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An Observation of Binghamton's Armory

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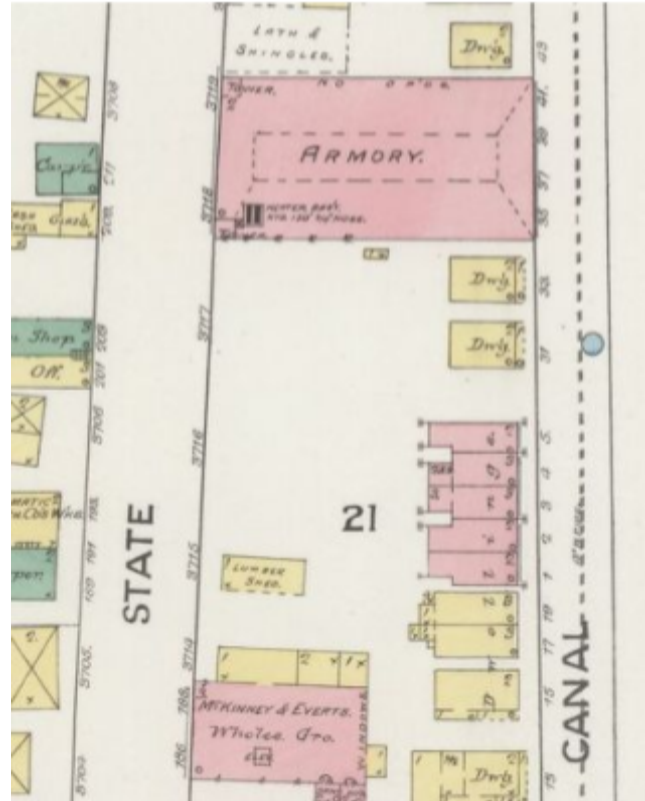
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An Observation of Binghamton's Armory

Like many early 19th century cities, Binghamton is full of old, brick buildings rich with history. A number of the structures, now home to our favorite shops and restaurants, once served a very different purpose. One of these locations can be found right in Binghamton's vivacious downtown.

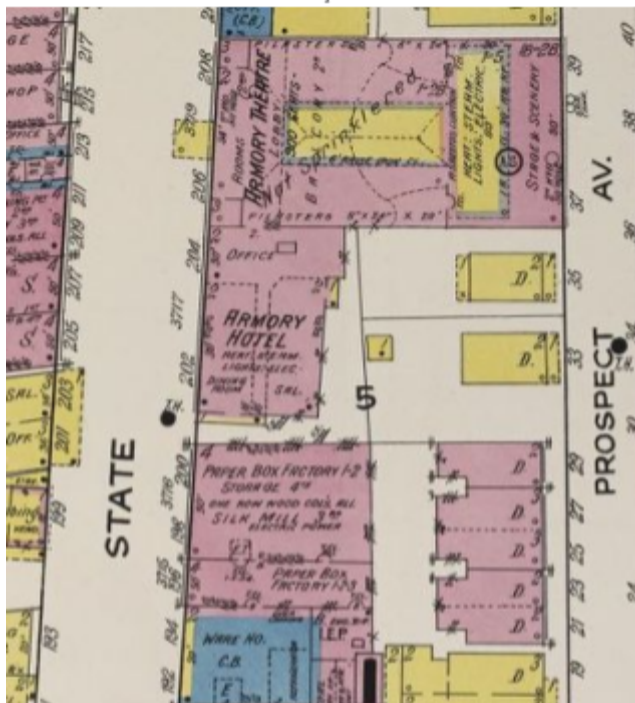
In the mid to late 19th century, many states began building armories amid growing concerns over class warfare (Moberg 2005). As an emerging industrial city, Binghamton had an armory of its own built on State Street. During the time of its operation, its units were responsible for maintaining order during a nearby railroad strike in 1892. Even before the construction of the armory; however, State Street played an important role in the city's industrial history. Prior to the construction of the armory in the 1880's,

Figure 1
1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map



Note. Provided by the Library of Congress.

Figure 2
1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

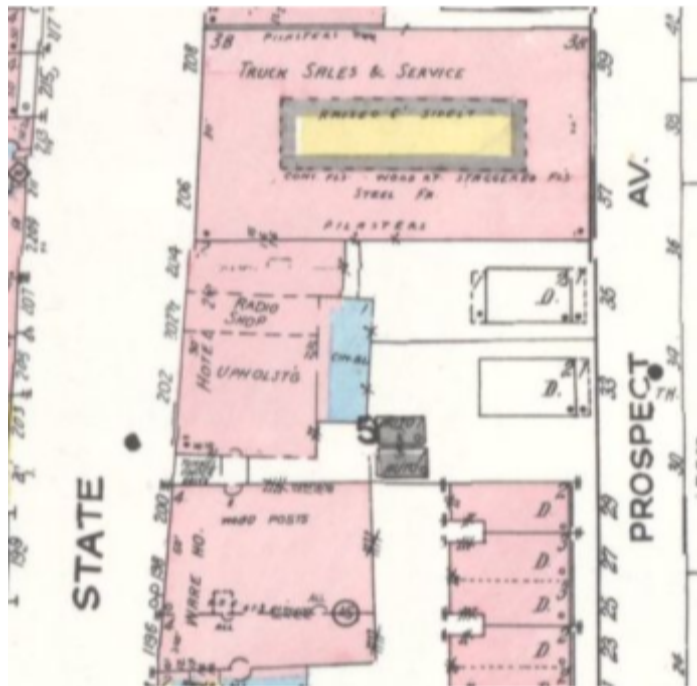


Note. Provided by the Library of Congress.

State Street had been the Chenango Canal, following the path of the nearby Chenango River. Atlases from both 1866 and 1876 show the canal in the place of where State Street would be today. Towards the end of the 1800's, the canal had grown obsolete and State Street was built following its path. As the city's street network began to change to meet the community's needs, so did its structures. New buildings emerged on the newly constructed State Street, including the armory. Of the available maps, the 1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance map contains the first evidence of the armory. The map features a seemingly larger building on the eastern side

of State Street labelled “Armory”. The map also indicates that the building had two towers on either side of the front. This armory did not stay in operation for long, as it moved one block over to Washington Street in 1906. Though none of the available maps seemed to cover this period, the building soon became the site of a once very popular theater called the Armory Theater. Although Binghamton residents were fond of the theater, it did not stay open for long and was eventually sold around the 1920’s. Both 1918 and 1952 show the site of the former armory and theater used for “Truck Sales and Service” and as the site of a “radio shop”. The use of the building as a place of businesses is more comparable to the purpose of the space today.

Figure 3
1952 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map



Note. Provided by the Library of Congress.

Although what the building contains has changed, much of its exterior has remained the same. It is easily recognizable from old photographs since it still has many of its Romanesque style features. Additionally, both towers on either side of the building are still intact although one of them is painted white to match the building next to it, while the other is just the color of standard brick. The current occupants of the structure are a business called “Enviren”, an art gallery, and a center for LGBT youth. I find the use of this space as an LGBT youth center especially interesting given the history of the building. Once used to assert the authority of the wealthy over the working class and suppress labor movements, this building now serves as a space to empower a marginalized community.

Over one hundred years after its operation, the site of Binghamton’s old armory remains in the center of downtown and serves as a reminder of the city’s industrial history.

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