

OAK KNITTING COMPANY **DRAFT**
Name of Property

ONONDAGA CO., NY
County and State

5. Classification

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

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

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

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Industrial Resources in the City of Syracuse

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

No style

foundation: stone, concrete

walls: brick

roof: EPDM

other: metal

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Narrative Description

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

Summary Paragraph

Located approximately one mile northwest of City Hall and downtown Syracuse, the former Oak Knitting Company building was purposely located near the New York Central Railroad, the Erie Lackawanna Railroad and the Oswego Canal, the latter now filled in and part of I-81, a major roadway through the heart of Syracuse. The building is a four-story, brick industrial building located at the northeast corner of West Division Street and Genant Drive, adjacent to I-81 in the northwest quadrant of the city and at the southeast end of Onondaga Lake. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the area was going through an industrial transition and the Oak Knitting Company was one of the first of many large industrial buildings constructed in the district. The original section of the Oak Knitting Company mill building was constructed in 1899-1900, expanded in 1900-1901, and had additions between 1908 and c1931-1942.

The four-story, red brick building sits on a raised basement, is seventeen-bays wide and ten-bays deep along Genant Drive, and has a two-bay, four-story stair tower on West Division Street. The building has a flat roof with metal copings. The oldest part of the building has a limestone foundation. Newer sections have poured concrete or concrete block foundations. The earliest two sections of the 146 x 100 foot rectangular building were built using common mill construction of load bearing masonry walls and wooden joists supported by heavy wooden posts. The footprint is basically rectangular with one two-story addition at the northwest end and a one-story L-shaped addition in the northeast corner of the building. The exterior of the building is defined by plain brick piers that divide the bays. Within the bays are large rectangular window openings with stone sills. The windows in the center section have arched brick lintels; all others are rectangular. Each bay has a corbelled brick cornice. Successive owners have replaced the various windows at various times and today the windows are an eclectic mix of materials and styles, with several surviving originals. The flush facade is interrupted by a stair tower and a non-historic porch at the main entrance. A loading dock area is on the west side of the building with several additional loading dock doors on the east.

Portions of the building are still used for industrial purposes and retain their open format and much of the historic fabric (wood floors/ceilings, wood support posts, stairs, freight elevators, and exterior brick and stone walls). A portion of the interior on the north side of the building is used for office and commercial space and retains its historic interior configuration and much of its historic fabric. A portion near the center was partitioned into apartment/living space, but much of this is reversible. Section 5 is open (used for warehousing/storage) and of more recent construction materials. It is not currently being used due to structural problems with the north wall. Although not individually referenced in the National Register Multiple Document Form *Industrial Resources of the City of Syracuse, Onondaga County, New York*,

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(2010), Oak Knitting meets the registration requirements defined in section F-6 as clearly being identifiable as a late nineteenth century building of common mill construction with turn-of-the-century additions done in the same manner.

Narrative Description

Location and Setting

Syracuse is a city in central New York State, southwest of Oneida Lake and at the southeast end of Onondaga Lake, a much smaller lake. The city formed in the early nineteenth century near the junction of Onondaga Lake, the Erie Canal and the Oswego Canal; both canals have been filled-in and the former Oswego Canal is now Interstate 81 (I-81), which effectively bisects the city. This juncture of lake and canal was the location of much of the city's industry and many of the extant buildings are now a mix of commercial and residential uses with some light industry. The Oak Knitting Company is on the east end of this former primarily industrial area. The building stands in its original location at the top of a rise at the corner of West Division Street and Genant Drive. It is fairly isolated from other larger former industrial buildings by I-81 to the east, large parking lots to the north and west and electric transmission equipment in the block to the south.

