrial areas, and the area east of Genesee saw a particular concentration of residential development.

Those patterns of development arose through a combination of chance and foresight. Bagg's Square and the original town center had developed more or less randomly at the intersection of existing roads that offered easy river and stage access; as new streets were needed, they often simply paralleled existing roads or waterways.[18] By contrast, the layout of the town east of Genesee developed in a more reasoned manner due to the influence of the Bleecker family, which controlled most of the land in that area.

In 1810, Rutger Bleecker's son, John Bleecker, filed a plat for the subdivision of three of the original great lots that were located south and east of Bagg's Square. That plat subdivided lots 92, 93, and 94 of Cosby Manor into some 50

[17] Clark 37; Przybycien 42.
[18] Harland Bartholomew, Preliminary Report on Major Streets Utica, New York 1921 (Willard Press, 1921) 2.

smaller new blocks, including the block now occupied by the Whiffen-Ribyat Building.[19] (Figure 10.) The plat also established several major streets, including Park, Rutger, and Bleecker. In addition to Rutger and Bleecker, several other streets in the area were named for members of the Bleecker family, including Catherine, John, and Jay, all descendants of Rutger Bleecker.[20] The plat also created Chancellor Square, the new town's first – and for many years only – public park.

The layout of the Bleecker plat was praised more than a century later by nationally-prominent city planning professional Harland Bartholomew. In a report on the major streets of Utica that was written in 1921, he said:

> *Considering the period in which this plan of streets was prepared, it is quite remarkable for its breadth and maturity….It was a plan at once serviceable and full of character. Its equal has not appeared in any other section of the city.*[21]

The Bleecker Subdivision helped direct new development east of the commercial center, and established an orderly pattern of streets and blocks that was extended as the city grew to the east. The area became a favored location for residential development, and by the end of the 19th century most of the streets shown on the map of 1810 were lined with two-story residences.

Whiffen Meats

Among the many businesses established close to the Erie Canal in the mid-19th century was a meat market opened by English immigrant, Isaac J. Whiffen, in 1843. Whiffen's business capitalized on the growing population of the community, as well as ready access to local livestock. As one early description of commercial development in Utica noted, the favorable transportation options of the community aided agricultural concerns as well as

[19] C. C. Broadhead, "Plat of a subdivision of Lots 92, 93, and 94 of Cosby's Manor, for representatives of Rutger Bleecker." 1810. (On file in the Oneida County Assessor's Office, Utica, NY.)
[20] Clarke 11-12.
[21] Bartholomew, 3.

heavy industry: "the return of the products of agriculture from a rich and wide reach of county gave (Utica) a start as a fit place for commerce."[22] Whiffen began his new venture with connections to the agricultural community, having already spent several years operating a milk business with his brother John.[23] He continued that interest throughout his life. He was a charter member of the Central New York Farmer's Club, as well as a longtime member of the Central New York Agricultural, Horticultural and Mechanical Association.[24]

Isaac Whiffen's meat market remained in business at the same location for nearly fifty years and grew into a successful wholesale and retail operation. His shop was located within the Bleecker plat of 1810, at the intersection of John and Jay Streets, just a few yards from the south bank of the canal, and three blocks from Bagg's Square. (Figure 8.) Whiffen was active in community affairs, and his success in business and civic affairs was noted in a history of Utica that was written in 1896: "his interest in municipal concerns, his energy, straightforwardness and integrity were admired by all."[25] He enjoyed a long and successful career, and in 1886 his sons George I. and B. Allen Whiffen joined him in operation of the firm.

The company was still located at Jay and John Streets when Isaac Whiffen died in 1889. A later biography noted that at the time of his death, Isaac Whiffen was "the oldest butcher and meat dealer in Utica and was known all over the state."[26] The sons carried on the operation of the company and remained dedicated to the memory of their father—they even chose the arguably awkward new business name of Isaac Whiffens' Sons Meat Company. The business continued to operate at the same location until the early 1890s, when the brothers purchased property located less than a block west of their current shop and commissioned the construction of a new building.[27]

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[22] Daniel Wager, Our County and Its People: a Descriptive Work on Oneida County, New York,(Boston: The Boston History Co., 1896) 366.
[23] Daniel Wager, *Our Country and Its People, Part II: Biography*,. (Boston: The Boston History Company, 1896) 168-170, "Oneida County, New York Biographies: Isaac Whiffen," 17 Feb. 2015 <http://home.comcast.net/-richardson156/whiffeni.html>.
[24] Wager, *Our Country and Its People*, Part II: Biography.
[25] Bagg, 256.
[26] Wager, *Our Country and Its People*, Part II: Biography
[27] Oneida County Recorder, Deed records. B. 498, p. 92, 20 June, 1892, and B. 500, p. 156, 26, July 1892.

That large new four-story building on Bleecker Street, which was completed in 1893, immediately became a symbol of the company. (Figure 11.) Subsequent descriptions of the company or biographies of the Whiffens invariably included some mention of the building. One of the first such notes came in 1896, when a biography of Isaac Whiffen mentioned that the sons had continued their father's business and noted that:

> *In 1892-93 they erected on Bleecker Street, opposite Chancellor Square, a large and commodious brick block, into which they moved in April, 1893, occupying the entire lower floor. Here both wholesaling and retailing of meats are carried on extensively, and here the business, established on the corner of John and Jay streets fifty-three years ago, has an appropriate home.*[28]

The building also served to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the family business, as shown in the two decorative terra cotta date plaques imbedded on the 4th floor of the façade. One plaque reads, "1843," (for the year Isaac Whiffen opened his meat market) and the other reads. "1893."

Although the new location was just a few hundred feet from the old one, it represented a major change in setting. The lot at John and Jay Street was surrounded by small business buildings and warehouses on the banks of the Erie Canal, while the new property was located on Bleecker Street, overlooking Chancellor Square and the elegant three-story brick building which housed the Utica Free Academy. (Both of the Whiffen sons had attended the academy.) Chancellor Square, now one of only four parks in the city, featured numerous trees and a large fountain, and most of the facing properties contained sizeable residences.[29] The move offered a more prestigious address than the corner lot on the banks of the Erie Canal.

In addition, relocation offered the Whiffen brothers better access to customers. By that time Bleecker Street had become a prominent route into downtown from the east and provided better proximity to the commercial district around Genesee Street. Commercial development had extended outward from Genesee

[28] Wager, *Our Country and Its People*, Part II: Biography.
[29] 1899 Sanborn Map.

onto several side streets, including Bleecker. Historic Sanborn maps show that the west end of Bleecker was now lined with multi-story commercial buildings. However, the density of commercial development dropped off before Chancellor Square, and only a few low houses occupied that block. (Figure 12.) As an undeveloped lot at the edge of the commercial district, the property probably offered an affordable option for the expansion of the company's holdings.

Last but not least, the new lot had frontage on Jay Street, which provided easy access to the nearby canal as well as to the established overland routes. Although there were two small residences at the back end of the lot for the first few years that the Whiffen Company operated on Bleecker Street, Sanborn maps shows that there was enough room next to them to provide access from Jay Street to the angled back wall of the early warehouse. (Now Section C; see Figure 13.) These houses may have served as extra office space for a time; an ad for the Whiffen company that ran in the city directory listed Jay Street as well as Bleecker Street.

The two structures were probably demolished within a few years. The original back wall of the building, now an interior wall in Warehouse #2, bears a painted sign which reads, "This Site to Let. Inquire at Whiffen's Sons Co. 327 Bleecker St." This sign would have had very low visibility if the houses were still on the lot at the time, inviting speculation that the Whiffen Company demolished them. They may have been taken down to provide more room for vehicles; several delivery wagons and teams of horses are included in an 1899 advertisement. (Figure 11.) It is clear that the back of the lot housed equine facilities in the first decade of the twentieth century; several city directories of the 1910s list the Jay Street address as "Whiffen's Stables."

The 1899 city directory ad included a caption which shows that the meat company handled a diverse array of products: "Isaac Whiffen's Sons…Pork Packers and Provision Dealers. Buyers of Hogs, Sheep, Lambs and Calves, alive and dressed. 327, 329, 331 Bleecker Street, 46-48 Jay Street." It is not clear if the live animals were processed on-site, but it is known that the brothers planned the new building to include refrigeration systems, as noted in an 1892 issue of *Industrial Refrigeration*: "Isaac Whiffen's Sons Meat Company, Utica, is

building a refrigerator building on Bleecker Streets and will put in a refrigerator and ice machine."[30]

Initially, an 1896 biography of Isaac Whiffen noted that his sons only used the first floor of the front block, leaving the upper floors available for rental or future expansion. Three years later, a Sanborn map shows that Whiffen's Sons had expanded their operations and occupied the lower two floors of the front block (Section A), plus all of the ell and warehouse #1 (Sections B and C; Section D had not yet been built.) The third floor of the front block was vacant and the Holbrook Insole Company was a tenant of the 4th floor.

