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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MAY 6 2016

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

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 Crescent Corset Company

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 165 - 177 Main Street  N/A not for publication

city or town Cortland  N/A vicinity

state NY code 36 county Cortland code 023 zip code 13045

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

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

national  statewide  local

Ruth A. Pauptot DBAHO 4/28/16  
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): \_\_\_\_\_

John Eason W. Beall 6.21.16  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

**5. Classification**

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

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

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	<b>Total</b>

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY: Manufacturing facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce: Business  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

no style  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE  
walls: BRICK  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof: ASPHALT  
other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

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## **Narrative Description**

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### **Site**

The Crescent Corset Company building is located at 165-177 Main Street, in the southeast quadrant of the City of Cortland, two blocks south of the commercial center of the city. Facing Main Street, the three-story building stretches from Randall Street on the north to Huntington Street on the south with a large paved parking lot at the rear (east) and a smaller lot on the south. The west side of Main Street is primarily residential, and the housing stock predates the construction of this building. The housing to the rear of the building on the same block was built around the same time as the factory.

### **Plan**

The Crescent Corset Company is a brick industrial building of three-stories on a concrete foundation, 25 bays wide and 8 bays deep. The slightly gabled roof is hidden behind a parapet and appears flat from the street. In plan, the structure consists of five connected sections built over a 40-year period between 1923 and 1966. The five sections combine for an almost uniform façade along Main Street, with a 50' x 150' rear (east) wing behind each section. The 1966 section is built in a slightly different style based on drawings prepared by Arthur B. Haley, P.E. of Syracuse, New York; its steel trusswork is different as well.

The first four sections of the building use the same red brick, with simple pilasters between large window openings. The pilasters extend above the parapet with square caps for a decorative effect. By contrast, the brick of the fifth section is slightly lighter in color. This section continues the use of pilasters, but the parapet lacks the decorative caps and the window openings are shorter. Only Section 4 lacks a street entrance opening onto Main Street.

The original section, constructed in 1923, is the second section south of Randall Street. The portion of the building adjacent to Randall Street was constructed in 1926, and the third and fourth sections were completed in 1927 and 1928. The third section is wider than the others to accommodate three loading docks located on the back of the connecting link between sections 2 and 3. The fifth section, constructed in 1966, has the same dimensions as the other parts of the building.

A 1933 insurance map (below) shows the first four sections of the building, with the dates that each was constructed. In addition, it shows connectors between Sections 1 and 2 (power plant) and Sections 3 and 4 (link with elevator). The 2015 aerial view shows that these connectors have been removed and replaced with one and two-story infill between four of the sections. This infill is believed to have been added between 1973 and 1981 (outside the period of significance) when the factory was independently operated by NCC Industries.<sup>1</sup> During that decade, NCC acquired the Lilyette Brassiere Company and is known to have expanded operations in Cortland.

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<sup>1</sup> NCC owned and operated the Crescent Corset Company between 1973 and 1981. A controlling interest in the company was then purchased by Triumph Industries and, subsequently, by Maidenform. NCC went into bankruptcy in November, 1997, and the factory closed the following month.

Crescent Corset Company

Name of Property

Cortland, New York

County and State

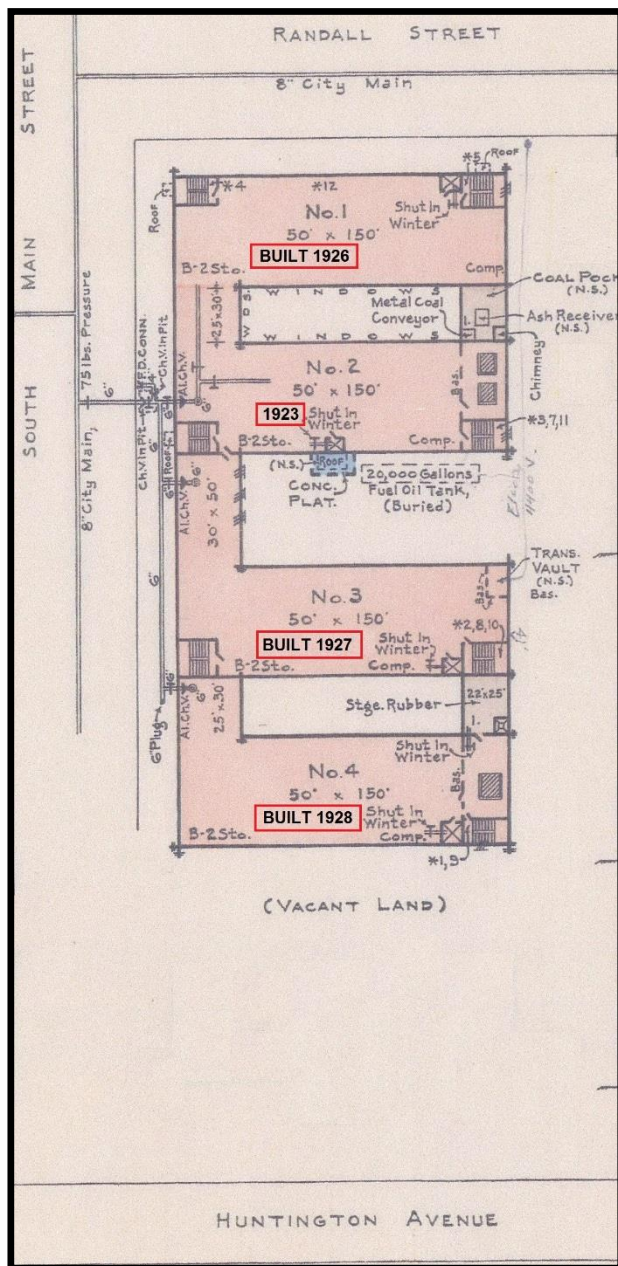


Figure 1. 1933 Insurance Map, showing first four sections of Crescent Corset Company factory.



Figure 2. 2015 Google Maps Aerial View, showing complete factory with infill between Sections 1/2; 3/4, and 4/5. The loading dock between Sections 2 and 3 has also been expanded.

**Elevations**

*Façade (West Elevation):* The Main Street façade is 25 bays wide. Part of the first floor is below grade; as a result, the windows on that floor open at ground level and are shorter than the windows in the above stories. The first 20 bays make up Sections 1-4 of the building; the last 5 bays make up Section 5. For the first 20 bays, spacing of the fenestration and pilasters is relatively regular; there are three identical window openings above one another except in the bays with doors. The original industrial windows are thought to have been removed in the 1970s, during the decade of independent NCC management (at the same time that the back wings were filled.)

Crescent Corset Company

Name of Property

Cortland, New York

County and State

The current windows are smaller, three over three with a single operable opening, centered in an infill panel. However, the original openings are entirely readable and the original concrete sills survive.

Four doors (in bays 1, 8, 15, and 25) access the building from the street level, which is half-way between the first and second floors. These bays are in Sections 1, 2, 3, and 5, and each accesses a staircase. As a result, the door bays are slightly narrower than the window bays, and there is only one window at the third-floor above the doors. Most of the doors (with the exception of the one in the 1966 addition) also appear to be replacements.

*North Elevation:* The north side of Section 1 along Randall Street makes up the north elevation of the factory. It is eight bays wide, defined with the same pilasters as on the façade. However, the spacing is a bit less uniform. Bays 1 and 8 are wider and taller than the others, and bay 2 is narrower and topped with an enclosure. This reflects the functional use of these bays. The end bays contain staircases used by Crescent Corset Company workers to access a cafeteria and rest rooms on the first floor, while bay 2 holds an exterior cargo door and small elevator used to move raw materials and finished goods between all floors. The remaining 5 bays originally held three large multi-pane windows on each floor that ran from pilaster to pilaster. Each window was 5 panes wide by 5 panes tall with center panes on a pivot to provide ventilation. Now, however, all original windows along this elevation have been removed and replaced with infill windows similar to the façade. Bay 1 also holds a replacement double door that opens slightly above the current grade.

*South Elevation:* The south side of Section 5 along Huntington Street makes up the south elevation of the factory. It too is eight bays wide, with pilasters defining the bays, staircases in bays 1 and 8, and an elevator in bay 7. However, as on the façade, this section of the building is somewhat different from the earlier sections. The roofline is lower and lacks pilaster caps; the elevator shaft rises higher above the roof than in the other sections; and the window openings are smaller. Each opening in bays 2 through 6 holds the original double steel windows from 1966. Each window on the second and third floors is 3 panes wide by 4 panes tall; the first-floor windows are slightly shorter (3 x 3). A one-story, covered loading dock protrudes from bay 6. An original double steel door is located at grade in bay 7.

*Rear (East) Elevation:* The rear elevation of the Crescent Corset Company is the most complex elevation of the building. As seen in Figures 1 and 2 above, it has five wings, the original loading dock, and areas of infill added in the 1970s. In addition, all of the wings have rear staircases and four of the wings have elevator shafts that rise slightly above the roofline of the workspaces in the center. Sections 1 and 2 have had all of their window openings infilled as on the façade, but the rear wings of Sections 3 and 4 have retained most of their original windows at the second and third floors. These windows can be seen in the following photo of the corset department workforce, taken in 1937.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State



Figure 3. "Corset Dept.," Sept 27, 1937. Photo from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

This image also shows how the grade of the building sloped down at back, encouraging NCC to add manufacturing space and individual loading docks between the wings. Most of this infill encloses the first and second floors of bays 1 through 4 of the interior elevations. Interestingly, when these areas were filled, the original windows were painted over on the interior and retained.

The gap between the wings of Section 2 and 3 still holds the original loading dock. Some of this area has also been infilled with enclosed platforms for the trucks.