General Description

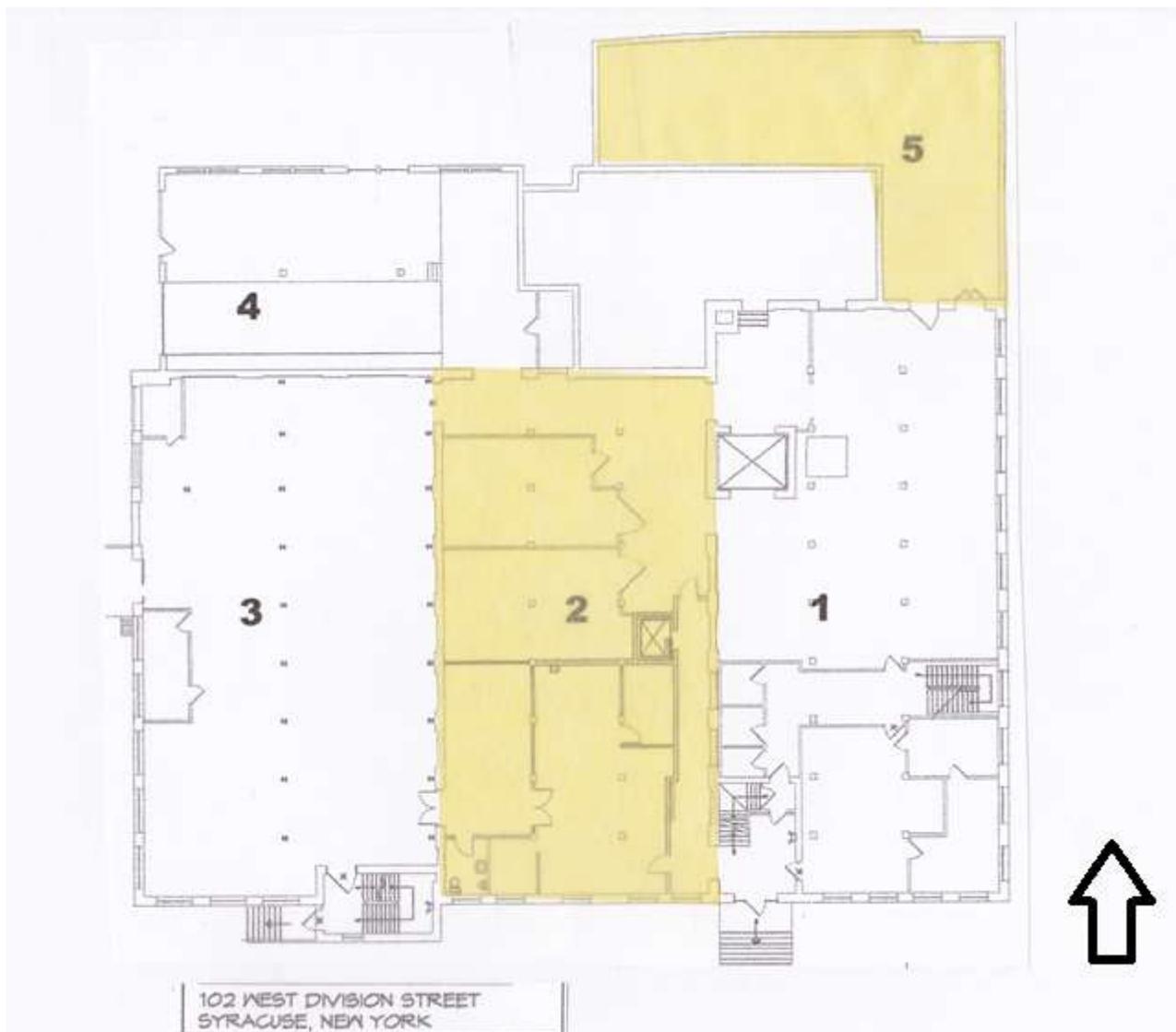
Constructed between 1899 and 1931, Oak Knitting is a four-story brick building with a stone and concrete foundation. One of its distinctive features is the large number of windows on each floor, separated by brick piers and panels. The building fronts onto West Division Street with the main entrance near the east end and a secondary entrance in a full-height stair tower to the west. Windows in the stair tower appear to be original. This elevation also has an advertising billboard and lighting atop the cornice over the entrance.

The building was constructed in five sections as illustrated in the following diagram. The original section of the Oak Knitting Company mill building (Section 1) was constructed in 1899-1900, followed in 1900-1901 by Section 2, both of which are depicted on a 1906 Sanborn map. A building permit issued in 1908 may have been for Section 4, which first appears on a 1911 Sanborn map (bleach house). Section 3 has a steel frame rather than the heavy timber used in the first two sections, indicating its construction between 1911 and 1924, also verified by Sanborn maps. Section 5 may date from as early as 1931, but was definitely constructed prior to 1942 as indicated by an updated (1942) Sanborn map.

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South Elevation

Facing West Division Street, the south elevation (façade) contains the main entrance near the southwest corner of Section 1. The entry is seven steps above the public sidewalk. The stairs and a ramp provide access to the recessed glass and aluminum door with sidelights. The wood pergola style porch, stone steps and planter and concrete walkway/ramp are recent non-historic additions. The south elevation consists of the south ends of Sections 1, 2 & 3 unified by an overhanging cornice and brick corbelling. Section 1 is six bays wide along West Division Street with seven bays in Section 2 and five bays in Section 3, with two of these bays in the stair tower. All bays except one have large rectangular window openings with stone sills; those in Section 2 have brick arched lintels. The bay immediately to the east of the entrance is solid brick on all levels. Most of the windows in Section 3 are twelve-over-twelve double-hung sash on the

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first and second floors and replacement windows of four-light casements topped with eight-light transoms in the upper floors.

Section 2 was constructed only a year after the company began operations. Windows in the first two floors are a different height (shorter) than the upper two floors, as this portion was originally only two stories high; it was expanded to a full four stories in 1907, as documented by a newspaper article describing the proposed addition. This is the portion of the elevation with arched brick lintels. The windows have the same stone sills, casements and transoms as seen in Section 1. One exception is a partially brick infilled window opening with a centrally placed, nearly square, multi-light metal and glass window with a concrete sill. Sections 1 and 2 share a matching stone water table and an ashlar foundation.