The business suffered a loss in 1912, with the death of George Whiffen. His obituary described him as, "one of the best known citizens and prominent businessmen of the city." As in Isaac Whiffen's biography, the obituary also included a description of the building on Bleecker Street as the home of his business: "In 1893 they (he and his brother) built the building at 227-331 Bleecker Street where they have since been located."[31]

The company continued to operate under the leadership of the remaining brother, B. Allen Whiffen, who was the original president of the company. He remained active in local commerce and the meat industry, and even served on the host committee for the 1914 statewide Meat Trade and Retail Butcher's Convention, held in Utica.[32] However, B. Allen apparently began trying to sell the company soon after the death of his brother George. An ad published in the 1913 *American Meat Trade and Retail Butcher's Journal* advertised the business and property for sale with a note that the sale was being offered due to health reasons. That effort was apparently not successful, and the Whiffen Company continued to operate on Bleecker Street until late 1915 or early 1916, when B. Allen Whiffen retired and the business closed. He spent the rest of his life in

[30] "Packing House Refrigeration," *Industrial Refrigeration*, (November 1892) 373. July 2015 Google Books <https://books.google.com/books?id=P5E4AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA373&lpg=PA373&dq=refrigeration+whiffen&source=bl&ots>.
[31] "George I. Whiffen Passes Away," *American Meat Trade and Retail Butcher's Journal* Vol 13 (21 Nov. 1912): 16.
[32] "New York State Convention a Big Success," *American Meat Trade and Retail Butcher's Journal*, Vol 16, (18 June 1914): 16.

Utica, and when he died in 1932, his obituary mentioned Isaac Whiffen's Sons Meat Company and noted that they had moved into the "brick block, Nos. 327-331 Bleecker Street," in 1893.[33]

Although B. Allen Whiffen's retirement marked the end of the Whiffen Meat Company, the building remained in service, albeit for a frequently changing set of tenants. Between 1916 and 1921, the building had four different tenants, three of which were automobile companies.[34] Ironically, city directories of the period continued to list the Jay Street address as "Whiffen's Stables" until 1917. The Whiffen building appears to have served as an incubator of sorts for local car companies during this time period. In 1916 it housed the Ford Motor Company, in 1917 Hughes Motor Sales, and in 1919 the Jones Motor Company. All three companies appear to have been new businesses when they moved in, and at least two of them remained in business after moving to more permanent quarters nearby. One, Hughes Motor Sales, moved only one door east, to 333 Bleecker, where they remained into the early 1920s. The final tenant to occupy the building under Whiffen ownership was a branch of the O. J. Childs Company, which was in the fire extinguisher business.

Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company

In 1921, B. Allen Whiffen and his wife were able to see the Bleecker Street property.[35] The new owners were also brothers, Samuel and Hyman Ribyat, of the Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company and, like the Whiffen brothers, they had a well-established business at another location in Utica before moving to Bleecker Street.

Ribyat Brothers Furniture was founded around 1906 as a modest second-hand furniture store, and by 1911 business had increased enough to warrant the construction of a large new building on Whitesboro Street. An article about the business published in 1918 noted that "To meet the rapidly increasing business they built the handsome three story block, now occupied, which they

[33] "B. Allen Whiffen Taken by Death," *Utica Daily Press* 22 Nov. 1932: n.p., Fulton History Online, 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.
[34] Utica City Directories 1916-1920.
[35] Oneida County Recorder, Warranty Deed records, B. 790, p. 241, 2 May, 1921.

later increased to four stories on account of the need for more room…"[36] That rate of growth apparently continued, as they purchased the Whiffen property just three years later.

It is likely that the Ribyats chose to move to Bleecker Street for many of the same reasons that the Whiffens developed the lot in the first place. The property still offered the dual advantage of a prominent façade on a busy street, plus a convenient back entrance for deliveries. In addition, the population of Utica had grown to more than 94,000 people by 1920, with many of those new inhabitants settling in houses on the east side of town; Bleecker Street had become even more of a gateway to downtown than it was when the Whiffens bought the property.[37] By the time the Ribyat Brothers purchased the building on Bleecker Street, modest commercial buildings filled the adjacent properties. Businesses had also been established along several blocks of Bleecker Street to the east, and the surrounding neighborhoods had become even more popular for residential development. As a result, the Bleecker Street building was now conveniently located between the central business district and hundreds of houses that were in need of furniture. The lot's rear access to area roadways would also have been attractive to the furniture company. The Erie Canal was replaced with a wide street (Oriskany) after the larger Barge Canal was completed in the early 1900s, and that new roadway provided ample access to city streets and the growing highway system.

On the negative side, other than the advantage of location, the building on Bleecker Street was in need of major upgrades and alterations, and the new owners spent nearly a year transforming the former meat packing facility into a modern furniture store. They purchased the property in May, 1921, and were still planning changes to the building in early 1922. In February 1922, the *Utica Sunday Tribune* published a long article titled "Whiffen Block to be Remodeled into Furniture Store by Local Concern," which described the remodeling project and noted that the building was expected to be ready to occupy in the spring. "It is believed that the change, both interior and exterior,

[36] "Newly Weds [sic] Should Visit Ribyat Brothers," *Utica Tribune* 24 Nov. 1918: n.p,. Fulton History Online, 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>. The building on Whitesboro is no longer standing.
[37] Presbycien 28, 35.

will result in the block being made into one of the largest and finest furniture stores in this part of the state."[38] Other planned work included the addition of a passenger elevator and the creation of a connection to the rear warehouse. The newspaper included a photograph of the existing building, as well as a line drawing of the proposed changes, with a note that the work was being overseen by architect Thomas H. Williams. (Figure 13.)

Williams was a Welsh immigrant who had been living in Utica for more than twenty years. He is listed as a stone mason in the 1900 population census and the Utica city directory, but by 1910 he had started working as an architect, and he continued in that profession at least through 1930.[39] Although he lived and worked in the city for more than 30 years, he does not appear to have played a major role in the architectural development of the city.[40] No account of his work was found in any city or county histories, nor did his name appear in comprehensive indexes of local newspapers of the era. However, it seems that he was well versed in his field and was able to provide the Ribyat Brothers with the plans they needed to update the Bleecker Street building, both inside and out. Williams also helped oversee the work of the contractor, Richard Roberts, who was awarded the contract for the remodeling project in April 1922.[41]

It is also likely that Williams was responsible for the drawing of the proposed new façade that was published with the article about the remodeling project. The drawing shows that most of the exterior work was concentrated on the lower two floors of the front wall. (At this time, the building remained four stories high.) The new design included wide expanses of glass on the first and second floors of the façade, which also received a new veneer of white glazed

[38] "Whiffen Block to be Remodeled Into Furniture Store by Local Concern," *Utica Tribune* 19 Feb. 1922: 11, Fulton History Online, 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.
[39] 1910, 1920, and 1930 U. S. Population Census Records, 1925 New York State census records. (Accessed on Ancestry.com, July 2015.)
[40] He is not mentioned in any major biographical or historical works on Utica, and does not appear in state and local newspaper indexes or historic AIA directories.
[41] "Utica, N.Y., Contracts Awarded," *American Contractor: Business Journal of Construction*. Vol. XLIII, No. 13. (1 April 1922) 54. 6 June 2015 <https://books.google.com/books?id=Z_tYAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA6-PA54&dq=american+contractor++ribyat&hl>.

terra cotta tiles. A tile band between the first and second floors bore the words, "FURNITURE 329 RIBYAT BROTHERS 331 FURNISHINGS." There was also a new terra cotta cornice at the top of the second floor to mark the transition between the original wall and the new terra cotta cladding. Last, the name, "RIBYAT," was spelled out in block letters at the top of the wall, just above the fourth-floor windows. That nameplate replaced the original "WHIFFEN" sign, which was in the same location before the building was remodeled. (Figure 11.)

Warehouse #2 (Section D) was also added to the north end of the building, as part of that project, or soon after.[42] The Ribyats had been using a garage in their Whitesboro location and most likely wanted one at the new property as well. The addition was clearly designed to accommodate large vehicles; the first floor of the north wall includes large vehicle doors, and the first floor is labeled "A" (for automobiles) on the 1925 and 1950 Sanborn maps of the building. (Figures 4 and 7.)

A profile of the store was published in the local paper in October 1923. It described the newly remodeled building in glowing terms, claiming that, "This block now constitutes one of the finest furniture stores in this section of the state."[43] The author praised the business acumen of the Ribyat Brothers, noting that in spite of numerous alterations and expansions of their building on Whitesboro, their business had grown to such an extent that they needed the extra space afforded by the former Whiffen block. The article also described the interior layout of the building, which included shipping and warehouses to the rear and furniture displays in the front four floors. The fourth floor was used for displays of kitchen equipment, rugs, and linoleum; the third for bedroom suites; and the second for living room furniture. The first floor, "where the prospective purchaser receives his first impression of the store," had been "given careful attention" and the overall effect was "a distinct addition to Utica's mercantile establishments."[44]

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[42] It is shown on the 1925 Sanborn map.
[43] "Ribyat Brothers Store One of the Finest in This Section of N.Y. State," *Utica Observer Dispatch* 8 Oct. 1923: n.p,. Fulton History Online, 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.
[44] "Ibid.

Less than a decade after making the move to Bleecker Street, the Ribyat Brothers were once again out of room. In 1929, they began yet another remodeling project, which this time involved a vertical expansion of the Bleecker Street store. In late 1929 and early 1930, two more stories were added to the front block. The project was celebrated with a grand reopening celebration in March, 1930. The company ran large ads in the local papers to promote, "The Great Store with Six Floors of Furniture."[45] One of these advertisements included a photograph of the newly expanded façade, by then painted white to match the terra cotta cladding on the first two floors. (See Figure 6. The company used the same photograph for a large ad in the 1930 Utica City directory.) The project may also have included the acquisition of a former car dealership located to the west on Jay Street. Sanborn maps show that the automotive building, which is no longer standing, was used as a furniture warehouse between 1925 and 1950.

The tall new Bleecker Street façade adopted the style of – but took a modern take on – many of the buildings that lined the nearby streets in the heart of the business district. (Figure 14.) Architecturally, the Whiffen-Ribyat building can be classified as a "vertical block," a common commercial building type that began to be used throughout the country in the mid-19th century[46] As architectural historian Richard Longstreth notes in *The Buildings of Main Street*, the vertical block is a mid-sized commercial building comparable to the two-part "commercial block" but distinguished by the size of its upper zone.

