

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DRAFT

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 Utica Mutual Insurance Building

other names/site number 1420 E Genesee Street

name of related multiple property listing N/A

2. Location

street & number 420 E Genesee Street

<input type="checkbox"/>	not for publication
<input type="checkbox"/>	vicinity

city or town Syracuse

state New York code NY county Onondaga code 042 zip code 13202

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
 I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

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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

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commercial

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

International Style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Brick, Glass, Aluminum
roof: Flat Slag Roof
other: _____

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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

The Utica Mutual Insurance Building at 420 E Genesee Street is a two-story, steel-frame, rectangular commercial building executed in the International Style. Designed by local architects King & King and constructed in 1956, the building occupies a 0.59-acre lot in the downtown business district in Syracuse, New York. It is located across from Fireman's Memorial Park (historically called Fayette Park) on the square historically numbered 123. The historic commercial building faces north onto East Genesee Street, and its rear parking lot extends to McCarthy Avenue. The façade of the modern office building is dominated by dramatic two-story metal and glass panels within a curtain wall, underlined by smooth black granite cladding on the first floor. Stylistically, the office building exhibits characteristics associated with the corporate International Style, such as an emphasis on volume, streamlined form, utility, and materials. The building retains its historic exterior appearance, with little alteration from its original construction. The interior of the building was renovated in the late twentieth century but retains its historic use as a multi-tenant office building. Historic interior finishes include terrazzo flooring in the historic staircase, slate window sills, and select historic wall finishes.

Narrative Description

Site

The Utica Mutual Insurance Building is in the central business district of downtown Syracuse at 420 E Genesee Street. The area is mixed-use in character, with commercial, religious, and institutional buildings. The property is bounded to the north by E Genesee Street, to the east by the former Syracuse Boys Club building at 420 E Genesee Street, to the south by McCarthy Avenue, and to the west by a contemporary office building at 407 S State Street. Immediately to the north, across E Genesee Street, is the historic Fireman's Memorial Park (formerly Fayette Park). The adjacent former Syracuse Boys Club is also proposed for nomination; however, the two buildings have no historic relationship with each other.

The building sits at the north end of a 0.59 acre lot and is subtly set back from the public sidewalk. A narrow row of low plantings sits in front of the north elevation, on either side of the main entrance. A parking lot wraps around the west and south sides of the building, with access directly from E Genesee Street. The building shares a narrow alleyway with the former Syracuse Boys Club building.

Exterior Elevations

The Utica Mutual Insurance Building is a two-story, rectangular plan, steel frame building with a completely below-grade basement. The roof is flat and punctuated by an L-shaped elevator penthouse clad in blonde brick. The north elevation is the façade and is dominated by a full-width, two-story curtain wall underscored by black granite cladding. Secondary elevations, on the east, south, and west side of the building, are clad in a blonde brick laid in a six-course common bond and feature regular fenestration. The main entrance is located to the east of the center on the façade; it is recessed and surrounded by a brick vestibule. Secondary entrances on the south side of the building are utilitarian in character. Window openings are supported by concrete sills and hold operable multi-light center-pivot steel-frame casement windows. Overall, the building exhibits qualities typical

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of the International Style, including clean lines, balanced asymmetry, and the liberal use of glass in the curtain wall.

The façade of the building is twelve bays wide, framed by two projecting full-height brick piers, and sheltered under a flat metal awning. The base of the elevation is clad in smooth black granite. The curtain wall extends from approximately four feet above grade, above the granite-clad base, to the top of the elevation. The metal framing holds four rows that alternate between operable windows and dark brown aluminum panels, divided horizontally by full-length aluminum posts. Windows within the curtain walls are center-hinge horizontal pivot windows, enhanced by fixed glass pane lights below and above. The primary entrance is recessed, surrounded by brick-clad return walls and sheltered by a metal-clad plate. Contemporary metal lettering that reads “The John P. McCrea Center” and “420 E Genesee Street” is affixed to the asymmetrical brick surrounds. The recessed entrance holds two contemporary metal frame glass doors, surrounded by transoms and sidelites. A metal awning also extends approximately two-thirds of the length of the building, above the first story.

The south, east, and west elevations are all clad in blonde brick and are comparatively utilitarian in character. Metal coping runs along the roofline on all three elevations. The east elevation is six bays wide with regular fenestration and a narrow section of exposed concrete foundation at the base. The south (rear) elevation is twelve bays. Fenestration is generally regular; only the far east bay lacks any openings. On the first story, there are two secondary entrances that both hold single-leaf aluminum frame glass windows. A metal awning shelters the more off-center entrance. The west elevation has no fenestration and has the same narrow section of exposed concrete foundation. There is a small contemporary mural on the top left corner.

The exterior of the building has been minimally altered from its original design and construction. It retains the same overall fenestration and character-defining features such as the large curtain wall, blonde brick, and aluminum frame casement windows. Minor alterations include new doors in historic entryways and the addition of one additional entrance to the south elevation.

Interior

The interior of the building is two stories and has a below-grade basement. Presently vacant, the building was historically organized around large, modular office spaces, designed to accommodate flexibility of tenant needs. It was renovated in the twentieth century for new office tenants and fixed partition walls. Horizontally, circulation is navigated by a mix of contemporary and historic hallways. Vertically, circulation is limited to the two historic staircases and the historic elevator. The center stair retains its historic multi-colored terrazzo treads and landings and iron handrails, while the secondary west stair lacks the decorative material palette. There are historic stone interior windowsills throughout, as well as select historic finishes. The basement is partially unfinished.