Section 3, at the west end of the façade, has the same fenestration as the rest of the façade but differs because of the stair tower and concrete foundation. A stair tower at the east side of Section 3 abuts Section 2 and is two bays wide and one bay deep. The windows that light the tower are staggered to coincide with the stairs, and each is tall and narrow with eight-lights of wood and fixed glass. Due to the slope of the site, the secondary entrance is higher than the main entrance and has a metal fire escape landing and stair on the west side of the stair tower. An entry into the basement is in the second bay and a short concrete ramp descends to the door. Windows in the basement level are fixed rectangular paired eight-light windows. As previously mentioned, the windows in the upper two floors are non-historic double-hung sash replacement windows arranged in pairs under multi-light fixed transom. The windows in the body of the building have stone sills that match the others on the façade. The windows in the stair tower have brick sills.

West elevation

Most of Section 3 and part of Section 4 compose the west elevation, which appears taller since it is at the portion of the site that begins the descending part of the slope. The pattern of brick and window continues on the west side of Section 3 and all of the windows in the second, third and fourth floors are non-historic paired double-hung sash replacement windows with multi-light fixed transoms. Three windows remain at the southwest end of the first floor. These are large multi-light metal industrial windows where the eight center lights pivot for ventilation. Due to the ill-fit at the sill and the shadow lines along the frames, these appear to be replacements for the original windows. The two bays to the north of these windows have been infilled with concrete blocks except for small, paired fixed windows one block level above the sill. A concrete loading dock is to the north of the infilled windows and a metal stairway provides access from the parking lot. Window openings at the end of the loading dock are also infilled, two with doors and the rest with concrete block. The dock also covers the windows that originally lit the basement. Additional basement windows are directly south of the dock, resting on the concrete foundation, and are eight-light glass and wood fixed windows.

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Set back from the northwest corner is the west side of Section 4, an early twentieth century, two-story brick bleach house with a flat roof. The west side of Section 4 is only two bays wide. The upper story had three windows in each bay; the openings have been covered with plywood. On the lower level, a large opening at the north end is infilled with concrete block, except for a metal door. Another large first floor opening has a three part metal and large multi-light fixed window over a large metal lower infilled section. Newer brick replaces the sections between the upper and lower windows and brick corbeling is barely visible under the cornice. Changes in the color of the brick and mortar in this section indicate much repair and or alteration.

East Elevation

Sections 1 and 5 compose the east elevation, which runs along Genant Drive facing I-81. Section 1 is the oldest part of the building and extends for ten bays from the south end of the elevation. This elevation has the same brick and fenestration as the façade but with square windows, no lintels, and stone sills. Windows are similar, with five-over-five fixed transoms over eight lights in the upper floors and six-lights in the lower floors, except for four two-light lower sections in the second floor north end. This section of the elevation is unified by brick corbeling and an ashlar water table, which is partly obscured by concrete that also obscures the foundation pattern of brick and random ashlar stone. The concrete is the remnant of a loading dock and there are double wood and metal loading dock doors in bays three, five, seven and nine. Tie rods are visible between the second and third floors and one on ground level between bays three and four. The remnants of a metal fire-escape are located between the third and fourth floors at the north end of this elevation. A hoist bar is centered at the eaves above the seventh bay.

North of Section 1 is Section 5, the last addition on the building (c1931-1942), which is slightly recessed from Section 1. This brick addition rises to the second story of Section 1 and is brick with a concrete foundation and a flat roof. Two loading dock bays on the first floor are infilled with brick and four large, metal, multi-light windows are above the bays. The section is essentially one-story that rises to the same height as section 1. The interior is largely open space.

North elevation

The north side is composed mostly of Sections 4 and 5. The portion of Section 5 is to the east and is a solid brick wall with one window opening that is infilled with brick. The foundation has been replaced on this and the west side with concrete block. A loading dock has been added at the basement level on the west side of this addition. A shed roof, sloping down from south to north, has been constructed over the dock area. There is a large overhead garage door opening onto the loading dock. The concrete foundation continues in Section 4 and the section itself is four bays wide. The paired windows between the bays are covered with plywood. Corbelling at the cornice matches that on the façade of

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the building. The upper two stories of Sections 1, 2, and 3 are visible above Sections 4 and 5. The windows in these sections match those on the building façade.

Interior

Although the building has a number of loading docks and doors, the main entrance is in the south elevation of Section 1. The entrance opens into the first floor lobby and stair hall, with doors to the right and left. To the right (east) side of the hall is an office suite in what was the original location of the Oak Knitting Company offices. This is the original location of the company's offices, but the current offices were renovated in 2001. The floors are carpeted and the walls are painted plaster board, dividing the offices into four rooms and closets. The ceilings are pressed tin and are assumed to be reinstalled from the original office complex.

To the left of the entrance lobby is a narrow hall that extends north. The right side of the hall was the original exterior wall of Section 1 and the window openings are clearly visible but now infilled with brick. Opening off the south end of the hall is a second office suite of two rooms, closet and bathroom, which also dates from the 2001-2002 renovation. North of the office suites in Sections 1 and 2 are open industrial spaces that have their original layout/configuration of large open spaces with heavy timber support posts throughout. The wood posts and beams are connected with heavy steel brackets. The floors are tongue and groove wood with numerous patches and areas covered with plywood. Brick is exposed in the walls. A hall across the rear of Sections 1 and 2 provides access to Section 3, which is open industrial space, also with steel beams, wood flooring and wood ceilings. A freight elevator, which occupies the same location as the original elevator, opens into the hall in Section 1. The north wall has a few original wood frame windows with center portions that pivot and a hopper transom.