Longstreth defines the vertical block as having a minimum of four stories, with a one to two story lower zone that serves as a visual base, and a dominant upper zone which displays a simplified and cohesive composition. A unified look is often achieved through columns, pilasters, or solid wall surfaces rising between windows, and differentiated end bays help present a sense of order and stability.[47] The Whiffen-Ribyat building fits that definition. The accented lower floors serve as a visual base, while the uniform treatment of the upper four floors creates a vertical emphasis and a sense of order, with differentiated

[45] "Ribyat Brothers 1930 Grand Opening," Advertisement, Utica Observer Dispatch. ca. March 1930, Fulton History Online, 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.
[46] Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*, (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2000) 82.
[47] Longstreth 85.

end bays and blank wall spaces on either side of the central section. This building type is defined more by form than by architectural styling, and vertical blocks could be relatively unstyled – like the Whiffen-Ribyat building – or ornamented with elements of whatever style was in vogue at the time. Examples include everything from Late Victorian to Art Deco.[48]

This was a common building form in Utica in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Many examples of the vertical block building form can be seen in historic photographs and postcards of the city dating from that time period. Figure 14, for example, is a postcard of the 200 block of Bleecker Street as it appeared in the early 1900s. The streetscape of the postcard is filled with vertical block buildings which display different ornamentation, but conform to the consistent massing of a lower-story visual base with a dominant upper zone.

The Ribyat Brothers filled the showrooms of their tall new vertical block with furniture for the grand opening celebration and announced in their ads that, "the curtain rises on the most important event that has ever been sponsored by this firm of furniture specialists. A style show that has never been equaled in this city before!"[49] The ads show that the sixth floor was "entirely devoted" to displays of living room suites, which could be purchased for as little as $95.

That upward expansion appears to have finally supplied the furniture company with all of the room it needed, and they operated at the location for another two decades. Business undoubtedly slowed significantly with the onset of the Great Depression, but the company's emphasis on moderately-priced furniture may have helped them weather the downturn. During the Depression, area furniture dealers worked together to encourage business and, in 1937, nearly twenty different Utica Furniture stores (including Ribyat's) coordinated "Furniture Week" in Utica.[50] Samuel Ribyat was a member of the finance committee for the event. As a local businessman with three decades of

[48] Longstreth, 85.
[49] "Grand Opening Sale." *Utica Observer-Dispatch*10 June 1952: 10. Fulton History Online. 18 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.
[50] "Merchants in Utica Are Co-Operating With Special Furniture Week Displays." *Utica Observer Dispatch,* n.d., 1937: n.p. Fulton History Online. 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>

experience in the furniture business by then, he would have been well-suited for that position.

As the economy revived in the 1940s, Ribyat Brothers were still in business and ready to once again spend money on the Bleecker Street property. A large ad for a "Remodeling Sale" published in 1942 noted that, "In spite of three major depressions, the firm of Ribyat Bros., still owned and operated by the same two men that founded the business," was still growing.[51] The ad promised readers that, "an entirely new, up-to-date front, including new display windows," was being planned.

The 1942 ad did not include images of the proposed new front, and no 1940s and 50s photos have been found, so it is not clear what was involved with the 1940s remodeling project. However, there is a photo taken around 1960 that shows that the lower floors of the façade had been remodeled again by that time. (Figure 15.) The terra cotta tiles had been replaced with smooth light-colored wall cladding, which may have been structural glass or, possibly, a simple, smooth coat of stucco. The first-floor storefront opening had been lowered, and the second-floor display windows were completely covered with the wall cladding. The flat new wall surface at the second floor had a few horizontal accent lines, plus block lettering that spelled "RIBYAT'S" in large letters, with "FURNITURE" and "FURNISHINGS" as smaller accents.

Samuel and Hyman Ribyat continued to operate the furniture store on Bleecker Street until 1952, when they announced, again through large newspaper ads, their joint retirement. They ran identical ads in Utica and Rome newspapers, which announced a liquidation sale and included a "Statement to the Public:

> *For over 47 years it has been our pleasure to serve you—honestly and fairly…It has been our pride to serve your fathers and mothers and grandparents before them…and now you the children up to the fourth generation."*[52]

[51] "Ribyat's Remodeling Sale," Advertisement, *Utica Daily Press* 1941: n.p. (Fultonhistory.com, accessed July 2015.)
[52] "Ribyat Brothers Retire," Advertisement, *Rome Daily Sentinel* 10 June 1952: 10. [Fulton History Online. 12 July 2015 http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html].

That liquidation sale marked the last major task of Samuel and Hyman Ribyat's long career, as well as the end of the period of significance for this property.

Deed records and city directories show that the brothers' retirement was accompanied by legal changes to the company. Ribyat Brothers Furniture, Inc. appears to have been terminated, and the furniture business was separated from the real estate. The real estate was owned by "Three Hundred Twenty Nine Bleecker St. Corp.," and the officers were members of the Ribyat family. The building still housed a furniture store, now called Ribyat's Fine Furniture, even though that company was no longer operated by Ribyat family members. The officers of the furniture business were Harry Markenson, president, Jacob Horowitz, vice-president, and Edward Horowitz, secretary-treasurer.[53]

Ribyat's Fine Furniture store continued the Ribyat tradition of service on Bleecker Street for another decade. In 1963, they expanded into the adjacent two-story building to the east, 333 Bleecker, and remodeled the front of this building to coordinate with the front of 327-331.[54] In 1965, apparently still in need of space, the business relocated to New Hartford, just south of Utica. City directories show that the move also brought a slight change of name, to "Ribyat's Carriage House."

The Bleecker Street building was destined to house one more Ribyat Furniture store, however. When Ribyat's Fine Furniture moved out, the Ribyat and Garfinkle furniture and appliance store moved in. This new company was operated by Hyman Ribyat's son, Morris Ribyat, and Melvin Garfinkle, who was married to Samuel Ribyat's daughter, Elizabeth.[55] Ribyat and Garfinkle survived a legal challenge from Ribyat's Fine Furniture, who tried to prevent

[53] 1952 Utica City Directory.
[54] "Fabulous, Fantastic Dollar-Saving Ribyat's Furniture…" Advertisement, Utica Daily Press 13 Sept. 1963: n.p. Fulton History Online. 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.
[55] "Death Takes Hyman Ribyat 78, Retired," *Utica Daily Press* 18 June 1954: 1. Fulton History Online. 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.

them from using the name Ribyat for the new business, and they remained in business on Bleecker Street until 1969.[56]

The building sat empty for several years after Ribyat and Garfinkle moved out. In 1974 the Ribyat family sold the property to Donald B. Jeffrey, who opened a hardware store soon after.[57] His hardware business continued into the 21st century, and the building still bears large painted wall signs that were added by Jeffrey Hardware. It is currently used only for storage. Because the building continued to serve a retail function long after Samuel and Hyman Ribyat retired, there has been little need for alterations, and it stands as a remarkably intact example of early 20th century commercial architecture in Utica.

Conclusion

The Whiffen Ribyat-Building is a strong example of an early 20th-century multi-story commercial building. It reflects the eastward expansion of Utica's commercial center around Chancellor Square Park in the early decades of the 20th century, and had a long association with two prominent local businesses. The interior spaces have excellent integrity, and the newer stucco on the lower façade follows the lines of alterations that were made during the period of significance. The building today looks very much as it did when the Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company was in operation. It is immediately recognizable to its period of significance, and it offers a significant link to the commercial history of Utica.

[56] "Ribyat Furniture Co. Secures Court Order," *Utica Observer Dispatch* 23 July 1965: 5. Fulton History Online. 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html> and "Ribyat & Garfinkel ...Going out of Business..." Advertisement, *Utica Observer Dispatch* 14 Apr. 1969: n.p. Fulton History Online. 10 July 2015 <http://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>.
[57] Oneida County Clerk's Office, Warranty Deed, Jul 11, 1974. Book 1993, p. 643.

