

Me: Hello! Have you ever wondered where Ithaca College really came from? It may surprise you to learn that, when it was founded in 1892, the Ithaca Conservatory of Music was not on South Hill, but in the heart of the City of Ithaca itself. This is the first of two videos that will explore Ithaca College's roots. Joining me will be Dr. Mary Arlin, an IC alumna and retired professor of music at the college. Welcome to another episode of Ithaca College: Then and Now.

Dr. Arlin: The Ithaca Conservatory of Music taught its first classes at the Day House at 403 E. Seneca Street in 1892. For the next few years, the college moved its headquarters several times, from the West Block in 1893 to the Wilgus Opera House, now the location of Center Ithaca, from 1894 to 1905, and back to the West Block from 1905 to 1908.

Me: In 1911, the Conservatory purchased 120 E. Buffalo Street, next to Dewitt Park. This block became the center of the downtown campus. The Boardman House, built in 1866 on land bought from Ezra Cornell, became the college's headquarters, housing the Music Conservatory until 1931, and then serving as the administrative and academic building for the college through 1965. Boardman House was at the center of campus activities, hosting classes upstairs, and a snack bar in the basement.

Dr. Arlin: After the administration moved to the new Job Hall in 1965, the college retained ownership of Boardman House for a while longer. In May 1966, the Boardman House was refurbished as the Ithaca College Art Museum. The college sold Boardman house to the county in 1969, and today it is in private hands.

Me: If there's something familiar about Boardman House, it's because traces of its design are right under your nose. The styling on the columns in IC Square copy the scrollwork and X pattern on the columns of the Boardman House porch.

Dr. Arlin: Behind Boardman house was Conservatory Hall, or the "Little Theater," built in 1913 and demolished by Tompkins County when the college left the downtown campus. The music and theater departments had to share the limited stage space, making the process of putting on a performance a complicated juggling act. Today, almost nothing is left of the Little Theater, save stones on the ground that mark the building's entrance, and the scarring on the back of Boardman House where the two buildings touched.

Me: Conservatory and College music students performed at various other venues, too. The Lyceum Theater, where city hall now stands, hosted performances until 1913. The Music School used the old Congregational Church, now St. Catherine's Greek Orthodox Church, on W. Seneca Street, from 1959 to 1965.

Dr. Arlin: Next was the Administrative Annex, which housed some of the college's offices. The Annex was adjacent to the Little Theater, which was connected to Boardman House, allowing people to move between the two buildings. Like the Little Theater, the Annex was demolished, and almost no trace of it exists today.

Me: Across from Boardman House, at 123 E. Buffalo street, was a building that served as the college's library in the 1930s and later housed other administrative offices. This building has been demolished, and a bank drive-through has taken its place.

Me: Located catty-corner behind Boardman house was another Annex, a two-story "L"-shaped building built in 1950 for classes. It was demolished after the college moved to South Hill, and only a parking lot marks where it once stood. Next door to Boardman House was the Library, which the college built in 1953. In 1957, the college added a second floor to the library to accommodate the radio and TV program, which remained there until it moved to the newly built Dillingham Center in 1969. The Library and Radio-TV building is still there, though it is now county property.

Dr. Arlin: up Cayuga street from Dewitt Park was the Gossman House, which was where IC's Department of Music was located from 1933 until it moved to Ford in 1965. Today, the old Tompkins County Public Library, built in 1968 and used until 1999, is where the Gossman House once stood.

Me: Behind the Gossman house was the so-called "Radio Shack", where the college Radio program was located until it moved to the second floor of the library in 1957. This building suffered the same fate as the music building, and no trace of it survives today.

Dr. Arlin: The department of Physiotherapy used a surplus WWII Army laboratory building that was reassembled at 402 East Buffalo Street, where the Terrace Apartments now stand.

Dr. Arlin: The Crescent Theater, on Aurora Street, was used by the college as the women's gymnasium from 1946 to 1965. The Star Theater, on East Seneca Street, was the home of the "Seneca Streeters," IC's basketball team from 1921 to 1965.

Me: Today, the Tompkins Trust Company Drive-thru sits on the site of the Star and Temple Theaters.

Me: While much of the downtown campus has been demolished, some of it is still there for students and alumni to see and enjoy. If you have memories or experiences you'd like to share about the downtown era, please post them in the comments section of the video so we can preserve this foundational period

in the college's history. This has been another episode of Ithaca College: Then and Now. Thanks for watching and see you next time.