Access between the floors is supplied by the main entrance stair, the original staircase in the Section 3 stair tower, and two elevators (the previously mentioned freight elevator and a small passenger elevator at the end of the narrow hall off of the lobby, installed in 2001). The stairs are at the front of the building; one within Section 1 and the other in the stair tower attached to Section 3. An additional interior stairwell was constructed on the east side of the building when the office suite was renovated. It connects the first with the second floor within the office suite in the southeast corner of the building. Offices have been constructed in the easternmost section on all four floors. Offices and two apartments were constructed in Section 2 in 2001. The westernmost section of the building retains its open layout and the steel support posts and large windows are the defining features.

Sections 4 and 5 most recently served the building as shipping departments with loading docks and interior wide open spaces. Several original windows are intact on the interior of Section 4; each consists of three stacked rectangular wood

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hopper windows. Plans are to repair and paint the existing historic windows that are in fair condition. Interior storm windows will be installed in these locations, as well. Windows that are beyond repair will be replaced in kind with wood aluminum clad windows. The more recent wood and steel replacement windows will be removed and replaced with wood and aluminum clad windows replicating the original windows on each elevation. The proposed repair of the historic windows and the installation of new windows replicating the originals will return the look of the building as it was during the period of significance.

Section 5 shows some damage, especially with the bowing outward of the north exterior wall. The addition was two stories in height on a full basement, but on the interior it is one vast open space with only the steel frame dividing the basement from the space above. Flooring originally divided the space but heavy water damage deteriorated the upper floors rendering them unsafe and requiring their recent removal. Due to problems with this part of the building, Section 5 is currently empty and not being used.

The exterior of the former Oak Knitting Mill retains a high level of architectural integrity. On the interior, some areas of the original open industrial space have been partitioned and converted for current uses; however, the proposed renovation will remove all of the 2001 partitions and the building will be converted into apartments and offices. The heavy wooden timber columns will remain visible throughout the developed portions of the building and the large window openings will fill the interior spaces with natural light, as was the case when it was designed by Archimedes Russell to serve the industrial needs of the Oak Knitting Company.

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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.)

- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Industry _____

Architecture _____

Commerce _____

Period of Significance

1899 - 1955 _____

Significant Dates

1899, 1901, 1907, 1908, 1927, 1955 _____

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.

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Archimedes Russell _____

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance (1899-1955) reflects the initial date of construction through subsequent historic expansions and the use of the building by two significant businesses

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary) N/A

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

Summary

The Oak Knitting Company building is historically significant under Criterion A in industry as outlined in Section B “**Industrial Boom and Diversification**” of the Multiple Property Documentation Form *Industrial Resources of the City of Syracuse, Onondaga County, New York* (2010). After the decline of the city’s early industries (most notably the salt industry), a large variety of newer industries appeared, building on the reclaimed salt flats in the northwest section of the city, continuing this part of the city as an industrial quarter. The quarter was well removed from the commercial center and residential sections of the city, but connected by road, rail and water to these sections and beyond. The Oak Knitting Company was part of this diversification, constructed on a former salt manufacturing site. By 1910, 29 textiles mills and factories in this area were collectively the second largest employer in the city, only surpassed by the large iron and steel mills that required more workers. Textile mills, Oak Knitting Mill included, were additionally important in the city as providing employment opportunities for women. The proliferation of private industry after 1870 made Syracuse into one of the premier upstate cities in New York, producing a wide variety of goods that ranged from clothing and caskets to agricultural implements, typewriters, brass goods and railroad car windows. After the building’s industrial use ceased in the 1920s, the former mill was used as a warehouse for more than fifty years. Its most important occupant was the American Stores Company, Inc. of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which owned the building from 1931 to 1955. Beginning as a small chain of grocery stores, American expanded to more than 1,200 stores, 33 of them in the Syracuse area. In 1937, America transformed itself into Acme, which pioneered a new larger, self-service shopping experience that also included parking lots at its stores. Syracuse, with its central location as an established transportation hub, became the regional headquarters for all Central New York stores and the warehouse at 102 West Division Street was its distribution center.