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Verbal Boundary Description

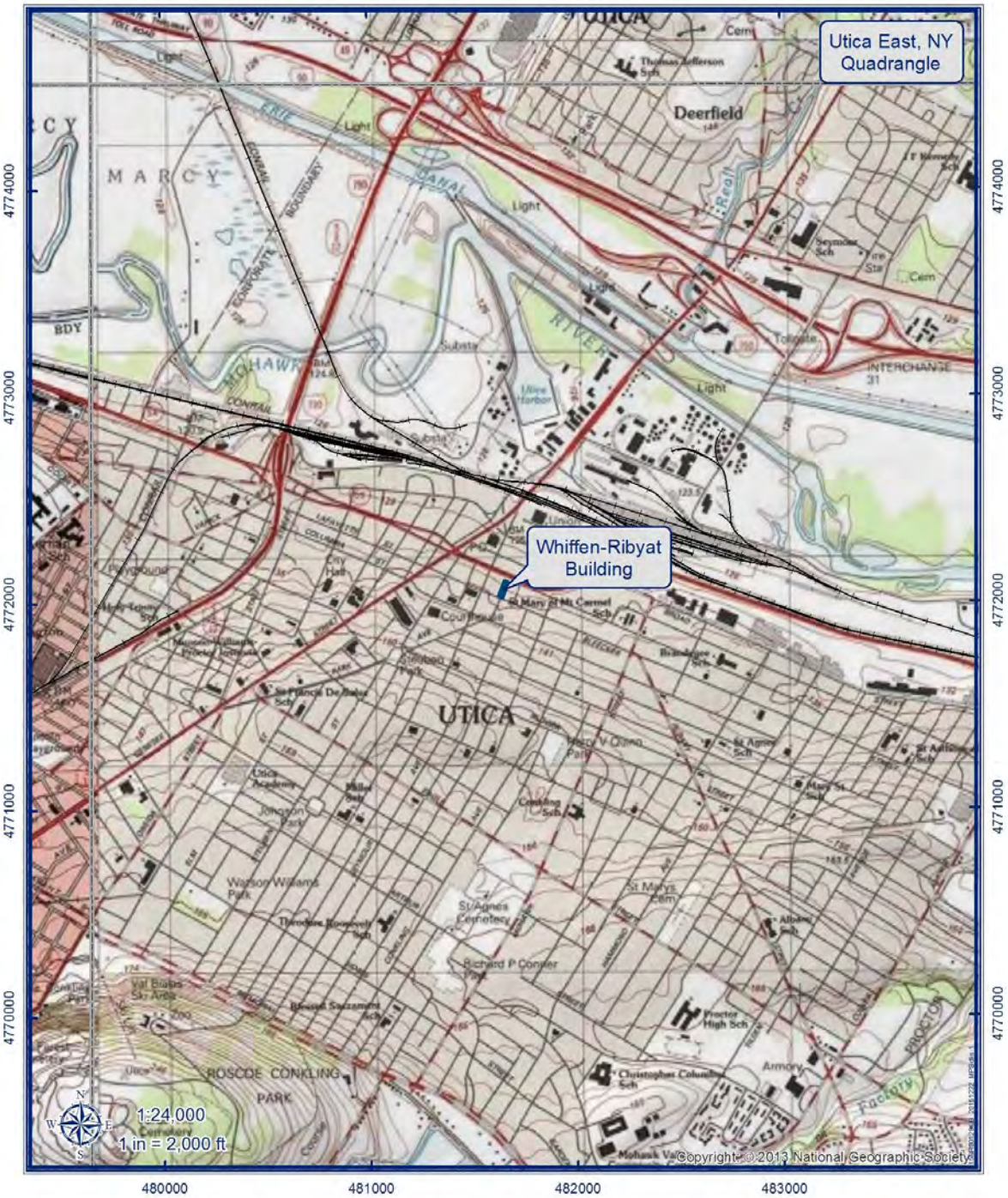
The boundaries are shown as a heavy dashed line on the attached maps with scale.

Boundary Justification

The current boundaries encompass all of the land associated with the building during the period of significance that retains integrity. The Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company also owned parts of Lots 7 and 15, located to the east of this parcel, during the period of significance, but did not occupy either of the buildings now located there. Lot 7, to the northeast, contains a modern building, and Lot 16, which faces Bleecker Street to the east, contains an early 20th century building that was not owned by the Ribyat Brothers Furniture Company during the period of significance.

Whiffen-Ribyat Building
City of Utica, Oneida Co., NY

327-331 Bleecker Street
Utica, NY 13501



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

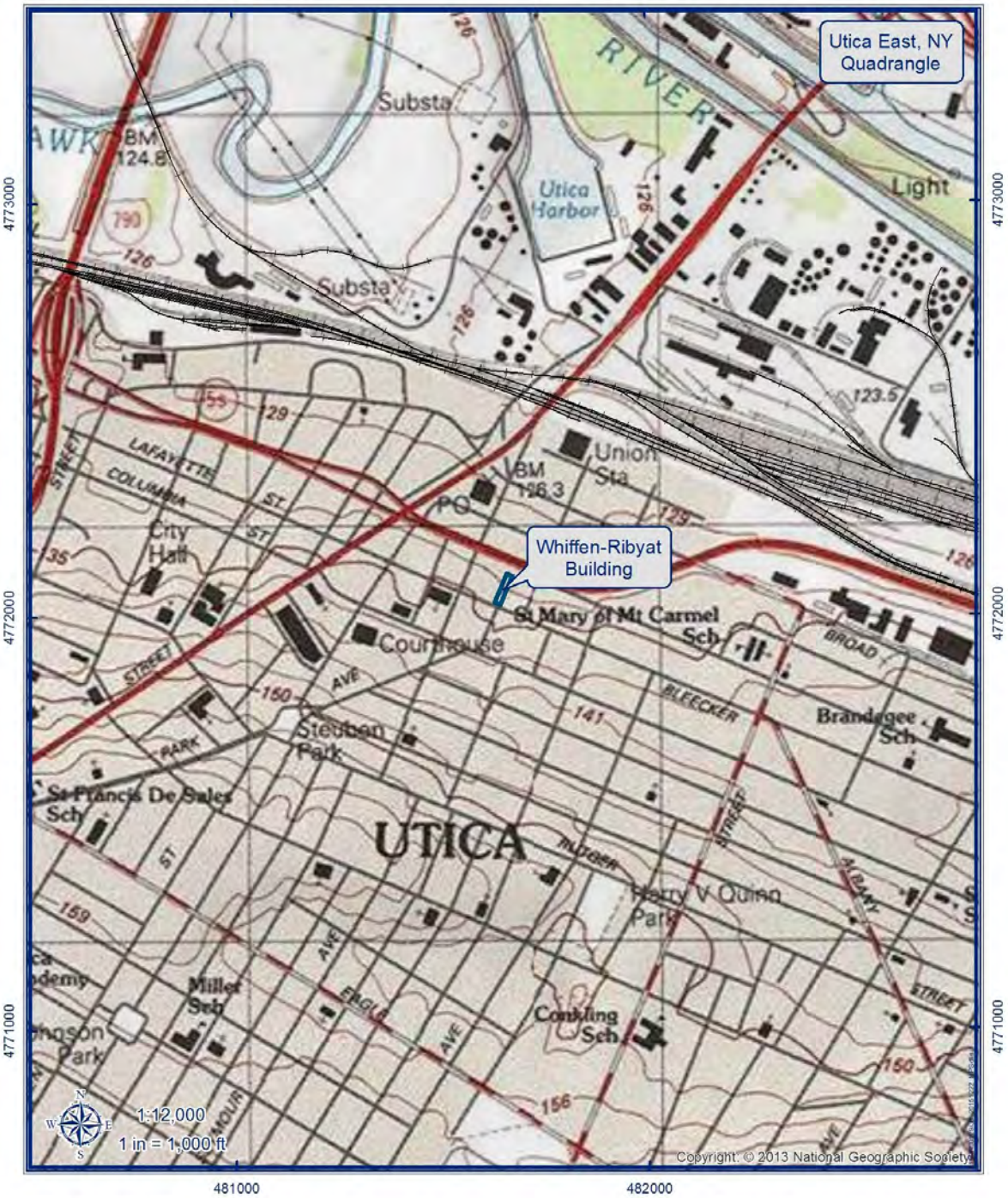
Feet
0 600 1,200 2,400

Whiffen-Ribyat Building

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

Whiffen-Ribyat Building
City of Utica, Oneida Co., NY

327-331 Bleecker Street
Utica, NY 13501



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Units: Meter

Feet
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Whiffen-Ribyat Building

