

Demolition of downtown Syracuse building starts as onlookers watch (video)









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Demolition of a building at 331 S. Salina St. where a partial collapse of the south wall happened on Thursday. After a couple hours of work a large section of the top front of the building was taken down. Sat. Feb. 6, 2016

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Demolition of downtown Syracuse building starts Contractors start to tear down 331 S. Salina St. in Syracuse on Saturday morning. The vacant building partially collapsed Thursday.

SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- Brick by brick, a partially collapsed building in downtown Syracuse is coming down.

The demolition of 331 S. Salina St. started around 8:30 a.m. Saturday -- two days after [part of the vacant, dilapidated building buckled](#). The collapse left a two-story hole in the five-story structure's outer wall, giving onlookers a view of caved-in floors and scattered bricks.

Dozens of people lined up along the 300 block of South Salina Street to watch the building's final moments, sipping coffee and passing around a box of donuts.

As soon as the excavator's engine whirred to life, the crowd pointed cellphones at the structure -- eagerly waiting for the first bricks to fall. When the excavator's claw-like attachment took its first bite out of the top of the building, a few onlookers cheered.

"Here we go," one man said.

The teardown is moving forward in measured steps. Ritter & Paratore, a Utica contracting company, started by ripping away decorative trim near the top of the roof. Behind the trim, the words "Chuck Butts for mayor" were written in paint.

The building crumbled slowly, tumbling to the street in a shower of bricks, dust and shattered glass. With the top quarter of the structure gone by 9:30 a.m., contractors took a break.

The building once known as the Hogan Building was built around 1890, according to Onondaga Historical Association records. [In its approximately 126-year lifespan, the building housed a variety of retailers](#) ranging from a piano company to Majestic Cloak Co., a specialty clothing store for women.

The building has had many owners, including [Eli Hadad](#) -- a real estate developer who media reports have tied to the the Israeli mafia. It last housed Baker Shoes, a shop that closed in 1987.

One onlooker was drawn to the demolition by the structure's colorful history.

Jeff Foley, of Syracuse, said he first stopped by the scene on Friday, when the building was originally slated to come down. He smiled as he shared photos of the building taken over two days, showing how the gaping hole grew between Friday and Saturday.

"I like old buildings," he said. "Why not come out?"

Syracuse will pay an estimated \$235,000 to take down the neglected building, said City Auditor Marty Masterpole. The city ordered the emergency demolition Friday and plans to bill the building's owner once the final cost is tallied.

The building has been embroiled in an ownership dispute for at least two years, according to Mayor Stephanie Miner. Tax records list 499 Syracuse City Centre LLC as the owner of the building.