Oak Knitting is also eligible under Criterion C in architecture as an excellent example of a late nineteenth century industrial factory built using common mill construction, as defined in section F-6 in the Multiple Property Document. Each section of the mill illustrates construction techniques typical of its period. In addition to meeting registration requirements outlined in the document, the building is an example of a later work designed by Archimedes Russell (1840-1915), perhaps Central New York's most prolific architect and certainly the premier architect in the city at that time.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

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HISTORIAL CONTEXT

As outlined in the Multiple Property Document *Industrial Resources of the City of Syracuse, Onondaga County, New York*, salt was an essential commodity and the salt springs near Onondaga Lake became the source for salt that was traded, first by the Onondaga Nation of the Iroquois and later the eastern settlers who moved into the area after the American Revolution. For much of first half of the nineteenth century, salt and salt related industries composed the economic base of the region and were responsible for the growth of Syracuse, incorporating as a city in 1848. After the Civil War, the salt industry, which had been the foundation of the Syracuse's earliest industrial development, began to decline and in its place scores of diverse industries began to drive the booming local economy. The 1892 Sanborn map for the area depicted row upon row of solar salt vats at the corner of North Clinton and West Division Streets in the northwest portion of the city. The salt vats were housed in simple wooden sheds that were quickly and easily removed. As the salt flats were abandoned, the area was opened up for redevelopment. In 1899, an article in the *Syracuse Evening Herald* announced that a large new knitting mill was to be constructed on West Division Street near the Oswego Canal. Local businessmen, Charles E. Crouse and Adolph G. Velasko, teamed up to start the Oak Knitting Company. Crouse was a pioneer in the local wholesale grocery business and was a local financier. Velasko grew up in the Syracuse area, graduating from the Syracuse City Schools and afterwards was employed as a manufacturers' agent for several knitting mills in New York City and Philadelphia. In 1896 he returned to Syracuse and became the manager of the Clinton Knitting Company, a manufacturer of ladies and children's knitted underwear. After partnering with Crouse, Velasko became the manager of the new business venture named the Oak Knitting Company, with local architect Archimedes Russell hired to design the new mill and office building.

The Oak Knitting Company History

The Oak Knitting Company was the third such enterprise in Syracuse, following the founding of the Clinton Knitting Company (1893) and West Brothers Manufacturers (1894), for the production of knit underwear. The first section of the Oak Knitting building was constructed in late 1899- early 1900 and manufacturing began in February 1900. The company initially provided employment for 80 individuals, the majority being women. Before operations were underway, the company received orders for the high quality ladies' knit underwear promised by the company. Almost immediately, the company needed additional space, and in the fall of 1900 plans were drawn up for a three story addition (two-stories on a raised basement) that was ready for occupancy on January 1, 1901.¹ This new section was constructed on the west side of the original building as warehouse space to store raw materials and finished merchandise, freeing up space for additional

¹ "Doubling Capacity of Knitting Plant," *Syracuse Post Standard*, 14 Oct. 1900.

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machinery in the main building. An updated 1906 Sanborn map showed the building as a four-story mill with a two-story addition to the west.

In 1903, Adolph Velasko announced that the company would buy the adjacent lot to the west for future expansion; however, in the fall of 1903, a major increase in the price of raw cotton negatively impacted knitting mills throughout the country, halting Oak Knitting's expansion plans. Cotton prices were generally at their lowest in October and November and increased through the following months until it reached a maximum in July, just as the new crops were beginning to be harvested. In spite of the normal cycle, prices continued to increase in the fall of 1903, and in that year, cotton prices were at their highest in a decade. An article in the *Syracuse Herald* on September 27, 1903 stated that "notwithstanding the present demoralization in the textile market, local mills are busy." At the time, the Oak Knitting Mill employed 150 individuals (25 men and 125 women) and early in October 1903, an article proclaimed that the Oak Knitting Mill would remain open.² A January 1904 article indicated that the local mills were not affected as much as those in other cities due in part to a large stock pile of raw cotton stock stored in the company's warehouse.

Oak Knitting withstood the downturn experienced by many and, by the end of the first quarter of 1904, was once again operating on a positive footing. An article on page five of the *Syracuse Post Standard* (March 20, 1904) stated that the company's advance output for nine months was sold and that due to the high demand for its products, another addition to the Syracuse plant was under consideration. Instead, the next expansion was the acquisition of the Fashion Knitting Company in the village of Arcade, Wyoming County that was made a subsidiary of the Oak Knitting Company in 1904.

In the December 1905 issue of the *Textile World Record*, an announcement was made that the Oak Knitting Company installed new knitting and sewing machines at its Syracuse and Arcade locations and the company was contemplating adding even more knitting machines. In January 1907, another announcement in the *Syracuse Post Standard* reported that the company planned to erect a four-story addition to serve as a warehouse for the factory. Once the warehouse was completed (1907), the company could open up space for more equipment and operators and this area is assumed to be the upper two floors that were added to Section 2. In December, 1908 the Oak Knitting Company was granted a building permit for yet another addition. At some point during this period of rapid expansion, a two-story bleach house (section 4) was constructed at the rear on the northwest corner of the building in addition to the two stories constructed atop the first addition. Both were depicted on a 1911 Sanborn map.

² "Will Not Close," *Syracuse Journal*, 6 Oct. 1903, 3.