On the first floor, a small vestibule with historic exposed blonde brick walls and red tile floor is accessed from the front entryway. The vestibule contains both the exterior entrance door and a second metal and glass double-leaf door with sidelights. Beyond the vestibule, a small historic lobby space is finished with red tile flooring, drywall, and contemporary paneled wood wainscoting. A historic corridor with the same red tile flooring extends north-to-south from the lobby to the rear exit of the building. A secondary vestibule protects the rear entrance and is accessed via a single-leaf aluminum frame glass door. An elevator lobby, located immediately off the main entrance lobby, accesses both the elevator and center stair. The floor plan for the first floor is organized around contemporary offices connected by a series of short hallways, finished with a combination of carpeting, vinyl flooring, acoustic ceiling tiles, and drywall. In addition to the offices, there is a break room on

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the south side of the building and several restrooms. The secondary staircase, located on the west end of the building, is connected to the exterior by a small hallway.

On the second floor, a double-loaded corridor runs east-to-west, connecting the main stair, elevator, and secondary stair to office spaces. Shorter internal hallways connect additional offices throughout. Bathrooms are located to the east of the central stair. Finishes are generally contemporary, and include a combination of vinyl flooring, acoustic tile ceilings, drywall walls, and carpet. A small section of historic cork wall is attached to the west wall adjacent to office space.

The basement level is partially finished and features a combination of office space, storage space, and a large boiler room. Finished spaces include the conference area, in the southwest corner, and the restrooms to the east of the elevator lobby. The elevator lobby and corridor feature vinyl tile flooring and drywall ceilings and walls. On this level, the bathrooms have historic wood doors affixed with historic metal lettering.

In spite of modifications designed to accommodate new tenant needs, the interior of the building continues to communicate its use as a mid-century office building intended for flexible use. The first floor north-south corridor remains in its historic location. The historic staircases and elevator shaft are also intact and retain their historic relationship with one another. Many historic finishes remain, including stone windowsills, terrazzo stairs, select historic asbestos vinyl tile flooring, historic interior signage, select historic wood doors, and a cork wall. The historic acoustic tile ceilings have been covered with contemporary ceiling tiles but appear to remain in some areas. Alterations include the addition of partition walls to accommodate smaller office spaces and smaller internal corridors. Contemporary finishes include wood paneling, new vinyl tile, carpet, and acoustic tile ceilings.

Integrity

Overall, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey significance as a mid-century commercial building executed in the International Style. The 1956 building maintains its original **location** on East Genesee Street in Syracuse's downtown business district. Its historic **setting** in the downtown core is relatively intact, surrounded by a mix of commercial, ecclesiastical and institutional buildings that are clustered around the Fireman's Memorial Park (Fayette Park). The overall **design** of the building exterior remains virtually unchanged, with its original volume, clean lines, and balanced asymmetry, all hallmarks of the International Style. The building interior has been modified for its changing uses in the late twentieth century but retains some of its original circulation. The building has a high integrity of **materials**, which include its historic blonde brick, aluminum frame curtain wall, and smooth granite cladding. The interior integrity of materials is somewhat altered by the introduction of more contemporary finishes, but it still retains its historic terrazzo stairs and stone windowsills. The high degree of workmanship relies on the structural capacity and technology of the building, best exemplified by the modern curtain wall and aluminum frame casement windows. The Utica Mutual Insurance building retains its ability to evoke the aesthetic and historic **feeling** of a mid-century commercial office building executed in the International Style, as well as its **association** with the mid-century development of Syracuse.

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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.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1956-1960

Significant Dates

1956 - Construction

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

King & King

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.

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for this building is 1956 to 1960, which reflects the period of construction.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Utica Mutual Insurance Building at 420 E Genesee Street is eligible under **Criterion C** as a rare and exceptionally intact example of an International Style office building in Syracuse designed by prominent local architects King & King. The building was constructed for the Utica Mutual Insurance Company in 1956 as part of a building expansion effort by the company across New York state modeled after its modernist headquarters constructed outside of Utica, NY, in 1954. The selection of King & King as the architects of the Syracuse branch was a natural fit for the vision of the Utica Mutual Insurance company; in addition to their role as building tenants themselves, the prolific local firm of King & King used this commission to demonstrate their fluency with the International Style. Utica Mutual Insurance Company was one of King & King's earliest commissions in the International Style, which later came to define their architectural practice in the midcentury. The building at 420 E Genesee Street stands as a prototypical example of the firm's early work in the style, as well as a rare extant example of the firm's proficiency with the Corporate International Style. The firm constructed several prominent buildings in this style in Syracuse and was especially well-known for their dramatic curtain walls and impressive structural work.

