



# HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY FORM

NYS OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION  
& HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
P.O. BOX 189, WATERFORD, NY 12188  
(518) 237-8643

OFFICE USE ONLY

USN:

## IDENTIFICATION

Property name(if any) Chacona Block  
 Address or Street Location 411-415 College Avenue  
 County Tompkins Town/City Ithaca Village/Hamlet: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Owner Student Agencies, Inc. Address 409 College Avenue, Ithaca, NY 14850  
 Original use mixed-use Current use mixed-use  
 Architect/Builder, if known John M. Wilgus Date of construction, if known 1911-12

## DESCRIPTION

Materials -- please check those materials that are visible

Exterior Walls:	<input type="checkbox"/> wood clapboard	<input type="checkbox"/> wood shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> vertical boards	<input type="checkbox"/> plywood	
	<input type="checkbox"/> stone	<input type="checkbox"/> brick	<input type="checkbox"/> poured concrete	<input type="checkbox"/> concrete block	
	<input type="checkbox"/> vinyl siding	<input type="checkbox"/> aluminum siding	<input type="checkbox"/> cement-asbestos	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <u>stucco</u>	
Roof:	<input type="checkbox"/> asphalt, shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> asphalt, roll	<input type="checkbox"/> wood shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> metal	<input type="checkbox"/> slate
Foundation:	<input type="checkbox"/> stone	<input type="checkbox"/> brick	<input type="checkbox"/> poured concrete	<input type="checkbox"/> concrete block	

Other materials and their location: \_\_\_\_\_

Alterations, if known: see continuation sheet Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Condition:  excellent  good  fair  deteriorated

## Photos

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

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

## Maps

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

Prepared by: B. McCracken address 108 E. Green St., Ithaca, NY 14850  
 Telephone: (607) 274-6555 email bmccracken@cityofithaca.org Date 8/8/17

(See Reverse)

**PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION**

**Narrative Description of Property:** Briefly describe the property and its setting. Include a verbal description of the location (e.g., north side of NY 17, west of Jones Road); a general description of the building, structure or feature including such items as architectural style (if known), number of stories, type and shape of roof (flat, gabled, mansard, shed or other), materials and landscape features. Identify and describe any associated buildings, structures or features on the property, such as garages, silos, privies, pools, gravesites. Identify any known exterior and interior alterations such as additions, replacement windows, aluminum or vinyl siding or changes in plan. Include dates of construction and alteration, if known. Attach additional sheets as needed.

See continuation sheet

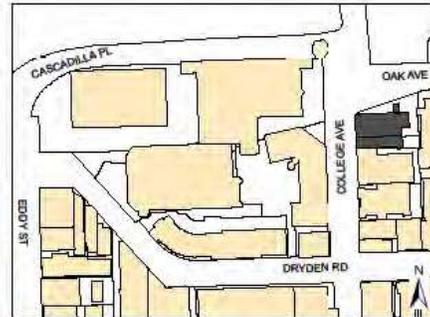
**Narrative Description of Significance:** Briefly describe those characteristics by which this property may be considered historically significant. Significance may include, but is not limited to, a structure being an intact representative of an architectural or engineering type or style (e.g., Gothic Revival style cottage, Pratt through-truss bridge); association with historic events or broad patterns of local, state or national history (e.g., a cotton mill from a period of growth in local industry, a seaside cottage representing a locale's history as a resort community, a structure associated with activities of the "underground railroad."); or by association with persons or organizations significant at a local, state or national level. Simply put, why is this property important to you and the community. Attach additional sheets as needed.

See continuation sheet



## **Narrative Description of Property:**

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



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

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

To the north of the Chacona Block, the historic stone arch College Avenue bridge across Cascadilla Creek connects the Collegetown neighborhood to the Cornell University campus. To the immediate east is St. Luke Lutheran Church at 109 Oak Avenue, constructed in 1923-24. Further along Oak Avenue are late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century homes, most

converted for student or fraternity housing, and the Cascadilla School on the corner of Oak and Summit Avenues. Across College Avenue to the west are Sheldon Court and Cornell's Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, with Cascadilla Hall further west. To the south along the 300 block of College Avenue are more commercial buildings, most of them dating from the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries; along the 100 and 200 blocks of College Avenue are formerly single-family homes converted to student apartments, except for the Grand View House at 209 College Avenue, the last surviving of Collegetown's great boardinghouses.