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Also in 1908, the company was incorporated with Charles E. Crouse as president, with 12,199 shares of stock; Adolph G. Velasko, vice-president and treasurer, with 1,299 shares; and George J. Sager, secretary, with two shares.³ For many years, Sager was a partner with his brother in the Sager Brothers Company that produced fine silk and mohair knit goods. At age 68, Sager was in retirement when he joined the Oak Knitting Company. In 1911, the company appeared to be doing well, producing an average of 12,000 garments, and on December 1, 1911, it purchased the Ypsilanti Underwear Company of Ypsilanti, Michigan.⁴ At the company's annual meeting held on December 31, 1915, President Charles E. Crouse announced that 1914 was the company's most productive year and that the company was hiring to expand its already large workforce of nearly 700 employees.

By the 1920s, the textile and knitting industries in the northern states entered into a period of decline and transition as southern states became the leaders in the industry due to easier access to raw materials and competitive wage structures. During this period, Oak Knitting had the added misfortune of losing its leader, when Charles Crouse died. Adolph Velasko stepped into the role of company president but retained his position as treasurer. William V. Walrath was named vice-president and secretary of the company, and both managed the company until 1927, when they entered into a merger agreement between Oak Knitting and the Lullwater Manufacturing Company of Eastport, Georgia. Shortly after the agreement, the company made plans to relocate all operations to Georgia. Machinery in the Syracuse and Arcade plants was dismantled and the equipment was moved to Atlanta, Georgia. After the merger, the company was known as the Oak Knitting Company of Georgia, with Adolph G. Velasko as president and general manager and Oliver J. Purnell, from the Ypsilanti, Michigan, branch of Oak Knitting Mills as vice president. Walter T. Chandler, former president of Lullwater Manufacturing Company, became a member of the board of the reorganized firm. By 1930, the Syracuse city directory listed only three knitting mills where, at the industry's peak in the 1910s, twenty-nine knitting mills operated in Syracuse.

American Stores Company

The year 1930 marked the end of the period of industrial boom and diversification (1870-1929) in Syracuse and empty industrial buildings were finding new life as warehouses. With the closing of the Oak Knitting operations in Syracuse, 83,000 square feet of manufacturing space stood empty and was offered for sale. It was leased for three years (1928-1931) by the Fern Furniture Company as a regional distribution warehouse. After Fern Furniture's lease expired in 1931, the building was acquired by the American Stores Company, Inc. of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The company was formed in 1917 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with the merger of five local grocery store chains. By 1920, The American Stores Company was operating 1,243 stores. By 1930, the company had more than doubled the number of stores and was operating in adjacent states. In 1931, 33 American Stores were in the city of Syracuse and the warehouse at 102 West

³ "Permits of Build," *Syracuse Herald*, 26 Feb. 1908, 2.

⁴ "Oak Knitting Company Gets Ypsilanti Mill," *Syracuse Journal*, 1 Dec. 1911, 4.

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Division Street was keeping them supplied with in-house store brands. In 1937, the company opened a new type of store that was a larger, self-service operation and offered a parking lot for its customers. This new supermarket was named the Acme Market and became the model for the future growth of the company. By 1942, the company had 576 supermarkets. Within a decade, the American Stores Company was the fourth largest grocery chain in the nation. Syracuse, with its central location as an established transportation hub, became the regional headquarters for all Central New York stores and the warehouse at 102 West Division Street was its distribution center. In 1955 the company built a vast new warehouse on Thompson Road in East Syracuse near Exit 35 of the recently constructed New York Thruway, and the building at 102 West Division Street became vacant.

In 1956, the building became the property of Midstate Warehouse, which leased portions to firms needing warehouse space. In 1960, William D. Birchenough, Sr. of Skaneateles purchased the building, leasing most of it as warehouse space but keeping the westernmost section of the building for his manufacturing company, Weather Products Dynamic Pak. Over the years, part of the interior was divided into office space and two apartments were built on the fourth floor. Currently, the building is still home to Dynamic Pak, and one office suite is rented to Onondaga Environmental Institute, a local not-for-profit organization, while another is occupied by Appel Osborn Landscape Architecture.

Criterion C

Textile mill architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has its roots in England prior to the industrial revolution and early mills built in America followed the same design. One of the earliest textile mills was the Slater Mill, built in Pawtucket, Rhode Island around 1793 by British immigrant Samuel Slater. The mill was basically a large open area with high ceilings that housed mechanized spinning and weaving equipment. Since the machinery was water powered, early mills were located along streams with the machinery connected by pulleys to large waterwheels. By the late nineteenth century, new technology freed the mill from water sites by using steam and, later, electric driven machinery. Technology also improved textile machinery, requiring larger space to house large and sometimes heavy machines for mass production of goods and warehouse areas for storing raw material. The rectangular, multi-story masonry form became the basic physical configuration for the early factory building following a common construction of load-bearing masonry walls and heavy interior timber framing.⁵ Although the buildings were considered fireproof, interior floors and ceilings were often wood.

The Oak Knitting Company mill building followed the pattern of late nineteenth century common mill construction. Constructed of brick, the building had rows of windows for natural interior illumination. Large support timbers with

⁵ Landscape & Prospect, *Syracuse Cultural Resources Survey: Volume 1—The Historic Architecture of the Central Business District*, 1993, 13.

