

Forman Block

City of Erie Historic Resource Nomination Binder



Photo 1. Forman Bloc, Primary Façade facing East, M. Falcone. April, 2026.

Description

The Forman Block is a three-story, brick commercial building located at 1013-1015 State Street in the Downtown neighborhood of Erie, Pa. The building's style is Romanesque Revival with Neoclassical embellishments. The resource is defined by its tax parcel and is physically bounded by State Street to the west, Commerce Street to the east, 1017 State Street to the south, and a small open lot to the south of the former Erie Trust Company Building.

Primary façade: the Forman Block's primary façade faces west on State Street and is divided into three distinct bays. The northern and southern bay of the first floor are commercial spaces comprised of largely modern materials. On each, a small, riverstone knee wall provides a base for metal-and-glass windows of differing composition. Each storefront is accentuated with black fabric awnings, branded to reflect the commercial establishment in each location. Two, painted square metal pillars frame the central bay of

the building, which contains three modern glass-and-metal doors that are the primary entrances to each of the establishments. The central doorway is framed by doorlites and by two transoms of differing sizes and leads to a grand staircase that leads to the building's upper floors. A prominent stringcourse, embellished with egg-and-dart molding, runs the entire length of the primary façade and serves as a prominent visual division between the first and upper stories.



Photo 2. Forman Bloc, Primary Façade facing East, M. Falcone. April, 2026.

The second and third stories of the building are designed to accentuate verticality. The bays are framed and divided by four brick pilasters with an engaged limestone base and crowned with terra cotta Corinthian capitals. Within each bay the fenestration of the second and third stories are framed within three round-topped arches rising from four brick pilasters. The three sets of windows on the second floor are wood framed, one-over-one, double-hung and the three sets of windows on the third floor are similarly wood-frame, one-over-one, double-hung with rounded top upper sashes. The sole exception to

this is the rounded-top opening in the central bay on the third floor, which contains a white plaster relief with red and blue inset tiles creating a geometric design that accentuates the recess's shape. A brick string course serves as a connection for the Corinthian-topped pilasters and also serves as a base from which the bronze cornice protrudes. Above this prominent cornice-line another demi-story rises, which is also divided into three bays. Each bay contains a series of three square openings. The opening on the far south contains an ornate wrought iron grill with a curvilinear design pattern, suggesting that this segment of the building served a ventilation and well as an interior illumination function. This demi-story is also crowned with a bronze cornice line, that accentuates architectural elements of the façade and is embellished with egg-and-dart molding.



Photo 3. Forman Bloc, Primary Façade facing east, M. Falcone. April, 2026.

Northern & Southern Facades: The northern and southern facades of the Forman Block are only partially visible from State Street though both contain ghost signs that are significant to the building's history and function. On the northern façade, a ghost sign reads: "Forman – Dry Goods – and Millinery" and on the southern façade is a ghost sign that reads "The Winter Co." These facades also provide insight into the function of the demi-story of the primary façade, as it clearly diminishes in height as the building extends towards Commerce Street.

Eastern Façade: the façade facing Commerce Street is, by comparison to the primary façade, utilitarian in design. From this vantage, the building rises two and a half stories, with a concrete loading dock occupying the southern most portion of the building. A series of four, rounded top window openings on the first floor contain four, one-over-one, double-hung windows of what appears to be wood. Painted metal bars cover each of these openings. The top story of the building similarly contains four rounded top openings with four one-over-one, double-hung windows with wooden

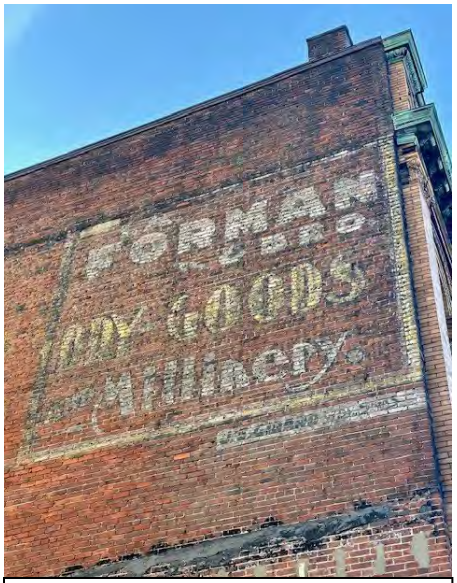


Photo 4. Forman Bloc, Primary Façade facing south, M. Falcone. April, 2026.

sashes. Rough hewn granite sills are present throughout. A small metal cornice crowns the building. This same configuration exists on the northern side of the building though the majority of it is obscured by a narrow, three-story addition composed of painted concrete blocks. The most striking visual feature of the eastern façade is a rectangular smokestack that rises roughly four stories in height and is placed just proud of the building's façade.