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

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

The southernmost storefront, at 411 College Avenue, departs in appearance from the northern two and was extensively altered sometime after 1975<sup>1</sup>. Where it once had a sheltered entrance similar to the one shared by 413 and 415, it now has a vaguely Gothic-Revival style appearance, including windows with pointed-arch mullions, a round-arched entry door, and heavy wood paneling and moldings.

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

The north façade of the Chacona Block consists of six bays, with single 6/1 windows on the second and third stories centered over first-story bays of large plate-glass windows each topped with two transom sash containing 6 lights. The exception to the pattern is in the second bay from the east, which contains paired 6/1 windows on the second and third stories over a glass

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

greenhouse-type structure (added after 1975<sup>3</sup>) within the first story bay which provides a second entrance to the commercial space. There are no fourth-story windows on the north façade. The brick wall and pilasters dividing the bays of the first story appears to have been originally stuccoed to match the upper stories. The wall terminates in a parapet which steps down towards the rear (east) of the building, disguising a low-slope shed roof. A palimpsest suggests that the height of the building was increased at some point prior to 1954.<sup>4</sup>

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

### **Narrative Description of Significance:**

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

**The Chacona Block is architecturally significant as a nearly intact example of a local interpretation of the commercial form of the Renaissance Revival Style.**

**The Chacona Block is significant for its close association with the growth and development of Cornell University, as an example of the early-twentieth century response to the changing housing needs and preferences of those seeking to reside in proximity to the campus, and for its role in the development of Collegetown, particularly College Avenue, as an urban neighborhood separate from downtown Ithaca and with its own distinct character. Built in 1911-12 as a mixed-use, fireproof, commercial-style building replacing an earlier wood boardinghouse, the construction of the Chacona Block on a site adjacent to the campus of Cornell University established it as one of Collegetown's most prominent and recognizable buildings. The Chacona Block has additional local significance for its association with John N. Chacona, the owner of a successful chain of confectionary and ice cream shops in Ithaca, as well as with the larger Greek business community in Ithaca.**

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

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Tompkins County Department of Assessment, Tompkins County Tax Assessment photograph, 1954, Historic Ithaca, Inc., Ithaca, NY.

**Wilgus's father John B. Wilgus and uncle Henry L. Wilgus were successful merchants who erected the Wilgus Block at the corner of State and Tioga Streets.**

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

Much of the land on East Hill was farmed or grazed during the early 19th century, and in 1857 the DeWitt farm north of Cascadilla Creek was purchased by Ezra Cornell, who would go on to donate 200 acres for the campus of his namesake university. To the south of the creek, much of present-day Collegetown was part of the 21-acre John and Samuel Giles estate. Possibly anticipating commercial and residential development after the opening of Cornell University in 1868, the Giles heirs divided the estate into urban-size parcels and sold them in the 1870s. The lot that would become 411-415 College Avenue was identified as Lot #4 of the John and Samuel Giles estate; the lot that would become 409 College Avenue was Lot #3.<sup>5</sup>

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

It appears that the first structure on the site of the Chacona Block was the boardinghouse constructed for Ellen M. Murphy in 1884 to cater to Cornell University students living off-campus in proximity to the student-oriented services beginning to flourish at the edge of campus. The house appears in an undated photograph prior to 1904 as a 2-story frame gable-and-ell structure with several projections and additions probably intended to maximize the number of rentable rooms.<sup>6</sup> It was one of four large, wood frame, residential style buildings on the east side of the block. This prominently located property across from Sheldon Court was sought after as a

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

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

business location by the early 1900s, with a January 9, 1908 *Ithaca Daily News* article reporting that Ms. Murphy turned down an offer of \$13,000 for the property amid speculation that the east side of the 400 block of College Avenue would soon be developed into one business block.<sup>7</sup> During the planning of the Chacona Block in 1911, it was noted that Mr. Chacona had not yet decided whether the existing boardinghouse building would be torn down or relocated.<sup>8</sup>