The Utica Mutual Insurance Company embraced a style ubiquitous amongst some of the largest and most impressive corporate headquarters in the United States in the post World War II period, communicating the building's local significance as a modernist landmark. Constructed to provide office space for the insurance company, the building was also leased to several notable tenants, including multiple steel manufacturers, as well as the King & King firm itself. The building not only served as an advertisement for the progressive vision of the Utica Mutual Insurance company, but also for the architectural prowess of tenants King & King. Throughout the firm's long career, King & King was one of the most influential architectural firms in upstate New York, and its buildings reflect the stylistic preferences of each generation, culminating in the Modern and International Style architecture from the 1950s and 1960s. The period of significance for this building is 1956 to 1960, which reflects the period of construction. Only four years after its construction, the Utica Mutual Insurance Company attempted to sell the building, suggesting that urban renewal practices and a lack of parking hampered its ability to operate as a private commercial building.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Historic Context

Development of Syracuse

The city of Syracuse, New York, was founded in 1847, advantageously located at the junction of the Erie Canal and several major land routes. Encompassing the former Village of Syracuse and the former Village of Salina, the city can attribute most of its early economic growth to the production of salt, mined from the nearby Onondaga Salt Spring Reservation. After the Civil War, competition and depleted natural resources depressed the salt industry, and Syracuse diversified the economy to include the production of other goods such as fine China and specialty metals.¹ The population and economy of Syracuse continued to develop through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, maturing into an important regional industrial center. The manufacturing sector flourished on the north side of the city, leaving the downtown area to the south of the

¹ "Syracuse, New York, United States," Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Syracuse-New-York>, accessed April 3, 2023.

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canal for banking, government, retail, commercial, and residential uses. Early buildings represent the wealth of the new town, with impressive masonry buildings executed by local architects in a variety of Classical, Beaux-Art, and heavily ornamental styles.

Like many former industrial American cities at the time, the Great Depression and World War II interrupted the growth of Syracuse, which was further exacerbated by the creation of suburbs. To combat the loss of population and faltering downtown, Syracuse city planners focused on revitalization of the urban core, hoping to court private economic investment by building newer, modern buildings. This emphasis on new commercial construction and increased density was achieved at the expense of the city's older building stock, as developers tore down smaller construction and residential buildings to make way for modern offices and retail spaces.

Multi-story commercial buildings and mid-range tower construction during this period include the Jefferson Building (1919), the Syracuse Building (1927), the Harrison Building (formerly the Hilton Hotel, 1929), and the State Tower Building (1927). In the 1950s and 1960s, the American economy began transitioning away from manufacturing, which was quickly overtaken by new office-based industries, leading to a loss of population and an emphasis on urban renewal policies. Like many industrial cities during this time, the once-thriving center of Syracuse lost much of its population to suburban developments, which grew in the 1950s by 70 percent, in part due to the construction of new highways. To accommodate this exodus, city planners again redoubled attempts to densify and modernize the downtown core. By 1965, Syracuse had formalized these ideas into a planning document, which described the city's plan to attract "national and regional headquarters location for commerce and administrative offices" to downtown Syracuse. Only a few years prior to this statement in 1956, the Utica Mutual Insurance Company answered this call, constructing a regional insurance office on 420 E Genesee Street.

The Modern Movement in Syracuse

The Modern Movement first came to American from Europe during the early twentieth century. The architectural styles associated with this movement emerged in response to large-scale social and technological changes that continued to evolve during the twentieth century; modernist architects eschewed the emphasis on historicism in favor of form, function, and technological advancement. Modernism first took hold in the United States in major cities such as New York, but later spread to the rest of the county, especially in the decades following World War II.

The first wave of modernism arrived in Syracuse following World War I. These buildings exhibited characteristics of the burgeoning Art Deco and Art Moderne styles, which utilized sleek design and applied ornament that was often geometric in form.

This development heralded new building designs, shaped by local architectural firms experimenting with building styles such as Art Deco and Art Moderne. One of the most influential of these firms was King & King, which spearheaded creative modern designs, such as the Art Moderne façade on the Niagara Mohawk Building (1932, NR Listed) and the Art Deco/Gothic Revival style Hills Building (1928, Montgomery Street-Columbus Circle Historic District).

The International Style

During this time, the design of buildings took on new expressions, moving away from the ornamentation that had characterized early twentieth century architecture. Architects designing in Syracuse adapted the newly

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coined European “International Style” to an American context, focusing on rectilinear forms, lack of decoration, and materials such as glass, steel, and reinforced concrete. The International Style was first conceived in the 1920s, although the name for the style was not formalized in print until a decade later, when Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson published a book entitled: *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*. The style spoke to the functionalist ethos of a rapidly growing industrial society and was made possible by innovative building technologies in metal, glass, and concrete.

By midcentury, the International Style had grown in popularity and was embraced by business enterprises as the preferred style for corporate headquarters and commercial buildings. Industry and production thrived in the postwar era, and corporations became increasingly present during this time. Buildings acted as symbols of power and progress for private enterprise, making corporations new landmarks in the modern cityscape. Led by renowned architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM), Corporate Internationalism reflected the hyperrational quality of business with its stripped-down ornamentation and utilitarian character. In many cities, this architectural style was concentrated in urban cores, which were undergoing redevelopment in the postwar era.

Beginning in the 1950s, Corporate Internationalism replaced the Late Modern architectural style as corporations leaned into the “puritanical aesthetic of European Modernist” with streamlined designs. Although many early examples of headquarters executed in the Corporate International Style were skyscrapers focused on verticality, such as the Seagram Building (New York City, 1954-1956), the Lever House (New York City, 1950-1952), and the Walter Netsch Inland Steel Building (Chicago, 1955-1958), other headquarters were designed with an emphasis on horizontally, including the General Motors Technical Center (Warren, MI, 1948-1956) and the John Deere & Co. Headquarters (Moline, IL, 1957-1963). Smaller corporations also embraced the style on a reduced scale, but with the same desires to make their mark on the cityscape and express through their headquarters the company’s success and power. The Corporate Internationalist Architecture was often characterized by simple geometries, flat rooms, lack of ornamentation, and glass curtain walls with spandrel panels that translated well to all scales. Together, this stripped-down, clean aesthetic reinforced the aesthetic logic of corporate power and influence. Another essential component to the style was the use of technology, particularly in the construction of curtain walls, which could support a large expanse of glass on the exterior, while also allowing for a flexible use of interior space as needed for office tenants.