Photo 5. Forman Bloc, Primary Façade facing north east, M. Falcone. April, 2026.

History

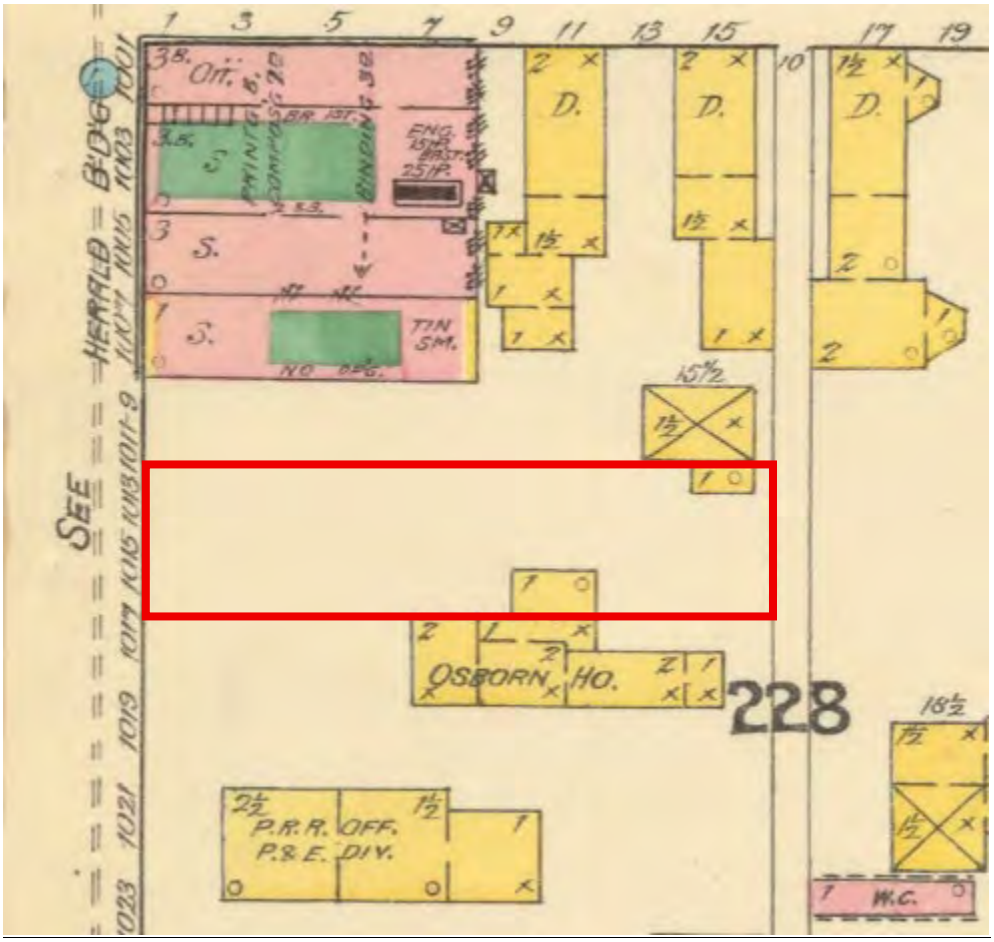


Fig. 1. *Map of Erie (Detail).* 1888. Accessed: Erie, Pa., 1888 - Erie 1888 sheet 09 - Digital Map Drawer - Penn State University Libraries' Digital Collections. Future resource is bounded within the red lines.

Site History – Pre-Constriction

The land that would later become home to the Forman Block was originally connected to indigenous peoples. The Erie people (also referred to as the Kahqua, Eriechronon, Riquéronon, Erielhonan, Eriez, Nation du Chat) were an Iroquoian group who lived along the south shore of Lake Erie in what is now Ohio, Pennsylvania, and western New York. Ultimately European colonists would settle this land. The Sandborn map of 1888 shows that most buildings in this block were primarily wooden structures and that neighboring structures may have partially overlapped the area where the Forman Block would be constructed. On November 8, 1875 the property was conveyed from Alanson Sherwood and his wife, Clarissa Sherwood, to Isaac Armstrong (IA) Forman, who would develop it into the Forman Block.