### **Interior**

Entering the center of the building from 165 Main Street, one enters at a landing in the stairwell. The first floor is one flight down and the second floor is one flight up. At the top of the stairs is a perpendicular hall that runs from Section 3 to Section 1. Offices open off both sides of the hall; additional doors give access to the industrial and warehouse space in the wings. In Section 1, some of the former industrial space on the upper floors has been divided into cubicles with shoulder-height partitions.

Within the wings, a central row of steel columns rhythmically divides the open floor space in the first and second floors. The third floor is open, without support columns, and steel trusses support the roof. The trusses of Sections 1 through 4 are identical (see Figure 4), while the roof structure of Section 5 is slightly simpler (see Photo 13).

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State



Figure 4: Open floor space allowed maximum flexibility.

Each of the rear wings has a rear stair tower and sections 1, 3, 4, and 5 have an elevator adjacent to the stairwell on the west side. Sections 1, 2, 3 and 5 have women's restrooms next to the stairwell on the north side. Fire doors separate the sections.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

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



Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/ INDUSTRY

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1923-1971

**Significant Dates**

1923 (Construction of Section 1)

1926 (Construction of Section 2)

1927 (Construction of Section 3)

1928 (Construction of Section 4)

1966 (Construction of Section 5)

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Arthur B. Haley, engineer (1966 Section 5)

**Period of Significance (justification):** Construction of all five sections (1926-1966) through transfer of Crescent Corset Company out of local ownership and control (1971).

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

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### Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Crescent Corset Company is locally significant under **Criterion A: Commerce/ Industry and Social History**, as the first wholly-owned subsidiary of the J.C. Penney Company, manufacturing their private label “Lady Lyke” corsets. The J.C. Penney Company was a leader in retail marketing in the early 20th century, developing a chain of department stores that spread across the United States. Selling private label brands was a major reason for the company’s success. The company is also significant as a major employer in the City of Cortland. Immigrant workers, mostly women from Italy, made up much of the labor force. Through kinship networks, the promise of jobs brought immigrants from Italy directly to Cortland, where the men found work in the Wickwire Brothers’ factory and women found immediate placement at the Crescent Corset Company.

In addition, the Crescent Corset Company is locally-significant under **Criterion C: Architecture** as an excellent example of an early 20th century daylight industrial building. The basic design, steel frame, and use of large glass windows on all sides of the five wings are all significant features of this style.

The period of significance runs from 1923, date of the construction of the first section of the building, through all subsequent stages of construction and growth until the company was sold out of local control in 1971.

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### Developmental history/additional historic context information

#### A History of Industry in Cortland

After the Revolution, more than 1 ½ million acres of land in central New York were set aside as the “Military Tract” for veterans of the war. However, it was not until July 3, 1790, that the Land Commissioners accepted a 1789 survey and laid out boundaries for the first 25 towns (named for Classical Greek and Roman leaders and a few English authors). In 1794, Jonathan Hubbard took up land in the town of Homer; the settlement of Hubbard’s Corners grew up around him. In the same year, Elkanah Watson platted Port Watson as a model community on the Tioughnioga River, just south of the junction of its east and west branches.

For the next fifteen years, the area population grew, as people began to establish farms and speculate in land. In 1808, residents of the towns of Fabius, Tully, Solon, Homer, Virgil, and Cincinnatus petitioned the State Assembly to split Cortland County off Onondaga County; court cases would be heard “at the school-house on lot 45, in the town of Homer.” Two years later, the state legislature appointed a board of commissioners to decide on a permanent location for a new courthouse. The communities of Homer, Cortland (Hubbard’s Corners), and Port Watson all vied to be named county seat. Jonathan Hubbard, “then in the vigor of his years and active on all occasions for the advancement of the village,” visited every commissioner and Cortland won. The first court house was built soon after on “Court-House Hill.”<sup>2</sup>

The community was incorporated as a village in 1853. The first railroad line through the community, built in 1854, connected Binghamton with Syracuse and, at Syracuse, with the Erie Canal.<sup>3</sup> This connection opened the community to industrial expansion. Initially industries related to wagon making and wire manufacturing were attracted to the village, with additional industries being added in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the Civil War, the Cortland Wagon factory and the Wickwire Brothers wire mill were established. The State Normal School (for training teachers) was constructed in 1868. The Utica & Ithaca Railroad opened in 1871 and was

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<sup>2</sup> H.P. Smith, Ed., *History of Cortland County* (Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1885), Chapters 4-7.

<sup>3</sup> The Syracuse, Binghamton & New York Railroad became part of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad in 1869.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

reorganized many times, ending as part of the Lehigh Valley Railroad in 1896; it added to the connections available to industries located in the community. A Burleigh bird-eye map of Cortland from 1894 lists almost two dozen major manufacturers.<sup>4</sup> After the turn of the century, the Gillette Skirt Company and Miller Corset Company were just two of the garment manufacturers located in Cortland.

From the Civil War to 1890, the population almost tripled – from 3,066 in 1870 to 8,590 in 1890. For a decade, the rate of growth slowed; the city added fewer than 500 people in the 1900 census. Thereafter, double-digit population growth resumed until World War II, with 11,504 in 1910, 13,294 in 1920, and 15,043 in 1930. The post-war baby boom led to renewed growth; the city reached its population maximum in 1980 – 20,138.<sup>5</sup>

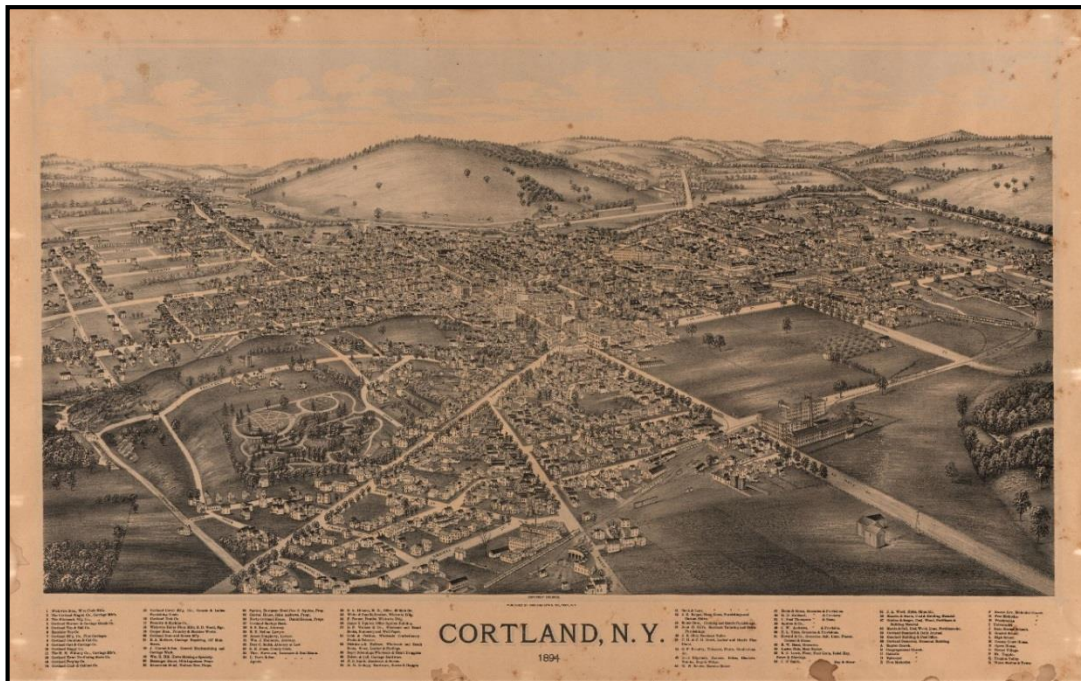


Figure 5. *Cortland, N.Y.* (Troy, N.Y.: Burleigh Litho. Co., 1894). Note the roundhouse and railroad tracks of the EC&NRR at the bottom of the map.

Corset making had a long history in Cortland County. Dr. Lucien C. Warner invented the “Health Corset” while living in McGraw, 5 miles east of the village of Cortland. As a doctor, Warner had lectured on the health hazards of tight corsets to little avail, so he decided to design a corset that would do the least injury and still appeal to a woman’s need to be stylish. In 1873, Dr. Warner successfully tested a design on his own wife, Karen, and was soon manufacturing the corset with the help of a local tailor, Moss G. Smith. Within the year, Dr. L.C. Warner was joined in the business by his brother, Dr. I. DeVer Warner. The Warner Brothers Company was born and went on to become the largest corset company in the world.

In 1876, 115 men were employed by the Warner Brothers Company in the village of McGraw. It was at this point that the brothers decided to move their business to Bridgeport, Connecticut. The following year, Perrin H. McGraw and his son, Albert P. McGraw, (descendants of village namesake Samuel McGraw) bought the

<sup>4</sup> *Cortland, N.Y.* (Troy, N.Y.: Burleigh Litho. Co., 1894).

<sup>5</sup> In 2010, the population was 19,204, only about 5 percent less than its peak. *US Census, 1870-2010.*

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State



Figure 6. Example of a Warner "Health Corset"

Warners' holdings in McGraw and opened the McGraw Corset Company. By 1885, the McGraw Company was the largest industry in the village, employing over 400 men and women in the factory and, additionally, providing area women with piece work to do in their homes.

In 1898, Edward Henry Miller, who had learned the corset trade at the Warner Brothers Company in Bridgeport, moved to McGraw to work for the McGraw Corset Company. He was soon made a partner and, when P. H. and A.P. McGraw were ready to divest themselves of the business, purchased it from them. He renamed it the Miller Corset Company, and moved the company to Cortland in 1907. Six years later, Miller hired Glyndon Crocker (who had been a salesman for the Warner Brothers Company in the Chicago area) as a salesman for his company, and Crocker moved his young family to Cortland.