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

Whiffen-Ribyat Building
City of Utica, Oneida Co., NY

327-331 Bleecker Street
Utica, NY 13501

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

Feet
0 100 200 400

Whiffen-Ribyat Building

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

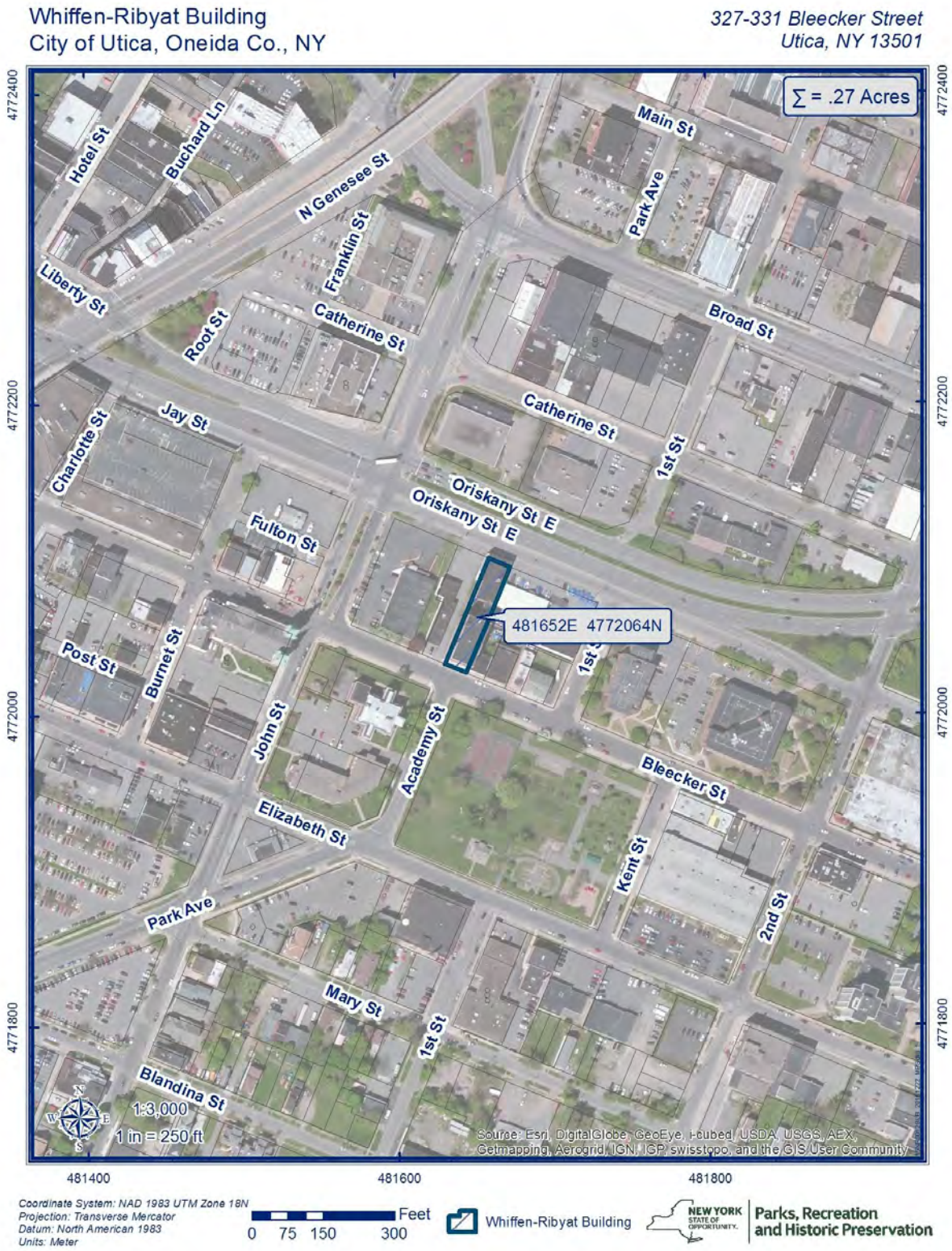
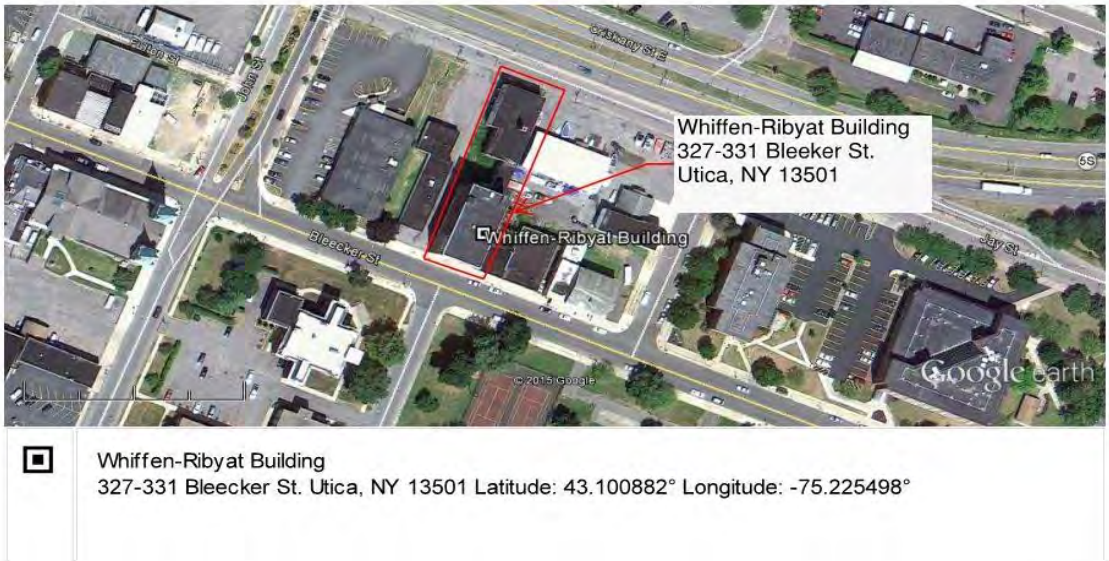

Whiffen-Ribyat Building
City of Utica, Oneida Co., NY
327-331 Bleecker Street
Utica, NY 13501
∑ = .27 Acres
481652E 4772064N
Hotel St
Buchard Ln
N Genesee St
Main St
Park Ave
Franklin St
Liberty St
Root St
Catherine St
Broad St
Jay St
Charlotte St
1st St
Oriskany St E
Fulton St
Post St
Burnet St
John St
Academy St
Bleecker St
Elizabeth St
Kent St
2nd St
Mary St
Blandina St
1:3,000
1 in = 250 ft
Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community
4772400
4772200
4772000
4771800
481400
481600
481800
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter
Feet
0 75 150 300
Whiffen-Ribyat Building
NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY.
Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Figure 1. Aerial photo map from Google Earth, with coordinates.



Whiffen-Ribyat Building
327-331 Bleecker St. Utica, NY 13501 Latitude: 43.100882° Longitude: -75.225498°

Figure 2. Aerial photo map of the area, from Google Earth.

Figure 3. Tax map, with boundaries of the nominated parcel.

Figure 4. 1950 Sanborn Map of the property, with added notes about construction dates.

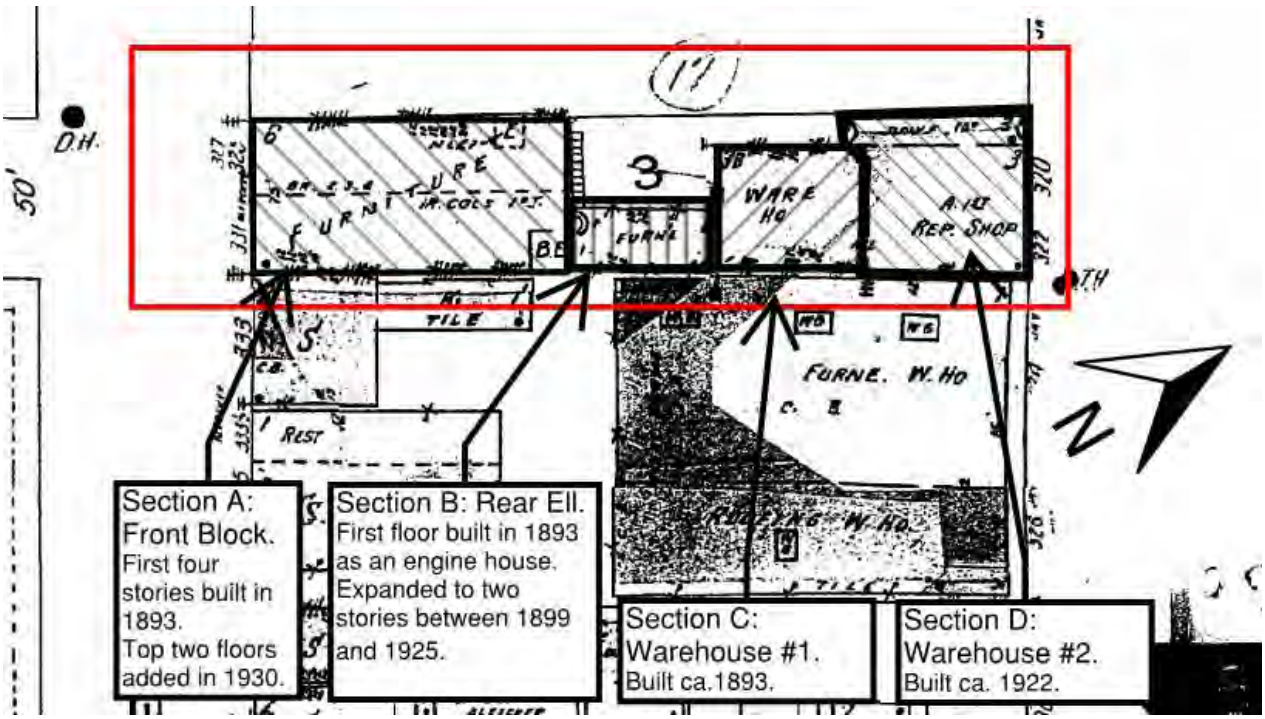


Figure 5. Floorplans, by Buxton Kubic Dodd Creative.

Floors 1-3.