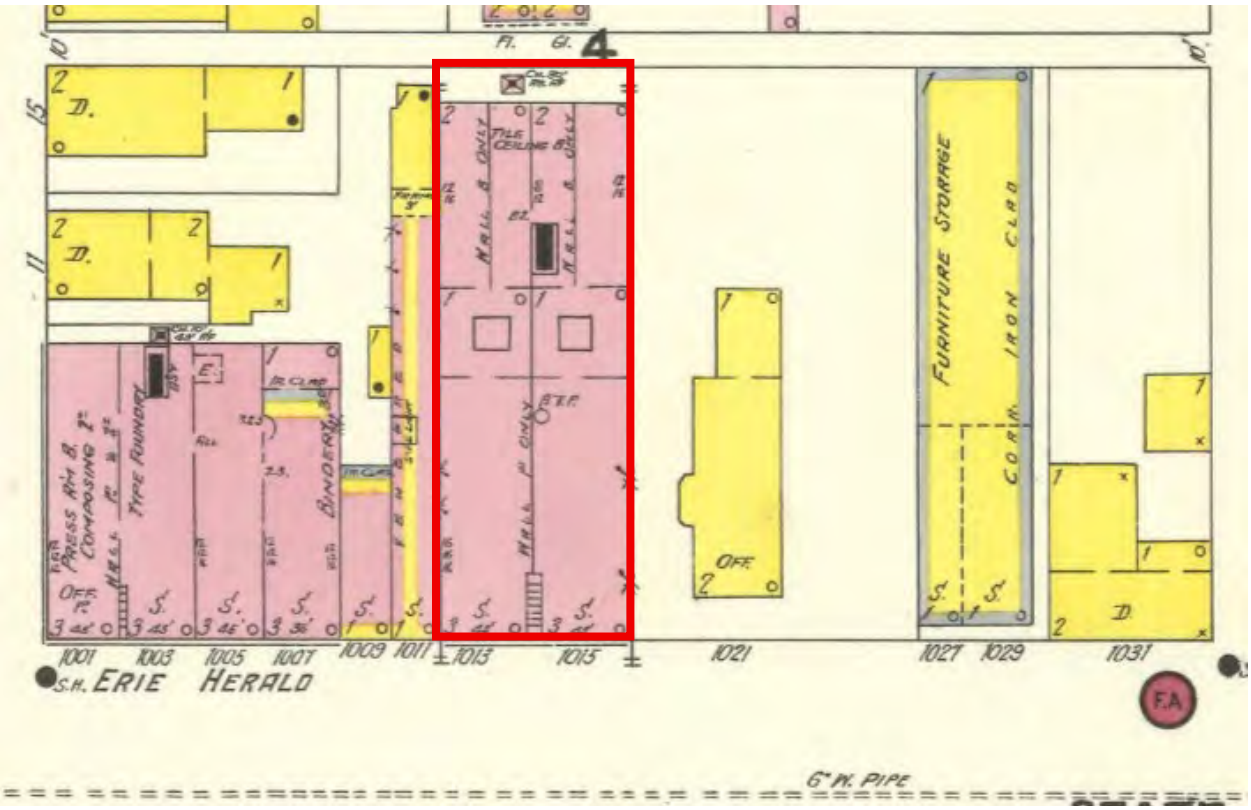


Fig. 2. *Map of Erie (Detail)*. 1900. Accessed: https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/7916/rec/3. Resource is bounded within the red lines.

Site History – Construction


Erie Times-News (published as THE ERIE DAILY TIMES) - November 20, 1897 - page 4
November 20, 1897 | Erie Times-News (published as THE ERIE DAILY TIMES) | Erie, Pennsylvania | Page 4

GRAND REMOVAL SALE!

We have leased the large store room at 1015 State Street, (Forman Block,) and intend to move our large stock of Furniture into same abont December 1st, but before doing same we will have a grand removal sale of furniture. We have placed our large stock of Furniture on sale at greatly reduced prices. People who are looking for Bargains in

Bed Room Suits, Rockers, Side Boards, Desks, Etc.,

Should not fail to attend this sale. Don't Forget—this sale begins at once and lasts