In 1920, Crocker, now acting as an agent of the J.P. Penney Company, organized the Crescent Corset Company as the Penney Company's first wholly-owned subsidiary for the manufacture of private-label clothing.

### **History of J.C. Penney and the Founding of the Crescent Corset Company**

The development of the J.C. Penney Company as a national chain led directly to the founding of the Crescent Corset Company. The retail empire of James Cash Penney began from a single store opened with partners in 1902 in Kemmerer, Wyoming. In 1907, Penney bought out his partners and became the sole owner of 3 dry goods stores. Five years later, Penney's holdings had grown to 34 stores, most located in mining towns in the west and midwest. The company was incorporated in 1913 under the name J.C. Penney Company. The following year, company headquarters moved from Salt Lake City to New York City to simplify purchasing, financing and the transportation of goods and to facilitate further growth. By 1920, the J.C. Penney Company had grown into a chain of nearly 200 mid-range, department stores located in downtown commercial centers across the United States.<sup>6</sup>

In 1920, a decision was made by Penney to manufacture some of the clothing it sold. In retrospect, this was a key strategic move:

*Private label brands were a major reason for the success of the company. Customers liked them because of controlled quality yet cheaper prices than brand names; Penney liked them because he could determine the price and make a higher profit margin. Big Mac, Waverly, and Lady Lyke were labels on work shirts, men's caps, and lingerie, respectively.<sup>7</sup>*

On July 1, 1920, the Crescent Corset Company was organized as the first wholly-owned subsidiary of the J. C. Penney Company. Former Miller Corset Company salesman, Glyndon Crocker, was named president of the company, a position he held until his death in 1945. The first shipment of Lady Lyke corsets was made to J.C. Penney on October 5, 1920, from Crescent's first factory, a three-story, rented building on Central Avenue with

<sup>6</sup>Whohistory.org, "James Cash Penney: From Clerk to Chain Store Tycoon." (<http://www.Wyohistory.org>)

<sup>7</sup>"J.C. Penney Company, Inc." *International Directory of Company Histories*, 2002. From *Encyclopedia.com* (<http://www.encyclopedia.com>)

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

38 sewing machines. Crocker reviewed the reasons for founding the company – in Cortland, specifically – in a January 8, 1921, article in the *Corset and Underwear Review*:

*The reason we went into the corset manufacturing business was largely because of the fact that we had found it impossible to get deliveries on time. With this in mind, the question of location was one of the most importance. Cortland, N.Y., being finally selected because of the fact that this place and the surrounding territory has for nearly half a century been a corset manufacturing center, it being a common thing to sometimes find entire families working at corset making. With our plant located here, we should have but little trouble with deliveries.*<sup>8</sup>

Early advertisements promised lower prices with the elimination of all middlemen.

**Lady-Lyke Corsets**

**LADIES! Your Opportunity!**

98c TO 2.98 **Lady-Lyke** 98c TO 2.98  
THE MOST IN CORSET PERFECTION  
A REAL INNOVATION IN  
CORSET VALUE GIVING

DIRECT FROM FACTORY—TO US—TO YOU  
with all middlemen's profits eliminated.

Think of it! High grade, hand laundered corsets, perfectly boned and reinforced to withstand hard wear. 98c

BETTER GRADES AT — \$1.49, \$1.98, \$2.49, \$2.98

These low prices are possible because we consume the entire production of LADY-LYKE Corsets, selling thousands of dozens annually in our 312 stores.

LADY-LYKE Corsets give you style, grace, good form and comfort. LADY-LYKE Corsets fit perfectly. Made of high-grade materials—rust-proof and give long service. Daintily trimmed and finished complete with lacer.

All new models—white and flesh. You can be sure you are well corsetted if you wear a LADY-LYKE. Select your LADY-LYKE Corset now.

**JCPenney Co.**  
312 DEPARTMENT STORES  
1274 Liberty Street.

Figure 7. Advertisement, *Franklin (PA) News-Herald* (July 25, 1921).

As the J. C. Penney Company grew, so too did the Crescent Corset Company – and the J.C. Penney Company was expanding rapidly. The company opened its 500th store in 1924 and, within four years, had doubled that number. Crescent's rented facilities soon became too small to keep up with the growing orders for corsets and lingerie. In 1923, the decision was made to invest in new facilities at 165 Main Street, Cortland, and the company bought 7 ½ lots owned by the Greater Cortland Company.

<sup>8</sup> "Cortland, N.Y. – Chain Store operators to make own Line of Corsets" *Corset and Underwear Review*, XVI: 4 (January 8, 1921), 102.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

### **History of 165 Main Street**

The parcel that is today 165 Main Street was once part of the large farm owned by William Randall Sr., an early businessman in the village of Cortland. Randall owned a vast tract of land comprising most of Great Lot 75 (originally a subdivision of the Town of Homer, itself a subdivision of the Military Tract) in the village of Cortland. Upon his death in 1850, the property was transferred to his son, William Randolph Randall. William Randolph Randall opened the Randall Bank in his father's former store on Main Street in 1850 and operated the bank until 1870. In 1866 he was one of the incorporators of the Cortland Savings Bank, and he served as its president until he retired in 1874. The Randall house was located on the northwest corner of Main and West Court Streets and the family farm was located east of Main Street, south of Port Watson Street. After his retirement from banking, William Randolph Randall devoted his time to care of the family estate.

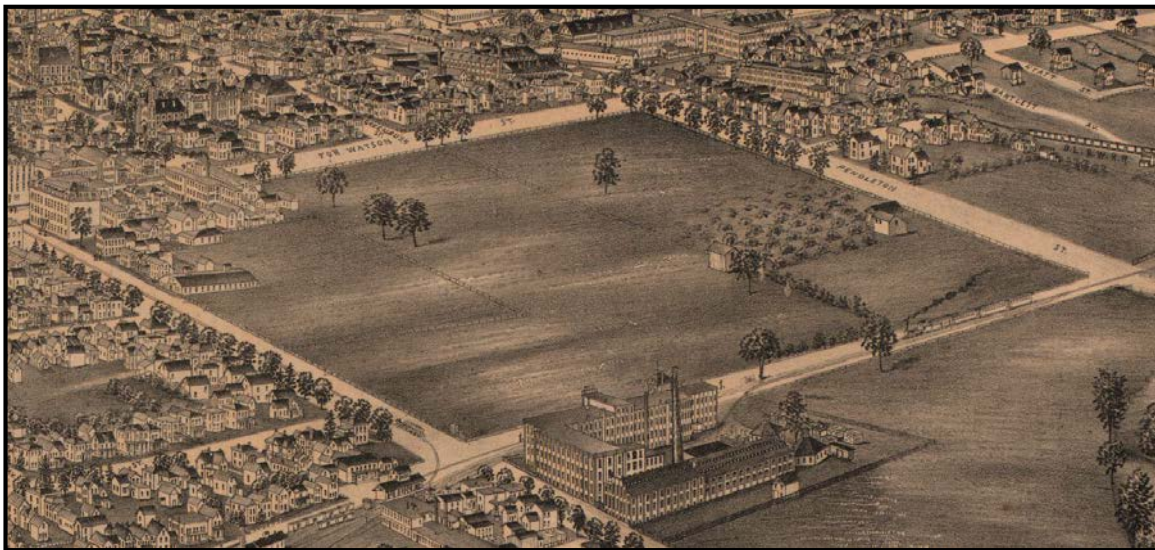


Figure 8. Detail of *Cortland, N.Y.* (Troy, N.Y.: Burleigh Litho. Co., 1894), showing the Randall family estate in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This large swath of land was not opened for development until years after William's death in 1901. His vast estate took years to settle, not only due to its complexity, but because of the 1907 death of his brother-in-law, William Huntington, whom Randall had named as his executor. A second executor had to be named, further drawing out the execution of Randall's will and the settling of his estate.

In 1911, the Greater Cortland Company was incorporated as a land development company with ten local businessmen as directors. They purchased much of Randall's former estate and had it surveyed and divided into lots with several proposed interior streets. The property was surveyed by D. B. Coleman, CE and the map was filed in the Cortland County Clerk's office on June 23, 1911. The 1915 Sanborn Map shows the subdivision.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

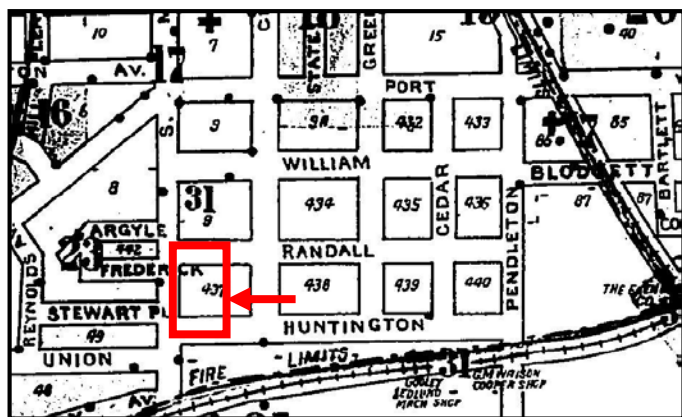


Figure 9. Detail, 1915 *Sanborn Map*, after Greater Cortland Company survey, showing land acquired by the Crescent Corset Company.