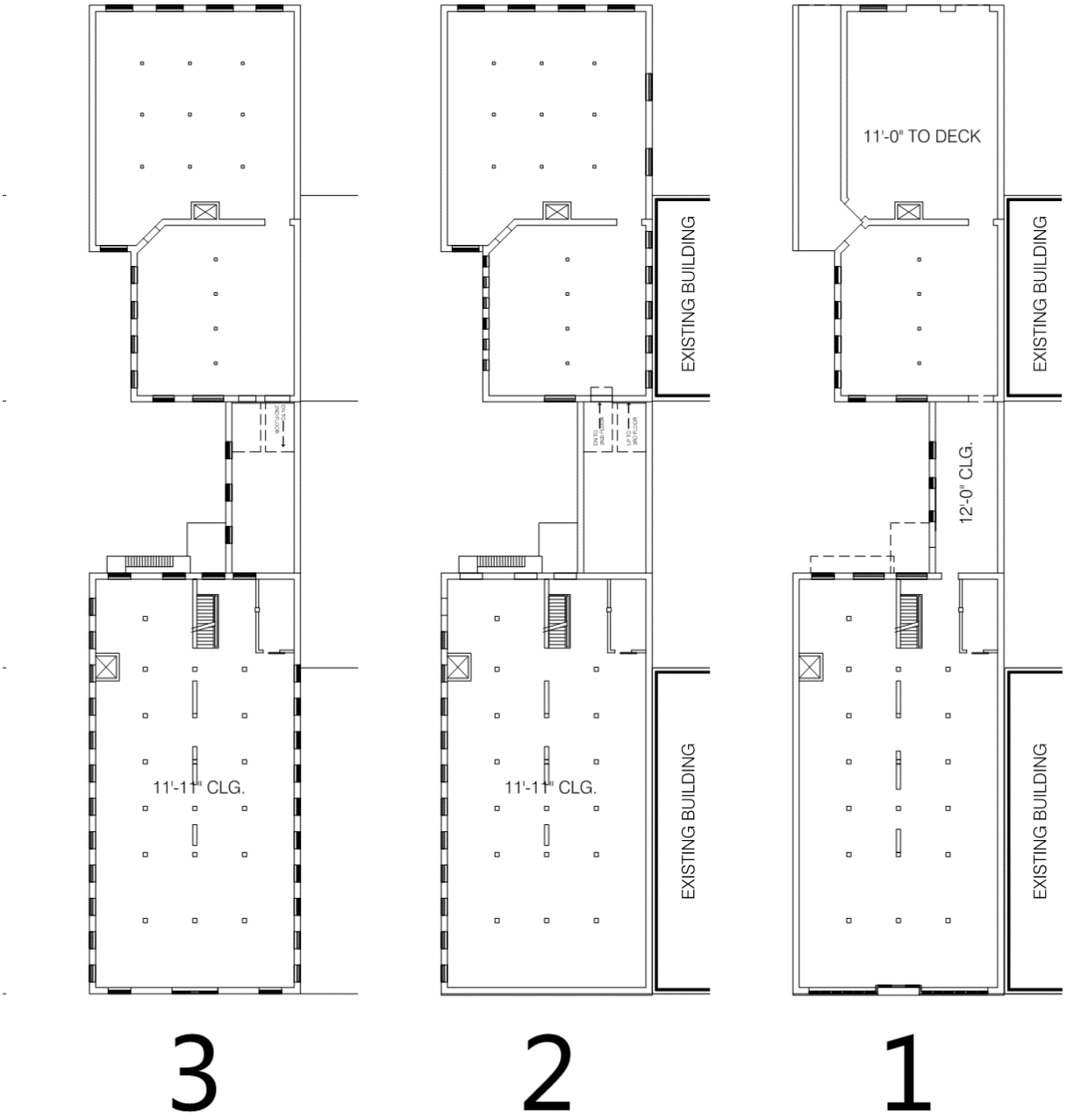


Figure 5., continued. Floors 4-6.

Figure 6. Photo taken shortly after the 4th and 5th floors were added. Image from a 1930 *Utica City Directory*, courtesy of the Oneida County Historical Society.

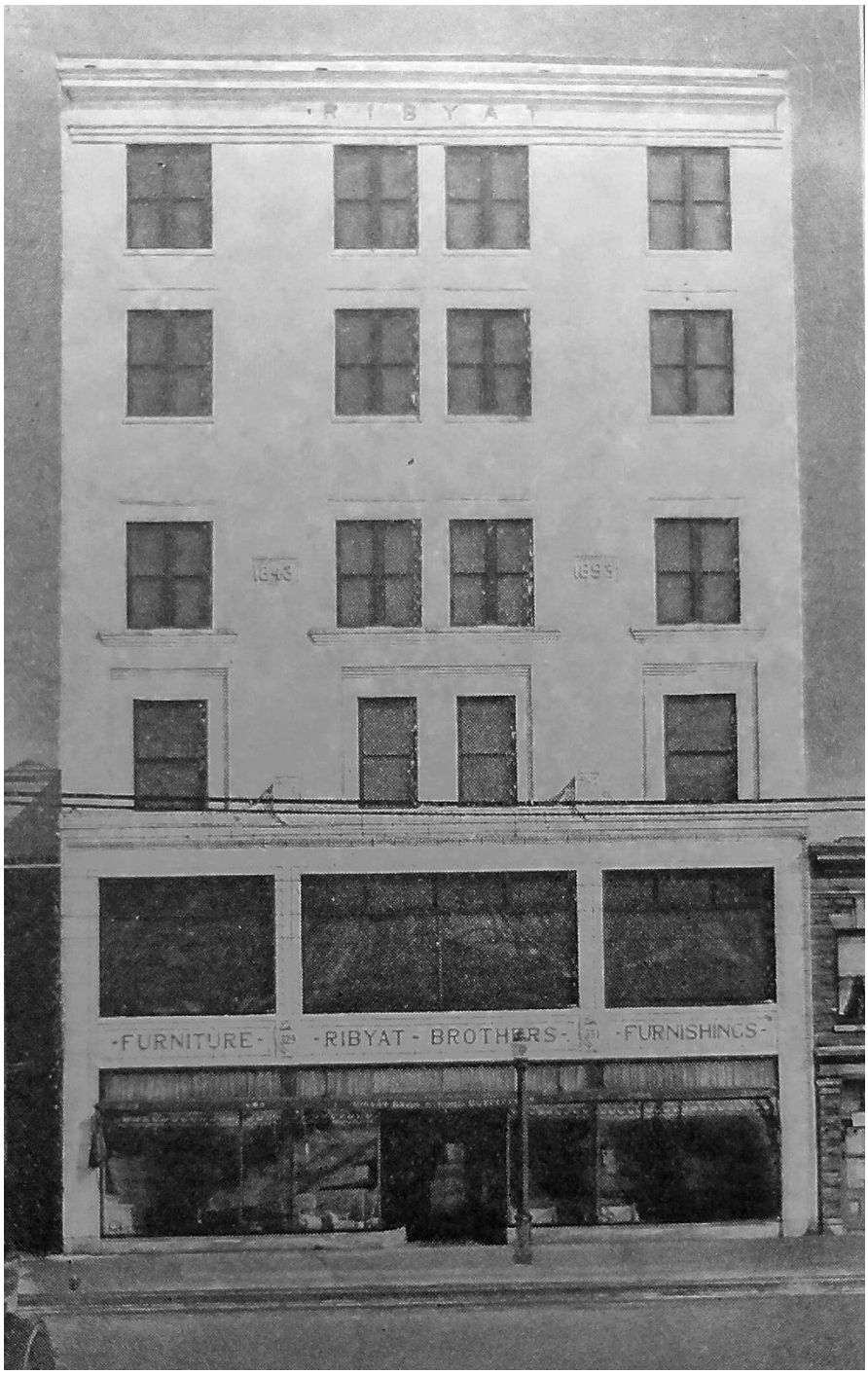


Figure 7. 1925 Sanborn Map of the property.

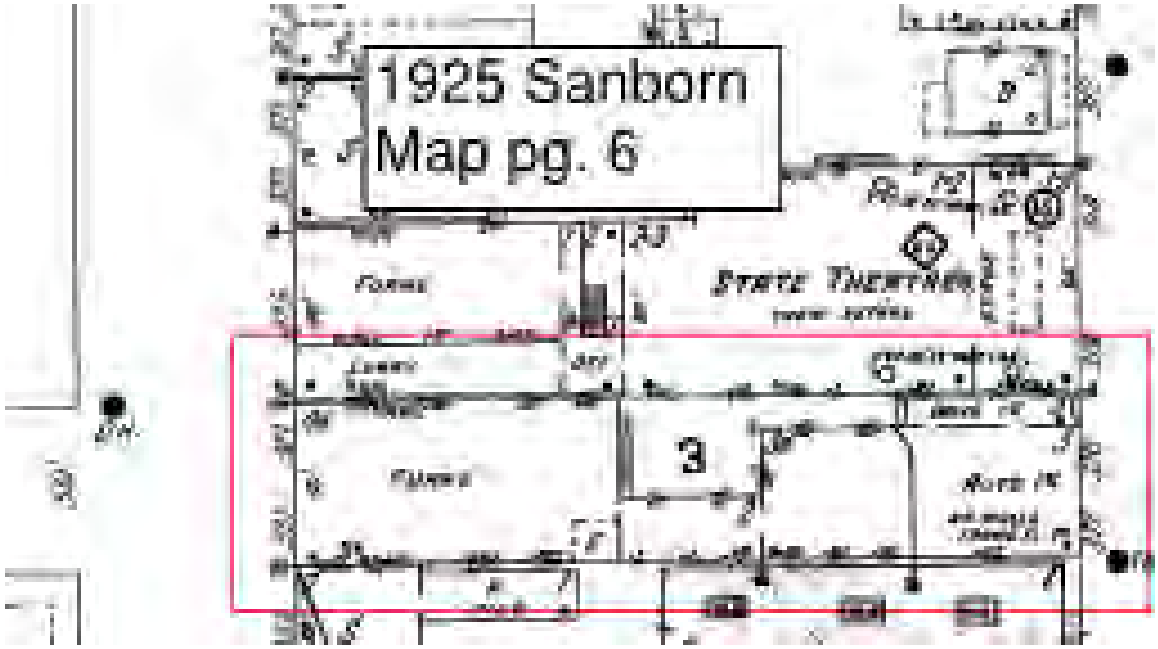


Figure 8. Map of Utica, 1825. From *Utica: A City Worth Saving*. Utica, New York: Mohawk Community College, n.d. (ca. 1970s.) 33.