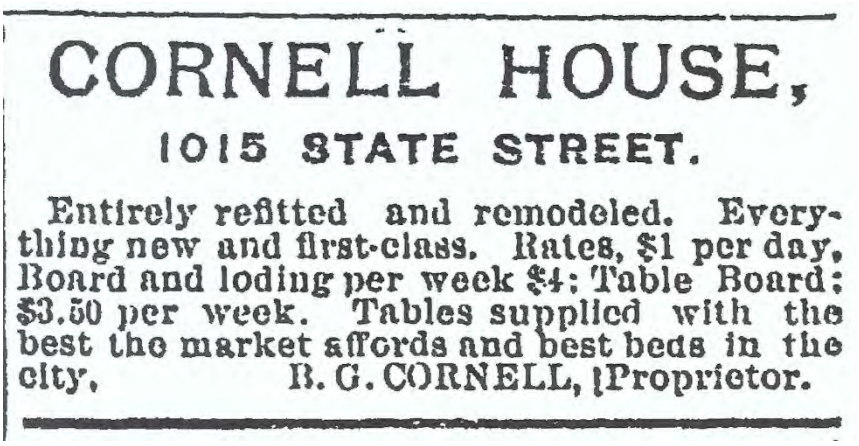
ONLY ONE WEEK!

BERKENKAMP & SCHAAL,
1206 STATE STREET.

Grand Removal Sale! *The Erie Daily Times*. *November 20, 1897.*

The Foreman Block is the first permanent structure to occupy this site and was constructed in 1895. The Sandborn map of 1900 shows that the block was rapidly changing. Many of the wooden structures are now absent and in their place are brick buildings or wooden buildings clad in stone. The Forman Block, now complete, was one of the largest single structures in this neighborhood and had a very large floor plate. Business advertisements from this time, as well as the building's interior features, indicate that the first floor was used a

commercial storefront space. The second floor operated as individual office space for rent, accessible through the grand staircase, and the third floor were high-end rooms to rent.



CORNELL HOUSE,

1015 STATE STREET.

Entirely refitted and remodeled. Everything new and first-class. Rates, $1 per day. Board and loding per week $4; Table Board; $3.50 per week. Tables supplied with the best the market affords and best beds in the city. B. G. CORNELL, Proprietor.

Cornell House, *The Erie Daily Times. December 5, 1889.*

The plat map from 1921 shows the development in this area of State Street would continue and the Forman Block was now amongst other brick and stone buildings of similar floor plans. This plat map also indicates that a loading dock was added to the rear of the Forman Block, surrounding the smokestack. An undated photograph from the *Image of America, Erie, Pennsylvania* book appears to be from roughly the same period as the buildings existent in the image match those present in the 1921 plat map. This is the earliest known visual record of the Forman Block.