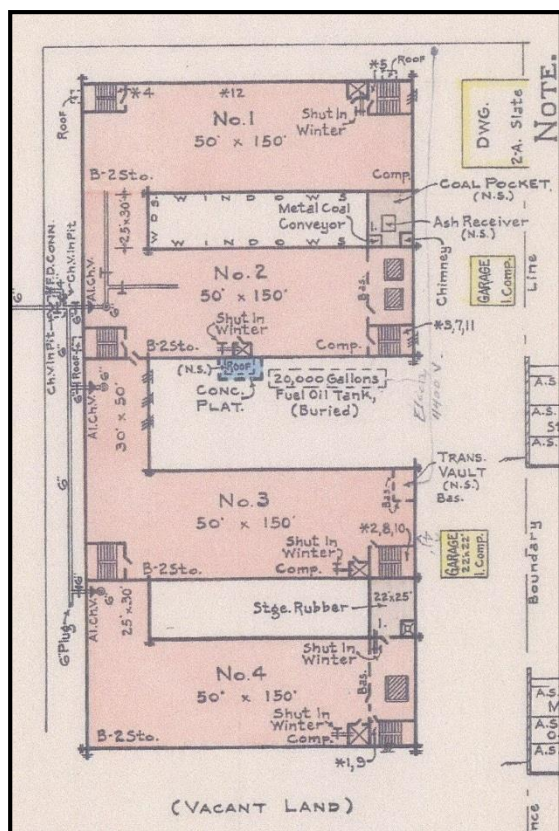


Figure 10. Detail, 1933 *Insurance Map*, with detail of first four factory buildings, from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

In the spring of 1923, Glyndon H. Crocker, as president of Crescent Corset Company, acquired lots 1-7 and the south end of lot 8 in Block 9 between Randall and Huntington Streets. The first part of the Crescent Corset Company complex was dedicated on November 27, 1923. By 1928, four joined sections, each three stories high (the first floor being a raised basement), 150' x 50', constructed of brick, steel and concrete, had been erected enclosing approximately 100,000 square feet.<sup>9</sup>

The first section to be built – No. 2 – was erected in 1923. Its neighbor, No. 1, at the intersection of Main and Randall Streets, was built in 1926. No. 3 was built in 1927, and No. 4 was built in 1928

The architects of the first through fourth sections are not known. However, they were clearly familiar with the design of daylight industrial buildings. Contemporary construction photos show the erection of the steel frame for Section 3.

<sup>9</sup> "Crescent Corset Company" *Cortland County Sesquicentennial 1808-1958* (Cortland, NY: Cortland County Historical Society, 1958), 117.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

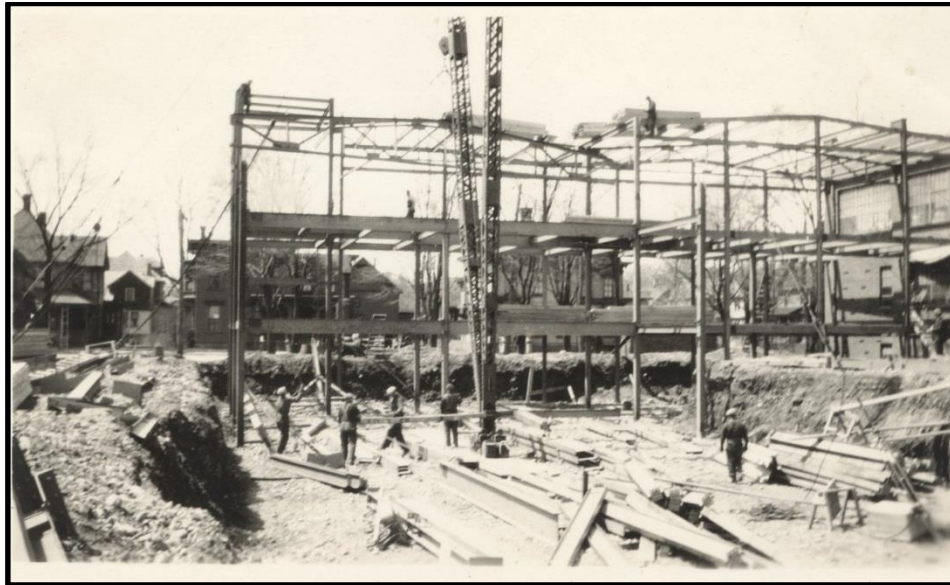


Figure 11. Construction underway on No. 3. Photo from the Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

The factory must have functioned well. In 1966, when the company added Section 5, the same basic design was maintained. Arthur B. Haley, P.E., of Syracuse, New York prepared the drawings, which use the same dimensions and almost the same profile as the earlier buildings.

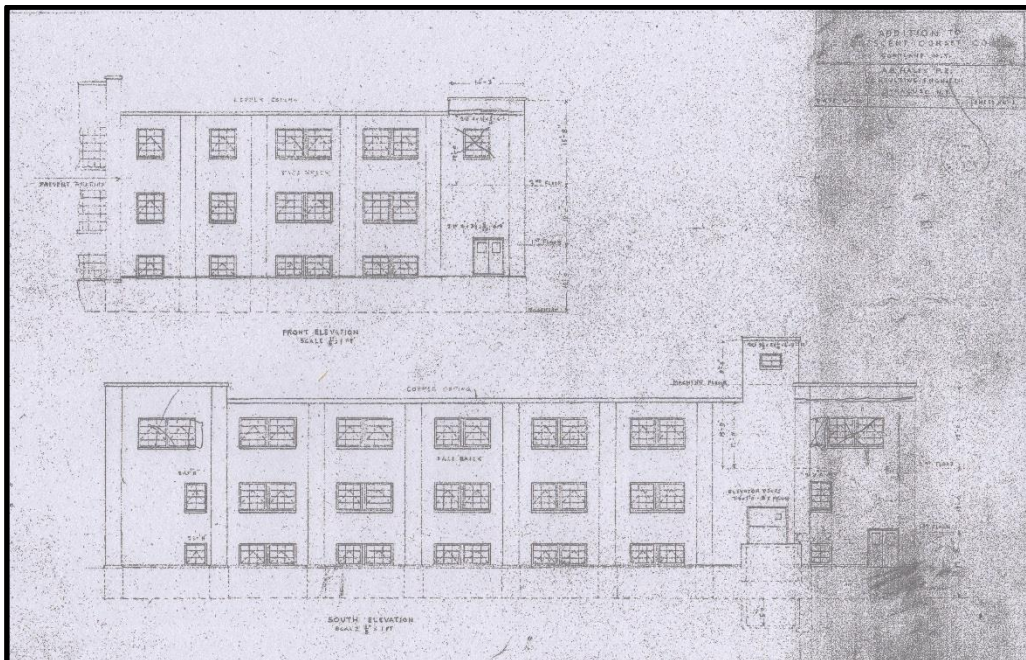


Figure 12. A.B. Haley drawings for Section 5, 1964.



Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

### **Workers at the Crescent Corset Company**

Immigrant workers, mostly women from Italy, made up much of the labor force. Strong kinship networks created solidarity among the workers, and many spent their entire working careers at the Crescent Corset Company. Assunta Curri, a first generation American born to Italian immigrant parents, was a floor supervisor at Crescent from 1925 to 1971. She spoke fluent Italian and could communicate with the new immigrants. Her employees would bring newly arrived friends or relatives to the company, introduce them, and request that they be hired. “Nicolina Giuliano, who emigrated from Castleforte, Italy, in 1952, arrived in Cortland on a Friday afternoon and started working at Crescent on Monday morning.”<sup>10</sup> The women were hired to sew, a skill they brought with them from Italy. “Nearly every Italian woman who immigrated to Cortland and worked outside the home did so at the Crescent Corset Company.”<sup>11</sup> Their husbands found work at the Wickwire factory, a few blocks south on Main Street.

By the time the following photos were taken, the number of workers in the factory had grown to seven hundred people.



Figure 13. “Underwear and Night Shirts, Sec #3.” Photo from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Diane Vecchio, “Ties of Affection: Family Narratives in the History of Italian Migration,” in Elliott Robert Barkan, Ed., *Immigration, Incorporation and Transnationalism* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 114.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State



Figure 14. "Underwear and Nightshirts, Sec. 4," 1928. Photo from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

Only in the cutting room were more men than women employed. In 1928, as much as 68 miles of cloth were cut in one week.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 15. "Cutting Room," 1928. Photo from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>12</sup> G.H. Crocker. "The Corset Business." Cortland County Historical Society Clipping File (Unknown journal), 1928.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

The Crescent Corset Company's motto – "Quality with Savings" – held it in good stead. As less restrictive clothing became the norm and the traditional corset was no longer the ubiquitous undergarment worn by all women, the Crescent Corset Company adjusted with the market. Glyndon Crocker wrote in an industry journal in 1928, "The small percentage of women who have discarded corsets is far more than offset by the fact that women are wearing lighter garments with less boning, made of materials that will not stand the wear of the old-type garments. The result is that instead of a woman's being a customer for two corsets a year, as she was under the old conditions, she is a prospective customer for as high as a half dozen garments in a price range as high or higher than the type of garment formerly worn."<sup>13</sup> By the late 1920s, the company was manufacturing ladies' underwear and boys' nightshirts as well as corsets. Later the company began producing brassieres and lingerie.

The manufacturing process was arranged by building section and floor. As an example, in 1933 corsets were constructed in Section 3. The cotton fabric, which was stored on the first floor, was checked out of the stock room and moved to the cutting room on the same floor. Large bolts of cloth were unrolled and placed in layers on the long cutting tables and the cutters, usually men, would place the patterns and, using cutting knives with a razor edge, cut through multiple layers of cloth. Once the pattern pieces were cut and stacked, they were sent to the top (third) floor where seamstresses would sew the panels together and sew in the pockets to hold the corset stays. The stays were inserted in the next step, and the piece sent to finish seamstresses for decorative detailing. The final step on the third floor was inspection of the finished garment. Once it was approved, the corset would be taken downstairs by elevator to the second floor in the same wing, where it would be steam pressed and molded before being boxed and cased for shipment.