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

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

The plans for the new building were made public August 3, 1911<sup>9</sup> and newspaper coverage followed the project until its completion in 1912. The cost of the building was estimated at \$30,000-\$40,000. It contained space on the ground floor for three shops, and three six-room flats on each of the second and third floors, all “strictly up-to-date with all modern conveniences,” including a vacuum cleaning system, steam heat, and electric light.<sup>10</sup> The attic was designated for storage. The northern two apartments on each floor were accessible from a common, skylit stairway and hall, while the southern apartments were reached from a separate entrance and stair hall, lit by windows opening to a narrow light well between the southern and central units. Masonry, structural steel and carpentry work was contracted to the Ithaca Contracting Company, plumbing and heating work were done by W. C. Dean, wiring and electrical work by Davis-Brown Electrical Company, “painters and decorators” were the firm of Vredenburg, Kelly & Bell, and the windows, plate glass, and builder's hardware were supplied by Treman, King & Co.<sup>11</sup>

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

The building was designed by the locally prominent architect, John M. Wilgus, who enjoyed a more than forty-five year career in the field. In contrast to most of his professional contemporaries such as A. B. Dale, William H. Miller, Clinton Vivian, and the partners of the firm of Gibb & Waltz, John M. Wilgus was raised in Ithaca, where his family was actively

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<sup>7</sup> *Ithaca Daily News*, January 9, 1908, page 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ithaca Chronicle and Democrat*, August 17, 1911, page 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ithaca Weekly Journal*, August 3, 1911, page 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ithaca Chronicle and Democrat*, August 17, 1911, page 5. *Ithaca Daily Journal*, July 13, 1912, page 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ithaca Daily News*, August 16, 1911, page 3.

involved in the business and social life of the city from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> through the early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His father John B. and uncle Henry L. Wilgus commissioned the Wilgus Block, erected in 1867-68 at the southwest corner of State and Tioga Streets, home to the Wilgus Bros. retail firm and Wilgus Hall (later Wilgus Opera House), a site now occupied by a portion of the Center Ithaca building. Local newspapers regularly reported on activities and events associated with Wilgus family members, such as the February 5, 1880, wedding of John M. and Carrie Thompson, the daughter of Ithaca grocer Thaddeus Thompson, complete with a description of the bride's attire, wedding gifts (including a calendar clock) and the presence of the "city orchestra" at the reception.<sup>12</sup> The marriage in 1890 of John's sister, Lois, to Cornell graduate J. Herbert Ballantine, a member of the noted New Jersey brewing company, was covered as "the nuptial event of the season."<sup>13</sup> The press followed the career of John's brother, Charles, who purchased and consolidated two newspapers in Ravenna, Ohio, commissioning John to design a substantial new building there in 1904.<sup>14</sup> The travels of John, Carrie and their daughter Amelia were also noted by the local papers, whether trips to visit friends in Auburn, New York, to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901 or to visit family in Pasadena, California in 1913.<sup>15</sup>

John M. Wilgus began his architectural career in the mid-1880s, and as a member of an established family within the Ithaca community, he likely had numerous social and business connections that would bolster his long and successful career. Unlike some of his contemporaries, John M. Wilgus did not pursue architectural studies at Cornell University or work in the prestigious office of William H. Miller. After some limited design work on his own, he partnered with Alfred B. Dale, a well-known local architect during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Dale's works included the Boardman House at 120 E. Buffalo St. (DeWitt Park Historic District), the Griffin Block at 224 E. State St. (NR Ithaca Downtown Historic District), and the Andrus-Whiton House at 222 S. Aurora St. (Individual Local Landmark). Although this partnership was short-lived,<sup>17</sup> it undoubtedly gave Wilgus valuable professional experience and exposure to potential clients within and outside of the community. In June 1887, Wilgus set up his own office in the Wilgus Block, and began designing buildings that ranged widely in terms of architectural style and programmatic use.<sup>18</sup> His works included everything from single-family residences to three- and four-story mixed-use buildings to a least one religious structure. Some of his early residential works included the F. M. Bush House at 110 N. Albany St. (1889; Downtown West Historic District), E. P. Gilbert House at 518 E. State St. (c. 1893; East Hill Historic District), and C. A. Ives duplex at 204 N. Cayuga St. (1893; DeWitt Park Historic District).<sup>19</sup> Wilgus's mixed-use commercial and apartment buildings included the Livingston Apartments at 318 E. Seneca St. (1896), 114-118 S. Cayuga St. (1898; NR Ithaca Downtown Historic District), the McAllister Block at 418-426 Eddy St. (1894-95; redesigned and rebuilt 1908-09 after fire; East Hill Historic District), and the Gainey Block at 315-317 College Avenue

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<sup>12</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, February 6, 1880, page 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ithaca Democrat*, September 25, 1890, page 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ithaca Democrat*, August 29, 1895, page 5; *Ithaca Daily Journal*, May 28, 1904, page 3, respectively.