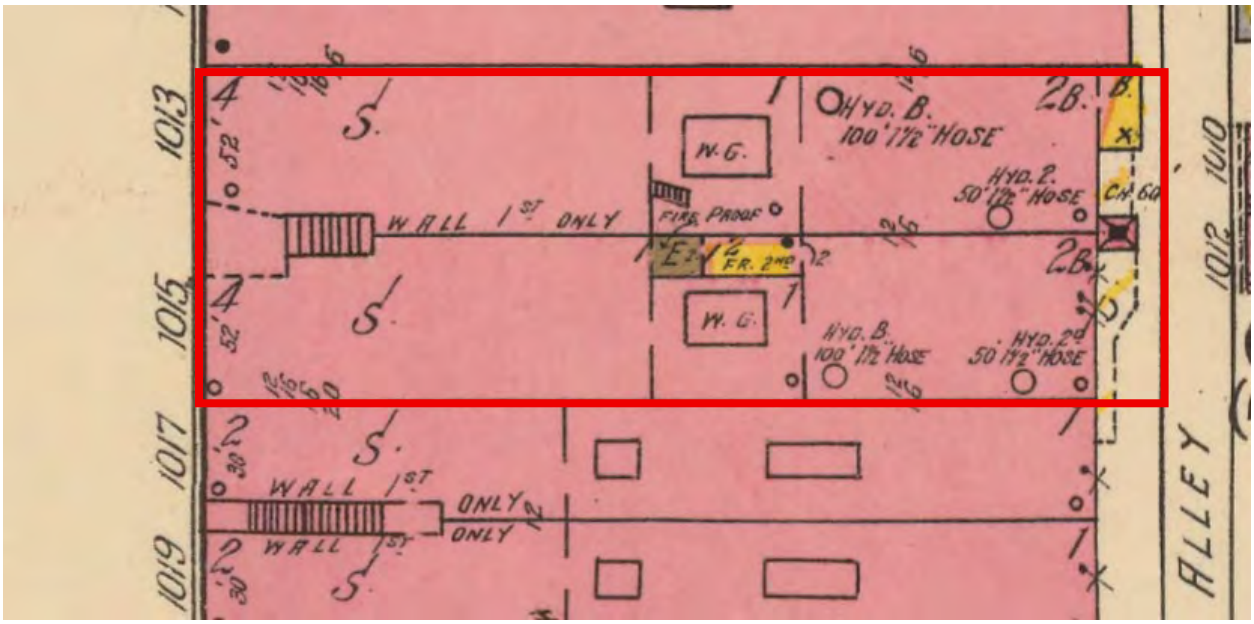


Fig. 3. *Map of Erie (Detail).* 1921. Accessed: https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/8062/rec/2. Resource is bounded within the red lines.



State Street looking northeast, Undated Photograph. Nelson, Jeffrey R. *Images of America, Erie, Pennsylvania*. Arcadia Publishing. 1998.

Ownership of the Forman Block would change over the course of the building's 130+ year history though the Winter family would maintain ownership of the building for the longest period of time, from 1911 to 1981. In addition to owning the building, the Winters owned and operated the Winter Piano Company, which sold and stored pianos in the building. As with other businesses that operated out of the building, newspaper advertisements provide insight into the alterations to the building over time to help further the business. In a detail of an image from the construction of the neighboring Erie Trust Building, we see a small billboard was added to the top of the Forman Block, advertising the Winter Piano Company (on right) as well as Star Electrical Company (on left).



Erie Trust Company Office Building, *Erie Daily Times*, *November 18, 1926*.



SELECT YOUR

PIANO or PLAYER

With Care and Discretion

The Winter Piano Co. Invites You to Inspect the Largest Showing of High Grade Instruments in the State

$300 $199 $175

Values Without An Equal

$250 $350 $200 $423

Other Pianos at Prices From $175 to $550 Other Players at Prices From $287 to $1,500

Hundreds of Just Such Wonderful Bargains As These

$260 $200 $325 $275

Winter Piano Company

1015 STATE STREET

YOU ARE INVITED

As Guests of the

WINTER COMPANY

To Visit the 1930

RADIO SHOW

Being Held in Their

Radio Salons—1015 State St.

No Admission Charge No Radios Sold

Don't Fail to Hear

PROF. GERSHOWITZ

Play the New

VICTOR THEREMIN

Special Program

3 P. M. 8 P. M. 9:30 P. M.

'Select your Piano or Player' (April 20, 1920) & 'You are Invited as Guests…' *(November 5, 1930) the Erie Daily Times.*

From these advertisements, it is clear that the first floor of the building at 1015 State Street operated as a show and sales room and that the second floor of the building held 'radio salons'. Physical evidence in the backrooms of 1015 State Street show that the wooden floors have been reinforced to support the transportation of heavily weighted items. From photographic evidence, it also appears that the first floor of the building was altered in the 1920s or 1930s with an Art Deco façade with a prominent marquee advertising the 'Winter Piano Co.' In this 1970s this prominent storefront was once again altered and the marquee read 'Winter Piano Inn' which illustrated a brief period when the building served as an informal hotel. The storefront at 1013 State Street was also altered over time and a photograph from the 1970s captures an image of the 'State Street Food Mart', a beloved institution by the community.





Foreman Block, Primary Elevation (State Street Foodmarket) & Primary elevation (The Winder Co.). Undated Photos. The Orton Collection.

Significance

A. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Erie history

This resource does not likely meet this criterion.

B. It is associated with the lives of persons significant in Erie's past

This resource does not likely meet this criterion.

C. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction

The Forman Block at 1013 & 1015 State Street meets this criterion as it is an excellent example of late 19th century Romanesque Revival with Neoclassical embellishments commercial storefront architecture, in Erie's Downtown.