The shipping department for all products was at the back of Section 3 on the second floor. Its 50 x 150 foot wing is the same as all others, but the façade of this section is 25 feet wider than the others, to accommodate the shipping department and the three loading docks. All finished garments were shipped from this central location.

In 1949, the J. C. Penney Company decided to divest itself of its manufacturing subsidiaries and made it possible for a local group to purchase the business. Officers and directors included Randolph V. Miller, Robert E. Hamill, Walter A. Smigel, Frank H. Reynolds, Charles V. Warner, Harold A. Armstrong, and Gordon C. Preston. At the time, in addition to the Cortland facilities, which still employed approximately 600 people, there was a branch plant in Moravia and a warehouse facility in Fresno, California, which facilitated the distribution of foundation garments throughout the West Coast.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Crocker.

<sup>14</sup> "Crescent Corset Company," *Cortland County Sesquicentennial Souvenir Book, 1808-1958* (Cortland County Sesquicentennial Committee, 1958).

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State



Figure 16. 1955 Penney ad featuring Adonna lingerie

Even after the sale and restructuring, the J.C. Penney Company remained the Crescent Corset Company's largest customer selling the "Adonna" brand as its own. And the company continued to grow. In 1966, the final section of the building was constructed at the south end of the complex at the intersection of Main and Huntington Streets.

In April 1969, Randolph V. Miller, the president of the company, died, and shortly thereafter the board of directors made the decision to sell the Crescent Corset Company. On March 6, 1971, the company was sold to NCC Industries, Inc., a small-conglomerate of intimate apparel companies, with headquarters in New York City. The Crescent Corset Company was no longer locally owned and operated.

NCC Industries continued to operate in the Crescent Corset Company factory building and, in 1973, the company acquired Lilyette Brassiere Company. Its operations were consolidated in the Cortland facility, possibly leading to the infill additions.

In 1981, Triumph International, a multi-national company headquartered in Munich, Germany, purchased controlling interest in NCC Industries. In April of 1995, Maidenform Worldwide, Inc. acquired 92 percent of NCC Industries: 84 percent of the stock from came from Triumph International and 8 percent from Frank Magrone, the NCC president. Maidenform closed the Cortland manufacturing plant in 1996 but maintained the facility as a distribution warehouse. On November 7, 1997, NCC Industries, Inc. filed for bankruptcy. A month later, Maidenform announced the closure of their facilities in Puerto Rico, Jacksonville, Florida and Cortland, New York. Cortland's history of corset manufacture had ended.

## Industrial Architecture

The Crescent Corset Company is also locally significant under Criterion C (Architecture) as an excellent example of an early-20<sup>th</sup> century daylight industrial building. In 1958, the building was described as "a modern, well lighted factory that attests to the forethought of its designers."<sup>15</sup> The basic design, steel frame, and use of large glass windows on all sides of the five wings are significant features.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

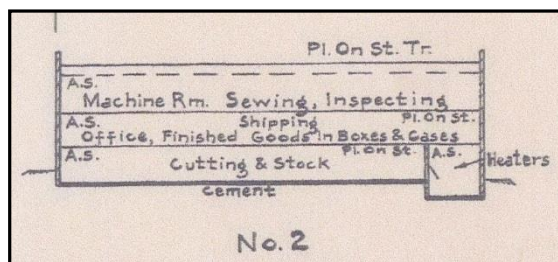
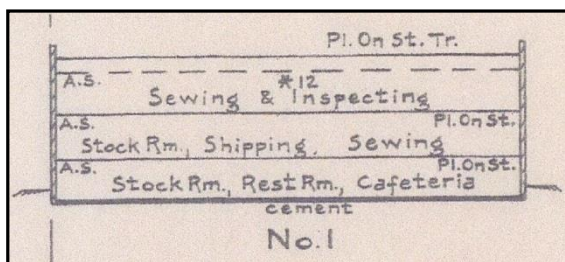
Cortland, New York  
County and State



Figure 17. Crescent Corset Company (corner of Main and Randall), circa 1930. Photo from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

The basic design of a unified façade on Main Street, with a projecting rear wing behind each addition to the building allowed manufacturing to be distributed into different sections of the building. Almost all of the sewing and inspecting operations were conducted on the third floors of the sections. Photos show corsets being manufactured in Section 3, and underwear and nightshirts in Sections 3 and 4. Cutting operations were done on the first floor of Sections 2, 3, and 4; parts of these floors also stored raw materials. The second floors seem to have been devoted to various finishing and packing processes – machine pressing, boxing, casing for shipment, and storage of finished goods, along with some overflow sewing in Section 1. Shipment took place out of the second floor of Section 3. The employee cafeteria was on the first floor of Section 1, and lockers for the workers were in the first floor of Section 4. Management offices were located mostly on the second floor in Sections 1 through 3 along Main Street.

The 1933 insurance map gives the vertical layout of work by building section, showing how different processes were conducted on different floors of the building.



Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

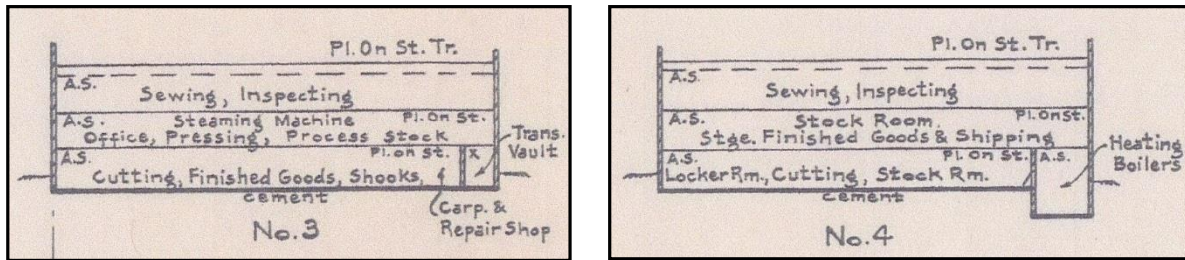


Figure 18. Use of Floors in the Four Factory Sections, 1933 *Insurance Map*, from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

The second key feature is the building's steel frame, which created open interior spaces with maximum flexibility for programming. The first four sections were constructed between 1923 and 1928 using the same basic blueprints, and each rear wing was 50 x 150 feet. Rather than the rows of heavy wooden posts dividing the interior space (as was the case in common mill construction), there was a single center row of steel support columns on the first and second floor levels. Steel trusses made columns unnecessary on the third floors, leaving them completely open. Early photographs of the interior show rows of sewing machines lined up perpendicular to the windows on the top floors. In photographs from the 1950s, new larger machines are set in rows parallel to the windows. The steel framing made this flexibility possible.



Figure 19. Arrangement of Sewing Machines in the 1950s (compare to Figures 6 and 7), Photo from Cortland County Historical Society Archives.

The final feature is the building's lighting. The large windows that line each wall of the façade and rear sections provide abundant natural light to the interior industrial spaces. Even though the first floors were partially below grade, these windows allowed them to be used for cutting rather than just for storage and mechanical systems.

Throughout the building, the original windows were 5 panes high and varied in width; some were 4 and others

Crescent Corset Company

Name of Property

Cortland, New York

County and State

were 5 panes wide. The wider windows had an awning window, 2 panes high by 3 panes wide, centered in the large frames at sill level, to draw in cool air for natural ventilation. In the upper sash a similar-sized window pivoted within the frame to allow warm air to escape the work space. The combination of these window openings and ceiling fans helped cool the interior.

The newest section, designed by Arthur B. Haley, P.E. in 1964 and constructed in 1966, resembles the others, but was constructed using a lighter shade of red brick. Haley used a different truss system and his section has a lower profile. However, the basic floor plan, steel framing, and window arrangements were maintained in the addition.

### **165 Main Street Since 1996**

After the closing of the Cortland facility, the building was marketed as an industrial site, but without success. Sections of the building were then leased to various smaller businesses, including the Scotmans Press (which closed on March 11, 2013), Electronics Maintenance Association, and St. Joseph's Homecare. St. Joseph's, which still maintains a presence in the building, uses offices on the first floor as a back-office facility for their extensive home health care agency. In 2016, Housing Visions of Syracuse purchased the building and plans to convert the facility into low-income apartments.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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### Bibliography

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Miller, Mary Van (daughter of Randolph Miller, president of Crescent Corset Company), Personal Interview, Oct. 21, 2015.

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Smith, H.P., Ed. *History of Cortland County*, New York. Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1885.

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*U.S. Census*, 1870-2010.

Vecchio, Diane. "Ties of Affection: Family Narratives in the History of Italian Migration." In Elliott Robert Barkan, Ed. *Immigration, Incorporation and Transnationalism*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011, 105-119.

*Wyohistory.org*. "James Cash Penney: From Clerk to Chain Store Tycoon." <http://www.Wyohistory.org>

### Other

Cortland County Historical Society Archives. Location of photos and 1933 *Insurance Map*.