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chamfered corners were seen as slow burning in case of fire, allowing time to call for assistance. As an added precaution, the boiler was located in a separate, one-story brick building on the north side of the mill and, later, sprinklers were added throughout the building, often insisted upon by insurance companies. Elevators allowed for the ease of movement of raw materials and finished products between floors. The corner location, removed from other tall buildings, ensured excellent natural light throughout the building, which was augmented with electric lights. According to a 1911 Sanborn Insurance map, Oak Knitting had steam heat, electric lights and sprinklers in the main manufacturing building. As the building was expanded, new additions had the same brick exterior, stone foundation and fire suppression systems. Only the section 4 bleach house on the north side of the building lacked sprinklers.

In addition to practical considerations, the design also reflected popular architecture of the period as used for industrial buildings. Oak Knitting's decorative features were limited to brick corbeling, cornice and stone sills and water table to contrast the brick. The original portion of the building was designed by local architect Archimedes Russell (1840-1915), the city's premier architect at the time. Originally from Massachusetts, he came to Syracuse in 1862 where he trained in the office of architect Horatio Nelson White, and in 1868 he opened his own firm. During his long career (1868-1915), he designed nearly 600 buildings in the Syracuse area and 250 more throughout central New York. When Syracuse University established the one of the oldest architecture programs in the country (1873) Russell taught at the school, educating students until he left his professorship in 1881. Russell was known for his use of new materials and techniques as they became available, and he was especially interested in fireproof construction. After its construction, the local newspaper described the sprinkler system and method of construction of the Oak Knitting mill as providing "absolute fire protection." The engine and boiler house were located in a separate building at the rear of the mill, further reducing the threat of fire. Russell designed the original mill and the 1900 addition to the building. A 1953 Sanborn map indicated that the engine and boiler house were expanded and encompassed by section 5.

Throughout his career, Russell designed practically every type of building in the reigning architectural style of the period. According to the *Syracuse Cultural Resources Survey* (1993):

His work touched all levels of society. He leaves a legacy of public architecture - churches, schools, and commercial buildings, which endure as focal points in the city landscape - residential architecture, from grand brick and stone mansions to modest clapboard homes. At least 60 of his buildings are in existence today in Syracuse, and probably at least that many remain elsewhere in Central New York. What remains is a good cross-section of Russell's practice - buildings remain of every type and every style. Integrity ranges from excellent to poor. Twelve of his buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and seven are located in Local Preservation Districts. Many more are eligible for historic designation, not only for their connection to the architect but also for their individual artistic value. Currently designated buildings represent only a fraction of Russell's extant body of work. Many commissions which are potentially eligible for historic designation have been adequately documented.

In order to fully appreciate an architect's significance, it is necessary to understand their entire body of work, from the high-profile commissions to the most modest. This is especially true of an architect like Russell, whose prolific practice was

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confined for the most part to Syracuse and central New York, and who had such a profound impact on the Syracuse landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶

The report went on to state that several examples of his late nineteenth and early twentieth century industrial buildings still exist in Syracuse, including buildings in the Geddes/Fayette Street and the Franklin Street areas. Oak Knitting Company Mill, at 102 W. Division Street in the Franklin Street area, is one of these and was specifically mentioned in the report as a prime example of his industrial design.

As one of Syracuse's extant late nineteenth/early twentieth century industrial resources, Oak Knitting's extant building remains an excellent example of a particular building type and construction and clearly representing the city's post Erie Canal industrial diversification. It also stands as an excellent late example of the work of Archimedes Russell and his use of common mill construction applied to newer "fireproof" methods and technologies. The diverse industries that developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries period had particular needs for factory and warehouse buildings, all defined by function related technologies. Elevators were an innovation that allowed for the use of multi-story buildings, and Oak Knitting embraced the invention by installing a freight elevator. Like most factory/mills of the period, the building was brick and stone with principal support posts are that decreased in dimensions with each successive floor. Even after its use as a mill, the Oak Knitting building retained its identifiable mill character and construction, giving it a substantial level of historic and architectural integrity.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

"Absorbs Fashion Company. Oak Knitting Corporation Will Take Over Business of Arcade Concerns." *Syracuse Herald*, 26 Feb. 1908, 2.

"Add Warehouse to Its Factory. Oak Knitting Company to Erect Four-story Addition." *Syracuse Post-Standard*, 29 January 1907, 7.

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⁶Landscape & Prospect, *Syracuse Cultural Resources Survey: Volume 2: The Historic Architecture of Archimedes Russell*, "Recommendations," 1.

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"Two Knitting Plants will Go to Atlanta." *Syracuse American*, 9 October 1927, 15.