The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission offers the following about Romanesque Revival:

> *The Romanesque Revival style was introduced in the United States in the mid-19th century, as architectural ideas from Europe, based on the buildings of ancient Rome, were imported here. Only a few public buildings were built in this style until the talented and influential American architect Henry Hobson Richardson embraced the style in the 1870s and 1880s. Richardson, a graduate of the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, developed a more dramatic version of this style with bolder, wider arches and strong sculptural forms. The Richardsonian Romanesque version of the style continued to be used for public buildings but also became popular for residential mansions. Interest in this style continued to grow after Richardson's death in 1886 with the publishing of a book on his work and later pattern books and builders' guides.*
>
> *Buildings of Romanesque Revival style are most easily identified by their pronounced round arches and heavy, massive stone or brick construction. Most have round towers, squat columns and decorative plaques with intricate or interlacing patterns. Since masonry buildings were more expensive to build than wooden ones, Romanesque Revival structures are less common than some of the other Victorian era styles executed in wood. With its strong sense of gravity and permanence, the Romanesque Revival style was especially suited to churches, university buildings, prisons and other public buildings.*

The Romanesque Revival style is seen most often in urban and suburban areas, and rowhouses were a particularly common building type constructed in this style. The areas surrounding Pittsburgh contain a number of buildings inspired by Richardson's Allegheny Courthouse and Jail. This building influenced construction around southwestern Pennsylvania for over a decade, from public buildings to residential detached homes and rowhouses. It is seen less often in Philadelphia, as Richardson did not have architectural commissions there.

Identifiable Features

1. *Masonry construction*
2. *Round arches at entrance windows*
3. *Heavy and massive appearance*
4. *Polychromatic stonework on details*
5. *Round tower*
6. *Squat columns*
7. *Decorative plaques*

Key character defining features of the Forman Block that reflect Romanesque Revival design are the rounded arches, hewn stonework, and decorative brickwork. The Neoclassical embellishments can be seen in the metal cornices with decorative brackets, its three-story height, tall narrow windows accentuated by architectural features, and use of symmetry.

Other examples of 19th century Italianate commercial storefront architecture within Downtown Erie are rare. Most commercial buildings within this area of the city were either removed during the urban renewal of the 1960s and the closest examples of comparable architecture are Italianate in design. This can be seen in the 500 Block of State Street just beyond the northern portion of Perry Square. The buildings at 502 and 508 State Street are two examples of three-story Italianate architecture though changes in fenestration, materials, and an exterior coating of paint have altered their character as near twins of one another. The building at 504 State Street also appears to have originally had a stone façade, since stuccoed.

Aside from retaining historic integrity, the Italianate design of 1013 & 1015 State Street is exceptional because of its age and become of the building typology, a 'block', is reflective of late 19th century and early 20th century commercial typologies in Erie. The 1921 plat map of the street block surrounding the Forman Block is indicative of the popularity of this commercial typology in Erie at this time.

Additionally, it should be noted that the architectural survey completed by the City of Erie in 2025 identified this resource (2025RE06807 – 1015 State Street) as "This

resource is recommended for NRHP listing under Criterion C as an example of late-nineteenth-century commercial storefront architecture in the Downtown neighborhood."[1]

D. It has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in Erie's prehistory or history

This resource does not likely meet this criterion.

E. It represents a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures or objects that may or may not be contiguous

This resource does not likely meet this criterion.

F. It exhibits a unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or Erie.

This resource potentially meet this criterion.

[1] Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, 2025.

Historic Integrity

- Location – The Forman Block retains integrity of location as the resource remains in the same location as when it was first constructed.

- Design – The Forman Block retains integrity of design, particularly as the character defining features of the second and third floor have not changed over time. While there were changes to elements of the first floor, these changes were by the businesses that occupied the building to market to the changing needs and desires of their community. As stated in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation in Repair or Replacement of Missing or Altered Storefronts: "Because it is so important to a merchant's livelihood that merchandise and the commercial establishment itself appear up-to-date to attract customers, storefronts are likely to have undergone more frequent remodeling over the years than some other kinds of historic buildings"

- Materials – The Forman Block retains integrity of materials. The original brick, terra cotta design elements, windows, metalwork, and stonework remain. While more modern materials exist on the first-floor storefronts, and some elements like some of the ornate grillwork patterns of the attic have been lost over time, the overall resource conveys a sense of materiality typical of the late 19th and early 20th century.

- Workmanship – The Forman Block retains integrity of workmanship. The most accessible elements of this work can be seen in the terra cotta ornamentation of the pilasters, the curvilinear brick registers atop the third story windows, and the design elements of the metal entryway columns. As prominent as these exterior features are, the workmanship present in the building's interior second and third floors are exceptional.

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Sandborn Map of Erie. 1921. Accessed: https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/8062/rec/2.

"Select your Piano or Player" the Erie Daily Times. April 20, 1920.

“You are Invited as Guests…” the Erie Daily Times. N*ovember 5, 1930*.

Forman Block - Areal View with Photo Key