Utica Mutual Insurance Company

The construction of the building was part of an expansion effort by the Utica Mutual Insurance Corporation in the 1950s. The company initially formed in Utica, New York, in 1914, on the heels of New York’s first worker’s compensation law, which passed that same year. The company offered mutual insurance policies for upstate industrialists and had 131 companies take out policies by the end of 1914. They quickly expanded and by 1920 the company had district offices across the state, including offices in Troy, Buffalo, Rochester, Watertown, and Syracuse. Initially operating out of small, scattered, and often rented quarters, by the 1940s, the company was ready to establish a permanent home office on a thirty-seven-acre site in New Haven, New York. The Utica Mutual Insurance Headquarters were constructed between 1951 and 1953, executed in an impressive modern style.² The building was featured in *Progressive Modernist Magazine* in 1954, notable for its use of large pane Herculine glass, massive construction, and modern geometric horizontality.³

² “50 Years Ago Today: The Story of Utica Mutual Began,” *Post Standard*, February 13, 1964.

³ *Progressive Architecture Magazine*, July 7, 1954, page 184-185.

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As part of the expansion campaign, newly constructed local offices were intended to reflect the overall aesthetic of the headquarters, cementing the insurance company's brand. The Syracuse division, constructed only a few years after the completion of the headquarters outside of Utica, modeled its regional office after the flagship building, emphasizing the overall design, clean lines, large sheets of pane glass, stone accent panels, and interior terrazzo flooring. This design echoed the design of other International Style corporate headquarters constructed around the same time, positing the Utica Mutual Insurance Building within a larger context of modern corporate architecture aimed to communicate a no-nonsense approach to business. The Utica Mutual Insurance Building, on a smaller scale, reflects the way corporations embraced the International Style seen in these institutional buildings to reflect their modern, no-nonsense approach to business. The company's growth and expansion were epitomized in the 1950s by the construction of the home office building in New Hartford, and the International Style Syracuse headquarters. Stylistically, both buildings reflected the success and philosophy of the company – getting the job done in an efficient manner.

Construction

The office building at 420 E Genesee Street was designed by prominent Syracuse architecture firm King & King for the Utica Mutual Insurance Company in 1954 and constructed by local building firm The Dawson Brothers between 1954 and 1956.⁴ Prior to the construction of the new headquarters, the Syracuse branch of the Utica Mutual Insurance Company occupied a frame dwelling on part of the site of the current building, purchased from Henry Elsner in 1951.⁵ In 1954, the company purchased the vacant lot between its office and the Syracuse Boys' Club, which had used the lot as a playground, for \$58,000.⁶ The design of the new building featured frontage on East Genesee Street. Although initially only two-stories in height, the design was intended to be expandable, structurally capable of accommodating up to a three-story addition later, though it was never realized.⁷ The new regional headquarters facility was intended to provide 13,000 square feet per floor, with the insurance agency occupying only 3,000 square feet, and the remainder spaces leased to tenants. In addition to the sixty-four parking spaces to the rear of the building, a supplemental parking lot was acquired on East Jefferson Street.

The Syracuse Bureau of Building and Rehabilitation issued a permit for the construction in June of 1955 and listed the estimated construction cost as \$363,870.⁸ When it was completed in 1956, the Syracuse branch of the Utica Mutual Insurance Company moved into its new quarters and rented out offices to several other tenants, including architects King & King.⁹ Other tenants included regional and local headquarters for the Bethlehem Steel Company, Genesee Real Estate, Buffalo Tank Corporation, the Republic Steel Corporation, and the Truscon Steel Division.¹⁰ Truscon Steel was a major manufacturer of industrial steel and aluminum windows; the specifications in the Truscon catalogs from this era reveal a striking similarity to the historic windows in the Utica Mutual Insurance Building.¹¹ Presumably, the construction of the building was not only an advertisement for the brand recognition of the insurance company and the design skills of the architects but also a showcase

⁴ "Good Mutual Set-Up," *Syracuse Herald-American*, October 7, 1954; this same architect builder team also constructed the former Boy's Club Building, directly to the west, thirty-three years prior.

⁵ "Utica Mutual Building to Be Constructed Soon," *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, May 8, 1955.

⁶ "Club Sells Vacant Lot," *Syracuse Herald Journal*, April 8, 1954.

⁷ "Utica Mutual Building to Be Constructed Soon," *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, May 8, 1955.

⁸ *Post Standard*, July 2, 1955; *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, May 8, 1955.

⁹ "Utica Mutual Insurance Moves into New Building," *Post Standard*, July 30, 1956.

¹⁰ "Utica Mutual Insurance Moves into New Building," 1956.

¹¹ Truscon Steel Division, *Truscon Catalog: Truscon Metal Windows and Doors*, 1958.

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for the technological innovations of the other building tenants. Truscon Steel's sale offices may have also served as a product display showcase for potential clients.