"Will Not Close." *Syracuse Journal*, 6 October 1903, .

maps:

- Hopkins, G. M., comp. Atlas of the City of Syracuse, NY. Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins Co., 1908
- Hopkins, G. M., comp. Atlas of the City of Syracuse, NY. Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins Co., 1924
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, City of Syracuse, vol.2. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1892
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, City of Syracuse, vol.2. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Company, 1892 updated to 1906
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, City of Syracuse, vol.3. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1911
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, City of Syracuse, vol.3. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1911 updated to 1942

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Onondaga Historical Association

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property \pm 1 acre

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18N</u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing	4	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing

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

The boundaries are indicated by the heavy line on the attached map.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries are those associated with the property acquire by the Oak Knitting Company during their occupation of the building and are currently defined according to the attached tax map. The boundary is the same as for the period of significance.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cynthia Carrington Carter (edited by Virginia L. Bartos, NYS OPRHP)
organization Renaissance Studio date June 2016
street & number 219 Crawford Ave. telephone 315-446-1310
city or town Syracuse state NY zip code 13224
e-mail ccarringtoncarter@verizon.net

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**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 2000x3000 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. For districts, key all photographs to the sketch map.

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Name of Property: Oak Knitting Mill

City or Vicinity: Syracuse

County: Onondaga State: NY

Photographer: Virginia L. Bartos

Date Photographed: 13 April 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number: see attached pages

Property Owner:

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

name Oak Knitting Mill Commons, LLC (Timothy M. Lynn)

street & number 100 Madison St. telephone _____

city or town Syracuse state NY zip code 13202

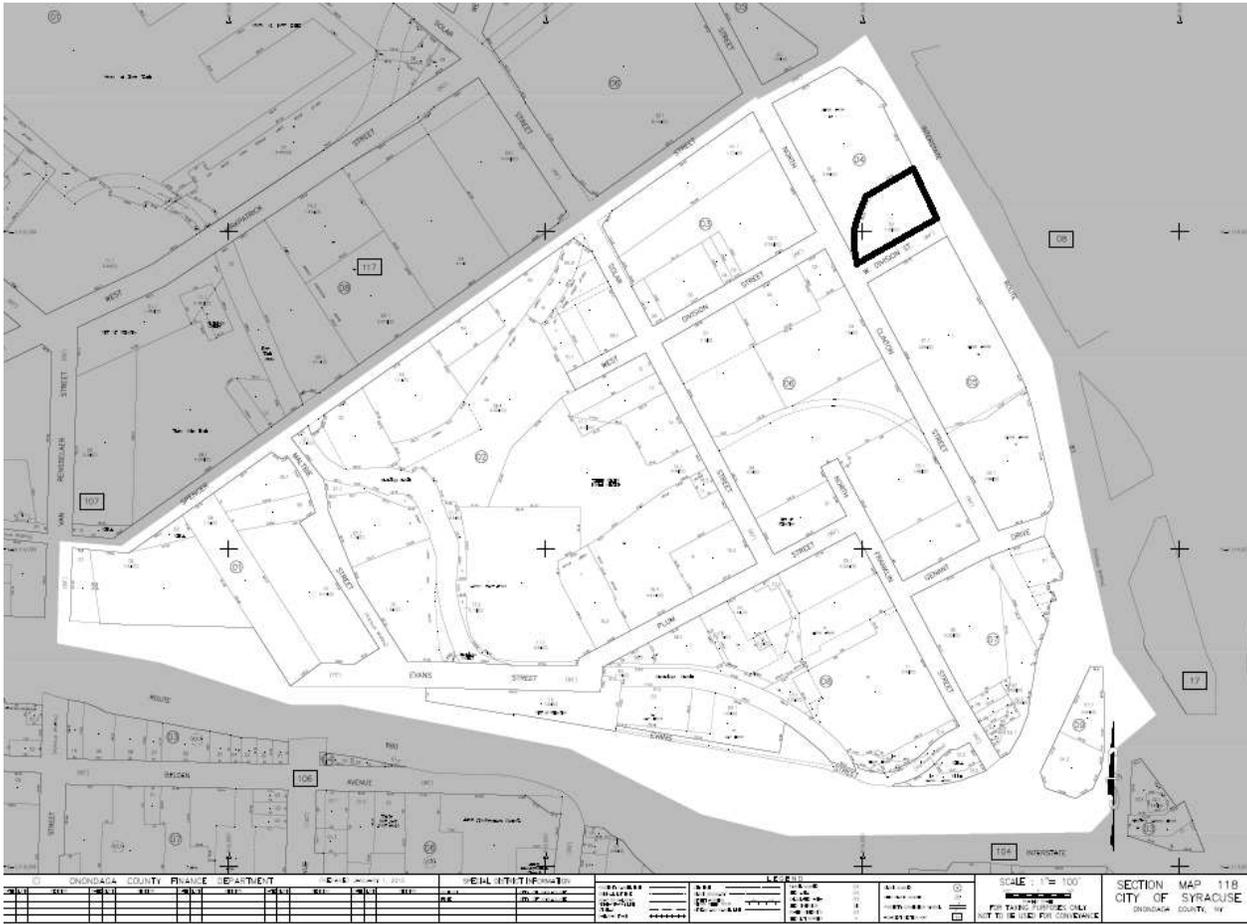
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain 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.

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Oak Knitting property boundary:

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South and East elevations, viewed looking northwest from Genant Dr.

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West and North elevations, view looking southeast.

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Section 5 north elevation, view looking south.

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Two views of interior industrial spaces



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Fourth Floor offices (Section 1)

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Basement area, Section 3

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Interior view of Section 3 Stair Tower