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#### 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: Cortland County Historical Society

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Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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### 10. Geographical Data

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**Acreage of Property** 3.06 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18N</u> Zone	<u>403255E</u> Easting	<u>4716419N</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 property boundary is contiguous with City of Cortland tax map # 86.74-02-23. The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

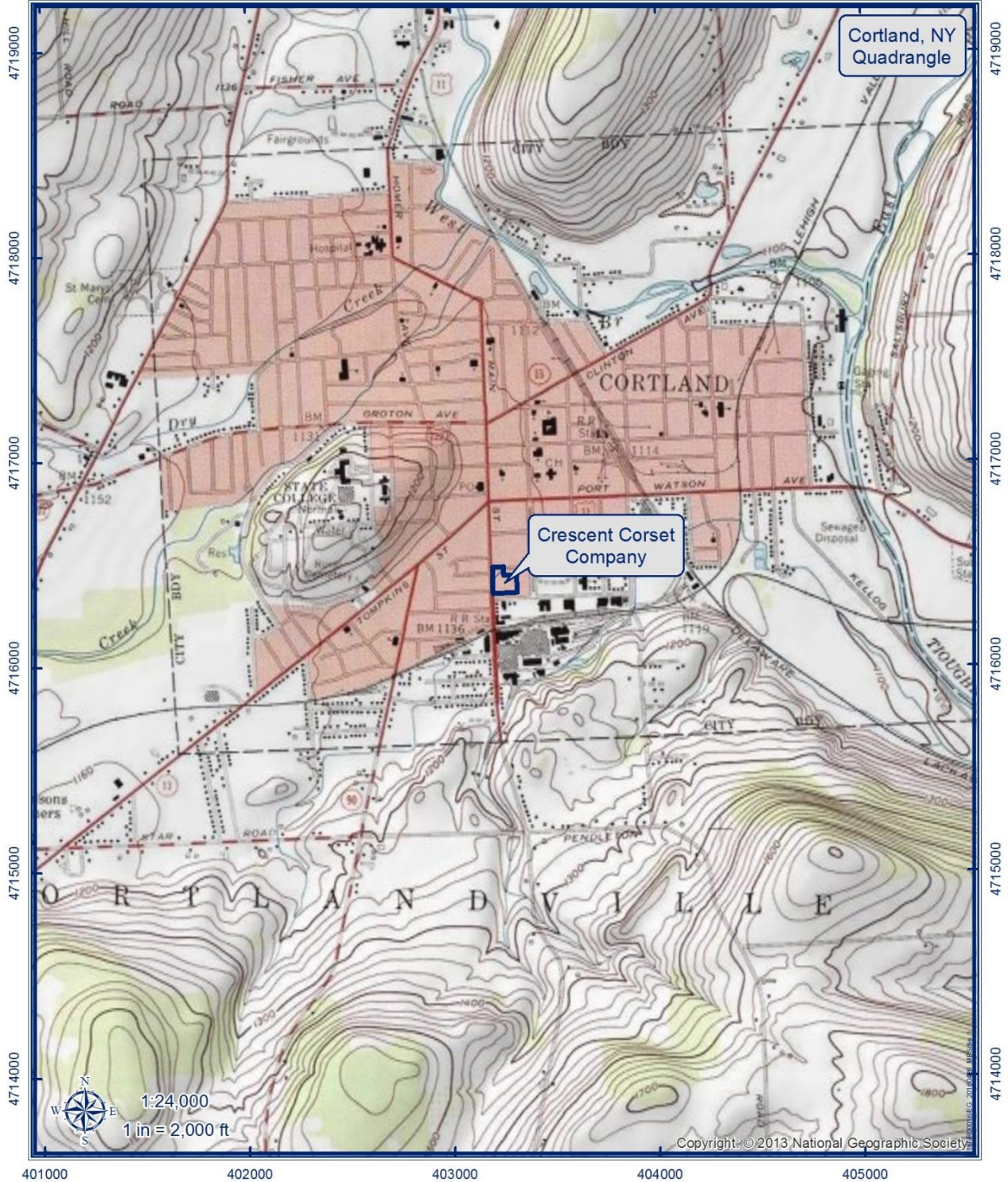
The boundary includes all of the property that was associated with the Crescent Corset Company during the period of significance.

Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

Crescent Corset Company  
Cortland, Cortland Co., NY

165-177 Main Street  
Cortland, NY 13045



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



Crescent Corset Co.



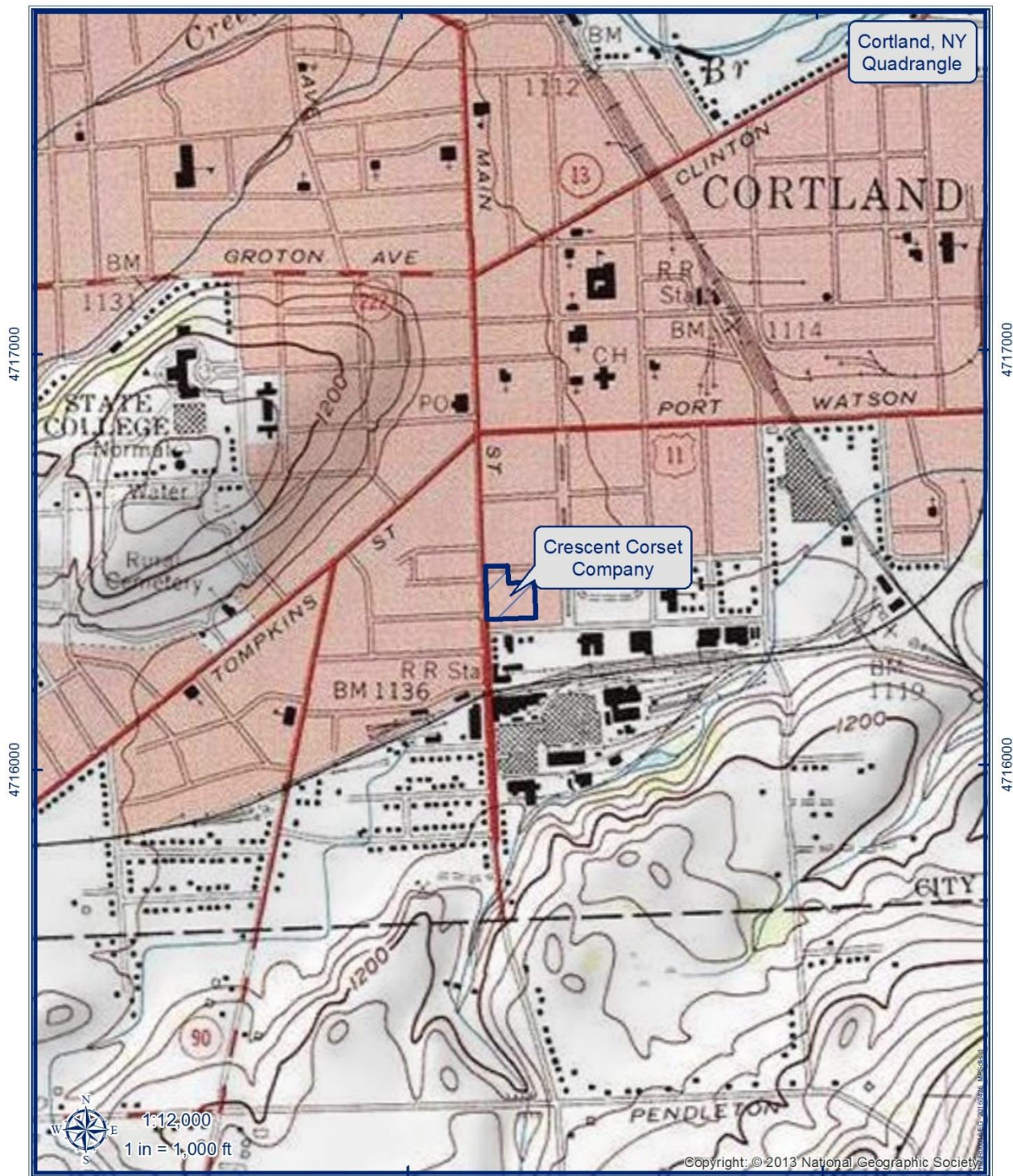
Parks, Recreation  
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Crescent Corset Company  
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County and State

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Cortland, Cortland Co., NY

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Cortland, NY 13045



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



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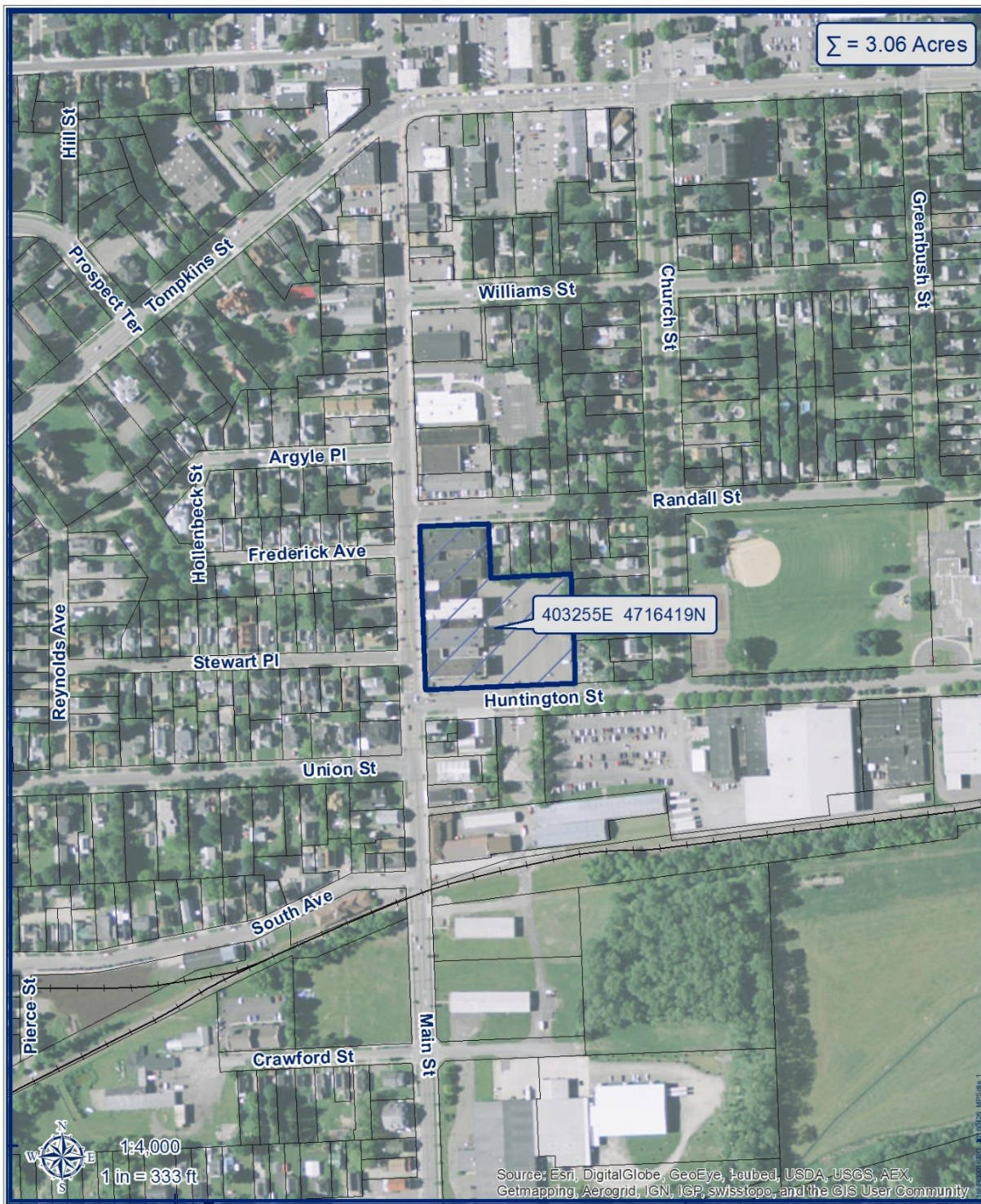
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Crescent Corset Company  
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Crescent Corset Co.