Subsequent History

Only four years after its construction, the Utica Mutual Insurance Company looked to sell its new Syracuse office building, citing the loss of parking spaces to an urban redevelopment program as its major concern.¹² Persuaded by its likeness to other county buildings and a desire to consolidate rented office buildings into one space, Gerald Ladd, then director of the Syracuse Board of Superintendents, authorized a survey of the building to contemplate purchase.¹³ However, ultimately its \$600,000 price tag was met with resistance from other governmental parties. The Governmental Research Bureau, which surveyed the building, wrote an extensive report detailing reasons why the county should not purchase the building. It continued to operate as an office building until it became the Transitional Living Services of Onondaga County in 1997.¹⁴

Early photos indicate that there have been no substantial alterations to the exterior of the building since its construction. Like other International Style buildings from the time, the design centered on the technological advantages of a large curtain wall and operable steel windows. The curtain wall maintained a voluminous modern appearance on the exterior and at the same time allowed for a flexible interior floorplan.

King & King Architects

The oldest continually operated architectural firm in New York state, King & King Architects was founded in 1868 by Archimedes Russell, one of the most prolific architects in Syracuse.¹⁵ Russell designed 850 buildings in Syracuse, including many of the buildings on the Syracuse University campus, as well as the second Park Central Presbyterian Church (1872, Syracuse) across from Fayette Park (now Fireman's Memorial Park).¹⁶ In 1888, architect Melvin King joined the firm as an unpaid apprentice, before eventually becoming a partner in 1906, causing the firm to be renamed Russell & King. King received his professional training under master architect James H. Kirby from 1886 to 1888 in order to achieve his architectural accreditation.¹⁷ King designed many notable buildings in Syracuse, including the Central High School of Syracuse; several branches of the First Trust & Deposit Company Building; the Onondaga County Court House; St. Peter's Church in Rome, New York; and the Yates Hotel in Syracuse.¹⁸ Additionally, King designed the Syracuse Boys' Club building in 1922 at 430 E Genesee Street (directly to the east of 420 E Genesee Street). In the 1930s, King's son, Harry King, became a partner, and the firm was renamed King & King. Harry King graduated from Syracuse University in 1924 and went on to be the primary designer of buildings for the university, as well as for the Coca Cola company.¹⁹ In 1945, F. Curtis King, cousin to Harry King, also became partner at the firm. Also a graduate of Syracuse University, F. Curtis King oversaw many of the firm's school construction projects and served as the president of the Syracuse Society of Architects.²⁰

¹² "Sale of Firm Building Due," *Utica Daily Press*, April 5, 1960.

¹³ "New County Building," February 28, 1960; newspaper clipping courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association vertical file on the Utica Mutual Insurance Building.

¹⁴ "TLS's new leader sees progress in changes," *Syracuse Herald Journal*, August 26, 1997.

¹⁵ "Near Westside Initiative." June, 2011 Vol. 2 No. 5." (Syracuse University, 2011).

¹⁶ Franklin Chase, *Syracuse and its Environs* (Lewis historical Publishing Company, 1924).

¹⁷ Franklin Chase, *Syracuse and its Environs*, 1924.

¹⁸ Franklin Chase, *Syracuse and its Environs*, 1924.

¹⁹ "King + King Architects," Accessed from kingarch.com

²⁰ "King + King Architects," Accessed from kingarch.com

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King & King Architects are responsible for some of the most prominent buildings in Syracuse, as well as across New York State. For over a century and a half, the firm innovated and adapted their designs to the changing needs and architectural styles of the day. Founder Archimedes Russell's early buildings were executed in a number of Victorian eclectic styles; his subsequent partners continually evolved with changing stylistic tastes with buildings designed in the Art Deco, Art Moderne, and International Styles.²¹ When 420 E Genesee Street was constructed, the firm was under the leadership of Harry and F. Curtis King as principal architects. They left a legacy of impressive Modern buildings throughout Syracuse such as the Onondaga County Office Building, 600 South State St, listed in the MONTGOMERY St-Columbus Circle History District Boundary Expansion (1956, listed in the), the Newhouse School at Syracuse University (1965), and the Lawyers Building (also WFBL Building), 433 South Warren Street; was a combination of two buildings with a new streamlined façade in 1947; South Salina Historic District Boundary Expansion).

In the early postwar years, King & King's most notable work was executed in the Art Moderne and Late Moderne Styles, as exemplified by their construction of the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant in Syracuse (1942) and the Lawyers Building (1941), both in Syracuse. However, by the 1950s, they had begun to experiment with the increasingly popular International Style and quickly became innovators in the field. The building at 420 E Genesee Street marks one of King & King's earliest experiments with their distinctive and dramatic curtain walls with aluminum spandrel, use of dark stone trim, and interior terrazzo flooring. Only a year after the construction of 420 E Genesee Street, they took inspiration from their own office building to construct the Onondaga County Office Building (1956-1957), embracing a similar material palette, and enlarging the design of the curtain wall to be eight-stories tall, the first of its kind to be constructed in central New York.²²

King & King's other later International designs in Syracuse include the Dell Plains Hall Dormitory at Syracuse University (1960); the Onondaga County Municipal Garage (1960); the twenty-one-story Syracuse University Lawrinson Dormitory (1965), applauded for its innovative use of concrete; and the Newhouse Building, designed in collaboration with renowned Chinese-American modernist architect I.M. Pei (1965).²³ These buildings demonstrate the firm's growing fluency with the International Style, which became increasingly large and technologically complicated. Many of these buildings utilized the same vocabulary as the 420 E Genesee Street building, with a curtain wall allowing for an airy volume and ample light, and the use of dark stone for the ground level cladding (as seen in the Onondaga County Office Building).