<sup>15</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, June 16, 1904, page 3; October 5, 1901, page 3; February 3, 1913, page 6, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, Aug. 17, 1883, page 3; 1886 Ithaca City Directory.

<sup>17</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, June 9, 1887, page 3.

<sup>18</sup> 1888 Ithaca City Directory.

<sup>19</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, Apr. 17, 1888, page 3; *Ithaca Daily Journal*, Jan. 9, 1889, p.3; *Ithaca Democrat*, Aug. 17, 1893, page 5.

(1908).<sup>20</sup> These buildings exhibit characteristics that reflect Wilgus's pragmatic and economical approach to building design, specifically their relatively simple brick façades with limited ornamentation.

One of Wilgus's more distinctive commissions, the First Church of Christ, Scientist again demonstrated his ability to meet the aesthetic, practical and financial needs of his clients. Located at the base of Cascadilla Park, an early-20<sup>th</sup> century planned residential development along Cascadilla Gorge, this Craftsman Style church was designed to meet the aesthetic requirements of this upscale development and the financial restrictions of the congregation that commissioned it. Built in 1910-11, the church's simple design reflected the architectural quality of the surrounding residences, provided the programmatic space needed by the congregation, and proved buildable within the limited means of the organization.<sup>21</sup>

The design of the Chacona Block at 411-415 College Avenue reflected this same practical approach to design as well as the architect's consideration of the needs and wishes of his client. Reminiscent of his other mixed-use, commercial, and apartment buildings, Wilgus's design for the Chacona Block included a relatively unadorned west façade and north elevation, a simple wood cornice and a stepped parapet. The building's large windows openings, skylight over the central interior staircase and light well between 411 and 413-415 College Avenue admitted natural light into the interior spaces and reduced the need for artificial light, an expensive amenity in 1912. The original storefronts on the 413-415 College Avenue reflected this same design approach but on a much smaller scale. The large plate glass windows at street level on the west façade and north elevation allowed pedestrians to easily see the merchandise within the shops. The prism-glass transoms over the plate glass windows on the west façade provided ventilation through their casement openings and directed natural light into the deep commercial spaces, again reducing the need for artificial light. The wood cornice above the glazed storefronts and the recessed doors completed the simple, yet highly functional, storefront composition.

The client's influence on the design was most distinctly represented in the pebble-dash stucco exterior, a unique feature of this design, and the west façade's stone plaques. The building's distinctive lion's head and Greek cross decorative plaques at the fourth floor bore witness to John N. Chacona's native land.

Wilgus's design also addressed concerns about life-safety in the quickly urbanizing Collegetown neighborhood. Fires remained a tremendous threat in the neighborhood well into the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. This danger was the result of the lack of running water in some buildings, the continued use of kerosene and gas lighting, and the lack of organized fire protection for Collegetown. Although the Company No. 9 firehouse was established in 1895 and a better water supply secured, major fires continued to destroy properties on the hill. A 1907 fire damaged several Eddy Street buildings, including the locations of the John Chacona Candy Company store, the Student Agencies laundry, and a men's clothing shop, possibly the Toggery Shops which moved

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<sup>20</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, Feb. 15, 1910, page 5; National Register of Historic Places, Ithaca Downtown Historic District, Ithaca, Tompkins, New York, National Register #04NR05326; *Ithaca Democrat*, Sept. 13, 1894, page 5, and *Ithaca Daily Journal*, Nov. 11, 1908, page 3; *Ithaca Daily Journal*, Mar. 28, 1908, page 6, respectively.