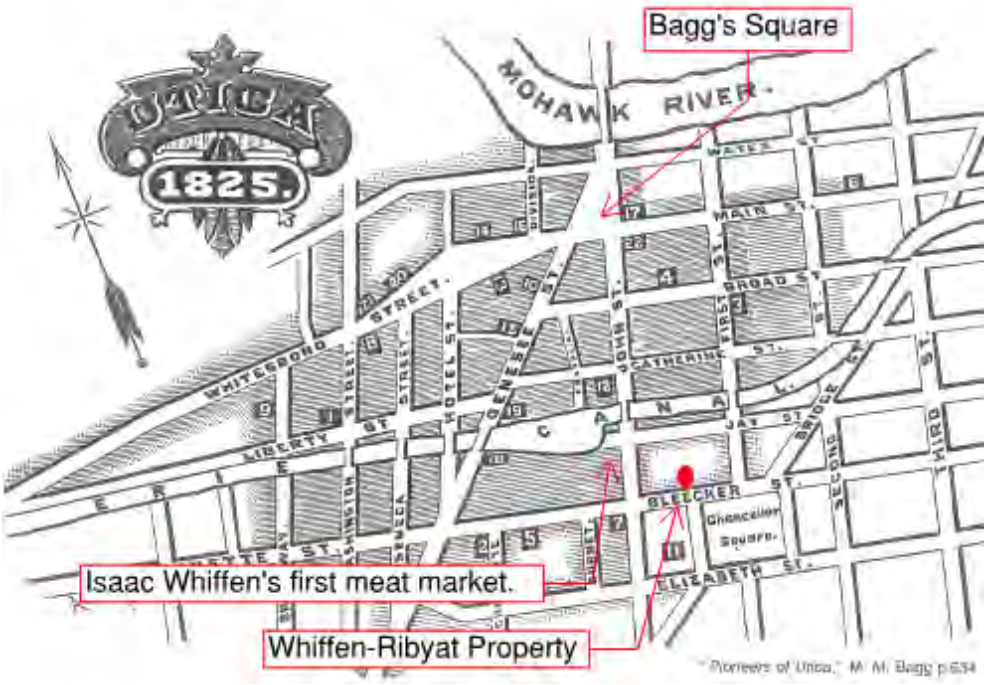


Figure 9. Map of Utica, about 1835, from, Daniel E. Wager, *Our County and Its People: a Descriptive Work on Oneida County, New York* (Boston: The Boston History Co., 1896), 379.

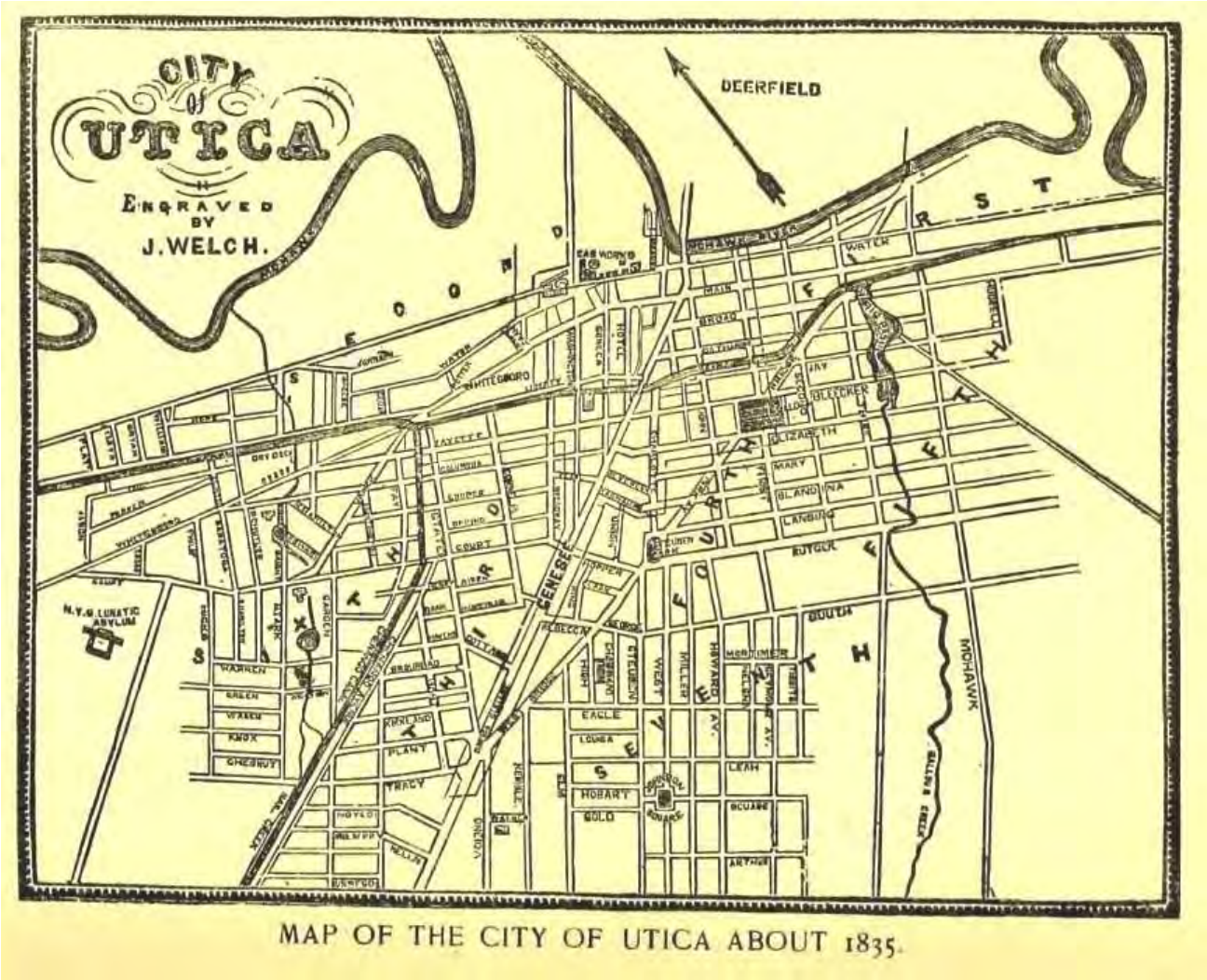


Figure 10. Plat filed by the family of Rutger Bleecker in 1810, with the location of the Whiffen-Ribyat property. (On file in the Oneida County Assessor's Office, Utica, NY.)

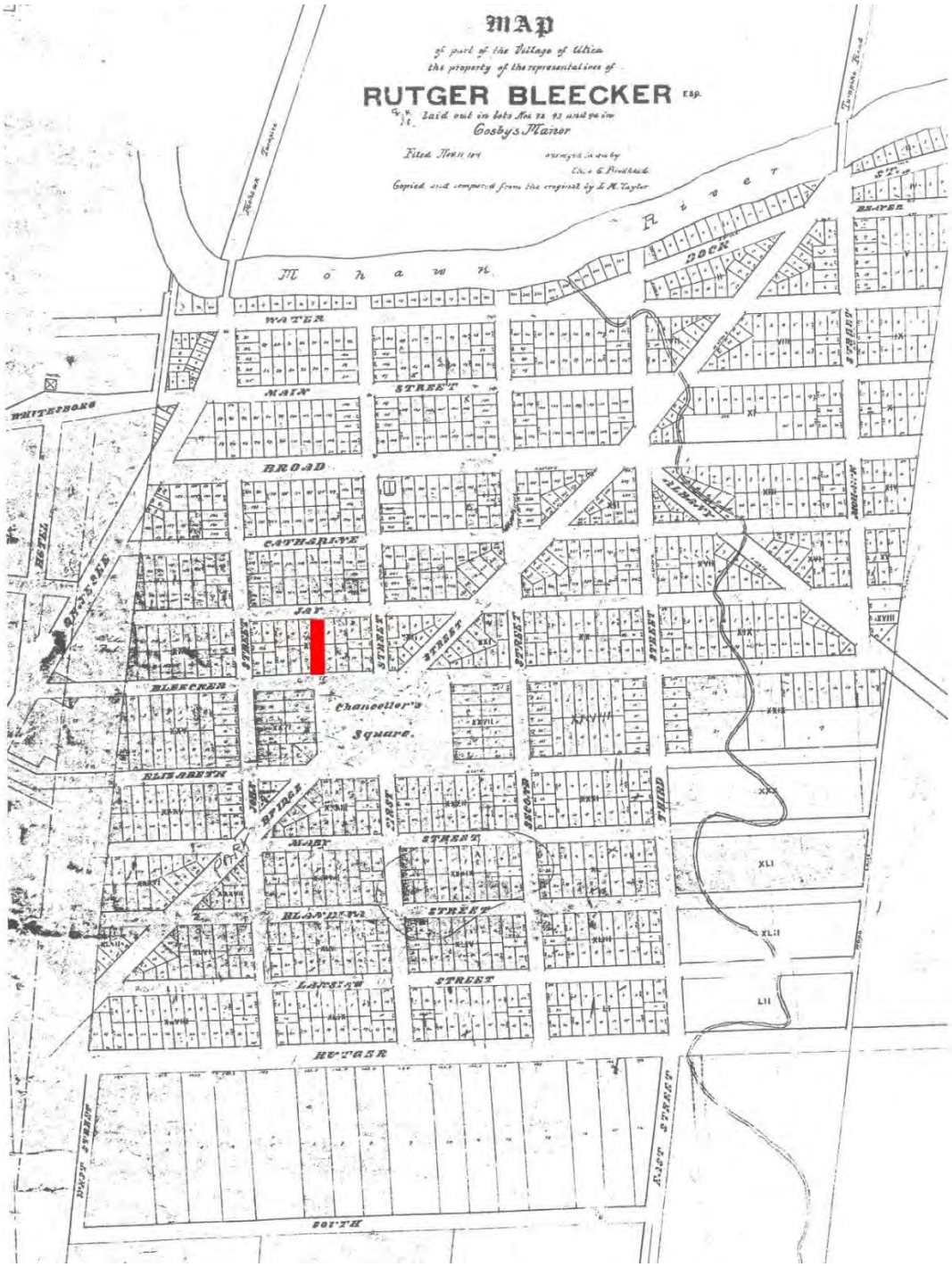


Figure 11. Photo of the building taken soon after it was completed. (From an 1899 *City Directory* ad for the Isaac Whiffen's Sons Meat Company on file with the (Oneida County Historical Society, Utica, NY.)

Figure 12. 1899 Sanborn Map of the block.