Conclusion

Developed in 1956 by the Utica Mutual Insurance Company, 420 E Genesee Street is significant as an excellent example of an International Style commercial office building designed by notable local architects King & King. The building at 420 E Genesee is one of their first executions in the International Style, for which they later become known locally as innovators in the style. It is also one of few International Style buildings designed by the firm in this modest scale and highlights the emerging popularity of the style for corporate use, both big and small, and contributes to an understanding of Syracuse's mid-century development. The design of the building emphasizes light, glass, and technological advancement, all of which were paramount to design during this time.

²¹ *City of Syracuse Intensive Level Survey: The Historic Architecture of Archimedes Russell* (Landscape and Prospect, Syracuse, 1993).

²² Evamaria Hardin, *Syracuse Landmarks: An AIA Guide to Downtown and Historic Neighborhood*, 1993.

²³ "Work On County Office Building Starts Soon," *Post-Standard*, September 4, 1955; Advertisement, *Syracuse Herald American*, Oct 31, 1965.

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

“50 Years Ago Today: The Story of Utica Mutual Began.” *Post Standard*, February 13, 1964.

Advertisement. *Syracuse Herald American*. Oct 31, 1965.

Chase, Franklin. *Syracuse and its Environs*. Lewis historical Publishing Company, 1924.

City of Syracuse Intensive Level Survey: The Historic Architecture of Archimedes Russell. Landscape and Prospect, Syracuse: 1993.

Hardin, Evamaria, *Syracuse Landmarks: An AIA Guide to Downtown and Historic Neighborhood*. Syracuse University Press, 1993.

“Sale of Firm Building Due.” *Utica Daily Press*, April 5, 1960.

“Syracuse, New York, United States.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*,
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Syracuse-New-York>, accessed April 3, 2023.

“TLS’s new leader sees progress in changes.” *Syracuse Herald Journal*, August 26, 1997.

“Utica Mutual Insurance Company.” *Progressive Architecture Magazine*, Jul 7, 1954.

Vertical File: Utica Mutual Insurance Building. Onondaga Historical Association.

“Work On County Office Building Starts Soon.” *Post-Standard*, September 4, 1955.

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: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.59 _____

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
County and State

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the attached map.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary for this property was determined using its historical parcel description.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kim Daileader, Director of Technical Preservation Services
organization EHT Traceries, Inc. date January 26, 2024
street & number 440 Massachusetts Avenue, NW telephone 202-393-1199
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20001
e-mail Kim.daileader@traceries.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**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
County and State



Figure 1: Detail from USGS Washington West 7.5-minute quadrangle with subject property annotated. (USGS)

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
County and State



Figure 2. Property map with 420 E Genesee Street outlines in red (GoogleMaps, annotated by Tracerics),

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
County and State

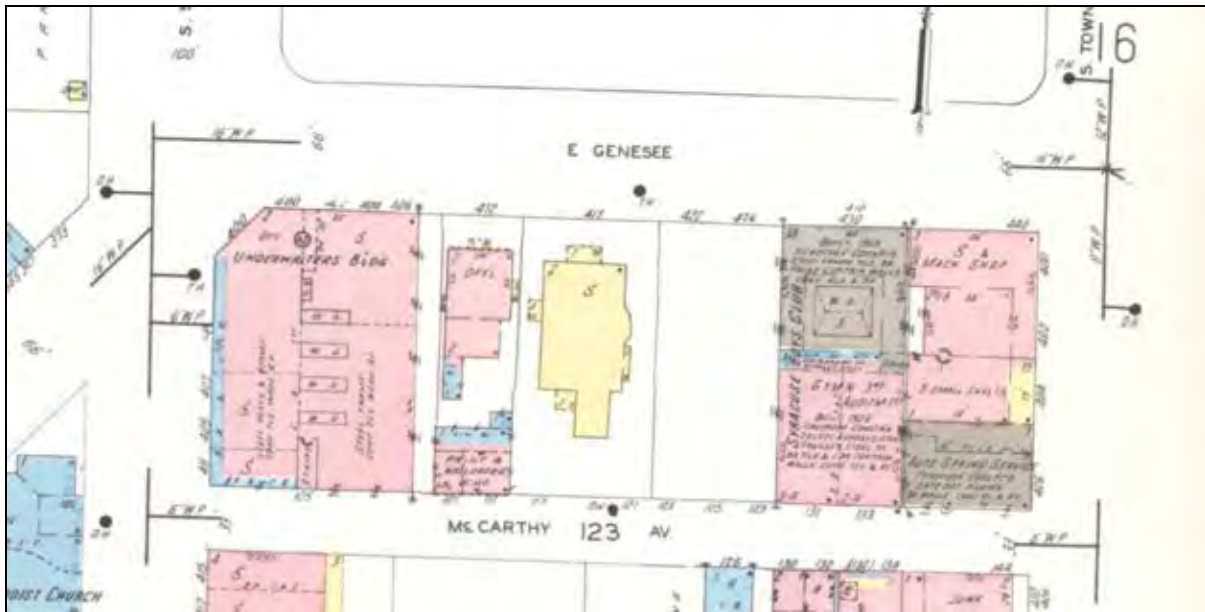


Figure 3: Detail from 1953 Sanborn map. (Library of Congress)