Parks, Recreation  
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Parks, Recreation  
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Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Cynthia Carrington Carter (edited by Emilie W. Gould, NY State Historic Preservation Office)

organization Renaissance Studio date January 27, 2016

street & number 219 Crawford Ave. telephone (315) 446-1310

city or town Syracuse state NY zip code 13224

e-mail ccarringtoncarter@verizon.net

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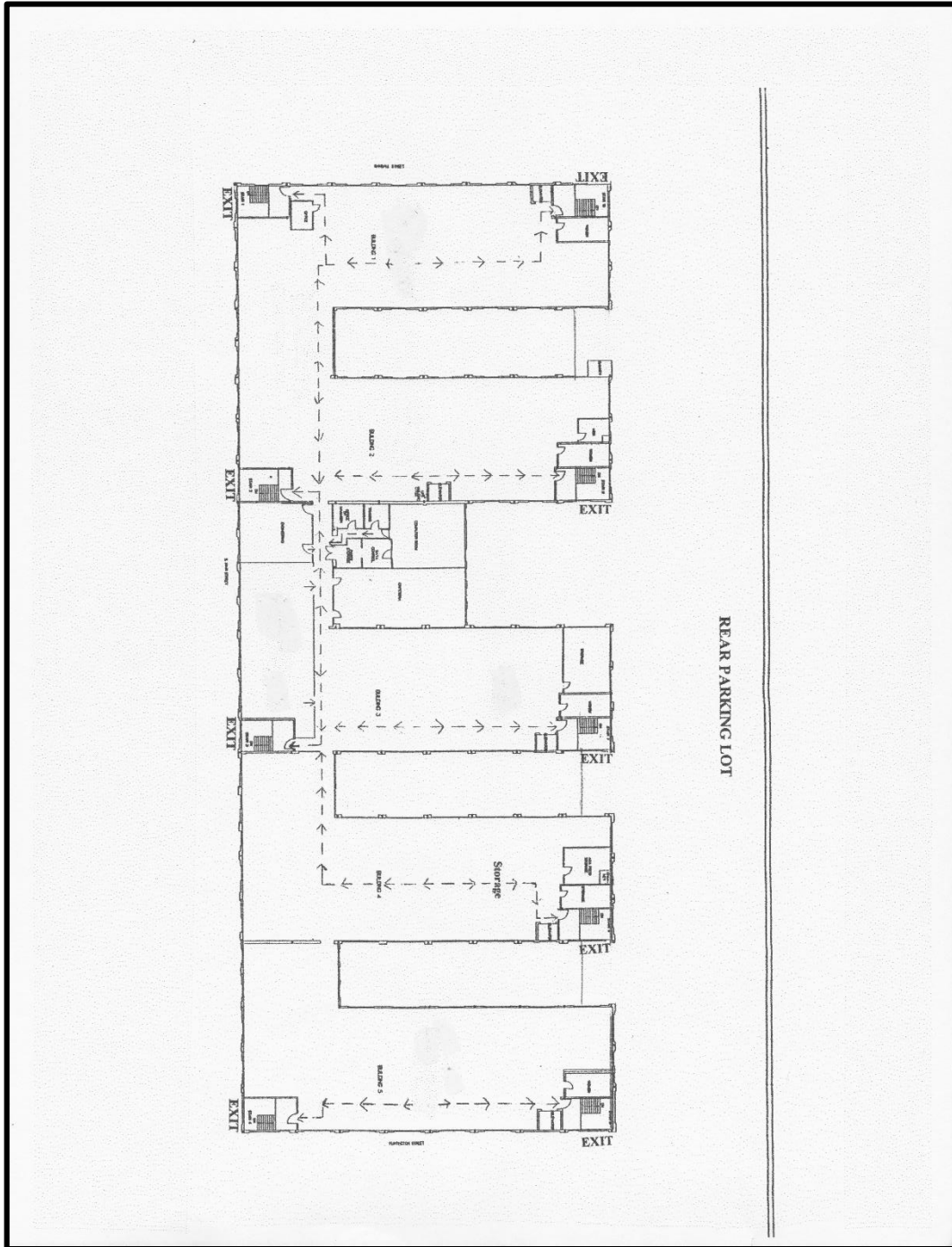
Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Floor Plans:** 1993 Evacuation Plan of Crescent Corset Company, Third Floor (Section 1 at top; Section 5 at bottom.) All floors have similar configurations.



Crescent Corset Company

Name of Property

Cortland, New York

County and State

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**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: Crescent Corset Company

City or Vicinity: Cortland

County: Cortland

State: New York

Photographer: Cynthia Carrington Carter

Date Photographed: March 20, 2015, and July 20, 2015

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

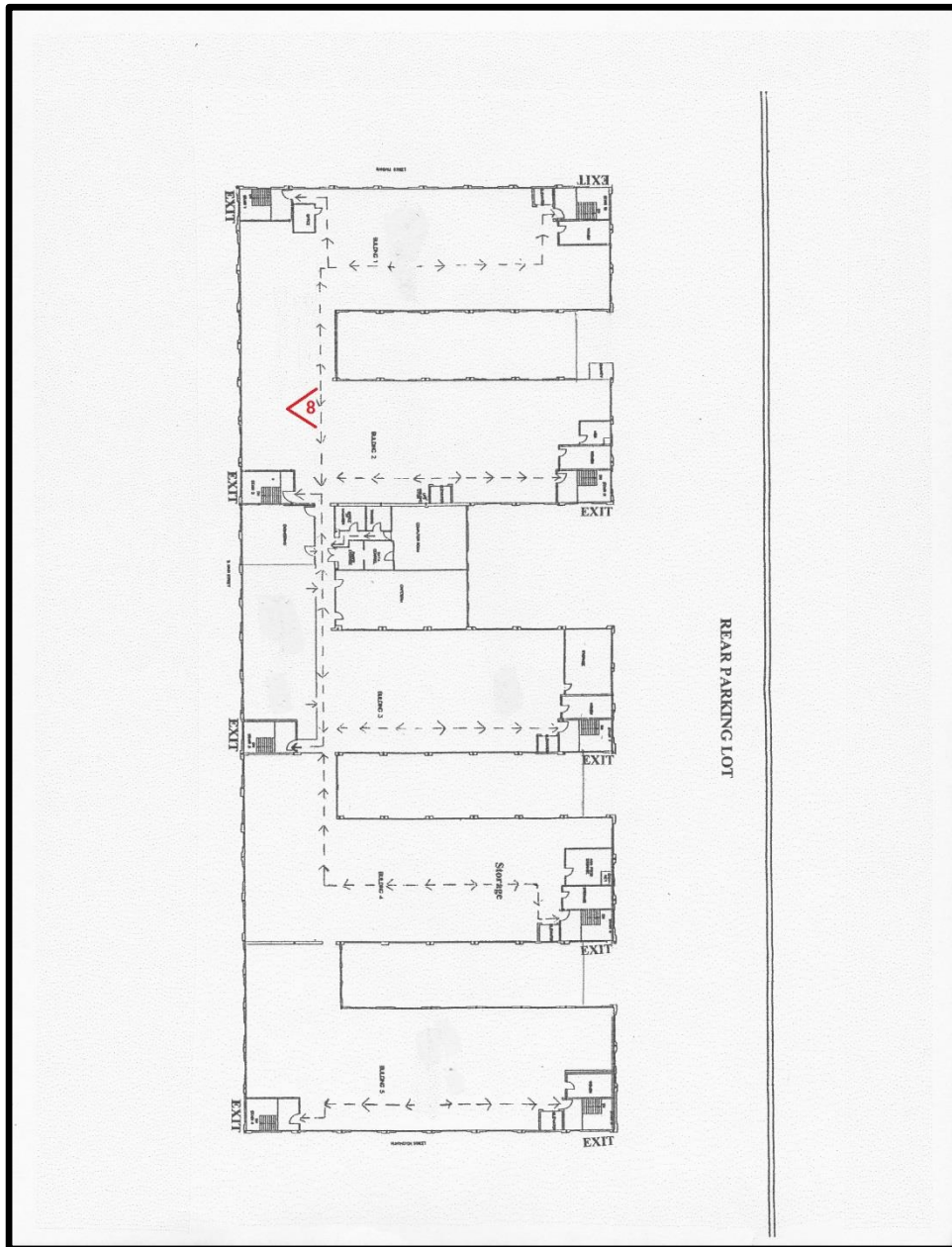
- 0001 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Northwest corner (Randall and Main Streets).
- 0002 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Southwest corner (Main and Huntington Streets).
- 0003 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Rear (east) and south side (from Huntington Street).
- 0004 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Loading dock (rear/east) between Sections 2 and 3.
- 0005 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Front door, Main Street façade (Section 2).
- 0006 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Interior stairway from front door to second-floor offices
- 0007 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Offices, second floor, Main Street façade (Section 1, looking north).
- 0008 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – First floor, Section 2, looking east.
- 0009 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Second floor, Section 2, looking east.
- 0010 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Second floor, link between Sections 5 and 4.
- 0011 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Second floor, Section 4, looking west.
- 0012 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Third floor, Section 1, looking east.
- 0013 of 13. Crescent Corset Company – Third floor, Section 5, looking west, showing difference in truss work.



Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

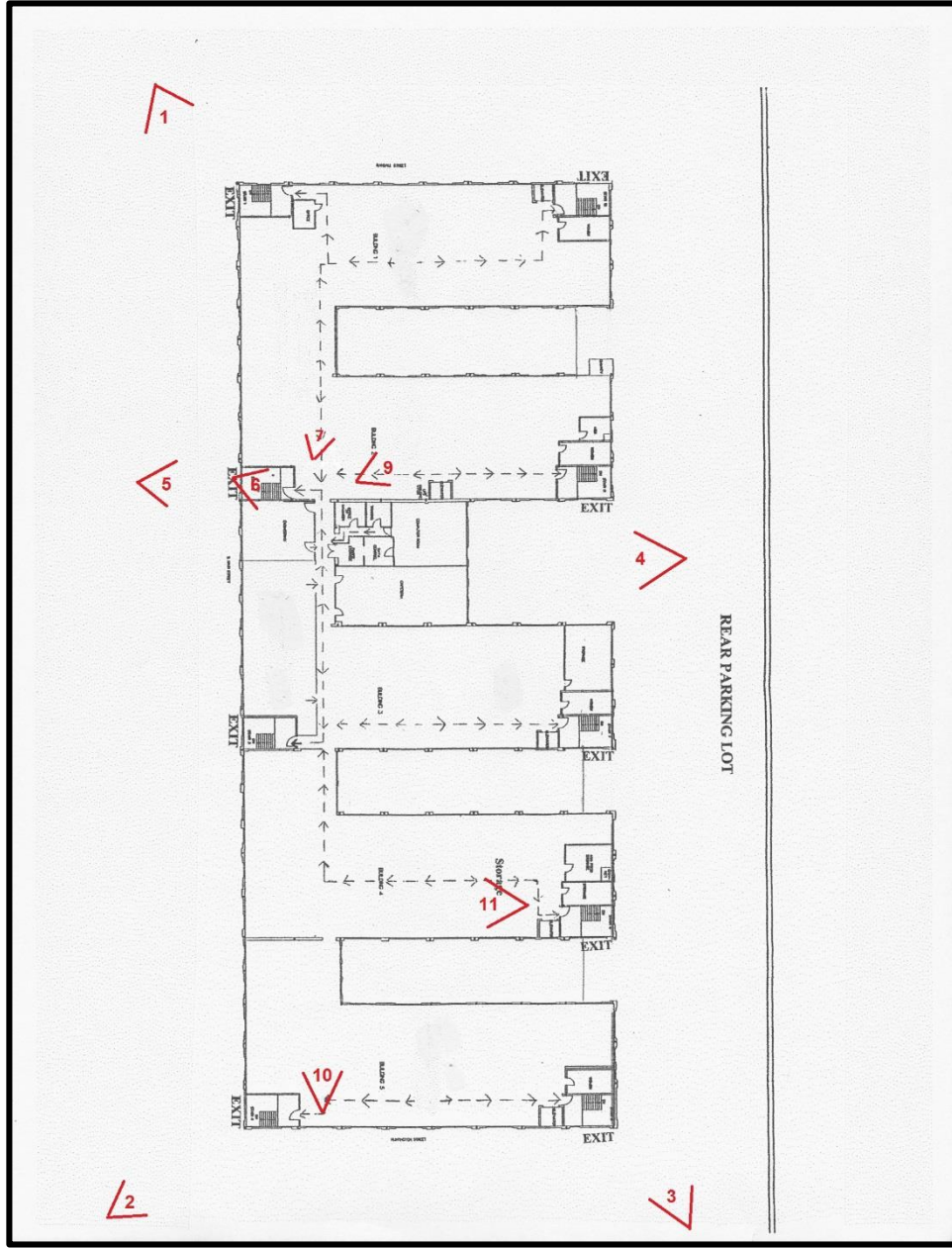
**Photo Key: First Floor**



Crescent Corset Company  
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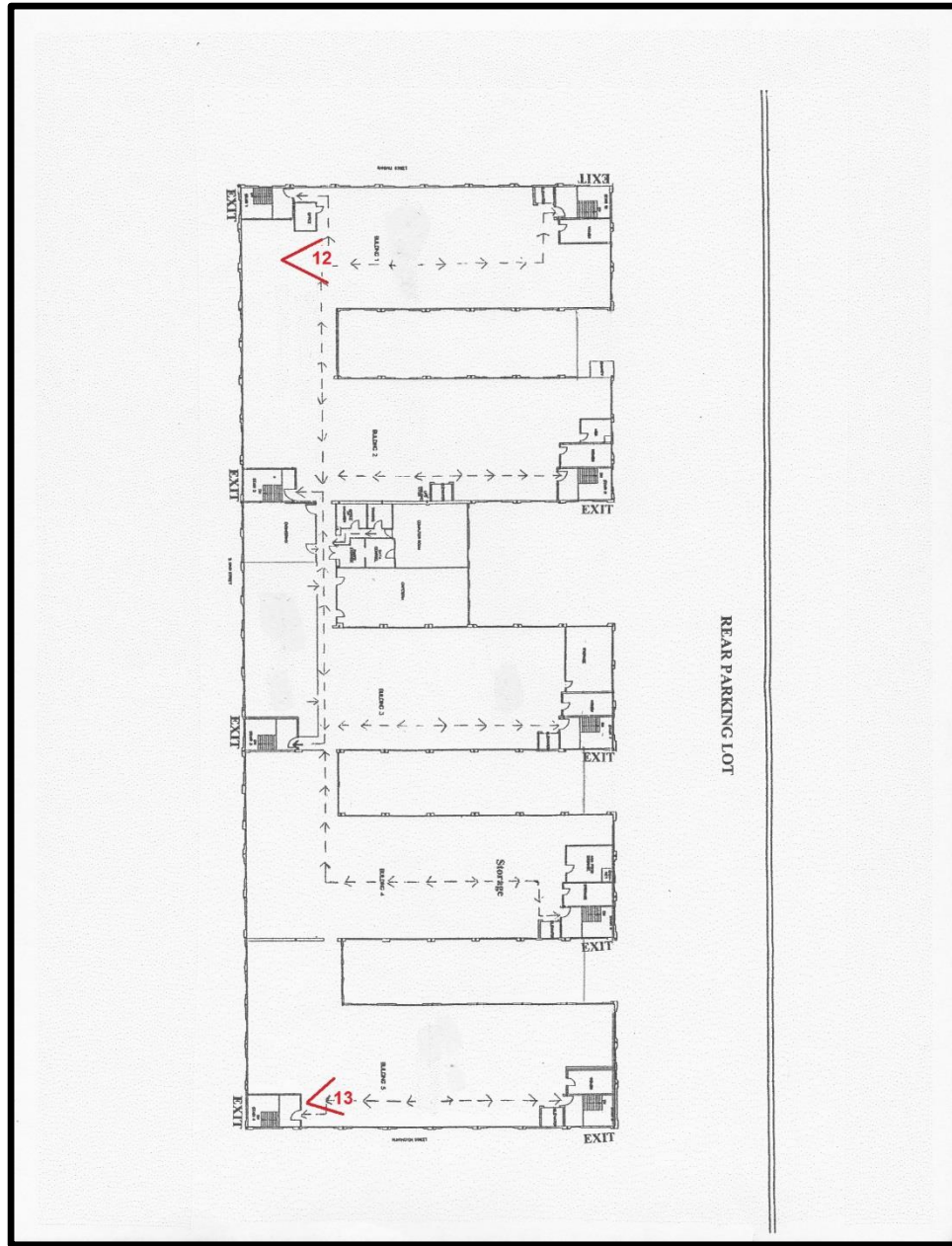
**Photo Key: Second Floor**



Crescent Corset Company  
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Cortland, New York  
County and State

**Photo Key: Third Floor**



Crescent Corset Company  
Name of Property

Cortland, New York  
County and State

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**Property Owner:**

---

name Housing Visions  
street & number 1201 East Fayette St. telephone (315) 472-3820  
city or town Syracuse state NY zip code 13210

**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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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Crescent Corset Company

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Cortland

DATE RECEIVED: 5/06/16      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/25/16  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/09/16      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 6/21/16  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 16000391

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    6-21-16 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



**Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation**

**ANDREW M. CUOMO**  
Governor

**ROSE HARVEY**  
Commissioner

29 April 2016

Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nomination

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following five nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Edmund B. Hayes Hall, Erie County  
Leyden Common School No. 2, Lewis County  
Crescent Corset Company, Cortland County  
Lemuel F. Vibber House, Otsego County  
Callicoon Downtown Historic District, Sullivan County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office