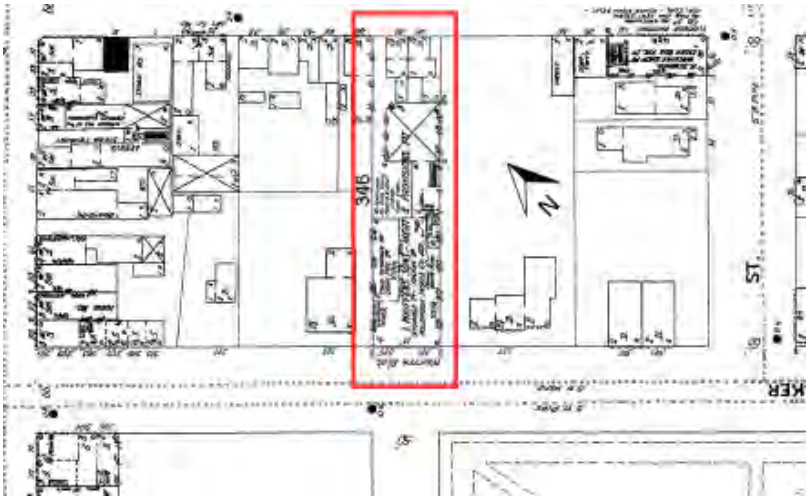


Figure 13. Drawing made for remodeling project of 1922. This was probably drawn by architect Thomas H. Williams. (The drawing was only partially scanned for online publication.) *Utica Daily Tribune*, 2 Feb., 1922. (fultonhisory.com, accessed July 2015.)

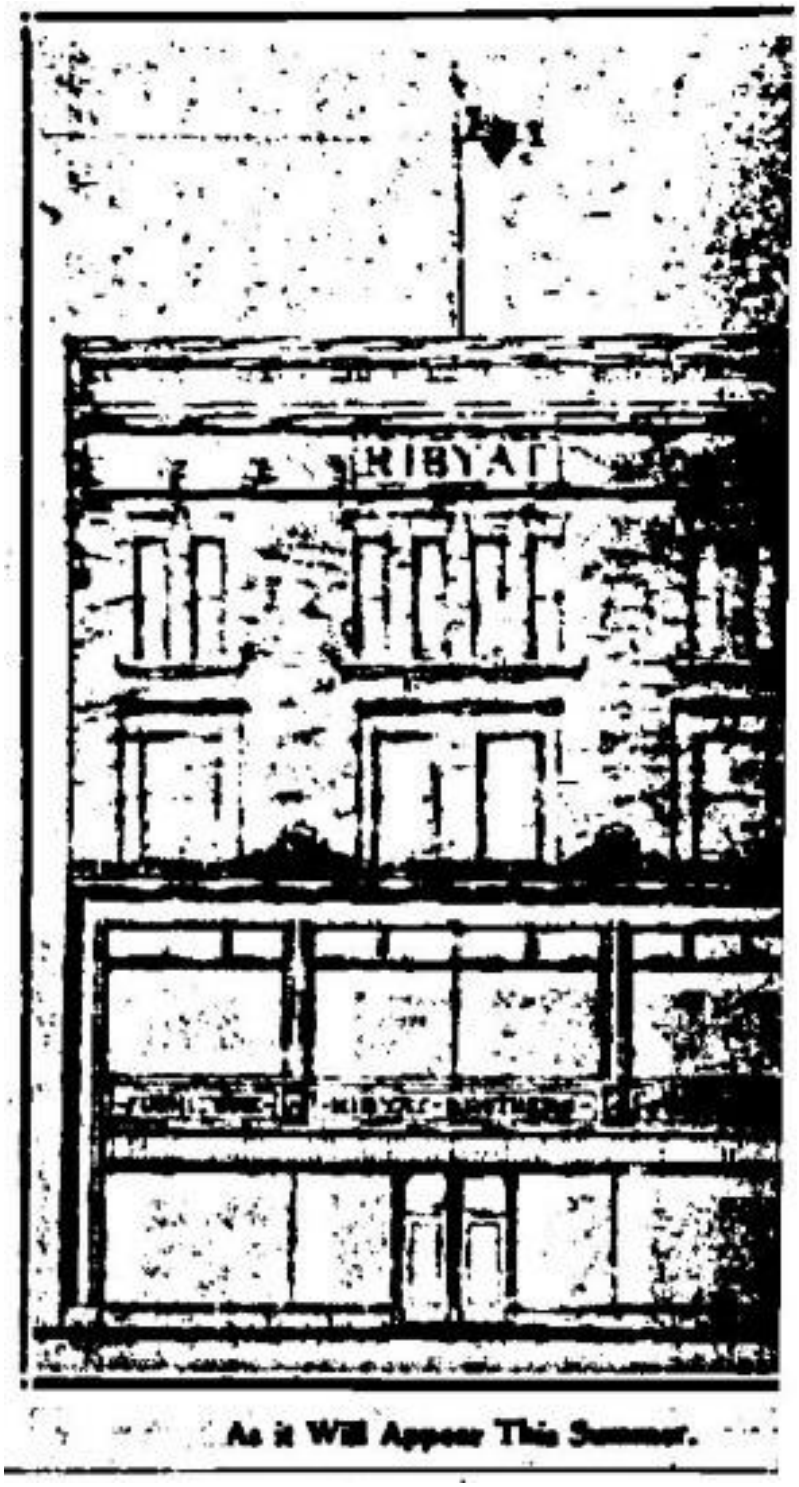
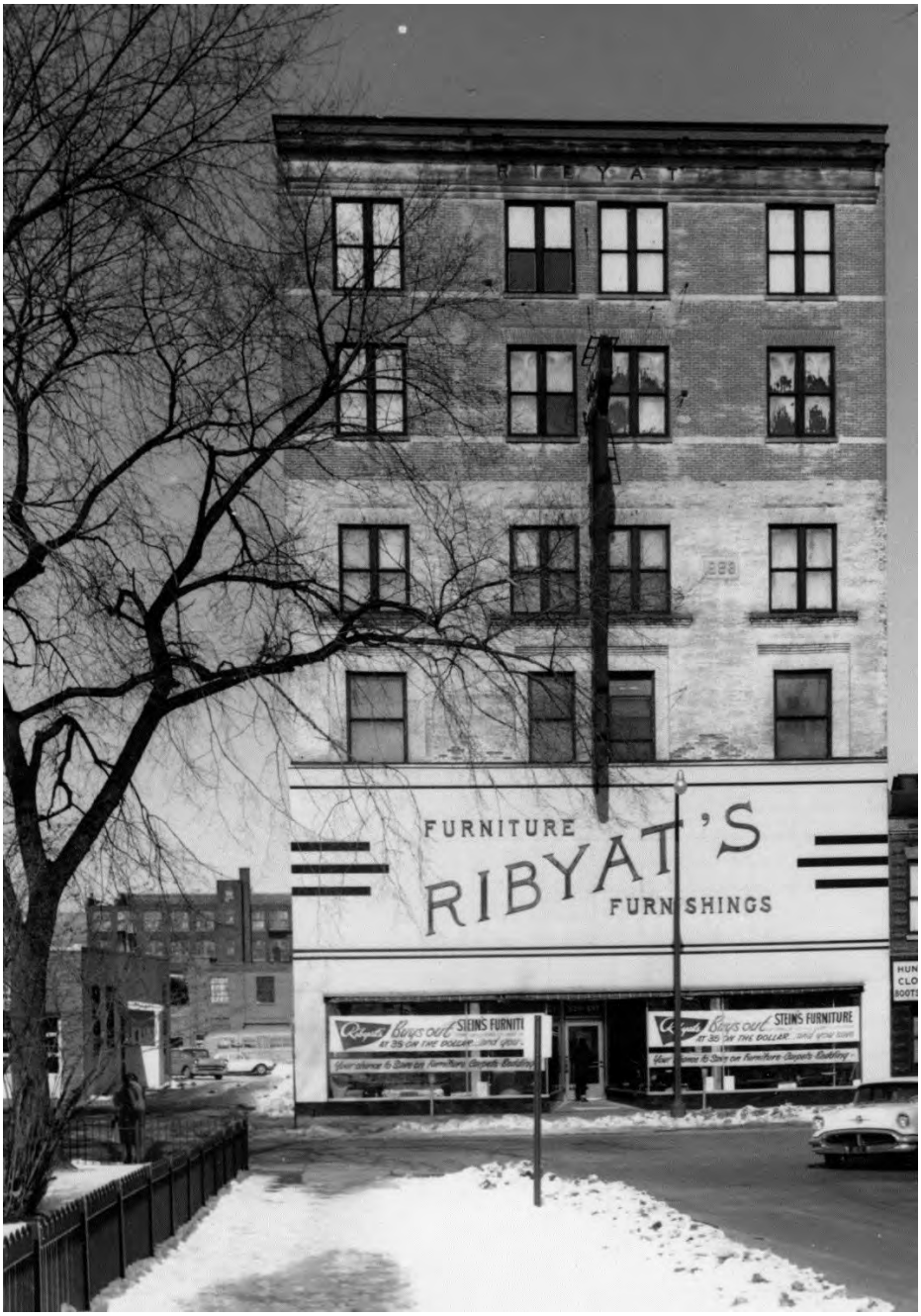


Figure 14. Early 20th century postcard of Genesee Street. (Perkins, Laura."Bleecker Street." *Postcards of Old Utica*. ca. early 20th century.) The view is looking southeast towards St. John's Church, with Chancellor Square just beyond that. The Whiffen Ribyat Building is a block beyond the church towers, out of view to the left.

Figure 15. Photo of the façade, taken ca. 1960. From the collections of the Oneida County Historical Society.



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