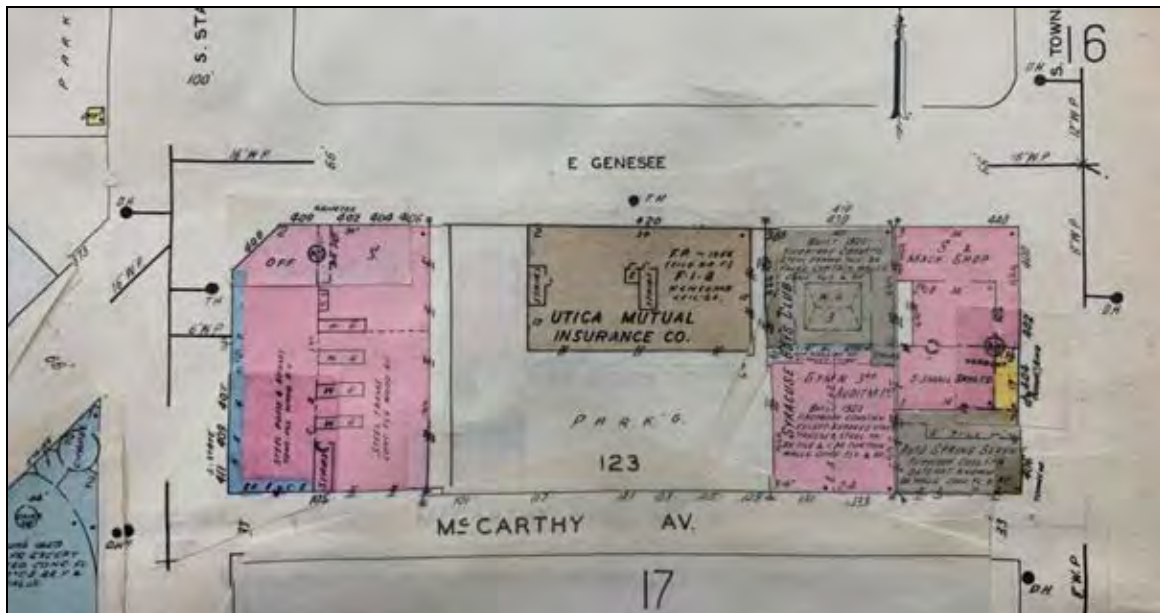


Figure 4: Detail from 1960 Sanborn map. (Syracuse Public Library)

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
County and State

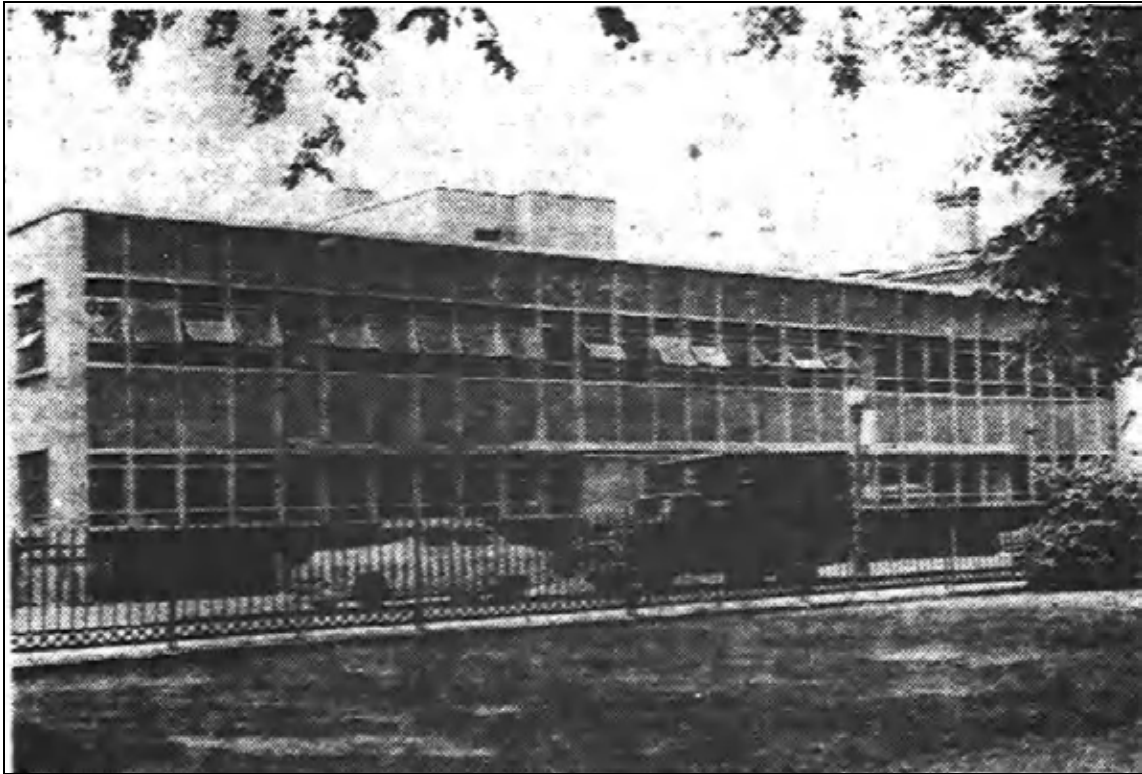


Figure 5: 1956 photo of 420 E Genesee Street, looking south from Fayette Park. (*The Post-Standard*)



Figure 6: 1960s photo of King & King Architects office inside 420 E Genesee Street. (King & King Architects Oral History Collection)

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
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Figure 7: 1962 photo of the rear of 400 block East Genesee Street. (Onondaga Historical Society)



Figure 8 and 9: Utica Mutual Headquarters. (Photos from the Post-Standard Newspaper and Progressive Architecture Magazine)

Utica Mutual Insurance Building
Name of Property

Onondaga, New York
County and State

Photographs:

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

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of ____.