<sup>21</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, May 23, 1910, page 3; July 15, 1910, page 3.

to the new Chacona Block along with the candy store in 1912. The modern rooming houses and apartment buildings constructed in the early 1900s – Sheldon Court, the Larkin Building and others – were constructed of fire-resistant materials, heated with steam, and illuminated with electric lights to reduce the danger of fire. Wilgus incorporated these features as well as structural terra cotta tile and stucco, steel framing and abundant sources of natural light into the design to reduce the threat posed by fire.<sup>22</sup>

The commissioner of the Chacona Block, John N. Chacona, was an active and influential member of the Greek-American business community in Ithaca at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. John N. Chacona was born in Sparta, Greece in 1884 and immigrated to the United States at the age of nine. He settled in the Ithaca area in 1899 and worked at the Chacona Candy Company on East State Street with his cousin, John P. Chacona.<sup>23</sup> John P. Chacona was known as “Big John” and John N. Chacona was known as “Little John”. These nicknames were commonly known and frequently used to distinguish John P. from John N. in newspaper accounts of their business and family activities. The two operated successful confectionary stores together and independently, not only in Ithaca but also in Buffalo and Syracuse. When their partnership dissolved, John N. opened several independent confectionary shops, the first being at 416 Eddy St. He also operated the Sugar Bowl restaurant, a business he purchased from John P. Chacona.<sup>24</sup>

With the completion of the Chacona block in 1912, John N. opened another confectionary shop in the storefront at 415 College Avenue. With its close proximity to Cornell University, Chacona’s confectionary shop at 415 College Avenue, and John N. Chacona, himself, became important parts of student life. In the April 26, 1918 issue of the *Cornell Daily Sun*, the satirical “Freshman Rules for 1918-19” referenced the store in rule number three: “no freshman shall be allowed in Chacona’s or downstairs in Candyland under any circumstances, nor upstairs in either, unless accompanied by an upperclassman.”<sup>25</sup> References to the John N. Chacona and his candy shop appeared regularly in the *Cornell Era*, a student produced publication published between 1868 and 1924. A poem titled “Fame” by Morris Bishop, class of 1913 and later Cornell historian, in the 1912-1913 issue of this publication included these lines: “With the John N. Chacona Hussars/Then followed the Greeks of the Candy Trade,/Their Martial rage to evince/And red-haired youths spoiled my drinks/(I’ve hardly recovered since).”<sup>26</sup>

Apart from Chacona’s confectionary shop in 415 College Avenue, the storefronts at 411 and 413 College Avenue were occupied by numerous student-oriented businesses in the second and third decades of the 20th century, including The Toggery Shops, a billiards establishment, A & B

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<sup>22</sup> An announcement in a local newspaper awarding the bids for the construction of the building noted that the building was to be constructed of hollow tile with a stucco exterior, and that steel was to be used for girders and beams. The masonry, structural steel and carpentry contract was reported to have been let to Ithaca Contracting Company. *Ithaca Chronicle & Democrat*, August 17, 1911, page X. Upon completion of the Chacona Block, the No. 9 hook and ladder truck was called out to determine whether the extension ladder could reach the top of the new building; it exceeded the height of the building by five feet. *Ithaca Daily News*, May 17, 1912, page 3

<sup>23</sup> “J.N. Chacona’s Twenty Years,” *Ithaca Daily News*, August 16, 1919, page 5

<sup>24</sup> “They Linked Greece to Ithaca,” *The Ithaca Journal*, July 15, 1989, page 14A.

<sup>25</sup> *Cornell Daily Sun*, April 26, 1918

<sup>26</sup> “Fame,” *Cornell Era*, 1912-13, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 3.

Stores selling student supplies, and the Orchard Tea Shop. Pop's Place, the confectionary shop and, later, restaurant operated by John G. Papayanakos, replaced the Chacona shop in the corner space at 415 College Avenue. During this time, at least two physicians rented flats for use as offices, while they resided elsewhere. Several Chacona family members, including John N. Chacona, also lived in the building. Although it was in a prime location for attracting student renters, the building's other early occupants were widows and professionals, including the principal of the Cascadilla School, suggesting that the six-room flats were beyond the means of most students at the time.<sup>27</sup>

The relocation of John N. Chacona's confectionary shop from Eddy Street to College Avenue was part of a larger shift in student- and university-oriented businesses from Eddy Street to College Avenue in the early decades of the twentieth century. Other businesses that moved from Eddy Street to College Avenue at this time were L.C. Bement's Toggery Shops, relocating to the Chacona Block, and the Taylor & Co. Book Shop, relocating to ground floor of Sheldon Court. While the nineteenth century saw student-oriented development both downtown and at the edge of campus with a concentration along Eddy Street, in the early twentieth century, the construction of large, commercial-style mixed-use buildings firmly established the 400 block of College Avenue as the heart of Collegetown. The construction of the Chacona Block was a key part of the area's transformation from an extension of downtown housing and services to a vibrant neighborhood with a distinct identity. The distinct shift was documented in following passage in the October 16, 1912 issue of the *Cornell Alumni News*:

Mercantile changes have taken place on the fringe of the campus. Right at the end of College Avenue (Huestis Street), near the campus entrance, across from Sheldon Court, Little John Chacona has built a big stucco block for stores and apartments. Little John sells candy and ice cream there. One of the stores in the block has been occupied by L.C. Bement, the hatter, hosier, etc., etc., who has given up his shop on Eddy Street. Taylor & Company also have closed their Eddy Street store and have doubled the size of the Triangle Book Shop in Sheldon Court. Business tends to seek the center of population, and the student center has moved up the hill in recent years. Hence the removals from Eddy Street. College Avenue now drains a big area of students every day, and it is lined with shops for two long blocks.<sup>28</sup>

The dual nomenclature of College Avenue in this passage alluded to a significant event that permanently marked this street as the geographic center of Collegetown. With support from the street residents and business owners, the City of Ithaca renamed Huestis Street as College Avenue in 1908.

Three years after opening his 415 College Avenue store, he sold the business to his brothers, Paul and Marcus, when he sailed to Greece to visit family. Upon his return to Ithaca in 1917, John N. purchased the confectionary back from his brothers and operated the business until 1919,

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<sup>27</sup> Ithaca city directories, 1864-1981, Historic Ithaca, Inc., Ithaca, NY.

<sup>28</sup> *Cornell Alumni News*, October 16, 1912.

when he sold the shop and block and returned to Greece, this time to bring his wife and children back to Ithaca.<sup>29</sup> He also established Cozy Corners, a “delicatessen lunch and imported food novelty shop,” at the corner of E Buffalo and N. Aurora Streets in 1926.<sup>30</sup>

In 1919 John N. Chacona sold the Chacona Block and confectionary business to James P. and John G. Papayanakos, immigrants or their descendants hailing from the same Greek village as the Chaconas. Papayanakos' business became known as Pop's Place and operated at 415 College Avenue until 1977 under a series of owners, many of whom were Greek-American.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the ownership of the building and proprietorship of tenant businesses at 413-415 College Avenue through much of the twentieth century appears to have been by immigrants and/or their descendants from the same village.<sup>32</sup> The close business associations of these families were part of the national pattern of cultural and family ties maintained by Greek and other immigrant groups.

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

Student Agencies Properties, Inc. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Student Agencies, Inc., the oldest independent student-run company in the United States. It was founded in 1894, providing laundry and other profitable services to the student population. For several years the company was sold from board to board, as students graduated and moved on, before it was finally incorporated in 1910. With over \$2 million in annual revenues, Student Agencies is the second-largest employer of students after Cornell, and its services include shipping and storage, moving, campus promotions, note-taking, housing, and publication of the *Cornellian Yearbook*.<sup>33</sup>

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

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<sup>29</sup> *Ithaca Daily Journal*, February 15, 1917, page 5.

<sup>30</sup> Advertisement, *The Ithaca Journal*, February 19, 1926, page 13.

<sup>31</sup> "Pop's Place, Higher rent ends the experiment," *Ithaca Journal*, June 9, 1977, page 20.

<sup>32</sup> Directory of the Tsintzinian Heritage Society of America. Owners of 413-415 College Avenue included James P. and John G. Papayanakos (likely two of three brothers who settled in Ithaca in the mid-1920s), George P. Nickles (original name Nikolaidis), Peter J. Poulos (a John J. Poulos reportedly came to Ithaca before 1913), and Constantine J. Manos (original name Voulomanos). Long-term leases on the candy shop were given to Constantine J. Manos and George Conomikes (originally Economikis).

<sup>33</sup> "Our Company," Student Agencies, Inc., accessed June 29, 2012, [www.studentagencies.com/info.php?page=our\\_company](http://www.studentagencies.com/info.php?page=our_company)

Today, the tenants of the Chacona Block's storefronts – two eateries and a store selling t-shirts and other Cornell-logo gear – reflect changes to the character of Collegetown and the orientation of its businesses in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The variety of businesses catering to students and other residents once included bookstores, salons and barbershops, eateries, and clothing and shoe stores. Today, dining and entertainment are by far the largest proportion of business types in the neighborhood. The residential units within the Chacona block, reorganized to offer 1-bedroom to 5-bedroom apartments, remain highly desirable as student rentals.