Property Owner:

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

name N/A
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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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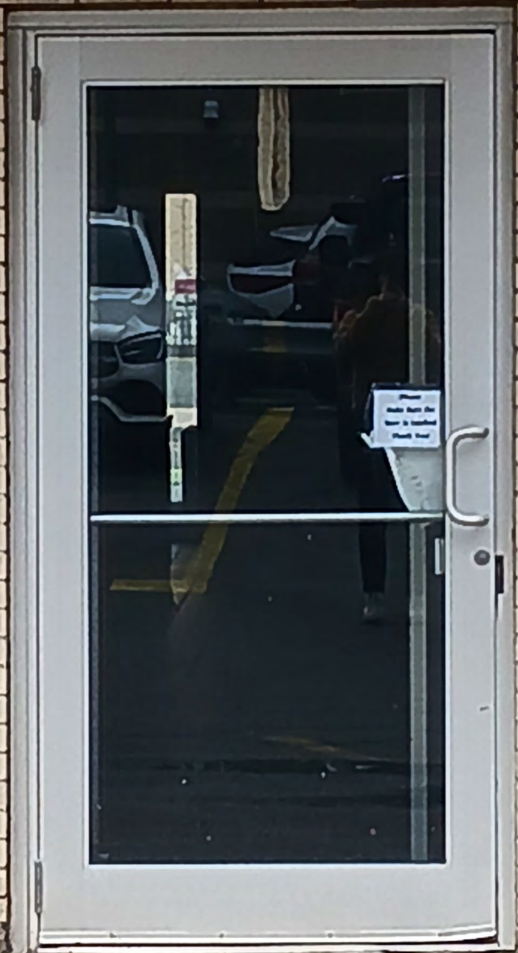
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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

MAYOR BEN WALSH

February 10, 2025

Mr. Daniel Mackay
Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation
NYS Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
Peebles Island, PO Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: Syracuse Boys Club (430 E. Genesee St)
Utica Mutual Insurance Building (420 E. Genesee St)

Dear Mr. Mackay:

The Landmark Preservation Board (LPB) reviewed the State and National Register nominations for the Syracuse Boys Club (430 E. Genesee St) and Utica Mutual Insurance Building (420 E. Genesee St) at its January 30, 2025 meeting. Please see the enclosed letters from the LPB.

I concur with the LPB that the Syracuse Boys Club meets Criteria A and C for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. In addition, I concur that the Utica Mutual Insurance Building meets Criterion C for listing. I encourage the NYS Board for Historic Preservation to approve the nominations at its March 12, 2025 meeting.

If you have any questions, please contact Kate Auwaerter, preservation planner, at 315-448-8108 or kauwaerter@syr.gov.

Sincerely,

Ben Walsh

Mayor
Encl.

Office of the Mayor
233 E. Washington St.
201 City Hall
Syracuse, N.Y. 13202

Office 315 448 8005
Fax 315 448 8067

www.syr.gov.net



January 10, 2025

Hon. Ben Walsh, Mayor
Syracuse City Hall
233 Washington Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

Re: Syracuse Boys Club (430 E. Genesee Street)

Dear Mayor Walsh:

In accordance with the requirements for participation in the Certified Local Government program and at the request of the State Historic Preservation Office, the Landmark Preservation Board (LPB) reviewed the nomination of the Syracuse Boys Club (430 E. Genesee Street) to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The LPB reviewed and discussed the nomination at its January 30, 2025 meeting.

The history of the Syracuse Boys Club involves themes of education, race and class, immigration, assimilation, and citizenship, themes which continue to resonate today. Centrally located, the Boys Club's mission was to improve the lives and prospects of young boys and men many of whom were drawn from immigrant and less-affluent families living in the neighborhoods surrounding downtown. For sixty years, the Syracuse Boys Club operated out of 430 E. Genesee Street, providing opportunities for after-school activities and sport, academic assistance, and technical skill development to its many young members.

The work of prominent local architect Melvin King, the design of the Syracuse Boys Club was meant to evoke the mission and vision of the Boys Club organization. It is one of the best examples of non-religious Collegiate Gothic style buildings in Syracuse and it represents the continued evolution of King's design practice after the passing of his mentor and business partner, Archimedes Russell.

The LPB concurs that the Syracuse Boys Club is eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. It encourages your support for the nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julia Marshall".

Julia Haffika Marshall
Chair



January 10, 2025

Hon. Ben Walsh, Mayor
Syracuse City Hall
233 Washington Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

Dear Mayor Walsh:

In accordance with the requirements for participation in the Certified Local Government program and at the request of the State Historic Preservation Office, the Landmark Preservation Board (LPB) reviewed the nomination of the Utica Mutual Insurance (420 E. Genesee Street) to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The LPB reviewed and discussed the nomination at its January 30, 2025 meeting.

The Utica Mutual Insurance Building is nominated for the State and National Registers under Criterion C as an excellent local example of the work of architects King & King in the International Style. As the author of the nomination notes, it is the firm's earliest example of modernist design, which set the stage for larger commissions including the Onondaga County Office Building and other significant work and collaborations on the Syracuse University campus.

It is notable that next door to the Utica Mutual Insurance Building is an earlier Melvin King designed building, the Syracuse Boys Club, which was constructed in 1922. Side-by-side, these buildings illustrate the evolution and legacy of King & King's practice, which traces its history back to the late nineteenth century and continues today.

The LPB concurs that the Utica Mutual Insurance Building is eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The board encourages your support for the nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Haffika Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia Haffika Marshall
Chair